For Republicans, it's easier to ban Muslims than guns

Last December Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife Tashfeen Malik arméd themselves with AR-15s – the type of weapon used to kill 50 people in Orlando – and murdered 14 people at a Christmas party in San Bernardino, California, in what was soon classified as a terrorist attack.

The following day Republicans in Congress blocked a bill that would have banned people who were on the terrorist watch list from buying guns. The National Rifle Association opposed the ban on the grounds the list might contain mistakes, and some people might unfairly have their right to bear arms infringed upon. The NRA's lackeys in Congress did as they were told, as they always do.

Since then Donald Trump has become the Republican Party's presumptive presidential nominee on a platform that includes a proposal to ban all Muslims from entering America "until we figure out what is going on".

But we already know what is going on. Over 40,000 Americans are dying each year partly because they live in a society in which it is more politically viable to propose banning Muslims than regulate gun sales.

Trump has already woven the weekend's slaughter into his campaign narrative, declaring: "I said this was going to happen - and it is only going to get worse."

"I am trying to save lives and prevent the next terrorist attack. We can't afford to be politically correct any more."

But we know nothing he has proposed doing would have had any effect because the perpetrator, Omar Mateen, was born in America. He had even been on the watch list for a time.

We know also that terrorist groups see the free availability of guns in America as a vulnerability to be exploited.

Way back in 2011 Adam Yahiye Gadahn, an American born al-Qaeda spokesman, made a propaganda video urging sympathisers to undertake lone-wolf attacks in the US. "America," he said, "is absolutely awash with easily obtainable firearms."

We know this most recent atrocity is unlikely to provoke significant change.

We even have a pretty good idea how many suspected terrorists have gone out and bought guns. According to the US Government Accountability Office, between 2004 and 2014 suspected terrorists attempted to purchase guns from American dealers at least 2283 times. As The Washington Post reported last year, in 2043 of those cases - 91 per cent of the time - they succeeded.

In spite of that astonishing figure, the vast majority of Americans gun deaths are born of far more banal causes than terrorism. Three-quarters of them are suicides, the rest are mostly ugly, tragic crimes. Very few are mass shootings, too many are accidents.

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At the coming election Americans will get to choose between one candidate who wants to defend guns and ban Muslims and another who has declared her support for gun control.

But even if Hillary Clinton wins the White House and her Democratic Party takes the Senate, they stand barely any chance of winning control of the House of Representatives, where the NRA will have its servants block any gun-control measures.

The last attempt to reform national gun laws in the US came in the wake of the murder of 20 primary school children in Sandy Hook, an atrocity committed by another young man armed with an AR-15.

The parents of the dead rallied and a movement formed. They proposed laws that would not have banned any weapons, but would have made background checks compulsory. This compromise, the believers, might survive.

Such a measure has massive support in America - up to 97 per cent according to one CBS/NYT poll - but is opposed by the NRA.

The day of the vote in 2013 the parents of Sandy Hook's dead children travelled to Washington to watch and weep from the gallery as their elected representatives voted the measure down.

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