

00;00;19;27 - 00;00;46;18

Stephen Gutowski

All right. Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to another episode of the Weekly Reload Podcast. I'm your host, Stephen Gutowski. I'm also a CNN contributor and the founder of thereload.com, where you can head over and sign up for our free newsletter today. If you want to keep up to date with what's going on with guns in America from a sober, serious perspective that focuses on hard news and analysis, this week we are going to be talking about the lack of good news.

00;00;46;18 - 00;01;05;24

Stephen Gutowski

Another good news episode. We had a new episode last week. The lack of mass shootings, we've seen this year so far. And to do that, we're speaking with professor, James Alan Fox, who is a criminologist with Northeastern University. Welcome back to the show, a professor. Thank you so much for coming on.

00;01;06;00 - 00;01;07;16

James Alan Fox

Thank you. Stephen.

00;01;07;18 - 00;01;15;22

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. And, before we get going, can you just tell people a little bit more about yourself. For anyone who may not have, listen to the previous episode. It's been a little while since we've had you on.

00;01;15;25 - 00;01;46;12

James Alan Fox

I'm sure. Well, I've been at northeastern for 48 years, and over 40 of those years have been studying mass murder, both serial killing and mass shootings and school violence and the like. I managed the Associated Press USA Today Northeastern University mass killing database, which is, a comprehensive database of all incidents where four more people are killed, since 2006.

00;01;46;14 - 00;02;15;29

James Alan Fox

Does it dozens of variables? Written 18 books, including six of them on mass killing, the most recent of which was Extreme Killing Understanding Serial and Mass Murder, which came out a year ago. I also write columns frequently. I know you contacted me because my Washington Post column from a week ago, but I've done over 300 over the years on various topics of violence and murder.

00;02;16;01 - 00;02;39;07

Stephen Gutowski

Yep. So needless to say, you have studied this topic very closely for a very long time. Yes, and written profusely about it and including your most recent Washington Post, column, which I which is sort of the impetus for why I mean, I've been actually look, I was hoping to have, somebody on to talk about this because it is a phenomenon that is not getting a lot of attention, which is something you talk about in your piece.

00;02;39;10 - 00;02;57;18

Stephen Gutowski

You'll be kind of only focused on this topic in the aftermath of a terrible mass shooting. And and when there's been a lull, we don't, you know, it doesn't get as much attention. Similar to what I was talking about last week with the murder rate. You know, that, murder gets talked about a lot when it when it's, getting worse and not so much when it's getting better.

00;02;57;18 - 00;03;24;08

Stephen Gutowski

So, you know, it's it's certainly important to check in on these things, in, regardless of whether it's getting worse or

better. And when they're getting better, it might be a good idea to try and understand why. Right. So to that end, you know, do you have, you know, it's interesting to me when I, when I look at the situation because we're seeing this decline in the murder rate, the, you know, this is your regular.

00:03:24;10 - 00:03:46;16

Stephen Gutowski

This is a terrible way to put it, but but you're you're more, common types of murders are going to be down. At the same time, we're seeing fewer of your mass killings, or at least the sort of mass shootings that garner a lot of attention in media. And so it might be natural to say, well, maybe, maybe they're connected.

00:03:46;16 - 00:03:55;14

Stephen Gutowski

You know, maybe there's there's the one is driving the other or something along those lines. It seems to me from reading your piece, you don't feel that way. Well, what do you think is happening?

00:03:55;16 - 00:04:22;00

James Alan Fox

Well, it's a short term decline, but it is a substantial decline is a substantial decline, following the worst year that we've had in terms of mass shootings, which was, 2023. And when things spike like they did that year, the tendency is to the numbers go back down the following year, I call it criminological gravity. And what goes up must come down.

00:04:22;02 - 00:04:44;06

James Alan Fox

But the thing is that there was not a peep about it in the press. You know, what is the old expression that, no news is good news. It's really good news. No news. And bad news is big news. When we had a couple of years ago, a relatively slight increase in mass shootings, it was a major story.

00:04:44;08 - 00:05:17;24

James Alan Fox

There's a couple of percentage points. Major story, leading all sorts of statements about an epidemic of mass shootings. But what we saw in 2024 over 2023 was a 24% decline in mass shootings, and this year, compared to last year, at the same point in time, another big drop, mass shootings of former people, injured or killed are down this year by a third and mass killings by gunfire, which this time last year were 11.

00:05:17;24 - 00:05:52;22

James Alan Fox

Now they're down to four. So it's a substantial drop, but it's only over 17 months. And I hate to declare, a trend on a relatively short period of time because numbers could bounce back up when you talk about relatively few. But it's still good news, and no one's knows about it because it has not been reported. And I think that's an important issue, is the press really should be paying attention when we see okay, I would say is good news is less bad news.

00:05:52;25 - 00:05:59;23

James Alan Fox

That's important. But because when it goes up slightly this is headlines. When it goes down a lot there's nothing.

00:05:59;25 - 00:06:21;08

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. Yeah it is a, it is a noticeable issue in the industry for sure. And, you know, it may just be, it's a lot of this people blame the media and that's fair. But it also is sort of media consumption. People tend to pay more attention when there's big, flashy bad news than when there's, you know, something bad didn't happen.

