

Opinions

What all mass shootings have in common

[+ Add to list](#)

By [Charles Lane](#)

Another day in America, another flurry of bullets, another massacre.

Sometimes, the gunman opens fire at Walmart, apparently because he believes America is being invaded by Mexicans, who must therefore die, as in El Paso on Saturday ([22 dead](#); more than two dozen injured).

Occasionally, he shoots up a former workplace after resigning for murky “personal reasons,” as in [Virginia Beach](#) on May 31 (12 dead; four injured).

At other times, as in [Pittsburgh](#) on Oct. 27, 2018, according to police, the killer takes aim at Jews whom he hates for allegedly plotting to resettle the U.S. with refugees (11 dead; six injured).

Or a shooter will barge into the offices of a newspaper against which he has a grievance, and start mowing people down, as occurred at the [Capital Gazette](#) in Annapolis on June 28, 2018 (five killed; two injured).

ADVERTISING

It is not unheard of for someone angry over a domestic quarrel to invade a church and begin shooting indiscriminately, as on Nov. 5, 2017, at [Sutherland Springs](#), Tex. (26 dead; 20 injured).

Once in a while, someone will point a weapon out of an upper-floor hotel window and, for no particular reason at all, rain 1,100 rounds on people attending a country-music concert, which is what happened in [Las Vegas](#) on Oct. 1, 2017 (58 dead; 851 injured).

Then there's the shooter, "fueled by rage against Republican legislators," in the words of a subsequent report by the local prosecutor, who attacked GOP congressmen as they practiced for a charity baseball game, on June 14, 2017, in [Alexandria](#). (Six injured; thanks to the intervention of a Capitol Police security detail, the suspect was killed before he could complete what would otherwise have been a mass political assassination.)

Another time, on June 12, 2016, in [Orlando](#), a perpetrator entered a nightclub frequented by gay Latino men and began shooting, pausing to call 911 and tell the police that he was a follower of the Islamic State terror group exacting revenge for U.S. airstrikes in Iraq and Syria (49 dead; 53 injured).

On the afternoon of July 7, 2016, in downtown [Dallas](#), a sniper targeted police officers in apparent retaliation for the deaths of black men at the hands of law enforcement (five dead; nine injured).

It has also happened, in [San Bernardino](#), Calif., on Dec. 2, 2015, that a married couple, inspired by Islamist terrorist groups abroad, planned and carried out an attack on an office Christmas party (14 people killed; 22 injured).

That was just a few months after June 17, 2015, when a white 18-year-old male, obsessed with the idea that “blacks were taking over the world,” according to police, entered an African American church in [Charleston](#), S.C., and began firing at people as they prayed (nine killed).

And going back a bit further, to Dec. 14, 2012, there was the time when a 20-year-old in the grip of “severe and deteriorating internalized mental health problems . . . combined with an atypical preoccupation with violence,” as an official investigation concluded, brought a semiautomatic rifle and huge quantities of ammunition to Sandy Hook Elementary School in [Newtown](#), Conn. (27 dead; two injured).

Every time, the story is a bit different. The shooters are white (e.g., El Paso, Pittsburgh), black (Virginia Beach, Dallas), young (Charleston), middle-aged (Las Vegas), Muslim (Orlando, San Bernardino) or Christian (Sutherland Springs).

What all the cases on this very limited partial list of American carnage have in common is that, each time, someone bent on mass murder found it possible — easy, really — to get the weaponry with which to carry out those intentions.

Sometimes, as in Sutherland Springs, they did so despite laws (which were not properly enforced). For the most part, though, they got their guns legally; the killer in Las Vegas had no fewer than 24 firearms in his hotel room, of which 22 were assault-style rifles, many with 100-round magazines and “bump stocks” for rapid firing.

Max Weber, the German sociologist, provided the classic definition of the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force” and “is considered the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence.”

By that definition, the United States is not a state; we have a constitution that distributes the right to use armed force among the federal government, state and local governments and, via the Second Amendment, individuals.

And we have a special interest lobby, with near-total control over the Republican Party, that exploits and distorts the nation’s founding document to block reasonable firearm regulations that would be consistent with individual freedom but protective of modern society.

No doubt there are benefits (hunting, self-defense in remote areas) to this situation. What’s now more apparent than ever, however, is the cost — the traumatic, bloody, unbearable cost.

Read more from [Charles Lane’s archive](#), [follow him on Twitter](#) or [subscribe to his updates on Facebook](#).

Read more:

[The Post’s View: Trump can honor shooting victims by changing his hateful rhetoric](#)

Karen Tumulty: Trump has proved himself incapable of changing

Eugene Robinson: To get sensible gun control, Democrats must take the Senate

Brian Klaas: The world thinks America's gun laws are crazy — and they're right

Richard Cohen: The GOP has plunged us into a modern Dark Age

Michael Gerson: Promoting love and unity goes against Trump's political brand

Charles Lane

Charles Lane is a Post editorial writer specializing in economic and fiscal policy, and a weekly columnist. Follow 
