

Their Guns Won't Protect You, but They Can Get You Killed

Why Neither Policing nor Gun Control Will Suffice to
Stop the Shootings

CrimethInc. and It's Going Down

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Neither Republican calls for more guns and policing nor Democrat demands for more gun control can put an end to the epidemic of mass shootings in the United States. The problem runs deeper than either of these approaches can address.

A week and a half after an 18-year-old white supremacist murdered ten Black people in a mass shooting in a Buffalo supermarket, another 18-year-old killed nineteen children and two teachers at a school in Uvalde, Texas attended by predominantly working-class and Latino/Latina students. The husband of one of those teachers subsequently died of a heart attack brought on by grief.

The town of Uvalde budgets almost half a million dollars for school security and monitoring services, augmented by \$69,000 from the Texas state government for metal detectors, barriers, security systems, “campus-wide active shooter alarm systems,” and the like. Despite receiving almost 40% of the city budget and an additional half a million dollars of state grant money, the Uvalde police dragged their feet for an unusually long time during the massacre while parents begged them to do something.

As anarchists have documented, militarizing police has done nothing to protect people from mass shootings. In 2020, firearms became the leading cause of death for children in the United States. Police killings were already among the leading causes of death for young men.

Creating a society based on coercion and control does not protect us. All the money that city, state, and federal governments have channeled to police departments has made them a more powerful force in our society, but this has made us no safer. They don’t use those weapons to stop people from harming us, but to protect themselves, pursue their own interests, and dominate us.

According to the courts, police officers have no duty to protect students from being killed in the first place. *That’s not what police are for.* **The role of police is not to protect, but to control. It is not to prevent crises, but to determine who suffers in them.** The footage of police physically restraining parents while their children were murdered speaks volumes about this.

Both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party are taking advantage of this opportunity to repeat their talking points about who should or shouldn’t have guns. But neither of them are acknowledging the root causes of the problem. Both of them are proposing responses that can only feed into the vicious cycle that produced this tragedy in the first place.

The Republicans...

Republicans, long tied to the National Rifle Association and the gun industry, have responded to this massacre by calling for more police and more guards at schools. They have consistently sought to defund schools and to limit what can be taught or even said in them, but they are eager to funnel ever more resources towards the security industry. Of course, flooding our society with even more weapons will not cut down on the number of shootings, whether by on-duty police, off-duty police, or others who have access to their guns.

Some Republicans have written mass shootings into their playbook, weaponizing these tragedies as an opportunity to spread disinformation and hatred. Arizona Congressman Paul Gosar, known for participating in white nationalist conferences, claimed that the shooter was a “transsexual leftist illegal alien,” repeating a lie that had appeared on the far-right recruiting platform 4chan. Right-wing media personality Candace Owens also spread this lie. It was no coincidence that a group of bigots repeated this claim as they assaulted an underage trans girl shortly afterwards.

Some rank-and-file Republicans may be credulous enough to believe these lies, which are constantly updated to keep ahead of fact-checkers in the news cycle. Other Republicans surely recognize them as falsehoods—but in a world of fake news, boldly proclaimed falsehoods are interpreted as a show of force.

This cynical strategy creates a feedback loop. The worse things get, the further society descends into self-destructive violence, the more opportunities there are to blame this violence on an Other—whether trans, leftist, undocumented, or Black—against whom ever more violent force is required. This is why no amount of mass shootings—and there have already been 214 this year—will discredit the Republicans, as far as their base is concerned.

...The Democrats...

Democrats, on the other hand, have called for more gun control. Some Democrats on the left are even coming around to understanding that no amount of policing is going to put a stop to mass shootings. But the problem is—who would enforce stricter gun laws? The police, of course. And they would enforce those laws just as selectively, and with just as much racism and violence, as they enforce all the other laws on the books.

