# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part I: The Role of Government</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger or Smaller Government?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Should Governments Do?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Political Cultures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Economy, Poverty, Hunger and Homelessness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II: The Performance of Government</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal-Provincial Relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Discontent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Leaders: An Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“If you want gratitude, don’t go into politics. Buy a dog instead.”

Given the harsh medicine that public opinion serves up to government and to elected representatives, this observation, by an anonymous author, would touch a chord in any politician who reads this eighth CRIC Paper.

The reader will discover that Canadians are losing confidence in the ability of their governments to defend programs that are important to them. He or she will also discover that political leaders, in the words of a well-known comedian, “get no respect.”

And the findings also show that most Canadians think that governments have a negative impact, or almost no impact, on their lives.

In the three western-most provinces, a plurality feels that government has a negative impact, whereas in the seven provinces east of Saskatchewan, people tend to believe that government has little impact on their lives.

In reading this paper, political leaders will find some consolation in the many qualifications surrounding these harsh judgments. One source of comfort will be respondents’ apparently contradictory viewpoints. Canadians want government to work more co-operatively for the common good. At the same time, however, they are:

- divided on whether or not government should play an expanded or reduced role in the conduct of the country’s business;
- split on whether, in formulating policy, government should be somewhat more interventionist in attenuating social inequality, or let the private sector play a greater role in building a democratic society;
- of the view, by a strong majority, that monies earmarked for health care are poorly managed, but of the view, also by a majority, that government should increase spending on the system;
- and are at odds on government’s role — with youth, women, and those on low incomes favouring more activist government, while older people, men and high earners lean towards the opposite view.

There are no grey shadings in this preface, but the reader will find plenty of nuances in the full report.

If our political leaders are not that popular among citizens at this time, neither can it be said that Canadians, as a whole, have clear notions about the directions in which government should move.

In the current context, a lot of significance is attached, among certain quarters of civil society, to the so-called democratic deficit. However, it is fair to ask this question: How can a society, seemingly so divided between viewpoints, between generations, and among regions, work with and through its governments to eliminate that self-same democratic deficit?

That very question underscores the need for continued public opinion research into the values shared by Canadians and those that divide them.

Pierre O’Neil  
Director General  
The Centre for Research and Information on Canada
Portraits of Canada is a study that benefits from the expertise of a number of people, within and outside CRIC. I thank Donna Dasko (Environics Research Group) and Claude Gauthier (CROP) for the invaluable role they play each year in developing and carrying out the survey. I also thank Matthew Mendelsohn and Maurice Pinard for their contributions to the process of broadening the survey’s scope, to the fashioning of the questions, and to the analysis of the results. While both Matthew and Maurice contributed to all aspects of the survey, I would like to give special mention to their generosity in sharing their expertise in their respective areas of specialization. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues at CRIC for their helpful comments on the report that I have authored below.

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

The 2002 edition is based on a sample of 2,939 adult Canadians. As in previous years, two separate surveys were conducted, one in Quebec and one in the rest of Canada. Environics Research Group surveyed 1,925 people in the nine provinces outside of Quebec between October 2 and 15, 2002. Sample sizes by province or region are: British Columbia, 330; Alberta, 326; Saskatchewan, 225; Manitoba, 202; Ontario, 404; the Maritimes, 327; and Newfoundland, 111. CROP surveyed 1,014 people in Quebec between September 27 and October 16, 2002. The data from the two surveys were combined and weighted appropriately in order to calculate results for the whole of Canada.

The results of surveys of this size have a margin of error of approximately plus or minus 1.8 %, 19 times out of 20. The margins of error for smaller subsamples within each survey are larger.

A NOTE ABOUT THE TEXT

Among the main subjects addressed in previous editions of Portraits of Canada are the evolution of support for federalism and sovereignty in Quebec, and the state of relations among different groups in Canadian society. These subjects were also addressed in this year’s survey. As the precise theme of this edition of the CRIC Papers took shape, however, it was decided that these subjects would be best treated in separate publications. Those interested in an analysis of the results as they pertain to the changing dynamics of Quebec politics or to relations among groups in Canadian society are invited to consult the CRIC website (www.cric.ca) in the coming months. Some highlights of the findings on these topics include the following:

- Most Quebecers, weary from decades of polarizing debate about their province’s status within Canada, refuse to define themselves as either sovereignist or federalist. Twenty-eight percent of Quebecers say they are neither sovereignist nor federalist while another 27% say that they are “in between” for a total of 55% who will not pick a side in the debate. The trend is particularly pronounced among younger Quebecers.

- While support for the notion of sovereignty with an economic partnership with Canada has remained steady since 1998, the number of Quebecers who say they agree with the statement that Quebec sovereignty is an idea whose time has passed has risen from 51% to 56% over the past three years.

- At the same time, the view that Quebec will probably become an independent country one day is losing ground, falling from 39% in 1998 and 1999, to 21% today.

- There is a fairly widespread sense nationally that relations between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians are poor. In fact, a plurality (42%) rates them as bad. A majority of western Canadians (52%) say that relations with Aboriginal peoples are bad, compared with 27% who say relations are good.

- Nationally, most Canadians seem confident about relations between immigrants and other Canadians, or between visible minorities and other Canadians. On relations between immigrants and other Canadians, 53% rate them good, 21% say they are neither good nor bad while 23% think that they are bad. Where relations between visible minorities and other Canadians are concerned, 52% say they are good, 23% view them as neither good nor bad while 21% think that they are bad.

