



Comprehensive Analysis of Gun Dependency and Reform: Historical, Cultural, Economic, and Psychological Perspectives in the United States

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Abstract

Gun violence in the United States remains a critical public safety issue, causing significant loss of life and economic strain. This paper explores the complex roots of American gun dependency, focusing on its historical, cultural, psychological, and socio-political dimensions. By examining the enduring influence of the Second Amendment, media portrayal, and gun lobbying, the study reveals the deep entrenchment of gun culture. Despite these challenges, the analysis underscores the feasibility and necessity of reform. Drawing on successful international models, including those in Australia, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Norway, the paper offers targeted recommendations for U.S. policymakers. These include promoting non-lethal self-defense, reassessing civilian armament, reforming police weaponry, and tightening regulations on straw purchases. The urgency of comprehensive reform is highlighted by the tragic incident at Robb Elementary School, illustrating the human cost of inaction. The findings suggest that, through collective effort, the U.S. can achieve significant reductions in gun violence.

Subject Areas

Culture, Economics, Psychology, Public Policy, Sociology

Keywords

Gun Violence, Mass Shootings, Firearm Dependency, Gun Control Policies, Second Amendment, Gun Lobbying, Historical Gun Culture, Psychological Drivers, International Gun Reforms, Economic Impact of Guns, Public Safety Reform

1. Introduction

Gun violence in the United States continues to be one of the nation's most pressing public health crises, contributing to significant loss of life and economic strain. With over 48,830 gun-related deaths reported in 2021 alone [1], this issue remains pervasive despite America's status as a global economic leader [2]. This study explores the deeply rooted phenomenon of gun dependency, tracing its historical, cultural, psychological, and socio-political dimensions.

By analyzing the influence of the Second Amendment, the impact of media portrayal, and the lobbying power of organizations like the National Rifle Association (NRA), the research reveals how ingrained gun culture has become in American society. Despite these challenges, there is potential for reform. Drawing on international models of success from Australia, Japan, Norway, and the United Kingdom, this study offers targeted recommendations to reduce gun violence in the U.S. These include promoting non-lethal self-defense, reforming police weaponry, and implementing stricter gun control policies.

Psychologically, firearms provide many Americans with a sense of power, security, and identity, yet this cultural attachment has resulted in numerous tragedies, including mass shootings, which underscore the urgent need for reform. The NRA's significant political influence further hinders progress by resisting changes to gun control policies. A notable example of the dangers of widespread gun accessibility was the assassination attempt during a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, which reignited national debates on gun control [3].

This study draws on successful international models from countries like Australia, Japan, Norway, and the United Kingdom to propose reforms that include promoting non-lethal self-defense, reforming police weaponry, and tightening gun control regulations. Highlighting the lessons from other nations, this research advocates for comprehensive reforms in U.S. gun policy to prioritize public safety. The tragic incident at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, serves as a poignant reminder of the human cost of inaction, underscoring the need for immediate and meaningful reform.

1.1. Literature Review: Foundations of Gun Dependency in the United States

Gun violence and dependency in the United States have been widely explored across public health, sociology, law, and psychology. Key themes from the literature offer insight into the historical, cultural, and psychological roots of gun ownership, as well as the political barriers to reform.

The U.S. gun culture is deeply tied to its colonial past and the Second Amendment ratified in 1791. Scholars like Cornell (2008) highlight how the amendment has entrenched the right to gun ownership as a pillar of personal liberty and protection [4]. Spitzer (2020) and Winkler (2011) emphasize that firearms have become symbols of American identity, particularly in rural areas where they represent self-reliance and freedom [5] [6].

Psychological research by Carlson (2015) shows that guns offer feelings of power, security, and identity [7]. Pew Research found that 74% of gun owners associate firearm ownership with personal freedom [8]. Sociologically, Goss (2006) and Metzl (2019) argue that gun rights activism often reflects broader ideologies of individualism and distrust of government, complicating reform efforts [9] [10].

Studies by Spitzer (2020) and LaPierre (1994) demonstrate the powerful influence of the NRA, whose lobbying efforts have blocked significant gun control measures [5] [11]. OpenSecrets report by Giorno et al. (2022) reports that the NRA consistently outspends gun control advocates, making it a dominant force in U.S. politics [12]. Spitzer (2020) and Hardy (2014) note that the NRA's framing of gun control as an attack on constitutional rights has stifled meaningful legislative change [5] [13].

Comparative studies by Chapman (2013) on Australia's gun reforms after the 1996 Port Arthur massacre, and by Squires (2000) on the UK's 1997 Firearms Act, demonstrate the potential of stringent regulations to reduce gun violence [14] [15]. Research on Japan's gun laws by Aoki (2017) and Weller et al. (2022) [16] [17], and Norway's low gun violence rates by Godin (2020) and Ofman (2016) further illustrate how strict regulations and cultural factors can enhance public safety [18] [19].

The literature establishes a comprehensive understanding of U.S. gun dependency, shaped by historical, cultural, and psychological factors, as well as the formidable influence of the NRA. International models suggest that reforms are possible, but they require overcoming significant political challenges.

1.2. Methodology, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

This study employs a multi-faceted approach to comprehensively analyze the various dimensions of gun dependency and gun violence in American society. The methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques, aiming to capture a holistic understanding of the issue.

