CONTENTS

Special Issue: Canada-US Relations in the Age of Donald Trump
Guest Editors: Donald E. Abelson and Adam Lajeunesse

Introduction
Guest Editors’ Introduction: Canada-US Relations in the Age of Trump
Donald E. Abelson and Adam Lajeunesse 1

Articles
The Canada-US Relationship: An Updated Evaluation of Public Opinion
John Kennedy, Cameron D. Anderson and Laura B. Stephenson 9
Trump’s “American System” and Canada
Greg Anderson 32
Canada–United States Environmental Relations during the Trudeau-Trump Years: A Story of Divergence and Resilience
Stephen Brooks 48
Forks in the Road: Energy Policies in Canada and the US since the Shale Revolution
Jean-Sébastien Rioux and Jennifer Winter 66
Living with Giants and Inconvenient Truths: The US, China, and Everyone Else
David A. Beitelman 86
Collateral Damage: The Canada-US Border and President Trump’s Executive Orders
Benjamin J. Muller and Bonnie Lynn Guthrie 103
Avoiding the "HUUUGE" Crisis Predicted: Third-Party Issues and Canada-US Relations in the Age of Trump
Charles-Philippe David and Julie-Pier Nadeau 116
Canada-US Relations: No Longer Special or Privileged
Derek H. Burney 128

Books Received 133
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The Canada-US Relationship: An Updated Evaluation of Public Opinion

John Kennedy, Cameron D. Anderson & Laura B. Stephenson


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The Canada-US Relationship: An Updated Evaluation of Public Opinion

John Kennedy, Cameron D. Anderson and Laura B. Stephenson
Department of Political Science, Western University, London, Canada

ABSTRACT
Despite the political turbulence of the Trump-Trudeau era, the US-Canada relationship remains workable on many policy fronts. Against this backdrop, this article explores this relationship by first focusing on public opinion toward “the other,” including general sentiments as well as political leadership specifically, before turning to public opinion in specific policy fields, such as bilateral trade, security, energy, and diplomacy. We broadly find that Canadians are more likely than Americans to draw distinctions between Canada and the US and view the relationship in more cautious terms. By contrast, opinion in the US appears to be much more positive about the relationship.

In the past 10 years, Canadian and American voters seem to have taken dramatically different paths. In 2008, Barack Obama entered office as president of the US, and Stephen Harper was reelected as prime minister in a minority parliament in Canada. Their ideological views diverged (progressive compared to conservative), but the relationship between Canada and the US seemed to be relatively stable and smooth. The 2015 Canadian federal election ushered in a more progressive Canadian government in the form of Justin Trudeau and the Liberals. The relationship between the two countries seemed to warm considerably, with the two leaders appearing to enjoy a “bromance” during their first meeting (Blake, Epstein, and Carey-Mahoney 2016). The following November brought a dramatic shift when American voters shocked the world by selecting Republican and reality TV star Donald Trump as their 45th president. What has this meant for the Canada-US relationship?

Since Trump took office in 2017 there has been considerable turmoil between Canada and the US, much more than at any point during the similarly ideologically divergent Harper and Obama administrations. There have been dramatic public clashes over policy and the closeness of the countries’ trade relationship. This change in tone has not gone unnoticed by the public in Canada and the United States. For Canadians, the situation to the south often looks dire. Canadians regarded Obama with a high degree of reverence, and their esteem for the American presidential office has plummeted in the wake of Donald Trump’s inauguration (Pew Research Center 2018). Conversely, according to the little public opinion research that has been undertaken, Americans’ views toward
Canadians and their government have remained stable. While their political knowledge of Canada is thin (Thompson 2003), Americans tend to look favorably upon the Canadian government, as well as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Despite the deeply polarized politics in the United States, Americans seem somewhat envious of the steadiness of the current Canadian political climate, and, particularly, Canada’s political leadership (Ipsos 2017b). Conversely, as has been the case for many years, Americans still feel “close” to Canadians on a number of measures (see Nanos/UB research 2005–19).

