

The Long-Lasting Unsolved Problem of Gun Violence in the United States Has Aggressively Trampled on Human Rights

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Recently, a number of deadly mass shootings have taken place in the United States, which have caused widespread concern in the United States and the international community. On August 3, 2019, El Paso shooter Patrick Krusius with an AK-47 rifle in hand went on a shooting spree in a busy Walmart store located in El Paso, Texas, killing 22 people and wounding more than 20. In the early morning of August 4, the Oregon District, a lively area full of bars, restaurants, and theaters in Dayton, Ohio, became a grisly crime scene, when the 24-year-old Caucasian Connor Betts shot at the pedestrians on

the streets with an AR-15-style rifle loaded with 100 bullets, killing 9 people and wounding 27. These two mass shootings have once again exposed the grave consequences of the proliferation of guns in the United States. They have reflected the profound crisis in the US political and social systems and highlighted the United States' hypocrisy on human rights.

Part 1 The Proliferation of Guns and the Serious Problem of Gun Violence in the United States

The United States has the largest number of privately owned guns in the world, and this number, which is large already, is continuously increasing. In 2000, there were 259 million guns in private hands in the United States. By now, the number of privately owned guns in the United States has already exceeded the number of US residents. According to a Gallup survey conducted in 2011, 47 percent of US adults reported that they had guns, and in the southern United States, 54 percent of adults had guns. On the one hand, concerns about the threat of

violence have led many US people to buy guns for self-protection. On the other hand, the proliferation of guns has increasingly become an important cause of violent crime. Since a large number of guns are privately held across the country, the United States has seen frequent shooting cases and an alarming number of shooting casualties. According to the 2014 report of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), because of the widespread school bullying phenomena, about 200,000 to 250,000 middle school students in the United States carried weapons to school, and according to statistics, 8.6 percent of the students who had been bullied before took weapons to school, and 4.6 percent of the students who had never been bullied also took weapons to school.

The proliferation of guns will inevitably lead to gun violence. The United States is the country with the most gun violence in the world. In 2018, a total of 57,103 gun cases occurred in the United States, resulting in 14,717 deaths and 28,172 injuries, including 3,502 deaths and injuries of

minors. The *Huffington Post* website reported on December 6, 2018, that an analysis of official data on gun deaths from 2000 to 2016 in the United States found that gun violence caused the average life expectancy of people in the US to drop nearly 2.5 years, with African-Americans decreasing by 4.14 years. Recurrent shooting cases have caused a large number of casualties in the United States, and deadly mass shootings have already become a major threat to public safety. Gun violence has severely violated human rights in the United States, especially the US people's right to life.

Gun violence is a long-lasting unsolved problem in the United States. According to statistics, among the non-natural causes of death in the United States, shootings are the second-leading cause of death after traffic accidents, with an average of 15,000 people being shot every year. According to the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) released by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the fall of 2016, in the United States, 71.5 percent of the murder cases, 40.8 percent of the

robbery cases, and 24.2 percent of serious violent attacks have involved guns. Since 1972, in the United States, more than 80 people on average, including about 12 children, have been killed by gunshots per day. No other developed country has seen so many gun violence incidents occur within its borders as the United States has. At present, the US population accounts for only 5 percent of the world's population, yet 31 percent of the world's mass shooting incidents in public places have happened in this country.

Recurrent deadly shooting cases have become a hallmark feature of the United States. Serious shooting incidents in the United States frequently make headlines on different media around the world. The mass shootings that have happened in crowded public places, such as cinemas and schools, have often caused serious casualties. On the evening of October 1, 2017, the 64-year-old Caucasian Stephen Paddock indiscriminately fired rifle rounds from the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas at more

than 20,000 spectators at the outdoor concert downstairs. The shooting lasted for 10 to 15 minutes, killing nearly 60 people and injuring more than 500 people. This incident is by far the deadliest mass shooting in modern American history. After the incident, the police found 42 guns, thousands of bullets, and explosives in the shooter's hotel room and home.

Part 2 Institutional Reasons for the Proliferation of Guns in the United States

Although gun violence is a serious threat to the lives of the US people, the United States has been unable to solve this problem in all these years. Gun violence has become a long-lasting problem in the country due to various reasons that are directly related to the country's special social and political systems.

