

# How the Firearms Industry Markets Guns to Asian Americans



**Violence Policy Center**

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## Introduction

Since the mid-1960s, self-defense has been the foundational argument used by the gun industry to sell firearms, primarily handguns, in the United States. In this effort, gunmakers have been aided by the gun lobby, most notably the National Rifle Association of America (NRA). Firearms are promoted as risk-free tools necessary for the defense of self and family from myriad threats, most frequently an attack by a stranger. Never acknowledged is the demonstrable fact that guns are rarely used to kill criminals or stop crimes, and that most homicides occur between people who know one another.<sup>1</sup> Also missing from this false and simplistic narrative is the reality of the trauma, legal and financial risk, and long-term emotional repercussions that can come with the act of taking another human life.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, the primary demographic targeted by the gun industry has been white males. This is now changing as the result of the fact that this traditional customer base is aging while gunmakers, to paraphrase a tobacco industry term, have failed to recruit a sufficient number of ‘replacement shooters’ to fill their thinning ranks. As a result, household and individual gun ownership over the past few decades in the United States have declined significantly and remain relatively stagnant.<sup>3</sup>

While children and women have been the default targets of the industry in the wake of stagnation of the white male market, there has also been a growing campaign to market guns to minority groups in America, primarily for self-defense. Latino and Black

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1 *Firearm Justifiable Homicides and Non-Fatal Self-Defense Gun Use*, Violence Policy Center, May 2020 (<http://vpc.org/studies/justifiable20.pdf>).

2 See, for example, *Unintended Consequences: Pro-Handgun Experts Prove That Handguns Are a Dangerous Choice for Self-Defense*, Violence Policy Center, November 2001 (<https://vpc.org/publications/unintended-consequences/>).

3 From 1977 to 2018, the percentage of American households that reported having any guns in the home dropped by 32 percent. During this period household gun ownership hit its peak in 1977, when more than half (50.4 percent) of American households reported having any guns. By 2018, 34.3 of American households reported having any guns in the home, a drop of 16 percentage points. From 1985 to 2018, the percentage of Americans who reported personally owning a gun dropped more than 28 percent. During this period, personal gun ownership hit its peak in 1985, when 30.5 percent of Americans reported personally owning a gun. By 2018, this number had dropped nearly nine percentage points to 21.9 percent. For more information, see *The Long-Term Decline of Gun Ownership in America: 1973 to 2018*, Violence Policy Center, June 2020 (<http://vpc.org/studies/ownership.pdf>).

Americans have been the primary focus of these efforts. This has begun to shift in the wake of high-profile racist attacks on members of the Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, including a mass shooting in Atlanta, Georgia, during the COVID-19 pandemic. As an April 2021 Pew Research survey found, “Amid widespread reports of discrimination and violence against Asian Americans during the coronavirus outbreak, 32% percent of Asian adults say they have feared someone might threaten or physically attack them – a greater share than other racial or ethnic groups. The vast majority of Asian adults (81%) also say violence against them is increasing, far surpassing the share of all U.S. adults (56%) who say the same....”<sup>4</sup>

Seeing an opportunity to exploit the fear spurred by these horrific attacks, the firearms industry has moved swiftly to expand its efforts targeting the AAPI community.<sup>5</sup>

Increased firearms ownership can only increase gun death and injury among Asian Americans. Bringing a gun into the home increases the risk of death and injury not only to the gun owner, but to his or her family as measured in suicides, homicides, and fatal unintentional injuries – regardless of race or ethnicity.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, contrary to gunmakers’ false promises, firearms are rarely used to kill criminals or stop crimes. For example, for the five-year period 2015 through 2019, only 37 firearm justifiable homicides committed by Asian/Pacific Islanders were reported to the FBI’s Supplementary Homicide Report. During the same five-year period, 3,076 Asian/Pacific Islanders died in firearm suicides, homicides, and fatal unintentional shootings: a ratio of 83 to one. And according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), *non-lethal* self-defense gun uses are equally rare. (For additional information, please see page 21).

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4 “One-third of Asian Americans fear threats, physical attacks and most say violence against them is rising,” Neil G. Ruiz, Khadijah Edwards, and Mark Hugo Lopez, Pew Research Center, April 21, 2021 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/21/one-third-of-asian-americans-fear-threats-physical-attacks-and-most-say-violence-against-them-is-rising/>).

5 The U.S. Census defines Asian as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam” and defines Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands” (see <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>). Throughout this study, these two groups will be referred to as the AAPI community or Asian Americans. When data cited specifically states Asian/Pacific Islander, such as that collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this designation will be used.

6 See, for example: “Firearm Ownership and Domestic Versus Nondomestic Homicide in the U.S.,” Aaron J. Kivisto, Lauren A. Magee, et al., *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, September 2019, Volume 57, Issue 3, pp. 311-320; “Unintentional Firearm Deaths in the United States 2005 - 2015,” Sara Solnick, David Hemenway, *Injury Epidemiology*, October 14, 2019, Volume 6, Number 42; “Rates of Household Firearm Ownership and Homicide Across US Regions and States, 1988 - 1997,” Matthew Miller, Deborah Azrael, David Hemenway, *American Journal of Public Health*, December 2002, Volume 92, Issue 12, pp. 1988-1993; “Firearm Availability and Homicide: A Review of the Literature,” Lisa M. Hepburn, David Hemenway, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Volume 9, Issue 4, July 2004, pp. 417-440; “Household Firearm Ownership and Suicide Rates in the United States,” Matthew Miller, Deborah Azrael, David Hemenway, *Epidemiology*, September 2002, Volume 13, Number 5, pp. 517-524.

Recognizing the low gun ownership rate of the AAPI community in the United States, the potential financial benefits to the firearms industry are clear. Just as important to both the firearms industry and gun lobby are the potential political benefits. Asian Americans strongly support stricter gun laws.<sup>7</sup> They are also the fastest-growing population among all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Between 2000 and 2019, the Asian population in the U.S. grew from roughly 10.5 million to a record 18.9 million, an increase of 81 percent. By 2060, the number of Asians in the United States is projected to rise to 35.8 million, more than three times the 2000 population.<sup>8</sup> In the eyes of the firearms industry and gun lobby, the purchase of a firearm is the hoped-for first step down the path for new gun owners to become pro-gun advocates and voters.

## Chris Cheng: “Diversity is the next area of success for our industry”

The birthplace of the long-term, organized, and coordinated campaign targeting non-white potential gun owners was the 2015 Industry Summit held by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), the trade association for the firearms industry, in Savannah, Georgia.<sup>9</sup> As a press release issued by NSSF after the event explained:

The central theme of the 2015 Industry Summit, diversity, is one that proved the industry is preparing to significantly change the way it does business. ‘We’ve talked loosely about diversity for years,’ said Chris Dolnack, NSSF Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer, ‘but there’s never been a cohesive effort across the industry as a whole to address this subject and innovate change. This year’s Industry Summit showed us that we’re about to experience a ground-swell shift in that attitude. Summit attendees came fully prepared, arriving with focused, on-point questions about what changes they need to make in their businesses to embrace a new consumer audience.’<sup>10</sup>

As illustrated by presentation slides shared on Twitter by Summit attendees, speakers offered overviews of the potential shooters they were targeting, breaking racial and ethnic groups (Black, Latino, and Asian) down by “demographics,” “psychographics,” and “technographics.” The demographics for “Asian Shooters” included: “Younger, higher income and education;

