



MICK O'LEARY

## DATABASE REVIEW

# Mass Shooting Databases

The new era of awareness of mass shootings began in 1999 with the massacre at Columbine High School, in which 13 people were killed and 21 injured. There, of course, have been thousands of mass killings throughout U.S. history, but Columbine stood out for two reasons. First, the killings were carried out by two high school students in their own school, thereby violating a space that we thought was removed from society's wider violence. Second, the shooters had long planned the incident, as the culmination of a twisted narrative of grievance and desolation.

The mass killings continued. In 2007, the largest mass shooting in U.S. history occurred when a Virginia Tech student killed 32 people and wounded 17. 2012 stood out, first, for the Aurora, Colo., movie theater shooting, with 12 killed and 70 injured, and then for the horrific massacre of 20 young children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

This seemingly escalating series of mass shootings sparked intense public scrutiny into their whys, whos, and hows. The media and citizens found that the official public record was deficient, which resulted in private sector initiatives to document these deeply troubling events. (This resembles the origin of officer-involved shooting databases—covered in the March 2015 and April 2016 Database Review—in which sparse information from

law enforcement agencies prompted private research projects.)

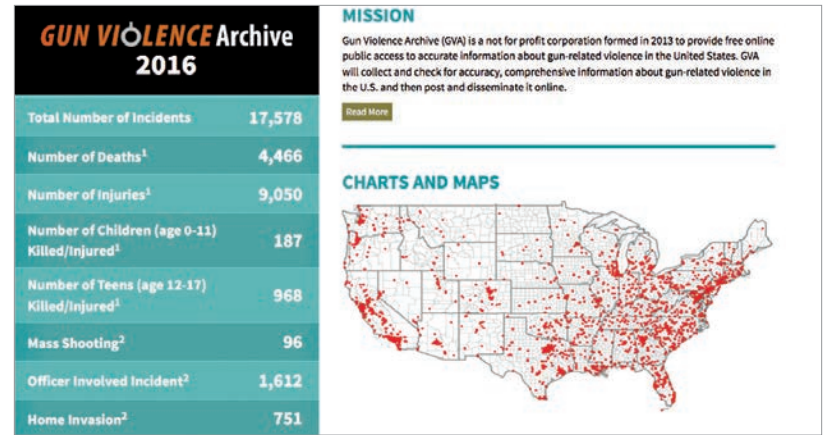
### The Mass Shooting Databases

Mass shootings have been the subject of previous academic and government studies, but with their limited distribution and delayed reporting, they are well behind the curve in today's information environment. They have been supplanted by two newer, faster-moving projects: US Mass Shootings, 1982–2016: Data From Mother Jones' Investigation ([motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data](http://motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data)) and the Mass Shooting Tracker ([massshootingtracker.org](http://massshootingtracker.org)).

But the data is far from settled. For 2015, Mother Jones reported seven mass shootings, while the Mass Shooting Tracker recorded 371. How can there be such a disparity? It comes down to definition. Mother Jones' is narrow: four or more people killed in an "indiscriminate" outburst. The Mass Shooting Tracker has a much broader definition: "We define a mass shooting to be an incident of violence in which 4 or more people are shot." This includes victims who are injured, as well as more incident categories: domestic violence, gang killings, and robberies, etc.

### Mother Jones' Mass Shooting Research

Mother Jones ([motherjones.com](http://motherjones.com)) is a progressive, left-leaning maga-



zine and news organization, named for Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, a social activist in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. It began its mass shooting research in 2012, in the aftermath of the Aurora shootings. Its US Mass Shootings, 1982–2016 database lists 75 cases as of March 31, 2016. The data is drawn primarily from national and local news media. Records contain the basic elements of the incident—the date, the location, numbers killed, shooter characteristics, a short summary, and links to sources—as well as other pertinent details, including mental health aspects and weapons used. The data is presented in a spreadsheet. In addition to the incident database itself, Mother Jones has published several analytical articles based on its research. These delve into the patterns of mass shootings and the role of weapons, etc.

