

Gun Violence and Mass Shootings

Bradley Steffens



Contents

Introduction	4
Parkland and Beyond	
Chapter One	9
A Uniquely American Problem	
Chapter Two	22
A Patchwork of Laws	
Chapter Three	36
Strengthening Gun Laws	
Chapter Four	51
An Armed Citizenry	
Source Notes	65
Organizations and Websites	71
For Further Research	74
Index	76
Picture Credits	80

Introduction

Parkland and Beyond

At 2:19 p.m. on Wednesday, February 14, 2018, an Uber driver dropped off nineteen-year-old Nikolas Cruz outside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD) in Parkland, Florida. With the school day drawing to a close, the campus gates were unlocked. Cruz, a former MSD student, knew they would be. He walked through the gate, crossed the campus, and entered Building 12, a three-story structure with thirty-three classrooms. On the second floor, Cruz opened a black case containing an AR-15 rifle and began to load it. Freshman Chris McKenna came across Cruz in the hallway. “You’d better get out of here,” Cruz told McKenna. “Things are gonna start getting messy.”¹

McKenna ran for help, and moments later Cruz began shooting into classrooms and at anyone who appeared in the hallways. Some students fled the building. Others hid in their classrooms. Teachers called 911. Students texted their parents. Cruz moved from floor to floor, shooting. An armed sheriff’s deputy took up a position outside the building, but he did not enter. Alerted by McKenna, football coach Aaron Feis ran to Building 12 and started directing students to safety. Cruz gunned him down. As police arrived, Cruz dropped his gun and melted into the crowd of fleeing students. Fourteen students and three teachers lay dead. Sixteen others were injured. The shooting lasted only seven minutes, but its effects would be felt by the survivors and the victims’ families for the rest of their lives.

A Plague of Violence

Horrific as it was, Parkland was not the worst mass shooting in US history. Less than five months earlier, a gunman in Las Ve-

gas had opened fire on a crowd of concertgoers at the Route 91 Harvest music festival, killing fifty-eight people and injuring more than eight hundred. According to the *Washington Post*, there have been 150 mass shootings since 1966. These attacks have claimed 1,077 lives. Twenty-one of these shootings took place at schools and colleges, leaving 194 dead.

While the carnage from mass shootings is horrifying, mass shooting deaths make up a tiny percentage of the gun-related deaths that occur the United States each year. In 2017 the ninety-four mass shooting deaths made up less than three-tenths of 1 percent of the more than thirty thousand total gun deaths that year. As *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof pointed out in 2015, “More Americans have died from guns in the United States since 1968 than on battlefields of all the wars in American history.”² The most recent figures show that there have been more than 1,516,000 gun-related deaths in the United States since 1968. That compares to 1,396,733 Americans who have died in all of the nation’s military conflicts, from the Revolutionary War to the Global War on Terrorism through 2017.

“More Americans have died from guns in the United States since 1968 than on battlefields of all the wars in American history.”²

—Nicholas Kristof, columnist for the *New York Times*

Although the number of school shooting deaths is relatively small, their emotional impact is great. School shootings tend to attract more attention than other shootings do because of the ages of the victims and the sheer senselessness of the attacks. “A student’s obituary should not contain the phrase ‘Gunned down while studying for a chemistry test,’”³ writes Kathy Durham, a social studies teacher at West Wendover High School in West Wendover, Nevada.

New Voices for New Policies

As is often the case after a mass shooting, outraged citizens called on the authorities to reduce gun violence. The aftermath

Adding Up All Gunshot Deaths

The IHME, CDC, and FBI studies focused on the criminal use of guns. However, gun homicides make up only a portion of the gun-related deaths—roughly a third. About 60 percent of all gun deaths are suicides. The CDC reports that there were 22,938 gun suicides in 2016. When deaths from homicides, suicides, accidents, and all other gun-related causes are added together, the United States had 38,658 gunshot deaths in 2016. Most disturbingly, firearm injuries are the third-leading cause of death among US children aged seventeen and younger, according to a 2017 study published in the medical journal *Pediatrics*.

