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Gun Violence: An Escalating Act of Terror

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### ABSTRACT

Diving in to an ongoing problem that our society faces today: gun violence. This paper will explore different reasons for this escalating act of terror – both in schools and other populated public areas. The “why” will be discussed. Along with such factors as: mental illness and mass shooters, political views on gun violence, media effect on provoking new shooters and giving current shooters attention, and laws pertaining to firearm ownership.

### Gun Violence: An Escalating Act of Terror

Times have changed on how we, as a society, views gun violence. The perception on our safety has also changed. And they will continue to change until and unless we do.

Sending our children to school has never been a more courageous and yet an equally simultaneous scary decision. Countless parents are forced to face several thoughts I'm sure they never counted on. Will my child be safe at school today? Has anyone in my child's class thought of shooting up the school? Do I send my child to school today because I'm scared of the potential threat of violence? Does my child know how to protect themselves and what to do if a violent threat crosses their path? None of these thoughts should be common, but here we are in 2018, having to teach correct procedures for overcoming and surviving violent acts inside our schools with the same attention as we used to treat common protocol for a pep rally.

Nonsense. And it has to stop. But how?

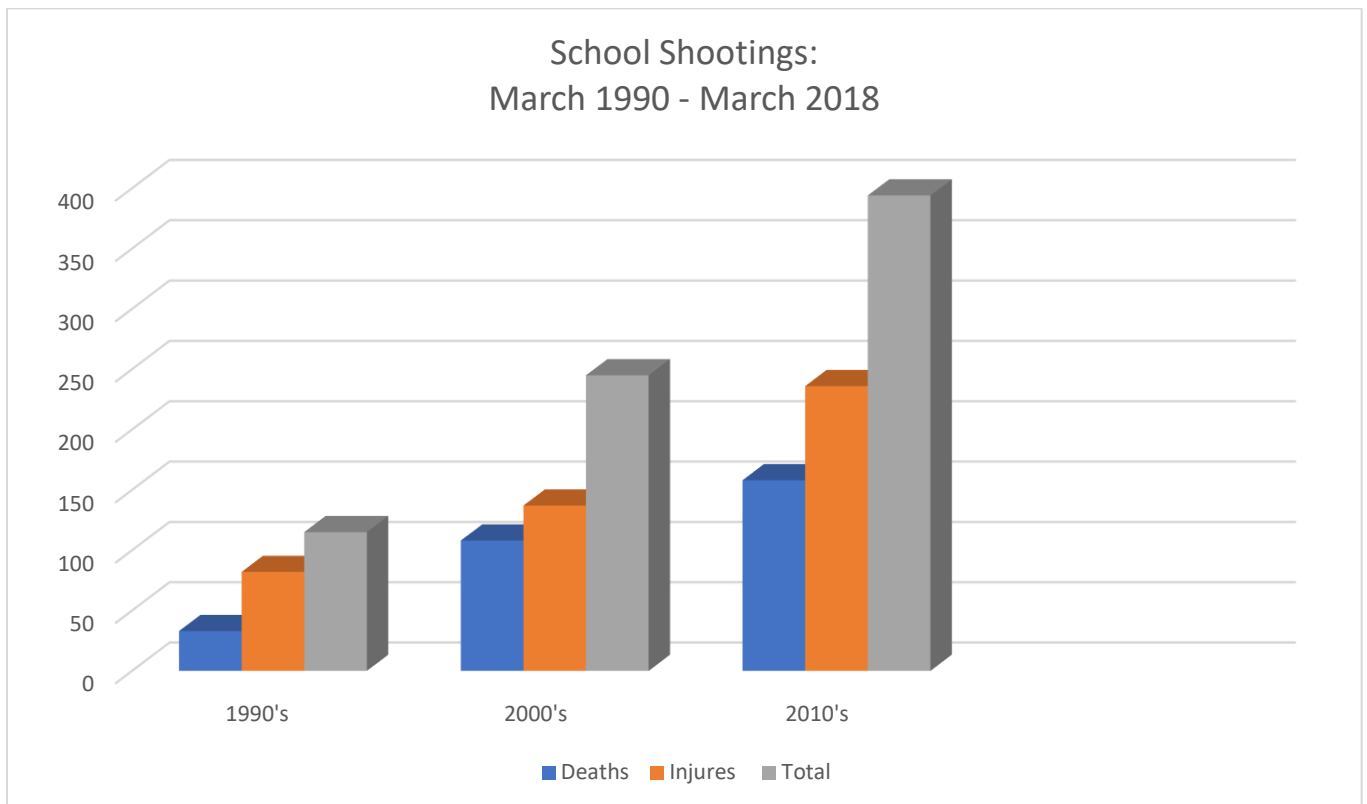
We cannot tolerate this violation to our children and students any longer. We must examine any and all options to keep our students and teachers safe while affording them the education they deserve. And to feel safe while at school. Several leaders in our communities across the country have recently began the daunting task of coming up with a solution. Gun control has been a more talked about topic since the mass school shooting on February 14, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. There are plenty of people advocating for something, but who is right? Who has the correct answer when it comes to preventing a horrific event like this from ever happening again? Let's take our time and investigate statistics and research that is undeniable. Let's see if we can conclude that the true problem is, in fact, gun control. We will look through the past 20+ years at the history of gun violence in schools and try

to find a correlation to how future acts could be prevented. Is this a political problem? Is this a criminal problem? Is this a left or a right problem? Let's dig in.

First, let's talk about the definition of a mass shooting. When searching for the definition on the world wide web, several questions arise. What number of victims must be fatalities? How many must be injured? Does the correlation between children and adults matter when it comes to declaring a 'mass shooting'? According to [www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com), "one strict definition used in the past by the federal government says at least four victims must be killed, not including the shooter". And the area I want to focus on as mass shootings directly reflect a person who brings a gun to school with the intention to kill or harm during school hours. There have been several accounts as to categorizing a school shooting in where the act did not take place during school hours, but was merely on school property. This could include a suicide involving only one person or a dispute between two or more people in a parking lot after school hours. For the purpose of this research paper, I'd like to separate all other instances in which acts of violence occur and are defined as school shootings. Particularly, mass school shootings.

Second, I think it's extremely important to see the numbers that we're dealing with. The innocent lives that have been taken as a result of a mass shooting in our schools. Below, you will find graphs that give specific decade information of reported gun violence across the United States of America, along with the number of fatalities and injured listed per how each shooting was reported. I am including all school shootings since March 27, 1990, in the public school of the Bensonhurst area in Brooklyn, New York, and ending with the most recent on March 2, 2018, at Central Michigan University in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. This covers over twenty years of school violence. You can clearly see the numbers listed for fatalities and injured persons.

Most would not have been labeled a mass school shooting per how our federal government defines that circumstance, but each life lost is tragic nonetheless.



(School Shootings in History, Wikipedia).

As you can see, school shootings are most definitely on the rise. The provided information begins in March of 1990, and had originally ended on February 14, 2018, with the mass school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. However, since adding this graph, there has been another shooting at a university in Michigan. Unfortunately, I'm sure that more information will have to be updated to this research paper before it is complete.

Beginning in March of 1990, we see that the number of deaths in the 1990's from gun violence in school is only 33. And while that number is 33 too many, it has only risen in almost three decades. During the decade of the 90's, you'll also see that there were only 82 reported injures relating to gun violence in schools.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century and the number of deaths related to gun violence in schools has more than tripled. From 2000 – 2010, there were a reported 108 deaths and another 137 injured. CNN conducted an investigation in 2015 and found that almost all plots in school shootings were “white male teenagers and almost all had studied the Columbine attack or cited the Columbine perpetrators Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold as inspiration” (Drash, 2015).

The Columbine High School mass shooting was the largest violent attack in a school during the decade of the 1990's. Eighteen-year-old Eric Harris and Seventeen-year-old Dylan Klebold both committed suicide at the end of their massacre. During their reign of terror over their classmates and teachers, they shot and killed 15 people (twelve students and one teacher) and injured an additional twenty-one people before committing suicide.

Let's dig deeper into the Columbine High School massacre.

