Portraits of Canada 2001
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The latest *Portraits of Canada* offers a clear picture of what unites Canadians, and what divides them.

This annual tracking poll reveals broad areas of agreement among Canadians on a wide variety of subjects that were in the news during the past year.

It pinpoints established or emerging consensuses on:

- support for a common Canada-US currency
- rejection of a continental energy policy
- the need to protect Canadian sovereignty in the face of globalization
- support for equalization
- up to a certain point, the best means to preserve the healthcare system
- support for official bilingualism and the importance of learning both official languages
- the best means to improve the workings of the federation
- support for the country’s farmers

A foreign visitor might be forgiven for thinking that the extent of cross-country agreement means that the country is easy to govern despite significant economic, social, cultural and political differences that are manifest in its regionalism.

Not so.

*Portraits of Canada* also reveals that in every part of the country, except Ontario and Quebec, a majority feels that their province neither gets the respect it deserves, nor enjoys the influence that it should have.

In and of itself, this more negative consensus considerably limits the impact of the abovementioned areas of agreement.

But it highlights another major national consensus identified in this and other CRIC polls: Canadians continue to demand, in a forceful and sustained way, closer cooperation between the federal and provincial governments.
CRIC wishes to acknowledge the contributions made by our associates and consultants. *Portraits of Canada* would not be possible without the work and energy that Donna Dasko, Claude Gauthier, Matthew Mendelsohn and Maurice Pinard each devoted to this project. In particular, we would like to thank Maurice Pinard for his assistance in drafting the section of this paper relating to the situation in Quebec. CRIC also thanks Environics Research Group for making available selected results from some of their earlier surveys.
**CANADA IN A CHANGING WORLD**

- As they confront globalization, most Canadians say that keeping the country independent is a greater challenge in coming years than keeping it united.
- A significant majority says a common North American energy policy would harm Canada, and a majority believes that free trade has resulted in Canada losing control over its energy resources.
- A majority now supports a common Canada-US currency, but most think it would be a bad idea for Canada to simply adopt the US dollar.
- Canadians feel more affinity with Americans in the wake of September 11th. The number who want closer ties with the US is up. But support for the free movement of Canadian and American citizens across the border with the US has dropped sharply.

**FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY**

- There is massive support in every province in Canada for equalization.
- A growing number of Quebecers view federalism more favourably. However, the number of western Canadians who see it as advantageous for their province has fallen sharply.
- In every province outside of central Canada, a majority says that their province has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions, and is not treated with the respect it deserves.
- In terms of priorities for making the country work better, Canadians are more united than divided. In each major region, the two options most likely to be chosen as high priorities are increasing federal-provincial cooperation and more free votes in the House of Commons.

- Three out of five Quebecers oppose a sovereignty referendum before 2005.
- Seventy percent of Quebecers would vote “yes” to a referendum question asking if their province should remain part of Canada.
- Sixty-one percent would vote “no” to the 1995 referendum question. But if NO supporters were convinced that a partnership with Canada was assured, a number of them would switch their vote to “yes” – enough to give the YES side a victory.

**PUBLIC POLICY**

- There has been a change in attitudes towards immigration: the number of Canadians wanting the country to accept fewer immigrants has risen.
- In every province, a large majority supports Canada’s official languages policy. Many are also agreeable to their province being officially bilingual.
- The proportion saying that relations with Aboriginal peoples are improving is the lowest since the *Portraits of Canada* surveys began in 1998.
- A majority says that the best way for governments to deal with the rising cost of health care is to significantly increase their spending in this area.
- An overwhelming majority – including a large majority of city-dwellers – agrees that in hard times, governments should lend a helping hand to the country’s small family farms.
**Methodology**

*Portraits of Canada* is an annual survey of public opinion in Canada conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC). The purpose of the survey is to track how the attitudes of Canadians have evolved on a range of issues relating to the nature and well-being of the country and its citizens. The survey is now in its fourth year.

The 2001 edition of the survey is more authoritative than ever because it is based on the largest sample size yet: 2,940 people. As in previous years, the telephone survey was conducted in two parts. Environics Research Group surveyed 1,939 people in the nine provinces outside of Quebec between October 1 and October 10, 2001, while CROP surveyed 1,001 people in Quebec between September 28 and October 14, 2001. The data from the two parts of the survey were combined in order to calculate results for the whole of Canada. The results have been weighted so as to reflect the actual distribution of the Canadian population (according to the last census) based on sex, age, province of residence, and – within Quebec – language use and region of residence within the province.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritimes</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>1,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Canadians are more pessimistic about the economy than they were six months ago. Thirty-four percent say that the economy will become weaker in the years to come, up from the 25% recorded in a CRIC survey conducted in March 2001. (In the present survey, 19% say the economy will get stronger, and 43% say it will stay about the same.)

• Canadians are more optimistic when asked about the quality of life in their local community. Twenty-four percent say it is getting better, compared with 21% who say it is getting worse, and 54% who say it is about the same.

• Residents of Alberta are more likely than other Canadians to say that their local quality of life is getting better. The reverse is true in neighbouring Saskatchewan: residents of that province are more likely than those elsewhere to say that the quality of life in their local community is getting worse.

1. The Economy and The Quality of Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE 1</th>
<th>THE ECONOMY AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the next few years, do you expect the Canadian economy to become stronger, to become weaker or to stay about the same? Thinking about the local community in which you live – that is your city, town or rural area – do you think that the quality of life there is getting better, getting worse, or staying about the same?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| \[ \begin{align*} &\text{The Economy} \quad &\text{The Quality of Life} \\
&\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{BECOME STRONGER} & \text{STAY ABOUT THE SAME} & \text{BECOME WEAKER} \\
19 & 43 & 34 \\
\end{array} \\
&\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{GETTING BETTER} & \text{STAYING ABOUT THE SAME} & \text{GETTING WORSE} \\
24 & 54 & 21 \\
\end{array} \\
\end{align*} |
1. THE ECONOMY AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Saskatchewan and Alberta: Neighbours on Different Paths

Saskatchewan and Alberta are a study in contrasts. In Saskatchewan, many more people say that the quality of life in their local community is getting worse (31%) rather than getting better (16%). The reverse is true in Alberta, where many more people say their quality of life is getting better (31%) rather than getting worse (14%). Similarly, residents of Saskatchewan are more likely than other Canadians to be contemplating a move away from the province, whereas Albertans are among those least likely to be doing so. Only 57% of Saskatchewan residents (compared with 79% of Albertans) say they are very likely to be living in their province five years from now, and 12% (compared with only 3% of Albertans) say it is very unlikely that they will.

This supports the findings on western Canada released by the Canada West Foundation earlier this year – although the present nation-wide survey adds that residents of Saskatchewan are less likely to say that they will stay in their province than are residents of any other province of the country, including those in Newfoundland and the Maritimes. ¹ CRIC’s findings on different outlooks in Saskatchewan and Alberta also reinforce the grounds for the Foundation’s concern about growing disparities among western provinces. ²


2. Canada in a Changing World

TIES TO THE US

• In the wake of September 11th, Canadians feel greater affinity towards Americans. There has been a 10-point increase since March 2001 in the proportion of Canadians wanting Canada to have closer ties with the US. Outside Quebec, the increase was 14 points, whereas in Quebec views were unchanged.

