

Firearm theft in Australia

Two decades of stolen guns

Theft of legal guns is now the main source of illegal guns in Australia, yet public information on the topic is scarce. This report compiles new data from state law enforcement agencies and other sources to find that over 9,000 firearms have been stolen since the start of 2020. At least 44,600 have been stolen over the past 20 years – one every four hours. Police recover only around a quarter of guns taken.

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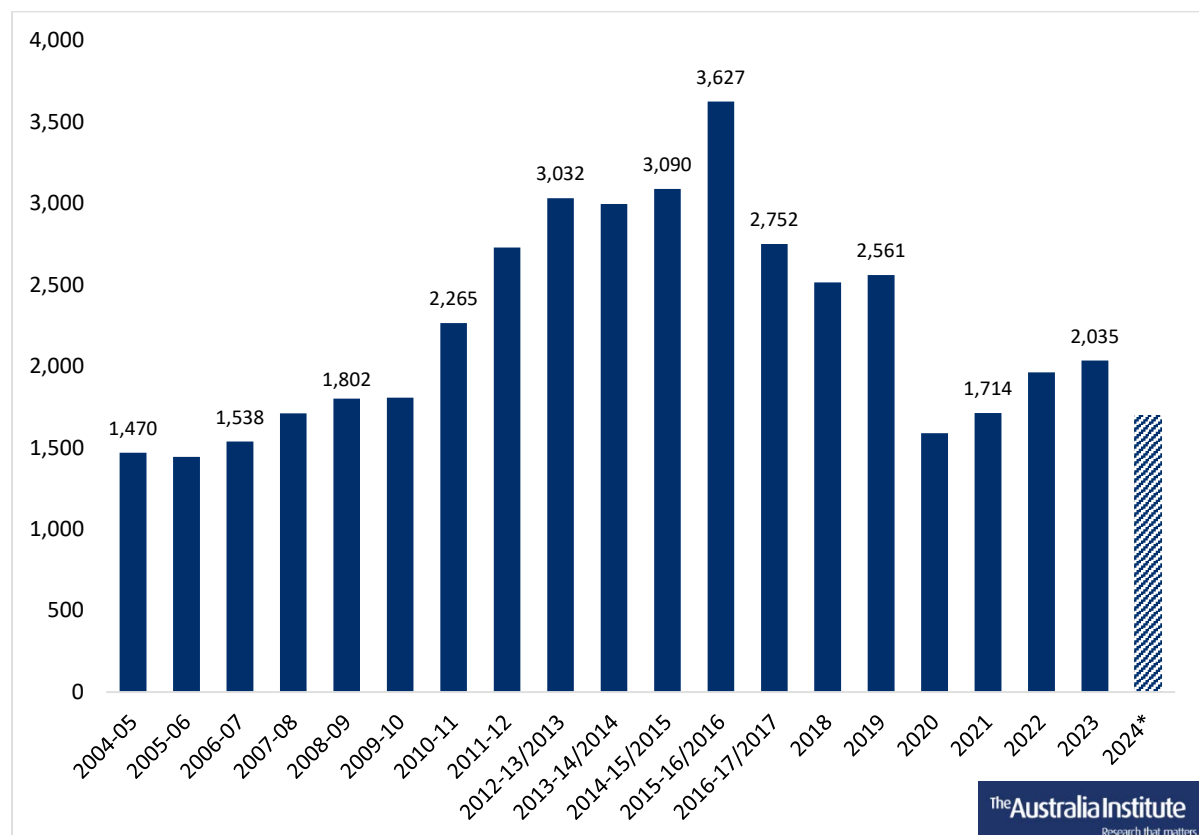
Summary

This report uses data from state and territory law enforcement agencies and other public sources to estimate the number of guns that are stolen from legal owners and enter the supply of illicit firearms in Australia. At least 9,287 firearms have been stolen in Australia since 2020. Over the past two decades, at least 44,631 were stolen, including:

- 10,892 in New South Wales,
- 10,896 in Queensland,
- 9,635 in Victoria,
- 6,429 in Western Australia,
- 2,890 in South Australia,
- 3,330 in Tasmania,
- 302 in the Australian Capital Territory,
- and 257 in the Northern Territory.

That amounts to a firearm being stolen at least every four hours for the past two decades.

Number of firearms stolen in Australia, by year



Source & Notes: See Appendix & Figure 16

It is unclear how many stolen guns are recovered by police nation-wide. The available data on recovery indicates that three-quarters were not recovered. Of the 8,847 firearms stolen in Queensland from 2018 to 2025 and in WA from 2013 to 2024, only 2,220 (25 per cent were recovered).

In Queensland and Tasmania, the two jurisdictions where we have data on the number of firearms stolen per individual incident of theft, it has been growing since 2018. This underscores the potential advantage of a cap on the number of firearms an individual can own, which would reduce the number of weapons that thieves can acquire from a single property.

Table 1: Total and average firearms stolen by jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	2004-2025 total	2020-2025 total	Yearly average (04-25)	Thefts per 100k people
NSW	10,892	2,145	559	6.5
Qld	10,896	3,257	552	9.8
Vic	9,635	1,850	494	7.0
WA	6,429	881	343	11.3
SA	2,890	419	175	9.2
Tas	3,330	669	169	29.3
ACT	302	66	15	3.1
NT	257	N/A	19	7.2
Australia	44,631	9,287	2,325	8.4

Source: See Appendix; ABS (2025) “National, state and territory population”,
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/mar-2025>

Note: All jurisdictions are missing six months where data switched from financial to calendar years, and some do not have data for the full 2004–2025 period. The yearly averages have been adjusted to take these differences in reporting periods into account.

Gaps in the data and a lack of information on unregistered firearms mean that the full number of firearms stolen in that time must be even larger. Firearm theft is currently the primary way that the number of illicit firearms in Australia grows, and the over 44,000 firearms stolen in the past 20 years represent a substantial supply of weapons into the hands of criminals.

Reducing the number of firearms available to thieves could mean fewer guns coming into the hands of criminals. Western Australia’s 2024 firearm laws stop most people from owning more than 10 firearms. For those the hunting licences, the limit for most people is five. If other states and territories adopted these laws, it would reduce the pool of firearms that can be stolen.

In addition to reducing the number of firearms, this report demonstrates a clear need for further research into gun theft. Restoring funding for federal research into firearm theft and

proceeding rapidly with the creation of a National Firearms Register, would also greatly enhance public and police understanding of the threat that stolen firearms represent.

Introduction

There are now over four million registered, privately-owned firearms in Australia – more than before Port Arthur – and nearly one million firearm licences.¹ This does not include illicit firearms, of which the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) conservatively estimates there are at least 200,000.²

Gun lobby organisations sometimes claim that the vast majority of crimes committed with a firearm in Australia use an illegal weapon.³ The claim is far from ironclad – it relies on an over-25 year old study that is contradicted by the most recent evidence – but lobby groups use it as evidence that concerns over the growing numbers of legal firearms in Australia are misguided.⁴ The Shooting Industry Foundation Australia, for example, argues that this means “we must look at and treat legal and illegal firearms as two separate issues”.⁵ This ignores the links between legal and illegal firearms.

