

# The Canadian Long-Gun Registry: A Preliminary Evaluation<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In March 2012, eleven years after its introduction, Canada scrapped its controversial long-gun registry. Starting in 2001, farmers, hunters and target shooters had been required to register their long guns (shotguns and rifles). The political battle had been fierce. The country was sharply divided over the issue, urban vs. rural; the West vs. the East; men vs. women. The opposition parties, backed by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the media, bitterly resisted any change in the federal gun laws. Gun owners celebrated their freedom, but opponents predicted disaster.

International observers were shocked by Canada's decision to cancel the long-gun registry (LGR) because universal firearm registration is integral to the United Nations "Programme of Action" that underlies international efforts to control civilian firearms. In the 1990s Canada had joined Australia and the United Kingdom in passing exceptionally restrictive gun laws. South Africa had even used Canada's 1995 Firearms Act as the template for their Firearms Control Act in 2000. Despite ending the long-gun registry, Canada still maintains a strict gun control regime: a firearms licence is required to own a firearm, stringent regulations are in place for storing and transporting firearms, handguns remain registered, many military-style semi-automatic long guns are either prohibited or restricted, and fully-automatic firearms are prohibited.

Understanding why Canada abandoned the long-gun registry requires knowing why it had been introduced.<sup>1</sup> Thus, I briefly review the politics of 1990s including the rise of the Reform Party. In the second section I explore whether there is a link between the long-gun registry and murder rates. Effectiveness was at the heart of the political battle. Did the LGR influence homicide rates in general, and spousal homicide in particular? What role did the LGR play, if any, in reducing multiple-victim murders? Will its removal presage an increase in murder rates? Will more women die?

I conclude by arguing that gun control is fundamentally a cultural war. Firearms have been so successfully demonized that both sides, pro and con alike, have abandoned reasoned arguments in preference for political mobilization. The modern bureaucratic state does not readily relinquish power. Despite the systematic failure to find convincing evidence that general gun laws are effective in reducing violent crime, urban progressives cling stubbornly to their myths. It took the rise of the populist Reform Party to roll back Canadian gun laws. Canadian grass-roots organizations have demonstrated that they can overturn governmental policies, such as the long-gun registry, that are championed by elite groups but which lack strong public support. The battle over civilian firearms rights will continue.

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<sup>1</sup> The version submitted to JFPP

## Recent Canadian Firearm Laws

The Twentieth Century saw Canada, along with other countries in the British Commonwealth, increasingly tighten the noose on civilian gun owners. While the famous English jurist Sir William Blackstone asserted that English subjects have the right to carry arms for personal protection, this “right” appears to be somewhat diminished over the centuries. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides less protection for individual rights than the American Bill of Rights (Kopel 1992). It may not be surprising that there is nothing like the Second Amendment in the Charter of Rights, but other freedoms, such as freedom of speech, are also less protected in the UK and the British Commonwealth than under the Bill of Rights in the US.

By abandoning the long-gun registry Canada joined New Zealand as one of the few countries that have rolled back civilian gun laws (Thorp, 1997). In so doing Canada defied strong local and international pressures from progressive forces. In the past few decades Australia, England, and the European Union have introduced ever more onerous restrictions on civilian firearms. The pattern is well known: a public multiple-person shooting dominates the media for a few weeks or months, creating a moral panic, which is capitalized upon by organizations opposed to civilian ownership of firearms, leaving politicians rushing to pass yet another restriction in civilian gun rights. Outside of the United States, public debate is minimal since any attempt to defend gun owners is vilified or ignored by the media. Despite the seeming unanimity among the political elite and the media there is no convincing evidence that disarming law-abiding civilians protects society from criminal violence or suicidal killers.

The current Canadian firearms law is the 1995 Firearms Act (Bill C-68), which mandates universal firearm registration and owner licensing.<sup>2</sup> The Liberal Party of Canada<sup>3</sup> brought in the 1995 Federal Firearms Act after a horrendous multiple-victim shooting in 1989. Prior to this legislation, the provinces had assumed responsibility for long guns (rifles and shotguns) through provincial hunting regulations, while the Federal Government controlled handguns relying upon its constitutional role of protecting “peace, order and good government.”<sup>4</sup> This division had been upended in 1977 by the Federal Government’s introduction of the Firearms Acquisition Certificate (FAC) that required prospective gun purchasers to pass a criminal record check before purchasing a firearm.

