

Views of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) 2023–2024 Tracking Study

Department of National Defence

Executive Summary

February 2024

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a national online survey and 10 online focus groups conducted by Quorus Consulting Group on behalf of the Department of National Defence. The online survey was conducted from August 7 to August 17, 2023, with Canadian adults aged 18 and older. A total of 2,004 individuals completed the online survey. The focus group sessions were held from January 8 to January 15 with participants from two segments of the general population: those 18 to 34 years of age and those 35 to 65 years of age. 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.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre: Points de vue sur les Forces armées canadiennes – Étude de suivi 2023–2024.

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Nadeau", is written over a light gray, textured rectangular background.

February 2024
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 assists the Government of Canada and the Minister of National Defence in considering the views of Canadians when developing policies, programs, services and initiatives such as Canada's Defence Policy and Canada's military role internationally. 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 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, such as international operations, 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 September 2022 and January 2023.

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 is to assess changes in the perspective of Canadians concerning the CAF and related military issues through quantitative and qualitative methods. To meet this objective, a comparative analysis of data, collected in previous waves, is required. A secondary objective is to explore, qualitatively, the perception of the CAF and attitudes toward security and defence.

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 the DND and 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:

- **Quantitative phase:** This phase of the research project consisted of a national online survey with Canadian adults aged 18 and older. In total, 2,004 individuals completed the survey. The survey was conducted from August 7 to August 17, 2023. The questionnaire had an average survey duration of 16 minutes.
- **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 / Nunavut, Moncton and surrounding areas, Winnipeg and surrounding areas / Nunavut / Northwest Territories, Montreal and surrounding areas, and Vancouver and surrounding areas / Yukon. 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 January 8 to 15, 2024. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. All participants were informed that the research was for the Government of Canada, and each received \$125 for participating. A total of 67 individuals participated in this study.

Research results

Quantitative research

Familiarity with the CAF

When asked about their overall level of familiarity with the CAF, roughly two in five (41%) respondents reported being at least somewhat familiar. The results are relatively consistent with those observed since 2020, noting a slight decrease in familiarity since the previous wave in 2022.

Among the three broad environments of the CAF, familiarity with the Canadian Army was highest, with two in five respondents describing themselves as at least somewhat familiar (40%).

Familiarity with both the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was lower, with 33% at least somewhat familiar with the RCAF and 28% familiar with the RCN. These results are consistent with the 2022 wave.

Overall, familiarity across each subset of the CAF was slightly lower than what was observed in the 2022 wave.

Recent awareness

Just over one-third of respondents (34%) had recently read, seen or heard something about the CAF. This reflects a continued decrease compared to scores observed in recent year (40%), however it is still above the 28% observed in 2020.

Overall impressions

Overall impressions of the CAF were predominantly positive, with nearly two in three respondents describing their opinion as at least somewhat positive (64%). Just over one in five respondents had a strongly positive view of the CAF (21%), and results were consistent with those observed in 2021 and 2022.

More than three quarters of respondents (76%) had an at least somewhat positive overall impression of those who serve in the CAF.

Overall, positive impressions of members of the CAF remained consistent with results from 2022 (77%) and 2021 (76%).

When respondents were asked to evaluate their impression of care for active military personnel, nearly half believed that the CAF was doing a good or very good job (48%). Conversely, 14% felt that the CAF was performing poorly. Overall, the results remain consistent with those observed since 2021.

Pride in the CAF

If a young person they knew told them they were joining the CAF, 54% would view that decision favourably. These results are consistent with the previous wave conducted in 2022.

Nearly half of respondents view the CAF as a source of pride for Canadians (48%). Results have remained stable since 2021.

Modern relevance of the CAF

Less than one in five respondents (17%) felt that the CAF was modern. Conversely, over a third of respondents (35%) felt that the CAF was outdated (scores of 1 or 2), an increase of 14% since 2016.

Exactly seven in ten respondents (70%) felt that the CAF is essential, a decrease of 5% from the 75% observed in 2022. Conversely, 6% felt that the CAF was no longer needed.

Workplace environment

When evaluating the inclusiveness of the workplace environment, 60% at least somewhat agreed that the CAF is as good a career choice for visible minorities as it is for anyone else, while a similar proportion, 59%, agreed that it is as good a career choice for women as it is for men.

Agreement was much lower when considering whether the CAF was as good a career choice for members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community compared to anyone else (33%). This statement saw an 8% decrease in agreement from 41% in 2022.

Exactly half of respondents agreed that they were concerned about systemic racism in the CAF (50%), while a slightly larger proportion agreed that racist or hateful attitudes are not tolerated in the CAF (53%). Just under one third of respondents agreed that the CAF does a good job of addressing misconduct, including racist, sexist or hateful conduct (32%).