Despite the political turbulence of the Trump-Trudeau era, the US-Canada relationship remains workable on many policy fronts. While a considerable amount of posturing and rhetoric occurs on both sides, the US and Canada, along with Mexico, were able to negotiate successfully the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). Canada and the US have been working closely on more integrative security measures for travelers, as well as accelerating preclearance for travel between the countries (Zimonjic 2019). There is also reciprocal interest in working more closely to combat the opioid epidemic on both sides of the border, particularly in improving cooperation among law enforcement agencies and engaging multilateral organizations (Zimonjic 2019). Despite these positive collaborations, however, a substantially larger portion of the media’s focus on this relationship has emphasized disagreement over agreement.

Against this backdrop, the goals of this article are twofold. The first is to explore public opinion about the US-Canada relationship in recent times to determine whether we should take the reports of successful cooperation, or the media stories of disagreement, as accurate indications of the real state of the relationship between the two countries. We do this by first focusing on public opinion toward “the other,” including general sentiments as well as ideas about political leadership specifically. We then turn to public opinion in specific policy fields, such as bilateral trade, security, energy, and diplomacy. We use public opinion polls and a survey of Canadians conducted from May to August 2019 to provide our data. The relationship between Canada and the US is not a young one, so we feel it is necessary to consider not only general opinions but also specific ones about leaders (who come and go) and issues (which ebb and flow). It would be foolish to expect any relationship to remain constant for more than a century, but it is also important to understand how resilient it is to big changes in leadership and policy direction. The second goal of the paper is actually a by-product of the first—to expand the exiguous literature on what is still one of the largest and longest partnerships in the world. While Donald Trump’s election to the presidency has sparked a recent uptick in commentary on and analysis of the bilateral partnership, this goal takes into account David Leal’s (2017) claim that while there have been efforts to urge political scientists to pay more attention to US-Canada relations, “political science has yet to heed such calls.”

Opinions of Each Other

Our first step in understanding the US-Canada relationship is to put into context how Canadians and Americans view their countries’ relationship by considering their opinions on relationships with other countries. We then consider opinions about leadership in Canada and the US, and close this section by outlining a comparison of opinions on underlying values between the two countries. Where possible, we consider over-time comparisons.
Just knowing whether Canadians or Americans value their partnership is not useful unless we can compare it to how they feel about their country’s relationship with other countries. Using the recent data available from the Consortium on Electoral Democracy’s 2019 Democracy Checkup, we can compare Canadian public opinion on relations that Canada enjoys with the world’s two superpowers (the US and China). Figure 1 shows that a desire for closeness favors the US, but desires for more distance are on relatively equal footing in the minds of Canadians when comparing the US and China, despite the very different histories of the relationships. Perhaps this reflects pragmatic considerations: as a “middle power” (Ravenhill 1998), it is important for Canada to have positive relations with its larger counterparts, which often include further integration of trade, security, and other policy fields.

A recent Nanos survey (April 2019) provides further comparisons with some of Canada’s other major international partners. Canadians are equally likely to indicate having a positive (44 percent) or negative (44 percent) opinion of the Canada-US partnership, and only the Canada-Chinese partnership (56 percent) shows a higher negativity rating. To put this into context, Canada’s relationship with the United Kingdom is viewed quite positively (86 percent), as are its relationships with Germany (82 percent), France (77 percent), and Mexico (65 percent). In addition, according to Environics’ 2018 Canada World Survey, only 11 percent of Canadians believed that the US stood out as a positive force in the world, down from 15 percent in 2008. Conversely, a majority (58 percent) of Canadians saw the US as a negative force, up from 52 percent in 2008. This placed the US ahead of North Korea (46 percent), Russia (24 percent), Iran (13 percent), and China (13 percent). There appears to have been some change in Canadian opinion, which was brought about by the change in US leadership that occurred after the 2016 election.

![Figure 1](https://example.com/figure1.png)

**Figure 1.** Canadian views on ties with superpowers.

Source: Stephenson et al. (2019)

Question (ties_us/ties_china): Do you think Canada’s ties with [the United States/China] should be much closer, somewhat closer, about the same as now, somewhat more distant, or much more distant? [split sample] (Don’t know/Prefer not to answer responses are not reported)
Additional data provide little reason for optimism. Canadians are nearly twice as likely to say they feel close to Western European Scandinavian countries (33 percent) as compared to the US (19 percent) (Environics Canada’s World Survey 2018). Similarly, Canadians are more likely to identify Europe (48 percent) over the US (34 percent) as the partner they are most comfortable with in terms of having a positive relationship that benefits Canada (Nanos 2019). Even among those who are most comfortable with the US-Canada partnership, physical proximity (44 percent) was the main reason they provided, ahead of more personal ties, such as being Canada’s largest trading partner (18 percent), sharing common interests and values (14 percent), and the familiarity of a longstanding relationship (12 percent) (Nanos 2019).

