



**House Committee on Oversight and Reform**

**Antonia Okafor Cover**

National Director of Women's Outreach

**Oral Testimony**

*July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022*

Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and Members of the House Oversight Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today and for giving me the opportunity to defend the rights of millions of American gun owners to own and maintain AR-15s for self-defense.

My name is Antonia Okafor Cover, and I am the National Director of Women's Outreach and a national spokesperson for Gun Owners of America. I am a certified firearms instructor and range safety officer who specializes in working with women, particularly those from a traumatic background.

I am what you would call an accidental activist. My parents are immigrants from Nigeria and I grew up primarily with an anti-gun, anti-Second Amendment mindset -- until I arrived at college in 2009 and was greatly grieved at the epidemic of sexual assault's occurring at universities across the country.

As a survivor of sexual assault, myself, I have since become a passionate advocate of empowering women. And in my years as a Range Safety Officer and firearms instructor, I have found that my female students tend to give the AR-15 the best review overall.

This year, Gun Owners of America put on a couple of free events for women that let new female shooters try out an array of firearms, from handguns to rifles and shotguns. Out of all the firearms, it was always the AR-15 that they raved about. Many of them are surprised, given the anti-AR-15 rhetoric pushed by organizations spending millions of dollars trying to deter them from owning one.

The AR-15 allows women to have a larger firearm without having to absorb the recoil as much as one does with a smaller, handheld firearm. The AR-15 makes it easier for those who have a physical disadvantage to the attacker to have an upper hand. Having a rifle allows me the advantage of being able to shoot the attacker from much further away than the standard handgun.

The number one reason that women buy firearms is for self-defense. I am a proud owner of a Daniel Defense firearm, and it is my "go to" rifle. It is, by far, lighter than any other rifle I own. It makes it easier for me to hold, and yet it still does an incredible job of absorbing the impact after each trigger pull.

Women have been known to use rifles in defense in plenty of instances. But the people who have used Armalite Rifles range from older men to young women. For instance, Stephen Willeford, a GOA spokesman and senior living in Sutherland Springs, Texas, used an AR-15 to effectively stop a mass shooter at the church in his town a few years ago.

In November 2019, a woman in her ninth month of pregnancy used her family's AR-15 to stop two armed attackers in her home. After two home invaders severely wounded her husband and attempted to grab her 11-year-old daughter, the wife grabbed the AR-15 and drove the attackers away. One of them was found dead from the round she put in him before they began to flee from the scene.

More recently, in Atlanta, a black male, Army veteran protected his home and family inside, using an AR-15 to fend off two intruders from his home. Caught on his home security camera, the man saw one of the men with a firearm near his vehicle. His wife was hiding inside the home, and the man used his rifle in defense of his family, home, and property.

Banning these firearms will only make it more difficult for women like me to protect our families. Gun bans never stop bad guys from getting firearms. As my written testimony shows, the original ban of 1994 did nothing to reduce crime. Consider also that the recent shootings in Buffalo and Uvalde were aided and abetted by gun restrictions. The Buffalo shooter indicated he was comforted that his victims would be limited in their ability to carry firearms by New York's tough gun laws, and the Uvalde school was a gun-free zone. It's not surprising that 94% of public mass shootings occur in these Gun Free Zones.

The Second Amendment guarantees a right that we already have. It pre-exists the Second Amendment. The right is to self-preservation. The Second Amendment's primary focus is not self-defense, nor is it about hunting. The Second Amendment was put into the Constitution as protection of the people against an oppressive government. History has shown countless times that any people group without the means of keeping and bearing arms has remained the oppressed people group.

Our history in America has shown oppression correlated with gun control. Even after black people fought alongside their white counterparts in the military, many came home to racist governments and institutions that systematically took away firearms from black communities -- communities that relied on firearms to deter attacks from the Ku Klux Klan and other anti-gun organizations. Martin Luther King, Jr. applied two times for a concealed carry firearm to protect his family during the civil rights movement. Both times, the racist police chief in charge of giving Dr. King a permit, refused to give him one.

Because of the many benefits of the AR-15 for women and those with physical disadvantages—including the fact that our Constitution is clear that no government body has any power to determine which firearm I choose to keep in my possession—the Armalite Rifle is a platform that is an exceptional, commonly-owned firearm and should be protected as such.

