

Mason Brasher

Dr. Frye

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“Is There a Better Answer Than Gun Laws?”

Mass shootings are killing more than just their victims. They are killing the unity of the nation and will to fight against them because of the stagnation and frustration over the gun debate. With mass shootings becoming more and more common on the news, the bickering over more or less laws seems to be getting America nowhere. In “New Gun Policies Won’t Stop Mass Shootings, but People Can,” published on the *National Review*, senior writer and Iraqi Freedom veteran David French appeals to American citizens that people taking action will stop more mass shootings than increased gun laws. He claims that gun legislation is ineffective against mass shootings because these crimes are so well thought out over long periods of time. He states that these criminals are determined and will find ways to acquire guns, and so a more effective way to deal with this problem would be for people to pay more attention to signs and talk of violence from others and report the issues. French shows that in several major mass shootings, including the Sandy Hook and Virginia Tech shootings, obvious signs were visible that the soon-to-be shooter was unstable or dangerous and the shootings could have been prevented had people taken the proper course of action. He argues that these shootings are getting easier to pull off as time goes on, so the best course of action and the responsibility of citizens is to protect themselves and others rather than look to the government to protect them from everything. French

successfully argues that people's actions are more effective than laws with a trustworthy tone; reliable sources; personal appeal; and well-organized, varied evidence.

For example, French shows professionalism by setting the example of his own ideals and speaking with a realistic tone, presenting himself as trustworthy to his audience. French does not talk down on his audience and order them to take action. He sets the bar himself by saying, "I've armed myself to protect my family and my neighbors," and, "I'll have the courage to seek the intervention that can save lives," in the event of "warning signs" (French). This style makes the author more credible to his audience because he puts himself on their level instead of acting like an elitist writer talking down to the plebeians. French also gives reasonable expectations to his claim when he concedes that "we'll never fully succeed" in stopping killings, even though he still believes his proposal is the most effective option. It is important to be honest and acknowledge weaknesses for a credible argument. French does this well, making his suggestions seem more realistic to his target audience than the promises of politicians. By showing his readers that he is in the fight right alongside them and using words that show his honesty, the author encourages them to put confidence in what he is saying.

French also presents himself as reliable through his strong use of sources while arguing for people to take more action against mass shootings. For instance, in his long list of evidence about how shootings could have been stopped if people had spoken up, he cites six different reputable sources from a variety of traditional viewpoints: *NBC News*, *Fox News*, *Washington Post*, *CNN*, *ABC News*, and the *New York Times*. This not only helps show the legitimacy of his evidence, but it also shows a professionalism that makes him easier to trust as a writer because he made the effort to find a different source for each example, rather than stacking evidence from one source. His citations are from organizations that everyone in his target audience will most

likely recognize immediately; and they represent a balance of right and left-leaning organizations, which appeals to both sides of his audience. In addition, French cites Glenn Kessler from the *Washington Post* to make the claim that gun laws would have little effect on mass shootings. As he points out himself, Kessler is “hardly an NRA apologist,” but instead is someone who carefully examines the facts from an unbiased perspective (French). This source has a good reputation as a fact checker. On the other hand, French does not provide enough sources for why increased gun laws wouldn’t work. His only citation on the issue is Kessler, and the statistics he uses to support his reasoning for why the laws don’t work are completely uncited. While these statistics could be accurate, the readers have no way of knowing because they cannot tell if they came from a legitimate source. Beyond this, it is a hasty generalization fallacy, as a single cited source is usually not enough to give a credible argument. Although this presents a major weakness, French still does a great job of using sources overall because his goal is to provide a better and more direct solution to the violence, not necessarily to prove that gun laws are completely ineffective.

Moreover, French appeals to his audience’s sense of American identity and responsibility to support his claim by using a sincere voice that tugs at their heartstrings. One example of this is when he brings sadness to his readers through the phrase “when children lay dead in school,” and then immediately gives a call to action (French). This tactic reminds his audience of the seriousness of the situation and points them towards his goal—taking action themselves. French also builds on his audience’s sense of American pride and patriotism with multiple phrases toward the end of his article such as, “It is the duty of free people to be aware.” This encourages his readers to stand up for themselves and not go running to the government for everything. It reminds Americans of their core values that our country is a government of the people, and it is

up to them to make change. However, French's use of this emotional language sometimes strays on the side of using a fallacy of sentimental appeals when he says things like, "if the people around them had shown just an ounce more courage," and when he makes fun of Americans attitudes with the phrase, "Rather than tweet impotently." This may turn off French's audience by guilt-tripping them for being lazy and cowardly. Nonetheless, this does not destroy his argument because he ultimately encourages them that they can and should be better than that. He does not continuously put his audience down, but rather, he holds them accountable as fellow Americans. By focusing a large part of his article on duty and identity, French successfully reinforced his claim that people working together would be more effective than laws.

Finally, French presents a well-reasoned argument for how people taking action have more effects on mass shootings than gun control with a variety of examples of how it would have worked in the past. French gives five different examples on how past shootings would have been prevented if people had reported what they knew to the proper authorities, and if existing background check laws had been properly enforced. The way he repeats examples like this strongly drives home the point. They are also well connected to the claim because they show, rather than tell, how his solution would work. Furthermore, French uses analogy to compare the situation to recently revealed sexual crimes in the #MeToo movement when he says, "We didn't need better laws to stop rape. We needed better people." By connecting the situation to a recent problem that most Americans are aware of, he brings the shooting problem down to earth as something that can be conquered with his solution. By using good examples, analogies, and organization, French gives his argument a logical backbone that supports the muscles and tendons of his other appeals.

Therefore, although French doesn't get into the nitty-gritty of specific gun laws, which could have the potential to fill an entire book, he fulfills the requirements of a persuasive article by narrowing his focus and supporting it. His goal is to convince people to stand up against mass shootings without relying on more legislation, and he does it well. He words it best himself: "We can't deflect responsibility upwards, to Washington" (French). He directly targets the average Americans, the people who come into contact with possible killers every single day without knowing it. With his straightforward and endearing yet serious tone, he successfully reminds them how many lives can be forever changed by failing to notice or care about the people around them.

Works Cited

French, David. "New Gun Policies Won't Stop Mass Shootings, but People Can." *National Review*, National Review Inc., 15 Feb. 2018, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/02/new-gun-policies-wont-stop-mass-shootings-but-people-can/>. Accessed on 2 Dec. 2019.