

REPORT

THE SECOND ANNUAL CANADIAN ARCTIC SURVEY

OBSERVATOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE ET LA SÉCURITÉ DE L'ARCTIQUE (OPSA), THE CANADIAN DEFENCE AND SECURITY NETWORK AND THE CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY STUDIES



OBSERVATOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE
ET LA SÉCURITÉ DE L'ARCTIQUE

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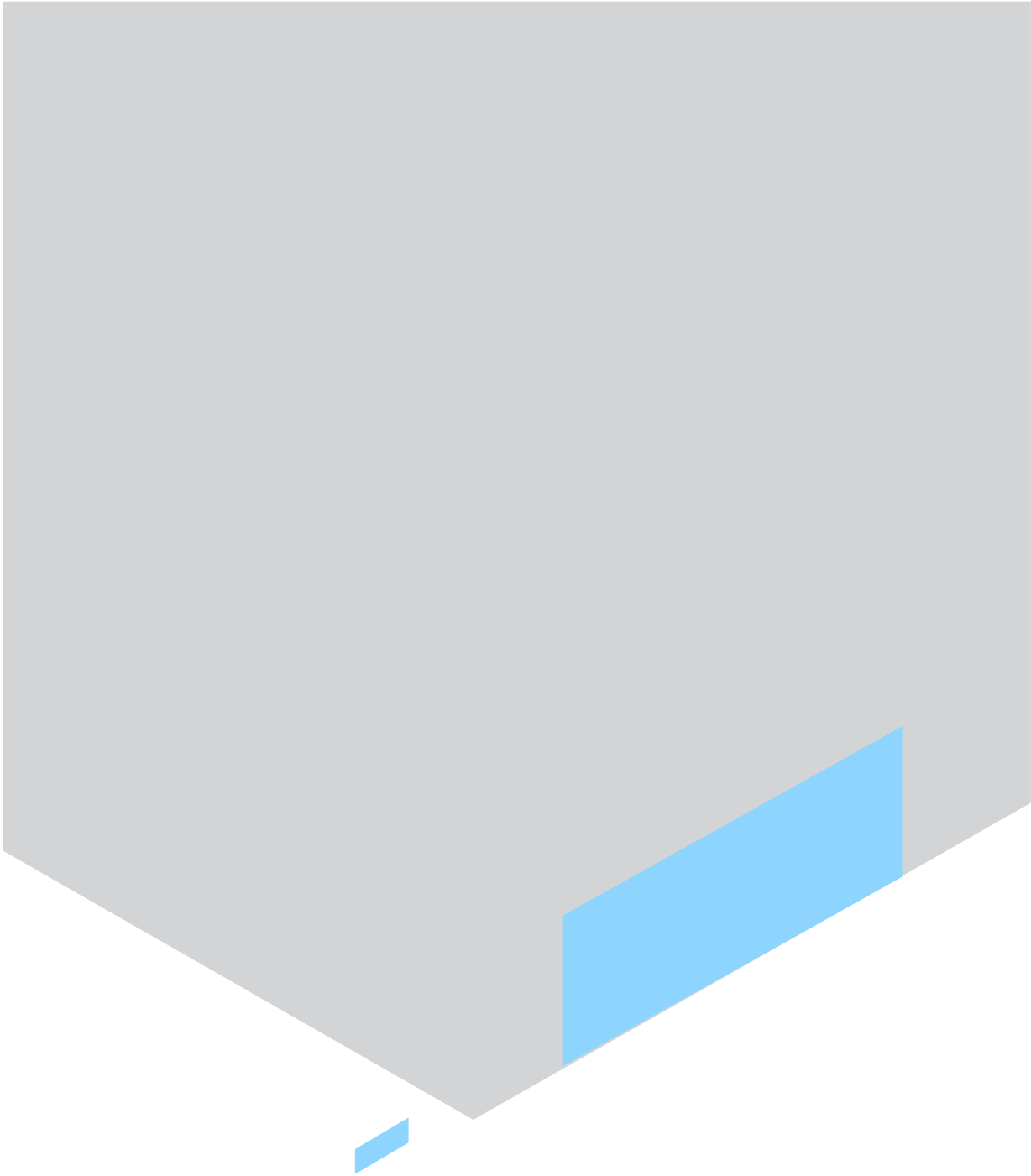
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REPORT



The second annual Canadian Arctic survey

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Last year, the first edition of the Canadian Arctic survey provided a glimpse into how Canadian Arctic residents thought and their policy preferences. This second edition will track if security preferences have evolved since May 2025 while also going into more details as to the type of threat they perceive to be salient and the means to engage them.

