

THE DANGERS OF GHOST GUNS

Ghost guns are one of the most pressing gun safety issues facing our country today, and the COVID-19 crisis only heightens the urgent need to act. Sales of ghost guns have reportedly spiked in recent months. The alarming proliferation of these do-it-yourself weapons undermines gun safety laws, and too many families and communities have already borne the consequences. **We need to bring immediate accountability and transparency to the sale of ghost gun parts in every state.** If the Trump administration and Congress refuse to act, states should pass legislation to protect their residents from unregulated ghost guns.

WHAT ARE GHOST GUNS?

Federal and state gun safety laws—like background check requirements—typically apply only to fully assembled firearms and to frames or receivers (the part of the gun that contains the firing mechanism). The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) has determined that these critical laws do not apply to “unfinished” frames or receivers, often colloquially referred to as “80% receivers.” As a result, these nearly completed firearm components can be manufactured and sold by unlicensed businesses without a background check, record of sale, or serial number. These DIY weapons are called “ghost guns” because, without serial numbers and records of sale, they are untraceable in law enforcement investigations.

HOW ARE GHOST GUNS MADE?

In recent years, reckless businesses have increasingly taken advantage of this loophole by selling DIY gun kits designed to enable untrained amateurs to assemble a gun in minutes using common household tools. Those kits and parts are often sold online and at guns shows without any regulation or regard for public safety. Ghost guns can also be assembled using 3D-printed frames or receivers.

WHY ARE GHOST GUNS DANGEROUS?

Ghost guns are specifically designed to be attractive to firearm traffickers and people who can't pass background checks. In 2016, a [report](#) by the US Government Accountability Office noted an “emerging reliance by criminal organizations on this source of weapons.” Since then, [law enforcement agencies have increasingly uncovered](#) “arsenals” of these weapons in investigations of organized gangs.

By early 2020, [reports](#) indicated that more than 40% of crime guns recovered by ATF in states like California were unserialized, untraceable ghost guns, putting the public—including law enforcement—at serious risk. In 2019, gunmen firing assault-type ghost guns fatally shot law enforcement officers in an ambush attack in [Sacramento](#) and a deadly shootout in [Riverside](#).

More than

40%

of crime guns recovered
by ATF in California
are ghost guns

Individuals prohibited by law from possessing firearms have used or planned to use ghost guns in a series of horrific mass shootings:

- In 2017, a man under prosecution for multiple crimes [killed six people and injured 10](#) in Rancho Tehama Reserve, California, with two assault-style rifles he assembled using parts ordered online.
- In 2018, a man prohibited from accessing guns built his own ghost gun from parts ordered online and perpetrated a mass shooting at his workplace in [Middleton, Wisconsin](#).
- In 2019, a man in Dallas, Texas, who was prohibited from possessing firearms due to a history of domestic violence was [arrested](#) for possessing an AR-15-style rifle made with a 3D-printed receiver. When he was arrested, he was carrying a hit list with the names and addresses of several federal lawmakers.
- In late 2019, a 16-year-old used a ghost gun to kill two students and injure three others at [Saugus High School](#) in California. He was too young to legally purchase a gun.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT GHOST GUNS?

Several legislative reforms could help address the threat of ghost guns, including proposals to:

- Expand the definition of “firearm” under federal law to include unfinished frames and receivers, or otherwise halt the unregulated sale of unserialized ghost gun parts.
- Expressly prohibit the distribution of code for 3D-printing firearms and restrict the distribution of machines like the [Ghost Gunner](#) to licensed firearm manufacturers.
- Require that firearms produced with 3D-printed parts comply with all gun safety laws (e.g. manufacturer licensing, serialization, and background checks).

FEDERAL GHOST GUN LEGISLATION

Legislation is pending in Congress to address the threat of ghost guns.

- Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI) introduced the [Untraceable Firearms Act](#), which would prohibit the manufacture and sale of firearms without serial numbers. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) introduced a [companion bill](#) in the previous session of Congress, and reintroduced this bill in May of 2020.
- The House of Representatives adopted an [amendment](#) by Rep. Norma Torres (D-CA) to continue to prohibit online publication of blueprints for 3D-printing guns, which was ultimately blocked by the Senate.
- Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) and Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL) introduced the [3D Printed Gun Safety Act](#) to prohibit the online publication of computer-aided design files, which automatically program a 3D-printer to produce or complete a firearm.

STATE ACTION TO PROTECT AGAINST GHOST GUNS

Several states have taken courageous action to regulate ghost guns, either by requiring people who assemble ghost guns to [serialize them](#), [requiring](#) sellers to obtain licenses and conduct background checks, or by stopping the sale of [unserialized frames and receivers](#) entirely. California, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Washington State have already taken these critical steps to regulate the manufacture and sale of ghost guns. While these efforts are critical to public safety, because ghost guns flow freely across state lines, **comprehensive national legislation is needed to protect all communities from these dangerous weapons.**