The History of Bullets Against Children

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Abstract

Hundreds of school shooting massacres happen yearly in the United States. This means yearly hundreds of students, teachers, staff, parents, and whole communities are physically and mentally harmed. Yet, no change is done to protect these hundreds of innocent lives from the firearms that aim at them. In this essay, we will discuss the history and our right to the Second Amendment, then we will analyze a selection of school shooting cases and how they present issues on current firearm laws. Afterwards, we will look at the effects mass school shootings cause. And lastly we will conclude by reviewing what we can do to cause change while protecting our constitutional right and all these innocent lives. Protective measures in gun laws are necessary for the safety of the future generations of the United States.

Introduction

The People have the right to life, liberty and justice for all... or all except the 360,000 youth who have experienced school shootings since 1999. The issue with guns and children has only been increasing in the past few decades, especially with the rise of illegal gun sales. There have been minimal protections set to make sure that firearms don't come into contact with schools. A place which is supposed to be a safe haven for children, for them to grow, learn, and develop as the future generation of this country is oftentimes met with violence. No parent should ever have to wonder if their child will come back after school. No child should go to school with the fear that they might not return home because of a firearm that ended up in the wrong hands.

The Second Amendment is one of the People's constitutional rights as well. But allowing those who are not equipped enough to hold that right oftentimes means that these children don't have their rights to liberty of harm. Do Americans value their right of carrying a gun more than the lives of innocent children? Needless to say, the moral answer is no, but "mention the Second Amendment, and all too often people reach for their revolvers," (Whitney, 2013) it seems like this topic about guns is out of reach, there are many opposing views and opinions. So, how can we have both? History has proved that having both is very punishing, there have been countless horrific events that have proved that the right to bear arms doesn't suit all. The answer to prevent these deadly weapons from reaching the hands of those who are not equipped is to set up more regulations on these machines, it is saying that, "..our gun control laws are so lax that anyone can buy a weapon- the mentally ill, the criminal, the boy too young to bear the responsibility of owning a deadly weapon." (Whitney, 2013, p.6) This is not to say that the 2nd amendment should be erased, after all it's the right of all American citizens. This is to say that ineffective action caused by pride does not stop a bullet from ending an innocent life.

The 2nd Amendment

The 2nd amendment entails: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." (U.S Const. art.III-XII, 1791) The Second Amendment was ratified on December 15th, 1791, which was 233 years ago. The United States was in the midst of the industrial revolution at that time, the development of different political parties and the construction of the Bill of Rights. Fast forward to now, the United States has self-driving cars, one of the most largest and diverse nations in the whole world, and has the world's biggest economies. Clearly, there has been a lot of change since the Constitution was written. Even if nothing had changed, the Second Amendment has terms written within it that specify who can bear arms and who can not. Another thing that is worth noting about the Second Amendment is that it discusses why the People need "security of a free state," which means that the necessity to have a well-regulated militia is because they are allowed to build a protection from events like invasions. It also talks about the right "to keep and bear Arms," which is the biggest thing to observe when the amendment is overlapping mass shootings. When the Second Amendment was written there were no semi-automatic weapons that only took less than 10 seconds to reload. The only guns that existed were muskets, which took a little bit more to reload, and are not very accurate when shot with, and pistols, which are used in more close-range situations, again not accurate for long distances. Now in 2024, there are semi-automatic weapons that are fed magazines that can shoot out 60 rounds per minute. With these advancements in firearms, should the laws surrounding them advance with them?

History of School Violence and Shootings

The United States is surpassing any other country in the world with its mass school shooting rate (Kerr, 2018, p.4). The history of gun violence against children in the United States traces back to the 1800s, with the St.Mary's

Parochial School shooting and still happening like the latest tragedy in Apalachee High School shooting that recently occured in 2024. School shootings are caused by multiple factors, the major ones being mental health issues and the lack of regulations surrounding gun sales. How many more kids have to be harmed for a nation wide legislative measure to be passed through all branches of the government?

