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### Tightening Gun Laws

We've all seen the several mass shooting reports that appear throughout the national media outlets everywhere. In fact, it is becoming so familiar that many people are beginning to feel numb to these horrifying junctures. From the Sandy Hook Elementary Massacre to the recent Las Vegas Strip Shooting and Texas Baptist Church Massacre, these outrageous acts of violence are becoming more commonplace in each of these last five years. With its increase in regularity, so has the debate about gun control. The liberal democrats want to enact stronger gun regulation whereas the conservative republicans do not. The conservatives say stronger gun regulation would be an infringement of the Second Amendment; The Right to Bear Arms. The Democrats argue that stronger regulations do not mean the banish of firearms, but simply a tougher process for shady individuals to obtain them. I, for one, believe The United States need to impose stronger gun regulations in order to reduce the rate of gun crime and violence. Simply allowing firearms to be used in the increasingly heinous fashion is tremendously irresponsible. The current congress of the United States should be ashamed of allowing such gruesome incidents to perpetuate themselves over the course of the past lustrum. With more restrictive gun laws, it is more than reasonable to believe gun violence and atrocious acts such as homicides will have a

much smaller role in the current society Americans experience today. Could you imagine turning on the local news channel and *not* hearing about a gun induced murder within 20 miles from home? Sounds like a ridiculous fantasy, but that may only be because our beloved nation has not taken steps to make it a reality.

Since 2009 there have been forty-five incidents classified as mass shootings in the United States. (A mass shooting is typically defined by 4 deaths or more as with this study). Nearly half of these shootings have occurred in just 3 short years (Follman, Aronsen, & Pan). I believe this statement gives a little bit of perspective on just how frequent mass shootings in particular have become. As of November 7th, 2017, there have been 52,655 gun related incidents. The death-toll reaching 13,233 and another 27,074 resulting in gun related injuries (Gun Violence Archive). There is an overwhelming amount of evidence to support that there is less gun violence where there are more firearm regulations. This has been discovered even despite the fact that the National Rifle Association (NRA) tries to bury such research deep beneath their filthy politics. Believe it or not, the NRA is an extremely powerful association that has a dramatic influence over our government. Especially when you consider the amount money they possess as well as the number of their members. Since our country has such a large gun culture it is only natural they have such a dedicated following. However, the number of members they have is unclear. While the association claims that membership is close to five million people, analysts put the figure closer to three million (US Gun Control). The organization has been known for artificially inflating figures in the past. It is components like these that make them such a strong figure when it comes to manipulating legislative figures and results.

Through extensive research ranging from newspaper articles to FBI reports, I believe, hand guns and assault rifles are weapons designed for killing people, and they have zero right to be sold in the free market of the United States under the present laws and regulations the government has set in place. With the current gun-regulations, firearms are simply too easily accessible to criminals and potentially dangerous people. Private gun dealers are able to sell without background checks with little to no accountability. Background checks are only held in official gun retailing stores and are practically worthless when it comes to people who could be dangerous but do not yet hold a criminal record. In fact, some states allow former criminals to purchase fire-arms as long as a decade has passed since they have completed their sentence, probation, parole, or suspension of a sentence (Andrews). Some states such as Louisiana do not even require licenses to carry rifles or shotguns. These are not just cherry-picked examples, many of these issues are country wide and may one day pose a threat to our family, friends, or neighbors. The Democratic Party is on the forefront for advocating change in gun policies. Contrary to popular belief, they are not pushing to ban firearms, but simply to make the selection of people who are allowed to wield them, slimmer, in order to help our communities become safer places.

First off, let us break down the arguments. To start off, whenever the gun debate begins, gun rights advocates always shout about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment; The right to bear arms. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment makes gun rights advocates righteous and intellectually lazy. To begin, let us start with what this amendment actually states. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of the United States 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” (amend.II, sec. 1). Here we can see that the Second Amendment does give the right to keep and bear arms, but gun control is just as much of a part of this decree. In the text of the amendment that refers to a “well regulated Militia,” suggests as much.

