# Public Opinion Research Study:
# Canadians' Perceptions of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

# Executive Summary

## Prepared for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

**Supplier:** Ipsos
**Contract Number:** CW2318759
**Contract Value:** $236,927.10 (including HST)
**Award Date:** 2023-06-16
**Delivery Date:** 2023-12-6
**Registration Number:** POR 017-23

For more information on this report, please contact the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at
SurveyCentreRCMP-CentresondageGRC@rcmp-grc.gc.ca
**Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français**

Canada

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre :
Recherche sur l'opinion publique : Les perceptions des Canadiens à l'égard de la Gendarmerie Royale du Canada.

This publication may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes only. Prior written permission must be obtained from the RCMP.

For more information on this report, please contact the RCMP at:
SurveyCentreRCMP-CentresondageGRC@rcmp-grc.gc.ca

Canada

# Political Neutrality Statement

I hereby certify, as a Representative of Ipsos, that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Government of Canada's Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, party standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Mike Colledge, President
Ipsos Public Affairs

# Executive Summary

## Research Objectives and Methodology

Recent RCMP-led and other surveys of the public have shown that trust with the organization has fluctuated. For example, the percentage of Canadians who agree that they have trust and confidence in the RCMP's contribution to public safety declined from 74% in 2018-19 to 53% in 2021-22 and then rose to 58% in 2022-23. While the surveys provided insight into overall public views, they did not provide in-depth information on the reasons behind the fluctuation.

This report presents the findings from qualitative research designed to gauge opinions and elicit an understanding of the reasons behind the Canadian public's decreasing level of trust in the RCMP. Specifically, the research dove into top-of-mind associations with the RCMP; levels of trust and confidence of the organization and the factors that underpin these perceptions; and recommendations for improving and enhancing public trust of the RCMP.

A total of 26 online focus group discussions were conducted, with 174 participants taking part. This qualitative research was comprehensive in terms of its national reach, including Canadians who live within and outside of local RCMP policing jurisdictions, and engaging Canadians who belong to equity-seeking groups. Focus groups were conducted in both official languages. Most groups had between 5 and 9 participants, and there were between 3 and 10 participants in groups with members of Indigenous communities. On average, every group was approximately 90 minutes long. Participants who took part in the study were offered an honorarium as a 'thank you' for their time. Harder-to-reach research audiences were offered $150 (Indigenous, 2SLGBTQI+, and persons living with a disability) and the remaining audiences were offered $125.

The focus groups elicited rich and detailed information that helps us understand the reasons behind the Canadian public's decreasing level of trust in the RCMP. Primary concerns among specific communities, as well as Canadians overall, were identified. The results of the focus groups provide insight into Canadians' perceptions of (1) overall impressions of the RCMP, (2) reasons why evaluations of the organization have declined, and (3) recommendations for improving the RCMP, and enhancing public trust.

It should be noted that qualitative findings presented in this report are intended to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations. Qualitative findings are not statistically projectable in nature, and thus, should not be extrapolated to the broader population.

## Summary of Key Findings

### Top-of-Mind Associations with the RCMP

Across the focus group discussions, there was a mix of positive, neutral, and negative top-of-mind associations with the RCMP:

- "Safety", "protection", and "security" were the recurring positive associations held by participants.

- The image of a Mountie on horseback with the symbolic red serge and Stetson uniform surfaced in almost all group discussions. Sentiment towards this imagery, however, varied. On the one hand, it was perceived as the quintessential image of Canada, which fostered a sense of national pride in a few cases of older participants. On the other hand, the image had negative connotations of colonialism and Indigenous oppression, as well as being outdated, among certain participants.

- There was a tendency to personify the RCMP as a "middle-aged white male" across the board and 2SLGBTQI+ participants added "cis" and "straight" in their personifications. This was complemented by negative associations of "racism", "trouble", "fear", and "abuse of authority", especially among participants from equity-seeking groups.

Impressions were partly shaped by personal experiences or witnessing first-hand interactions with RCMP officers, or the lack thereof for those living outside of RCMP local policing jurisdictions. Moreover, it was evident that the broader current discourse on the RCMP and policing in general, driven by media and education, shaped participants' attitudes towards the organization.

## Trust and Confidence in the RCMP

The research captured the full spectrum of trust and confidence levels and four main groupings emerged from how participants expressed their views on the RCMP.

1) **A few participants were very vocal in their distrust and lack of confidence of the RCMP.**

- Lack of trust in many instances was a result of participants, or those close to them, being victims of racial profiling or biases at play when interacting with RCMP officers or municipal force officers, which had a spillover effect in views of the RCMP. Several participants shared their personal stories in this regard. These participants identified systemic issues affecting the RCMP institution which resulted in low levels of trust and confidence. This was not a recent shift in attitudes for many of these participants. The make-up of this distrustful group tended to skew towards racialized, Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQI+ participants.

