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VISIBLE MINORITIES: BREAKING DOWN THE NUMBERS IN ORDER TO BUILD THEM UP

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**VISIBLE MINORITIES:
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VISIBLE MINORITIES: BREAKING DOWN THE NUMBERS IN ORDER TO BUILD THEM UP

AIM

1. The Employment Equity Act (EEA) requires the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to “identify and eliminate employment barriers to ensure that women and other designated groups are appropriately represented.”¹ This paper argues that the current CAF Diversity Strategy (CAF DS) for recruiting and retaining visible minorities will not achieve this requirement as mandated by the EEA. The term visible minority is too broadly grouped to actually address the specific issues and concerns of its distinct subgroups. It is possible that similar breakdowns are required among the other diversity groups, specifically women and aboriginals, however it is not considered here. The only viable way forward is to stop looking at visible minorities as one homogeneous group and address their individual and specific differences.

INTRODUCTION

2. The EEA was created in 1995 to ensure employment opportunities in the labour force were extended to four distinct groups of Canadian society: Women, Visible Minorities, Aboriginals, and Persons with Disabilities. In 2002, the CAF was directed to comply and established the Employment Equity Plan in 2006, setting a visible minority target of 9.1 percent, which was later adjusted to 11.8 percent in 2010.² The number of visible minorities will continue to rise, potentially exceeding the majority by 2050 while

¹ Office of the Auditor General, *Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence*, (Ottawa: Office of the Auditor General, 2016), last accessed 24 October 2019, http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

² Browne, Phyllis, *Visible minority recruitment and the Canadian Armed Forces*, (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2018) 2.

the percentage of traditional “white male” recruits will diminish.³ Despite being federally mandated, the CAF is visibly failing to achieve its target for visible minorities and is currently sitting at 7.2 percent, a number that has been fairly static for the past few years, indicating that the CAF is still not a workplace of choice for this growing part of society.⁴

3. This paper will examine current CAF guiding documents including Canada’s new defence policy, Strong Secure Engaged (SSE), and the CAF DS. It will examine the broad definition of visible minority, identify barriers to attracting and retaining visible minorities, and discuss how to better leverage those already serving. Finally, it will offer two potentially enduring solutions that could address EEA target shortfalls. This paper assumes a basic awareness of the CAF DS.

DISCUSSION

4. In an effort to better reflect society, SSE has included several new initiatives aiming to recruit and retain visible minorities from Canada’s diverse population. These include appointing a “Diversity Champion”, “promoting diversity and inclusion as a core institutional value”, and a “focus on recruiting and retaining under-represented populations.”⁵ Under the guidance of the Diversity Champion, the CAF DS and subsequent Action Plan, through its framework (see figure 1), envisions a CAF that

³ Ibid, 2.

⁴ Global News, “Canada’s Armed Forces, struggling to hit diversity goals, turns to new digital recruiting tools,” last accessed 24 October 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4450927/canada-armed-forces-diversity-goals-digital-recruiting/>

⁵ Department of National Defence, *Strong Secure Engaged Canada’s Defence Policy*, (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2017) 23.

resembles Canada where all members participate without feeling disrespected or excluded based on their differences.⁶ The first goal of this strategy promotes the use of external and CAF internal research to help better understand the culture of diversity within the forces.

