

One Nation, Under the Gun

In the wake of the slaughter at a Colorado movie theater and at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin this summer, *Mother Jones* identified and analyzed 60 mass shootings over the last 30 years. The data reveals that as gun laws have loosened and millions more firearms have flooded the country, mass shootings have become more frequent and more deadly. —**Mark Follman**

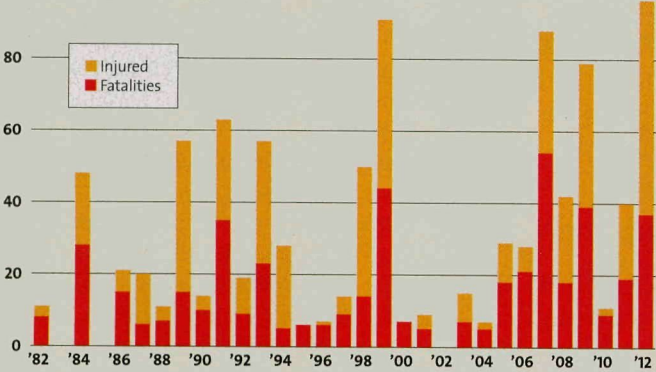
What exactly is a mass shooting?

The FBI defines a mass murderer as someone who kills four or more people (not including himself) in a single incident, usually in one location. (As opposed to spree or serial killers, who strike multiple times.) Our investigation excluded shootings involving armed robberies or gang violence. We used conservative criteria to build a comprehensive rundown of this particular kind of high-profile attack—at schools, workplaces, government buildings, and shopping malls.

More frequent, more bloody

Mass shootings represent a small fraction of the nation's gun violence. There have been, on average, two mass shootings per year since 1982. Yet 23 of the 60 cases we documented happened since 2006. As of September, there had been five this year—and a record number of casualties.

Annual mass shooting casualties



Armies of one

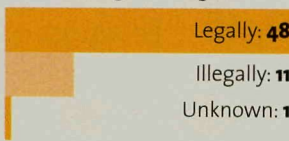
Most killers possessed several weapons. More than 70 percent carried a semi-automatic handgun; more than 40 percent had an assault weapon. Eighty percent obtained their weapons legally.

Guns possessed by mass shooters*



*Includes multiple weapons. Assault weapons include machine pistols.

How killers got their guns



Portrait of a mass killer

All but one of the 62 killers were men (two cases involved two shooters); their average age was 35. The youngest was 11. Many clearly suffered from mental illness, which may explain why the majority took their own lives.

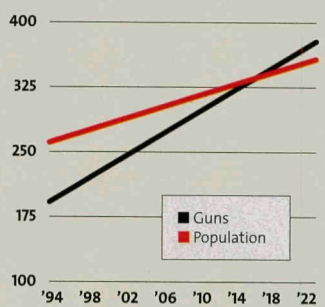
Killers who...

- ...committed suicide: **34**
- ...were apprehended: **21**
- ...were shot dead by police: **7**

The arms race

In 1995, there were an estimated 200 million firearms in private hands. Today, there are roughly 300 million. At this rate, there will be a gun for every man, woman, and child in less than a decade.

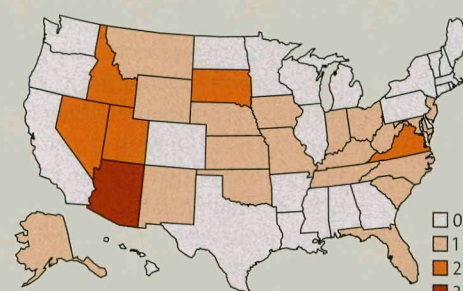
Number of civilian firearms vs. US population (millions)



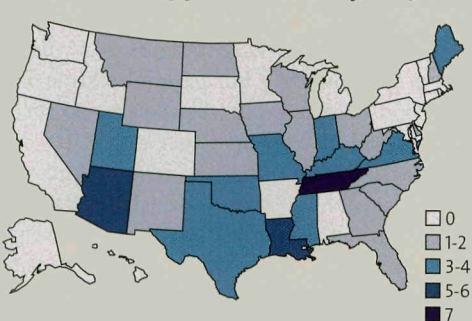
The NRA surge: 4 years, 37 states, 99 laws

Since 2009, 99 laws have been passed across 37 states making guns easier to own, easier to carry in public, and harder for the government to track. Eight states now permit firearms in bars. Law-abiding Missourians can carry a gun while intoxicated. Concealed weapons are allowed in schools in Kansas and churches in Louisiana. Virginia repealed a law requiring handgun vendors to submit sales records and ordered the destruction of all such existing records. Many states passed several laws; two-thirds were passed by GOP-controlled legislatures, although often with bipartisan support.

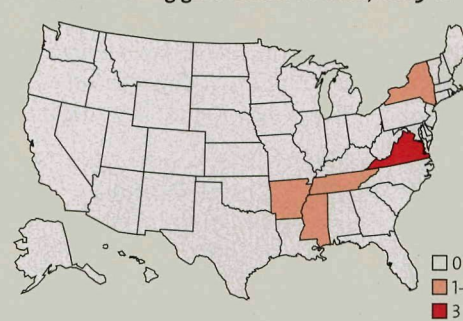
Provisions making guns easier to own, 2009-12



Provisions making guns easier to carry, 2009-12



Provisions making guns harder to track, 2009-12



The friendly fire fallacy

Gun rights advocates suggest that arming more civilians might have stopped some mass shootings. The data suggests otherwise. Colorado has issued nearly 120,000 concealed-carry permits since 2003; Wisconsin has issued more than 122,500 since enacting its law just last year. Neither of the recent shootings in those states was stopped by an armed civilian.

Mass shootings in which...

- ...the killer was apprehended with civilian help: **3**
- ...the killer was stopped while shooting by an armed civilian: **0**

For sources, additional data, and an interactive map of the incidents analyzed here, go to motherjones.com/shootings.

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