Thank you.

## Written Testimony

Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and Members of the House Oversight Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today and for giving me the opportunity to defend the rights of millions of American gun owners to own and maintain AR-15s for self-defense.

My name is Antonia Okafor Cover, and I am the National Director of Women's Outreach and a national spokesperson for Gun Owners of America. I am testifying to address the benefits of the Armalite Rifle platform and how it has benefited vulnerable communities and has become the “go to” rifle for many of my female firearm training students.

For years, I have been a certified firearms instructor and range safety officer who specializes in working with women, particularly those from a traumatic background. As a sexual assault survivor, I believe my calling in life is to empower women and minorities through gun ownership. In 2017, I started Empowered 2A, a national organization that educates and equips women to seek empowerment through the Second Amendment. The organization originally started as a college-age only women’s organization which led me to speak at over 20 universities across the United States with the simple message that, “Gun Rights Are Women’s Rights.”

The Universities I have spoken at include: Yale Law, Berkeley, UMass-Amherst, Harvard, Mt. Holyoke, Norte Dame, and many others. Among Antonia Okafor Cover's titles, the most important ones in her life are wife, mother of two, and a believer in Jesus Christ. (Exodus 22:2)

I am what you would call an accidental activist. My parents are immigrants from Nigeria, and I grew up primarily with an anti-gun, anti-Second Amendment mindset—until I arrived at college in 2009 and was greatly grieved at the epidemic of sexual assault’s occurring at universities across the country. Since my sexual assault, I have been a passionate advocate of empowering women. That passion led me to the realization that I empower myself and other defenseless and vulnerable people the best when I stand up for their access to self-defense.

I began my 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment activism journey as a graduate student at the University of Texas at Dallas in 2015. It was at that time I advocated for the passage and implementation of the concealed carry-on campus—the so called “campus carry” bill in Texas as the Southwest Director of Students for Concealed Carry. My leadership resulted in the successful implementation of the campus carry bill in Texas, and I worked as an overseer and so-called watchdog to make sure that all Texas universities applied the full letter and intent of the campus carry law into university policy.

My written work has been published by the *New York Times*, NBC Universal, Fox News, *Austin-American Statesman*, and *The Hill*. I have also appeared regularly on media outlets such as CNN, Fox News, BBC, Al Jazeera America, One America Network, TRT World, Sinclair Broadcast Group/WJLA, Newsmax, and the Black News Channel as a 2nd Amendment commentator.

I am one of hundreds of thousands of black women who are part of a recent and growing trend. Black women are the [fastest](#) growing demographic of new gun owners. A Harvard study concluded that in the years 2019-2021, that the US gained 8 million new gun owners. 48% of

those are women (3.84 million). And of those [women](#), 21% of those women are black women. (806,400)

Black women are leading the charge in many aspects of politics. But it's been very clear to many fellow black women that we are still the ones who must protect ourselves. 806,400 black women in America chose to become gun owners for the very first time during the pandemic. Black women are also leading the charge in American gun ownership. We understand that no one is coming to save us. Violent crime continues to disproportionately impact black women more than any other demographic in America. So, it makes sense that we are literally taking up arms and fighting back against crime for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

It is very important that this is made clear. The Second Amendment guarantees protection of a right that we already have. It pre-exists the Second Amendment. The right is to self-preservation. The Second Amendment's primary focus is not self-defense, nor is it about hunting. The Second Amendment was put into the Constitution as protection for the people against an oppressive government. History has shown countless times that any people group without the means of keeping and bearing arms has remained the oppressed people group.

It makes sense that black people are leading the charge of gun ownership in general. The largest increase in new gun owners occurred over the last two years, many of them minorities and women. The root cause of this was the want and need to defend oneself, whether that be due to the distrust garnered by the police or the inability of them to respond to crimes.

