Anvika Menon

Dr. Gingrich

AP Lang/Comp 1st Period

25 February 2019

Why School Shootings Should Cease to Exist: An Exploration of Causes and Potential Solutions

Bang. Bang. Bang.

Tears.

13 dead: 12 students and 1 teacher

#WeAreAllColumbine

#ColoradoStrong

[“I sat there thinking of how that second shot ended the life of my son. Could there possibly be a more horrific, solitary sound that a parent might hear?”](https://momsdemandaction.org/from-a-loving-father-who-lost-his-son-in-the-columbine-massacre-14-years-ago/) -Tom Mauser, Father of Daniel Mauser

04.20.1999

Bang. Bang. Bang.

Cries.

26 dead: 20 children and 6 teachers

#26Angels

#ProtectOurKids

#SandyHook

[“I don’t think I’ve every properly grieved Dylan because I still find it too hard to accept that he’s gone…I’ve had to find space to forgive myself because I couldn’t save my son.”](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sandy-hook-victims-5-years_n_5a2ac6cce4b073789f695659) -Nicole Hockley, Mother of Dylan Hockley

12.14.2012

Bang. Bang. Bang.

Screams.

17 dead: 14 students and 3 teachers

#MSDStrong

#NeverAgain

#MarchforOurLives

[“I wish I could take all the bullets for you.”](https://www.mynews13.com/fl/orlando/news/2019/02/14/dear-alyssa--a-parkland-mother-s-valentine-s-letter-to-her-daughter) -Lori Alhadeff, Mother of Alyssa Alhadeff

02.14.2018

02.18.2019

Twenty years have passed since the Columbine shooting. Seven years have passed since the Sandy Hook massacre. A little more than one year has passed since the tragedy at Parkland. These three events, three of the most heart-wrenching and soul-shattering events to plague the lives of school children and their families, have one major thread in common: the use of guns to inflict violence and horror. There are no words to describe the grief of parents and siblings, friends and teachers, who have lost integral people in their lives. There is no remedy to return the shining lights of children who had to leave this world prematurely. The loss that those communities and our nation as a whole face can not be filled with thoughts and prayers, as soothing as they may be. That hole in our hearts can not be fixed with flags at half-mast every few weeks for every preventable tragedy that occurs. In all three school shootings, the killers should have been prevented from even gaining access to the fatal weapons due to various developmental disorders, mental health issues, lapses in background checks, and a lack of effective federal laws. In other words, the system designed to protect us, our children, and our peers, failed us.

Nikolas Cruz, murderer of 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, was [expelled from MSD for exhibiting troubling behavior, bragged about his firearms, boasted about how much he loved killing animals, and even went to a clinic for mental health treatment](https://canoe.com/news/crime/how-u-s-mass-shooters-got-their-guns) before the tragedy occurred. The FBI had also received a tip that Cruz exhibited warning signs that could manifest in a potential school shooting a month before it occurred. There was no follow-up. Somehow, the troubled 19-year old was able to legally purchase an [AR-15](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-ar-15-americas-rifle-or-illegitimate-killing-machine/2018/02/15/743e66ca-1266-11e8-9065-e55346f6de81_story.html?utm_term=.10f1c822007d), a military-grade assault weapon. According to federal law, people who are at least 18 years of age can purchase a firearm, even while undergoing mental treatment. Additionally, it is easier to purchase a semi-automatic rifle than it is to purchase a [handgun that shoots low-velocity bullets with few fatal wounds](https://globalnews.ca/news/4043345/ar-15-handgun-bullet-wounds-difference/), with the legal age of purchase for a handgun being 21 years instead of 18. Loopholes and conflicting legislation such as these contribute to the problem: a gun violence epidemic sparked by a lack of stringent gun control laws, a lack of enforcement when it comes to protocols and background checks, and a lack of human decency in the face of profit and power. From a global perspective, America owns [48%](https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/03/americas/us-gun-statistics/index.html) of total civilian guns, and despite being less than 5% of the world population, we account for 31% of mass shooters worldwide, beating out countries known for instability and unceasing conflict. So, what needs to change?