To examine the historical and cultural roots of gun ownership in the United States, the study reviewed historical documents, legislative records, and cultural artifacts. Key sources included the U.S. Constitution, historical accounts of the American Revolution, and post-Civil War legislation. Cultural influences were assessed through media analysis, focusing on the portrayal of guns in movies, literature, and other forms of popular culture.

Data on gun violence, ownership, and economic impact were sourced from reputable organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF). These datasets provided quantitative measures of gun-related incidents, economic costs, and employment statistics within the firearm industry.

The study incorporated findings from psychological and sociological research

on gun ownership and behavior. Surveys and studies conducted by the Pew Research Center, Gallup, and academic institutions were analyzed to understand the psychological drivers behind gun ownership and the social implications of widespread firearm accessibility.

The effectiveness of gun control policies in other countries was evaluated through a comparative policy analysis. Case studies of Australia, the United Kingdom, Japan, New Zealand, and Norway were conducted to identify successful strategies and their outcomes. Legislative documents, government reports, and academic articles were reviewed to gather insights on these international approaches.

The historical and cultural data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and narratives that have shaped American gun culture. Media content was analyzed using content analysis techniques to determine the portrayal of firearms and their perceived role in society.

Statistical data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify trends, correlations, and patterns in gun violence and ownership. Economic impact assessments were conducted to calculate the direct and indirect costs associated with gun violence.

The policies of the selected countries were compared to U.S. policies to identify gaps and potential areas for reform. Success factors and challenges in the implementation of these policies were documented to provide a contextual understanding of their applicability to the U.S.

1.3. Limitations

The study acknowledges certain limitations. The reliance on secondary data sources may introduce biases inherent in the original data collection processes. Additionally, the cultural and political uniqueness of each country studied may limit the direct applicability of their policies to the U.S. context. Despite these limitations, the study provides a robust framework for understanding the complex issue of gun violence and dependency in American society.

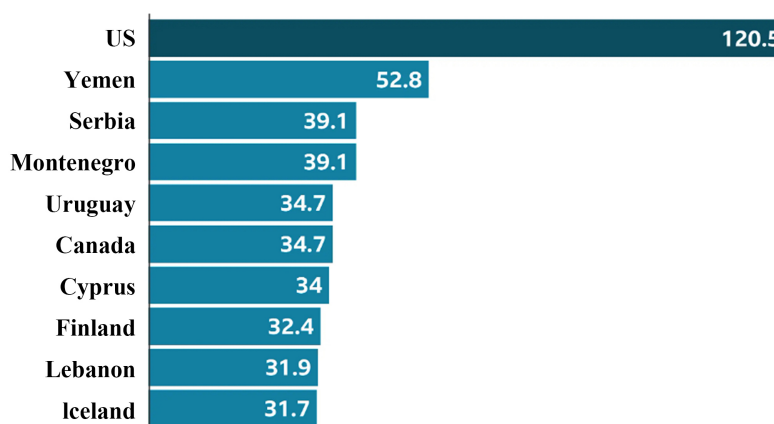
2. Driving and Restraining Factors of Gun Reforms

It is quite weird that the number one advanced economy in the world [2] which possesses massive influence throughout the whole planet is experiencing safety concerns for civilians caused by firearms. However, why can't we see the substantial restrictions and reforms in the country that experience the catastrophic outcomes of easy gun accessibility?

In the United States, there is no unified consensus regarding gun ownership, reforms, or even responses to mass shootings that have resulted in significant loss of life. Some individuals argue that gun ownership is essential for personal protection and self-defense, viewing it as an indispensable tool for ensuring safety. From this perspective, firearms are considered necessary in maintaining personal security. Conversely, others contend that public safety would be significantly

enhanced by enacting stricter gun control policies. Advocates for such regulations argue that limiting civilian access to firearms would reduce violence and create a more secure environment for society as a whole. This division reflects deeply rooted cultural and ideological differences regarding the role of firearms in American society [8] [20].

Top 10 civilian gun-owning countries Estimated number of firearms per 100 residents



Source: Small Arms Survey, 2018

B B C

Figure 1. Top 10 Civilian gun-owning countries. Source: [21].

As indicated in **Figure 1**, The US ratio of 120.5 firearms per 100 residents far surpasses that of other countries around the world [21].

Why does the US society need so many guns? To answer this question, we are going to look at this tendency considering various perspectives and factors.

3. The Historical and Cultural Background of US Civil Gun Dependability

US history is rich with many wars ranging from the need to be independent from colonists to the expansion of national boundaries. After the end of the Civil War (1861-1865), guns were sold at dry goods stores alongside flour and sugar. Moreover, the end of slavery brought the formation of armed groups regarding protecting newly freed Black men, while others terrorized them [22].

Colonial and revolutionary roots are not the only major factors that promoted America's pervasive gun culture. The Second Amendment ratified in 1791, states: "*A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.*" Pro-Second Amendment groups claim that it protects an individual's right to own guns which are needed for self-defense from threats ranging from local criminals to foreign invaders, so gun ownership restrains crime rather than causes crime [23].