### Mass Shooting Tracker

The Mass Shooting Tracker began as a group on reddit in 2013 ([reddit.com/r/GunsAreCool/wiki/2013massshootings](http://reddit.com/r/GunsAreCool/wiki/2013massshootings)). Its data is now also presented as a section in the Gun Violence Archive. As described previously, it uses a broad definition of mass shootings that includes victims who are injured as well as killed, and it covers all categories of mass shooting incidents. The database draws primarily on—as do the other mass shooting databases—local and national media reports. A Mass Shooting Tracker record has the incident date, the city and state, numbers of the dead and injured, shooter names, and source links.

### Mass Shooting Data in the Gun Violence Archive

The Gun Violence Archive (GVA; [gunviolencearchive.org](http://gunviolencearchive.org)) is a compre-

hensive record of gun violence in the U.S., including mass shootings. The data from the Mass Shooting Tracker is posted in GVA ([shootingtracker.com](http://shootingtracker.com)), with augmented records. In addition to the Mass Shooting Tracker elements mentioned previously, a GVA record includes the type of incident, victim identifications, and weapons used, etc.

### More Mass Shooting Resources

US Mass Shootings, 1982–2016 and the Mass Shooting Tracker are the most comprehensive and up-to-date databases of U.S. mass shootings. There are others that cover much of the same ground, but with different kinds of added value.

The VICE Mass Shooting Tracker ([vice.com/read/mass-shootings-in-the-united-states-and-europe-in-2016](http://vice.com/read/mass-shootings-in-the-united-states-and-europe-in-2016)) is part of the VICE suite of sites that cover news, sports, entertainment, and more. The VICE tracker uses the broad GVA/Mass Shooting Tracker definition. Its coverage starts in 2016, and its numbers are close to the totals in GVA and the Mass Shooting Tracker. Its records contain the basic elements: the date, the city and state, numbers of the dead and injured, a brief description, and source links. The VICE database is distinguished by tracking mass shootings in Europe, as a counterpoint to U.S. incidents.

Behind the Bloodshed: The Untold Story of America's Mass Killings ([www.gannett-cdn.com/GDContent/mass-killings/index.html#explore](http://www.gannett-cdn.com/GDContent/mass-killings/index.html#explore)) is produced by USA TODAY. The database's name includes the words "Mass Killings," because, unlike the mass shooting trackers, it features other types of violence, such as stabbings and blunt force injuries, etc. (mass vio-

### Gun Violence Archive

Mass shootings are just one kind of gun violence tracked by the Gun Violence Archive (GVA; [gunviolencearchive.org](http://gunviolencearchive.org)). GVA is a not-for-profit corporation formed in 2013 to provide online access to information about gun-related violence in the U.S. It has a thorough research protocol that encompasses local media and police data. The GVA database starts in 2014 and covers every sort of gun violence, including accidents. Its incident records are highly detailed, with data on the incident type, age ranges, and many other factors.

—M.O.

lence perps can be imaginative and resourceful in their methods). Its records start in 2006, and, as of the end of March 2016, it includes 306 incidents. Records provide the date, city and state, method, and number of victims, as well as a short description. There is also a lengthy analysis of incident patterns.

*The Washington Post's* The Math of Mass Shootings ([washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/mass-shootings-in-america](http://washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/mass-shootings-in-america)) is not just a record of U.S. mass shootings; it also provides a compelling presentation of the data itself. The database is derived from Mother Jones' data and other sources, and it uses the more narrow definition of mass shootings. It covers shootings from 1966 to the present. Its distinctive features include brief profiles of victims and shooters and a fascinating visual catalog of all the weapons used. Mass shooters have a diverse set of guns, from tiny, toy-like pistols to formidable hunting rifles, shotguns, and assault rifles.

There are two government reports that are fundamental sources in the overall documentation of U.S. mass shootings. "Mass Murder With Firearms: Incidents and Victims, 1999-2013" ([fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R44126.pdf](http://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R44126.pdf)) is from the Congressional Research Service, and "A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013" ([1.usa.gov/1GkcHHH](http://1.usa.gov/1GkcHHH)) is from the FBI.

### Mass Shooting Databases and the Web

Mass shooting research has been conducted for many years, but the databases covered here are possible only with the modern web. Their principal sources are online stories from local and national news media, which carry out original, on-the-scene investigations and then post them on their websites. The mass shooting trackers then harvest these individual reports and merge them into comprehensive, continually updated, free web databases.

