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Canadian News Media Coverage of the Canadian Rangers in the Canadian North, 2000-2024

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Arctic security has surged to the forefront of the Canadian political agenda. With climate change firing up imaginations about an increasingly *accessible* region, the Government of Canada has announced various measures over the past twenty-five years to demonstrate official presence and control in the region. Media representations of the Arctic, and particularly of sovereignty and security, oscillate between sensationalist coverage of *sovereignty and thinning ice* and Northern-centric stories featuring diverse voices sharing insights on Northerners' perspectives and priorities.[1] The Canadian Rangers often feature prominently in Arctic sovereignty and security discourse, providing a clear example of a persistent military presence in the Canadian Arctic while also acting as a powerful (and popular) symbol for the Canadian populace.[2] "If Canada's

[1] Mathieu Landriault, *Media, Security and Sovereignty in the Canadian Arctic: From the Manhattan to the Crystal Serenity* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[2] For representative articles, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, ed., *Canada's Rangers: Selected Stories, 1942-2012* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2013), and P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Bianca Romagnoli, eds. *Sovereignty, Security, and Resilience: Selected Stories about 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, 1998-2022* (Yellowknife and Peterborough: 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group and the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 2022).

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Arctic sovereignty has a brand," journalist Tim Qurengesser quipped in 2010, *it's the red Rangers hoodie*.[3]

As part-time, non-commissioned members of a subcomponent of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Reserves, the Canadian Rangers serve as the *eyes, ears, and voice* of the Canadian Armed Forces, providing a military presence in the remote parts of the country "which cannot conveniently or economically be covered by other elements of the CAF."[4] They are not intended to act as combat forces and receive no tactical military training. Instead, their regular tasks include surveillance and presence patrols, collecting local data for the CAF, reporting unusual sightings, participation in community events, and assisting with domestic military operations. To facilitate these operations, Rangers share their knowledge and skills with regular members of the CAF, teaching them how to survive and function effectively in Arctic, Subarctic, and rugged coastal environments. They are also heavily involved in leading and mentoring youths in their communities through the Junior Canadian Ranger (JCR) program, a Department of National Defence initiative that promotes traditional cultures and lifestyles and other developmental activities. Furthermore, Rangers are often called upon to respond to local emergencies and disasters, conduct search and rescue operations, support humanitarian operations, and perform other public safety missions.[5]

In this article, we analyze how news media outlets in Canada depicted the Canadian Rangers from 2000-2024. We begin with an overview of the history of the Canadian Rangers in the North, followed by quantitative analysis of the frequency of coverage across time periods, dominant frames in Northern and Southern Canadian media, and correlation of coverage with broader political and operational activity in the Canadian North. While Southern Canadian outlets tend to build narratives around

[3] Tim Querengesser, "Embedded with the Canadian Rangers," *Up Here* magazine 26, 7 (2010): pp. 24-30.
[4] Department of National Defence (DND), Defence Administration Order and Directive (DAOD) 2020-2 - Canadian Rangers (2015). On the evolution of their formal role over time, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, ed., *The Canadian Rangers @ 75: Key Documents*, Documents on Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security (DCASS) no.19 (Calgary: Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies, 2022).
[5] See P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers: A Living History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013); P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Vigilans: The 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group* (Yellowknife: 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, 2015); and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Stéphane Roussel, and Magali Vullierme, *Les Vigiles: Le 2e Groupe de patrouille des Rangers canadiens* (St-Jean-sur-Richelieu: 2nd Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, 2022).

sovereignty, security, surveillance, and the military, Northern Canadian outlets more frequently highlighted the Rangers' non-traditional roles, such as search and rescue and community service, as well as featuring more Ranger voices. We also find that coverage tends to emphasize the *Indigeneity* of the Canadian Rangers in the North.

The Canadian Rangers

The Canadian Rangers were conceived during the Second World War and the Cold War. The force was originally modelled after the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers (PCMR), a home guard established along the West Coast in 1942 to meet potential Japanese incursions. The Ranger concept was predicated on the idea that unpaid volunteers, often too old or too young to serve overseas, could perform useful military functions while carrying out their everyday civilian lives on land and sea. Given their intimate knowledge of local areas, these men (as women were excluded from Ranger service until the early 1990s) could provide intelligence, act as guides, and delay an enemy advance using guerrilla tactics. All told, more than 15,000 British Columbians served in the PCMR before it was stood down in late 1945.[6]

