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Gun Control: Where Do We Go From Here?

Introduction: The Second Amendment and a Brief History of Gun Laws

 “A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed” (United States). These are the now well-known words of the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution, as it was so eloquently set forth by our Founding Fathers many years ago. It is these same words that have long been the subject of heated debate, and political gridlock within the United States. The gun debate revolves around the idea of rights versus control and is prefaced by two United States Supreme Court (USSC) cases, *District of Columbia v. Heller* and *US v. Miller*, and a bevy of laws beginning in 1934. It is first necessary to outline these two cases and the history of laws which have been passed on the subject to understand where we are today, including what some of the elements of the debate are focused on. At issue is whether or not gun rights should be enhanced in the broadest sense or condensed into a small, limited set by a strict interpretation of the Second Amendment.

 The National Firearms Acts of 1934 and 1938 were the first laws to affect gun rights. Together the two established a federal system of licensing for firearms as well as implementing a tax that would prohibit the ownership of automatic weapons (Lepore, “Battleground America”). In 1968 the United States received its first bit of major legislation involving firearms in the form of the Gun Control Act. This bill established various classes of individuals that would be prohibited from purchasing firearms including illegal aliens, felons, members of the military who have been dishonorarily discharged, the mentally ill, and others with similar characteristics. Domestic abusers have since been added to the list and the mentally ill distinction has been defined as only including those who have been forcefully committed to an institution and those clinically diagnosed with a disease. In addition to this, the act established a federal license for those selling guns and a plethora of rules that come with it. One specific example of these rules is that citizens must be at least 21 years of age to purchase a handgun (Bennett). Particularly, the law was passed in response to the assassination of former president John F. Kennedy who was murdered by Lee Harvey Oswald after he purchased a rifle from an advertisement in a magazine. The law mainly affected the sale and purchase of weapons from military surplus stores (Lepore, “Battleground America”). A rather large issue with this legislation was that it solely based itself on an honor system and had no way of verification, which made it generally unenforceable (Bennett).

 Next came the Firearm Owner’s Protection Act of 1986. This act overturned some of the legislation in the Gun Control Act and stipulated that the Second Amendment was to be perceived as an individual’s right (Lepore, “Battleground America”). Former President Bill Clinton then signed into effect the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act in 1993. The Brady Act required a five day waiting period in order to give ample time for a background check and applied to federally licensed dealers only. It has since expired and is no longer viable. Clinton also signed the Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act, or as it is commonly known the Assault Weapons Ban, in 1994. Assault weapons were defined as weapons which look and act like those used for war. This bill was a response to law enforcement’s pleas due to their being outgunned in the “crack wars”. The bill was not retroactive, had a ten year shelf life, and was limited to eighteen specific models of firearm and any weapon with two or more military attributes. As stated, the bill had a ten year shelf life and since expired. The National Instant Background Check (NICS) was created in 1998. NICS is run by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and allows for instant access to a database that contains a listing of all those who fall into the ineligible classes of citizens as delineated in the Gun Control Act (Bennett). This concludes the major sources of gun control that have been enacted in the United States since gun ownership became an issue of serious debate.

 *US v. Miller* is the first of the two USSC cases that changed the landscape for gun ownership. Its majority opinion was handed down in 1939 and reflected a collectivist view of the Second Amendment. The opinion stated that the Second Amendment is only the, “keeping and bearing of arms by the people collectively for their common defense and security.” Basically, this meant that the right espoused in the amendment is not meant to be used for personal reasons, rather only as part of a militia or some other lawful military organization intended for the state’s protection (Lepore, “The Lost Amendment”). *District of Columbia v. Heller* is the second of the two USSC cases. Justice Antonin Scalia issued the majority opinion in 2008, which reflected an individualist view of the amendment. Justice Scalia wrote that the Second Amendment confirms the right of individuals to keep and bear arms and not merely for the purpose of situations involving confrontation. He goes so far as to define arms as weapons either used for offense or defense as armor and includes the language, “weapons that were not specifically designed for military use and were not employed in a military capacity.” Furthermore, because handguns are the most common choice among citizens for self-defense in the home it would be unconstitutional to ban them and their use for such purposes (Pizzullo). While states enjoy the right to make a bevy of laws regarding guns, both of these cases overturned laws at the municipal and state levels.

