

AUDITING AUSTRALIA

By Guy Smith

“AUSTRALIA,” SAID HILLARY CLINTON, “[IS] A GOOD EXAMPLE ...” CONCERNING GUN CONTROL. BUT WHAT PRECISELY IS IT A GOOD EXAMPLE OF? CERTAINLY NOT HOMICIDE.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS:

- 1996/97 gun ban and confiscation had no effect on homicides
- Ban may have led to increased sexual assaults
- Unarmed robbery fell faster than armed robbery, showing a disconnect

THE HISTORY AND CURRENT POLITICAL CLAIM

In the wake of a mass shooting in Port Arthur, the Australian government orchestrated a “National Firearms Agreement” whereby all the states within Australia would enact tougher gun control (the various states within Oz largely had their own localized gun control regimes). The system banned all semi-automatic rifles, all semi-automatic and pump-action shotguns, and created a restrictive system of licensing and ownership which was nothing short of draconian (then again, what can you expect from a government that censors Internet content). The government was legally compelled to compensate people for the loss of their firearms, so they instituted a program to bribe people to comply.

This was a bit of a failure. In the span of a year, Australians surrendered about a million guns (from a population of over 18 million people). Unofficial estimates conclude that maybe 20% of the gun owners in Oz complied with the new law.¹ So claims about any serious fall in crime, much

less an association of such to a gun ban, strain credulity. This includes certain politicians in the current American presidential election.

It should be noted that in terms of homicides, Australians never had that much to worry about. The place is huge, the population is small, and the people are spread out. This fact of geography – paired with a rather laid-back culture and a dearth of sociopathic street gangs – contributes to subdued hostilities. Australia’s homicide rate is about half that of the USA during periods of non-prohibition (where America banned alcohol and later drugs is strongly associated with abhorrent spikes in Yank homicides).

SO, WHAT HAPPENED (OR DIDN'T)?

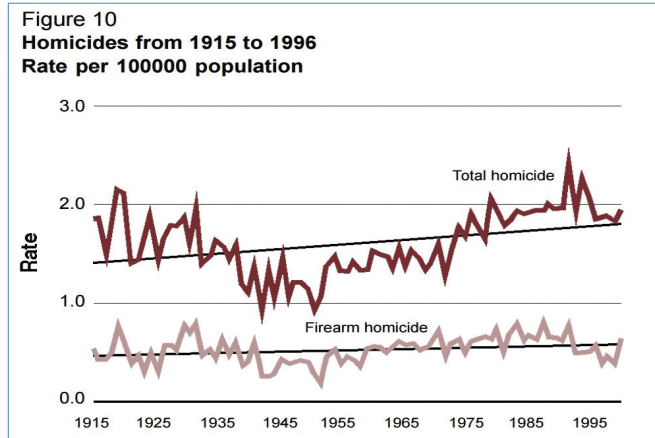
The question then is whether the gun ban in Australia had any effect. The short answer is it did, but maybe not in a good way.

First, I need to point out that though various agencies of the Australian government collect criminology statistics, it can be a challenge to gather them. The single best and consistent source for homicide stats only went back to 1989, a mere seven years before the Port Arthur massacre. But that is enough to get a sense of the before and after.

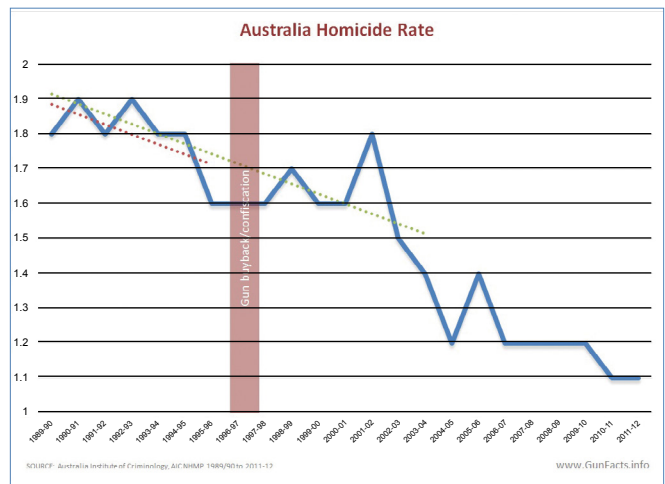
What we see is that homicides in Oz were on the decline before the Australian gun “ban.” In fact, the slope of the homicide line for seven years before and after the ban are identical

Originally published on www.gunfacts.info

Guy Smith has been referred to as a libertarian with a foreign policy. With an education in quantitative management, and as a working market researcher, Guy started noticing that members of the gun control industry were less than factual and often outright dishonest. He decided to take on the cause of debunking gun control misinformation. Guy is a regular speaker on television, radio, and at meetings of civil liberty groups, including being an invited speaker at the Gun Rights Policy Conference. For more information and other articles, visit GunFacts.info



SOURCE: *FACTS and Figures, 1998, Australian Institute of Criminology*



SOURCE: Australia Institute of Criminology, AIC/NMSP 1989/90 to 2011-12

www.GunFacts.info

down to four decimal places (a slope of -0.0286 for my fellow number nuts). If the gun ban was designed to impede homicides, then it had zero effect (it is curious to note that homicides fell sharply starting around 2002 – but we’ll discuss this a little down the page).