00:06:21;14 - 00:06:23;23

Stephen Gutowski

It's not doesn't maybe not get as much attention.

00;06;24;00 - 00;06;46;20

James Alan Fox

Sure. Like, like we every almost every night of the national news, we have stories about, bad weather, hurricanes, tornadoes, storms, when there is going to be bad weather, they don't come on the news, say, hey, there's been no bad weather this today. They don't do that. Of course they're all better. It's bad things, but it's sort of happened is not a report.

00;06;46;22 - 00;07;05;27

Stephen Gutowski

It's sort of also an issue just with human nature of what people want to pay attention to, but I do. I agree with you that it is important to note what these trends and try to understand them, regardless of whether they're good or bad. And, you know, sometimes it's nice to talk about the trend for once, but I would,

00;07;05;29 - 00;07;19;11

James Alan Fox

Will say that I think, you know, 24 over 23, a 24% drop, you would have thought that there'd be some news reporting on that. No, it wasn't.

00;07;19;14 - 00;07;39;17

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. And, you know, we've talked we've gotten into some of the, the, definitions here a little bit. And obviously that's one of the controversies in this, this whole field is. But how how do you define these things? You know, I, the related we tend to look more towards the I guess what it would be the strictest definition is the violence project, which is for more killed.

00;07;39;20 - 00;07;55;28

Stephen Gutowski

But also in a public in an event that's not connected to some other kind of crime, like, like drug related crime. You know, you got there's then there's the most is the, I think the most expansive definition is kind of the one that gets the most attention, which is the Gun Violence Project, which is just for more.

00;07;56;00 - 00;07;56;27

Stephen Gutowski

Know the injured.

00;07;57;02 - 00;07;59;12

James Alan Fox

Yeah, right. The gun violence archive.

00;07;59;15 - 00;08;20;11

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. Sorry. That's okay. We've talked to them as well on the show before, but but, you know, that's the more that's going to get you a lot more incidents caught in that, definition. Certainly. And, but you guys, the, with the database that you ran with the Associated Press in the USA today, you kind of take a more holistic approach.

00;08;20;11 - 00;08;30;07

Stephen Gutowski

You know, you kind of try to include a lot of different definitions that people can go through on their own. What, can you just explain, your approach to that?

00;08;30;09 - 00;09;13;09

James Alan Fox

Well, we use first of all, we use the traditional threshold, which is four or more people. I do know that, for example, that

mother Jones switched from 4 to 3, when Congress passed a law, back in 2013 that that arbitrary really said, well, mass shootings are three people are more killed. So they switched. Unfortunately, they didn't they didn't go back and fill in the cases of three people killed in their earlier data, which has led a number of analysts to claim a big surge using their data, when in fact it was just because you.

00;09;13;16 - 00;09;38;28

James Alan Fox

Why are you below the threshold? The numbers go up. So we use the for more. Till now, as far as as the issue of killing versus injuring death is different. I mean, I sure injuries can be debilitating. They often are, but they can also be minor. So the whole range of what is an injury, but there's not a range of deaths.

00;09;39;00 - 00;10;13;09

James Alan Fox

So we've used the this definition of former people killed goes back decades to the 80s. When I started using it, when the FBI were using it, it was only happened in 2013 when the Gun Violence Archive and National Tracker, they basically said, well, there's nothing in the term mass shootings that says people have to die. So, you know, I, I, I respect and use the gun violence archive data.

00;10;13;11 - 00;10;37;13

James Alan Fox

And it gets a lot of press, as you say, because, you know, big numbers seem more important. And when you have over 600 in a year, you know, almost to a day that's a headline grabber. The problem is there if I make is that sometimes people get confused between a mass killing, lots of deaths and a mass shooting where no, no deaths.

00;10;37;13 - 00;11;04;11

James Alan Fox

In fact, half of the gun violence archive cases have no deaths and three quarters have either 0 or 1. The problem is, when you have a big let's say, for example, the massive shooting in Maine, in two, 13, 18 people killed. Newspapers would report in the you know, along with that is sidebar information, our context that there'd been hundreds of mass shootings.

00;11;04;14 - 00;11;16;02

James Alan Fox

Well, those are like the one that happened in Maine. It's like great mixing up grapefruits and grapes, and that confuses people.

00;11;16;04 - 00;11;34;25

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. I mean, that's always been my critique of it. That's why I've always preferred the Violence Project count. I mean, it's not perfect either, because sometimes you'll get incidents where, you know, three people are killed in a very similar situation to, one where four people are killed, but it doesn't make it into the tracker. And also it focuses exclusively on shootings, right?

00;11;34;25 - 00;11;55;10

Stephen Gutowski

Where they're, you know, we're talking about this so far, and there haven't been any mass shootings that qualify for the violence project, and there haven't been any what you, would term public mass shootings, or but there has been a mass public mass killing this year. Right. And it's in your tracker because you guys go beyond just shootings.

