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Gun control or Gun Anarchy: Examining the options

There has long been a deadly plague tearing the United States apart. It has separated families, divided politicians, and crippled, or even ended, people’s lives. It is a plague that cannot be transmitted by air or touch, and yet, because of the actions taken by certain people, it has become so widespread. The name of this plague is mass shootings, and there have already been 279 cases of it up to August 31, 2018. As of 2019 (This essay being written in September of that year), there have been more mass shootings than days within the year. (Sylverstein) With the events taking such a shocking turn, many politicians, along with civilians, began to argue whether it was safe to allow ordinary people to be in position of the plague’s main tools: Firearms. While some consider gun control to be a necessary measure, others argue that their constitutional right to protect themselves would be hindered. The only reasonable means of even getting close to this argument’s much desired conclusion, is to explain the benefits of gun control, while also exploring the point of view of gun supporters.

On May 18th, 2018, a typical day at Santa Fe High School, Texas, was brutally interrupted when suspect Dimitrios Pagourtzis, 17, pulled the institution’s fire alarm, prompting students and faculty to evacuate. Once all of them started coming outside, he fatally shot 9 students and one teacher, causing unforgettable pain, unimaginable terror, and irreplaceable loss for all those involved. (Andone and Allen, 1). Survivor Michael Farina, 17, recalls being on the opposite side of the high school’s campus, and also thinking that the occurrence was a regular fire drill. While some students were hiding behind a car shop, others were attempting to jump the shop’s fence. Farina confesses that “I debated doing that myself,". Another student, by the name of Damon Rabon, said that it was, in fact, his substitute teacher who pulled the alarm, to alert the other students after he saw a “short male wearing a black trench coat carrying a backpack and armed with a sawed-off shotgun.” Rabon managed to put himself together for the press, describing the horror within his school that day: "It was just so scary, you could hear him walking, you'd hear him walking right past our classroom," Rabon said. "You could hear the shots, 'boom, boom, boom.' Thank God he didn't come into our classroom." A student named Laren Little describes hearing “people crying and screaming everywhere.”, as her mathematics class was interrupted. Zach Lawford, another student, confessed of hearing more than 20 shots coming from outside his classroom.

The incident is one of many that have occurred in the United States over the last few years. But it alone sparks many burning questions: How safe are students within their learning environment? How effective is the school police? What measures should be taken to avoid another such incident? And, perhaps most importantly, how did Pagourtzis gain access to a gun? The last question could be answered very easily, as, according to police, the guns used in the massacre were a .38 revolver and a shotgun. Both firearms were completely legally owned by the suspect’s father. Such an answer, however, poses a second question: How did Pagourtzis manage to take the guns with him? Were they not properly stored? Did his father not notice their absence? Did he believe some fabricated reason his son gave for using them? Or did he not manage to decipher some terrible inner struggle his son had been having? This last part ought to be given great attention, as, according to *Psychology Today*, the connection between mass shootings and mental illness has been largely overstated. Although there is research indicating such a connection to exist, other research has “[shown a connection](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/2/16399418/us-gun-violence-statistics-maps-charts) between the unique gun laws in the U.S. and the excessively high rate of mass shootings in our nation.” (Geher). So what exactly are these laws, and how do they suppress (or expand) gun violence?

Although there are restrictions on certain types of weapons, the Federal government still allows its citizens to bear firearms for their own protection. Specifically, restrictions in selected states include owning or selling machine guns, silencers, and short barreled shotguns. In other states, these guns and accessories are not completely restricted, but in order to purchase them, the buyer must sign a great deal of documentation, registering their weapons with organizations like the ATF and NFA. (FindLaw) But are stacks of signed paperwork an effective way to combat the losses of life shotguns and rifles cause? Making a weapon legal tells law enforcement nothing about an individual’s intentions, or, as it was in the case of Pagourtzis, the intentions of the people around them. There is another set of rules for purchasing weapons which makes the restrictions somewhat more clear, and it is known as the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act. The Act denies the ownership of firearms to persons who:

1. Were convicted of a crime that is punished with more than one year in prison.
2. Are fugitives of the law
3. Are using or are addicted to controlled substances
4. Are either confined to a mental institution or were ruled mentally ill by a court
5. Are undocumented immigrants
6. Were discharged from the United States Armed Forces dishonorably
7. Renounced American citizenship
8. Are subject to the restraining order of a court involving children and intimate partners
9. Were domestic violence convicts.

