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Forum: Perceiving Security and Insecurity: The Campus Carry Law in Texas

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This introduction lays out the research design of a project on the Texas state "Campus Carry" gun legislation (SB 11) that went into effect in 2016. The project's transdisciplinary and multi-methodological approach – based on team fieldwork, personal interviews, focus groups, testimonials, visual materials, and a survey – is used to offer an example of phenomenon-based American studies research that is contextualized beyond disciplinary boundaries. Public debates, personal experiences, and cultural analysis demonstrate the de facto ramifications of gun legislation on people's lives. Considering viewpoints both for and against Campus Carry, the discussion reveals deep-seated beliefs about guns as an intrinsic part of "Americanness."

When the Texas legislature in 2015 passed the "Campus Carry" law (SB 11), allowing concealed guns on public university campuses, uproar was to be expected. As a result of the legislation that came into effect on 1 August 2016, public universities were charged with implementing the law in a way that meets campus needs without infringing gun carriers' rights. The University of Texas at Austin, which at the time had a student body of close to 51,000, was forced to conform to the contentious law, even though many in the university community expressed strong objections to it. Proponents of the legislation were strongly in favor of SB 11, claiming that campuses, too, were finally allowing gun carriers to exercise their Constitutional right to keep and bear firearms. The ensuing controversy surrounding Campus Carry made Austin the center of national and international debates on individuals' and communities' sense of security and insecurity in educational contexts. Since its implementation, there has been much speculation regarding the impact of Campus Carry on university communities. In this forum, we want to offer original research data and cultural analysis on the de facto ramifications of guns for members of campus.[1]

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By considering viewpoints both for and against Campus Carry, we will probe the issue of firearms on campuses from the various vantage points of the parties involved.

The essays in the forum result from fieldwork and interviews conducted by the Academy of Finland-funded Campus Carry research team in Austin in the spring semesters of 2018 and 2019.[2] While studies on gun culture and policies are often based on either quantitative or qualitative research but not both, this research makes it a point to employ both approaches as an example of transdisciplinary American studies research.[3] Qualitative research on gun culture in the United States typically focusses on the history of firearms or the hypermasculine and symbolic nature of gun ownership.[4] Recent studies on attitudes toward gun laws employ quantitative approaches, which provide useful, but general, views of opposing positions.[5] With a focus on multiple viewpoints and data, this forum complements existing research by offering, through the

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Research Support & Compliance at The University of Texas at Austin approved the University of Turku's clearance.

[2] The research was conducted at the John Morton Center for North American Studies, the University of Turku, Finland. In the United States, the project was hosted by the Department of American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin. The team has also collaborated with St. Edward's University and Austin Community College. We would like to express particular thanks to Steven Hoelscher, Randy Lewis, Laura Hernandez-Ehrisman, and Georgia Xydes for hosting us. Thanks also to all the anonymous interviewees as well as the professors and collaborators who granted us permission to field the quantitative survey and collect written testimonials.

[3] Jennifer Carlson, Kristin A. Goss and Harel Shapira, eds., *Gun Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Politics, Policy, and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); Hannah E. Jones and Sean M. Horan, "Guns on Campus: Campus Carry and Instructor–Student Communication," *Communication Education*, 68, 4 (2019), 417–37; P. J. Verrecchia and Nicole Hendrix, "College Students Perceptions toward Carrying Concealed Weapons on College Campuses," *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 29, 1 (2018), 62–78; James H. Price, Amy Thompson, Jagdish Khubchandani, Joseph Dake, Erica Payton, and Karen Teeple, "Regarding the Carrying of Concealed Handguns on College Campuses," *Journal of American College Health*, 62, 7 (2014), 461–69.

[4] Saul Cornell, *A Well-Regulated Militia: The Founding Fathers and the Origins of Gun Control in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Paula Haag, *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2016); Angela Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Jimmy Taylor, *American Gun Culture: Collectors, Shows, and the Story of the Gun* (El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2013); and Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[5] Katherine Bennett, John R. Kraft and Deborah Grubb, "University Faculty Attitudes toward Guns on Campus," *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 23, 3 (2012), 336–55; Robert Birnbaum, "Ready, Fire, Aim: The College Campus Gun Fight," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 45, 5 (2013), 6–14; Rhonda Lewis, Jamie Locurto, Kyrah Brown and David Stowell, "College Student Opinions on Gun Violence," *Community Health*, 41, 3 (2016), 482–87.