1. The rigid constitutional provisions of the United States have made it impossible to achieve a comprehensive ban on guns. The Second Amendment to the US Constitution reads in the following manner: "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." This constitutional amendment was enacted in 1791. Back then, it reflected the aspirations of US people, who had just gained independence from Britain through the War of Independence, and to some extent, met their actual needs. It is precisely because most people in the 13 states of North America owned guns that they were able to launch a military campaign against the British colonial rule, establish the Continental Army mainly consisting of militia, and eventually win independence. This special historical experience has led the people in the United States to believe that gun ownership is a vital right. This provision has had a major impact on the country's politics. There are 44 states in the United States that have protected the citizens' right to bear arms in their constitutions.

Nevertheless, given the increasing power of guns and the increase in population density caused by urbanization, the negative effects of privately

owned guns are becoming increasingly apparent. It is widely acknowledged by different countries in the world that privately owned guns are not conducive to public safety. The proliferation of guns in private hands is directly related to gun violence and may cause a large number of casualties and an increase in violent crime. Given this, most countries have strict control over privately owned guns. The right to hold guns under the US Constitution clearly does not accord with the needs of modern society. In fact, many years ago, the US society recognized the negative impact of privately owned guns and the danger of gun proliferation, and discussed the possibility of banning privately owned guns by amending the Constitution. Unfortunately, it is an incredibly difficult, complicated, and time-consuming task to amend the Constitution of the United States. Given the strong gun culture, a large number of gun holders, and powerful interest groups that support privately owned guns in the United States, the attempt to ban privately owned guns by amending the US Constitution has little chance of success.

Another possible way to achieve a constitutional ban on privately owned guns is by asking the US Supreme Court to reinterpret the relevant constitutional provisions. In the history of the United States, the US Supreme Court has reinterpreted many constitutional provisions to make them meet the requirements of the times. There are always two different interpretations of the Second Amendment to the US Constitution in US society. One interpretation holds that the Second Amendment protects the individual rights of citizens. The other believes that it protects the collective rights of the states because the word "Militia" in the article is a militant collective. In previous debates on guns, the liberals took the collective rights theory as the theoretical basis for gun control, and hoped that the US Supreme Court would accept this interpretation to control the proliferation of guns. Unfortunately, in June 2008, the US Supreme Court's ruling on the Heller case completely destroyed the liberals' hopes. In this ruling, the US Supreme Court held that the possession and

carrying of firearms is a "natural" human right, that individual citizens have the right to own and use firearms, and that it is unconstitutional for local governments to establish gun control laws. In June 2010, the US Supreme Court further ruled that the provisions of the Second Amendment to the US Constitution concerning the freedom of individual possession of guns also apply to state and local laws, thereby extending the individual right of possessing guns throughout the United States. These two rulings of the US Supreme Court completely eliminated the possibility of banning privately owned guns through adopting a different interpretation of the relevant constitutional provisions.

2. The drawbacks of US party politics have hindered gun control efforts. As there is no hope of banning privately owned guns, the United States can only find ways to control firearms, that is, to restrict how guns are purchased, registered, and managed. Nonetheless, the implementation of such a limited number of constraints on privately owned

guns has met with many obstacles. In recent decades, the phenomenon of "polarization" in US politics has become increasingly apparent, and the opposition between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party has intensified. Core voters of the two parties hold completely opposing perspectives on gun control. The Democratic Party supports gun control and advocates a stricter gun control policy, while the Republican Party opposes gun control. Gun control has become one of the major topics in the presidential and congressional elections, and a candidate's attitude on this issue has become an important factor in determining the success or failure of his or her election campaign. During the Clinton administration, the US Congress passed the "Federal Assault Weapons Ban (AWB)", which explicitly prohibited the sales of 19 highly aggressive semi-automatic firearms and more than 10 bullet clips in the private sector, and made some progress on the issue of gun control. During the Obama administration, given the high incidence of shooting violence in the United States and frequent school

shootings, the Senate Democrats proposed a gun control amendment, which would require that the background checks on gun buyers include buyers at gun shows and online. Despite that this amendment was supported by 90 percent of US citizens, it was rejected by the Senate in 2013. As its gun control bills were repeatedly killed off by Congress, in January 2016, the Obama administration began to bypass Congress and tried to control firearms by issuing administrative orders, which stipulated that mental patients should be prohibited from holding guns, required gun dealers to hold certificates, and strengthened the background checks on gun buyers. Later, when the Republican government took office, these weak gun control measures of the Obama administration could not be maintained.