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BARBARA QUINT

VIEWPOINT

## From Curation to Discovery to Revenue

**T**he other day, I received yet another glossy, colorful catalog from King Arthur Flour, a siren call to home bakers everywhere. It included some very attractive baking pans and devices, accompanied by mouthwatering recipes and pictures of the results.

One of the items featured in this edition of the catalog was a square Bundt pan, complete with striking ridge patterns. I already have two Bundt pans, so I hardly need—or have room for—another. But since when have grim realities ever interfered with the lust to purchase? I recalled the last purchase I had made from King Arthur, which was just a month or 2 previously. That did quell the lust slightly. It involved a tad longer wait on the phone than is comfortable; ordering item after item; hearing the order read back; supplying my name, contact and shipping information, and credit card number; and waiting for confirmation. Then there would be a 2-week or more wait for the items to arrive by standard shipping.

So, whoosh! Into the arms of Amazon to order the pan. Sixteen clicks, and the same square Bundt pan, manufactured by Nordic Ware for both King Arthur and Amazon, was on its way to me with a 2-day turnaround—no shipping and handling charges for Amazon Prime members. Could the ease of acquisition be more felicitous?

Actually, yes. Amazon's price for the pan was more than \$10 cheaper than King Arthur's. In fact, King Arthur's price for express shipping alone was only a few dollars less than the entire cost of acquiring the pan from Amazon.

So here lies the body of King Arthur and his court, slain by the Amazon shopping and shipping dragon. Well, one fact remains: If I hadn't seen that pretty pan in the King Arthur catalog, I would never have thought about it on my own. Despite all the yeoman-like algorithmic associative processing done at Amazon, it simply doesn't have the same impact as the vertical marketing provided by a knowledgeable vendor to an established community of focused consumers. The curation of content facilitates discovery by consumers more than short, quick suggestions do. Both approaches can work, but the curated approach builds on the community. The discovery process can extend to page after page of catalog entries, not just one quick item and a glance at related suggestions.

But let's get real. How long can King Arthur continue to produce these curated, discovery-enhancing catalogs if Amazon gets all the sales revenue? How long can brick-and-mortar stores serve as showrooms for items while "customers" snap Amazon app pictures of items and bar codes so they can check prices and buy online?

Amazon itself has opened a brick-and-mortar bookstore in Seattle, with one in San Diego planned. If those are successful, it might open several hundred more. But is this just a "chump change" advertising ploy designed to convince recalcitrant print devotees that Amazon remains the go-to bookstore in any format? After all, Amazon could just as easily open stores in any field, since it sells items for practically every purpose.

Bottom line, it would seem that trying to fight monster online sales forces such as Amazon or even opening competitive online services to dominant players such as Uber is just a lost cause. Instead, one should take advantage of—and, if possible, create—alliances and opportunities to share in revenue flow.

### Where's the Revenue?

The largest collection of curated content in the world is probably what sits on library bookshelves or in the licensed databases of library vendors. But arranging that content to promote purchase—or in the case of libraries, circulation—requires a more focused push to reach people's interests. Sustaining such efforts, which may well extend beyond immediate constituencies, will probably require some strong links to revenue. In just one day, I received three press releases outlining vendor approaches to curating content. Altmetric launched Altmetric Badges for Books, which provides publishers with summaries of the "online attention" a book has gotten, down to the chapter level. An academic colleague has informed me that his library's ILL program receives more requests for chapters than for books or articles. Kudos, a free service that helps authors build usage of their content and offers extensive metrics to track success, has recently allied with Ingenta, a library vendor, and its publishers. ProQuest has launched nine regional databases of locally published scholarly journals, grouped geographically by continent or country. This is a more traditional approach of curating content, but it should appeal to the demographics of library constituencies.

However, where's the revenue here? Grouping content effectively and winnowing the wheat from the chaff are all very well. Analyzing the success of discovery by probing into usage statistics as accurately as possible is valuable. But flexibility in building revenue models—particularly those not built to look like six-foot-high paywalls to users—is critical. Vendors that believe their job is done once they get their checks from the library have missed the real problem. Finding ways for libraries to gather revenue from the role they play can ensure that they will still be signing checks next year or the year after. Translating patrons into purchasers in return for a piece of the action is part of the job for librarians and their vendors.

Here's an idea: Why not build on the library guides so many librarians have in their institutions? Back them up with purchase, license, and free-access links. Get a good price discount for customers coming in through the library connection.

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