

Poly Remembers

Students and Graduates of Polytechnique for Gun Control



www.polysesouvient.ca ❖ info@polysesouvient.ca ❖ @polysesouvient ❖ 514-816-7818 ❖ C/o 102-4529 Clark St, Mtl (Quebec) H2T 2T3

PRESS RELEASE

Public opinion poll: 8 out of 10 Canadians support a ban on assault weapons including 63% of gun owners

Montreal, March 12th 2018 – On the eve of the tabling of a federal gun-control bill, an **Environics Research** poll¹ confirms that the vast majority of Canadians (81%) support a ban on assault weapons, with support predominant in all regions of the country including western provinces (the lowest: 72% in Saskatchewan). Even a large proportion of gun owners (63%) support the measure, and support is the same in urban as in rural areas.

The survey also shows that an even larger majority supports tougher controls on gun sales, whether commercial or private, with 85% in favour of reinstating the requirement for gun stores to keep sales records and requiring private transfers to be reported to the authorities (including 64% of gun owners).

QUESTION 1: "Most of the recent mass killings in the United States have involved military-style semi-automatic firearms, typically referred to as "assault weapons". These same types of weapons are also legal in Canada. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Private ownership of semi-automatic assault weapons for recreational purposes should not be legal in Canada.'** Select one response: Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree, I do not know / I prefer not to answer."

"It's clear that the vast majority of Canadians agree that assault weapons have no place in our streets and communities. Massacre after massacre demonstrate the absurdity of allowing the private possession of military-style semi-automatic weapons for recreational purposes. In fact, virtually all of the weapons used in the recent mass killings in the United States are legal in Canada," says **Heidi Rathjen**, a witness of the École Polytechnique tragedy and **spokesperson** for **PolySeSouvient**. *"If our law allows the private ownership of assault weapons, it is because it reflects the influence of the gun lobby and not the will of the public."*

Nathalie Provost, who survived the massacre at **Polytechnique** despite four gunshot wounds, comments: *"The Trudeau government was elected to a majority having promised to strengthen gun control. Canadians, just like Americans, continue to be horrified by every new mass killing committed with an assault weapon. Only the gun lobby is opposed to banning these weapons. If the impending federal legislation does not include a ban on assault weapons, it will be because the Trudeau government has chosen to side with the gun lobby and not the public's interest."*

¹ **Environics Research**, for PolyRemembers/PolySeSouvient, conducted online from March 6th to 8th 2018 among 1510 Canadians aged 18 years and over. Results : http://polysesouvient.ca/Documents/STATS_18_03_08_Environics_Poll_Results.pdf; methodology : http://polysesouvient.ca/Documents/1_ERG_Online_Methodology_n1510_March%202018.pdf

Meaghan Hennegan, who survived the mass shooting at **Dawson College**, adds, "*The assault weapon that was used to shoot me is now easier to obtain than at the time of the killing, when it was classified as 'restricted'. Today, it is available in 'non-restricted' version. This means that assault weapons have become even more accessible since the killings in my school. This is totally messed up. These weapons have no place in the hands of private citizens; you never know who will end up using them to kill. They can also be stolen or illegally sold. This is an aberration that must be corrected. We hope this poll will convince Minister Goodale to take action to ban assault weapons, in order to protect the public instead of bowing down to the gun lobby, as the Conservative government did.*"

The **Liberal government** has mandated the **Minister of Public Safety** to "[take action to get handguns and assault weapons off our streets](#)". Yet despite this mandate the **RCMP** [continues to approve the sale of new assault weapons](#), including unrestricted models. When asked about the availability of assault weapons, **Minister Ralph Goodale** usually refers to the specific authority that allows the Public Safety Minister to overturn the **RCMP's** classification decisions - that is, their interpretation of classification criteria as spelled out in the law. This power was introduced by the **Conservatives** through **Bill C-42** and allows only for classifications to be *downgraded* (or the firearms in question to be subject to *weaker* restrictions). Unfortunately, while it is a good thing, eliminating this authority does *nothing* to solve the fundamental problem, which is that semi-automatic assault weapons are legal in **Canada**.

Controls on sales

One of the measures contained in the [2015 Liberal election platform](#) was to "require firearms vendors to keep records of all firearms inventory and sales to assist police in investigating firearms trafficking and other gun crimes". The former sales ledgers, in effect since the 1970s, were abolished for all unrestricted weapons under the **Harper government** following complaints from pro-gun groups shortly after the abolition of the long gun registry.

QUESTION 2: "In the U.S., gun stores are required by law to keep sales records in order to ensure minimal controls on sales and to assist with criminal investigations. In Canada, the former Conservative government eliminated the requirement for gun stores to keep sales records. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'The Canadian government should reinstate the requirement for commercial gun sellers to keep records of sales and require private sellers to report gun transfers to the authorities.'** Select one response: Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree, I do not know / I prefer not to answer."

[Several experts](#) at the **Summit on Gun and Gang Violence** highlighted the importance of tracing weapons found at crime scenes, both for criminal investigations and for crime prevention. On this point, the **government of British Columbia's** [report on illegal guns](#)² says the lack of sales records could explain an increase in the diversion of non-restricted firearms towards the illicit market³ and recommends reinstating the measure and extending it to private transfers. Otherwise, it is impossible to know at what point a gun was diverted (ex. stolen or illegally sold).⁴

² **Illegal Firearms Task Force (British Columbia)**, *Final Report*, 2017. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/criminal-justice/police/publications/government/iftf_final_report_pdf.pdf; highlighted version: http://polysesouvient.ca/Documents/RAPP_17_11_27_BC_Illegal_Firearms_TaskForce_Report_Highlighted.pdf

³ "In Canada, there is no national legislation to require record keeping for sales of non-restricted firearms. Unlike many American states, sellers need not keep any records of sales of non-restricted firearms. Purchasers can re-sell, trade or give away a firearm without keeping records. Without sales records, crime investigators often cannot trace the ownership of crime guns ... The National Weapons Enforcement Support Team reports an increase in the number of legally purchased firearms that were diverted to the illicit market. Many have been recovered in criminal investigations." **Illegal Firearms Task Force (British Columbia)**, *Final Report*, 2017, page 59. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/criminal-justice/police/publications/government/iftf_final_report_pdf.pdf

⁴ "Point-of-sale recordkeeping would help link straw purchasers and illegal firearms traffickers to crime guns. It would disrupt and deter illegal transfers by increasing the risk of detection to straw purchasers. It would align with U.S. regulations, further disrupting illegal cross-border trading of firearms. It would

"If the government really wants to help the police in their criminal investigations and their efforts to counter the illegal market, controls on gun sales cannot just be half measures; they must take into account all arms transfers, not just commercial ones," concludes Ms. Rathjen. "The majority of Canadians recognize that documenting gun sales is a common-sense measure."

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For more information and interviews:

- Heidi Rathjen : 514-816-7818

For interviews :

- Kathlene Dixon (Meaghan's mother): 514-299-5160
- Meaghan Hennegan : [via email](#)
- Nathalie Provost : 514-796-0142