Portraits of Canada 2004
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Portraits of Canada is an annual survey of public opinion in Canada conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC). It tracks the evolution of Canadians’ attitudes on a range of issues that reflect the well-being of the country and its citizens. This is the eighth Portraits survey in seven years.

Portraits of Canada 2004 contained a few surprises. For example, health care and improved intergovernmental relations remained among the highest priorities across the country. However, among the 11 possible priorities that respondents were asked to rank in order of importance, the environment emerged as number one, while improving the quality of life for Aboriginal Canadians was in second-last place.

The survey also revealed that more Canadians are showing greater confidence in their political leaders and feel that their governments are working together more effectively. On political leaders, 48% say they have confidence in them. This number has been rising steadily and is now at its highest point since 1985. And, for the first time since 1998, a small majority (55%) say that the federal and provincial/territorial governments are working well together. However, intergovernmental cooperation remains a high priority for Canadians. Clearly governments are not being let off the hook.

Regional discontent still is very much part of the Canadian reality, especially among residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan. In Quebec, constitutional issues are simmering. Support for sovereignty-partnership has increased during the past few years and is now at its highest level since 1996.

Attitudes to Canada-US relations reflect the distinction that Canadians make between what they consider joint concerns and values and what they see as distinct. For example, Portraits 2004 shows that Canadians are quite willing to work with Americans on many issues of joint security yet are divided on more controversial matters such as ballistic missile defence.

These and other issues are explored in the following pages. There readers will find not only findings and summaries from the survey, but also expert analysis of Portraits of Canada 2004.

METHODOLOGY

For Portraits of Canada 2004, the overall sample size of 3,202 is large enough to ensure that opinions in all regions of the country are accurately reflected, including those of Canada’s three Northern Territories. Results of surveys this size have a margin of error of plus or minus 1.7%, 19 times out of 20.

As in past years, two separate surveys were conducted, one in Quebec and one in the rest of Canada. Environics Research Group surveyed 2,202 Canadians in the nine provinces and three territories outside of Quebec between September 15 and October 4, 2004. CROP surveyed 1,000 persons in Quebec between September 16 and October 3, 2004.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As in previous years, the Portraits of Canada survey was developed and directed by a group of researchers that included, in addition to CRIC personnel, Amanda Parriag, co-director of this survey (Amanda Parriag and Associates), Donna Dasko (Environics Research Group), Claude Gauthier (CROP), and Maurice Pinard (Professor Emeritus, McGill University). CRIC thanks each of these individuals for their invaluable contributions to the survey and for the analysis and presentation of its results. Portraits of Canada has also benefitted from comments from public opinion specialists in the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Privy Council Office, from suggestions of researchers in other organizations who have worked with the data from previous editions of the survey, and from feedback from many citizens who have attended presentations of survey results in past years.

Gina Bishop
Co-director, Portraits of Canada 2004
• Most Canadians (55%) think that the federal and provincial/territorial governments are working well together, an increase of 13% from last year.

• Perceptions that the federal government is primarily to blame for federal-provincial conflict have declined since 2003 (from 19% to 13%).

• More than seven in ten Canadians (77%, up seven points from 2003) feel that both levels of government are usually to blame when there is intergovernmental conflict.

• Atlantic Canadians are least likely overall to say that they get the respect they deserve in Canada (30%, down from 37% in 2003).

• Ontarians (54%) followed by Quebecers (51%) are most likely to say that they have about their fair share of influence on national decisions. Residents of Nunavut (28%), Yukon (28%) and Newfoundland (15%) are least likely to hold this view.

MORE COOPERATION, FEWER SQUABBLES
By Gina Bishop

As Canadian decision-makers monitor the public pulse, the citizens polled are being asked what is important to them. Certain issues – such as health care and access to education and training – are almost predictable. However, some results, such as the high priority the public places on improved cooperation between federal and provincial/territorial governments, can be surprising (Figure 1).

The emphasis on intergovernmental cooperation flows logically from other important and consistent findings of CRIC public opinion research: Canadians want the country to run smoothly, and they expect governments to be responsive to their priorities and needs. The same surveys have also shown repeatedly that they are irritated by jurisdictional squabbles and, when such disputes arise, are unmoved by the arguments advanced by either side. In fact, when there is conflict, Canadians overwhelmingly place the blame equally on both levels of government. This is also true in parts of the country where loyalty to the provincial government might be expected to be high.

Could things be improving?

Portraits of Canada 2004 found that a small majority of Canadians now think that the federal and provincial/territorial governments are working well together. In fact, 55% are of this view – a 13-point increase over 2003 – and the first rise since 1998 in the proportion of Canadians who say that their governments are working well (Figure 2).

One reason attitudes have shifted may be that Canadians are noticing the increased number of First Ministers’ Meetings in the past year. According to the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, there were four such meetings in 2004 alone. In comparison, only two were held from 2000 to 2003.
Nevertheless, although there is a perception of improved intergovernmental cooperation, *Portraits of Canada 2004* shows that even more Canadians than last year say that increased cooperation between the federal and provincial/territorial governments should be a high priority for the new federal government (74%, up from 70% in 2003).

The desire for improved cooperation does not mean that Canadians do not have views on who should have jurisdiction over key matters. *Portraits of Canada 2004* clearly showed that Canadians believe the federal government should have jurisdiction over issues relating to immigration and the environment, whereas the provinces should have the final say over education and cities (Figure 3). Across Canada, however, there was no clear preference for one level of government over another when it came to health care and energy. Where health care is concerned, this suggests that the cooperative approach taken by the federal and provincial/territorial governments is exactly what Canadians want. Certainly, this is consistent with their oft-expressed desire for governments to work together efficiently on the issues of greatest importance to them.