According to the ACIC, theft of legal firearms is the largest contemporary source of illegal firearms.⁶ Australian research suggests that criminals often have relative ease in stealing firearms from licensed owners, especially in regional areas.⁷

This report compiles data on firearm theft obtained by the authors from state and territory law enforcement agencies. This was a lengthy process because this data is not available on agency websites and had to be specifically requested, in some cases using the relevant freedom of information legislation. Even then, there are inconsistencies in reporting between jurisdictions and Northern Territory did not respond. These issues have plagued all research into firearm theft in Australia. The recently obtained data is combined with previous reports to compile a 20-year picture of stolen guns in Australia.

¹ Clarke, Gottschalk, Chollet and Grundy (2025) *Gun control in Australia*, p 4, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/gun-control-in-australia/>

² Attorney-General's Department (2024) “Permanent National Firearms Amnesty Annual Report – 2022-23”, p 4, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/criminal-justice/firearms/permanent-national-firearms-amnesty>

³ SSAA (2025) “Australia Institute Report on Gun Ownership Distorts Reality”, https://www.ssaa.org.au/?ss_news=australia-institute-report-on-gun-ownership-distorts-reality

⁴ Predavec, Grundy & Campbell (2025) “Australian gun control: 29 years after Port Arthur”, pp 3-4, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/australian-gun-control-29-years-after-port-arthur/>

⁵ SIFA (2025) “More Registered Firearms Do Not Increase Public Safety Risk”, <https://sifa.net.au/more-registered-firearms-do-not-increase-public-safety-risk/>

⁶ ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, p 10, <https://www.acic.gov.au/publications/unclassified-intelligence-reports/illicit-firearms-australia-report>

⁷ Bright (2022) “‘I Know a Guy and He’s Got Guns Galore’: Accessing Crime Guns in the Australian Illicit Firearms Market”, *Deviant Behaviour*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01639625.2022.2086838>

Research into firearm theft

There is currently no regular national research conducted into firearm theft in Australia. From 2006 to 2010 the National Firearm Theft Monitoring Program (NFTMP) produced annual reports into firearm theft in Australia, but its funding ended in 2010 and was not renewed.⁸

A 2015 Senate inquiry into the ability of Australian law enforcement to eliminate gun-related violence in the community included ongoing funding for the NFTMP to investigate firearm theft as a key recommendation.⁹ The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) undertook a one-off study of firearm theft in 2018 to investigate how the situation had changed since the end of the NFTMP, but the federal government has not implemented the 2015 recommendation to make the funding ongoing.

The other significant work on firearm theft in recent years was from Gun Control Australia (GCA) that produced a report in 2018 on theft from 2007 to 2017, which was the product of data requests and Freedom of Information requests to each state and territory.¹⁰

All these reports are limited by inconsistencies in the reporting of data. Each state and territory provided their own data with different standards for record-keeping and reporting. This creates potential issues with comparing data between states and territories, since each one may have a different definition of what constitutes a stolen firearm.

The NFTMP and GCA reports also used financial years to divide firearm theft data, whereas the AIC's 2018 report used calendar years. This presents further issues with comparing years in different decades.

In mid-2025, the Guardian also compiled recent data on firearms theft for the past five years.¹¹ They attained figures from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia, but were unable to get full data from the NT, ACT or Western Australia. The

⁸ Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee (2015) "Ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community", p 87, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Illicit_firearms/Report

⁹ Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee (2015) "Ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community", p 88

¹⁰ Gun Control Australia (2017) "Firearms Theft in Australia 2007-2017", https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Illicit_firearms/Report

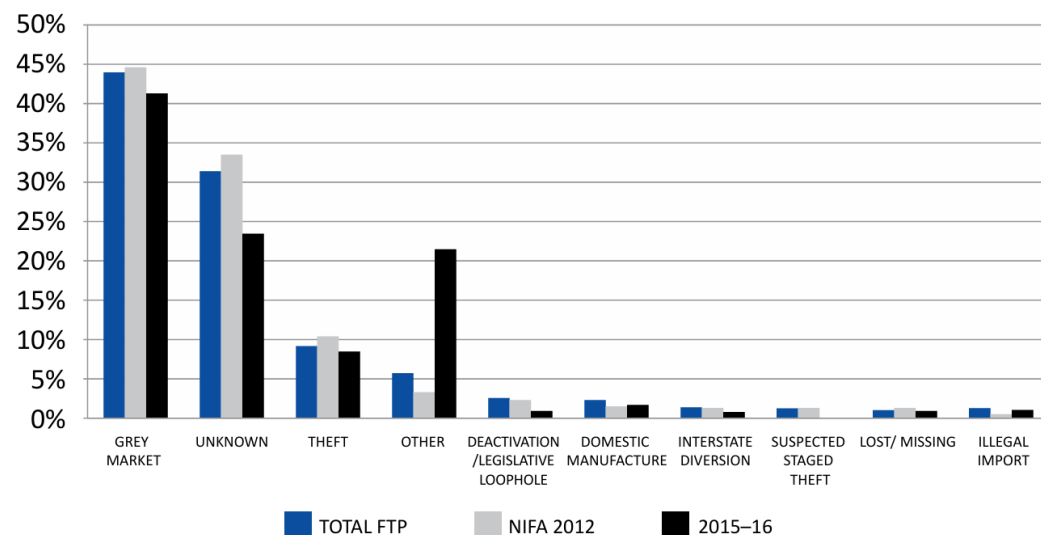
¹¹ Martin & Bogle (2025) "'I could get a gun within an hour of leaving jail': how Australia's licensed firearms end up in criminal hands", <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/sep/03/how-licensed-guns-firearms-australia-end-up-criminal-hands>

Guardian found that more than 9,000 firearms have been reported stolen in the past five years, which aligns with the results of this report.