In 1989, Gamil Gharbi murdered 14 female engineering students at the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal. Gharbi (who had changed his name to Marc Lépine) was the son of a wife-beating Algerian immigrant to Canada who, after his father abandoned his mother, knew whom to blame for his personal problems: liberated women. Police incompetence allowed Gharbi the time to kill at leisure. At the university, Gharbi ordered the males to leave the room, and, after they meekly complied, he shot the remaining women to death. Despite his stopping to change magazines during the carnage nobody attempted to intervene. The police arrived long after Gharbi had committed suicide. The Montreal coroner strongly criticized the police handling of the matter (Sourour, 1991),

while Canadian feminists blamed all men (Rebick, 2005). The media were dominated by strident calls for disarming men in order to “stop violence against women.”

Immediately after the Gharbi shootings, the government of the day, Brian Mulroney’s Progressive-Conservatives, introduced tighter gun controls on civilians (Bill C-17),<sup>5</sup> including prohibiting large-capacity magazines and semiautomatic military-style rifles, introducing safe-storage regulations, and stricter screening and training of prospective firearms purchasers. Thanks to Gharbi’s choice of the semiautomatic rifle marketed under the name Mini-14, a major focus of Bill C-17 was semiautomatic military-style guns. A series of Orders-in-Council prohibited a wide variety of semiautomatic firearms that had been converted from fully automatic, and also their high-capacity cartridge magazines. Ironically, the Mini-14 was neither restricted nor prohibited because of its popularity in Western Canada.

Bill C-17 tightened up the FAC system so that applicants were now required to provide a photograph and two references. Applicants had to take a safety-training course and an examination, and then wait a mandatory twenty-eight-day period before being allowed to acquire a firearm. The application form was expanded to screen applicants’ marital and medical qualifications as well as criminal involvement. If the applicant was married or divorced, one of the references was required to be from a spouse or former spouse. Police screened applicants by telephoning neighbors, spouses, and ex-spouses, if any. Other major changes included new explicit regulations for safe storage, handling, and transportation of firearms.

During this same time period (the early 1990s), public support for the Progressive-Conservatives was fast eroding. In the 1993 election, their backing splintered into three antagonistic factions, the Reform Party<sup>6</sup> in the west, the Bloc Québécois (the Quebec Party)<sup>7</sup>, and a minuscule rump retaining the Progressive-Conservative name. As a result, the Liberals handily won a majority in Parliament, and, in thrall to the feminist lobby, promptly introduced radical changes to Canada’s already strict gun laws (Bill C-68). This was the second gun law born of Gharbi’s murders.

When the Liberals came to power, they could not allow themselves to be outflanked by the Progressive-Conservatives on gun control, as both parties relied upon urban voters, so they rammed Bill C-68 through Parliament in 1995. Demonizing guns allowed progressives<sup>8</sup> to simultaneously manipulate the fears of both upscale urbanites as well as recent immigrants who tended to live in high-crime neighborhoods. Radical feminists<sup>9</sup> played a dominant role in shaping the progressives’ political calculations, but other forces, including antipathy to the United States (a long-standing Canadian idiosyncrasy), continued to play an important role.

Despite their mutual antagonism, three of the four opposition parties (Reform, Progressive-Conservative and New Democrat<sup>10</sup>) united against the legislation. The only opposition party to support the new gun law was the Bloc Québécois. In 2000, the Supreme Court of Canada rejected a constitutional challenge by six provincial governments (including Ontario, the most populous province) and ruled that the federal

gun law was justified under the “peace, order and good government” clause of the constitution.

The keystone of the Liberals’ Firearms Act (Bill C-68) was licensing: henceforth, owning a firearm, even a normal rifle or shotgun, was a criminal offence without holding a valid licence. Any person who allows a licence to expire is subject to arrest and having their firearms confiscated. Furthermore, long guns (rifles and shotguns) now had to be registered. The government prohibited over half of all registered handguns in Canada (the smaller styles of handguns that could be carried more easily concealed) and initiated plans to confiscate them. There was no evidence provided that these handguns had been misused. The Auditor General of Canada found that no evaluation of the effectiveness of the 1991 firearm legislation had ever been undertaken (Auditor General, 1993, pp. 647 - 655).

Bill C-68 became law on December 5, 1995 (the second gun law to commemorate the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women), but, because of the complexity of the regulations, it took until 1998 for the Canadian Firearms Centre (established as a program within the Justice Department) to begin issuing firearm licences and requiring gun buyers to register long guns. On January 2001, gun owners were required to have a licence and by July 2003 to register all rifles and shotguns in their possession. Not everyone complied, as C-68 was not popular among those affected. Approximately 65% of firearms owners are estimated to have registered at least one rifle or shotgun, and ultimately it became clear that no more than half of the country’s long guns ended up in the registry (Mauser 2007).

