

PRO/CON: Is it time to pass tough gun control laws?

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Semi-automatic weapons are displayed at a gun range in Las Vegas, Nevada. Photo by: Wikimedia Commons

PRO: Outrage over Las Vegas must outlive news and election cycles

By now, the timeline after a mass shooting is predictable.

The community and country mourn. News outlets cover the story for several days, and politicians send their thoughts and prayers. People talk about changing gun laws, but the National Rifle Association (NRA) and its supporters largely remain silent or call for a cooling-off period.

And then, nothing changes and the news cycle moves on. All the while, the powerful gun lobby and the NRA, which influences politicians, prevents sane policies and laws on firearms.

This is a cycle we must break.

People against strict gun laws always use the same excuses. The Second Amendment, personal protection, recreational use, fear of a police state, and a general call for freedom.

None of these arguments pass a simple logic test.

The Second Amendment grants U.S. citizens the right to bear arms, but it was written in a very different time: there was no police protection, and there were no automatic weapons available.

The idea that people own guns for self-defense is impractical and glamorized. Very few gun-owning individuals have the experience, training and temperament to successfully defend themselves or others in an emergency situation.

Guns for hunting and sport are fine. That doesn't mean we should have loose purchasing laws, weak safety standards or massive stockpiles of automatic weapons.

There's also the slippery slope argument. It preys on people's fears that the government will turn into a dictatorship or completely ban guns.

As for real freedom, I'll reference Nelson Mandela, the revolutionary and former president of South Africa who said, "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

For this, we can see that gun ownership is a false freedom if all residents of a community or country are not free from gun violence.

I am not a liberal city boy. I grew up in rural Texas in a hunting family and lived my childhood with a gun in my hand, but there comes a time when you must think outside of your own lived experience.

Currently, deadly weapons are easily accessible and studies about the causes of gun violence are prohibited. Meanwhile, the super-political gun industry profits from death. These truths are, in turn, irresponsible, unthinkable and gutless.

We can't continue to hide behind falsehoods and political fear. We can't let elected officials mourn publicly then fail to do their job to protect us. We must enact strict and smart gun regulations.

Congress, as well as local and state bodies, must act now. Our elected leaders must be fearless and look past the next newscast or election. Nothing less than our freedom is at stake.

ABOUT THE WRITER: Don Kusler is the national director of Americans for Democratic Action, the nation's oldest progressive advocacy organization.

CON: Gun control laws won't stop Las Vegas-type massacres

To avoid another Las Vegas, people must be prepared.

Enacting more gun control laws would be the most ineffective and irrelevant reaction.

France has far stricter gun laws than the U.S. Yet, 130 were slain, mostly with illegal guns, in the 2015 Paris attacks.

"Protection" offered by law guarantees nothing. Every person is ultimately responsible for his or her safety. While critical in many contexts, armed citizens could not have helped in Las Vegas — flight was the only choice.

Normally, large events employ security guards armed with pistols and screen entrants with metal detectors. Such measures are useless when a killer secures a towering location above the event.

The security guard and officers who responded to the massacre acted heroically and effectively. But, could steps have been taken to prevent the carnage altogether?

That requires serious study, not just blaming the National Rifle Association for the murders.

Those who think a ban could prevent such killings ignore the nature of evil. Those that seek political gain by saying that "guns are evil" refuse to address the complex motivations of killers.

Relying on Congress to pass further restrictions on law-abiding gun owners would do nothing to stop mass murders.

California lawmaker Dianne Feinstein's immediate reaction to Las Vegas was to start writing a new law that would ban guns that somehow fire faster. Doing this made it clear that Feinstein did not realize that speed depends on the user's skill. The key piece Feinstein wanted to ban was the bump-fire stock, which was used in the Las Vegas shooting. However, proposals to ban the bump-fire stock are a sideshow to the real agenda of banning guns.

The Second Amendment of the constitution ensures that "the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." The Founders of our country wanted the people to be able to protect themselves from over-powerful governments.

Millions of people were murdered by strict and controlling governments over the course of the 1900s. It is ironic that those who fear the Trump administration are suggesting that only the government should have guns.

"Gun control" takes away the ordinary citizen's constitutional right to possess firearms. Just like our response to 9/11, our reaction to the Las Vegas massacre should be that we continue to live and stand strong as free Americans.

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