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Texas example, a more nuanced understanding of recent developments in US gun culture. Through intersections between policymaking, quotidian experiences, and cultural viewpoints, the essays showcase the multiple levels on which security and insecurity are contested in light of this specific case study.

The essays in this forum introduce a robust, people-centered focus that pushes beyond mere policy discourses by interrogating the ways in which the members of the campus community experience, negotiate, and challenge SB 11. The Campus Carry law has multiple theoretical and practical ramifications for communities and individuals, and it is also linked to broader ideological assumptions about Constitutional rights. The pro-gun contingency advocating for less restriction on guns base their arguments on the Second Amendment right to practice self-defense. The antigun contingency calling for more restrictions on gun carriers' rights argue that the First Amendment grants them the right to exercise freedom of speech without any external threats. The debates on the Second Amendment in the United States assume spatial meanings on various scales: as federal- and state-level legislation, as a public-versus-private matter, as a context-specific issue (such as on a college campus), and as an understanding of shared space. Ultimately, issues of gun violence have to do with agency in terms of who gets to decide and participate in representational processes in public, semipublic, and private space.

Drawing on fieldwork, interviews, focus groups, testimonials, and a survey, the essays consider the varying ways in which students, faculty, staff, and the administration at UT Austin experience guns on campus. In particular, we analyze the ways in which the campus proper – complete with the inclusion and exclusion zones that dictate where guns can and cannot be carried – impacts the campus community's senses of security and insecurity. On a personal level, for both the supporters and opponents of the legislation, Campus Carry is understood as a safety issue. For those studying or working at the university, the presence of guns on campus may result in visceral reactions, from subtle feelings of anxiety and fear to outright terror. By the same token, the pro-gun advocates insist on their fundamental right to rely on themselves, rather than law enforcement, for self-defense. For outsiders, such as job seekers, Campus Carry has a bearing on an educational establishment's reputation. At UT Austin, for example, there were known cases of hiring disruptions, where candidates withdrew their applications because of the legislation.[6]

[6] Ralph K. M. Haurwitz, "Campus Carry Law Kept This Scholar from Pursuing a Deanship at UT," *Austin American-Statesman*, 18 Feb. 2016, at http://highered.blog.statesman.com/2016/02/18/campus-carry-law-kept-this-scholar-from-pursuing-a-deanship-at-ut, accessed 14 May 2020.

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The focus on lived experiences that explicate the ramifications of the Campus Carry legislation in Texas contributes an important case for broader analysis of US gun politics that has both internal and external significance for campuses.

Alongside the lived experiences, the research underscores the cultural ramifications of the legislation by examining official and unofficial cultural statements related to it. During the implementation process and after, members of the university community resorted to a range of informal measures that took a stand on Campus Carry. This resulted in various forms of activism by students and personnel. Student reactions to the legislation were conspicuous and radical. The pro-gun activists, including Students for Concealed Carry, produced a range of online audiovisual materials with cautionary scenarios and imaginaries depicting the perils that unarmed campuses would bring about. The materials were meant to be graphic and provocative, with racialized images invoking tropes of white, middle-class women as damsels in distress, white hegemonic masculine heroes, and nonwhite male attackers. One highly controversial film went as far as explicitly depicting the murder of a credulous and naive antigun activist.[7]

Among the most organized and visible oppositions to the law was UT Austin's Cocks Not Glocks group, which distributed dildos on campus and around the city in an effort to disrupt ideas about social values and priorities. Through the dildo as a publicly outlawed symbol of obscenity, the group challenged people to question which is more objectionable, a phallus or a gun penetrating the spaces of higher learning. The Cocks Not Glocks collective urged the broader community to replace the slogan from the Texas Revolution – "Come and take it," beloved by Second Amendment protestors – with "Take it and come," with intentional absurdity and queering. Gun Free UT, a grassroots organization comprising UT faculty, staff, students, alumni, family, and community, was the largest antigun activist group on campus. Their campaign was centered around distributing "GUN FREE UT" signs and "ARMED WITH REASON" graphics on campus. The multiple strategies used by members of the community to delineate and critique the legislation exemplify the dynamic relationship between the various power players involved, each with their ideological and political leanings. Collectively, both official and informal measures create a dynamic landscape that offers new insights into senses of security and insecurity in an armed campus space, also contributing new overtures to transdisciplinary and multimethodological knowledge production within the field of American studies.

[7] The film, entitled *Never Met Her – Short Film*, was available for public circulation on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ar1a878M98w but has subsequently been made private.

