



The Importance of Analyzing Public Mass Shooters Separately from Other Attackers When Estimating the Prevalence of Their Behavior Worldwide

Adam Lankford¹

[LINK TO ABSTRACT](#)

Public mass shootings have traumatized Americans for more than fifty years. Notable examples include the 1966 University of Texas tower shooting, the 1984 San Ysidro McDonald's shooting, the 1986 Edmond post office shooting, and the 1991 Luby's Cafeteria shooting. Other horrific incidents include Columbine in 1999, Virginia Tech in 2007, the Aurora movie theater shooting in 2012, and the Sandy Hook shooting that same year. More recent tragedies include the mass shootings at a concert in Las Vegas in 2017, at a high school in Parkland, Florida in 2018, and at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas in 2019.

Over the same period, similar incidents seem to have been extremely rare in other countries, and many Americans have demanded to know why. I was also curious to find out, so several years ago I conducted a cross-national study of public mass shooters (Lankford 2016). The goal was simple: to measure how often public mass shooters attack in different countries, and identify variables that help explain why some countries have more than others.

To make the study's focus clear, I cited the Department of Homeland Security's definition of active shooter—"an individual actively engaged in killing

1. The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487.

or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area”—and noted that “their attacks must have (a) involved a firearm, (b) appeared to have struck random strangers or bystanders and not only specific targets, and (c) not occurred solely in domestic settings or have been primarily gang-related, drive-by shootings, hostage-taking incidents, or robberies” (Lankford 2016, 190). I also emphasized that “attackers who struck outdoors were included; attackers who committed sponsored acts of genocide or terrorism were not” and that “only offenders who killed four or more victims were included in this study” (ibid., 190–191).

The results indicated that the United States had 30.8 percent of all public mass shooters from 1966–2012, despite having less than five percent of the world’s population (Lankford 2016). The United States’ status as leader in this unfortunate category was consistent with findings from previous research on rampage school shooters (Böckler et al. 2013) and public mass shooters (Lemieux 2014). My results also showed a statistically significant association between national firearm ownership rates and the number of public mass shooters per country, which was also consistent with prior research (Lemieux 2014), and persisted whether the United States was included in the analysis or not (Lankford 2016).

Unfortunately, John Lott and Carlisle Moody (2019; 2020) have created a great deal of confusion with their recent claims, which grossly underestimate the United States’ global share of public mass shootings. Here I explain:

1. why analyzing public mass shootings and other types of attacks as a single form of violence is as flawed as claiming that tornadoes and hurricanes are a single type of storm;
2. how readers can sort Lott and Moody’s dataset to more accurately estimate the United States’ global share of public mass shootings;
3. how Lott and Moody misrepresent approximately 1,000 foreign cases from their own dataset, and what the corrected figures actually show;
4. why readers should think twice about trusting Lott and Moody’s claims.

The importance of analyzing public mass shootings separately from other violence: A parallel with tornadoes and hurricanes

There are many things that kill people, including viruses, diseases, accidents, natural disasters, armed conflict, and violent crime. And overarching studies of causes of death would include them all. However, it is far more common for re-

searchers to study them separately, because the explanations for each one differ, as do the solutions. If scientists tried to identify variables that jointly explain both natural disasters and violent crime, their analysis would be too broad and likely to fail.

For a moment, let’s pretend I had studied deadly tornadoes. What if after I published findings on the global distribution of tornadoes, a researcher proclaimed that my study was “bogus research,” “fake,” and “fraud” (Lott 2019), and for supporting evidence, presented a dataset which included a small number of tornadoes and a large number of hurricanes.

That is essentially what Lott and Moody have done. I studied public mass shootings, but their dataset includes two fundamentally different types of violence: a small number of public mass shootings (“tornadoes”) and a large number of group attacks by paramilitary fighters, armed rebels, militia group members, and terrorist strike teams (“hurricanes”).

In Table 1, I summarize Lott and Moody’s main arguments about the joint analysis of public mass shootings and other types of attacks, and then provide analogous arguments for tornadoes and hurricanes.

