DESCRIPTION OF THE
ASSOCIATED PRESS/USA TODAY/NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
MASS KILLING DATABASE
2006 – PRESENT

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The AP/USA TODAY/Northeastern University Mass Killing Database (AP/USATODAY/NU) contains information on incidents, offenders, victims, and weapons for all multiple homicides with four or more victims killed in the United States from 2006 to the present.

DEFINITION

Mass murder is defined as the intentional killing of four or more victims— excluding the deaths of unborn children and the offender(s)—by any means within a 24-hour period. This definition includes cases involving all weapons (e.g., shooting, blunt force, stabbing, explosives, etc.), 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. The time frame of 24 hours was chosen to eliminate conflation with spree killers who kill multiple victims over several days in different locations, and to satisfy the traditional requirement of occurring in a "single incident," even if that incident involves an offender targeting multiple locations in an extended assault but within a relatively short time span. However, offenders who kill four or more victims during any 24-hour period of time as part of a multi-day spree are included as are all their victims within seven days of the mass killing. Negligent homicides related to driving under the influence or accidental fires are excluded due to the lack of intent. Finally, only incidents occurring within the 50 states and the District of Columbia are included in the database.

Consistent with the traditional definition, mass shootings are those mass killings (four or victim fatalities) in which most or all the victims are killed by gunfire. This differs from the alternative definition used by the Gun Violence Archive that includes incidents in which at least four victims are shot regardless of whether the injury is fatal. Less than five percent of these shootings are mass killings as defined here. The definition of a mass shooting used here also differs from an active shooter event which, as characterized by the FBI, involves an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area. Less than 25 percent of active shooter events result in four or more victim fatalities so as to constitute a mass killing.

METHODS

Researchers at USA TODAY first identified potential incidents using the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR). Homicide incidents in the SHR were flagged as potential mass murder cases if four or more victims were reported on the same record, and the type of homicide was coded as "murder or non-negligent manslaughter." Cases were subsequently verified utilizing media accounts, court documents, academic journal articles, books, and local law enforcement records obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Each data point was corroborated by multiple sources, which were compiled into a single document to assess the quality of information. When sources were contradictory, official law enforcement or court records were used, when available, followed by the most recent media or academic source. Case information was subsequently compared with other available mass murder or mass shooting databases to ensure validity. Incidents listed in the SHR that could not be independently verified were excluded from the database.

In 2016, primary data collection and verification efforts shifted from USA TODAY to Northeastern University. Northeastern researchers conducted extensive searches for incidents not reported in the SHR during the time period, utilizing internet search engines including Lexis-Nexis, Google News, and Newspapers.com. Search terms included: [number] dead, [number] killed, [number] slain, [number] murdered, [number] homicide, mass murder, mass shooting, massacre, rampage, family killing, familicide, and arson murder. Offender, victim, and location names were also directly searched when available. Northeastern University researchers also independently verified data collected by USA TODAY staff and filled in missing information, sometimes involving updated reports pertaining to older cases.

In December 2018, a Memo of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the Associated Press, USA TODAY, and Northeastern University to formalize a joint initiative to maintain and expand the mass killing database previously housed at USA TODAY. The Associated Press hosts the database and maintains the data entry tool, USA TODAY has developed and maintains the public website for the database, and Northeastern University manages data collection and updates.

The full database currently consists of four linked data tables with a total of 59 data fields (not counting indicators for the availability of offender/victim identity)—18 fields for each incident, 20 fields for each offender, 13 fields for each victim killed, and 8 fields for each weapon used. Most variables, with the notable exception of victim names, are available for public download. The remaining data are reserved for individuals affiliated with the Associated Press, USA TODAY/Gannett, and Northeastern University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, and others by permission of all three organizations. Moving forward, additional variables may be added to the full database as well as the public subset.

RELEVANT HYPERLINKS

Public database site: https://data.world/associatedpress/mass-killings-public

Three infographics websites:

Associated Press:
https://projects.apnews.com/features/2023/mass-killings/index.html

USA TODAY:
http://masskilling.usatoday.com

Washington Post:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/mass-shootings/

LIST OF PUBLIC VARIABLES

Incident	Offender	Victim	Weapon
incident_id	incident_id	incident_id	incident_id
date	offender_id	victim_id	weapon_id
city	firstname	age	weapon_type
state	middlename	race	gun_class
num_offenders	lastname	sex	gun_type
num_victims_killed	suffix	vorelationship	
num_victims_injured	age		
firstcod	race		
secondcod	sex		
if_assault_rifle	suicide		
type	deathcause		
situation_type	outcome		
location_type	criminal_justice_process		
location_type	sentence_type		
longitude	sentence_details		
latitude			
county			
geocode			
narrative			

CODEBOOK FOR PUBLIC DATA

1. Incident Characteristics

1.1	incident_id	Numeric identification for incident record
1.2	date	Date of incident
1.3	city	City/town name
1.4	state	State postal code
1.5	num_offenders	Number of offenders
1.6	num_killed	Number of victims killed
1.7	num_injured	Number of victims injured

1.8 firstcod   First cause of death

Shooting
Blunt force
Stabbing
Smoke inhalation and burns
Asphyxiation
Strangulation
Hanging
Vehicle crash
Drowning
Poison
Bombing
Pushing/Jumping
Other
Unknown

1.9 secondcod   Second cause of death

Shooting
Blunt force
Stabbing
Smoke inhalation and burns
Asphyxiation
Strangulation
Hanging
Vehicle crash
Drowning

