

# *Philosophy Ripped From The Headlines!*



**Issue #3, November 2017**  
**Compiled & Edited by *Philosophy Without Borders***

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# 1. “American Toddlers Are Still Shooting People On a Weekly Basis This Year”

By [Christopher Ingraham](#)

The Washington Post 29 SEPTEMBER 2017

URL = [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/09/29/american-toddlers-are-still-shooting-people-on-a-weekly-basis-this-year/?utm\\_term=.a654b672e89f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/09/29/american-toddlers-are-still-shooting-people-on-a-weekly-basis-this-year/?utm_term=.a654b672e89f)



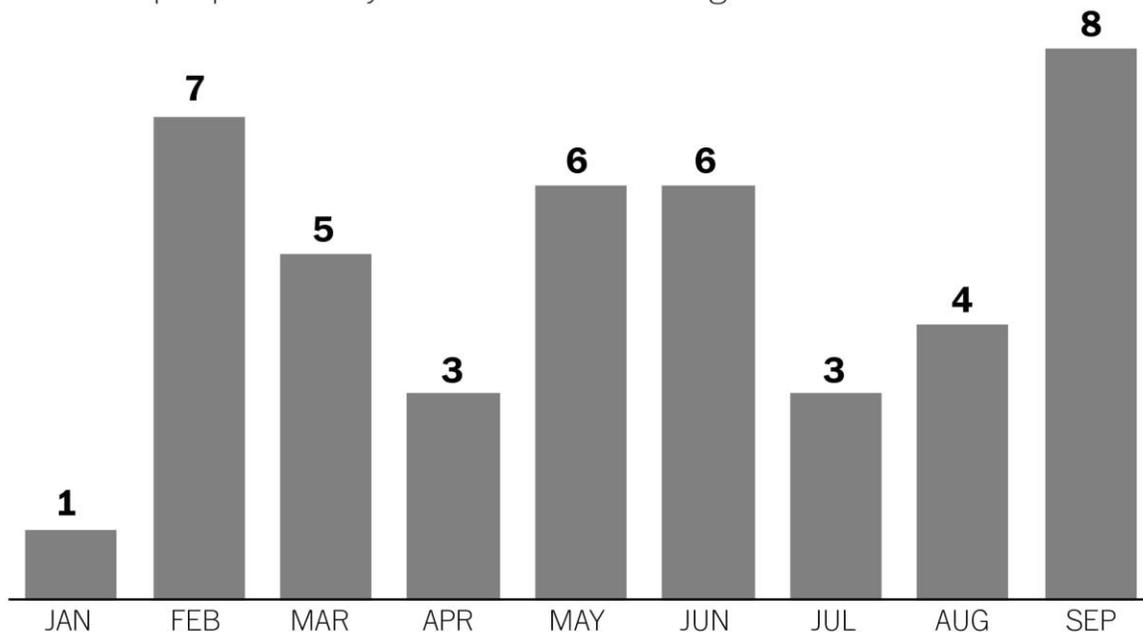
(Sergio Flores/Bloomberg)

On Wednesday two 3-year-old boys were shot by another toddler who found and inadvertently fired a gun at the home of their babysitter in Dearborn, Mich., [according to the Detroit Free Press](#). The boys, one of whom was shot in the face and the other in the shoulder, are in stable condition at a hospital.

The Dearborn boys are at least the 42nd and 43rd people to get shot by a child under the age of 4 this year, according to [a database of accidental child-involved shootings](#) maintained by Everytown, a gun violence prevention group. On average, someone gets shot by an American toddler a little more frequently than once a week, similar to [previous years](#).

## Toddler shootings in 2017

Number of people shot by children under the age of four



WAPO.ST/**WONKBLOG**

Source: Everytown

These figures, which are compiled from media and police reports, are likely an undercount. If a child receives a relatively mild gunshot injury, such as a grazing, parents may try to keep the incident quiet and not seek medical care. It's also possible that an unknown number of small children find guns and fire them without hitting anyone, which would not necessarily result in a medical or police report.

[\[4-year-old boy critically wounded after shooting himself\]](#)

In many of these shooting cases, a toddler finds a gun and accidentally shoots himself with it — 27 out of the 43 toddler shootings involved self-inflicted injuries. Earlier this month in Ohio, for instance, a 3-year-old boy [found his father's loaded gun in the kitchen and fatally shot himself in the head](#) with it.

But shootings of other people are common, as well. Last weekend in St. Louis, a 2-year-old found a loaded handgun and [accidentally shot and killed his father](#), who was asleep at the time. The day before, in Pennsylvania, a 3-year-old riding in the back seat of a car found a loaded gun and [shot his uncle in the shoulder](#).

Nearly all toddler shootings involve boys. So far this year there have been just two exceptions. In March, 3-year-old Yasha Ross from Pittsburgh found a loaded gun in the home of a man she was visiting with her mother and [fatally shot herself in the chest](#). Another 3-year-old girl [shot herself in the stomach](#) in Georgia in June. She survived.

*[[A 4-year-old was looking for candy in her grandmother's purse. Instead, she found a gun.](#)]*

The youngest toddler involved in a shooting this year was an 18-month-old from Nashville, who police say found a loaded pistol on a bed and [shot himself in the face](#). His injuries were not fatal. So far this year 17 toddler shootings have ended in a fatality, while 26 resulted in a non-life-threatening injury.

Gun violence researchers have found that child protection laws that mandate safe storage of guns at home are [associated with reductions in accidental gun deaths](#) among children.

“Storing guns responsibly — locked and unloaded, with ammunition stored separately — is a critical step that every gun owner can take to protect kids and adults alike from the life-threatening consequences of a curious toddler getting access to a gun,” Emily Durbin of Michigan Moms Demand Action, said [in a statement](#) Wednesday in response to the Dearborn shooting.

Beyond the immediate toll of death and injury, shootings involving small children have [profound and often tragic effects](#) on surviving family members. [Earlier this month in South Carolina](#), for instance, 2-year-old Kyree Myers found a loaded gun at his home and fatally shot himself in the head.

Police arrived to find the boy's father, Keon Myers, despondent and threatening to kill himself. Despite officers' attempts to intervene, Myers then shot himself in the head, as well. Myers and his son were pronounced dead at a hospital.

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## 2. “Nothing Will Change After the Las Vegas Shooting”

By STEVE ISRAEL

The New York Times 2 OCTOBER 2017

URL = <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/02/opinion/gun-control-vegas-shooting.html>



Flags being lowered to half-staff in Washington on Monday. Credit Mark Wilson/Getty Images

WASHINGTON — In the wake of one the deadliest mass shootings in our nation’s history, perhaps the most asked question by Americans is, “Will anything change?” The simple answer is no. The more vital question is, “Why not?”

Congress is already doing what it sees as its part. Flags have been lowered, thoughts and prayers tweeted, and sometime this week it will perform the latest episode in the longest-running drama on C-Span: the moment of silence. It’s how they responded to other mass shootings in Columbine, Herkimer, Tucson, Santa Monica, Hialeah, Terrell, Alturas, Killeen, Isla Vista, Marysville, Chapel Hill, Tyrone, Waco, Charleston, Chattanooga, Lafayette, Roanoke, Roseburg, Colorado Springs, San Bernardino, Birmingham, Fort Hood and Aurora, at Virginia Tech, the Washington Navy Yard, and the congressional baseball game practice, to name too many.

In my 16 years in Congress, [Mother Jones magazine counted 52 mass killings](#). Fewer lessons about Congress were starker than the ones I learned about why, after each one, nothing happened. The first lesson was in January 2001, shortly after I was sworn in. I wanted to introduce legislation to require safety locks on certain guns and sought the support of a fellow freshman, a Democrat from Arkansas.

“I can’t do that,” he said. “In my district, we close schools on the first day of hunting season.” I kidded him that in my suburban district, we close school when there was a big sale at the mall. That’s when I learned that all politics is local, and on the issue of guns, it’s hard to build a political bridge from Huntington, N.Y., to Huntington, Ark.

There were moments when I thought, “Finally, we will do something.” I remember sitting at my desk in my district office on Long Island watching the grisly images of the murder of 26 children and adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., in 2012, and President Barack Obama with tears streaming down his cheeks. I was confident that at the very least we’d expand background checks or make it harder for people with mental illness to obtain guns.

My confidence ebbed when I heard my colleagues turn this into a debate over the rights of gun owners instead of the right to life of children. In the confines of the members-only elevators, where my colleagues could speak honestly, I heard colleagues confide that any vote for gun safety would lower their N.R.A. scores, making them casualties in the next election.

“Finally, we will do something,” I thought after the June 2016 mass shooting in an Orlando, Fla., nightclub. I was in a leadership meeting with Nancy Pelosi when we heard that several colleagues had taken to the floor and started a sit-in to force the House to address gun violence. I was stunned to see dozens of my colleagues sitting and chanting, just before we were about to take a long recess, “No bill, no break.”

We held the floor for 24 hours. Thousands converged spontaneously on Capitol Hill in support. This was a moment I thought we could no longer be ignored. I was right. Congress did act. It declared that fines would be slapped on House members who broadcast audio or video from the House floor. Thank God the decorum of the House was safe, at least.

Then there were the annual rituals in the House Appropriations Committee. Democrats would offer amendments to prevent people on the terrorist watch list from purchasing firearms. A no-brainer, I thought. If you’re too dangerous to board a plane, you’re too dangerous to buy an assault weapon, a common-sense position [shared by over 80 percent of Americans](#).

I remember the Republican chairman of the committee rising in opposition to the amendment, arguing that in America, everyone is innocent until proven guilty. I’m not sure he ever extended that argument to other populations, but it didn’t matter. The amendment failed.

