



"Military Grade Assault Weapons"

The Manufactured Term: A Documented Exposé

Research compiled by She's Right | shesright1776.com

The phrase "**military grade assault weapon**" sounds authoritative — like a precise military or legal classification. It is not. The term has no official military definition, no standardized legal meaning, and no technical basis in firearms engineering. What it *does* have is a documented paper trail showing it was deliberately crafted as a political messaging tool to frighten the public and advance a gun-control agenda. This document presents that paper trail.

Term coined	No military definition	No agreed legal definition	Strategy openly admitted
1980s	None exists	Varies by state	In writing, 1988

SECTION 1: What the Military Actually Calls an Assault Rifle

The U.S. Army has a precise, technical definition of an "assault rifle." It is not remotely the same as what politicians and media call an "assault weapon." According to official U.S. Army doctrine, a true assault rifle must meet ALL of the following criteria:

- **Selective fire capability** — the weapon must be able to switch between semi-automatic and fully automatic fire
- **Intermediate cartridge** — more powerful than a pistol round, but less powerful than a full battle rifle round
- **Detachable box magazine** — ammunition fed from a removable magazine
- **Effective range of at least 300 meters**

"The U.S. Army defines assault rifles as "short, compact, selective-fire weapons that fire a cartridge intermediate in power between submachine gun and rifle cartridges.""

— Wikipedia, "Assault rifle" — citing U.S. Army definition | en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assault_rifle

The AR-15 does not meet this definition. The civilian AR-15 is a semi-automatic rifle — it fires one round per trigger pull, period. It does not have selective fire capability. Wikipedia's article on assault rifles states plainly:

“Semi-automatic-only rifles like the Colt AR-15 are not assault rifles; they do not have select-fire capabilities.”

— Wikipedia, "Assault rifle" | en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assault_rifle

The key mechanical distinction: fully automatic military rifles continue firing as long as the trigger is held and ammunition remains. The civilian AR-15 requires a separate, deliberate trigger pull for every single round. This is a fundamental operational difference — not a cosmetic one.

SECTION 2: "AR" Does Not Stand for Assault Rifle

One of the most persistent myths is that "AR" in AR-15 stands for "Assault Rifle" or "Automatic Rifle." This is factually wrong and is repeatedly corrected by firearms historians and manufacturers.

“A common misconception is that "AR" is an abbreviation for "assault rifle" or "automatic rifle." "AR" stands for ArmaLite Rifle, named after the company that developed it in the 1950s.”

— Wikipedia, "AR-15-style rifle" | en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AR-15%E2%80%93style_rifle

The civilian AR-15 was introduced by Colt in 1963 specifically as a *semi-automatic* firearm for civilian and law enforcement markets — with the selective-fire feature of the military version intentionally removed.

SECTION 3: The 1988 Strategy Memo — Proof in Their Own Words

The smoking gun is not a rumor, a conspiracy theory, or speculation. It is a published document written by **Josh Sugarmann**, founder and executive director of the Violence Policy Center (VPC), in 1988. The document is titled *"Assault Weapons and Accessories in America."*

In it, Sugarmann *openly strategizes* about exploiting public confusion between semi-automatic and fully automatic weapons to build support for bans. He wrote:

“The weapons' menacing looks, coupled with the public's confusion over fully automatic machine guns versus semi-automatic assault weapons — anything that looks like a machine gun is assumed to be a machine gun — can only increase the chance of public support for restrictions on these weapons.”

— Josh Sugarmann, "Assault Weapons and Accessories in America," Violence Policy Center, 1988

Sugarmann also noted that because few people can envision a practical use for these guns, the public should be more inclined to support a ban on "assault weapons" than a ban on handguns — even though handguns are by far the more common crime weapon. This was an explicit admission that the strategy was about optics, not facts.

The Washington Post — no conservative outlet — acknowledged the document's significance:

"Many attribute its popularization to a 1988 paper written by gun-control activist and Violence Policy Center founder Josh Sugarmann and the later reaction to the Cleveland School massacre in Stockton, California, in January 1989."

— The Washington Post, 2013 — as cited in Wikipedia, "Assault weapon"

Sugarmann himself acknowledged in the same paper that defining the term is nearly impossible: *"Defining an assault weapon — in legal terms — is not easy. It's not merely a matter of going after guns that are 'black and wicked looking.'"* Yet that is precisely what subsequent legislation did.