The survey was conducted from May 4 to 30 2026 amongst a random sample of 650 Canadians aged 18 and over living in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavik. Answers were collected through a hybrid online/phone method¹. Questions focused on respondents' opinions about the Arctic strategic and security context as well as their level of satisfaction towards the federal and territorial (local for Nunavik) governments.

On the Arctic strategic and security context

Respondents continued to adopt a pessimistic outlook on Arctic disputes, seeing very room for negotiations or compromise. This observation remained constant with our 2025 findings: Northern residents expect their governments to display a firm stance in relations to border or resources' claims by other countries (see table 1). This finding contrasts sharply with preferences in 2010 and 2015, when respondents favored compromise-based approach over a confrontational one.

¹ In total, 92 cases were collected online while 558 were collected through telephone. The technique guaranteed equal probability sampling. The margin of error associated with the total sample is 3.92 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. All the data have been statistically weighted by age, gender, and region to ensure the sample's composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada's three territories according to 2021 Census data.

	2010	2015	2025	2026
Canada should pursue a firm line in defending its sections of the Arctic	41%	38%	62%	60%
It is better to negotiate a compromise with other countries	46%	47%	26%	26%
National disputes over the Arctic are unnecessary. It should be an international territory like Antarctica	8%	11%	7%	7%

Table 1: the question was: Thinking about border and/or resource-sharing disputes in the Arctic, which statement is closest to your point of view?. The question was asked in 2010 and 2015 as part of the Rethinking the top of the world polls, led by the Gordon Foundation.

The nature of threats looming over the Canadian Arctic point in the direction of heightened anxiety. By far, the United States is considered to be the number one threat in the region: 48% believed so (up from 37% in 2025) while only 30% picked Russia (35% in 2025) and a distant 12% selected China (17% in 2025).

Respondents were also questioned on the most salient military threat over the Canadian Arctic: were they worried about foreign incursions by land, sea or air? By far, threats over the Canadian airspace were perceived to be the most concerning ones, with 50% of respondents feeling slightly safe or not safe at all in relation to a possible air attack (see table 2).

	Extremely/very safe	Moderately safe	Slightly/Not safe at all
A maritime attack?	22%	34%	39%
An armed land attack?	27%	33%	37%
An air or space attack?	14%	30%	50%

Table 2: opinions on possible attacks on Canada's North.

Counter-intuitively, respondents did not prioritize investments in the air force to meet this threat assessment. When asked which branch should receive additional funding to defend the Canadian Arctic, the most popular answer ended up being the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard rather than the Royal Canadian Air Force, by a significant margin (see figure 1).

