

Views of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) 2022-2023 Tracking Study

Department of National Defence

Executive Summary

February 2023

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This public opinion research report presents the results of 10 online focus groups and a national dual-mode survey conducted by Quorus Consulting Group on behalf of the Department of National Defence. The focus group sessions were held from September 8 to 15, 2022, with participants from two segments of the general population: those 18 to 34 years of age and those 35 years of age and older. One online focus group with each of these segments was held with participants located in the following cities and surrounding areas: Toronto, Moncton, Winnipeg, Montreal (in French) and Vancouver. The dual-mode survey was conducted from December 19, 2022, to January 15, 2023, with Canadian adults aged 18 and older. Approximately half of the data (1,001 completed surveys) was collected using an online panel of households, and the other half (1,000 completed surveys) via a stratified random sample of telephone interviews.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Points de vue sur les Forces armées canadiennes – Étude de suivi 2022-2023.

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Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Nadeau", is centered within a rectangular area that has a light gray dotted background. The signature is fluid and cursive.

February 2023
Rick Nadeau, President
Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

Executive summary

Background and research objectives

DND and the CAF need to stay attuned to the views, perceptions and opinions of Canadians. Public opinion research (POR) assists the Government of Canada and the Department of National Defence (DND) in considering the views of Canadians when developing policies, programs, services and initiatives such as Canada's Defence Policy and Canada's international military role. The annual *Views of the Canadian Armed Forces Tracking Study* represents an important source of information to support decision making and enable informed communications strategies.

DND has used the *Views of the Canadian Armed Forces Tracking Study* to identify changes in Canadian public opinion on the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and related military issues since 1998. To maintain the validity of the study, some tracking questions will remain unchanged; however, some questionnaire modules on specific topics may be introduced, modified or removed to reflect Canada's current affairs and the Defence community. The last *Views of the Canadian Armed Forces Tracking Study* was conducted between July 2021 and January 2022.

DND and the CAF use the Tracking Study to understand Canadians' views, knowledge and expectations of the CAF in general. More specifically, the study examines issues such as the image of the CAF, the role of the CAF at home and abroad, perceptions of equipment procurement and the funding of the CAF, as well as views about Canada's operations, both domestically and internationally.

The objective of the research was to assess changes and see trends in the perspective of Canadians concerning the CAF and related military issues through quantitative and qualitative methods.

Specific objectives of the research include, but are not limited to, providing DND and the CAF with up-to-date data for the following purposes:

- The Treasury Board Secretariat's Directive on the Management of Communications requires departments to monitor and analyze the public environment as it relates to policies, programs, services and initiatives.
- The research supports the government's priority commitment to seek the feedback of Canadians, including those concerning national security issues.
- The research will benefit Canadians by means of improved communications regarding DND and the CAF.

Methodology

In order to provide reliable tracking data, Quorus used a similar approach to what was used in the previous waves, using both quantitative and qualitative research. More specifically, the study consisted of the following:

- **Qualitative phase:** This phase of the research project consisted of 10 online focus groups. These groups were completed with members of the general population located in five areas of Canada: Toronto and surrounding areas, Moncton and surrounding areas, Winnipeg and surrounding areas, Montreal and surrounding areas, and Vancouver and surrounding areas. In each of these regions, participants were segmented into two age groups: 18 to 34, and 35 years of age and older. Groups in Quebec were held in French while all groups in all other regions were held in English. Data collection took place from September 8 to 15, 2022. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. All participants were informed that the research was for the Government of Canada, and each received \$100 for participating. A total of 67 individuals participated in this study.
- **Quantitative phase:** This phase of the research project consisted of a national dual-mode survey with Canadian adults aged 18 and older. Approximately half of the data (1,001 completed surveys) was collected using an online panel of households, and the other half (1,000 completed surveys) via a stratified random sample of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) interviews. The survey was conducted from December 19, 2022, to January 15, 2023. The questionnaire had an average survey duration of 15 minutes.

Research results

Qualitative research

Awareness, impressions and perceptions of the CAF

When participants were asked what first comes to mind when they think of the CAF, some were reminded of military-related terms and objects, peacekeeping and humanitarian help. Some of the participants were more critical of the institution, using terms such as “antiquated,” “underfunded” and “scandal.”

