



Media Bias Report

An Investigation

The Canadian Coalition for Firearm Rights

The Canadian Coalition for Firearm Rights' investigation of bias in Canadian Broadcasting Corporation web media publishing on the subjects of Firearms, and Gun Control

Abstract

Canadian firearm owners frequently make the claim that the public debate over firearm rights and gun control is tainted by bias in our media institutions. This report is a preliminary look into this apparent bias with the intention of measuring the depth of the problem through a case study of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

This first foray into the question of media bias with regard to the gun debate wrestles with the subjectivity of bias itself. It is of course possible to explain how bias exists in terms which the reader can understand, and any individual media can be deconstructed, and the subjectively biased aspects can be pointed out and critiqued. However, in the pursuit of some quantifiable expression of how much bias exists we sought to identify the volume of information presenting the various sides of the gun debate.

Recognizing the limitations of this process and acknowledging that we are still subject to the author's subjective interpretation of each article and the ideas expressed; in this initial report our process was as follows: identification and catalog of published articles, take word counts using five categories including one neutral category, and then ranking and sorting which further categorized articles for their overall bias giving each a numerical rank.

From this counted and ranked data we were able to create visual representations of the data and draw some basic conclusions about the direction and tone of coverage which the CBC provides on firearm issues. Firearm owners are constituents of the CBC and deserve fair and equal representation in CBC coverage. In fact, nowhere more so than at the CBC should firearm owners expect this equitable coverage.

Conclusions

Analysis reveals that some bias does exist in the overall coverage and that there is a disparity of coverage quality and balance especially dependent on the journalist's experience covering the topic. Writing off beat substantially increased the likelihood of an article being one sided or ignoring the voices of firearm owners. Areas for further or expanded study are identified and future improvements to the methodology are discussed.

Report

The Canadian Broadcast Corporation Website. cbc.ca

All web media articles were selected from the CBC website using a few initial search terms: gun control, firearm rights, long gun registry, shooting, gun violence, etc. Articles were saved to a master list and cross referenced to that list upon new identification. Once the initial search terms were exhausted those dozens of articles were used to identify more via the CBC's own cross linking which provided a growing number of articles. Each linked article which met the criteria of having some relation to firearms or gun control were added to the list.

In total just over 900 articles from the 2018 calendar year were identified which covered firearms, their use, legality, and ownership; articles mentioning firearms, shootings, guns, rifles, shotguns, assault weapons etc. All of these were then manually scrubbed for data. 2018 was the most recent full year so it was selected for this initial test of bias, future work will include more years in the data to understand the temporal progression of the biases. Future work may also automate aspects of the data collection and analysis allowing for many years and more news outlets to be included for a more comprehensive study of the question.

Process

Following the identification of relevant articles certain key information was collected. We collected the article title, link, the number of comments, journalist names, emails, twitter, personal profile, total number of words, and words in favour or opposed to gun control; firearm rights including self-defence, further restrictions on firearms or firearm owners, and words supporting those claims were counted and each passage assigned to a category.

The Media Mirror

The CCFR Media Bias Report turns a mirror on the reporting of the CBC and other media organizations and the individuals who write for them.

These data are key to demonstrating the personal and institutional biases to which all organizations are subject.

Providing this analysis can help members of the media and the public, better understand the complex issues which come to the fore when tackling questions of rights and responsibilities in society and the cycles of violence and retribution that currently plague our communities.

Categories

The categories were applied symmetrically, and the definitions used to distinguish between words, phrases, and whole articles which carried a bias were as follows:

- 1. Pro-Firearm Rights:** Words, phrases, or articles which oppose new gun-control measures, OR which advocate a loosening or simplifying of current gun-control legislation or policy to reduce the burden on firearm owners, OR any strong firearm rights advocates' voices.
- 2. Firearm owners/community voices:** Words, phrases, or articles that present perspectives from firearm owners, sport shooters, hunters, or other community members who support the above, OR any friendly explanation of their concerns and perspectives.
- 3. Just News:** Any reporting of legislative changes, context, most criminal case reports, factual details of stories, etc. This category is the left-over number of words when eliminating the other categories from the word count. Articles ranked with balanced content.
- 4. Gun-control counter-point/supportive:** Words, phrases, or articles expressing general support for gun-control with balancing counter-point OR as a balancing counter to opposing points, OR any moderate gun-control voices.
- 5. Pro, gun-control:** Words, phrases, or articles expressing exclusively calls for new specific gun-control measures of any kind, OR expressing general support for gun-control measures or further restrictions without a balancing counter-point, OR any strong gun-control advocates' voices.

