

74% of Canadians say military's culture disrespectful toward women; more call problem handling complaints 'systemic'

Plurality across political spectrum doubt transparency of Trudeau, Sajjan regarding Vance

May 19, 2021 – The hasty replacement of Maj.-Gen. Dany Fortin as head of Canada's COVID-19 vaccine campaign with Brig.-Gen. Krista Brodie marks the latest instance of Canada's military brass having to make unplanned personnel changes in its higher ranks over [allegations](#) of sexual assault or misconduct, or the way in which such allegations were handled.

Now, new public opinion data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute shows these events are having an overwhelming impact on how people in this country – including those with personal proximity to the military – view its culture and ability to handle sexual misconduct complaints.

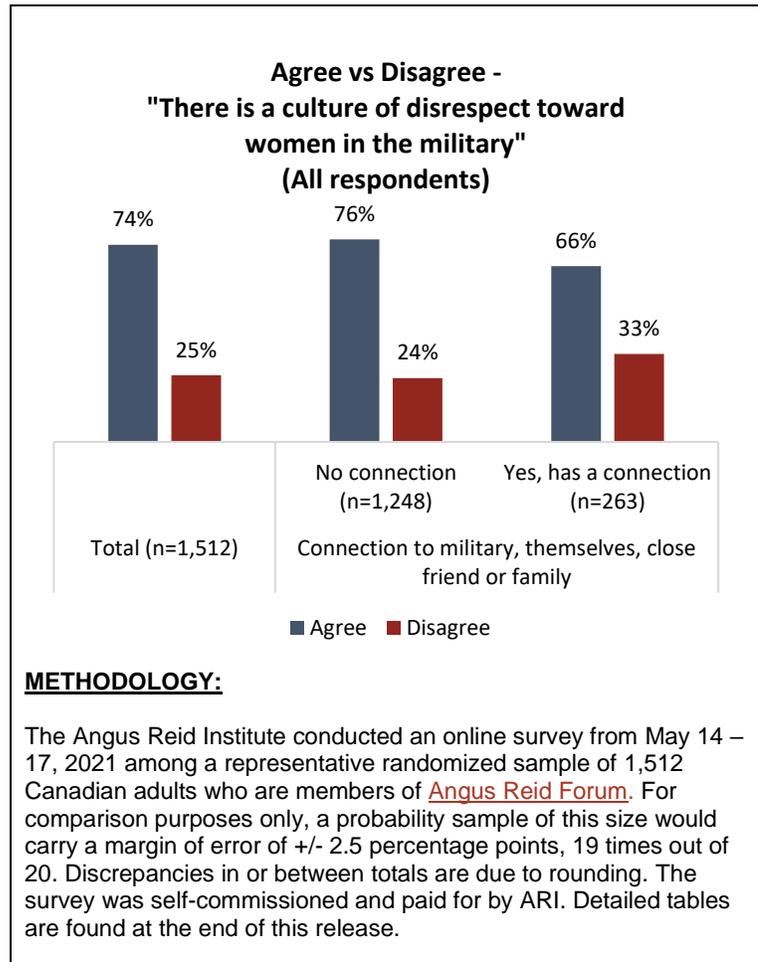
Three-in-four (74%) say there is a culture of disrespect toward women in the Canadian military – while a commanding majority of those who either served, know someone who is serving, or has served in the forces (66%) agree.

An even greater number (78%) perceive systemic problems with the way the Canadian military handles sexual misconduct complaints.

Awareness and perceptions of gravity among events surrounding alleged sexual misconduct are similarly high, as is doubt the Trudeau government has not been forthcoming or transparent about the situation. Six-in-ten (59%) of those following events say the Prime Minister has not been open about his knowledge of events, a number that intensifies among those with a personal connection to the military (72%).

More Key Findings:

- Just two-in-five Canadians say they are confident that military leaders will make the necessary changes to ensure a comfortable environment for women going forward
- Three-quarters of Canadians say they take pride in Canada's armed forces. That said, the proportion who say they do not has more than doubled since 2019



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- There is a high level of cross-party agreement about a lack of transparency among Trudeau, Defense Minister Sajjan, and Chief of Staff Telford. Canadians of all political stripes are more likely to say each has not been open and honest than to say that they have

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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Part One: Handling of Vance allegations, military misconduct

One-quarter following Vance affair closely, most paying some attention

In February, [Global News](#) reported that former defence chief, General Jonathan Vance, allegedly engaged in inappropriate behaviour with two female subordinates. Subsequently, military police launched twin investigations: the first involving [Maj. Kellie Brenann](#), an army staff officer with whom Vance had an intimate relationship, and another involving an unidentified woman, to whom he apparently made a sexual comment.

Allegations against Vance were first made in 2018, when [former military ombudsman Gary Walbourne](#) raised concerns with Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan. The complaint was then passed to the Privy Council Office, with no further action. [Prime Minister Justin Trudeau](#) and his office have said that while they knew about the 2018 allegation, they did not know any of the details prior to recent reporting on the issue. Recently asked about the decision not to involve the prime minister with the 2018 allegation, Trudeau's [chief of staff Katie Telford](#) has reportedly avoided providing any further details.

In addition to the Vance situation, other revelations have come to light regarding sexual misconduct allegations against another former defence chief, [Admiral Art McDonald](#), as well as other military officials.

