

THE FATE OF THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY

Introduction

Focus

In September 2010, the Parliament of Canada defeated a private member's bill that would have abolished the long-gun registry. This *News in Review* module examines the reasons why the registry was created, how it has functioned, and why it continues to bitterly divide Canadians.

Did you know . . .

Members of Parliament defeated a motion to repeal the long-gun registry in Canada by a vote of 153 to 151.

The vote could not have been closer.

On September 22, 2010, by a margin of only two votes, members of Canada's Parliament rejected Bill C-391, a private member's bill that would have abolished the long-gun section of the Canadian gun registry. The private member's bill demanded that Canadians continue to have to register handguns and other restricted weapons, but would have removed rifles and shotguns from the registry.

The debate leading up to the vote was particularly acrimonious. The Conservative Party argued that the registry is a waste of taxpayer's money because it fails to prevent violent crime. They said that the gun registry victimizes average Canadians, especially rural residents, who use their guns for hunting and sport. They also argued that the guns most often used to commit crimes—handguns—are in the hands of people who will never register them. And since handguns, not long guns, are the real problem weapons, the law would continue to require that they be registered.

Opposition parties—with the support of most of Canada's police associations—insisted that the registry is a crucial tool in the fight against violent crime in both urban and rural areas. They pointed to an RCMP study that reported police departments rely on the gun registry to determine the potential presence of guns at crime scenes they are investigating. They argued that long guns are frequently used in crimes of domestic

violence. And they noted that long guns are also the weapons of choice used in successful suicides.

The defeat of Bill C-391, while a victory for the opposition, was still a hollow victory. The Prime Minister has vowed to continue the fight until the registry is abolished. Both the Liberals and the New Democrats have several members who oppose the registry as it stands. In fact, six members of the NDP voted with the Conservatives in favour of abolition. The Conservatives have promised to use the registry as a wedge issue in targeting candidates who voted to retain the registry despite strong opposition to it by citizens who live in their ridings.

According to many experts, the long-gun registry is an issue that really will refuse to die. On May 8, 2010, *Globe and Mail* columnist Jeffrey Simpson wrote: "The long-gun registry is to Canadian politics what abortion is to U.S. politics: an issue that will not go away, divides people into entrenched camps, defies compromise, and defines the way adherents of both positions view themselves in the wider society.

"It's an issue that pits rural Canada against urban Canada, splits the Liberals and NDP, and, relative to all the other more useful discussions the country could have about tackling crime, occupies far too much time and leads to excessive rhetoric."

If this is indeed the situation, a solution that reconciles the two sides in this debate seems highly unlikely.

To Consider

Politics is often described as the art of compromise. Can you suggest any grounds on which the two sides in this debate might be brought together? Who do you think should make the first concessions in this debate? Why?

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Video Review

Pre-viewing Discussion

Bill C-391 would not have completely removed the Canadian Firearms Registry; only long guns—rifles and shotguns—would have been removed. Handguns and assault weapons would still have required licensing. With a partner, in a small group, or with the entire class, discuss the following: What are some of the reasons that some people would want to separate the two categories of firearms? What groups would be most interested in doing so?

Viewing Questions

As you watch the video respond to the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. In what year did Canada begin registering long guns?

2. How long after that did the Conservative government offer an amnesty to long-gun owners?

3. Who introduced the private member's bill to scrap the long-gun registry?

4. What is the position of most police chiefs on the registry?

5. By how much have spousal homicides declined since the 1995 passage of gun-control legislation?

6. Reporter Terry Milewski summarizes some of the main points of the RCMP report on the gun registry. Fill in the blanks:
 - a) Long guns were used in _____ per cent of firearm-related spousal homicides.
 - b) _____ per cent of police officers killed on the job in the last 10 years were killed by long guns.
 - c) _____ per cent of trained police officers agreed the long-gun registry is beneficial.
 - d) Homicides by long guns are down _____ per cent since 1995.
7. Which opposition party allowed some of its members to vote in favour of abolishing the registry?