By 1947, chilly superpower relations and a new focus on northern security, coupled with renewed sovereignty concerns related to a US military presence in the North, led the government to establish the Canadian Rangers as a Corps of the Reserve Militia. The force was unpaid, and members were simply provided with an armband, a .303 rifle, and 200 rounds of ammunition a year. In wartime, they would serve as coast watchers and guides to regular troops, assist authorities in reporting and apprehending enemy agents and saboteurs, provide local defence against small enemy detachments, and undertake ground search and rescue (GSAR) operations. Their peacetime roles were similar, focusing on guiding troops on exercises, collecting detailed information about their local areas and reporting any unusual activities, and providing GSAR parties when tasked. They were recruited from local areas, commanded by civilian leaders from their communities, and expected to serve as the military's *eyes and ears* while carrying out their daily lives.[7]

[6] P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Guerillas in Our Midst: The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942-45," *BC Studies* 155 (2007): pp. 31-66.
[7] Lackenbauer, *Canadian Rangers*.

The Rangers survived the oscillating cycles of military concern about the Canadian North through the second half of the twentieth century.[8] Military and political interest in the Rangers diminished by the late 1950s, when technological solutions like the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line were conceived to secure the continent.[9] Although the Rangers were left to *wither on the vine,* they survived because there was no political benefit to formally disbanding something that cost the military virtually nothing to maintain on paper. During the 1970s, the *Northern* Rangers enjoyed modest growth as a sovereignty-bolstering measure, but it was only in the mid-1980s, when the voyage of the US Coast Guard vessel *Polar Sea* renewed sovereignty concerns related to the Northwest Passage, that the Rangers underwent dramatic growth. By 1992 the national strength of the force rose to 3200 (having doubled in the territorial north), and a ceremony celebrating the enlistment of the 5000th Ranger was held on the Arctic tundra in Nunavut in August 2013.[10] Since that time, the strength of the force has remained relatively stable.[11]

The Rangers grew *North of 60* after 1970 because the basic structure already existed and was very inexpensive, but also because a *new security discourse* emerged. Military activities in the region could no longer be divorced from domestic socio-economic, cultural, and environmental health issues. Indigenous leaders repeatedly called for the demilitarization of the Arctic on social and environmental grounds, often construing a

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[8] Kenneth Eyre, "Forty Years of Defence Activity in the Canadian North, 1947-87," *Arctic* 40,4 (1987): pp. 292-299; Ken Eyre, *Custos Borealis: The Military in the Canadian North, 1898-1975*, ed. P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Peterborough: North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 2020).

[9] Ken Coates, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, William Morrison, and Greg Poelzer, *Arctic Front: Defending Canada in the Far North* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2008); P. Whitney Lackenbauer, ed. *Canada and Arctic Sovereignty and Security: Historical Perspectives* (Calgary: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 2011); P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Matthew Farish, eds., *The Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line Coordinating Committee: Minutes and Progress Reports, 1955-63*, Documents on Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security (DCASS) 15 (Calgary: Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies, 2019); P. Whitney Lackenbauer, ed. *Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security, Volume 2: Historical and Legal Perspectives* (Calgary: Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies, 2024).

[10] Lackenbauer, *Canadian Rangers*; and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Rangers: Canada's 'Eyes and Ears' in Northern and Isolated Communities," In *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture, Vol. 2*, eds. Cora Voyageur, David Newhouse, and Dan Beavon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 306-28.

[11] P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Diversity Statistics, Self-Identification Data, and the Canadian Rangers: Underestimating Indigenous Peoples' Participation Rates in the Canadian Army," NAADSN *Policy Brief*, 19 April 2021.

military presence as a threat to their peoples' security. Conversely, military officers noted that the public and Indigenous leaders took great interest in the Rangers. Beginning in the late 1980s, explicit government statements increasingly stressed the socio-political benefits of having Ranger patrols in Indigenous communities. Consequently, the Rangers enjoyed sustained growth in the 1990s while the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) more generally faced austerity measures and personnel cuts, representing a *postmodern militia* that enjoyed strong political and popular support in the North.[12]

This support has continued through the first quarter of the twenty-first century. There are currently approximately 5100 Rangers in more than 220 communities across Canada.[13] The Rangers are neither a military nor an Indigenous *program* (as they are sometimes misidentified), but rather a subcomponent of the Reserves that leverages the skillsets of Canadians from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds to support home defence, security, and public safety missions. While official figures suggest that Indigenous Canadians represented 2.2 percent of the total Canadian Armed Forces (2013), they make up more than two-thirds of the Canadian Rangers in Northern Canada.[14] Approximately 25% of Rangers are female, and the Rangers in 1CRPG are a representative cross-section of adults from 18 into their 80s (given that there is no mandatory retirement age for Rangers).[15]