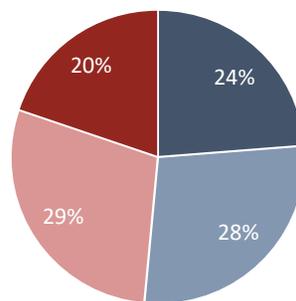
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Just last week, the Department of National Defence announced that the head of Canada's COVID-19 vaccine distribution efforts – Maj.-Gen. Dany Fortin – would be stepping down “[pending the results of a military investigation](#)” into a past sexual assault incident.

Respondents were asked more specifically about the Vance and McDonald situations. One-quarter of Canadians (24%) say they have been following the issue very closely, while a similarly sized group (28%) have been reading about it and discussing it to a lesser extent.

**How closely, if at all, have you been following this issue of sexual misconduct in the military?
(All respondents, n=1,512)**



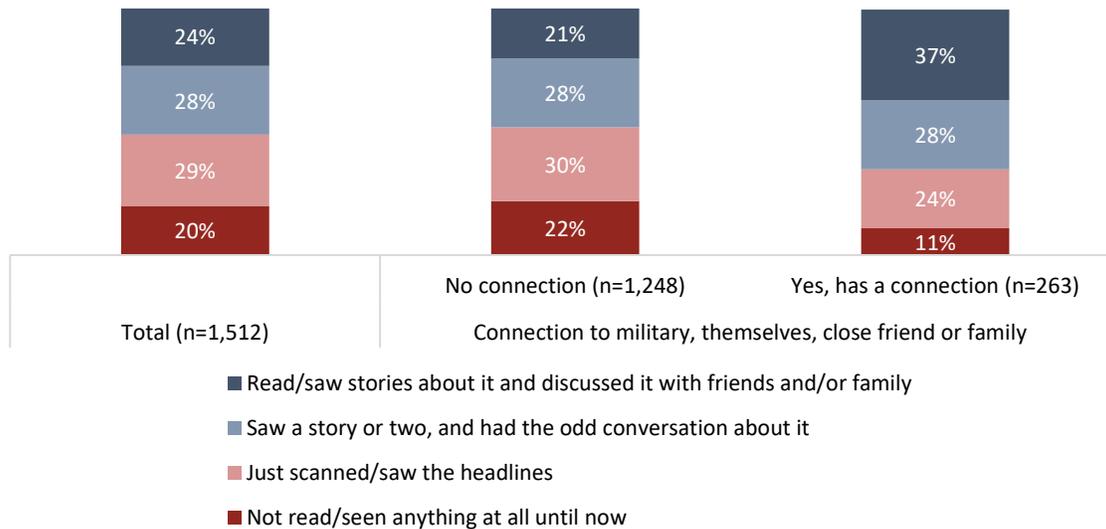
- Read/saw stories about it and discussed it with friends and/or family
- Saw a story or two, and had the odd conversation about it
- Just scanned/saw the headlines
- Not read/seen anything at all until now

Notably, approximately one-in-five Canadians (17%) have some form of connection to the military, whether through their own current or past experience, or having a close friend or family member who serves or has served. This group is much more likely to be following this story ([see detailed tables for full breakdown of connections](#)).

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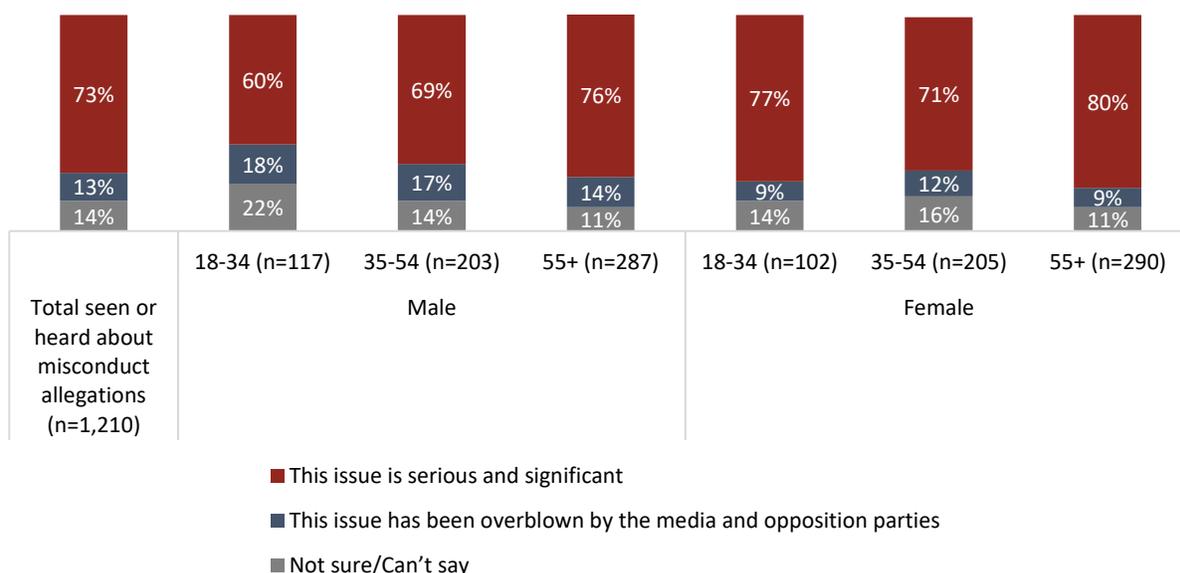
**How closely, if at all, have you been following this issue of sexual misconduct in the military?
(All respondents)**



