



# WORLD AND PRESS

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IMAGE: Wildpixel/Getty Images

## Why are Americans shooting strangers and neighbors? 'It all goes back to fear.'

**SOCIETY** Experts say that anxiety might help explain a recent spate of shootings.

BY DANIELLE PAQUETTE, JOHN D. HARDEN, AND SCOTT CLEMENT

STEVE BRIDGES had just parked his pickup truck at the Texas Boot Factory when he saw a man – White, maybe 55 or 60 – step out of the car beside him and slip a gun under his belt. It was a Friday afternoon, three days after two cheerleaders opened the wrong car door in a supermarket parking lot nearby and were shot. Bridges, a 63-year-old contractor, had tried to picture how that could happen in Elgin, Tex., where eruptions of violence are rare. "It all goes back to the fear," he said. "Why are cheerleaders getting shot for opening the wrong door? Why is a grown man scared to go into a boot store without carrying his weapon? Why are these people so afraid?"

Across the country this month, at least four men have opened fire on someone who'd stumbled upon their space, resulting in one death, two injuries, and a car pocked with bullet holes. The apparent acts of snap-aggression have reinvigorated the debate around the prevalence of "stand-your-ground" laws in the United States and a pressing question: Why are people so quick to pull the trigger on strangers? Why did a 65-year-old man kill a 20-year-old woman who had accidentally pulled into his Upstate New York driveway? Why did an 81-year-old man fire two bullets

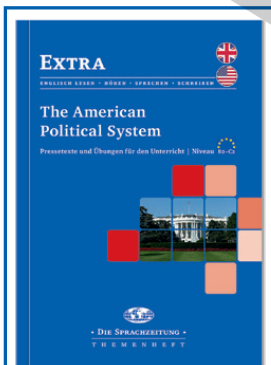


Attendees look at guns during the National Rifle Association's annual convention at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis in 2023. | PHOTO: Demetrius Freeman/The Washington Post

into a 16-year-old boy who had mistakenly knocked on his Kansas City door? Why did a 43-year-old man in South Florida allegedly shoot at a 19-year-old Instacart delivery driver and his 18-year-old girlfriend who had arrived at the wrong address? Experts blame a cocktail of factors: The easy availability of guns, misconceptions around stand-your-ground laws, the marketing of firearms for self-defense – and a growing sense among Americans, particularly Republicans, that safety in their backyard is deteriorating. Since 2020, the share of Republi-

cans who said that crime is rising in their community has jumped from 38 percent to 73 percent, according to the latest Gallup numbers from last fall. Among Democrats, that same concern climbed only 5 percentage points to 42 percent, marking the widest partisan perception gap since the polling firm first asked the question a half-century ago. Reality is more complicated. A 'Washington Post' crime analysis of 80 major police departments' records found that reported violence across the country in 2022 was lower than the five-year average

the National Criminal Victimization Survey showed the number of people reporting sexual assault, robbery, and other physical attacks is overall much lower now than in the 1990s and has not increased in recent years. Homicides and thefts, however, rose during the pandemic, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data – though not to the levels of the 1990s. A 'Post' analysis, meanwhile, found that states with stand-your-ground laws had a 55 percent higher homicide-by-firearm



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# Gun-riven America is heading for a record year of mass murder



**Donald Trump** at the NRA's annual meeting in 2023. | PHOTO: Demetrius Freeman/The Washington Post via Getty Images

## SHOOTINGS

By KEIRAN SOUTHERN

ANOTHER WEEKEND of gun violence in the United States brought a grim reminder that this year is set to be the country's worst for mass killings in recent history. In the early hours of Sunday, there were shootings in Baltimore, Maryland – killing two people and injuring 28 – and Wichita, Kansas, where seven were wounded and two more were taken to hospital after being trampled in their escape. As the U.S. prepares to celebrate Independence Day on Tuesday, politicians are grappling with how to tackle the country's gun problem. While there is no official measure of what constitutes a mass murder, the Gun Violence Archive (GVA) defines it as one in which four people are killed, besides the perpetrator. There have been 25 mass killings this year, according to the GVA, which means 2023 is on track to eclipse the 36 recorded in 2022. There were 31 in 2019, 21 in 2020, and 28 in 2021, the group's data shows. The GVA, a non-profit research group that compiles data from public sources, including police and news reports, tracks mass shootings separately. It de-

at least four people are killed or injured by guns, not including the perpetrator. This year, it has recorded 339.