In 1865 after the abolishment of slavery, "black codes" prohibited black people

from owning guns, thus laws allowing the ownership of guns specified “free white men”. An 1833 Georgia law stated, “It shall not be lawful for any free person of color in this state, to own, use, or carry firearms of any description whatever... that the free person of color, so detected in owning, using, or carrying firearms, shall receive upon his bare back, thirty-nine lashes, and that the firearm so found in the possession of said free person of color, shall be exposed for public sale [23].”

Prohibition (dry jurisdiction)¹ in the 1920s and the Great Depression² in the 1930s brought the era of America’s public enemies. Famous figures of this era were gangsters like Al Capone, John Dillinger, Bonny and Clyde, “Baby Face” Nelson, “Pretty Boy” Floyd, and “Machine Gun” Kelly. Although many of these gangsters were criminals, villains, and thieves, they became beloved by millions and even some of them were considered heroes. For example, John Dillinger was hailed as a hero by bank debtors for destroying the debtor lists of the banks, he robbed during the Great Depression [24]. Their clothing styles, speech styles, and quotes were examples for many. American cinematography did not lag behind in reviving the memories of gangsters. Of course, such approaches have made it common for people to take up arms. Thus, there is no doubt that Americans’ fascination with guns has very deep historical and cultural roots.

Several authors have drawn a connection between gun ownership and racial tensions by examining the cultural symbolism and socio-political meaning of guns. Metzl argues, “Mainstream society reflexively codes white men carrying weapons in public as patriots while marking armed black men as threats or criminals.” In support of this view, a 2013 study found that having a gun in the home is a sign of racism against black people as measured by the Symbolic Racism Scale [25].

As it turns out, the Americans’ demand for guns has deep historical roots. Events in American history have had a direct impact on this trend. Wars, slavery, the revolt of slaves, lack of full restoration of rights after being freed, discrimination of aborigines and people of color, and adoption of laws increasing discrimination in various states even provoked the enthusiasm for arms.

4. Influence of Lobbying

Prominent gun rights organizations consistently outspent gun control counterparts in Washington, investing millions more in lobbying efforts to influence gun policy. This financial dominance underscores the significant political power held by these groups, making it challenging for gun control advocates to advance legislative reforms. The NRA is consistently the top contributing organization among gun rights groups [12].

NRA stands for National Rifle Association. It was founded in 1871 by two US Civil War veterans as a recreational group designed to “promote and encourage

¹January 19, 1919, Congress ratified the 18th Amendment, banning the manufacture, sale and transport of alcoholic beverages [40].

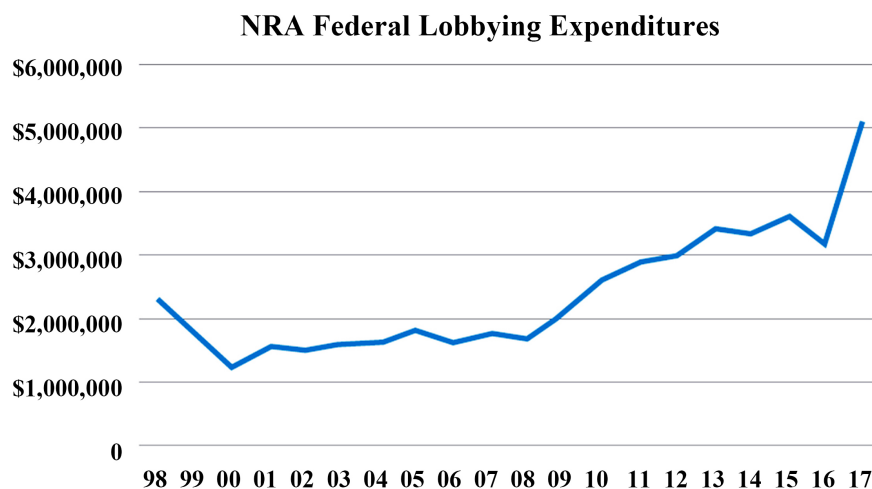
²One of the worst economic downturn in the history of the industrialized world, lasting from 1929 to 1939 [41].

rifle shooting on a scientific basis”. NRA formed a lobbying arm, the Institute for Legislative Action, to influence government policy in 1975, and two years after it formed its own Political Action Committee (PAC). The NRA is now among the most powerful special interest lobby groups in the US, with a substantial budget to influence members of Congress on gun policy. In 2020, the NRA spent about \$250 million—far more than all the country’s gun control advocacy groups put together. NRA officially spends about \$3m per year to influence gun policy. However, that is only the recorded contributions to lawmakers, and considerable sums are spent elsewhere via PACs and independent contributions—funds that are difficult to track [26]. The annual report put total revenue from all sources for the NRA and its affiliated nonprofits at a 14% drop to \$282 million in 2021, down from \$329 million in 2020 [27].

As shown in **Figure 2**, the NRA’s federal lobbying expenditures have seen a notable increase over time. For instance, in 2007, the NRA spent \$1,815,000 on lobbying efforts at the federal level. By 2017, that figure had surged to \$5,122,000. This growth in expenditure highlights the NRA’s expanding influence and dedication to shaping gun-related legislation in the United States.

The NRA also uses the American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC] to push its pro-gun laws, thus lobbying is another strategy that the NRA uses to accomplish its political goals [28].

The NRA spent \$29.1 million in the 2020 federal elections, most of that to support Trump in the final months of the cycle. Most of the NRA’s 2016 spending was routed through its main “dark money” group, which does not disclose its donors [12].



