

Make Canada Great Again: The Influence of Donald Trump on the Canadian Right Wing Identity

By Parul Singh Kanwar

Introduction

Canadian identity and politics are based on the accommodation of diversity in the essence of true equality (Kymlicka 2014, 21). Canadians widely believe that they live in a “multination” (22, emphasis in text) with ethnocultural distinctiveness as a result of colonization, conquest, and confederation as well as immigration (23). However, the Canadian identity is not an isolated entity and its full comprehension is not possible without a thorough examination of the extreme web of economic social, cultural, security, and political ties” it has with the United States of America (Brooks 2014, 437). The United States’ similar culture, close proximity and same language have a crucial impact on Canadian values, behaviors and institutions (439, 440). Therefore, changes in the political climate in the United States can lead to changes in the Canadian identity and an upsurge in different ideologies.

In 2016, the United States elected its 45th president: Donald Trump. Trump “ran an explicitly racist, sexist and xenophobic campaign” which called to “Make America Great Again” (Perry et al. 2019, 143). The campaign’s ideologies were applauded by Canadians who wanted to revert back to the Canadian when multiculturalism was not its official national culture (151). This essay argues that the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States led to a resurgence of the Right-Wing identity in Canada, which exposed the climate of difference within the country and created a strain on the Canadian multicultural identity. This is significant because, through an analysis of the impact of American politics and identity on Canadians, the limitations of the foundation of Canada’s identity, which is Anti-Americanism, can be explored (Brooks 2014, 441). This essay will begin by conceptualizing the meaning of Canadian identity and its relation to the United States; it will then explore how the election of Donald Trump changed what Canadian identity looks like for extremist groups, the government of Canada and other Canadian groups. Lastly, it will look at prior foundations of right-wing sentiments that might have increased the receptiveness of Trump’s ideology in Canada.

Identity Politics and The Far Right

Identity politics is defined as the inclination for individuals of a specific religion, ethnicity, social background etc. to form exclusive political alliances, to step away from standard broad-based party politics (“Identity Politics”). Primarily, identity politics govern how cultural identities are created and how they translate into political demands that are “infinitely fluid and malleable” and can be understood as both progressive and reactionary (Bondi 2004, 83). Identity politics can be used to explore how expansive representation of identities in a state can become undemocratic, violate individual rights, eliminate gender

justice, and establish the status quo. While identity politics often refer to actors outside the traditional heteronormative narrative focusing on white male subjects of Canadian politics, it is an essential theme in the radicalization of the far-right (Abbas 2017, 60). Within the context of political identities, the ‘far-right’ is associated with white heterosexual individuals’ “ultranationalist, chauvinist, xenophobic, racist, or reactionary” views that translate into their political opinions and activities (Carlisle 2005, 693). Although Far-Right voices are not predominant in the popular discourse, they do play a significant part in determining the direction of politics in western countries and hold influence over policy outcomes (Carlisle 2005, 693). The election of Donald Trump revived a “form of right-wing populism convergent with an emboldened white supremacy” which emerged in multiple western countries, including Canada (Perry and Scrivens 2019, 145). Far-Right populism can be defined as an emphasis on the sovereignty of the people where “bad others” are juxtaposed against “good people” in terms of race and sexuality (Barbara 55). While populist platforms are the favoured mode of expression of Far-Right ideology, extremist identities- which operate outside mainstream politics-are a growing concern in Canada (Carlisle 2005, 694).

Canadian Identity and the United States

The United States being so close has been beneficial for Canadian exports and Canada, to a great extent, has been focused on the United States in terms of economic and military foreign relations (Brawley 2014, 420). Economic and military relations between the two countries also influence each other’s social and political identities as they define the lifestyles of citizens. However, such interdependence can lead to Canada being held at “political leverage” by the United States as it can get entangled in the American ideologies, even if they contradict the collective Canadian identity (420). For instance, after 9/11, Canada participated in the War on Terrorism (Bush 2001) as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). From its inception, NATO contained a mutual defense clause which the USA invoked for the first time after 9/11 declaring that should the US take military action, its allies would be implored to do the same (Daley). Therefore, all members of NATO committed to “the use of force” (Daley 2001) in order to secure the USA, including Canada. The Canadian participation in the NATO missions provided a platform for the right-wing Canadian politicians, think tanks and extremist groups to beat the war on Islam and created a xenophobic environment in Canada. Thus, the mission led to the rise of identities contradictory to the Canadian multiculturalism policy that accommodates for different cultural communities and promotes their “desire to participate in and contribute to the larger community” (Kymlicka 2014, 37).