Ranking and Sorting

Once word counts were complete; all articles were ranked between 1 and 5 for their bias according to the same above categories based on the proportion of words in each category and the number of perspectives given in the article.

The tone, ordering, and direction of the articles were also considered in the ranking since the framing of quotations could occasionally lead this reader to view the writer as hostile to the quoted speaker or wholly dismissive of the perspectives given rather than letting the speaker's words speak for themselves. Articles that only reported events and provided no perspective on firearms except to identify their existence were categorized as news.

Analysis

Analysis follows under the following headers:

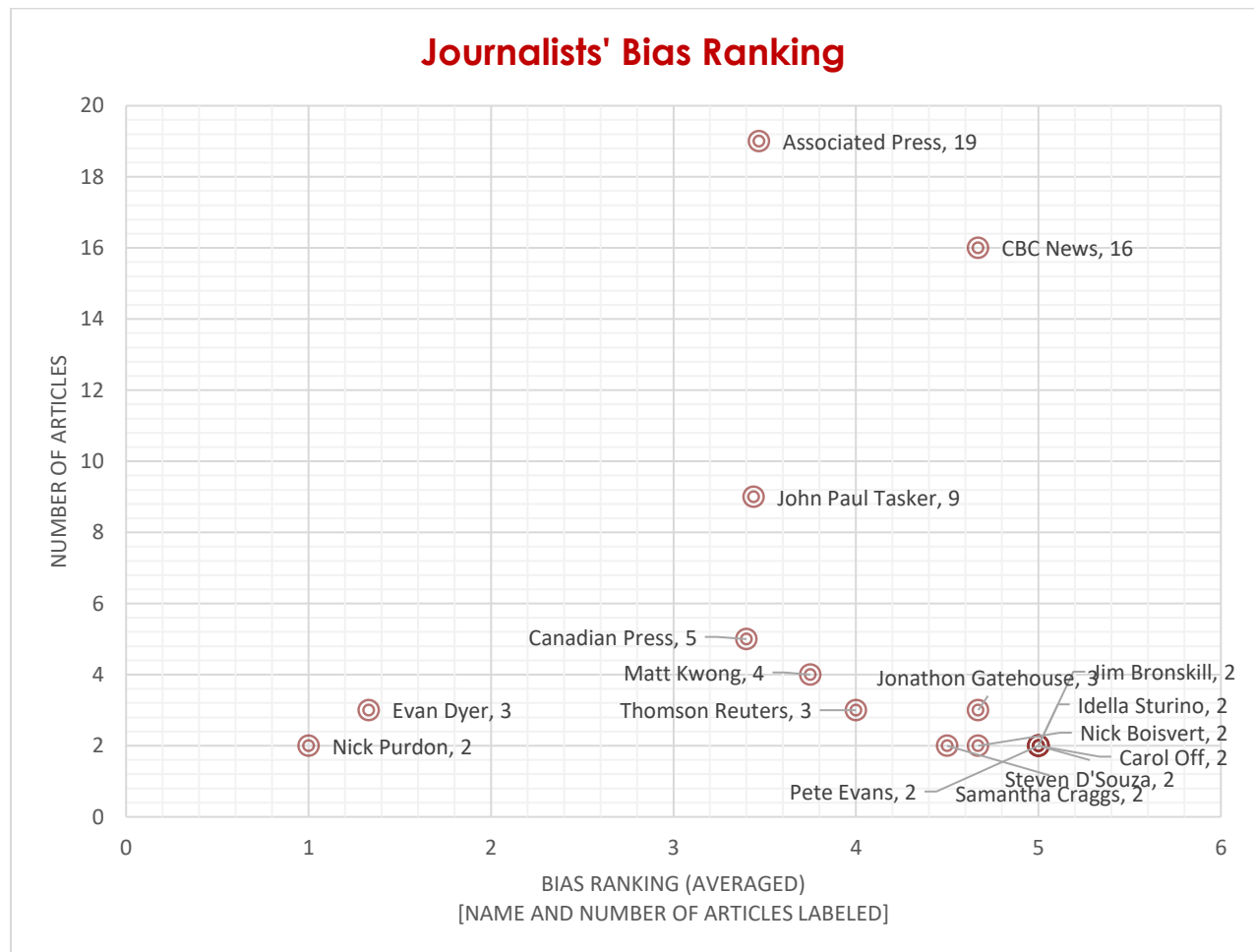
Journalists, Overall Bias, Country of Focus, and Bias by Country of Focus.

