

EXPLAINER

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Bondi Beach shooting: How tough are Australia's gun laws?

The shooter responsible for the Bondi Beach attack was a licensed firearms holder who owned six firearms, police say.



A police officer talks to a member of the public following a shooting the day prior at Sydney's Bondi Beach
[Mark Baker/AP]



By **Sarah Shamim**

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The murder of at least 15 people at a Jewish [Hanukkah celebration](#) at Sydney's Bondi Beach by two gunmen on Sunday was a rare occurrence in a country that is known for its strict gun laws.

The incident which police describe as a "terrorist" attack was the worst mass

The incident, which police describe as a terrorist attack, was the worst mass shooting in the country since 1996, when gunman Martin Bryant shot and killed 35 people and injured nearly two dozen others at Port Arthur, a tourist site in the southern island state of Tasmania. Bryant received 35 life sentences, but his motive for the shooting, which prompted a raft of new anti-gun legislation, was never made clear.

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Here's a closer look at what took place, despite Australia's strict gun laws.

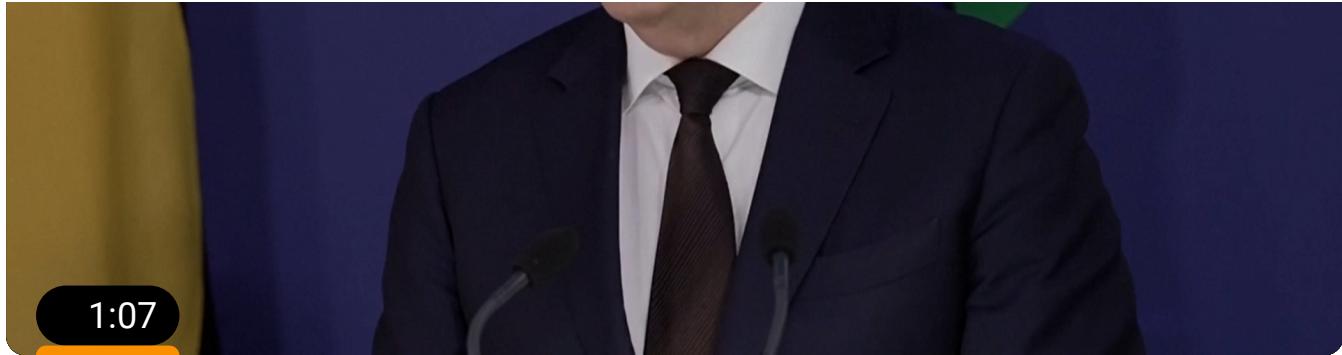
Who were the shooters?

During a news conference on Monday, New South Wales Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon said the suspects were a 50-year-old man, who was shot dead by police at the scene, and his 24-year-old son, who was also shot but remains in hospital in critical, but stable, condition.

Lanyon said the father "is a licensed firearms holder who had six firearms licensed to him", emphasising that he "met the eligibility criteria for a firearms licence".

The police confirmed that the 50-year-old suspect lived in a Sydney suburb and held a New South Wales firearms licence.





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How strict are Australia's gun laws?

Two weeks after the shooting at Port Arthur, Tasmania, in 1996, the government led by Prime Minister John Howard of the conservative Liberal-National coalition launched the [National Firearms Agreement](#) (NFA), which significantly tightened Australia's gun laws.

The new legislation was effectively an agreement drawn up between the Australian government and Australia's various states and territories, which adopted the new legislation by passing their own corresponding laws. While specific laws do vary from state to state, they are all guided by the NFA and National Handgun Control Agreement measures.

The legislation banned ownership of most automatic and semiautomatic rifles, required gun owners to register their firearms with the police and apply for licences to own them, and initiated a buyback programme that removed some 650,000 assault weapons from public circulation.



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It now takes at least 28 days for a gun licence application to be processed.

Under the law, gun owners are required to provide proof of a valid reason for owning a gun. This could be membership in a recreational hunting club, or being employed as a security guard, for example. Gun owners may own multiple firearms as long as they have specific reasons for requiring them.

Owning a gun for the purpose of self-defence is not considered a valid reason and is expressly prohibited in Australia.

Before a gun owner can become fully licensed to own or use a gun, he or she must complete a multi-day safety course, pass a written test, and complete a practical assessment to demonstrate they can safely use and maintain a gun.

After that, Australia's National Firearms Register conducts background checks to determine whether the applicant has any criminal record or any court-ordered mental health orders.

Those who have committed serious crimes linked to sexual assault, violence, drugs, robbery, "terrorism", organised crime, illegal weapons, or fraud are barred from holding gun licences.