• Greater apprehension about national security after September 11th has also affected views about the Canada-US border. Fewer Canadians today than a year ago support the idea of free movement across the border for Canadian and American citizens.

A COMMON CURRENCY?

• Canadians are open to sharing a currency with the United States, but not if that means unduly compromising Canadian sovereignty. A majority (55%) says that it would be a good idea for Canada and the US to have a common currency, when this is defined as “the same dollar.” This figure has risen notably in recent years.

• In this survey, however, only one half of respondents were asked this question. The other half were asked whether it would be a good idea for Canada to use the US dollar as its currency. Far fewer Canadians think that this would be a good idea, and there has been no notable increase in the figure over time.

FIGURE 2 | CANADA’S TIES WITH THE US

Do you think Canada should have much closer ties to the U.S., somewhat closer, about the same as now, somewhat more distant or much more distant ties to the US than it has now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SPRING 2001*</th>
<th>AUTUMN 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closer</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Distant</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: CRIC Survey on Trade, Globalization and Canadian Values.

FIGURE 3 | FREE MOVEMENT ACROSS THE BORDER?

Do you think Canadian and American citizens should or should not be allowed to move freely across the Canada-US border – that is to say, without having to report to a customs and immigration post?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES – Move Freely</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO – Retain Customs</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Environics Focus Canada

FIGURE 4 | A COMMON CURRENCY?

A. Do you think it would be a very good, somewhat good, not very good, or not at all a good idea for Canada and the United States to have a common currency – that is the same dollar? (Note: 1/2 sample)

B. Do you think it would be a very good, somewhat good, not very good, or not at all a good idea for Canada to use the U.S. dollar as its currency? (Note: 1/2 sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1992*</th>
<th>1999*</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Idea</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a Good Idea</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Idea</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a Good Idea</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Environics Focus Canada
2. CANADA IN A CHANGING WORLD

Would a Common North American Currency Compromise Canadian Sovereignty?

“…[T]he euro is a supra-national currency … While the formal euro area encompasses 12 nations, this will double soon… Hence, there will be many fewer currencies in the world in the near future and I doubt whether the Canadian dollar will be one of them…

Under the version of a common currency that… I favour, some Canadian symbolism could still remain on the currency. But the more important sovereignty issue is that those policies that Canadians value most highly – Medicare, equalization, CPP/QPP, the Canada Assistance Plan, even regional development – were put in place (or finalized in their current form) during the 1960s. Yet the 1960s were the only period in the post-war period where Canada had a fixed exchange rate with the USA. Therefore, tying ourselves to US monetary policy did not lead to a decline in our ability to legislate in our likeness and image elsewhere in the policy arena.

…Canadians will be influenced by the British decision toward the euro. Since the British want no part of a political union with European nations, adopting the euro would send a message that a common currency is all about economics and market access and not about sovereignty. I think Canadians are increasingly sensing this.”

Thomas Courchene
Jarislowsky-Deutsch Professor of Economics and Financial Policy at Queen’s University
and Senior Scholar at the Institute for Research on Public Policy

1 Thomas Courchene, remarks quoted from: “Is It Time for Canada to Embrace Monetary Union?” Edited transcript from “The Art of the State” Conference hosted by The Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) and the Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development (CIRRD), Friday, October 12, 2001, Montebello, Quebec. Available on the website of the IRPP at: www.irpp.org.
“\textit{In the end, the problem of any kind of currency union here without political union basically implies that Canada adopts the US currency.} We have none of the comparable arrangements that they have in Europe. If, for example, the British join the euro, they will be another large country along with France, Germany and Italy, in the European Central Bank. They are going to have a lot of influence relative to those other countries in making European monetary policy. The North American situation is just not comparable. And the Americans really do make it quite clear they’re not about to make any comparable accommodation here. So if you’re talking about currency union, let’s remember you are talking about adopting the US dollar.”

Gordon Thiessen
Former Governor of the Bank of Canada
and Executive in Residence in the School of Management at the University of Ottawa

\textit{“But the real issue at stake is sovereignty.} By adopting the US dollar, we would relinquish a critical policy tool for managing our economy. It is improbable that the US Federal Reserve would grant Canada a voice at the table for the purposes of making monetary policy, simply because we adopted the US dollar. And without political accountability, it is implausible that most Canadians would knowingly surrender their ability to make monetary policy.

 Monetary policy cannot be separated from political sovereignty... Given that the maintenance of a separate national currency has been synonymous, historically, with political independence, such a decision would be a momentous step for Canada, with major implications for our continued existence as an independent nation.”

Anne Golden
President and CEO of the Conference Board of Canada

\footnote{Gordon Thiessen, remarks quoted from: “Is It Time for Canada to Embrace Monetary Union?” Edited transcript from “The Art of the State” Conference hosted by The Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) and the Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development (CIRRD), Friday, October 12, 2001, Montebello, Quebec. Available on the website of the IRPP at: www.irpp.org.}

\footnote{Anne Golden, “In Loonies, We Should Trust,” \textit{The Globe and Mail} (Toronto), 29 November 2001, p. A19.}
ENERGY POLICY

• Concerns about Canadian sovereignty are also evident on the issue of a common North American energy policy. When told that the Canadian government has started talking with the American and Mexican governments about creating such a policy, almost two-thirds of Canadians (65%) express concern that “a common energy policy will harm Canada because we will lose some control over our energy resources.” Twenty-eight percent say that it would benefit the country by allowing Canada to sell more energy to the US and Mexico. There was no significant difference of opinion between residents of oil-producing provinces, such as Alberta, and other Canadians.

• Similarly, a majority (54%) agrees that “the Free Trade Agreement with the United States has resulted in a loss of Canada’s control over our energy and natural resources.” Thirty-five percent disagree. Canadians have become even more concerned about this consequence of free trade than they were in 1987, when the agreement was being negotiated. Then, 46% said that the free trade agreement would result in a loss of Canada’s control over our energy and natural resources, while 31% disagreed.6

6 Source: Environics Focus Canada. The data were made available by the Canadian Public Opinion Archive at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario (http://queensu.ca/cora).
Free Trade and The Control of the Economy

Canadians endorse free trade. In March 2001, a CRIC survey on the subject confirmed that roughly two-thirds of Canadians favour Canada negotiating new international trade agreements with other countries, including a Free Trade Area of the Americas. But 84% also said they would favour restrictions to prevent American investors from taking control of Canadian companies. Some might say that Canadians are contradicting themselves, since such restrictions would contravene the rules of free trade. But a more generous interpretation is that Canadians simply are expressing their support for two policy objectives that they wish to see achieved at the same time, and that they do not see as incompatible: participating in international trade, and maintaining control over their own economy.

In the current survey, concern about potential loss of domestic control of the economy is again evident, with a majority of respondents stating that free trade has resulted in a loss of Canadian control of the country’s energy and natural resources. Interestingly, in the period since the signing of the Free Trade Agreement, outright opposition to free trade has dissipated. At the same time, the sense that it has cost us a measure of control over an important sector of our economy has accentuated.

