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Firearm theft in Australia 2018

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Abstract

In 2018 there were 847 reported incidents of firearm theft in which 2,425 firearms were stolen. This represents a 15 percent increase in incidents and a 35 percent increase in stolen firearms since 2008–09. Most thefts targeted residential premises with an average of three firearms stolen in each incident. The largest proportion of thefts occurred in regional parts of Australia, indicating a shift from major cities as the primary site of theft incidents. The majority of stolen firearms were in firearm safes at the time of the theft.

Introduction

The Australian Institute of Criminology's (AIC) National Firearm Theft Monitoring Program (NFTMP), which operated between 2004–05 and 2008–09, calculated over 7,700 firearms were reported stolen to state and territory police during this five-year period. There was an average six percent increase each year in the number of stolen firearms and an average 1,570 firearms stolen each year (Borzycki & Mouzos 2007; Bricknell 2011, 2010, 2008; Bricknell & Mouzos 2007). Most firearms were Category A and B firearms; Category C and D firearms comprised less than one percent of stolen firearms and Category H firearms between five and seven percent. Nine in 10 theft incidents were burglaries, with the theft location and firearm storage site described as secure in the majority of incidents. However, a fifth of residential and business thefts and over a third of thefts from vehicles were enabled by unlocked access points. Further, firearms were stolen from non-compliant receptacles in a quarter of incidents. In 14 percent of incidents, the firearms were recovered.

Subsequent compilations of firearm theft data suggest a substantial increase in the number of incidents and stolen firearms, and increased targeting of rural and remote locations (Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission 2016; Gun Control Australia 2018). However, data from these sources were limited to the number of firearm theft incidents and the number of firearms reported stolen and did not include additional contextual information about the characteristics of the theft. To this end, Operation Athena commissioned the AIC to examine firearm theft data for the most recent 12-month period (2018) to establish the rate of change of firearm theft in Australia.

Methods

Data were requested from state and territory police on incidents of stolen or lost/mislaid firearms reported between 1 January and 31 December 2018. In July 2019, Police Commissioners were contacted about the study and the proposed data request. Data specifications outlining 17 data items were provided in this request. The data items comprised incident and firearm characteristics, licence status of the reporting firearm owner and numbers of registered firearms and licensed owners at the end of 2018. The 2018 dataset was created as a subset of the NFTMP to reduce the burden on those providing data and to include data items that were consistently provided by state and territory police during the NFTMP.

Data were provided to the AIC between August and December 2019. State and territory data were cleaned, recoded and merged into a national dataset. A unique identifier was generated for each unit record or individual report event. The national dataset contained 1,090 report events.

A series of exclusion rules were applied to the data (see Table 1):

- Exclude incidents reported before 1 January 2018 or after 31 December 2018 (*n*=10).
- Exclude incidents of lost firearms (*n*=233). Incidents involving lost firearms were excluded from the final analysis as these data were not available from all jurisdictions and, where provided, described events that occurred days or even decades prior to the report.

Findings presented in this report refer to incidents of firearm theft reported to police between 1 January and 31 December 2018. These data are compared with findings from the National Firearm Theft Monitoring Program, noting that the former is calendar year and the latter is financial year data.

Calculation of rates

Rates represent the preferred unit and measure of change. This study, however, largely presents numbers rather than rates due to the absence of an appropriate population denominator—that is, the licensed population. Licensed population data were sought for this study but not provided by every jurisdiction. Further, jurisdictions did not provide licensed population data for the last two years of the NFTMP collection. Rate calculations are therefore limited to an incident rate based on the Australian population (ABS 2019) and should be treated with due caution. Reported changes in numbers of incidents and firearms should be treated with equal caution as they do not factor in underlying population changes.

Table 1: Out of scope incidents by jurisdiction (*n*)

	Outside date range		Not stolen	
	Incidents	Firearms	Incidents	Firearms
NSW	0	0	40	50
Vic	8	24	1	1
Qld	0	0	11	34
WA	0	0	167	221
SA	0	0	14	16
Tas	0	0	0	0
ACT	0	0	0	0
NT	2	2	0	0
Total	**10**	**26**	**233**	**322**

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Incidents of theft and stolen firearms

Number of incidents

There were 847 incidents of reported firearm theft between 1 January and 31 December 2018 (see Table 2) with an average 71 incidents reported each month. The distribution of reported theft incidents across states and territories reflects population size. A quarter of incidents were reported in Queensland (*n*=206, 24%) and Victoria (*n*=201, 24%) and a fifth in New South Wales (*n*=158, 19%) and Western Australia (*n*=156; 18%). The number of reported incidents of firearm theft increased by 15 percent (*n*=740 vs *n*=847) in the 10-year interval between 2008–09 and 2018.

The national firearm theft rate was 3.4 incidents per 100,000 population, similar to the theft rate of 3.3 incidents per 100,000 in 2008–09. Rates are based on the total Australian population rather than licensed firearm owners (see *Methods*) and may under/overestimate the incident rate and direction of change. Excluding the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory, where small population size can affect rates, the highest rates of firearm theft in 2018 occurred in Tasmania (8.1 per 100,000) and Western Australia (6.0 per 100,000) and the lowest rate in New South Wales (2.0 per 100,000).