00;11;55;10 - 00;11;59;03

Stephen Gutowski

And, that would be the New Orleans, attack being the year.

00;11;59;05 - 00;12;34;29

James Alan Fox

19% of mass killing, then of all guns as a primary weapon. New Orleans is the example. Another example with the mass stabbing of the students for students at the University of Idaho, because that gets a lot of publicity come to, you know, coeds and students and so forth. But that's the only database that has that case is ours because we don't we say, you know, if if people are killed by strangulation, stabbing, rent, truck ramming, they're just as dead.

00;12;35;01 - 00;13;03;26

James Alan Fox

And sometimes they even suffer more painful, deaths than a shooting. So why don't those count? They do count. Obviously. If you use our database, you can separate the shootings from that. I should, if you wish. But those people are just as dead. And I will say that I understand the violence projects, focus on public, because those are the ones that scare people.

00;13;03;28 - 00;13;37;01

James Alan Fox

Because they can happen at any time, at any place, to anyone without warning. Whereas 45% of mass killings and mass shootings are within the family in a private residence. Those don't scare people cause they say, well, that's not my family, and they don't tend to get the same level of publicity either, but they're just as dead. So in our way of thinking, if four people died in as homicides, that matters.

00;13;37;03 - 00;13;49;07

James Alan Fox

Now there are cases where four people are dead, and. But it's a murder suicide. Three victims killed, perpetrated, commit suicide. We don't include that.

00;13;49;09 - 00;14;03;11

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. And I guess, well, first off, just, so people are aware that your tracker has at least five of those so far this year. Four and that. And like you said, that ends up being nearly half of of, mass.

00;14;03;16 - 00;14;19;02

James Alan Fox

Killings, I'll say, for this year, the gun violence archive includes a fifth that happened recently, but by appearances and I've talked to the police, there is not really mass shooting. It's probably, a murder suicide.

00;14;19;05 - 00;14;20;26

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah, but. And one of them was we.

00;14;20;26 - 00;14;21;25

James Alan Fox

Weren't included until it.

00;14;21;29 - 00;14;48;01

Stephen Gutowski

We know one in your count as a stabbing as well. So, you know, so it's not like there's mass violence has disappeared. It's just, you know, it's certainly the kind that we tend to focus on, a lot, in America have we haven't seen as many of those. Right. And it is interesting under system to have these conversations because it's like, well, what, you know, why do you draw the line in a certain, spot?

00;14;48;06 - 00;15;07;19

Stephen Gutowski

Right. And then why, you know what? What does it look like when you count things in different ways? And, one thing I will say, though, this year is clearly all of these counts have gone down right. The gun violence archives count is also down. It's much higher than the other counts, but it's still down from what it had.

00;15;07;19 - 00;15;10;01

James Alan Fox

By its third. Yeah. So.

00;15;10;04 - 00;15;11;00

Stephen Gutowski

So there's one.

00;15;11;05 - 00;15;14;25

James Alan Fox

Hundred and 70 last year to 150 this year.

00;15;14;27 - 00;15;36;29

Stephen Gutowski

So, you know, it seems to be a trend that's captured by all of these, these counts, regardless of which one you look at. You know, one violence projects at zero. You know, you guys are a little higher than that. And then, gun violence archives higher than that. Mother Jones, mother Jones does the three or more, but they also filter out incidents that aren't in public.

00;15;36;29 - 00;15;40;08

Stephen Gutowski

And, and that don't have anything to do with crime.

00;15;40;08 - 00;16;06;23

James Alan Fox

So there have been no public mass killings this year. And last year there were three. Yeah. As opposed to 10 in 2023, which is the most ever the average number of public mass killings by gunfire, the ones that the violence Project focused. So and we have that classification. Two. We averaged about six a year. Now people talking about the increase.

00;16;06;23 - 00;16;28;12

James Alan Fox

Well if you go back decades, we had about two a year and now we averaged about six a year a triple. Yeah. But it's from 2 to 6. And by the way some of that increase it because the population increased by 50% over that period of time. So it's not an epidemic. I mean that term is used so loosely.

00;16;28;15 - 00;16;55;15

James Alan Fox

And let me make this point porque so several years ago I did a podcast for another organization. And it was all about mass shootings. And, and the host tweeted out, that James L Fox expert on mass shootings, says there's no evidence of an epidemic. Well, that was retweeted by then. The 45th president, Donald Trump was president.

00;16;55;15 - 00;17;28;00

James Alan Fox

Then he retweeted it, which increased my number of followers by about thousands. But that maybe you were tweeting because it meant. Well, we don't have to do anything about guns because it's not epidemic. Well, that's wasn't my point. Even though it's not an epidemic, it's still a problem. People are still dying. So, I don't want people to oftentimes misread when I say an epic, not epidemic by saying we shouldn't or we should worry about it.

00;17;28;02 - 00;17;46;00

James Alan Fox

Yes, we should worry about it, because we still have many more than our share. You know, our research has shown that, you know, I say the population has about 4% of the world population, and we have approximately 20% of mass shootings. So. Right.

