On the afternoon of February 14th, 19-year old Nikolas Cruz walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School in Parkland, Florida and opened fire on unsuspecting students, resulting in the death of 17 students and staff members while 17 others were wounded. The Parkland school shooting is the second deadliest school shooting in the US since the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in which 20 first graders were killed. Mass shootings have become an all too common event in a US plagued by excessively permissive gun laws.

Since the shooting, Emma González, a student from Parkland, has become one of the most recognized and vocal leaders in support of gun reform in the US. Together with a group of her Douglas High School classmates, she founded the Never Again movement using social media to launch a nationwide campaign that has already caught the attention of lawmakers, multinational companies, and thousands of supporters across the United States.

In a speech delivered by González in commemoration of her murdered classmates, she vowed to make Parkland "the last mass shooting" in the United States, adding that "if you actively do nothing, people continuously end up dead, so it's time to start doing something." [1] González's speech went on to call out the hypocrisy of American lawmakers who have stood by after every mass shooting in America without enacting any change.

On Wednesday March 15, 2018, González helped organized a nationwide walkout at nearly 3,000 schools around the United States. Students walked out for 17 minutes, one for every life taken in the shooting. In Washington D.C. students from 28 surrounding schools marched to the US Capitol to extend their protest. In a fiery speech outside of Congress, 12th grade student Matt Post, declared: "we will accept nothing less than comprehensive gun control [...] this is in our hands now, and if any elected official gets in our way, we will vote them out." [2]
For the first time in recent memory, the Never Again youth-led movement has been successful in keeping the debate on gun control a major national topic of conversation. More importantly, Never Again has already led to important legislative accomplishments. On March 10, 2018 Florida Governor Rick Scott signed into law the first gun control legislation in response to the Parkland school massacre. Governor Scott directly credited Douglas High School for this legislation telling Parkland students "you made your voices heard. You didn't let up and you fought until there was change." [3]

The new law raises the minimum age to buy a gun to 21, implements a waiting period for buying a new gun and allocates almost $70 million in financial assistance for mental health training and services at Florida schools. Nonetheless, González has criticized the law for keeping in place a controversial measure aimed at arming Florida school teachers to protect against school shooters - a measure also supported by Donald Trump.

The United States Congress is also under ongoing debates regarding several bills that would reform the nation’s gun control laws. Donald Trump originally came out in support of a bill sponsored by Democrat Senator Dianne Feinstein, which aims to ban all assault weapons and raise the minimum age requirement for gun purchases, along with stricter background check requirements. However, after meeting with the Executive Director of the National Rifle Association's (NRA) lobbying arm, Donald Trump rolled back on his original statements and recanted his comment in support of new gun control legislation. [4]

The NRA holds extraordinary sway in the American political sphere and the American population. Since their founding, they have been active supporters against any type of gun reform legislation. González and her classmates have received death threats from NRA supporters who see the Never Again movement as an attack against their constitutional rights to own a gun. Yet, despite the NRA’s undeniable influence, González has inspired major corporations to cut ties with the NRA, including Delta, United Airlines, the First National Bank of Omaha, Symantec, and MetLife, amongst several others.

Since the shooting, González has also been working tirelessly to travel across the United States and meet with other students and activists in support of gun control reform. Notably, she met with students in Chicago’s West and South Side to discuss how gun violence has disproportionately affected Black and Latino students in Chicago’s inner-city neighborhoods. In 2017 alone, there were over 2,700 shootings in Chicago. After the meeting, González released a statement in solidarity with students in Chicago and to draw attention to the lack of attention paid by the media to gun violence against students of color. [7]

In what González hopes will deliver the loudest message to Congress, on Saturday March 24, she organized the ‘March For Our Lives’ protest in Washington, D.C. to demand lawmakers to enact legislation that can finally put an end to gun violence in the US. González’s organization also helped organize 600 sibling marches in the US and internationally, including in Chicago, London, and Paris. According to the preliminary counts by Vox, at least 1.2 million people marched in the U.S. with the main march in Washington D.C. making it one of the biggest youth protests since the Vietnam War [8].

Moving forward, González and her supporters have made it clear that the Never Again movement will not be over until a comprehensive and effective gun reform bill is passed by
the US Congress and signed into law by Donald Trump. Never Again will continue to put pressure on US lawmakers through a targeted voting campaign to show the collective strength of their voice in the streets and at the voting booth. González and her classmates also plan to use the remaining funds from the March For Our Lives to enact voter education and registration campaigns, lobbying and high impact legislative advocacy at the local, state and federal level [9].

Since the March For Our Lives, González and other activists have been working on organizing a series of town hall meetings on April 7 with every member of the US House of Representatives. Together, they have already helped organize over 100 meetings across the US where they will demand each congressman and congresswoman what they are doing to enact gun reform legislation [10]. If no legislation is signed into law before the upcoming US midterm elections on November 6, 2018, Never Again supporters have promised to hold those in congress accountable by voting them out.

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REFERENCES
[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNWOmtDOr_k