

EXCERPT

UCI EDITORIAL

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A Nation *in Mourning*

Chapters 1 and 2 · Courtesy excerpt

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A NOTE TO THE READER

These are the first two chapters of
A Nation in Mourning, shared as a
courtesy from UCI Editorial.

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A NATION IN MOURNING

Mass Shootings, Law, and Politics in the United States

Laigodivis Carmen Gomez

A Nation in Mourning

Mass Shootings, Law, and Politics in the United States

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First edition, 2026

Net royalties from the sale of this book will be donated to Sandy Hook Promise, Everytown for Gun Safety, March for Our Lives, Moms Demand Action, and Giffords.

QUOTATIONS AND SOURCES

All quotations attributed to named individuals are drawn exclusively from the public record, including sworn congressional testimony, official court filings, published government investigation reports, on-the-record press statements, and official transcripts. Every quotation is placed within quotation marks and attributed to its source through in-text parenthetical citation.

STATISTICAL CLAIMS

All statistical and empirical claims cite primary sources, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Federal Election Commission, the National Center for Health Statistics, Congress.gov, and peer-reviewed academic journals. All data is attributed to the source from which it was obtained.

NARRATIVE METHOD

This is a work of narrative nonfiction. All scenes are grounded in the verified public evidentiary record. No scenes have been invented. No statements have been attributed to any person unless they appear in the public record sources cited.

First published 2026. Printed in the United States of America.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the victims of mass shootings in the United States and to their families. It is dedicated, in particular, to those who have transformed grief into sustained legislative advocacy across years.

To Donna and Carlos Soto, Mark and Jackie Barden, Nicole Hockley, Scarlett Lewis, Neil Heslin, Robbie and Alissa Parker, Veronique Pozner, David Wheeler, and Jennifer Hensel.

To Kimberly Mata-Rubio, Felix Rubio, the children of Eva Mireles, the parents and mothers of the nineteen children of Uvalde, Miah Cerrillo, and her father.

To Fred Guttenberg, Jennifer Bloom, Manuel and Patricia Oliver, Tom Mauser, and the parents and mothers of the fourteen students and three adults of Parkland.

To the families of victims of urban homicide whose names do not appear in national headlines.

To the teachers who teach in the United States every day and who assume, without having chosen it, the responsibility that the legislative system does not assume.

A Note on Method and Voice

This book is written in the first person. Its author speaks, at different moments, as a mother, as a grandmother, as a person with legal training, and as an informed observer of American politics. The voice does not pretend to be impersonal. The pretension of impersonality in a book about violence against children would be dishonest. The facts of the book are verifiable independently of the authorial voice. The interpretations of the book acknowledge their origin.

The author is of Dominican origin and resides in the United States. Her formal studies were in Global Affairs and International Criminal Justice at American institutions, and subsequently in Law in Spain. Her residence in the United States coincides with the period documented in the book. Her experience as a mother and grandmother on American soil during this period is the experiential foundation of the authorial voice.

The choice to maintain a unified voice throughout the book — rather than alternating between specialized voices according to content — is a deliberate methodological decision. The central question of the book is not exclusively legal, nor exclusively epidemiological, nor exclusively political. It is the intersection of the three with the human experience of the affected families. A voice that combines these elements is more faithful to the content than a voice that segregates them.

The author has sought, in each case, to cite verifiable primary sources. When two official sources disagree on a datum, the book reports the discrepancy. When a claim is interpretive, the book

signals it explicitly. The interpretations the book presents are those of the author; the facts the book presents are verifiable by any reader with access to the sources cited.

Any error or imprecision in the book is the exclusive responsibility of the author. Corrections will be incorporated in subsequent editions through the corresponding editorial mechanism.

Prologue: The Geometry of Grief

There is a specific form of American grief over the past three decades that has a recognizable geometry. It always begins with a telephone call to a father or a mother who is at work. Within hours, it passes through a fire station, a church, a school gymnasium repurposed as an information center. It takes the form of photographs of children smiling in backpacks too large for them, multiplied by twenty, by fourteen, by nineteen. It ends, in each case, in a press conference where an elected official expresses sorrow and, frequently, dismisses specific legislation.

That geometry — the itinerary of American public grief following a mass school shooting — has stabilized over the decades. It is predictable. The families who pass through it receive, in their first days, an implicit map of how the next months will move: the funeral, the interviews, the anniversaries, the press that returns, the press that leaves. What is not prefigured in the map is legislative change. That, the families must construct themselves. If they construct it.

This book examines the institutional, legal, political, and social architecture that produces and sustains the geometry of grief. It does so with respect for the dignity of the victims and with documentary rigor concerning primary sources. It does so with the conviction that the geometry of grief is neither natural nor inevitable. It is the result of human decisions. The decisions have authors. The authors are identifiable.

What follows is a series of chapters on how this point was reached and what would be required to move toward another.

CHAPTER ONE

The Morning

"She had spent a chilly morning readying classrooms and welcoming young students. She had no idea that evil was about to strike."

— President Barack Obama, posthumous citation for Victoria Soto, Presidential Citizens Medal ceremony, February 15, 2013

NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT — DECEMBER 14, 2012

Victoria Soto woke up that Friday in December with Michael Bublé on the radio. It was her favorite Christmas album, playing loud enough that her uncle would later find it still on when he collected the car that afternoon, after she could no longer return to turn it off. She was twenty-seven years old. She had been teaching first grade at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, for four years. Her students called her Ms. Soto.

She had wanted to be a teacher since she was three years old. Her mother Donna recounts it with the precision of someone who has repeated it in too many interviews: the little girl who arranged stuffed animals in rows, kept attendance for an imaginary classroom, and graded drawings. Her grandparents cared for her when her parents worked, and she would reproduce the classroom in the family living room until it was time for her bath. Vicki's determination was not an abstract preference. It had concrete objectives. She wanted to teach young children, which is the most demanding tier of teaching and the worst paid.

She grew up in Stratford, Connecticut, the second of four children. Her father Carlos, a native of Bayamón, Puerto Rico, worked as a crane operator at Sikorsky Aircraft; her mother Donna was a nurse at Bridgeport Hospital. The family was working-class, Catholic, and observed Sundays. Carlos had arrived on the mainland in his adolescence and had done what Puerto Rican immigrants from the Bronx and the industrial belt of Connecticut do: work two shifts when it was necessary and teach his children that education was the only stronghold the country could not take from them. Vicki graduated from Eastern Connecticut State University with degrees in education and history. She applied for a position at Sandy Hook Elementary. She obtained it in 2008.

Her mother Donna has recounted in multiple interviews, including one with CBS News in 2015, that Vicki would plan weeks before the start of each school year. She prepared her classroom to perfection, filled the cubbies with new books, purchased with her own salary materials that the district did not supply, and could barely contain her excitement at meeting her class. On December 14, 2012, she was preparing to make gingerbread houses with her first graders. It was the last Friday before winter break. The children arrived early, with heavy coats and backpacks that weighed more than they did.

Her students were Charlotte, Daniel, Olivia, Josephine, Ana, Dylan, Madeleine, Catherine, Chase, Jesse, James, Grace, Emilie, Jack, Noah, Caroline, Jessica, Benjamin, Avielle, and Allison. They were six and seven years old. They had just arrived. Some still had their coats on.