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TRANSDISCIPLINARY AND MULTI-METHODOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The forum's transdisciplinary and multi-methodological approach is based on team fieldwork, personal interviews, focus groups, testimonials, visual materials, and an online survey. The fieldwork was conducted in two-month periods by the Campus Carry research team in 2018 and 2019.[8] Members of the research team are positioned within various fields of study, including American studies, urban studies, and security studies. The research team's various positionalities offer multiple vantage points, allowing for the contemplation of the gun question beyond disciplinary boundaries. Our primary concern in this forum is to probe the ways in which the US Constitution and the rights it confers are perceived and constructed within the Campus Carry discourses at UT Austin. Consequently, it bears underscoring that we do not attempt to engage in any legal or criminological discussion of the topic, as that does not fall within the purview of our research or expertise.[9]

The team fieldwork had three specific rationales: to enable simultaneous observations that demonstrate the multiple aspects of the power dynamics involved; to leverage strong expertise in participant observation, interviewing, and visual analysis; and to engender peer-group support and reflection among the researchers during fieldwork. The fieldwork included semi-structured interviews with administrators, activists, students, faculty, and staff. The twenty-eight interviews conducted were designed to gather in-depth, expert information, allowing for the expression of personal viewpoints, and they were also used to develop the quantitative survey in light of the existing literature. Even though fieldwork comprises the project's methodological core, the study does not attempt to do conventional ethnography (a thick description of an unnamed location) in the anthropological tradition. Rather, we consider fieldwork as a transdisciplinary practice, one which springs from the specifics of the research context and allows for modification of the research agenda, contingent upon societal developments impacting academia.

[8] All of the participants were informed of the purpose of the project – and the use of the materials – and were asked for written consent to participate. The consent form, written in English and Spanish (per the policy of the state of Texas), included the premises of the contributions/interviews, with a copy provided to the participants and the researcher. The form states that the materials will be retained for future analysis and used for publications and presentations.

[9] For legal perspectives for and against the SB 11 law see Aric Short, "Sane Gun Policy from Texas: A Blueprint for Balanced State Campus Carry Laws," *Northeastern University Law Review* 11, 2 (2019), 401–73; and Shaundra K. Lewis and Daniel Alejandro De Luna, "Symposium on 'Texas Gun Law and the Future': The Fatal Flaws in Texas's Campus Carry Law," *Thurgood Marshall Law Review* 41, 2 (2015–16), 135–50.

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To complement the qualitative interviews and to allow more freedom for subjective reflection on individual, lived experiences, the team collected 124 written testimonials from undergraduate students. The testimonials were collected in undergraduate classes at UT Austin, St. Edward's University, and Austin Community College. We chose a comparative format for the testimonials in order to see how students made sense of the legislation at different types of educational establishments: UT Austin, the flagship of the state's public-university system; St. Edward's, which as a private institution has been allowed to opt out of the legislation; and Austin Community College, whose student demographics and socioeconomic status differ significantly from the previous two. Asked to write or draw freely about their experiences and sentiments in relation to the Campus Carry law, students were allowed to choose the form of a story, description, poem, picture – or combination of text and images – whichever form they preferred. The exercise was completely anonymous, but the students could create a pseudonym for themselves if they so wished.

The positioning of the research takes into account both pro and con statements on Campus Carry in order to help explicate the various vantage points from which the contentious issue is approached. The scope and depth of the data go beyond existing studies, providing new knowledge about the impact of the law on individuals' lives that can be used as reference points by policymakers in the US and beyond. The research, then, hopes to serve as a gateway for the broader public to engage with academic research on US gun culture and to better understand the individual experiences there. By expanding the research beyond policy documents and existing quantitative studies, this project exposes the ways in which different modes of communication are tied to questions of grassroots activism and collective agency, enabling a rethinking of the broader epistemological consequences of the data that have a direct impact beyond academia.

Ultimately, the positions for or against the Campus Carry policy reveal deeply seated assumptions about gun culture, specifically in US society. The belief in Constitutional rights – and the right to bear arms in particular – is frequently used to define "Americanness." In debates surrounding US gun culture, firearms are often characterized as "a way of life" and "what it means to be American" – views that foster exceptionalist understandings of nationhood and national identity.[10] Whether for or against guns on campuses, most sources interviewed for this research, reflecting pro- and antigun viewpoints alike, view the carrying of firearms and the freedom to make choices

[10] Student Debate on the Second Amendment, University of Texas at Austin, 10 April 2018, notes in possession of author.