Australia to strengthen gun laws after mass shooting in Sydney's Bondi Beach

How common are shootings in Australia?

Mass shootings are very rare in Australia, which is considered a generally safe country.

On the Global Peace Index, which is produced by the Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), the country ranks 18th among 163 countries.

In the years immediately following the 1996 passage of the National Firearms Agreement, Australia experienced a handful of shooting incidents, each resulting in no more than three fatalities.

In October 2002, an international student believed to be suffering from paranoid delusions shot and killed two other students on campus at Monash University in Melbourne, Victoria. He injured five others, including a lecturer. After this, handgun laws became even stricter.

In recent years, however, there has been a rise in the number of guns being sold. It is unclear why this is, but some reports link it to increasing demand for hunting sports.

But the mass shooting at Bondi Beach comes just two months after a 60-year-old man in the Sydney suburb of Croydon Park shot up to 50 bullets from his window at cars in a busy street, wounding one person critically, according to police. Fourteen others were treated at the scene for shock or minor injuries, including from glass from shattered car windows, emergency services said.

The suspect in that case was arrested after police stormed his apartment. However, police said he has no links to organised crime or "terror" organisations and no history of mental ill health. They have not established a clear motive for the shooting.

How have the Australian authorities responded to the Bondi Beach shooting?

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Monday that he will discuss introducing even stronger gun control laws with the National Cabinet.

Albanese told a news conference that the Australian government “is prepared to take whatever action is necessary” and “included in that is the need for tougher gun laws”.

He added that this could mean restrictions on the number of firearms each person is allowed to own or be licensed to use, along with more regular reviews of their licences. The authorities in Australia do carry out firearms licence checks currently, but in most states and territories, these are relatively infrequent unless triggered by a specific incident or raised concern.

“Licences should not be in perpetuity, and checks, of course, making sure that those checks and balances are in place as well,” Albanese said.

New South Wales Premier Chris Minns told a news conference on Monday: “It does require legislation. It means introducing a bill to Parliament, making it more difficult to get these horrifying weapons that have no practical use in our community.”



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How did the Bondi shooting happen despite Australia's strict gun laws?

"It is very reasonable to ask how another massacre has happened in Australia, given we have extremely strict gun laws," Samara McPhedran, a principal research fellow at Griffith University in South East Queensland, Australia, told Al Jazeera.

McPhedran, whose research expertise includes gun violence, said that it is too early to know whether there were any failures in the licensing process.

"This is certainly something that police will look at as part of their investigation, and it is important to gather all the facts before rushing to conclusions. It is crucial that we know the exact circumstances that led up to this event, if we are to identify things that may have gone wrong and ways to fix those."

McPhedran said obtaining a gun licence in any state or territory in Australia is not a quick and simple process, and "obtaining a gun licence is subject to an extensive range of controls".

She added: "Questions are being asked about the number of firearms – six – that were legally registered to one of the shooters. This number is nothing unusual. Most licence holders own multiple different types of firearms, for different purposes, for example, hunting different types of animals or shooting in different types of competitions."

What is the solution?

"Although it may seem counterintuitive, the number of firearms, what type they were, and whether the perpetrators were licensed, are not the real issue," McPhedran said.

In the history of mass shootings in Australia both prior to and after the 1996 Port Arthur shooting, she said, some perpetrators held licences, and some did not. Some perpetrators used semiautomatic firearms; some did not. Most used one or two firearms.

"However, from 1996 onwards, our reaction to firearm violence has always been the

However, from 1990 onwards, our reaction to mental violence has always been the same: swift political announcements of bans, buybacks, more laws. We have done this time and time and time again, and it is very clear that this approach does not work to prevent violence," McPhedran said.

She added, "We can keep doing more of the same and hope for a different result. Or we can try a different approach."

McPhedran said that for years, politicians have "fostered division and hostility between Australians" based on religious, racial, ethnic, cultural and other identity divisions to win votes, causing lasting harm to communities through increased intolerance and prejudice.

In recent years, successive governments in Australia have clamped down hard on immigration, with many migrants from some countries held for months on end in offshore detention centres on islands such as Nauru and Manus. This has sparked concerns from human rights activists.

In January 2025, the United Nations Human Rights Committee said the Australian government had violated a human rights treaty by [detaining a group of asylum seekers, many of them minors](#) on Nauru, despite them being granted refugee status.

"If we are serious about preventing future violence – whether with a firearm or any other method – we must change how we engage in public debate, stop the short-term political gameplaying, and heal the divisions in our community," McPhedran said.

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