With the majority of gun reform being taken up by select [state governments](https://www.cnbc.com/2018/12/26/tougher-gun-laws-to-take-effect-in-2019-in-ca-several-other-states.html), the federal government has yet to catch up. Under current federal legislation, only federally licensed gun dealers are required to conduct background checks, leaving those that are prohibited from buying guns ([roughly 22%, around millions of Americans](https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/background-checks/universal-background-checks/)) to purchase their weapons from gun shows and via the Internet. This is where universal background checks are key. With universal background checks, virtually all transactions involving firearms would be forced to be recorded and undergo the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, closing up private sale loopholes, and providing accurate results [99.3-99.8%](https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/background-checks/universal-background-checks/) of the time in only 90 seconds. Supported by [97%](https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/background-checks/universal-background-checks/) of Americans, universal background checks would significantly curb the number of gun related deaths per year from a whopping [40,000](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/18/us/gun-deaths.html) in 2018, the highest in 50 years. In addition to the legislative loopholes surrounding background checks, the availability of military-grade weapons to civilians has also posed a dire threat to the safety of children.

While actual automatic weapons, that release bullets for as long as the trigger is pulled, are heavily regulated for civilian use, their presence raises the question of why any non-military personnel would need such a lethal weapon. They aren’t designed for hunting, sport, or any other recreational activity. Their sole objective is to kill. [Gun rights advocates](https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/en/why-american-citizens-need-assault-rifles) cite a need to have the same weaponry as the government to be prepared to fight a tyrannical regime if necessary, claiming the Second Amendment protects this right. However, this argument remains ignorant of the minimal chances that an American Revolution scale rebellion would occur in today’s times. The trend in American political activism has gone towards nonviolent protests, peaceful demonstrations, and marches as opposed to full blown wars. Long story short: if you, a sane human being capable of rational thinking, have an opinion to express about the government, chances are you will not be using a militaristic weapon to shoot government workers and kill top officials in cold blood. You would just write a letter to your Congressman or sign a petition like a normal person. To claim you would do otherwise just demonstrates the lack of enforcement of the background checks we *do* have and puts gun rights advocates in a double bind. Either they admit they’re not mentally stable enough to be in legal possession of an automatic gun, or they concede they have no real and justifiable purpose in owning one. We stand nothing to gain from leaving these military-grade weapons available for civilians, but everything to lose if it gets misused or falls into the wrong hands.

Furthermore, the historical context of the Second Amendment was when the right to bear arms meant a musket that could fire approximately one bullet a minute, not a semi-automatic rifle that could kill 14 teenagers and three adults in the span of six seconds, as was the case in Parkland. In a largely unsettled America, these obsolete firearms were necessary to defend your family against wild animals, unlike modern urban society where the reoccurring threat of wild animals affects very few of us. On top of the dramatic change in the ability of firearms and the circumstances surrounding their use, the Constitution was meant to change with the times and reflect society as it progressed. That was the point of creating a process to formally amend the backbone of our government. The United States has even overturned amendments when they were deemed no longer relevant. For example, the 21st Amendment nulled the effects of the 18th Amendment Prohibition-era ban on alcohol. The Constitution was designed to be flexible and meet the needs of the people, not hold children hostage to centuries-old legalities. Despite the fact that the majority of gun control activists are nowhere near willing to revoke the Second Amendment altogether, the proponents of the Second Amendment argument are clinging to a tiny piece of legislation, desperately willing the Constitution to be static and unchangeable, and using it to justify mass murders beyond the human imagination.

Apart from the Second Amendment, another big argument used by gun rights advocates claim that [people are the sole instigator of conflicts, not the weapons themselves](https://www.theodysseyonline.com/guns-problem). While technically accurate, this argument ignores the volatility of a semi-automatic firearm as opposed to a knife or a fistfight. Even if one wants to concede that a gun is harmless without a human to operate it, the presence of a weapon that damaging is the reason that mass murders in the span of minutes can occur. If an attacker tried to use a knife to inflict damage upon a school, he or she would be incapable of wounding more than a handful of people before the knife got too dull and bloody to keep using or officials eventually caught up to the perpetrator and detained him or her. A knife is only effective at a close-range, giving most of the people present in the building the opportunity to run. Even with throwing knifes, accuracy is not as guaranteed as a rifle that comes with aim-aiding technology. As for fistfights? By the time someone was capable of seriously wounding another person with nothing but hand-to-hand combat in a school setting, an administrator would have broken up the fight. Only a gun can kill people from long distances instantaneously, require very little work to shoot, and take the lives of dozens of human beings in a matter of minutes, if not mere seconds.

