

Canadian Politics at the 150th Anniversary of Confederation

Blame Canada! An Occasionally Serious Overview of US-Canada Relations

David L. Leal, *University of Texas, Austin*

“Canada, the country you think about so little” – John Oliver¹

An unaccustomed spark of celebrity animated Canadian politics in 2015 when Justin Trudeau, son of Pierre Elliot Trudeau, led the Liberal Party to its first parliamentary majority since 2006. Since the election, the new Prime Minister has added a touch of glamor to a country whose politics are earnest but perhaps just a little dull.

This northern version of Camelot has much work to do, however, as a number of tensions have emerged with the nation that matters most to Canada—the United States. Americans are largely unaware of these challenges, but we can hardly be blamed, as this would require us to notice Canada. Ignorance is not always bliss, however, and how these issues are managed will have considerable implications for prosperity and security in both nations. Examples include:

- (1) A number of high-profile spats in the new century ranging from Iraq policy to soft wood imports to ballistic missile shields.
- (2) In one of the last acts of the Bush White House, the United States declared the Arctic an international waterway, thereby rebuffing Canadian sovereignty claims.
- (3) In June of 2009, enhanced identification became required for Canadians entering the United States.

- (4) The United States and Canada are disputing the ownership of an outcropping of rocks near Maine. In fact, Wikipedia has a page dedicated to “List of areas disputed by Canada and the United States,” which includes five items.
- (5) President Trump has pledged to renegotiate NAFTA, and while most commentary focuses on the US and Mexico, trade between the US and Canada is larger. Both nations have much at stake, but Canada will be particularly worried about suffering collateral damage in a dispute that is largely about the US-Mexico relationship.²

As academics, we might try to understand such disputes through boring, nerdy research, but to paraphrase UK Brexit leaders, we don’t need no stinkin’ experts. Instead, why not follow the lead of an animated cartoon (*South Park* 1999) and Blame Canada. Is there a case for vilifying our cold-to-the-touch but warm-of-heart neighbors to the north? Are the US and Canada entering a new (very) Cold War?

The answer is Yes, and it is all Canada’s fault!

Evidence of Canadian disdain for our values is right in front of our eyes (and ears). For instance, the lyrics of the Canadian national anthem include the line “We stand on guard for thee,” but if you listen carefully, Canadians actually sing “We stand on God for thee.”³ Why Canadians want to keep Him down is uncertain, but this is undoubtedly a swipe at American religiosity. In fact, Canadians are probably mentally spelling the word as “god” or even “g*d,” which just adds insult to injury.

Canadians are also infiltrating our cultural institutions. Exhibit A: Canadians in Hollywood. Many celebrities we think are Americans are in fact Canadians. The list includes William Shatner, Keanu Reeves, Michael J. Fox, Pamela Anderson, Tommy Chong, Donald Sutherland, Kim Cattrall—need I go on? Literally thousands of Canadians are pouring across our border ever year,⁴ many heading straight to Hollywood. One day, a critical mass of entertainers will be Canadian, and they will subtly socialize our culture.

The US government understands this threat. For many years—and this is actually true—newly-inaugurated presidents visited Canada before any other nation. This was essential spy

craft, a way to keep our friends close but our enemies closer. George W. Bush, however, went to Mexico first and look what happened to his presidency. Barack Obama took this lesson to heart and visited Canada on February 19, 2009.

Why do Canadians hate us and plot against us?

The main reason is hockey. It is the national sport of Canada, but most Americans do not realize that it is played in the United States. Nevertheless, two NHL teams moved from Canada to America in the mid-1990s. The Winnipeg Jets moved to Phoenix, where the team played before packed crowds in bankruptcy court. The Québec Nordiques moved to Colorado,

Just as I thought—zero for three. Extensive laboratory research predicts that your attention is now drifting and you are thinking of a Mountie. Just like they want.

What can we do? Sadly, nothing. Our last invasion of Canada, during the War of 1812, was followed by the burning of the White House. Who knows what might happen this time. Our options are limited, however, since we better not fight them (see aforementioned burning of the White House) and we cannot identify them (see Hollywood discussion). We do not even understand many of them; for instance, what does the “je me souviens” on Québec license plates mean—“I am a souvenir”?