The right to own guns is one that if used correctly can be very beneficial. But it doesn't take away from the fact that guns have a great toll on children's mental health and how they develop their relationship with firearms. Guns also impact how kids view their communities and overall the society they live in. The exposure that kids have to violence is a great factor for the development of mental health issues, if not supported these mental illnesses can be the ones that cause these tragic events. Furthermore, less exposure of violence and more attention to mental health issues that develop in children, can help greatly with preventing school shootings. There is a need to stop guns from perfectly landing into the perpetrators hands when they pay the right price, because who really pays the highest price in the end?

Straw Purchases and Gun Show Loophole

There are certain loopholes that have allowed for guns to be fired by the wrong hands simply because they pay the right price. Straw purchases are an example of this. Straw purchases are very common in some mass shooting cases, even though it is now deemed an illegal way of selling and purchasing firearms. A straw purchase usually occurs at a gun show, a place where there are many gun vendors, collectors and purchasers coming together to exchange money for guns. A straw purchase is the action of purchasing a firearm in the name of someone else to be able to clear the background check, but then providing the firearm to someone who is prohibited by law to purchase and own a firearm (Cole, 2008, p.641). Another major contributor to school shootings has been the 'Gun Show loophole.' The gun show loophole is the lack of background checks during gun sales at gun shows but most mandatory specifically during private gun sales (Cole, 2008, p.640). During gun shows there are many vendors that have signs that promote "private" sales, which are transactions that require no documentation, just money. To combat this, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act was signed into legislation. This act is to

ensure the whole nation's safety, "Rights come with responsibilities, and the Second Amendment right to own and sell firearms does not extend to criminals, terrorists, and others deemed ineligible under existing laws passed by Congress." (Odrich, 2023, p.1) With this signed into law, it means that it closes the gun show loophole for legal sales of firearms for any physical or online purchases.

Columbine Massacre

Broken bonds to society and hands loaded with weapons is what ignited the actions of the two who committed the Columbine massacre on April 20, 1999. The two perpetrators had conspired and developed a horrific plan to take out as many fellow peers. Through a disturbing process of routine activity, illegal gun transactions and psychological illnesses were the main causes of this disturbing event. The Columbine shooting was committed by two high school students named Eric Harris, 18 years old, and Dylan Klebold, 17 years old in Littleton.Colorado. This wasn't an all of sudden gun fight, it was a premeditated plan. A plan to take out as many as they could, a plan which aimed to inspire many others since "Eric Harris wanted to bomb his high school out of a desire to terrorize the entire nation by attacking a symbol of American life..." (Altheide, 2009, p.1354) Dylan Klebold, was 17 years old and experienced many mental health issues from depression to paranoia. Eric Harris was also 17 years old at the time of planning the massacre but turned 18 years old just a few days before the shooting. Harris experienced homicidal fantasies and anger issues. Long before the massacre occurred, there was already police involvement with the two teenagers. From notifications to the police from parents of peers due to online rants and kill list, to Haris and Klebold being charged with breaking and entering, theft, earlier in 1998. Rumors of evidence about pipe bombs surrounded them as well, and even though a search warrant was written it wasn't served. What would've happened if that warrant had been searched, would this deadly event have been prevented?

These signs of their behavioral issues and devious tendencies were widely known and included multiple encounters with the police, yet nothing stopped them from being "Misfits on a mission to delete us all..." (Kerr, 2018, p.1358) Armed with propane bombs and their illegally obtained guns, they set

up at their school and committed the horrible event that brutally took the lives of "12 of their classmates and a teacher. The two young men then com-mitted suicide in the school library, where many of theirvictims were slain." (Lickel et al., 2003, p. 194) From the evidence of the crime their original plan of using bombs malfunctioned so they ended up using the illegally obtained guns they had.

How does Columbine show us the issues with gun regulations? Well, because multiple loopholes in gun sales allowed Harris and Klebold to be armed and cause a massacre. Initially Harris and Klebold didn't want to use the firearms in their possession, as their main tools to wreak harm on their fellow peers and teachers. Instead they wanted to cause harm by using explosives that they had strategically placed at high traffic areas of their campus. Neither Harris and Klebold were legally permitted to buy the guns used because they were both underage at the time of purchase. They decided to get Klebod's girlfriend to purchase the three firearms. The purchase in this case is an example of a straw purchase. This is because Keblolds' girlfriend legally purchased the guns at a gun show because she was at the legal age of purchasing. She could clear the background check with no issues but after the purchase she provided the weapons to Klebold and Harris (Obmascik et al., 2019). They were both not permitted under the law to own or purchase guns at the time because of their age, so that made this transaction illegal for Klebold and Harris. Another thing to ask is if she was also guilty of the massacre as well?