There are more than 400 million privately owned firearms in the United States, well over one per human being. Now that those are in circulation, it will be hard

to put the genie back in the bottle. Buy-back campaigns might have some small impact, but as long as there are armed white nationalists and armed police, other people will be rightly hesitant to give up their guns. Until our society is ready for multilateral disarmament—including the state—those guns are going to stay in circulation, and police efforts to *control* them will only lead to more imprisonment and police violence.

If, at the end of an unprecedentedly invasive crackdown, only police retained access to firearms in the United States, that would not put an end to white supremacist mass shootings like the one in Buffalo. Police are disproportionately involved in white supremacist movements—even if we don't count the murders they commit on the job.

When Democrats criticize police behavior—for example, the cowardice of the cops in Uvalde—this often serves to rationalize directing more resources towards police and their surrogates. As long as the logic of the punitive justice system remains unquestioned, even the fiercest criticisms will be used to justify calls for new police training compounds and programs.

Republicans don't want to hinder white vigilantes' gun access, because they see white vigilantes as essential to preserving the prevailing social order. Democrats want the state to have a monopoly on force, because they believe that this is the best way to preserve that same social order. Under Biden, Democrats have done everything they can to rehabilitate the image of police while falsely associating the steady increase in violence and desperation with movements to abolish police and efforts to abolish the disparities in wealth and power that the police exist to impose.

...And Us

What is the solution, then? What can we do to put a stop to mass shootings?

If the police exist to protect the wealthy (and themselves), then as disparities in wealth and power increase, the police will protect fewer and fewer people. This is not a sign of their failure; it is precisely what they have always done.

The gulf between the wealthy and the poor has steadily increased for decades now, alongside police violence and mass shootings. The resulting desperation and despair contribute to people becoming mass shooters. The same goes for the scapegoating and demagoguery that arise in such a profoundly unequal, fearful, and acrimonious society. If we want to stop the shootings, in the long run, we have to abolish all the mechanisms that create these inequalities, and all the forces that preserve capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. In this regard, the fight to stop mass shootings must set itself much broader goals if it is to succeed.

During active shooter drills at schools across the United States today, children are taught that their best bet in the event of a shooting is to fight back—to throw textbooks or chairs or whatever they can get their hands on at the shooter. This is the response of a society that doesn't intend to protect children, that never has protected them. It indicates that we really are on our own. We have to understand this and start organizing accordingly, rather than putting our faith in politicians of any party.

One of the fundamental roles of police is to discourage us from solving problems ourselves, so we defer both our own safety and the resolution of conflict to the authorities. Yet most parents will risk more to protect their children than the police ever will. What would have been necessary for the parents in Uvalde to have been able to successfully address the shooting themselves, in defiance of the police? What grassroots institutions would need to exist, what resources and skills would need to circulate? It's horrifying to acknowledge, but we are in a situation in which more and more of us really have no better option.

If it's up to us to address these shootings, then rather than looking to the Democrats to tighten gun control via legislation and police action, we might begin by asking what a direct action campaign targeting the gun industry itself might look like. What if we could sidestep the Rube Goldberg machine of party politics entirely to cut into the profit margins of the corporations that have been making a killing selling firearms?

There is no safety without self-determination. To be safe, we have to be the ones who define what counts as safety, and we have to have the power to shape the conditions of our lives. So far, the most effective participants in the movement against mass shootings have been the students who have staged walkouts from their schools. Another starting point is to make sure that student organizers have all the support and resources they require as they figure out for themselves how best to preserve their lives.

“If school has taught today's students anything, it is that those who make decisions on their behalf do not always have their best interests at heart. In the world that they are entering—fraught with tremendous disparities, threatened by climate catastrophe, and wracked by civil conflict—the most important thing they could learn is how to act collectively to defend each other. That is the skill they are going to need, more than any prerequisites or job training.”

—When Cutting Class Is a Matter of Life and Death

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anarchist-archive.org · anarchist-archive@riseup.net