Issue of misconduct seen as serious, significant

The vast majority of Canadians who have exposure to this issue view it as a serious one. Women are more likely to say this, while young men are most likely to disagree. Even with this group, however, three-times as many say it is serious rather than overblown, as seen in the graph below:

Based on what you've seen, read, or heard about this issue, including in this survey, which view is closest to your own:

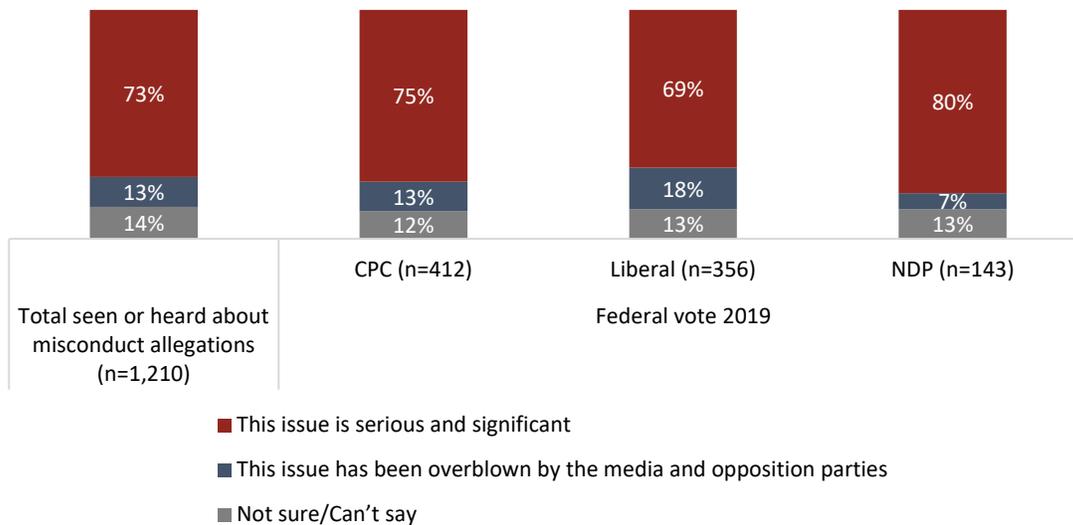


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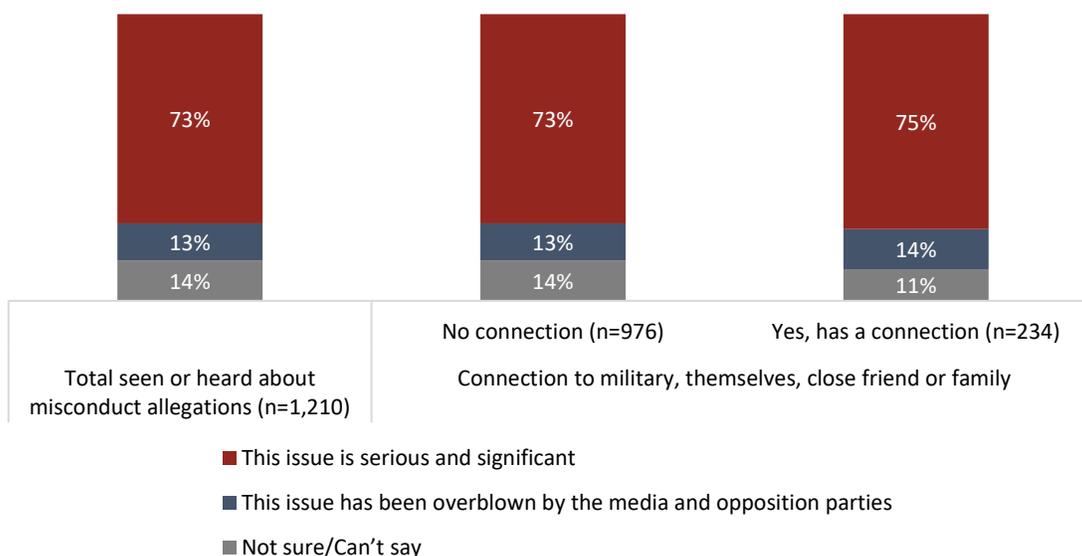
There is considerable agreement across the political spectrum that these allegations are serious and significant. Past Liberal voters are most likely to say that this coverage has been overblown, but even in this case just 18 per cent feel this way, while the vast majority treat the issue with significance:

Based on what you've seen, read, or heard about this issue, including in this survey, which view is closest to your own:



Those aforementioned Canadians who have more personal exposure to the military agree at the same level as the general public that these allegations are something to take seriously:

Based on what you've seen, read, or heard about this issue, including in this survey, which view is closest to your own:



