



Mass Attacks at LGBTQ+ Venues 1970-2025

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Introduction

Mass attacks are an enduring criminological phenomenon. Since 2022, they have occurred in the United States at an increased rate, now occurring at least once per day. Although case collection and analysis indicate mass attacks that target LGBTQ+ venues and events offer a unique perspective on motives, methods, and victimology, no published research has examined patterns or trends of mass attacks on gay venues thus far (Ledur & Rabinowitz, 2022). This report focuses on mass attacks globally.

Gay or transgender individuals and venues may be perceived as symbols for an unwelcome way of life. Members of the LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately subject to ill-treatment because they do not conform to socially constructed expectations for gender and sexuality (Organization of American States, 2018). However, being openly gay has increasingly gained acceptance in many parts of the world, resulting in a higher number of publicly advertised gay venues and, therefore, a higher number of potential targets for mass attacks.

As of this writing, the largest loss of life in a U.S. LGBTQ+ venue occurred on June 12, 2016, at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida (Alvarez & Pérez-Peña, 2016). A total of 49 people died, and 58 were wounded when the shooter attacked “Latin Night” in the one-story club. Indeed, a club bouncer is credited with saving 70 lives by opening a “latched door” to help people escape (Holley, 2016, p. 1; Schogol, 2016, p. 1), but many victims lay dead on the dance floor, and nearly a dozen more retreated into a rear restroom where they became trapped when the gunman entered (Straub et al., 2017). An Orlando police officer was on-site at the time of the attack and returned fire. Other officers arrived quickly and also confronted the shooter with gunfire. He was eventually killed, and recovery began. Two after-action reports were eventually published for all to learn from (Straub et al., 2017; Straub et al., 2018).

This paper will examine the characteristics of mass attacks at gay venues of varying types, including motivation, weapon use, and implications for the LGBTQ+ community. Based on the presented data, the paper will propose protocols to secure

Editor’s Note: The use of the term “gay” throughout this paper is in line with the guidance of the Association of LGBTQ+ Journalists’ stylebook on sexual orientation terminology. Both terms “Gay” and “LGBTQ+” are used throughout the paper when referring to the larger communities impacted as a means of varying word choice and to avoid repetition.

venues specifically designed for, or advertised as accepting, members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Methods and Scope

Information used in this paper was compiled from open-source data and did not rely on prior collections of cases from other agencies, such as the Southern Poverty Law Center or, internationally, the Human Rights Watch. Our data collection timeframe spanned 1970-2025, and the geographic area included countries and territories worldwide. Excluded were cases in which the offender targeted fewer than four people, attacks on LGBTQ+ people occurred in non-gay venues, even at ones associated with or in the vicinity of gay venues, and attacks occurred with unconfirmed intentionality, such as accidental fires. The total number of cases accrued was 463, including threats and incomplete attacks (Drake et al., 2025). This allowed researchers to examine the full trajectory of the construction of a true mass attack.

Results may have been somewhat limited by the English-language search. It is important to understand that not all attacks at gay venues can be tallied. There are limitations on which events appear to news gatekeepers as worthy of coverage, and this can vary with the relative importance of news stories on any given day. Likewise, some violent threats against gay bars back in the 1990s received so many hate phone calls and threats that it might be common to receive enough threats in one day to fill a voice-messaging system. In that sense, the data collected herein can only be considered a sample rather than a census of every single case.

Classification of Mass Attacks, Gay Venues, and Events

A *mass attack* is a successful attack of violence that targets four or more people (Morton et al., 2014) and aims to cause panic, destruction, injury, and/or death. Mass attack weapons include firearms, arson, explosives, chemical weapons, sharp-edged weaponry, and, less commonly, bludgeons and blunt-force objects, and even parts of the offender's own body. Some attacks develop as verbal threats, also called leakage (Reid & O'Toole, 2011), which are precursors and may evolve into mass attacks (Silver et al., 2018). For this paper, the phrase "mass attack" encompasses all possible methods or modes of attack of violence, directed against the LGBTQ+ community during public or quasi-public gatherings. These places have included gay bathhouses, restaurants, bars, and clubs, as well as public and private Pride celebration events, and at community, medical, political, cultural, and religious centers.

Ecological Environment of Anti-gay Attacks

An ecological environment encompasses all "living and non-living things" within a particular area (Felson, 2006, p. 60). For the purposes of this paper, an ecological environment includes a venue's location, layout, and clientele. Gay venues comprise unique ecological environments; their only common denominator is that LGBTQ+ people frequent them. However, the specific characteristics of each venue play a pivotal role in determining the success of any attack that occurs there.

Gay environments may be categorized by the formation of internal social networks and by their status as cultural hubs that drive trends in the LGBTQ+ community and sometimes in mainstream communities. The cultural environment of gay venues typically emphasizes support, belonging, love, and acceptance of diverse identities, as they were created to allow LGBTQ+ people to commune and express themselves without fear of judgment or persecution (Baxter et al., 2023). Gay venues historically serve as gathering places for both 'closeted' and 'out' individuals to gain confidence in their own identities and meet people with shared or similar experiences. Therefore, they provide a sense of safety to patrons who actively face, or fear they may face, discrimination elsewhere, such as in their households, workplaces, or venues that serve a purpose similar to that of the particular gay venue.

Unfortunately, the sense of safety granted by an accepting gay venue is a mere illusion in the case of mass attacks.

Due to the predominant cultural environment of gay venues, some people who are not a part of the LGBTQ+ community feel more emotionally and socially secure in these spaces than they do in non-gay venues. For example, a significant percentage of heterosexual or “straight” women may attend gay bars and nightclubs because they are disproportionately victimized and subject to normalized misogynistic encounters in similar mainstream spaces. Additionally, the common perception of gay bars as a more inclusive and fun option contributes to a physical sense of safety (Peckford, 2023). Although some straight people feel safer in gay venues, many LGBTQ people feel invaded when non-LGBTQ+ people occupy LGBTQ+-designated spaces. Perceptions of members of the LGBTQ+ community of their own safety in gay venues differ and may be defined by the nature of other attendees, past personal or communal experiences, the rigor of security measures, or the quality of the event or venue itself. As LGBTQ+ people and culture become more accepted in the mainstream, gay venues host an increasing number of heterosexual and cisgender gay venue attendees (Baxter et al., 2023). This documented demographic shift may lead to an increase in mass attacks that occur from within, eroding the sense of safety many LGBTQ+ people find in spaces once exclusively occupied by members of their community.

Common Venue Types

Gay Bars & Clubs

Bars and clubs typically combine an area where alcohol is served with a large dance floor and food service tables. Gay bars are likely to have few exits and many obstacles, such as tables and chairs, that could prevent efficient escape from an offender in the event of an attack (Will, 2023). Prior to the Gay Liberation Movement, gay bars rarely included windows, and buildings used as gay hangouts with pre-existing windows were typically boarded up, blacked out, or otherwise covered for secrecy (Higgins, 2013). However, modern bars and clubs now routinely install windows, which represent a new age of queer visibility as well as a potential emergency escape route and method of attack.

Clients of gay bars typically consist of adult customers aged twenty-one or older due to the legal restrictions of alcohol distribution and consumption. Gay bars attract customers of varying backgrounds, and not all of those who spend time within gay spaces are LGBTQ+. Though alcohol is a primary motivator for many, customers with no intention of drinking, including recovering alcoholics, also attend gay bars to socialize. The prevalent intoxication of clientele in gay bars slows reaction time and reduces motor control, inhibiting recognition of and physical escape from a mass attack. Gay bars are most often located in heavily populated urban areas where it may be difficult to escape from an attack or pinpoint a suspicious individual. These commercial businesses may employ on-site security, such as bouncers, whose purview is limited to the establishment's interior. Attacks on gay bars often occur directly outside the building's front doors, as offenders driving or walking by attack patrons entering or exiting the venue (CBS News, 2015; Drake et al., 2025; Komo News Staff, 2025; O'Hare, 2009). Gay bars widely publicize gatherings of sexual minority customers, attracting premeditated and opportunistic predators alike.

Mitigating risk or saving lives in these types of venues is not impossible. Multiple points of entry surveilled by staff to prevent unauthorized access can disperse crowds and facilitate escape. Gay bars can also install panic bars on doors to permit rapid exit and panic buttons to notify emergency services. Many bars, including the Pulse nightclub, have restrooms at the back of the building. These bathrooms usually have only one door serving as both the entrance and the exit. Individuals can become trapped if the attack occurs while they are in a restroom or if they are trying to flee the attacker by finding a place to hide (Straub et al., 2017). Rooms with only one entry point can lead to the attacker barricading themselves in with hostages. Multiple points of entry and exit can reduce risk and save lives by

preventing individuals from becoming trapped and enabling emergency teams to evacuate victims while they neutralize the attacker.

Firearms, knives, and chemicals like bleach are easy to conceal in bags, purses, and backpacks. Gay bars can limit the size of a personal item carried by patrons, such as banning backpacks. Doing so would increase the difficulty of concealing firearms or other weapons and rule out the possibility of inconspicuously carrying ammunition or explosive devices inside the club.

Violent law enforcement raids on gay bars have played a critical role in the development of the Gay Liberation Movement, which led to many injuries, some being very serious. Such was the case at a raid of the Snake Pit bar, where a guest either jumped or was pushed from an upper-story window, only to be impaled on a fence down below (Historic Sites Project, 2020). Raids have been reported as recently as May 2025 at a Pittsburgh bar during a drag show, which continued outside despite the police presence. Police explanations include investigating invalid liquor licenses as well as claims of overcrowding (Riley, 2025). Whether or not a raid is conducted for a valid reason, it may have qualified as an attack if officers attempt to threaten and intimidate, such as by smashing windows. Officers are also known to present themselves in a militaristic fashion by wearing masks, bearing machine guns, and forcing patrons at gunpoint to lie down with their hands behind their heads (Padgett, 2024). Police raids have not prevented or improved the unfortunate reality of mass attacks on gay bars and nightclubs. Instead, they have instilled fear in decades of gay patrons and complicated efforts to solicit security or emergency services from local law enforcement.

Bathhouses

Gay bathhouses provide critical context for a study of mass attacks at gay venues, though they are not nearly as prevalent in the modern day as they were in the mid to late 20th century. Just like standard bathhouses, gay bathhouses are designed to facilitate relaxation, socialization, and hygiene (Bérubé, 2013). Additionally, they cater specifically to gay or bisexual men and are known as hubs for casual sexual activity due to their clientele and layouts (Holmes et al., 2007). Most gay bathhouses include both wet and dry saunas, steam showers, locker rooms, and rooms used for sexual relations, with varied privacy. They are considered safe havens for the community in times of prejudice and places where men of all sexualities can experiment without judgment (Punkpink, 2020). Public health concerns in the 1980s, a result of the AIDS epidemic, caused many gay bathhouses to close, though some still operate in major cities around the globe under stringent regulations (Yeros, 2022).

