

AUSTRALIA'S GUN NUMBERS CLIMB

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New figures from the Small Arms Survey, which tracks the global trade in weapons, show that the number of weapons being imported into Australia continues to climb.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Port Arthur massacre: On 28–29 April 1996, 28 year old Martin Bryant went on a killing spree in which 35 people were killed and 23 wounded at the historic Port Arthur, a former prison colony and popular tourist site in south-eastern Tasmania, Australia.

Discuss

- Why is the number of weapons being imported into Australia on the increase? What are the guns mainly used for?
- Which country imports and exports the most weapons?
- What did the Australian government do after the Port Arthur massacre?
- How does media coverage of gun violence influence public attitude to tougher gun control laws?
- In countries like the United States, it has proven very hard for governments to tighten gun control policies – why? What role has the gun lobby played in such debate?
- What is your opinion on the issue of gun control?

Before you read, try to answer the following questions:

- There is **less risk** / **more risk** of being killed by a gun in Australia now compared to 20 years ago.
- Most gun deaths in Australia are a result of crime. **True** / **False**
- Semi-automatic guns are banned in Australia. **True** / **False**
- The proportion of households which own a gun in the United States has been falling. **True** / **False**

Read the article and check your answers

Australia's gun numbers climb: men who own several buy more than ever before

The proud claim that Australia may have “solved the gun problem” might only be a temporary illusion. In recent years, arms dealers have imported more guns than ever before. And last year we crossed a symbolic threshold: for the first time in 20 years, Australia's national arsenal of private guns is larger than it was before the Port Arthur massacre.

This increase must be seen in context. Australia's population grew by five million in the same period, so per-capita firearm ownership remains 23% lower than it was before Port Arthur.

But after a 16-year surge in gun buying, can we hold onto the gains made by the laws introduced 20 years ago, after Martin Bryant's rampage in Port Arthur killed 35 people?

The story so far

From the late 1970s, gun deaths in Australia have trended downwards. The risk of an Australian dying by gunshot remains less than half what it was before Port Arthur. Research shows that murderers did not move to other methods.

But although Australia hasn't seen a public mass shooting since 1996, we have no shortage of firearm-related crime. Gun owners who know each other well – be they family members or gang members – have always been the ones to kill each other most frequently.

Then there's the killer already in the room. About 80% of gun deaths in Australia have nothing to do with crime. Instead, they're suicides and unintentional shootings.

Although Australia destroyed rapid-fire weapons, most gun deaths take only one shot. We have yet to discover how swapping semi-automatic weapons for single-shot firearms – always the most common tools in fatal shootings – might affect overall gun deaths in the long term. In fact, that's largely what the change has been – a gun swap.

The 1996 firearm laws were immediately followed by a buying spree, as banned rapid-fire rifles and shotguns were replaced with freshly imported single-shot firearms.

By 1999, civilian gun imports had dropped to a record low. And most gun dealers closed their doors. In the years that followed, gun-buying climbed steadily to new heights. By 2015, the arms trade had broken all previous records. Last financial year Australia imported 104,000 firearms.

The million guns destroyed after Port Arthur have been replaced with 1,026,000 new ones. And the surge only shows upward momentum.

More and more

But here's the thing: fewer Australians now own guns. Since 1988, the proportion of households with a firearm fell by 75%.

The same holds true in the United States, where researchers now see household gun ownership as the most reliable indicator of firearm distribution.

The reason? Those who already possess several guns have bought more. Until recently, the average Australian shooter owned three to five firearms. The same people now keep a larger collection, and a proportion of their guns continue to leak into the illicit market.

Although rumours of large-scale gun smuggling to Australia are common, almost all such stories are evidence-free. Apart from an enterprising criminal band that ran a post office to import Glock pistols, no interdiction agency can point to a sizeable batch of guns smuggled to Australia since the 1980s.

Certainly, there's an "ant trade" in single guns and parts smuggled by post. But studies by the Australian Crime Commission, the Institute of Criminology and several others point to a much more common source.

When guns found in crime are traced back to their point of origin, experts agree that most are found to have leaked from licensed gun owners and rogue firearm dealers. This is usually by way of the "grey market", a large pool of illicit firearms created by Australian gun owners who did not register their firearms after the laws changed in 1996.