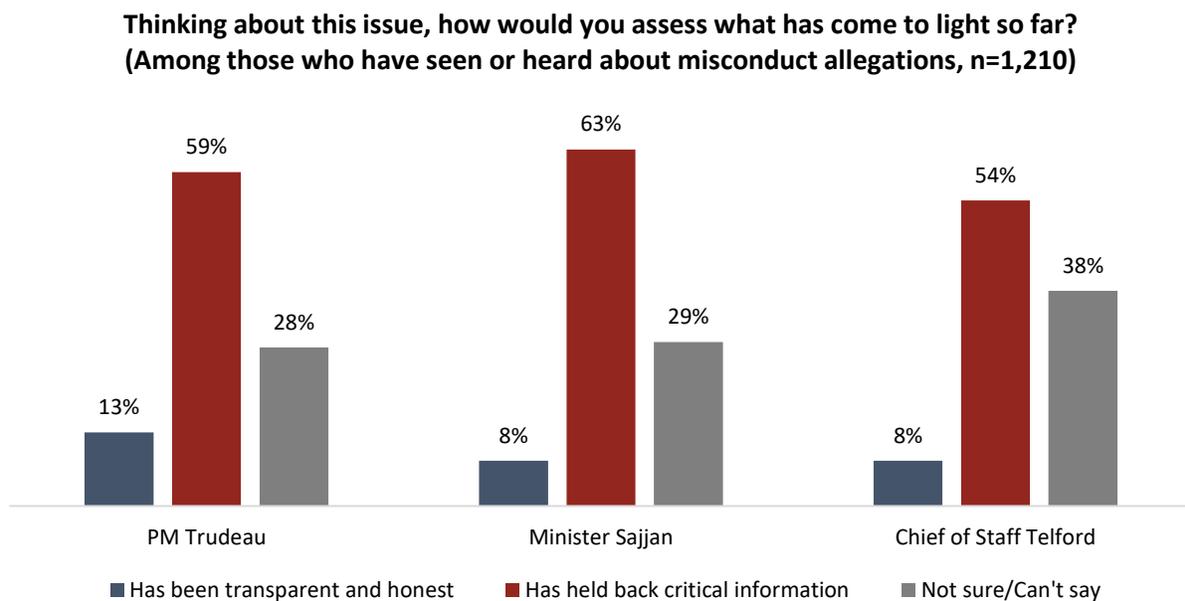
Concerns about transparency of Trudeau, Sajjan, Telford

The response of Liberal government officials during the Vance affair has been heavily criticized by opposition parties. A former senior adviser in the Prime Minister’s Office recently testified that both Defense Minister Harjit Sajjan and the Prime Minister’s Chief of Staff Katie Telford were aware of sexual misconduct allegations related to General Vance in 2018 and failed to act. Former military ombudsman Gary Walbourne also stated that he had taken a complaint to Minister Sajjan which Sajjan suggested he passed along to his chief of staff but did not investigate.

Telford testified in early May that she did not inform Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of the issue in order to maintain that same political independence. Critics have suggested that this perspective was “incorrect”.

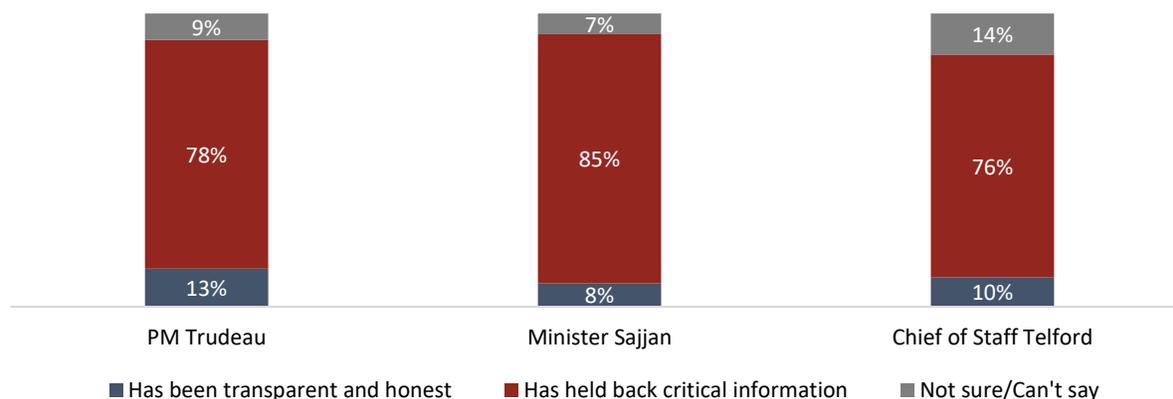
For their part, Canadians have questions.

Asked whether they feel that each individual has been open and honest, the majority of Canadians are critical and feel that all three have not been truthful about what they knew.



For those who have been following most closely, uncertainty fades and the view that each public official has withheld information hardens even further.

**Thinking about this issue, how would you assess what has come to light so far?
(Among those following most closely, n=356)**



Perhaps more troubling for the Liberal Party and its highest-ranking military representatives, those who have closer proximity to the Armed Forces are more critical than the general population of both Trudeau and Sajjan.

