

Implementing Canada's *Firearms Act*

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Introduction

Few public policies garner the kind of widespread and sustained interest that has been attracted by Canada's *Firearms Act*. For more than ten years, the name "Bill C-68" has held a prominent place in Canadian news reports, party platforms, and the literature of various lobby-groups; and it has appeared on bumper-stickers across Canada. Yet, although the past decade has seen keen interest in gun control, much academic work on the topic remains to be done. Traditional policy analyses focus on the advantages and disadvantages – or to put it another way, the costs and benefits – of a particular policy, and so often lose sight of what the policy actually "means" to people. Further analysis of discourse in media and parliamentary documents can provide insight into how stakeholders construct meaning and how little those meanings have changed over time. Such an analysis can help provide answers to the question "Why, thirty years later,² are we still debating the registration of firearms?"

The distinction between policy formulation (including initiation and legitimation) and policy implementation is well known and need not be further explored here. This paper focuses on implementation because issues like gun control are attached fundamentally to questions of value and identity, which means that legislation is "interpreted" by various stakeholders in ways which are a) fundamentally different, and b) not necessarily connected to questions of effectiveness or utility. The challenges associated with implementing policy amidst such divergence of stakeholder perceptions are what produce the debate that is never truly resolved.

Canada now has strong regulation in all three dimensions of a gun control regime (gun owners, guns themselves, and gun use)³. Almost twenty years elapsed between the first effort to pass strong legislation (1976) and the eventual passage of Bill C-68, *The Firearms Act* (1995). After 1995, of course, attention turned to the regulations, and other important parts of the implementation phase. Throughout, opposition was – and remains – pressing, persistent, and relatively consistent, if somewhat lacking in traction. Given the way in which a strong gun control regime was implemented, and given the strength and persistence of the opposition to it, this is certainly one of the more interesting public policy stories of our recent past. Yet, with the notable exceptions of Pal (2003) and Bottomley (2004) – both of which focus on policy formulation – this important shift in public policy has not generated the level of academic interest that the circumstances seem to warrant. This paper narrows that gap, with particular emphasis on the implementation phase.

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² Bill C-83, which would have been Canada's first comprehensive gun control law, was introduced in Parliament in February 1976 but was terminated when that session ended. It was replaced in the subsequent session (1977) by Bill C-51 (Pal 2003, 246).

³ The three dimension of a gun-control regime are well explored by Pal (2003). See especially pages 238-239.

Drawing on implementation theory, this paper aims to offer an overview of the key actors and ideas that constitute Canada's gun control "policy culture" (cf. Yanow 1987). It describes the implementation of the *Firearms Act* as a broad process that is both nebulous and iterative. Following the lead of public policy theorists who promote a broad definition of policy implementation, the paper builds on Dvora Yanow's (1993) interpretive approach to implementation research in order to better understand the fundamental assumptions informing the various ways in which Bill C-68 has been interpreted by both supporters and critics of the new controls on firearms in Canada. Rather than striving to offer an authoritative answer about the "right" way to interpret Bill C-68, the paper works to map the significant features of Canada's continuing story of gun control policy, and points to several fundamental discrepancies between the ways different stakeholders conceive of and depict the *Firearms Act*.

The *Firearms Act* is also distinguished by the length of time it took to implement. Since achieving Royal Assent in December 1995, the legislation's already-extended deadlines were further extended, making it 2003 before it was fully implemented. Shortly after being elected in 2005, the new Conservative government pledged to repeal the law. Although its minority status made it unable to pass the needed legislation, the Conservatives did introduce a variety of measures in an effort to fulfil the party's election promise.⁴

The following analysis suggests that the relatively long and uncertain implementation of the *Firearms Act* – a tumultuous period marked by ongoing debate over the central meaning of the legislation – can be partially explained by the drastically different interpretations made by, on one hand, the groups and individuals who viewed the *Firearms Act* favourably, and on the other, those who interpreted it unfavourably. Specifically, by analyzing the themes emerging from stakeholder testimony before the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs (SCJLA), the study places stakeholder interpretations on Bill C-68 into two categories: the first interprets the *Firearms Act* as an effective contribution to the health and safety of Canadian society, and a symbol of long-cherished Canadian values; the second interprets the *Firearms Act* as an ineffective waste of money and a reflection of an increasingly dangerous tendency toward state limitations of individual liberties.

The paper makes two contributions to the literature on public policy in Canada. First, by identifying the main actors, and by reviewing Committee testimony to chart the complex relations that constitute recent debates on gun control policy, it contributes to our understanding of the current

⁴ Bill C-10 (Canada 2006a) was introduced on 04 May 2006 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on 13 June 2006, where a bruising battle ensued – over 252 days – during which the Committee stripped the Bill of all but nine of its 28 provisions. However, in the Report stage in the House of Commons, MPs restored most of the provisions removed by the Committee. The bill was passed by the House of Commons on 29 May 2007 with a vote of 157 in favour and 117 against and was given first reading in the Senate on 30 May 2007, but died there, having spent a total of 414 calendar days before both Houses of Parliament.

Bill C-21 (Canada 2006b) received first reading in the House of Commons on 19 June 2006 to address the non registration of firearms that are neither prohibited nor restricted. It died on the order paper when Parliament was prorogued in June 2007.

Other non-legislative measures that actually *were* implemented included:

- an amnesty for failure to renew firearms licenses and register firearms (Canada 2006c and 2006e)
- transferring responsibility for the *Firearms Act* and regulations back to the RCMP, which took over from the formerly independent Canada Firearms Centre (Canada 2006f), a shift made possible under the *Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act* (Canada 1985).
- reducing the annual operating budget for the program by \$10 million (Canada 2006d), and implementing certain fee waivers and refunds (Canada 2006g).
- eliminating the need for physical verification of non-restricted firearms (Canada 2006d).

firearms policy climate and points to future causes for consideration. Moreover, it helps to clarify a range of perspectives on an issue that is defined by competing viewpoints, and has often been mistakenly portrayed. Second, by employing a broad definition of implementation, and focusing on the points of contact and complex meaning-making processes unfolding around legislators, bureaucrats, advocacy groups, journalists, and citizens, the paper makes a modest theoretical contribution to the literature on implementing public policy.

Background and Context of Policy (Also see Appendix A: The Gun Control Story)

In 1977 Canada introduced legislation that required the owners of rifles and shotguns to obtain a Firearm's Acquisition Certificate (FAC) and banned fully automatic weapons, with a "grandparent clause" that allowed current owners to retain their firearms. Because of the strong opposition of gun owners, plans to also require the registration of rifles and shotguns – which would record the type and serial number of firearms acquired – were scrapped, although a requirement was retained that the seller of firearms would retain a record of the firearm sold and the FAC of the firearm purchaser. At the time, Tommy Douglas, leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP), was one of the principal advocates of stronger controls on firearms. In his speech in the House of Commons on July 18, 1977, when dealing with a portion of gun control law he said:

All this legislation will do is restrict the purchase of guns after it is passed. It will not do anything with regard to registering the millions of guns already around. However, half a loaf is better than none. I believe this legislation is a first step...This is weak legislation in terms of gun control. However, it is better than nothing. It will give us a chance to ensure that guns sold in the future will not be sold to people who should not have them. We will develop techniques for registration in the years ahead in the hope that this legislation will be strengthened even further.⁵

During the 1980s, proposals for other measures resurfaced and the Conservative Solicitor General, Doug Lewis, began working on a proposal to extend the prohibition on fully automatic firearms to selective fire and semi-automatic firearms, in part in response to events in the United States and lobbying by police groups. His plans were fast tracked when, on December 6th, 1989, a man armed with a legally acquired Ruger Mini-14 rifle and large-capacity magazines entered *l'Ecole Polytechnique*, a Montreal engineering school, and shot 27 people, killing 14 young women (Canadian Press 1989, A1).

The tragedy became a catalyst for public calls for increased gun control which, probably for the first time in Canadian history, included a broader range of groups (Jones 1990, L1). The students of *l'Ecole Polytechnique* launched a petition calling for a ban on military assault weapons. At the same time, in Toronto, Canadians for Gun Control (CGC) was founded and eventually merged with the students of *l'Ecole Polytechnique* and a wide range of groups to evolve into the Coalition for Gun Control, a network of over 350 policing, crime-prevention, health, women's, and community groups from across the country.

In a relatively short time, two pieces of legislation – Bills C-17 and C-68 – were passed. Kim Campbell's legislation, Bill C-17, which passed the Senate on December 5, 1991, had a rough ride within the Conservative caucus, failing to pass second reading because of opposition within the Conservative backbench. However, the law strengthened screening requirements for acquisition certificates (to include two references, a 28-day waiting period, and a minimum age of 18, among others); defined safe storage requirements (firearms to be unloaded and locked in a secure container or with a trigger lock); and banned some military assault weapons (semi-automatics which could be converted to automatic

⁵ Quoted by MP Morris Bodnar (Lib – Saskatoon-Dundurn) in testimony before the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs (SCJLA 16 May 1995, 17:20).

fire).⁶ Although the Conservative Senate eventually supported the legislation, the chair, Nathan Nurgitz criticized the bill for not going far enough, maintaining that the witnesses' calls for registration of all firearms should have been addressed in the legislation. Even within the Conservative party there were significant differences of opinion on the issue.

When the Liberal's were elected in 1993, one plank in their campaign platform⁷ became Bill C-68 which, despite considerable internal resistance within the majority Liberal government, was proclaimed December 5, 1995.⁸ It included licensing for all gun owners; registration of all guns; a ban on 50% of handguns (short-barrelled, .25 and .32 calibre); a complete ban on large capacity magazines and a ban on semi-automatic military assault weapons "not reasonably used in hunting."