00;17;46;03 - 00;18;07;29

Stephen Gutowski

Right. It's not to say that there's no problem that people shouldn't work to try and solve this issue. Right. It's just about properly explaining it to people what's actually happening because. Yeah. And, and I, you know, this has been my critique of a lot of, you know, the gun violence archive. I and I don't I don't think counting those incidents is a problem.

00;18;07;29 - 00;18;36;01

Stephen Gutowski

I think the way that it gets talked about can be problematic because like as you said, you're conflating something like parkland or, Maine with what, you know, with, gang shootings that occur. And then, it doesn't mean that gang shootings where people get injured are unacceptable or. Okay, but they're very different problems. Right? Right. The same thing for, you know, family size for someone who murders their family, it's a obviously a horrendous issue.

00;18;36;04 - 00;18;43;19

Stephen Gutowski

But it's a different problem. Maybe related problems, but different from somebody who goes out in public and kills people and.

00;18;43;21 - 00;19;08;11

James Alan Fox

The probably the and this is not their fault, but the problem with the numbers in the gun violence archive is it takes some work to figure out what percentage of those cases were gang related, or are family massacres. You have to download the data, you have to do all sorts of searches. And all right, here, with ours, we there are three data.

00;19;08;18 - 00;19;30;04

James Alan Fox

We have three websites. Basically the AP has a website. USA today has a website and the Washington Post also, which is adopted. Our data also is a website. It's very easy. For example, there's a you can filter the data with a single click on these websites to look at. If you only want to look at public, you choose public and it'll show you the map.

00;19;30;04 - 00;19;46;02

James Alan Fox

I'll show you. I show you the the trend lines, all sorts of stuff. You will if you want to look at family related, just click that. So we've made it very easy to distinguish the different types of mass killings, right?

00;19;46;04 - 00;20;11;21

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. Which, I think makes it easier to have a better understanding of what's going on. And, and, which, which is key to informing people, about the entire situation. So, you know, we are seeing this decline now. It seems, just as there wasn't necessarily an epidemic where, you know, this is accelerating at, you know, an unprecedented pace.

00;20;11;24 - 00;20;20;20

Stephen Gutowski

You know, sounds like you aren't convinced that we are necessarily seeing, a lasting decline here. We may have you.

00;20;20;23 - 00;20;34;02

James Alan Fox

We may. It's just. Okay. You know, it's just I. I have a degree in statistics beside my criminology degree, and. Right. I'm just very wary of declaring a trend on a relatively short period of time.

00;20;34;05 - 00;20;34;21

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah.

00;20;34;23 - 00;21;02;27

James Alan Fox

You know, this happened back in the 90s when John, do you and I independently talked about the youth homicide problem, and I, you know, he used the word super predator, which I never liked. I talked about, the calm before the crime storm and did. And I work with the white House and the Him department and Janet Reno and produced forecasts of what would happen if trends and trends continue.

00;21;02;27 - 00;21;26;18

James Alan Fox

Well, they didn't continue. So as soon as though it was dry on the report to the attorney General, things started turning around. Now, I don't apologize for that, do you? Little has I don't apologize. I think people did something about it. I'm not the so did the right thing. I was always pushing for prevention programs and and Congress in there.

00;21;26;20 - 00;21;34;11

James Alan Fox

I think lack of wisdoms pushed to for prison construction and trying as an adult. But still the numbers did go down.

00;21;34;14 - 00;21;40;05

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. And so, you know, you're not convinced yet that this is.

00;21;40;11 - 00;21;40;16

James Alan Fox

I'm.

00;21;40;16 - 00;21;54;07

Stephen Gutowski

Hopeful a sustainable trend, a trend or something that we can look at and say things have turned a corner here. It's just that we're still in the early stages of this. Yes. And there's no saying that it's going to continue on this path.

00;21;54;10 - 00;21;58;28

James Alan Fox

We don't know. But, I am hopeful. But the facts are what.

00;21;58;28 - 00;22;01;07

Stephen Gutowski

Makes you hopeful, I guess, would be the next question.

00;22;01;07 - 00;22;28;07

James Alan Fox

Well, 24 and 24 were basically brought. Think back to where they were after 2023. And the fact that it's continuing this year through almost five months is a very good sign that maybe just wasn't have a one year aberration. But I worry about it being a two year aberration. So let's, let's, you know, not to not declare victory yet.

00;22;28;08 - 00;22;56;18

James Alan Fox

And. Yeah, but certainly fewer people are dying, fewer people being shot. And that's excellent news. And take a turn for a moment for some. Sure. The other area, which is so much misunderstanding is school shootings. What is the school shooting? How, you know, the K through 12, school shootings database? That's about 350 school shootings a year.

00;22;56;20 - 00;23;45;28

James Alan Fox

And I broken all those numbers down, and it's 9% of them occurred in school, 91% concurred at school meeting on the



on the school grounds and oftentimes at 11 at night weekends, summer not involving students at all. So I think it's important to make that to understand what is a school shooting by that database. And the and the, mother, the, every time for gun safety also has a database where you also look at the same thing that when you whittle, take the numbers and whittle it down, you find that the vast majority of shootings on school property are the property, not in the school.