Due to difficulties of concealing a weapon in spaces where most, if not all, attendees are semi or fully nude, bathhouses are primarily targeted by violent police raids and arson attempts as opposed to other forms of mass attacks (Ogles, 2017). They are conducive to arson attacks because their layouts, with numerous confined spaces such as cubicles and small rooms, can be difficult to navigate in an emergency. Fires may be caused by electrical wiring used to power saunas or by flammable materials such as cigarettes and drugs. The most notable bathhouse arson occurred in 1975, when Montreal's Sauna Aquarius Bathhouse was firebombed, killing several patrons (Turner, 2018). The oldest continuously running gay bathhouse, New York City's Everard Baths, also experienced a devastating fire that killed nine and injured 12 in 1977. The cause of that fire had not been conclusively determined (Klara, 2023), so it is not included as an arson attack in our dataset.

Bathhouse raids were typically carried out under the guise of public health and safety, or more overtly to enforce morality or punish lewdness. The first recorded raid on a gay bathhouse occurred in 1903 and resulted in a dozen sodomy charges (Turner, 2020). The most infamous Canadian raids occurred in a single night in 1981 and are known as the Toronto Bathhouse Raids or Operation Soap. Targeted businesses included Richmond Street Health Emporium, Roman II Health and Recreation Spa, The Barracks, and Club Baths of Toronto. In all, 272 people were arrested, 253 of whom were charged

with the archaic offense of being found in a bawdy house (Canadian Pride Historical Society, 2024). The resulting protest, occurring a few hours later, sparked Toronto's primary gay rights movement.

Police officers involved in raids on gay bathhouses were often reported to conduct themselves violently and show the intention to threaten and intimidate. For example, during the Toronto Bathhouse Raids, police used crowbars and sledgehammers to shatter glass windows, force open lockers, and break down doors and walls. Violent raid methods were often coupled with derogatory comments and threats made to venue occupants. One officer famously expressed regret to detainees in a shower room that the gas could not be hooked up to the water pipes (CPHS, 2024). Due to the lack of regard for gay property and welfare demonstrated during police raids on gay bathhouses, they constitute mass attacks.

Festivals

Festivals that cater to the LGBTQ+ community, such as annual Pride festivals, are generally held in urban areas, usually in the downtown. These festivals are held in open spaces such as city parks or on designated, blocked-off streets. Due to the public and temporary nature of these festivals, anti-LGBTQ+ bystanders can unintentionally find themselves in the midst of a gay venue. For example, an anti-LGBTQ+ person who frequents a park might one day find it reserved to celebrate the gay community, disrupting their routine with something they oppose or are disgusted by.

Areas hosting Pride festivals are often lined with tents from which attendees can buy food or souvenirs. These tents are at risk of being set on fire. Though security personnel are present, they are vastly outnumbered by attendees, complicating their ability to keep a watchful eye on everyone. They can easily become distracted or overwhelmed, allowing a perpetrator to slip by unnoticed.

LGBTQ+ Pride festivals attract tens of thousands of people to congregate at a single location. Navigating through a large crowd during a mass attack can be difficult; stampedes and bottlenecks result from collective movement away from the offender, panic at the sound of gunfire, or general confusion. While most attendees may be sober, LGBTQ+ festivals and marches often host beer gardens or beer tents, and attendees inebriated as a result may find their senses dulled or muddled, and their motor control and their response time slowed. Festivals also risk driving attacks due to their large footprint. Perpetrators may carry out attacks either by crashing a car or truck into a crowd or via a drive-by shooting. A segment of the LGBTQ+ community sometimes attends Pride events dressed in what might be described as adult kink-related attire, or clothing worn to emphasize or express a kink or fetish to others, such as a leather bodysuit and mask or a leash held by a partner or spouse (Brut America, 2021). Due to the overt sexuality on display during Pride events, perpetrators aiming to harm the LGBTQ+ community may be more inclined to commit a mass attack at or near these particular exhibits.

People attending Pride gatherings are not limited to LGBTQ+ adults or allies; children and pets are also common. Events are public, so many courts have ruled that anti-LGBTQ+ people are also permitted to attend. Despite being allowed into Pride events, those who are anti-LGBTQ+ tend to stay outside or on the fringe of the event and can sometimes be seen holding anti-gay signs or Bibles. Even disengaged anti-LGBTQ+ people can present a threat to attendees, because they may be able to perpetrate a mass attack from outside the festival grounds.

Community Centers

In the early days of the Gay Liberation Movement, gay bars were considered one of the only safe meeting places for gay people, fulfilling a similar purpose to today's community centers. Modern community centers are stand-alone structures intended solely to provide independent community meeting spaces for political or social activities. Many contain a large social hall, smaller meeting rooms, and several offices. Their main entrances have a lobby and a receptionist's desk. During most of the week, these sites are sparsely populated, but on occasion, they may seat hundreds of attendees (Hind, n.d.).

Youth community members visit community centers for after-school activities or clubs. They are also used by senior-citizen or volunteer social service groups and the general public as venues for graduation receptions, birthday parties, baby showers, public education courses, and town hall meetings. LGBTQ+ community centers distinguish themselves from non-LGBTQ+ centers through specialized events, health and wellness resources, and advocacy and support groups. They also serve as safe havens for members of the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups, including the deaf, blind, mobility-impaired, and immigrants who may or may not speak English. These characteristics may challenge one's ability to self-rescue in an emergency. Blockages or an inadequate number of exits, often found in crowded indoor spaces, further complicate the escape attempts for large numbers of attendees.

Not all community centers are equipped with security guards or technology. Centers in rural areas and small towns typically contain only a receptionist and a few employees. Community centers in metropolitan areas are more likely to employ a number of security guards and other staff due to the potential of threats. However, depending on the events taking place in the center on the day of an attack, security may or may not be on duty.

Nationally, 73% of community centers have reported security "threats or harassment," with 50% relating to transgender-related issues (Movement Advancement Project & Centerlink, 2024, p. iii). Notable threats to gay community centers especially occurred following the murder of gay university student Matthew Shepard, which made international news. Few incidents were reported through official channels, though, given how common they were at the time (see People for the American Way, 2000). One report concerned the delivery of dead animals and blood, made to the Delta Lambda Phi fraternity at Colorado State University (Gladstone, 1999). In a 2009 shooting at Tel Aviv's LGBTQ+ youth center Bar Noar, two people were killed, and 15 people were injured (Agence France-Presse, 2009), and in 2022, there was a threat and attempted attack on the LGBTQ+ Drop-in Center in Montenegro in 2022 by a group of young men armed with metal bars (Stojanovski, 2022). These centers were known for providing services to LGBTQ+ community members, including mental health support groups, medical clinics, and social events.

Churches

Signaling that no place is sacred to everyone, several mass attacks have occurred against LGBTQ+ or LGBTQ+-affirming religious congregations. These venues typically outwardly identify themselves as welcoming and accepting environments by decorating their exteriors with rainbow flags or colors. Churches are scattered throughout communities, but gay groups typically migrate to older traditional structures located in inner cities. Though this choice sends a message of tolerance woven with tradition, such buildings are expensive to maintain and prone to fire. Often, exit corridors are blocked by seasonal decorations or chairs used for temporary seating. However, some churches (e.g., All God's Children Metropolitan Community Church in Minneapolis) have installed panic bars on doors to permit rapid exit. It is common for congregations to have assigned, trained ushers who serve as informal security guards in smaller churches. Larger churches may have paid security staff. Churches often have large parking lots and are mostly located on street corners, though some newer structures are centrally located on large lots.

Though individual church layouts vary widely, most contain a receiving lobby, or narthex, adjoining a large worship area with an elevated altar. Food service occurs either in the basement or an appended addition to the main floor, in a large room referred to as a fellowship or social area. Most fire and life safety codes require clear, accessible aisles between seating areas, and chairs are legally required to be secured together to maintain these clear aisles and exit access. The location and number of exits in areas of worship are specified by city or state codes (McElheny, 2021). Despite fire safety

regulations, many worship areas currently have unopenable windows and carpeted floors, making an arson attack especially successful.

The most targeted gay churches include members of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC), which includes 222 congregations in 37 countries and specifically advertises its affirmation of LGBTQ+ people (Gerber, 2025). Metropolitan Community Churches known to have suffered mass attacks and attack attempts include its Los Angeles, Nashville, San Francisco, Atlanta, Springfield, River City, Oak Park, Vancouver, and Richmond branches. Of these, only the Metropolitan Community Churches in Vancouver, Washington, and Richmond, Virginia, were targeted with bomb threats rather than arson (Drake et al., 2025). On occasion, there are anti-gay demonstrations outside of the churches (e.g., All God's Children Metropolitan Community Church in Minneapolis), which have had the effect of intimidating worshipers, though they did not evidence a direct threat of violence.

Private Events & Parties

Private parties for the LGBTQ+ community include wedding receptions, graduation parties, birthday parties, house parties, and by-invitation backyard or basement concerts. Parties vary in size, demographics, and location, from a few to hundreds of guests, from formal or informal, academic or punk, and from rural locations to heavily populated urban areas. Wedding receptions typically take place in a reception hall close to the ceremony location. Birthday or graduation parties may be held in parks, community centers, or private residences. Generally, private parties do not implement security measures or personnel, except for some wedding receptions or other events where alcohol is served. Private parties do not have a single layout, though each includes designated seating areas where guests can sit, eat, and spend time with others. Areas used for food preparation and serving can comprise a single space, such as a home kitchen, or two separate spaces, such as in a reception hall. While some home layouts are conducive to escape in the case of an attack, other guests are more easily targeted. Reception halls often feature large open layouts, in which elements such as the dance floor, tables, and kitchen are in direct view of the front entrance.

Arts and Culture

Gay venues with the primary purpose of sharing or selling works of written or audiovisual media include bookshops, libraries, newspapers, broadcast stations, cinemas, and museums. These spaces are not gay-exclusive but tend to attract a primarily gay audience due to the focus of their content.

Written Media

LGBTQ+ bookshops may be defined as bookshops known to be owned by LGBTQ+ individuals, to accept or cater to LGBTQ+ individuals, or to exist specifically to counteract widespread or local censorship, book burning, and the banning of literature or academic works with LGBTQ+ content. LGBTQ+ content in works of writing includes fiction featuring LGBTQ+ characters or authors, memoirs or biographies of LGBTQ+ people, LGBTQ+ medicine and psychology, and LGBTQ+ history, such as recordings of landmark legislation or bars that have since closed.

One of the most well-known LGBTQ+ bookshops is Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium, which opened in 1983 in Vancouver, Canada. After Canada Customs repeatedly stopped most of the shop's shipments at the country's border, the owners of Little Sister's legally challenged the definition of the word "obscenity" and, with it, the status quo of LGBTQ+ censorship. The bookshop made a name for itself as an unspoken gay community center and faced multiple explosive attacks and threats as a result (Paget, 2025).

Libraries are not typically LGBTQ+-exclusive, but the majority of academic and school library management and staff support the collection of LGBTQ+-inclusive materials (Oltmann, 2016; Siegel et al., 2020). Libraries have also been at the forefront of a movement resisting censorship, including literature about LGBTQ+ people. Such libraries were often targeted by threats whenever the issue of books containing what was referred to as “transgender ideology” gained mass attention (Asmalash, 2025). Some libraries have separate LGBTQ+ sections, while others integrate LGBTQ+ topics into more traditional sections, such as Non-Fiction and Young Adult Fiction. Most anti-gay attacks at libraries target LGBTQ+-centric events they often host, like drag queen story hours, rather than an inherent quality of the venues themselves.

