

GUN OWNERSHIP AND VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIA: STRATEGIES FOR REDUCTION*

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ABSTRACT

Prospects for the reduction of gun violence in Australia revolve around two basic issues; legislative reform and behaviour modification. In terms of legislative reform, politicians will only pass stricter gun control laws if they perceive that a large number of voters support the proposition. To date, however, pro-gun groups have been more successful in getting their message across than the gun control groups. The reasons for this are partly based on their greater understanding and use of marketing techniques. This paper examines, from a marketing perspective, why the gun lobby, although relatively small in numbers, is seen to be so influential in determining public policy. Major reasons for this success are that the "gun lobby" has defined its product more effectively and has better segmented its markets. Suggestions are then given as to how pro-control groups could better market their ideals and consequently achieve their objectives of fewer guns and stricter control laws.

INTRODUCTION

Prospects for the reduction of gun violence in Australia revolve around two basic issues; legislative reform and behaviour modification. Rather than simply discussing the consequences of tighter gun law by comparing the Australian gun violence situation with the situation of other countries with varying degrees of gun control, a task which has been undertaken before, this paper addresses issues relating to why those Australians who form what is referred to as the gun lobby, have been successful in resisting reform in the past.¹ Much of the relative strength of pro-gun groups relates to their approach to marketing although it is unlikely that any group bases its operations on a specified marketing plan. Consequently, the analysis here is on what aspects of marketing practices the gun lobby has successfully employed compared to those in favour of stricter gun control.

The consequences of the successful marketing of a cause such as the gun issue are reflected in both legislation and social behaviour. Politicians will legislate for greater gun

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1 For example see Snowdon, J, "Suicide in Australia—a comparison with suicide in England and Wales" (1979) 13 *ANZ J Psychiat* 301–307; Chappell, D, Grabosky, P, Wilson, P and Mukherjee, S, "Firearms and Violence in Australia" (1988) 10 *Trends and Issues*; and Peters, R and Egger, S, "National Gun Laws Fall Short of the Mark" (1991) 16/6 *Leg Serv B* 265–269.

control if they perceive that the majority of voters support the stance. If, however, a large and vocal pro-gun lobby gives the impression that a substantial portion of the population do not support increased control or national gun laws, then strict legislation is unlikely to be forthcoming. Similarly, the successful portrayal of guns as a necessary and desirable possession will lead to an increase in gun ownership whereas social condemnation of large scale private ownership of firearms is likely, through peer group pressure if nothing else, to reduce the desire to own a gun.

Despite its relatively high profile, the "gun lobby" in Australia is not a formal organisation but a loose coalition composed mainly of gun clubs, including rifle clubs, field and game hunting organisations, pistol clubs, and firearms traders. Within this coalition, however, are several well organised groups, the most notable being the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia with an estimated membership of 50 to 60,000, the Firearm Owners Association of Australia and the Firearms Safety Foundation. It is primarily through subscriptions to these formal organisations, as well as appeals conducted through them, that the gun lobby is able to finance large scale advertising campaigns, particularly during elections.²

In any discussion of this type it must be remembered that the gun lobby is not a single cohesive organisation but rather is made up of diverse range of individuals and smaller groups. In its broadest sense the gun lobby would include all owners of guns although in reality, certain sectors of the gun owning public would themselves support stricter control. This paper looks first at the extent of gun ownership. It then addresses the issue of product differentiation from the perspectives of those for and against strict gun laws before looking at the marketing tactics of pro-gun organisations. Finally, it offers some suggestions as to how gun control organisations could improve their standing and open support with a more marketing oriented approach.

OVERVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN FIREARMS SITUATION

One of the major problems facing any organisation involved in gun control is the lack of current, accurate data concerning the number of firearms in private ownership and, more importantly, the actual number of gun owners. The most recent figures available on gun ownership are based on the 1989 International Victims of Crime Survey in which a random sample of households revealed a household gun ownership level of approximately 20.7 per cent. This represents between 994,881 and 1,184,383 households throughout Australia. The proportion of households with guns varies according to location with approximately 41.1 per cent rural households owning a gun compared with only 11.7 per cent of households in the major metropolitan areas (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide) Although those who owned a gun were asked whether the weapon was a handgun or rifle/shotgun, no additional information was available as to the number, calibre or other qualities of the guns owned by households.³

2 McEvoy, M, Nance, J and Quinn, S, "The Gun Lobby—who are they?", *Sunday Telegraph* 1 September 1991.

3 Chappell, D, "A national gun control strategy: The Recommendation of the National Committee on Violence", (1992) 3/3 *Criminology Australia* at 3.