Moreover, 40% agreed that CAF membership is as diverse as the Canadian population, and the same proportion agreed that the CAF is a respectful workplace environment for women (40%).

Over two in five (46%) agreed that the CAF does a good job taking care of ill and injured members. One in five respondents at least somewhat agreed that they could see themselves joining the CAF (20%).

Results were mostly consistent with those observed in 2022.

Trust in the CAF

Just over two in five respondents (41%) trust the CAF (scores of 8 to 10), and the same proportion is somewhat trustful (scores of 5 to 7). The extent to which respondents expressed a high level of trust in the CAF increased slightly from the results observed in 2022 (from 37% to 41% in 2023); however, these findings are still slightly below the 43% observed in 2021.

Nearly a third of respondents (30%) trust the information provided to Canadians by the CAF (scores of 8 to 10), and another 46% are somewhat trustful (scores of 5 to 7).

Threats to Canada

Consistent with 2022, Russia was viewed as the biggest threat to Canadian security (15%). Another one in ten respondents mentioned China (11%), a finding consistent with the previous waves.

Funding and equipment

Consistent with results from 2022, more than two in five respondents (46%) said that Canada's military was underfunded, while 25% said that the CAF receives the right amount of funding.

More than one quarter of respondents agree that the CAF has the equipment that it needs to do its job (27%) and that the CAF's military equipment purchases benefit local economies (26%).

One quarter of respondents agree that the CAF is good at planning its future equipment needs (25%), a decrease from 34% in 2022. Slightly fewer agreed that purchases of military equipment tend to be well managed (23%).

Agreement with each of these statements has declined since 2022.

Less than one in five respondents were able to answer whether the CAF has the equipment it needs (18%). Close to three in ten respondents did not know whether the CAF's equipment purchases benefit local economies (29%), whether the CAF is good at planning its future equipment needs (29%), or whether purchases of military equipment tend to be well managed (28%).

International roles

Respondents were most in agreement that the CAF should have participation in disaster relief/humanitarian aid (71%) and peace support operations (69%).

Roughly two thirds of respondents at least somewhat agree that the CAF should be participating in surveillance and defence in the North (67%), as well as in non-combat support missions (66%).

At least half of respondents agreed with the following roles:

- using satellites in space for monitoring purposes (60%);
- missions that target illegal trafficking activities (56%); and

- combat support missions for the UN and NATO (54%).

Finally, slightly less than half of respondents said they at least somewhat agree that the CAF should be training militaries or police of other countries (48%).

Overall, agreement for the CAF's involvement in each of these international roles has declined since 2022.

More than seven in ten respondents (72%) at least somewhat agreed that Canada's membership in international organizations such as NATO and NORAD is important for Canadian security. Agreement has declined from the previous wave in 2022.

Domestic roles

Overall, more than half felt that each domestic role played by the CAF was at least important. Ratings were highest for the following roles:

- responding to natural disasters (84%);
- search and rescue (82%); and
- providing protection against terrorist threats (81%).

More than two thirds of respondents felt that preventing illegal activity was an important role (71%), followed by protecting against cyber-security threats (70%) and patrolling the Arctic (67%). Importance ratings were lower for youth programs (54%).

Overall, the results were fairly consistent with those observed in 2021 and 2022.

When asked to provide their level of agreement that the CAF is doing a good job of performing its duties in Canada, nearly seven in ten (69%) at least somewhat agreed.

Misconduct allegations

Respondents were given the option to either respond to or skip a series of questions related to sexual misconduct allegations brought forward in the CAF. The results presented in this section are based on the 1,871 (out of 2,004) respondents who felt comfortable proceeding with the misconduct questions.

In 2023, nearly half of respondents reported paying at least some attention to news of alleged sexual misconduct in the CAF over the previous few months (47%). On the one hand, nearly one

in ten respondents reported paying a lot of attention (9%). On the other hand, more than one in five (22%) had paid no attention at all to that news.

The proportion of respondents paying attention to this news is consistent with the 2022 findings.

Exactly two in five respondents (40%) at least somewhat agreed that the CAF takes misconduct allegations seriously. Conversely, one in five respondents (19%) disagreed.

More than one third of respondents agreed with the following statements regarding misconduct in the CAF:

- The misconduct allegations have led the Canadian Armed Forces to make positive changes (37%).
- I feel like the Canadian Armed Forces is taking concrete steps to make changes to evolve its culture (37%).
- I feel like the Canadian Armed Forces is taking concrete steps to prevent misconduct (36%).

