

The Open Carry Argument

by Mainsail, a USACarry member

My primary goal when I'm out and about, besides whatever I went out and about to do, is to go about peaceably and not be the victim of a violent crime. To that end I carry a firearm whenever I go out as well as follow all the other standard safety practices like maintaining situational awareness, staying out of high crime areas, and avoiding confrontation. I also have a larger overall goal of making it through my life without shooting anyone. Simply put, I don't want to be responsible, legally or morally, for another's death. Those two goals might appear at first blush to be mutually exclusive, and with concealed carry it would be a difficult set of goals to realize.

Carry of any firearm or other weapon for defensive purposes is a solemn responsibility. Those of us that do (openly or concealed) are mortified by the idea, constantly promoted by the pacifists, that our behavior is more reckless because we are armed. In other words, because we carry a handgun we take more risks than we would if we were unarmed. While it would be dishonest to claim we are all responsible gun owners, it is my belief that the vast majority of us are. Regardless of what or how you carry, you need to come to the realization that you are setting yourself up to lose. Whenever you are placed in a defensive situation, you will always lose; it's only the degree of loss that's negotiable. Ayoob hits on this in his book, *In the Gravest Extreme*. He suggests tossing the robber a small wad of cash and moving off, even if you *could* prevail with a weapon. There's a very good reason for this. **Regardless of how skilled you are at drawing your weapon, you are going to lose.** It may be only a minor loss, like being very shaken up and not sleeping well for a few days, or it may be a major loss, like becoming fertilizer, or (most likely) it may be somewhere in-between, but you *always* lose. Your life will not be the same even if you prevail.

Carrying a concealed firearm presents to a criminal that I am unarmed. Every study I've ever read, not most but *every* study, says that criminals will avoid an armed person or home when selecting a victim. That only makes sense, right? Robbers, rapists, or carjackers might be dumb and opportunistic, but they have the same instinctual sense of self preservation we all have. Hyenas don't attack lions to steal the gazelle the lions have just killed. It's all about risk management; are the potential gains (a tasty gazelle dinner) worth the risks (pain and damage the lion's teeth will cause), and does the hyena really need to test the lion to figure out the answer? No, the hyena can see the lion's teeth and knows to stay well clear.

Deterrent Value:

When I'm carrying concealed I feel like my 'teeth' are hidden, and thus of no real deterrent value. If I appear unarmed then I am unarmed in the eyes of the robber, I appear as easy a target as almost anyone else out on the street. **My probability of being a victim of a crime, violent or otherwise, is completely unchanged by the fact that I have hidden**

beneath my shirt the means to defend myself. My goal, however, is *not* to be a victim in the first place, remember? I don't want to be a victim that fought back successfully and triumphed; I prefer to not be victimized at all. I recognize that there are some people who (think they) want to be victimized so they can whip out their concealed firearm and 'surprise' the mugger; that is, in my opinion, foolish immaturity. Concealed carry is good; it throws a wrench in the works for criminals who might see the teeming masses as a smorgasbord of financial gain. This deterrent effect is, nonetheless, indirect and often nil. At some point the thug will weigh the risks vs. the gains; is his current desperation for money/drugs/booze/gold grille greater than the gamble that one of those people *might* be carrying a gun? If he decides to play the odds, which helped along with surprise tip the scale in his favor, he will attack. Will his attack allow enough time for me to draw my concealed firearm to affect a defense? Maybe, but then again, maybe not.

Remember, I don't want to be a victim *and* I don't want to shoot anyone. So how do I realize both goals; or how do I make them inclusive? I can do that through open carry. By making it clear and obvious that I am armed, that I have teeth, I tip the risk scale to the point that the criminal's gains are far outweighed by the risk. There is no ambiguity when the thug is doing his risk assessment, there's something right there in plain sight that can quickly and painfully change or terminate his life. You may not think his life has much value, but as I mentioned before, he has the same sense of self preservation as any other living creature and to him it's every bit as valuable as yours is to you. It would be foolish to ignore this indisputable fact when you develop your overall tactical strategy.

The Five Stages of Violent Crime

I am a firm believer in this defense theology and urge anyone who carries a firearm for protection (and even those who do not) to follow the link and read it carefully. Please, for your and your family's sake, read that. Drill down into the hyperlinks for better explanations; absorb as much information as you can. A violent crime does not begin at the point where one person with ill intent draws a weapon or attacks another.

