

How to stop another Uvalde Massacre and Other Mass Public Shootings from Occurring

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I want to do something to stop violence, but let's do something that matters.

Three basic facts.

1) **Over 92% of violent crimes in America do not involve firearms.** The U.S. Department of Justice's National Crime Victimization Survey for 2020 shows 4,558,150 rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults, and the FBI reports 21,570 murders.¹ Of those, firearms were involved in 350,460 rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults). Adding those numbers up, 7.9% of violent crimes were committed with firearms.

2) While the US media doesn't give much, if any, coverage to mass public shootings in other countries, **mass public shootings per capita are relatively low in the United States compared to the rest of the world.** Over the 20 years from 1998 to 2017, the US had less than 1.13% of the world's share of mass public shooters and 1.77% of its mass public shooting murders. That's much less than the US's 4.6% share of the world population.²

Since 2000, there have been nine mass public school shootings in the US. Germany had only three over that period and Finland had only one, but the United States has four times the population of Germany and sixty times that of Finland. Russia has had four such massacres, but we have 2.3 times its population. On a per capita basis, all three countries have a similar or higher rate compared to that of the US.

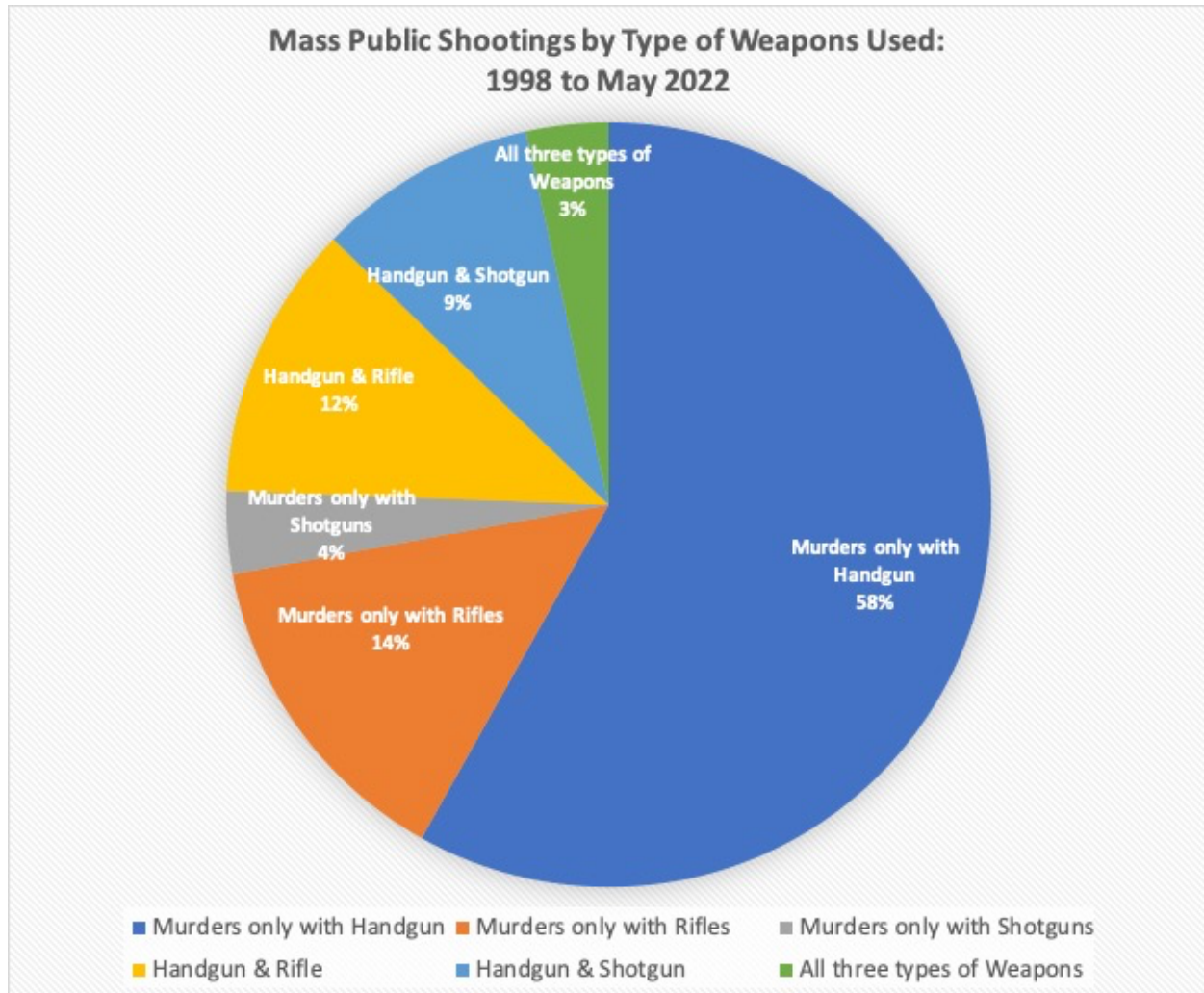
3) Like many other mass public shooters, the Buffalo shooter targeted defenseless people. He even wrote in his manifesto: "Attacking in a weapon-restricted area may decrease the chance of civilian backlash. Schools, courts, or areas where CCW are outlawed or prohibited may be good areas of attack. Areas where CCW permits are low may also fit in this category. Areas with strict gun laws are also great places of attack."³ The national media refuses to report other explicit statements by attackers explaining why they pick the targets they do.⁴ Nor do they report the fact that **94% of mass public shootings occur in places where civilians are banned from having firearms.**⁵

What are the Proposals to Stop these Attacks?

