Gun ownership rights have been a hot button issue for well over 25 years. Particularly over the last 15, it seems that every time a mass killing occurs in America we see one side dashing to clear out gun stores before their weapons are taken away and another crying out for an assault weapons ban or gun registry. In recent years, be it due to wider and faster access to information, or an increase in actual mass murders, the issue began to reach a head, climaxing at the end of 2012 with the mass killing of children and teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Within a week ammo for certain guns was almost impossible to find and the news was full of outcry from both sides. One to protect their gun rights and another to somehow legally prevent this from happening again. By mid-2014 it was as if none of these things had ever happened. The media and Washington turned to other issues after very little changed for gun owners or the proponents of stricter gun control. Having grown up a liberal in the conservative hunting mecca of Wyoming, this issue has always been complex for me. Myself, my family, and most of my fellows all owned firearms. Due to my desire to know more than small town Wyoming life I was blessed with an awareness of issues outside of my hometown, where the average murder rate is less than one per year and developed a realization that there is a unique gun violence problem in America that desperately needs to be addressed. I respect firearms and even enjoy using them, but unlike most of my peers in Wyoming, believe limitations on access to them are necessary. For these reasons I chose to focus my research on answering the question: What needs to change in American law to protect both the rights of responsible citizens to own firearms, and the safety of our citizens from mentally unstable criminals with guns? Through my research I intend to learn what ideas
have been roadblocked and why, as well as what has shown to be the cause of such high rates of gun violence in this country and how it can be stopped.


In “Tucson Tragedy: Is Gun Control a Dead Issue?”, Michael Grunwald evaluates the political stances of the Republican and Democratic parties, raising the question of whether or not gun control is an issue they find too controversial to address. Grunwald highlights America’s history of being very protective of their gun rights even in the wake of massive tragedies at the hands of unstable gun owners, pointing out statistics pegging the United States as a country plagued by gun violence compared to other wealthy nations, and the astronomically low number of actual self defense shootings. Grunwald implies that the NRA’s political strength, and lack of budging room in their stance toward gun legislation has scared any politicians who support stricter gun laws from proposing legislation or touching on the issue in their campaigns. He provides a history of the past 20 years of gun legislation, starting with the Clinton era assault weapon ban which he implies attributed to a republican sweep of the following congressional election. For the following 20 years, he insists, presidents Obama and Bush have campaigned in support of gun reform but not acted on it once in office. Grunwald, however, argues that the NRA’s influence on the issue may have weakened, citing their lack of success in influencing the 2008 election of Barack Obama. The article concludes with a slew of statistics on gun related deaths and their relation to state to state gun laws.

Michael Grunwald relies on historical evidence, statistics and emotional appeals for safety to show how American politicians are failing to address the gun violence issue in America. The article was written in the wake of a shooting in Tucson where congresswoman Gabby Giffords was shot in the head, causing a severe and traumatic brain injury, along with many being killed and wounded. He sets up the article using clever literary analogies about American
traditions such as baseball and westward expansion. Grunwald uses logical appeals to highlight the history of inaction by politicians regarding gun reform since the early Clinton era, as well as numerous statistics about gun related death in America to show that the issue of gun reform deserves attention. He appeals to the facts to address the increasing availability and ownership of guns in the various states throughout America. Grunwald appeals emotionally by implementing our nations as inactive in an issue he strongly feels deserves their attention, and by painting the NRA as a political bully who threatens the careers of politicians going against the association’s agenda. His final most powerful emotional appeal is when he paints the shooting of Gabby Giffords as personal to a Congress which has been largely silent and inactive on the issue of gun control.

This article by Michael Grunwald contained some very valuable information for my paper. The statistics listed in the end speak volumes about the need for something in the way of change to steer away from America’s alarming gun violence trends. More importantly it provides a view on why the issue hasn’t really made it out of the media and into the legislature for the better part of the past 25 years. Grunwald’s article touches on the “hands off” attitude toward any and all gun legislation that makes middle ground so hard to find. I will make good use of his historical analysis of presidential inaction over the last 25 years, and his statistical information on gun deaths. I also feel that his assessment of the NRA as having a stranglehold on the political arena regarding the topic is accurate and a major pitfall in finding middle ground on the issue. Overall, while still not a true ‘middle ground’ analysis of the issue (it’s fairly left slanted) it does help to provide an analysis of why middle ground is so hard to find.

