

## Scapegoating detracting from meaningful gun reform

**The NRA doesn't care that children have died as a result of their politicking, and they're not even pretending they do anymore. What's a few more lives so long as the checks keep clearing?**



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Our leaders are mechanically going through the motions in response to the tragedy in Uvalde, sharing platitudes and pointing fingers at the appointed scapegoats. As they did after Parkland and Sandy Hook, legislators will bicker about the latest cause de jour for the next few weeks, before moving on without accomplishing anything meaningful.

In a rare show of bipartisan unity, bad actors on the left and right seem to have settled on this tragedy's scapegoat: the officers responding to the scene. After years of increased scrutiny over unjustified police shootings, many are reversing track to put forward the notion that these officers should have gone in guns blazing.

This narrative does nothing but detract from the real problem: the availability of automatic and semi-automatic weapons in our country and the ease with which they can be obtained. These guns have been the common thread of each shooting mentioned above. They were the weapon of choice in the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, and countless similar tragedies.

The 18-year-old shooter legally purchased the two platform AR rifles he used to kill 19 children and two educators just a few days earlier, along with 375 rounds of 5.56-caliber ammunition. Teenagers in Texas aren't allowed to drink, smoke cigarettes, or purchase metal-tipped lawn darts, but there's nothing stopping them from purchasing a literal weapon of mass destruction. You can't purchase Claritin without an entry into a computer, but talk to the right people and you can get yourself a gun.

Even if you've got a criminal record, there's no shortage of loopholes, like gun shows or swap meets to avoid potentially failing a background check. And then of course there are ghost guns – untraceable, assembled-from-parts weapons that accounted for a third of the firearms recovered by state police in California in 2019.

What need does an 18-year-old, who isn't in the police or the military, have for a semi-automatic weapon? A person might reasonably own a handgun, shotgun or single shot rifle for hunting or home defense, as is their right under the Second Amendment, but what need would they have for a rifle that can fire 60 rounds in a minute? Let's ban them and see what the Supreme Court ultimately decides as to the legality of such action.

These absurdities in our otherwise fairly reasonable system persist thanks to powerful lobbying groups like the National Rifle Association. Undeterred by the national tragedy that occurred just a few days and a few hundred miles away, the group didn't hesitate to continue with its planned annual convention in Houston last week. The NRA doesn't care that children have died as a result of their politicking, and they're not even pretending they do anymore. What's a few more lives so long as the checks keep clearing?

Over time, after investigations, we'll learn whether those responding officers acted improperly and what could have been done differently. There will no doubt be a number of civil lawsuits against the department to sort out where they may have erred and what liability they bear, which make a national discussion largely unnecessary. We're wasting our breath talking about it, when we still haven't gotten past step one on gun reform.

I've seen these officers compared unfavorably to firefighters, who critics note often run into burning buildings and put themselves in great peril as a matter of course in their daily jobs. But fires start and continue to burn until stopped – they're static and mostly predictable foes. School shooters are not so formulaic.

We can't fight fire with fire. As always, the best way to fight a fire is to stop it from igniting in the first place – the spark being great. Since the Sandy Hook shooting one decade ago, there have been plenty of calls for sensible gun reform but next-to-zero success. Politicians have ditched "thoughts and prayers" in favor of calls for mental health reform as the generic response of choice to tragedies like this. But just like with gun reform, few of them seem to have any interest in doing anything about it.

There's certainly a discussion to be had on how law enforcement could do better in situations like Uvalde, but that seems like it should be point eight or nine in our long and very American discussion on gun violence. Can we first, at long last, address point one? Can we please get these weapons of mass destruction out of civilian hands?

We have the ability both locally and nationally to do what is necessary to protect future victims. Do we have the will, or are guns more important than the lives of people in our communities?