- On relations between the country’s two official-language communities outside Quebec, 70% of Quebec Anglophones rated them good, as did 50% of Francophones outside Quebec. Only 19% of Quebec Anglophones and 24% of Francophones outside Quebec thought English-French relations were bad.
One key issue for any society is how large or small a role governments should play in managing the economy and delivering social services. In countries such as Canada, this was one of the most contested questions in the first decades after the Second World War, as the building blocks of the modern welfare state were put in place. It was also one of the most divisive among western nations in the 1980s and 1990s, as stagnating economic growth and escalating government deficits undermined some of the foundations underlying the welfare state.

The debate about government’s role is a heated one in liberal-democratic societies because it opposes two core values: freedom and equality. The protection of freedom requires that governments keep their distance from the economic and social relationships that citizens forge among themselves. The protection of equality compels governments to intervene to correct the injustices that such relationships sometimes perpetuate. Much of Canadian politics consists of trying to find the right balance between these valid, but often competing, goals.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, a second important question has emerged: can governments be trusted to carry out those tasks citizens assign to them, whatever the scope of these tasks may be? While the question of the role of governments tends to divide those on the left and right, all citizens, regardless of ideology, have for some time appeared united in having low levels of confidence in governments. This is visible not only in public opinion data (see Figures 3 and 4), but also in declining voter turnout.

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The 2002 edition of the Portraits of Canada survey, in attempting to take stock of Canadians’ evolving attitudes toward the federation and its institutions, produced striking findings on the issues just mentioned, namely, the role of government and trust in government. The result is a picture of a country sometimes divided over government’s role, and increasingly uneasy with its performance. On the first point, the survey reveals important differences of opinion on the basis of age, gender, income and region. On the second point, while confidence in political leaders has risen since its nadir in 1992 (see Figure 4) – which was a time of crisis reflected in economic recession and failed constitutional talks – citizens’ trust in federal and provincial governments to work together has been eroding. Citizens appear increasingly frustrated as they look to their governments to agree on, among other things, the recommendations of the Romanow commission on health care, the Kyoto Accord, and the best way to share tax revenues within the federation. As in previous years, a central theme emerging from Portraits of Canada is Canadians’ desire for better co-operation among governments, as well as better mechanisms to accommodate the concerns of those in the West and Atlantic Canada.

FIGURE 3  CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS
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: a) Political leaders, b) Business leaders, c) Religious leaders, d) Military leaders, e) Leaders of environmental groups, f) Leaders of groups that protest against free trade and globalization?

FIGURE 4  CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS (1983-2002)
Figures show results for a lot/some confidence or a great deal/some confidence

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.*
2002: 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.

*Source: Environics Focus Canada / Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen’s University.
LARGER OR SMALLER GOVERNMENT?

Historically, Canadians have been distinguished from Americans by their greater inclination to support government intervention. The American sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset, for instance, asserts that Canada remains “more willing to use the state” than its neighbour. In contrast to the US, he argues, “the country has an extensive welfare state and considerable government ownership.”¹ Similarly, a review of public opinion data in both countries found that one clear difference in Canadian and American attitudes is greater support in Canada for an active role for the state in providing for the welfare of its citizens.²

There is currently no domestic consensus on whether government’s role should be expanded or contracted. The Portraits of Canada survey shows that many Canadians (45%) currently favour larger government offering more services, but almost as many (42%) favour smaller government and fewer services. Canadians are, however, less inclined to support smaller government than are Americans. An ABC/Washington Post poll conducted in the US in July 2002 found that 53% of Americans wanted to see smaller government – a figure that is 11 points higher than that obtained by CRIC in Canada (see Figure 5).³ This despite the fact that government is already smaller in the US (see Figure 2).

![Figure 5: Larger or Smaller Government? Views in Canada and the US](image)


### Table 2: Larger or Smaller Government?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Canada east of Manitoba</th>
<th>Western Canada</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>18-34 year olds</th>
<th>35-54 year olds</th>
<th>55 years and older</th>
<th>Annual household income below $40,000</th>
<th>Annual household income between $40,000 and $79,999</th>
<th>Annual household income $80,000 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A smaller government</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A larger government</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 3.
There are significant variations within Canada on this issue. First, while larger government is the preferred choice east of Manitoba, smaller government is favoured in the West. Second, men are more inclined than women to favour smaller government, while women tend to favour larger government. Third, support for larger government with more services is higher among younger Canadians and decreases with age. Finally, support for larger government with more services is higher among those with lower incomes. High-income Canadians prefer smaller government with fewer services. (See Table 2). This last point is particularly significant, for it confirms that the idea of smaller government appeals most to those who can most afford to make up for governments cutbacks by paying for services delivered by private sector. Note that the option of smaller government with fewer services appeals to 59% of men with annual household incomes of $80,000 or more, but only 30% of women with annual household incomes of under $40,000.

WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENTS DO?

The lack of a consensus on government’s role is evident in certain other cases. For instance:

- When asked what governments should do with any budget surpluses, 38% say that they should put the money into social programs, but almost as many (34%) say they should repay debt. Twenty-seven percent say that tax cuts should be the priority. (Note that support for devoting the surplus to spending on social programs is increasing gradually, while support for debt repayment is declining. Whereas a plurality favoured debt repayment in 2000, a plurality now favours spending the surplus on social programs (see Figure 6)).