Slate Journal is an online news source that published an article on the fifth anniversary of the Columbine massacre. The article tries to reveal what is (seemingly) the conclusion to the question of why the killers did it. Although they can never be interviewed, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold left behind journals and video messages that unleashed a very different view on their lives and what was on their mind.

During the summer of 1999, just a few months after the Columbine shooting, the FBI linked together world-renowned mental health experts, including Michigan State University psychiatrist Dr. Frank Ochberg, and Supervisory Special Agent Dwayne Fuselier, the FBI's lead Columbine

investigator and also a clinical psychologist. In the article, *The Depressive and the Psychopath* by Dave Cullen, their conclusions are shared publically for the first time.

They believed that the first step to understanding Columbine was to “forget the popular narrative about jocks, Goths, and Trench coat Mafia and to abandon the core idea that Columbine was simply a school shooting”. Ochberg and Fuselier say we “can’t understand why they did it until we understand what they were doing” (2004).

Harris and Klebold desired to kill on a much larger scale than just being known for a school shooting. Their end goal was not to target classmates and teachers whom they resented. Ochberg and Fuselier referred to their classmates and teachers as “collateral damage”. Harris and Klebold planned out a very specific attack for over a year. In fact, their original plan was to carry out their massacre on the anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing with their own version of a bombing, instead of a shooting. Dave Cullen goes on to reference their tactic from a video that featured Klebold commenting on “inflicting the most deaths in U.S. history”. Cullen goes on to say that Harris and Klebold had placed propane bombs in the cafeteria that would’ve wiped out 600 people. However, they were apparently not well versed in wiring the bomb timers, and they never actually went off. If the cafeteria bombs had been successful, their next goal was to “gun down fleeing survivors”. Following “an explosive third act, when their cars, packed with more bombs, would rip through more crowds, presumably survivors, rescue workers, and reporters”. “The climax”, says Cullen, “would be captured on live television”. Agent Fuselier stated publically that “it wasn’t just fame they were after. They were gunning for devastating infamy on the historical scale of Attila the Hun”. They wanted the entire world watching. And they wanted them scared.



Cullen went on to say that even though “Harris and Klebold had their sights set on eclipsing the world’s greatest mass murderers, the media never saw past their choice of venue”.

In searching for the reason to why killers kill, we’re told by Fuselier and Ochberg that, (2004):

Harris and Klebold were radically different individuals, with vastly different motives and opposite mental conditions. Klebold is easier to comprehend, a more familiar type. He was hotheaded, but depressive and suicidal. He blamed himself for his problems. Harris was the challenge. He was sweet-faced and well-spoken. Adults, and even some other kids, described him as “nice.” But Harris was cold, calculating, and homicidal. Klebold was hurting inside while Harris wanted to hurt people. Fuselier says, Harris was not merely a troubled kid, he was a psychopath.

In labeling someone a psychopath, shouldn’t we understand the medical, psychiatry diagnosis of what a true psychopath is? I think any shooter in mass school shootings has been labeled a psychopath at one point or another – being a loose cannon, out of control with their actions, and acting on impulse. However, a psychopath is a mental condition that rarely even involves psychosis, according to Dr. Robert Hare (another psychologist consulted by the FBI about Columbine). Dr. Hare states that, (2004):

Psychopaths are not disoriented or out of touch with reality, nor do they experience the delusions, hallucinations, or intense subjective distress that characterize most other mental disorders. Unlike psychotic individuals, psychopaths are rational and aware of what they are doing and why. Their behavior is the result of choice, freely exercised. Because psychopaths are guided by such a different thought process than non-psychopathic humans, we tend to find their behavior inexplicable. But they’re actually

much easier to predict than the rest of us once you understand them. Psychopaths follow much stricter behavior patterns than the rest of us because they are unfettered by conscience, living solely for their own aggrandizement. (The difference is so striking that Fuselier trains hostage negotiators to identify psychopaths during a standoff, and immediately reverse tactics if they think they're facing one.).

None of his victims means anything to the psychopath. He recognizes other people only as a means to obtain what he desires. Because of their inability to appreciate feelings of others, some psychopaths are capable of behavior that normal people find not only horrific, but baffling. For example, they can torture and mutilate their victims with about the same sense of concern that we feel when we carve a turkey for Thanksgiving dinner.

This direct behavior defined more specifically perhaps indicates how Harris was able to shoot his victims, then stand over them and taunt them while they suffered, until he finally ended their lives. The psychiatrists from the FBI came to the conclusion that Harris was unable to be rescued. In fact, they site that him dying at Columbine probably saved lives in the future. From what he was capable of as an eighteen-year-old young man, wouldn't matured and surely gotten worse with age. Their conclusion was cumulative when they were quoted saying, (2004):

Harris was irretrievable. He was a brilliant killer without a conscience, searching for the most diabolical scheme imaginable. If he had lived to adulthood and developed his murderous skills for many more years to come, there is no telling what he could have done. His death at Columbine may have stopped him from doing something even worse.

Columbine was by far the worst reported school shooting massacre in the 1990's.

Unfortunately, some nineteen years later, we (as a society) have still not figured out how to prevent a shooting of this volume. We continue arguing and debating the cause which ultimately

prevents us from finding the cure for prevention. Let's move on to the next decade and see what, if anything, has changed with mass school shootings.

There are a handful of reports where the numbers climb into the teens and twenties of fatalities and injuries. Focusing on the deadliest school massacre of the 2000's would be the Virginia Polytech Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) incident in Blacksburg, Virginia, on April 16, 2007, by twenty-three-year-old student, Seung-Hui Cho. This massacre will go on to be the third-deadliest mass shooting by a single gunman in U.S. history (not just in a school setting). However, at the time of the shooting, it was considered the deadliest.

It was reported that Cho fatally shot thirty-two students and faculty, before ultimately committing suicide. Bringing the total deaths during this massacre to thirty-three. He reportedly wounded another twenty-three (six of whom were wounded trying to escape out a second story window, not from being shot). This massacre occurred in two separate attacks. And authorities noted that each victim who was fatally shot, was shot no less than three times and all received a bullet to the head.

Just like now, in 2018, the Virginia Tech shooting sparked many debates. What was the killer's state of mind? Did he have mental problems/illnesses that contributed to his actions? What was his home life like? Do we need stronger gun laws? Do we need stricter background checks? What is the role of the school (college in this instance) to provide protection for students and faculty and prevent things like this from occurring? What role does the media play to amp up the public? Is that even good journalism to sway society to one side of an issue?

And also like today, no one has the correct answers. And our students are still dying.

Cho took his time surveying the classrooms and different floors before opening fire on the students and faculty. Several rooms were barricaded shut with people using their bodies as

shields. Sadly, most of those brave people who were trying to protect their fellow classmates and students were killed in the ambush. Cho showed mercy to no one.

In his early life, Cho had received various types of therapy, from speech therapy to seeing mental health counselors. His parents urged him to get help and supported him during his therapy sessions. He was diagnosed as having severe depression as well as an anxiety disorder (selective mutism) which some family members thought was autism. South Korean relatives and family members said Cho was bullied for various reasons: his speech difficulties, his body size (height and weight), and his race. None of these reports were conclusive with the Virginia Tech Review Panel. Cho eventually decided himself to stop therapy. And his former mental health needs were never reported due to the federal privacy laws prohibiting such disclosure (unless a student requests a special accommodation).

List of fatalities from the Virginia Tech Shooting on April 16, 2007.

