“At some point, we as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this type of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries. It doesn’t happen in other places with this kind of frequency. And it is in our power to do something about it.”

-Barack Obama, June 8, 2015

What Should We Do About Mass Shootings?

The stories have inundated our headlines in recent years: Sandy Hook, San Bernardino, and Virginia Tech are etched permanently into our minds, the reminders of a crisis plaguing our nation. On June 12 2016, the most deadly mass shooting in U.S. history occurred in Orlando, Florida, where an armed gunman killed forty-nine people in a nightclub.¹ In 2015 alone, there were 372 mass shootings in the United States.²

Mass shootings have been an especially salient issue in recent years. Even though overall U.S. gun violence and homicide rates have fallen over the past twenty years, mass shootings have tripled between 2011 and 2014, according to the Harvard School of Public Health. Between 1983 and 2013, the United States experienced more than twice the number of mass shootings than 24 other wealthy nations combined. Although mass shootings have increased in recent years, even using a broad definition, they account for merely two percent of yearly U.S. gun-related deaths.

- We define a mass shooting as four or more people injured or killed in a single incident, at the same approximate time and location, not including the shooter. This definition is derived from the FBI definition of mass shootings.
- Mass shootings may include incidents characterized as terrorism, gang murders, active shooter incidents, etc.

This issue guide offers four potential approaches for addressing mass shootings. Each approach offers unique policy options with stories explaining the impact on individual citizens. The aim is to avoid the technical side of legal debates

¹ Kirk, Chris and Alex Yablon. “How Many People Have Been Shot in Your Neighborhood This Year?” Slate. 2016. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/crime/2015/12/gun_deaths_map_how_many_people_have_died_or Been_injured_in_shootings_around.html
and policy prescriptions, and instead provide unbiased information to prompt an accessible deliberation based on common values.

**Approach Summaries:**

- **Approach One** focuses on arming and training civilians. This approach gives capable citizens the tools to protect themselves and others from mass shootings.
- **Approach Two** focuses on prevention at a grassroots educational or psychological level. By targeting mental health, this approach attempts to root out violent tendencies in our nation’s youth.
- **Approach Three** focuses on reducing potential shooters’ access to weapons. This approach would enact gun laws that restrict access to specific firearms and make it more difficult to obtain firearms in general.
- **Approach Four** is a complete ban on private gun ownership. This approach hinges on the maximum removal of firearms from society to combat mass shootings.

**Note:**
- For the purpose of our deliberations, we ask that you overlook the Second Amendment. Our question is: what is the best approach if the Second Amendment is not taken into consideration?
- The stories preceding each approach are intended to provide an idealistic outcome of each policy and are not based on real-life events.

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**The Weingartner Initiative on Deliberative Democracy**

This issue was prepared by the Weingartner Global Policy Fellows, under the leadership of Professor Joel Schwartz and Professor Clay Clemens. The 2016 fellows are: Bryan Burgess, Kate Connors, Alyssa Harrison, Emma Merrill, Julia Moore, Lorraine Pettit, Brandon Posner, Samantha Stafford, Jared Vallejos, and Hannah Winckler-Olick.

The purpose of this initiative is to facilitate nonpartisan deliberations to find common ground between citizens of the world.

A special thanks to Werner and Mary Ann Weingartner for making this fellowship possible.

For more information on the Weingartner Global Initiative, please visit [www.wm.edu/charlescenter](http://www.wm.edu/charlescenter)
Approach One: 
Arm the Good Guys: Equip Society for Self-Defense

Growing up, John always loved Western movies because the good guys always stand up to the villains and win. Now, as an adult living in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area, John is aware of the comings and goings of the temporary inhabitants in his neighborhood. The forty-five year old father of two prioritizes protecting his family from any potential threats. Thus, he is always cautious around people he doesn’t recognize and carries a concealed pistol. John has taken civilian firearms training courses and practices frequently at a local firing range.

One day, John and one of his daughters were at their neighborhood park when two strangers walked up, displaying assault rifles and threatening to shoot everyone in the area. John quickly used what he learned in his training courses and neutralized the situation. He prevented the armed strangers from harming anyone present by threatening them with the use of deadly force and holding his ground until law enforcement officers arrived on the scene. Later that evening, John’s friends and family praised his brave use of self-defense to protect himself and others.