When specifically asked about the best aspects of the CAF, similar themes emerged, including peacekeeping, and helping other countries or Canadian communities in times of crisis / natural disaster. When specifically asked about the worst aspects of the CAF, many could not think of

anything in particular. Some felt they did not know enough about the CAF to comment and seemed to think that we typically hear more about other countries, including the United States.

Among those who could reflect on the worst aspects of the CAF, many referred to it being underfunded and using antiquated equipment. However, a few felt that the CAF was receiving too much funding and others referred to scandals, bad press, harassment, bullying, discrimination and abuse of power. Some were broadly reminded of “violence,” and others recalled mental health challenges that individuals in the CAF face.

For the remainder of the discussion, impressions and opinions related to the CAF were for the most part limited, as many participants felt they were generally uninformed regarding activities undertaken and roles played by the CAF. Few could recall anything from the media or elsewhere about the CAF. Among the few who had noticed something, it tended to pertain to allegations of misconduct and to activities related to the recent conflict in Ukraine.

While most participants were unfamiliar with the CAF’s roles and activities, particularly basic day-to-day activities, their overall impressions of the people who serve in the CAF were mostly positive. Several participants viewed those who seek out jobs in the CAF as well disciplined. For many, the “bad press” did not necessarily influence how they feel about those who serve in general.

To the extent to which they felt that the CAF was involved in peacekeeping, helping other countries in times of crisis and coming to the aid of local communities when natural disasters strike, participants also had a positive impression of the work performed by the people who serve in the CAF.

Participants tended to describe their level of trust in the CAF as moderate to high. Some felt they had no genuine reason to distrust the CAF, while others’ trust was based on knowing individuals in the CAF. A few mentioned having high overall trust for all of Canada, and thus the CAF. Those who were more neutral explained that they lack familiarity with the CAF. The few who mistrust the CAF generally tended to mistrust or be skeptical of any institution in a position of power.

When participants were asked whether the CAF’s job is easier or harder than it was 10 years ago, opinions were split. Some felt that improvements in technology and greater recognition of and support related to mental illness might make the job easier and improve members’ quality of life. Conversely, some felt that the increase in natural disasters requiring CAF involvement and a sense that there are more conflicts compared to 10 years ago might make CAF members’ job harder. A

few also felt that aging equipment and growing politicization of the military is also making their jobs harder.

Lastly, participants were asked for their opinion of what the primary or main role of the CAF was. Some felt that with the lack of war and conflict within Canada, the primary role for the CAF is to be on standby to help other countries when needed, which shows the international community that Canada is willing to play its role.

Domestic focus

Few participants could think of roles played by the CAF domestically beyond providing support to communities in times of need, including during natural disasters and, more recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic. A few thought that they are also conducting surveillance along our borders and in the Arctic. A few explained that those who serve are also conducting training exercises, learning, maintaining equipment, recruiting, educating the Canadian public about the importance of commemorating those who lost their lives in the line of duty, etc.

Participants were presented with a list of roles played by the CAF in Canada.¹ Most participants believed that it is important that the CAF play these roles in Canada. Beyond noticing that the CAF performs quite well when responding to natural disasters, participants did not feel sufficiently informed about the other roles to assess how well or poorly those roles were being performed.

Many had heard something about the CAF's deployment to help with the COVID-19 pandemic, especially supporting long-term care homes. However, participants were not overly familiar with what the CAF had done beyond this role. When provided with more details, participants had positive impressions of how the CAF handled the pandemic and the roles they were called upon to play.

International focus

Participants knew very little about the CAF's international roles. Although they think that the CAF is playing peacekeeping and support roles, participants did not know where this was happening, or the level of effort or resources being deployed for these purposes. For the most part, participants support this sort of role, and some admitted that their opinion might change for the better if they knew exactly what efforts are being deployed and where.

¹The list included responding to natural disasters, providing protection against terrorist threats, search and rescue, patrolling our borders, patrolling the Arctic, and, monitoring space.