The militia of the founding era was the body of ordinary citizens capable of taking up arms to defend the nation. While the Founders sought to protect the citizenry from being disarmed entirely, they did not wish to prevent government from adopting reasonable regulations of guns and gun owners (Winkler).

Although, many Americans believe gun regulations are a modern invention, the Founding era of the United States had laws regulating the armed citizenry as well. Some examples include; laws that required armed citizens to appear for gun inspections, government registries that determined if citizen-owned firearms were appropriate for military service, and finally, perhaps the most important, had broad bans on gun possession by people deemed *untrustworthy*. Keeping likely dangerous criminals and killers from having possession of such dangerous weapons. This was even before semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles. Therefore, if these laws were set in place directly after the writing of the constitution it is not unreasonable to assume that law-makers are not restricted from creating stronger gun regulations. With this information in mind, it leaves the Second Amendment argument used by gun-supporters with little impact. History has shown that legislature is not impeded from putting laws into place that can prevent gun violence as well as the recent uptick of mass shootings. Yet, “The right to bear arms”

remains the number one pro-gun rights argument. Another controversy regarding gun policy happens to be a line from NRA powerhouse and Vice President, Wayne LaPierre, “The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.” This suggests that the best way to solve gun violence is by selling more guns. Not only does that increase the chance of more gun shootings, but it also puts the lives of “good guys” and the lives of others in mortal danger (Cohen). To make matters worse, these “good guys” with guns often make situations worse. Most of these “good guys” will have no training in law enforcement and no understanding of what to do during an active shooter situation. They lack the training that allows them to make split second decisions that can ultimately cost people their lives. These good Samaritans that appear with guns in hand ready to “save the day” have been killed in action as well (Follman). When the NRA or gun owners of America are asked to make comments when such events unfold they refuse to take responsibility, and have been noted saying “life is full of risks” (Cohen). Gun advocates also argue that firearms are used for self-defense. In fact, Gun Owners of America has a section on its website called “Just for Skeptics” that states, “Americans each year use guns 2.5 million times in self-defense” (McLaughlin). Not only has Harvard said this is untrue, but almost statistically impossible. The Harvard Injury Control Research Center found that guns are used for more in acts of intimidation rather than self-defense (McLaughlin). Considering we live in a nation where there are more than 300 million firearms it is appalling how little guns are used in self-defense. While purchasing a gun will indeed further enrich the firearms industry, the facts will show it is very unlikely it will increase personal safety. A fourth argument that anti-gun control advocates provide is, “No law will

stop a determined gun man.” While it is true, the more intelligent the gun man the less likely laws will prevent his intended plan of action, it does not follow that every gun man is as forward thinking. In fact, such articulately planned cases are the exception, not the rule.

