

Tens of thousands protest mass shootings in New York, Michigan, Boston and the southern United States

Tom Hall
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) mobilized campaign teams throughout the United States on Saturday to participate and campaign in the March for Our Lives rallies.

IYSSE campaigners were present in a significant number of the more than 800 demonstrations held throughout the United States, from the larger protests in Washington, D.C. and other major cities such as New York City and Los Angeles, to protests in smaller cities in upstate New York and Michigan. IYSSE campaigners were also present at demonstrations throughout the American South.

Below is a selection of interviews with demonstrators throughout the country:

New York City

Between 150,000 and 200,000 people demonstrated at the march in New York City. Aside from the main demonstration in Washington, D.C., this was by far the largest protest in the country on Saturday.

Briana, a high school student from Queens, felt compelled to march and search for political solutions. “I don’t usually put my mind into politics like that, I try to keep a positive mindset, but after all this happened that’s when I started getting more into it.

“The days are just getting worse and worse, and a lot of our generation are very open-minded, so if we could just keep it up and keep protesting, we could be the next generation that changes everything. I just want to be peaceful, I don’t want to go to school worried that something could happen to me, and I don’t want other people to be worried either. School’s supposed to be somewhere you think about your future, I don’t want to think about what’s going to happen if... am I going to die today? As dramatic as it sounds, that’s the society we live in today.”

Another high school student told the IYSSE: “Trillions of

dollars are spent on war. Put it in social programs, pay teachers. We need to try to stop the massive amounts of pointless deaths we have in this country.”

Syracuse, New York

The IYSSE campaign spoke with and leafleted participants at the March For Our Lives rally in Syracuse, in upstate New York, where it was reported that over 1,000 marchers attended. The WSWS spoke with a group of Syracuse University students. Nadia gave her impressions of the event and its significance in the light of ongoing US wars, “I feel like a lot of the wars were done for political reasons, more so for the making money and capitalism, it’s for profit.”

Ann Arbor, Michigan

A crowd of around 4,000 people demonstrated at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Ethan is a high school student from Deerfield who traveled to Ann Arbor for the demonstration. Ethan sought to connect mass shootings to the mental health crisis and the cuts to social spending in the United States. “A person who is on a disability check—a mental disability check—is getting about \$8,000 a year from the government ... which is nowhere near enough to keep them up. So I feel like if we just increase our mental disability checks for certain individuals that are severely mentally ill, then it would be a lot more productive.”

Sarah and Eric also spoke to IYSSE campaigners. “I support getting money out of politics,” Eric said, “which is one of the driving factors for why we don’t have good gun control.”

“These issues are interconnected. I know that poverty is a huge issue in these factors as well. Something like 60 percent

of Americans couldn't afford to fly across the country to see their own family member's funeral. Half of working Americans don't earn \$30,000 a year according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics."

They also denounced the impact of nonstop imperialist war. "We've had whole generations that have been experiencing war and have this violence," Sarah said. "We should be putting the money back here into health care, education, and infrastructure so we don't have lead in our water everywhere."

"One of the big push-backs we hear when we talk about single-payer healthcare—people say, 'Well, how are we going to pay for it?'" Eric said. "But I don't hear those same people asking how we're going to pay for two illegal, criminal wars of aggression that are sixteen, seventeen years in the making. We really need to re-prioritize. We're the wealthiest nation on the planet where three people have more wealth than half the country. [Such a nation] can actually afford to provide for its own citizens..."

Sarah added: "The two party system is a joke because they're both working for the same people, and they're both controlled by money. But people can't afford a \$400 emergency, and don't have \$1000 in savings. Just about everyone that I know and that I work with is in that category. So I'm here to demand action."

Boston

Students and their supporters marched from Boston's Roxbury neighborhood to the Boston Common Saturday, culminating in a rally in the afternoon of an estimated 50,000 people. Teachers and students spoke from the platform on gun violence in the schools and on the city's streets.

MIT students Emile, Karina and Van came to the Boston march.

Emile said, "Personally, gun violence is something that hits very close to home, especially considering I come from Chicago—a lot of gang violence, gun violence, things like that. That's pretty much why I'm here. I'd like to see something done about gun violence, gun control, things like that."

Van said, "One of the reasons I'm here is because Stoneman Douglas, where the recent shooting took place, is very near to where I live in Florida, and I wanted to show my support."

Audrey, Raquel, Sam and Caroline, from the Massachusetts South Shore, attended the march in Boston.

Raquel, from Norwell, said, "I personally think that the school shootings and police violence in the streets are two different things. But we have to do something to stop it all.

"Video games, and the violence in them, are also a factor in promoting violence."

Asked what she thought about the recent passage of the

budget containing \$700 billion for the military, she said, "If they spent that money on people who need it, we wouldn't have any poor."

Nashville, Tennessee

Approximately 10,000 to 12,000 people attended a march in Nashville, the capital and largest city of the southern state of Tennessee.

Maggie, 26, works in the construction industry. She caught a bus before 8 a.m. to come to the Nashville protest, which was held downtown in front of the Metro Nashville Courthouse.

"I think that we need to let legislators know how we feel about guns rights and there needs to be some kind of reform or there has to be at least there needs to be a big discussion. Just being part of this march and supporting the students who have really organized this ... to show them that we support them as well."

Two students, Khai and Veronica, said they came to march out of concern for their younger siblings. "I have a little brother and a little sister who are in school and if anything were to happen to them I would be devastated," Khai said. "This has to end. People everywhere cannot keep going through this. Nobody should have to see their kids die."

"I also have a youngster sister in grade school and I would be devastated if anything happened to her," Veronica said. "Also, I don't want to be afraid to have children in the future and put them in school, and it would be something I think about every day—they go to school wondering if something could possibility happen."

"I definitely see this branching out. We are just finding a voice for this movement," Khai said. "This is something that has been happening for a long time and...I think people will actually hear us now."

"I also think that this will expand to the Dream-defenders (DACA supporters) and groups like that that have focused on these issues for a long time," Veronica added. "I hope this movement begins to encompass all that and grows and spreads and get a little bit stronger. I think people are becoming more aware of issues they didn't know about so this is kind of like a starting point."

Besides Nashville, there were marches elsewhere in Tennessee in Knoxville, Chattanooga and Memphis.



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