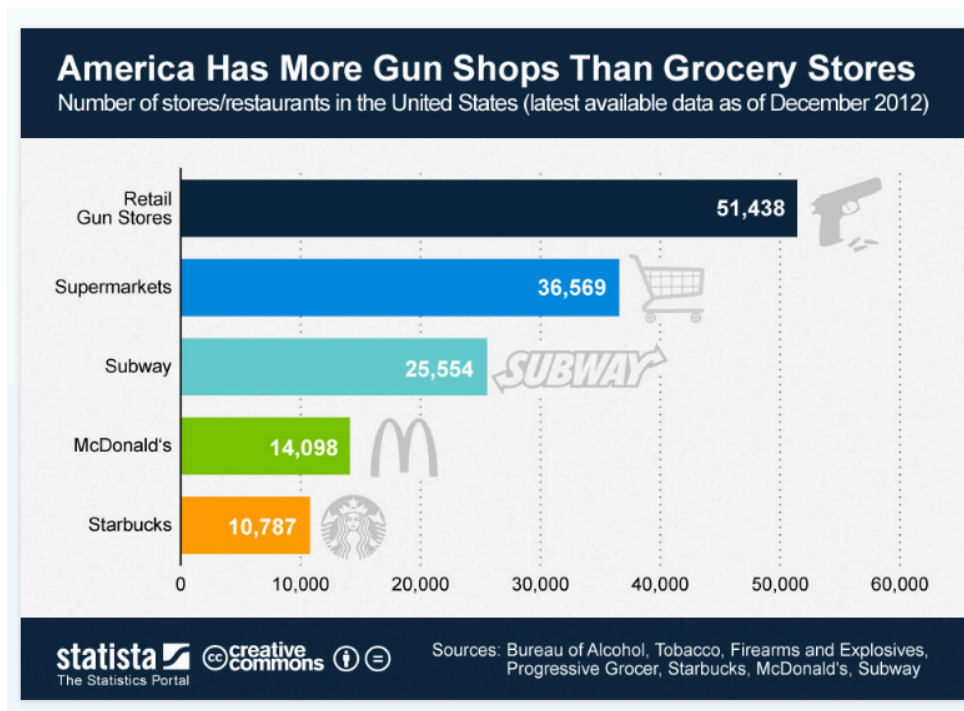


America's Obsessive Gun Psychosis

Stephan A. Schwartz

There are more guns than people in the United States. In a nation of 330,196,902 people, as of Saturday 10 April 2021,¹ on that same day guns in civilian hands totaled an estimated 393 million weapons.² Forty percent of adult Americans own a gun or live with someone who owns one,³ although both the total number of guns and gun owners may actually be considerably higher. Because of the various restrictions at both the federal and state level, the laws have been deliberately structured to make getting firm numbers impossible. To quote a research paper by Alex Yablon on this issue, “The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, which regulates gun sales, even faces severe restrictions on how much it can digitize its records of firearms transactions, lest they form a de facto national gun inventory.”⁴

You may find this hard to believe but in the United States there are more gun shops than supermarkets, McDonald's, Subways, or Starbucks. In fact, there are more gun stores in the U.S. than McDonald's, Subway and Starbucks restaurants combined.

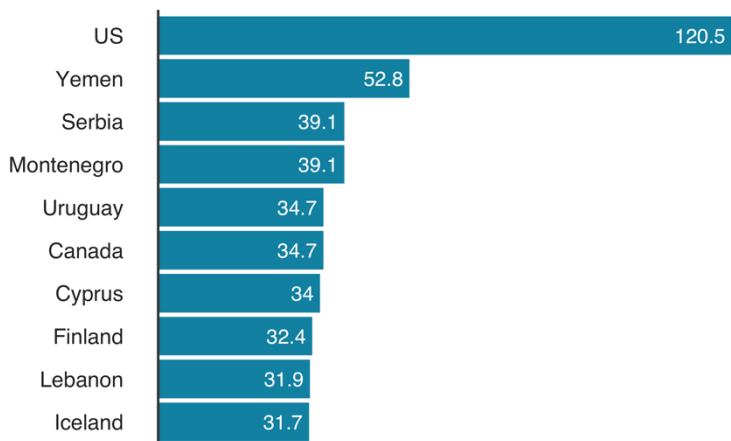


What is particularly interesting is that the number of gun owners is going up exponentially. According to the the Firearm Industry Trade Association, “nearly 5 million Americans purchased a firearm for the very first time in 2020. NSSF surveyed firearm retailers which reported that 40 percent of sales were conducted to purchasers who have never previously owned a firearm.”⁵

“This is a tectonic shift in the firearm and ammunition industry marketplace and complete transformation of today’s gun-owning community,” said Lawrence G. Keane, NSSF Senior Vice President of General Counsel. “These first-time buyers represent a group of people who, until now, were agnostic regarding firearm ownership.”⁶

Top 10 civilian gun-owning countries

Firearms per 100 residents



Source: Small Arms Survey 2018

BBC

America by any standard has an psychotic obsession with guns. And this really becomes apparent when one looks at gun ownership in other nations, both developed and developing, where private civilian gun ownership is permitted.

