



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on September 16, 2019

Why AR-15s Are the Plastic Straws of the Gun World — and Why Banning “Assault Rifles” Won’t Save Even One Life

How did AR-15s become the plastic straws of the gun world? It’s simple: Demagogues need scapegoats. Yet just as banning plastic straws won’t make a dent in the ocean-polluting plastics problem, banning “assault rifles” (which aren’t) won’t save even one life.

It’s tragic how, just like faddish teenagers playing a dangerous or stupid social-media-driven prank, so-called adults go on misguided, media-driven, lynch-mob kicks. Remember when SUVs were demonized as planet killers approximately 15 to 20 years ago? Some environmentalists [claimed](#) that SUV drivers were essentially “hate group” members, and other [vandalism-crazy](#) greenies would, ironically, [set fire](#) to the vehicles to combat global warming. Yet SUVs currently appear more popular than ever, and all is quiet on the gas-guzzler front. What happened? The demagogues and their dupes have moved on to a different neurotic fixation.



Now the suburban soccer mom can drive her Panzer-size SUV (by the by, back in the “day” they were called “trucks” — ah, marketing) content in the “feeling” that she’s saving the environment because she supports banning plastic straws. Never mind that doing so likely won’t save even one marine mammal, since the U.S. is responsible for only one percent of ocean-polluting plastics, and straws [account for just](#) 0.025 percent of that. Never mind that anti-“strawism” began with [erroneous claims](#) in a nine-year-old’s science project (ugh, beam me up, Scotty). The lynch mob must be fed, and plastic straw users, well, really suck....

Joining straws in the dock, and giving new meaning to demonizing the one percent, are Assault Rifles™. Not only are they used in, approximately, just one percent of homicides, they aren’t even “assault rifles,” a term that had always referred to weapons that could be fired fully automatic or in more than one way (fully auto, three-shot bursts, etc). Now the term is being applied to semi-automatic (one trigger pull, one shot) rifles with certain cosmetic features (a military “look”), which is a bit like putting a Porsche body on a Yugo chassis and claiming the car will win races.

But, hey, as anti-gun crusader Josh Sugarmann once [put it](#), these “weapons’ menacing looks,” coupled with the public’s confusion — “anything that looks like a machine gun is assumed to be a machine gun



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— can only increase the chance of public support for restrictions on these weapons.” Yeah, it’s a con. That said, AR-15s are used in an inordinate percentage of high-profile mass shootings. But believing that outlawing them would reduce these incidents’ frequency makes as much sense as believing that banning the BMW 4 Series — which AutoBlog.com [lists](#) as the car most likely to be involved in a crash — would reduce the accident rate.

Quite apropos, AutoBlog’s subtitle boldly reminds readers, “Remember: People cause crashes, not cars.” The point is that outlawing a vehicle wouldn’t take the kind of people who drive it off the road; they’d just get into accidents in a different vehicle.

This point is even more relevant for AR-15-category rifles. The AR-15 is commonly used in mass shootings for two simple reasons: It’s the most popular rifle in America.

And it looks cool.

In reality, though, such a weapon isn’t the best choice for committing mass shootings, which generally involve attacking soft targets at close range. More effective would be a semi-automatic, 12-gauge shotgun or even a pump-action one (and a shotgun was used in the Aurora, Colorado, shooting in 2012). In other words, not only would mass shooters simply choose a different weapon if AR-15-type rifles were somehow unavailable, but it’s arguable that the rifle’s criminalization could push them toward more effective weaponry.

Speaking of which, presidential contender Beto O’Rourke [said](#) in March, echoing many, “I just don’t think that we need to sell any more weapons of war into this public.” He’d have been more accurate if he’d stopped after his first four words. But the pitch is rhetorically effective, conjuring up images of flesh-eviscerating machine-gun fire.

Yet leaving aside the common argument that allowing Americans the same firearms the military uses was the Second Amendment’s actual intent, first note that the AR-15 was never a standard issue U.S. military rifle. In fact, while the M-16 — which uses the same platform but isn’t limited to semi-auto fire — was, it was [supplanted](#) a while back by the M-4; this, in turn, is [set to be replaced](#) by an entirely different rifle that will likely even use different, *more effective* ammunition (critics have long bemoaned the M-16’s/M-4’s relative lack of stopping power).

Moreover, how many guns weren’t designed as “weapons of war”? Bolt-action rifles were once state-of-the-art weapons of war. So was the flintlock. Go back even further, and clubs were weapons of war, and many people are still [killed with them today](#). Should we outlaw baseball bats?

In fact, far from devastating, the AR-15’s standard round is small caliber (the same diameter as a .22) and has the *second least* power of the 41 cartridges found on this [Rifle Cartridge Killing Power List](#) page (note: when loaded with 5.56mm ammo, the power is somewhat greater but still relatively lacking). In other words, you can acquire any number of hunting rifles far more devastating than an AR. This, mind you, is why some states have prohibited the AR-15’s use in deer hunting; its relatively weak round may not kill the animal, but simply send it off wounded and suffering.

It’s also why the nine-year-old girl in the video below could fire the weapon with ease.

In contrast, I’ve seen a 240-pound man (who wasn’t prepared for the extreme recoil) almost knocked over by a 12-gauge shotgun loaded with a magnum shell.



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So we can outlaw AR-15-type rifles if it makes us feel better, but just as banning plastic straws won't save marine life, it won't save even one human life. For this reason, it would also be followed by another scapegoated gun targeted for criminalization. Note here that Britain's deadliest-ever mass shooting, the [Dunblane massacre](#) in 1996, inspired sweeping anti-firearms laws — after being committed with handguns.

Oh, and London just surpassed New York City in homicides last year.

This is unsurprising since, as Professor Thomas Sowell [illustrated](#), there's no correlation whatsoever between stricter gun laws and lower murder rates.

This is why, more to fear than guns are demagogues — shooting off their assault mouths.

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