

Forum: *Special Committee*

Issue: *The Question of Addressing the Issue of Gun Violence in North and South America*

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1. **Introduction**

Gun violence is a widespread issue that impacts countries all over the world, but remains to be most prevalent in the United States, Brazil, Mexico, and Columbia where it causes thousands of deaths every year. In recent years, the number of deaths has increased at a rapid rate and more attention has been brought to the issue. On the 14th of February 2018, seventeen students were killed in a school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglass High school in Parkland, Florida. This event put gun associations in the spotlight and more protests against gun violence began. One of the more known demonstrations was “March for Our Lives” which was a student-led protest on the 24th of March 2018. This protest was triggered by the events at Parkland and held in Washington D.C in attempt to provoke gun reform and end mass shootings in the US. These children took initiative, and brought attention towards the violation of a basic human right - the right to live. However, firearm violence isn’t only an issue that affects North America. Although Latin America only hosts 8% of the world’s population, 33% of all the world’s homicides occur in the continent. Latin American countries take up 17 spots on the world’s Top 20 list for highest number of murders which shows the extent of the issue in the region. Certain parts of Latin America have become hotspots for gangs and criminals which allows gun violence to flourish. The lack of government control, as well as the excessive corruption has allowed the country to become susceptible to the atrocities brought along by firearms and guns. The violent crime happening in both Americas has translated into a widespread sense of fear amongst their civilians who are finally realizing the weight of the issue. Now, the United Nations and its members should focus on solving the issue through gun reform laws and take all necessary measures to end gun violence.

1. **Definition of Key Terms**

**Gun Violence:**

Any crime that involves the use of guns, firearms, or assault weapons and is considered a criminal offence, depending on jurisdiction. Types of gun violence include homicides, assault with a deadly weapon, mass shootings, and suicides.

**Black Market**

**Denotation:**

An illegal, non-government sanctioned market where trade and purchase of items takes place. It helps buyers and sellers avoid paying taxes and also, control prices of items to their desire. It is characterized as non-compliant or disobeying rules of methodical trade.

**Connotation:**

The illegal trade and sale of firearms and other assault weapons.

**Gang Violence:**

Violent attacks and other non-violent acts perpetrated by gangs against civilians, other gangs, or law enforcement.

**Assault Weapons and Firearms:**

The term assault weapon or firearm mainly refers to pistols, semi-automatic rifles, and shotguns that have been made or civilian purchase and have detachable, high capacity magazines.

**Mass Shootings:**

An incident that involves the murder of multiple people with the use of a firearm, excluding the shooter themselves.

**Reform**

**Denotation:**

To change, improve, or amend things that are corrupt or wrong. It includes addressing what is wrong without altering the fundamental system of authority. Unlike radicalism, which aims to overthrow the entire system, reformists usually aim to change the system rather than demolish it.

**Connotation:**

The enforcement of measures taken with the intention of strengthening regulations in regard to the possession and use of arms, specifically firearms.

**The United States Constitution**

**Denotation:**

A group of points or rules that were established in 1788 to determine how the Unites States of America was expected to run. The purpose of this constitution is to set guidelines for the government to follow and to also ensure that government officials abide by the articles, which are also known as amendments.

**Connotation:**

The main article or amendment that relates to the topic of gun violence is the Second Amendment. This amendment states that, " the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed", which means that every America citizen has the constitutional right to own guns and other weaponry.

1. **General Overview – Background information**

Gun Violence:

Every year, there is an estimate of 8 million small arms, and almost 15 billion rounds of ammunition produced. And every day, these weapons are used in heinous acts of gun violence killing more than 500 people daily. All around the world, these acts are disproportionately affecting people of color, women, and other minorities and marginalized groups. One of the main drivers of gun violence is the easy access to firearms - whether legal or illegal. The majority of the perpetrators and victims are young men, but this doesn't mean that all of them are. Activists claim that governments need to use gun reform to stop the violence and to also protect the rights of the people. Countries have the obligation to protect their people from harm, and they can do so through enforcing stronger gun reform. The reason gun violence impacts people - other than the fact that it murders people-, is the fact that it creates an atmosphere of danger, and a culture of fear. The reason this issue specifically flourishes in North and South America is due to the fact that there is poor implementation of gun laws. Access to firearms is easier and laws made to protect people from guns don't prevail. Furthermore, in the Latin American region, organized crime and corruption thrive, and the fraudulent justice system fuels the issue.