Trump’s Effect on Canadian Right Wing Identity

While Canada’s official stance remains one of multiculturalism and does not align with ideologies of far right nationalism (Kymlicka 2014, 37). However, since the 2016 American presidential election, Canadians from different walks of life such as politicians and citizens have expressed their want for leadership similar to Donald Trump with policies focusing on Far-Right Populism (Perry and Scrivens 2019, 165). Donald Trump declared his candidacy in 2015 with a speech which portrayed the “white voter, as the victim of the establishment, globalization, particularly trade imbalances with Asia, immigration, the media, political correctness, and a failure of leadership by then-President Barack Obama” (King and Leonard 2019, 1). Trump took a tough stance against immigration, anathematizing countries with

dominant populations of people of colour. The following excerpt from Trump's campaign provides a demonstration of the racism descriptive of his campaign.

they (sic) are not sending their best. They are not sending you [in reference to good civil citizens]. They are not sending you. They are sending people that have lots of problems, and they are bringing those problems with them. They are bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They are rapists" (DelReal 2015). By using anxiety-inducing rhetorics against different groups, Trump "restat[ed] longstanding negative association and restabiliz[ed] persistent social hierarchies" in the United States (King and Leonard 2019, 2).

This association between immigrants and crime incentivized the far-right and led to an overall increase in hate crime (Modi and SLAAT 2018). One fifth of all attacks documented as hate crimes referenced Donald Trump or his policies during their commission and garnered support from individuals of the "racist right" such as the "neo-Nazi[s], Ku Klux Klan [members and], white nationalists" (Modi and SLAAT 2018; Barnett 2019, 78). Therefore, Trump has legitimated formerly tabooed white power movements ideology by relying on beliefs and language "that divides, demeans, and demonizes" part of the American population while implementing policies that exacerbate inequalities ((King and Leonard 2019, 4). Trump, through the course of his campaign and presidency, became the symbol of the far-right and an embodiment of hate which infiltrated Canada.

The Canadian Far Right's ideology used social media to broaden its reach globally by aligning their identitarianism and white identity politics with Donald Trump's platform as journalists found links between the Canadian far-right groups and Donald Trump through the latter's re-tweets on Twitter (Kusz 2019, 114). The virtual space has been used to informally infiltrate the public with political messages by different groups, especially the right spectrum of politics by leaders from various countries. Twitter, amongst other social media platforms, during Donald Trump's campaign, became a space to demonstrate "white rage" (Kusz 2019, 116).

Since 2016, far-right views have manifested in Canada due to the popularity of social media and the World Wide Web, which has familiarised the Canadian population with Donald Trump (Perry and Scrivens 2019, 156). Canadians are users of US-owned social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter which provide constant access to Trumps toxic rhetoric and opposes Canada's official policy of multiculturalism and have formed virtual ties between Trump and Canadian Right Wing Extremism which disregards Canada's inclination towards creating a diverse and inclusive state (Perry and Scrivens 2019, 156; Treasury Secretariat). Similar to Trump, Maxine Bernier, the now-leader of People's Party of Canada, tweeted: "More diversity will not be our strength, it will destroy what has made us such a great country" (Wente 2018). Therefore, while he did not use the official political channels such as press conferences and news outlets to express his xenophobic beliefs, he indirectly appealed to the fundamental ideology of the far-right. Although Canadians are prone to dissociate themselves from American identity, they are influenced by the United States' political discourse of inequality (Brooks 2014, 442).

One of the first signs that "Canadians are not immune to the appeal of racialized politics" was observed shortly after the 2016 Presidential elections in the United States (Perry and Scrivens 2019, 149, emphasis in text). Canadian media documented occurrences exuding Islamophobic, homophobic,

