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Here's What You Need To Know About The Weapons Of War Used In Mass Shootings

February 14, 2018 [Syndicated \(http://loghim.com/home/author/syndicated/\)](http://loghim.com/home/author/syndicated/)

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As officials continue to investigate 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, who is accused of opening fire on his former high school Wednesday afternoon, killing at least 17 people and injuring more than a dozen others, familiar details are already emerging about the weapon police believe was used in the massacre.

Police suspect Cruz was armed with at least one AR-15-style rifle and "countless magazines" in the deadly shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

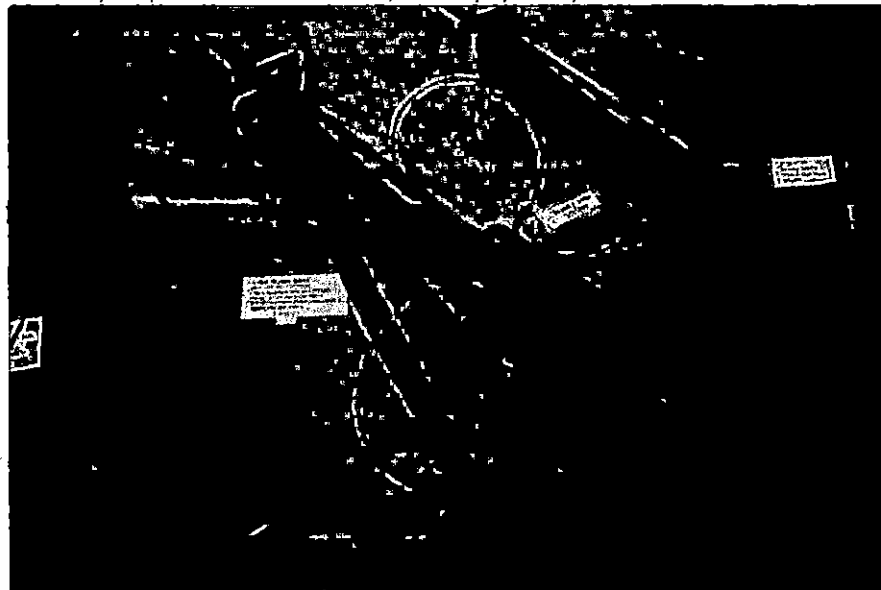
This adds to a disturbing trend. In many of the most deadly mass shootings in the last several years, including the Las Vegas massacre on Oct. 1 and the shooting at a Texas church on Nov. 5, the lone gunmen were armed with assault-style rifles like the one reportedly used at the Florida school.

There's plenty of debate over what constitutes a mass shooting (http://new.www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/us-mass-shootings_us_565f58cfe4b08e945fedd47d) — as well as what drives those who commit them. But it's increasingly clear that individuals who want to inflict mass casualties are taking advantage of the widespread availability of weapons of war.

These weapons are meant for use on the battlefield.

Renowned firearms engineer Eugene Stoner developed the first AR-15, or ArmaLite Rifle (hence the "AR"), in the late 1950s, using advances in technology and materials to revolutionize battlefield weaponry.

Stoner's rifle was marketed to national militaries interested in a lightweight firearm with precision accuracy and high lethality at long range. Colt Manufacturing Co. eventually purchased ArmaLite and convinced the U.S. military to replace the M-14 with its M-16, which employed many of the advances in the AR-15.



Many modern AR-style rifles are modeled off of these rifles and their successors, which have been the standard issue for the U.S. military since the Vietnam War. But there is one key difference: Battle-ready assault rifles have a selector switch that allows automatic fire (a continuous spray of bullets with a single pull of the trigger), or semi-automatic (one shot with each trigger pull). Civilian versions are semi-automatic only.

The AR-15's influence is apparent on the .223 SIG Sauer MCX rifle reportedly used in the 2016 Pulse nightclub massacre in Orlando, according to Mother Jones (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/06/assault-rifle-used-by-orlando-mass-shooter>).

NO MATTER THE CONDITIONS

The SIG MCX is an innovative weapon system built around a battle-proven core SIG's proprietary Short Stroke piston system. That's why the SIG MCX delivers performance, no matter the conditions, that you've come to expect from the leading name in firearms.



