

The FBI, other federal agencies, and mass shootings

Nikolas Cruz walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14th, 2018, and killed 14 people, along with wounding 12 others, using an AR-15 assault-style rifle. There is always blame passed around in the wake of such a tragic mass shooting. The media focuses on the gun rights debate because they are the most sensational and emotional; they get people to tune-in. However, not much blame has been placed on the FBI even though they received numerous tips concerning Cruz's erratic behavior and speech. Could the FBI have prevented the school massacre had they investigated the tips? We do not know. However, we do know that the FBI, and other federal agencies, have 'dropped the ball' like this on more than one mass shooter.

Two days after the shooting, the FBI stated that they had failed to act on a tip about the shooter, Nikolas Cruz. A person, close to Cruz, contacted the FBI on January 5th, 2018, yet the bureau did not follow established protocols to investigate the tip. The FBI said that the tip was not provided to the Miami Field Office, so no further investigation was conducted. This was not the only tip reported.

In September of 2017, YouTube user Ben Bennight contacted the FBI about the alarming comment that Cruz typed about (under) a video he posted, which said, "I want to be a professional school shooter." Cruz provided a similar comment under a video about another shooter, Elliot Rodger, who killed six and injured 14, near the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2014. Finally, Cruz wrote, "I am going to do what he did" under a video about the 1966 University of Texas tower shooting.

I believe that criticizing the FBI, for failing to investigate these tips, is merited. Period. And this is because the tips' contents should have been assessed as 'as a potential threat to life', this according to the FBI's protocols. The January tip, according to the FBI, provided information about Cruz's gun ownership, desire to kill people, erratic behavior, disturbing social media posts, as well as the potential of him conducting a school shooting. This content does not require interpretation. The tip contained information which, unfortunately, played out on February 14th.

There is no doubt that the FBI's protocols, and procedures, for processing such tips needs to be reviewed and revised. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has already called for such a review. The lack of investigation could be chalked up to the nature of bureaucracy to miscommunicate, or not communicate, yet this is not acceptable when there is a potential threat to life.

Federal law prohibits one who is adjudicated mentally defective, or has been committed to a mental institution, from possessing a firearm. However, we have watched bureaucratic errors, in enforcing this law, result in the deaths of many people. Consider the Texas Church Shooting in 2017. Do you recall this incident? David Kelly shot 46 people and 26 of them were killed in Sutherland Springs, Texas. Kelly, who served in the Air Force, was charged in military court for repeatedly assaulting his wife and baby stepson; he was then committed to a psychiatric facility. This should have precluded him from purchasing a firearm, yet the Air Force failed to enter Kelly's name into a federal database.

This wasn't the only failure. Do you remember Dylan Roof? He was the shooter who, in 2015, killed nine people, and injured another, in the Charleston church shooting. Then-FBI director James Comey said that Roof was able to purchase the gun used in the attack only because of lapses in the FBI's background-check system.

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Episode 74: The Parkland school shooting: How did this happen?

<https://youtu.be/Ye91ietADaw>