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A Guide to Mass Shootings in America

There have been at least 67 in the last three decades—and most of the killers got their guns legally.

—By [Mark Follman \(/authors/mark-follman\)](#), [Gavin Arosen \(/authors/gavin-arosen\)](#), and [Deanna Pan \(/authors/deanna-pan\)](#)
| Updated: Wed Feb. 27, 2013 7:45 AM PST

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It is perhaps too easy to forget how many times this has happened. [The horrific mass murder at a movie theater in Colorado](#) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/07/batman-theater-shooting-updates-dark-knight-rises>) last July, [another at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin](#) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/08/what-we-know-about-sikh-temple-shooting-wisconsin-updates>) in August, [another at a manufacturer in Minneapolis](#) (<http://www.startribune.com/local/171774461.html>) in September—and then [the unthinkable nightmare at a Connecticut elementary school](#) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/newtown-connecticut-school-shooting-explained>) in December—are the latest in an epidemic of such gun violence over the last three decades. Since 1982, there have been at least 62 mass shootings* ([#update](#)) across the country, with the killings unfolding in 30 states from Massachusetts to Hawaii. Twenty-five of these mass shootings have occurred since 2006, and seven of them took place in 2012. We've gathered detailed data on the cases and mapped them below, including information on the shooters' identities, the types of weapons they used, and the number of victims they injured and killed.

Weapons: Of the 143 guns possessed by the killers, more than three quarters were obtained legally. The arsenal included dozens of assault weapons and semi-automatic handguns with [high-capacity magazines](#) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/01/high-capacity-magazines-mass-shootings>). (See charts below.) Just as Jeffrey Weise used a .40-caliber Glock to slaughter students in Red Lake, Minnesota, in 2005, so too did James Holmes, along with an [AR-15 assault rifle](#) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AR-15>), when blasting away at his victims in a darkened movie theater. In Newtown, Connecticut, Adam Lanza wielded a [.223 Bushmaster semi-automatic assault rifle](#) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bushmaster_Firearms_International) as he massacred 20 school children and six adults.

The killers: More than half of the cases involved school or workplace shootings (12 and 20, respectively); the other 30 cases took place in locations including shopping malls, restaurants, and religious and government buildings. Forty four of the killers were white males. Only one of them was a woman. (See Goleta, Calif., in 2006.) The average age of the killers was 35, though the youngest among them was a mere 11 years old. (See Jonesboro, Ark., in 1998.) A majority were mentally troubled—and many displayed signs of it before [setting out to kill](#) (

Tragedy in Newtown

[The NRA Myth of Arming the Good Guys](#) (/politics/2012/12/nra-mass-shootings-myth)

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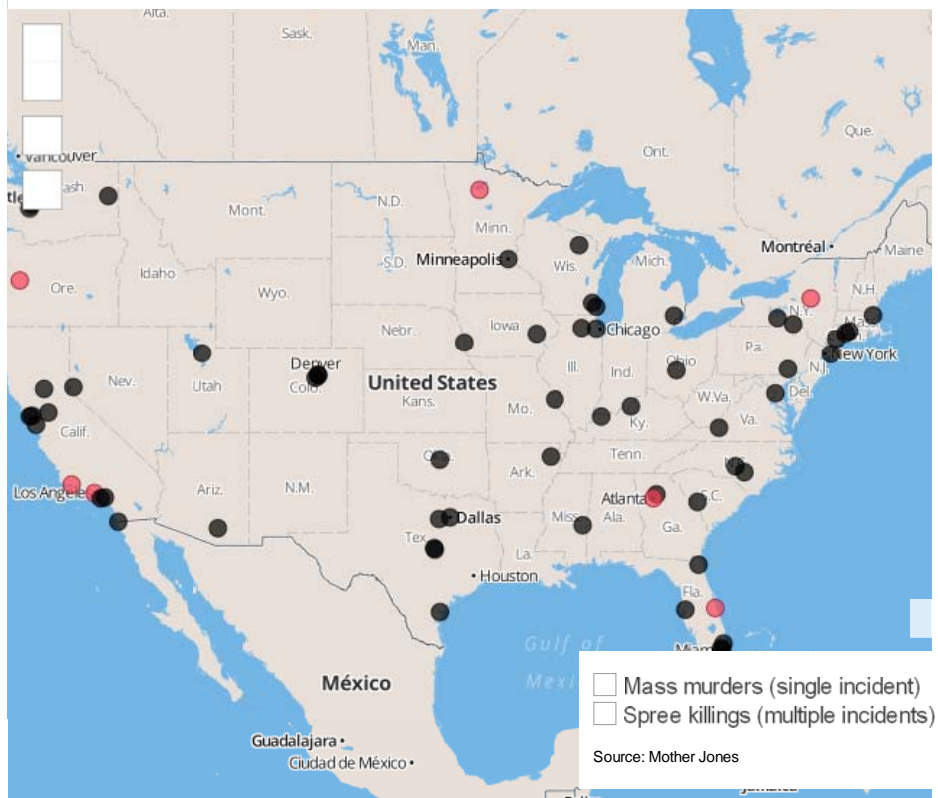
["A Killing Machine": Half of All Mass Shooters Used High-Capacity Magazines](#) (/politics/2013/01/high-capacity-magazines-mass-shootings)