Here's how one reviewer described the SIG Sauer MCX (<http://www.thetruthaboutguns.com/2015/10/foghorn/gun-review-sig-sauer-mcx/>):

SIG SAUER developed the MCX rifle for America's special forces. Their goal: a firearm that's as quiet as an MP5, as deadly as an AK-47, and more modular than anything ever designed.

The manufacturer touts the same qualities, saying the rifle is designed to be "silenced, light and short." These rifles are designed to kill as efficiently as possible.

These weapons are designed to fire off bullets very, very quickly. Some manufacturers boast that an experienced shooter could fire as many as 45 rounds

(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/06/13/the-men-who-wrote-the-2nd-amendment-would-never-recognize-an-ar-15/>) in one minute. Magazines containing fresh ammunition can be swapped out in a matter of seconds.

The specifications of assault-style rifles vary depending on ammunition, but many tests put the muzzle velocity of a standard round from an AR-15 at 3,200 feet per second, making it accurate up to 500 yards — more than a quarter-mile.

This makes rounds from an AR-15 or other assault-style weapons far more devastating than those fired from small-caliber handguns.

Here's a video of a 5.56mm caliber round (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRbAfd0U9vY>) — the kind used in many assault-style rifles — being fired into ballistic gel meant to mimic human flesh. You can see how a single shot inflicts massive trauma, regardless of where it hits the target.

And that's just one round. A standard AR-15 magazine holds 30 rounds. But in most states, the rifles can be legally outfitted with high-capacity magazines that can hold 60 or even 100 rounds. A gunman in Texas recently managed to fire off 212 rounds from an AR-15 (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/houston-shooting-ar15_us_574efd52e4b0c3752dcc134c) during a standoff with police, though it's unclear if he used high-capacity magazines. Six people were shot during this exchange, none fatally. If the shooter had chosen a more densely populated target, the outcome could have been much different.

AR-15 and similar weapons also are highly customizable, allowing for the addition of aftermarket sights, grips, suppressors and other accessories that make them more effective and easier to wield in combat situations.

Assault-style rifles are relatively cheap and easy to buy.

The average price of an assault-style rifle fluctuates somewhat with supply and demand. Online distributors currently offer versions for under \$200, though the average price appears to be around \$1,000. A SIG Sauer MCX like that used by the Orlando gunman retails for about \$1,700.

In most states, anyone legally allowed to possess a handgun can also purchase an AR-15 or other assault-style rifle, with no further requirements. In Florida, for example, there is no waiting period (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/gun-shop-owner-orlando-nightclub-shooter-omar-mateen-passed-background-check/>) for would-be buyers of rifles or other long guns.

Not even people on the terrorist watch list are barred from purchasing assault-style rifles. An attempt to close that loophole was voted down (<http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/gop-blocks-bill-stop-terrorists-buying-guns>) by Senate Republicans in 2015, and was blocked again shortly after the Orlando shooting (<http://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/284188-senate-votes-down-closing-terror-loophole>) the following year.

These guns are already everywhere.

There are estimated to be millions of assault-style rifles already in civilian hands, according to recent manufacturer reports (<https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/data-statistics>), with dozens of companies offering versions. Most of these weapons will never be used in crimes. But the threat is nonetheless present.

A suspect arrested in 2016 in Los Angeles had three of AR-15 rifles in his car

(http://new.www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/los-angeles-gay-pride-arrest_us_575da27fe4b0ced23ca85716), along with bags of ammo and explosive materials. He reportedly told police he was on his way to the city's gay pride parade.

And it's not just a matter of AR-15s and their higher-tech variants. Hundreds of thousands of new assault-style rifles flood the market each year. This includes high-powered weaponry like the AK-style rifles used in 2015 by the Planned Parenthood shooter in Colorado Springs, or the gunman who attacked a military recruitment center in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Some states ban assault weapons, but manufacturers have found ways around the restrictions.

A number of states, including California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey and New York, have laws limiting or banning the sale of assault weapons. California, for example, has banned AR-15s and other rifles with detachable magazines, which allow shooters to quickly reload. However a recent feature called a "bullet button" allows magazines to be quickly replaced, while still technically remaining fixed, rendering this law largely ineffective. State lawmakers attempted to close this loophole by introducing legislation prohibiting future sales (<http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-sac-gun-control-bills-20160419-story.html>) of rifles with bullet buttons, but gun owners have found ways around the ban (<https://www.thetrace.org/2017/01/california-gun-owners-assault-weapons-ban-bullet-button/>).