However, the desire for cooperation should not be allowed to cloud the fact that there are very real divisions within the federation arising from a feeling in many regions of unequal treatment, a phenomenon that can result in conflicts about power, resources, and influence.

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1. Quebecers were more likely than other Canadians to prefer provincial control over a wider range of jurisdictions.
Regional discontent remains strong. This year’s survey results show that people in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan remain the most frustrated with their status in the federation (Figure 4). They are consistently among the most likely to say that their province has less than its fair share of influence in the country, and that it does not have the respect it deserves. Another manifestation of regional discontent is visible in Quebec where there is rising support for sovereignty-partnership. Meanwhile, a majority (57%) in other provinces believes that nothing will satisfy Quebec and that it will always keep asking for more. In fact, the number who hold this view is up nine percent from 2003 (Figure 5).

The increase may reflect the media attention given to the special provisions accorded Quebec during last fall’s First Ministers’ Meeting on health care. While a small majority of Canadians (52%) support having different agreements between provinces and the federal government, 45% favour identical agreements. But support for differently tailored agreements – or “asymmetrical federalism” – depends on whether they raise perceptions of bias or inequality.

Despite a sense that governments are working better together, there are no grounds for complacency. Canadians continue to make health care a top priority, and to view intergovernmental cooperation as a key issue. In other words, they continue to see plenty of room for improvement. Meanwhile, other pressing problems – such as regional alienation – remain an unhappy fact of life for the federation.

Still, that Canadians are noting improvements in areas such as intergovernmental cooperation, along with rising confidence in political leaders (48% – a level not reached since 1985) should be some encouragement for political decision-makers.

Gina Bishop is Acting Director of Research (CRIC) and was Co-Director of Portraits of Canada 2004.

2. Particularly because the survey fieldwork began on the same day that this First Ministers’ meeting concluded (September 16, 2004).
Part 2: Views on Leaders, and Democratic Reform

- A plurality of Canadians (48%, up six percentage points since 2002) say that they have a great deal or some confidence in their political leaders. However, political leaders are still ranked lowest when it comes to honesty and ethics. Only 23% of Canadians (up two points from 2002) give these leaders a high rating on these characteristics.

- Across the country, most people (60%) believe that campaign promises must be kept when a government is formed because it was elected on that basis while 38% think promises can be broken in some situations if circumstances warrant.

- Nine out of ten Canadians support increasing the number of women in elected office in order to achieve a well-functioning political system.

- Effecting significant changes to Canadian political institutions to make them much more open and democratic rallied new support, making it the fourth highest priority of Canadians for the new federal government (55% - up seven points from 2003).

- Canadians still prefer reform of the Senate (39%, up three points since 2003) to abolition (29%, unchanged from 2003 levels). One-quarter of Canadians (24%, down two points from 2003) would leave the Senate as it is.

SWIMMING AGAINST THE CURRENT
By Amanda Parriag

Since the 1960’s, lack of confidence and trust in politicians has increased worldwide. Over the decades, from Watergate to the recent election woes in Ukraine, public opinion surveys measuring public confidence and trust in political leaders have registered declines. In addition, results from Europe show that political parties remain the least trustworthy of a list of 15 institutions tested.3 Seventy-six percent say they tend not to trust political parties while 54% feel the same way about their national parliaments and 61% tend not to trust the government of their country.

When asked about the trust and confidence in federal and provincial governments to do a good job in carrying out their responsibilities, CRIC’s data suggests that Canadians hold opinions similar to those held worldwide. However, in Canada, when asked about confidence in political leaders, the trend since 1992 runs counter to global results with respondents indicating increasing confidence (Figure 6). This seems astonishing when Canadian political leaders are often subjected to harsh public criticism for their perceived missteps. The survey questions on this issue have usually referred to political leaders generally without specifying federal, provincial, municipal or even Canadian leaders in particular. Even so, these results and their potential implications for Canadians bear scrutiny. Could it be that Canada’s recent political history and emerging identity have affected our impressions of political leaders? Further, are leaders aware of the potential effect of these impressions on their political currency?

FIGURE 6 CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS (1983-2004)
A LOT / SOME CONFIDENCE OR A GREAT DEAL / SOME CONFIDENCE

2002-2004: Can you tell me if you have a great deal of confidence, some, not very much, or no confidence at all in each of the following: political leaders; religious leaders; business leaders.

1983-1995: Can you tell me if you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in the following persons or organizations: political leaders; religious leaders; business leaders.

(Source: Environics Focus Canada / Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen’s University.)

3. The Eurobarometer surveys EU15 residents on their perceptions of government and quality of life issues annually. These results are from 2004.
Until 1992, confidence in political leaders in Canada was declining overall. The 1993 defeat of a Progressive Conservative government, which had become unpopular, marked a public desire for change. The impression that things were changing was underscored by the efforts of Prime Minister Chrétien’s government to end deficit financing. In fact, Paul Martin, as Finance Minister, was able to get the deficit under control in record time, and the federal government has been recording surpluses ever since. Canada experienced a severe recession in 1990-92, but since the late 1990s, its economy has been booming. This year, it continues to grow and the dollar is stronger. Canada was the only G-7 country in 2004 to have recorded economic surpluses for three straight years.

Couple the burgeoning federal coffers with Canadians’ increasing perception that our country is a good place to live, and confidence in political leaders is further bolstered. Until 2001, Canadians trumpeted the fact that for seven straight years, we resided in the country that was ranked the best place to live according to the UN’s Human Development Index. In 2001, that ranking slipped to third place, but Canadians still continue to feel that their standard of living and quality of life have increased in the past 10 years. In fact, today, Canadians rate their quality of life higher than do citizens of any other nation. Add Canada’s opposition to involvement in the Iraq War to the mix and the increased confidence in our political leaders becomes even more understandable. It is no secret that most Canadians opposed military action without the sanction of the United Nations. Today, many Canadians remain convinced that we were correct not to enter this war.