00;23;46;01 - 00;24;16;14

James Alan Fox

The reason why this is important is so these numbers tend to fuel efforts to to, have more and more active shooter drills in schools. Is armed guard surveillance systems locking classroom doors. The thing is that those strategies are not relevant for the overwhelming majority of our schools. So the school shootings, because they're not in the school, right.

00;24;16;17 - 00;24;25;23

James Alan Fox

So I think that's another area where there's lots of misunderstanding and hand-wringing and, and poor responses.

00;24;25;25 - 00;24;49;01

Stephen Gutowski

There's because a fear. Yeah, I think it's a I think it's an even more difficult situation with school shootings because, you know, there's an even less agreed upon definition. It's just kind of a shooting that occurs at a school can be a school shooting. Right. That unlike when you look at mass murder and there's some, you know, background from the FBI or from DOJ on what should constitute a mass murder.

00;24;49;03 - 00;25;09;23

Stephen Gutowski

There really isn't anything like that for school shootings. You can just kind of call any shooting that happens on a school shooting. But obviously most people are not thinking, right. You know, an accidental discharge from a, even from an SRO, a school resource officer as a school shooting, even though it is a technically a shooting that happened at the school most people are thinking of, you know, something like parkland.

00;25;09;23 - 00;25;19;18

Stephen Gutowski

I mean, when you talk about a school shooting or, you know, even the less devastating, well, you know, one that affects fewer, it kills fewer people would still be considered a school shooting. But, you know.

00;25;19;18 - 00;25;56;08

James Alan Fox

The FBI active shooter database, the average number of active shooters in school is two a year, and that's out of 130,000 schools. And by the average number of students who are killed in school a year is five five students on average is two. Yeah. Obviously, when in 2018 you had Parkland and Santa Fe and of course, 2012 we had Sandy hook and, and 2023 we had, Uvalde.

00;25;56;10 - 00;26;15;03

James Alan Fox

The numbers spike, but the average is five and that's out of 50 million school children, which basically says that the likelihood that your students are going to get killed in school by an armed assailant is 1 in 10,000,000. Now, again, I want to minimize. And one is one too many.

00;26;15;06 - 00;26;15;26

Stephen Gutowski

Certainly.

00;26;15;28 - 00;26;32;18

James Alan Fox

But compare it to the fact that there are hundreds and hundreds of, school age children who who drown in pools every

year. What we really need is more lifeguards at pools. Not maybe not armed guards at schools.

00;26;32;21 - 00;26;57;02

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. And it does you know that this sort of focus on, on these things and misunderstanding about them, drives people to be much more concerned than might make sense from this, you know, and reading the statistics and, and it's understandable why. Right. I mean people are going to be worried about their children. And, you know, it can happen at any school, but it's extremely rare.

00;26;57;04 - 00;27;20;27

Stephen Gutowski

Just the same for mass shootings on, you know, in practice that can happen anywhere. And so that's very scary. But they are extremely rare. And, you know, in reality, not as rare as we want them to be. Certainly. And hopefully we'll see fewer of them if this trend continues. But but yeah, I mean, it's it's all about trying to give people a full understanding of what's, what's actually happening out there.

00;27;20;29 - 00;27;32;05

Stephen Gutowski

So as you know, so they can have a, a proper estimation of what the risk actually is and these things because schools in reality are some of the safest places for children to be. Right?

00;27;32;07 - 00;27;47;04

James Alan Fox

They absolutely they're, they're they're more at risk in the after school hours when parents are at home and they're out at the mall, the playground bad things tend to happen there. While they're in school, they have supervision and structure.

00;27;47;06 - 00;27;53;09

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. Of course, those are much more, you know, pools and playgrounds are much more mundane risks there.

00;27;53;09 - 00;27;53;24

James Alan Fox

Yeah.

00;27;53;27 - 00;27;59;03

Stephen Gutowski

You know, it's nice. You know, you can. Children die more frequently in those locations.

00;27;59;03 - 00;28;05;29

James Alan Fox

But because to the parents, it doesn't matter where the opportunity grounds are shot right to the community, it does.

00;28;06;02 - 00;28;06;15

Stephen Gutowski

Its.

00;28;06;17 - 00;28;27;18

James Alan Fox

Impact on the community over the nation. When there's a shooting at a school, you know, and of course, we had the, the, one in Georgia last year, where four students were killed. That has a devastating impact if kids drown. Doesn't have the same impact on the psyche of Americans.

00;28;27;20 - 00;28;54;18

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah, it's. And I think the rarity of it is part of that. You know, it's it's, not as common of a thing to hear about. And, and, you know, still preventable. And so, you know, people, people focus a lot more on, on those recent and more gruesome as well. Obviously, you know, it's a horrible scene, a school shooting and a pool drowning.

00;28;54;18 - 00;29;28;00

Stephen Gutowski

But, yeah, you know, to to get off a little bit of this morbid streak here. What what do you see? Anything, any initiatives that have happened over the last couple of years that you think are maybe contributing to is there evidence that we've seen in the data that that suggests some of these efforts we've put in place, you know, across the political spectrum, whether it's red flag laws or, you know, higher security or loosening concealed carry, restrictions, those sorts of efforts that we've seen.

