

“There is no gun problem, there is only a people
problem”

Keywords in the American gun debate and their differing usage

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Abstrakt: <p>The gun debate in the United States has been going on for decades. Whether or not new gun legislation should be implemented in the wake of repeated mass shootings and the public outrage that follows them is constantly debated, but little progress has been made in the way of lawmaking. This thesis explores the way that differing sides of the gun debate – those for gun control and those against – use different definitions and ways to present keywords that are frequently used in the gun debate.</p> <p>The study is an analysis of four speeches that were given by four different speakers in the wake of a school shooting in Parkland, Florida in 2018. The four selected speeches have been given by Emma Gonzalez and David Hogg, both students at the school, NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre and Republican Senator Marco Rubio. The hypothesis is that people on opposing sides of the debate will speak about and use the keywords in the text differently. Theoretical approaches used in the analysis include critical discourse analysis and strategic maneuvering. The keywords have been preselected by me and include words such as <i>gun</i>, <i>Second Amendment</i>, <i>United States</i> and <i>victims</i>.</p> <p>The analysis of the speeches shows that the speakers differed the most when speaking about guns, laws and the United States. Guns were presented either as objects without any agency and therefore lacking any moral implications or as direct reasons for the mass murder of innocents. Current laws were presented as either fundamental for American society or were not mentioned at all, and future legislation was either referred to as desirable change, ineffective, or as oppression of the rights of American citizens and a slippery slope towards the complete banning of firearms. On the other hand, the ways in which each speaker referred to the victims of the shooting were very similar, and the name of the gunman was not mentioned in any of the speeches. Issues that would have been more difficult to deal with by each speaker, depending on the side of the debate they represent, were frequently left out of the speeches. Hogg and Gonzalez, for example, never mention what should happen to weapons already in circulation if gun ownership is banned, nor do they bring up their thoughts about the Second Amendment. LaPierre and Rubio, on the other hand, while vocal about the harms of introducing new gun legislation, fail to mention what should be done to prohibit criminals from having continued access to firearms.</p> <p>It would appear that there is no clear solution to the gun debate on the horizon. The different attitudes towards gun control that predominate the discussion are recycling the same arguments in each debate, which would appear to have brought the issue to a standstill. Whether or not the number of mass shootings will lessen in the coming years can only be determined by how actively the gun control activists fight for their cause, and how strongly gun owners and the NRA will continue to resist their efforts.</p>	
Nyckelord: gun debate, Second Amendment, Constitution, freedom, speeches, framing, strategic maneuvering	
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1. Introduction

The gun control debate continues to be a hot topic in the United States of America. Mass shootings frequently make headlines within and without the nation, and the most shocking ones are then discussed publicly while people ask themselves how such tragedies should be prevented in the future. The incidents that garner the most media attention are typically shootings of an exceptional scale, such as the Pulse nightclub shooting in June 2016 and the Las Vegas massacre in October 2017. However, the most disturbing ones usually involve children getting shot in schools, such as the infamous Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in December 2012, in which 20 young children were fatally shot by 20-year-old Adam Lanza.

The discussions following such shootings have turned out to be extremely polarized. Those affected by gun violence frequently express their dismay over the National Rifle Association and politicians who, in their view, are blocking legislation that would prevent future mass killings, while the opposing side feels that their individual right to own firearms is being threatened on unfair grounds. The significance of the Second Amendment in the 21st century is constantly debated, and there seems to be no clear solution on the horizon.

In this thesis, I explore the discourses of the opposing sides regarding gun legislation in the United States following a school shooting. The school shooting of interest in this thesis is the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, which took place on February 14, 2018. Nicolas Cruz, a student at the high school, fatally shot 17 of his fellow students, and wounded 17. The shooting resulted in very public activism by some of the young survivors. This student activism eventually led to the March for Our Lives campaign, where students and their supporters took to the streets to protest gun violence in schools and to implore politicians to take legislative action in order to prevent future school shootings. I conduct a discourse analysis exploring the wordings used by two of the students who survived the shooting and went on to speak publicly on behalf of stricter gun control, Emma Gonzalez and David Hogg. The opposers of these measures are here represented by Senator Marco Rubio and National Rifle Association (NRA) CEO Wayne LaPierre, who both expressed their thoughts on the issue in the aftermath of the Stoneman Douglas shooting. Even though discourse analysis on the gun debate has been done many times before,

minors who have experienced school shootings themselves have rarely entered the spotlight to express their thoughts on gun legislation. One of the aims of this thesis is to find out whether their personal experience of the attack affects their reasoning for more gun control.

Before turning to my analysis, I provide background information on the Second Amendment and the general views and concerns of the opposing sides in the matter. I discuss the role of the NRA in the debate, and the history of prior school shootings and reactions that they have inspired. I also touch upon the importance of issue framing and strategic maneuvering in the debate about gun control and the right to bear arms. This backgrounding is followed by my analysis of each individual speech given, after which I sum up my findings and offer my concluding remarks and thoughts on future research.

2. The Gun Culture

2.1. The Second Amendment

The Second Amendment lies “at the heart” of the defense of gun rights (Utter & Spitzer, 2016:xvi). Its meaning is frequently debated, and according to Utter & Spitzer, two questions tend to predominate the discussion, namely whether the amendment protects a state or individual right to militia service, and whether the right of individuals to bear arms applies to states as well as the national government (2016:274). Gun rights advocates insist that the amendment protects both the right to keep and the right to bear arms – therefore, it supports not only states’ right to bear arms, but individuals’ as well, since the people are the ones who “have a need to keep arms in their homes for both self-protection as well as to maintain readiness against a threat to the public peace” (2016:274). Supporters of the “militia interpretation”, on the other hand, consider the amendment simply a guarantee that states have a right to maintain militias and believe that it does not concern individuals’ rights to own weapons – which is countered by the statement that, since individuals are what form a militia, the amendment refers to them by extension (Utter & Spitzer, 2016:274). Supporters of the militia interpretation then argue that not all individuals used to qualify for the militia – one had to have been 18-45 years of age and “have received appropriate training” (2016:275), which would negate the

interpretation that the individual right to bear arms would concern everyone equally. Another argument used by gun rights advocates is that the Second Amendment secures the right of citizens to rebel against tyrannical governments, whereas opposers of this view argue that no nation would guarantee its citizens the right to overthrow “legally established institutions” (2016:275).

According to Williams, the early drafts of the Second Amendment referred to “the Body of the People, rather than to individuals or persons” (2003:90), and that the original legal meaning of the Second Amendment is as follows: “To ensure that The Body of the People is prepared to resist a corrupt central government, The Body of the People shall have the right to keep and bear arms” (2003:69). Together with the Congress, the American people therefore had “two modes of expressing their will about the use of political violence – representatively in the Congress and directly in the militia” (2003:69). Williams also states that there is no modern equivalent to the militia, which causes the confusion in the modern-day gun debate (2003:70) – and since it does not exist, its rights cannot be legally protected (2003:272). He states that “the Second Amendment simply cannot, under modern conditions, mean what it meant under eighteenth-century conditions” (2003:271).

Another problem with the framing of the Second Amendment would be, according to Williams, the complexity of the militia – which, in the 1780s, “had a dual nature: it was raised and trained by the state to ensure its universality and its virtue, but it was also a popular body to resist government” (2003:17). Therefore, on the one hand, the militia had “important connections to the government” (2003:9), but on the other hand had to “exercise independent judgment” (2003:10). The militia was therefore neither simply a governmental institution nor a mass of individuals – it was a mixture of both. The opposing sides of the gun debate, however, tend to emphasize only one of these functions (2003:17). Over time, the militia developed into what is today known as the National Guard, thereby moving from state to federal control, and since members are no longer expected to supply their own weapons, the guarantee offered in the Second Amendment would therefore not be threatened by the institution of gun control (2003:110).

When it comes to the Second Amendment, gun control supporters argue that the Second Amendment, “like any other freedom, is not absolute” and are of the opinion

that the government may “institute reasonable firearms restrictions to maintain an ordered society” – although this is often interpreted by the opposing side as a way to ease into a complete banning of firearms (Utter & Spitzer, 2016:xvii).

2.2. The Debate

Perhaps with the exception of abortion, gun control is the most controversial issue in American politics, appealing strongly to the emotions of those who support, as well as to those who oppose, further regulation of firearms.
(Utter & Spitzer, 2016:xv)

The United States is deeply divided on the issue of guns, and the matter of gun control is frequently debated by politicians and citizens alike. According to Blanco, the gun control debate can essentially be boiled down to one question, which is “whether more guns make society more or less safe”. Gun control supporters believe that the ready availability of guns is the main cause of gun violence, whereas those opposed believe that guns keep people safe by enabling them to ward off potential attackers (2016:620). Those opposed to stricter gun laws consider themselves “supporters of a vital constitutional right to keep and bear arms”, whereas those in favor see themselves as “struggling for a more civilized society against the ‘gun nuts’ and profit-hungry firearms manufacturers and dealers” (Utter & Spitzer, 2016:xv). Essentially, the gun control issue, among other sociopolitical issues in America, boils down to disagreements about whether individual rights or the common good should take precedence (Blanco, 2016:624).

Both sides of the debate enforce their own message by casting a negative light on that of the opposing side. Gun control advocates express concern for the attitudes expressed by the opposing side (the “gun nuts”) regarding the ownership and use of firearms, and the association of firearms with death and violence. Gun rights supporters, on the other hand, highlight the “irrational fear of guns” expressed by the control side (the “gun grabbers”), and the tendency to depict guns as inherently evil in themselves, without regard for how they are used (Blanco, 2016:631). Blanco highlights how the gun control debate is also a question about semantics in that the way the disagreeing sides talk about each other nurtures their polarization:

The worldviews and interpretations assigned and the signification attached to each other makes society’s polarization and dichotomization even more pronounced, magnified, and exacerbated because the way interaction and discourse are done and

the manner of treatment each side puts on the discussion table. The social labeling and stereotyping allows people to cast judgments and aspersions which may be baseless and unfounded but remains and endures because of the way they construe and interpret the meaning of a gun without cultural bases.

(Blanco, 2016:632)

2.3. Gun Control

According to James D. Wright, one of the main issues when talking about gun control is that claiming to be for or against it is highly ambiguous. He clarifies this by saying:

In the present-day American political context, “stricter gun control” can mean anything from federal registration of firearms, to mandatory sentences for gun use in crime, to outright bans on the manufacture, sale, or possession of certain types of firearms. One can control the manufacturers of firearms, the wholesalers, the retailers, or the purchasers: one can control the firearms themselves, the ammunition they require, or the uses to which they are put. And one can likewise control their purchase, their carrying, or their mere possession. “Gun control” thus covers a wide range of specific interventions, and it would be useful indeed if the people who say they favor or oppose gun control were explicit about what, exactly, they are for and against.

(Wright, 1988:25-26)

Wright also states that gun laws are, in fact, not obsolete, but that they vary enormously within the nation, and that sometimes, “regulations carried on the books are not or cannot be enforced” (1988:26).

Different groups and classes of people have, in general, differing views about guns and the meaning of guns (Blanco, 2016:629). Blanco states that these differences should be taken into account by policymakers before trying to predict the people’s reaction to gun control, because the reactions to stricter gun laws cannot truly be realized before people’s backgrounds, values and attitudes are fully understood (2016:629).

2.3.1. Supporters

The gun control advocates want to change things, whereas gun proponents are happy with the way things are. This means that “the burden of proof” lies with the gun control proponents, since they have to be able to prove that current conditions can be improved upon. This means that the gun control side often cites statistics and studies, whereas gun proponents typically just reference the Second Amendment in their

arguments (Wright, 1988:37). According to Utter and Spitzer, gun control advocates (or “the liberal elite”, Williams, 2003:170) are “at a definite disadvantage” in the gun debate due to “the large membership in gun rights organizations and the many popular publications dealing with firearms” (2016:xxi).

In his article, Rood discusses how “the warrant of the dead” is used when dealing with the aftermath of public shootings. He defines the term as “an explicit or implicit claim that the dead place a demand on the living” where the “living are called on to act and the dead are invoked as justification for that action” (2018:47). This refers to the way gun control proponents use victims of gun violence as reasons for why gun control is necessary. Rood states that this argument is more often assumed than argued outright by the gun control movement (2018:48). During his presidency, Obama frequently used the warrant of the dead when arguing for stricter gun laws (2018:49). However, the warrant of the dead is used in a restricted manner, since most deaths involving a firearm do not make the news or result in political debate. According to Rood, to use the warrant of the dead as an argument for stricter gun control laws, some criteria need to be met – in general, shootings that happen in what is thought to be a safe environment or that claim a great number or particularly young victims garner more media attention than bar shootings in an unsafe neighborhood (2018:52). The biggest problem that Rood identifies with this kind of argument is “the problem of fleeting engagement”, where the public feels sympathy for and mourns the victims for short periods of time before moving on with their lives without pursuing societal changes.

Fleeting engagement is not caused simply by a failure of rhetoric or lack of effort. Fleeting engagement is a cultural, economic, and technological problem; it is a problem of limited time, energy, and attention in a world in which our media and our newsfeeds prize speed and the next interesting thing (whether important or not).
(Rood, 2018:55)

The problem, it appears, is not the lack of support for gun control laws (such as background checks, which, according to statistics is supported by the vast majority of Americans) but the lack of activism from gun control supporters (2018:53).

2.3.2. Opposers

Those who support Americans’ right to bear arms frequently argue that guns are not to blame for the violence that occurs in the nation – the saying “Guns don’t kill

people, people kill people” is often heard as an argument against gun control. Instead, gun proponents often argue that owning guns is “natural” and that American citizens have a constitutional right to defend themselves against a potential attacker with deadly force (2016:xvi). Henigan (2016) claims that the point of the “guns don’t kill people” slogan is to point out that guns are “morally neutral” and “not dangerous in and of themselves” – rather, they only become dangerous when they are being used by dangerous people. The “gun problem” should therefore rather be understood as a “people problem” (2016:15).

The warrant of the dead is also problematic in that the pro-gun side often denounces it as “violating decorum and manipulating emotions” (Rood, 2018:62). According to Rood (2018),

gun rights advocates often reject the notion that there is any obligation to the dead by claiming that now is the time for mourning, not action; or that if there is an obligation to the dead, it is not as important as the obligation to support the Second Amendment; or that if an obligation to the dead is in fact most important, that obligation is for greater access to guns to make sure that citizens can protect themselves— that a “good guy” is not defenseless against a “bad guy.”
(Rood, 2018:55)

According to Williams, proponents of “the gun culture” are not simply people who own guns, but rather people who place a special meaning to owning guns – people who, in general, are “white rural males” from the South (2003:168).

Gun proponents often claim that outlawing guns would mean that only criminals would end up possessing guns, a situation that most people would want to avoid at all cost. For a criminal, “a firearm is an income-producing tool with a consequent value that is several times its initial cost” – a robber, for example, can easily get his money back after buying a firearm since it has enabled him to rob “more lucrative targets” (Wright, 1988:30). Wright also claims that having guns available to someone (e.g. police force) means that guns would most probably end up being available to anyone – just at a certain price (1988:30). The corruption within groups of people with access to guns cannot be excluded from the debate.

2.3.3. The National Rifle Association

On the NRA website, the NRA is presented as “a major political force” and “America's foremost defender of Second Amendment rights” (“A Brief History of

the NRA”). The website encourages people to join the association due to the fact that America’s gun rights are under threat and need to be protected. The executive director of the NRA, Jason Ouimet, has published a number of articles on the website that shine some light into the NRA point of view, two of which I mention here.

In “Why We Fight To Preserve, Safeguard Our Important Second Amendment” (2019), Ouimet explains his point of view as an NRA member – he states that his will to own a gun was established due to growing up in a bad neighborhood. He states that the NRA protects the right of “law-abiding citizens” to carry firearms when “they need them the most”. He thanks the NRA members for their continued fight for their Second Amendment rights, and claims that there is “no question that the forces aligned against you, me and our Second Amendment rights are more organized and better-funded than anything we’ve faced before”. In “Armed Citizens Save Lives” (2019), he claims that gun control supporters have “abandoned all logic” in their support of gun laws that do not work. They will not work, he claims, because criminals will not obey these laws – “which is why we call them criminals”. As an example, he uses a home invasion where the homeowner was able to avoid getting robbed and killed due to the presence of a firearm in the house that was used to kill the assailant, and an attack on a civilian in Chicago, who was able to neutralize his two assailants and save his own life because of his legally acquired firearm. According to Ouimet, restrictions to gun ownership are therefore “potentially deadly” for law-abiding citizens, which is why they are inherently flawed.

Based on these stories published on its website, the NRA prides itself in being the supporter of the people who find themselves at a disadvantage in a physical altercation, and this also includes women. However, Carlson (2014) states in her article that the NRA’s thoughts on female safety are quite contradictory – on the one hand, the organization promotes their guns to women, claiming that they prevent women from becoming victimized, while at the same time, the NRA “has regularly opposed laws that would make it more difficult for people who are suspected of domestic violence to access firearms” (2014:60). The NRA’s opinion on gun control is widely known to be negative, and the organization tends to claim that gun laws simply do not work. Henigan identifies this argument as the “futility argument” – gun laws do not work because criminals will not obey them, and since they will not obey them, only law-abiding citizens will be affected by the laws in that they will be

defenseless when they are facing an armed criminal (2016:42). The NRA has, however, supported strict sentencing of those who have provably used firearms in crimes (Wright, 1988:27).

Henigan, who is heavily critical of the NRA rhetoric concerning gun legislation in *Guns Don't Kill People, People Kill People: and other myths about gun control*, believes that comparing guns to other potentially dangerous products, such as cars (which the NRA has done on multiple occasions when opposing the introduction of stricter gun control), is fallacious due to the fact that guns are manufactured, sold and used as weapons, while cars are not (2016:23). He states that, while it is true that guns do not kill people on their own, they do enable people to kill others in a much more effective way than other weapons, such as knives and baseball bats (2016:28). He also states that the NRA has resorted to the “slippery slope” argument (the argument that gun control will eventually lead to the complete banning and confiscation of firearms) due to the difficulty in opposing so-called common-sense measures:

because it is so obviously difficult for the pro-gun forces to persuasively argue that many reasonable and popular measures – such as waiting periods, background checks, licensing and safety training, registration of gun sales, curbs on large-volume gun sales, and mandatory consumer-safety standards – are objectionable in their own right, it becomes essential to argue that these measures will ultimately lead to policies that have far less popular support and may be more difficult to justify. (Henigan, 2016:82)

In this way, the NRA can switch the main point of the argument into being one about values – which its supporters are more likely to feel defensive about (2016:84).

3. School Shootings in America

An issue that is often discussed when debating gun rights is the concern that students will bring firearms to schools (2016:xxii), a concern which has proven valid due to the substantial number of school shootings in the United States. However, gun rights supporters have argued that firearms “in the hands of authorized persons” in schools are likely to deter school shootings (2016:xxii). According to Utter & Spitzer, there are two reasons for why students would take firearms with them to school: “self-protection” and “impressing fellow students” (2016:269). It is typically after a violent incident that measures are taken to prevent guns from entering school

property, such as installing metal detectors or hiring security staff. At the start of the 21st century, measures such as these were becoming “common practice” in American schools (2016:270).

According to Utter & Spitzer, the chances of a school student being injured during a school shooting is “vanishingly small” when taken into account that there are approximately 50 million school students in the United States – however, in the same paragraph, it is mentioned that over the last twenty years, “shooting deaths account for three-quarters of all violent school deaths” (2016:270).

According to Henigan, the mass shooting of young people in spaces that are supposed to be safe – such as schools – are the ones that cause the most grief and outrage in the general population. Therefore, he believes that gun advocates do their best to minimize the significance of such shootings by comparing them to other ways young children die senselessly, such as by drowning in swimming pools or in car accidents (2016:34). It will be interesting to see whether this is the case in the speeches given by Wayne LaPierre and Marco Rubio.

