

## Gun Control: Profound Cultural Differences Regardless of Statistics

Franco Famularo  
February 26, 2018



News of the February 14 mass shooting at a Florida high school that claimed the lives of 14 students and three staff has people all over asking questions once again. In a debate where the same arguments are exchanged consistently, it seems a spiritual numbness prevails that leads to more confusion and frustration than solutions.

Here, I look at some statistics and posit there's a profound cultural difference between the USA and most other nations, not only in the developed world but most other countries, when it comes to gun

ownership.

Neither side of the debate in the USA has convinced the other. Supporters of tighter gun control scream something must be done and restrictions should be placed on gun ownership and background checks should be more rigorous. Supporters of existing gun laws tell us stricter laws are not the answer and that "Guns don't kill people. People kill people."



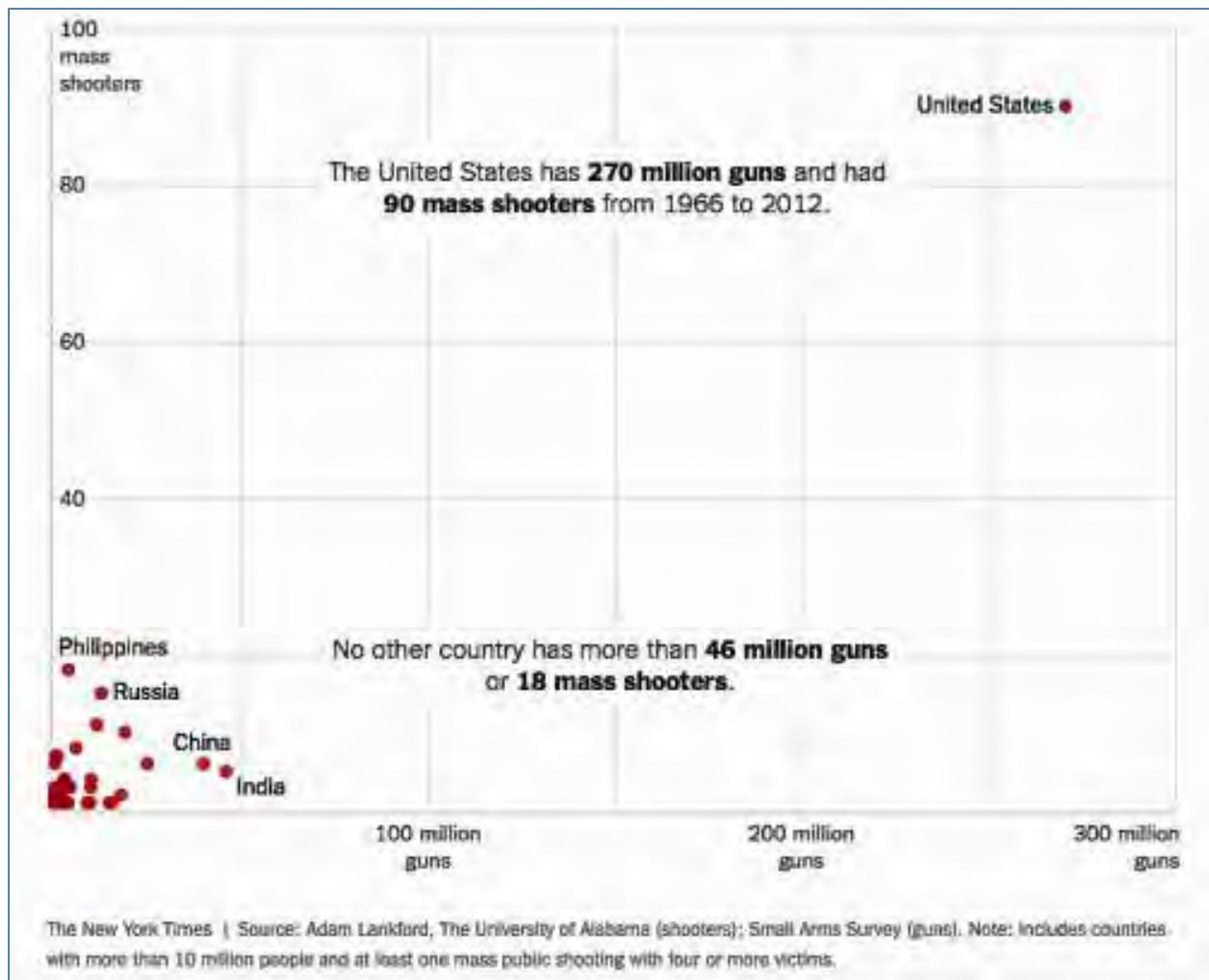
*Franco Famularo*

We are told, for example, that Chicago, with strict gun laws, has a very high murder rate and high crime rate. Some would suggest stricter laws would prevent people from killing people.

Most folks living outside the U.S. are perplexed that gun laws are as loose as they are and ask why Americans don't do the obvious. Some go as far as avoiding travel to the U.S., fearing gun violence!

But there is one puzzle that repeatedly stumps supporters and non-supporters alike. Why does the U.S. have an enormously higher rate of mass shootings than anywhere else? And why do most developed countries such as in Europe,

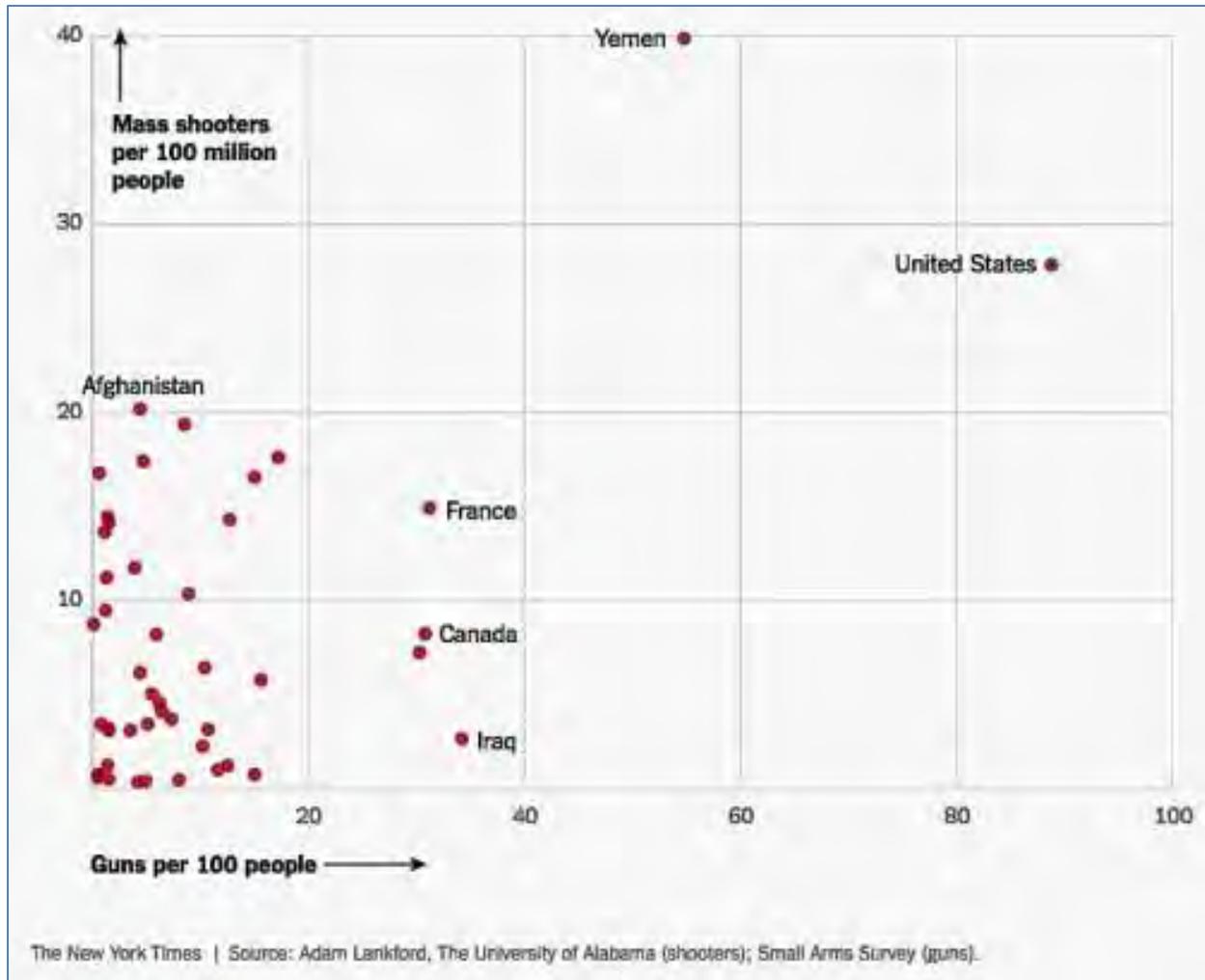
Japan and Canada have such low homicide rates -- especially those involving guns?