To see if this negative opinion is reciprocated, we can look at where Americans situate Canada in their list of global allies. Figure 2 shows Gallup poll data from July 2018 that gauged American views about relationships with many of the US’s closest allies. The results indicate a relatively healthy view of Canada with 57 percent of respondents identifying Canada as an “ally” and another four in 10 (37 percent) citing Canada as “friendly, but not an ally.” This response is similar to the results for Great Britain and places Canada ahead of other major partners, such as France, Japan, and Germany. Although feelings toward the US’s northern neighbor are comparatively positive, the 57 percent of Americans who consider Canada an ally is down slightly from 61 percent in a similar poll conducted in 2013 (Gallup 2013).

Although not a massive gap, there is a noticeable lack of reciprocity in positive sentiment from Canadians. This can be seen clearly in Gallup data from February 2018 (Gallup 2018a). Comparing Americans’ views of other countries against those countries’ opinions of the US’s current leadership, some dramatic gaps are evident. Americans have a 94 percent favorable opinion of Canada, but only 20 percent of Canadians approve of US leadership (a 74-percentage point difference). This gap is larger than that of Norway (72 points), Germany (62 points), Great Britain (45 points), and France (37 points).

Figure 2. American views on relations with key countries.
Source: Gallup (2018b)
Question: For each of the following countries, please say whether you consider it an ally of the United States, friendly but not an ally, unfavorable, or an enemy of the United States. How about...?
points), France (59 points), and Great Britain (56 points). Clearly, Americans are much more positive about Canada than Canadians are about the United States.

Given the dramatic change brought about by Trump’s election, and the shift in the way Canada has been treated in policy negotiations (more below), it is best to separate opinion about the country from opinion about political leadership. Figure 3 shows data from the Pew Research Center that does just that. The data show that Canadians’ confidence in the US president is more volatile than their views of the US generally, and that there were large drops in both measures in 2017, after the election of Donald Trump. Favorability of the US went from 65 percent in 2016 to 43 percent in 2017, and confidence in the US president went from 83 percent in 2016 to 22 percent in 2017, indicating a drastic opinion shift among Canadians.

Without question, the transition from Barack Obama to Donald Trump soured Canadian public opinion, as 70 percent indicated they were dissatisfied with Trump’s electoral victory (Ipsos 2016a). The perceptible difference between Canadian and American retrospective ratings of Barack Obama and their prospective ratings of Donald Trump mere months after his inauguration paints a similar portrait. Figure 4 provides comparative data from an Ipsos poll conducted in January 2017a. Upon reflection, a similar proportion of Americans who approved of Obama’s time in office held the same sentiments when thinking ahead to the Trump administration. By contrast, Canadians were less optimistic: there was a profound gap in approval ratings by Canadians when they looked back at Obama’s presidency and forward to Donald Trump’s presidency.

![Figure 3. Canadians’ views of the US.](image)

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey (Pew Research Center 2018)

Question (Q17a): Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of the United States.

Question (Q35a): For each, tell me how much confidence you have in each leader to do the right thing regarding world affairs—a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all. a. US President [Donald Trump/Barack Obama/George W. Bush]
In part because of Trump’s ability to turn any colorful comment or tweet into a major headline at any time, Canadians have been polled regularly about their opinions of the US president. But measuring American opinion of Justin Trudeau is difficult. In our research, we were only able to uncover one poll gauging American opinion on Canada’s prime minister (Ipsos 2017b). Figure 5 shows that many Americans readily admit to having no familiarity with Justin Trudeau; among those who do, opinion is quite favorable. Almost half (43 percent) of Americans approve of Justin Trudeau’s performance, and more Americans (40 percent) than not (33 percent) agree that they would prefer to have Justin Trudeau as president instead of Donald Trump.

Overall, public opinion polls show that for Canadians, there is no ambivalence about the Canada-US relationship. While sentiments toward Barack Obama may have softened their disposition, Canadians appear to be increasingly more negative toward the US and its leadership. This seems to have been fueled largely by the election of Donald Trump. This change in the American political landscape has led to Canadians now acknowledging closer ties to Great Britain, although this trend may be affected by Boris Johnson’s time as Prime Minister and the specter of Brexit. Despite this, Americans still appear to hold Canadians, and Justin Trudeau, in high regard.

