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Bans on Semi-Automatic Rifles and Magazine Restrictions Don't Work

No "Epidemic" of Mass Shootings

Legislation banning certain semi-automatic rifles and creating magazine restrictions are often based upon the false premise that there is an "epidemic" of mass shootings.

This erroneous assumption is fueled by media sensationalism but is not supported by statistics or research.

From Table 1, there are almost four times as many people killed with knives or other cutting instruments than rifles and about 50% more by hands, fists, and feet.

Yet, there is no outcry about an "epidemic" of knife or fist violence.

The number of deaths from mass shootings is rare. Looking at data from 1982 through 2018, there are an average of 23 deaths per year due to mass shootings.¹ Over a similar time period, the number of people killed in a lightning strike was about 43 per year.² So, one is twice as likely to be killed by a lightning strike than in a mass shooting incident.

Researchers also confirm that there is no "epidemic" of mass shootings. In an interview, Northeastern University criminologist James Alan Fox, the leading expert on the subject, stated "There is no evidence that we are in the midst of an epidemic of mass shootings."³

In a peer-reviewed journal article, Fox reported that there has been "no increase in mass shootings and certainly no epidemic...what is abundantly clear from the full array of mass shootings is the largely random variability in the annual counts." He goes on to say that "journalists and others have speculated about a possible epidemic in response to a flurry of high-profile shootings. Yet, these speculations have always proven to be incorrect when subsequent years reveal more moderate levels."⁴

2019 FBI UCR - Homicides by Weapon Type

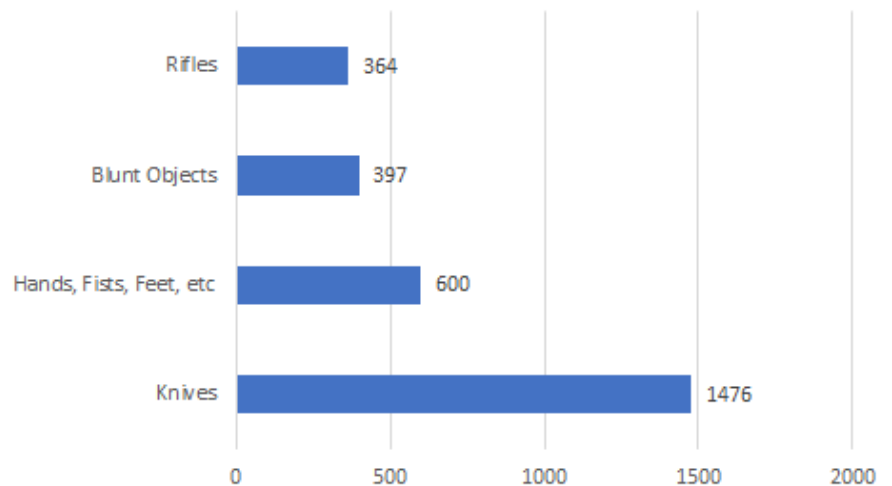


Table 1. Source: 2019 FBI Uniform Crime Report, Table 8



The Federal “Assault Weapons” Ban of 1994

The Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act (Federal Assault Weapons Ban) was enacted in 1994. The ban outlawed certain types of semi-automatic firearms and implemented a national 10-round magazine capacity restriction.

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and other researchers studied the effectiveness of the ban. Some of these findings are summarized below:

- Significantly relevant to the discussion surrounding mass shootings, the NIJ concluded that the Federal ban “has failed to reduce the average number of victims per gun murder or multiple gunshot wound victims.”⁵
- Murder rates were 19.3% higher when the Federal assault weapons ban was in force.⁶
- In 2004, the year the Federal ban sunset, the NIJ concluded that “we cannot clearly credit the ban with any of the nation’s recent drop in gun violence.”⁷
- In the first seven years since the ban was lifted, murders declined 43%, violent crime 43%, rapes 27%, and robberies 49%.⁸

The above conclusions demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the Federal assault weapons ban of 1994. Murder rates were higher during the ban and fell after the sunset. Recall that the 1994 ban restricted magazine capacity to 10 rounds, but the government’s own study concluded the ban did not reduce the average number of victims per murder or multiple gunshot wound victims.

Sources

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