

## RCMP confuses PAL holders with criminals

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Is a national police force a help or a threat to democracy? Unquestionably, professional police are the best deterrent to crime, but robust democracy cannot exist when the police are too powerful or if they are corrupt. Just compare Russia with New Zealand. To keep our democracy, we must continually monitor the political power of the RCMP. Recent events suggest the RCMP invents its own firearm rules under the cover of interpreting regulations.

Apparently, the RCMP views lawful firearms ownership as a questionable activity and possibly even as a fundamental threat to public safety. One example is the recent prohibition of magazines for the Ruger 10/22. This came out of the blue even though these magazines have been safely owned by thousands of Canadians for decades. Another questionable policy is the RCMP crack down on firearm owners in BC. Kim Bolan in the *Vancouver Sun* (14-4-2016) has the RCMP boasting that Surrey gangsters are now forced to get their guns locally because the police have been so effective in stopping smuggling. The RCMP will now focus on expired PAL holders. This strategy is based on a secret study by the National Weapons Enforcement Support Team that found, "61% of crime guns in the province were domestically sourced."

It is difficult to believe NWEST's claim that lapsed licence holders are the prime source of crime guns in BC. First, it is doubtful that the police have been able to successfully thwart smuggling (whether guns or drugs). Smuggling continues to be big business. There has been no indication that drug crime and the violence associated with it have decreased in recent years. Second, no available statistics corroborate allegations that licensed Canadian gun owners (lapsed or not) are a major source of crime guns. Secret studies aside, the facts show that previously registered firearms constitute only a small fraction of crime guns.

Statistics Canada recently reported that drug crime and criminal violence is growing again. A recently released report shows that homicide rates increased 15% from 2014 and attempted murder rates jumped 22%. Importantly, drug crimes (other than cannabis-related charges) have swelled by 5% (Allen 2016). Drug trafficking is estimated at \$44.5 billion in 2014 (CISC 2014). It is no surprise that demand remains high for illegal guns and drugs, and smugglers are inordinately challenging to catch. With billions of dollars of shipping crossing the Canadian border monthly, the Canada Border Services Agency can only physically check a small percentage of cross-border shipments for illegal goods. The CBSA relies primarily upon manifests submitted by shippers to know what's being imported. Drugs remain big business, and Canada's gangsters lust after the flashiest guns to stake out their turf. In sum, despite the police publicly patting themselves on the back, there are no hard statistics showing that either the police or the CBSA has been successful in curtailing smuggling.

Are licensed firearms owners the source of crime guns?

Previous police reports have systematically pointed to smuggling being the dominant source of crime guns in Canada, with BC and Ontario remaining the prime corridors for Canadian

smuggling. The Ontario Provincial Police reported in 2014 that 20% of crime guns were locally sourced in 2011, while 60% were smuggled and 20% were unable to be traced (Press 2014). Unfortunately, the OPP do not specify how many had ever been registered. Toronto Police Service studies found between 2% and 20% of the crime guns (depending upon the year) had domestic origins. Bill Blair, former Toronto Police Chief, says smuggling accounts for 70% of crime guns. In BC the smuggling percentages reported are even higher. One Vancouver Police spokesperson even claimed 99% of crime guns are smuggled.

### Domestic sources of guns

Statistics Canada data do not support the claim that lawful gun owners are the major domestic source of crime guns. In a Special Request to Stats Can, I found that only 6% of the guns used in murder had ever been registered (Mauser 2015). Whether recently smuggled or long held in Canada but never registered, the overwhelming number of guns used in crime have long been outside the system. Authorities are too embarrassed to admit that a large number of guns are held by owners without a firearms licence. At least two million Canadian gun owners never bothered to get a PAL or POL when licensing was imposed (Mauser 2007). Some are merely scofflaws, while others are hard-core criminals.

One domestic source for crime guns are the police or military themselves. It is impossible to know how many guns go missing from evidence lockers or are “lost or stolen” from serving members, because neither Canadian police nor the military routinely report “lost or stolen” guns. Not to Parliament, not to the Canadian Firearms Program. And certainly not to the public. Occasionally, a scandal reveals that guns previously held by police or military are sold to criminal gangs (Duncanson and Rankin 1997). Recent Access-To-Information requests by Dennis Young found that the RCMP admitted losing track of 125 firearms and the DND disclosed missing 20 firearms (Young 2016).

