

## **It Is Time to Redefine Terrorism and Legislate Firearms**

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And we mourn again today. We mourn the countless dead and wounded in Las Vegas, Nevada. Not at the hands of the destruction unleashed by forces of nature or the targeting by foreign militants, but the chilling and deliberate killing by one of us – a white man with guns. Why do we remain silent as we witness a slow-motion massacre unfolding before us? Ordinary people's lives are in danger. From school shootings to crowd-carnage, we are becoming anesthetized to this very real danger in our midst. Firearm regulation, or the lack thereof, is now a serious public health and safety issue.

Twenty years of government-funded research has shown several effective ways to address the issue of gun violence. Among these efforts, which need political support and a bit of money, are:

- Assault-weapons ban
- Universal background checks
- A national push to curb urban violence

There are about 300 million privately owned firearms in the US – that works out to about one gun for every American. The US has the highest gun ownership in the world, followed by Yemen. We are the most powerfully armed civilian population. Most Americans don't own guns though. Most gun-owners own more than two firearms. Gun ownership is higher among whites than blacks; higher in the country than in the city; higher among older people. Due to the inaction of Congress, anyone on the terrorism watch list can buy a gun. Any felon, convict, or suspect can buy a gun as well.

So, yes, people's lives are in danger, and we do need to make America safe again. But it's not by fixating solely on our narrow definition of terrorism. Between 2001 and 2013, 3,030 people were killed in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil — a number that includes the terrible toll of September 11, 2001, according to University of Maryland data. But during that same time frame, records from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that 406,496 people were killed by gunfire.

And yet the power of the gun lobby is on the rise. Since 1980, 44 states have passed gun laws allowing concealed weapons. A federal ban in 1994 to possess, transfer, or manufacture semi-automatic assault weapons was allowed to expire in 2004. Twenty-four states have passed "Stand Your Ground" laws allowing citizens to use deadly force if they think they are in danger of being assaulted.

Adding another potential danger is the SHARE Act (Sportsman's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement Act) currently before Congress. Among other things, it would make it easier to buy silencers to disguise the sound of gunfire. The tragedy in Las Vegas likely would have been even worse if the shooter had used a silencer.

Forty percent of guns purchased in America are bought from private sellers at gun shows, or through classified ads – thus creating an unregulated marketplace. One in three Americans knows someone who has been shot. "We live in a society now that is Balkanized," claims David Keene, past president of the NRA. "But that has nothing to do with guns." Really, sir?

Former Chief Justice Warren Burger got it right. "The new interpretation of the Second Amendment was one of the greatest pieces of fraud on the American public by special-interest groups," he said.

It is time to address this fraud, to right this wrong. It is time for our nation to wake up to the very real and present danger that lurks in our society and flourishes in plain sight.

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