

**A** On 14 February this year, seventeen people were killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Several other mass shootings had previously taken place in the US in 2017. In fact, the United States is the worldwide leader in mass shootings. We've invited journalist Monica Freeman who has studied several research papers investigating why there are more mass killings in the US than in any other country. Monica, what conclusion have you reached?

**B** First I looked at the numbers. Americans make up about four point four per cent of the global population but own forty-two per cent of the world's guns. A recent study analysed mass shootings between 1966 and 2012, and found that thirty-one per cent of the gunmen in mass shootings worldwide were American. The study also showed that the United States had six times as many guns and five times as many mass shooters as any other country.

**A** But does it necessarily follow that the more guns, the more mass shootings?

**B** People have given other explanations for this phenomenon. Some say there are so many mass shootings because the US is unusually violent. Others claim it's because America lacks proper mental health care.

**A** Isn't there some truth to all that?

**B** Let's consider mental health. If mental health made the difference, then data would show that Americans have more mental health problems than do people in other countries that have fewer mass killings.

**A** Isn't that the case?

**B** The mental health care spending rate in the United States, the number of mental health professionals per capita, and the rate of severe mental disorders are all in line with those of other wealthy countries. Countries with high suicide rates tend to have low rates of mass shootings, but this is the opposite of what you'd expect if mental health problems correlated with mass shootings. In fact it's estimated that only four per cent of American gun deaths are due to mental health issues.

**A** What about the notion that the US is more prone to crime and violence?

**B** America's gun homicide rate was thirty-three per million people in 2009. In Canada it was five per million, and in Britain zero point seven [0.7] per million — that also corresponds with differences in gun ownership.

**A** But doesn't that suggest that America is more violent?

**B** What it says is that American crime is simply more lethal. A New Yorker is just as likely to be robbed as a Londoner, but the New Yorker is fifty-four times more likely to be killed in the process.

**A** What accounts for the discrepancy?

**B** Researchers have looked at all the possibilities and in the end ascertained that the only variable that can explain the high rate of mass shootings in America is its astronomical number of guns. Several studies show that the more guns people own, the more murders from guns you'll see. And this is true across all developed countries, all American states, towns, and cities.

**A** What about gun control?

**B** Gun control legislation tends to reduce murders by guns, according to an analysis of one hundred and thirty studies from ten countries.

**A** Can you give specific examples?

**B** Switzerland has the second highest rate of gun ownership of any developed country — about half that of the US. Its gun homicide rate is a fraction of that in the US. That can be explained by the fact that Swiss gun laws are more stringent, setting a higher bar for securing and keeping a license, for selling guns, and for the types of guns that can be owned. Such laws imply a different way of thinking about guns, as something that citizens must affirmatively earn the right to own.

**A** Whereas the US maintains that people have a right to own guns, so virtually anyone can own one. However, opinion polls do show that more than two-thirds of Americans now support tighter gun restrictions. Are we likely to see a change in US gun laws?

**B** A meeting was organised in February this year with survivors of the Parkland Florida shooting. The spokeswoman of the National Rifle Association of America who was present at this meeting blamed the shooting on mental illness and ineffective law enforcement. The NRA donated more than thirty million dollars to back Trump's 2016 bid for the White House...

### **Outline**

Seventeen people were killed at a high school in Florida on 14 February 2018, and several other mass shootings took place in the US in 2017. There are more mass killings in the US than in any other country. Is this because the US is unusually violent, or because it lacks proper mental health care? In fact, researchers have ascertained that the astronomical number of guns in the US is what explains the high rate of mass shootings. The more guns people own, the more murders from guns there are. Americans make up about 4.4% of the global population and own 42% of the world's guns. Switzerland is the developed country with the second highest rate of gun ownership and its gun homicide rate is a fraction of that in the US.

### **Questions**

1. Why don't many Americans acknowledge that guns and lack of gun control cause mass shootings?
2. Does in-depth knowledge of the history and mentality of the US enable one to understand why guns are important for many people in the US?
3. Are we likely to see a change in US gun laws?
4. Have the mass killings in the US caused you to view the US differently?