

# METHODOLOGY

A note on the methodological approach to compiling “[Mass Shootings in the United States](#).”

## DEFINING A MASS SHOOTING

The objective of Everytown’s mass shooting investigation is to track, examine, and analyze the nature of multivictim shootings in the United States, regardless of the circumstances of the crime. As such, this analysis includes mass shooting incidents that occur in both public and private spaces, have any number of shooters, and result from a myriad of motives, including but not limited to group violence, domestic violence, and community violence.

**Everytown defines a mass shooting as an incident in which four or more people are killed or injured with a firearm, excluding the perpetrator.**

This represents a change in definition from Everytown’s original work on this topic. Everytown’s original definition of a mass shooting was derived from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s definition of mass murder, which included any incident in which four or more people were killed, no matter the weapon(s). This could include firearms but also bombs or other weapons.<sup>1</sup> In 2012 Congress passed the Investigative Assistance for Violent Crimes Act of 2012,<sup>2</sup> which lowered the FBI’s threshold for mass murder to three or more people killed. But the FBI never developed a definition of mass shootings, and no federal definition nor consensus exists across organizations or academics on a definition of such actions.

Recently, the publicly accepted definition of a mass shooting has been shifting to a more inclusive definition that gives equal importance to those injured as well as those killed in a shooting incident. News outlets and researchers have begun to adopt a definition of mass shootings that includes all incidents where four or more people are killed or injured. Everytown’s “Mass Shootings in the United States” report reflects this newer definition.

## MASS SHOOTING DEFINITIONS OF DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS

Source	Years	Definition	2021 Incident Count
Gun Violence Archive Mass Shooting Incidents	2014–present	4+ shot and killed or injured, excluding the shooter	693
<i>Mother Jones’s</i> US	1982–present	3+ killed (4+ before 2013),	6

<sup>1</sup> 1 Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Serial Murder: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives for Investigators,” 2005, <http://bit.ly/1hWdFVU>.

<sup>2</sup> Codified at 6 USCS § 455(d)(2)(a).

Mass Shootings		excluding the shooter. Includes shootings that occurred in a public place only, excluding “conventionally motivated crimes” such as gang violence and armed robbery.	
The Violence Project Mass Shooter Database	1966–present	4+ shot and killed, excluding the shooter. Shootings must have occurred at least partially in a public place and are not attributable to any other underlying criminal activity.	6
<i>USA Today</i> Behind the Bloodshed	2006–present	4+ shot and killed, excluding the perpetrator. Not exclusive to firearm mass killings.	35
<i>Washington Post</i> Mass Shootings in America	1966–May 12, 2021	4+ shot and killed at least partially in public, excluding shootings tied to robberies	8

## DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

Everytown uses the reliable and independent tracking of the nonprofit Gun Violence Archive, established in 2013, which combs through over 7,500 sources from local and state police, media, data aggregates, and government and other sources to provide a comprehensive and timely picture of gun violence in America.

Everytown also tracks incidents as they occur using media and law enforcement sources and revisits them as additional information about the incidents becomes available. To supplement publicly available resources, researchers also request police and court records for the deadliest mass shooting incidents. The information contained in these records includes, but is not limited to, incident reports, investigative reports, available court records, and historical criminal records concerning the perpetrators of these incidents.

These two data sources are combined in the report’s analyses. All incidents with fewer than four people killed are from Gun Violence Archive, while all incidents with four or more people killed are from Everytown tracking.

# DEFINITIONS

Children and teens	Ages 0 through 19
Domestic violence–related mass shooting	Any incident in which the perpetrator shot (either fatally or nonfatally) a current or former intimate partner or family member
Death and injury counts	For the purpose of this analysis, the death and injury counts included reflect only those inflicted by a gunshot wound. In some mass shootings, people are killed or wounded by a weapon other than a firearm, such as a knife, or are wounded while fleeing the scene.
Prohibited person	People prohibited by state or federal laws from possessing firearms for a number of reasons, including felony convictions, domestic violence misdemeanor convictions, domestic violence restraining orders, and having been adjudicated mentally ill by a court of law.
Warning sign	Warning signs that would qualify in this analysis include any of the following, if observed within three years of the shooting: a recent threat of violence, act of violence, or attempted act of violence toward self or others; a conviction for certain firearms offenses (including unlawful and reckless use, display, or brandishing); a violation of a protective order; evidence of ongoing abuse of controlled substances or alcohol.
<b>Gun Hardware</b>	
Assault weapon	Includes semi-automatic firearms that would be classified as assault weapons under state laws or in recent legislation, including AR-15- and AK-47-style weapons as well as other rifles, shotguns, and pistols with certain military-style features, such as pistol grips, flash suppressors, and folding or telescoping stocks. This category excludes manually operated firearms, such as bolt- and lever-action rifles as well as pump-action shotguns.
High-capacity magazine (HCM)	A high-capacity magazine is an ammunition-feeding device that is capable of holding, or which can be readily converted to accept, more than 10 rounds of ammunition.
Mass shootings that “involved” a specific gun type	Shootings that involve multiple types of guns—for example, both a handgun and an assault weapon. Mass shootings were included in the count of each weapon type as long as at least one of the guns was of that type.