Authorities weren't sure if she actually had committed a crime because she was of legal age and her motives were not known. But she did in fact provide the firearms to two minors, so it violated a statute of the state. "When tragic events occur as a result of human action, people feel a need to assign responsibility,"(Lickel et al., 2003, p.203) at the end she was not held accountable for her crime of arming the two underage males and instead she was just declared a witness and Harris and Klebold both committed suicide. From a perspective she was let go and never held accountable for the pain that she enabled to happen. This tragedy is an example of what can happen with loopholes like the straw purchase. Someone who has their right to purchase can end up handing weapons to those who have clear mental health issues and are not permitted to own such weapons.

Sandy Hook

Twenty elementary school kids did not walk out at the end of their school day alive out of Sandy Hook on December 14th, 2012, this heartbreaking event stuck in the small town of Newtown, Connecticut. This has been one of the deadliest school shootings in the United States. On that day, 20 year old Adam Lanza, struck havoc on a school filled with innocent lives, who were just trying to get educated "...a gunman grabbed three firearms and headed to Sandy Hook Elementary School. The gunman shot the locked doors in order to gain entrance into the building."(Hurley-Hanson et al., 2013, p.225). Lanza suffered a lot of mental health issues including obsessive traits, depression, isolation, and also was said to have Asperger's syndrome. It is believed that all of these psychological issues could have been the leading factors of his horrific actions. One of which was starting his day by killing his mother who was the owner of the rifle and firearms he used. Then, he went on a rampage at Sandy Hook Elementary, where "One hundred fifty-four rounds were fired from the shooter's rifle." (Hurley-Hanson et al., 2013, 227) His motive was never really known, and answers were not able to be given since he committed suicide in one of the classrooms at the end of his rampage. His actions terminally affected twenty children who never got the chance to keep growing and learning. As well as six staff that never came back home to their families. This is yet another case where mental health issues and lack of regulations around guns allowed the firearms to land in the wrong hands that took away so many innocent lives.

The right to keep a well-regulated militant style collection of firearms is well-stated in the Second Amendment, but it is also what took the lives of twenty-six people at Sandy Hook. The lack of attention to serious mental issues and the great accessibility to firearms was the leading factor of this disturbing event. Lanza's mother was the legal purchaser and owner of the firearms that were used in the massacre.

This event can be seen as the outcome of an unintended straw purchase. Even though Lanza's mother didn't intend to purchase the guns for Lanza, her firearms still landed on her mentally ill son, someone who shouldn't have been within reach of deadly weapons. A straw purchase can also be defined as, " ...anyone who can easily acquire weapons by arranging for a person who is not prohibited from buying a gun to purchase it for them," (Cole, 2008, p. 640), she knew that her son was not mentally stable, yet she purchased and kept the firearms where he had full accessibility of them. Seems like a clear action of buying something for someone who is not legally allowed to obtain

the certain object and leaving it within arms reach. It was unintentional perhaps, but she still had some responsibility of keeping her firearms away from those who are prohibited to do so.

Uvalde School Shooting

In more recent years another devastating act of violence upon a school was experienced by the county of Uvalde in Texas. A big state that wears their right to bear arms with pride, felt small and shattered when the news of the murderous rampage pierced a hole through the hearts of everyone. The Uvalde School shooting happened on May 24th, 2022, at Robb Elementary, "19 children and 2 teachers. The Uvalde massacre is the second deadliest on record, following the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary." (Rossin-Slater, 2022, para. 1) This shooting brought a lot of backlash towards the responding law-enforcement in the area, because they waited one hour until going inside to apprehend the gunman.

18 year old former student Salvador Ramos left 400 police officers in a frenzy while they were trying to analyze the situation. He held thirty-three students and three teachers hostage. Imagine how much horror and fear all those inside felt when they saw a gunman holding a semi automatic weapon at them or all those who heard the bullets that pierced doors down. Imagine how all of this could have been prevented if law enforcement had better resources. Days prior to the shooting Ramos posted pictures of the semi-automatic weapons he had purchased on his 18th birthday. What would have happened if the police officers had taken action as soon as those images and subtle threats were posted.

