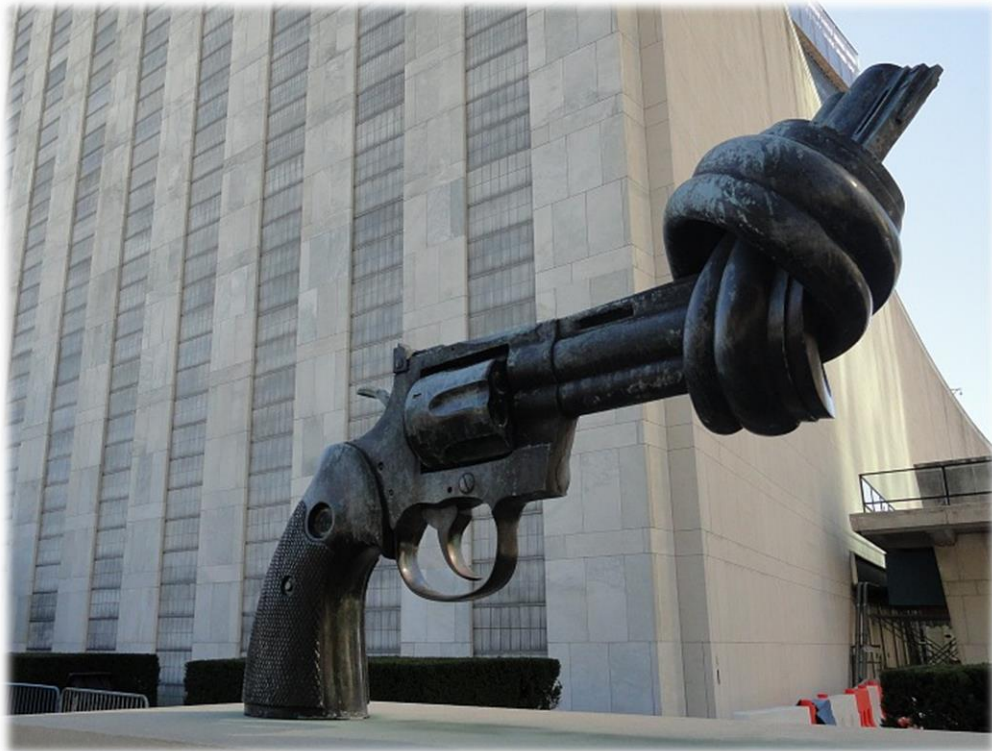




# School Sisters of Notre Dame

**Domestic Terrorism in the United States:  
A Resource for Reflection and Action**



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In the United States, over the weekend of August 3-4, 2019, 31 people were killed and many more wounded by young men with access to automatic weapons. The communities of El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio are reeling in the aftermath of these horrendous act of violence, and many in the nation are stunned and beset with overwhelming grief and trauma. Since 2016, according to the Gun Violence Archive, 1,321 mass shootings have occurred in the United States, 253 of these since January 2019.<sup>1</sup> The toll of violence, due in part to the nation's failure to enact effective, common sense, gun safety laws, is growing. But, under-regulated access to guns is not the only reason why gun violence in the United States is pandemic. Gun violence is increasingly fueled by the rise of anti-immigrant, racist, anti-Semitic, misogynist, and white nationalist movements in the county. The "manifesto"<sup>2</sup> written by the El Paso shooter lists a number of grievances, but vivid among them is anti-immigrant vitriol and specific fears regarding the growth of the Hispanic voting bloc.

Kathleen Belew, professor of history at the University of Chicago and author of Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America, advises that we should not regard these attacks as one-off events. She contends that they are connected by an underlying white power ideology and are planned in such a way so as to incite others to join the movement. Underscoring this point, the gunman in El Paso wrote that he was inspired by the terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand. Similarly, the terrorist who attacked a synagogue in California last spring was inspired by the massacre in a Pittsburgh synagogue the previous fall. Recent investigations into this phenomenon have indicated that "at least a third of white extremist killers since 2011 were inspired by others who perpetrated similar attacks, professed a reverence for them, or showed interest in their tactics."<sup>3</sup>

"Domestic terrorism" is a phrase that is being used with greater and greater frequency to describe these assaults within the United States. White, nationalist ideology is frequently identified as the driver of these escalating acts of mass murder. But who are white nationalists, and why is this a growing problem in the United States? "White supremacy extremists, are motivated by a hatred of other races and religions; some try to achieve their political and social goals through violence. They target the federal government and racial, ethnic and religious minorities."<sup>4</sup> White nationalists are those who specifically espouse a nation of white people. The United States has a deep and unresolved history of racism; we know well the scale of terrorism that was at the heart of the plantocracy and slavery. We also know that white, nationalist terrorism has never been eliminated in the United States even when segregation and other egregious, racially-motivated injustices were outlawed by federal legislation. Hate crimes, according to the most recent FBI report have been on the rise for the last several years.<sup>5</sup> The greatest number of hate crimes are based on race or ethnicity. Racism remains systemic in the United States, and we have yet to eliminate this scourge from our lives and societies. We cannot eliminate the violence of white nationalism without eradicating racism.

The racism and domestic terrorism that took the lives of our brothers and sisters the weekend of August 3-4 must be rooted out. We must confront this terrorism in the same way we have confronted terrorist attacks on the United States by foreign extremists. Online message boards that fuel hatred and nurture domestic terrorists must be dismantled. For once and for all, our legislators must come together in bipartisan deliberations to craft legislation and to support programs to stop domestic terrorism, enact common sense gun laws, and comprehensive immigration reform. It is, however, critical that these essential pieces of legislation be delinked and not used in a fashion that thwarts or undermines the potential power each one will have in shaping a future that promotes justice with peace for all.

