

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Polling shows most Canadians want to avoid cuts to military spending, even amid economic upheaval. Respondents largely back the Forces' participation in global humanitarian and peacekeeping missions, but are divided on involvement in direct combat

OPINION

Nik Nanos is the chief data scientist at Nanos Research, a global fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, Honorary Captain (Navy), a research professor at the State University of New York in Buffalo and the official pollster for The Globe and Mail.

The iconic blue helmet of the UN peacekeeper often comes to the minds of Canadians when they are asked about our role in the world.

How does that vision align with global trade and security instability?

A new study by Nanos for the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary and Carleton University's Canadian Defence and Security Network sheds light on how Canadians feel about the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and our country's ambitions.

What emerges is a complex picture that lays out potential paths for the Forces that Canadians are ready to embrace – roles that are more than just peacekeeping.

The survey was conducted in August, while Canada was still mired in the COVID-19 pandemic, and portrays a population who believe we face international threats. Canadians are twice as likely to see a high rather than low degree of international threats – just 20 per cent say they believe those threats are low.

Specifically, the top international threats identified by Canadians included China (22 per cent), the United States/Trump administration (17 per cent), cyberattacks (10 per cent), terrorism (7 per cent), trade wars (6 per cent) and climate change (6 per cent).

When asked an open-ended question about what role Canada should play in the world, the most popular responses included: peacekeeper/mediator (31 per cent), followed by a leader (13 per cent), an advocate for human rights and freedom (10 per cent), and a role model for what countries should be (10 per cent).

By a margin of more than 3 to 1, Canadians say we should be promoting our country's values rather than its interests. Responses to a separate question about which values and interests Canadians want promoted provide a snapshot of who we are as a country today.

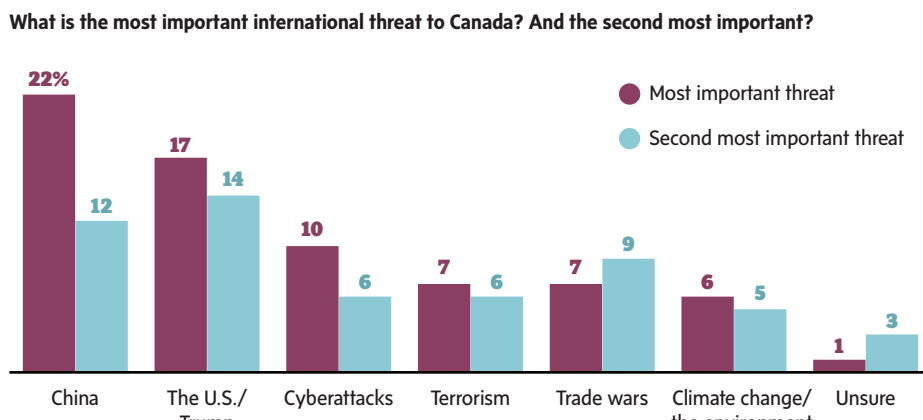
The top values included inclusivity (25 per cent), peace (13 per cent), human rights (13 per cent) and democracy (11 per cent). The top two unprompted interests we want advanced included trade (36 per cent) and environmental responsibility/climate change (16 per cent).

How well does our vision of the world and our role in it fit with how the CAF supports these ambitions?