After investigation of this massacre, it was found that "Almost 400 officers from several local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies responded to Robb Elementary..the law enforcement officers waited more than an hour for a Border Patrol tactical team to arrive and breach the classrooms, despite nationwide active shooter protocols that call on officers to stop an attacker as soon as possible." (Méndez, 2023) Lots of questions of why police didn't react quicker surfaced, but also questions on how the shooter was able to obtain the firearms arose as well. Was his purchasing of the firearms used legal or illegal? The answer is he bought the two AR-15s legally right on his 18th birthday, a week before the shooting (Coronado et al., 2022, para. 2). This is a great example of the overarching effects of the gun show loophole, just because

he passed the background check he was allowed to purchase. What would've happened if he was required to have a psychiatric screening to be allowed to purchase the AR 15s? Would he have passed those requirements? Probably not.

Furthermore, why is it allowed for an 18 year old to buy semi-automatic weapons right when they turn 18 years old, but not allowed to buy an alcoholic drink at a bar or store until they are 21 years old? The answer is simple, because it is not legal to provide alcohol to underage young adults, because drinking can cause negative effects on theri still developing frontal lobe. But the underdeveloped frontal lobe shouldn't be a concern for the purchasing of firearms, right? Their decision making part of their brain is still not developed, yet they are allowed to buy a tool of mass destruction that not only causes negative effects if not used correctly, but can permanently stop other youth from developing. What would happen if the age for the Second Amendment was raised until 21 years old or perhaps until the frontal lobe is fully developed, would that decrease a senseless act of violence like the one that scarred Uvalde?

Apalachee High School

Tragedies like the ones mentioned above still haven't stopped. The most recent school shooting in the United States was in fact in 2024. The Apalachee High School shooting which was perpetrated by a 14 year old, named Colt Gray. He inflicted harm on his own school community. Everyone that day expected a regular school day of learning and interacting with each other, but that day turned into a heartbreaking nightmare. The tragic truth about this event is that it could have been prevented like the others mentioned above. This shooter had given warning signs of his intentions. Gray had also had interactions with authorities before. At the age of 13 years old he was flagged by police for allegedly threatening harm against his middle school, "There had long been signs that Colt Gray was troubled. Colt and Colin Gray were interviewed about an online threat linked to Colt Gray in May of 2023. Colt Gray denied making the threat at the time." (Associated Press, 2024) When authorities talked to him for the first time, Colt claimed he would never threaten to harm a middle school online and so police just left with a warning. His father, Colin Gray, firmly backed his son. It was found later during investigation that Colin was the one that had provided the firearm used in the shooting to Gray. He had handed his son the rifle that led to tragedy on September 4, 2024. On that day Gray arrived at school on a hateful mission that led to "Two

students and two teachers were killed and nine other people were injured." (Burke et al. 2024) Gray used his Christmas gift from his father and took the gift of life from four people.

This case is very complicated because it challenges the concept of who is responsible for heinous events like this one. Clearly, Colin aided his son to perpetrate this harm. Reports show that Colin Gray had taught Colt how to use firearms on their weekend father and son camping trips. He claimed it was a way to get Colt away from the bullies. A big issue of this case is Colt's age, he was clearly under the age of having a permit to carry a firearm. So the question came, would he be charged for adult time for his adult crime? And would his father be charged for his actions as well? Colt was indicted for a total of 55 counts, those included four counts of premeditated murder, four counts of felony murder, aggravated assault towards children, and his father was indicted for 29 counts, which included second-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter, and reckless conduct (Associated Press, 2024). And at the end of their trials the justice system decided to charge Colt with four counts of felony murder and also charge Colin with involuntary manslaughter and second-degree murder. Yet, Colin declared himself not guilty. But how can someone not be guilty when they were the ones that helped ignite the fire?