How a trained gun-user uses and maintains his or her firearms is different from a novice. For this approach, we will consider two potential forms of trained user, based on NRA training programs: specific weapons trained and outside-the-home trained.

Specific weapons training may include:
- Attending at least one three-hour class with split time between classroom and shooting range.
- Learning the NRA’s rules for safe gun handling.
- Learning shooting fundamentals and how to clean your weapon (Pistol, Shotgun, and Rifle).

Outside-the-home training, or further training for gun-owners, may include:
- Attending a nine hour class, several hours on the range, the discharge of 100 rounds.
- Learning the skills and acquiring the knowledge to store, carry, and use firearms outside of home.

In order to properly “arm the good guys,” the United States would need to have a nationally sanctioned training program that properly trains citizens and gives them the tools necessary to defend themselves. Fortunately there is legislation that already provides the foundation for a program of this scope. The 1996 Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP) (Title 36 U.S. Code, 40701-40733) has worked toward:
- “[instructing] citizens of the United States in marksmanship”
- “[promoting] practice and safety in the use of firearms”.

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Civilian Marksmanship Program. (2016). About the CMP. http://thecmp.org/about/
This private, non-profit corporation, which is sanctioned by the U.S Government, already receives logistical support from the Secretary of the Army.\(^5\) If the federal government brought the CMP under its umbrella, potentially making it a federal agency, it would be able to arm and train more civilians to defend themselves.

Currently, sixty-eight percent of Americans say that they feel safer in a neighborhood where guns are allowed.\(^6\) If Americans feel safer when armed, why not officially promote a policy that arms more people? In fact, the amount of concealed handgun permits has increased from 4.6 million in 2007 to 12.8 million in 2015.\(^7\) This dramatic increase in civilian private gun ownership points to a belief that more guns can help prevent serious violence.

To defend the idea of “arming the good guys”, gun-rights advocates point to stories of normal citizens preventing mass shootings;\(^8\)

- In early 2015, an Uber driver in Chicago with a concealed handgun permit stopped a gunman from opening fire on a crowd.
- In 2014, a psychiatrist outside of Philadelphia used a weapon to prevent one of her patients from shooting people in the hospital where she worked.

Stories like these are at the heart of a potential policy approach in which capable Americans arm themselves to prevent or de-escalate situations that have the potential to become mass shootings. However, certain statistics surrounding mass shootings specifically call this reasoning into question.

- Of all the active shooter incidents between 2000 and 2013, a total of 160 as reported by the FBI, only 3.1 percent of these incidents were stopped by civilians with a firearm.\(^9\)
- Rushing the shooter was more successful than engaging in a firefight.
- Additionally, researchers found that a firefight is very likely to increase the amount of collateral damage.\(^10\)

Another drawback of arming the population is that it has the potential to increase the frequency of situations in which people can get harmed by firearms.

- The American College of Physicians found in their meta-data analysis that an “increased access to firearms is associated with risk for completed suicide and being the victim of homicide”.\(^11\)

Potential increases in other forms of violent crime with firearms are worth considering when contemplating this approach. Even if armed civilians may feel safer, they would also be more at risk to other types of gun violence.


\(^7\) News Day.


**Approach Two:**
**Address the Cultural and Psychological Roots of Violence in Society**

In most ways, Taylor was an average ten year old living in a middle-class neighborhood. Unfortunately, she was constantly teased at school because of a lisp and clumsiness. Taylor also grew up struggling with a predilection for violence--she had always enjoyed watching bloody horror movies and had even tried killing a few small animals, making her an unpopular child. Soon she began to plan ways to get back at her parents and all of the kids at school who bullied her.

Eventually, her counselor at school noticed that Taylor was not acting like a normal kid. During her routine elementary mental health screening at the beginning of the school year, the counselor recommended that she see a psychiatrist for her mental health. When Taylor’s mom took her in to see her pediatrician, she received the same recommendation. After going to see a psychiatrist, Taylor began weekly treatment to deal with her violent tendencies and she stopped watching violent movies. The other students in her class stopped bullying her when they watched a video about how bullying affects others.

Now at age thirteen, Taylor is much happier, healthier, and ready to start high school.

As with other forms of violent behavior, mass shootings have long been linked to mental illness. In fact, “reports suggest that up to 60% of perpetrators of mass shootings in the United States since 1970 displayed symptoms, including acute paranoia, delusions, and depression before committing their crimes.”\(^{12}\) Many prominent shooters, such as Dylan Roof, the perpetrator of the mass shooting in Charleston, expressed irregular tendencies that made their peers and those close to them uncomfortable, prior to committing their crimes.