**Values and Policy Cooperation**

In this section, we explore public opinion from each country in terms of similar values and the desire for cooperation on major US-Canada issues. The picture painted above about the US-Canada relationship is a negative one, but it also seems to be related directly to Canadians’ dislike of Donald Trump. The relationship is much bigger than any specific president or prime
minister and, in fact, is rooted in very practical issues. The cultures are very similar, and they share similar concerns about security. Have opinions on these issues changed in the recent past, and especially since Trump was elected?

Longitudinal opinion tracking of Canadians’ and Americans’ views of each other’s values shows similarity to the opinion trends indicated above. A Nanos/University of Buffalo (UB) survey that tracks North American attitudes shows that Canadians have been seeing themselves as less close to Americans on the issues of human rights (Figure 6(a)) and family values (Figure 6(b)) over the past several years, beginning with Obama’s time in office. Interestingly, there has also been a decline in a perceived similarity on business values (Figure 6(c)), but only since Trump took office. On the American side, the change in opinion has been much weaker. There have been dips regarding Americans’ assessments of their similarities to Canada on human rights and family values, but they are relatively small (Figures (6b) and (6d)); and, if anything, there is an upward trend on business values (Figure 6(f)). Unlike their overall attitudes toward the US, Canadian opinions do not seem to be changing as a direct consequence of Trump’s election.

Turning now to specific policy issues, we can assess whether specific conflicts have led to attitudes that could have contributed to the overall trends observed above. Since Trump was elected in 2016, four policy fields have been most prominent in the relationship: Free Trade, Foreign Relations/Policy, Border Security and Immigration, and the Environment/Energy Resources. Comparative public opinion on these key issues, particularly surrounding USMCA negotiations and security (which stems mostly from immigration sentiments), reveals a tension between the two neighbors and an apparent ongoing divergence.

Figure 5. Americans’ attitudes on Justin Trudeau.
Source: Ipsos (2017b)
Question: Thinking about the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

Figure 5: Bar charts showing public opinions on Justin Trudeau's performance
- "I approve of Justin Trudeau’s performance as Canada’s Prime Minister" (43% Agree, 16% Disagree, 34% Don’t Know)
- "I would prefer to have Justin Trudeau as President over Donald Trump" (27% Agree, 33% Disagree, 40% Don’t Know)
- "Justin Trudeau will be able to stand up effectively to Donald Trump" (27% Agree, 39% Disagree, 34% Don’t Know)
Question: Thinking about Canada in relation to the countries below, could you please identify the first and second-ranked countries that are closest with Canada in terms of human rights? [ROTATE] [FIRST RANKED]

Question: Thinking about Canada in relation to the countries below, could you please identify the first- and second-ranked countries that are closest with Canada in terms of family values? [ROTATE] [FIRST RANKED]

Figure 6. (a) Canadians’ attitudes on human rights (first ranked). (b) Canadians’ attitudes on family values (first ranked). (c) Canadians’ attitudes on business values (first ranked). (d) Americans’ attitudes on human rights (first ranked). (e) Americans’ attitudes on family values (first ranked). (f) Americans’ attitudes on business values (first ranked).

Source: Nanos (2018a)
Question: Thinking about the US in relation with the countries below, could you please rank the top two countries that are closest with the United States in terms of human rights? [ROTATE] [FIRST RANKED]
Source: Nanos (2018a)

Question: Thinking about Canada in relation to the countries below, could you please identify the first- and second-ranked countries that are closest with Canada in terms of family values? [ROTATE] [FIRST RANKED]
Source: Nanos (2018a)

Figure 6. (Continued).
Figure 6. (Continued)

Question: Thinking about the US in relation with the countries below, could you please rank the top two countries that are closest with the United States in terms of family values? [ROTATE] [FIRST RANKED]

Source: Nanos (2018a)

Question: Thinking about the US in relation with the countries below, could you please rank the top two countries that are closest with the United States in terms of business values? [ROTATE] [FIRST RANKED]

Source: Nanos (2018a)
The USMCA Free Trade Agreement

Amidst a campaign filled with notable promises and changes, one of the major policy positions taken by Donald Trump on the campaign trail was the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Particular points of contention included improved American access to Canadian dairy, “country-of-origin” automotive manufacturing rules and the desire for a sunset clause that would set an end date for any potential agreement. Immediately upon taking office in January 2017, President Trump signed executive orders signaling his intention to renegotiate the NAFTA deal, 23 years after it was ratified.