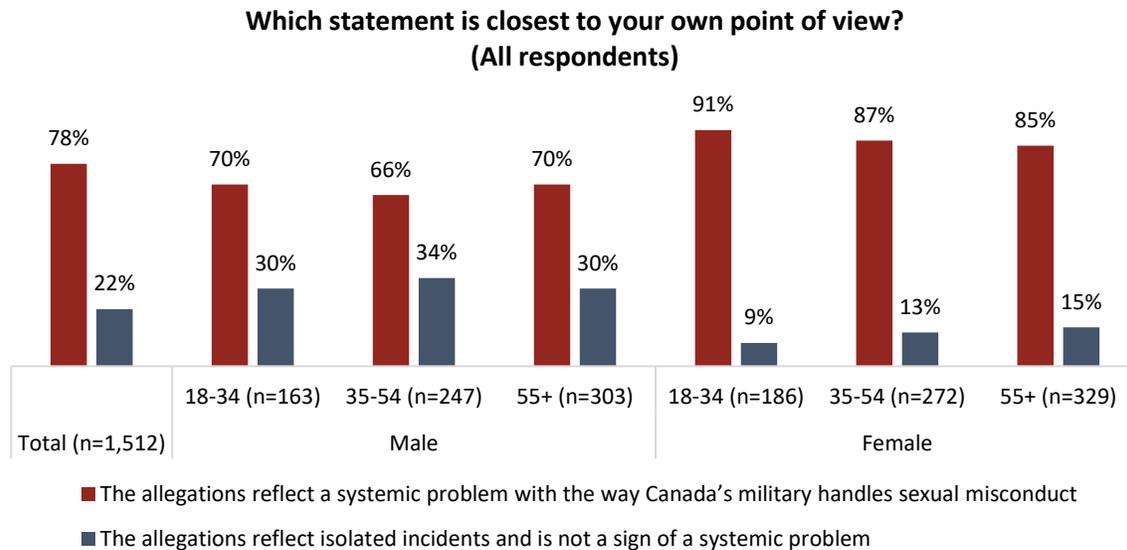
Thinking about this issue, how would you assess what has come to light so far? Would you say... (Among those who have seen or heard about misconduct allegations)			
	Total (n=1,210)	Connection to military	
		No (n=976)	Yes (n=234)
Justin Trudeau			
Has been transparent and honest	13%	14%	10%
Has held back critical information	59%	56%	72%
Not sure/Can't say	28%	30%	18%
Harjit Sajjan			
Has been transparent and honest	8%	8%	7%
Has held back critical information	63%	60%	75%
Not sure/Can't say	29%	32%	17%
Katie Telford			
Has been transparent and honest	8%	8%	8%
Has held back critical information	54%	52%	65%
Not sure/Can't say	38%	40%	27%

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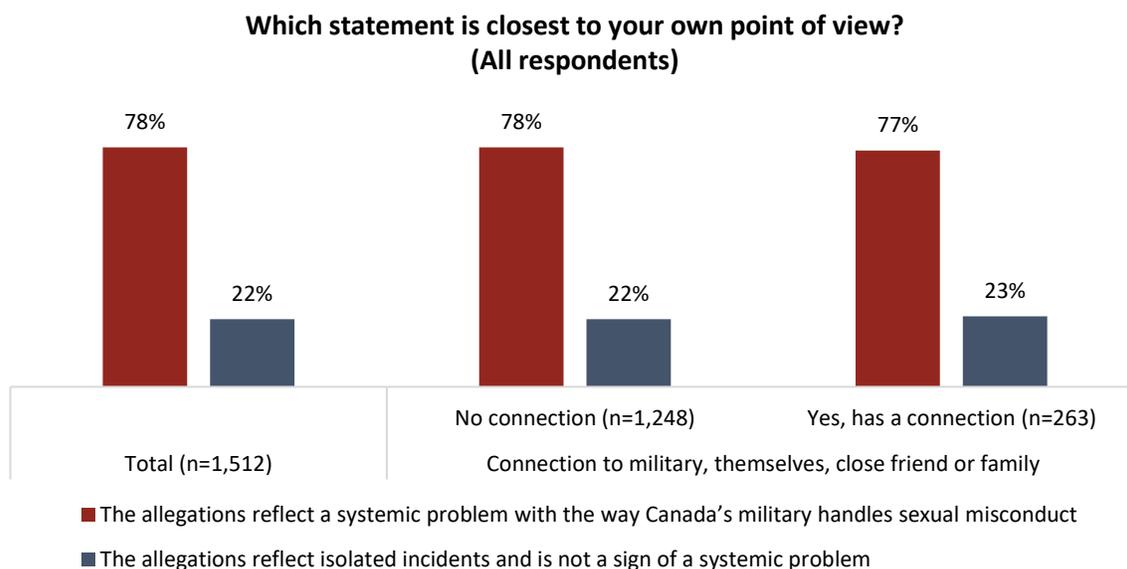
Part Two: Isolated issue or something bigger?

While specific instances of sexual misconduct and harassment have dominated the headlines in recent months, there is a widespread sense among Canadians that this is a much broader and more systemic problem that goes beyond those specific situations. Indeed, four-in-five say that these current allegations are a reflection of a bigger problem with the way that Canada’s military handles sexual misconduct. Close to three-in-ten men say these are isolated instances:



Those with closer proximity to military agree say issue is systemic

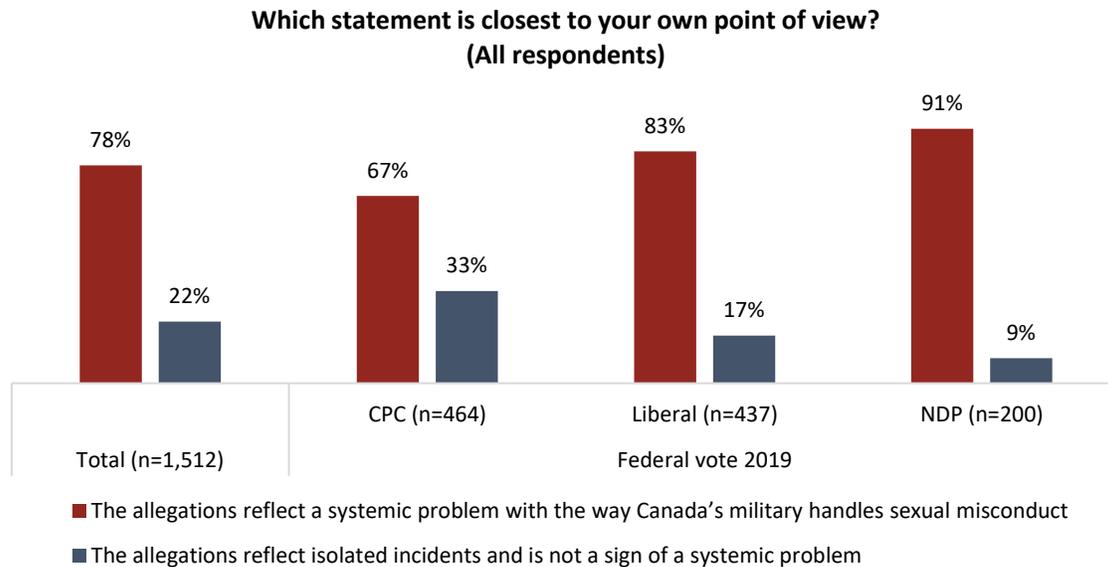
There is high level of agreement among those closer to the armed forces. That said, the same proportion of Canadians say this is a systemic problem regardless of their proximity to the military:



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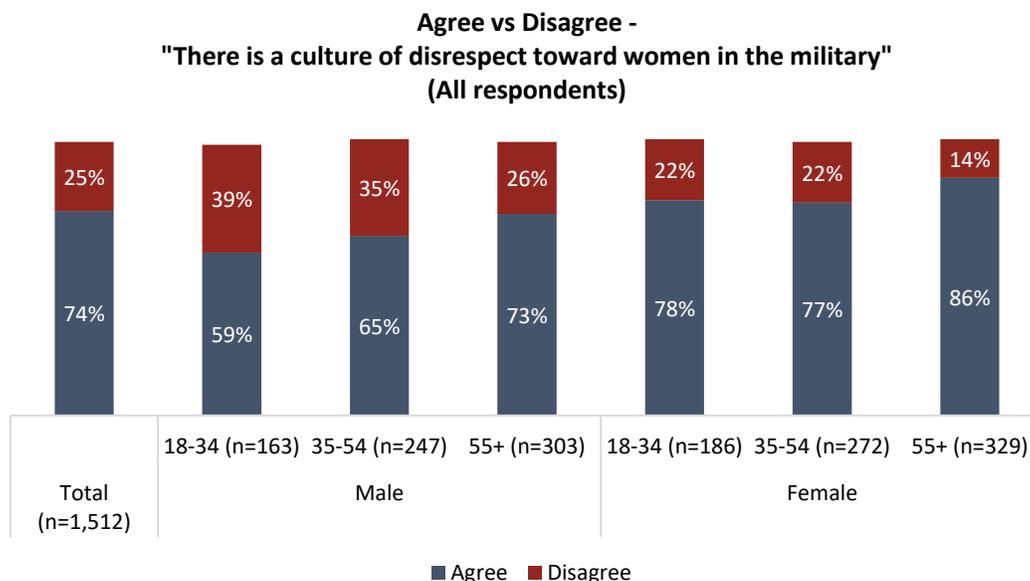
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Past Conservative Party voters are considerably more likely to say that these allegations are isolated incidents compared to past Liberal or NDP voters. One-in-three (33%) say this is the case:



Three-quarters say there is a culture of disrespect toward women in military

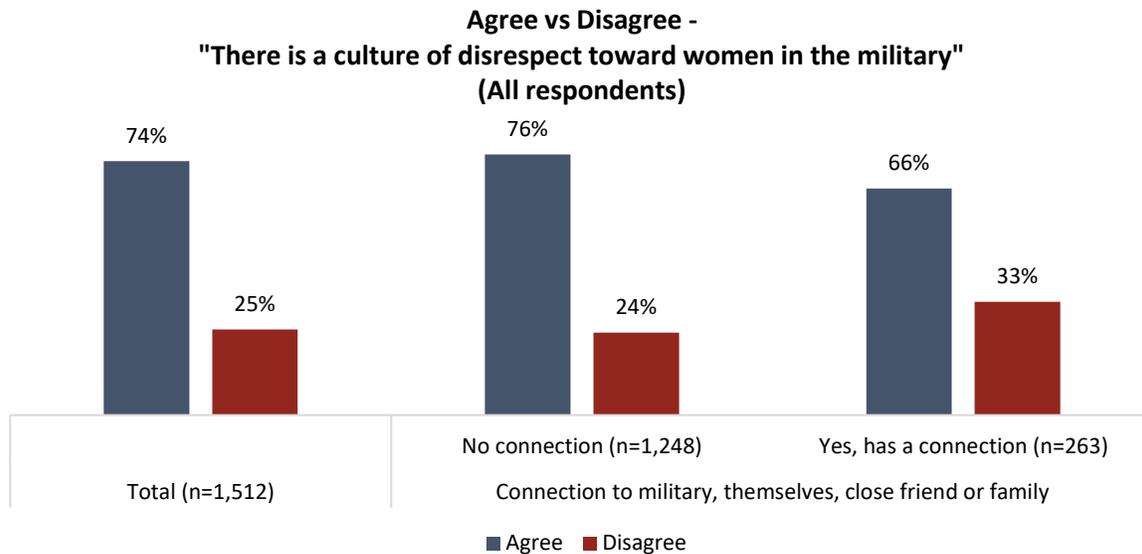
The idea that there is a culture within the military that disrespects women finds a level of consensus among Canadians: overall, three-quarters feel this way. That said, for men under the age of 55, this is much more a point of contention. Whereas four-in-five women among all age groups agree that there is an inherent culture problem in the armed forces:



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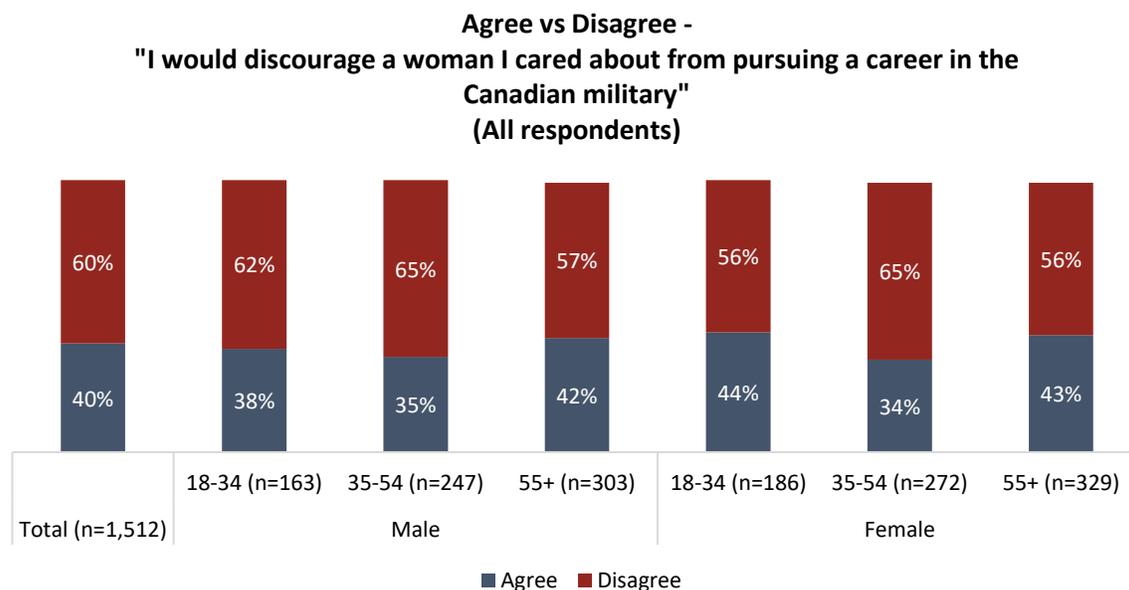
Notably, a majority of those who have more access to people within the military, or who are part of the military themselves, are also of this view, though slightly less so:



Three-in-five would still encourage a woman close to them to join

This issue ultimately speaks to the safety and respect women who join the ranks may expect, and whether young women and those who surround them see this as a suitable career.

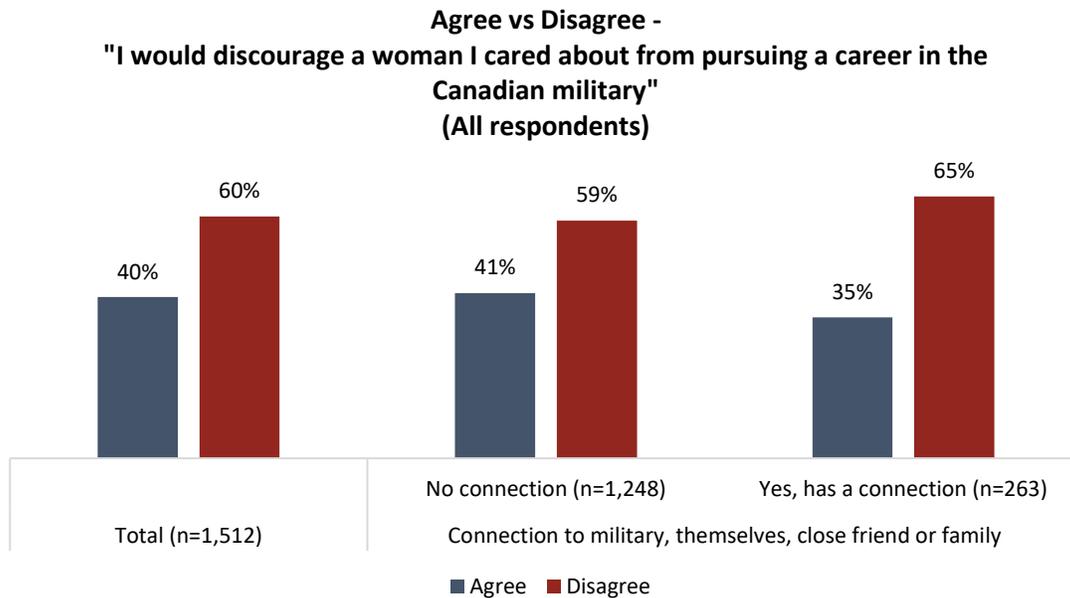
Perspectives are currently divided within the population. Two-in-five Canadians say they would discourage a woman they cared about from joining the Armed Forces, while three-in-five are undeterred by these recent controversies. Notably, responses are near identical across age and gender:



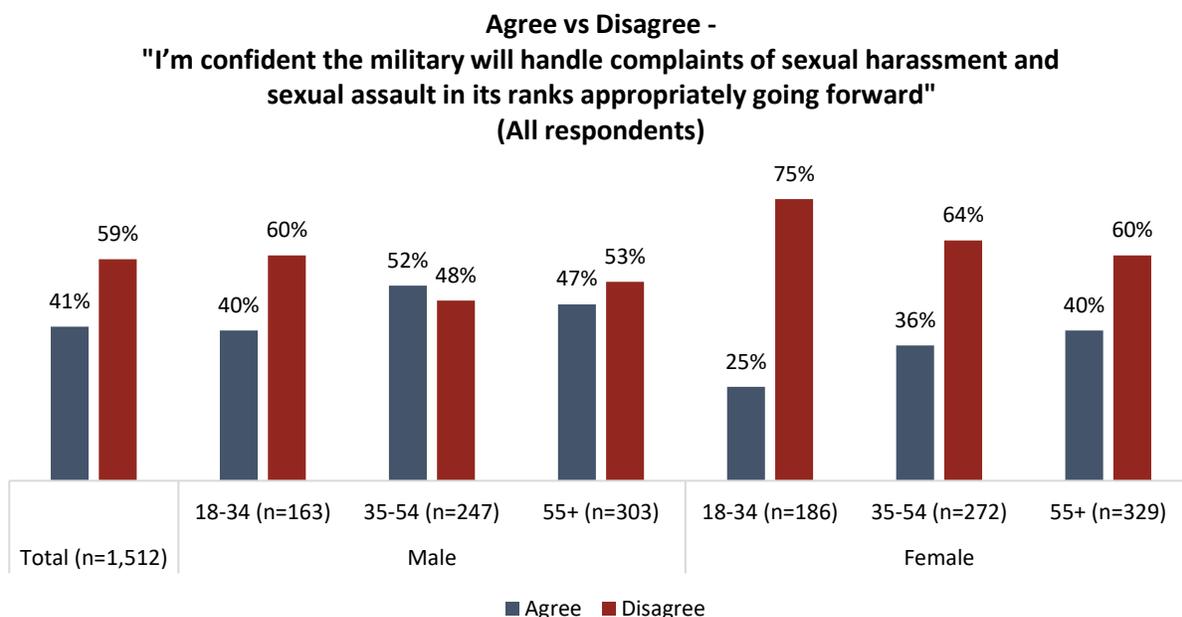
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Those who are closer to the military are slightly more likely to say that they would encourage a woman in their life to pursue this path, though one-in-three (35%) say they would not:

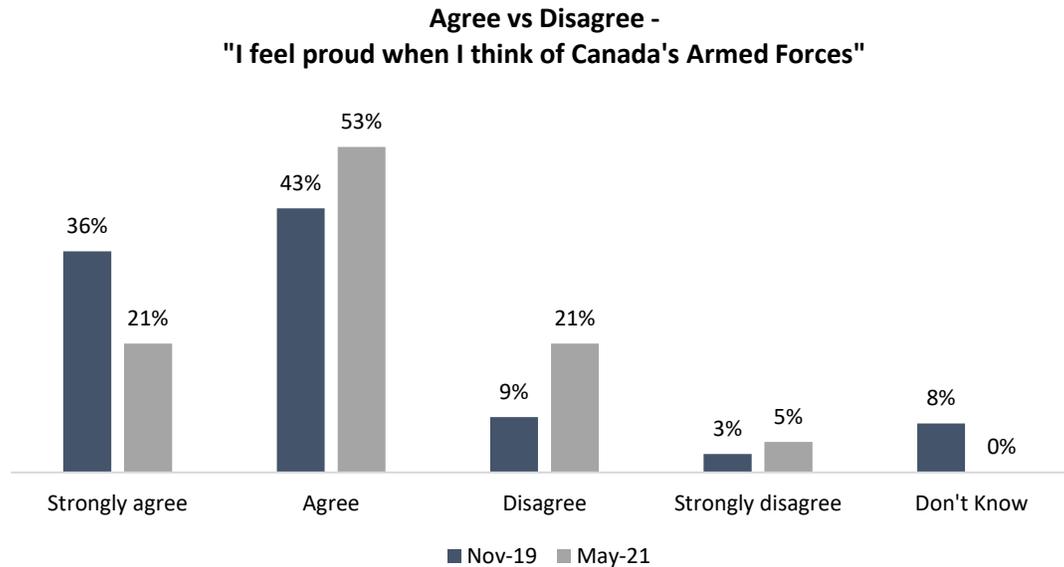


Much of this tribulation likely arises from the fact that a majority of Canadians, even after seeing the attention that has been brought to this issue, lack confidence that the military will fix procedures going forward to ensure a comfortable environment, free from harassment and misconduct. Men are far more confident than their female counterparts that this will be the case:



But most still proud of Armed Forces

While there are clear challenges for Canada’s military and its leadership, the institution itself still generates considerable pride among Canadians. Three-quarters (74%) say that they view the military this way, while one-in-five say they disagree. That latter proportion has doubled since 2019:



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by connection to Canada’s military, [click here](#).

For detailed results by engagement with media coverage of these events, [click here](#).

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