Given their very limited awareness of where the CAF is present around the world, few participants could confidently suggest where it should be more or less involved. Some thought that supporting Ukraine should probably be a priority these days and that the CAF could be doing more international humanitarian aid, although they had limited awareness of what roles were currently being played in those areas.

There is a general understanding that the CAF works with various alliances to contribute to international peace and security. Most believe that the benefits of these types of collaborations outweigh the concerns associated with them. Participants felt that working together with other countries would lead to critical mass and sharing of best practices, as well as ensuring some protection in the event that support is ever needed in Canada. Few had concerns, but the main one was the possibility of becoming involved in conflicts which may not align with Canada's priorities.

That said, few seemed to believe that this type of alliance would ever be needed to defend Canada against an external threat. Few seemed to be able to think of a credible threat to the security and sovereignty of Canadians and Canada at this time. Among some of the comments shared, the more common ones included environmental threats or cyber-security concerns.

Care of military personnel and family

Most participants were not sufficiently familiar with what was being provided to active personnel and their families to share an opinion on how well the CAF is meeting their needs.

Some sensed that the level of internal support and benefits is not as good as it should be, given some of the recent headlines pertaining to allegations of misconduct. This impression was shared among those who know of individuals who previously served and are in the community suffering from serious mental illnesses. On the other hand, some believe that support for and recognition of mental illness among active personnel has been improving.

Some believe that the CAF does rather well in terms of providing education and training and taking care of moving expenses. Finally, a few seemed to believe that those who serve are not well paid and that more should be done about it.

Media coverage of the CAF

A few participants in the 18 to 34 age bracket had considered joining the CAF at some point. Several were intrigued by the job because it would pay for their education, and a few also perceived that joining the CAF would give them a sense of direction or discipline. Otherwise, few of the young adults would consider joining the CAF.

Few participants in either age segment felt that they would discourage a friend who was considering serving in the CAF. However, participants, especially women, were not convinced that it would be an advisable career option for a woman, mostly because of what they had recently heard regarding misconduct allegations.

Participants were asked whether their recommendation would be influenced in any way by their friend's gender identity, the colour of their skin or whether they identify as a member of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Some participants would outright discourage such friends from enlisting. However, many participants would simply ensure that their friend understood that they would likely be treated differently and that they might face more barriers.

Some participants had recently heard about the allegations of misconduct brought forth in the CAF. This had left an impression on some participants—especially, although not exclusively, among women in the groups. Participants were uncertain that the CAF would deal with those allegations appropriately. Many participants felt that the best solution was an independent external review of the allegations. Ultimately, seeing or hearing of more individuals being accused and seeing clear and appropriate consequences would convince many that the allegations are being dealt with appropriately. There is a sense that the culture within the CAF is changing but that the change is slow. There was a feeling that, much like society in general, as younger attitudes and belief systems replace older ones, the CAF will become more diverse and inclusive.

Quantitative research

Familiarity with the CAF

When asked to state their overall level of familiarity with the CAF, nearly half of respondents (45%) reported being at least somewhat familiar. Among each of the three environments of the CAF, familiarity with the Canadian Army was highest (45%), followed by the Royal Canadian Air Force (33%) and the Royal Canadian Navy (27%).

When the specific subsets of the CAF were compared, familiarity with the Regular Force (41%), the Reserves (33%) and Health Services (27%) was highest. Familiarity with the Rangers (15%) and the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (14%) was lowest.

Recent awareness

Approximately two in five respondents (40%) had recently read, seen or heard something about the CAF. This result remains consistent with scores observed in the previous year (42%). Among

respondents having read, seen or heard something about the CAF, allegations of sexual misconduct was by far the leading topic (37%), followed by recruitment (19%), the F-35 fighter jets purchase (13%) and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine (9%).

Overall impressions

Overall impressions of the CAF were predominantly positive, with 64% describing their opinion as at least somewhat positive. When describing the biggest challenges facing the CAF, the most commonly mentioned were recruitment or retention (26%), followed by budget or funding issues (18%) and operating with outdated equipment (12%).

