

## OUR VIEW

## 'Gun culture' has skidded from us

After Uvalde, there are, again, millions of takes on social media and in conversations across the country. Millions of emotions. Millions of reasons, searching for blame. A cry about just what is in us as a people that lets this happen time after time. This reaction to another shooting in America is exhausting, frightening and just so maddening.

How we respond is just as fractious as the divisions among us socially and politically.

Can we add to the mix? Maybe.

In the whole, there can seem little to say that will change gun culture in America. And when we say "gun culture," we don't mean that negatively. It would be great if "gun culture" meant what many of us in this part of the country want it to mean: generations of hunters who find great joy in the activity. Who pass down guns and hunting safety to children, who in turn learn to love the hunt as well. There's even those who don't hunt, who may own a gun just to take to the gun range. There are also those who want a gun for protection, and, we hope, have been trained on how to use it.

That is a "gun culture" most of us can probably understand.

But here's the problem with the constant thrum of gun violence: It is changing perceptions about guns as a whole, and your definition, even one that is cogent and reasonable, is getting lost in death after death after death.

So we find it of utmost importance that those who most cherish the right to own a gun also take heed, and stop, what "gun culture" has come to mean. Simply, it means coming to agreement that some measures are needed, almost required, to stop events like those in Uvalde.

It's up to you, gun owners. You know where the politicians on either side of the aisle stand. They are beholden to party and politics, which often means money. Were it true that they truly represent us, they would come up with meaningful solutions about the access and use of guns, especially the rapid-fire, multiple-round human killer models that are used so often in mass shootings.

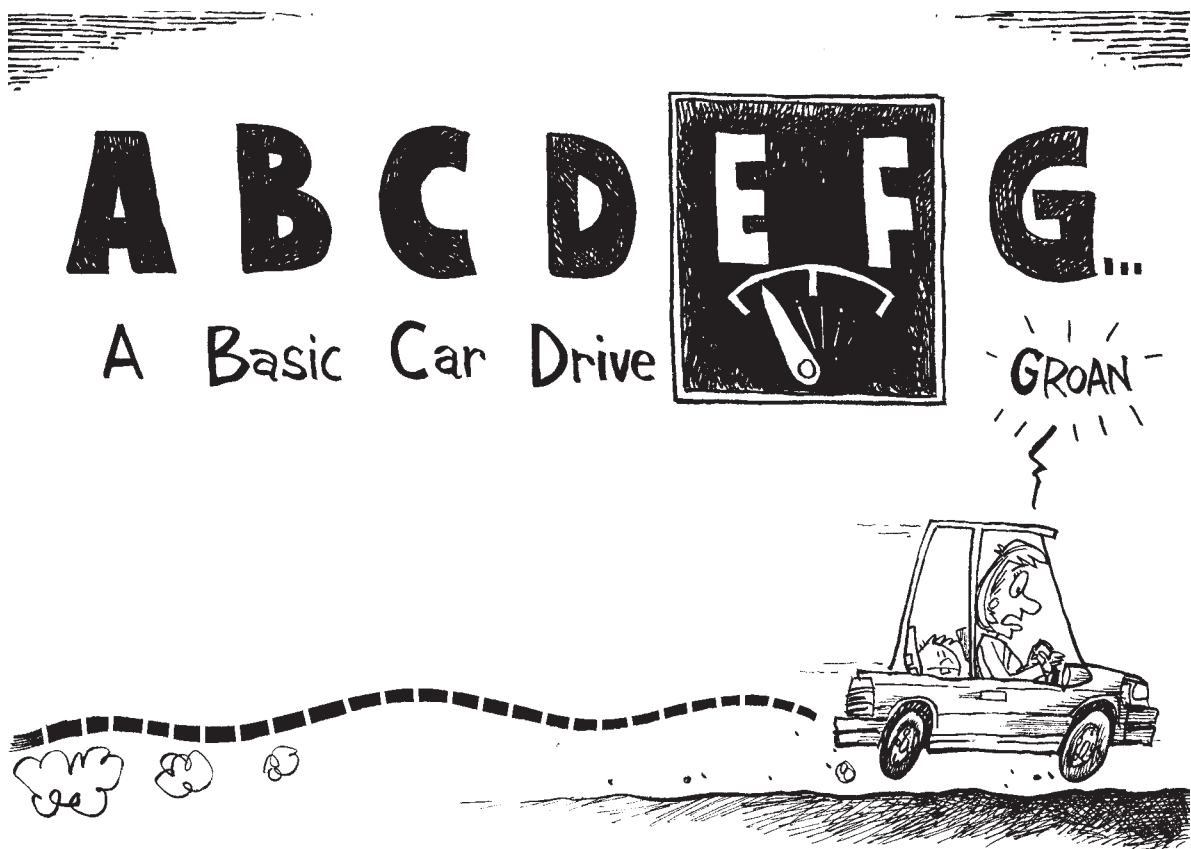
We've heard often that firearms such as the AR-15 fall under the blanket of the Second Amendment. No exceptions. They are fun to shoot, and you don't want to give that up. But after so many deaths, so much inflicted pain, can one really say that a weekend of shooting off these types of guns is "fun?" Is your right to that thrill worth the price we are paying? You see the faces: 19 children dead. Two teachers dead.

