

The state of the Canadian private security industry in 2024

Roy H. Jensen*

Abstract

Security guards are an increasingly vital component of Canada's public safety system, often serving as first responders prior to emergency services arriving. Despite their growing importance, little consistent or publicly available data exists on the size, scope, and characteristics of the private security industry. This study consolidates licensing information from Canada's provinces and territories to create a 2024 baseline of the Canadian security industry. It is expected that the security industry will undergo significant transformations over the next decade as the responsibilities and expectations of security guards continue to increase.

I find that Canada surpassed 300,000 licensed security guards in June 2024, reaching an estimated $328,000 \pm 10,000$ by year-end. This is more than 4.5 times the number of police officers in Canada. The average career duration of a security guard is (2.6 ± 0.4) years, at the 90 % confidence level. Of the 328,000 licenced security guards, only around 11,000 are career security guards, while the remaining hold a security license for only one cycle. The high turnover rates are driven by low wages, temporary employment motivations, and challenging working conditions. Security guards are concentrated in urban centers, and represent approximately 710 ± 140 per 100,000 urban residents. In jurisdictions with multiyear data, the security industry growth ranged from 11 to 26 % in 2024, and the growth rate is increasing.

Keywords

private security; security licensing; career duration; security industry growth; professionalization; public safety.

Abstract (tweetable)

Canada's private security industry employed $\approx 328,000$ licensed guards by December 2024, and the industry is growing by around 20 % per year. Security guards have an average career duration of 2.6 years, with high turnover highlighting the need for better training and professionalization.

* Dr. Roy Jensen is the Training Director of the Canadian Association of Security Professionals, and a member of the Centre for Leading Research in Education (CLRE) at Wilfrid Laurier University. He is formerly teaching faculty, teaching post-secondary chemistry.

Introduction

Security guards are the first link in the emergency response chain, as illustrated in Figure 1. They are responsible for enforcing the laws of Canada and the policies of their client to protect the people, property, and information of their client.



Figure 1. Security guards are the first link in the emergency response chain. They are often first on scene, and expected to manage situations until emergency services arrive.

Increasingly, municipalities are employing security guards to perform duties once reserved for police officers. Examples include foot patrols, public area monitoring, bylaw enforcement, and alarm response. Security guards are often first on scene, and expected to manage the situation until emergency services arrive.

The Canadian Association of Security Professionals (**CA*SP**) is a recently established organization. **CA*SP** is committed to professionalizing the security industry through advocacy and training. A necessary foundation for measuring progress is to understand the current state of the private security industry. This study establishes a baseline of the Canadian private security industry.

Our review revealed a significant lack of publicly available data about the security industry. Existing information was often contradictory. To address this, I collected and analyzed data from across Canada, focusing on licensing and workforce trends in 2024.

Roles and responsibilities

Consultation with industry stakeholders and a review of provincial legislation confirm that the core responsibilities of security guards are broadly consistent nationwide.¹ Security guards staff access control points, conduct roving patrols of facilities and grounds, work as loss-prevention specialists in retail establishments, engage in field and video surveillance, and monitor and respond to alarms. While each post is unique, the general roles and responsibilities are the same across jurisdictions.

However, training requirements differ. In Atlantic Canada (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador) and the Arctic territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut), no formal training is required to obtain a security license. In contrast, other provinces mandate basic training programs ranging from 32 to 54 hours.

Historical national data²

According to the 2006 Canada Census, 102,000 Canadians identified their primary occupation as security guard or private investigator.³ This figure represents a minimum estimate, as many people work part-time in the security industry while holding full-time positions elsewhere. No updated census data has been published since.

Conversely, the number of active security guard licenses represents a maximum estimate, as this number does not indicate how active the license holder is. License holders may be working full-time, part-time, in security management, or not actively employed in security.

Historical provincial data

Historical data on active security guard licenses is available for three provinces.

Alberta. Researcher Dr. Glen Kitteringham obtained annual statistics on security guard licensing from the Alberta Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services (PSES; formerly the Alberta Solicitor General).⁴

Ontario. The Private Security and Investigative Services Branch (PSISB) of the Ministry of the Solicitor General publishes annual licensing reports.⁵ Reports from 2021 onwards are available. Additionally, Ontario provides information to Statistics Canada.⁶ Data from 2015 to 2023 is available. There is an anomaly between these data sets that is discussed below.