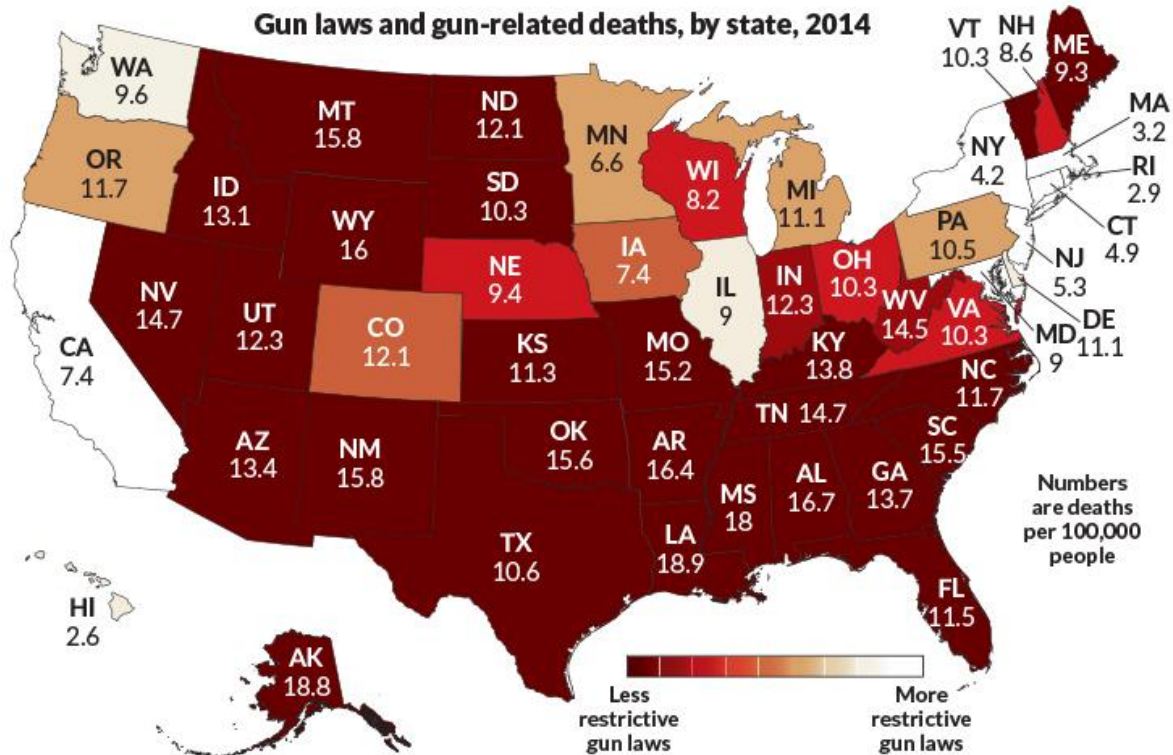
Laws that don't prevent carefully planned acts of violence (the exception) may still prevent less carefully planned or random acts of violence. Following the “no law will prevent a determined gun man” logic, there is no point in locking one's doors at night, since locks won't stop a determined (and expert) intruder (Anti-Gun Control Arguments).

Just because a law does not deter all crime, it does not make a law useless. It is better to have laws set in place that will at the very least limit the amount of gun violence that occurs. It will keep not only our family and friends safer, but our law enforcement as well. Stricter gun laws can achieve this, congress only needs to sign the bill.

Now that some of the oppositional arguments are tied up, it is time to dig deeper into some of the issues regarding the United States' gun control regulations. Starting with how the lack of gun control effects gun violence. The southern region of the United States, and uncoincidentally, the more conservative region of the country, contains 9 of the 10 states with the weakest gun regulations. These states include Louisiana, Alabama, Arizona, Mississippi, South Carolina, New Mexico, Missouri, Arkansas, and Georgia. These states with the weakest gun laws in America also collectively suffer from a level of gun violence that is more than twice as high as the 10 states with the strongest gun laws, according to a new state-by-state analysis of gun violence (Peters). The image provided below will act as a

visual guide to demonstrate just how much of a difference gun laws make for each state.

The states with loose gun restrictions have much higher death rates than those that do not.



This map as you can see show's each state's gun restriction law levels and death rates per 100,00 people in relation. Those with weaker gun laws have much higher death rates than those with tougher gun laws.