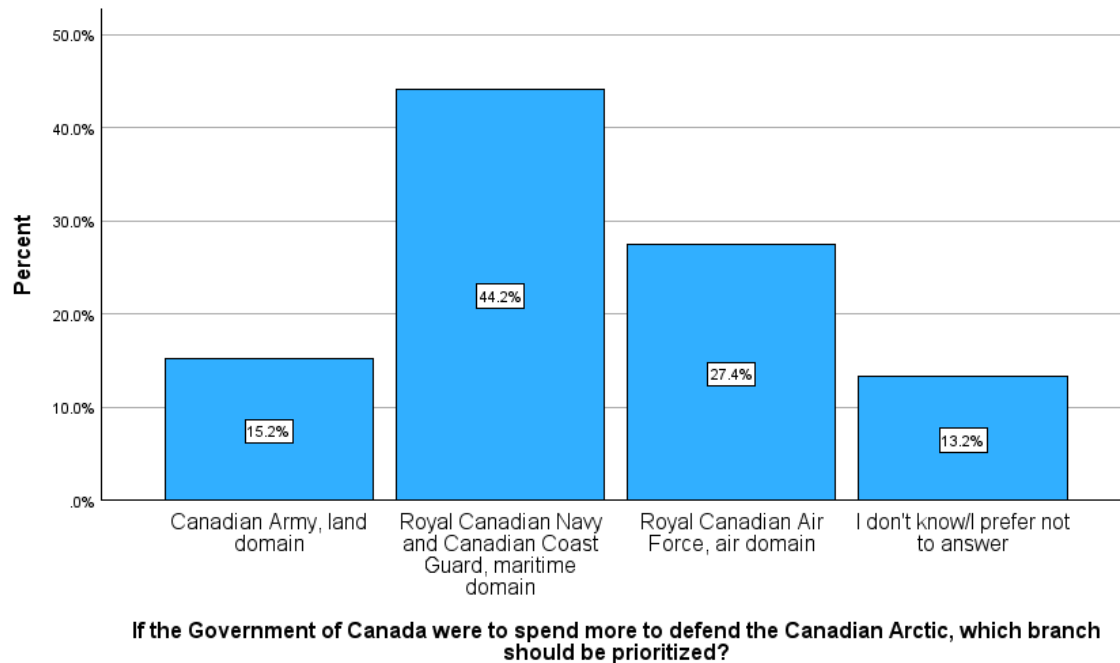


Figure 1: support for additional investments into different branches of the Canadian Armed Forces.

This points in the direction of a branch of the Canadian Armed Forces that offers practical and visible support to communities, especially the Coast Guard, but also anxious assessment about the perceived future of maritime traffic in the region.

On a related note, a strong majority of respondents (74%) also supported arming the Canadian Coast Guard.

On Arctic unconventional threats

Northern perspectives about future maritime traffic are unequivocal: they expect an increase in maritime traffic in the next few years. A full 85% support this assumption, either for a significant increase (38%) or a modest increase (47%).

Increased activities will bring different types of vessels into the region: they are perceived differently depending on their functions and roles. As can be seen in figure 2, cargo ships are the most feared while scientific vessels were considered the most benign.

