Abstract

Scholarship on mass public shootings has increased in recent years as comprehensive datasets have become more available. As a result, much is known about the contextual and offender related characteristics of such attacks. However, less research has been conducted on attacks that were planned but ultimately did not occur. Understanding how mass public shootings may be thwarted or averted is important for both policy and theoretical reasons. In this paper, we describe a new dataset of averted mass public shooting threats (N=194) from 2000-2019 and compare them to mass public shootings that were completed during this time (N=97). Several noteworthy findings emerged, including that nearly half of the averted cases were reported by a friend or acquaintance, most targeted a specific location or group, and averted cases were more likely to involve school targets and co-offenders. Implications are discussed.

Introduction

Late in the summer of 2021, a 19-year-old male opened fire at a pier in South Haven Michigan, injuring two people before turning the gun on himself and ending his own life (Agar, 2021). When seemingly random attacks occur, policymakers and the public alike often search for clues that it was going to happen or information that could help explain such senseless actions. In this case, there was plenty to point to; the shooter had been incarcerated as a juvenile three years prior for planning an attack on his high school. Thankfully, that attack was averted, and the teen was required to undergo treatment (Newman, 2018), but unfortunately this did not prevent his later act of violence.

Deadly mass shootings, particularly those occurring in public spaces, evoke much fear and concern among the public (Brenan, 2019; Flaccus, 2021). Not only are these incidents more difficult to predict than other crimes (see Duwe et al., 2021; Smart & Schell, 2021), but the sometimes indiscriminate nature of the targets also engenders a distinct sense of vulnerability. Mass public shootings have increased in the US in recent years, along with scholarship seeking to understand their causes and consequences (Capellan & Gomez, 2018; Fox, 2020).

Nearly all of this work has been done on completed mass shootings. Examining planned but ultimately thwarted mass shootings can be informative in terms of understanding such tragedies. This is particularly the case at a time when threats at schools may be increasing, with 151 recorded in September of 2021 alone (Densley, Riedman, & Peterson, 2021). A comparison of completed and averted/thwarted mass public shootings can advance understanding of the contributing factors to these deadly events. Differences that emerge between the two may help explain why particular plots were foiled.

To date, a small body of research has examined averted school shootings (Daniels et al., 2007; 2010; Madfis, 2014) and attempted mass homicides more generally (Sarteschi, 2016), cataloging descriptions of the plots and would-be perpetrators. There are few studies on thwarted mass public shootings plans (Silva, 2021a, b; Silva & Greene-Colozzi, 2021). Silva (2021a) compared completed to averted mass public shootings from 2000-2019, providing a foundation for the current work. Given the recent focus in the social sciences, including criminology on replication and robustness of results (Farrington et al., 2019; Pridemore, Makel, & Plucker, 2018), additional research on understudied topics is warranted.

This study advances previous scholarship in several ways. First, we utilize a different dataset of completed mass public shootings. Importantly, our dataset is part of a federally funded grant that will be publicly available for replication and additional research. This supports the recent movement toward open science in the social sciences in general and criminology in particular. Second, our definition of averted mass public shootings is distinct from previous work. For example, we include both planned and in-progress attacks, the latter of which Silva and Greene-Colozzi (2021) term "failed" mass shootings. Finally, we expand on the incident and perpetrator information for comparative analysis.

Mass Public Shootings

The considerable interest in mass shootings shown by academics, the public, and policymakers is a relatively recent development, which took off after 2012. In the 1980s, scholars and public officials began to differentiate between serial killing and mass killing, the latter of which includes multiple deaths in a relatively limited amount of time (Fox & Levin, 1998). In terms of fatality threshold, definitions vary but four or more is common (Duwe, 2020). A mass shooting, then, would be an event with four or more shooting victims who died. A mass

public shooting, which is the focus of this paper, is a mass shooting that takes place in a public setting, not tied to any other crime, such as gang conflict and robbery (see for example, Duwe, 2020, Silva, 2021a).

Mass Public Shooting Context and Perpetrator Characteristics

Research on mass public shootings has focused on perpetrator, target, and contextual characteristics, uncovering useful information for risk assessment and prevention. With an average age in their 30s, mass public shooters tend to be somewhat older than other homicide perpetrators (Capellan & Gomez, 2018; Duwe, 2020, Silva, 2021a, b). They are also most likely to be white males, although non-whites are disproportionately represented compared to their share in the general population (Duwe, 2020, Fox & DeLateur, 2014; Schildkraut et al., 2018; Silva & Capellan, 2019). In addition, the average age of perpetrators is lower in school mass shootings, compared to those occurring elsewhere, while the percentage of perpetrators that are white is higher (Capellan et al., 2019; Silva & Capellan, 2019). Finally, these incidents almost always include solo perpetrators (Duwe, 2020; Lankford & Silver, 2020), acting on some type of grievance or desire for fame (Smart & Schell, 2021).

Recent work on mass public shootings has turned to factors that may be useful for prevention purposes. While developing mass public shooter profiles remains problematic because they often fail to differentiate between people likely to commit mass shootings and those who are not (Schildkraut, Naman, & Stafford, 2019), characteristics of the incident, including how it was carried out, may point to possible intervention points (Capellan & Jiao, 2019). For example, Capellan and Jiao (2019) found that about half of perpetrators were seeking revenge, and there was a clear precipitant. Leakage occurs when the perpetrators make their intentions known prior to the attack and may be written or verbal. Estimates of leakage that occurs in all

mass public shootings ranges from around 30% to 40% in other work (Cappellen & Gomez, 2019; Capellan & Jiao, 2019; Duwe, 2020, but see a higher estimate in Lankford, Adkins, & Madfis, 2019).

Information about weapons used in mass public shootings could also be important for prevention purposes. Research indicates that most mass public shooters obtain their weapons legally (Lankford et al., 2019; Greene-Colozzi & Silva, 2020). Understanding how those who planned, but did not complete, mass public shootings had obtained their weapons is important for policy purposes. For example, if those plotting mass public shootings that were foiled were more likely to steal weapons than those who completed mass public shootings, it may be the case that plots are thwarted when it is discovered that weapons were stolen.

Finally, with respect to theory, recent work has applied situational explanations to better understand when and where mass public shootings occur. Situational crime prevention explicitly seeks to analyze the spatial and temporal factors related to the occurrence of crime for the purpose of reducing the opportunity for those crimes to happen in the future. Frielich and colleagues (2020) examined how situational crime prevention strategies, such as assessing the vulnerability and symbolic value of targets, as well as the importance of clear communication between place managers and local authorities (which was not present in the Parkland, 2018 school shooting), may reduce mass shootings. In a recent analysis, Schildkraut et al. (2022) discovered temporal trends to mass public shootings. For example, school shootings happened more frequently in the early morning (when students were getting to school), lunch, and when school was released. Additionally, shootings were more likely on Friday, Thursday, and Monday. Utilizing routine activities theory and situational crime prevention techniques is

increasingly becoming a promising approach to studying mass public shootings (see also Schildkraut, Naman, & Stafford, 2019).