Gun manufacturers have also managed to easily circumvent other state laws by making small modifications to the weapons, such as replacing the grip (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/01/new-york-assault-weapons-ban-circumvented-modification>) or other components.

Federal attempts at banning assault weapons have been largely unsuccessful.

In 1994, then-President Bill Clinton signed a federal ban (<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/F?c103:1:/temp/~c103ouQ1eL:e644150/>) on the manufacture, sale and possession of assault weapons and large-capacity magazines. The law specifically banned certain semi-automatic weapons, including the AR-15, as well as rifles that could accept detachable magazines. That ban lapsed in 2004, when Congress did not reauthorize (<http://www.nbcnews.com/id/5946127/ns/politics/t/congress-lets-assault-weapons-ban-expire/#.V17steYrJp8>) it.

There's been debate about how well the ban actually worked. It didn't apply to guns manufactured prior to 1994. According to NBC News (http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/01/16/16549416-was-the-last-assault-weapons-ban-effective?lite), more than 1 million assault-style rifles and 25 million guns with high-capacity magazines were grandfathered in. A 2004 study (<http://www.factcheck.org/2013/02/did-the-1994-assault-weapons-ban-work/>) by the University of Pennsylvania found that while the ban did result in a measurable reduction in crimes involving assault weapons, crimes involving non-banned guns remained steady or increased.

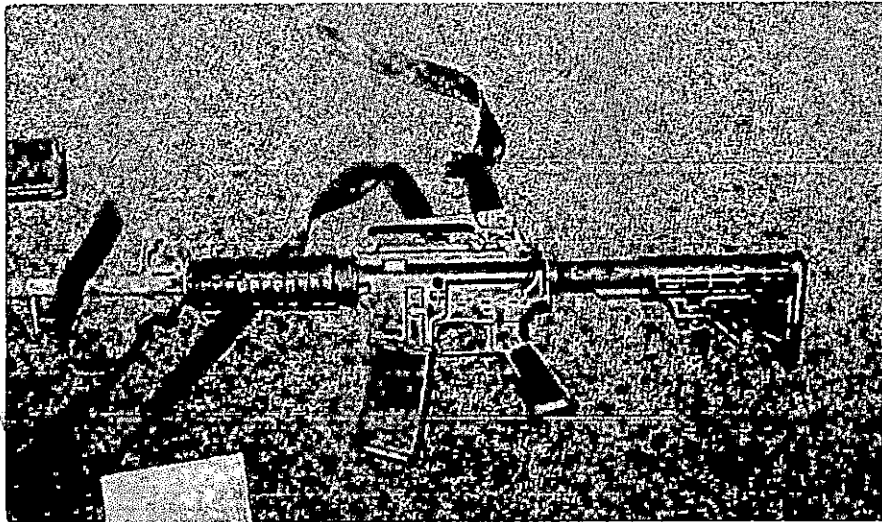
"We cannot clearly credit the ban with any of the nation's recent drop in gun violence," concluded the study. "There has been no discernible reduction in the lethality and injuriousness of gun violence, based on indicators like the percentage of gun crimes resulting in death or the share of gunfire incidents resulting in injury."

Pro-gun activists say this shows a new assault weapons ban wouldn't affect gun violence. But if the ban hadn't expired, it's difficult to imagine these guns proliferating to the point of becoming the weapon of choice of mass shooters.

After the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in Connecticut, some members of Congress sought to renew the assault weapon ban. It passed the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2013, but was excluded (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/20/us/politics/senate-gun-bill-will-exclude-assault-weapons-ban.html?hp>) from a vote by the full Senate due to Republican opposition. An attempt to re-attach the measure by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), one of the ban's most ardent supporters, was voted down 40 to 60 (<http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/17/news/la-pn-dianne-feinstein-assault-weapons-vote-20130417>).

House Democrats again (<http://thehill.com/regulation/263489-assault-weapons-ban-targets-semi-automatic-guns>) pushed for renewal in late 2015, following the mass shooting in San Bernardino, California, and Feinstein reintroduced (<http://www.latimes.com/politics/essential/la-pol-ca-essential-politics-updates-sen-dianne-feinstein-reintroduces-1510159003-htm1story.html>) it in 2017 following the Las Vegas and Texas shootings. There's been no action on it since.