Pro-guns or not, when presented with such a comparison, it is hard to deny that there is a clear link between weak gun regulation and high levels of gun violence. For example, in Louisiana, gun owners do not need a permit in order to purchase a firearm. Buyers do not have to register their gun or need a license to own one. And although, Louisiana state laws *do* require a permit to keep a concealed handgun, there is no permit required to carry assault rifles or shotguns (Andrews). Furthermore, the state has enacted "castle doctrine", meaning deadly force is considered justifiable in a court of law to defend against an

intruder in a person's home. The most concerning law that 8 of these 10 open gun policy states have enacted is the "Stand Your Ground" Law. This law states that "anyone in a place 'where he or she has a right,' including public spaces, is not obligated 'to retreat' if faced with a threat and 'may stand his or her ground and meet force with force'" (Lee). In other words this law allows people to use deadly force against another in any place he or she has the legal right to be, as long as they reasonably believed they or someone else faced imminent death or great bodily harm. This law only promotes the use of guns in situations that may not be called for violence. Not only that, but the law is subjective as well. Many people have different ideas of a situation that can justifiably be called an "imminent threat." The law is so poorly defined that even some of the most outrageous cases get dismissed.

In Louisiana of 2015, a grand jury cleared 21-year-old Byron Thomas after he fired into an SUV filled with teenagers after an alleged marijuana transaction went sour. One of the bullets struck and killed 15-year-old Jamonta Miles. Although the SUV was allegedly driving away when Thomas opened fire, Lafourche Parish Sheriff Craig Webre said to local media that as far as Thomas knew, someone could have jumped out of the vehicle with a gun. Thomas, said the sheriff, had "decided to stand his ground" (Lee).

Apparently, not only does "Stand Your Ground" allow you to shoot first and ask questions later, but it also justifies pursuing a retreating "imminent threat" and murdering them as well. It seems to be just another law put in place so gun-rights activists can neglect



all safety measures and contribute to our country's asinine gun violence with no repercussions.

Another issue that seems to have a very minimal effect in lowering gun violence would be the background checks. Background checks are an exceptionally weak form of gun regulation, since 1998, there have been more than 230 million background checks made. Of these 230 million background checks, there have only been about 1.3 million denials (National Instant Criminal Background Check System). That means, only 0.005% of American gun applicants have been refused a gun. Not only are they limited in effectiveness but, people who are supposed to be exempt from buying guns from this system still sometimes manage to pass it anyway. One of the largest preventions a background check failed to prevent was the Sutherland Springs Baptist Church Massacre. On November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 gunman Devin P. Kelley, killed 26 people and injured another 20, who were attending a Sunday church congregation (Rosenberg, Eli, et al., 2017). Devin's early life was filled with warning signs. He was being faced with military criminal charges, had a conviction after beating his wife and stepson, charges of animal cruelty, mental health concerns, and made threats against his family members. With as many charges and reports filed against him, Kelley still managed to pass a background check and *legally* purchase an assault rifle. Not only are background checks, a limited safety precaution but private arms dealers are not required to do background checks from buyers at all, and are held at little to no accountability for their buyer's actions.

During a 2011 NYPD undercover operation of Armslist and similar sites, in which investigators pretended to be buyers who stated they couldn't pass a background check, 62 percent of sellers they contacted said they were willing to sell them a gun anyway (Raja 2016).

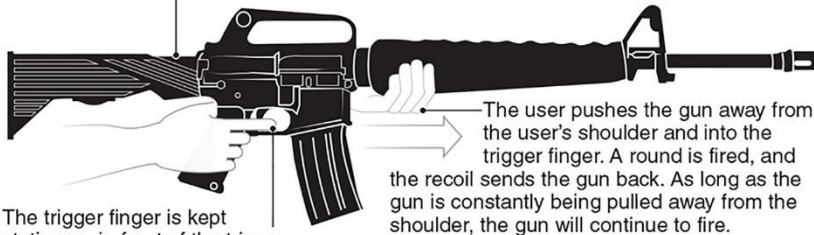
A frightening result. A handful of these sales have resulted in death. People who could not previously pass a background check have gotten guns this way and have used them to kill people who they have felt done them wrong in the past. Radcliffe Haughton for example, killed his ex-wife just a day after he purchased a pistol in a McDonald's parking lot (Raja, 2012). Just one of many people killed from this background check free loophole.