In Canada, it ultimately was the provincial governments that became the strongest opponents of the legislation. The provinces of Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, with the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, fought the law in the Alberta Court of Appeals during the Committee stages (Feschuk 1995, A2). They led the constitutional challenge to the law. They also announced they would not enforce the law. Ultimately, both the Alberta Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the jurisdiction of the federal government to pass law in this subject area, noting:

The registration provisions cannot be severed from the rest of the Act. The licensing provisions require everyone who possesses a gun to be licensed; the registration provisions require all guns to be registered. These portions of the Firearms Act are both tightly linked to Parliament's goal of promoting safety by reducing the misuse of any and all firearms. Both portions are integral and necessary to the operation of the scheme (Supreme Court of Canada 2000).

However, the controversy did not end there. In 2002, just prior to the Liberal leadership campaign, the Auditor General released a scathing report indicating that the costs of the legislation were far in excess of what had been projected in 1995. This report led to the reframing of the legislation as "the billion dollar boondoggle" (Cukier and Thomlinson 2004). The high profile conflicts within the governing Liberal party were well publicized during the period and almost led to a reversal of long-standing support for the legislation.⁹ As noted above, when the Conservatives won the federal election, they made clear their intention to repeal the law and, despite their minority status, it is possible that they might have had the support needed. However, the context changed again when, on 13 September 2005, a man walked into a Montréal Cégep with a legally acquired military weapon and shot 26 people, killing Anna Marie deSouza. As well, urban crime has gained profile and, since 2005, prominent officials,

⁶ See Appendix A (The Gun Control Story).

⁷ "In order to combat crime a Liberal government will work in a broad range of areas. To strengthen gun control, a Liberal government will, among other measures, counter the illegal importation of banned and restricted firearms into Canada and prohibit anyone convicted of an indictable drug-related offence, a stalking offence, or any violent offence from owning or possessing a gun" (Liberal Party of Canada, 1993: 84).

⁸ The origins of Bill C-68 and internal dissension in Liberal ranks are well-explored in Bottomley 2004, 38-52. See also Vienneau 1994, A3; Vienneau 1995, A1.

⁹ Albina Guarnieri, MP (Lib – Mississauga East-Cooksville) led a three-month review of the federal firearms programme and reported to Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan (also Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Canada). The review urged the government to take the requirement for registration of rifles and shotguns out of the Criminal Code and turn it into a routine ticket offence that would not result in a criminal record. It also recommended the renewal of gun-owner licences every 10 years instead of every five years. The report sparked furious lobbying on both sides of the issue and, at the end of the day, the federal cabinet decided against the changes proposed by Ms. Guarnieri (Naumetz 2004b, A1).

including the Mayor of Toronto, David Miller, the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, and former Prime Minister Paul Martin have called for a complete ban on handguns.

During this period, the issue of gun control has gained considerable momentum internationally, as well, with the development of both the Firearms Protocol through the United Nations Crime Commission, and the 2001 Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms. While many of the players – the gun lobby, police groups, public health organisations and others – jostled for position internationally, more than 50 countries have strengthened their gun laws during the last 5 years, many implementing laws modelled on Canada's (Cukier and Sidel 2006). Most recently the European Union passed the Firearms Directive requiring all countries to introduce minimum standards for firearms legislation including the licensing of all firearm owners and the registration of all firearms.¹⁰

Research on implementing public policy

Hill and Hupe (2002, 39) are right to remark that hopes of achieving policy implementation have existed “ever since people sought to co-opt the efforts of others to undertake complex tasks”, but implementation research in its contemporary guise is an outgrowth of the 1970s and the search for a “missing link” (Hargrove 1975) in a seemingly broken policy process. Thirty years ago, recurring failures in the post-war struggle to institute the *great society* (Goggin et al. 1990) led scholars to question the “inevitable gap” between political promises and legislation, on the one hand, “and the programs actually delivered” on the other (Palumbo and Calista 1990b, 4). In general, the first generation of implementation theorists took a “pessimistic view of implementation” (Winter 2003, 212) – one best demonstrated by the oft-quoted subtitle of Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) seminal book: “How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland; or, Why it's amazing that federal programs work at all...” Nevertheless, although they have been criticized for lacking theoretical coherence and being overly pessimistic, these pioneering studies broadened the view of public administration by “shift[ing] the focus from how a bill becomes a law to how a law becomes a program” (Goggin et al. 1990, 13). Over the past three decades, “implementation studies have waxed and waned” (Schofield and Sausman 2004, 236); yet literature surveys show that implementation research remains both popular and relevant (Barrett 2004; Saetren 2005).

The literature on implementation theory includes three central divisions. First, it is divided between top-down and bottom-up approaches (Hill and Hupe 2002). Even when acknowledging the complexity of the policy process, top-down approaches make the normative assumption that “democratically elected officials have the lead role in deciding policy” (Fox 1987, 129), and that “policy intentions precede implementation” (Calista 1994, 132). Conversely, arguing that top-down approaches neglect the crucial “place where the public sector meets the citizens or firms” (Winter 2003, 212), bottom-up implementation research looks beyond the “policy input” (Hill and Hupe 2002, 53), and assesses the influence of a variety of stakeholders (e.g. street-level bureaucrats, lobby-groups, news media), organizational structures, and other elements of “implementation contexts” (Meyers and Vorsanger 2003, 245).

Second, there is disagreement over whether the concept of implementation should be defined narrowly or broadly. Because implementation research arose out of a desire to better understand the reasons for policy failure, early studies tended to confine implementation to the final stages of a chronologically-ordered policy process (Yanow 1990). However, according to Palumbo and Calista (1990b, 5), one of the three reasons “why the early implementation studies were wrong,” is that they

¹⁰ In 2007, the European Parliament moved to amend the 1991 Directive 91/477/EEC. Online at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sites/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0559+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#top>

held too narrow a conception of the activity of implementation. Many students of implementation contend that negotiation is inherent in all stages of policymaking, and therefore question the value of separating formation from implementation (e.g., Hjern and Hull 1982; Winter 1990). In short, the broad definition of implementation includes not only a wide array of actors, but also “revise[s] earlier linear concepts of policy execution in favor of a more complex, iterative model” (Yanow 1990, 226).

Third, the literature on policy implementation contains epistemological conflict between those who rely on positivist methods of analysis, and those whose studies are founded on interpretive logic (Hill and Hupe 2002). Certainly there are benefits to approaches that appeal to the credibility of statistical analysis and use “a mixed-method, dynamic model with clearly stated, testable hypotheses” (Kaplan and Corbett 2003, 64) in order to standardize the notion of policy implementation and evaluate policymaking and policy-delivery (see Goggin et al. 1990). Nevertheless, positivist methods have been roundly criticized for over-simplifying what is recognised as a highly complex policy process (Birkland 2001). Moreover, as Fox (1987) argues, because positivist policy analyses test only one hypothesis at a time, they are necessarily blind to the potential “lasting social effects” (136) of a broad front of government initiatives and, as such, are predisposed to uncovering a series of individual policy failures. Not surprisingly, “this tends to support the conservative view that government is a negative influence on society” (134).

Interpretive approaches to policy implementation criticize positivist research for attempting to locate the “one meaning that can be established clearly and that will carry legislators’ intent unambiguously to implementers ... leaving no room for interpretation” (Yanow 1993, 55). In accordance with the call for more nuanced approaches to policy implementation, interpretive approaches focus not only on the “self-contained” factors of a particular policy, but also “look for changes in regime norms or *geist* changes as possible contributing factors” to meaning-making in the policy sphere (Fox 1987, 139). Rather than analyzing policy implementation by assuming “a dependent variable and engag[ing] in a search for determinants, or independent variables” (Linder and Peters 1987, 123), the interpretive approach asks “how a policy accrues meaning; where meanings reside; how they are transmitted to and among various policy stakeholders; how they come to be shared or not shared; how they may be destroyed” (Yanow 1993, 41).

Methodology: Interpretive implementation analysis

In the context of the foregoing literature review on implementation theory, this paper acknowledges the insight of both top-down and bottom-up approaches; maintains a broad conception of the implementation process; and draws on interpretive logic in order to gain a richer understanding of the dominant positions on gun control policy in Canada. Specifically, the paper takes a qualitative approach to the implementation of Canada's *Firearms Act*, and analyzes transcripts of witness testimony delivered at the parliamentary committee which reviewed Bill C-68 during the spring of 1995. As in the work of Patton, et al. (2003, 815), interpretive implementation analysis is used with the intention of providing “an iterative commentary of how a particular policy has been interpreted and implemented by those parties involved in the programme.”

Part of what Ascher (1987, 3) describes as “the battle to reassert the importance of the contextual” in research on public policy, interpretive logic “attempts to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them” (Patton et al. 2003, 815). One of the leading authorities on interpretive policy analysis, Dvora Yanow (1990, 221) explains that

Using interpretive logic, implementation analysis is no longer the search for a factual essence of the implementation problem. [...] Multiple meanings, multiple interpretations coexist, like the many facets of a cubist portrait. The role of the analyst is to investigate implementors’ and other relevant publics’ interpretations of the policy

culture and to analyze the effects of these interpretations and meanings on implementation efforts.