Assault Weapon Ban

In July, the Associated Press's influential Stylebook finally acknowledged that terms such as "assault weapon" and "weapons of war" convey "little meaning" and are "highly politicized."⁶

But that hasn't stopped politicians from continuing to use those terms. "The idea we still allow semi-automatic weapons to be purchased is sick," President Biden claimed on Thanksgiving Day.⁷ "It has no socially redeeming value. Zero. None. Not a single solitary rationale for it except profit for the gun manufacturers." The firearms Biden was talking about are "designed for the civilian market" and certainly not used by any militaries.



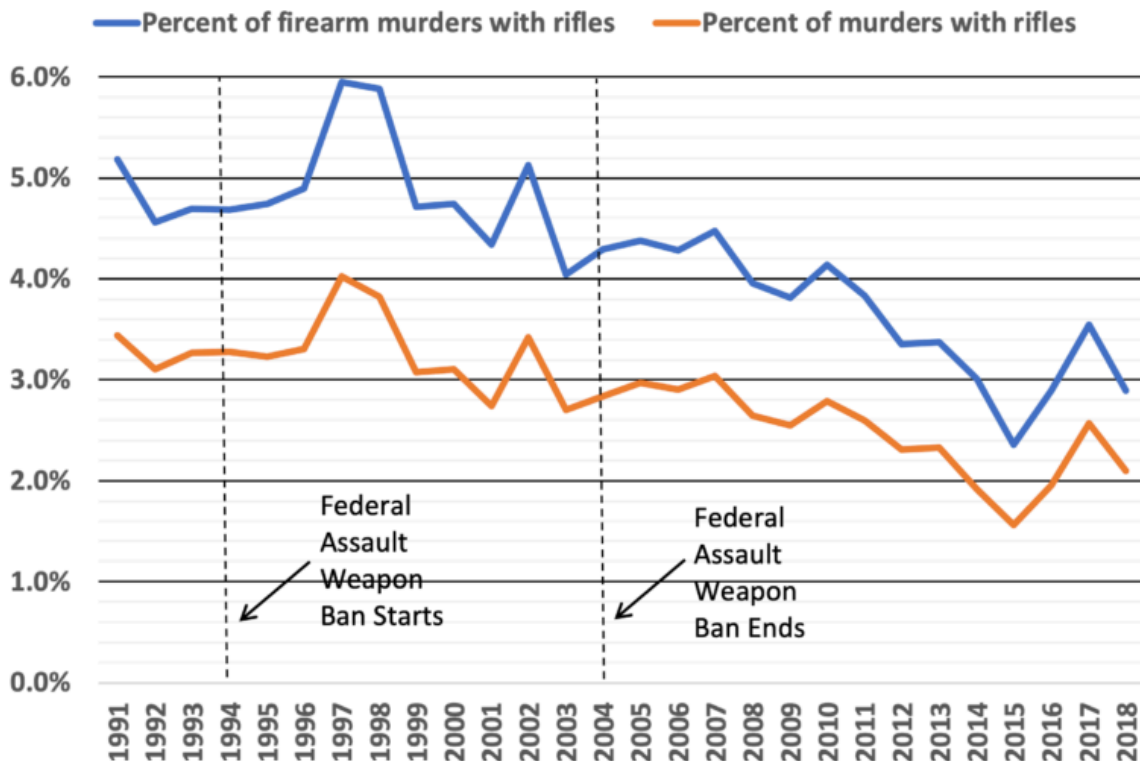
Understandably, people want to do something to stop these attacks. But semi-automatic guns provide critical self-defense benefits. After each shot, a semi-automatic gun reloads itself. A single-shot gun, by contrast, requires manual reloading. This can prove a liability when more than one shot has to be fired. That can easily happen if there are multiple attackers or if a shot misses the target.

The vast majority of handguns sold in this country are semi-automatic. In 2018, almost 3.9 million semi-automatic handguns were manufactured in the U.S., compared to fewer than 700,000 revolvers.⁸ So, about 85 percent of all handguns made were semi-automatics. A similar percentage holds for rifles.

The much-maligned AR-15 functions exactly the same as any small caliber semi-automatic hunting rifle – firing the same bullets with the same rapidity and doing the same damage.