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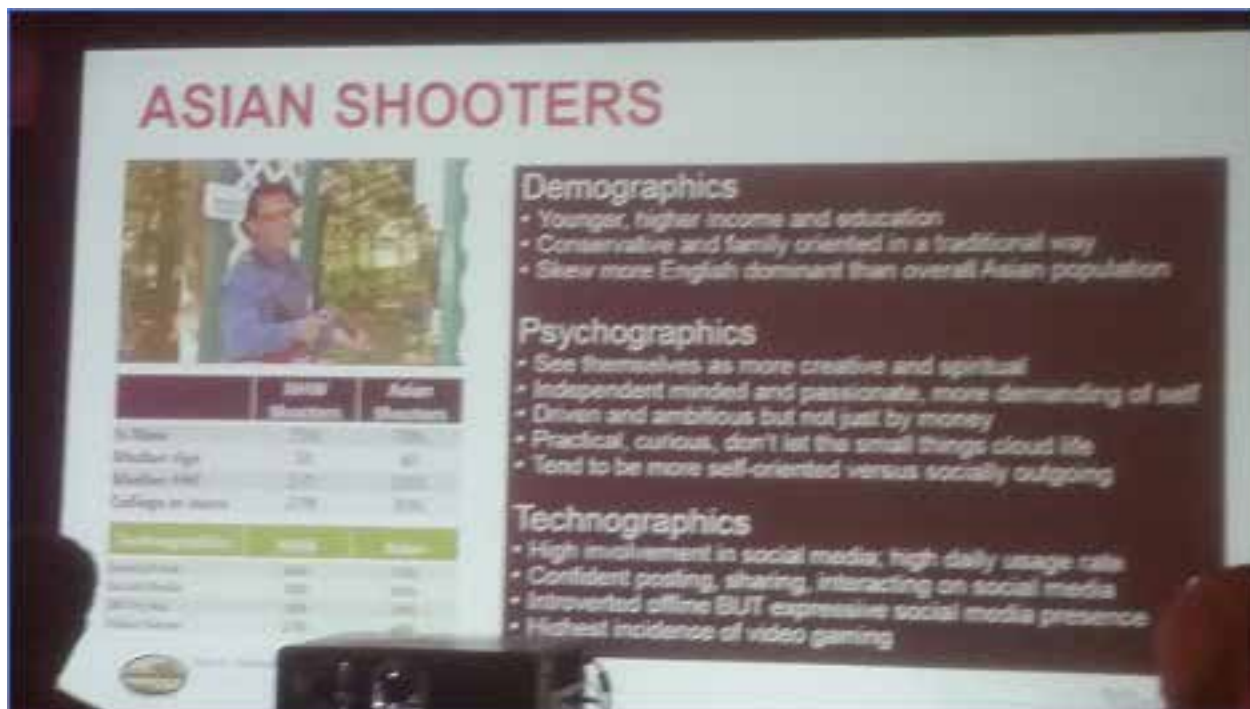
7 See, for example, *AAPI Data*, <https://aapidata.com/?s=gun>.

8 *Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the U.S.*, Abby Budiman, Neil G. Ruiz, Pew Research Center, April 9, 2021 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/09/asian-americans-are-the-fastest-growing-racial-or-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s/>).

9 In a grim irony, NSSF’s headquarters is located in Newtown, Connecticut, site of the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre.

10 “2015 NSSF Industry Summit Hits High Notes,” National Shooting Sports Foundation, press release, June 4, 2015 (<https://www.nssf.org/2015-nssf-industry-summit-hits-high-notes/>).

Conservative and family oriented in a traditional way; Skew more English dominant than overall Asian population.” Psychographics were listed as: “See themselves as more creative and spiritual; Independent minded and passionate, more demanding of self; Driven and ambitious but not just by money; Practical, curious, don’t let the small things cloud life; Tend to be more self-oriented versus socially outgoing.” Technographics were listed as: “High involvement in social media, high daily usage rate; Confident posting, sharing, interacting on social media; Introverted offline BUT expressive social media presence; Highest incidence of video gaming.”



Among the speakers at the meeting was Chris Cheng, a one-time Google employee whose notoriety stemmed from his having won the *History Channel's* “Top Shot” shooting competition without any formal training or having garnered a prior shooting award. Cheng has advocated on behalf of NSSF, with one NSSF article’s author describing him as “one of the more unlikely people I can think of to become a top shooter. He not only breaks many shooting sports molds, but rumor has it he even has the mold-makers on the run. Cheng is a techno-nerd, an Asian-American and openly gay — three things the stereotype monitors tell us you’re not supposed to find in the shooting sports.”<sup>11</sup> Cheng has also served on NSSF’s Inclusion and Outreach Working Group.<sup>12</sup>

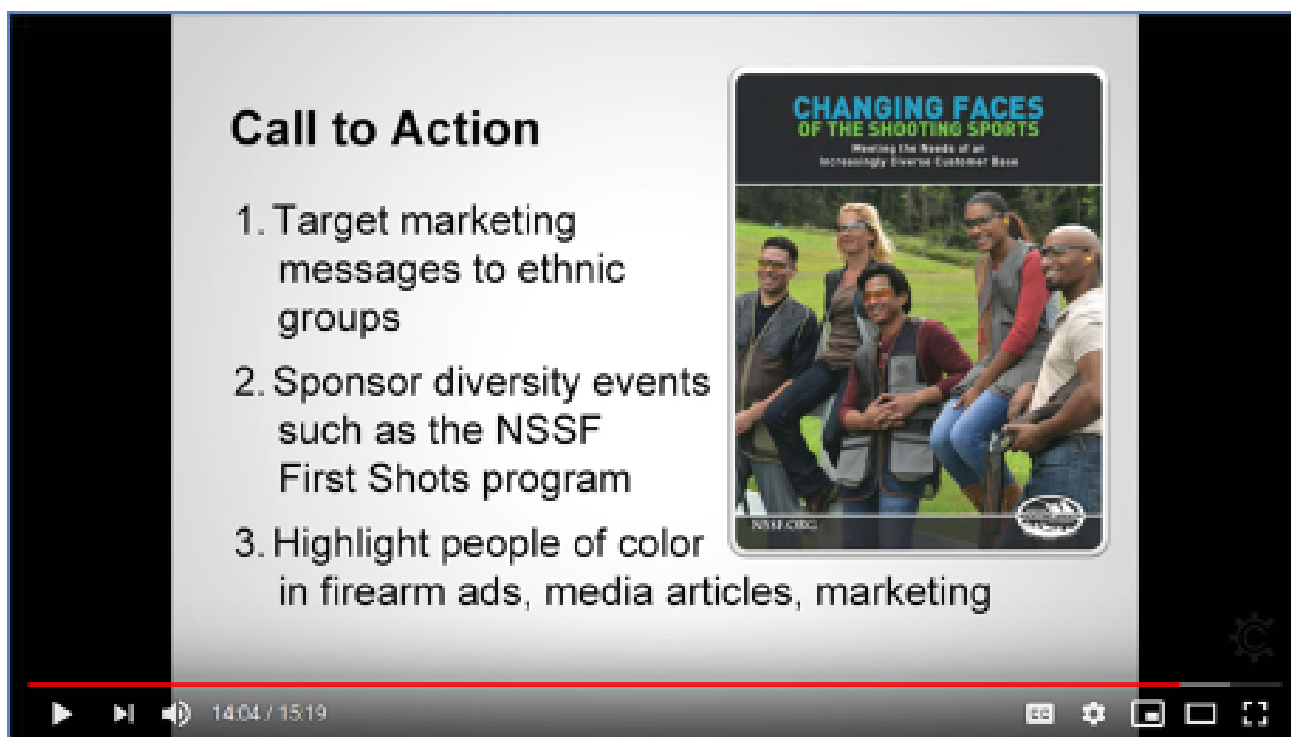
11 “Chris Cheng — An Unlikely Top Shot,” National Shooting Sports Foundation, November 20, 2018 (<https://www.letsgoshoooting.org/2018/11/20/chris-cheng-an-unlikely-top-shot/>).

