

Misogyny is fueling the country's gun violence epidemic, experts say

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<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/WI-EXAM/gettyimages-515043009-430x280-misogyny-lede-art.jpg>



“Every day, as virulent white supremacists make their hatred known, we immediately and rightly call them extremists. We have not been nearly as unequivocal in our condemnation when it comes to men who express violent anger toward and loathing for women.” – Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in a 2018 report

This story originally appeared in [Michigan Advance](#) .

Dawn Gillard's life revolved around her children.

Everyone who loved her knew that. The rest of the world would read about it in her obituary.

On May 27, Gillard was shot and killed at age 40 alongside her three young children: Katelynn, 6; Ronald, 4; and Joshua, 3, at a home in Austin Township, a rural area south of Big Rapids in Mecosta County. Gillard's husband, 51-year-old Charles Gillard, has been [charged](#) in their murders.

“Becoming a mom was a pinnacle of Dawn's life,” her [obituary](#) read. “Her children quickly

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became the focus of her drive and making their world a place of joy.”

Gillard, an only child who left behind three older children and her own parents, was, the obituary said, “an active mom” who loved taking her children “out in nature for their long walks.”

Now, “she and her three youngest children will forever be tied together in life and death.”

The deaths of Gillard and her three children are one of 12 mass shootings in Michigan and one of at least 331 mass shootings nationwide that have occurred this year, [according](#) to the Gun Violence Archive. The Washington D.C.-based nonprofit defines a mass shooting as four or more people being shot or killed in a single incident, not including the shooter.

These are violent deaths that leave behind often unhealable wounds for those who loved them — people who [describe](#) a searing pain that never fully recedes.

And they are the deaths behind the soaring gun violence in the United States, a country where the number of mass shootings has skyrocketed from 272 incidents in 2014 to 692 in 2021, according to the Gun Violence Archive, which began collecting information about mass shootings in 2013.

In a country where there are [more firearms than people](#), mass shootings have become increasingly frequent — and gun violence in general is [on the rise](#)

. More Americans died from gun violence in 2020, the most recent year for which there is data, [than any other year](#) on record, and gun violence was the [No. 1](#) cause of death for children in 2020.

In the last year, the country has grappled with an [onslaught](#) of [mass shootings](#), from a 15-year-old boy [shooting and killing](#)

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four students and wounding seven others at Oxford High School in Southeast Michigan to a gunman killing seven people and wounding dozens more during a July 4 celebration in Highland Park, Ill., another gunman killing 19 children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas — the deadliest mass shooting in 2022, and a gunman and avowed

[white supremacist](#)

shooting and killing 10 people at a supermarket

[in Buffalo](#)

, N.Y.



Miah Cerrillo, a survivor of the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas testifies remotely during the House Oversight and Reform Committee hearing with victims' family members and survivors of the Buffalo, New York and Uvalde, Texas massacres on June 8, 2022, on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. (Jason Andrew | Pool, Getty Images)

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This violence has so thoroughly permeated our day-to-day lives that people have stopped going to some public spaces because they're worried about mass shootings. When the American Psychological Association surveyed about 2,000 people regarding their stress levels following mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, in 2019, [one-third of respondents](#) said they would no longer go to certain public spaces or events out of a fear of violence.

Amidst this terror, experts are grappling with *why* this is happening. The answer to that is layered: There's the fact that guns are ubiquitous in the United States (in a country of about 330 million people, gun owners possess about [39](#) [3.3 million weapons](#) and gun ownership [soared](#) during the pandemic). AR-15s — often the [weapon of choice](#) for mass shooters — are [readily available](#) and used to quickly kill large numbers of people in a short amount of time.

Other factors are state gun laws [vary dramatically](#), the financial and cultural power that the National Rifle Association [wields](#) and primarily Republican lawmakers have for decades [resisted](#) gun restrictions meant to curb violence. Following the Uvalde and Buffalo shootings — after years of obstructing movement on gun legislation — some Republican legislators recently joined their Democratic colleagues and passed the [most comprehensive federal gun safety legislation](#), the Safer Communities Act, in nearly 30 years.

But there's a large piece missing to many of the conversations around gun violence, some academics, lawmakers and other experts said. We are not sufficiently talking about the role that misogyny — and, often, its collision with white supremacy — plays in gun violence.

That omission comes as there's a litany of examples of misogyny in gun violence, including the fact that more than two-thirds (68.2%) of mass shootings in the U.S. involve shooters who either killed family or intimate partners prior to the mass shooting or had another history of domestic violence, according to a 2021 [study](#) by the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence.

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In Michigan, one of every five homicides of women, such as Dawn Gillard, involves a current or former intimate partner with a gun, [according](#) to data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The 18-year-old gunman who killed 19 children and two teachers in Uvalde [shot his grandmother](#) in the face before murdering [10- and 11-year-olds](#) who were spending their final days in school before summer vacation. The 20-year-old man who in 2012 shot and killed 26 people at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut murdered [his mother](#) moments before going to the school. The gunman who murdered 49 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando in 2016 abused his wife while she was pregnant, the woman [told](#) authorities. The man who killed 26 people at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, in 2017 had been convicted of domestic violence; his ex-wife [said](#) he told her that, "I could just bury you somewhere here in the desert and nobody would ever find you."

Mass shooters are also [overwhelmingly men](#) — a staggering 98% of mass shootings since 1966 have been committed by men, [according](#) to [the Violence Project](#), a research group that tracks U.S. mass shooting data.

There's a masculinity epidemic in the United States, and we're seeing that time and again in these shootings.