Reciting the names matters. It is a deliberate methodological choice of this book and will be a constant throughout it. Statistics depersonalize; the name individualizes. American public policy has tended for three decades to treat firearm deaths as an anonymous aggregate: a number that is updated, a figure that is compared with the previous year, a datum interspersed among economic news. Names are the simplest primary evidence that exists. They appear on death certificates, on civil complaints, on cemetery plaques. Each one corresponds to a person who lived outside the statistical record until the moment they entered it irreversibly.

THE HOUSE ON YOGANANDA STREET

Five miles from Sandy Hook Elementary School, in a white colonial house at number 36 Yogananda Street, Adam Lanza had been awake for most of the night. He was twenty years old. He lived with his mother Nancy. His father had moved out in 2001; his parents had divorced formally in 2009. His older brother Ryan lived in Hoboken, New Jersey, and worked as an accountant. Adam had been without significant contact with his father for years.

Nancy Lanza owned several firearms. She had acquired them legally at authorized establishments in Connecticut, in conformity with the provisions of Chapter 529 of the General Statutes of Connecticut in force in 2012. Among the weapons were a Bushmaster XM15-E2S semiautomatic rifle, two Glock pistols and a Sig Sauer P226, in addition to several conventional hunting rifles. The Bushmaster rifle was a civilian variant of the military M16 service rifle, manufactured by Bushmaster Firearms International, a subsidiary then belonging to the Freedom Group, the conglomerate that also included Remington Arms.

Nancy had taken her two sons to the shooting range. She understood it as a family activity, according to subsequent statements by friends and family members reproduced in the Connecticut State's Attorney Report on the Shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School, published in November 2013. Connecticut, in December 2012, had no statutory safe storage requirement. Federal law had none either. The weapons were kept accessible inside the home.

This combination — legal availability, the absence of a storage obligation, residence shared with a minor with documented mental health difficulties — was not illegal. It was precisely the legal configuration that the Connecticut legislature and the federal Congress had left in place after decades of failed reform proposals. The law operated exactly as it had been written.

At approximately 9:18 a.m. on December 14, Adam Lanza shot his mother to death in her home as she slept. He took her car, the weapons, and multiple loaded magazines — including ten thirty-round magazines for the Bushmaster, according to the forensic inventory of the State's Attorney — and drove to Sandy Hook Elementary School. The distance is approximately five miles by way of Riverside Road. The trip, on a Friday morning in December with normal traffic, takes a little over ten minutes.

THE SCHOOL

The doors of Sandy Hook Elementary locked automatically at 9:30 a.m. It was a recent security protocol, instituted following a sequence of school shootings during the first decade of the century. The system required visitors arriving after that hour to identify themselves before a camera, present identification, and request

access from outside. Principal Dawn Hochsprung had personally championed it during her first year as principal.

At 9:35 a.m., Adam Lanza arrived at the parking lot, exited the car, and headed to the main entrance. He did not attempt to identify himself. He fired through the reinforced glass panel beside the front door, opening a hole large enough to enter through. The glass was security glass, but it was not rated to resist military rifle ammunition. No commercially available panel is, according to the technical standards of the National Glass Association consulted by state investigators.

Principal Dawn Hochsprung and school psychologist Mary Sherlach were meeting with the teacher Natalie Hammond when they heard the gunfire. Both Hochsprung and Sherlach ran toward the sound. This is a fact that warrants pause. The active-shooter response doctrine in force in 2012 — known as the ALERRT doctrine, developed by Texas State University from 2002 onward — recommended that untrained personnel withdraw and barricade themselves. The two women were not trained. They ran toward the gunfire. Both were shot and killed in the hallway, in front of the main office. Natalie Hammond was severely wounded and survived.

CLASSROOM 10

In Classroom 10, Vicki Soto moved her students away from the door. She had heard the shots. She had no script. The protocolization of school lockdown drills would generalize in the years that followed precisely as a response to Sandy Hook. In December 2012, each teacher improvised under the pressure of the minute. Soto hid some children in a built-in closet at the back of

the room, others in a storage cabinet. The closet was approximately half the size of an office closet; the children fit pressed together.

When Adam Lanza came through her classroom door, she told him her students were in the gymnasium. It was a deliberate lie, spoken aloud so the children hidden behind her could hear it and remain silent. He shot her. She died in her classroom. The students she had hidden in the closet survived. Some of those who had remained in the visible portion of the classroom did not.

Five of the children in Classroom 10 lost their lives — four were found dead in the classroom and a fifth was pronounced dead after being transported to Danbury Hospital, in conformity with the Final Report of the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission. Eleven survived: nine managed to escape from the classroom during the attack and two were found hidden in the adjacent bathroom. The survivors were too young to fully articulate what they had seen, and state investigators took their statements with the obligatory presence of forensic pediatric psychologists. The State's Attorney Report, in its sections concerning the testimony of minors, maintains the confidentiality of names in conformity with the procedural provisions applicable to victims and witnesses who are minors in criminal investigations of the State of Connecticut, and with the restrictive practice of the Office of the State's Attorney concerning the public disclosure of the identities of minors.

In Classroom 8, the substitute teacher Lauren Rousseau, thirty years old, was killed along with fifteen of her students. Only one girl survived in that room, playing dead among the bodies of her classmates. Her mother would later describe her daughter's return

home covered in the blood of other children as the beginning of a life that no family should have to traverse.

Anne Marie Murphy, special education teacher, was found covering with her body the six-year-old Dylan Hockley, son of Nicole Hockley — whose story will resurface in Chapter Four of this book as one of the central names of post-legislative advocacy. Dylan had been diagnosed on the autism spectrum. He was with Anne Marie because she was his individually assigned teacher. They died together.

THE DURATION

The full massacre lasted fewer than eleven minutes. Adam Lanza fired 154 rounds in that interval, in conformity with the forensic count of the State's Attorney. Twenty children between six and seven years of age were dead. Six adults were dead: Dawn Hochsprung, Mary Sherlach, Lauren Rousseau, Vicki Soto, Anne Marie Murphy, and Rachel D'Avino. Lanza killed himself with a shot to the head from one of the pistols as soon as he heard the first police sirens approaching. Officers found him in the hallway.

The massacre ended when Lanza killed himself, not when officers stopped him. This distinction will prove central in Chapter Two. No police protocol acted upon the perpetrator. The eleven minutes elapsed without external armed intervention. The protocol was the perpetrator's suicide.

All weapons used were legally purchased. Connecticut had no safe storage law in 2012. There was no federal safe storage law. Connecticut enacted one in April 2013, four months later; Public Act 13-3 introduced storage requirements, an expansion of the

state's assault weapons prohibition, and universal background checks for all sales within the state. Federal legislation on safe storage continued not to be enacted in the years that followed and, as of the close of the editorial process for this book, still does not exist.

The eleven minutes began long before 9:35 a.m. They began at the moment when the federal assault weapons legislation expired in September 2004. They began when Connecticut, the state of residence of Nancy Lanza, did not require safe storage. They began when the Bushmaster rifle was designed, manufactured, marketed, and distributed without legal restrictions sufficient to prevent its circulation into a household within whose jurisdiction resided a young man with documented difficulties. Each step was legal. Each step was the result of a specific political or legislative decision.

THE AFTERNOON

The parents of the children were summoned to the Sandy Hook Volunteer Fire Department, located one mile from the school. The procedure was improvised. The authorities had no protocol for informing twenty-six families simultaneously that their children would not be returning. Some parents found their children quickly among the survivors. Others waited for hours. Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman, alongside Governor Dannel Malloy, was eventually the one who had to officially confirm to the remaining families that no additional child had left the school alive. Final identification by the parents was carried out the following day, by means of forensic photographs, given the impossibility of exposing family members directly to the bodies.

