

ASIA

Australian gun lobby scores big on funds

Report finds it spent more per head last year on political donations than NRA in America

The Guardian

A new report has found Australia's gun lobby spent more per capita over the course of one year on political donations than America's National Rifle Association (NRA) did in 2018.

In the wake of revelations that One Nation sought millions in donations from the NRA, the report from the Australia Institute has found the country's gun lobby spends just as much, and has as many members as the NRA, when adjusted for Australia's smaller population.

In the 2015-16 financial year, the Shooting Industry Foundation of Australia donated US\$64,000 to political parties, which equates to US\$2.56 spent per a thousand Australians.

This was more than the NRA spent in 2018, which was US\$2.51 per a thousand Americans or US\$823,842 in total.

The report, commissioned by Gun Control Australia and Getup!, noted it was based on publicly available records, and there could be more spending undisclosed. Australia's gun groups also spent similar amounts to the NRA on campaign spending - distinct from direct political donations.

Bill Browne, author of the report, wrote that "there is a real danger of our firearm laws being watered down" because Australian's does not realise the scale and power of its own gun lobbies.

"Firearms interest groups have made a concerted effort to undermine these laws and loosen state-level gun controls."

The interim leader of the New South Wales Labor party said she would support a ban on donations from the firearms lobby following the revelations about One Nation.

"Gun laws in Australia cannot and must not be watered down," Penny Sharpe said.

An undercover investigation this week revealed that senior One Nation figures James Ashby and Steve Dickson had sought millions in donations from the NRA during a trip to America last year in a bid to weaken gun laws.

The report prompted a backlash in Australia and placed raised pressure on the prime minister, Scott Morrison, to rule out preference deals with the far-right party at the May federal election.

One Nation is one of several rightwing parties to have received thousands of dollars in donations from the Australian gun lobby in recent years as part of a push to pursue changes to firearm laws established after the Port Arthur massacre in 1996.

Forward march



Soldiers in Myanmar march in a formation during a parade to mark the country's 74th Armed Forces Day. At the parade in Naypyidaw, General Soe Win, a leading commander, stressed the three capabilities needed to make the military more efficient:

military capability, administrative capability and organisational capability. He also called for continued efforts in promoting the peace and stability of the country, solidarity and socioeconomic development. Photo: AFP

AUSTRALIA

PUBLIC ANXIETY GROWS OVER CHINA INFLUENCE

Despite being Canberra's biggest trading partner and a source of tourist dollars, Beijing faces increasing suspicion about its intentions down under

Tamara Thiessen

Two of Australia's leading daily newspapers *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* launched an advertising campaign recently to demonstrate their commitment to investigative journalism.

Headlined "It's Your Future, You Deserve to Know", the campaign featured four broad areas of coverage, including one titled "China's Growing Influence". Articles were described as revealing the "true scale of China's ambition for power".

The descriptions reflect how deeply concerns about China's rising influence in Australian politics and society have taken root.

"There's also a lot of anxiety right now among the public and in universities, local government and the media about Chinese investments, and what the Australian government should do about it," University of Sydney Associate Professor James Reilly said.

Mixed feelings towards China has inevitably polarised debate among public intellectuals and commentators. Former Australia

ambassador to Beijing, Geoff Raby, said last year bilateral ties were in a mess.

Last week, in an article on the think tank Lowy Institute's website, Euan Graham of La Trobe University noted some policymakers, businesspeople and academics were not forthcoming about the possibility that Beijing "harbours less than benign intentions towards Australia", despite "unclassified evidence staring them in the face".

Australian National University lecturer Iain Henry, in a Twitter post, said discussions about China were "getting worse".

"There is a narrative emerging in Oz strategic circles that there is only one 'acceptable', 'grown-up' view of China and if anyone holds a contrary view they must be, worst case, compromised or, best case, a useful idiot," he wrote.

China remains Australia's largest trading partner and the latest figures show mainland tourists made up about 15 per cent of all international visitors down under. About 1.3 million mainlanders spent A\$11.3 billion (HK\$63.2 billion) in Australia



between June 2017 and June 2018. There are also 190,000 Chinese students in Australian schools.

Last year, Canberra's decision to bar Chinese telecom firms Huawei and ZTE from participating in a roll-out of Australia's new 5G network was among the developments that angered Beijing.