In “The Newtown Tragedy: Complex Causes Require Thoughtful Analysis and Responses”, John Malcom addresses the response of Americans legislators to the tragic mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012. Malcom insists that any gun control legislation would impede on American’s second amendment rights. He also argues that banning weapons will likely increase gun violence in America, citing historical gun violence data in parts of the world where guns are heavily controlled, or banned amongst the civilian populous. He cites many court cases and their interpretation of the second amendment to paint gun legislation as unconstitutional. Malcom states that gun legislation and school security should be regulated by states and cities as opposed to the federal government. He suggests that programs directed at changing behavior amongst teens with potential for violence are more likely to quell risks of mass school shootings than gun control, and uses correlating drops in crimes at schools where these laws have been enacted to show this trend. He addresses the failures of federally funded mental health programs to address severe mental illness, as well as correlations between schizophrenia and violent crime to paint gun violence amongst teens and children as a mental health issue and foster support for state mental health assistance and regulations instead of federal ones. Malcom addresses the community and family responsibility toward raising of children as the primary concern for prevention of gun violence. He inserts arguments for legislative support of traditional family values, as well as support of religion to ensure the raising of children who are less apt to commit violent crimes. Malcom cites correlations between broken homes and non-religious upbringing, and suicide and violence rates as supportive to his argument. Malcom also calls for social responsibility and capital persuasion in the content of entertainment media, accusing the Motion Picture Association of condemning gun violence and fighting for gun control while producing ultra-violent products that may or may not encourage violence. In conclusion, John Malcom insists that social responsibility, not gun control, is the missing piece in quelling the current trend of gun violence among teens in America.
John Malcom’s article uses a mixture of emotional and logical appeals to argue that further restriction of gun rights would be detrimental to America. He alludes to the founding fathers and formative days of America in discussing the second Amendment, creating the patriotic groundwork on which he lays out the article. Malcom uses terms like “rights” and “liberty” frequently to equate gun ownership to freedom in America. In his arguments for social responsibility, Malcom leans heavily on discussions of family values and social responsibility to paint a wholesome conservative picture of the ideal ‘perfect world’ family, and suggests that the values of such a model family could help prevent gun violence. He rarely uses any accusatory statements toward those of opposite beliefs, which helps maintain some credibility with readers he may not see eye to eye with. Malcom also presents facts and statistics throughout the article, but mostly relating to mental health, family structure and public school programs aimed at preventing violence. This, while sometimes distracting regarding the topic (discussing gang violence for the most part in an article responding to a suburban school shooting) effectively diverts the focus of the issue to community values, as I had all but forgot I was reading about gun legislation by the end of the article. Malcom’s wholesome, conservative attitude, paired with his patriotic appeals and statistics paints an image of a violence issue fueled by social irresponsibility and not access to firearms.

In reflection, Malcom’s article will be fairly useful for my research paper. I disagree with most of what Malcom says in the paper but it paints a great picture of a point of view drastically different from my own. The article’s main failure was to address anything short of gun bans when discussing the topic of gun control. I am yet to find a conservative piece addressing the issue as one of legislative changes instead of outright gun bans. I agree with Malcom that banning firearms altogether is a terrible idea, but would like to have seen more arguments against more middle of the road solutions such as closing gun show loopholes and greater regulation on concealed carry, etc... While I agree that gun violence is a multi-faceted
issue, it is hard for me to read about all of these suggestions regarding school programs from an article for an Institution who repeatedly allows funding for schools to take the back seat to other issues. I am looking forward to finding some better conservative work that may address the issue from a perspective more realistic to the actual political arena today, as I haven’t heard or read anything on proposed gun bans.


“License to Kill”, a comprehensive article by Chelsea Parsons and Arkady Gerney, examines Stand Your Ground laws and regulations for concealed carry permits in the United States of America. The article provides insight into the effects of stand your ground laws on criminal activity in states which have enacted them, as well as interpretations by both proponents and opponents of such laws which are all in need of further study to verify. The authors discuss the possible racial disparities in the enforcement of these laws. The article also provides insight into the various levels of regulation placed on concealed carry permits in different states and how those regulations succeed and fail to ensure concealed carry permits are safely issued. The authors warn of attempts by the NRA to nationally require all states to recognize concealed carry permits from others, regardless of disparities in the regulations placed on obtaining them from state to state. All of the facts and background lead to a set of suggestions from the authors on how state and federal governments need to amend or enforce the laws regulating lethal acts of self defense and carrying of concealed weapons. They suggest a minimum standards on criminal records, training and governance for all states issuing concealed carry permits and federal oversight requirements for states documentation standards regarding these permits. In regards to stand your ground laws the authors suggest levying federal JAG and other grants against states not regularly evaluating the laws for effectiveness and trends of racial disparity. In conclusion
the authors urge that while concealed weapons and their use in self defense should remain protected in this nation, those using them must be held to a higher standard.