Semi-automatic guns are, of course, dangerous and make it easier to kill people. But they also enable people to protect themselves and others. When Biden says that he can't see "a single, solitary rationale," he shows his ignorance of the importance of self-defense.

How has the rate that rifles were used in murders and firearm murders changed over time?

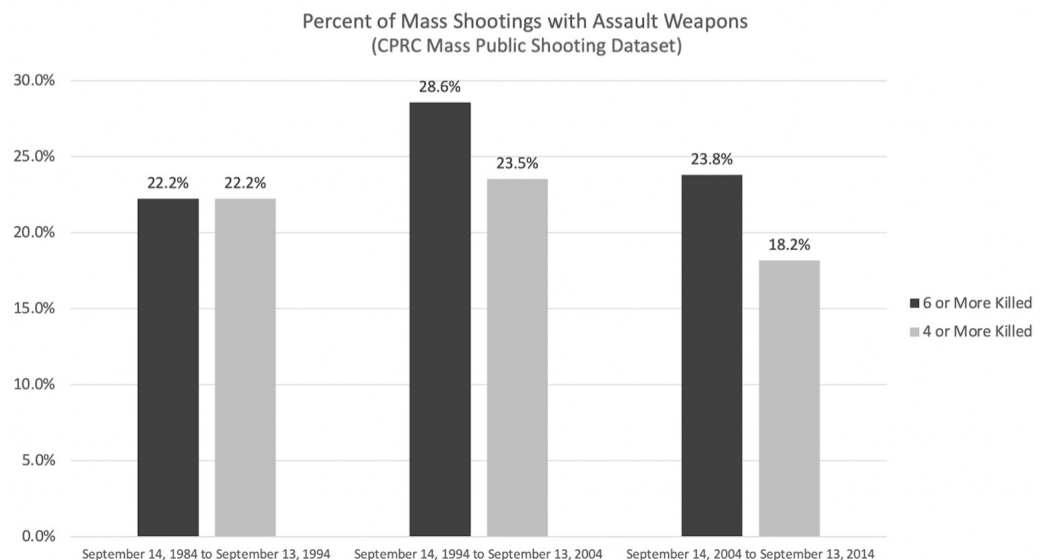
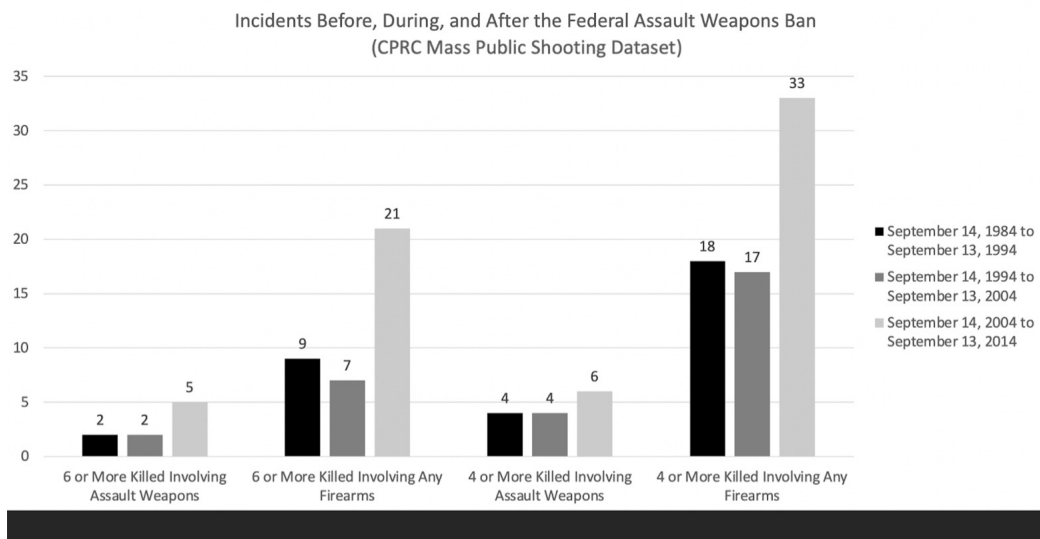


Despite all the discussion about banning rifles classified as assault weapons, 58% of mass public shootings over the last 25 years involve only handguns.⁹ Only 14% involve only rifles.

With all the concern about assault weapons since the federal ban sunset in 2004, it is interesting to see what a small share of murders are committed with rifles of any kind. even that share has fallen over time. The percentage of firearm murders with rifles was 4.8% prior to the ban starting in September 1994, 4.9% from 1995 to 2004 when the ban was in effect, and just 3.6% after that (3.9% if you look at just the first ten years after the ban ended). The data is from the FBI UCR reports.¹⁰

The average rate of firearm murders committed with rifles after the assault weapons ban was statistically significantly lower than the rate during the ban at the 0.0001 percent level for a two-tailed t-test. There was no statistically significant difference in rates for the period before the ban compared to the assault weapon ban period.