Table 2: Incidents of theft and stolen firearms by jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018

	Incidents				Firearms			
	n	%	Mean[a]	Rate	*n*	%	Mean[a]	Mean (Median)[b]
NSW	158	18.7	13.2	2.0	466	19.2	38.8	2.6 (2)
Vic	201	23.7	16.8	3.1	572	23.6	47.7	2.8 (2)
Qld	206	24.3	17.1	4.1	584	24.1	48.7	2.8 (2)
WA	156	18.4	13.0	6.0	382	15.8	31.8	1.9 (1)
SA	58	6.8	4.8	3.3	226	9.3	18.8	3.4 (2)
Tas	43	5.1	3.6	8.1	147	6.1	12.3	3.4 (3)
ACT	8	0.9	0.7	1.9	15	0.6	1.3	1.9 (2)
NT	17	2.0	1.4	6.9	33	1.4	2.8	1.9 (1)
Total	**847**	**100.0**	**70.6**	**3.4**	**2,425**	**100.0**	**202.1**	**2.9 (2)**

a: Average per month

b: Average per incident

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Number of stolen firearms

There were 2,425 firearms reported stolen between 1 January and 31 December 2018 (see Table 2). Of these, 584 firearms (24%) were stolen in Queensland, 572 (24%) in Victoria and 466 (19%) in New South Wales. Each month an average of 202 firearms was reported stolen to police and an average of three firearms were stolen per incident (see Table 2). The mean number of firearms reported stolen per incident ranged from 1.9 (in Western Australia, the ACT and Northern Territory) to 3.4 (in South Australia and Tasmania).

The number of firearms reported stolen increased by 35 percent between 2008–09 and 2018 (*n*=1,802 vs *n*=2,425). Figure 1 shows the number of firearms reported stolen in each jurisdiction between 2004–05 and 2008–09 and in 2018. Figure 2 shows the national trend and Figure 3 the yearly percentage change. The earlier five-year data found general fluctuation in numbers of stolen firearms interspersed by marked single inter-year differences (eg a 44 percent increase in New South Wales between 2007–08 and 2008–09). Queensland and South Australia were the least variable of the five largest jurisdictions.

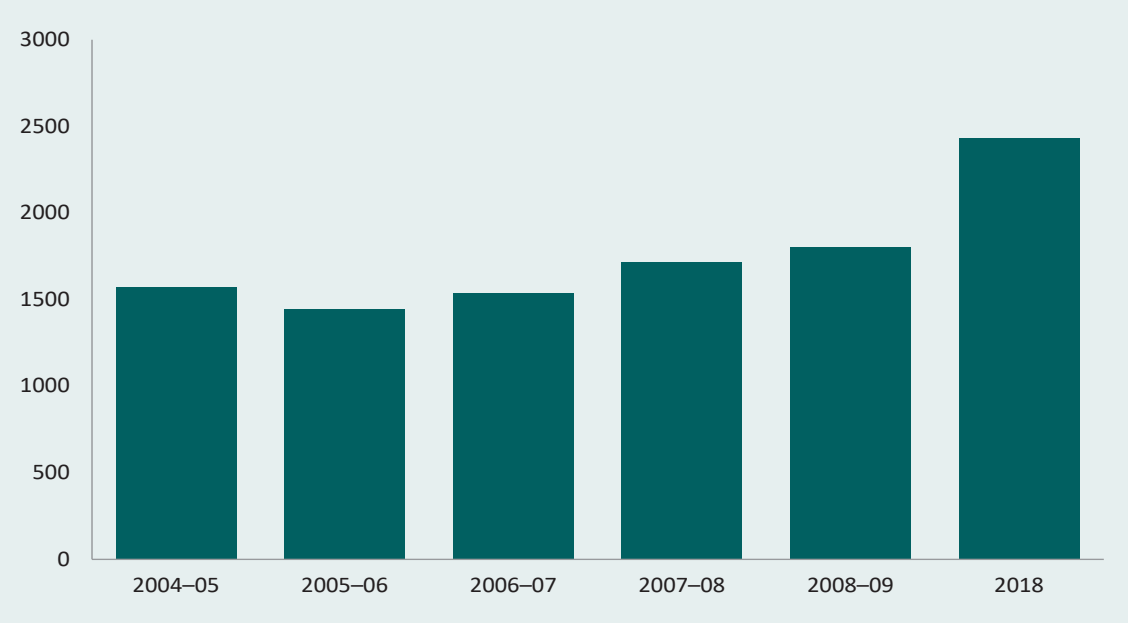
Marked increases in the number of firearms reported stolen in 2008–09 and 2018 were recorded in Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia—up 89 percent (*n*=302 vs *n*=572), 83 percent (*n*=319 vs *n*=584) and 65 percent (*n*=232 vs *n*=382) respectively. Little change was observed in South Australia, with a small increase of seven percent (*n*=211 vs *n*=226). However, New South Wales recorded a 21 percent decrease, from 592 to 466 firearms. The changes in Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory are affected by the variability expected in jurisdictions with a small number of reported incidents each year.

Figure 1: Stolen firearms by jurisdiction, 2004–05 to 2008–09 and 2018 (*n*)

Note: Stolen firearm numbers for Western Australia in 2008–09 and the ACT in 2006–07 are estimates based on the average number of firearms reported stolen in reference years

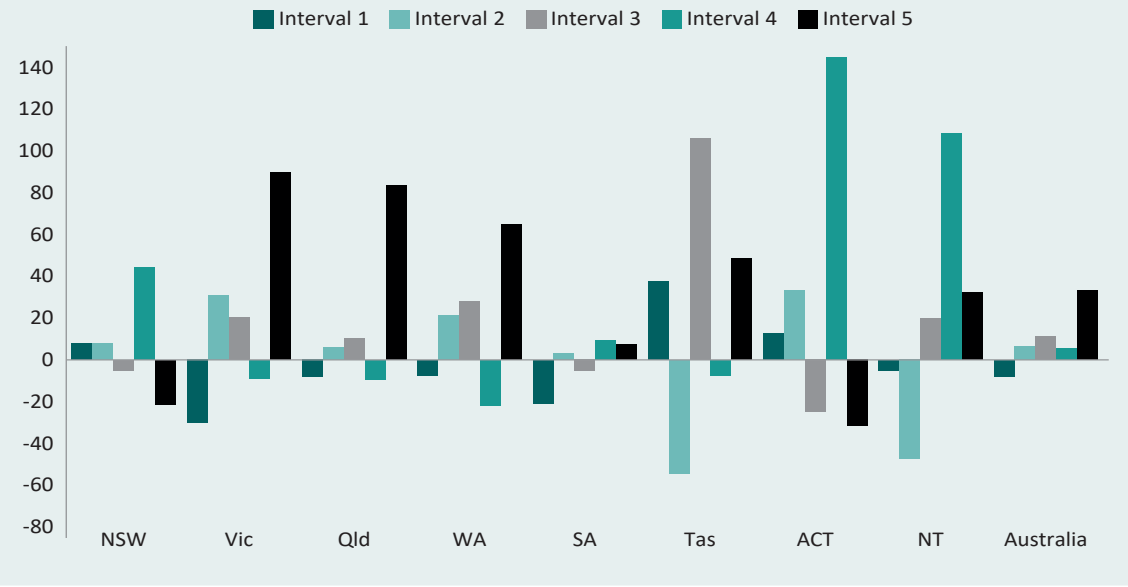
Source: NFTMP 2004–05 to 2008–09 [computer file]; AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]; see Table A1

