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Introduction

What causes mass shootings in the United States?

For years, I've been waking up to the tragic news of another mass shooting taking place somewhere in the United States to the point that it started to feel as if it was something normal. We can't let such tragedies become part of our daily lives. This is the reason I got interested in doing this research, to find answers to a question that shouldn't have to be asked in these modern, civilized times. I believe we can find ways to stop mass shootings from happening, but first, we must ask the right questions. By doing this, we could narrow the scope of the possible solutions to the problem.

In this research, I expect to find out the reasons why the United States experiences a much higher number of mass shootings than any other country. We will explore the psychological aspects of these tragic events, and how they could be prevented. It is also important to verify each source's credibility, as this is a very politically divisive topic. Many news outlets and other sources tend to provide biased information in order to protect their own interests, even if that means providing false or inaccurate information. I will try to get the real facts behind these tragedies.

Source Entries

Citation #1

Barnhorst, Amy. "The Mental Health System Can't Stop Mass Shooters." The New York Times, Feb 20, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/opinion/mental-health-stopping-mass-shooters.html?searchResultPosition=5

Summary

Amy Barnhorst, an emergency psychiatrist, talks about the challenges of treating patients who could potentially become the next mass shooter. She talks about her own experiences with patients, pointing out that it isn't possible to prevent mass shootings through psychiatry. She says patients usually deny having any mental issues, and it isn't possible for mental health specialists to involuntarily admit patients to a psychiatric hospital unless they represent a danger to themselves or others. Barnhorst talks about the challenges of identifying individuals who could pose a threat to others. She says there are many different personalities and there isn't a one-fits-all process to treat the patients. Every case is different and has to be approached individually. It is very important to respect patients' rights, especially if they don't seem to be harmful to others. Barnhorst blames the mass shooting problem almost entirely on gun regulations. She says it isn't possible to cure mental illness. The best approach would be to keep these individuals far from their guns.

Reflection

I really liked the language used by Amy Barnhorst in this article. It is very clear and easy to read. Besides the lexis she used, the information she provided is equally appealing. The way

she explains her own experiences with patients makes it easier to understand the issue. After reading her article, I am convinced the only solution to prevent mass shootings is by having stronger gun regulations. We can't deprive people of their freedom or their rights for something they could potentially do in the future. That's not how our justice system works. It would be unfair to find these mentally unstable individuals guilty of something they haven't done.

However, a more feasible solution would be to do background checks and psychological tests for individuals who want to purchase a gun. This would ensure we don't sell guns to people who could potentially carry out mass shootings.

Quotation

“The reason the mental health system fails to prevent mass shootings is that mental illness is rarely the cause of such violence. Even if all potential mass shooters did get psychiatric care, there is no reliable cure for angry young men who harbor violent fantasies. And the laws intended to stop the mentally ill from buying guns are too narrow and easily sidestepped; people like Nikolas Cruz and my patient are unlikely to qualify.

Instead of hoping that imposing mental health treatment on everyone who shows “red flags” will put an end to mass shootings, we should focus on ways to put some distance between these young men and their guns.”

Citation #2

Hoyer, Meghan. Kelly, Mark. “Why is it so difficult to stop mass shootings in the U.S.?” PBS NewsHour, Jul 24, 2015,
www.pbs.org/newshour/show/difficult-stop-mass-shootings-u-s/#transcript

Summary

In this interview performed by Judy Woodruff, Meghan Hoyer and Mark Kelly talk about the main causes of mass shootings in the United States. Meghan Hoyer starts the interview by defining what a mass killing is. She says mass killing is basically four or more dead, not including the shooter, and that's according to the FBI definition. She also provided important information on the demographics of people who commit mass killings. 94 percent of the cases were men, and their average age is about 30. She also said in more than 50 percent of mass shootings, victims knew their shooter. She also points out that in about 75 percent of mass killing cases there was a gun involved. Most of these guns were handguns in opposition to high-capacity assault rifles. We also have Mark Kelly, retired NASA astronaut, and whose wife, former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, was severely wounded after being shot in the head at an event in Tucson. He says we have more gun violence in states that have the weakest gun laws. He says he understands the need for responsible citizens to own guns, and he is in favor of that. However, he says the easy access we provide to felons and criminals is the real problem. He also said most Americans agree with getting a background check before buying a gun.