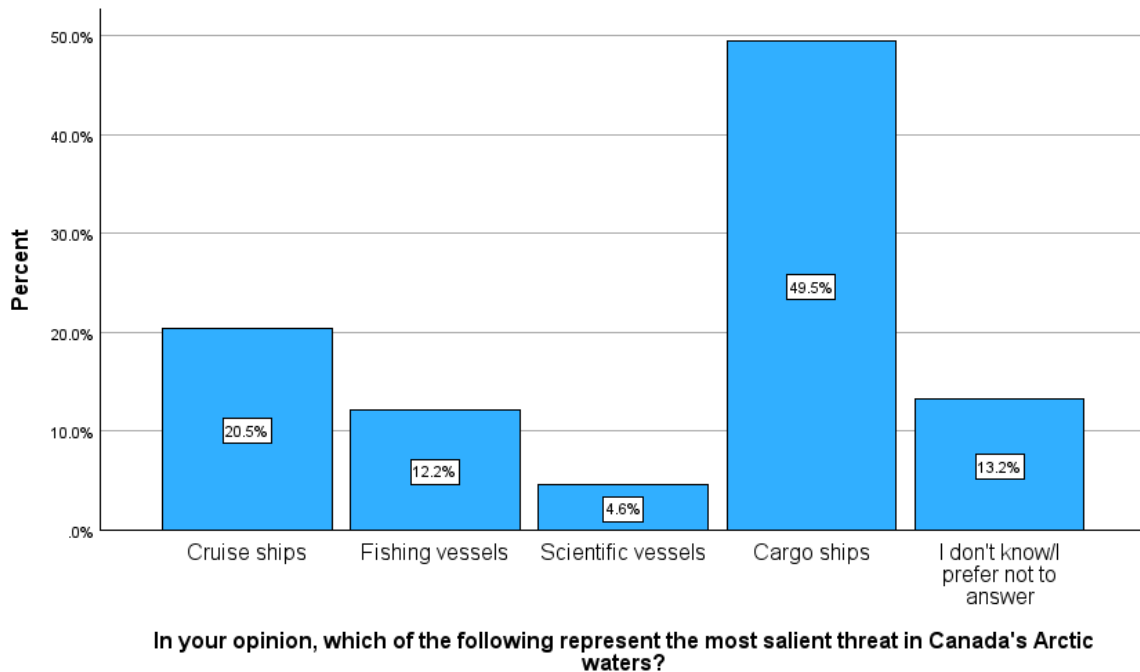


Figure 2: perceptions of security risks posed by different types of vessels.

Although the sample is more limited, Nunavut residents have relatively similar views on cargo ships and cruise ships, with both being considered a threat by a similar proportion of respondents (35% and 28%, respectively). It points to diverging views about tourism in Nunavut, with some communities being open to tourism and cruise ships while others are more reluctant to embrace this potential economic opportunity.

The results bear insights into the presence of an emerging actor in the region, China. China is a distant third in terms of most imminent threat to the region, as we covered earlier. China is also conducting hybrid operations in the Arctic (intelligence-gathering, illegal activities) by using scientific and/or fishing vessels. As we observed on figure 2, these vessels are not perceived as threat by most Northerners. These two factors highlight that there will be more work to be done to underline the Chinese threat in the Canadian threat to Northern residents.

We further evaluated for a second year if climate disinformation was prevalent amongst Northerners. Last year's results were confirmed: 65% shared the scientific consensus that climate change is mostly caused by human activities while 32% thought otherwise (see table 3).

	2025	2026
Climate change is mostly caused by human activities	60%	66%
Climate change is mostly caused by natural changes and cycle	22%	19%
The cause of climate change is unclear	15%	13%

Table 3: the question was: Which of the following statements comes closer to your point of view?

Finally, human and environmental security concerns were tested by inquiring about preferences for mining activities. We presented again respondents with a tradeoff: to weigh the importance of potential economic opportunities (jobs, revenues, etc) in relation to environmental and cultural risks. For the second year in a row, we found Northern public opinion divided on this issue, although there is more support for mining activities than in the 2025 edition (see table 4).

	2025	2026
The positive impact on jobs and revenues outweighs the negative consequences	37%	43%
The negative consequences outweigh the positive impact on jobs and revenues	47%	44%
I don't know/I prefer not to answer	16%	14%

Table 4: the question was: Mining projects in the Canadian Arctic provide jobs to local Northern residents and generate revenues for local governments. However, they can have negative consequences for the environment and on traditional Indigenous customs such as hunting and fishing. Which of the following two statements comes closest to your point of view?

On satisfaction of Arctic residents with territorial and federal governments

On government relations, local perceptions on the effectiveness and quality of consultation are split (figure 3): almost 45% of respondents indicate an adequate level of consultation before important investments and initiatives, while 50% indicate dissatisfaction with the level of consultation before important investments and initiatives. 5% responded that they didn't know or preferred not to answer. This 5% could therefore indicate a variety of sentiment, from disinterest in the topic to lack of awareness. While the current balance somewhat leans towards dissatisfaction, this sentiment is not necessarily preponderant according to our survey and could gain from further intra-community insight in order to better understand local variations since the result of the survey is split. These results however are subject to change should major projects be given the go-ahead, supporting thereby the need for further intra-community insight.

