

NATIONAL REVIEW

America Is Not Japan and 'Common Sense' Won't End Mass Shootings

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Start with the fact that there are more than 300 million guns in the United States.

Yesterday, another horrendous and tragic shooting occurred on an American college campus. I will hold off conjecturing about the shooter, how he obtained his weapons, and whether he was able to evade existing restrictions to acquire his guns and ammunition.

Such decorum, however, is not the modus operandi for President Obama and others who never tire of using these horrible occasions to call for “commonsense” gun regulations. Our Conscience-in-Chief believes “common-sense gun safety laws” can stop these tragedies, and his strategy is once again to essentially blame such acts on people who oppose his “common sense” and, in particular, on the NRA. Few shibboleths are as vacuous as the call for “common sense.” The implication is that such things are easy to stop and that, if Obama were king for a day, with no dullards standing in his way, then he could stop it.

Similar piffle is posted on social media, as the self-styled caring class takes the opportunity to sanctimoniously post the Onion article headlined “‘No Way To Prevent This,’ Says Only Nation Where This Regularly Happens,” or to link to a YouTube video of a comedian riffing on America’s love affair with the Second Amendment. People will claim that this doesn’t happen elsewhere (it does), or ask a “commonsense” question like “How can you need a license to drive a car but not to own a gun?” (Actually, gun-rights advocates would be pretty okay with regulating guns like cars.)

Our conversations about guns in America are imbued with sanctimony and indictment, and you’re certain to lose a few friends on Facebook if you post something sufficiently provocative. You might even lose friends by posting this article.

So let’s have a serious conversation about how to stop these tragedies. First, understand that there are more than 300 million guns in America, and that’s not changing anytime soon. You can bemoan this fact as an indication of America’s barbarism, you can be disgusted by anyone who owns a gun, or you can talk about the excellent policies they have in Japan, where gun ownership is almost non-existent. Fine.

But all of that is just policymaking in fantasy land until you accept that there are 300 million guns in America. And, in case you haven't noticed, America is not Japan.

Perhaps you think all guns should be confiscated. Okay, tell us how you will do that without stormtroopers roaming the country systematically violating our Fourth Amendment rights in a way that makes Donald Trump's call for the mass deportation of illegal immigrants look like taking a census.

If 90 percent of American firearms were turned over to the government, that would still leave 30 million guns in private hands, and you can imagine how law-abiding those who didn't turn in their weapons would be.

Or perhaps President Obama's moral exhortations will work wonders on the American psyche and over the next two months an astounding 90 percent of American firearms are turned over to the government. That still leaves 30 million guns in private hands, and you can imagine how law-abiding those who didn't turn in their weapons are.

Perhaps you think that all guns should be registered and licensed. Again, explain how you will do that without a battalion of stormtroopers kicking down doors. Sure, some people will voluntarily register their guns, but they are unlikely to be criminals or would-be mass shooters. Canada tried to register guns and eventually gave up. New York's attempt to register "assault weapons" has been a glorious failure.

Or let's talk about "commonsense" restrictions like "universal background checks" and whether they can stop mass shootings. Colorado is trying "universal background checks," and of a predicted 420,000 checks, they've carried only out 13,600. Oregon's universal-background-check system, which went into effect in August, is also off to a shaky start.

Unfortunately, mass shooters look an awful lot like normal, law-abiding gun owners before they commit their atrocities. And highly motivated, would-be mass shooters would be unlikely to subject themselves to increased screenings when obtaining guns illegally is relatively easy. Mass shootings should not be the centerpiece of gun-control policy. Mass shooters are motivated, difficult to detect, and commit only a tiny fraction of gun violence in America. Pretending that stopping these psychopaths is a matter of passing "commonsense" laws is just moral grandstanding for cheap political points. If all that is keeping us from being mass-shooter-free is failure to heed the suggestions of Obama and other champions of "common sense," then I invite them to try — and then to take personal responsibility for every one that they miss.

Passing effective gun-control policies in a nation brimming with 300 million guns is difficult; don't believe anyone who tells you otherwise. Have we come to accept that a certain amount of gun violence in our country is inevitable? The hard truth is that we have, just as we accept that deaths by automobile accidents, drowning in swimming pools, and industrial accidents are inevitable. This doesn't mean that there is nothing we can or should do, but the first thing that we must do is to stop pretending that ending mass shootings is merely a matter of "common sense."

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