8. How often does Officer Nadine Teeft search the registry every day?

9. What was the final vote?

10. How did the Conservatives respond to the defeat of their attempt to abolish the registry?

Post-viewing Discussion

The RCMP report evaluating the firearms registry includes the following statement:

“The Program not only impacts the 1.9 million Canadians who own firearms, it enhances the safety of all other Canadians who live in the same communities, by promoting safe use and storage of firearms. The requirement that all firearms must be registered and known to authorities supports a climate of individual accountability and public confidence, which in turn goes a long way toward ensuring the 30 million Canadians who do not own firearms to accept the privilege of others to do so” (www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/fire-feu-eval/eval-eng.pdf).

1. If you are (or were) a long-gun owner, how would you respond to this statement?

2. Is owning a firearm a privilege or a right? Explain your position.

3. Does owning a firearm create a special responsibility to other members of society?

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The Current Debate

Quote

"The people of the regions of this country are never going to accept being treated like criminals, and we will continue our efforts until this registry is finally abolished." — Prime Minister Stephen Harper (*The Globe and Mail*, September 23, 2010)

Focus for Reading

As you read the following information outlining the recent debate on the future of Canada's long-gun registry, consider the following questions:

1. Which political parties support the gun registry and which one(s) would like to see it abolished?
2. What are some of the arguments in favour of and against the registry?
3. What is the outlook for the registry if the Conservatives form a majority government in the future?

In 1995, the Liberal government under Jean Chrétien introduced Bill C-68, legislation requiring the registration of all firearms, including long guns (shotguns and rifles). While the move was controversial at the time, few members of that government expected that the registry would still be under attack 15 years later.

But the Conservative Party has, since its inception, made clear its intention to see the long-gun registry abolished. In 2006 and in 2007 Stephen Harper's government introduced legislation to kill the registry. In neither case was the government able to generate enough support to pass that legislation.

Bill C-391

But on May 15, 2009, Candice Hoepfner—a Conservative who represents the riding of Portage-Lisgar in Manitoba—introduced a private member's bill to repeal the long-gun registry. It would eliminate the need to register rifles and shotguns and require the destruction of all information on the seven million such guns already registered. Restricted and prohibited weapons—handguns, semi-automatic and automatic weapons—would continue to require registration. All gun owners would continue to require licensing under the new legislation.

Why might a private member's bill succeed where a government bill had failed? Harper, Hoepfner, and the Conservatives were well aware that there were members of both the Liberals and NDP who opposed the long-gun registry. Votes on government bills are usually whipped; that is, party members are forced to vote according to party line. Both the Liberals and NDP are, as parties, supporters of the registry.

But the vote on a private member's bill is usually a free vote. Individual members are allowed to vote however they see fit. This possibility was expected to be an inviting one for opposition members from ridings that are strongly opposed to the registry—primarily rural or northern ridings.

This proved to be the case. Bill C-391 easily passed second reading—approved in principle and sent on to a committee for further study—by a surprising vote of 164-137. Eight Liberals and 12 NDP members supported the bill.

Yeas and Nays

The Conservative Party took the lead in the ongoing fight to abolish the long-gun registry. They offered two main arguments:

- The registry has been and continues to be a waste of taxpayer's money, expensive to set up and expensive to

Did you know . . .

The major changes both the Liberals and the NDP would like to make include decriminalizing the failure to register a long gun. Punishment might be a fine, rather than a criminal record as is now the case. The \$60 fee to register a weapon would likely also be eliminated by both parties.

operate. It has cost about \$2-billion since 1995; \$750-million was spent just setting up the database.

- The registry is an unacceptable burden on legitimate gun owners, while doing little or nothing to prevent violent crime. In the words of Candice Hoepfner, the “long-gun registry unfairly targets our hard-working farmers, hunters, and sport shooters, but not criminals” (*Toronto Star*, September 30, 2009).

The second argument remains especially popular in rural Canada, where many citizens see the gun registry as a government intrusion into personal freedom.