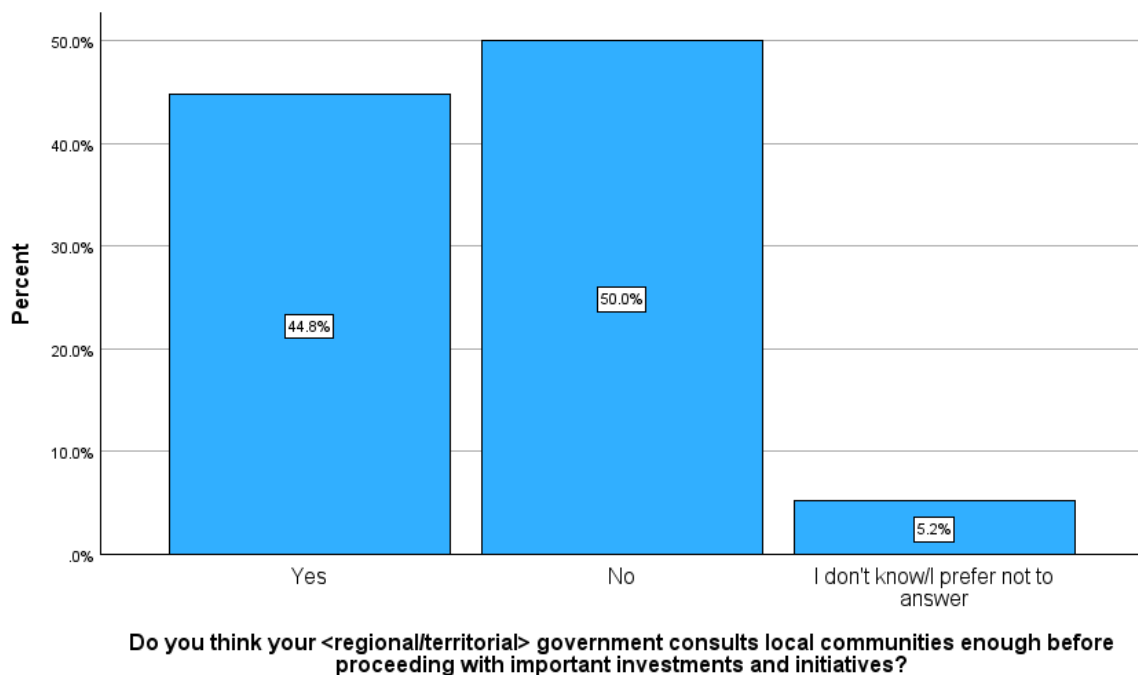


Figure 3: Regional and territorial governments' consultation with Northerners.

While respondents' perception of the level of consultation by the territorial and/or regional government was split, Northerners' perception of federal consultation is predominantly negative (figure 4): 62.3% of respondents indicated a lack of consultation before proceeding with important investments and initiatives in the Canadian North. Only 30.6% of respondents indicated

being satisfied. Slightly above 7% of respondents indicated either not knowing or preferring not to answer. These findings between local perceptions of the federal governments versus territorial or regional governments exemplify a schism in how the federal government is perceived compared to local governments: local governments seem to benefit from higher local confidence than the federal government.