– Sarah Prior, a sociology professor at Michigan State University whose research focuses on gendered violence

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call them extremists,” a [2018 report](#) from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) said. “We have not been nearly as unequivocal in our condemnation when it comes to men who express violent anger toward and loathing for women.”

The author of that report, Jessica Reaves, who has for years studied extremist ideologies and groups and is the director of content and editorial strategy at the Anti-Defamation League’s [Center on Extremism](#), said it’s vital for the country to center the role misogyny plays in extremism and violence.

As for why misogyny does not play a larger part of our dialogue and action around extremism and violence, Reaves said, “it’s part of our country.”

“Women were not viewed as full people by the founding fathers,” she said. “We didn’t get the right to vote until relatively recently; there’s still no [Equal Rights Amendment](#). There’s no real social cost to being sexist; that was made exceptionally clear in the [2016 presidential election](#) [between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, the first major-party female nominee]. There’s no cost to treating women like objects and talking about them as if they’re subhuman.

“We’ve seen racism go unchecked; we’ve seen people hold onto their positions after being anti-Semitic or Islamophobic,” Reaves continued. “Misogyny falls into that same space where you can dismiss it out of hand because it’s so baked into our country’s fabric, the way we treat mothers and parents, the way we provide no support for childcare, the way we don’t pay teachers enough. All of these things are rooted in the belief that women and their contributions are not worth as much. I think that plays into why people can just get away with quite literally murder when it comes to attitudes towards women.”

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Michigan's abortion ban while Michigan's ban was in effect, April 30, 2020. (Associated Press)
"A masculinity epidemic in the United States"

The current gun violence crisis comes at a time when gun ownership [soared](#) during the pandemic and the number of white nationalist groups [jumped by 55%](#) during the Trump presidency.

There are a lot of guns and a lot of anger — much of which is fueled by misogyny and white supremacy that spreads like a wildfire because of social media — in the country right now, experts said.

"There's a masculinity epidemic in the United States, and we're seeing that time and again in these shootings," said Sarah Prior, a sociology professor at Michigan State University whose research focuses on gendered violence.

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Prior and Reaves were careful to note the dangerous collision of misogyny and white supremacy — and how misogyny can often introduce people to white supremacy — and their role in violence.

Misogyny “stands on its own as an extremist ideology” that’s “often interwoven with tenets of white supremacy, anti-Semitism; there’s all sorts of gross belief systems that depend heavily on hatred of women or play off of hatred of women,” Reaves noted.

The shooter in Buffalo, for example, embraced the virulently racist and antisemitic [“Great Replacement”](#) theory, a conspiracy theory [advanced](#) by white supremacists, right-wing figures like Fox’s Tucker Carlson, and some Republican lawmakers that centers around white people being systematically replaced by nonwhite people.

“The most extreme version of the Great Replacement, which is played out in this [the Buffalo shooting] and other white supremacist attacks embraces violent accelerationism — the belief that society as it stands is irredeemable and that only violence can bring about the ideal white state,” Reaves [said](#) in an ADL video that aired following the mass shooting in Buffalo.

The Buffalo shooter’s manifesto that allegedly laid out his plans for an attack that ultimately killed 10 Black people at a grocery store was filled with racism and misogyny, according to authorities.

“I carried out the attack” in order to intimidate and remove the “replacers” and to incite violence in order to create an “atmosphere of fear and change” that could “eventually start the war that will save the western world,” the shooter [wrote](#) .

“The time for meekness has long since passed,” as has chances for a democratic solution, he continued. “Men of the West must be men once more.”

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For me, things will never be the same

This hatred of women and the idea that women have a specific place in the world — i.e. taking care of children at home — permeates culture outside of mass shootings, experts said.

It incites violence, including gun violence, against women, said political experts who pointed to the prevalence of militias in Michigan and the Midwest, the planned [assassination](#) of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, and former and current GOP lawmakers — including those who have been accused of [sexual assault](#) and [sexual harassment](#) — refusing to act on gun violence legislation.

“How is it that female lawmakers experience this kind of violence and are told it’s just part of the job in a way?” Prior said. “We don’t see women doing this to male lawmakers. The planned

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attack on Gov. Whitmer had to do with toxic masculinity, and yet that's often not how it's framed. When we don't frame it like that we do a disservice. We're so afraid to talk about masculinity because of the backlash we're going to get. Then we see women address it and get more backlash."

There's extensive documentation of the deeply rooted misogyny that women have [faced](#) in Lansing, from the men who plotted to hogtie and shoot Whitmer in an attempt to [stop President Joe Biden](#) from becoming president to Michigan Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake) saying the GOP-led legislature ["spanked"](#) Whitmer over her pandemic orders and Michigan Republican Party Chair Ron Weiser [calling](#) the state's top three Democratic leaders — Whitmer, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson — "witches" that Republicans need to defeat in 2022 by "burning at the stake."

The planned assassination against Whitmer — who also faced misogynist attacks by people wielding signs [emblazoned](#) with the governor's photo and messages like "tyrant bitch" at armed protests over Whitmer's pandemic health orders — has [resulted](#) in two men pleading guilty, two being acquitted, and two being granted a mistrial.

"The details of the plot against me are terrifying enough that if I could, I would have shielded my family and friends from them," Whitmer said in a victim impact statement shared with the media before the sentencing of Ty Garbin, who is serving six years in prison for his role in the plan to kidnap and kill Whitmer.

"Threats continue," Whitmer said. "I have looked out my windows and seen large groups of heavily armed people within 30 yards of my home. I have seen myself hung in effigy. Days ago at a demonstration there was a sign that called for 'burning the witch.' For me, things will never be the same."

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