Australians continue to speak as though the 1996-97 Australian Gun Buyback was the key factor in the country's national about-turn on guns. But several simultaneous, largely unheralded changes could have more effect in the long term.

In the 1996 National Firearms Agreement, Australia installed a holistic suite of firearm-related public health interventions. These spanned from compulsory firearm seizure in domestic violence cases to the requirement to show "genuine reason" for owning each firearm (now rolled back in several states); universal firearm registration; enforced safe storage regulations; definitive denial of the "right to bear arms"; and many others.

Dangerous backsliding

By my own analysis of 350 jurisdictions worldwide, Australia has in place the most comprehensive and perhaps the most effective mesh of gun control measures on the planet.

As no law is effective until taken seriously, enforcement and resistance to backsliding are now key. Realising the potential of our toughened firearm legislation, police have led two decades of national attitude adjustment reminiscent of the 1980s turnaround on drink-driving enforcement.

These days, dedicated gun-crime taskforces target armed career criminals; firearm-related prosecutions have soared; police launch “nationwide blitzes” on gun owners’ homes and seize thousands of firearms; lethal weapons are removed from violence-prone or suicide-risk households; and actual sanctions are imposed on shooters who ignore safe storage regulations.

All this adds up to a new generation of police and political awareness.

But perhaps the most profound change has been in public attitude. At this 20th anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre, we’ve seen in media coverage a resurgence of public scepticism about the motives of self-interested groups seeking to wind back gun laws.

Dedicated, single-issue political potency remains theirs; surely we’re the only country in the world with two state political parties built and run by the gun lobby.

But in recent debates, we’ve seen little but reinforcement for the public health and safety measures forced on us two decades ago by the rampage of a solitary male, enabled with a couple of guns.

POST READING

1. Which statement is correct?
 - a. Compared to 20 years ago, the total number and per capita number of private guns in Australia has increased.
 - b. Compared to 20 years ago, the total number of private guns in Australia is greater but the number of guns per person has fallen.
 - c. Compared to 20 years ago, the total number of private guns in Australia is greater and the number of guns per person is about the same.

2. Although there is less risk of being killed by a gun in Australia now compared to 20 years ago, there is more chance of being murdered in other ways. **True / False**

3. The author expects the increase in gun imports to continue. **True / False**

4. Most guns that are used in crime come from supplies smuggled into Australia. **True / False**

5. The author believes that compared to most other countries, gun control measures in Australia work well. **True / False**

6. The author says the police's enforcement of firearm legislation and attempts to change the public's attitude toward the ownership of firearms is similar to which other law enforcement area?
.....

7. The author believes:
 - a. A lot has been done through law enforcement to reduce the risk of guns in Australia but the gun lobby has negated those efforts.
 - b. Not enough is being done through law enforcement to reduce the risk of guns in Australia and the power of the gun lobby is stronger than ever.
 - c. While the gun lobby is influential, a lot has been done through law enforcement to reduce the risk of guns in Australia and public opinion in favour of gun control has strengthened.

Vocabulary 1

Which words listed below could replace the underlined words in the text?

accidental fairly large ~~false belief~~ force
 illegal jump level move own
 resourceful complete concurrent confiscation
 deadly great involvement range
 reappearance similar to unconditional

false belief	illusion
	threshold
	surge
	trend
	unintentional
	momentum
	possess
	illicit
	enterprising
	sizeable

	simultaneous
	interventions
	span
	seizure
	definitive
	comprehensive
	reminiscent of
	lethal
	profound
	resurgence

Writing

Some people believe the best way to reduce the number of gun deaths in society is to introduce strict gun control laws. Others say every adult should have the right to own a gun.