Gay newspapers report on issues and events that may be underreported or underrepresented in mainstream publications. Notable examples include Boston’s *Gay Community News*, which ran from 1973 to 1999 (Northeastern University, n.d.), and Houston’s *Montrose Star*, which was first published in 1976 and continues to be published to this day. Though it initially marketed itself as *The South’s Free Weekly Gay Newspaper* (Montrose Star, 1979, p. 1), it currently advertises itself as a “monthly LGBTQ entertainment newspaper” (Montrose Star, 2025). The marketing shift indicates a change in cultural identity due to increased acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. However, newspaper headquarters are not exempt from mass attacks. The Gay Community News publication house was targeted by arson in 1982 (Gay Community News Editors, 1982).

Attacking or threatening to attack a gay newspaper for expressing the views of the editors or for reporting on issues relevant to the LGBTQ+ community is a form of attempting to silence the press. The specific use of arson to target gay venues that publish written works recalls book burnings of materials considered heretical or “dangerous” and may be at renewed risk given the current U.S. political climate. The historical antecedent for this occurred in 1933, when Nazi-affiliated students and officials burned over 20,000 books and archival materials of the Magnus Hirschfeld Institute of Sexology in Berlin, Germany. This targeted attack, which included burning pioneering trans health research, was one of the first major public actions to erase queer, trans, and progressive gender studies from German society (Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 2026).

Audiovisual Media

Gay radio broadcasts can be found live on the air alongside their non-gay counterparts. Though broadcast stations are private, their productions are public. Due to the nature of tuning a radio, anti-LGBTQ+ people can stumble upon gay broadcasts without prior knowledge or intention. Hearing gay-centered content without warning or motive can anger anti-LGBTQ+ people and lead to attacks on or threats to the creators or managers of the broadcast. Notable gay broadcast stations targeted with bomb threats include The Gay 90s broadcast station in 1993 (Drake, 2015) and the headquarters of JOY 94.9 in 2016 (Harper, 2016).

Similar to bookshops and libraries, LGBTQ+ cinemas and screenings are cultural venues and events that exist to counteract censorship or discrimination. LGBTQ+ people may attend these venues or events to view gay media not shown elsewhere or because they feel safer accompanied by others in the queer community. Both gay cinemas and screenings of LGBTQ+ films in non-gay cinemas have suffered attacks for publicizing narratives that center the gay community. Examples include the 1977 arson at Washington D.C.’s Cinema Follies Theater (Weil & Lewis, 1977), the 1994 arson at London’s Dream City Cinemas (Haycock, 1994), the 2014 violence at Sarajevo’s Merlinka Film Festival perpetrated by a group of masked men (Amnesty International, 2014), the 2017 Pride screening in Tbilisi’s Mziuri Park (DFWatch Staff, 2017), the attempted 2019 firebombing of a Brazilian production studio that created a gay Christmas special (Hopewell, 2019), and the firecrackers thrown by protesters

at attendees of a gay romance movie shown in multiple cinemas in Tbilisi and Batumi, in the European country of Georgia in 2019 (Euronews & Reuters, 2019).

Museums featuring LGBTQ+-themed works of art or commemorating LGBTQ+ history have also come under attack. Examples include Bolivian activist group La Pesada Subversiva's exhibition, "Revolución Orgullo" at the Altillo Benni Museum in 2022 (Rodriguez Hernández, 2024) and Berlin's Schwules Museum (of LGBTQ History) (Grieg, 2023). Perpetrators of mass attacks against artistic institutions like art galleries protest the publicization of a lifestyle with which they vehemently disagree, and they often view their actions as a necessary precaution to prevent the spread of evil ideology. The practice of destroying artwork believed to violate religious laws traces back to Byzantine Iconoclasm (Freeman, 2021).

As a general rule, cultural institutions that openly celebrate the LGBTQ+ community or commemorate its history are not found in areas that criminalize or threaten an openly gay lifestyle. In these countries and territories, both venue managers and potential patrons risk associating with or promoting the LGBTQ+ community. Consequences may be imposed by governing bodies or by civilians whose beliefs about the LGBTQ+ community align with or are shaped by their government's attitudes.

Medical

As noted in the earlier section on community centers, LGBTQ+ medical care is sometimes provided in gay community centers. They are also available in standalone buildings dedicated solely to medical care, or, more recently, as specialist programs integrated into non-LGBTQ+ medical associations. Though medical services for the LGBTQ+ community are far more accessible than they have ever been before, they are still targeted by attacks and threats. Attacking LGBTQ+ medical services carries the implication that the perpetrator does not care for the welfare of both the people in the building at the moment, as well as any individuals who may have benefited from it in the future.

The two primary kinds of medical gay venues found in the dataset are centers offering AIDS resources or gender-affirming care. In 1989, one of the largest fires in Dallas history at that time destroyed the AIDS Resource Center (Anglin, 2017). Little has changed, as in 2023, the Blair Building in Decatur, Georgia, was targeted by arson. The building houses the company QMed (QueerMed), which offers HIV/AIDS testing and gender-affirming care (Wiggins, 2024).

In recent years, an increasing number of hospitals have hired professionals who specialize in gender-affirming care and advertised their services to the LGBTQ+ community. These hospitals have come under fire for their pro-LGBTQ+ stances and for offering both transgender and pediatric care. Popular public opinion, especially when expressed by influential figures such as politicians, correlates with attacks, attempted attacks, and threats at gay venues. In the case of medical gay venues, online verbal attacks from anti-transgender activists and vocal conservative influencers quickly led to repeated bomb threats at centers including Boston Children's Center and Portland's OHSU Primary Care Clinic in 2022 and 2023 (Levinson, 2023).

Political Offices and Advocacy Groups

Gay venues also include offices occupied by governmental and non-governmental pro-LGBTQ+ groups. Attacks on political offices rarely result in injuries to occupants due to heightened consequences, so they are typically confined to property damage and threats. One such threat was to the first Gay Pride Parade in London in 1972. Despite drawing nearly 1,000 people, some bystanders hurled glass bottles, coins, and epithets at parade-goers (Ashenden, 2016), which only signified a much larger and possibly developing threat. Arson is also commonly used to attack office buildings because of the

flammability of stacks of files often found there. Gay offices set on fire include New York's Gay Activist Alliance Firehouse in 1974 (Johnston, 1974) and the Dallas Gay Alliance Office in 1989 (Anglin, 2017).

Though pro-LGBTQ+ stances are more common now than in the past, political gay venues continue to be targeted by mass attacks and threats. In 2012, several Washington, D.C. LGBTQ offices were targeted by bomb threats, including the Metropolitan Police Department Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and Chamber of Commerce (American University Radio, 2012).

Peaceful pro-LGBTQ+ rallies and protests on central city streets or outside policy offices have also been violently targeted by counterprotesters and police forces. Outdoor LGBTQ+ political events may be meticulously coordinated or impromptu, hosted by a single organization or multiple groups allied under the same cause. Reasons for pro-LGBTQ+ gatherings include LGBTQ+ legislation and anti-LGBTQ+ policy platforms, as well as recent attacks on LGBTQ+ people, especially activists. Attacked or threatened advocacy rallies include the Detroit Gay Activists Demonstration in 1972 (Henderson, 2025), the ACT UP/RNC and Queer Nation/Houston protest in 1992 (Protest, n.d.), and the joint protest hosted by Albanian groups Alliance Against Discrimination, Pro LGBTQ+, and Pink Embassy in 1995 (Pink Embassy, n.d.)

Though pro-LGBTQ+ rallies are now mostly protected in countries like the United States, and police presence is usually available at planned LGBTQ+ rallies in the United States, pro-LGBTQ+ rallies can still come under unprotected attack in a number of countries around the world that experience lower rates of LGBTQ+ acceptance. For example, Nepal's Blue Diamond Society was attacked twice during protests in July and August of 2004 (Amnesty International, 2004).

A third kind of political advocacy group that occupies gay venues is the gay student group. Though gay university groups were outliers in the 1970s through 90s, these are uncommonly threatened or sidelined today, as advocating for acceptance is no longer controversial at the vast majority of college campuses. However, in past decades, gay student groups were widely discriminated against and subject to ill-treatment by school administration and peers, as well as outside parties. The most common tactic of fear used against these groups are threatening leaflets and bomb threats made to their meetings and programs. Examples of groups threatened with mass attacks include the Gay Academic Union at John Jay in 1973, the Gay Student Union at California Polytechnic State University in 1977, and Iowa State University's Gay/Lesbian Student Outreach in 1987 (D'Emilio, 2016). Gay student groups and their meeting rooms may be attacked or threatened by students or alumni, as well as local unaffiliated anti-LGBTQ+ individuals (lone wolves) and groups.

Differences Between LGBTQ+ & Non-LGBTQ+ Mass Attacks

Gay venues differ from their non-gay counterparts due to the symbolism behind the assembly of LGBTQ+ people. Historically, the continuous presence of danger, including harassment and mistreatment, previously deterred LGBTQ+ people from congregating, and even today, the LGBTQ+ community can be endangered by overt expression. Therefore, like venues designed for other marginalized groups, gay venues carry the weight of gathering in a safe haven, and attacks on these venues are most often motivated by hatred or fear of the collective.

Most perpetrators of mass attacks against gay venues have negative sentiment toward the LGBTQ+ community before, after, or during their attack (Kehoe, 2020). For example, the man who shot seven people at the Backstreet Cafe in 2000 specifically asked patrons of a tavern for directions to the nearest gay bar before carrying out the attack due to his stated motive of "shooting gay people" (ABC News, 2000, p. 1). Similarly, the perpetrator of the Otherside Lounge bombing claimed he attacked the establishment to promote his anti-gay rhetoric (Duncan, 2018). Both victims and offenders specifically

select the gay venue over a similar non-gay venue due to its gay ownership and clientele. Perpetrators of mass attacks against gay venues attack or threaten a group of people due to their hatred of an entire community, reflecting a symbolic attack on the entire LGBTQ+ community (Franklin, 1998).

Conversely, mass attacks involving non-LGBTQ+ events do not occur in venues that advertise a specific target demographic and lack a clear bias that characterizes mass attacks on gay events as hateful. The Boston Marathon bombing of 2013 resulted in three deaths and over 280 other casualties (Gates et al., 2014, p. 3). However, the attendee population was diverse because the event was not marketed to any specific group. Therefore, investigators concluded that the perpetrator aimed to instill fear, but it was not motivated by prejudice (Onion & Mullen, 2014). This instance reveals how mass attacks involving non-gay venues lack the same bias that fuels violence against LGBTQ+ events.