THE LINK BETWEEN THEFT AND ILLICIT FIREARMS

Other relevant research looks at firearm theft in the wider context of illicit gun supply and sources. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC)’s firearms trace program was established in 2004 to help Australian law enforcement agencies ascertain the history of seized firearms. Their 2016 report into the trace program shows the “grey market”, defined as weapons that should have been but were not surrendered in the 1996–97 gun buyback, was the most common origin of illicit firearms.¹²

Figure 1: Comparison of diversion methods of firearms traced by ACIC, 2004 to June 2016



Source: ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, p 23

Figure 1 shows that the grey market was the largest single contributor to the number of illicit firearms in Australia as of 2016, but by definition it cannot grow unless further firearms are banned and their owners do not return them.¹³ The grey market has also been slowly reduced in size through ongoing recovery of firearms such as through the current permanent national amnesty. For this reason, ACIC labels the grey market a “historical” method of diverting firearms to the illicit market.¹⁴ This category also includes the use of legislative loopholes and reactivating previously disabled firearms (which are relatively rare).¹⁵

¹² ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, p 8

¹³ ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, p 8

¹⁴ ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, p 8

¹⁵ ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, p 8

Methods that currently move firearms into the illicit market are labelled as “contemporary” by ACIC. They identified four major contemporary methods for moving firearms from the legal firearms market to the illicit market in a 2016 report:

- Theft from licenced individuals and firearm dealers, including suspected staged theft,
- The domestic manufacture and assembly of firearms,
- The illegal importation of undeclared firearms and firearm parts, and
- Failure to record or reconcile the interstate movement of firearms.¹⁶

This means that while the grey market remains the single most common origin of illicit firearms, theft is currently the most significant source of new illicit weapons.¹⁷

As shown in Figure 1, the firearms trace program found that one in ten of the firearms it examined had been sourced through theft – more common than domestic manufacture, illegal importation, and interstate transfers combined. Of stolen firearms, a tenth were suspected to have come from staged thefts, where the “theft” was faked in order to transfer the firearm to a third party. ACIC could not find the source of over 30 per cent of firearms it attempted to trace.

ACIC’s research was conducted in 2016, meaning that the current illicit firearms environment may be somewhat different. For example, there has been an “alarming increase” in 3D-printed firearms, which have become a significant gun control issue.¹⁸ However, without any updated information on the origins of firearms in the illicit market, the ACIC report remains the most current information publicly available.

The scale of Australia’s illicit firearm threat is unclear. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) conservatively estimates there are at least 200,000 illicit firearms in Australia, though the number may be significantly higher.¹⁹ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates the global illicit firearms market is approximately 10 to 20 per cent the size of the legal market.²⁰ This ratio has previously been used by ACIC to estimate the size of Australia’s illicit market,²¹ and it now implies there could be between 400,000 and 800,000 illicit firearms in Australia.²² ACIC estimates that the number of illicit

¹⁶ ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, p 10

¹⁷ ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, pp 10, 22

¹⁸ Gwynn (2025) “Alarming increase in 3D-printed ‘ghost guns’ has authorities on alert”, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-01-23/australia-police-3d-printed-ghost-guns-rising-concern/104836954>

¹⁹ Attorney-General’s Department (2024) “Permanent National Firearms Amnesty Annual Report – 2022-23”, p 4

²⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2011) *The Globalisation of Crime*, unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf

²¹ ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, p 7

²² Calculated from the 4,078,746 registered firearms in Australia as of 2024.

firearms in Australia has declined in recent years due to the permanent national firearms amnesty which began in 2021.²³

²³ Attorney-General's Department (2024) "Permanent National Firearms Amnesty Annual Report – 2022-23", p 4

New data on firearm theft

We requested firearm theft data from each state and territory for each calendar year from 2018 to 2024, which in some states and territories required a Freedom of Information request. It took just under three months to get data for seven of the eight states and territories. At the time of writing, the Northern Territory has not responded to our request for data, which appears to be a consistent issue with this type of research. The GCA report, for example, was unable to acquire NT firearm theft data.²⁴

The process and results of the data requests for each of the responsive jurisdiction are as follows.

NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW has the most transparent information on firearms of any state or territory, with the number of licences and firearms by category, type and postcode published regularly by their firearms registry. Their data on firearm theft was similarly easy to access and was supplied on request by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOSCAR).

The request took some additional time to process due to the need for “further programming” to produce data on the number of firearms stolen rather than the number of theft incidents.

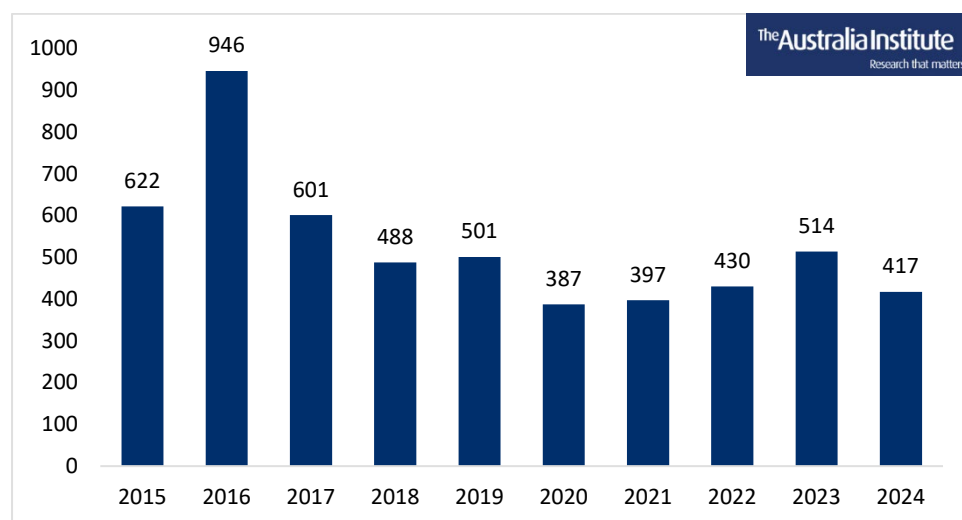
Figure 2: Information provided by BOSCAR

NSW Recorded Crime Statistics January 2015 to 31 December 2024										
Number of stolen firearms* recorded by NSW Police by calendar year										
	Jan 2015-Dec 2015	Jan 2016-Dec 2016	Jan 2017-Dec 2017	Jan 2018-Dec 2018	Jan 2019-Dec 2019	Jan 2020-Dec 2020	Jan 2021-Dec 2021	Jan 2022-Dec 2022	Jan 2023-Dec 2023	Jan 2024-Dec 2024
Count	622	946	601	488	501	387	397	430	514	417

As with all other states and territories, BOSCAR was unable to confirm the licencing status of firearms stolen.

²⁴ Gun Control Australia (2017) “Firearms Theft in Australia 2007-2017”

Figure 3: Firearms stolen in NSW 2015–2024



Source: data from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, supplied on request.

As shown in Figure 3, at least 5,303 firearms have been stolen in NSW since 2015.

The record high for number of firearms stolen in NSW was 2016: 946 across the state. Thefts declined slightly in 2018, then dropped during COVID-19, but have been trending upwards since 2020.

VICTORIA

Victorian firearms data for 2017–2024 was supplied on request by the state’s Crime Statistics Agency (CSA).