Averting Tragedy: Evidence on Thwarted Mass Public Shootings

Only a few studies have examined planned or attempted mass public shootings that were thwarted before any blood was shed (see Agnich, 2015; Daniels et al., 2007; 2010; Madfis, 2014; Silva, 2021a, b; Silva & Green-Colozzi, 2021). Some scholars have begun to examine averted school shootings (Agnich, 2015; Daniels, et al., 2007; 2010; Madfis, 2014). This research has identified important information, such as how the plot came to light and how it was averted. For example, Daniels and colleagues' (2007) study of 30 foiled school shootings found that the plots were often discussed verbally or via notes and that other students revealed the plots to officials in about half of the cases. That students are often the parties to expose the plots is supported by other research on averted school shootings (see Stallings & Hall, 2019). Additionally, a quarter of the plots were uncovered by school administrators. In over 80% of the cases, the plotting student was arrested and nearly 80% of those were charged or convicted. Interestingly, while half the incidents included one student plotter, up to six were involved in other cases. Note, however, the 30 cases studied by Daniels and colleagues included 7 incidents in which guns were not meant to be used.

Some research on averted school shootings has attempted to understand how these incidents can inform prevention. For example, a "code of silence" appears to be prominent in certain contexts, in which students are unwilling to "rat out" their peers. According to qualitative research (Daniels et al., 2010; Madfis, 2014; 2020; Swezey & Thorp, 2010), this code is a significant reason why school attacks are not discovered earlier. In their case study of an averted school shooting, Swezy and Thorp spoke to two of the suspect's friends, both of whom

experienced deep anxiety and conflicting emotions regarding their responsibility to their friend versus the other students.

Few studies have compared completed to averted school violence incidents. In one, Agnich (2015) collected data on 91 attempted mass shootings, 126 completed mass shootings, 35 mass killings, and 30 attempted mass killings. With respect to attempted mass shootings, 30 were "averted," meaning they were stopped before they occurred. Attempted mass shootings were those that were carried out but did not result in anyone being killed. She found no differences in gender (nearly all male) across the four categories, but attempted mass shootings were more likely to be committed by younger individuals compared to all other categories, were more likely to be white compared to mass killings and had more co-perpetrators than attempted mass killings.

The Averted School Violence database (Langman & Straub, 2019) includes any planned attack, with any type of weapon, which was stopped prior to any injuries occurring (see also Daniels, 2019). In their report, Langman and Straub (2019) compared 51 averted attacks to 51 completed attacks (in which any injury or death occurred), finding more averted attacks at high schools compared to completed attacks. In both completed and averted cases, most perpetrators were male. There was only one perpetrator in completed cases, but 21 cases of averted school violence included more than one perpetrator. Averted cases were more likely to include white perpetrators (86.4% compared to 47.1% of completed cases). Finally, stressors and mental health issues appeared to be more common in completed than averted cases.

Averting Mass Public Killings

There is limited research on averted or thwarted mass killings generally and mass public shootings in particular. One study (Sarteschi, 2016) examined 57 cases across the United States,

excluding incidents in schools where the suspect was a student and in which any injuries occurred. The study delineated cases by the level of credibility (high or low) and examined suspect, target, planning, weapon, mental health, plot uncovering, and outcome information. The results revealed that schools were a common target (54% and 68% in high credibility and low credibility defined cases, respectively). The average age of the suspect in both categories was 25.5 and 29.5. Mental health problems were more common cases defined as highly credible (44% vs. 18%). Finally, the majority of plots were uncovered by family, friends, acquaintances, or the public in both categories, while few were uncovered by law enforcement (8.5% of high credibility and 14% of low credibility cases respectively).

With respect to mass public shootings specifically, three studies have been published, one of averted incidents, one of failed incidents, and one comparing the two. Silva (2021a) compared foiled to completed mass public shootings from 2000-2019. He defined foiled shootings as those in which there was a plan, and access to weapons or a plan to obtain them, but the incident was not in progress. Completed mass public shootings were defined as incidents in which four or more people died by gunfire in a public place within a 24-hour period, by one or two individuals, with at least some random or symbolic targets. Profit-motivated crime, terrorism, and familicide were excluded.

Silva (2021a) found several differences between foiled and completed mass public shootings, including that foiled perpetrators were more likely to be a student and less likely to be targeting specific victims. Additionally, foiled shootings were more likely to target a school or houses of worship. Foiled perpetrators were more likely to be younger and less likely to have a criminal history.

Another study by Silva (Silva & Green-Colozzi, 2021) examined "failed" mass public shootings, which are defined slightly differently than foiled events. In failed events, a mass public shooting was both planned and initiated, but stopped before any injuries had occurred. Rather than compare failed to completed events, Silva and Greene-Colozzi (2021) used a crime script analysis, which focuses on the context, decisions, and process by which a crime is committed to explore the 14 incidents and how they were prevented. The results indicated that in many respects, failed mass shooters are similar to mass shooters who completed attacks (mostly male, white, high percentage of confirmed or suspected mental illness). Most perpetrators had planned the attack to some extent, had owned a gun prior to the attack, used a handgun, and the most frequent outcome resulted in the perpetrator being arrested. Interestingly, they found that while most of the perpetrators had access to buildings, in three government shootings, security measures made it difficult for the individual to enter.

Finally, Silva (2021b) compared completed, attempted, failed, and foiled mass public shootings. Attempted mass shootings are those in which an attack occurred, but fewet than four deaths resulted. Failed mass shootings were those in progress but stopped before any casualties occurred. Finally, foiled mass shootings were stopped in the planning stages. Silva found differences across these categories both with respect to offender and incident characteristics. For example, offenders tended to be older and more likely to be fame-seeking and targeting schools in foiled plots.

These three studies lay important groundwork for understanding mass public shootings by focusing on attempts that were not completed. The failed attempt study is useful for crime prevention purposes, but the small sample size and inclusion of cases where it is not clear that the intention was to kill four or more people limits the conclusions that can be drawn. This is

also true of "attempted" mass shootings. For example, the attempted and failed attacks are very similar to active shooter cases that are potential mass public shootings, but also possible death by police cases. Importantly, all three studies mainly focused on characteristics of cases rather than the mechanisms by which the plots were averted and, as a result, contained no information about the nature of the threat, how the perpetrators were caught, or detailed information on the perpetrators themselves. Finally, all three were restricted to cases with less than 3 perpetrators. However, there is nothing in the definition of mass public shootings that suggests a plan/threat involving more than 2 perpetrators should not qualify.

