



Americans Against Gun Violence
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2023 National High School Essay Contest \$1,000 Award Winner

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Will I Be Next?

Sandy Hook Elementary. This was the first time I'd ever heard of a school shooting. I was in second grade and came home to find my mom secretly sobbing at the television. She pushed me away, not wanting me to see her cry. But it was then that I caught a glimpse of the television "Twenty dead at Sandy Hook Elementary." Those children were my age. Could you imagine dying at seven?

I remember my first real lockdown. I was in third grade learning how to add when the school's sirens blared, "Lockdown, this is not a drill." A gunman got loose in my school's neighborhood. Thus the school was forced into a lockdown. I remember seeing a mix of reactions; some students were sobbing, some were frozen in fear, and some covered their ears as the sirens blared. Only eight years old, yet we knew what this meant.

As a current high school senior, I've practiced endless lockdowns: hide in the corner, turn the lights off, and stay quiet. Tell me America, what are wooden doors compared to a gun? What do we do when the shooter starts shooting down the door? Stay quiet? Hope? No, a lockdown won't save us. There are countless deaths to prove that.

The reason why we're forced to participate in lockdown drills is our government's refusal to enforce stringent gun control regulations that would prevent school shootings from happening in the first place. Tell me America, how many more children have to die before a definitive response is warranted?

According to a study done by the National Institute of Justice, from 1966 to 2019 seventy-seven percent of mass shooters purchased their guns legally.¹ Meaning that America's current background check system gave the OK for seventy-seven percent of all mass shooters to legally acquire the weapons they used to kill their victims. What kind of background check system is that? A background check system that runs an instant computer check to see if a person is on a chronically

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incomplete list of persons who meet narrow criteria for being prohibited from owning a gun instead of really checking a person's background and mental state.

The lockdowns will not prevent American children from being gunned down in their classrooms. The only way to stop school shootings is to adopt stringent gun control laws in the United States comparable to the laws in other high income democratic countries.

An international comparison of the frequency of school shootings from 2009-2018 (before the most recent rash of school shootings in our country) showed that the United States had the highest number of school shootings with a total of 288.² Mexico was second with eight; South Africa was third with six; India was fourth with five; and Nigeria and Pakistan tied for fifth with four school shootings apiece. Among the other high income democratic countries of the world, Canada and France both had two school shootings; Germany had one; and Australia, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom all had none. The main factors that explain why the United States is such an extreme outlier as compared with all these other countries are our extremely lax gun control laws; the related vast number of privately owned guns in circulation in our country; and as a result, the extraordinary ease with which almost anybody can acquire a gun.

We beg, pray, and hope for effective legislation while the American government hands out its "Deepest condolences." Meanwhile, children plan their escape routes, we freeze at any noise that resembles a gun, we fear walking to the bathroom thinking someone will shoot us on the way there, we cry as we see yet another school shooting, and we mourn the loss of our fellow Americans.

Some people claim that there's a longstanding "gun culture" in America that prevents us from adopting stringent gun control laws comparable to the laws in other democratic countries. But since when is it "anti-American" to want a safe place to learn and grow? Demanding stringent gun control doesn't make us "unpatriotic." It makes us human.

My generation of Americans will continue to plea and fight for definitive measures to stop school shootings. Because seriously America, how many more children and youth must die – and will I be next – before you adopt laws that show that you love your children more than your guns?

¹ "Public Mass Shootings: Database Amasses Details of a Half Century of U.S. Mass Shootings with Firearms, Generating Psychosocial Histories," National Institute of Justice, accessed May 20, 2023, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/public-mass-shootings-database-amasses-details-half-century-us-mass-shootings>.

² "School Shootings by Country 2023," World Population Review, accessed May 21, 2023, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/school-shootings-by-country>; "School Shootings in the US Compared with the Rest of the World - CNN," CNN, May 21, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/21/us/school-shooting-us-versus-world-trnd/index.html>.