Politicians in Ottawa (the capital of Canada—no, it's not Toronto) will then change our political system, abolishing our beloved Electoral College and giving us multiple party choices on the ballot. We will also be ruled by Prime Ministers, who have most recently been (1) a born-again Christian conservative (Stephen Harper) and (2) the son of a former leader (Justin Trudeau). Can we survive such un-American outcomes?

where at least there is snow. In the meantime, the NHL expanded into hockey-mad south-of-the-border venues like Atlanta, Miami, Nashville, Tampa Bay, and soon—hold on to your toques—Las Vegas! While the Atlanta Thrashers recently moved to Winnipeg and became the Jets, Canadians are not appeased. Imagine the outcry if MLB teams moved north. What would Americans think of the Yellowknife Yankees, the Regina Red Sox, or the (Socialized) Medicine Hat Mets? Now you understand why Canadians are angry.

They cover it up with politeness, but they doth protest too much. As John Candy said in *Canadian Bacon* (1995), “If you say please one more time, I’m going to let you have it.” In so many respects, this film was right on the money. However, because most movie reviewers are probably Canadian (see above discussion of Hollywood) and want to deter viewership, the film has a 14% rating on Rotten Tomatoes.⁵ Don’t listen, America.

The “kindler, gentler, nation” of the north may one day prove to be anything but. It could even send its huge army south and annex our territory, as we once did to Mexico. Politicians in Ottawa (the capital of Canada—no, it’s not Toronto) will then change our political system, abolishing our beloved Electoral College and giving us multiple party choices on the ballot. We will also be ruled by Prime Ministers, who have most recently been (1) a born-again Christian conservative (Stephen Harper) and (2) the son of a former leader (Justin Trudeau). Can we survive such un-American outcomes?

Americans are blissfully ignorant of the threat. Even basic facts about Canada are beyond our ken. Take this short quiz:

1. Who is the Prime Minister of Canada? (I just told you and you probably still do not know.)
2. How many people serve in the Canadian armed forces? (You probably thought “huge army” was an exaggeration, but how would you know?)
3. What is the capital of Canada? (I just told you and you still do not know. No, it is not Toronto.)

Canadians worry that 90% of their population lives within a two day march from the US border. But this means most Canadians can march to the US in two days—it is we who should Stand on Guard. And it is undoubtedly Canadian spies in Congress who are trying to distract us by constantly pointing to the US-Mexico border. Nice try, eh, but I’ve got my eye on Vancouver, Windsor, and Niagara Falls (these are cities in Canada).

But the real threat is not military—it is our ignorance. Lulled by images of beavers, Mounties, and maple syrup, Americans know almost nothing about our largest trading partner and our longest border. Is Canada an icy Sword of Damocles, or is it a friend we haven’t quite met?

Maybe we should be studying Canada—its culture, its politics, its economy, and especially its huge army. America’s security and prosperity depend on building relationships, and what better place to start than right next door. Rather than taking the UK approach of #Brexit, maybe we should try #HugCanada.

If you are still reading this Introduction, congratulations. The seven essays in this symposium will get you started on your new status as Canada Expert. Please enjoy the professional adulation and career success that will undoubtedly follow.

This symposium is the latest of three efforts in *PS: Political Science & Politics* to urge political scientists to pay more attention to Canada and US-Canada relations. The first appeared in 1993 (“The Canadian Constitutional Crisis,” edited by Kent Weaver) and the second in 2006 (“The Politics of Canada,” edited by David Leal). Nevertheless, political science has yet to heed such calls. To quote myself (Leal 2006, 813), “asking scholars to care about Canadian politics is like asking them to get a physical or eat more vegetables. Everyone agrees these are probably good ideas, but there is often a certain reluctance to comply.”

We begin with an essay by Harold Clarke, Timothy Gravelle, Thomas Scotto, and Marianne Stewart, “Like Father, Like Son: Justin Trudeau and Valence Voting in Canada’s 2015

Federal Election.” They compare the factors associated with the election of Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party in 2015 with the 1968 campaign won by his father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Despite the passage of almost half a century, the essay finds notable parallels, particularly party leader images but also partisanship and party-issue preferences.

