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**Abstract** | Using data from a large national survey of online Australian adults ( $n=9,951$ ) conducted in late 2024, we measured exposure to digital firearms products being sold online, including blueprints and printing files to manufacture 3D-printed firearms.

A small proportion of respondents reported having seen digital firearms products for sale on the public internet (2.4%) or the darknet (0.9%). Just over one percent (1.1%) of respondents said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online on the public internet (0.7%) and/or on the darknet (0.8%).

Respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online were more likely than other respondents to have had contact with the criminal justice system (including for violent offences), to own a firearm without a licence, to have intentionally viewed fringe or radical content, and to have seen content depicting or calling for violent action.

## The availability and purchase of digital firearms products among online Australians

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The increasing availability of illicit, untraceable and unregistered privately manufactured 3D-printed firearms poses a significant safety risk to frontline law enforcement officers and the community at large. During 2024, Western Australian police seized 21 privately made 3D-printed firearms from a home in Perth and, in Queensland, police recovered a 3D-printed firearm allegedly linked to the attempted murder of a man who was shot in the head (Loram & Taylor 2025; Thomas-Sam 2024). In October 2025, joint operations between federal and state law enforcement agencies led to the seizure of 281 privately manufactured and 3D-printed firearms or firearm parts from numerous jurisdictions across Australia (Australian Border Force 2025). Although it is illegal to manufacture a 3D-printed firearm in Australia, legislation banning the possession of digital blueprints to create 3D-firearms currently varies between states and territories.

Three-dimensional printing is the process of creating a solid-state object from a digitally rendered model. The core function of 3D-printing is known as additive manufacturing, in which devices follow digital blueprints to successively build upon each layer until the desired object has been created. Since the first fully 3D-printed firearm was successfully constructed and fired in 2013, the design and quality of these weapons have significantly improved and evolved over time (Schaufelbühl et al. 2024). They now include fully 3D-printed firearms consisting of almost all printed parts (except, usually, the firing pin); hybrid 3D-printed firearms comprising a mix of both 3D-printed and conventional firearm components; and conventional firearms that have been modified using 3D-printed parts, such as a printed frame (Schaufelbühl et al. 2024).

Since the early development of 3D-printed firearms, law enforcement has raised concerns about their potential use by organised crime groups and extremists (Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee 2015), especially given the role these actors play in driving the illegal firearms market in Australia (Australian Federal Police 2025). These criminal actors are especially likely to be motivated to acquire 3D-printed firearms since they can be manufactured relatively cheaply, are easier to conceal and are difficult to trace due to the absence of serial numbers and ballistic evidence (Veilleux-Lepage 2024). They can be disassembled and their component parts are able to avoid detection by traditional screening methods, allowing them to be taken into secure locations.

While organised crime groups have yet to fully embrace the use of 3D-printed firearms over conventional firearms, there are examples of police having seized them from Australian outlaw motorcycle gangs (Mann, Bright & Allen 2025). An analysis of more than 200 incidents involving police recovery of a 3D-printed firearm spanning a 10-year period revealed a rapid increase in cases since 2020 (Dass 2024). The majority were categorised as criminal incidents—the manufacture, trafficking or possession of firearms—since most incidents involving 3D-printed firearms relate to seizures, rather than the discharge of a firearm (Dass 2024; Schaufelbühl et al. 2024). There are particular concerns about their use by lone actors (rather than groups) and, among those incidents classified as being related to terrorism, the vast majority have been linked to far-right actors (Dass 2025; Veilleux-Lepage 2024).

Several studies have highlighted the ready availability of digital files and blueprints for 3D-printed firearms (hereafter referred to as ‘digital firearms products’) online. Schaufelbühl et al. (2023) and, more recently, Mann, Bright and Allen (2025) analysed the availability of design files and blueprints on the clear or surface web. They were able to easily locate platforms that make available design files for both firearms and parts, including metal and plastic digital design files. These platforms had inconsistent policies with regard to the use of these files to manufacture firearms.

