

GUN CONTROL LAWS AND REGULATIONS IN INDIA AND IN THE UNITED STATES

By – Titiksha Shetty, Mumbai University

The possession, manufacture, sale, and use of firearms are strictly regulated in India in order to ensure public safety and prevent the misuse of firearms. The primary law governing firearms in India is the Arms Act, 1959 [1], which regulates the possession, manufacture, sale, and use of firearms. This legal article provides an overview of the Arms Act, 1959, and the relevant case laws that have helped to clarify and reinforce its provisions.

The possession, manufacture, sale, and use of firearms are regulated in the United States by a complex federal and state laws system. These laws aim to ensure public safety and prevent the misuse of firearms. This legal article provides an overview of gun control laws and regulations in the United States, with a focus on federal and state laws.

The Arms Act, 1959

The Arms Act, 1959 is the primary law governing firearms in India. Section 3 of the Act provides that no person shall possess or carry any firearm, ammunition or prohibited weapon without a license issued under the Act. Section 4 of the Act provides for the issuance of licenses for the possession and use of firearms for specific purposes, such as self-defense, sporting activities, and professional use. The licensing authority is the District Magistrate or the Commissioner of Police, depending on the jurisdiction. Under the Arms Act, it is illegal to possess or use a firearm without a license. The

Act provides for the issuance of licenses for the possession and use of firearms for specific purposes, such as self-defense, sporting activities, and professional use. The licensing authority is the District Magistrate or the Commissioner of Police, depending on the jurisdiction.

Section 5 of the Act regulates the manufacture, sale, and transfer of firearms. It requires anyone engaged in the manufacture, sale, or transfer of firearms to obtain a license from the government. The Act also prohibits the sale or transfer of firearms to anyone who is not authorized to possess them. Section 7 of the Act provides for the cancellation or suspension of licenses in certain circumstances, such as if the licensee is convicted of a crime or becomes of unsound mind.

The Arms Act, 1959 has been amended several times to address emerging issues related to firearms in India. For example, in 1983, the Act was amended to prohibit the possession of firearms by members of certain organizations considered to be a threat to public safety. In 2016, the Act was amended to impose stricter penalties for the illegal manufacture, sale, and use of firearms.

Notable Amendment

The Arms (Amendment) Act, 1988: This amendment introduced stricter provisions regarding the possession and use of firearms, including enhanced penalties for illegal possession, trafficking, and misuse of firearms. Here are a few amendments:

Section 3: Categories of arms and their classification.

Section 4: Prohibition of acquisition, possession, or manufacture of firearms without a license.

Section 5: Power to grant licenses

Section 7: Power to delegate the granting of licenses.

Section 13: Penalty for breach of license conditions.

Section 14: Penalty for using firearms or imitation firearms in a manner causing alarm, annoyance, or injury.

Section 17: Power to make rules.

Section 18: Punishment for contravention of rules.

The Arms (Amendment) Act, 2019: This amendment expanded the definition of prohibited arms, increased the punishment for certain offenses, and introduced provisions for the cancellation of licenses in cases of misuse or contravention of the Act. Here are a few amendments:

Section 4: The amendment introduced changes regarding the prohibition of the acquisition, possession, or manufacture of firearms without a license.

Section 5: The amendment brought modifications to the power to grant licenses.

Section 17: The amendment made changes to the power to make rules.

Section 18: The amendment introduced alterations to the punishment for contravention of rules.

The Arms (Amendment) Act, 2021: This recent amendment introduced various changes to the Arms Act, including provisions related to the issuance of licenses, regulating the sale and transfer of firearms, and strengthening penalties for offenses

American Federal Laws

The primary federal law governing firearms in the United States is the Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA). The GCA regulates the sale, transfer, and possession of firearms by prohibiting

certain individuals from possessing firearms. These individuals include convicted felons, people with mental illnesses, and domestic abusers. The GCA also requires licensed firearms dealers to conduct background checks on potential buyers and maintain records of all sales according to the GCA is codified in the United States Code as Chapter 44, Sections 921-931

The National Firearms Act (NFA) of 1934 [2] is another federal law that regulates firearms. The NFA imposes a tax on the manufacture, sale, and transfer of certain firearms, including machine guns, short-barreled shotguns, and silencers. The NFA also requires individuals who own these firearms to register them with the federal government.[3]

State Laws

In addition to federal laws, each state in the United States has its own laws and regulations governing firearms. Some states have stricter gun control laws than others. For example, California [4] has some of the strictest gun control laws in the country, while states like Texas [5] and Florida[6] have more relaxed laws.[7]

State laws can include background check requirements, waiting periods, and restrictions on the types of firearms that can be sold or possessed. Some states like California, Hawaii, and Connecticut require individuals to obtain licenses or permits before they can purchase or possess firearms.