12 “What Does It All Mean?,” *SHOT Business*, October/November 2018.

Cheng’s presentation was titled “Diversity: The Next Big Opportunity,” with the hoped-for result being “new shooters, and new gun owners, and new Second Amendment advocates...” As Cheng addressed his audience, he asked:

Now, what is diversity and why is it important...For the context of today’s talk, we’re talking about ethnicities like we’ve been talking about for most of the day. Hispanics, Asians, whites, Blacks. Now, this is important because in the context of America, we are a country of immigrants... [W]e then have to understand that a lot of immigrant families do not have traditions of firearms ownership, of hunting, of sports shooting. And therein lies the opportunity for us to promote the Second Amendment, to promote hunting and sports shooting to this new demographic and make them a multigenerational customer and a lifelong Second Amendment advocate.

Cheng concluded with a “call to action” including: “more targeted messaging towards ethnic groups..., sponsoring or attending diversity events such as the NSSF First Shots Program..., [a]nd then finally highlight people of color in firearm ads, media articles and other marketing collateral.” Cheng promised, “Diversity is the next area of success for our industry.”<sup>13</sup>



A slide from Chris Cheng’s presentation at the 2015 NSSF Industry Summit

13 “Diversity: The Next Big Opportunity,” presentation by Chris Cheng at the 2015 NSSF Industry Summit, June 23, 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FZbiyEJJGo>).

Following the Summit, NSSF Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer Chris Dolnack discussed the trade association’s marketing efforts:

[O]ver the years many of us have discussed how to expand shooting participation numbers beyond the traditional predominance of Caucasian males. We’ve made tremendous strides in welcoming women into the sport in the past couple decades, but we haven’t been as successful when it comes to ethnic diversity.<sup>14</sup> And the thing is, there are legions of African-American, Hispanic and Asian recreational and competitive shooters out there, as well as hunters, but they aren’t part of the greater family of gun enthusiasts most are familiar with. We need to change that, need to create the avenues that will welcome these shooters into the fold, and that’s what this year’s Summit focused on.<sup>15</sup>

Or as NSSF president and CEO Steve Sanetti summarized, “What a difference this is from just a few years ago when the industry was lamenting that it was becoming stale, male and pale.”<sup>16</sup>

## Exploiting COVID Violence Against Asian Americans

Since the “ground-swell shift” felt at its 2015 Atlanta meeting, NSSF, its gun industry members, and the National Rifle Association have focused primarily on Blacks and Latinos in their marketing efforts.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to advertising and articles featuring non-white models and their own promotional activities, a parallel track has been to promote pro-gun organizations and “personalities” from the ethnic or racial communities being targeted, many of whom have benefited financially from their relationships with gunmakers or the NRA.

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14 Despite NSSF’s claims of success in marketing guns to women, according to the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, in 2018, 10.5 percent of females reported personally owning a firearm. In its 2015 report *Trends in Gun Ownership in the United States, 1972-2014*, NORC noted, “Personal ownership of firearms has not appreciably change[d] for women from 1980 through 2014. Between 9% and 14% of women personally owned a firearm during those years and there is no meaningful trend in the level of personal ownership.” The 2015 NORC study also noted that men “are much more likely to personally own a firearm than women are, but the gender gap has narrowed due to a decline in personal firearm ownership among men,” not an increase among women. In 1980, 50.3 percent of men owned a firearm while 10.1 percent of women owned a gun resulting in a gender gap of 40.2 percentage points. By 2018, male gun ownership had dropped more than 14 percentage points from 1980 to 35.8 percent, while female gun ownership in 2018 remained relatively stagnant at 10.5 percent, resulting in a gender gap of 25.3 points. For more information, see *Trends in Gun Ownership in the United States, 1972-2014*, Tom W. Smith and Jaesok Son, NORC at the University of Chicago, March 2015 ([http://www.norc.org/PDFs/GSS%20Reports/GSS\\_Trends%20in%20Gun%20Ownership\\_US\\_1972-2014.pdf](http://www.norc.org/PDFs/GSS%20Reports/GSS_Trends%20in%20Gun%20Ownership_US_1972-2014.pdf)) and *The Long-Term Decline of Gun Ownership in America: 1973 to 2018*, Violence Policy Center, June 2020 (<http://vpc.org/studies/ownership.pdf>).

15 “NSSF Industry Summit Earns Rave Reviews,” *NSSF Blog*, June 12, 2015 (<https://www.nssf.org/nssf-industry-summit-earns-rave-reviews/>).

16 “Shooting Industry Must Talk the Talk with New Generation,” *Shooting Sports Retailer*, October 2015.

17 For more information, see the January 2021 Violence Policy Center study *How the Firearms Industry and NRA Market Guns to Communities of Color* (<https://vpc.org/how-the-firearms-industry-and-nra-market-guns-to-communities-of-color/>).



For example, until its collapse in 2019, Black pro-gun YouTube personality Colion Noir was a staple of the NRA's online "news" channel NRATV, with his own show supported by gun industry sponsors. Noir currently promotes pistols in ads for gunmaker Sturm, Ruger. Joining Noir as an NRATV commenter was Gabby Franco, a Latina and the first female shooter to represent Venezuela in the Olympics as well as a contestant, like Cheng, on the *History Channel* show "Top Shot." Franco's gun industry links have included a "marketing alliance and sponsorship" agreement with Remington Outdoors Company and serving as a "brand ambassador" for Walther Arms. Like Cheng, Franco has been a member of NSSF's Inclusion and Outreach Working Group. Maj Toure, founder of Black Guns Matter, in addition to promoting Bersa handguns and partnering with another manufacturer to sell a branded assault rifle to financially benefit his organization, was promoted by the NRA and offered his endorsement of the group (he later publicly turned against them and now is associated most frequently with NSSF). In 2016 an NRA blog highlighted the one-year anniversary of the National African American Gun Association (NAAGA) with an interview with its founder.

Acting as 'ambassadors' to the non-gun owning members of their respective communities, a common thread that runs through the rhetoric of many of these pro-gun spokespeople is to cite legitimate incidents of past oppression or extreme violence against their race or ethnicity and then use this shameful history as a rationale for personal self-defense gun ownership in the present day.

As noted, the bulk of marketing efforts targeting minority communities have focused on Black and Latino Americans. But now, faced with the opportunity to exploit current fears among the AAPI community, the firearms industry has moved swiftly to make up for lost time.