It has been estimated that there are at least 3.5 to 4 million guns in private ownership in Australia.⁴ The worst case scenario in terms of the extent of gun ownership is to assume that each gun owner possesses only one firearm. Based on this fairly weak assumption, the ratio of non-owners to owners varies between 5:1 and 4.4:1. Harding, however, estimated an average number of 1.68 firearms per ownership. Using this assumption the ratio changes significantly to between 8.4 and 7.4 non-gun owners for each person who possesses a firearm. In other words, non-gun owners substantially outnumber gun owners under both assumptions. A summary of these statistics and ratios is given in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1:
Proportion of people who do not possess a gun compared to those who do based on an assumption of 3.5 million firearms in private ownership

<i>Assumption</i>	<i>Ownership of gun</i>	<i>Number*</i>	<i>Proportion</i>
1 gun per owner	No	14,029,000	5.0
	Yes	3,500,000	1.0
1.68 guns per owner	No	15,446,000	8.4
	Yes	2,083,000	1.0

Table 2:
Proportion of people who do not possess a gun compared to those who do based on an assumption of 4 million firearms in private ownership

<i>Assumption</i>	<i>Ownership of gun</i>	<i>Number*</i>	<i>Proportion</i>
1 gun per owner	No	13,529,000	4.4
	Yes	4,000,000	1.0
1.68 guns per owner	No	15,148,000	7.4
	Yes	2,381,000	1.0

* Figures based on a national population of 17,529,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 1992)

The number of people who actually possess a firearm is probably even lower. Crook estimates that 22 per cent of gun owners possess a firearm for the purpose of self defence or personal safety.⁵ Although there is no clear evidence, it is probably reasonable to assume that those people who have a gun for personal safety reasons own only one

4 Chappell, D, Grabosky, P, Wilson, P and Mukherjee, S, "Firearms and Violence in Australia" (1988) *Trends and Issues No 10*, Australian Institute of Criminology.

5 Crook, J, "The development of the gun lobby in Australia", in *The Gun Lobby in the 1990s*, Gun Control Australia Inc (1992) at 37.

weapon. Based on the 3.5 million gun estimate, this accounts for 770,000 guns. If the higher estimate of 4 million guns is accepted this number rises to 880,000. Assuming single ownership only for those who possess firearms for self defence reasons, the number of people who own guns for recreation, sport or other reasons falls to between 1.3 and 1.5 million. (see Tables 3 and 4) Even this is probably an overestimate as many people who own a gun for reasons other than self defence will own several weapons.

Table 3:
Estimates of probable gun ownership based on an estimate of 3.5 million guns and a total of 2,083,000 owners

Number of owners (self defence)	770,000
Total number of guns in single ownership	770,000
Total number of guns in multiple ownership	2,730,000
Number of owners with more than one gun (Total owners — single gun owners)	1,313,000
Average number of guns per multiple owner	2.08

Table 4:
Estimates of probable gun ownership based on an estimate of 4 million guns and a total of 2,381,000 owners

Number of owners (self defence)	880,000
Total number of guns in single ownership	880,000
Total number of guns in multiple ownership	3,120,000
Number of owners with more than one gun (Total owners — single gun owners)	1,501,000
Average number of guns per multiple owner	2.08

Assumptions:

- (i) each person who possesses a firearm purely for the purposes of self defence or personal safety owns only one gun
- (ii) all other owners have more than one gun

In terms of community attitudes towards gun ownership and gun control laws, there appears to be strong support for increased gun control. In the aftermath of the Strathfield massacre in August 1991, a public opinion poll commissioned by the *Sydney Morning Herald* found that 90 per cent of Sydney residents supported a ban on semi-automatic guns while 67 per cent supported a ban on all guns except those required by people for

their jobs.⁶ Given the circumstances of the recency of the incident combined with the fact that Sydney has the lowest overall proportion of households with guns (7.5 per cent compared with the national average of 20.7 per cent), these figures are probably higher than would normally be expected.⁷ Even so, they clearly show strong support for the strict control of guns.

Based on the above figures of relatively low gun ownership, (even the most pessimistic estimates show that approximately 80 per cent of the population do not own a gun), combined with high approval for increased gun controls, why then is the gun lobby so apparently influential? The reasons can be found largely in their greater understanding and use of marketing.