 Scalia’s opinion in the Heller case reflected an earlier interpretation of the Second Amendment given by Orrin Hatch. Hatch was appointed the chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee during his tenure and was charged with creating a history of the Second Amendment. Hatch published “The Right to Keep and Bear Arms” which stated that the amendment was written as an “individual right of the American citizen to keep and carry arms in a peaceful manner, for protection of himself, his family, and his freedoms.” Hatch’s interpretation was the first major contribution to the individualist camp. Then, in 1989 Sanford Levinson proposed what is considered the insurrectionist interpretation of the Second Amendment. Levinson stated that the amendment allows for an armed militia of the citizenry that is ready at any time to defend itself against a tyrannical government (Lepore, “The Lost Amendment”). It is the opinion of this paper that neither interpretation is conducive to solving the debate at hand. Rather, the individualist interpretation presented in *US v. Miller* is the correct interpretation to use when approaching a solution to the gun debate. A comprehensive solution that includes a ban on assault weapons, reduced magazine sizes, a federal database containing all gun sales, universal background checks, several other policies proposed by President Barack Obama, and the eventual disarmament of the citizenry to a minimal point are necessary in order to correct the gun violence problem in the US. Additionally, it is necessary for the government to address the driving factors behind gun violence, such as extreme poverty, before it will have the support necessary to pass meaningful legislation.

What is the Case?: The Current Situation and Gridlock

 An extreme partisanship has taken over the nation’s political realm, dividing both camps of interpretation severely on most of the major issues facing it. This current polarization is due to an extreme sorting into either the Democratic left or into the Republican right based upon differences in worldview. Republicans are characterized by an authoritarian view, a black and white view of good and evil in the world, and an uncomfortableness with cultural change and “out groups” to a large degree. Democrats, on the other hand, are seen as being less authoritarian in nature, largely more accepting of change and ambiguity, and are less likely to reject minorities. As a result of this sorting, based on these ideals, there exists, “seemingly irreconcilable differences between two warring camps, as political differences become [so] intense and personal that there appears to be no common ground for agreement” (Weiler). Unfortunately, gun control is not exempt from this polarization and its solution is now trapped in gridlock.

 Before reviewing or exploring what the two sides think about the issue and explaining how far apart they are, it only makes logical sense to explain the current situation in the US as it relates to gun violence. Typically, assassinations and large scale shootings continually drive public opinion regarding increased gun control laws; however, each time momentum in Congress is quelled and usually stopped by the gun lobby (Bennett). Again and again this has been the process. Current public opinion revolving around stricter laws has been well documented. Fifty-four percent of Americans surveyed believe that stricter gun laws would reduce deaths by massive shootings and 43 percent do not. Fifty-eight percent also believe that it would make it harder to protect one’s home and family. Fifty-seven percent of these same people feel that stricter laws would give the government too much power while 40 percent do not. Fifty-one percent think that stricter laws would help keep guns out of the hands of criminals and 47 percent do not. These statistics speak to the current debate, which is a battle over whether more gun control or gun rights are necessary to curb gun violence (Pew Research Center). In January of 2013 55 percent of people polled supported tighter controls on guns; nevertheless, a poll published in December of 2013 revealed that 49 percent supported tighter controls, while 50 percent opposed them (CNN Political Unit). Even the public remains very divided on such a controversial issue.

Democratic and Republican stances on the issue are rooted in the long noted tensions between classical republicanism and classical liberalism as they relate to the liberal-republican mind. Republicans are in favor of gun rights that allow people more freedom to do as they see fit, whereas Democrats support stricter gun laws that will protect the people and reduce gun violence. The Republican stance, as odd as it sounds, is representative of classical liberalism. They want a freer market and enterprise for guns that will further the liberty of the moderns. Classical Republicans defended accepted Harrington’s idea that militias are part of a good society. Liberty of the moderns can be defined as rights of the individual to be free from government control. Classic liberalism also believes that government should be limited in their power and anything that increases government control, as they see stricter gun laws to do, infringes upon their civil liberties.