Jamie Bishop (35) Pine Mountain	Georgia—German instructor
Jocelyne Couture-Nowak (49) Montreal	Quebec—professor of French
Kevin Granata (45) Toledo	Ohio—professor of Engineering
Liviu Librescu (76) Ploiești	Romania—professor of Engineering
G. V. Loganathan (53) Gobichettipalayam	India—professor of Engineering
Ross Alameddine (20) Saugus	Massachusetts—sophomore
Brian Bluhm (25) Louisville	Kentucky—masters student
Ryan Clark (22) Martinez	Georgia—senior
Austin Cloyd (18) Champaign	Illinois—freshman
Daniel Perez Cueva (21) Woodbridge	Virginia—junior

Matthew Gwaltney (24) Chesterfield County	Virginia—masters student
Caitlin Hammaren (19) Westtown	New York—sophomore
Jeremy Herbstritt (27) Bellefonte	Pennsylvania—masters student
Rachael Hill (18) Richmond	Virginia—freshman
Emily Hilscher (19) Woodville	Virginia—freshman
Matthew La Porte (20) Dumont	New Jersey—sophomore
Jarrett Lane (22) Narrows	Virginia—senior
Henry Lee (20) Roanoke	Virginia/Vietnam—freshman
Partahi Lumbantoruan (34) Medan	Indonesia—PhD student
Lauren McCain (20) Hampton	Virginia—freshman
Daniel O'Neil (22) Lincoln	Rhode Island—masters student
Juan Ortiz (26) Bayamón	Puerto Rico—masters student
Minal Panchal (26) Mumbai	India—masters student
Erin Peterson (18) Centreville	Virginia—freshman
Michael Pohle Jr. (23) Flemington	New Jersey—senior
Julia Pryde (23) Middletown Township	New Jersey—masters student
Mary Karen Read (19) Annandale	Virginia—freshman
Reema Samaha (18) Centreville	Virginia—freshman
Waleed Shaalan (32) Zagazig	Egypt—PhD student
Leslie Sherman (20) Springfield	Virginia—junior
Maxine Turner (22) Vienna	Virginia—senior
Nicole White (20) Smithfield	Virginia—junior

(Virginia Tech shooting, Wikipedia)

After the Virginia Tech shooting, plenty of controversy began. Political debates, gun-control debates, state and local laws were impacted. The ban on firearms on campus was even called into question with state permits effecting students being able to carry concealed firearms onto campus. This movement inspired student activists to change laws and rules on campuses where students were allowed to carry weapons (both open and concealed). Their newly formed allegiance to this task found that thirty-eight states throughout the U.S. ban weapons at schools; sixteen of those specifically ban guns on college campuses. This group, known as Students for Concealed Carry on Campus, formed after the shooting. As of March 2008, it claimed to have 16,000 members at 500 campuses nationwide (Boccella, 2008). There were many states who tried to pass laws favoring gun permit holders to carry concealed weapons (guns) while on campus. In support of their argument, they gave several examples of students with concealed weapons (on campus) being able to subdue an active shooter, saving an unknown number of lives. So far, no legislation has passed in favor of students carrying concealed weapons on campus (Archibold, 2008).

The university was in and out of court over the next decade, fighting fines and litigation with families and the Department of Education. Ultimately, they ended up paying for life-long medical needs of some of the victims and an additional \$32,500 in federal fines due to their failure in timeliness to notify students that there was an active shooter on campus. The Virginia Tech massacre was the worst reported incident in the decade from 2000-2009.

Another mass school shooting that happened during this decade was at in DeKalb County, Illinois, at Northern Illinois University. The shooting took place on February 14, 2008, ten years to the date prior to the most recent massacre in Parkland, Florida. The school shooting at

Northern Illinois University was committed by a former student, Steven Kazmierczak. Kazmierczak shot and killed five people when he opened fire in a single classroom on campus. Another twenty-one were wounded (seventeen by gunfire, four trying to escape). This was an isolated event and did not span out across campus. Kazmierczak was said to have studied Cho and his massacre at Virginia Tech and Kazmierczak tried to immitate Cho's MO (modus operandi). Kazmierczak took his own life before police arrived.

Steven Kazmierczak was known to have a history of mental illness. In high school, he was treated at Elk Grove Village Thresholds-Mary Hill House psychiatric center (Vann, 2008). His parents encouraged this treatment, saying he was unruly at home. As a teenager, he was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder (characterized by abnormal thought processes and deregulated emotions). The symptoms of schizoaffective disorder could include hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking, depressed mood, and manic behavior. Kazmierczak took a cocktail of medications for control of this illness which included Ambien, Prozac, and Xanax. His current girlfriend at the time of the shooting was interviewed and stated that Kazmierczak had stopped taking his medications at least three weeks leading up to the massacre.

Kazmierczak was known as a well-rounded student. Prior to committing this mass shooting, he had been a student at NIU. He had even made the Dean's list and was considered a stand-out student (Boudreau, 2008). Jessica Baty, his girlfriend at the time of the shooting, stated that (Boudreau, 2008) "he (Kazmierczak) was anything but a monster. He was probably the nicest, most caring person ever." Steven's friends were also baffled at his act of violence. Former roommates were interviewed and stated that Kazmierczak was a (Boudreau, 2008) "quiet man who stayed to himself, not spending much time with other students." To the outside world, he appeared outgoing and never appeared to have social problems.

Research by Vann (2008) suggests that authorities stated,

that while the initial reports said there were no signs, he was troubled. A story published by Esquire stated that he allegedly had a history of mental illness and attempted suicides, was bullied in high school, and had shown an interest in previous school shootings, particularly those that occurred at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech.

Given this information and these scenarios, one must indulge the attention that these shooters receive as fueling the fire for the one standing next in line to commit such a heinous crime.

Does the media play a role in one's decision to act out such a terrible act of violence? If these perpetrators received no attention and were simply locked away (if they didn't take their own lives during the massacre), would more and more crimes of mass devastation continue to occur and be planned out by one after another after another who wishes to unleash the rage and the violence and the uncontrollable anger inside them? So far, three specific cases (Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Northern Illinois University) have given reference to the shooters commenting on other massacres and how they idolized the act itself. Specific attention was even drawn to wanting to do more harm and creating havoc on a much larger scale. They wanted to be known as great killers or masterminds of their time committing unstoppable acts of violence. And some succeeded. All of the media attention creates opportunities for the next up and coming mass shooter to emerge. Plotting and planning, for a bigger headline.

These criminals and murderers (who survive) develop a fan base that some celebrities don't achieve. They become the focus of political debates and discussions. They welcome adversity at the hands of heinous acts they committed. They become numb to court appearances and



getting dragged back and forth to hearings and news conferences. They are ushered into a life of fame for very disturbing and sick reasons. They become pawns in a game of tug-o-war for others with an agenda to meet selfish needs and personal gain. It feeds their narcissistic ego and has them feeling that they are above reproach and out of touch with reality.

Let's look into and not discount the history of mental illness regarding mass shooters. As previously stated, true psychopaths are not easily unhinged or loose cannons. They do not easily lose control of their emotions or actions. They are cold, calculated, and disassociated from their feelings. They are (usually) narcissists and unattached to normal human emotions, specifically guilt. They may be characterized (or undiagnosed) as having antisocial personality disorder and be without empathy or remorse. They are manipulative and often extremely intelligent. However, it needs to be noted that not all psychopaths are serial killers.

There is a clear relationship between mental illness and mass public shootings. According to research conducted by author Grant Duwe in his book *Mass Murder in the United States: A History* (2007),

59% of the 185 public mass shootings that took place in the United States from 1900 through 2017 were carried out by people who had either been diagnosed with a mental disorder or demonstrated signs of serious mental illness prior to the attack. (We define mass public shooting as any incident in which four or more victims are killed with a gun within a 24-hour period at a public location in the absence of military conflict, collective violence or other criminal activity, such as robberies, drug deals, or gang turf wars.)

This research also yields that (Duwe, 2007)

Only one-third of the people who have committed mass shootings in the U.S. since 1900 had sought or received mental health care prior to their attacks, which suggests that most shooters did not seek or receive care they may have needed.

Oddly enough, this documented information is often not reported in the news when, in fact, mass murderers are “nearly 20 times more likely to have a “severe” mental illness than the general population” (Duwe, 2018).

Isn't it possible for mass public shootings to be both a gun problem and a mental health problem? Duwe and Rocque believe it is. They believe that “although the link between mass shootings and mental illness has only recently gained widespread recognition, the correlation itself is longstanding”. They list two very specific examples of mass shootings with an undiagnosed shooter. Looking as far back as 1903, they list U.S. Gilbert Twigg, who opened fire on a concert crowd in Winfield, Kansas, killing nine. Twigg had displayed signs of paranoia beforehand. Another example was Howard Unruh, who shot and killed thirteen people in Camden, New Jersey, in 1949, and was later diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. (Both were also Army veterans who had seen combat.). (Duwe & Rocque, 2018).

