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The Essence of “Now” on Gun Control

“There was this naïve part of me that wanted to believe that we were all going to be okay. And when I got up I knew that wasn’t the case. We started running, I was pressing this stranger’s tank top to my face, and we were passing people on the ground and we just knew that they were dead. It was so hard to keep going because I just didn’t want to leave these people on the ground. I realized that they were never going to return home, and that they were somebody’s son or daughter or mom or wife or husband.” This is an account by Natalie Grumet, a survivor of the horrific 2017 Las Vegas mass shooting at the Route 91 Harvest music festival. A part of her face got blown off, and her left jaw bone was completely fractured (Silman 18). Similar stories and accounts can be observed all across the US: 2 killed and at least 12 injured in a shooting at a Halloween party in Illinois; 1 killed and 4 injured at a boxing event in Florida; 2 killed and 5 wounded at a party in California; 1 dead and 9 others injured at another party in Texas; 2 killed and 2 injured near a gas station in Kentucky; 2 killed and 2 injured in a commercial area of Colorado --and all of these in only the span of a single weekend (Cullinane 21). How has it come to this? How is it that in America, one of the greatest and most respected countries in the world, that such a thing occurs?

Gun violence has always been a touchy issue in the United States, and most of the American public is no stranger to the great controversy surrounding it. Does it really need to be repeated? The fact that politicians still accept vast sums of money from the NRA (National Rifle

Association), the fact that mass shootings and gun violence are still rampant, and the fact that guns are still somehow glorified by many? There's only one appropriate description and label for gun violence in this country: a sick disease that needs to be stopped, and as I have affirmed and reaffirmed through my research and personal experiences, this is not just a political opinion or stance. It is a simple fact.

The absence of robust gun control policies and mechanisms deals massive damage financially and in terms of physical violence/injury. In 2019, killings involving a gun accounted for almost 75% of all homicides in the US, and nearly 24,000 suicides involved guns (BBC 21). And despite a "26% drop from last year's holiday weekend," nearly 250 people were killed and over 600 injured by gun violence in the U.S. over this year's Fourth of July weekend (Tucker et al. 21), not to mention how there have already been 599 mass shootings in America this year alone (Cullinane 21). [Cracking down on and confronting the issue of gun violence by major American cities seem to be responsible for the decline (Tucker et al. 21).] Mass shootings ("an incident with four or more people killed or wounded by gunfire, excluding the shooter," according to CNN) are still at large (Tucker et al. 21). Furthermore, gunshot wounds are costing American taxpayers 500 million dollars per year, according to a study by the Urban Institute, as most victims of such wounds are uninsured or on public insurance (Smith 14).

The United States struggles with gun violence a lot more than other developed countries (BBC 21), and it should be no surprise. According to a Small Arms Survey done in 2018, there were 120.5 firearms per 100 residents in the US (BBC 21), and gun sales have ballooned during the pandemic (Schaeffer 21). Obtaining a gun in America is an easy feat: denials for gun purchases based on background checks are rare (as in the case of Dylann Roof when he purchased a Glock despite having racist symbols on Facebook and being arrested earlier in 2015

for trespassing/drug possession), gun shows (which don't have background checks) are frequent, and friends/family members can easily give guns to one another (Smith 15). Opponents of more stringent gun control laws may claim this to not be the case by making arguments such as how background checks for purchasing a firearm are robust (Burrus 21), but the ease of obtaining a gun from a source such as a gun show remains to be refuted.