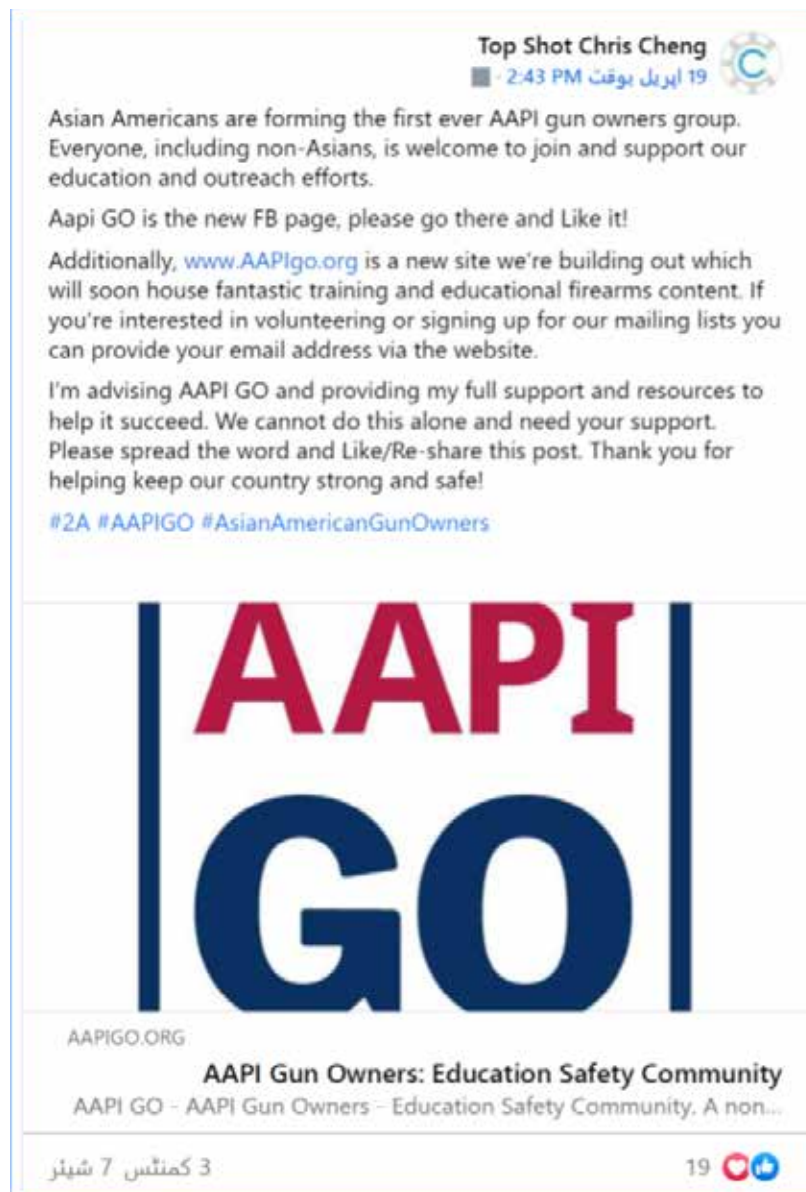
As a March 2021 *Forbes* article titled "More Asian-Americans Are Buying Guns For Protection From Hate Crimes" matter-of-factly explained, "Gun makers like Smith & Wesson and Sturm, Ruger want to expand their customer demographics to include more minorities. Asians have been historically underrepresented among gun owners. The NSSF said that in early 2020 only 3.1 percent of gun buyers were Asian males and 0.7 percent were Asian females, even though they represent 6 percent of the U.S. population. This is compared to white males, who accounted for 55.8 percent of gun buyers, and 16.6 percent were white females." The article quoted NSSF Director of Public Affairs Mark Oliva, who stated, "Every law-abiding American has the right, at their birth, to keep and bear arms...The concerns of personal safety of Asian-Americans are no less legitimate than that of any other demographic group in America."<sup>18</sup>

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18 "More Asian-Americans Are Buying Guns For Protection From Hate Crimes," *Forbes*, March 18, 2021 (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/aaronsmith/2021/03/18/asian-americans-buy-guns-for-protection-from-hate-crimes/?sh=40052a623edd>).

The well-established pro-gun process of promoting a high-profile ‘ambassador’ and relevant organization to aid industry marketing efforts is now being repeated with Chris Cheng and the organization AAPIGO (Asian American and Pacific Islander Gun Owners). Following his own recommendations in his “calls to action” back in 2015 to use “more targeted messaging towards ethnic groups” and “highlight people of color in firearm ads, media articles, marketing,” Cheng has quickly become the pro-gun face of Asian American recruitment efforts.

On his Facebook page in Spring 2021 Cheng announced AAPIGO, “the first ever AAPI gun owners group. Everyone, including non-Asians, is welcome to join and support our education and outreach efforts...I’m advising AAPIGO and providing my full support and resources to help it succeed.”



Launched in April 2021, AAPIGO was founded by Patrick Lopez and Scott Kane after meeting online on Reddit.<sup>19</sup> According to an article on the blog site *The Reload*, “The two men had been looking for ways to encourage the influx of new Asian-American gun owners to get training and learn about their Second Amendment rights.”<sup>20</sup> The article noted that Lopez is Asian American and that Kane’s wife and daughter are of Chinese descent<sup>21</sup> In the article, Cheng bluntly describes the role he hoped the group would play: “Chris Cheng...told *The Reload* an Asian group would fill a hole in current efforts by the gun-rights movement and the firearms industry to reach new demographics. He said many Asians come from countries where guns are negatively stigmatized as being tools of oppressive military and police regimes. That, combined with language and cultural barriers, can make it especially hard to get Asian Americans interested in gun ownership, according to Cheng. But not impossible. ‘If we look at the success of outreach programs for women, we have a template and a blueprint for how this can be successful,’ he said. ‘Now, the challenge is taking that and applying it to Asian Americans.’”<sup>22</sup>



Chris Cheng interviewed by former NRATV personality Colion Noir on the topic of  
“Does The Asian Community Care About The Second Amendment”

19 See <https://aapigo.org/>.

20 “Asian Americans Create Gun Group as Ownership, Hate Crimes Rise,” *The Reload*, April 19, 2021 (<https://thereload.com/asian-americans-create-gun-group-as-ownership-hate-crimes-rise/>).

21 “Asian Americans Create Gun Group as Ownership, Hate Crimes Rise,” *The Reload*, April 19, 2021 (<https://thereload.com/asian-americans-create-gun-group-as-ownership-hate-crimes-rise/>).

22 As noted earlier, contrary to the assertions of Cheng and the firearms industry, according to the National Opinion Research Center’s General Social Survey (GSS), personal ownership of firearms by women has not changed appreciably since 1980, with nine to 14 percent of women personally owning a firearm. For more information, see *The Long-Term Decline of Gun Ownership in America: 1973 to 2018*, Violence Policy Center, June 2020 (<http://vpc.org/studies/ownership.pdf>).

Yet by May 2021, AAPIGO was engaged in an internecine battle after co-founder Scott Kane told CNN that he supported expanded background checks for gun sales and that he had voted for Joe Biden for president.<sup>23</sup> Soon after these and other “morally reprehensible” actions,<sup>24</sup> visitors to the AAPIGO website were greeted with the banner headline “AAPIGO.org is moving to APAGOA.ORG,” where the “leadership team,” minus Kane, appeared to be reassembling under the new moniker of the Asian Pacific American Gun Owners Association (APAGOA).<sup>25</sup> Cheng remained an advisor to the renamed group.<sup>26</sup>

In an online interview with former NRATV commenter Colion Noir, Cheng, explained the “very logical conclusion” as to why more Asian Americans should be buying guns:

Specifically with Asians, COVID has been a flash point with this increase in violence against Asian Americans. Now you couple that with defund the police. If you hear defund the police, you see all these riots and civil unrest that has taken over our country over the past year. The conclusion for many Asians has been, oh crap. If the police can't be there for me....If 911 literally just doesn't work when I need help, then who out there is going to defend me? Obviously you and I know that the answer is every person needs to be their first line of defense. There's where buying a gun is a very logical conclusion for Asian-Americans.