Duwe and Rocque are very concerned about BOTH the mental health side of mass shooters and the gun control stance of mass shootings. They believe this is a problem for both sides to consider. That mass public shootings are not simply an issue pertaining to one side alone.

One of the primary reasons some are reluctant to establish the link between mass shootings and mental illness is a fear that it will lead to the stigmatization of such disorders. This concern is valid. The vast majority of people with mental disorders are not violent, after all. Conversely, some have insisted that mass public shootings are strictly a mental health problem rather than a gun problem. They, too, are on the wrong

side of the evidence. It's possible for mass public shootings to be both a gun problem and a mental health problem. Because there's still a lot we don't understand about mass shootings, we need to invest in research to develop evidence-based solutions. In the meantime, the media should stop glorifying this violence. In the midst of our tribal hyper-partisanship, the debate over mass shootings is doomed to continue ignoring facts. We won't make any progress until those on the mental health side and those on the gun side find common ground that's rooted in empirical reality (Duwe & Rocque 2018).

Another author from Politico Magazine, Laura Kiesel strongly disagrees with mental illness' role in mass shootings. She is focused on gender. In her article *Don't Blame Mental Illness for Mass Shootings; Blame Men*, she states that

It's time to have a more nuanced discussion about what might really be to blame for the trend of mass shootings in America – as well as the gun violence epidemic more broadly. No, it isn't mental illness. It's gender. If we want to stop the problem of mass shootings, we need to fix the problem of toxic masculinity. If you take time to dig into the research, you'll find that mental illness doesn't play the role in mass shootings and other gun violence that many, especially our politicians, seem to think it does. Serious mental illness has been found to be conclusively present in a minority of mass shootings—only [14.8 percent](#) of all of the mass shootings committed in the U.S., defined as a shooting which injures or kills four or more people, between [1966 and 2015](#). (Another study focusing on different data collections of generalized “mass murder” from 1949 to 2015 [attributes 23 percent](#) of those incidents to the mentally ill.) Studies have also found that those with serious mental illness are responsible for just [4 percent](#) of the incidences of interpersonal violence and [less than 1 percent of all gun-related homicides](#) annually in

the United States. Generally speaking, people with mental illness are far more likely to be victims of firearm violence than commit it (Kiesel, 2018).

Kiesel could easily be described as an anti-Trump supporter with the following statements so clearly blasting out the POTUS regarding gun control and mental illness. In her article in Politico Magazine she says that

The year 2017 brought the deadliest mass shooting in modern history to the United States, which has become home to more gun massacres than any other country in the world. The response offered by many of our political leaders, both Democrat and Republican, has been to focus on the role of mental illness in such shootings. The day after Stephen Paddock took to a hotel room in Las Vegas with 23 firearms and murdered 59 people this past October, President Donald Trump told reporters that Paddock was “sick” and “demented,” even as evidence suggested Paddock did not have a confirmed mental health disorder. Trump was also quick to blame mental illness on the mass shooting at a Texas church in early November, saying at press briefing the following day that it the tragedy was not “a guns situation” but instead “a mental health problem at the highest level (2018).

Kiesel goes on to back up her opinion with the following research in trying to say mass shootings is less of a mental health issue than it is a gender issue. Here she is quoted giving statistics based on a few variables. She states that

To be sure, a variety of factors are associated with committing serious violence, such as a history of binge drinking, childhood abuse, living in a neighborhood with a high rate of violent crime and experiencing stressful life events. But being a male is often listed as one of the top two predictive risk factors for committing serious violence in peer review

papers on the topic—more than any mental health diagnosis. In addition to gender, a history of alleged or convicted domestic abuse has also been found to be more prevalent among mass shooters than a definitive mental health diagnosis, something that's just starting to get much-needed attention.

Furthermore, women live through the same experiences, from childhood abuse to stressful life events, at rates similar to or even higher than men. (One notable exception is binge drinking, which men do at double the rate of women.) Women are also up to 40 percent more likely than men to develop mental health conditions, according to a 2013 study by Oxford University. The Oxford study found women were nearly 75 percent more likely than men to have depression and around 60 percent more likely to have an anxiety disorder, while men and women were found to suffer from schizophrenia in more or less equal numbers. Given these numbers, if the propensity to commit gun violence and mass shootings were based largely on mental health or life events, then you would expect women to commit violent attacks at rates similar to, or higher than, men. And yet, women commit a very tiny fraction of these incidences. In fact, being of the female sex is actually considered a protective factor against becoming a perpetrator of serious violence (Politico 2018).

In her research, she links some information to sociologist Eric Madfis, who is an associate professor at the criminal justice department at University of Washington-Tacoma and the author of a 2014 journal article exploring the intersectional identities of American mass murderers. According to Madfis, Kiesel states that

Women tend to internalize blame and frustration, while men tend to externalize it through acts of aggression. This isn't just because of how men are built physically. While it's true that having higher testosterone is often related to aggression, recent research indicates that testosterone is likely a result rather than a cause of violent behavior. This suggests that societal influences probably play a larger role in violence than any biological factor. After all, our culture is saturated in messages—whether in the media, in our military, in sports, at the workplace, or in our education and health care systems—that embrace and even endorse a distorted view of masculinity, which tends to value and encourage expressions of aggression by men.

Even those men who might be suffering from mental illness are unlikely to seek out counseling because it is often stigmatized as “weak” for men to seek out help and admit vulnerability. Among those who do make it into a therapist's office or mental health program, domestic abusers are notoriously resistant to treatment protocols.

Madfis also notes that many men who commit mass shootings tend to be those who have failed to achieve financial and romantic success in ways that our society values and accredits as “manly.” As a result, Madfis explains, men may feel emboldened to resort to violence to gain both revenge and some level of notoriety as compensation for being denied what they thought they were owed, or felt pressure to attain. Elliot Rodger went on a shooting spree in Santa Barbara, California, in 2014 after he taped a video of himself complaining about beautiful women denying him sex. James Oliver Huberty shot up a California McDonald's in 1984 after his business ventures failed. We could also consider the trend of post office shootings committed by disgruntled postal workers or former workers, or the fact that nearly a third of all mass shootings often occur in

workplaces, or the many incidents involving a woman being shot for leaving or threatening to leave her abusive male partner.

“If violence was just due to genetics, [mass shootings] would not be happening with increasing frequency or occur so much more often in the United States than other places,” says Madfis. “It’s time to have a close look at our culture and what is going in terms of how masculinity is defined and characterized, which is often as something that is performed or ‘proven’ through acts of aggression and even violence (Kiesel, 2018).

Kiesel certainly gives an alternative view on mass shootings. She gives thought provoking information as to why we (as a society) should carefully consider a non-one-sided view on why these mass shootings are taking place. She dismisses some charges against the mental illness community that shouldn’t be dismissed perhaps, rising against her own argument of creating a non-one-sided view point, but Kiesel does spark some new information that cannot be ignored.

The only two mass shootings committed by women since 1982, were done by perpetrators Cherie Lash Rhoades and Jennifer Sanmarco. Both shootings took place in California, Rhoades was Native American and Sanmarco was Caucasian.

*Psychology Today* blogger, Elly Vintiadis, Ph.D., wrote an article titled Mass Shooting and the Myth of the Violent Mentally Ill. Here, she, like Kiesel, focuses on not being quick to decide that all mass shootings have a shooter(s) that with a connection to a mental illness. She states

When the latest school shooting took place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, President Trump tweeted:

“So many signs that the Florida shooter was mentally disturbed, even expelled from school for bad and erratic behavior. Neighbors and classmates knew he was a big problem. Must always report such instances to authorities, again and again!”

With declarations such as these, President Trump and a number of his colleagues made school shootings a question largely about mental health, implying that the cause of such actions is that the people carrying them out are mentally ill. In doing so they help perpetuate the stereotype that mentally ill individuals are violent and dangerous, and thus reinforce stigmatizing beliefs about mental illness that, though common, are unfair and erroneous.

Associating mental illness with violence is, in a certain respect, a natural reaction to an action that to most people seems unfathomable. It is natural in the sense that in trying to understand mass shootings—and to find something to blame them on—especially when they involve children, one immediately asks who would do such a thing? And a common answer is that nobody who thinks like us, like most people, would. In this, purely statistical sense, a person who acts in this way is abnormal (Vintiadis, 2018).