Robbie Parker, father of six-year-old Emilie Parker, gave a public statement on the night of December 15. His statement, broadcast on national television, was subsequently the object of conspiracy theories that the radio commentator Alex Jones disseminated through his Infowars program for years, falsely maintaining that the massacre had been staged. In 2022, a Texas jury ordered Jones to pay 49.3 million dollars in compensatory and punitive damages to Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis, parents of Jesse Lewis. A second jury, in Connecticut, ordered him to pay an additional 965 million dollars to other families, including Robbie Parker. Jones declared bankruptcy; the families continue to litigate to make the judgments collectible.

The dissemination of the conspiracy theory, the anonymous threats the parents received over years, the harassment on social media, and the public confrontations: all of it forms part of the auxiliary record of Sandy Hook. It is not a secondary datum. It is one of the structural consequences of the combination of unregulated social media and the disposition of the authorities not to prosecute criminally the threats against persons who have lost a child. The Sandy Hook parents have litigated for a decade for the elementary right not to be harassed in their grief.

UVALDE, TEXAS — MAY 24, 2022

There were two days left to finish the school year. In Classrooms 111 and 112 of Robb Elementary School, the teachers Eva Mireles and Irma Garcia were finishing the kind of week that teachers remember: the calm one, when the children are already halfway into summer and parents have begun to buy swimwear for the season

at the Frio River in Garner State Park, the traditional family resort area of the county.

Irma Garcia had taught at Robb for twenty-three years. Her husband Joe drove her to the school at 7:15 a.m. and watched her enter through the main doors. It was a marital routine of more than two decades. They had four children. Eva Mireles had been teaching for seventeen years, all of them in Uvalde. Her husband, Ruben Ruiz, was an officer of the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District police department, the UCISD Police Department. He was the officer who held direct legal responsibility, in the active-shooter response chart, for the Robb Elementary building.

Nineteen children and two teachers from those classrooms would lose their lives that day. The names are: Makenna Lee Elrod, Layla Salazar, Maranda Mathis, Nevaeh Bravo, Jose Manuel Flores Jr., Xavier Lopez, Tess Marie Mata, Rojelio Torres, Eliahana Cruz Torres, Eliana "Ellie" Garcia, Annabell Guadalupe Rodriguez, Jackie Cazares, Uziyah Garcia, Jayce Carmelo Luevanos, Maite Yuleana Rodriguez, Jailah Nicole Silguero, Amerie Jo Garza, Alithia Ramirez, and Lexi Rubio.

Amerie Jo Garza had arrived at the school with her best friend Jackie Cazares. They had been inseparable since third grade. They did their homework together, slept at one another's houses on weekends, and attended the same catechism class. Their mothers organized turns driving the two to birthday parties. They died in adjacent classrooms separated by a partition wall.

Lexi Rubio, daughter of Kimberly Mata-Rubio and Felix Rubio, had received an honor roll certificate that same morning, at a

school ceremony her parents had attended. The family photograph, taken minutes before Lexi returned to her classroom, was published by her mother three weeks later in her testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, where she described the last image she had seen of her daughter alive.

THE PURCHASE

On May 16, 2022 — his eighteenth birthday — Salvador Ramos legally reached the age sufficient to purchase a semiautomatic rifle under federal law. The Gun Control Act of 1968, codified at 18 U.S.C. § 922(b)(1), establishes the federal minimum age for the purchase of long guns from licensed dealers at eighteen years. The age for the purchase of handguns, under the same section, is twenty-one years. Ramos was not legally old enough to purchase a handgun for three more years. He could legally purchase any semiautomatic rifle.

On May 18, two days after his birthday, he entered Oasis Outback, a licensed dealer in Uvalde. He purchased a Daniel Defense DDM4 V7 rifle of 5.56-millimeter caliber, a civilian variant of the combat rifle used by the United States Armed Forces. The price was approximately 2,054 dollars. The instant background check — the NICS procedure administered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation — returned an approval. Ramos had no adult criminal record. There was no record of any mental health adjudication. There was no protective order. There was none of the nine federal disqualifications codified at 18 U.S.C. § 922(g).

On May 20, he returned to the same establishment and purchased a second rifle, a Smith & Wesson M&P15, essentially equivalent to the first. He purchased seven thirty-round magazines and 1,657

rounds of 5.56-caliber ammunition. All of it was legal. No waiting period was required. Texas does not have a waiting period. Federal law does not impose a waiting period for most firearms purchases.

The Report of the Texas House of Representatives Investigative Committee on the Robb Elementary School attack, published on July 17, 2022, documents the chronology of the purchases with forensic precision. The report records that the Oasis Outback establishment followed all applicable legal procedures and that its employees perceived the buyer as unusually young but not as suspicious. The transaction complied with every requirement that the law imposed. That is precisely the problem this book identifies.

THE MORNING OF THE 24TH

On the morning of May 24, Ramos shot his grandmother in her home. She survived, gravely wounded. She called for help. Ramos took her pickup truck and drove toward Robb Elementary School. On the way, he lost control of the vehicle and crashed it into a ditch on an avenue adjacent to the school building. He exited the vehicle armed. Personnel from a nearby funeral saw him. They called 911. Ramos fired toward them before heading to the school.

A staff member of the Uvalde school district, identified in the Department of Justice report as UCISD Staff 1, saw the scene from inside the building. She was on the telephone with 911 reporting the vehicle accident when she saw the gunfire. She reentered the building to initiate the lockdown procedure. She closed the exterior door through which she had entered. The door was supposed to lock automatically when closed, in conformity with district protocol. It did not lock. The door was not physically locked when Ramos arrived.

PARKLAND, FLORIDA — FEBRUARY 14, 2018

It was Valentine's Day, and the hallways of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School smelled of carnations. Students had been selling them as a fundraiser. The flowers were delivered in class to chosen recipients: friends, partners, siblings. It was an annual tradition of the school.

David Hogg was in the school television studio recording a segment for the student newspaper. He would become, in the months that followed, one of the most recognizable faces of American youth activism. Emma González was in the auditorium. Jaime Guttenberg, fourteen, had a carnation to deliver. Joaquin Oliver, seventeen, was in literature class.

Five miles away, Nikolas Cruz, nineteen years old, told the man with whom he lived — Cruz's adoptive parents had died and the Sneed family had taken him in — that he was not going to school on Valentine's Day. Instead, he called an Uber. He had purchased an AR-15-style rifle approximately one year earlier — on February 11, 2017, at the age of eighteen — at a local gun shop, legally, with no waiting period, and a background check approved. The shop was Sunrise Tactical Supply, of Coral Springs.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation had received two warnings about Cruz in the months prior to the attack. The first, in September 2017, alerted to a YouTube comment bearing his name in which a sentence was read declaring explicit intentions to become a school shooter. The second, in January 2018, was a call from a relative of Cruz to the FBI Public Access Line in which his access to weapons, his erratic behavior, and the concrete possibility that he might perpetrate a school shooting were reported. Both

warnings were registered. Neither was investigated in the field. The FBI acknowledged this publicly in its Parkland Investigation Timeline, formally published in February 2018 and updated in 2022.