It is important, given the paucity of research on averted mass public shootings, to examine this phenomenon further. Clearer definitions are needed to advance the literature and guide policy (Madfis, 2020). As Madfis (2020) notes, it is very difficult to assess genuine from non-serious threats. Relying on police reports or after-the-fact statements from plotters who may deny any intent can be problematic (Madfis, 2020). For example, a suspect may deny any intention to commit an attack or claim it was a "joke" to avoid punishment, and police may claim a mass shooting was averted by their actions in a self-justificatory manner (see also Larkin, 2009). Finally, the findings to date should be supplemented by additional scholarship which may include different cases both of averted and completed mass public shootings.

Data and Methods

The current study seeks to advance knowledge about mass public shootings by examining incidents that were planned and feasible, but ultimately thwarted and comparing them to completed mass public shootings in the United States. Our study focuses on public shootings, as these are the cases that generate the most fear and media attention (Fox et al., 2021). We compare these averted shootings to completed mass public shootings using a dataset compiled

from various sources. We restrict our cases to those occurring in the United States from 2000-2019. The completed cases represent, to the best of our knowledge, the population of mass public shootings during that time period. However, given the significantly less media attention given to shootings that did not occur, it is unlikely that all cases were identified. Thus, the averted shootings cases we collected are a subset of a larger population.

Definitions

Our definitions of completed and averted mass public shootings are constructed to be as similar as possible. We define completed mass public shootings as an incident in which four or more victims are fatally shot in a public location within a 24-hour period absent other criminal activity, such as robbery, illicit drug trade, and gang conflict. Moreover, at least half of the victims must have been shot in a public space, or if more than seven victims, at least four were shot and killed. Non-private residences, such as motels, were also included in our definition (see Siegel et al., 2020). Our definition of averted mass public shootings was similar, except the requirement that no injuries (other than to the perpetrator) occurred.

As others have noted (Sarteschi, 2016; Silva, 2021a), it is important to ensure that the averted incidents reflected credible threats. Thus, to be included, the plot or threat must have met either of two criteria: 1) the perpetrator had weapons, access to weapons, or attempted to obtain weapons, or 2) if no weapons were readily accessible, there was evidence of a specific, serious, and a detailed plan (e.g., map of target, hit list).

We also considered intent whenever possible. For example, if an incident included a person with a weapon shooting at a crowd at close range but no one was harmed, the intention to actually kill others is less than clear. The incident could have been intended to cause panic or

10

terror, with some fatalities, with no plan to kill several individuals. In such cases, we sought confirmation that the perpetrators had a specific plan in place for a mass shooting. For example, we looked for evidence, such as a threat of mass violence or a statement preceding the incident, which suggested an intention to commit a mass public shooting. Our definition of averted mass public shootings differs from the work of Silva (2021a, 2021b) and Silva and Greene-Colozzi (2021). We include events that were foiled at the planning stage (the focus of Silva, 2021a) or at the attack stage (the focus of Silva and Greene-Colozzi's 2021 work). However, in these studies, there was no requirement that the perpetrator planned a *mass* shooting in failed cases; intention was in some instances determined by the characteristics of the case. For our dataset, both types of cases (in progress or not) were included so long as there was a clear threat of a mass shooting made by the perpetrator(s). If a plan had advanced to the attack stage with clear evidence of intent to shoot at least four victims (e.g., a threat to conduct "another Columbine," a hit list with more than 3 names, etc.), we included it as thwarted and indicated that the case was in progress.

Data Collection Strategy

Data for completed mass public shootings were collected using a triangulated approach. Rather than relying on existing data sources, we utilized both official records (e.g., Supplementary Homicide Reports from the FBI) and other public and non-public datasets to identify cases that fit our inclusion criteria (see Duwe et al., 2021). The dataset began with cases identified by Duwe (2020), whorelied on the SHR and news sources to assemble his database. We then examined other mass public shooting databases (e.g., Mother Jones, The Violence Project, Associated Press/USA Today/Northeastern University) to ensure comprehensiveness. Then, the research team conducted a consensus review for additional cases to determine whether they fit the inclusion criteria. Occasional disagreements were resolved through discussion. To

11

collect data on particular variables, open-source news documents, court files, police reports, and prison records were referenced. The completed mass public shooting dataset used in this study includes 97 cases, with 99 perpetrators, 765 victims killed, and 1,432 injured.

Information on averted mass public shootings relied on existing data and open sources. The research began by developing the definition and criteria and then reviewing lists of cases provided by other researchers (e.g., Agnich, 2015; Madfis, 2014; Sarteschi, 2016). We also examined lists of averted cases of mass violence from other online sources, such as the Averted School Violence project (avertedschoolviolence.org) and Center for Homeland Security's K-12 School Shooting Database (https://www.chds.us/ssdb/). A list of sources consulted can be found in the Appendix. We also utilized archived news accounts from Nexis Uni®, with searches developed to capture averted mass shootings (example search terms can be found in the Appendix).

Three researchers were involved in the selection of cases and data collection. Potential cases were reviewed by at least two members of the research team to ensure they met the inclusion criteria. For some cases in which disagreement emerged, consensus was reached via discussion. Disagreements may have emerged regarding evidence of intent or the level of detail of the plan, for example. The researchers shared sources and their opinions on each case and either included or excluded the case once each reviewer was in agreement. Often, these were brief conversations, discussing inclusion criteria or aspects of certain cases that were unclear (e.g., determining whether a threat that included less than four specific targets was general enough to consider it an intended mass public shooting). In addition, to ensure the data on certain variables were collected consistently, a reliability test was conducted on a random sample of ten cases that had been entered into the dataset before they had been reviewed carefully by the team.

Information on variables that were viewed as potentially subjective (e.g., mental illness suspected or diagnosed, length of plan, response, motivation, and whether the case was credible) was collected by each of the three researchers. Length of threat was found to be problematic in terms of coding and subsequently divided into plan and threat length and coded categorically.

We used percent agreement to assess consistency in coding, which reached 85% across the ten cases after length of plan/threat were recoded. We also used Gwet's AC (Gwet, 2008) as a more rigorous inter-rater reliability assessment. This analysis produced scores ranging from .40 (threat length) to .73 (mental illness), to .86 (plan length), to .92 (credibility). Based on these results, we decided not to include the threat length field in our analyses below (we exclude plan length as well due to large amounts (e.g., >60%) of missing data in that field). We did not statistically assess certain fields, such as response to the threat (e.g., outcome) or motivation, as these involved text data. However, the coders tended to capture similar information (e.g., arrest or not) in the response field. Upon completion of the reliability assessment, the dataset was checked carefully to ensure information that had been entered was consistent with the discussion that occurred during the test. Following the reliability assessment, whenever any new coding or recoding was done, at least two researchers checked each case, and unclear cases were discussed to reach resolution.

