



Views of the Canadian Armed Forces 2018 Tracking Study Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present this report to the Department of National Defence (DND) summarizing the results of the qualitative and quantitative research study regarding Canadians' views, expectations and knowledge of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

In 2017, the Government of Canada released a new vision for Canada's armed forces. 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. More specifically, this 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. The findings of the research will be used to monitor any changes in the public environment, inform decision making, communications strategies and messages, improve communications with Canadians and report on departmental performance. The total cost to conduct this research was \$144,650.55 including 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 Toronto, ON (February 26); Montreal, QC (February 27), Moncton, NB (February 27), and Winnipeg, MB (February 28). The focus groups in Montreal were conducted in French to ensure representation of both first official languages in the sample. In each city, the first focus group was conducted with Canadians aged 18 to 34, and the second with Canadians aged 35 to 65. Each lasted approximately two hours.

For the quantitative phase we conducted a telephone survey of 1,524 adults in collaboration with our quantitative sub-contractor, Leger. The survey was conducted via telephone from Léger's centralized call-centre using state of the art Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. The survey was conducted from April 30 to May 21, 2018 and was an average of 20 minutes in length.

The data have been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the Canadian population aged 18 and over. The margin of error for a sample of this size is +/- 2.53%.

The objective of both phases of research was to do a comparative analysis of data against previous waves to understand shifts in perceptions. A secondary objective of the research was to explore, qualitatively, the perception of the CAF and attitudes toward security and defence.

For the purposes of this report, it is important to note that qualitative research is a form of scientific, social, policy and public opinion research. Focus group research is not designed to help a group reach a consensus or to make decisions, but rather to elicit the full range of ideas, attitudes, experiences and opinions of a selected sample of

participants on a defined topic. Because of the small numbers involved, the participants are not representative in a statistical sense of the larger population from which they are drawn and findings cannot reliably be generalized beyond their number.

The key findings from the qualitative and quantitative research are presented below.

Qualitative Research

Awareness, Impressions and Perceptions of the CAF

- **Awareness of and familiarity with the CAF was generally very low; virtually non-existent among those in the younger age group.** Indeed, few had recently seen, read or heard anything about the CAF.
- **While awareness was low, most tend to hold positive views of the CAF and the people who serve in it.** Positive impressions are to a large extent shaped by the fact that participants had not heard anything negative, and a few said the CAF's perceived role as a peacekeeper influenced their positive reaction.
- **Most tended to describe the CAF as a peace keeping and supportive force.** We are viewed as collaborative and supportive but thoughtful and deliberative about our involvement, in contrast to the U.S., whose army participants were described (on an unprompted basis) as more aggressive.
- **The overwhelming majority of participants felt that the CAF's job is much harder today than it was a decade ago.** Participants suggested that terrorism and advances in technology have created a much different playing field today, and there was a sense of ambiguity in terms of understanding who is the good guy and who is the bad guy.

Domestic Focus

- **Combatting/protecting against terrorism was mentioned most often as the biggest threat to Canadian security.** Other mentions included border protection, particularly as it relates to the influx of people coming into Canada from the U.S.
- **Participants were hard-pressed to volunteer what roles they believed the CAF plays domestically.** Someone in each group mentioned they thought the CAF was involved in responding to natural disasters and a few mentioned their role in patrolling our borders – both worthwhile roles, according to participants.
- **Many were surprised to learn about the CAF's role in patrolling the Arctic and there was some uncertainty about the importance of this role, particularly among the younger participants.** They tended to think of the CAF's role in the Arctic as being about protecting the environment, while the older group was more aware of the territorial "dispute" with Russia, Denmark, and the U.S.
- Most of the exercises and operations being carried out in the Arctic that were presented to participants were deemed important, though some in the younger group felt patrolling the Arctic was the least important CAF domestic role.

International Focus

- **Most participants had a hard time conjuring up where they thought Canada was currently active internationally**, though some brought up involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan, peacekeeping missions in Africa and disaster relief in Haiti.
- **Supporting allies, particularly the UN, was seen as a worthwhile endeavour**, as long as the CAF works with countries and on missions that fit with Canada's principles.

Procurement and Equipment

- **There was a continued lack of awareness around procurement.** Given the lack of awareness, most tended to assume the best – our equipment must be top notch, or good enough, because we are a first world country.

