

MASS CASUALTY SHOOTINGS

While mass casualty crimes are rare events, they constitute an important subset of homicides because they garner a great deal of media and public policy attention. The exact number of these events varies by the definition used, but the general trend is that these events have increased in the United States both in terms of frequency as well as the number of people killed. While shootings are the most common form of domestic mass casualty crime, crimes of mass violence include bombings, arson, sabotage, poisonings, chemical weapons, and cyber-attacks as well as events designated as acts of terrorism.¹ This section focuses on mass casualty shootings occurring primarily from 2000 – 2012.²

Three terms are commonly used when considering these types of events: mass murder, active shooter cases, and active shooter events. The FBI uses the term “mass murder,” which refers to the murder of four or more victims occurring during the same incident with no distinctive time period between murders.³ The Department of Homeland Security uses the term “Active Shooter Cases,” which refers to an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.⁴ One recent study used the term “Active Shooter Event,” which refers to one or more persons engaged in killing or attempting to kill multiple people in a defined area with the primary motive appearing to be mass murder.⁵ The statistics and trends

1 U.S. law defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.” 22 U.S.C. § 2656f(d) (2011).

2 The event at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado on April 20, 1999, where two students killed a teacher and 12 classmates, was a defining moment in the country’s analysis and response to mass casualty killings.

3 Robert J. Morton and Mark A. Hilts, eds., “Serial Murder: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives for Investigators,” (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, 2005), accessed November 5, 2014, <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder/serial-murder-july-2008-pdf>.

4 Excluded from these Active Shooter Cases are gang-related shootings, shootings occurring solely in a domestic setting, robberies, drive-by shootings, attacks that did not involve a firearm, and attacks categorized primarily as hostage-taking incidents. Furthermore, events were restricted to those that occurred in the United States, resulted in at least one victim or attacker casualty, and were not foiled before the attack occurred. Raymond W. Kelly, “Active Shooter: Recommendations and Analysis for Risk Mitigation, 2012 Edition,” (New York: New York City Police Department, 2012), 4, accessed October 7, 2014, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/counterterrorism/ActiveShooter.pdf>.

5 More specifically, the area or areas are occupied by multiple, unrelated individuals and at least one of the victims must be unrelated to the shooter. Gang-related shootings are excluded. J. Pete Blair and M. Hunter Martindale, “United States Active Shooter Events from 2000 to 2010: Training and Equipment Implications,” (Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training, Texas State University, 2013), 3, accessed October 7, 2014, <http://alert.org/files/research/ActiveShooterEvents.pdf>.

related to mass casualty shootings reported in this section rely on one of these three definitions. In addition to the challenge in defining the underlying crime, the effect of these incidents is difficult to quantify. The statistics below are limited to victim fatalities. The actual harm from mass violence encompasses a much broader circle, including those with non-fatal injuries and those who experience trauma and ongoing mental injury. This impact also extends to the victims’ families and to witnesses, first responders, medical professionals, and the larger community.

- Between 2006 and 2010, victims of mass murders constituted only about 1 percent of all murder victims in the United States based on FBI data.⁶ During this time, 156 mass murders occurred that involved 774 victims. This number compares to 71,945 victims of murder during that same time period.⁷

Active Shooter Events

- According to a recent study, the number of Active Shooter Events has increased over the past 12 years.⁸ However, according to a study published by the PEW Research Center, this may not be an accurate picture of Active Shooter Events due to limitations in the data including timeliness and reliability.⁹
- From 2000 to 2008, Active Shooter Events averaged 1 event every other month or approximately 5 per year.¹⁰

6 Morton and Hilts, “Serial Murder: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives.”

7 Brad Heath and Megan Hoyer, “Mass Killings Occur in USA Once Every Two Weeks,” *USA Today*, December 18, 2012, *calculated from data in FBI Supplemental Homicide Report*, accessed October 7, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/18/mass-killings-common/1778303/>.

8 J. Pete Blair, M. Hunter Martindale, and Terry Nichols, “Active Shooter Events from 2000 to 2012,” paragraph 10, accessed June 27, 2014, <http://leb.fbi.gov/2014/january/active-shooter-events-from-2000-to-2012>.