So did our attempts to rescind the infamous Dickey Amendment, which prevents the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from even researching the relationship between gun violence and public health. The Dickey Amendment was so absurd that it was [ultimately opposed by its own sponsor](#), Jay Dickey, an Arkansas Republican. Still, we failed. The result? The government can’t

study gun violence but is spending \$400,000 analyzing the effects of Swedish massages on rabbits. So at least the rabbits feel safe.

And finally, there are those moments when members ourselves became victims. Gabby Giffords in Tucson; Steve Scalise at the congressional baseball game. Even the proximity of bullets resulted in shock and inaction.

Why? Three reasons.

First, just like everything else in Washington, the gun lobby has become more polarized. The National Rifle Association, once a supporter of sensible gun-safety measures, is now forced to oppose them because of competing organizations. More moderation means less market share. The gun lobby is in a race to see who can become more brazen, more extreme.

Second, congressional redistricting has pulled Republicans so far to the right that anything less than total subservience to the gun lobby is viewed as supporting gun confiscation. The gun lobby score is a litmus test with zero margin for error.

Third, the problem is you, the reader. You've become inoculated. You'll read this essay and others like it, and turn the page or click another link. You'll watch or listen to the news and shake your head, then flip to another channel or another app. This horrific event will recede into our collective memory.

That's what the gun lobbyists are counting on. They want you to forget. To accept the deaths of at least 58 children, parents, brothers, sisters, friends as the new normal. To turn this page with one hand, and use the other hand to vote for members of Congress who will rise in another moment of silence this week. And next week. And the foreseeable future.

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### 3. “America’s Gun Problem, Explained”

**The public and research support gun control. Here's how it could help — and why it doesn't pass.**

By German Lopez

Vox 2 OCTOBER 2017

URL = <https://www.vox.com/2015/10/3/9444417/gun-violence-united-states-america>



On Sunday night, it happened again: a mass shooting in America. In Las Vegas, a shooter [opened fire at a country music concert](#), reportedly killing more than 50 and resulting in more than 400 injured, according to police.

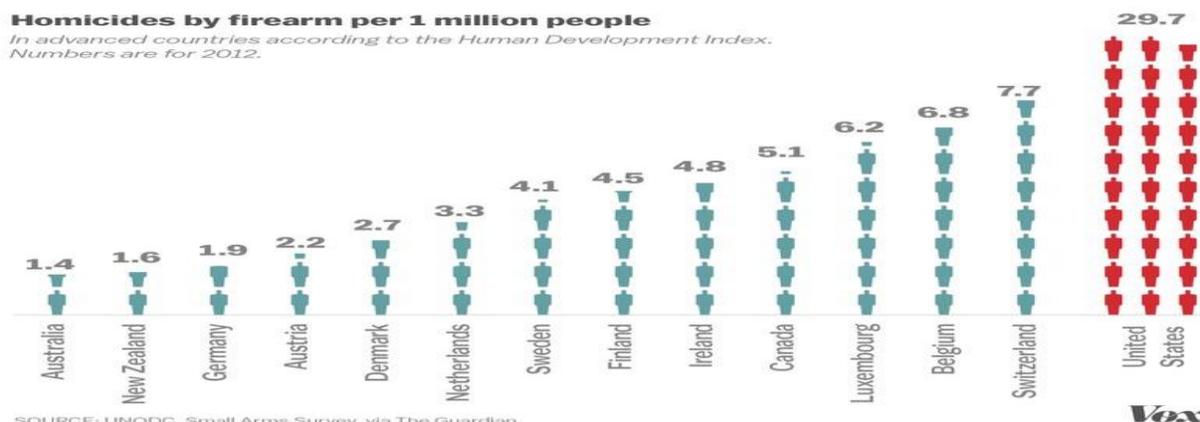
The shooting has already led to discussions about gun control. Americans have heard these types of calls before: After every mass shooting, the debate over guns and gun violence sparks up once again. Maybe some bills get introduced. Critics respond with concerns that the government is trying to take away their guns. The debate stalls. So even as America continues experiencing levels of gun violence unrivaled in the rest of the developed world, nothing happens — no laws are passed by Congress, nothing significant is done to try to prevent the next horror.

It has become an American routine for the aftermath of a gun violence to play out this way.

So why is it that for all the outrage and mourning with every mass shooting, nothing seems to change? To understand that, it's important to grasp not just the stunning statistics about gun ownership and gun violence in the United States, but America's very unique relationship with guns — unlike that of any other developed country — and how it plays out in our politics to ensure, seemingly against all odds, that our culture and laws continue to drive the routine gun violence that marks American life.

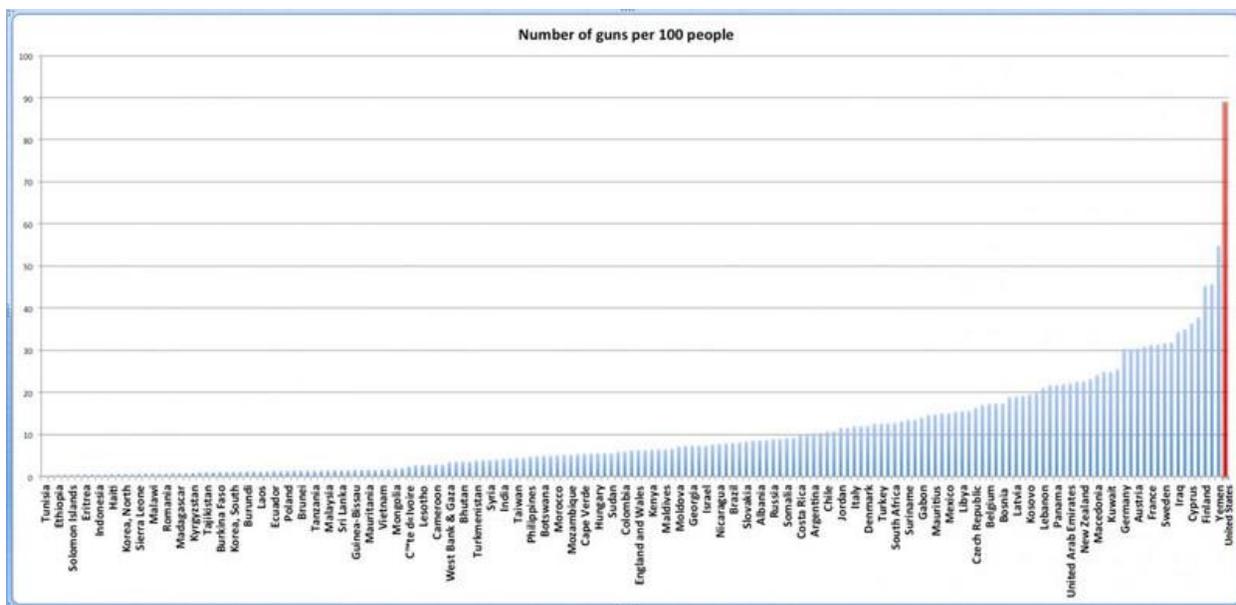
### 1) America's gun problem is completely unique

No other developed country in the world has anywhere near the same rate of gun violence as America. The US has nearly six times the gun homicide rate as Canada, more than seven times as Sweden, and nearly 16 times as Germany, according to [UN data](#) compiled by the Guardian. (These gun deaths are a big reason America has a [much higher overall homicide rate](#), which includes non-gun deaths, than other developed nations.)



Javier Zarracina/Vox

To understand why that is, there's another important statistic: The US has by far the highest number of privately owned guns in the world. Estimated in 2007, the number of civilian-owned firearms in the US was 88.8 guns per 100 people, meaning there was almost one privately owned gun per American and more than one per American adult. The world's second-ranked country was Yemen, a quasi-failed state torn by civil war, where there were 54.8 guns per 100 people.

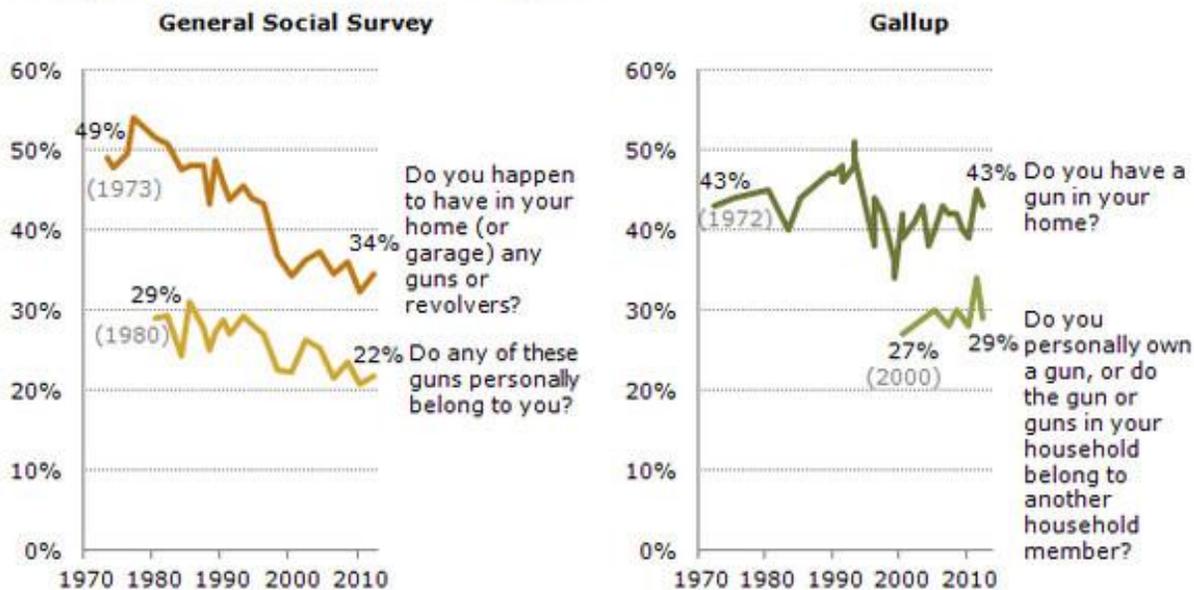


[Max Fisher/Washington Post](#)

Another way of looking at that: Americans make up about 4.43 percent of the world's population, yet own roughly 42 percent of all the world's privately held firearms.