xenophobic sentiments across the country; this was the first instance when the magnitude of the far-right identity was encapsulated as a concern (Perry and Scrivens 2019, 149). According to Statistics Canada, police-reported hate crime was up 47 per cent in 2017 (Smith 2012). Many of these incidents could have been coincidentally timed with the American elections were it not for the use of Trump's slogan, name and speeches at these events which provided a distinct link between Trump's ideology and the identity of the far-right Canadian citizens (Sharpe 2016). One of the first instances of such hate crimes was documented in Regina, Saskatchewan where a wall was graffitied with: "niggers go to the U.S. and let Trump deal with you" (Sharpe 2016). Following this, Ottawa saw a period of violent hate crimes between November 13-19, 2017 during which a Jewish prayer house, two synagogues, a mosque, and a church with a black minister were vandalized with spray-painted racial slurs and white supremacy symbols" (Perry and Scrivens 2019, 150). Similar events followed in Montreal, Toronto, Hamilton, Edmonton and other Canadian cities (Perry and Scrivens 2019, 150). Therefore, it was evident that the values of multiculturalism, liberty and equality were overtaken by xenophobic, racist and homophobic tropes that were fundamental to Donald Trump's campaign and escalated the far-right movements in Canada (Silverman 2014, 20).

Foundations of Canadian Right Wing Identity Before Trump

Donald Trump cannot be credited as the founder of right-wing populism in Canada as the far-right have been active in Canada since the 1990s (Perry et al. 2019, 62). The Canadian government has witnessed historical and contemporary vestiges of right-wing populism that resembles Trump's campaign (62). During the Harper government, Canada took a turn towards the far-right populist policies and leadership as the government greatly represented far-right "sub-groups seeking a means of expressing their political preferences" (Sayers and Denmark 18). Harper's government emphasized on immigration control, denounced Quebec's "distinct province" demands and decrease the Canadian welfare state's scope (7). In addition to the anti-immigrant rhetoric, the Harper government also initiated a retreat from human rights through the elimination of hate speech protections, fear-mongering and hate (Barbara et al. 63). Many policies released by Harper such as removing the citizenship of individual Canadian citizens "for national security"; the "Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act" targeting the Muslims in Canada and the "Oath of Citizenship Act" (2015) that disapproved religious observance in public spaces were applauded by the right-wing extremist groups in Canada (Meyer 2017). Harper's term, an archconservative milieu," also alludes to the possible imprint on American politics and identity as well since the far-right populist policies and leaders have been prevalent in Canada before Trump's rise to political fame and were in place before he was elected (Smith 2018, 26). While some Canadian individuals and groups have accepted the far-right populist ideology, Justin Trudeau's election as the Prime Minister depicted that the majority of the Canadian population was averse to the right-wing populism as Trudeau's campaign focused on an inclusive approach to negotiating identities and ethnic differences (66).

Anti-Far-Right Response In Canada

It is important to acknowledge the influx of responses to Donald Trump's populism that emphasize the Canadian multicultural identity and have attempted to counter ideologies of hate in Parliament, online and in public (Perry and Scrivens 2019, 165). The Canadian House of Commons passed M-103: a motion in 2017 "condemn[ing] Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination" in response to the growing unease and far-right sentiments that attacked their core values

of liberty and multiculturalism (CBC News 2017). Moreover, many local activist groups participated within private sector politics such as Canada such as “Coalition Against White Supremacy and Islamophobia” (CAWSI) with more than 6000 members who continue to oppose right-wing populism (Patton 2017). CAWSI further believe that economic differences are the root cause of the issues, such as unemployment, which have been used as the precedent for creating an anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric in Western countries following Donald Trump’s campaign and victory (Patton 2017).

Conclusion

The duplicity of the Canadian-American relationship and the impressionability of Canadian individuals can be explored through an analysis of the effects of Donald Trump’s election as the President of the United States. The event, although theoretically distant from the Canadian citizens as it did not explicitly affect their government and was paradoxically distinct from the morals of the Canadian society of equality, liberty and multiculturalism, impacted the Canadian population significantly by inciting an increase in the far-right identities. While the majority of Canada defines their identity as separate from the United States, identity politics within the country is significantly aligned with American politics and fluctuates with it (Brooks 2014, 347). However, Donald Trump, alone cannot be associated with the rise in the right-wing populism and extremism in Canada as their past governments and leaders have also propagated far-right beliefs and ideas in their policies and set a foundation for Donald Trump’s ideologies to attach to the Canadian rhetoric. At the same time, Trump’s popularity has also shown how different identity politics interact with each other through the interactions of his supporters and adversaries in formal and informal domains.