At 2:21 p.m., Cruz exited the Uber in front of Building 12. He carried the rifle disassembled in a case. A campus monitor, Andrew Medina, saw him and recognized him: Cruz had been expelled from the school a year earlier. Medina did not activate a Code Red. The subsequent justification, in testimony before the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission, was that he did not want to trigger a lockdown protocol over a false alarm.

Cruz was halfway through his six-minute attack before anyone activated the Code Red. Fourteen students and three adults were killed. Seventeen more were wounded. Jaime Guttenberg was shot while running. She was fourteen years old. Her father Fred Guttenberg would become one of the most vocal activists of the gun violence prevention movement and would testify in the Senate during the confirmation hearings of Justice Brett Kavanaugh, offering him a handshake that the nominee declined in front of the cameras.

The Minutes

"Stay quiet, make sure everybody stays quiet."

— 911 dispatcher to Khloie Torres, age 10, Classroom
112, Robb Elementary School, 12:10 p.m., May 24,
2022

NEWTOWN — 9:35 A.M.: ELEVEN MINUTES

The Sandy Hook attack lasted fewer than eleven minutes. Adam Lanza fired 154 rounds, killed twenty children and six adults, and ended the lives of teachers who ran toward him rather than away. Principal Hochsprung and psychologist Sherlach ran toward the gunfire. Six-year-old Jesse Lewis shouted at his classmates to run. He was killed looking at the gunman. The massacre ended when Lanza killed himself, not when officers stopped him.

What no school lockdown drill could address: the weapons Adam Lanza used were in his home, legally owned, legally stored, legally accessible. The eleven minutes began long before 9:35 a.m.

The minute-by-minute chronology, reconstructed by investigators of the Connecticut State's Attorney from the 911 recordings, the school surveillance cameras, and the testimony of the survivors, was published in the Report of November 25, 2013. The simplified table is the following. At 9:35:39 a.m., Lanza fires through the glass panel of the main entrance. At 9:35:50 a.m., he enters the building. At 9:36 a.m., he encounters Hochsprung, Sherlach, and Hammond in the hallway and opens fire. At 9:36:30 a.m., he enters Classroom 8 and attacks Lauren Rousseau and her students. At 9:38 a.m., he enters Classroom 10. At 9:40 a.m., the custodian unlocks the office and calls 911. At 9:46 a.m., Lanza commits suicide. Police breach the building at 9:46:48 a.m. The total duration between the first

shot at the entrance and the perpetrator's suicide is approximately eleven minutes.

Connecticut implemented substantial legislative changes following Sandy Hook. Public Act 13-3, enacted on April 4, 2013, and signed the same day by Governor Dannel Malloy, expanded the list of prohibited semiautomatic weapons, prohibited magazines with a capacity of more than ten rounds, instituted a registration system for legally pre-existing magazines, required permits for all long-gun purchases, mandated universal background checks for all legal weapons transfers within the state, and created the first state registry of dangerous offenders for firearm possession. The act also introduced safe storage requirements when minors were present in the home. The constitutionality of the act was challenged in *Shew v. Malloy* and was upheld by the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in 2015. The Supreme Court of the United States declined to hear the case.

UVALDE — 11:33 A.M. TO 12:50 P.M.: SEVENTY-SEVEN MINUTES

The shooting itself lasted approximately three minutes. The remaining seventy-four minutes were something else entirely. The distinction is important because the ALERRT doctrine — the nationally recognized protocol in the United States for police response to active shooters — establishes as an absolute priority immediate entry to the location of the shooting, even under conditions of tactical inferiority. The doctrine, developed after the Columbine massacre in 1999, holds that each minute of delay between the first shot and contact with the perpetrator increases

exponentially the probability of fatalities. The Uvalde officers had received ALERRT training.

At 11:33 a.m., Ramos entered through a door that had been propped open and then kicked shut but not locked. He fired more than one hundred rounds in the first minutes. He killed Eva Mireles, Irma Garcia, and most of the nineteen students who would lose their lives that day in Classrooms 111 and 112. The two classrooms were connected by an interior door; Ramos passed from one to the other and back. Three UCISD officers entered the school immediately afterward, were fired upon from inside Classroom 111, sustained light wounds, and withdrew to the hallway. After that, the gunfire from inside the classrooms largely ceased. Ramos was waiting.

The children were still alive. Miah Cerrillo, eleven years old, covered herself in the blood of a classmate fallen beside her and feigned being dead. She took the cellular telephone of her deceased teacher and called 911. The recording of that call has been partially made public in conformity with public information requests submitted by journalistic organizations following the incident. Eva Mireles, wounded but still alive, called her husband Ruben Ruiz on the telephone — the officer who was in the hallway outside — to tell him she was dying. He attempted to enter. Other officers physically held him back.

At 11:48 a.m. — fifteen minutes after the shooting began — a law enforcement officer was physically prevented from going to his dying wife twenty feet away. The scene was filmed by the body cameras of several officers present, whose recordings were eventually published following litigation under the Texas Public

Information Act. Outside, a mother, Angeli Rose Gomez, was handcuffed for trying to enter the school to save her two children. She was subsequently released. She picked up her children and removed them through a window. Both survived. Her action provoked formal complaints from the local police chief. A father, Felipe Castaneda, was handcuffed under similar circumstances. Press coverage of the case was extensive.

THE FIGURE OF 376

In conformity with the Report of the Texas House of Representatives Investigative Committee, 376 law enforcement officers were positioned around a building in which children were alive and calling 911. The disaggregated figure is the following. 149 belonged to the United States Border Patrol. 91 to the Texas Department of Public Safety. 25 to the Uvalde Police Department. 16 to the SWAT unit of the San Antonio Police Department. 16 to the Uvalde County Sheriff's Office. The remainder corresponded to smaller units of adjacent jurisdictions, federal agents of the FBI, agents of the U.S. Marshals Service, and, toward the end of the incident, agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

The door was not locked. No one opened it.

At 12:10 p.m., Khloie Torres, ten years old, called 911 from Classroom 112, identifying her location to the operator with the phrase that subsequent journalistic coverage has reproduced: I am in classroom 112. Please hurry. There is a lot of dead bodies. Khloie asked the dispatcher to send help. The operator instructed her to remain silent and to keep her classmates silent. She remained on the line for more than seventeen minutes. The operator transmitted

by radio to the officers present the information about the live victim, the presence of bodies, and the specific identification of the classroom. The officers received the transmission. They remained in the hallway. Approximately twenty feet away. Without opening the door.

In conformity with the Critical Incident Review Report of the Department of Justice of the United States, published on January 18, 2024, the door of the classroom had not been locked at any moment during the seventy-seven minutes. No officer had tested the handle. The officers in the hallway believed the door was locked and devoted time to searching for the custodian's key rather than testing the handle. The Department of Justice report identifies this decision as one of the breakpoints in the chain of failures that led to the outcome.

At 12:50 p.m., a BORTAC tactical team of the Border Patrol used the custodian's key to open the door and killed Ramos. Seventy-seven minutes had elapsed since the first shot.

Eva Mireles died in Classroom 111. Joe Garcia, the husband of Irma, died of a heart attack two days later. The death certificate cites acute cardiac cause. Press coverage cited the family describing the death as a death from grief. Their four children buried both parents in the same week. The eldest son, Cristian, a twenty-three-year-old Marine reservist newly graduated from basic training, assumed a central role in the care of his younger siblings: Jose, a student at Texas State University; Lyliana, a sophomore in high school; and Alysandra, a seventh-grader.

THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE REPORT AND THE CASCADING FAILURES

On January 18, 2024, the Attorney General of the United States Merrick B. Garland presented the Critical Incident Review Report of the Department of Justice, a 575-page document prepared by the DOJ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services over the course of twenty months. The report had been requested by Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin a few days after the attack and constitutes, as of the time of writing of this book, the most exhaustive and officially sanctioned examination of what happened at Robb Elementary.

The language of the report is unsparing. It identifies cascading failures of leadership, decisionmaking, tactics, policy, and training that together contributed to a failed police response. It identifies Chief Pete Arredondo, of the UCISD Police Department, as the de facto incident commander and concludes that he did not provide appropriate leadership, command, and control. It establishes that thirty-three students and three teachers, many of them wounded, were trapped in a room with an active shooter for more than an hour while officers remained outside.

Attorney General Garland declared publicly, when presenting the report, that the victims and survivors deserved better and that the police response was a failure. The declaration was broadcast on national television. Associate Deputy Attorney General Vanita Gupta, present at the press conference, had traveled to Uvalde months earlier to meet with the families and committed personally that the report would be detailed, independent, and authoritative.

The recommendations of the report extend across more than two hundred pages. They cover leadership, incident command, operational tactics, communications, trauma services, support to victims and families, school safety, and pre-incident planning. It is essentially a manual for active-shooter response derived from the analysis of what was not done in Uvalde.

The county district attorney, Christina Mitchell, announced in March 2024 a criminal investigation of the police failures. In June 2024, a Uvalde grand jury formally indicted former Chief Arredondo and former Officer Adrian Gonzales on multiple counts of child endangerment. The criminal proceedings continue as of the close of the editorial process for this book. It is the first time in American history that law enforcement officers have been criminally charged for their response to a mass school shooting.

PARKLAND — 2:21 P.M.: SIX MINUTES AND TWENTY SECONDS

Cruz killed fourteen students and three staff members in six minutes and twenty seconds. The chronology was reconstructed by the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission, created by the Florida legislature following the attack, and published in its Final Report in January 2019.

Scott Beigel, thirty-five years old, geography teacher and cross-country coach, unlocked his classroom during the attack so that fleeing students could shelter inside. He was shot closing the door. Investigators estimated that he saved thirty-one lives. Aaron Feis, thirty-seven years old, the assistant football coach, threw himself in front of students to shield them physically. He received several fatal shots.

Cruz was arrested without incident ninety minutes later on a residential street in Coral Springs, where he blended in among the fleeing students. The seventeen people he had killed were not alive. The Commission documented that the school resource officer Scot Peterson, assigned to the building, did not enter during the attack. He remained outside for approximately forty-five minutes. He was criminally charged in 2019 with neglect in the care of minors. In June 2023, a Florida jury acquitted him of all charges. His acquittal generated significant controversy among the families of the victims and raised the same questions about individual police responsibility that would resurface in the indictments of Arredondo and Gonzales in Uvalde.

WHAT THE MINUTES REVEAL

The three attacks that structure this chapter — Sandy Hook, Uvalde, Parkland — share a temporal architecture that warrants systematic attention. In each case, the duration of the shooting itself was brief: eleven, three, and six minutes respectively. In each case, the absence or delay of effective police intervention was significant: the perpetrator at Sandy Hook killed himself before police contact; in Uvalde, officers waited seventy-seven minutes; in Parkland, the assigned officer remained outside for the entire attack.

These three patterns are not aberrations. They are reproduced configurations. The ALERRT doctrine prescribes the opposite; the three responses deviated from it. The official reports — that of the Connecticut State's Attorney, that of the Texas House Investigative Committee, that of the Department of Justice, that of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Commission — have documented the

deviations with a level of detail sufficient to construct a systematic critique of American police training. That critique, however, is not the principal object of this book. This book maintains that even if the police response had been optimal in each case, the prior legislative question — how and why the perpetrators legally accessed the weapons they used — would have persisted unaltered.

The minutes matter. It matters how long each shooting lasted, how many shots were fired per minute, how many magazines were used, how long the officers took to arrive and to enter. But the minutes are the consequence of decisions taken much earlier. The legislative decisions that put the rifles used into legal circulation were taken in Congress. The record of those decisions is the content of the following chapter.

Expanded Reading: Biographies of the Victims and the Teachers

THE BIOGRAPHIES OF THE SANDY HOOK TEACHERS

Each of the six adults killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012, had arrived at teaching or school administration through specific trajectories. Recovering those trajectories matters for the same methodological reason that reciting the names matters: to convert the statistical aggregate of six into six persons with individual biographies. Statistics depersonalize. Biography individualizes.

Dawn Hochsprung, principal, was forty-seven years old. She had grown up in Naugatuck, Connecticut, had obtained her bachelor's degree in special education at Central Connecticut State University, and subsequently her master's degree in education at Southern Connecticut State University. At the time of the attack she was pursuing doctoral studies in the Educational Leadership program of the Esteves School of Education at Russell Sage College. She had been principal at Sandy Hook for two years after serving as principal at other schools in the regional district. Her husband George Hochsprung would later describe, in interviews with the Hartford Courant, the specific passion she had for elementary education and for the professional development of beginning teachers. Hochsprung had personally championed the automatic door-locking system installed at the school months before the attack. She died running toward the gunfire.

Mary Sherlach, school psychologist, was fifty-six years old. She had been the district psychologist for eighteen years. She had obtained

her bachelor's degree in psychology at the State University of New York College at Cortland and her master's degree at Southern Connecticut State University. Her husband Bill Sherlach would describe her passion for her work and her practice of arriving at the school hours before the start of classes to prepare materials for students with special needs. Sherlach became one of the plaintiffs in *Soto v. Bushmaster*, where she gave public interviews during the discovery phase. She died running toward the gunfire alongside Hochsprung.

Lauren Rousseau, substitute teacher in Classroom 8, was thirty years old. She had been hired as a full-time teacher only a few months earlier after years of working as a substitute in various districts of Fairfield County. She was a graduate of the University of Connecticut. Her mother Teresa Rousseau, a local news journalist in Danbury, had previously written columns about the difficulty of obtaining permanent employment as a teacher in the Connecticut school system. Lauren had arrived at the position in Sandy Hook as one of the most coveted appointments of her career. She had been employed for four months when she died. Her boyfriend Anthony Wagner had planned to propose to her at Christmas. Fifteen of the sixteen children in Classroom 8 died alongside her. Only one girl survived, playing dead among the bodies.

Anne Marie Murphy, special education teacher, was fifty-two years old. She was the mother of four children. She was a graduate of Southern Connecticut State University with a master's degree in education. She worked in the district as a specialized teacher and maintained with Dylan Hockley, the child on the autism spectrum from Classroom 10, a relationship of individualized tutoring. She

died covering him with her body. State investigators identified her remains in that position. Her action was not the product of protocol. It was a personal decision of instinct.

Rachel D'Avino, educational assistant to Vicki Soto, was twenty-nine years old. She was a specialist in applied behavior analysis, a specific educational methodology for students on the autism spectrum. She had a marriage engagement that would have been formalized months later. She had been working at Sandy Hook for one week before the attack. Her boyfriend Anthony Cerritelli would buy a ring in the days that followed; he never had the opportunity to propose to her formally.

