

The Danforth Shooter was Mentally Ill, but most Gun-Related Crime is Rooted in Culture

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Donate All donations go to this article's author and this month's charity. The shootings on The Danforth in Toronto's "Greektown" earlier this month, which killed two and injured 13, gave me a special frisson. My son and his family live a few blocks away from the incident. Five days earlier, on a balmy evening, I had taken four of my five granddaughters to Pappas Grill, where we lingered over a fine dinner on the terrace. Pappas Grill happened to be one of the stops on the shooter's long trajectory of targets. I naturally considered this a lucky escape. That area is one of Toronto's more desirable neighborhoods for young, moderately upscale families: safe, well-resourced, diverse and bustling with civic energy. A lot of professionals live there, including journalists and other cultural elites. Mayor John Tory was there the next day to bolster morale and encourage a return to normalcy – a positive action – even though he opted to focus on the unhelpful suggestion that firmer gun control might prevent more such incidents ("Why does anyone in Toronto need to have a gun at all?"). Demanding stricter gun control is a reflexive response to tragedies of this kind, almost invariably made by politicians who are understandably frustrated and feel the need to respond with some kind of call to action. But Tory did not serve anyone's interest by implicitly demonizing responsible gun owners, who may not "need" guns, but who like them, use them carefully and appropriately, and who are not the problem here. It is already illegal to carry or conceal a handgun in Canada. That law will mean nothing to a determined killer. All you need is to get one. Faisal Hussain, the Danforth shooter used a gun stolen from a legitimate owner (not, as previously reported, a gun from the U.S.).

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} A longtime friend of Hussain's, a drug dealer who may have been his source, was found to have 33 guns and ammunition on a Pickering rental property. So, gun control of any rigor would not have stopped Hussain from acquiring his illegal weapon. In illegal gun acquisition, it's a question of who you know. Once you know the right person, acquiring an illegal gun is child's play. Canada already imposes strict controls on guns. Handguns and semi-automatic weapons are restricted, meaning they are tracked and registered by the government. For non-restricted guns, Canadians 18 and older must take a two-day safety course, pass a test, take an additional course and test for restricted guns, on which they must get 80% or higher. Then they must apply for a Possession and Acquisition license (PAL), paying an $80 fee, for restricted firearms; requiring disclosures of mental health or criminal-record histories. If you don't have a valid gun license, there's a 28-day waiting period. Oh, and you have to be a member of a shooting club to get authorization to transport the gun, because why else would you have a gun? Buying the actual gun, at a store or online, involves further hassle. There are only five places you can transport the gun to: your house, a border crossing (to, not across), a gunsmith, a peace officer, and a shooting range in proximity to your home. Storage? So many rules it is an ordeal to make the gun actually functional.
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} Only the most civic-minded and responsible people are willing to jump through all these hoops in order to ensure they
can enjoy their guns. Which is why liability insurance for legal gun owners is ridiculously cheap, something like $15 a
year. Why? Because legal gun owners virtually never are liable for harm to others, and therefore the insurance
companies virtually never have to pay out for claims. var quads_screen_width = document.body.clientWidth;
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} How much more rigorous can you make the gun control laws? And what's the use? Over 50% of illegal gun use in
Canada is attributable to gangs. They will get their guns one way or another. Just as Prohibition only punished
responsible drinkers, draconian gun laws only punish the good gun guys. A good gun guy can have one gun, or ten. It
doesn't matter. He will never use the gun(s) irresponsibly. A bad guy, one with criminal intent, has no motivation to
negotiate this arduous process. The harder it gets to acquire a gun legally, the greater the motivation for a flourishing
black market. var quads_screen_width = document.body.clientWidth;
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} I'm not arguing against background checks. But I am arguing against the unrealistic perspective that wholesale ban on
guns will solve the problem of gun violence. Extensive research on gun violence has been done in the U.S., including
this one from the Heritage Foundation, which lays out eight "stubborn facts" about gun violence in America, many of
which can be applied to Canada, even though the rates of violence are astronomically higher in America. Most notable,
in my opinion, is that, according to the Crime Prevention Research Center, over 50% of gun-related murders occur in
only two percent of America's 3,142 counties. Conversely, 54% of U.S. counties report zero or close to zero murders. Up
to a third of gun-related homicides are gang-related. Gangs inhabit and roam well-defined terrain. Risk is race-related.
Black men between the ages of 15 and 34 account "for almost two thirds of gun murder victims every year." In other
words, fragile communities – especially those where fatherlessness is a huge issue – account for a significant proportion of
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both perpetrators and victims of gun violence. Higher rates of legal gun ownership are not associated with higher rates of violent crime. As is often observed, both Israel and Switzerland have higher gun ownership rates than the U.S. (Canada is 12th in the world for gun ownership), and very low violent crime rates. Nor is there a correlation between highly restrictive gun laws and lower gun crime. New Hampshire (“live free or die!”), Vermont and Oregon have few restrictions on gun acquisition, but have some of the lowest homicide rates, while states like Maryland and Illinois, with highly restrictive gun laws, rank very high in violent gun crime. Again, it seems the problem is more about internal community culture than about the number of guns available. Bill C-71 will likely pass in the fall, aimed at tightening controls on handguns. It would force businesses to maintain inventory and transfer records for non-restricted firearms, supposedly allowing police to trace firearms better. It would also allow for more detailed background checks for mental health. This added layer of vigilance might have stopped some killers, like the 2017 Quebec mosque massacrists, Alexandre Bissonnette, whose firearms were legally acquired, but not Phu Lam, who shot eight people dead in Edmonton in 2014 using a stolen handgun. And it would not have stopped Faisal Hussain. We know that alcoholism cannot be cured by prohibiting the sale of alcohol. Gun crime will not be solved by a ban on all guns. We must be realistic about what we can and cannot do. Harm reduction must be our goal. A good place to begin would be an admission by those in a position to effect change that a major cause of gun crime – boys growing up without fathers in poor and culturally fragile communities – has been ignored as a sop to the ideology-based illusion that mothers are more important to children than fathers, and that fatherlessness presents no particular social risks. Publicly and proudly acknowledge the importance of fathers to children, encourage marriage before producing children, and as the number of intact families rises, the rates of gun-related violence will go down. It really is that simple.

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rcds.appendChild(rcel);
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