American history reveals that oppression is correlated with gun control. Slave codes and post-Civil war, so-called Black Codes were used to keep firearms out of the hands of African Americans. Even after black people fought alongside their white counterparts in the military, many came home to racist governments and institutions that systematically took away firearms from black communities. These communities relied on firearms to deter attacks from the Ku Klux Klan and other anti-gun organizations. Martin Luther King, Jr. applied two times for a concealed carry firearm to protect his family during the civil rights movement. Both times, the racist police chief in charge of giving Dr. King Jr. a permit, refused to give him one. The recent Supreme Court decision *NYSRPA v. Bruen* completely reverses this and takes away the ability of the government to dictate whether someone is worthy of having a firearm for personal protection.

My testimony today is to offer my expertise and the experience in the matter of the rifle platform, the AR-15. And to show you how the Armalite Rifle is your standard semi-automatic firearm. The modern AR-15 usually holds a magazine capacity of thirty or more rounds. The AR-15 usually holds .223 or 5.56 caliber rounds. In my years as a Range Safety Officer and Firearms Instructor, I have found that my female students tend to give the AR-15 the best review overall.

In the last year alone, Gun Owners of America has put on free events for women in Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth. These events have let new female shooters try out an array of firearms of several different handguns, rifles and shotguns. The women even got to shoot an actual assault rifle (the fully automatic rifles that are very hard to find outside of well-funded gun ranges). Out

of all the firearms, it was always the AR-15 that they raved about. Many of them are surprised, given the anti-AR-15 rhetoric pushed by organizations spending millions of dollars trying to deter them from owning one.

The AR-15 allows women to have a larger firearm without having to absorb the recoil as much as one does with a smaller, handheld firearm. The AR-15 makes it easier for those who have a physical disadvantage to the attacker to have an upper hand. Or at the very least an equal platform. Having a rifle allows me the advantage of being able to shoot the attacker from much further away than the standard handgun.

The AR-15 is the most common firearm in America due to its modularity and its ability to conform to the needs of the user. What these so-called “assault weapon” bans like the one currently being discussed this year do is leave a vast majority of Americans, including women, unable to use the most effective self-defense firearm possible. For many Americans, a shotgun, revolver, or bolt action rifle would NOT be as effective when compared to the ability to use an AR-15.

The number one reason that women buy firearms is for self-defense. In fact, according to a recent industry [study](#), women reported self-defense as the number one reason why they purchased their first firearm. Because of the very conspicuous nature of rifle or shotgun, women are not using concealed carry permits to carry their AR-15s. But they are using them in case of home defense at an increasing rate. Because of the increased marketing that gun manufactures have spent, more women feel that they can and should use a rifle.

Gun manufactures are listening to the growing voice of women like me who have seen the Second Amendment world stay a boy’s club for centuries. I am a proud owner of a Daniel Defense firearm, and it is my “go to” rifle. It is, by far, lighter than any other rifle I own. It makes it easier for me to hold, and yet it still does an incredible job of absorbing the impact after each trigger pull.

Women have been known to use rifles in defense in plenty of instances. But the people who have used Armalite Rifles range from older men to young women. For instance, Stephen Willeford, a GOA spokesperson and senior living in Sutherland Springs, Texas, used an AR-15 to effectively [stop a mass shooter](#) at the church in his town a few years ago.

In November 2019, a [woman](#) in her ninth month of pregnancy, used her family’s AR-15 to stop two armed attackers in her home. After two home invaders severely wounded her husband and attempted to grab her 11-year-old daughter, the wife grabbed the AR-15 they had in their home and drove the attackers away. One of them was found dead from the round she put in him before they began to flee from the scene.

On the other hand, a woman attempting to [defend herself from two home invaders](#) in 2016 was beaten when her firearm ran out of bullets. After the incident, she stated that she will be buying another gun, presumably one with a greater magazine capacity. The AR-15, with its standard capacity magazine of 30 rounds, may effectively be used to defeat multiple intruders when one’s life is on the line.

More recently, in Atlanta, a black Army veteran protected his home and family inside, [using an AR-15 to fend off multiple intruders](#) from his home. Caught on his home security camera, the man saw one of the men with a firearm near his vehicle. His wife was hiding inside the home, and the man used his rifle in defense of his family, home, and property.