3.1. The Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting

The Stoneman Douglas High School shooting took place on February 14, 2018. The gunman, Nicolas Cruz, entered the school building in a premeditated attack on his schoolmates and teachers. When he arrived at the school, he had a “backpack filled with magazines and [he was] carrying a black duffel packed with his legally purchased AR-15 semi-automatic rifle” (history.com Editors). Once inside the building, Cruz started firing his weapon in a corridor, and managed to kill 11 people in less than two minutes. The whole attack lasted just over four minutes. He abandoned his weapon and managed to leave campus without being caught, although he was arrested later the same day. Despite the school having organized school shooter drills before the massacre and employing an armed officer on campus in order to stop any potential shooter, the attack could not be prevented.

Three weeks after the shooting, Florida Governor Rick Scott signed a bill imposing a 21-year age limit for the purchase of firearms. Additionally, the same bill allowed the arming of some school employees in an attempt to stop future attacks (history.com Editors). Cruz confessed to the killings, and is currently awaiting trial.

Following the shooting, surviving students started the Never Again movement, whose intention was to prevent further mass shootings by fighting to implement stricter gun laws. According to Livni, these students “made sure that the tragedy at their school was impossible to ignore” (2019). The students’ advocacy even resulted in stricter gun laws in Florida. The same students organized and partook in the March for Our Lives demonstrations, where they gave speeches and showed their solidarity with the gun control movement. However, on federal level, little progress has been made (Livni, 2019).

4. Discourse Analysis

The concept of choice is what marks all discourse analysis – choosing to say one thing instead of another to further one’s own point. Gee (2018), explains the phenomenon as follows:

Choices have meaning not just by themselves, but also in relation to all the other choices that were available, but excluded, once a choice was made. [...] Choices can allow us to try to capture the truth as we see it; to lie effectively; or to shape how people think without directly lying to them. They allow us to express what we want to say in ways that can reach people’s emotions and minds, and even encourage them to act. We see here an important principle at work, the principle of choice. This principle is at the heart of discourse analysis. This principle says that what something means depends both on what we said and on the possible choices we had to pick from in saying it. Both what we picked (the choice we made) and what we didn’t (what we excluded) are meaningful and play a role in interpretation. (Gee, 2018:4)

According to Gee, speakers themselves must signal to their audience the context in which they are speaking by using “contextualization cues”. These clues indicate to the audience what the context is, what statements are important, and helps the audience understand the speaker’s viewpoint. These cues also tell the hearer “what sort of person the speaker takes (or wants) the hearer to be for this communication, what sort of person the speaker takes herself to be for this communication, and what the speaker assumes of the world” (2018:106). According to Fairclough, “discourses may represent the same area of the world from different perspectives of positions” (2003:26). In *Analysing Discourse*, he states that:

Different discourses are different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different relations people have to the world, which in turn depends on their positions in the world, their social and personal identities, and the social

relationships in which they stand to other people. Discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions. The relationships between different discourses are one element of the relationships between different people – they may complement one another, compete with one another, one can dominate others, and so forth.

(Fairclough, 2003:124).

Further, Fairclough points out that each separate representation of the same issue is not necessarily a separate discourse, but rather, that one single discourse may generate several different representations (2003:124). The gun debate, for instance, is one single discourse, but the opposing sides of it are two representations of it. In these differing representations, guns may be presented as things that cause mass shootings, things that prevent mass shootings (in the hands of possible security personnel), or neutral agents that are used for mass shootings by deranged individuals.

Fairclough states that, when different discourses (or their representations) come into conflict, their vocabularies “may be partly different, but are likely to substantially overlap” (2003:130). The same vocabulary may be used, but the words are frequently used in different ways (2003:131). One way of discovering these ideological differences is to identify words that frequently co-occur with the words in the shared vocabulary – such as collocations, attributes and prepositions that are assigned to these shared words. This is certainly true of the gun debate, where the same vocabulary is often used on both sides when referring to weapons, victims of gun violence and potential regulations, but where the ideological differences are especially pronounced.

4.1. Framing

Issue framing relates to how different events, in their aftermath, come to be understood (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001:521). How events such as mass shootings are framed in discussions will directly impact how people relate to them and decide how to handle them, and political debates contribute a great deal into this (2001:521). Depending on which viewpoint dominates, policies get put in place that correspond to these. In other words, frames decide what is considered important. However,

Haider-Markel and Joslyn also state that the effects of framing “are not unlimited” (2001:522).

In their article, Haider-Markel and Joslyn review two field studies conducted when researching opinions on guns after a school shooting in Littleton, Colorado in 1999. The first study examined “support for concealed handgun laws”, and was conducted through phone interviews, whereas the other examined “blame attribution following the shootings at Columbine High School” (2001:520).

In the first study, adults in Kansas were asked about their opinion on concealed handgun laws. The issue was framed in two ways: either by emphasizing how carrying a handgun has been considered an individual right or by stating that handguns have been argued to threaten public safety, especially in schools (2001:524). The frames can therefore be called the individual rights and the public safety frames. Partisanship and political knowledge were also taken into consideration when analyzing the results. It was found that the opinions of Republicans and Independents were “most influenced by alternative frames”, whereas the same effect could not be found with Democrats. Haider-Markel and Joslyn speculate that the variation in the Republican answers stems from the Republican emphasis on both individual freedom and public safety (2001:528). People with considerable political knowledge were also more prone to “opinion stability” (2001:529).

The second study was a telephone study conducted in Kansas where the interviewees were asked why they thought the Columbine High shooting took place. The people interviewed were divided into three groups: a control group, a “blame gun laws” frame group, and a “blame violence in the media” group (2001:531). The results of the study clearly show that frames affected the responses of the “blame gun laws” and “blame violence in the media” groups when compared with the responses of the control group (2001:532). Haider-Markel and Joslyn also state that Democrats are the “most sensitive to the blame gun laws frame whereas Republicans and Independents are not” and that Republicans are the “most influenced by the blame media violence frame”, whereas Democrats are not (2001:535). All in all, Haider-Markel and Joslyn concluded that “influence was possible if frames were accessible,

political predispositions were consistent with the frame, and political knowledge was low” (2001:536).

We find that alternative gun frames influence opinion about concealed handgun laws as well as attributions of blame for Columbine. However, the effect is conditional, hinging on the nature of respondents’ predisposition and existing knowledge. (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001:520)

Obama’s speeches in response to mass shootings, especially those involving children, have framed the issue of gun control as a parental responsibility – according to Rood, Obama suggests that citizens have “an enduring obligation to act as metaphoric parents” in order to protect the innocents in society (e.g. schoolchildren) from becoming victims of a mass shooting (2018:60).

Seeing the dead only as statistics or as part of an abstract, mediated spectacle is not enough. Instead, he asks listeners to recognize that the dead were real people and that real families and friends and neighbors have been left behind. The dead will no longer be able to celebrate “birthdays and anniversaries and graduations.” Moreover, he asks us to imagine the dead as if they were part of our families and, more subtly, to recognize that our own loved ones—whether we imagine our partner, child, parent, grandparent, friend, neighbor, or someone else—could become a victim of gun violence. Finally, he urges us to identify with all of the dead, even those forgotten or ignored. Race and class should not matter. Proximity should not matter. And questions about guilt and innocence are not the only ones that matter. (Rood, 2018:61)

These findings are relevant when analyzing the speeches given by Emma Gonzalez, David Hogg, Marco Rubio and Wayne LaPierre. Their different views on gun control, and their desire to influence their listeners, means that they will frame the issue in varying ways. For example, it would be reasonable to assume that when David Hogg and Emma Gonzalez speak about guns, they will associate them with negative things, such as increased violence, less safety and more unnecessary deaths. Marco Rubio and Wayne LaPierre, on the other hand, will most likely want to bring up the positive sides of gun ownership, such as increased possibilities for self-defense.

4.2. Strategic Maneuvering

Strategic maneuvering plays a key role in the art of argumentation. According to van Eemeren and Houtlosser, those who engage in argumentative discourse “are characteristically oriented towards resolving a difference of opinion and may be

regarded as committed to norms instrumental to achieving this purpose – maintaining certain standards of reasonableness and expecting others to comply with the same critical standards” while at the same time attempting to resolve the issue in a way that is favorable to their own agenda (1999:480).

Topical potential, audience demand, and presentational devices are, according to van Eemeren and Houtlosser, what create “rhetorical strategy” (1999:485). Using these in order to reach an agreement is described by van Eemeren and Houtlosser as follows:

...strategic manoeuvring can take place in making an expedient choice from the options constituting the *topical potential* associated with a particular discussion stage, in selecting a responsive adaptation to *audience demand*, and in exploiting appropriate *presentational devices*. Given a certain difference of opinion, speakers or writers may choose the material they find easiest to handle; they may choose the perspective most agreeable to the audience; and they can present their contribution in the most effective wordings.
(1999:484)

Choosing the topical potential includes restricting the “disagreement space” in such a way that is beneficial to the speaker, i.e. “in such a way that the confrontation is defined in accordance with the speaker’s or writer’s preferences”. The opening stage is about creating “the most advantageous starting point” by finding points that the other party can (or must) agree with. During argumentation, a line of defense for the speaker’s point of view is chosen from those available, and in the concluding stage, the speaker attempts to reach their desired conclusion by, for example, pointing out “the consequences of accepting a certain complex of arguments” (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999:484).

In order for argumentation to be successful, it also needs to be adapted to the audience at hand. This is usually done by creating common ground and establishing empathy, and may manifest itself “by avoidance of unnecessary or unsolvable contradictions”. The speaker usually attempts to establish shared values, and use may be made of experts that the audience agrees with or “referring to argumentative principles that they adhere to” (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999:485). One way to establish common ground with the audience is to further one’s argument by using concepts generally considered social goods, defined by Gee as follows:

A social good is anything some group of people take as valuable, good, wanted, or necessary to have. Some social goods are society wide: nearly every human being considers respect and freedom to be social goods.

(2018:144)

What the speakers present as social goods may differ, depending on the point they are trying to get across.

Zarefsky also identifies persuasive definitions, i.e. “those that convey an attitude in the act of naming” (2007:399) as a part of strategic maneuvering. According to Zarefsky, there are two ways to define a rhetorical situation – one is “a single advocate addressing an audience” and the other is “two or more advocates in competition for the adherence of an audience” (2007:402) – in other words, speeches and debates. However, these two frames are often combined “in the midst of ongoing controversies” (2007:402), such as the gun debate. Persuasive definitions are used by speakers to convey and strengthen their own points of view. Another term for this is “loaded language” – a way to use language itself to boost your own position, as opposed to just logical arguments (2007:403):

a persuasive definition is a non-neutral characterization that conveys a positive or negative attitude about something in the course of naming it. The name is, in effect, an implicit argument that one should view the thing in a particular way. But the argument is never actually advanced. Rather, the definition is put forward as if it was uncontroversial and could be easily stipulated.

(Zarefsky, 2007:404)

In a controversy as emotionally loaded as the gun debate, it is reasonable to expect that loaded language will also be used in the speeches analyzed in this thesis.

5. Methods and Materials

The materials for this study include four speeches, given by four different people. The first two speeches are by Emma Gonzalez and David Hogg, both students at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School, and both survivors of the shooting in February 2018. Both of them spoke out on behalf of stricter gun control. The other two speeches are by Senator Marco Rubio and Wayne LaPierre, Executive Vice President and CEO of the National Rifle Association, both of whom spoke against further gun legislation. The lengths of the speeches range from two to six pages. In my analysis, only the words used are of interest, so aspects such as body language, facial expressions, and audience reactions, although relevant to the delivery, will not be taken into account.

Firstly, the analysis consists of discovering which words are used in combination with certain key words that I have preselected, that frequently appear on both sides of the gun control debate. Secondly, it consists of discovering the attitudes that hide behind the specific word choices, and how they help further the speaker's argument.

The preselected key words include the following:

5.1. Any word for firearm: *gun/firearm/weapon/arms*

Due to the fact that guns are the very issue that is being debated here, words referring to them simply had to be included in the analysis. The interest here lies in what adjectives and other nouns guns are associated with in each speech, and what this could mean for the effect of the delivery. Those in favor of gun control are more likely to apply negative connotations to guns than those who oppose gun control. Those in favor of gun ownership, on the other hand, are more likely to talk about guns as tools for self-defense.

Cothran (2003) brings up differing opinions about guns in her book *Gun Violence: Opposing Viewpoints*. The book contains a number of articles that bring up different points of view in regard to gun violence and gun control. An article by the Violence Policy Center describes how a "crisis" started when gun ownership in America became more common in the following words:

The explosion in the country's homicide and suicide rates has paralleled a corresponding boom in its firearms population. Usually purchased for self-defense, the easily concealable and portable handgun is used in the vast majority of gun violence – even though it is outnumbered two to one by such traditional long guns as sporting rifles and shotguns. The increased popularity of high-caliber, high-capacity semiautomatic handguns – both standard and assault-weapon configurations – has added to the carnage.

(The Violence Policy Center, 1998:18)

This point of view obviously supports the idea that the availability of guns would play a significant part in the gun violence epidemic. The Violence Policy Center also concludes that, in contrast to the position often touted by gun advocates, most murders are committed by people who know each other and who often have a close relationship (such as family members), rather than criminals (1998:19).

However, Don B. Kates Jr.'s article offers a different take on the subject – he believes that the rise in gun sales is not the reason for the increase in gun violence during the 1960s:

The fact is that mere correlation between increases in gun buying and in homicide does not and cannot prove guns cause murder. Assuming that there is any cause and effect relationship, the most obvious one is the reverse, i.e., that it was the rise in murders that caused increased gun buying. Alternatively, the upsurges in both murders and gun sales may have been caused by a third factor, e.g., the enormous increase in burglary and violent crime that also began in the 1960s.

(Kates, 2000:25)

Gun ownership should therefore be seen as a response to already occurring gun violence, and not the other way around.

5.2. Words relating to current gun legislation: *The Second Amendment, Constitution*

Since gun owners frequently bring up their belief that their right to own firearms is written in the Constitution, these words had to be included in the analysis. In his article, LaCourse brings up arguments for why the Second Amendment protects the right of private citizens to own firearms – the key here, according to LaCourse, is how you choose to interpret the use of the term “the people” (which is mentioned in the Second Amendment):

In order to find the true meaning of “the people”, one must simply read the first Ten Amendments to the Constitution, commonly known as the Bill of Rights. The term “the people” was used in the First, Second, Fourth, Ninth and Tenth Amendments. The First Amendment has never been interpreted as giving “the states” the right to peaceably assemble. Nor has the Fourth Amendment been ruled as providing only protection for state officials from unreasonable searches and seizures. Why should the Second Amendment be treated differently?

(LaCourse, 2000:65)

Simmons claims that, from the middle of the 19th century, “a consistent line of Supreme Court and federal appellate court decisions holds that the amendment does not concern private citizens” (1997:69).

LaPierre and Rubio will most definitely incorporate the Second Amendment argument into their speeches. I am interested to see whether Emma Gonzalez or David Hogg will incorporate them into their message as well – and if so, how they do it.

**5.3. Words relating to potential gun legislation:
*law/control/regulation/ban/legislation***

These words are also a key element in the entire debate and can therefore not be excluded.

Sobran claims that gun control is unconstitutional – he points out that the Second Amendment “clearly forbids the federal government to ‘infringe’ that right [to keep and bear arms]”. Additionally, since people have the intrinsic right to “life, liberty and property”, then people also have the right to defend those rights – with deadly force, if necessary (1999:75). The Second Amendment should be considered as important as the First Amendment, since it “ensures that the federal government will never get a monopoly of weaponry” in the same way that the First Amendment protects the freedom of religion and press (1999:75.)

However, Blek Jr. sees the situation differently. He states that responsible gun laws are essential, and that the belief that such laws would somehow violate the constitution needs to be put to rest (1999:78). He claims that the NRA is misusing the First Amendment right by spewing misinforming propaganda in order to allow the continued widespread ownership of firearms. Blek Jr. points out that even the First Amendment has restrictions to its use – and therefore, the Second Amendment should, too:

The NRA uses our First Amendment right of freedom of speech to repeat their misinformed rhetoric. In comparing First and Second Amendment rights, we all recognize that freedom of speech, as broadly as it is interpreted, still has limitations. For example, we are not allowed to yell “fire” in a crowded theater when none exists. However, if we are to believe the NRA, the Second Amendment grants an unconditional right to individuals to possess arms.

(Blek Jr., 1999:78-79)

Gonzalez, Hogg, Rubio and LaPierre will most likely have very different connotations that they combine with each of these words.

5.4. *America(n), United States*

Gun supporters often speak about guns as something inherently American. It can hardly be denied that guns are quite a prominent element of American lifestyle. The interest here lies in exactly how America is being defined by each speaker – how the words are used and what connotations they are given by both sides of the debate.

5.5. *freedom/right(s) and safe(ty)/protect(ion)*

The debate inevitably hinges on which is more important, and how each of these things is presented. Is safety something that is brought on by everyone having guns, or by no one having them? Is the right to own guns brought up by the gun control side, or the right to life by gun supporters?

In his article, Rosenblatt (1999) states that what ultimately will bring change to the ongoing gun violence in the United States is not legislation in itself, but the people.

There comes a time in every civilization when people have had enough of a bad thing, and the difference between this moment and previous spasms of reform is that it springs from the grass roots and is not driven by politicians or legal institutions. Gun-control sentiment is everywhere in the country these days – in the White House, the presidential campaigns, the legislatures, the law courts and the gun industry itself.

(Rosenblatt, 1999:50)

The fact that people are so tired of ongoing gun violence is what will spring them into action and lead to firearms being banned.

Goldstein, on the other hand, recalls in his article an instance where he was almost shot to death. As a result of this experience, he has become a firm believer in the Second Amendment, and maintains that it is the right of every citizen to carry a firearm for their protection if they so desire (2000:56). He believes that disarming the people will “pave the way for major-league mass murderers, such as Adolf Hitler” (2000:57).

5.6. *victims and perpetrator*

I also explore how the speakers each refer to the victims of gun violence, be it as loss of life, victim(s), death(s), and how they each refer to the perpetrator of gun violence, Nicolas Cruz, be it as terrorist, shooter, kid, or any other variation. This will hopefully show their attitude towards the tragedy and give an indication of where they place the blame for the incident.

5.7. *we/us and they/them*

Additionally, I investigate how the speakers refers to themselves and the side of the debate they represent, what they identify as their duties and what they consider to be the failings of the opposing side.

Full transcripts of the speeches are provided in the Appendix.

6. Speeches

6.1. Emma Gonzalez

Emma Gonzalez gave her speech at an anti-gun rally in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in February 2018. In her speech, she accuses politicians of taking donations from the NRA and not caring about the children whose lives are in danger as long as they get paid. She speaks critically about the ease with which an automatic and semiautomatic weapon may be purchased, and the inaction of the people in charge. The speech can be described as aggressive, and the influence of her audience should be noted – at an anti-gun rally, it is reasonable to assume that the audience will side with Gonzalez on the gun control issue. This means that she is freer to speak her mind without bothering about being diplomatic. Gonzalez’s speech is both a blame attribution to the people in charge and a call for action.

6.1.1. *gun/weapon/firearm/arms*

Gonzalez mentions weapons 23 times in her speech. She uses the word *gun* 19 times, *weapon* once and *firearm* once. Additionally, she mentions the word *gunshot* twice. She also mentions the words *rifle* and *shotgun* once, respectively.

Gonzalez begins to present her stance on guns by stating that, since the Founding Fathers, guns have “changed” drastically and have “developed at a rate that leaves me dizzy”. This is to make the point that weapons are not what they used to be when the Second Amendment – the law most frequently used by those supporting gun rights – was written, and that laws should reflect this development. Due to this development, guns can be used to do much more damage than the guns referred to in the Second Amendment were able to inflict.