While we cannot directly test whether President Trump’s campaign messages influenced public opinion, a comparative poll conducted by the Pew Research Center (2017a) prior to the start of negotiations revealed extensive hostility among Americans toward the original agreement. Only 51 percent of Americans indicated that the original NAFTA deal had been “good” for the US compared to four in 10 (39 percent) who categorized it as “bad.” By contrast, substantially more Canadians identified the original NAFTA as “good” (74 percent) for Canada as opposed to it being “bad” (17 percent). This reflects the fact, as scholar Meredith Lilly argues, that Canada is “much more reliant on stable bilateral relations with the United States for economic success than vice versa” (Lilly 2017, 68). It seems that many Americans are aware of the power balance of this relationship, particularly surrounding the original NAFTA deal, as nearly three times as many Americans (20 percent) indicated that Canada benefits more than the US from NAFTA than the other way around (7 percent), although most (57 percent) believed both countries benefit equally (Pew Research Center 2017b).

President Trump wasted no time trying to get the upper hand in the pre-negotiation process phase, even promising to impose stiff tariffs on steel and aluminum imports upon the Canadian trade partnership based upon a “national security” justification (Payne 2019). Well aware that this posturing could lead to a potential trade war, public opinion in Canada showed little reticence in the face of these threats. When asked, most Canadians (58 percent) said they would support “Canada having a trade war with the US if the US puts new tariffs on Canadian goods entering the US,” compared to 35 percent who opposed this position (Nanos 2017b). This hardened stance toward a trade war, however, softened in the months leading up to the first round of negotiations, when a majority (54 percent) of Canadians stated they would be at least somewhat open “to making concessions in order to keep an open trading relationship in the US and Mexico” (Nanos 2017c). Staying true to his word, President Trump announced the implementation of these tariffs, which ultimately took effect in June 2018, just prior to the G7 Summit in Charlevoix, Quebec. Although the US and Mexico reached a deal in late August 2018, Canada would not sign the agreement until the end of September, when the Trudeau government made the removal of these tariffs a strict condition for ratification. The tariffs were lifted in May 2019.

Diplomacy

In the midst of early discussions to rework the expiring NAFTA deal, the behavior of the president and the prime minister at the G7 Summit held in Charlevoix, Quebec was heavily scrutinized and analyzed as an indication of a growing rift between Trump and Trudeau. Everything from the “jerk and pull” handshake (Wherry 2019, 126) to venomous tweets promising automobile tariffs were interpreted as proof of tension that emanated
from the NAFTA renegotiations and appeared to spill into the court of international diplomacy. In a news conference after meeting with President Trump, Justin Trudeau vehemently stated that “we [Canada] will not be pushed around.” This statement was met with a response from the president, who called the prime minister “meek and mild” and accused him of making several false statements.

Shortly after the summit, a comparative poll conducted by Ipsos (2018) gauged opinions from Americans and Canadians about this conflict on the world stage (see Figure 7). A substantial proportion of Americans (71 percent) and Canadians (81 percent) indicated