(FindLaw)

This elaborate set of rules seems like the perfect answer to the mass shooting issue. However, as a freshman college student who is seriously concerned about his own safety, I can confidently say this is just the first brick of a 100-storey building. Let us remind ourselves that most of the people who committed school and other shootings were not mentally ill, as stated in *TIME.* However, there is a huge difference between being mentally ill and emotionally disturbed. These laws do not seem to account for people who express disappointment in life, have violent tendencies, and struggle to fit into society, without necessarily being affiliated with a mental institution. It is true that such people are difficult to spot, but there are certain behavioral indicators that could effectively prevent future violence. These indicators, if not spotted by everyday people, could be revealed by making each and every U.S. citizen undergo a thorough psychological evaluation in specific centers prior to being granted ownership of a gun. Marksmanship classes by professionals should also be offered, in order to minimize the possibility of accidental injury. The candidates should also be tested on a lie detector when stating their purpose of buying the gun. Failure to participate in psychological testing should be punished by a fine and denial of firearm ownership. These ideas may seem very strict and potentially effective in reducing gun deaths. But not all Americans are fond of such radical changes.

According to ProCon.org, “The Second Amendment of the US Constitution reads, "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."” (ProCon.org). After the government enacted several strict gun laws, gun supporters cried out in one voice that their Second Amendment rights of self-defense was being violated. They even use statistical evidence to support their argument. These include the fact that “According to the National Rifle Association (NRA), guns are used for self-defense 2.5 million times a year. [[57](https://gun-control.procon.org/additional-resources/footnotes-sources/#57)] The police cannot protect everyone all of the time. 61% of men and 56% of women surveyed by Pew Research said that stricter gun laws would "make it more difficult for people to protect their homes and families."” (ProCon.org), as well as that “Despite Chicago's ban on gun shops, shooting ranges, assault weapons, and high capacity magazines, in 2014 Chicago had 2,089 shooting victims including at least 390 murders.” (ProCon.org)”. While all of these may be true, it is definitely not a good excuse to make gun ownership legal. The father of Dimitrios Pagourtzis, for example, most likely owned the guns for self-defense, and what occurred on May 18th, 2018, was a terrible “accident”. But as statistics show, it is just one of many, as “Between 2005 and 2010, 1.4 million guns were stolen from US homes during property crimes (including burglary and car theft), a yearly average of 232,400.” (ProCon.org). It isn’t difficult to realize that more gun ownership restrictions would reduce such thefts, therefore reducing the rate of crimes committed using these weapons. But even the seemingly excessive fines and testing I have previously mentioned aren’t enough to prevent more life losses, as it is proven in the example of a Tampa, Florida serial killer.

The 24-year old Howell “Trai” Donaldson III admitted to legally purchasing his weapon, a .40 caliber Glock gun, six days before he went on a killing spree. He confessed to having passed a background check to obtain it, and went to pick it up just two days prior to his crimes. (Jacobo and Winsor, 1). This fact does not come as a surprise to experts, who have already dealt with a long list of “legal shooters”, including the Santa Barbara attacker, the Las Vegas attacker, and even the notorious Virginia Tech attacker, among many others (Hawkins). What is, therefore, the point of legalizing firearms. Gun supporters argue that “The problem with such [gun control] laws is that they take away guns from law-abiding citizens, while would-be criminals ignore them.” (ProCon.org). But in my opinion, allowing everyone to possess firearms is not the solution to the problems. Since most shooters obtain guns legally, the most logical, and perhaps the best, resort, would be to restrict even legal gun access to every person living within the United States. But there is a problem with this approach used by gunowners to support their views, and that, indeed, requires a very careful approach.

The supporters of fewer gun restrictions express their fears about the fact that a government ban on guns would render the people helpless should the government become despotic. (ProCon.org) This is indeed a very realistic fear that must be addressed carefully. A powerless people against a totalitarian state is truly a thing of nightmares. However, what they fail to imagine is the opposite effect: If guns are allowed to be freely used, a tyrannical leader might as well choose to encourage violence and shootings. The fatalities will then increase dramatically, especially if citizens are influenced to do harm to themselves (If there is, for example, a nationwide suicide cult). While this may happen even without guns present, the tyrant might also choose to confiscate the guns already owned by people in order to secure their regime. In other words, if a tyrannical government were to ever be established, the presence of guns might not have played that big of a role.

As mentioned before, I am a freshman college student who is genuinely concerned about his friends’, as well as his own, wellbeing. I live and study at a relatively small campus, with what I would call a decent emergency response system. This same campus, however, is open from all sides, including the completely unguarded front gate, making it extremely easy for a potential perpetrator to enter, either through the nearby woods, or almost any other ways. It therefore makes me extremely uncomfortable to think that there are people with guns out there, all with different intentions, and that the structure of our building makes it a practical open house for them. There are, off course, Public Safety officers. But who knows how fast they can prevent the perpetrator from executing their plan, especially since they don’t know what that plan involves. Off course, schools could improve their safety by putting more guards and security systems, but that does not make them entirely safe. And although it is obvious that criminals can illegally obtain weapons even after a nationwide ban, I believe that such a ban would definitely have the potential to reduce mass shootings significantly.

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