

## **An Election-Eve appeal to Voters and Party Leaders Violence-by-gun is still an open issue for Canadians**

This is an appeal to those voters still deciding for whom they will vote on election day, tomorrow, September 20, from the Danforth Families for Safe Communities. We'd like to remind those Canadians who are voting on election day, of an issue that is a critical consideration in this election, and appeal to each party leader that, regardless of outcome, Canadians need better gun laws and regulations to achieve the public safety outcomes that other like-minded countries' citizens enjoy. <sup>1</sup> This is also a request to each leader who leads a national party and might be the next Prime Minister of Canada.

That violence-by-gun has been back in the headlines during this election is unfortunate. The current government campaigned on, and were elected in 2015, on a platform where gun control was featured as a major issue, and they were re-elected in 2019 where again promises were made to stem violence-by-gun. During their mandate, the government moved with insufficient urgency to implement needed laws and regulations that could have helped to stem some of violent outcomes we have seen. Instead of "control", more Canadians than ever were granted licences to own restricted weapons. By the end of 2019, Canadian ownership of restricted weapons had grown to 1,057,418, which constitutes an average of approximately 65,000 additional weapons per year, and a 32% growth in the total number owned. <sup>2</sup> In the same period, the number of gun-related incidents of harm increased - from 3,544 in 2019 to 4,137 in 2020, a 15 per cent increase and the sixth consecutive annual increase <sup>3</sup>.

Rather than looking backward, let's instead consider the path forward, with a view to putting into balance, the interest of legitimate sports shooters and hunters, with the broader interest of national public safety.

Most of us are prepared to accept a sports and hunting use case that is widespread. Hunting with guns can provide a source of food for some and/or represent a way of life, which necessitates the prudent ownership of certain rifles and shotguns. No victims or gun control advocacy group has raised issue with most of the estimated 8-10 million hunting rifles and shotguns sitting in Canadian homes for such a purpose, except to point out that homes with guns, including these kinds of guns, have a higher suicide rate than those without, and that suicide by firearm leads to more deaths than homicides in Canada <sup>4</sup>. Both issues are tragic and we support the stand of health care experts that the remedy to death by suicide from hunting rifles and shotguns is a public health response, and improved use of red flag laws.

Restricted weapons are the focus where greater prohibition and restriction are required. There are about 1.1 million in total <sup>2</sup>, or about 10% of the estimated guns in circulation, which are either handguns, the weapon of choice in most gun crime, or assault-style semi-automatic weapons, the weapon of choice in most mass shootings. Before anyone objects to the use of the term "assault style weapon" just, as an example, type "IWI X95" into your favourite search engine,

read the manufacturer's <sup>5</sup> and some retailer's <sup>6</sup> own description of the rifle's bona fides, and you will see it is the industry itself that reinforces "assault" and "combat" to the public. By the way, the IWI X95 is a non-restricted rifle.

On September 13, the families of Dawson College in Montreal commemorated a date we're sure they wish did not want to exist. It was 15 years ago (2006) that a mass shooting took place in that school by a person licensed to own guns. From their statement:

"The Dawson killer was the legal owner of a legal Beretta CX4 Storm with a legal 10-bullet magazine and a legal handgun, both of which (were) used to shoot 20 people including Anastasia De Sousa who was shot twelve times at close range" <sup>7</sup>

All parties, through their leaders' statements during the campaign, have declared that the designated assault style rifles, identified by the last government by Order in Council in May 2020, should be permanently removed from Canadian homes through buy back, or irreversibly disabled if retained by the owner. Truly removing and/or disabling assault-style is a significant promise and step forward by all parties, and hopefully such declarations are sincere.

The Dawson College letter, fifteen years after the incident occurred, is a sobering reminder of the long-lasting effect that each and every incident of violence-by-gun has on its victims. In the past few weeks, articles have been published that show that violence-by-gun incidents are not going away and new victims are being created with disturbing frequency. A casual survey of recent reporting from across the nation reveals that gun violence is a national issue. In the Byward Market in Ottawa <sup>8</sup>. In London, Ontario <sup>9</sup>. In Edmonton, Alberta<sup>10</sup>. In Montreal, Quebec <sup>11</sup>. In Surrey, BC <sup>12</sup>. In Calgary, Alberta. <sup>13</sup> In Tent Hills, ON <sup>14</sup>. ... We could go on. In the City of Toronto, 1100 persons were killed or injured by guns between 2016 and 2020, which is an average of 222 per year or 46% more per year, on average, compared to the 152 incidents in 2015. <sup>15</sup>