An attempt to ban bump stocks, a device used by the Las Vegas shooter that effectively turns semi-automatic rifles into automatic ones, also failed to gain traction in Congress (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bump-stocks-sales-las-vegas_us_59fa0675e4b0b0c7fa377bbb). (Massachusetts, however, became the first state (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/massachusetts-bump-stock-ban_us_5a708397e4b0a52682ffa243) to ban the add-on stocks earlier this month.)



Every time a gunman carries out a massacre with an assault-style rifle, sales go up. Gun sales, particularly those of assault weapons, tend to spike after each mass shooting, fueled in part by fears that lawmakers will crack down. Already immensely popular (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/12/03/military-style-ar-rifles-market-saturated/19836755/>), AR-15s and similar rifles flew off (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/ar-15-gun-sales-continue-to-spike-after-shootings/>) the shelves (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/03/business/the-ar-15-the-most-wanted-gun-in-america.html>) after Sandy Hook. Gun shop owners saw a similar spike after San Bernardino (<http://www.wsbtv.com/news/local/gun-store-owners-say-they-see-increase-assault-rif/17225639>).

This trend is so pronounced that gun industry executives have admitted (<https://theintercept.com/2015/12/03/mass-shooting-wall-st/>) mass shootings are good for business. Families of gun violence victims are fighting back against this profit windfall (<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/gun-violence-good-business-firearms-manufacturers-article-1.2464147>). The parents of nine Sandy Hook victims and one person who survived the massacre are suing Remington (<http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/22/health/sandy-hook-families-gun-lawsuit/>), the manufacturer of the rifle used in that shooting. The suit accuses (<http://www.koskoff.com/In-the-News/Sandy-Hook-Families-Complaint.pdf>) Remington of negligence in selling a military-grade weapon for civilian use, arguing that the guns were purposefully marketed to young men as personal weapons of war.

"Remington took a weapon that was made to the specs of the U.S. military for the purpose of killing enemy soldiers in combat — and that weapon in the military is cared for with tremendous amount of diligence, in terms of training, storage, who gets the weapon, and who can use it," the families' attorney, Joshua Koskoff, told CNN (<http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/22/health/sandy-hook-families-gun-lawsuit/>) in February of 2016. "They took that same weapon and started peddling it to the civilian market for the purposes of making a lot of money."

Handguns are common in single-victim gun violence, but military-style rifles are becoming the weapon of choice for mass shooters.

Tens of thousands of people (<http://time.com/5011599/gun-deaths-rate-america-cdc-data/>) die in gun violence every year, and the overwhelming majority involve handguns, not assault-style rifles or other long guns. At least 64 percent of the gun-related homicides in 2016 (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s./2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-4.xls>) were committed with pistols, according to FBI data.

When shooters do turn to heavy weaponry, however, the results can be catastrophic.

Weapons of war have been used in some of the deadliest shootings over the last several years. In addition to Las Vegas, AR-15 style rifles were used during mass shootings in California, Connecticut, Florida, Oregon, Texas and Colorado.

The gun industry is trying to convince you these weapons are just for fun.

Gun advocates insist assault-style rifles are ideal for hunting and target shooting. A fact sheet published by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (http://www.nssf.org/factsheets/PDF/So_Called_Assault_Weapons.pdf) in 2013 condemned the "assault weapon" label, claiming the term was "conjured up by anti-gun legislators to scare voters into thinking these firearms are something out of a horror movie." The group has repeatedly argued that the guns are useful for marksmanship competitions and hunting large game. The NRA champions the AR-15 as "America's rifle" (<https://www.nrablog.com/articles/2016/1/why-the-ar15-is-americas-most-popular-rifle/>).

The industry has coined the term "modern sporting rifles" (<http://www.nssf.org/mstr/facts.cfm>) to describe assault weapons, and the term is used by major gun retailers like Cabela's (<http://www.cabelas.com/category/Modern-Sporting-Rifle/535807080.uts>), and manufacturers such as Smith & Wesson (http://www.smith-wesson.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/Category4_750001_750051_757785_-1_757784_757784_image) (<http://www.remington.com/rifles/modern-sporting>).

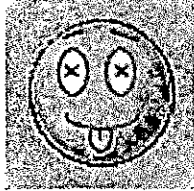
That message may resonate with gun enthusiasts. The weapons are versatile and efficient, and if you like the idea of shooting things for sport, the appeal is obvious. Assault-style weapons look cool. Shooting one might even make you feel like a badass.

