

Understanding America's Gun Obsession: History, Culture, and Violence

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America's Gun Obsession Latest News

- Charlie Kirk, a 31-year-old American conservative leader who once defended gun rights despite yearly deaths, was killed by a sniper in Utah.
- His death underscores the irony and tragedy of America's entrenched gun obsession, reigniting the divisive debate that many believe is tearing U.S. society apart.

America's Gun Crisis in Global Perspective

- The United States has more guns than people, with **1.2 guns per person**—far higher than any other nation.
- Though home to less than 5% of the world's population, Americans own 45% of civilian firearms globally.
- This widespread access fuels staggering violence: in 2023, the U.S. recorded 46,728 gun deaths—128 daily, with over half suicides.

- The gun homicide rate stands at 4.38 per 100,000, 26 times higher than other wealthy nations, compared to under 0.05 in the UK and virtually zero in Japan.

Guns and the Myth of Freedom in America

- America's deep-rooted gun culture is tied to historical **myths of firearms as protectors of liberty, from the Revolution to the Wild West.**
- The **Second Amendment (1791)** enshrined this belief, framing arms as safeguards against tyranny.
- Founding Father James Madison even argued that armed citizens could topple oppressive governments, unlike Europe's monarchies.
- Historian Richard Hofstadter observed in 1970 that many Americans stubbornly saw guns as essential to democracy, a notion echoed by Charlie Kirk in 2023, who defended the Second Amendment as protection against government overreach.

The Making of America's Gun Culture

- A 1969 U.S. Justice Department report highlighted the explosive rise of guns — doubling from 45 million in 1945 to nearly 90 million by 1969, even as population grew by less than 50%.
- By 2018, gun numbers were **ten times higher than 1945**, while the population grew only 2.5 times.
- Historians trace this culture to racism: firearms enabled White slave owners to control Black slaves, and post-Civil War fears of retribution spurred groups like the Ku Klux Klan.
- In the 20th century, crime, immigration, and Cold War anxieties intensified gun demand.
- Abundant post-WWII weapon supplies, with Europe's surplus arms flooding the U.S. market, created a mass gun economy, embedding firearms deeply into American society.

America's Romantic Obsession with Guns

- In the U.S., gun culture has been shaped by powerful advocacy groups like the NRA and gun capitalism, which **transformed firearms into symbols of identity and freedom.**
- Historian Andrew McKeivitt notes that 19th-century gunmakers sold not just weapons but stories, **imbuing guns with cultural meaning** — a case of “commodity fetishism.”
 - Commodity fetishism means giving an object (like a gun, phone, or brand item) a kind of “magical” value, while forgetting how and why it was actually made.
 - For example, instead of seeing a gun as just metal and parts made in a factory, people treat it as a symbol of freedom, power, or identity.
- This fetishization distorts America's gun debate, unlike other countries that embraced strict gun control.
- For example, Australia reduced gun deaths from 2.9 per 100,000 in 1996 to 0.88 in 2018 after reforms.
- The U.S., however, loosened laws, with the 2008 Supreme Court ruling in *Columbia v. Heller* affirming individual gun ownership rights, fueling further resistance to restrictions.

The Deadly Link Between Guns and Everyday Violence

- NRA advocates claim “a good guy with a gun” stops violence, but historian Dominic Erdozain notes even “good people” can act aggressively, creating risks.
- Data disproves the simple good-versus-bad binary. Research revealed most U.S. gun homicides stemmed from arguments with friends or spouses, often under alcohol’s influence.
- It showed that keeping a gun at home significantly raised homicide risk.
- As experts warned in 2008, the real danger is not strangers but those with “a key to the house.”

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