Journalists

Articles are the expression of a personal perspective informed by research and interview. Some journalists incorporate a wide spectrum of perspectives, data, and research into their articles and this helps to inform and mitigate individual biases.

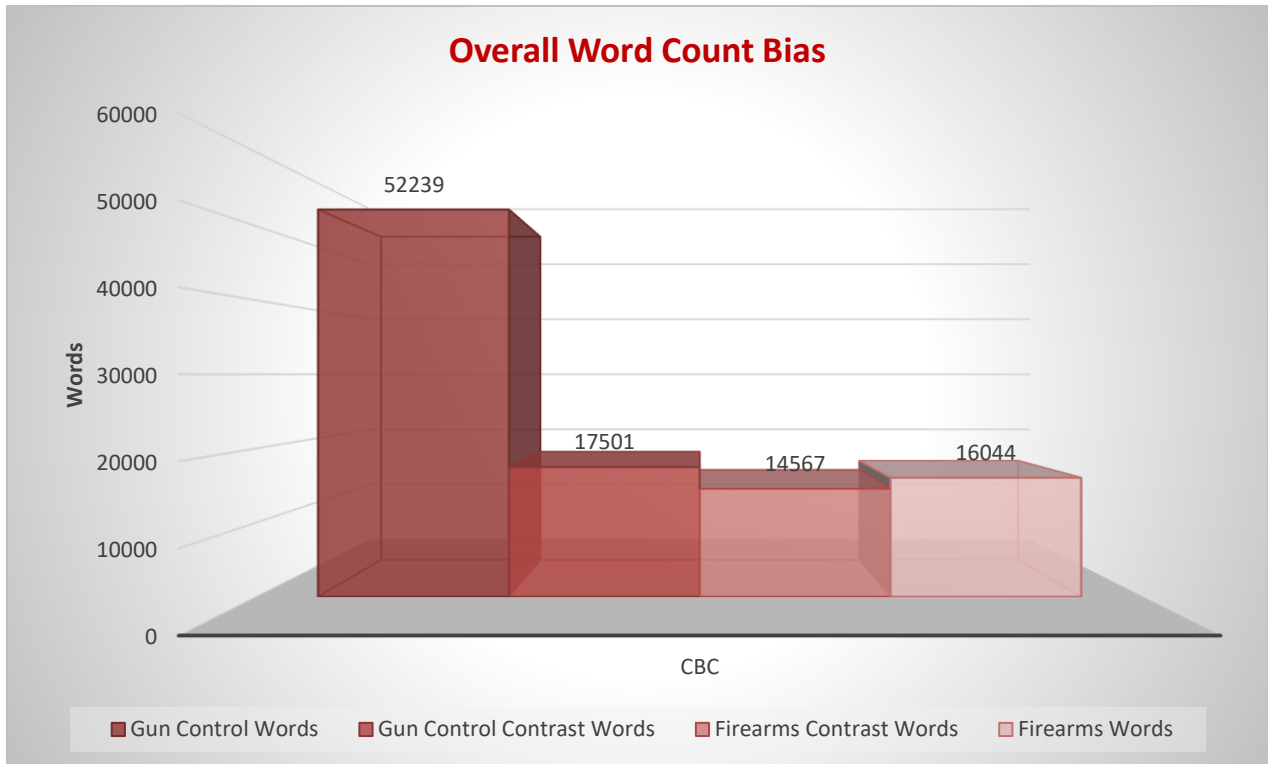
Cutting through the haze and bringing perspectives and bringing important information together is what makes useful and informative journalism.

In total just over 900 articles from the 2018 calendar year were identified about firearms, their use, legality, and ownership. All of these were then manually scrubbed for information which resulted in the identification of 144 unique articles with clear direction or perspectives. Those 144 articles were written by 65 journalists and 4 news services.



Overall Bias

By combining ranked word counts we can demonstrate the overall direction and bias of CBC coverage of firearm owners, gun control and related questions.