**Figure 7.** Americans’ and Canadians’ Opinions on the 2018 G7 summit conflict.
Source: Ipsos (2018)

Question: As you may know, during the recent G7 meeting in Quebec, Prime Minister Trudeau said that US tariffs against Canadian steel and aluminum are insulting to Canada. In response, President Trump called Prime Minister Trudeau dishonest and weak, and US officials said that Canada backstabbed the United States. Thinking about this issue, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:
that “the situation has damaged relations between the US and Canada.” More Americans than Canadians believed that Prime Minister Trudeau could be pushed too far by President Trump and take retaliatory action that would either hurt the American economy or make it more difficult to travel to Canada. A majority of Canadians (72 percent) and Americans (57 percent) approved of how Prime Minister Trudeau handled the situation, while fewer approved of President Donald Trump’s job in handling this situation (37 percent of Americans vs 14 percent of Canadians). Considering Trump’s use of personal attacks in an attempt to gain the upper hand in what has been called his zero-sum view of negotiations (Payne 2019), more than half of Canadians (57 percent) and Americans (52 percent) believed that “Canada shouldn’t overreact to President Trump’s recent comments—it was just political posturing related to the NAFTA negotiations.” No matter the result of the conflict, Americans’ perception that the US needs Canada much more than Canada needs them (41 percent vs 53 percent of Canadians who believe that Canada needs the US more) is indicative of a disparity in both partners’ belief that the US is superior in the relationship. But the same Ipsos poll (2018) revealed that Trump’s comments did not affect broader Canadian attitudes toward the US: a majority (57 percent) of Canadians said that “recent events have had no impact on my favourability of American people” (vs 12 percent who claimed these events produced a more favorable opinion of Americans and 32 percent who said they had less favorable opinions). However, 73 percent of Canadians indicated that the events left them with a less favorable opinion of President Trump (against 10 percent with a more favorable opinion and 17 percent whose opinion was not affected).

After the smoke cleared, the Pew Research Center (2018) conducted a multinational poll with many of the US’s largest partners to understand current international opinion toward the US and its current administration. When asked how much “the US takes into account the interest of countries like ours” when “making international policy decisions,” fewer than one in five Canadians (18 percent) said “a great deal/fair amount”—down from 31 percent in 2013 (Figure 8). Canadian views on this matter were tied for lowest (with France) across all major US partnerships. While it is reasonable to believe that these opinions may be biased in part due to the events around the time of polling, few could argue against the importance of these results and their potential to snowball into further conflict should similar actions be taken in other international forums.

However, we would be remiss if we did not note that since the signing of the USMCA, Canada and the US have started to repair their relationship, partly out of increasing necessity in the wake of several international issues involving China that have forced the US and Canada to work together. Recently, the US and Canada have announced a joint effort to disrupt the flow of fentanyl into the two countries from China (Blanchfield 2019). This, combined with the ongoing international security issue stemming from the detention of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou by Canadian authorities at the request of the US, has led the US into a precarious position with its two largest trading partners.³ As the US has taken a hard-line stance against China on these issues, a shared position in opposition to China has served to strengthen ties between Canada and the US. David Beitelman discusses this matter in his article in this issue.

Immigration and Security

Although free trade and diplomacy have been salient issues in US-Canada relations, immigration and border security have also been an important focus of the relationship.
This is not particularly surprising as the US and Canada share the longest international land border in the world. President Trump’s often hard-line stance on immigration and security has pushed these issues to the forefront of public opinion on more than one occasion. While the USMCA has been a primary focus of the Canada-US relationship in recent years, security is not forgotten. As the late Paul Cellucci (Weber 2003), former US ambassador to Canada, once put it, “security trumps trade.”

Compared to more tenuous opinions among Canadians and Americans on free trade and foreign relations, annual data from Nanos/UB surveys (2005–18) over three administrations show in each country a desire for increased cooperation on security issues between the US and Canada (Figures 9(a)-9(f)). A majority of both Canadians and

**Figure 8.** Global attitudes: the US takes into account the interest of countries like ours a great deal/fair amount.

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey (Pew Research Center 2018)

Question (Q39): In making international policy decisions, to what extent do you think the US takes the interest of your country into account?
Americans supported closer cooperation with their long-standing neighbors on matters pertaining to national security, border security, and terrorism. This longitudinal data also shows relative consistency since 2005, suggesting that changes in leadership did little to damage the overall relationship.

The consistency is particularly interesting in light of the very different policy paths taken in each country. However, there does not seem to be a lot of concern with the policy choices of the opposite government in this area, and in fact there is internal disagreement about domestic choices. Prior to the Trump administration, Prime Minister Trudeau announced that Canada would be accepting 25,000 Syrian refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East. An Ipsos poll (2016b) revealed that Americans were split (50 percent agreed vs 50 percent disagreed) on the statement: “I’m not concerned about the 25,000 Syrian refugees that Canada has accepted posing a security threat to the US.” Nearly a year later, a similar Ipsos poll (2017b) revealed that more Americans disagreed (34 percent) than agreed (26 percent) with the notion that “Justin Trudeau’s actions and policies are making North America open to terrorists.” In 2017, Quebec received a sizable influx of Haitian asylum-seekers after President Trump rescinded temporary protected status for nearly 60,000 Haitians in November 2016. While many Haitians flocked to Canada, particularly in the wake of Justin Trudeau’s tweet welcoming those fleeing persecution, Canadians acknowledged mixed feelings about this influx. In fact, Canadians were split evenly (37 percent) on the question whether “Canada should welcome asylum seekers from the US” or “Canada should close its borders to asylum seekers” (Nanos 2017a). Interestingly, when Americans were polled by Ipsos about this issue earlier in 2017, more agreed (41 percent) than disagreed (32 percent) that “Justin Trudeau and Canada should take in the refugees that Donald Trump is refusing to admit to the United States.”

