IS THAT WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR? EVOLVING RELATIONS BETWEEN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE SECOND COMING OF PRESIDENT TRUMP

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Canada and the United States "share much more than a border." There are "special bonds that come when two nations have shed their blood together – which we have... America is deeply fortunate to have a neighbour like Canada... and... we have before us the opportunity to build even more bridges, and bridges of cooperation and bridges of commerce."

This lovely tribute to the relationship between Canada and the United States was offered by none other than U.S. President Donald Trump at the outset of his first term in 2016. (*NBC News*, March 2025)

Nearly a decade later, the relationship between the two countries looks very different. Now in his second term as U.S. president, the same Trump has on several occasions publicly expressed his interest in making Canada America's "51st state." As he puts it, "Canada and the United States, that would really be something... You get rid of that artificially drawn line, and you take a look at what that looks like, and it would also be much better for national security." (*National Post*, February 2025)

Some might interpret his desire for us to be part of the United States as a peculiar form of courtship. After all, President Trump recently said that he loves Canada and Canadians (see Pereira, *ABC News*, March 2025). He really likes hockey icon Wayne Gretzky and our national anthem, which he has generously stated that we can retain (the

anthem, not Gretzky) in the event we join the United States. Presumably, however, *O Canada* would become our "state" song.

Trump's sudden desire for Canada has not always been accompanied by flattery, as reflected by the following observation: "I deal with every country indirectly or directly; one of the nastiest countries to deal with is Canada. Now this was Trudeau – good old Justin, I call him Governor Trudeau – his people were nasty – and they weren't telling the truth. They never tell the truth." (Ingraham, March 2025). He thinks Canadians are nasty and yet says he loves them. Hmmm.

How seriously are Canadians taking Donald Trump's expressed interest to annex Canada? In short, very seriously. That's what two-thirds of Canadians said in response to a recent Leger survey done for the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS-Leger, March 1–2, 2025). The Canada-U.S. relationship has deteriorated to the point where about one in five Canadians thinks that the United States might send troops into Canada if it refuses to become the 51st state (and 32 per cent say they don't know).

Apart from the talk of annexation, the second coming of Trump has very ungenerously and unfairly modified trade arrangements with Canada via the introduction of various and varying tariffs, which will adversely affect Canada and wreak financial havoc on Canadians.

To be fair, Trump's punitive tariffs targeted several countries other than Canada, and perhaps one might therefore conclude that it's not personal. Nonetheless, there is a widely held view that the Trump tariffs to which Canada is being subjected seek to render the country more dependent than others on the United States.

What makes it all the more frustrating is that over the course of Canada's history, it has been the United States that is widely seen as the country's closest ally. This has many Canadians asking: Is that what friends are for? The outcome of Trump's actions is that Canadians are now expressing a record high negative view of the U.S. In the March 30–31, 2025 poll conducted by Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, some 33 per cent of Canadians say they have a positive view of the U.S. The survey puts negative views of the United States at 58 per cent, a point *higher* than the rate of negative sentiment that Canadians harbor towards China (ACS-Leger, March 29–31, 2025.)

The record low level of positive sentiment towards the U.S. has resulted in the widest of gaps in the countries' respective perception of each other. Americans continue to hold Canada in high esteem. As revealed in a February 2025 Gallup poll, some 89 per cent of Americans see their northern neighbour favorably, placing Canada above all other countries in that regard (Gallup, February 2025). The net outcome, though, is a record 66-point difference between how positively the countries view each other.

For the time being, Canadians are distinguishing the negative view of the United States as a country from their views of the American people themselves, with 38 per cent of these Canadian respondents holding negative views of their geographic neighbour and 50 per cent seeing Americans positively. Canadians' relatively warm

feeling towards Americans is at risk of changing if the political and economic relationship between the two countries erodes further.

