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Views of the Canadian Armed Forces – 2020 Tracking Study Executive Summary

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September 2020

This executive summary presents the key results of the focus groups, telephone and online survey conducted by Earncliffe Strategy Group on behalf of Department of National Defence. The research was conducted in February, July and August 2020.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Points de vue sur les Forces armées canadiennes – Étude de suivi 2020

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Points de vue sur les Forces armées canadiennes – Étude de suivi 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present this executive summary to the Department of National Defence (DND) highlighting the key findings of the Department's 2020 tracking study.

The CAF is dedicated to protecting Canada and Canadians' interests and values at home and abroad, especially in a rapidly changing and increasingly volatile global security environment such as the one we find ourselves in today. To help inform the development of policies, programs, services and initiatives in response to this new policy, DND required public opinion research to understand the views, perceptions and opinions of Canadians. DND regularly conducts tracking research to measure the shifts in public opinion regarding Canada's armed forces and military.

This research 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, including the NATO Mission Iraq in the Middle East. The findings of the research will be used by DND and the CAF to monitor the public environment, inform decision-making, inform communications strategies and messages, improve communications with Canadians and report on departmental performance.

The total contract value of this research was \$123,655.53, plus HST.

Earnscliffe conducted a two-part research program. The research program began with an initial qualitative phase involving focus groups with Canadians 18 and over across the country. Building on the learning from the initial qualitative phase, we conducted a quantitative phase involving a comprehensive survey of Canadians aged 18 and over across the country.

The initial qualitative phase included a series of eight focus groups conducted in: Quebec City (February 22); Toronto (February 24); Moncton (February 25); and, Calgary (February 27). In each city, the discussions were conducted with Canadian adults (18+); segregated by age with the first group among those 18-34 and the second group among those 35-65. The sessions were approximately 2 hours in length. The groups in Quebec City were conducted in French, and the rest were conducted in English. It is relevant to note that the qualitative research was conducted prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, and consequently did not address the CAF's involvement in the crisis.

For the quantitative phase we conducted a dual-mode survey of 1,503 Canadians 18+, with 571 of the sample conducted via telephone and 932 conducted online in collaboration with our quantitative sub-contractor, Léger. The phone portion was conducted via telephone from Léger's centralized call-centre using their state of the art Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system, and the web survey was conducted using Léger's, proprietary online panel. The survey was conducted from July 20 to August 20, 2020 and was an average of 14 minutes in length by phone and 10 minutes on the web.

The data have been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the Canadian population aged 18 and over.

The key findings from the research are presented below.

Qualitative Key Findings

- Awareness of and familiarity with the CAF continues to be very low, particularly among those 18-34. Few had recently seen, read or heard anything about the CAF, aside from one or two participants in each group who vaguely recalled having seen recruitment ads online.
- Despite the limited familiarity with the CAF, most tended to hold very positive views of the CAF and the people who serve in it. Respondents tended to describe members of the CAF as brave, courageous, selfless, humble, loyal, prideful, dedicated, focussed, and highly trained.
- The majority of participants felt that the CAF's job today is much more difficult than in the past, largely due to global political uncertainty and advances in technology that have facilitated the use of drones and cyber-attacks.
- Most viewed the CAF as a primarily peacekeeping and supportive force and would prefer it plays a defensive, rather than offensive, role.
- Domestically, respondents view the CAF's role as responding to natural disasters; protecting our borders/sovereignty; and, search and rescue.
 - Participants agreed that all the domestic roles they were presented with are important. However, most seemed to believe the CAF's efforts should be dynamic and fluid across these various roles; prioritizing those that demand more immediate focus and attention depending on the situational context or level of threat.
 - While specific awareness of the CAF's role in patrolling the Arctic continued to be low, we detected slightly less resistance to the CAF playing this role than we may have detected in the past, especially among the younger participants.
 - Monitoring space seemed to be particularly novel for participants to consider when thinking about the roles the CAF plays. Participants were comforted to learn that we would be using advanced technology to protect our interests in this way.
- Supporting allies, particularly the UN, was seen as a worthwhile endeavour, particularly in a supportive or peacekeeping role. Respondents viewed aligning ourselves with other countries as an important thing to do to foster goodwill but also an important means of pooling resources.
 - One caveat respondents highlighted was our relationship with the United States, and a certain level of apprehension about American politics and our potential to be collateral damage.
- Participants had difficulty naming where Canada might be currently involved internationally. Those who could name a location most often mentioned the Middle East and peacekeeping in Ukraine.
- There was a continued lack of awareness around procurement and equipment. Few had heard much recently in the news about the CAF's procurement. When asked whether the CAF has the equipment and tools of a modern and innovative institution, most had the impression that it does not.

- New this wave, we also asked participants whether they had seen CAF facilities and the impact of these facilities on their impressions of the state of the CAF's equipment. While a number of participants in each group had not noticed CAF facilities in their communities, others felt that they had noticed some in the past. Many had the sense that a number of bases were now closed which implied a certain level of outdatedness. Those who were aware of facilities in existence did not describe them as all that modern.
- When asked whether they would ever consider joining the Forces (those aged 18-34) or recommend the Forces (those aged 35-65), views were mixed.
 - Some of those in the younger cohort indicated that they had considered joining when they were younger, while others said that they never had because they felt it was too scary. For some, the option of serving in the Reserves was somewhat appealing given you could serve on a part-time basis and had the choice to stay in one city if you were not interested in volunteering for deployment.
 - Those in the older cohort seemed to be slightly more likely to recommend than the younger was likely to join. The benefits they perceived one would gain from the experience included camaraderie; skill set; strong work ethic; job security; paid education; and, opportunity to find oneself while doing something important and for which one could be proud.
- Participants were not able to say definitively whether they felt members of the CAF were diverse and representative of Canada's population. Most indicated that they just had no idea.
- When asked whether they thought there were any barriers that could prevent individuals from diverse backgrounds from joining the CAF, many felt that while it was probably changing for the better with time, there still seemed to be a sense that the CAF was likely a predominantly macho environment.
 - Some also pointed out that some cultural groups and/or the LGBTQ community may be less inclined to join because of negative past experiences in society, with other authorities and/or because they perceive the CAF as not already including people like them.

