

March for Our Lives Highlights: Students Protesting Guns Say 'Enough Is Enough'

 [nytimes.com/2018/03/24/us/march-for-our-lives.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/24/us/march-for-our-lives.html)

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

March 24, 2018

Demonstrators flooded streets across the globe in public protests on Saturday, calling for action against gun violence. Hundreds of thousands of marchers turned out, in the most ambitious show of force yet from a student-driven movement that emerged after the recent massacre at a South Florida high school.

At the main event in Washington, survivors of mass shootings, including the one in Florida, rallied a whooping crowd — “Welcome to the revolution,” said one of the student organizers — and spoke of communities that are disproportionately affected by gun violence. “It is normal to see flowers honoring the lives of black and brown youth that have lost their lives to a bullet,” Edna Chavez, 17, said of her South Los Angeles neighborhood.

- In New York, marchers bundled in bright orange — the official color of a gun control advocacy group — charged toward Central Park. And in Parkland, Fla., less than a mile from where the shooting took place last month, one protester’s eyes brimmed with tears, surrounded by the echoing chant, “Enough is enough!”
- Small groups of counterprotesters supporting gun rights also marched in different cities. In Salt Lake City, demonstrators carried pistols and flags. One of their signs read: “What can we do to stop mass shootings? SHOOT BACK.” In Boston, opposing groups of protesters shouted at one another before the police intervened.
- More than 800 protests were planned in every American state, including in some gun-friendly cities, and on every continent except for Antarctica, according to a website set up by organizers. Check out photos from around the world.
- Planning for the events was spearheaded by a group of students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., who have emerged as national anti-gun figures in the wake of the shooting that left 17 dead.
- Sharp-tongued and defiant, the student leaders hoped to elevate gun control as a key issue during the upcoming midterm elections, and to inspire their peers to register to vote en masse.
- They were building on the success of a national school walkout this month, and gun control legislation in Florida that they helped to usher in. Their goal remains, as articulated online in the event’s mission statement, to “demand that a comprehensive and effective bill be immediately brought before Congress to address these gun issues.”
- The White House responded to the demonstrations in a statement. “We applaud the many courageous young Americans exercising their First Amendment rights today,” it read. On

Friday, the Justice Department proposed banning so-called bump stocks, but President Trump signed a spending bill that included only some background check and school safety measures.

- The Times had journalists covering the marches in Washington; New York; Boston; Montpelier, Vt.; Parkland, Fla; Dahlonaga, Ga.; Chicago; Salt Lake City; Los Angeles; Seattle; Anchorage, Alaska; Rome; Berlin; and Tokyo. Follow them on Twitter.
- Sign up for the Morning Briefing for news and a daily look at what you need to know to begin your day.

The student organizers want action in a midterm year.

The student activists emphasized that they would soon have access to the ballot box as they hope to build support for candidates who support universal background checks and bans on assault-style weapons.

Large majorities of Americans say they support gun control measures like universal background checks. Yet when put directly to the people in a referendum in recent years, the results have been mixed. Here is a look at what polling and recent referendums reveal about the political challenges that face the student-led activists.

At street intersections in Washington on Saturday, voter registration volunteers waved clipboards over their heads, shouting, "It takes less than three minutes!" They wore neon yellow shirts that read, "Register to vote!"

"These Parkland students have already been able to make change that no one else could for decades," said Carol Williams, a volunteer from West Chester, Pa.

In Parkland on Saturday, Sari Kaufman, a Stoneman Douglas sophomore, urged people to "turn this moment into a movement" that would push out of office any politician who took money from the National Rifle Association.

"They think we're all talk and no action," she said to loud applause and cheers, and urged the crowd to prove politicians wrong by voting in huge numbers.

"Remember that policy change is not nearly as difficult as losing a loved one," she said. "Don't just go out and vote: Get 17 other people to go out and vote."

The crowd was particularly rousing in its appreciation of Casey Sherman, 17, a Douglas student and one of the Parkland rally organizers.

"My love for Parkland had taken on a whole new meaning," she said. "After all this heartbreak, we have come back stronger than ever. Those 17 people did not die in vain. We will stop at nothing until we make real, lasting change."

'Welcome to the revolution,' one of the student organizers said in Washington.

At the rally in Washington, the first speaker was Cameron Kasky, 17, a junior at Stoneman

Douglas who last month challenged Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, a Republican, to stop accepting donations from the National Rifle Association. Mr. Kasky called for universal background checks on gun sales and a ban on assault rifles.

“To the leaders, skeptics and cynics who told us to sit down and stay silent: Wait your turn,” Mr. Kasky said. “Welcome to the revolution.”

Another speaker, Edna Chavez, 17, a high school senior in Los Angeles, said she had lost her brother to gun violence. “Ricardo was his name. Can you all say it with me?” she asked.

The crowd said his name over and over again, as Ms. Chavez smiled through tears.

Alex Wind, 17, a junior at Stoneman Douglas, spoke about the need for legislative change.