Figure 2: Stolen firearms, 2004–05 to 2008–09 and 2018 (*n*)



Source: NFTMP 2004–05 to 2008–09 [computer file]; AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]; see Table A1

Figure 3: Inter-year change in stolen firearms by jurisdiction, 2004–05 to 2008–09 and 2018 (%)



Interval 1=difference between 2005–06 and 2004–05

Interval 2=difference between 2006–07 and 2005–06

Interval 3=difference between 2007–08 and 2006–07

Interval 4=difference between 2008–09 and 2007–08

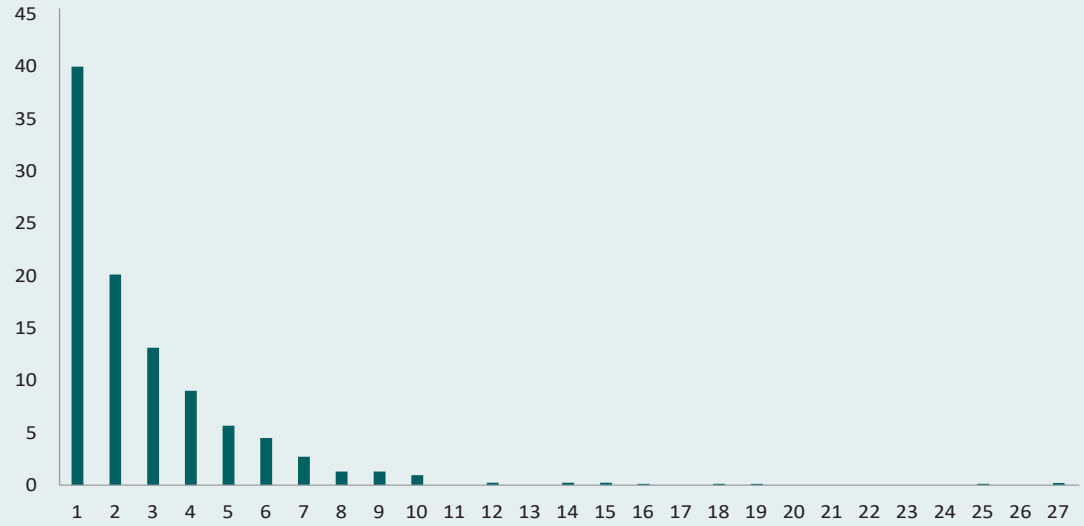
Interval 5=difference between 2018 and 2008–09

Source: NFTMP 2004–05 to 2008–09 [computer file]; AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]; see Table A2

Single and multiple firearm thefts

Figure 4 shows the proportion of incidents resulting in the theft of one or more firearms. Forty percent of incidents (*n*=339) resulted in the theft of a single firearm, 20 percent (*n*=170) in two firearms and 13 percent (*n*=111) in three firearms. Multiple-firearm thefts made up more than half of incidents in all but one jurisdiction (see Table 3). The proportion of multiple-firearm thefts ranged from 53 percent (*n*=110) in Queensland to 74 percent (*n*=43) in South Australia. The majority of incidents of firearm theft in the Northern Territory were single-firearm thefts (71%, *n*=12).

Figure 4: Firearms stolen per theft incident (%)



Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]; see Table A3

Table 3: Single versus multiple firearm thefts by jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018

	Single-firearm theft		Multiple-firearm theft		Range
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*
NSW	54	34.2	104	65.8	1–14
Vic	78	38.8	123	61.2	1–27
Qld	96	46.6	110	53.4	1–27
WA	66	42.3	90	57.7	1–14
SA	15	25.9	43	74.1	1–18
Tas	15	34.9	28	65.1	1–9
ACT	3	37.5	5	62.5	1–3
NT	12	70.6	5	29.4	1–9
Total	**339**	**40.0**	**508**	**60.0**	**1–27**

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Firearm type

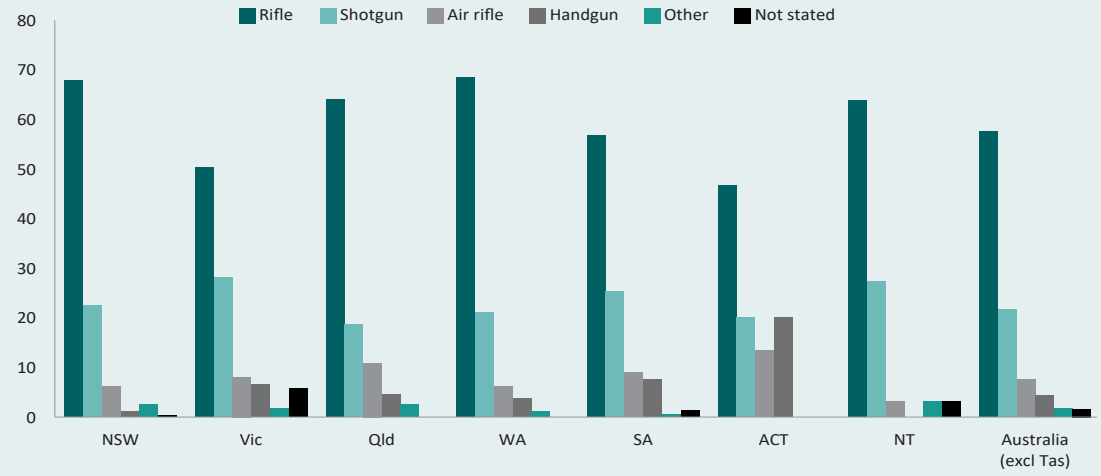
Information on the types of firearms stolen was available for all jurisdictions except Tasmania. Of these 2,278 firearms, 61 percent (*n*=1,394) were rifles, 23 percent (*n*=522) were shotguns, eight percent (*n*=183) were air rifles and five percent (*n*=102) were handguns. Four percent of firearms were 'other' types (2%, *n*=40) or the category was not stated (2%, *n*=37). Table 4 shows the number of stolen firearms by type and jurisdiction and Figure 5 shows the proportions. At least one rifle was stolen in 78 percent (*n*=630) of incidents, a shotgun in 45 percent (*n*=364) of incidents, an air rifle in 20 percent (*n*=157) of incidents and a handgun in six percent (*n*=45) of incidents (see Table 5).