00;29;28;02 - 00;29;32;29

Stephen Gutowski

Is there evidence that any of those are contributing to this or, you know, mental health, funding that that kind of thing?

00;29;33;02 - 00;29;59;20

James Alan Fox

Well, our, you know, my colleagues and I have done, have done research on public mass shootings, state by state, looking at various state laws. We looked at about 11 different laws and see what what is related to the rates of mass shootings state by state, because most state, most gun laws are state level. And we did find two that actually have a significant effect.

00;29;59;22 - 00;30;30;16

James Alan Fox

One is states that have permits to purchase requirements, which of course is a much more detailed background check then the NICs system. The federal system. And and in permit purchases, a state like Massachusetts, you know, even things that don't result in the conviction or even arrest may be a red flag for saying no. You know, you know, you're not a good, person for a, permit.

00;30;30;18 - 00;31;19;14

James Alan Fox

States that have permitted purchase laws have significantly lower rate of mass shootings. And the states that have bans on large capacity magazines is my 11 states that do. Those states have significantly fewer casual these deaths and injuries when there is a mass shooting. So there are things that have shown to work now red flag laws. The curious thing there is that every red flag law that exists in this country has been motivated in the wake of, homicide, typically mass killings, mass shootings, and, you know, most of them actually were implemented after after parkland.

00;31;19;16 - 00;31;43;10

James Alan Fox

The research that's been done that shows the impact of red flag laws has been on suicide, but research based looked at suicide rates before and after is one of the red flag laws. And some people so say they work. Yeah, they do work for suicide. We don't know if they work for homicide. It's a very different kind of thing.

00;31;43;13 - 00;32;12;07

James Alan Fox

And I always worry if you're not if we these laws are implemented with the proper level of, protections, and rights to those who are the focus. So the red flag law, you have people homicidal if you take that gun away or attempt to take their gun away. There are other weapons in the house. So I just I just have to understand that suicide, homicide are different.

00;32;12;09 - 00;32;23;19

James Alan Fox

So I'm hopeful that these expand and red flag laws will have an effect on homicides and mass shootings in particular.

We just don't know yet.

00;32;23;21 - 00;32;38;20

Stephen Gutowski

So for you, the answer is permits purchase laws and, and magazine limits. Yes. It was limited. Did you guys, to answer that because that's one of the you know, it varies significantly state to state.

00;32;38;22 - 00;32;51;06

James Alan Fox

Yeah. Well it was just with states that do just that. This was usually ten is sort of the typical. But any state that did limit the size of the magazine. Well, did you.

00;32;51;12 - 00;33;05;26

Stephen Gutowski

Were you able to were able to look at the mass shootings in particular to see if the perpetrators had used smaller magazines, or was this just, you know, more of a broad level review of that?

00;33;05;28 - 00;33;22;25

James Alan Fox

Well, we had we had the rates. Yeah. So we did obviously we have four or more where the with the, with the number of killed. Right. And if the state had one or didn't have one, that was the, the independent variable in that case.

00;33;22;27 - 00;33;38;24

Stephen Gutowski

Okay. So it wasn't, it wasn't we weren't able to go in and look at the actual individual incidents to see if they were these different sized magazines or were what have you. Right. Is that what is the theory there? I guess that they have to stop to reload more on this.

00;33;38;24 - 00;33;55;07

James Alan Fox

Is this the requirement to reload, which is it creates a pause, even though it may be a short pause, it's still a pause and giving up ability for people to escape or or, attack the perpetrator themselves.

00;33;55;09 - 00;34;04;12

Stephen Gutowski

Interesting. And you think the permit to purchase one, you mentioned, the idea that it's a more rigorous process to get a firearm or that, I suppose.

00;34;04;14 - 00;34;38;16

James Alan Fox

In my state, Massachusetts, where to get a permit, you have to basically apply to the local police department. Now, the local police department would know if it but lots of of calls for domestic violence concerns of that household, for example. That that wouldn't necessarily disqualify someone federally, you know, if there'd been no arrest. Right. But the police will know that that that person there, we don't trust them with a gun so they wouldn't give the permit.

00;34;38;18 - 00;34;56;25

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. I mean, obviously that raises the same sort of concerns that, you mentioned with the red flag issue of people, you know, people's rights and the idea that they could use a weapon. But. Okay. All right. Well, you know, we have I don't want to, I, we don't need to totally litigate these things in there, you know?

00;34;56;28 - 00;35;21;11

Stephen Gutowski

But, you know, there's some certainly obviously, there's a lot of, disagreement over what works and what doesn't work. I

have, I have seen I think Rand, had, similar findings, maybe citing some of your work. I think, actually, but, you know, is there anything else beyond gun control measures that you see as, potentially helpful to reduce some.

00:35;21;13 - 00:35;29;19

James Alan Fox

Somebody's mental illness, most mass shootings, by the way? Not mental health. They're not happy, obviously.

