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Buyback of guns 'a life-saver'

LAURA ANDERSON, CANBERRA
April 23, 2007 02:15am

Article from: The Advertiser

AUSTRALIA'S gun buyback has saved between 128 and 282 lives each year, a report says.

The report, by Dr Andrew Leigh from the Australian National University in Canberra and Canadian academic Dr Christine Neill, says the gun buyback has affected homicide and suicide rates.

They say their findings discount a previous study in the British Journal of Criminology in 2006, which found the buyback had no impact on either gun homicide or suicide rates.

Dr Neill said statistical models used in that study were not appropriate and results were inconsistent.

"Since the gun buyback, the non-firearm homicide rate has stayed stable, and the non-firearm suicide rate has fallen," he said.

"We find reductions in both gun homicide and gun suicide rates that are statistically significant.

"Our best estimates are that the gun buyback has saved between 128 and 282 lives per year." The report comes a week after the deadliest shooting rampage in modern U.S. history, in which Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people at Virginia Tech University and committed suicide.

But the massacre has not sparked any significant moves for tighter gun control laws in the U.S., with pro-gun lobbyists instead calling for the ban on carrying weapons on campuses to be lifted, so students can defend themselves.

Dr Neill said the report findings could be used to assess the cost-effectiveness of the gun buyback, set up after Martin Bryant shot dead 35 people at Port Arthur in Tasmania in April, 1996.

In Australia between May, 1996, and October, 1997, 643,000 guns were handed to police.

"Economists typically put the value of a life saved at around $2.5 million," Dr Neill said.

"At a one-off cost of approximately $500 million, this suggests that the gun buyback has proved a good use of public money."

PAGE 16: Editorial

ABC Online

Suicide data suggest gun buyback successful: ANU team. 22/04/2007. ABC News Online

[This is the print version of story http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200704/s1903564.htm]

Last Update: Sunday, April 22, 2007. 12:00pm (AEST)

Suicide data suggest gun buyback successful: ANU team

A group of researchers say Australia's gun buyback scheme that followed the Port Arthur massacre in Tasmania 11 years ago could have saved up to 280 lives per year.

A 2006 study that concluded the gun buyback had no impact on gun homicide or suicide rates has been revisited by economists in Canberra and Canada.

They say the original study was flawed because of the data used.

Dr Andrew Leigh from the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra says the gun buyback was successful because the number of gun suicides have dropped significantly.

Dr Leigh says his study shows it has saved between 120 and 280 lives per year.

"We said, 'well hang on, if the non-gun suicide rate had gone up then you would've said that people were substituting to non-gun suicide methods'," he said.

"We think the original authors can't have it both ways - really you've just got to look at gun suicides and we think they've gone down a lot.

"Even if you take the bottom level of that and take the standard estimate that economists put on the value of a statistical life - $2.5 million - then that suggests to us that the buyback paid for itself in the first two years.

"It was $500 million one-off and it continues to save lives."

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Gun buyback saves lives

April 23, 2007 12:00am

Article from: The Courier Mail

AUSTRALIA'S gun buyback after the Port Arthur massacre in 1996 has saved up to 3000 lives. Have your say.

A new study released by the Australian National University yesterday contradicts earlier research suggesting the buyback had negligible effect on homicide or suicide rates.

Gun control is back in the spotlight after last week's shooting in the US.

Cho Seung-hui, 23, shot dead 32 people at Virginia Tech during a two-hour rampage last Monday.

Economists Dr Christine Neill, of Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada, and Dr Andrew Leigh from the ANU, revisited a study published in the *British Journal of Criminology*.

The original study concluded the buyback of 600,000 guns had no impact on either gun homicide or suicide rates.

But the re-analysis, using additional data, found a "statistically significant" reduction in deaths.

"Our best estimates are that the gun buyback has saved between 128 and 282 lives a year," Dr Leigh said.

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THE Daily Telegraph

Gun buyback saves 280 a year

April 23, 2007 12:00

Article from: Sunday Telegraph

AS many as 280 lives are spared every year in Australia because of the removal of weapons from the streets by the gun buyback scheme, a report has found.

In the wake of the Virginia Tech massacre, the Australian National University has released an analysis showing Australia is safer for the $500 million buyback scheme.<P>

The scheme, introduced after the 1996 Port Arthur massacre, resulted in 600,000 guns being handed in.<P>

ANU economist Dr Andrew Leigh said there had been a "substantial" drop in firearm deaths after 1997. The value of every life saved was around $2.5 million, he said. <P>

The scheme had cost about $170,000 for every life saved – suggesting it had been a good use of public money.

"We find reductions in both gun homicide and gun suicide rates that are statistically significant, meaning they are larger than would have been expected by mere chance," Dr Leigh said.

"Our best estimates are that the gun buyback has saved between 128 and 282 lives per year."

Dr Leigh said there was no evidence people who would once have used a gun were now using other methods.

"Since the gun buyback, the non-firearm homicide rate has stayed stable, and the non-firearm suicide rate has fallen. This does not appear to point to any substantial method substitution," he said.

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DERRICK Z. JACKSON

Democrats still silent on gun control

The Boston Globe

By Derrick Z. Jackson, Globe Columnist | April 25, 2007

AS SENATE majority leader Harry Reid bares his fangs on President Bush and Iraq, he betrays how toothless the Democrats are on guns at home.