Vintiadis goes on to say that her theory does not discount that some mass shooters are mentally ill, but that most are not. She believes that “generalizing to the whole population is unfair and not supported by evidence” (2018). She believes that connecting the dots to the mentally ill being violent and supposing that all mass shooters are mentally ill (instead of perhaps getting to the root of the true problem), is “counterproductive – both when it comes to addressing mental illness, and to addressing mass shootings and gun violence in general” (2018).

Vintiadis also states in her blog that



There is substantial research(link is external) that shows that the correlation between mental illness and violence is much lower than is commonly assumed and that mass shooters are not in their majority mentally ill. Even in cases of severe mental illness, like schizophrenia, research shows that there is no significant link between mental illness and mass shootings or other forms of extreme violence. In fact, the evidence shows that the percentage of mentally ill people that are violent is less than the percentage of violent people in non-mentally ill populations. For instance, data shows that, at most, only around 5 percent (link is external)of crimes in the U.S. are performed by people with mental illness and that the percentage is the same for violent crimes(link is external)—which means that 95 percent of violent crimes are committed by non-mentally ill individuals.

Though mental illness of any kind in itself is not predictive of violence, a tendency towards extreme violent behavior is associated with other risk factors(link is external) including various environmental stressors, past trauma (e.g., physical abuse), substance abuse(link is external), domestic violence, a history of incarceration, parental criminal history and access to firearms(link is external). For example, there is substantial evidence that people with mental illness who do end up committing violent crimes (just as people who are not mentally ill but commit violent crimes) are also substance users, a factor which is a more reliable indication of violent behavior(link is external) than the presence of mental illness.

It is factors such as these that, regardless of mental health, are predictive of violent tendencies and violent behavior. Ignoring such determinants of violence boils down to a

form of scapegoating—trying to easily make sense of mass shootings by blaming them on mental illness while ignoring scientific research that shows that this phenomenon is much more complicated than that and that addressing it effectively will have to involve focusing on other factors, including sociocultural ones (Psychology Today 2018).

One might draw the conclusion, based on evidence offered by Vintiadis, that the plea for an insanity defense by a mass shooter would be troublesome due to some authors, political activists, researchers, educators, and others' attempts to disprove the connection of mental illness to their specific acts of violence.

Vintiadis sums up her article by stating that

I have written in a past blog post about the effects that stigma has on mental illness and how it affects the quality of life and the recovery prospects of people living with mental disorders. I argued there that perpetuating wrong stereotypes about mental health is a public health issue, but it is also a question of social justice. This is also the case when it comes to blaming mental illness for mass shootings.

One effect that this stigmatization can have on people with mental illness is that they will avoid seeking treatment in order not to be labeled as dangerous. Clearly, this is a form of harm towards innocent people, since it compromises their recovery prospects and thus their quality of life. But this also means that potentially dangerous people—people with violent tendencies—will also not seek therapy since, they too, will not want to be labeled as mentally ill and thus carry the stigma that goes with such a label.

In the end, it is misguided to causally connect extreme violence with mental illness and, more importantly, it is unlikely that doing so will have any effect in preventing such incidents from happening again. Instead of taking the easy route of scapegoating we should try to understand and address the various determinants of violence, including sociocultural determinants, and make sure that people with violent tendencies have access to affordable therapy and that, regardless of their mental health, they do not have access to guns (2018).

So, let's look at how gun control relates to the mentally ill. How are mentally ill persons able to obtain firearms, or are they? Any person who has been involuntarily committed to a mental institution or deemed mentally incompetent by a court system is prevented from purchasing a firearm. Or, at least, they're legally supposed to be blocked. Yet we've all (by now) heard the saying that criminals will get their hands on firearms faster than someone can obtain one legally. So, even in the event that a person is declared mentally unstable, don't they still have options to obtain guns? Yes, of course they do.

We are completely out of touch with reality if we think that any and all persons who purchase firearms do so legally.

On [gun.laws.com](http://gun.laws.com), they estimate that there are "250-280 million firearms in America. Out of these, it is impossible to tell how many are illegal weapons" (2017). The article goes on to state

But it is still fairly clear with a cursory glance of some statistics that illegal weapons have made their ways into the hands of plenty of criminals. 86% of juveniles in correctional facilities are reported to have owned a gun at some point, all of which

would have been illegal weapons for the juveniles to own. 65% of juvenile offenders tend to own three or more illegal weapons and firearms.

In Rochester, New York, there was even the reported statistic that 22% of all young males in the city, as opposed to just those who are juvenile offenders, have carried an illegal gun for some period of time. While these particular statistics are oriented around youth, it still remains fairly clear that illegal guns are very prevalent, for these young people to have such easy access to them.

According to [gunfacts.info](http://gunfacts.info), there were approximately 100,000 people convicted of "unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle each year." The point of this number is to prove that simply because something is licensed does not mean that unlicensed individuals will actually obey the regulations.

This is something of a logical fallacy, as the same rules do not necessarily apply to illegal weapons usage; but, according to all information, it would seem the analogy is apt, not least because unlicensed, illegal weapons will never be discovered unless the wielder is caught with the weapon.

Handguns are easily concealable, and as most illegal weapons are handguns, most illegal weapons will remain undiscovered. Furthermore, interestingly, [gunfacts.info](http://gunfacts.info) points out that criminals who may have committed a crime with a weapon do not actually need to obtain licenses or register their weapons, as this would be an act of self-incrimination, a ruling upheld in 1968 in the case of *Haynes vs. the US*.

Another study showed that five out of six gun-possessing felons did not purchase a handgun or otherwise get one through legal means, but instead procured an illegal weapon through the secondary market, or by theft.

The information of this study strongly supports the fact that handguns used by criminals are most often stolen or traded between each other, and therefore become nigh impossible to track in any meaningful fashion. All of these would be deemed illegal weapons.

According to a study conducted in 1997, which admittedly could be out of date but is one of the most recently conducted studies of this comprehensive nature, only 15% of firearms possessed by Federal inmates were obtained through a retail store. The largest portion of illegal weapons were given to the inmates by a family member or a friend, with the next largest portion having been given to the inmates by a drug dealer.

The bottom line of most of this information is quite clear: the firearms being used in crimes are overwhelmingly illegal weapons, and unfortunately, the government is unable to track illegal weapons because of their illegal, unregistered status (2017).

Articles like this, show that it is nearly impossible to keep up with the rate at which firearms are obtained illegally. Still on the fence that gun control needs revamping, but not sure it will work for criminal who have a greater desire to commit crimes than to purchase firearms the way law-abiding citizens are required and concede to doing? Check out this information from Gifford's Law Center on *Statistics on Gun Trafficking and Private Sales*.

Interstate firearms trafficking flourishes, in part, because states regulate firearm sales differently and there is no federal limitation on the number of guns that an individual may purchase at any one time.

More than half a million firearms are stolen each year in the United States and more than half of stolen firearms are handguns, many of which are subsequently sold illegally.

According to ATF, one percent of federally licensed firearms dealers are responsible for selling almost 60 percent of the guns that are found at crime scenes and traced to dealers.

A 1997 U.S. Department of Justice survey found that 8.4% of state prison inmates who used or possessed a firearm during the offense for which they were incarcerated obtained the gun from the illegal market.<sup>8</sup>

Random inspections by ATF have uncovered that a large percentage of dealers violate federal law, and that percentage is growing.<sup>9</sup>

An estimated 40% of the guns acquired in the U.S. annually come from unlicensed sellers who are not required by federal law to conduct background checks on gun purchasers.<sup>10</sup>

Nearly 80% of Mexico's illegal firearms and most recovered crime guns in major Canadian cities are imported illegally from the U.S. (2017).

This information, and many others (including statistics), should open the eyes of American citizens to prove that we need a stricter gun policy on obtaining access to firearms. Proof of mental illness excluded, it should not be easy to get your hands on a gun – of any kind. I'm finding that most people agree with that statement. Those who don't, usually don't have the best of intentions with what they intend to use the firearm for. And, criminals who plan to use firearms to commit crimes, surely do not want anything traceable to them where they could be held accountable to whatever act of violence they've just recently been involved in – with said

“illegal” firearm. So, stricter gun control laws will only assist in law abiding citizens obeying the law even more. Criminals will still not adhere to the laws – regardless their strength or intentions to prevent crimes. Criminals who have a strong enough desire to commit violent acts of terror will always find a way. If they had respect for the law in the first place, they wouldn’t be criminals.