The personal experiences and background of shooters certainly plays a significant role in shaping their propensity for this type of mass violence. In addition, media content may be a factor contributing to mental instability in some individuals. For example, a significant relationship exists between watching large amounts of violent television and “an increased likelihood of committing aggressive attacks against others,” that is only due in part to external factors about television watching and aggressive behavior in general.\(^{13}\) Additionally, researchers have found that clinical interventions for violence prevention during child check-ups can decrease exposure to violent media, and result in safer storage of firearms in homes.\(^{14}\) Theoretically,

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parents will follow doctors’ advice from the check-ups and will better monitor their children’s media consumption and the safety of their home environment by locking up firearms.

Grass roots initiatives may help stop potential mass shooters from ever picking up a gun. A policy approach taking this view might include the following:

- Increased government funding of mental health care.
- Mental health screening in public elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and workplaces.
- Public campaigns to reduce bullying and youth exposure to violent media.

Critics of such an approach may argue that it remains unclear exactly what the connections are between mental illness and mass shootings. The American Psychological Association reports that “decades of research have established that there is only a moderate ability to identify individuals likely to commit serious acts of violence” and that “there is no established link between violent media exposure and firearm usage in particular,” although an individual’s environment does play a significant role in incubating violent tendencies and predilections in general.\(^\text{15}\) Thus, the linkage between mental illness and ability to identify a mass shooter is hazy, and that between violent media exposure and firearm use is even more tenuous.

Other difficulties with this approach include:

- It is difficult to differentiate between dangerous characteristics and simply irregular or strange personality traits.
- Mass shootings may be too rare for us to accurately model the impact of mental illness on their occurrence and prevention.\(^\text{16}\)
- Many believe that it would take a long time to implement this approach and result in various results for different segments of the population.
- The belief that there are no constitutional grounds for any government regulation of violent media, especially without a clear link between “programming and imminent lawless action.”\(^\text{17}\)


\(^{16}\) Metzel and MacLeish, 241.

Approach Three: Increase Gun Ownership Restrictions

Logan is a poultry farmer living in the Ozark Mountains. He has also been an avid hunter his whole life. Logan enjoys being outside and shooting a deer or two to cook up a special dinner for his wife and children. He owns a couple of rifles and a shotgun, the former for hunting and the latter for protection. He and his family live in a pretty isolated area, and wild bears have been spotted frequently.

Following a series of government regulations on gun ownership and licensing, Logan is required to re-register his three guns in order to comply with the new regulation standards. Since he does not own a high capacity magazine, assault weapon, or other restricted firearm, the process is fairly simple and does not require significant time. Logan undergoes a background check from the state government of Arkansas and two short training programs on the use of rifles and shotguns. He is somewhat frustrated since he already knows how to use his weapons properly and would rather be at work with his chickens, but Logan understands that laws like these are meant to protect his family in the long run.

Gun control advocates argue that more restrictive gun laws can reduce firearm injuries and fatalities, including those from mass shootings. Researchers from the Boston Children’s Hospital and the Harvard School of Public Health found that generally there is a positive correlation between more state gun laws and fewer gun fatalities.18

Research consistently indicates that the weapons used in mass shootings and other violent crimes are transported across state lines from those with weak gun laws to those with greater restrictions.19 A study by The Guardian regarding the twenty most deadly 2015 mass shootings argued that “tougher gun control measures could have reduced the likelihood of some of the worst mass shootings this year.”20

This approach would target gun control laws to prevent future mass shootings and would prevent certain individuals from owning a firearm. Approach three might include the following:

- A requirement that citizens obtain a license for each weapon in their possession.
- A requirement to state cause for concealed carry of firearms and restrictions on assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and armor-piercing ammunition.
- Detailed background checks, mandatory waiting periods to purchase firearms, and training programs based on the type of firearm issued to an individual.

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● Elimination of “straw purchases”, or the buying of a gun for another person, with gifts as an exception.
● Legal requirement that gun owners take initiative by reporting lost or stolen guns to law enforcement officials.\textsuperscript{21}
● Periodic re-registration of current gun-owners to comply with the new regulations.

As a society under this approach, citizens would support political candidates who believe in limiting gun ownership. They would re-register their guns if they are current gun-owners. They would submit to background checks and comply with law enforcement officials who asked them to state cause for concealed carry of their registered firearms.