Quebec. The Bureau de la Sécurité Privée (BSP) of the Ministère de la Sécurité Publique publishes annual licensing reports.⁷ The content of these reports has varied. Consistent data from 2015 onwards is available.

Figure 2 illustrates the trends in active licenses for these provinces. Also reported is the annual percentage change.

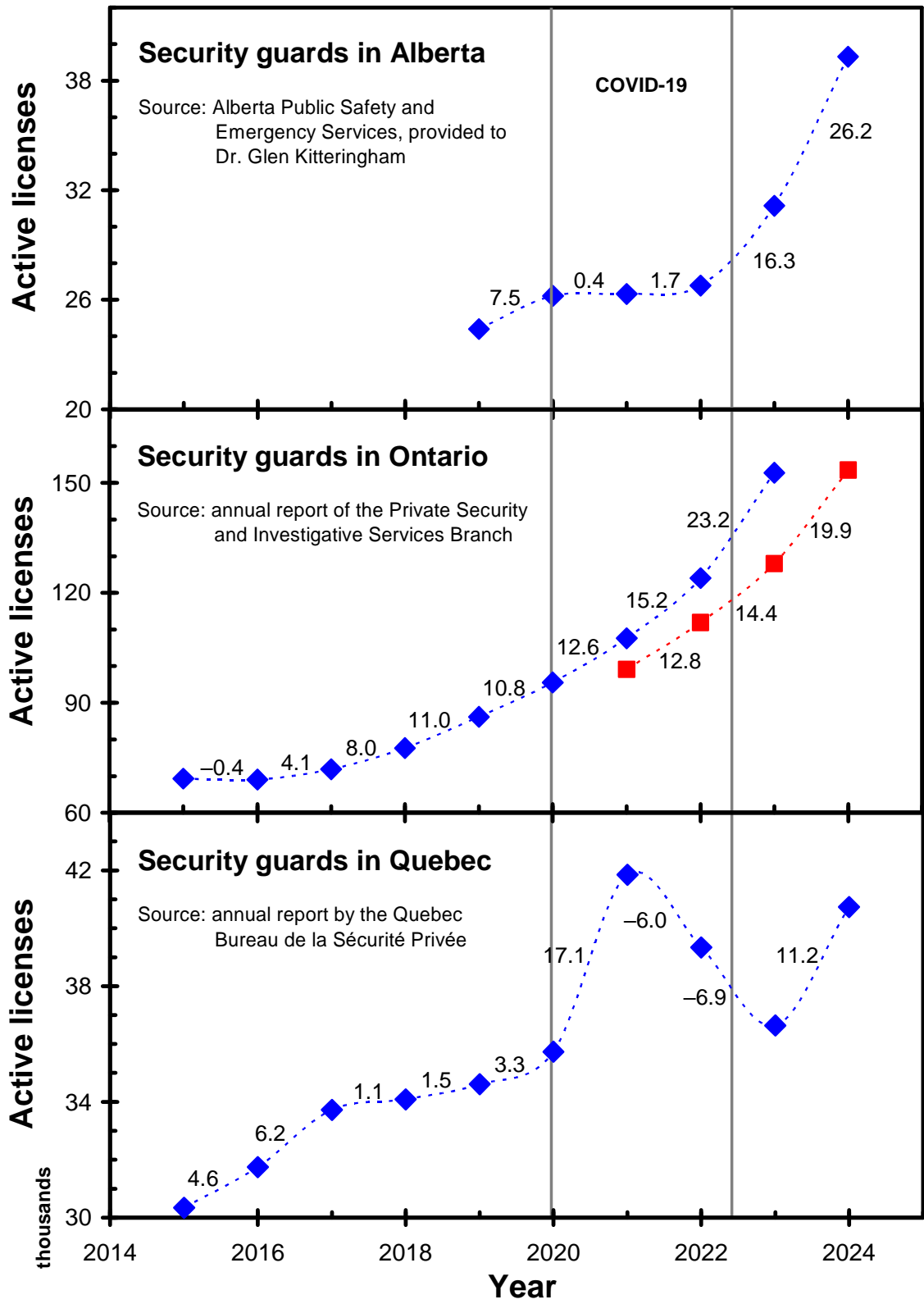


Figure 2. Historical active security guard licenses in Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec. The dashed lines only aid in visualization; they do not represent additional data.