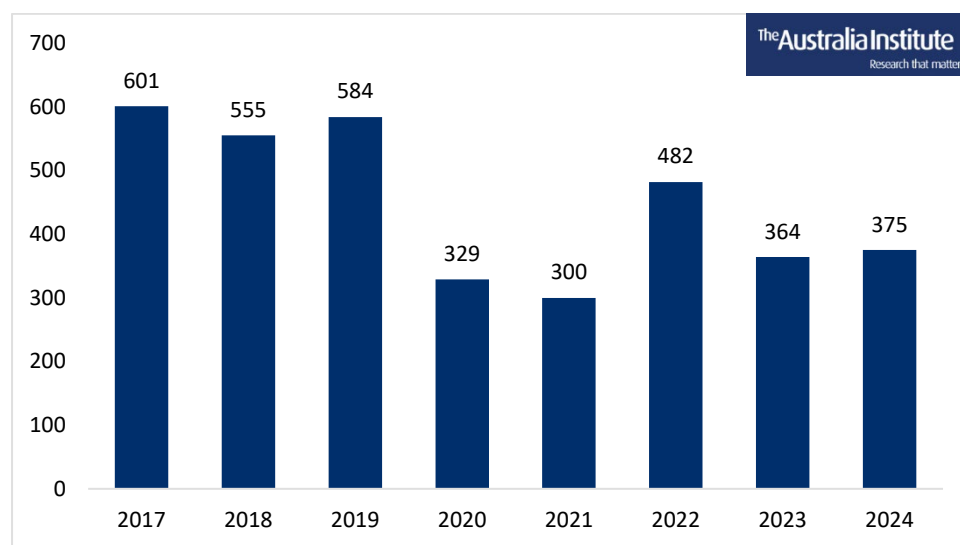
Figure 4: Information provided by CSA

Table 1. Firearm property items stolen¹ - January 2017 to December 2024

Supp Category	Supp Subdivision	Jan - Dec 2017	Jan - Dec 2018	Jan - Dec 2019	Jan - Dec 2020	Jan - Dec 2021	Jan - Dec 2022	Jan - Dec 2023	Jan - Dec 2024
Property	Air Rifle	48	49	58	24	26	37	33	36
	Gun	5	8	1	5	2	2	2	1
	Other Firearm	12	11	7	18	8	29	11	48
	Pistol	4	8	9	0	5	10	11	0
	Revolver	1	4	0	0	0	4	5	0
	Rifle	318	293	310	182	133	246	192	187
	Shotgun	213	182	199	100	126	154	110	103
Grand Total		601	555	584	329	300	482	364	375

As shown in Figure 4, the Victorian data was broken down by the type of firearm stolen and included air rifles as well as “other” firearms. It is unclear what constitutes the “other firearm” category.

Figure 5: Firearms stolen in Victoria 2017–2024



Source: Victorian Crime Statistics Agency

As shown in Figure 5, at least 3,590 firearms have been stolen in Victoria since 2017. Firearm theft dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic but has risen since the start of 2020.

QUEENSLAND

Queensland firearms data for 2018–2024 was supplied on request by the state’s Police Service, and 2014–2017 data was sourced from a Ministerial press release reporting on Queensland Police data. The Queensland Police had the quickest response of any state and territory to our request for data, responding less than 24 hours after our request.

Figure 6: Information provided by Queensland Police

Number of unique occurrences for stolen firearms, Queensland, 1 January 2018 to 31 May 2025

Description	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of unique occurrences	216	205	143	165	206	230	189	68

Number of stolen and located firearms, Queensland, 1 January 2018 to 31 May 2025

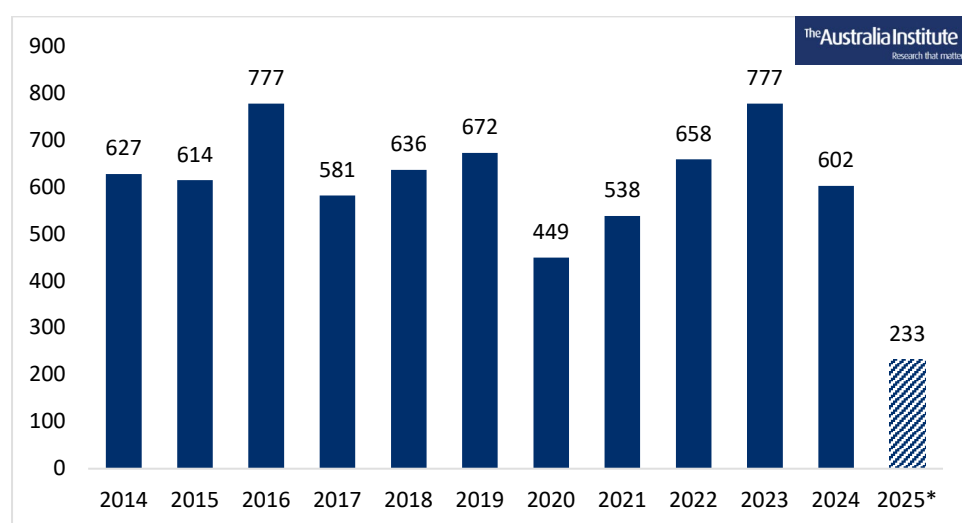
Firearm Category	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Stolen	636	672	1,308	538	658	1,196	602	233
Located	162	181	121	146	112	185	113	28
Not Located	474	491	328	392	546	592	489	205

The number of firearms stolen on average per unique occurrence of theft grew from 2018 to 2025. In 2018, 2.9 firearms were stolen per incident, whereas the incomplete 2025 figures show that 3.4 were stolen in each occurrence of theft.

The Queensland data appeared to have anomalous totals for 2020 and 2023. In all other years the number stolen was the same as the number located and not located added together, but not in 2020 and 2023. Queensland Police did not respond to a request for

clarification. We combined the “Located” and “Not Located” numbers for 2020 and 2023 to come to a conservative estimate of the number of firearms stolen in those years.

Figure 7: Firearms stolen in Queensland 2014–2025



Source: Queensland Police Statistical Services; Ryan (2018) “Gun theft at its lowest in four years”, <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/83807>

*Note: 2025 data is only for the period from January to May.

As shown in Figure 7, at least 7,164 firearms have been stolen in Queensland since 2014.

Queensland is the only state where firearms returned to pre-COVID highs after dropping in 2020. In 2023, 777 firearms were recorded stolen, tying with 2016 for the most stolen in a single year.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Western Australia firearms data for 2013–2024 was acquired through a Freedom of Information request to the state’s Police Force.

Figure 8: WA Information provided in response to FOI

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Table 1: Firearms reported as stolen in Incident Management System (IMS) from 01 January 2013 to 10 March 2024, inclusive.