With respect to the implementation of Canada's *Firearms Act*, an interpretive epistemology is especially valuable, because it allows the analyst to compare and contrast the "communicative interaction between policy actors and their target groups" (Grin and Van de Graf 1996, 292), with the intention of offering more than a mere declaration that one group is ultimately "right" and another "wrong." Rather, interpretive logic is valuable here because it is "designed to reproduce the purposive, intentional character of the practical reasoning carried out" (Jennings 1983, 9) by the participants in Canada's debate on gun control policy. It offers a chance to present a more detailed understanding of how and why different citizens held such firm – yet at the same time contradictory – views on the nature of Bill C-68. Interpretive analysis provides an opportunity to paint a more complex picture of the policy implementation process, adding to our understanding of how and why certain decisions were made over the course of implementing the legislation. It may also provide clues about the course of future debates on the topic. In short, compared to positivist implementation research methods, interpretive analysis goes deeper into the philosophical underpinnings of stakeholders, and helps get to the root of the gun control debate.

Those who would accuse this approach of bowing to the bogeyman of cultural relativism are missing the point: it is not the purpose of this paper to suggest that any interpretation is as good as the next – on gun control, or on any other issue. On the contrary, interpretive logic does not rule out the possibility that some understandings of gun control policy will be preferred over others. As Terry Eagleton (2003) notes, "To acknowledge that *King Lear* has more than one meaning is not to claim that it can mean anything at all" (96). Nevertheless, whereas policy analysis undertaken from the perspective of logical positivism tends to presume that meanings surrounding the implementation process are relatively fixed, and universally shared, interpretive logic holds the promise of offering a more "subtle and sympathetic appraisal of the intentions and self-understandings of the agents involved" in debating, amending, and, ultimately accepting (or resisting), public policy (Jennings 1983, 10).

Data for the following analysis consists of parliamentary committee proceedings on Bill C-68. Verbatim transcripts of the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs (SCJLA) were collected from the Parliament of Canada website.¹¹ Between April 24 and May 19, 1995, the committee devoted forty-one meetings to hearing testimony on the proposed *Firearms Act*. During these twenty-six days, the committee heard from representatives from seventy different witness groups, before sending the bill back to the House of Commons for Third Reading. Using well established techniques of critical discourse analysis, transcripts were reviewed and coded for the principal actors, the arguments, in support and in opposition to the legislation and the connotative language and metaphors (Cukier et. al. 2004). The data were then organized in themes that emerged around notions of the individual, notions of the state, individual versus communitarian rights and obligations, notions of identity and notions of the assessment of costs and benefits.

Appendix B summarizes the principal actors and Appendix C outlines the major themes. This study focuses on the discourse of the witnesses and the politicians participating in the debate. The media discourse concerning the issue has been discussed elsewhere (Cukier and Thomlinson 2004).

¹¹ Because not all necessary records were available in hardcopy, citations use time (as opposed to page number) to reference parliamentary statements. This system is, in fact, more precise than citing page numbers, because *Hansard* online is broken into five-minute segments; by contrast, ten minutes or more can fit onto one page of *Hansard's* hardcopy.

Interpretations of the Firearms Act

Broadly speaking, the groups and individuals supporting Bill C-68 tended to interpret the legislation as part of a larger push towards making Canada a safer place in which to live. Stakeholders in this camp emphasised specific improvements expected to stem directly from the legislated controls – most commonly, a presumed reduction of gun-related injuries and deaths – but the meaning of the *Firearms Act* was also discussed in more general terms. Legislators supporting the bill were especially keen to argue that the *Firearms Act* would not only help to curb gun violence, but would also play a crucial role in building “the kind of Canada we want for ourselves and for our children” (Allan Rock, House debates 13 June 1995, 10:10).

The groups and individuals opposed to the passage of Bill C-68 tended to interpret the legislation as constituting an egregious infringement upon the rights of law-abiding citizens. In the words of Gary Mauser, a leading firearms advocate and Professor at Simon Fraser University, “firearm registration is another step along a slippery slope that could damage individual freedom for all Canadians” (2001, 4). Critics such as MP Chuck Strahl (Reform – Fraser Valley East) condemned the *Firearms Act* for doing “very little to clamp down on the criminal misuse of firearms” (House debates, 13 June 1995, 12:25). Others, such as MP Jim Gouk (Reform – Kootenay West - Revelstoke) suggested that the government responsible for the bill believed that it would “somehow magically ... keep our homes and streets safer” (House debates, 13 June 1995, 13:40). However, interpretive analysis of a wide range of textual sources reveals that hostility towards Bill C-68 is more complex than a mere concern that the legislation would fail to achieve its stated objectives.

For the purposes of this paper, a series of fundamental themes have been identified, and the interpretations of key stakeholders – both favourable and unfavourable – analysed on the basis of their comments before the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs during the period March-June 1995, or when addressing the same subject in the House of Commons. These claims are summarised, by theme, in Appendix C.

Assumptions about the state (and its appropriate role):

Those who interpret the *Firearms Act* favourably demonstrate trust in the state's ability to play a positive role in organizing social, political, and cultural practices. This sentiment is most obvious in the speeches of legislators in the House of Commons. For example, at second reading debate on Bill C-68, Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Canada Allan Rock explained that “the regulation of firearms” was an initiative in keeping with the government's commitment to ensuring “the preservation of the safe, civilized and peaceful nature of Canada” (House debates 16 February 1995, 12:10). Support for an active state also came from members of the Bloc Québécois. Notwithstanding the possibility that their passionate defence of Bill C-68 might appear ironic – an avowedly separatist party appealing to Canadian values and the power of the Canadian state – Bloc Members of Parliament offered some of the most compelling arguments in favour of tightening restrictions on firearms in Canada (cf. Cairns 2003). Indeed, from the start of debate on the *Firearms Act*, Bloc MPs contended that “setting up a national registration system is a positive step” toward improving Canadian society (Pierette Venne, House debates 16 February 1995, 13:10).

Joining MPs in affirming the role of the state in stemming gun violence were various public institutions and interest groups. Testimony demanding firm state action was delivered at the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs by representatives from high-profile groups such as the Canadian Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canada Safety Council, the Big-City Mayors (Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver), the Coalition for Gun Control, and others. As Cukier and Fletcher (2002, 15) observe, the

backing of “respected and credible ‘expert’ organizations” – especially that of the widely popular police groups – proved invaluable in framing the *Firearms Act* as a necessary and reasonable approach to a complex social problem. Although different stakeholders brought their own unique perspectives to the debate on gun control, each addressing particular aspects of the legislation with the hope of improving their own lot, the ones who made a favourable interpretation of Bill C-68 exhibited a basic trust in the role of the state as an effective guardian of public safety. For example, Mike Badham, representing the Canadian Association of Police Boards testified “the bill represents a logical step in regulating the use of firearms in a manner so as to protect the public interest ... I use the word ‘right’ as it is provided in our Charter. Canadians believe universally that it is their right to live and work in an environment which does not post undue risk to themselves or their families. They look to you as lawmakers, and to those of us who are responsible for this daily protection, to help maintain that right” (SCJLA 04 May 1995, 15:45). The rights referred to by Mike Badham are also consistent with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, which includes, among protections, “freedom from fear.” Claudette Picard, of the Québec Bar Association said explicitly “ We think the bill helps achieve a fair balance between individual rights and the protection of society” (SCJLA 17 May 1995, 15:40).

On the other hand, critics of the legislation tended to be suspicious of the role of the state in political affairs. It would be an exaggeration to say that people opposed to the *Firearms Act* saw the state as an inherently negative political force – certainly, many critics praised specific state functions— however, Lucien Bouchard was right when he said in the House that opponents of Bill C-68 “perceive the intervention of the state and additional restrictions as an unnecessary attack on individual freedoms” (House debates, 13 June 95, 10:30). This underlying distrust in government is apparent throughout the texts reviewed in this study.

For example, testifying before the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, the legal counsel for the Saskatchewan Responsible Firearms Owners, John Hardy, argued that Bill C-68 offered the state unwarranted and potentially dangerous access into private homes. Referring to the British Common Law, Hardy declared:

an Englishman's home is his castle; not only a fortress for his defence in time of trouble, but also a place of refuge. A citizen's home and the privacy of his home are a fundamental part of his individual right of privacy. Home is that person's personal space. It is the place where they can go to be away from the cares of the world, including the watchful eyes of the state (SCJLA 01 May 1995, 10:00).

During debate in the House of Commons, it was not uncommon to find Reform Party MPs castigating the *Firearms Act* as an attack on civil liberties. John Cummins (Reform – Delta) said the Bill amounted to a “violation of human rights” (House debates 13 June 1995, 16:55), while his colleague Lee Morrison (Reform – Swift Current - Maple Creek) said it was characteristic of the way that “governments often chip away at civil liberty little by little by little” (House debates 13 June 1995, 13:35). While these claims were made in the context of a sustained attack on the particular bill at hand, it is also important to note their broader implications. The preceding quotations unquestionably reveal opposition to Bill C-68, but they are also an incomplete representation of a complex discursive strategy. Putting the question of validity to one side, the argument that Bill C-68 would be ineffective is not the same as an argument that interprets and depicts the legislation as an example of the dangerously intrusive power of the state. It appears that anti-government, “outsider” rhetoric – the same kind that helped to sweep Mike Harris to

power in 1995¹² and George Bush to power in 2000 – was used as a vehicle by those articulating opposition to Bill C-68.