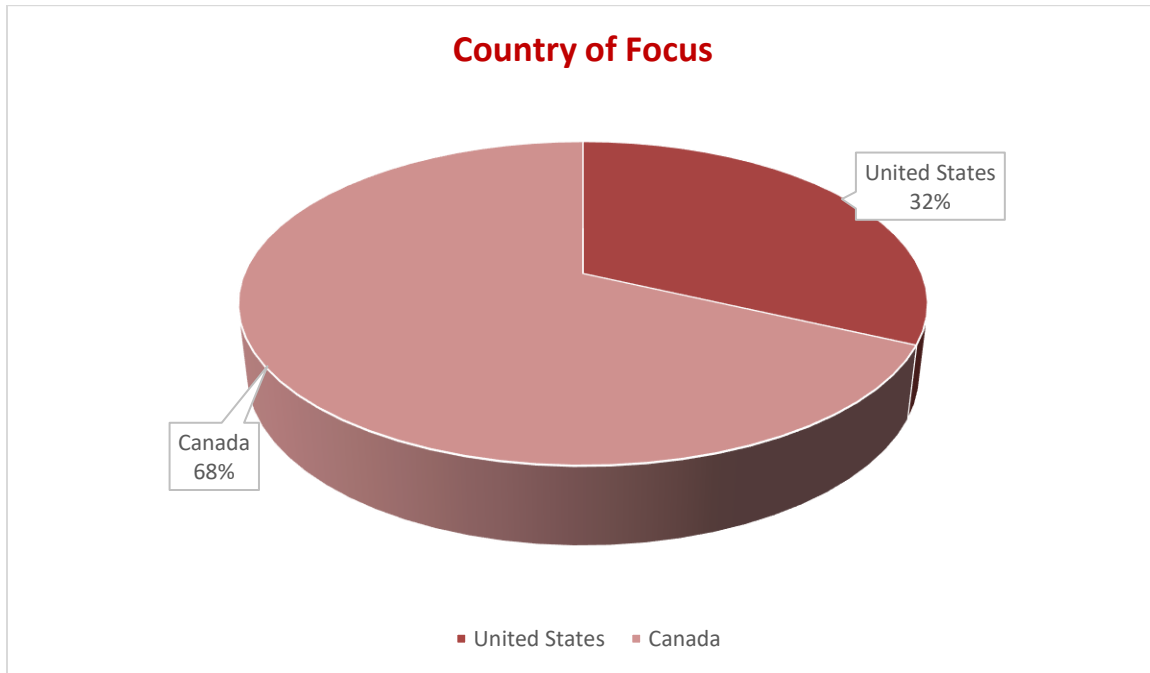


Forty-five percent of the articles that demonstrated a perspective on firearms and gun control included no reference at all to the perspectives of legal firearm owners. This dramatically skewed the overall balance of coverage and kept the perspectives of the people most affected by new gun control measures out of the public discourse.

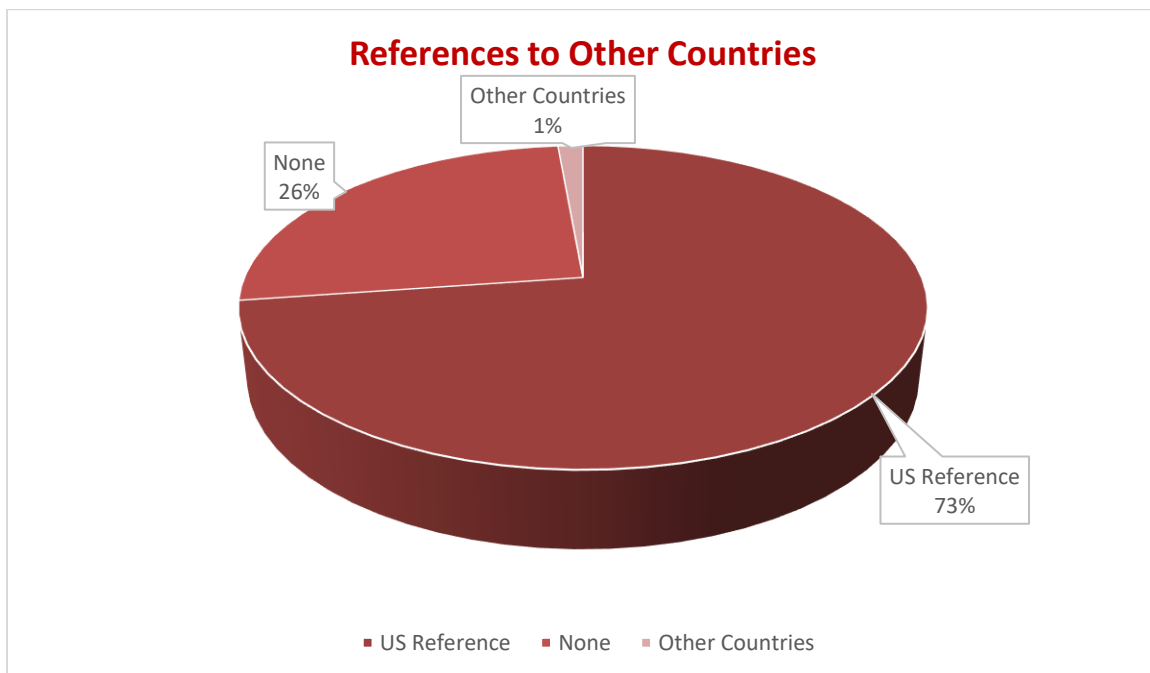
“FORTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THE ARTICLES THAT DEMONSTRATED A PERSPECTIVE ON FIREARMS AND GUN CONTROL INCLUDED NO REFERENCE AT ALL TO THE PERSPECTIVES OF LEGAL FIREARM OWNERS.”