However, political leaders should not place a disproportionate amount of importance on the findings from this year’s Portraits of Canada in which 48% of Canadians express a great deal or some confidence in their political leaders. Although this represents a significant increase from the nadir reached in 1992, when only 19% expressed confidence in their political leaders, Portraits found that 52% of Canadians still claim to have little or no confidence in their political decision-makers.

How can politicians build on the gains that they have made in recent years?

In Canada, Portraits 2004 shows a widespread desire among the public that campaign promises be kept and patronage avoided (Figure 7). This suggests a fundamental belief in the health of the Canadian political system and a conviction that politicians can do better.

Over and above confidence, Canadians make a clear distinction about the honesty and ethics of political leaders, rating them far behind religious and business leaders (Figure 8). This is in keeping with the global trend toward increasing disenchantment with politicians. Gallup International’s Voice of the People survey this year found that across all the countries surveyed, politicians are overwhelmingly seen as dishonest (63%), with too much power and responsibility (60%) and as behaving unethically (52%).

4. Gallup surveyed more than 60 countries this year.
While confidence has risen it could be increased substantially if there were demonstrable evidence of increased honesty and ethical behavior. For example, confidence rose 22 points among people in Newfoundland and Labrador between 2002 and 2004, the same period in which Premier Danny Williams, praised for his ethical behaviour, has run the province.\(^5\)

It appears that political leaders are moving on Canadians’ concerns by addressing democratic reform. In the past year and a half alone, there have been five provincial initiatives and one territorial initiative to review the first-past-the-post electoral system. Federally, Prime Minister Martin has made a point of publicly addressing the democratic deficit.

There is clearly an appetite for democratic reform among Canadians, but it is not total. *Portraits of Canada* found that a majority of Canadians indicate support for distributing seats proportionally, but at the same time, a corresponding majority favours strong majority government, which was the status quo for the two decades preceding the present Parliament (Figure 9).

Canadians recognize that this is a good country in which to live, and give some credit for their general satisfaction to those who have steered the country to prosperity. We are more confident in our leaders, but it is clear that confidence would rise considerably if they addressed such key issues as keeping campaign promises, reducing patronage and instituting palatable democratic reforms. Only then will a respectable majority demonstrate confidence in their leaders.

Amanda Parriag is Co-Director of CRIC’s *Portraits of Canada* 2004, and Principal Consultant for Amanda Parriag and Associates, a consulting company that focuses primarily on quantitative research in the social sciences and public opinion research sectors.

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FIGURE 8  HONESTY AND ETHICS OF LEADERS (2002-2004)

Generally, how would you rate the honesty and ethical standards of the following leaders these days? Would you give them a very high rating, a high rating, a low rating or a very low rating for honesty and ethical standards... Political leaders; religious leaders; business leaders [2002: Heads of major companies].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Political Leaders</th>
<th>Religious Leaders</th>
<th>Business Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 9  REFORMS TO POLITICAL SYSTEM

Please tell me if in order to achieve a well-functioning political system you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose each of the following changes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>100</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing women in elected office</td>
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<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allowing smaller parties to win representation in legislatures</td>
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<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distributing legislative seats proportionally</td>
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<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forming coalition governments when no party has a majority</td>
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<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring strong majority governments</td>
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<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing minorities in elected office</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding national referendums on moral issues such as abortion and gay marriage</td>
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<td>56</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. Based on a combination of news reports (on issues such as praise for his donation of his premier’s salary to charity) and anecdotal evidence.
Part 3: Fiscal Issues

- Canadians are even more supportive of the federal equalization program than in the past with majorities supporting it in every province. Nationally, 85% support the equalization program (up two percentage points from 2001) while 14% (down one percentage point from 2001) oppose it.
- Canadians are less likely than they were last year to say that governments lack the revenue needed to fulfill their responsibilities.
- Residents of Newfoundland and Labrador are the most likely to say that their provincial government has too little revenue (85%), while Albertans are the least likely to share this view (9%, down from 19% in 2003).
- Sixty-five percent of Canadians believe they are overtaxed for the services they receive from the federal government; 60% of Canadians say they are overtaxed for the services they receive from their provincial government, and half of Canadians think their municipal or local governments are overtaxing them.

A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN CANADA
By Joe Ruggeri

Portrait’s results are encouraging because they indicate that Canadians hold an optimistic view of the future, one firmly rooted in the fundamental values that have shaped this country throughout its history. Particularly heartening is the overwhelming support for equalization across the country (Figure 10).

Equalization is often viewed from the narrow perspective of total payments and incomprehensible formulas. It occasionally is vilified for allegedly interfering with provincial policy priorities and retarding economic development. Yet, equalization embodies the fundamental values cherished by Canadians – namely, a generous willingness to share, the advancement of human rights, and a commitment to equal opportunity for all. This commitment promotes social cohesion and strengthens democratic institutions. It seems that these values are so well entrenched in the hearts and minds of Canadians that they cannot be shaken by changes in the political landscape.