In addition to licensing owners and registering firearms, the Firearms Act of 1995 broadened police powers of search and seizure and expanded the types of officials who could make use of such powers; it weakened constitutionally protected rights against self-incrimination, and it imposed stricter requirements for obtaining a firearm licence (the application retained the personal questions required by the previous legislation and now required two personal references plus endorsements from current or former “conjugal partners”).

The Firearms Centre proved unable to cope. The Auditor General released a scathing report revealing stunning incompetence (Auditor General 2002a). Despite Allan Rock’s promises that the firearms program would cost only C\$2 million, the Auditor General only a few years later estimated that expenditures would exceed C\$1 billion by 2005. By 2012, the cumulative total had ballooned to more than C\$2.7 billion (Lott and Mauser, 2012). Fiscal and other irregularities uncovered by the Auditor General (December 2002a,b, 2006) including mismanagement, corruption and misleading Parliament, stimulated a parliamentary revolt. In 2003, Parliament established the Firearms Centre as a freestanding agency and imposed an annual spending cap. In 2006, responsibility for the Firearms Centre was transferred to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

Thanks to the continued disarray of the opposition, Jean Chrétien led the Liberals to victory in the two subsequent elections (1997 and 2000). However, fundamental changes

were taking place. Opposition to the Liberals' 1995 Firearms Act (Bill C-68) was intense from the beginning and continued unabated. But it was restricted to rural Canada. Opposition became more respectable following the Auditor General's 2002 report and the publication of a critical analysis of the 1995 Firearms Act by the influential Fraser Institute (Mauser, 1995). Grassroots anger helped to fuel the rise of the Reform Party and contributed to the virtual elimination of the Liberals in the West in 1997. Reform Party stalwart Garry Breitkreuz, MP (Yorkton-Melville, Saskatchewan), led the fight in Parliament by vociferously criticizing gun licensing and registration, pointing out their failings. Scrapping Bill C-68 was a staple campaign promise for the Reform Party while in opposition.

The Reform Party continued growing stronger. In 2003, the Reform Party merged with the Progressive-Conservatives to create the Conservative Party of Canada. The Liberal government fell in 2006 when the Auditor General's reports led to RCMP investigations of Liberal insiders. Arrests and convictions followed, and the Conservatives won a minority government under Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The Conservatives finally won a majority in 2011. By 2012, the Conservatives had managed to appoint a majority of Senators, and so controlled both branches of the Canadian government.

The Conservative majority victory inaugurated a fundamentally different style of government. In addition to ending the long-gun registry, Canada's first truly Conservative government scandalized the progressives by expanding individual rights to self-defence and by cracking down on violent criminals. Punishment overshadowed rehabilitation. Historic changes were not limited to the criminal code: the Conservatives staked out robust positions in the United Nations, such as strongly supporting Israel, and by casting cold water on feel-good initiatives such as the Kyoto climate change agreement and the Arms Trade Treaty.

Once Stephen Harper became Prime Minister, the Conservatives immediately moved to end the long-gun registry. The first effort, a private member's bill (Bill C-391) introduced by Candice Hoepfner, MP (Portage-Lisgar, Manitoba), was narrowly defeated (153 - 151) in 2010 in the House of Commons. The Conservatives had to wait until they had a majority in both the House and Senate. In 2012, Parliament voted to kill the long-gun registry in an intensely partisan battle in the House. Only two MPs broke ranks (both NDP representing rural ridings) to vote for Bill C-19, which was virtually identical to the earlier Bill C-391, and were promptly disciplined by their party leader. The bill was duly passed by the Senate and immediately proclaimed into law by the Governor General.

The long-gun registry is difficult to kill. Immediately following the passage of Bill C-19, a cabal of Chief Provincial Firearms Officers mandated that retailers must continue to maintain the same information as had been required by the long-gun registry.<sup>11</sup> This was widely viewed as a backdoor approach to setting up provincially controlled long-gun registries. The Federal Government quickly introduced new regulations carefully tailored to close this loophole. At the same time, the Quebec government launched a legal challenge to halt the destruction of the data in the long-gun registry so they could set up their own provincial registry. Still before the courts, Quebec continues to enforce the LGR

within its territory. This will ultimately be settled in the Supreme Court of Canada. Rumours persist that the RCMP continues to maintain unauthorized versions of the LGR.

The Conservatives' decision to scrap the LGR was the first major installment of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's campaign promise to change firearm legislation in order to focus on criminals rather than hunters and farmers. Since the abandonment of the LGR, the Prime Minister has taken other steps to relax the burden of firearms regulations. The most recent came on July 2014 when Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney announced legislation to reduce red tape in firearm regulations, restrict the ability of Chief Firearms Officers (CFOs) to make arbitrary decisions, and to create a grace period at the end of a five-year licence expiry to prevent criminal charges for the technical offence of expired paperwork.