Despite the drop in good feelings on the part of Canadians toward the United States, the majority (53 per cent) acknowledge that there is more in common between the two peoples than with any others in the world. Still, Canadians insist on highlighting our differences, with some 78 per cent agreeing with the statement that they possess values that make them different from Americans. When asked what makes Canadians different, one might have expected references to universal health care north of the border and gun violence to the south. When surveyed about this, those things were indeed mentioned. And the more common differences cited by respondents have Canadians as more welcoming, friendly, compassionate and inclusive.

In sum, when compared with Americans, Canadians see themselves as members of a kinder, gentler nation (ACS-Leger, March 29–30, 2025). For many in Canada, the tariffs and threats of annexation feel very personal and existential, as though they are core challenges to the country's perceived way of life and identity. (See Table 1)

TABLE 1. PLEASE TELL US IN A FEW WORDS WHAT IN PARTICULAR MAKES CANADIANS DIFFERENT FROM AMERICANS.

Canadian are more welcoming/friendlier/compassionate	15%
Our kindness/politeness	14%
Canadian are inclusive/celebrate diversity/are multicultural	12%
Canadian respect civil rights/equality/we are open-minded	12%
Canadians are community oriented/united	9%
Guns laws/gun culture	9%
We are a proud nation/loyal to the country	8%
Canadian have better manners/are respectful	8%
Medicare/universal healthcare	8%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, March 29–30, 2025.

CANADIAN COUNTERMEASURES

At recent professional hockey games played in Canada, when Canadian and American teams were pitted against each other, it has become common to hear PA announcers ask fans not to boo the U.S. national anthem. An ACS-Leger survey reveals that a majority of Canadians oppose the practice of disparaging *The Star-Spangled Banner* (ACS-Leger, March 1–2, 2025). At present, in response to the threats from the U.S. administration, Canadians' preferred course of action is to avoid travelling to the United States (66 per cent) and to buy more made-in-Canada products (79 per cent).

It remains unclear as to the extent to which Canadians will act upon these preferred strategies and, in the event that they do, what impact such action would have on the United States. (See Table 2)

PRIDE IN BEING CANADIAN IS ON THE RISE

Another effect of the trade war and annexation

TABLE 2.

	BOOING THE U.S. NATIONAL ANTHEM AT SPORTS EVENTS SENDS THE RIGHT MESSAGE TO AMERICANS	BUYING MORE CANADIAN PRODUCTS IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF RESPONDING TO PRESIDENT TRUMP'S PROPOSED TARIFF INCREASES	NOT TRAVELLING TO THE UNITED STATES IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF RESPONDING TO PRESIDENT TRUMP'S PROPOSED TARIFF INCREASES
Yes	28%	79%	66%
No	58%	12%	22%
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	14%	9%	12%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, March 1–2, 2025

threats from the United States has been a noticeable increase in feelings of pride about being Canadian. In the March 2025 survey, the sense of Canadian pride reached significant heights across the country, and even seems to have drawn out what might be described as the inner Canadian for a lot of Quebecers.

Over the past 12 months, pride in being Canadian has swelled from 80 per cent to 86 per cent, and Quebec's expressed pride in being Canadian is now in line with the national average. As seen in the Table below, with few exceptions, the feeling of pride in being Canadian transcends all regions and demographics. (See Table 3)

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

It's difficult to predict what the future holds with regards to relations between the United States and

TABLE 3.

I AM PROUD TO BE CANADIAN	TOTAL	ATLANTIC	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
March 1–2 2025	86%	89%	86%	87%	86%	74%	90%
November 22–24, 2024	80%	91%	81%	80%	77%	84%	70%
May 17–20 2024	80%	93%	83%	80%	82%	80%	71%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, March 1–2, 2025, November 22–24, 2024 and May 17–20, 2024.

Canada. Are we in the process of some redefinition of the relationship that increasingly challenges Canada's political sovereignty? Is Canada destined for greater economic dependency on the U.S.? The surveys shared above affirm a sharp decline in favorable views of the United States and a strong desire to retaliate. It all makes for an uncertain future.

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