Common Cause analysis of lobbying data from Center for Responsive Politics

Figure 2. NRA Federal Lobbying Expenditures. Common Cause analysis of lobbying data from the Center for Responsive Politics

Most of the gun control movement’s political influence comes from 2 well-connected organizations. First is former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s

Everytown for Gun Safety and another one is Giffords. Giffords and Everytown for Gun Safety spent just under \$30 million on lobbying from 1998 through the second quarter of 2022—about six times less than gun rights groups spent over the same period [12].

5. Economic Impact

The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) Economic Impact 2024 report highlights the substantial economic impact of the firearm and ammunition industry on both national and state levels. The industry's recent growth is remarkable, driven by an unprecedented number of Americans exercising their right to bear arms, including an estimated 4.3 million new gun owners in 2023.

The report also underscores the industry's significant contribution to wildlife conservation funding through the Pittman-Robertson excise tax, which contributed over \$944 million to the Wildlife Restoration Trust Fund in 2023 [29].

In the United States, companies manufacturing, distributing, and selling firearms, ammunition, and hunting equipment employ 154,611 people and generate an additional 229,826 jobs in related industries. These jobs support the supply chain for manufacturers, distributors, and retailers, as well as businesses that depend on sales to industry workers [29].

The firearm and ammunition industry not only creates jobs but also contributes significantly to the overall economy. In 2023, it was responsible for \$90.06 billion in total economic activity. The industry's economic impact extends across various sectors, including banking, retail, accounting, metalworking, and printing, all of which depend on it for their livelihood. Furthermore, the industry generates considerable tax revenue, paying over \$10.90 billion in property, income, and sales taxes. Of the \$998 million in excise taxes paid to the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Fund in 2023, \$944 million came from firearms and ammunition [29].

According to the Economic Cost for Gun Violence Report by Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund in the United States, the annual economic impact of gun violence is \$557 billion. The human cost, encompassing the loss of life and the enduring trauma experienced by survivors, is the most profound aspect of this issue. Nonetheless, the economic repercussions offer a comprehensive perspective on the extent and financial burden of this crisis [30].

The annual cost of gun violence in the United States amounts to \$557 billion, five times the budget of the Department of Education. This figure includes immediate costs (police investigations and medical treatment), subsequent costs (long-term health care, lost earnings, and criminal justice expenses), and quality-of-life costs (pain and suffering). The financial burden is shared among survivors, families, communities, employers, and taxpayers, with daily costs averaging \$7.79 million for healthcare, \$147.32 million for lost productivity, \$30.16 million for criminal justice, and \$1.34 billion for quality-of-life losses. The economic impact varies significantly across states, with those having stringent gun laws experiencing lower costs. Understanding these impacts is crucial for policymakers to allocate

resources effectively. The average annual cost per resident is \$1,698, with states having stricter laws facing substantially lower economic burdens than those with lenient regulations [30].

These figures fail to capture the total cost, including the psychological burden of living in fear and the ongoing trauma experienced by individuals and communities. Indirect monetary costs, such as lost investments and business opportunities, and macroeconomic harms, are often unaccounted for. Consequently, overall estimates likely represent a lower-bound estimate rather than a complete picture [31].

6. Psychological Factors Behind Gun Passion

I found quite irrational the carrying of weapons by civilians in modern times, especially in a developed country like the USA. Especially, while observing the real negative outcomes like the mass killing of children at schools, and prayers in mosques, and churches, you think twice about the consequences of the weapons. In this chapter, we will try to analyze the psychological factors that stand behind US gun owners.

Do guns kill people or do people kill people? Answers to this riddle bring endless debate in which one side believes that guns are the biggest threat to public safety, while the other believes that they are inevitable tools of self-preservation [25].

(Asked of gun owners) Next, please tell me whether you own a gun for each of the following reasons. How about -- [RANDOM ORDER] ?			
	Yes %	No %	No opinion %
For hunting			
2021 Oct 1-19	56	44	--
2005 Oct 13-16	58	41	1
2000 Aug 29-Sep 5	59	41	--
For target shooting			
2021 Oct 1-19	70	30	
2005 Oct 13-16	66	34	--
2000 Aug 29-Sep 5	67	33	--
For protection against crime			
2021 Oct 1-19	88	12	
2005 Oct 13-16	67	33	--
2000 Aug 29-Sep 5	65	35	--
GALLUP			

Figure 3. Opinions of gun owners. GALLUP [32].

According to the research provided by the Pew Research Center 74% of gun owners associate the right to own guns with a personal sense of freedom, compared with only 35% of non-gun owners who say the same [8].

As indicated in **Figure 3**, recent GALLUP survey results show that 56% of gun owners cited hunting, 70% identified target shooting, and 88% mentioned protection against crime as the primary reasons for owning firearms. These percentages have remained relatively consistent compared to survey results from 2005 and 2000. However, the significant increase in gun ownership for protection, now at 88%, raises serious concerns among officials, as this suggests a growing perception of insecurity among the public [32].

According to the results of their survey, Edward Diener and Kenneth Kerber conclude that however, gun owners stated that recreation and defense were the primary reasons for owning guns, they also had personalities that were characterized by lower sociability and a higher need for power than the non-gun-owners. Meanwhile, the survey results tell us that none or only one respondent indicated reasons for gun ownership “to avoid violence with trouble-makers,” “so others won’t bother me,” or “in case of foreign invasion.” Hence, it is crystal clear that the argument of the NRA that private firearms are required in case of foreign invasion is not a reason at all for gun ownership [33].