- Forty-eight percent of Canadians think government has a responsibility to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes, but 49% disagree.

![Figure 6: The Surplus](image)

If governments have budgetary surpluses, which of the following three things should be the highest priority: cutting taxes, paying down the debt or putting more money into social programs?
When it comes to government spending on some specific programs, however, Canadians are not always so evenly divided.

- In the case of spending to assist poorer regions, 57% say that federal and provincial governments should be spending more to create jobs and provide social assistance in these regions, compared with 39% who say that people in these regions should be willing to move to where the jobs are. It is worth noting that a majority supports increased spending, even though the respondents are asked to keep in mind that “increased spending may cause taxes to rise.” Support for increased spending is highest in Quebec (67%) and Newfoundland (65%) and lowest in Alberta (44%). Opinions on whether governments should spend more to assist poorer regions have not changed significantly over the past ten years.5

- A majority of Canadians (52%) believe that the best way for government to deal with rising health care costs is to increase spending on health care significantly, as opposed to limiting services (an option supported by only 8%) or allowing the private sector to provide some services to people who can afford to pay (38%). This national result, however, masks an important regional difference of opinion that will be discussed below. The preference for more spending on public health care over privatization, however, does not mean that Canadians think more money is the only solution to problems within the health care system. In fact, fully 84% of Canadians agree that “most of the problems in the health care system can be fixed if the money we spend now is managed better by the bureaucrats who run the system.”

- In this context, it is also worth noting the high level of overall support for the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions. The Protocol’s ratification entails government intervention to create various incentives and disincentives within the economy. At the time of the survey, no less than 78% of Canadians agreed that Canada should formally ratify it, while only 18% disagreed. As expected, however, views were dramatically different in Alberta. There, 49% opposed ratification while 45% supported it. Agreement in the other areas of the country ranged from a high of 85% in Atlantic Canada to a low of 68% in Saskatchewan.

![Figure 7: KYOTO – SUPPORT FOR RATIFICATION](image)

As you may know, in 1997, countries from around the world agreed in principle to the Kyoto Protocol that calls for reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases that lead to global warming. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree that Canada should formally ratify the Kyoto Protocol, committing it to cut its own greenhouse gas emissions?

4 This question was asked to one-half of the survey sample. The other half was asked the same question about government spending, but without being read the statement about the possibility of more spending leading to tax increases. In this case, 64% supported more government spending to assist poorer regions, including 55% of Albertans.

5 This comparison is based on results from Environics Focus Canada surveys conducted in 1992 and 1996. The data were obtained from the Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen’s University. See www.queensu.ca/cora/.
These findings offer an idea of the specific options favoured by those Canadians who say they favour larger government with more services. Those who prefer larger governments are more likely to:

- prefer devoting the surplus to social programs;
- choose increased spending on health care over privatization;
- say that governments have a responsibility to reduce the differences in income between rich and poor;
- support more government spending to help poorer regions of Canada;
- support ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

Moreover, just as lower-income as opposed to higher-income Canadians, and women as opposed to men, are more likely to favour larger government in general, so they are more likely to favour these specific options (see, for example, Figure 8).\(^6\) Note that it is only among higher-income Canadians (those with annual household incomes of at least $80,000) that the option of private health care services for those who can afford them is more appealing than the option of governments significantly increasing health care spending. Once again, the starkest contrast is between higher-income men and lower-income women. On the question of health care, 51% of the former group favours allowing private services for those who can afford them, compared to 31% of the latter group.\(^7\)

Are differences of opinion about the role of government evidence of a division within Canadian society over fundamental values? Not necessarily. The clash over the best way to deal with rising health care costs, or what to do with the surplus, might be motivated by disagreements about which policies to use to realize shared objectives, and not by disagreements over the objectives themselves. For example, while a significant number of Canadians think rising health care costs are best handled through expanded private services, this does not mean necessarily that they are any less committed to the idea that everyone, by right of citizenship, is entitled to quality health care services free of charge.\(^8\) There is another point of view, however. In the face of ever increasing integration of the Canadian economy into the North American one, and, more generally, of more intensive global economic competition, many of the country’s economically advantaged may be rethinking their traditional commitment to distinctive Canadian policy objectives in such areas as health care, regional economic development, and social assistance. This possibility deserves continued examination in future studies.

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\(^6\) There is one exception: support for the Kyoto Protocol does not vary significantly on the basis of respondents’ gender or household income.

\(^7\) As was the case above, “lower income” in this case means annual household incomes of $40,000 or less.

There are several important regional differences of opinion on the appropriate role for government.

In the case of the rising costs of health care, support for allowing private services for those who can afford to pay for them has risen dramatically in Quebec, but not in the rest of the country. In Quebec, 49% now say the best way to deal with the rising costs of health care is to allow the private sector to provide some services to people who can afford to pay. This is an 11-point jump from a year ago. Outside Quebec, however, the figure is 33%, up only 2% from 2001 (see Figure 9). Thus, while there was only a seven-point difference between Quebecers and other Canadians on this a year ago, there is now a 16-point gap. Fifty-seven percent of Canadians outside Quebec want governments to significantly increase spending, compared with 39% of Quebecers.

This must be viewed in the context of the intense pre-election debate on health care that has been underway in Quebec in recent months, a debate invigorated, in part, by the rise to the top of the polls of the Action Democratique du Québec (ADQ), a party that, until recently, had only one elected member in the National Assembly. A central plank in the ADQ platform is expansion of private health care services for those who can afford them, and its unabashed promotion of this approach clearly has had an impact on public opinion.

