



Universität St.Gallen



Firearm homicide: Is the “Swiss case” really special?

Nora Markwalder, University of St.Gallen Switzerland

Simone Walser, University of St. Gallen Switzerland

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*“From insight
to impact”* 

Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Firearm ownership and firearm homicides in Switzerland
3. Firearm homicides in European comparison
4. Conclusions

1. Introduction

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The Atlantic

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The Swiss Have Liberal Gun Laws, Too

But they also have fewer gun-related deaths than the U.S.

By Krishnadev Calamur



Participants fire their infantry and assault rifles during the traditional "Ruetlischiessen" (Ruetli shooting) competition at the Ruetli meadow in central Switzerland on November 6, 2013. (Arnd Wiegmann / Reuters)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/swiss-guns/553448/>

1. Introduction

- Link between firearm availability and firearm homicides in the US-context (Hepburn & Hemenway, 2004) → firearm availability hypothesis
- Switzerland as a country with high gun ownership rates and low firearm homicides is often cited as «proof» that guns don't cause crime
- But is that really the case?
- Current project is based on data from the Swiss Homicide Monitor (SHM), containing detailed information about all homicide cases in Switzerland between 1990 and 2022 (1650 cases, 1845 victims, 1750 offenders)

2. Firearm ownership and firearm homicides in Switzerland

Switzerland guns: Living with firearms the Swiss way

11 February 2013

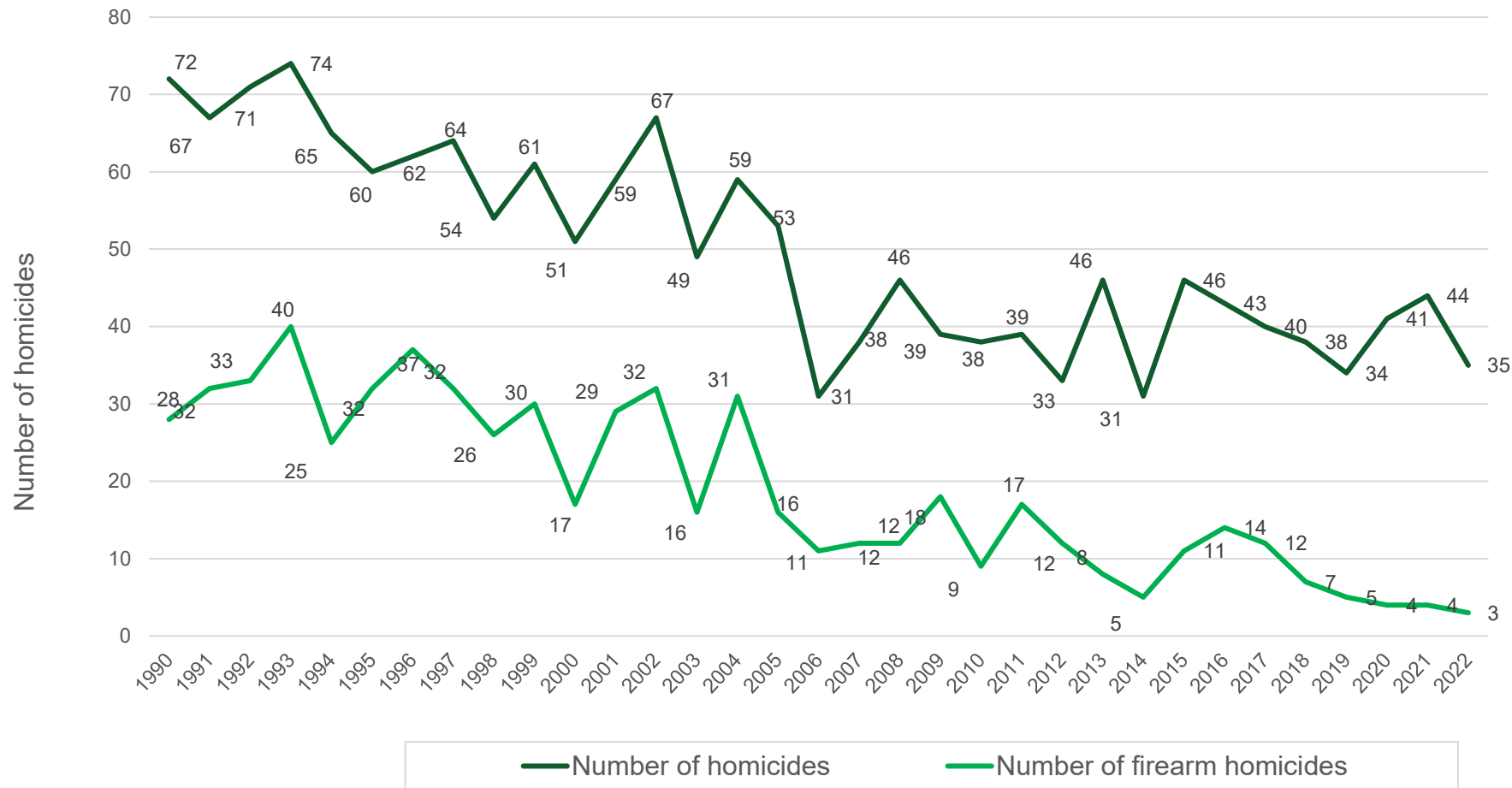


<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21379912>

2. Firearm ownership and firearm homicides in Switzerland

- High firearm ownership rates in Switzerland due to mandatory military service and hunting/shooting tradition
- Nature of gun ownership is different from the US: Mostly former military weapons or hunting rifles, fewer handguns
- Reason to own a gun: Mostly for hunting / shooting or former military service, self-defence not a common reason
- Strong decline of gun ownership in the last 20 years: From 38.2% (1998) to 17.3% (2022)
- At the same time also strong decline of (firearm) homicides

Trends in overall homicides and firearm homicides in Switzerland