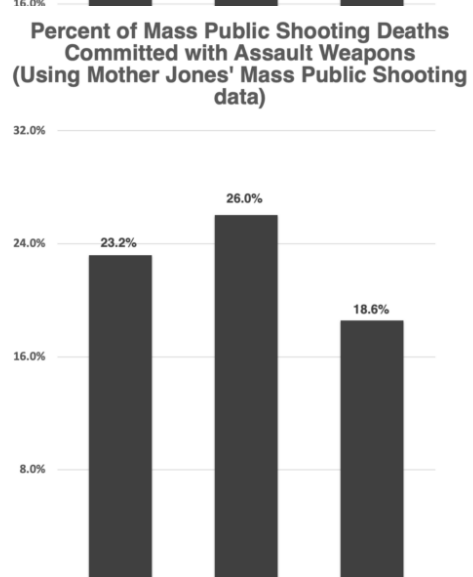
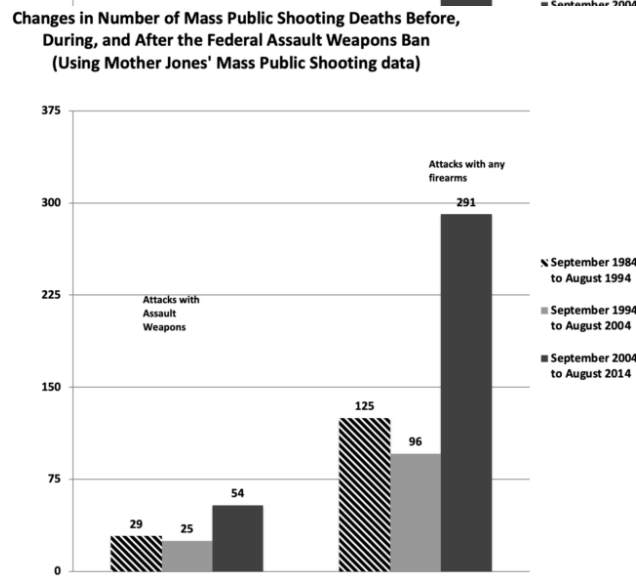
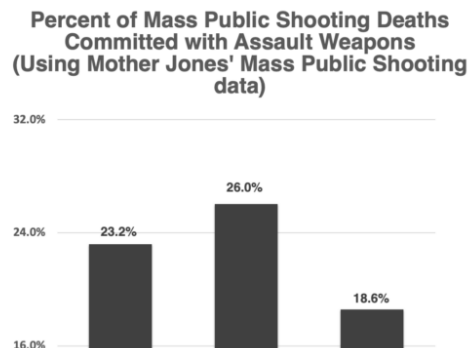
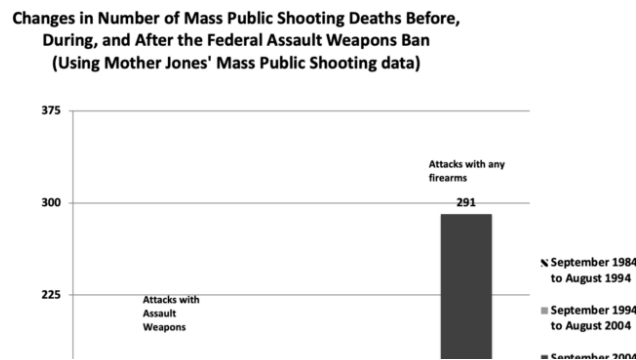
Data on Mass Public Shootings Before, During, and After the Federal Assault Weapons Ban



There was no drop in the number of mass public shootings with assault weapons during the 1994 to 2004 ban.¹¹ There was an increase after the ban sunset, but the change was not statistically significant. The claim that there was a drop during the assault weapon ban arises from a unique set of cases compiled by Louis Klarevas. More importantly, if the assault weapon ban drove any drop in attacks, we should see a drop in the percentage of attacks with assault weapons during the federal ban period and then an increase in the post-ban period. but the opposite is true. It just doesn't make sense for the ban to reduce the number of attacks without the share of attacks using assault weapons falling.

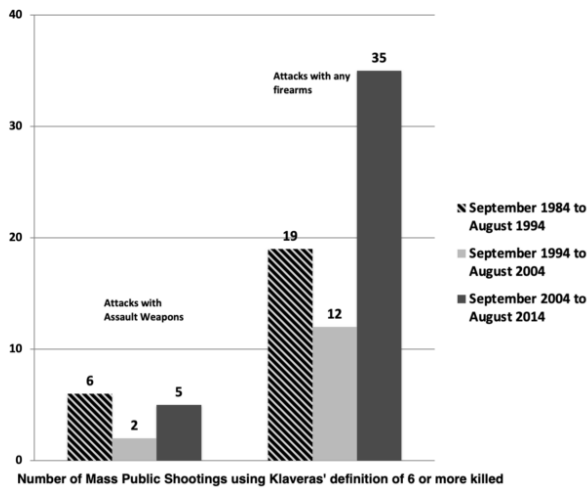
While virtually all of the work in this area looks at attacks where four or more people are murdered, the graphs above only include incidents with 6 or more fatalities. that is how Louis Klarevas structured his data.