On the other hand, the Democratic stance is typical of the classical republican mind. Their view is supportive of anything that promotes democracy, as they believe that stricter gun laws are since they will curb gun violence and bring tranquility, and supports the liberty of the ancients. Liberty of the ancients is predicated on freedom from domination which includes civil rights, rather than liberties, in the form of positive liberty. Positive liberty is giving the people a capacity to exercise their freedom. It is the Democratic view that stricter gun control will not infringe upon people’s liberty, but instead give them a more clear path of following through with their Second Amendment rights while protecting them from others. Republicans take the position that negative liberty, removing constraints from people and freeing them from government oppression, is of much greater value.

A final source of opposition between the two ideologically is their interpretation of the Second Amendment. Republicans tend to take an individualist perspective by stating that the constitution protects everyone’s right as an individual to own firearms for the defense of themselves and their home. Additionally, they do not believe that gun ownership should be restricted at all for law-abiding citizens and that citizens should be freer to own guns as they please. Democrats take a more collectivist view that the right to own guns is rooted in the Second Amendment for self-defense only and in connection with a militia. These are the ideological differences between the two that have led to a gridlock in the debate over gun control.

Many of the material differences in the debate can be attained through various polling results. One major issue of gridlock found is that 80 percent of Republicans disprove of President Obama’s performance thus far (Clement). Such a large rift between the Republican Party and the face of the Democratic Party are not conducive to getting things done. Another instance of gridlock is found where 85 percent of Americans and 81 percent of gun owners support universal background checks, yet no policy has been passed approving this (Cole). On top of this, 71 percent of Democrats feel that we need gun legislation this year and a mere 19 percent of Republicans do. Fifty-three percent of Republicans believe that we should not pass any further legislation on the subject (Pew Research Center). The two parties cannot even agree on the basic issue of whether or not something needs to be done. A situation made even worse by the fact that any bills passed by the Senate must go through the House Judiciary Committee which is chaired by Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA). Goodlatte who is a large supporter of gun rights and has promised to oppose any laws that further gun control (Stein). Democrats defend the rights of the state to strictly regulate gun control while Republicans contend that the Second Amendment applies to the states through incorporation and limits their individual power to control. Again, this is only conducive to gridlock and not to change.

Not only do the two parties currently disagree among themselves, their viewpoints are not always representative of their constituents either. For example, 52 percent of the public believes that stricter gun laws would limit the number of accidental deaths related to guns, but only 32 percent of Republicans espouse this same view (Democrats-74 percent). Seventy-seven percent of Republicans and 44 percent of Democrats felt that stricter laws would make it harder for citizens to defend their homes and families while 58 percent of the public felt this way. Fifty-four percent think that these laws would reduce the number of deaths in mass shootings; 79 percent of Democrats agreed with this statement, but a menial 29 percent of Republicans said the same. Finally, 51 percent of the American public said that stricter controls would keep guns away from criminal possession while 31 percent of Republicans responded this way and 73 percent of Democrats did (Pew Research Center). Stark differences in the public’s opinion on the effect of these laws, and an ever larger gap between Democrats and Republicans are at the heart of the US’s current gridlock over guns.

A further representation of this country’s partisan divide about gun control can be seen based on their support of individual policies currently at the forefront of the debate. ABC News in conjunction with the Washington Post recently conducted a survey of 1,001 adults using the random sampling method to discover their beliefs about each individual policy. For background checks at gun shows, the poll found that 89 percent of Republicans, 91 percent of Democrats, and 88 percent of all adults were in favor of this policy. Despite this result, the recent measure of universal background checks which included this failed to pass in Congress. In terms of background checks on ammunition 69 percent of Republicans, 90 percent of Democrats, and 76 percent of all adults supported this rule. Fifty-eight percent of adults supported a ban on assault weapons with Democrats weighing in at 76 percent and Republicans at 45 percent. This is one of the major ideals being tossed around and this huge disparity between not only the two parties but the public indicate that it will be very hard to get anything accomplished in Congress on the matter. Other major policies being considered that respondents were polled about include the creation of a federal database for tracking all gun sales (A=71%, D=87%, R=61%), eliminating high capacity magazines (A=65%, D=51%, R=59%), and the placement of an armed guard at every school in the country (A= 55%, D=52%, R=65%). This survey’s results and the results of the survey on the effects of stricter gun laws depict the current gap between the two major parties causing a stalemate, and the inconsistency of their own thoughts with those of the public that they represent (Clement).

