

The Uvalde massacre and the tragedy of school shootings in America

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On Tuesday, Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas joined the long list of names that have been violently inscribed on the collective consciousness: Columbine, Newtown, Parkland, Blacksburg and many more over the last 25 years.

For reasons which may never be known, the shooter, 18-year-old high school student Salvador Ramos, first shot his grandmother before driving to the elementary school. Dressed in all black and armed with an AR-15 assault rifle and a handgun, Ramos shot his way past an armed school district police officer and made his way into the school. Within two minutes, 19 children and two teachers were dead, making it the deadliest school shooting in Texas history and third in the US, surpassing Parkland and Columbine. Ramos was killed in a shootout with police.

Grieving parents were taken to the local Civic Center, where they were swabbed for DNA. The bodies of the children, between the ages of seven and 10, were in some cases so mutilated by AR-15 fire that they can only be identified through genetic testing.

A few details are beginning to emerge. According to media reports, Ramos, born in North Dakota, was bullied in school for a stutter and lisp, frequently getting into fist fights with classmates. He apparently had few friends and kept to himself and often missed class. He made posts on social media about guns, including posting images of his two legally purchased semi-automatic rifles just three days before the attack on Robb Elementary.

Whatever the individual psychological issues involved, however, they do not explain the routine outbursts of mass violence that plague American society. The problem is much deeper.

Little exposes the pretense of the US as the land of milk and honey as much as the regularity of such horrors. The massacre at Robb Elementary was the 19th school shooting so far this year. According to the Gun Violence Archive, there have been more than 17,000 gun deaths so far this year, the majority by suicide. There have been 213 mass shootings where four or more people were killed or injured.

Of these, 10 have been mass murders with four or more killed.

The politicians in both the Democratic and Republican parties have responded to Uvalde with their typical trite and empty platitudes that explain nothing. President Joe Biden gave a perfunctory nine-minute speech Tuesday night in which he postured against the gun lobby while calling on the country to do nothing but pray. On Wednesday, Biden called for “action” on gun laws.

On Wednesday, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer threw cold water on the president’s pretenses, noting that the prospect of any new federal gun laws was “all too slim,” even though the Democrats control both houses of Congress, and suggested that horrified Americans should vote in the November midterms.

The Republicans, while offering up hollow concerns about mental health, insist that the solution is more guns and brute violence, so that the “good guys” can kill the “bad guys” before they carry out their attacks. They argue for turning schools into armed garrisons more akin to maximum security prisons than institutions of learning. These fascistic “solutions” are the rhetoric and justifications of the so-called “war on terror”—which resulted in torture chambers, drone assassinations and the destruction of entire societies in the Middle East—brought home.

Nowhere from within the political establishment and the media is there any serious examination of the underlying social and political conditions that find expression in the homicidal actions of individuals. American capitalism, in fact, is suffused with violence, promoted by a ruling class that normalizes death and trivializes life.

The attack on Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, in which Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold murdered 12 of their classmates and one teacher, shocked the world and was seen as a significant turning point. At the time, it was the fifth deadliest act of mass murder in the US since World War II. The WWSWS drew attention to the social factors ignored and covered up at the time:

... the concentration on individual warning signs will be of little help in preventing further tragedies. Attention should be focused, rather, on the social warning signs, that is, the indications and indices of social and political dysfunction which create the climate that produces events like the Columbine HS massacre. Vital indicators of impending disaster might include: growing polarization between wealth and poverty; atomization of working people and the suppression of their class identity; the glorification of militarism and war; the absence of serious social commentary and political debate; the debased state of popular culture; the worship of the stock exchange; the unrestrained celebration of individual success and personal wealth; the denigration of the ideals of social progress and equality.

Since then mass shootings have become more common and more deadly. Columbine now ranks as only the sixth deadliest school shooting in American history. The students who survived that shooting now have children of their own who must deal with the prospect of being victims themselves. Across the country children are put through “active shooter” drills where they are taught to “run, hide, fight.”

The social, political and cultural factors underlying the growth of malignant tendencies, including school shootings, have only grown more extreme. Social inequality has grown to almost incomprehensible levels, with the 400 richest Americans claiming more than \$3 trillion in wealth, while half of adults report they would have difficulties covering a \$400 emergency.

The Republican Party, one of the two principal parties of the ruling class, has been transformed into a semi-fascistic organization that sought to overturn the Constitution through a violent coup on January 6, 2021. The massacre in Texas came only 10 days after a gunman, politically and ideologically inspired by the fascistic conceptions promoted by significant factions of the Republican Party, murdered 10 people in Buffalo, New York.

The growing phenomenon of school shootings and mass shootings in general is a symptom of the advanced decay and breakdown of American society. Life has become exceedingly cheap under capitalism.

The United States is now in the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has already claimed the lives of more than 1 million people. Children and educators have been forced back into schools that are known to be primary vectors of the disease, offered up as sacrifices for profit. More than 1,500 children have died from COVID-19 as a

direct result of the homicidal “herd immunity” policy pursued first by Trump and now Biden.

At the same time, the Biden administration is pursuing a reckless and aggressive foreign policy that has opened up a war against Russia in Ukraine, pouring billions of dollars worth of guns, ammunition and missiles into that country. Biden made his remarks about the Uvalde shooting on Tuesday after returning from a trip to Asia where he threatened to wage war against China. A direct conflict between the US, Russia and China would inevitably result in nuclear war, killing millions, a prospect that the American ruling class is clearly prepared to accept.

Meanwhile, police roam the streets of America, harassing, beating and killing workers with impunity. An average of three people are killed every day by the police, adding up to more than 1,000 deaths every year, far above the total from school shootings in even the deadliest years.

Hundreds of thousands of students, educators and parents participated in walkouts and protests after the Parkland, Florida shooting in 2018, demanding that action be taken to end school shootings. However, this mass outpouring of anger and determination was subordinated to the Democratic Party and illusions in gun reform legislation through the March for Our Lives organization. Millions continue to look for a way forward, with students and educators discussing the possibility of walkouts on social media in the aftermath of Uvalde.

Finding a solution must begin with identifying the cause. Any explanation of the massacre at Robb Elementary that does not point to the ruling class, its political leaders, its military-police machinery, its homicidal policies and, above all, the socio-economic system of capitalism over which it presides is nothing more than a cover-up that prepares the way for the next horror.



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