There is no evidence to suggest that this continuing preoccupation with economic sovereignty will turn Canadians against the principle of free trade. But the survey data do suggest that Canadians are well aware of the pluses and minuses associated with participation in the international economy, and of the challenges that continental economic integration poses for the future of the country.

2. CANADA IN A CHANGING WORLD

GLOBALIZATION

- This concern about control over resources is echoed in a more general question that asks about the challenges that will face the country in the years to come. Sixty-three percent of Canadians said that the biggest challenge will be “keeping Canada independent - that is maintaining control over its economy, social policy and culture in the face of the challenge of globalization.” By contrast, only 33% said it will be “keeping Canada united - that is responding to regional concerns and to Quebec nationalism.”

The Challenge of Globalization

Canadians recognize that the country faces challenges very different from those that preoccupied the country during the past several decades. National unity – seen in terms of relations between the federal and provincial governments – cannot be taken for granted. But by a margin of almost two-to-one, Canadians are more likely to say that keeping Canada independent, in the context of globalization, is the bigger challenge.

This, along with the survey results with respect to monetary and energy policy noted above, adds another important nuance to the free trade debate. While Canadians have no objections, in principle, to participating in a more integrated continental and global economy, it seems that they are likely to reject specific measures (such as adopting of the US dollar as Canada’s currency) that are seen to impinge directly on Canadian sovereignty.
3. Immigration

- Attitudes toward immigration have changed dramatically since March 2001. There has been a 16-point increase in the proportion of Canadians who say that the country should accept fewer immigrants than it does now. Despite this shift, a majority says that the country should either accept more immigrants, or about the same number as now. And the number who want to accept fewer immigrants, while a good deal higher than six months ago, is actually about the same as it was in 1997.

- Changes in attitude are somewhat less pronounced on two supplementary questions about immigration. The proportion agreeing that “many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees” is very high (70%), but this is not significantly higher than it was when the same question was asked in 1998, and is lower than it was in 1993. Similarly, 57% disagree that “Canada ought to be accepting more immigrants from those parts of the world which are experiencing major conflicts.” This figure is 10 points higher than it was in 1998, but is slightly lower than in 1993.¹

- The recent change in attitude toward immigration is probably a response to the abovementioned growing economic pessimism, and possibly to heightened concerns about national security following the September 11th attacks against the US.

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¹ Source for 1993 and 1998 results: Environics Focus Canada.
3. IMMIGRATION

Attitudes Toward Immigration

Public opinion about immigration issues, particularly issues having to do with the numbers of immigrants that this country should accept, tend to be related to the state of the domestic economy. When the economy is strong, attitudes towards immigrants tend to improve. During recessions, when unemployment rises, the view that immigrants take jobs away from Canadian-born workers gains currency.

For example, during the recession of the early 1990’s, public attitudes hardened on almost all questions related to immigration. As we moved into a period of strong growth and job creation in the late 1990’s, attitudes became more positive. In times of strength and growth, people feel secure; in times of recession, fearing for their own jobs or security, many people “circle the wagons,” become less open, and more concerned with their own survival. Blaming immigrants or becoming less accepting of immigrants is one response. Such negative attitudes are rarely articulated publicly and are almost never expressed by opinion leaders or elites, but the changes are evident in public opinion surveys that consistently track opinion.

The new Portraits of Canada survey may mark another turning point in public attitudes toward immigration. After several years of robust growth, the economy was just beginning to slow, and, in turn, economic confidence was beginning to weaken as the survey began. As the survey shows, the number of Canadians expecting the economy to decline jumped nine points between March and October. At the same time, the dramatic September 11th events shone a brighter light on this country’s faulty procedures for investigating and removing those who do not qualify as immigrants or refugees. September 11th does not bode well for fostering a welcoming attitude toward those arriving on Canadian shores as refugee claimants.
Indeed, the survey shows an increase in the number of Canadians who say we should accept fewer immigrants, from 29% a few months earlier to 45% today. A total of 70% agree that many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees. As well, 39%, down seven points since 1998, say this country should accept more immigrants from parts of the world which are experiencing major conflicts. These findings suggest a hardening of views toward immigration at least over the very short term, although the figures show that current opinions are still within the range of views that we have seen over the past half-decade or so.

Looking ahead to the next few years, I think that Canada’s multiracial and multicultural society will survive and prosper, despite the few troubling incidents reported in the wake of September 11th. The long-term trend toward acceptance of ethnic and racial diversity means that very few Canadians today would exclude any groups or categories of immigrants on these bases. Most Canadians have already come to realize and accept that entire communities cannot be blamed for the actions of a few individuals with the same religious background. At the same time we will see a tightening of this country’s security arrangements and immigration control procedures which will undoubtedly catch in their web the innocent as well as the guilty, both non-citizens and citizens. The real test, I believe, will be the impact of a declining economy. A few quarters of declining growth won’t change the public mood, but a sustained downturn and high unemployment will have a decidedly negative impact on this country’s support for sustained immigration.

Donna Dasko
Senior Vice President
Environics Research Group Limited
4. Federalism and National Unity

**FIGURE 7  SUPPORT FOR EQUALIZATION**

As you may know, under the federal equalization program money is transferred from the richer provinces to the poorer ones, in order to ensure that Canadians living in every province have access to similar levels of public services. Do you strongly support, moderately support, moderately oppose, or strongly oppose the equalization program?

![Bar chart showing support for equalization by province](chart)

**FIGURE 8  EQUALIZATION: MORE OR LESS?**

And do you think that the equalization program should be changed so that it transfers more money from the richer to the poorer provinces, less money from the richer provinces to the poorer provinces, or should the program be kept as it is now?

![Bar chart showing the preference for more or less equalization](chart)

**EQUALIZATION: A COMMITMENT TO SHARING THE WEALTH**

- Canadians are very supportive of the equalization program, indicating a fundamental commitment to sharing the country’s wealth as an important part of the bargain of Confederation. Support for equalization is lowest in Alberta, currently the country’s wealthiest province, but even here three out of four respondents endorse the program. Support is as high in British Columbia as it is in Quebec, and as high in Ontario as it is in Atlantic Canada. On this question, there is no significant difference of opinion between the “have more” and the “have less” provinces.

- The extent of support for equalization is also clear in the lack of any real appetite for reducing equalization payments. Less than 20% of Albertans would like the program to transfer less money from the richer to poorer provinces. The proportion of British Columbians and Ontarians that would like to transfer more money under the program exceeds the proportion that would like to transfer less.
Sharing the Wealth

Equalization has been subjected to some harsh criticism in recent months. Leaders from “have less” provinces have argued that the way equalization payments are calculated effectively penalizes them when they succeed in developing their economies because new revenues are unfairly “clawed back” by the federal government. On occasion, some leaders from “have more” provinces have criticized the program for making the “have less” provinces too dependent on government transfers. Journalist John Ibbitson has argued that “equalization must end because it has failed” and has created a “cycle of have-not dependence.”