What has been the response of local government? In Montreal, Valerie LaPlante organized the mayors of the five largest cities in Quebec to demand action, federally, on gun violence <sup>16</sup>. Ms LaPlante reiterated her call for a national ban on the private ownership of guns. In the last election, we saw a similar call for federal action – not local empowerment - by the mayors of the Greater Toronto Area <sup>17</sup>. In the past few years we have seen other mayors speak up in a similar way, expecting action at a federal level. If the policy objective should be about supporting local municipalities, it seems that the desires of those who are responsible for several large municipalities is clear. The only mystery is that no party seems to be listening to the very leaders they purport to support.

Not knowing the outcome of the election at the time of writing, and in consideration of the party platforms<sup>18</sup>, we offer the following advice to each of the leaders of the national parties

that could form the next government, with the hope that such advice, if taken, will save others from being victimized by guns.

Dear Mr Trudeau:

If you are returned to office, make good on your higher ideal of stemming gun violence. Your comments on this topic usually start the right way, uttering that the growing incidents of gun violence are unacceptable. Now follow through, fully and completely, on what is required. You have rightly improved the assault weapon measure proposed in Bill C21 from the last parliament, and you have committed to a mandatory buyback or permanent disablement of these weapons of choice for mass murders. You have also proposed specific funding for youth-at-risk and community-based programs, which hopefully will find its way into effective programs for the neighbourhoods that need this. You have taken some steps, with more work to be done, on retail record retention, gun storage and transportation regulations, and background checks to ensure those entrusted with ownership of guns can indeed be trusted. But the number one issue, in terms of the threat to Canadians, is the growth of both the legal and illegal supply of handguns in this country. You need to deliver on tighter border controls, which you have pledged to do. In addition, you need to stop allowing more handguns to enter our country for private ownership, which then pose a risk of theft, diversion or illegal use. Cease to issue any more RPALs for handgun use. Put into effect a strategy that eliminates private ownership of handguns through a program of retirement and buy back, over a reasonable but firm multi-year period. Listen to the majority of those that elected you, others in your caucus, victim's groups, doctors, women's groups, municipal leaders, the editorial boards of prominent newspapers, and the public at large<sup>19</sup>. Accept the responsibility to solve the handgun menace at a federal level, just as removing assault style weapons needed federal action.

Dear Mr. O'Toole:

As a person who served in the military, surely you recognize that guns are first and foremost designed to be weapons. To kill. To maim. To threaten and menace your enemy. Not some benign collectible. Not some accessory to a sport that is just like, for example, a football or a curling stone. As the leader of the law-and-order party, and the party of economic conservatism, surely the question should be, given the criminal threat and economic cost, why do we need certain kinds of guns in our society? Why put a strain on law enforcement, the health system, and most citizens by tolerating the wide distribution of handguns that have very little utility and pose such risk to fellow humans. These are not the tools of hunters and outdoor sportspeople. Prominent "pro gun" groups that have been lobbying you, by their own web sites, publish that gun ownership is about the right to own whatever one wants, and the ability to protect personal property. There is also expressed support for concealed carry of weapons<sup>20</sup>. Is concealed carry required in sport shooting? This thinking is the path to the tragic results we see in the US related to violence-by-gun. Your promise to consult Canadians and offer a



simplified gun classification and licensing is worrisome if this consultation is dominated by input from those who would de-emphasize public safety concerns, and instead provide a path to hassle-free stockpiling of deadly weapons.

Dear Mr. Singh:

Your party's seeming lack of regard and engagement on violence-by-gun is puzzling. We offer the following example. CTV aired a debate on gun control, hosted by Evan Solomon<sup>21</sup>. When asked about the NDP position, the NDP candidate for the Danforth riding in Toronto tried to change the subject and deflect the issue to a discussion on vaccines. Maybe that was done because there is no real platform for the NDP. If the NDP wants to represent the Danforth, and if they want to govern the country, they have to engage on the significance of violence-by-gun. Do not ignore the national significance of this issue, including the tragic experience of the many, many Danforth and GTA families affected when July 22, 2018 occurred. Mr Singh, if you are Prime Minister, or hold a balance of power, hopefully you will recognize this issue as being important to all Canadians, and you'll choose to engage more fully.