Assumptions about human nature

Those interpreting the legislation favourably express the belief that all people have potential to do bad things, which means that allowing easy access to things that have great capacity to harm (e.g., guns) increases the risk that harm will occur. This was heard repeatedly in the House and before the Committee. For example:

Robert Coté, representing the City of Montréal noted: “We also feel that the public will be better protected. Protection depends on prevention and prevention on tighter controls. Easy access to a firearm is often a determining factor in many murders as well as crimes of passion or committed on impulse, accidents and suicides. In Canada, firearms are responsible for the death of 1,400 people every year. Eighty percent commit suicide, 15% are murdered and 5% of deaths are accidental. The City of Montréal believes that gun registration will help prevent these deaths. Our streets will be safer, just as our highways became safer when speed limits were imposed” (SCJLA 04 May 1995, 9:55).

Barbara Hall, Mayor of Toronto, said: “I think guns lying around often end up being used in violent situations just because of their mere availability. In domestic situations, in other situations, often involving alcohol where people might have, in other days, received a black eye or a broken nose, if there's a gun available, people end up being killed. Guns lying around houses, not being properly stored, end up being stolen in break-and-enter incidents and end up committing offenses ... many people believe that they're legal owners of guns until they use them in a situation that they greatly regret afterwards, for an illegal purpose” (SCJLA 04 May 1995, 10:05 ... 11:35).

The Committee Chair, Warren Almand (Lib-Notre-Dame-de-Grace), in responding to Mayor Hall, noted “66% of those who committed murder in Canada, this was their first criminal offense. ... Some people appearing before this committee suggest that we restrict our legislation to the criminal element. The conclusion is that we should wait until the crime is committed and then have tough penalties. We know Marc Lepine had no criminal element before he killed 14 women at the Université de Montréal. Valery Fabricant had no criminal record before he killed 4 professors at Concordia University. What do you think of this argument that's put forward to us over and over again that we should limit our legislation to the criminal use of guns and not pass legislation that impacts on non-criminals?” (SCJLA 04 May 1995, 11:35).

Sandra Essex speaking on behalf of the YWCA of Canada said: “the men who commit these crimes are usually perceived by their friends and neighbours as law-abiding responsible people, and many of them own guns legally. ... Domestic homicide is not usually pre-meditated. It is an impulsive act that follows an assault or a perceived loss of control, such as when the woman threatens to leave” (SCJLA 16 May 1995, 15:40). While Essex is willing to acknowledge legitimate uses of firearms for hunting and target shooting, she notes “... we believe romantic attachment to guns is behind the desire of many people to allow access to paramilitary and military weapons. We have become desensitized to violence in our society and therefore allowed an acceptance of these guns. The measures to prohibit certain weapons will help change the values that precipitate a culture of violence” (SCJLA 16 May 1995, 15:45).

¹² Mike Harris was frequently quoted as saying “We are not the government; we are here to fix the government.” See MPP Marilyn Churley (NDP-Broadview-Greenwood): http://www.ontla.on.ca/house-proceedings/transcripts/files_html/2000-06-14_L072A.htm

Unfavourable interpretations of Bill C-68 are grounded in an epistemological assumption that the primary definer in social affairs is the free, rational, and informed individual human being. In this view, not only does a national registration system for firearms appear unable to increase public safety, but virtually any restrictions on the types of guns available for private ownership are seen to be offensive (if not downright oppressive) and dangerous, insofar as they deprive law-abiding citizens of one important means of protecting their families and property. In the discourse of unfavourable interpretations of Bill C-68, guns are not inherently linked to violence; on the contrary, guns are viewed as tools to be used by responsible people who “like to get out and shoot and have a good time” (Ontario Arms Collectors Association¹³). Or they are portrayed as a bulwark against the actions of bad people (Lott 2000). In this view, there is no *gun problem*; the problem is the criminal who uses the gun. In fact, opponents explained that their “problem is that special-interest groups, politicians, and the media keep portraying responsible firearms ownership and responsible use as violence” (George Duffy, SCJLA 03 May 1995, 12:10). This group tends to dichotomize people – there are criminals and there are law abiding citizens. Larry Tardiff, of the Responsible Firearms Owners of Manitoba, claimed that “[Gun control] is a means of disarming honest citizens without limiting the firepower available to those who prey on the law-abiding public and attempting to use the legal system to *punish the firearm* [emphasis added] rather than the person misusing the firearm ... Criminals do not respect the Canadian justice system. They do not fear retribution from society and, therefore, have no incentive to law-abiding citizens. Violent criminals are particularly insolent. In short, citizens are fearful while criminals are fearless (SCJLA 08 May 1995, 10:15). From this angle, a gun is interpreted as a piece of property and, as MP Dick Harris (Reform – Caribou - Prince George) argued in 1994, the debate on Bill C-68 “goes to the heart of the right to own property and not be deprived thereof without adequate compensation” (“Protestors rally against gun controls,” *Globe and Mail*, 29 August 1994, A4).

With respect to military-style AK-47s, the late David A. Tomlinson, then President of Canada's National Firearms Association explained: “It's like owning almost anything else, which is dangerous if it is misused” (SCJLA, 24 April 1995, 15:55). When the individual human being is considered to be the ideal rational actor, the need to regulate guns evaporates and the central feature of the *Firearms Act* becomes its unnecessary restrictions upon individuals' right to own – and protect – property.

Individualism and communitarianism

Favourable interpretations of the *Firearms Act* seem grounded in long-standing Canadian values that elevate social responsibility above individual rights. These theoretical notions were prevalent in the rhetoric of parliamentarians from the Liberal party and the Bloc Québécois. Speaking in the House of Commons, Liberal MP Beth Phinney implored opponents of Bill C-68 to “act as good citizens and accept their responsibility” by submitting to the reasonable restrictions set out in the gun control legislation (House debates 13 June 1995, 16:35). Her caucus colleague, Marlene Catterall asked (House debates 13 June 1995, 11:55): “Is that not what good citizenship is all about, accountability and responsibility as well as rights and privileges?” While Bloc Québécois leader Lucien Bouchard's eloquent speech expressed sympathy for opponents of Bill C-68 who felt that the legislation would infringe on their individual rights, he remained steadfast in his belief that “a society such as ours which claims to be reasonable, vigilant and civilized, has a responsibility to ensure that the use of firearms is better controlled” (House debates 13 June 1995, 11:00).

Unfavourable interpretations of the *Firearms Act* tended to link it to what is generally described as a systematic movement within which individual rights are being taken away in accordance with a larger “hidden agenda” of elitist social engineering (George Hardy, SCJLA 03 May 1995, 9:35). In this

¹³ <http://www.hockings.net/rso/oaca.html>, retrieved on 5 April 2006.

narrative, Allan Rock was most often held responsible for leading the charge towards the creation of a Canadian police state. For example, in one (remarkably typical) characterization, Len Romanuk, the President of the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association declared that "One man, Allan Rock, has stated that he intends to change [Canada's] culture. Joseph Stalin and Adolph Hitler also changed their countries' cultures" (SCJLA, 01 May 1995, 14:35). Indeed, a discursive strategy favoured by one vocal element of the anti-*Firearms Act* camp is to draw comparisons between the political parties and interest groups who favour tighter gun control, and fascists and Nazis.

A libertarian strain underpins the unfavourable discourse. University of Calgary Professor Terry Ursacki said: "I believe that all persons have an innate and inalienable right to do whatever they want, as long as they're not harming anyone else" (SCJLA 08 May 1995, 12:05). Some went even further. For example, a spokesman for the Responsible Firearms Owners Coalition of BC, Jack McCollum, wrote: "Countless women have been attacked in the so-called safety of their homes, but the Justice Minister says the preservation of life is not a legitimate use of a firearm in Canada. What kind of a man would value the lives of rapists and murderers over the lives of their innocent victims? ... Do Canadians really want Canada to become a police state, similar to Nazi Germany or the former U.S.S.R? I have never heard of such an abuse of governmental authority in a democratic country since Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector in England ..." (SCJLA 08 May 1995, 14:20). Terry Ursacki argued further: "A registration system is simply the first step to widespread confiscation, a fear that's not entirely irrational given that it has already be used by both this government and the previous one for exactly that purpose" (SCJLA 08 May 1995, 9:40). Zena Putnam, for the Saskatchewan Responsible Firearms Owners, said "Today, May 8 marks the 50th anniversary of the victory over tyranny in Europe, a victory that was aided by hundreds of thousands of Canadian men and women who fought, bled, lost limbs and died to ensure that their children and all future Canadians would live in a free and democratic society. ... [you have made us] come to Ottawa to defend our right to retain that hard- and long-fought-for freedom" (SCJLA 08 May 1995, 9:50). Similarly, when Reform party MP Lee Morrison said that his criticism of the legislation is "certainly not suggesting that the self-righteous authoritarianism of this [Liberal] government places it on the same level as the Third Reich" (House debate, 13 June 1995, 13:35), he is at least raising the possibility that the comparison might be made.

Those who view the *Firearms Act* unfavourably believe that they are defending their rights, but they also believe that they are being "punished" by the proposed regulations. As Rick Morgan, from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, notes "I think it's clear that any Canadian – who has been law-abiding and does not have a problem ... but is required to go through a number of steps that will serve no good – is being punished when they have to pay money to register and be licensed and spend time, effort and money, yet they aren't creating the problems. Then they are being punished (SCJLA 15 May 1995, 11:50). Andy Von Busse, speaking for both the Alberta Fish and Game Association and the National Coalition of Provincial and Territorial and Wildlife Federations added "we aren't the problem, so why are we singled out?" (SCJLA 15 May 1995, 11:50).