Data collection

In June 2025, freedom of information (FOI) requests were submitted to the ten provinces and three territories in Canada (jurisdictions) requesting the number of:

1. active security guard licenses as of 31 December 2024 (or thereabouts)
2. new security guard licenses issued in 2024
3. security guard licenses renewed in 2024
4. active security guard companies as of 31 December 2024 (or thereabouts)

The FOI requests also asked that, if private investigators are licensed separate from security guards, to provide the same information for private investigators. Because of the diversity of the data received, this information was excluded from the present analysis. Additionally, some jurisdictions have a “dual” category for persons that hold both security and investigator licenses. Conversations with security representatives familiar with the dual category state that these individuals usually work as investigators. As such, this data was not included in the calculations. This decision minimally impacts the analyses because the number of people holding dual licenses was between 1 and 5 % of the number of people holding only security licenses.

Table 1 summarizes the results received.

Table 1. Provided data on security guard licensing, by jurisdiction in 2024				
jurisdiction	term /yr	active licenses	new	renewal
BC	1, 2, 3	37985	13729	
Alberta	2		14190	7549
Saskatchewan	1	4320	2965	1587
Manitoba	1	8992	3037	5878
Ontario*	2	153493	58728	38702
Quebec*	2	40736	13070	2912
New Brunswick	2	<no data received>		
Nova Scotia	1	4140	2435	2502
Prince Edward Island	1	484	204	206
Newfoundland & Labrador	2	<does not license security guards>		
Yukon	2	<no data received>		
Northwest Territories	2	<no data received>		
Nunavut		<does not license security guards>		

* Data is from March 2024, not December 2024.

Notable observations

Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan did not separate the number of new and renewed licenses by license category (security, private investigator, dual), but they did provide the totals in another table. The active, new, and renewed security guard licenses were determined as the fraction of total licenses. Permanent and temporary security licenses were included in calculations.

Manitoba. This data is for the “2024-2025 Fiscal year”. We set this data to be from 31 December 2024. Permanent and temporary security licenses were included in calculations.

Ontario. Ontario PSISB publishes the relevant information in their annual reports⁸ (red line) and provides data to Statistics Canada⁹ (blue line). There appears to be a one-year shift in the reported data. The Ontario government and Statistics Canada were contacted about this discrepancy, but have not yet responded. I assume the PSISB data is correct. This data is from March 2024, and adjusted below.

Quebec. Quebec publishes an annual report on the security industry.¹⁰ This data is from March 2024, and adjusted below.

Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut. The respective governments advise that they do not register their security guards.

New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Yukon. No data was received.

Analysis

Data consistency

In jurisdictions where a security guard license is valid for one year, the maximum number of active security licenses in a given year is the sum of the new and renewed licenses for that year.

In jurisdictions where a security guard license is valid for two years, the maximum number of active security licenses in a given year is the sum of the new and renewed licenses in the previous and current years. Licenses may be revoked or surrendered, reducing the number of active licenses. Quebec provides data on revoked and surrendered licenses. In 2024, 2.9 % of licenses were revoked or surrendered.¹¹ It is assumed that this is similar in all jurisdictions.

Alberta. As Alberta does not provide the number of active security guard licenses, it was calculated as the sum of the new and renewal licenses for the previous and current years.

Where multi-year data is not available, an estimate on the number of active licenses involves doubling the number of new and renewed licenses for that year. As Figure 2 shows that the number of active licenses is increasing, this approximation will over-estimate the number of active licenses by the increase from the previous to current year, which could be 20 % or higher.

For jurisdictions that provide the number of active licenses, new licenses, and renewed licenses, I conducted a consistency check on the data.

Manitoba. The license duration is one year. In the 2024-2025 fiscal year,

$$\text{reported active licenses} = 8992$$

$$\text{new licenses} + \text{renewed licenses} = 8916$$

There is less than 1 % difference between these values, indicating consistent data. It is surprising that there are more licenses than expected. No mechanism is known for there to be more active licenses than new plus renewed.

Ontario. The license duration is two years. Data is available for 2023 and 2024, allowing for an accurate calculation of the maximum number of active security licenses in 2024. This value is 180,316, 17 % higher than the actual value of 153,493. The only error is the number of revoked and surrendered licenses. The difference is significantly higher than expected, indicating inconsistent data.