Preventive measures taken to limit the occurrence of mass attacks also differ across venues. Several LGBTQ+ events, such as Pride festivals, have barred police officers from attending while in uniform and carrying their firearms. The ban on uniformed patrol relates back to police violence shown toward the LGBTQ+ community in events such as the Stonewall riots (Thibault, 2022), though more recently by the police shootings of LGBTQ+ people of color suspects. The banning measure is directly contrasted by the methods implemented at non-LGBTQ+ events, which often request greater police presence to not only deter crime but also provide attendees with a greater sense of safety. With a significant increase in violent crime in public areas, many have argued that increasing officer numbers will lead to greater safety at community events (Wald, 2022). The distinctions in the precautionary measures taken further delineate the differences between the respective venues in terms of the risks and dangers they face.

Offenders and Motives

The motivation behind mass attacks on gay venues often stems from the offender's own characteristics. Offenders with strong ideological beliefs can be motivated to commit a mass attack on the LGBTQ+ community as a means of gaining control or respect, or to further their view of an ideal society. Additionally, unstable mental health often leads offenders to act on violent desires that they would normally ignore. Offenders may also be influenced by their own sexual or gender identity. The ages of offenders are often shaped by their misguided belief that after 18, they may be held more accountable; however, many juvenile actors are instead bound over into adult court due to the depravity of the offense.

Offenders known to be homosexual or defined by their homosexuality are primarily absent from offender literature, though they may exist (Dennis, 2013). A person who identifies as gay may carry out an attack against the LGBTQ+ community because they harbor internal prejudice labeled 'internalized homophobia' or 'heterosexism' (Villines, 2021). In some cases, those who commit attacks against the LGBTQ+ community may possess unrecognized homosexual thoughts or fantasies, or they may engage in same-sex behaviors. An attack against the LGBTQ+ community by a perpetrator struggling with their own sexuality may be a symbolic act of self-hatred (Peterson & Panfil, 2014). Unable to come to terms with their own sexuality out of fear or resentment, a perpetrator who has yet to 'come out' may commit a mass attack against the LGBTQ+ community as a means of repressing their 'deviant sexuality' or righting something they believe about themselves (Franklin, 1998). Internalized homophobia is the suspected motive in the Detroit 2019 house party murders of two gay men and a transgender woman committed by a party attendee (Brand-Williams, 2019).

Heterosexual offenders of LGBTQ+ mass attacks are also often motivated by sexuality, though not their own. Offenders who incorporate a heterosexist ideology often appoint themselves as agents or vigilantes tasked with controlling perceived societal sexual deviance (Franklin, 1998). These perpetrators believe members of the LGBTQ+ community deserve to be punished for expressing

identities or behaviors that transgress or run contrary to traditional gender norms and roles. The offender's view of their victim as deranged or deviant due to their sexual orientation or expression dehumanizes the victim and alleviates the guilt of committing the crime. Another motive for attacking gay venues is rooted in conspiracy and politics. Conservative offenders often view gays as perpetrators of a movement towards a more leftist world (Alden & Parker, 2005). Offenders make the incorrect assumption that every member of the LGBTQ+ community holds leftist values and therefore attempt to prevent this liberalist world from existing by carrying out attacks on gay venues (Organization of American States, 2018). White supremacists may also target the LGBTQ+ community because they view gay people as antithetical to their worldview (Burlein, 2002).

Thrill seekers, or those involved in recreational or sexual violence, may also target gay venues (Franklin, 1998). These offenders may seek power or esteem among their peers (Peterson & Panfil, 2014). Due to the common misconception of gay men as feminine, fragile, and cowardly, some offenders believe gay people are less likely to fight back. The feasibility of attacking gay venues may be appealing to hedonistic perpetrators.

An offender's mental health is known to play a significant role in mass attacks. Mental illness can intensify an offender's pre-existing hatred toward the LGBTQ+ community and weaken their self-restraint. Schizophrenic patients often struggle with paranoia, which is characterized by heightened feelings of persecution, prejudice, and marginalization (Rosenbaum, 2005). Paranoia causes schizophrenia patients to comprise a third of the mass attacks in the United States each year (Treatment Advocacy Center, 2016). Individuals who suffer from "schizophrenia are 4 to 7 times more likely to commit" acts of violence, and "4 to 6 times more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior" (Cho et al., 2019, p. 475). When schizophrenia goes untreated, individuals experiencing their first episode of psychosis are 15.5 times more at risk of committing homicide than the general population. Furthermore, of the mentally ill individuals who have committed homicide, 80% had received psychiatric treatment in the past, but were not receiving care at the time of the attack (Treatment Advocacy Center, 2016). Mass killers who have been characterized as mentally ill were almost all diagnosed with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia involving psychotic breaks (Treatment Advocacy Center, 2016).

Religious and Symbolic Components

The execution of a mass attack may carry symbolic weight. Though offenders usually select their weapons solely for their effectiveness in eliminating the victim, they may also view their chosen weapon through a convoluted symbolic lens. In one case, a seventeen-year-old offender opened the door to a gay bar and threw chunks of concrete at the patrons inside, injuring two. Concrete may have been a weapon of opportunity. It matches the biblical Jewish punishment for adultery found in Deuteronomy 22:24 of the Old Testament Bible. Symbolism is also at times conveyed not through weaponry but through words spoken before, during, or after the attack. For example, the perpetrator of the Pulse nightclub shooting swore allegiance to the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Tsukayama, 2016).

Perpetrators who commit attacks against LGBTQ+ people and venues come from a wide array of religious backgrounds because a large majority of religions believe LGBTQ+ people are sinful and abominable (Scanzoni & Mollenkott, 1994). Although motivations for attacks on gay venues often involve an intersection of religion, minority status, and political ideology, most attacks against the LGBTQ+ community are primarily religiously motivated (Gold, 2010).

Though many mainline churches (ELCA, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian) openly declare their support for LGBTQ+ members in their congregation and provide safety for these individuals, others are more traditionally conservative or evangelical in their native perception of LGBTQ+ people or actions, which may cause LGBTQ+ persons to fear potential persecution by fellow non-LGBTQ+ church members and leaders. The dichotomy between exclusivity in religion and inclusivity in gay

venues may serve as a demarcation between the two. While religious venues tend to be quite exclusive, gay venues pride themselves on being open to anyone regardless of race, religion, or sexuality. Due to the exclusivity of churches, mass attacks on churches are typically committed by insiders who are a part of the church congregation, whereas offenders of mass attacks against gay venues tend to be outsiders or those who do not identify as LGBTQ+ (Afshar, 2006).

Church sermons by some evangelicals and white nationalists may advocate for violence towards the LGBTQ+ community, which not only increases fear in the LGBTQ+ community but also further condones the victimization of those within it (Meyer & McRary, 2019). This dangerous verbiage can trigger individuals to act out violently in the form of mass attacks. Because religious leaders are highly regarded within the church, their words and opinions greatly impact people who attend their sermons, therefore further supplying potential offenders with reasoning and perhaps justification for the attacks.

Weaponry

Firearms

Mass shootings are the most commonly studied and well-known kind of mass attack. They are widely reported due to high victim counts and the contentious issue of gun violence and legislation. Despite year-to-year fluctuations, mass shootings are overall on the rise (Donnelly et al., 2023). The 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting was the second-deadliest mass shooting in the United States and the deadliest known attack on a gay venue. However, these shootings that killed and/or injured at least four people are not limited to the United States. Other notable mass shootings at gay venues include the 1989 shooting at Peru's Las Gardenias (Redacción, 2025), the 2003 attack on Sizzlers in Cape Town (Serra, 2023), the Tel Aviv Gay Centre shooting in 2009 (Agence France-Presse, 2009), the La Madame shootings in Mexico (Donohue, 2016) and, 2022's Oslo Pride shooting at the London Pub in Norway (Sandvik & Ik Dahl, 2022).

Alternate Weaponry

Firearms are the most frequently used weapon in mass attacks (Schildkraut, 2019), particularly in areas with relatively easy access, such as the United States (Institute for Health Metrics Evaluation, 2023). Therefore, much of the focus on mass violence revolves around shootings but neglects data regarding other methods of attack. While the LGBTQ+ community has been targeted by mass shootings, it also faces attacks utilizing weaponry modes ranging from arson to chemicals like bleach or tear gas.

A perpetrator's chosen weaponry usually depends on how readily attainable the weapon is, its potential symbolic meaning to the perpetrator, or the extent of death and injury it can inflict on victims. Firearms are known to hold the potential for high victim counts, but alternative weaponry can be just as, if not more, successful (Malcom & Swearer, 2018).

Arson

Arson is a highly accessible mode of attack because gasoline and other highly flammable substances are ubiquitous and available for unregulated purchase. The materials needed to commit arson can be found at gas stations or grocery stores. A perpetrator can decide to commit arson and carry it out on the same day, with minimal planning. Arson is one of the least difficult methods of attack because it does not require the perpetrator to make direct contact with the victims. In 2004, the FBI's Uniform Crime Report estimated that 0.8% of murders in the United States used fire as the primary murder weapon (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). Venues such as older historic or brick and steeple gay-

affirming churches are especially prone to arson, as they may display banners on their exteriors and contain flammable décor. Perpetrators typically have little to no control over how a fire spreads or the extent of its destruction. Although offenders may feign innocence if a fire victim dies, the law holds them accountable for setting the chain of events in motion.

Perpetrators who use fire may do so symbolically. Fire is associated with baptism or ritual cleansing by immersion in fire, or the destructive and purging force of hell (Interesting Literature, 2021). As such, arson can be viewed as a ritual cleansing method to purify or purge what the perpetrator perceives as wrong or unnatural.

Due to improved fire alarm systems and protocol, arson is often less fatal than other forms of attack. Perpetrators who intend to destroy a gay establishment but not people may be attracted to the method for this reason. Arson at gay venues was most common in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, especially in Texas (Drake et al., 2025). Gay bars in Houston, and Dallas specifically, often relocated or reopened under different names but were torched repeatedly due to their local reputation as gay hangout spots (Houston LGBTQ History, n.d.).

The most famous mass attack on a gay venue involving arson is the 1973 Up Stairs Lounge fire in New Orleans, Louisiana. The attack killed 32 people and devastated the LGBTQ+ community. At least three bodies were never identified, and several of the identified bodies were never claimed by their families because their relatives were ashamed that their relative was gay. The perpetrator of the Up Stairs Lounge attack, a gay man who was turned away from the bar earlier that night and sought revenge, likely selected arson as his weapon due to its ease of access and impersonal nature rather than for any symbolic reasons (Fieseler, 2018).

Chemical Attacks

Mass chemical attacks on the LGBTQ+ community are infrequently reported compared to other methods of attack. The most common chemicals used in attacks against the LGBTQ+ community are bleach and tear gas (Drake et al., 2022). Chemical attacks are more common outside of the United States, where access to guns is restricted, and thus perpetrators must find other means of attacking the LGBTQ+ community.

