

# In Gun-torn America, Solidarity is Best Source of Strength

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Sandy Hook Elementary: 27 deaths. Umpqua Community College: nine deaths, nine injuries. Colorado Springs: three deaths, nine injuries. San Bernardino, California: 14 killed, 22 wounded. A total of 1,052 mass shootings from January 2013 to Dec. 2, 2015: 1,347 dead, 3,817 injured. National media firestorms. Intense debates. No action.

Gun violence has now become a defining feature of American culture. Mass shootings have become ordinary; lockdown drills and locked doors are now considered normal. But it is inexcusable to watch and wait any longer after so many lives have been lost in preventable shootings. It is now crucial for the U.S. to overcome its powerful political and societal divisions in order to take action.

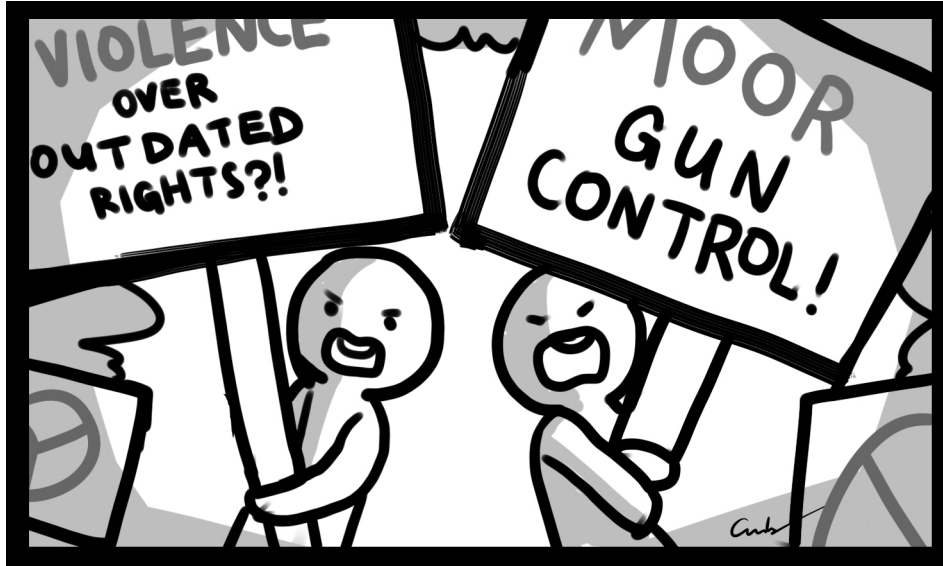
The most obvious solution to preventing gun violence is to prevent killers from accessing guns in the first place. According to National Public Radio, gaping holes in background checks systems were responsible for multiple mass shootings. The Charleston church shooter on June 17, 2015 was a vocal white supremacist with two past arrests. He easily bypassed state laws to acquire all of his weapons. On May 23, 2014, 20 UCSB students were shot in the streets

of Isla Vista, mere blocks away from my own brother's house. Despite a history of mental illness and past assaults, the shooter purchased all three of his weapons legally. The background check system must be

reformed so that gun sellers thoroughly examine a customer's criminal and mental health records. It is true that there is currently no consensus as to how effective these policies will be, but they still merit a trial run. According to the Washington Post, Congress has consistently blocked

funding for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention gun-violence studies ever since the NRA accused the agency of promoting its gun control agenda in 1996. But nobody benefits from ignorance; Congress should fund research to help lawmakers determine the most effective policies for reducing gun violence. Cooperation is essential for both lawmakers and Americans as a whole. After the San Bernardino shootings, our country has shown a deeply ugly side with the wave of anti-Muslim prejudice. According to the New York Times, the rate of anti-Islamic hate crimes has tripled since the Paris and San Bernardino attacks. It is truly a sad time when a leading presidential candidate receives cheers for proposing a ban on all Muslim immigrants. It should be needless to say, but an extremist group does not represent the ideals of Islam any more than the Ku Klux Klan represents all Christians. American Muslims have in fact raised almost \$200 thousand for helping the victims of the San Bernardino attacks, according to KTLA. We should take the example of the various groups around the country that have offered support for Muslims. For instance, the Los Angeles Police Department reached out to the Islamic Center of the San Gabriel Valley to assure them that they would be protected from backlash, as reported by the Huffington Post.

The recent upsurge in mass shootings is worrying, but solidarity is the first step to combat it. Lawmakers must try to cooperate to address gun violence, rather than be inflamed by partisan passions. And American society should reach out to the Muslim community, rather than blame them for the actions of a few. In these times, we must remember that America is greatest when it stands together, not when it turns on itself.



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## MOOR VS MOOR | ESTABLISHING CHARTER SCHOOLS

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The Los Angeles Unified School District has recently been considering turning almost half of its current public school campuses into charter schools. This proposition, although still not official, has already received a wide amount of criticism. Charter schools are effective in the sense that this independence gives the leaders of a community better control over what kids are being taught and how, rather than following government instruction in which would hardly benefit students.

The advantage of charter schools can all be summed up in three key words: knowing your audience. An important aspect to keep in mind when trying to define the benefits of a charter school is that no two charter schools are exactly the same.

Charter schools are spawned from the teamwork of people within a community such as parents, city officials, and school staff, making them specifically crafted to aid the kids living in the area. This is especially beneficial because it makes each school unique in its own way, catering specifically to the needs of the students attending. For instance, such needs may include smaller class sizes so that each student gains a significant amount of teacher attention in comparison to public school.

In addition, because charter schools remain paid for by the government, low income communities have the opportunity to better their schools without having to worry about funding. Many low income families who are unhappy with their child's school cannot afford to send their children to a better performing one, therefore leaving them stuck with their average public school. Fortunately, charter schools serve as an opportunity to provide the children of low income families to attend better schools. Overall, charter schools are a superior alternative to public schools in which come at no cost to the communities in which they serve.