Will scrapping the long-gun registry endanger public safety?

It is still too soon to properly evaluate after abandonment of the LGR, as only one year of crime data is available since its demise. However, a prediction of what will happen after the demise of the LGR can be derived from its eleven years of operation.

In this section, I will examine homicide rates, including spousal homicides and multiple-victim murders, as well consider the accused's criminal history, and the legal status of the murder weapon. This is the first published analysis of the homicide data for the full eleven-year period that the LGR was in effect. Thanks to a series of Special Requests I made to Statistics Canada for unpublished data, it is now possible to look at specific types of homicides, such as spousal murders (1995-2012) and multiple-victim murders (1974-2012), as well as to explore the legal status of the murder weapon. The value of universal licensing and firearms registration is put into question if few violent offenders hold a firearms licence and if virtually no murder weapons are registered.

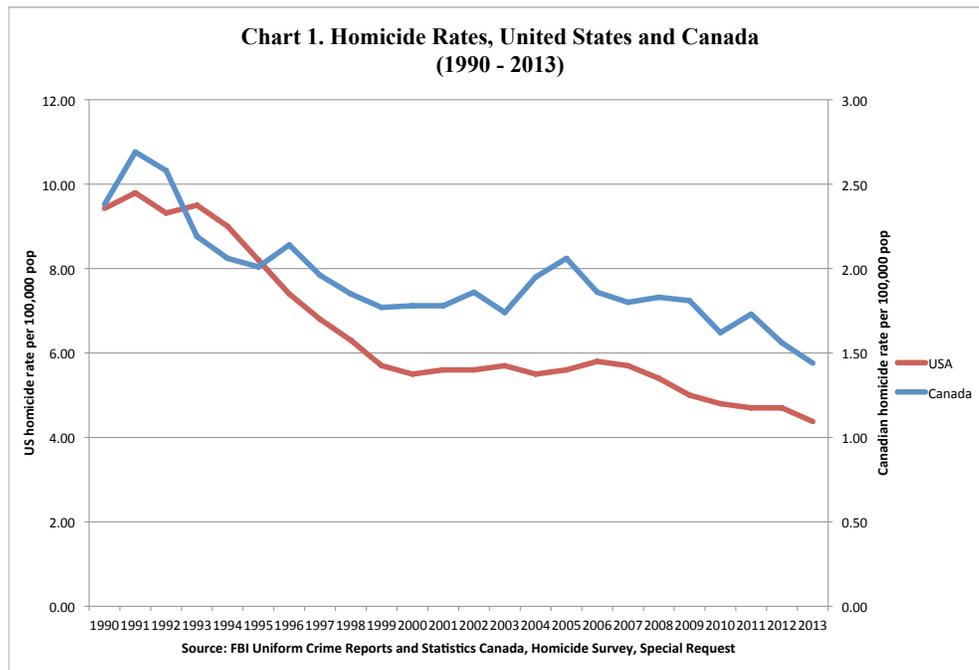
It is important to remember that while the long-gun registry was included along with licensing in the 1995 Firearms Act, it took until 2001 to require owners to get a firearms licence and until 2003 to mandate the registration of long guns. This long lag was due to the immense challenge of creating the bureaucracy to implement licensing and registration.

First, was registering long-guns associated with a fall in murder rates?

After the introduction of the long-gun registry Canadian homicide rates continued to fall at the same rate (or more slowly) as they had before. Canadian homicide rates have been declining intermittently since the 1970s, but no solid evidence has been found linking any of Canadian gun laws to this slide (Dandurand, 1998; Langmann 2011; Mauser 2007). Langmann's work masterfully confirmed earlier academic findings: "This study failed to demonstrate a beneficial association between legislation and firearm homicide rates