Chemical attacks do not often result in deaths, but they can critically injure victims and pose health risks such as chemical burns and temporary vision loss. An offender can potentially decide to launch a chemical attack on the spur of the moment, because many of the chemicals commonly used are highly accessible. For example, bleach can be found in gas stations, in many grocery stores, and in households. Conversely, chemical attacks utilizing controlled substances like tear gas may be specifically employed by a person with a military or police background with access to weapons bases or stockpiles. One famous chemical attack at a gay venue is the tear gas thrown by a protester into a crowd of marchers at the 1999 San Diego Pride parade. Four people were taken to the hospital, and a dozen other event attendees were injured and treated at the scene. The offender was never identified or arrested (SDPride, 2020).

Bombings

Bombs are chosen as a homicide weapon to inflict or threaten to inflict catastrophic harm. The explosion itself has the ability to kill, maim, and injure many, while shrapnel, shattered glass, and concrete can severely harm even those at a distance. Dynamite was commercially regulated beginning in the early 1970s in the United States (Organized Crime Control Act, 1970) and in many other countries. Dynamite and high-grade commercial explosives may be illegal, but theft of explosives occurs with some frequency depending on the country (INTERPOL, 2024).

In May 1990, white supremacists from Idaho's Aryan Nations compound plotted to bomb *Neighbors-Disco*, a popular Seattle gay bar, intending to cause mass casualties by detonating explosives after calling in a threat. The FBI foiled the plot, arresting two men with pipe bombs near the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (Hatch et al., 1990).

Homemade explosives such as pipe bombs are common. As described by the ATF, pipe bombs are often constructed of simple materials that are easily accessible, such as steel or copper pipes, explosive mixtures for the inside, and a fuse. According to the NYC LGBTQ Historic Sites Project, this weapon was used in an attack at a NYC gay bar called Uncle Charlie's in 1990 (Lustbader, 2018). The pipe bomb was constructed of M-80 fireworks enclosed in a pipe, which was ignited and placed in a trash can inside the establishment, injuring three. Similar to pipe bombs, nail bombs are easy to make and have been utilized in mass attacks on gay venues. A popular LGBTQ+ pub in London called Admiral Duncan was targeted in a 1999 nail bombing that killed three and injured 79 (Smith, 2021). The bomb contained about 1,500 nails, which caused injuries ranging from debris injuries to partially amputated legs (Lee, 2019).

Stabbings

Mass stabbings do not occur frequently. Perpetrators of mass attacks generally aim to cause as much injury and death as possible in as minimal an amount of time. Stabbings, however, are time-consuming and generally do not harm a high number of victims before security or the police are able to step in. Perpetrators aiming to create as much panic or kill as many people as possible are unlikely to use this particular method of attack. Additionally, the use of knives or other stabbing mechanisms forces the perpetrator to be in close range with the victim, making sharp-edged homicide a more personal way of killing, which is found frequently in intimate partner homicides (Cook & Walklate, 2022). Mass attacks against the LGBTQ+ community do not usually involve personal motive, and thus, sharp-edged weapons are not frequently used.

While there have been no mass stabbings at LGBTQ+ venues in the United States, that cannot be said of other countries. The two most well-known mass stabbing attacks against a gay venue were perpetrated by the same man at the 2005 and 2015 Jerusalem Pride parades (Beaumont, 2015). Therefore, care should be taken to include them in prevention planning.

Handheld Weapons

Handheld weapons include blunts and bludgeons such as baseball bats, metal bars, glass bottles, and concrete chunks. These are primarily convenience weapons. Offenders may also use handheld weapons, such as stones, which may be chosen for their ubiquity or religious symbolism. These types of weapons are rarely used in mass attacks due to their limited effectiveness in causing large numbers of casualties.

Threats and Unsuccessful Attempts

Some attacks on the LGBTQ+ community amount only to threats or are carried out unsuccessfully. Attack attempts and threats typically receive far less press attention than their successful counterparts due to a lack of injuries and deaths. However, these forms of mass attack impact their victims regardless. Affected venues often lose business or their image as a safe space for the LGBTQ+ community. They may be forced to shut down for an extended period to ensure there is no danger. Threats made during an LGBTQ+ event or at a gay venue can have a similar psychological and

emotional effect on patrons as a physical attack, including panic, stampedes, and post-traumatic stress (*Amicus brief: Romer v. Evans*, 1996). Police may be dispatched to a location to secure the area, using vital resources that could be better used elsewhere. The potential devastation of a threat must not be underestimated, as it has vast implications for the gay venue and for those who frequent or patronize it. One widespread threat was made in 2009 against 11 bars in Seattle, Washington (Conder, 2009). In anonymous letters to the bars threatening to poison its patrons with ricin, the offender wrote, “Please be prepared to announce the deaths of approximately 55 individuals” (Towle, 2009, p. 1). Gay venues are most often threatened with bombings, occurring at a rate of about 45% of all cases coded in the database as threats (Drake, et al., 2025).

Despite the absence of serious injury or damage caused by unsuccessful mass attacks, they create fear, panic, and anxiety within the LGBTQ+ community. An example of an unsuccessful mass attack is the 2018 attempted arson of The Lithuanian Gay League, a gay rights organization. Both the front door and the door blinds of the establishment were set on fire, but a nearby taxi driver managed to put out the flames before the interior was damaged (Braidwood, 2018). No one was injured or killed, but fear of what might have been lingered (Courtney, 2018). Just as successful mass attacks can prompt changes in policy or security measures, unsuccessful attacks or threats can prompt changes in policy or security measures.

Pride events and parades are particularly common targets of threats and unsuccessful attempts due to their visibility, and their organizers consequently often strengthen security measures or host a significant police presence (Ebrahimji, 2022). In 2022, 31 members of the white nationalist group called *Patriot Front* were arrested for planning a mass attack on a Pride event in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. The masked group was found concealed in a U-Haul truck and equipped with shin guards, riot shields, and at least one smoke grenade (Sullivan, 2022). The suspects had traveled from a variety of states, from Texas to Washington, and were apprehended only after a bystander alerted the police to the suspicious entry of a large group into a U-Haul (Wolfe, 2022). The unsuccessful attack inspired several Pride events in other states to tighten their security measures (Ebrahimji, 2022). Many mass attacks are successfully executed but seek to threaten or intimidate rather than harm individuals. Attacking places sacred to the queer community, even at night or early morning hours when the offender knows they will likely damage property but not injure or kill, is an act of prejudice and cowardice.

In some cases, perpetrators openly identify themselves as a person planning to commit a mass attack through what has been termed “leakage,” or the intentional or unintentional sharing of plans, feelings, or fantasies. Frequently, leakage is subtle, with the perpetrator merely hinting at their plan or desire to attack (Lankford et al., 2019). Leakage often involves verbal media such as letters, social media posts, or online chatrooms. Though some who encounter it may ignore it, believing the threat to be false, leakage is one of the most prominent indicators of a future mass attack and should be reported to authorities immediately (Lankford et al., 2019).

Due to digital “leakage” and the anonymity that facilitates online threats, about 70% of mass attack cases since January 2020 were only considered threats or attempts. This compares with only about 43% between 1970 and 1975 and 50% between 1990 and 1995 (Drake et al., 2025). Additionally, while many events in the early decades of queer visibility had hosted events in spite of harassment or potential danger. One such instance was the Gay Academy Union conference in 1973 that was targeted by bomb threats but was not postponed or even relocated after being threatened (D’Emilio, 2016). Modern gay venues and events often exhibit heightened caution due to extensive precedent for attacks at LGBTQ+ venues.

Unintentional Targets

Perpetrators motivated by prejudice against LGBTQ+ people often unknowingly target people who are not LGBTQ+. People who are not LGBTQ+ may be impacted by attacks on gay venues, by association with victims, or by their presence in the venues themselves (Arkin et al., 2022; Madigan et al., 2016; Thrasher, 2016).

Gay venues often serve as a meeting place or safe haven for other marginalized communities. Patrons may also indiscriminately elect to attend a gay venue rather than a non-gay venue, especially when their exteriors are indistinguishable from one another. Gay bars, for example, are typically surrounded by non-gay bars, and a perpetrator seeking a bar to attack may not research which bars are gay venues in advance.

A perpetrator cannot guarantee that all their victims are LGBTQ+ because a rule requiring all attendees to be a part of the community is impossible to enforce. It is also rare that a venue announces such a rule due to a culture of acceptance of allies or people who are questioning their gender or sexuality. However, perpetrators willing to attack LGBTQ+ establishments or events typically plan to do so as a symbolic statement and therefore do not care if every victim is LGBTQ+. Perpetrators who commit mass attacks for the thrill may not distinguish between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ victims, as any person present is a target of convenience.

Intentional targets are difficult to trace and are not frequently the focus of investigations. One unintentional target of Orlando's Breakthrough Theatre in 2024 is known because the offender was misinformed, and the threatened attack was never carried out. The offender sent a bomb threat to the managers of the theater with the stated intent to protest the presence of drag queens at that theater's New Play Festival (Giles, 2024). Bombing a multi-part event with a singular LGBTQ+ component almost certainly results in victims who are not LGBTQ+. Additionally, although early festival advertisements featured a drag queen show, it was later canceled. If the offender had bombed the New Play Festival, he would have successfully targeted few drag queens, if any at all. Further information about the New Play Festival case, such as evidence that the offender intended to attack any and all festival affiliates or patrons rather than the drag queens themselves, could be used to argue that this case does not constitute an unintentional target case.

Global Statistics Using an International Database

Composite Statistics

The data collected for this project included 463 incidents, of which 265 were from within the United States. Indeed, the U.S. accounts for 57.2% of all cases worldwide, according to media outlets and nonprofit human rights monitoring groups. The U.S. is followed by Canada at a distant 7.3%, and then by Russia with 4.1%. In the U.S., arson attacks lead, accounting for 37.7% of all attacks.

Of particular interest is the distribution of offenses by decade. Table 1 indicates that both the U.S. and Canada experienced a decline in these attacks from the 1970s through 2000, after which they nearly doubled in the U.S. by the 2020s, while decreasing in nearby Canada. That upward trend in the U.S. especially jumped going into the 2016 presidential election cycle and its swing toward authoritarianism, with a total of 105 instances during the 2020s, a decade we are only halfway through. Many of the attacks during the 1970s were undertaken by law enforcement vice officers who repeatedly raided Gay establishments and venues.

Table 1 Mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues in North America by decade

Country	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s	Total
Canada	18	7	5	1	1	2	34
Costa Rica	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Haiti	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Mexico	0	1	0	0	5	1	7
United States	56	34	27	11	32	105	265

Note: Counts are for each decade. For example, 1970 through 1979. A few cases may include instances where police beat patrons during a raid, mostly in the 1970s.

Historical events of mass attacks in South America are minimal. Anecdotal evidence reveals that LGBTQ+ people in the country of Haiti were under extreme strain to exist openly as gay. To do so would have been to risk immediate death by being beaten, and they typically die in solo homicides or as couples. There were too few openly LGBTQ+ people to be able to safely gather as groups, and thus, few mass attacks occurred in Haitian venues.

While Brazil (see Table 2) has an excellent monitoring program to track LGBTQ+ homicides (Mott & Domingos, 2025), and the frequency of such killings is high, only one such mass attack was uncovered. This might be due to their use of Portuguese, which makes such cases inaccessible to researchers lacking knowledge of the language. Other issues include strong religiosity and the history of authoritarian governance (Reuters, 2025). Machismo is also entrenched in Brazil and reported to lead to strong anti-gay sentiments, often motivating violence (Lopez, 2015). With attacks on individuals so high there, mass attacks may seem an unnecessary strategy of anti-gay forces.