Since 2017, Canadian opinion on accepting refugees who cross the US border to claim asylum has remained resolute. Canadians are three times more likely to say that the Government of Canada should be “less welcoming” (43 percent) to refugees who cross the Canadian border from the United States to claim asylum compared to those who say Canada should be “more welcoming” (14 percent) (Nanos 2018b). Canadians also feel that there is too small a “law enforcement presence at the Canadian border to respond to so called ‘irregular border’ crossings by refugees leaving the United States and seeking asylum in Canada” (57 percent), compared to only 29 percent who believe the “right amount is present” or that there is “too much presence” (2 percent) (Nanos 2018b). Although Americans and Canadians want more cooperation on security and immigration issues, public opinion in both countries indicates the desire for the other to deal with potential refugee issues more efficiently.

**Energy and Climate Change**

Similar to the issue of refugees, the Canadian and American administrations appear to be moving in opposite directions on the environment. More in line with Trump’s predecessor, President Obama, Justin Trudeau’s administration has focused on promoting clean renewable-energy source development and ending fossil fuel subsidies (Hale 2012). In contrast, President Trump has pursued environmental deregulation since he came to office (Carment and Sands 2019, 106). Canadians seem content with achieving outlined environmental targets, even if their US counterpart decides not to. Stephen Brooks examines this dynamic in his article in this issue. Seven in 10 (71 percent) Canadians indicate that they support the Canadian government
Figure 9. (a) Canadians’ attitudes on border security. (b) Americans’ attitudes on border security. (c) Canadians’ attitudes on national security. (d) Americans’ attitudes on national security. (e) Canadians’ attitudes on anti-terrorism. (f) Americans’ attitudes on anti-terrorism.

Source: Nanos (2018a)

Question: In terms of border security, should the United States and Canada be moving towards greater and closer cooperation or should they be maintaining more separate policies and priorities?

Source: Nanos (2018a)

Question: In terms of border security, should the United States and Canada be moving towards greater and closer cooperation or should they be maintaining more separate policies and priorities?

Source: Nanos (2018a)
Question: In terms of national security (i.e., NATO, the United Nations), should the United States and Canada be moving towards greater and closer cooperation or should they be maintaining more separate policies and priorities?

Source: Nanos (2018a)

Figure 9. (Continued).

Question: In terms of national security (i.e., NATO, the United Nations), should the United States and Canada be moving towards greater and closer cooperation or should they be maintaining more separate policies and priorities?

Source: Nanos (2018a)
Figure 9. (Continued).

Question: In terms of anti-terrorism measures, should the United States and Canada be moving towards greater and closer cooperation or should they be maintaining more separate policies and priorities?
maintaining its commitment to drastically reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector in Canada, even if the US does not reduce its methane emissions (Nanos 2017b). Similar to the previous issues discussed, however, there is a desire for integration among Americans and Canadians. Once again, data from a Nanos/UB survey ((Figures 10a and 10b)) show that 82 percent of Canadians and 84 percent of Americans think it is important for “the United States and Canada to work together to develop an integrated energy policy to remove any dependence on Middle East oil” (Nanos 2018a). These opinions have remained consistent since 2005, albeit with a slight decline since Donald Trump’s inauguration (Nanos 2018a).

