



Texas shooting aftermath highlights the danger of these 4 American gun myths

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In my walks along the Blanco River in the small town where I live in Texas, a few hours' drive from Uvalde, I have been contemplating that wonderful town's horrendous mass murder this week and what we can do about gun violence in America, and here in the Lone Star State.

One big reason pragmatic positive change so rarely occurs in politics is the myths that take hold both among groups of voters and in the media. These myths are repeated over and over, often without much pushback. Here are four myths that need to be confronted and discarded when talking about commonsense gun reform.

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Myth One: Only coastal elites want gun reform, because they don't understand what it is like to own a gun and go hunting. And related to this myth is the (false) idea that gun owners don't want reform. As a Texas gun owner who has also talked to many gun owners here, this myth is completely false. In poll after poll, nationally and at the state level, the vast majority of citizens want gun reform. This isn't necessarily a blue or red state issue. In 2015, a Public Policy Polling survey found 83 percent of gun owners wanted universal background checks, and 72 percent of National Rifle Association members supported them as well. While the overall share of Americans who think gun laws need to be stricter has decreased recently, falling to 53 percent in 2021 according to Pew, there remains bipartisan support for various individual reform measures.

Myth Two: The gun violence problem exists because our country has become too secular and more morally lost. In looking at survey data from around the globe, the countries that are the most secular and don't ascribe to idea that "a belief in God is necessary to be moral and have good values" are some of the safest when it comes to gun violence. More than three quarters of citizens in Spain, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Sweden and France feel that a belief in God is not necessary to being moral, more than 20 points higher than "unbelievers" America, and yet none of those countries are struggling with rampant gun violence.

Myth Three: It is the Second Amendment and gun ownership that ensures America is the most free country in the world. In the Cato Institute's latest Human Freedom Index, America ranks 17th. Countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and Germany all rank far higher than the U.S. on this freedom scale, yet each one has far lower rates of gun ownership. In fact, the study shows that America has fallen on the freedom index over the last decade — as the number of guns in the United States has grown dramatically.

Myth Four: Gun ownership keeps illegal gun violence down. America by far has the most guns per 100 residents in the world. In fact, we have double the guns of the next highest country, which is Yemen. America unsurprisingly also ranks second in total gun deaths in the world, behind only Brazil. If more guns equaled less gun violence, America would be the safest country. And you only have to turn on the news tonight to see that is not the case. Want more evidence of this fallacy? When looking at states across our nation, those with stricter gun laws have less gun violence, and those with weak gun laws have higher rates of gun violence.

In order to have a functioning democracy we must be able to come together for the common good. But to do that, we must start with a common set of facts. The majority of Americans do want gun reform, even if they do not all agree on what that reform should include. Instead of relying on mythology, let's base our debate on data. Both our hearts and our minds can lead us to a better place, and honor the many young victims of gun violence by passing gun reform. As President John F. Kennedy said, before he himself was murdered with a bullet: "The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive and unrealistic."