

America Can Do Better About Guns

The country is reeling once again from gun violence. Within 14 hours of each other, gunmen in El Paso and Dayton used semi-automatic assault weapons to open fire on defenseless residents. The El Paso victims were targeted specifically because of their race. Within minutes, 31 were dead and more than 50 were wounded. We have seen the footage of people running for cover or hiding under tables as shots ring out. We also see the responding officers—heavily outgunned—bravely going in the opposite direction to no doubt save other lives.

This violence is much too familiar in today's America. There's not enough space on this page to describe them all. Instead, they've been reduced to a name. Las Vegas, Orlando, Pittsburgh, San Bernardino, Charleston, Parkland. And the one that still may be the hardest to shake: Sandy Hook.

While the President and others point to everything else—video games, mental health, etc.—the answer is, and always has been, right in front of us. It's the guns. Video games and mental illness are just as prevalent throughout all the developed countries, but we are 10 times more likely to die as a result of a firearm compared to residents of other high-income countries. What's different? Guns.

So what can we do? Time and again, we hear some politicians offer thoughts and prayers and then throw their hands up and say that there's nothing we can do. As Democrats, we refuse to accept that. America is the greatest country in the world and we are capable of anything. We can reduce gun violence too.

There's also a way to respect the rights of law-abiding gun owners AND adopt common sense reforms that protect us all. Democratic leaders agree we should expand and strengthen background checks for those who want to purchase a firearm to ensure that guns are not sold to domestic abusers, other violent criminals, or those who have shown signs of danger toward themselves or others. The Democratic party also supports a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines nationwide. The Dayton gunman shot 36 people in 32 seconds. Assault weapons belong only in the hands of our military. Responsible gun owners can enjoy hunting or shooting at the range with rifles and pistols. Let's be clear: Democrats are not coming for all the guns. We simply don't need people wandering around carrying weapons of war that are designed to inflict massive casualties as quickly as possible.

Are reasonable gun safety measures like these permissible under the Second Amendment? Yes they are. Even the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia—widely considered the most conservative member of the Court—explained, “Like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited.” He continued, it is “not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose.”

Americans of all political stripes overwhelmingly support these reasonable changes like universal background checks and the ban on assault weapons. Massachusetts has adopted some important changes already. Yet, while the Democratic-led U.S. House of Representatives has already passed some of these fixes, they have not become law because the Republican-led U.S. Senate has stonewalled each bill. Democratic leaders asked the Senate to return from their August recess to take up the background check bill right away. Instead, while the nation grieves the victims of the latest shootings, their Republican counterparts opted to stay on vacation.

All Americans deserve to be safe at work, school, church, a concert, a restaurant, and everywhere else. America can do better and Democratic leaders stand ready to make the necessary changes to get us there.

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