There are so many issues in this case. The biggest one being that a gun reached a minor's hands, someone who is prohibited under law to own a firearm, was enabled to take innocent lives away. Not only had his father gifted him these firearms but he also had already told police officers that he taught him how to use them properly and that Colt had open access to guns in his house, which he had primary custody of. Not only that but the district attorney found that, "He had knowledge of Colt's obsessions with school shooters. He had knowledge of Colt's deteriorating mental state. And he provided the firearms and the ammunition that Colt used in this." (Associated Press, 2024) The biggest issue here is that Colin decided to disguise the accessibility his son had to guns as a hobby they both shared. This hobby emerged when Colt's parents split and he had bullied him. Colin had shared images of Colt smiling while smeared with blood and the minor holding a gun, claiming that was a great day. Sad to see that the father knew of Colt's mental health issues, his obsessive traits to harm and violence, his obsession with school massacres, and still decided to leave deadly weapons in his hands.

This is an example of a straw purchase but in a deeper sense. Perhaps, Colin hadn't bought the semi-automatic rifle with the intent of his child

harming others, but perhaps he did. Colin still bought a firearm for a minor, that makes it an illegal purchase and illegal ownership. He provided a firearm to someone who was prohibited under law to own one, that is clearly a straw purchase. The lack of accountability towards the father the first time police were dispatched into his home is truly horrifying. The father knew all of these obsessions and mental issues his son was experiencing due to bullying and other factors surrounding them and yet decided the solution was to teach his underage son how to load and use deadly weapons. Colin Gray is just as guilty as Colt Gray. They clearly misused their Second Amendment.

Benefits of the 2nd Amendment

Not only is the Second Amendment a right that all American citizens are entitled to, it is very much, "an important part of the American tradition." (Whitney, 2012, p.19) The right to purchase and have possession of legal firearms is something that Americans have carried through centuries. And it is a privilege that Americans possess with a lot of honor and respect. Used for leisure or for protection, they are tools that aid those who use them to feel empowered. Reasons for owning guns can range from wanting to go hunting with friends on the weekends, going to shooting ranges to release stress, forms of protection for oneself or for one's family.

Reality is that owning a firearm is beneficial if those who own them can responsibly and appropriately use them. Multiple surveys have led to the answer that, "Gun owners increasingly cite protection as the main reason they own a gun. And a large percentage (79%) say having a gun makes them feel safer. At the same time, nearly as many (78%) say that owning a gun is something they enjoy." (Pew Research, 2013) Owning guns can be something that helps the owner with their daily lives whether that is by using them for enjoyment or just as a method of protection in case of harm perpetrated against them. The Second Amendment is an important right that Americans hold, but it is also a responsibility for those who own them. There shouldn't be a ban on all firearms, just more regulations to make our communities safer.

Impacts of Guns on Youth

After all that has been discussed, the belief that guns have a great impact on youth is still greatly true. These range from mental health impacts to the education inequality that gun violence in school produces, the truth is children, youth, and their entire communities are greatly impacted by illegal use of firearms and the easy access to these weapons. Without questioning, school shootings cause a great impact within the communities that suffer these great losses. Those who experience these disheartening events firsthand, are affected greatly, "Common knowledge about traumatic events and psychopathology would suggest that any exposure to such trauma either directly (as witnessing or surviving an assault) or indirectly (by hearing or seeing images of the event) would lead to long-standing psychological impact." (Cimolai et al., 2021, p.1) These tragic events can be the factors of the development of mental health illnesses, like PTSD, anxiety, or other psychological illnesses. These psychological issues can be carried over to the children's test scores and cause a decrease in their academic grades due to the fact that they are exposed to this sort of violence directly or indirectly. The issue is that they are not the only ones that are impacted when one of these life-altering events happen.

In the digital age that we live in, it is easy to expose other communities from the catastrophes that happen, "The media attention that gun violence and its aftermath garners makes it virtually impossible to ignore and has a reach beyond just where it occurred." (Cimolai et al., 2021, p.1) There are so many ways for mass shootings to go viral, and they usually have a lot of media coverage. Usually they expose the perpetrator to the public, which can lead to emotional stress to all. Children who see the news of school shootings may develop anxiety about going to school and sometimes even fear of attending in-person classes. Which can cause a blow to attendance and therefore affects the whole education systems of these communities. Not only does it affect the youth but those who are supposed to care and protect for the youth. Parents, teachers, and whole communities are met with a moral panic of not being sure what to do. Is it safer to homeschool your children? But how can that be attainable when parents can't afford to stay home and not work? Is it selfish then to send your kids to school, even if they might be victims of a crime? Parents need to work to provide for their necessities, but also a necessity of a child is to get an education. From another perspective, is it even worth it to go to college to get your degree in education? Are those studying to be teachers, and K-12 administrators willing to risk their lives and impact their nuclear families and communities because of the field of work they intend to take up after graduating? But then who will educate the future generations of this country? It certainly is a deeply tangled topic that lies in the hands of the entitlement to preserve the right to bear arms with no regulations.

