

# Mass Shootings and Domestic Violence

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**By Amy Goodman and Denis Moynihan**

The mass murder in Sutherland Springs, Texas, was a horrific crime. It was also horrifically predictable, and emblematic of the systemic problem we have with guns and violence in the United States. Devin Patrick Kelley was the white, 26-year-old former active-duty member of the U.S. Air Force who is believed to have killed 26 people and injured 20 on Sunday before killing himself. The massacre serves as yet another lethal example of the link between domestic violence and mass shootings.

While he was in the Air Force, Kelley was convicted of assaulting his wife and fracturing the skull of his 18-month-old stepson. The Air Force court-martialed him and confined him for a year, but failed to report his conviction to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System. He had numerous other red flags, from the violent abuse of animals to issuing death threats against his superiors in the Air Force. He reportedly had been sending threatening text messages to his mother-in-law, who attended the church where he committed mass murder.

"The majority of mass shootings are connected to domestic violence or family violence in some way," Sarah Tofte, research director at Everytown for Gun Safety, told us on the "Democracy Now!" news hour. Tofte's team has just published a new report. They found that from 2009 to 2016, in more than half of mass shootings, the shooters killed intimate partners or other family members. Domestic violence is more than just a red flag; it is a crime in itself.

Their report reads:

- "The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed."
- "Women in the U.S. are 16 times more likely to be killed with a gun than women in other high-income countries, making this country the most dangerous in the developed world when it comes to gun violence against women. Every year American women suffer from 5.3 million incidents of intimate partner violence."

- “Fifty American women are shot to death by intimate partners monthly, and many more are injured. Nearly 1 million women alive today have been shot, or shot at, by an intimate partner.”

“We see this pattern over and over again,” Soraya Chemaly, director of the Women’s Media Center Speech Project, said on “Democracy Now!” “There’s absolutely no doubt that the practice of violence within a home, in an intimate setting, with people that theoretically the aggressor loves, opens the floodgates to public violence.”

Soraya Chemaly continued: “This bigger question is how we treat private violence, how we treat sexual violence, how we think about gendered violence. The public-private divide that we’re working with does us a real disservice ... if you think of the fact that there are three women a day in the U.S. killed by an intimate partner, if that happened in one incident and we were talking about between 20 and 25 women a week being killed in one incident, people might sit up and pay attention.”

Mariame Kaba is an organizer and educator who works on anti-domestic-violence programs. She added: “We get too caught up in trying to label forms of violence as terrorism. The thing that we need to do is to end violence against women, gender-nonconforming people and children at the root of these forms of gun violence and mass shootings. Let’s focus on trying to end those other forms of violence, which are themselves forms of mass violence.”

Vice President Mike Pence traveled to Sutherland Springs to meet with family members of the massacre victims. Pence is a longtime National Rifle Association member with an “A” rating. While in Congress, he voted for gun lobby legislation to block individuals from suing gun manufacturers and loosened rules on interstate gun purchases. Pence blamed this week’s shooting on “bureaucratic failures” and mental illness. Earlier this year, President Donald Trump made it easier for people with mental illness to acquire guns by reversing an Obama-era rule.

Trump was in Japan at the time of the Texas massacre, attempting to sell billions of dollars’ worth of weapons to regional allies as he continued with his bellicose rhetoric against North Korea. He should learn from the countries he visits; in Japan, a nation of 127 million people, there are less than 10 gun deaths in a typical year, primarily due to strict gun control. Compare that with over 33,000 annual gun deaths in the United States.

In the midst of the arms deals, when asked about gun control in light of the mass shooting, he said it was too early to talk about changes in gun policy. How many massacres will it take?