

Most churches have security plans, armed members

June 8, 2023

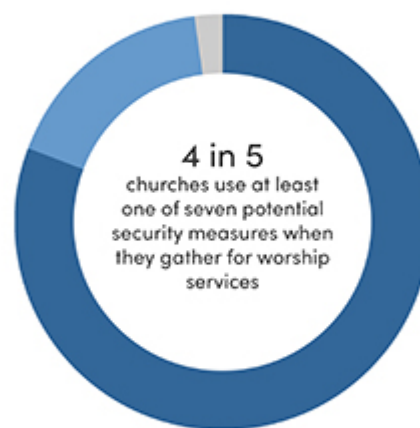
BRENTWOOD, Tenn.—Most churches have some type of security measures in place during worship services, a Lifeway Research survey revealed.

Pastors point to intentional plans and armed church members more than other measures, and compared to three years ago, more say they have gun-carrying congregants.

When asked about their protocols when they gather for worship, around 4 in 5 U.S. Protestant pastors (81 percent) say their church has some type of security measure in place, according to a [study from Lifeway Research](#).

Most churches have at least some security measures in place for worship services

Among U.S. Protestant pastors



Notes: 81% say they use at least one of the seven potential security measures included in this study, 17% say "none of these," and 2% say not sure.

Lifeway research

Still, more than 1 in 6 (17 percent) say they don't use any of the seven potential measures included in the study, and 2 percent aren't sure.

"Churches are not immune to violence, disputes, domestic disagreements,

vandalism and burglary,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. “

While loving one another is a core Christian teaching, churchgoers still sin, and nonchurchgoers are invited and welcomed. So real security risks exist whether a congregation wants to acknowledge them or not.”

What plans do churches have in place?

In terms of security specifics, pastors are most likely to say their congregation has an intentional plan for an active shooter situation (57 percent). Additionally, most (54 percent) also say armed church members are part of the measures they have in place.

Around a quarter (26 percent) use radio communication among security personnel, while 1 in 5 say they have a no-firearms policy in the building where they meet (21 percent) or armed private security personnel on site (20 percent). Fewer have uniformed police officers on church grounds (5 percent) or metal detectors at entrances to screen for weapons (1 percent).

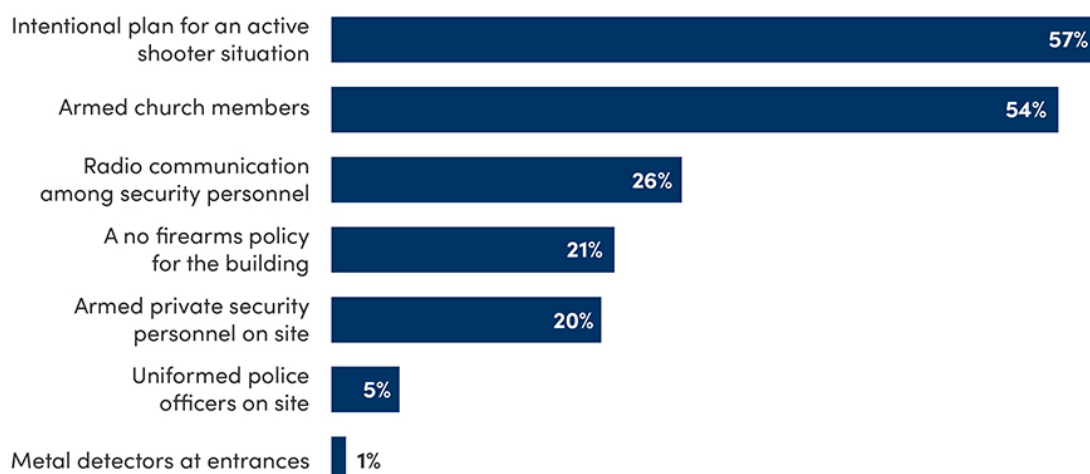
“Most churches are small. So, security plans often don’t need to be elaborate or expensive,” McConnell said.

Around half of the fatal shootings in churches since 1999 have occurred in the South. Pastors in that region are among the most likely to report their congregation has an intentional plan for an active shooter situation (64 percent), radio communication among security personnel (34 percent) and armed private security on site (26 percent).

Additionally, Southern pastors are the most likely to say they have armed church members (65 percent) and uniformed police officers on site (9 percent).

Most churches use planning, armed members as part of security measures

Among U.S. Protestant pastors



Lifeway research

Size and denomination make a difference

More worshipers in attendance often leads to increased security measures. The larger the church, the more likely it is to have armed private security personnel on site and radio communication among security personnel.