The authors of this article rely heavily on logical appeals in this article to reinforce the need for stricter regulations on concealed carry permits and stand your ground laws, written in a time when racial tensions, and tension over gun rights were at an all-time high. The writer cites statistics from studies on racial disparity in enforcement of stand your ground legislation, as well as statistics from both proponents and opponents of the laws which show opposite trends based on the methods of data collection. In discussing concealed carry laws the authors go to great lengths to describe the different types of laws which govern these permits. They use statistics regarding failures by more lax states to correctly enforce their existing gun laws, to point out the need for more standardized regulatory systems for concealed carry permits. The authors reinforce their credibility by taking a middle of the road stance, acknowledging the need for concealed carry rights, while also expecting a higher standard of care and enforcement. The authors reinforce this credibility with the strength of their logical appeals, and the multiple credible sources cited in the writing of the article.

In reflection, this article provided a great deal of information and insight from supporters of stricter gun legislation. Even better, it provided some fairly unbiased factual information on the current laws regarding concealed carry of firearms in various states. The article was jam packed with information, with very little opinion, but still provided a great argument for middle of the road solutions to gun violence problems in America, even if it only covers one aspect of the gun issues being debated today. The information in this article will prove useful in providing me with neutral, factual information on the baseline of existing gun laws, as well as some great suggestions for laws which can improve public safety without going to extremes of prohibition or a hyper-armed militant populous.
In “The gun-show loophole myth; FBI checks have to be fixed; new laws not needed on private gun sales.”, an article written for The Washington Times in January of 2013, the author explains what he perceives as a myth regarding criminals acquiring weapons at gun shows. The article opens discussing Wayne LaPierre’s impending appearance before the Senate Judiciary Committee regarding proposed gun legislation. The article explains that the existing instant background checks run by an FBI system instantly weeds out criminals who are trying to acquire a firearm from a gun store. The writer goes on to accuse proponents of stricter gun legislation of reaching for an ultimate goal of universal registration. The article cites a statistic which states that 40% of gun purchases are purchased without a background check and breaks it down to show that the majority of those come from private sales from friends or family, and not from gun shows. The writer also cites statistics claiming that a very marginal number of violent felons claim to have purchased their weapons at gun shows. The article concludes in stating that legislation aimed at registration for private sellers would be ineffective, and the government would do better to ensure that states are up to speed on current registration laws, and in submitting felony and mental health information in a timely manner.

The writer of this article uses appeals to fears of gun owners and statistical information to argue that legislation aimed at registration of private gun sales would be ineffective at keeping guns out of the hands of criminals. The article is worded to paint politicians as unguided in saying that they are jumping to “do something” in the wake of the Newtown shooting. The article uses accusatory verbage such as “gun grabbers” to appeal to fears of gun owners having their weapons taken away. The writer cites several statistics to break down private gun sales and how criminals acquire weapons. The article appeals to both sides of the argument by conceding to a
need to strengthen current background check systems to help prevent dangerous people from purchasing guns. The article is well timed in the wake of the Newtown shooting and on the brink of the meeting between Wayne LaPierre and the Senate Judicial Committee.

This article (by an author not listed in the database) is very useful as it’s one of few I’ve found from a conservative angle, that cites statistics regarding the issue. It effectively convinced me that gun shows aren’t the heart of the problem of gun violence in America. The statistics on private sales are very useful, but not as the author intended. It helps me form the belief that private sales, whether made at gun shows or not, should be regulated. This is reinforced by the fact (stated in the article) that 29% of gun sales are unregulated sales or trades outside of gun shows. Regardless of whether or not these sales are between friends, families, and acquaintances or not, they are made bypassing any background check or legislation, essentially allowing anyone to buy a gun off of craigslist. In conclusion this article reinforces the idea in me that all gun sales should require a background check, funded by the seller as it is a small price to pay to protect the public from criminals and the mentally unstable acquiring weapons to commit crimes.

In my research on the topic I have learned that due to the political climate, gun legislation is a topic largely avoided by politicians. Because of this, any solution is going to face complications in being passed. Doing nothing certainly isn’t the answer, as gun violence doesn’t appear to be slowing down. I have discovered that many of the pitfalls in recent proposed legislation have been fear based and unrealistic concerns about the consequences of restricting gun access. The best answer I have found for a middle of the road solution is that the government must set a federal minimum standard for issuance of concealed carry permits, abolish stand your ground laws, and set a registration requirement on all gun transactions, including private ones. Fears about having our guns taken away can’t get in the way of legislation that doesn’t call for that in the first place. Americans must trust in the constitution and checks and balances to protect them from tyrannical rule. The second amendment must remain intact, even to reinforce the protection of that constitution, but like most other amendments, it needs guidelines.