There are five Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups (CRPGs) across Canada, each encompassing a distinct geographical area. 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (1 CRPG), the largest military unit in Canada, has an effective strength of about 1400 Rangers in 64 patrols across the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and northern British Columbia. 2 CRPG covers Quebec. 3 CRPG spans northern Ontario. 4 CRPG covers British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. 5 CRPG covers Newfoundland

[12] P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "The Canadian Rangers: A Postmodern Militia That Works." *Canadian Military Journal* 6, no.4 (2006): pp. 49-60. See also P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Armed Forces' Eyes, Ears, and Voice in Remote Regions: Selected Writings on the Canadian Rangers* (Peterborough: North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 2022).

[13] DND, 2024-25 Departmental Plan (Ottawa: DND, 2024).

[14] Lackenbauer, "Diversity Statistics."

[15] P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "The North's Canadian Rangers," in Alistair Edgar, Rupinder Mangat, and Bessma Momani, eds., *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces through Diversity and Inclusion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), pp. 67-86.

and Labrador. The organization thus provides a strategic reconnaissance screen in isolated Northern and coastal communities beyond the Arctic, despite the typical national political focus on their presence and activities in that particular region. The Rangers are also heavily involved in leading and mentoring youth in their communities through the Junior Canadian Ranger (JCR) program, a military-funded initiative that promotes traditional cultures and lifestyles and other developmental activities. Furthermore, Rangers are often called upon to respond to local emergencies and disasters, support humanitarian and search and rescue operations, and perform other public safety missions.[16]

Table 1: Canadian Ranger Tasks (DAOD 2020-2)

The tasks in the following table may be undertaken by a CR member on duty when authorized by their CRPG HQ:

Tasks	Examples
Conduct and provide support to sovereignty operations	Conduct and provide support to surveillance and sovereignty patrols, including training in Canada. Conduct North Warning System site patrols. Report suspicious and unusual activities. Collect local information of military significance.
Conduct and provide assistance to CAF domestic operations	Conduct surveillance of Canadian territory.

[16] P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Peter Kikkert, *Measuring the Success of the Canadian Rangers* (Report to the 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, 2020); Peter Kikkert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "'A Great Investment in Our Communities': Strengthening Nunavut's Whole-of-Society Search and Rescue Capabilities." *Arctic* 74/3 (September 2021): pp.258-75; Peter Kikkert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, 2021. "The Canadian Rangers: Strengthening Community Disaster Resilience in Canada's Remote and Isolated Communities," *Northern Review* 51 (2021): pp. 35-67; and Peter Kikkert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Broadening Human Security: The Canadian Rangers and Community Disaster Resilience," in *Evolving Human Security: Frameworks and Considerations for Canada's Military*, eds. Shannon Lewis-Simpson and Sarah Jane Meharg (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy, 2023), pp. 148-151.

	Provide local knowledge and CR expertise (i.e. advice and guides).
	Participate in search and rescue operations.
	Provide support in response to natural or man-made disasters and support in humanitarian operations.
	Provide assistance to federal, provincial, territorial or municipal government authorities.
	Instruct, mentor and supervise Junior Canadian Rangers.
Maintain a CAF presence in the local community	Participate in and support events in the local community (e.g. Yukon Quest, Canada Day, Remembrance Day, etc.).

The following tasks may not be assigned to a CR member, except when placed on active service under section 31 of the *National Defence Act*:

1. undertaking tactical military training;
2. performing immediate local defence tasks, such as containing or observing small enemy detachments pending the arrival of other forces;
3. providing vital point security (e.g. dams, mines, oil pipelines, etc.);
4. assisting federal, provincial, territorial or local police in the discovery, reporting and apprehension of enemy agents, saboteurs, criminals or terrorists; and
5. serving in aid of the civil power.

Method

We selected traditional media to track temporal fluctuations in Canadian media coverage of the Canadian Rangers over a 25-year period, spanning from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2024. Newspapers were given precedence over other media due to their wide regional coverage. Using the Canadian Major Dailies database, we chose 16 Southern

newspapers from different regions of the country as part of our sample.[17] We used the keyword *Canadian Rangers* to gather all articles referring to our subject matter, and retained those relating to the Canadian Rangers in the Canadian North.[18] In total, we analyzed 675 journalistic articles in Southern Canadian outlets that mentioned the Canadian Rangers operating in the Canadian North during the time period covered by our study.