If guns were an illicit drug the medical community, the media, and politicians would all be describing what is happening in America in terms of addiction, and psychotic and obsessive behavior.

They would also be talking about the lethality of this obsession. How lethal is it? According to the Gun Violence Archive in 2020, 19,379 men, women, and children were murdered by gun fire. And additional 24,000 died by suicide using a firearm. So far in 2021 there have been 5,127 homicides and 6,666 suicides by firearm for a total of 11,793.⁷

These deaths rarely make the news, but mass shootings do, and the level of mass firearm killings in the U.S. at the time I am writing this has reached 130. But I want to give that number some context, so here is a compilation by Madeline Holcombe of ABC News covering just the last two weeks of March 2021, after the three Atlanta-area spa shootings on 16 March claimed the lives of eight people. During just those two weeks after the Atlanta murders at least 20 other mass shootings took place.⁸

Just to be clear, CNN defines a mass shooting as a shooting incident that results in four or more casualties (dead or wounded), excluding the shooter(s).

The following incidents listed by ABC occurred all over the country from California to Washington, DC., and at least seven mass shootings occurred just in the week between the attacks in Atlanta and the mass shooting in the grocery store in Boulder, Colorado. In the week that followed, that number more than doubled.

Stephan A. Schwartz - Schwartzreport

March 31: Orange, California

Four people, including a child, were killed and another person wounded in a mass shooting at an office complex in Orange, California, according to authorities.

March 31: Washington, DC

Five people were shot in Washington, the DC Police Department said. The incident started as a dispute and ended with two people dead and three injured.

March 28: Cleveland, Ohio

Seven people were shot at a Cleveland nightclub, according to CNN affiliate WOIO. The victims, four men and three women, were all between 20 and 30 years old, and police believe several shooters fired inside the nightclub, the station reported.

March 28: Chicago, Illinois

[Four people in an SUV were shot](#) on the I-57 expressway, according to Illinois State Police. All were taken to hospitals in critical condition.

March 28: Essex, Maryland

A man fatally shot his parents before shooting three people at a convenience store, killing two of them, CNN affiliate WBOC, citing Baltimore County police. The suspect died by suicide.

March 27: Chicago, Illinois

Four people were shot in Chicago's South Austin neighborhood, according to a CNN affiliate. The victims, which included men ages 42, 53 and 64, were all near a sidewalk when they were shot, the station reported.

March 27: Yazoo City, Mississippi

At least seven people were injured in a mass shooting at a nightclub, CNN affiliate WLBT reported. At least six people were shot and another person suffered a laceration, the station reported.

March 27: River Grove, Illinois

A shooting on a party bus left three people injured and one dead, according to CNN affiliate WLS. Police say the occupants of another vehicle fired at the bus while stopped at an intersection, the station reported.

March 26: Virginia Beach, Virginia

Three shootings in the city left eight people injured and two dead, according to the City of Virginia Beach. Officers responded to shots fired and found the eight victims, who were transported to local hospitals with gunshot wounds ranging from serious to life-threatening. Officers heard additional gunshots nearby and found a female victim who died of injuries from gunshot wounds.

The suspected gunman succumbed to his wounds after a related officer-involved shooting, the city said.

March 26: Chicago, Illinois

A gathering in Chicago's Wrightwood neighborhood turned into a [mass shooting](#), according to WLS. Two gunmen opened fire inside the gathering, wounding seven people and fatally shooting a 26-year-old man, the station reported.

March 26: Norfolk, Virginia

Police responded to a shooting that left four people wounded, CNN affiliate WTKR reported. The victims -- two 18-year-old men, a 17-year-old girl and a 21-year-old woman -- sustained non-life-threatening gunshot wounds.

March 26: Memphis, Tennessee

Five people were shot in Memphis, the Memphis Police Department said on Twitter. Three victims were pronounced dead at the scene, two were transported to the hospital in critical condition and one was transported in non-critical condition, the tweet said.

March 26: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Outside of the Golf and Social Club, police say two suspects shot seven people, CNN affiliate WPVI reported. Video released by police shows two suspects approaching a gathering crowd and opening fire.

March 23: Aliceville, Alabama

A shooting reported at an Aliceville home left two people dead and two injured, according to CNN affiliate WVTM.

March 23: Boulder, Colorado

Ten people, including a Boulder police officer, were killed in a shooting at the King Soopers supermarket, according to police.

