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TOM TOM ENGLISH



Hard-Wired Beliefs: Gun Rights v Gun Control

VOCABULARY

Carnage =

The killing of a large number of people

Irreconcilable =

So different from each other that they cannot be made compatible (usually ideas)

Status quo =

The existing state of affairs, especially regarding social or political issues

Hinge =

To depend entirely on something; to pivot around a particular event

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. What do you think about US gun culture? Do you think it's possible to change it in future?
2. The article says that an overwhelming majority of Americans favour universal background checks for gun owners. Why do you think this law has not been implemented in all states?
3. There are 270 million guns in America. Given this situation, is it possible to reduce the amount of gun crime? How?
4. Do you think there are any advantages to citizens being allowed to own guns? What?
5. Do you agree that the US has a "hard-wired belief in guns? Why? Why not?

VOCABULARY

Senseless =

Lacking common sense; wildly foolish; lacking any meaning

Scathing =

Severely critical, scornful

Op-ed =

Section of newspaper devoted to personal opinion & comment

Hard-wired =

Genetically determined or compelled

Since America's latest school **carnage** the debate on gun control has flared anew. The arguments are well-rehearsed, the rival positions seemingly **irreconcilable**.

President Barack Obama has led renewed calls for a comprehensive reform in the wake of the community college shooting in Oregon, but gun control advocates doubt the **status quo** will shift an inch. "Any expectation of real change in the foreseeable future is just wishful thinking," said Jimmy Taylor, author of "American Gun Culture."

On one side of the debate are gun rights activists who invoke the Second Amendment to the US Constitution to oppose any attempt to restrict access to guns or to control where they can be taken. Their argument **hinges** on two key premises: no law can prevent criminals or the mentally unstable from getting guns; faced with these real threats, law-abiding citizens need guns to protect themselves.

On the other side are the outraged gun control advocates, who have lost hope of passing meaningful national reform through the Republican-controlled Congress. Instead, they are focusing their fire on state and local governments in the hopes of attaining more limited goals.

One battle has been pushing for universal background checks prior to gun purchases, a measure adopted by only 18 of the 50 US states despite having support from a vast majority of Americans. As for major reform, even with a major push from the president, there are simply too many legislative and legal hurdles to passing significant gun controls, Taylor told AFP. Meanwhile, the sheer number of firearms already in circulation in the country—270 million—and the number of people with undetected or badly-treated mental illnesses, would seem to make it impossible to prevent mass shootings, he added. The carnage in Roseburg, Oregon was the 45th school shooting this year and the 142nd since the massacre at Sandy Hook elementary school claimed the

lives of 20 small children in 2012. Each shooting reopens the wounds for past victims.

"The hardest part is knowing it could have been prevented," said Yvonne Crasso, who lost her sister to gun violence in 2012. "Everyone has blood on their hands. Sending our thoughts and prayers are not enough - we need to be held accountable for continuously voting for members of Congress who do not support common-sense legislation." Andy Parker, the father of a journalist shot during a live broadcast in Virginia, blamed the National Rifle Association for blocking "reasonable safeguards" which could prevent "**senseless** tragedies" in a **scathing op-ed** published in USA Today.

Experts say the gun rights organization has a lock on the debate because its members are simply more vocal and motivated than the so-called silent majority of Americans who support some level of gun control. "The President was right to point out that many gun owners do not support the stances of the NRA, but those that do are the ones that write letters, show up at protests, and all the rest," Stephen Saideman, a professor at Carleton University in Ottawa, wrote.

At the heart of the matter is the nation's "**hard-wired** belief in guns. I do not think that many Americans want change. Every mass shooting only reinforces their belief that the world is a dangerous place and that their gun protects them from these dangers. They believe the gun is necessary."

There are however some long-term demographic trends which point to a shift in attitudes and the waning power of the gun rights lobby. Gun rights activists tend to be white Republicans while women, immigrants and people of color tend to be more likely to support gun controls. Their numbers are growing. While gun sales have been very strong for the past two decades, the overall rate of gun ownership is actually down, he added.