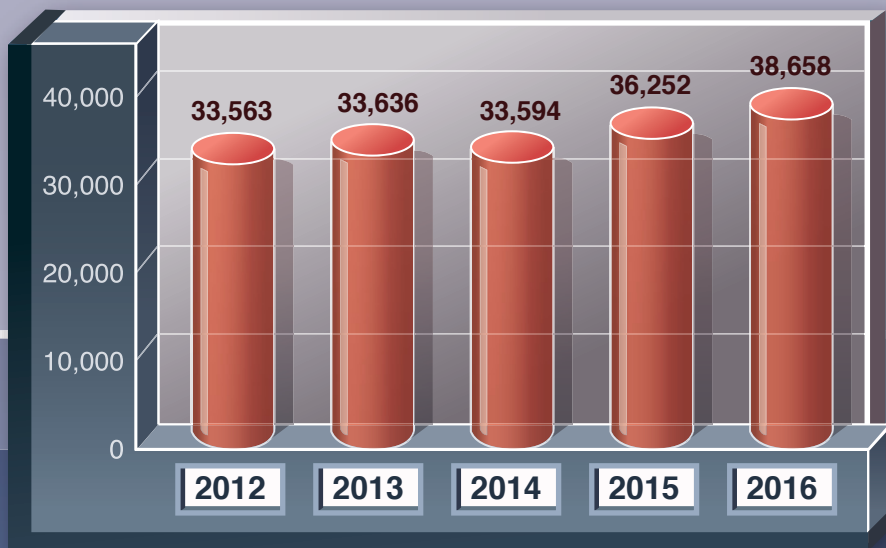
The United States has far more gunshot deaths than any country in the developed world. According to the CDC, the United States had 11.96 gunshot deaths per 100,000 people in 2016. Numbers are not available from all countries for the same years, but figures from 2014 show Switzerland with the second-highest rate, at 3.01 gunshot deaths per 100,000 people—about one-fourth the US rate. Austria was next at 2.9 deaths per 100,000 people in 2014. France had 2.6 deaths per 100,000 people in 2013, Croatia had 2.35 in 2013, and Canada had 2.05 in 2011—about one-sixth the US rate. All other advanced countries were below 2 gunshot deaths per 100,000 people. The rate in Germany—Europe’s most populous country—was 1.01 in 2014, nearly one-twelfth the US rate. The United Kingdom, which founded what later became the United States and shares a similar culture, had a gunshot death rate of 0.22 in 2013—fifty-four times lower than the US rate.

Using the overall gunshot death rate in public policy debates about mass shootings and gun-related crime is deceptive, some gun rights advocates maintain, because suicides and accidents should not be factored into that debate. At the end of 2017, Grant Stinchfield, host of an online news program sponsored by the National Rifle Association (NRA), said, “The final fake news of the year comes in the form of a statistic, the overused 30,000 gun deaths

Two-Year Rise in Gun Deaths—and Still Rising

Data published by the CDC in December 2017 show the number of gun deaths (including suicides) in the United States has increased for two consecutive years. Gun death totals increased in 2015 and again in 2016. The CDC publishes these statistics in its annual year-end summary. Gun Violence Archive (GVA), a nonprofit organization that tracks media and law enforcement reports of shootings, also collects gun death statistics. Its 2017-released count (which excludes most suicides) shows a 3 percent increase in the number of people killed by guns in the United States—an early indicator of a continued rise in gun deaths.

Two-Year Rise in Gun Deaths—and Still Rising



Source: The Trace, "The First Estimate of 2017 Gun Deaths Is In," April 17, 2018. www.thetrace.org.

a year. The left never mentions that two-thirds of those include suicides. Yet it is a number thrown around like confetti. And it's deceptive to say the least."¹⁷ Cydney Hargis, a guns and public safety researcher at Media Matters for America, a media watchdog group, disagrees with Stinchfield. "Stinchfield's claim that 'gun suicides' don't count in gun death totals ignores a vast body of research proving that firearm availability has a direct impact on successful suicide attempts,"¹⁸ writes Hargis in the Media Matters blog.