Gun Violence in the United States of America:

In general, the United States have a high rate of gun violence. These rates of homicide began to rise during the 1980s and the 1990s where conflict would often occur amongst the youth of Hispanics, African Americans, and other minorities. Unfortunately, these rates haven't seemed to drop, but have actually seemed to grow. The issue in America is clearly alarming and this is mainly due to the lack of gun control. Part of the United States' Constitution is the Second Amendment which states that, "the right of the people to bear Arms, shall not be infringed." With this excuse, many people defend the right to purchase and possess firearms. In 2017, there were nearly 40,000 deaths that occurred as a result of gun violence, or gun misuse. Unfortunately, about two thirds of these deaths were suicides. This comes to show that gun violence in the US isn't an issue that only entails mass shootings and other homicidal acts. It also includes acts of self-harm and this aspect of the issue must be tackled as well. It has also been found that rates of gun violence increase at the same time of drug epidemics, such as the correspondence between rising gun violence in the 1970's and the spread of cocaine and heroin in the US during the same time. Although mass shootings make up for less than 1% of gun violence in the US, recent mass shootings at schools, places of worship, concerts, and other public venues has finally instigated the American consciousness. Some of the more known mass shootings in the US include:

* October 2018: Pittsburg, Pennsylvania - Synagogue shooting - 11 deaths
* February 2018: Parkland, Florida - School Shooting - 17 deaths
* November 2017: Sutherland Springs, Texas - Church Shooting - 27 deaths
* October 2017: Las Vegas, Nevada - Concert Shooting - 59 deaths
* June 2016: Orlando, Florida - Nightclub Shooting - 50 deaths
* December 2012: Newton, Connecticut - School Shooting - 28 deaths
* April 2007: Blacksburg, Virginia - University Shooting - 33 deaths
* April 1999: Columbine, Colorado - School Shooting -15 deaths

Gun Violence in Canada:

Many assume that gun violence isn’t an issue in Canada, but after some research, you may come to the realization that gun violence and related crimes run rampant throughout the country. In Canada, stabbings and shootings are the two main forms of homicide in the country, but it changes from year to year in which one leads the way. The use of handguns in crime has been on a steady rise since 2013, where 130 homicides were committed with a handgun in 2016. Not all shootings are fatal, but they still shake the people of the country. Through investigation, authorities have found that most guns were smuggled into Canada from the US, but recent investigations have also shown that there has been a recent surge in the number of illegal guns within the national borders of Canada itself. Canada is also known for gun violence in terms of accidental shootings on the Prairies. Every year, around 240 people are hospitalized in the more rural areas of Canada due to the accidental discharge of a firearm. Suicides are also overlooked in the country, and disregarded in the debate of gun violence. In actuality, suicide was the cause behind 75% of gun deaths in Canada from 2000 to 2016. That’s 9,919 out of the 13,168 firearm deaths that took place over those 16 years.

Gun Violence in Brazil:

Brazil itself has been known to be one of the countries in the world with the highest rates of violent crime in general. The crimes are usually murders and robberies, but can also include others. In the past few years, crime and homicide rates have been stabilizing at a very high level. This has started to worry many Brazilians, and also, activists around the world. Although the country is a large importer of cocaine and arms, most weapons used in gun violence and drugs used by the people are locally produced. Drugs play a large role in gun violence in Brazil and it has been seen that rising levels of drugs, have surged levels of gun violence. Most of this violence is also related to gangs and criminal organizations who usually attack police officials and other related facilities. The issue is in the public's attention because it directly involves children. Gang youth is a common notion in Brazil because gangs appoint children to commit crimes, since their sentence in prison would be shorter. As of 2007, murder was the most common cause of death amongst children and 40% of all murder victims that year were 15-25 years old. Gang violence isn't only existent between the gangs and authorities. There are many cases of gang-on-gang conflicts or inter-gang conflicts. Gangs fight in order to keep up their reputation. Public image is a very important aspect of gangs in Brazil especially. Brazilian gangs are also very involved in territorial disputes and focus heavily on land and their territories. They indulge in narcotic and weapon sales since petty crimes like theft and robbery don't bring in as much money.

