



National Défense  
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# Views of the Canadian Armed Forces – 2021-2022 Tracking Study

## Executive Summary

Prepared for the Department of National Defence

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# Views of the Canadian Armed Forces – 2021-2022 Tracking Study

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March 2022

This public opinion research report presents the 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 August 2021 and January 2022.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Points de vue sur les Forces armées canadiennes – Étude de suivi 2021-2022

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Points de vue sur les Forces armées canadiennes – Étude de suivi 2021-2022

## Executive Summary

Earncliffe Strategy Group is pleased to present the following report to the Department of National Defence Canada (DND) summarizing the results of the 2021 tracking study.

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, DND requires 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 and the Views of the Canadian Armed Forces Tracking Study is an important source of information to support decision-making and enable informed communications strategies.

The research examines issues such as the image of the CAF, the role of the CAF at home and abroad, and allegations of sexual misconduct within the CAF. 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 for this project was \$131,712.52 including HST.

To meet the objectives, Earncliffe conducted a two-part research program. The first part consisted of a dual-mode survey of 1,501 Canadians aged 18 and older, with 525 conducted by phone and 976 conducted online in collaboration with our quantitative sub-contractor, Léger. The phone portion was conducted via telephone from Léger's remote 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 27 to August 10, 2021, and was an average of 20 minutes in length by phone and 11 minutes on the web.

The qualitative phase involved a series of ten online focus groups. Two groups were conducted with individuals living within 100km of each of the following cities: Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver and Moncton. Groups were segregated by age and gender. Ten participants were recruited for each group. Five groups were conducted with Canadians ages 18-34, two groups with individuals identifying as men and three groups with individuals identifying as women. The other five groups were conducted with Canadians ages 35-65, three groups with individuals identifying as men and two groups with individuals identifying as women. The groups with individuals from Montreal were conducted in French. The group of 35-65-year-old women in Moncton was also conducted in French to ensure official language minority community representation. The groups were approximately 90 minutes in length and participants received an honourarium of \$100.

The key findings from the research are presented below.

### Quantitative Key Findings

- Familiarity with the CAF has declined slightly, from 46% saying they are very or somewhat familiar with it in 2020 to 41% this year.
- Two-thirds (65%) have a positive impression of the CAF. Few (11%) have a negative impression.

- Although overall impressions of the CAF are mostly positive or neutral, tracking data demonstrates that the degree of positivity towards the CAF is lower.
  - For example, while 76% view those who serve in the CAF positively, 35% say their impression of those who serve is strongly positive, compared to 43% in 2020 and 57% in 2018.
  - Similarly, 21% say they would view the decision of someone they know to join the CAF very favourably, compared to 27% in 2020.
  - The percentage who say the CAF is a source of pride has also fallen. Asked to rate their sense of pride in the CAF on a scale of 1 to 5, 18% provide a rating of 5, and 29% provide a rating of 4. In 2020, 28% provided a rating of 5 and 34% provided a rating of 4.
- The percentage who agree that the CAF is as good a career choice for women as it is for men or that the workplace environment is respectful of women have both decreased since 2020.
  - About half (56%) agree that the CAF is as good a career choice for women as it is for men, compared to 70% in 2020.
  - Slightly more than a third (36%) feel the CAF workplace environment is respectful of women, while half (48%) disagree. In 2020, 50% agreed that the workplace environment was respectful of women.
- Although 60% agree that a career in the CAF is as good a choice for visible minorities as it is for anyone else, over half (56%) are concerned about systemic racism in the CAF.
  - Furthermore, fewer respondents this wave agree that racist or hateful behaviours are not tolerated in the CAF. Just shy of half (46%) agree that they are not tolerated, compared to 61% in 2020.
  - Just 32% say the CAF is doing a good job addressing hateful, racist or sexist conduct while 46% disagree.
- Few (8%) feel that the CAF is over-funded. Over two-thirds say it is either underfunded (40%) or receives the right amount of funding (29%).
  - About a third (31%) feel the CAF has the equipment it needs to do its job. The same percentage (33%) feel the CAF does not have the equipment it needs.
  - Just 28% agree that the CAF is good at planning its future equipment needs, while 24% agree that purchases of military equipment by the CAF are well-managed. Of note, roughly half neither agree or disagree or do not provide a response when asked about these two topics.
- When it comes to attitudes about the CAF's international roles, little has changed from 2020. The vast majority (80%) agree that the CAF should participate in disaster relief or humanitarian aid. Respondents also widely support the CAF participating in peace support operations (76%), non-combat roles to support UN or NATO missions (75%) and surveillance and defence in the North (73%).
  - While few oppose the CAF's involvement in any of the international roles included in this study, roles such as combat in support of UN and NATO missions (56%) and training the militaries or police forces of other countries (54%) do not enjoy the same broad-based support. This finding is in keeping with results from previous waves.
- Attitudes about the importance of the CAF's domestic roles have not changed much since 2020.
  - Responding to natural disasters remains the top ranked in terms of importance (68% very important) followed by protecting against terrorism (66%) and search and rescue (63%).

