

US Mass Shootings and Concealed Carry by Joshua Klaver

Views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect SSANZ policy.

We often hear outcry from politicians and the media about how mass shootings and gun violence are out of control in the United States-about how dangerous it is. We all know that they do this to drum up fear in order to control people, but how dangerous is it really? Let's take a look at the facts and statistics and find out.

The United States has a population of about 320 million and every year there are 9,000-10,000 murders with firearms, giving a likelihood of .003% (3 in 100,000) that you will be murdered with a firearm. However, if you are not in a gang the numbers are about 5,000 per year, giving you a likelihood of .001% (1 in 100,000). For reference, your likelihood of being killed is .01% (1 in 10,000) by car accident, .004% (1 in 25,000) by drunk driver, .01% (1 in 10,000) by accidental drug overdose, .04% (1 in 2500) by common injuries, and .01% (1 in 10,000) by accidental fall. There are only about 15 people a year on average killed in mass shootings, giving you a likelihood of .000004% (1 in 5,000,000).

Contrary to what you might have heard on the news, mass shootings are not becoming more common. Also, while 15 might seem like a very small number, it is important to remember that the occasional mass shooting which exceeds this does not change the overall trend. Some people will try to compare the overall murder rate in America with countries like England and Australia and say that it is disproportionately high, but they fail to take into account the other major differences, such as a diverse population, densely populated cities, an ongoing drug war, and widespread poverty, which all contribute to violent crime.

The rate of murders and non-negligent manslaughters in 2014 (by any method) was about 4.5 per 100,000 population; in 1991 this number was 9.8 per 100,000. So what has changed to cause a drop of over 50% since then? Certainly there are many factors, but one that is specifically relevant here is the increased popularity of citizens carrying firearms, especially concealed firearms. In 1991 16 states had shall-issue concealed carry and only 1 state had unrestricted or Constitutional Carry(no permit required for open or concealed carry); in 2014 these numbers were 37 and 5(6 as of 2015), respectively. The number of concealed carry permits in the US increased from 2.7 million in 1999 to 4.6 million in 2007 and 12.8 million in 2015. There are millions more people living in states that do not require permits. Despite fewer states requiring permits, the rate of permits being issued is rising faster than ever. 5.2% of the total adult population have carry permits; in some states that number is over 10%. Studies have shown that permit holders commit crime at a rate far lower than that of the general population.

Violent crime in general has been rapidly decreasing since 1991. The prominence of concealed carry has resulted in a major shift in the mindset of criminals-they no longer expect to be safe or in control simply because they are armed. Prison interviews of career criminals revealed that one of their biggest fears was not being confronted by police, but being shot by an armed citizen, who would almost invariably take them by surprise.

It is very difficult to find accurate numbers on defensive firearms use because most incidents are never reported, but there are likely between 800,000 and 2,000,000 defensive uses of a firearm each year. Despite this, concealed carry permit holders actually only kill a very small number of people each year (usually less than 100). This is because when a citizen draws their firearm in self-defence, merely brandishing the firearm is sufficient to end the confrontation at least 90% of the time (this is why these incidents are rarely reported). When they do have to fire, most of the rounds fired are either warning shots or misses. When they fire and hit their target, only about 15% of those shot actually die due to handguns' relative lack of lethality.

The main problem hindering the crime-detering effectiveness of concealed carry is the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990. A large proportion of the few mass shootings that there still are occur in these "gun-free zones"(or in locations that prohibit firearms by policy) because the shooters cannot experience the feeling of total power and control that they seek unless they are the only armed person in the area. Many pro-freedom advocates refer to these areas as "resistance-free zones," which is essentially what they are to armed people with bad intentions. Simply possessing a loaded firearm within 1000 feet of a school could put you at risk of imprisonment, fines, and a lifetime ban on owning firearms. It should be noted that many areas are impossible to walk or drive through without violating that law. The Act was declared unconstitutional in 1995 but re-enacted in a virtually identical form in 1996. It must be said, however, that many states' carry laws supersede this federal law for those with carry permits.