

# The Shooting Cycle: Stopping Mass Shootings and Stopping Gun Violence

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Josh Blackman

During a recent trip to Times Square, I saw huge billboard with a photo of Gabby Giffords and her husband, next to a headline asking for support in stopping “gun violence.” This phrase is often used interchangeably with mass shootings. For example, consider the President’s remarks in January 2013:

*And that’s why, last month, I asked Joe to lead an effort, along with members of my Cabinet, to come up with some concrete steps we can take right now to keep our children safe, to help prevent mass shootings, to reduce the broader epidemic of gun violence in this country.*

Notice the pivot. The goal is not merely to prevent “mass shootings,” but to “reduce the broader epidemic of gun violence in this country.” Mass shootings are certainly a subspecies of gun violence, and the type that garner the most attention. But, as I document in [The Shooting Cycle](#), they represent a tiny sliver of death by guns. Roughly .1% of deaths from gunfire take place during a mass shooting (defined as 4 or more deaths in a single event). The overwhelming majority, 99.9% are not during a mass shooting. This much is straightforward statistics.

A point that I didn’t address in [The Shooting Cycle](#), but will elsewhere, is how politicians conflate the steps needed to stop mass shootings, with the steps needed to stop gun violence. In short, they are not the same discussion.

Politicians hold out proposals, such as bans on assault weapons and bans on high-capacity magazines as ways to stop “gun violence.” But really, they are holding out these measures as a ways to stop “mass shootings.” I’ll assume for the moment these steps will stop mass shootings (I am seriously doubtful here. Deranged people intent on killing two-dozen children are not likely to be deterred by background checks, and will find alternative means, such as the shooter in Araphoe who used a [shotgun](#), the very weapon VP Joe Biden [recommended we buy](#) instead of an AR-15). But even so, this will only address a tiny, tiny percentage of deaths by guns. As Professor Winkler [noted](#), “Even if the law could be passed, it wouldn’t have made any dent in gun violence statistics because these guns are rarely used in crime.” Everyone knows this. Even the people at Brady.

Further, I’ll assume that banning high capacity magazines makes it more difficult to inflict mass casualties (Again I am doubtful. Reloading can be done fairly quickly, and it is very easy to carry multiple weapons, as most shooters do). The overwhelming majority of gun deaths involve one, maybe two bullets being fired. That’s it. (With civilians. When police officers shoot, they fire hundreds of rounds. I suspect people would be more amenable to a debate about gun control for the police). So a ban on high capacity magazines would only have the effect of criminalizing the overwhelming majority of semiautomatic pistols, that take magazines with more than ten rounds. Of course, this is not a bug, but a feature .

In short, all of these efforts are aimed at disarming the overwhelming majority of law-abiding citizens, and

doing little to stop the actual causes of gun violence. But again, the gun control advocates realize this.

The reasoning for these moves is accurately summed up in a quotation from 1996 by conservative columnist [Charles Krauthammer](#), who conceded that the assault weapons ban would not result in a decrease in violence, but it served as an important symbolic step in desensitizing Americans towards the path of banning all guns.

*“Ultimately, a civilized society must disarm its citizenry if it is to have a modicum of domestic tranquility of the kind enjoyed in sister democracies like Canada and Britain. Given the frontier history and individualist ideology of the United States, however, this will not come easily. It certainly cannot be done radically. It will probably take one, maybe two generations. It might be 50 years before the United States gets to where Britain is today.*

*Passing a law like the assault weapons ban is a symbolic — purely symbolic — move in that direction. Its only real justification is not to reduce crime but to desensitize the public to the regulation of weapons in preparation for their ultimate confiscation. Its purpose is to spark debate, highlight the issue, make the case that the arms race between criminals and citizens is as dangerous as it is pointless.*

*De-escalation begins with a change in mentality. And that change in mentality starts with the symbolic yielding of certain types of weapons. The real steps, like the banning of handguns, will never occur unless this one is taken first, and even then not for decades....*

Laws aimed at stopping mass shootings are not actually about stopping gun violence, directly at least. They are about desensitizing us to incremental laws, until the American culture has shifted enough that registration and confiscation are options. When members of the Brady Campaign speak about patience, and a long, drawn-out process, this is their end goal.

Nelson “Pete” Shields III, a founder of Handgun Control, Inc.—the progenitor of the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence—openly advocated for the elimination of all handguns: “‘We’re going to have to take this one step at a time. . . . Our ultimate goal—total control of all guns—is going to take time.’ The ‘final problem,’ he insisted, ‘is to make the possession of all handguns and all handgun ammunition’ for ordinary civilians ‘totally illegal.’” John Hechinger, a sponsor of the D.C. handgun ban and a board member of Handgun Control, Inc., put it simply: “We have to do away with the guns.”

Honest discussions to stop gun violence would focus on the 99.9% of deaths from handguns. And even before *District of Columbia v. Heller* took handguns off the table, the focus was still on the scary-looking rifles.