

The US Is at War with Itself

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Global Research, June 09, 2022

[The Jordan Times](#) 8 June 2022

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

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US citizens will not come to grips with the growing epidemic of mass shootings, almost all by young men wielding assault rifles. Self-interest prompts US politicians to refuse to address mass and multiple shootings while the public is divided by conflicting, politically-motivated narratives. Last weekend, there were 17 fatalities in 10 multiple shootings across the country.

Foreign observers of the US scene have no problem understanding this unique phenomenon and lay the blame on omnipresent weaponry, particularly AR-15-type long guns. In the US, there are 400 million guns, 20 million of which are assault weapons. This means 120.5 guns for every 100 residents, an increase from 88 per 100 in 2011. The next highest ratio is 53 per 100 in war-ravaged Yemen.

While US suicides by gun account for 54 per cent of deaths, 43 per cent are homicides, 79 per cent of which are murders committed with guns.

Revolvers and semi-automatic hand guns account for 62 per cent of murders. However, over the past three years assault rifles have been used for 67 per cent of massacres involving the deaths of six or more people, reported Louis Klarevas, a research professor at Columbia University.

Of the 50 US states, only seven plus Washington DC ban assault weapons while just two regulate but do not ban such weapons. A ten-year federal ban enacted in 1994 was successfully negotiated by President Joe Biden when he was a senator. At that time, he made an impassioned plea for adoption of the measure by the Senate. But when the law expired, the ban was not renewed because of the deep divisions within both houses of the US legislature.

In response to the murder of two teachers and 19 elementary school children in Uvalde, Texas, Biden stated, “When we passed the assault weapons ban, mass shootings went down. When the law expired, mass shootings tripled.”

However, that law was deeply flawed because it did not mandate the collection and destruction of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. Unfortunately, the impact of the ban was limited since there were 1.5 million assault weapons owned privately and some 25 million weapons were equipped with large magazines.

It is significant that in the aftermath of the Uvalde massacre, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tabled a bill in parliament for a ban on the sale, transfer and importation of handguns and the reconfiguring of rifle magazines so they can hold only five bullets. Canada already has stronger gun regulation than the US.

However, Trudeau did not dare to emulate New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who met Biden the day after the Uvalde shootings, and proffered advice on how to deal with gun violence. Following the 2019 massacre of 21 worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, Ardern rammed through her country's parliament a ban on and buy of assault weapons and set the end of that year as the deadline for the hand-over.

Nowhere in world other than the US are so many innocent civilians being slaughtered by civilians in schools, shops, and other public places. The US is at war with itself. Banning or curbing guns is vehemently opposed by gun manufacturers, lobbyists and millions of owners. They consistently win when challenged.

Consequently, psychologists study the shooters involved and gun-rights activists argue that the problem is the mental health of perpetrators, not possession of weapons of war. They do not accept that putting the two together creates the motivation and urge to use guns to express rage and frustration and provide the satisfaction of revenge for real or perceived slights, insults and abuses.

It is significant that males commit 98 per cent of mass shootings although females also experience major physical and psychological changes during their teens and young adulthood.

The latest fashion is to blame the traumas of male puberty rather than the shooters themselves. Writing in The New York Times on June 2nd, Glenn Thrush and Matt Richtel report that investigators and researchers dealing with the recent shootings in New York state and Texas say "the age of the accused has emerged as a key factor in understanding how two teenagers became driven to acquire such deadly firepower and how it led them to mass shootings.

"They fit in a critical age range, roughly 15 to 25, that law enforcement officials, researchers and policy experts consider a hazardous crossroads for young men, a period when they are in the throes of developmental changes and societal pressures that can turn them toward violence in general, and, in the rarest cases, mass shootings."

The article goes on to state:

"Six of the nine deadliest mass shootings in the United States since 2018 were by males who were 21 or younger, representing a shift for mass casualty shootings, which before 2000 were most often initiated by men in their mid-20s, 30s and 40s."

The blame is placed on an increasingly serious mental health crisis which preceded but was worsened by COVID. Online bullying, widespread marketing of guns by manufacturers, weak

state laws and sales to boys 18 and above contribute to the dire situation.

Alabama Republican **Congressman Mo Brooks** invented a new sexist/racist notion to add to the list of why young men become mass killers: Moral decline caused by single-parent families. He argued on right-wing Fox news that children living in such families are more likely to be on welfare, do poorly in school, and involved in drugs and criminal activity. His remarks were sexist because the majority of single parent families are headed by women and racist because a large proportion of these women are black.

US-centric analysts seeking to excuse the omnipresence of guns do not take into consideration that young males in the same age range in other countries do not engage in mass shootings. They are not driven to ease puberty pain by engaging in senseless, largely suicidal shootings and do not strive to get their hands on guns.

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