9 There are differences in the methodologies between these two studies that may account for the differences in counts of Active Shooter Events/Public Mass Killings. J. Pete Blair and colleagues employed the supplemental homicide reports produced by the FBI as part of the Uniform Crime Report, as well as obtaining information via the Freedom of Information Act, and searching LexisNexis to obtain newspaper accounts of Active Shooter Events. Drew Desilver’s article used the *USA Today* database to obtain counts of Public Mass Killings. Drew Desilver, “Why Timely, Reliable Data on Mass Killings Is Hard to Find,” paragraph 2, accessed June 17, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/17/why-timely-reliable-data-on-mass-killings-is-hard-to-find/>.

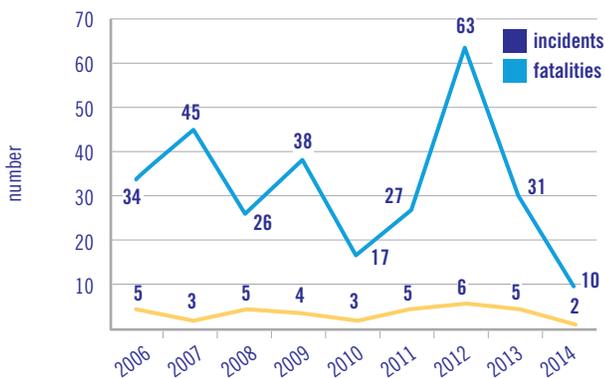
10 J. Pete Blair, “Active Shooter Events,” paragraph 10.

- From 2009 to 2012, the average Active Shooter Events increased to at least 1 or more per month or approximately 16 per year. According to the same study, the increase continued into 2013 with approximately 15 Active Shooter Events.¹¹
- The frequency of Active Shooter Events has increased from 1 in 2000 to 15 in 2013.¹² According to a Pew Research Center tabulation of *USA Today* data, there were only five incidents of public mass killings in 2013.¹³

Characteristics of Active Shooter Events

- According to the same recent study, between 2000 and 2012, 40 percent of active shooter events occurred at businesses, 29 percent at schools, 19 percent outdoors, and 12 percent at other places (including places like military bases and churches).¹⁶
- According to another study of Active Shooter Events in the United States from 2000 to 2012, 94 percent of shooters were male, and 6 percent were female.¹⁷
- According to another study of Active Shooter Events from 2000 to 2012, in 45 percent of events the shooter did not have a connection with the shooting location, and in 55 percent of the events the shooter had a connection with the shooting location.¹⁸
- According to a recent study of Active Shooter Events between 2000 and 2012, 59 percent of the shooter(s) used a pistol, 26 percent of the shooter(s) used a rifle, and 8 percent of the shooter(s) used a shotgun. Moreover, in one-third of cases, the shooter(s) brought multiple weapons.¹⁹

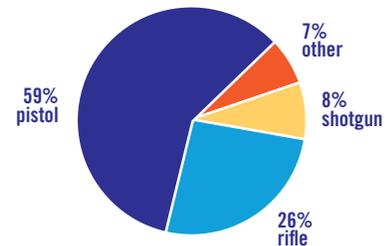
PUBLIC MASS KILLINGS FROM 2006 – 2014*



*Note: 2014 includes all incidents until June 17, 2014. Public mass killings refers to events in public settings with at least 4 victims. While shootings are the majority of the events, data also includes those killed by stabbing, blunt force trauma and smoke inhalation and burns.

- In 2013, there were 72 people shot and 39 killed in Active Shooter Events.¹⁴ According to the same Pew Research Center study there were only 31 fatalities attributed to the five incidents of public mass killings in 2013.¹⁵

TYPE OF GUN USED IN ACTIVE SHOOTER EVENTS FROM 2000 – 2012



¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Drew Desilver, "Why timely, reliable data on mass killings is hard to find," Figure 1.

¹⁴ J. Pete Blair, "Active Shooter Events," paragraph 10.

¹⁵ Drew Desilver, "Why timely, reliable data on mass killings is hard to find," Figure 1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ J. Pete Blair, "Active Shooter Events," paragraph 14.

¹⁸ Ibid., paragraph 15.

¹⁹ Ibid., paragraph 17.