

# America needs a national epiphany on gun control

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JANINE DI GIOVANNI

Last week there was yet another high-school shooting in the US; another round of senseless killings; and another set of families who are planning funerals instead of the upcoming Thanksgiving holidays. Three teenagers at Saugus High School in California, including the shooter Nathaniel Berhow, are dead.

Berhow was 16 years old and by all accounts, smart and polite. He was a student of psychology, a boy scout who mentored younger students and a cross-country runner. Local police still do not know Berhow's motive or why he had six other weapons at home. His mother, who dropped him off at school on Thursday morning, had no idea her son had a semi-automatic handgun in his backpack – or that he would unleash it on five students, killing two and wounding the others before using the last bullet on himself.

The shootings took place against the backdrop of a tense week of impeachment proceedings of US President Donald Trump. These events seem utterly unrelated – and yet they are not. The political polarisation of America has never been so stark. Democrats and Republicans are divided over Mr Trump and are tearing each other to pieces over crucial policies regarding taxation, gun control and abortion rights.

The number of mass shootings in the US this year is averaging more than days: as of November 15, the 319th day of the year, there have been 366 mass shootings, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

Gun control is one of the most heated debates in America. Those who defend the right

to carry arms cite their constitutional right to self defence. They talk of coup d'etats, home invasions and tyrannical governments that need to be regulated by individuals.

The opposition to gun control in the US is fierce, even if everyone knows that if guns were more regulated, there would be fewer incidents like the one last week in Santa Clarita, California. Even the roll call of sorrow over the past few decades is not enough to convince them: Parkwood, Sandy Hook, Santa Fe, Texas, Columbine.

The names of places where children were slaughtered – and I am not even listing the incidents at churches, synagogues and public places – are now embedded in American history. Listening to the testimonies of parents who have lost children in school shootings is heart-breaking, and yet their advocacy has done nothing to make gun control tighter.

When I heard the news of Santa Clarita, I realised with shock that most of the victims of Columbine, the mass shooting in 1999, one of the worst in US history, would now be in their mid-30s, had their lives not been cut short. We have had two decades to examine gun control in the US and to implement higher standards so teenagers and adults aren't able to get their hands on deadly weapons. Yet we have gone no further down the road to making the country safer.

Individual motives vary in these shootings. The shooters at Columbine were severely bullied by their classmates – which is no excuse – while the shooter in Santa Clarita had recently lost his father who often took him hunting. But the common denominator is that all



A Saugus High School student (2nd L) in front of the school where the shooting took place and others wounded.

of these shooters were able to access weapons and that could have been prevented. Instead of having lockdown drills at schools, we should be looking at how to change the culture of guns entirely.

So where does our gun culture come from? The Second Amendment, which was passed by Congress in 1789, states: "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

The private right to own a firearm – for protection, for hunting or for enjoyment – has remained central to the national ethos of the US.

But it needs to be looked at in

Former US President Barack Obama had fought hard for gun control and made it one of his priorities. He was devastated by the Senate's decision and called it "a pretty shameful day for Washington".

context. That amendment was created at a time when pioneers needed guns to protect their land. The country was young

# UK's relations with the Gulf will be at stall

CON COUGHLIN

When Britons go to the polls next month to elect the country's next prime minister, the outcome could have a profound effect on the UK's relations with the Middle East for many years to come.

For the majority of voters in Britain, the contest is being seen as the Brexit election because, irrespective of who wins, the hope is that the outcome will finally break the political paralysis that has taken hold of the country as a result of the outgoing government's failure to break the Brexit deadlock.

Thus, if Tory leader Boris Johnson can win sufficient seats to form the new government with his "get Brexit done" slogan forming the centrepiece of his campaign, then the expectation is that he will press ahead with the deal he has negotiated with the European Union to secure Britain's exit by January 31 next year.

If, on the other hand, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn emerges victorious, either with Labour winning an outright majority or by forming a coalition with

anti-Brexit parties such as the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish nationalists, the country can expect another prolonged period of Brexit debate, with the most likely outcome being Britain holding a second referendum on the troublesome issue of EU membership.

Yet while Brexit will remain a dominant feature of the campaign, there are many other issues up for debate, not least the role Britain will play on the world stage once the new government is formed.

And at a time when the Arab world is facing increased uncertainty as a result of the Trump administration's confused policy towards the region, the outcome of the British election could have repercussions of its own.

In his four months as prime minister since replacing Theresa May, Mr Johnson has made significant strides towards demonstrating that, under his leadership, Britain would be far more proactive in its support of its traditional Arab allies.

Prior to entering Downing Street, Mr Johnson established a warm personal friendship with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mo-



Jeremy Corbyn, left, and Boris Johnson, right, will face off next month in a general election.

ammed bin Salman and spent a week as a guest on his private yacht last summer. Since becoming prime minister, Mr Johnson has continued to maintain a close dialogue with Riyadh, and the Saudis can expect to continue to enjoy a constructive relationship with Westminster if Mr Johnson

is returned to power. Mr Johnson's leadership has also benefited Britain's Arab allies in the Gulf, which have seen a distinctive shift in Britain's position with regard to Iran and the controversial nuclear deal. Throughout Mrs May's three-year tenure, Britain remained

committed to supporting the nuclear deal with Iran, in common with France and Germany, the other European signatories. Since Mr Johnson replaced her, Westminster has taken a more robust attitude towards Tehran and has now joined American-led efforts to improve security for Gulf

*The role the UK plays on the world stage once the new government is formed will be up for debate on December 12*