

# Evolv Technology's AI monitors public venues for weapons

## Article

**The news:** Evolv Technology thinks its AI can help stem the epidemic of mass shootings in public spaces.

- The Massachusetts-based company developed a scanning machine to replace conventional metal detectors, bypassing the need for people to stop and empty their pockets.

- The technology deploys an “**active sensing**” **light-emission technique using radar and lidar to create images that are then examined by an AI**, [per](#) The Washington Post.
- Evolv says its system can identify a concealed weapon on someone who walks through the scanner and prompt security to intervene.
- The AI scanners are already deployed at [public places](#) like **Citi Field, Lincoln Center, The Museum of Natural History, and NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital** in New York.

**How we got here:** The US has a major mass shooting problem with high [casualties](#), occurring in churches, schools, and grocery stores.

- The second-deadliest [school shooting](#) in US history happened at an elementary school in Texas on Tuesday, just over a week after 10 people were shot and killed at a [grocery store](#) in Buffalo.
- There were **61 mass shooting incidents in the US in 2021, nearly a 100% leap** from the 32 incidents in 2017. And **213 US mass shootings have already occurred this year**, [per](#) NPR.

**False positives:** Although Evolv’s AI scanners are a low-profile way to detect firearms, inaccuracies could lead to chaotic scenes in busy places.

- New York City is [considering](#) deploying AI weapons detectors in the subway system. However, false positives could potentially mean scores of people unnecessarily detained for screening during their daily commute.
- Data on Evolv’s system shows that of **190,000 alerts, 172,000 were benign objects like umbrellas and laptops. Only 0.8% of the alerts were weapons**, [per](#) New York Focus.

**Not a panacea:** Despite the false positives, AI detection systems can learn to more accurately identify weapons over time and potentially ferret out attempts at evasion, such as someone modifying a gun’s shape.

- Considering one Evolv scanner runs between **\$2,000 and \$3,000 per month**, according to NY Focus, they won’t be ubiquitous, and those plotting mass shootings could opt for places with less surveillance.
- Furthermore, as there are more gun deaths in states with weaker gun control, [per](#) Sky News, **areas with lax weapon laws could still allow guns in public spaces** even with scanners.

- While technologies like Evolv's could help monitor weapons in the public sphere, privacy is at stake.
- AI's deployment in the workplace has already triggered ethics concerns. For weapons detection, anyone riding the subway or going to a sporting event would be subject to AI scrutiny, raising questions about how the data could be misused.
- Alternatively, if lawmakers passed legislation applying AI to universal background checks for gun ownership, the scanners could potentially have fewer weapons to detect. In that scenario, the **AI could improve detection of red flags based on the buyer's history.**

## Level of Importance of Current Issues to US Adults, Feb 2022

% of respondents

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Unimportant
Jobs and the economy	66%	27%	5%	2%
Healthcare	66%	23%	8%	3%
Crime	61%	28%	8%	3%
National security	61%	27%	7%	4%
Taxes and government spending	59%	32%	7%	3%
Education	59%	29%	7%	4%
Civil liberties	55%	29%	11%	5%
Civil rights	53%	26%	15%	5%
Guns	51%	25%	15%	9%
Criminal justice reform	50%	31%	13%	7%
Immigration	47%	33%	14%	5%
Abortion	45%	28%	17%	10%
Climate change and the environment	43%	24%	17%	16%
Foreign policy	36%	46%	12%	6%

Note: ages 18+; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Source: YouGov, "The Economist/YouGov Poll," Feb 11, 2022

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