Reported Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 YTD*
Firearms Stolen	417	447	562	514	601	396	464	187	251	212	181	50

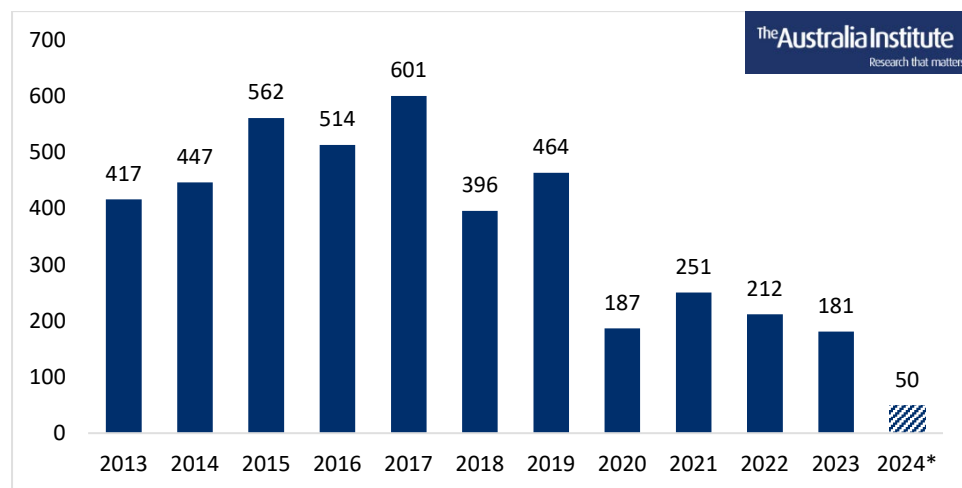
Table 2: Recovered firearms which were reported as stolen in Incident Management System (IMS) from 01 January 2013 to 10 March 2024, inclusive.

Reported Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 YTD*
Firearms Recovered	98	126	122	136	131	117	193	56	59	57	57	20

*2024 YTD refers to 01 January 2024 to 10 March 2024.

In response to an email to WA Police firearm licencing services, we were told that any information on this topic would have to be requested via Freedom of Information. Despite the request covering a period up until the end of 2024, WA Police were only able to produce a document that ended in March of that year. Their lack of data on firearm theft for most of 2024 by August of the following year implies a concerning lack of information held internally by the WA police.

Figure 9: Firearms stolen in WA 2013–2024



Source: Freedom of Information request to the Western Australian police force.

*Note: The 50 thefts recorded in 2024 are only for January to March, not the entire period.

As shown in Figure 9, at least 4,282 firearms have been stolen in WA since 2013.

As in other states and territories, gun thefts dropped significantly in WA during the COVID-19 pandemic, with around 200 recorded each year from 2020 to 2023, down from 601 in 2017.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australian firearms data for 2018–2024 came from a Freedom of Information request to SA Police. After requesting information from the Policy and Analytics division of the South Australian Attorney-General's Department, we were told they did not have access to firearm theft information and suggested we apply through Freedom of Information.

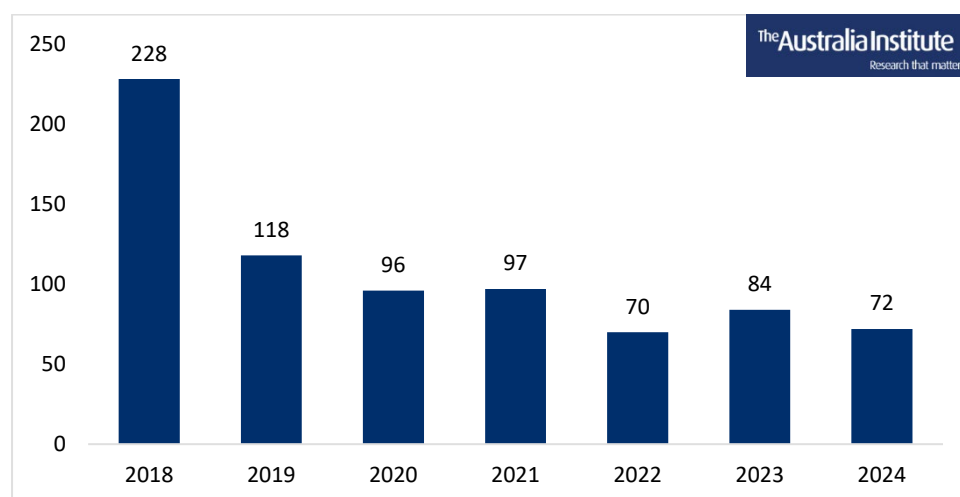
Figure 10: Information provided on FOI request

SAPOL provide the below information in response to your request and agree to **release the information in full**.

Year	Total Firearms Reported Stolen	Total Firearms Reported Stolen by Category						
		CAT A	CAT B	CAT C	CAT D	CAT H	OTHER	PRESCRIBED
2018	228	148	54	6	0	17	3	0
2019	118	69	24	3	0	22	0	0
2020	96	68	26	1	0	1	0	0
2021	97	58	30	5	0	4	0	0
2022	70	51	17	2	0	0	0	0
2023	84	53	16	5	0	10	0	0
2024	72	41	24	6	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	765	488	191	28	0	55	3	0

South Australia, like other states and territories, did not hold information on the licencing status of the stolen firearms.

Figure 11: Firearms stolen in SA 2018–2024



Source: Freedom of Information request to South Australian Police

As shown in Figure 11, at least 765 firearms have been stolen in South Australia since 2018. As in other states, firearm theft dropped during COVID-19. Unusually however, they stayed relatively low after the end of the pandemic, and South Australia recorded 72 thefts in 2024.

TASMANIA

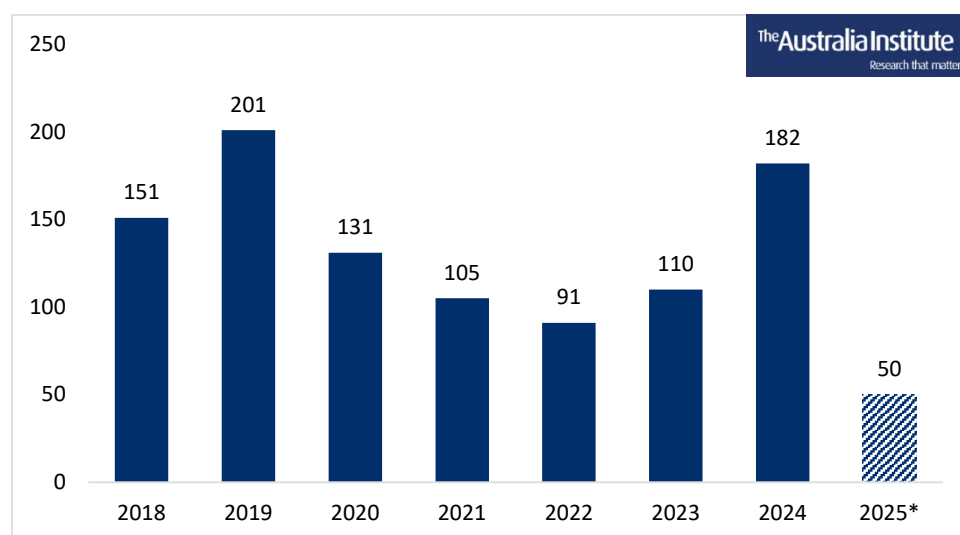
Tasmanian firearms data for 2018–2024 was supplied on request by the state’s Department of Police, Fire & Emergency Management.

Figure 12: Information provided on request

year	Firearm theft incidents	Firearms stolen
2018	47	151
2019	69	201
2020	40	131
2021	33	105
2022	30	91
2023	30	110
2024	49	182
2025 to 30 April	14	50

As shown in Figure 12, the number of thefts and the number of firearms stolen were roughly consistent across the 2018–2025 period at around three firearms stolen per incident. However, like in Queensland, the average number stolen in each incident grew somewhat over that period: from 3.2 in 2018 to 3.6 in the first quarter of 2025.

