

Gun-free Zones

There is a huge debate as to what should be considered a “gun-free” zone and whether or not they are really effective. Gun-free zones are designated areas where the use or possession of firearms is a crime. They are intended to reduce violent crime, suicides, unintentional firearm injuries and deaths, and mass shootings in specific locations. Certain public spaces, like courthouses and schools, are designated as gun-free zones. Federally, there are several locations that ban the carrying of firearms, even with a permit. These include any building or land owned, leased, or rented by the federal government such as national cemeteries, military bases, federal prisons, and post offices. In theory, gun-free zones reduce or eliminate the presence of guns in these areas, thereby eliminating the risk of unintentional firearm injuries due to recklessness, escalatory conflicts, or criminal activity.

The recent focus in this debate has been “mass shootings” and the need to increase areas that are “gun-free.” In order to examine this debate with unbiased facts, you first must define the term “mass shooting.”

The FBI’s definition of a “mass shooting” is one that involves four or more deaths, excluding the shooter. This is much different than what the average person considers as a mass shooting. For most the term mass shooting is shootings that occur in public spaces like schools, malls, or bars. Interpretation of the term in these two vastly different ways results in two vastly different sets of facts that contradict each other. To sum it up, the answer isn’t as straightforward as one might think. It’s hard to make sweeping statements about gun-free zones until we can universally come to a consensus on what determines a mass shooting.

In clarifying the term “mass shooting,” I believe we should consider the shooter’s intent or motivation behind the shooting. I divide the mass shootings into two distinct categories: rampage mass shootings and domestic mass shootings.

First let’s discuss **Domestic Mass Shootings**. These shootings occur as a result of gang violence, drugs, armed robbery, employee disputes, or domestic violence. In the FBI’s database this type of shooting accounts for over 90% of the mass shootings. The majority of gunmen in domestic mass shootings target places with which they had a personal connection and in over 80% percent of the cases, the attacker had a relationship to his/her victims. Many of these shootings happen in private homes.

Rampage Mass Shootings, on the other hand, are more likely to happen in densely populated spaces, such as schools, places of worship, workplaces, and shopping centers - many of which happen to be gun-free zones. These are the type of mass shootings that target innocent bystanders and that the average citizen worried about the most. Typically, a mass shooter’s intent

is to inflict the largest amount of damage in the shortest amount of time with the least amount of security and not to “get away” with heinous acts of crime, but to instill fear, feel powerful, and be seen. These types of crimes are highly publicized. In many rampage mass shootings, the shooter “stages” the attack with a gun visible for up to 30 minutes - often caught on security cameras. Hiding from people or cameras is not a typical concern. Remember this is their attempt at fame or notoriety. For the large part, mass rampage shooters choose gun-free zones because they are easy targets where they can do maximum damage in the least amount of time.

With the rise in high-profile rampage mass shootings in recent years, people are beginning to question whether gun-free zones actually increase safety. As organizational leaders work toward making our communities safer, it’s natural to assess what’s working and what isn’t working.

What we do know is that individuals bent on committing murder and mayhem are deterred by conditions that make it difficult for them to freely move, and by the presence of individuals or technology that will suddenly stop them.

Rather than focusing on the efficacy of gun-free zones, leaders should be looking toward new, innovative solutions that actually deter shooters and help prevent mass shootings from happening. We need to act now to protect our people.

Public places, schools, office buildings, and houses of worship have a duty to provide a safe environment to the extent they are able. No matter what side of the gun-free zone argument you side with, we all know that simply putting up gun-free signs is not sufficient.

For me there are a minimum of two conditions that have to be met before an area or place can be declared a gun-free zone:

1. It must have limited and controlled access such as a reduced number of entrances and metal detectors in place at those entrances, and
2. The area must be manned, patrolled, and equipped adequately to provide comprehensive security for the protection of the expected number of people.

Target-hardening your physical spaces is a must for a declared gun free zone. This may mean something quite different for different locations, but in general, it means not having easy hiding places outside or inside your location, keeping all entrance and exit points locked or monitored, and having well-positioned security and/or camera system.

The best way to do that is by implementing a multi-layered security system that considers physical security measures, innovative technologies, and proactive means. Visual gun detection technology driven by artificial intelligence software that immediately detects visible firearms and instantly informs onsite security and local first responders is one system. Having security

personnel on-site helps ensure that you can act quickly should a potential threat occur is another system.

Other ways to target-harden your location can be determined by doing a safety assessment with the help of local law enforcement.

No matter what a person's beliefs are, the one thing that everyone can agree on is that senseless mass shootings of any kind need to end. People should feel safe when they leave their homes and, sadly, that isn't the case today.

America! What a great place to live.

Thanks, Semper Fi, and Stay Safe!

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