

1. **Mark your confusion.**
2. **Show evidence of a close reading.**
3. **Write a 1+ page reflection.**

In the shadow of the Las Vegas tragedy, there is a national debate about what might be done to reduce the amount of gun violence in this country. Below you will find two opinion pieces with opposing points of view on the issue of gun control.

The Case For Banning Guns

Source: Paul Waldman, TheWeek.com, September 6, 2017

Whenever America has one of its periodic mass shootings, you can count on seeing this particular exchange played out on cable news and in conversations across the country. The advocate for guns will say to the promoter of restrictions, "You just want to ban all guns!" to which it is replied, "No, I don't! I just want some common-sense regulation!" In anticipation of this criticism, Democratic politicians will regularly begin their remarks on gun control by saying, "I support the Second Amendment, and I'm not trying to ban guns. I just believe..."

So since no one else wants to say it, I will: Yes, I'd like to ban guns. Almost all of them, at least the ones in private hands.

Now before you begin penning your angry, threatening email to me (and so you know, you won't be the first or even the hundredth to communicate your friendly sentiments), let me be completely clear about what I'm not saying. First and most important, I know that guns are not going to be banned. And I know that with around 300 million of them already in circulation, collecting them would be an impossible task even if we tried (which we won't). I am fully aware of the Second Amendment, and of how the Supreme Court decided for the first time in 2008 that it confers an individual right to own a gun. This isn't a realistic proposal for legislation.

At times, however, it's worthwhile to step back from the concrete debates we're having, as important as those are, and spend a moment contemplating what kind of society we'd prefer if there were no practical impediments to radical change. If we could snap our fingers and create any situation we wanted, to start over, what would we do?

I'd suggest that if we were able to do that, we'd be much better off if we abandoned the absurd fetishism around guns that leaves us awash in so much blood and gore. America would simply be safer if we constructed our gun laws like one of our peer countries in Europe or Asia, in which private gun ownership is relatively rare and strictly regulated.

To gun owners, let me make something else clear: I get it. I get that the hunting rifle your grandfather passed down to you gives you a strong and meaningful connection to him. I get that guns are fun, and that just holding one, let alone firing it, can give you an intoxicating feeling of power and potency. I get that tricking out your guns with all kinds of cool accessories and reading about them and talking about them and thinking about them is hugely enjoyable for you. I'm a gearhead too, just about different hobbies. I'll even grant that you're one of the responsible ones, that you take safety seriously and that it burns you up that people who are less careful than you give gun owners a bad name.

But no matter how trustworthy you might be, you have to reckon with the price we all pay for the thing you enjoy: Over 30,000 Americans dead every year, and tens of thousands more maimed and paralyzed. Can you imagine how many restrictions on our rights we'd welcome if terrorists were killing 30,000 of us a year?

Oh, but you say, society has to pay that price, because this isn't just a hobby, it's my family's safety. Would you deprive people of the ability to defend themselves, even in their own homes? Well, if

we're imagining what it would be like to start over, then yes, I would. You wouldn't be able to shoot an intruder, but he probably wouldn't have a gun either.

We don't have to imagine the horror such a society would produce, because we have examples all over the world. Do you think defenseless homeowners in England or Japan or Singapore have to fend off a daily stream of home invaders breaking down their doors with homicide in mind? No, they don't. They have crime, and even murders. What they don't have is the kind of body count that we do. It's not because Americans are an inherently violent people, it's because guns are so easily available here.

Yet many on the political right continue to make the ludicrous argument that even if you took away everyone's guns, people would still have evil in their hearts, and if they really wanted to kill they'd find a way. Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) recently suggested that instead of passing restrictions on guns, "people are going to have to take steps in their own lives to take precautions," and if you find yourself in a mass shooting, you should "get small" to make yourself less of a target. It's like the weather — it's not like you can do anything about it, right?

