

Homicides in US dropped by 12% in 2023, but country set a record for mass shootings, says expert

January 4 2024, by Ian Thomsen



James Alan Fox, the Lipman Family professor of criminology, law and public policy at Northeastern. Credit: Matthew Modoono/Northeastern University

The year 2023 established tragic highs for gun violence, according to

James Alan Fox, a Northeastern professor.

Last year there was a U.S. record of 39 mass shootings with at least four victim fatalities, says Fox, a criminologist who has studied [mass killings](#) for more than four decades.

"We're still talking about a small number of cases," says Fox, the Lipman Family Professor of Criminology, Law, and Public Policy at Northeastern. "The previous record for mass shootings was 36 (set in 2022). So we are talking about the actions of three additional assailants."

Fox says that 10 of those mass shootings were carried out in public settings, which is another American record. These are the kind of incidents that engender tremendous levels of fear, he notes.

The devastating events included the October shootings in Lewiston, Maine, by a 40-year-old man with a semi-automatic rifle. That attack claimed 18 lives and wounded an additional 13 people, making it the 10th-deadliest mass shooting in recorded U.S. history.

About half of all mass shootings occur in private homes, says Fox, most commonly in the form of murder–suicides involving [family members](#). Fox says the escalation of public mass shootings was driven by a variety of factors, including [economic hardship](#) and entrenched political division in the U.S.

"There were three or four more public mass shootings than we've typically had in the past," Fox says. "When they happen, they impact not just the victims and their families—the community and the whole nation are also impacted."

Overall, homicides in the U.S. dropped by an estimated 12% in 2023—a decline that Fox had predicted three years ago when the U.S. was

experiencing a 30% rise in murders amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fox presides over the Associated Press/U.S. TODAY/Northeastern University Mass Killing Database, the longest-running and most extensive data source on the subject. According to the database, there were 42 mass killings in the U.S. in 2023, the second-highest total over the past 18 years.

The database includes every mass killing since 2006 from all weapons in which four or more people, excluding the offender, were killed within a 24-hour time frame. The database also contains dozens of variables on each incident, offender, victim and weapon.

At year's end the [database](#) had recorded 574 mass killings since 2006, claiming 2,989 lives.

Fox says that no mass killing was categorized as a [hate crime](#) in 2023.

"This is not unusual: Hate crimes that result in mass killings average out to just under one a year," Fox says, while adding that a significant number of homicides overall continue to be driven by hate.

In the absence of meaningful change, Fox anticipates the numbers of [mass shootings](#) and killings will remain high in 2024.

"This year will likely be about the same as last year," Fox says. "I don't expect a big jump and I don't expect a big decline."

This story is republished courtesy of Northeastern Global News news.northeastern.edu.

Provided by Northeastern University

Citation: Homicides in US dropped by 12% in 2023, but country set a record for mass shootings, says expert (2024, January 4) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-01-homicides-country-mass-expert.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.