

## America and its Guns - Fundamental Right or National Nightmare?

Task:

Read the short texts and answer the questions below.

### M1 Long line of shooting tragedies

At least 60 people were killed and more than 500 injured in the deadliest mass shooting in US history on October 2nd, 2017, when a gunman opened fire on an open-air music festival from the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay hotel and casino on the Las Vegas strip. The death toll surpasses the Orlando shooting at the Pulse Nightclub in June 2016, when 49 people were killed. Since 1982, there have been more than 60 mass shootings. Virginia High Tech University in April 2007, where 32 students and teachers were killed was the worst single act of *gun violence* in US history until the Orlando attack. Now, the Las Vegas massacre is leading the long line of sad examples of gun violence. In the majority of cases, the weapons were *acquired* legally.

### M2 Stricter gun control: politically unachievable?



Former President Obama recognized the *lunacy* of America's attitude to guns. His rage at the deaths witnessed during his time in office became ever more apparent with every high-profile shooting; yet the rage was matched only by his inability to bring about sufficiently *substantive* change because American politicians are unwilling to act on such a controversial issue. He admitted that his failure to pass "common sense gun safety laws" in the US was the greatest frustration of his presidency. His successor Donald Trump, by contrast, has sided with the pro-gun groups from the very beginning of his campaign and profited from his supporters' fears that their beloved right to carry guns may be restricted. He openly describes himself as a pro-gun champion who will defend citizens' right to carry guns and sees no need for tightening the gun laws. He assured the group and its members that they "have a true friend and champion in the White House". After every new heartbreaking incident of gun violence makes headlines, gun control advocates are renewing calls for tightening regulation on firearms. But on the federal level, the interest and attention in new legislation has led to almost no action in decades.



### M3 The right to bear arms

The Second *Amendment* (Amendment II) to the United States Constitution is the part of the Bill of Rights that protects the right of the people to keep and bear arms. Its somewhat vague meaning has made discussion of

these issues very *challenging*, as the contents are open to interpretation. The text of the official copy, when distributed to the states, reads in the following manner:

"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*."

### M4 What exactly is the NRA?

*Due to* the Second Amendment, gun ownership is constitutionally protected, and a powerful lobby exists to watch over that right. Any political attempt to reach stricter laws against gun *abuse* is quickly branded "unconstitutional" by these groups. For years, the National Rifle Association (NRA), the most powerful and most influential pro-gun lobby, has *fought tooth and nail* against practically any gun control. They fought for guns all over and *cowed* a generation of politicians. Could there be a change now - a crack in their power *in the wake of* the tragic shooting in Newtown? Past mass shootings have come and gone without any action. Many argue that the reason for this inaction is simple: politicians have been afraid to *take on* the National Rifle Association because of its enormous political power. It spent about \$25 million this past election cycle - \$17 million through its Political Action Committee, plus \$7.5 million through its affiliated Institute for Legislative Action. Will a massacre of children break the grip of the NRA?

### M5 Central part of America's culture

*Crucially*, opposition to gun control is not limited to ideological lobbies. For many ordinary Americans, gun ownership is synonymous with *self-reliance*, and they inhabit a culture in which hunting has both mythic and popular appeal. Any effort to *curtail*



significantly access to guns would not only face legal *objections* but also risk an ugly political war between town and country. Furthermore, the extraordinary *saturation* of American homes with weapons would limit the *impact* of any effort to reduce over-the-counter sales. Whatever steps are taken in the wake of new tragedies, guns will remain a central part of America's culture, as will gun violence. That may appear *baffling* to European eyes, but it is not something that can or will be quickly or easily changed.

### Vocabulary box

- gun violence - Waffengewalt
- to acquire – to receive
- hurdle – obstacle
- lunacy – madness
- substantive – wesentlich
- amendment – addition to the constitution
- challenging – herausfordernd
- to infringe – antasten
- due to – because of
- abuse – misuse
- to fight tooth and nail – to fight with everything you have

- to cow – to frighten
- in the wake of – als Folge von
- to take on – to compete against
- crucially – entscheidend
- self-reliance – self- government
- to curtail – to reduce
- objection – protest/ complaint
- saturation – Sättigung
- impact – effect
- baffling – unergründlich
- on high alert – in höchster Alarmbereitschaft
- stubborn - hartnäckig
- advocate – Befürworter

### Questions:

1. Give one or two examples of mass shootings in the U.S. (M1)
2. State, which kind of people often carry out mass shootings. In your eyes, what could be done to prevent that? (M2)
3. Contrast Ex-President Obama's and President Trump's attitude towards gun control. (M2)
4. State the background of US citizens' right to own guns. (M3) What do you think about this justification?
5. Explain the job of the NRA and why it embodies a big hurdle on the way to a fundamental change in gun control. (M4)
6. Explain the cultural aspect of guns in the U.S. (M5)