No program is beyond improvement, and suggestions will continue to be made about how best to calculate the level of equalization payments. But what Portraits of Canada shows is that Canadians are not as caught up in the debates about the technicalities of the equalization program as are some political leaders and commentators. They overwhelmingly support equalization, and even residents of the country’s wealthiest provinces do not wish to see it curtailed.

4. FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY

**Figure 9: An Assessment of Federalism**

Figure shows the proportion agreeing with the statement that "Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for [name of province]."

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**The Practice of Federalism: An Assessment**

- Quebecers are viewing the practice of federalism more favourably. But the opposite is true of Atlantic Canada and, above all, the West.

- A majority of Quebecers (56%) agree that “federalism is flexible and helps Canada adapt to changing circumstances.” This is eight points higher than in 1999.

- Similarly, a majority of Quebecers (55%) agree that Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their province – up six points since 1999.

- In contrast, the proportion of western Canadians agreeing that Canadian federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their province has fallen sharply, from 61% in 1999 to 51% in 2001. The fall has been most dramatic in Alberta – from 64% to 45%.
• Ontario continues to stand out as the province most content with its place in the federation. The number of Ontarians who say that the province has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions, or is not treated with the respect it deserves in Canada, is small and contrasts with the situation in the rest of the country.

• In fact, in every province outside of central Canada, a majority says that their province has less than its fair share of influence on national decisions, and is not treated with the respect it deserves in Canada.

• The proportion of Quebecers saying their province is treated with the respect it deserves has been rising since 1999. But in Atlantic Canada and in Alberta, the proportion saying their province is treated with the respect it deserves has fallen ten points since 1999.

4. FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY

FIGURE 10 INFLUENCE AND RESPECT

A. In your opinion, how much influence does (name of province) have on important national decisions in Canada? Would you say it has more than its fair share, less than is fair share, or about its fair share.

B. In your opinion, is (name of province) treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

FIGURE 11 PROVINCE IS TREATED WITH RESPECT: TRENDS

In your opinion, is (name of province) treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not? (Figure shows the proportion saying that their province is treated with the respect it deserves.)
4. FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY

The West: Declining Satisfaction with Federalism

Canada is a country of regional identities and distinctions. That diversity can be a very positive thing – one of the advantages of federalism is that it allows countries to experiment with policy, and to develop policy environments that meet the particular needs of provincial communities. But that same diversity can also be a negative factor if regions feel that they are disrespected, disengaged or disadvantaged within the larger federal community. In such a case, regional diversity can be extremely corrosive to the very idea of federalism itself.

This remains a challenge in Canada, not only in Quebec but also in the four western provinces. As CRIC’s data demonstrate, western Canadians have become less satisfied with federalism in recent years. The 2001 data are striking enough: only one in two western Canadians feels that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages, and a majority of western Canadians feel that their province does not have its fair share of influence in national decision-making and is not treated with respect in Canada.

But what is more illustrative than the 2001 numbers alone is the longitudinal trend. Simply put, western Canadian attitudes toward federalism are worsening. Looking from 1998 to 2001 – a period of considerable economic prosperity and growth in Canada – western Canadians became less and less convinced that the Canadian federal system was benefiting their provinces and, one might assume by extension, their own personal interests.

The challenge for Canadians and their governments is to resist the temptation to dismiss the dissatisfaction expressed in western Canada. From my observation, one of the primary sources of western frustration is the continued perception that western views and perspectives are not taken seriously east of Manitoba. When politicians and analysts argue that western alienation is irrelevant or invalid, the feelings of being ignored are only intensified.
4. FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY

Dismissing a region’s feelings of dissociation or estrangement as simple political inconvenience only serves to perpetuate the problem.

And western alienation truly is a problem for Canadian federalism. Alienation captures feelings of unfairness, inequality and isolation – feelings not conducive to a strong federal system. This is seen in responses to CRIC’s survey question concerning a confederation of regions: Alberta (22%), British Columbia (18%) and Saskatchewan (16%) respondents all report surprisingly high levels of support for the idea of breaking Canada into a confederal (rather than a federal) system – a partnership of more powerful regions with a much smaller role for the central government. It is ironic that at a time when an increasing number of countries around the world are moving towards federal or near-federal systems, so many residents of Canada, one of the world’s more mature federations, are ambivalent about federalism’s merits.

Admittedly, addressing western alienation is not an easy task. Many concerns arising in western Canada are institutional – such as the need for Senate reform and electoral reform – rather than policy-specific, and are unlikely to change in the near or even distant future. There is no one policy issue that the federal government can back that will necessarily lead to a reversal of the current trend of increasing dissatisfaction. There is no quick fix. But the lack of easy answers does not mean that the federal government can ignore the issue.

The onus is on the federal government to ensure western Canadians that they are benefiting from Canadian federalism, and that the federal government is attentive to western Canadian interests. Failing to do so works against the long-term interests of all Canadians.

Loleen Berdahl, Director of Research
Canada West Foundation
4. FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY

PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE

• Canadians want the federal and provincial governments to develop more cooperative relationships. When asked about the way governments make decisions, only 18% say that “the federal government should have the final say on some things, the provincial governments on others, and they should both stay out of each other’s way.” Four out of five would prefer that “both levels of government should work most things out together.” The proportion preferring the second option is lower in Quebec than elsewhere, but nevertheless is almost two-thirds (65%). Even a majority of sovereignists in Quebec prefer that both levels of government work most things out together.

• Thus, it is not surprising that, across the country, the most favoured option for making the country work better is increased federal-provincial cooperation. Two-thirds of Canadians say that this is a high priority.

Federalism: The Public’s Desire for Cooperation

“Canadians outside Quebec have little attachment to particular divisions of powers in the BNA Act and show little support for governments asserting their sovereignty in particular policy areas. They have...little interest in attempting to implement “watertight jurisdictions.” If Canadians are federalists, they seem to be instrumental and protective federalists: they take for granted that there are two constitutional orders of government and want both to be involved in most policy areas in order to check one another...Political platforms built around massive devolution where the federal government is shut out of major policy areas are likely to have little public appeal, even in a province like Alberta.

Although Canadians do want both governments to be involved in most areas, they would not like to live in a unitary state. Their distinct preference is for a collaborative and cooperative intergovernmental model in which all governments work together to come to agreement on most things.”

Fred Cutler (University of British Columbia) and Matthew Mendelsohn (Queen’s University)

• The second most common high priority to make the country work better is “changing the rules of the House of Commons so that members of parliament can vote more freely, rather than having to vote the same way as their party.” The fact that a majority (57%) of Canadians see “free votes” in the House of Commons as a high priority sends a strong signal to Canada’s political leaders – one that points to a troubling level of dissatisfaction with the way issues are debated and decisions are made in parliament.

• In terms of priorities for making the country work better, Canadians are more united than divided. In each major region, the two options most likely to be chosen as high priorities are increasing federal-provincial cooperation and more free votes in the House of Commons.

• The sense that the Senate is in need of reform is one that is shared by many provinces, and not only those in western Canada. In fact, the West appears to have an ally in Ontario: residents of that province are almost as likely as are residents of western Canada to say that an elected Senate is a high priority.