While representing a small fraction of illicit activity on the darknet, digital firearms products may also be sourced from anonymised online markets on encrypted internet platforms (Paoli et al. 2017). The accessibility of digital firearms products on the darknet was demonstrated by Broadhurst et al. (2021), who undertook research into the availability and cost of weapons across 12 online darknet markets during July–December 2019. In addition to several thousand weapons available for purchase—including firearms, ammunition, explosives, and other weapons—these marketplaces listed digital blueprints to create 3D-printed weapons for sale, at an average cost of A\$77, as well as a listing for a 3D-printed firearm for A\$561.

These studies have not been able to determine the extent to which online Australians are exposed to or involved in the trade of digital firearms products online and, if they are, whether these are individuals who may be at higher risk of engaging in firearm-related violence. This research addresses this gap by using a national online survey to measure the extent to which Australians have seen, bought or traded digital firearms products on the clear web and darknet. Furthermore, to better understand the threat posed by this market, we examine the characteristics of Australians who are buying or trading digital firearms products, particularly with regard to their prior criminal history, history of violence, and exposure to fringe or radical content online.

## Method

### Data collection and analysis

This research used data from a large sample of online Australians as part of the Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia. The survey collected, among other things, information about exposure to conventional and digital firearms products, including blueprints and 3D printing files, on the public internet (clear web) and darknet, and whether the respondent or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online. The survey was conducted by Roy Morgan Research in November 2024. Respondents were recruited from Roy Morgan's Single Source panel and panels managed by PureProfile and Octopus Group. The survey was sent to members of these panels aged 18 years and over who had voluntarily joined to receive incentives in exchange for completing surveys. Proportional quota sampling was used to ensure the sample was representative of the spread of people living in Australia. Quotas were based on the Australian adult population stratified by age, sex and usual place of residence, based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024) population data. The data were weighted by age, sex and usual place of residence to ensure the data were demographically representative, while additional random iterative method weights were applied to correct for education level and internet and social media use.

In addition to reporting the overall results in terms of exposure to and buying and trading of digital firearms products online, we also compare respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought digital firearms products online and those who said they had not (and for which this information was unknown) on several variables of interest. We used a chi-square test of independence ( $\chi^2$ ) to compare groups and establish whether the differences were statistically significant. Because the analysis is based on weighted survey data, the Pearson  $\chi^2$  statistic is corrected and converted into an *F* statistic.

## Sample characteristics

Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Approximately half the sample was female (50.5%) and aged between 35 and 64 years (47.5%), and most of the sample lived in a major city (72.4%), were currently employed (64.9%), currently in a relationship (62.4%), and did not identify as First Nations (95.4%). Respondents reported that they spent an average (mean) of 3.6 hours online per day for personal purposes (95% confidence interval (CI)=[3.5, 3.6]). Only a small proportion (1.6%,  $n=163$ ) reported accessing, or trying to access, the darknet in the past 12 months. A small proportion of respondents owned firearms (3.2%,  $n=317$ ) or currently held a firearms licence (3.7%,  $n=364$ ).

<b>Gender</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
Female	50.5	5,028	Employed	64.9	6,457
Male	48.7	4,847	Unemployed	4.5	450
Non-binary/other	0.8	75	Other <sup>a</sup>	30.2	3,010
<b>Age in years</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	Unknown	0.4	34
18–24	11.6	1,157	<b>Education level</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
25–34	19.0	1,887	Year 12 or lower	30.3	3,020
35–49	25.4	2,530	Vocational training	27.6	2,751
50–64	22.1	2,201	University degree	41.5	4,127
65+	21.9	2,176	Other <sup>b</sup>	0.2	19
<b>First Nations</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	Unknown	0.3	34
No	95.4	9,493	<b>Annual income</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
Yes	3.5	347	\$0–\$18,200	9.9	985
Unknown	1.1	111	\$18,201–\$45,000	21.7	2,157
<b>Currently in relationship</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	\$45,001–\$120,000	43.9	4,369
No	37.1	3,689	\$120,001–\$180,000	11.9	1,188
Yes	62.4	6,205	\$180,001+	4.4	441
Unknown	0.6	57	Unknown	8.2	812
<b>Children living at home</b>	<b>%</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>Geographic remoteness<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>%</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
No	73.4	7,305	Major city	72.4	7,209
Yes	26.5	2,639	Regional	24.2	2,409
Unknown	0.1	7	Remote	2.8	279
			Unknown	0.5	54