Sadly, there is legislation in Congress that would ban commonly-owned firearms and, thus, disenfranchise law-abiding citizens and good Samaritans everywhere of their ability to defend themselves and others. Take for example of the hero at the Greenwood mall in Indiana, where [Elisjsha Dickens used his 9mm Glock to end the threat in 15 seconds](#). Under new legislation in the House, this weapon would have been banned as a “semiautomatic assault weapon.” Would Congress rather have a higher casualty count at [Greenwood, Indiana](#); [Sutherland Springs, Texas](#); or [Arvada, Colorado](#)? It is clear that being responsible for one’s own protection and carrying a firearm is a better response than simply waiting for the police. Mr. Dickens took action 308 times faster than those first responders at Uvalde.

In conclusion, because of the many benefits of the AR-15 for women and those with physical disadvantages and the many reasons I stated above—including the fact that our Constitution is clear that no government body has any power to determine which firearm I choose to keep in my possession—the Armalite Rifle is a platform that is an exceptional, commonly-owned firearm and should be protected as such.

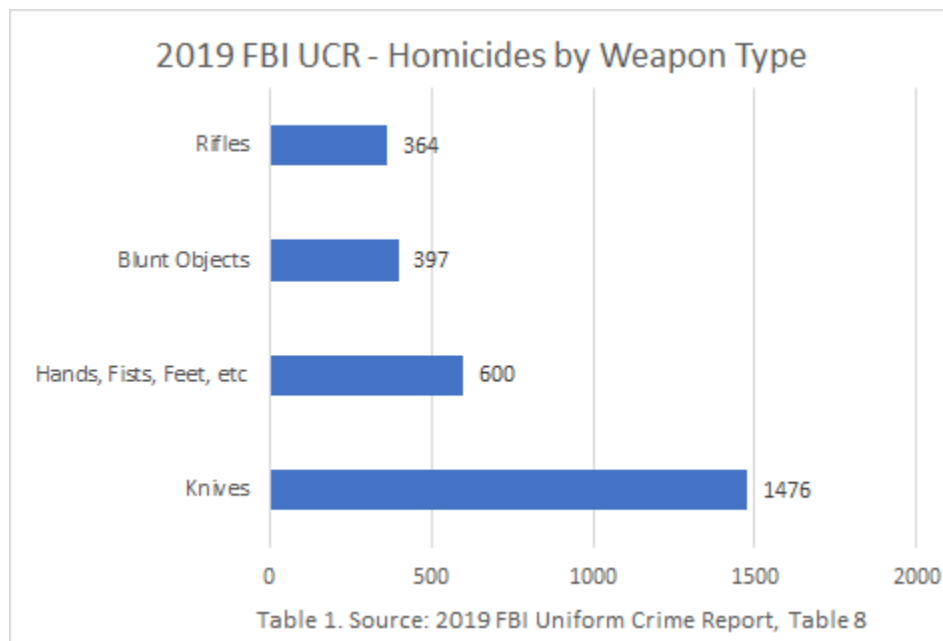
## Appendix\*

### Bans on Semi-Automatic Rifles and Magazine Restrictions are Ineffective and Unconstitutional

#### No “Epidemic” of Mass Shootings

Legislation banning certain semi-automatic rifles and creating magazine restrictions are often based upon the false premise that there is an “epidemic” of mass shootings. This erroneous assumption is fueled by media sensationalism but is not supported by statistics or research.

Figure 1 shows the FBI Uniform Crime Report statistics for the number of people killed by various weapons for 2019, the most recent year for which data are available.



From Table 1, there are four times as many people killed with knives or other cutting instruments than rifles and about 50% more by hands, fists, and feet. Yet, there is no outcry about an “epidemic” of knife or fist violence.

The number of deaths from mass shootings is rare. Looking at data from 1982 through 2018, there are an average of 23 deaths per year due to mass shootings. (1) Over a similar time period, the number of people killed in a [lightning strike](#) was about 43 per year. So, one is twice as likely to be killed by a lightning strike than in a mass shooting incident.