Later, Cheng acknowledged his own role in “putting guns in the hands of good people,” stating: “I want to encourage Asian Americans to think about the Second Amendment, to think about these personal civil liberties that we have in our country. Like it or not, it often takes somebody who either looks like you, sounds like you, and in this case, I'm Asian and whether you like it or not, the messenger matters. I think Asians hearing this message, that gun ownership can be good...It's about putting guns in the hands of good people.”<sup>27</sup>

## A Marketing Means to a Political End

As noted in the beginning of this report, the hoped-for goals of the firearms industry and gun lobby are not only financial, but also political. In a July 2020 article published on its website, NSSF chief Larry Keane tied the organization's marketing activities to its battle against gun violence prevention

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23 “The Fight Against Gun Control Has Some Surprising New Allies,” *CNN*, May 18, 2021 (<https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/18/business/gun-control-debate-women-minorities/index.html>).

24 See “AAPIGO.ORG is Not Associated with Mr. Scott Kane,” May 31, 2021 (<https://aapigo.org/2021/05/30/aapigo-org-is-not-associated-with-mr-scott-kane/>).

25 See <https://aapigo.org/>.

26 See <https://apagoa.org/about-us/>.

27 “Does The Asian Community Care About The Second Amendment w Chris Cheng,” April 15, 2021 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtNji7fzpc4>).

efforts, promising that “increasingly more voices of a diverse American gun owner are responding. The impacts will be significant on the future of Second Amendment rights in America.”<sup>28</sup>



Illustration from the NRA article “New Gun Owners and the Election”

These assertions were echoed by the NRA in October 2020 in an article titled “New Gun Owners and the Election” that appeared in the organization’s *America’s 1st Freedom* magazine. Promising that “no, not of all them look the same” and that it was no longer the case that “gun ownership is merely the preserve of white men,” the article argued that “many of those new gun owners have a practical stake in the preservation of the Second Amendment, and in the prevention of draconian gun-control laws that attempt to criminalize their peaceful behavior and make scapegoats of the peaceful. Perhaps in the coming election, but certainly soon after, these alterations will yield a change in our political debate.”<sup>29</sup>

28 “Diversity in Gun Ownership Nothing New to Firearm Industry,” National Shooting Sports Foundation, July 17, 2020 (<https://www.nssf.org/diversity-in-gun-ownership-nothing-new-to-firearm-industry/>).

29 “New Gun Owners and the Election,” *America’s 1st Freedom*, October 2020 (<https://www.americas1stfreedom.org/articles/2020/9/25/new-gun-owners-and-the-election/>).

## The Real-World Lethal Impact of Guns on the AAPI Community

Not surprisingly, the firearms industry and its financial partners in the National Rifle Association never acknowledge the harm guns inflict on our nation, and on communities of color in particular. In 2019 alone, nearly 40,000 lives were lost in gun homicides, suicides, fatal unintentional shootings, and other firearm deaths.

There are two major sources of national lethal victimization information — public health and criminal justice records:

- The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services maintains national public health data as recorded by death certificates and compiled by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). The CDC collects mortality data that includes homicides, suicides, and unintentional deaths. While the CDC data is the most comprehensive available to measure total fatal victimization in each category as well as age and race, it lacks the additional information categories contained in the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Report for homicides.
- The U.S. Department of Justice is the repository of national criminal justice records. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) compiles data on reported crime, including homicide, through its Uniform Crime Report (UCR) and its Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR), which is a subset of the UCR. Homicide-related information that is unique to the SHR includes: the age of both the victim and offender; the circumstances surrounding the homicide; the relationship of the victim to the offender; and, more detailed information on the type of weapon used, including whether a gun used was a handgun, rifle, or shotgun.

While the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Report offers the most information available on homicide at the national level, the data is less complete than public health data from the CDC.

Recognizing the strengths and limitations of each of these two separate data sets, this study will utilize 2019 CDC data (the most recent available at time of writing) for information on Asian/Pacific Islander homicide, suicide, and overall gun death; leading causes of death; and, the use of firearms in homicide and suicide. It will utilize 2019 FBI data (the most recent available at time of writing) for information on Asian/Pacific Islander homicide victimization not contained in the CDC data.

**Public Health Data.** Using this data for Asian/Pacific Islanders we will: rank the leading causes of death, including homicide and suicide; detail the number of homicides and suicides, sex, and the

victimization rates; and, present historical data on Asian/Pacific Islander homicide, suicide, and overall gun death.

**Criminal Justice Data.** Using this information, we will detail for Asian/Pacific Islanders: the types of firearms used in homicide; the relationship of homicide victims to their offenders; and, the circumstances of the homicides.

## Public Health Data

In 2019, the most recent year for which complete data is available, 679 Asian/Pacific Islanders were killed by firearms in the United States. Between 1999 and 2019, more than 10,000 Asian/Pacific Islanders were killed by guns.

### Asian/Pacific Islander Firearm Deaths in the United States, 1999 to 2019

Year	Firearm Homicide	Firearm Suicide	Firearm Unintentional	Other Firearm Deaths*	Total Firearm Deaths
1999	229	203	5	9	446
2000	210	189	14	11	424
2001	188	179	6	16	389
2002	242	170	7	11	430
2003	241	189	3	12	445
2004	200	182	3	13	398
2005	266	149	23	9	447
2006	280	175	11	9	475
2007	201	221	7	11	440
2008	208	181	3	10	402
2009	215	208	4	11	438
2010	167	226	5	13	411
2011	195	217	3	14	429
2012	209	253	5	11	478
2013	175	272	4	18	469
2014	171	245	6	13	435
2015	203	304	11	16	534
2016	243	346	8	15	612
2017	205	380	7	18	610
2018	235	374	7	25	641
2019	245	400	10	24	679
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,528</b>	<b>5,063</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>10,032</b>

\* “Other” includes legal intervention and undetermined intent.

## Homicide

In 2019, there were 397 Asian/Pacific Islander victims of homicide by all means in the United States. The Asian/Pacific Islander homicide victimization rate for that year was 1.82 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall homicide victimization rate for that year was 5.83 per 100,000, the Black homicide victimization rate was 21.86 per 100,000, and the white homicide victimization rate was 3.22 per 100,000.

While nationally homicide ranked 16th among all leading causes of death, for Asian/Pacific Islanders it ranked 18th, for Blacks it ranked seventh, and for whites it ranked 19th.

### Ranking of Homicide as the Leading Cause of Death, 2019

Race for Both Sexes, All Ages	Ranking of Homicide, Any Means, Leading Cause of Death
General Population	16
Asian/Pacific Islander	18
American Indian/Alaska Native	12
Black	7
White	19

Looking at youth and young adults, however, in 2019, homicide ranked as the fourth leading cause of death for Asian/Pacific Islanders ages 15 to 24. Homicide ranked as the leading cause of death for Blacks in this age group, and third for American Indian/Alaska Natives and whites.