Additionally, three in ten respondents at least somewhat agreed that the CAF deals with misconduct allegations appropriately (30%). Conversely, one quarter of respondents at least somewhat disagreed (25%).

Qualitative research

Awareness, Impressions and Perceptions of the CAF

When participants were asked what first comes to mind when they think of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), some were reminded of military-related terms, peacekeeping, disaster relief and protection.

When specifically asked what comes to mind regarding the best aspects of the CAF, many of the same themes were repeated, especially the themes pertaining to peacekeeping and helping others, and particularly, helping Canadian communities in times of crisis / natural disaster. Many also referred to access to good careers, good benefits and access to education. Protecting and keeping people safe was also a common theme.

When specifically asked what comes to mind regarding the worst aspects of the CAF, many could not think of anything in particular. Among those who could, many referred to the CAF as being too small, underfunded and using obsolete equipment. Issues related to culture were also raised.

Some were broadly reminded of the dangerous nature of being part of the CAF. Lastly, some brought up a lack of support for veterans.

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 by and roles played by the CAF. This limited awareness of the CAF's activities and roles is consistent with what has been observed in previous iterations of this qualitative research. If anything, participants' views and opinions were largely anchored around what they saw as the CAF's "traditional" role of peacekeeping, the CAF's activities in communities in times of natural disasters, and any headlines / news stories encountered over the past few years.

Few had seen, heard or read anything in the media or elsewhere about the CAF in general, or about CAF equipment and procurement, in particular. Among the few who had noted something, it tended to pertain to allegations of misconduct, shipping equipment to the Ukraine or the purchase of planes / used planes. A few had also seen recruitment-related initiatives.

Most would agree that the CAF lacks equipment or has obsolete equipment and that they are doing the best they can with what they have.

While they may not know very much about the CAF's roles and activities, most participants could share their overall impressions of the people who serve in the CAF. These were mostly positive, with many explaining that members of the CAF are viewed as hard-working, well-trained, dedicated and self-sacrificing individuals.

Few felt that they could easily weigh in on the work performed by those serving in the CAF. Based on their limited awareness of the CAF's activities and the extent to which they felt that the CAF was involved in peacekeeping and coming to the aid of Canadians when natural disasters strike, participants generally had a positive impression.

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, and others felt that, having known some individuals who serve (or have served), the CAF is trustworthy. When it came to trusting the information that the CAF provides to Canadians, most explained that they would instinctively mistrust such information or feel that they were not being told all the facts. This sentiment seemed to stem from an expectation that any military is likely to keep a lot of information "close to its chest" given the nature of its operations.

Most participants seemed to feel that the CAF's job is harder than it was 10 years ago. These participants explained that the increase in natural disasters requiring the CAF's involvement and

a sense that there are more conflicts around the world compared to 10 years ago might make the CAF's job harder. That being said, advances in technology left some feeling the CAF's work might be easier in some ways. However, some also felt these advances would make the CAF's work more challenging in other ways, especially when it comes to cybersecurity.

Domestic Focus

While many could think of roles played by the CAF domestically, they tended to focus entirely on the support provided during natural disasters. A few recalled certain roles they believed the CAF played during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the trucker convoy protest in Ottawa. A few participants also suspected that the CAF are conducting surveillance along Canada's borders and in the Arctic.

Participants were presented with the following six roles played by the CAF in Canada:

- Responding to natural disasters
- Providing protection against terrorist threats
- Search and rescue
- Patrolling our borders
- Patrolling the Arctic (this includes defending Canadian sovereignty, natural resources, etc.)
- Monitoring space (this includes things like monitoring satellite communications, monitoring Canada's maritime approaches, space-based earth observations, space surveillance of debris and other threats, search and rescue, selection of targets for combat operations, etc.)

The following themes emerged when discussing these specific roles:

- Most believed it is important that the CAF play these roles in Canada.
- Upon seeing the list, many explained how they take most of the roles the CAF play in Canada for granted.
- The list was, for the most part, complete – in other words, very few participants would change it by removing or adding anything.
- A few were surprised to learn that the CAF monitor space, although upon reading the description provided, they understood how that makes sense and is important.
- Beyond noticing that the CAF perform quite well when responding to natural disasters, participants did not feel sufficiently informed about the CAF's other roles in order to assess how well or poorly they were being performed.

