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Gun control in the context of the presidential debate

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I was pleasantly surprised when Nina Gonzalez finally asked the question. She was one of the undecided voters in the audience at the presidential debate Tuesday at Hofstra University, and she actually raised an issue we have heard little about on the campaign trail this year: She asked both President Barack Obama and Gov. Mitt Romney about their views on gun control.

Romney's answer opposing any new regulation of guns -- even assault rifles -- did not surprise me. After all, he's in the pocket of the National Rifle Association. (But then, he is in "etch-a-sketch" mode on this issue, too. He signed an assault weapons ban when he was governor of Massachusetts, but now he's against gun control laws of any kind).

But I *was* wondering what Obama would say. He has done nothing on this issue in his first four years in office, except maybe to expand gun carrying rights to national parks. What he did say made sense, as far as it went: "Weapons that were designed for soldiers in war theaters don't belong on our streets." He favors re-installing the ban on assault weapons.

That would be a start, and it's far better than Romney's non-position. But it would not go far enough. Even Obama himself acknowledged that much of the violence in his home city of Chicago comes from handguns, not assault rifles. But he offered no plan for handguns.

My European friends are appalled at the lack of gun control in the United States. This topic needs a lot more serious discussion, both moral and ethical. It's another place where the bishops could be helpful, if they ever got their heads out of the sand.

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