Care of Military Personnel and Family Members

- **Participants' views of the support military personnel and their family receive varied by age group.** Those in the younger cohort tended to believe they were generally well cared for (decent pay, shelter, career training, benefits, etc.). The older cohort agreed but did not believe mental health supports for PTSD, for example, are always sufficient. For some, the perception was that care, particularly around mental health issues, appears to be lacking for Veterans.

Recruitment and Diversity in the CAF

- **The majority of participants assumed that the CAF was diverse culturally but had the sense that there may be a gender imbalance.**
- **Participants unanimously agreed that women should be welcome.** However, many argued that while it was probably changing for the better with time, there still seemed to be a persistent macho view in the CAF.
- **Some pointed out that cultural groups may be less inclined to join** because of negative past experiences with the military or other state authorities (domestically, or family history in another country) and/or because they perceive the CAF as not already including people like them.

Quantitative Research

Awareness, Impressions and Perceptions of the CAF

- **Roughly one-quarter (26%) report having heard, read or seen something about the CAF in the past year and can recall what it was they saw, read or heard.**
- When specifically prompted, **few (15%) have any recall of the release of a new Defence Policy** in 2017 called *Strong, Secured, Engaged*.

- Less than half of Canadians (42%) describe themselves as at least somewhat familiar with the CAF and few (10%) go so far as to say they are very familiar with the CAF. Nevertheless, Canadians hold a variety of favourable impressions regarding the CAF:
 - The vast majority (89%) have positive impressions of those who serve in the CAF;
 - Two-thirds (66%) feel the CAF is a source of pride for Canadians; and,
 - Most Canadians (83%) feel the CAF is essential, including 57% who feel it is very essential.
- Only about one-third (31%) feel the CAF is modern, but another 44% feel that although it may not be modern, it is not outdated. Perhaps relatedly, nearly half (48%) feel the CAF is underfunded and few (9%) hold the opposite view.

CAF Priorities and Roles

- **When it comes to Canadians' view of what should be the CAF's top priority, international work tops the list (48%),** followed by domestic (34%) and the North American continent (15%).
 - Nearly all agree it is critical for Canada to co-operate with the U.S. to protect North America (90%) and that NATO membership is important for Canadian security (88%).
- **Whether asked in an international or domestic context, the widest consensus over what roles the CAF should play are found around non-combat missions.**
 - Internationally, this means humanitarian or disaster relief (90%), peace support missions (85%) and non-combat roles in support of U.N. and NATO missions (88%) and these are the types of missions Canadians are most likely to feel the CAF is currently playing.
 - Domestically, this means responding to natural disasters (94%), protecting against terrorist threats (89%) and specifically those that include cyber security (89%), as well as search and rescue (90%).

Procurement and Equipment

- **While just under half of Canadians (45%) have heard about plans to purchase new defence equipment, slightly over half of those who have report only vague recall.**
 - Among those who had heard something about purchasing plans, the most common topic was the purchase of new aircraft (45%).
- **Almost two-thirds of Canadians (64%) feel the purchase of military equipment benefits local economies and defence companies in Canada.** However, when it comes to the CAF's ability to plan for and manage its equipment needs, opinion is more divided.
 - Fewer (47%) feel the CAF is good at planning its equipment needs.
 - Opinion is divided over whether the CAF has the equipment it needs to do its job (41% agree, 42% disagree) and whether the purchases of military equipment are well managed (an equal proportion, 38%, agree and disagree).

Care of Military Personnel and Family Members

- Just under half (44%) of Canadians report having heard something about the treatment of CAF personnel and their families than of the CAF and defence issues in general.

- Among those who have heard something, the top mention was mental health issues, including PTSD (48%).
- There is limited consensus when it comes to the job the CAF does in support of its members and their families.
 - Roughly half or just over half feel that the CAF does at least a somewhat good job of looking after military personnel (55%), dealing with injured military personnel (51%) or looking after the families of military personnel (50%).
- Opinion is more divided when it comes to perceptions of the job the CAF does in helping military personnel transition from active duty to civilian life (44% at least somewhat good v 34% somewhat or very poor) or dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace (33% at least somewhat good v 41% somewhat or very poor).

Recruitment and Diversity in the CAF

- The majority (72%) feel the CAF is as good a career option for women as it is for men, although fewer (53%) are convinced the CAF workplace environment is respectful of women.
- Half (50%) believe the CAF is as diverse as the Canadian population and only about one in three (31%) feel this is not the case.

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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: June 8, 2018

Stephanie Constable
Principal, Earnscliffe