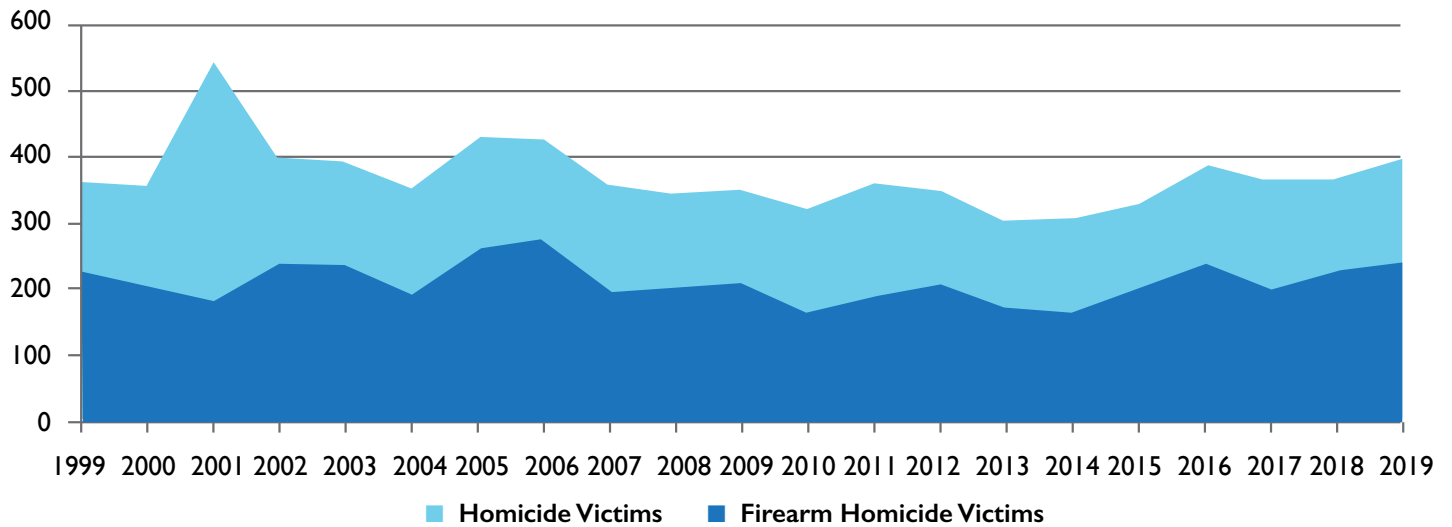
### Ranking of Homicide as the Leading Cause of Death, Ages 15 to 24, 2019

Race for Both Sexes, Ages 15 to 24	Ranking of Homicide, Any Means, Leading Cause of Death
General Population	3
Asian/Pacific Islander	4
American Indian/Alaska Native	3
Black	1
White	3

In 2019, 62 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander homicide victims were killed with firearms. (Because the CDC data does not report what type of firearm — handgun, rifle, or shotgun — was used in the homicide, this question is addressed later in this section using 2019 data from the FBI’s Supplementary Homicide Report.) During the period 1999 to 2019, nearly three out of five Asian/Pacific Islander homicide victims were killed with firearms (58 percent).



## Asian/Pacific Islander Homicide Victims and Asian/Pacific Islander Firearm Homicide Victims, 1999 to 2019



## Number of Homicide Victims, Homicide Rate, and Percentage Killed With a Firearm, Asian/Pacific Islander Victims, 1999 to 2019

Year	Homicide Victims	Homicide Rate per 100,000	Percentage Killed With a Firearm
1999	360	3.17	64%
2000	356	3.00	59%
2001	543	4.37	35%
2002	399	3.08	61%
2003	394	2.93	61%
2004	351	2.51	57%
2005	428	2.95	62%
2006	427	2.84	66%
2007	357	2.29	56%
2008	343	2.13	61%
2009	348	2.10	62%
2010	321	1.89	52%
2011	358	2.03	54%
2012	348	1.92	60%
2013	298	1.60	59%
2014	308	1.60	56%
2015	327	1.65	62%
2016	385	1.88	63%
2017	364	1.74	56%
2018	365	1.71	64%
2019	397	1.82	62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,777</b>	<b>2.23</b>	<b>58%</b>

Asian/Pacific Islander victims of firearm homicide are overwhelmingly male. In 2019, 74 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander victims of firearm homicide were male. In comparison, 76 percent of white firearm homicide victims were male. Eighty-nine percent of Black firearm homicide victims were male, as were 81 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native victims.

### Firearm Homicide Victims by Race and Sex, 2019

Race	Male Victims	Percent	Female Victims	Percent	Total Victims
Asian/Pacific Islander	182	74%	63	26%	245
American Indian/Alaska Native	157	81%	38	19%	195
Black	7,685	89%	922	11%	8,607
White	4,103	76%	1,264	24%	5,367
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,127</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>2,287</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>14,414</b>

## Suicide

Nationally suicide ranked 10th among all leading causes of death in 2019 and also ranked 10th for Asian/Pacific Islanders. For American Indian/Alaska Natives it ranked eighth, for whites it ranked ninth, and for Blacks it ranked 15th.

### Ranking of Suicide as the Leading Cause of Death, 2019

Race for Both Sexes, All Ages	Ranking of Suicide, Any Means, Leading Cause of Death
General Population	10
Asian/Pacific Islander	10
American Indian/Alaska Native	8
Black	15
White	9

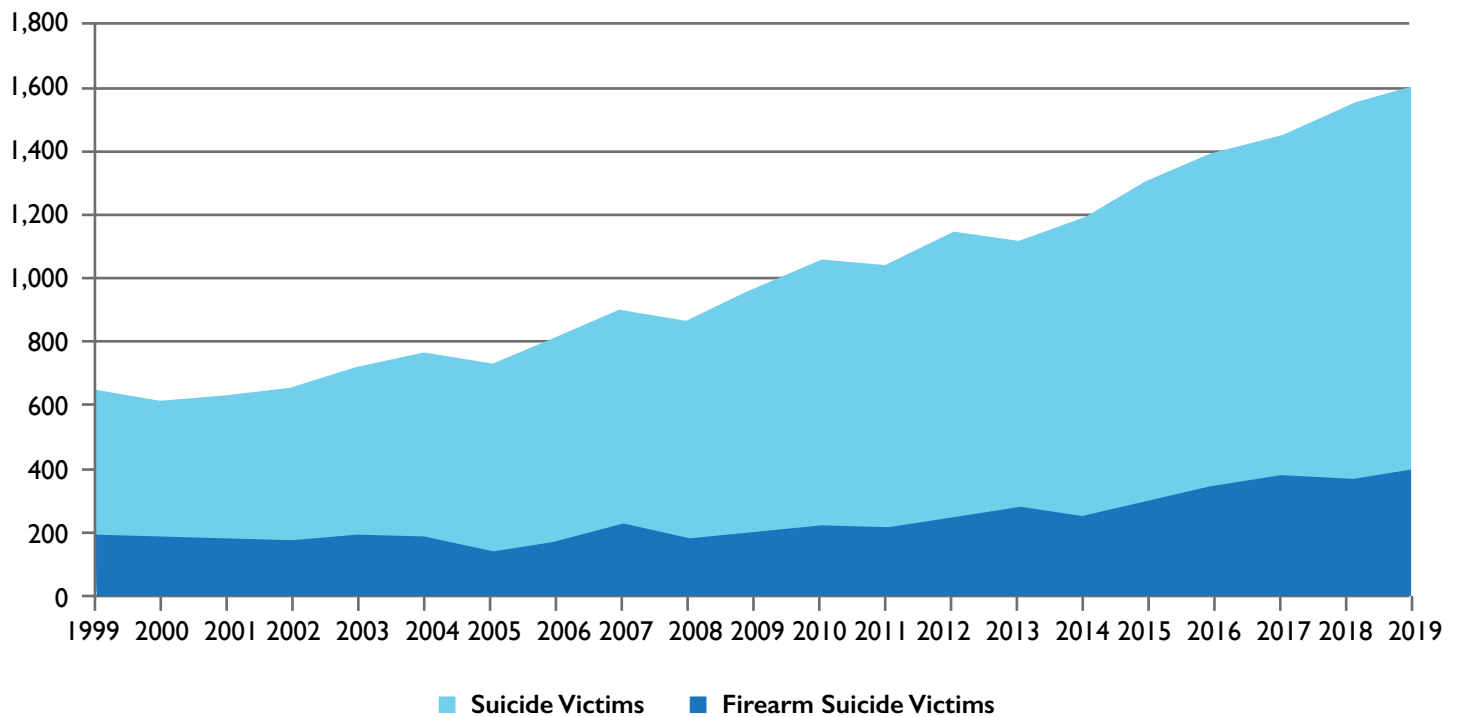
Looking at youth and young adults, however, in 2019 suicide ranked as the leading cause of death for Asian/Pacific Islanders ages 15 to 24. Suicide ranked as the second leading cause of death for American Indian/Alaska Natives and whites, and third for Blacks in this age group.