The minimum age for gun ownership in Brazil is 25, but many people under the age of 25 own guns in Brazil. This is mainly due to corruption and other related issues which makes it relatively for younger people to purchase and carry firearms. More recently, the president of Brazil, Jair Bolsanaro, has made it easier for people to carry guns. He has loosened certain gun laws in Brazil which have now permitted Brazilians to attain guns more easily than before.

Gun Violence in Mexico:

Crime can be considered as one of the most urgent and dire concerns facing Mexico right now. The major ringmaster behind the rise of crime in Mexico is the abundance of drug cartels and drug traffickers in the country. The country's geographic location allows it to lie between the United States of America and the Latin American region. So, the country acts like a path between the two and that means that drugs frequently travel through the country. These frequent drug sales have allowed corruption to grow amongst the authorities in the country, which has all played into the increasing rates of gun violence and other violent crimes in Mexico as a whole. The country itself has been rapidly growing in terms of urbanization and other economic aspects, but that has allowed certain areas to fall behind. These lower socioeconomic areas have succumbed to corruption and its related issues, and the severity of the issue is increased by the fact that the majority of the Mexican population lives in these less fortunate areas. In May 2018, there were 2,530 reported cases of homicides. That's 93 per day, which broke the record for the deadliest month on record in all of Mexican history. This shows how dire and significant the issue is in Mexico. Although most of the population protests against the use of guns and other crimes in Mexico, the government does little to nothing about the issue.

Gun Violence in Columbia:

Like many other Latin American countries, Columbia has evolved as a very segregated society. The conflict in Columbia began during the mid 1960's between the government and paramilitary groups who fought each other for Colombian territory. Between 1958 and 2013, nearly 220,000 people died in the conflict, and more than 5 million people had been internally displaced. That meant that nearly 17% of the population had been a direct victim of the war. Gun violence runs rampant in most Latin American countries but luckily, the rates of homicides in 2016 are at their lowest since 1974. This shows that gun reform is being efficient but it still is moving a terribly slow rate.

Gun Control and Reform:

Gun reform or gun control is the set of regulations that are placed to regulate the sale, manufacture, trade, possession, and use of assault weapons. This term is often politicized and used in debates regarding the issue of gun violence. Those in favor of regulating the use of guns refer to gun reform as, “gun violence prevention” or “gun safety”. In the United States, the main body in charge of enforcing gun reform is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). However, the bureau has recently faced fire for not doing their job efficiently. In public statements, the bureau has claimed that their hands are tied by the government who are preventing them for doing their job since it infringes on the Second Amendment; the right to bear arms. In general, the US is very permissive when it comes to regulations regarding guns which is a great contrast from Japan, which has very restrictive gun laws. On the other hand, the countries in South America lie between the US and Japan. In South America, most countries allow citizens to own guns but with strict regulation regarding licensing the guns and other firearms.

1. **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

National Rifle Association (NRA):

The National Rifle Association, or NRA, is one of the leading gun rights associations in the United States, and has played a large role in the debate regarding the issue of gun violence and mass shootings in the USA. The association was founded in 1871 as a managing body for the sports of shooting, and hunting, but with time, it has grown to be so much more than just that. With the support of many gun enthusiasts, the association played a vital role in lobbying and campaigning against virtually any legislation regarding gun control. When it comes to their campaigns, the NRA mainly uses the argument that gun control infringes on the Second Amendment rights of US citizens. Although the association regularly refrains from public statements after mass shootings, the NRA has often commented that all of these atrocious events could have been prevented if more people are armed with guns to protect themselves. They claim that gun control will have no impact on whether the mass shootings take place or not, and that mass shootings are simply the price that the USA needs to pay for the freedom guaranteed by the Second Amendment.

March for Our Lives:

March for Our Lives was a student-led protest that supported enforcing stronger gun control measures. It took place in Washington D.C. on the 24th of March in 2018, almost 1 month after the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High school in Parkland, Florida. It included a series of protests in over 800 cities all over the United States where people of all ages protested for reform. In these demonstrations, protestors urged the government and other organizations to help enforce more impactful regulations regarding guns in the United States. Their main aims include passing a bill for universal background checks on all people looking to purchase firearms, funding intervention programs for people at risk of gun violence, as well as putting an end to gun trafficking.

