

Why not require suitability test before gun purchase?

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On Sunday, October 1, 2017, 64-year-old Stephen Paddock committed the largest single massacre, but not the last mass killing, in United States recent history. Using a renovated bump stock repeater rifle, he fired many rounds of ammunition into a crowd of concert goers for approximately ten minutes. The death toll was 59 people, including his own suicide, and he injured 527 of the crowd of 22,000 fans attending a musical concert in Las Vegas.

As usual in the United States, citizens are at a loss to explain the motives of murderers or to know how to defend themselves from such terrible recurring massacres in the future.

If guns were sold to children it would be clear to Americans that this would be an unethical practice. Rational people agree that children would not have the judgment of how deadly guns can be. Children do not have sufficient maturity to use guns safely. Recurring massacres indicate that there are also some adults who, like children, do not have the judgment and understanding to be in possession of guns. It is equally unethical to sell guns to those adults who seem incapable of using guns safely.

Some American statistics claim a daily average of 25 murders caused by guns in the United States. This is a number in excess of 9000 people per year, although in 2012 gun deaths actually tripled that number. Depending on population density, annual gun deaths range from 3.4 to 4.7 per 100,000 citizens.

Politicians have an ethical obligation to create legislation controlling the sale of guns to citizens of any age who do not possess the mental or physical capability to use guns safely. In the United States, the second amendment is not sufficient reason to allow every citizen the right to bear arms. For example, totally blind people or violently insane people should not be allowed to purchase guns. Yet in

many individual States, there are very few regulations or, in some States, none required to purchase guns. There are, however, Federal laws which limit the misuse of guns and uphold punishments after a crime is committed.

A problem arises in assessing the various degrees of physical or mental disability of those who want to own guns. For this reason a responsible approach would be to have citizens individually assessed prior to purchasing guns. This procedure is not as cumbersome as it may first appear. When people are individually assessed for their suitability for many occupations, they are often required to have a police check to determine if they have a criminal record. Many occupations also require health records indicating the likelihood of mental or physical stability or lack of it.

Signs of severe depression, aggression, abuse of illegal drugs, theft, extreme anxiety, physical altercations, or sex abuse may well be available from medical or criminal records. As Dr. Phil McGraw of television fame has said, "The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior."

Of course, there are some degrees of mental illnesses or criminal activity or physical disabilities which may not in themselves be sufficient reasons to decide citizens are too dangerous to possess guns. It is for this reason that those in charge of assessing suitability for gun ownership should rely on professional health records and criminal records when this information is available.

The National Rifle Association is a large politically powerful group. There must surely be enough wisdom and intelligence within their group that they can be persuaded an ethical approach would be to establish reasonable gun control regulations in advance of ownership in order to protect American citizens while still upholding the second amendment.

There are a number of reasons why thoughtful readers will be drawn towards the idea of more effective gun control. Many of the most recent massacres have been driven by extremism and the lack of reasoning. Massacres express hatred towards one's fellow human beings. On the other hand, the principles of humanism uphold peacefulness and a rational approach in making our world better for all humanity. These principles contain references to compassion, respect for the dignity of every

human being, human freedoms, and democratic methods. The ideas of those who have committed recent massacres are both antithetical and abhorrent to these good moral principles.