Figure 13: Firearms stolen in Tasmania 2004–2024



Source: Tasmanian Department of Police, Fire & Emergency Management.

*Note: 2025 only includes thefts from January to 30 April

As shown in Figure 13, at least 971 firearms have been stolen in Tasmania since 2018.

Tasmania has a much higher share of Australia’s firearm theft than their population: 2.1 per cent of Australians live on the island but 6.9 per cent of firearms were stolen there from 2018 to 2024 – three times higher.²⁵ This is why Tasmania had more firearms reported stolen than South Australia despite having a quarter of the population.

²⁵ ABS (2025) “National, state and territory population”,

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release>

The higher rate of firearm theft in part reflects the state's disproportionate share of firearms. There are 14,736 firearms per 100,000 people in Australia, but 27,222 firearms per 100,000 people in Tasmania – almost double.²⁶

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

ACT firearms data for 2018–2024 came from a Freedom of Information request to the Australian Federal Police. Before submitting the request, we were told that “This data will be extremely hard to extract however and may not be possible”.²⁷

The comment that data on the number of firearms stolen in a jurisdiction is difficult to extract implies that their firearms systems are not easily searched. This may reflect the fact that the ACT firearms register remains mostly paper-based, with the head of the ACT Firearms Registry describing it as “very analogue”.²⁸ According to ACT Minister for Police Marisa Paterson, the lack of digitisation leads to “loopholes” and “lags” in the registry system.²⁹ For the planned National Firearms Registry to come to fruition, all jurisdictions including the ACT will need to fully digitise their records by 2028.³⁰

Upon receipt of our Freedom of Information request, the AFP requested a one-month extension due to “an excessive number of requests that have come through our office”. After granting a two-week extension, the request was fulfilled after 39 days.

²⁶ Clarke, Gottschalk, Chollet and Grundy (2025) *Gun control in Australia*, p5

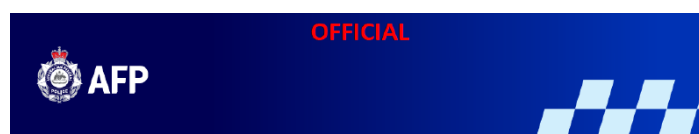
²⁷ Correspondence with the Australian Federal Police, June 2025

²⁸ Shirley (2025) “Police and ACT government say mostly paper-based gun registry needs to go fully digital”, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-07/act-firearms-registry-mostly-paper-based-police-say-need-digital/105744732>

²⁹ Shirley (2025) “Police and ACT government say mostly paper-based gun registry needs to go fully digital”

³⁰ Shirley (2025) “Police and ACT government say mostly paper-based gun registry needs to go fully digital”

Figure 14: Information provided by the AFP under FOI

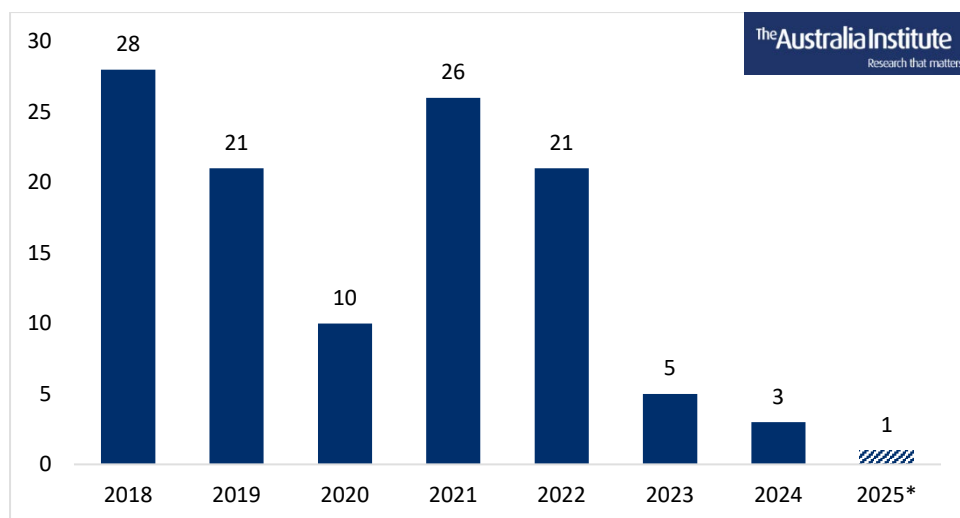


Firearms stolen in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) from 2018 – 2025, by calendar year

This document has been created pursuant to s17 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth)*.

Year	Number of firearms stolen
2018	28
2019	21
2020	10
2021	26
2022	21
2023	5
2024	3
2025 (as of 13 June 2025)	1

Figure 15: Firearm theft in the ACT 2018–2025



Source: Freedom of Information request to the Australian Federal Police

*Note: 2025 only includes thefts from January to 13 June.

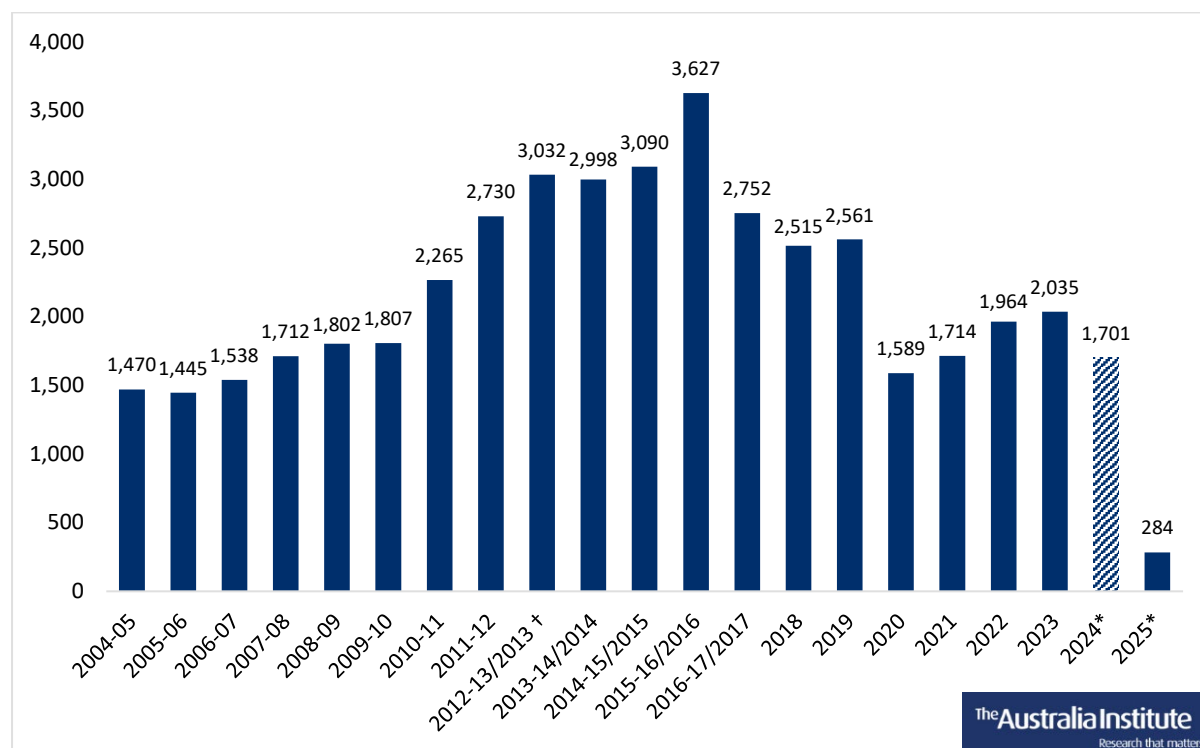
As shown in Figure 15, at least 115 firearms have been stolen in the Australian Capital Territory since 2018. The 2025 figure only represents the year up to 13 June. It is difficult to interpret trends from the limited volume of available data.

