

# GHOST GUNS



Ghost guns are unregulated firearms that anyone can buy and build without a background check and without complying with any other requirements as mandated under federal or state law for traditional firearm transactions. Ghost guns are unserialized and untraceable. Ghost gun kits include all of the parts and often the equipment necessary to build these weapons at home. These kits are widely available and can be purchased by anyone, including prohibited purchasers, domestic abusers, and gun traffickers — without a background check. As these kits and guns are sold at gun shows and online every day throughout the country, they undermine all of the life-saving policies that state legislatures have fought so hard to put in place.

## WHAT IS A GHOST GUN?

Ghost guns are constructed by individuals using unfinished frames or receivers, the piece of the firearm that contains the operating parts of the firing mechanism, and which are the part of the gun regulated under federal law. However, when a frame or receiver is “unfinished” by a small fraction, it is unregulated. Ghost gun kits include all of the necessary component parts to turn the unfinished frame or receiver into a fully functioning gun, which once assembled looks, feels, and functions like a traditional gun, whether a handgun or assault weapon, and is just as deadly and dangerous in the wrong hands.

- There are no federal restrictions on who can buy ghost gun kits or parts;
- There are no federal limitations on how many ghost gun kits or parts someone can buy;
- Ghost gun kits and parts are relatively cheap; and
- Ghost gun kits and parts are intentionally marketed as unregulated and untraceable to appeal to those who want to avoid background checks and/or are gun traffickers.

## GHOST GUNS UNDERMINE ALL GUN LAWS

You do not need a background check to purchase a ghost gun kit or parts, which allows prohibited and dangerous individuals to evade federal and state gun regulations. The availability of ghost gun parts and kits is creating a gaping, and dangerous, loophole that undermines currently enacted gun-related regulations.

**The photo (right) is of a ghost gun kit purchased for \$400 cash at a California gun show without a background check or a bill of sale.**

- The kit includes every part needed to make a “glock” type handgun.
- The “unfinished” frame is packaged inside of the “jig” which works to provide a pattern for where to drill holes to make it a finished frame.



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- All that is needed is a hand drill or drill press, although the drill bits are provided for ease.
- The process of converting these parts into a ghost gun involves just a few steps and can be completed without any specialized skills.

**This photo (right) shows how ghost gun kits for Glock 17 (9 mm) clones were displayed at a gun show. The unfinished receivers were rubber banded to the other parts to show how near to complete these guns are. Potential purchasers can see and feel exactly what their gun will look like once they have put it together.** Because the receivers are unfinished and unregulated, these kits can be purchased at gun shows without a background check or any identification. This is true even in states that have diligently closed the “gun show loophole” by mandating universal background checks for all purchases or sales of firearms.



This isn't just a gun show problem. Anyone can go online and purchase one of these kits just as easily as they might purchase a stuffed animal. Online sellers emphasize that no background check is required, and that no interaction with a federally licensed dealer is necessary to purchase a ghost gun kit or parts.

*Currently, there is simply no mechanism to stop dangerous individuals or gun traffickers from obtaining these kits and building firearms, undermining the entire federal and state systems of gun regulation.*

## THE IMPACT OF GHOST GUNS ON COMMUNITIES

The sale of ghost gun parts and kits have increased significantly in recent years, and not surprisingly, the use of ghost guns in crime has increased exponentially:

- In 2020, Carlos A. Canino, the Special Agent in charge of the ATF Los Angeles Field Division explained: “41%, so almost half our cases we’re coming across are these ghost guns.”<sup>1</sup>
- In 2017, three ghost guns were recovered by law enforcement in the District of Columbia. In 2018, it was 25 ghost guns. In 2019, 116 ghost guns were recovered, and at least three in connection with homicides. Just two months into 2020, 38 ghost guns have already been recovered, which suggests over 220 ghost guns will be recovered in crime in 2020.<sup>2</sup>
- Ghost guns have been used in three separate mass shootings in California: Saugus (2019), Tehama County (2017), and Santa Monica (2013). Twelve people, including two teenagers, were killed in these shootings, and dozens more were shot and injured. The Tehama and Santa Monica shooters were prohibited from purchasing firearms, and the Saugus shooter was a minor who, by virtue of his age, was not legally able to possess any firearm under California law.<sup>3</sup>

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## GHOST GUNS UNDERMINE LAW ENFORCEMENT

Gun tracing — a method for identifying the sequence of ownership from manufacturing to the first retail sale is — as the ATF has noted, “an integral tool in law enforcement’s efforts to reduce firearms-related violence.”<sup>4</sup> Ghost guns have no serial numbers and are untraceable.. Gun traffickers can purchase unlimited numbers of parts and kits and build unserialized guns which can then be easily diverted into the criminal market, leaving law enforcement with no way to trace their origin. These weapons are, by design, perfect crime guns.

## WHAT STATES MUST DO

It is critical for states to act now to proactively prevent ghost guns from becoming more prevalent. New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, California, Washington State, and the District of Columbia have all taken action to regulate or ban ghost guns, and several other states are considering similar legislation.

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1 Brandi Hitt, “‘Ghost guns’ investigation: Law enforcement seeing unserialized firearms on daily basis in SoCal” (January 30, 2020), ABC 7, <https://abc7.com/5893043/>

2 “Mayor Bowser Announces Emergency Ghost Gun Legislation” DC.Gov (February 28, 2020), <https://dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-announces-emergency-ghost-gun-legislation>

3 Alain Stephens, “Officials Confirm Santa Clarita Shooter Used A Ghost Gun”, LAist (November 20, 2019), [https://laist.com/2019/11/20/feds\\_investigating\\_whether\\_saugus\\_santa\\_clarita\\_shooter\\_used\\_ghost\\_gun.php](https://laist.com/2019/11/20/feds_investigating_whether_saugus_santa_clarita_shooter_used_ghost_gun.php); Joseph Serna, Woman attacked months ago by Rancho Tehama gunman ‘knew this was going to end bad’, Los Angeles Times, (November 30, 2017), <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-tehama-shooting-neighbor-20171130-story.html>

4 “Firearms Tracing Guide,” ATF (March 2020), <https://www.atf.gov/file/58631/download>