

PRO/CON: Is it time to pass tough gun control laws?

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Semi-automatic weapons are displayed at a gun range in Las Vegas, Nevada. Photo by: Wikimedia Commons

PRO: Outrage over Las Vegas must outlive news and election cycles

The story is becoming so common we can almost predict the timeline.

A mass shooting terrorizes a community. The community and country cycle through fear, anger and sadness. News outlets cover the story for several days. Politicians send their thoughts and prayers. Change in our gun laws is bantered around, and vigils are held. The National Rifle Association and its legal and political allies largely remain silent or call for a cooling-off period.

And then ... nothing meaningful happens as the news cycle shifts to something else and we get distracted by cat videos on social media or the latest episode of our favorite television show. All the while, the powerful gun lobby tamps down any attempt to legislate a more sane set of policies on firearms.

This is a cycle we must break.

Our laughable, shameful system of gun regulations is propped up only by romanticized and dishonest arguments. It's always the same set of excuses: the Second Amendment, personal protection, recreational use, fear of a police state, and a general call for freedom.

None of these arguments pass a simple test of logic.

The Second Amendment was written in a very different time when public safety systems were nonexistent and well before automatic weapons were available. The personal protection angle is as impractical as it is glamorized.

Are there some individuals with the experience, training and temperament to successfully engage in self-defense? I'm sure there are. But the average gun owner, thrown into an emergency situation, is more likely to freeze, mishandle their weapon, or injure innocent bystanders than neutralize a live danger.

Recreational use is fine, but why on earth does enjoying sport require loose purchasing and safety standards or massive stockpiles of automatic weapons? The slippery slope argument, preying on fears of totalitarian dictatorships like that of Nazi Germany or a complete ban of guns, is simply a tactic meant to close our minds.

As for freedom, I'd reference Nelson Mandela in saying, "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." He was talking about freedom from oppression and discrimination, but the sentiment applies to so much more.

If all residents of a community or country are not free from the terror of gun violence, then the romanticized freedom of gun ownership is a false freedom.

If you are in the pro-gun camp, you are likely thinking at this point, "This urban liberal doesn't understand me."

Think again. I grew up in rural Texas in a hunting family and lived my childhood with a gun in my hand. I enjoyed hunting and shooting for sport, but there comes a time when you must think beyond yourself and the insulation of your community about something larger.

It is absolutely irresponsible to continue allowing such easy access to deadly weapons, unthinkable to continue prohibiting research into the causes of gun violence and gutless to continue letting the politically abusive gun industry profit from death.

It is far past time to continue hiding behind falsehoods and political fear. Past time for elected officials to simply mourn publicly and fail to do their job to protect us. And past time to enact strict and smart gun regulations.

The all-or-nothing mentality driving our inaction must end, and Congress, as well as local and state bodies, must step in now. Our elected leaders must cast off their fears and look past the next newscast or election. Nothing less than our freedom is at stake.

ABOUT THE WRITER: Don Kusler is the national director of Americans for Democratic Action, the nation's oldest progressive advocacy organization.

CON: Gun control laws won't stop Las Vegas-type massacres

To minimize the chances of another horrific massacre like that in Las Vegas, imaginative risk assessments must be made and acted on by ordinary citizens, organizations that sponsor events, and state and local authorities.

The most ineffective, irrelevant reaction would be for Congress to enact yet more gun control legislation.

While the federal Gun Control Act is as complex as antitrust law, it did nothing to prevent the murder of 58 innocents.

France has far stricter gun laws than the U.S., but 130 were slain, mostly with illegal guns, in the 2015 Paris attacks.

In reaction to such Islamic State-inspired assaults, the European Union imposed diktats against law-abiding gun owners. But it did nothing to ban motor vehicles after a single terrorist murdered 86 with a cargo truck in Nice in 2016.

Pseudo protection offered by paper laws guarantees nothing. Every person is ultimately responsible for his or her safety. While critical in many contexts, armed self-help by concertgoers was no option in Las Vegas. Flight was the only choice.

Risk assessments for mass events typically involve security armed with pistols and the screening of entrants with metal detectors. That is irrelevant when a killer such as Stephen Paddock secures a towering location above the event. He was not screened and was out of range of handguns.

In such a venue with 22,000 guests, security should include trained snipers with long-range, precision rifles and high-power, night-vision scopes.

Paddock shot at a distances upward of 300 yards. Had two or three riflemen been on duty with the right equipment, they might have been able quickly to spot the room from which he was shooting and dispatch him.

The security guard and officers who responded to the massacre acted heroically and effectively in identifying and assaulting the killer's room, prompting him to commit suicide. But could steps have been taken to prevent the carnage altogether?

That requires serious study, not the Hillary Clintonism of blaming the National Rifle Association for the murders and lamenting how much worse the carnage would have been had the killer used suppressors to reduce the firing noise only to the level of a jackhammer.

Fantasizing that a ban on this or that physical object will remove the capacity of the demented to do evil is a form of animism. Reducing evil to an object without addressing the complex motivations that drive killers to commit unspeakable acts serves no purpose other than padding political talking points.

Relying on Congress to pass further restrictions on law-abiding gun owners would do nothing to stop mass murders.

California Sen. Dianne Feinstein's immediate reaction to Las Vegas was a bill banning guns that somehow fire faster, not realizing that speed depends on the user's skill. Proposals to ban the bump-fire stock are a side show to the real agenda of banning guns.

The line in the sand since the National Firearms Act was passed in 1934 is whether the gun fires only one shot with a single pull of the trigger — such as an ordinary semi-automatic — or multiple shots automatically with one trigger pull as with a machine gun. Those who never let a tragedy go to waste seek to blur the difference.

The Second Amendment provides that “the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” The Founders adopted this to allow the people to protect themselves from tyranny.

Countless millions were murdered by oppressive governments in the 20th century. How ironic it is then that those who denounce the Trump administration as fascist propose that only the government have arms.

“Gun control” is code for unconstitutionally criminalizing the possession of common firearms by ordinary citizens. Just like our response to 9/11, our reaction to the Las Vegas massacre should be that we continue to live and stand strong as free Americans.

ABOUT THE WRITER: Stephen P. Halbrook is a senior fellow with the Independent Institute in Oakland, California, and the author of “Gun Control in the Third Reich” and “The Founders’ Second Amendment.”