Country of Focus

Much Canadian media focused on the question of firearm ownership focuses on the United States departing from Canadian laws and issues and getting embroiled in the much more polarizing concerns of our American friends.



The United States features prominently in the Canadian discussion with the US being referenced in 73% of the articles identified.

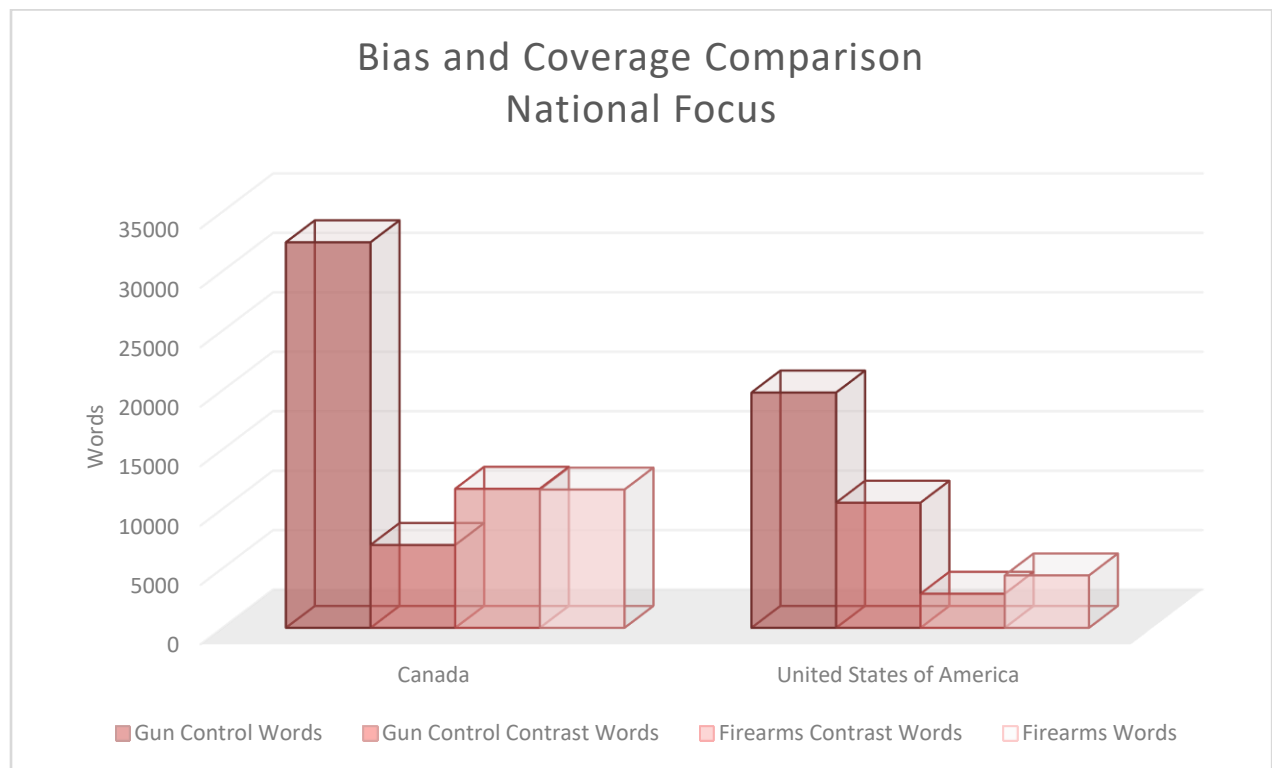


Bias by Country of Focus

The country of focus and source of Journalism affects the bias ranking.