The Mother Jones set of mass public shootings uses the traditional FBI definition of four or more people murdered. Again, there is virtually no change in the number of attacks with assault weapons, though the number of attacks with any type of weapon does increase. Again, though, that is because when the assault weapon ban sunset there was a huge increase in the number of attacks that did not involve a so-called assault weapon. It would be interesting for gun control advocates to explain why eliminating the assault weapon ban did not affect the number of attacks with assault weapons but instead led to an increase in attacks that involved other types of weapons.

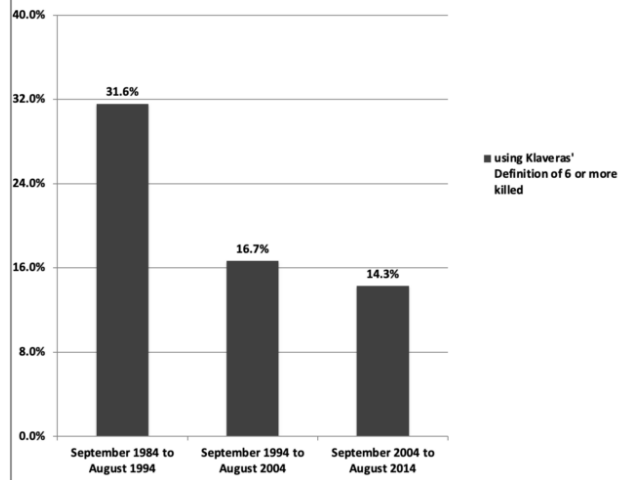


Finally, I show Klarevas's unique data that the Biden administration and others have been relying on. Klarevas creates his own definition of mass public shootings, requiring six or more murders and ignoring the FBI's provisions that the attack must occur in a public place and cannot involve another type of crime such as robbery. Still, even with those changes, the share of mass public shootings involving assault weapons fell after the assault weapon ban sunset. The increase in attacks primarily involves more non-assault weapons. Gun control advocates don't seem to have an explanation for that.

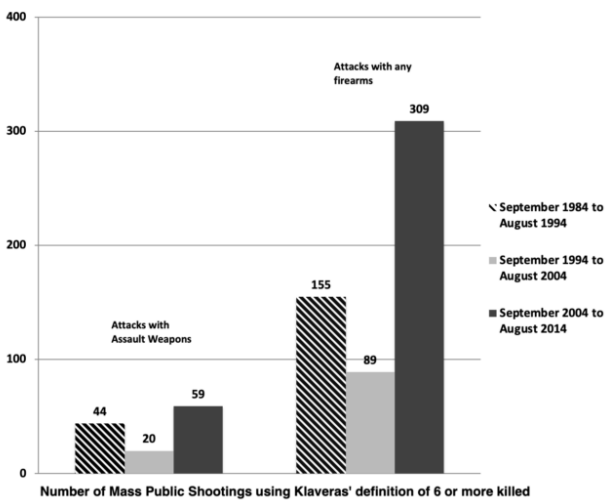
Changes in Number of Mass Shootings Before, During, and After the Federal Assault Weapons Ban (Using Klarevas' Mass Shooting data)



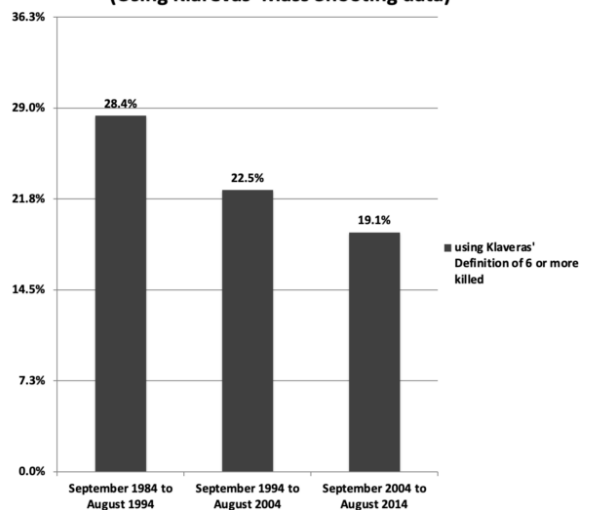
Percent of Mass Shootings with Assault Weapons (Using Klarevas' Mass Shooting data)



Changes in Number of Mass Shooting Deaths Before, During, and After the Federal Assault Weapons Ban (Using Klarevas' Mass Shooting data)



Percent of Mass Shooting Deaths Committed with Assault Weapons (Using Klarevas' Mass Shooting data)



There has been a lot of research on the assault weapon ban, and even work paid for by the Clinton administration [could not find any benefits from the law, including a reduction in any type of violent crime or mass public shootings](#).¹² A recent California judicial decision concluded that the state was unable to provide any evidence that its assault weapon ban reduced any type of violent crime.¹³

Red Flag Laws

Gun control advocates would have us believe that confiscating people's guns is the solution to all problems. Without even a hearing, Red Flag laws allow judges to confiscate people's guns due to mere suspicion of mental health based on a single written complaint.