TABLE 1. Lott and Moody’s arguments about the joint analysis of public mass shootings and other types of attacks, and analogous arguments for deadly tornadoes and hurricanes

Lott and Moody’s arguments that public mass shootings and other type of attacks are a single type of violence	Analogous arguments that deadly tornadoes and hurricanes are a single type of storm
They have the same basic ingredients: people shooting other people in public.	They have the same basic ingredients: rapidly rotating air.
They have the same consequences: innocent victims are killed.	They have the same consequences: innocent victims are killed.
These are the same type of shooting, they just appear different, depending on the location.	These are the same type of storm, they just appear different, depending on the location.
In the United States, they almost always involve perpetrators who attack alone—in other countries, they usually involve perpetrators who attack in groups. But this does not mean they are fundamentally different.	In some places, they form over landlocked areas and touch down for minutes or hours—in other places, they form over water and last for days or weeks. But this does not mean they are fundamentally different.
Group attacks by terrorist organizations, genocidal militias, paramilitary fighters, and armed rebels are just what happen when individual public mass shooters cluster together.	Hurricanes are just what happen when individual tornadoes cluster together.
Lankford should have been clearer that group attacks by terrorist organizations, genocidal militias, paramilitary fighters, and armed rebels were not included in his study of public mass shooters.	Researchers should be more clear that hurricanes are not included in their studies of tornadoes.

Superficially, tornadoes and hurricanes may appear similar, because they both contain rapidly rotating air and can kill innocent people. However, scientists agree they are distinct phenomena. Tornadoes differ from hurricanes based on their warning signs, frequency, shape, size, number of convective storms, life span, and more. In fact, a *Live Science* investigation could not find a single study in which a shared explanation was sought for both types of storms, because experts regard them as completely different (Wolchover 2011).

Public mass shootings and the other types of attacks in Lott and Moody's dataset also have superficial similarities: they all involve people shooting and killing other people outside of their homes. But they are fundamentally different phenomena. As I have noted previously, "There are major differences in the psychology, behavior, weapons acquisition, underlying causes, and prevention strategies that apply to these distinct types of violence" (Lankford 2019, 70).²

For one thing, public mass shooters almost always attack alone, as shown by both research on perpetrators in the United States (Berkowitz et al. 2019; Bjelopera et al. 2013; Blair and Schweit 2014; Capellan et al. 2019; Duwe 2016; FBI 2019; Peterson and Densley 2019; Schildkraut et al. 2018), and by research on perpetrators in other countries (Böckler et al. 2013; Lankford 2019; Larkin 2009; Lemieux 2014; Malkki 2014; Mullen 2004). And Lott and Moody's own data show that more than 95 percent of incidents they include from the United States involved a single perpetrator. However, almost all of the other types of violence in Lott and Moody's dataset involved groups. This is important because extensive evidence has shown that group dynamics powerfully influence behavior (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004; Kerr and Tindale 2004; Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey 1962). In addition, although violent organizations may occasionally attract people who would otherwise kill on their own, it would be absurd to suggest that terrorist groups, armed militias, rebel movements, or paramilitary organizations are simply the combination of individual mass shooters who have joined together. That would be like claiming that hurricanes are composed of individual tornadoes.

Another obvious psychological difference is that public mass shooters are often self-destructive and suicidal (Blair and Schweit 2014; Duwe 2016; Mullen, 2004; Peterson and Densley 2019; Silver, Simons, and Craun 2018), while the other types of attackers are not. Lott and Moody's own data show that more than 60 percent of the perpetrators they included from the United States committed suicide. In fact, public mass shooters often make suicidal threats or attempts prior to their attacks (Silver, Simons, and Craun 2018), and a significant portion kill themselves before law enforcement even confronts them at the scene (Blair and

2. On these differences see, e.g., Duquet 2018; Eichstaedt 2009; Hoffman 1998; Lankford 2015; Moghaddam 2005; Silver, Simons, and Craun 2018; Stein 2017.

