**A Land Without Guns: How Japan Has Virtually Eliminated Shooting Deaths By Max Fisher**

*In part by forbidding almost all forms of firearm ownership, Japan has as few as two gun-related homicides a year.*

A Tokyo "gun" shop owner, who mostly sells air rifles, displays one of Japan's relatively few licensed rifles.

Of the world's 23 "rich" countries, the U.S. gun-related murder rate is [almost 20 times](http://www.politifact.com/virginia/statements/2012/jan/27/jim-moran/rep-jim-moran-says-us-gun-homicide-rate-20-times-h/) that of the other 22. With almost one privately owned firearm per person, America's ownership rate is the highest in the world; tribal-conflict-torn Yemen is ranked second, with a rate about half of America's.   
  
But what about the country at the other end of the spectrum? What is the role of guns in Japan, the developed world's least firearm-filled nation and perhaps its strictest controller? In 2008, the U.S. had over [12 thousand](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr59/nvsr59_04.pdf) firearm-related homicides. All of Japan experienced [only 11](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-%20and-analysis/homicide.html), fewer than were killed at the Aurora shooting alone. And that was a big year: 2006 saw an astounding *two*, and when that number jumped to 22 in 2007, it became a [national scandal](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7257072.stm). By comparison, also in 2008, 587 Americans were killed just by guns that had discharged accidentally.   
  
Almost no one in Japan owns a gun. Most kinds are illegal, with onerous restrictions on buying and maintaining the few that are allowed. Even the country's infamous, mafia-like Yakuza [tend](http://www.japanfocus.org/-Andrew-Rankin/3688) to [forgo](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/01/09/120109fa_fact_hessler) guns; the [few exceptions](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20060822a7.html#.UA19bkR9nRw) tend to become big national news stories.  
  
Japanese tourists who fire off a few rounds at the Royal Hawaiian Shooting Club would be breaking [three](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/01/09/120109fa_fact_hessler) separate laws back in Japan -- one for holding a handgun, one for possessing unlicensed bullets, and another violation for firing them -- the first of which alone is punishable by one to ten years in jail. Handguns are forbidden absolutely. Small-caliber rifles have been illegal to buy, sell, or transfer since 1971. Anyone who owned a rifle before then is allowed to keep it, but their heirs are required to turn it over to the police once the owner dies.   
  
The only guns that Japanese citizens can legally buy and use are shotguns and air rifles, and it's not easy to do. The process is detailed in David Kopel's [landmark study](http://www.guncite.com/journals/dkjgc.html) on Japanese gun control, published in the 1993 *Asia Pacific Law Review*, still cited as current.

To get a gun in Japan, first, you have to attend an all-day class and pass a written test, which are held only once per month. You also must take and pass a shooting range class. Then, head over to a hospital for a mental test and drug test (Japan is unusual in that potential gun owners must affirmatively prove their mental fitness), which you'll file with the police. Finally, pass a rigorous background check for any criminal record or association with criminal or extremist groups, and you will be the proud new owner of your shotgun or air rifle. Just don't forget to provide police with documentation on the specific location of the gun in your home, as well as the ammo, both of which must be locked and stored separately. And remember to have the police inspect the gun once per year and to re-take the class and exam every three years.  
  
Even the most basic framework of Japan's approach to gun ownership is almost the polar opposite of America's. U.S. gun law begins with the second amendment's affirmation of the "right of the people to keep and bear arms" and narrows it down from there. Japanese law, however, starts with the [1958 act](http://digital.law.washington.edu/dspace-law/bitstream/handle/1773.1/806/9PacRimLPolyJ165.pdf?sequence=1) stating that "No person shall possess a firearm or firearms or a sword or swords," later adding a few exceptions. In other words, American law is designed to enshrine access to guns, while Japan starts with the premise of forbidding it. The history of that is complicated, but it's worth noting that U.S. gun law has its roots in resistance to British gun restrictions, whereas some academic literature links the Japanese law to the national campaign to forcibly disarm the samurai, which may partially explain why the 1958 mentions firearms and swords side-by-side.  
  
Of course, Japan and the U.S. are separated by a number of cultural and historical difference much wider than their gun policies. Kopel explains that, for whatever reason, Japanese tend to be more tolerant of the broad search and seizure police powers necessary to enforce the ban. "Japanese, both criminals and ordinary citizens, are much more willing than their American counterparts to consent to searches and to answer questions from the police," he writes. But even the police did not carry firearms themselves until, in 1946, the American occupation authority ordered them to. Now, Japanese police receive more hours of training than their American counterparts, are forbidden from carrying off-duty, and invest hours in studying martial arts in part because they "are expected to use [firearms] in only the rarest of circumstances," according to Kopel.  
  