Gonzalez also mentions how easy it is to obtain guns under the current legislation. She claims she does not understand “why it should be harder to make plans with friends on weekends than it is to buy an automatic or semi-automatic weapon”. Here, she is comparing the act of buying a dangerous weapon with a normal occurrence in a teenager’s life – making plans with friends. This highlights her youth and brings it into strong contrast with the trauma she has been through because of these relaxed gun laws. Next, she lists the amount of freedom the people of Florida enjoy when it comes to purchasing a weapon:

...to buy a gun you do not need a permit, you do not need a gun license, and once you buy it you do not need to register it. You do not need a permit to carry a concealed rifle or shotgun. You can buy as many guns as you want at one time.

Pointing out all the things that are not needed to acquire a gun implies that these things should be needed in order to obtain one. Gonzalez does not directly prescribe specific attributes to guns in the way one would expect when someone is trying to convince people to not buy or limit the purchase of a certain product. Perhaps she feels that her audience knows enough about guns that she does not need to highlight their deadliness. Instead, similarly to Rubio, she is speaking of guns as something to be obtained, something used, something seen in gun shows. She is not vilifying guns in themselves, at least not in an obvious way. She is merely pointing out the recklessness of legislation that permits just about anyone to purchase one. However, she also admits that guns cannot be described as “just tools like knives” or accused of being “as dangerous as cars”, as those not sharing her viewpoint would claim. According to Gonzalez, guns are dangerous, and should therefore be legislated more effectively – but she does not suggest that guns are evil.

There are several points where Gonzalez calls “BS” on what gun supporters claim, such as that “tougher gun laws do not decrease gun violence”. This is a statement she does not agree with, and it is obvious that *gun laws* are viewed by her as something good, whereas *gun violence* (obviously) is not, and that gun laws can be used to tackle the problem of gun violence in America.

6.1.2. *Second Amendment, Constitution*

Gonzalez only mentions the *Second Amendment* and the *Constitution* once in her speech. She mentions how the amendment was added to the Constitution in “the time

of the Founding Fathers”, which highlights its age and is perhaps meant to illustrate how out of place it is in modern society. This is made especially clear considering that Gonzalez continues by mentioning the alarming rate at which guns have developed since the 18th century. The fact that the amendment is not mentioned anywhere else in her speech suggests that she does not think it is worth considering when discussing the matter of guns. Either she disagrees with the current interpretation of the Second Amendment, or she does not think it has any intrinsic value in the modern-day United States.

6.1.3. *law/control/regulation/ban/legislation*

The word *law* is mentioned a total of four times in Gonzalez speech, *control* once and *regulation* twice.

Gonzalez first mentions laws in comparison with guns – “the guns have changed, and the laws have not” – suggesting that the laws should have developed at the same rate. *Laws* are therefore presented as critical in a society where gun ownership is so widespread. Later in her speech, she states that “we are going to change the law”, which again indicates that “change” is the thing to be sought after and what is needed. At the end of her speech, she suggests that *tougher gun laws* are the key to ending gun violence.

Gonzalez also mentions *gun control* once in her speech, when she compares the United States to other developed countries in the world. She states that after Canada and the UK experienced mass shootings, they introduced gun control. In comparison, she says, the US has developed a website to track mass shootings in the country. In conclusion, gun control works, if only the nation would choose to implement it into its legislation.

Regulation is mentioned twice in her speech, in an allusion to an Obama era regulation that would have limited the ability to sell firearms to people with diagnosed mental illnesses. She mentions that the Trump administration repealed said regulation, which she describes as “a really dumb idea”, no doubt concerned about how this has made it possible for people with violent tendencies to acquire firearms even with background checks being performed.

6.1.4. *America(n)/United States*

Interestingly, *America* is only mentioned once in Gonzalez’s entire speech, when she mentions “mass shootings in America”. This unflattering connotation highlights the very essence of her speech – the United States is the only major western nation that struggles with mass shootings. The situation has gotten so bad that the country is actually known for the number of mass shootings that happen there every single year. In a nation as patriotic as the United States is, this should be a cause for concern – even among those who support gun ownership.

The *United States* is mentioned only once in her speech, as Gonzalez mentions “the number of gunshot victims in the United States”. Again, the connotation is less than flattering.

6.1.5. *victims and perpetrator*

Gonzalez mentions the word *victim* four times in her speech, and includes herself in the definition (seen by her usage of the word *we* in the second paragraph). A victim, by definition, is either subjected to something unpleasant or unpleasantly impacted by something that is out of their control. The phrase “the number of gunshot victims” is used twice in the speech, in an estimate as to how much money President Trump received in donations from the NRA per gunshot victim lost to gun violence. Turning the statistics of gun-related deaths into a math problem is a macabre illustration of how gun control activists perceive the current situation – children’s lives are not as important to politicians as money is. Gonzalez makes the point that, the more shootings happen, and the more people die, the less each individual life’s monetary worth is for politicians.

Gonzalez also uses the word *students* to refer to the victims of this particular mass shooting. This highlights their position as young people who are at the mercy of their elders when it comes to protection – students are, typically, minors, and most people agree that children need to be protected by adults and other people in charge. Gonzalez mentions how “the students at this school have been having debates on guns for what feels like our entire lives”, which illustrates how they, apart from being victims, are also taking part in a discourse about things that they in reality have

no control over – even though their lives have been directly affected by the issue at hand.

Just like *Tinker v. Des Moines*, we are going to change the law. That's going to be Marjory Stoneman Douglas in that textbook and it's all going to be due to the tireless effort of the school board, the faculty members, the family members and most importantly, the students – the students who are dead, the students still in the hospital, the students who are now suffering from PTSD, the students who had panic attacks during the vigil because the helicopters who wouldn't leave us alone, hovering over the school for 24 hours a day.

Here, the word *students* is combined with words relating to the trauma and violence they have suffered because of the shooting. It is very likely that Gonzalez is doing this intentionally, in order to evoke emotions in her audience and inspire them to do something to protect students and children in the future.

Gonzalez refers to Cruz as *the shooter* four times in her speech, and once as *kid* (“you didn't know this kid”). The fact that she does not use his name and simply calls him a shooter strips him of any redeeming qualities and simply paints him as a terrorist. However, Gonzalez's mentions of him are kept rather short and she does not go into any details as to what kind of person he was, or what his motivations may have been – she simply states that learning he was the perpetrator of the act “was no surprise to anyone who knew him”. Clearly, the signs of danger had been there for some time, and yet Cruz was able to acquire firearms in order to perform a premeditated mass murder.

6.1.6. *freedom/right(s) and safe(ty)/protect(ion)*

Gonzalez does not mention the word *freedom* in her speech. This is hardly surprising, since she is actively advocating for more restrictions. This word is more often used by those supporting gun ownership.

Rights are mentioned three times in her speech, all of them within the quote she has chosen: She brings up a quote from a teacher, which is intended to sum up the viewpoint of those opposing stricter gun laws: “When adults tell me I have the right to own a gun, all I can hear is ‘my right to own a gun outweighs your student's right to live.’ All I can hear is mine, mine, mine, mine.” This is a statement that most likely no one will admit to supporting, but this is how gun control activists view the situation – unless something is done to limit the ability of people to freely purchase

any weapon they want, this effectively means that the lives of the people who will be lost because of this are put second to the individual's rights to purchase said weapons.

Gonzalez mentions the word *safety* once, in combination with the word *gun*. She states that, since Australia introduced *gun safety* after a mass shooting in 1999, they “haven't had one since”. Australia has, in other words, done what the United States ought to do, in her opinion. Gun safety made sure that there would be no further massacres. The word *protect(ion)* is not mentioned in her speech at all. This is somewhat surprising, since Gonzalez is addressing adults and placing blame on them for not introducing proper gun laws – adults are the ones bearing responsibility over the children in society, and in effect should protect children, such as Gonzalez herself.

6.1.7. *we/us & they/them*

Gonzalez creates a connection with her audience when she refers to herself and them as *we* throughout her speech – in the beginning, she states that “we are up here standing together”. She obviously views the audience as standing on her side and sharing her goals. She also uses the word *we* when referring to the United States and the dire situation the nation is in:

Japan has never had a mass shooting. Canada has had three and the UK had one and they both introduced gun control and yet here we are, with websites dedicated to reporting these tragedies so that they can be formulated into statistics at your convenience.

Gonzalez mentions different ways that *we* are going to change the system – “when we have had our say with the government”, “we are going to be the last mass shooting”, “we are going to change the law” – the word *we* is associated with change that is desirable.

Gonzalez uses the word *they* when she wishes to distance herself from an idea or claim. Her speech begins with her stating that *they* (meaning the politicians in the House of Representatives) have not held a moment of silence for the victims lost in the shooting. She seems to be suggesting that the politicians do not care about the victims, which places a very strong divide between Gonzalez and the people in charge, since she herself is one of the victims affected by the mass shooting. She also

refers to the Founding Fathers as *they* – “since they added the Second Amendment to the Constitution” – which makes it seem like she is distancing herself from them and their principles, as well. Gonzalez speaks about how *they* (it is unspecified who she is referring to) are claiming that mental illness is the reason for the shooting, which she clearly does not agree with. She also blames those in the life of the shooter, Nicolas Cruz:

...the people who let him buy the guns in the first place, those at the gun shows, the people who encouraged him to buy accessories for his guns to make them fully automatic, the people who didn't take them away from him when they knew that he expressed homicidal tendencies...

These people are, according to Gonzalez, not just the people who sell the firearms or the politicians defending relaxed gun laws, but also “the people he [Cruz] lived with” and “the people who saw him outside holding guns” – in essence, people who witnessed troubled behavior and yet did nothing.

The motivations of the politicians opposing gun control are presented as purely monetary – President Trump receiving thirty million dollars in donations from the NRA, and the senators “who sit in their gilded House and Senate seats funded by the NRA”. Gonzalez even calculates the monetary worth of each shooting victim to President Trump:

Thirty million dollars! And divided by the number of gunshot victims in the United States in the one and one-half months in 2018 alone, that comes out to being \$5,800. Is that how much these people are worth to you, Trump? If you don't do anything to prevent this from continuing to occur, that number of gunshot victims will go up and the number that they are worth will go down! And we will be worthless to you! To every politician who is taking donations from the NRA, shame on you. If your money was as threatened as us, would your first thought be, “How is this going to reflect on my campaign? Which should I choose?” Or would you choose us, and if you answered us, will you act like it for once?

The politicians taking donations from the NRA are portrayed as people looking to make money off tragedies, as people who do not care about the consequences or the loss of life as long as they are getting paid.

Gonzalez ends her speech by listing all the claims made by those opposing her agenda – and even though these may represent different groups of people, they are all lumped together and simply referred to as *they*: “they hush us into submission”, “they say that tougher gun laws do not decrease gun violence”, “they say a good guy

with a gun stops a bad guy with a gun”, “they say guns are just tools like knives” and “they say that no laws could have been able to prevent the hundreds of senseless tragedies”. She counters all these claims with “we call BS”, once again uniting herself and her audience in a mutual cause. At the very end of her speech, she urges her audience to “give *them* [local congresspeople] a piece of your mind”.

Gonzalez is very obviously critical of the politicians making the decisions that lead to lax gun laws, but in her view, everyone who partakes and supports gun culture and witnesses people misusing guns also shares the blame.

6.2. David Hogg

David Hogg gave a speech at the March for Our Lives rally in March 2018. His speech differs somewhat from the three others in that he does not directly mention many of the keywords selected for my analysis, which frequently appear on both sides of the debate. His speech mainly focuses on electrifying his audience and inspiring them to be a part of the change he and his supporters wish to see in the United States – to end unnecessary gun violence and to get rid of the politicians who he claims have been bought by the gun lobby. He urges his audience to vote and to be the heroes that the country needs.

6.2.1. *gun/weapon/firearm/arms*

Hogg only mentions the word *gun* four times in his speech and uses no synonyms. His opinion on guns is made clear early on in his speech when he states that “96 people die every day from guns in our country”. Here, the middleman (the gunman) is left out of the equation, and it is made to appear that guns are the root cause of those deaths. Hogg is directly associating guns with death to further his point of the danger they pose to Americans – and despite this, he claims that “most representatives have no public stance on guns” (implying that this is an important issue, and that they should have one).

The other times Hogg uses the word *gun* is when he talks about the *gun lobby* and *gun violence*. The gun lobby is presented as the enemy in his speech, as it is portrayed as an entity that stands against what he is trying to convey to the audience. Hogg states that Americans should have the ability to “live without fear of gun violence” – here, guns are associated with both fear and violence, and are vilified and

clearly viewed as a problem to be solved, and not simply tools used by an unbalanced person who wishes to cause damage.

6.2.2. *Second Amendment, Constitution*

Hogg makes no mention of either the Constitution or the Second Amendment in his speech. This is quite unusual, considering how prominent these concepts usually are in a discussion about firearms. However, since these concepts do nothing to support his agenda, it is understandable that Hogg would leave them out.

6.2.3. *law/control/regulation/ban/legislation*

Hogg does not mention any of these words in his speech. His speech is more abstract than this, even though his intentions are made perfectly clear – regulations, laws, and control need to be implemented, but what is more important than the details is getting people actively involved.

6.2.4. *America(n)/United States*

America is mentioned once in Hogg's speech, *American* once and *Americans* four times. It is obvious that the definition of what America means is important to Hogg and the main theme of his speech. Hogg speaks about how the people running for office need to run "not as politicians, but as Americans", how people need to come together "not as Democrats, not as Republicans, but as Americans", and how they are "Americans of the same flesh and blood". To Hogg, the concept of American-ness is in people working together for the greater good. Instead of focusing on what divides them, Hogg's message is that people should focus on what unites them, which is being American. Hogg's wish is that "every American can live without fear of gun violence" – his speech is therefore sets a both unifying and hopeful tone for the future. At the end of his speech, he utters the familiar patriotic phrase "God bless America".

Hogg's frequent use of the word *America* makes his patriotism very evident. However, it is patriotism of a different kind than what gun supporters are presenting – Hogg is very clearly supportive of American ideals and values, but guns are left out of the equation. While there are some that would accuse him of being disloyal to the United States by not supporting gun ownership, the way he presents his viewpoint

makes it very obvious that the concept of America is of great value to him – even if he believes that things need to change.

6.2.5. *victims and perpetrator*

Hogg only directly mentions the victims of the Parkland High School shooting once in his entire speech. At the beginning of his speech, he places a price tag in front of his podium to illustrate “how much [Republican Senator] Marco Rubio took for every student’s life in Florida” (one dollar and five cents, according to Hogg). The lives lost are represented by this price tag.

Hogg also mentions the word *children* twice in his speech in reference to victims of mass shootings in the United States, and identifies them as the future of the nation as he speaks of the “continued slaughter of our children and our future” that politicians are currently allowing. He states that Americans should care about “one thing and one thing only, and that’s the future of this country and the children that are going to lead it”.

The use of the word *children* is of course a tactical move that is supposed to highlight the innocence and dependency of the young people on the adults as decision-makers. It also enhances the reality that children are going through traumatic events all over the country due to the inaction of those in charge – children, who should be happy, go to school and grow up safely, are forced to go through unimaginable traumas multiple times a year due to current legislation. Hogg is blaming decision-makers for simply standing by and watching their futures get slaughtered without doing anything about it.

Hogg does not mention Cruz in any way during his speech. This could be due to not wanting to give Cruz any more media attention than he has already received, or perhaps because he feels that the issue is much bigger than Cruz. Instead, his speech is entirely focused on changing the status quo.

6.2.6. *freedom/right(s) and safe(ty)/protect(ion)*

Hogg mentions neither *freedom* nor *rights* in his speech, which is understandable since he, just like Gonzalez, is advocating for more restrictions and less individual freedoms. He does mention the words *safe*, *safety* and *protective* once, respectively,

but not in the way that might be expected. He does not talk about how people should be safe from being shot, but rather, how politicians have chosen to be “protective of their position, the safety of inaction”. He suggests that politicians, rather than keeping the public safe, have chosen to protect themselves, instead. They have chosen not to do anything for fear of possible backlash at the expense of those who die every year from being shot by a random perpetrator. This highlights their incompetence and how unsuitable they are to hold office due to their complete disregard of the public’s welfare. Hogg wants to change this, and states that “inaction is no longer safe”, because the public will bring about change. Those who do not take their responsibilities as politicians seriously enough to implement changes intended to protect the public will, according to Hogg, be removed from office.

6.2.7. *we/us and they/them*

Hogg mentions the word *we* 14 times in his speech. Apart from creating solidarity with his audience, it is most often used by Hogg as a call for action. Five times, he uses the exact same phrasing – “we say: no more” – in response to a number of the government’s wrongdoings that he mentions. The other nine times *we* is used to state something that Hogg and his audience and those supporting him will make happen – “we are going to make this the voting issue”, “we are going to take this to every election”, “we are going to make sure the best people get into our elections”, “we will come together”, “we will get rid of these public servants that only serve the gun lobby, and we will save lives”, “we will not stop”, and so on. Hogg ends his speech by stating that “we can, and we will, change the world”, which has brought his message full circle from one of anger to one of hope and determination.

However, Hogg does see obstacles in his way. He states that there are people who oppose his message and says that “they will try to separate us in demographics” to weaken the chances for gun control. He does not clarify who he is referring to, but it could be a number of groups – the gun lobby, politicians, gun owners, or anyone else who does not agree with his message. However, his hope is not shaken, as he responds to these statements by saying “they will fail”.

6.3. Wayne LaPierre

The speech by Wayne LaPierre was given at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) a week after the Stoneman Douglas shooting. The speech is roughly 35 minutes long, easily the longest out of all four speeches selected for this thesis. In the middle of the speech, LaPierre shows a video clip of himself speaking about background checks. Since this video clip has nothing to do with the shooting of interest in this thesis, LaPierre's comments on the video and its contents have been left out of the transcript.

Like Emma Gonzalez and David Hogg, LaPierre is also facing an audience that he can presume to be on his side. This means that he does not need to be careful in his comments, and he can freely place blame away from himself and the NRA. He does not need to convince anyone, so he does not waste time by weighing the pros and cons of each side. In his mind, Democrats and liberals are in the wrong, and Republicans and the NRA are not.

6.3.1. *gun/weapon/firearm/arms*

Unsurprisingly, LaPierre's view on firearms varies drastically from those of David Hogg and Emma Gonzalez. The first mention of guns comes in his speech when he states how people are trying to eliminate "our firearms freedoms". LaPierre does two things here – he brings himself and the audience together in their mission to preserve their right to own firearms with his use of the word *our*. He is stating that they are all on the same side, and that all of them are affected by what the liberals are trying to do. At the same time, he is combining the word *firearm* with the word *freedom*, which is known as a very important and frequently brought up American value. Essentially, he is making guns an important part of the lives of American people, something that affects everyone in the audience.

LaPierre also mentions "gun-free zones", and casts a rather negative light on them – immediately following his mention of these zones, he adds that they are "wide open targets" for anyone with bad intentions. Essentially, when guns are not around, an area becomes vulnerable. He mentions that schools need to be protected with "effective, trained, armed security" that will protect the most valuable thing of all, the children. Therefore, guns should be associated with safety.

Interestingly, LaPierre does combine the word *weapon* with destructive properties. However, here, he is not referring to firearms when he talks about weapons – instead, he is referring to “the art of the smear” that he feels the “socialists” are doing to the NRA and gun owners in order to rob them of their liberties:

And socialism is a movement that loves a smear – racist, misogynist, sexist, xenophobic, and more. These are the weapons and vitriol these character assassinations scream to permanently hang on their targets and create a growing segment of victims.

The smear campaign initiated by the socialists is connected with nouns that otherwise would be associated with firearms – *assassinations*, *targets*, and *victims*. LaPierre is taking the negative connotations of firearms and projecting them onto something else. It is a remarkable shift of blame, and very likely intentional.

LaPierre does, however, make some concessions. He does admit that guns should be kept out of the hands of those who pose a danger to society:

No one on the prohibited persons list should ever have access to a firearm. No killer, no felon, no drug dealer. And anyone that is adjudicated is mentally incompetent or danger to society should be added to the check system and prevented from getting their hands on a gun.