Quebec. The license duration is two years. Data is available from 2016 to 2024, allowing for an accurate calculation of the maximum number of active security licenses in 2017 onwards. This data is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Active security guard licenses reported by Quebec					
year	active	new	renewed	calculated	error
2016	31748	6615	4334		
2017	33723	7787	7297	26033	-23%
2018	34086	6464	2407	23955	-30%
2019	34608	7443	1953	18267	-47%
2020	35736	7146	2011	18553	-48%
2021	41850	18415	4334	31906	-24%
2022	39340	14357	6258	43364	10%
2023	36639	9781	3171	33567	-8%
2024	40736	13070	2912	28934	-29%

In all years, except 2022, there are up to 48 % more licenses than expected. The number of reported and calculated licenses are visualized in Figure 3. The data is not consistent, but the reported active licenses data appears more reasonable.

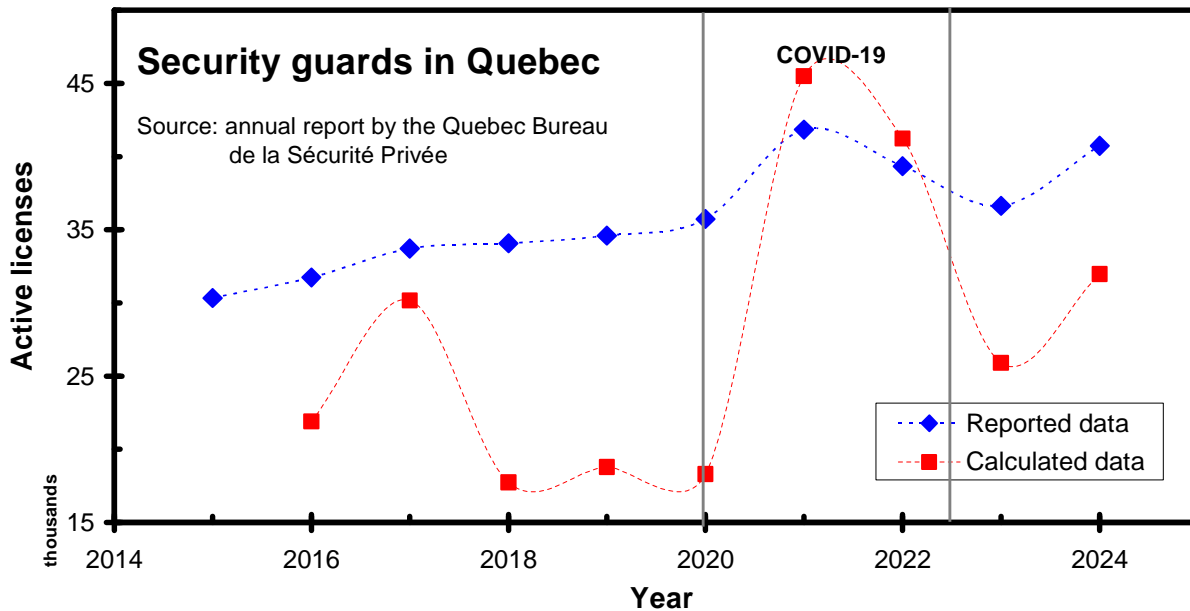


Figure 3. Active security guard licenses reported by Quebec, and calculated from Quebec’s reported number of new and renewed licenses. The dashed lines only aid in visualization.

Nova Scotia. The license duration is one year. In 2024,

$$\text{reported active licenses} = 4140$$

$$\text{new licenses} + \text{renewed licenses} = 4937$$

There are 19 % fewer active licenses that expected, indicating inconsistent data. This difference is unlikely to be explained by the number of revoked and surrendered licenses.

Prince Edward Island. The license duration is one year. In 2024,

$$\text{reported active licenses} = 484$$

$$\text{new licenses} + \text{renewed licenses} = 410$$

There are 15 % more active licenses that expected, which should not be possible, indicating inconsistent data.

Summary. Significant discrepancies exist in the data from all jurisdictions, except Manitoba. The jurisdictions were contact about the inconsistencies, but have yet to respond.

These inconsistencies introduce a significant uncertainty in calculations. Despite the inconsistencies, I use the jurisdictions' reported number of active security licenses.

Career duration

Two methods were used to estimate how long a person works as a security guard (career duration).

