

# POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

## TOPIC: GUN CONTROL

graphic by Sam Weston

*Over the last decade, one of the most contentious topics in the political world has been gun control. Although gun laws have largely remained stagnant at the federal level since the expiration of the Federal Assault Weapons Ban in 2004. Despite this, the debate over the proper handling of guns in the United States hasn't stopped. Recently, the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida has once again enflamed this debate. But what is the correct response to such a tragedy? Is additional control of the country's guns necessary or is a different response warranted?*



BY WILLIAM FARRIS  
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With the recent shooting in Parkland, the national conversation has once again shifted to gun control, and once again we see the same quotes from politicians on the matter.

The idea is that gun control in any form isn't the solution to the problem and the real cause to such events are issues such as mental health. This is a point many are quick to use in this situation that seems down right hypocritical when you realize that those same politicians still refuse to make any significant change to mental health policy or funding.

It is, of course, also worth mentioning that according to "Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the "Politics of American Firearms" by the American Public Health Association, only five percent of gun related killings between 2001 and 2010 involved mentally ill people.

This routine of mass shootings occurring followed by the use of other issues and problems as a defense against gun control has become so repetitive it verges on nauseating at times. It's not only unhelpful but starts to become disrespectful to those who have been affected by these shootings and advocate for change.

Common sense gun laws seek to help restrict who can get access to guns and to prevent the use of these weapons in shootings and numerous other gun-related crimes. According to The New York Times, out of the 292 guns used in the last 150 mass shootings in America around 167 of them were legally obtained. These laws do not, however, seek to eliminate the sale of guns or to take away guns from people.

The most common things that most of these laws seek to do is have tighter restrictions on who can purchase, have the process for buying guns involve better screening and a possible wait period before receiving the firearm and restrict or stop the sale of automatic and military grade weapons to civilians.

The idea of restriction and tighter controls and scrutiny does worry and frustrate gun enthusiasts, and that's truly

an understandable concern. No one likes the idea of something they enjoy being overly policed or restricted. But changes like these would go a long way to help curb violence and may be more than worth it since America was found to have the 31st highest gun violence rate in the world in 2016, according to NPR.

Laws like these are nothing new to the United States. When driving under the influence killed and injured people, we passed laws prohibiting drinking and driving; certain pesticides were shown to harm and kill people, and we banned the sale of those as well.

Passing other laws that don't necessarily restrict gun sales are also widely asked for but not talked about as often, such as laws that alert abuse victims when their abusers are buying guns, or closing the gun show loophole.

But the biggest thing that I and activists want to happen, is something. After the trend of shootings happening with little to no attempt at change, people just want some kind of reform.

Recently there has been news of bans on bump stocks and other accessories involved in shootings, which is a step in the right direction. But more needs to be done to help get to the root of the problem instead of contributing to the problem.

It can be chilling to look at the amount of weapons and the caliber that shooters were able to stockpile in recent shootings; and while a case can be made that we should see the warning signs, it is rarely that simple. Because the scary truth is that it's not just "bad guys" who commit these crimes. It can be almost anyone who's left in a dark place and makes bad decisions, and sometimes, there are little to no warning signs.

So our reaction shouldn't be to just pin everything on our mental health system, it does need reforms and more funding but it's not the root cause. We as a nation need to take a look at how we handle guns and decide if we can do more to curb what kind of weapons we allow on our streets.



BY IAN VAN ORDEN  
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Shortly after the ratification of the United States Constitution, the process to create what would become the Bill of Rights began. Twelve articles of amendment were approved by Congress as possible additions to the Constitution. Ten of these would be adopted, describing and guaranteeing rights and freedoms that should not be limited by the federal government.

Our right to keep and bear arms is described in the Second Amendment. The importance our founders placed in this right can be seen by its position in the Bill of Rights, listed just below our freedom of speech.

After nearly every tragedy involving guns, there is a push to limit this right, claiming that our safety is more important than the right enshrined in the Second Amendment. That we have the responsibility to remove the tools used by those with ill intent from the hands of all, including law abiding citizens, to stop further tragedy from occurring.

This is not the proper response.

Considered to be the father of the Bill of Rights, George Mason spoke about the topic of guns on several occasions. During the Virginia Ratifying Convention, Mason argued the importance of the public remaining armed, stating, "...to disarm the people; that it was the best and most effectual way to enslave them..."

Mason, and many of the other founding fathers, believed that personal liberty was only guaranteed while the public remained armed. That despite the dangers presented by firearms, the guarantee of our freedom was more important than safety.

The necessity to defend our freedom has not disappeared and never will. The Second Amendment is clear in its wording. "...the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

There are, however, many ways that guns can be removed from the hands of

those who shouldn't have them. One of the most common safeguards are background checks. According to Politifact, around 90 percent of citizens of the United States support background checks, including 74 percent of members of the National Rifle Association. Background checks that are already required by the federal government.

The problem does not largely begin when a gun is purchased. The last two mass shootings have highlighted this fact. In both cases, the Stoneman Douglas School shooting and the Sutherland Springs church shooting, the shooter had a history of mental instability. In the case of the school shooting, CNN has reported that there were as many as 39 calls made to the Sheriff's office over a six-year period. In fact, over the last decade the number was as high as 45.

In the case of Sutherland Springs, the shooter had been convicted of domestic violence by the US Air Force, barring him from possessing or purchasing a firearm. Unfortunately, the conviction was never recorded in the National Crime Information Center database, the database used for background checks, and he was able to purchase guns nonetheless.

In both cases, the law would have already prohibited one, if not both shooters, from possessing and purchasing firearms. Rather than creating new laws that would remove guns from rightful owners, the existing systems need to be refined and repaired so these mistakes do not happen in the future.

Guns are part of the fabric of our country. The right to own a gun was defined so early in our Bill of Rights for a reason. It is the backbone of our freedom, the guarantee that we will never lose our rights to a tyrannical government. The proper response to tragedy is never to limit liberty, no matter the circumstance. To do so is to jeopardize the core of what makes our country great.