VIETNAM

Hmong Christians persecuted by state - and neighbours

Communist government is especially suspicious of Christianity, fearing it encourages separatism

Josep Prat in Dien Bien province

Foua, a farmer in his 30s, has spent three months behind bars in Vietnam's northwestern province of Dien Bien. He will remain there for two more, convicted of deforestation - even though the law only stipulates a fine as punishment.

His crime? Cutting down nine trees to build a hut for his family.

But his wife, Cua, who did not want to reveal her or Foua's real names for fear of retaliation, says her husband has been persecuted for being Christian. When she last saw him, he was in hospital, three days after he was jailed, his leg shackled to his bed.

"He thinks the police tried to poison him," she says. "In his cell, the person watching him squeezed his genitals very hard until he was unable to walk. They did this as he urinated on himself, because no one took him to the bathroom."

The couple are ethnic Hmong - a group that in the late 1980s began converting to Christianity after listening to an evangelical radio programme hosted by Protestants, broadcast from Manila. There are an estimated 300,000 Hmong Christians living in Vietnam, where the communist government is suspicious of all religion, particularly Christianity, which is associated with former invaders, France and the US.

Hmong are originally from China but during the 18th century began migrating to the rugged uplands of northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and the eastern parts of Myanmar.

Tam Ngo, a cultural anthropologist from the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Germany, says the government is particularly wary of Christianity among Hmong. The establishment of an independent kingdom is a prominent feature of traditional Hmong folklore and the government regards Christianity as a possible touchstone for armed rebellion and separatist movements.

"Christianity is seen as leaving the nation vulnerable to... foreign cultural and political forces," Ngo explains. "This adds to Hmong marginalisation, the distance [between them and] the nation is reinforced and in Vietnam leads to suspicion."

The Paris-based Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) recently submitted a report to the United Nations documenting the persecution endured by the Hmong in Vietnam from 2002 to 2017: threats, coercion, torture, prison sentences and deaths in police custody.

Nhat Vo Tran, executive secretary of VCHR, says persecution of Hmong Christians and Christians

in general has increased. He cites the Law on Belief and Religion that came into effect on January 1, 2018, allowing significant government control over the practice of religion.

The law includes broad provisions to restrict religious freedom in the name of national security and social unity. Registration is required for groups to preach, organise ceremonies, conduct religious education at approved locations, publish religious materials, accept donations from foreign sources or provide humanitarian aid.

Hmong Christians who try to register are regularly denied and complain the entire process is designed to identify and repress minorities and believers.

The state is not the only source of persecution. Some animist Hmong regard the Christians as having betrayed their culture, and cooperate with authorities.

Open Doors International, which monitors persecution of Christians internationally, described the situation in its latest report on Vietnam.

Christianity is seen as leaving the nation vulnerable to foreign forces

TAM NGO, ANTHROPOLOGIST

"In tribal backgrounds, where ethnic religions are still strong, people are forced to keep following the age-old norms and values of their community, so in order to maintain the tribe's culture, tribal leaders will often react violently against new Christian converts and expel them from their villages," the report said.

Other Hmong families were involved in Foua's case. Cua says the family converted to Protestantism two years ago when their two children fell ill. Due to their conversion, Foua's family was banished from their village by Hmong non-Christians for 27 days. Upon their return, Foua was charged with deforestation.

The pastor who ministered to Foua and Cua, who said he could not reveal his name, has also been arrested multiple times. Eight years ago, his newborn son became ill. Due to his religious beliefs, the pastor was denied an identity card and documentation for his son. Hospitals were therefore unwilling to provide treatment and his son died.

However, there are no signs Hmong Protestants are giving up their faith, Tam says.



The Hmong are sometimes persecuted in Vietnam. Photo: Corbis

AUSTRALIA

Briton held fleeing Australia on jet ski

The Guardian

A wanted British man has attempted to flee Australia on a jet ski, travelling almost 150km across the Torres Strait while armed with a crossbow.

The 57-year-old man is subject to an outstanding warrant for drug-related charges in Western Australia.

The man almost made it to Saibai Island in the Torres Strait islands archipelago, which is part of Australia though just 4km south of Papua New Guinea. He was

arrested on the mudflats on the eastern side of the island.

Locals alerted police in Bamaga, at the tip of Cape York in far north Queensland, that a man, possibly armed with a crossbow and carrying additional fuel and supplies, had been seen launching a jet ski at Pundsand Bay.

