

Poll: Floridians don't want guns on college campuses

Ledyard King, Democrat Washington Bureau 11:49 p.m. EDT October 6, 2015



WASHINGTON — An overwhelming number of Floridians oppose letting college students carry concealed weapons on campus, according to a survey released Tuesday.

The USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey by the University of South Florida found most state residents disagree with pro-gun groups that say campuses would be safer if students could carry guns. The survey was conducted before the Oct. 1 shooting at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Ore., that left 10 people dead, including the gunman.

Seventy-three percent of Florida adults said allowing students with permits to carry concealed weapons on campus would be heading in the "wrong direction," according to the survey. Only 17 percent said it would be a move in the "right direction," while 10 percent had no opinion.

Since 2013, there have been 59 shootings on college campuses — including six in Florida,, according to the gun-control group Everytown for Gun Safety.

The state legislature is again expected to consider legislation next year that would allow college students to carry a concealed weapon or firearm into any college or university facility. A similar bill died in the Senate earlier this year.

The Sunshine State Survey, based on interviews with 1,251 adults, was conducted from July 30 through Aug. 16. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.77 percentage points.

USF professor Susan MacManus, who directed the project, doesn't think the Oregon shooting would have swayed the survey results because feelings about gun rights are so entrenched.

Younger adults, males and whites are more likely than older Floridians, women or blacks to support concealed-carry on campuses, the survey found.

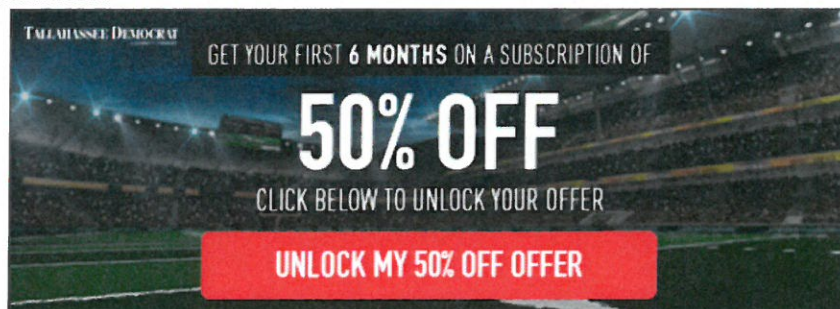
"There's huge consensus" against guns on campus, she said Tuesday. "It probably wouldn't change much because of the ideological disposition and who supports each side of this."

The survey's findings suggest a widening gap between supporters and opponents of the controversial policy.

A Saint Leo University Polling Institute survey released in March found that 56 percent of 522 Florida adults surveyed opposed allowing individuals with concealed firearms licenses to carry guns on state campuses, while 32 percent supported it and 12 percent were undecided.

Florida is one of 19 states that ban carrying concealed weapons or firearms on college campuses, according to research by the Florida Legislature. Eight states allow the practice and 23 leave the decision to colleges and universities.

On Friday, faculty members at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers voted in favor of a resolution opposing the concealed-carry on campus bills scheduled for debate next year in Tallahassee.



"Faculty has no interest in seeing students carrying guns, and students have zero interest in seeing faculty have guns," said English professor Patrick Niner. "The student government has made that very clear. We don't want our mutual sense of collegiality to be in any way compromised."

But FGCU sophomore Ryan Dodge, 19, said allowing people to carry concealed weapons on campuses could save lives.

"Say it happened in the library — someone just pulls out a gun and goes crazy," he said. "If there were people there that had concealed weapons, they could stop it early before he gets to kill more people."