Table 2 Mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues in South America by decade

Country	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s	Total
Bolivia	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Brazil	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Chile	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Ecuador	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Paraguay	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Peru	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Venezuela	0	0	0	0	0	1	1

Note: Counts are for each decade. For example, 1970 through 1979. A few cases may include where violent groups beat patrons, mostly in the 1970s. Attacks in the 2020s rose most dramatically from the 2016 election cycle onwards.

On the European continent, mass attacks were reported most frequently in England, with 13 cases, followed by Germany with nine, and Ukraine with seven. Many of the countries listed in Table 3, if not English-speaking, were routinely covered in English-language newspapers such as *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom. Although slight, the upward trend, when viewed across multiple countries, is clearly developing throughout the 2010s and 2020s. See Table 3.

Table 3 Mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues in Europe by decade

Country	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s	Total
Albania	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Austria	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Bosn/Herzegovina	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
Bulgaria	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Croatia	0	0	0	1	2	1	4
Czech Republic	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Denmark	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
England	0	0	3	0	6	4	13
Finland	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
France	0	0	0	0	3	2	5
Germany	0	0	0	0	1	8	9
Hungary	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Latvia	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Lithuania	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Macedonia	0	0	0	0	5	0	5
Moldova	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Montenegro	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
Norway	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Poland	0	0	0	0	4	1	5
Serbia	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
Slovakia	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Slovenia	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Spain	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
Sweden	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Ukraine	0	0	0	0	5	2	7
Wales	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

Note: Counts are for each decade. For example, 1970 through 1979. A few cases may include where violent groups beat patrons, mostly in the 1970s.

Globally, arson (39.1%) was the most commonly used weapon in attempted or completed attacks, and bombs (64.0%) were the most frequently mentioned weapon in threats. Personal means (14.5%) was the second most commonly used weapon in attempted or completed attacks, and firearms (23.4%) were the second most common. See Table 4. The likely reason bombs are the most commonly used in threats is the perceived security and ease of issuing online threats. Arson, too, only requires one person to start a fire. Lone-wolf attacks are the most common offender group type for arson (70.1%) and bombs (80.8%) across all combined attack levels.

Weapons used during attacks by violent group actions often involved bludgeons, personal means, and other miscellaneous weapons, such as rocks or projectiles. These frequently consisted of striking victims with truncheons, or weapons of opportunity such as glass bottles, broken bottles, pool cues, bar stools, and other miscellaneous objects. These

Table 4 Mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues globally by weapon (1970-2025)

Weapon	Threats	Attempts	Completed	Total
Firearm	26	5	28	59
Knife	2	2	5	9
Arson	4	18	95	117
Bomb	71	10	23	104
Chemical	4	3	14	21
Personal Means	1	4	38	43
Bludgeon	1	1	18	20
Rocks or Projectiles	2	5	20	27
Totals	111	48	241	400

Note: Only the dominant weapon is categorized. Counts exclude “missing” values. In many instances, as in a threat, the weapon remained unstated, as was the case in 12 instances. “Personal” consists of using one’s hands, fist, feet, or some other part of one’s person. Categories labeled “other” were omitted as the goal was to seek the central tendency.

attacks were difficult to classify due to the large number of violent interactions, many with individualized weaponry and varying individual aggressors. In some cases, they involved the blunt force of LGBTQ+ victims being slammed into walls, while others were abruptly and forcefully shoved to the floor (Ryan, 2019).

A variety of serious injuries occurred as recently as 2009 that involved “a torn rotator cuff” and “brain injury.” Some were forced to the ground onto “broken glass” (Mattson, 2016, p. 1). They also involved broken bones (Human Rights Watch, 2005), cuts, and bruises. Many victims had injuries that were serious enough to be seen at local hospitals, with some requiring hospitalization. At some outdoor events, such as festivals or parades, stones were thrown at LGBTQ+ participants (LGBTIQ+ Intergroup, 2011).

Mass Attacks in the United States Statistics

Frequency

A total of 53.5% of attacks in the United States were completed (137), meaning the physical attack was carried out, while threats accounted for 37.1% (95), and another 9.4% were attempted but not carried to fruition (24). See Table 5. The U.S. led the world in threats and completed attacks on LGBTQ+ venues.

Table 5 Mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues in the U.S. and globally by degree of completion

Country	Threats	Attempts	Completed	Total
United States	95	24	137	256
Non-U.S. Countries	57	26	108	191

Note: Counts exclude “missing” and categories labeled “other.”

Among U.S. attacks, in only 5.7% (15) of instances were any people killed, while in 14.8% (39) of attacks, people were injured. In some cases, attacks resulted in many deaths, such as the Pulse

Nightclub attack. The mass attacks data appear to reveal what we have already learned about hate crime and terrorist events, which is that their point is to provoke mass fear among the targeted group. Only 10.6% (28) of attacks can truly be considered mass attacks, but their impacts far outweigh their incidence. Moreover, 439 victims were injured in United States attacks, and 124 were killed.

Table 6 Mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues in the United States by weapon

Weapon	Threats	Attempts	Completed	Total
Firearm	18	3	14	35
Knife	0	0	2	2
Arson	2	13	85	100
Bomb	51	4	9	64
Chemical	4	1	4	9
Personal Means	1	1	13	15
Bludgeon	1	0	7	8
Rocks or Projectiles	0	2	3	5
Totals	77	24	137	238

Note: Only the dominant weapon is categorized. Counts exclude “missing” values. In many instances, as in a threat, the weapon remained unstated, as in 18 instances. “Personal” consists of using one’s hands, fist, feet, or some other part of one’s person. Categories labeled “other” were omitted as the goal was to seek central tendency.

In Table 6, we can see an important comparison between bombs and arson attacks. Arsons are seldom threatened (2.0%), but frequently carried out (85.0%), while the opposite is true for bombs. Bombs were “Threatened” in 79.7% of incidents, compared to being “Completed” in only 14.1%. So, while bomb threats are common, they should not be ignored or minimized due to the very high danger to life involved.

Of mass attacks globally, 10.6% (49) targeted transgender-specific events, and of these, 83.7% occurred in the United States (41), thus illustrating that recent attacks in the U.S. are anti-transgender specific.

Gay political empowerment lags in many countries around the world, and therefore so does LGBTQ+ visibility. Their mass attacks only began occurring in the 2000s or later, and therefore, they now experience violent group attacks or police raids similar to those of the 1970s in North America. Many contemporary threats over the last 5-10 years in the U.S., England, and Canada correspond to drag events such as storytelling hours. Although some performers are transgender, many are gay men using it as a means of challenging political ideas about gender and gender roles.

Repeated attacks targeting a single venue have occurred. *Central Station* (club) in Russia (Pedro, 2013; Ring, 2013) is reminiscent of the fate of bars and clubs across Texas and the United States in the 1970s. The Texas ones were repetitive arson attacks on churches of a single denomination. Government officials failed to mobilize to protect the community from these attacks, a phenomenon termed “political silence” (Cooke, 2018, p. 1). In Russia, the government has begun raiding LGBTQ+ venues after labeling LGBTQ+ organizations as extremist, and legislation was passed codifying anti-propaganda laws.

Countries in which members of the LGBTQ+ community are openly persecuted or even outlawed do not have many openly gay establishments or events. Though reduced reporting on LGBTQ+ issues from these countries complicates statistical comparisons, it is likely that they typically see higher rates of attacks on gay individuals but lower rates of attacks on gay venues because there are so few.

Weapons

The U.S. accounts for 59.3% (35) of firearm cases globally compared to 40.7% (24) of non-U.S. cases. Firearms (24) were identified as being used in fewer threats or attacks in non-U.S. countries than personal means (28). Conversely, firearms (35) identified in the U.S. for attacks or threats were greater than personal means (15). In other words, the U.S. comprised 8.8% of all shooting attacks or threats as compared to 7.0% of non-U.S. cases (all combined), perhaps an artifact of the available prevalence of firearms in the United States.

Due to strict firearm regulations, European countries seldom experience mass shootings. Instead, most attacks on European gay venues were committed using sharp-edged weapons, chemical weaponry, bombs, or arson. In the United States and Mexico, firearms were the most prominent weapons utilized in non-LGBTQ+-specific mass attacks (Molla, 2022). The most devastating shootings at gay venues in the United States and Mexico included the 2016 attacks at Orlando's Pulse (Alvarez & Pérez-Peña, 2016) and Veracruz state's La Madame (Murphy, 2017). A curious finding is that although firearms proliferation is high in the United States, it is not the weapon of choice in anti-LGBTQ+ attacks, according to our data.

Although arson attacks were common in both the United States and Europe, 85.5% occurred in the United States. Elsewhere, in Lithuania, an anonymous arsonist staged an attack on an LGBTQ+ group called the Lithuanian Gay League (LGL), where the office entrance was torched by an unknown flammable liquid and was quickly extinguished by a passerby, leading to minimal damage and no deaths (Courtney, 2018).

Arson attacks did occur in the United States, but they seldom rose to the level of a *mass killing*. In a more recent U.S. attack, a fire started in the Rash Bar of Brooklyn, New York, which left two people severely injured (Stelloh, 2022). Many fires at gay bars or clubs were never proven to be arson, though they might have been. Fires often occur at gay bars that are not arson, due to poor fire prevention practices such as cluttering and/or inadequate housekeeping. Arson occurred in 42.0% (100) of U.S. cases, compared to 10.5% (17) of non-U.S. ones.

Bombs were commonly used on every continent. However, 64 bombing incidents occurred in the U.S. compared to 40 occurring in countries elsewhere. In the U.S., 79.7% of bomb attacks were only threats. Outside of the U.S., only 50% of bomb attacks were simply threats. Bombing threats and attacks most commonly occurred along the European border with Asian countries.

Compared to other countries, the United States has experienced fewer LGBTQ+ mass attacks in which bombs were utilized as the primary weapon. However, bomb threats in the United States have become a commonplace way for anti-LGBTQ+ people to exhibit their displeasure with gay establishments or events. The growing popularity of drag shows in recent years, in particular, has engendered a multitude of bomb threats. One of the most notable bombings within the United States targeted the lesbian bar called *Otherside Lounge* in 1977 (Abid-Kons, 2022).

Chemical weaponry was also more common in countries outside of the United States, with 12 cases in non-U.S. countries compared to nine inside the U.S. Few nations have taken firm action to limit the rate of chemical attacks against the LGBTQ+ community and have instead responded with minimal police force and news coverage. Following the tear gas attack of a San Diego Pride Parade in 1999, attendees described law enforcement as complacent in their search for the suspect, as no arrests were made and the suspect was never caught (Associated Press, 1999). Similarly, *Central Station*, a gay Moscow nightclub, experienced several attacks in the form of poison gas and the complete dismantling of the club's roof (Pedro, 2013; Ring, 2013). However, due to the police's negligent efforts to protect the establishment and its attendees, the owners were forced to close *Central Station* in 2014 (Brydum, 2014). These instances indicate that the United States and other nations respond similarly to chemical mass attacks despite a large disparity in the rate of incidents.