The final database includes 194 unique incidents from 2000-2019 involving 303 identified perpetrators. A majority of the incidents (78%) targeted a school, which likely reflects the increased attention on school violence after the 1999 Columbine massacre as well as the data sources we used to identify eligible cases. However, it is also possible that thwarted attacks are more likely to occur at schools.

Analytic Strategy

To address our research goals, we provide a description of averted mass public shootings, as well as a comparison to completed incidents. Because this is a relatively new area of research, understanding the characteristics of such incidents is a fundamental first step in moving the scholarship forward. We first explore the demographics and context of mass public shootings that were planned but averted in order to gain insight on how they were stopped. We examine how similar or different averted cases are to completed mass public shootings.

It is important to note that our dataset of completed mass shootings represents--to the best of our knowledge--the population of such incidents from 2000-2019. At the same time, given the nature of plans that did not come to fruition, we make no claim to have identified all such incidents. Thus, our averted mass public shooting database represents a non-random subset of the population. Traditional statistical tests of equality (e.g., independent samples t-tests) seek to determine whether two samples come from the same population (Wheelan, 2013). Rather than testing for differences between two samples, as is the norm, we examine if and how a sample (averted cases) differs from a population (completed cases). Thus, one sample tests (e.g., one-way chi-square and tests of proportions) are appropriate for our purposes.

Finally, we present a narrative comparison of two cases, one averted and one completed. This analysis provides more context and illustrates the ways in which these types of events are similar but also differ. The cases are not chosen for representativeness but simply as an illustration.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 2 presents the contextual information on all averted mass public shooting plans. Most of the cases involved one perpetrator, but two cases involved six individuals. In terms of

when the arrests took place, there is a relatively even distribution across seasons, with the most cases occurring during the winter months.[1] Consistent with general homicide patterns (CDC, 2021), the South had the highest number of cases and the location most frequently targeted was a school. This is likely due in part to the sources for our sample, which disproportionately include school-based plans. However, previous work (e.g., Silva, 2021a) has indicated that a majority of thwarted attacks take place at schools.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Table 3 provides information on the specifics of the plans. Most (61%) focused on a specific location or group (e.g., a plan to attack a school). The vast majority of plans did not reach the attack stage, which is defined as being on location with a weapon or initiating the attack. In terms of threats that were discovered, the largest share (38%) were verbal, followed by those made online (e.g., in a chatroom, 23%). Threats were frequently reported by other students (again, due to the disproportionate number of school-based plans). In certain thwarted cases, anonymous individuals reported the threat (11%), such as when an FBI informant discovered the plot. Most of the plans, when reported, were reported to law enforcement. With respect to the ways in which the plans were discovered, over 50% were direct threats in which an individual told another person about their plans, who then reported it. Also, some were discovered because the attack was initiated, but in progress cases may have been uncovered in other ways (e.g., the individual made it to the scene but then told another person about their plans).

Most of the plans targeted specific individuals or were driven by a grievance, followed by autogenic, and then ideological (e.g., terrorism). Finally, over 70% of the cases involved

---

[1] The arrest date may not have been when the attack was planned. For example, in one case, an attack was planned in 2011/2012 but not discovered until 2015. Such a gap was a rare occurrence, however.

weapons in hand. Less information was available on how the weapons were possessed, but when it was clear how the weapons were acquired, the majority were legally purchased.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Table 4 presents information on the perpetrators of the plots, including mean or proportions, as appropriate, as well as the number of cases for which data were available. Certain variables, such as race and sentencing, were less available than others. In terms of demographics, it is clear that the majority of cases in our dataset include young males. The low average age of perpetrators (19.3) is influenced by the disproportionate number of school threats that are included in our file. In fact, over 85% of all perpetrators for whom age information was available were under age 25. The majority of cases involved white perpetrators who were employed or in school as well.

With respect to mental illness, 28% of the perpetrators were suspected of or diagnosed with having a mental illness. About half of that number were perpetrators with a confirmed mental illness diagnosis (15%). These are conservative estimates given the lack of information available in many cases. Only around 2% of the cases ended in suicide, but 12% of the perpetrators indicated some intention to kill themselves after/during the attack.

Finally, information is limited for how cases were resolved, particularly after arrest. Most of the time, information was only available regarding arrests. We did find, however, that over half of the offenders were incarcerated, and another 21% received probation or community supervision.

[Insert Table 4 here]

Comparison to Completed Mass Public Shootings

Figure 1 provides a comparison between averted and completed mass public shootings based on contextual information (e.g., season, region, location). A greater proportion of averted cases involved multiple offenders compared to completed mass public shootings (34% vs. 2.1%). There were no significant differences between averted and completed incidents in terms of season and region. However, the specific location varied significantly using a one-way chi-square test (we only tested locations that were similarly coded across the two types of incidents). As can be seen, a much larger proportion of averted cases targeted a school, with completed cases more likely to target businesses or offices.

Figure 2 presents information on offender characteristics. Averted cases differed significantly from completed mass public shooters for each comparison using a one-way chi-square test. While we did not test each category within the variables, it appears that averted cases included a greater proportion of females, white individuals, and those under age 18. Finally, a greater proportion of offenders for completed incidents evidenced some sort of mental illness and committed suicide. Offenders in averted cases were more likely to be arrested or incarcerated.

[Insert Figures 1 and 2 here]

To provide a more qualitative context on the comparison between averted and completed mass public shootings, we focus on one school shooting and one averted school shooting, both of which occurred in 2018. The completed shooting took place in Florida, at a high school and the averted case involved a middle school in Vermont. We examine the perpetrator(s) background, plans, and attack behaviors for this comparison. While this analysis is not necessarily generalizable, it can illustrate in more depth the ways in which averted and completed mass public shootings are similar and distinct.

Completed Mass Shooting Narrative[2]

The completed mass school shooting took place in February 2018 in Parkland, Florida at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. During the attack, which took 17 lives and resulted in 17 injuries, the perpetrator shot people outside and inside the school, then escaped by immersing himself in the throng of students seeking to escape. The shooter, a 19-year-old white male, who had formerly attended the school, was later arrested, confessed to the crime, and is awaiting sentencing as of this writing.