The foregoing quotations demonstrate that a significant part of the broader sentiment driving the interpretation of the *Firearms Act* as a threat to individual liberty is underpinned by views that most sensible observers would find "extreme," to say the very least. Though they exist at the margins of this position, it is disturbing that they exist at all.

Assumptions about crime: problem identification and policy response

Interestingly, the Canadian value that tends to elevate social responsibility above individual rights commonly informs discussions about – and choice of – policy *instruments*, but is rarely applied to analyses of the policy *problem* itself. That is, there is a general – if sometimes rather grudging – acceptance of the idea that policy solutions which cause pain to – or impose loss upon – the few are

acceptable if they provide a demonstrable good to the many. And certainly, that line of reasoning is well developed in Canadian gun control debates (cf. Pal 2003). But, in Canadian debates about gun control, the individual-vs.-collective dichotomy is also evident in analyses of the problem itself. At the risk of over-simplification, those who view gun controls favourably tend to see guns – and the availability of guns – as a problem that potentially affects everyone, so solving the problem (the policy instrument chosen) becomes everyone's responsibility. This point of view was exemplified by the views of Dr. Stephen Corber, a spokesperson for the Canadian Public Health Association, who declared: "Gun control is a public health issue" (SCJLA 27 Apr 1995, 10:05). In this view, in addition to whatever quantifiable consequences the legislation was expected to generate – namely, a reduction in gun-related injuries and deaths – the *Firearms Act* also symbolized a holistic approach to a multifaceted problem. By depicting Bill C-68 as part of the public health approach – an approach that is "concerned about the health of populations and about looking out for what's best for groups of people" – Dr. Corber articulated the underlying assumption that the proposed legislation rightly demanded a collective response to challenges that are inherently collective in nature.

On the other hand, those who view gun control legislation unfavourably tend to identify the problem as applying only to a very few individuals (i.e., irresponsible owners and criminals) and therefore argue that the policy instrument should target only that small group of individuals, leaving everyone else to do what they please. This assumption is translated into the oft-repeated aphorism: *there are no such things as bad guns—only bad people*. Robert Mitchell, then NDP Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Saskatchewan, demonstrated this interpretation when he advised the committee: "They [the people of Saskatchewan] don't consider themselves to be any part of the problem and they resent mightily the fact that again Parliament is looking to them to observe yet further requirements as an apparent solution to a problem of which they are not a part" (SCJLA 09 May 1995, 9:10). Similarly, MP Mike Scott (Reform - Skeena) suggested that "[t]he minister seems to be saying that criminals are not responsible for violent crime, gun owners are. He appears intent on making legitimate firearms owners pay the price for the recent spate of crime" (Vienneau, 1994, A2). University of Calgary Professor Terry Ursacki also articulated this position clearly when he stated: "I think we all are solidly in agreement that no type of handgun should be banned. We adamantly and categorically reject – completely, totally, absolutely – any idea that there are good guns and bad guns" (SCJLA 08 May 1995, 11:15). Later in his committee testimony, Ursacki stated that people need to be trained on how to use guns properly, but "I think any type of prohibition of a specific type of firearm is worthless. It will have no effect on crime" (12:10).

Firearms and identity

It is possible to identify three distinct forms of identity that intersect with interpretations of the *Firearms Act*: Canadian, geographic, and gender.

Favourable interpretations of Bill C-68 mesh nicely with the desire of many Canadians to distinguish their national identity from that of the United States. On one level, supporters of the *Firearms Act* based their call for a distinctly Canadian approach to gun control on empirical evidence demonstrating the United States' high rates of gun violence. Expert witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice frequently invoked comparisons with the USA. Dr. Al Drummond, President of the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians (CAEP), noted that guns are "a major problem in the United States" (SCJLA 11 May 1995, 11:40), while Professor Brian L. Mishara, past President of the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, and Professor of Psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal noted that among American states, the ones "which have stricter gun controls, have lower suicide rates than states that do not" (SCJLA 11 May 1995, 10:20). Toronto Mayor

Barbara Hall argued that Americans themselves often choose to vacation in Canada “because of the safety on the streets” of major Canadian cities (SCJLA 04 May 1995, 11:25).

At another level, in addition to comparing national statistics and making empirically-based claims about how best to reduce gun-related injuries and deaths, favourable interpretations of Bill C-68 draw on the familiar trope of Canadian superiority vis-à-vis American culture. The words of the late Shaughnessy Cohen, then a Liberal MP from Windsor, Ontario, neatly capture this popular narrative. A former lawyer, Cohen referred to her courtroom experience with US citizens visiting Canada, saying that very often Americans

would be offended by our laws and highly indignant, all of them feeling that they have a God-given right to carry a gun, and in spite of the warning at the border they were going to continue to carry it. Why do they feel that way? They feel that way because their culture is different from ours, but also because many of them feel a need to carry that gun. They feel they need protection. This is not the society or the culture the vast majority of Canadians want to live in. (House debates, 13 June 1995, 15:30)

Thus, because it was anathema to the political ideals of the United States, in addition to its promise to make Canada safer, the *Firearms Act* also offered citizens a powerful opportunity to symbolically reaffirm their commitment to the idea of a unique Canadian identity. Minister of Justice Allan Rock made this point clear at second reading, arguing that there are “aspects of the American way of life that we see as very different from what we want for ourselves. Perhaps chief among them is the way in which firearms are regulated and used” (House debates, 16 February 1995, 12:10). Indeed 49 per cent of American households owned at least one firearm in 1996, while the comparable figure for Canada was only 22 per cent (Adams 2003, 119).

These notions were echoed in the hearings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. Marilyn Letts, of the Canadian Federation of University Women, said: “Gun ownership is not part of Canadian culture, it is part of the culture in the United States. It is not the norm. In 1994, CFUW clubs expressed support for policy requiring further limitation of access to firearms, reinforcing a difference for the American right-to-bear-arms culture. The myth of guns as self protection is false (SCJLA 16 May 1995, 16:00). While acknowledging urban and rural differences, these groups stressed that guns are also a problem in rural communities, where rates of suicide and domestic violence are high. Groups such as CFUW also tended to place emphasis on issues like suicide and domestic violence, rather than simply focusing on “criminal violence.”

In contrast, those opposing the legislation, referred repeatedly to the legislation as an assault on their way of life. For example, George Duffy, of the Responsible Firearms Owners of Alberta, stated:

We believe this bill will totally destroy a culture, a tradition and a way of life for a large segment of the population of Alberta. These traditions are steeped in a very colourful, historical and factual way of life. ... We believe this bill is a direct attack on this way of life. ... It's going to have a great effect on our way of life. The reason is that children are going to cease to participate in their type of activity because for no reason it's going to get too regulatory. Children are going to say, I'm going to play golf; I'm going to play football... The government does not want our children to become involved in responsible firearm use. They want our children to give this up. If they do, within 20 years, there won't be any firearms ownership in Canada because our children will just have given it up” (SCJLA 08 May 1995, 12:00).

While there is a regional and rural dimension to this notion of identity, it is not restricted to Canada's west. Jules Sobrian, of the Responsible Firearms Owners of Ontario, stated: “We are the responsible firearm owners of Canada. We continue that tradition by hunting, target shooting and gun

collecting ... We are proud of our tradition and teach our children to respect firearms, not to fear them" (SCJLA 08 May 1995, 19:36). This is also an issue raised by Aboriginal groups testifying before the committee, although their emphasis was largely upon the effect of the legislation on treaty rights and self-government.

This strong association of gun ownership and identity – “we are gun owners” – is not mirrored on the other side of the debate. For example, few witnesses prefaced their remarks by saying “we are not gun owners.” Indeed some of the supporters of stronger controls – such as Canadian Association of Emergency Physician (CAEP) spokesperson Dr. Al Drummond, YWCA spokesperson Sandra Essex, and Canadian Labour Congress spokesperson Dick Martin – all noted that they were gun owners but supported the legislation. In the same way, many groups rejected as a false dichotomy attempts to portray the division on the issue as an urban versus rural divide.

Assumptions about “cost” and “value”

Favourable interpretations of Bill C-68 turn on an inherent tension between balancing social benefits and financial costs. Three textual examples help to illustrate this underlying struggle. First, long before the Auditor General's infamous 2002 appraisal of the Canadian Firearms Program (Canada 2002), the question of funding the *Firearms Act* was raised during committee hearings on Bill C-68. Fishing for an ally in his attack on the legislation, MP Jack Ramsay (Reform – Crowfoot) asked Neil Jessop, President of the Canadian Police Association, how he felt about the possibility that creating a national gun registry would reduce current police budgets. Jessop's response was blunt: “How I feel about it, Mr. Ramsay, is very simple. I'd like to have both, thanks. I don't know how to put a price on life and death” (SCJLA 01 May 1995, 17:35). That there would be costs associated with the implementation was not a matter of debate, but supporters of the legislation tended to frame it as an investment rather than as an expenditure. Mike Badham, for the Canadian Association of Police Boards, stated “Much of the cost mentioned in studies has to do with that local investment of human resources ... We are willing to absorb the cost and to make the commitment ... because, as an association, we believe the universal firearms registry, as proposed, will save lives and assist investigations; and ultimately, because it is first and foremost a preventative measure. ... We believe, in the long run, it will also save tax dollars ... every dollar spent on crime prevention saves \$5 in future costs.” (SCJLA 04 May 1995, 15:40).

