

Special Series from 1A

Sadly, in another political climate, those same statistics could potentially be used to gain useful information to improve gun safety on school grounds. Was the night shooter putting anyone in danger? Could the suicide have been prevented?

But these finer points get lost in the debate as the weaponization of statistics makes it increasingly difficult to even agree on what the definition of a mass or school shooting is.

The FBI defines "mass murder" as "an incident where three or more people are killed, regardless of weapons."

But other organizations define a mass shooting as at least four or more people shot.

And then there are questions of how motive plays into defining mass or school shootings. Is terrorism a mass shooting event, or its own separate category? What about gang violence? Is a drive-by shooting of several individuals a mass shooting? What if it occurs at school but is limited to gang members? Is it a mass shooting if one person kills only family members? And if the shooter takes his or her own life at the end, should they be included in the death toll or only their victim(s)?

All of these variables can be added or subtracted to bolster the arguments of the side presenting them. Some gun reformers want higher numbers to force action on gun control, while gun rights advocates sometimes deflate numbers to temper concerns.

The highest reported number comes from left-leaning publication The Guardian, which reports a staggering 1,624 mass shootings in 1,870 days.

That publication keeps a running count of shootings but doesn't clearly state its methodology for determining a mass shooting. In fact, it doesn't even gather its sources directly, instead culling them through a

list of shootings from the online website "Gun Violence Archive," which lists a mass shooting as "an event where at least four people are injured or killed in a single incident, at the same general time and location, not including the shooter."

The Guardian lists incidences that would otherwise be excluded from other mass shooting lists. For example, it cites a Feb. 11, 2018, incident involving a domestic dispute where a male gunman killed his girlfriend, two women and then himself during a 14-hour standoff. The gunman also wounded three officers during the incident, and then shot himself.

Many lists exclude domestic disputes.

The Guardian also lists an incident on Jan. 27, 2018, when an argument at a bar resulted in four people getting shot, but with no fatalities. The majority of lists require a mass shooting to require fatalities.

On the other end of the spectrum, the conservative-leaning group Cato Institute, which often advocates for gun rights, had much lower numbers.

In a February 2018 report, it cited an FBI study from 2000 to 2016 that showed a rising trend in mass shootings but questioned the agency's methodology because FBI statistics include gang violence. Cato Institute also questioned how the FBI graphed the rise in incidents as a way of discrediting the report.

However, no matter how one graphs the data, the numbers do show a rise in active shootings.

It should be noted that the Cato study, titled "Are Mass Shootings Becoming More Frequent," states that the FBI was studying "active shootings," but doesn't go into details.

An active shooting, as defined by the FBI, is "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and popu-

lated area."

Cato took that FBI study and compared it to the liberal-leaning

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— Commander John Pitcher, Florence Police Department

ing publication Mother Jones' study on mass shootings, which defines a mass shooting as "indiscriminate rampages in public places resulting in four or more victims killed by the attacker. We exclude shootings stemming from more conventional crimes such as armed robbery or gang violence."

That's entirely different from the FBI's data, and is an apple to oranges comparison.

Regardless, Mother Jones also showed an increase of mass shootings, just as the FBI did for active shootings.

Cato rightfully pointed out that Mother Jones had a liberal bias but throws out the rising trend due to its limited time span. Cato instead averaged the death from every year, pointing out that there are only 23 deaths per year from mass shootings, an extremely low number when compared to the overall gun deaths in America.

However, Cato ignored Mother Jones' and the FBI's main premise that mass/active shootings are rising, concluding instead mass shootings are a rare occurrence in relation to gun deaths as a whole.

At the end of the article, Cato takes its own partisan jab, stating, "Every time one of these random mass shootings occurs, journalists and legislators invariably seize on the tragedy to lecture about the need for artfully unspecific changes in federal gun control laws."

Are any of the numbers being presented wrong?

No. Both Cato and The Guardian

are absolutely correct in their mathematical assessment based on the criteria defined by each.

Statistics are being used to minimize opponents or instill fear. But fear is the last thing that Pitcher believes we need to feel.