Researchers also confirm that there is no “epidemic” of mass shootings. In a recent [interview](#), Northeastern University criminologist James Alan Fox, the leading expert on the subject, stated “There is no evidence that we are in the midst of an epidemic of mass shootings.” (2)

In a peer-reviewed journal article, Fox reported that there has been “no increase in mass shootings and certainly no epidemic...what is abundantly clear from the full array of mass

shootings is the largely random variability in the annual counts.” He goes on to say that “journalists and others have speculated about a possible epidemic in response to a flurry of high-profile shootings. Yet, these speculations have always proven to be incorrect when subsequent years reveal more moderate levels.” (3)

### The Federal “Assault Weapons” Ban of 1994

The Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act (Federal Assault Weapons Ban) was enacted in 1994. The ban outlawed certain types of semi-automatic firearms and implemented a national 10-round magazine capacity restriction.

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and other researchers studied the effectiveness of the ban. Some of these findings are summarized below:

- Significantly relevant to the discussion surrounding mass shootings, the NIJ concluded that the Federal ban “has failed to reduce the average number of victims per gun murder or multiple gunshot wound victims.” (4)
- Murder rates were 19.3% higher when the Federal assault weapons ban was in force. (5)
- In 2004, the year the Federal ban sunset, the NIJ concluded that “we cannot clearly credit the ban with any of the nation’s recent drop in gun violence.” (6)
- In the first seven years since the ban was lifted, murders declined 43%, violent crime 43%, rapes 27%, and robberies 49%. (7)

The above conclusions demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the Federal assault weapons ban of 1994. Murder rates were higher during the ban and fell after the sunset. Recall that the 1994 ban restricted magazine capacity to 10 rounds, but the government’s own study concluded the ban did not reduce the average number of victims per murder or multiple gunshot wound victims.

### Constitutional Issues

An extensive Constitutional analysis is beyond the scope of this testimony. Instead, I would like to dispel a common myth that is currently being circulated by politicians and the media—that semi-automatic rifles are military-type weapons and have no justification for civilian ownership. On the contrary, it is exactly these types of weapons that the Second Amendment and the Pennsylvania Constitution were designed to protect.

One Supreme Court case that addressed this issue was *U.S. vs. Miller*. (8) In this case, the Court wanted evidence presented confirming that citizens have a right to military-style weapons. Here is the quote:

“The signification attributed to the term Militia appears from the debates in the Convention, the history and legislation of Colonies and States, and the writings of approved commentators. **These show plainly enough that the Militia comprised all males physically capable of acting in concert for the common defense.** “A body of citizens enrolled for military discipline.” And further, that ordinarily when called for service **these men were expected to appear bearing arms supplied by themselves and of the kind in common use at the time.**”



In Miller, the type of weapon in question was a sawed-off shotgun. Since Miller did not show and no arguments were made, the case was remanded to the lower court.

The government's own arguments in Miller are even more to the point:

“The ‘arms’ referred to in the Second Amendment are, moreover, those which **ordinarily are used for military or public defense purposes ...**”

“The Second Amendment does not confer upon the people the right to keep and bear arms; it is one of the provisions of the Constitution which, recognizing the prior existence of a certain right, declares that it shall not be infringed by Congress. Thus, the right to keep and bear arms is not a right granted by the Constitution and therefore is not dependent upon that instrument for its source.”

We see two themes emerge from Miller that also were considered in subsequent Supreme Court cases and even in the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings. The Second Amendment protects:

- Weapons suitable for military purposes
- Firearms in common use at the time

The AR-15 semi-automatic rifle is similar to the military M-16 and M-4. The difference is that the AR platform is semi-automatic while the military rifles are select-fire (i.e. they can be set to fire in fully automatic mode). The AR is also a commonly owned platform in the United States used for a wide variety of legitimate purposes, including self-defense.

Semi-automatic rifles are, therefore, weapons suitable for military purposes and in common use. Arguably, the civilian semi-automatic AR platform is LESS THAN suitable for military use since it is not a select-fire weapon. The true intent of the Second Amendment would preserve the right of citizens to own M-4s and M-16s.

*\* This Appendix was provided by Dr. Val Finnell, who is the Pennsylvania Director for Gun Owners of America.*

## References

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7. FBI. *Uniform Crime Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics – UCR Data Online, 1995-2012*.

8. *U.S. vs. Miller*. U.S. 174, s.l. : United States Supreme Court, 1939.