(\text{ breachedunmasked.com})

Critics of the gun control policies that this approach would entail argue that they may prevent citizens from defending themselves or others. Law-abiding gun owners may protest that they are being punished for crimes that they have no intention of committing. Additionally, gun control also puts a fiscal burden on government entities as well as private gun salesmen and will inconvenience current gun owners.

There is also uncertainty about the efficacy of this approach at preventing potential mass shooters from carrying out their intended destruction.

\textsuperscript{21} Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

● Restrictions on concealed weapons actually correspond to greater numbers of gun-related deaths at the state level \textsuperscript{22}.
● Banning assault weapons may have no significant impact on murder rates.\textsuperscript{23}
  ○ (Note: These statistics do not correspond to mass shootings specifically, but rather to gun violence as a whole.)
● Dangerous individuals might acquire the firearms they need regardless of the gun laws of their resident state, as in the case of the San Bernardino shooting in California, a state with strict gun laws.
● Additionally, it is impossible to prove that a lack of gun laws causes gun fatalities, especially with mass shootings, which are far rarer than other firearm fatalities.\textsuperscript{24}
● There is little information about how most shooters acquire their guns, the type of firearm or size of the magazines used, and whether or not the shooters had criminal records.\textsuperscript{25}

“\text{Trying to prevent carnage by getting rid of 'assault weapons' is like trying to prevent alcoholism by outlawing vodka. There are plenty of good substitutes. Limiting the size of magazines is also no hurdle for a minimally competent shooter, who can bring extras to quickly replace depleted ones.}” \textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 265.
\textsuperscript{24} Robertson.
\textsuperscript{25} Chalabi.
Approach Four: Eliminate Private Gun Ownership

Alex runs into her neighbor, and they begin talking about the buyback program. She finds out that her neighbor, another gun-rights advocate, participated in the buyback program and learns that there are tax benefits and a cash payment when you turn in operable firearms. Realizing the benefits of the buyback program and remembering that she has not needed firearms to protect herself, Alex heads to the nearest buyback location and hands over her guns.

Australia restricted gun licenses to those people who needed firearms for self-defense from nature and implemented a buyback program. Gun-control advocates in the United States have used Australia’s buyback program as proof that eliminating most private gun ownership will not result in a “criminal takeover”. Since banning most private gun ownership in 1996, Australian firearm deaths have fallen precipitously. In 1996, there were ninety-eight gun homicides, while in 2014 that number fell to thirty-five—even though the Australian population increased from 18 million to 23 million. More importantly, there have been no mass shootings in Australia since the 1996 National Firearm Agreement was passed, while the U.S. has accounted for 31% of the world’s mass shootings during this period. Proponents of the law point to twenty years without mass shootings as a clear indication of its success.

The Australian National Firearm Agreement was a sweeping piece of multifaceted legislation. Provisions include:

● A ban on certain semi-automatic and self-loading rifles, along with shotguns.
● Standard licensing, permit controls, and restricting licenses to people demonstrating a need for self-defense from nature.
● Storage requirements and inspections.
● Greater restrictions on the sale of firearms and ammunitions.
● Applicants for a firearms license will be required to provide legitimate cause for owning a firearm.
● Requirement that licenses have a photo id displaying the person’s address and the type of gun they own.
● Creation of a national database of gun owners.
● Failure to comply with these laws result in stringent jail sentences.

The National Firearm Agreement also called for a mandatory gun buyback program. The law required citizens to exchange their firearms, no questions asked, and distributed compensation to participants. The program resulted in the destruction of one-fifth of Australia’s guns and was funded by a one-time tax.30

Gun rights advocates point out several criticisms of the Australian approach. The National Firearm Agreement’s outcomes did not always cohere with the spirit of the law. For example, the NFA’s restricted access to firearms forced law-abiding citizens to turn to illegal means for protection.

● The NFA created a black market of gun-running in Australia.31

Others argue that while the buyback program has successfully targeted homicides, it has facilitated increases in other forms of violent crime, including sexual assault.

● Since the passage of the NFA, the number of violent crimes has increased in Australia and the number of sexual assaults has increased from 14,542 in 1996 to 19,907 in 2014.33
● From 05/06 to 14/15 there has been an 83% increase in firearm-related offenses in New South Wales and an 85% increase in Victoria.34

While it may have helped prevent mass shootings, the NFA has actually promoted other forms of criminal activity in Australia. Instead of protecting citizens, the NFA has put them in another form of harm’s way.