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Vocabulary 2

illusion	threshold	surge	unintentional
momentum	illicit	enterprising	sizeable
simultaneous	intervention	seizure	definitive
comprehensive	lethal	profound	resurgence

1. A newstudy conducted by some of the world’s leading climate change scientists showed that millions of people would be displaced as a result of rising sea levels.
2. A new study showed migrants tended to be more Compared to people born in the country, the proportion of migrants who started their own businesses was almost twice as high.
3. After another mass shooting, support for tougher gun control laws gained
4. After the latest gun massacre, the fourth in 3 months, there had been ain public support for stricter gun control laws.
5. Despite strong opposition from the gun lobby, the country’s prime minister said a decision had been reached by the government to ban the private possession of semi-automatic guns.
6. Heavy alcohol consumption can have a number of adverse consequences including medical problems,injuries and violence.
7. If fertility rates fall below theof 2.1 and net migration is small, a country’s population may shrink over time.
8. In a recent survey, amajority of people said they were strongly opposed to the death penalty.
9. Police announced that they had arrested 2 men and a woman attempting to smuggle more than 200 kg of heroin into the country aboard a yacht. They said it was the biggestof heroin in more than 10 years.
10. Real estate agents like to promote thethat the value of houses always goes up. But financial experts often like to remind people that the price of houses can go up and down just like any other asset.
11. The government said it wouldto make sure a KFC restaurant would not be located on the site of the new hospital.
12. The peace agreement between the two countries commenced with aceasefire and laying down of weapons.
13. The use ofdrugs in sport is particularly disappointing because so many young people look up to athletes as role models.
14. There had been a rise in the number ofdrug overdoses over the past year.
15. Traditionally, the country had been very poor with an annual GDP per capita of less than \$1000. But as a result of ain oil exports over the last few years, there was an emerging middle class with more people able to afford luxuries like a new car and a big house.
16. What you eat can have a effect on both your mental and physical health.

Answer Key

- less risk
 - F - suicides and unintentional shootings
 - T
 - T
1. Compared to 20 years ago, the total number of private guns in Australia is greater but the number of guns per person has fallen
 2. F
 3. T
 4. F - most are from licensed gun owners and rogue firearm dealers
 5. T
 6. drink-driving
 7. while the gun lobby is influential, a lot has been done through law enforcement to reduce the risk of guns in Australia and public opinion in favour of gun control has strengthened

false belief	illusion	concurrent	simultaneous
level	threshold	involvement	interventions
jump	surge	range	span
move	trend	confiscation	seizure
accidental	unintentional	unconditional	definitive
force	momentum	complete	comprehensive
own	possess	similar to	reminiscent of
illegal	illicit	deadly	lethal
resourceful	enterprising	great	profound
fairly large	sizeable	reappearance	resurgence

1. A new **comprehensive** study conducted by some of the world's leading climate change scientists showed that millions of people would be displaced as a result of rising sea levels.
2. A new study showed migrants tended to be more **enterprising**. Compared to people born in the country, the proportion of migrants who started their own businesses was almost twice as high.
3. After another mass shooting, support for tougher gun control laws gained **momentum**.
4. After the latest gun massacre, the fourth in 3 months, there had been a **resurgence** in public support for stricter gun control laws.
5. Despite strong opposition from the gun lobby, the country's prime minister said a **definitive** decision had been reached by the government to ban the private possession of semi-automatic guns.
6. Heavy alcohol consumption can have a number of adverse consequences including medical problems, **unintentional** injuries and violence.
7. If fertility rates fall below the **threshold** of 2.1 and net migration is small, a country's population may shrink over time.
8. In a recent survey, a **sizeable** majority of people said they were strongly opposed to the death penalty.
9. Police announced that they had arrested 2 men and a woman attempting to smuggle more than 200 kg of heroin into the country aboard a yacht. They said it was the biggest **seizure** of heroin in more than 10 years.
10. Real estate agents like to promote the **illusion** that the value of houses always goes up. But financial experts often like to remind people that the price of houses can go up and down just like any other asset.
11. The government said it would **intervene** to make sure a KFC restaurant would not be located on the site of the new hospital.
12. The peace agreement between the two countries commenced with a **simultaneous** ceasefire and laying down of weapons.
13. The use of **illicit** drugs in sport is particularly disappointing because so many young people look up to athletes as role models.
14. There had been a rise in the number of **lethal** drug overdoses over the past year.
15. Traditionally, the country had been very poor with an annual GDP per capita of less than \$1000. But as a result of a **surge** in oil exports over the last few years, there was an emerging middle class with more people able to afford luxuries like a new car and a big house.
16. What you eat can have a **profound** effect on both your mental and physical health.