That does not, however, mean that every American adult actually owns guns. In fact, gun ownership is concentrated among a minority of the US population — as [surveys](#) from the Pew Research Center and General Social Survey suggest.

### Survey Trends in Gun Ownership Rates

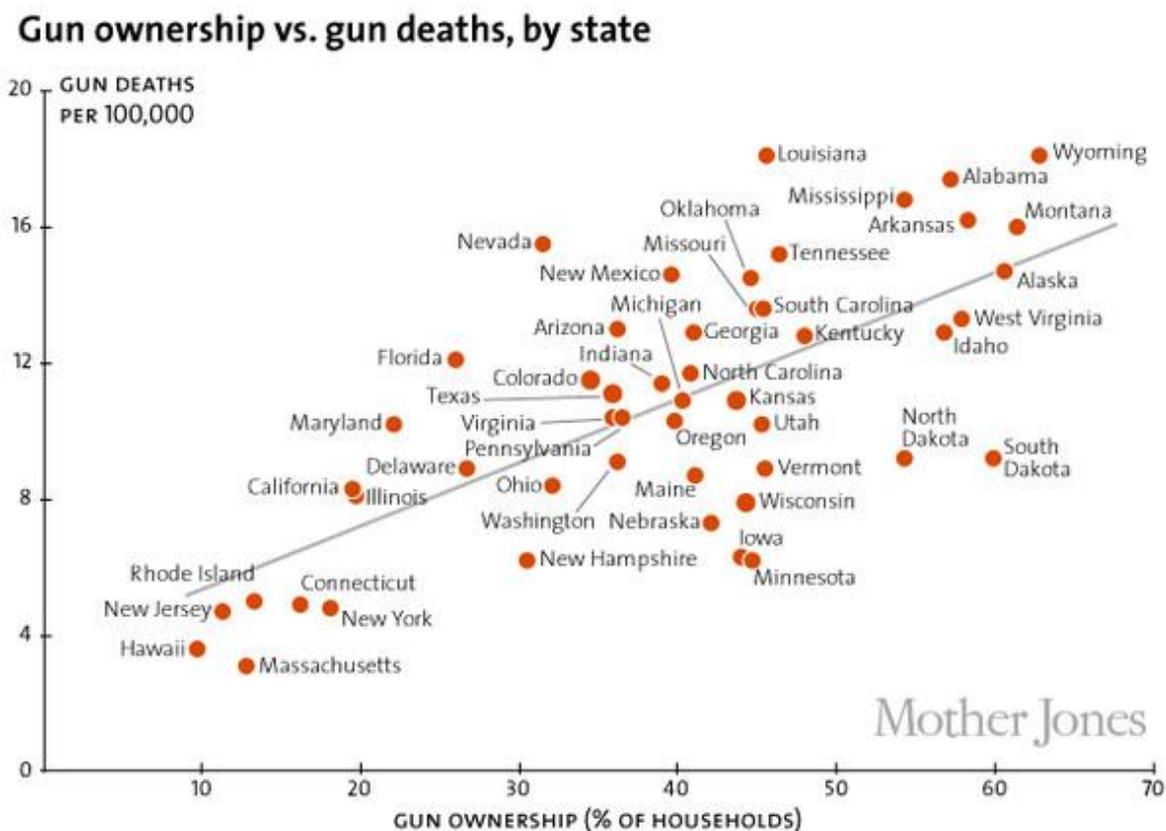


These three basic facts demonstrate America's unique gun culture. There is a very strong correlation between gun ownership and gun violence — a relationship that researchers argue is at least partly causal. And American gun ownership is beyond anything else in the world. At the same time, these guns are concentrated among a passionate minority, who are typically the loudest critics against any form of gun control and who scare legislators into voting against such measures.

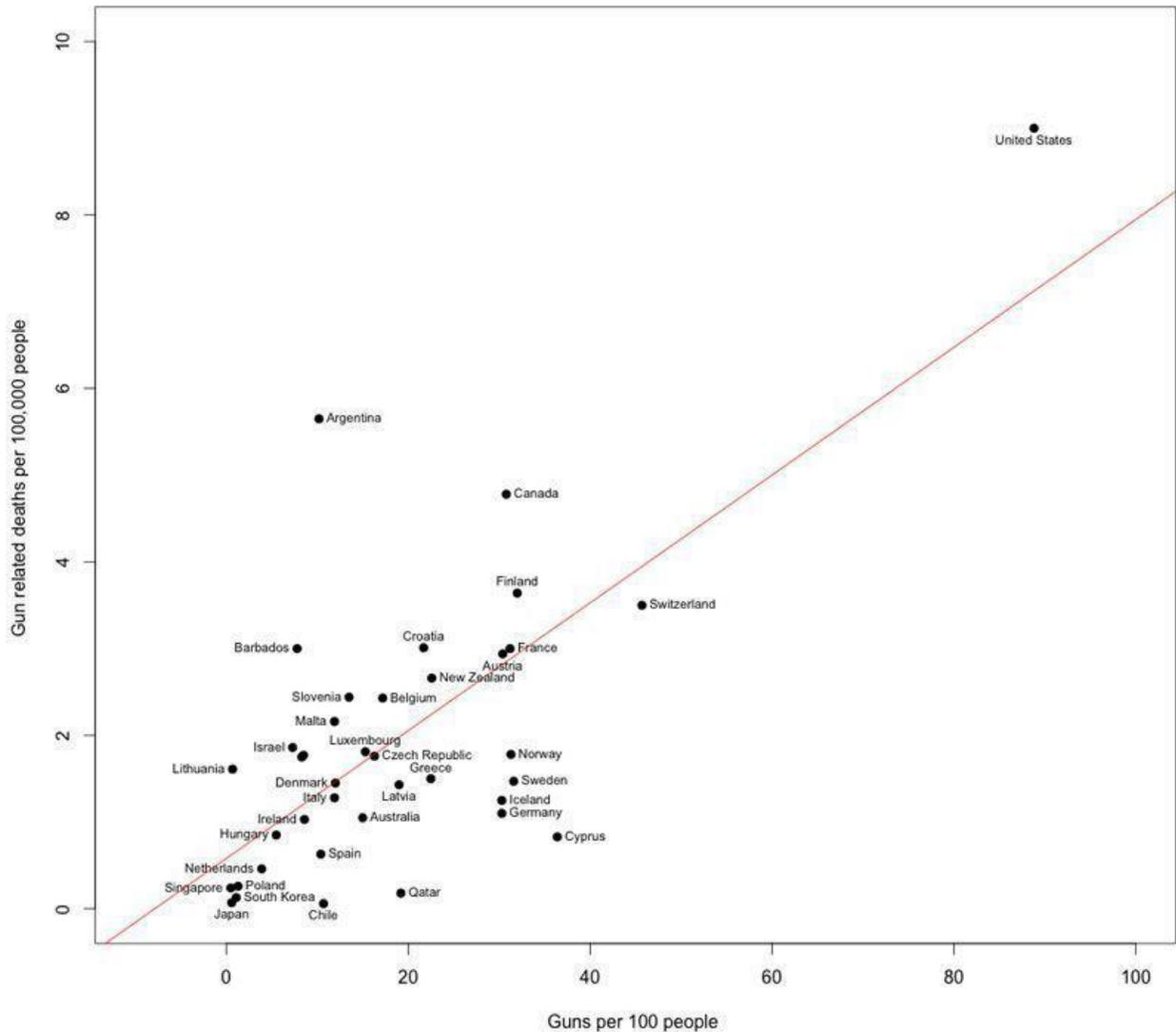
## 2) More guns mean more gun deaths. Period.

The research on this is overwhelmingly clear. No matter how you look at the data, more guns mean more gun deaths.

This is apparent when you look at state-by-state data within the United States, as this chart from [Mother Jones](#) demonstrates:



And it's clear when you look at the data across developed nations, as this other chart



Opponents of gun control tend to point to other factors to explain America's unusual gun violence: mental illness, for example. Jonathan Metzl, a mental health expert at Vanderbilt University, [told](#) me that this is just not the case. People with mental illnesses are more likely to be victims, not perpetrators, of violence. And while it's true that an extraordinary amount of mass shooters ([up to 60 percent](#)) have some kind of psychiatric or psychological symptoms, Metzl points out that [other factors](#) are much better predictors of gun violence in general: alcohol and drug misuse, poverty, history of violence, and, yes, [access to guns](#).

Another argument you sometimes hear is that these shootings would happen less frequently if even more people had guns, thus enabling them to defend themselves from the shooting.

But, again, the data shows this is simply not true. High gun ownership rates do not reduce gun deaths, but rather tend to coincide with increases in gun deaths. While a few people in some

cases may use a gun to successfully defend themselves or others, the proliferation of guns appears to cause far more violence than it prevents.

[Multiple simulations](#) have also demonstrated that most people, if placed in an active shooter situation while armed, will not be able to stop the situation, and may in fact do little more than get themselves killed in the process.

This video, from [ABC News](#), shows one such simulation, in which people repeatedly fail to shoot an active shooter before they're shot: <https://youtu.be/8QjZY3WiO9s>

The relationship between gun ownership rates and gun violence rates is well established. Reviews of the evidence compiled by the [Harvard School of Public Health's Injury Control Research Center](#) have consistently found that when controlling for variables such as socioeconomic factors and other crime, places with more guns have more gun deaths.