Schweit 2014). By contrast, terrorist groups, armed militias, rebel movements, and paramilitary organizations are almost entirely composed of people who want to fight and survive (Hoffman 1998; Lankford 2013). According to START (2020), less than 1.3 percent of all terrorist attacks involving firearms are committed by perpetrators who intended or expected to die.³ And in Lott and Moody's dataset, only 0.3 percent of the incidents they included from outside the United States were coded affirmatively for suicide. Even when I add information on suicide for some cases they missed, this raises the total proportion of suicides in their foreign dataset to less than three percent.

There is also a major difference in weapons acquisition. Public mass shooters usually buy their firearms over the counter from gun stores, or through other legal means (Silver, Simons, and Craun 2018). On the other hand, paramilitary fighters, armed rebels, militia groups, and terrorist organizations appear much more likely to obtain weapons through illegal means, such as gun smuggling (Duquet 2018; Eichstaedt 2009).

Furthermore, much like tornadoes and hurricanes are almost never studied as a single type of storm, public mass shootings and the other types of attacks in Lott and Moody's dataset are almost never studied as a single type of violence. Lott and Moody have taken an unprecedented and unreasonable leap in claiming they should be analyzed together. This is completely inconsistent with previous studies of these shootings in an international context (Böckler et al. 2013; Lankford 2016; 2019; Larkin 2009; Lemieux 2016; Malkki 2014; Mullen 2004). Despite an extensive review, I could not find a single peer-reviewed study of public mass shootings that categorized them with attacks by terrorist organizations, genocidal militias, armed rebel groups, and paramilitary fighters, which is what Lott and Moody have done—and then falsely claimed as the scholarly norm. They are way out of bounds on this.

The only possible exception is not peer-reviewed, but rather the New York City Police Department's (2012) active shooter report, which included a few cases of group terrorism or genocide in its appendix, along with hundreds of active shootings as they have been traditionally defined. One of the NYPD report's strengths was its list of many cases, which allows researchers to identify which are relevant and which are not. However, the report was focused on enhancing the security of buildings—not on analyzing causal factors or preventative solutions. Therefore, it made sense to consider multiple types of threats, even though they are fundamentally distinct phenomena, much like it makes sense for the Federal

3. As of March 15, 2020, the Global Terrorism Database showed that only 841 of 67,501 attacks involving firearms were suicide attacks (i.e., committed by perpetrators who intended or expected to die), and $841 / 67,501 = 1.25$ percent (START 2020).

Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to plan for both terrorist attacks and natural disasters. More importantly, however, the NYPD *did not include any attacks by terrorist groups or genocidal militias in their analysis*, so these incidents had no distorting effect on their conclusions.

Given that public mass shootings and the other types of attacks in Lott and Moody's dataset are fundamentally different, why not analyze them separately? I suspect Lott and Moody knew that if they combined them into a single category, the American mass shooting problem would no longer seem so bad. They could proudly proclaim that "the U.S. has 1.25 percent of the world's mass shooters" (Lott and Moody 2020, abs.).

However, if these are recognized as separate types of violence, then it is easy for anyone to understand that the United States could have six times its global share of one type, without having many of the other type (Lankford 2019). It is also obvious that separate explanations could exist for each type. Easy access to firearms could explain why the United States has so many public mass shooters—as both Frederic Lemieux's empirical study (2014) and my empirical study (Lankford 2016) independently found—even if civilian firearms do not explain the prevalence of terrorist groups, armed militias, rebel movements, or paramilitary organizations.

How can readers sort Lott and Moody's dataset to estimate the United States' global share of public mass shootings?

If someone published a dataset with a small number of tornadoes and a large number of hurricanes, but did not label them by type of storm, how could readers identify the tornadoes for themselves? One approach would be to read through the entire dataset, and determine whether each storm is a tornado or not based on case descriptions. Another option would be to sort the dataset based on some distinguishing characteristic of tornadoes, exclude all cases without that characteristic, and thereby eliminate most of the hurricanes.