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about guns as inalienable rights, specifically celebrating the United States as separate and distinct from the rest of the world. When asked in interviews about the possibility to repeal the Second Amendment, hardly anybody regarded such a scenario as feasible. Indeed, the right to bear arms and the freedom to defend one's property are used in an almost mantra-like fashion to define nationhood and national identity.

ESSAYS IN THIS FORUM

The essays in this forum conceptualize the Campus Carry legislation as a complex nexus that intertwines ideological assumptions, policymaking, everyday experiences, cultural expressions, and individual perceptions of safety. We probe the question of experiences of security and insecurity within the armed campus space on multiple levels: from ideological understandings of security in the United States broadly, via the practical implementation of the legislation on the state level, and extending to the individual experiences of students, faculty, and staff through the grassroots actions of activists and online visual materials.

The forum consists of five essays by the Campus Carry research team. Benita Heiskanen's piece sets the stage first by providing the ideological reasoning behind Campus Carry laws in the United States. As a negotiation by the federal government, state legislature, university, and members of the campus community, the question of gun rights has been interpreted vis-à-vis notions of space, freedom, and privacy, as understood through amendments to the US Constitution. Drawing on public debates organized at UT Austin, which were complemented by thousands of Internet responses, as well as interviews conducted with faculty and students on campus, the essay reveals the various practical and ideological corollaries that the legislation manifested within the armed campus space. While drawing on Constitutional rights, the implementation of the law resulted in a conspicuously unequal and hierarchical positioning of members of the campus community.

Albion M. Butters examines guns on campus with a focus on the use of rhetoric surrounding Campus Carry, first by examining the strategies employed by UT's academic community in opposition to the policy there, and then by distinguishing between moves made by factions within the pro-gun contingent to frame the professors and student activists. In order to understand such a phenomenon better, Butters examines both sides of the Campus Carry divide through the lens of fear. On one hand, fear attends to the voices of professors and activists who rejected the new law, providing them with a strategy for their resistance; on the other, it traces the (literally) hidden positioning of Campus Carry supporters against their own genealogy of insecurity. Butters also examines the competing forms of rhetoric around these positions to parse how the

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emotion – be it personal or culturally informed – has become visible as a form of affect in the learning environment of shared social space.

Malla Lehtonen and Mila Seppälä probe the sentiments toward Campus Carry legislation by considering undergraduate students' written testimonials on the policy. In their examination of the texts and drawings, two different but overlapping viewpoints emerge: guns as a threat and as a form of protection. The polarization around issues related to personal firearms extends from questions of who should be allowed to own guns in the first place to where they should be permitted. In a figurative sense, battle lines have been drawn, with one side categorically opposing civilians carrying on campus, due to the risks it poses, and the other side protesting that Campus Carry is the only way to keep students safe amidst increased risk of violent attacks, including mass shootings. The discussion shows that the processes of meaning-making and positioning in the debate about guns on campus are not without inconsistencies, nor are they always tied to overarching ideologies.

Juha Vuori approaches the issue of Campus Carry from the viewpoint of emotion management with regard to active-shooter events. Vuori contextualizes his discussion around the notion of vernacular forms of social imaginaries that affect what can be seen, heard, and felt in and through their popular representations. He examines concealed-carry imaginaries by comparing them with those discernible in active-shooter-event instructional videos produced by the City of Houston, the Department of Homeland Security, and a number of universities. In the case of social imaginaries of Campus Carry in Texas, in particular, crucial elements include preparedness as a form of emotion management, the construction of "good guys" and "bad guys" that serves to produce a sense of unease, and a politics of fear. This allows for an exploration of visions of the political that are contained in the imaginaries. In this way, the essay connects the Campus Carry issue to the broader securitized imaginary of active-shooter events.

Sampo Ruoppila and Albion M. Butters's essay discusses the significance of the stance of The University of Texas at Austin on Campus Carry against the views of undergraduate students there. While the administration has regarded the policy as a "nonissue," a quantitative survey conducted among approximately 1,200 undergraduates demonstrates that a majority of students view the issue as important. And while opinions certainly differ between supporters and opponents of Campus Carry, divergences also exist within their ranks, such as among supporters of the law on where guns should specifically be allowed at the university. On the basis of the survey, the essay also examines how many licensed carriers are actually on campus, compared to the university's estimates.

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