- About half feel protecting against cyber-security threats (52%) and preventing illegal activity such as smuggling (48%) are very important roles.
- Slightly fewer agree that patrolling the Arctic (44%) and supporting communities through the COVID-19 pandemic (42%) are very important, though over two-thirds agree they are at least somewhat important.
- Over three-quarters (79%) agree that the CAF does a good job of performing its roles in Canada. However, the percentage who strongly agree has fallen since 2018, from 50% in 2018 to 44% in 2020 and to 34% this wave.
- Three-quarters (77%) also agree that the CAF can be counted on for assistance with the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Almost half (46%) clearly recall hearing about the CAF playing a role in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- While less than one-in-five (15%) say they have paid a lot of attention to the allegations of sexual misconduct in the CAF, 81% say they have paid at least a little attention to the issue.
  - One-in-five (21%) say they are confident that the CAF will deal with these allegations appropriately (8-10 on a 10-point scale), while 37% are somewhat confident (5-7) and 38% are not confident (1-4).
  - After being read/shown an explanation of Justice Morris Fish’s independent review and the Minister of National Defence’s response, a quarter (25%) say that they are confident the CAF’s culture will change based on these actions. Just shy of half are somewhat confident (46%) while a quarter (25%) are not confident.

## Qualitative Key Findings

- Most groups had some participants who felt they knew little about the CAF, sometimes describing the CAF as not being terribly visible.
  - When asked what comes to mind when they think of the CAF, participants often brought up the CAF’s role protecting the country and responding to domestic emergencies (including forest fires, flooding and COVID). Some also associated the CAF with peacekeeping. Others noted that the CAF is disciplined, professional and honourable.
- Participants were asked to name the best and worst things about the CAF. The best things included the sense that the CAF can be counted on to help Canadians. A few of the younger participants also noted the educational and training opportunities that the CAF can provide to recruits. The worst things included concerns around the mental health of CAF members, including PTSD, and a few mentions of the allegations of sexual misconduct within the CAF’s ranks.
- Most participants trusted the CAF, though their trust seemed to derive more from general impressions, personal relationships with members and expectations of the role a country’s military should play, rather than extensive knowledge of what the CAF does.
- Initially, most participants were uncertain when asked to name the CAF’s main role. However, with prompting and discussion, participants were able to name a few. They tended to be more domestic than international. For example, many felt the CAF’s main role was to protect Canadians and respond

to domestic emergencies, including natural disasters. The international roles that participants mentioned included peacekeeping and non-combat missions.