SECTION 4: Legal Scholars and Experts Confirm the Term Is Political, Not Technical

"The term "assault weapons" in the popular or politicized context dates back to the 1980s as an attempt to evoke public fear and "reinvent the gun control movement.""

— Prof. George Mocsary, University of Wyoming School of Law, Director of UW Firearms Research Center (Cowboy State Daily, January 14, 2024)

"Assault weapon" is not a technical term, a term of art used by firearm manufacturers, or a military term. As used by the media, politicians, and gun control activists, "assault weapon" is a loosely defined term for a semiautomatic civilian firearm that has the appearance — but not the function — of a fully automatic military firearm."

— AssaultWeaponTruth.com

"The name assault weapon is a political phrase coined by American legislators in the late 1980s and early 1990s to refer to firearms considered too dangerous for public use."

— EBSCO Research Starters, "Assault weapon," Military History and Science

Even politicians who advocate for banning these firearms cannot consistently define them. In a May 2021 Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, Biden ATF nominee David Chipman was directly asked by Senator Tom Cotton: *"What is an assault weapon?"*

Chipman's response: *"Any semi-automatic rifle capable of accepting a detachable magazine above the caliber of .22."* Senator Cotton noted this definition would cover essentially every modern sporting rifle in America.

SECTION 5: "Military Grade" Is Equally Meaningless

Pairing "military grade" with "assault weapon" compounds the deception. The phrase implies the civilian AR-15 is identical to military weapons — it is not. As documented:

- The civilian AR-15 **cannot fire automatically**. Military M4 and M16 rifles can. This is the defining difference.
- AR-15 style rifles are **not "military grade"** — they are specifically the *de-militarized* version with the automatic function removed.

- Military rifles are **not available to the general public**. Fully automatic weapons have been tightly regulated since the National Firearms Act of 1934 and new civilian production was banned by the Firearm Owners Protection Act of 1986.
- AllSides.com confirms: "**AR-15 style rifles are not military-grade**" — they are, at most, military-style in appearance.

Calling a semi-automatic civilian rifle a "military grade assault weapon" is the equivalent of calling a civilian pickup truck a "military grade combat vehicle" because it shares a similar chassis with an Army transport.

SECTION 6: The 1994 Assault Weapons Ban — Defined by Cosmetics

The Federal Assault Weapons Ban of 1994 — the legislative product of this manufactured term — defined "assault weapons" based largely on *cosmetic features* rather than mechanical function. A rifle with a folding stock or a pistol grip became an "assault weapon." The same rifle without those features was perfectly legal.

"Loopholes allowed gun manufacturers to modify weapons slightly so that they did not fall under the ban."

— AllSides.com, "Analyzing the Many Different Definitions of Assault Rifle"

The ban's own author, Senator Dianne Feinstein, specifically exempted certain rifles like the Iver Johnson M1 carbine and the Ruger Mini-14 — but only when they had fixed stocks. Adding a folding stock to these same rifles transformed them into prohibited "assault weapons," even though that change did not alter their lethality in any way.

The ban expired in 2004 and was not renewed. Studies by the Department of Justice found **no statistically significant evidence** that the ban reduced gun violence.

QUICK REFERENCE: The Term vs. Reality

The Claim	The Documented Fact
"Assault weapon" is a military term	The U.S. Army does not use this term. "Assault rifle" has a strict military definition that civilian semi-auto rifles do not meet.
"AR" stands for Assault Rifle	"AR" stands for ArmaLite Rifle — the manufacturer's name.
AR-15s are military grade	The civilian AR-15 specifically has the military's select-fire capability removed. It is the de-militarized version.
The term has a neutral origin	Josh Sugarman's 1988 memo documents the term was deliberately chosen to exploit public confusion and build political support for bans.

"Assault weapon" has a clear legal definition	Even gun-control advocates and Biden's own ATF nominee could not define it consistently. Definitions vary by state with no federal standard.
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Conclusion

The phrase "military grade assault weapon" is a manufactured political term with no basis in military doctrine, firearms engineering, or consistent law. It was deliberately designed — as documented in a 1988 strategy paper by a gun-control advocate's own hand — to exploit public confusion between semi-automatic civilian firearms and fully automatic military weapons.

The U.S. Army's actual definition of an assault rifle excludes the AR-15 categorically. No branch of the U.S. military uses the term "assault weapon." No consistent legal definition exists. And the term's popularizer openly admitted the strategy was about leveraging public misunderstanding, not technical accuracy.

You are now armed with the documented facts. Share them.

Sources & References

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