Nature of firearm homicides in Switzerland (2015-2022)

	Gun	Non-gun
Offenders (N = 204)		
% female	3.2	15.7
		** 5.6
Age (mean)	54.8	38.5
		*** (T-Test)
% Swiss	80.3	42.4
		*** 5.5
Victims (N = 229)		
% Men	38.6	39.7
		n.s.
% Women	55.7	44.9
		n.s.
% Children (< 18 years)	5.7	15.4
		n.s.
Age (mean)	50.3	41.9
		** (T-Test)
% Swiss	71.4	46.1
		*** 2.9

3. Firearm homicides in European comparison



Firearm homicides in Switzerland and Europe

- International comparison of firearm homicides in Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland
- Finland, Switzerland and Sweden with the highest number of firearms in households, low availability in the Netherlands and Denmark

Table 1. Homicide rate per 100.000 population (2016), number of legally registered and overall estimated firearms per 100 population (2017) in Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland.

	Denmark	Finland	Netherlands	Sweden	Switzerland
Homicide Rate ^a	0.93	1.35	0.54	1.02	0.33
Firearm homicide rate ^a	0.19	0.16	0.16	0.3	0.07
Registered civilian firearms per 100 individuals ^b	6	27.8	1.2	19.7	9.4
Estimated civilian firearms per 100 individuals ^{b,c}	9.9	32.4	2.6	23.1	27.6

Firearm homicides in Europe

- Two profiles when it comes to firearm homicides
- Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden: most firearm homicides take place in
 - Mostly in public and urban areas
 - involving male victims and perpetrators
 - largely concentrated in the criminal milieu
- Finland and Switzerland:
 - mostly domestic homicides
 - higher share of female victims

4. Conclusions

- Very low (firearm) homicide rate in Switzerland and Europe (compared to the US)
- Firearm homicide rate in Europe rather dependant on the size of organized / gang crime activities in a country than legal firearm ownership rate
- However, firearm ownership influences the share of firearm homicides and the constellations in which firearms are used
- Share of firearm homicides still very high in Switzerland (especially compared to other European countries), and firearms are used in all types of homicides
- Especially high use in intimate partner killings of older Swiss men killing their spouses with a military gun

Thank you for your attention!

Any questions and comments?

nora.markwalder@unisg.ch

Kompetenzzentrum
für Strafrecht und Kriminologie