

History of guns in South Africa

South Africa has one of the highest murder rates in the world. The availability and social acceptability of guns is a major contributing factor.

South Africa has inherited a 'culture of violence' from its colonial and apartheid past. In the run-up to the 1994 democratic elections, over 3.5 million licensed firearms were in the hands of 2.4 million individuals. At that time, gun ownership was governed by the Arms and Ammunition Act of 1969, which put the age limit for gun ownership at 16 years, allowed people to own up to 12 guns, and gun licences were issued for life.

In 1994, 31 people were shot and killed each day; this figure rose to 34 a day in 1998, which is when government started taking action to tighten gun control in South Africa.

"OVER 3.5 MILLION FIREARMS WERE IN THE HANDS OF 2.4 MILLION INDIVIDUAL OWNERS PRE-1994"



GUN VIOLENCE IN NUMBERS IN 1994



3 500 000

FIREARMS LICENSED TO INDIVIDUAL GUN OWNERS



31

PEOPLE MURDERED WITH GUNS IN SA EVERY DAY, INCREASING TO 34 A DAY IN 1998



14 000

GUNS REPORTED LOST/ STOLEN FROM CIVILIANS — AN AVERAGE OF 39 GUNS A DAY

What is gun control?

Gun control legislation aims to:

😔 🛮 Regulate legal guns

- Control who can and cannot own a gun and the conditions of that ownership.
- Keep track of who owns which gun, so that each gun can be linked to its owner should it be used to commit a crime, or to know when guns have been stolen or lost.

"THE MAJORITY
OF ILLEGAL GUNS
WERE LEGALLY
OWNED BEFORE
LEAKING INTO THE
ILLEGAL POOL"

• Take illegal guns out of circulation

 Most illegal guns were once legally owned before they leaked into the illegal pool. Legal guns become illegal when they are lost or stolen. The biggest source of illegal guns in SA are civilian gun owners.

How to reduce illegal guns:

- Limit the number of legal guns;
- Hold regular operations including search and seizures as well as amnesties to recover illegal and legal guns; and
- 3. Regularly destroy recovered, confiscated and unwanted guns so they don't leak back onto the streets.

"THE BIGGEST
SOURCE OF ILLEGAL
GUNS IN SA ARE
CIVILIAN GUN
OWNERS"

Why gun control is important

By controlling how many guns (legal and illegal) are on the streets:

- Orime will be less violent and deadly.
- The risk of accidental death, suicide, and murder of partners and family members can be reduced.



THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW:

THE FIREARMS CONTROL ACT

The Firearms Control Act (FCA) governs everything about guns in SA. It was signed into law in April 2001 and replaced the old Arms and Ammunition Act of 1969.

It features important principles like:

- Gun ownership is NOT a right but a privilege.
- · The age limit for gun ownership is 21 years.
- The number of firearms for self-defence is limited to one handgun or shotgun.
- A gun licence can only be issued after the applicant has passed tests to qualify for a competency certificate.
- Public spaces, like schools, can be declared as Firearm Free Zones.
- Gun owners must renew their gun licence regularly to make sure that they remain 'fit and proper' to own the gun and that the firearm has not been lost, stolen or illegally traded.





GUN DESTRUCTION

Legally you are not allowed to destroy your own gun. It is the responsibility of the police to destroy guns. These guns can be destroyed by either crushing or smelting them in a hot furnace. This ensures that these guns don't make their way back onto the streets.



GUN AMNESTY

During an amnesty you can hand your gun and ammunition over to the police without being prosecuted. For example, if you have failed to renew your gun licence, you are breaking the law. A gun amnesty will allow you to hand in the gun without being prosecuted for breaking the law.

Strong gun laws save lives — poor enforcement kills

After the introduction of stronger gun laws in South Africa there was a significant drop in the country's gun-related deaths: from 34 gun deaths a day in 1998 to 18 a day in 2009.

Gun laws prevent disability

Not only do they save lives, but gun laws also reduce the risk of people being shot and permanently disabled. Before the FCA was passed into law, South Africa's traumatic spinal cord injury (TSCI) rate was that of a country at war. More people were disabled from a gunshot than from a traffic accident. After the FCA was passed into law, the number of people paralysed after a shooting declined and traffic accidents became the leading cause of TSCI.



Challenges facing gun control

Despite this great progress, gun violence started rising again in 2011. due to:

Poor management and fraud and corruption by the police
 Problems in the police service allowed guns in police
 custody to be stolen and sold. In one case, a police colonel
 and his accomplices stole 2 400 guns that were meant to
 be destroyed and sold them to gangs in the Western Cape
 (the Prinslop case).

2. Corruption in the gun-licensing process

Police officials are bribed to either award gun licences to individuals who are not fit for gun ownership or fast-track applications without following due process to deal with the backlog.