The first method is based on the Rate Replacement Method. This asks the question: how long does it take for new licenses to replace all the active licenses?

$$\text{career duration} = \frac{\text{active licenses}}{\text{new licenses}}$$

To account for growth in subsequent years, the number of active licenses must increase annually. This revises the career duration equation as follows. Figure 2 shows that security industry growth ranged from 11 to 26 % in 2024, depending on the jurisdiction.

$$\text{career duration} = \frac{\text{active licenses} \cdot \text{growth}^{\text{term}-1}}{\text{new licenses}}$$

The second method is based on the Law of Total Expectation.¹² The equations are given without proof.¹³ There is no correction for growth in this method.

$$\text{career duration} = \text{term} \cdot \left(1 + \frac{\text{renewed licenses}}{\text{new licenses}} \right)$$

Table 3 calculates the career duration from both methods. Because British Columbia offers license terms of one, two, and three years, the average of the different years' calculations is reported.

Industry size

The proportion of security guards in Canada can be used to estimate the number of licensed security guards in non-reporting jurisdictions. These values are included in Table 3.

The data now allows for the determination of the number of licensed security guards in Canada in 2024.

Recall that the data for Ontario and Quebec was for 31 March 2024, and the data from the remaining jurisdictions was from 31 December 2024. This provides two data points:

- Ontario and Quebec: 194,229 security licenses on 31 March
- other jurisdictions: 106,109 security licenses on 31 December

This data can be used to plot the number of active security licenses throughout 2024, for different annual growth rates. This is plotted in Figure 4 for 10, 15, 20, and 25 % growth rates.

Figure 4 shows a point of intersection in late June. This value is 300,338 licensed security guards, and is the sum of the “active license” column in Table 3. That this occurs in late June results from the relative number of active licenses across jurisdictions. It is reasonable to say that Canada transited 300,000 licensed security guards in late June 2024.

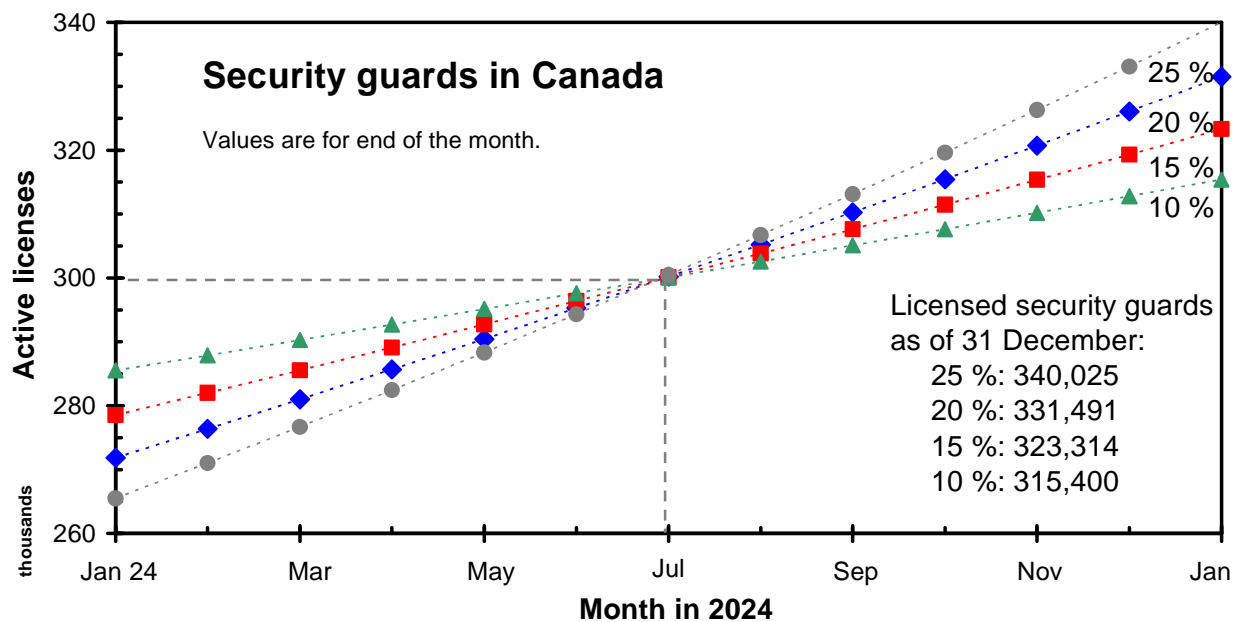


Figure 4. Active security guard licenses in 2024, assuming 10, 15, 20, and 25 % annual increases for Ontario and Quebec. The dashed lines only aid in visualization.