Imagine if our "car culture" suffered the same barrage. Say we never required seatbelts, stiff drunk driving laws, car safety advances, or, most recently, getting people to stop using cell phones while driving. It would be a free-for-all and the injurious carnage would surely lead to us trying to find some kind of effort to abate it.

There are myriad examples of changes made to our daily lives to make them safer. It's the maddening aspect of this current crisis. We put up with the measures put in place in airports and on planes after Sept. 11, 2001. Our teachers and students surely know of the measures in their schools to block that which is no longer an abstract notion, that someone will try to come into their building and shoot them. That fact alone, with the thought that today's seniors not only bless themselves for surviving a difficult pandemic but also for avoiding a school shooting, is heartbreaking.

We have to do better. We have to have the conversations. And we have to let those in power, who have the ability to create and change laws, know that we will no longer put up with this new definition of guns in America. Everyone is in this. And everyone must keep an open mind on how we can stop the killing.

We can, together, redefine who we are and who and what we are willing to sacrifice.



## Why good investigative journalism matters

Recently, a couple of reporters at The New York Times published an intriguing story about conversations between House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy and other members of his leadership team. It was shortly after the events of Jan. 6 at the Capitol, and they were talking about what to do about then-President Trump.

His conduct, McCarthy said, had been "atrocious and totally wrong." Moreover, wrote Alexander Burns and Jonathan Martin in their article, McCarthy "faulted the president

for 'inciting people' to attack the Capitol, saying that Mr. Trump's remarks at a rally on the National Mall that day were 'not right by any shape or any form.'" He added, "I've had it with this guy."

Burns and Martin have since published a series of articles on the subject, including McCarthy's fears that some of his more extreme colleagues could themselves incite more violence. Not surprisingly, there have been plenty of denials, but the two reporters have countered with one key point: They have the audio recordings.

I happen to believe these stories are important for the insight they provide into key politicians' thinking at a dark moment in our history — and on those politicians' willingness to backtrack in the year since. But whether you agree or not, the willingness of two reporters to dig deep into what actually happened and set the record straight has sent shockwaves through Washington and cast the behavior of powerful

officials in a new light.

This is what good investigative journalism does. It is an essential part of our representative democracy, offering all of us — the people who have the most at stake in who represents us in Washington and how they and other officials behave on our behalf — the chance to understand more fully what's going on. I often think to myself how dull our lives would be without the difficult, important work that enterprising journalists do. They get for us the facts and — mostly — put them in context so that we can understand what we need to know.

I'm not going to recite a list of all the important stories that journalists have uncovered or helped to explain; it would take us hours. But a quick look back at some relatively recent investigative work gives you a sense of the key importance they play. There was the 2019 Washington Post story on a confidential "trove" of government papers documenting nearly two decades of U.S. officials' misleading statements about the war in Afghanistan. And Jodi Kantor, Megan Twohey, and Ronan Farrow's groundbreaking investigations of the sexual predation of Harvey Weinstein. There's been ongoing coverage of the dark corners of America's war on terror, from Abu Ghraib to Guantanamo. The work by the Seattle Times on how failures of government oversight helped lead to the crashes of the Boeing 737 MAX. The Boston Globe's earth-shattering investigations of abusive behavior by priests and the Catholic Church hierarchy's

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Lee Hamilton

efforts to cover it up.

It's possible that just by reciting that tiny fraction of important work, I've spurred you to think of other examples, from Watergate to the exposure of corruption or malfeasance or toxic pollution or some other community harm where you live. And that's my point: Journalists are constantly finding and exposing the truth in ways that, ideally, spur us to improve our lives, communities, government, and democratic system as a whole. They have a lot of power — they can destroy the career of public and private-sector leaders — and certainly some of them have their faults, obsessing over feuds and conflict and giving them more attention than they deserve. But overall, I've found journalists as a whole and investigative journalists in particular to be intelligent, compassionate, and people of integrity.

And I'll say it again: They're vital to our representative democracy. We need the work journalists do to remain a free and independent nation, with power residing ultimately in the hands of its citizens. There's a reason that one of the first things authoritarians do is try to bring the press to heel. They understand, perhaps better than we who get to take these things for granted, how a thriving free press lets people form their own opinions.

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