International Focus

Participants knew very little about the CAF's roles on the international stage. Although they suspect the CAF are playing peacekeeping and support roles, other than some references to the Ukraine conflict, 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 the CAF playing a peacekeeping role since this aligns with an established area of expertise for Canada, and it is probably the best kind of role the CAF can take on given their limited size and limited equipment. Support for a combat role was much more mixed – some felt that if the cause(s) were right, then they would support it, however many were concerned about what is in fact “the right cause.” Most felt that they would need to know more information on the specific conflict for them to comfortably take a position on a combat role.

Given participants' very limited awareness of where the CAF are operating around the world, few could confidently suggest where they should be more or less involved.

There is a general understanding that the CAF work with various alliances to contribute to international peace and security and that participation in those alliances is important. Most believe that the benefits of those types of collaborations outweigh their concerns. The main benefits mentioned included:

- Working together with other countries leads to critical mass, meaning we are bigger/stronger together.
- Working together with other countries allows for the sharing of best practices, technologies, knowledge, information, and so on; in other words, we are better together.
- Being part of a large group of allies ensures some degree of protection, knowing that this same group will support Canada if ever needed.
- Being part of an alliance allows Canada to be “at the table” when decisions are made and to be visible to the international community.

These benefits are especially important for the CAF since most agreed that the CAF are too small to undertake anything on their own on the international stage.

Few had concerns, but the main one was the possibility of becoming *de facto* involved in conflicts that may not align with Canada's priorities or values.

When asked what they considered to be the biggest threat to the security and sovereignty of Canadians and Canada at this time, the most common themes included:

- Cybersecurity
- Retaliation against Canada, for our involvement in, or support for specific conflicts in other parts of the world, with particular concern for Russia
- General concerns about other countries with whom disagreements could escalate, including India, China and North Korea
- A few noted that the United States could become problematic depending on the outcome of this year's presidential election.

Care of Military Personnel and Family

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

Of the opinions shared, views were somewhat divided regarding access to internal support and benefits. Some sensed that the level of support is not as good as it should be given the headlines pertaining to allegations of misconduct. This sentiment was shared among those who know individuals who previously served and were now in the community suffering from serious mental illnesses.

- Views were also mixed when it came to compensation – some felt the CAF pay well, while others felt the opposite.
- Some believed that the CAF perform rather well in terms of providing education, career/skills development and training and taking care of moving expenses.
- A few mentioned how the quality of housing for CAF members and their families in Canada needs improvement.

Media Attention Around CAF

A few participants in the 18 to 34 age bracket had considered joining the CAF at one point. It was seen as an option among many others but was particularly attractive to the younger age bracket because it paid for their education and it offered interesting career options. Otherwise, few in the young adult groups would consider joining the CAF.

Few participants among both age groups felt they would discourage a friend who was considering serving in the CAF. They felt that if this person knew what they were getting into and they were passionate about it, far be it for them to discourage their choice. That said, a good number of

participants were not convinced that this would be an advisable career option for women, mostly because of what they had heard regarding misconduct allegations.

Participants were asked by the moderator whether their recommendation would in any way be influenced by their friend's gender identity, the colour of their skin or whether they identify as a member of the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Some participants would discourage such friends from enlisting, with the biggest concerns expressed for individuals who are gender diverse or a member of the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Concerns on this front included challenges with discrimination within the CAF but also concerns with the international destinations in which these individuals might find themselves, some of which may not be open to gender- and sexually-diverse individuals.

While some felt that the culture was slowly changing to become more inclusive, there was a sense that this progress was happening slowly and that the CAF were still a very white male dominated environment.

Few participants had heard something over the past 12 months about the allegations of misconduct brought forth in the CAF. Participants were concerned that the CAF would not deal with these allegations appropriately. There was a sense that aspects of the CAF culture focused on "protecting our own", which would provide unnecessary obstacles when dealing with allegations. Some also questioned whether a military court system would generate the best outcomes for these allegations. Once informed that cases of sexual assault leading to criminal charges are now being transferred to the civilian court system, many felt this was a step in the right direction and would likely lead to appropriate outcomes. While still not a perfect solution, many felt that removing a part of the process from the CAF universe would be beneficial. Ultimately, seeing or hearing more individuals being accused of misconduct and seeing clear and appropriate consequences would convince many that the allegations are being dealt with appropriately.

Moving forward, few participants could propose strategies to reduce the likelihood of future misconduct within the CAF. Among the ideas proposed, some sensed that only time and the gradual disappearance of the "old guard" and the growing presence of more diverse and inclusive staff and mindsets will lead to improvements on this front. Some also felt that the introduction and promotion of reliable and safe avenues for victims to disclose abuse would be an improvement. Ultimately, it was suggested that only those within the CAF were in a position to propose strategies since they were the ones familiar with why and how abuse happens.

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.

As a result of 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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