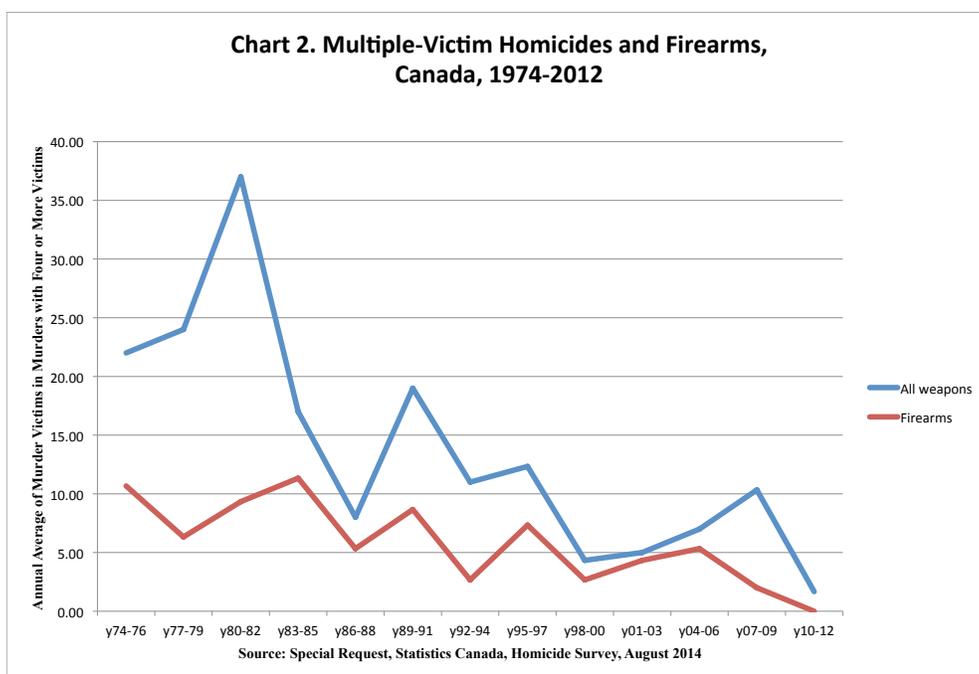
between 1974 and 2008.” There is not a single refereed academic study by criminologists or economists that has found a significant benefit from the Canadian gun laws.

One way to visually evaluate Canadian gun laws is to compare Canada with the United States. It is difficult to argue that Canadian gun laws are effective when homicide rates dropped faster in the United States than in Canada over the same time period (1991 to 2012). During these years, increasing numbers of Americans obtained permits to carry concealed handguns while gun laws in Canada became progressively restrictive. The homicide rate fell 55% in the US from the peak in 1991 to 2012 but slid just 46% in Canada. Even after the introduction of the LGR in 2003, rates dropped faster in the US than in Canada (dropping 23% in the US to 17% in Canada). Apparently, allowing civilians to carry concealed handguns about town is at least as effective in reducing murder rates as Canada’s restrictive gun laws.



The failure of the long-gun registry to influence homicide rates can also be seen by comparing homicide rates before and after the implementation of the long-gun registry in 2003. The homicide rate fell no faster after long guns were required to be registered in 2003 than before. Between 1991 and 2002, the homicide rate fell 31% but just 17% from 2003 to 2012. The decline is roughly 2 points per year both before and after the introduction of the LGR.

Some have suggested that gun control is particularly useful in reducing multiple-victim murders. In this view, restricting access to firearms would not only bring down multiple-victim shootings, but would also cause a decline in the total numbers of multiple-victim murders. As can be seen in Chart 2 the long-gun registry has had no obvious influence on the rate of multiple shootings or multiple-victim murders. The annual number of multiple-victim shootings continued its long irregular decline that began in the 1970s at roughly the same rate after the LGR was introduced. High-profile shootings occurred even after the long-gun registry came into force (e.g., Justin Bourque in Moncton, New Brunswick in 2014; Kimver Gill at Montreal’s Dawson College in 2006, James Roszko at Mayerthorp in 2005, and the murder of six people in an apartment building in Surrey by the Red Scorpion drug gang in 2007).



The Canadian findings are consistent with international research. There is no convincing empirical support for claiming that laws restricting general civilian access to firearms are effective in reducing homicide rates either in the United States or elsewhere, such as Australia (Baker and McPhedran, 2008; McPhedran, et al., 2010). In general, laws that restrict access to particular instruments such as firearms have not been found to influence the murder rate (See Kates and Mauser, 2007; Kleck, 1991, 1997; Mauser, 2008). Criminologists typically argue that demographics, not firearms laws, better explain the decline in Canadian homicides (e.g., Abma, 2011).

Second, do firearms owners pose a threat to public safety and need to be monitored?

Firearms certainly can be misused, but it approaches paranoia for the police to develop computer routines to screen the database of firearms licence holders every night. Under the current regime law-abiding citizens who own firearms are monitored nightly for outstanding warrants, court orders or firearm prohibitions. This is irrational, overly intrusive and diverts police resources from more serious threats to public safety. Available statistics show that law-abiding gun owners are much less likely to be murderous than other Canadians. This should not surprise: firearms owners have been screened for criminal records since 1979, and it has been illegal since 1992 for people with a violent record to own a firearm.