a: Currently employed respondents include those who are working full-time, part-time, or casually or who are semi-retired. 'Other' employment status includes respondents who are studying full-time, homemakers, unable to work due to illness, retired, or seasonal workers

b: 'Other' education level includes respondents who have commenced (but did not complete) university studies, or who have achieved a diploma/certification

c: Geographic remoteness ratings are derived from the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia classification (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021), which is based on postcode data

Note: Unknown responses include those who answered 'Don't know' or 'Prefer not to say'. Weighted frequencies and percentages may not add to total due to rounding

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

## Limitations

While this study offers insight into the availability of digital firearms products to online Australians, there are several limitations to be noted. The survey used a non-probability sampling method; namely, proportional quota sampling from an opt-in online research panel. Although the sample was demographically representative of key population indicators (such as gender, age and usual place of residence), we are cautious not to generalise to the wider Australian community, since the data may under-represent certain groups, such as those who speak a language other than English. In addition, because questions about digital firearms products were included in a larger survey, we were limited in the level of detail that could be captured about the actual products that were seen online. Respondents who had seen digital firearms products online were not asked whether they had intentionally sought out these products, so it is unclear whether these individuals came across these products inadvertently or deliberately. Finally, we note that while this was a confidential survey, some respondents may have been unwilling to provide information about their exposure to digital firearms products online or about other relevant information, such as their exposure to fringe and radical content and prior contact with the criminal justice system. Respondents who did not answer these questions are always retained as part of the analysis for this reason. Similarly, in order to meet ethical requirements, and address concerns about asking respondents about buying or trading digital firearms products (which would be a criminal offence in some jurisdictions), we asked respondents whether they or someone they knew had bought or traded these products. This may limit some of the inferences that can be drawn from our analysis.

## Results

### Exposure to digital firearms products online

Overall, a small proportion of respondents reported that they had seen digital firearms products, including blueprints and 3D-printing files, being sold online (Table 2). However, more than twice as many respondents had seen these products on the public internet (2.4%,  $n=241$ ) than on the darknet (0.9%,  $n=92$ ). Similarly, one percent of respondents ( $n=99$ ) had seen physical firearm products for sale on the darknet, including conventional firearms, parts, accessories and ammunition. A total of 1.1 percent of respondents ( $n=114$ ) said that they or someone they knew had ever bought or traded digital firearms products, including on the public internet (0.7%,  $n=71$ ) or on the darknet (0.8%,  $n=78$ ).

**Table 2: Seeing, buying and trading digital firearms products online (n=9,951)**

	Yes		No		Unknown	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
<b>On the public internet (clear web)</b>						
Had seen digital firearms products	2.4	241	96.3	9,586	1.2	124
They or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products	0.7	71	97.3	9,682	2.0	197
<b>On the darknet</b>						
Had seen or accessed physical firearms products <sup>a</sup>	1.0	99	99.0	9,852	–	–
Had seen or accessed digital firearms products <sup>a</sup>	0.9	92	99.1	9,859	–	–
Had seen or accessed other weapons and related digital products <sup>a</sup>	0.7	67	99.3	9,884	–	–
They or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products	0.8	78	97.0	9,654	2.2	218

a: These questions were asked as options in a ‘Select all that apply’ list of activities on the darknet, meaning there were no ‘Don’t know’ or ‘Prefer not to say’ options for these questions