However, it is unclear whether the NRA has actually done anything recently to implement these restrictions – LaPierre also talks about the citizens’ right to privacy, and goes on to mention how “your conversations with your doctor” should be kept out of government databases. This begs the question as to how people with mental health diagnoses could be prevented from purchasing firearms.

LaPierre urges his audience to remember that he is not advocating armed resistance when it comes to people protecting their firearms. Instead, he points out that this movement should be “a resistance armed with the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights in our country”. He ends his speech with a known quotation, frequently used by supporters of the Second Amendment: “to stop a bad guy with a gun, it takes a good guy with a gun”. The gun is therefore never the problem in itself – it all depends on the person who wields it.

6.3.2. *Second Amendment, Constitution*

The *Second Amendment* is mentioned a total of 12 times in LaPierre’s speech, whereas the *Constitution* is mentioned five times (*constitutional* once). In his speech, LaPierre is presenting the Second Amendment as something that is being threatened by the gun control movement (and the politicians supporting it) that should be protected at all costs. He claims that *they* – identified as “Chris Murphy, Nancy Pelosi, and more” – “hate the Second Amendment” and want to eliminate it along with “our firearms freedoms”. Whereas the gun control movement, according to LaPierre, “hates” the Second Amendment and the individual freedoms associated with it, he himself, and the people who support him, “revere their Second Amendment freedom to protect themselves”.

LaPierre asks the audience to imagine a scenario where “an elderly couple that, because they sought help to do their taxes, that they could no longer exercise their fundamental Second Amendment right” (a misrepresentation of the Obama administration’s proposal to ban the purchase of firearms for people who had given authority of their financial assets to someone else). The Second Amendment is presented as a fundamental right of the American people, something which cannot simply be taken away on a whim. He claims that the “socialists” are trying to deny people their “Second Amendment rights”. By definition, denying someone their rights is illegal, so what the liberals are essentially trying to do is, according to LaPierre, criminal. He claims that “socialists” dislike the Second Amendment in the same way that they dislike free speech – and that they revel in stripping people of their individual liberties:

They like only limited speech, controlled speech, controlled by them, through safe speech zones, where they can shame the outspoken, or riot to shut them up. If you still think we have full First Amendment freedom in this country, try going right now out to Berkeley and speaking out in favor of conservative causes or even the Second Amendment.

LaPierre claims that, if the “socialists” gain power in the United States, Americans will end up losing a great deal of their individual freedoms, and that the Second Amendment and the Constitution “will be the first to go”. Essentially, gun control activists – or socialists, as LaPierre describes them – are a threat to American values in general, and the Constitution is a representation of those values, which should be

protected. The Second Amendment is now being “despised” in American schools due to propaganda from the gun control movement and must also be protected.

At the end of his speech, LaPierre calls the audience to “stand and unflinchingly defend the Second Amendment, the one freedom that protects us all in this country”. This sentence seems to sum up the intention of his whole speech – instead of mentioning the children that were killed because the purchase of firearms lacks a proper screening, LaPierre wants the audience to protect the law that allows this practice to continue. Instead of focusing on how such tragedies could be prevented in the future, he focuses his speech on convincing his audience that it is the right to possess firearms that is under threat, and to portray this as the main issue, and the attempt to impose more restrictions as unnecessary government control of law-abiding citizens.

The Constitution is given the same treatment in LaPierre speech – it is presented as something fundamentally American, something that is being threatened by “saboteurs” who “don’t believe” in the Constitution, and therefore, don’t believe in “America as we know it”. LaPierre claims that the Constitution is the sole thing preventing “the privileged and the powerful” from taking charge completely. In the same way that the Second Amendment is “despised” in schools, the Constitution is being “ignored”. Out of the six times that the Constitution is mentioned, four times LaPierre calls it “the United States Constitution”, which is evidently intended to highlight the Constitution’s importance in American society. The United States *is* the Constitution, and through the Constitution being under threat, the United States is also under threat.

6.3.3. *law/control/regulation/ban/legislation*

The word *law(s)* is mentioned 19 times in LaPierre’s speech, *control(led)* 9 times, and *banned* twice. Most of the time, these concepts are given negative connotations.

LaPierre identifies the “calls for more gun control laws” as shameless exploitation of tragedy performed by the gun control movement. Aside from the Second Amendment and the Constitution being under threat, also the law-abiding are being threatened by sanctions that they have not deserved. In essence, LaPierre is claiming that those suffering from further gun control laws are not criminals, but rather

responsible gun owners who have done nothing wrong. Therefore, the victims of these laws are going to be gun owners in general, and not criminals.

Next, LaPierre goes into why he thinks laws are not the solution to the problem. He claims that gun control activists “fantasize” about imposing more laws, even though laws in general are ineffective. He talks about how laws have “failed to stop” problems in society, and how laws only succeed “when people obey them” – in essence, you cannot expect a criminal to respect any new laws that Democrats can come up with, because if criminals cared about the laws, they would not be criminals. Laws are, according to LaPierre, being “ignored” on a regular basis, they “don’t stop” gang violence or illegal immigrants from crossing the border, and they “haven’t stopped the plague of opioids”. In essence: laws do not work, and should not be considered the solution to the gun problem in the United States. At the same time, LaPierre identifies the NRA to be “one of the largest law enforcement organizations in the United States”. It is unclear what is meant by this, although it could have something to do with the sale of firearms to law enforcement.

LaPierre considers the movement for more gun control to be a ploy by the socialists, the Democrats, and the government to exercise more control over law-abiding Americans. They want “even more government control”, “care more about control”, they want to “get more control over people” – their agenda is presented as nothing more than a ploy to be in charge of Americans and strip them of their freedoms. “Absolute control” is supposedly “their ultimate dream” – control of the people, their guns, social media, everything.

They like only limited speech, controlled speech, controlled by them, through safe speech zones, where they can shame the outspoken, or riot to shut them up.

Control is essentially a dirty word for LaPierre, who believes that Americans do not need (or want) that type of government interference in their lives. It is to be seen as the very opposite of freedom, which is what LaPierre himself appears to cherish more than anything else.

In his speech, LaPierre also describes a dystopian society, one which, according to him, could be brought on by “political disease” rising to power. In this dystopian world, people are repressed, their rights are “destroyed”, and their firearms “banned and confiscated”. The right to own guns is presented as something essential to a free

society, and only a society of repression would even consider taking its citizens' firearms away. To him, the issue is not about the safety of the masses, it is a ploy by the government to try to keep control of the masses.

6.3.4. *America(n)/United States*

America(n) is mentioned 23 times in LaPierre's speech, whereas the *United States* is mentioned 8 times.

LaPierre begins his speech by saying how another tragedy has taken place in an "American school". While Americans were searching for solutions, those opposing LaPierre's message – "Chris Murphy, Nancy Pelosi, and more, cheered on by the national media" – are unreasonably blaming the NRA for what has happened. But in reality, LaPierre states, these people "don't care, not one wit about America's school system". The "American mental health system" has failed, and now laws implemented have been able to keep crime out of "every major American community" or "American streets". This gives the impression that the actions of the Democrats, in their pursuance for stricter gun laws, are anti-American. In turn, LaPierre states that "we at the NRA" are "Americans who continue to mourn and care and work every day at contribution real solutions".

LaPierre states that he has "had the pleasure of working with a number of Democrats who believe America to be the greatest country in the world" (suggesting that he thinks this, too), but that the party has changed during the Obama era. He claims that the current Democratic Party is a party that does not "believe in America as we know it". The party is trying to change the very essence of what the country is all about. LaPierre describes "individual liberty" as the "American ideal". He claims that this liberty is being infringed upon by the government demanding too much information from the people:

This growing socialist state dreams of manipulating schoolchildren, to squeeze and squeeze information about their parents. They'll be asking your kids if mommy and daddy spank them, or what mommy and daddy feeds them for dinner, they'll want to know what TV shows you watch, what magazines, newspapers you read, and, oh, yes, do mommy and daddy own a gun? And all that private information will be entered into that ultimate list that cloud of data storage that couldn't care less about due process and constitutional freedom and your privacy as an American citizen.

The government is trying to strip people of their rights as American citizens by taking away their guns and taking away their privacy, and all this is, according to LaPierre, “the real consequence of this new socialist wave in America” – and as a result, “American freedoms” will be lost.

LaPierre talks about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights as documents of genius that are responsible for “the brilliance of America”. He even goes as far as claiming that the right to keep and bear arms for self-defense is “not bestowed by man but granted by God to all Americans as our American birthright” – however, it is unclear why God would choose to bestow that right only on Americans. LaPierre is not only turning to the Constitution to defend his beliefs about guns, but now he is also appealing to religion.

According to LaPierre, the United States Constitution makes it clear that the privileged and powerful are not in charge, but rather, the people are. The ability to be in charge is presented as being made possible by the right to own guns. LaPierre believes that the United States has come under threat from the liberals, who have caused a situation where “United States Constitution is ignored”, and “United States history is perverted”. The words *United States* are mostly used in combination with the word *Constitution*, which makes it seem like those two things are roughly the same thing, in LaPierre’s mind.

6.3.5. *victims and perpetrator*

LaPierre refers to the victims of the attack as *the innocent* once, *schoolchildren* once, *our children* four times, *our kids* three times, and *innocent child* once. By doing this, he is showing that he is not indifferent to the suffering of the families, and that he is aware that children need to be protected. By calling the victims *children*, he is assigning them attributes that make people want to take action to protect them – and by calling them *our children*, he is creating solidarity with the audience proving to them that he, personally, is in this, too. However, LaPierre’s idea of protecting schoolchildren differs drastically from the ideas of the gun control movement – instead of limiting the sale of firearms, he claims that firearms bring safety – if they did not do this, he claims, they would not be used in the White House, Capitol Hill and Hollywood. He states that “our banks, our airports, our NBA games, our NFL

games, our office buildings, our movie stars, our politicians” are all protected more thoroughly than the children at school – through guns.

In reference to the shooter, LaPierre remains quite vague. He never refers to Cruz by his name, as a “shooter”, “terrorist”, “kid”, or any other usual name. Instead, he states that “evil walks among us” – turning school shootings into something abstract and the enemy into something that is hard to defeat. By dehumanizing the threat to safety, LaPierre is creating an image in the audience’s mind that will most likely have them reaching for their firearms in a bid to protect themselves and their loved ones. As he speaks more generally about school shootings, he mentions that schools are “wide open targets for any crazy mad man bent on evil” – suggesting that, when that happens, the only proper thing to do is to have another armed person there to eliminate the shooter. Evil and madness are both forces that are difficult to reign in by creating new laws, which I suspect is precisely the message LaPierre wants to convey.

6.3.6. *freedom/right(s) and safe(ty)/protect(ion)*

LaPierre mentions *freedom(s)* 21 times, *right(s)* 9 times, *safe(ty)* 8 times and *protect(ion)* 13 times. LaPierre claims that his opposers “hate individual freedom”, that their goal is to “eliminate” firearms freedoms and “eradicate all individual freedoms”. At the same time, the Second Amendment freedoms are “revered” by those who support him. He refers to the freedom Americans have as *fundamental freedoms*, *basic freedoms*, *individual freedoms*, *essential freedoms* and *our freedom*. *Freedom* is obviously a key word in his message, which is in line with earlier argumentations for keeping the Second Amendment unchanged in the Constitution. He often combines the word *freedom* with an adjective or attribute that indicates that it is worth defending – examples being *basic* and *fundamental*, which indicate that freedom is something that people naturally are entitled to, *our* and *individual* to indicate that it is something everyone shares. He also talks about *Second Amendment freedoms*, *First Amendment freedoms*, *constitutional freedom* and *American freedoms*, connecting the concept of freedom very firmly with American values and as a fundamental part of American lifestyle. Freedom is what sets America apart, freedom equals life itself, since there is “no greater personal individual freedom than the right to keep and bear arms, the right to protect yourself, and the right to

survive”. The Second Amendment is identified as “the one freedom that protects us all in this country”. LaPierre states that the NRA not only protects the Second Amendment, but *all of our freedoms* – because protecting all of the citizens’ freedoms is what leads to having *real freedoms*.

LaPierre often talks about *Second Amendment rights* as something that cannot be denied American citizens, as they in his mind are connected with “the right to protect yourself” and “the right to survive” – he even claims that “the right to keep and bear arms” is an “American birthright”. To him, the threat to take guns away from American citizens is literally a matter of life and death.

LaPierre claims that he, his audience and even his opposers “share a goal of safe schools, safe neighborhoods, and a safe country” – however, opinions about the methods with which these goals are to be attained are vary drastically between the parties. LaPierre also claims that, for his opposers, the gun issue has nothing to do with schoolchildren – “for them, it is not a safety issue, it is a political issue”. This should be interpreted to mean that LaPierre himself is only concerned about safety – which, in his mind, can only be brought about through the presence of guns. Claiming that armed security makes people less safe is, according to him, “completely ridiculous”, and armed security is what keeps the rich, famous and powerful safe. The same courtesy should therefore be afforded to children in schools. In contrast, “safe speech zones”, that socialists support, are simply a platform where free thinkers are shamed into silence.

LaPierre believes that the duty of the adults is to *protect* schoolchildren and themselves from danger. This duty is fulfilled by being armed and prepared in the face of danger. He claims it is “bizarre” that “our banks, our airports, our NBA games, our NFL games, our office buildings, our movie stars, our politicians, they’re all more protected than our children at school”. Also “the innocent law-abiding people of this country” need to be protected “from being falsely accused, politically abused and permanently stigmatized unjustly” simply for owning a firearm, as such protection is currently not in place. LaPierre also states that “real freedom requires protection”. His view of being protected is equal to having the right to carry a firearm or be protected by someone else who carries one.

6.3.7. *we/us and they/them*

LaPierre starts his speech by stating that “we have serious discussions ahead and serious issues that impact each and every one of us”, and how a week earlier “we were all horrified” by the shooting in the Parkland high school. This *we* likely includes himself, his audience, and every other American. However, his tone quickly shifts, and he starts to distance himself and the audience from anyone that does not share their view:

Think about that, in the midst of genuine grief, and a very understandable passion, as millions of Americans searched for meaningful solutions, what do we find? Chris Murphy, Nancy Pelosi, and more, cheered on by the national media, eager to blame the NRA and call for even more government control.

Suddenly, there has been a shift in whom *we* is referring to. The next time LaPierre uses the word, he is referring to the NRA – “we at the NRA are Americans who continue to mourn and care and work every day at contributing real solutions to this very real problem” – and no longer to the general population of the United States.

Do we really love our money and our celebrities more than we love our children? Can we answer that question honestly? Any of us. Can we answer that question honestly? Knowing that we surround and protect so much with armed security while we drop our kids off at school that are so-called gun free zones, that are wide open targets for any crazy mad man bent on evil to come there first?

Here, *we* is referring to LaPierre himself and those in his audience who support gun ownership. LaPierre is appealing to the audience members’ parental protectiveness and hopes to make them see that they are currently not doing everything they could be doing to keep their children safe from harm. Later on, *we* refers to the NRA again, when LaPierre proclaims that “we will provide immediate assistance and we will also provide it absolutely free to any school in America”. By doing this, he is presenting the NRA as the solution to the problem, since the “socialists” do not “believe in America as we know it” – *we* being the people present.

At the end of the speech, *we* has reverted back to meaning the NRA – *we* will speak out “louder” and “stronger” for the preservation of individual freedoms, and LaPierre is careful about making it clear that *we* “are never talking about an armed resistance against the socialist corruption of our government”. In the last sentence, LaPierre brings the audience into the definition by stating that *we* “must immediately harden our schools”. This is so that the audience realizes that, when something needs to be

done, their contribution will be essential. *We* are the people in the right, whereas anyone not supporting LaPierre's views is referred to as *they*.

LaPierre creates a very clear divide between his side of the argument and those opposed to it. He makes so many radical claims about those against him that it starts to sound like a conspiracy theory:

They hate the NRA. They hate the Second Amendment. They hate individual freedom. In the rush of calls for more government, they also revealed their true selves. The elites don't care, not one wit about America's school system. And schoolchildren – if they truly cared, what they would do is they would protect them. For them, it is not a safety issue. It is a political issue. They care more about control and more of it. Their goal is to eliminate the Second Amendment and our firearms freedoms, so they can eradicate all individual freedoms.

He claims that these people “don't care if their laws work or not”, because ultimately, all they are after is more control. In contrast, “the NRA does care”.

Absolute control in every corner of our government is their ultimate dream. These intellectual leads, they think they're smarter than we are. They think they're smarter than the rest of us. And they think they're better than we are. They truly believe it, and you know it.

LaPierre is making it clear to the audience that people supporting gun control believe that gun supporters are stupid. Not only that, he is also telling the audience that they already know this, too – the “intellectual leads” may think that NRA supporters are stupid, but the NRA knows that their audience is clever enough to see it. He is intentionally creating a divide between his listeners and his opposers, no doubt hoping this will work to his advantage. Gun control activists are not the only ones that are being painted in an unflattering light, either – according to LaPierre, “those who have risen to power in this so-called national news media and seized control of social media to spread their propaganda” are also lying to the American people:

They don't tell us news, and you all know it, and people know it all over the United States, they say it to me every day. They don't tell us news – they tell us what we need to think. That's the way it is these days.

These are the same people that LaPierre has referred to as both “political disease” and “the privileged and the powerful”. “The privileged and the powerful” are “political disease” that is the enemy of gun owners – excluding himself out of this group suggests that LaPierre is placing himself in the same group with his audience,

and thereby the common man. Since he should be seen as belonging to this group, it should be easier to believe that he also has their interest at heart.

Meanwhile, *they* (“you name the group”) are fighting the NRA by turning themselves into victims and “finding something to be offended by every minute of every day”. LaPierre also claims that *they* are responsible for the mass shootings taking place in the United States through the cracks in the system, “the very cracks that they have enabled in the system”. He claims that Charles Schumer, United States Senator, “shook my hand to get all the mental health records into the system” and “did absolutely nothing”. LaPierre states that *they* (presumably the “elites”, as he describes them) “are liars to the core”. Essentially, the NRA is unfairly being assigned blame for the mass shootings, even when the organization is only trying to prevent them.

6.4. Marco Rubio

Marco Rubio spoke about gun laws on the Senate floor one day after the Parkland shooting. His speech is roughly ten minutes long, and touches upon issues such as the ineffectiveness of gun laws and the determination of shooters to acquire their preferred firearms. Rubio also repeatedly states that these issues should not be interpreted to mean that there is nothing to be done to prevent future attacks.

Similarly to LaPierre, Rubio is also against the banning of firearms, but his reasons are somewhat different. He claims not to be against the limiting gun purchases “per se”, but instead claims that laws simply will not solve the problem. He also does not present the issue as Democrats versus Republicans. Rather, he suggests that there are better solutions to the problem, however, he fails to mention any concrete actions that the government could or should take in the future.

The fact that this speech took place in the Senate means that Rubio will have faced an audience with differing opinions. Some may have agreed with his statements, and others may not. His delivery of the speech is more careful than that of the three others, because he cannot assume to be supported. This is why he must be careful when constructing his arguments, and he also needs to provide explanations for why his view about the ineffectiveness of gun laws is right and the opposite view is wrong. The transcript of this speech has been written by me.

6.4.1. *gun/weapon/firearm/arms*

Rubio mentions *weapons* 16 times in his speech – he uses the word *gun* ten times, *weapon* four times, *weaponry* once and *arms* once. These words are often the objects of a sentence, preceded by a verb such as *get*, *acquire*, *sneak*, *use*, and *buy*. The guns and weapons are subjected to an action, which indicates that guns are neutral tools in the matter with no agency. This indicates that the person that acts, i.e. uses the gun, is the one who is to blame for gun violence, not guns in themselves. Therefore, the efforts made by the gun control community to implement laws that would restrict the availability of firearms are misplaced – changing the law will not matter, since guns are not the issue. Three times he refers to creating laws about who gets access to firearms as “making it hard” to get guns – “hard”, not impossible – which shows his lack of faith in the agenda.