THE BIOGRAPHIES OF THE CHILDREN

Each of the twenty children killed at Sandy Hook was six or seven years old. The names, in alphabetical order, are: Charlotte Bacon, Daniel Barden, Olivia Engel, Josephine Gay, Ana Márquez-Greene, Dylan Hockley, Madeleine Hsu, Catherine Hubbard, Chase Kowalski, Jesse Lewis, James Mattioli, Grace McDonnell, Emilie Parker, Jack Pinto, Noah Pozner, Caroline Previdi, Jessica Rekos, Avielle Richman, Benjamin Wheeler, and Allison Wyatt. The recitation is important. It is the first available evidence.

Charlotte Bacon was six years old. She loved the color pink. She had begged her mother Joanne to wear her new pink dress on Friday the 14th rather than the following Monday, the day on which it had been originally planned. Her mother relented. Charlotte wore the pink dress on the day she died.

Daniel Barden was seven years old. He was the youngest son of Mark and Jackie Barden. Mark Barden, his father, was a

professional musician who played the double bass. Daniel was left-handed. He was especially kind to his older siblings and to his cat. Mark Barden would cofound Sandy Hook Promise with Nicole Hockley in the months that followed and his transformation from professional musician to full-time legislative advocate is one of the trajectories documented in this book.

Olivia Engel was six years old. She wanted to be a painter. She had offered her mother Shannon to say grace at dinner the previous night. Her mother permitted it. Olivia thanked her family, God, and Ms. Soto. She died the following day.

Josephine Gay had turned seven on the Monday before the attack. Her family had celebrated a party on Saturday, December 8. Her mother Michele Gay had decorated the house with yellow balloons — Josephine's favorite color. Some of the balloons were still present on Friday the 14th when Josephine's parents received the call.

Ana Márquez-Greene was six years old. Her father Jimmy Greene was a jazz musician and professor at the University of Connecticut. Ana sang frequently. Her version of "Come, Thou Almighty King" had been recorded by her father months before the attack and was made public following her death as part of the testimonies of the families.

Dylan Hockley was six years old. He had arrived in Connecticut with his family from England two years earlier. He was on the autism spectrum. His special education teacher Anne Marie Murphy covered him with her body when the gunfire began. His mother Nicole Hockley would become a cofounder of Sandy Hook Promise.

Madeleine Hsu was six years old. Her family was of Taiwanese origin. Madeleine had recently learned to read in English and in Mandarin. Her parents kept her children's library intact for years afterward.

Catherine Hubbard was six years old. She had asked her parents to take charge, on her behalf, of the animal sanctuary that Catherine had declared she wanted to establish when she grew up. Her parents Jenny and Matthew Hubbard founded the Catherine Violet Hubbard Animal Sanctuary in Newtown, which operates as of the close of the editorial process for this book and receives public donations in her name.

Chase Kowalski was seven years old. He was athletic. He had completed his first children's triathlon six months before the attack. His parents established the Chase Michael Anthony Kowalski Memorial Foundation, which supports children's exercise programs in Connecticut.

Jesse Lewis was six years old. He had been in Classroom 10 with Ms. Soto. When the gunfire began, Jesse shouted at his classmates to run. He died looking at the gunman. His mother Scarlett Lewis founded the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, which has developed a social and emotional education curriculum implemented in schools across the United States.

James Mattioli was six years old. He was the youngest son of Cindy and Mark Mattioli. He was an enthusiastic singer. His mother later described his voice, his tendency to sing at any moment, his specific passion for Broadway songs.

Grace McDonnell was seven years old. She was an artist. She had painted a self-portrait weeks before the attack. The family conserves the painting. Her father Chris McDonnell has spoken at multiple gun violence prevention events.

Emilie Parker was six years old. Daughter of Robbie and Alissa Parker. Robbie Parker delivered the first public statement of a Sandy Hook father, on the night of December 15. His statement, broadcast on national television, was subsequently the object of conspiracy theories that the radio commentator Alex Jones disseminated through his Infowars program. Robbie Parker was one of the plaintiffs against Jones. The 2022 judgment awarded him a portion of the 49.3 million dollars Jones was ordered to pay.

Jack Pinto was six years old. He was an admirer of the wide receiver Victor Cruz, of the New York Giants. Jack was carrying a Cruz jersey when he died. His mother Tricia Pinto chose to bury him with the jersey. Cruz, upon learning of the fact, traveled to Newtown, met the family, and maintained a public relationship with them.

Noah Pozner was six years old. He was the youngest of the Pozner twins — his twin sister Arielle was in another classroom that day and survived. His mother Veronique Pozner, a dentist by profession, decided to keep the casket open during Noah's funeral. Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy and Veronique Pozner spoke before the funeral; she told him, as was published subsequently in biographical profiles, that the casket should remain open so that the attack would not be sanitized.

Caroline Previdi was six years old. She lived in Newtown with her parents. She had declared to her parents weeks before the attack

that she wanted to be a good person when she grew up. Her parents Jeff and Sandy Previdi created a foundation in her name.

Jessica Rekos was six years old. She wanted to be a marine biologist. Her specific passion was orcas. She had asked her parents for her seventh birthday — which would have been on June 4, 2013 — for a trip to SeaWorld San Diego. Her parents made the trip with her younger brother on the original date.

Avielle Richman was six years old. Her parents Jennifer Hensel and Jeremy Richman were academics. Jeremy Richman, a neuroscientist, founded the Avielle Foundation, dedicated to the study of the brain factors that lead to violence. In March 2019, six years after Avielle's death, Jeremy Richman took his own life. His death is identified clinically as a complication of prolonged grief.

Benjamin Wheeler was six years old. His father David Wheeler became one of the plaintiffs against Bushmaster. His older brother Nate, nine years old, survived in another classroom.

Allison Wyatt was six years old. She was kind and shy. Her mother Beth Wyatt described her readiness to share snacks with classmates who had forgotten theirs.

Each of these biographies is necessarily truncated. Each had a trajectory that was interrupted. The interruption is the content of the book. The institutional continuity — of the legal regime that permitted the deaths — is what the book examines.

EMILIE PARKER'S FATHER AND THE CONSPIRACY THEORY

On the night of December 15, 2012, Robbie Parker presented himself at an improvised press conference in Newtown. It was the first public statement of a Sandy Hook father following the attack. His statement lasted approximately five minutes. He spoke of Emilie with specificity: of the color pink she preferred, of her artistic tendency, of her affection for her younger sister Madeline. He mentioned forgiveness in his voice. The coverage of the press conference was immediate and national.

The radio commentator Alex Jones, host of the Infowars program from Austin, Texas, began hours later to disseminate, through his program and his websites, the claim that Parker's statement was theatrical, that Parker was a crisis actor, and that Sandy Hook was a federal staging designed to promote firearms legislation. The claim was false. Subsequent journalistic coverage documented this in full. But the claim had an audience. Infowars had approximately fifty million monthly visits at its peak in the 2010s.

The consequences for the Sandy Hook families accumulated in the years that followed. Robbie and Alissa Parker received death threats. There were people who arrived in Newtown to confront the families physically. Photographs of Emilie were published with annotations suggesting she was a real child adopted to substitute for a fictitious dead daughter — the claims had no basis in fact. Some families moved away from Newtown to escape the harassment. Others installed home security systems.