3. Poor compliance by gun owners

Gun owners are not complying with the 2018 Constitutional Court ruling that affirms the importance of regular firearm renewal. As a result, over 450,000 guns are illegally possessed, which undermines SA's firearms control management system. "AS OF 2014
GUNSHOTS
REPLACED TRAFFIC
ACCIDENTS AS THE
LEADING CAUSE OF
TRAUMATIC SPINAL
CORD INJURIES IN
CAPE TOWN"

The result of poor enforcement

Poor enforcement ultimately leads to illegal guns ending up back on the street and in the hands of people who are not fit to handle or own a gun.

For example, as a result of the Prinsloo case:



2 400 GUNS IN POLICE CUSTODY SOLD TO WESTERN CAPE GANGS



89 KILLED 261 SHOT CHILDREN AFFECTED BY



RECOVERED AND FORENSICALLY LINKED TO 1 066 MURDERS



1100 GUNS
UNACCOUNTED FOR
AND CAN STILL BE
USED TO COMMIT
VIOLENT CRIMES



Facts



3 MILLION (5.9 GUNS PER 100 PEOPLE)

FIREARMS REGISTERED TO CIVILIANS

2015



DROP FROM 1999 WHEN 3.5 MILLION (8.3 GUNS PER 100 PEOPLE) WERE REGISTERED TO

CIVILIANS



NATIONAL HEALTH BUDGET SPENT (R8.2 BILLION) ON TREATING ABDOMINAL GUN-SHOT INJURIES AT STATE HOSPITALS



THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES THAT HAVE SEVERELY RESTRICTED/BANNED CIVILIAN GUN OWNERSHIP

Australia, Botswana, Japan and the UK have severely restricted/banned civilian gun ownership. These countries have some of the lowest gunrelated murders in the world — 42, 51, 4 and 23 respectively a year. In SA, 23 people are shot and killed a day.



24 GUNS A DAY

THE NUMBER OF GUNS REPORTED LOST OR STOLEN IN 2019/20 IN SOUTH AFRICA 22 GUNS FROM CIVILIANS

22 GUNS FROM CIVILIANS 2 FROM POLICE

DID YOU KNOW?



IT IS ILLEGAL:

- · To keep or use someone else's gun.
- · To buy a gun from an unlicensed dealer.
- To not report a stolen or lost gun to the police.
- · To point a gun at someone.
- · To not store the gun in a safe and secure place.
- · To discharge a gun in public without 'good cause'.
- To provide false information on a gun application form.

WHO IS 'FIT AND PROPER' TO OWN A GUN?



A COMPETENCY CERTIFICATE TO OWN A GUN WILL BE DENIED IF THE APPLICANT HAS:

- · A history of violence.
- · A criminal record.
- · A drug or alcohol abuse problem.
- · A conviction for sexual abuse or domestic violence.
- · Used a firearm negligently.
- · Been declared unfit to possess a gun.
- Had a final protection order issued against them under the Domestic Violence Act

Myths

Myth: Guns don't kill people, people kill people.

Fact: People with guns can kill more people more quickly. Evidence shows that limiting access to guns can prevent murders, suicides and injuries. The data also show that countries with restrictive gun laws and lower gun ownership levels tend to have lower levels of gun violence.

Myth: Criminals don't follow the law, so why have any gun laws?

Fact: Not true! When stricter gun laws were introduced in 2000, gun deaths almost halved – from 34 a day to 18 a day.

Myth: Crime is committed with illegal guns and not legal guns.

Fact: Most illegal guns were once legal guns. When legal guns are either stolen or lost, they end up as illegal guns. However, legal guns are also used to commit crime, especially in the home, and between partners or ex-partners.

Myth: The weapon used to commit a crime has no relevance to the levels and impact of the crime.

Fact: Firearms are most often the weapon of choice of criminals: they are small, light, easy to use and conceal; and they are more lethal than any other weapon. One in three people who are shot will die, while one in 55 people who are stabbed will die.

"1 IN 3 PEOPLE WHO ARE SHOT WILL DIE, WHILE 1 IN 55 PEOPLE WHO ARE STABBED WILL DIE"



Take action

What you can do:

- Your voice can stop a bullet. Raise your voice in support of a country free from gun violence — reach out to your wider community by writing letters to your local newspaper, phoning your local radio station, tweeting or blogging.
- Use this Toolkit to find out how you can take action against gun violence in your family, circle of friends or community.
- Praise the police for gun recovery and destruction campaigns, but be critical when you hear cases where the law hasn't been implemented, resulting in unfit people being granted gun licences.
- Get the facts read the news and follow GFSA on social media for news and information about gun violence and how to prevent it.





What your government can do:

- Comply with international obligations to regulate firearms and ammunition, including securing stockpiles to stop loss and theft – from the police, the military and civilians.
- Enforce the law, which will help reduce the risk of gunviolence.
- Hold regular no-questions-asked amnesty and public gun destruction campaigns.
- Bring the Firearms Control Amendment Bill to Parliament to close loopholes and strengthen the law regulating who can own what gun for which purpose.
- Provide accurate crime statistics with detailed information on guns used in crime. This will help monitor the impact of gun control policy and enforcement, highlight successes and challenges, and identify areas requiring urgent attention.

"YOUR VOICE CAN STOP A BULLET"



Notes			