More than three quarters (77%) of respondents had an at least somewhat positive overall impression of those who serve in the CAF. When asked to specify their impression of care provided for active military personnel, 48% felt that the CAF was doing a good or very good job. Overall, results remain consistent with those observed in 2021.

Pride in the CAF

If a young person they knew told respondents that they were going to join the CAF, 53% of respondents would view that decision favourably. Overall, favourable results have continued to decline since 2018. Most notably, “very favourable” scores have decreased from 30% in 2018 to 20% in 2022.

Nearly half of respondents view the CAF as a source of pride for Canadians (49%), with one in five (20%) providing the highest rating (5 on a scale from 1 to 5). Results have remained stable since 2021.

Modern relevance of the CAF

More than one in five respondents (22%) felt that the CAF was modern, increasing slightly from the 2021 results (16%). Conversely, 29% felt that the CAF was outdated, a result that has remained relatively consistent since 2016.

Three quarters of respondents (75%) felt that the CAF is essential, a result that has remained consistent since 2020.

Workplace environment

When evaluating the inclusiveness of the workplace environment, 63% at least somewhat agreed that the CAF is as good a career choice for visible minorities as it is for anyone else. Slightly fewer agreed that it is as good a career choice for women as it is for men (58%). Agreement was much lower for members of the LGBTQ2+ community (41%) compared to any other subset.

A majority of respondents (54%) agreed that they were concerned with systemic racism in the CAF. A similar proportion agreed that racist or hateful attitudes are not tolerated in the CAF (52%). Slightly more than one third of respondents agreed that the CAF does a good job of addressing misconduct, including racist, sexist or hateful conduct (36%).

Moreover, 41% of respondents agreed that membership is as diverse as the Canadian population, while 39% agreed that the CAF is a respectful work environment for women.

Nearly half of respondents agreed that the CAF does a good job taking care of ill and injured members (48%). More than one in five respondents (22%) at least somewhat agreed that they could see themselves joining the CAF.

Results related to these themes were predominantly consistent with those observed in 2021. The largest improvement observed was regarding a sense of agreement that racist or hateful attitudes or behaviours are not tolerated in the CAF (52%, up from 46%).

Compared to the 2020 survey results, agreement with the CAF being a good career choice for visible minorities increased from 44% to 63%, while agreement for women decreased from 70% to 58% over the same period.

Trust in the CAF

More than one in three respondents (37%) trust the CAF, while an additional 40% were somewhat trustful. The extent to which respondents reported a high level of trust in the CAF decreased slightly from results observed in 2021 (from 43% to 37% in 2022).

Threats to Canada

Russia was viewed as the biggest threat to Canadian security by nearly one in five online respondents (16%). Nearly one in ten respondents cited China (9%), similar to the total observed since 2020. Conversely, more than two in five respondents did not know of or mention any threats currently facing Canada (42%).

Perceptions of CAF funding

When asked to provide their perceptions of CAF funding, 47% reported that Canada's military was underfunded, while 28% felt that the CAF receives the right amount of funding. Perceptions that Canada's military is being underfunded (47%) increased from the results observed in 2021 (40%).

Perceptions of CAF military equipment

More than a third agree that the CAF's military equipment purchases benefit local economies and that the CAF has the equipment it needs to do its job (35% for each statement). Overall, the perception that the CAF has the equipment it needs has declined from 50% in 2016.

The perceptions that the CAF is good at planning its future equipment needs has steadily decreased to 34% from 58% in 2016. Despite the overall decline since 2016, agreement with each statement increased compared to results observed in the previous wave of the survey. Most notably, agreement that purchases of military equipment tend to be well managed rose to 32%, up from 25% in 2021.

Agreement with CAF activities abroad

Overall, at least three in five respondents at least somewhat agreed that the CAF should participate in each international role explored in the survey. Agreement was strongest regarding participation in the following roles: disaster relief/humanitarian aid (81%) and peace support operations (80%).

Roughly three quarters of respondents at least somewhat agreed that the CAF should be participating in non-combat support missions (78%) and in surveillance and support in the North (75%).