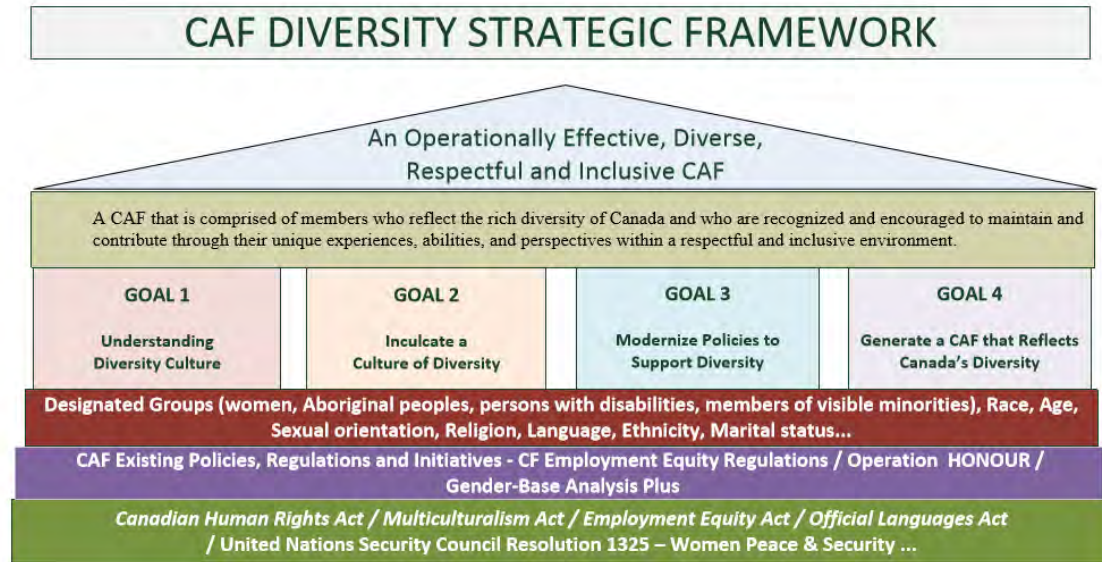


Figure 1.

5. In 2018, a comprehensive study (CS) on visible minority recruitment was conducted looking at the CAF as a potential career choice as well as “perceived barriers” that might detract certain groups from joining.⁷ This CS looked at separate visible minority subgroups and conducted interviews with both military-aged youth as well as persons who have influence within their communities. The results across the subgroups varied considerably, albeit with one common theme: less than 1% in each group saw the military as a potential career choice, citing the dangers of the occupation, being sent away

⁶ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy*, (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2016) 2.

⁷ Browne, Phyllis, *Visible minority recruitment*, 3.

from home, having to follow orders, and giving up their freedom as their main concerns.⁸ The data from the study comes from 2010-2014 during a different political climate and when Canada was transitioning its mission in Afghanistan. It is unknown if this would affect the results today.

6. In order to better understand the term visible minority, it is important to know what it comprises. According to the EEA, visible minorities “means persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.”⁹ This rather broad definition comprises immigrants from all over the world with differing cultures and traditions. Many of these cultures, such as Asian and Arab, tend to have strong links to family, while others in Africa and the Middle East come from oppressive military regimes and may distrust the military for resembling that which they left. It could thus be argued that no one common strategy would work for everyone. For ease of analysis, the CS selected several subgroups¹⁰ and the CAF should consider defining their own subgroups for ease of targeting potential recruits, limiting the scope only to resources available.

7. However you divide up the visible minority group for recruiting purposes, the focus has to remain on them rather than promoting what the CAF is doing internally. It has already been mentioned that these groups don’t see the CAF as a viable option; so do they really care if the CAF is hitting its diversity goals? Goal 2.4 of the CAF DS,

⁸ Ibid, 13, 19.

⁹ Canada. Justice Canada. "Employment Equity Act (S.C. 1995, c. 44), Section 2-3." Ottawa: Justice Canada, 2019.

¹⁰ Browne, Phyllis, *Visible minority recruitment*, 2. These subgroups included: Chinese-Canadian, Asian- & Arab-Canadian, and Latin American-, Phillipino- and Black- Canadian.

Conduct Strategic Communication, “effectively communicates how it values and promotes diversity”.¹¹ A better narrative would be to focus on how the CAF interacts within society and demonstrate how a culture including all visible minority subgroups would better enhance diversity. Once this is understood, this message needs to be replicated through other policy documents such as the CAF Diversity Governance Structure.¹²

8. One way to understand someone’s culture is to become actively involved within their community. The CAF has had success participating in parades for notable events such as Pride Week. Another way is to encourage select visible minorities, both serving and retired members of the CAF, to engage members of their communities either at places of worship or during other community events where appropriate.¹³ Junior members will be able to relate to the youth and share experiences, while senior members will provide influence and understanding of the military in general. Oversight is necessary, especially early on to ensure you are sending the right message so that you don’t end up with soldiers carrying weapons “at the ready” as took place last April during the Sikh Khalsa Day parade.¹⁴

9. The CS cited the most common ways visible minorities receive information about the CAF. The number one method amongst all groups was television, although the next

¹¹ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy*, 10.