- Relatedly, participants viewed the CAF as more of a supportive, often peacekeeping, force rather than a military that frequently engages in combat. Some participants also felt that the CAF is not a large or powerful enough force to take on a predominantly combat role.
- Upon being shown a list of the CAF's domestic roles, participants deemed them appropriate and important. Responding to natural disasters seemed particularly important and participants felt it would likely become an even more vital role for the CAF to play as climate change causes more unusual major weather events, like the flooding and forest fires this past year.
- A few had heard recently about the CAF's role in Afghanistan. Those who were aware of it had heard about it on the news. Some thought it was important for the CAF to be involved. One or two were critical, but their criticisms often related more to the US's withdrawal, which they perceived happened too quickly for those who needed to be evacuated.
- Recall of the CAF's involvement in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic was higher. It often came up unprompted. Among those aware, most mentioned the CAF being deployed to help in long term care. One participant noted that the CAF had gone to communities in the North to help administer vaccines and provide supplies. Another mentioned assistance with vaccine protection or distribution.
- A few also recalled, positively, the CAF's involvement in BC with the most recent flooding.
- Asked about the biggest threats to Canadian sovereignty, participants offered a variety of suggestions. Many noted that Canada's resources, including oil and access to fresh water, could make the country a target for future conflict. Others mentioned terrorism, foreign espionage, and cyber-attacks. A few countries – China, Russia, and North Korea – were singled out as posing greater threats to Canada than others.
- Most agreed that it is important that Canada work with its allies. They sensed that since Canada is a smaller country, we rely on our allies for protection and resources.
- Participants' impression of the care and support the CAF provides to personnel and families was mixed. Many were also uncertain about the types of support the CAF offers.
  - Some felt that personnel and their families were well taken care of, noting housing on base, opportunities for training and support for post-secondary education. Others had heard that the military provides comprehensive health and dental benefits, as well as pensions.
- Among those who questioned whether the CAF does enough to support its members, most were concerned about mental health services. They had heard stories, from friends and/or in the media, about PTSD among members of the CAF and veterans. Participants did not know much about what mental health supports are currently provided but had the sense that they are not sufficient and that there may be barriers to access, particularly once someone retires from the CAF.

- Some, but not all, had heard about the recent allegations of sexual misconduct within the CAF. Fewer women ages 18-34 had heard than women 35-65 or men, though recall among any group was not universal.
- Many respondents – both men and women – noted that issues of discrimination and harassment are pervasive throughout society, so they were not surprised to hear that the CAF was dealing with issues of this nature.
- The impact of these allegations on impressions of the CAF was mixed. Some, and men in particular, were more likely to say that while the incidents they had heard about were horrible, the perpetrators' behaviour was not reflective of the entire CAF.
  - Others felt that while the allegations did not change their confidence in the CAF's ability to fulfill its roles, they did call into question whether everyone in the CAF is treated fairly.
  - A few participants (mostly women) argued that what they perceived to be the CAF's efforts to "cover up" the allegations cast a negative light on the entire military.
- Most seemed skeptical that the CAF would address the allegations and misconduct. Of note, women 18-34 were less convinced that the CAF's culture will change in the future than other groups, but there was some degree of skepticism in most groups.
  - Some of their pessimism seemed to come from their own experience hearing of and dealing with issues of sexism, harassment and assault in society broadly. They noted that society itself has "a long way to go" and that culture takes a long time to change, and change may take even longer within the CAF.
- Some groups, particularly men, held out more hope in the CAF's response. Those who were confident that the CAF would address the allegations argued that pressure from the media may force the military to change and that failure to do so could hamper future recruitment efforts.
- Participants hoped that moving forward, the CAF would promote more women to leadership roles and make it easier to report misconduct. Many highlighted the need for education and prevention efforts, including mandatory training for everyone in the CAF.
  - A couple called for "real" consequences for those found guilty of misconduct, which they felt could only be achieved by taking the decision of what to do about such cases out of the military's hands.
  - A few also noted the importance of transparency as the CAF moves forward with any sort of plan to address the issue of misconduct.
- Asked whether they would consider joining the CAF, young men were more likely than young women to say they would, but overall, less than half of any group typically indicated they would.
  - Men and women alike were deterred by the idea of having to leave their families and/or move around frequently, requiring them to uproot their families. Some were concerned about danger, and strenuous training. A few did not see how their current career path could be accommodated in the CAF.
  - A few participants were also put off of joining the CAF based on what they had heard about allegations of sexual misconduct.

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- Knowing that they would not necessarily have to move around or serve directly on the front lines in a combat role did make some more likely to say they would consider a career in the CAF.
- Most participants either would encourage, or at the very least would not try to prevent, someone they know from joining the CAF. However, a few said that if the friend was a woman, or was a person of colour or member of the LGBTQ community, they might want to make sure they were aware of past issues of discrimination and misconduct before making a final decision.

Research Firm:

Earnscliffe Strategy Group Inc. (Earnscliffe)  
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I hereby certify as a Representative of Earnscliffe 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: March 31, 2022



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Principal, Earnscliffe