

Aurora shooting highlights discussion of gun control

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DISCLAIMER:

The following is not intended to reflect the actual views of the writers. This work is only intended as an exercise in debate.

Point

It took just seven minutes for the midnight screening of *The Dark Knight Rises* at the Century 16 Theatre in Aurora, Colorado, to turn from a simple film viewing to a chaotic and national issue. At 12:38 on July 20, 2012, James Eagan Holmes entered Theater 9 with tear gas and multiple firearms, taking twelve lives – including that of a six year-old girl – and injuring fifty-eight. The audience never knew what hit them.

This massacre story is one of many that follow the same pattern. A mentally unstable individual gains access to a firearm through legal means and when driven over the edge uses it to commit a public act of violence.

The Aurora shooting and incidents like it could be avoided if they were nipped in the bud by stricter regulation of firearms.

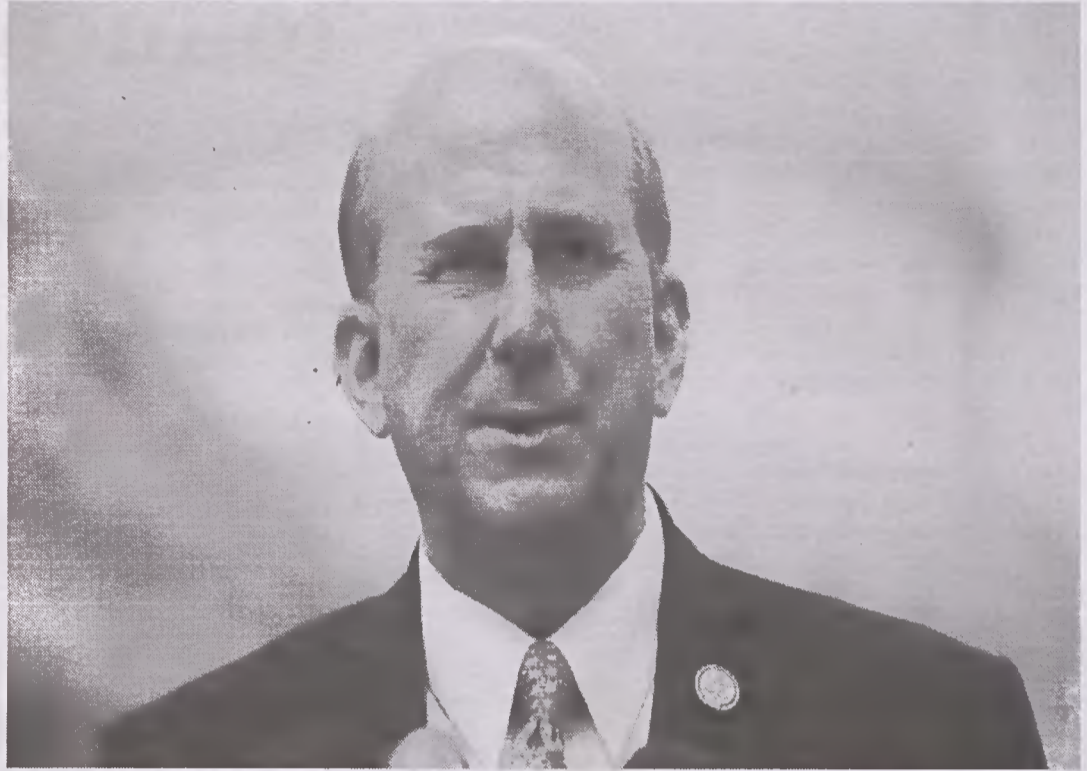
use of time, money, and other resources, but a full examination of an individual's psychological health could help ensure that those gaining access to weapons do not intend to use them for violence.

A system of vigilante justice also has room to grow without gun regulation. A background check could have saved the life of Trayvon Martin, whose alleged shooter, George Zimmerman, made 46 calls to police between 2004 and the February, 2012, shooting: most of them false.

After the shooting the National Sheriff's Association released a statement revealing that Zimmerman was a "self-appointed Watchman" and had no ties to a registered Neighborhood Watch group or any law enforcement agency.