Moving on from gun control and how easily firearms are accessible to who is responsible for these mass shootings. Earlier, I gave information pertaining to all mass shooters being men, except for two women. Now, I’d like to look at race/ethnicity of these men. I’m also curious as to research done on why they committed these massacres.

Looking at statistics on [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com), we learn that

the number of mass shootings in the United States between 1982 and February 2018, by race and ethnicity of the shooter(s). Between 1982 and February 2018, 56 out of 97 mass shootings were initiated by White shooters.

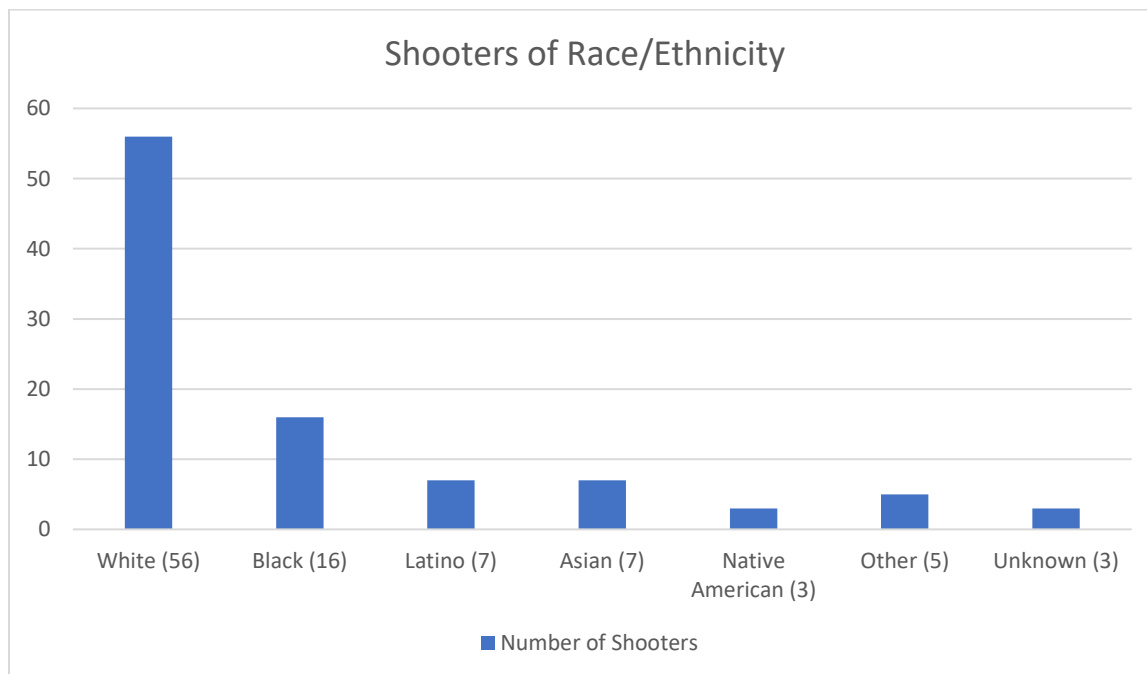
The high number of tragic mass shootings that have occurred in the United States has led to a large amount of attention on the profile of the people who commit such violent acts.

A look at the worst mass shootings in the United States suggests no clear common connections other than a tendency to undertake mass shootings in educational institutions and other populated areas. However, a look at mass shootings in the United States by gender shows a great majority of mass shootings are carried out by men.

With no clear patterns between the socio-economic or cultural background of mass shooters increasing attention has been placed on mental health.

Analysis of the factors American's considered to be to blame for mass shootings showed 48 percent of people felt the inability of the mental health system to recognize those who pose a danger to others was a significant factor in 2013. Further attention has also been given to the factors influencing the behavior of mass shooters. Surveys on violence in the media and drug use as potential factors show that many Americans place blame on these influences.

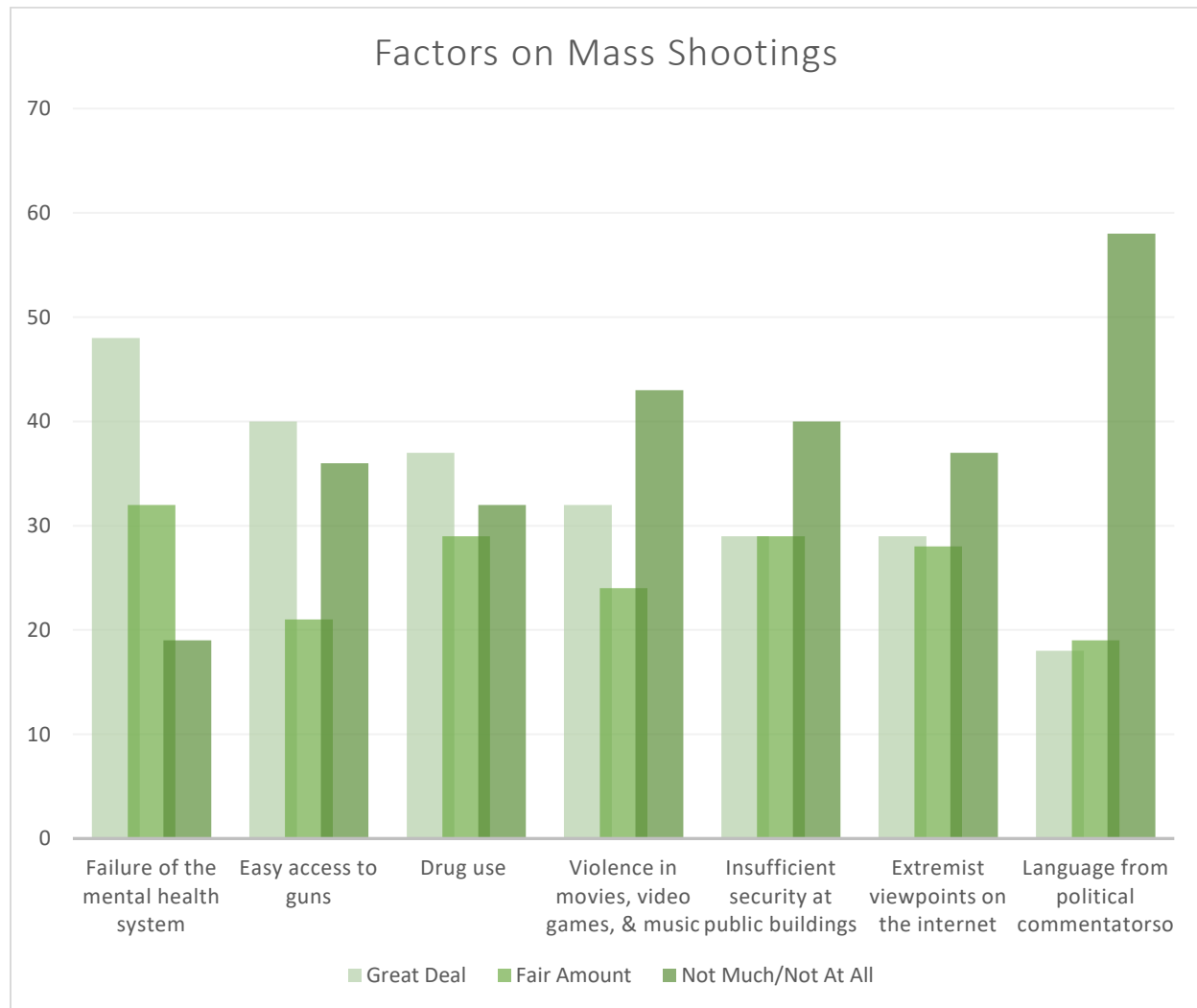
In the wake of multiple mass shootings critics have sought to look beyond the issues of shooter identification and their influences by focusing on their access to guns. The 2013 study above showed 61 percent of Americans felt the easy access to firearms was to blame by either a "great deal" or a "fair amount" (Statista, 2018).