It is doubtful, however, that Quebecers are currently more to the right of the ideological spectrum than other Canadians, or that they are in the midst of a right-ward shift in attitudes about the role of government. In the first instance, there has been a 12-point increase over the past two years in the number of Quebecers wanting to devote government surpluses to social programs. More generally, Quebecers are less likely than other Canadians to prefer a smaller government offering fewer services. They are more likely to want to spend budget surpluses on social programs, and significantly more likely to agree that it is the responsibility of government to reduce differences in income between high and low earners. This latter point is especially important, and can be viewed in the context of the data presented in Figure 10. As that figure shows, Quebecers are clearly distinct in their greater support for the value of socio-economic equality, as compared with other Canadians.

Thus, if Quebecers are becoming more supportive of private health care for those who can afford it, it is, nevertheless, unlikely that they are less committed to universal public health care. Instead, many may have accepted the argument that a greater role for the private sector will relieve pressure on the existing public system, thereby improving that system for those who continue to use it. Not everyone agrees that this is the likely outcome of a “two-tiered” health care system, however. It would be ironic if Quebecers, motivated by their greater commitment to the value of equality, were to be at the forefront of a change that made equality of access much more difficult to achieve.

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**FIGURE 9**

Question (abbreviated): To deal with rising costs, government should: a) **increase their spending** on health care; b) **limit the availability** of some treatments or medications; or c) **allow the private sector** to provide some services to people who can afford to pay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase Spending:</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Spending:</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada Outside Quebec</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Services:</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This figure, which combines responses for the nine provinces outside of Quebec, masks a 14-point jump in support for private services in Manitoba between 2001 and 2002. Manitoba is the only province outside of Quebec where there has been a large increase in support for private services as the best means of dealing with rising health care costs. Given the sample size in Manitoba (202), this finding should be noted but treated with some caution until confirmed by subsequent surveys.
The greater support among Quebecers for private health care is an important exception to an otherwise consistent pattern that has already been noted in Table 2, but bears emphasizing: the tendency of western Canadians to favour a more limited role for government than that preferred by those in central or Atlantic Canada (see Table 3). On some of these questions – notably those relating to the use of the surplus, to health care, and to government spending to assist poorer regions – the views of respondents in Saskatchewan and Alberta are more or less the same, despite the contrasting economic circumstances of these provinces. Similarly, on these same questions, the views of those in Ontario are not too different from those in Atlantic Canada. For example, 50% of residents of both Saskatchewan and Alberta favour smaller government, compared with 42% in Ontario and the Maritimes. Support for increased health care spending as opposed to more private services also is ten points higher in both Atlantic Canada and Ontario than it is in both Saskatchewan and Alberta. To some extent, then, one’s view on the role of government is not simply a function of whether one lives in a “have” rather than a “have not” region or province. Distinct regional political cultures, including the one shared by Saskatchewan and Alberta, have an influence as well.

THE ECONOMY, POVERTY, HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS

Canadians currently feel relatively positive about their economy. They are more likely to say that they expect the economy to become stronger in the next few years (30%) than they are to say they expect it to become weaker (17%). (Forty nine percent expect the economy to stay about the same). While Canadians did become somewhat more pessimistic about the economy following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the pessimism was short-lived. Indeed, Canadians are even more optimistic about the economy now than they were before the attacks took place.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-- ATTITUDES ON THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT, BY REGION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atlantic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favour larger government with more services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising health care costs: governments should significantly increase spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surplus: spend on social programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favour increased government spending to assist poorer regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree: it is the responsibility of government to reduce the differences in income</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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This is an important factor influencing opinions on public policy. In the absence of pessimism about the economy, for instance, Canadians have become more inclined to say that environmental concerns should take priority over economic growth. This helps to explain why it has been hard for critics of the Kyoto Protocol to shift public opinion on the issue. A mood of relative self-confidence also leads Canadians to believe that they can innovate in the face of change. Rather than fearing Kyoto’s impact, they are optimistic. Specifically, they are more likely to think that ratification will have a positive rather than a negative impact on jobs. Thirty-eight percent say that if Kyoto is ratified, on the whole, jobs will be created, 30% say that ratification will not have any affect on jobs, one way or another, and only 26% say that, on the whole, jobs would be lost. (In Alberta, however, 60% expect a net job loss.)

Despite the fact that Canadians are more optimistic than pessimistic about the economy, a significant number (45%) think that poverty and homelessness is more of a problem in their community today than it was a few years ago. Very few (8%) say it is less of a problem, while 44% say that things are about the same.

This result may not be too surprising. While the poverty rate in Canada has been falling in recent years, several published reports have highlighted increased levels of food bank use, the persistence of housing crises in Canadian cities, rising levels of debt among some families, and greater income inequality between the richest and the poorest families in Canadian society. Canadians appear aware that the economic growth experienced in recent years has not been of equal benefit to all of the country’s citizens.

It can be argued that one of those things that Canadians have traditionally expected of government, at least since the end of the Second World War, is action to alleviate poverty. The goal has been to ensure that economically disadvantaged Canadians do not fall so far behind their fellow citizens that they are denied a dignified life, or opportunities to improve their situation. The survey shows, however, that Canadians are currently quite divided on a number of questions related to poverty, its causes, and government’s role in addressing the issue.