But the fact is that the easier it is to get guns, the easier it is to kill many, many people. To take just one vivid example, on December 14, 2012, the very same day that Adam Lanza murdered 20 children at Sandy Hook Elementary School, a man named Min Yingjun entered the Chenpeng Village Primary School in China with equally murderous intent. He attacked 23 children. But since he was wielding a knife instead of a gun, every one of those children survived.

Imagine if we could save all those lives, the 11,000-12,000 gun homicide victims and the 20,000 gun suicides we have every year, a number that researchers tell us would be far smaller if the means to so surely and easily complete a suicide attempt weren't available. Imagine if we didn't have to pay the billions of dollars we spend every year treating gunshot victims. Imagine if police didn't kill 1,000 or so Americans every year, which they do in large part because they're trained to believe that anyone who looks at them funny might be about to shoot them. Imagine if our country could have that much less fear, that much less misery, that much less grief.

We may not often think about it in these terms, but if you're a gun advocate (or a member of the party that supports unfettered gun rights), you're saying that all this is just the price we have to pay for the joy some people take in their guns. No other developed country pays it, but we must.

So yes, if I had my way, there would be little private ownership of guns, and what there was would be highly regulated, with strict requirements on licensing, training, and record-keeping. You might be able to get an instrument whose very purpose is to kill, but you'd have to jump through some pretty serious hoops, and there would be lots of things that could disqualify you from that privilege. You could keep a small number of bolt-action hunting rifles, but anything else you'd have to go to a range to use, unless there were some extraordinary circumstance that absolutely demanded you keep a different kind of gun in your home. I realize that to some people that sounds like a nightmare.

No matter what legislation we might pass, even in liberal states that have increased restrictions in recent years, we won't get anywhere near banning guns. In particular, we won't address the biggest gun problem we have, which is not mass shootings but the daily carnage that claims around 90 Americans lives every day — and that means handguns, not military-style rifles or accessories like bump stocks. Precisely because we can't start from scratch, all we can do is trim around the edges, try to find ways to reduce the unending slaughter a little bit here and a little bit there.

Those things are absolutely worth doing — if there's a compelling reason why we shouldn't have universal background checks or why someone has a constitutional right to a magazine that holds 30 rounds or a device that turns their semiautomatic rifle into an automatic one, I've yet to hear it. Those are the questions we're actually going to debate, and we should.

But when you talk to people from other countries about America and guns, you always get the same incredulous questions. Are you people crazy? How can you tolerate this? And the answer is that while we might not be crazy, our gun reality is.

We may not be able to change the two centuries that brought us to where we are. But it wouldn't hurt to imagine something less awful.

The Case Against Banning Guns

Source: Shiha Dalmia, TheWeek.com, September 6, 2017

In the wake of massacres like the Las Vegas mass shooting, many Americans reflexively demand gun control. The instinct is understandable. But that doesn't mean such initiatives will be effective beyond the margins.

So what should we do instead? How about focusing less on preemptively thwarting prospective attackers and instead boosting the defensive capacities of prospective victims.

There is no doubt that Stephen Paddock was a gun nut. Police found 23 firearms in his hotel room and 19 more in his home. Even more chillingly, he converted his semi-automatic rifles that shoot only once when the trigger is pulled into something resembling automatic guns that shoot multiple times by using "bump stock" — a device that uses the recoil energy of the gun to partially reload. (This contraption basically eviscerated the existing laws that make it exceedingly difficult and expensive for private citizens to buy automatic weapons.)

All of this is boosting calls for more stringent gun regulations, especially since Paddock, who had no history of mental illness or crime, would have cleared every background check. And even Republicans and the NRA are jumping on board with plans to at least ban conversion kits that include "bump stock." No mass killer seems ever to have deployed this device before, but given the danger of copycats, banning its sale may make some difference at the margins. Or it may not. It's hard to predict.