We also gathered all articles referring to the keyword *Rangers* from three Northern Canadian media outlets: *Nunatsiaq News*, *The Yellowknifer*, and *Nunavut News North*. Limited archival resources for these newspapers meant that our timeline for Northern publications extends from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2024. In total, we gathered 396 articles from these three Northern newspapers. We then performed manual coding on all of the articles in both Southern and Northern media outlets to understand how the Canadian Rangers were described.

Prevalence and nature of mentions of the Canadian Rangers in Southern and Northern media outlets in Canada

Media attention on the Canadian Rangers in Southern Canada followed a similar pattern to overall media interest for Arctic issues in Canada.[19] Figure 1 reveals how the number of articles mentioning the Canadian Rangers was initially low in the early 2000s before climbing in the second half of the decade, peaking in the early 2010s, and receding in the late 2010s. The low number of mentions remained stable in the 2020s, even as the Rangers played a significant role in the COVID-19 pandemic response in Northern communities. The pace of global warming and sea-ice loss, coupled with headline-grabbing developments (such as the 2007 drop of the Russian flag under the North Pole,

[17] These newspapers were: *Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, The Globe and Mail, Kingston Whig – Standard, Leader Post, Montreal Gazette, National Post, The Ottawa Citizen, The Province, Star-Phoenix, Telegraph – Journal, Times – Colonist, Toronto Star, The Vancouver Sun, The Windsor Star* and *The Winnipeg Free Press*.

[18] For example, articles referring to the operations of Canadian Rangers patrols in British Columbia and Saskatchewan were not retained in our sample.

[19] Mathieu Landriault, "Interest in and Public Perceptions of Canadian Arctic Sovereignty: Evidence from Editorials, 2000–2014." *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 54 (2016): pp. 1-25; and Landriault, *Media, Security and Sovereignty.*

the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022) and announcements of Arctic investments by the Government of Canada in the late 2000s contributed to this pattern. The frequency of mentions in Northern outlets was more stable through the time period studied, with articles in Northern media published at different times of any given year, with no particular concentration of articles at specific times.

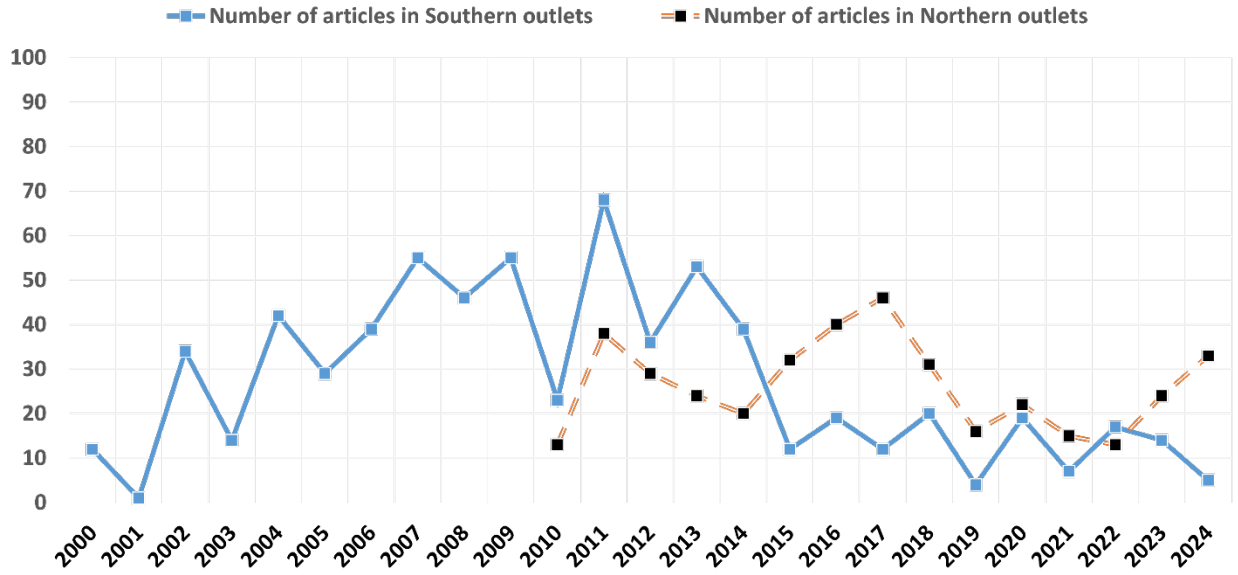


Figure 1: number of articles mentioning the Canadian Rangers in 19 Canadian media outlets from 2000 to 2024.