¹² Ibid, B-8.

¹³ Browne, Phyllis, *Visible minority recruitment*, 59-60.

¹⁴ Global News, “*Canadian soldiers carry guns in ‘full fighting order’ at Toronto’s Khalsa Day – the Forces called it ‘misguided’*” last accessed 27 October 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/5223262/canadian-soldiers-unmuzzled-weapons-khalsa-day/>

varied by subgroup though typically between newspaper and internet.¹⁵ Social media was not a key consideration but likely grouped under internet. We have seen social media used extensively in elections, including the recent Canada election where Elections Canada provided voting information in at least eight languages to targeted communities where the risk of neither national official language being spoken at home was high.¹⁶ When done properly, social media has the ability to reach specific groups quickly and effectively. This would enable the military to tailor messages to specific visible minority groups, highlighting key information about specific career opportunities, at the right time to achieve the greatest effect.

10. Despite the variance in top career choices amongst the different youth subgroups from the CS, the CAF offers opportunities in the majority of those fields including healthcare, finance, IT and engineering.¹⁷ Even more interesting is that the most desired factors in selecting a career, good pay and benefits, job security, interesting, and intellectually challenging, are again arguably offered by the CAF.¹⁸ One could then discern that the military itself and not its career opportunities was the main factor why recruitment is low. The CAF DS captures this by acknowledging diversity as a key enabler of military operations but further cautions that “individual values and beliefs must align with CAF values and be balanced against the constraints of operational effectiveness and the principle of Universality of Service.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Browne, Phyllis, *Visible minority recruitment*, 43-45.

¹⁶ Global News, “*Election Canada spends big on social media ahead of Oct. 21 vote*,” last accessed 27 October 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/5932349/elections-canada-social-media/>

¹⁷ Browne, Phyllis, *Visible minority recruitment*, 61.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 62.

¹⁹ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy*, 2.

11. Goal 2.3 of the CAF DS makes reference to modernizing the CAF by going beyond the ceremony drill, dress, and deportment to an organizational culture that “expands towards a more diverse and inclusive national military institution.”²⁰

According to Grant Freeland, a senior partner with BCG, a change in organization culture must come from the top: “Culture change comes from concrete and noticeable changes in leadership behavior: what they do; who they hire; who they ask to move on.”²¹ As the military must promote from within, it cannot afford the luxury of simply hiring persons of visible minority to assume senior positions. The lack of diversity in the most senior of ranks is noticeable and the CAF senior leadership should look inward to achieve diversity parity at its most senior ranks first. Perhaps a more diverse senior leadership will be better equipped to tackle the issues the CAF continues to face.

12. In the early 2000s, the CAF instituted several policy changes aimed to help with recruiting including allowing the wearing of a turban in uniform, and incorporating halal and kosher vegetarian meals into Individual Meal Packs (IMPs) and dining facilities.²² This eliminated a major barrier in visible minorities having to choose between military or religion. While changes have continued, including a 2018 CANFORGEN allowing soldiers to grow beards,²³ there are still many changes that should be done, which will be addressed later. Despite the move to be more inclusive federally however, the issuing of Bill C-21 in Quebec’s provincial government aims to prevent government employees

²⁰ Ibid, 9-10.

²¹ Forbes, “*Culture Change: It starts at the top*,” last accessed 27 October 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/grantfreeland/2018/07/16/culture-change-it-starts-at-the-top/#2d591cd636c2>

²² CBC, “*Canadian military seeks Muslim recruits*,” last accessed 24 October 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/canadian-military-seeks-muslim-recruits-1.599390>

²³ Department of National Defence, “*CANFORGEN 158/18 – Amendment to Beard Policy*,” last accessed 27 October 2019, https://mobile.caf-fac.ca/canforgens/page.php?path=data/2018/158-18_e.asp

(teachers, police, and lawyers) from wearing religious items.²⁴ Although this does not directly relate to recruiting in the CAF, policies designed to limit diversity such as Bill C-21 may further create reluctance, especially among new immigrants to the country for fear of once again being forced to choose between religion and work.