Poison
Bombing
Pushing/Jumping
Other
Unknown

1.10   if_assault_rifle   **If an assault rifle used in the offense**
AR-15 style
Other assault rifle
Gun not an assault rifle
Unknown gun type
Nongun

1.11   type   **Type of incident**
Family (including intimate partner)
Felony
Public
Suspected felony
Other
Undetermined
Unsolved

1.12   situation_type   **Type of situation**
Arson
Despondency
Drug trade
Employment grievance
Family issue
Gang conflict
Hate
Indiscriminate
Interpersonal conflict
Profit
Robbery
Terrorism
Other
Undetermined

1.13   location_type   **Type of location**
Commercial/Retail/Entertainment
Government/Transit
House of worship
Medical facility
Open space
Residence/Other shelter
School/College

Vehicle
Multiple
Other

1.14 location   **Location**
Bar/Club/Restaurant
College
Commercial/Retail
Government/Transit
Hotel/Motel
House of worship
Medical facility
Open space
Residence
School
Shelter/Drug house
Vehicle
Multiple
Other

1.15 longitude   **Longitude**

1.16 latitude   **Latitude**

1.17 county   **County associated with longitude and latitude**

1.18 geocode   **FIPS geocode of location**

1.19 narrative   **Brief description of incident**

2. Offender Characteristics

2.1 incident_id   **Incident identification number for linking offender data**

2.2 offender_id   **Numeric identification for offender record**

2.3 firstname   **Offender's first name**

2.4 middlename   **Offender's middle name**

2.5 lastname   **Offender's last name**

2.6 suffix   **Offender's suffix**

2.7 age   **Offender age**

2.8   **race**   **Offender race or ethnicity**
                                    American Indian
                                    Asian/Pacific Islander
                                    Black
                                    Hispanic/Latino
                                    White
                                    Other
                                    Undetermined

2.9   **sex**   **Offender sex**
                                    Male
                                    Female

2.10 **suicide**   **If offender committed suicide**

2.11 **deathcause**   **Cause of offender death if suicide or killed by police/bystander**
                                    Shooting
                                    Blunt force
                                    Stabbing
                                    Smoke inhalation and burns
                                    Asphyxiation
                                    Strangulation
                                    Hanging
                                    Vehicle crash
                                    Drowning
                                    Poison
                                    Bombing
                                    Pushing/Jumping
                                    Other
                                    Unknown

2.12 **outcome**   **Outcome of incident**
                                    Acquitted
                                    Arrested/Pending trial
                                    Charges dropped
                                    Convicted
                                    Death sentence
                                    Died awaiting trial
                                    Fugitive
                                    Incompetent
                                    Killed
                                    Legally insane
                                    Life sentence
                                    Life with parole
                                    Life without parole

Prison sentence
Sentenced as juvenile
Suicide
Suicide awaiting trial
Unknown
Unsolved

2.13   criminal_justice_process   Status of criminal justice process
Arrested/Pending trial
Charges dropped
Fugitive
Incompetent
Plea
Trial
Not applicable

2.14   sentence_type   Type of sentence if convicted
Acquitted
Awaiting sentencing
Committed
Death sentence
Incompetent
Life sentence
Life sentence with parole
Life sentence without parole
Prison sentence
Undisclosed

2.15   sentence_details   Details of sentence if convicted

3. Victim Characteristics

3.1   incident_id   Incident identification number for linking victim data

3.2   victim_id   Numeric identification for victim record

3.3   age   Victim age

3.4   race   Victim race or ethnicity
American Indian
Asian/Pacific Islander
Black
Hispanic/Latino
White
Other

Undetermined

3.5   sex   **Victim sex**
                                              Male
                                              Female

3.6   vorelationship   **Relationship of victim to the offender**
                                              Acquaintance
                                              Aunt/Uncle
                                              Child or stepchild
                                              Classmate
                                              Cousin
                                              Co-worker or employer
                                              Criminal associate
                                              Dating relationship
                                              Ex-dating relationship
                                              Ex-spouse
                                              First responder
                                              Former relative/in-law
                                              Friend
                                              Grandchild
                                              Grandparent
                                              Individual with some non-blood/marriage relationship to
                                              a known person
                                              In-law
                                              Neighbor
                                              Niece/Nephew
                                              Parent or stepparent
                                              Random bystander/Stranger
                                              Relative of a known person
                                              Roommate
                                              Sibling
                                              Spouse
                                              Other familial relationship
                                              Other
                                              Undetermined

4. Weapon Characteristics

4.1   incident_id   **Incident identification number for linking weapon data**

4.2   weapon_id   **Numeric identification for weapon record**

4.3   **weapon_type**   **Type of weapon**
Blunt object
Explosive
Fire
Gun
Knife
Sharp object
Strangulation
Vehicle
Other
Unknown

4.4   **gun_class**   **Gun class**
HG (Handgun)
LG (Long gun)
UG (unknown gun class)
NG (Non-gun)

4.5   **gun_type**   **Type of gun**
Handgun
Pistol
Revolver
Rifle
Semiautomatic handgun
Semiautomatic rifle
Shotgun

Note: Offender and victim race/ethnicity is determined from an official record (e.g., arrest report), news reports, or confirmation by a journalist covering the case. Images of the offender and the offender's surname are not used to determine race. Hispanic/Latino includes all races of this ethnicity (i.e., White Hispanic and Black Hispanic are both coded as Hispanic/Latino). Individuals of multiple races/ethnicities are coded as "Other."