Since the group began recording data in 2014, the most mass shootings in a year occurred in 2021, when there were 690. This year's incidents have occurred all over the country, from the party in Maryland to a dance hall in southern California and a shopping centre in Texas.

President Biden has repeatedly called for a ban on assault weapons but does not have the votes in Congress to overcome Republican opposition.

The leading candidates for the Republican nomination are strong supporters of gun ownership and will not support attempts to restrict firearms laws. In April, Donald Trump, who holds a commanding lead in opinion polls for the party's nomination, told the National Rifle Association's annual meeting that mass shootings are "not a gun problem". Trump said: "This is a mental health problem; this is a social problem; this is a cultural problem; this is a spiritual problem." ...

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## COMMENT

# Is a nation where bullets fly at schools, parties, parades really free?

**FREEDOM** The mass shooting injuring 30 people, two fatally, tells us how captive we are to the tyranny of gunfire.

By PETULA DVORAK

AS WE SET OFF fireworks and start the grills – or just wilt in front of the AC – this steamy Fourth of July, we need to be honest with ourselves about all that freedom we're whooping and crackling about.

The fact that innocent shoppers, students, revelers, worshippers, learners, dancers, and workers are being slaughtered by random gunfire is neither normal nor free. And as a society, we should continue to be defined by what we are willing to accept as a normal condition of American life.

On Sunday, after 30 people were shot at a gathering in south Baltimore, Mayor Brandon M. Scott (D) raised this explicitly, saying: "We want this mass shooting to be treated just as [if] it happened in rural America. When it happens in Baltimore, Chicago, or D.C., it doesn't get that same attention," Scott said Monday. "These Black American lives, children's lives, matter just as anyone else."

The barrage of gunfire was a gut-wrenching end to an annual community day in a working-class part of Baltimore, one of America's cities where gunfire is not uncommon – and too often labeled "urban" in an attempt to distance people from accountability for the conditions we allowed over decades of policy decisions. We the People.

"We are not free if we are in a war zone," pastor John D. Watts said after gunfire terrorized Baltimore's Brooklyn neighborhood, where his congregation often works, killing an 18-year-old woman and a 20-year-old man. So on this Independence Day, it's time to talk about our freedoms – and the lack thereof. Watts and other folks from Kingdom Life Church Apostolic have been coming to Brooklyn Homes for about three years now, to talk with people who are struggling, to mentor young men who feel left behind as gleaming developments grow around their neighborhood but



**An Independence Day fireworks display at the White House in Washington, D.C., on July 4, 2022.** | PHOTO: Demetrius Freeman/The Washington Post

never in it. An entire block was littered with shell casings Sunday, and many of the neighbors who usually sit on their porches were locked inside, living with a fear they have grown used to. Baltimore police, Scott said, have seized 1,345 illegal guns so far this year.

The freedom from that fear is becoming rare in all corners of the nation. Because today, the places where innocent people are hit by gunfire are spreading past barriers of economics, politics, race, and class. To so many places, we look like a nation at war.

In America, under the tyranny of a culture that celebrates gun ownership over the unburdened pursuit of happiness, we are no longer free to feel safe:

- At a country music concert (Las Vegas, Oct. 1, 2017; 62 dead, 413 injured)
- At a Fourth of July parade (Highland Park, Ill., July 4, 2022; 7 dead, 48 injured)
- In a grocery store (Buffalo, May 14, 2022; 10 dead, 3 injured)
- In a dance hall (Monterey Park, Calif., Jan. 21, 2023; 11 dead, 9 injured)
- At a newspaper office (Annapolis, June 28, 2018; 5 dead, 2 injured)

- 26 dead, 22 injured)
- In a synagogue (Pittsburgh, Oct. 27, 2018; 11 dead, 6 injured)
- At a nightclub (Orlando, June 12, 2016; 49 dead, 53 injured)

And, of course, we are not free from atrocity at schools, airports, military bases, movie theaters, restaurants, hospitals, swimming pools, medical offices, or even someone's driveway that we may have accidentally pulled into.

