

Analysis: Are Texans horrified by the Uvalde school massacre ready to demand change?

Counting the Uvalde massacre, mass shootings have claimed the lives of 108 people in Texas since 2009.

By [Sanford Nowlin](#) on Wed, May 25, 2022



Wikimedia Commons / Fibonacci Blue These high school students who walked out of class in 2018 to demand lawmakers rein in gun laws know what's up.

We don't yet know what mental illness, consuming rage or hate-fueled ideology drove an 18-year-old gunman to enter a Uvalde elementary school on Tuesday and spill the blood of innocents.

But we do know this: politicians are already scrambling to assure us the shooter's ability to purchase firearms and body armor bore no responsibility. Mere hours after the carnage, U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-

Texas — [recipient of a 100% rating from the National Rifle Association \(NRA\)](#) — sounded a warning against "politicizing" it.

"You know, inevitably, when there is a murder of this kind you see politicians try to politicize it," he said. "You see Democrats and a lot of folks in the media whose solution is to try to restrict the constitutional rights of law-abiding citizens. That doesn't work."

By now we know what to expect. Politicos will explain that arming teachers or designing safer campuses, not limiting access to guns, are how we prevent future incidents. They'll tell us the Second Amendment prevents lawmakers from putting any limits on access to weapons such as those the shooter used to massacre 19 children and two adults.

Never mind that every other democratic country has passed laws that limit who can access the deadliest kinds of firearms. The citizens of those countries are no less loving of their personal liberties than Americans. The gun owners aren't deprived of their ability to hunt or protect their families.

And contrary to the arguments of Second Amendment absolutists, every other right enshrined in the U.S. Constitution has reasonable limits. The First Amendment protects free speech, but it doesn't protect the right to scream "Fire!" in a crowded theater nor to reveal troop movements to the enemy during wartime.

We're also likely to hear politicians declare that "good guys with guns" ensured the bloodshed in Uvalde wasn't far worse. Never mind, of course, that the good guys in this case appeared to be trained peace officers, not wannabes empowered by Texas' permitless carry law signed into law last year by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott.

The bottom line is this: no matter how horrifying and incomprehensible the mass slaying at Robb Elementary School is to Texas voters, there's little to suggest the state's Republican majority will do nothing of consequence to keep firearms out of the hands of those who would turn them into instruments of mass carnage.

It's reasonable to expect both the aforementioned Cruz and Abbott will move forward with their planned speeches at the NRA's national convention this weekend, mere days after the carnage in Uvalde. So far, representatives for the two haven't mentioned plans to cancel their appearances at the event touted on the NRA's website as a "celebration of Second Amendment rights."

If they keep their commitments to speak, it's a fair bet both will shake their heads at the senseless loss of life in South Texas, deliver now-familiar "thoughts and prayers" bromides, then double down on their promise to prevent any

restriction on the ownership of firearms.

Abbott and Cruz couch their defiance as courage — the steely resolve to stand firm on gun rights. However, it's far from courage. It's cowardice.

How else does one explain Texas lawmakers' willingness to loosen restrictions on firearms in the face of the El Paso Walmart, Sunderland Springs and at Santa Fe High School mass shootings? Counting the Uvalde massacre, those incidents and others have claimed the lives of 108 people in Texas since 2009.

Active shooter cases in the United States increased 50% from 2020 to 2021, according to FBI crime statistics, and the country has already experienced 198 mass shootings between January and May of this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive. Of those so far this year, 27 have been in schools, according to a National Public Radio analysis.

"We are now in this country, when it comes to mass shootings and active shootings, at an epidemic level," St. Thomas University professor and criminologist Debbie Goodman told the *Current*. "It is absolutely time to address this from the focus of safety and security."

Goodman said limiting access to guns for people who would use them for malicious intent is one part of the solution. At the very minimum, stronger background checks could keep some troubled individuals from accessing the kind of weaponry and body armor obtained by the Uvalde shooter.

Yet, in the wake of this epidemic, Abbott, Cruz and their ilk have shown their lack of appetite for even those kinds of common-sense reforms.

Their willingness to ignore the safety of their constituents comes down to their dread over losing the support of the powerful NRA and Texas State Rifle Association. While those organizations spread around plenty of campaign cash, it's the loss of their votes elected officials fear even more.

"Their influence goes beyond financial contributions," Ed Scruggs, the vice chair of gun-control group Texas Gun Sense, told the Texas Tribune in 2018. "They are woven within the fabric of the majority party in every facet. They've cultivated their contacts for decades, so they don't really need to spend a lot of money."

For all their bluster about standing up for gun rights, Abbott and Cruz are cowards to ignore the crisis at hand. As they and other Republicans pander to the farthest fringes of the party, they fear being unable to tout their sterling NRA rating, being called out in a flyer campaign, or worse, facing a primary candidate with more gun clout.

It's up to Texans whether they're willing to keep electing craven political opportunists who ignore a growing crisis that has no apparent end in sight.

In an interview this week with *The Atlantic*, Brown University Dean Megan Ranney — a physician with public-health expertise in gun safety — likened the lax regulation on firearms to the lack of safety in vehicles for much of the last century. It took citizens, consumer groups and politicians demanding that Detroit do better.

"This is not an impossible problem. This is not hopeless," Ranney said of the mass shooting epidemic. "But it requires a commitment to do more than just talk about it in the wake of a mass shooting. It requires a commitment to address it every single day."

If Texans are ready to make that commitment, they can start by demanding the politicians that represent them stop with the empty words, break their fealty to the NRA and work on real solutions to the snowballing catastrophe that puts us all at risk. ###