In addition to that from the three opposition parties—Liberals, New Democrats, and Bloc Québécois—the long-gun registry has strong support from most of Canada’s police forces. In 2008 alone, there were 3.44 million police queries of the registry. On average, the registry is now checked about 11 000 times a day. Only three police chiefs have expressed opposition to the registry; 430 have expressed their support.

Responding to the first argument about cost, supporters of the registry admit that establishing it was much more expensive than anticipated. (It was originally expected that fees paid by gun owners would cover most of the cost of the registry.) But they also point out that the costs of maintaining it have become quite reasonable. Only about \$3-million per year would be saved if the long-gun portion of the registry were abolished.

Supporters also argue that the registry makes policing safer. Officers can check the registry before any intervention to see if weapons are likely to be available to the persons they are dealing with. Police argue this is especially important in domestic disputes, because rifles and shotguns are used in about three-quarters of spousal homicide.

Both the Liberals and the NDP have proposed changes to the registry to make it less objectionable to gun owners who feel it is discriminatory. The NDP plans to introduce a bill to provide these changes in this session of Parliament.

The Story as of September 2010

On September 22, 2010, Parliament voted on a Liberal motion to kill Bill C-391 before third reading. The vote was a cliffhanger: 153-151, with every MP present for the vote. The registry, at least for the time being, was saved.

The registry was saved because only one party followed the free vote option usually permitted for a private member’s bill. The Conservatives (anti-registry) and Liberals (pro-registry) both whipped their vote. All the members of the Bloc expressed strong support for the registry. Only the NDP permitted a free vote. Its leader, Jack Layton, used all his influence to change the votes of the 12 party members who had voted in favour of the bill at second reading. Six of those members, despite anti-registry radio ads sponsored by the Conservatives in their ridings, did vote to save the registry.

However, the long-gun registry remains vulnerable. The Conservatives plan to use the registry as a wedge issue in the next election. “My message everywhere I go [is] if you want the registry scrapped, you need to vote for a Conservative member of Parliament,” says Candice Hoepfner (*The Globe and Mail*, September 23, 2010). The Prime Minister continues to insist that the Conservatives will never abandon their attempts to abolish it.

Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff responded to the vote and said: “The majority of parliamentarians have spoken for the majority of Canadians who wanted the gun registry maintained, after listening to their constituents, the police, and those concerned about

violence against women” (Saint John *Telegraph-Journal*, September 23, 2010). The Liberals have pledged to reform the long-gun registry if they form a government, but insist it must be maintained for reasons of public safety.

NDP leader Jack Layton plans to introduce reform legislation in the near

future, saying, “. . . we can perhaps find a way to work with other members of Parliament who will show a willingness, I hope, to build those bridges (between rural and urban Canada) that are so needed really in politics” ([Saint John] *Telegraph-Journal*, September 23, 2010).

Follow-up

The following information appeared on *The Chronicle Herald* (Halifax) Web site on September 26, 2010:

- Percentage of general duty police officers in a Canada Firearms Centre survey, who stated that the registry query results have proven beneficial during major operations: 74
- Percentage of general duty police officers in the same survey who stated that they use the system: 92
- Percentage of police officers trained to use the long-gun registry who believe it protects public safety: 81
- Number of Canadian police chiefs who have expressed support for the long-gun registry: 430
- Number of Canadian police chiefs who have expressed their opposition to the long-gun registry: 3
- Number of police associations that have expressed support for the long-gun registry: 154
- Number of police associations that have expressed their opposition to the long-gun registry: 6

If you were deciding to vote to keep or abolish the long-gun registry, how important would the opinions of various chiefs of police and police associations be to you? Discuss this with a partner and then team up with another pair to compare your opinions.

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Background

Further Research

For extensive background material on the Montreal Massacre, visit the CBC Archives at http://archives.cbc.ca/society/crime_justice/topics/398/.

Further Research

Quebec has had more than its share of mass shootings. The most recent was on September 13, 2006, when Kimveer Gill entered Dawson College in Montreal armed with several weapons. He opened fire, killing one student and injuring 19 others. You can learn more about the Dawson College incident and Kimveer Gill on the CBC Web site at www.cbc.ca/canada/montreal/story/2006/09/15/aftermath-shooting.html.