But anyone who thinks that this — or similar measures — would significantly deter motivated shooters like Paddock, who meticulously planned his grisly attack, is fooling themselves.

There are about 300 million guns in this country — nearly one for every man, woman, and child. Congress can pass all the regulations it wants — and even declare an outright ban on guns. Anyone who wants a gun badly enough would still be able to get one. Substantially reducing America's stockpile of guns might make it more difficult for a potential killer to get a firearm undetected, but accomplishing that won't require a ban on guns, but a war on guns, whose constitutional implications are identical to those of the conservative war on terrorism. Indeed, it won't just require liberals to end their "truce with the Second Amendment" — as The New Yorker's Adam Gopnik wants — but also eviscerate other aspects of the Constitution.

There is no good or easy way to get Americans to voluntarily surrender their guns. Asking them nicely won't do the trick.

Liberals like to tout Australia's "buyback" programs as a possible model, but the success of that program in actually reducing the number of guns — and gun-related homicides — is deeply disputed. Indeed, one indication that the program wasn't all that it is cracked up to be is that illegal gun ownership in Australia is up again, necessitating yet another amnesty initiative by the country this year.

Besides, Australia's love affair with guns is nowhere as strong as America's — which is why Australia doesn't have the Second Amendment to begin with and America does. That, combined with the greater number of guns in this country, might make any buyback program prohibitively expensive for taxpayers.

So what is the alternative? Basically, forcing people to give up their guns. But the kind of intrusive searches of the homes and property of gun owners this would entail would make the Bush

administration's warrantless surveillance of telecommunications look positively restrained. Nor are Americans likely to simply lie down and take it. They will likely resist and fight back, which would require the government to crack down even more — or, in other words, declare war on its own people.

No matter how much liberals want a gun-free paradise, they can't simply wish away a deeply entrenched gun culture. If they truly want to reduce the number of firearms, they need to be prepared to get draconian.

But would that even be worth it? I am highly skeptical that reducing the number of guns will actually result in fewer mass killings. Paddock took 59 lives — including his own. But look at the worst mass murders in modern American history: 9/11, in which thousands were killed by hijacked airplanes crashing into buildings; the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 people with a homemade bomb and a truck. Meanwhile, the Nice attacker in France managed to kill 87 people — and injure 434 — by simply mowing them down with his truck.

The grim lesson is this: There is nothing we can do to completely stop all killers at all times. The possibilities for mayhem are infinite. A society's means to stop them are finite. Psychotics and terrorists will always find ways to exploit the cracks. No government can create an entirely foolproof system. So what can be done?

Employ modest firearm restrictions that can be enforced, sure. But also, encourage private entities to step up their own lines of defense. It is really quite amazing that Paddock could sneak in so much weaponry — and install security cameras in his room to monitor police activity outside — completely undetected by the Mandalay Bay. As I have written previously, that kind of thing would never happen in my home country of India, where after the 2011 Mumbai attack, every hotel runs every car, every piece of luggage, and every hand bag through a metal detector. Ditto for movie theaters and malls. Neighborhoods have installed their own private guards.

One reason Indians are taking security into their own hands is that their government is so inept that Indians have no illusions that it will protect them. But even where the government is more functional, it can't be omnipresent — and protect everyone from every single threat.

The American Hotel & Lodging Association declared after the Las Vegas shooting that it will re-evaluate the industry's security protocols. That's good. Other industries should follow suit.

The only way killers like Paddock — or Islamist terrorists, for that matter — have a prayer of being thwarted is if we fundamentally rethink our security strategy and build millions of points of resistance. Trying to go after their means (as liberals want to do) or targeting them by their motives (as conservatives want to do) won't cut it.

Possible Response Questions:

- Which of the opposing arguments do you side with? Explain.
- Did the writers leave anything out of their arguments that you would have added? Explain.
- Discuss some of the “moves” made by the writers to persuade their readers. Explain.
- Pick a passage from the article and respond to it.