Similarly, anyone could read through every case in Lott and Moody's dataset and identify which are public mass shootings and which are fundamentally different. For instance, their dataset includes:

- a massacre ordered by the President of Nigeria, in which his soldiers "killed up to 200 civilians and caused thousands of villagers to flee into the bush" (case #333)

- a group attack intended “to destroy a bridge over the Dange River to disrupt the flow of good[s] between the Zaire and Uige provinces” (case #269)
- a firefight in which “opposing political factions engaged in rocket-propelled grenade, mortar, grenade, rocket, and small arms attacks” (case #966)
- an armed robbery in which a large group of “rebels attacked a state-owned explosives depot...The group stole between 20–50 tons of explosives and detonators and 17 rifles” (case #660)
- a prolonged crisis in which “Pakistani soldiers were taken hostage by tribal militants in an ambush while on patrol” and then executed four days later (case #513)
- an incident in which suspected members of a genocidal militia killed civilians and “stole 2177 livestock animals” in Darfur, Sudan (case #689)

A massacre ordered by a country’s president; an attempt to destroy a bridge; a firefight; a robbery; a hostage crisis; and an attack in which two thousand animals were stolen. Yes, these all resulted in people being killed outside of their homes, but apart from that, they have very little in common with public mass shootings like Columbine, Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, or Parkland. I do not know a single respected criminologist who would categorize them together, nor any peer-reviewed research in which that has ever been done.

To account for these fundamental differences, another option is to sort Lott and Moody’s dataset based on a distinguishing characteristic of public mass shootings, exclude all cases without that characteristic, and thereby eliminate most of the other types of attacks.

For instance, we can focus exclusively on cases where at least one perpetrator is known to have personally killed four or more victims.⁴ This seems like a defining element of public mass shooters’ behavior, and was a criterion for my 2016 study. It is also the main reason why mass shooters are studied separately from other shooters in the first place. The rationale is that perpetrators who personally kill a large number of victims are an especially terrible form of criminal, worthy of their own categorization and scrutiny.

As shown in Table 2, if we focus exclusively on cases where at least one perpetrator is known to have personally killed four or more victims, most of the

4. There are two ways to know if at least one perpetrator killed four or more victims: first, if there is only one perpetrator and more than four victims were killed; second, if there are multiple perpetrators and they averaged killing more than three victims each. For instance, if two perpetrators killed seven victims, or three perpetrators killed ten victims, that suggests that at least one of them must have killed four or more.

other types of attacks in Lott and Moody's dataset are screened out.⁵ As a result, their dataset shows that from 1998–2012, the United States had 24 percent of the world's public mass shootings. That is more than five times its global share.

Another option is to use an approach more similar to my original study's method (Lankford 2016). We can analyze Lott and Moody's dataset by focusing exclusively on public mass shootings that involved at least one perpetrator known to have personally killed four or more victims, and exclude what I referred to as "sponsored acts of genocide or terrorism" (2016, 191). By this I meant that if the perpetrator attacked because he was a member of a terrorist organization or genocidal group, he was not included; otherwise he was included, regardless of his beliefs or sources of anger. No mind reading was required: post-attack investigations regularly examine whether a shooter was part of a violent organization or group. If Lott and Moody's data are analyzed based on the cases that meet this description,⁶ they show that from 1998–2012, the United States had 30 percent of the world's public mass shootings, which is more than six times its global share. This is similar to my original study's result of 30.8 percent, even though I studied many more cases that met these criteria over a much larger time span (Lankford 2016).

As I demonstrated in *Econ Journal Watch* one year ago (Lankford 2019), another way to sort Lott and Moody's dataset is by number of perpetrators, and focus on the cases where shooters attacked alone. Of course, a few legitimate cases would be missed, such as the 1999 Columbine attack. However, research on incidents in the United States and in other countries suggests that focusing on single perpetrators would account for 95–99 percent of total cases (Berkowitz et al. 2019; Bjelopera et al. 2013; Blair and Schweit 2014; Böckler et al. 2013; Capellan et al. 2019; Duwe 2016; FBI 2019; Follman, Aronsen, and Pan 2019; Lankford 2019; Lemieux 2014; NYPD 2012; Peterson and Densley 2019; Schildkraut et al. 2018).