The survey also indicates that Canadians are aware of the fiscal imbalances that need redressing in order to strengthen the foundations of federalism. They recognize that the federal government has a stronger fiscal position than provincial or local governments. Almost eight of ten respondents believe that the federal government has sufficient revenues to fulfill its responsibilities. Sixty percent have the same view when it comes to provincial/territorial governments (Figure 11). The recent arrangements negotiated between the federal and provincial/territorial governments will help redress some of this imbalance. It is to be hoped that these arrangements have ushered in a new era of cooperation between the two orders of government, so they can work together as equal partners for the benefit of all Canadians.
We need constant reminding that the foundation of intergovernmental fiscal relations reflects the collective will of succeeding generations of Canadians to provide public funding for what I call “national programs” – namely, health care, education and social services. These programs are delivered by provincial governments in fulfilment of a constitutional responsibility, but are financed jointly with the federal government. They strengthen social cohesion, not just by allowing similar standards of health care and education across the country and providing a social safety net, but by enshrining a principle of wealth sharing in inter-governmental fiscal relations and a commitment by Canadians, through their governments, to the principle of equality of opportunity regardless of economic situation, place of birth or residence. We cherish our national programs. Periodically, we reaffirm their importance and value, not only because they remind us of our heritage and shared values, but also because, as Helliwell has pointed out, they contribute to our collective well-being by strengthening civic institutions and enhancing social cohesion.6

Canadians believe that they are overtaxed. This view is held more frequently with respect to the federal government than to provincial or local governments (Figure 12). This response is consistent with the one on fiscal resources; if governments have more than enough money to meet their spending responsibilities, they must be imposing unnecessarily high tax burdens. The implication that Canadians believe that they do not a receive a dollar’s worth of benefits from a dollar of taxes may be a response to the deterioration of public service standards during the period of fiscal restraint. It also may indicate that they do not attach much value to the current policy of using their tax dollars to pay down the debt. In the latter case, their views would be a realistic reflection of the intergenerational implications of the current fiscal structure in Canada.

Rather than being selfish, or uncaring about the well-being of their children and grandchildren, they may have recognized that a fiscal system which is projected to generate surpluses over time for all governments combined will be able to provide future generations with current standards of public services and lower tax burdens. Why should the current generation bear higher tax burdens in order to help future generations enjoy even lower tax burdens?

Canadians’ optimism about their country’s future is well founded. It rests on the solid pillars of strong economic and fiscal performances. Canada holds an enviable position as the only large industrialized country with a balanced budget and the realistic expectation of maintaining this fiscal position in the foreseeable future. In my view, this advantage can be used to further strengthen Canada’s future prospects. It could be done through a domestic policy strategy that rests on four fundamental pillars: maintaining a sustainable fiscal structure by letting the debt-to-GDP ratio fall with economic growth without the need for debt repayment; developing more effective institutions and practices of cooperative federalism; enhancing the mechanisms and forces of social cohesion; and strengthening the foundations of balanced and sustainable development.

In a world where internal strife in many countries prevents economic development, where intolerance destroys the lives of millions, where industrialized countries are unable to contain their budget deficits, and where the unbridled operation of a market system corrupted by imperfections is polarizing both countries and socio-economic groups, Canada can serve as a beacon, showing how governments can help improve the human condition while promoting balanced growth.

Dr. Joe Ruggeri is Vaughn Chair in Regional Economics and Director of the Policy Studies Centre at the University of New Brunswick. He is the author of several books and numerous papers on public finance, taxation, inter-governmental affairs, and human capital.
• Improving the quality of life for Aboriginal people is second-last on a list of 11 items that Canadians were asked to rate as a priority for the federal government.

• Almost one in two Canadians (49%) say that the situation of Aboriginal Canadians is about the same or better than that of other Canadians. Forty-four percent say it is worse.

• Only 19% of survey respondents say that relations between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians are deteriorating, the lowest proportion holding this view since 1999.

• Forty percent believe that Aboriginal people should have some type of preferential access to hunting and fishing grounds in areas where they have traditionally lived; 58% believe governments should treat everyone the same on this issue.

EXPLORING CANADIANS’ VIEWS ON ABORIGINAL ISSUES
By F. Leslie Seidle

In this year’s Portraits of Canada survey, “improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people” was among the issues that respondents were asked to rank as a priority (high, medium or low) for the federal government. Twenty-nine percent rate it as a high priority item – the same percentage who want more military spending. The only item receiving less support as a high priority is giving more money to the country’s big cities (18%). The highest-rated items are protecting the environment, spending more money on health care and increasing cooperation between the federal and provincial governments (Figure 1).

Residents of the three northern territories are most likely to say that improving the quality of life for Aboriginal people should be a high priority for the new federal government (43%). However, even in this region, it places only seventh among 11 possible choices offered in the survey. Quebecers are the least likely (22%) to say that this issue should be a high priority (Figure 13).

Low-income earners are most inclined to say improving the quality of life for Aboriginal Canadians is a high priority. Among those whose annual household income is under $20,000 before taxes and deductions, 38% say this issue should be a high priority for the federal government. The figure drops to 17% among those with a household income of $80,000 or more.

Younger Canadians are least likely to rate improving the quality of life of Aboriginal Canadians as a high priority. Among those aged 18-34, 22% take the view that this should be a high priority, compared to 29% for the 35-44 age group and 35% for those aged 55-64 (Figure 14).

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The low priority so many Canadians attach to improving the Aboriginal quality of life is disappointing. Moreover, the rating of the 18-34 age group is somewhat surprising. Other survey research suggests that younger Canadians are more supportive of diversity than those in other age groups. For example, in the 2003 CRIC-Globe and Mail “New Canada” survey, Canadians aged 18-30 were more likely than their older counterparts to give supportive responses to a range of questions on ethnic diversity (see Andrew Parkin and Matthew Mendelsohn, “A New Canada: An Identity Shaped by Diversity,” CRIC paper 11, October 2003, pp. 2-3).

But perhaps the low rating given to improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people should not be directly linked to attitudes about diversity. Rather, Canadians’ ratings of this issue may reflect a lack of information about the situation of Aboriginal people.

