



Americans Against Gun Violence
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2023 National High School Essay Contest Second Place Winner (\$2,500 Award)

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What Are We Really Locking Down by Lockdowns?

Every time I hear the alarm go off and the beginning of the looped script urging us to shelter in place, I feel an inherent sense of disbelief at the absurdity of our situation. Tucked away in a darkened corner of the classroom, I find myself wondering about what type of country we live in where it's a necessary precaution to practice hiding from an active shooter who may come to find you during math class, or who might decide to kill you at lunch. The morbidity of looking around a classroom and analyzing what places would offer the best cover, or trying to calculate the odds that your classmates will be shot instead of you, is something that no student should have to face.

Thankfully, while my experiences with these grim thought experiments have been just that, only thoughts, for many other students across America, school shootings have been a grim reality. We cannot continue to pretend that sitting in a classroom with the lights off and locking the doors and covering the windows like lambs awaiting a slaughter will solve the issues of gun violence in our schools. Active shooter drills are a band-aid solution. The only true way to end school shootings is through the enactment of stricter gun-control legislation.

To come to this conclusion it is first necessary to analyze the effectiveness of both solutions: lockdown drills and gun control. As early as 2015, 95% of public schools practiced lockdown procedures to prepare for the the event of a school shooting.⁽¹⁾ Considering the over 345 shootings since then, with 137 resulting in the loss of life, this is evidently not very effective.² So what about gun control?

Between 1982 and 2022, over 67% of the guns used by mass shooters in the US were obtained legally, after these individuals had passed computerized instant criminal background checks. Theoretically, just by doing more comprehensive background checks, up to two-thirds of mass shootings could be prevented.⁽²⁾ Some people claim that the shooters would have just obtained their guns through other methods, but other countries that put the burden of proof on the person

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seeking to acquire a gun to show that he or she has a legitimate need for one and can handle one safely have far lower rates of gun violence than the United States. And considering that many people who harm themselves or others with guns do so on impulse with weapons they recently purchased, any obstacle to acquiring a gun may dissuade them from acting rashly or give time for others around them to recognize the danger signs they're exhibiting.

When we have the examples of effective gun control laws in other high income democratic countries, it is horrific to instead ask elementary schoolers to practice their best shooter-hiding skills and act like this is a suitable alternative. Crouching in the dark and contemplating your own death is not an educational activity. It is the manifestation of a deeply flawed system that has sacrificed the lives of American children to the interests of the U.S. gun industry and its associated lobby.

Rather than forcing our children to practice locking down inside their schools, it is long past time for our country to start melting down our vast pool of privately owned assault weapons and handguns and to tighten up background checks for other firearm purchases

Footnotes

1. National Center for Education Statistics. "Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2017." DC: U.S. Department of Education, March 2018.
2. National Center for Education Statistics. "Number of Casualties from Shootings at Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, Number of School Shootings, and Number of Schools with Shootings, by Type of Casualty and Level of School: 2000-01 through 2020-21." National Center for Education Statistics, September 2021. Available at: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_228.12.asp.
3. Statista Research Department. "Number of Mass Shootings in the United States between 1982 and November 2022, by Legality of Shooter's Weapons." Statista, January 2, 2023. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/476461/mass-shootings-in-the-us-by-legality-of-shooters-weapons/>.