Quantitative Key Findings

- The percentage who say they are very or somewhat familiar with the CAF has fallen, from 52% in 2018 to just under half (46%) this wave.
- About a quarter (28%) have read, seen or heard something about the CAF recently. This figure remains stable from 2018, and lower than preceding years.
 - The CAF's assistance responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term care facilities is by far the most common topic respondents recall hearing of (26%). Fewer recall advertising in general (10%), the Cyclone helicopter crash in April 2020 (8%) and peacekeeping missions (7%).

- While the vast majority (82%) have a positive view of those who serve in the CAF, the percentage who have a strongly positive impression (42%) has declined from 2018 (57%).
 - Impressions of prospective members of the CAF remain similar from 2018 to 2020. Almost two-thirds (62%) would view a young person’s decision to join the CAF favourably.
- Pride in the CAF has slipped slightly over the past four years, from 70% agreeing it is a source of pride in 2016 to 66% in 2018 and 62% in 2020. The percentage who provide the highest rating (5 on a scale from 1 to 5), indicating that the CAF is very much a source of pride, has fallen from 37% in 2016 to 28% this wave.
- As has been the trend in past waves, the plurality feel the CAF is neither modern nor outdated (43%), while equal proportions believe it is either modern (24%) or outdated (24%).
- Half agree that the CAF is very essential, down slightly from 57% in 2018. Very few (2%) believe it is no longer needed at all.
- Overall, respondents view greater diversity in the CAF positively, but are not convinced it is currently as diverse as it could be. Almost three-quarters (70%) agree that greater gender and cultural diversity in the CAF could improve operational and/or military performance.
 - More disagree (53%) than agree (39%) with the statement that it is not important that the CAF’s membership be as diverse as the Canadian population.
 - Respondents are more divided over whether the CAF is actually culturally diverse. Under half (42%) agree that the membership of the CAF is as diverse as the Canadian population, while 35% disagree and 23% do not know or do not offer a response.
 - The majority (54%) of respondents are concerned about systemic racism in the CAF.
- Well over half (61%) agree that hateful or racist attitudes and behaviours are not tolerated in the CAF.
 - Half (50%) agree that the CAF responds appropriately when it learns of members displaying hateful attitudes or behaviours, but almost a third (29%) do not know or do not offer a response.
- While 70% agree that the CAF is as good a career choice for women as it is for men, respondents are less certain that the workplace environment is respectful of women (51% agree, 32% disagree and 18% do not offer a response).
- Few (9%) strongly agree that they could see themselves joining the CAF, while half (49%) strongly disagree that they could see themselves joining.
- Compared to improving health services (77% high priority) and creating jobs (70%), funding the CAF is less important (48%). Domestic operations (46%) are deemed more important than international operations (36%).

- Respondents are divided over whether the CAF has the equipment it needs to do its job - 39% agree, 34% disagree. They are more inclined to agree it has the facilities it needs (63%).
- Much like previous waves, respondents strongly agree that the CAF should be involved in disaster relief and humanitarian aid (51% strongly agree), though strong support has slipped from 69% in 2018.
 - Respondents also believe the CAF should be involved in peace support operations (45% strongly agree) and non-combat roles in support of UN or NATO missions (43% strongly agree), though of note, support was higher in both 2018 and 2016.
 - As in 2018 and 2016, combat roles (22% strongly agree) and training the militaries of other countries (19%) are the activities respondents are least certain the CAF should be involved in.
- The vast majority of respondents believe the CAF certainly or probably is involved with disaster relief/humanitarian aid (88%), peace support operations (88%), non-combat support missions (88%) and training missions (84%).
 - Fewer believe the CAF is currently involved in anti-trafficking missions (66%), gathering intelligence via satellite (63%) and combat missions (57%). Of note, one-in-five or fewer are certain the CAF is involved in any of these three activities.
 - Knowledge of where the CAF is currently serving is limited – half (50%) cannot name a country.
- NATO membership is still viewed as important (83% agree it is important to Canadian security) but the percentage who strongly agree has fallen from 63% in 2018 to 49%.
- Respondents feel the CAF's most important domestic roles are responding to natural disasters (70% very important) protecting against terrorism (69%) and search and rescue (64%). These three were also rated most important in 2018 and 2016.
 - Less important roles include patrolling the Arctic (40%) and delivering the Cadet program (28%).
- Slightly less than half (44%) strongly agree that the CAF is doing a good job performing its roles here in Canada, while another 39% somewhat agree. The proportion who strongly agree has fallen from 50% in 2018.
- The vast majority (82%) agree the CAF can be counted on to help the country respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including 50% who strongly agree.
 - Overall, most also agree that the CAF is doing a good job of protecting its members during the pandemic (76%).
 - Three-quarters agree that the CAF is valuable in helping Canada respond to the COVID-19 pandemic (73%).

Research Firm:

Earncliffe Strategy Group Inc. (Earncliffe)
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I hereby certify as a Representative of Earncliffe Strategy Group that the final deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. 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:

Date: September 22, 2020



Doug Anderson
Principal, Earncliffe