In contrast, two broader developments contributed to the increased attention devoted to the patrol group in Southern outlets: military exercises by the Canadian Armed Forces in the 2000s and early 2010s. In many instances, the renewed military activity or interest in the Arctic region served as the main narrative, with Exercise NARWHAL, Operation KIGLIQAQVIK RANGER, and Operation NANOOK framed as deployments to assert Canadian Arctic sovereignty. These articles emphasized the dynamic nature of the Arctic environment, highlighting that climate change would drive

structural changes in regional geopolitics.[20] Media coverage on these operations served as a pretext to conduct assessments of Canada's Arctic capabilities.[21]

The annual Arctic tour launched by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2006 explains the greater attention devoted to the Rangers in Southern outlets from 2007-2014. These Northern visits coincided with the Operation Nanook military exercise conducted by the CAF, making the Canadian North the center of political attention. The presence of the Prime Minister attracted considerable attention, with journalists, especially national correspondents, following the Prime Minister's agenda. Accordingly, the number of articles about the Rangers in the Southern media declined substantially after Harper's last tour (2014), even though the CAF still conducted annual military exercises. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, elected in 2015, did not follow his predecessor's practice of heading north for military operations as part of his reorientation of Canada's Arctic and Northern policy agenda.[22] The 2018 transformation of Operation NANOOK from one major deployment in August into an overarching annual series of four exercises held at different times of the year cemented this trend: the absence of a single keystone exercise, coupled with the absence of prime ministerial profile, further diminished the appeal of these deployments for the national news media.

In contrast, the number of mentions of the Canadian Rangers in Northern media outlets did not drop substantially after 2014. As Table 1 reveals, the number of occurrences increased from 2015-2017 before reverting to the early 2010s baseline. Furthermore, Northern media did not concentrate media coverage in the August-September timeframe coinciding with Operation Nanook to 2018, and instead offered a

[20] For context see Franklyn Griffiths, Rob Huebert, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Canada and the Changing Arctic: Sovereignty, Security and Stewardship* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), and Rob Huebert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Debating Arctic Security: Selected Writings by Rob Huebert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, 2010-2021* (Peterborough: North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 2022).

[21] Adam Lajeunesse and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "The Canadian Armed Forces in the Arctic: Building Appropriate Capabilities," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies,* 16, 4 (March 2016): pp. 7-66.

[22] P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Arctic Defence and Security: Transitioning to the Trudeau Government," in *Whole of Government through an Arctic Lens,* eds. P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Heather Nicol (Antigonish: Mulroney Institute on Government, 2017), pp. 308-40.

more diverse view of the functions and roles performed by the Canadian Rangers throughout the calendar year.

Roles[23]	**Number of mentions in Southern outlets**	**Number of mentions in Northern outlets**
Sovereignty-related	116	31
Surveillance	108	20
Search and rescue/first responders	77	84
Military	58	16
Community services	46	60
Teaching/Training CAF soldiers	32	46
Science/environmental monitoring	25	4
Total	462	261

Table 1: number of mentions of different roles played by the Canadian Rangers as described in 19 Canadian newspapers from 2000-2024.

Table 1 parses the contrasting emphases on the functions the Rangers were performing according to Southern and Northern reporters. In Southern outlets, three of the four most frequent roles (sovereignty, surveillance, military) focussed on a traditional definition of security. Taken together, these roles constituted most mentions before the 2020s, and were particularly prominent during the 2000-2009 period when Arctic

[23] All roles described in an article were coded. Hence, a single article listed multiple roles while others did not present any role.

sovereignty issues attracted important coverage; issues such as controversies around Hans Island (2004-2005), the U.S. *Charlotte* transit of the Northwest Passage (December 2005), and the placing of a Russian flag at the geographic North Pole (July/August 2007) were extensively covered in the Canadian traditional media.[24] Mentions of sovereignty and surveillance roles appeared most frequently between 2000 and 2009, and subsequently declined when Prime Minister Stephen Harper stopped applying his *use-it-or-lose-it* mantra to Arctic sovereignty.[25]

Linkages between the Canadian Rangers and new Arctic capabilities constituted the majority of mentions in every five-year period of our 25-year timeline, except the 2020-2024 period (when the COVID-19 pandemic response, of which the Canadian Rangers played a key role in Northern communities, dominated coverage). Mentions of the Rangers' role in community services were absent from 2015 to 2019 but made up 38 percent of our sample from 2020 to 2024. All but one of the community services mentions from 2020 to 2024 were concentrated in 2020 and 2021, at the peak of the pandemic response, and they vanished after 2021 from the journalistic reporting. In contrast, sovereignty, surveillance and military-related roles only represented a minority of all mentions in Northern outlets. For example, 23 percent of mentions presented one of these roles from 2020-2024.

