

If You Are Worried about Your Safety, Focus Less on Refugees and More on Guns

Written by Dana Janbek and Melissa Wall

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DANA JANBEK AND MELISSA WALL, JUN 28 2016

When 49 innocent lives were cut short by a pro-ISIS American shooter who opened fire in a gay nightclub in Orlando, Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump argued that the attack proved that the growing threat of terrorism inside the United States can only be contained with bans on immigration.

In his attempt to mix facts with fiction, Trump brought up the “tremendous flow” of Syrian refugees in his remarks even though Syrian refugees have nothing to do with this case. The hundreds of Syrian refugees we met over the last couple of years are escaping heinous crimes similar to the ones committed by the Orlando shooter. They all have family members who have been killed because of their political affiliation, their religion, or their sexual orientation.

What Trump doesn't mention is that the shooter, who despite being investigated by the FBI for radicalism and described by coworkers as unstable, was able to walk into a store and legally purchase the guns used to massacre scores of victims.

In addressing the tragedy, Trump advanced his guns-for-all and anti-immigrant agendas. In telling the NRA's “guns don't kill” story, he implied that the Orlando shooter was a foreigner because his parents were born outside the United States and called for the overhaul of the US immigration system. The problem with his logic is clear; none of these points he so aggressively claims has anything to do with this case. Guns, however, have everything to do with it.

Here is what Trump conveniently left out:

Firearms result in approximately 30,000 deaths each year in this country, while terrorists have caused a total of 3,380 American deaths since 2001. For every American who has died at the hand of terrorists during that same time period, more than 120 Americans have been killed by perpetrators using firearms, many obtained legally. All deaths are equally disturbing and tragic. And of course there is a connection between terrorism and firearms. Like Orlando, sixty-seven percent of fatal terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2014 involved firearms. Terrorists' easy and hassle-free access to guns is disturbing to say the least. But whether a shooting is labeled as an act of terrorism or not, the fact remains that firearms threaten the safety of thousands of Americans each year. Trump's alliance with the NRA ensures that these data don't matter. Facts, it seems, are Trump's number one enemy.

Instead of focusing on the glaringly obvious problem of easy access to guns by terrorists and those who are mentally ill, Trump talks about closing our country's borders. This is how he distracts us from the real issue.

Trump would like us to believe that the Orlando tragedy was enabled by immigration. The fact that the gunman was born in New York, less 10 miles from where Trump himself was born, and like Trump is American by birth, does not stop him from using the tragedy to renew his call to ban Muslim refugees. Trump tells us that Muslim refugees represent *the real threat* and that the current immigration vetting process is subpar. But those claims are not only irrelevant in this case, they are exaggerated at best. Research on the topic demonstrates that since 2001, only three of the 784,000 resettled refugees (0.000004%) have been arrested on terrorism-related charges. During the same

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time period, there have been thousands of shootings by Americans in this country that have resulted in the deaths of more than 400,000 people. Terrorism is of course a real threat, and the growing influence of ISIS cannot be underestimated. But acts of terrorism by refugees are a disproportionately exaggerated threat. So if you are worried about your safety, focus less on refugees and more on guns.

The Orlando attacker was a disturbed individual, born and raised in this country, who purchased guns legally. He killed and injured fellow citizens as well as immigrants. He did not discriminate between the two. We must come to terms with this very difficult truth. This case is not about immigration. This case is about guns. It is also about a homophobic culture that makes room for violence against the LGBT community.

Congress' flurry of prayers in the aftermath of each tragedy, quickly followed by a lack of action on gun regulations is offensive. Using political distractions to draw our attention away from the most pressing matters, all while accepting \$3.7 million in NRA donations since 1998, makes a mockery of our democracy. We hope this tragedy will spark action. After all, gun law reforms cannot happen fast enough for the next victims.

About the author:

Dana Janbek is associate professor of Public Relations at Lasell College and co-author of *Global Terrorism and New Media: The Post-Al Qaeda Generation*.

Melissa Wall is professor of Journalism at California State University-Northridge. Previously she was a Fulbright Scholar at Notre Dame University in Lebanon.