ISSUES OF PRODUCT DEFINITION

The first issue which needs to be considered in any systematic marketing campaign is product definition. In this area that the gun lobby has been very successful in diverting attention away from issues relating to the negative consequences of gun misuse. In effect, those who form the gun lobby do not attempt to “sell” guns as such. Rather they have adopted a three pronged lifestyle approach to product definition. The three “products” sold by the gun lobby are as follows:

- 1 self defence and the right to personal safety;
- 2 the liberal democratic rights of the individual to privacy and self expression; and
- 3 a healthy outdoor lifestyle which can involve the whole family.

Taking each product in turn, considerable success has been achieved with respect to selling guns as a means of ensuring personal safety with over three quarters of a million people estimated to have purchased a firearm for this reason. The targetting of specific groups, such as women, as a part of this strategy will be discussed in more detail later.

Current objections on the part of the gun lobby to uniform national gun laws are based on the perceived threat to democracy posed by the process of law reform and the laws themselves coupled with privacy considerations. For example, in a three page article in the March 1993 edition of the *Australian Shooter's Journal*, the following comments are made in relation to the proposed national gun laws:⁸

“That the government is moving secretly snacks of a dictatorship; not a democracy which Australia is alleged to enjoy.”

“This is not information about criminals that is available to all and sundry, but information about law abiding, respectable Australian citizens.”

“A disarmed country can never be called a free country.”

6 Peters and Egger, above n1.

7 Chappell, D (1992), “A national gun control strategy: The recommendation of the National Committee on Violence” (1992) 3/3 *Criminology Australia* 5-9 at 7.

8 “Gun Laws to be Nationalised”, *Australian Shooters Journal*, March 1993.

The actual process being followed is similar to that employed in most areas of law reform where a government constituted committee, in this case the National Committee on Violence, provides advice on issues related to specific pieces of proposed legislation. For those people without knowledge of the workings of parliament and advisory bodies, however, it is easy to portray the process of law reform as being, in some way, subversive. The ideal of a free democratic society is one which has strong public support and is easy to "sell" even amongst those who do not agree with guns being easily available.

The third product which the gun lobby promotes is a healthy, outdoor, family oriented lifestyle. This image is reinforced throughout gun magazines both in the articles published and in the advertising accepted. The Sydney Pistol Shooting club, for example, advertises pistol shooting as being "a sport that the whole family can enjoy together" and offers both single and family memberships. Similarly, the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) merchandise catalogue features a wide range of outdoor equipment such as camp ovens, jackets and shooting glasses. The important point to note in this overview is that ownership of guns is not promoted as an end in itself, rather guns are seen as an accessory to a lifestyle.

This contrasts with the gun control groups which tend to suffer from what is referred to as "marketing myopia". Marketing myopia occurs when organisations too narrowly define their purposes or goals and consequently, reduce their potential client support. In this instance, the gun control lobby narrowly and specifically defines its purposes as being to:

- 1 reduce the number of firearms in Australian society; and
- 2 prevent access to those weapons by individuals who are not fit and proper persons such as those who have been convicted of a violent crime or who have shown a propensity to violence.

While such narrowly defined objectives are useful from a strategic planning perspective, from the point of view of selling the concept of gun control to the general public, wider issues need to be considered. For example, the focus of the gun control lobby could be "to reduce violence in society". Obviously, a major factor in controlling violence is restricting the availability of guns. The promotion of the general issue will, therefore, necessarily involve the more specific aims. By widening the overall aim of the organisation rather than focussing on specific objectives, gun control organisations will be able to widen their base of support to include those people who currently oppose violence, either in general or in specific settings such as domestic violence or cruelty to animals, but do not have strong views on the gun issue.

By way of comparison, it is unlikely that many people would support the pro-gun lobby if their stated aims were to increase the number of privately owned guns in Australia. By disguising this aim, which is inherent in any gun based organisation which is attempting to increase its membership, the gun lobby appears to enjoy a reasonable level of support, or at least, there are few groups which actively oppose the use and ownership of firearms.

MARKETING TACTICS OF PRO-GUN ORGANISATIONS

Marketing is a complex process involving, amongst other things, the division of the total population in a number of smaller, homogeneous “target markets” and the development of a suitable “marketing mix” which consists of four basic elements; price, product, promotion and distribution.