Given the election politics in the United States and the fact that strict gun control policies are not conducive to maximizing Democratic votes, the Democratic Party has gradually softened up its attitude on gun control in recent years. During the Clinton administration, the Democratic Party lost

control of the Senate and House of Representatives in the mid-term elections in 1994. The main reason the Democratic Party lost such a large amount of votes and funds was that the Clinton administration insisted on passing two gun control bills. Gore, a Democratic candidate for president, was thought of as a protestor to the possession of privately owned guns, since he had voted for a gun control bill when serving as the president of the Senate and the vice president of the United States. This was one of the major reasons for his failure in the presidential election. The Democratic Party has learned its lessons, and thus its opinion on gun control has begun to waver. It dares not explicitly support gun control because radical gun control policies will make it lose a large number of votes. It is also less willing to oppose gun control because it will make them lose the support of its traditional voters. Its attitude on the issue of firearms has begun to become somewhat vague. To win more votes and political contributions, some Democratic politicians who run for office do not even dare to demand strict

gun control, not to mention a comprehensive ban on privately owned guns.

The Republican Party always supports the possession of privately owned guns and opposes strict control over firearms. Given this, Republican administrations usually loosen control over privately owned guns. For example, during the Reagan administration, Congress passed the Firearm Owners' Protection Act in 1986, which drastically relaxed restrictions on gun sellers and buyers, and stipulated that the inspection on firearms by the federal government is to be carried out once a year. This Act significantly strengthened gun rights in the United States and was a serious retrogression in the cause of pursuing proper gun control in the United States. During the Bush administration, when the Federal Assault Weapons Ban (AWB) was about to run out its 10-year term, Congress refused to review the AWB and let it expire automatically.

The current Republican administration still supports private gun ownership. In February 2017, the Republican-controlled Senate and House of

Representatives abolished an administrative order issued by the Obama administration, which prohibited patients with certain serious mental illness from buying guns, and required mentally ill patients' medical insurers to submit relevant identification information to the FBI for approval of these patients' gun purchases. In April 2018, US Vice President Pence attended the annual meeting of the National Rifle Association of America (NRA) and said in a speech, "The president and I both have a clear conscience to support the Second Amendment. The current administration will not violate the people's right to own and carry weapons." Because of deadly school shooting incidents, in March 2018, the Florida Senate passed a bill that allowed teachers to carry guns in schools. Subsequently, the US federal government also proposed a similar plan to prevent the occurrence of school shootings by arming school staff. Given the Republican Party's consistent opposition to gun control, there is a reason to believe that the United States will further relax its gun management in the

future. The prospects for the United States to solve the problem of gun proliferation are very slim. The incidents of gun violence and shooting casualties may continue to increase.

The Republican Party's support for gun rights not only affects Congressional legislation, but also affects the Supreme Court's rulings. In 2010, the US Supreme Court, dominated by Republican supporters, ruled on the McDonald's case, arguing that US citizens in all states and cities can own guns as this is their constitutional right. That means the right to hold guns applies nationwide. Since that ruling went into effect, gun control in the United States has been significantly loosened, and about half of the states in the United States have amended their original laws to allow gun owners to openly carry guns in most public places. With the official implementation of Illinois's Firearm Concealed Carry Act (FCCA) on January 5, 2014, the possession and carrying of concealed firearms became legal in all 50 states of the United States. The FCCA stipulates that people who have obtained concealed weapon

licenses can carry concealed guns anywhere, except in public places, such as government buildings, schools, hospitals, and buses. This means that there will be more guns on the streets. More than 20 airports, including those in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, allow gun owners to carry guns to the security checkpoint. At schools in northern Texas, teachers are allowed to carry guns in schools. Tennessee, Arizona, Georgia, and Virginia allow pistols with ammunition to be carried in bars. There are another 18 states that allow weapons to be carried in restaurants that offer alcohol.