The shooter had a troubled background, having been expelled from the school he attacked. Social media posts and acquaintances pointed to concerning behavior, such as animal cruelty, hate speech, anger, and even threats of mass violence. Federal investigators were made aware of his comment on YouTube regarding becoming a school shooter. His mother had died the previous year and he had relocated to the home of a classmate, who secured him a job at a nearby store. He had received mental health care and certain sources noted that he had been diagnosed with depression and ADD. After he was apprehended, the shooter indicated that he had suicidal thoughts and that a "demon" told him to commit the crime. The weapon used in the

---

[2] The following sources were used for the completed case narrative: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/police-respond-shooting-parkland-florida-high-school-n848101; https://www.wpbf.com/article/florida-parkland-nikolas-cruz-trial-jury-attorneys-delay/40207816; https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/14/585908507/what-we-know-about-the-florida-school-shooting-suspect; https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-ne-henderson-cruz-civil-suit-20190116-story.html; https://www.npr.org/2018/02/28/589502906/a-clearer-picture-of-parkland-shooting-suspect-comes-into-focus; https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/timeline-parkland-shooter-nikolas-cruz/; https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/07/us/florida-parkland-nikolas-cruz/index.html; https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/02/15/florida-shooting-suspect-bought-gun-legally-authorities-say/340606002/; https://apps.sheriff.org/ArrestSearch/InmateDetail/201800014; http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MSDHS/Meetings/November-Meeting-Documents/Nov-13-145pm-Cruz-Behavior-Chris-Lyons.aspx

attack, a Smith & Wesson M&P 15 .22 assault style rifle was purchased legally by the shooter a year earlier. While concerns about the shooter were reported, none led to discipline or surveillance of the shooter prior to the attack. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, which was given a tip regarding the YouTube comment, found "no connection to South Florida" and did not pass along the tip to local authorities. One NPR story described the shooter as a "story of red flags, ignored," stating, "[d]espite warning signs stretching back over a decade, no one intervened to stop the Valentine's Day shootings."

Averted Mass Shooting Narrative[3]

On December 18, 2018, two 14-year-old males planned to attack Middlebury Union Middle School in Middlebury, VT. However, the perpetrators, both students at that school, were overheard by a schoolmate discussing the plot – an occurrence that eventually led to their planned mass shooting being thwarted. Although little information is available about the offenders' background and history prior to their planned mass shooting, there is enough detail to explore how and why the plot was averted.

A student at Middlebury Union in turn overheard the two would-be perpetrators discussing their plans in school, which included obtaining a weapon from a relative and then attacking one specific student with whom one of the perpetrators had a conflict as well as "anyone else." The overheard threat was reported to the school's principal, who then contacted the authorities. The local police immediately launched an investigation into the plot, which

_____

[3] The following sources were used for the averted case narrative: https://www.kshb.com/middle-school-student-helps-thwart-possible-school-shooting-in-vermont; https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/12/19/attentive-vermont-student-stops-middle-school-shooting-plot-police-say/Y5G9H4e07p42pRDBmNnsNJ/story.html; https://www.mychamplainvalley.com/news/local-news/alert-student-thwarted-alleged-shooting-plot-at-middlebury-union-middle-school/; https://vtdigger.org/2018/12/18/middlebury-teens-plan-shoot-school-thwarted-police-say/

19

ended with the two students' arrest. One of the students was taken to a hospital for psychiatric evaluation and placed into custody of the Department for Children and Families. Additionally, prosecutors obtained an Extreme Risk Protection Order to seize the guns from the other student's relative, although the firearms were secured and the relative had no knowledge of the plot. The threat was reported on a Saturday, December 15, just days before the intended attack date (Tuesday, December 18).

As can be seen from the descriptions of the two cases, there are similarities as well as differences. Both of the cases occurred at schools and involved perpetrators who potentially had mental health issues. However, the differences that exist may account for why the Middlebury case was averted but the Parkland case was not. First, the Middlebury case involved two perpetrators, who were younger than the Parkland shooter. This may increase the likelihood of leakage occurring because the more perpetrators who are involved in planning the attack, the more opportunity for someone to overhear the plans and take action. In addition, the tip was reported by the principal to law enforcement, who then acted on the information. It is unclear why this occurred whereas the red flags were relatively ignored in the Parkland case, but the online nature of the leakage in the latter case may have made the information less actionable and threatening to those who saw it.

Discussion and Conclusion

Research on mass shootings in public places has advanced considerably in recent years. Thanks to this work, much is known about mass public shootings, including offender characteristics and contextual details about attacks. However, less research has focused on

attacks that were planned but did not come to fruition. Such information could be vital for understanding how mass public shootings can be prevented.

This study built upon recent efforts examining averted or thwarted mass public shootings and sought to both describe a new database of 194 averted mass public shootings and compare them to a comprehensive list of completed attacks from 2000-2019. Our data on averted mass public shootings, which involve mostly school-based incidents, reveal a number of interesting findings. First, most of the threats did not involve specific individuals, but rather a specific location or group as the main target. Second, more than half of the cases were discovered by direct threats, which were then reported to authority figures. Third, almost half of the threats were related to a grievance or desire for general revenge. Fourth, weapons were available for over almost three-quarters of the cases.

We also found that most threats, nearly three-quarters, were reported to police or other authorities. This illustrates the importance of having authority figures in schools to whom students feel they can confide. While research on school resource officers (SRO) is decidedly mixed regarding violence prevention (Gottfredson et al., 2020; Johnson, 1999), some work has found that views on SRO effectiveness depends on communication and perceptions of the SRO themselves (May, Fessel, & Means, 2004; McDevitt & Panniello, 2005). Thus, rather than having SROs act as a deterrent, we argue that they should focus on building trust and communication with the student body.

In addition, several noteworthy differences between averted and completed cases emerged. Much like previous research comparing mass public shootings that did and did not occur (Silva, 2021a), we found that thwarted attacks involved younger perpetrators and targeted schools. The thwarted attacks were also less likely to involve one perpetrator, who were less

likely to be male and white than completed attacks. The incidence of mental illness and suicide was also lower in the averted sample. Silva's work (2021a, 2021b) indicates that "foiled" attacks (e.g., those in which the offender is stopped before they get to the target or inflict any damage) are more similar to our averted cases. There are fewer demographic differences between completed and attempted or failed attacks in his data.

Because the completed cases involved fewer school-based attacks, many of the differences we found with respect to offender characteristics are not surprising. The question is whether the averted cases at schools are more likely to come to the attention of the press or whether averted cases themselves are more likely to involve students. Both possibilities are plausible. Silva (2021a, p. 202), for example, states that "[w]orkplace and open-space shootings receive substantially less media coverage and subsequent concern…" This suggests there are a host of averted incidents outside of school locations that fly under the radar, and we simply do not have information on these plans, implying greater media attention should be paid to such events.

If it is the case that averted plots are more likely to take place at schools, this would suggest that existing school strategies are relatively successful in thwarting violence and such approaches may be useful in other contexts. For example, in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre in 2012, the Sandy Hook Promise Foundation was formed in part to help encourage youth to say something if they hear any signs of a plan or threat of an attack (Sandy Hook Promise, 2021). Our finding that verbal threats are the most common form and that students/acquaintances were the most likely to report the threats suggest that any effort to encourage peers to report threats, even if they do not seem credible, can go a long way toward prevention. Efforts need to be made to break down the "code of silence" (Madfis, 2014) that

exists in schools and encourage students to tell adults anytime a threat is made to commit mass violence. Encouraging reporting and accurate threat assessment not just in schools is a priority for reducing all mass public shootings (Nagin, Koper, & Lum, 2020).