Of these three aforementioned traditional functions, the most unorthodox is definitely the military one, given the special nature of the Canadian Rangers. The Southern media's habit of painting all the military with a single brush resurfaced, with many journalists casting the Canadian Rangers in military roles "defending the Arctic,"[26] "maintaining" or "projecting" a "military presence,"[27] or "demonstrate[ing] Canada's

[24] Mathieu Landriault, *La Sécurité Arctique 2000-2010: Une Décennie Turbulente?* (Peterborough: North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 2020).
[25] P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Toward a Comprehensive Approach to Canadian Security and Safety in the Arctic." in *Breaking Through? Understanding Sovereignty and Security in the Circumpolar Arctic*, ed. Wilfrid Greaves and P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), pp. 137-167.
[26] E.g. David Pugliese, "Tories to deep-six deep water port," *Montreal Gazette*, 3 February 2007, p. A12.
[27] E.g. Angela Hall, "Former Reginan part of northern patrol," *Leader Post*, 26 April 2004, p. B2; and Chris Wattie and Carly Weeks, "U.S. sub in Arctic embarrassing, opposition says: 'Sovereignty challenged,'" *National Post*, 20 December 2005, p. A10.

ability to defend the Arctic."[28] Southern media commentators critical of the Canadian Rangers and their capabilities typically mobilized them as a proxy to denigrate Canada's alleged lack of "real" military presence in the North. For example, Lackenbauer has analyzed examples of some journalists' persistent frustration with Canada's modest Arctic defence posture compared to other Arctic countries and their dismissal of a largely Indigenous, Northern-based military organization that does not fit their traditional concept of national defence. On the one hand, the Rangers are held up as a *strawman* for these journalists to knock down in their overall critique of Canada's alleged failure to invest in *serious* or *real* military capabilities. On the other hand, their unwillingness to embrace any concept of military service that does not involve conventional soldiers preparing for warfighting is limiting in a defence-of-Northern-Canada context. Instead, Lackenbauer contends that by turning to self-sufficient, locally-based Canadian Rangers as an enabler or *force multiplier* for conventional southern-based military units and as an organized body of first responders in and for their communities, Canada has developed a successful model for defence of regions that face little to no conventional military threat, particularly in the land domain.[29]

Given the national media's fixation on sovereignty and national defence frames, the Rangers' non-traditional military roles received significantly less attention in Southern outlets, especially from 2000-2009, than in Northern media. The Rangers' role in search and rescue ranked a distant third to sovereignty and surveillance roles, and the Canadian Rangers were typically presented as support to CAF regular operations. Mentions of Canadian Rangers training and teaching survival skills to soldiers did not appear until 2008. The community service dimension received little attention in Southern outlets until 2010, when the Harper Government adopted a more comprehensive

[28] Harry Sterling, "Closer ties with U.S. military will hurt our sovereignty," *Toronto Star*, 30 August 2002, p. A21.

[29] P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "'Indigenous Communities are at the Heart of Canada's North': Media Misperceptions of the Canadian Rangers, Indigenous Service, and Arctic Security," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 19,2 (December 2018): pp. 158-192.

approach to sovereignty and security in its Northern Strategy.[30] Nonetheless, this role constituted a small percentage of mentions (9 percent) from 2010-2019.

In contrast, the Rangers' non-traditional military roles were front and center in Northern outlets, which highlighted search and rescue, community service roles, and specific functions performed by the Canadian Rangers. This coverage highlighted how the Rangers are deeply embedded in their communities and support civilian authorities, especially in times of emergencies.[31] Mentions of community services as part of the Rangers' core mandate showcased the Canadian Rangers' diverse roles, including suicide prevention, outreach programs towards youths and elders, sharing of traditional knowledge, harvesting country food, and community wellness checks (especially with community elders). Northern reporters also documented exchanges and interconnections between Canadian Rangers and Junior Canadian Rangers, describing how Rangers trained youth on teamwork, leadership, stress management, traditional knowledge, and land skills.[32]

Overall, Southern media outlets did not cover the different roles of the volunteer force in a holistic fashion, instead framing the Rangers in a conventional military manner. Readers were left with a particular notion of the organization that failed to capture the

[30] Lackenbauer, "Toward a Comprehensive Approach." See also P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Canada's Northern Strategy: A Comprehensive Approach to Defence, Security, and Safety," in *North of 60: Toward a Renewed Canadian Arctic Agenda*, eds. John Higginbotham and Jennifer Spence (Waterloo: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2016), pp. 43-48.

