

The following writing sample was a policy memo written for the Introduction to Policy Analysis course at UCSD. It examines what policy a given senator should support to address mass shooting deaths in the United States. This sample exemplifies my ability to synthesize policy factors in a succinct, clear manner.

To: Senator Gary Peters, Senate Chair of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

From: Brenna Farris, Political Science Student at the University of California San Diego

Subject: Mass Shootings Injuries in the United States

Introduction

The United States has already surpassed 200 mass shootings in 2023 as of mid-May (How many US mass shootings have there been in 2023?). A sharp rise in mass shootings has become an increasingly worrying issue for many Americans, causing stress in addition to injury (Abrams). There must be a policy to address this issue since lives are being lost and mass-shooting anxiety plagues those in the United States. This memo explains policy solutions to mass shooting injuries in the United States and recommends that the U.S. Congress ban assault weapons and large-capacity magazines.

Problem, Alternatives, and Evaluation Criteria

Mass shootings, or shootings where four or more people are hurt, have been increasing in the United States (How many US mass shootings have there been in 2023?). However, there are not many federal policies to prevent mass shootings and Americans remain divided on what types of policies they approve of (Schaeffer). Mass shootings are a negative externality market

failure. The gun market is meant to satisfy the demand of consumers who want guns for protection or recreational purposes. However, due to the firearm market's existence, mass shootings occur, a price not associated with the direct purchase of a gun.

I will explore the following policy solutions to mass shootings in the United States: a federal universal background check, a federal assault weapon and large capacity magazine ban, and arming school employees. The costs and benefits of these policies will be evaluated based on efficiency and security. An efficient policy will ensure that the benefits and savings of reducing mass shooting injuries outweigh the economic costs of the policy. A policy that exemplifies security will ensure that people's needs are fulfilled while placing the highest value on protecting people's physical security, such as their safety and ability to live.

Federal Universal Background Checks Analysis

Federal universal background checks would screen people before they purchase a firearm to ensure they are eligible for the purchase, and not limited by something like a criminal record (Kleck 414). Its benefits would include that people trying to obtain a firearm would have to pass certain federal criteria before obtaining the gun (Kleck 414). In addition, background checks for private gun sales have large bipartisan support, so this policy would likely be politically viable (Schaeffer). Its costs include that this policy would require funding to implement and a potential decrease in sales for gun markets. In addition, research has found that background checks are not related to mass shootings with fatalities, meaning this policy would not effectively save lives from mass shootings (Webster et al. 171).

Though there is a common perception that federal universal background checks would increase physical security for people in America, research has found that background checks do not reduce fatalities in mass shootings, homicides, or suicides (Castillo-Carniglia et al.

50)(Webster et al. 171). Therefore this policy is not likely to protect physical security. Also, there is a potential for economic costs to whoever has to pay for background checks, such as firearm dealers, customers, or the government. However, in California, the cost of a background check is twenty dollars, which is unlikely to pose a threat to the economic security or stability of people wishing to purchase a gun (Frequently Asked Questions).

Federal Assault Weapon and Large-Capacity Magazine Bans Analysis

Extensive research has found that banning assault weapons and large-capacity magazines leads to a decrease in mass shooting fatalities and injuries, a clear benefit (DiMaggio et al. 12)(Gius 281)(Siegel et al. 347). Research details 38 percent fewer fatalities from large-capacity magazine bans and that fatalities were 70 percent less likely to happen with a federal assault weapon ban (Siegel et al. 347)(DiMaggio et al. 12). The costs of this policy option include fluctuations in prices in the assault weapon market, especially during the initial policy implementation (Koper and Roth 239, 264). In addition, this policy would likely receive opposition from Republicans who largely disapprove of assault weapon bans, reducing its political viability (Schaeffer). Since this law would limit people's liberty to purchase a type of firearm, it may be subject to legal overturn as a potential violation of the Second Amendment (Schaeffer).

Banning assault weapons would increase physical security for people existing in most spaces in the United States. Considering most mass shootings occur in spaces outside someone's residence, like the workplace, school, church, outdoors, or in retail, a great reduction in mass shooting fatalities and injuries would protect people's physical security when they go to these spaces (Shadid and Duzor)(DiMaggio et al. 12)(Gius 281)(Siegel et al. 347). The costs for this

policy in security would be a reduction in economic security for actors with stakes in the assault weapon and large capacity magazine market (Koper and Roth 239, 264).

Arming School Employees Analysis

It is difficult to determine the efficiency costs and benefits of arming school employees because there is not much data on whether this policy would decrease mass shooting fatalities or fatalities. It is possible that this policy would be beneficial if school employees could use their firearms to stop shooters from hurting anyone. It could also have the benefit of creating economic growth in the firearm market. However, this policy would have an economic cost in order to train all employees and provide them with firearms. In addition, data has shown that a bystander only shot an attacker about five percent of the time, which is not a highly efficient percentage considering the economic cost (Buchanan and Leatherby). Research has also found that teachers do not want to carry guns at schools, making this policy not technically viable (Wood and Hampton 119). Data has found that school shootings make up approximately 16 percent of mass shootings, so this policy would not address the majority of mass shootings (Shadid and Duzor). This policy is largely opposed by Democrats and would consequently have difficulty passing through Congress, making it not largely politically viable (Schaeffer).

Arming teachers and school administrators has the potential to increase physical security in school mass shootings. If the teacher is armed, they may be able to protect themselves and their students from physical harm from a shooter. In addition, a shooter may be deterred by the knowledge that the employee has a gun, and not choose to violate others' physical security. At the same time, there is likely to be increased costs to physical security with this policy. Research has found that children could potentially access the teachers' guns and use them in physically harmful ways (Arming Teachers Introduces New Risks Into Schools). Also, school employees

may use the guns to harm themselves or others with or without intent to do so once they have access (Arming Teachers Introduces New Risks Into Schools).

Recommendation

Based on my analysis of the costs and benefits of these policies, I believe the United States government should choose to attempt to implement a federal ban on assault weapons and large-capacity magazines. This is the most efficient policy because it is the only one examined that has substantial data supporting that it would decrease mass shooting fatalities. It would create better physical security for everyday Americans and allow them to pursue their lives without as much risk to their physical well-being.

Implementation and Evaluation

This policy would be implemented by being passed through U.S. Congress. Senator Gary Peters could sponsor the bill to be presented in the Senate, where it would likely be referred to the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee due to its focus on stopping mass shootings. This bill would then have to pass through the Senate and House before being signed by the president and becoming law.

After assault weapons and large-capacity magazines are banned, this policy should be evaluated based on how efficient it has been at reducing injuries and fatalities from mass shootings. It should also be evaluated for how much it has increased and decreased physical security for people in America. Its efficiency can be measured by data analysts in the U.S. Department of Justice who can determine if the number of mass shooting fatalities and injuries has changed once implemented while accounting for confounding variables. In addition, these data analysts can calculate whether the number of lives saved was worth the effect these bans would have on the firearm market. This policy can be evaluated for how much security it has

affected through data analysts reviewing how much safer people will be from physical harm in the case of mass shootings. If there is a statistically significant increase in protection from mass shooting physical injuries, it can be determined that the policy increased security.

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