What Ought to Be the Case?: Each Party’s Stance on the Ideal Situation

An ideal society, according to most conservative Republicans and the NRA, would be one where it is easy as possible for law-abiding citizens to obtain and carry firearms. Gun rights would be enhanced for the citizenry and few, if any, limitations would be placed on the types of weapons that citizens could own. For instance, many reject the term “assault weapons” in favor of “modern sporting rifles”. Any law that would limit the exercise of constitutional rights guaranteed by the Second Amendment is eliminated and new ones opposed. It is their belief that current legislation is undermining of our constitutional rights and should be done away with. There would exist more information on the mentally ill and large armed attacks would be curbed by the availability and expansion of such information. Fifty-three percent of Republicans believe that no further gun legislation is necessary (Pew Research Center). It is the view of this party that no comprehensive approach is required to solve gun violence (Clement). The ideal solution to this debate would be based on an individualist interpretation of the Second Amendment. This would include better education on this view of the amendment and larger amounts of freedom.

 Democrats view the ideal world as one in which adequate gun control laws are in place to prevent gun violence, without eliminating the liberty of the citizens to defend themselves and their homes. A system for better tracking the sale of guns in the US and preventing criminals or other excluded classes from getting their hands on weapons would exist. The two sides would come to a bipartisan conclusion to curb gun violence and increase the use of background checks. In addition to this, a much broader system of information reporting with regards to mental health would exist. No one would slip through the cracks or find a loop hole to purchase guns when they are not legally supposed to. It is the belief of the Democratic Party that in an ideal world there would be comprehensive gun control policies that truly quell active armed attacks and reduce gun violence as a whole throughout the nation to the most minimal amount possible. The types of guns and amount of ammunition that they contain would be limited so that when armed attacks do occur they will be easier to stop. Everyone will be trained properly to respond and cease an armed attack before it gets out of hand. Finally, people will view the Second Amendment from a collectivist viewpoint with the insertion of keeping and bearing arms solely for the defense of the home.

How Do We Get There?: Proposed Gun Violence and Gun Law Solutions

 Much of the Republican ideology concerning guns can be derived from their 2012 party platform. The Grand Old Party (GOP), or Republican, position on guns in 2012 has been described as the most pro-gun platform in our country’s history. Opposition to any legislation that would restrict the Second Amendment rights of US citizens is the focal point of the Republican Party. This includes a vehement opposition to a renewal of the Assault Weapons Ban that expired in 2004. They advocate for an extension of the “Stand Your Ground” law, right to self-defense, that includes anywhere citizens have a legal right to be. Self-defense is seen as a God-given right that cannot be revoked by any means. Also, Republicans propose that magazine sizes should be unlimited and that citizens should be able to purchase as well as store ammunition without registration (Bedard). The safe use and storage of firearms is similarly paramount to their view. According to them, more judges should be appointed who are inclined to acknowledge the Second Amendment. Further education in schools regarding constitutional rights should also be set in place. Other policies include opposition to registration at the federal level, opposition to federal licensing of citizens who obey the law, the added option of training with firearms in programs that serve women and senior citizens, and a review of traumatized Armed Forces members who are denied ownership of firearms immediately upon returning home from service. Its final major component is the proposal that whenever a carry permit is issued in one state, that permit should be valid in all states where such permits exist. The GOP holds that gun control is ineffective in curbing violent crime and that it only hurts lawful citizens given that criminals already violate current laws. Added gun control laws would further be violated by criminals and thus be ineffective (Workman). It is for this reason that they feel their platform is how to get to their ideal society.

Democrats, as stated above, believe that the Second Amendment is subject to various regulations as left open by Justice Scalia in the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision. They call for an open discussion of the gun laws that has been nonexistent in previous years in our nation’s capital. Some of the major positions in the party’s platform include reinstating the Assault Weapons Ban and extending background checks in order to eliminate the free-for-all sale of guns through the internet and gun show loopholes. The extension of background checks would require all sellers, not just federally licensed ones, to perform a background check before completing a sale. Their main purpose is to keep guns out of the hands of law-breaking citizens, who are not currently denied access. Some of this can be achieved in their minds by increasing current penalties for gun crimes and ramping up enforcement of current laws (Barkoukis). As is easily observed, the Democratic platform for gun control is lacking in comparison to the Republican one; however, it is supplemented by President Barack Obama’s comprehensive proposal on gun control.