Reflection

Listening to people's opinions on the mass shooting problem is important because you get to grasp the emotions that these people reflect when talking on this subject, especially when they're personally affected by the issue. This is the case of Mark Kelly, who had his wife getting shot at an event. By hearing his testimony, it is more likely to change your perspective than by reading an article. In this interview, we go back to the issues we previously talked about, guns

and mental health, but this time focusing more on the gun regulation issue. It is clear by now that the American gun culture seems to be the gear that got stuck, and it's making it impossible to stop gun violence in this country. Government officials are aware of the consequences they will have to face if they threaten to impose tougher gun laws. In the end, it might cost them the election. Therefore, they keep passing the ball on who will be the one to sacrifice their political career in exchange to save innocent people's lives.

Quotation

“Well, I think, you know, a logical response is that we have a lot of gun violence in this country.

We have — over 30,000 people die from gun violence every year. In states that have the weakest gun laws, we tend to have more gun violence. And Congress is perfectly capable of doing something about it. But they choose not to. And that's something that, you know, people should demand. They should demand action, because, unless we make changes to our laws and changes to easy access for felons, domestic abusers, people that are mentally ill, we will continue to see this very high rate of gun violence.”

Citation #3

Lifton, Robert Jay. “An Ideology of ‘Gunism,’” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. 53, May 4, 2007, p. B11.

https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=42&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=20&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010015231&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=Z

XAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010015231&searchId=R
1&userGroupName=nysl_oweb&inPS=true

Summary

In this article, Lifton mentions mental health issues and access to guns as the main causes of mass shootings in the United States. In the article, Lifton focuses on the Virginia Tech shooting that happened on April 16, 2007. At the time, he agreed with the consensus that “something should be done to intervene earlier in threatening forms of psychological disturbance.” However, Lifton also attributes these massacres to the gun culture of this country. He calls it “gun-centered cultural disease.” Lifton disagrees with the idea of solving the problem by allowing some students to carry hidden guns into university classrooms. He says we need a diagnosis of our “cultural disease,” then take slow steps to address the flaws in gun regulation laws.

Reflection

I have to say I agree with Robert Jay Lifton on what he believes causes people to commit mass shootings. He mentions a combination of mental disease and access to guns as the main two causes of mass shootings. Even though Lifton is referring to the 2007 Virginia Tech shootings, his comments can be applied to mass shootings in general. He says guns are not only lethal devices but also “psychological actors in this terrible drama.” I can interpret this quote as the close relationship between mass shooters and their guns. Many times, it turns out that these individuals act as gun collectors. They are passionate by their weapons. This deep emotional connection makes it easier for them to form ideas of harming innocent people. They already have

the necessary tools. We combine that factor with some psychological traumas and the result can be very tragic. Despite being aware of this issue, it seems almost impossible for the federal and local governments to make some meaningful changes to gun regulations. Americans love their guns. Therefore, I strongly agree with Lifton's idea of making slow changes to gun regulations in order to avoid a wave of backlash from pro-gun groups and individuals.

Quotation

“Much has been said, with considerable truth, about the role of the frontier in bringing about this psychological condition. I would go further and suggest that American society, in the absence of an encompassing and stable traditional culture, has embraced the gun as a substitute for that absence, and created a vast cultural ideology we can call “gunism”.”

Conclusion

After doing research on what are the causes of mass shootings, I was able to conclude that gun regulation is the key solution to these tragedies. While mental health plays a big role in these events, there isn't much the authorities can do to solve the mental health side of the problem. However, they could start by establishing tougher requirements for buying a gun, including background checks and mental fitness. Despite having a clear path to a safer gun violence-free country, the same gun-centered culture doesn't allow the government to start working on a solution. For now, all we can do is to keep advocating for a safer gun violence-free country, where we are able to go to the mall without worrying about the possibilities of becoming non-useful statistics on another mass shooting.