Safer Schools

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Since the Columbine High School massacre, the number of school shootings within the United States (U.S.) has significantly increased from 23 incidents in 1999 to 235 cases in 2025. According to the K-12 School Shooting Database, since 2026, 63 school shootings have occurred in the U.S, which raises concern over the safety of the learning environment. While between 2021-2022, 96% of U.S schools had written procedures for school shooting scenarios, this suggests 4% of schools lacked them.

While the United States is the most affected country, the recent shootings in Prague (2023), Austria (2025), Brazil (2025) the double attack in Turkey (April 14 and April 15 2026) and the attempted shooting in Hungary (2026) underscore that this phenomenon is not strictly limited to the U.S.

Therefore, the implementation of preventive and mitigative policies is required to safeguard both the educational environment and students who attend these institutions. Preventive & Mitigative Strategies are crucial for

the deterrence and management of school shootings, as effective measures may reduce their likelihood and their impacts.

Prevention strategies

1. *Encouraging and monitoring reporting*

According to the K-12 School Shooting Database, 42.7% of US school shooters between 1966 and 2025 were current students, and a further 3.6% were former students. While no empirical data reflects these statistics on a global level, as Langman's (2012) paper underlined, school shooters have often expressed their violent fantasies or plans in their assignments, projects or to classmates. Teachers and students should be encouraged to report any of these activities to school principals and relevant authorities. Governmental institutions should additionally monitor whether the report has been taken seriously, whether necessary actions have been taken and whether the report has been effectively reviewed. These measures would prevent potential school shooters from engaging in violence.

2. *Implementing mitigation tools*

The incorporation of special tools and devices within educational institutions is crucial in the mitigation of school shootings, as they protect students and may decrease the success of the attacker.

Such apparatuses include door barricade bolts, which are designed to halt the intruder from entering classrooms. Other examples, such as lockdown shades, can reduce visibility inside the room, decreasing the chance of the perpetrators firing at students through a window or door while hindering their mobility. This can be relevant, given that in incidents such as the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, the perpetrator attempted to shoot students through the door or windows next to them.

Additionally, alarm systems should be placed at certain strategic locations, which would allow students or staff to quickly warn authorities in case of an ongoing shooting.

3. *Ensuring effective training for law enforcement officials*

Since regular patrol officers are usually the first responders during a school shooting, each police officer must be trained to engage and manage active shooter events. The Uvalde school shooting, which left 21 individuals deceased and 18 others directly injured, highlights the importance of effective police training, command structure and management. While the perpetrator entrenched himself within the classroom and shot the students and staff trapped inside, the police waited 77 minutes before entering the classroom and neutralised the perpetrator. The final report concluded that the officers delayed entry due to an inaccurate assessment of the situation (i.e., the officers wrongfully believed all the individuals inside the classroom were already dead), poor command structure, coordination and training.

Therefore, training for law enforcement officials is both necessary and crucial. Such training should include four main components:

1. Rapid threat neutralisation
2. Prompt information gathering and assessment
3. Immediate formation of command structure
4. Evacuation of victims

Alongside the four components, the training should prepare the officers for adaptability in case of an unexpected occurrence. For example, if multiple perpetrators are present or officers from multiple agencies respond, officers should be able to adapt and achieve all four components.

4. *Conducting training exercises for students*

Students and staff members constitute the primary target of school shooters. Therefore, schools should have a minimum of one exercise per year for both staff and students. During these exercises, teachers should lock the doors and windows, turn off the lights, install the door barricade bolts and roll down lockdown shades or close all blinds. Furthermore, teachers should discritely alert authorities through either installed alarms or mobile phones discreetly. Students, including staff members, should turn down the volume or switch off all electronic devices that could emit noise or flashing light (e.g., mobile phones or smartwatches) and hide under the tables. The goal of these actions is to reduce the access and visibility of the shooter inside the classrooms. Martindale et al. (2023) underscore that active shooters do not usually attempt to breach the door during a school shooting. This highlights the importance of locking the doors and installing a door barricade bolt. Ultimately, classrooms should remain silent and locked until law enforcement officials arrive and permit the opening of classrooms safely.

Implications

While these recommendations have potential limitations and challenges such as costs or implementation difficulties, this paper will not address them. The implementation of these policies, while necessary, can reduce the impact and likelihood of school shootings. The increasing number of school shootings in both the U.S and throughout the world highlights the need for such policies and their implementation.