Note: Physical firearms products include conventional firearms, parts, accessories and ammunition. Digital firearms products include blueprints or printing files to manufacture 3D-printed firearms. Unknown responses include those who answered ‘Don’t know’ or ‘Prefer not to say’. Weighted frequencies and percentages may not add to total due to rounding

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

## Characteristics of respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online

Respondents were grouped into three categories:

- respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products on the public internet or darknet ( $n=114$ );
- respondents who said neither they, nor anyone they knew, had ever bought or traded digital firearms products on either the public internet or darknet ( $n=9,538$ ); and
- respondents who had answered either ‘don’t know’ or ‘prefer not to say’ to questions about buying or trading digital firearms products on the public internet or darknet ( $n=299$ ).

The three groups were compared in terms of sociodemographic characteristics, history of contact with the criminal justice system and violence, and exposure to fringe and radical content online.

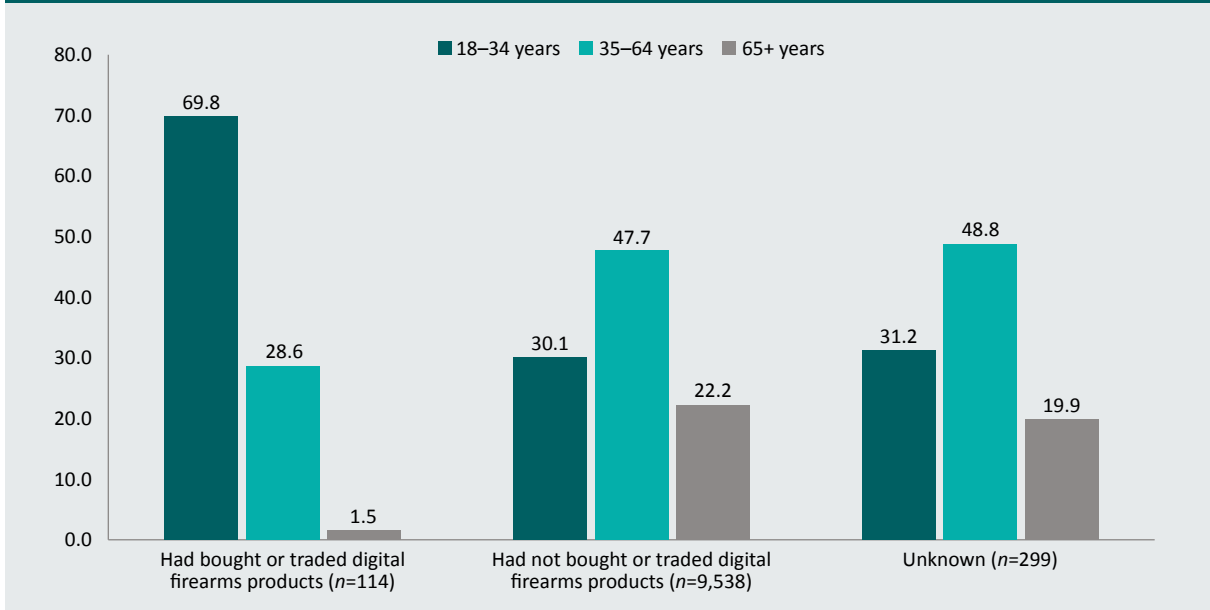
### *Sociodemographic characteristics*

Respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online were more likely to be male (70.8% vs 48.4–49.2%;  $F=5.27$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and more likely to be currently employed (91.8% vs 63.2–64.6%,  $F=6.78$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). They were more likely to have a university education (61.6% vs 41.2–42.4%) and less likely to have vocational training (9.7% vs 27.8–29.0%;  $F=3.64$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

There were more than twice as many respondents aged 18–34 years among those who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online (69.8% vs 30.1–31.2%;  $F=20.68$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), as shown in Figure 1. They were less likely to have an annual income of below \$45,001 (14.7% vs 30.3–31.8%) and more likely to have an annual income between \$45,001 and \$120,000 (58.8% vs 42.7–43.8%) or over \$120,000 (24.6% vs 15.5–16.3%;  $F=4.54$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Finally, respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online reported spending an average (mean) of 4.5 hours online per day for personal use. This was higher than other respondents (3.5–4.0 hours;  $F=6.38$ ,  $p=0.002$ ).