What Happens Next

It is clear that we won't erase the Second Amendment as a whole. However we do have the power to take action to urge our local, state, and overall federal government to make changes in legislation that hold gun owners accountable while still allowing them their constitutional right. Many local and state governments have taken actions to make access to illegal gun purchases harder. But the work is still not done because there are still kids being harmed due to firearms being bought and perpetrated with at their places of education. There are a lot of communities that come together to advocate for stricter and harsher gun regulations and laws. One of these is "Mayors Against Illegal Guns," which is a group of mayors who have created a non-profit organization whose main goal is to advocate against gun violence. This organization was founded by Mike Bloomberg and Thomas Menino, both mayors at the time, in 2013 in New York, their main goal was to combat illegal gun transactions and motivate more regulations on firearms as a whole as stated on Everytown's website.

Another non-profit is the Sandy Hook Promise, which was also founded in 2013 by some of the parents of the victims of the Sandy Hook shooting and others in their community. Their goal was and is to push legislators to enhance the current regulations and add stricter restrictions on large magazines. As stated on the Sandy Hook Promise website, they also aim to promote training for police and schools in case of a mass school shooting and mental health services that can pinpoint mental health issues so that they can be treated and potentially prevent other tragedies from happening. There are many others trying to make an impact to prevent these horrible events from taking place. They all have the same motivations and the Sandy Hook Promise encapsulates their motives. A small part of the meaningful pledge that the Sandy Hook promise says, This is a Promise. To Truly honor the lives lost by turning our tragedy into a moment of transformation. This is a Promise. To be open to all possibilities. There is no agenda other than to make our nation a safer, better place. This is a Promise. To have conversations on ALL the issues. Conversations where listening is as important as speaking. Conversations where even those with the most opposing views can debate in good will. This is a Promise. To turn the conversation into actions. Things must change. This is the time. This is a Promise. We give to our precious children. (Sandy Hook et al., 2013)

Mayors Against Illegal Guns and Sandy Hook Promise, are just two of the many trying to make an impact on legislation and overall the safety of schools, to prevent these horrible events from taking place.

There needs to be a push not to restrict our Second Amendment but to have more regulations around it. These can range from psychological screenings done alongside the background checks, yearly reevaluations for those who purchase or want to purchase, and stricter penalties for illegal gun sales. As seen from all the cases above Columbine, Sandy Hook, Uvalde, and Appalachee, all of them had mental health issues that were the underlying motivators to committing such crimes, so psychological screenings should be prioritized for gun regulations. And reality is that "most Americans support new gun control legislation such as broader background checks or bans on assault-style weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips." (Pew Research, 2013) So there is an urgent need to keep working together to maintain firearms from those who should never be allowed to pull the trigger.

Conclusion

The Second Amendment is our constitutional right. When," Even our language smells of gun-powder," (Whitney, 2012, p.2) the right to bear arms is worn with pride by many Americans, but may that pride not withhold us from protecting those who are most precious to our country. It is a fact that the Second Amendment doesn't mean the same thing that it meant 233 years ago. It is clear that school shootings keep increasing in the United States and it is shown by the continuous tragic events like those at Columbine, Sandy Hook, Uvalde, and Apalachee. All had different scenarios, all had legal and illegal methods of accessing the firearms, but they all came to the same gut-wrenching fact of losing far too many innocent lives.

No child should fear going to school, no teacher or staff should fear going into work one day, and no family member should worry about the fact that one or more of their loved ones may not come back home after a day at school. The need to make sure we hold those who are in positions of power to the responsibility to stop the rapid fire of bullets that impact too many schools and communities. The strongest weapon the United States has is its people, so let's come together to protect our precious children, who are the future of our beloved nation.

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