It is notable that Rubio speaks of guns in this passive sense throughout his speech, which highlights his stance that guns themselves do not directly cause gun violence. He also rarely uses adjectives to describe guns – rather, he refers to semiautomatic weapons as “those things”, “a certain kind”, “those kinds”, “this type” of guns, which is quite neutral. He seems to avoid connecting any adjectives or attributes to weapons themselves in a way that might be expected of someone arguing for the continued right to gun ownership. I believe this is because attributes that make a weapon good (effectiveness, speed, easy handling) do not create compelling arguments for why they should still be available to people. However, Rubio does mention that he supports “the right to bear arms” for protection, allowing the interpretation that, according to him, owning guns equals safety.

Notably, and quite understandably, Rubio also never explicitly refers to “semiautomatic” weapons, even though this is what was used in the Parkland shooting (and also what is meant by “this kind” and “those kinds” of guns) – possibly to downplay their capacity to cause significant damage. Only once in Rubio’s speech do the words *gun* and *violence* occur together – however, immediately after, Rubio states that “we also have to focus on the violence part”. This makes it very clear that he wishes to separate the concept of guns and the concept of violence from one another, which would seem like a vain effort, considering that the very purpose of guns is to cause damage.

6.4.2. *Second Amendment, Constitution*

Rubio states that, as he took office, he swore to “uphold the Constitution of the United States”. His purpose as a Senator is to obey and uphold the Constitution, and in effect, the Second Amendment – he “agrees with it” and he “supports it”, despite not having written it himself. He adds that the Second Amendment “is in the Constitution” – which in itself is not much of an argument, but the point here is to make it clear that the Constitution is something that ought to be supported for the intrinsic importance it carries for American society. He highlights the importance of the Second Amendment by stating it is “so important”, that it is the *second* amendment in the Constitution, “right after free speech”. This suggests that the right to own guns would be almost if not equally as important as free speech, one of the core values in most western societies. He mentions the ranking of the Second Amendment twice during his speech. (However, it should be noted that Rubio also admits to the importance of the Constitution’s preamble, which highlights the government’s obligation to protect its citizens from both foreign and domestic threats.)

6.4.3. *law/control/regulation/ban/legislation*

Laws are mentioned a total of ten times in Rubio’s speech. During his speech, Rubio makes it very clear how little faith he has in “these laws that have been proposed” and “those laws”. He claims that the laws “wouldn’t have prevented them [the attacks]”, and that anyone who has decided to commit mass murder will “figure out a way to evade those laws, or, quite frankly, to comply with them in order to get around it”. So laws are not only ineffective in that criminals have no respect for them, but also allow criminal misuse of the system through compliance with the laws.

Rubio keeps repeating how laws “could” be passed, but immediately follows these statements up with a reason for why that would be useless. For instance, he states that “you could pass a law that makes it hard to get this kind of gun in a new condition”, but that this would not matter, “because there’s so many of them out there already”. However, he also states that this “doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have a law that makes it harder [to get guns]” – and immediately counters this by saying that “it isn’t going to stop this from happening”. Instances where he mentions laws are full

of negations or mentions about how laws are difficult to implement, as illustrated in the example below (negations in bold):

And I would add, though, that if we do something, it should be something that works. And the struggle up to this point has been that most of the proposals that have been offered **would not have prevented, not just yesterday's tragedy, but any of those in recent history**. And I'm gonna say now what I'm gonna really emphasize at the end – just because these proposals **would not have prevented these, does not mean** that we therefore just raise our hands and say therefore, **there's nothing that we can do**. It is a tough issue, because it is part of the reason why it is so **hard to prevent these**, is because if someone decides that they're gonna take it upon themselves to kill people – whether it's a political assassination of one person or the mass killing of many – if one person decides to do it and they're committed to that task, it is a **very difficult thing to stop**. But that again **does not mean that we should not try** to prevent as many of them as we can.

The negative statements make it clear that Rubio does not have any faith in the gun control agenda, and this tone continues throughout the entire speech. At the end of the speech, Rubio suggests that there is something that could be done “without laws” to better the situation – however, he never mentions what this action could be.

6.4.4. *America(n)/United States*

The word *America* is used only once in Rubio's speech, as is the word *Americans*. He states that the “Second Amendment gives Americans the right to bear arms and to protect themselves” and that “somewhere in America right now, some equally troubled and deranged, violent individual is reading and watching coverage of this attack and gaining from it, not sorrow, but inspiration”. First, he mentions the fundamental American right to self-defense. Immediately after this, he creates a picture of a threat that makes this type of self-defense necessary, namely an unstable individual in *America* (not in some foreign country or anywhere else in the world) who has made the decision that he wants to commit a crime similar to the mass shooting that is being discussed. Even here, the United States is (perhaps unintentionally) being associated with frequently occurring mass shootings, which makes it necessary for people to defend themselves and their families, and therefore own guns.

The *United States* is mentioned only once in Rubio's speech, as he is talking about “the Constitution of the United States”, and how “every element of it” needs to be upheld.

6.4.5. *victims and perpetrator*

Rubio refers to the victims of the shooting as *children*. Like the other speakers, he wishes to highlight the vulnerable position of the shooting victims, which are dependent on the protection of their elders. Rubio even highlights his own position as a father in order to create common ground with his listeners and make the point that he understands the concerns of the parents in the audience:

And I can only imagine how fearful it would be, when suddenly, those texts are not being answered, and those calls are not being returned. I thought about that last night, and what it must feel like to be one of those parents at the hotel, waiting for word, if you hadn't heard from your children in hours. Or how painful it must've been to those, whose job it was to go to these parents and inform them, that their child, who they had sent off to school in the morning, perhaps just weeks away from graduation, that their life had ended senselessly in an event such as this.

Rubio also points out that schoolchildren are not the only victims of the gun violence epidemic – he mentions “the murder of children in schools, the murder of moviegoers, the murder of people at a church, the murder of people at a dance club on Saturday night” as a way to show that everyone’s lives are in danger. He also frequently refers to the victims of both the shooting in question and other shootings as *people*, which can be seen as a more neutral and less provoking expression than *children*. Perhaps this is done to mitigate the outraged response to the shooting – but most likely it is just a natural choice of words.

He only mentions the shooter Nicolas Cruz once as “yesterday’s killer” and “assailant” respectively, but mostly refers to shooters in general as *someone* (9 times) *they* (27 times), *one person* (once) and *individual* (7 times), and in some instances, *killer* (5 times). These descriptions, apart from *killer*, are quite vague, and especially the terms *one person* and *individual* seem to suggest that these shootings should be considered isolated incidents that are simply caused by sick people with bad intentions. The descriptions are also somewhat isolating – the term *someone* refers to an unknown or unspecified person, *they* refers to other people, excluding the speaker and the group(s) they belong to, *one person* is a singular person acting on their own accord, as well as *individual*. The term *killer* excludes anyone who is not a killer themselves. All of these descriptions indicate that the shooters are different from everyone else, they are outcasts of society – and this is what leads them to commit violent acts. Nothing is mentioned of the system that enables them to carry firearms,

and no solutions are presented as to how firearms could be taken away from people that are dangerous.

6.4.6. *freedom/right(s) and safe(ty)/protect(ion)*

Interestingly, Rubio does not mention the word *freedom* anywhere in his speech (apart from referring to the United States as “the freest and the most prosperous nation in all of human history”). Perhaps he feels that the freedom argument has been overused by Republicans and representatives of the NRA, or perhaps – since he has previously expressed his parental concern for his daughters in public schools – he does not want to highlight the stance that guns should be available for just anyone.

It’s cliché-ish to say, but I think it’s important to say that I’m a father of two young ladies who happen to be in high school. I cannot imagine, but I can only envision what it would be like, if one day, here, walking through the capital, I get a text or one of those news alerts that says that there’s been a shooting in the high school that they attend. And I can only imagine how fearful it would be, when suddenly, those texts are not being answered, and those calls are not being returned. I thought about that last night, and what it must feel like to be one of those parents at the hotel, waiting for word, if you hadn’t heard from your children in hours.

However, Rubio does speak about the American *right* to bear arms, which essentially carries the same meaning as the freedom argument. He also associates the bearing of arms with self-defense and defines it as “a right that I strongly support and will continue to support”.

The word *safe* is mentioned twice in the speech and *protect* once. Rubio does seem to make some concessions in that he recognizes that it is the “obligation of our government” to keep people safe “from threats both foreign and domestic”. Shooters are obviously a domestic threat, and he is acknowledging that it is the government’s responsibility to do something about it. However, despite this, Americans also need to have the right and be able to “protect themselves”. In other words, their safety cannot be completely guaranteed by the government, which is why they need to have the means to take care of themselves.

6.4.7. *we/us and they/them*

Rubio uses the word *we* 60 times in his speech. He places himself among the mourners by using the word *we* to emphasize that the American people are in this together.

And that's why we continue to face this, we continue to face these... I think it is a legitimate thing to say that, even as we mourn, we have an obligation to ask ourselves: Is there something we could have done, or should do, to ensure that we don't see these things happen?

He repeats several times that *we* "should be able to do something", however, he never explicitly states what that "something" is. Instead, Rubio continually claims that gun laws are ineffective, and that they would have done nothing to prevent the shooting. He states that "if we do something, it should be something that works", and the use of the word "if" leaves it unclear as to whether or not he is actually intending to take action against the recurring mass shootings.

And so, I hope that we can start to figure it out. I haven't had the time, frankly, in less than 18 hours, to bring to the floor a proposal for how we move forward or what the form would be for this conversation to even begin, but I know that we can no longer just chalk it up to isolated instances. Because it's happened too often, and sadly, I believe, will happen again. So we confront it, try to solve it. And I hope that we will, and I believe that we can. I believe that we must. For, as I said at the outset, and I'll say in conclusion, it goes to the core of why we even exist to begin with: keeping our people safe – no matter how new, how different, or how unique the threat may be.

The ending of Rubio's speech, which appears to be meant as an encouragement to the people listening, seems to fall rather flat. He frequently uses the word *we* in order to make it clear that collective action is needed, but he repeatedly fails to identify what this action could be – in fact, for most of the speech, Rubio is mainly discussing why laws do not work. But what else is there for a government to do but implement new laws? Rubio seems determined to convince the audience about the uselessness of laws, but in doing so, his message appears rather empty when no alternatives are offered. It leaves it unclear what the collective *we* is supposed to fight for, i.e. what cause it is that is supposed to unite them.

Rubio makes it clear in his speech that he does not believe guns are the issue. Rather, individuals, identified by Rubio simply as *they*, are the problem.

They deliberately took steps to get the guns, the weapons, the ammunition that they needed, in many cases they carefully studied the outline of the target which they were going to go after. They specifically planned soft targets, there's evidence of that in this case. And they planned to maximize the loss of life. They acquired the weapon that they needed, and they used tactics that they needed to kill as many people as they could. By the way, because of that premeditation and planning, is one of the reasons why these laws that have been proposed wouldn't have prevented

them. Because when someone is planning and premeditating an attack, they will figure out a way to evade those laws, or, quite frankly, to comply with them in order to get around it.

They are the ones who *get*, *acquire* and *buy* weapons to use them in destructive ways – even guns that have been “outlawed” in a vain effort to reduce gun violence – whereas *guns* simply are the things that are needed, gotten, acquired, bought and used. According to Rubio, if *they* are determined enough to commit a crime, *they* will find a way, regardless of laws. Rubio states that, since guns “last a hundred years”, it will be a struggle to “keep it [a gun] out” of someone’s hands who has decided to use it.

7. Findings

People use different nouns, adjectives, attributes, and even prepositions, and the connotations associated with them, to offer differing points of view about the same things. This trend can definitely be seen when looking at the four speeches selected for this analysis, as discussed below.

7.1. Guns

When Gonzalez and Hogg speak about weapons, it is interesting to note that they speak about them in a rather limited way – Gonzalez talks about guns in a rather neutral way, and mainly focuses on their easy attainability, which she opposes. However, she does not explicitly state why guns need to be regulated, nor does she combine them with unflattering attributes in a way that might be expected. Hogg, on the other hand, only barely mentions guns in his speech – but when he does, he makes sure to associate them with the “96 people” whose deaths they cause every year. Gonzalez speaks about guns in a way that could be expected from someone who supports gun ownership – as if they were tools that just wound up in the wrong hands. Hogg’s way to talk about gun is more representative of his stance – he associates guns with death and violence, and does not consider them to be neutral tools in the matter, but rather a root cause of the problem.

Similarly to Gonzalez and Hogg, LaPierre and Rubio – despite sharing the same opinion on gun control – differ drastically in their ways to talk about guns. LaPierre frequently associates guns with freedom, an important American value, and sees

guns as something that gun control activists are trying to take away. In an interesting shift of blame, LaPierre does combine the word *weapon* with destructive properties – however, not while he is speaking about actual weapons, but rather when he talks about a socialist smear campaign against gun owners, with “character assassinations”, “targets” and “a growing segment of victims”. All the negative connotations that are usually combined with guns are suddenly plastered on to those who do not agree with him. Rubio is more neutral in his presentation and does not make it obvious that guns need to be protected, but rather speaks about them as neutral tools without agency, which is why guns in themselves cannot be the cause of a mass shooting. Guns are things that get “used” by people, who sometimes happen to have bad intentions, and this is where he and LaPierre agree – guns cannot be blamed, it is all about the person who shoots. LaPierre associates guns with the utmost American value, freedom, whereas Rubio sticks to talking about guns as objects, and avoids combining them with descriptive attributes. Out of the four speakers, Gonzalez and Rubio seem to have a more objective view on guns, whereas Hogg has the most negative view and LaPierre the most positive one.

7.2. The Constitution and the Second Amendment

The Constitution and the Second Amendment have always been a large part of the debate surrounding gun laws, mostly on the side supporting gun ownership. This is also the case in these four speeches – Gonzalez barely mentions either of these, and Hogg does not mention them at all. This is understandable when considering their standpoint, since the existence of the Second Amendment does little to help their cause. However, since the meaning of the Second Amendment is frequently debated, they could have included a different interpretation of the amendment into their speeches. However, it is possible that a full-blown attack on the Second Amendment, which many Americans consider important, poses a risk of alienating many listeners and thereby making them reluctant to listen to the message in the speeches. Therefore it makes sense that Gonzalez and Hogg would focus their attentions somewhere else.

LaPierre and Rubio both make a point of highlighting the importance of the Second Amendment for the United States and its people. To LaPierre, the Second Amendment is something that must be protected at all costs, since it is a symbol and

a guarantee of American freedom. There is no valid reason for Democrats to want to get rid of it – they simply work towards gun control to try and exert their power over the American people, whom they just love to deny their rights. Stripping people of their Second Amendment right is, according to LaPierre, just the beginning – once the “socialists” are done with that, they will work towards removing all the other freedoms, too. Rubio takes a more subtle approach – he stresses the value of the Second Amendment by stating that its importance stems from the fact that the Founding Fathers found it important enough to make it the *second* of all the amendments, with only the First Amendment, free speech, preceding it. Due to its placing in the Constitution, and his role as a senator, Rubio considers it his duty to protect and support the Second Amendment. The Constitution is given the same treatment by both LaPierre and Rubio – both see it as a crucial part of American society and legal system. The Constitution should be protected because it defines the United States. Threatening to change something in the Constitution should be seen as a direct threat to American-ness in itself and should therefore not be tolerated.

7.3. Gun control

Gonzalez and Hogg both support gun control, which means that they have a positive attitude towards laws and regulations concerning weapons. This is also made clear in the way they speak about laws – Gonzalez speaks about laws as something that need to change in order to properly reflect modern society, where there is need for them. She compares the United States to other nations that have implemented gun control, and paints an unflattering picture of a nation that does not appear to care about the safety of its citizens. She also criticizes the Trump administration for repealing already existing regulations that have been designed to limit gun ownership, and writes this off as “a really dumb idea”. Hogg, on the other hand, does not mention regulations or laws in his speech at all, probably under the impression that his desire to implement these changes can be understood well enough from the context from which he is speaking. Instead, he speaks about a “change” that he and his supporters will implement in society. Neither of them mentions what would happen to current gun owners if the desired changes would be implemented, and whether or not their guns would be taken away from them.

When LaPierre speaks about laws, he does it with a vengeance – he presents them as something created in order to oppress law-abiding American citizens, to strip them of their rights, and an outright violation of the Constitution. He frequently mentions how laws have failed to protect American citizens against various ills in society – drugs, gang violence, illegal immigration – and how they will continue to do so with mass shootings, because criminals, by definition, do not obey laws. In LaPierre’s eyes, freedom is the most fundamental American value, and a right that gun control is meant to infringe upon. LaPierre also goes as far as claiming that gun control in itself will not be enough to the “socialists” – it is “absolute control” that they are really after. Rubio, on the other hand, sticks to claiming that laws simply do not work, and also frequently uses negations to create negative connotations with the idea of creating new regulations. He also mentions that changes should be made “without laws”, but fails to mention what kind of changes he is referring to.

7.4. America and the United States

The name of the country had to be included in the analysis in order to explore the speakers’ values and find out their feelings about the state of their nation. When Gonzalez speaks about America, it is exclusively with connotations to mass shootings, i.e. “mass shootings in America” and “the number of gunshot victims in the United States”. This makes it seem like one of the key elements of the country is the occurrence of mass shootings. This association is essential to the message, since Gonzalez is clearly trying to convey the point that shootings are too widespread, happen too often, and only within the United States. Hogg’s message is different in that he seems to believe in the future of the nation, and that said future can be brighter as long as Americans choose to work together. He refuses to divide the nation into Democrats and Republicans, because, according to him, they are all “Americans of the same flesh and blood”. Their nationality is what unites them, what causes them to have a common goal, even if everyone does not realize it. Hogg makes his patriotism known throughout his speech, but his patriotism is not based on gun ownership, since that is not what the United States is all about. Instead, his patriotism is shared on shared ideals and values, in which guns have no part. Hogg demonstrates that one can be fond of one’s country, even while accepting that it is not perfect and that some things do need to change.

LaPierre, on the other hand, presents those that do not support gun ownership as anti-American, and as people who do not share the view and values of so-called real Americans (of which he, his listeners and the NRA are prime examples). LaPierre states that America “is the greatest country in the world”, and that individual liberty is one of the most fundamental values that makes it so. The United States is known for its freedoms, and those freedoms are currently under threat by gun control activists – by threatening Americans’ rights to own guns, they are attacking the very essence of the country itself. Guns are such an essential part of American culture that LaPierre goes as far as claiming that the right to keep and bear arms is “not bestowed by man but granted by God to all Americans as our American birthright”. For those whom the argument of the Constitution does not convince, the argument of God supporting gun rights should prove persuasive. Rubio follows the same argument as LaPierre in that Americans do have the right to carry arms and protect themselves in case of an attack. He also states that the chances are very high that, somewhere in America, another individual is planning a similar attack as the one being discussed. The mention of Americans’ right to protect themselves is followed up by the image of a threat which makes owning guns for self-defense appear necessary, since these individuals, according to Rubio, cannot be stopped by further gun legislation.

7.5. Victims and perpetrator

One thing that unites all of the four speakers is their way of speaking about the victims as children, which is reminiscent of Obama’s way of talking about gun legislation as a parental responsibility, as mentioned earlier. All four speakers make it clear in their speeches that children need to be protected and that it is the responsibility of the adults in their lives to guarantee their safety – even if their opinions on how to achieve this goal differ drastically.