Based on various socio-economic indicators, the vast majority of Aboriginal people fare poorly compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians. For example:

- According to the 2001 census, 48% of non-reserve Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 had not completed secondary education, compared to 26% for the total Canadian non-reserve population.
- In Statistics Canada’s 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey 45% of the Aboriginal population aged 15 and older reported having one or more chronic health conditions (a condition that has been diagnosed by a health-care professional and had lasted, or was expected to last, at least six months).
- Research by Kevin Lee showed that in 1995, 56% of Aboriginal people in cities were living in poverty, compared to 24% for non-Aboriginal people (Urban Poverty in Canada: A Statistical Profile, Canadian Council for Social Development, 2000).

These findings should not obscure the progress in some areas. For example, the proportion of non-reserve Aboriginal people aged 20-24 who had not completed secondary education dropped four percentage points between 1996 (when it was 52%) and 2001. That said, it is difficult to think that most Canadians, if they were more aware of data such as those presented here, would remain indifferent.

Nor should we ignore the fact that governments are taking action and developing new measures, particularly in key areas such as education and health. The Martin government’s first Speech from the Throne (February 2, 2004) stated that “the conditions in far too many Aboriginal communities can only be described as shameful” – strong words for such a parliamentary statement. The government indicated (among other objectives) that it would focus on education and skills development and work with provinces and territories and Aboriginal partners in a renewed Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy.

Expectations about progress in this area were raised further by the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable the federal government sponsored on April 19, 2004. Some 70 national Aboriginal leaders, experts and practitioners from 20 Aboriginal organizations attended, along with several ministers and Members of Parliament. In his opening remarks, Prime Minister Martin stated: “Let it be that, ten years from now, people will look back on this … roundtable as an event that marked a truly new beginning for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.” Although the roundtable did not arrive at specific recommendations, it identified key issues in the areas of economic development, education health and housing.
As with so many policy fields, making real progress on education and skills development will require a multi-partner approach. The same is true for health. At the First Ministers’ meeting of September 13-15, 2004, which included Aboriginal leaders, the federal government undertook to provide $700 million for: an Aboriginal Health Transition Fund to better adapt existing health care services to Aboriginal needs; an initiative to encourage greater Aboriginal participation in the health professions; and programs for health promotion and disease and suicide prevention.

Since the First Ministers’ meeting, Aboriginal issues seem to have had a somewhat lower profile for the federal government. The Speech from the Throne of October 5, 2004 referred to the September agreement, but was short on other specific measures. However, Prime Minister Martin has said on several occasions that Aboriginal issues are among the government’s half dozen or so priority areas. While there are no “quick fixes” in this area, federal leadership is clearly needed – both to refine the agenda and to advance collaborative initiatives with provincial (and sometimes municipal) governments and Aboriginal leaders. Such leadership, and concrete results, could in turn encourage more Canadians to view improving the quality of life for Aboriginal people as a higher priority.

Turning to other questions about Aboriginal issues in the 2004 Portraits of Canada survey, there is some evidence, however modest, of a positive shift in the attitudes of Canadians. Asked whether relations between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians are improving, deteriorating, or staying about the same, only 19% say that relations are deteriorating. This is down one point from 2003 and is the lowest proportion holding this view since 1999 (Figure 15).

Canadians in the North and in Atlantic Canada (13% in both cases) are the least likely to say that relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians are deteriorating. In Atlantic Canada, this figure is down significantly from 22% in 2003. The only region where respondents see increasing difficulties is Quebec where 24% say that relations are deteriorating, up from 19% last year. Canadians aged 18-44 are less likely to say that relations are improving (20%) than are Canadians over the age of 45 (27%).

In this year’s Portraits of Canada survey, Canadians were again asked whether they believe that Aboriginal people should have some type of preferential access to hunting and fishing grounds in areas where they have traditionally lived. This year, 40% are in favour of some type of preferential access, up from 35% in 2003. A clear majority (58%, down from 63% in 2003) believe that governments should treat everyone the same in this regard.
Support for treating everyone the same way when it comes to hunting and fishing access is highest in Atlantic Canada (73%), followed closely by Saskatchewan (71%), and is lowest in Nunavut (38%) and the Northwest Territories (45%) (Figure 16).

Younger Canadians are least supportive of giving Aboriginal Canadians preferential access to hunting and fishing – 36% of those aged 18-34 agree with preferential access, compared to 44% of Canadians aged 35-44 and 42% of those aged 45-54. Canadians with some university education or a university degree are much more likely than Canadians with less than a high school diploma to support this option – 48% and 28% respectively.

The results for the questions on Aboriginal issues in the Portraits of Canada 2004 survey suggest that further information and education are required – particularly among younger Canadians. Civic education programs in schools should be enriched so that students have the opportunity to understand both the historic role of Canada’s Aboriginal people and the place they should occupy in the country’s labour market, and its cultural and public life.

CRIC will continue striving to broaden public understanding of Aboriginal issues and to encourage dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians (see “Facing the Future: Relations Between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Canadians,” CRIC paper 14, June 2004). It is to be hoped that other organizations, along with researchers and opinion leaders, will add their voices and energy to a sustained national collaborative effort to broaden opportunities for Aboriginal people.

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Voting intentions in support of a sovereign Quebec in a partnership with Canada have risen to 49% (with the undecided redistributed on a pro rata basis) - their highest level since Portraits of Canada began tracking the issue in 1998.

When those who voted YES in 1995 are asked if they have become more or less sovereignist, 65% say that their views are unchanged, while 23% say they are now less sovereignist, and 12% say they are now more sovereignist.

The proportion of Canadians who say that they have become more hard-line toward Quebec has been cut by half since 1998, from 52% to 25%.