Last but certainly not least, the United States allows gun accessories like extended magazines and bump stocks. Extended magazines allow gun wielders to fire more bullets at a time before needing to reload. Bump stocks are an accessory that modifies a semi-automatic rifle into an all-out machine gun, making it possible to fire 400 rounds per minute (Beckett). (Please refer to the bump stock image below as it describes how bump stocks work). Larger magazine sizes, like 15 or 30-round magazines, are common among American recreational shooters, and even larger 100-round magazines are available for

## Bump stocks

*Although automatic weapons — those that continue firing as long as the trigger is pulled — have been banned in the U.S., modifications known as bump stocks or reciprocating stocks allow semi-automatic rifles — those that fire one bullet for every trigger pull — to be fired continuously.*

The shoulder stock is designed to slide toward and away from the user's shoulder.



The trigger finger is kept stationary in front of the trigger.

The user pushes the gun away from the user's shoulder and into the trigger finger. A round is fired, and the recoil sends the gun back. As long as the gun is constantly being pulled away from the shoulder, the gun will continue to fire.

Source: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

Graphic: Tribune News Service

This image here demonstrates how a bumpstock utilizes a rifle's recoil, in order to fire more bullets at a more rapid pace, similar to a machine gun.

legal sale (Beckett).

The Las Vegas shooter

himself used a bump

stock on his AR-15 as

well as magazines that

held bullet capacities of

100. Combining these

two factors made a

huge contribution to the 59-person death toll, as well as the other 500 people who were injured. If he had only been able to use magazines that held only 20-30 bullets instead, he would have had to reload more, thus allowing more people to retreat to safety. Such accessories are completely unneeded and are seemingly designed for the sole purpose of killing large quantities of people. Bump stocks and extended magazines are not for sport, or for hunting, so it really begs the question; what purpose is there to own them? Recent studies have also found a correlation between mass shootings and extended magazines. States that have imposed bans on high capacity magazines are associated with a 63% lower rate of mass shootings (Petulla). Another study has revealed that extended magazines have been used in over 40% of the murders of police as well (Petulla). Law-makers need to stop aiding these dangerous individuals with the tools they need to make assault rifles and handguns more threatening than they already are. Additional laws must be put in place in order to make our communities safer places.

Many people in the United States don't believe the issue about guns affect them therefore avoid the topic. However, serious matters such as firearm regulations should not be ignored. Many Americans don't take notice to a problem until it directly effects them. This was the case for a cousin of mine. She was downtown drinking outside of a bar with her friends when a drive by shooting occurred. One of the stray bullets ricocheted off a metal bench nearby and hit her in the leg. She eventually recovered after 3 months of physical therapy and a slow healing bullet hole disappearing from her leg, but she has not quietly backed down from this issue. It is now more important to her than ever. She knows that bullet could have instead hit her in the head and possibly killed her. If possible I would like people to seriously consider the dangers of loosely regulated gun sales *before* getting shot. It is better to be proactive rather than reactive.

If we, the American people, decide not to accept mass shootings and gun violence as the new "norm" as many politicians and news anchors have already began to calling it, we can make a dramatic difference. It may not completely eliminate all mass shootings but it will certainly help make them instances of rarity rather than regularity. Not only could it limit such frightening situations, but it would also reduce the loss of innocent lives like those who were at Sandy Hook or Las Vegas. Nearly half of congress has been pushing for stronger gun control to begin with. The American populace just needs to give them that extra push to make it happen. It does not require mass protests or even picketing. Simple phone calls or emails to our representatives work just as well. As long as our voices are heard, our congressmen will either obey or risk reelection. As their constituents it is their duty to represent our values and goals. Let us all work together to make our communities

safer places and advocate for gun control. We truly can make a difference. Reducing gun law loop-holes, improving background checks, and eliminating laws such as “Stand Your Ground” are all simple suggestions we can put forth to try and get the ball rolling. Fewer guns means fewer deaths. The evidence is there, despite what the NRA and gun corporations would like you to believe.