The most disturbing part of the school shooting, and gun violence at large, epidemic in the United States is not that the status quo is ineffective at deterring future threats. It’s the fact that politicians are more enamored with their careers and the prospect of campaign donations to change anything, despite the [33,000](https://theundefeated.com/features/fivethirtyeight-breaks-down-the-more-than-33000-annual-u-s-gun-deaths/) people that die each year to preventable gun violence. Entities such as the National Rifle Association, that rate candidates on a grading scale of A+ to F based on their dedication to keeping guns free from more governmental interference, are part of the issue. Interest groups are inevitable in a democracy like the United States, and guns are not all bad. Yet, the fact that a third-party organization [controls the campaign platforms and agenda of candidates](https://www.theodysseyonline.com/nra-problem), especially in red states, at the cost of their own children is sickening. The fact that these politicians welcome the high ratings and flowing campaign donations while agreeing not to do anything to protect human lives is even worse.

School shootings are not the result of violent video games or [ADHD kids](https://themighty.com/2018/05/incoming-nra-president-oliver-north-ritalin-school-shootings-santa-fe/), as NRA president, Oliver North, [claimed](https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/may/22/oliver-north/no-connection-ritalin-school-shootings-nra/). Stigmatizing mental illnesses and the necessary medication to avoid taking responsibility for one’s role in the deaths of countless kids is despicable. Universal background checks, a popular and easy solution to attack the root cause of this violence, work and need to be enacted. The federal government should be stepping up and carrying out their mandate to protect the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of the American people, instead of staying neutral and leaving the job up to the states. The Alhadeffs deserve it. The Hockleys deserve it. The Mausers deserve it. All of those families broken apart by senseless violence deserve it.

And we, as the children of America, should expect nothing less.

## Model Analysis

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/opinion/america-children-guns-shooting-florida.html>

<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1876-1900/william-allen-white-whats-the-matter-with-kansas-august-16-1896.php>

Both the *New York Times* article, pertaining to the topic of gun control itself, as well as the William Allen White piece on economic and infrastructural problems in Kansas in 1896 held a plethora of stylistic choices and rhetorical devices that inspired my editorial on the school shooting epidemic. The *New York Times* editorial masterfully blended pathos into its statistics and fact-grounded logical appeals. This is seen throughout my editorial in the way I tried to incorporate numbers and yearly statistics into the overarching emotional framework I set up in the beginning with the introduction of major school shootings in American history. The sentence structure in the *New York Times* article also placed an emphasis on simple sentences that command attention and draw an emotional reaction, as opposed to overly lengthy sentences that distract from the desired effect. In terms of personification, both the *New York Times* editorial and the William Allen White paper personified the United States and Kansas, respectively, to draw a connection between the audience and the patriotic ties the audience feels towards its governmental institution. This makes the argument feel personal in both the papers and hooks the reader into the intricate weaving of logos and pathos that is prevalent throughout. By referring to the audience as “children” of the country, the editorials trigger a protective instinct and instills a personal resolve to fix the problem into the hearts and souls of the readers.

The William Allen White article also focused on rhetorical questions, something that I tried to employ throughout my paper to introduce the topic of solutions as well as counter gun-rights advocate claims about alternative weapons filling in the spot of guns. In addition, White made a point of distinguishing Kansas’s role in the United States from more economically prominent states, using this juxtaposition to highlight the blanks that need to be filled in terms of Kansas’ infrastructure, and focusing on the root cause of the problem. To parallel this stylistic decision, I brought up the gun rights culture in America as opposed to countries that are frequently in the media for mass violence to bring attention to the severity of the problem that largely goes unnoticed in the context of global issues. The organization of both these editorials relied heavily on emotion, which I felt suited a topic as heavy and controversial as school shootings. These stylistic trademarks helped give the topic a personal connection with the audience and draw a line from the root cause of the epidemic to the solutions.