“To all the politicians out there, if you take money from the N.R.A., you have chosen death,” he said. “If you have not expressed to your constituents a public stance on this issue, you have chosen death. If you do not stand with us by saying we need to pass common sense gun legislation, you have chosen death. And none of the millions of people marching in this country today will stop until they see those against us out of office, because we choose life.”

David Hogg, 17, a senior at the high school and one of the most recognizable faces of the movement, said: “Who here is going to vote in the 2018 election? If you listen real close, you can hear the people in power shaking.”

[Read more about what the day was like for other Stoneman Doulgas students](#)

On Saturday, officials with Metro, the region’s subway system, said more than 207,000 rides had been taken on the system by 1 p.m., about half of the number by that time during the women’s march.

A team of crowd science researchers led by the professor G. Keith Still of Manchester Metropolitan University in England estimated that about 180,000 people attended Saturday’s rally in Washington. They examined photographs, video and satellite imagery of the rally to estimate the crowd density in different areas of the demonstration. The number is less than half of the 470,000 that Mr. Still estimated had attended the women’s march in Washington in 2017.

Emma González, one of the student organizers, stood for several minutes of silence

Ms. González spoke for just under two minutes on Saturday at the rally in Washington, describing the effects of gun violence in emotional detail and reciting the names of classmates who had been killed.

Photos From the 'March for Our Lives' Protests Around the World

Crowds gathered in cities across the United States and around the world.



OPEN Photographs

Then she said nothing for four minutes and 26 seconds.

She stared straight ahead during her period of silence onstage, her sometimes watery eyes fixed in the distance. Then a timer went off.

“Since the time that I came out here, it has been six minutes and 20 seconds,” she said. “The shooter has ceased shooting, and will soon abandon his rifle, blend in with the students as they escape, and walk free for an hour before arrest.

“Fight for your lives, before it’s someone else’s job,” she continued, and then walked offstage.

In New York, 150,000 people were marching, the mayor said.

In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio said early in the afternoon on Twitter that an estimated 150,000 people were marching. “You have to know when a revolution is starting,” he said.

The musician Paul McCartney, speaking to CNN at the march, opened his jacket to show a T-shirt that read “We can end gun violence.”

“This is what we can do, so I’m here to do it,” Mr. McCartney said. “One of my best friends was killed in gun violence right around here, so it’s important to me,” he added, referring to his

Beatles bandmate John Lennon, who was shot and killed in December 1980 outside his apartment on the Upper West Side.

As the crowd thickened before a rally in front of the Trump International Hotel and Tower near Columbus Circle, Mary Ann Jacobs, 55, of Sandy Hook, Conn., milled in the crowd with her husband.

Ms. Jacobs was a library clerk during the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School. She barricaded herself in the school's library, "in a closet hidden behind file cabinets" along with 18 fourth graders.

"In the months after the shooting it took 100 percent of my personal focus to get up and go to work every day to take care of my surviving students," she said.

Opponents of gun control staged their own smaller rallies in Boston and Salt Lake City.

Tensions over guns seemed to converge in Salt Lake City, where a gun rights march kicked off just minutes before a gun control march.

The gun rights rally drew hundreds of people, many carrying signs — "AR-15s EMPOWER the people," one said.

Brandon McKee was one of the many people with pistols on their hips. His daughter Kendall, 11, held a sign: "Criminals love gun control."

Mr. McKee said of the Washington marchers: "I believe it's their goal to unarm America, and that's why we're here today. We're not going to stand idly by and let them tell us what we can and cannot do."

As the gun rights advocates set off toward the Capitol, some began to heckle a gun control advocate, Linda Peer, 67, who had infiltrated the march line.

"She's not a true American!" one man yelled. "Shame on you!" the group chanted at her.

In Boston, a clutch of Second Amendment supporters gathered in front of the Statehouse with signs that said, "Come and take it."

"We believe in the Second Amendment," said Paul Allen, 62, a retired construction worker who lives in Salisbury, Mass. "You people will interpret it the way you want and we'll interpret it for what it is — that law-abiding citizens who are true patriots have the right to bear arms."

Mr. Allen described supporters of gun control as "ignorant sheep who are being spoon-fed by liberal teachers."

"They haven't read the Constitution and they don't know what it means," he said.

[Read more about these protests.](#)

Gun rights organizations were mostly quiet about the demonstrations on Saturday. A spokesman for the N.R.A. did not answer several emails requesting comment.

On the eve of the march, Colion Noir, a host on NRATV, an online video channel produced by the gun group, lashed out at the Parkland students, saying that “no one would know your names” if someone with a weapon had stopped the gunman at their school.

“These kids ought to be marching against their own hypocritical belief structures,” he said in the video, adding, “The only reason we’ve ever heard of them is because the guns didn’t come soon enough.”

Demonstrators gathered in gun-friendly states.

In places where gun control is less popular, demonstrators pooled together, trying to show that support for their cause extends beyond large, predominantly liberal cities.

In Vermont, a rural state with a rich hunting culture and some of the nation’s weakest gun laws, marchers gathered at the Capitol in Montpelier. Organizers hoped that thousands would turn out by the end of the day — an ambitious goal in a city of 7,500 people.

