

Basic Case *Against* Prohibiting 3D-Printed Firearms/Components

by RJ Miller



Objects as detected through **thermo-conductive imaging**. 3D-printed objects are just as clearly detected using the same technology, as well as via **backscatter x-ray** and **millimeter-wave scanners**.

“Undetectable” no longer applies to plastic.

- 1. Unnecessary:** With the advent of new detection technologies (such as [backscatter x-ray](#), [millimeter-wave](#), and [thermo-conductive](#) imaging systems), firearms can easily be detected [irrespective of what material they are composed of](#). This means *all polymers, including 3d-printed plastic*. Currently new scanners are being developed and approved that can detect hidden objects [without violating the personal privacy](#) of the person being scanned. No bill so far that seeks to reinstate the Undetectable Firearms Act in “modernized” form has mentioned any of these. Yet even the original text of the first 1988 UFA anticipated that many restrictions would soon [no longer be necessary as detection technologies improved](#).
- 2. Arbitrary:** Bills seeking to ban the use of 3D-printing to personally manufacture firearms have nothing whatsoever to do with the actual *lethality* of such guns. Just as “assault” weapon bans focused on the *aesthetics* of various firearms, any modernized “Undetectable Firearms Act” only places emphasis on *how something is made*. There is no reason death tolls from shootings or annual murder rates ought to be [weighed differently due to the manufacturing means](#) of the guns used.
- 3. Obfuscation:** Proponents of restrictions on the personal use of 3D-printers to manufacture firearms or certain components might insist that a printed firearm could be disguised to *look* like something inconspicuous. [Disassembled firearms](#) and [disguised guns](#) illustrate that this has already been possible without significant security issues.
- 4. Zip-Guns:** For decades now, information on how to produce improvised firearms (which could be disguised as something else) for as little as \$10 has been [available to anyone who seeks it](#). These have not been shown to pose the same kind of threats that printed guns are purported to pose, yet they are cheaper to make and just as easy to smuggle.
- 5. Source of Crime Guns:** [According to the ATF](#) and the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), personally-constructed firearms are not a key source of criminally-used guns. Nearly 80% of all firearms possessed by criminals at the time of their offense are obtained through either straw purchases, or other illegal sources such as theft or black market purchases. Thus it makes little sense to say that subverting background checks through 3D-printing is going to be anything of special value to criminals.

In a nutshell, 3D-printing does not offer criminals anything they don't already have access to.