Gonzalez paints the victims of the mass shooting as victims of the Trump administration’s inaction. She creates a division between “victims” (of mass shootings) and “our government and President”, whose only action in dealing with mass shootings has, according to her, been “to send thoughts and prayers”. As she speaks about the statistics of gun-related deaths in the United States and the sums of money that the president and his administration have received in donations from the NRA, she essentially speaks about children who have been sold out and betrayed by

a corrupt government. Referring to the victims as children and students highlights their youth, innocence and vulnerable role in society, which is most likely intentional. In contrast, she uses the word “adults” to describe those opposing her message, the implied message being that those adults, who supposedly should be in charge of her and her friends’ safety, are not fulfilling their responsibility. The implicit message here is that children should be protected, a value that is shared by most people and can therefore easily be accepted by the audience. She associates the students of the school with the consequences that they had to endure because of the shooting – she refers to them as students that are “dead”, “still in the hospital”, “suffering from PTSD”, and having panic attacks. While they are stuck with the consequences of the shooting, they are also forced to take part in debates in schools about guns and the Second Amendment, and yet, their voices are not being heard in society. When she speaks about Cruz, she refers to him as *the shooter*, and effectively strips him off his name and any other qualities that he may have possessed. Her mentions of him are kept rather short and she does not speculate too much on his motivations or personality in general. It is likely that she sees him only as the symptom of a bigger problem. Gonzalez clearly places blame away from mental illness and possible exclusion from social circles and towards gun culture and those supporting and participating in it.

Hogg does not directly refer to the victims in the Parkland shooting, but he does place a price tag on the podium before beginning his speech. This price tag represents the sum that, according to Hogg, was received by Senator Marco Rubio for each life that was lost that day. Hogg is presenting the deaths of those students as nothing more than a sum of money to the politicians that continue to block attempts at stricter gun legislations. During the speech, Hogg speaks about *children* as the people who suffer most when it comes to mass shootings – they are the future of the nation, and yet, they are being left without proper protection. He and Gonzalez are using similar tactics in their way to talk about the victims of mass shootings – as children, students and young people in general who cannot make important decisions for themselves despite the fact that their very lives depend on it. Cruz is not mentioned at all in Hogg’s speech – either because he does not want to give him any more press and attention than he has already received, or perhaps because he, just like Gonzalez, considers Cruz to be just a small part of a huge problem.

LaPierre also brings out the innocence and helplessness of children by referring to them as *the innocent*, *schoolchildren*, *our children*, *our kids*, and *innocent child*. However, his solution to the problem differs quite drastically from that of Gonzalez and Hogg. Instead of getting rid of guns to make sure that children are safe, *more* guns should be introduced in order to ward off potential attackers. The protection of schoolchildren is, according to LaPierre, lacking, since more protection is afforded to movie stars and politicians (through guns), but not schoolchildren. LaPierre also abstains from mentioning Cruz directly – instead he speaks about how evil is walking “among us”, and madmen with guns. As mentioned before, madness and evil are both difficult to combat through legislation, which seems to indicate that the only option for protecting oneself and one’s family against such threats is to own firearms.

Rubio also speaks about the victims as children, and highlights his own concern for the matter through the fact that he, himself, is a parent as well. He also refers to victims in other ways by using the word *people*, possibly to avoid emotional responses from the audience, though it may also be unconscious. He also does not refer to Cruz by name – and instead calls him “yesterday’s killer” and “assailant” – and when he speaks about other mass shootings, he uses personal pronouns that would alienate the listeners from the shooter. He refers to shooters as *someone*, *they*, *one person*, and *individual*, and in some instances, *killer*. Referring to shooters in this way creates the impression that all shooters are outcasts – *someone* and *they* are words that could refer to mostly anyone apart from the people listening to or partaking in the conversation, whereas *one person* and *individual* create the impression that the shooters have acted alone and that the incidents are isolated. The same effect is produced by using the word *killer* – anyone who is not a killer will not be able to relate to the shooter. Shooters are to be seen as outcasts and anomalies.

7.6. Freedom vs. safety

Since the entire gun debate hinges upon whether the safety of the many or individual liberties should take precedence when creating new laws, the way that the speakers talk about these values needed to be analyzed. Gonzalez does not mention *freedom* in her speech at all. She does speak about *rights* and *safety*, albeit in different ways. *Rights* are mentioned as she is criticizing the NRA and gun supporters in general of valuing their right to own a gun over students’ right to life. *Safety* is mentioned in the

context of *gun safety*, which has been implemented in other countries and is, according to Gonzalez, the solution to the problem of recurring mass shootings. *Gun safety*, in this context, should be considered the same thing as gun control. In Hogg's speech, neither *freedom* nor *rights* are mentioned, since these words are most often associated with arguments supporting gun ownership. Hogg does, however, talk about how politicians have, instead of protecting children, chosen to be "protective of their position, the safety of inaction". The politicians are thereby more interested keeping themselves safe than worrying about the safety of the public, which proves just how corrupted they are.

Freedom, *safety* and *protection* all play an important role in LaPierre's speech. Individual freedom is under threat from those who "hate" it and want to "eradicate" all freedoms, and the safety and protection of schoolchildren is being ignored since using guns to do this is not being considered as an option. Freedoms are very firmly associated with American values, and a right that is shared by all and cannot be taken away. The most important freedom, according to LaPierre, is the freedom and the right to protect oneself – with guns if necessary. The right to own and use weapons is defined by "the right to survive", and is even described by LaPierre as an "American birthright" that has been "granted by God". Rubio does not place very much emphasis on freedom in his speech. Instead, he mentions the *right* of Americans to bear arms, as he associates it with being able to defend oneself. At the same time, Rubio acknowledges the safety of the American people to be the responsibility of the government, which makes his stance on self-defense somewhat contradictory.

7.7. Us vs. them

All of the speakers include their audiences in their usage of the word *we*. Gonzalez and Hogg mainly use it as a way to try and inspire their audiences to actively participate in society in order to make a difference, whereas LaPierre and Rubio mainly focus on the hardships that all Americans face together due to the repeatedly occurring mass shootings. LaPierre also uses the word *we* when referring to himself and the NRA and how the organization is going to keep fighting for continued gun rights. However, Rubio, while encouraging collective action, leaves it open what exactly the collective *we* is supposed to stand for. No matter who each speaker is

referring to, the collective *we* is always seen as the solution to the existing problem – even when opinions differ as to what the problem is.

The speakers also differ in who they refer to as *they* in their speeches. When Gonzalez and Hogg use the word *they*, they are referring to the politicians who are in charge and oppose their message of more gun control. They both believe that the reason for no gun laws being implemented is the fact that politicians consider their personal monetary gain more important than the safety of American citizens. Their point of view in the issue is presented as the only ethical one, since it is implicitly stating that financial gain cannot by any standards be considered more important than the personal safety of millions of people. The framing of the issue leaves the audience no room for disagreement. The politicians are accused of taking bribes in exchange for children's lives.

LaPierre and Rubio, on the other hand, have their own ideas about who *they*, or the enemy, is – LaPierre uses the word when he is referring to Democrats, “socialists” and gun control activists in general, whereas Rubio uses the word when he is referring to the actual shooter(s). The use of this word makes it very clear where each speaker believes that the core of the problem lies – which also affects what they consider the best way to handle the problem.

8. Discussion

The four speakers in this analysis represent two differing viewpoints on gun control. One of the viewpoints supports the implementation of stricter gun control, whereas the other does not. Gonzalez and Hogg present gun control as something necessary in order to save lives, whereas LaPierre presents the idea as a ploy by Democrats to gain more control and Rubio simply points out the futility of gun control. The fact that there is a problem in American society is accepted by each speaker, but it is identified differently. Gonzalez and Hogg believe the availability of guns causes the problem of mass shootings, LaPierre believes that the essential American value, freedom, is being threatened, and Rubio, while accepting that mass shootings are an all-too common problem, believes that new gun laws are ineffective and that other solutions to mass shootings should be considered. In other words, a shared discourse has given rise to a number of different representations, and these representations illustrate the values, beliefs and thought processes of their speakers.

The issue of guns has been debated for a long time in the United States, and although the aim of this thesis has been to discover how the selected words, i.e. the choices that speakers make and the attributes and connotations they use in their definitions impact their message, and whether the participation of people who actually experienced the shooting themselves would bring any new insights into the debate, it turns out that the decades-old debate has changed very little during the years. This can be seen from the fact that, in describing the gun debate earlier in the thesis, almost all of the arguments used by each speaker in the aftermath of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting could be found to have been used before, such as the futility argument identified by Henigan (2016), which was used by both LaPierre and Rubio in their speeches to make the point that gun laws are essentially useless.

The definition and purpose of guns was one of the things that the speakers expectedly disagreed on – while Gonzalez and Hogg saw them as threats to society, LaPierre and Rubio identified them as means to acquire safety and as tools with no agency and therefore also no part in the blame for the mass shootings they are being used in. The importance of the Second Amendment was only mentioned by those supporting gun ownership, and gun control was either presented as something necessary or as a slippery slope into the complete banning of firearms, and thereby control of American citizens. The warrant of the dead, or the belief that the fate of those who have died due to gun violence places certain responsibilities on the living, was used by both Gonzalez and Hogg – Gonzalez uses it when she speaks about the students who are dead and had not needed to be, and Hogg uses it when he speaks of the children that have been, and are being, gunned down. In a predicted move, LaPierre counters the warrant of the dead in his speech by claiming that “the opportunists wasted not one second to exploit tragedy for political gain”. Even Rubio mentions the lack of a “mourning period”, which according to him used to be the norm before policy changes would be discussed. The importance of guns for the United States and their inclusion in the Constitution were only mentioned by LaPierre and Rubio. Even though Hogg’s speech was patriotic in its message, guns were not considered by him to be an important reason for American greatness.

It is not that surprising that all of the speakers would use the same language when talking about the victims of the shooting – after all, the victims were children, and

most people would agree that protecting the young and vulnerable in society is a social good and frame the issue similarly to Obama as a parental responsibility. However, I did expect the speakers to use different language when it came to the shooter. I would have thought that at least one of the speakers might try to minimize the role of Nicolas Cruz in the tragedy, perhaps calling him a “kid” and thereby highlighting his youth and thereby his vulnerability to things such as violent media and video games. However, none of the speakers seemed interested in letting him off the hook for the crimes he committed – in the selected speeches, he was mentioned either briefly, indirectly or not at all. This may be due to the fact that the speakers believe such a standpoint would not resonate with the crowd they are facing, or perhaps they all just agree that Cruz does carry a lot of the blame. In any case, this similarity in rhetoric from four different speakers was somewhat surprising.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, issues that are difficult to incorporate into one’s own argument are typically left unmentioned, and the selected speeches are no different in this regard. As van Eemeren and Houtlosser (1999) predicted, each of the speakers chose to make use of the material that was the most beneficial for them, while ignoring the parts of the discourse that would have presented challenges for their agenda. Gonzalez and Hogg both choose not to bring up the meaning of the Second Amendment in American society, nor the supposed benefits of guns for self-defense or the question of how to prevent criminals from getting access to guns already in circulation – issues that are often brought up by gun activists and owners. They do not mention the word *freedom*, which is thought to be one of the fundamental values of American society and frequently found in arguments supporting gun ownership. There is also no mention of exactly what kinds of regulations should be implemented on the purchase of firearms. LaPierre and Rubio make no mention of alternative courses of action if new laws are not an option. Essentially, the speakers simply choose not to deal with difficult issues so as not to hurt their own cause. The argument of whether freedom or safety should be considered the more important social good, remains unresolved.

In order to avoid this pitfall in future research, it would be helpful if the keywords chosen for analysis would be ones that are previously determined to have been used by each speaker. This would make the comparison of values, attitudes and persuasive definitions significantly easier and potentially much more interesting.

9. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to find out how people on opposing sides of the gun debate will make use of the same keywords in different ways to further their arguments. The hypothesis in the beginning of the thesis was that, even though the speakers may use the same words, they will present them and ascribe meaning to them in different ways to make sure that their arguments are supported. This will be done through methods such as framing, persuasive definitions, appealing to emotions and responsibilities, and loaded language. A person arguing that guns are dangerous weapons that should be subjected to harsher regulations will be likely to assign different attributes to guns than a person arguing that guns should continue to be available to civilians.

The analysis found that this was, indeed, the case. The four speakers assigned different definitions and meanings to almost all of the selected keywords, apart from the victims of the attack and the gunman, which indicated that their opinions about the innocence of the victims and the guilt of the perpetrator were roughly the same. Some of the keywords were left out by some of the speakers, and this could often be attributed to the fact that, even though the keyword appears frequently in most discussions about guns, this particular keyword could not be used by the speaker in a way that would support their cause. The speakers would also, apart from having different definitions of the keywords used, paint the opposing side of the debate in an unflattering light, and assign attributes to them in a way that would make them seem as unworthy of support by the audiences the speakers were facing. The gun advocates were presented by the opposing side as people who were supporting current gun legislation simply for personal monetary gain, whereas the gun control advocates were presented by the opposing sides as people who desire control for its own sake and as supporters of laws that have repeatedly proved to be ineffective.

It does not appear that the debate is going to end any time soon, especially as long as the arguments that have already been used in the debate for decades continue to be recycled time and time again. Whether any real progress in the fight against continued mass shootings is on the horizon, remains to be seen.

Svensk sammanfattning

”Vi har inget vapenproblem, endast ett människoproblem”: nyckelord i den amerikanska vapendebatten och deras varierande användning

Inledning

Civilpersoners rätt att bära vapen i USA har debatterats i många årtionden, och debatten pågår än idag. Debatten om huruvida det andra tillägget (Second Amendment) i landets rättighetsförklaring (Bill of Rights) som skrevs på 1700-talet fortfarande kan gälla i dagens läge är en omtvistad och väldigt polariserad fråga, både bland politiker och den allmänna befolkningen. Massskjutningar på allmänna ställen såsom skolor, konserter och nattklubbar händer alltför ofta, men trots detta är begränsningarna för ägandet av vapen obefintliga och ingen klar lösning på problemet har tillsvidare hittats.

I denna avhandling undersöker jag fyra olika tal som följde skjutningen i Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School i Parkland, Florida den 14 februari 2018. Nicolas Cruz, en elev i skolan, tog sig in i skolbyggnaden beväpnad och började skjuta. 17 människor miste livet och 17 skadades. Skjutningen ledde till proteströrelsen March for Our Lives, som organiserades av studerande som överlevt skjutningen. Rörelsens uppgift var att framföra nödvändigheten av striktare vapenlagar i USA. Rörelsen hade också sina motståndare, huvudsakligen lobbygruppen National Rifle Association (NRA), vapenägare och andra som understöder den amerikanska rätten att bära vapen.

De två första talen hölls av Emma Gonzalez och David Hogg, båda studerande som överlevde skjutningen och blev välkända för sitt deltagande i March for Our Lives. De höll sina tal framför stora publiker som hade samlats för att protestera alltför effektlösa vapenlagar. De två andra talen hölls av den republikanska politikern Marco Rubio och Wayne LaPierre, vd:n för NRA. Rubio talade inför senaten en dag efter skjutningen, och LaPierre framförde sina åsikter inför en stor publik av vapenägare och NRA-medlemmar under Conservative Political Action-konferensen i februari 2018.

Avhandlingens syfte är att genomföra en diskursanalys av de fyra talen med hjälp av ett antal förvalda nyckelord. Jag undersöker ordval som kombineras med dessa

nyckelord för att identifiera attityder och fördomar bakom argumentationerna.

Nyckelorden innefattar:

1. Ord som betecknar vapen (*gun/firearm/weapon/arms*)
2. Ord som hänvisar till aktuell lag (*Second Amendment, Constitution*)
3. Ord som hänvisar till eventuell lag (*law/control/regulation/ban/legislation*)
4. Ord som betecknar USA (*America, United States*)
5. Ord som relaterar till frihet och trygghet (*freedom/rights* och *safety/protection*)
6. Ord som betecknar offren och gärningsmannen
7. Ord som betecknar den egna och den andra sidan av debatten (*we/us, they/them*)

Jag undersöker hur varje talare använder sig av dessa ord och vilka adjektiv och attribut de kombinerar med dem. Detta borde avslöja även undangömda attityder och argument som inte nödvändigtvis yttras i sin helhet.

Teori

Framing inom lingvistik handlar om att skapa ett s.k. ramverk inom vilket ett visst tema kommer att behandlas, och fastställer därmed vad som anses viktigt. När det gäller masskjutningar kan olika ramverk vara avgörande för vem som anses skyldig för skjutningen – handlar det om en enskild aktör med eventuella mentala störningar, eller borde man skylla på våldsamma videospel? Ligger skulden hos vapenhandlare som garanterar enkel tillgång till vapen? Är vapenproblemet överhuvudtaget ett vapenproblem, eller är problemet egentligen att människor är onda? Framing är ett avgörande medel för hur problem presenteras till allmänheten och därmed hur allmänheten förstår dem.

Utöver detta använder sig talarna av strategisk manövrering – ett argumentations sätt vars syfte är att hjälpa människor bringa fram de aspekter av en situation som framhäver deras position och som kan enkelt accepteras av deras publik, såsom t.ex. argumentet att barn bör vara säkra i skolan. Det är svårt att vara oense om denna synpunkt, vilket skapar en ideal utgångspunkt för ett antal andra argument, t.ex. att vapen bör hållas utanför skolor.

Analys av talen

De olika utgångspunkterna för dessa tal innebär att talarna kommer att presentera sina egna tolkningar av nyckelorden och kombinera dem med sina uppfattningar av vad problemet egentligen utgörs av.

Emma Gonzalez och David Hogg

Gonzalez talar om vapen på ett relativt neutralt sätt. Hon påpekar att de har förändrats mycket sedan det andra tillägget i rättighetsförklaringen introducerades och att de är alltför lätta att få tag på. Hon hävdar också att vapen inte kan jämföras med andra verktyg såsom knivar eftersom de är betydligt farligare i fel händer. Inget av det Gonzalez säger tyder på att hon anser att vapen skulle vara onda i sig själva, men det är tydligt att hon vill införa flera begränsningar för människor som vill skaffa dem. Hogg pratar om vapen på ett sätt som tyder på att de är onda i sig själva, i och med att han hävdar att vapen *orsakar* amerikanska dödsfall. Ingentida inkluderar det andra tillägget i sina argument, vilket tyder på att dess roll inte anses viktig av dessa talare. Bortlämningen kan också tyda på att Hogg och Gonzalez inte är säkra på hur de kan använda sig av det andra tillägget utan att skada sitt budskap.

Båda talarna har en positiv inställning till nya lagar, vilket framkommer ur deras sätt att tala om dem. Gonzalez presenterar lagar som den tydliga lösningen på vapenproblemet, medan Hogg inte direkt pratar om lagar utan om önskvärd förändring, vilket i denna situation kan tolkas som införandet av nya lagar. Gonzalez nämner USA endast i samband med skjutningar, vilket skapar en föga smickrande bild av situationen i landet. Hogg nämner USA flera gånger i sitt tal, men hans definition av en ideal version av USA innefattar inte rätten att äga vapen, utan snarare ett enat folk med samma mål.

Varken Gonzalez eller Hogg nämner frihetsargumentet i sina tal, vilket är förståeligt med tanke på att deras mål är att skapa flera begränsningar, men också överraskande i och med att frihet anses vara ett av de främsta amerikanska värderingarna och en av de viktigaste orsakerna för den fortsatta rätten att äga vapen. Gonzalez hänvisar inte heller till att människornas säkerhet måste tryggas – vilket är förvånansvärt med tanke på hennes önskemål – men hävdar att andra länder som tagit itu med sina

vapenproblem har infört ”vapentrygghet” (gun safety), vilket har lett till det minskade antalet masskjutningar i andra länder, ett exempel som hon önskar att USA skulle följa. Hogg nämner inte heller skolelevers säkerhet i sitt tal, men talar istället om hur beslutsfattare har beslutat att trygga sin egen säkerhet på befolkningens bekostnad. Härmed presenteras de som korrupta.

