**The Most Surprising New Gun Owners Are U.S. Liberals**

Cameron McWhirter and Zusha Elinson, the Wall Street Journal, Sept. 20, 2024

Michael Ciemnoczolowski, a lifelong Democrat, supports stricter gun laws and contributes to Sandy Hook Promise, a gun-violence-prevention nonprofit. But this summer, the liquor store clerk in Iowa City, Iowa, for the first time in his life bought a gun. Apprehension about street crime, armed right-wing extremists, and “whatever else the world could possibly throw at us,” drove his decision. “Domestic politics have grown increasingly acrimonious,” says Ciemnoczolowski, 43.

American gun culture has long been dominated by conservative, white men. Now, in a marked change, a burgeoning number of liberals are buying firearms, according to surveys and fast-growing gun groups drawing minorities and progressives.

“It’s a group of people who five years ago would never have considered buying a gun,” says Jennifer Hubbert, an anthropology professor at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Ore., who has researched liberal gun owners.

Historically, it wasn’t unusual for Democrats to own guns, with many more of them living in rural areas. Also, hunting was much more popular. But starting in the early ’90s, gun ownership among Democrats dropped significantly. Increasingly divisive political battles over the role of firearms in American society led the Democratic Party to become an advocate for gun regulation. Republicans became the party of gun rights. Now, today’s Democrats are rediscovering guns.

**A turbulent landscape**

Researchers, gun merchants and owners attribute the shift to factors including rising concerns about personal safety and a volatile political climate: GOP presidential candidate and former President Donald Trump warning of “potential death and destruction” if he is charged with crimes, Democrats warning of the potential end of democracy, and two assassination plots against Trump.

Neo-Nazi groups have recently been more active nationwide, according to the Anti-Defamation League. Violent threats aren’t limited to progressives or minorities; conservative and pro-gun rallies have also been targeted.

Twenty-nine percent of Democrats or those leaning Democrat said they had a gun at home in 2022, up from a four-decade low of 22% in 2010, according to a long-running survey by NORC at the University of Chicago, a nonpartisan research organization. In 2022, 55% of Republicans had a gun in their home, up 3 percentage points since 2010, the survey of about 3,500 adults found.

In a nationally representative 2023 survey of about 3,000 people by the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, about 11% of respondents had purchased a gun since 2020. Among Democratic gun buyers since 2020, more than half were first-time owners, compared with less than a quarter of Republicans, according to researchers who analyzed the data.

And this might be the first presidential campaign where the Democratic candidates are the literal face of gun owners. Vice President and Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris surprised many during the Sept. 10 debate when she noted, “Tim Walz and I are both gun owners.” (Harris, a former prosecutor, owns a handgun, while Walz, the Democratic vice presidential nominee, is an avid hunter.) [...]

Four decades ago, Democratic gun owners were typically white men, including auto or steel union workers who grew up hunting. Today’s liberal gun owners are much more diverse. Gun dealers saw the largest increase in Black Americans buying guns compared with any other racial group in 2023, according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, an industry group. Women accounted for nearly half of new gun buyers from 2019 to 2021, according to the 2021 National Firearms Survey of 19,000 adults, designed by professors at Harvard and Northeastern universities. [...]