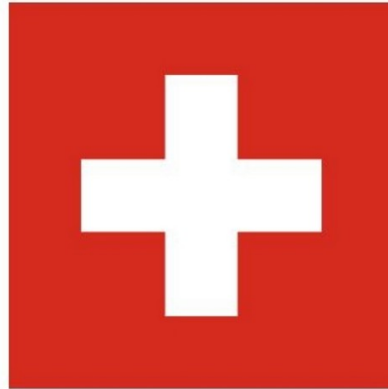




## Swiss Example of Low Mass Shootings Despite Widespread Gun Ownership

The recent school shooting in Parkland, Florida, and other mass shooting in the past few years have prompted the usual outcries for more gun control from those who choose to disregard the Second Amendment. Among those clamoring for more restrictions on gun ownership were thousands of students who were manipulated into attending the “March for Our Lives” demonstrations in Washington, D.C., and other cities on March 24. Some observers have said that these demonstrations reminded them of National Socialist Adolf Hitler’s “Youth Parades,” a favorite propaganda gimmick of anti-gun Nazis.



Fortunately, the calls for more gun control have also inspired several reports in the media noting that Switzerland, despite having one of the highest rates of gun ownership in the world, has an overall murder rate near zero. Among these was a March 24 report in *Business Insider* by science reporter Hilary Brueck. In her report, Brueck noted that Switzerland hasn’t had a mass shooting since 2001, when a man attacked the local parliament in Zug (the capital of the Swiss canton of the same name), killing 14 people and then himself

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The report went on to state that Switzerland, a nation of 8.3 million people, has about two million privately owned guns. Despite this large number of guns in private hands, the country had only 47 homicides in which firearms were used in 2016 and the country’s overall murder rate is near zero.

*Business Insider* explored some of the cultural differences between the United States and Switzerland and, in particular, the role that firearms ownership and training plays in Swiss society. Brueck cited some of the traditional gun-related events that are popular in Switzerland. One such event is Knabenschiessen, a traditional target shooting competition in Zürich every September. The festival has officially been held since 1889, but unofficially dates back to the 17th century and was first mentioned in a document in 1656. The competition is open to 13- to 17-year-olds who either reside or are enrolled in a school in the canton of Zürich. It was originally open only to boys, but girls have been eligible to enter since 1991.

More significantly, *Business Insider* notes that Switzerland’s history of having an armed citizenry has helped keep the Alpine country neutral for more than 200 years. Switzerland hasn’t taken part in any international armed conflicts since 1815.

The *Business Insider* report links to a Swiss website that explains the country’s practice of “armed neutrality. The country’s neutrality in diplomatic matters is well known, but its ability to deter invaders while not engaging in armed conflicts depends on it have a strong national defense, as well. A key



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component to that defense is having a nation of armed citizen soldiers ready to defend their homeland. The Swiss website article notes:

In principle, the Swiss cannot enter military alliances unless they are attacked. They must not take sides in international conflicts and cannot give right of transit to foreign forces.

For Switzerland, neutrality implies armed neutrality, which explains why the country has always strived to maintain its defense at a respectable level, and why military service remains compulsory for male citizens under the constitution.

The article continues to explain how the national defense works.

The Swiss Army largely is a non-career militia. Switzerland has compulsory military service for male citizens, though this and indeed the role of the army altogether have recently been called into question. Nevertheless, joining up and passing through the “recruit school” has been a rite of passage for generations of young Swiss men.

After their basic training, they have to maintain their skills by spending several weeks in the army each year. Young soldiers in uniform, often carrying weapons, are a frequent sight in Swiss towns and cities, and the sound of gunfire is common in the otherwise peaceful Swiss landscape when they are on maneuvers.

Soldiers take their guns home with them. There has been controversy about this in recent years due to the frequent role of army weapons in murders of spouses and suicides. At a nationwide vote in February 2011 the Swiss rejected an initiative aimed at creating a central gun registry, a strict licensing system for the use of firearms, a ban on the purchase of automatic weapons and a ban on keeping army-issue guns at home.

Though Switzerland is a gun-friendly nation, there are apparently still some restrictions on gun ownership. *Business Insider* notes that after they have finished their military service, men can buy and keep their service weapons, but they have to get a permit for them.

Another article in the *Christian Science Monitor* for March 7 stated: “The Swiss’s historic relationship to their arms as members of a standing militia, their motives for keeping them, and the regulations around them diverge from the American experience. It’s one reason that the prevalence of arms here is not accompanied by a scourge of gun violence.”

The *Monitor* report noted that the Swiss see their right to possess weapons as being based on their experience as citizen soldiers and part of their responsibility to defend that nation. The report noted:

The militia, and the culture it has fostered is seen as part of the common good, binding a nation together in a mission of national security. That differs widely from America’s individualistic gun culture. According to a Pew poll in 2017, 67 percent of those who own guns in the US cite their personal protection as a major motive.

The poll results indicate that even American gun owners probably do not understand the historic reasons for the Second Amendment, which actually anticipates individuals’ ownership of firearms as being necessary for national rather than person protection: “A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.”

That amendment was inspired by the experience of the American colonists, who zealously resisted the British government’s attempt to seize the colonists’ stores of arms at Lexington and Concord. At the time, the government was their own and the “free state” mentioned in the amendment was also their



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own.

The Swiss, being surrounded by other nations, regard the greatest threat to their freedom and sovereignty as being external, while the authors of our Bill of Rights feared not a foreign invasion, but oppression by an authoritarian government.

Though the Swiss and Americans have different reasons for cherishing their private ownership of weapons, the fact that Switzerland is relatively free of gun violence does provide excellent ammunition (no pun intended) to argue the case that gun control is not the solution to mass shootings.

Related article:

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