[Mass Shootings: Maybe We Need a Better Mental-Health Policy](#) (/politics/2012/11/jared-loughner-mass-shootings-mental-illness)

[Why Mass Shootings Deserve Deeper Investigation](#) (/politics/2013/01/mass-shootings-james-alan-fox)

[loughner-mass-shootings-mental-illness](#)). Explore the map for further details—we do not consider it to be all-inclusive, but based on [the criteria we used \(#criteria\)](#) we believe that we've produced the most comprehensive rundown available on this particular type of violence. (Mass shootings represent only a sliver of America's overall gun violence.) For a timeline listing all the cases on the map, including photos of the killers, [jump to page 2 \(http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/07/mass-shootings-map?page=2\)](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/07/mass-shootings-map?page=2). For the stories of the 151 shooting rampage victims of 2012, [click here \(http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-victims-2012\)](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-victims-2012), and for all of [MoJo's year-long investigation into gun laws and mass shootings](#), [click here \(http://www.motherjones.com/special-reports/2012/12/guns-in-america-mass-shootings\)](http://www.motherjones.com/special-reports/2012/12/guns-in-america-mass-shootings).

Hover over the dots or use the search tool in the top-left corner of the map to go to a specific location. (Zoom in to see the Aurora shooting, located close to other massacres in Colorado, and to see other proximate shootings in Milwaukee, Seattle, and elsewhere.)



Sources: Research by Mother Jones. (With thanks to the [Associated Press \(http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/07/20/the-worst-mass-shootings-of-the-past-50-years/\)](http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/07/20/the-worst-mass-shootings-of-the-past-50-years/), [Canada.com \(http://o.canada.com/2012/07/17/interactive-map-mass-shootings-in-north-american-history/\)](http://o.canada.com/2012/07/17/interactive-map-mass-shootings-in-north-american-history/), and [Citizens Crime Commission of NYC \(http://www.nycrimecommission.org/initiative1-shootings.php\)](http://www.nycrimecommission.org/initiative1-shootings.php).)

We used the following criteria to identify mass shootings:

- **The shooter took the lives of at least four people.** An [FBI crime classification report \(http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder/serial-murder-1#two\)](http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder/serial-murder-1#two) identifies an individual as a mass murderer—versus a [spree killer \(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spree_killer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spree_killer) or a [serial killer \(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serial_killer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serial_killer)—if he kills four or more people in a single incident (not including himself), typically in a single location.
- **The killings were carried out by a lone shooter.** (Except in the case of the Columbine massacre and the Westside Middle School killings, both of which involved two shooters.)
- **The shootings occurred in a public place.** (Except in the case of a party in Crandon, Wisconsin, and another in Seattle.) Crimes primarily related to gang activity or armed robbery are not included.
- **If the shooter died or was hurt from injuries** sustained during the incident, he is included in the total victim count. (But we have excluded many cases in which there were three fatalities and the shooter also died, per the above FBI criterion.)

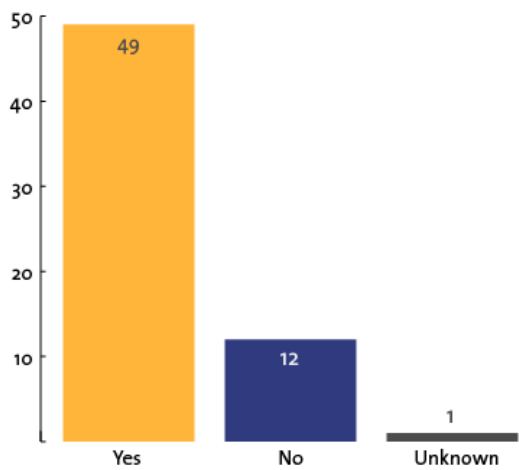
- We included a handful of so-called "spree killings"—high-profile cases that fit closely with our above criteria for mass murder, but in which the killings occurred in more than one location over a short period of time.