It is also important to address the availability of weapons in the averted cases. While they ultimately were not used to harm others, it is alarming that weapons were accessible in over 70% of the cases for which data were available, which means mass violence was a real possibility. The wide availability of guns in the US far exceeds that of most other nations (Ingraham, 2018), which makes these threats more plausible. Restrictions on gun ownership have been shown to reduce mass public shootings (Siegel et al., 2020) and it may be the case that similar policies would reduce threats. Because of the availability of weapons and the possibility that leakage may not be acted upon in all cases, situational prevention measures may be a useful supplement to threat assessment and gun control. For example, heightened security or decreased access to schools during certain hours may help prevent violence in cases that were not stopped in the planning stage. Certain differences between completed and averted cases may point to possible reasons why some plans are thwarted. For example, the finding that averted cases were far likelier to include more than one perpetrator (as many as six) than completed cases may mean that the probability of leakage or discovery of the threat increases with more planners. It may also be the case that school settings simply provide more opportunity for leakage, as students are surrounded by peers with whom they socialize nearly everyday. Silva (2021b) found that attempted mass public shootings were much less likely to take place at schools than foiled plans, meaning they were stopped not by leakage but in the act. Additionally, the rates of suicide and mental illness are lower for averted cases, which may suggest suicidal or mentally ill individuals are more likely to work alone or not share their plans, leading to higher rates of completedmass

public shootings. Some work has shown large age differences between mass shootings where leakage was reported, with younger offenders as well as those targeting schools much more likely to leak intentions (Peterson et al., 2021). However, research has found no differences in age between mentally ill and non-mentally ill mass public shooters (Lankford & Cowan, 2020), which suggests that age may not be useful to explain the differences in mental illness we found between averted and completed attacks.

Finally, we did not statistically compare gun acquisition between averted and completed cases because the legal gun acquisition variables were on different levels (offender for completed cases, incident for averted). However, our data showed that 77% of the perpetrators of mass public shootings obtained their guns legally, whereas only 58% of the incidents of averted mass public shootings involved legal weapon acquisition. Both of these variables have considerable missing data, however, making conclusions difficult to draw.

Our study has several limitations. First and foremost, identifying averted mass public shootings is a challenging task (Silva, 2021a), and it is unlikely that the cases included here represent more than a sample of a much larger universe. The use of previous research and data shared by others examining averted mass violence certainly helped in identifying cases that otherwise would have been missed. However, given that these are mass public shootings that did not occur, the media attention provided to the cases pales in comparison to completed cases. Thus, not only are incidents difficult to identify, but information on the cases is also simply less available.

Additionally, our dataset for averted cases begins in the year 2000, whereas the completed mass public shootings dataset we utilized begins in 1976. This decision was made because of the difficulty of identifying cases and information on those cases prior to this point.

As a result, we are not able to examine whether differences we found would apply prior to this century. The 1999 Columbine massacre led to much more attention being given to school violence and to the prevention of such attacks. Columbine copycat cases also emerged after this time (Peterson & Densley, 2019). Future research should seek to study averted mass shootings prior to the 20th century to supplement the existing scholarship on the topic.

Future research should seek to expand on the study of averted mass violence, identifying additional cases and examining more details of the plots and how they were thwarted. It is also important for future work to differentiate types of averted mass violence, such as by target and motivation. Silva's (2021a, 2021b) work is a step in the right direction, exploring whether there are differences across types of threats according to whether the case was foiled before any attempt was made, those that were attempted, and those that failed.

References

Agar, J. (2021). Gunman in random shooting on South Haven pier once threatened school
   shooting. Mlive. https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2021/08/gunman-in-random-
   shooting-on-south-haven-pier-once-threatened-school-shooting.html.

Agnich, L. E. (2015). A comparative analysis of attempted and completed school-based mass
   murder attacks. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 40*(1), 1-22.

Brenan, M. (2019). Nearly half in U.S. fear being the victim of a mass shooting. *Gallup.*
https://news.gallup.com/poll/266681/nearly-half-fear-victim-mass-shooting.aspx

Capellan, J. A., & Gomez, S. (2018). Change and stability in offender, behaviours, and incident-
   level characteristics of mass public shootings in the United States, 1984–2015. *Journal of
   Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling, 15*(1), 51-72.

Capellan, J. A., and Jiao, A. Y. (2019). D*econstructing mass public shootings: Exploring
   opportunities for intervention.* Rockefeller Institute of Government.
   https://rockinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/10-24-19-Deconstructing-Mass-
   Shootings-Brief-1.pdf

Capellan, J. A., Johnson, J., Porter, J. R., & Martin, C. (2019). Disaggregating mass public
   shootings: A comparative analysis of disgruntled employee, school, ideologically
   motivated, and rampage shooters. *Journal of Forensic Sciences, 64*(3), 814-823.

CDC. (2021). Homicide mortality by state.
   https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/homicide_mortality/homicide.htm

Daniels, J. A. (2019). *A preliminary report on the Police Foundation's Averted School Violence
   Database*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.
   https://nccpsafety.org/assets/files/library/Preliminary_Report_on_the_ASV_Database.pdf
   .

Daniels, J. A., Bradley, M. C., Cramer, D. P., Winkler, A. J., Kinebrew, K., & Crockett, D.
   (2007). The successful resolution of armed hostage/barricade events in schools: A
   qualitative analysis. *Psychology in the Schools, 44*(6), 601-613.

Daniels, J. A., Volungis, A., Pshenishny, E., Gandhi, P., Winkler, A., Cramer, D. P., & Bradley,
   M. C. (2010). A qualitative investigation of averted school shooting rampages. *The
   Counseling Psychologist, 38*(1), 69-95.

Densley, J., Riedman, D., & Peterson, J. (2021). The rise in school shooting threats is alarming--
   and a cry for help. Los Angeles Times. https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-11-
   05/record-school-shooting-threats-guns

Duwe, G. (2020). Patterns and prevalence of lethal mass violence. Criminology & Public Policy,
   19(1), 17-35.

Duwe, G., Sanders, N. E., Rocque, M., & Fox, J. A. (2021). Forecasting the Severity of Mass Public Shootings in the United States. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology,* 1-39.

Farrington, D. P., Lösel, F., Boruch, R. F., Gottfredson, D. C., Mazerolle, L., Sherman, L. W., & Weisburd, D. (2019). Advancing knowledge about replication in criminology. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 15*(3), 373-396.