Table 4: Stolen firearms by type and jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018 (*n*)							
	Rifle	Shotgun	Air rifle	Handgun	Other	Not stated	Total
NSW	316	105	28	5	11	1	**466**
Vic	288	160	46	37	9	32	**572**
Qld	373	108	63	26	14	0	**584**
WA	261	80	23	14	4	0	**382**
SA	128	57	20	17	1	3	**226**
ACT	7	3	2	3	0	0	**15**
NT	21	9	1	0	1	1	**33**
Total	**1,394**	**522**	**183**	**102**	**40**	**37**	**2,278**

Note: Excludes Tasmania

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Figure 5: Stolen firearms by type and jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018 (%)



Note: Excludes Tasmania

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]; see Table A4

Table 5: Incident count by firearm type and jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018								
	Rifle		Shotgun		Air rifle		Handgun	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
NSW	130	82.3	71	44.9	25	15.8	2	1.0
Vic	141	70.1	110	55.0	42	26.6	7	3.0
Qld	157	76.2	82	39.8	49	31.0	18	8.7
WA	135	86.5	62	39.7	21	13.3	11	7.1
SA	52	89.7	29	50.0	17	10.8	6	10.3
ACT	4	50.0	2	25.0	2	1.3	2	25.0
NT	12	70.6	8	47.1	1	0.6	0	0.0
Total	**631**	**78.4**	**364**	**45.3**	**157**	**19.5**	**46**	**5.7**

Note: Total percentages calculated using base *n*=804 incidents (excludes Tasmania: *n*=43). Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Firearm category

Category information was provided for 2,230 firearms (excludes Tasmania, the ACT and Northern Territory; see Table 6). Category A and B firearms accounted for 58 percent (*n*=1,294) and 29 percent (*n*=641) of stolen firearms in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia. No more than one percent of firearms were Category C and D (*n*=29 and *n*=8 respectively) and four percent were Category H (*n*=99). The remaining 159 firearms were recorded as other categories or not stated/unknown. There was some variation across jurisdictions; for example, over a third of firearms stolen in Queensland (36%, *n*=208) were Category B compared with a quarter in Western Australia (*n*=100, 26%) and South Australia (*n*=54, 24%).

Table 6: Stolen firearms by category and jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018

	Category A		Category B		Category C		Category D		Category H		Total[a]
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
NSW	263	56.4	142	30.5	5	1.1	0	0.0	5	1.1	**466**
Vic	330	57.7	137	24.0	3	0.5	0	0.0	37	6.5	**572**
Qld	333	57.0	208	35.6	6	1.0	6	1.0	26	4.5	**584**
WA	222	58.1	100	26.2	9	2.4	2	0.5	14	3.7	**382**
SA	146	64.6	54	23.9	6	2.7	0	0.0	17	7.5	**226**
Total	**1,294**	**58.0**	**641**	**28.7**	**29**	**1.3**	**8**	**0.4**	**99**	**4.4**	**2,230**

a: Total include firearms with 'other', not stated or unknown category. Excludes Tasmania, ACT and the Northern Territory

Note: Rows exclude firearms of 'other' and not stated categories; hence row percentages do not total 100

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Registration status

Eighty-five percent (*n*=1,903) of stolen firearms (excluding Tasmania and the Northern Territory) were registered at the time of theft. Twelve firearms (0.5%) were recorded as unregistered. The registration status was not stated or not applicable for the remaining 330 firearms (15%).

Characteristics of theft incidents

Location

Eighty-one percent of incidents (*n*=684) occurred at a residential setting (see Table 7). Firearms were stolen from houses in over half of incidents (*n*=482, 57%) and from a garage, shed or other residential outbuilding in 22 percent of incidents (*n*=184). Residential thefts accounted for 83 percent (*n*=2,017) of firearms reported stolen in 2018. In six percent of incidents (*n*=50), firearms were stolen from agricultural sites, including theft from sheds and outbuildings that were not identified as adjacent to rural private residences. Other locations comprised no more than three percent of incidents.

Remoteness

The locations of theft incidents were classified by remoteness status using postcode data supplied by seven of the eight jurisdictions. Remoteness status is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Remoteness Structure and is a measure of relative access to services (ABS 2016). It cannot differentiate between urban and rural settings within and between categories but indicates the geographical location of individual theft incidents.

Twenty-three percent (*n*=182) of firearm theft incidents occurred in major cities, 30 percent (*n*=244) in inner regional areas and 31 percent (*n*=250) in outer regional areas. Figure 6 shows the remoteness status of incidents across the states and territories. The areas with the highest concentration of theft incidents were outer regional areas of New South Wales (*n*=83, 53%), inner regional areas of Victoria (*n*=95, 48%) and major city locations in South Australia (*n*=20, 35%). Similar proportions of theft incidents in Western Australian occurred in major city and inner regional locations. Multiple-firearm thefts were less common in major city locations (*n*=96, 53%) compared with inner regional (*n*=157, 64%), outer regional (*n*=159, 69%) and remote locations (*n*=44, 58%; see Table 8).