([www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com), 2018)



Another study was also completed in 2013, by [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com), when the question was proposed to a group of Americans on what factors were to blame for the mass shootings in the US in recent years. Here are the results of that study.



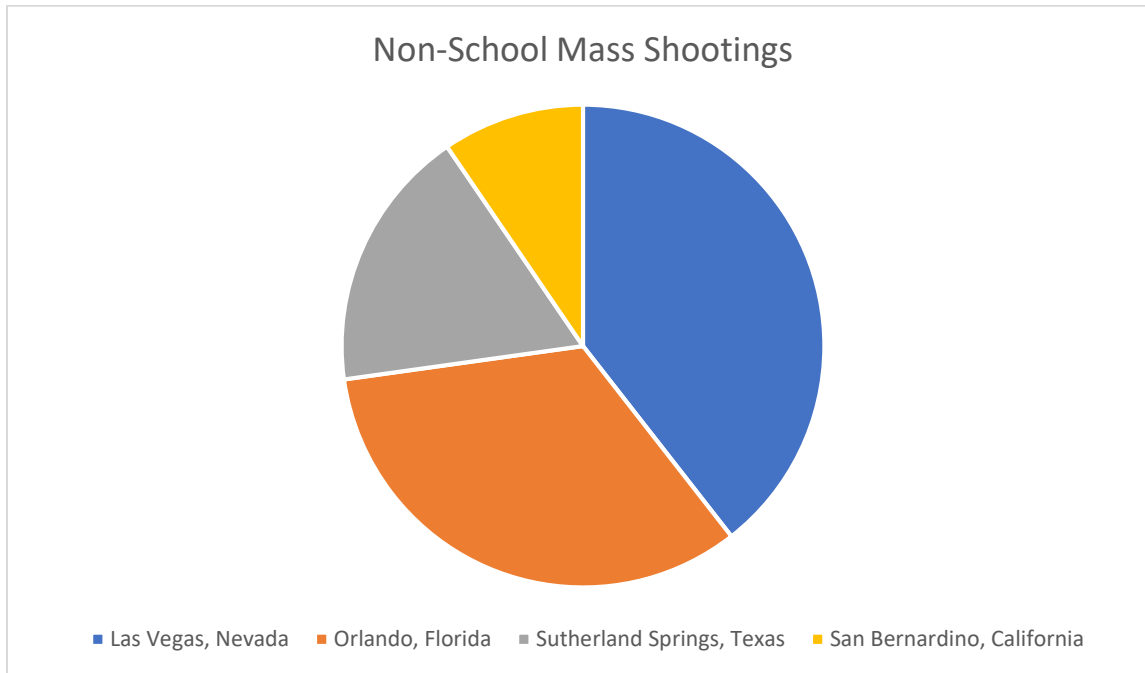
Graph provided by: [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com) (How much do you think each of the following factors is to shootings that have occurred in the US in recent years?)

Based on this study, it's clear that Americans who were polled believe that the failure of the mental health system to identify individuals who are a danger to others was the greatest influence

(48%). Coming in second, is easy access to guns (40%). And while this is just a reflection on the people who were polled, it lines up with some evidence in this paper and it contradicts other information given. Proving again, the problem is NOT one-sided. Even though this study was done five years ago, it still rings true on how many things factor in on the reasons behind mass shootings. No one will ever be able to pinpoint *exactly* the cause of why people choose to seek out populated areas and open fire. These stats also serve as a great indicator on how much difference there is in opinions of the American people as a whole. There are still so many different viewpoints, most with great arguments for whatever stance they've taken, on why these massacres continue to occur. No one has the definitive answer on how to make them stop or how to prevent them from happening in the first place. The common ground we have to arrive at is that there could be multiple answers for both. Then we move forward to plan and prevent in the best way we can to save lives – even those of the potential shooters.

While it seems that the new stage for mass shootings is, in fact, schools (elementary, middle, high school, and colleges), we cannot exclude the volume of murders committed by shootings outside the school setting. Some of these acts of violence could've also contributed to reasons people decide to indulge in school shootings, but their environment of choice is often one of convenient. They are either a student or a faculty member or has easy access to school property and, therefore, they choose these locations. They may also choose these locations to create mass hysteria with the media and new outlets. Death (murder) is never easy to hear about, but it seems particularly grim when it is innocent children and/or teachers responsible for them. Schools are often chosen targets because of their victims' inability to get away. Once inside a classroom or gym or hallway, there are few places to run. Making these children easy prey.

Here are some horrific examples of mass shootings outside schools that certainly demand attention into what should be the focus of how to prevent these horrendous acts of terror.



(Wikipedia Information, 2018)

On October 1, 2017, Stephen Paddock opened fire on concertgoers in Las Vegas, Nevada. Witnesses say the gunfire went on for approximately 10-15 minutes. Paddock killed 58 people and wounded almost 500. Authorities say he took his own life in his hotel room at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino (CNN, 2018).

On June 12, 2016, Omar Saddiqui Mateen shot and killed 49 people at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. He injured more than fifty people during the massacre and he was subsequently shot and killed by police in an effort to save hostages police say Mateen was holding inside the club (CNN, 2018).

In Sutherland Springs, Texas, on November 5, 2017, Devin Patrick Kelley opened fire on a church killing 25 people and an unborn child, wounding 20 others. Kelley was later found deceased. Police are unclear if the shooter died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound (CNN, 2018).

Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik killed employees gathered for a holiday party at Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California, on December 2, 2015. They killed 14 people and wounded an additional 21. They ultimately died during a shootout with police. Farook and Malik were married (CNN, 2018).

These are just four examples of mass shootings outside the school setting. In just these four shootings, 147 people lost their lives and another 600+ are wounded. So many lives changed or taken in only four acts of violence. No doubt, things like these shootings paves the way for potential criminals interested in mass shootings or mentally unstable persons to figure out a game-plan or a how-to on improving their chances of committing a mass shooting. Determined to kill a higher volume of people and wound an undetermined number of others. Aren't we helping these acts be committing by not having harsher punishments or lessening the media coverage and attention these criminals receive (both deceased and surviving)?

One final thing to address and to consider in mass shooters is the 'why'? Why do mass murders happen? Why do shooters decide on targets of a large scale and populated areas? Is there any way we can ever really come up with a true answer for this? Perhaps not, but we can rely on what statistics and previous events show us.

In the internet magazine article on National Review, John R. Lott, Jr., states that "we refuse to confront murderers' motivations, and make high body counts more likely" (2013). Lott goes on to address various reasons behind why he believes mass murders happen (based on former

evidence). He begins his focus on the mass murders committed in Newtown, Connecticut, at Sandy Hook Elementary School. This mass school shooting took place on December 14, 2012, when Adam Lanza fatally shot twenty school children and six adults at the school. His rampage began at home when he shot and killed his mother, bringing his total killings to twenty-seven deaths before taking his own life by suicide. Lanza was said to have suffered from Asperger's Syndrome and battled depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder as a teen. Although, authorities say it's unlikely that any of these factors contributed to Lanza's decision to commit murder. They focused more on his obsession with violence and things they found in his home pertaining to other mass murders.

Here's what Lott has to say specifically about Sandy Hook.

Why did a deranged man choose to kill 20 innocent young children in Newtown, Conn.?

Immediately after the killing, some speculated that he was jealous of the Sandy Hook students because his mother spent time volunteering at the school.

However, new evidence shows the real motive was likely different: He wanted to try to kill more people than the current mass-shooting record holder, the 2011 Norwegian mass shooter.

Police have apparently discovered articles in the killer's bedroom leading to this conclusion. *USA Today* writes that the school was picked "because it was the easiest target for an alleged attempt to outdo Norwegian mass murderer who killed 77 people in July 2011." Likewise, the *Hartford Courant* reports that the Connecticut shooter "saw himself as being in competition with" the Norwegian killer.

Is this a believable motive? Unfortunately, it is. Indeed, the goal of a high body count is nothing new at all. Many mass killers are clearly vying for fame, and not just any

shooting will do. They know very well that the more people they kill, the more the world will hear about their deeds. The Newtown killer presumably picked this target also because the horror of killing small children would further add to the media attention. These killers might well be mentally ill, but many of them are also calculating and highly logical. Though many plan to die in the attacks (75 percent of mass shootings end with the shooter's death), they typically feel unappreciated and want to be remembered by others. They use mass killing to force people to notice their existence (Lott, 2013).

