

# RIGGED CONTROVERSY

New open carry law sparks debate in Texas

by **ANNA GRAVES**  
print editor-in-chief

As fireworks boomed and people rang in the new year, Texas was also ringing in a new law. As of Jan. 1, citizens of Texas are now allowed to openly carry a handgun in most public places. Guns must be in a holster on your shoulder or belt, there is no separate license or additional fee required to open carry and the criteria to obtain a license does not change.

Despite the fact that Texas is the 45th state to legalize open carry, this enactment has sparked some debate. Will this law improve safety in Texas, or will it only increase threat?

“The hope of the open carry law is that it will benefit everyone, both Texas and Texarkana, by allowing licensed firearm owners to protect themselves or others if a situation calls for such action,” biology teacher Lauren Pilgreen said. “My thinking is that it makes it easier to see who is carrying a firearm. If you are open carrying, you are a licensed, law-abiding firearm owner and citizen.”

According to politifact.com, in states that allow open carry, violent crime rates were 23 percent lower, the aggravated assault rates were 23 percent lower, the murder rates were 5 percent lower and robbery rates were 36 percent lower. For some people however, these statistics do not encourage them to support the law.

“I think open carry will be a disaster,” government teacher John Littmann said. “Too many Texans have the potential for domestic violence, road rage, and other mental instabilities. Giving them the freedom to carry a gun just widens their area of possible mayhem.”

Much of the controversy and disagreement stems from the idea that the legalization of open carry

desensitizes citizens on the topic of firearms.

“Guns have become play toys for leisure and aren’t taken seriously enough,” sophomore Karissa Smith said. “I think there’s a place and time for carrying a gun and people just deciding to take one with them on errands isn’t appropriate. Giving people the right to carry a gun wherever they want may make the carrier feel safer but, people around them won’t.”

On the opposite side of the debate, many law supporters believe that this in fact will help prevent a lot of crime and work in favor for the protection of citizens.

“I hope that it works as a beneficial deterrent to those who commit crimes,” Pilgreen said. “If a criminal can see that a person clearly has a way both physically and legally to defend themselves, hopefully they will think twice about the crime they are about to commit.”

This enactment has also heightened the debate about stricter gun control, as many say that the laws currently in

place are enough as long as they are properly enforced. Others however, disagree completely. Littmann’s opinion is that the only additional regulation needed is an exhaustive mental evaluation for all citizens wanting to carry a weapon.

“[A mental evaluation] would effectively weed out the borderline lunatics,” Littmann said.

With open carry still being a relatively new law, Texas has yet to see what effect it will ultimately have. However, there have already been a few mishaps. On Jan. 20, a man in Sulphur Springs accidentally shot himself in the foot at church. Many wonder if accidents like this are what is to be expected of the law or if the ability to openly carry a firearm will result in favor of citizen protection.

“I think open carry is a good thing if it’s handled correctly,” senior Tyler Bewley said. “People should have quite a few qualifications before they are allowed, but I think it’s better for people and makes themselves feel safer when carrying.”

## SHOTS OF STATS

- 300 million guns in the U.S.
- 60 percent use it for protection
- Nationwide, firearms are used in 68 percent of murders, 41 percent of robberies, 21 percent of aggravated assaults
- Studies show, those in possession of a gun during an assault are 4.5 times more likely to be shot
- Guns are used defensively 2.5 million times per year in the US



**ALWAYS ON HAND** A restaurant patron keeps his gun within easy reach. New open carry laws in Texas have sparked debate among legislators and citizens alike.

photo by s. vaughn