The available data allowed a comparison of the remoteness status of theft incidents in 2007–08 and 2018 for New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. These data show an overall decrease in major city theft incidents (36% vs 21%) and an increase in outer regional (23% vs 34%) and remote (3% vs 8%) theft incidents in these jurisdictions (see Figure 7).

Table 7: Location of firearm thefts, 1 January to 31 December 2018				
	Incidents		Firearms	
	n	%	*n*	%
Dwelling	482	56.9	1,402	57.8
Outbuilding	184	21.7	580	23.9
Residential[a]	**684**	**80.8**	**2,017**	**83.2**
Car parks/public transport	4	0.5	5	0.2
Streets and footpaths	21	2.5	27	1.1
Community[b]	**29**	**3.4**	**46**	**1.9**
Administrative/professional	9	1.1	18	0.7
Retail	13	1.5	66	2.7
Manufacture and construction	7	0.8	19	0.8
Agricultural (including farmland)	50	5.9	126	5.2
Recreational	11	1.3	27	1.1
Bushland and waterways	5	0.6	8	0.3
Other[c]	**107**	**12.6**	**306**	**12.6**
Not recorded	26	3.1	54	2.2
Unknown	1	0.1	2	0.1
Total	**847**	**100.0**	**2,425**	**100.0**

a: Includes other and not recorded residential locations (*n*=18 incidents and *n*=35 firearms)

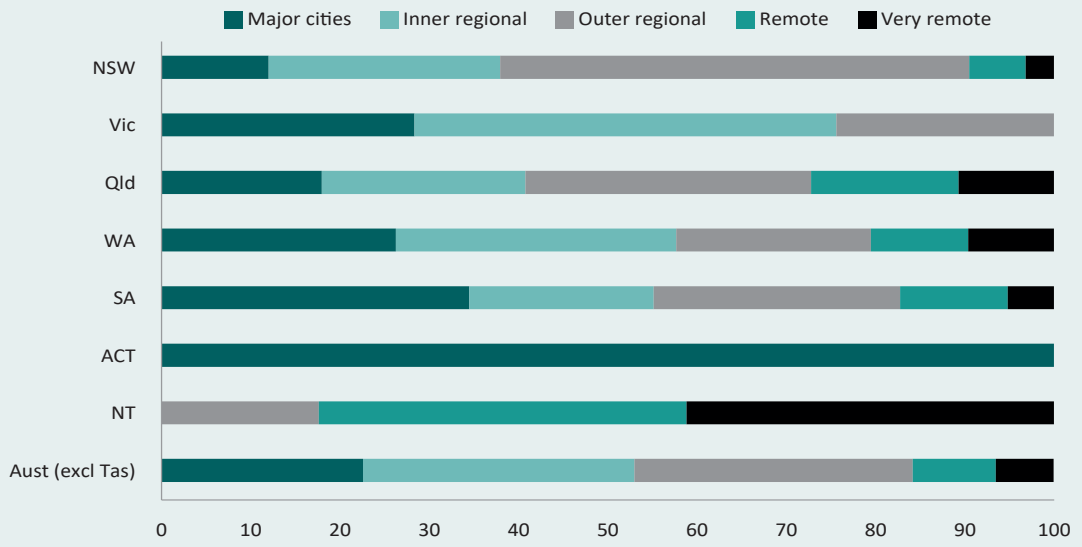
b: Includes other and not recorded community locations (*n*=4 incidents and *n*=14 firearms)

c: Includes unspecified locations (*n*=12 incidents and *n*=42 firearms)

Note: Excludes one incident where number of stolen firearms was not available. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Figure 6: Incidents of firearm theft by remoteness status and jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018 (%)



Note: Excludes Tasmania

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]; see Table A5

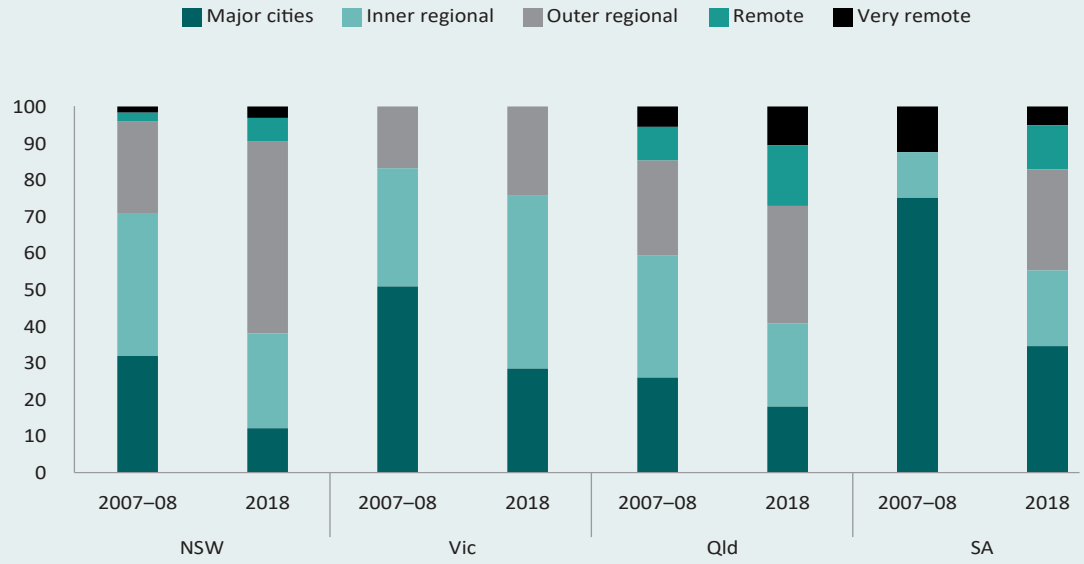
Table 8: Single-firearm and multiple-firearm theft incidents by remoteness status, 1 January to 31 December 2018

