

# The Liberals are playing dishonest games with stats to crack down on legal gun owners

While the Liberal party sees gun control as a possible 'wedge' issue, StatsCan simply has no evidence to support their claims

By Gary Mauser and Vincent Harinam, National Post - August 17, 2018

<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/the-liberals-are-playing-dishonest-games-with-stats-to-crack-down-on-legal-gun-owners>

The Toronto and Fredericton shootings all but guarantee that gun control will become a key political issue in next year's federal election. With their momentum interrupted by their indecisiveness on the Trans Mountain pipeline, the Liberal party sees gun control as a possible "wedge" issue.

Officially known as An Act to Amend Certain Acts and Regulations in Relation to Firearms, Bill C-71 assumes that constricting the lawful sale and use of firearms will reduce criminal violence.

The draft legislation proposes new provisions that augment existing measures. These include: extending background checks to cover a buyer's life history (instead of just the past five years), reinstating the requirement for request permits to transport restricted firearms to gun shops or gun shows, and unleashing the RCMP to restrict or prohibit firearms. Firearm vendors must also retain sales information for 20 years, a move decried by some as a "backdoor gun registry."

According to Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale, Bill C-71 is a response to substantial increases in gun violence since 2013. It is legislation driven and justified by the empirical evidence. Or so it would seem.

In actuality, the statistical basis for Bill C-71 is particularly weak. Its reliance on faulty assumptions regarding crime and firearms breaks with the government's promise of legislation tempered by "evidence-based decision making."

Minister Goodale's assertion that "gun homicides are up by two-thirds since 2013" should concern Canadians. After all, that's quite an increase. But why select 2013 as the baseline for comparison?

2013 was a year of historical lows, a statistical outlier of sorts. According to Statistics Canada, 2013 had the lowest police-recorded crime rate since 1969. In fact, it had the lowest rate of

criminal homicides in 50 years (1.45 per 100,000) as well as the lowest rate of fatal shootings ever recorded by Statistics Canada (0.38 per 100,000).

By selecting a year of record lows, marginal increases in succeeding years are made to look like significant surges. This explains Minister Goodale's decision to use four years (2013 to 2016) of crime data instead of the standard five. Selecting 2012 as the point of comparison would weaken the perception that gun violence had increased precipitously.

In truth, gun homicides have not exploded. They have regressed to normal levels prior to 2013. In fact, Canada's crime rate has steadily declined since the 1990s.

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What's more, Bill C-71 misunderstands the nature and frequency of violent crime. Most crimes in Canada are neither violent nor involve a firearm.

In 2016, violent crime made up 20 per cent of all Criminal Code offences. In fact, 78 per cent of violent crimes did not involve a weapon. When a weapon is used, either a knife or a blunt instrument is preferred. "Other weapons" account for 19 per cent of weapons-related offences. Only three per cent of violent crimes involved a firearm in 2016. This rate oscillated between 1.9 per cent and 2.3 per cent between 2009 and 2014. Since 1995, knife-related and firearm-related homicides have kept apace, perpetually trading places as the most common homicide method in Canada.

If we are adopting a public safety measure based on lives lost, why hasn't Bill C-71 targeted knives? After all, of the four years used in Minister Goodale's assessment, three (2013, 2014 and 2015) had more knife homicides than gun homicides.

Nevertheless, Bill C-71 fails to address the area where gun violence has actually risen over the past 20 years: gangs.

Gang violence has steadily risen since the 1990s, increasing from under 10 per cent of all homicides in 1999 to 24 per cent in 2016. Importantly, the 20-per-cent increase in homicides between 2013 and 2016 was driven by an astonishing 68-per-cent increase in gang-related homicides over that period. In 2016, 54 per cent of all firearm-related homicides were gang-related.

However, this rise in gang violence is concentrated in urban zones. From 2013 to 2016, gang-related homicides doubled in metropolitan areas. Though rates of firearm violence in urban and rural areas are comparable, a large proportion of violent crime occurs in rural First

Nations Reserves. In fact, Minister Goodale suggested that new drug markets were driving gangs into Indigenous communities.

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Crucially, Bill C-71's focus on the legal means of firearm ownership disregards illegal channels. The firearms used by gangs are generally smuggled into Canada as part of the drug trade. Analyses of guns recovered from criminal activity in various Canadian cities show that over two-thirds were smuggled.

This is not to suggest that illegal firearms cannot be acquired domestically. However, the claim that there has been an increase in straw purchasing where gang-affiliated people with clean criminal records get firearm licences to traffic guns is not supported by any statistics. In general, the claim that there has been an increase in illegal firearms obtained from "domestic sources" is not backed by Statistics Canada.

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However, there is a large pool of firearms in Canada with questionable legality. When firearm licensing was introduced in 2001, between one-third and one-half of then-law-abiding Canadian gun owners declined to apply for a licence. Though civilian gun owners ranged from 3.3 million to 4.5 million in 2001, fewer than 2 million licences were issued. Many gun owners remain outside the system.

Instead of calling for more laws, perhaps a better approach would be to enforce the current laws. We urge authorities to focus on the following areas: enhancing the treatment of mental illness; focusing directly on gangs and organized crime; and investing in Canada Border Services Agency to address the smuggling of drugs and firearms into Canada.

In sum, a more measured approach is required. Measures like Bill C-71 that focus exclusively on law-abiding Canadians are simply not effective crime-reduction strategies.

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