Gun owners may be compared with other Canadians by calculating the homicide rate per 100,000. Statistics Canada reports that 194 licensed gun owners were accused of committing murder over the 16-year period (1997-2012), or an average of 12 owners per year out of an annual average of 2 million licensed firearms owners. This gives a homicide rate of 0.60 per 100,000 licensed gun owners. Over the same 16-year period, there were 9,315 homicides in total, or an average national homicide rate of 1.81 per 100,000 people in the general population. In other words, licensed Canadian firearms owners are less likely to commit murder than other Canadians. Or to put this another way, Canadians who do not have a firearms licence are three times more likely to commit murder than those who do (Mauser 2014).

Third, are long guns the weapons of choice in domestic homicides?

Supporters of the registry argue that since ordinary rifles and shotguns are often used in domestic homicides, they should be registered in order to aid police in identifying their owners. Registration, it is claimed, encourages responsible use as well as pinpointing anyone who has misused a firearm.

In fact, the long-gun registry and licensing are rarely needed by police to solve spousal homicides: first, in almost all cases the murderer is immediately identified, and secondly few firearms used by abusive spouses to kill their wives are possessed legally.

An analysis of a Special Request to Statistics Canada found that just 4% of long guns involved in homicide were registered that and only 24% of homicide suspects who used a firearm had a valid FAC or firearms licence (Mauser 2012a).

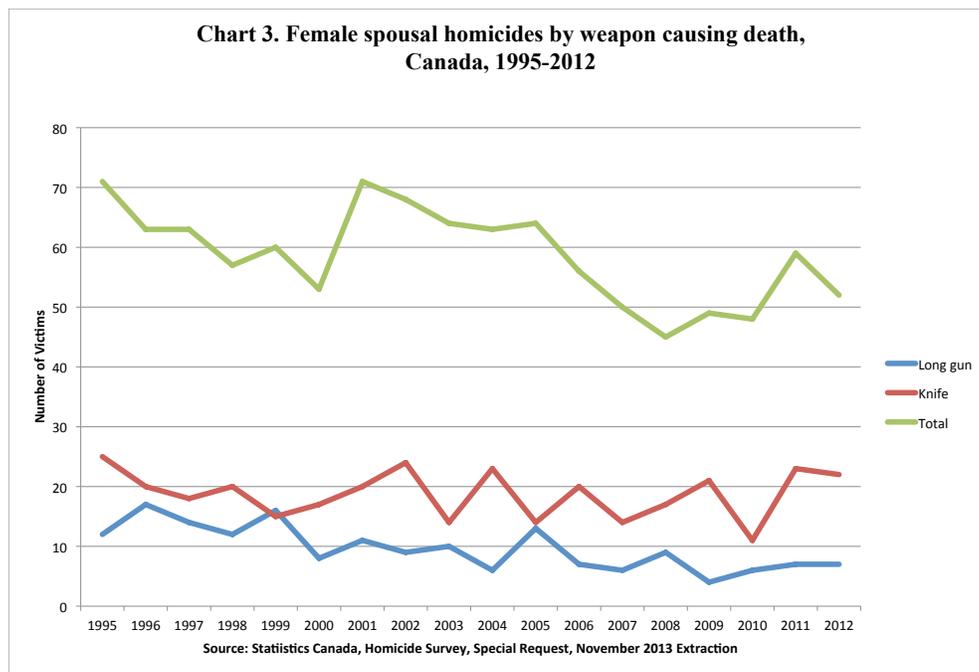
Most spouses (65%) accused of homicide had a history of violence involving the victim (Sinha 2012). Approximately two-thirds of those accused of homicide were known to have a Canadian criminal record; the majority of these were previously convicted of violent offences. Over one-half of the victims were also known to have a Canadian criminal record; most had been convicted of violent offences (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005).

Every home has a variety of objects, such as baseball bats, hammers, or kitchen knives that can be used for assault or murder. Spousal murderers are opportunistic in that they use whatever implements are available to them to kill. Creating an expensive bureaucracy to register one or more of these items does nothing to protect vulnerable women.

In the period 1995-2012, there were approximately 585 homicides and 59 female spousal murders in Canada each year; long guns are involved in the deaths of 10 female spouses. The most common weapons in spousal murders are knives and not firearms. In the period 1995-2012, knives were used in 32% of the murders of female spouses (Mauser, 2014). Firearms of any kind were used in 27% of homicides of female spouses.

Fourth, did spousal murders with guns fall after the law was passed even though spousal murders without guns remain the same?

Spousal murders (both with and without guns) have slowly been declining since the mid-1970s (Sinha 2011). See Chart 3.



Firearms are involved in a small percentage of spousal homicides. Knives, clubs, fists and feet are much more prevalent. Knives or cutting instruments are used in 39% of spousal homicides, firearms of any kind 25%, and a long gun in 15%. The total female spousal

murder rate has been slowly if irregularly declining since 1979. There is no discernible change after 2001 when the long-gun registry began. Over this same time frame, the percentage of homicides involving guns has declined at approximately the same rate. Since the decline in spousal murders is a long-term trend, it is logically incorrect to link it to legislation that came into force only in the last few years.