Stephen White then examines the immigrant vote in Canadian federal elections, a key part of the winning coalition of Justin Trudeau. Canada has admitted a growing number of immigrants over the last five decades, and they now predominantly arrive from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and South America instead of Europe. Not only do these new immigrants more strongly support the Liberal Party than do other Canadians, but this support is growing across each immigrant cohort. As in the United States, shifting demographics may be changing politics in fundamental ways.

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Randall Hansen continues the discussion of immigration in his famous contrarian spirit. He claims the two main arguments explaining Canadians’ uniquely positive views of multiculturalism—a talent for dealing with diversity due to experience with the Québec challenge, and the success of multiculturalism in integrating immigrants—are false. The first is false because Canada has failed to incorporate its “First Nations” peoples, and the second is false because Canadian support for multiculturalism is almost entirely rhetorical. He argues that Canada spends little on multicultural policies and that Canadians are naïve to believe that its milquetoastian efforts can produce such integrative results. Instead, the federal government spends considerable sums on efforts that focus on integration, and migration policies select for migrants with high levels of education and skills. Public support for “multiculturalism,” he concludes, has more to do with a self-congratulatory Canadian search for a national identity rather than with any actual government policies.

The next two essays address Canadian federalism. Jennifer Wallner discusses how ideas about federalism can shape inter-governmental relations (IGR). More specifically, Stephen Harper as opposition leader had called for an “open federalism,” but did Canadian IGR change during his time in 24 Sussex? The essay finds that the federalism status quo, characterized by a “democratic deficit,” largely prevailed. The reality of federal-provincial interdependence, and conflicting policy priorities at the federal level, were obstacles too substantial for new federalism ideas to overcome.

Bartholomew Sparrow and Diane Sun then consider Canada as an expanding federation, a perspective that has gained little attention in the United States. The puzzle for scholars is that adding provinces and territories served to reduce the power of the national government, but add it did, and regularly so. Is the explanation national security, economics, or culture?

Rather than pointing to a single reason, the essay posits that different provinces were added for different reasons—including security concerns, economic development, and cultural/nationalist ambitions. In doing so, the authors find parallels with the history of American state admission and thereby cast doubt on the claim that Canada followed a British “colonial” model of expansion.

The next essay, by Mebs Kanji and Kerry Tannahill, asks about the state of democracy in Québec. Given the unique status of this province in Canada, we need to be concerned about Quebecer views of such systemic issues. A disaffected Québec could be the precursor to dissatisfaction with its place in the federation and even lead to future independence movements. This is complicated, however, by the need to study not only how Quebecers view different levels of government and specific aspect of democracy but also according to language

group. The authors find a variety of effects that defy easy categorization, which has the ring of authenticity. What they do not find is a simple dynamic of Québec vs. the Rest of Canada or Francophones v. Anglophones. Instead, we see some differences in how Quebecers and Francophones evaluate government, but this depends on the level of government and the specific aspect of democracy.

Munroe Eagles and Nik Nanos conclude the symposium with a study of Canadian attitudes toward the United States. Noting both shared values and relationship imbalances, they also find changes over time. First, we see majority sentiment in both nations for cooperation across four particular policy areas. Second, Americans are more enthusiastic about policy cooperation than are Canadians, although the differences are larger for security-border-terrorism than for energy. Third, support for cooperation has increased in recent years, although more strongly among Canadians. The authors conclude that regardless of the views of political elites, public opinion provides a foundation for bilateral cooperation. ■

NOTES

1. “The 11 Best Moments from John Oliver’s Hilarious Guide to the Canadian Election.” Craig Silverman, October 19, 2015. *BuzzFeed*. https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/john-oliver-just-spent-5000-to-tell-you-to-vote-out-harper?utm_term=.xyPPapOXa#.tj5ELdb5L
2. On the other hand, Brent Scowcroft, in response to a question from Ali G. about whether the US should nuke Canada, responded that “we don’t have any real significant problems with Canada” and “We don’t want what they have.” See videos on YouTube as well as “The Secret of Ali G.” in *National Review*: <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/211926/secret-ali-g>
3. “Misheard Lyrics -> Song -> O -> O Canada” <http://www.amiright.com/misheard/song/ocanada.shtml> The website notes that an alternative mishearing is “We Stand On Cars and Freeze.” My favorite misheard “O Canada” lyric is “True pastry love” instead of “True patriot love.”
4. About 800,000 Canadians live in the US today. See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/canadian-immigrants-united-states>
5. “Canadian Bacon.” https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/canadian_bacon/

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SYMPOSIUM CONTRIBUTORS

Harold D. Clarke is Ashbel Smith Professor, University of Texas at Dallas. His most recent books are *Brexit – Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), *Austerity and Political Choice in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), and *Affluence, Austerity and Electoral Change in Britain*, (Cambridge University Press, 2013). He regularly teaches courses on structural equation modeling, survey research, and time series analysis at UTD and locations such as the ICPSR Summer Program, the University of Essex Summer School and the Workshops in Social Science Research, Concordia University, Montreal. He may be reached at hclarke@utdallas.edu.

