

## **Are gun control laws popular in the United States? (45 marks)**

Gun politics in the United States centre around disagreements that range from the practical and ethical issues, to the constitutional. Many question what the balance should be between an individual's right of self-defence through gun ownership and the American population's interest in maintaining public safety. Political arguments about gun rights fall into two basic categories, first, does the government have the authority to regulate guns, and second, if it does, is it effective public policy to regulate guns.

Once a traditional symbol of American way of life, guns are now at the centre of vast political debate. In modern day, both the Democrats and the Republicans agree that the American public should be allowed the right to bear arms, however the rules concerning this vary and the Democrats generally support gun control laws. The partisan divide on this issue is somewhat reflected by public opinion. During the 2000 Presidential campaign, George. W. Bush indicated his support for a trigger lock requirement, raising the age limit, and requiring background checks at gun shows. But no legislation on these issues were initiated by congress. Supporters of gun control measures (usually more liberal) are instead on the defensive as more recent Congressional votes have increased rather than restricted gun rights. When Barack Obama was elected President in 2008, he spoke for the Democrats concerning gun control, stating that he believes all citizens have the right to own a gun; however there should be tighter restrictions on gun licensing, to prevent a gun being put into the wrong hands. Obama also stated that he deems gun bans to be settled federally, similarly Hillary Clinton argues cities and states should determine the gun control and that the local police should have access to federal gun tracking information. The Republican party believe that gun laws should be interpreted according to the constitution and believe the II amendment should be taken literally. During the 2008 election campaign Republican runner John McCain argued that guns should be made safer, and cheaper models should be restricted, arguing they're not as reliable. McCain declared he did not own a hand gun, yet knew how to use one, in vast contrast to this statement McCain's running mate Sarah Palin announced she was a lifetime member of the National Rifle Association and that she regularly used a rifle in the interest of hunting and fishing.

Gun Culture in the states has grown rapidly due to the media, negative connotations have been attached to something that was intended for the use of hunting and many moral panics have arisen. Many films, and popular music often romanticize the idea of owning a handgun in particular, and this has resulted in many people wanting to restrict or fully remove guns from America, arguing gun crime is on the rise because of this media portrayal. However, there are many political barriers preventing Congress passing gun control laws. Firstly, pressure group the NRA have the same set of beliefs as the Republican Party, and believe owners of guns should be educated in gun usage. In 2007 it was discovered that only 28% of the American public wanted a completed blanked ban on individual gun ownership, raising the question of democracy when scrutinising potential gun control laws in Congress.

Constitutionally, the II amendment states that the people have the right to keep and bear arms. The Republican party argue that this statement should not be amended, however the Democrats often disagree stating that the constitution should be adapted to suit modern day gun culture and should have more emphasis on the control of gun possession. In 2008 for the first time in seventy years, the Supreme Court agreed to review the meaning of the II amendment District of Columbia v. Heller. After the District of Columbia passed legislation barring the registration of handguns, requiring licenses for all pistols, and mandating that all legal firearms must be kept unloaded and disassembled or trigger locked, a group of private gun-owners brought suit claiming the laws violated their Second Amendment right to bear arms. The federal trial court in Washington D.C. resulted in the court stating that the Second Amendment applies only to militias, such as the National Guard, and not to private gun ownership. Another example of the debate caused by this constitutional interpretation was the introduction of the 'Brady bill,' this occurred in 1993 when Government assistant James Brady was shot and left disabled in an attempt to shoot the president, Ronald Reagan. The Supreme Court passed the Brady Bill putting into legislation that when guns are licensed an in-depth background check must be carried out on individuals. The NRA challenged the passing of this bill also. Similarly, the Supreme Court passed the 'The Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990' making it illegal to carry a gun on a school premises. This bill was introduced hoping that guns would not end up in the wrong hands,

To summarise, depending on the political ideology taken on would often determine ones views on gun control. In comparison to other modern Westernised countries, America appears to be fairly tolerant concerning the owning of a gun. With only 28% of the public arguing to completely ban guns proves that gun control laws are not very popular. The National Rifle Association has 3million members, and the Republican party argue that gun control laws are not always necessary and state that the 'fun' should not be removed from sports such as hunting. However, the Democrats argue with recent gun-crime disasters such as the Virginia-Tech shootings, tighter restrictions should be introduced and gun laws should be tackled at a Federal level, Similarly the more liberal amongst the American public may argue a modern update is necessary of the II amendment. With guns becoming the centre of not only a political controversy, but also a media and ethical issue, many would say it would be hard to categorize the American opinion as a whole on such a large issue.