Fifth, is the long-gun registry an important tool for the police?

Proponents of the registry claim that the police use the long-gun registry 16,000 to 17,000 times daily and therefore it is valuable. Besides mistaking frequency of use with usefulness, this claim is disingenuous in that it confuses the long-gun registry with the Canadian Firearms Registry On-line (CFRO) that contains information about the owner of the firearm.

During the ten years from 2003 to 2012, there were 5,952 homicides; 1,819 of those involved firearms. Statistics Canada reports that only 166 were registered (9.1%). In just 95 cases – that is only 5.2 percent of all firearm homicides – was the gun registered to the accused. Only 54 of these 95 cases involved long-guns; thus, less than 3 percent of firearms homicides involved long-guns registered to the accused. (Mauser 2014)

The small number of cases involved registered long-guns implies that eliminating the long-gun registry could not meaningfully compromise law enforcement's ability to trace firearms in Canada, as registered firearms are involved in only 5.2% of firearm homicides and 1% of all homicides. Predictably, the police have not been able to say that the long-gun registry identified any murderer from tracing a firearm in these few cases.

Nor has the long-gun registry proved useful in solving police killings. Since 1961, 123 police have been shot and killed. Only one of these murders involved a registered long gun, and it did not belong to the murderer. Once again, the registry could not have been useful to the police in identifying the killer.

The long-gun registry has reduced the effectiveness of the police by driving a wedge between them and responsible citizens who own firearms. Including firearms licences in criminal databases encourages police to confuse law-abiding citizens with criminals. This does not encourage public cooperation. Police distance themselves further from the public by no longer shooting at public gun ranges alongside fellow citizens; they now have their own private ranges. The bewildering complexity of firearms laws means that many individuals are uncertain if they have unknowingly violated a firearm law. Such confusion provokes distrust in both police and civilians alike. Rightly or wrongly, the public increasingly feels like the police are searching for ways to confiscate their firearms.

Treating honest citizens as if they were criminals violates the basic principles of Sir Robert Peel, the father of modern policing. The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon the public approval of police actions. Police must secure the willing co-operation of the public in voluntary observation of the law to be able to secure and

maintain the respect of the public. If not, the police begin to resemble a military occupying force.

Sixth, does the registry help the police by letting them know who has firearms?

The long-gun registry *ipso facto* contains no information about unregistered firearms, and less than half of the Canadian firearm stock has been registered (Mauser 2007). Unsurprisingly, the most dangerous criminals have not registered their firearms. Trusting the registry can get police officers killed. The failure of the registry to signal a firearm owner at a residence does not rule out a firearm being there.

When police approach a dangerous person or situation, they must assume there could be an illegal weapon. The police need information they can trust. Experienced police officers who work on the front lines say they do not find the registry helpful (Grismer, 2011; Hansen, 2012).

In summary, Canadian homicide rates have been declining intermittently since the 1970s, but no solid evidence has been found linking any of the Canadian gun laws to this slide, including the long-gun registry. Available statistics show that law-abiding gun owners are much less likely to be murderous than other Canadians. An analysis of a Special Request to Statistics Canada found that less than 3% of long guns involved in homicide were registered to the accused, and that only 24% of homicide suspects who used a firearm had a valid FAC or licence. Spousal murders (both with and without guns) have slowly been declining since the mid-1970s. The long-gun registry did not have a measurable effect on the spousal homicide rate. Importantly, registered firearms were involved in only 4.7% of firearm homicides and 1% of all homicides. The registry is not useful to police because it cannot alert them to the existence of unregistered guns. Only half of Canada's gunstock has been registered. Trusting the registry can get police officers killed. In a period of tight police budgets, it is difficult to justify the \$C70 million annual cost of the Firearms Program when it focuses exclusively on law-abiding citizens.

## Conclusions

In summary, the available data suggest that Canadian homicide rates are likely to continue declining after the demise of the long-gun registry. No convincing evidence has been found that the long-gun registry has acted to reduce homicide rates, so logically its end would not be expected to produce an increase.

Homicide rates dropped faster in the United States than in Canada, despite an increasing number of Americans deciding to carry concealed handguns over the past two decades. The long-gun registry had no observable impact on spousal murder rates. The total female spousal murder rate has been slowly if irregularly declining since 1979. Importantly, there was no discernible change after 2001 when the long-gun registry began. The long-gun registry has had no obvious influence on the rate of multiple shootings or multiple-victim

murders. The annual number of multiple-victim shootings continued its long irregular decline that began in the 1970s, at roughly the same rate both before and after the LGR was introduced. Despite the failure of the long-gun registry to reduce criminal violence, many progressives as well as the Association of Chiefs of Police refuse to admit that it was ineffective.