In contrast, stakeholders making an unfavourable interpretation of the legislation appeared unwilling to distinguish economic costs and benefits from other social issues. Before the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs (SCJLA), representatives from several outfitters' associations demanded that Bill C-68 be scrapped, for “If only 25% or 30% of outfitters' clients refused to come to Canada because of gun registration, this industry would collapse” (Lee Bolster, SCJLA, 01 May 1995, 14:15). Opponents of the legislation also predicted that its costs would be excessive and that the money could be better spent on other measures. For example, Gary Mauser, speaking on behalf of the British Columbia Wildlife Federation and the National Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Wildlife Federations, said: “According to my estimates, registering field and stream firearms is very expensive. The true costs are unknown, but to the extent that the justice department has underestimated the costs, the provinces and municipal governments will be forced to bear the new financial burden ... this could increase the risks of criminal violence to Canadians ... this is a proposal for siphoning money out of the rural parts of Canada and feeding it to job creation projects in Ottawa” (SCJLA 15 May 1995, 11:00).

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the key actors, as well as the values and beliefs that are embedded in the ongoing Canadian debate about gun control. Yanow (1987) asserted “implementation is affected not only by what happens after the legislative phase, but by what transpired prior to and during policy-drafting as well” (108) and characterised this as a key element in a “policy culture.” This was certainly true throughout the relatively long and uncertain implementation of the *Firearms Act* – a tumultuous period marked by ongoing debate over the central meaning of the legislation. By examining stakeholder interpretations, as expressed to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs (SCJLA), this paper has identified the fundamental assumptions that underpin the interpretation of the *Firearms Act*, and has grouped them in several broad thematic categories.

What is striking about the debate is that it has, from its earliest beginnings, been conducted almost as though the public policy itself (controlling gun owners, guns themselves, and gun use) is really just a proxy for other, deeply held and symbolic values. As this paper demonstrates, the assumptions that underpin stakeholder positions have to do with the state and its appropriate role in society, the fundamental essence of human nature, individual versus collective values, whether crime is a product of bad people or of environmental variables. Moreover, the assumptions also contain elements that are central to identity: as a Canadian, as a resident of a particular area (e.g., centre vs. periphery, urban vs. rural, east vs. west), and as a man or a woman. Finally, the assumptions reveal a propensity to confuse “cost” and “value.” The regulation of firearms has therefore become a flash-point that brings together combinations of deeply held values of identities in ways that make the idea of compromise untenable to most. Thus, as Yanow (1987) asserted, understanding “what transpired prior to and during policy-drafting” is central to understanding what happened after.

While the legislation passed the House of Commons with a healthy margin, making it operational was neither simple nor was the process marked by any sort of consensus. In 1996, while the regulations needed to implement the law were being drafted, several provinces (led by Alberta) and gun lobby groups announced that they would challenge the constitutionality of the law in the Courts. Although the gun control regime was launched in December 1998 (after many delays), the uncertainty around the constitutional challenge persisted until the Supreme Court of Canada announced its decision in June 2000, just months before the deadline to obtain a firearms license. During that period, problems related to systems and rising costs were exacerbated by aggressive opposition and incitements to non-compliance. Many of the assumptions on which the system design and costing were based – such as the participation of the provinces, and the ability of gun owners to complete forms correctly – proved flawed. The issue continued to be politically charged, and the 2002 Auditor General’s report on cost overruns and lack of transparency sent the governing Liberal’s scrambling for ways to cut costs and streamline processes. By mid 2003, levels of compliance were estimated at over 90% for both licensing and registration, however the discourse around the legislation had shifted dramatically and opponents tried to make it an election issue in both 2003 and 2005. Even in 2006, the issue was framed in much the way it had been in 1995. In announcing legislation to repeal the long gun registry, Public Security Minister Stockwell Day (Conservative - Okanagan-Coquihalla) said, “The effort of trying to track down every single long-gun [rifles and shotguns] in Canada has been ineffective, costly and wasteful and has not led to a reduction in crime with guns. ... Duck-hunters, farmers and law-abiding gun owners do not pose a threat to Canadians, criminals do” (CTV.ca 2006). Similarly, supporters of the legislation continued to make their claims. Tony Cannavino, president of the Canadian Police Association, told reporters “Our position is very, very clear, we support the gun registry. For us it is important” (Brennan, 2007). Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion said that the 16 April 2007 Virginia Tech massacre underscored the need for gun control and specifically the long-gun registry: “All the statistics will show that the big

difference between the criminality rate in the United States and in Canada is about gun crime, so we need to have a strong gun control in Canada," Dion told reporters" (Brennan, 2007).

It is clear that the passage of time has done little to change the fundamental assumptions examined here. All that has changed is context, challenges, and the personalities involved. The number of supporters and opponents may shift slightly for various reasons, but the fundamental values remain.

Traditionally, the policy implementation process is conceived as beginning only *after* policymaking has concluded. By contrast, building on Yanow's (1993, 219) observation that "implementation success and failure cannot be confined to postlegislation factors alone," the foregoing analysis adopts a broad definition of policy implementation with respect to Canada's *Firearms Act*, and theorizes the public testimony of key stakeholders in Canada's gun policy culture as an essential (albeit early) part of the implementation process. This examination of stakeholder discourse during consideration of Bill C-68 has been conducted under the banner of implementation research as a deliberate response to calls "for a revival of interest in implementation studies" (Barrett 2004, 260). That interest includes expanding ideas about what constitutes the implementation process itself (see also Winter 1990; Yanow 1993).

Royal Assent to Bill C-68 did not instantaneously transform longstanding views about the meaning of the proposed legislation; nor did the practical demands of the *Firearms Act* arrive without a history. Considered in the context of an issue-based "policy culture" – which Yanow (1993, 219) insists "... includes the accumulated and often competing values and beliefs concerning that issue, collected over successive debates" – it is clear that bureaucratic and public relations efforts to make operational the *Firearms Act* were – and are – inextricably bound up in earlier discursive battles. Regulatory struggles and public debates since 1995 are rooted in the positions articulated by stakeholders who appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. Further research into the successes and failures of gun control in Canada must take into account the complex competing conceptual frameworks identified in this study.

The point here is not to suggest that all stakeholder interpretations are equally valid, persuasive, or powerful. The question – according to Clifford Geertz (1973, 2000a, 2000b), whose cultural anthropology is largely responsible for moving the analysis of multiple meanings to the centre of the social sciences (cf. Shweder and Good 2005) – is how humans make sense of what tend to be seen as self-evident phenomena. Thus, the implementation issue regarding Canada's *Firearms Act* is not exclusively a question about whether there is a hierarchy of public policy stakeholders that influences policy outcomes, whether the ultimate policy direction was clear or ambiguous, or whether street-level bureaucrats fulfilled their duties as instructed. These are important questions and they, too, require further research. The issue that this paper has addressed, however, is the nature of the gap separating different understandings of a single piece of public policy. To borrow again from Geertz (2000b, 22), the paper analyses the narratives of those who identify themselves as integral to the implementation of gun control policy as a way of learning more about "what institutions, actions, images ... all the usual objects of social-scientific interest, mean to those whose institutions, actions, customs, and so on they are."

In identifying a series of thematic assumptions at work during the great debate about gun policy in Canada, this paper has demonstrated the extent to which symbolism, identity, and ideology underpin the conflicting views of whether the *Firearms Act* will make Canada safer, or is simply another example of the heavy hand of government reaching into people's lives. Rational debates about policy that do not take into account deep-rooted symbolic values and identities are destined to be lengthy and defy resolution. That is why the regulation of firearms has become the "energiser bunny" of Canadian public policy ... it is an issue that just keeps going and going and going.

Appendix A: The Gun Control Story

1867: *An Act to Prevent the Unlawful Training of Persons in the Use of Arms* is passed.

1892: The first *Criminal Code of Canada* is passed, and includes firearms regulations.

February 1976: The first attempt to produce a comprehensive gun control law (Bill C-83) is given first reading but, under heavy criticism, is withdrawn and replaced by Bill C-51, widely seen to be much less stringent.

December 6, 1989: The "Montréal Massacre." A misogynist shoots 28 people at *l'Ecole Polytechnique*, killing 14 young female engineering students with a legally-obtained semi-automatic (Ruger Mini -14) and large capacity magazine.

December 1989 - January 1990: Responses focus on violence against women more generally, on impediments to women in engineering, and also on gun control. The students of *l'Ecole Polytechnique* begin to circulate a petition calling for a ban on military weapons. In Toronto, a small group begins to develop a comprehensive approach to gun control, becoming the nucleus of Canadians for Gun Control. They recommend licensing firearms owners, registering guns, banning military assault weapons, etc.

June 26, 1990: Justice Minister Kim Campbell introduces Bill C-80, which improves the screening process required to obtain a Firearms Acquisition Certificate (FAC), defines safe storage, bans some military weapons and large-capacity magazines, but does not ban semi-automatic military weapons such as the Ruger Mini-14, register firearms, or control the sale of ammunition.

November 1990: Bill C-80 fails second reading, because of opposition in Kim Campbell's own Conservative caucus, and is sent to a "Special Committee."

November 1990 - February 1991: The Special Committee on Bill C-80 conducts hearings.

April 1991: The students of *l'Ecole Polytechnique* and Canadians for Gun Control formally merge to form the Coalition for Gun Control. The Coalition holds its first national press conference in Ottawa – with representatives from the Canadian Police Association, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Victims of Polytechnique, the Canadian Criminal Justice Association, and others – calling on the Government to reintroduce gun-control legislation.

May 12, 1991: Parliament prorogues and Bill C-80 dies on the order paper.

