DATA DIVE **WITH** NIK NANOS

CANADIANS ARE CLAMOURING FOR A STRONGER MILITARY

In a world of changing threat perceptions, the appetite for defence spending has increased

OPINION

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Canada is witnessing a once-in-a-generation shift in opinion on matters of national defence. In the absence of a traditional war, a wartime mentality is emerging: Canadians have an appetite for more defence spending as they see significant global threats.

A study commissioned by the University of Calgary and completed by Nanos Research in late 2025 points to a series of historic shifts that will influence both Canada's defence posture and strategy. U.S. President Donald Trump's musings about Canada becoming the 51st state and strained trade discussion have shaken Canadians.

Just as many Canadians agree that the best way for Canada to be a world leader in foreign affairs is to build international consensus (66 per cent agree with this statement) as believe that Canada needs a strong military to be effective in international relations (65 per cent agree with this statement).

When asked how Canada can best advance its place in the world, trade topped the list (91 per cent of respondents felt it was important), followed by diplomacy (83 per cent), national defence (71 per cent), environment (63 per cent), foreign aid (51 per cent) and immigration (41 per cent). Since the benchmark study was conducted in 2020, the importance of trade and defence are up nine and 17 points respectively, while environment and immigration have decreased in importance 16 and 19 points respectively.

Right now public sentiment suggests that Canada's strategy should be driven by trade and defence, and enabled by diplomacy.

Prime Minister Mark Carney's recent speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, on the new relationship between great and middle powers, points to a pivot. Only time will tell whether this is a rupture or a transition.

The short-term polling suggests the former. The belief that Canada faces international threats has surged from 41 per cent in 2020 to 58 per cent in 2025.

When it comes to specific threats, foreign interference and disinformation was cited by more than eight in 10 Canadians (82 per cent), followed by the U.S. (71 per cent), Russia (61 per cent), climate change (60 per cent) and China (56 per cent).

When it comes to defence, 30 per cent of Canadians still see their country's role as that of a peacekeeper and mediator, and 65 per cent say Canada needs a strong military for effective international relations. This speaks to the collision of our historic self-image as peacekeepers with the reality of a changing, more dangerous world.

A majority of Canadians (57 per cent) say that in the event of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military conflict with Russia, Canada should support NATO militarily. In contrast, a mere 13 per cent of Canadians would support the U.S. militarily in a conflict with China while 29 per cent say they would oppose the conflict and urge diplomatic solutions.

In a world of changing threat perceptions, the appetite for defence spending has increased from 41 per cent in 2020 to 62 per cent. But even with the increased appetite for defence spending, views on the Canadian Armed Forces remain mixed. When asked about how much confidence Canadians have in the ability of CAF leaders to shape policies that benefit Canada, 38 per cent (and only 31 per cent of Canadians under the age of 35) say they have confidence, down from 43 per cent in 2020. This ranks below academia (44 per cent of Canadians have confidence) and intelligence agencies (43 per cent), but above the defence industry (27 per cent), politicians (24 per cent) and the media (22 per cent).

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When asked an open-ended question where they could say anything in terms of what comes to mind when they think of the Canadian Armed Forces, the lack of resources tops the list, with that response tripling over the past five years from 6 to 21 per cent. References to the CAF being weak or ineffective is up by a multiple of five, from three to 16 per cent, while peacekeeping is down from 21 to 11 per cent. Canadians also associated the CAF with small size (7 per cent), being well-trained (6 per cent), having old or outdated equipment (5 per cent), protection or providing security (5 per cent), bravery (3 per cent), and patriotism (3 per cent). Of note, one in 50 Canadians (2 per cent) associate a culture of harassment with the CAF – up from 1 per cent in 2020.

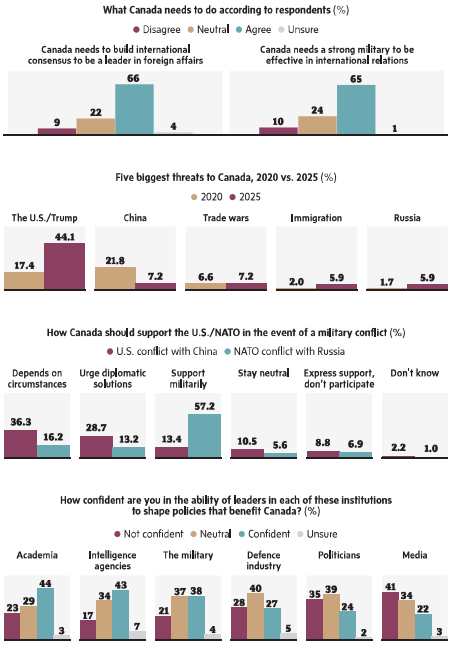
This suggests Canadians view the CAF as a small, underfunded, but well-trained organization that has difficulty being effective because of its reliance on outdated equipment. Interestingly, Canadians are more than twice as likely to think that the priority when buying military equipment should be creating jobs (64 per cent) rather than getting the best price (7 per cent). Asked separately how much of a priority buying military equipment from the United States should be, only 12 per cent of Canadians agreed buying American should be a priority.

