

Guns made for slaughter

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Customers in line at a gun store. [Some rights reserved](#) by [Patrick Feller](#)

Each mass shooting is unique, a particular horror inflicted on particular people. The June 12 attack on Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, was uniquely deadly: 50 killed, including the shooter, making it the worst mass shooting in U.S. history. Most of the victims were gay men of color, members of a local LGBTQ community that had long found refuge and safety at Pulse. The gunman shattered this refuge, leaving terror in his wake.

Yet while distinct in their horrors, mass shootings have become so common that we can identify some predictable elements. The shooter's weapon of choice was a gas-powered semiautomatic rifle, a powerful assault weapon similar to those used in the shootings in Aurora, Newtown, and San Bernardino. As in those shootings, the gun was obtained legally and used for the exact purpose for which it was designed: killing multiple human beings with ruthless efficiency. As usual, some have taken offense at any "politicized" talk of gun control in the wake of the massacre—as if a shooting has nothing to do with a shooter acquiring a weapon and using it to shoot people.

And as usual, the most the congressional leadership has been able to do so far is to say nothing. Representative Jim Himes (D., Conn.) has had it. He and a few other members boycotted the moment of silence held in the House of Representatives the day after the shooting. "Silence: that is what we offer an America that supports many of the things we could do to slow the bloodbath," Himes said beforehand on

the House floor. “Not me—not anymore.”

Himes is right: most Americans favor stronger gun control measures. According to most polls, this includes a renewal of the ban on assault weapons, which Congress allowed to expire in 2004. Of course, having an opinion isn’t the same as actively working for change, and those who oppose gun control tend to be more devoted advocates than those who support it. And these days, legislators are primed to respond more readily to fervency than to majorities. After all, it doesn’t take a majority of citizens to mount a challenge in a primary election when a representative is perceived as soft on guns—just some true believers and some gun-lobby money.

An assault weapons ban wouldn’t put an end to LGBTQ people’s legitimate fears. It wouldn’t stop terrorists or backlashes against innocent people. It certainly wouldn’t dismantle the deep violence embedded in American culture. These are complex problems that legislation alone can’t solve.

A ban wouldn’t even end mass shootings—but it would reduce the body count. From a distance, this may sound secondary. In grieving Orlando it sounds urgent. Banning assault weapons—machines designed not to defend people but to destroy them—is the least we can do.