

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON SO-CALLED “ASSAULT WEAPONS”

The term “Assault Weapon”, coined in the 1980’s in an effort to ban semiautomatic rifles, has arguably become one of the most successful antigun public relations tools in modern history. The term “assault weapon” is now broadly used by antigun activists to describe any and all semiautomatic firearms as taboo and undesirable for private civilian ownership, despite being legally owned and used by millions of Americans. Antigun politicians and misinformed media have perpetuated this erroneous moniker for decades to drive public opinion of semiautomatic firearms into the gutter. As a result, many think that a semiautomatic firearm is a so-called “assault weapon” based on its cosmetic features or assume that the firearm is in fact a fully automatic machine gun.

What has incorrectly been termed an “assault weapon” is a semi-automatic firearm that fires just one bullet with each pull of the trigger (versus a fully automatic firearm — machine gun — which continues to shoot until the trigger is released). Specifically, legislation has incorrectly defined an “assault weapon” as a semi-automatic firearm that can accept a detachable magazine and has one or more of the following cosmetic features (it is these cosmetic features that



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distinguish the firearm from other “non-assault weapons.”):

- A folding or telescoping stock
- A pistol grip
- A bayonet mount
- A flash suppressor, or threads to attach one
- A grenade launcher

None of these features figure into the criminal misuse of firearms, regardless of their appearance.

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

There is a tremendous amount of misinformation surrounding the issue of so-called “assault weapons.” Below are several of the more misleading allegations related to these firearms followed by corresponding statements of fact:

Claim: A commercially-sold “assault weapon” is a machine gun and has no place in civilian hands.

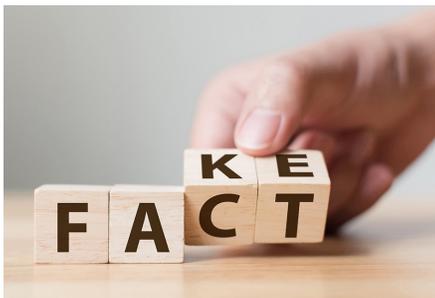
Fact: A so-called “assault weapon” is NOT a machine gun or automatic firearm. Automatic firearms were

severely restricted from civilian ownership under the 1934 National Firearms Act. A so-called “assault weapon” is functionally no different than any other “legal” firearm. These guns fire in the same manner as any other semi-automatic firearm (one shot per trigger pull — no spray firing), they shoot the same ammunition as other guns of the same caliber and are no more powerful. What differentiates a so-called “assault weapon” from other guns is cosmetic; for example, the type of stock on the gun, which makes the conventionally operating firearm look more like a military firearm.

The gun-ban lobby understands that the confusion over what is and what is not an “assault weapon” only benefits them. Consider this statement from Josh Sugarmann of the Violence Policy Center:

“The public’s confusion over fully-automatic machine guns versus

continued →



semi-automatic assault weapons — anything that looks like a machine gun is presumed to be a machine gun — can only increase the chance of public support for restrictions on these weapons.”

Claim: Semi-automatic “assault weapons” are high-powered guns that are meant for war.

Fact: So-called “assault weapons” are more often than not less powerful than other hunting rifles. The term “assault weapon” was conjured up by anti-gun legislators to scare voters into thinking these firearms are something out of a horror movie. These guns are used for many activities. In fact, the Colt AR-15 and Springfield M1A, both labeled “assault weapons,” are the rifles most often used for marksmanship competitions in the United States. And their cartridges are standard hunting calibers, useful for game up to and including deer.

Claim: The 1994 “assault weapons ban” helped to reduce violent crime.

Fact: A recent comprehensive study by the Centers for Disease

Control — hardly a pro-gun entity — looked at the full panoply of gun control measures — including the “assault weapons ban” — and concluded that none could be proven to reduce crime. Homicide statistics demonstrate that the miniscule use of so-called “assault weapons” in crime (less than 1 percent) continued to decrease after the ten-year ban expired in 2004 and their manufacturing and sales resumed.ⁱ

Another study, commissioned by Congress, found “the banned weapons and magazines were never used in more than a modest fraction of all gun murders.”ⁱⁱ

The report also noted that so-called “assault weapons” were “rarely used in gun crimes even before the ban.”

CONCLUSION

Legislation to ban so-called “assault weapons” typically targets rifles that are in common use and rarely used in crime. According to the 2019 FBI Uniform Crime Report, from 2015 – 2019: Knives, Blunt Objects, and Personal Weapons (fists and feet) exceeded rifles of all kinds for cause of death every year.ⁱⁱⁱ

Semiautomatic pistols, the

firearm of choice for conceal carry licensees, have recently garnered attention from antigun lawmakers, as evidenced by their inclusion under the “assault weapon” umbrella in legislation. This practice is becoming more commonplace as the efforts to conceal true intentions of banning all privately owned firearms are diminished. Banning all semiautomatic firearms is now the goal of the antigun lobby who know that the common criminal will not be affected by such bans and legislation. Labeling every semiautomatic firearm as an “assault weapon” plays on the emotional response of the public who may not be educated on how firearms work and their everyday use by law abiding citizens seeking to defend themselves and their families. Legislation to curb crime should be the priority, not laws that will only disarm and endanger those who follow the rules. Semiautomatic firearms are the most common type of firearm in the United States and are used for a wide variety of legitimate purposes, including hunting, small game control, target shooting, competition, and personal defense.

They should not be banned.

ⁱ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/204431.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/67071/406797-Impact-Evaluation-of-the-Public-Safety-and-Recreational-Firearms-Use-Protection-Act-of--.PDF>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-8.xls>