Three in five respondents or more agreed with the remaining roles:

- Using satellites in space for monitoring purposes (70%).
- Combat support missions for the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (68%).
- Missions that target illegal trafficking activities (67%).
- Training militaries or police of other countries (60%).

Compared to the 2021 results, agreement scores increased notably for the following roles:

- Combat missions in support of the UN and NATO (57% to 68%).
- Using satellites in space for monitoring purposes (61% to 70%).
- Training the militaries or police forces of other countries (54% to 60%).

In 2022, respondents were most likely to “strongly agree” with the following international roles:

- Missions that target illegal trafficking activities (48%).
- Peace support operations (46%).
- Non-combat support operations (46%).

Membership in international organizations

Canada’s membership in international organizations such as NATO and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) continues to receive a high level of support, as more than four in five respondents at least somewhat agreed that membership is important for Canadian security (81%). This represents an increase compared to the previous year, including a notable increase among those who “strongly agree,” which rose from 43% to 57%.

Importance of the CAF’s domestic roles

Overall, more than half felt that each domestic role played by the CAF was at least important, with the following roles receiving the highest ratings:

- Responding to natural disasters (86%).
- Providing protection against terrorist threats (83%).
- Search and rescue (83%).

Nearly three quarters of respondents felt that protecting against cyber-security threats was an important CAF role (73%), followed by preventing illegal activity (72%) and patrolling the Arctic (68%). Importance ratings are lower for youth programs (59%) and for community assistance related to the COVID-19 pandemic (53%).

Results were consistent with those observed in 2021, notwithstanding the decrease observed regarding support related to the COVID-19 pandemic (69% down to 53%).

It is important to note that “very important” scores have decreased since 2016 for some roles, including the following:

- Responding to natural disasters (74% down to 64%).
- Providing protection against terrorist threats (75% down to 66%).
- Search and rescue (67% down to 59%).

Agreement regarding the domestic value of the CAF

When asked about their level of agreement that the CAF is doing a good job of performing duties in Canada, 78% at least somewhat agreed. More specifically, 33% strongly agreed with this statement. As well, 62% at least somewhat agreed that the CAF plays a valuable role in supporting Canada’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recall of the CAF’s role during the COVID-19 pandemic

Online respondents were subsequently asked to indicate the extent to which they recalled hearing anything about the CAF playing a role in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic since its outbreak. More than two thirds at least vaguely recalled the role (68%), with 33% clearly recalling having heard of the role.

Misconduct allegations

In 2022, nearly half of online respondents reported paying at least some attention to news of alleged sexual misconduct in the CAF over the few months preceding the survey (48%). More than one in ten respondents reported paying a lot of attention (11%). Conversely, 19% had paid no attention at all to that news.

Percentages are lower compared to those observed in 2021, with those paying at least some attention falling from 59% to 48%.

More than one quarter of respondents (27%) were confident that the CAF would handle the allegations appropriately, while 44% were neutral. Conversely, 22% were not confident. Confidence that the CAF would appropriately address misconduct allegations increased from 2021 to 2022-23, rising from 21% to 27%.

Using the same confidence scale, respondents were asked to rate their confidence in the CAF’s ability to make positive changes in the future. Nearly one third of respondents (31%) were

confident that the CAF could move toward a more positive culture, while 47% were neutral and 15% were not confident. Confidence in the ability to make positive changes was higher than in 2021, increasing from 25% to 31%.

Qualitative research disclaimer

Qualitative research seeks to develop insight and direction rather than quantitatively projectable measures. The purpose is not to generate “statistics” but to hear the full range of opinions on a topic, understand the language participants use, gauge degrees of passion and engagement and leverage the power of the group to inspire ideas. Participants are encouraged to voice their opinions, whether or not those views are shared by others.

Due to the sample size, the special recruitment methods used and the study objectives themselves, it is clearly understood that the qualitative research under discussion is exploratory in nature. The findings are not, nor were they intended to be, projectable to a larger population.

Specifically, it is inappropriate to suggest or infer that few (or many) real-world users would behave in a certain way simply because few (or many) participants behaved in that way during the sessions. Such projections are strictly the prerogative of quantitative research.

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