But the very same traits that have made them the preferred weapon for military personnel and sport shooters are what make them a natural choice for those who want to inflict senseless violence with maximum casualties.

It now seems the toll of mass killers is limited only by their choice of weapon, their training and their target. The political response to that terrifying reality has been to hope that people will choose not to kill. That plan clearly isn't working.

A version of this article initially ran in 2016.

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From the NY Times online 2-16-2018

The Interpreter

By MAX FISHER and JOSH KELLER NOV. 7, 2017

The United States has **270 million guns** and had **90 mass shooters** from 1966 to 2012.

No other country has more than **46 million guns** or **18 mass shooters**.
~~an ever-growing body of research consistently reaches the same conclusion.~~

The only variable that can explain the high rate of mass shootings in America is its astronomical number of guns.

A Look at the Numbers

The top-line numbers suggest a correlation that, on further investigation, grows only clearer.

Americans make up about 4.4 percent of the global population but own 42 percent of the world's guns. From 1966 to 2012, 31 percent of the gunmen in mass shootings worldwide were American, according to a 2015 study by Adam Lankford, a professor at the University of Alabama.

Adjusted for population, only Yemen has a higher rate of mass shootings among countries with more than 10 million people — a distinction Mr. Lankford urged to avoid outliers. Yemen has the world's second-highest rate of gun ownership after the United States.

Worldwide, Mr. Lankford found, a country's rate of gun ownership correlated with the odds it would experience a mass shooting. This relationship held even when he excluded the United States, indicating that it could not be explained by some other factor particular to his home country. And it held when he controlled for homicide rates, suggesting that mass shootings were better explained by a society's access to guns than by its baseline level of violence.

Factors That Don't Correlate

If mental health made the difference, then data would show that Americans have more mental health problems than do people in other countries with fewer mass shootings. But the mental health care spending rate in the United States, the number of mental health professionals per capita and the rate of severe mental disorders are all in line with those of other wealthy countries.

A 2015 study estimated that only 4 percent of American gun deaths could be attributed to mental health issues. And Mr. Lankford, in an email, said countries with high suicide rates tended to have low rates of mass shootings — the opposite of what you would expect if mental health problems correlated with mass shootings.

Whether a population plays more or fewer video games also appears to have no impact. Americans are no more likely to play video games than people in any other developed country.

Racial diversity or other factors associated with social cohesion also show little correlation with gun deaths. Among European countries, there is little association between immigration or other diversity metrics and the rates of gun murders or mass shootings.

A Violent Country

America's gun homicide rate was 33 per million people in 2009, far exceeding the average among developed countries. In Canada and Britain, it was 5 per million and 0.7 per million, respectively, which also corresponds with differences in gun ownership.

Americans sometimes see this as an expression of deeper problems with crime, a notion ingrained, in part, by a series of films portraying urban gang violence in the early 1990s. But the United States is not actually more prone to crime than other developed countries, according to a landmark 1999 study by Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins of the University of California, Berkeley.

Rather, they found, in data that has since been repeatedly confirmed, that American crime is simply more lethal. A New Yorker is just as likely to be robbed as a Londoner, for instance, but the New Yorker is 54 times more likely to be killed in the process.

They concluded that the discrepancy, like so many other anomalies of American violence, came down to guns.

More gun ownership corresponds with more gun murders across virtually every axis: among developed countries, among American states, among American towns and cities and when controlling for crime rates. And gun control legislation tends to reduce gun murders, according to a recent analysis of 130 studies from 10 countries.

This suggests that the guns themselves cause the violence.

Comparisons in Other Societies

Skeptics of gun control sometimes point to a 2016 study. From 2000 and 2014, it found, the United States death rate by mass shooting was 1.5 per one million people. The rate was 1.7 in Switzerland and 3.4 in Finland, suggesting American mass shootings were not actually so common.

But the same study found that the United States had 133 mass shootings. Finland had only two, which killed 18 people, and Switzerland had one, which killed 14. In short, isolated incidents. So while mass shootings can happen anywhere, they are only a matter of routine in the United States.

As with any crime, the underlying risk is impossible to fully erase. Any individual can snap or become entranced by a violent ideology. What is different is the likelihood that this will lead to mass murder.