Although gun ownership creates positive feelings within “gun culture”, fear is a core of ownership. Hence, the decision to obtain a firearm is largely motivated by past fears of future victimization. As a fact, there is a widespread belief that having a gun makes one safer, supported by published claims like “more guns”, there is “less crime” [25].

Jennifer Carlson, author of “Citizen-Protectors: The Everyday Politics of Guns in an Age of Decline,” explained why men feel the need to carry guns in public: “One man told me he felt “naked” without his gun.” She concluded by noting: “The gun rights platform is not just about guns. It’s also about a crisis of confidence in the American dream. And this is one reason gun control efforts ignite such intense backlashes: Restrictions are received as a personal affront to men who find in guns a *sense of duty, relevance, and even dignity* [7].”

In 2012, James Brockmole, an associate professor of psychology at Notre Dame, found that “Wielding a gun increases a person’s bias to see guns in the hands of others.” Participants holding a toy gun during an experiment were more likely than participants holding a neutral object, to think that people on a computer screen in front of them were also holding a gun [7].

At Harvard University study in September 2002 Matthew Miller, David Hemenway, and Henry Wechsler found that “gun-owning college students are more likely than their unarmed counter-parts to drink frequently and excessively and, when inebriated, to engage in activities that put themselves and others at risk for life-threatening injury [7].”

Terence Hill, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Arizona, contends that gun ownership does not lead to greater happiness, despite claims by many gun owners. According to Hill, while firearm owners often argue that guns provide “safety, empowerment, and independence,” his research finds no evidence that these perceived benefits result in higher levels of happiness. He notes,

“If guns truly make people feel safer or more empowered, this should promote happiness, but we don’t find evidence of that.” This raises questions about whether the attachment to guns is rooted in genuine emotion or a product of cultural narratives around firearm ownership. His study further explores the varied reasons behind gun ownership—some driven by fear of victimization, while others, such as collectors, see it as a personal or recreational interest. Hill emphasizes the distinction between owning a gun for protection, which may be fear-based, and collecting firearms for interest or hobby [34].

A European journalist from *The Economist* provides further insight into the paradox of American gun culture. He remarks, “American gun culture appears utterly insane. Americans are far more likely to murder someone or to kill themselves than people in almost all Western European countries, largely because guns make it easier... Yet shooting is fun” [35]. This highlights the cultural fascination with firearms despite the risks they pose. The *Rifleman’s Creed* further reflects this deep connection, as it emphasizes, “My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life,” portraying the firearm as an extension of personal identity and control [36].

7. Filmography Promotes Positive Gun Culture

For several decades, U.S. society has been significantly influenced by films that promote gun ownership. These movies, spanning generations, have been remarkably successful in portraying gun holders as heroic figures who protect their rights, interests, and loved ones against adversaries. Hollywood and other Western film studios have captivated billions with narratives that glorify gun use, creating enduring cultural icons.

Western films such as “One-Eyed Jacks,” “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly,” “The Magnificent Seven,” and “Unforgiven” from the 1960s and 1970s laid the groundwork. Blockbusters like “Rambo,” “Die Hard,” and the “James Bond” series in the 1980s and 1990s further entrenched the association of guns with heroism and masculinity. The 21st century continues this trend with popular action films such as “John Wick” and “The Expendables.”

These films consistently feature protagonists who are highly skilled with firearms and are often portrayed as attractive and romantically successful. Despite variations in style and narrative, the common threads of gun use and the allure of heroism and romance persist. This segment of the paper aims to elucidate the cultural factors behind American society’s passion for firearms, setting the stage for a subsequent analysis of the tragic consequences of this fascination. In this part, we tried to connect the reasons for American society’s passion for weapons from several aspects. In the next part, we will get acquainted with the bitter ends of the passion for weapons.

8. Lives Gotten by Gunmen

The breakdown of gun-related deaths, as illustrated in **Figure 4**, conceptualizes

the various causes behind these fatalities, which include homicides, suicides, accidental discharges, and law enforcement-related incidents. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a total of 48,830 individuals lost their lives due to gun-related injuries in 2021, reflecting an almost 8% increase from 2020, a year that had already set a record for firearm-related deaths. Furthermore, this figure represents a staggering 23% rise compared to 2019, highlighting the growing severity of gun violence in the U.S. [1] [21].

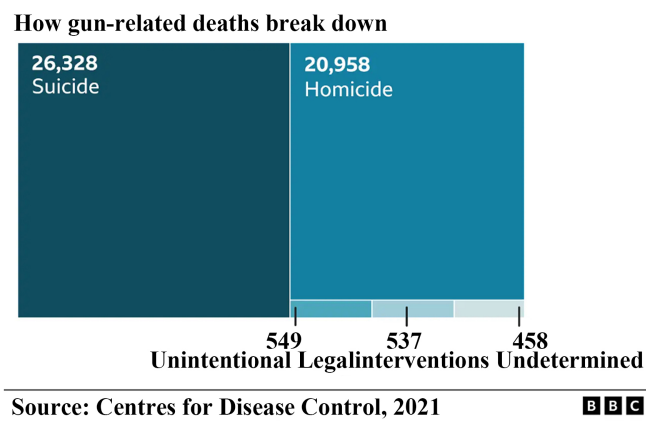


Figure 4. How gun-related deaths break down. Center for Disease Control. BBC [21].

