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USA

Republicans Are Responsible for the Massacre of Children

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An 18-year-old man carrying an AR-15 assault rifle, a weapon of war, walked into Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas on the morning of May 24, shot and killed 19 children and two teachers, and wounded another 17. Earlier in the day he shot his grandmother. The children he killed and wounded were nine, ten or eleven years old. The murderer, Salvador Ramos, was a Latino, as were nearly all of his victims. The town of Uvalde is a working class, Mexican American community of about 16,000 inhabitants with an average annual income about one third that of the average nationally.

Only ten days before, on May 14, another 18-year-old, that one a white racist, entered Tops Friendly Market, a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, killing 13 people, 11 black and two white. But mass killings, that is taking more than three lives, occur in communities rich and poor. There were 417 mass shootings in 2019, 611 in 2020, and 693 in 2021, according to the Gun Violence Archive. The deadliest mass shooting took place in Las Vegas in 2017, where a gunman killed more than 50 people and left 500 wounded. This year there have already been 221 mass shootings, among them 27 school shootings. The most common mass shooting takes place in the home and is associated with domestic violence, but people are also killed in mass shootings in churches, synagogues, concerts halls, and sporting events. Many other Americas are killed in ones and twos in gang fights, by police, and in suicides. No nation in Europe, not Britain, Canada, or Australia has such a record of mass murder. It is a uniquely American problem.

The National Rifle Association, the country's principal gun lobby and a rightwing organization aligned with the Republican Party, went ahead four days after the Uvalde massacre with its annual convention and gun show in Houston, Texas. Former president Donald Trump and Republican politicians spoke, arguing that guns were not the problem. They called for "hardening" schools with locked doors, metal detectors, and armed guards, for more mental health counseling, and they lamented the "evil" in our society. Some Republicans call for arming teachers so they can respond to armed intruders. Republican Ted Cruz said, "What stops armed bad guys is armed good guys."

Yet it is clear that the presence of so many guns and so many high-powered guns in our country is the principal cause of the mass shootings. The U.S. population is 330 million, but we have 390 million guns. And men and women, whites, Blacks and Latinos are buying more guns. Today there are 20 million military grade assault rifles in the hands of civilians. These are the guns that have taken so many lives in mass shootings in the last decade.

Following the Robb School killings, thousands of students at high schools around the country walked out of their schools in protest, demanding the government to do something about the killings. Hundreds of adults also protested outside of the NRA convention in Houston and in other cities. They speak for a majority of Americans, with 68% wanting criminal and mental health background checks on gun purchasers, and 47% desiring stricter gun law. Democrats, by and large, favor stricter regulation of guns, but Republicans oppose virtually any restrictions on gun ownership. By and large this opposition to gun control is led by the same white Evangelical Christian who oppose abortion and LGBTQ people. For the NRA, Evangelicals, and Republicans, guns symbolize the independent white Christian man who is prepared to defend his home and his business from Blacks and Latinos, and, if necessary, take up arms against the government.

The question is, will the Republicans' opposition to gun control, like their opposition to abortion, lead independents and Democrats to turn out in greater numbers for the November mid-term election. We'll see. Women and gun-control activists both will be organizing to defeat the Republicans.

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