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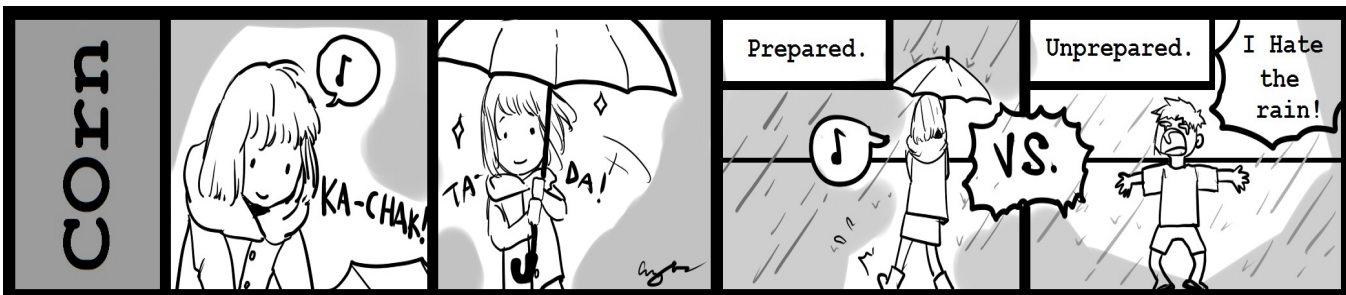
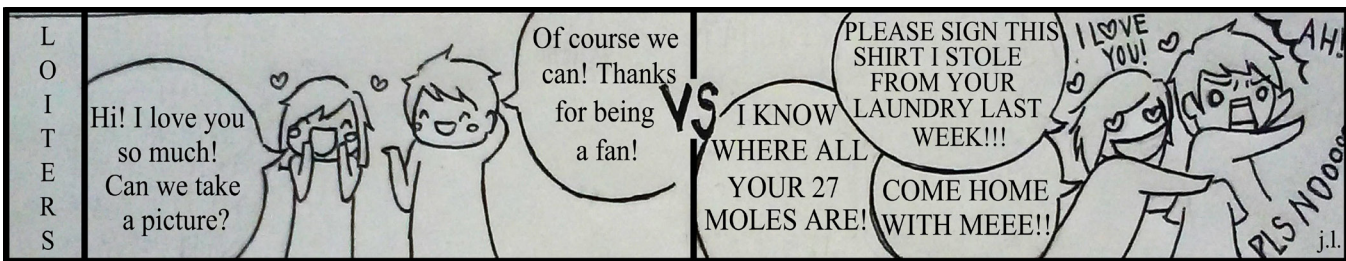
While many school reformers highly regard charter schools as the solution to the problems of public education, the establishment of these selective institutions would weaken regular public schools and create more complications in the school community. Charter schools are run independently in their development of curriculum, academic programs and testing methods. Charter schools also organize their own admission of students, but are funded on tax dollars like public schools. As more charter schools open, more of the district's funds are split, forcing regular public schools to cut down on teachers and discontinue beneficial programs.

Instead of uniting public education, charter schools create a system that allows them access to continuous government funding and maintenance to their reputation.

Although charter schools cannot discriminate against students due to their race, gender or disability, their admissions process create barriers that weed out unwanted students. Charter schools with applications only printed in English and mandatory family interviews lessen chances for students with family issues or parents who are only fluent in other languages. Because of this, charter schools contribute to a type of re-segregation of U.S. education.

With this being said, public schools in Los Angeles need more support, not less. Public schools are open to all and serve the community as a public trust. Charter schools are only open to the source of their funding. If public schools had the resources and funding to offer more choices, then concerned parents would no longer feel the need to separate their child from regular public schools. Instead of using up funding to create more private, for-profit schools, the district budget should be used to improve and enhance education of already existing public schools.

MOOR graphics by LESLIE HWANG



### CAN YOU DIG IT?



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#### Diversity in College Admissions

As a senior, awaiting college decisions is quite an anxious experience. I am constantly pondering over whether my grades, test scores and leadership experiences have made the mark to be accepted into the colleges I have applied to. Based on what the recently revived Supreme Court case Fisher v. University of Texas has conveyed, it seems as though my race is another aspect I should be worried about. As long as affirmative action remains prevalent in college admissions, race is seen as the basis for diversity among America's universities. Colleges that have an affirmative action policy factors race and ethnicity quite highly for a student's acceptance, bringing to light how contentious the matter of diversity is in higher education.

Affirmative action exists to provide equal access to education for historically underrepresented groups, specifically minorities and women. However, basing the acceptance of applicants on their race seems collectively unfair to prospective students of all racial and ethnic groups.

The fact that race is seen as such a permissible element in college admissions makes me as a student question my own academic valuation. As someone who will appear as a minority to most of the colleges I have applied to, I find it appalling that I may be accepted to certain institutions based on nothing more than the fact that my admission will help fulfill their diversity proportion. Nonetheless, I acknowledge the fact that affirmative action serves as a steady solution to level the playing field for minorities in white-dominated communities. Giving students from a wide array of backgrounds a boost in the application process can be beneficial, but more than anything, the existence of affirmative action questions whether diversity can truly even exist in higher education. Perhaps ending affirmative action and changing the overall admissions pool to become race-neutral will combat that question. Emphasizing class rank policies and individualized assessments may help colleges can achieve a well rounded community. Whether or not affirmative action will cease in the near future is unclear, but we cannot deny that Fisher vs. University of Texas brings up a reexamination on the legacy of race in our country's educational standards.