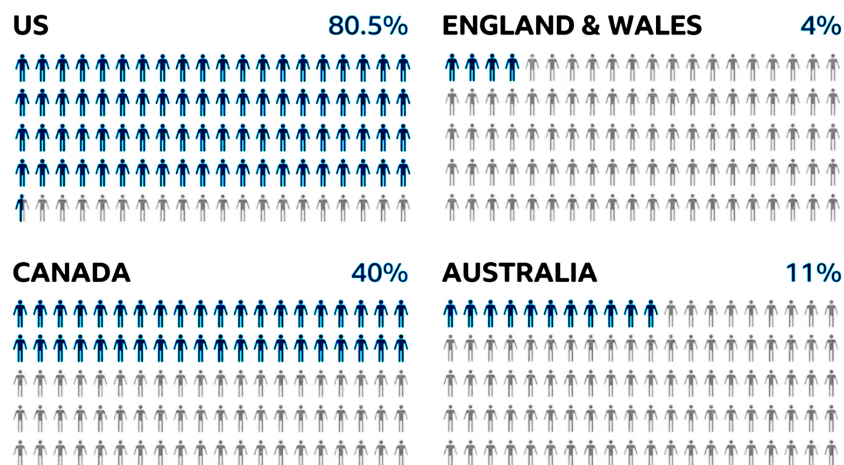
As depicted in **Figure 5**, an international comparison reveals that 80.5% of murders in the United States are committed using firearms, according to data provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This percentage is significantly higher compared to other countries such as Canada, Australia, and England and Wales, where gun-related killings constitute a much smaller proportion of overall homicides [21]. This stark contrast highlights the unique challenge the U.S. faces in addressing gun violence, with a much higher reliance on firearms in violent crimes compared to other developed nations.

According to the FBI, there were 345 “active shooter incidents” in the United States between 2000-2020, resulting in more than 1024 deaths and 1828 injuries. The deadliest was in Las Vegas in 2017, got the lives of more than 50 people and left 500 wounded [21].

Gun violence is considered a very big problem by roughly half of Americans in the USA. The figures for this tendency vary due to race, ethnicity, and party preferences. According to the survey results, 82 % of black adults, 58 % of Hispanic adults, and 39% of white adults consider gun violence as a very big problem in US society. 73% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning see gun violence, but only 18% of Republicans and GOP³ leaners see gun violence as a major problem. Gun owners are generally less likely than non-owners to favor policies that restrict access to guns [20].

³GOP-short for Grand Old Party, is a nickname for the Republican Party of the United States of America.

An international comparison of gun-related killings as a % of all homicides



Source: Statistics Canada and CDC (US) 2021, ONS (England & Wales) Apr 2021 - Mar 2022, Australian Institute of Criminology Jul 2020 - Jun 2021 **B B C**

Figure 5. An international comparison of gun-related killings as a % of all homicides. BBC [21]

Figure 6 illustrates the most severe mass shootings in the U.S. since 1991, highlighting the tragic scale of gun violence over the past few decades. This figure provides a concise overview of some of the deadliest incidents, underscoring the recurring pattern of mass shootings in the country. These events not only result in devastating loss of life but also reignite national debates on gun control and public safety measures.

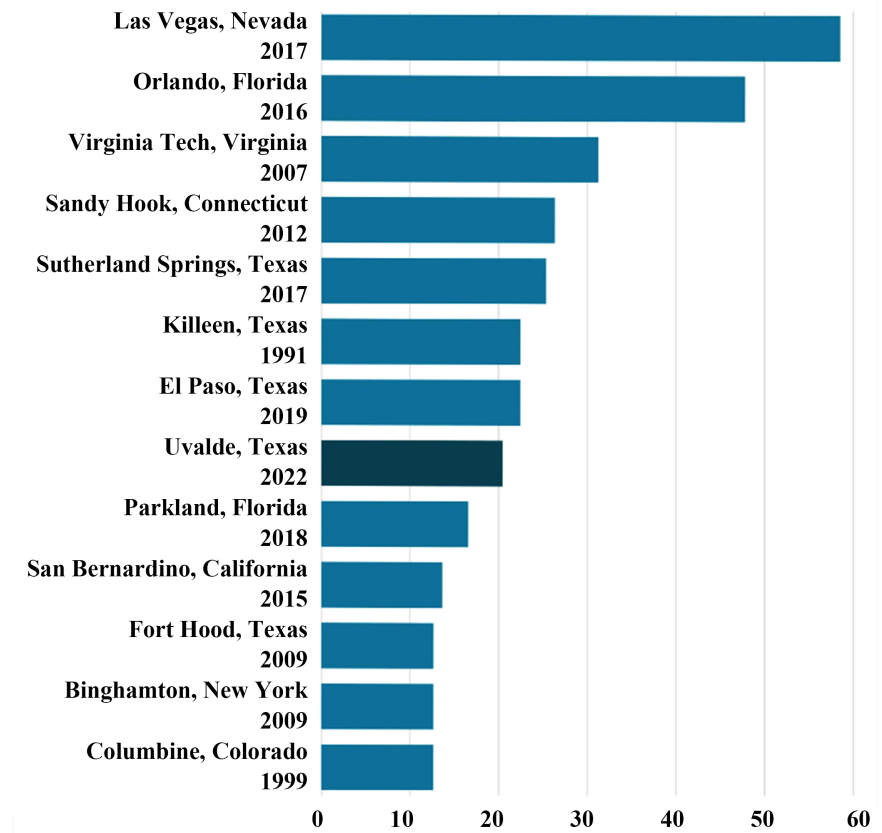
Over recent decades, numerous mass shootings have highlighted the unrelenting gun violence crisis in the U.S. Significant incidents include the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, where 58 were killed and 850 injured when a gunman fired into a crowd from a hotel. In 2016, the Orlando nightclub shooting led to 49 deaths and over 50 injuries, with the shooter pledging allegiance to ISIS. The 2007 Virginia Tech massacre claimed 32 lives and wounded 17 others, while the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy took the lives of 27 people, including 20 young children. Further events, such as the 2019 El Paso Walmart shooting (23 dead), the 2022 Uvalde school shooting (21 dead), and the 2018 Parkland school shooting (17 dead), are only part of a devastating pattern. Mass shootings like these continue to fuel national debates over the necessity of comprehensive gun reform, yet the list is tragically endless [38].

