**Introduction**

 It is no secret that America has a problem. This problem has been gradually eating at American society and will have long-term effects if we don’t seek action. Gun control and rights have been an issue that has been debated for decades. Whenever there is a tragedy the debate tends to heat up again, but the fact still remains, guns kill people. Since the tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut, there have been an estimated 24,980 people that have died from guns in the United States (Kirk & Kois, 2013, Slate). Many people think the Second Amendment protects all gun regulation, but this writer believes that a call for stricter gun control measures is necessary to lower gun violence, enact stricter gun licensing laws, and to prevent the further desensitization of the children and teens in America.

**History of Guns in America**

The history of guns in America began before the United States was founded. In the late eighteenth century gun ownership was widespread throughout the colonies. Settlers used guns to protect their homes, families, and to hunt. America’s founders, who led the revolution against the British Empire, considered firearms to be a necessity to defend the nation against foreign threats as well as excessive government power. They envisioned a nation without a standing army, but reliant on local militias made up of citizens instead. Since the infancy of America, society has changed dramatically causing many people to question the value and wisdom of allowing ordinary citizens to carry and own a gun.

There have been various tragedies of gun violence throughout the United States. The mass killings triggered government officials to enact national gun control laws and restrictions. According to Miller (2009), “The first federal gun control laws were the National Firearms Act of 1938. The laws were inspired by a growing culture of lawlessness and gang violence that developed during the Prohibition era. These laws regulated the possession of these weapons, imposed a $200 dollar tax on all gun sales, and required registration of the firearm to proper authorities (p.117). They also prohibited the sale of firearms to those without a permit and criminals convicted of certain crimes.

During the 1960s, gun control became popular after assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert Kennedy, and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. The result was the Gun control act of 1968, which expanded the seller license requirement, more detailed record-keeping, restricted gun sales across state lines, and prohibited gun sales to felons, mentally ill, drug abusers, and others. Another significant federal gun control measure was the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1994. The legislation that passed the law was named after former White House press secretary James Brady, who was shot and wounded by a man with mental instability named John Hinckley. Brady was shot during an assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan in 1981. With the Brady Act passed, it imposed a five-day waiting period and background check before a licensed gun importer, manufacturer, or dealer could sell or deliver a handgun to a buyer, as well as bans on assault weapons with large magazines.

**Gun Violence**

Firearms are generally classified into three broad types: handguns, rifles, and shotguns. Rifles and shotguns are both considered “long guns.” Handguns are semi-automatic firearms and fires one bullet each time the trigger is pulled, ejects the spent shell, and loads another bullet for the next pull of the trigger. A fully automatic firearm fires multiple bullets with the single use of the trigger according to the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. In 1970, there were an estimated 104 million firearms in a nation of 203 million people – or about one gun for every two persons. Based on consolidated information, the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives suggest that there are now upwards of 300 million guns in the country. Today, guns are one of the leading causes of violence in the United States, and each year over 30,000 U.S. civilians are killed in addition to 200,000 injuries, with many being serious or disabling. (G&V)

The United States is one of the easiest countries in the world to purchase firearms. There are a number of ways that allow guns to fall into the wrong hands. According to ATF agent Jason Wachtel, one of the most common ways criminals are able to get their hands on weapons is through straw purchase sales. A straw purchase occurs when someone who may not legally obtain a firearm, or who wants to do so anonymously, has someone buy it on their behalf. In a 1994 ATF study on "Sources of Crime Guns in Southern California," many straw purchases are conducted in an openly "suggestive" manner where two people walk into a gun store, one selects a firearm, and then the other uses identification for the purchase and pays for the gun (Noyes, 1995, *How criminals get guns*). Another source of illegal gun-dealing is sales made by licensed at-home or commercial gun dealers. In order for people to sell weapons, they must have a Federal Firearms License, or FFLs. People with FFLs are another source of illegal gun sales for traffickers, who end up selling them on the street.

The states hold different views on ways to handle guns within their borders. There are twenty-three states that have no gun registration at all, while other states have enacted legislation that controls the sale and manufacture of firearms. For example, California requires a fifteen-day waiting period and a mandatory background check. Owners must also register all military-style rifles, handguns, and shotguns. Although not all gun owners have complied with the state law, the fifteen-day waiting period and background check have proven to be beneficial. Bender’s study (1992) proved they prevented gun purchases by 71 people convicted of homicide, 14 convicted of kidnapping, 141 for restraining order under domestic violence, 203 of sex crimes, 884 convicted of burglary or robbery, 1,283 convicted of drug offenses, and 5,772 convicted of assault. Without these laws, we can be sure that guns would have been in the hands of convicted criminals (p.25).

**Brady Bill**

In March 1981, in Washington D.C. President Reagan and his White House press secretary, James S. Brady were walking to their limousines when a twenty-six-year-old man, John Hinckley opened fire with a .22 caliber revolver and fired all six of his rounds toward President Reagan and struck him in the lung. Hinckley also shot James S. Brady in the right side of the brain. Brady survived, but his injuries left his left side of his body paralyzed. A few weeks after the shooting, congress began discussing a bill of control the sale of handguns. The proposed act required a waiting period of five days between the application to purchase a handgun and the time the weapon is handed over to the customer. In order to do a successful check of the purchaser’s records, the local authorities must receive accurate data within the brief dating period (Dolan & Scariano, 1994, p. 52). Ever since the bill was enacted, many people believe the Brady Bill has not gone far enough. Although studies have shown that the number of homicides decreased overall since the law was implemented, it did not decrease any faster in the states that previously didn’t have background checks and waiting periods argues Sanford Professor of Public Policy Studies, Philip Cook and Georgetown University public policy professor, Jens Ludwig. While keeping more than 40,000 people with prior felony convictions from buying guns from licenses dealers, unregulated secondary markets accounted for thirty to forty percent of guns bought in this market according to the two professors (Carmichael, 2000).

