

Even if nondiscretionary handgun permits reduce murder rates, we are still left with the question of what happens to the rates for accidental death.

As more people carry handguns, accidents may be more likely. Earlier, we saw that the number of murders prevented exceeded the entire number of accidental deaths. In the case of suicide, the nondiscretionary laws increase the probability that a gun will be available when an individual feels particularly depressed; thus, they could conceivably lead to an increase in the number of suicides. While only a small portion of accidental deaths are attributable to guns (see appendix 4), the question remains whether concealed-handgun laws affect the total number of deaths through their effect on accidental deaths.

To get a more precise answer to this question, I used county-level data from 1982 to 1991 in table 5.6 to test whether allowing concealed handguns increased accidental deaths. Data are available from the Mortality Detail Records (provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) for all counties from 1982 to 1988 and for counties with populations over 100,000 from 1989 to 1991. The specifications are identical to those shown in all the previous tables, with the exceptions that they no longer include variables related to arrest or conviction rates and that the variables to be explained are either measures of the number of accidental deaths from handguns or measures of accidental deaths from all other nonhandgun sources.

While there is some evidence that the racial composition of the population and the level of welfare payments affect accident rates, the impact of nondiscretionary concealed-handgun laws is consistently both quite small economically and insignificant statistically. The first estimate in column 1 implies that accidental deaths from handguns rose by about 0.5 percent when concealed-handgun laws were passed. With only 200 accidental handgun deaths nationwide during 1988 (22 accidental handgun deaths occurred in states with nondiscretionary laws), the implication is that enacting concealed-handgun laws in states that currently do not have them would increase the number of deaths by less than one (.851 deaths). Re-doing these tests by adding together accidental handgun deaths and deaths from “unknown” types of guns produces similar results.

With 186 million people living in states without concealed-handgun laws in 1992,<sup>18</sup> the third specification implies that implementing such laws across those remaining states would have resulted in about nine more accidental handgun deaths.<sup>19</sup> Combining this finding with earlier estimates from table 4.1, we find that if the rest of the country had adopted concealed-handgun laws in 1992, the net reduction in total deaths would have been approximately 1,405 to 1,583.