

# RESEARCH IN BRIEF

## Mass Shooting in the United States: Victim and Offender Profiles

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### Introduction

Mass shootings are not an everyday occurrence, but they have the potential to leave entire nations in hysteria. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, over 100 mass shootings have occurred in the United States leaving nearly 850 people killed (Peterson & Densley, 2023). Not only have a large number of people been killed in mass shootings, hundreds of thousands of people have suffered direct and indirect injuries as a result of the actions of a few. Each individual killed had family, friends, and loved ones who mourned them, first responders who witnessed the aftermath of the carnage, individuals who survived the experience yet witnessed it all, community members who no longer feel safe, and the lingering feelings of hopelessness amongst all.

While the consequences of mass shootings are widespread and extensive, research on this topic is still in an early exploratory phase. The current *Research in Brief* examines the existing state of mass shootings in the United States and profiles of its victim and offender. These profiles include information on the demographic characteristics of both victims and offenders, as well as factors associated with offenders of mass shootings. Prevention strategies will also be discussed.

### Definition of Mass Shootings

There are several definitions of mass shootings utilized in the research literature on these incidents. The current study uses the following definition of mass shooting provided by the

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Over 850 people have been killed in U.S. mass shootings since 2000 (Peterson & Densley, 2023).
- Based on a limited definition focused on at least four victim fatalities that occurred in a public location and not related to any underlying criminal activity, there have been 112 mass shootings across numerous states from 2000 to 2022 (Peterson & Densley, 2023).
- Since 2000, Nevada has experienced two mass shootings with one being the “1 October” attack, the largest mass shooting in modern American history that left 60 people dead and over 850 people injured in the process.
- Primary victim and shooter profiles were developed to highlight who tends to be the victim and offender of mass shooting incidents.
- Early detection methods, such as VOID are being utilized to identify potential individuals who are likely to become involved in future gun violence.

Congressional Research Service and the Violence Project:

“multiple homicide incident in which four or more victims are murdered with firearms—

not including the offender(s)—within one event, and at least some of the murders occurred in a public location or locations in close geographical proximity (e.g., a workplace, school, restaurant, or other public settings), and the murders are not attributable to any other underlying criminal activity or commonplace circumstance (armed robbery, criminal competition, insurance fraud, argument, or romantic triangle)” (Krouse & Richardson, 2015).

### Scope of the Problem

#### *National Overview*

By all accounts, mass shootings in the United States (U.S.) are a national problem. From 2000 to 2022, there have been 112 mass shootings across numerous states. The exact number of these incidents varies depending on the definition and data source used. For example, Associated Press and USA TODAY (2023) has identified 451 mass shootings just from 2006 to 2022 (Fox, 2023). They used a looser definition and counted any mass shootings that resulted in at least four victim fatalities. As shown in Figure 1, the number of fatalities and injuries in these attacks has generally increased over time.

**Figure 1. Number of Mass Shootings and Deaths in the United States (2000-2022)**

Mass shootings are not limited to a particular state and their prevalence varies across states. For example, 15 states had no mass shootings from 2000 to 2022 (see Figure 2).

In contrast, states like Texas (n=18 mass shootings) and California (n=12 incidents) have multiple incidents (Peterson & Densley, 2023).

**Figure 2. Number of Mass Shootings and Deaths in the United States (2000-2022)**

#### *Nevada State Overview*

From 2000 to 2022, Nevada has experienced two mass shootings. One of these was the “1 October” attack, the largest mass shooting in modern American history. In this mass shooting, the offender open fired from several stories up into a large crowd at the Route 91 festival in 2017 in Las Vegas, Nevada. His actions left 60 people dead and over 850 people injured in the p9705 0 cs

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Examples of these include a rapid increase in depression, mood swings, increased agitation or abusive behaviors, unusual feelings of calmness or happiness, the inability to complete daily tasks, paranoia, increased isolation, and signs of losing touch with reality (Peterson & Densley, 2023). Unfortunately, some of these examples are common occurrences within the general population so it can be difficult to truly see the signs of crisis until it is too late.

Among various types of mental illness, thought disorders has been widely associated with increased violence and aggressive behavior (Song, Corcoran &

colleagues (2019), the VOID tool was effective enough to utilize in identifying individuals who will be involved in gun violence. Further, a number of machine learning (ML) models and tools have been utilized to scour social media sites to predict and classify mass shooting topics to detect individuals who may offend in the future (Ahmed & Okoroafor, 2023). In addition, situational crime prevention techniques such as target-hardening, removing excuses, decreasing provocations, and increasing mental health expenditures offer prevention strategies.

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