"Within the United States, a wide array of empirical evidence indicates that more guns in a community leads to more homicide," David Hemenway, the Injury Control Research Center's director, wrote in [Private Guns, Public Health](#).

Experts [widely believe](#) this is the consequence of America's relaxed laws and culture surrounding guns: Making more guns more accessible means more guns, and more guns mean more deaths. Researchers have found this is true not just with [homicides](#), but also with [suicides](#), [domestic violence](#), and even [violence against police](#). To deal with those problems, America will have to not only make guns less accessible, but likely *reduce* the number of guns in the US as well.

The research also speaks to this point: A 2016 [review](#) of 130 studies in 10 countries, published in [Epidemiologic Reviews](#), [found](#) that new legal restrictions on owning and purchasing guns tended to be followed by a drop in gun violence — a strong indicator that restricting access to guns can save lives.

Guns are not the only factor that contribute to violence. (Other factors include, for example, poverty, urbanization, and alcohol consumption.) But when researchers control for other confounding variables, they have found time and time again that America's high levels of gun ownership are a major reason the US is so much worse in terms of gun violence than its developed peers.

"A series of specific comparisons of the death rates from property crime and assault in New York City and London show how enormous differences in death risk can be explained even while general patterns are similar," UC Berkeley's Franklin Zimring and Gordon Hawkins wrote in a [breakthrough analysis](#) in 1999. "A preference for crimes of personal force and the willingness and ability to use guns in robbery make similar levels of property crime 54 times as deadly in New York City as in London."

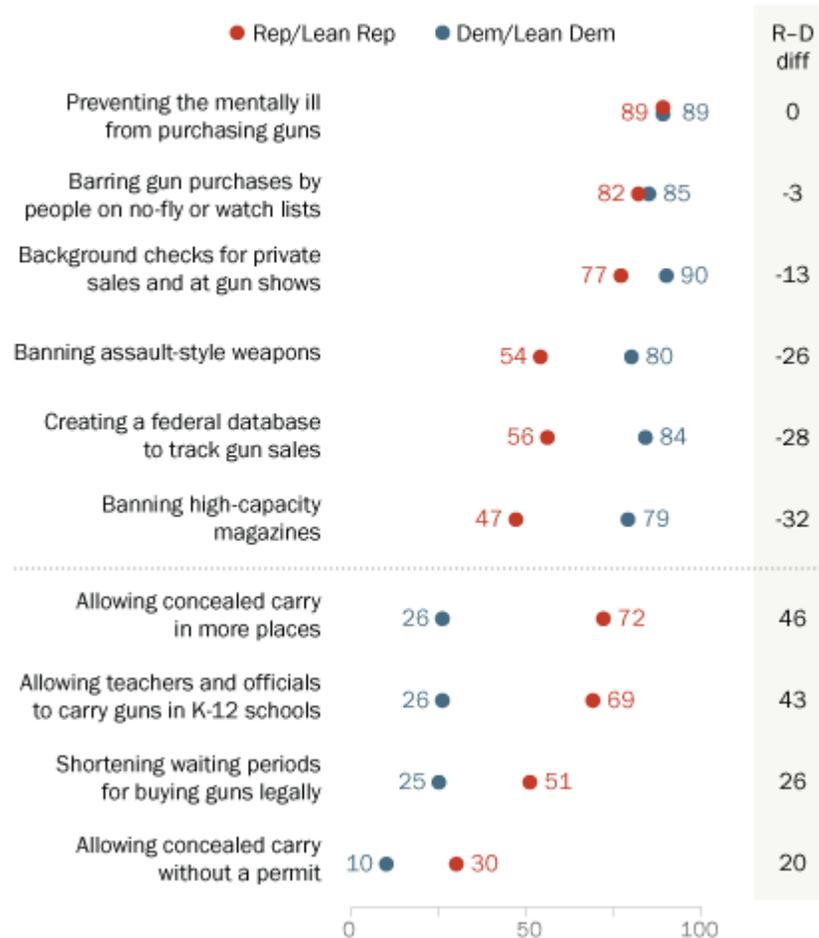
But even with the outrage over gun massacres, the sense that enough is enough, and the clear evidence that the problem is America's high gun ownership rates, there hasn't been significant legislation to help solve the problem.

### 3) Americans tend to support measures to restrict guns, but that doesn't translate into laws

If you ask Americans how they feel about specific gun control measures, they will often say that they support them. According to [Pew Research Center surveys](#), most people in the US support background checks, bans on assault-style weapons, bans on high-capacity ammunition clips, bans on online sales of ammunition, and a federal database to track gun sales.

#### Partisan gap in views of concealed carry is among widest on gun policy proposals

*% who strongly or somewhat favor ...*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 13-27 and April 4-18, 2017.

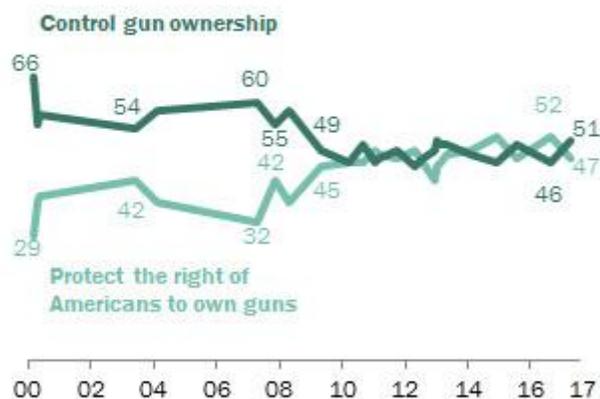
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

So why don't these measures ever get turned into law? That's because they run into another political issue: Americans, increasingly in recent years, [tend to support](#) the abstract idea of the right to own guns.

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### Public remains closely divided on controlling guns and protecting rights

% saying it is more important to ...



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 5-11, 2017.

"America's Complex Relationship With Guns"

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This is part of how gun control opponents are able to kill even legislation that would introduce the most popular measures, such as background checks that include private sales (which have 85 percent support, according to Pew): They're able to portray the law as contrary to the right to own guns, and galvanize a backlash against it.

This kind of problem isn't unique to guns. For example, although many Americans say they [don't like Obamacare](#), most of them do in fact like the [specific policies in the health care law](#). The problem is these specific policies have been [masked](#) by rhetoric about a "government takeover of health care" and "death panels." Since most Americans don't have time to verify these claims, especially when they involve a massive bill with lots of moving parts, enough end up believing in the catchphrases and scary arguments to stop the legislation from moving forward.

Of course, it's also the case that some Americans simply oppose *any* gun control laws. And while this group is generally outnumbered by those who support gun control, the opponents tend to be much more passionate about the issue than the supporters — and they're backed by a very powerful political lobby.

#### 4) The gun lobby as we know it is relatively recent but enormously powerful

The single most powerful political organization when it comes to guns is, undoubtedly, the [National Rifle Association](#) (NRA). The NRA has an enormous stranglehold over conservative politics in America, and that development is more recent than you might think.

The NRA was, for much of its early history, more of a sporting club than a serious political force against gun control, and [even supported some gun restrictions](#). In 1934, NRA president Karl Frederick was quoted as [saying](#), "I do not believe in the general promiscuous toting of guns. I think it should be sharply restricted and only under licenses."

A 1977 revolt within the organization changed everything. As crime rose in the 1960s and '70s, calls for more gun control grew as well. NRA members worried new restrictions on guns would keep coming after the historic [1968 law](#) — eventually ending, they feared, with the government's seizure of all firearms in America. So members mobilized, installing a hard-liner known as Harlon Carter in the leadership, forever changing the NRA into the gun lobby we know today.

This foundation story is crucial for understanding why the NRA is near-categorically opposed to the regulation of private firearms. It fears that popular and seemingly common-sense regulations, such as banning assault-style weapons or even a federal database of gun purchases, are not really about saving lives but are in fact a potential first step toward ending *all* private gun ownership in America, which the NRA views — wrongly, in the minds of some [legal experts](#) — as a violation of the Second Amendment of the US Constitution.

So any time there's an attempt to impose new forms of gun control, the NRA rallies gun owners and other opponents of gun control to kill these bills. These gun owners make up a minority of the population: anywhere from around 30 to around 40 percent of households, depending on which survey one uses. But that population is a large and active enough constituency, particularly within the Republican base, to make many legislators fear that a poor grade from the NRA will end their careers.

As a result, conservative media and politicians [take](#) the NRA's support — especially the coveted A-to-F ratings the organization gives out — very seriously. Politicians will go to sometimes absurd length to show their support for gun rights. In 2015, for example, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) starred in a video, from [IJ Review](#), in which he cooked bacon with — this is not a joke — a machine gun.

Although several campaigns have [popped up](#) over the years to try to counteract the NRA, none have come close to capturing the kind of influential hold that the organization has. Some of the groups — such as [StopTheNRA.com](#), in part [funded](#) by Democratic donor Ken Lerer — didn't even last a few years.

Kristin Goss, author of [The Gun Debate: What Everyone Needs to Know](#), previously told me this might be changing. She [argued](#) that newer gun control groups like [Everytown for Gun Safety](#) and [Americans for Responsible Solutions](#) are much more organized, are better funded, and have

more grassroots support than gun control groups have had in her 20 years covering this issue. As a result, Democrats at the state and federal levels seem [much more willing](#) to discuss gun control.

But supporters of gun control face a huge obstacle: far more passionate opponents. As Republican strategist Grover Norquist [said](#) in 2000, "The question is intensity versus preference. You can always get a certain percentage to say they are in favor of some gun controls. But are they going to vote on their 'control' position?" Probably not, Norquist suggested, "but for that 4-5 percent who care about guns, they will vote on this."

