

News Research Study Guns Active Shooter Police

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Study Praising Armed Civilians Sparks Criticism

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By **Jenna Sundel**
News Reporter

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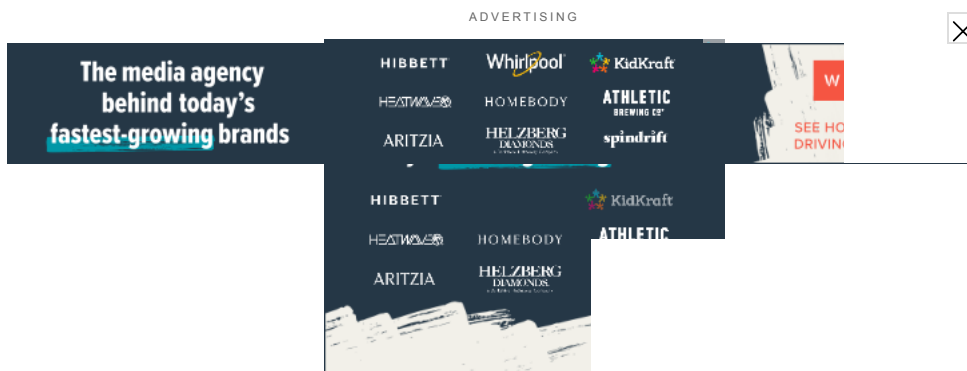
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Several gun control experts are criticizing a study that found that civilians with gun permits reduce the number of victims killed and injured in active shooting cases more than responding police officers do.

The study, done by researchers John R. Lott, Jr. and Carlisle E. Moody with the Crime Prevention Research Center, also found that civilians with permits stop attacks more frequently and face a lower risk of being killed or injured than police.

Devin Hughes, founder and president of gun violence research organization GVPedia, told *Newsweek*, "The paper is fraud, which I do not use lightly."

Hughes alleges that the study defines active shooter incidents differently from the FBI.



"Lott's study then only applies that new definition to cases in which there was a defensive gun use, while deliberately excluding thousands of cases in which a defensive gun use did not occur," Hughes said. "This deceptive tactic allows Lott to claim that the percentage of active shooter cases stopped by a defensive gun use is vastly higher than it is in reality, regardless of what definition of an active shooting one uses. The end result is blatant statistical malpractice."

Lott told *Newsweek* that the FBI's definition excludes gang violence, drug related violence and shootings in relation to another criminal act.

"The FBI defines active shooter incidents as those in which an individual actively kills or attempts to kill people in a populated, public area," Lott said. "But it does not include those it deems related to other criminal activity, such as a robbery or fighting over drug turf. Over the period from 2014 to 2024, the FBI includes 14 cases where a legally armed civilian used a gun to stop an active shooting attack. We think that the number is 199. We thought it was useful to fill in the rest of these cases using the exact same definition that excluded 'gang violence,' 'drug related violence,' and 'shootings in relation to another criminal act' to see how police and civilians compared in dealing with these attacks."

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Daniel Webster, a professor of health policy and management with the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, told *Newsweek* that the researchers support their findings with flawed data.

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"Lott has promoted - with flawed data and logic - the idea that the USA has so many mass shootings because we have too many gun-free zones. The solution to Lott's view of the problem is that we need more people walking around with guns are the ready to jump in and take effective and heroic efforts to save the day," Webster said. "The reality is that such incidents are incredibly rare even though we live in a country with more guns than people and more armed civilians walking and driving around than has ever been the case."

Why It Matters

Lott and Moody said their study is the first to compare how uniformed police and civilians with concealed handgun permits perform in stopping active shooting cases.

"Attackers who see an officer present in a place they are planning to attack can either wait for the officer to leave the area, move on to another target themselves, or kill the officer. Webster can assert that we are wrong, but to my knowledge our paper is the very first one to actually empirically study that issue," Lott said.

