

After Parkland shooting, dozens of US students arrested for social media posts

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Some two weeks have passed since 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz opened fire at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, killing 17 people, including 14 students. According to Educators School Safety Network, in the 15 days since the shooting, a daily average of 70 threats or violent incidents at schools has been reported across the country. By comparison, prior to the Parkland shooting, the group was recording an average of 10 to 12 incidents a day.

Such “threats or incidents of violence” have been reported in all 50 states plus the territory of Puerto Rico, and over 460 schools have been impacted. Ohio leads the nation with 44 reported incidents in the last 15 days; Florida and Texas rank next with 33; Pennsylvania has seen 29 and Kentucky 28, respectively. The incidents tracked in the study range from false alarms and hoaxes to postings by disturbed and mentally unstable individuals who have been prompted to make threats or, apparently, make plans to carry out violent attacks.

The authorities have responded with a hysterical law and order campaign resulting in the arrest and detention of dozens of teenage students across the country. Children as young as 13, including some with special needs, have been seized at their homes or schools by local police and charged with felonies. Scores of students have been suspended or expelled. Over half of the allegations are based on social media posts.

This repressive response to the latest mass school shooting reflects, in different ways, the deeply dysfunctional and diseased state of American society. It is in keeping with a general increase in the presence of armed police at schools and other public places, part of an accelerating militarization of US society. It demonstrates the ever more pervasive and intrusive character of state surveillance of the Internet. It

underscores the inability of the political system to advance any humane, rational and democratic policies to address the underlying social problems—the impact of permanent war and mass killing internationally and increasing poverty and social inequality at home—behind the epidemic of shooting rampages in the US.

To the extent that the social media posts express genuine threats of violence, they reflect a malignant level of social alienation and depression among young people in the United States, which has seen a sharp increase in the rates of teen drug addiction and suicide in recent years.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has compiled a sampling of the hundreds of reports from throughout the country over the past two weeks:

* In Avenal, California, police arrested a 17-year-old boy after he posted a Snapchat image of himself holding a gun. The weapon turned out to be an airsoft gun, which the Central Valley Regional SWAT team found in the course of executing a high-risk search warrant at the student’s home.

* In Rochester, New York, Abigail Hernandez, a 21-year-old developmentally disabled student, was arrested and jailed for allegedly posting a threatening message to the Facebook page of a local high school. Her parents claim that due to their daughter’s limited mental capacity, she could not have written the post. Hernandez was charged with making a “terroristic threat” and jailed on \$15,000 bail. An undocumented DACA recipient, she has since been detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and sent to the Buffalo Federal Detention Center in Batavia, New York to await deportation proceedings against her.

* In South Lyon, Michigan, a teen has been arraigned on a felony charge of making a false terrorist threat in

an online exchange with a friend about shooting up South Lyon High School.

Ryan Robert Debruyne, 17, was arraigned Tuesday on the single charge, which carries a maximum sentence of up to 20 years in prison. Bond was set at \$10 million cash.

* A 13-year-old student at Anderson Middle School in Martin County, Florida was arrested on Thursday after the sixth-grade student faked having a weapon and pretended to shoot his fellow classmates and teacher. He has been charged with a misdemeanor for disrupting a school function.

* In Illinois, two Mundelein High School students were arrested Sunday for allegedly making threats against the school on social media. School officials said that one of the students posted a photo of a handgun, later found to be fake, on Snapchat, with the caption, "Mundelein ain't ready for this." Both students were arrested for the post. Juan Bello, who is 18, was charged with a class four felony and given a \$5,000 bond. Both teens say they never intended to harm anyone.

* A 13-year-old girl who attends school in Pennsylvania's Central York school district has been charged with 15 felony counts of terroristic threats. The charges are based first on a conversation reported second-hand to school officials in which she allegedly talked about shooting up the school and, second, on social media posts.

These measures coincide with a dramatic militarization of school campuses throughout the country. Healdton Public Schools in Oklahoma have just begun installation of a bullet-proof safe room. Sales of bulletproof backpacks have boomed in the last two weeks. Many schools in Florida, Illinois and Ohio have banned students from carrying backpacks inside their buildings in an attempt to prevent them from hiding firearms. One school in Ohio reports that some students have started carrying their books in laundry baskets.

Officers of every stripe have been permanently stationed outside of Parkland High School. All are armed with the same type of military grade weapon as that used by the shooter, a practice that is being instituted at hundreds of schools where threats have been reported. Even before the Parkland massacre, it was a well-documented fact that police officers

outnumber school counselors in the public school systems of cities such as New York, Chicago and Miami.



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