**Figure 1: Buying or trading digital firearms products online, by respondent age (%)**



Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

### *Self-reported contact with the criminal justice system and interpersonal violence*

We asked respondents whether they had ever had any contact with the criminal justice system, which included whether they had ever been arrested, charged, summonsed, convicted or had any findings of guilt for any offence (see Table 3). Respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online were more likely than other respondents to say they had been in contact with the criminal justice system before the age of 18 (19.7% vs 3.2–5.4%;  $F=43.81$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and as an adult (21.4% vs 8.8–14.7%;  $F=26.73$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). They were also more likely to say that this contact related to violent offending as a juvenile (11.5% vs 1.4–4.6%;  $F=53.11$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and as an adult (10.6% vs 1.4–4.4%;  $F=17.15$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

These respondents were also more likely to report having been physically violent (hitting, slapping, pushing, shoving, punching or otherwise physically harming, excluding acts of self-defence) towards another individual in the 12 months prior to the survey (16.9% vs 2.3–5.5%;  $F=49.80$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

### Unlicensed firearm ownership

Respondents were asked whether they owned a firearm and, if so, how many firearms they owned. They were also asked if they had a firearm licence. This made it possible to establish whether respondents owned a firearm without a licence (by their own admission). The prevalence of unlicensed firearm ownership was low among respondents. However, as Table 3 shows, respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online were more likely than other respondents to report owning a firearm without a licence (9.7% vs 1.3–2.4%;  $F=98.48$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). We could not establish whether these were conventional firearms or 3D-printed firearms that may have been produced from the digital firearms products they had accessed online.

**Table 3: Prior contact with the criminal justice system, interpersonal violence and unlicensed firearm ownership**

	Respondent or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products ( $n=114$ )		Respondent or someone they knew had not bought or traded digital firearms products ( $n=9,538$ )		Unknown ( $n=299$ )	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
<b>Contact with the criminal justice system</b>						
Juvenile	19.7	22	3.2	303	5.4	16
Juvenile (violent offence)	11.5	13	0.4	44	1.4	4
Adult	21.4	24	8.8	839	14.7	44
Adult (violent offence)	10.6	12	1.4	130	4.4	13
<b>Interpersonal violence in past 12 months</b>	16.9	19	2.3	220	5.5	16
<b>Currently own a firearm without a licence</b>	9.7	10	0.2	23	1.3	4

Note: All differences between the three respondent groups were statistically significant at the  $p<0.001$  level. Unknown responses combining those who answered 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' included in the denominator

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

### Exposure to fringe or radical content online

As well as asking about exposure to digital firearms products on the darknet, we asked respondents whether they had accessed or attempted to access the darknet in the 12 months prior to the survey. These results are reported in Table 4. We found that respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online were more likely than other respondents to have accessed the darknet in the past 12 months (23.8% vs 1.4–1.7%;  $F=160.82$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). They were also more likely to report that they had ever seen or accessed extremist propaganda materials on the darknet (22.8% vs 1.2–3.3%;  $F=160.24$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Respondents were asked whether, in the last 12 months, they had seen political, ideological or religious content online that mainstream society or the government might describe as fringe, unorthodox or radical (hereafter referred to as 'fringe or radical content'). More information about how we defined and asked about this content is provided in Cubitt and Morgan (2024). In the 12 months prior to the survey, respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online were more likely than other respondents to have viewed fringe or radical content (74.2% vs 33.8–44.7%;  $F=29.23$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), to have viewed this material intentionally (22.7% vs 5.0–8.2%;  $F=17.20$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and to have viewed content describing, advocating or depicting violence (70.9% vs 26.9–37.5%;  $F=25.22$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