00:35;29;22 - 00:35;33;19

Stephen Gutowski

But they're going through like a mental health spiral is is what they may.

00:35;33;21 - 00:35;33;28

James Alan Fox

Yeah.

00:35;34;03 - 00:35;36;19

Stephen Gutowski

They project. That's one of the main things they talk about.

00:35;36;24 - 00:36;00;24

James Alan Fox

They see themselves as the victims of injustice. They see themselves as a good guy trying to get even with the people they blame for their problems. And, you know, I recall very vividly back after Sandy hook, when Barack Obama went to Hartford, he gave a speech and said, we need to do something about the mentally ill before it's too late.

00:36;00;27 - 00:36;24;17

James Alan Fox

Now, why is it so we're so concerned about the well-being of the mentally ill, or are we concerned about the well-being of the people? They may shoot? I think it's a latter, which really by focusing on my by this idea that mass shooters and mental illness the same thing conflating the two intensifies the stigma associated being mentally ill.

00:36;24;19 - 00:36;53;25

James Alan Fox

But most mass shooters are not, it takes a certain degree of clear headed it to carry out that kind of bloodbath. And so people who are severely mentally ill just aren't capable that kind of planning and execution. So for example, the Columbia University database, the percentage of mass shooters who are mentally ill, the seriously mentally ill, I can't remember exact numbers.

00:36;53;25 - 00:36;58;03

James Alan Fox

Around 13%, relatively rare.

00:36;58;05 - 00:37;15;25

Stephen Gutowski

Right? Most. It's usually more of a mental health crisis where somebody is spiraling. And, and there's, you know, the violence project talks at least a lot about the idea of off ramping. And so maybe mental health services can help somebody even if they're not, you know, they're not like diagnosable mentally ill. And so but.

00:37;15;25 - 00:37;53;09

James Alan Fox

We have to be careful. The vast project database. And I've looked at all the cases, I was involved as recruiting is the was in the lawsuit following the the Sutherland Springs shooting in Texas and there the the plaintiffs were citing the the the gun violence, the vast project numbers of 30 some 1% being mentally ill. I looked at all those cases, and unfortunately, a lot of the cases were there wasn't a diagnosis, it wasn't the officials, just neighbors said, oh yeah, the guy was nuts,

right?

00:37:53;13 - 00:38:19;04

James Alan Fox

Or sometimes, things like with, abuse, as if they, the abuse was, guy, had a shopping mall yelling at his wife. So he had to be really careful about not, about. Yeah. Qualify. What do we mean by mental illness? Somebody who's who's depressed, who lost their job. That's a mental illness. It just upset.

00:38:19;04 - 00:38:25;17

James Alan Fox

They're angry and unhappy and they feel hopeless. Yeah. No.

00:38:25;19 - 00:38:30;04

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. There's a difference between serious mental illness and a mental health crisis.

00:38:30;07 - 00:39:00;22

James Alan Fox

Yeah. Do I believe that that, we should do something about improving access to mental health services? Yes. Problems. We don't. Congress doesn't talk about that. Except we've had a mass shooting. And that goes back to that. The stigma associated with being mentally ill. Oh, yeah. Likely mass killer. We we should improve services, mental health services, because there are millions of Americans who could benefit.

00:39:00;24 - 00:39:28;08

James Alan Fox

It would prevent mass shootings. Well, I'm not so sure, because the thing about mass shooters, they don't think there's anything wrong with it. They think the problem is everybody else. Wife doesn't understand them. The wife kicked him out of the house, though. The boss didn't give him the right kind of assignments or raises. Then, okay. If you say, well, we hear you go to this counselor and say, hell no, I don't need a counselor.

00:39:28;16 - 00:39:55;06

James Alan Fox

Maybe you need a counselor, not me. The kind of treatment they want is fair treatment, not psychological kind. So it sounds great. Let's, said better mental health service. And we should. But I don't expect that's going to make take a major bite out of mass shootings. It might it will affect some. Prevent some. Absolutely. And we should have it.

00:39:55;08 - 00:40:01;27

James Alan Fox

But that's not the reason we should have it. The reason we should have it because lots of Americans can benefit sir.

00:40:01;28 - 00:40:22;01

Stephen Gutowski

Fair point. All right. Well look, we appreciate you, joining us here at The Reload again, to give us your insight on this, especially talk about what has been, you know, a good like, I think you said, like seven, 18 months, something like that so far. Hopefully this trend will continue and we can have you back on to discuss this further.

00:40:22;01 - 00:40:28;10

Stephen Gutowski

More, you know, more good news, maybe, but focus more on the explanation for why it might be happening next time.

00:40:28;17 - 00:40:41;04

James Alan Fox

Maybe, maybe in the year. Let's see what happens by the end of 2045. Yeah. It will be lower. I don't see a big spike coming. But it would be nice to have two years of full two years of data.

00;40;41;07 - 00;40;46;19

Stephen Gutowski

That would be. It would be so, yeah, maybe we'll have to have you back on either way. Just to see what what what exactly happened?

