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How Should We Prevent Mass Shootings in Our Communities?

The tragic attacks in El Paso, Texas; Dayton, Ohio; Parkland, Florida; and other places have raised concerns among many people across the nation. Such shootings have become more frequent and more deadly in the last decade. Each mass murder has devastating effects on a whole community.

Overall, the United States has become safer in recent years. Yet mass shooters target innocent people

indiscriminately, often in places where people should feel safe—movie theaters, shopping centers, schools. Many believe these attacks are nothing short of terrorism. How can we stop mass shootings and ensure that people feel safe in their homes and communities?

This issue advisory presents three options, along with their drawbacks. These are not the only options, and you may think of others.

Option One: Make Mass Killings More Difficult

According to this option: The problem is that we are too vulnerable to gun violence. Communities and homes should be places where people are safe. The tools for carrying out mass shootings are all around. It is too easy for individuals to obtain weapons that are designed to kill a large number of people in a short time.

We cannot stop all violent impulses, but we can and should make it much more difficult for people to act on them. We should restrict the availability of dangerous weapons, identify potentially dangerous people, and prevent them from carrying out their plans.

A Primary Drawback

This gives the government extraordinary control.

Possible Actions

- Ban military style and assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and armor-piercing ammunition.
- Pass “red flag” laws in every state so that police can take firearms away from people who are a threat to themselves or others.
- Police departments should hold voluntary buyback programs where people can turn in firearms for money with no questions asked.
- Require a mandatory 28-day wait to buy firearms and conduct background checks for all buyers, including those buying from private individuals.
- Boycott companies that do business with or enable gun manufacturers.

Drawbacks and Trade-offs

- Stable, law-abiding citizens will lose access to weaponry they can currently purchase.
- This would make it more likely that firearms would be confiscated unfairly from some people.
- People with illegal weapons will get amnesty and money as well and may just buy new guns.
- This will limit people’s ability to defend themselves. Background checks may weed out criminals but miss mentally ill individuals.
- This would unfairly punish businesses for dealing with a legal product.

Option Two: Equip People to Defend Themselves

According to this option: The problem is that most people are not able to defend themselves from the sudden danger posed by mass shootings. There will always be some who are a threat to those around them. We cannot afford to rely on the presence of police to rescue us. We should be prepared for violence and have the means to defend against it. The Second Amendment to the US Constitution guarantees this right.

A Primary Drawback

The proliferation of firearms and armed guards in public places would create the atmosphere of a police state and would significantly change US society.

Possible Actions

- Post more guards, security officers, and metal detectors in public places as well as schools, places of business, and any venue with large crowds.
- Drill teachers and students in the best ways to hide and protect themselves in the case of attacks.
- More Americans should carry firearms openly to dissuade potential attackers.
- People in professions that have close contact with the public should be required to identify and report people who appear to be unbalanced or to pose threats.
- Arm teachers and school administrators so they can protect themselves and their students.

Drawbacks and Trade-offs

- This will make schools and other public places seem like prison camps.
- This will alarm young children and may cause them to become unnecessarily fearful.
- This would lead to greater fear, not greater security.
- This may result in people being pushed into the mental health system when they are just undergoing normal stress.
- This places teachers in a position for which they may be neither ready nor temperamentally suited. Guns in schools may go off accidentally.

This issue advisory was prepared for the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. National Issues Forums issue guides are used by civic and educational organizations interested in addressing public issues. These organizations use the books in locally initiated forums convened each year in hundreds of communities. Recent topics have included immigration, opioids, the national debt, and health care. For more information on the National Issues Forums, visit the website: www.nifi.org.

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Option Three: Root Out Violence and Hate in Society

According to this option: The problem is that we live in a culture that perpetuates violence and numbs people to its effects. The Internet provides a platform and organizing space for hate groups and domestic terrorists. Violence and criminality are pervasive in movies, television, and video games. Mass murderers gain notoriety through nonstop media portrayals.

This results in a culture in which stories of mass murder circulate and gain momentum—so further shootings become a greater possibility. We must root out and stop the glorification of violence and promotion of hate to break this cycle.

A Primary Drawback

We would be restricting freedom of speech.

Possible Actions

- Public officials and community leaders should not stereotype or target minorities or other groups or use violent imagery.
- Reduce depictions of violence, mayhem, and shooting in popular culture.
- Internet companies such as Facebook and Internet providers should ban violent, hateful materials.
- Allow the FBI and police to monitor and track online conversations by hate groups and domestic terror organizations, just as they now do with international terrorism.
- People should speak out publicly when others use hate speech or make light of violence.

Drawbacks and Trade-offs

- If people become afraid to say the wrong thing, it could be harder to discuss important issues.
- This limits freedom of expression. There is no conclusive proof that violent entertainment causes violent behavior.
- This gives private companies far-reaching power to limit free speech.
- This would be a significant invasion of privacy and could lead to innocent people being arrested.
- This will lead to more conflict.



Founded in 1927, the Kettering Foundation of Dayton, Ohio (with an office in Washington, DC), is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute that studies the public's role in democracy. It provides issue guides and other research for the National Issues Forums. For information about the Kettering Foundation, please visit www.kettering.org or contact the foundation at 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459.