For our group, the Danforth Families for Safe Communities, who were reluctantly drawn into the gun control debate by the loss of life and injury and menace that occurred at 10pm on July 22, 2018, on a busy street in Toronto, by use of a legally imported gun diverted to criminal use, we are now watching and listening to the various political parties as this election proceeds.

There is still plenty of room for the victorious party to get this right when in power, and to commit to a course of action that puts gun ownership into proper balance with public safety - a balance the majority of Canadians want to see changed from the status quo as well as better than what has been promised by any party.

The Danforth Families for Safe Communities.

## **Links and Sources**

1

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gun-deaths-by-country>

2

<https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/firearms/2019-commissioner-firearms-report>

3

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00010-eng.htm>

4

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2019/09/13/dont-ignore-gun-control-in-preventing-suicides.html?rf>

<https://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/cohen-most-canadian-gun-deaths-are-suicides-we-need-tighter-controls>

5

<https://iwi.net/iwi-x95/>

6

<https://gun-shop.ca/product/iwi-x95-5-56mm-18-6-fde-pre-order/>

7

[https://polysesouvient.ca/Documents/PRSS\\_21\\_09\\_13\\_Dawson\\_Students\\_Victims\\_CallToVote\\_rs.pdf](https://polysesouvient.ca/Documents/PRSS_21_09_13_Dawson_Students_Victims_CallToVote_rs.pdf)

8

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/byward-market-shooting-clarence-street-1.6166044>

9

<https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/first-year-western-university-student-mourned-after-near-campus-killing>

10

<https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/edmonton-police-seeing-rise-in-guns-seized-from-vehicles>

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<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/montreal-police-investigating-overnight-gunshots-in-two-boroughs>

12

<https://bc.ctvnews.ca/1-sent-to-hospital-in-2nd-shooting-at-surrey-home-in-under-a-month-1.5565926>

13

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7960386/calgary-police-gun-violence-report/>

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<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/09/17/police-hunting-suspect-in-trent-hills-ont-shooting.html>

15

<https://data.torontopolice.on.ca/pages/shootings>

16

<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/quebecs-biggest-cities-call-for-firm-commitment-to-fighting-gun-violence>

17

<https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2019/10/01/at-trudeau-event-gta-mayors-say-they-support-a-national-handgun-ban.html>

18

Liberal platform: <https://liberal.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/292/2021/09/Platform-Forward-For-Everyone.pdf> See page 64

Conservative platform: <https://cpcassets.conservative.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/08200659/e4cd8c0115c3ea0.pdf> See pages 89-90

NDP platform: <https://www.ndp.ca/commitments> See section on Strong Communities

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The [Angus Reid Institute](#) published a survey on May 1, 2020, that plainly shows 67% of Canadians want a ban on handguns. [Ipsos](#) Canada published a survey on gun control on May 28, 2020, where 71% of respondents indicated that “the federal government’s legislation (related to assault weapons) should also include a ban on all handguns”.

A third survey, made public for the first time today, commissioned by the Montreal based gun control advocacy group PolySeSouvient, asked whether Canadians felt the decision to ban handguns should be federally determined or left to municipalities. The [EnviroNics Research poll](#) shows a full **69% of Canadians** prefer gun control laws banning or further restricting handguns to be national and applied uniformly across the country, as opposed to having the federal government work with municipal governments to allow for local bans or further restrictions on handguns



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<https://firearmrights.ca/15-7-self-defence/>

<https://firearmrights.ca/15-10-concealed-or-open-carry/>

<https://nfa.ca/about/about-the-nfa/>

21

CTV debate -NDP comment at 4 minutes 15 seconds

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2273294>

#### About Danforth Families for Safe Communities

DFSC is a group of survivors, families, friends and community members impacted by the shooting tragedy on Danforth Avenue, Toronto, Canada, on July 22, 2018, where a young girl and a teenager were killed and 13 were shot by a lone gunman. The DFSC have come together in the wake of our tragedy to share our views and experience, in the hope that others will not have to experience anything similar.

<https://www.danforthfamilies.com>

[danforthfamiliesc@gmail.com](mailto:danforthfamiliesc@gmail.com)

@DanforthFSC

416-580-3184