As outlined previously, the actual number of people who possess firearms is relatively small. In such a market, manufacturers who wish to expand their businesses can choose to increase their marketshare through the aggressive promotion of their existing products, create new products to better service their market or expand the overall size of the market by creating products which serve the needs of those not already in the market. In the gun industry both product and market development are very common strategies. One of the main reasons that constant product modifications are necessary in the firearms industry is that guns, as a general rule, are well made and intended to last indefinitely. Without providing some sort of incentive or reason to upgrade, manufacturers and retailers would soon exhaust the interested market. In other words, for the gun manufacturers to increase their sales, they need to make the current products owned obsolete by introducing new, improved guns on a regular basis.⁹

In terms of both market and product development, manufacturers and retailers in America and Canada have identified the women’s market as being an area of potential high growth. This has led to the development of a range of smaller, light weight guns, most notably the Lady Smith handgun by Smith & Wesson. By promoting the Lady Smith as an indispensable accessory while concentrating their advertising of women’s fears, 24,000 guns were sold within a month of release. Another development in the women’s market is a handbag with built in holster for easy access. A second important product modification has been the development of the all plastic gun. The plastic gun is not reliably detected by standard security screening equipment making it attractive to those who want to take guns into restricted areas. Again, because of its lightness, easy care and the fact that it is available in a range of colours, the “all plastic” gun is being specifically marketed to women.¹⁰ Guns are also modified to expand their attraction in existing markets, for example, in Australia Remington is currently heavily promoting specialist guns for “the serious duck and quail shooter” which come in two different camouflage variations so that hunters can avoid detection in different settings.¹¹

Products can be divided into a number of different categories ranging from the unsought product; that is, one about which the potential consumer is largely unaware, to the speciality good which customers will actively seek out. Guns can be classified at either end of the spectrum depending on the client group. Based on the earlier figures, for most Australians guns are clearly an unsought product and one which they do not consider to be necessary or relevant to their current lifestyle. To persuade these potential clients, and to expand the overall gun market, manufacturers and retailers need to convince non-owners that owning a gun would in some way enhance their lives. The main motive

9 Juan, S, “America’s Firearms Fetish”, *Broadside* 7 April 1993, 13.

10 Ibid.

11 See *Australian Shooters’ Journal* March 1993 at 61.

being used by both manufacturers and retailers at the moment is to appeal to the non-owners fear of crime and present guns as being a means with which they can keep themselves and their families safe. One of the fourteen listed policies of the Shooter's Party specifically "asserts the right of the law-abiding individual to protect self, family and property"¹² thereby implicitly encouraging the use of guns by private citizens against perceived criminals or intruders. This approach to developing a new market based on fear would seem to be reasonably successful given the substantial number of people who own guns for personal protection.

In terms of the distribution of the gun lobby's message, three major outlets have been employed; letter writing campaigns in the mainstream media, shooting magazines and the Shooters' Party. One of the cheapest and easiest ways to deliver a message is to write topical letters to the editors of major newspapers, particularly at times when the issue of gun control is prominent such as following a major shooting incident. A brief survey of newspapers shows that this tactic is commonly employed by individuals opposing stricter gun controls. The gun lobby's most important targeted periodical is the *Australian Shooters' Journal* which is the official journal of the Sporting Shooters' Association. Regular publications which are sold in newsagents throughout the country provide the gun lobby with a publicly accessible forum in which they can not only discuss guns and shooting as a sport but also disseminate political opinions. In the March 1993 edition of the *Australian Shooters' Journal*, for example, two full articles as well as the editorial specifically addressed legislative issues relating to gun control while the March/April 1993 edition of *Guns Australia* devoted three pages to an explanation of the policies of the Shooters' Party as well as an editorial which aims to undermine the recent work and information packages distributed by the Coalition for Gun Control. This editorial strongly opposed the idea of registration for all firearms using emotionally charged statements such as "a reliable informant told me that this [press] kit was prepared by federally-funded women's activists" and referring to gun control groups as "anti-gunners".¹³

The gun lobby has also widened its audience as a result of the decision to form a Shooters' Party to run for the Senate in New South Wales. As would be expected, the Shooters' Party promotes the "right of law abiding citizens to own and use firearms for any lawful purpose without having to prove specific need". Unlike many minor political parties based on a single issue, however, the Shooters' Party is presenting itself as a viable option for those who oppose stricter gun control by developing a range of policies covering firearms, law and order, conservation and the environment, business, individual rights, transport and energy, resource development, government and the flag.¹⁴ Another well designed initiative of the Shooters' Party was to break down stereotypes of the pro-gun lobby by ensuring a gender balance of three male and three female candidates on the Senate ticket.

12 See "The Shooter's Party", *Guns Australia* March/April 1993, 6-8.

13 "Frontline", *Guns Australia* March/April 1993 at 4.