[31] For context, see Sébastien Girard Lindsay, « L'intégration Des Autochtones Dans L'armée Canadienne – Entre Émancipation et Assujetissement : Une Étude des Représentations Sociales qu'ont Les Militaires des Autochtones dans L'armée Canadienne » (MA thesis, École Nationale d'Administration Publique, 2017); Magali Vullièrme, "Towards Human Security in the Arctic: Lessons Learned from the Canadian Rangers." *Arctic Yearbook 2019*: pp. 1-14; Kikkert and Lackenbauer, "The Canadian Rangers: Strengthening Community Disaster Resilience"; Peter Kikkert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Search and Rescue, Climate Change, and the Expansion of the Coast Guard Auxiliary in Inuit Nunangat/the Canadian Arctic." *Canadian Journal of Emergency Management* 2, no.1 (June 2021): pp26-63.

[32] See also Lackenbauer and Kikkert, *Measuring the Success of the Canadian Rangers*; Magali Nicolas-Vullierme, « Les Rangers canadiens et les Rangers Juniors canadiens: vecteur de sécurité humaine des Inuit canadiens » (unpublished PhD dissertation, Political Science, Université Paris-Saclay, 2018), pp. 167-181; Magali Vullièrme, "The Social Contribution of the Canadian Rangers: A Tool of Assimilation or Means of Agency?" *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 19, 2 (2018): pp. 193-211; and Bianca Romagnoli, "Patrolling North of 60: Military Infrastructure in Canada's Arctic Communities" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2023).

multifaceted nature of its role and mission. Furthermore, we observed that the period with the most frequent mentions of traditional military functions (including sovereignty and surveillance) also featured the most observations depicting the Rangers as an example or source of Canada's military weakness in its Arctic. In this regard, the Canadian Rangers were used to demonstrate that the Government of Canada did not possess the required Arctic capabilities to face emerging challenges by state and non-state actors alike. The patrol group was then presented as "giving the country a tenuous military presence"[33] or representing the "government's only visible presence in Arctic territories."[34] These sentiments often surfaced in editorials and tended to be more numerous during episodes of perceived sovereignty challenges.[35]

Indigeneity and Indigenous Traditional Knowledge

News coverage often highlighted the Indigeneity of the Canadian Rangers when sovereignty and military roles were preeminent in media coverage. For example, 48 percent% of articles in Southern outlets from 2000-2009 mentioned that most of the Canadian Rangers in the North were Indigenous. In contrast, only 2 percent of articles in Southern outlets did the same from 2010-2024, when mentions of sovereignty and military roles were less numerous. This reflected how mentions of the Rangers after 2010 were more anecdotal or passing in general stories about sovereignty and security that did not warrant further description of the nature of the volunteer force. Given that Southern media coverage tended to overlook community service, the Canadian Rangers' role in leveraging or transmitting Indigenous traditional knowledge was seldom mentioned (10 percent of the 675 articles constituting our sample).

The Northern media were not more likely than Southern ones to recognize the predominantly Indigenous composition of the Canadian Rangers. In this case, however, reporters seemed to take this notion for granted, perhaps armed with the knowledge that their readership was already aware of this reality. For example, while the Canadian Rangers were explicitly described as being mainly Indigenous or Inuit in only 29 articles,

[33] Bruce Garvey, "A battle brews for 'our true North,'" *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 August 2004, p. A4.
[34] "Showing the flag north of 60," *National Post*, 29 March 2004, p. A15.
[35] Landriault, "Interest in and Public Perceptions"; Landriault, *Media, Security and Sovereignty*; Landriault, *La Sécurité Arctique 2000-2010*;

mentions of traditional Indigenous knowledge (ITK) were also found in 46 articles. In many instances, ITK was presented while implicitly acknowledging the Indigenous composition of the force. Focusing on the connection between the Rangers and the Junior Rangers allowed Northern outlets to emphasize teaching youth survival skills, traditional customs and how to *live on the land*. The same dynamic was observed when the Rangers were presented as teaching Canadian Armed Forces personnel: knowledge transmission of Rangers leaders was highlighted, drawing attention to traditional Indigenous knowledge and its importance to thrive in the North.[36]