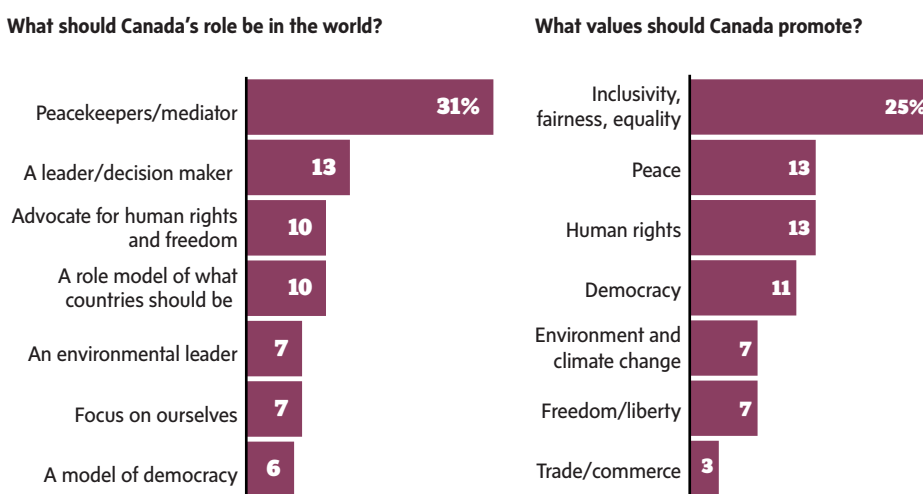
Peacekeeping and defending Canadian territory/Canadians are the top two missions respondents saw as appropriate for the

Canadians on Canada's place in the world

THREATS TO CANADA



CANADA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD



MURAT YÜKSELİR / THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: NANOS RESEARCH

Forces (40 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively). Canadians also place a high priority on a role for the military that includes helping authorities with crises at home.

Recent events in which the Forces have been asked by governments to help respond to natural disasters and the pandemic have highlighted that domestic role during emergencies.

When it comes to international missions that Canadians support most, they included participating in natural-disaster relief (77 per cent), UN peacekeeping (74 per cent), defence co-operation with allies (70 per cent) and conducting cyberoperations (65 per cent). But Canadians are much more divided when it comes to combat missions such as air strikes, or fighting on the ground or at sea.

The key takeaway is that there is significant political licence for humanitarian, peacekeeping and co-operative defence missions with allies. However, cross the line into direct combat and Can-

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adians are more likely to have a view that "it depends."

In essence, we are pragmatic. When Canadians see a mission aligning with our values of peace, order and good government, or our self-image of leading by example, there is a default green light to proceed. Once a potential mission veers outside that frame, our political leaders have more explaining to do.

This extends to military equipment sales. In recent years, there has been a series of controversial sales of Canadian military equipment to countries such as Saudi Arabia. Part of the public debate has included the perceived trade-offs between jobs and human rights.

When respondents were asked about a range of factors to consider when selling military equipment to foreign countries, respect for human rights by the buyer (31 per cent) and respect for international law (22 per cent) outranked Canadian jobs (11 per cent) and developing

Canadian technology and innovation (13 per cent). Also of note: About 14 per cent of Canadians say they believe we should not export military equipment at all.

Canadian sensibilities point to the view that we cannot aspire to lead by example and advance peace on one hand, while at the same time selling military equipment to any country that may use it to undermine values we cherish.

The big financial question is: Are Canadians ready to increase defence spending to support our role in the world and security at home?

In the real world there are trade-offs. In this nationally representative study, two scenarios were introduced: raising defence spending through a tax increase, or less defence spending and a reduction in the capacity of the Armed Forces. In that context, respondents were asked if they wanted more or less defence spending.

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Even though Canadians are gripped with concern about their personal and economic health because of the pandemic, there is very little desire to cut defence spending. On the contrary, the appetite for more spending rather than less is stronger by a factor of more than 2 to 1.

Canadians continue to see the country as having a role in the world leading by example. The CAF is a critical lever to advance those values of peace, humanitarian aid and working with our allies to maintain security.

There is little appetite to withdraw from the world to deal with the pandemic at home. Canadians still see the nation taking an active role globally when it aligns with our interests and values.

Canadians want a mission for the Armed Forces that is "peacekeeping plus." The "plus" is continuing to defend our borders, keeping Canada secure and stepping up to help respond to natural disasters at home and around the world.

Even in an environment of significant fiscal pressure on governments to fight the pandemic, Canadians understand and support the need for defence spending that aligns with their values.