- As noted above, Canadians, as a whole, are evenly split on the question of whether it is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes. And while a majority of Quebecers believe the government has a responsibility to reduce income inequality, a majority in the rest of the country disagrees (see Figure 10).

11 Fifty-five percent hold this view today, an increase of 9% since the recession year of 1993. Figures for 1993 are from Environics Focus Canada and were obtained from the Canadian Opinion Research Archive, Queen’s University. See www.queensu.ca/cora/. The exact question was: “In your opinion, should the development of the economy take priority over environmental concerns or should environmental concerns have priority over economic growth?”

12 An additional factor informing views about Kyoto is the sense, shared by many, that the state of the environment is worsening. Nationally, 48% of Canadians think pollution is becoming more of a problem in their community today, compared with 10% who say it is less of a problem, and 40% who say that things have stayed about the same. In Toronto, Canada’s largest city, 58% say pollution in their community is getting worse.


14 The comparison here is between respondents in Quebec and those in the other nine provinces taken together. However, it should be noted that in Atlantic Canada, a majority (52%) also agrees that government has this responsibility.
• Fifty-five percent of Canadians agree that “most people who don’t get ahead should not blame the system, they only have themselves to blame,” but 42% disagree. (Note that, in a survey conducted in 1998, 71% percent of Americans agreed with this statement, and 27% disagreed.\textsuperscript{15})

• Forty-six percent say that “poor people today have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return,” but almost as many (43%) say that “poor people have hard lives because government benefits don’t go far enough to help them live decently.”

• A slim majority (52%) agree that “there is no excuse for hunger and homelessness in a society like ours; we could eliminate poverty if we really wanted to,” but almost as many (47%) believe that “there will always be people in society who will be hungry and homeless; it may be regrettable, but it is a fact of life.”

There are only two aspects of this issue on which most Canadians agree. First, 72% say that there are jobs for most welfare recipients who really want to work, compared with 25% who say there are not. Second, however, 70% of those who say there are jobs available concede that most of these jobs do not pay enough to support a family.

In terms of how attitudes have changed, Canadians are less convinced than they were in the mid-1990s that hunger and homelessness is “a fact of life,” and more inclined to say that “there is no excuse for poverty and homelessness in a society like ours.” In fact, the number saying there is “no excuse” for hunger and homelessness is 11 points higher than it was in 1996 (\textit{see Figure 11}). It is likely that the recent experience of economic recession influenced responses in 1996, whereas more consistent economic growth in subsequent years encouraged a greater number of respondents to question whether the problems associated with poverty are, in fact, unavoidable.

A similar trend is seen in responses to the question about whether those who do not get ahead have only themselves (rather than “the system”) to blame. Canadians today are slightly more likely to say that the system is partly to blame than they were in 1990, when the last recession began.\textsuperscript{16}

This raises the question, however, of whether the trend will reverse itself the next time that economic growth slows. If Canadians feel less prosperous, they may once again feel somewhat less generous or sympathetic towards the poor. Ironically, public good will towards the poor, the homeless and the hungry might decline just when it is most needed — during an economic slump.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure11.png}
\caption{HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS}
Which of the following views is closer to your own: a) There will always be people in society who will be hungry and homeless; it may be regrettable, but it is a fact of life; b) There is no excuse for hunger and homelessness in a society like ours; we could eliminate poverty if we really wanted to.
\end{figure}

\begin{tabular}{c c c c c c c c c c c c}
\hline
\textbf{Fact of Life} & & & & & & & & & & & & \\
\textbf{No Excuse} & & & & & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\textbf{2002} & & & & & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{15} Source: \textit{Washington Post}/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation 1998 National Survey of Americans on Values, based on random telephone interviews with 2,025 adults conducted between July 29 and August 18, 1998. Available online at \url{http://www.kff.org/content/archive/1441/values.pdf}.

\textsuperscript{16} In 1990, 36% disagreed with the statement that “most people who don’t get ahead should not blame the system, they only have themselves to blame.” The figure today is 42%. Source for 1990: data from the 1990 Survey of Attitudes About Electoral Reform which was conducted at the Institute for Social Research, York University for the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing under the direction of Professors André Blais and Elizabeth Gidengil. Neither the Royal Commission nor the Institute for Social Research are responsible for the analyses and interpretations presented here.
“Alienation” is a word used frequently in discussions of contemporary Canadian politics. It is used in two different contexts:

- “regional alienation,” meaning discontent in the Western and Atlantic provinces with the way the federation is managed; and
- “political alienation,” meaning citizens’ sense that the political system is unresponsive.

This year’s *Portraits of Canada* confirms that both these phenomena are alive and well.

**FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS**

In previous editions of *Portraits*, Canadians have stated consistently that increased federal-provincial cooperation is a top priority. Based on the results of this year’s survey, an increasing number believe that their desire for better relations between the two levels of government is being ignored.

There has been a marked decline in Canadians’ confidence in their governments’ ability to work cooperatively. While 50% say the two levels of government have worked well together in recent years, this is 13 points lower than in 1998, the last time the question was asked. In 2002, 48% said that they have not worked well together, an increase of 12 points since 1998. The decline among those who say both levels of government have worked well together is steepest in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and BC. Overall, New Brunswickers (77%) and Manitobans (73%) are the most likely to say both levels have been working well together, while British Columbians (40%) and Quebecers (37%) are the least likely to say the same thing.