The Five Stages of Violent Crime:

Crime and violence are processes that take time to develop. The attack is not the first step, the preliminary triangle must be built. There are five distinct stages that are easily identified:

- 1) Intent
- 2) Interview
- 3) Positioning
- 4) Attack
- 5) Reaction

I do not believe the act begins after the BG has made his intentions known by drawing on you (attack); it began when he formed the intent. Well, there's not a lot I can do personally to stop another's intent, so I need to look a little farther along in the sequence and try to derail that train before it gets to the attack. For the sake of argument, let's remove weapons

from the equation for just a moment. A 5'2" unarmed attacker isn't going to choose a 6'6" victim over a 5'1" victim, right? He's going to attack the easier target. Now let's come back to the reality of violent crime and add back the weapons. Concealed carry presumes it is better to wait until the opponent has drawn his knife or gun and then try to 'fix' the situation. It seems a bit foolish to promote the idea that it's better to attempt to stop a violent crime in the fourth stage when you could instead prevent it in the second. A concealed weapon cannot deter an attack at the 'interview' stage; it's completely ineffectual in that role. Open carry is the only method that provides a direct deterrent. Let's say the bad-guy missed the openly carried pistol and holster during the interview stage, and has proceeded to the 'positioning' stage. Chances are pretty good he'll see it at some point then, right? Then, let's say the planets have all aligned just so and he, for whatever reason, has begun his attack despite your openly carried sidearm. At this point, the OCer is on level footing with the CCer, the attack has begun. Who has the advantage? Well, I'm going to say that with all things being equal (skill level and equipment) the OCer has a speed of draw advantage over the CCer.

First One To Be Shot:

There are some who criticize open carry and claim it will make you more of a target or 'the first one shot' when a robber walks into the 7-11, despite the absolute lack of credible evidence that this has ever happened. If the robber walks in and sees that you're armed, his whole plan has encountered an unexpected variable. In bank robberies where he might expect to see an armed guard he will have already factored that possibility into his plan, but only for the armed guard, not for open or concealed carry citizens. No robber robs a bank without at least a rudimentary plan. Nevertheless, being present for a bank robbery is an extremely remote possibility for most of us regardless of our preferred method of handgun carry, so let's go back in the 7-11. If the robber sees someone is armed he is forced to either significantly alter the plan or abort it outright. Robbing is an inherently apprehensive occupation, and one that doesn't respond well to instant modifications. He is not prepared to commit murder when he only planned for larceny. He knows that a petty robbery will not garner the intense police manhunt a murder would. He doesn't know if you're an armed citizen or a police officer and isn't going to take the time to figure it out. Either way, if someone in the 7-11 is unexpectedly armed, how many others might be similarly adorned and where might they be? Does this unexpectedly armed individual have a partner who is likewise armed nearby, someone who is watching right now? Self preservation compels him to abort the plan for one that is less risky. So we see that the logic matches the history; open carriers are not the first ones shot because it doesn't make sense in any common street crime scenario that they would be. If your personal self protection plan emphasizes "Hollywood" style crimes over the more realistic street mugging, it might be best to stay

home.

Surprise:

Probably the most common condemnation of open carry comes from the armchair tacticians who believe it's better to have the element of surprise in a criminal encounter. Although this was touched on in the previous paragraph about deterrence, I'll expand on it specifically here because there are some important truths you need to consider before you lean too heavily on this false support. Surprise as a defensive tactic is often based on unrealistic or ill-thought out scenarios, and seems to exist only in the minds of concealed carry firearms proponents. The circumstance where several street toughs surround and taunt you for a while before robbing you, like in some Charles Bronson movie, is not realistic; the mugger wants to get in and out as fast as possible. In most cases you will have only seconds to realize what's happening, make a decision, and react. Imagine you're walking along the sidewalk when two gangsta looking teenagers suddenly appear at the corner coming in the opposite direction. You have only seconds to react *if* their intent was to victimize you. Do you draw your concealed firearm now or wait until there's an actual visible threat? If they are just on their way to church and you pull a gun on them, you are the criminal and you will likely forever lose your firearms rights for such a foolish action. If you don't draw and they pull a knife or pistol when they're just a couple steps away, your only options are draw (if you think you can) or comply. Imagine staring at the shiny blade of a knife being held by a very nervous and violent mugger, three inches from your or your wife's throat and having to decide whether or not you have time to draw from concealment. The element of surprise may not do you any good; in fact the only surprising thing that might happen is that your concealed carry pistol gets taken along with your wallet. The thug will later get a good chuckle with his buddies about how you brought a gun to a knife fight. **The simple truth is that while surprise is a monumentally superior tactical maneuver, it is exclusively an offensive action, not a defensive one.** What many internet commandos call 'defensive surprise' is nothing more than damage control, a last ditch effort to fight your way back out of a dangerous situation. I am not aware of any army that teaches using surprise as a defense against attack. No squad of soldiers goes on patrol with their weapons hidden so that they can 'surprise' the enemy should they walk into an ambush.

