

What Parkland's experience tells us about the limits of a 'security' response to Christchurch

Written by Amanda Tattersall, Postdoc in urban geography and Research Lead at Sydney Policy Lab. Host of ChangeMakers Podcast., University of Sydney

In the days before the [mass shootings in Christchurch](#) I was visiting Parkland, Florida, where 17 people were killed in a [school shooting](#) on Valentine's Day 2018. I was recording a story about how those survivors and their allies [built a global movement against gun violence](#). I met students, teachers and supporters.

These American students knew all about Australia's gun laws. "How did you get such strong laws?" they would ask. And I would tell them about the Port Arthur massacre and [how our conservative prime minister acted](#). "We haven't had a gun massacre since," I proclaimed. Days later, I felt shame at my hubris – an [Australian has been charged](#) with the shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Read more: [***Parkland shooting: One year later, Congress still avoids action on gun control***](#)

Lessons from a 'high-security' suburb

We have so much to learn from Parkland. And it's not simply how they [built a remarkable social movement](#). Some lessons become visible only when you actually see the place.

Parkland is a suburb close to the Everglades, 30 minutes from the beach and an hour north of Miami. It is a wealthy, majority-white neighbourhood. But the thing that overwhelmed me when I was driving around is that it is a gated community.

The entire suburb is broken up into large blocks, and at the centre of each block is a single entrance for cars. The road has a security hut, large barriers stretching across and there is a

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large gate. You need a PIN code to go inside.

When you go through, the homes and streets are beautiful. Green grass, and every home has one of those white mailboxes with a red flag that turns up when the mail arrives.

These gated communities tell you something. Parents choose to live behind walls to create a nice way to live and keep their family safe.

But in Parkland all that security didn't keep them safe. Darkness found a new way in – and everyone is still feeling the murderous pain.

The limits of security and walls offer a profound lesson for us in Australia as we work out how to respond to the terrorism in Christchurch. Prime Minister Scott Morrison wants to lock up our places of worship – particularly mosques. He wants police with guns and security checks. It's like he wants to build religious gated communities.

Read more: [Morrison announces \\$55 million for security at religious premises and warns against 'tribalism'](#)

This approach is consistent with his other policies – [use the navy to stop boats, use cages to stop refugees](#) . Our prime minister has only one register – security.

But if Parkland showed anything, it's that gated communities don't stop violence. The violence just moves and shifts. An aggressive security response might make you "feel" safer, but it doesn't make you safe.

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At the same time, security heightens the tension. And it does nothing to deal with the causes of the violence.

So how do we respond to the causes of the violence? In Parkland, the main issue was access to guns. The [March for Our Lives](#) students called this out quickly. They gained traction because they bravely and forcefully condemned the National Rifle Association for creating the context for mass shootings – easy access to guns.

Read more: [*We must not punish content creators in our rush to regulate social platforms*](#)

It started with the demonisation of others

Our context is different. The issue in Christchurch [was about guns, yes, but equally it was about motive](#). As Australians, one of our citizens “radicalised” themselves to such a point that they massacred other people. How did this happen?

White supremacy. OK, but how do we unpack white supremacy? Who emboldened this? Who made it OK to demonise Muslims – to say they don’t belong?

First, people looked to [Pauline Hanson and Fraser Anning](#). The social movement around [#EggBoy](#) shows people’s anger at extremism.

But it’s more than that. Murdoch news media have been running a crusade against Muslims for years. The Coalition has brutalised Muslims and refugees for votes since September 11 2001. And the Labor Party has given bipartisan support to the offshore detention of predominantly Muslim refugees.

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Read more: [Christchurch attacks are a stark warning of toxic political environment that allows hate to flourish](#)

Come together in love to overcome hate

But knowing who prosecutes hate is not enough. Hate can't drive out hate. As Martin Luther King junior said, only love can do that.

How do we bring love into our work to stop race being used as a divisive power? I wish I had the answer. But I do know that building love is something that can happen everywhere all the time – not just at vigils or special services.

Can we build a movement that would [amplify love](#) at work, in our community, in our schools, where we have intentional conversations to talk about what Christchurch meant and why the Muslim community was targeted?

The Muslim community are in pain. We – especially white people like me and some of you – have to do the heavy lifting on this one. We can take the lead on doing something about white supremacy and dividing people by race and religion.

Imagine if we could take the pain of this moment and turn it into a real reckoning for our country. For as long as white people have stood in Australia we have caused harm to others. But too often we shrug off responsibility through phrases like “[the most successful multicultural country in the world](#)”. Or we get scared off the conversation by phrases like the “[history wars](#)”.

Yes, the shock jocks will berate and the trolls will yell. But let's have them yell at white people taking on white supremacy instead of Muslim and other leaders of colour.

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It's time to act. The election is one place – we need to vote for leaders who stand with Muslims because “ [they are us](#) ”.

But this is more than just electoral politics. It's about a movement committed to connection, understanding, listening, respect and love. And that's love as a verb, love as action.

A year after the mass shooting, Parkland is still a torn community. Many are still deeply active in social movements pushing for gun law reform. And [many others are still healing](#) .

In Parkland the lesson is that they were forever changed, not because of the hate that was inflicted, but because of the love they cultivated in response.

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