President Barack Obama’s proposal serves as the main point of reference for getting the society to the ideal Democratic state. His plan comes in two distinct parts: the first being strictly executive actions and the second ideal congressional actions. I will begin here with his intended executive actions. The plan starts with a memorandum that would require any data relevant to the background check system to be made accessible to federal agencies, a memorandum requiring law enforcement at the federal level to trace any and all guns recovered during criminal investigations, and a memorandum that would require the Center for Disease Control to begin conducting gun violence research. His dealing with any and all legal barriers which may cause states to hold back information from the federal background check system, in particular as it relates to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Development of motivations that would cause states to share information with the background check system; necessitate that the Attorney General (AG) review the types of people ineligible from gun ownership to ensure no dangerous individuals are getting through the system; make available to law enforcement officials a report that analyzes information related to lost and stolen guns; ensure proper training for first responders and school officials during mass attacks; push for the maximum enforcement of prevention in relation to gun violence and the prosecution of gun crimes; explain that under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) doctors are not prohibited from asking patients about guns in their homes. Creation of a rule that would give authorities within law enforcement the ability to conduct a background check on individuals whose guns they have seized before returning them; get the Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, Tobacco, and Explosives (ATF) to send a letter on the procedure for running a background check to all private sellers. Initiate a gun ownership campaign centered on safety and responsibility; have the Consumer Product Safety Commission review their standards for gun safes and locks; require the AG to put out a report of gun safety technology, most effective technology, and its availability. In addition to this, encourage production of new technologies within the private sector; issue a letter to health care providers stating that no law prevents them from alerting law enforcement about violent threats, make state health officials aware of all of the mental health services that must be given under Medicaid, ensure the finalization of parity regulations for mental health, and complete regulations that clarify parity requirements and health benefits that are essential within insurance exchanges; give schools incentives for hiring resource officers; and establish emergency response models for public institutions. Finally, initiate some type of national dialogue over mental health ("What’s in Obama’s Gun Control Proposal”).

In combination with these executive actions are the suggested congressional actions of the president. First on the list would be to establish a system of universal background checks that would include private sellers. Then, reinstate the Assault Weapons Ban that expired in 2004, eliminate magazines larger than 10 rounds, place a ban on the ownership of armor-piercing rounds by anyone not in the military or law enforcement, and increase penalties at the criminal level for straw purchasers (those who pass the required background check to buy a gun on behalf of someone else). Next, act on the pending proposal that would keep 15,000 police officers on the street, approve the presidential nominee for the ATF and get rid of its loophole that allows weapons 50 years or older to be imported. Fund more programs that will educate responders to active armed attacks on how to react. Approve and allocate the funding to expand the current system tracking national violent deaths to include all 50 states. Set up a $30 million grant system for states that will aid schools in developing emergency response tactics for violent attacks. Lastly, finance the expansion of young people’s mental health programs. These actions when placed alongside the executive actions President Obama has proposed will bring about his ideal society as it relates to gun violence and control ("What’s in Obama’s Gun Control Proposal”).

Although these are the proposals of the two major political parties within the US, they are not the only proposals. The National Rifle Association (NRA), the nation’s largest gun lobby, has its own thoughts on how to get to the ideal society. “Only honest, law-abiding gun owners will be affected and our children will remain vulnerable to the inevitability of more tragedy” (Stein). It is because of this statement that the NRA is opposed to any new gun control laws. Instead they have composed their own plan for gun safety in what has become known as the Shield Program. Shield calls for armed guards at and in every school because response to active armed attacks is the most important factor of all. Federal funding would employ these guards and finance their training, which would consist of 40 to 60 hours of instruction. These guards would be allowed to carry any weapon of their choosing from a handgun all the way up to a “modern sporting rifle”. Change of local and federal laws to allow school personnel to carry weapons is also included (Pilkington).

Conclusion: A Solution That Works

Democrats are a lot closer to developing a strategy that will significantly reduce gun crime than are that of the Republican Party or the NRA. That being said, neither has developed a plan that will be particularly effective on its own. Forty percent of guns are now currently bought through the gun show loophole (Lepore, “Battleground America”). This, coupled with the fact that 90 percent of gun crimes have been committed after a gun has changed hands at least once since its original sale, speak to the need for not only universal background checks, but also a federal database of all weapons purchases for instances such as these (Bennett). The two together would help to prevent criminals and the mentally ill from buying weapons themselves in addition to preventing law-abiding citizens from being duped into selling to them. In turn, this will reduce crime and the demand for guns by the public because the need for protection will be reduced. The 42 percent drop in murders during the Clinton administration supports this supposition (Donohue).