• Further down the list of priorities, opinions do diverge somewhat. Transferring more powers from the federal to the provincial governments is a high priority for 42% of Quebecers, but only 18% of Ontarians. Similarly, changing the Canadian constitution to recognize Quebec’s unique character is a high priority for 40% of residents of that province, but for only 9% of those outside of it. Reducing regional economic inequalities is a high priority for 54% of Newfoundlanders, but for only 29% of Albertans. This does not detract from the point made above, namely that Canadians from all regions of the country agree on the two highest priorities for making the country work better.
4. FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY

**TABLE 1: PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE**

When it comes to helping the country work better, please tell me if you think each of the following should be a high priority, a medium priority or a low priority...?

(Table shows the proportion in each region saying that each item is a high priority.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ATLANTIC CANADA</th>
<th>ONTARIO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Increasing co-operation between the federal and provincial governments (66%)</td>
<td>Increasing co-operation between the federal and provincial governments (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>More free votes (57%)&lt;sup&gt;11&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>More free votes (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reducing regional economic inequalities (47%)</td>
<td>Replacing the existing Senate with an elected Senate (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Replacing the existing Senate with an elected Senate (39%)</td>
<td>Reducing regional economic inequalities (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Transferring more powers from the federal to the provincial governments (27%)&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Transferring more powers from the federal to the provincial governments (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Changing the Canadian constitution to recognize the unique character of Quebec (15%)</td>
<td>Changing the Canadian constitution to recognize the unique character of Quebec (9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>QUEBEC</th>
<th>WESTERN CANADA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Increasing co-operation between the federal and provincial governments (62%)</td>
<td>Increasing co-operation between the federal and provincial governments (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>More free votes (54%)</td>
<td>More free votes (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reducing regional economic inequalities (52%)</td>
<td>Reducing regional economic inequalities (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Transferring more powers from the federal to the provincial governments (42%)</td>
<td>Replacing the existing Senate with an elected Senate (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Changing the Canadian constitution to recognize the unique character of Quebec (40%)</td>
<td>Transferring more powers from the federal to the provincial governments (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Replacing the existing Senate with an elected Senate (38%)</td>
<td>Changing the Canadian constitution to recognize the unique character of Quebec (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>11</sup> The exact wording of this option is: “changing the rules of the House of Commons so that Members of Parliament can vote more freely, rather than having to vote the same way as their party.”

<sup>12</sup> While the four Atlantic provinces are grouped together for the purposes of this table, there are some important differences between Newfoundland and the Maritimes that should be noted. Newfoundlanders are more likely to say that transferring more powers from the federal to the provincial governments is a high priority (38%, compared to 24% for the Maritimes). They are also more likely to say that reducing regional economic inequalities is a high priority (54%, compared to 45%). But they are less likely to say that having more free votes is a high priority (46%, compared to 61% for the Maritimes).
Who Are the “Instinctive Federalists”?

At a CRIC panel on Western alienation, held in Toronto this September, economist and commentator John Richards argued that residents of the Prairie provinces are “instinctive federalists.” This means that they see the benefits of the two levels of government and have a strong desire to see the division of powers respected.

There is some evidence to support this assertion. Saskatchewan and Alberta are the two provinces most likely to say that their provincial governments should have more power in the future. Similarly, they are more likely to say that the federal government has too much power (only Newfoundlander are even more likely to say that this is the case). What is notable here is that these two provinces are more supportive of a stronger provincial government, and of a weaker federal one, than is Quebec.

However, some caveats are in order. First, Quebecers are much more likely to say that the transfer of powers from the federal to the provincial governments is a high priority. Second, an overwhelming majority of Saskatchewan and Alberta residents – over 80 percent – would prefer the federal and provincial governments to work most things out together, as opposed to each level of government having the final say in its own area and staying out of the other’s way. Only in Quebec does a significant minority (31%) prefer that the two levels of government stay out of each other’s way. This is in keeping with Mendelsohn and Cutler’s conclusion, noted above, that few Canadians have an interest in their two levels of governments observing a strict division of powers and operating separately from one another in their respective areas of exclusive jurisdiction. Finally, it should be pointed out that residents of Manitoba are among the least supportive of the devolution of power to the provinces – only Ontarians are less devolutionist. Thus, the three western provinces with most in common on this issue are Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC.

It is notable, for instance, that the proportion saying that the transfer of powers from the federal to the provincial governments is a high priority increases gradually but consistently as one moves west from Ontario to BC (though nowhere is it as high as it is in Newfoundland or Quebec).
THE BALANCE OF POWER

• Very few Canadians think that their provincial governments have too much power. The proportion ranges from a high of 12% in BC, to a low of zero in Newfoundland.

• At the same time, the number saying that the federal government has too much power is lower in 2001 than in previous years, while the proportion saying the balance of power between the two levels of government is about right has been increasing since 1999. In Quebec, 36% of respondents say that the federal government has too much power, down from 43% in 1999. The proportion of respondents saying the balance is about right is up seven points since 1999 in Quebec, up eight points in Alberta, and up nine points in BC.

• Nonetheless, there is notable support in certain areas of the country for devolution of power from the federal government to provincial ones. As noted in Table 1 (page 24), transferring more powers to the provinces is far from being the option most likely to be chosen as a high priority for making the country work better. But even if it is not a top priority, over 40% of respondents in Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC say that their provincial government should have more power.13

• Ontario is clearly the province that is least interested in devolution of power.

• One-third of Canadians (34%) think that their provincial government should give more powers to local governments in their province – that is governments of cities, towns or rural areas. Fifty-five percent think that no change is called for, and only 9% think that their provincial government should give less powers to local governments.

13 The question was worded as follows: “in the future should the provincial governments have more power, the federal government have more power, or should things stay as they are?” Few respondents said the federal government should have more power, and over 40% in each case said that things should stay as they are now.
• Support for more powers for local governments is higher in Quebec (43%) than elsewhere in the country, and higher in Montreal (43%) than in Toronto (36%) or Vancouver (27%).

• Support for more powers for local governments is higher in the eastern half (48%) than in the western half (38%) of the Island of Montreal. This no doubt reflects the greater opposition in the western portion of the city to the newly created “megacity” of Montreal. Interestingly enough, while area of residence within Montreal affects the result for the question, language is not a significant factor: Anglophone and Francophone Montrealers have roughly the same views on this question.

SUPPORT FOR SOVEREIGNTY IN QUEBEC
• Fifty-four percent of Quebecers view sovereignty as an outdated idea, up 4% from last year.

• There is little desire for a renewed debate on sovereignty: only 32% say they favour another referendum before 2005, while 60% are opposed.

SOVEREIGNTY-PARTNERSHIP VS. CONFEDERAL UNION
• The idea of Quebec sovereignty is less and less popular among Quebec voters. YES support for the 1995 referendum question on sovereignty-partnership is lower than in previous years: 36% before redistribution of undecided voters, and 39% after. Furthermore, YES supporters are more likely to say that they might change their voting intention (34%) than are NO supporters (21%).

• However, a sovereignist victory in a referendum could still be possible if NO voters were convinced that a partnership deal with Canada was assured. In that case, a number of NO voters say they would switch sides, enabling the “yes” vote to rise to 49% before the redistribution of undecided voters, and a hypothetical winning 58% after redistribution. This shows that a YES victory is dependent on voters’ sense that a sovereign Quebec would retain some kind of association with Canada.