Churches with 250 or more in attendance are the most likely to have armed church members (74 percent) and uniformed police officers on site (27 percent). Those large congregations are also among the most likely to have an intentional plan for an active shooter situation (74 percent).

Pastors at churches with worship attendance of fewer than 50 people (29 percent) are the most likely to say they aren't using any of the methods of preparation considered in this study.

Mainline pastors (22 percent) are more likely than evangelical pastors (14 percent) to not use any of the seven potential ways of security preparation at their churches. Denominationally, Lutheran (34 percent) and Presbyterian/Reformed pastors (30 percent) are at least twice as likely as pastors at non-denominational (14 percent), Restorationist movement (13 percent), Pentecostal (12 percent) or Baptist (8 percent) churches to say they don't use any of the security measures.

African American pastors are three times more likely than white pastors to say they have uniformed police officers on site (12 percent vs. 4 percent). African American pastors are also more likely than white pastors to say part of their security measures includes radio communication among security personnel (37 percent vs. 25 percent) and a no-firearms policy in the building where they meet (34 percent vs. 21 percent).

Meanwhile, white pastors are more likely than African American pastors to say they have armed church members (56 percent vs. 33 percent).

Some things have changed

Compared to three years ago, pastors say they're more likely to rely on armed churchgoers and less likely to have a no-firearms policy for their building. Fewer also say they have an intentional plan for an active shooter, compared to a [2019 Lifeway Research study](#).

Previously, 45 percent of U.S. Protestant pastors said armed church members were part of their congregation's security measures. Now, more than half (54 percent) include that in their attempts to keep churchgoers safe. In 2019, 27 percent said they enforced a no-firearms policy at their building. That has dropped to 21 percent now.

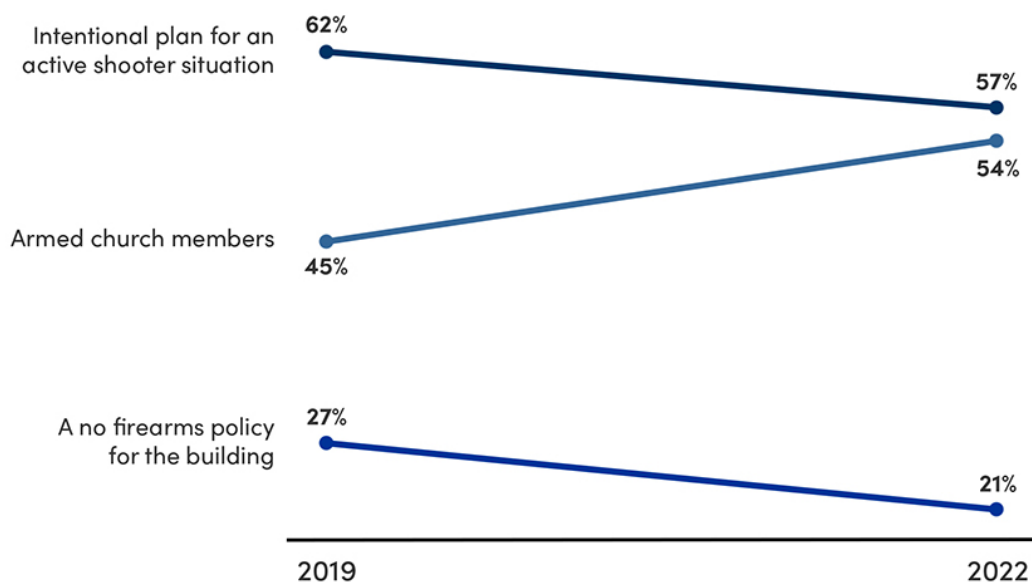
Churches also are less likely to rely on intentional planning to address potential security threats. In 2019, 62 percent said they had such a plan in

place for an active shooting situation. Since then, the percentage of pastors who say that is the case at their church has fallen to 57 percent.

“While churches may have different convictions on how to maintain security, it is surprising that fewer churches have an intentional plan for an active shooter than did in 2019,” McConnell said. “As churches cut back on activities during COVID, this may have been one of the initiatives that did not resume for some churches.”

Changes in church security measures for worship services

Percentage of U.S. Protestant pastors who say their church has that security measure in place



Lifeway research

The phone survey of 1,000 U.S. Protestant pastors was conducted Sept. 6-30, 2022. The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Responses were weighted by region and church size to reflect the population more accurately. The completed

sample is 1,000 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.2 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.