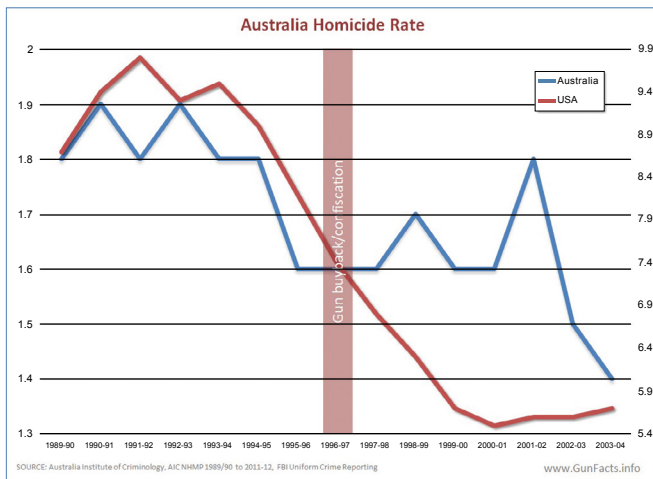
The important points are that:

- Homicides were falling before the gun ban.
- They were falling after the gun ban.
- The rate of decline was identical before and after.
- Even allowing for a generous lead/lag affect, no homicide decline can be attributed to the gun ban.

FOREIGN PERSPECTIVE

Perhaps more enlightening than this time-series for Australia alone would be to compare homicides in the same period with the United States. After all, American politicians campaigning for gun control and using Oz as a model need to prove that a Down Under approach is “a good example.”

Using the same +/-7 year span before and after the Australian gun “ban,” all other things being equal, the theory states that America’s homicides would have gone wildly higher since Americans were continuing to buy guns in annually increasing numbers.

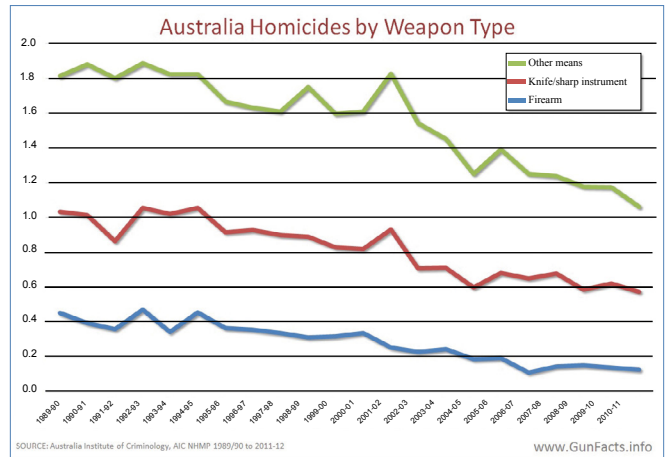


Hillary is not going to be happy. As the chart demonstrates, homicides fell faster and further in America than Australia. Given Oz’s relatively low starting homicide rate, they perhaps had less free fall room than the United States. But this decline occurred during a period when America went from 16 to 36 states (32% to 72%) that allowed people to carry concealed firearms in public, and for which many of the states rolled back firearm restrictions.

Guns do not appear to have been a huge swing variable in Australian homicides. But other forms of murder were. A sad secret is that murderous Ausies never resorted to guns much. They have traditionally been much fonder of using knives, bare hands, blunt objects, fire, poison and other means.

But this is where we find some meaningful insight. Recall that we could not earlier explain the dramatic drop in homicides starting around the year 2002? What we see is that homicide by something other than guns and knives dropped rapidly starting in 2002. For the years 2002 through 2011, the rate of decline for “other” means of homicide fell nearly three times faster than for guns (oddly, both gun and knife homicide rates fell at about the same pace).

This last bit is vitally important to the gun control industry. They will point to the long-term homicide rate decline and claim that the gun ban was responsible. But it was not gun control or

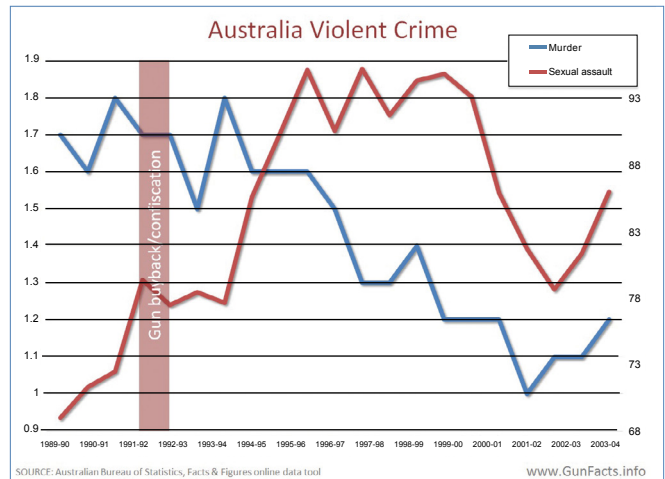


knife control that did the trick since most of the decline came from neither of these weapons.

OTHER VIOLENT CRIME

A good question to ask is if any other effects came from the Australian gun “ban.” Were any other forms of violence abated or encouraged? The bag is decidedly mixed.

Of all mayhem, homicide was the second least affected after the gun “ban” (the least affected was manslaughter). Armed robbery fell, but unarmed robbery fell even faster. Even kidnapping dropped on a steeper slope. However, rapes rose. This is not proof that gun control leads to rape, but one cannot claim women are safer from such assaults in a disarmed society.



SO WHAT IS A “GOOD EXAMPLE”?

Let’s lay to rest a few myths about politics, policy, Australia and guns.

- Like the UK, Australia has an admirably low homicide rate. But it was that way before gun control.
- Modern gun control in Oz did not change the rate of decline in homicides.
- The entire Australian gun “ban” was at best an exercise in how to waste millions in taxpayer money, because it had no demonstrable effect.

Hillary Clinton may be right. The Australian gun “ban” is a good example of what **NOT** to do.

Notes:

1. *New National Gun Laws – are they cost effective?*, Lawson, Review, Institute of Public Affairs, 1999