"He gave it a red-hot go," said Jock O'Keefe, of the Queensland Police Service's Criminal Investigation Branch who confirmed that the man was in possession of a crossbow throughout his journey but did not have the weapon with him upon his arrest.

Locals assisted police in tracking the man's path through the Torres Strait islands, calling in with updates as he passed or landed on their islands.

"It's a bit unusual to try and get from Pundsand Bay all the way to Papua New Guinea. He stuck out like the proverbial," O'Keefe said.

A border force vessel was deployed with officers from three agencies. O'Keefe confirmed that the man was facing "serious drug charges" in Western Australia.

"We wouldn't have gone to this sort of effort if they weren't significant charges," he said.

JAPAN

Nation prepares for an imperial era name change

Reuters in Tokyo

In Japan, every emperor's era has its own name - appearing in places such as coins, official paperwork and newspapers - and with an abdication coming at the end of April, speculation is swirling about what the new gengo will be.

Although the Western calendar is widespread use, people in Japan count years in terms of gengo or use the two systems interchangeably. Emperor Akihito's era, which began in 1989, is Heisei, making 2019 "Heisei 31".

The new era name is one of the biggest changes - both practically and psychologically - for Japan at the start of Crown Prince Naruhito's reign on May 1. On April 30, Akihito will abdicate, ending an era in the minds of many Japanese.

The new name is so secret that senior government officials involved in the decision must surrender their mobile phones and stay sequestered until it is broadcast, according to media reports.

City offices and government agencies, which mostly use gengo in their computer systems and paperwork, have been preparing

for months to avoid glitches. To make the transition easier, authorities will announce the new gengo - two Chinese characters the cabinet chooses from a shortlist proposed by scholars - a month early, on April 1.

"We've been working on this change for about a year," said Tsukasa Shizume, an official in the Tokyo suburb of Mitaka, where the era name will be changed on 55 kinds of paperwork in 20 administrative sections. The month-long lead time should be sufficient, he said.

Corporations such as Fujitsu and NEC have been helping

customers ensure the switch does not crash their systems. Programs have been designed to make it easy to change the gengo, Shunichi Ueda, a NEC official, said.

"If people want to test their computer systems, they can use a trial gengo," he said.

Most major companies use the Western calendar in their computer systems, so it would not affect them as much, although smaller companies might run into some problems, he said.

In Tokyo's Minato ward, officials will cross out Heisei on thousands of documents and stamp the new gengo above it.

The era name is more than just a way of counting years for many Japanese.

It is a word that captures the national mood of a period, similar to the way "the '60s" evokes particular feelings, or how historians refer to Britain's "Victorian" or "Edwardian" eras.

"It's a way of dividing history," said Jun Iijima, a lawyer who was born the last year of Showa, the era of Akihito's father, Emperor Hirohito. "If you were just counting years, the Western system might be sufficient. But gengo gives a certain meaning to a historical period."

THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY  
 香港理工大學

**CATERING SERVICES TENDER NOTICE**

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University invites tenders from capable and financially healthy caterers for operation of the following catering facilities to provide services for University community of about 28,000 students and 5,300 staff for a term of 72 calendar months commencing on 1 July 2019. (The below 2 catering outlets should be treated as a combined tender)

Catering Facilities	Location	Seating Capacity
Theatre Lounge	G/F, Chung Sze Yuen Building	Approx. 80
Z Restaurant	2/F, Block Z	Approx. 126

Tender invitation documents are now available for collection during office hours at the Finance Office at 11/F., Li Ka Shing Tower, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, contact Mr Au on 2766 4512. For record purpose, interested parties are required to submit their business registration certificate copy and business card of the responsible person.

The tender briefing session will be held on 1 April 2019 at 3:00 p.m.

The closing date for tender submission is 17 April 2019 at 10:00 a.m. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University does not bind itself to accept the lowest tender or any tender.

**TENDER NOTICE**

Tenders are invited for the following:

**Tender for the Supply, Installation, Commissioning and Maintenance of Personal Computers (PCs) and Peripherals for the Vocational Training Council**

**Tender Reference : VTCPT-18/15(F)**

**Closing Date : 17 April 2019**

Tender documents are available at the Supplies Section, Vocational Training Council, 17/F., VTC Tower, 27 Wood Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong. For enquiries, please call 2836 1074.