



# Gun Violence in Montréal: Context, Causes, Reactions, and Recommendations



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## Context

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Montréal has recently been experiencing an unprecedented spike in gun violence, primarily perpetrated by a younger demographic. These shootings are occurring more frequently in broad daylight, in the midst of populated urban areas (Magder). As of August 31, the Montréal police (the SPVM) had documented 77 separate firearms being discharged, with 360 bullets being fired in roughly 100 shootings. This has already surpassed total instances for 2019 and 2020. 654 firearms have been seized, furthermore, the highest ever for the SPVM. This has led to 23 homicides, which is already rapidly approaching the 25 that were observed in both 2019 and 2020 (Perron).

## *What are the causes of this violence?*

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The Montréal neighbourhoods of Rivière-des-Prairies and Montréal-North have experienced the majority of these shootings (Magder). According to the 2016 census, Montréal-North has the lowest average after-tax household income (\$45,909) of all Montréal's boroughs. While Rivière-des-Prairies has a higher after-tax household income (\$63,669) than the former, this average obscures the low-income residents in Rivière-des-Prairies's West End (McKie).

As discussed by the John Howard Society, "being born into a low-income family in a disadvantaged neighbourhood significantly increases one's odds of ... becoming involved in criminal behaviour" (The Counter Point). However, there is no single explanation to be attributed to this recent explosion in gun violence, according to criminologist Maria Mourani (Grant). This brief discusses four recent contributing causes: street gang politics, the repercussions of COVID lockdowns, the rise of social media, and easy handgun access.

Montréal-North's Zone 43 and Rivière-des-Prairies' Profit Boyz are the two principal gangs involved in a majority of these shootings. Starting with the murder of an important figure in Zone 43 back in 2010, the bloodshed has periodically continued. In recent years, these two gangs have grown in importance,

leading to occasional instances of turf wars as well as intra-gang conflict (Renaud).

Criminology researcher Marc Alain at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières suggests that the recent COVID lockdowns may have contributed to heightening tensions. Gang members "have a tendency to be very proud of their territorial assets ... [being] confined isn't the best way to ensure that you know this piece of land is mine and you're not welcome here" (Grant).

Compounding these lockdowns is the concurrent rise in the use of social media. Such platforms have, by their very nature, promoted the practice of sharing images of gun-toting bravado. These images contribute to the normalization of handguns. Threats, furthermore, can be more readily shared through social media accounts than in an era without access to instant messaging (Dunlevy).

Marc Alain also points out that handguns have been exceedingly accessible for two reasons. First, this is due to the proliferation of social media accounts through which to purchase them (Renaud). The internet has become the "main source for people to assemble, buy and distribute illegal firearms" (Magder). Second, this is due to the porous nature of Québec's southern border with the United States. "There's more guns than citizens in the U.S. [...] [and] [our] border is literally full of holes" (Grant). In March 2020, for example, a 24-year old man was caught attempting to transport 249 prohibited handguns across the border into Québec (Luft).

## *What have been the reactions?*

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In the midst of a municipal election, Valérie Plante's Projet Montréal has pledged \$110 million in funding over the next four years to hire mediation and social intervention teams, as well as fund mixed patrols ("officers and non-police staff") (Maratta). The CAQ provincial government, for its part, has announced its pledge of \$90 million, which aims to hire 107 new specialists (87 police officers, 15 forensic scientists and 5 correctional officers) (Nerestant). These municipal and provincial teams are meant to work together as a new permanent unit

to address the gun violence.

Many community groups are proposing alternate solutions. Coalition Pozé, an amalgamation of organizations working with Black youth to fight gun violence in Montréal-Nord and Rivière-des-Prairies, believes that the state's approach of strengthening police forces ignores root causes (Blue Line). Youth's talent and creativity ought to be harnessed early so as to prevent them "from falling into a gang life" (Banerjee). The coalition is calling for such organizations to have "a seat at the decision-making table, stable funding and recognition" (Banerjee) from government, as they are the ones with a greater understanding of the situation on the ground.

Tanya Share, an associate professor at the University of Toronto and a partner on the Survivors of Homicide Victims and Mental Health Research Project, discusses how "research has historically focused on perpetrators and victims of homicide - neglecting to examine the post-homicide experiences of survivors, and leaving a wide gap in mental health support" (Lee-Shanok). We must not forget to consider the resulting trauma among the survivors of these shootings.

## *Recommendation*

Based on an admitted introductory understanding of the phenomenon, Y4Y believes that a primacy on strengthening police runs the risk of increased instances of police repression and racial profiling, which furthers already existing realities of inequality and marginalization. According to Concordia professor Ted Rutland's 2019-2020 research, Black people are 42 times more likely than white people to be stopped and charged by the Montréal police's anti-gun squad (Gazette). Rutland warns of how such marginalization can push residents of racialized and low-income communities (like Rivière-des-Prairies and Montréal-North) towards illegal activities (Bruemmer).

Y4Y, instead, supports an approach to addressing gun violence that meets that of Projet Montréal and community groups like Coalition Pozé in the middle. The US based Cure Violence model, started in

2000 and since expanded internationally in 2008, has demonstrated promising results (Cure Violence). Like Projet Montréal's investment in outreach workers, and Coalition Pozé's call for direct community member involvement, this public-health based approach calls on "outreach workers and community members" to intervene "directly in at-risk communities to disrupt the tit-for-tat cycle of violence between" a small core of gang members (Schwartz). The model has been successfully trialled in New York between 2010 and 2013, and resulted in an 18% homicide reduction. Such an approach listens to insight from local community organizations, and allows for a reduced workload from police officers in these particular neighbourhoods. More information on the Cure Violence model can be found [here](#).

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