Mina Fadeel

Professor

Philosophy 100

26 February 2019

Political Argument: Gun Control in American Campuses Today

In the U.S., the issue of gun control is a debate rife with controversy and emotion. A rising number of shooting incidents, in particular in educational institutes, have led growing concerns and have made it a leading public policy debate in which public and politicians alike remain divided. The debate sparked in colleges and institutes of higher education when the state of Texas allowed legally carrying guns, with certain restrictions, in American campuses, that conservatives and liberals remain sharply divided about. Each side has presented its own set of arguments to justify whether carrying weapons into campuses and in general, should be legal or not, which shall be further illustrated in the discussion below.

Today, a growing number of liberal-leaning public and students are of the view that firearms themselves are a source of violence due to their inherently lethal nature. This is further reason why college-aged individuals should not be allowed to carry weapons in campuses because they have a greater tendency to engage in aggressive, irresponsible and impulsive acts such as binge-drinking, fighting, etc. In these cases, it is the availability of lethal weapons that can lead to violence, injury or death resulting from an escalation in the absence of which, it would only remain a common act of aggression. In turn, it affects the safety, well-being, and security of everyone on the campus, creating an atmosphere of fear. Another argument given by liberal-leaning individuals is that allowing weapons on campuses does not create a sufficient deterrence effect that can prevent an incident of gun violence from occurring or reduce their impact. As a result, there are no foreseeable practical benefits to be achieved from carrying guns, since they only create fear and distraction among students (Webster, Donohue, and Klarevas).

Moreover, it is further argued that allowing individuals to carry weapons in educational institutions or places of similar nature create a greater likelihood of a person randomly ‘snapping’ and shooting everyone at sight. Any depressive or impulsive trigger can lead to a situation where many would suffer from the consequences. Furthermore, guns as self-defense are not effective especially in the case of women, who have a greater likelihood to be victims of gun violence from their intimate partners, in general, compared to men. Non-lethal weapons, instead, should be used such as pepper-sprays or Tasers if self-defense is the objective. Likewise, in calling for guns to become illegal in campuses, these individuals are of the view that carrying weapons should only be restricted to professionals who should be especially hired to provide security in campuses. Large-Scale ownership of weapons leaves ordinary law-abiding citizens to be vulnerable and increases the threat of risks for them. Therefore, besides prohibiting any weapons on campuses, certain laws such as mental health laws should be expanded to make the possession of weapons even more difficult. Provisions that allow family members and associated to report or confiscate weapons from individual owners should be enacted to prevent irresponsible individuals from contemplating harm to themselves or others. Furthermore, only handguns should be allowed in extreme circumstances to be used or sold in order to reduce potential lethality and ability to create a massacre-like situation.

In contrast, the conservative position is completely opposite and favors the carrying of weapons and guns in and out of campuses as a means to deter acts of gun violence and provide a sense of safety and security to individuals. The 2nd amendment is frequently brought up to argue that no laws or authorities have the right to bar a citizen from carrying weapons. Using the argument from the constitutional provision, further arguments that relate to the physical safety and deterrence value of weapons are presented. For instance, firearms provide a sense of safety and assurance to those concerned about burglary, theft, or similar crimes from being perpetrated against them. The value of weapons to provide a deep sense of security, along with the self-defense argument is used to strengthen the call for allowing weapons on campuses. Conservative students argue that they feel vulnerable and would be left with inadequate protection if they are barred from carrying weapons. A 2005 poll suggested that the sense of assurance regarding personal safety which stems from carrying weapons is the primary reason why people prefer legislation allowing weapons to be carried in public places (Flapping).

Moreover, some of the liberal assertions regarding deterrence and lack of value are counter-argued using evidence from reports which suggest that allowing concealed carry of weapons in certain states led to a significant reduction in murders, aggravated assaults, and robberies, with nearly an 8.5% difference. Likewise, in those states where there are less restrictive laws on gun control have a significantly lower number of homicides, reported murders, and incidences of gun violence, which points to the safety and deterrence value provided by guns (Mauser). Therefore, besides the constitutional rights to carry weapons for self-defense that are inviolable, there is a case for allowing weapons since a basic need to feel safe and protected exists among humans, in which guns help them feel empowered to protect themselves and their families from harmful incidents. The conservative side also advocates that besides the deterrence value of weapons, responsible and law-abiding citizens can cut the gun-violence incident short by attacking the perpetrator, thereby reducing their potential to inflict more harm although the latter point remains a matter of disagreement with each side presenting different evidence to back their claims.

Another argument that is made is that if laws strip people of their weapons, in case of any incident they will be defenseless. It is not reasonable to rely on police protection alone in this case. The normal police response is that it transforms the helpless victims into those who discourage violent attacks. The criminal will think before committing any offensive act. In addition, they pick targets who are defenseless. The average police response time is 11 minutes, and it is enough to cause damage to the victim. Research confirmed that 37 incidents of shootings were resolved before the arrival of police (National Threat Assessment Center). In addition, allowing to carry weapon on campus is that most schools have open environments in which it is not feasible to arrange airport-grade security. Inadequate protection in colleges makes the incidents unavoidable and considerable resources are required to arrange defensive measures such as metal detectors. Hence, if responsible teachers and students are allowed to carry guns and weapons, it will definitely fill the security gaps and will provide considerable protection to them. Besides, it can cut the cost and time of any worse incident and killing spree of the offender will also be reduced.

In conclusion, it can be seen that disagreement over whether weapons are a cause or a source of violence remains deep, with a number of ideological, political, and circumstantial and social arguments presented by the liberal and the conservative side to justify their position. The intense nature of the debate often translates to disagreements among policymakers and legislators and consequently prevent practical action to be taken, regardless of whether it favors the liberal-Democrat side or the conservative-Republican side. A number of individuals and policymakers are inclined towards a mediated solution wherein weapons are allowed to be carried but with greater restrictions on the type, nature, extent of the weapon, and to whom the license is to be issued. At the moment, states, as well as colleges and institutions, remain divided, which leads to varying rules in different states and campuses.

# Works Cited

Flapping, Brian. *Gun demanding: the psychology of why people want firearms*. 7 October 2015. 2 January 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/brain-flapping/2015/oct/07/gun-demanding-control-firearms-psychology>.

Mauser, Gary. "Some International Evidence on Gun Bans and Murder Rates." *Fraser Forum* October 2007: 23-27. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239579177\_Some\_International\_Evidence\_on\_Gun\_Bans\_and\_Murder\_Rates>.

National Threat Assessment Center. *Safe School Initiative: An Interim Report on the Prevention of Targeted Violence in Schools*. U. S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center. Washington DC: ERIC, 2000. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED447392.pdf>.

Webster, Daniel W., et al. *Firearms on College Campuses: Research Evidence and Policy Implications*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2016. <https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/\_pdfs/GunsOnCampus.pdf>.