

Self-Defense: A History in Codes

Stephen's Draft (1878)

SECTION 119.

SELF DEFENCE.

The intentional infliction of death or bodily harm is not an offence when it is inflicted by way of self defence against unlawful violence.

Criminal Code Bill Commission's Draft (1879)

SECTION 55.

SELF-DEFENCE AGAINST UNPROVOKED ASSAULT.

Every one unlawfully assaulted, not having provoked such assault, is justified in repelling force by force, if the force he uses is not meant to cause death or grievous bodily harm, and is no more than is necessary for the purpose of self-defence; and every one so assaulted is justified though he causes death or grievous bodily harm, if he causes it under reasonable apprehension of death or grievous bodily harm from the violence with which the assault was originally made or with which the assailant pursues his purpose and if he believes on reasonable grounds that he cannot otherwise preserve himself from death or grievous bodily harm.

SECTION 56.

SELF-DEFENCE AGAINST PROVOKED ASSAULT.

Every one who has without justification assaulted another, or has provoked an assault from that other, may nevertheless justify force subsequent to such assault, if he uses such force under reasonable apprehension of death or grievous bodily harm from the violence of the party first assaulted or provoked, and in the belief on reasonable grounds that it is necessary for his own preservation from death or grievous bodily harm: Provided that he did not commence the assault with intent to kill or do grievous bodily harm, and did not endeavour at any time before the necessity for preserving himself arose, to kill or do grievous bodily harm: Provided also, that before such necessity arose he declined further conflict, and quitted or retreated from it as far as was practicable.

Provocation within the meaning of this and the last preceding section may be given by blows words or gestures.

Canadian Criminal Code (1892)

45. Every one unlawfully assaulted, not having provoked such assault, is justified in repelling force by force, if the force he uses is not meant to cause death or grievous bodily harm, and is no more than is necessary for the purpose of self-defence; and every one so assaulted is justified, though he causes death or grievous bodily harm, if he causes it under reasonable apprehension of death or grievous bodily harm from the violence with which the assault was originally made or with which the assailant pursues his purpose, and if he believes, on reasonable grounds, that he cannot otherwise preserve himself from death or grievous bodily harm.

46. Every one who has without justification assaulted another, or has provoked an assault from that other, may nevertheless justify force subsequent to such assault, if he uses such force under reasonable apprehension of death or grievous bodily harm from the violence of the person first assaulted or provoked, and in the belief, on reasonable grounds, that it is necessary for his own preservation from death or grievous bodily harm: Provided, that he did not commence the assault with intent to kill or do grievous bodily harm, and did not endeavour at any time before the necessity for preserving himself arose, to kill or do grievous bodily harm: Provided also, that before such necessity arose he declined further conflict, and quitted or retreated from it as far as was practicable.

2. Provocation, within the meaning of this and the last preceding section, may be given by blows, words or gestures.

Canadian Criminal Code (until 2013)

Self-defence against unprovoked assault

34. (1) Every one who is unlawfully assaulted without having provoked the assault is justified in repelling force by force if the force he uses is not intended to cause death or grievous bodily harm and is no more than is necessary to enable him to defend himself.

Extent of justification

(2) Every one who is unlawfully assaulted and who causes death or grievous bodily harm in repelling the assault is justified if

(a) he causes it under reasonable apprehension of death or grievous bodily harm from the violence with which the assault was originally made or with which the assailant pursues his purposes; and

(b) he believes, on reasonable grounds, that he cannot otherwise preserve himself from death or grievous bodily harm.

Self-defence in case of aggression

35. Every one who has without justification assaulted another but did not commence the assault with intent to cause death or grievous bodily harm, or has without justification provoked an assault on himself by another, may justify the use of force subsequent to the assault if

(a) he uses the force

(i) under reasonable apprehension of death or grievous bodily harm from the violence of the person whom he has assaulted or provoked, and

(ii) in the belief, on reasonable grounds, that it is necessary in order to preserve himself from death or grievous bodily harm;

(b) he did not, at any time before the necessity of preserving himself from death or grievous bodily harm arose, endeavour to cause death or grievous bodily harm; and

(c) he declined further conflict and quitted or retreated from it as far as it was feasible to do so before the necessity of preserving himself from death or grievous bodily harm arose.

Provocation

36. Provocation includes, for the purposes of sections 34 and 35, provocation by blows, words or gestures.

Defence — use or threat of force (current)

34 (1) A person is not guilty of an offence if

- (a) they believe on reasonable grounds that force is being used against them or another person or that a threat of force is being made against them or another person;
- (b) the act that constitutes the offence is committed for the purpose of defending or protecting themselves or the other person from that use or threat of force; and
- (c) the act committed is reasonable in the circumstances.

Factors

(2) In determining whether the act committed is reasonable in the circumstances, the court shall consider the relevant circumstances of the person, the other parties and the act, including, but not limited to, the following factors:

- (a) the nature of the force or threat;
- (b) the extent to which the use of force was imminent and whether there were other means available to respond to the potential use of force;
- (c) the person's role in the incident;
- (d) whether any party to the incident used or threatened to use a weapon;
- (e) the size, age, gender and physical capabilities of the parties to the incident;
- (f) the nature, duration and history of any relationship between the parties to the incident, including any prior use or threat of force and the nature of that force or threat;
 - (f.1) any history of interaction or communication between the parties to the incident;
- (g) the nature and proportionality of the person's response to the use or threat of force; and
- (h) whether the act committed was in response to a use or threat of force that the person knew was lawful.

No defence

(3) Subsection (1) does not apply if the force is used or threatened by another person for the purpose of doing something that they are required or authorized by law to do in the administration or enforcement of the law, unless the person who commits the act that constitutes the offence believes on reasonable grounds that the other person is acting unlawfully.