At the same time, Canadians’ trust in governments to protect important programs has slipped significantly. When asked which level of government respondents trusted more to protect the programs they care about – the federal government, their provincial government, both equally, or neither – the most popular choice was “neither.” At 34%, the number saying they trust neither level of government is the highest recorded by CRIC – up 14 points from 2000, the last year in which the question was asked.

It is worth noting that the 2000 survey, carried out soon after federal and provincial first ministers agreed to increase health care funding, recorded a 10-point drop, compared to 1999, in those who trusted neither level of government to protect the programs they cared about, and a corresponding 10-point increase in those who trusted both. Thus, at that time, co-operative action by governments directly affected the esteem in which they were held. Absent similar co-operation in the ensuing years, trust has fallen to a new low.

Canadians give very different answers to this question, depending on the province or region in which they live. British Columbians (51%), residents of Saskatchewan (42%) and Ontarians (39%) are most likely to say they trust neither level of government. Albertans stand out as being much more likely to trust their provincial government. Forty-nine percent of Albertans take this view, a figure almost double that in the two provinces with the next highest levels of trust in provincial governments, Manitoba and Quebec (26% in each). In Quebec and Atlantic Canada, a plurality (37% and 33% respectively) trust both levels of government equally.
Decreased trust in the ability of either level of government to protect their cherished programs indicates that many Canadians are growing frustrated with the failure of the two levels of government to work more co-operatively on key issues such as Kyoto and reform of the health care system.

On Kyoto, the survey confirms that many Canadians (though by no means all) consider federal-provincial co-operation important. While they support ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, 52% say that the federal government should delay ratification until agreement is reached with all the provinces. This compares with 43% who think the federal government should go ahead with ratification even if, by the end of this year, some provinces still disagree. Albertans (86%) were the most likely to say that ratification should be delayed pending federal-provincial agreement, while in the other provinces, support for a delay only outweighs that for ratification in the absence of agreement by 49% to 46%. A majority of those who support Kyoto think that ratification should go ahead even in the absence of federal-provincial agreement, but a significant number of them (45%) think that in the absence of an agreement, ratification should be delayed.

**REGIONAL DISCONTENT**

The sense among many Canadians that their province is not treated with the respect that it deserves is widespread. With the exceptions of Ontario, Manitoba and New Brunswick, majorities in every province think their province is not treated with the respect that it deserves. Only 30% of British Columbians, 23% of Saskatchewan residents and 16% of Newfound-landers think their province gets the respect it deserves, compared with 76% of Ontarians. Quebecers and Albertans have similar views on this matter: 55% of Quebecers and 56% of Albertans say their province is not treated with the respect it deserves in Canada, while 42% in each province say it is.

In British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland, the number who say that their province is treated with respect is not only very low, it is declining, down seven points since 2001 in BC and Newfoundland, and 11 points in Saskatchewan. In Quebec, opinions on this question have been more or less stable since CRIC began asking it in 1998. The number of Albertans who think that their province is treated with the respect it deserves is 15 points lower than in 1998.
The survey also asked those in Alberta and Saskatchewan who feel their province is not treated with the respect it deserves, to give reasons why. The ones most commonly given were that their provinces have too little influence in national decision-making, or too little representation in federal institutions, notably the House of Commons (for examples, see Table 4). In Alberta, about seven in ten of those who said the province isn’t treated with respect point to this lack of influence or representation, compared with about three in ten who said that it is because more money flows out of Alberta than back in. Thirteen percent mentioned poor management of the national economy and 12% mentioned Kyoto. In Saskatchewan, about six in ten mentioned the province’s lack of influence in federal decision-making. Roughly three in ten mentioned the farm crisis, while 25% said it is because the province is too small or too rural.17

Two points should be made about these responses:

- it is notable that relatively few “discontent” Albertans say they resent the fact that their province’s wealth is shared with others in Canada. This is consistent with the findings of last year’s survey, which showed that 74% of Albertans support the country’s equalization program;
- the responses indicate that what is angering western Canadians is not so much one or two specific policy decisions they see as counter to the region’s interest, but a deeper sense that the federal system is not responsive to their concerns.

Issues such as the farm crisis or Kyoto matter, but they don’t matter nearly as much as how Parliament and the electoral system work. This is an important finding. It shows clearly that there may be no quick fix to regional discontent, since, in the absence of institutional reforms, no single change in policy can address Westerners’ concern that their views on a wide range of matters simply don’t count as much as those of central Canada.

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The percentages do not add up to 100% because some respondents gave more than one reason.
Feelings of regional discontent should not be discounted as an inevitable feature of political life in a geographically large federation with distinct regions. A comparative study of attitudes towards federalism in Canada and the US, conducted in the summer of 2002 by CRIC, The School of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Arlington and *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* found that the sense of being treated with a lack of respect within the federal system was absent among the major regions of the United States, in stark contrast to Canada.\(^{18}\) Regional discontent with the practice of federalism has emerged in Canada for specific historical reasons, and for reasons related to the character of its federal institutions, notably the federally appointed Senate, which in comparison to its elected American counterpart, provides little effective voice for regional interests within the federal legislature. Of course, Senate reform has fallen off the political agenda, and few have an appetite for a new round of constitutional talks. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that lack of progress on this and related issues is not without its consequences, in terms of public perceptions of the federal system.

