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# Santa Monica Shooter Built His Gun From Parts He Bought Online

06/15/2013 01:35 pm ET | **Updated** Aug 15, 2013

Yesterday, we [learned from the Santa Monica Police](#) that the .223 caliber AR-15 type semi-automatic rifle that John Zawahri used to kill five people during his rampage last Friday was assembled from parts he bought through the Internet. To make matters worse, the California gun law had actually previously worked when he was prevented from buying a gun locally in 2011 due to his past record of mental instability that caused a run-in with police. To circumvent the law, Zawahri bought the components over the Internet from sellers in other states, and assembled the rifle himself.

To make your very own AR-15 type rifle, all you need are [Google](#), YouTube, and tools that can be purchased at any home center or tool dealer. To keep from making it easier than it already is, I'm not going to show the links to the sources or the videos here. All of the parts are available without purchasing through an FFL (federal firearms licensed dealer), and the only real fabrication that must be done is to a part called the lower receiver, the part that contains the trigger mechanism and receives the magazine. Completed receivers, which generally carry a serial number, must be sold through an FFL; to get around federal firearms law, many online dealers sell what they call 80 percent lower receivers which are only partially completed. You have to do the rest yourself, which is what Zawahri did to build his rifle. Enforcement of the current law here is muddy at best. Depending on how a lower receiver is fabricated, it can be determined by the ATF to be a firearm or not be a firearm, and it's not completely clear how that is determined, as even [admitted by some](#) gun bloggers. I found one seller who actually said on its website selling 80 percent lowers, "The item is NOT A FIREARM and does not need an FFL. We can ship to most U.S. addresses." Even though it's clear that what they sell are certainly assembled into a firearm, online sellers get away with it by being allowed to say that it's not. If not a firearm, what is it?

Zawahri's ability to assemble a semi-automatic rifle used in this mass-murder, even though he had been denied the purchase of a gun in California, is the glaring textbook example of why, with interstate commerce and the Internet, that state by state regulation of guns and



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background checks for all gun purchases, including private sales, and eliminating the ability for just anyone to assemble a working rifle from parts acquired on the Internet. I actually don't believe that an "assault weapons" ban is the best policy. I believe that, along with universal background checks, laws which are consistent state to state on magazine size and ammunition lethality are more critical. The rules here should be simple; not inconsistent and muddy as it is today. Online gun parts sales should be regulated as with actual gun sales: run through an FFL for a background check that is nationwide.

The gun lobby always asserts that there should be no gun laws because criminals won't follow the law. That's nonsensical on the face, and argues for no laws anywhere, including traffic laws because everyone breaks them. The point here is that it's not that criminals won't follow the laws, it's that these laws will make it harder for these law breakers to acquire these weapons to begin with. The California gun law worked in this particular case; Zawahri was prevented from buying a gun locally. What good is that, though, when he could just get online and buy the parts from non-FFL dealers to assemble that same gun? Had laws to prevent him from buying the parts of his rifle online, this is one tragedy that could have been prevented.

In this day of Internet commerce and fast long distance travel, state by state gun laws make no sense. We need a nation wide, consistent set of laws that deny terrorists, criminals, and the mentally unstable easy access to guns, the high capacity magazines, and the massive amounts of ammunition that do so much damage so quickly. It's that common sense approach that so many oppose.

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