3. Interest groups are the biggest resistance to gun control efforts in the United States. In addition to the deep-rooted gun culture in US society, interest groups are another important factor causing difficulties in achieving proper gun control in the United States. The legal factor is just a reason on the surface, the real reason is the influence of interest groups. The production, sales, and use of guns in the United States have formed a huge

industrial chain that generates tremendous interests. According to a National Broadcasting Company (NBC) report in 2015, the gun and ammunition manufacturing industry in the United States earned a collective annual revenue of approximately \$13.5 billion; guns and ammunition stores had an average annual income of \$3.1 billion, and their actual profits reached \$478.4 million. Gun production and sales industries paid \$2 billion in taxes, and provided 263,000 full-time jobs, with 100,000 retailers officially registered to sell weapons. The total economic impact of the US gun and ammunition industry is estimated to be valued at \$42.9 billion. The associations that oppose gun control and represent the interests of the gun industry and the people who carry guns wield great influence on the issue of gun control. In the United States, the interest groups that oppose gun control include 12 national organizations, such as the National Rifle Association of America (NRA), Gun Owners of America (GOA), National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), and the National Association for

Gun Rights, etc. These interest groups have made substantial political donations to US presidential elections and congressional elections. They donated \$113 million through the Political Action Committee (PAC) from 2010 to 2018 alone. Founded in 1871, the National Rifle Association of America, the leading organization that opposes gun control in the United States, has 5 million members, including powerful gun manufacturers and distributors. To fulfill its mission to oppose gun control, the association conducts specific activities to advocate gun ownership, oppose gun control, lobby, and make political donations. The NRA is the most influential lobbying organization in the United States, with annual operating expenses of \$250 million and more expenses during election years. According to relevant statistics, the NRA donated \$54.4 million for political campaign funds during the 2016 presidential election, among which \$30 million was donated to Republican candidates. According to CNN, at present, 307 of the 535 Senators and Representatives of Congress have either obtained

campaign funds directly from the association and its affiliates, or have benefited from the association's advertising campaigns. The NRA has made numerous political donations to congressmen, among which 20 large donations were given to Republican congressmen. In recent years, the US interest groups that oppose gun control, represented by the NRA, have achieved great success. They have succeeded in killing off almost all gun control bills and further relaxing gun control in the United States.

4. The proliferation of guns is closely related to the excessive use of guns by the US police. The US police often use guns excessively and resort to violence in performing their duty. Their excessive use of guns has caused a large number of casualties when dealing with targets suspected of carrying weapons. In 2017, the US police shot and killed 987 people, many of whom were innocent. The *Washington Post* reported in 2016 that as of July 8, at least 124 of the 509 people shot by US police in half a year were mentally ill. The policemen

abuse their authority to shoot civilians but are rarely investigated for criminal responsibility. Every year, about 1,000 civilians are shot by the police and at least 400 of them die. In contrast, from 2005 to 2016, only 77 policemen were accused of manslaughter or murder, averaging only 7.7 people per year, and the vast majority of them were exempt from prosecution. In the first five months of 2015, the number of deaths caused by US policemen by using guns reached 385, an average of more than two people per day. In sharp contrast, only three policemen were accused during this period, less than 1 percent of the total. This situation has caused great social repercussions. In 2015, the Chicago police officer who fatally shot the 17-year-old African-American boy McDonald was not prosecuted for a long time, which resulted in a protest by the public. This police officer had suffered 20 complaints before, but he had never been investigated.

Due to the above-mentioned fundamental institutional reasons, the gun issue in the United States has no hope to be settled, and the US

government is in a dilemma regarding gun control, which fully reflects the predicament of its so-called liberal democracy. The US political system fails to resolve the contradiction between individual liberty and public security and cannot maintain a balance between the two. The United States government is unable to correct the deteriorating situation in which the individual freedom to carry weapons causes heavy casualties and threatens public safety. "US Democracy" can't find a way to solve the gun issue because the foundation of US democracy is general elections, which are inseparable from money. Gun-related interest groups gain political influence through monetary donations and they prevent the government from controlling guns. At the same time, candidates, with the purpose of winning more votes, often cater to voters who advocate the right to hold guns. In addition, US partisan politics has penetrated into the federal Supreme Court, which should be an independent national judicial body, causing divergence within the federal Supreme Court on gun control issues. The gun control issue

reflects the fundamental dilemma of the US political system and declares that the US-style liberal democracy has encountered a dead end.

Part 3 The Serious Social Problems Caused by the Proliferation of Guns

The proliferation of guns and gun violence in the United States has serious consequences. In addition to causing a large number of casualties, it has also bred more violence and crimes, which has greatly reduced the sense of security in US society.