13. Another key barrier to joining the CAF identified in the CS was the possibility of being posted away from family. This likely attributes in part to the disproportional amount of visible minorities in the more static reserves compared to regular force, 11 percent compare to 5 percent at the time of publishing.²⁵ While SSE promises a comprehensive military family plan²⁶, there is little in there specific to supporting visible minorities. One reason most immigrants tend to migrate to large cities, is to have access to religious and other services, including special dietary needs, they require. As was mentioned with Bill C-21, Quebec does not appear to be actively promoting diversity. In remote areas such as Bagotville, there are already limited services available. This increases the requirement for the CAF to provide. Unfortunately, something as simple as requesting a padre from your own religion is proving as difficult as recruiting visible minorities of the same faith.²⁷

14. Although some programs exist, they are not typically well known. A quick informal and non-scientific poll of current JCSP students revealed that a large percentage

²⁴ Globe and Mail, “*Quebec passes bill banning public servants from wearing religious symbols,*” last accessed 27 October 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-quebec-legislature-expected-to-pass-bill-21-late-sunday/>

²⁵ Government of Canada, “*A profile of the Canadian Forces,*” last accessed 27 October 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-001-x/2008107/article/10657-eng.htm#a3>

²⁶ Department of National Defence, *Strong Secure Engaged Canada’s Defence Policy*, 29.

²⁷ Canadian Army, “*Canadian Forces Chaplaincy seeks increased diversity,*” last accessed 27 October 2019, <http://www.army-armee.forces.gc.ca/en/news-publications/national-news-details-no-menu.page?doc=canadian-forces-chaplaincy-seeks-increased-diversity/j1wgin0e>

were either unaware or unfamiliar with the CAF DS, the various diversity working groups and other available programs for visible minorities. The programs appear to be in place nationally and even within the different L1 headquarters, however they do not appear to be well integrated at the formation and unit levels. It is unacceptable to imagine a superior having no adequate way to deal with a visible minority seeking help within their unit. Goal 4.4. of the CAF DS calls for the development of a CAF Mentorship program,²⁸ which could address some of these shortfalls, albeit outside the chain of command. However, nothing could be found indicating that the program is either difficult to access or does not yet exist.

15. Finally, SSE has directed the creation of the CAF Transition Group, which will ensure a smoother transition through the CAF and eventually back into civilian life. It currently does not appear to be linked to the CAF Diversity Strategy and should be in future iterations. There also appears to be no mention specific to Visible Minorities at this time.

CONCLUSION

16. The challenges of recruiting visible minorities are not going away. Now is the time to adjust and get it right going forward, which may include looking at dividing the visible minority group into a series of select subgroups. The focus should be outward towards visible minority communities and not inward towards achieving internal diversity goals. The key to achieving this will be through community involvement by visible minorities within these subgroups. Another consideration is the use of social

²⁸ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy*, 14.

media to more accurately target the select subgroups. However, at the end of the day, the CAF still needs to attract the right people who share its values.

17. Internally, the best way to initiate change is to lead by example from the top. The current profile of senior leadership is not at all reflective of a diverse military. While there have been advancements in the past to make the CAF more inclusive, new changes are slow coming and may be a result of lack of diversity at the top to inject fresh ideas into old problems such as family moves, access to services, and padres in their own faith. Finally, the Transition Group should ensure it takes into consideration all aspects of diversity as it matures as an organization.

RECOMMENDATION

18. The most important aspect of improving CAF diversity specific among visible minorities is to avoid grouping them as a single entity. It is strongly recommended that the CAF consider the creation of subgroups to better target specific communities. This will allow tools such as social media to become more effective.

19. It is also recommended that the CAF lead by example to include having its senior leadership better reflect the diverse society it wants to become. By aligning the top in accordance with EEA targets, it will become easier to increase numbers in the ranks as leadership will be better positioned to engage within the community it will soon come to rely on.

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