	Single-firearm theft		Multiple-firearm theft	
	n	%	*n*	%
Major city	86	47.3	96	52.7
Inner regional	87	35.7	157	64.3
Outer regional	92	36.7	159	63.3
Remote	32	42.1	44	57.9
Very remote	27	52.9	24	47.1

Note: Excludes Tasmania

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Figure 7: Incidents of firearm theft by remoteness status, selected jurisdictions, 2007–08 and 2018 (%)



Source: NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]; AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]; see Table A6

Type of offence

Data on the offences resulting in the theft of firearms were available from five jurisdictions (*n*=581 incidents). Eighty-one percent (*n*=472) of these incidents were recorded as unlawful entry with intent/burglary and 14 percent (*n*=79) as stealing (see Table 9). Armed robberies made up one percent (*n*=8) of incidents. One incident of armed robbery resulted in the theft of 27 handguns from a retail location; the remaining seven incidents resulted in the theft of one to four firearms, mostly in residential and retail settings. The offence category was not stated in 22 incidents.

Table 9: Stolen firearms by theft status, 1 January to 31 December 2018

	Unlawful entry with intent		Stealing		Armed robbery		Not stated/ unknown		Total
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
NSW	123	77.8	33	20.9	2	1.3	0	0.0	**158**
Vic	168	83.6	16	8.0	2	1.0	15	7.5	**201**
WA	116	74.4	30	19.2	3	1.9	7	4.5	**156**
SA	58	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	**58**
ACT	7	87.5	0	0.0	1	12.5	0	0.0	**8**
Total	**472**	**81.2**	**79**	**13.6**	**8**	**1.4**	**22**	**3.8**	581

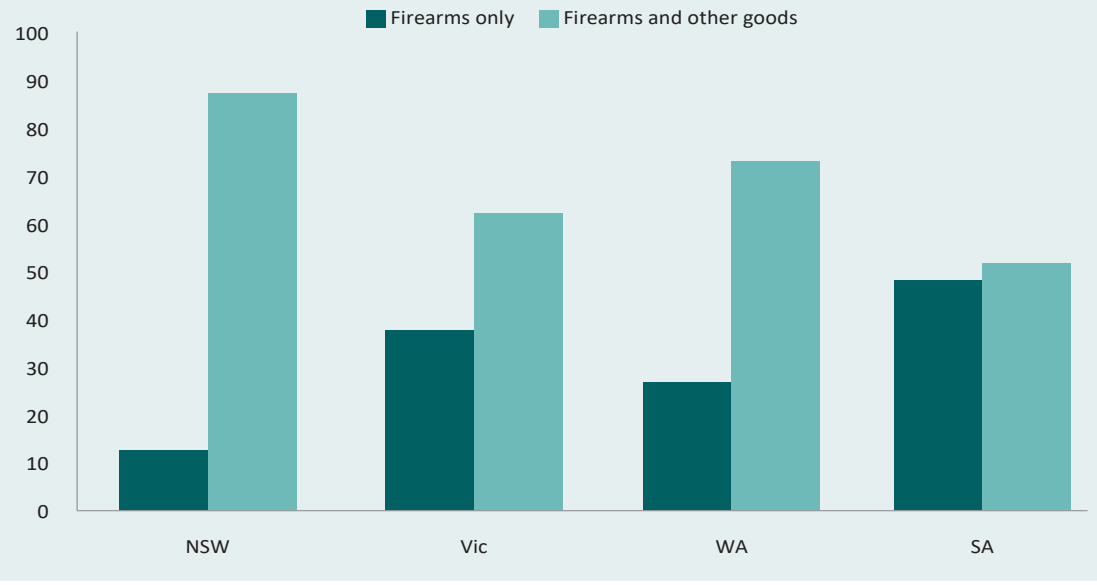
Note: Excludes Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Theft of other items

Data on the theft of items other than firearms were available from four jurisdictions (*n*=573 incidents; see Figure 8). Firearms were the sole item(s) stolen in 29 percent of incidents (*n*=166), although there was variation across the four states. Firearms and other goods were stolen in 87 percent of incidents (*n*=138) in New South Wales, whereas in South Australia firearm-only (*n*=30, 48%) and firearm and other goods thefts (*n*=28, 52%) were evenly distributed. There was no association between theft type and numbers of firearms stolen. Firearm-only thefts were more frequent when targeting residential outbuildings (*n*=59, 43%) compared with private dwellings (*n*=74, 22%) but this was not affected by remoteness status.

Figure 8: Incidents theft of firearms and other goods, 1 January to 31 December 2018 (%)



Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]; see Table A7

Method of entry and access

Police narrative data provided by Victoria enabled analysis of methods used to access the premises or vehicle where the incident occurred and the method of access to the firearms. The premises were known to have been secured in 30 percent (*n*=61) of incidents (see Table 10). Force or tools were used to access a secured house in 19 percent (*n*=39) of incidents and a secured shed or garage in 11 percent (*n*=22) of incidents. In 16 percent of incidents (*n*=33) the premises were not secured. Most of these incidents involved entry into an unlocked or open shed or garage (*n*=27, 13%). The method of entry was not evident (ie there were no signs of forcible entry) or not stated in over a third of Victorian incidents (*n*=80, 36%).

Most stolen firearms were stored in firearm safes or similar receptacles at the time of the theft. Force was applied or tools used to cut the locking device in 18 percent (*n*=37) and 13 percent (*n*=26) of incidents respectively (see Table 10). In 12 percent of incidents (*n*=24) the key was located and used to open the receptacle. The entire receptacle was stolen in 14 percent of incidents (*n*=28). Most of these cases required offenders to force the safe bolted to the floor and/or wall from its mooring and haul or drag it to a vehicle. Of note is that firearms were reportedly secured in 15 percent (*n*=30) of incidents but it was not evident how the receptacle was accessed.

