# Stephen King: Why the US must introduce limited gun controls

The bestselling author, owner of three handguns, explains why Americans should accept controls on assault weapons

*Stephen King*

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During my junior and senior years in high school, I wrote my first novel, then titled Getting It On. The story was about a troubled boy named Charlie Decker with a domineering father, a load of adolescent angst and a fixation on Ted Jones, the school's most popular boy. Charlie takes a gun to school, kills his algebra teacher and holds his class hostage.

Ten years later, after the first half-dozen of my books had become bestsellers, I revisited Getting It On, rewrote it, and submitted it to my paperback publisher under the pseudonym of Richard Bachman. It was published as Rage, sold a few thousand copies and disappeared from view. Or so I thought.

In February 1996, [a boy named Barry Loukaitis](http://listverse.com/2012/05/09/top-10-chilling-quotes-during-school-shootings/) walked into his algebra class in Washington, with a .22-caliber revolver and a high-powered hunting rifle. He used the rifle to kill instructor Leona Caires and two students. Then, waving the pistol in the air, he declared, "This sure beats algebra, doesn't it?" The quote is from Rage.

A PE teacher, in a commendable act of heroism, charged at Loukaitis and overpowered him.

In 1997, Michael Carneal, age 14, arrived at Heath high school, in Kentucky, with a Ruger MK II semi-automatic pistol in his backpack. He killed three and wounded five. A copy of Rage was found in his locker. That was enough for me. I asked my publishers to pull the novel.

Political discourse as it once existed in America has given way to useless screaming. Although I'm a blue-state American now, I was raised a red one, and I've spent my life with at least half of one foot still in that camp. It gives me a certain perspective. It also allows me to own my handguns – I have three – with a clear conscience.

Even if I were politically and philosophically open to repealing the Second Amendment (I'm not), I don't believe that repeal, or even modification, would solve the problem of gun violence in America. The guns are already out there and the great majority of them are being bought, sold and carried illegally.

I also don't believe the National Rifle Association's assertion – articulated by Wayne LaPierre, its vice-president, each time there's another mass murder by gun in a school or a shopping mall – that America's "culture of violence" plays a significant role in kid-on-kid school shootings. If you take a close look at the dozen top-grossing films of 2012, you see an interesting thing: only one (Skyfall) features gun violence.

In video gaming, shooters still top the lists, but Super Mario Brothers and Pokémon enjoy perennial success, and when it comes to Wii, the 2012 bestseller was a pop-music sweetie called Just Dance 4. The assertion that Americans love violence and bathe in it daily is a self-serving lie.

Most Americans who insist upon their right to own as many guns (and of as many types) as they want are, by and large, decent citizens. They are more apt to vote for increasing law enforcement funds than they are for increasing school improvement funds, reasoning that keeping kids safe is more important than getting them new desks.

They can weep for the dead children and bereft parents of Sandy Hook, then wipe their eyes and write to their congressmen and women about the importance of preserving the right to bear arms.

Guys, gals, now hear this: no one wants to take away your hunting rifles. No one wants to take away your shotguns. No one wants to take away your revolvers, and no one wants to take away your automatic pistols, as long as said pistols hold no more than 10 rounds. If you can't kill a burglar with 10 shots, you need to go back to the shooting range.

Men (it's always men) who go postal and take out as many innocents as they can may be crazy, but that doesn't mean they're stupid. They don't arrive at the scenes of their proposed slaughters armed with single-shot .22s or old-style six-round revolvers; they bring heavy artillery. Some back down, but when they don't, carnage follows, the kind that gives cops nightmares for years afterwards. One only wishes Wayne LaPierre and his NRA board of directors could be drafted to some of these scenes, where they would be required to put on booties and rubber gloves and help clean up the blood, the brains and the chunks of intestine still containing the poor wads of half-digested food that were some innocent bystander's last meal.

I have nothing against gun owners, sport shooters, or hunters, but semi-automatic weapons have only two purposes. One is so that owners can take them to the shooting range once in awhile, yell yeehaw and get all horny at the rapid fire and the burning vapour spurting from the end of the barrel. Their other use – their only other use – is to kill people.

In the wake of [the Sandy Hook shootings](https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2012/dec/16/sandy-hook-shooting-victims-pictures#/?picture=401158446&index=2), gun advocates have to ask themselves if their zeal to protect even the outer limits of gun ownership has anything to do with preserving the Second Amendment as a whole, or if it's just a stubborn desire to hold on to what they have, and to hell with the collateral damage.

In January 2013, President Obama announced – to predictable howls of outrage – 23 executive orders and three major initiatives intended to curb the spread of guns and stiffen penalties for illegal use and possession. What they all boil down to is a trio of reasonable measures. I list them in ascending order, from the one most likely to happen to the one least likely.

**Comprehensive and universal background checks.** This probably will happen, and not a moment too soon. For one thing, it would entail a waiting period, and that alone might stop a number of would-be mass killers. Remember that two school shooters, Dustin Pierce and Michael Carneal, expressed incredulity at what they had done only moments later. Violent emotions, especially in teenagers, are like spring tornadoes: their departure is as sudden as their violent arrival. Given a chance to think, even for 48 hours, would be enough to stop at least some of these guys.

**Ban the sale of clips and magazines containing more than 10 rounds.** A shooter with only eight or 10 rounds at his disposal really might be taken down by a brave teacher or bystander. Dawn Hochsprung, the principal of Sandy Hook elementary school, died apparently in an effort to subdue [Adam Lanza](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/16/adam-lanza-quiet-friendless-boy). If Lanza had been reloading after shooting his way in, she might have succeeded.

**Ban the sale of assault weapons such as the Bushmaster and the AR-15.** This is the one that probably won't happen. There are rationalisations but very little actual discourse on the subject of banning assault weapons. When I listen to gun advocates and NRA brass on this subject, I get an image of a little kid having a tantrum in the dirt, rolling around with his hands plastered over his ears. No! No! No! No! Also, La-la-la-la, I can't HEAR you. Can't HEAR you. Can't HEAR you!

What they can't hear – because they don't want to – is that the restriction of heavy weaponry works.

Here's a dope for you: [Martin Bryant](http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2006/03/28/1143441154819.html), of Port Arthur, in Tasmania. On April 28, 1996, he went on a spree with an AR-15. This happy asshole mowed down more than a dozen people in a crowded cafe, then moved on to a gift shop and garage. The final tally was 35 dead and 23 wounded.

Afterwards, the Australian government either banned or restricted automatic weapons and authorised a huge buyback that eventually netted 600,000 weapons. Since then, homicides by firearm have declined almost 60% in Australia. The guns-for-everyone advocates hate that statistic, and dispute it, but as Bill Clinton likes to say, it's not opinion; it's arithmetic, honey.

In the end, this sort of ban can be accomplished in only one way, and that's if gun advocates get behind it. I can hear people laughing and saying pigs will whistle and horses will fly before that happens, but hey, I'm an optimist.

If enough American gun owners urge Congress to do the right thing, and insist the NRA climbs aboard, the results might surprise you.

I didn't pull Rage from publication because the law demanded it; I was protected under the First Amendment, and the law couldn't demand it. I pulled it because in my judgment it might be hurting people, and that made it the responsible thing to do. Assault weapons will remain readily available to crazy people until the powerful pro-gun forces in this country decide to do a similar turnaround.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/feb/01/stephen-king-pulled-book-gun-controls>