What's behind that passion? Goss, who's also a political scientist at Duke University, suggested that it's a sense of tangible loss — gun owners feel like the government is going to take their guns and rights. In comparison, gun control advocates are motivated by more abstract notions of reducing gun violence — although, Goss noted, the victims of mass shootings and their families have begun putting a face on these policies by engaging more actively in advocacy work, which could make the gun control movement feel more relatable.

There is an exception at the state level, where legislatures have passed laws imposing (and relaxing) restrictions on guns. In the past few years, for instance, [Washington state](#) and [Oregon](#) passed laws ensuring all guns have to go through background checks, including those sold between individuals. "There's a lot more going on than Congress," Goss said. "In blue states, gun laws are getting stricter. And in red states, in some cases, the gun laws are getting looser."

But state laws aren't enough. Since people can simply cross state lines to purchase guns, the weaker federal standards [make it easy](#) for someone to simply travel to a state with looser gun laws to obtain a firearm and ship it another state. This is such a common occurrence that the gun shipment route from the South, where gun laws are fairly loose, to New York, where gun laws are strict, has earned the name "[the Iron Pipeline.](#)" But it also happens all across the country, from New York to Chicago to California. Only a federal law could address this issue — by setting a floor on how loose gun laws can be in every state. And until such a federal law is passed, there will always be a massive loophole to any state gun control law.

Yet the NRA's influence and its army of supporters push many of America's legislators, particularly at the federal level and red states, away from gun control measures — even though some countries that passed these policies have seen a lot of success with them.

## **5) Other developed countries have had huge successes with gun control**

In 1996, a 28-year-old man walked into a cafe in [Port Arthur, Australia](#), ate lunch, pulled a semi-automatic rifle out of his bag, and opened fire on the crowd, killing 35 people and wounding 23 more. It was the worst mass shooting in Australia's history.

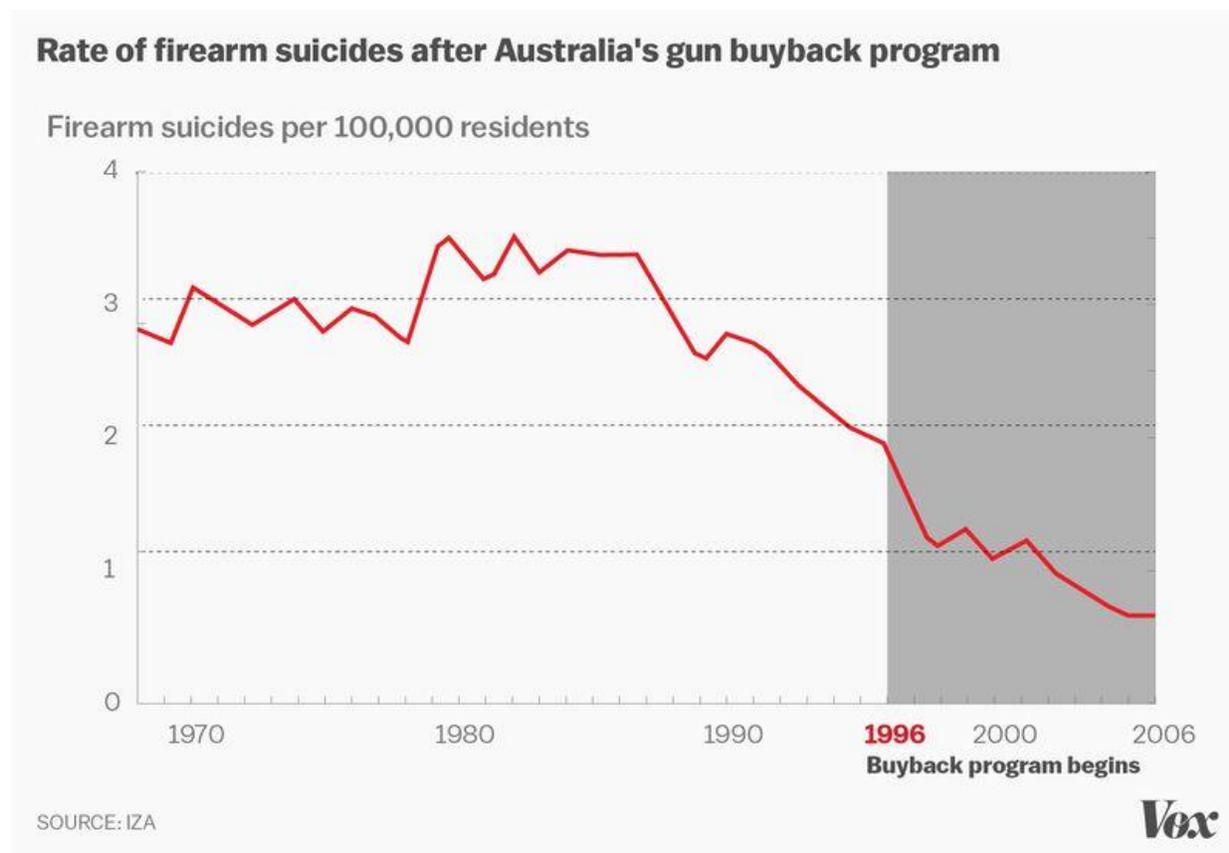
Australian lawmakers responded with [new legislation](#) that, among other provisions, banned certain types of firearms, such as automatic and semi-automatic rifles and shotguns. The Australian government confiscated 650,000 of these guns through a gun buyback program, in which it purchased firearms from gun owners. It established a registry of all guns owned in the country and required a permit for all new firearm purchases. (This is much further than bills

typically proposed in the US, which almost never make a serious attempt to *immediately* reduce the number of guns in the country.)

The result: Australia's firearm homicide rate dropped by about 42 percent in the seven years after the law passed, and its firearm suicide rate fell by 57 percent, according to [one review of the evidence](#) by Harvard researchers.

It's difficult to know for sure how much of the drop in homicides and suicides was caused specifically by the gun buyback program. Australia's gun deaths, for one, were already declining before the law passed. But researchers [David Hemenway and Mary Vriniotis](#) argue that the gun buyback program very likely played a role: "First, the drop in firearm deaths was largest among the type of firearms most affected by the buyback. Second, firearm deaths in states with higher buyback rates per capita fell proportionately more than in states with lower buyback rates."

One [study](#) of the program, by Australian researchers, found that buying back 3,500 guns per 100,000 people correlated with up to a 50 percent drop in firearm homicides, and a 74 percent drop in gun suicides. As Dylan Matthews [noted](#) for Vox, the drop in homicides wasn't statistically significant. But the drop in suicides most definitely was — and the results are striking.



One other fact, noted by [Hemenway and Vriniotis](#) in 2011: "While 13 gun massacres (the killing of 4 or more people at one time) occurred in Australia in the 18 years before the [Australia gun

control law], resulting in more than one hundred deaths, in the 14 following years (and up to the present), there were no gun massacres."

## **6) Although they get a lot of focus, mass shootings are a small portion of all gun violence**

Depending on which [definition of mass shooting](#) one uses, there are anywhere from a [dozen](#) to a [few hundred](#) mass shootings in the US each year. These events are, it goes without saying, devastating tragedies for the nation and, primarily, the victims and their families.

Yet other, less-covered kinds of gun violence kill far more Americans than even these mass shootings. Under the broadest definition of mass shooting, these incidents killed about 500 Americans in 2013. That represents just a fraction of total gun homicides: more than 11,200 that year. And firearm suicides killed even more: nearly 21,200 Americans.

Preventing suicides isn't something we typically include in discussions of gun control, but other countries' experiences show it can save lives. In Israel, where military service is mandatory for much of the population, policymakers realized that an alarming number of soldiers killed themselves when they went home over the weekend. So Israeli officials, as part of their solution, decided to try forcing the soldiers to keep their guns at the base when they went home. It worked: A [study](#) from Israeli researchers found that suicides among Israeli soldiers dropped by 40 percent.

So while politicians often lean on mass shootings to call for gun control, the problem goes far beyond those incidents. Though it's hard to fault them for trying; mass shootings, after all, force Americans to confront the toll of our gun laws and gun culture.

But it seems that we as a nation just aren't willing to look, or else don't sufficiently mind what we see, when these events occur. Even the 2012 mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, in Newtown, Connecticut — in which a gunman killed 20 young children, six school personnel, and himself — catalyzed no significant change at the federal level and most states. Since then, there have been, by some estimates, [more than 1,300 mass shootings](#). And there is every reason to believe there will be more to come.