The lawsuits filed by the families against Jones converged in two states. In Texas, a jury ordered him in August 2022 to pay 49.3

million dollars in compensatory and punitive damages to Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis, parents of Jesse Lewis. In Connecticut, a jury ordered him in October 2022 to pay 965 million dollars in damages to families including Robbie Parker, Mark Barden, Nicole Hockley, and others. The combined figure exceeded 1.4 billion dollars.

Jones declared personal bankruptcy in December 2022 and the organization Free Speech Systems, owner of Infowars, declared bankruptcy in July 2022. The bankruptcy proceedings have extended over years. The families have litigated to make the judgments collectible. A modest portion of the damages has been recovered as of the close of the editorial process for this book.

The litigation against Jones is, in doctrinal terms, distinct from the litigation against firearms manufacturers. Jones disseminated defamatory claims and was held liable under the defamation law of Texas and Connecticut. The firearms industry is not legally or morally defensible by the same arguments that protect Jones. But the case illustrates a dimension of the phenomenon that the book will address in subsequent chapters: the secondary effects of conspiratorial activism on the families of victims, its capacity to deform public debate, and the insufficiency of American civil law to provide timely protection to victims of mass defamation.

Robbie Parker eventually moved with his family from Connecticut to Washington to escape partially the sustained harassment. Emilie Parker would today be completing university studies. The duration of the injury is not measured in the short term. It is measured in the permanent transformation of the lives of those who suffered it.

CHAPTER TWO

The Minutes

"There's a school shooting."

— Khloie Torres, age 10, to the 911 dispatcher,
Classroom 112, Robb Elementary School, May 24,
2022

THE 911 RECORDINGS FROM UVALDE

The Critical Incident Review Report of the Department of Justice, published on January 18, 2024, devotes more than forty pages to the transcription and the analysis of the 911 communications during the seventy-seven minutes at Robb Elementary. The record is one of the most harrowing documents that the federal government of the United States has ever produced regarding an event of armed violence. Its value is not stylistic. It is evidentiary. It establishes, with timestamps and identification of the interlocutors, what the officers knew at each minute and what they decided to do in response to that information.

At 12:03 p.m., a ten-year-old girl whose name the Department of Justice report omits for confidentiality called 911 from Classroom 112. The operator of the Uvalde dispatch center, identified in the report as Dispatcher 2, received the call. The girl spoke in whispers. She reported that there were children and teachers wounded and dead. She asked for help. The operator instructed her to remain silent and to stay on the line. The girl remained. She spoke intermittently for seventeen minutes. The operator transmitted by radio on multiple occasions to the officers on site that there was a

girl alive in Classroom 112, that there were wounded, that the situation was active.

At 12:10 p.m., Khloie Torres, also ten years old, called from Classroom 112, where she found herself with several surviving classmates. The recording of her call has been partially published with family authorization. Khloie reported to the 911 operator: I am in classroom 112. Please hurry. There is a lot of dead bodies. The dispatch records indicate that Khloie reported the number of victims, identified the classroom, and requested immediate intervention. The operator asked her if officers were present. Khloie answered that she heard voices in the hallway but that no one had entered. The operator confirmed by radio to the officers present the exact location of the classroom and the presence of live victims. The transmission was received by the incident command.

At 12:16 p.m., a 911 center operator transmitted to the officers that there were eight or nine children alive inside the classroom. The transmission is recorded in the official records and was reproduced during the hearings of the Texas House of Representatives Investigative Committee. At 12:21 p.m., gunfire resumed inside the classroom. At 12:36 p.m., Khloie Torres called a second time. At 12:43 p.m., a third call. At 12:47 p.m., a fourth. The gunfire continued intermittently.

The Department of Justice report identifies the central problem of the 911 communications as a problem of the chain of information, not of the information itself. The information reached the dispatch center. The dispatch center transmitted it by radio. The officers received it. The chain broke at the point of tactical decisionmaking. The de facto incident command, exercised by Chief Pete

Arredondo, did not act upon that information. He characterized it, in conformity with the testimony gathered by the Department of Justice investigators, as a barricaded hostage event and not as an active shooter event. This characterization contradicted the ALERRT doctrine and contradicted the operational information available in real time.

THE ALERRT DOCTRINE AND ITS FAILURE

The Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center, ALERRT, was established at Texas State University in San Marcos in 2002 in response to the Columbine massacre of 1999. Its doctrine was recognized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 2013 as the national standard for police response to active shooters in the United States. The doctrine is taught in state police academies, municipal departments, and federal agencies. More than 130,000 officers have received ALERRT training since its creation.

The ALERRT doctrine establishes specific operational principles. First: immediate entry to the location of the shooting, without waiting for reinforcements, tactical teams, or formal incident command, when ongoing gunfire is heard or there is reasonable indication of live victims. Second: the absolute priority of stopping the gunfire over any other tactical consideration, including the personal safety of the officer. Third: the operational differentiation between the active shooter scenario — in which the priority is to contact and neutralize the perpetrator — and the barricaded hostage scenario — in which the priority is negotiation and containment. The transition from one scenario to the other requires a sustained cessation of gunfire and the confirmation that

the perpetrator has established demands or has ceased the attack on the present victims.

At Robb Elementary, none of these conditions was met. Gunfire continued intermittently throughout the entire seventy-seven-minute period. Live victims requested help repeatedly by telephone. The perpetrator did not establish demands. No negotiation took place. The characterization as a barricade event was, according to the Department of Justice analysis, incorrect in operational terms and contradictory with the available information.

The officers in the hallway were not individually responsible for the decision, in conformity with the analysis of the report. The doctrine of incident command establishes that subordinate officers execute the decisions of the designated incident commander. The problem in Uvalde was that no formal commander assumed the role with the correct information. Chief Arredondo, subsequently identified as de facto commander, has maintained in his public statements that he did not consider himself to be in that role that morning. Other senior officers present — from the Texas Department of Public Safety, the Border Patrol, the County Sheriff's Office — also did not formally assume command. The result was a command vacuum with nearly four hundred officers present and live victims twenty feet away.

THE TESTIMONY OF MIAH CERRILLO BEFORE CONGRESS

On June 8, 2022, two weeks after the attack, Miah Cerrillo, eleven years old, testified before the Committee on Oversight and Reform of the United States House of Representatives. Her testimony was delivered by prerecorded video, in conformity with the provisions

for the protection of minor witnesses. She spoke briefly. She described having covered herself with the blood of a deceased classmate to feign her own death. She described having taken the telephone of teacher Mireles to call 911. She described having heard the gunfire cease and resume. She described having waited.

The transcript of Miah Cerrillo's testimony is part of the official record of Congress. It is one of the youngest statements of an eyewitness to armed violence in the legislative history of the United States. Following her testimony, her father, Miguel Cerrillo, declared before the committee that his daughter was no longer the same girl. The intervention was brief. His words — initially pronounced in Spanish and translated for the record — constitute, in their brevity, one of the most sustained accusations that Congress has ever received concerning the consequences of legislative inaction.

Kimberly Mata-Rubio, mother of Lexi Rubio, testified at the same session. The photograph she displayed — of the family minutes before Lexi returned to her classroom following the morning honor roll ceremony — is the last living image of her daughter. The Rubio family had arrived at the school in the morning for that ceremony. Lexi received a certificate for good conduct and academic excellence. Her parents returned to their respective workplaces. Her mother returned to the local Uvalde newspaper, where she worked as a reporter. She received the news of the shooting at 11:38 a.m. and drove back to the school. She identified her daughter the following day.