“Had our resource officer taken action immediately, the result of the Stoneman Douglas Valentine’s Day Massacre would have been different.”⁶⁰

—Kai Koerber, student at MSD

away from murderous tragedy.”⁶⁰ Andrew Pollack, whose eighteen-year-old daughter, Meadow, died in the shooting, said that the officer’s failure to act was “unbelievable.” He wrote on Facebook, “Scot Peterson had ample enough to time to make it to the third floor and prevent 6 deaths including the death of my daughter Meadow.”⁶¹

More Armed Guards

In the aftermath of the Parkland shooting, the Florida legislature passed, and Governor Rick Scott signed, a bill that set aside funding for more armed police officers on school campuses. “I’m not into banning specific weapons,” Scott told *Fox News Sunday*. “I want to make sure we have significant law enforcement presence at schools.”⁶² Pollack, who also was interviewed on the program, agreed. “I just had to listen to you and Gov. Scott talk about gun control,” Pollack told news anchor Chris Wallace. “We don’t care about gun control right now,” said Pollack. “It’s not about guns now. It’s about the safety of our schools.”⁶³

The idea of stopping school shooters with armed guards is not new. After the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School that left twenty-six dead and two wounded, Wayne LaPierre, the executive vice president of the NRA, said:

You know, five years ago, after the Virginia Tech tragedy, when I said we should put armed security in every school, the media called me crazy. But what if, when Adam Lanza started shooting his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School last Friday, he had been confronted by qualified, armed security? Will you at least admit it’s possible that 26 innocent lives might have been spared? . . . The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. Would you rather have your 911 call bring a good guy with a gun from a mile away . . . or a minute away?⁶⁴

The Case for Self-Protection

The vast majority of gun owners say they purchased the weapons to protect themselves. In this excerpt, attorney and journalist David French explains why he and his wife choose to have guns.

It starts with the consciousness of a threat. Perhaps not the kind of threat my family has experienced. Some people experience more. Some less. And some people don't experience a threat at all—but they're aware of those who do. With the consciousness of a threat comes the awareness of a vulnerability. The police can only protect the people you love in the most limited of circumstances (with those limits growing ever-more-severe the farther you live from a city center.) . . .

Yes, if someone tried to break into your house, you know that you'd call 911 and pray for the police to come quickly, but you also start to think of exactly what else you'd do. If you heard that “bump” in the night, how would you protect yourself until the police arrived? . . .

Because of the threats against my family—and because I don't want to be dependent on a sometimes shockingly incompetent government for my family's security—I carry a weapon. My wife does as well. We're not scared. We're prepared, and that sense of preparation is contagious. Confidence is contagious. People want to be empowered. That's how gun culture is built. Not by the NRA and not by Congress, but by gun owners, one free citizen at a time.

David French, “What Critics Don't Understand About Gun Culture,” *Atlantic*, February 27, 2018. www.theatlantic.com.

Those who support the use of guns to stop shooters often point to the hypocrisy of those who disagree with the policy but are themselves protected by armed guards. “Members of Congress work in offices surrounded by armed Capitol Police officers,” said LaPierre. “Yet when it comes to the most beloved, innocent and vulnerable members of the American family—our children—we as a society leave them utterly defenseless.”⁶⁵



Gun owners march in Idaho to support a 2016 law that allows citizens to carry concealed weapons without a permit. Supporters of such laws say they are needed so that citizens can defend themselves rather than having to wait for law enforcement officers to arrive when a crime is in progress.

Self-Protection

The argument that another individual with a gun is the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is used to support not only more armed guards but also an armed citizenry. Gun rights advocates do not think people confronted with a gun should have to hope that a good guy gets there fast enough. Many firearm owners carry a gun so they do not have to wait for help. The reason all fifty states allow concealed carry—and a growing number are allowing it without a permit—is that the leaders in those states believe people should be able to defend themselves. According to the Crime Prevention Research Center, concealed carry permits issued by state and local governments increased by 215 per-

cent from 2007 through 2015, to more than 14 million Americans. More than 6 percent of the US adult population has a concealed carry permit. “The formula is simple: Criminals and the dangerously mentally ill make our nation more violent,” writes attorney and journalist David French. “Law-abiding gun owners save and protect lives.”⁶⁶