Other miscellaneous weapons used in mass attacks included: knives (2 U.S., 7 non-U.S.), personal means, including hands, first, or feet (9 U.S., 28 non-U.S.), and other (9 U.S., 7 non-U.S.). Therefore, these other weapon types are not insignificant in mass attacks.

True Mass Attacks

Editor's Note: True Mass Attacks do not include threats or attempts but do match the criteria of four or more dead or wounded.

Among true mass attacks that pass criteria (TMA), they are defined as a single event where four or more people were injured and/or killed and that targeted LGBTQ+ venues. The data shows that 35.8% (24) came from the U.S., though the majority, 64.2% (43), came from outside the United States. Additionally, the U.S. accounted for only 34.9% (448) of injuries from true mass attacks, while non-U.S. countries accounted for 65.1% (836). Despite their minority of cases, the U.S. accounts for 59.6% (124) of the total deaths in true mass attacks. The rest of the world experienced 40.4% (84) of these deaths. See Table 7.

Table 7 True mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues in the U.S. and globally

Country	Injured	Killed	True Mass Attacks
United States	448	124	24
Non-U.S. Countries	836	84	43

Note: Counts exclude "missing" and categories labeled "other."

The deadliest weapon in a TMA is a firearm, which accounted for 29.7% (19) of all TMAs but is responsible for 68.3% (140) of all deaths. See Table 8. In our data, there was no firearm use that did not lead to at least one death in a TMA. Of these firearm cases, 52.6% (10) of them occurred in the United States and accounted for 57.1% (80) of the firearm deaths. Although firearms were not the weapon of choice for mass attacks and threats, they were favored in TMAs.

Table 8 True mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues by weapon

Weapon	Injured	Killed	True Mass Attacks
Firearm	226	140	19
Knife	9	7	2
Arson	42	55	5
Bomb	223	3	5
Chemical	99	0	5
Personal Means	280	0	14
Bludgeon	307	0	9
Rocks or Projectiles	79	0	5
Totals	1,265	205	64

Note: Only the dominant weapon is categorized. Counts exclude "missing" values. "Personal" consists of using part of the offender's body. Categories labeled "other", as in three cases, were omitted as the goal was

to seek the central tendency.

When it came to TMAs, lone wolves tended to favor firearms, with 51.9% (14) of lone wolf attacks primarily using a firearm. This appears to be a contradiction because our data encompassing all mass attacks showed arson and bombs to be the weapon of choice for lone wolves. Despite this, arson and bombs together accounted for a relatively small percent (29.6%; 8 cases total) of TMAs committed by lone wolves. Most firearm attacks (73.7%) in our data were committed by lone wolf perpetrators, with only 26.3% (5) having been committed by a small violent group.

The lone wolf category was also the deadliest offender group type, perhaps because of their choice of weapon. Lone wolves accounted for 80.8% (168) of reported deaths. On the other hand, this group committed only 37.2% (471) of the injuries reported. See Table 9. Lone wolf perpetrators tended to lead to deadlier outcomes than any other group type, and only 25.9% (7) of lone wolf events did not result in any deaths. Non-lone wolf events for comparison had no reported deaths in 82.5% (33) of cases. This is likely because lone wolves were not attacking reactively. Instead, they planned and committed themselves to kill, as opposed to other group types who may have been more prone to reactive attacks or avoiding killing altogether.

Table 9 True mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues by group type

<i>Group Type</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>True Mass Attack</i>
Lone Wolf	471	168	27
Violent Group	447	37	26
Police Group	335	0	13

Note: Counts exclude "missing" and categories labeled "other."

Despite having the same number of attacks globally, arson (5) comprised 26.8% (55) of deaths while bombs (5) comprised 1.5% (3) of TMA deaths. Conversely, bombs comprised 17.6% (223) of injuries while arson consisted of 3.4% (42) injuries. See Table 8. This disparity reveals that while arson fires were typically extinguished before any injuries or deaths could occur, when they did reach the level of a TMA, the consequences were prolific. Bombs on the other hand, while they are normally used as threats, when they reach the point of a TMA, they can affect and injure far more people than an arson can.

Despite not having any reported deaths, bludgeon attacks should not be viewed as lesser because these events can have high injury counts and highlight the wrongdoing of police during peaceful events. Police routinely raided bars using truncheons, which in violence research are viewed as being used to bludgeon their victims. Bludgeoning had the highest injury count at 307 injured (24.3%) during TMAs but had no reported deaths in these events. These events were typically committed by police groups who made up 19.4% (13) of the TMAs against LGBTQ+ venues and 66.7% (6) of the bludgeon attacks. See Table 8. Among these events, *The Elephant Walk* in 1979 had the highest injury count of any TMA in our data. This event composed 52.4% (161) of the reported injuries using bludgeon weapons.

People are politically concerned about transgender specific events, but the data revealed that among TMAs, only two such events have occurred, and there were no reported deaths. Neither took place in the U.S., and both were committed by police groups. While recent attacks in the U.S. seem to target transgender specific events, TMA incidents seem to target LGBTQ+ venues more broadly.

Despite the tolerance of LGBTQ+ people growing around the world, the frequency of TMAs appears to be rising. With only six cases globally in the 1970s, TMAs in our data peaked in the 2010s at 21 cases and have totaled 13 cases thus far in the 2020s. Interestingly, this rise appeared to be unique to non-U.S. countries up until the 2020s, wherein the U.S. is now experiencing an increase in TMAs. The U.S. had five cases of TMAs in the 1970s and then dropped to two in the 2010s. See Table 10. Political success among LGBTQ+ groups around the world remains limited in many countries. When LGBTQ+ groups become more visible, the intolerant groups and individuals push back violently, which explains the current rise in TMAs in non-U.S. countries.

Table 10 True mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues in the United States and globally by decade

Country	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s	Total
Non-U.S. Countries	1	2	4	10	19	7	43
United States	5	4	4	3	2	6	24
Total	6	6	8	13	21	13	67

Note: Counts are for each decade. For example, 1970 through 1979.

The 2010s were the most dangerous decade for gay groups as they witnessed the highest number of TMAs, reported injuries, and deaths. The 2010s alone accounted for 32.6% (418) of these injuries and 52.9% (110) of the deaths during TMAs. See Table 12. These attacks also took place outside the U.S. in a majority of cases (90.5%; 19 cases). See Table 10. A firearm was used in 33.3% of these attacks, the most lethal weapon for a TMA. See Table 11.

Table 11 True mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues weapon use by decade

Weapon	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
Firearm	0	3	0	4	7	5
Knife	0	0	0	2	1	0
Arson	2	0	1	0	2	0
Bomb	0	0	3	1	0	1
Chemical	0	0	0	1	2	2
Personal Means	2	2	1	1	4	4
Bludgeon	2	0	3	1	3	0
Rock or Projectiles	0	0	0	3	2	0
Total	6	5	8	13	21	12

Note: Counts are for each decade. For example, 1970 through 1979. These counts exclude “missing” values. “other” categories were also not included, as in 3 cases, as the goal was to seek the central tendency.

While mass attacks (including fewer injured/dead victims or threats and attempts) occur more frequently, they do not have the devastating impact that TMAs have. Despite making up only 14.5% (67) of our data, TMAs constitute 94.5% of all death reports and 90.5% of all injury reports in our dataset. See Table 13. Firearms have been the favored weapon during TMAs, and 84.2% (16) of all firearm cases have appeared after the 1990s. See Table 11. The recent rise of TMAs and the deadlier weapons being used warns us that TMAs against gay venues may only increase without intervention.

Table 12 Mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues injuries and deaths by decade

	<i>1970s</i>	<i>1980s</i>	<i>1990s</i>	<i>2000s</i>	<i>2010s</i>	<i>2020s</i>	<i>Total</i>
Injured	209	40	217	161	418	239	1,284
Killed	41	13	14	13	110	17	208

Note: Counts are for each decade. For example, 1970 through 1979.

Table 13 True mass attacks vs mass attacks at LGBTQ+ venues

<i>Attack Type</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Events</i>
True mass attack	1,284	208	67
Mass attack	135	12	396
Total	1,419	220	463

Note: Counts exclude “missing” categories. Mass attacks included attempted or threats to gay venues that targeted 4 or more people. True mass attacks are attacks that had 4 or more people killed or injured.

Implications of Findings on Preventing and Mitigating Mass Attacks

Relationships with Law Enforcement

Today, the LGBTQ+ community has a complex and fraught relationship with the police force due to a history and persistent culture of violence, mistrust, and intimidation. Police primarily interacted with groups of LGBTQ+ people at protests and bar, nightclub, or bathhouse raids, where police would routinely beat and intimidate large numbers of LGBTQ+ patrons.

Throughout history, police forces have often broken up peaceful protests or advocacy through nonpeaceful means. Weapons include rubber bullets, batons, personal means, or chemicals such as tear gas or pepper spray, typically reserved to counteract violent clashes or riots. Many in the modern LGBTQ+ community remain torn between holding police-free celebrations and acquiring security at Pride events to prevent further mass attacks.

The issue of law enforcement involvement in Pride events has prompted a range of responses and decisions. Sensitive to the history of the gay liberation movement, organizers of the Grand Rapids Pride Festival hired private security instead of police (Witkos, 2022). In 2019, Toronto banned the police from the city’s annual parade indefinitely, and Minneapolis police themselves decided not to march in that city’s parade due to community opposition (Stack, 2019). The organizers of the NYC Pride March, Heritage of Pride, took a stance in 2022 by banning uniformed officers with weapons from marching. The decision was protested by the Gay Officers Action League (GOAL), an organization composed of gay and lesbian police officers that advocates for LGBTQ+ military, first responders, law enforcement, and criminal justice professionals (Berger, 2025).

Some members of the LGBTQ+ community form queer security factions that they can trust to protect their events and establishments. Others seek to bridge divides with the police force. A poll conducted in 2019 found that 79% of LGBTQ+ Americans supported including police officers in Pride events, while only 8% opposed it (Stack, 2019). Gay police officers pressured to select only one of their conflicting identities play a major role in connecting the two communities. Though police have

historically permitted, perpetrated, or even encouraged violence against LGBTQ+ people, the vast majority of modern law enforcement personnel in the United States and many other countries now include the LGBTQ+ community in their mission to protect and serve (Toesland, 2021).

Police raids were routine in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in both gay and non-gay venues (Stewart-Winter, 2015). However, a pattern of violent raids was a focal point of the Stonewall Inn uprising and the consequential gay rights movement. Many early raids did not hide their intentions as they conducted inspections or shut down bars or nightclubs for being lewd, while other raids were disguised as consequences of fire code violations, operating without liquor licenses, or tax evasion (Nakasone, 2024). These excuses for disproportionately targeting gay bars and nightclubs continue to be used to this day, as seen during 2024 raids on several Seattle LGBTQ+ establishments (Shapiro et al., 2024). The power granted to police forces to conduct compliance checks or shut down businesses without evidence of rule breaches enabled violence and prejudice against LGBTQ+ establishments. For example, New York's 1985 Padlock Law licensed police to close businesses suspected of illegal activity without review or oversight (Nakasone, 2024).

