

How Are Automatic Weapons Legal in the United States?



Summary: Upon the devastation of the Las Vegas shooting, the question of how the shooter obtained automatic weapons is asked.

Of the United States guns laws, there are certain types of guns that are heavily restricted. Automatic guns are one of the few guns that are banned in the country for pretty much everyone. However, there are ways of getting around the laws banning these types of guns and it is possible that the Las Vegas shooter used one of these loopholes.

Automatic weapons are generally thought of as machine guns. They are able to shoot off a stream of bullets just by holding the trigger. In comparison, a semiautomatic weapon can fire a single bullet per trigger pull.

Automatic weapons are only legal if they are made before 1986, those made after are illegal in the United States, according to the Firearm Owners' Protection Act passed by Congress. This is, in essence, the first loophole. Guns made before 1986 are grandfathered in so they can be bought sold and exchanged, even in Nevada. It is believed that there are around 630,000 of these guns in circulation.

The second loophole to possessing an automatic weapon is that it is legal to sell and buy modification kits that turn semiautomatics into automatics. The Associated Press explained how this happens, "The device basically replaces the gun's shoulder rest, with a "support step" that covers the trigger opening. By holding the pistol grip with one hand and pushing forward on the barrel with the other, the shooter's finger comes in contact with the trigger. The recoil causes the gun to buck back and forth, "bumping" the trigger. Technically, that means the finger is pulling the trigger for each round fired, keeping the weapon a legal semi-automatic."

NBC News reports that the shooter had 12 bump stocks along with a collection of 23 guns in the hotel room plus another 19 guns at his home, some of which were AR-15 and AK-47 like guns. Investigators are still trying to determine if the bump stocks were actually used in the shooting.

This kind of modification is just one of several others that can be done to turn guns into automatics. Another modification involves a crank that replaces the trigger. There are also illegal modifications that can be done to make a gun fully automatic. As John Sullivan of Defense Distributed told Wired, "Converting a semi-automatic to fully automatic is very, very easy. At the end of the day, machine guns are easy to make."

Attempts to make bump stocks and other modifications illegal arose after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting but the proposed bill never even got a vote in Congress. In truth, Congress pushes away most attempts to place restrictions on gun laws, in large part because no one proposes a realistic solution to control guns while respecting the Constitution.

How do you think gun control can be enforced? Tell us in the comments below.

To learn more about attempts at addressing gun control, read these articles:

- [Students Protest Gun Laws...with Dildos](#)
- [Obama Offers Tears and Executive Orders for Gun Control](#)
- [Democrats Stage Sit-In to Protest Lack of Gun Control](#)

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