2) **Several participants were somewhat conflicted in their views of the RCMP, which in turn affected their levels of trust.** The following distinct positionings emerged:

- Some were more inclined to trust individual RCMP officers but were generally distrustful of the RCMP as an institution. These participants had positive experiences in their interactions with RCMP officers that were contrary to their pre-existing negative views of the RCMP or the negative stories about the RCMP in the media.

- Some perceived a disconnect between their own experiences in dealing with the RCMP versus those who belong to equity-seeking groups. Participants in these cases were highly cognizant that their "white, middle-class privilege" would likely result in positive outcomes, whereas this would not be the case for the majority of those belonging to equity-seeking groups. Decline in trust and confidence with the RCMP appeared to be most prevalent among this group of participants who had developed an increased awareness of issues such as racial profiling in policing. Increased awareness was partly a function of media coverage on the RCMP specifically, as well as policing in general.

- Operational response times and effectiveness in resolving crimes were found to affect levels of trust and confidence in the RCMP. This was especially the case for rural participants who had low levels of confidence in their local RCMP detachment's ability to respond to calls in a timely manner. At the same time, there was a belief that local detachments were doing "the best they could" and thus more inclined to shift blame onto the institutional RCMP "bureaucracy" and "management".

- The 2020 mass shooting in Portapique (Township in Nova Scotia) emerged in the discussions in Atlantic Canada as a factor in eroding trust and confidence in the RCMP to an extent. Some participants felt that the RCMP's handling of the aftermath lacked transparency and accountability. Yet, for a subset of these participants, they continue to have an underlying level of trust in individual local RCMP officers given the complexity and difficulty of the circumstances.

- A small number of female participants had general confidence and trust in the RCMP to protect them in most scenarios. The exception to this was the RCMP's ability to handle cases of sexual harassment or domestic violence.

3) **Many participants did not hold a strong position but were inclined to trust the RCMP.**

- Often this positioning was based on a direct lack of experiences with the RCMP and thus, participants had no reason not to trust that officers would fulfil their "serve and protect" mandate. This was true for both those who live outside of local RCMP policing jurisdictions as well as those within. Or, in the latter case, participants had largely positive interactions with officers in the past. There was a tendency to view negative incidents involving police officers (e.g., racial profiling) to a few "bad apples".

4) **A few participants displayed high levels of trust towards the RCMP.**

- This final grouping of participants came across as more emphatic than the previous group in their level of trust and confidence in the RCMP. They tended to skew older and had been taught growing up to show respect for RCMP officers. Some have extended family who are/were RCMP officers and therefore had a positive perception and trust in the institution.

## An Inclusive Organization

There was broad agreement that the RCMP has a lot of work to do in terms of being a diverse and inclusive organization. Beyond the perceived lack of racialized RCMP officers, the internal RCMP organizational culture was highlighted as problematic by several participants who placed less trust in the RCMP as an institution. Participants' impressions were shaped by accounts of friends in the force as well as negative media coverage.

Asked whether they would personally consider a career with the RCMP, participants tended to immediately reply with a negative. General public attitudes towards policing emerged as a potential barrier to a career with the RCMP on two levels:

- A few participants were put off by what they perceived as a hostile environment whereby police officers are no longer respected by the public. This coupled with the increased scrutiny of officers by the public, the media, and on social media were cited as barriers.

- Racialized participants concurred that as RCMP officers, they would be operating in a challenging public environment as they felt that many white members of the public are not ready to see People of Colour in positions of power.

## Improving Trust and Confidence in the RCMP

There was a high degree of consistency across regions and audiences on how public trust and confidence in the RCMP could be enhanced in the future. Participants honed in on the following themes:

- **Outreach and Community Engagement** – increasing the number of RCMP officer encounters with the public in friendly and less intimidating settings.

- **Accountability** – swift, decisive, and strong action regarding internal problem employees was called for to help dispel the perceived RCMP culture of protecting one's own.

- **Proactive Communication and Transparency** – proactive communication on the RCMP's positive impact on communities in the media and social media to counterbalance the dominant negative discourse.

- **Diversity and Inclusion** – a need to go beyond the perception of "token hires" and instill an inclusive culture that is led from the top of the organization with the appropriate training, supports, and accountability measures in place.

- **Taking Action on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls** – increased level of urgency and RCMP action.

- **Handling of Mental Health Issues** – training, especially on how to de-escalate a situation involving a mental health crisis, and collaboration with other professions.

- **Mental Health Supports for Officers** – help officers cope with the toll of the profession.

- **Recruitment Practices** – showcasing a variety of roles, targeting university fairs, setting the bar higher for entry.

- **Continuing Professional Development** – ongoing training for officers to reduce poor handling of situations due to desensitization or bad habits formed over time.

- **Visibility, Response Times, and Operational Efficiencies** – more visibility of officers, more resources, and increased operational efficiencies.