Two decades of firearm theft

Combining new data from our requests with previous reports by the NFTMP and GCA shows that at least 44,631 firearms have been stolen in Australia since July 2004 – one every four hours.³¹ That number is conservative, since it does not account for gaps in reporting and only includes firearms that were reported to law enforcement.

As shown in Figure 16, yearly firearm theft fell significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic but have risen since 2020. This mirrors broader household crimes – for example, break-ins dropped significantly in 2020-21 and went up after, though not to their former levels.³²

Figure 16: Number of firearms stolen in Australia, by year



Source: See Appendix

Note: Totals for 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 do not include South Australia, and totals for 2019-2025 do not include the Northern Territory.

* 2024 excludes three quarters in Western Australia where the number of firearms stolen was not reported.

† 2004-2012 figures use financial years, and 2018 to 2024 figures use calendar years. From 2012 to 2017, the type of year used varies by jurisdiction (details in the Appendix)

³¹ See Appendix for gun theft total workings that sum to 44,631. Over 20 years there are 175,200 hours (20 x 365 x 24). $44,631 / 175,200 = 0.255$ gun thefts per hour, or one every four hours.

³² ABS (2025) "Crime Victimisation", <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/crime-victimisation/latest-release>

Where updated data from our requests was not available, we used figures from the 2018 GCA and AIC reports into firearm theft. The GCA report (and prior NFTMP reports) used financial years, leading to some inconsistency in the data, and leaving a six-month gap in each state and territory. For example, the transition from using data for the financial year of 2016–17 to data for the calendar year of 2018 leaves July to December 2017 unreported.

In addition to the thefts shown in Figure 16, at least 284 firearms have been stolen in 2025.³³ This is not a representative figure and cannot be compared to other years as it only includes thefts reported for the first part of the year in Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT.

Over the past two decades, an average of 2,245 firearms have been stolen each year. The years from 2012–2019 had the numbers of firearms stolen, with at least 2,500 each year.

RECOVERY AND REGISTRATION STATUS

While law enforcement and government do not have complete information on how many stolen firearms were recovered by law enforcement, the available data indicates that three-quarters were not recovered. Of the 8,847 firearms stolen in Queensland from 2018 to 2025 and in WA from 2013 to 2024, only 2,220 (25 per cent) were recovered.³⁴ The tens of thousands of stolen, unrecovered firearms that this data represents would be a major contributor to the illicit firearms market in Australia.

It is unclear how many unregistered firearms are included in the theft data since no state or territory had data on the registration status of firearms stolen. Some of the data, at least for Queensland from 2019–2025, explicitly excludes unregistered firearms. Even where unregistered firearms are not explicitly included, “common sense would suggest that it would be rare for a person to report to police the theft of an illegally owned firearm” (as the Tasmanian Department of Police, Fire & Emergency Management told us).³⁵ The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC)’s 2018 report into firearm theft found that only 0.5 per cent of firearms reported stolen that year were unregistered, with 85 per cent registered and the remainder did not have a recorded status.³⁶ The 2016 ACIC report into illicit firearms in Australia suggests a similar conclusion, saying “ACIC has received reports of thefts where both registered and unregistered firearms were stolen; to avoid police attention, the victim reported only the theft of the registered firearms”.³⁷

³³ See Appendix

³⁴ Data provided by the Queensland Police Service on request; Data provided by the Western Australia Police Force through Freedom of Information.

³⁵ Correspondence with Tasmanian Department of Police, Fire & Emergency Management, June 2025.

³⁶ Bricknell (2019) “Firearm theft in Australia 2018”, p 9, <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr24>

³⁷ ACIC (2016) “Illicit firearms in Australia”, p 8

Conclusion

Thefts are the primary source of new illicit firearms in Australia, and at least 44,631 have been stolen in the past two decades. The number of firearms stolen declined significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, but has risen since 2020, and thousands of firearms are stolen each year. At least 9,287 firearms have been stolen since the beginning of the decade. The number would be higher if the Northern Territory and Western Australia had complete data. This represents a flow of deadly weapons into the illicit firearms market.

There are now over four million firearms in Australia, more than before the Port Arthur massacre and the implementation of the National Firearms Agreement. Gun lobby organisations sometimes claim that most crimes committed with a firearm in Australia use an illegal weapon, and that therefore a focus on growing numbers of legal firearms is mistargeted.³⁸ However, theft of licenced firearms is a primary source of illicit guns and thousands of firearms are stolen each year.³⁹ As the number of firearms grows – whether legal or illicit – so does the pool of firearms that can be stolen.

For this reason, reducing the number of firearms available to thieves could mean fewer guns coming into the hands of criminals. Western Australia's 2024 firearms laws stop most people from owning more than 10 firearms, five for those with hunting licences.⁴⁰ If other states and territories adopted these laws, it would reduce the pool of firearms that can be stolen.

The results of our analysis also highlight the need for compliance with safe storage requirements. Put simply, "Poor storage makes theft easier", as a spokesperson for South Australian Police told *Adelaide Now*⁴¹⁴²

Additionally, the process of obtaining up-to-date data on firearm theft highlights the urgent need for updated firearms research and the National Firearms Register. While NSW,

³⁸ SSAA (2025) "Australia Institute Report on Gun Ownership Distorts Reality", https://www.ssaa.org.au/?ss_news=australia-institute-report-on-gun-ownership-distorts-reality

³⁹ ACIC (2016) "Illicit firearms in Australia", p 10

⁴⁰ Bourke (2024) "WA's new firearms laws explained – how to get a gun licence and how domestic violence perpetrators will be restricted", <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-06-20/wa-s-new-firearms-laws-explained-gun-licence-dv/103995350>

⁴² Henson (2025) "More than 750 stolen guns are fuelling South Australia's criminal underworld", <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/more-than-750-stolen-guns-are-fuelling-south-australias-criminal-underworld/news-story/5765ebd354437f9ab0d2bdf0c77ea9dc>

Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania supplied theft data upon request, WA, SA and ACT data all required Freedom of Information requests. Western Australia's data is incomplete, and their police force apparently did not hold information on the number of firearms stolen from April to December 2024 by August of the next year. The AFP's response to our request for data implies either a worrying level of difficulty in using their register or a concerning resistance to providing the information.

