

# In the debate over firearms, what is the cost of freedom?

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In light of recent school shootings and the subsequent calls for a restriction of gun rights, we decided to discuss the clash between freedom and personal safety. Would you be willing to sacrifice your right to bear arms in order to guarantee your child's safety from school shooters? Would you be willing to allow the government to exercise that much more control in the lives of law abiding citizens due to the actions of others? This problem is the heart of the gun debate. We will analyze both sides of the argument that is dividing America.

Individual freedom was one of the principles the United States was founded on, and its tradition has been respected by generations of Americans. Our founding fathers envisioned a nation whose government's goal was to protect the "certain inalienable Rights" of its citizens. At the end of the 18th century, this meant safeguarding citizens from tyrannical government (with the second amendment to the constitution) and promoting new Humanist rights such as freedom of speech, religion, and the press.

These rights, along with many others, came to dominate the political stage of western nations during the 19th and 20th centuries. How do these Enlightenment era ideals re-

late to U.S. politics and society today? This question is essential to have an understanding of why the gun debate in our country is so intense.

Americans value their rights more than anything else. As a result, many of us harbor serious resentment to the idea of the government telling us what we can and can't do with our lives. This resentment has been demonstrated countless times in the nation's history. We saw it in the disregard for Prohibition in the 20s, the Bundy standoff over a cattle herders use of federal lands without paying taxes, and even in daily disregard for simple traffic laws. These incidents, as well as the many like them, do not compare to the fervor the Second Amendment inspires.

Many gun-owning Americans feel that the right to bear arms is essential to protecting all the other rights granted to us by the Constitution. Many supporters argue that without an armed populace, there would be nothing to stop a government from restricting other rights that are even more important for a functioning democracy, namely freedom of speech, the press, and assembly.

Many Americans also feel that the government has no right to take a person's firearm away. A common argument is that the government should not have that level of involvement in a citizen's life, and that our country was founded on the belief in an armed citizenry as well as limited government. Both of these are valid arguments, and bring us back to the questions posed earlier: would you be willing to sacrifice your right to bear arms in order to guarantee your child's safety from school shooters? Would you be willing to allow the government to exercise that much more control in the lives of law

abiding citizens due to the actions of others?

These questions are difficult to definitively answer. On one hand, we as freedom-loving Americans should do everything in our power to prevent government overreach and protect our rights. On the other hand, our government should be able to keep its citizens safe from harm. The unfortunate truth is, in order for the government to effectively protect citizens from domestic threats

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such as school shootings or terrorist attacks, the government must have access to its citizens' personal information.

The events following 9/11 provide a good example. Airports all over the country have x-ray scanners that see through bags and people, dogs meant to locate explosives, and countless security officers whose sole purpose is to monitor the people preparing to travel. Despite the intrusive nature of many of the policies, such as bag searching and a full body pat down, we have come to accept these practices as being necessary for our safety.

However successful this government involvement has

been for safety, it has not been enough to convince many gun owners that similar policies towards guns could reduce the levels of gun deaths in the U.S. Many people are still adamantly opposed to measures such as increased background checks, restrictions on what types of firearms can be purchased, and a registry for gun owners so the government can track who owns what.

For many Americans, freedom is far more important than personal safety. This idea has been present ever since it was most famously espoused by Patrick Henry, who prior to the Revolutionary War said, "As for me, give me liberty, or give me death!". Whatever you think about these measures, one thing is certain: U.S. gun policy is unlikely to experience significant changes in the future, and the Second Amendment will remain a highly contentious issue.

But as many innocents are slaughtered en masse in movie theaters, concerts, and schools, it is not hard to see why people are calling for the banning of firearms. It is a common misunderstanding that the anti-gun camp wants to completely rid the US of firearms, when in fact they mostly want to limit what kinds of firearms are sold.

The guns called to be banned, most infamously AR-15 style rifles, are semi-automatic rifles with high capacity magazines. Since 2016, Nikolas Cruz, Devin Kelley, Stephen Paddock, and Omar Mateen have all used AR-15 style rifles to commit mass shootings with fatalities ranging from 19 to 58 people. While the gun itself doesn't kill people, it sure makes it a heck of a lot easier - and that's the problem.

Violent crimes will never stop no matter how much we push mental healthcare. Shooter Elliot Rodgers had visited

therapists his entire life and still decided to go on a killing spree. Banning all forms of violent media won't help either. That's why the focus needs to be on making it as difficult as possible for shooters to kill large numbers of people.

While the rate of mass shootings hasn't significantly risen, the average death toll has. Bringing down the death tolls comes at the cost of sacrificing the rights to own certain firearms. Banning the sale of certain firearms that are almost completely unnecessary seems a fair price to pay to protect the lives of innocents.

One man should by no means be able to slaughter 58 people using legally purchased firearms; however, we watched it happen less than a year ago. There is no way that Paddock could have killed 58 if he were limited to a handgun or a low capacity hunting rifle.

While more thorough background checks, mental health awareness, and anti-bullying campaigns are steps in the right direction, they are band-aids on the oozing wound that is America's gun problem.

Shooters are born from issues that are engrained so deep in our society that it is completely unreasonable to believe that can be fixed. Not to mention that making shootings more difficult to commit will also serve to discourage potential shooters.

This is a case where some small freedoms must be sacrificed in order to guarantee that American citizens can go to concerts, theaters, nightclubs, schools, and churches without the threat of being gunned down.

By limiting the type of weapons these psychos have access to we can bring down the death tolls and discourage potential shooters.

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