THE EVOLUTION OF SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHOICES IN QUEBEC
By Maurice Pinard

In the past three years, there has been a significant shift in popular support for the various constitutional choices in Quebec. From the early 1990s to the beginning of this decade, support for sovereignty-association was in decline. After peaking at two-thirds support following the failure of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990, the option, re-branded "sovereignty-partnership" in 1995, only managed to stand at a support level of 53% among Quebecers on the eve of that year's referendum.

In the referendum aftermath, pro-sovereignty support continued to dwindle. By 2001, only 40% of Quebecers said they would vote YES if a new referendum were called on that option (Figure 17).

But since 2002, the constitutional tide in Quebec has turned. Sovereignty support has risen considerably in the past three years, reaching 47% in 2004, its highest level since 1997. What is behind this sudden turnaround?

Figure 17: Support for Sovereignty-Partnership for Quebec, 1988-2004

From 1988 to 1995 the results are from different firms, with variations in question formulations, but always involving vote intentions on sovereignty with an economic association/partnership. From 1996 to 2004, all polls are from CROP, with the same question: If a referendum were held today on the same question as that asked in 1995, that is, sovereignty with an offer of partnership with the rest of Canada, would you vote YES or would you vote NO?

Flagging support in the 1990s

Three factors seem to be key to explaining the decline between 1990 and 1995. First, the high level of support sovereignty enjoyed in 1990 was the direct result of grievances sparked by the failure of the Meech Lake Accord. Thus, unlike the effects of more long-standing grievances, such as the feelings that Quebecers were not given due recognition by the rest of Canada, the repercussions of this isolated event could only have a limited life-span.

Second, while frustration over the failure of Meech initially led many to downplay apprehension about the economic costs of independence, these concerns quickly resurfaced as anger over Meech began to dissipate. In addition, the proportion of those expecting gains decreased to the advantage of those expecting no change in the economic situation. All of this caused a drop in sovereignty support.
And third, although the Quebec Liberal Party, in reaction to the failure of Meech, briefly flirted with the idea of sovereignty, from 1991 on it gradually returned to its more traditionally federalist position, bringing many of its supporters back with it. Thus, unlike 1980, the 1995 referendum was held against a backdrop of flagging support for sovereignty.

The decline, to which there were a number of contributing factors, continued after the referendum until 2001.

While French-speaking Quebecers’ historical grievances were still at a high level, these grievances seemed, as indicated by polls, to exert less of a rallying impact on the population.

And, although the YES camp’s second defeat in the 1995 referendum was hardly decisive, it was enough to make sovereignists less optimistic about the future of their option. This created a certain apathy among both the movement’s leadership and its rank-and-file with each groups’ attitudes having a negative impact on the other. A waning nationalistic zeal, widespread public objections to another referendum, and the desire of movement supporters to turn to more pressing concerns sparked reduced militancy among leaders – reducing optimism among sovereignty supporters even further.

It is also important to add that Quebecers’ sense of attachment to Canada, though still relatively high, fell to its lowest level in the early 1990s, with only about 60% of Quebecers claiming a deep attachment to Canada. Subsequently, that percentage increased substantially, climbing to 79% in 2001, the highest level recorded since this was first measured in 1980. Inevitably this worked against sovereignist support.

Lastly, the belief that Quebec would benefit economically from independence continued to decline until 2001.

**The Resurgence of Sovereignty-Partnership Support**

That year, the trend reversed and support for sovereignty-partnership began to climb. In fact, its leap was quick and substantial, moving from 40% in 2001 to 47% in November 2004. What explains this?

First, it is interesting to note that a similar resurgence occurred in the late 1980s, almost a decade after the defeat of sovereignist forces in the 1980 referendum. Again, nearly 10 years after the 1995 referendum, history appears to be repeating itself. Could it be that the discouragement and uncertainty many voters feel in the wake of a failed referendum actually lessen with time and give way to a more optimistic view of the option? It seems almost as if post-referendum fatigue has a finite shelf life among some sovereignty supporters.

The emergence of their newfound optimism also was greatly facilitated by major political developments. First, the PQ traditionally has a harder time rallying support for sovereignty when it is in power. This tendency becomes more pronounced during a second term in office, a time when satisfaction with the party tends to be even lower. At best, support for independence tends to level off under such circumstances; at worst, if public dissatisfaction with the government is especially high, that support falls. This phenomenon also explains the decline in sovereignty support between 1998 and 2001, when the Parti Québécois government was in its second term – a time when it often faced public dissatisfaction. That led to declining support for both the party and its option.

Oddly enough, sovereignty support is most likely to climb when the Quebec Liberal Party is in power and voters are generally dissatisfied with its performance in government. At such times, the absence of any immediate referendum threat, coupled with the Liberal government’s low level of popularity, leads many Quebecers to embrace the Parti Québécois and its option. And, without the burden of government, the Parti Québécois is free to devote greater energy and resources to building support for sovereignty.
This is precisely what has happened since the Liberal Party’s election in April 2003. As long as public support for the new government remained high, as it did for the remainder of that maiden year, YES support grew, but did not go beyond 44%. But as the level of dissatisfaction with the government mounted in 2004, YES support climbed to 47%.

Obviously, while it is difficult to tell at this point whether the trend will continue or level off, the latter seems the more likely scenario. It is also hard to predict the potential impact of a return to power by the Parti Québécois. Would the level of support for sovereignty hold steady or begin to fall off, as it has in the past under similar circumstances?

The Age Factor

Traditionally, younger voters have been more likely than their older counterparts to support sovereignty. But certain events, like the failure of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990, caused the gap to narrow between the generations (Figure 18). The sheer scope of public reaction to the failure of Meech, for example, caused distinctions in sovereignty support related to age, educational level and profession to blur temporarily. In particular, support for sovereignty-association rose among all age groups, closing the gap considerably younger and older voters.