May 1991: Justice Minister Kim Campbell unveils Bill C-17, a revised version of Bill C-80, and argues that the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General does not need to conduct extensive hearings but should send the bill back to the House of Commons for third reading. Gun organizations push for hearings in an effort to weaken the bill. Gun-control advocates push for hearings in order to strengthen the bill. The National Action Committee on the Status of Women storms the hearings, arguing that women have the right to be heard, and the bill is subsequently sent to the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General.

May - September 1991: The Legislative Committee hears witnesses on both sides. This time, the Coalition for Gun Control appears with support from health-care, crime-prevention and other experts. The Liberal and ND parties support the position of the Coalition advocating licensing of firearm owners and registration of firearms.

November 7, 1991: The House of Commons passes Bill C-17 by a vote of 189-14. Members of all four political parties acknowledge the efforts of the Coalition for Gun Control.

November - December 1991: The Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs reviews the legislation. Priscilla DeVilliers, whose daughter Nina was killed months earlier, and John Bickerstaff, whose son Lee was accidentally killed by a friend playing with his father's service revolver, testify.

December 5, 1991: Bill C-17 receives Royal Assent, having passed the Senate. Senator Nathan Nurgitz, Chair of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, writes to Justice Minister Kim Campbell advising her to look carefully at the regulations and to registration of all firearms.

- March 1992:** Regulations are introduced after considerable discussion and lobbying. Major lobbying efforts secure strong screening processes, including the requirement that references sign the FAC application form.
- August 1992:** A professor with legally acquired handguns shoots and kills four colleagues at Concordia University in Montréal. The University launches a petition calling for a ban on all handguns.
- September 1992:** While Bill C-17 banned large-capacity magazines, it allowed provinces to exempt "legitimate competitions." A national protest, sparked by the Halifax police chief's refusal to issue exemptions, results in all provinces refusing.
- January 1993:** After a number of delays, the new screening process associated with Bill C-17 is implemented.
- September 1993:** An Angus Reid poll commissioned by the Coalition for Gun Control shows that the vast majority of Canadians support registration of all firearms (86%), a ban on military weapons (84%), as well as a ban on handguns (70%). There are regional differences: support for gun control is higher in Quebec (90%) and lower in the west (72% in Alberta). There are also gender differences: a higher percentage of women than men support the proposal. But even among gun owners support is high. The Coalition for Gun Control now includes over 100 organizations.
- October 25, 1993:** The Liberals are elected with a majority government. The Conservatives are reduced to two seats. During the election campaign, the Liberals, Bloc Québécois, and NDP endorse stricter gun control.
- March - April 1994:** A series of shootings in rapid succession heighten concern about gun control. The Minister of Justice, Allan Rock, signals that he intends to strengthen gun-control legislation and is considering a range of proposals.
- April - September 1994:** Pro-gun groups across the country begin to organize rallies and protests. New "Responsible Firearms Owners" groups appear in most provinces. The Coalition for Gun Control launches a "gun-control-now" postcard campaign, calling on the government to introduce stricter laws. A large number of policing and community organizations participate, including the Metro Toronto, Peel, and Montreal Police Departments, Cities of Toronto and Montréal and Ontario Federation of Women Teachers Associations.
- September 22, 1994:** A rally is held on Parliament Hill drawing over 10,000 gun owners. "Crime control not gun control" and "Don't blame us" were the rallying cries.
- November 1994 - January 1995:** The Minister of Justice, Allan Rock unveils a comprehensive package of gun-control proposals which include licensing and registration of all firearms, a ban on semi-automatic military weapons, a ban on some handguns, and stiffer penalties for firearms offenses. The proposals are quickly denounced by gun groups and endorsed by over 300 police, injury-prevention, crime-prevention, and other organizations. The proposals address the key demands of the Coalition for Gun Control and, in some respects, go further. The Coalition organizes press conferences across the country of groups in support of the law, including Winnipeg, Vancouver, Edmonton, Montréal, Québec City, and Toronto.
- February 14, 1995:** Bill C-68 is tabled and is faithful to the proposals announced earlier.
- March - June 1995:** The Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs hears over 75 witnesses. Pro-gun witnesses outnumber gun-control supporters 2 to 1.
- June 13, 1995:** The House of Commons passes Bill C-68 by a vote of 192 to 63.
- June - November 1995:** The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, chaired by Senator Gerald Beaudoin, begins its review of the legislation. Letter-writing and telephoning campaigns on both sides escalate. In last-minute appeals, both the families of the victims of *l'Ecole Polytechnique* and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police call on the Senate to pass the law without amendment.
- September 26, 1995:** The Province of Alberta – supported by Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, and Yukon – announce that the constitutionality of the law will be challenged in Court.
- November 22, 1995:** Senators on both sides of the issue make impassioned speeches. Amendments, which would have gutted the bill and sent it back to the House of Commons, are narrowly defeated 53 to 46. The

amendments are defeated because four Conservative women, Senators Mira Spivak, Ermine Cohen, Janis Johnson, and Therese Lavoie Roux were joined by three Conservative men from Québec, Senators Gerald Beaudoin, Senator Rivest, and Senator Bolduc, in breaking party ranks. Once the amendments were defeated, the intact legislation passed by a comfortable margin of 64 to 28, with 11 abstentions.

December 5, 1995: Bill C-68 receives Royal Assent and is proclaimed as *The Firearms Act*.

March 13, 1996: In Dunblane, Scotland 16 primary-school children and their teacher are murdered by a member of a local gun club who then killed himself. A petition is launched calling for a complete ban on handguns.

April 5, 1996: In Vernon, BC, Rajwar Gakhil and 8 members of her family are murdered by her estranged husband, a gun-club member, who then commits suicide. The Coalition raises a number of questions about the way in which the RCMP processed the murderer's gun application. An inquest and inquiry are called which makes wide ranging recommendations relevant to the implementation of the firearms legislation.

May 1996: First regulations are tabled, and then withdrawn, after opposition from the rural caucus over the provision to "double lock" long guns with a trigger lock and safe storage compartment.

May 10, 1996: 35 people are killed and 18 injured in Port Arthur, Tasmania, Australia by a gun collector with military style semi-automatic rifles. Within months the Australian government announces a series of improvements to gun-control legislation, including a buy-back of semi-automatic weapons and a national licensing and registration scheme. Previously, 5 of 8 states had registered guns. Tasmania was not one of them.

Fall, 1996: Provinces, led by Alberta, announce their intention to challenge the constitutionality of the law.

December 2, 1996: Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories and others, file documents to obtain intervener status in the constitutional challenge to oppose the law. The Coalition for Gun Control, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Cities of Montréal and Toronto, and Alberta Council of Women's Shelters obtain intervener status in support of the law and the Federal Government.

February 1997: Britain's bill banning 90% of handguns is passed. Victims press for a ban on all handguns and are supported by the opposition Labour Party.

April 1997: United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice releases its multi-nation study. A resolution sponsored by 33 countries calls on all countries which have not already done so to introduce regulations concerning safe storage of firearms, licensing firearms owners, and registering firearms. The NRA, which has allocated substantial funds to fighting the United Nation's efforts, denounces the move as driven by Japanese interests. Consultations are scheduled around the world in Slovenia, Tanzania, India, and Brazil.

May 1997: New Zealand's review of firearms regulations is released. Retired Judge, Sir Thomas Thorp, announces that the reasons which led New Zealand to discontinue registration of rifles and shotguns no longer apply and recommends, among other things, a return to registering all firearms.

May 1997: Britain's Labour party sweeps the country and moves to ban all handguns.

May - June 1997: During the Canadian election campaign, Reform and Conservative parties pledge to repeal the law. The NDP sits on the fence despite Alexa McDonough's commitment during the leadership campaign. Liberals and Bloc Québécois stand firm.

September 08-16, 1997: A constitutional challenge is heard in the Alberta Court of Appeal. During the court case, the Province of Alberta argued that, while handguns and other restricted weapons were dangerous and therefore could be controlled by the Federal Government, rifles and shotguns were "ordinary firearms" and therefore just private property which was properly provincial jurisdiction.

October 1997: The final set of regulations is tabled.

March 1998: Regulations are finalized.

April - May 1998: The United National Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice passes a resolution calling for the development of an internationally binding instrument to control the import, export and in transit movement of firearms.

September 1998: A rally is held on Parliament Hill to oppose the implementation. In addition to Canadian opponents, several Americans¹⁴ are invited by organisers.

September 29, 1998: In the split (3-2) decision of the Alberta Court of Appeal in *Reference re the Firearms Act*, federal jurisdiction was upheld. Chief Justice Catherine Fraser reaffirmed the importance of licensing and registration to any effective gun control system because these are:

... about the protection of public safety from the misuse of ordinary firearms. This is to be accomplished through a simple but compelling concept - individual responsibility and accountability for one's ordinary firearms. This is a small price to pay for the privilege of being allowed to possess and use a dangerous weapon.

She also wrote:

... increased firearms controls are also consistent with the philosophy underlying the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. ... I am well aware that the Declaration has not been expressly incorporated into domestic law. However, where legislation is open to two interpretations, one of which is more consistent with international human rights norms, then that interpretation is to be preferred. ... Parliament's efforts with Bill C-68 were motivated, in part, by the desire to reduce the incidence of firearms-related domestic violence. This being so, one should not ignore the international human rights context.

October 1998: Alberta announces its intention to appeal the decision of the Alberta Court of Appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada.

December 1, 1998: Most elements of the regulations come into force, including individual licensing and firearm registration. First license issued. First long gun registered.

