



QUICK FACTS about firearms in Australia

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Do more legally owned guns mean more theft?

- It is difficult to accurately measure trends over time in firearms theft in Australia due to inaccuracies in government/police administered lists of legally owned firearms, time lags between data collection and reporting, and incomplete datasets.
- Australia's most populous jurisdiction, New South Wales (NSW), is the only jurisdiction that has released data about firearms ownership and theft statistics, over time.
- The number of legally owned (registered) firearms in NSW has continued to increase, while the number of firearms stolen each year in NSW has undergone a downwards trend over time.
- These figures do not support the view that increased numbers of legally owned guns are associated with more guns being stolen.

Do stolen firearms end up being used in crimes? (from NSW data 2001-2011)

- Over a 12 month period (2005-2006) in NSW, 634 incidents of firearms theft (1445 firearms) were reported to police.
- This represents a decline from 2004-2005 (665 incidents).
- The number stolen represents 0.05% of the total number of registered firearms in Australia.
- The overall risk of firearms theft is low.
- There were five incidents in 2005-2006 where a stolen firearm was identified as being used in a subsequent crime.
- It appears that only a small number of firearms from theft incidents (0.8%) were diverted for use in illegal activities.
- Offenders (those found to have stolen the firearms) were prosecuted in just 14% of incidents.

Handguns and crime

- The majority of firearms used to commit homicide in Australia since 1989-90 were not legally held.
- Of the 150 offenders who used a handgun to commit homicide, just 2% used a registered handgun.
- Arguments over money or drugs represented the primary alleged motive for handgun homicides.
- Firearms theft data from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2006 show that 162 handguns were reported stolen, representing 6% of all reported stolen firearms in that period.
- Two of the 162 stolen handguns were subsequently used to commit a crime - a murder and an armed robbery.

- Both handguns had been stolen from security guards - one outside a club and the other outside a bank.

Firearms registration

- Australia's 1996 National Firearms Agreement (NFA) required all firearms to be 'registered' with a state-controlled authority.
- Each of Australia's eight States and Territories maintains a firearms registry, staffed by police and/or civilian public servants.
- There are approximately 2.6 million registered firearms in Australia.
- The number of unregistered firearms in Australia is unknown, but is estimated to range between 1.5 and 6 million.
- These figures suggest registration compliance is around 30% to 63%, meaning that between one and two out of every three firearms in Australia have never been registered.
- The error rate in the registries is estimated to be up to 80%.
- That is, up to eight out of every 10 records held by the registries is thought to be inaccurate.
- The annual cost, nationwide, of maintaining the firearms registries is not publicly available.
- Estimates place the annual cost somewhere between \$27 million and \$100 million.
- Almost all firearms used to commit homicide in Australia are unregistered, with the offenders unlicensed.
- There is no publicly available evidence to indicate that firearms registration in Australia has prevented any criminal acts.
- There is limited analysis of captured 'crime' firearms.
- The majority of police time and effort goes into licensing low risk, legal firearms owners, and administering firearms registration.

Mass shootings

- Following conventions used by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP), a mass shooting is defined as an event with four or more people killed by a single perpetrator.
- Although rare, these events were 'clustered' in the late 1980s to mid-1990s.
- In reaction to the Port Arthur shooting, Australia banned semi-automatic rifles and shotguns, and pump-action shotguns.
- New Zealand still allows these types of firearms for the purposes of hunting and target shooting.
- In Australia, all firearms must be registered. New Zealand does not require registration of all firearms.
- From 1980 to 2010, there were 12 mass shootings in Australia and 4 mass shootings in New Zealand. Neither country has experienced a mass shooting event since 1996/1997.
- Despite their different gun laws, both countries have experienced comparable periods of time with no mass shootings.
- From 1980 to 1997, the rate of mass shootings (which controls for differences in population size) was comparable between the two countries, which means that the absence of mass shootings in both countries since then is likely to be due to factors other than guns laws.

Firearms and suicide

- Although most firearm-related deaths are suicides, firearm suicides represent a low percentage of suicides overall.
- Firearm suicide rates began falling in the 1980s.

- A number of studies, from a range of different sources, have shown that:
- The 1996 firearms legislation did not have a significant impact on the pre-existing downward trend in firearm suicides.
- Declines in firearm suicide have been accompanied by an increase in the use of other suicide methods (especially hanging).
- Declines in non-firearm suicides began around the same time as the gun laws were changed. The declines coincided with the introduction of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy.
- A recent report (Vos et al, 2010) backed by the Public Health Association of Australia concluded that the 1996 gun laws were “not a cost effective intervention” for suicide prevention.

Firearms and homicide

- Firearm homicide rates began falling in the early 1980s.
- Reports from the Australian Institute of Criminology consistently show that almost all firearm homicides involve unlicensed perpetrators and unregistered firearms.
- Not a single peer-reviewed research paper has found an impact of the 1996 laws on firearm homicides. The authors of some papers have claimed to have found an effect, even though their actual statistics do not support their claims.

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