Table 10: Method of access to premises and firearm receptacle, 1 January to 31 December 2018

	n	%
Method of access to premises		
Used force and/or tools	61	30.3
House	39	19.4
Shed/garage/workshop	22	10.9
Key located	3	1.5
Unsecured or open access	33	16.4
House	6	3.0
Shed/garage/workshop	27	13.4
Vehicle broken into/Vehicle stolen	23	11.4
Armed robbery	2	1.0
Not stated/unknown[a]	79	39.3
Total	**201**	**100.0**
Method of access to secured receptacle		
Used force	37	18.4
Used tools	26	13.4
Key located	24	11.9
Entire receptacle stolen	28	13.9
Other	3	1.5
Receptacle opened but method of access not stated/unknown[b]	30	14.9
Unsecured	36	17.9
Not stated/unknown[a]	17	8.5
Total	**201**	**100.0**

a: Includes incidents in which no signs of forced entry were visible

b: Includes incidents in which no signs of forced access were visible

Note: Victorian firearm theft incidents only

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

The methods of entry to the premises and methods of access to the firearms are compared in Table 11. In just under a fifth of incidents (*n*=36, 18%) the offender used force or tools to enter the premises and to open or steal the receptacle. In nine percent of incidents the firearms were in a secured receptacle but the premises were not secured (*n*=18) and in 17 percent (*n*=34) the firearms were in a secured receptacle but the method of entry was not evident or not stated. Method of entry and method of access was not evident or not stated in eight percent of incidents (*n*=16).

Table 11: Patterns of method of entry and access, 1 January to 31 December 2018

	Receptacle secured[a]		Key located		Alleged secured[b]		Other		Vehicle		Not secured		Not stated	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Premises secured[c]	36	17.9	7	3.5	10	5.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	3.0	2	1.0
Key located	0	0.0	1	0.5	2	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Armed robbery	1	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.5
Premises unsecured	18	9.0	6	3.0	4	2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	2.5	0	0.0
Vehicle	2	1.0	0	0.0	1	0.5	0	0.0	14	7.0	10	5.0	1	0.5
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not stated	34	16.9	10	5.0	6	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	3.0	16	8.0

a: Includes incidents in which force or tools were used to access receptacle or entire receptacle stolen

b: Includes incidents in which no signs of forced access were visible but firearms were allegedly in a locked receptacle

c: Includes incidents in which force or tools were used to enter premises

Note: Victorian firearm theft incidents only

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Firearm security

Firearm security refers to the known storage or other safekeeping arrangements at the time of the theft. Data were available for 581 incidents (excludes Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory). Stolen firearms had been secured in a firearm safe or other approved receptacle in 73 percent of incidents (*n*=425; see Table 12). Firearms were in vehicles in six percent (*n*=33) of incidents and unsecured in 15 percent (*n*=88). The highest proportion of incidents where firearms were in a firearm safe or equivalent were recorded in South Australia (86%, *n*=50), followed by New South Wales (80%, *n*=126). These findings suggest improvements in safe storage compliance since the NFTMP, when compliance rates averaged 60 percent over the five-year period.

Previous analyses showed that security arrangements tended to be better for firearms stored in residential outbuildings compared with dwellings. These findings were not substantiated in 2018, although a slightly higher proportion of firearms stolen from dwellings (15%, *n*=55) compared with garages, sheds or other outbuildings (9%, *n*=14) were unsecured at the time of the theft.

Table 12: Incidents of firearm theft by firearm storage arrangements and jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018

	Firearm safe		Storage room		Vehicle		Other		Unsecured		Not stated		Total
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
NSW	126	79.7	4	2.5	12	7.6	0	0.0	16	10.1	0	0.0	**158**
Vic	138	69.0	0	0.0	14	7.0	2	1.0	27	13.0	20	10.0	**201**
WA	105	67.3	0	0.0	4	2.6	0	0.0	40	25.6	7	4.5	**156**
SA	50	86.2	2	3.4	2	3.4	0	0.0	4	6.9	0	0.0	**58**
ACT	6	75.0	0	0.0	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	12.5	0	0.0	**8**
Total	**425**	**73.3**	**6**	**1.0**	**33**	**5.7**	**2**	**0.3**	**88**	**15.0**	**27**	**4.7**	**581**

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Recovery of firearms

Firearm recovery data for the NFTMP was provided for each incident rather than each individual firearm. The 2018 data included the recovery status of each firearm, but these data were limited to thefts from New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. Seventeen percent (*n*=250) of stolen firearms in these jurisdictions were recovered: 11 percent (*n*=50) in New South Wales, 20 percent (*n*=117) in Queensland and 22 percent (*n*=83) in Western Australia.

Summary

The number of firearm theft incidents and stolen firearms increased in the 10-year period from 2008–09 (the conclusion of the NFTMP) to 2018. A 15 percent increase in reported theft incidents was accompanied by a 35 percent increase in stolen firearms. The firearm theft incident rate remained the same despite a decline in general theft rates over the same period.

Trend data from the NFTMP and obtained by Gun Control Australia (2018) showed general increases in the number of firearms stolen between 2004–05 and 2016–17 but the patterns varied across jurisdictions. The 10-year point-to-point data demonstrated similar jurisdictional variation. The most consistent pattern occurred in South Australia, where numbers of stolen firearms remained relatively stable. Sizeable increases, however, were recorded in Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia. New South Wales recorded a decrease after a marked rise in reports of stolen firearms from 2010–11.

Incident and firearm characteristics have remained largely the same. Most incidents resulted in the theft of multiple firearms, primarily Category A and B firearms (reflecting the predominance of these firearms in Australia). Further, most thefts were burglaries of residential premises, primarily dwellings but with around one in five thefts targeting a garage, shed or similar. The method of access to the theft site was not collected for this study (and only available from one jurisdiction) but information from five jurisdictions on firearm safekeeping arrangements found the majority of firearms were secure prior to the theft. Storage compliance has improved since the previous decade—from an average of 60 percent between 2004 and 2009 to 73 percent in 2018.

The geographic location of firearm thefts has changed. Police intelligence and anecdotal evidence have suggested a shift towards regional and rural theft locations. While based on one year of theft data, postcode information collected for this study supports this observation. The proportion of thefts occurring in major cities has decreased substantially, with a corresponding increase in theft in inner regional, outer regional and/or remote locations depending on jurisdiction.

