

# Mass Shootings in the United States: Then and Now

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There have been numerous mass shootings in the United States over the last few decades, claiming the lives of men, women, and children, while injuring others. Many of these victims were innocent bystanders. These acts of violence are not relegated to the past, but continue to occur today and with even more frequency. An example of a past mass shooting occurred a century ago in Tulsa, Oklahoma, prominently referred to as the “Black Wall Street Massive Shooting”. The Black Wall Street Mass Shooting took place from May 31, 1921 to June 1, 1921, and resulted in the brutal massacre of many Black people, (Yun Li, 2021). A more recent mass shooting took place on June 21, 2021, in Richmond, Virginia, resulting in the killing of many victims, including a police officer, while injuring many others. These incidents were reported by CNN (June 2021). Mass shooting occurrences are on the rise in the United States and appear to be an epidemic.

## Definition of Mass Shooting

According to Smart and Schell (2021), there is no standard definition of what constitutes a mass shooting, and different data sources frequently use different definitions when discussing and analyzing shootings. On the other hand, the U.S. government did not define mass shooting in a separate crime category, but rather in 1980, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defined a mass murderer as someone who kills four or more people, not including himself, in a single incident and location (Krouse & Richardson, 2015).

## Frequency

Cohen, et al. (2014) report that between 1982 and 2011, a mass shooting occurred every 200 days but greatly accelerated to one such incident every 64 days between 2011 and 2014. The number of mass shootings over decades has desensitized us and suppressed our memory to violent crimes. In other words, many United States residents/citizens have become inured to these violent acts. We react

as anesthetized persons who have adopted the slogan, “I know it’s wrong, but I can’t get involved as long as it doesn’t happen to me or my family”.

In past years, mass shootings were rarely categorized; but following the movie theater massacre of 2012 in Aurora, Colorado, *Mother Jones* magazine created an open-source database documenting mass shootings in the United States (Follman et al, 2021). *Mother Jones* is a guide to mass shootings in America.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, mass shootings increased to 578 incidences in the United States (Jackson, 2020). In 2021, there have been over 147 mass shootings (Ferrando, 2021). With modern technology and social media videotaping, mass shooting incidences are reported immediately and with much more frequency. This was not the case in the past because many of these devices were not available.

## Other Factors Related to Mass Shootings

Statista (2021) reported that California has experienced the most mass shootings since 1982, totaling 22 shootings. However, the Las Vegas Strip massacre in 2017 was the worst in this decade, resulting in 58 deaths and 548 injuries.

Another important factor regarding mass shootings, from the past to the present, is the perpetrator of many of these mass shootings. Radford (2019) reported in *The New York Times* that a majority of mass shootings in the United States were committed by White males who acted alone. White male lone shooters represent 50% of all shooters in the US. A handgun is the weapon mostly used, in the past as well as currently, to commit many of the mass killings.

Finally, as reported by Healy (2017) in *The Los Angeles Times*, contributing factors that cause perpetrators to commit these heinous crimes are (a) higher accessibility to guns, (b) mental illness, (c) desire for revenge, (d) aspirations of fame and notoriety, and (d) impulse of copycat killers.

## Actions Needed to Decrease Mass Shootings

Both legal and illegal guns are used to commit mass shootings. Laws have been proposed by federal, state, and local government officials to reduce the availability of guns, especially illegal guns; however, most of the proposed gun safety laws are dead on arrival because of aggressive lobbying by gun manufacturers. In those rare instances where a gun safety law is actually passed, the laws have been too weak or not well enforced, and mass shootings have continued to soar in the United States.

With mass shootings continuing to rise, we must keep the pressure on lawmakers to pass meaningful gun safety legislation through letter writing campaigns and by scheduling and attending town hall meetings with legislators. Most of all,

we must use the power of the vote to elect lawmakers who will vote to pass laws that keep guns out of the wrong hands and that prohibit illegal gun purchases. We must adhere to the guidance of the late Congressman John Lewis and, “Get into Good Trouble” if we want to see a decrease in mass shootings in the United States of America.

## Conclusion

Mass shootings in America have increased over the past decades. They are becoming more frequent (often with the use of military style automatic guns), and these mass shootings have become more deadly. We are a country suffering from excessive gun violence. Lawmakers must pass legislation focused on (a) requiring background checks on all firearm sales, (b) keeping firearms out of the hands of domestic abusers, and (c) restricting the purchase and possession of illegal guns. There must be stricter gun laws and accountability for those who violate such laws. Everyone must work together to reduce mass shootings in the United States. The time may change, the place may change, the number of victims may change; but mass shootings are still escalating. More needs to be done to bring awareness to the occurrence of these deadly acts and the lives taken and affected by such heinous violence. The time for standing on the sidelines and talking about the issue is over; action is needed now.

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