ARMS CONTROL STRATEGIES

Debunking the myths

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Myth: Registering every firearm enhances the physical control of firearms

- The NZ experience (Thorp, 1997).
  - Assistance which registration would provide to crime prevention and detection does not of itself justify the cost.
  - In order to be effective registration needs to reach a high threshold.

- The New Zealand database remains inaccurate
  - despite maintaining records of only pistols, MSSAs and restricted weapons; and despite a ten yearly audit. (Police operational source)

- After 10 years of legislated universal registration neither Canada or Australia have evidenced reaching this threshold.
The Australian experience

• Overwhelming majority of firearms used in homicide between 1 July 1997 and 30 June 1999 were not registered and the offenders were not licensed. Mouzos (2000: 4).

• Trend in firearms related deaths not linked to post 1996 initiatives. (NISU, 2005).

• Number of firearms related suicides has decreased steadily since 1987 (ABS).

• Firearms related homicides increased marginally compared to total number of firearms 1915-2003 (ABS).

• Registration regime has not enabled firearms to be tracked accurately.
The Canadian experience

• ‘No convincing empirical evidence can be found that the firearms program has improved public safety’ (Mauser, 2007).
  – Downward trend in suicide by firearm in Canada cannot be attributed to legislated registration.
  – Cost rises from estimate of CDN$2 million in 2002, to CDN$1 billion by 2005.

• Canadian government considering eliminating the requirement to register non restricted firearms (Bill C-24, October 2007).
  – To re-focus on licensing of individuals as fit and proper to possess firearms.
Myth: banning the possession of firearms will reduce crime
United Kingdom

• Virtually all legally held handguns confiscated between July 1997 and February 1998.
  – Paid 95 million pounds compensation. (Greenwood, 2006).
  – Pistol clubs turned to shooting pistol calibre carbines.

• Increase in homicide with pistols.
  – ‘The ban on handguns is neither here nor there in the equation’ (Greenwood, 2006).
  – Of 80 firearms offenders interviewed, 57% (n=41) of them used handguns (UK Home Office, 2006).
Myth: Banning the possession of firearms will reduce crime

Australia

• 2002 Australia introduced a national handgun control agreement.

• Since that agreement there has been an increase in homicides by handgun and a high level of diversion of handguns to the illicit market.

• NSW Police subsequently establishes a special unit to address increased handgun crime.
Myth: Rendering firearms inoperable (deactivated) will remove them from use

- United Kingdom and Australia recognise (in varying ways) the deactivation of firearms.

- ‘Deactivated’ and ‘deregistered’ firearms ‘reactivated’ and found in criminal hands in Australia and the UK.

Myth: buyback gets unlawfully held guns out of the community and reduces crime

- Australian buyback. 640,000 firearms were collected

- Mouzos & Reuter (2003):
  
  *Difficult to link buyback to violence reduction.*

  *Availability of one form of firearm not likely to have much effect on homicide and suicide.*

  *Declines in total homicide and firearm homicide a long term trend.*

- ‘The ban on handguns is neither here nor there in the equation’ (Greenwood, 2006).
Myth: that increasing penalties will deter firearms offending

‘The 5 year mandatory minimum sentence for possession of a firearm was well known (but those interviewed were serving prison sentences). Longer sentences might bring about counter-productive outcomes, such as offenders trying to “shoot their way out” if challenged by Police’.

(Source: UK Home Office, 2006)
Myth: that centralised armouries enhance control of firearms

- UK: people can retain .22 target pistols, to be secured at the shooting club. (Greenwood, 2006).

- Requiring firearms to be lodged in central armouries encourages poor security practice – firearms subsequently left insecure.

- Centralised armouries provide a centralised point for criminals to take firearms from.

(NZ Police operational source)
Myth: that pistols, military style semi automatics and restricted weapons present a special risk to the community

- Shotgun and rifle firearms of choice of NZ criminal – (Newbold, 1999).

- Firearms reported seized under the provisions of the Arms Act 1983:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rifles</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>(n=508)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotguns</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>(n=347)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pistols</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>(n=70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down rifle</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>(n=21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSSA</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>(n=25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airgun</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>(n=405)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total seized: 1,413

Suicide by firearm – a long downward trend line -- despite a variety of strategies
Homicide by firearm follows a downward trend
--
Canada an exception
In New Zealand violent offending with firearms remains stable at about 1.3% of all violent offending.

% Violence Offences that involve a Firearm of all Violence Offences

Year

%
Summary

• ‘The illegal use of firearms is a complex problem.

• There are some clear recommendations, such as greater efforts to tackle the availability and conversion of highly realistic imitation firearms.

• However most problems are more challenging and require social and economic rather than technical solutions’.

‘The dividing lines between underdevelopment, instability, fragility, crises, conflict and war are becoming increasingly blurred’.

‘It seems crucial to further understand the interplay between armed personal protection and armed power projection, and to focus on developing sustainable alternative livelihoods for those coping with disempowerment and despair’.

‘The issue of small arms cannot be addressed with arms control measures only’
References


• NISU (National Injury Surveillance Unit) 2005. *Firearms deaths and hospitalisations in Australia*.

• New Scotland Yard (2000) *Cloning and the reactivation of deactivated firearms*


• New Zealand Mountain Safety Council (Inc)


• Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom (2004). Age-standardised rate for international self-harm or open verdict from injury due to firearm or explosive material, England & Wales, 1979-2006. (retrieved February 12, 2008, from Brock, A.)


• United Nations, report of the Secretary General on Small Arms, April 2008.