What are the possible merits to a civilian owning a gun or guns? Well, according to the Pew Research Center, personal protection is the most frequently used justification by gun owners for owning a firearm (Schaeffer 21). There is a lot of controversy over how many people exactly use guns in self-defense due to issues like what exactly constitutes defensive gun use (Raphelson 18). However, the latest findings (consisting of a Harvard University analysis) reveal that people rarely use guns for self-defense, and a widely cited study by criminologists Gary Kleck and Marc Gertz placing defensive gun uses in the millions has been found to be flawed (Raphelson 18). In fact, owning a gun puts oneself and others more at risk of danger in cases where one may be blinded by anger, jealousy, hate, or any combination of these. And then, of course, there are the justifications that guns are needed for hunting and that they are needed for rebelling against the government if it, for instance, becomes too corrupt or problematic. Touching on the first contention, yes, there will be a loss for hunters. But there's always archery as a means of hunting, as humorous as that may sound, and it's a small price to pay for an enormous saving of both lives and money. Moving onto the second, let us imagine for a moment that an overly corrupt American government does arise. As written in the Huffington Post, "[A]rmed Americans have never been able to overthrow their government, even in the early years of the country... It's doubtful the NRA and '2nd Amendment option' people recall this day in U.S. history when claiming a well-armed citizenry can frighten the government" (Goodman 14).

Armed resistance is only likely to result in a slaughter of the rebels, especially given that they would likely be facing the most advanced military on the planet.

I recognize the deep meaning the 2nd Amendment has and has had for this country. It is a symbol of freedom, and it is a symbol that this is a country for the people. The government is at the people's mercy. However, the immediate safety of the people themselves is should clearly be a priority, and if we're just shooting each other recklessly, how is that doing us any good?

Recently, I've found myself in the habit of instinctively surveying my surroundings very carefully and looking back every so often whenever in public or at school. It's been really frustrating because I hate that I feel the urge to do that. I don't want to feel paranoid. But when there's a gun culture that's so rampant and numerous shootings that have occurred at schools, that leads me and many others with no choice. No one should feel uncomfortable in public settings, especially in a school, where children and teenagers are supposed to be in an environment that fosters their growth and development.

Apparently, according to Trevor Burrus of the Cato Institute, "schools are still very safe places for children to be. A student is fourteen more times likely to commit suicide with a gun than be shot at school" (Burrus 21). Is that supposed to be reassuring? Suicide rates of students are quite concerning (Miron et al. 19), and with the past Saugus High School shooting (2019), gun violence hits close to home.

What are possible solutions to the gun issue that are more practical and feasible? More stringent background checks on potential gun buyers, gun-violence restraining orders (red flag laws), allowing doctors to take a prominent role in reducing gun violence, ceasing legal immunity for gun manufacturers, getting rid of funding restrictions on gun violence research, and more controversially, replacing traditional guns with "smart guns" that only respond to the

owner, are all key ways to combat gun violence in the U.S. (Gregory and Wilson 18). As former US President Barack Obama pointed out in a 2016 town hall: "...why don't we treat this like every other thing that we use? We used to have really bad auto fatality rates. The auto fatality rate has actually dropped precipitously... Why is that? We studied what is causing these fatalities using science and data and evidence and then we slowly treated it like the public health problem it was and it got reduced. We are not allowed to do any of that when it comes to guns..." (PBS NewsHour 16). (There is a substantial level of demand already for "smart guns," but they are controversial because some believe that introducing them into the market would encourage more to purchase guns since they're safer, exacerbating the current problems associated with guns in general.)

Skeptics claim that the passing of gun control legislation is futile. Empirical evidence says otherwise (Peters 19). In fact, following the Sandy Hook mass shooting (which resulted in the deaths of 20 elementary school children and 6 adult staff), 280 gun safety bills were turned into law across the country at the state level. Several strides have been made toward beating back the NRA as well: many businesses cut ties with the organization, and the NRA's reputation has been sinking. The Bipartisan Background Checks Act, with the aid of pressure from a changing mindset in this country regarding guns, student activists, and their supporters, was also passed on January 8th of 2019, "the first piece of gun safety legislation to pass in over a decade."

I, again, completely understand why someone would see the value in the 2nd Amendment and oppose stricter gun control. However, stronger gun control or the stripping away of guns from civilians is not only better for societal welfare but a simple necessity. There are practically no conceivable and sound reasons as to why any civilian would need a gun, and any possible benefit that could be derived from it is trumped by its much greater destructive consequences.

Gun control needs to stop being politicized, and we must cease the brutal and senseless killings of innocent men, women, and children at the hands of firearms immediately. The time for action is **NOW**.

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