



Americans Against Gun Violence
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**2020 National High School Essay Contest
Third Place Winner (\$2,000 Award)**

(Student's name and high school withheld at student's request)

Never Again

How many times does our country have to say "Never again?" to another mass shooting?

We said it for Columbine in 1999, for Sandy Hook in 2012, and for Orlando in 2016. We said it again in 2017 for Las Vegas. And we shouted it on February 14th, 2018 for Parkland.

While other countries like the United Kingdom and Japan have successfully responded to shootings through strict regulations and bans, policymakers in the United States have repeatedly failed to pass sufficiently stringent gun control legislation (1). The cost: gun-related death rates in the U.S. have claimed an unrivaled first place amongst all other developed nations, boasting a gun homicide rate around 6 times that of Canada's, 16 times that of Germany's (2), and 350 times that of Japan's (3).

And without any serious action, the rate will only continue to increase (4). Because despite making up less than 5% of the world's population, we own roughly 45% of all the world's privately held firearms (5). It's no mere coincidence: time and time again, research has shown that the extraordinarily high number of privately owned guns in the United States is at the heart of our high gun violence rates. (6).

The national safety of our country begs the question: how can we let the gun lobby's misrepresentation of the Second Amendment, endorsed by a narrow one justice majority in the Supreme Court's rogue 2008 *Heller* decision, block the adoption of gun control laws that would save tens of thousands of lives? How can we continue claiming gun ownership increases safety when guns kept in the home are 4 times more likely to initiate accidental shootings, 7 times more likely to initiate assaults or homicides, and 11 times more likely to initiate suicide attempts than to be used for self-defense (7)?

Because the fundamental cause of the problem is skyrocketing gun ownership, firearm regulations - especially bans on handguns and assault weapons - that cut the numbers of the most dangerous guns in circulation are the most effective method to save lives. Although less stringent measures like background checks have some limited effectiveness, they simply can't achieve the same dramatic reductions in rates of gun-related deaths as outright bans of entire classes of weapons. We need sweeping national action, as enacted in every other developed country, to bring about significant change (8).

A prominent example is Australia's 1996 National Firearms Agreement, which established a gun buyback program and banned all automatic rifles, semi-automatic rifles, and semi-automatic and pump action shotguns, cutting its number of gun-owning households in half. Within the first seven years of the law's passage, Australia's firearm homicide rates decreased by 42% and firearm suicide rates fell by 57% (9). The rate of gun deaths in Australia is presently 1/12th the rate in the United States. (10)

Although many people claim that we won't be able to end the gun violence epidemic in our country any time soon, I have hope that we will. I have hope because of the brave students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School who survived the deadliest high school shooting in U.S. history and turned their grief into a movement that succeeded in stigmatizing the gun lobby and any politicians who take money from it. I have hope because as more and more young people exercise their power at the voting booths, we will demand the enactment of stringent gun control laws that will end the epidemic of gun violence in our country once and for all. I have hope that our generation has the power to say, for the last time, "Never again."

References

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