

Like 241k

LOG IN/REGISTER

NEWS & POLITICS TECH BUSINESS ARTS LIFE HEALTH & SCIENCE SPORTS DOUBLE X PODCASTS PHOTOS VIDEO SLATEST BLOGS MYSLATE

**Slate** **iPHONE APP 2.0**  
faster, smarter, free **DOWNLOAD NOW**



Available on the **App Store**

A BLOG ABOUT MURDER, THEFT, AND OTHER WICKEDNESS.

« OLDER

[A Day After the Shooting, Newtown Is Being Watched by the Entire World](#)

NEWER »

[In the Wake of the Newtown Shooting, Should We Fear a Wave of Copycat Crimes?](#)

## After a 1996 Mass Shooting, Australia Enacted Strict Gun Laws. It Hasn't Had a Similar Massacre Since.

By Will Oremus | Posted Sunday, Dec. 16, 2012, at 10:00 PM ET

Like 62k Tweet 1,887 

5k+



Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard lays a wreath at the memorial site of the Port Arthur massacre on its 10th anniversary. The mass killing spurred Howard's government to pass sweeping gun control laws. Photo by Ian Waldie/Getty Images

[Read the rest of Slate's coverage of the Sandy Hook school shooting.](#)

On April 28, 1996, a gunman opened fire on tourists in a seaside resort in Port Arthur, Tasmania. By the time he was finished, **he had killed 35 people** and wounded 23 more. It was the worst mass murder in Australia's history.

Twelve days later, Australia's government did something remarkable. Led by newly elected conservative Prime Minister John Howard, it announced a bipartisan deal with state and local governments to enact sweeping gun-control measures. A decade and a half hence, the results of these policy changes are clear: They worked really, really well.

At the heart of the push was a massive buyback of more than 600,000 semi-automatic shotguns and rifles, or about one-fifth of all firearms in circulation in Australia. The country's

**Slate**

**iPHONE APP 2.0**  
faster, smarter, free

**DOWNLOAD NOW**



Available on the **App Store**

new gun laws prohibited private sales, required that all weapons be individually registered to their owners, and required that gun buyers present a "genuine reason" for needing each weapon at the time of the purchase. (Self-defense did not count.) In the wake of the tragedy, polls showed public support for these measures at upwards of 90 percent.

What happened next has been the subject of several academic studies. Violent crime and gun-related deaths did not come to an end in Australia, of course. But as [the Washington Post's Wonkblog pointed out](#) in August, [homicides by firearm plunged 59 percent between 1995 and 2006](#), with no corresponding increase in non-firearm-related homicides. The drop in suicides by gun was even steeper: 65 percent. Studies found [a close correlation between the sharp declines and the gun buybacks](#). Robberies involving a firearm also dropped significantly. Meanwhile, [home invasions did not increase](#), contrary to fears that firearm ownership is needed to deter such crimes. But here's the most stunning statistic. In the decade before the Port Arthur massacre, there had been 11 mass shootings in the country. There hasn't been a single one in Australia since.



Read more from [Slate's coverage of the Sandy Hook school shooting](#)

There have been some contrarian studies about the decrease in gun violence in Australia, including a 2006 paper that argued the decline in gun-related homicides after Port Arthur was simply [a continuation of trends already under way](#). But that paper's methodology [has been discredited](#), which is not surprising when you consider that its authors were affiliated with pro-gun groups. Other reports from gun advocates have similarly [cherry-picked anecdotal evidence](#) or presented [outright fabrications](#) in attempting to make the case that Australia's more-restrictive laws didn't work.

Those are effectively refuted by findings from peer-reviewed

papers, which note that the rate of decrease in gun-related deaths more than doubled following the gun buyback, and that states with the highest buyback rates showed the steepest declines. A [2011 Harvard summary of the research](#) concluded that, at the time the laws were passed in 1996, "it would have been difficult to imagine more compelling future evidence of a beneficial effect."

Whether the same policies would work as well in the United States—or whether similar legislation would have any chance of being passed here in the first place—is an open question. Howard, the conservative leader behind the Australian reforms, wrote [an op-ed in an Australian paper](#) after visiting the United States in the wake of the Aurora shootings. He came away convinced that America needed to change its gun laws, but lamented its lack of will to do so.

There is more to this than merely the lobbying strength of the National Rifle Association and the proximity of the November presidential election. It is hard to believe that their reaction would have been any different if the murders in Aurora had taken place immediately after the election of either Obama or Romney. So deeply embedded is the gun culture of the US, that millions of law-abiding, Americans truly believe that it is safer to own a gun, based on the chilling logic that because there are so many guns in circulation, one's own weapon is needed for self-protection. To put it another way, the situation is so far gone there can be no turning back.

That's certainly how things looked after the Aurora shooting. But after Sandy Hook, with the nation shocked and groping for answers once again, I wonder if Americans are still so sure that we have nothing to learn from Australia's example.

5k+



« OLDER


[A Day After the Shooting, Newtown Is Being Watched by the Entire World](#)

NEWER »

[In the Wake of the Newtown Shooting, Should We Fear a Wave of Copycat Crimes?](#)

## SLATE'S MOST VIRAL

Like      RSS

[Justin Peters](#) is [Slate's](#) crime correspondent. 