Weapons utilized in police mass attacks on gay venues include batons or other bludgeons, which are coded as "other" in the database (Drake, et al., 2025). Police officers also use fists or other personal means, as well as guns. Though firearms are rarely employed in police raids or protest responses, the presence of armed personnel in a venue designed for comfort and relaxation is a means to threaten, which can be frightening and intimidating for patrons.

Owners and Managers

While mass shootings have high lethality, most attacks on LGBTQ+ venues involve arson attacks, of which completed attacks occurred 39.4% globally and 62.0% in the U.S. Exits need to be clear of obstructions and unlocked or provided with panic hardware. All doors should be operable. The egress route should not be a location for storage. Curtains, especially on performance stages, should be flame-retardant, and fireworks displays should not be allowed. Pressurized water extinguishers must always be in operable condition and serviced by licensed fire extinguisher companies at routine intervals. All areas of public assembly must have a fire alarm system that is operable and tested periodically. Gatherings in private homes are not designed for public assembly.

Since the shooting at Orlando's Pulse nightclub, owners and operators of gay venues have taken necessary measures to ensure that their bars and clubs do not experience the same tragedy. These measures include visible indicators of tightened security, including pat-down checks and metal detectors (Schonfeld & Brenner, 2016). However, some steps taken are invisible, such as installing video cameras, enhancing police patrols, and hiring private security companies. Companies like Nightclub Security Consultants (NCS) of San Diego, California, offer emergency response training for situations such as mass attacks. Such training might benefit any person who owns or operates a gay venue or event.

Many companies across the United States have installed "safe rooms" in their buildings, areas which can be locked from the inside and are bullet-resistant. Restrooms are often converted into safe rooms. In the past, many victims have hidden in restrooms during mass attacks and consequently lost their lives. Managers of gay venues that lack space to install an additional safe room can consider updating their bathrooms to create a safe place to hide in the case of a mass attack. Perhaps a less expensive alternative is to install a second exit route (Drake & Mathwig, 2018).

In the wake of mass attacks and threats, some local and federal law enforcement officials have helped educate and train gay venue managers. For example, after the Pulse nightclub shooting, local police departments in Seattle and Phoenix conducted active shooter training in local gay nightclubs (CNN Wire, 2016; Koehle, 2016), while police in the San Fernando Valley visited local gay bars to evaluate their floor plans and exits and to recommend emergency plans for patrons to hide or escape

(Carey, 2016). Other gay venues and organizations, such as San Antonio's LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce, organized active-shooter training for their members (Rambaldi, 2016), and even the FBI led active-shooter training at an LGBTQ+ community center in Michigan following a 2021 threat (Michael, 2021). In response to threats made to Costa Rican gay clubs to repeat the Pulse nightclub shooting, government officials and police coordinated with bar owners to plan extra security measures, including strategic placement of security cameras, thorough bag and body checks, and increased police vehicle and foot patrols (Anders, 2016). Due to the polarization of LGBTQ+ people around the globe, taking threats seriously is of utmost importance.

Police emphasize the importance of reporting suspicious activity, regardless of the precautions venue owners take, because law enforcement officers undergo extensive training to prepare them for mass attacks. However, taking the time to call the police or making sounds during an attack endangers the caller and all occupants of the venue. To remedy this, gay bar owners in states such as New Hampshire have installed silent alarms and emergency (panic) buttons in their bars, allowing employees to instantly and silently notify the police of an emergency (Chaturvedi, 2020).

Despite the known benefits of increasing security and police presence, the LGBTQ+ community has voiced concerns about such protocol at gay venues. People who are transgender and queer people of color have often suffered violence at the hands of security guards and police. Because of this history, some owners and managers may be reluctant to hire security, while other patrons find the presence of police traumatic rather than assuring. The Safe Bar program by the Collective Action for Safe Spaces may help alleviate some of the fear by providing anti-racist and trans-inclusive training for those who work to protect gay bars and venues (Shadel, 2017).

Many owners refuse to implement any security at their gay venue because they feel that doing so would be giving in to fear (Shadel, 2017). For example, even after the attack on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, the owner of a gay bar in Washington, D.C., rejected recommendations for armed security, pat-downs, or metal detectors. He believed that implementing tighter security measures in response to threats and attacks was "losing" to people who hate the LGBTQ+ community (Drabold, 2016). Such venue owners rely on their customers' shared attitude to continue visiting these venues despite perceived intimidation by offenders (Hutchison, 2016).

|State Level Policy Actions

The most common and deadly type of mass attack on gay venues in the United States is a shooting. Stricter gun regulations are associated with reduced numbers of firearm-related deaths (Donnelly et al., 2023). Gun legislation could, therefore, significantly impact mass attacks, but it is not a fail-safe or complete solution on its own. Given the commonplace use of bomb threats, materials, and packaging, larger venues like festival grounds or parades might do well to employ bomb-sniffing dogs over the weekend. Security staff should be well-trained to identify unaccompanied packages or double-capped pipes. They should also have written response procedures that they train for in advance.

Establishing public policies that set community standards for acceptance and non-violence can deter attacks on gay venues and individuals. Implementing policies sets a community-wide standard and counters the motives of potential offenders. Successful mass attacks on gay individuals and venues likely embolden would-be perpetrators and further violence, as demonstrated by spates of unpunished "gay bashings" in the mid to late 20th century.

Creating a non-violent society at the state or federal level can minimize violence in individual communities. For instance, when Massachusetts legalized gay marriage in 2003, state hate crimes dropped by roughly 37% (Bantley, 2008). Policies and the attitudes of influential figures also have the potential to perpetuate further violence against the LGBTQ+ community. A 1992 protest held by ACT UP/RNC and Queer Nation/Houston outside the Republican National Convention due to its anti-

LGBTQ+ platform was attacked by police in riot gear. At least twelve people were injured. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force blamed the attack on the anti-gay sentiment promoted by the George H. W. Bush 1992 presidential campaign (NGLTF, 1992). All over the world, anti-gay and anti-trans legislation is being proposed at the state and federal levels at growing rates. Such bans on LGBTQ+ medical care, social rights, and education are directly linked to increased attacks on gay individuals and venues. For example, anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes were between three and four times higher from 2021-2022 than from 2015-2019 in states with prominent anti-LGBTQ+ policies and sentiment (Kirpalani, 2024). Policies in recent years, such as Florida's 2022 'Don't Say Gay' bill, focus public attention on LGBTQ+ issues, foster stigma, and tolerate hateful rhetoric. Many politicians associate LGBTQ+ activity with a lack of morality or traditional values, shaping the moral codes of the public to oppose the LGBTQ+ community (Feldblum & Boucai, 2006). Breaching these moral codes may stir anti-LGBTQ+ people to what they view as 'righteous anger,' similar to the reaction of self-acclaimed 'vigilantes of justice' toward individuals they feel break the law (Asif & Weenink, 2019). Therefore, the reframing of LGBTQ+ issues as freedoms that do not impact collective values or the common good by influential figures would substantially decrease the chances of mass attacks fueled by panics regarding morality or justice.

However, policies do not have to be enacted by governing bodies to impact the protection of LGBTQ+ persons. For example, after an attempted riot at the 2022 Idaho Pride Festival, the organizers of New York City Pride announced new policies for their annual march (Ebrahimji, 2022). Although individual venue or event owners and managers can only reliably dictate their own policies, such changes often have far-reaching impacts, prompting decision-makers at other venues or events to tighten security or raise concerns with law enforcement (Morse, 2025). Unfortunately, most changes are made only after attacks have already occurred; a strong security posture should be proactive and preventive rather than reactive. Additional information is available from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2025).

Gay venues may benefit from policies that regulate the selection of security officers and determine their specific training. The guards or managers at each venue should be trained to address the weaknesses specific to their venue. The policy also ensures an evacuation or protection plan in the event of a mass attack. Security guards should also be warned against releasing footage of any explosion or shooting because it plays into the hands of terrorists who need as many people as possible to view the spectacle, thereby fomenting the terror (Matusitz, 2015; Mirgani, 2017). Security officers and owners should also warn customers against posting this video on social media to limit others' exposure to any trauma it might transmit.

LGBTQ+ Venue Attendee Actions

The gay venue patron experience varies due to contextual factors such as time period, location, and venue type, as well as individual characteristics such as cognition, sensation, and interpretation. Though many LGBTQ+ people feel safer than they used to due to increased societal and legislative acceptance, others experience fear when entering large event spaces due to continued attacks on gay venues. Since the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, one New York drag queen looks around for an exit route whenever entering a venue, whether or not it is affiliated with the LGBTQ+ community (Alfonseca, 2022). Thus, mass attacks at gay venues, especially high-profile attacks like Pulse, have impacted the patron experience of gay venues and non-gay venues alike.

Mass attacks on gay venues have spurred a broad spectrum of responses, the most well-known of which is anti-violence advocacy. Members of the LGBTQ+ community are often members of anti-violence organizations that fight for the enactment of gun control legislation and for increased venue protection. Groups such as Gays Against Guns stage protests at firms that invest in gun production and

target companies that partner with the National Rifle Association (Neate, 2017). Just as establishment owners and managers often take active-shooter training to prepare for emergencies and to identify security weaknesses in their layouts or operations, patrons are also advised to regularly attend emergency preparedness and defense workshops.

In lieu of mandated ‘bubble zones’ that safeguard civilian access to public events or services from protesters, volunteer groups composed of members of the LGBTQ+ community and allies often plan in advance to peacefully protect gay venues and events. Members of groups like the Australian Rainbow Community Angels (RCA) wear large angel wings for defensive purposes. The wingspan enables the RCA to block off entrances to gay venues and keep protesters a safe distance from patrons (Kelly, 2023). However, their defensive approach is primarily effective when protesters use hateful rhetoric or empty threats but do not intend or are unwilling to enact physical violence. Unless groups like the RCA were armed and trained as security guards, they could not effectively guard against a mass attack.

A sect of the LGBTQ+ community addresses this crucial gap with a proactive offensive approach. Like those who advocate for arming teachers in response to the ongoing crisis of school shootings, groups like The Pink Pistols believe that members of the LGBTQ+ community should actively defend themselves against inevitable attacks on gay venues and individuals. A self-described “gay self-defense group” in the United States and Canada, The Pink Pistols provides LGBTQ+-friendly firearm training and education and encourages LGBTQ+ people to protect themselves against attacks (Diamond & Berg, 2016). However, indoor facilities traditionally do not allow firearms, even for “good guys,” nor is it wise to pull out a firearm during a mass shooting because you may be mistaken for the shooter. Intentionally or not, the Pink Pistols group makes the statement that LGBTQ+ people cannot *only* rely on non-LGBTQ+ people in their time of greatest need. Their view still oftentimes rings true.

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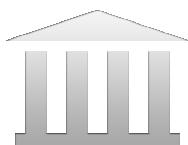
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