A third party need only complain that a gun owner is a danger to himself or others. After reviewing the single, written complaint, all a judge needs is "reasonable suspicion." No mental health care experts are involved in the evaluation process or in treating the person.

These laws were supposed to stop the recent mass murders in Colorado Springs and Chesapeake, Virginia on November 19th and 23rd.¹⁴ They were supposed to stop this May's Buffalo mass murderer, who underwent a mental health evaluation last year after threatening to shoot up a school and then kill himself. He was released when he told the mental health professionals that he was merely joking.¹⁵ The problem is that unless someone admits to being serious about committing a crime, it is very possible to evade detection by mental health professionals.

Even when someone poses a danger, red flag laws are hardly a solution. After all, guns present just one of many means of harming oneself or others.

It's easy enough for people to do something crazy with a motor vehicle. Florida police narrowly averted a "mass casualty" event at a 5K Thanksgiving Day run by stopping a woman before she could drive her Range Rover Velar at 60 MPH through the crowd.¹⁶ Once caught, the disturbed woman "repeatedly banged her head" against the window of a police car.

A few weeks ago, a car was driven into a crowd of 800 people at a Christmas Market in Congleton, England.¹⁷ And a year ago, a man killed six and injured sixty-one by driving into a Christmas parade in Wisconsin.¹⁸

The Washington Post notes that between May and June 2020, there were at least 18 deliberate vehicle attacks on people.¹⁹ The worst, recent vehicle attack occurred in France on July 14, 2016, and left 86 killed and 430 wounded.²⁰ That attack was much more deadly than any American mass public shooting.

The recent Colorado Springs mass murderer had made bomb threats just the year before. If guns suddenly vanished, there would likely be more of those types of attacks.

Red Flag laws are almost exclusively invoked when someone is suicidal. But, of course, there are many ways to commit suicide without a gun. Instead of focusing on weapon confiscation, let's focus on getting people the mental health treatment they need.

It has always been possible to take a dangerous person's guns away. All 50 states and the federal government have involuntary commitment laws that go by various names: the Baker Act in Florida, for example, or the 5150 code in California. All of these laws require an evaluation by a mental health expert and testimony before a judge. If the defendant can't afford a lawyer, one is provided. Hearings can occur quickly in urgent cases, but a person's right to due process is respected.

Judges have a much broader array of options than just taking away a person's guns. A person may agree to voluntary psychiatric treatment, with a follow-up court hearing to evaluate progress. The individual may also be given home detention or involuntarily committed in a mental health care facility.

Safe Storage Laws

Gun control advocates claim that gunlocks will also reduce children's accidental deaths. Unfortunately, the problem is more complicated. Mandating that people lock up their guns can have unintended consequences.

According to my research, published in the Journal of Law and Economics and elsewhere, requiring individuals to lock up their guns in certain states made it more difficult for those people to successfully defend their families.²¹ Such laws emboldened criminals to attack more people in their homes, causing an average of 300 more murders and 4,000 more rapes each year in these states. Burglaries also rose dramatically.

Time and again, crime rises when we prevent people from protecting themselves. Indeed, every place in the world that has banned guns has seen an increase in murder.²²

Over the ten years from 2011 through 2020, accidental gunshots annually claimed the lives of an average of 63 American children aged under 15.²³ This is a tragic number, but so too is the much larger number of cases where people cannot protect themselves and their families from criminals.

Even if locking up guns could have prevented all four of the mass shootings since 2000 that were committed by juveniles, there would have been 27 fewer deaths. One could even add in

all accidental gun deaths and assume that all of those would be prevented, too. But, even then, we are talking about just a fraction of those who die in one year from the mandated safe storage of guns.

Unfortunately, mandatory gun locks scarcely even reduce accidental gun deaths among children or teenagers. Most accidental gunshots that result in the deaths of minors are fired by males in their mid-to-late 20s with criminal histories. Many are drug addicts or alcoholics.

Unless you send your child to play at a violent criminal's home, your child is exceedingly unlikely to get shot at a gun owner's home. It makes much more sense to find out if your neighbors have violent criminal histories than if they own guns.

We see news stories about the horrible deaths and injuries that occur in school shootings. And rightly so. But we don't hear about the deaths that occur because people can't readily access a gun to protect themselves and their families.

The threat of a felony will ensure that people keep their guns locked. But what we don't need are any more laws that leave people defenseless.