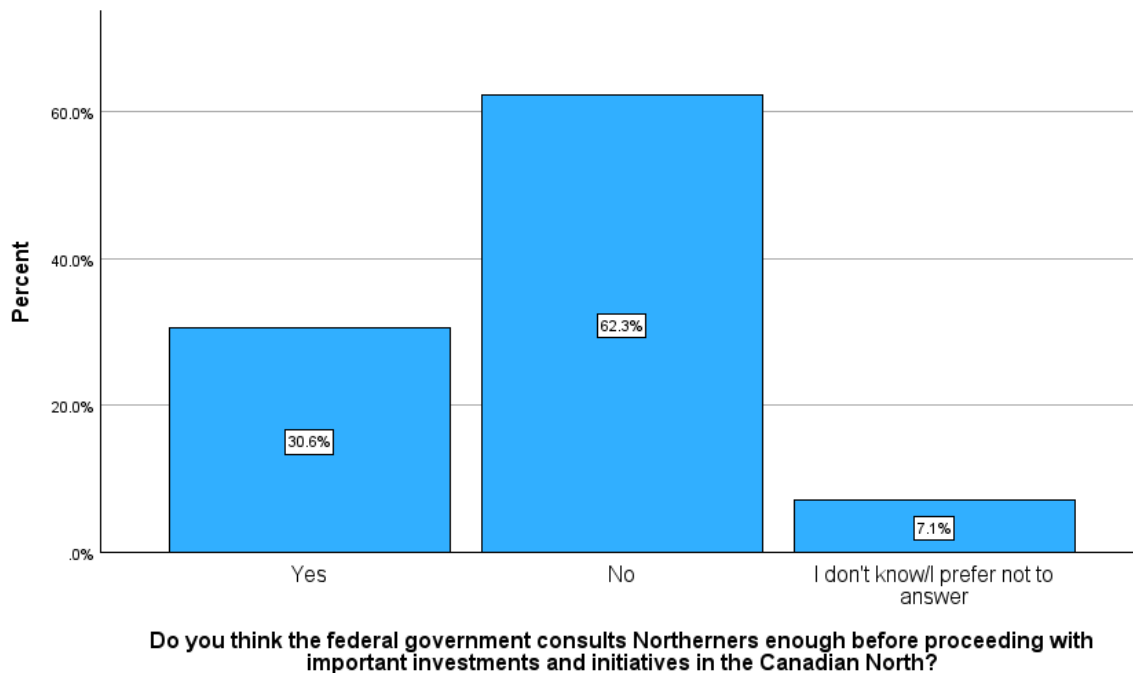


Figure 4: Federal consultation with Northerners.

The higher local confidence in regional or territorial governments is supported by these further findings of the survey (figure 5): almost 55% of respondents are somewhat satisfied with the services provided by their regional or territorial government, and 17.2% are very satisfied, bringing to 72.1% of respondents indicating overall satisfaction from the services provided by their regional or territorial government. On the flip side, 25.8% of respondents indicated being unsatisfied with the services provided. 2% of respondents indicated either not knowing or preferring not the answer. While local perceptions on consultation before important investments or initiatives are split, local perceptions on services are strongly positive, supporting our finding of higher confidence in local governments.

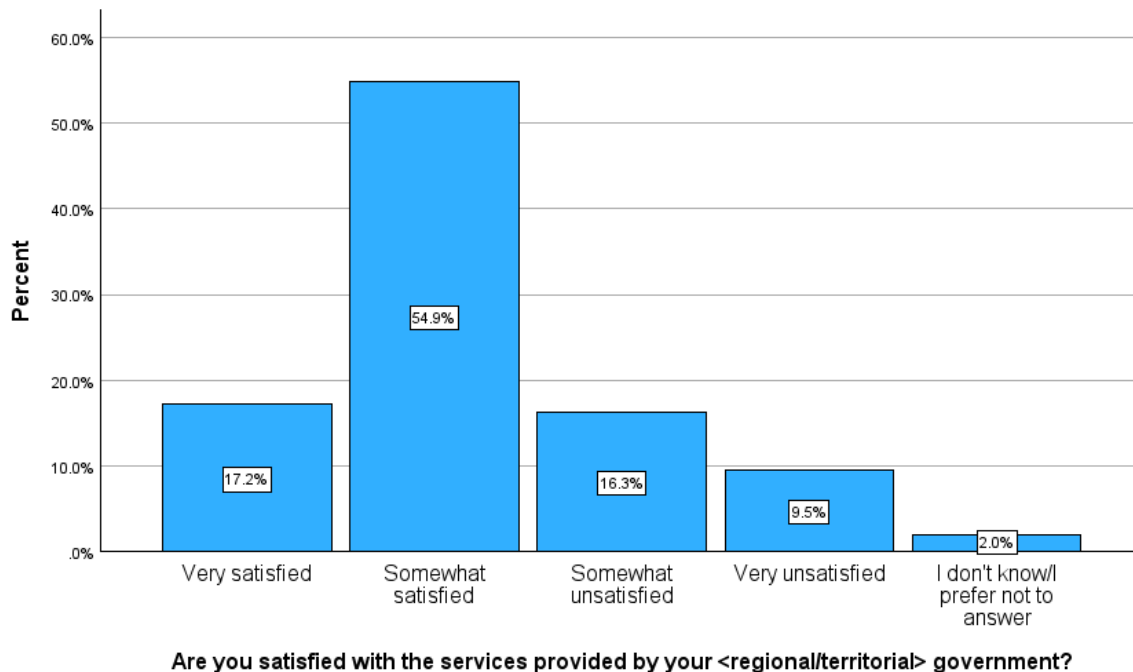


Figure 5: Levels of satisfaction with services provided by regional or territorial governments.