In the absence of a more effective Senate, provincial governments have emerged as the main vehicle for representing regional concerns within the federal system. Thus, it is not surprising to find that within some of the provinces most likely to say that they do not receive the respect they deserve – namely Newfoundland, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC – a plurality (and in some cases a majority) would like to see power increased for their provincial governments as opposed to giving the federal government more power, or maintaining the status quo. The figures are highest in Quebec (58%), Newfoundland (54%) and Alberta (53%). In Quebec and Alberta, the number wanting more power for the province is higher than last year – up 8 points in Alberta, and 15 points in Quebec.\(^{19}\) In no province do more than one in five want the federal government to have more power. Ontarians, who are the most comfortable with the existing federal system, are the least likely to favour a powerful provincial government (28%).


\(^{19}\) No comparison with 2001 is available in the case of Newfoundland.

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**Figure 16**

**The Division of Power**

In your opinion, in the future, a) should the provincial government have more power, b) the federal government have more power, c) or should things stay as they are?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Government of Canada should have more power</th>
<th>Territorial government should have more power</th>
<th>Things should stay as they are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CRIC Survey of the North, conducted by telephone by Environics Research Group among a sample of 1,207 adult Canadians who live above the 60th parallel. The interviews took place in English, Inuktitut and French between June 4th and July 6th, 2002. Subsample sizes: Yukon = 352, NWT = 480, Nunavut = 325.

One further note: a separate CRIC survey conducted in the summer of 2002 found that residents of Canada’s three northern Territories also favour devolution of power over a more powerful federal government or the status quo. Support for stronger territorial governments is highest in the Northwest Territories (57%).
POLITICAL LEADERS: AN ASSESSMENT

Previous CRIC studies have drawn attention to low public levels of confidence in political leaders and institutions. While confidence in political leaders is higher than it was ten years ago, the public continues to have much lower levels of confidence in political leaders than other types of leaders, notably business leaders and leaders of environmental groups (see Figures 3 and 4).

The public also rates political leaders very low in terms of their honesty and ethical standards. In fact, their ratings are lower than those obtained by either heads of major companies or religious leaders. At the same time, 73% agree that political leaders do not tell the truth. It should be noted, however, that Canadians are not alone in their perception that their political leaders are “ethically challenged”. A US survey in March 2002 found that the number of Americans giving “public officials in Washington” a very high or high rating for honesty and ethical standards was 34%, a figure higher than the 21% obtained in Canada, but still remarkably low. In 1995, the US figure stood at 18%.

At first glance, these positive and negative assessments appear difficult to reconcile. However, political leaders are not Canadians’ sole source of frustration. There is an awareness that many of the problems discussed above are related less to leaders’ personalities and more to the failings of different institutions, including the Senate, the House of Commons and provincial legislatures (or at least the tradition of tight party discipline upheld within these bodies), the adversarial nature of party politics, and the media’s “gotcha” approach to political coverage. For example, consider again the reasons given by respondents in Alberta and Saskatchewan who felt their province was not treated with the respect it deserved. While a majority focused on the shortcomings of political institutions, only a handful targeted the failings of specific political leaders.

To shift a good part of the focus to the shortcomings of political institutions helps us to understand why, although the public condemns leaders on one hand, they also concede that their own representatives do a good job, that political leaders’ jobs are more difficult, that the media makes them look bad, or that businesses encroach on their prerogatives. In short, while the public is critical of politicians, there is also a recognition that many try to do their best within difficult parameters that are not of their choosing.

### TABLE 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>NEGATIVE ASSESSMENTS</strong></th>
<th><strong>POSITIVE ASSESSMENTS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political leaders: low or very low rating for honesty and ethical standards</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most political leaders do not tell us the truth or keep their promises</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry that young people today have no good leaders or role models to look up to</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much or no confidence in political leaders</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures represent the proportion of respondents holding this view or agreeing with this statement.

---


Note, for instance, that in last year’s survey, 57% of Canadians said that when it comes to helping the country work better, having more free votes in the House of Commons is a high priority. See CRIC, Portraits of Canada, CRIC Paper # 4 (CRIC: Montreal, 2002), pp. 22-24.
All of this suggests that political leaders who succeed in capitalizing electorally on public frustration with government and the public’s desire for change should be cautious in assessing the basis of their popularity. Many commentators characterize the public’s wish for change as a desire for a new leader with a “fresh face.” It is almost certain, however, that what the public really seeks is real improvements in the way government manages the issues Canadians care most about. Newly elected leaders who fail to deliver will see their popularity drop as fast as it once may have risen.

THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT

When CRIC and its research partners released their survey on Canadian and American federalism during the summer of 2002, many were surprised to learn that confidence in both the federal and provincial governments was lower in Canada than was confidence in the US in federal and state governments. The current Portraits offers further confirmation of the situation.

Thirty-seven percent of Canadians say government has a negative impact on most people’s lives, compared with only 28% who say that its impact is positive. Another 33% say government does not have much of an impact on people’s lives. As shown in Figure 17, Canadians are more likely than Americans to say that government’s impact is negative. While 70% of Canadians say that government either has a negative impact, or not much impact, this view is shared by only 53% of Americans.

Several additional points should be noted:

- The view that government has a negative impact on most people’s lives is shared by those on the left and right of the political spectrum. Not surprisingly, those who think government surpluses should be used to fund tax cuts are more likely to view government’s impact as negative. What is more striking is that this is also the case among those who prefer to use surpluses to fund more social program spending. Government is more likely to be seen as having a negative impact both among those who would curb rising health care costs by allowing private sector delivery of health services, and among those who prefer governments to increase their health care spending significantly. In fact, respondents who favour more spending are more likely than those who favour privatization to say that government’s impact is negative.