Case Laws

The Arms Act, 1959 is supported by a number of relevant case laws that have helped to clarify and reinforce the provisions of the Act. For example, in the case of State of Punjab vs. Baldev Singh (AIR 1999 SC 2378), the Supreme Court of India held that possession of an unlicensed firearm is a serious offense and that the burden of proving lawful possession lies on the accused. In another case, the Supreme Court held that

the right to possess firearms is not a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution and can be regulated by the government (Jagdish Singh vs. State of Uttar Pradesh, 1998 SCC (Cri) 139).

Jagmohan Singh v. State of U.P. (1973): In this case, the Supreme Court of India held that the right to bear arms is not a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution and that the licensing authority has the power to refuse a license or revoke it if there are reasonable grounds. The petitioners claimed that this wide discretion afforded to courts violated the Right to Equality, Right to Freedom of Expression, and Right to Life under Articles 14, 19, and 21 of the Constitution of India, 1950. The SC stated that the Right to Life is not violated as long as the death sentence is imposed as per the procedure established by law. The death penalty was not unreasonable and did not violate public policy—it did not contravene Article 19. The discretion afforded to Courts in imposing the death penalty was not violative of the Right to Equality. The Court balances ‘aggravating’ and ‘mitigating’ circumstances in deciding whether to impose the death penalty—therefore, the Court’s discretion is not unfettered.

State of U.P. v. Ram Swarup (1974): The Supreme Court emphasized that the licensing authority has wide discretion in granting or refusing licenses for firearms, and the denial of a license does not infringe upon the right to life and personal liberty. [8] “The right of private defense is a right of defense, not vengeance. It is available in the face of an imminent threat to those who act in good faith and is in no case can the right be approved to a person who stage-manages a situation wherein the right can be used as a safeguard to justify an act of aggression.”

Association of Victims of Uphaar Tragedy v. Union of India (2011): While not specifically focused on gun control, this case dealt with fire safety regulations. The Supreme Court observed that allowing firearms inside a cinema hall could

pose a significant risk to public safety and security. [9]

The interpretation and enforcement of gun control laws in the United States are often the subject of court cases. One of the most significant Supreme Court cases on gun control is *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) [10]. In this case, the Supreme Court held that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution protects an individual's right to possess firearms for lawful purposes, such as self-defense. However, the Court also held that this right is not absolute and can be subject to reasonable regulation by the government.

Another significant case is *McDonald v. City of Chicago* (2010), in which the Supreme Court held that the Second Amendment applies to state and local governments and that they cannot infringe on an individual's right to possess firearms for lawful purposes. [11]

Conclusion

In conclusion, India has strict gun control laws and regulations in place that are designed to ensure public safety and prevent the misuse of firearms. The primary law governing firearms in India is the Arms Act, 1959, which regulates the possession, manufacture, sale, and use of firearms. The Act is supported by a number of relevant case laws that have helped to clarify and reinforce its provisions.

The possession, manufacture, sale, and use of firearms in the United States are regulated by a complex system of federal and state laws. The primary federal law governing firearms in the United States is the Gun Control Act of 1968, which regulates the sale, transfer, and possession of firearms. Each state in the United States also has its own laws and regulations governing firearms. The interpretation and enforcement of these laws are often the subject of court cases.

[1] THE ARMS ACT, 1959. ACT NO. 54 OF 1959. [23rd December, 1959.]

[2] The National Firearms Act (NFA) of 1934 is 26 U.S.C. Chapter 53, Sections 5801-5872

[3] National Firearms Act of 1934, Pub. L. No. 73-474, 48 Stat. 1236 (1934).

[4] The Gun Control Act of 2016 (Sections 26500-26850 of the California Penal Code), which covers various aspects of firearms regulation, including assault weapons, ammunition, and background checks. The Handgun Roster (Section 32000-32050) outlines requirements for the sale and transfer of handguns. Additionally, California has specific laws on concealed carry permits (Section 26150-26225) and waiting periods (Section 26800-26850)

[5] Texas Penal Code, Chapter 46. This chapter covers offenses related to weapons, including the unlawful carrying of firearms (Section 46.02), unlawful possession of firearms (Section 46.04), and the licensing and regulation of firearms dealers (Chapter 2155)

[6] Chapter 790 of the Florida Statutes. This chapter covers various aspects, such as the carrying of concealed weapons (Section 790.06), the possession of firearms by convicted felons (Section 790.23), and the regulation of firearms dealers (Section 790.065)

[7] Gun Control Act of 1968, Pub. L. No. 90-618, 82 Stat. 1213 (1968).

[8] State of U.P. v. Ram Swarup (1974) AIR 1974 SC 1570

[9] Association of Victims of Uphaar Tragedy v. Union of India (2011) (2011) 14 SCC 481

[10] District of Columbia v. Heller, 554 U.S. 570 (2008).

[11] McDonald v. City of Chicago, 561 U.S. 742 (2010)