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# AGAINST GUNS

**In the 11th of his Theses on Feuerbach, Karl Marx wrote that**  
*“philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it.”*

- 1** I completely agree with him that the ultimate aim of philosophy is to change the world, not merely interpret it. So Marx and I are both philosophical liberationists: that is, we both believe that philosophy should have radical political implications. But I also sharply disagree with him, insofar as I think that the primary aim of philosophy, and its practices of synoptic reflection, writing, teaching, and public conversation, is to change our lives. Then, and only then, can we act upon the world in the right way. As a case in point, I'm now going to argue that not only (i) owning or possessing and using guns, but also (ii) the Second Amendment, are rationally unjustified and immoral. In order to do that, however, and for clarity's sake, I'll quickly introduce some terminology.
- 2** By coercion I mean: either (i) using violence (e.g. injuring, torturing, or killing) or the threat of violence, in order to manipulate people according to certain purposes of the coercer (primary coercion), or (ii) inflicting appreciable, salient harm (e.g. imprisonment, termination of employment, large monetary penalties) or deploying the threat of appreciable, salient harm, even if these are not in themselves violent, in order to manipulate people according to certain purposes of the coercer (secondary coercion).
- 3** So all coercion is manipulation. Therefore, whether it is primary or secondary, coercion should be carefully distinguished from what I will call minimal sufficiently effective, last resort, defensive, protective, and preventive moral force: As a last resort, only either using the smallest sufficiently effective level of violence or threat of violence, or deploying the smallest sufficiently effective threat of appreciable, salient harm, in order to defend against, protect against, or prevent, oneself or someone else being primarily or secondarily coerced, or having their rational human dignity directly violated.
- 4** All human persons, aka people, are (i) absolutely intrinsically, non-denumerably infinitely valuable, beyond all possible economics, which means they have dignity, and (ii) autonomous rational animals, which means they can act freely for good reasons, and above all they are (iii) morally obligated to respect each other and to be actively concerned for each other's well-being and happiness, aka kindness, as well as their own well-being and happiness.
- 5** Therefore it is rationally unjustified and immoral to undermine or violate people's dignity, under any circumstances.
- 6** People have dignity as an innate endowment of their rational humanity. Dignity is neither a politically-created right, nor an achievement of any sort. Nor can anyone lose their dignity by thinking, choosing, or acting in a very morally or legally bad way.
- 7** The primary function of guns is for their owners/possessors or users to manipulate, threaten, or kill other people for reasons of their own, namely, coercion. This is clearly proven by the history of firearms: [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_firearm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_firearm)] Indeed, this is even admitted by the American Firearms Institute: [<http://www.americanfirearms.org/gun-history/>]
- 8** Notice that I said that the primary function of guns is coercion. Please do not let the fact that guns can have secondary or tertiary functions, say, for hunting non-human animals, or for recreational shooting, or for holding doors closed on windy days, conceptually confuse you.
- 9** Notice too, that if it turns out that owning/possessing and using guns according to their primary function is rationally unjustified and immoral, then owning/possessing and using guns according to their secondary and tertiary functions will be equally rationally unjustified and immoral. If it is rationally unjustified and immoral for you to own/possess and use a bomb that would blow up the Earth, then it is equally rationally unjustified and immoral for you to own/possess and use that bomb for hunting non-human animals, for recreational bombing, or for holding doors closed on windy days.
- 10** Now arbitrarily coercing other people is rationally unjustified and immoral because it undermines and violates their dignity.
- 11** Notice that I said “arbitrarily coercing other people.” That means manipulating, threatening, or killing other people either (i) for no good reason or (ii) for no reason at all, much less a good reason. “For no good reason” does not imply that there could be a good reason for coercion: all manipulation is inherently bad. People who act coercively either have bad motivating reasons for so acting (e.g., selfishness), or simply coerce without a reason, in a spontaneously bad way. And please do not let the fact that in some circumstances minimal sufficiently effective, last-resort, defensive, protective, and preventive moral force is rationally justified and morally permissible, conceptually confuse you.
- 12** Therefore, since it fully permits arbitrary coercion, owning/possessing and using guns is rationally unjustified and immoral, other things being equal.
- 13** Notice, again, that I said other things being equal. Please do not let the fact that under some special critical (in the sense of “involving a crisis”) conditions, when other things are not equal, when all else has failed, and when the only way to stop someone doing something horrendously immoral, and in direct violation of human dignity—e.g., rape, torture, murder, mass murder, genocide—to you, to someone else, or to many other people, that it is rationally justified and morally permissible to use a gun for the purposes of minimal sufficiently effective, last-resort, defensive, protective, and preventive moral force against that evil person, conceptually confuse you. No one may permissibly own or possess a gun, but sometimes, under some special critical conditions, it is morally permissible to use one. But this permissible use is only for last-resort, defensive, preventive, and protective purposes: it is never morally permissible to use a gun for coercion.
- 14** One very important moral and political consequence of the preceding argument is its direct bearing on the Second Amendment to the US Constitution, which says this: A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. In other words, focusing on the material in boldface, the Second Amendment says that “the people,” i.e., all Americans, have the moral and legal right “to keep and bear arms,” i.e., the moral and legal right to own/possess and use guns, unconditionally.
- 15** This means that the Second Amendment fully morally and legally permits arbitrary coercion. The further historical question of whether the original intention of the Second Amendment was to establish a legal right to own/possess and use guns for militias only, or for all Americans, is irrelevant.
- 16** But arbitrary coercion is rationally unjustified and immoral.
- 17** Therefore the Second Amendment is rationally unjustified and immoral.
- 18** More generally, no one, which includes all Americans, and which especially includes all members of the police and the army, i.e., the “Militia,” has the moral right “to keep and bear arms,” i.e., to own/possess and use guns, other things being equal.
- 19** Immanuel Kant pointed out in “*What is Enlightenment?*” that for philosophers to publish unpopular ideas is a life-changing act, not only life-changing for the philosopher as an individual, but also as a necessary phase of the larger historical process of “exiting” our “self-incurred” intellectual and moral immaturity. Moreover, the intellectual and moral maturation process can be a painful one for all concerned. So I have no doubt in my mind that many or even most Americans deeply believe things about guns and the Second Amendment that are sharply contrary to what I have just argued.
- 20** But if what I have argued is sound, then they're wrong, and we should all change our lives for the better.

## 5. “If Newtown Wasn't Enough, Why Would Las Vegas Be Enough?”

By [Charles P. Pierce](#)

Esquire 2 OCTOBER 2017

URL = <http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/politics/a12764429/las-vegas-shooting-result/>

**Our leaders are afraid to tolerate limits on Second Amendment "freedoms."**



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On July 4, 1854, William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist firebrand, burned a copy of the Constitution of the United States of America at a gathering of anti-slavery activists in Framingham Grove in Massachusetts. Garrison called the document, “a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell.” Almost 100 years later, Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, writing in dissent in the case of *Terminiello v. City of Chicago*, opined rather famously:

“The choice is not between order and liberty. It is between liberty with order and anarchy without either. There is danger that, if the court does not temper its doctrinaire logic with a little practical wisdom, it will convert the constitutional Bill of Rights into a suicide pact.”

Both of these men have been proven wrong, most recently [by the events Sunday night in Las Vegas](#), when a 64-year old man named Stephen Paddock opened fire on a crowd of 22,000 people gathered for a country music concert. At this writing on Monday morning, 50 people

were dead and several hundred wounded. (Editor's note: As of 11:42 a.m., 58 people are dead and 515 wounded.) The number of the dead almost assuredly will rise. This makes Paddock's unfortunate exercise of his Second Amendment freedoms the deadliest mass shooting in history. This makes Paddock's unfortunate exercise of his Second Amendment freedoms the 273rd mass shooting in the United States this year.



Getty

Paddock's sniper's perch was on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay casino and hotel. His targets of opportunity were penned into a parking lot a few blocks distant. This literally was like shooting fish in a barrel. Paddock's weapon of choice was a military-style assault weapon. When police finally broke into Paddock's room, they found 10 other rifles. Paddock came well-prepared to exercise his Second Amendment freedoms on a penned-in crowd of Jason Aldean fans. And he did.

Ever since Adam Lanza opened fire five years ago at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, I have been struck by the argument implicit in all the rhetoric directed at defending this country's lubriciously insane love of its firearms. It caught fire almost immediately. Wayne LaPierre, the spokesman for the National Rifle Association, the pre-eminent lobbying organization for weapons manufacturers, [said this](#) in the immediate aftermath of Lanza's unfortunate exercise of his Second Amendment freedoms:

The truth is that our society is populated by an unknown number of genuine monsters — people so deranged, so evil, so possessed by voices and driven by demons that no sane person can possibly ever comprehend them. They walk among us every day. And does anybody really believe that the next Adam Lanza isn't planning his attack on a school he's already identified at this very moment?

And throughout it all, too many in our national media ... their corporate owners ... and their stockholders ... act as silent enablers, if not complicit co-conspirators. Rather than face their own

moral failings, the media demonize lawful gun owners, amplify their cries for more laws and fill the national debate with misinformation and dishonest thinking that only delay meaningful action and all but guarantee that the next atrocity is only a news cycle away. The media call semi-automatic firearms "machine guns" — they claim these civilian semi-automatic firearms are used by the military, and they tell us that the .223 round is one of the most powerful rifle calibers ... when all of these claims are factually untrue. They don't know what they're talking about!

That spring, at CPAC, the annual convention of conservative activists, LaPierre expanded on his original argument:

The Second Amendment is not just words on parchment. It's not some frivolous suggestion from our Founding Fathers to be interpreted by whim. It lies at the heart of what this country was founded upon. Our Founding Fathers knew that without Second Amendment freedom, all of our freedoms could be in jeopardy. Our individual liberty is the very essence of America. It is what makes America unique. If you aren't free to protect yourself — when government puts its thumb on that freedom — then you aren't free at all.

Subsequent events have proven that LaPierre had the right of things and that William Lloyd Garrison and Robert Jackson were wrong. The Constitution is not a pact with the devil, nor is it a suicide pact. It is a formalized, legalistic ritual of blood sacrifice. There are some things that we as a society, alas, must tolerate in order to stay true to our founding beliefs and to remain free. Schoolchildren shot to pieces is one of those things. The massacre of country music fans is another one of those things, the 273rd blood sacrifice to that one provision of the Constitution this year.

The Constitution is not a pact with the devil, nor is it a suicide pact. It is a formalized, legalistic ritual of blood sacrifice.

We hear serious arguments about all the other parts of the Bill of Rights: that the First Amendment has limits on what T-shirts high-school students ("Bong Hits 4 Jesus!") can wear; that the Fourth Amendment has limits that allow wiretaps without warrants; that the Fifth Amendment has limits that allow drug-testing without cause; that the Sixth Amendment has limits that allows the states to poison convicts to death. But only with the Second Amendment do we hear the argument that the only tolerable limit on its exercise is that there are no limits. Only with the Second Amendment do we hear that the price of freedom is the occasional Stephen Paddock, locked away in his own madness on the 32nd floor of a luxury hotel and casino, deciding coolly whose brains he will blow out next a few blocks away in the 273rd such unfortunate exercise of Second Amendment rights this year.