In China, about a dozen seemingly random attacks on schoolchildren killed 25 people between 2010 and 2012. Most used knives; none used a gun.

By contrast, in this same window, the United States experienced five of its deadliest mass shootings, which killed 78 people. Scaled by population, the American attacks were 12 times as deadly.

Beyond the Statistics

In 2013, American gun-related deaths included 21,175 suicides, 11,208 homicides and 505 deaths caused by an accidental discharge. That same year in Japan, a country with one-third America's population, guns were involved in only 13 deaths.

In 2013, American gun-related deaths included 21,175 suicides, 11,208 homicides and 505 deaths caused by an accidental discharge. That same year in Japan, a country with one-third America's population, guns were involved in only 13 deaths.

This means an American is about 300 times more likely to die by gun homicide or accident than a Japanese person. America's gun ownership rate is 150 times as high as Japan's. That gap between 150 and 300 shows that gun ownership statistics alone do not explain what makes America different.

The United States also has some of the weakest controls over who may buy a gun and what sorts of guns may be owned.

Switzerland has the second-highest gun ownership rate of any developed country, about half that of the United States. Its gun homicide rate in 2004 was 7.7 per million people — unusually high, in keeping with the relationship between gun ownership and murders, but still a fraction of the rate in the United States.

Swiss gun laws are more stringent, setting a higher bar for securing and keeping a license, for selling guns and for the types of guns that can be owned. Such laws reflect more than just tighter restrictions. They imply a different way of thinking about guns, as something that citizens must affirmatively earn the right to own.

Photo

A vigil after the Las Vegas attack. Credit: Hilary Swift for The New York Times

The Difference Is Culture

The United States is one of only three countries, along with Mexico and Guatemala, that begin with the opposite assumption: that people have an inherent right to own guns.

The main reason American regulation of gun ownership is so weak may be the fact that the trade-offs are simply given a different weight in the United States than they are anywhere else.

After Britain had a mass shooting in 1987, the country instituted strict gun control laws. So did Australia after a 1996 shooting. But the United States has

repeatedly faced the same calculus and determined that relatively unregulated gun ownership is worth the cost to society.

That choice, more than any statistic or regulation, is what most sets the United States apart.

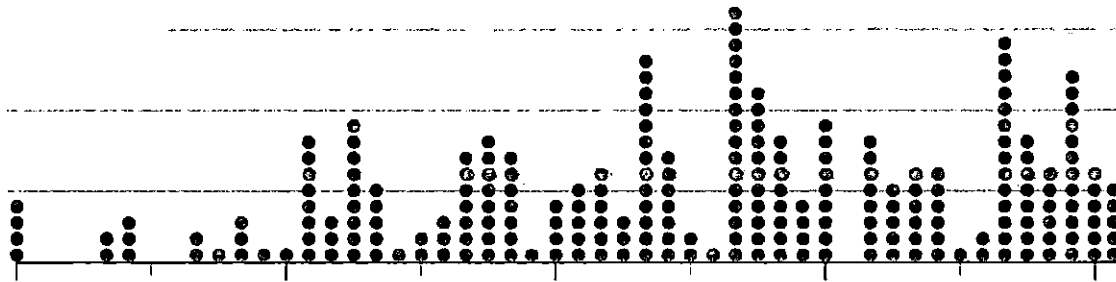
“In retrospect Sandy Hook marked the end of the US gun control debate,” Dan Hodges, a British journalist, wrote in a post on Twitter two years ago, referring to the 2012 attack that killed 20 young students at an elementary school in Connecticut. “Once America decided killing children was bearable, it was over.”

A version of this article appears in print on November 8, 2017, on Page A15 of the New York edition with the headline: Only One Thing Explains Mass Shootings in the United States. [Order Reprints](#) [Today's Paper](#) [Subscribe](#)

After Sandy Hook, More Than 400 People Have Been Shot in Over 200 School Shootings

By **JUGAL K. PATEL** FEB. 15, 2018

When a gunman killed 20 first graders and six adults with an assault rifle at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, it rattled Newtown, Conn., and reverberated across the world. Since then, there have been at least 239 school shootings nationwide. In those episodes, 438 people were shot, 138 of whom were killed. The data used here is from the Gun Violence Archive, a nonprofit that began tracking school shootings in 2014, about a year after Sandy Hook.