Each of these tragedies has taken the lives of innocent individuals, leaving the nation in collective shock. The ongoing loss of life raises urgent questions: Why do innocent victims continue to suffer? How long will the law remain unchanged despite these repeated horrors? How many more lives must be sacrificed before meaningful reforms are enacted? These are the painful questions that the families

of victims must confront daily. The search for solutions feels increasingly urgent, yet debates remain polarized. Is the answer truly to arm children with bulletproof vests and weapons under the guise of the Second Amendment?

Worst mass shootings in the US since 1991

Victims killed



Source: FBI

BBC

Figure 6. Worst mass shootings in the US since 1991. Source: FBI, BBC [37].

Despite the rising death toll, a significant faction continues to advocate for civilian armament, arguing that gun ownership is essential for personal security. Gun sales consistently spike during times of crisis—whether it be a pandemic or inflation—suggesting a deep-seated belief in firearms as a safeguard against societal instability. This unending cycle of increased armament, rather than resolving the issue, perpetuates a culture where weapons are seen as a necessary response to fear.

9. Legal Guns vs Illegal Guns

According to the study held by the City of Detroit City Council, Gun theft accounts for a relatively small portion of illegally trafficked firearms in the United States. According to the National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment

(NFCTA) report by the US Justice Department, from 2017 to 2021, 1096 firearms were stolen from licensed facilities, and approximately 6462 firearms were stolen annually from private individuals, with only about 75% of these thefts reported. Data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) indicates that 99% of firearms traced in criminal investigations were purchased from licensed dealers, pawn shops, or manufacturers, with 70% coming from licensed dealers. Notably, 58% of these crime guns were possessed by individuals other than the original purchasers, and in Detroit, this figure was 61%. This suggests that many firearms used in crimes are obtained through “straw purchases,” where another person buys a gun on behalf of someone else. Although stolen guns are used in crimes, the incidence of such thefts is significantly lower compared to straw purchases and undocumented private sales. This data underscores the importance of addressing straw purchases and unregulated private transactions in efforts to curb gun-related crime [39].

10. Gun Policy Reforms in Foreign Countries

If there’s any chance of reform in gun legislation, legislators and “anti-gun” proponents are going to have to understand why the “pro-gun” half of the country owns guns, likes guns, and sometimes invokes the NRA slogan, “I’ll give you my gun when you pry it from my cold, dead hands,” when the issue of gun control comes up [35].

No country has the same political structure or history with firearms as the US, but several have taken steps that have worked for them. Here are some insights from other nations into how gun violence could be reduced.

Australia—1996 shooting that left 35 dead led Australian Prime Minister John Howard to convene an assembly of the group for successful gun-control legislation which landed on a massive buyback program, that bought and destroyed more than 600,000 automatic and semiautomatic weapons and pump-action shotguns. The program cost hundreds of millions of dollars offset by a one-time tax increase. As a result, gun death figures were cut nearly in half over the next few years. Firearm suicides dropped to 0.8 per 100,000 people in 2006 from 2.2 in 1995, while firearm homicides dropped to 0.15 per 100,000 people in 2006 from 0.37 in 1995 [17].

United Kingdom—Around when Australia adopted its gun regulations, UK Parliament passed legislation banning private ownership of handguns, and pump-action firearms throughout the UK. As a result of the 200-million-dollar buyback program, 162,000 guns and 700 tons of ammunition were purchased from UK citizens. The result has been roughly 50 - 60 roughly gun deaths a year in England and Wales, which have a population of 56 million, but 330 million populated US has 160 times more gun-related homicides [17].

New Zealand—After a mass shooting in Christchurch left 51 people dead and dozens more injured in March 2019, New Zealand has instituted a ban on most semi-automatic rifles. The gunman, a white supremacist, targeted two mosques

during a Friday prayer with semi-automatic weapons. Around 10% of guns had been collected as of September 12, almost 20,000 firearms and 75,000 parts, with the equivalent of about \$23 million US dollars paid out for buyback. Thereafter, on November 10, 36,000 weapons and 132,000 parts had been collected. As a next step, New Zealand proposed a ban on criminals being in even the proximity of guns, for example at home, at work, or in a vehicle [17].

