Opinion
Guest Voices



A man holds a sign during a vigil outside Monterey Park City Hall, blocks from the Star Ballroom Dance Studio, Jan. 24, in Monterey Park, California. (AP/Ashley Landis)



by Phyllis Zagano

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @phylliszagano

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

May 22, 2023

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The statistics are numbing. The United States suffered 202 mass shootings — four or more persons killed or injured by firearms — during the first six months of 2023. Texas has had 17 mass shootings and 214 gun violence deaths so far this year. Most estimates count more weapons than people throughout the country.

Some folks blame mental health issues for every shooting. But what mental health condition? Paranoid psychosis? Sociopathic behavior? Depression? Bipolar disorder?

Perhaps the crucial ingredient is anger. Anger, at whom or at what, is for the psychiatrists to determine. But anger is clearly at the root of it all.

Anger-plus-gun equals tragedy.

Advertisement

So, what causes anger?

Yes, some people, with or without drugs, are detached from reality. Their anger erupts without warning.

More people, it seems, are infected with anger by an imagined reality that threatens their understanding of safety. While not every gun owner is paranoid, not every gun owner is not paranoid.

Selling anger and fear is big business. We saw what happened when QAnon exploded on the internet. Add Truth Social, Fox News and Newsmax to smaller outlets, like The Tennessee Star and NewBostonPost, and you have an electronic cauldron ready to boil over. Who, after all, can forget Jan. 6?

Anger-plus-fear-plus-guns destroys too many lives. Whether for random shootings or the horror of war, individuals or entire nations are picking up guns to solve their real or imagined disputes.

Pope Francis seems to be the only stable voice in the discussion. The normalization of guns, he told The Associated Press after a gunman killed 11 people in Monterey

Park, California, in January, has led to a "habit" of resorting to guns for every difficulty. "Instead of making the effort to help us live," said the pontiff, "we make the effort to help us kill."

That habit is ruining civilized society and societies everywhere in the world. Normal conversation, let alone international negotiation, is virtually impossible.

In the United States, people have a particular fondness for guns, born of distortions of the Second Amendment to the Constitution. These distortions are proposed principally by the National Rifle Association and echoed by the politicians the organization supports financially.

The problem stretches far beyond rifles and pistols for sport. The AR-15 semiautomatic rifle is the mass shooter's weapon of choice. Want one? Today, you can find some 250 AR-15-style rifles for sale on the internet by an online retailer based in Texas. Prices range from $449 to $1,749; financing available.

The NRA calls the AR-15 "America's Rifle." The name of the NRA's official journal is "American Rifleman."



Fitzgerald Moore leads a group in prayer at a memorial for victims in a recent mass shooting at an entrance to The Covenant School on March 29, in Nashville, Tennessee. (AP/Wade Payne)

Granted, some people in some states have reasons for guns — say, to shoot the menacing moose in the garden or as a real means of protection on a frozen tundra or a rural farm.

But many, if not most, states and certainly most cities should not suffer individuals wandering around with guns in their belts, and certainly not with AR-15s.

New York's historical relationship with the NRA is perhaps instructive. In the late 19th century, the state's Legislature and the NRA joined to acquire some 70 acres of farmland along a rail line in Queens to create a firing range. The property, the old Creed farm, was the site of international competitions until 1891. Neighbors complained so much, the NRA relocated to New Jersey, and the property eventually reverted to the state of New York.

The train stop for the property had cemented the name of the place: Creed's moor, or Creedmoor. Soon a state hospital took over the property.

The irony is unmistakable. Today, that former NRA firing range is the campus of the largest hospital in New York, the Creedmoor Psychiatric Center.