More proof that there can be more than one cause as to why shooters decide to kill. There could be several underlying reasons as to why someone decides to take the life of another, whether one person or in a populated area killing several. There also has to be thought given to how people can have such a similar past and one kills while one doesn't. Again, there is never going to be one single answer to these questions.

Lott goes on to say that a "perfect example (of killers wanting to be remembered by others) is the Virginia Tech killer, who compared himself to the Columbine killers. He hoped that if he could massacre more people than they had, he could achieve even more media coverage" (2013).

All the discussion about the shooter only shows future mass killers that they can expect to be lavished with similar attention. I have been arguing for almost 15 years that, in order to cut down on future killing sprees, the media should stop giving these killers the attention that they crave, especially by mentioning their names.

Some countries, including Canada, put legal embargoes on information about pending criminal cases. Only after trials have occurred may the news media go into the case's details. The main reason is to protect the jury from bias, but it also limits the notoriety the

killers can accrue. That said, even Canada has no restrictions on coverage if the killer himself dies at the scene.

But this is the United States, home to the First Amendment. No one seriously discusses a gag order on the press, even if it would be a very effective way of curtailing these attacks. A free press serves as an important check on government power and allowing the government to determine when certain topics are too sensitive for the press puts us on a slippery slope (Lott, 2013).

Mass killers choose their targets carefully, so they can achieve the greatest carnage. Obviously, schoolchildren make an easy target, but they aren't the only example of this phenomenon.

Mass shootings occur in places where people of all ages are defenseless, such as so-called gun-free zones in which lots of people congregate and guns are banned. Since at least 1950, all but two of the public shootings in America with more than three deaths have taken place where guns were banned.

Take the Aurora shooting last summer. Within 20 minutes of the murderer's apartment there were seven movie theaters premiering the Batman movie. The shooter didn't go to the one that was closest to his apartment. And he didn't choose the one with the largest audience. Instead, he went to the only one where guns were banned.

We should be trying to deprive these killers of what they crave: attention and easy targets. Instead, we ignore measures that might keep them from getting attention and pass laws that give them defenseless victims (Lott, 2013).

Another great point in addressing gun control. Not even making certain areas “gun-free zones” will deter men (or women) who wish to carry out a mass murder. There are just so, so many variables in these malicious acts of violence.

The last thing I’d like to address is what happens to the killers who don’t die during their act or terror. An article on [www.news.com.au](http://www.news.com.au) gives an account for several of the shooters who survived their mass shootings. All except two, are incarcerated. Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden, two cousins who committed a mass murder an elementary school in Arkansas in 1998, were juveniles at the time of the shooting. Each boy remained incarcerated until he reached the age of twenty-one and was then released. This sparked an outrage with folks who then began demanding a higher law on consequences for juveniles who commit such heinous crimes. The boys have been in trouble with the law since their release. Here is information on other mass shooters who did not die during their shooting spree.

Nikolas Cruz has been charged with 17 counts of murder after the Florida school shooting. To date, there’s been a total of 30 mass shooting incidents in the United States in 2018 alone. This includes Cruz, who has been charged with 17 counts of murder after the Florida school shooting yesterday. But in Cruz we see one of the few examples of a perpetrator who doesn’t end up dead in the process.

A 2010 study of mass shootings found that perpetrators die in 48 per cent of attacks — 38 per cent killing themselves, and the remaining 10 per cent at the hands of the police.



Of the 22 deadliest shootings in US history to date, the perpetrator has died in all but five cases, including Cruz's.

James Holmes was responsible for the Aurora movie cinema mass shooting during a midnight screening of *The Dark Knight Rises* on July 20, 2012.

He set off tear gas grenades and shot multiple firearms into the audience at the Century movie theatre in Colorado, killing 12 people and injuring 70.

Holmes, 30, was arrested in his car outside the cinema moments after the incident. He confessed to the crime but attempted to plead insanity.

His trial lasted 11 weeks, after which he was sentenced to 12 consecutive life sentences, plus 3318 years in prison.

Holmes was found guilty on all 165 counts against him. He avoided the death penalty because the jury couldn't reach a unanimous decision and was instead sentenced to life in prison without parole at Colorado State Penitentiary, the highest security jail in the state. Former prison guard George Emil Banks was responsible for shooting dead 13 people at his home in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

On the morning of September 25, 1982, after a night of mixing straight gin with prescription drugs, Banks used an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle to kill eight people in his house.

The victims included four of Banks' own children, and three women who were girlfriends and mothers of them.

He also shot at bystanders who were across the street during the incident, before going to the home of his former girlfriend and their son. He killed them both, as well as his girlfriend's mother and nephew, who were also in the home.

When police found Banks, a four-hour standoff took place. On September 30, 1982, Banks was charged with eight counts of murder and a string of other crimes including car theft, robbery and aggravated assault.

During his trial the following year, Banks claimed he had only wounded his victims, and that police had killed them. At the end of his trial the jury recommended the death penalty.

Over the following years, Banks has remained in prison while attorneys continued to appeal his case. He was found mentally incompetent three times, with psychiatrists testifying that he was “psychotic, delusional and irrational”.

In 2010, his lawyer said his mental health had deteriorated significantly since 1982, and he was ruled mentally incompetent for execution.

Today Banks, now 75, remains on death row in Pennsylvania.

In 2013, Army psychiatrist Nidal Malik Hasan was sentenced to death for killing 13 people and wounding 32 others in a 2009 shooting rampage.

The incident took place at Fort Hood, a US military post in Texas, and remains the worst mass murder at a military installation in American history.

Hasan carried out the shooting shortly before he was due to be deployed to Afghanistan.

That morning, he gave away furniture and handed out copies of the Koran.

After the shooting, he was hospitalized under heavy guard in stable condition.

Hasan was charged with 13 counts of premeditated murder and 32 counts of attempted murder. The jury was given the option of agreeing to hand him a life sentence in prison, or the death penalty.

He appeared to be hoping for the death sentence to be given a path to martyrdom. The Judge responded saying: “[He] can never be a martyr because he has nothing to give ... Do not be misled; do not be confused; do not be fooled. He is not giving his life. We are taking his life. This is not his gift to God, it’s his debt to society. He will not now and will not ever be a martyr.”

After his sentencing, Hasan was incarcerated at the United States Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas to await execution. He remains there today.

Howard Unruh was responsible for the first mass shooting in US history.

In 1949, he went on a 12-minute walk through his neighborhood in Camden, New Jersey, and murdered 13 people — including three children.

At the end of his killing spree, he returned to his apartment and surrendered himself to the police waiting outside.

According to a psychiatric report, Unruh believed his neighbors were gossiping about his private life. The report said he was “a master of suppressed rage” with a “smoldering anger”. He even kept a diary detailing all the things he thought people were saying about him.

Unruh was eventually charged with 13 counts of “willful and malicious slayings with malice aforethought” and three counts of “atrocious assault and battery”. He was also deemed insane, which made him immune to criminal prosecution.

He ended up in a private cell in a maximum-security psychiatric hospital. His chilling last words — uttered to a psychologist — were “I’d have killed a thousand if I had enough bullets.” After 60 years of confinement, Unruh died at age 88 due to health complications (Fernando, 2018).

What can be concluded with this piece on mass shootings is – there is not one primary answer as to why shooters have committed mass shootings in the past, or how to prevent it from happening in the future, or even as to what's to blame for the shooters decision to commit these horrendous acts on terror on unsuspecting victims.

Do we need stricter gun laws? Yes.

Do we need to give more attention to the mentally ill population? Yes.

Do we need harsher punishment for people committing mass shootings? Yes.

Do we need safer policies in effect for people in these targeted areas? Yes.

Do we need to limit the coverage from the media and how they (can) spin information given to the general population on these mass shootings and shooters? Yes.

Do we need to stop using these tragedies as a political platform to push an agenda? Yes.

Do we need to help victims and surviving family members after these events take place? Yes.

There is SO MUCH we need to be doing. One thing we cannot afford to do is *nothing*.

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