**Enacting Stricter Laws**

Gun violence occurs in the streets, schoolyards, and workplace. The public overwhelmingly supports gun control with Sixty-eight percent favor banning cheap handguns known as “Saturday Night Specials,” Seventy-two percent favor banning semi-automatic assault weapons, and Seventy-eight percent of people want the laws relating to the purchase of firearms to be stricter (Bogus, C. (1994.) Laws should be passed that require gun owners to be licensed in the same way drivers do. Obtaining a license would require a background check, fingerprinting, firearms training courses, and a more extensive mental health test. Registration of firearms will increase accountability by gun owners who transfer or sell their guns illegally. It will help the law enforcement to trace weapons used in crimes and create a higher standard of responsibility for gun ownership to keep gun out of the hands of the youth and out of the hands of those that would do harm. With over 20,000 gun control measures already in existence, the difficulties of firearms misuse still continue. On average, the U.S. has had a major gun-related mass murder every eighteen months for the last thirty years (Miller, 2009, p. 61.) In order to combat straw purchase sales, guns should be limited to one a month per person throughout the United States. By prohibiting purchases of multiple firearms, the practice of transporting large numbers of firearms, known as drug-running, will be significantly curbed. States such as California, Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia have enacted a month-gun-a-month law limiting firearms purchases.

Two out of every three homicides, half of all suicides, a third of all robberies, and one in five aggravated assaults are committed with a gun (Miller, 2009, p. 62-63.)The U.S. has come to rely on the gun because of our history and habit. American culture encourages a causal attitude toward guns, as well as the armed, self-reliant citizen. Entertainment portrays the gun as an instrument of personal justice. For example, in the new “Grand Theft Auto: V” game, when playing as the main character, the player gains money and reputation with gun violence and other crimes. We can be sure this influences younger people in society. With more people moving to urbanized areas, there is a call from congress and citizens alike, for a different approach to gun control. Methods of control such as enforced safety devices on handguns and widespread educational programs on firearm safety will help in reduce the number of gun violence in the U.S. By implementing these gun control measures while respecting the Second Amendment of the Constitution will lead to better security, safer neighborhoods, and less crime.

**Suicides, Violence and Youth**

Many American believe that possession of handguns is useful for self-defense. In reality, having a gun in your home makes it over twenty times more likely that it will be used to kill someone you know than any other gun. Throughout years of gun control, one of the lesser known facts is that the largest number of gun deaths is suicides (Torr, 2002, p.57.) Research from 1990 to 1997 shows there were 147,000 suicides committed with a firearm in comparison to 100,000 firearm homicides. More than half of the suicides that were committed were with a handgun. People that live in a home with a gun are five times more likely to commit suicide than those living in a gun-free household. The violent death of a juvenile is something that should never happen. Yet, in 1997, 300 young people between the ages of 15 to 24 years old died in unintentional shootings, yet more than eight times as many died in firearm-assisted suicides (Torr, 2002, p. 21-23.)

 Gun violence is a serious problem among the youth in the United States. In the United States, firearms outnumber children by a three to one ratio. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the rate of firearms causalities among children under age fifteen is almost twelve times higher in America than twenty-five other industrialized nations combined. A study reported by the American Journal of Public Health found that 1.4 million homes with 2.6 million children had firearms stored unlocked with and loaded, or unlocked and unloaded but stored with ammunition. In many neighborhoods throughout the country, many kids feel they will die violently, probably by a gunshot wound. Many large cities such as New York, Miami, Chicago and Boston have seen decreases in their homicide rates, but evidence suggests victims are getting younger. For example, John Hopkins Hospital treated 390 gunshot wounds in 1999, and over two-thirds of the patients were between fifteen and twenty years old (Torr, J., 2002, p. 32-33.)

**Conclusion**

Owning a gun is no longer a necessity for protecting or feeding a family, while uncontrolled gun sales have led us to being less safe, as a result. Therefore, stricter gun control laws are essential to the development of a society less frustrated by the fear of gun violence. This writer firmly believes stricter gun control laws such as mandatory gun registration, limiting the sales of guns to one per month per person, and stricter penalties for gun owners that sell firearms illegally will improve the overall gun control dilemma. With almost 300 million guns in the United States alone, it is no tough task for anyone to abolish gun violence and crime, but stricter licensing and registration will make it more difficult for angry or depressed people to impulsively buy a weapon to harm themselves or others. Gun control advocates can point out that the amendment’s “right to bear arms” was not intended to protect individual gun ownership, but rather to safeguard the rights of states to maintain a regulated militia. An example of a well-regulated militia is the National Guard. The Second Amendment poses no obstacle to a stricter form of gun control laws. There is nothing unconstitutional about waiting periods, or to own a weapon without knowing proper safety procedures. The current lenient laws serve only to protect the criminally inclined. As American citizens we should not blind ourselves to the violence on the streets or in our schools. Laws like the Brady Bill work to reduce gun violence, but mass gun shootings continue to threaten our lives, children, workplace, and schools. With better gun control laws, we can envision a safer and healthier community without gun violence.