THE TEXAS LEGISLATIVE RESPONSE

Texas enacted limited legislative changes following Uvalde. Texas House Bill 3 of the 88th legislative session, approved in June 2023, required each school district to have at least one armed officer on each campus, allocated additional funds for school security, and modified incident reporting requirements. The act did not include modifications to the laws governing weapons acquisition. The minimum age to purchase a semiautomatic rifle in Texas remains eighteen years, in conformity with the federal standard codified at 18 U.S.C. § 922(b)(1). Texas did not pass red flag legislation. Texas did not pass universal background checks. Texas did not pass a waiting period. Texas maintains one of the most permissive jurisdictions for the legal acquisition of weapons in the United States, in conformity with the classifications of the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence and the Brady Center.

Governor Greg Abbott convened special sessions of the Texas Legislature in August and September 2022 to consider additional legislation on school safety. Raising the minimum age for the purchase of rifles to twenty-one years was proposed by families of the victims and by bipartisan organizations. The proposal did not advance in committee. The Texas House of Representatives Select Committee on the Robb Elementary massacre recommended, in its July 2022 report, modifications to the safe storage laws and to the police response protocol but not to the laws governing weapons acquisition. The recommendation to raise the minimum age was presented separately by families of the victims during hearings at the State Capitol. The measure was shelved.

The contrast with Connecticut is illustrative. Connecticut, after Sandy Hook, passed Public Act 13-3 within four months of the attack. The act was processed in a bipartisan session of the Connecticut General Assembly, voted on favorably with significant Democratic and Republican support, and signed by Governor Dannel Malloy. Texas, after Uvalde, did not pass equivalent legislation. The difference between the two responses is not one of relative speed. It is one of regulatory orientation. Connecticut expanded the restrictions on acquisition and possession. Texas expanded the armed presence in the schools and increased the funds for security without modifying the legal availability of the causal armament.

This regulatory divergence between states — which results from the federal constitutional design of the United States, in which police powers reside primarily in the states — explains why the national debate on weapons tends to focus on federal legislation. State action can mitigate but cannot eliminate the problem when weapons circulate across state borders with relative ease. The traceability of weapons used in crimes by state of origin, recorded by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives through the eTrace program, documents this flow. A significant proportion of weapons recovered at crime scenes in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and California was originally acquired in Florida, Georgia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Texas. The eTrace data are public and published annually by the ATF.

THE TEXAS WHITE PAPER AND THE INITIAL DISINFORMATION

In the first seventy-two hours after the attack of May 24, the public statements of the Texas Department of Public Safety and of UCISD officials presented a version of the events that would be refuted by the subsequent investigations. The director of the Texas DPS, Steven McCraw, initially affirmed that an officer had confronted Ramos outside before his entry to the building. The affirmation was incorrect. No officer confronted Ramos before his entry. McCraw retracted the affirmation at a press conference on May 27. The retraction was accompanied by the phrase, subsequently cited in national coverage, that the decision not to enter Classroom 111 was the wrong decision.

This public retraction was unusual in American police practice. McCraw's declaration — the highest-ranking state law enforcement officer on site — established the institutional acknowledgment of the failure before the formal investigations had concluded. His declaration did not produce immediate consequences in terms of personal accountability but established a framework of public acceptance of the failure that the subsequent investigations would ratify with additional detail.

The Texas House of Representatives Investigative Committee, presided over by State Representative Dustin Burrows, was created by resolution of the House on May 31 and presented its hundred-page report on July 17, 2022. The report documented the pattern of failures before and during the attack. It identified the presence of behavioral and mental health problems documented in Ramos over years, without any formal intervention having taken place. It identified the failure of the locked exterior door. It identified the

absence of incident command. It identified the noncompliance with the ALERRT doctrine. The report was drafted by a bipartisan commission; its recommendations were signed by representatives of both parties.

The Texan reports, however, are institutionally subordinate to the federal Department of Justice report for two reasons. The first, of jurisdiction: the Department of Justice is the federal authority with competence to investigate and publish critical incident review reports at the national level, and its reports are the authoritative source for the formation of public safety doctrine in other jurisdictions. The second, of exhaustiveness: the Department of Justice report is 575 pages, encompasses twenty months of investigation, and rests on interviews with 260 direct witnesses, review of more than 14,000 documentary pieces, and a frame-by-frame reconstruction of the body camera and dispatch camera recordings. It is, to date, the most extensive federal report ever published on a single mass school shooting incident in the United States.

PARKLAND — THE LESSONS NOT LEARNED

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission, created by the Florida Legislature following the attack of February 14, 2018, published its Final Report in January 2019. The commission was directed by the Sheriff of Pinellas County, Bob Gualtieri, and its report constitutes the documentary primary source of greatest exhaustiveness on the events of that day. The report identifies cascading failures similar to those that the Department of Justice would subsequently identify at Uvalde: absence of immediate response by the officer assigned to the

building, delays in the activation of the Code Red, lack of coordination between the local police department and the school resource officer, and absence of clear communication protocols with the external authorities.

A specific recommendation of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas report was subsequently codified in Florida legislation. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Act, approved by the Florida Legislature and signed by Governor Rick Scott on March 9, 2018 — less than a month after the attack — raised the minimum age to purchase rifles to twenty-one years in Florida. The act also introduced a three-day waiting period for the purchase of long guns, prohibited the bump stock device, and authorized risk protection orders — the Floridian equivalent of red flag legislation. The act was challenged by the National Rifle Association immediately after its enactment. The challenge, *NRA v. Bondi*, was resolved in favor of the state by the Florida courts at multiple instances and, subsequently, by the Eleventh Circuit en banc in March 2025.

Florida, governed by a Republican majority in the Legislature and by a Republican governor, passed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Act with bipartisan votes: the raising of the minimum purchase age was supported by twenty of the twenty-three Republican senators. The act constitutes one of the most substantive state legislative responses to a mass school shooting in the recent history of the United States, and it demonstrates that the modification of weapons acquisition laws is politically feasible even in Republican-majority jurisdictions when a mass event mobilizes public opinion with sufficient intensity. The central political question raised by the contrast between Florida 2018 and Texas

2022 — two Republican jurisdictions, both affected by mass school shootings — is why the first responded with the raising of the minimum purchase age and the second did not.

The answer is not interpretive. It is contextual. In Florida 2018, the student activism of the survivors — led by figures such as David Hogg, Emma González, Cameron Kasky, Sarah Chadwick, and others — mobilized national public opinion with an unprecedented communicational efficacy. The March for Our Lives demonstration of March 24, 2018, drew approximately 800,000 people in Washington, D.C., in conformity with the estimates of Digital Design and Imaging Service Inc. published after the event. Sister marches in another 800 cities of the United States gathered between 1.4 and 2.2 million additional people. The political pressure on the Florida legislature was intense, sustained, and covered by the media. In Texas 2022, the media coverage was intense but briefer, the student activism was limited by the demographic characteristics of the district — Uvalde is a small community, predominantly Hispanic, with less exposure to national activist networks — and the Texas legislature has a more conservative orientation on weapons matters than Florida had in 2018. The result was a substantially smaller state legislative response.

This variation across jurisdictions is one of the central arguments of this book: the legislative response to mass armed violence in the United States is not determined by the horror of the event. It is determined by the political, demographic, and media configuration that the event encounters. Connecticut responded. Florida responded. Texas did not respond. The event was, in terms of the

horror inflicted, comparable or worse in each case. The difference is political.

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