By this metric, Lott and Moody's dataset shows that from 1998–2012, the United States had 29.7 percent of the world's public mass shootings by perpetrators who attacked alone. This is more than six times the United States' proportionate

5. Some examples illustrate how misleading it is for Lott and Moody to count cases where this is unknown. For instance, they include an attack in which seven victims were killed by 300 members of the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (case #1037). These perpetrators averaged killing *0.02 victims each* ($7 / 300 = 0.02$). As another example, they include a case in which "Thousands of armed protestors stormed a jail in an effort to free 23 members of the Akramia religious group... At least nine people were killed" (case #585). Because this incident involved at least 2,000 perpetrators (it is described as multiple "thousands") and nine victim fatalities, the perpetrators averaged killing *0.005 victims each* ($9 / 2000 = 0.005$).

6. The determination of whether each attack was committed by member(s) of a terrorist organization or genocidal group was based solely on information in Lott and Moody's dataset, and therefore may be incomplete. Additional foreign attacks would likely be excluded if further research were conducted on perpetrators' group affiliations.

share, given its population. In fact, based on these data, the United States had more public mass shootings by perpetrators attacking alone than any *continent* except Asia, which has more than ten times the U.S. population (Lankford 2019). In this issue of *Econ Journal Watch*, Lott and Moody (2020) attempt to undermine this finding, but as I will demonstrate in the next section, their new claims provide further reason to question their credibility, because they misrepresent approximately 1,000 cases from their own dataset.

TABLE 2. The United States' global share of public mass shootings, according to different criteria

Data source	Criteria	The United States' global share of incidents worldwide	Number of U.S. incidents / Number of total incidents worldwide
Lankford (2016)	all incidents (1966–2012)	30.8%	89 / 289
Lott and Moody (2019)	all incidents in which at least one perpetrator is known to have killed four or more victims (1998–2012)	24.0%	42 / 175
Lott and Moody (2019)	all incidents in which at least one perpetrator is known to have killed four or more victims, and the attack was not committed by member(s) of a terrorist organization or genocidal group* (1998–2012)	30.0%	42 / 140
Lott and Moody (2019)	all incidents in which the perpetrator is known to have attacked alone (1998–2012)	29.7%	41 / 138
<i>Notes:</i> The United States has approximately 4.5 percent of the world's population. One of Lott and Moody's (2019) foreign cases was removed prior to these calculations because it was a duplicate of the same incident (#960, #961). Lankford's (2016) study included 292 public mass shooters from 289 incidents. See Appendix B for coding and calculations. *This is most similar to the criteria used in Lankford's (2016) study, even though it does not screen out some of the other fundamentally different cases in Lott and Moody's dataset.			

Again, by focusing on (a) incidents in which at least one perpetrator is known to have killed four or more victims, (b) incidents in which at least one perpetrator is known to have killed four or more victims and the attack was not committed by member(s) of a terrorist organization or genocidal group, or (c) incidents in which the perpetrator is known to have attacked alone, we can distinguish most public mass shootings in Lott and Moody's dataset from the other types of attacks. However, this approach is still not as effective as reading through every case and carefully identifying which should be included and which should not, based on definitions of public mass shootings and prior research on this behavior.

Lott and Moody's misrepresentation of approximately 1,000 cases from their own dataset

Lott and Moody (2019, 39) admitted in *Econ Journal Watch* (apparently for the first time) that the United States has “an outsized number” of public mass shootings by single perpetrators. In their 2020 rejoinder, however, they attempt to deny what their own data show: that from 1998–2012, the United States had 29.7 percent of the world’s public mass shootings by perpetrators who attacked alone.

Lott and Moody’s new claim is that 1,052 foreign attacks from their dataset are completely “unknown” (2020, 31–32) as to whether they were committed by single or multiple perpetrators, and they assign each of these cases a 24.8 percent chance of being committed by a single perpetrator.⁷ Then they add more than two hundred “estimated” cases to their known cases. This greatly reduces the U.S. proportion of total incidents, because Lott and Moody left the U.S. count unaltered, while more than tripling the number of foreign attacks with their estimate of supposedly “unknown” cases.