The Japanese and American ways of thinking about crime, privacy, and police powers are so different -- and Japan is such a generally peaceful country -- that it's functionally impossible to fully isolate and compare the two gun control regiments. It's not much easier to balance the costs and benefits of Japan's unusual approach, which helps keep its murder rate at the [second-lowest in the world](http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2009/oct/13/homicide-rates-country-murder-data), though at the cost of restrictions that Kopel calls a "police state," a worrying suggestion that it hands the government too much power over its citizens. After all, the U.S. constitution's second amendment is intended in part to maintain "the security of a free State" by ensuring that the government doesn't have a monopoly on force. Though it's worth considering another police state here: Tunisia, which had the [lowest firearm ownership rate in the world](http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2009/oct/13/homicide-rates-country-murder-data) (one gun per thousand citizens, compared to America's 890) when its people toppled a brutal, 24-year dictatorship and sparked the Arab Spring.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/07/a-land-without-guns-how-japan-has-virtually-eliminated-shooting-deaths/260189/>

**Japan's Cutthroat School System: A Cautionary Tale for the U.S. By Noah Berlatsky**

Yuriko Nakao

"No Child Left Behind." "Race to the Top." The names suggest mobility, progress, moving on up and not falling back. The goal of education, according to these national education initiatives with their standards and testing, is forward motion and competitive advantage, progress and success, both in an unabashedly economic context. President Obama [talks](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/26/nyregion/obama-visits-brooklyn-high-school.html) about how we need to "invest in our young people" in order to compete in a global marketplace.   Bill Gates, too, [argues](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2012/05/educating_to_compete_in_the_gl.html) we need standards in order to become "more competitive as a country."

In this, as in so many other things, Japan preceded us. In her new book, *Precarious Japan*, anthropologist Anne Allison returns to the Japanese education system that she discussed in some detail in her 1995 monograph *Permitted and Prohibited Desires*. As Allison says in both volumes, the Japanese education system after World War II was built around highly competitive and rigorous high-school testing, which required enormous discipline and study. The goal was to prepare students for equally arduous employment in Japan's industrial capitalist economy, where men worked basically all the time. (In *Precarious Japan*, Allison relates one anecdote of a man sleeping at his desk for no extra pay.) Good scores on tests ensured good jobs in Japan's corporate economy. For their part, Allison writes, Japanese women were expected to stay home and focus all their time and energy on preparing children for their exams. In Allison's words, they "worked hard at love." Family, school, and work thus fit into a single seamless system of economic striving that "catapulted Japan to the heights of global prestige as an industrial power."

Again, in many ways, the Japanese experience seems to echo the dream of education reformers and policy-makers in the United States: strong parental involvement, rigorous testing, discipline, and study in school leading to disciplined workers competing successfully in the global economy. Obviously, every detail isn’t as appealing as every other. The relegation of women to the domestic sphere would not be popular in the U.S., for example. But overall, Japan's system can be seen as a prototype; the dream we Americans are now striving for.

The one problem being, as Allison shows, that that dream has already turned to dung. Japan's bubble economy burst in the ‘90s. Its amazing, decades-long post-war economic boom turned into post-post-war economic stagnation. *Precarious Japan* chronicles the unraveling of the home/job/school unity on which Japanese capitalism was based. Through a combination of economic contraction and neo-liberal restructuring of the economy, the lifetime salaryman jobs which were to be the reward of success in high school dried up. Today one-third of Japanese workers are irregularly employed, including 70 percent of all female workers and half of all workers between 15 and 24. A full 77 percent of the irregularly employed earn wages less than poverty level, and so are working poor.

There are a couple possible lessons to take from Japan's experience. On the one hand, you could perhaps argue that it shows that test-oriented education does not actually promote global competitiveness; that Japan's focus on testing and rigid connections between school, home and family, stifled creativity and created an insufficiently flexible economy. This is the critique that University of Oregon Professor Yong Zhao [makes](http://www.opb.org/radio/programs/thinkoutloud/segment/professor-yong-zhao-on-how-to-educate-globally-competitive-students/) of our emphasis on testing in the U.S. From his perspective, the goal of global competitiveness is the right goal, but to get there we need education that focuses on creativity and innovation rather than test-taking.

