Analysis of Active Shooter Cases in the U.S., 2000-2013
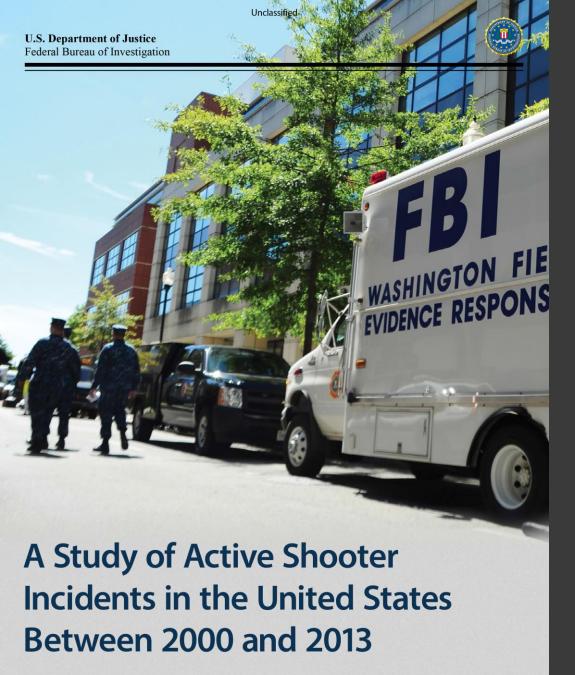
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A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013

September 16, 2013
Washington Navy Yard,
Washington, D.C.

Introduction

- 2014 FBI study of 160 incidents of active shooters

- Definition: "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people (using a firearm) in a confined and populated area"

Snapshot

The following characteristics of the 160 active shooter incidents identified between 2000 and 2013 are noted:

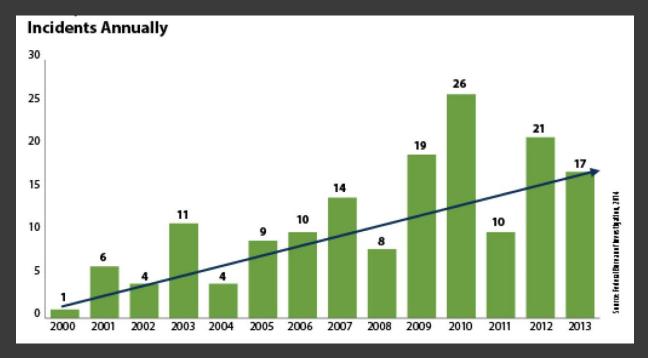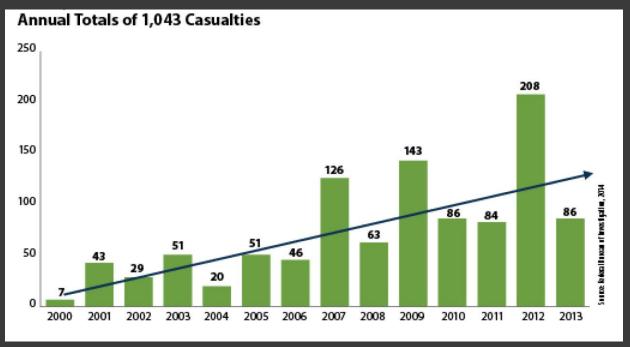**160** incidents occurred between 2000 and 2013

An average of **11.4** incidents occurred annually; with an increasing trend from 2000 to 2013.

486 were killed in 160 incidents

1,043 Casualties, including killed and wounded (shooters were not included in this total)

557 were wounded* in 160 incidents.