This comparison of US and Canadian focused articles word counts on either side of the debate. The United States coverage has a more graduated curve but skews more heavily toward calls for increased gun control without providing an alternative perspective.

Canadian sources were still frequently one sided but articles that chose to take into account gun owners' perspectives were more friendly to them. US coverage from the Associated Press was especially one sided and demonstrated a great deal of animosity to any firearm friendly position.



Summary

Summary follows under the following headers:

The Numbers, Journalists, Limitations, Further Study, Conclusions

The Numbers

With over a hundred thousand words published, we have plenty of data to show trends on either side of the gun control debate in CBC coverage. Surveying over 900 articles by more than 200 individual authors this report clearly demonstrates a need for more balance in the coverage of firearm legislation, gun crime, and issues and questions related to firearms and firearm ownership.

Journalists

A correlation which became quite clear is that writers who were regular contributors to the topic of firearms, and gun control were more likely to give a platform to firearm owners and their advocates. This is an understandable result of familiarity with the topic but journalists unfamiliar with firearm issues should take cues from their colleagues and bring in more perspectives.

Improving journalists' understanding of the statistics surrounding legal and illegal firearm use, crime, and violence will likely help balance coverage and provide Canadians with a clearer picture. The perspectives of legal firearm owners need to be given a voice at the CBC whenever new legislation or calls to restrict their rights are up for discussion.

Limitations & Solutions

When considering the subjective factors of tone, ordering, and direction in the articles the author has placed his own perception of the bias in the articles into the rankings of articles as a whole. The less subjective process of identifying sections of text which display an affinity to the categories also relies on a lesser degree of subjectivity. Survey data questioning members of the public about their perceptions of bias in similar articles can be combined with machine learning and AI to create a model of the various kinds of bias. This model can then be applied to larger collections of articles automating the process of categorization and democratizing the perceived bias instead of relying on the authors judgement. This can help reduce the impact of the author's personal biases on the categorization process. Demographic weighting of the survey participants can also reduce biases in the sample.

As important as increasing the fidelity of the image we are developing, is the automation aspect of the machine learning method. By using AI we improve both the objectivity of the process and also the speed at which we can collect and process information into usable data. This will allow the incorporation of all Canadian media outlets and analysis of annual changes in coverage biases.

Combined with tools which can scrape news media websites for articles related to the search terms, these data science methods can help improve the quality of the results of subsequent study.

Conclusions

The CBC serves all Canadians regardless of their demographic including their status as a gun owner or non-gun owner. There is an expectation that Canadians who are affected by the debates and discussions being had in the CBC's coverage will be given a platform and a voice.

CBC coverage should reflect the diversity of perspectives which Canadians hold on issues of national interest including firearm rights and gun-control.

In the interest of balanced coverage; firearm owners and their advocates must be included in the conversation. Journalists must become more informed about the real data on crime, firearm use, and ownership; so that they can be inoculated against common mistakes and errors which are often pushed into public discourse by misinformed gun control advocates. Some journalists are already performing well, but many demonstrate significant room for improvement. In a democracy we cede to the will of the majority and yet one of the principals of this system is that the opposition position be given a fair hearing in the public sphere. It is the public broadcaster's responsibility to ensure those voices are heard.

More balanced and better-informed coverage is achievable through education and clear communication of the truth about legal gun ownership.

We look forward to continuing to improve upon this information in our continued work on the question of fair coverage for the firearm community. The CCFR appreciates the reader's openminded discussion and feedback through all forums.



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Find us on **[Twitter](#)** and **[Facebook](#)**

Our Mission

The Canadian Coalition for Firearm Rights aims to be a strong and reputable, public-facing voice for Canadian firearm owners. We are committed to maintaining our current rights and freedoms while continuing to push as a mobilizing and organizational force for positive legislative change.

Our Vision

The Canadian Coalition for Firearm Rights is an organization representing the Canadian firearm owning community. Our vision is to maintain, protect and promote private firearm ownership. We will accomplish our vision by engaging in the following efforts:

- Inform and educate the Canadian public about current firearm laws and regulations and their effect on our society.
- Provide support and accurate information to media and government concerning firearm issues, policies and regulations including social impacts.
- Promote human rights in Canada as they apply to defense of persons and property rights.
- Promote in an inclusive nature, all firearm related activities, and culture in Canada.