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More Rights, More Danger for Police: An Experimental Look at How Messaging Shapes Public Views about Constitutional Carry

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ABSTRACT

Constitutional carry (CC) laws, now enacted in 29 states, allow individuals to carry firearms openly without permits, yet little is known about public perceptions of these laws. This study employs a pre-registered survey experimental design to investigate whether varying support for CC laws by police leaders and politicians influences attitudes toward the laws and their perceived consequences. One-third of respondents supported CC laws, with most disagreeing that they will make communities safer. The majority of the sample felt these laws would increase personal liberty but also felt these laws would increase police danger. Oppositional messaging increased agreement that the laws would increase police danger, and supportive messaging increased the public's agreement that these laws would increase liberties. Since most Americans oppose CC laws, yet many would be more likely to carry under them, policymakers should carefully balance the tradeoffs of police safety and liberty.