March 20: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

One person was killed and another five were injured during a shooting at an illegal party, CNN affiliate KYW reported. "There were at least 150 people in there that fled and believed they had to flee for their lives," Philadelphia Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw said.

March 20: Dallas, Texas

Eight people were shot, one fatally, by an unknown assailant, according to police.

March 20: Houston Texas

Five people were shot after a disturbance inside a club, according to police. One was in critical condition after being shot in the neck, the rest were in stable condition, according to CNN affiliate KPRC.

March 18: Gresham, Oregon

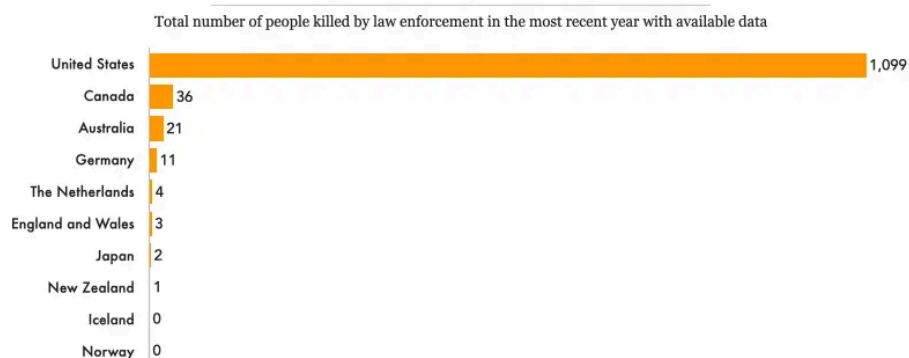
Four victims were taken to the hospital after a shooting in the city east of Portland, police said in an initial report.

March 17: Stockton, California

Five people who were preparing a vigil in Stockton, in California's Central Valley, were shot in a drive-by shooting, the San Joaquin Sheriff's Department said. None had life-threatening injuries.

What is alarming to me and others who are following this, however, is not just the guns involved in these murders but who is using those guns. Since 2016 the United States has experienced an alarming growth in White Supremacy stimulated by the Trump administration.⁹ The Brookings Institute has been focusing on this. Their conclusion, "Roughly 75% of domestic terrorist acts are committed by right-wing extremists and 75% of them are committed by white nationalists and white supremacists. Domestic terrorism is so concerning that the Director of National Intelligence and the Department of Homeland Security have classified domestic violent extremism to be the biggest threat for mass violence in the United States."¹⁰

U.S. POLICE KILL FAR MORE CIVILIANS ANNUALLY THAN ANY OTHER WEALTHY COUNTRY



PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE

Sources: Data compiled by the Prison Policy Initiative from news sources, government reports, and advocacy groups. Data from the U.S., the Netherlands, England and Wales, and Iceland are from 2019. Data from Australia, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and Norway are from 2018, and data from Canada are from 2017. For details, see: www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/06/05/policekillings/

America's obsession with guns infects not only the sad loser, the White racist, or the mentally deranged mass murderer, but the police and sheriffs throughout the United States. American law enforcement kills people by gun fire at a rate unseen in any other developed nation. In fact, U.S. police kill more civilians annually than all the European nations combined.

And, as with everything else involving the police there is a huge racial disparity.¹¹ If you are Black, Hispanic, or Asian and you are stopped by the police, you have a much higher probability of experiencing violence, even death, as the current George Floyd trial, on television daily as I write this, makes clear.

Oh, my God, there has just been another one. Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old black man, out driving to his brother's new house with his girlfriend on a Sunday afternoon in Brooklyn Park, a Minneapolis suburb about 10 miles from where George Floyd trial is taking place was, in my opinion murdered by police. He initially stopped by police for "air fresheners hanging from his rearview mirror."¹² Somehow a few minutes later, as his girlfriend looked on, he was murdered by Kim Potter, a policewoman 26 year on the force who mistook her Glock 9 for her taser and shot and killed him. No one trained to be armed would make that mistake, It is so preposterous it is worth looking at a picture of both.



Glock 9



Police issue taser

You wear the gun on the side of your dominant hand, and the taser on the hip of your non-dominant hand. The gun is notably heavier than the taser.

I think it needs to be asked why police departments across America routinely get increased budgets almost every year, and American police and sheriffs are amongst the highest paid law enforcement personnel in the world; yet their gun violence is unequalled by any other nation. A survey of police salaries around the world shows “the median average salary for police and sheriff patrol officers in the United States is around \$60,000. This amount varies depending on the state one is employed in and level of experience. Some of the highest paying states are New York (Average – \$103,000 Entry level \$62,000), California (Average: \$102,000 Entry Level: \$80,000), New Jersey (Average \$100,000 Entry Level \$53,000).”¹³ So pay isn’t the issue. The question seems to be why can’t American police and sheriffs department recruit and hire a higher caliber of individuals? Why do American law enforcement personnel kill the people they are supposed to serve and protect at a rate seen nowhere else in the developed world? What is it all those other countries can do, with their lower budgets, that American law enforcement agencies can’t seem to manage?

