

# New Zealand Gun Laws

## 2019 Fact Sheet from GunPolicy.org and Philip Alpers\*

New Zealand firearm legislation has remained substantially unaltered since 1992. In 1997, retired High Court judge Sir Thomas Thorp's year-long, million-dollar Review of Firearms Control in New Zealand (1997) recommended the following major changes:

- All firearms to be individually registered to their owners, in addition to owner licensing
- A buy-back of military-style semi-automatic weapons (MSSAs, or "assault rifles")
- All restricted weapons (privately held machine guns, etc.) to be permanently disabled
- The law to make clear that "self defence" is not a legitimate purpose for acquiring a gun
- Tightened provisions for vetting and licensing, with more stringent rules for secure storage
- A three-year licensing period to replace the current 10-year vetting cycle for gun-owners
- Firearm-specific licences to prevent sales of ammunition for concealed, unregistered guns
- An independent Firearms Authority to monitor enforcement and compliance with gun laws

Not one of these measures has been addressed by legislation. Government has since considered a range of similar recommendations, but special interest groups prevent meaningful change.

In comparison to similar countries, aspects of New Zealand firearm legislation remain permissive:

Law or Regulation	Aust	UK	Canada	NZ
Proof of "Genuine reason" needed to obtain a firearm licence	Yes	Yes	No	<b>No</b>
Enforced disabling of restricted weapons (machine guns, etc.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	<b>No</b>
Ban on military-style semi-automatic ("assault") weapons	Yes	Yes	Part Ban	<b>No</b>
Ban on semi-auto centrefire ("high power") hunting rifles	Yes	Yes	No	<b>No</b>
Ban on semi-automatic & pump-action shotguns	Yes	Yes	No	<b>No</b>
Ban on semi-automatic rimfire .22 ("rabbit") rifles	Yes	No	No	<b>No</b>
Minimum age for unsupervised use of a shotgun or rifle	18	15-17	18	<b>16</b>
Years between police re-vetting of gun owners	5	5	5	<b>10</b>
Each shotgun and rifle to be individually registered with police	Yes	Yes	Yes	<b>No</b>
Fine or jail sentence for insecure gun storage	Yes	No	Yes	<b>No</b>
Ban on unrecorded private gun sales	Yes	Yes	Yes	<b>No</b>

\*[GunPolicy.org](http://GunPolicy.org) is the world's most comprehensive and accessible Web source for published evidence on armed violence, firearm law and gun control. Founding director [Philip Alpers](#) is Adjunct Associate Professor at the [Sydney School of Public Health](#), The University of Sydney.

## Gun Registration

In 79 countries surveyed by the United Nations, firearm registration is the accepted norm and a cornerstone of gun control. Among developed nations, New Zealand's decision not to register 96% of civilian firearms makes it a stand-out exception, along with the United States and Canada.

Registration of All Firearms -- YES	Registration of All Firearms -- NO
Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden	United States, New Zealand, Canada

## Current Gun Laws

As the law stands, any person aged 16 or over with an entry-level firearm licence can keep any number of common rifles and shotguns without an official record of those guns being kept anywhere. Most guns can be legally sold on the Internet or through newspaper ads. The most popular firearm types can lawfully change hands in private homes or even in hotel carparks with no requirement for records to be kept.

Police have no authority to monitor the size and content of most private gun collections, and so cannot detect or prevent the build-up of private arsenals. Officers responding to callouts have no idea what guns they might encounter, nor how many they must find and remove to make families safe in cases of domestic violence.

NZ Police report that most firearms used in crime came from the collection of a licensed gun owner, either by sale, theft or neglect.

## Firearm Licensing and Registration

Every civilian in possession of a firearm must hold a current firearm licence, renewable every ten years. Sporting long guns (shotguns and rifles, or 96% of firearms) are not registered, while military-style semi-automatic rifles (MSSAs), handguns (pistols & revolvers), and restricted weapons (mainly fully automatic firearms) are individually registered and more carefully monitored.

Registration makes gun owners individually accountable for each weapon in their possession. A register provides a strong incentive to lock up guns and protects the rights and safety of the wider public. The New Zealand Police Association and the public health community promote registration as an essential tool to reduce the availability of firearms for all forms of violence and crime.

Registration gives police a starting point to trace guns used in crime. When NZ Police did maintain a register of most guns, a 1982 survey found that, of those officers who had consulted the firearm register for a criminal offence, 67% found that it assisted in the apprehension of an offender. Three-quarters of these officers had used the register successfully to help catch criminals more than three times each, solving cases from illegal gun sales to armed robbery.

Of the 3.9 million New Zealanders of gun licensing age, 238,000 (6%) hold a firearm licence. Among those eligible to vote, 99.8% of women and 92% of men *do not* own guns.

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