Incidents Annually

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Incidents	1	6	4	11	4	9	10	14	8	19	26	10	21	17

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014

Annual Totals of 1,043 Casualties

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Casualties	7	43	29	51	20	51	46	126	63	143	86	84	208	86

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014

Incident characteristics

- Shootings in 40 states + D.C.
  - 32.5% in South
  - 30.6% in West
  - 21.9% in Midwest
  - 15.0% in Northeast

- States with largest number of incidents:
  1. California: 19 (11.9%)
  2. Florida: 12 (7.5%)
  3. Pennsylvania: 10 (6.3%)

- Incidents occurred all throughout the year:
  - 38 in spring (23.8%)
  - 38 in summer (23.8%)
  - 43 in fall (26.9%)
  - 41 in winter (25.6%)

Incident characteristics

- Location types:
    - 74 in areas of commerce (46.3%)
    - 38 in educational environments (23.8%)
    - 16 on government property (10%)
    - 14 in open spaces (8.8%)
    - 8 in residences (5%)
    - 6 in houses of worship (3.8%)
    - 4 in healthcare facilities (2.5%)

- Incident outcomes:
    - 65 shooters committed suicide (40.6%)
    - 64 shooters apprehended (40%)
    - 28 shooters killed at scene (17.5%)

Shooter characteristics

- Nearly all involved a lone male shooter
  - 2 pairs of shooters
  - 6 women shooters

- Age ranged from 12 to 88 years ($\mu = 36.37$)

- Type of gun used
  - One or more handgun(s): 58.3%
  - One or more long gun(s): 22.6%
  - Both handgun(s) and long gun(s): 18.9%

Why some cases & not others?

- Some cases are notorious

  - Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, CT (2012)
  - Movie theater shooting in Aurora, CO (2012)
  - Ft. Hood Soldier Readiness Processing Center in Texas (2009)
  - Massacre at Virginia Tech (2007)

- Most of the others are not

Traditional news values

1. **Impact:** how many affected; how big the effect

2. **Timeliness:** recency of an event

3. **Conflict:** struggles, disagreements, feuds, etc.

4. **Unusualness:** out-of-the-ordinary events

5. **Proximity:** geographic closeness

6. **Prominence:** important/well-known entities

What's newsworthy about an active shooter case?

- Drawing on symbolic interactionism & social constructionism

- Statistical analysis of factors that may influence amount of news coverage

  - <u>Dependent variable</u>: number of articles retrieved about each case from the National Newspapers Core database

  - <u>11 independent variables</u> from FBI report info

Independent variables

- Incident variables
  - **Year**
  - **Time of year**
    - spring, summer, fall, or winter
  - **Location region**
    - West, Midwest, Northeast, South, or Pacific
  - **Location type**
    - commerce, education, government, open space, residences, health care, or house of worship
  - **Gun(s) type**
    - handgun(s), long gun(s), or both

Independent variables

- Shooter variables
  - **Age**
  - **Gender**
  - **Outcome**
    - suicide, killed by other, apprehended at scene, apprehended after fleeing, still at large
  - **Identified connection to scene and/or victim(s)**

- Victim variables
  - **Total fatalities**
  - **Total casualties** (fatalities + physically injured)

Analysis

- Dependent variable descriptive stats:
  - Range = 0 to 3,054
  - μ = 46.27 (sd = 269.298)

- For variables measured at nominal/ordinal level, chi-square (with re-coded dependent variable at ordinal level)

- For variables measured at interval/ratio level, Pearson correlation coefficient (with original ratio-level dependent variable)

Findings

- **<u>Not significant</u>** with number of articles:

  - Incident year
  - Time of year (season)
  - State
  - Geographic region
  - Age of shooter
  - Gender of shooter
  - Type of gun used
  - Shooter's connection to scene
  - Outcome of the incident

Findings

- **<u>Significant relationships</u>:**

  - Highly significant positive relationship between number of articles published & number of victims (for both fatalities & overall casualties)

  - Age group: Incidents with youngest shooters receive more news coverage

  - Location type: Incidents in educational settings receive more news coverage

Conclusions

1. National news journalists doing a decent job

   "Traditional news values" in journalism
   1. **Impact:** how many people are affected
   2. **Timeliness:** recency of an event
   3. **Conflict:** struggles, disagreements, feuds
   4. **Unusualness:** out-of-the-ordinary events
   5. **Proximity:** geographic closeness
   6. **Prominence:** important/well-known entities

2. Coverage may lead to misperceptions about these cases