

# KEEPING WITH TRADITION: PREFERENCE FOR THE LONGSTANDING DEFINITION OF MASS SHOOTING

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There are many definitions of mass shootings used by the press and researchers alike.  
We prefer the approach that has been the standard for decades:

The intentional fatal shooting of four or more victims by gunfire—excluding the deaths of unborn children and the offender(s)—within a 24-hour period. This includes cases involving all types (e.g., public, felony-related, and familicides), motivations (e.g., domestic dispute, profit, revenge, terrorism, hate, etc.), victim-offender relationships (e.g., stranger, family, acquaintance, co-worker, etc.), and number of locations.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEFINITION

- 1 Injury and death are qualitatively distinct and should not be conflated.
- 2 Lowering the victim fatality threshold increases the risk of missing data bias, especially for cases occurring in earlier decades.
- 3 Perpetrator deaths are not equivalent to those of victims and should not be included in fatality counts.
- 4 All types of incidents—regardless of motivation, location, or victim-offender relationship—are worthy of study.
- 5 A concrete time frame establishing the length of “a single incident” is necessary to distinguish these events from serial and spree killings.
- 6 Definitions must be applied consistently across cases and over time.

## BY THE NUMBERS: JANUARY 2006 - AUGUST 2022

**397** Total number of mass shootings

**2,141** Victim fatalities from mass shootings

**24** Average number of mass shootings annually

**128** Average number of mass shooting deaths annually

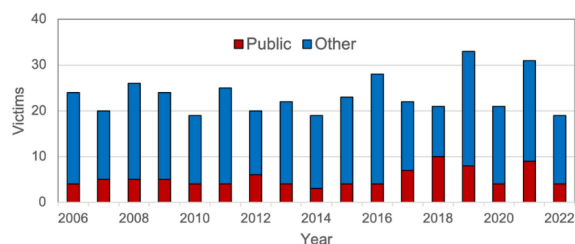
**<6** Yearly average number of public mass shootings\*

**<48** Yearly average number of public mass shooting fatalities

\*Public mass shootings are those events that are unrelated to ongoing criminal activity (e.g., gang conflict, drug trafficking)

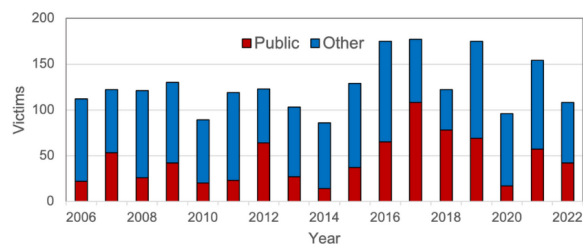
### Mass Shooting Incidents, Jan 2006 - Aug 2022

Source: AP/USA TODAY/Northeastern University Database



### Mass Shooting Victims Killed, Jan 2006 - Aug 2022

Source: AP/USA TODAY/Northeastern University Database



## THE TAKEAWAY

As shown in the above figures, based on the Associated Press/USA TODAY/Northeastern University Mass Killing Database, there has not been very much in terms of a trajectory since 2006.

Contrary to the narrative often promoted by the media that mass shootings are an epidemic, the prevalence of mass shootings has shown minimal increase over the past decade and one-half, particularly considering the ten percent growth in the U.S. population over that time span. If there is any type of epidemic underfoot, it is in the level of fear, which is out of proportion with the actual risk.