### Ranking of Suicide as the Leading Cause of Death, Ages 15 to 24, 2019

Race for Both Sexes, Ages 15 to 24	Ranking of Suicide, Any Means, Leading Cause of Death
General Population	2
Asian/Pacific Islander	1
American Indian/Alaska Native	2
Black	3
White	2

During the period 1999 to 2019, 24 percent of all Asian/Pacific Islanders who took their own lives did so with a firearm.

### Asian/Pacific Islander Suicide Victims and Asian/Pacific Islander Firearm Suicide Victims, 1999 to 2019



## Number of Suicide Victims, Suicide Rate, and Percentage Killed With a Firearm, Asian/Pacific Islander Victims, 1999 to 2019

Year	Suicide Victims	Suicide Rate per 100,000	Percentage Killed With a Firearm
1999	658	5.80	31%
2000	616	5.19	31%
2001	634	5.10	28%
2002	661	5.10	26%
2003	722	5.36	26%
2004	765	5.48	24%
2005	726	5.01	21%
2006	813	5.41	22%
2007	900	5.78	25%
2008	876	5.44	21%
2009	971	5.85	21%
2010	1,061	6.24	21%
2011	1,043	5.92	21%
2012	1,152	6.35	22%
2013	1,121	6.00	24%
2014	1,188	6.17	21%
2015	1,316	6.63	23%
2016	1,402	6.86	25%
2017	1,452	6.92	26%
2018	1,546	7.23	24%
2019	1,609	7.38	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,232</b>	<b>6.08</b>	<b>24%</b>

For all races, victims of firearm suicide are overwhelmingly male. In 2019, 87 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander victims of firearm suicide were male. Eighty-nine percent of Black firearm suicide victims were male, as were 85 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native victims, and 86 percent of white victims.

### Firearm Suicide Victims by Race and Sex, 2019

Race	Male Victims	Percent	Female Victims	Percent	Total Victims
Asian/Pacific Islander	347	87%	53	13%	400
American Indian/Alaska Native	172	85%	31	15%	203
Black	1,445	89%	184	11%	1,629
White	18,761	86%	2,948	14%	21,709
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,725</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>3,216</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>23,941</b>

## Criminal Justice Data

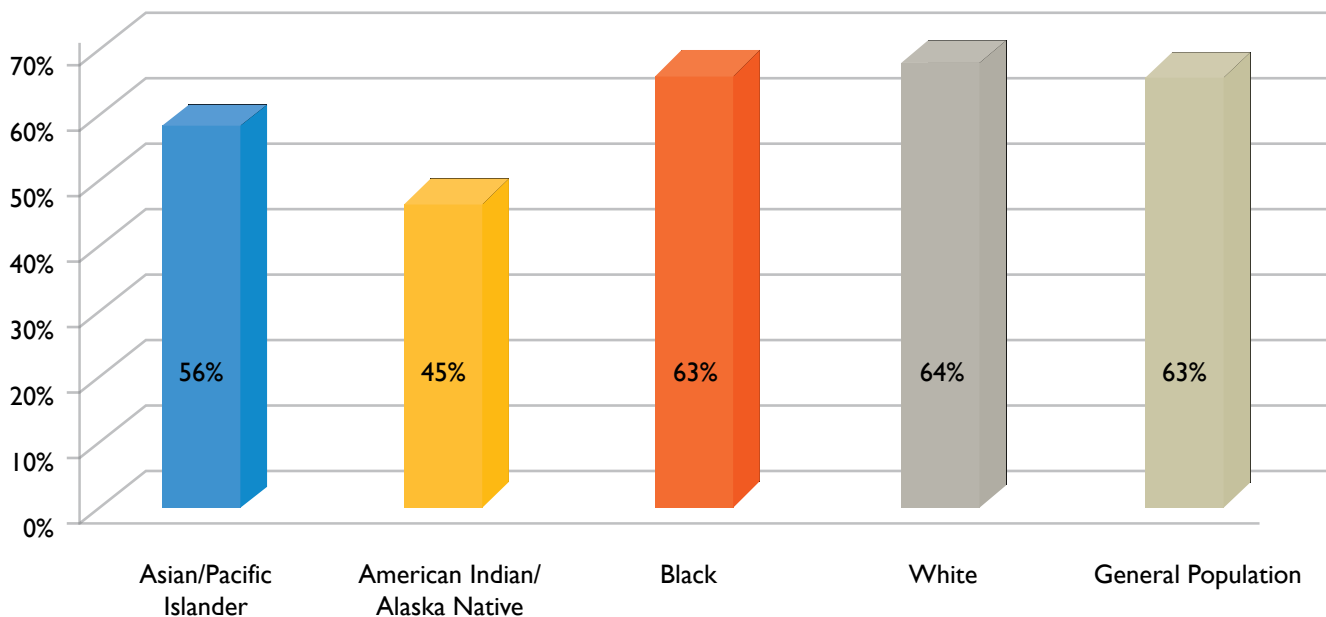
As noted earlier, while data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers the most comprehensive tally of Asian/Pacific Islander lethal victimization, it offers very limited data on the type of firearms used in homicides and no information on the factors surrounding the homicide (e.g., victim to offender relationship, circumstances). The FBI's annual Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) does report such information, albeit on a smaller number of incidents.

In 2019, the Supplementary Homicide Report contained data for 250 Asian/Pacific Islander homicide victims. This section details data unique to the SHR data set for these deaths.

### Types of Firearms Used in Homicides

In 2019, where the type of weapon used in the homicide could be determined, for Asian/Pacific Islander victims, 56 percent of all gun homicides involved a handgun. In comparison, handguns were used in 63 percent of Black homicides involving a gun and 64 percent of white homicides involving a gun. Overall, handguns were the most prevalent firearm used in homicides in 2019 (63 percent).

### Percentage of Firearm Homicides Involving Handguns, By Race, 2019



## Relationship of Homicide Victims to Offenders

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, Asian/Pacific Islander victims were more likely to be killed by a stranger (30 percent). In comparison, 23 percent of Black victims were killed by a stranger and 24 percent of white victims were killed by a stranger. Overall, 24 percent of homicide victims were killed by a stranger.