The Trump administration’s recent actions to move forward with the Keystone XL pipeline, reversing the Obama administration’s rejection of its approval, has reopened this topic (Lilly 2017). Interestingly, at the time of its initial demise, only a minority (43 percent) of Canadians supported development of the pipeline (compared to 59 percent of Americans) (Pew Research Center 2015). With the announcement of its reaplication and subsequent approval by the Trump administration, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of Canadians agreed that “approval by the United States of the Keystone XL pipeline which connects the oil sands to the US market would be good news for Canada” (Nanos 2016). Historically, American and Canadian public opinion has shown a desire for more integration and cooperation from their neighboring administrations despite their policy agendas being distinct from each other. The future development of the Keystone XL pipeline will be an interesting focal point for public opinion, especially among Canadians who have held contradictory opinions—advocating for clean energy generally, but at the same time supporting this new oil pipeline.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Through the aggregation of a number of different public opinion polls, our study provides an updated look at public opinion among Canadians and Americans on US-Canada relations. We broadly find that Canadians are more likely to draw distinctions between Canada and the US and to view the relationship in more cautious terms. By contrast, opinion in the US appears to be much more positive about the relationship. Despite these different aggregate perspectives on the tenor of the relationship, there is a shared sentiment regarding the importance of working together on major issues.

Perhaps not surprisingly, American sentiments toward Canada have gone relatively unchanged over the past ten years. This opinion consistency, however, is not shared by Canadians. While Canadians desire more integration with the US when it comes to matters of security, immigration, and energy policy, they are noticeably divergent from their neighbors on core social values. While this divergence could be expected considering the divisiveness of the Trump administration and Trump’s noticeably lower favorability ratings compared to his predecessor, what is surprising is that Canadians’ opinion deviation from the US began prior to Trump’s arrival in office.

Despite this apparent divide, in a recent and rare visit to Canada’s capital, US Vice President Mike Pence lauded the US-Canada relationship as having “never been stronger and that is a reflection of his [Trump’s] leadership and your leadership.” In response, political scientist Nelson Wiseman called these remarks “laughable” and stated that “Canada, like the Europeans and the Japanese, is waiting Trump out, calculating reasonably that a new administration will be more grounded and consistent … I don’t expect Trump will ever again be in Canada as president. So much
Question: In your opinion, how important or unimportant is it for the United States and Canada to work together to develop an integrated energy policy to remove any dependence on Middle East oil? Is it very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant?

Source: Nanos (2018a)

Figure 10. (a) Canadians’ attitudes on integrating energy policy. (b) Americans’ attitudes on integrating energy policy.

Source: Nanos (2018a)
for strong relations” (PBS Newshour 2019). In an anecdotal way, both Pence’s and Wiseman’s comments appear to reflect accurately their respective nations’ opinions about “the other.” While recent changes in administration and policy focus have pulled the two countries further apart, there is, overall, a consistency in Canadians’ and Americans’ attitudes about cooperation. There is still much work to be done to understand the underlying attitudes that drive public opinion regarding US-Canada relations and the role that public opinion itself plays in helping influence this relationship.

Notes

1. Data collected over four waves from May to August 2019 for a total sample of 5,067 respondents.
2. Such content rules would mean that an increased percentage of an automobile’s value would have to come from the US, Canada, or Mexico to qualify for zero tariffs.
3. In December 2018, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police arrested Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou at Vancouver International Airport at the behest of the United States. This was in accordance with both the Extradition Act and the Treaty of Extradition between Canada and the United States. This arrest came from accusations that Wanzhou attempted to defraud several American financial institutions by providing misleading information about Huawei’s businesses in Iran, which violated U.S-based sanctions on the country.

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Notes on contributors

**John Kennedy** is a PhD student in the Department of Political Science at Western University, London, Ontario. He completed his MA at Wilfrid Laurier University in 2012 before going on to work for many of Canada’s largest public opinion polling organizations. His current research interests include understanding the effects of misinformation and how different technological advancements and delivery formats affect its salience.

**Cameron D. Anderson** is Associate Professor of Political Science at Western University, London, Ontario. He is a member of both the Consortium on Electoral Democracy and the Canadian Municipal Election Study research teams. He is a specialist in political behavior, and his research focuses on public opinion and voting behavior in Canada with a particular emphasis on economic and contextual influences.
Laura B. Stephenson is Professor of Political Science at Western University, London, Ontario. She is co-director of the Consortium on Electoral Democracy, one of the investigators of the 2019 Canadian Election Study, and a member of the Canadian Municipal Election Study team. Dr. Stephenson specializes in the study of political behavior, both Canadian and comparative. Her research focuses on understanding how institutions and context influence attitudes, electoral preferences, and engagement with politics.

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