

# US Mass Shootings Will Continue Until the Majority Can Overrule the Minority

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## Guns symbolize the power of a minority over the majority, and they've become the icons of a party that has become a cult seeking minority power

I wrote this Friday, trying to connect the tightening control on women's bodies and the ever-loosening control on weapons of mass death that are icons of white supremacist patriarchy:

The dots are easy to connect, because they're so close together, and because they're the entry and exit wounds inflicted on US society by the subculture whose sacrament is the gun. Texas, while tightening restrictions on abortion, has steadily loosened them on guns. These weapons are symbols of a peculiar version of masculinity made up of unlimited freedom, power, domination, of a soldier identity in which every gunslinger is the commander and anyone is a potential target, in which fear drives belligerence, and the gun owners' rights extend so far no one has the right to be safe from him. Right now it's part of a white-supremacist war cult.

Anyplace its weapons are wielded is a war zone, and so this can be racked up as another way the United States is in the grip of a war that hardly deserves to be called civil. The rest of us are supposed to accommodate more and more high-powered weapons of war never intended for civilian use but used over and over against civilians in mass shootings across the country, including earlier this week when 19 fourth-graders and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas, were murdered by someone whose 18th birthday made him eligible to buy the semiautomatic and hundreds of rounds of ammunition he used.

At the time the second amendment was added to the constitution, reload time for the guns was about a minute and all of them were single-shot weapons. By contrast, the Las Vegas killer in 2017 sprayed more than a thousand bullets out his hotel window to kill 60 people in a 10-minute period. The teenager in Buffalo who killed 10 Black shoppers and an armed security guard was not a well-regulated militia, and neither was the antisemite who killed 11 in the synagogue in Pittsburgh, or the homophobe who killed 49 and wounded 53 in an Orlando nightclub, or the anti-immigration butcher in El Paso who killed 23 and wounded 23 or the child killer who took 26 lives in Newtown, Connecticut, 20 of them six and seven-year-old children.

To accommodate the cult of guns and the series of massacres, teachers and children practice school drills that remind them over and over that they could be murdered. To accommodate them, schools spend hundreds of millions of dollars on security, building reinforcements, trainings and drills, and the federal government spends more millions for campus officers. To accommodate them, municipalities across the country spend a fortune on police and equipment, in a sort of arms race that has also justified militarizing the police. To little avail, and in Uvalde the heavily armed and armored police seem to have essentially protected the shooter, by doing crowd control of parents as their children died, rather than rushing in as they had trained and rehearsed and been paid and equipped to do. All this is a sort of tax on the rest of us, in money and well-being, so that the gunslingers can sling their guns.

One of the staggeringly disturbing things about the American right wing is that it is a cult manipulated by corporations and vested interests profiting mightily off its obsessions. In no respect is this more true than of guns. Less than two decades ago, the National Rifle Association and gun manufacturers decided to shift from

promoting the culture and equipment of hunting and rural life to hawking high-powered weapons of war and the armor and outfits that go with it, turning conservative white men into amateur commandos cosplaying war wherever they liked and the US into a war zone. Fear and hatred increase the profits, and so both crops are cultivated avidly, by the gun industry, the rightwing news organizations, the various pundits and demagogues and militia leaders and neo-Nazis.

As former gun executive turned critic Ryan Busse wrote in the Guardian, “As the increasing vitriol of the National Rifle Association (NRA) proved politically effective, some in the gun business realized this messaging could be adopted by the firearms industry to sell more guns. All that was required for success was a dedication to frighteningly dangerous rhetoric and increasingly powerful weaponry.” Republican politicians gobbled up the industry donations and passed laws making gun sales boom, profits skyrocket, and guns start to show up in new ways. The rage that led to the guns was whetted with racism, anti-immigration hatred, misogyny, war imagery, neo-Confederate fantasies, and cartoonishly vile versions of masculinity, and the guns made it all dangerous. Minority rule perpetrates it, because just as the majority of Americans want abortion rights to stand, so do they want limits on access to guns.

Gun culture reminds me of rape culture, specifically the conventions that hold the victims rather than the perpetrators responsible for limiting the violence. For women this means being told to radically rearrange our lives to avoid sexual assault rather than to expect that society will protect our rights and freedoms. We are told to limit where we go and when, to be careful about solitude, crowds, bars, drinks, drugs, naps, parties, public spaces, public transit, strangers, cities, wilderness, to see our clothing and even our appearance as potential provocation, a sort of asking for it. To wither away our freedom and confidence to accommodate a culture of violence. In the same way, we are now supposed to adapt to a culture of guns.

The idea of unlimited rights is meant to apply to a limited number of us. Open-carry laws, it’s often noted, wouldn’t allow Black people to wander through the supermarket with huge guns slung over them and the confidence they could impose on others this way; Philando Castle was shot point-blank just for telling a policeman he had a gun in the car in 2016; 12-year-old Tamir Rice was shot for holding a toy rifle in Cleveland in 2014. And the spate of new abortion laws being passed and the likely overrule of *Roe v Wade* means that those who can get pregnant are being denied even jurisdiction over their own bodies while gun owners assert their rights over the bodies of others.

In Oklahoma, anyone who gets pregnant has fewer rights than a cluster of a few cells visible only under a microscope. Any pregnant woman may face prosecution as a murderer if she doesn’t bring a baby to term. They also face grotesque intrusiveness – criminal investigation for a miscarriage, having to try to prove to an unsympathetic legal system that a pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, the sense that their pregnancy is supervised and they are potential suspects. There’s a gruesome symmetry to this expansion of patriarchal violence and withering away of reproductive rights.

Guns symbolize the power of a minority over the majority, and they’ve become the icons of a party that has become a cult seeking minority power through the stripping away of voting rights and persecution of women, immigrants, black people, queer people, trans people – all of whom have been targeted by mass shootings in recent years. This is the same party that sought to overturn an election through violence whipped up from on high, by the cult leaders, including the former president and various pundits and demagogues. “Trial by combat,” wheezed Rudy Giuliani as he incited the crowd to go rampage through Congress. If guns are icons it’s because violence is a sacrament defended as a right and an identity.

Semiautomatic weapons are instruments of death perpetrated by a death cult. And the carnage will continue until the majority can overrule the minority in power that profits from and perpetrates it.