But by the 1995 referendum, the traditional age disparity between the youngest and the oldest YES supporters was back as strong as ever. By then, however, middle-aged Quebecers were almost as likely as the younger generation to support sovereignty, as Figure 18 illustrates. Only those in the higher age group remained staunchly opposed to it.

In fact, since the 1980 referendum there has been a steady narrowing of the gap between the two younger age groups. The obvious reason: the aging of once young sovereignists who have remained committed. Since 1995, the gap has also been shrinking between the oldest cohort and the two younger groups. Again, this reflects the fact that the older group now includes an increasing number of early-day supporters of the sovereignty movement from 30-40 years ago. To put it another way, older people today are more likely to support sovereignty than they were in 1995, while those in the two other age groups are less likely. Therefore, recent gains in YES support are more attributable to the choices of older Quebecers then to the enthusiasm of the young.
The Other Variations of the Sovereignty Option

Another important phenomenon is that softer variations on the sovereignty model have always garnered more support among Quebec voters than the more hard-line versions. This is not changing. For example, Quebecers are far more likely to support sovereignty coupled with some form of partnership with Canada than out-and-out independence. Moreover, favourable attitudes towards one option or the other have always been higher than actual voting intentions for these options. These differences may even be quite significant, as Figure 19 shows.

The findings of this year’s CRIC survey reveal that while 54% of Quebecers say they favour sovereignty-partnership, only 46% would be prepared to vote YES to the option were a referendum held "today".

And while favourable views toward Quebec independence remain, at 44%, lower than those towards sovereignty-partnership, here again there is a large discrepancy between such views and voting intentions. Less than a third of voters say they actually would vote YES to independence, particularly when defined as complete independence, implying no association. This is virtually the same percentage of Quebecers who say they would vote NO to Quebec remaining a province of Canada (31%). The more a version of the sovereignty option emphasizes secession, the less support it attracts.

Not surprisingly, 93% of those who would vote NO to sovereignty-partnership would vote for Quebec to remain in Canada. What is more surprising is that 34% of those who would vote Yes to sovereignty-partnership would also vote in favour of Quebec remaining a province of Canada. If a third of pro-sovereignty voters would choose to remain within Canada, this suggests that there is still a lot of confusion and many sovereignty supporters believe Quebec would remain a province of Canada after a referendum YES victory.

As Figure 19 shows, the resurgence in sovereignty-partnership support since 2001 has been accompanied by a similar resurgence in support for different versions of sovereignty, equal to about 10 percentage points in each case.

Federalists, Sovereignists and Those Who Reject Either Label

While most members of Quebec’s political elite, whether in Ottawa or Quebec City, seem quite comfortable being labelled either federalist or sovereignist, the same cannot be said of most Quebecers. Indeed, a clear majority refuse either label. When asked by Portraits 2004 if they consider themselves to be mainly a federalist, mainly a sovereignist, someone who is in between the two, or neither one nor the other, only 22% of Quebecers see themselves mainly as federalists and 20% as sovereignists. A majority of respondents, 55%, refuse either label, with 29% claiming to be somewhere between the two options and 26% to be neither. These findings were identical to those in Portraits 2002, the last time the question was asked.
Age seems to be the only socio-demographic indicator with a notable impact on these attitudes. Younger Quebecers were more likely to reject either label, those in the middle age group were inclined to say that they considered themselves to be between the two while older Quebecers were more inclined to define themselves mainly as federalists.

These results in no way suggest that those Quebecers who reject both labels would not vote were there to be another sovereignty referendum. In fact, they are about half and half for the YES and NO camps. But if instead of their vote intentions, they are asked whether they strongly or somewhat favour or oppose sovereignty-partnership, nearly two-thirds say they are only somewhat in favour of or opposed to sovereignty-partnership. But among those who declare themselves either federalist or sovereignist, more than half are strongly favourable or opposed to their choice. Thus, voters who reject either label are soft YES or NO supporters.

Finally, we find that a large majority (70%) of those Quebecers who support the Action Démocratique (ADQ) reject either label, while the same is true of only 44% of Liberal and 51% of PQ supporters. The ADQ’s recent adoption of an autonomist constitutional platform will likely benefit this party among “unlabeled” voters.

In summary, pro-sovereignty support has risen steadily over the past three years. While undoubtedly due in large part to the Parti Québécois’ move to opposition and to mounting dissatisfaction with the ruling Liberal Government, this shift may also be the result of a more lasting trend. A gradual shrinking over the past quarter-century of the generation gap that has traditionally characterized sovereignty support was also noted.

Yet, major distinctions remain among the levels of support for the various versions of the sovereignty option. Whereas sovereignty-partnership accounts for about half of voting intentions in Quebec, complete independence only garners support among about a third of the electorate. Moreover, on constitutional change, the general public is far less polarized than Quebec’s political elite. In fact, the majority of Quebecers reject both federalist and sovereignist labels and are far less staunch in their support of either option than those who declare themselves either federalist or sovereignist.

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**Part 6: Canada-US Relations**

- A strong majority of Canadians (71%) say they have more in common with other Canadians than they do with people in nearby American states.
- Where relations with the United States are concerned, a plurality of Canadians (41%) want to maintain the same level of relations as now, up two percentage points from last year.
- However, the number of those who would like closer ties has dropped 10 points since last year, from 44% to 34% while the number who seek more distant ties has risen nine percentage points from 15% in 2003 to 24% this year.
- A slim majority of Canadians (52%) oppose Canadian involvement in the United States’ proposed missile defence system, while 55% say that participating in the system is not an important international objective for the country.
- 62% of Canadians believe a common border security policy is a good idea because it will increase the security of both countries (up slightly from 59% in 2003).