• Recently, some sovereignist leaders have been advocating that Quebec be made a sovereign country that would then enter into a confederal-style union with the rest of Canada. This option has elicited little enthusiasm from Quebec voters: on average, 39% (on two slight variations of the question) support the plan, with 51% opposed and 10% undecided. (Note that the question presupposed that there would indeed be a confederal union after a “yes” vote.)

4. FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY

FIGURE 13  SUPPORT FOR “SOVEREIGNTY-PARTNERSHIP”
(Quebec Respondents Only. Decided Voters, With Undecided Respondents Redistributed on a Pro Rata Basis)
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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Surveys from CROP. Number of surveys for each year: 1996 = 9; 1997 = 5; 1998 = 13; 1999 = 8; 2000 = 10; 2001 = 13.
4. FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY

- If a referendum were to be held on this confederal-union option, 38% of Quebecers say they would vote “yes”, 51% would vote “no” and 11% are undecided. After proportional redistribution of undecided voters, 43% favour the option and 57% are opposed, results only marginally higher than those obtained for sovereignty-partnership.

- Only 27% believe the confederal-union option is different from sovereignty-partnership, while the majority (57%) sees little or no difference, and 19% say they do not know.

- In a referendum on whether or not Quebec should remain a province of Canada, the “yes” vote finds itself at its highest level since 1998, or 70%, with only 23% voting “no” and 7% undecided. Support for Quebec remaining a province of Canada stood at 64% in 1998, 60% in 1999 and 68% in 2000. It should be noted here again that 38% of those who would vote “yes” to sovereignty-partnership would also vote in favour of Quebec remaining a province of Canada.

- The number who say that Quebec will likely one day become an independent country continues to decline. This year, only 23% of Quebecers hold that view, while 69% believe instead that Quebec will likely remain within Canada.

ATTACHMENT AND IDENTITY

- Within Quebec, attachment to Canada has been on the rise over the past four years, up from 72% in 1998 to 79% this year (although the wording of the question was changed slightly after 1999). Conversely, attachment to Quebec has declined somewhat over the last four years, falling from 92% in 1998 to 85% in 2001. Thus the gap between attachment to Quebec and attachment to Canada has narrowed among Quebecers, with the difference now only 6%.

- Since 1970, the percentage of Quebec Francophones who identify themselves as “Québécois,” rather than “French Canadian,” or “Canadian,” has grown from 21% to 54%. The corresponding percentage for the period from 1977 to 1985 stood between 36% and 39%, and has remained above the 50% mark since 1990. This is a relatively significant shift in identity.

OTHER REFERENDUM OPTIONS

- Sixty-eight per cent of Quebecers say they would vote “no” in a referendum on outright independence; 25% would vote YES, and only 7% remain undecided.

- Among those who would vote YES to sovereignty-partnership, a full 34% say they would vote “no” to outright independence.

15 The data from prior to 1998 come from a variety of surveys, as compiled and analyzed by Maurice Pinard.
Factors Contributing to the Decline in Support for Sovereignty

How can the decline in support for sovereignty since the 1995 referendum be explained? There seems to be a number of factors at play, which will be examined briefly.

First, let us consider the changes in motivations which occurred for many Francophone voters who supported the YES side in 1995. In this respect, the traditional ethnic grievances that underlie the sovereignty option – like the sense of not being recognized as equal by Anglophones or of occupying a lesser rank in the economy – must be taken into account. Strangely enough, these feelings have changed little over time, and in some cases not at all. Where change has occurred, it is because these grievances are now proving to be less of a mobilizing force than they once were. Yet everything suggests that the feeling of a lack of recognition remains an important factor.

Among those who do not share a strong nationalist ideology, these kinds of feelings are not part of their most salient or intense concerns. It is only in times of crisis, such as with the failure of Meech, that for them somewhat different concerns, such as feelings of rejection, become more intense and widespread. Traditional grievances may also become more salient for them, without necessarily becoming shared more widely, when political leaders set an agenda, like a referendum, which forces them to consider these issues. At other times, as is the case at present, their attention is focused, temporarily for some and more permanently for others, on more immediate economic or emotional concerns, such as the well-being of their families, their jobs or health.

It is during these periods, for instance, that a vast majority of voters say they do not want another referendum, so as to avoid, it appears, a return to nationalist concerns. Similarly, when last year we asked those 1995 YES supporters who claimed to have become less sovereignist, why that was the case, a quarter stated that their interest and enthusiasm for sovereignty had diminished, that the issue was no longer topical, that their view of things had now changed and that there were other more pressing problems. For some, this may be short-lived, but the answers of others revealed a more lasting shift of opinion.
4. FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY

In other cases, the decline in support for sovereignty is the result of growing dissatisfaction with the option’s flag-bearer, the Parti Québécois government, over their more immediate concerns. There has always been a very strong, two-way, relationship between support for the option and support for the party. When dissatisfaction with the PQ is high, support for sovereignty tends to weaken or even disappear. Thus, slightly more than 20% of the less-sovereignist YES respondents attributed their change in attitude to dissatisfaction with the Parti Québécois, either in general or with respect to specific areas. In two thirds of the latter cases, the concern was health care.

When the Parti Québécois has been in power support for sovereignty has, at best, remained stable, during a first term in office (1976-1980; 1994-1995), or decreased, during a second term and/or after a referendum (1981-1985; 1995-2001). It is as if when the PQ is in power, ambivalent voters tend to become more nervous about the heightened possibility of a referendum. That means that were the PQ to move into opposition after the next election, there could be some resurgence of YES support, as it sometimes happened in the past. Barring any major crisis, however, there is nothing to indicate that such a revival would be major in the short term.

In addition to the abovementioned grievances, concerns and dissatisfaction, there are other changes in motivating factors that may account for the drop in support for sovereignty. It is a matter of different positive or negative incentives, or, in other words, of the gains or losses that it is believed would result from independence. Since 1990, but up until 1995 especially, there has been an increase in the anticipated economic costs of that option. All along there has also been an increase in the proportion anticipating neither gains nor losses and conversely, an important decrease in the perception of potential economic gains. Here again, slightly more than 20% of the less-sovereignist YES supporters attributed their shift in attitude to a greater anticipation of economic costs or to the feeling that sovereignty would not change things very much, that there is little to gain from it.
Multiple *loyalties* or *feelings of attachment* to Canada and Quebec are other factors that exert a direct role or a mediating one between motivations and the sovereignty option. Since 1995, the previously very high level of attachment to Quebec has dropped slightly, while the level of attachment to Canada, which had been weaker at the outset, has risen quite significantly. This has resulted in a much smaller gap between the two than was previously the case.

Finally, among the factors contributing to the decline, the reduced efforts towards political *mobilization* by the PQ and many sovereignist leaders and activists must be mentioned. This is obviously closely linked to the drop in popular support for sovereignty itself, which has a negative impact on the motivations of these leaders and activists, especially on their expectancy of success. But in turn this absence of leaders’ mobilization efforts increases the supporters’ demobilization. It is worth adding that in periods of reduced popular support, even the more ideological leaders and activists cannot count on easy successes. Indeed, Bernard Landry’s redoubled efforts to mobilize supporters, on taking the helm of the PQ in the spring of 2001, had negative results, until he toned down his rhetoric.