Critics of permitless concealed carry believe an armed citizenry poses a danger greater than the ill it is meant to cure. Many states require gun owners to pass a safety test before receiving a concealed carry permit. In states that do not require a permit, gun owners do not have to prove they can handle a gun safely before carrying a concealed weapon. Before the lower house of the North Carolina state legislature passed a law to allow permitless concealed carry in 2017, Peter Ambler, executive director of Americans for Responsible Solutions, a gun control advocacy organization, argued against the bill when it went before the state senate. “You don’t want folks carrying around an incredibly dangerous consumer product like a firearm without knowing how to use it,”⁶⁷ Ambler said. The gun control lobbying group North Carolinians Against Gun Violence agreed, saying, “Make no mistake, permitless carry puts everyone in the community at risk, significantly weakens law enforcement’s ability to protect the public, and threatens citizens’ rights to safely and peaceably enjoy public spaces in their community.”⁶⁸ Explaining why the state of Hawaii opposed a federal law that would require states to allow visitors from permitless carry states to bring their weapons into other states, Hawaii’s attorney general, Doug Chin, said, “Hawaii lawmakers already made decisions about firearms and public safety that best serve our state. We will resist any efforts by the federal government to turn our state into the Wild West.”⁶⁹

“The formula is simple: Criminals and the dangerously mentally ill make our nation more violent. Law-abiding gun owners save and protect lives.”⁶⁶

—David French, attorney and journalist

Source Notes

Introduction: Parkland and Beyond

1. Quoted in David Fleshler and Yiran Zhu, "Timeline: How the Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting Unfolded," *Sun Sentinel* (Broward County, FL), March 9, 2018. www.sun-sentinel.com.
2. Nicholas Kristof, "Lessons from the Virginia Shooting," *New York Times*, August 26, 2015. www.nytimes.com.
3. Kathy Durham, "Opinion: A Student's Obituary Should Never Say 'Gunned Down While Studying for Chemistry,'" PBS, February 16, 2018. www.pbs.org.
4. Quoted in *Face the Nation*, "Transcript: Florida School Shooting Survivors on *Face the Nation*, Feb. 18, 2018," CBS News, February 18, 2018. www.cbsnews.com.
5. Quoted in Colleen Shalby, "Members of the First Generation to Grow Up with Social Media at Its Fingertips Launch a Gun-Control Movement," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 2018. www.latimes.com.
6. March for Our Lives, Twitter, February 2018. <https://twitter.com>.
7. Quoted in Julie Turkewitz et al., "A Parkland Student Steps Up, and Her Voice Is Heard When She Says to Politicians, 'We Call BS!,'" *Boston Globe*, February 18, 2018. www.bostonglobe.com.
8. Quoted in Ray Sanchez and Holly Yan, "Florida Gov. Rick Scott Signs Gun Bill," CNN, March 10, 2018. <https://edition.cnn.com>.
9. Ted Deutch, Twitter, March 7, 2018. <https://twitter.com>.

Chapter One: A Uniquely American Problem

10. Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to William S. Smith, 1787," James Madison Research Library and Information Center. www.madisonbrigade.com.

Organizations and Websites

American Public Health Association

www.apha.org

A nonprofit organization, the American Public Health Association speaks out on public health issues and policies. The gun violence area of the website provides articles, fact sheets, research and data, news, useful links, and other resources.

Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence

840 First St. NE, Suite 400

Washington, DC 20002

www.bradycampaign.org

Founded in 1974 as the National Council to Control Handguns, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence was renamed in 2001 in honor of James Brady and his wife, Sarah. The organization has a goal of cutting the number of US gun deaths in half by 2025 through stronger background checks, cracking down on irresponsible gun dealers, and educating the public about gun violence.

Coalition to Stop Gun Violence (CSGV)

805 Fifteenth St. NW

Washington, DC 20005

www.csgv.org

The CSGV is a nonprofit organization founded in 1974 with the goal of building communities free from gun violence. The organization pursues this goal through research, policy development, and lobbying for gun control legislation.

Everytown for Gun Safety

450 Lexington Ave.

New York, NY 10022

www.everytown.org

For Further Research

Books

John Allen, *Thinking Critically: Gun Control*. San Diego: Reference-Point, 2018.

Anne Cunningham, *Guns: Conceal and Carry*. New York: Greenhaven, 2018.

Adam Furgang, *Everything You Need to Know About Gun Violence*. New York: Rosen, 2018.

Carol Hand, *Gun Control and the Second Amendment*. Minneapolis: Essential Library, 2017.

Bridget Heing, *Investigating Mass Shootings in the United States*. New York: Rosen, 2018.

John R. Lott Jr., *The War on Guns: Arming Yourself Against Gun Control Lies*. Washington, DC: Regnery, 2016.

