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Texas church shooting caps record year for mass killings in America

A gunman and two other people were killed during services at a church in White Settlement, Texas on Sunday. According to the Texas Department of Public Safety, two of the deceased were church-goers: Anton Wallace, 64, from Fort Worth, and Richard White, 67, from River Oaks.

The shooter, identified as Keith Thomas Kinnunen, was killed after members of the church's security team responded to his opening fire on the congregation. According to the police, Jack Wilson, a former reserve deputy sheriff, was the only person to return fire at Kinnunen. Wilson fired a single shot, from which Kinnunen would later die after being taken to a hospital.

Livestream footage from the church shows a grisly scene. Kinnunen, wearing dark clothing, is seen sitting towards the back of the church. He gets up and holds a short conversation with one of the members, who points towards the right. Kinnunen then walks to the middle of the church before pulling out a shotgun and shooting two people before being shot himself. The incident lasted six seconds.

Amy Kinnunen, the gunman's sister, told reporters her brother had a troubled past and was homeless for a time. Keith Kinnunen was charged with misdemeanor deadly conduct in 2009 and misdemeanor theft in 2013. He and his brother Joel lived on the streets. The latter died by suicide in 2009. Sunday was his birthday. Amy said she did not think her brother's actions were politically motivated or an act of revenge.

Sunday's tragic incident has been seized on to praise a Texas law passed in 2017 making it legal to carry arms in places of worship. The law was passed in response to a deadly shooting at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs. The Texas lieutenant governor referred to the law at a press conference where he said the church security team saved "an untold number of lives."

On Monday, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said on Fox News that had that law not been passed, "I fear that we could have lost, you know, hundreds."

The hailing of lax gun laws as a supposed deterrent to gun violence contrasts with reports that 2019 will set a new record for mass killings in the US. A database compiled by the Associated Press, *USA Today*, and Northeastern University shows that there were more mass killings, identified as incidents where four or more people are killed, in 2019 than in any year dating back to 2006, when the team first began tracking such events. Other research going back to the 1970s shows that no previous year had as many mass killings.

Overall, there were 41 mass killings that resulted in more than 210 deaths. Only eight of the killings did not involve guns.

According to the Gun Violence Archive, there have been more than 400 mass shootings in 2019. The website defines mass shootings as incidents involving firearms where four or more people are injured. Texas alone saw some 30 attacks this year, including the tragic shooting in El Paso that left 22 dead.

Although the number of incidents set a record, the 210 people killed this year is still overshadowed by 224 victims in 2017, when the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history took place in Las Vegas, claiming 58 lives.

According to the database, most mass killings fail to make national news because they do not occur in public spaces. The majority of the killings involve people who know each other, such as family members, gang members and distraught individuals who open fire on their coworkers. Nine mass shootings occurred in a public place. Other mass killings occurred in a home, a workplace or a bar. Often, the motives behind the killings are never discovered.

Nearly half of all states experienced mass shootings this year. Mass slayings occurred in various parts of the nation, from large cities such as New York to small communities like Elkmont, Alabama, with a population of just under 475 people. California, a state with some of the most stringent gun laws in the country, had eight mass killings, the most of any state.

The prevalence of mass violence in the United States is indicative of a malignant social crisis. The regularity of mass violence is bound up with a systematic assault by the ruling class on the conditions of the working class. The American ruling elite diverts billions to fund its imperialist strivings and enrich the upper echelons of society, but tells Americans there is “no money” for basic social programs.

Politicians and the media inevitably respond to the latest mass killing with empty platitudes. The Democrats call for restricting access to guns as the solution, while most Republicans promote the opposite. Both of these responses are disingenuous and serve to cover up the rotten state of American capitalism.

Along with the spread of poverty and toxic levels of social inequality, the militarization of American society plays a key role in the social crisis. Each year, state and local governments spend over \$100 billion to fund police departments. The Democrats and Republicans recently passed, with bipartisan support, the largest military budget in US history, giving the Trump administration a green light to wage wars abroad and against migrants crossing the US-Mexico border.