Rangers as active participants

`Canadian Rangers members were seldom showcased as active participants in the articles studied in Southern outlets. Reporters could accomplish this by interviewing unit members and quoting them in their articles. However, this technique was only employed in 112 articles, representing a mere 17% of our overall sample. Most of the interviewees were either Rangers' spokespersons or commanders, with only a small fraction of interviews conducted with Rangers themselves. Most of these interviews (73 percent) were conducted between 2000 and 2008, at a time when the Arctic attracted significant media attention. During this period, the *National Post, Globe and Mail* and *Edmonton Journal* all published reports of journalists embedded in Ranger patrols, braving the harsh Arctic environment. These in-depth stories, taking the form of travelogues or adventure tourism, all but disappeared after 2008. The same could be observed about articles that focused solely on the Canadian Rangers. These types of stories were more common from 2000-2009 and were rare in the subsequent decade. The number of Rangers interviewed followed a downward pattern during the time period studied, which may reflect reduced money to fund southern-based reporters to observe military operations in the North.

Northern outlets accessed and more frequently quoted Canadian Rangers. While only 8 percent of articles in Southern outlets from 2010-2024 quoted a Ranger, 19 percent of

[36] See also P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Teaching Canada's Indigenous Sovereignty Soldiers … and Vice Versa: 'Lessons Learned' from Ranger Instructors." *Canadian Army Journal* 10/2 (Summer 2007): pp. 66-81; and Magali Vullièrme, "Cultural Understanding and Dialogue within the Canadian Armed Forces: Insights from Canadian Ranger Patrols," *Northern Review* 52 (2021: pp. 127-144.

Northern outlets' articles did so. These citations came in more diverse contexts, with only 24% of the quotes in Northern articles covering Ranger participation in large-scale exercises with southern-based military units. In turn, these stories showcased the Canadian Rangers in different settings, sharing their thoughts and impressions on different types of roles, missions, and tasks that the Rangers perform. In Southern newspapers, 58 percent (65/112) of interviews with Rangers were quoted in articles covering annual CAF military exercises.

Conclusion

Southern media coverage of the Canadian North is unlikely to fundamentally change in the near future. Financial obstacles and media concentration are structural constraints that Southern newspapers are likely to continue facing. For the Canadian North, this in turn means less resources for journalists to access and cover meaningful stories playing out in the region. Media concentration also resulted in the same article being printed in multiple outlets, especially with regard to Postmedia newspapers: this phenomenon does not contribute to a diverse media coverage, as illustrated elsewhere on Arctic tourism.[37] Media outlets located in Southern Canada also reach a different audience. Some of these publications cater to a regional readership, for which the Canadian North might be considered peripheral or disconnected from local concerns. As for the national media, such as the *Globe and Mail*, the Canadian Arctic is deemed worthy of attention mainly when national issues are concerned, for example, sovereignty, borders or military security.

These various constraints are not promising if we hope to have a more diverse and accurate representation of Northern issues in general and of the Canadian Rangers in particular. Northern media have privileged access to Northerners and, as the evidence demonstrated, they generally depicted a more comprehensive portrayal of the patrol group. While these media have an online presence, they do not reach as many readers as Southern media. However, this study illustrates the importance and quality of local journalism to ensure that stories are covered in all their complexity.

[37] Landriault, *Media, Security and Sovereignty*, pp. 102-124.

A promising possibility would be for Southern media to strike partnerships with Northern outlets in order to relay articles published by the latter. Precedents of this exist. For example, Southern newspapers relied heavily on *Nunatsiaq News* from 2010 to 2012 to share Northern stories with their readerships. References to *Nunatsiaq News* in these newspapers, using the Canadian Major Dailies database, numbered 101 in 2010, 161 in 2011 and 69 in 2012, before falling below 20 in subsequent years. Data collected for this article reflect this pattern, with articles on the Canadian Rangers by *Nunatsiaq News* published in Southern newspapers only from 2010 to 2012.

This type of collaboration could alleviate the difficult access and high costs associated with reporting on the Canadian Arctic. In turn, as we have demonstrated in this article, Canadians would be better informed about the Northern part of their country, a region that many Canadians will most likely never visit in their lifetime. Additional diffusion of adequate and correct information about the Canadian North will contribute to a public conversation that is both more mature and better informed about a region that attracts growing national and global attention in a world of climate change and geopolitical turmoil.

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