Gunshot Victims in School Shootings

Killed
Injured

Sandy Hook

Jan. 2014
Feb. 2014
March 2014
Apr. 2014
May 2014
June 2014
July 2014
Aug. 2014
Sept. 2014
Oct. 2014
Nov. 2014
Dec. 2014
Jan. 2015
Feb. 2015
March 2015

Apr. 2015
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July 2017
Aug. 2017
Sept. 2017
Oct. 2017
Nov. 2017
Dec. 2017
Jan. 2017
March 2017
Apr. 2017
Jan. 2018
Feb. 2018

Parkland, Fla.

Source: Gun Violence Archive

Note: Shootings in 2013 are not included because complete data was not available in that year. Months with blanks indicate no shootings archived.

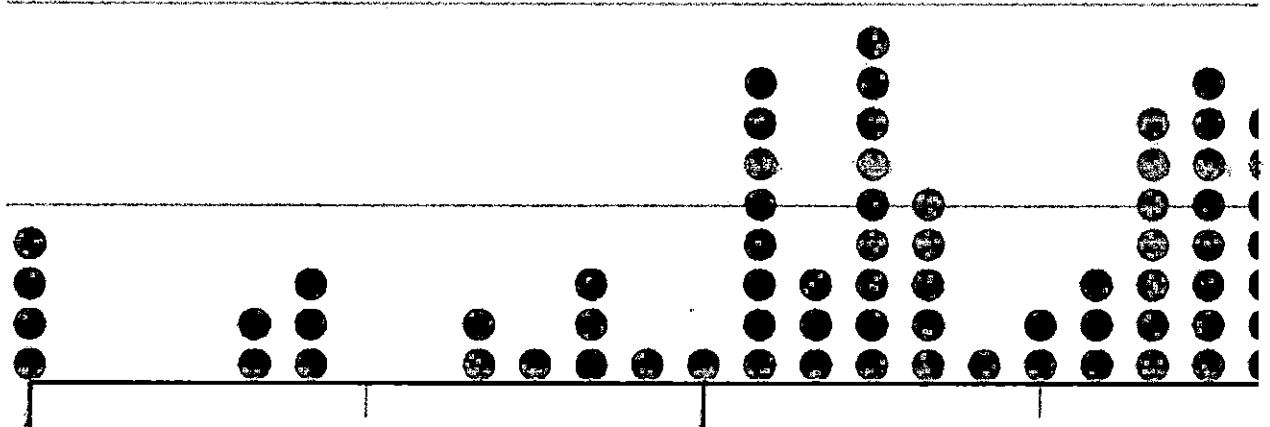
The shootings have taken place at sporting events and in parking lots, cafeterias, hallways and classrooms.

A shooting took place Wednesday at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., about an hour northwest of Miami. As of

Wednesday night, 17 people had been killed and the number of people injured was unknown.

Sixteen of the 239 shootings shown below can be classified as mass shootings, events in which four or more people are shot.

On average, there have been about five school shootings each month, including episodes that were not mass shootings.



15 school shootings

10
5

Jan. 2014
Jan. 2015
Jan. 2016
Jan. 2017
Jan. 2018

Source: Gun Violence Archive.

Each of the episodes falls under the definition of “school shooting” used by the Gun Violence Archive.

The nonprofit defines a school shooting as an episode on the property of an elementary school, secondary school or college campus. Another defining characteristic is timing — shootings must occur during school hours or during extracurricular activities.

Only episodes in which people were injured or killed by gunfire are included. Injuries like a leg broken while fleeing the site were not archived.

Police reports often leave out the origin of guns used in school shootings, but researchers say a significant portion of the guns used in such episodes come from the shooters’ homes.

Many children have access to unlocked guns at home. Data from gun ownership surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center show that 54 percent of gun owners with children under 18 living at home say they keep all of their guns locked away.

Fourteen states and Washington, D.C., have laws that impose criminal liability on those who store guns at home and know “or reasonably should know” that those firearms are accessible to children.

In a study conducted in 2000 by the RAND Corporation, researchers estimated that more than 22 million children live in homes with a firearm.

Additional work by Jasmine C. Lee.

Correction: Feb. 15, 2018

An earlier version of this article misstated the number of school shootings since 2012. It was 239, not 273. The number of people shot was also misstated. It was 438, not 439.