About This Issue Advisory

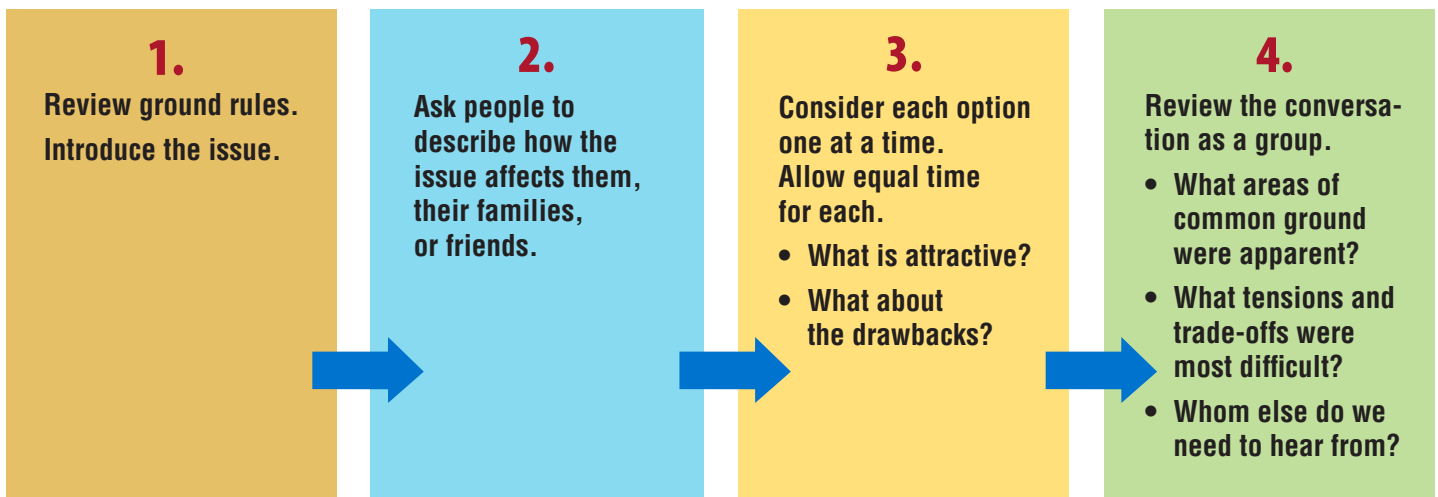
Recent horrific events involving mass shootings have struck a deep chord in many of us. Deliberative forums on this issue will not be easy. Remember that the objective of these forums is to begin to work through the tensions between **security**, **freedom**, and a **healthy society**.

In productive deliberation, people examine different options for addressing a difficult public problem. This

issue advisory presents three such options and provides an alternative means of moving forward in order to avoid the polarizing rhetoric so common today.

Each option is based on a shared concern and poses a distinct strategy for addressing the problem. Equally important, each option presents the drawbacks or trade-offs inherent in each action.

Holding a Deliberative Forum



Ground Rules

- Focus on the options and actions we can take nationally and in our community.
- Consider all options fairly.
- Listening is just as important as speaking.
- No one or two individuals should dominate.
- Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.

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Community Forum Worksheet



NOW THAT YOU HAVE DELIBERATED IN YOUR FORUM, you and others in your community can use this worksheet to continue considering ideas about what might be done about this problem. Here is a reminder of actions you discussed in your forum:

- a. Ban military and assault weapons.
- b. Pass “red flag” laws.
- c. Hold voluntary gun buyback programs.
- d. Enact a mandatory waiting period and background check to buy guns.
- e. Post more guards and metal detectors at schools and events.
- f. Train teachers and students to hide and stay out of danger.
- g. Teachers and other professionals should identify potential threats.
- h. Arm teachers and school staff.
- i. Public figures should stop stereotyping minorities.
- j. Reduce the violence in popular culture.
- k. Allow the FBI to monitor online conversations.
- l. Internet companies should ban hate speech.

1. Which **three** actions above (a-l) do you most strongly support? _____
2. Which **three** actions above (a-l) do you most strongly oppose? _____
3. Are there any actions above you still feel **unsure** about? _____

4. Below are some actions that people can do by themselves or with others. Which ones do you think would be helpful? Which ones would not be helpful?

Action	Helpful	Not Helpful
Boycott companies that help gun manufacturers		
Carry firearms openly		
Speak out against hate and violence		

5. What else could people, working together in your community, do to address this problem?

6. Did you talk about aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before?

Yes

No

If so, please explain.

7. Were there ideas or proposals that you tended to favor coming into the forum that you now have second thoughts about?

Yes

No

If so, please explain.

8. Not including this forum, how many National Issues Forums have you attended?

0

1-3

4-6

7 or more

Not sure

9. Are you male or female?

Male

Female

Other (please specify)

10. How old are you?

17 or younger

18-30

31-45

46-64

65 or older

11. Are you:

African American

Asian American

Hispanic or Latino

Native American

White/Caucasian

Other (please specify)

12. Where do you live?

Rural

Small Town

Large City

Suburb

13. What is your ZIP code?

What state do you live in? _____

Please give this worksheet to your moderator when you have filled it out, email to forumreports@nifi.org, or mail to: National Issues Forums Institute, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459.

This worksheet is also available online at www.nifi.org/questionnaires.