Wayne LaPierre och Marco Rubio

På samma sätt som med Gonzalez och Hogg skiljer sig LaPierres och Rubios sätt att tala om vapen, trots att de delar samma åsikt gällande vapenlagar. LaPierre associerar vapen med frihet, och anser att rätten att äga vapen garanterar fortsatt frihet för den amerikanska befolkningen. Rubios sätt att prata om vapen påminner om Gonzalez sätt att prata om dem – som objekt. Vapen är enligt Rubio endast verktyg som används av människor, och människornas användningssätt kan vara antingen goda eller onda. Vapen kan alltså inte tilldelas skulden av masskjutningar, eftersom dådet alltid begås av en människa. När det gäller det andra tillägget presenterar LaPierre det som något som måste beskyddas, eftersom det garanterar amerikansk frihet. Försöken att avskaffa det andra tillägget anses av LaPierre vara ett medel som demokraterna vill använda sig av för att stegvis kunna avskaffa allt fler amerikanska rättigheter och därigenom kunna utöva mer kontroll över befolkningen. Rubio anser att det andra tillägget är viktigt för amerikansk lag, eftersom USA:s grundlagsfäder ansåg att tillägget var så viktigt att de bestämde att det skulle bli det andra tillägget, direkt efter det första tillägget som tryggar yttrandefriheten.

När LaPierre pratar om nya lagar, associerar han dem med mer statlig kontroll över den amerikanska befolkningen, vilket han ser som en kränkning av deras rättigheter. Han hävdar att eftersom lagar inte har kunnat skydda amerikaner mot droger, olaglig immigration och gängvåld kommer de inte heller att skydda dem mot kriminella – som till skillnad från laglydiga amerikaner kommer att kunna beväpna sig trots ytterligare vapenlagar, eftersom kriminella inte bryr sig om lagar till att börja med. Rubio har inte en lika negativ attityd mot nya lagar som LaPierre, men han gör det klart att han också anser att nya lagar är ineffektiva. Han hävdar att förändring borde åstadkommas ”utan lagar”, men nämner inte vad detta skulle innebära. När LaPierre och Rubio talar om USA, presenterar LaPierre människor som stöder nya vapenlagar som antiamerikanska, eftersom han anser att rätten att äga vapen är en viktig del av

amerikansk kultur. Han hävdar till och med att den amerikanska rätten att bära vapen har kommit från Gud. Rubio anser att den amerikanska rätten att äga vapen direkt hänger ihop med rätten till självförsvar. Han hävdar också att det är mycket sannolikt att någon individ i USA redan planerar en liknande attack som massskjutningen i Parkland. Utöver att hävda att amerikaner har rätten att försvara sig själva med vapen, skapar Rubio också en hotbild som får lyssnarna att anse att denna rättighet är av yttersta vikt.

Frihet är definitivt det främsta nyckelordet i LaPierres tal. Han anser att frihet är en av de viktigaste, om inte den viktigaste amerikanska värderingen, och att den måste beskyddas. När det gäller trygghet anser LaPierre att mer vapen för med sig trygghet i och med att beväpnade personer inte är ideala offer för kriminella. Han hävdar att, eftersom vapen kan skydda så viktiga saker som banker och själva presidenten, är det ologiskt att hävda att vapen inte för med sig säkerhet – och eftersom vapen kan skydda välkända och förmögna personer, kan de också användas för att skydda skolelever. Rubio använder sig inte direkt av frihetsargumentet, men hävdar istället att människor bör ha rätten att försvara sig själva. Samtidigt hävdar han också att det är statens skyldighet att skydda befolkningen, vilket verkar en aning motstridigt.

Offren och gärningsmannen behandlas av alla fyra talare på nästan samma sätt, med några små variationer. Varje talare hänvisar till offren som barn, vars trygghet måste säkras av beslutsfattare. Åsikterna om hur detta mål ska uppnås varierar betydligt, men målet är detsamma. Gärningsmannens namn nämns inte en enda gång i något av de fyra talen, och de gånger som han nämns, händer det oftast på ett sätt som endast identifierar honom som en skytte utan andra egenskaper.

Alla talare inkluderar sig själva och sina lyssnare i beteckningen *vi*. Gonzalez och Hogg använder ordet för att aktivera sina lyssnare och få dem att sträva efter striktare vapenlagar. LaPierre och Rubio använder ordet för att binda sig samman med publiken och framhäva att skjutningarna påverkar alla i samhället. LaPierre använder ordet också för att beteckna sig själv och NRA och hur organisationen kommer att fortsätta kämpa för den fortsatta rättigheten att bära vapen. Oberoende av vem som talar, presenteras det kollektiva *vi* alltid som lösningen på problemet, medan de som lämnas utanför definitionen presenteras som problemet. När Gonzalez och Hogg

pratar om *dem* hänvisar de till politiker och andra beslutsfattare som inte aktivt strävar efter strängare vapenlagar. LaPierres användning av ordet *de* betecknar demokrater, socialister och aktivister, medan Rubio använder ordet då han talar om massskjutningars gärningsmän. De personer som betecknas som problemet påverkar givetvis hur talarna anser att situationen borde hanteras.

Sammanfattning

De fyra talen som diskuteras i denna avhandling representerar två olika sidor i vapendebatten – sidan som strävar efter ytterligare vapenlagar, och sidan som inte gör det. Varje talare verkar acceptera att det finns ett problem, men definitionerna av problemet varierar.

Analysen av talen visar att varje talare presenterar nyckelorden på ett varierande sätt. De enda definitionerna som inte innehöll många skillnader var definitionerna av offren och gärningsmannen. Definitionerna av de andra nyckelorden, varav de flesta hade att göra med policy, varierade betydligt mer. Trots detta visar analysen att vapendebatten inte har ändrats betydligt under de tiotal år som vapenägan har debatterats. En lösning på problemet med massskjutningar verkar inte sannolikare nu än för femtio år sedan.

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Appendixes:

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Appendixes

Emma Gonzalez

They haven't already had a moment of silence in the House of Representatives, so I would like to have another one. Thank you.

Every single person up here today, all these people should be at home grieving. But instead we are up here standing together because if all our government and President can do is send thoughts and prayers, then it's time for victims to be the change that we need to see.

Since the time of the Founding Fathers and since they added the Second Amendment to the Constitution, our guns have developed at a rate that leaves me dizzy. The guns have changed, and the laws have not. We certainly do not understand why it should be harder to make plans with friends on weekends than it is to buy an automatic or semi-automatic weapon. In Florida, to buy a gun you do not need a permit, you do not need a gun license, and once you buy it you do not need to register it. You do not need a permit to carry a concealed rifle or shotgun. You can buy as many guns as you want at one time.

I read something very powerful to me today. It was from the point of view of a teacher. And I quote: "When adults tell me I have the right to own a gun, all I can hear is 'my right to own a gun outweighs your student's right to live.' All I can hear is mine, mine, mine, mine."

Instead of worrying about our AP Gov chapter 16 test, we have to be studying our notes to make sure that our arguments based on politics and political history are watertight. The students at this school have been having debates on guns for what feels like our entire lives. AP Gov had about three debates this year. Some discussions on the subject even occurred during the shooting while students were hiding in the closets. The people involved right now, those who were there, those posting, those tweeting, those doing interviews and talking to people, are being listened to for what feels like the very first time about this topic that has come up over 1,000 times in the past four years alone.

I found out today, that there's a website called shootingtracker.com. Nothing in the title suggests that it is exclusively tracking the USA's shootings and yet, does it need to address that? Because Australia had one mass shooting in 1999 in Port Arthur (and after the) massacre introduced gun safety, and it hasn't had one since. Japan has never had a mass shooting. Canada has had three and the UK had one and they both introduced gun control and yet here we are, with websites dedicated to reporting these tragedies so that they can be formulated into statistics at your convenience.

I watched an interview this morning and noticed that one of the questions was, "Do you think your children will have to go through other school shooter drills?" And our response is that our neighbors will not have to go through other school shooter drills when we have had our say with the government — and maybe the adults have gotten used to saying "it is what it is," but if us students have learned anything, it's that if you don't study, you will fail.

And in this case, if you actively do nothing, people will continually end up dead, so it's time to start doing something.

We are going to be the kids that you read about in textbooks. Not because we're going to be another statistic about mass shootings in America, but because, just as David said, we are going to be the last mass shooting. Just like Tinker v. Des Moines, we are going to change the law. That's going to be Marjory Stoneman Douglas in that textbook and it's all going to be due to the tireless effort of the school board, the faculty members, the family members and most importantly, the students. The students who are dead, the students still in the hospital, the students who are now suffering from PTSD, the students who had panic attacks during the vigil because the helicopters who wouldn't leave us alone, hovering over the school for 24 hours a day.

There is one tweet I would like to call attention to. "So many signs that the Florida shooter was mentally disturbed, even expelled for bad and erratic behavior. Neighbors and classmates knew he was a big problem. Must always report such instances to authorities again and again." We did, time and time again. Since he was in middle school, it was no surprise to anyone who knew him to hear that he was the shooter. Those talking about how we should have not ostracized him, you didn't know this kid! OK, we did. We know that they are claiming that there are mental health issues, and I am not a psychologist, but we need to pay attention to the fact that this isn't just a mental health issue. He wouldn't have hurt that many students with a knife!

And how about we stop blaming the victims for something that was the shooter's fault, the fault of the people who let him buy the guns in the first place, those at the gun shows, the people who encouraged him to buy accessories for his guns to make them fully automatic, the people who didn't take them away from him when they knew that he expressed homicidal tendencies, and I am not talking about the FBI. I am talking about the people that he lived with. I'm talking about the neighbors who saw him outside holding guns!

If the President wants to come up to me and tell me to my face that it was a terrible tragedy and how it should never have happened and maintain telling us how nothing is going to be done about it, I'm going to happily ask him how much money he received from the National Rifle Association. And hey, you wanna know something? It doesn't matter because I already know! Thirty million dollars! And divided by the number of gunshot victims in the United States in the one and one-half months in 2018 alone, that comes out to being \$5,800. Is that how much these people are worth to you, Trump? If you don't do anything to prevent this from continuing to occur, that number of gunshot victims will go up and the number that they are worth will go down! And we will be worthless to you! To every politician who is taking donations from the NRA, shame on you.

If your money was as threatened as us, would your first thought be, "How is this going to reflect on my campaign? Which should I choose?" Or would you choose us, and if you answered us, will you act like it for once? You know what would be a good way to act like it? I have an example of how to not to act like it. In February of 2017, one year ago, President Trump repealed an Obama-era regulation that would have made it easier to block the sale of firearms to people with certain mental illnesses.

From the interactions that I had had with the shooter before the shooting and the information that I currently know about him, I don't really know if he was mentally ill. But still, I wrote this before I heard what Delaney said. Delaney said that he was diagnosed. I don't need a psychologist and I don't need to be a psychologist to know that repealing that regulation was a really dumb idea. Republican Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa was the sole sponsor on this bill that stops the FBI from performing background checks on people adjudicated to be mentally ill and now he's stating for the record, "Well, it's a shame the FBI isn't doing background checks on these mentally ill people." Well, duh. You took that opportunity away last year!

The people in the government who were voted into power are lying to us. And us kids seem to be the only ones who notice and our parents to call BS. Companies trying to make caricatures of the teenagers nowadays, saying that all we are self-involved and trend-obsessed, and they hush us into submission, when our message doesn't reach the ears of the nation, we are prepared to call BS. Politicians who sit in their gilded House and Senate seats funded by the NRA, telling us nothing could have ever been done to prevent this, we call BS. They say that tougher guns laws do not decrease gun violence. We call BS. They say a good guy with a gun stops a bad guy with a gun. We call BS. They say guns are just tools like knives and are as dangerous as cars. We call BS. They say that no laws could have been able to prevent the hundreds of senseless tragedies that have occurred. We call BS. That us kids don't know what we're talking about, that we're too young to understand how the government works. We call BS.

If you agree, register to vote. Contact your local congresspeople. Give them a piece of your mind.

David Hogg

First off, I'm gonna start off by putting this price tag right here as a reminder for you guys to know how much Marco Rubio took for every student's life in Florida. One dollar and five cents.

The cold grasp of corruption shackles the District of Columbia. The winter is over. Change is here. The sun shines on a new day, and the day is ours. First-time voters show up 18 percent of the time at midterm elections. Not anymore. Now, who here is gonna vote in the 2018 election? If you listen real close, you can hear the people in power shaking. They've gotten used to being protective of their position, the safety of inaction. Inaction is no longer safe. And to that, we say: No more.

Ninety-six people die every day from guns in our country, yet most representatives have no public stance on guns. And to that, we say: No more. We are going to make this the voting issue. We are going to take this to every election, to every state, in every city. We are going to make sure the best people get in our elections to run, not as politicians, but as Americans. Because this — this is not cutting it. When people try to suppress your vote, and there are people who stand against you because you're too young, we say: No more.

When politicians say that your voice doesn't matter because the NRA owns them, we say: No more. When politicians send their thoughts and prayers with no action, we say: No more. And to those politicians supported by the NRA, that allow the continued slaughter of our children and our future, I say: Get your résumés ready.

Today is the beginning of spring, and tomorrow is the beginning of democracy. Now is the time to come together, not as Democrats, not as Republicans, but as Americans. Americans of the same flesh and blood, that care about one thing and one thing only, and that's the future of this country and the children that are going to lead it.

Now, they will try to separate us in demographics. They will try to separate us by religion, race, congressional district and class. They will fail. We will come together. We will get rid of these public servants that only serve the gun lobby, and we will save lives. You are those heroes.

Lastly, let's put the USA over the NRA. This is the start of the spring and the blossoming of our democracy. So let's take this to our local legislators, and let's take this to midterm elections, because without the persistence — heat — without the persistence of voters and Americans everywhere, getting out to every election, democracy will not flourish. But it can, and it will. So, I say to those politicians that say change will not come, I say: We will not stop until every man, every woman, every child, and every American can live without fear of gun violence. And to that, I say: No more.

Thank you, I love you all, God bless all of you, and God bless America. We can, and we will, change the world.

Wayne LaPierre

Thank you very much. I appreciate this opportunity. We have serious discussions ahead and serious issues that impact each and every one of us.

Just a week ago, we were all horrified by another terrible tragedy at an American school. Each and every member of the National Rifle Association mourns the loss of the innocent and continues to keep their families and that community in our prayers. We share a goal of safe schools, safe neighborhoods, and a safe country. As usual, the opportunists wasted not one second to exploit tragedy for political gain. Saul Alinski would have been proud. The break back speed of calls for more gun control laws and the breathless national media eager to smear the NRA.

Think about that, in the midst of genuine grief, and a very understandable passion, as millions of Americans searched for meaningful solutions, what do we find? Chris Murphy, Nancy Pelosi, and more, cheered on by the national media, eager to blame the NRA and call for even more government control. They hate the NRA. They hate the Second Amendment. They hate individual freedom. In the rush of calls for more government, they also revealed their true selves. The elites don't care, not one wit about America's school system. And schoolchildren. If they truly cared, what they would do is they would protect them. For them, it is not a safety issue. It is a political issue. They care more about control and more of it. Their goal is to eliminate the Second Amendment and our firearms freedoms, so they can eradicate all individual freedoms.

What they want are more restrictions on the law-abiding. Think about that, their solution is to make you, all of you less free. They want to sweep right under the carpet the failure of school security, the failure of family, the failure of America's mental health system, and even the unbelievable failure of the FBI. They fantasize about more laws, stopping what other laws failed to stop. The truth is, laws succeed only when people obey them. That's what the law-abiding majority in this country practices. But once again, so many existing laws were ignored. Their laws don't stop illegal criminals from crossing our borders every single day. Their laws don't stop the scourge of gang violence and drug crime that savages Baltimore, Chicago, and every major American community. Their laws haven't stopped the plague of opioids, and Chinese fentanyl from Mexico, that floods American streets and kills victims every single day in this country. No wonder law-abiding Americans, all over this country, revere their Second Amendment freedom to protect themselves more than ever.

They don't care if their laws work or not. They just want to get more laws, to get more control over people. But the NRA, the NRA does care. We at the NRA are Americans who continue to mourn and care and work every day at contributing real solutions to this very real problem. Real practical action, to truly protect our children. Think about it. It is a bizarre fact that in this country our jewelry stores, all over this country, are more important than our children. Our banks, our airports, our NBA games, our NFL games, our office buildings, our movie stars, our politicians, they're all more protected than our children at school. Does that make any sense to anybody? Do we really love our money and our celebrities more than we love our children? Can we answer that question honestly? Any of us. Can we answer that question honestly? Knowing that we surround and protect so much with armed security while we drop our kids off at school that are so-called gun free zones, that are wide open targets for any crazy mad man bent on evil to come there first.

In every community in America, school districts, PTAs, teachers' unions, local law enforcement, moms and dads, they all must come together to implement the very best strategy to harden their schools, including effective trained armed security that will absolutely protect every innocent child in this country. And that has to happen now. Evil walks among us. And God help us if we don't harden our schools and protect our kids. The whole idea from some of our opponents that armed security makes us less safe is completely ridiculous. If that's true, and just think about this, if that's true, armed security makes us less safe, let's just go ahead and remove it from everywhere. Let's remove it from the White House, from Capitol Hill, and remove it from all of Hollywood. Any American school that needs immediate professional consultation and help with organizing and defining these solutions should call the National Rifle Association school shield program. And we will provide immediate assistance and we will also provide it absolutely free to any school in America.

I'll tell you this, that's more than anybody at the Democratic National Committee or NBC News or the "Washington Post" is offering. The – But you know what, the shameful politization of tragedy, it is a classic strategy, right out of the playbook of a poisonous movement. In my three decades of leading the NRA, I've had the pleasure of working with a number of Democrats who believe America to be the greatest country in the world, because of our free market capitalism, and because of our individual liberties. But during the last decade, the Obama decade, many of those leaders have been forced out as a tidal wave of new European style socialists seize control of the Democratic Party. Obama promised a fundamental transformation of our country. And you know what, it began with his own national party. A party that is now infested with saboteurs who don't believe in capitalism, don't believe in the Constitution, don't believe in our freedom, and don't believe in America as we know it. Obama may be gone, but their utopian dream, it marches on.

And President Trump's election, while crucial, can't turn away the wave of these new European style socialists bearing down upon us. I'm not just talking about Bernie Sanders. I mean, he's near the end of his career. But how about Kamala Harris, Elizabeth Warren, Bill de Blasio, Andrew Cuomo, Cory Booker, Christopher Murphy and Keith Ellison? They are not Democrats in the mold of John F. Kennedy or Tip O'Neill. They hide behind labels like Democrat, left wing and progressive to make their socialist agenda more palatable. And that is terrifying. That should terrify every citizen who values the American ideal in this country of individual liberty. They politicize the Department of Justice. They weaponize the internal revenue service. The EPA. Perhaps cripple the FBI. And the Intelligence Community. And seized an embedded leadership in all of them to advance their agenda. Absolute control in every corner of our government is their ultimate dream. These intellectual leads, they think they're smarter than we are. They think they're smarter than the rest of us. And they think they're better than we are. They truly believe it, and you know it.

The privileged and the powerful, they think they deserve to be in charge of every lever of power. But you know what, the United States Constitution makes it absolutely clear that they are not in charge. We, the people, are in charge of this country. But Washington, oh, my gosh, this city, he likes to ignore that. Our Intelligence Community shrouds everything in secrecy, driving into darkness every dirty memo and every dirty institutional secret and memory in the name of national security. But when the leaks come, as so often occurs, in the light of day, it reveals nothing about the security of our country and it reveals everything about the corruption of those in power. That's because in a captive society the

loss of transparency results in the loss of truth. They also eliminated turnover assistance of wrongdoing in these great institutions. There is no stronger supporter of our law enforcement than the National Rifle Association.