Focus For Reading

The Canadian gun registry took years to create and continues to be controversial and potentially subject to abolition. As you read the information in this section, make a timeline of the important dates in its history, beginning with the Montreal Massacre and ending with the most recent vote in Parliament.

The Montreal Massacre is generally credited as the impetus behind Canada's long-gun registry.

On December 6, 1989, Marc Lépine, a 25-year-old Montreal man armed with a semi-automatic rifle, entered an engineering classroom at the École Polytechnique de Montréal. He separated the men from the women and ordered the men to leave. He called the nine women who remained behind a "gang" of feminists, and shot them all, screaming "I hate feminists." Six of them were killed. Moving on to other parts of the school, yelling "I want women!" he continued his shooting rampage for 45 minutes. Lépine killed a total of 14 women and wounded 10 more (as well as four men) before using the gun to kill himself. In his pocket was a three-page letter blaming feminists for ruining his life.

The crime horrified the nation and resonated in a very special way with women throughout Canada.

Lépine's crime was not the first—nor the last—act of mass gun violence in Canada. In fact, Lépine's letter included words of praise for Denis Lortie, a Canadian soldier who killed three Quebec government employees in 1984 in an attempt to assassinate Premier René Lévesque and other members of the Parti Québécois.

But the Montreal Massacre was the worst act of mass gun violence in Canada, and it led many members of the public to question the ready availability of guns in the country.

Coalition for Gun Control

One of the people who wanted tougher gun controls in Canada was Heidi Rathjen. Rathjen was a student at the École Polytechnique who was in a classroom that Lépine did not enter. Together with Wendy Cukier, the current president of the organization, she founded the Coalition for Gun Control (www.guncontrol.ca) in April 1991. They were strongly supported by people like Suzanne Laplante-Edwards and her husband, Jim Edwards, whose daughter Anne-Marie was killed by Lépine. The Coalition put pressure on the federal government of Brian Mulroney to bring in legislation for the control of firearms.

The Coalition fought hard for effective legislation. For committee hearings in Parliament the Coalition marshalled support from experts and stakeholders in health care and crime prevention. Among their supporters were the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. Both groups recommended that all firearms be subject to registration.

Ultimately, the 1991 legislation did not require firearms registration, but it did make it possible for the minister of justice to prohibit certain types of weapons. These would include guns not "commonly used in Canada for hunting or sporting purposes" (<http://stason.org/TULARC/society/guns-canadian/17-What-is-Bill-C-17.html>). It also placed limits on the size of ammunition magazines, effectively outlawing the one used by Marc Lépine—though the rifle he used remained legal.

Bill C-68

The Liberal Party included stricter gun control as one of the planks in its 1993 election platform. Spurred on by a series of shootings in 1994, the new government announced a group of proposals to toughen existing regulations. These included:

- Licensing and registering of all firearms, including long-guns
- A ban on semi-automatic military weapons and some handguns
- Tougher penalties for firearms offences

Despite widespread opposition by gun owners, Bill C-68 became law on December 5, 1995.

A Failed Challenge

Even before the bill passed into law, the Province of Alberta announced that it would challenge its constitutionality. Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon all supported the challenge.

Alberta argued that rifles and shotguns—unlike handguns and other restricted weapons—were subject to provincial jurisdiction as ordinary property, and were not subject to federal control. In October 1998 the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled 3-2 in favour of the federal government.

Analysis

1. One of the arguments made against the long-gun registry is that all gun owners in Canada already need to be licensed. If that is the case, why should they also need to register their guns?
2. Wendy Cukier, of the Coalition for Gun Control argues as follows (Toronto Star, December 6, 2009): "Registration ensures licensed gun owners are held accountable for their firearms. If gun owners are licensed but guns not registered, guns cannot be traced to their source. Legal gun owners can sell or give guns to unlicensed and potentially dangerous people without consequences." Do you find this argument convincing? Why or why not?