Despite the earlier finding that the federal government is not perceived as consulting with Northerners enough, it is however perceived as providing meaningful employment opportunities for Canadian Northerners (figure 6). A total of 63.7% of respondents agree with the statement, and 32.2% disagree with the statement. The question was not to ask whether the federal government provides enough employment opportunities, but whether the federal government provides meaningful employment opportunities. Despite low confidence in the quality of local consultation by the federal government, Northerners do seem to indicate a recognition of the quality or meaningfulness of employment opportunities that the federal government provides. This is also consistent with the economic make-up of the territories who generally have economic leanings towards the public and government sector.

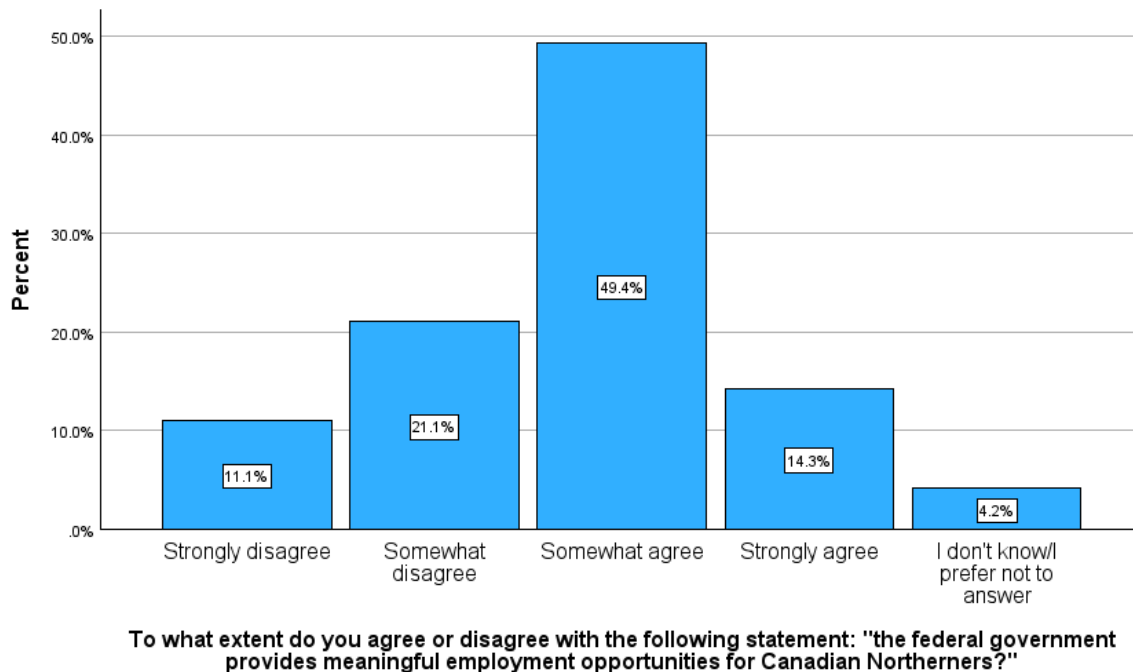


Figure 6: Perceptions on meaningful employment provided by the federal government.