A close inspection of their dataset, however, reveals that Lott and Moody have misrepresented approximately 1,000 foreign attacks. As shown in Table 3 and Appendix B, only 58 cases are actually unknown as to whether they were committed by single or multiple perpetrators. Lott and Moody fail to acknowledge the difference between not knowing the total number of perpetrators in an attack, and not knowing whether the number was *more than one*. As a result, they misrepresent 953 incidents for which their data clearly *do* indicate there was more than one perpetrator.

Readers can see this by reviewing the incident summaries and details for the supposedly unknown cases in Lott and Moody’s dataset. The vast majority of attackers are described using plural nouns (e.g., “assailants,” “rebels,” “militants,” “terrorists,” or “gunmen”), not singular nouns (e.g., “an assailant,” “a rebel,” “a militant,” “a terrorist,” or “a gunman”). Although the importance of this distinction seems obvious, I verified it by asking Erin Miller, principal investigator and manager of the Global Terrorism Database (which was the source for over 90 percent of Lott and Moody’s data). She confirmed that the singular/plural distinction matters, and added that she “would recommend interpreting assailant descriptors much like you would in a news article, because the team follows what the

7. Lott and Moody (2020) applied estimates of 73 percent and 34 percent in two stages. Overall, this means they assigned each of these cases a 24.8 percent chance of being committed by a single perpetrator ($73\% \times 34\% = 24.8\%$).

source articles say.”

TABLE 3. Lott and Moody’s (2020) misrepresentation of approximately 1,000 foreign attacks from their own dataset

	Single perpetrators	Multiple perpetrators (numeric estimate)	Multiple perpetrators (more than one)	Unknown
Lott and Moody’s (2020) claims	98	298	0	1,052
Corrected figures, based on information in Lott and Moody’s own dataset	97	339	953	58
<i>Notes:</i> For Lott and Moody’s (2020) claims, see my Appendix A; for the corrected figures based on information in Lott and Moody’s own dataset, see my Appendix B. Case #1095 had a missing number in the summary description (“At least _ Muslim gunmen...”) which was verified through an internet search. The status of some of the remaining “unknown” cases could also be clarified through additional research. In their dataset Lott and Moody (2019) identified 16 cases as having “>1” perpetrator, but now Lott and Moody (2020) count each of those cases as having two perpetrators in their rejoinder’s estimates.				

Lott and Moody also fail to account for multiple-perpetrator cases in other important ways. For instance, some have a numeric estimate for how many attackers were captured, killed, or wounded—not counting those who escaped. Others are described as having perpetrators who attacked while simultaneously driving multiple vehicles, which is impossible for one person to do alone. And a few involve attackers striking at multiple locations at the same time.

There are also more than 40 foreign attacks that Lott and Moody falsely classify as “missing values” (2020, 31–32) in their rejoinder, despite having a numeric estimate for multiple perpetrators listed in their own dataset’s incident summary or details. As examples:

- “about 150 insurgents seized two police stations...” (case #534)
- “Around 100 Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels attacked the Kirindi displaced persons camp...” (case #146)
- “Fifty to 60 unknown attackers ambushed an Algerian military convoy...” (case #561)
- “More than 50 unidentified gunmen killed 18 Shi’i employees of a brick factory...” (case #673)
- “a group of more than 50 militants attacked a village...” (case #1080)
- “Approximately 50 attackers dressed in police and army uniforms attacked Bompai police barracks...” (case #1264)

Again, these cases are all claimed by Lott and Moody to be unknown as to whether

they were committed by single or multiple perpetrators, and they estimate each one has a 24.8 percent chance of having been committed by a single attacker.

Conclusion

Many Americans want to know how their country's public mass shooting problem compares to the rest of the world's. Unfortunately, the evidence consistently shows that the United States has far more than its share of these shootings and attackers (Böckler et al. 2013; Lemieux 2014; Lankford 2016). As I demonstrated last year (Lankford 2019) and in this article, my original study's results (Lankford 2016) have now been confirmed by multiple replications, with various approaches, using Lott and Moody's own data.

