



Scenario: Politics on Social Media

Group Size: 4-15

This scenario may contain explicit language and references to harmful situations which may be emotionally activating for some people. If you need support, services are available through the [CAF Member Assistance Program \(CFMAP\)](#) and the [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#).

You are a member of a small Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) unit with a diverse combination of backgrounds. Training in close quarters has made you all good friends. A high-profile election is coming up, which you have discussed with your peers at length. Even though you have different perspectives, you respect each other's opinions and do not let these opinions impede your relationships.

Linjin is a fellow unit member, and one of your friends on social media. While her profile is private, you can see that she has about 1,000 friends, that she has been married since 2009, and that she is from Manitoba. Her work information and interests are not listed. Her profile picture shows her in a CAF uniform.

You notice that Linjin has been interacting with and sharing posts related to the upcoming election. For instance, three days ago she shared an interview that featured a political commentator with the following comment:

“Such a good watch! Summarizes why we need to vote for a candidate who supports a carbon tax. Check it out if you’ve got six minutes to spare.”

Yesterday, she shared a speech by another candidate and asked the following:

“Hmm... What do we think of her platform?”

While you know that CAF members are not allowed to express political opinions while on duty, this situation is less clear. Linjin’s profile is private, and she does not seem to be publicly endorsing any candidate or organization. She is also not posting her own original content, such as a standalone status, of a political nature.

Categories

Principles:	Obey and Support Lawful Authority
Values:	Integrity
Cultural Themes:	Service
Misconduct Types:	General Misconduct
GBA Plus Themes:	Not Specific
Audience:	Canadian Armed Forces

Facilitator's Guide

Learning Objectives:

- Discuss how social media platforms are considered public and political expression within them can only be permissible where the person has a reasonable expectation of a reader not connecting the views expressed to the person's professional identity.
- Discuss the right of Department of National Defence (DND) personnel and CAF members to exercise their freedom of political belief and expression only when they do so in a manner which takes all reasonable steps to avoid identification of such beliefs or expression with their professional role.

Facilitation Questions:

1. What is the ethical issue in this scenario?
 - Open group discussion.
2. What are the facts? What are the assumptions?
 - Open group discussion.
3. What are the obvious courses of action (COAs)? Are there other possible COAs?
 - Open group discussion.
4. Which ethical principles, values and results are at play for each option, including the option to do nothing?
 - Open group discussion.
 - Discuss "Serve Canada before Self;" and "Obey and Support Lawful Authority" in relation to this scenario.
 - Discuss integrity and duty in relation to this scenario.
5. Did Linjin violate her professional duties when she posted comments to her social media page, particularly when shown there in her CAF uniform? Why?
 - Open group discussion.
 - Should she have had a reasonable expectation of a reader not connecting the views expressed to the person's professional identity? She was wearing her uniform in her profile.
6. Would such constraints be at odds with her individual rights and freedoms? How would you handle this situation as either a friend or supervisor? Why?
 - Open group discussion.
 - Discuss with reference to Defence Ethics, the military ethos, and relevant policies.
 - Discuss CAF's unique role in Canada and what duty requires re: members' public speech related to government/politics. Is there a difference between CAF members and DND employees on this topic?