14 Above n12 at 7.

MARKETING ISSUES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE GUN CONTROL LOBBY

The previous section has demonstrated how a small but well organised group with a specific cause can effectively employ marketing techniques to appear to be a powerful social force. In numerical terms, those who do not actively support the pro-gun lobby account for a far greater proportion of the overall population than those who do. The main objective of the gun control lobby should be to mobilise this latent support in order to convince political parties that, contrary to the literature distributed by the pro-gun lobby, the majority of voters favour strict gun controls. To achieve this aim gun control needs to become a mainstream political issue rather than being perceived as an ongoing struggle between two committed, but marginal, lobby groups. As part of this change in focus, it may be worth adopting a name such as the “anti-violence coalition” rather than operating under a title which specifically mentions guns and gun control.

As stated previously, one of the first tasks of the overall gun control movement is to widen its base of support by broadening its overriding objectives. For example, the “product” being promoted to the public could be more widely defined as “reduced violence in Australian society” or “the increased safety of individuals in society”. Violence, in a general statement such as this need not refer only to acts of violence committed by one person against another, but should also include self inflicted acts of violence such as suicide as well as the threat of violence. When a comparison of gun deaths per capita is made between the nations on the basis of the availability of firearms, there is a consistent trend for fewer gun deaths in countries where controls are strict compared to those places where firearms are more accessible. Approximately 700 people die in Australia each year as a result of gunshot injuries of which around 80 per cent are suicides. In addition, approximately 1,500 people are injured by guns and 26 per cent of women involved in the Victorian Domestic Violence Survey claim to have been injured or threatened with weapons.¹⁵ These statistics point to the conclusion that a reduction in the availability of guns should, in turn, result in a reduction in these statistics of violence. Hence, the current stated aims of gun control groups, a reduction in the number of firearms and stricter controls on the ownership and registration of guns, can be promoted as a means by which the wider objectives can be met.

In widening its base of support, the gun control lobby should actively seek out other organisations which are committed to the reduction of violence in specific sectors of society and develop closer ongoing ties with such organisations. Although the primary objectives of such organisations would not be to reduce in the number of, and access to, guns many related groups would benefit if guns were less freely available. For example, an organisation such as the RSPCA aims to minimise cruelty and violence towards animals. This includes the shooting of both wildlife and domestic animals for “sport”. While their primary objective is not to lobby for a reduction in access to guns, if fewer guns were in private ownership and being used for recreational hunting purposes it is likely that the number of firearms injuries to animals would correspondingly be reduced. By enlisting the support of such organisations, the benefits of stricter gun controls can be

15 Peters and Egger, above n1 at 266; O’Byrne, A, “Women and Guns”, in *Weapons and Violence in Australia*, Gun Control Council of Australia (1990) at 27.

more easily communicated to the members who may already have some sympathy with the cause. The relationships between the gun control lobby and such organisations could be strengthened through joint promotional projects.

One potential source of support, which incidentally would increase the gun control lobby's credibility while weakening the pro-gun lobby, is that of the genuine target/sporting shooters. To appeal to the wider public it is important to portray a pro-control rather than anti-gun image. By ignoring the legitimate target shooting organisations and concentrating almost exclusively on the misuse of guns, the gun control lobby risks diminishing its public credibility. Serious target shooters, such as those who represent Australia in the Olympic and Commonwealth games, have no need to take their weapons home. If high profile members of this group of shooters were to publicly agree to stricter measures such as the storage of pistols only with registered clubs, they would effectively be joining the gun control lobby.

A second objective of gun control groups should be to counteract the effectiveness of the pro-gun groups' product definition. For example, alternative family oriented outdoor activities which do not involve a gun could be promoted in conjunction with sporting or other recreational organisations. If guns are to form part of recreational activities, greater emphasis should be placed on the enjoyment associated with target shooting which allows people to handle and learn about guns but does not involve violence to either people or animals. Similarly, the personal safety issue should be addressed and suggestions for self protection without recourse to a firearm discussed in a public forum.

Promotion is the most visible aspect of marketing and is divided into four elements; advertising, publicity, personal selling and sales promotions. Advertising, although effective in delivering exactly the message required, is extremely costly. For the promotion of social causes advertising also tends to be regarded cynically by the public because it is paid for commodity reflecting the views of those with the money. When promoting a cause or idea, the most credible means of promotion are publicity and personal selling.

