

Mass Shootings: The Vicious Cycle Fueled by America's Toxic Cult of Violence

By [John W. Whitehead](#) and [Nisha Whitehead](#)
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“Mass shootings have become routine in the United States and speak to [a society that relies on violence to feed the coffers of the merchants of death](#). Given the profits made by arms manufacturers, the defense industry, gun dealers and the lobbyists who represent them in Congress, it comes as no surprise that the culture of violence cannot be abstracted from either the culture of business or the corruption of politics.”—Professor Henry A. Giroux

We are caught in a vicious cycle.

With alarming regularity, the nation is being subjected to a heartbreaking spate of violence that terrorizes the populace, fractures communities, and gives the government greater justifications to crack down, lock down, and institute even more authoritarian policies for the so-called sake of national security without many objections from the citizenry.

Mass shootings have taken place in schools, on college campuses, movie theaters, nightclubs, grocery stores, concert venues, bars, workplaces, churches, on military bases, and in government offices. In almost every instance, the shooters were dressed in military-style gear and armed with military-style weapons.

Take the [latest shooting that took place in Uvalde, Texas](#), when 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, wearing body armor and carrying a rifle, walked into Robb Elementary School and opened fire, leaving at least 19 children and two teachers dead.

This Uvalde shooting took place ten days after [another 18-year-old man](#), heavily armed and wearing tactical gear (including a tactical helmet and plated armor), opened fire in a grocery store in Buffalo, N.Y., killing 10 people.



Cruz during his arrest in Coral Springs (Licensed under public domain)

In 2018, a 19-year-old former student armed with a [gas mask, smoke grenades, magazines of ammunition, and an AR-15-style semiautomatic rifle](#) opened fire on students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., leaving 17 people dead.



Police arrive at Sandy Hook Elementary, after the shooting on December 14, 2012. (Licensed under public domain)

Ten years ago, 20-year-old Adam Lanza—wearing body armor and black clothing, and armed with military-style weapons—[opened fire on students and teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School](#) in Newtown, Conn., leaving [26 dead](#). Prior to the shooting, Lanza reportedly spent his days “[playing violent video games amid posters showcasing military equipment](#).”

According to an [FBI report](#) issued the day before the Uvalde shooting, these kinds of “active shooter attacks” have doubled in recent years.

As expected in the wake of such tragedies, there has been a [vocal outcry for enacting more strident gun control measures](#), more mental health checks, and heightened security measures.

Yet surely there's more to these shootings than just easy access to weapons and mental illness.

Ask yourself: Why do these [mass shootings keep happening](#)? Who are these shooters modelling themselves after? Where are they finding the inspiration for their weaponry and tactics? Whose stance and techniques are they mirroring?

When you start to connect the dots, they lead right back to the American police state and the war-drenched, violence-imbued, profit-driven military industrial complex, both of which continue to dominate, dictate and shape almost every aspect of our lives.

The United States is the [number one consumer, exporter and perpetrator of violence and violent weapons](#) in the world.

- Violence has become America's calling card.
- We are a military culture engaged in continuous warfare.
- We have been a nation at war for most of our existence.
- We are a nation that makes a living from killing through defense contracts, weapons manufacturing and endless wars.
- We are being fed a steady diet of violence through our entertainment, news, sports and politics.

All of the military equipment featured in blockbuster movies is provided—at taxpayer expense—in exchange for carefully placed promotional spots aimed at [boosting civic pride in the military](#), recruiting for the military, and churning out [profit-driven propaganda for the military industrial complex](#). Even [reality TV shows have gotten in on the gig](#).

It's estimated that [U.S. military intelligence agencies \(including the NSA\) have influenced over 1,800 movies and TV shows](#).

Then there are the growing number of [violent video games](#), a number of which are engineered by or [created for the military as recruitment tools](#), which have accustomed players to interactive war play through military simulations and [first-person shooter scenarios](#). As Esther J. Cepeda writes for *The Washington Post*, "Violent video games alone do not cause people to go off the rails, arm themselves and open fire on innocent people in public places. But there's also no question that there is something wrong with a multibillion-dollar video game industry that sells to young men [the ability to virtually assassinate a foe](#) as an escape from real life."

The media, eager to score higher ratings, has been equally complicit in making (real) war more palatable to the public by packaging it as TV friendly. The military has also been firmly entrenched in the nation's sports spectacles, having [co-opted football, basketball, even NASCAR](#), "[tying the symbols of sports with the symbols of war](#)."