Reid said last week of Iraq, "This war is lost," partially because of "the extreme violence." On Monday, he said that Bush is in a "state of denial" about American casualties and the trauma to Iraqi children. Reid said, "What a shame that after five-and-a-half years, so many lost lives and so much treasure depleted, President Bush hasn't budged from the shoot-first, talk-never style."

That is fine for Reid to say about Iraq, where 34,000 Iraqi civilians were killed in violence last year, according to the United Nations. But what about our streets, where 29,569 Americans died from firearms in 2004, according to the Centers for Disease Control? Iraq Body Count estimates that between 62,000 and 68,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed since the invasion of 2003. In that same time period, at least 116,000 Americans have died from gunfire.

Last week's massacre at Virginia Tech that claimed 33 lives has done little to reignite the gun-control debate. One expects nothing from the Bush administration and the Republicans, who beginning with the 2000 elections have received 92 percent of the $9.1 million in campaign contributions from gun-rights organizations, according to the Center for Responsible Politics.

The Democrats, not officially beholden to the National Rifle Association, have been cowards more concerned about reelection in centrist districts than the trauma to American children. The same Reid who bemoans the loss of life over a failed Iraq war said about Virginia Tech, "I hope there's not a rush to do anything. We need to take a deep breath." House Speaker Nancy Pelosi ignored a question by a reporter on whether Virginia Tech would inspire Democrats to revisit gun control. All she said was, "the mood in Congress is one of mourning, sadness, and the inadequacy of our words or our actions to console the families and the children who were affected there."

"Inadequacy of our words or our actions" was a Freudian slip. None of the home pages on the websites of Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Rodham Clinton, Barack Obama, or John Edwards says anything about guns in relation to Virginia Tech. This is despite the fact that the US public arsenal, according to the Small Arms Survey, an independent research group based in Switzerland, "is comparable or even greater than the total firearms of all the armed forces in the entire world."

This week, Massachusetts Representative Michael Capuano told the Globe "we know we're going to lose" on any serious push for gun control because "the NRA has this place wrapped up." With defeatism like that, who needs a Democratic majority?

The paralysis can end by looking not to the power of the NRA but to the facts. This week, researchers in Australia published a study that found that the national gun buyback program, which was instituted after the 1996 Tasmania massacre where one man shot dead 35 people, is working. Between 1,000 and 2,500 lives were saved in the first eight years of the buyback, according to paper coauthor Andrew Leigh, an economist at the Australian National University in Canberra.

Gun ownership in Australia had been sliced in half, from 20 percent of households in 1989 to 10 percent by 2000, according to a Swiss study. It is the largest known percentage decline in the developed world. The United States has also seen a decline, but only from 46 percent of households to 32 percent of households.

"It really was the buyback," Leigh said this week over the telephone. "The biggest benefit comes down on the suicide side. We think the buyback reduces suicides by 250 people a year."

Leigh estimates that if Australia's buyback was done on an American scale, it would cost about $7 billion to $8 billion. It might save up to 3,900 lives a year. Australia has not had a mass killing since 1996.

Leigh said the reaction against the massacre in Australia has led to the quiet survival of individual children who would have shot themselves or adults who would have shot their partners in domestic disputes. "We're a policy laboratory for the world," Leigh said. Asked what kind of massacre it might take for the United States to become a laboratory of its own, Leigh said : "That's a terrible thing to consider. Maybe in the US you'd have to have a killing of 100 victims. "

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Gun laws credited as lifesavers

John Garnaut
April 23, 2007

THE tough gun controls introduced after the Port Arthur massacre have probably saved about 2500 lives, economists say.

Debunking a widely reported study to the contrary, their analysis suggests that removing 600,000 guns from circulation has sharply reduced suicide and murder rates.

Andrew Leigh, at the Australian National University, and Christine Neill of Canada's Wilfrid Laurier University found a sharp, statistically significant reduction in murder and suicide.

"There were on average 250 fewer firearm deaths per year after the implementation of the National Firearms Agreement than would have been expected," they said.

Using deaths data since 1915, the authors estimated gun control had led to about 35 fewer murders and 247 fewer suicides annually since 1997. They calculate slightly smaller numbers when their statistical model is restricted to data after 1969.

Their report found no evidence that gun control may have simply caused a substitution from shooting to other killing methods.

"The fact that overall violent deaths have fallen since 1996 … strongly suggests there has not been substantial method substitution," the report says.

The authors slam an earlier report in the *British Journal of Criminology* that claimed the firearms agreement had no effect on death rates.

That study, by Jeanine Baker from the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia and Samara McPhedran from the Coalition for Women in Shooting and Hunting, exploited less than a third of the available annual data and used "very dubious" statistical methodology, they say.

The Federal Government's 1997 National Firearms Agreement allowed the buyback of semi-automatic rifles, pump-action shotguns and other firearms. The agreement, which introduced some of the world's toughest gun laws, was negotiated by the Prime Minister, John Howard, 35 people were shot at Port Arthur in 1996.

The most recent reliable figures, for 2002-03, show there were 0.27 firearm-related homicides per 100,000 Australians - about one-fifteenth of the US rate.

"The risk of dying by gunshot halved over the past 10 years," said Philip Alpers, adjunct associate professor at the University of Sydney's School of Public Health.

Earlier this month, the Australian Institute of Criminology reported the rate of gun theft had dropped by 70 per cent since stricter gun laws were introduced.

In NSW, the number of guns in the hands of registered owners has risen in the past six years.

NSW Police Firearms Registry figures show that as of April 9, there were more than 516,000

guns registered in the state.

with Linton Besser

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