In February 2000 the Supreme Court of Canada heard an appeal on the constitutionality of the registry by the government of Alberta. On June 15, in a unanimous decision, the court ruled that the law was fully constitutional. The registry was legal.

The Battle Continues

From the beginning, the Conservative Party of Canada pledged to abolish the long-gun registry. Two government bills, one in 2006 and one in 2008, attempted to do just that. Both died on the order paper. The recently defeated Bill C-391, although a private member's bill, came very close to succeeding. It was defeated by a vote of 153-151 on September 22, 2001.

There is no reason to doubt that the Conservatives will continue to attempt abolition. Most political commentators expect them to use opposition to the registry as a vote-getter in many rural ridings now held by Liberals or members of the NDP in the next election. The party's opposition to the long-gun registry has also enriched its war chest. Registry opponents are among the most generous donors to the Conservative Party.

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A Rural-Urban Divide

Quote

“Opponents claim that guns are an urban problem. The terrible irony is that where there are more guns, there is more opposition to gun control. But where there are more guns, there are higher gun death rates. . . . Yukon, for example, has a gun death rate three times the national average.” — Wendy Cukier (*Toronto Star*, December 6, 2009)

Focus for Reading

Before reading this section, work with one or two classmates to write a definition describing what makes an “urban” Canadian and what makes a “rural” Canadian. When you have finished the section, revisit your definitions and see if you would change them in any way.

All political commentators discussing the future of the gun registry point to one central idea: urban Canada sees the long-gun registry as important in the fight against violent crime, but rural Canada wants nothing to do with it.

Writing in the *Toronto Star* (November 3, 2009), James Travers summed up opinions on the registry: “Popular with police chiefs and city folks worried about gun crime, the registry is anathema to farmers, hunters, and a high proportion of westerners who see Big Brother in its prying details.” Travers goes on to describe it as “a gift that keeps on giving” to the Conservatives, who are using the issue to pressure MPs from opposition parties who represent rural ridings.

It isn’t hard to find examples of individuals who reinforce Travers’ take on the issue.

Pierreson Vaval, director of a Montreal outreach group who works with street gangs in the city’s north end said: “For city people, this registry is important, it’s a relevant tool to fight crime . . . There’s not much hunting in Montreal . . . If someone is going around with a gun in Montreal, he’s hunting another type of animal” (*The Globe and Mail*, November 6, 2009).

Town councillor Dale Harten, in Tarbutt Township (40 kilometres east of Sault Ste. Marie) declared: “The Conservative government did the right thing [in introducing a private member’s bill to abolish the registry]. The people I hunt with, they figured we didn’t need it” (*The Globe and Mail*, November 6, 2009).

Nor is the urban-rural division anything new. When the registry was first proposed in 1995, nine Liberals from rural ridings voted against it. Three Reform Party members (the Conservative Party is the result of a merger between Reform and the Progressive Conservative Party) from urban ridings voted in favour of the registry.

What’s Urban? What’s Rural?

Surprisingly, perhaps, defining the two terms is not all that straightforward. Consider the following difference of opinions expressed in the *The Globe and Mail*. First up: John Ibbitson (November 6, 2009):

“Urban voters support the registry, and any other measure that limits gun violence. Rural voters oppose the registry, seeing in it an insidious government conspiracy to pry rifles and shotguns out of hunters’ and farmers’ infuriated hands.

“Eighty per cent of us live in cities. If the House of Commons were representative of the nation, the gun registry would survive; the voters of greater Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver would insist on it.

“The House of Commons, however, is skewed: by laws and conventions that ensure smaller provinces and Quebec have certain minimum levels of representation in the House.

“Within each province, electoral commissions are authorized to adjust riding boundaries in favour of rural voters, on the grounds that otherwise those ridings would become impossibly large.

“That is, however, the whole point. Rural ridings would be impossibly large because so few people live in rural parts of the country. Rural overrepresentation in the House distorts policy and confounds the people’s will.”

Responding to Ibbitson was Roy MacGregor (November 9, 2009):

“It is the ultimate urban myth. And this newspaper is as guilty as any when it comes to spreading that myth.