Zimmerman should not have had access to weapons because of his false alarms, which classify as first-degree misdemeanors; a background check would have yielded such results.

Finally, training on the proper use of firearms should be mandatory and more rigorous. This could prevent



Representative Louis Gohmert, Texas (R)

Courtesy of ABC News

Many of the United States' most infamous and tragic cases of mass-murder, including the massacres at Columbine, Virginia Tech, and now Aurora, involve weapons obtained legally by the crimes' perpetrators.

Very few are claiming that law enforcement officers should not have access to firearms and even fewer believe that guns should be illegalized: it is a constitutional right to bear arms. Still, in order to keep the populace safe, restrictions must be placed on the access of the dangerous to lethal weapons.

Counterpoint

More restrictions on gun ownership won't necessarily prevent massacres such as James Holmes' murder of twelve people in Aurora, Colorado.

CNN's Howard Kurtz attacked other news correspondents for having a gun control debate so soon in the wake of the tragedy, but now enough time has passed.

Some extremes of the gun control debate have already been established. In *District of Columbia v. Heller* in 2008, the Supreme Court established that the Second Amendment guarantees the individual right to own firearms, as opposed to the right to form militias--vital to the Founding Fathers, but obsolete in the 21st century.

We can agree that Americans have a constitutional right to own firearms. On the other hand, virtually no one is arguing that civilians should or need to own fully automatic weapons.

The arguments sparked by gun control regulations and policies could prevent unfortunate cases in which legally-obtained weapons are used to kill.

owners should have criminal record checks, training in proper gun safety, and other more stringent licensing requirements, and that the types of firearms available should be limited (for instance, renewing the 1994 ban on assault weapons).

These ideas may curb accidental gunshot incidents and certain types of gun crime, but one may argue that there are factors that make them less effective in preventing mass murder.

In July of 2011, Anders Breivik shot 69 dead in Norway with a semi-automatic rifle obtained legally in Norway (and it should be noted that Norway has stricter gun laws than the United States).

Both Holmes and Breivik had clean criminal records before their respective shootings. Holmes was part of a graduate neuroscience program at the University of Colorado.

For first time criminals, background checks are not a barrier, and for repeat offenders, what qualms are there about obtaining weapons illegally?

Another common argument among gun control proponents is that carrying a weapon for defense won't help against someone armed with the intent to kill, so therefore restricting gun access should not reduce the ability to protect one's self.

While it is true that Holmes was wearing a bulletproof vest when arrested and would have been extremely difficult to stop, three months earlier another shooting occurred in Aurora.

A man shot the mother of a pastor in a parking lot of the New Destiny Christian Center, but an off-duty police officer saved lives when he shot the attacker. There are many cases when having a gun in self-defense has been the difference between life and death.

Finally, after Representative Louie Gohmert asked why no one attempted to shoot James Holmes in that movie theater, a *New York Times* editorial read, "That sort of call to vigilante justice is sadly too familiar, and it may be the single most dangerous idea in the debate over gun ownership."

The *Wall Street Journal* writer James Taranto criticizes portrayal of a response to an "immediate danger" as vigilante justice, and not what it actually is--self defense. We should not be criticizing the victims in these tragedies.

The way to prevent these types of atrocious crimes lies at the intersection of gun control, treatment of mental illness, criminal justice, awareness of violence in media, and a number of other factors.

We frankly should address all of them instead of restricting access to firearms.



James Eagan Holmes, lone suspect in Aurora massacre

Courtesy of US News

James Holmes' mental instability is at the heart of much recent media speculation. The news of Holmes' psychiatrist's attempt to report what she believed to be his potentially-dangerous state reopened the age-old case of questioning how the situation could have been avoided.

Implementing background checks and even psychological examinations before firearms can be purchased is one way in which devastating incidents like the Aurora shooting can be prevented.

It would require the

accidental death by mistakes made with guns or gun malfunctions, but it could also ensure that those who obtain guns legally are able to use them for the purposes stated in the Second Amendment: for self-defense.

Unfortunately there will always be those who obtain firearms illegally. While enforcing more stringent laws will not protect people from these individuals, gun control regulations and policies could prevent unfortunate cases in which legally-obtained weapons are used to kill.

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