To enact this policy, citizens must elect officials that support the elimination of private gun ownership. Additionally, for this approach to have a considerable effect on gun ownership, citizens would need to participate voluntarily. The federal government would need to incentivize gun-owners to relinquish operable firearms. Thus, a major downside to this approach is the significant financial burden of incentives. These would potentially be higher in the United States than in other countries because of strong perceptions of individual gun-ownership as a fundamental right protected by the U.S. Constitution’s Second Amendment.

31 Library of Congress.
33 Australian Institute of Criminology. (2013). Victims of Violent Crime (n per year).
34 The New Daily.
Summary

As citizens of the United States, we have a civic duty to protect the rights of fellow members of our society. This includes preserving their right to life, stated originally in the Declaration of Independence. In order to carry out this duty, every American has the responsibility to consider all possible ways of eliminating mass shootings, regardless of which policy they favor initially.

We hope that participating in this deliberative process will both inform participants about the issue of mass shootings and provided relevant information in a balanced, conscientious, and substantive way. Each participant will have had the opportunity to converse with fellow citizens in a public forum separate from outside opinions and should then be more capable of rationalizing their own views.

The following table provides a summary of the approaches to facilitate a constructive deliberation by highlighting the most important elements of each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROACH ONE</th>
<th>EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE</th>
<th>SOME DRAWBACKS TO CONSIDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equip Society for Self Defense</td>
<td>Mandate each public school meet a quota of armed teachers or properly trained personnel</td>
<td>Safety risk of children near guns; funding burden for school districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institute a federal permit-less carry law</td>
<td>Easier access to firearms for potential mass shooters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lift bans on firearms and ammunition for private ownership (i.e. high capacity magazines)</td>
<td>Higher possibility for potential mass shooters to outmatch or out-arm law officials; incidents are more likely to have high fatality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase government funding for civilian firearms training programs and offer tax credits for participation</td>
<td>Cost and implementation could result in government funding burden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPROACH TWO

### Focus on Violent Behavior

By focusing on the psychological factor of mass shootings, the American public will feel safer as those with a proclivity for violence will receive proper treatment. This approach addresses the issue of mass shootings while keeping current gun laws intact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase government funding of mental health care</td>
<td>Cost and implementation could result in government funding burden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute early mental health screening in public elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and workplaces</td>
<td>Potential invasion of individual liberty; unlikely to evenly reach all members of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase public campaigns to reduce bullying</td>
<td>Likelihood for varied implementation with mixed results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce youth exposure to violent media</td>
<td>Challenge of regulating media content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## APPROACH THREE

### Increase Gun Ownership Restrictions

This approach would make Americans feel safer by restricting weapons that have the ability to inflict large amounts of casualties. This approach would allow Americans to have firearms, with regulation of the process in which they are legally acquired.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE</th>
<th>SOME DRAWBACKS TO CONSIDER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Require cause for concealed carry</td>
<td>Potential to prevent law-abiding citizens from defending themselves or others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrict assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, armor-piercing ammunition, and licenses issued per person</td>
<td>Law-abiding gun-owners may protest that they are being unjustly punished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute background checks, mandatory waiting periods to purchase firearms, and training programs based on the type of firearm issued</td>
<td>A bureaucratic burden for both private gun salesmen and government entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-register current gun-owners to comply with new regulatory standards</td>
<td>Implementation will inconvenience current and potential gun-owners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPROACH FOUR**

**Eliminate Private Gun Ownership**

Eliminating private gun ownership would make Americans feel protected against mass shootings by focusing on the complete removal of firearms from all or most aspects of society. This approach suggests that it is a person’s right to own a firearm for protection against nature alone.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE</th>
<th>SOME DRAWBACKS TO CONSIDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ban all private gun purchases, potentially instituting a gradual buyback program or confiscating currently owned guns</td>
<td>Potential mass shooters could purchase guns illegally or borrow from previous owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possible animosity toward government confiscation without reimbursement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitation of gun ownership to the government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography

● Kirk, Chris and Alex Yablon. “How Many People Have Been Shot in Your Neighborhood This Year?” Slate. 2016. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/crime/2015/12/gun_deaths_map_how_many_people_have_died_or Been_injured_in_shootings_around.html