This came as something of a shock to most people, but not to those of us who remembered Wayne LaPierre's speech to CPAC two years earlier. (This was a year after he'd explained to that same audience that Adam Lanza's unfortunate exercise of his Second Amendment rights was just part of the price of freedom in this country.) [LaPierre had walked the same dystopian landscape](#) more than two years before the new president\* had.

"Almost everywhere you look, something has gone wrong. You know it in your heart. You feel it in your gut. Something in our country has gone wrong...All across America, people come up to me and they say, 'Wayne? I've never been worried about this country until now.' They say it not in anger, but with sadness in their eyes...We fear for the safety of our families. That's why neighborhood streets that once were filled with bicycles and skateboards and laughter in the air, now sit empty and silent.

"We trust what we know in our hearts to be right," he said. "We trust our freedom. In this uncertain world, surrounded by lies and corruption everywhere you look, there is no greater freedom than the right to survive and protect our families with all the rifles, shotguns and handguns we want. We know, in the world that surrounds us, there are terrorists and there are home invaders, drug cartels, carjackers, knockout gamers and rapers, and haters and campus killers, and airport killers, shopping mall killers, and killers who scheme to destroy our country with massive storms of violence against our power grids, or vicious waves of chemicals or disease that could collapse our society that sustains us all."

Blood sacrifices are born of the fear of unseen power and invisible threat. Carve up a bull, and Zeus won't send a thunderbolt up your ass. Cut out someone's heart, and Tlaloc will make it rain to provide a bountiful harvest. Take your son up on a mountaintop, tie him to an altar, and unsheath your knife, hoping in your heart that Jehovah will step in and stop the whole business. Buy a gun. Buy two. Buy 10, and the monsters and knockout gamers and carjackers from the silent playgrounds will be held at bay.



Getty

Christians believe that the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary obviated forever the need for further blood sacrifice. However, not even that could obviate or eliminate the entirely secular desire for blood sacrifice within a society perceived to have gone astray. Christians pray to the crucified Christ. Christians also push the plungers that send the poisons into the veins of prisoners. Christians believe that atonement comes through the intercession of Jesus. Christians also believe that atonement comes from smart bombs and predator drones. The fear of unseen power and invisible threat is more than is thought of in your theologies, Horatio.

The president\* and Wayne LaPierre together created an America of the mind in which blood sacrifice is the highest form of patriotism.

The president\* and Wayne LaPierre together created an America of the mind in which blood sacrifice is the highest form of patriotism. They have taken the legitimate right of all people to self-defense and twisted it, for their own purposes, into a demand for ritual atonement on the part of an imaginary universe filled with nothing but bogeymen. For the president\*, this helped him attain the office he now holds. For LaPierre, it made the people for whom he was the frontman wealthier than they ever were before.

So now, here we sit, after another unfortunate exercise of Second Amendment freedoms, the 273rd of this year and the worst one of modern times, another opportunity for presidential leadership, the fourth one of those in a month. Storms are breaking everywhere, the carnage in America suddenly is very real, and blood sacrifices are lying all over a parking lot in Las Vegas.

If Newtown wasn't enough, how can Las Vegas be enough? And if Las Vegas isn't enough, how can anything be enough?

[Thoughts and prayers are not enough.](#) "Warm condolences," as dispatched by a president\* who never is at a loss for the wrong word or the bizarre reaction, are not enough. Arcane debates about whether or not Stephen Paddock used an automatic or a semi-automatic weapon for his unfortunate exercise of his Second Amendment freedoms are not enough. Absurd debates over whether or not his weapon of choice was truly "military-style" are not enough. Being sickened is not enough. Being saddened is not enough. The word "tragedy" is not enough.



All of these things are not enough because Newtown wasn't enough. And, if Newtown wasn't enough, how can Las Vegas be enough? And if Las Vegas isn't enough, how can anything be enough?

If Newtown wasn't enough, how can Las Vegas be enough?

We have become a nation that accepts the blood sacrifice of our children as an ineffable part of our constitutional order, one of those things you have to tolerate, like pornography and the occasional acquittal of an unpopular defendant, in order to live in a free society. Better that one Stephen Paddock go free than a hundred law-abiding gun owners wait a week before buying an Uzi. This is a vision of the nation that has been sold to us by a generation of politicians who talk brave and act gutless, and by the carnal skills in the employ of the industries of death. Better that one Stephen Paddock go free than a hundred law-abiding gun owners wait a week before buying an Uzi. We are all walking blood sacrifices waiting to happen.

Disgust isn't enough.

Sorrow isn't enough.

Nothing is enough because, if Newtown wasn't enough, then how can Las Vegas be enough? And if Las Vegas isn't enough, then how can anything be enough?

God help us all.

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## 6. “When You Politicize Shootings You Make It Harder To Find Solutions”

By [David Harsanyi](#)

The Federalist 2 OCTOBER 2017

URL = <http://thefederalist.com/2017/10/02/politicize-shootings-make-harder-find-solutions/>



There are generally two kinds of social media reactions to heart-wrenching events like yesterday’s mass shooting in Las Vegas: one is to offer prayers and sympathy to the victims and their families, and the other is to reflexively lash out in anger at those who don’t share your political agenda. Although emotionally satisfying, one of these responses makes it nearly impossible for the country to engage in any kind of useful discussion moving forward.

No doubt, there is immense frustration after a mass shooting, and this looks to be the most deadly in American history. The unstated reality is that many of these murders probably can’t be stopped. Attempting to preemptively discern which of our neighbors are ideologically driven or mentally capable of committing mass murder is no more feasible than trying to keep every one of the 350 million guns in the country away from them. Most often, even the relatives seem to be at

a complete loss as to why it happens. “We’re lost. I don’t understand this,” the Vegas shooter’s brother told the media. They never do.

The more horrifying realization is that once a person has lost his moral bearings the killing part is pretty easy. The gunman, 64-year-old Stephen Paddock, poured hundreds of bullets from the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay hotel into a concert below. Some reports say his criminal record amounted to no more than minor traffic infractions, and other reports say he [was “known” to the local police](#). Some people have jumped to conclusions [regarding “terrorism,”](#) though, as of this writing, there is no evidence of any political motive. Sooner or later we’re going to know everything about the man.

Maybe Paddock evaded or abused some gun law. Maybe it can be tightened. But those who reflexively call for more restrictive gun laws without even knowing how or why Paddock got his hands on guns — or what kind of firearms he used — give themselves away. Those who conflate automatic and semi-automatic guns also give themselves away.

[Those in the press who mislead the public on all these issues give themselves away, as well.](#)

They are interested not merely in stopping mass shootings, but limiting gun ownership. This kind of reaction hardens the resolve of Second Amendment advocates and creates an environment that makes any realistic options moot. Rather than specifically pointing to areas of achievable compromise, the reaction of most gun-control advocates seems to be a declaration of partisan war.

“Our grief isn’t enough. *We can and must put politics aside, stand up to the NRA,*” tweeted Hillary Clinton (emphasis mine), “and work together to try to stop this from happening again.” This an example of someone — and there increasingly more like her — who can’t distinguish ideology from general decency. The NRA is a strawman for countless political activists who are too cowardly to condemn the 55-plus million Americans who own firearms and the millions of others who support their right to do so. Reflexively treating law-abiding gun owners or the organizations that represent them as if they are tacitly encouraging or cheering violence does nothing to advance the goals that gun-control advocates claim to embrace.

It wasn’t that long ago, in fact, that Democrats led by Sen. Chris Murphy, a person who’s probably done as much as anyone in recent years to ensure the failure of gun-control legislation, were accusing [Republicans of selling guns to ISIS](#).

“Thoughts & prayers of politicians are cruelly hollow if they are paired with continued legislative indifference,” [the Connecticut senator said today](#). “It’s time for Congress to get off its ass.” Other than self-aggrandizement, Murphy has never gotten off his ass to do anything about the issue. None of the legislation he’s championed would have done anything to stop the shootings in Newtown or any other events he’s decided to exploit.

In fact, when Republicans agreed to legislation that would link the terror watch list (which includes many thousands of Americans, most innocent of wrongdoing) to a gun sales ban as long as there was some semblance of due process, [Senate Democrats killed it](#). Murphy is so intent on

weakening the Second Amendment he is perfectly willing to circumvent the Fifth and Sixth, as well.

This kind of ideological stridency and partisanship feeds into the distrust gun owners have towards politicians. For many of them, gun laws feel a lot like incremental steps to undermine access. It's difficult to disagree with this perception when you read and listen to the rhetoric of most liberal gun-control groups. The only thing this kind of partisanship creates is a [spike in legal ownership](#). That is fine by me, but probably not what the sincere gun-control advocate was hoping to accomplish.

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## 7. “Repeal the Second Amendment”

By [Bret Stephens](#)

The New York Times 5 OCTOBER 2017

URL = <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/opinion/guns-second-amendment-nra.html>



Credit Victor J. Blue/Bloomberg

I have never understood the conservative fetish for the Second Amendment.

From a law-and-order standpoint, more guns means more murder. “States with higher rates of gun ownership had disproportionately large numbers of deaths from firearm-related homicides,” noted one exhaustive [2013 study](#) in the American Journal of Public Health.

From a personal-safety standpoint, more guns means less safety. The F.B.I. counted a total of 268 “[justifiable homicides](#)” by private citizens involving firearms in 2015; that is, felons killed in the course of committing a felony. Yet that same year, there were 489 “[unintentional firearms deaths](#)” in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Between 77 and 141 of those killed [were children](#).

From a national-security standpoint, the Amendment's suggestion that a "well-regulated militia" is "necessary to the security of a free State," is quaint. The Minutemen that will deter Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un are based in missile silos in Minot, N.D., not farmhouses in Lexington, Mass.

