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# What our gun laws say about us



John Locher, The Associated Press

People pause at a memorial for the victims of a mass shooting in Las Vegas, Wednesday, Oct. 4, 2017, in Las Vegas. A gunman opened fire on an outdoor music concert on Sunday killing dozens and injuring hundreds.

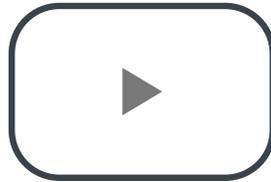
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By **THE DENVER POST EDITORIAL BOARD** |

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In the modern list of mass shootings on American soil, a disturbingly familiar pattern has emerged: military-style semiautomatic weapons with large magazines purchased, borrowed or stolen in the days and months leading up to the attacks.



Who doesn't wish James Holmes had been stopped from purchasing four guns in the 60 days prior to his attack, including the semiautomatic Smith & Wesson M&P 15, a civilian version of the U.S. military's fully automatic M-16, that he coupled with a 100-round magazine?

Who doesn't regret the murderous efficiency of the weapons used by Stephen Paddock last Sunday as he killed 58 human beings and injured hundreds more who were simply trying to enjoy a concert in Las Vegas?

Yet on the question of gun limits, our nation remains hopelessly divided.

The gun control debate is so politicized between liberal and conservative camps that it becomes a convenient demonizing weapon of its own.

[In calling for an honest debate](#), we know we're asking a lot: that both sides suspend the acrimony. Americans have a culture of responsible gun ownership, and we should respect those who wish to have the weapons to protect their families and themselves, hunt and enjoy sport shooting responsibly.

But we also must remember there are limits to our freedoms. Just as we don't shout "fire" in a theater and thereby violate the spirit of our First Amendment rights, we shouldn't violate the spirit of our Second Amendment rights. But we are doing exactly that by allowing easy access to gun technology so dangerous that when an idiot gets hold of it the damage he can do is as devastating as we witnessed last week in Las Vegas.

An attack this horrendous injures the very psyche of our nation. The human loss and misery tears at our hearts and crushes our souls.

Americans need to decide whether owning and selling these killing machines — designed for military use and stripped of their fully automatic capabilities for civilian sales — is worth the price we pay in added death and injury every time a psychopath targets civilians.

Our freedoms come with a cost. After 9/11, the pendulum swung too far toward state surveillance of Americans. We surrendered liberties to the government as we swore never again. There's certainly a line that we should not cross in the gun debate as well.

But our gun laws are far from that line. They are so permissive that in 49 states anyone who can pass a federal background check, wait at least 24 hours and shell out serious cash can walk away with a semiautomatic, .50-caliber rifle like those used by U.S. military snipers and gunners to pierce metal barriers and hit targets a mile away.

Sadly, the window of opportunity to ban military-style rifles has likely closed. When Congress let the 1994 assault weapon ban expire in 2004, it opened the already porous flood gates to sales.

The U.S. Supreme Court held in *District of Columbia vs. Heller* that the Second Amendment protects weapons “in common use,” although it emphasized the legality of “prohibiting the carrying of dangerous and unusual weapons.”

The Sig Sauer AR-15 (used to kill 49 people in an Orlando nightclub), the Smith and Wesson M&P and the DPMS Panther Arms (used to kill 14 at an office party in San Bernardino, Calif.), are sold in mass and “in common use.” Any effort now to ban sales of “assault weapons” — an admittedly ill-defined term — would likely fall to *Heller*.

As Coloradans, we write from the unique perspective granted us by lawmakers in 2013, who adopted a 15-round magazine limit and other reforms.

Yes, they remain susceptible to abuse. But they would serve the nation well.

We supported the state's reforms. We would also support a step further: Why not require new assault weapons to be sold with fixed magazines that must be reloaded? And the nation's system of screening gun buyers must be made stronger still.

It is heartening to see lawmakers in Congress, Republicans and Democrats, getting serious about banning devices used to modify guns so they fire like an automatic weapon, as Paddock employed.