---

**54-Year-Old Mom Looks 27**  
Follow this 1 weird tip and remove 20 years of wrinkles in 20 days.  
[theSmartConsumerLiving.com](#)

**Gun Safe**  
Looking For Gun Safe? Find It Nearby With Local.com!  
[Local.com](#)

**Decot Shooting Glasses**  
The BEST shooting glasses available Polarized Prescription & Bifocal  
[www.Decot.com](#)

**Counterpoint DVD Video**  
Starring Charlton Heston and Maximilian Schell.  
[www.thevintage theatre.com](#)


---

**FROM AROUND THE WEB**


- [How Intel IT's BYOD enables thousands of employee-owned devices in the enterprise](#) (*Intel*)
- [81 Seconds of Happiness: Coca-Cola Cans Rolling Off the Factory Line](#) (*Journey*)
- [You should be eating berries and apples every day. Here's Why.](#) (*MSNBC*)
- [Internet threats beyond viruses: The top 5 digital dangers threatening your computer.](#) (*DeVry University*)
- [10 Things You Should Never Buy at Garage Sales](#) (*Reader's Digest*)

[?]


---




**1. Help! My Roommate Had Drunken Sex, and Now She Can't Be in the Same Room With the Guy.**  
By Emily Yoffe | December 27, 2012



**2. We Didn't Include Bud Light in Our Taste Test of Cheap Beers —Not Cheap Enough**  
By Troy Patterson | December 27, 2012



**3. Ron Rosenbaum Explains Why You Shouldn't Go to Grad School**  
By Ron Rosenbaum | December 27, 2012



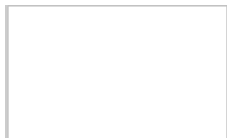
**4. How the State of Georgia Declared War on Its Poorest Citizens**  
By Neil deMause | December 26, 2012



How the State of Georgia Declared War on Its Poorest Citizens



Christmas Eve Shooter, Like Lanza, Used Bushmaster Rifle



Dear Media: Please Don't Fall For John Boehner's Silly Process Games



5. How Did Dear Prudence's Advice Take in 2012?

By Emily Yoffe | December 26, 2012

FROM AROUND THE WEB

- [3 Simple Questions to Ask When Clearing Out a Loved One's House](#) (from *Women&Co.*)
- [Unbelievable prom makeovers](#) (from *Nine West on YouTube*)
- [13 Things a Movie Theater Employee Won't Tell You](#) (from *Reader's Digest*)
- [How Extroverts and Introverts Experience the Holidays](#) (from *Live Better America*)
- [How Intel IT's BYOD enables thousands of employee-owned devices in the enterprise](#) (from *Intel*)

MORE FROM SLATE

- [Reporter Breaks News to Adam Lanza's Father](#)
- [Newtown Bee: "Please Stay Away From The Victims"](#)
- [Gunman Shot Mother Four Times in the Head](#)
- [Gorgeous Photo of Gigantic Black Hole Spewing Out Vast Beams of Matter](#)
- [What Obama Looked Like When Romney Conceded](#)

[?]

Pest Exterminators

Pest Exterminators in Your Area Find Listings on YELLOWPAGES.COM. [yellowpages.com](http://yellowpages.com)

Marriott Spa Resorts

Enjoy a Luxurious & Relaxing Spa Vacation at Marriott. Book Now. [www.Marriott.com](http://www.Marriott.com)

Raspberry Ketone Exposed

Celebrity Doctor Exposes Fat Blasting Fruit. Results Will Shock you! [PureRaspberryKetone.com](http://PureRaspberryKetone.com)

U.S. Birth Certificates

Certified vital statistics from most state and county records [www.abirthcertificate.net](http://www.abirthcertificate.net)

LOG IN/REGISTER



Guest

Please log in to comment.

Length: 0 characters (Max: 5000)

Post

[Click here to load comments.](#)

« PREV

NEXT »



Gingrich Is Back! Romney Has a Shot! David Weigel's Worst Predictions of 2012.



If Studios Didn't Make Movies Just To Win Oscars, There Would Be No Good Movies



Why Fiscal Cliff Is Such a Powerful Metaphor



When Did Monocles Become a Symbol of Wealth?



Nearly 100 Years Later, Why Are Scientists Still Baffled by the 1918 Spanish Flu?



Meet Parking Panda, the Airbnb of Parking Spaces



[about us](#) | [contact us](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Discussion and Submission Guidelines](#) | [Slate on Facebook](#) | [ad choices](#)  
[feedback](#) | [help](#) | [advertise](#) | [newsletters](#) | [mobile](#) | [make Slate your homepage](#)

Slate is published by The Slate Group, a Division of the Washington Post Company  
All contents © 2012 The Slate Group, LLC. All rights reserved.

## After a 1996 Mass Shooting, Australia Enacted Strict Gun Laws. It Hasn't Had a Similar Massacre Since.

By Will Oremus

Posted Sunday, Dec. 16, 2012, at 10:00 PM ET

A blog about murder, theft, and other wicked

After a 1996 Mass Shooting, Australia Enact  
Laws. It Hasn't Had a Similar Massacre Sinc



*Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard lays a wreath of the Port Arthur massacre on its 10th anniversary. The Howard's government to pass sweeping gun control laws. Images*

Read the rest of Slate's coverage of the Sand shooting.

On April 28, 1996, a gunman opened fire on