

Ban Assault Weapons?

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Since the mass shooting at Columbine High School in 2000, there has been much public debate about banning assault weapons. Because of the coverage given to this incident and subsequent mass shootings, it seems like common sense would dictate private citizens be banned from possessing these types of weapons. After all, if it were not for assault weapons, these killings would have never occurred, right? I say that is not only an incorrect assumption, but there are several good reasons for owning them.

So what is an assault weapon? House Resolution 4269, the Assault Weapons Ban of 2015, defines assault weapons as those with the following attributes:

- Semi-automatic firearm capable of accepting a detachable magazine
- A pistol grip on a rifle
- A forward grip
- A folding, telescoping, or detachable stock
- A grenade launcher or rocket launcher
- A barrel shroud
- A threaded barrel

This describes a semi-automatic rifle, such as an AR-15, not what is generally considered a semi-automatic pistol.

Why do these weapons get such a bad rap? Supposedly they are the weapon of choice for mass shooters. But are they?

Since 1949 there have been twenty-eight mass shootings in the United States where the number of victims totaled ten or more. Of those mass shootings semi-automatic pistols were used in fifteen, semi-automatic rifles were used in seven, and both were used in four. The remaining two mass shootings did not involve a semi-automatic weapon. Of the twenty-eight mass shootings in the US with ten or more victims since 1949, twice as many involved semi-automatic pistols rather than semi-automatic rifles (aka 'assault weapons').

So, based on this definition of an assault weapon, seven of those mass shootings *may* have been prevented.

To further put that into perspective, of the one hundred eighteen mass shootings, defined as four or more victims, between 1982 and February 2020, ninety-five involved different handguns, not rifles.

Handguns of any sort, revolvers or semi-automatic, accounted for *eighty percent* of mass shooting deaths.

Armed with this knowledge, why do you think Congress is so focused on banning semi-automatic ('assault') rifles and not semi-automatic pistols? Perhaps it is because they fear the perceived deadliness of these weapons. The Second Amendment states:

A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

Andrew McCarthy in response to a question on Quora, "Why do hunters in the U.S. need semi-automatic weapons?" responded, "Individual gun ownership is what maintains a militia of the people, and is our first line of defense against invasion on American soil, (it likely prevented invasion of the US in WW2) as well as *protection from our own government.*"

I argue that semi-automatic rifles have practical uses beyond mass killings and keeping politicians in line. For instance, they are a popular choice for big game hunting. AR-10s are often the choice for big-game hunting due to their longer range. Why, you ask, is a semi-automatic rifle needed for hunting? Oleg Krestovcev, from the same Quora thread previously mentioned explains it this way:

... i was hunting a bear for my 24 birthday. And i went for my grandpas eye shot thing. And i botched the shot while being 300 meters from him, which wounded bear crossed in time enough for me to literally soil myself and just then shoot it in center mass again.

The point of Oleg's story and the reason many big-game hunters choose semi-automatic rifles is so that if the first shot is not clean, they can quickly get off a second shot to kill the animal to minimize its suffering and to protect themselves from a large, angry, wounded animal.

They are also great for home defense. The AR-15 is best-suited for this because it is light-weight and has very little recoil. It holds up to 30 rounds and is very fast and easy to reload. It is also very easy for an inexperienced shooter to operate and is less likely to jam than a shotgun or semi-automatic pistol. Interestingly, the high-speed bullets from rifles like the AR-15 are so fast that even when they hit something like drywall, they are much more likely to break up and therefore less likely to accidentally hurt or kill someone on the other side. By comparison, the large caliber bullets used in many pistols chosen for home defense do not break up. Many years ago, my father fired a .45 caliber pistol, and the bullet went through the brick side of a house, lodging intact in the drywall on the other side of the room.

So why ban so-called 'assault weapons?' Granted, in the wrong hands they are deadly, but so are semi-automatic pistols and no one's gunning for them.