The last finding on regional-territorial-federal relations is interestingly split, and consistent with early findings from qualitative fieldwork conducted recently (figure 7). On whether regional or territorial governments should receive more powers from the federal government – devolution – there does not appear to be a consensus. 32.5% of respondents indicated no, 36% indicated yes but only limited powers, and 23.1% indicated yes, significantly more powers. 8.5% of respondents indicated not knowing or preferring not the answer. In total, 59.1% of respondents lean on the positive regarding regional or territorial governments obtaining more power from the federal government, which is a majority but also not a very strong one, and the vote remains somewhat split between significantly more powers and limited powers. This split on the positive side indicates a somewhat polarizing topic, consistent with observations on ongoing discussions regarding the capacity of regional and territorial governments to adequately engage with the powers they already have. While local confidence is high regarding the quality of services provided by regional or territorial governments, this finding could indicate a lack of clarity on how devolution could further support the provision of services to Northerners. Importantly, the report will dive deeper in territorial and regional differences across the Canadian North regarding the need or lack of need for further devolution.

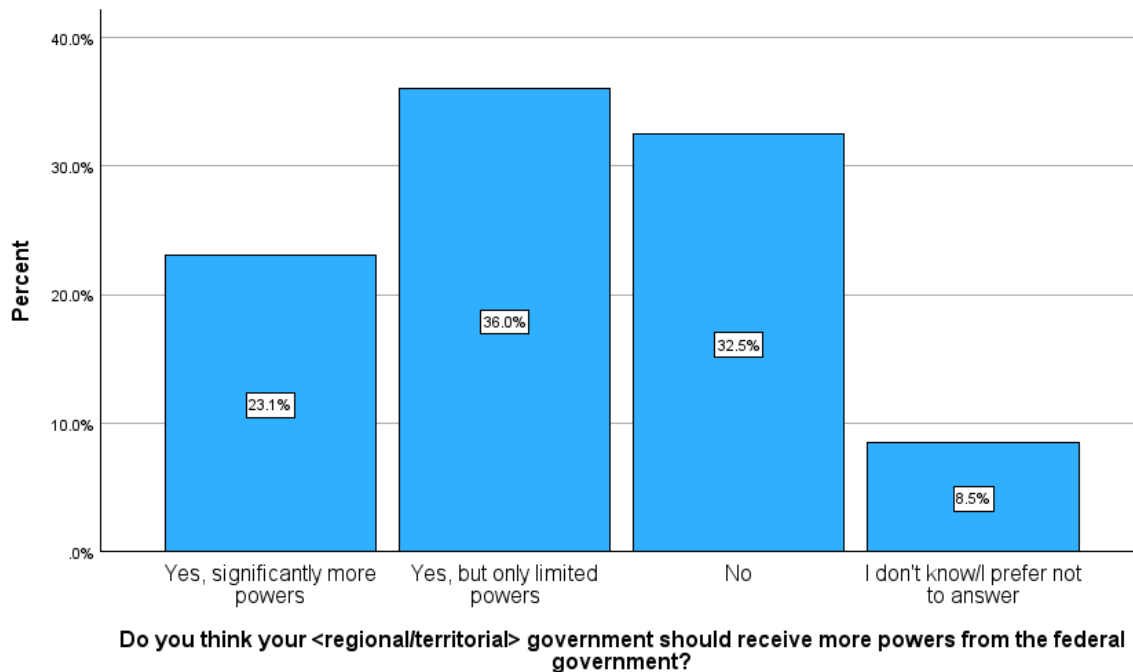


Figure 7: Perceptions on devolution.

Conclusion

This second edition of the Canadian Arctic Survey confirms certain observations from the first edition. Northerners in Canada do not perceive ample space for compromise and their main expectation is for the federal government to adopt a firm stance on resource and border issues. Perceptions of mining activities gathered in 2025 are also confirmed in 2026: mixed views dominate, with significant proportions of respondents having doubts on the positive consequences of mining projects.

This edition put the spotlight on the satisfaction of Northerners towards their territorial government as well as the federal government. Overall, we found a federal government that offers meaningful employment but does not consult enough. Further the level of satisfaction with territorial governments is high, offering these governments an opportunity to play a more central role in important decisions. These administrations clearly possess a capital of sympathy from the public and could be put to contribution.

These insights allow us to know more about the contours of public opinion in the Canadian Arctic. We hope that similar initiatives will be launched to detail even further Northern preferences in Canada.

About the authors

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