From a personal liberty standpoint, the idea that an armed citizenry is the ultimate check on the ambitions and encroachments of government power is curious. The Whiskey Rebellion of the 1790s, the New York draft riots of 1863, the coal miners' rebellion of 1921, the Brink's robbery of 1981 — does any serious conservative think of these as great moments in Second Amendment activism?

And now we have the relatively new and now ubiquitous "active shooter" phenomenon, something that remains extremely rare in the rest of the world. Conservatives often say that the right response to these horrors is to do more on the mental-health front. Yet by all accounts Stephen Paddock would not have raised an eyebrow with a mental-health professional before he murdered 58 people in Las Vegas last week.

What might have raised a red flag? I'm not the [first pundit](#) to point out that if a "Mohammad Paddock" had purchased dozens of firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition and then checked himself into a suite at the Mandalay Bay with direct views to a nearby music festival, somebody at the local F.B.I. field office would have noticed.

Given all of this, why do liberals keep losing the gun control debate?

Maybe it's because they argue their case badly and — let's face it — in bad faith. Democratic politicians routinely profess their fidelity to the Second Amendment — or rather, "a nuanced reading" of it — with all the conviction of Barack Obama's support for traditional marriage, circa 2008. People recognize lip service for what it is.

Then there are the endless liberal errors of fact. There is no "[gun-show loophole](#)" per se; it's a private-sale loophole, in other words the right to sell your own stuff. The civilian AR-15 is not a true "assault rifle," and banning such rifles would have little effect on the overall murder rate, since most homicides are [committed with handguns](#). It's not true that 40 percent of gun owners buy without a background check; the real number is closer to [one-fifth](#).

The National Rifle Association does not have Republican "balls in a money clip," as Jimmy Kimmel put it the other night. The N.R.A. has donated a paltry \$3,533,294 to all current members of Congress since 1998, [according to The Washington Post](#), equivalent to about three months of [Kimmel's salary](#). The N.R.A. doesn't need to buy influence: It's powerful because it's popular.

Nor will it do to follow the "Australian model" of a gun buyback program, which has shown [poor results](#) in the United States and makes little sense in a country awash with hundreds of millions of weapons. Keeping guns out of the hands of mentally ill people is a sensible goal, but due process is still owed to the potentially insane. Background checks for private gun sales are

another fine idea, though its effects on homicides will be negligible: guns recovered by police are rarely in the hands of their legal owners, a [2016 study](#) found.

In fact, the more closely one looks at what passes for “common sense” gun laws, the more feckless they appear. Americans who claim to be outraged by gun crimes should want to do something more than tinker at the margins of a legal regime that most of the developed world rightly considers nuts. They should want to change it fundamentally and permanently.

There is only one way to do this: Repeal the Second Amendment.

Repealing the Amendment may seem like political Mission Impossible today, but in the era of same-sex marriage it’s worth recalling that most great causes begin as improbable ones. Gun ownership should never be outlawed, just as it isn’t outlawed in Britain or Australia. But it doesn’t need a blanket Constitutional protection, either. The 46,445 murder victims killed by gunfire in the United States between 2012 and 2016 didn’t need to perish so that gun enthusiasts can go on fantasizing that [“Red Dawn”](#) is the fate that soon awaits us.

Donald Trump will likely get one more Supreme Court nomination, or two or three, before he leaves office, guaranteeing a pro-gun court for another generation. Expansive interpretations of the right to bear arms will be the law of the land — until the “right” itself ceases to be.

Some conservatives will insist that the Second Amendment is fundamental to the structure of American liberty. They will cite James Madison, who noted in the [Federalist Papers](#) that in Europe “the governments are afraid to trust the people with arms.” America was supposed to be different, and better.

I wonder what Madison would have to say about that today, when more than twice as many Americans perished last year at the hands of their fellows as died in battle during the entire Revolutionary War. My guess: Take the guns—or at least the presumptive right to them—away. The true foundation of American exceptionalism should be our capacity for moral and constitutional renewal, not our instinct for self-destruction.

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## 8. “We Don’t Need the 2nd Amendment — We Need a Real Debate About Guns”

By Timothy William Waters

The Los Angeles Times, 13 OCTOBER 2017

URL = <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-waters-second-amendment-constitution-gun-control-20171013-story.html>



An array of guns at Markley's Gunrange in Watsonville, Calif. on Feb. 6, 2014. (Los Angeles Times)

Fifty-eight dead, nearly 500 injured, but our national debate will come through unscathed.

Like so many before it, the mass shooting in Las Vegas has resolved into a set piece between gun-rights advocates and gun-control advocates, yielding no fundamental change. Bump stocks may get banned, but that's as far as things will go, because in America, discussion ends with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment.

Worse, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment ends discussion. The other day, I heard an expert close a debate by shouting, “Too bad, it’s in the Constitution!” That really is too bad, because the Constitution is getting in the way of the conversation. There’s a lot to debate about guns and law. Do guns guard against tyranny? Do you support background checks? Do you like to hunt? There are good reasons to limit guns, and to have them. But the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment isn’t one of those reasons.

Sensible people disagree about what the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment means. Perhaps it ensures an individual right, forbidding restrictions on “constitutional carry.” Perhaps it refers only to militias, and therefore authorizes regulation. But everyone agrees that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment was an *amendment* — a change to the Constitution.

The 2nd Amendment makes gun-rights advocates righteous and intellectually lazy.

Maybe taking away guns *would* take away our freedoms, but talking about it won't. And the most important guarantee of our liberty is not the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment or even the 1<sup>st</sup> — it's Article V, which outlines the procedure for amendments. Article V is what makes the Constitution a living document, even for the most committed originalist.

I believe the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment ensures an individual the right to bear arms. I also believe the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment banned alcohol and that the Constitution originally installed the runner-up in presidential elections as vice president and protected my right to own slaves. As someone who likes a cold beer, believes people should be paid for work and doubts Hillary Clinton would have enjoyed being [President Trump](#)'s veep, I'm all in favor of the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> amendments. But I don't believe those things *because* they're amendments.

We don't disrespect the Constitution when we change it — like when we added the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, in 1791. We all want to live in a country governed by the rule of law, and that includes deciding which laws rule. Rights are important — and rigidly defined. Talking about rights can make it harder to talk about what's right. That's doubly true for a Constitution as sacralized as ours.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment makes gun-rights advocates righteous and intellectually lazy; instead of advancing plausible arguments about security, they too often point to text. It makes gun-control advocates deploy awkward, hypocritical arguments in order to fit them within the Constitution's limits. This leads to pointless debate about what is or isn't a militia, well-regulated or otherwise, when the only sensible thing to say is: Whatever the Founding Fathers meant, things are different today. We don't have militias, but we do have semi-automatic rifles and buildings with 32 stories. So what would you like to do?

As long as there's a 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, *any* regulation is plausibly suspect. We'll be haggling over silencers, magazines, background checks — “chipping away at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment,” as Trump has put it. We'll be quibbling over everything except the heart of the issue, which is what to do about the 300 million guns in this country.

Rights matter, and protecting rights carries costs. We need a real debate about our willingness to pay those costs. There is serious disagreement about whether guns protect liberty or threaten it — disagreement we don't have when it comes to the value of voting or free assembly. That alone is reason enough to reconsider the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment.

Our Constitution is unusually difficult to amend, but amendment is possible. So it's our responsibility to consider not just what the Constitution says, but what it *should* say.

And on guns, what the Constitution should say is nothing. The result might be greater freedoms in some states, greater restrictions in others. We could ban all guns, or not. If Americans want to carry concealed pistols and long rifles in public — if they believe guns prevent tyranny and save lives — they can demand their legislators keep the public square open. If Americans want stricter background checks, mandatory storage, even prohibition — if they believe the 90 lives lost daily from suicides, murders and accidents are not worth whatever else guns give us — they can demand that, too.

We don't need an amendment prohibiting guns or protecting them. We just need a 28<sup>th</sup> Amendment that repeals the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Constitution should be silent, because there's a lot we need to talk about.

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## **FIVE Follow-Ups:**

1. The Second Amendment to the US Constitution says this:

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

Therefore, in the USA, there is a *political* right of the people—whether as members of militias or as individuals—to own and use guns. But is there a *moral* right to own and use guns, and if so, what is its rational justification, and is this rational justification cogent?

2. Obviously there is a difference between *gun control* and *gun abolitionism*. But what is this difference, more precisely? And what, more precisely, are the differences between different kinds of gun control (say, minimal vs. moderate vs. maximal, etc.) or different kinds of gun abolitionism (say, abolishing ownership and use of guns for individuals only vs. abolishing it for both individuals *and* militias, etc.)?

3. Are there moral arguments for any of the different kinds of gun control? If so, what are they, and are they rationally well justified?

4. Are there moral arguments for any of the different kinds of gun abolitionism? If so, what are they, and are they rationally well justified?

5. Consider the following statement: “Assuming that there is a cogent moral argument for any of the different kinds of gun control or gun abolitionism, then the right means for implementing it/them politically, would be to amend the US Constitution by repealing the Second Amendment and ratifying another amendment for gun control or gun abolitionism.” Is this a correct statement? If so, why? Or if not, why not?

**TWO Links:**

1. “The Second Amendment and the Inalienable Right to Self-Defense,”

URL = <http://www.heritage.org/the-constitution/report/the-second-amendment-and-the-inalienable-right-self-defense>

2. “What Gun Control Advocates Can Learn From Abolitionists,” URL

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[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/history/2016/06/what\\_gun\\_control\\_advocates\\_can\\_learn\\_from\\_the\\_abolitionists\\_who\\_helped\\_end.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2016/06/what_gun_control_advocates_can_learn_from_the_abolitionists_who_helped_end.html)

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