

# A Tragedy of Silence

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Another day, another mass shooting in America. When, and how, will this end? In fact, will it ever end?

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/15/opinion/blow-a-tragedy-of-silence.html>

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Damon Winter/The New York Times

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## Gun Country

The United States has more guns per capita than any country.

*Percentage of Americans satisfied or dissatisfied with the nation's laws and policies on guns.*

Total satisfied

50%

Total dissatisfied

42

Source: Gallup, January 2012

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*Percentage of Americans for or against a law which would make it illegal to manufacture, sell, or possess semi-automatic guns known as assault rifles.*

Against

53

For

43

Source: Gallup, October 2011

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*Percentage of Americans who have personally ever fired a gun.*

69

Source: Gallup, October 2007

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*Percentage of Americans saying that they have a gun in their homes.*

45

Source: Gallup, October 2011

On Friday, a gunman identified as 20-year-old Adam Lanza, killed 26 people, including 20 children between the ages 5 and 10, [at a Connecticut elementary school](#). He is reported to have also killed his mother, a kindergarten teacher at the school, and committed suicide.

This comes after Jacob Roberts, a 22-year-old man, armed with a semiautomatic AR-15, carrying extra magazines and wearing a hockey mask walked into a shopping mall in Oregon filled with 10,000 people and began shooting. He killed two people, and then took his own life.

A visibly shaken President Obama said after the shooting at the school, “As a country, we have been through this too many times.” He continued, “We’re going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent tragedies like this, regardless of the politics.”

I agree. I only hope that in coming days we flesh out what “meaningful action” means in policy terms. If not now, when? After the next shooting?

How many more deaths and mass shootings will it take for Washington to begin to lead the country in a deeper conversation about sensible gun controls? What will it take for our politicians to take firm and principled positions on gun policies and stand up to the gun lobby in this country? Surely this is a moment that calls all of us to reckoning.

In the vacuum of strong advocacy, too many Americans respond to tragedies like these in undesirable ways.

According to [an August report from Bloomberg News](#), “background checks for gun purchases spiked 41 percent in [Colorado](#) after 12 people were killed inside a suburban Denver movie theater, according to state data.”

And while gun control advocates grow more quiet, the gun lobby grows stronger and louder. According to [a report issued Friday by the Center for Responsive Politics’ OpenSecrets.org](#), “For gun rights groups, 2012 was the most [active election cycle](#) since 2000. They contributed a total of \$3 million to candidates, 96 percent of them Republicans.” By contrast, the group pointed out that “[gun control groups](#) contributed less in this election cycle than in any cycle as far back as OpenSecrets has data (1990).”

According to the Web site ThinkProgress, Larry Pratt, the executive director of Gun Owners of America, wasted no time trying to pin Friday’s shooting on gun control advocates. ThinkProgress quoted a statement of his that read, in part: “Gun control supporters have the blood of little children on their hands. Federal and state laws combined to ensure that no teacher, no administrator, no adult had a gun at the Newtown school where the children were murdered. This tragedy underscores the urgency of getting rid of gun bans in school zones.”

Outrageous.

This is a sad, sad state of affairs.

No wonder public opinion is shifting away from gun control. [Gallup found](#) that the number of Americans who believe that these laws should be stricter fell more than 40 percent from 1991 to 2011.

Gallup also found, for the first time last year, “greater opposition to than support for a ban on semiautomatic guns or assault rifles, 53 percent to 43 percent. In the initial asking of this question in 1996, the numbers were nearly reversed, with 57 percent for and 42 percent against an assault rifle ban.”

Both the Oregon and Connecticut shooters had semiautomatic weapons.

And screening prospective gun buyers for criminal records and for mental illness is helpful, but it is not enough and isn’t always done.

And mass shooters don’t necessarily have criminal records and seem to have no problem obtaining legal guns.

[An analysis published earlier this year by Mother Jones](#) of the 61 mass shootings in America over the last 30 years found that: “Of the 139 guns possessed by the killers, more than three-quarters were obtained legally.”

(The Oregon shooter stole his gun. The Connecticut shooter’s guns [are reported to have been legally purchased](#) in his mother’s name.)

We must reinstate the assault weapons ban. Military-style guns belong in the hands of military personnel, and maybe police officers, but not in the hands of civilians.

A vast majority of mass shootings in the last three decades involved assault weapons and semiautomatic handguns, according to Mother Jones.

Even if you believe, as most Americans do, that the Second Amendment grants Americans the right to bear arms, one must also acknowledge the right of other Americans to not bear arms and be safe.

Where are the voices for those who choose not to — or are not old enough to — own guns? Are the gunless to have no advocate? Will our politicians forever cower before the gun lobby?