This is the first publicly released research into the volume of firearm theft since 2018. Restoring federal funding for the National Firearm Theft Monitoring Program (NFTMP), as was the case from 2006 to 2010, would dramatically enhance public and police understanding of stolen firearms.

This research would have been far more straightforward with the National Firearms Register to centralise information from all jurisdictions. This would help law enforcement, and the public, understand and respond to the number of firearm thefts across the country. The register was part of the National Firearms Agreement in 1996 and was reaffirmed by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments in 2017.⁴³ Currently, the register is slated to launch by the end of 2028, 32 years after it was first agreed to.⁴⁴ After the tragic Porepunkah shooting in August 2025, Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie and Labor MP Dan Repacholi called for the register to be operational sooner.⁴⁵

The flow of firearms in their thousands into the hands of criminals, including through theft, puts Australians in danger. Simple reforms could stem the flow of illicit weapons and help give both the police and the public a clearer understanding of the danger.

⁴³ Predavec, Grundy & Campbell (2025) "Australian gun control: 29 years after Port Arthur", pp 3-4

⁴⁴ Department of Home Affairs (2025) "National Firearms Register", <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/criminal-justice/firearms/national-firearms-register>

⁴⁵ Jeffrey (2025) "Amid calls to fast-track the national gun register, one expert says a different issue is far more pressing", <https://www.9news.com.au/national/porepunkah-shooting-national-gun-register-debate/cc7e23cf-f479-4630-ad3d-6a277a52459e>

Appendix

Table 2: Firearms stolen in Victoria 2004-2025

	2004 -05	2005 -06	2006 -07	2007 -08	2008 -09	2009 -10	2010 -11	2011 -12	2012 -13	2013 -14	2014 -15	2015 -16	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Vic	302	211	276	332	302	363	426	763	799	701	747	823	601	555	584	329	300	482	364	375	N/A

Sources: For 2004-05 to 2007-08: Australian Institute of Criminology (2018) "Firearm theft in Australia", p 20, <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr24>;
 For 2008-09 to 2015-16: Gun Control Australia (2018) "Firearm theft in Australia 2007-2017", p 5, https://www.guncontrolaustralia.org/gun_theft_skyrockets_over_ten_years;
 For 2017-2024: Data provided on request by the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency

Table 3: Firearms stolen in New South Wales 2004-2025

	2004 -05	2005 -06	2006 -07	2007 -08	2008 -09	2009 -10	2010 -11	2011 -12	2012 -13	2013 -14	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
NSW	371	401	432	410	592	446	700	794	717	726	622	946	601	488	501	387	397	430	514	417	N/A

Sources: For 2004-05 to 2007-08: Australian Institute of Criminology (2018) "Firearm theft in Australia", p 20, <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr24>;
 For 2008-09 to 2013-14: Gun Control Australia (2018) "Firearm theft in Australia 2007-2017", p 5, https://www.guncontrolaustralia.org/gun_theft_skyrockets_over_ten_years;
 For 2015-2024: Data provided on request by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research

Table 4: Firearms stolen in Queensland 2004-2025

	2004 -05	2005 -06	2006 -07	2007 -08	2008 -09	2009 -10	2010 -11	2011 -12	2012 -13	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 *
Qld	329	302	320	352	319	461	552	518	579	627	614	777	581	636	672	449	538	658	777	602	233

Sources: For 2004-05 to 2007-08 & 2018: Australian Institute of Criminology (2018) "Firearm theft in Australia", p 20, <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr24>;
 For 2008-09 to 2012-13: Gun Control Australia (2018) "Firearm theft in Australia 2007-2017", p 5, https://www.guncontrolaustralia.org/gun_theft_skyrockets_over_ten_years; For 2014-2025: Data provided on request by the Queensland Police Service; Ryan (2018) "Gun theft at its lowest in four years", <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/83807> (2025 data only for period from January to May)

Table 5: Firearms stolen in Western Australia 2004-2025

	2004 -05	2005 -06	2006 -07	2007 -08	2008 -09	2009 -10	2010 -11	2011 -12	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 *	2025
WA	207	191	232	297	232	289	318	381	417	447	562	514	601	396	464	187	251	212	181	50	N/A

Sources: For 2004-05 to 2007-08: Australian Institute of Criminology (2018) “Firearm theft in Australia”, p 20, <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr24>;

For 2008-09 to 2011-12: Gun Control Australia (2018) “Firearm theft in Australia 2007-2017”, p 5,

https://www.guncontrolaustralia.org/gun_theft_skyrockets_over_ten_years;

For 2013–2024: Data released under Freedom of Information by the Western Australian Police Force

*Note: Data for 2024 is only for the period from January to March.

Table 6: Firearms stolen in South Australia, Tasmania, ACT and NT 2004-2025

	2004 -05	2005 -06	2006 -07	2007 -08	2008 -09	2009 -10	2010 -11	2011 -12	2012 -13	2013 -14	2014 -15	2015 -16	2016 -17	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 *
SA	150	198	204	193	211	N/A	N/A	N/A	253	246	262	274	134	228	118	96	97	70	84	72	N/A
Tas	83	114	52	107	99	216	249	189	245	231	257	260	207	151	201	131	105	91	110	182	50
ACT	8	9	12	9	22	15	3	68	5	8	8	10	10	28	21	10	26	21	5	3	1
NT	20	19	10	12	25	17	17	17	17	12	18	23	17	33	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sources: For 2004-05 to 2007-08 (all four) & 2018 (NT only): Australian Institute of Criminology (2018) “Firearm theft in Australia”, p 20,

<https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr24>;

For 2008-09 to 2016-17: Gun Control Australia (2018) “Firearm theft in Australia 2007-2017”, p 5,

https://www.guncontrolaustralia.org/gun_theft_skyrockets_over_ten_years;

For 2018–2024: Data provided on request by the Tasmanian Department of Police, Fire & Emergency Management; Data released under Freedom of Information by the South Australian Police, and Australian Federal Police (2025 data for Tasmania is only from January to April; 2025 data for ACT is only from January to June).

Note: Three years of data for SA and seven years for NT are marked as “N/A” because we do not have figures for those periods available.

Table 7: Total firearms stolen in Australia 2004-2025

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 *	2025 *
Total	1,470	1,445	1,538	1,712	1,802	1,807	2,265	2,730	3,032	2,998	3,090	3,627	2,752	2,515	2,561	1,589	1,714	1,964	2,035	1,701	284

Source: See tables 2–6;

Note: Where financial year data is used, it is included in the total for the year it ended in (e.g. 2004-05 figures are “2005” here).