Flaccus, G. (2021). As pandemic ebbs, an old fear is new again: Mass shootings. ABC News. https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/pandemic-ebbs-fear-mass-shootings-77488354

Fox, J. A., & Levin, J. (1998). Multiple homicide: Patterns of serial and mass murder. *Crime and Justice*, *23*, 407-455.

Fox, J. A. & DeLateur, M. (2014). Mass shootings in America: Moving beyond Newtown. *Homicide Studies, 18*(1), 125-145.

Fox, James Alan. (2020). Trends and Contagion in Mass Public Shootings. Advancing Understanding, and Informing Prevention of Public Mass Shootings: Findings from NIJ Funded Studies, Part 1. https://nij.ojp.gov/events/advancing-understanding-and-informing-prevention-public-mass-shootings-findings-nij-funded

Fox, J. A., Gerdes, M., Duwe, G., & Rocque, M. (2021). The newsworthiness of mass public shootings: what factors impact the extent of coverage?. *Homicide Studies*, *25*(3), 239-255.

Freilich, J. D., Chermak, S. M., & Klein, B. R. (2020). Investigating the applicability of situational crime prevention to the public mass violence context. Criminology & Public Policy, 19(1), 271-293.

Greene-Colozzi, E. A., & Silva, J. R. (2020). Contextualizing Firearms in Mass Shooting Incidents: A Study of Guns, Regulations, and Outcomes. *Justice Quarterly*, 1-25.

Gottfredson, D. C., Crosse, S., Tang, Z., Bauer, E. L., Harmon, M. A., Hagen, C. A., & Greene, A. D. (2020). Effects of school resource officers on school crime and responses to school crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *19*(3), 905-940.

Gwet, K. L. (2008). Computing inter-rater reliability and its variance in the presence of high agreement. *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology*, *61*(1), 29-48.

Ingraham, C. (2018). There are more guns than people in the United States, according to a new study of global firearm ownership. *Washington Post, June 19, 2018.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/19/there-are-more-guns-than-people-in-the-united-states-according-to-a-new-study-of-global-firearm-ownership/

Johnson, I. M. (1999). School violence: The effectiveness of a school resource officer program in a southern city. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *27*(2), 173-192.

Langman, P., & Straub, F. (2019). *A comparison of averted and completed school attacks from the Police Foundation Averted School Violence Database*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Lankford, A., & Silver, J. (2020). Why have public mass shootings become more deadly? Assessing how perpetrators' motives and methods have changed over time. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 19(1), 37-60.

Lankford, A., Adkins, K. G., & Madfis, E. (2019). Are the deadliest mass shootings preventable? An assessment of leakage, information reported to law enforcement, and firearms acquisition prior to attacks in the United States. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 35*(3), 315-341.

Lankford, A., & Cowan, R. G. (2020). Has the role of mental health problems in mass shootings been significantly underestimated?. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, *7*(3-4), 135.

Larkin, R. W. (2009). The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts. American Behavioral Scientist, 52(9), 1309-1326.

Madfis, E. (2014). Averting school rampage: Student intervention amid a persistent code of silence. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 12*(3), 229-249.

Madfis, E. (2020). *How to stop school rampage killing: Lessons from averted mass shootings and bombings*. Springer Nature.

May, D. C., Fessel, S. D., & Means, S. (2004). Predictors of principals' perceptions of school resource officer effectiveness in Kentucky. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *29*(1), 75-93.

McDevitt, J., & Panniello, J. (2005). National Assessment of School Resource Officer Programs: Survey of Students in Three Large New SRO Programs. Document Number 209270. *US Department of Justice*.

Nagin, D. S., Koper, C. S., & Lum, C. (2020). Policy recommendations for countering mass shootings in the United States. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *19*(1), 9-15.

Newman, A. (2018). Judge orders treatment for teen in case. Herald Palladium. https://www.heraldpalladium.com/news/local/judge-orders-treatment-for-teen-in-threat-case/article_ffcd5c27-7d6d-5142-9543-e57fecf26825.html.

Peterson, J., & Densley, J. (2019). How Columbine became a blueprint for school shooters. *The Conversation.* https://theconversation.com/how-columbine-became-a-blueprint-for-school-shooters-115115.

Peterson, J., Erickson, G., Knapp, K., & Densley, J. (2021). Communication of intent to do harm preceding mass public shootings in the United States, 1966 to 2019. *JAMA Network Open*, *4*(11), e2133073-e2133073.

Pridemore, W. A., Makel, M. C., & Plucker, J. A. (2018). Replication in criminology and the social sciences. *Annual Review of Criminology, 1*, 19-38.

Ressler, R. K., Burgess, A. W., & Douglas, J. E. (1988). Sexual homicide: Patterns and motives. New York: The Free Press.

Sandy Hook Promise (2021). Say Something Anonymous Reporting System. https://www.sandyhookpromiselearning.org/say-something-ars

Sarteschi, C. M. (2016). An examination of thwarted mass homicide plots and threateners. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 3*0, 88-93.

Schildkraut, J., Elsass, H. J., & Meredith, K. (2018). Mass shootings and the media: Why all events are not created equal. *Journal of Crime and Justice, 41*(3), 223-243.

Schildkraut, J., Naman, B. M., & Stafford, M. C. (2019). Advancing responses to mass shootings using a routine activity approach. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety, 21*(4), 346-361.

Schildkraut, J., Elsass, H. J., Stafford, M. C., & Sheingold, J. (2022). Understanding More Than 50 Years of Mass Public Shootings as a Function of Routine Activities. Homicide Studies, Online First.

Siegel, M., Goder-Reiser, M., Duwe, G., Rocque, M., Fox, J. A., & Fridel, E. E. (2020). The relation between state gun laws and the incidence and severity of mass public shootings in the United States, 1976–2018. *Law and Human Behavior*, *44*(5), 347.

Silva, J. R. (2021a). A comparative analysis of foiled and completed mass shootings. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 46(2), 187-208.

Silva, J. R. (2021b). Mass Shooting Outcomes: A Comparison of Completed, Attempted, Failed, and Foiled Incidents in America. *Deviant Behavior*, Online First.

Silva, J. R., & Capellan, J. A. (2019). The media's coverage of mass public shootings in America: Fifty years of newsworthiness. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice, 43*(1), 77-97.

Silva, J. R., & Greene-Colozzi, E. A. (2021). An exploratory study of failed mass shootings in America. *Security Journal*, 1-33.

Smart, R. & Schell, T. L. 2021. Mass shootings in the United States. Rand Corporation. https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/essays/mass-shootings.html

Stallings, R., & Hall, J. C. (2019). Averted targeted school killings from 1900-2016. *Criminal Justice Studies, 32*(3), 222-238.