Perhaps though the problem, though, is not with the methods we are using to link education to economic advancement, but linking education and economic advancement in the first place.  Uncertain work and falling wages have contributed to the precariousness in Japan that Allison discusses, but they aren't its only cause. Rather, she suggests, the unified emphasis on economic achievement and global advancement as *the* social purpose has left people with few resources with which to confront hard times. The path from family to school to corporation in the context of expanding capitalism underwrote people's social place to such an extent that without it, many individuals become placeless.

In this context, Allison talks at some length about the Japanese social phenomenon of *hikikomori*, which began to emerge in the early 1990s. Hikikomori are effectively non-spiritual late capitalist monks; male young adults who "withdraw and remain in a single room they rarely, if ever, leave," sometimes for years. Generally hikiomori are isolated in their family homes and remain dependent for minimal care on their parents, who they may not even interact or speak with. Estimates of the number of hikikomori range between 100,000 and 700,000. Close to a third of them start out as kids who refuse to go to school. One hikikomori Allison talks to named Kacco says, "As long as I performed well in school, things were okay. But once I started to deviate just a little—they [parents, teachers] went to the extreme and started treating me incredibly coldly." Kacco adds, "now as the economy has fallen, we've all become strangers to one another. Society today is very cold." Allison discusses this coldness in other contexts: the isolation and abandonment of many elderly people; the disconnected lives of the growing ranks of part-time workers, many of whom have no permanent residence but go from net-café to net-café, logging on to seek the next day’s employment.

The Japanese school system oriented fanatically towards capitalist achievement seems to have reproduced or helped create capitalist social atomization. The notorious bullying in Japanese schools has actually been seen by many parents and teachers as a feature not a bug. Students can be targeted for failing to do well academically (Allison discusses one girl bullied for her failure to learn *kanji* quickly enough.) "[T]he parent who refuses to pamper their bullied child…, thereby forcing them to become tough as nails, is something of a Japanese ideal," Allison writes. "Tough love," she adds, leads to toughness and success, "Japan as number one."

Again, though, that link between competitive schooling and Japanese triumph has broken apart over the last decades. In light of that, and of our own protracted ongoing experience with economic precariousness, it might be worthwhile for the U.S. to reconsider our current focus on schools as engines of economic attainment, either individual or national. Do we want all our students constantly rushing in a race to the top, even if, life being what it is, that top is sometimes not a mountain but a cliff? Is education entirely about succeeding economically? Or might there be other, more important kinds of success, involving connection, community, and rootedness? Both Japan and the U.S. could stand to think about whether we want to concentrate on getting schools to produce good workers, or whether we would rather have them help to make good human beings.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/11/japans-cutthroat-school-system-a-cautionary-tale-for-the-us/281612/>

A characteristic of the Japanese school system are entrance exams, and with them a high competitiveness among students. Most high schools, universities, as well as a few private junior high schools and elementary schools require applicants to write entrance exams. In order to pass entrance exams to the best institutions, many students attend special preparation schools (juku) besides regular classes, or for one to two years between high school and university (yobiko).

**Japan Population 2013**

127,000,000

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Population Rank:** | [10](http://worldpopulationreview.com/) |
| **% of World Pop:** | [1.77%](http://worldpopulationreview.com/) |

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Japan, the island nation in East Asia, is a fairly sizable archipelago of 6,852 islands, although the four largest islands (Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shitoku) account for 97% of its population. The last set of official figures pertaining to Japan’s population were released at the time of the 2010 census and the final statistics showed there 128,056,026 people here, which would make Japan the tenth largest country in the world.



However, the commonly held view that the population of Japan is in line for a [sharp decline](http://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/30/world/asia/japan-population-decline/index.html) is backed up by its estimated 2013 population of 126,981,371, which is down again from its estimated 2012 population of 127.9 million.

**Japan Demographics**

Unlike many other countries around the world today, the population of Japan appears largely homogenous with the final population statistics comprising of a 98.5% contribution from ethnic Japanese people. In addition, there is a very small proportion of foreign workers living here, largely made up of Koreans, Chinese, Peruvians and Brazilians.

The largest native ethnic group in Japan is the Yamato people, although large minority groups include the indigenous Ryukyuan and Ainu peoples. While Japan may seem homogenous in terms of ethnicity and culture, this may be due to Japan's absence of racial and ethnic statistics for Japanese nationals. The country has traditionally rejected the need to recognize ethnic differences in Japan, and Former Japanese Prime Minister Aso once described the country as one of "one race, one civilization, one language and one culture."