Lott previously served as a senior adviser for research and statistics in the

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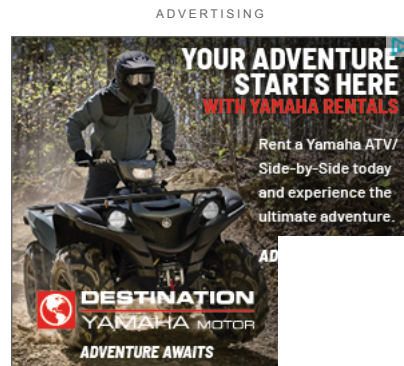
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Office of Justice Programs and the Office of Legal Policy in the U.S. Department of Justice under President Donald Trump's administration. Moody is a professor of economics at the College of William and Mary.



A 2022 article in *The New Yorker* stated that "Lott's findings and methods have generated scathing criticism from prominent academics, who have questioned his veracity and exposed flaws in his work. But the critiques have not diminished his stature. Instead, they have fed the conspiracy-oriented mentality of the gun-rights movement. In the eyes of its adherents, and in the messaging of the gun lobby and trade groups, attempts to discredit Lott are really attempts to suppress the truth."

What To Know

Crime Prevention Research Center is an organization that is dedicated to conducting research on the relationship between laws regulating the ownership or use of guns, crime, and public safety, according to the organization's website.

The data was compiled from cities in nearly all states for the years 2014-2024.

The FBI reported 350 active shooting cases over those years. The researchers said they identified 562 cases utilizing Nexis searches and defensive gun use cases from the Heritage Foundation, Defensive Gun Use Tracker, Gun Violence Archive, the American Rifleman and Reddit that met the FBI's definition of an active shooting.

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The FBI defines an active shooting as “one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.”



Stock image: Three pistols laying on table with bullets. | Bytmonas/Getty Images

Hughes said the researchers expand that definition to include “any shooting that occurs in public and is not part of another ongoing crime.”

“While one can argue whether Lott’s definition is better than the FBI’s, there are only two possible conclusions: The FBI definition is proper, in which case Lott is falsely adding incidents that aren’t real active shootings. Lott’s definition is proper, in which case Lott is failing to include thousands of applicable shootings that don’t have a DGU. The end result in either scenario is data fraud,” Hughes said.

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Lott told *Newsweek* that when he worked in the Department of Justice, it was "clear" the FBI missed "many cases." As part of his research, he said he's been "very careful to insure that the cases we include meet the FBI's definition."

Lott and Moody found that 167 active shooting incidents were stopped by police, 199 were stopped by an armed citizen, and 196 resulted in a different outcome, such as the shooter fleeing the scene or being neutralized by unarmed citizens or unarmed security guards.

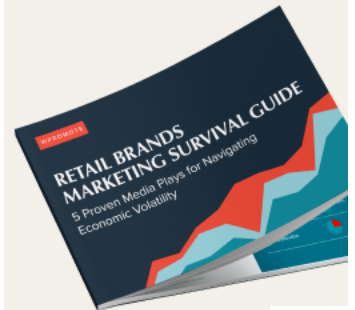
The researchers found that armed citizens reduce the average number of victims per attack killed by between 1.07 and 1.78 while the police increase the average number killed by between 0.5 and 0.6 in comparison to shootings that resulted in a different outcome.

Lott and Moody note in their study, "This does not mean that calling the police results in more deaths. In the absence of an armed civilian on the scene, there is no other choice; otherwise, the death toll would be higher."

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What People Are Saying

John R. Lott, Jr. and Carlisle E. Moody, in a study: "Our research shows that armed civilians reduce the number of killed, wounded, and total casualties by more than uniformed police officers do. This outcome doesn't reflect poorly on law enforcement—it highlights the tactical disadvantages uniformed officers face."

Daniel Webster, a professor of health policy and management with the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, in comments to *Newsweek*: "Even if an armed citizen interrupts an active shooter event 50 times a year as their data suggest, that pales in comparison to the population-wide harmful effects of so-called Right to Carry policies on public safety."

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Update 11/24/25 9:51 a.m. ET: This article has been updated with comment from John R. Lott, Jr.

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