For Immediate Release

Canadians Favour Increased Power for Local Government
Federal Level of Government is Least Favoured in Canada, the US and Mexico

Ottawa, August 13, 2003 – A majority of Canadians (56%) believe the federal government has too much power and a plurality (45%) want local governments to have more influence, according to a new poll that examines attitudes to federalism in Canada, the United States and Mexico.

These are central findings from the Annual Publius Survey on Attitudes Toward Federalism. It reveals that a significant number of citizens in all three countries say it is the federal level of government, rather than provincial/state or local, that gives them least for their money. But the number of Canadians who hold this view, at 43%, is conspicuously higher than among Americans (30%) or Mexicans (35%).

In all three countries, the federal government is seen as the one with too much power. This view is shared by 65% of Mexicans, 56% of Canadians and 51% of Americans.

Cities seek a voice

In Canada, when asked which level of government needs more power today, 45% say their local government, compared with 32% for the provincial and 14% for the federal. The desire for increased power for local government is strongest in three of the country’s four major urban areas -- Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary-Edmonton (taken together). The fourth urban area, Montreal, is the exception. These four urban areas are home to half of Canada’s population.

In Toronto, 60% support increased power for their city government. Support for more power for local governments is almost as strong in Vancouver (56%) and the cities of Calgary and Edmonton (52%).

By contrast, a plurality of Montrealers (39%) believe the provincial government needs more power, while 29% say more power should go to local government.

“Big city mayors contend that they need greater political and financial clout within the federation and, by and large, these results suggest that a significant proportion of the
Canadian public agrees,” said Dr. Andrew Parkin, CRIC’s Co-Director, who oversaw the Canadian portion of the survey.

“The different view taken by Montrealers may reflect two factors: the traditional tendency of Quebecers to seek greater powers for their province; and the still contentious status of the ‘mega-city’ of Montreal to which a number of suburbs were amalgamated through provincial legislation.”

**The poll and methodology**

The poll is an annual assessment of public attitudes toward federalism in Canada, Mexico and the United States. It is co-sponsored by *Publius, the Journal of Federalism*, the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC), and the School of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Arlington.

CRIC is an independent and non-partisan organization that informs Canadians about the federation, its people, and its values. It is the research and communications program of The Canadian Unity Council (CUC) whose activities receive financial support from a number of sources, including the Government of Canada.

The poll was commissioned by the sponsoring organizations. It was conducted in Canada by Environics, in the United States by Tele-Nation, and in Mexico by Mund Americas.

Approximately 2000 adults aged eighteen and over were interviewed in Mexico and Canada, and 1000 in the United States, during March and April of 2003. Surveys of this size have a 95% probability of being accurate to within plus or minus 2.1% in the case of the Canadian and Mexican samples, and 3.1% in the case of the American sample.

**Provincial power**

Canadians who live in provinces without major urban centres are more likely to prefer a transfer of power to their provincial government. This view is held by 54% of respondents in Saskatchewan, 42% in Manitoba and 42% in Atlantic Canada.

Forty-four percent of Quebecers hold the same opinion.

Only 21% in Ontario and 22% in British Columbia want increased provincial powers.

Support for the provincial level of government is notably lower in BC than elsewhere, with 42% saying the province has too much power and only 12% saying they trust their provincial government the most to deliver important programs and services.

Support for the federal government is lowest in Saskatchewan and Alberta. People in these provinces are most likely to say that the federal government gives them the least for their money and is the least trusted level of government to deliver important programs
Trust in government

On the matter of which of the three levels of government is most trusted to deliver important programs and services, views in the three countries differed. Canadians were most likely to choose their respective provincial governments (25%), although a comparable number (23%) said that they did not trust any level of government. In Mexico, the federal government was the most frequently cited as the most trusted (27%), while in the US, local government came out on top (31%).

Twenty percent of Canadians said they trusted local government most to deliver important programs and services, and 18% said they trusted all three levels of government equally.

The highest level of trust in provincial governments to deliver important programs and services was in Quebec (39%) and in Alberta (36%).

The full poll, including graphics and regional breakdowns, is available on the CRIC website www.cric.ca.

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