As if that were not enough, the infiltration of law enforcement and the military by MAGA racists is something that should concern all of us. This is straight out of the Nazi playbook, and since 1860 and the Civil War, this has never before been a serious issue. However, the number of active duty and veteran police and military in the 6th January insurrection, in my opinion, should be seen as a wake-up call, warning us about what is happening. This incursion of MAGA racists into the police and military threatens the democracy that has historically been the foundation of America. The Brennan Center for Justice published a special report, “Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism, White Supremacy, and Far-Right Militancy in Law Enforcement.”

As Michael German, the lead author of the report, wrote, “The harms that armed law enforcement officers affiliated with violent white supremacist and anti-government militia groups can inflict on American society could hardly be overstated. Yet despite the FBI’s acknowledgement of the links between law enforcement and these suspected terrorist groups, the Justice Department has no national strategy designed to identify white supremacist police officers or to protect the safety and civil rights of the communities they patrol.”¹⁴

It is also easy to see, if one is willing to look, how America’s psychotic gun obsession has completely warped our entertainment industry. Think for a moment about the heroes of action movies made before the Reagan era: Jimmy Stewart, Cary Grant, Sean Connery, Charlton Heston, William Holden, Rock Hudson. Mostly elegant men, and yes, guns played a role in their movies, but a small one incidental to the main plot development. Now think about the action heroes of recent movies, Dwayne Johnson, Vin Diesel, Jason Statham, Liam Neeson, Daniel Craig, Tom Cruise, Mark Wahlberg. Guns and gun battles are central to their movies, and a typical Jason Statham film is a study in mass murder by gun fire.

Similarly, compare Netflix, Showtime, Starz series and films with those made in Iceland, Finland, Norway or the U.K. Say *Sniper*, *Seal Team*, *The Mandalorian*, compared to *Bordertown*, *The Vahalla Murders*, *Ragnarok*, *Lilyhammer*, *The Bodyguard* you can quickly see that multiple gun killings are a central feature of the American series but largely absent in series made in other Western countries.

In his 8 April 2021 Rose Garden presentation on gun violence in the U.S., President Biden said, “This is an epidemic, for God’s sake, and it has to stop. It’s an international embarrassment. Enough prayers. Time for some action.”

President Biden then proposed a series of measures that are as sensible and as evidence based as wearing your seatbelt when driving.

- Direct the Justice Department to propose a rule within 30 days to help stop the proliferation of ghost guns – firearms assembled from kits that often lack serial numbers and are difficult to trace.
- Direct the DOJ to craft a rule within 60 days that clarifies the point at which a stabilizing arm brace effectively turns a pistol into a short-barreled rifle, subjecting that firearm to additional regulations.
- Direct the DOJ to publish, within 60 days, model red-flag legislation, which lets law enforcement officers or family members ask a court to temporarily bar someone from accessing guns under certain circumstances. The White House says the model legislation will make it easier for states to pass their own versions of that law.
- Direct the DOJ to issue a comprehensive report on gun trafficking.
- Call for Congress to end the broad immunity that gun-makers have from being sued for shootings.

This last point is particularly interesting and to Biden his most important. He said, “If I get one thing on my list, the Lord came down and said, ‘Joe, you get one of these,’ give me that one.” (the ability to sue gun manufacturers)¹⁵

“Because I tell you what,” he added, “there would be a come-to-the-Lord moment these folks would have, real quickly.”¹⁶

I am writing this in April, and you are reading it in July. By then you will see whether anything has happened or the mass murders just continue. We are not going to solve this problem until we make fostering wellbeing our first priority.

You cannot bully a racist gun obsessed White male, the Ammond Bundys, the Proud Boys, the 3 per centers into changing. If you outlawed guns tomorrow they would become illicit but no less prevalent. That would just increase their sense of persecution and create more violent resistance.

The way we can get rid of America’s gun obsession and the White supremacy, with which it is linked, is to take away the circumstances, the culture, that activates both the gun obsession and the racism. And the easiest, most efficient, least costly, way to do that is to create wellbeing at both the individual and social level. At its most fundamental level, this is all about consciousness, the consciousness of the America culture and the intentions to which it gives priority, Change that and everything else changes. That is how Gandhi got independence for India without a war. Changing the social level depends on collective change by individuals as to whether the gun madness and racism continues. One of the ways we do that is how we vote in 2022.

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