We must not allow ourselves to be numbed by yet another unspeakable mass murder. This time, we must stop, reflect, and make a determination to do something. Let us renew our resolve that our lives and our actions be a tangible manifesto of love, inclusion, peace and justice.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://thefederalistpapers.org/opinion/el-paso-shooters-entire-purported-manifesto>

<sup>3</sup> Editorial, New York Times, August 4, 2019

<sup>4</sup> <https://cve.fbi.gov/whatare/?state=domestic>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fbi-hate-crimes-increase-report-today-2018-11-13/>



## Pause and Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on these statements.  
Choose a few and share what they evoke in you with a friend or your community.

“This Anglo man came here to kill Hispanics, I’m outraged and you should be, too. This entire nation should be outraged. In this day and age, with all the serious issues we face, we are still confronted with people who will kill another for the sole reason of the color of their skin.”  
- **El Paso Sheriff, Richard Wiles**

“It’s clear that there are people not unifying with their family and that there are people who are worried or injured that did not go to hospitals likely because of their immigration status.”  
- **Observations of Juliette Kayyem, formerly of the Homeland Security Department**

President Trump repeatedly warned that America was under attack by immigrants heading for the border. “You look at what is marching up, that is an invasion!” he declared at one rally. “That is an invasion!”  
- **Re-reported in Washington Post, Aug 4**

“This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas.”  
- **Manifesto of El Paso Shooter**

“As our nation tries to process the unthinkable yet again, it is clearer than ever that we are facing a public health crisis of gun violence fueled by racism, bigotry and hatred. The combination of easy access to assault weapons and hateful rhetoric is toxic. Psychological science has demonstrated that social contagion — the spread of thoughts, emotions and behaviors from person to person and among larger groups — is real, and may well be a factor, at least in the El Paso shooting. Routinely blaming mass shootings on mental illness is unfounded and stigmatizing. Research has shown that only a very small percentage of violent acts are committed by people who are diagnosed with, or in treatment for, mental illness. The rates of mental illness are roughly the same around the world, yet other countries are not experiencing these traumatic events as often as we face them. One critical factor is access to, and the lethality of, the weapons that are being used in these crimes. Adding racism, intolerance and bigotry to the mix is a recipe for disaster. **Statement of American Psychological Association President in Response to Mass Shootings in Texas and Ohio**

Mass shootings are not an inevitability. All human beings have the right to live without violence. To behave otherwise is to advance a lie. Stopping this lie begins with holding accountable our elected officials who have done nothing to address gun violence. Inaction only cements the idea that these tragedies are acceptable and that the weapons that enable them are simply common features of American life today. But we also need to hold accountable those in society, including some leaders, who fuel these violent acts by dividing humanity through hateful rhetoric. This must stop — along with the silence of our elected officials who have failed to condemn hate speech, for they are the very ones who have sworn to keep our nation safe.

We know that together we can do something to stem the flow of blood. And we call on our elected officials to show us that they know it too. **Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago**



# Take Action

## *What Can You Do?*

Pray for our nation and those most affected by gun violence. Consider the prayer below.

Act: Participate in the [Voter Voice campaign that corresponds to this resource to urge Congress to Pass Common Sense Gun Laws!](#)

Partner: In local efforts that address racism and promote equality for all.

Love your neighbors: Partner with local efforts to combat racism and inequality; reach out to those who are lonely and hurting; stand up for those who are bullied (physically or rhetorically).

## *What Should You Know?*

### **Measures passed by House\*:**

*H.R. 8: Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019*

This bill would prohibit most person-to-person firearm transfers unless a background check can be conducted, aiming to close a potential loophole allowing the transfer of firearms without a background check at gun shows or between individuals.

*H.R. 1112: Bipartisan Background Checks Act*

This bill would extend to at least 10 days the amount of time firearms dealers must wait for a response from the background check system before the sale can proceed. Currently, they can make the sale if they haven't received a response in three days.

**\*The Senate has refused to bring these for a vote.**

### **Measures Congress could take up:**

*"Red-flag" Laws*

Some Republicans have spoken in favor of "red-flag" laws, which would allow family members or law enforcement to limit a person's access to firearms if they are deemed a potential threat to the public.

*Assault Weapons Bans*

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, lapsed in 2004. This legislation, among other provisions, banned the manufacture and sale to civilians of assault-style weapons and certain "large-capacity" ammunition magazines for guns, Congress has attempted to pass new bans on assault-style weapons, but the legislation has picked up little traction in the Republican-controlled Senate.

*Reverse H.J. Res 40*

This bill rolled back Obama-era regulations that made it more difficult for people with mental illnesses to purchase a gun.

## Prayer for Mercy in a Time of Violence

We seek your mercy O God  
as our hearts are rent with guilt and grief  
for the lives of brothers and sisters  
shattered by violence.

We seek your mercy O God  
for the hatred and intolerance  
that blinds us to the dignity and rights  
you have bestowed on each precious life  
made in your image and likeness.

We seek your mercy, O God  
as we beg that you strengthen our resolve  
to eliminate words that divide  
ideologies that disdain  
guns that destroy.

Restore in us the memory of Jesus  
who prayed “that all may be one.”

Forgive our failures  
grace us with vision  
sustain us for the hard work ahead, Amen.