Publicity is the voluntary reporting by another organisation, usually the media, of a commercially significant piece of news regarding a product. It is not paid for by the originating organisation and consequently the organisation has no control over the content of the news generated. It is riskier in terms of getting the right message across but is perceived by the public as being more "legitimate" in the case of social causes than advertising. New research, figures relating to gun based issues, meetings and planned promotional events could all be used to generate commercially significant news in relation to stricter gun control laws. Personal selling, as the name implies, relies on spokespeople from gun control groups approaching individuals and/or organisations and "selling" the views of the gun control lobby. This could involve speaking at conferences, to related anti-violence organisations or simply persuading friends and acquaintances on a personal level that the issue of gun control is worth supporting.

A successful means of generating publicity adopted in the past by Domestic Violence Groups has been to approach the producers of popular soap operas and asking them to incorporate a storyline into the series which is based on the issue of concern, in this case

the dangers associated with unrestricted gun ownership. Proposed story lines which could be negotiated may revolve around accidental deaths or injuries by gunshot, particularly if children are involved, youth suicide and domestic violence. It may also be possible to persuade a particular station or current affairs program to make a documentary on the whole gun control issue.

On a person to person basis, one group worth approaching individually are those involved in the media. In the search for "good copy" the media has tended to glamorise those who commit violent crimes and excuse their behaviour on some personal grounds such as a family break down. For example, in describing the mass murder at Hanging Rock, the phrase "shooting spree" was used extensively by the media. This phrase not only glamorises the the act of Ledbeater and his associates but, at the same time, trivialises the carnage caused. By persuading individual journalists to avoid techniques such as giving those who commit violent crimes macho nicknames and allocating front page headlines to people who go out to systematically shoot others it should be possible, in the long term, to change the focus of reporting of violent gun related incidents away from the shock/glamour approach which can result in copy cat incidents as impressionable people try to emulate the fame given to certain violent criminals (such as that of the school boy in Adelaide following the Hanging Rock incident). Few, if any, people would wish to be associated with someone who had been publicly ridiculed in the national media.

A second group of individuals who should be approached on a personal basis are politicians, particularly those (such as Democrat Senators) who hold positions of strategic influence in the parliamentary process. The extent to which politicians would be lobbied would depend largely on their influence within their party, their public profile and involvement in gun violence related issues and their accessibility to lobbyists.

Whatever promotional techniques are used, it is important that the pro-control groups appear committed, rational and working towards the greater social good rather than obsssive, emotional and simply interested in attacking another special interest lobby group. Given the number of people who probably would not have died each year in Australia if guns were not as accessible, sticking to a campaign based on facts would probably gain greater public support than one based on emotional appeal.

CONCLUSION

From the comparative data available, it seems that countries which minimise access to firearms have fewer gun related violent incidents than those where guns are more accessible. America, for example, there between 130 and 200 million guns in private ownership, more than one for every two people. With a population 14 times the population of Australia, America has a gun death rate 49 times that of Australia. In Canada, the introduction of stricter gun control in 1978 has resulted in a significant decline in the percentage of guns used in violent crime as well as in accidents and suicides. Basically, all these statistics reflect is the obvious conclusion that you can't shoot someone if you don't have a gun.

Currently those who object to stricter gun controls, uniform national gun laws and the registration of all firearms have been better organised and more vocal in their objections than supporters have in their agreement with the proposals. There are an estimated 1.5 million people in Australia who own a firearm for any reason. Compared to the national population of 17.5 million this is a relatively small proportion. Even on a household basis (1 in 4 households is estimated to own a gun), there are still three households who do not own a gun for each household which does. Over a fifth of those who own guns do so, not from any inherent desire to be involved in the gun culture, but for reasons of self defence. The use of guns in self defence, however, is fraught with legal problems. For example, the shooting of an intruder can result in the person who was defending themselves or their property being charged with murder or manslaughter. Having guns in the home for the purpose of self defence simply increases the probability that an act of violence will occur.

The task facing the gun control lobby is to mobilise the support of the majority who support stricter gun control to counteract the publicity generated by pro-gun organisations. Even if only half of those who do not currently possess a gun sympathise with stricter controls and all people who do own a gun oppose them, gun control groups need only gain the active support of one probable sympathiser in five to outnumber the entire pro-gun lobby.

Projects for the reduction of gun violence in Australia rest on active public support and effective legislative reform. By carrying out a systematic and well organised marketing campaign, gun control groups should have little difficulty in gaining open public support for reform given the high level of approval expressed in opinion polls. Legislative reform will occur when only when politicians perceive that the pro-control groups are larger and politically stronger than the pro-gun lobby.