There exists a long litany of arguments for and against tighter gun laws and both sides in the USA cite the Second Amendment. Most folks outside the U.S. cannot easily understand what's at the root of the gun issue and what the American worldview is when it comes to gun ownership and their use.

I have tried to understand the gun issue as I often travel to the USA. I live in Montreal, Canada, and like most Canadians, reside a short 45 minute drive from the U.S. border. But when it comes to views on gun control we could be living oceans apart.

Greater Montreal is a predominantly French-speaking yet multilingual city with a multiracial and multi-ethnic population of close to four million people who live in the greater urban area. Like most large North American cities, Montreal has social problems and organized crime has a strong presence with involvement in the illicit drug trade. Crime is an ever-present issue, but there is little chance you will get shot if you steal or are the victim of a break and enter. Neither Montreal nor Toronto, a much larger city, have the level of gun violence found just a few miles down the road in the U.S. For example, in 2017, Montreal had 22 murders and not all involved firearms. Firearms are often smuggled into Canada from the USA.



Hardly anyone in Canada would consider liberalizing the current strict gun laws as a solution to crime. And Canadians have a high level of gun ownership since it is a nation of hunters and many people engage in activities in the great outdoors. Canadians own 31 guns per 100 residents compared to the U.S., where the number is 89 per 100 residents. The U.S. is number one in the world in terms of gun ownership.

Canada shares a lot in common with the United States -- not limited to a strong trade relationship, but shared history and culture. Both are predominantly countries influenced by the British and have encountered similar challenges with the terrain, the development of their countries and more. But Canada did not take part in the American Revolution. Indeed some Canadians (both English and French speakers) trace their roots to those who remained loyal to the British Crown.

There are many statistical studies that show the differences between gun violence in the USA and the rest of the world as shown in a November 2017 *New York Times* article that references a study by Adam Lankford. Some key points from it are:

- Americans make up 4.4% of the global population but own 42% of the world's guns
- 31% of mass shootings from 1966 to 2012 were in the USA
- Only Yemen has a higher rate of mass shootings among countries with populations more than ten million
- A country's rate of gun ownership correlates to odds it would experience a mass shooting
- Mental health stats don't correlate because the U.S. does not have higher mental health problems. Also the U.S. and other countries spend the same or more on mental health care

- Playing more or less video games does not appear to have an impact on mass shootings since Americans don't play more or less video games than other countries
- Racial diversity or other diversity metrics has little association with gun murder rates

In 2009, a study found the gun homicide rate in the U.S. was 33 per million (Canada has 5 per million and the UK has 0.7 per million).

A New Yorker is just as likely to get robbed as someone living in London. But the New Yorker is 54 times more likely to get killed in the process. Data repeatedly tells us that American crime is more lethal.

Switzerland is often used as an example of high gun ownership as it has the second-highest gun ownership rates in the developed world. However, the rate of mass shootings when comparing the U.S. to Switzerland is 133 to 1. Mass shootings are rare. Swiss laws are stricter and there is a different view of gun ownership. Apart from the heavily regulated Swiss militia, guns are government-issued and ammunition is tightly controlled and gun laws for the general population are highly restrictive.