When it comes to the Canadian Armed Forces, there are a number of bright spots. Canadians are more than seven times more likely to have a positive impression (68 per cent) than a negative (9 per cent) one if a friend or family member decided to join the CAF. They are six times more likely to think the CAF is good at what it does (56 per cent) rather than not good (9 per cent).

It also appears many Canadians are willing to personally serve their country in different capacities were Canada to be involved in a major conflict. Fifty-seven per cent report an interest in volunteering to support civil defence responses, and 45 per cent say they would join a civil defence organization on a part-time (45 per cent) or full-time (32 per cent) basis. Significantly, nearly one in five Canadians (19 per cent) say they would be open to joining the Forces as a part-time job (i.e. reserve duty) and 12 per cent would join the CAF as a full-time job (i.e. enlist).

Canadians are living in a moment where they feel the ground shifting, recalibrating long-standing assumptions about allies, threats, and our own military capacity. Past complacency is gone. The appetite for action on defence investments is strengthening. More importantly, faced with a major challenge, many Canadians are ready to serve.

Canada on the world stage



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

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

Organized crime does not operate in isolation. Canada should stop acting as if it does

ANTONIO NICASO

OPINION

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The recent arrests of members of the Toronto Police Service on allegations of collusion with organized crime have sent shockwaves well beyond the city. They raise uncomfortable questions not only about individual misconduct, but about how Canada understands organized crime, and its willingness to expose and challenge the political, economic and institutional relationships that allow criminal organizations to endure.

One of the defining characteristics of organized crime, alongside violence, secrecy, and money, is relational capacity: the ability to build, maintain, and exploit networks of people. Criminal organizations survive not simply through intimidation or profit, but by cultivating durable ties with corrupt officials, compromised professionals, political intermediaries, financial actors and, at times, members of law enforcement. Without these connections, organized crime is reduced to common criminality.

For decades, Canada has treated organized crime as an ethnic phenomenon: a criminal underworld operating on the margins of society, largely disconnected from institutions and from political, economic and administrative environments. Investigations and prosecutions have often focused on criminal groups as closed entities – gangs, families, networks – rather than on the ecosystems that sustain them.

The Toronto case disrupts this comfort zone.

Allegations that police officers may have abused their positions to assist criminal actors force a more difficult recognition: Organized crime does not function in isolation. It feeds on proximity to power, access to information, and institutional legitimacy. When those resources come from within public institutions, the damage extends far beyond any single investigation.

Historically, Canada has responded to such situations with a protective reflex. Within some police organizations, an unwritten rule prevailed: When an officer was implicated in serious wrongdoing, resignation was encouraged to limit institutional damage. The aim was to contain scandal, preserve authority, and draw a discreet line between the individual and the badge.

This instinct has deep roots. As early as 1894, an inquiry chaired by Henri-Benjamin Rainville in Montreal attempted, unsuccessfully, to investigate police corruption. Further inquiries in 1909 examined tolerance toward gambling and prostitution. The issue sharpened with the Coderre Commission in 1924, after which Montreal was portrayed by the anglophone press as a city shaped by corruption and alcohol smuggling. Proximity to the U.S. border and the rise of the automobile made contraband lucrative and difficult to police. Yet scrutiny was uneven, and many parts of Canada looked away.

The pattern resurfaced in 1961 with the Roach Report, which found no evidence of government corruption and little organized crime beyond gambling, echoing claims that Canada was largely free of gangsterism. Yet the report still recommended the removal of a deputy commissioner and another senior officer in the OPP over allegations of improper conduct linked to a gambling gang. Once again, resignations were encouraged to contain the fallout, reflecting a belief that public exposure weakened institutional authority.

But in recent years, Canada has begun moving toward an approach long adopted elsewhere: zero tolerance, transparency, and public accountability. Countries that have seriously confronted entrenched organized crime have learned a hard lesson: Secrecy shields criminal networks far more than it protects institutions. Openly confronting wrongdoing does not rot the barrel; it preserves and even strengthens it. Here, efforts to disrupt the external ties of criminal organizations remain limited, but change is under way.

This shift requires balance. The presumption of innocence remains fundamental, and due process cannot be sacrificed to public outrage. Allegations are not convictions. But once responsibility is established, hesitation becomes complicity. Firmness is not optional; it is the only credible strategy.

These scandals are not anomalies. They have happened before and will happen again, particularly in organizations where camaraderie hardens into corporatism and loyalty to colleagues outweighs loyalty to the law. The culture of silence – the belief that exposure is betrayal – is one of organized crime's most reliable allies.

Canada's institutions are not fragile. They do not need protection from accountability; they need protection from denial. The Toronto arrests should not be treated as an embarrassment to be managed, but as an opportunity to reaffirm a principle too often softened by caution: No relationship, no rank and no uniform places anyone above the law.

By confronting collusion openly and decisively, Canada does not weaken its institutions; it proves they are worth defending. The next step should be to seek out corruption and sever any remaining ties.

In 1963, journalist Alan Phillips wrote in Maclean's magazine that organized crime was infiltrating legitimate business and politics, though "some politicians and policemen like to deny it." His warning, however, was met with considerable irritation. That's no longer an acceptable response.