Munroe Eagles is a professor of political science and director of the Canadian Studies Academic Program at the University at Buffalo—State University of New York. He may be reached at eagles@buffalo.edu.

Timothy B. Gravelle is a visiting fellow in the School of Government and Public Policy at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland, and teaches public opinion at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. His research interests include public opinion and political behavior in the United States, Canada, and Europe, and public opinion toward foreign policy. His recent work has appeared in *Public Opinion Quarterly* and the *European Journal of Political Research*. He may be reached at tgravelle@wlu.ca.

Randall Hansen is director of the Centre for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, Munk School of Global Affairs and full professor and Canada Research Chair in Immigration & Governance in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto. His published works include *Disobeying Hitler: German Resistance after Operation Valkyrie* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), and *Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race and the Population Scare in 20th Century North America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), among others. He may be reached at r.hansen@utoronto.ca.

Mebs Kanji is associate professor of political science at Concordia University whose work centers around

democratic governance and value diversity. He may be reached at mebs.kanji@concordia.ca.

David L. Leal is professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin and a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. His primary academic interest is Latino politics, and his work explores the political and policy implications of demographic change. His email address is dleal@post.harvard.edu.

Nik Nanos is the founder of Nanos Research, a market a public opinion research firm with clients across North America. He may be reached at nik.nanos@wilsoncenter.edu.

Jason Reifler is professor of politics at the University of Exeter. He studies political behaviour, public opinion surrounding foreign policy, and the mechanisms for correcting factual misperceptions about politics held by citizens. Recent publications appear in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Political Behavior*, and *Public Choice*. He can be reached at J.Reifler@exeter.ac.uk.

Thomas J. Scotto is professor of government and public policy at the University of Strathclyde. His recent publications related to Canadian politics include: *Making Political Choices: Canada and the United States* (University of Toronto Press, 2009) and "Foreign Policy Beliefs and Support for Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party" appearing in a 2014 volume of the *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*. He may be reached at tom.scotto@strath.ac.uk.

Bartholomew Sparrow is professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin. Sparrow studies *American Political Development* and is the author of *The Insular Cases* and the *Emergence of American Empire*, and the coeditor of *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion, 1803–1898*. He may be reached at bhs@austin.utexas.edu.

Marianne C. Stewart is a professor in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences at the University of Texas at Dallas. Her interests include

political attitudes, electoral choice, and political participation; the political economy of regime change and development; the logic, methodology, and scope of political science; and survey research data collection and analysis. Her recent books include *Affluence, Austerity and Electoral Change in Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) and *Austerity and Political Choice in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). She may be reached at mstewart@utdallas.edu.

Diane Sun is a senior at the University of Texas at Austin where she is pursuing a double major in business administration and government. She has twice received a University of Texas Undergraduate Research Award, once in 2015–2016 and again in 2016–2017. She is from Houston, Texas.

Kerry Tannahill is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. Her current work focuses on public opinion and political support with special attention to the role of identity, social contexts and political performance in shaping attitudes toward various aspects of democracy.

Jennifer Wallner is associate professor of political science at the University of Ottawa. She researches federalism, comparative provincial politics, and intergovernmental relations. She is the author of *Learning to School: Federalism and Public Schooling in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2014). She may be reached at jennifer.wallner@uottawa.ca.

Stephen E. White is assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at Carleton University. His research focuses on Canadian and comparative public opinion and political behaviour, and immigrant political incorporation. He is a coeditor of *Comparing Canada: Methods and Perspectives on Canadian Politics*, and has contributed articles and chapters on North American political cultures, attitudes towards immigration, and immigrant political engagement. He may be reached at steve.white@carleton.ca.