Swezey, J. A., & Thorp, K. A. (2010). A school shooting plot foiled. *Journal of Research on Christian Education, 19*(3), 286-312.

Wheelan, C. (2013). *Naked statistics: Stripping the dread from the data*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

Table 1: Contextual Information for Averted Mass Shooting Plans

Category	Variable	f	%
Number of offenders	One	128	42.2%
(Mean = 1.56)	Two	39	25.7%
	Three	18	17.8%
	Four	4	5.3%
	Five	3	5.0%
	Six	2	4.0%
	Total	194	100.0%
Season	Winter	60	30.9%
	Spring	37	19.1%
	Summer	45	23.2%
	Fall	52	26.8%
	Total	194	100.0%
Region	East	28	14.4%
	Midwest	37	19.1%
	South	73	37.6%
	West	55	28.4%
	Multiple/missing	1	0.5%
	Total	194	100.0%
Location	School	151	77.8%
	Retail/Restaurant	13	6.7%
	Multiple	2	1.0%
	Religious	6	3.1%
	Other	9	4.6%
	Government	4	2.1%
	Office	3	1.5%
	Entertainment	2	1.0%
	Unclear	4	2.1%
	Total	194	100.0%

Table 2. Details for Averted Mass Public Shooting Plans

Category	Variable	f	%
Planned targets	General/random	12	6.5%
	Specific individuals	29	15.7%
	Specific and random individuals	32	17.3%
	Specific location/group	112	60.5%
	Total	185	100.0%
In progress	Yes	17	8.8%
	No	177	91.2%
	Total	194	100.0%
Threat type	Other	15	7.8%
	Written	27	14.1%
	Multiple	34	17.7%
	Online	44	22.9%
	Verbal	72	37.5%
	Total	192	100.0%
Threat reported by	Self	5	2.8%
	Healthcare provider	5	2.8%
	Law enforcement/security	7	3.9%
	Family	8	4.5%
	Parent/caretaker	11	6.2%
	Teacher/school employee	14	7.9%
	Anonymous/unknown	19	10.7%
	Other	28	15.7%
	Student/friend/acquaintance	81	45.5%
	Total	178	100.0%
Threat reported to	Other	2	1.1%
	Multiple	15	8.2%
	Teacher/school employee	40	21.9%
	Police/authorities	126	68.9%
	Total	183	100.0%
How caught	Other	3	1.6%
	Self	6	3.2%
	In progress	13	6.8%
	Overheard/read/saw plans	61	32.1%
	Direct	107	56.3%
	Total	190	100.0%
Motivation	Ideological	25	17.2%
	Autogenic	49	33.8%
	Revenge/grievance/victim-specific	71	49.0%
	Total	145	100.0%
Weapons posessed	No	54	27.8%
	Yes	140	72.2%
	Total	194	100.0%
Weapons acquisition	Stolen	28	39.4%
	Legal	43	60.6%
	Total	71	100.0%

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Averted Mass Shooting Offenders

Variable	Category	f	%
Sex	Female	26	8.8%
	Male	269	91.2%
	Total	295	100.0%
Age	<18	168	62.2%
(Mean = 19.3)	18-24	62	23.0%
	25-34	23	8.5%
	35-49	13	4.8%
	50+	4	1.5%
	Total	270	100.0%
Race/Ethnicity	White	109	80.7%
	Black or African American	6	4.4%
	Hispanic	5	3.7%
	Asian	6	4.4%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	2	1.5%
	Other Race	7	5.2%
	Total	135	100.0%
Employment	Unemployed	7	2.8%
	Employed	22	8.7%
	Student	224	88.5%
	Total	253	100.0%
Mental Illness	Diagnosed	44	14.5%
	Suspected only	42	13.9%
	Unknown/No	217	71.6%
	Total	303	100.0%
Suicide	Committed	5	1.7%
	Planned	35	11.6%
	Not planned/committed	263	86.8%
	Total	303	100.0%
Response/Outcome	Expulsion/Suspension	1	0.4%
	NGBI	2	0.7%
	Other	7	2.5%
	Treatment	13	4.7%
	Charges dropped/Not filed	16	5.7%
	Probation/Community Supervision	35	12.5%
	Incarceration or detention	94	33.7%
	Arrest (only detail)	111	39.8%
	Total	279	100.0%

Table 4. Comparison of Averted to Completed Mass Public Shooting Incidents

Variable	Category	Averted		Completed	
		f	%	f	%
Number of offenders***	One	128	66.0%	95	97.9%
	Multiple	66	34.0%	2	2.1%
	Total	194	100.0%	97	100.0%
Season	Winter	60	30.9%	30	30.9%
	Spring	37	19.1%	21	21.6%
	Summer	45	23.2%	24	24.7%
	Fall	52	26.8%	22	22.7%
	Total	194	100.0%	97	100.0%
Region	East	28	14.5%	13	13.4%
	Midwest	37	19.2%	20	20.6%
	South	73	37.8%	35	36.1%
	West	55	28.5%	29	29.9%
	Total	193	100.0%	97	100.0%
Location***	School	151	79.5%	13	13.4%
	Retail/Restaurant	13	6.8%	21	21.6%
	Religious	6	3.2%	7	7.2%
	Other	9	4.7%	17	17.5%
	Government	4	2.1%	9	9.3%
	Office	3	1.6%	21	21.6%
	Entertainment	2	1.1%	9	9.3%
	Total	188	100.0%	97	100.0%

***p<.001, based on one-sample chi-square

Table 5. Comparison of Averted to Completed Mass Public Shooting Offenders

Variable	Category	Averted		Completed	
		f	%	f	%
Sex***	Male	269	91.2%	95	96.0%
	Female	26	8.8%	4	4.0%
	Total	295	100.0%	99	100.0%
Race***	White	109	80.7%	57	57.6%
	Black	6	4.4%	21	21.2%
	Hispanic	5	3.7%	8	8.1%
	Other	15	11.1%	13	13.1%
	Total	135	100.0%	99	100.0%
Age***	<18	168	62.2%	3	3.0%
	18-24	62	23.0%	20	20.2%
	25-34	23	8.5%	29	29.3%
	35-49	13	4.8%	33	33.3%
	50+	4	1.5%	14	14.1%
	Total	270	100.0%	99	100.0%
Mental illness***	No evidence/Unknown	217	71.6%	35	35.4%
	Diagnosed	44	14.5%	34	34.3%
	Suspected only	42	13.9%	30	30.3%
	Total	303	100.0%	99	100.0%
Outcome***	Arrested/incarcerated	205	72.2%	36	36.4%
	Suicide	5	1.8%	42	42.4%
	Other	74	26.1%	21	21.2%
	Total	284	100.0%	99	100.0%

***$p<.001$, based on one-sample chi-square