Internet Sources

Mark Abadi, "The 12 Deadliest Mass Shootings in Modern US History," *Business Insider*, February 15, 2018. www.businessinsider.com/deadliest-mass-shootings-in-us-history-2017-10.

BBC, "America's Gun Culture in 10 Charts," March 21, 2018. www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41488081.

Bonnie Berkowitz, Denise Lu, and Chris Alcantara, "The Terrible Numbers That Grow with Each Mass Shooting," *Washington Post*, December 14, 2012; updated April 24, 2018. www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/mass-shootings-in-america/?utm_term=.731d15a0f6de.

John Woodrow Cox, "Inside an Accused School Shooter's Mind: A Plot to Kill '50 or 60. If I Get Lucky Maybe 150,'" *Washington Post*, March 3, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/inside-a-teen-school-shooters-mind-a-plot-to-kill-50-or-60-if-i-get-lucky-maybe-150/2018/03/03/68cc673c-1b27-11e8-ae5a-16e60e4605f3_story.html.

Index

Note: Boldface page numbers indicate illustrations.

- age and gun ban, 42, 48–50, **49**
- Alaska, 24
- Albania, 9
- Ambler, Peter, 57
- ammunition. *See* high-capacity ammunition magazines
- Arizona, 22, 25
- armed school guards
 - example of effective, 51–53
 - example of ineffective, 53–54
 - funding, 54
 - LaPierre's call for, 54, 55, 59
- assault weapons. *See* semiautomatic assault weapons
- Assault Weapons Ban (1994), 33–34, **34**, 36
- Australia, **41**, 41–44
- Austria, 18
- automatic weapons. *See* machine guns
- Background Check Completion Act (proposed, 2017), 47–48
- background checks
 - calls for closing loopholes
 - March for Our Lives, 37, 45
 - proposed federal law (2017), 47–48
 - Stevens, 16
 - NICS
 - loopholes, 45, 47
 - provisions, 32–33
- Blackstone, William, 62
- Blow, Charles M., 13
- Blumenthal, Richard, 47–48
- Boston, Massachusetts, 34
- Brady, James, 30, **31**
- Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (1993), 30–33, **31**
- Brandeis, Louis, 23, **24**
- Brown, Anna, 32
- bump stocks, 38
- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)
 - licensing of gun dealers by, 45, 46
 - weapons retrieved by, 27, 47
- California laws
 - among strongest state laws, 25–26
 - provisions, 22–23, 26
 - semiautomatic assault weapons regulation, 34
- Cameron, Tim, 51–52
- Canada
 - gunshot deaths, 14, 18
 - registered gun owners in, 9
- Center for Responsive Politics, 39
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
 - firearm homicide statistics, 15–17
 - gun suicide statistics, 18
 - increase in gun-related deaths, **19**
 - unintentional firearms deaths, 60
- Chadwick, Sarah, 6
- "Charleston loophole," 47–48
- Chicago, Illinois, 26–28, 34
- Chin, Doug, 57
- Cicilline, David N., 39
- Clinton, Bill, 30, **31**, 33
- Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program, 8
- concealed weapons
 - carriers of, as low risk for committing crimes, 59–60
 - carry permits in Hawaii, 23
 - increase in number of permits issued for, 56–57
 - permitless, **56**, 56–58
 - states allowing, 22, 24, **56**
 - states with "may issue" laws, 22–23
 - states with "must issue" laws, 23
- Connecticut, 34
- Constitution
 - Second Amendment
 - calls for repeal of, 16, 36
 - District of Columbia v. Heller* and, 16, 28–29, 30, 33, 42
 - Highland Park, 35
 - military-style weapons and, 27, 35
 - nation's founders and, 10
 - United States v. Miller* and, 30
 - Tenth Amendment, 22
- crime
 - age and rate of, 42
 - committed by concealed carry permit holders, 59–60
 - gender and rate of, 42
 - public opinion on guns as protection against, 60
 - rate of violent, in right-to-carry states, 58
- Crime Prevention Research Center, 14, 56–57, 59–60
- Croatia, 9, 18
- Crockett, Davy, 11
- Cruz, Nikolas, 4, 48, **49**
- deaths. *See* gun-related deaths
- defensive-gun-use (DGU) uses, 60–62
- Deutch, Ted, 8
- District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008)
 - age restrictions and, 42
 - background, 28