**Canadians’ Views on Canadian Security and American Ties**

By Don Munton

Canada-United States relations focus mainly on issues although officials and the media pretend they are also, if not mainly, about personalities. Presidents and prime ministers come and go, but the issues persist.

Paul Martin may not thank his stars for George Bush’s re-election. But he should, since he does not have the problem that John Diefenbaker faced in the early 1960s. He had as a continental partner an American President who was highly popular among Canadians – someone who, in fact, was more popular than the Canadian Prime Minister was in his own land. Canada’s current Prime Minister can at least rest assured that most Canadians would not have voted for George W. Bush.

Nor does Mr. Martin have to worry about the Soviet threat imposing itself on Canadian choices, as it did during the Cold War.

However, little more than a decade after the country briefly pondered the so-called “peace dividend”, old issues that haunted previous prime ministers are back, albeit in a different form. Mr. Martin is confronting difficult choices over continental defence and security issues. And he must face another American President who has something to ask of Canada.

*Portraits of Canada 2004* revealed that more Canadians than in 2003 believed Canada ought to have “more distant ties” to the United States (Figure 20). Hold it – more distant ties? The question posed here and the responses provided may represent something of a contradiction in terms. Ties are ties, and Canadians well understand that we are tied, closely, to the United States. To some respondents, therefore, it may not have been clear how one can have more or less distant “ties.” But we need to assume that Canadian good sense was able to cut through the phraseology. So, why do more Canadians prefer more distance in 2004 (24%) than did so in 2003 (15%)?
It is undoubtedly not a wave of anti-Americanism in Canada – as conjured by at least one national columnist with an ideological axe to grind. Nor is it simply the character and style of the American President himself, though many Canadians find the self-satisfied smirk and stagy strut annoying. It is much more the tenor and substance of the policies Mr. Bush has pursued, particularly the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq, but also ballistic missile defence.

Contra Mr. Bush, the real lesson of 9/11 was not that terrorism can strike the North American continent. Experts and public alike have recognized that for a decade or two. As far back as the 1980s, polls showed that the Canadian public viewed terrorism as a significant threat to Canada.

Rather, the lessons of 9/11 were threefold. They showed: the major threats to Canada and other western countries were non-state in origin; non-national in their targets; and non-conventional in their means. Assaults by enemy states, if they ever were much of a threat for Canada, are now less likely than attacks by non-territorial groups and organizations. Armed aggression against Canadian territory or the Canadian state is much less likely than attacks against groups of Canadians who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Ballistic missiles carrying nuclear weapons are a much less likely means of attack than unconventional weapons, such as hijacked airliners or suitcase-sized dirty bombs.

It is not difficult to see where the lessons of 9/11 take us in one respect. Not surprisingly, Portraits showed that Canadians support a common border security policy by a two to one margin, even though it “will give the United States some say” in our affairs (Figure 21).

But the lessons of 9/11 do not lead us in another direction: that of ballistic missile defence (BMD). Canadians are divided on whether this country ought to participate in the missile shield that Mr. Bush champions and that is approaching operational deployment (Figure 22).
What BMD has going for it is the obvious benefit of a defensive system that may protect the lives of Americans from a missile attack. It will be expensive, but surely, the proponents say, the lives of innocent people are worth protecting.

Many Canadians, however, clearly are not convinced. Why? For some, BMD is the wrong emphasis in the aftermath of 9/11 because it would throw a lot of money at a now unlikely threat. But it is, after all, the Americans’ money to waste.

Enter the Canadian connection: Canada-United States cooperation on BMD is yet another tie to the US, but a major one that could have a significant impact in a variety of ways, and not merely by draining away resources from more likely threats, such as terrorism.

For some Canadians, a close relationship with the United States runs against a fundamental element of the country’s identity – Canada’s internationalist traditions. A foreign policy independent of the United States, or at least one as independent as possible, is a basic element of that internationalism. We can do little about trade and other ties, those Canadians would say, but we do not have to follow every American crusade, whether it is ousting Saddam or pursuing the chimera of a missile shield.

Clear evidence of that internationalist strain in Canadian public opinion is to be found in *Portraits 2004*. Respondents were asked to rate the importance for Canada of six international objectives or commitments: United Nations peacekeeping; reducing the spread of AIDS in Africa; participating in NATO; in the war against terrorism; in NORAD; and taking part in the US missile defence system (Figure 23). More than four in every five (over 80%) judged United Nations peacekeeping, reducing AIDS in Africa and participating in NATO to be very or somewhat important. Fewer, but still a solid majority, regarded participating in the war on terrorism and NORAD to be very or somewhat important. Only missile defence was not similarly rated by a majority. Barely 40% said it was very or somewhat important. Notice, however, that the international commitments that tie us into the United States are the least popular.

Canadian public enthusiasm for most internationalist policies has been high since at least the turn of the century and clearly continues today. This support for an active international involvement extends across Canada and, on most measures, does not vary greatly from one province or region to another. At the same time, the support is not undiscriminating, as shown by the lower level of enthusiasm for Canadian participation in missile defence or, for example, the war in Iraq.
Part 6: Canada-US Relations

Public opposition notwithstanding, Ottawa is clearly edging ever closer to accepting the incorporation of BMD into the joint NORAD structure. Mr. Martin and Defence Minister Bill Graham are hoping to avoid Mr. Diefenbaker’s ultimately fatal path in the early 1960s on the Bomarc defensive missile and other US nuclear weapons. The script they are following is the one Pierre Trudeau used as he very carefully approached another security decision in the 1980s — allowing American cruise missiles tests over northern Canada.

This is the inevitable kind of choice that security issues and our security ties to the United States impose — no matter what Canadians think.

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