We then asked about specific types of content that respondents had seen online. Overall, respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online were consistently more likely to have seen each type of content, though there was often little difference when compared to respondents who did not answer the questions about digital firearms products. There were particularly noteworthy differences relating to several types of content depicting or calling for violent action. Specifically, respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products online were much more likely than other respondents to have seen:

- real-life violence, including gore, murder, torture or sexual violence (28.8% vs 9.9–17.4%;  $F=27.41$ ,  $p<0.001$ );
- religious extremist material that promotes hatred and advocates for violence (32.9% vs 15.3–21.6%;  $F=15.13$ ,  $p<0.001$ );
- content posted on message boards, or sites supporting open communication, that promoted violence against specific ideological or cultural groups (27.0% vs 6.1–13.0%;  $F=45.78$ ,  $p<0.001$ );
- sermons or speeches promoting violence or action to be taken on behalf of a group or ideology (29.5% vs 6.9–11.3%;  $F=39.54$ ,  $p<0.001$ ); and
- manifestos written by people who have committed or attempted to commit violence (15.4% vs 1.9–5.4%;  $F=44.91$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

This may be because this is the type of extremist propaganda that is accessible on the darknet, which these respondents were more active on, or because they reflect the types of content which do not mention specific ideological positions (eg far-right, far-left or anti-government).

<b>Table 4: Exposure to fringe and radical content online</b>						
	<b>Had bought or traded digital firearms products (n=114)</b>		<b>Had not bought or traded digital firearms products (n=9,538)</b>		<b>Unknown (n=299)</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>Use of the darknet</b>						
Accessed or attempted to access the darknet in the last 12 months	23.8	27	1.4	131	1.7	5
Had ever seen or accessed extremist propaganda materials on the darknet (eg text, videos, speeches)	22.8	26	1.2	113	3.3	10
<b>Exposure to fringe or radical content online in the 12 months prior to the survey</b>						
Viewed fringe or radical content online	74.2	84	33.8	3,227	44.7	134
Intentionally viewed fringe or radical content online	22.7	26	5.0	481	8.2	25
Viewed content describing, advocating or depicting violence online	70.9	81	26.9	2,568	37.5	112
<b>Selected types of fringe or radical content seen by respondent</b>						
Real-life violence, including gore, murder, torture or sexual violence	28.8	33	9.9	940	17.4	52
Extreme far-right political content that promotes hatred and advocates for violence	24.5	28	15.6	1,488	22.4	67
Extreme far-left political content that promotes hatred and advocates for violence	25.1	29	12.8	1,216	21.0	63
Religious extremist material that promotes hatred and advocates for violence	32.9	37	15.3	1,459	21.6	65
Content posted on message boards, or sites supporting open communication, that promotes violence against specific ideological or cultural groups	27.0	31	6.1	578	13.0	39
Sermons or speeches promoting violence or action to be taken on behalf of a group or ideology	29.5	34	7.0	663	11.3	34
Manifestos written by people who have committed or have attempted to commit violence	15.4	18	2.0	185	5.4	16
Hate speech	24.5	28	15.3	1,461	23.3	70
Misogynistic content	22.1	25	11.6	1,111	17.2	52
Conspiracy theories	24.9	28	16.9	1,611	27.2	81
Content promoting anti-government sentiment, or encouraging resistance to lawful/government authority	15.9	18	12.2	1,164	18.7	56

Note: All differences between the three respondent groups were statistically significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level. Unknown responses combining those who answered 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' included in the denominator

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

## Discussion

We have shown that digital firearms products, including 3D printing files and the blueprints to manufacture these firearms, are readily accessible to online Australians. While only seen by a small proportion of respondents, more than twice as many (2.4%) had seen these products for sale on the public internet (clear web) compared with the darknet (0.9%). In terms of actually buying or trading digital firearms products, comparable (albeit very small) numbers of respondents said they or someone they knew had done so on the clear web (0.7%) and the darknet (0.8%).

