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## OPINION

# Gun brace rule is common sense

Don't let NRA dog whistles undermine this long-standing policy.



Stabilizing braces essentially turn handguns into short-barrel rifles, writes The Dallas Morning News editorial board. (Getty Images)



By [Dallas Morning News Editorial](#)

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Last week, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives [published a new rule](#) requiring federal controls on devices called stabilizing braces, which essentially turn handguns into short-barrel rifles. It's a good rule but, predictably, the gun lobby went ballistic.

The braces in question are extensions that can be added to a handgun for stability. Some strap to the shooter's forearm, or simply press against it. Others provide a shoulder stock so that the weapon can be fired like a long gun.

This is a reversal of previous rules. In 2012, the ATF ruled that such braces did not change the definition of the gun they were affixed to since they did not reconfigure the gun to be fired from the shoulder. Since then, new brace designs have proliferated, many of which do facilitate shoulder-firing. Under the new rule, handguns equipped with such braces will be considered short-barrel rifles, meaning shoulder-fired weapons with a rifled bore and a barrel shorter than 16 inches or an overall length shorter than 26 inches.

Short-barreled rifles have been subject to federal restrictions since the passage of the National Firearms Act of 1934, which also restricted such things as sawed-off shotguns, machine guns and silencers. Short-barreled rifles are not illegal in all circumstances. Owners can apply for special permits.

In response to the rule change, the NRA tweeted, "The Biden administration chose to shred the Constitution today."

The Texas Public Policy Foundation sued, claiming that the new rule will "turn millions of law-abiding citizens into felons by bureaucratic diktat, in direct violation of both the structural limits in the U.S. Constitution and the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms."

The rule does none of those things. But the debate over guns has advanced to the post-truth stage.

Chance Weldon, the Texas Public Policy Foundation's director of litigation, said his group's problem with the rule is about constitutional law, not culture wars. He said the rule violates the Second Amendment, and even if it didn't, it should come from Congress, not bureaucrats. Those arguments require logical and constitutional gymnastics. In our view, the bureau whose mission is to regulate firearms has the right to regulate firearms, especially as it relates to a law that has been on the books for nearly a century.

There's no difference between the business end of a rifle and a handgun of the same caliber. But shorter barrels make guns less accurate and easier to conceal. They also make them easier to maneuver in crowded places, which may be why shooters in at least two mass murders — at a grocery store in Boulder in 2021, and a busy street in Dayton in 2019 — [used handgun braces](#).

Commonsense readers will see this for what it is: an attempt to rein in a situation where active shooter incidents have [increased 2,000% since 2000](#), according to the FBI. Meanwhile, [most Americans favor stricter gun laws](#), according to Pew Research.

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