Violence Policy Center



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SKS ASSAULT RIFLES-A MENACE TO PUBLIC SAFETY

SKS assault rifles such as that used to kill eight in an Omaha, Nebraska, mall on December 5, 2007, are "the rifle model most frequently encountered by law enforcement officers," according to a 2002 report by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). The ATF report also notes that "these high capacity rifles pose an enhanced threat to law enforcement, in part because of their ability to expel projectiles at velocities that are capable of penetrating the type of soft body armor typically worn by the law enforcement officers." Despite the hazard this assault weapon poses to law enforcement and the general public, the rifle was not covered by the federal assault weapons ban that expired in 2004.



The SKS is the predecessor to the AK-47 assault rifle and uses the same 7.62 x 39mm ammunition as the AK-47. According to the Paladin Press book *Full-Auto Conversion of the SKS Rifle*, "In the first few years of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, the Viet Cong were mainly armed with the SKS rifle, and they used it to horrific effect. In fact, for sniping operations, the SKS, particularly when equipped with a scope, was much preferred to the AK-47 by Viet Cong and NVA soldiers...."

Although statistics on the number of such weapons traced to crime are no longer publically available because of Congressionally imposed restrictions on the release of such information, crime gun trace data that was available through 2000 shows the SKS to be a popular crime weapon:

SKS Assault Rifles Traced to Crime Scenes by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, 1995 Through 2000¹

Year	Traces	Year	Traces
1995	1,264	1998	2,210
1996	1,574	1999	2,433
1997	2,031	2000	2,079
		Total	11,591

Russian SKS assault rifles may not be imported pursuant to voluntary trade agreements initiated during the Clinton Administration. The Bush Administration, however, has specifically authorized the import of SKS rifles manufactured in Albania and the former Yugoslavia.



Tracing data after 2000 is unavailable because of Congressionally imposed restrictions on information release.