Lacking additional information, and cognizant of the uncertainties, calculation of the average and uncertainty of the different growth rates finds that there were $(328,000 \pm 10,000)$ licenced security guards on 31 December 2024, at the 90 % confidence level.

Career security guards

The average career duration of 2.6 years can be interpreted as many security guards lasting working for one license cycle (nominally 2 years), and a few security guards having a career in security. Assuming a long-term career is 20 years, we can calculate the number of short-term and long-term security guards as follows. This calculate is for 31 December 2024, where there were 328,000 licensed security guards.

$$\begin{aligned} & (x \text{ guards}) \cdot 20 \text{ yr} + ((328000 \pm 10000 - x) \text{ guards} \cdot 2 \text{ yr}) \\ & = (2.6 \pm 0.4) \text{ yr} \cdot (328000 \pm 10000) \text{ guards} \\ & \vdots \\ & x = (10900 \pm 7800) \text{ guards} \end{aligned}$$

The uncertainty nearly overwhelms the values. But it is reasonable to say that, of the over 300,000 private security guards in Canada, only about 11,000 people have a long-term career in the security industry. The assumptions mean that 11,000 is a low-end estimate of the number of career security guards.

Discussion

Jurisdictional data

The provided data showed varying degrees of internal consistency. The sum of the new and renewed licenses should be the maximum number of active licenses. A lower reported number of active licenses could be due to surrendered and revoked licenses. Barring massive wrongdoing, the number of surrendered and revoked licenses should be small compared with the total number of active licenses. That is, sum of new and renewed licenses should be close to the reported number of active licenses, with the sum of new and renewed licenses being greater.

This was only the case for Manitoba. Every other jurisdiction shows an 8 to 48 % deviation, and often with the number of actual licenses significantly higher than the sum of new and renewed licenses.

Career duration

The average career duration of security guards was calculated as (2.6 ± 0.4) years, at the 90 % confidence level. This aligns with anecdotal evidence of high turnover.

Except for Manitoba, the career duration in every jurisdiction is slightly larger than the license term. In practice, the observation is that the majority of security guards work one license term, while a few have a multidecade career in security. The high turnover has been attributed to several factors:¹⁶

- low wages

- stop-gap employment. Because the requirements are minimal, people work as security guards while they seek other employment, complete their studies, and/or wait for their professional credentials to be recognized in Canada.
- engagement expectation. The nature of the position requires direct engagement in potentially dangerous and litigious situations, which many people are not trained and not comfortable doing.
- workplace physical and psychological abuse. Abuse often comes from customers, employees, clients, and subjects.

No study was found that quantifies the contribution of these factors. A national exit-interview study would provide valuable information on the reasons people leave the security industry.

Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have an anomalously high number of new licenses, resulting in shorter career durations. Both jurisdictions are small, so would be affected by events that required an influx of security guards for a single event. Data for additional years is required to understand these anomalies.

The only jurisdiction where the career duration calculations differ substantially is Quebec. This is a result of the anomalously low renewal rate. Clarification by the province will assist in understanding this anomaly.

Career security guards

Sources in industry indicate that the demarcation of one-cycle security guards and career security guards is accurate. While the statistics result in high uncertainty, it is obvious that only around 3 % of security guards plan to have long-term careers in the security industry. The remaining 97 % work for up to one license cycle. The implications of this are profound. My earlier work finds that security guards feel unprepared after completing basic security training.

The nature of security work requires a personality and preparation for the challenging, dangerous, and litigious situations they are expected to engage in. Being unprepared cognitively and psychologically would be off-putting. The feeling of losing control during the situation, and the potential condemnation from other workers and managers would cause many to quit.

Another realization is that many people obtain employment in security, knowing it is a temporary position. Many immigrants take a security position while waiting for their credentials to clear in Canada. Post-secondary students find that security work is suitable to their academic schedules.

No matter the reason, high turnover means that there is a lack of experienced security guards, lack of mentors, and low-quality security services for the client.

Improved training would increase a security guard's knowledge and skills, increase their confidence, and possibly result in them remaining in security for longer.

Industry size

In late June 2024, the number of licensed security guards in Canada transited 300,000. These security guards were concentrated in the urban centers.

On 31 December 2024, there were $(328,000 \pm 10,000)$ licensed security guards in Canada.