1. **Timeline of Events**

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| **Date** | **Description of event** |
| June 21st, 1788 | The United States Constitution of America is ratified and placed into effect |
| December 1989 | In Canada’s worst school shooting, a gunman killed 14 students, all female, and wounded 13 at the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal, Quebec before committing suicide. |
| 2004 | The Economist magazine says that, “in several Latin American countries, 2004 will be remembered as the year in which the people rose up in revolt against crime”. |
| September 2006 | A man opened fire at Dawson College, in Montreal, killing one student and injuring 19 before killing himself. |
| April 7th, 2011 | An armed man enters an elementary school in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 12 children are killed, and 12 others are critically injured. It was the first non-gang shooting with a sizable number of causalities reported in Brazil. |
| December 31st, 2016 | At a family gathering in São Paolo, Brazil, a man opens fire and kills his estranged wife and son, and 10 other relatives before committing suicide and killing himself. |
| January 29th, 2017 | A man opened fire during evening prayers at a mosque in Quebec City, killing six people and wounding five. Twelve others were treated for minor injuries. |
| October 1st, 2017 | Deadliest shooting in the history of the US takes place. 59 are killed and nearly 900 people are injured during a shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada. |
| 2017 | Countries in Central America witness a 23% decline in killings, in comparison to 2016. |
| February 14th, 2018 | 17 students are killed at Marjory Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, which triggers March for Our Lives to begin. |
| July 22nd, 2018 | 2 people are killed and 13 are injured in an attack in Toronto, Ontario. |
| February 15th, 2019 | A 45-year-old man opens fire at a company in Aurora, Illinois, killing 5 and injuring 6 others, before shooting himself. |

1. UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events:

* UN Small Arms Program of Action (UNPoA) - In 2001, this program placed a set of politically binding regulations toward gun regulations, but the regulations aren't legally binding.
* UN Arms Trade Treaty - In 2009, 151 member states of the UN negotiated a legally binding arms treaty that would establish common international standards for trading and exporting guns if ratified.

1. Possible Solutions

Banning assault weapons and firearms as a whole might not seem possible, due to many factors, but if countries were to ban these weapons as a whole, peace may be achieved, and the issue of gun violence may finally end. This idea is supported by the fact that firearms are the main weapons of perpetration for acts of gun violence. By banning assault weapons, countries can rid culprits from their weapons of murder. It'll be harder for people to access these weapons, and thus, it'll be harder for them to go through with the acts of gun violence.

Another solution to the issue of gun violence would be to increase the intensity of background checks for gun purchasers. One of the main causes behind the high rates of gun violence is the fact that weapons are so easily accessible for people. Vendors don't often enforce rules and regulations when selling guns. This leads to guns falling into the wrong hands. If countries were to go through with further background checks, then the rate of guns being sold to the wrong people will decrease. All in all, the rate of gun violence will hopefully decrease. However, very often, gun vendors are those who intentionally sell weapons in an illegal manner. It would be a good solution to increase monitoring for gun vendors. By requiring vendors to keep track of their sales, authorities can keep track of who is receiving weapons and it will help them do their jobs in preventing gun violence. Furthermore, taking stricter measures when it comes to selling guns would help further ensure that gun violence doesn't take place.

1. Guiding Questions
2. How high is the rate of gun violence in my country?
3. Has my country taken any initiative in terms of legal reform for the issue of gun violence?
4. Is gun violence a prevalent issue in my country?
5. What are the main reasons behind acts of gun violence?
6. How can we tackle factors leading to gun violence?
7. What role does the black market play in the trade of firearms?
8. What are the impacts of gun violence on a country's economy, people, and politics?
9. To what extent do online platforms play a role in congregating extremists?
10. What's my government's opinion on the issue of gun violence?
11. What's my people's opinion on the issue of gun violence?
12. How can we prevent the illegal trade of firearms and other assault weapons?
13. How can we increase measures to prevent the sale of guns to past criminals?
14. How can we monitor gun vendors to ensure the ethical sale of guns?
15. Useful links
16. https://www.britannica.com/technology/gun-control/
17. https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/gun-violence/
18. https://www.politifact.com/california/article/2017/oct/04/mass-shooting-what-does-it-mean/
19. https://www.britannica.com/topic/school-shooting
20. https://www.dw.com/en/latin-americas-history-of-violence/a-15912191
21. https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/2/16399418/us-gun-violence-statistics-maps-charts
22. https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/blackmarket.asp
23. https://www.britannica.com/story/gun-control-in-the-us

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