00;40;46;19 - 00;41;13;19

James Alan Fox

Okay, I would say one more thing about the media. Yeah. It's really unfortunate that the media will often conflate the mass shooting. The mass shootings that have no fatalities are maybe one with the ones that lots of people die. A great example is a couple years ago, The York Times did an article with the headline. It was a may of the of, a couple of years ago.

00;41;13;19 - 00;41;42;13

James Alan Fox

It which you hear about top my head there they said as a part the headline was a partial list of mass shootings thus far this year, and there were 13 on the list. Every one of those 13 was a mass killing with at least four dead. They were all the mass killings that so far that year. And then the article says there are many more that are on that list.

00;41;42;16 - 00;42;02;14

James Alan Fox

The many more were like that. And that's but they didn't say that. They didn't say it was many more with fewer than four killed. They didn't say that. They just let the reader misunderstand. Think all of these 13? Oh, that was a terrible as many more can't name them because those are the only 13 mass killings.

00;42;02;16 - 00;42;31;10

Stephen Gutowski

I think that's a serious problem in the extreme. You know, the because the ones that get coverage right are the mass killings. Yes. As you describe these public mass killings and specifically public mass killings, not the family side. That does not get as nearly as much attention, certainly not at national level. Public mass killings do. And then one went off very commonly when covering the public mass killings, they will bring up most, most of the time the gun violence archive number, which is in the hundreds.

00;42;31;10 - 00;42;57;08

Stephen Gutowski

And then the implication will be this happens under times, but they don't cover the other ones. Because they don't happen is because the, the, the reality is that the public mass killings aren't as frequent as the other kinds of shootings, and they aren't as interesting to audiences. I guess they're not as shocking, right? They may be bad and a serious problem in the country, but but they don't go to the same attention.

00;42;57;08 - 00;43;09;09

Stephen Gutowski

And and I think it is misleading for exactly the reasons you laid out. It gives people the impression that something like Parkland or Las Vegas happens all the time, right? Hundreds of times a year. And it's not true.

00;43;09;12 - 00;43;10;07

James Alan Fox

Right.

00;43;10;10 - 00;43;13;17

Stephen Gutowski

I agree. Yeah. So anyway, we appreciate you coming up.

00;43;13;17 - 00;43;21;19

James Alan Fox

We know we don't see the public that's more of critical of the news that they read or watch. Yes I, I don't think people are.

00:43:21;21 - 00:43:42;09

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah I mean it is somewhat like I said, there's a reason that news media covers things this way. And it's not just because they may be misinformed or whatever, or they don't want to cover good news. It's often that people don't pay attention to the news, right? It's that's that's reality. But what what gets covered in part is might be driven by what's get what gets attention.

00:43:42;12 - 00:44:06;19

James Alan Fox

But I will say, you know, several years ago, the gun violence archive, when they reported the number of fatalities, they included the perpetrator with the number. And I saw lots of news stories that would that haven't had the number of victims wrong because they misunderstood that the person who commits suicide is not a victim. Fortunately they changed age.

00:44:06;20 - 00:44:33;10

James Alan Fox

They then made a a revision where they separated out, and with the school shootings, I did a piece years ago when every time for gun safety had the term, school shootings and they included shootings that weren't in the school, but on the school property. Fortunately, they changed and they renamed it, killings, US shootings on school property or school grounds.

00:44:33;12 - 00:44:59;14

James Alan Fox

Right. So I think it's very important that language is very important in how this is reported. So it's not to confuse the public. Yes. And that's why we have this pop. You know, surveys show that the, level of fear is that's where the epidemic is. Yeah. As many as, I mean, it. There's 30% of people say they avoid certain places because they're afraid of being gunned down in a mass shooting.

00:44:59;17 - 00:45:22;12

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. And parents, often when you ask them their expectation for a that there will be a shooting at their, their child's school. Yeah. The numbers are very high when in reality as you as you mentioned earlier, the the incidents are exceedingly rare, as bad as they are. Again, you know, it goes back to your point. It is the point here is not that there's no problem.

00:45:22;14 - 00:45:43;26

Stephen Gutowski

The point is to make sure people will have a correct understanding of the problem and that are different problems. Right? These aren't all the same issue, but. Oh, look, I appreciate you coming on. I know I took up, I think, more time than we were supposed to go. So I appreciate you giving us, this much of your, your time, but, for people who want to follow your writing, maybe pick up your book here.

00:45:43;29 - 00:45:45;09

Stephen Gutowski

Where can they do that?

00:45:45;11 - 00:46:07;28

James Alan Fox

Well, of course, Amazon has all the books. Or my better. You have my my website. James.allen@fox.com is James Allen. And f o x.com. You'll find all my columns there. You'll find links to books. You'll also find videos of my



presentations. So wonderful.

00:46:08:01 - 00:46:23:23

Stephen Gutowski

That's a great resource for people who want to keep up to date with what's going on with you. Thanks again for coming on to. We'll have to have you on in the future to, to, you know, to figure out where these trends head in in the long run. But, that's all we've got for you guys this week.

00:46:23:23 - 00:46:25:27

Stephen Gutowski

We will see you all again real soon.