“I’m not scared, I’m prepared”

"The odds of a mass shooting happening anywhere are slim," Pitcher said when asked about the possibility of a school shooting in Florence. "You

could pick a school in L.A. and that would be slim. In Florence it's pretty slim. But to think it would never happen is naive."

Yet with the seemingly constant barrage of media coverage, it might seem that the next school shooting is waiting around the corner.

"Let me show you something," Pitcher said as he brought out the children's picture book "I'm Not Scared, I'm Prepared" by Julia Cook. The book highlights some of the measures of the ALICE active shooter response program, a nationwide program that informs children, school faculty, police responders and others what to do if a school shooting occurs.

"That's what we want people to be," Pitcher said. "Prepared. You don't have to be scared. Just be prepared. Learn how to survive these incidences."

Pitcher and his department recently taught ALICE — which stands for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate — to local school districts. It's a way to be more proactive during a school shooting.

Previous recommendations involved people waiting the shooter out, either by hiding in hopes the shooter wouldn't find them, or that the shooter ends the rampage through suicide, running out of bullets, the police, etc.

But ALICE teaches a more proactive approach, stressing evacuation, such as exiting windows, or stacking obstacles that make it more difficult for a shooter to traverse the landscape.

ALICE does have its detractors, though, particularly when it comes to the "counter" portion of the program, including complaints that teaching elementary school students to

swarm a shooter is unrealistic and dangerous.

"Counter" is not just swarming," Pitcher said. "'Counter' can be, 'I've got something I can throw at the guy, and then I run.' We always want to make creating a distance the first option when you have a threat. 'Counter' is the very last option. If you're talking about grade school kids, obviously you're not expecting them to swarm an armed adult."

It has also been pointed out that ALICE's effectiveness has not been proven by any peer reviewed studies. However, data on any school shooting is scarce due to their infrequency. And there has been anecdotal evidence that supports the use of ALICE.

On Jan. 20, 2017, a student at Liberty-Salem High School in Ohio shot and injured another student in the restroom of the school and intended to shoot others in the school indiscriminately.

After hearing the shots, students at the high school began barricading doors and evacuating, while high school staff pounced on the shooter and restrained him until law enforcement arrived.

School officials credited ALICE training for saving students' lives.

"We're not expecting little kids to swarm and take down an adult," Pitcher said. "But once we get into the high school range? Believe me, I think it's a very legitimate option."

Pitcher pointed to the Thurston High School shooting in Springfield, Ore., that was also stopped by high schoolers swarming a shooter.

"Counter" is a very last option," Pitcher said. "'If I don't do this, I'm going to die.' So that's why we teach it. We want to give someone an option other than dying."

But if programs like ALICE prove to be effective, it leads to the question: Do we need to arm school staff?

After the Parkland, Fla., school shooting, multiple calls have been made to arm teachers because of the response time of law enforcement.

A 2013 FBI report found that in 160 active shooter incidents, 44 ended in 5 minutes or less, with 23 ending in 2 minutes or less — with 107 of the incidences ending before law enforcement could arrive.

"Even when law enforcement was present or able to respond within minutes, civilians often had to make life-and-death decisions and, therefore, should be engaged in training and discussions on decisions they may face," the FBI report stated.

Suggestions regarding school staff come down to two groups: Resource officers and teachers.

Resource officers generally have wide support on both sides of the debate, and they have been credited with saving lives.

In August 2010, a man entered Sullivan Central High School in Tennessee, armed with two handguns, pointing one of the guns at the school principal's head. The school resource officer was notified, and held the gunman at bay until the arrival of police officers, who eventually shot and killed the gunman.

More recently, in March a high school student in Maryland who was believed to be carrying out a mass shooting was confronted by a resource officer after shooting two students.

While the resource officer was initially credited with killing the gunman by politicians and the NRA, the gunman actually shot and killed himself.

However, he did so when the officer had already drawn his weapon and got off one shot before the assailant took his own life, according to a March 27 CNN report. Whether the resource officer's actions directly led to assailant's death is hard to say.

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