In addition, of the 93 mass public shootings since 1998, there are two cases where gun locks might have stopped someone under 18 years of age from obtaining a gun: the 1998 attacks in Jonesboro, Arkansas, involving Mitchell Scott Johnson and Andrew Douglas Golden and also in 2018 in Santa Fe, Texas with Dimitrios Pagourtzis. There were two other attacks where the murderers obtained guns that were locked up. In the 2021 Oxford, Michigan murders, Ethan Crumbley allegedly took the gun from a locked drawer. In the 2014 Marysville, Washington murders, the guns were kept in a safe. In both the 1998 Columbine and 2005 Redlake, Minnesota murders, the murderers obtained the guns from outside the home. With Columbine, one of the murderers was over 18 years of age.

The Danger of Gun-Free Zones

So what do you do if you can't identify in advance who is going to commit a mass murder? When a shooting happens, who is going to fight back?

Mass shootings overwhelmingly occur in gun-free zones where people are defenseless. That was true of the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas b.²⁴ It was true of the Tulsa, Oklahoma, hospital shooting and the Walmart shooting in Virginia.²⁵ As noted earlier, the Buffalo shooter clearly stated in his manifesto why he wanted to attack gun-free zones.²⁶ Many other planned attacks based on similar explicit comments, including the Aurora Batman movie theater murderer, Elliot Rogers who attacked in Santa Barbara, Abu-Rayyan in Detroit, and Justin Bourque in Canada. Even the Columbine murderers strongly opposed people having permitted concealed handguns.²⁷

Ninety-four percent of all mass public shootings keep occurring in places where guns are banned.²⁸ The murderers might be crazy, but they aren't necessarily stupid. They know that the more people they kill, the more media attention they can get. and they know that if they go to a place where people can't defend themselves, they can kill more people. gun-free zones serve as magnets for attacks.

Surveys show that criminologists and economists had the same top four preferred policies for stopping mass public shootings.²⁹ On a 1 to 10 scale, American criminologists rated the following policies most highly: Allow K-12 teachers to carry concealed handguns (6.0), allow military personnel to carry on military bases (5.6), encourage the elimination of gun-free zones (5.3), and relax federal regulations that pressure companies to create gun-free zones (5.0).

The top four policies for economists were the same, but in a different order: Encourage the elimination of gun-free zones (7.9), relax federal regulations that pressure companies to create gun-free zones (7.8), allow K-12 teachers to carry concealed handguns (7.7), and allow military personnel to carry on military bases (7.7).

As important as police are to fighting crime, increased policing didn't make the top of the list. That's because stopping mass public shootings is a uniquely difficult challenge. For police, wearing a uniform is often akin to wearing a neon sign saying, "Shoot me first." That makes officers easy targets for attackers. The benefit of concealed carry is that the attackers won't know who is a threat to them.

"A deputy in uniform has an extremely difficult job in stopping these attacks," said Sarasota County, Florida, Sheriff Kurt Hoffman.³⁰ "These terrorists have huge strategic advantages in determining the time and place of attacks. They can wait for a deputy to leave the area, or pick an undefended location. Even when police or deputies are in the right place at the right time, those in uniform who can be readily identified as guards may as well be holding up neon signs saying, 'Shoot me first.' My deputies know that we cannot be everywhere."

It is well past time that we address these mass public shootings. But, unfortunately, too many are more concerned about "doing something" than fighting to do something that makes things better. Let's come up with proposals that matter—starting with eliminating "gun-free zones."

Outside of Gun-Free Zones, Concealed Handgun Permit Holders Stop Most Active Shooting Attacks

My organization, the Crime Prevention Research Center, has documented 30 cases since January 2020 where a would-be mass public shooting was likely stopped by civilians legally carrying

guns.³¹ During that time, there were 17 mass public shootings where four or more people were killed. These heroic actions rarely get national news coverage.

But they are just a fraction of the incidents stopped by legally armed civilians. The FBI reports that armed citizens stopped only 11 of the 252 active shooter incidents that it identified for the period 2014-2021.³² The FBI defines active shooter incidents as those in which an individual actively kills or attempts to kill people in a populated, public area.³³ But, as with mass public shootings, it does not include shootings that are deemed related to other criminal activity, such as robbery or fighting over drug turf. Active shootings may involve just one shot being fired at just one target, even if the target isn't hit.

To compile its list, the FBI hired academics at the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center at Texas State University. Police departments don't collect data, so the researchers had to find news stories about these incidents.

The CPRC also undertook a search for news stories. We discovered a total of 360 active shooter incidents from 2014 to 2021, and found that an armed citizen stopped 124 of these.³⁴ I also found that the FBI had misidentified five cases, usually because the person who stopped the attack was incorrectly identified as a security guard. We found these cases on a tiny budget of just a few thousand dollars.

Though we found that armed citizens had stopped 11 times more cases than the FBI reports, I make no claim that we have identified all of them. It is quite possible that the news media itself never covers many such incidents.

But no one needs to take my word for it that the FBI missed many cases. All of the news stories that my team collected are listed on the CPRC website.³⁵

While the FBI claims that just 4.4% of active shootings were stopped by law-abiding citizens carrying guns, the percentage that I found was 34%. We had more lucky finding recent cases, and the proportion of cases stopped in 2021 was even higher – 49%.