“But there it was again late last week, published as if fact: ‘Eighty per cent of us live in cities.’ It is a claim that—in various forms—appears regularly in newspapers and in broadcast commentary across the country, an absurdity as hard to kill as the notion that porcupines shoot quills or that astronaut Neil Armstrong took his legendary ‘one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind’ in Sudbury.

“This idea that 80 per cent of Canadians live in cities—the other 20 per cent being yokels—comes courtesy of Statistics Canada and a non-thinking media.

“StatsCan, which for reasons even many of its employees puzzle over, considers an ‘urban’ centre a defined area with 1 000 or more population. That has the effect of deeming little places like Arnold’s Cove, [Newfoundland], and Barry’s Bay, [Ontario], ‘urban.’ The media, then, substitutes ‘city’ for ‘urban’ (why not?) and we end up with this continuing misread of the country.

“If the cutoff were 100 000, then Canada would be considered roughly half urban and half rural. The population is clearly more in cities, and it can be fairly argued that city voters get short-changed when it comes to the value of their vote, but that is another point, not this one.”

Follow-up

How do you respond to Keith Martin’s argument that as Canadians, we often focus on things that divide us rather than unite us? How would you suggest Parliament go about finding the middle ground on a divisive issue like the gun registry?

In Search of Solutions

When it came to the crunch in the most recent vote to save the registry, the rural-urban divide was demonstrated again when six members of the NDP, from ridings MacGregor would describe as rural, voted in favour of abolishing it. But six other members, also mostly from rural ridings who had previously voted for abolition reversed their positions.

One important reason why those MPs voted to preserve the registry was a pledge by their leader, Jack Layton, to introduce legislation to amend the registry to deal with concerns expressed by rural voters—making failure to register punishable by a fine rather than a criminal record, and eliminating registration fees (which can run into significant amounts for serious gun collectors).

The Liberals have promised to introduce similar measures if they form a future government. The Conservatives continue to insist that nothing short of abolition will satisfy them, and those NDP MPs who supported the registry will be specially targeted for defeat in the next election.

But is the rural-urban divide real? Consider the opinion of Keith Martin, Liberal MP for Esquimalt-Juan de Fuca. “It’s an artificial divide, and it preys on old mythologies of people in rural areas being hewers of wood and drawers of water, whereas ‘urban’ people are more sophisticated and higher educated. “Those stereotypes are long gone. But the problem in Canada is that we focus more on the things that divide us than those things that bring us together” (*The Globe and Mail*, November 9, 2009).

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The Truth About Guns and Violence

Further Research

The “Canadian Firearms Program evaluation” is available at www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/fire-feu-eval/eval-eng.pdf. It is currently the most important study in support of the long-gun registry. But even this study is controversial.

Reading Prompt

As you read the information in this feature, consider the following: Has the long-gun registry been effective in fighting violent crime? Opponents insist it has little effect. Proponents insist it has made a huge difference in many areas. Is there evidence to support either group?

The Vancouver Sun reported that as recently as 2006 Canada’s Auditor-General, Sheila Fraser, pointed out that no one really knows whether the long-gun registry was effective. “Fraser noted that a performance report she reviewed at the time focused only ‘on activities such as issuing licences and registering firearms.’ The (Canadian Firearms) Centre does not show how these activities help minimize risks to public safety with evidence-based outcomes such as reduced deaths, injuries, and threats from firearms” (Barbara Yaffe, August 27, 2010).

The RCMP Canadian Firearms Program Evaluation

In February 2010 the RCMP completed a report on the Canadian Firearms Program that included an evaluation of the long-gun registry. The report endorsed the registry after drawing on information from a number of sources.

“Finding 6: Firearms registration is a critical component of the entire firearms program. The program, as a whole, is an important tool for law enforcement. It also serves to increase the accountability of firearms owners for their firearms, by linking registered firearms to licensees. An acceptable level of compliance toward long gun registration is essential for improving the Registry’s utility as a tool to promote public safety” (www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/fire-feu-eval/eval-eng.pdf).

