

Few online firearm listings in the U.S. require or conduct background checks

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Credit: golubovy

Individuals who hold federal firearms licenses are required by federal law to run a background check on buyers. However, the same requirement does not apply to private sellers.

A new study conducted by researchers with the University of Minnesota and several other institutions, described [firearm](#) listings on Armslist.com, an online marketplace for private firearm sales, based on whether listings requested a background check. The study authors are a student and graduates of the University's School of Public Health who began the research as students. Their findings were recently published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

The researchers identified 4.9 million active firearm listings dating from July 2008 to June 2018. The top three categories included 2.4 million handguns, 1.6 million rifles and almost half a million shotguns. They also counted the number of listings that specifically displayed evidence of a background check or other information that indicated that some form of a background check would be required by the seller, such as showing proof of a license to carry, a permit to purchase, etc.

The study found:

- only 9 percent of the 4.9 million listings displayed evidence of a background check;
- [background checks](#) or similar language was included in 13 percent of handgun listings, 8 percent of rifle listings and 6 percent of shotgun listings;
- only 11 percent of firearms that require licensure under [federal law](#) per the National Firearms Act, such as machine guns, displayed evidence of a background check.

"Our research shows that online firearms sales represent a huge potential loophole," said study co-lead Ashley Hernandez, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. "Individuals who would fail a background check and would be prevented from buying a firearm from a federally licensed firearm dealer would potentially find it easy to buy one in a private sale facilitated by an online marketplace like

Armslist.com."

"It's great that some policymakers are exploring ways to reduce gun violence. One such policy is restricting access to firearms for individuals unable to pass background checks," said study co-lead Coleman Drake, an assistant professor in the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. "If these policies are to be effective, they should extend to online firearm sales."

The researchers plan to extend the study to include geographical and individual firearm laws by state.

More information: Coleman Drake et al. Evidence of Background Checks in an Online Firearms Marketplace, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2019.06.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2019.06.006)

Provided by University of Minnesota

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