

**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.

LIST OF PUBLIC VARIABLES

<i>Incident</i>	<i>Offender</i>	<i>Victim</i>	<i>Weapon</i>
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		
type	suicide		
situation_type	deathcause		
location_type	outcome		
location_type	criminal_justice_process		
longitude	sentence_type		
latitude	sentence_details		
GPS_point			
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 type

Type of incident

Family
Felony
Public
Suspected felony
Other
Undetermined
Unsolved

1.11 situation_type

Type of situation

Arson
Despondency
Drug trade
Employment grievance
Family issue
Gang conflict
Hate
Indiscriminate
Interpersonal conflict
Profit
Robbery
Terrorism
Other
Undetermined

1.12 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

1.13 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

- 1.14 longitude **Longitude**
- 1.15 latitude **Latitude**
- 1.16 GPS_point **Geocode of location**
- 1.17 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 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

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."