For comparison, Statistics Canada reports that there were 71,472 police officers in 2023, and that the number is relatively constant year to year.¹⁷ There are 4.5 times more security guards working in Canada than police officers, and they are typically posted to locations where situations are likely. Security guards are often first on scene and expected to manage the situation, determine if emergency services are required, and ensure the safety and security of everyone until emergency services arrive.

The Canadian security industry employs 710 ± 140 per 100,000 urban residents, or (0.71 ± 0.14) % of the urban population, at the 90 % confidence level.

Professionalizing the security industry requires convincing more security guards to stay longer than one license cycle. Currently, only about 11,000 security guards have a long-term career in the security industry.

Conclusion

Assuming the assumptions were reasonable, the number of licensed security guards in Canada transited 300,000 in late June 2024. By 31 December 2024, there were $(328,000 \pm 10,000)$ licensed security guards in Canada, at the 90 % confidence level.

The average career duration of security guards is (2.6 ± 0.4) years, which means that only around 11,000 security guards have a long-term career in the security industry.

Security guards make up 710 ± 140 per 100,000 urban residents, or (0.71 ± 0.14) % of the urban population.

Future work

Conduct national exit-interview research to better understand turnover.

Work with jurisdictions to improve data consistency.

Explore strategies to retain security guards.

Repeat this study regularly to assess the impact of increasing responsibilities and professionalization.

Expand the survey to include private investigators and security agencies.

Conflict of interest disclosure

Dr. Roy Jensen is the Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Security Professionals, CA*SP. CA*SP's vision is to professionalize the security industry through advocacy and training.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Dr. Glen Kitteringham for providing the Alberta licensing data, directing my attention to relevant Statistics Canada resources, and his feedback on this article.

Reference

1. Jensen Roy; Trettwer, Laura. Review and revision of the Alberta Basic Security Training program. 2023. Unpublished. Part of this process was a review of the security guard training programs in Canadian jurisdictions and select countries around the world.
2. “Licensed security guard”, “active security guard license”, “active security license”, and “active license” are synonymous.
3. Li, Geoffrey. *Private Security and Public Policing*. Statistics Canada Juristat. 28 (10). December 2008.
4. Kitteringham, Glen. Personal communication. July 2025.
5. Private Security and Investigative Services Branch; Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General. *Private security and investigative services* (internet). July 2025. Reports are linked in Section 7. Available from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/private-security-and-investigative-services#section-6>
6. Government of Canada. *Security guard and private investigative services industry data [for Ontario]* (internet). July 2025. Available from <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/5a9cdaa5-c5f2-4756-b235-809475bd6d73>
7. Bureau de la Sécurité Privée; Quebec Ministère de la Sécurité Publique. *Annual reports* (internet). July 2025. Available from at <https://www.bspquebec.ca/en/29>
8. Private Security and Investigative Services Branch; Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General. *Private security and investigative services* (internet). July 2025. Reports are linked in Section 7. Available from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/private-security-and-investigative-services#section-6>
9. Government of Canada. *Security guard and private investigative services industry data [for Ontario]* (internet). July 2025. Available from <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/5a9cdaa5-c5f2-4756-b235-809475bd6d73>
10. Bureau de la Sécurité Privée; Quebec Ministère de la Sécurité Publique. *Annual reports* (internet). July 2025. Available from at <https://www.bspquebec.ca/en/29>
11. Bureau de la Sécurité Privée; Quebec Ministère de la Sécurité Publique. *Annual reports 2023 – 2024* (internet). July 2025. Available from at <https://www.bspquebec.ca/en/29>
12. Wikipedia. *Law of total expectation* (internet). August 2025. Available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_total_expectation
13. Jensen, Ryan. Personal communication. August 2025.

14. Statistics Canada. *Population estimates, quarterly* (internet). August 2025. Data for Q4, 2024. Available from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901>
15. Statistics Canada. *Proportion of the population living in rural areas, provinces and territories, 2006 and 2011* (internet). August 2025. Available from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-310-x/2011003/fig/fig3_2-3-eng.cfm
16. Jensen Roy; Trettwer, Laura. Review and revision of the Alberta Basic Security Training program. 2023. Unpublished. Part of this process was a survey and consultation with security guards, security employers, and clients.
17. Statistics Canada. *Police resources in Canada, 2023* (internet). August 2025. Available from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240326/dq240326a-eng.htm>