Moreover, the reinstatement of the Assault Weapons Ban from 1994 should also be done. While this may not itself reduce gun violence, it is a step in the right direction because it will warm people up to the idea of giving up some of their weapons. I say that it may not do much because most gun violence is handgun related. However, before this can be done, it is necessary to first address the root causes of violence or it will have little to no effect. The root causes of gun violence include systematic poverty, gangs, unemployment, broken families, failed public education systems, and drugs (Cole). Without this first step to change the way that the American people think about guns, certain actually effective steps will be unachievable. Once this step is taken, it will make the American people feel safer and they will be more apt to support a ban on assault weapons. The ban on assault weapons will then serve not as a reduction of crime, but rather bring the issue of gun laws back to the forefront of debate. It will then help to illustrate that our current “arms race” among citizens and criminals is not only dangerous, but senseless. This is where Democrats approach the issue from the wrong angle. For them to be taken seriously they must increase penalties for all crimes and reduce the rate at which they occur. It is this alone that will help them gain reception to the idea of gun control (Krauthammer).

On top of these policies, it is necessary to enact some policies that are sure not to offend gun owners. This includes safe-storage laws and increased safety designs for firearms (Cole). All of the intermediate policies that President Obama has set forth in regards to the expansion of the information in the background check system, health care improvements, health care reporting, and related to funding should also be passed. Specifically, the elimination of armor piercing rounds and reduction to the magazine size are a must. Policies such as these are tedious but necessary in a comprehensive plan such as the one that is here detailed.

Charles Krauthammer articulates that the only way to decrease murder, in a real way, is to completely confiscate guns. He pronounces that anything short of this will have zero effect on gun violence (Richter). Only then will we enjoy domestic tranquility as other democracies do (Krauthammer). To some degree this resonates with the solution I have been building here. A major difference is that I do not believe total disarmament necessary. Once crime has been curbed to the point necessary to pass a ban on assault weapons, a similar ban on handguns should follow soon after. Banning handguns will intend to, and I propose successfully, eliminate a large portion of the remaining crime. This is prefaced by evidence that the majority of gun violence is committed with a handgun and firearms themselves are present in nearly 10 percent of all violent crime (Cole).

No longer would there be weapons that are easily wielded by the common criminal or weapons with skills that are easily honed. Only hunting weapons and guns of sport would remain legal. I believe this to be the sticking point in the American way that Krauthammer cannot get past on the road to total disarmament. Hunting and shooting for sport are such an integral part of this country’s culture and rich history; therefore, I do not envision that even with the lowest crime rates possible it would be realistic to seize this class of guns. Especially because in some areas hunting is necessary to curb overpopulation. It is this class of weapons that would remain legal and be used for not only this sporting, but also as a means of self-defense in the home which I find to be paramount for families. Even with these guns remaining in circulation to the public, the previous laws involving safe-storage, proper training, etc. would all still be in effect and more laws could be developed and passed to quash any new issues that arise, however minor they may be.

Overall, there is no short-term solution for the political gridlock and partisan division concerning gun laws that can be had. The only appropriate course of action is to instantiate as many intermediate policies proposed by President Barack Obama as possible to improve the situation currently and then to discuss and develop a long-term plan. This long-term plan would in point of fact solve the gridlock. Thus, it is possible to get past gridlock in the gun debate but only by addressing the root causes of violence first in order to reduce the need for guns. Without doing so the public will never be receptive to increased gun control. Once violence as a whole has been brought down by the government then, and only then, can gridlock be relieved because the American citizen on average will be more sympathetic to such policies. Slowly, but surely, eliminating guns down to the bare minimum necessary and appropriate for hunting and self-defense is the best path to take when it becomes possible. It is policies and plans like this,not those radical ideas of the GOP or the NRA, that will drive down gun violence and resolve the extreme partisanship that exists over gun laws. Anything that fails to address these root causes first or falls short of this minimal bearing of arms will have negligible results, if any.

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