

## Tighter gun control resisted

**Survey finds more opposition than support for tougher measures,**

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OTTAWA—A federally commissioned poll of "stakeholders" selected by the government to comment on potential changes to gun control found more opposition than support for tighter restrictions.

In the wake of the Dawson College shooting rampage in Montreal last September that left one dead and 19 wounded, the Conservative government said it would still move to kill the long-gun registry, but promised to toughen screening of gun owners.

It has yet to actually pass its bill to eliminate the registry, or bring in other regulations that would achieve the "more streamlined and effective" gun control system it promised.

When tougher screening measures were presented to participants in the survey, they were more often poorly received, while changes that appeared to lessen the burden on gun owners, such as dropping a five-year licence renewal requirement, were supported by a majority of participants.

The tougher screening measures included such options as requiring more background references, mandatory interviews with spouses, and a requirement to have a firearms officer personally contact all references listed.

Currently, background references from two adults who have known an applicant a minimum of three years are required.

The survey described a potential change where references from "a variety of personal and professional relationships such as family, friends, employers, employees, professionals (such as lawyers, doctors), or roommates" could be required."

Overall, it found 50 per cent opposed to a requirement for "a more robust

set of background references," saying the current system is already sufficient. About 38 per cent supported more references. About 10 per cent were "neutral," the survey said.

There were similar responses to the other tougher licence screening measures.

Opposition to mandatory interviews with spouses was largely driven by the belief that spousal interviews, particularly those with former spouses, do not constitute an objective assessment of an applicant's suitability for firearm ownership, the survey said.

It quoted participants using comments like: "Current partners would be unlikely to incriminate and former partners may well be vindictive."

Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day has said the Conservative government would look at requiring firearms officers to contact all references of firearms applicants, as opposed to the current system, which is discretionary and sees an officer only contacting references when there are questions about an individual's eligibility.

That proposal saw 57 per cent say such a proposal would simply be too costly, although 45 per cent agreed that mandatory interviews could potentially uncover safety risks. Overall, "opinion is starkly divided on support for this proposal, with equal numbers supporting (41 per cent) and opposing (39 per cent) the notion, it said.

However, the survey did find respondents leaning toward support for requiring gun club owners to report suspicious behaviour.

It also found support for having the government cover all or a larger portion of the administrative fees charged to gun owners.

In other words, the 159-page report, which was posted on a federal website Friday, more than a week after Parliament rose for its summer break, found many responses were predictable based on a group's overall stance on gun control.

The federal government would be unwise to use the survey to back any new moves, however.

The survey conducted by Ekos Research in November drew a poor response rate overall – just 29 per cent of 474 groups or individuals completed the survey.

And Ekos also warned the results "should be interpreted with caution."