Japan is currently the world's [oldest country](http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/01/japans-population-to-shrink-nearly-a-third-by-2060/), and it's set to get even older. In 50 years, it's estimated by the government that 40% of Japan's population will be over 65. In the last few decades, the country's social security budget has increased 15%. While 5 decades ago there were 12 workers for every retiree, there will be an equal 1:1 ratio in 50 years. This is one of any demographics problems Japan must address.

**Reasons for Falling Numbers**

Some reports claim that Japan’s total population could fall by as much as 30% to around 87 million by 2060 and the reasons, quite simply, point to a disparity in the birth and death rates. In addition, it’s impossible to rule out the part that the March 2011 Tsunami and Earthquake played. 19,000 people lost their lives at the time, and it’s widely accepted that the incidents will have a ‘knock-on’ effect of reducing overall life expectancy.

The difference between rising death rates and lower birth rates is also clearly a factor with low fertility rates among women shouldering part of the blame. Experts attribute Japan's low growth to the high cost of raising children in the country, the growing number of women who choose to work longer and have a career rather than have children, and Japan's reluctance to accept immigrants.

Another statistic that doesn’t help the population decline is the alarming number of suicides in young people.

Unfortunately, Japan has one of the world's highest suicide rates, and suicide is the leading cause of death for people under 30. Factors in suicides in the country include social pressure, depression and unemployment, and the National Police Agency found that suicides linked to job loss increased 65.4%. There is a suicide in Japan every 15 minutes, with close to 33,000 reported in 2009. This is just one of the many problems Japan will need to control to see its population and economy grow into the future.

**The Future of Japan**

Overall, Japan has the highest life expectancy in the world even though it is expected to fall slightly in the near future. However, with low birth rates, the population is rapidly aging but in 2007, the country announced its first significant birth rate increase in many years, so could the predictions be false? Incentives to have more children are also being announced but as a whole, the country is just starting to feel the effects of a post-war baby boom, many of whom are now nearing the end of their years.

It's expected that Japan's population will drop to just 95 million (from 2013's 126 million) by 2050, and the country as a whole is involved in serious debate about how to fix this problem. While birth incentives and immigration incentives are often suggested as the solution to bring the young workers necessary to support the country's aging population, time will tell if this is enough.

Slowing population growth and an aging population are creating more than a headache for the island nation, as this problem is shrinking its pool of taxable citizens, causing the social welfare costs to skyrocket, and has led to Japan becoming the most indebted industrial nation with public debt that is double its economy.

**Japan Population Chart**

**Population History**

| **Year** | **Population** | **Change** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1950 | 82,199,000 | N/A% |
| 1960 | 92,501,000 | 12.53% |
| 1970 | 103,708,000 | 12.12% |
| 1980 | 115,912,000 | 11.77% |
| 1990 | 122,249,000 | 5.47% |
| 2000 | 125,715,000 | 2.83% |
| 2010 | 127,353,000 | 1.30% |

**Population Projections**

| **Year** | **Population** | **Change** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2020 | 124,504,000 | -2.24% |
| 2030 | 118,277,000 | -5.00% |
| 2040 | 110,279,000 | -6.76% |
| 2050 | 101,571,000 | -7.90% |
| 2060 | 92,734,000 | -8.70% |
| 2070 | 83,345,000 | -10.12% |
| 2080 | 74,414,000 | -10.72% |
| 2090 | 66,621,000 | -10.47% |
| 2100 | 59,506,000 | -10.68% |

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/japan-population-2013/>

In 2060, Japan will have 87 million people. The number of people 65 or older will nearly double to 40 percent, while the national work force of people between ages 15 and 65 will shrink to about half of the total population, according to the estimate, made by the National Institute of Population and [Social Security[http://images.intellitxt.com/ast/adTypes/2_11pxw.gif](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/46187200/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/)](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/46187200/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/) Research.

The total fertility rate, or the expected number of children born per woman during lifetime, in 2060 is estimated at 1.35, down from 1.39 in 2010 — well below more than 2 needed to keep the country's population from declining. But the average Japanese will continue to live longer. The average life expectancy for 2060 is projected at 90.93 for women, up from 86.39 in 2010, and 84.19 years for men, up from 79.64 years.