Among the sources quoted by the RCMP is the Canadian Association of

Emergency Physicians (CAEP). In 2009 CAEP issued a position statement on gun control (available at www.caep.ca/template.asp?id=37C951DE051A45979A9BDD0C5715C9FE). Among its observations:

- Firearm homicides have decreased significantly since the introduction of stricter gun control. There were 271 firearms homicides in 1991 (a rate of 0.99 per 100 000 people). In 2006 this had dropped to 190 (0.58 per 100 000).
- In 2005, 25 per cent of firearms-related homicides in Canada were by long gun.
- In 2005, long guns were used in 72 per cent of spouse-related homicides.
- 10 of 13 police officers killed in the period 1999-2009 were killed by long guns.
- Since the introduction of the registry, homicides by long gun have decreased 30 per cent.
- A recent study shows that handguns are more usual in urban crimes, but long guns are more commonly used in rural crimes.

Another source used by the RCMP is the Canada Safety Council (CSA). In a 2004 report on suicide in Canada titled “Canada’s silent tragedy” (<http://archive.safety-council.org/info/community/suicide.html>), the CSA provides the following information:

- In Canada, suicide is the leading cause of death for men aged 25 to 29 and 40 to 44, and for women aged 30 to 34.
- The proportion of completed suicides is highest with a firearm (92 per cent).

- A home where there are firearms is five times more likely to be the scene of a suicide than a home without a gun.
- Nearly 80 per cent of all firearms deaths in Canada are suicides, compared with 15 per cent of homicides. A firearm is the method used in nearly 20 per cent of all suicide fatalities.

In a recent position paper, CAEP notes that the number of suicide deaths by firearms has declined significantly

since the introduction of the gun registry (www.caep.ca/item.asp?it=0080D0D66671492DA38795EFB5760C9D).

Are these statistics convincing? Certainly they speak to registry supporters. Opponents argue that they fail to demonstrate a direct correlation between the registry and the prevention of violent crime or suicide. Until that correlation can be demonstrated, much of the value of the registry will remain unknown.

Follow-up

1. Can or should statistics be used to measure the effectiveness of the long-gun registry?
2. Do you find any of the statistics cited in this article convincing?
3. Are there other ways you can suggest to demonstrate the value or lack of value of the registry?
4. The case against the RCMP's "Canadian Firearms Program evaluation" has been made by several people, including Gary Mauser, a retired professor of criminology at Simon Fraser University. It is available on the National Firearms Association Web site at www.nfa.ca/police-and-registry-what-are-facts.

Compare the information provided by Mauser with the information in this section and write a short (one-page) paper outlining your assessment of Mauser's criticisms.

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Activity: Class Vote

The vote is in; the long-gun registry has survived, but the battle isn't over. The debate continues. Opponents will get another chance to abolish it.

Preparation

The class should divide into small groups.

Using the information in this *News in Review* guide, half the groups will research the arguments supporting the gun registry. They should consider where their support comes from: urban centres, police forces, health-care advocates, public safety organizations. Are there statistics that support their cause? Does the horror of the Montreal Massacre—one of the fundamental reasons the registry was created—strengthen their case?

The other groups will make the case to abolish the long-gun registry. Again, they will need to consider their support base: law-abiding gun owners who want to use their rifles and shotguns to hunt and to protect their rural properties, or rural and urban dwellers who collect guns as a hobby or enjoy target shooting as a sport. Is the registry just an annoyance for law-abiding people? Is it an expensive boondoggle that does nothing to prevent crime?

Debate

Once each group has completed its preparation, the groups should come together to make their case either for or against the proposition "BE IT RESOLVED THAT the long-gun portion of the Canadian Firearms Registry should be abolished."

If discussion is to be a formal debate, the usual format is an opening speech by the affirmative side, followed by one by the negative. This is followed by a second affirmative speech and a second speech from the negative. The debate closes with a rebuttal speech from the negative side, followed by a rebuttal speech from the affirmative. Each speech can be given by a different student.

Voting

Once the debate is concluded, the proposition is submitted to a vote by the entire class.