“I hope the national march is going to be impactful, but at least we know state by state that we can make change,” said Madison Knoop, a college freshman who organized the rally.

In Dahlonega, Ga., several hundred people gathered outside a museum, a surprising show of strength for gun control in an overwhelmingly conservative region.

“We’re going to be the generation that takes down the gun lobby,” Marisa Pyle, 20, said through a megaphone.

Ms. Pyle, a student at the University of Georgia and an organizer of Saturday’s rally in Lumpkin County, challenged critics of the demonstrations across the country.

“I’m starting to think they just want to shut us up because they’re scared of what we have to say,” Ms. Pyle said.

Young people were scattered in a crowd dominated by people in middle age and older. There were few signs of counterprotesters. But as Ms. Pyle led a roll call of the Stoneman Douglas victims, a man in a passing vehicle yelled: “Trump! Trump! Trump!”

In Anchorage, the largest city in Alaska, marchers gathered in weather that peaked above freezing around noon.

Alaska has not seen a school shooting in two decades, but it has the highest rates of both gun-related deaths and suicides in the nation.

High schoolers turned out in jean jackets and hoodies, and shoveled snow to clear paths for one another in the 24-degree weather.

“Do you know how it feels to have the principal pretend over the intercom that the shooter is

walking your way?” Elsa Hoppenworth, a 16-year-old junior at West Anchorage High School, asked a cheering crowd. “Those who do not contribute to change contribute to our death.”

Melanie Anderson, a 44-year-old middle school teacher, held up a sign that said “teacher, not sharp shooter.”

Keenly aware that Alaska is a pro-gun state, the students who marched and made speeches were careful to make clear that they were seeking modest reinforcements on existing gun laws, rather than all-out bans.

The message resonated for Chicago residents all too familiar with gun violence.

Thousands of demonstrators came together at Chicago’s Union Park, where speaker after speaker rattled off grim statistics about the city’s endemic violence.

“Chicago has been plagued with gun violence way before the Parkland shooting,” said Juan Reyes, a high school student. “Suddenly, people are talking about students not feeling safe in schools. But in reality, students in our city’s South and West Sides have never felt safe.”

Speaking at the rally in Washington, Trevon Bosley, a 19-year-old Chicago resident whose older brother Terrell died of a gunshot wound in 2006, said, “We deserve the right to have a life without fear of being gunned down.”

Mya Middleton, 16, also traveled to speak in Washington, where she recalled an encounter with an armed man who was stealing from a store when she was a high school freshman.

“He pulls out this silver pistol and points it in my face and said these words that to this day haunt me and give me nightmares. He said, ‘If you say anything, I will find you.’ And yet I’m still saying something today,” she said, to loud cheers.

[Read more about how students from Chicago and Baltimore, which set a per capita record for homicides in 2017, experienced Saturday’s events.](#)

Americans in Tokyo, Rome, Madrid and Berlin showed support.

On Saturday in Tokyo, where guns are highly restricted and shootings are rare, dozens of protesters gathered with signs bearing the names of people who have been killed by gun violence. Participants, many of them American, took turns reading poems or sharing memories of family members or friends killed in shootings.

“I think it is important not just to call for changes to our gun laws, not just to debate the subtleties of the Second Amendment, but to remember that it is people who have died because of our gun laws,” said Linda Gould, an American in Japan who organized the vigil.

And in Nagoya, Japan, Mieko Hattori, the mother of Yoshihiro Hattori, a Japanese exchange student who was shot and killed in Baton Rouge, La., in the early 1990s, said earlier in the week, “I just wanted to convey our message: We support you from Japan.”

In Rome on Saturday, demonstrators at the American Embassy chanted, “Hey hey, ho ho, the N.R.A. has got to go” and waved signs that read, “A Gun Is Not Fun” and “Am I Next?” The speakers at the rally included local students as well as Valentina and Gabriela Zuniga, a freshman and junior at Stoneman Douglas, who were on spring break.

“We knew there were rallies all over the world, and we looked for one in Rome,” said Gabriela, 16, adding that her life had changed drastically since the shooting. “You go into class and see empty desks. It’s different for everyone now.”

Near the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, 150 to 200 people, most of them Americans, held signs saying “bullets aren’t school supplies” and “Waffeln statt Waffen” (Waffles Instead of Weapons).

Dylan von Felbert, 16, an 11th grader at the John F. Kennedy School in Berlin, said, “Our generation can be very apathetic — myself included — so I think it’s important to support those things you really believe in.”

In Madrid, a small crowd — almost all of them Americans — braved a cold Saturday to gather in front of the American embassy. An American student read out a list of all the American school shootings since the Columbine massacre.

Fiona Maharg Bravo attended with her 13-year-old daughter, Elena. Ms. Maharg Bravo grew up in Chicago but has lived in Madrid for more than 10 years.

“It’s perhaps hard for people here to relate to what unfortunately is a uniquely American issue,” she said.