*To conclude, let us mention that if the sovereignty movement currently faces serious problems, it would be a great mistake to assume that a resurgence on a longer term basis is unlikely. This remains a possibility that cannot be dismissed.*

*Maurice Pinard*
*McGill University*
5. Official Languages

Eighty-two percent of Canadians – including no fewer than seven out of ten in every province – support Canada’s official bilingualism policy, the policy that the country has two official languages, meaning that all citizens can get services from the federal government in the official language that they speak. Do you strongly support, moderately support, moderately oppose, or strongly oppose this policy?

Many Canadians are also agreeable to their provincial government being officially bilingual, meaning that all citizens can get services from the provincial government in the official language that they speak.

- Eighty-two percent of Canadians – including no fewer than seven out of ten in every province – support Canada’s official bilingualism policy, the policy that the country has two official languages, meaning that all citizens can get services from the federal government in the official language that they speak.

- Many Canadians are also agreeable to their provincial government being officially bilingual, meaning that all citizens can get services from the provincial government in either English or French.

- Support is highest in New Brunswick (83%), Canada’s only officially bilingual province. Almost four out of five Francophones in Quebec support official bilingualism at the provincial level, as do 96% of the province’s Anglophones.

- Support is lower in the western provinces, dipping to 49% in Saskatchewan and BC.

- Young people are more likely to favour two official languages: 91% of 18 to 24 year olds support bilingualism, compared with 77% of those aged 55 years and over.16

- Eighty-six percent of Canadians (including 82% of Anglophones) think that it is important for their children to learn to speak a second language. Among Anglophones wishing their children to learn a second language, 75% say that it should be French. Ninety percent of Francophones who wish their children to learn a second language say that it should be English.

- Looking only at English-speaking respondents in the three largest provinces outside Quebec, those saying that the second language their children should learn is French is 79% in Ontario, 69% in Alberta, and 59% in BC.

- A majority of Canadians think that, in the years to come, the survival of the Francophone or Anglophone minorities in their province is assured. More importantly, 70% of Francophones outside Quebec think that the survival of their own communities is assured (though only 25% think it is very assured). This compares to 54% of Anglophones in Quebec who think that the survival of their community is assured.

- Canadians inside and outside Quebec hold opposing views on the security of the French language in that province. Fifty-two percent of Quebecers (and 60% of Francophone Quebecers) think that the French language is threatened in Quebec, compared to only 15% of Canadians living outside Quebec.

This pattern is more pronounced in the provinces outside Quebec than in Quebec – that is to say, the differences among age groups are not as large in Quebec.
6. Aboriginal Peoples

- Fifty percent of Canadians say that few or none of the land claims made by Aboriginal peoples are valid, while 43% say that many or all are valid.

- Quebecers are becoming more receptive to Aboriginal land claims – 43% say that all or many such claims are valid, up eight points since 1998.

- Canadians outside Quebec are becoming less receptive: in these nine provinces, the proportion saying all or many are valid has fallen eight points since 1998, to 43%.17

- Only 17% of Canadians say that relations with Aboriginal peoples are improving, compared with 24% who say they are deteriorating. Fifty-six percent say that relations are staying about the same.

- The proportion saying that relations are improving is the lowest since the Portraits of Canada surveys began in 1998. In British Columbia, 20% currently say that relations are improving, compared to 36% in 1998.

Relations with Aboriginal Peoples

A decade ago, the political fortunes of Aboriginal peoples in Canada appeared to be on the rise. After having been shut out of the negotiations that produced the Meech Lake Accord, Aboriginal leaders first contributed to its demise and then joined First Ministers at the talks that produced the Charlottetown agreement – a proposal for constitutional renewal that would have recognized the right to Aboriginal self-government.

17 Note that the movement, in opposite directions, of opinion in Quebec and opinion in the provinces outside Quebec since 1998 has meant that there has been a convergence of views. The proportion saying that many or all land claims are valid is now 43% in both cases.
6. ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Ten years later – following the agreement’s defeat in a national referendum and the shelving of many recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples – the situation looks quite different. In much of the country – notably Ontario and the Prairies – the proportion of Canadians who agree that Aboriginal land claims are valid is declining. Only one third of Canadians outside Quebec agree that Aboriginal peoples should have some type of preferential access to hunting and fishing grounds in areas where they have traditionally lived. These attitudes exist despite the view, upheld by the courts, that Aboriginal peoples have distinct claims – indeed, constitutional rights – to resources by virtue either of treaties or of their continual occupation of land since time immemorial. And more Canadians are inclined to blame the ambitions of Aboriginal peoples themselves, rather than the reticence of the Canadian government, for the breakdown in negotiations between the two parties (the figures are 45% compared with 28%). (A sizeable portion of the public (27%) say they don’t know which party is to blame.)

Two other points are worth noting. First, the proportion of Atlantic Canadians agreeing that all or many Aboriginal land claims are valid fell by 12 points last year, most probably in response to the intense media coverage of the Supreme Court’s decision in the Marshall case and the ensuing disputes at Burnt Church. This year, in the absence of extensive media coverage, opinions returned to the level they were at in 1999. Second, it is notable that in BC, where there has been a more sustained and comprehensive public debate on Aboriginal rights in recent years, opinions on the validity of land claims are less volatile. Moreover, the proportion of British Columbians who say that relations with Aboriginal peoples are deteriorating has decreased for two years running – down seven points since 1999. Given what is at stake in land claims negotiations currently underway in that province, this is a positive sign, so long as it is evidence of something more than wishful thinking on the part of the public.

18 The decline in Ontario and the Prairies has been relatively sharp: a 10 point drop in Ontario and Alberta since 1998, and a larger drop in Saskatchewan. Opinion is more or less unchanged in Atlantic Canada and BC. Quebecers have become more accepting of the validity of land claims since 1998.

19 This question was not asked in Quebec this year.

20 Note that the proportion in BC saying relations are improving has also fallen, while the proportion saying that relations are staying about the same has increased.
7. Health Care and Social Programs

The Surplus

- Canadians remain split on the question of how to allocate whatever budgetary surpluses governments might run. Thirty-six percent would put more money into social programs, 35% would pay down the debt, and 27% would cut taxes. The proportion wishing to spend the surplus on social programs is five points higher than it was last year.21

- There are clear differences of opinion on this question from province to province, with debt reduction being the most favoured option in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC, and spending on social programs the most favoured option in Newfoundland, the Maritimes, Quebec and Manitoba. In no province are tax cuts the preferred option.

- A likely explanation for this shift is the growing economic pessimism noted at the beginning of this report. However, those who expect the economy to get weaker are no more likely to favour spending the surplus on social programs than are other Canadians.

Health Care

- Eighty-five percent of Canadians think that Canada has a better health care system than does the US; only eight percent think the US system is better.