In places where law-abiding citizens are allowed to carry firearms, the percentage of active shootings stopped is above 50% for the entire 2014 to 2021 period. And, again, we are more confident that we have more of the cases from recent years. The figure reaches a lofty 58% in 2021.

In order to follow the FBI's definition, I also had to exclude 24 cases because a law-abiding person with a gun stopped the attacker before he was able to get off a shot.

But there is a more basic problem in the reliance on news coverage to determine whether an active shooting was stopped by an armed civilian. The news media has a clear bias for covering cases where bad things happen over cases where bad things are prevented. The old adage is: "If

it bleeds, it leads.” Killings are usually more newsworthy than woundings, and woundings are more notable than confrontations defused simply by someone brandishing a gun.

To illustrate this, I examined news stories of defensive gun use data from Jan. 1 to Aug. 10 of this year, and found 774 defensive gun uses. Fully 85% involve people shot: 43% resulting in death and 42% in wounding.³⁶ Less than 4% of the cases found in news stories involved no shots fired. But survey data indicate that in 95% of cases when people use guns defensively, they merely show the gun to make the criminal back off.³⁷ Such defensive gun uses rarely make the news.

Family Background

Since 1998, there have been 96 mass public shooters. Of those, the Crime Prevention Research Center has found information on the family lives of 68 of them. Nineteen of these murderers grew up in single-parent families, and another eight grew up with step-parents. In four other instances, the parents separated after the person turned 18. In three cases where there were multiple murderers, there was one case where one of the attackers grew up with a step-parent and one case where the parents of one of the attackers separated after the attacker turned 18.

There is Actually Much Less Support for Gun Control Laws than People think

Red Flag laws are the top priority of Democrats and gun control advocates. Polls show that Americans overwhelmingly support these measures — by margins ranging between 2-1 and 3-1.³⁸ Congress recently passed legislation providing funding for states that adopted these laws.

But the polling doesn’t really gauge whether Americans understand how these laws operate. The surveys generally just ask people if they support laws that “allow guns to be temporarily confiscated by a judge from people considered by a judge to be a danger to themselves or others.”³⁹

Respondents might reasonably assume that a normal legal process is being followed, whereby complaints are made and witnesses are cross-examined. They might presuppose that mental health experts are involved in the process.

To examine this premise, the Crime Prevention Research Center (CPRC), which I head, hired McLaughlin & Associates to survey 1,000 general election voters from July 21 to 24, 2022.⁴⁰ The survey began by asking people whether they supported red flag laws. It then informed respondents that there are no hearings before an individual’s guns are taken away, and that there are no mental health care experts involved in the process.

People initially answered by a two-to-one margin that they support red flag laws (58%-to-29%), with the strongest support coming from Democrats, the wealthy, blacks and Hispanics, and people aged between 18 and 29.

However, after being told that there are no court proceedings before an individual's guns are taken away, and that there are no mental health care experts involved in the process, support changed to opposition (29%-to-47%). Strong support plummeted from 34% to 14% and strong opposition rose from 18% to 29%.

Finally, people were asked if they prefer "involuntary commitment" to red flag laws. They were told that involuntary commitment laws provide for evaluations by mental health care experts, that an emergency court hearing takes place before a judge's decision, and that a lawyer is provided if a person can't afford one. They are also told that, under such rules, judges have a range of less extreme options such as mandatory outpatient mental health care and weapon confiscation.

Survey respondents favored involuntary commitment by a 40%-to-33% margin. Only Democrats, the wealthy, blacks and Asians supported red flag laws as their preferred option.

In April, the CPRC also hired McLaughlin & Associates to survey people's estimates of the percentage of violent crime that is committed using guns.⁴¹ They found that those most strongly supporting gun control dramatically overestimated the percentage of violent crime committed with guns. While the average Democrat estimates that 56.9% of violent crimes involve guns and the typical Republican gave an answer of 37%. (The actual rate is less than 8%.) This suggests that Democrats, who are more likely to favor gun control, are particularly ill-informed about the realities of gun violence.

We keep being told that there is 90+% support in polls for universal background checks on the private transfer of guns.⁴² But when these measures have been on the ballot, they haven't been slam dunks. In 2016, despite Michael Bloomberg's overwhelming financial backing, ballot initiatives failed in Maine by 4 percentage points and won in Nevada by less than 1%.⁴³

The Nevada initiative had \$20 million in funding behind it, amounting to an impressive \$35 per vote.⁴⁴ That's three times more than what was spent in opposition. In Maine, the opposition was *outspent by a factor of 20*.⁴⁵ And in both states, the media coverage was overwhelmingly sympathetic to the background checks.

While the Nevada initiative technically eked out a win, it wasn't able to go into effect because it had been inaccurately sold to voters as not costing taxpayers any money.⁴⁶

Americans keep being told by the media that they overwhelmingly support gun control laws. So why don't the laws get passed? Might it be that the polls are inaccurate and biased? My own survey suggests just that.

End Notes

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