This study, like the NFTMP, suggests that firearm theft offenders—opportunists and specialists alike—are entering theft locations suitably prepared to penetrate and remove firearms from otherwise secure receptacles. The concentration of thefts in regional, rural and remote settings further suggests a deliberate relocation of effort, where larger numbers of firearms may be stolen at lower risk of detection. Whether the move to regional and remote theft is associated with an increase in stolen firearms requires further, longer-term examination.

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Appendix

Table A1: Stolen firearms by jurisdiction, 2004–05 to 2008–09 and 2018 (*n*)						
	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	2018
NSW	371	401	432	410	592	466
Vic	302	211	276	332	302	572
Qld	329	302	320	352	319	584
WA	207	191	232	297	232[a]	382
SA	150	198	204	193	211	226
Tas	83	114	52	107	99	147
ACT	8	9	12[b]	9	22	15
NT	20	19	10	12	25	33
Total	**1,570**	**1,445**	**1,538**	**1,712**	**1,802**	**2,425**

a: Estimate based on average of 2004–05 to 2007–09 total stolen firearms recorded in Western Australia

b: Estimate based on average 2004–06 and 2007–08 total stolen firearms recorded in the ACT

Source: NFTMP 2004–05 to 2008–09 [computer file]; AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Table A2: Inter-year change in stolen firearms by jurisdiction, 2004–05 to 2008–09 and 2018 (%)					
	Interval 1	Interval 2	Interval 3	Interval 4	Interval 5
NSW	8.1	7.7	–5.1	44.4	–21.3
Vic	–30.1	30.8	20.3	–9.0	89.4
Qld	–8.2	6.0	10.0	–9.4	83.1
WA	–7.7	21.5	28.0	–21.9	64.7
SA	–20.8	3.0	–5.4	9.3	7.1
ACT	37.3	–54.4	105.8	–7.5	48.5
NT	12.5	33.3	–25.0	144.4	–31.8
Total	**–5.0**	**–47.4**	**20.0**	**108.3**	**32.0**

Interval 1=difference between 2005–06 and 2004–05

Interval 2=difference between 2006–07 and 2005–06

Interval 3=difference between 2007–08 and 2006–07

Interval 4=difference between 2008–09 and 2007–08

Interval 5=difference between 2018 and 2008–09

Source: NFTMP 2004–05 to 2008–09 [computer file]; AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Table A3: Incidents of theft by number of firearms stolen, 1 January to 31 December 2018		
	n	%
One firearm	339	40.0
Two firearms	170	20.1
Three firearms	111	13.1
Four firearms	76	9.0
Five firearms	48	5.7
Six firearms	38	4.5
Seven firearms	23	2.7
Eight firearms	11	1.3
Nine firearms	11	1.3
Ten firearms	8	0.9
Twelve firearms	2	0.2
Fourteen firearms	2	0.2
Fifteen firearms	2	0.2
Sixteen firearms	1	0.1
Eighteen firearms	1	0.1
Nineteen firearms	1	0.1
Twenty-five firearms	1	0.1
Twenty-seven firearms	2	0.2
Total	**847**	**100.0**

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Table A4: Stolen firearms by type and jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018 (%)						
	Rifle	Shotgun	Air rifle	Handgun	Other	Not stated
NSW	67.8	22.5	6.0	1.1	2.4	0.2
Vic	50.3	28.0	8.0	6.5	1.6	5.6
Qld	63.9	18.5	10.8	4.5	2.4	0.0
WA	68.3	20.9	6.0	3.7	1.0	0.0
SA	56.6	25.2	8.8	7.5	0.4	1.3
ACT	46.7	20.0	13.3	20.0	0.0	0.0
NT	63.6	27.3	3.0	0.0	3.0	3.0
Total[a]	**57.5**	**21.5**	**7.5**	**4.2**	**1.6**	**1.5**

a: Total percentages based on *n*=2,278 firearms (excludes Tasmania)

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Table A5: Incidents of firearm theft by remoteness and jurisdiction, 1 January to 31 December 2018										
	Major city		Inner regional		Outer regional		Remote		Very remote	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
NSW	19	12.0	41	25.9	83	52.5	10	6.3	5	3.2
Vic	57	28.4	95	47.3	49	24.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Qld	37	18.0	47	22.8	66	32.0	34	16.5	22	10.7
WA	41	26.3	49	31.4	34	21.8	17	10.9	15	9.6
SA	20	34.5	12	20.7	16	27.6	7	12.1	3	5.2
ACT	8	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
NT	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	17.6	7	41.2	7	41.2
Total	**182**	**22.6**	**244**	**30.4**	**251**	**31.2**	**75**	**9.3**	**52**	**6.5**

Note: Excludes Tasmania. Row percentages are presented and may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Table A6: Incidents of firearm theft by remoteness status and jurisdiction, 2007–08 and 2018 (%)								
	NSW		Vic		Qld		SA	
	2007–08	2018	2007–08	2018	2007–08	2018	2007–08	2018
Major city	31.8	12.0	50.8	28.0	25.9	18.0	75.0	34.5
Inner regional	39.1	25.9	32.3	47.5	33.3	22.8	12.5	20.7
Outer regional	24.9	52.5	16.9	24.0	25.9	32.0	0.0	27.6
Remote	2.4	6.3	0.0	0.5	9.3	16.5	0.0	12.1
Very remote	1.7	3.2	0.0	0.0	5.6	10.7	12.5	5.2

Source: NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]; AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

Table A7: Incidents by theft of firearms and other goods, 1 January to 31 December 2018 (%)								
	NSW		Vic		WA		SA	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Firearms only	20	12.7	76	37.8	42	26.9	28	48.3
Firearms and other goods	138	87.3	125	62.2	114	73.1	30	51.7

Note: Excludes Queensland, Tasmania, ACT and the Northern Territory. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC Firearm theft 2018 [computer file]

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