### How many crime guns are stolen from lawful owners?

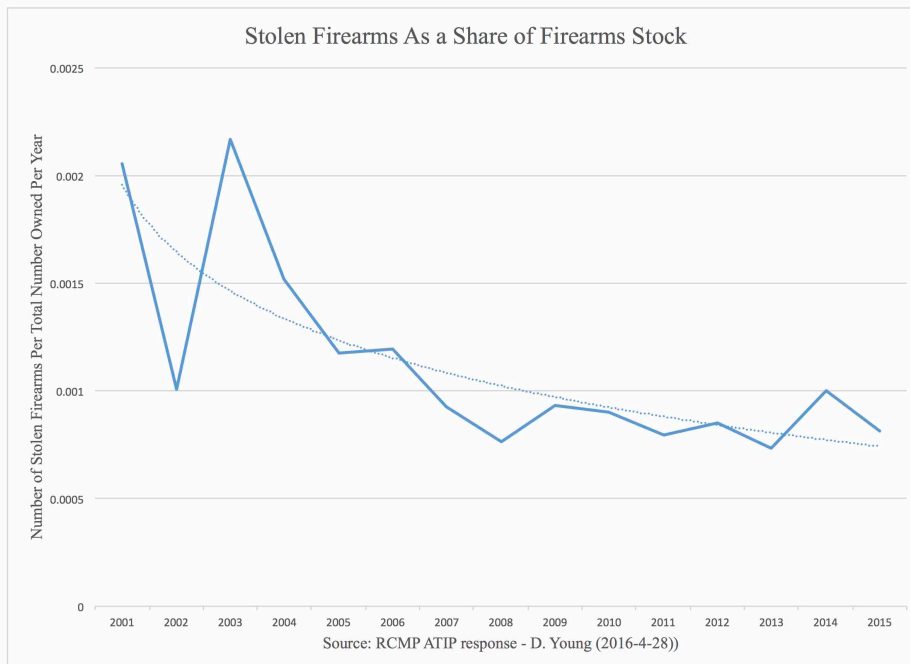
To determine whether guns stolen from lawful owners are a major source of crime guns, it is necessary to first know how many crime guns there are. In 2012 (the most recent year statistics are readily available), Stats Can reported that there were 5,575 violent crimes “where a firearm was present,” 3,166 of which involved a handgun. If each of these incidents involved a unique firearm, the number of crime guns that year can be estimated as between 3,166 and 5,575, depending upon whether “crime guns” are limited to handguns.

According to Statistics Canada “about 3,000” firearms were reported as stolen in 2012. Thanks to Dennis Young’s Access-To-Information requests, we know that 661 (22%) stolen firearms had been previously registered in 2012 (Vautour 2016). This ATI report did not specify whether long guns were included. It would be reasonable to do so, given that the long gun registry was still in effect during 2012. If so, then 14% (661/5,575) of crime guns were stolen from lawful owners. If long-guns were excluded from the count, then 21% would have been stolen (661/3,166) from lawful owners, since there were 3,166 violent crimes involving handguns that year. Thus, we

have at most 21% of crime guns as stolen from lawful owners. Thefts from lawful owners are hardly the prime source of crime guns. There is no research supporting claims that tighter gun storage laws yield public safety benefits (Greenwood, 2007; Lott 2016).

What are the trends?

Despite the small percentages of crime guns stolen from PAL holders, thefts of restricted or prohibited weapons rose by 27% from 2010 to 2015 (from 633 to 805). However, this increase is at least partially explained by the 41% jump in the number of legally owned restricted or prohibited weapons over the same 5-year time period (from 703,000 to 991,000). Not even one out of a thousand legally owned firearms were stolen in any given year. It is important to remember that all owners of restricted or prohibited weapons have been thoroughly vetted by the police and are monitored daily. It is a tribute to the trustworthiness of the lawful owners that a smaller percentage of lawful restricted or prohibited guns are being stolen. But the RCMP sees this as an excuse to crack down on PAL holders. If the police are concerned lawful owners, perhaps education would be more effective than threats and bluster. The wild gyrations in the numbers of thefts in 2002 and 2003 are not mirrored in trends of either violent crime or drug offences. Rather these wild swings are most likely due to problems with the computer system in the Canadian Firearms Program during the early years (Auditor General 2002). Setting up the CFP was enormously challenging, and necessitated the CFP being transferred from the Department of Justice to the RCMP.



Conclusions

I am quite concerned that the police would justify a change in enforcement policy with secret studies. NWEST's claims that BC gangsters now get 61% of their guns from domestic sources are unsubstantiated. This claim flies in the face of all available statistics implying that only 20% or so of crime guns are "domestically sourced," while around 80% of crime guns are smuggled. Moreover, few of the domestically sourced crime guns could have been stolen from lawful owners. The fact that police do not wish to admit is that large numbers of firearms have never been in the system – i.e., never registered or never owned by a licensed owner. Nor does the government publish the number of guns that were "lost or stolen" from the police or military. Cracking down on PAL holders targets innocent people and squanders valuable police resources. Recent police claims begin to look more like a public relations setup rather than an honest effort to deal with real problems. Illegal drugs remain big business and the United States is a close and tempting market for gangsters exchanging Canadian drugs for American weapons.

It is important to continuously police the police. While police are necessary in a democracy, they should not be above the law. If the police are not reigned in, abuses like these will continue.

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