This research was commissioned by the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary and Carleton University's Canadian Security and Defence Network.

Nanos conducted a random-digit-dialling dual frame (land and cell lines) hybrid telephone and online survey of 1,504 Canadians, 18 or older, from Aug. 21 to Aug. 31. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

When borders close, we must keep our minds open

DEREK LUNDY

OPINION

Author of *Borderlands: Riding the Edge of America*

Any Canadian who's surprised the Canada-U.S. border will stay closed for another month, raise your hand. Looking around ... north ... cross-country. Okay, not a hand in sight. Or, perhaps a few, which can only belong to frustrated snowbirds or to divided families or to struggling business owners. The two governments have agreed to extend until Nov. 21 the existing month-by-month agreement to allow only essential travel across the border – with a few discretionary exceptions. And it seems that the great majority of Canadians concur.

"Our decisions will continue to be based on the best public health advice available to keep Canadians safe," boringly sane Public Safety Minister Bill Blair wrote on Twitter. Sanity-challenged – if never boring – U.S. President Donald Trump said re-

cently: "Canada would like it open, and, you know, we want to get back to normal business. ... [So] we're going to be opening the borders pretty soon."

Not a chance. Unless the Canadian government wants to deal with a mass uprising of its own citizens.

So the famous "longest undefended border in the world" will remain defended. And, in all likelihood, not for just another month but for the foreseeable future. We have already adapted to this strange and novel situation and, in the face of the malign and seemingly uncontrollable efflorescence of COVID-19 cases in the United States, most of us accept its absolute necessity. Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of what an astonishingly abrupt and radical change this represents.

Marshall McLuhan wrote that, in an increasingly globalized and interdependent world, a border should be defined as an "interval of resonance ... a field of negotiated relationships rather than a line of authoritarian demarcation." He was trying to get at the paradoxical nature of borders,

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how they divide nations, but also how they act as economic and cultural conduits. They are both barriers and bridges, dualistic, equivocal places, permeable membranes that simultaneously admit and interdict.

Mr. McLuhan's somewhat abstruse prescription also seemed to describe a developing reality in many parts of the world – in Europe, for example, where national borders have come to resemble the line between any two Canadian provinces. Like abstractions, you know they are there but you often have trouble

believing in them. And Mr. McLuhan's dictum made a great deal of sense when one looked at the Canada-U.S. border, unique in its scale as a neighbourly fence rather than as a kind of peremptory obstruction to the passage of people, goods, services.

However, this hypothesis of increasingly irrelevant borders between countries assumes normal times. And by "normal," I mean the absence of malevolent conditions: war, famine, drought, particularly savage political repression, grave trade disputes – anything that might trigger a rush of refugees – and disease.

What do we think about borders in a time of plague? They are still porous, open to ideas and to trade – nothing must stop the ceaseless rush of things we consume. But now, it seems that borders can be closed. The way they used to be in what we thought of as the old days, before globalization and economic unions and free-trade agreements and the absence of war.

Our national anthem sums up the Canadian mission: We stand on guard. Even in periods of har-

monious relations with the U.S., we remain watchful, wary. We fear the arbitrary imposition of economic pain, the grief of cultural dilution, perhaps annihilation, at the hands of our overwhelmingly powerful neighbour. Our southern border always means something more to us than a superfluous, ambiguous line.

And when the stress is great enough – if a new disease begins its remorseless cull and the threat of infection on one side of the line becomes disproportionately unbearable, then "authoritarian demarcation" seems necessary to us once again. We desire it, demand it.

Like so many of our assumptions about our lives, open borders that we can cross more or less at will evaporate when abnormal conditions appear. And sooner or later, they will. Then we can't help ourselves; we revert to our ancient and instinctive convictions and remedies: exclusion, stasis, xenophobia. Then borders take on their ancient commission: to protect "us" inside, to keep out the "other."