My gosh, we're one of the largest law enforcement organizations in the United States if you look at our membership. And we're proud of that. Everywhere I go I get a police officer coming up to me, thanking me and saying I'm a member of your organization, keep up what you're doing. And there are tens of thousands of incredible men and women at the FBI. These are honorable, decent, hardworking people, and they're dedicated to keeping our country safe every single day. And we're proud of them and we thank them. But as we have learned in recent months, even the FBI is not free of its own corruption. And its own unethical agents. Look, and I know you probably all share this sentiment and I get people telling me from coast to coast, and they shake their heads when they say it to me. I can understand a few bad apples in their organization as large as the FBI, but what is hard to understand is why no one at the FBI stood up and called BS on its rogue leadership. I mean, really, where was the systemic resistance and repulsion that should protect every powerful institution that serves us. The lowest ranking marine knows to resist an unlawful order. The rank and file in every powerful institution must police its own leadership. But still, too much of today's Washington, no one speaks out. No one challenges authority. Everyone keeps their mouth closed and their heads down and that's exactly how socialist societies function.

When leaders do whatever they want, when resistance and repercussion disappears, and when the fundamental concept of moral behavior is expunged, the state rules the day. And anyone who attempts to resist is smeared right into submission. You know it. Yes, the art of the smear. We do live in the socialistic age of the art of the smear. Doesn't have to be true. It just has to stick somewhere. Anywhere. It is designed to degrade, destroy, and it is all over the national media to serve their agenda. And socialism is a movement that loves a smear. Racist, misogynist, sexist, xenophobe and more. These are the weapons and vitriol these character assassinations scream to permanently hang on their targets and create a growing segment of victims. Because socialism feeds off manipulated victims. You name the group, and they will find a way to turn them into victims. They keep their movement growing by finding someone to be offended by something every minute of every day. From the Occupy movement, to Black Lives Matter, to Antifa, they agitate the offended, promote uncivil discourse and ignore any sense of due process and fairness to destroy their enemies. The illumination of due process is the very gold standard of the socialist state.

Imagine this, and this happened, and it is true, imagine telling an elderly couple that because they sought help to do their taxes, that they could no longer exercise their fundamental Second Amendment right. That's exactly what Obama did. His administration proposed that some social security recipient who granted financial authority to a family member, friend or financial professional was banned from purchasing a firearm. No questions asked. Just like that. Good, law abiding people were automatically and unjustly declared mentally incompetent and put on a new government list. And, oh how socialists love to make lists, especially lists that can be used to deny citizens their basic freedoms. And now some people are calling for a new list, of anyone, anyone who sought mental health care to deny them their Second Amendment rights. Look, and this is really important, and you never hear this on the national media, so I want to say it to all of you now and I need your help in telling all the Americans, this is the truth. The National Rifle Association originated the national instant check system, it was our bill. No one on the

prohibited persons list should ever have access to a firearm. No killer, no felon, no drug dealer. And anyone that is adjudicated is mentally incompetent or danger to society should be added to the check system and prevented from getting their hands on a gun.

VIDEOTAPE

Now, here's the real tragedy. Charles Schumer shook my hand to get all the mental health records into the system and then went back to Capitol Hill and you know what he did, absolutely nothing. How many lives might have been saved if he had just kept his promise? They are liars to the core and I'll make this prediction right now. A year from today, many of those records may still not be in the system. Not if some of these whining for television politicians and their media enablers have their way.

Instead, what they'll do is they'll keep coming after the NRA and when another monster slips through the cracks, the very cracks that they have enabled in the system, as the records of prohibited persons remain out of the database, it will happen again. But here's something we must be careful of as we go forward. We all have to be careful that this doesn't become a runaway train. What if all of your medical records, perhaps your conversations with your doctor, your prescription information, do we really want all that on a government list and in the government database? Here's another one. A military vet, comes -- goes to his local VA, comes home, goes to his or her local VA, and tells the doctor they're having trouble sleeping at night or anyone who shares nightmares, nightmares with a medical professional, they all become potential triggers that somebody, somewhere could define as a mental health barrier to owning a firearm.

I even heard a television pundit recently suggesting that people seeking to buy a firearm should be interviewed first. I mean, interviewed first? Who's going to conduct that interview? And what will they ask? That's the challenge we as a free society face. How do we create a step along the way called due process that protects the innocent law-abiding people of this country from being falsely accused, politically abused and permanently stigmatized unjustly?

Come on. Socialists oppose all of our most fundamental freedoms enshrined in the bill of rights. They don't like free speech any more than they like the Second Amendment. They like only limited speech, controlled speech, controlled by them, through safe speech zones, where they can shame the outspoken, or riot to shut them up. If you still think we have full First Amendment freedom in this country, try going right now out to Berkeley and speaking out in favor of conservative causes or even the Second Amendment.

This growing socialist state dreams of manipulating schoolchildren, to squeeze and squeeze information about their parents. They'll be asking your kids if mommy and daddy spank them, or what mommy and daddy feeds them for dinner, they'll want to know what tv shows you watch, what magazines, newspapers you read, and, oh, yes, do mommy and daddy own a gun? And all that private information will be entered into that ultimate list that cloud of data storage that couldn't care less about due process and constitutional freedom and your privacy as an American citizen. And then it is just a short hop to the systematic destruction of our most basic freedoms in this country. And you all know what they are, but let me say them, family, faith, individual responsibility, and self-destiny, a free market economy, patriotism, respect for our national flag and national anthem, personal liberty, and justice for all.

Going back a decade or more, these essential freedoms and these essential values have been increasingly and sadly ridiculed and disrespected and diminished in this country. And it won't take long if we stay on the path we're on to raise them completely. That's the real consequence of this new socialist wave in America. You know, I hear a lot of quiet in this room, and I sense your anxiety. And you should be anxious, and you should be frightened. If they seize power, if these so-called New European Socialists take over the House and the Senate and God forbid, they get the White House again – our American freedoms could be lost, and our country will be changed forever. And the first to go will be the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

History proves it. Every time, in every nation in which this political disease rises to power, its citizens are repressed, their freedoms are destroyed, and their firearms are banned and confiscated. And it's all backed in this country by the social engineering, and the billions of people like George Soros, Michael Bloomberg, Tom Steyer and more – and gleefully promoted by those who have risen to power in this so-called national news media and seized control of social media to spread their propaganda. They don't tell us news, and you all know it, and people know it all over the United States, they say it to me every day. They don't tell us news – they tell us what we need to think. That's the way it is these days.

On college campuses, *The Communist Manifesto* is one of the most frequently assigned texts. Karl Marx is the most assigned economist. And there are now over 100 chapters of young democratic socialists of America at many universities and students are even earning academic credit for promoting socialist causes. In too many classrooms all over the United States – and I know you think about this when you decide where you're gonna send your kids to school, and your kids think about it, too – the United States Constitution is ignored, United States history is perverted, and the Second Amendment freedom in this country is despised.

You know, some people out there think the NRA should just stick to its Second Amendment agenda, and not talk about all of our freedoms. But real freedom requires protection of all of our rights, and the Second Amendment isn't worth its own words in a country where all of our other individual freedoms are destroyed. So I promise you this: the NRA will not only speak out. We will speak out louder, and we will speak out stronger than ever before.

We will do it through NRA TV and our media operations, which we'll expand to reach a growing audience of Americans that are looking all over this country for the truth. They're gonna do it with strong voices, like Dana Loesch, that you've just seen, Dan Bongino and others who are engaging in new programming to make our message just as accessible as NBC, The New York Times, and the rest of the so-called national news media.

Let's be clear. We are never talking about an armed resistance against the socialist corruption of our government. We are always talking about a resistance armed with the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights in our country. The genius of those documents, the brilliance of America, of our country itself, is that all of our freedoms in this country are for every single citizen. And there is no greater personal individual freedom than the right to keep and bear arms, the right to protect yourself, and the right to survive. It's not bestowed by man but granted by God to all Americans as our American birthright.

So I call right now today on every citizen who loves this country and who treasures this freedom, to stand and unflinchingly defend the Second Amendment, the one freedom that protects us all in this country. And I refuse to leave this stage until I say, one more time,

that we must immediately harden our schools. Every day. Every day, young children are being dropped off at schools that are virtually wide-open soft targets for anyone bent on mass murder. It should not be easier for a madman to shoot up a school than a bank or a jewelry store or some Hollywood gala. Schools must be the most hardened targets in this country, and evil must be confronted immediately with all necessary force to protect our kids.

I said, five years ago, after that horrible tragedy in Newtown, and I wish, oh God, I wish more had heeded my words. So lean in, listen to me now, and never forget these words: to stop a bad guy with a gun, it takes a good guy with a gun. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you.

Marco Rubio

Madam President, I join my colleague, the Senior Senator from Florida here today with a broken heart – as I do most of the nation – would join us in the events of yesterday. And... there indeed was a time in the history of our country, where, after an event such as this, there was a mourning period that followed with a policy debate, but today, that time is interrelated and intermixed. And I don't blame them, I'm not upset about it, in fact, I think there's just been too many of these now. And that's why we continue to face this, we continue to face these... I think it is a legitimate thing to say that, even as we mourn, we have an obligation to ask ourselves: Is there something we could have done, or should do, to ensure that we don't see these things happen?

It's cliché-ish to say, but I think it's important to say that I'm a father of two young ladies who happen to be in high school. I cannot imagine, but I can only envision what it would be like, if one day, here, walking through the capital, I get a text or one of those news alerts that says that there's been a shooting in the high school that they attend. And I can only imagine how fearful it would be, when suddenly, those texts are not being answered, and those calls are not being returned. I thought about that last night, and what it must feel like to be one of those parents at the hotel, waiting for word, if you hadn't heard from your children in hours. Or how painful it must've been to those, whose job it was to go to these parents and inform them, that their child, who they had sent off to school in the morning, perhaps just weeks away from graduation, that their life had ended senselessly in an event such as this. And because of what happened yesterday, and because it's happened so often, people from across the political spectrum are arguing "there's gotta be something we can do, we have to be able to do something". And I agree with that sentiment, I understand it.

And I would add, though, that if we do something, it should be something that works. And the struggle up to this point has been that most of the proposals that have been offered would not have prevented, not just yesterday's tragedy, but any of those in recent history. And I'm gonna say now what I'm gonna really emphasize at the end – just because these proposals would not have prevented these, does not mean that we therefore just raise our hands and say therefore, there's nothing that we can do. It is a tough issue, because it is part of the reason why it is so hard to prevent these, is because if someone decides that they're gonna take it upon themselves to kill people – whether it's a political assassination of one person or the mass killing of many – if one person decides to do it and they're committed to that task, it is a very difficult thing to stop. But that again does not mean that we should not try to prevent as many of them as we can.

Perhaps the answer in how to prevent them begins by asking ourselves, "What do these things have in common?". They have two things in common. The first is that every single one of them was premeditated and planned. None of these shootings were an act of passion or someone got up in the morning and was upset and decided to do something out of rage. They all involved careful planning and premeditation. They deliberately took steps to get the guns, the weapons, the ammunition that they needed, in many cases they carefully studied the outline of the target which they were going to go after. They specifically planned soft targets, there's evidence of that in this case. And they planned to

maximize the loss of life. They acquired the weapon that they needed, and they used tactics that they needed to kill as many people as they could. By the way, because of that premeditation and planning, is one of the reasons why these laws that have been proposed wouldn't have prevented them. Because when someone is planning and premeditating an attack, they will figure out a way to evade those laws, or, quite frankly, to comply with them in order to get around it. That may be an argument for new laws of a different kind, but it's what makes it hard, though not impossible. The second thing they have in common is that almost all of these attacks were preceded by clear signs of what was to come. A cursory review this morning of just a handful of the recent cases points that out.

We're all familiar with the loss of life of over 20 people at a Texas church not long ago. This is a case of a killer whose wife said that he tried to kill her, an individual who was arrested and convicted for domestic violence, which was unfortunately never reported to the background check system. An individual who escaped a mental health facility, who was caught sneaking guns onto an air force base while on active duty, who was discharged from the military for bad conduct, who had social media posts that bragged about buying dogs to shoot them and... actually expressed admiration for the South Carolina killer in that church killing a few years ago, an individual who was actually charged with animal mistreatment just a few years earlier. In Sandy Hook, we know that the killer had a spreadsheet with details of the previous school shootings. It was also an individual whose mental state was rapidly deteriorating to the point where they spoke to no one but his mother, who he ultimately killed before carrying out the horrific massacre. But someone who was isolated in their room all day, largely playing video games. And the Polz attack, which was precipitated and inspired by an adherence to a jihadist ideology, as Senator Nelson's already pointed out, this individual, not once, but twice, had been on the radar screen of the FBI and both times, had been cleared. They interviewed him, they asked him questions – he didn't meet the standard for staying on the list, and he came off.

We are still learning facts about yesterday's killer. Unlike these others, we may learn more, because he was apprehended alive, and authorities will have an opportunity to question him. And that will continue. But here's what we know – we know that he was expelled from school for behavior that the administrators thought was dangerous. We know that, from press accounts now, both teachers and students did not act surprised that he was the assailant, in fact, many of them said that there was a running joke – obviously not a joke anymore – that one day, he would do something like this. We know that the media and others have discovered social media posts, which are, in hindsight, deeply disturbing, as they point to glorification of gun violence and murder and... animal cruelty, even, apparently. We saw reports this morning of a post on YouTube a year ago, where he posted that he wanted to be a school shooter – this was alerted to the FBI. Who have followed up, by the way, in an interview with that person who alerted them.

They all have this premeditation in common, and we sit here in hindsight and see all of these little points and say, "taken together, those are warning signs". The problem is, they're not taken together, because the people who might have known about him being expelled may not have known about the social media posts, and the people who knew about the social media posts may not have known about what he wrote on YouTube, and

the people who knew about the YouTube may not have known about the fact that the police have been called several times for different reasons, and so forth.

And so, hence the challenge for why it's so hard to find something that works, and there are a lot of proposals. And I'll share the ones – 'cause I've heard them before and I hear them today, and I'm not diminishing them. I don't want this to be taken as "because it won't work, I don't even wanna hear your argument" – I understand, I really do. You read in the newspaper that they used a certain kind of gun, and therefore, let's make it harder to get those kinds of guns. I don't have some sort of de facto religious objection to that, or some ideological commitment to that, per se – there's all kinds of guns that are outlawed and weaponry that's outlawed and/or special category. The problem is, we did that once, and it didn't work for a lot of reasons – one of them is, there's already millions of these in the street. And those things, they last a hundred years. And so, you could pass a law that makes it hard to get this kind of gun in a new condition. But you're gonna struggle to keep it out of the hands of someone who's decided that's what they want to use, because there's so many of them out there already, they would be grandfathered in.

You can do a background check. The truth is, in almost all these cases I cited, the individual either erroneously passed the background check, or would have passed it, or did. Again, even if they couldn't pass the background check, then they could buy them the way MS13 does, and other gangs, and other street elements do: from the black market. Again, not because we shouldn't have the background check, I'm just trying to be clear and honest here – someone's decided, "I'm going to commit this crime", they'll find a way to get the gun to do it. That doesn't mean you shouldn't have a law that makes it harder, it just means, understand, to be honest, it isn't going to stop this from happening. You could still pass the law, per se, but... you're still gonna have these horrible attacks.

And that's why, I do think, that, in some circles, it isn't fair or right to create this impression that, somehow, this attack happened yesterday because there's some law out there that we could have passed to prevent it. For if there was such a law, that could have prevented yesterday, I think a lot of people would have supported it. But I also want to be honest to people who share my point of view on these issues. I think it's also wrong to say that there's nothing we can do. And I would admit that perhaps, even I, in the past, in the way I've addressed this issue or spoken about it, may have come off as dismissive with the argument that, since none of these laws would have worked, there's just nothing we can do and we'll just have to deal with it. Just because I don't have a quick or easy answer for how to prevent these, doesn't mean that we don't have an obligation to try and find one. And by finding one, I don't mean a quick and easy answer. I mean an answer that would work.

When I took office here, I swore to uphold the Constitution of the United States. Every element of it. I didn't write the Constitution, but I agree with it and I support it. The Second Amendment's in the Constitution. And you can debate what the outlines of the Second Amendment are, how far it goes, but it's in there. And I happen to support it. And I happen to oftentimes point to the Second Amendment and say, "it's the second amendment, right after free speech – that tells you how important it was to those who wrote those words". I still believe every bit of that. But I also recognize that, if it's fair to say that the Second

Amendment is so important – and I want to reiterate, it is, because of how high up it is in the ranking from first to second, it's the second one – then I have to recognize that there's a part of the Constitution that was written even before the Second Amendment. And it's the preamble. And that preamble lays out why we have a constitution, and ultimately, why we have a government. And in it, it says that two of the reasons why we have a government, and therefore two of the reasons why we have a senate, is to ensure domestic tranquility and to promote the general welfare. And these school shootings and mass shootings and murders that we are seeing now at an accelerated pace – these things are, by definition, a threat to our domestic tranquility and a threat to our general welfare.

The murder of children in schools, the murder of moviegoers, the murder of people at a church, the murder of people at a dance club on Saturday night – these are all places where we should be enjoying the general welfare and the domestic tranquility. And so, even as we recognize that the Second Amendment gives Americans the right to bear arms and to protect themselves – a right that I strongly support and will continue to support – we must also recognize that the same constitution places upon this government an obligation to ensure domestic tranquility and promote general welfare. And we must confront the fact, that over the last 20 years, these attacks have accelerated, and we must recognize the evidence that they are not isolated from one another, they are building upon one another. We must recognize the scary reality, that even as a nation mourn and parents grieve, it is a high probability, if not certainty, that somewhere in America right now, some equally troubled and deranged, violent individual is reading and watching coverage of this attack and gaining from it, not sorrow, but inspiration. That even as we speak here now, even as we stand here in mourning, and even as the days go by, there are probably some people out there who are going to try to do this because of what happened yesterday. That is a frightening thought, but it is a reality. And it challenges us to find an answer to a very difficult issue. How do we take all of these bits and pieces of information out there? How do we, in this society, confront someone, who does things that, in another era, we would say “well, they're just a strange person”? “They're just weird”? “They're just going through a phase”? We can't do it anymore. There is no longer such a thing as just an innocent posting online that you just look at and say, “well, that's just them, they're strange, they don't mean anything by it, they're harmless”. We cannot assume that anymore. None of us. How do we create a system where all of these disconnected pieces and bits of data can somehow be tied together so that, whenever it was that this killer got a hold of these weapons and proceeded to perform, conducting these attacks, someone would say, “Hold on a second – this person is the person who got expelled from school who had these social media posts saying he wanted to be a school shooter, whose mother passed away in November, who is now living isolated, who has students of all suspected him of being a person who could one day be violent...” How do you take these bits and pieces of information and turn them into a usable source of data that perhaps prevents the acquisition of a weapon or, preferably, intervenes in that person's life before they carry this out? If anyone here tells you that they have that one figured out, they're not being honest. This is hard, but we need to do it. We need to somehow figure it out. Because it goes to the very core of why exist to begin with. There is no greater obligation of our government than to keep our people safe – from threats both foreign and domestic. And we must

acknowledge that this is a threat, that for whatever reason, we now live in a society where someone, at 19 years of age, in the freest and the most prosperous nation in all of human history, has decided to take it upon themselves to take the lives of 17 individuals and severely injure 14 others, and actually, probably try to kill even more.

What is happening in our country, in our culture, in our society? And if there is something to be done without laws, we should do that, too. I'm not saying don't focus on the gun part, but we also have to focus on the violence part. For to talk about gun violence requires to talk about both. And the violence part is the one that goes well beyond an easy government solution and entails all different aspects of modern life that we are still grappling with. And so, I hope that we can start to figure it out. I haven't had the time, frankly, in less than 18 hours, to bring to the floor a proposal for how we move forward or what the form would be for this conversation to even begin, but I know that we can no longer just chalk it up to isolated instances. Because it's happened too often, and sadly, I believe, will happen again. So we confront it, try to solve it. And I hope that we will, and I believe that we can. I believe that we must. For, as I said at the outset, and I'll say in conclusion, it goes to the core of why we even exist to begin with: keeping our people safe – no matter how new, how different, or how unique the threat may be. Madam President, I yield the floor.