The availability of digital firearms products on the public internet is a concern, as these markets are accessible without the technical proficiency or the specialised software needed to access the darknet. The availability of digital firearms products on darknet markets also presents a significant challenge for law enforcement, as digital firearms products and other illicit commodities are purchased from anonymised markets on encrypted platforms using cryptocurrency, further complicating efforts to identify and intervene in such transactions (Broadhurst et al. 2021). The fact that respondents were just as likely to say they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products on the darknet as on the public internet, despite being more than twice as likely to have seen them on the public internet, suggests that this is the preferred method of acquiring illicit firearms products, likely because of the anonymity and security the darknet provides.

Digital firearms products being available on publicly accessible websites significantly lowers the barrier to entry to those seeking to manufacture potentially lethal 3D-printed firearms. This includes individuals who are socially isolated or are outside of existing criminal networks, who may have had difficulty acquiring illicit firearms through traditional illicit channels, such as organised crime groups (Bricknell 2012). This also includes those who may have difficulty accessing legal firearms through legitimate channels, such as respondents who have a history of offending that disqualifies them from holding a firearm licence. Indeed, we found that respondents who had bought or traded digital firearms products were more likely than other respondents to have a history of contact with the criminal justice system, including for violent offending.

Respondents who had bought or traded digital firearms products were also more likely to have seen or intentionally accessed fringe or radical content, including content that describes, depicts or advocates for ideological violence. While most incidents involving 3D-printed firearm seizures or arrests internationally have related to crime more generally—mostly because of the illegal nature of the firearms themselves, rather than their actual involvement in firearm violence—the growing popularity of 3D-printed firearms among extremists, especially those with far-right ideologies, has been highlighted (Dass 2025; Veilleux-Lepage 2024). Respondents who said they or someone they knew had bought or traded digital firearms products were much more likely than other respondents to say they had seen extremist content on the darknet; religious extremist material promoting hatred and violence; sermons, speeches and message boards promoting ideological or collective violence; and manifestos by extremist actors. Given the strong links between exposure to this type of content online and radicalisation, especially behavioural radicalisation (Wolfowicz, Hasisi & Weisburd 2022), the availability to this cohort of digital firearms products that can be used to manufacture untraceable and unregistered 3D-printed firearms should raise significant concerns.

That said, it seems that some level of technical proficiency is required to access digital firearms products online. Respondents who had bought or traded digital firearms products spent more of their personal time on the internet per day than other respondents. Accordingly, many of the sociodemographic characteristics associated with digital firearms products—that is, being male, younger in age, currently employed, having a university education, and having a higher annual income—are associated with having higher digital abilities and skills (Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2021). These respondents may have the confidence and digital proficiency needed to be able to successfully find online marketplaces for illicit products and purchase these products with less fear of detection. This is an important consideration, especially given the capability of these internet users to find technical workarounds for any strategies that may be used to restrict online access to these products (Mann, Bright & Allen 2025).

The accessibility of digital firearms products on publicly accessible websites has several implications. First, Australian legislation banning the possession of digital blueprints to create 3D-printed firearms currently varies by jurisdiction, and the findings here—coupled with evidence of seizures of 3D-printed firearms from criminal actors—highlight the need to strengthen legislation to restrict access for online Australians. Any legislative change would need to be supported by appropriate awareness-raising to ensure the public knows that it is an offence to download digital firearms products as well as to manufacture 3D-printed firearms, and to encourage the wider community to recognise and report illicit firearms products (whether online or offline). Finally, restrictions on the download of digital firearms products will only be effective if online platforms, especially those on the clear web, restrict, monitor or report the download of digital firearms products by online Australians.

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*URLs correct as at November 2025*

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