

Mass Shootings Online in California



There have been almost two mass shootings a day in America during 2021 – the highest rate on record. With the number of mass shootings in 2021 increasing by **149%** when compared to 2014, we wanted to learn more about how people explore mass shootings online and therefore identify ways to support those vulnerable to committing mass shootings.

From 16 November - 13 December 2021, Moonshot gathered anonymous search data in California related to mass shootings. We've defined mass shootings as events in which multiple people are killed in educational settings using firearms, though we have included some cases that fall outside these parameters due to their similarities to mass shootings. Our data from this initial snapshot shows three main things:

1. The majority of interest in school shooters and shooting is generic and reflects "general interest" rather than deeper concerning behavior, in much the same way as true crime is a popular genre.
2. Concerning behavior – from watching footage of shootings, to idolising shooters, to expressing intent to harm students – is also evident, and needs to be properly understood.
3. Pre-attack behaviors are being exhibited online, and present a vital opportunity to offer support to those drawn towards committing school shootings.

We also recognize that behind these numbers are hundreds of people affected by mass shootings, all with individual stories of grief, difficulty and resilience. Our sympathies are extended to those who are affected by these issues, and hope this data can be used in collaboration with partners to reduce the risk of mass shootings in the future.

Search behaviors

For those searches that displayed a developed, rather than general, interest in mass shooters or shootings, search behavior can be categorized in five different ways.

Engagement 62%

Searches that illustrate a desire to deepen knowledge or exposure to mass shootings. These searches aim to engage with mass shootings as a topic through such activities like seeking out forum discussions, watching footage of shooters or shootings, or reading written material from past shooters.

Affinity 32%

Searches that reflect some level of identification with mass shooters or shootings. They illustrate an affinity with shooters by using their nicknames, searching for details about their clothes or style, or seeking music related to them.

Intent to harm 3%

Searches that indicate an intention to harm others. They can include searches about how to shoot schools or students.

Imitation 2%

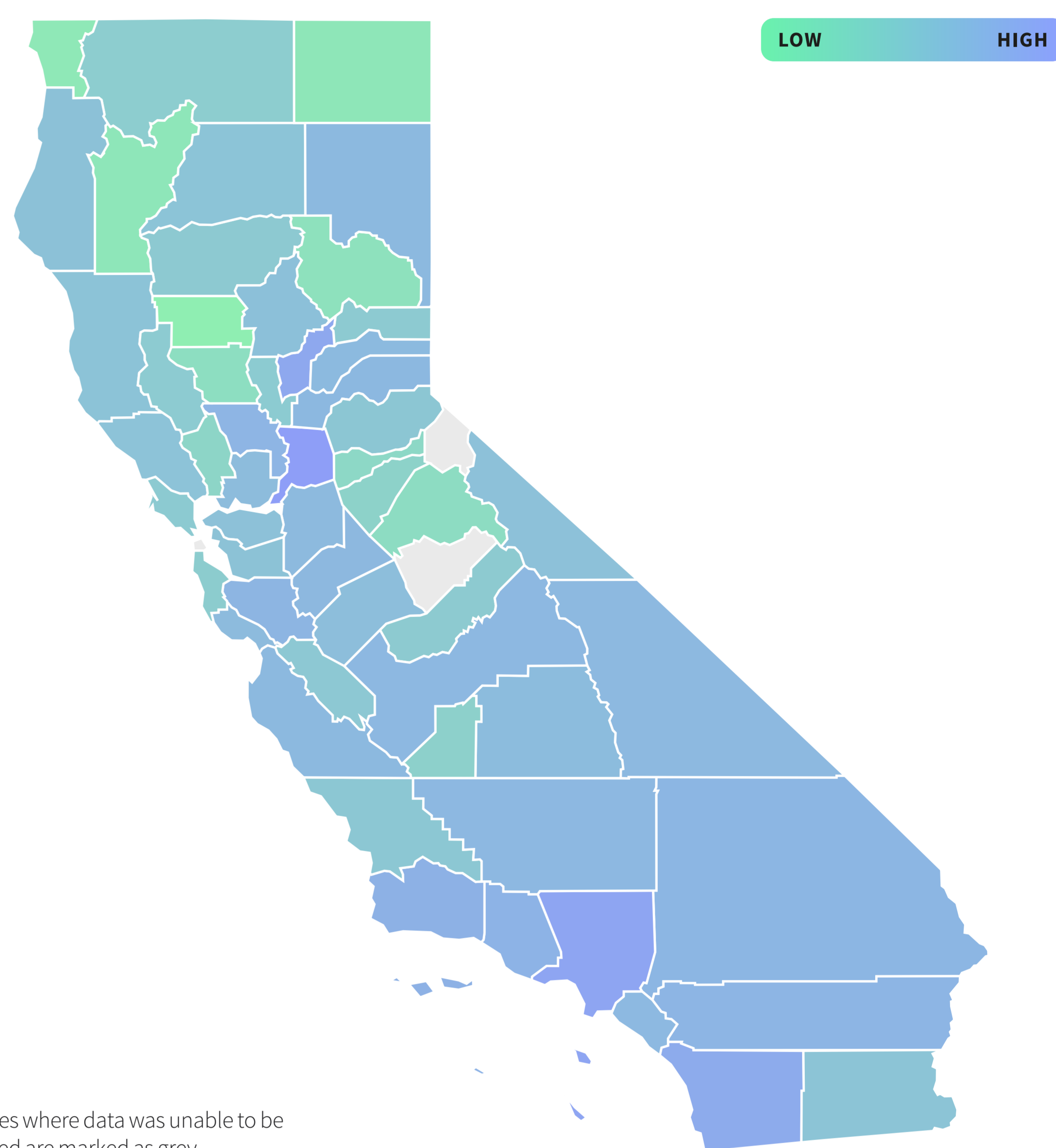
Searches that suggest an interest in emulating a mass shooter or shooting. For example, searches for games that reconstruct past shootings and allow players to act out the role of shooters.