Quoting statistics is simply not the only explanation to why the U.S. is an anomaly among the developed countries of the world. And few Americans are convinced by statistics, especially the gun lobby. For example, in 2013, there were over 30,000 gun-related deaths in the USA. There were only 13 in Japan. American gun ownership is 150 times higher than Japan.

The U.S. is clearly an anomaly when compared to the rest of the world (see these five global charts compiled by CNN).

### **Cultural differences**

Gun ownership levels do not explain what makes the USA different. All the statistics in the world will not convince some Americans there is a need for gun control. Interestingly, it is not a Republican vs. Democrat issue -- or simply supporters of the NRA vs. those demanding stricter gun control. Most Americans seem to support what they refer to as their "constitutional" right to bear arms. And to many Americans, the Constitution is equivalent to the holy scriptures of some religions -- texts that are virtually engraved in stone.

The United States is one of only three countries, along with Mexico and Guatemala, that begin with an assumption that people have an inherent right to own guns. For Americans, it is a matter of freedom, of a "right" to defend themselves, a "right" to be independent that goes back to the founding of the country and the revolution of 1776.

Without an understanding of this fundamental view, it is difficult for citizens of other countries to grasp what is at the root of the resistance of Americans to regulating guns.

It would seem easy to point out the difference in laws between the U.S. and Canada, for example, and explain why the level of gun violence is so high in the USA in comparison.

Canada is a country of law and order where its motto is "Peace, Order and Good Government" and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is considered a symbol of the country. In short, Canada with a very diverse population has a high regard for the rule of law.

Here are some comparisons with Canada when it comes to gun purchases:

### **Guns per person:**

- Canada reports 30.8 firearms per 100 people. The country ranks 13th worldwide for firearms per capita. The U.S. has 88.8 per 100 people and ranks number 1.

### **Waiting period to purchase a gun:**

- Canada requires a 60-day waiting period.
- There is no federally mandated waiting period in the U.S. as residents can obtain a gun after a background check.

### **Largest mass shootings:**

- Canada's largest mass shooting was in 1989 when 25-year-old Marc Lepine killed 14 people at a Montreal university. In the U.S., the largest mass shooting was in Las Vegas in October 2017 when 58 people were killed.

### **License and registration requirements:**

- To own a gun in Canada, residents must take a safety course and pass both a written and a practical exam. The license expires in five years. Residents have to register restricted firearms, such as handguns and automatic weapons, with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Canadian Firearms Program.



- In the U.S., license and registration laws vary from state to state, often with no such requirements. There is no mandatory course or exam.

#### **Background checks:**

- Canada requires a background check that focuses on mental health and addiction. Agents are required to inform an applicant's spouse or family before granting a license.
- The U.S. requires a federal background check for all those buying guns from licensed dealers but does not require one in private transactions such as at gun shows.

#### **People kill people – better laws are needed**

Agreed! Guns don't kill people. People kill people. But because human beings are not living in harmony with God and the natural laws of the universe, good and enforceable laws are needed to restrict bad behavior. Therefore, sound gun laws would likely go a long way to lower the homicide rates in the USA. The cultural differences may be vast, but in the end, measures must be taken when a citizenry is denied its right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness because someone else values his or her right to bear arms more than someone else's right to live. And law-abiding gun owners, who are troubled by mass shootings and illicit gun use, should not have an issue accepting good and enforceable laws that uphold the right to life.

Because human beings don't naturally abide by the highest moral and ethical codes, laws and regulations are needed. If humanity could simply follow the dictates of their hearts it would be ideal. Reality has it that most human beings are not in total sync with the Divine or with Godly rules and ideals.

Therefore, effective laws that can be enforced are needed. Again, guns don't kill people -- people do. It is precisely because people kill people that stricter rules and regulations concerning gun ownership are needed.

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*Information for this article, in addition to indicated hyperlinked sources, is based on data collected by the Small Arms Study, The United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, and the Canadian Firearms Program.*

*Rev. Franco Famularo (UTS Class of 1994) lives in Montreal, Canada, and serves as FFWPU National Leader of Canada. He is also Chair of the Board of Trustees of Unification Theological Seminary.*