Of victims who knew their offenders, 37 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander victims were intimate acquaintances of the offender. In comparison, 25 percent of white victims and 17 percent of Black victims were intimate acquaintances of the offender. For the overall population, 22 percent of homicide victims were intimate acquaintances of the offender.

## Circumstances of Homicides

For all races, for homicides in which the circumstances could be determined, 71 percent were not related to the commission of another felony. For Asian/Pacific Islanders, 68 percent of the homicides were not related to the commission of another felony. Seventy-one percent of white homicides and 70 percent of Black homicides were not related to the commission of another felony.

For all races, of the homicides not related to the commission of another felony, 52 percent involved arguments between the victim and the offender. Fifty-four percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders killed in homicides not related to the commission of another felony were killed during arguments (compared to 56 percent of Black victims and 49 percent of white victims).

## Age of Homicide Victims

For all victims, 29 percent of homicide victims were age 24 or younger. For Asian/Pacific Islander victims, 22 percent of homicide victims were age 24 and younger. In comparison, 34 percent of Black homicide victims were age 24 and younger and 24 percent of white victims were age 24 and younger.

### Victims Age 24 and Younger as a Percentage of All Homicides by Race

Race	Percentage of All Homicides, Victims Age 24 and Younger
Asian/Pacific Islander	22%
Black	34%
White	24%
All Races	29%

## Guns are Rarely Used by Asian Americans in Justifiable Homicides

Despite the firearms industry and gun lobby’s rhetoric and advertising, firearms are rarely used in justifiable homicides by private citizens. In 2019, across the U.S., Asian/Pacific Islanders committed two firearm justifiable homicides. For the five-year period 2015 to 2019, Asian/Pacific Islanders committed 37 firearm justifiable homicides. During this same five-year period, 3,076 Asian/Pacific Islanders lost their lives in firearm homicides, suicides, fatal unintentional shootings, and other firearm deaths: a ratio of 83 to one.

### Race of Shooter and Person Killed in Justifiable Homicides by Firearm, 2015 to 2019

Race of Shooter	Race of Person Killed	Number of Justifiable Homicides											
		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		TOTAL	
White	White	81	63.3%	77	62.6%	87	67.4%	100	70.4%	108	70.1%	453	67.0%
	Black	46	35.9%	39	31.7%	39	30.2%	37	26.1%	44	28.6%	205	30.3%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	3	2.4%	2	1.6%	4	2.8%	1	0.6%	10	1.5%
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	0.8%	3	2.4%	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	0.7%
	Unknown	0	0.0%	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	1	0.7%	1	0.6%	3	0.4%
Black	White	10	7.9%	14	10.8%	9	6.2%	14	9.7%	16	10.7%	63	9.0%
	Black	116	92.1%	115	88.5%	137	93.8%	131	90.3%	133	88.7%	632	90.7%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.7%	2	0.3%
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Unknown	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	White	0	0.0%	5	35.7%	6	60.0%	2	33.3%	0	0.0%	13	35.1%
	Black	5	100.0%	9	64.3%	4	40.0%	3	50.0%	1	50.0%	22	59.5%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	16.7%	1	50.0%	2	5.4%
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Unknown	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	White	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	33.3%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	3	42.9%
	Black	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	1	33.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	28.6%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	33.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	28.6%
	Unknown	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Totals</b>		<b>261</b>		<b>268</b>		<b>288</b>		<b>294</b>		<b>306</b>		<b>1,417</b>	

While it is clear that guns are rarely used to justifiably kill criminals, an obvious question remains: How often are guns used in self-defense whether or not a criminal is killed? The answer comes from the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).<sup>30</sup>

According to the NCVS, which has been ongoing since 1973, looking at the total number of self-protective behaviors undertaken by victims (of all races and ethnicities, Asian-specific data is not available) of both attempted and completed *violent* crime for the *three-year period 2014 through 2016*, in only 1.1 percent of these instances had the intended victim in resistance to a criminal “threatened or attacked with a firearm.”<sup>31</sup> For the *three-year period 2014 through 2016*, the NCVS estimates that there were 16,115,500 victims of attempted or completed violent crime. During this same *three-year period*, only 177,300 of the self-protective behaviors involved a firearm. Of this number, it is not known what type of firearm was used or whether it was fired or not. The number may also include off-duty law enforcement officers who use their firearms in self-defense.

According to the NCVS, looking at the total number of self-protective behaviors undertaken by victims of attempted or completed *property* crime for the *three-year period 2014 through 2016*, in only 0.3 percent of these instances had the intended victim in resistance to a criminal threatened or attacked with a firearm.<sup>32</sup> For the *three-year period 2014 through 2016*, the NCVS estimates that there were 45,816,900 victims of attempted or completed property crime. During this same *three-year period*, only 123,800 of the self-protective behaviors involved a firearm. Of this number, it is not known what type of firearm was used, whether it was fired or not, or whether the use of a gun would even be a legal response to the property crime. And as before, the number may also include off-duty law enforcement officers.

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30 According to the website of the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the “National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is the nation’s primary source of information on criminal victimization. Each year, data are obtained from a nationally representative sample of about 240,000 interviews on criminal victimization, involving 160,000 unique persons in about 95,000 households. Persons are interviewed on the frequency, characteristics, and consequences of criminal victimization in the United States. The NCVS collects information on nonfatal personal crimes (i.e., rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated and simple assault, and personal larceny) and household property crimes (i.e., burglary/trespassing, motor-vehicle theft, and other theft) both reported and not reported to police. Survey respondents provide information about themselves (e.g., age, sex, race and Hispanic origin, marital status, education level, and income) and whether they experienced a victimization. For each victimization incident, the NCVS collects information about the offender (e.g., age, race and Hispanic origin, sex, and victim-offender relationship), characteristics of the crime (e.g., time and place of occurrence, use of weapons, nature of injury, and economic consequences), whether the crime was reported to police, reasons the crime was or was not reported, and victim experiences with the criminal justice system.” (See Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Data Collection: National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS),” <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=245>.)

31 For “violent crime” the NCVS measures rape or sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault.

32 For “property crime” the NCVS measures household burglary/trespassing, motor vehicle theft, as well as property theft. Since the survey information is obtained from a sample of households, it does not include property crimes affecting businesses or other commercial establishments. If such crimes are reported to law enforcement, they are included in the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting Program. The NCVS includes property crimes affecting victims and household members which were reported and not reported to the police.



## Conclusion

The gun industry resembles all other manufacturers in that it needs a constant flow of customers to survive. And, like all other industries, it must eventually attempt to adjust to demographic and cultural changes. To this end, the industry has worked to not only resell its shrinking primary market of white males (through the marketing of military-bred weaponry such as assault weapons and the promotion of pistols for concealed carry), but also focused on new “opportunities.” As noted at the beginning of this study, historically the focus has been on women and children. And now, following a trail blazed by the alcohol and tobacco industries, it has expanded to non-white potential gun buyers, where it is openly acknowledged by the gun lobby and firearms industry that the hoped-for benefits are political as well as financial.

For any American, regardless of race or ethnicity, bringing a gun into the home increases the risk of death or injury to the owner or a family member. If the marketing efforts targeting the AAPI community gain traction, the impact will be measured not only in dollars and cents in gunmakers’ coffers, but in increased death and injury among Asian Americans.



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