- While 44% of those who prefer smaller government with fewer services say that government has a negative impact, only 33% of those who prefer larger government say that it has a positive impact. Thus, a majority (64%) of those who prefer larger government think that government either has a negative impact, or not much impact, on most people’s lives.

- Those with lower incomes are less likely than those with higher incomes to say that government has a positive impact. Only 23% of women with an annual household income of less than $40,000 say that government has a positive impact, compared with 35% of men with an annual household income of $80,000 or more. This should be viewed in the context of the finding, noted earlier, that low-income women are much more likely than high-income men to prefer a larger government with more services.

---

**FIGURE 17** DOES GOVERNMENT HAVE A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE IMPACT?

These days, what kind of impact do you think governments have on most people’s lives: a positive impact, a negative impact, or don’t governments have much impact on most people’s lives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Impact</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Impact</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Much Impact</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---


That those who prefer more active governments do not necessarily see governments as having a positive impact and, in some cases, are less likely to view government as positive, compared to those who prefer to reduce government’s scope, is not a contradiction. Rather, it shows that while some feel that governments have a negative impact because they are too big or inefficient, others feel they have a negative impact because they are not fulfilling their responsibilities and have allowed the quality of important social programs to deteriorate. This is a key to understanding why frustration with government in Canada is relatively high, and confidence relatively low.

One further significant finding: Residents of the three western-most provinces are much more likely to say that government’s impact is negative than people in the rest of the country. Forty-three percent of those in Saskatchewan, 49% of Albertans, and 52% of those in BC say government has a negative impact on most people’s lives, compared with 36% of Ontarians, 33% of Manitobans, 32% of Maritimers, 28% of Newfoundlanders, and 26% of Quebeckers. However, those in the seven provinces east of Saskatchewan are not much more likely to say that government has a positive impact; rather, they are more likely to say that government does not have much impact.

This should be viewed in the context of earlier findings about the role of government and trust in government. As mentioned, western Canadians are more likely to support smaller government with fewer services, and the feeling is most pronounced in Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC. And residents of Saskatchewan and BC are more likely than other Canadians to say that they trust neither level of government to protect the programs they care about. (Albertans do not stand with their neighbours on this issue because of their far greater trust in their provincial government). To sum up: Westerners are more likely than other Canadians to favour smaller governments; with the exception of Manitobans, they are more likely to say that governments have a negative impact on most people’s lives; and, with the exceptions of Albertans and to a lesser extent Manitobans, they are more likely to trust neither level of government to protect important programs. These findings fit with the those from the earlier survey on federalism in Canada and the US, which showed that, among regions in both Canada and the US, British Columbians and Albertans had the lowest level of trust in the federal government to do a good job in carrying out its responsibilities, while residents of BC and Saskatchewan had the lowest level of trust in provincial governments.

British Columbians stand out most consistently on these issues. They are most likely to say that governments have a negative impact, most likely to trust neither level of government to protect important programs, and most likely to have low levels of trust in both levels of government to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Many factors influence the assessment of government in BC and its western neighbours, including:

- a more fiscally conservative political culture (especially within the Prairie provinces);
- high levels of discontent with the federal system (especially west of Manitoba);
- economic anxiety caused by the farm crisis on the Prairies and, in BC, the Canada-US softwood lumber dispute;
- disillusionment with provincial political leaders, stemming from past scandals in Saskatchewan and BC.
- a penchant for populism which “still forms the core of western Canadian political culture.”

All of these factors colour politics in the West, and help to explain why, in recent years, some federal political parties have had much greater success in that region than in others.

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25 The weighted average for the three western-most province is 50%, compared with 32% in the other seven provinces.
Portraits of Canada 2002 shows that Canadians are often divided on what is the appropriate role for government. Yet differences on questions related to government activities and expenditures is far from troubling. Indeed, they are the very basis of political life in a democratic society. They animate constructive debates among citizens and contests for political office among political parties and candidates. As mentioned earlier, there is no definitive answer on how to balance the goals of protecting freedom and promoting equality within any domain of public policy. Canadian democracy is made all the stronger when citizens continue to respectfully disagree among themselves about how much, or how little, governments should do.

A note of caution is in order when debates about the government’s role in delivery of health care and other social services consistently pit the most economically advantaged against those of lesser means. Not every Canadian sees an issue from the same perspective. Good public policy must do more than follow the preferences of the majority. It must be sensitive to the fact that services that seem excessive to one group may seem essential to others.

Portraits illustrates how debates about government’s role are intersected by another concern, namely the extent to which governments can be trusted. Regardless of their views on the scope of government activities, many Canadians are losing confidence in their governments’ ability to work together to deal effectively with today’s policy challenges. The majority of Canadians do not express confidence in their political leaders. Outside of Ontario, the majority also questions the fairness of the federal system. All of this contributes to a relatively pervasive sense that government does not have a positive impact on the lives of Canadians.

Beyond satisfying Canadians’ desire for such things as improvements in the health care system, a better environment, and more assistance to poorer regions, governments and political leaders must also respond to a desire for a more constructive approach to political decision-making. There will be ample opportunity for the federal and provincial governments to demonstrate that they have taken the public’s wishes to heart as they address the recommendations issued by the Romanow commission on health care, the pending ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, and the setting of budget priorities for 2003.
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