Japan—There are rarely more than 10 gun-related homicides a year in Japan with a population of 127 million people. If a Japanese citizen wants to own a gun, he/she must attend an all-day class, pass a written test, achieve at least 95% accuracy during a shooting-range test, pass a mental-health evaluation at a hospital, as well as a background check, in which the government digs into any criminal records or ties and interviews friends and family members. Successful candidates must retake the class and initial exam every 3 years. No handguns or air rifles are permitted, only shotguns [17].

Norway—Like Americans, many Norwegians own guns. However, it's uncommon to see guns outside organized settings like gun clubs or during hunting season. "Yes, there's a high percentage of gun ownership in Norway," she says, "but those guns are used mainly one week in the year during the hunting of elk season ... the rest of the year it's locked down and stored. [19]" There are different approaches to firearms by US and Norwegian law enforcement. In this country, police officers are typically unarmed, and use guns only with permission in exceptional circumstances. While 1090 people were killed by police in the United States in 2019, but no deaths at the hands of police officers for the same year in Norway [18]. "The police have not been armed in Norway," Seierstad says. "Well, when the police are not armed, the drug dealer is not armed, the criminals are not armed, because no one is armed [19]."

11. Discussions & Recommendations

This paper has analyzed the multifaceted nature of gun dependency in U.S. society, encompassing its historical and cultural roots, economic impact, psychological aspects, gun-related tragedies, factors influencing gun policy reforms, and successful international strategies.

Critics argue that ban and buyback strategies, effective in other countries, would not work in the U.S. due to the influential gun lobby. Gregory Koger, a political science professor at the University of Miami, noted, "They don't have an NRA. There's no organization of gun owners and gun companies that systematically and persistently opposes regulations of guns" [17]. However, despite America's deeply rooted gun culture spanning over 200 years, this does not preclude the possibility of effective reforms.

The notion that reforms will not work in the U.S. is unfounded. If a problem exists, it can be overcome. The primary issue is whether the U.S. government recognizes and addresses this problem. There is no unified opinion on gun accessibility and whether its harm outweighs its usefulness. While many view mass

shootings as a critical issue requiring urgent action, others downplay the losses and even propose arming more civilians, such as schoolteachers.

The media's diverse opinions and analyses often obscure the core issue, likely serving the interests of those resisting change. Effective reforms require comprehensive measures beyond simple buybacks. Based on the analysis, this study recommends the following targeted reforms, drawing on lessons from international models.

11.1. Promoting Non-Lethal Self-Defense Solutions

U.S. policymakers should prioritize non-lethal alternatives to firearms for personal protection. This includes promoting advanced Tasers and other non-lethal weapons, allowing individuals to defend themselves without fatal consequences. Encouraging the development of non-lethal, smart firearms—such as GPS-enabled and trackable guns—would not only ensure safety but also maintain market viability. Additionally, non-lethal cartridges could replace traditional ammunition, aligning self-defense with public safety by reducing the risk of fatalities.

11.2. Reevaluating Civilian Armament and Law Enforcement Practices

The relevance of civilian armament under the Second Amendment must be reassessed in the context of modern security challenges. Arguments for arming civilians to counter foreign invasions are outdated, and the Second Amendment's application needs modernization. Similarly, police forces should adopt non-lethal weapons, particularly in non-critical situations, following international models such as Norway. This shift in policing would reduce civilian casualties and foster societal support for non-lethal armament.

11.3. Addressing Gun Sales and Market Reform

The government, alongside gun manufacturers and organizations like the NRA, should advocate for the development and promotion of non-lethal weapons. The financial resources exist to create and market smart firearms that enhance safety while preserving economic dynamics. To further reduce gun-related crime, stringent regulations on gun ownership are necessary. This includes enforcing secure storage requirements through smart safes with tracking capabilities to curtail illegal gun sales and straw purchases.

11.4. Learning from International Successes

U.S. policymakers should draw lessons from successful gun control models implemented in countries like the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, and Norway. These nations have demonstrated the efficacy of buyback programs, strict background checks, psychological evaluations, and comprehensive firearm legislation. Adapting these international strategies to the U.S. context could help address the gun violence epidemic while respecting cultural and legal considerations unique

to American society.

This approach offers a clear path forward for reducing gun violence while considering the economic, cultural, and legal challenges unique to the U.S. The potential for positive change exists if there is the desire and goodwill to pursue these reforms.

12. Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of gun violence and dependency in the United States is complex and deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and psychological factors. Despite the significant influence of the gun lobby, effective reforms are possible and necessary. A comprehensive approach, incorporating lessons from successful international models and promoting non-lethal alternatives, can lead to meaningful change. It is imperative for policymakers and society as a whole to recognize the urgency of this issue and work towards implementing reforms that prioritize safety and reduce the devastating impact of gun violence. Through collective effort and commitment, the U.S. can move towards a future where the tragic loss of innocent lives due to gun violence is significantly reduced.

Disclaimer

This work includes contributions completed during the author's pursuit of a master's degree at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy. The paper is dedicated to the memory of passed schoolchildren and teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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