April 1999: The Coalition for Gun Control, along with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, CAVEAT, the Canadian Paediatric Society, Canadian Association for Adolescent Health, Québec Public Health Association, the December 6th Foundation, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, the Cities of Toronto, Montréal and Winnipeg are granted intervener status at the Supreme Court of Canada.

February 21-22, 2000: The Supreme Court of Canada hears Alberta's constitutional challenge and the testimony of interveners.

June 15, 2000: Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, upholds the constitutionality of the *Firearms Act*, ruling that it falls under federal jurisdiction.

November 27, 2000: In federal election, Liberals win third consecutive majority. Although gun control did not become an issue of significance during the campaign, several supporters of Bill C-68 were targeted by gun organisations. Anne McLellan is re-elected in Edmonton West.

October-November, 2002: Bill C-10, amendments to the *Criminal Code of Canada* to address logistical and administrative issues associated with the implementation of *The Firearms Act*, and to deal with cruelty to animals, is passed in the House of Commons (09 Oct) but is split into two separate Bills by the Senate (28 November). Bill C-10A deals with firearm issues, relaxes screening processes and extends grandparenting provision for prohibited handguns.

December 3, 2002: Auditor General's Report on the Firearms Program criticized cost over-runs and lack of transparency. The A-G said

¹⁴ One American, in particular, drew considerable attention: John Lott, author of *More Guns, Less Crime*. He is known for advancing the argument that gun control caused an 11 year old and 13 year old to steal some guns and shoot their classmates and a teacher in Arkansas. He argued that if only one of the teachers had been armed, the tragedy would not have happened.

We did not audit program efficiency or whether it is meeting its objective. ... The issue here is not gun control. And it's not even astronomical cost overruns, although these are serious. What's really inexcusable is that Parliament was in the dark.

December 31, 2002: Deadline for firearm registration.

February 2003: Gun Control Program Action Plan announced to streamline costs and make it easier for firearms owners to comply

March 25, 2003: An additional \$59 million is provided to sustain the gun registry through the end of the fiscal year. Party discipline is imposed on Liberal members who, with the support of the Bloc Québécois, approve the infusion by a vote of 173-75.

May 13, 2003: Royal Assent to Bill C-10A.

June 2003: Proposed changes to Firearms Act regulations tabled in the House of Commons and the Senate.

Fall 2003: CAFC Stakeholder consultations and Parliamentary Committee reviews of proposed regulatory changes.

Early 2004: Ministerial review of the Firearms Program – pressure to relax the legislation in order to appease critics.

March 2004: Effort to cut funding for the firearms program is defeated.

May 2004: Government announcement of Firearms Program cost caps and other measures to help combat firearms crime.

June 28, 2004: Federal election. During campaign, Conservatives pledge to repeal the law. Liberals win a minority government with 135 of 308 seats.

December 2005: effort to cut funding to Firearms Program is defeated despite the minority government. Most NDP and Bloc Québécois vote with the Liberals in support of the programme.

December 2005: Requirements for renewing firearms licenses are relaxed.

January 23, 2006: Conservatives win minority government with 124 of 308 seats.

April 2006: Elected MPs of all political parties are now participating in a parliamentary "Outdoor Caucus" to protect gun owners interests based on the American Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus.

May 2006: Auditor General reveals that the system is now operating as it should, without major problems.

May-June 2006: new Conservative government lacks the votes to scrap the gun registry, but moves to fulfil election promises by:

- providing an amnesty for failure to renew firearms licenses and register firearms
- transferring responsibility for the *Firearms Act* and regulations back to the RCMP, which took over from the formerly independent Canada Firearms Centre, a shift made possible under the *Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act (1985)*.
- reducing the annual operating budget for the program by \$10 million, and implementing certain fee waivers and refunds.
- eliminating the need for physical verification of non-restricted firearms.

June 2006: Conservatives table legislation Bill C-21 repealing the requirement that rifles and shotguns be registered.

September 14, 2006: Gunman walks into a Montreal Cégep, Dawson College, shooting 26 people, killing Anastasia deSousa.

October 2006: Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day sets up a "Firearms Advisory Committee" that excluded every public safety organisation (including policing groups) but included gun merchants, hunters' associations and some police officers (representing themselves) who have been vocal against gun control.

January 2007: Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day reports in the media considering one-time application for gun licenses.

April 16, 2007: A gunman went on a rampage on the Virginia Tech campus during the early morning hours killing more than 30 students and faculty members.

May 2007: Conservatives extend amnesty on failure to license or register rifles and shotguns.

June 2007: Bill C-21 dies when the House of Commons' session is prorogued.

June 2007: Quebec proposes the "Anastasia Law" focusing on supplementing existing federal legislation with measures targeted specifically at the misuse of restricted or prohibited weapons and on protecting children and youth from gun violence.

November 2007: Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day reintroduced a bill (Bill C-24) to kill the registration of rifles and shotguns.

December 2007: Conservatives postponed to 2009 the implementation of the marking and tracing requirements for imports and exports of firearm as per international obligations stated under the UN Firearms Protocol and the Organization of American States Firearms Convention.

December 2007: Quebec's Anastasia Law is passed.

April 2008: Canadian Press reports that the Conservatives have refunded 56.5 million dollars in licensing fees to gun owners.

May 2008: Conservatives extend once again the amnesty for failure to renew licenses or to register long guns.

Appendix B: Key stakeholder positions on the *Firearms Act* during Committee Hearings

Stakeholder	Favourable Interpretation	Unfavourable Interpretation
Federal legislators ¹⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Liberal Party of Canada ➤ Bloc Québécois ➤ few Reform MPs (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reform Party/Canadian Alliance ➤ Conservative Party (some exceptions) ➤ most NDP MPs (8 of 9) ➤ some Liberal MPs (9)
Public institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Department of Justice; Revenue ➤ Provincial government (BC, NS, PEI) ➤ RCMP ➤ Big City Mayors (Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver) ➤ National Crime Prevention Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provincial governments of AB, SK, MB, and territorial government of Yukon
Interest groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Canadian Coalition for Gun Control ➤ Cdn Association of Chiefs of Police ➤ Cdn Professional Police Association ➤ Cdn Association of Police Boards ➤ Cdn Medical Association ➤ Cdn Assoc. of Emergency Physicians ➤ Canada Safety Council ➤ Cdn Public Health Association ➤ Cdn Assoc. for Suicide Prevention ➤ Cdn Criminal Justice Association ➤ Cdn Bar Association, Quebec Bar Association ➤ Women's Groups (National Association of Women and the Law, Canadian Federation of University Women, METRAC, YWCA of Canada-Calgary) ➤ Addiction Research Foundation ➤ Council for Suicide Prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ National Firearms Association ➤ Dominion of Canada Rifle Association ➤ Responsible Firearms Owners (various provincial chapters) ➤ Canadian Federation of Agriculture ➤ Outfitters associations ➤ Hunting and angling associations (Ontario Federation of Hunters and Anglers, BC Wildlife Federation, PEI Wildlife Federation, Quebec Wildlife Federation, Alberta Fish and Game, Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation) ➤ Arms and ammunition collectors' associations ➤ Target shooting associations: (International Practical Shooters Confederation; Canadian Shooting Federation) ➤ Cdn Civil Liberties Assoc (CCLA)¹⁶ ➤ Friends of Liberty (Montréal) ➤ First Nations groups (Dené Nation, Cree Nation, Inuit President, Métis National Council, Assembly of First Nations, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Nunavik Tungavik Inc., Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Council)¹⁷

¹⁵ The position of the federal legislators is derived from House of Commons debates and votes

¹⁶ The CCLA supports gun control in principle, but opposed the registry for the powers it granted to police.

¹⁷ Aboriginal groups have not, in general, opposed the principle of gun control, but were (and are) concerned with the implications of the law for treaty rights. The Assembly of First Nations attempted to have Aboriginal peoples exempted from the registry.

Appendix C: Fundamental themes underlying stakeholder interpretations of the *Firearms Act*

Themes	Favourable Claims	Unfavourable Claims
In general ...	the <i>Firearms Act</i> is about making Canada safer	the <i>Firearms Act</i> infringes upon the rights of law-abiding citizens
Assumptions about the state (and its appropriate role)	the state is a trustworthy and effective arbiter of social, political, and cultural practices	individuals must guard against increasing state encroachment into the private realm ("the best government is the least government")
Assumptions about human nature	all people have potential to do bad things; easy access to things that have great capacity to harm (e.g., guns) increases the risk that harm will occur	good people can be trusted to behave responsibly, and have the right to protect themselves, their families, and their property
Individualism and communitarianism	with individual rights come social responsibilities; the good (safety) of the many is more important than the perceived rights of the few	there exists a systematic movement to take away individual rights in accordance with a larger "hidden agenda" of elitist social engineering
Crime: problem identification and policy response	crime is result of many variables; solution is to control environment (conditions) that foster criminal activity	there is no such thing as bad guns, only bad people; policy should be directed toward bad people
Firearms and Identity		
<i>Canadian</i>	Canada has a culture and a set of values that distinguish Canada from the US – and it is crucial that the distinction be nurtured and preserved	guns are part of Canada's history and culture
<i>Geographic</i>	aside from law enforcement personnel, guns have little place in urban environments	guns are a way of life in rural Canada and the west
<i>Gender</i>	guns are a threat to the safety of women and children	guns are part of masculine identity
Assumptions about "cost" and "value"	gun control is an investment in reducing the costs of gun, death, injury and crime	gun control is a cost to taxpayers and gun owners

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