Canada only started rolling back the gun laws, including the long-gun registry, when the Conservative Party of Canada won power. The CPC is committed to conservative ideas, such as limited government, punishing criminals, and the importance of the nuclear family. The CPC built a coalition of social and fiscal conservatives, including recent immigrants (called “visible minorities” in Canada) and rural gun owners. It is not beholden to urban progressives. It is impressive that Conservatives can maintain power despite the continued dominance of the media by the progressives and the opposition of the police bureaucracy who remain in the thrall of those who oppose civilian ownership of firearms.

The Conservatives’ majority government represents a sea change in Canadian politics and has the potential to dramatically shift the national culture. The rise of the Reform Party and Conservative Party meant the end of consensual politics. The Conservative Party was the ideological opponent of the progressive parties that had dominated Canada since WWII. The fusion of the Reform Party with the Progressive-Conservatives under the leadership of Stephen Harper imbued the new Conservative Party with the libertarian and conservative values that drove the Reform Party.

Scrapping the long-gun registry was the first real step in Prime Minister Harper’s campaign promise to dismantle the overly bureaucratic and expensive firearms legislation. Hysteria over guns had created an oppressive regime for law-abiding gun owners. Blaming guns allowed politicians to simultaneously be seen to do something while skating past their inability to stop the drug gangs that continued to thrive and break many laws involving violence. The Conservative revolution has just begun. Many needed changes remain to be made in policing and corrections.

The political battle over civilian firearms reflects a deeper cultural war. Gun control is not a policy area amenable to rational negotiation. Faith in tighter controls over citizen firearms approaches the fervor of a religious belief for many progressives. Old-fashioned political organizing was required to win elections, and continue winning elections, in order to replace progressives with conservatives. Firearms owners were one of the key constituents of the populist Reform movement, and they continue to be crucial for the Harper Conservatives. The conservative coalition has endured for over twenty years to date. However, the jury is still out whether the shooting community will continue to provide political support for the CPC, as newer issues come to the fore, or whether their commitment will fade. Historically, populist groups collapse after winning early victories. If this happens, the CPC will drift back to normal politics, driven by the need for votes to rely upon urban progressives. The goal of any political party is to win and maintain political power.

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Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> This essay updates an earlier article that appeared in the *Journal on Firearms and Public Policy* (2012) and includes the most recent crime statistics.

<sup>2</sup> For more detail about Canadian firearms legislation, see Mauser (2007 and 2012b,c).

<sup>3</sup> The Liberal Party of Canada is a progressive or left-leaning party. In North America, “liberal” refers to socially liberal. Outside of North America, “liberal” implies classical liberalism, i.e., promoting free trade and private property rights while opposing both socialism and traditional conservatism.

<sup>4</sup> “Peace, order and good government” is the introductory phrase of section 91 of the Canadian Constitution Act, 1867, that outlines the scope of the legislative jurisdiction of the federal Parliament.

<sup>5</sup> Bill C-17 became law on December 5, 1991 to coincide with the “National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women,” (a memorial to Gharbi’s victims).

<sup>6</sup> Preston Manning, an evangelical Christian, founded the Reform Party in order to give Western Canada a voice in national politics. Reform was a populist party that advocated smaller and more democratic government, balanced budgets, higher political morality, and the repeal of the 1995 Liberal gun law.

<sup>7</sup> The Bloc Québécois is a party that was founded to create a sovereign Quebec. It held and lost two referendums on independence.

<sup>8</sup> “Progressive” refers to those who espouse socially liberal policies, e.g., the expanding welfare state, active governmental involvement in social issues, such as gay rights, opposition to abortion legislation, and restrictive controls on civilian firearms.

<sup>9</sup> “Radical feminism” refers to a branch of feminism that views women as victims of the “patriarchy”; more specifically, it blames men for family violence and assumes women are blameless victims. One of the government-funded groups pushing for stricter gun control was the National Action Committee for the Status of Women. See Delacourt (2000) and Rebick (2005).

<sup>10</sup> The Canadian New Democratic Party is a socialist, left-leaning political party, akin to Labour parties in the UK and Australia.

<sup>11</sup> The CFOs argued that this power was pursuant to Section 58 of the Firearms Act, wherein a Chief Firearms Officer (CFO) who issues a business licence may attach any reasonable condition (including written record-keeping) on a business licence in their jurisdiction establishing what activities a business can undertake, as well as conditions CFO considers desirable in the particular circumstances and in the interest of public safety.