Trivialisation 1%

Searches that undermine the seriousness of mass shootings, most typically memes mocking the events.

Where are the risks?

This map shows the proportion of searches related to mass shooters and shootings across counties in California. Volumes are calculated per 100,000 people, to link search behavior to the population in each county. San Francisco County was also omitted from the map due to being significantly higher than other counties, with 123 searches per 100,000 of the county's population.

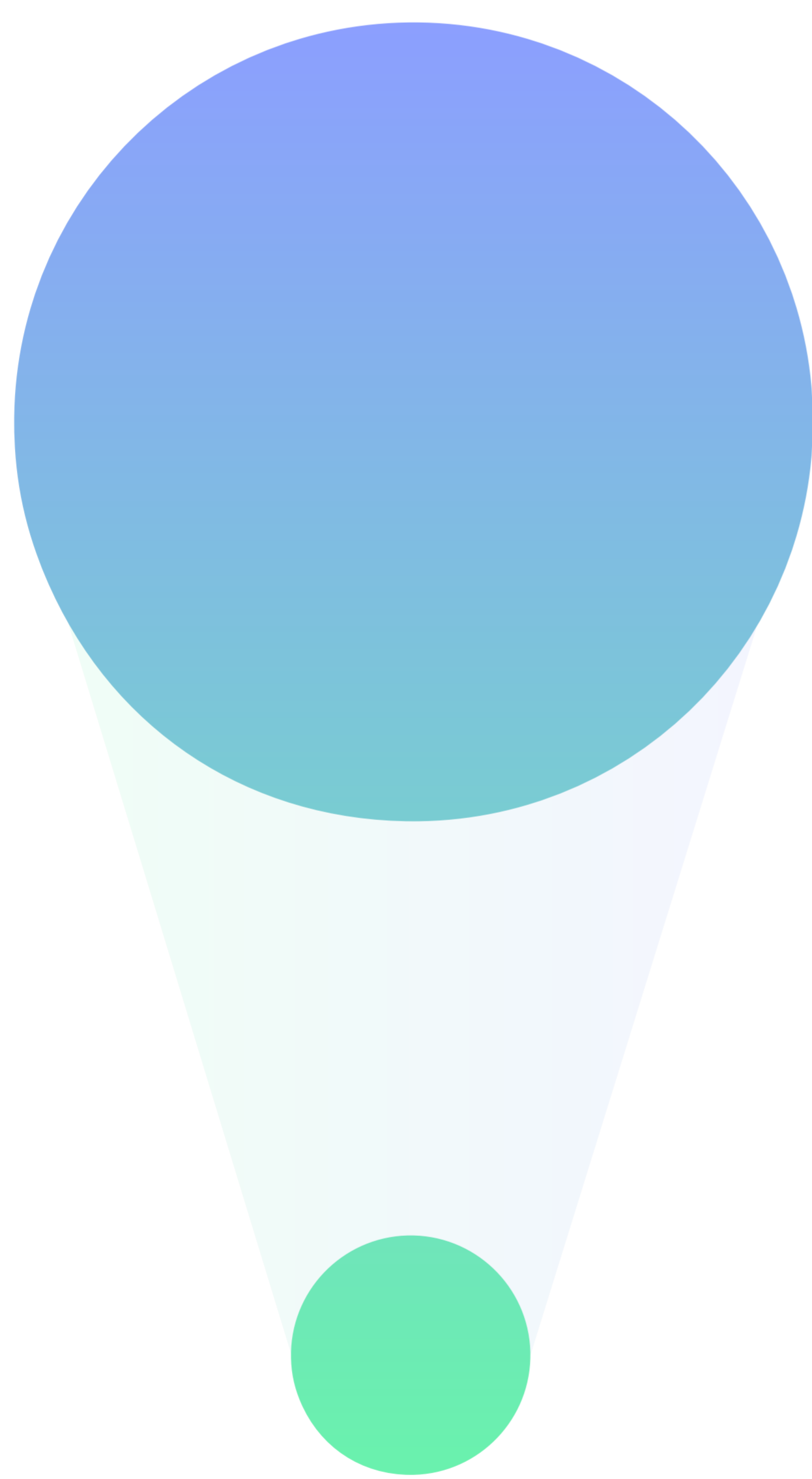


Counties where data was unable to be collected are marked as grey.

Total searches related to mass shootings

42,854

The total number of searches gathered that are related to mass shooters or shootings



12,860

of which were specifically associated with mass shootings targeting educational facilities

Top five searches

Searches for footage

Nikolas Cruz – the perpetrator of the 2018 Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Florida, the deadliest in US history – was reported to have repeatedly searched for school shooting content and footage in the months preceding his attack. Below are the top five developed searches gathered by Moonshot that look for video footage related to mass shootings targeting educational facilities.

- #1 **Columbine Hitmen for Hire**
- #2 **Sandy Hook footage**
- #3 **Sandy Hook CCTV**
- #4 **school shooting footage**
- #5 **school shooting videos**

Searches for intent to harm

Moonshot gathered 50 searches in total that indicated an intent to harm others. The top five terms are listed below.

- #1 **kill classmates**
- #2 **shoot students**
- #3 **attack school**
- #4 **how to kill classmates**
- #5 **how to kill students**

Number of searches per day

The below graph shows how searches that displayed a developed interest in mass shooters or shootings targeting educational facilities changed over time. Search volumes peaked on 1 and 4 December - the day after the Oxford High School shooting in Michigan occurred, and the day the shooter's parents were reported to be detained following a brief manhunt.