Among the saddest – and most accurate – graduation memes I've seen circulating on social media is a photoshopped celebration titled "When you finally graduate from high school in the USA," with kids throwing Kevlar vests instead of mortarboards into the air. Hold on to that body armor, kids. America outside the classroom isn't much safer. Just last month, after all, a high school graduate and his father were killed and five others were wounded by a shooter who opened fire at a commencement ceremony in Richmond.

We have absolutely failed the vision of our Founding Fathers for a peaceful, safe, and prosperous nation if we're willing to apply rules conceived of when a break-away people in revolt deployed muskets, flintlock pistols, and

**A**

accountability	Rechenschaft; Verantwortung
active shooter	Amokschütze(-in)
advocacy organization	Lobbyorganisation
advocate	Befürworter(in); Verfechter(in)
affidavit	eidesstattliche Erklärung
agency	Behörde
ammunition	Munition
anguished	besorgt
to arm	bewaffnen
arms company	Waffenhersteller
arms	Waffen
assailant	Angreifer(in)
assault rifle	Sturmgewehr
assault weapon	(AE) halb automatische Schusswaffe
atrocities	Gräueltat

**B**

background check	Zuverlässigkeitsprüfung
to bar s.o.	jdm. (etw.) verbieten
to be awash in s.th.	von etw. überschwemmt sein
bill	Gesetzentwurf
bipartisan	parteiübergreifend
bloodshed	Blutvergießen
body armor	Schutzweste
bullet hole	Einschussloch
bullet	Geschoss
bulletproof vest	schussichere Weste
bump stock	Schnellfeuerkolben

**C**

caliber	Kaliber
carjacking	Autoraub
carelessness	Fahrlässigkeit
cartridge	Patrone
to champion s.th.	s. für etw. einsetzen
clout	Einfluss; Macht
concealed carry	verdecktes Tragen
constitution	Verfassung
constitutional	in der Verfassung verankert
contentious	umstritten
criminal law	Strafrecht

**D**

to derail	scheitern lassen
to deter	abschrecken
to deteriorate	sich verschlechtern
devastating	verheerend
due process of law	ordentliches Gerichtsverfahren

**E**

eligibility	Eignung; Berechtigung
embedded	(fig) verankert
eruption of violence	Gewaltausbruch
to exact revenge	Rache üben
exceptionalism	Einzigartigkeit
explosive	Sprengstoff

**F**

felon	Schwerverbrecher(in)
felony record	Vorstrafenregister schwerer Straftaten
firearms	Schusswaffen
flintlock pistol	Steinschlosspistole
to flout	missachten
full automatics	vollautomatische Waffen

**G**

gamesmanship	List; Taktieren
grassroots movement	basidemokratische Bewegung
gridlock	festgefahrene Situation
gun control	Reglementierung des Waffenbesitzes
gun dealer	Waffenhändler
to gun down	niederschließen
gun exports	Waffenexporte
gun industry	Waffenbranche
gun laws	Waffenrecht
gun lobby	Waffenlobby
gun ownership	Waffenbesitz
gun policy; gun politics	Politik in Bezug auf Waffenbesitz
gun rights group	Organisation, die sich für das Recht auf Waffenbesitz einsetzt
gun safety	Sicherheit im Umgang mit Schusswaffen
gunfire	Schüsse; Schießerei
gunmaker; gun manufacturer	Waffenhersteller
gut-wrenching	herzerreißend

**H-K**

handgun	Handfeuerwaffe
high-capacity magazine	Magazin mit hoher Kapazität
to hold s.o. accountable	jdn. zur Rechenschaft ziehen
homicide	Mord
hospitalization	Krankenhausaufenthalt
to hospitalize	ins Krankenhaus einweisen
hunting rifle	Jagdgewehr
inevitability	Unvermeidbarkeit
insidious	heimtückisch
intervention	Eingreifen
jarring	verstörend; schockierend
jurisdiction	Gerichtsbarkeit; Zuständigkeit
Kevlar vest	kugelsichere Weste