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Bans fail to address root issues behind gun violence

By Peter Small, AdvocateDaily.com Contributor

Handgun bans are not the solution to violent crime because they chiefly affect law-abiding citizens, says Toronto criminal lawyer [Jordana Goldlist](#).

“Banning handguns, making guns illegal, is not going to make the people who are already carrying illegal handguns pay attention to the laws. It doesn’t make sense,” Goldlist, principal of [JHG Criminal Law](#), tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#).

“The only group it’s going to impact is law-abiding citizens who are already following the law in the way in which their handguns are purchased, owned and stored,” she says.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has directed his government to examine the possibility of a full ban on handguns and assault weapons in the wake of a Toronto shooting spree that killed two young females last summer and a 2017 Quebec city mosque shooting in which six worshippers died, the *Globe and Mail* [reports](#).

But in an [opinion piece](#) in the *National Post*, a professor and a firearms researcher argue that such bans are ineffective. In fact, every time guns are banned in various jurisdictions, murder rates go up because it is law-abiding citizens rather than criminals who turn in their firearms, Gary Mauser and John R. Lott, Jr. write in the newspaper.

Goldlist, a sports shooter and gun collector, agrees that such bans don’t work.

Some people have the misconception that licensed firearms holders are allowed to carry their guns as they go about their business, she says. “That’s just not the case.”

Canadian gun laws are tougher than those in most American states, and rightfully so, she says. In Canada, would-be firearms owners must apply to the RCMP for a licence, providing two

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references and submitting to a detailed background check, Goldlist says.

Once licensed, they must register and properly store their firearms. “And those guns only come out when they’re going to the shooting range, or hunting, or they need to fix their guns, and they go to a gunsmith, all of which are authorized activities,” she says.

Illegal gun owners, on the other hand, typically store their weapons haphazardly in a bedside drawer, car, or their waistband, says Goldlist, who defends many people accused of gun crimes.

“Those are the people that are buying guns off the street that are coming in from the black market,” she adds.

Banning handguns to stop gun crime is like banning cars to stop drinking and driving, Goldlist says.

Instead, we should focus on the underlying causes, she says.

“People are carrying guns, illegal guns, in order to protect themselves,” Goldlist says. “Why do we have young kids that feel like they have to carry a gun in a very dangerous manner?”

Gun violence hardly touches affluent neighbourhoods but hits hard in marginalized communities, and it will never decrease until their issues are addressed, she says.

Unless we counter the root causes of crime, through education, job training, self-esteem building, and increased upward mobility for disadvantaged youth and adults, we will never solve the illegal gun trade, Goldlist says.

Although most illegal guns enter Canada from the United States, stepped-up border security would not work any better than it has for the drug trade, she says.

However, some illegal guns come from licensed Canadian “straw purchasers,” she says. They could be caught if the RCMP visited people who have bought multiple identical restricted firearms to find out if they still have them, Goldlist says.

Gun buyback programs, in which citizens are paid for each firearm they turn in to police, are ineffective, she says. They take legal guns out of circulation, not illegal firearms because those who possess them do not receive immunity for weapons used in crimes, she says.

“It’s for people who are cleaning out their parents’ attic and they find a box of old guns that have been sitting around for 20 years that they don’t know what to do with.”

Toronto’s most recent gun buyback program has led to the retrieval of 1,500 firearms and could cost taxpayers up to \$750,000, *Global News* [reports](#).

“Why aren’t we putting that money into youth programs that could maybe deter individuals from using guns in an illegal fashion?” Goldlist asks.

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