- Canadians have become slightly more open to the idea of allowing privately-owned companies to deliver some health care services in Canada, and less certain that the health care system should be operated entirely as a public program. This year, 41% agreed that the private sector should have a role, compared to 36% in 2000. Nonetheless, a majority (55%) prefer that the health care system be operated entirely as a public program.

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21 A likely explanation for this shift is the growing economic pessimism noted at the beginning of this report. However, those who expect the economy to get weaker are no more likely to favour spending the surplus on social programs than are other Canadians.
The previous question touches on the role of the private sector in the delivery of health care services but does not refer directly to a parallel private health care system that would charge fees to patients. That option is raised in the next question, one which produces the following two notable results.

- A majority (55%) says that the best way for governments to deal with the rising cost of health care is to significantly increase their spending in this area, rather than allow privatization or reduce services.

- At the same time, one out of three Canadians say that the best way for governments to deal with rising costs is to allow the private sector to provide some health care services to those people who can afford to pay for them. This is a significant level of support for an option that breaks with the principles that underpin Canada’s public health care system.

- Not surprisingly, support for private health care rises with income.

- Support for private health care for those with the means to pay for it is highest in BC (39%) and Quebec (38%) and lowest in Ontario (27%).
Health Care: Looking for Solutions

Canadians are very attached to their health care system and clearly prefer it to the American model. Only 8% of Canadians say they prefer the American to the Canadian system, up only slightly from 3% in 1987.\(^{22}\) The public does not want to abandon what they understand to be the core principles of the Canadian system, namely that the system is national and publicly-funded, and that it provides Canadians with universal coverage and medical care on the basis of need.

Within the context of the public system, however, Canadians increasingly are willing to consider different options. A majority of Canadians (55%) say that their health care system should be operated entirely as a public program, but this figure is down from 61% in CRIC’s 2000 survey. Those who say instead that Canada should allow privately-owned companies to deliver some health care services in Canada now constitute a near majority in the western provinces and Quebec, while Atlantic Canadians and those in Ontario remain more committed to an entirely public system.

Canadians are very worried about the future of the health care system. They have perceived a deterioration in the quality of the system during the past decade, particularly in regards to waiting times for specialists, waiting times at emergency rooms, the availability of the best technology, and adequate numbers of doctors and nurses. For this reason, many Canadians are willing to express what I would characterize as unenthusiastic support for some aspects of privatization. However, most Canadians prefer less radical options designed to sustain rather than radically change the system.

\(^{22}\) Source for 1987: Environics Research Group.
7. HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS

In fact, many surveys have shown that a majority of Canadians say they are willing to pay more for a top quality health care system. When presented in the latest CRIC survey with a realistic array of options for dealing with the rising costs of health care, most Canadians opt to significantly increase government spending, rather than curtailing services or allowing the private sector to provide some services to those people who can afford to pay. The preference of Canadians is to achieve better quality health care by investing in the public system. However, other surveys show that Canadians believe that there are structural and organizational problems with the health care system that cannot be addressed through the injection of funds alone. Most Canadians do recognize that some reform of the health care system is necessary.

These data show that Canadians support the current health care system, but are looking for ways to reform it to improve its quality. This could mean some experimentation with privatization, within the overall context of the Canadian model, or it could involve reorganizing the way health care is managed and delivered. Support for privatization is likely to grow unless governments address the deterioration within the system. This might require more funds, but almost certainly entails structural reforms, such as the reorganization of primary health care delivery or more fee for service for certain kinds of treatments.

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Men and women in Canada have different views on these issues. Women are more likely to devote budgetary surpluses to increased spending on social programs, while men are more likely to choose paying down the debt. Similarly, women are more likely to say that the best way to deal with rising health care costs is for governments to significantly increase their spending, whereas men are more likely to say that the best solution is to allow the private sector to provide some health care services to those people who can afford to pay for them.
8. Rural Canada

An overwhelming majority (85%) of Canadians agree that “in tough times, governments should provide financial support to Canada’s small family farms so that they don’t go bankrupt.” Support is highest in Ontario (89%), the country’s most urban province, and lowest in Saskatchewan (78%). While only a minority (20%) of respondents in Saskatchewan disagreed with the proposition, this was the highest level of opposition in the country.

More than four out of five residents of the country’s biggest cities favour government support for family farms: Toronto (89%), Montreal (84%) and Vancouver (81%).

Only 37% of Canadians agree with the proposition that best solution for small town residents who are having trouble making a living is to move to a bigger city to seek a better job. Fifty-nine percent disagree. The implication is that a majority of Canadians think that a better solution is to create sufficient job opportunities in small town economies. Newfoundland is the only province where the pattern is reversed: there, a majority agrees that the best solution for small town job-seekers is to move to a bigger city.

Residents of small towns are slightly more likely than those of big cities to say that their local quality of life is getting better, and slightly less likely to say that it is getting worse. For instance, in the provinces outside Quebec23, 26% of those living in towns with a population of less than 10,000 said their quality of life was getting better, compared with 20% of those living in either Toronto or Vancouver. Similarly, 19% in those small towns said their quality of life was getting worse, compared with 25% in the two big cities.

23 Quebec respondents were surveyed by CROP, which uses a different system for classifying respondents according to community size than that used in the other provinces by Environics.
What type of portrait of Canada does this year’s survey paint? Despite their continued support for free trade and for measures such as a common currency, Canadians recognize that globalization poses a challenge to the country’s independence. They are also feeling somewhat closer to the US in the wake of the September 11th attacks in that country, but at the same time are less favorable to allowing people to move freely across the border. These viewpoints are not contradictory. However, they do demonstrate that Canadians resist crude characterizations that try to place them wholly on one side of an issue or another. Canadians are both eager to participate in the continental and global economies, and protective of their country’s sovereignty.

In terms of national unity, the survey reveals two distinct trends: Quebecers are becoming more supportive of federalism (and less supportive of sovereignty), while Canadians living in the West and the Atlantic region are becoming more dissatisfied with their role in Confederation. Indeed, two of the biggest shifts of opinion that Portraits of Canada tracking has detected are, on the one hand, the growing number of Quebecers who think that their province will remain a part of Canada, and, on the other hand, the declining number of Albertans who say that federalism has more advantages than disadvantages for their province.

But there are values and priorities shared by all Canadians. The most obvious relates to the importance of sharing the country’s wealth among the different regions of the country, as well as between urban and rural communities. There is also evidence of a shared commitment to bilingualism, and (to a lesser extent) the principles underlying the country’s health-care system. And there is agreement on the need for more inter-governmental cooperation. Divergent opinions on the benefits of federalism notwithstanding, public opinion, on the whole, is not regionally fragmented.

The survey does highlight several disturbing trends that will bear watching in the months to come. They include: growing economic pessimism, lower support for immigration, and, in some areas of the country, hardening attitudes toward Aboriginal land claims. CRIC in its periodic polls and in the autumn 2002 edition of Portraits of Canada will monitor these issues, along with those arising from continental economic integration, globalization and the integrity of the federation itself.
ALSO AVAILABLE FROM CRIC:

CRIC Paper # 1: Trade, Globalization and Canadian Values (April 2001)
CRIC Paper # 2: Bridging the Divide between Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State (June 2001)

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