Beyond the specific crime of public mass shootings, if Lott and Moody want to study how the United States compares to the rest of the world based on all violence, homicides, mass killings, or mass shootings, there would be nothing wrong with that. However, that is not what they have done, either. Instead, they have excluded many mass shootings that occur in public locations because they were related to gangs, robberies, or other criminal behavior. As a result, their overall dataset reflects neither the global distribution of public mass shootings as a specific and cohesive type of violent behavior, nor the distribution of all shootings that kill masses of people in public.

Lott and Moody have also made many false claims, distortions, and errors that raise serious questions about their credibility. For instance, Lott has:

- used “inappropriate statistical methods...to create the false impression that mass shootings are less frequent and less deadly in the United States than in European countries,” according to analysis by the fact-checking service Snopes (MacGuill 2018);
- changed how he counted public mass shootings by including nearly 500 battles over sovereignty in his dataset (Lott 2018a; Lott and Moody 2019), after previously claiming they should be excluded to make “a fair comparison” with shootings in the United States (Lott 2015);
- along with Moody, claimed the Northern Mariana Islands has a mass shooting rate 100 times higher than that of the United States, without calling attention to the fact that the Northern Mariana Islands had only one incident in the entire study period (Lott and Moody 2019, 62);
- along with Moody, insisted they found “no significant relationship” between firearms and terrorist shootings worldwide, but also suggested “more guns, less terrorism” (Lott and Moody 2019, 60, 47); and

- accused the FBI of “slicing the evidence to distort the results” about mass shootings in the United States “to promote a political agenda,” which Lott initially blamed on the FBI’s operation under the Obama administration (Lott 2014), but more recently has blamed on the FBI under the Trump administration (Lott 2018b).

In addition, Lott and Moody (2020) now:

- hold up the FBI’s definition as a shining beacon of legitimacy, while making similar accusations and conspiratorial innuendos about my work;
- claim that I included “nine cases that don’t meet the FBI or NYPD definitions of mass public shootings” (p. 30), even though all nine of those cases appear in the FBI or NYPD reports, as readers can verify for themselves (Blair and Schweit 2014; Lankford 2019; NYPD 2012);
- falsely count 16 attacks from their dataset as having only two perpetrators in their 2020 rejoinder, after labeling them “>1” in 2019 (which indicated a much larger and more accurate range);
- claim they “excluded gang violence” (p. 35) in both the United States and other countries, even though their dataset has many foreign attacks described as involving a “gang,” as readers can verify through a quick word search;⁸
- categorize public mass shootings together with attacks by terrorist organizations, genocidal militias, armed rebel groups, and paramilitary fighters—and then falsely claim this as the scholarly norm;
- include more than 1,300 cases in their dataset (more than 90 percent of their foreign cases) for which it is unknown if *any* perpetrators personally killed four or more victims, based on their own coding;
- misrepresent approximately 1,000 foreign cases from their own dataset, by claiming these cases are “unknown” (pp. 31–32) as to whether they were committed by single or multiple perpetrators, even though information in their own dataset shows that more than 90 percent of these attacks involved multiple perpetrators; and
- either did not bother to read their own dataset’s incident summaries and details for foreign cases, or are intentionally deceiving people about them.

8. The following cases are described as involving a “gang”: #34, #41, #74, #195, #212, #305, #449, #502, #560, #828, #912, #922, #983, #1148, #1198, and #1355. This does not include other attacks by gangs that were described using some other term.

If you are a reader who believed Lott and Moody in the past, and now realize that was a mistake, this is a chance to make a change in who you trust. Choose wisely, and it could greatly improve your life. When the information you receive actually reflects reality, your ability to understand the world around you grows exponentially stronger.

Appendices

There are two online appendices: Appendix A ([link](#)) is the Lott and Moody (2020) dataset unedited, and Appendix B ([link](#)) is the Lott and Moody (2020) dataset with my corrections.

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About the Author



Adam Lankford is a professor of criminology and criminal justice at The University of Alabama. He is the author of two books and many peer-reviewed journal articles on various types of criminal behavior, including mass murder, mass shootings, and terrorism. His research has examined perpetrators' psychological tendencies, mental health problems, suicidal motives, fame-seeking tactics, copycat behavior, and weapons acquisition—along with the strategies that might be used to prevent their attacks. His email address is adam.lankford@ua.edu.

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