1. The proliferation of guns has led to a large number of murders in the United States.

Guns are closely linked to murders. The US people own a large number of private guns. The easy access to guns leads to a high possibility of using guns in conflicts. With the intervention of guns, small quarrels may escalate into murders, and criminal acts such as robbery and theft may turn into murder cases if the criminals carry guns. When drugs and guns are linked together, more violent crime can be bred. Organized crimes of the gangs will cause greater harm when employing guns. Given the

widespread private gun ownership in US society, it is unavoidable that a large number of guns will be sold illegally and possessed without registration, which increases the difficulty in gun control. All of this directly enhances the murder rate in the United States. According to the Harvard Injury Control Research Center's study of multinational conditions, there is a positive correlation between privately owned guns and murders. In the 1990s, an average of 2 million violent criminal cases and 24,000 murders occurred in the United States per year, 70 percent of which were related to guns. According to a report issued by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, between 2005 and 2012, about 60 percent of intentional murders in the United States were carried out through the use of guns. The close link between guns and violent crimes is also proved by a crime data analysis released in the United States in 2017. According to the study, violent crimes in some states have increased by 10 to 15 percent in 10 years after relaxing restrictions on the issuance of Concealed Pistol Licenses.

2. The proliferation of guns has led to the constant occurrence of school shootings.

Frequent school shootings are a peculiar phenomenon and the consequence of the proliferation of guns in the United States. No country with strict gun control suffers as many campus shootings as the United States. As campuses are densely populated public places, it is easy to cause heavy casualties in school shootings. A large collection of juveniles on campus cannot defend themselves, respond to unexpected situations, and are vulnerable in shooting incidents. The horrific experience of shooting incidents can cause long-term harm to many children, leading to problems such as poorer academic performance, social disabilities, depression, anxiety, lack of sleep, and drug abuse. The families of the students are affected as well. Therefore, the social impact of school shootings is extensive. In 2018, there were 25 campus shootings in the United States, affecting 25,332 students, 33 of whom were killed and 61 were injured. More than 4 million children have

experienced a campus blockade in the 2017-2018 school year, and many have suffered physical and psychological trauma. Due to the frequent occurrence of school shootings, a peculiar phenomenon that teachers and students carry guns in school has emerged in the United States. Some states have even enacted laws requiring that teachers be equipped with guns.

3. Gun violence has seriously undermined the US people's sense of security. One argument for supporting individual gun ownership is that guns can protect personal safety. But the paradox is that if everyone holds a gun, he or she will become more insecure. Due to the massive shooting incidents and widespread gun violence, the United States has become an extremely insecure country. Its people live in fear and are forced to rely on guns to protect themselves. The laws reflect the fear of the US people. Many state laws allow citizens to shoot in the event of a threat, even if they can escape the threat without the use of weapons. This adds to the sense of insecurity in society. The United States has

fallen into a vicious circle. On the one hand, the increasing proliferation of guns in the United States has brought more security risks and increased the number of vicious criminal offenses. On the other hand, every time a shooting incident occurs, more US people will buy guns out of safety concerns and the need for self-defense.

The US people are living with a strong sense of insecurity. According to a Gallup poll in 2015, 37 percent of interviewees said they did not dare to walk one kilometer away from their household at night, and above 40 percent of the low-income people with annual family incomes below 30,000 US dollars dared not to walk anywhere at night. According to a 2017 survey by the *American Journal of Public Health*, 9 million American citizens carry a loaded pistol outdoors at least once a month, and 3 million of them even carry guns every day. A February 2016 study by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that Americans were 10 times more likely to be shot than those in other developed countries.

Rampant gun violence is an epitome of serious human rights problems and the consequence of extremely overwhelming individualism in the United States, reflecting its inherent institutional problem. Many people in the United States mistakenly believe that they can protect themselves only with guns. They have forgotten that personal security is inseparable from protection by the state. On the issue of gun control, the United States has driven into a dead end. The demands of US society simply cannot change the legislation and decision-making of the gun issue. On the issue of gun control, we cannot see the effectiveness of US democracy, as it has been undermined by political polarization. Both parties have done nothing and failed to respond to the demands of the reality of US society. Every moment, US society is in danger of suffering from gun violence, and human rights are being trampled on.