- This is how you acclimate a population to war.
- This is how you cultivate loyalty to a war machine.
- This is how, to borrow from the subtitle to the 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove*, you

teach a nation to “stop worrying and love the bomb.”

- This is how you sustain the nation’s appetite for war.

As journalist David Sirota writes for *Salon*, to those who profit from war, it is “a ‘product’ to be sold via pop culture products that sanitize war and, in the process, [boost recruitment numbers](#).”

No wonder entertainment violence is the hottest selling ticket at the box office. As professor Henry [Giroux points out](#), “Popular culture not only trades in violence as entertainment, but also it delivers violence to a society addicted to a pleasure principle steeped in graphic and extreme images of human suffering, mayhem and torture.”

No wonder the government continues to whet the nation’s appetite for violence and war through paid propaganda programs (seeded throughout sports entertainment, Hollywood blockbusters and video games)—what professor Roger Stahl refers to as “[militainment](#)”—that glorify the military and serve as recruiting tools for America’s expanding military empire.

No wonder Americans from a very young age are being groomed to enlist as foot soldiers—even virtual ones—in [America’s Army](#) (coincidentally, that’s also the name of a first-person shooter video game that was produced by the military and used as a pivotal recruiting tool for 20 years).

Explorer scouts, for example, have been one of the [most popular recruiting tools for the military](#) and its civilian counterparts (law enforcement, Border Patrol, and the FBI). Writing for *The Atlantic*, a former Explorer scout described the highlight of the program: monthly weekend maneuvers with the National Guard where scouts “got to [fire live rounds from M16s, M60 machine guns, and M203 grenade launchers](#)... we would have urban firefights (shooting blanks, of course) in Combat Town, a warren of concrete buildings designed for just that purpose. The exercise always devolved into a free-for-all, with all of us weekend warriors emptying clip after clip of blanks until we couldn’t see past the end of our rifles for all the smoke in the air.”

No wonder America [spends more money on war](#) than the combined military budgets of China, Russia, the United Kingdom, Japan, France, Saudi Arabia, India, Germany, Italy and Brazil. America polices the globe, with [800 military bases and troops stationed in 160 countries](#). Moreover, the war hawks have turned the American homeland into a quasi-battlefield with military gear, weapons and tactics. In turn, domestic police forces have become roving extensions of the military—a standing army.

You want to stop the gun violence?

Stop the worship of violence that permeates our culture.

- Stop treating guns and war as entertainment fodder in movies, music, video games, toys, amusement parks, reality TV, sports and more.
- Stop distributing weapons of war (weapons that have no business being anywhere but on a battlefield) to the local police and transforming police into extensions of the military.
- Stop exposing young people to the military industrial complex’s pervasive propaganda.

- Stop falling for the military industrial complex's psychological war games.

Salvador Ramos may have pulled the trigger that resulted in the mayhem in Uvalde, Tex., but something else is driving the madness.

We've got to do more than react in a knee-jerk fashion.

Those who want safety at all costs will clamor for more gun control measures, widespread mental health screening of the general population and [greater scrutiny of military veterans](#), more [threat assessments](#) and behavioral sensing warnings, more CCTV cameras with facial recognition capabilities, more "See Something, Say Something" programs aimed at turning Americans into snitches and spies, more metal detectors and whole-body imaging devices at soft targets, more roaming squads of militarized police empowered to do random bag searches, more fusion centers to centralize and disseminate information to law enforcement agencies, and more surveillance of what Americans say and do, where they go, what they buy and how they spend their time.

Yet as I point out in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), all of these measures play into the government's hands by locking down the nation without doing anything to address the underlying causes of this madness.

What we need is a thoughtful, measured, apolitical response to these shootings that takes aim at the violence plaguing our nation by lowering the levels of violence here and abroad, whether it's violence we export to other countries, violence we glorify in entertainment, or violence we revel in when it's leveled at our so-called enemies, politically or otherwise.

Our prolonged exposure to the toxic culture of the American police state is deadly.

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Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of [The Rutherford Institute](#). His most recent books are the best-selling [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), the award-winning [A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State](#), and a debut dystopian fiction novel, [The Erik Blair Diaries](#). Whitehead can be contacted at staff@rutherford.org.

Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of The Rutherford Institute. Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at www.rutherford.org.

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