It Will Get Stolen:

Another common criticism of open carry is that the firearm itself will be the target of theft, prompting a criminal to attack simply to get the gun from you. Like the previous example of being the first one shot in a robbery, above, this is despite the fact that there is no credible evidence it happens. It also blindly ignores the more obvious fact that anything you possess

can make you the target of a crime, be it a car, a watch, or even a female companion (girlfriend, wife, or daughter). Crooks commonly steal for only one of two reasons; to get something you have that they want, or to get something that you have so they can sell it and buy something they want. I don't claim it could never happen; just that it's so remote a possibility that it doesn't warrant drastic alterations to our self defense strategies. If you believe otherwise, leave your wife, children, watch, sunglasses, jewelry, and cell phone at home, hop into your Pinto wagon, and head out to do your thing. Very often, someone critical of open carry will cite some example of a uniformed police officer whose gun was taken by a violent criminal, and yes, this does indeed happen. The argument, however, breaks down when they assume the officer was targeted solely to steal his firearm. What is more likely is that the officer was targeted merely for being a police officer and the gun was stolen as a byproduct of the attack. More often, the officer's gun is taken during the struggle to get the suspect into custody due to an entirely unrelated matter. However, let's suppose, for argument, that a police officer really was attacked just to get his firearm. What actions did the police department take to prevent it from reoccurring? Did they demand that their officers carry concealed? No, of course not. You should, like the police, prioritize your defense strategy for the most likely threat first, and the least likely last.

It Scares People:

One other statement against open carry I hear is that it damages public perception of firearms owners, or that by carrying openly we are not being good ambassadors to the public. While there are some people who have a genuine fear of firearms, due either to some horrible past experience or anti-gun indoctrination, the majority of people are either indifferent to them or quite fascinated by them. I've never kept track of the dozens of fellow citizens I've encountered who have marveled at the idea of open carry, but I do know exactly how many have expressed displeasure at it; one. People are scared of many things for many reasons; however, pretending those things do not exist only perpetuates the fear. Someone who is disturbed by open carry is going to be every bit as disturbed by concealed carry. The only effective way to overcome a fear is to come to the intellectual realization that the phobia is based on emotion and not on fact. By being a firsthand witness that a firearm was carried responsibly and peaceably, and wasn't being carried in the commission of a crime, one who was apprehensive about firearms discovers their fear is not fact based, but emotional. Thus, open carry can be a very effectual way of helping to overcome the emotionally based fear of the firearm. After all, you'd be much more likely to believe in ghosts if you saw one rather than if you listened to a ghost story around a campfire. In other words, we give significantly more credibility to the things we experience than we do to the things we hear. The bottom line is that this argument is made by people who don't, cant, or haven't carried openly; those of us who do so on a regular basis have an entirely different experience.

I'm Not Comfortable Carrying Openly:

This is really the only reasonable argument against open carry for an individual. We all have a comfort zone for any aspect of our lives and we prefer to stay within that comfort zone. We all agree that it's better to be armed and never need the firearm than it is to need it and not have it. There is a point where concealing your firearm becomes so problematic, due to conditions like temperature or comfort, that some choose to either leave it behind or carry in such a way that it would be difficult or impossible to draw it quickly. If it takes me five or six seconds to draw my firearm from deep concealment and I had sufficient time before hand to actually do so, I would prefer to use that five or six seconds to avoid the entire encounter. I'm glad we have concealed carry laws in most of the states; it empowers and protects not only us but the general public through the offset deterrent effect. Some of us, however, choose the more direct deterrent effect of open carry.

Conclusion

No, open carry is not the be-all-end-all of self defense any more than concealed carry is. The purpose of this essay is not to convince you to carry a firearm openly, but to merely point out the reasoning I used to determine that it is often the best option for me. If you think otherwise, please feel free to write an essay of your own outlining the reasoning you used. I would suggest that you avoid the intellectual mistake of emphasizing rare or unlikely defense scenarios that many of us will never experience. I believe one should prioritize for the most likely threat, not the least likely threat. I don't put Hollywood style bank robberies high on my threat list because I rarely go into a bank and those types of robberies are very rare themselves. I live in the most crime riddled city in the northwest; the most likely threat here is some young male with a knife or gun trying to carjack me or mug me on the street, in the park, or in a parking lot. With this knowledge I build my personal self protection plan based on that manner of attack. This may not suit you, especially if you live in Hollywood.

Original Post Link:

<https://www.usacarry.com/forums/threads/the-open-carry-argument.7230/>