For more on how we determined the criteria, see our [mass shootings explainer](http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2012/08/what-is-a-mass-shooting) (<http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2012/08/what-is-a-mass-shooting>). Plus: more on the [crucial mental illness factor](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/11/jared-loughner-mass-shootings-mental-illness) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/11/jared-loughner-mass-shootings-mental-illness>), and on the recent barrage of [state laws rolling back gun restrictions across the US](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/map-gun-laws-2009-2012) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/map-gun-laws-2009-2012>). And: Explore [the full data set behind our investigation](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data>).

Here are two charts detailing the killers' weapons:

Killer Obtained Weapons Legally?

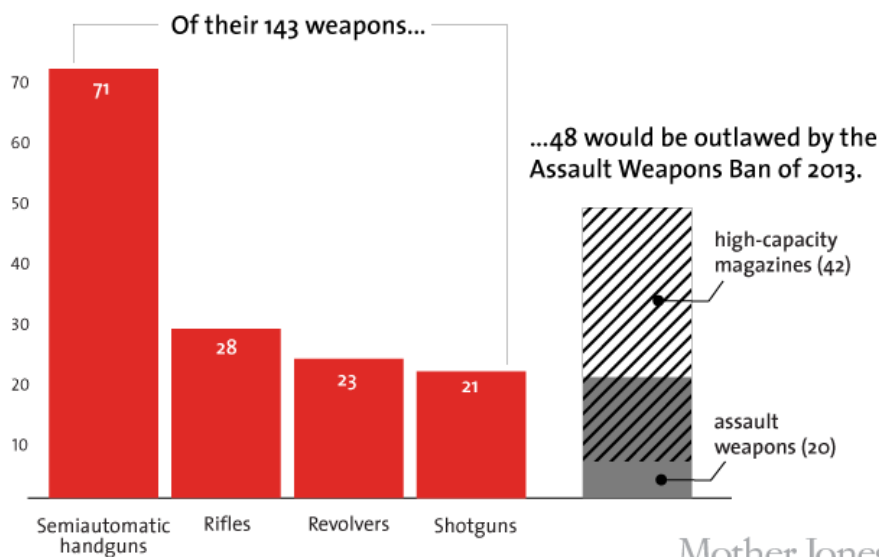
Mass shootings in US, 1982-2012



Mother Jones

Mass Shooters' Weapons, 1982-2012

More than half of all mass shooters possessed high-capacity magazines, assault weapons, or both.



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We've updated and expanded this story with additional research multiple times since initial publication on July 20, 2012, thanks in part to some valuable feedback from MoJo readers. (Thanks also to Professor James Alan Fox of Northeastern University.) Details about our

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updated analysis and data on the shooters' weapons [are in this story](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/02/assault-weapons-high-capacity-magazines-mass-shootings-feinstein). For more about the mass shooting at the movie theater in Aurora, Colo., [click here](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/07/batman-theater-shooting-updates-dark-knight-rises), and for the mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, [click here](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/newtown-connecticut-school-shooting-explained). And for additional reporting and analysis from our in-depth investigation, [read this companion story](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/mass-shootings-investigation). [\(Return to intro.\)](#) (#intro)

First published: Fri Jul 20, 2012 7:32 PM PDT.

Interactive production by [Tasneem Raja](#) and [Jaeh Lee](#)

Image: Clockwise from upper left: Wade Michael Page: [Anti-Defamation League](http://blog.adl.org/extremism/adl-connects-suspected-shooter-at-wisconsin-sikh-temple-to-white-supremacist-skinhead-group); James E. Holmes: Arapahoe County Sheriff's Dept./Zuma; Seung-Hui Cho: Virginia Tech University/Wikimedia; Jared Loughner: Pima County Sheriff's Office/Wikimedia

[Next Page: A 30-year timeline of mass shootings, with photos of the killers](#)

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MARK FOLLMAN [\(/authors/mark-follman\)](#) Senior Editor
 Mark Follman is a senior editor at *Mother Jones*. Read more of [his stories](http://www.motherjones.com/authors/mark-follman), follow him on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/markfollman), or contact him with tips or feedback at [mfollman \(at\) motherjones \(dot\) com](mailto:mfollman@motherjones.com). [RSS](#) | [TWITTER](#)

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GAVIN ARONSEN [\(/authors/gavin-aronsen\)](#)
 For more of Gavin's stories, [click here](http://www.motherjones.com/authors/gavin-aronsen).

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DEANNA PAN [\(/authors/deanna-pan\)](#)
 Deanna Pan is a former senior editorial fellow at *Mother Jones*.

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