References

- Abbas, Tahir. 2017. "Ethnicity And Politics In Contextualising Far Right And Islamist Extremism". *Perspectives On Terrorism* 11 (2): 54-61.
- Barnett, Brett A. 2019. "The Trump Effect: The 2016 Presidential Campaign And The Racist Right's Internet Rhetoric". *Journal Of Hate Studies* 14 (1): 77. doi:10.33972/jhs.125.
- Bondi, Liz. 2004. "Locating Identity Politics". In *Place And The Politics Of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Brawley, Marks. 2014. "Canada In The World". In *Canadian Politics*, 419-436. New York: The University of Toronto Press.
- Brooks, Stephen. 2014. "The Canada-United States Relationship". In *Canadian Politics*, 437-458. New York: The University of Toronto Press.
- Bush, George. 2001. "President Bush Addresses The Nation". *The Washington Post*.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html.
- Carlisle, Rodney P. 2005. *Encyclopedia Of Politics*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Reference.
- CBC News. 2017. "House Of Commons Passes Anti-Islamophobia Motion". *CBC*.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/m-103-islamophobia-%20motion-vote-1.4038016>.
- Daley, Suzanne. 2001. "AFTER THE ATTACKS: THE ALLIANCE". *New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/13/us/after-attacks-alliance-for-first-time-nato-invokes-joint-defense-pact-with-us.html>.
- DelReal, J.A. 2015. "Donald Trump Announces Presidential Bid". *The Washington Post*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/>.
- Desilver, Drew. 2016. "Why Electoral College Wins Are Bigger Than Popular Vote Ones". *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/20/why-electoral-collegelandslides-are-easier-to-win-than-popular-vote-ones/>.
- "Identity Politics". 2020. *Lexico Dictionaries*.
https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/identity_politics.
- King, C. Richard, and David J. Leonard. 2019. "The Resurgence Of Hate: Introductory Notes On The 2016 US Presidential Campaign". *Journal Of Hate Studies* 14 (1): 1. doi:10.33972/jhs.121.

- Kusz, Kyle W. 2019. "'Winning Bigly': Sporting Fantasies Of White Male Omnipotence In The Rise Of Trump And Alt Right White Supremacy". *Journal Of Hate Studies* 14 (1): 113. doi:10.33972/jhs.127.
- Kusz, Kyle W. 2019. "'Winning Bigly': Sporting Fantasies Of White Male Omnipotence In The Rise Of Trump And Alt Right White Supremacy". *Journal Of Hate Studies* 14 (1): 113. doi:10.33972/jhs.127.
- Kundnani, Arun. The Muslims Are Coming!: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War On Terror
- Kymlicka, Will. 2014. "Citizenship, Communities And Identity In Canada". In *Canadian Politics*, 6th ed., 21-47. The University of Toronto Press: New York.
- Meyer, Carl. 2017. "Donald Trump And Canada: Are We Really So Different?". *Macleans*. <https://www.macleans.ca/politics/donald-trump-and-canada-are-we-really-so-different/>.
- Modi, Radha, and SLAAT. 2018. Communities On Fire: Confronting Hate Violence And Xenophobic Political Rhetoric. Washington D.C.: SLAAT.
- Patton, Jessica. 2017. "Tensions Run High As Groups Gather To Protest, Counter-Protest AntiIslamophobia Motion". *Global News*. <https://globalnews.ca/news/3288014/tensions-run-high-as-groups-gather-to-protest-counter-protest-anti-islamophobia-motion/>.
- Perry, Barbara, Tanner Mirrlees, and Ryan Scrivens. 2019. "The Dangers Of Porous Borders". *Journal Of Hate Studies* 14 (1): 53. doi:10.33972/jhs.124.
- Perry, B. 2019. "Epilogue: The Trump Effect On Right-Wing Extremism In Canada". In *Right-Wing Extremism In Canada*, 143-172.
- Sayers, Anthony and Denmark, David. 2014. "Radicalism, Protest Votes and Regionalism: Reform and the Rise of the New Conservative Party." *Canadian Political Science Review* 8, no.1: 3-26
- Sharpe, Krista. 2016. "Regina Homeowners Upset After Property Tagged With Racist Graffiti". *Global News*. <https://globalnews.ca/news/3074086/regina-homeowners-upset-after-property-tagged-with-racist-graffiti/>.
- Silverman, Bryan A. 2014. "CANADIAN IDENTITY, MULTICULTURALISM, AND A COSMOPOLITAN FUTURE". https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=kent1403361821&disposition=inline.

Smith, Charlie. 2018. "Police-Reported Hate Crimes Jump 47 Percent In A Year, According To Statistics Canada". *The Georgia Straight*.
<https://www.straight.com/news/1170896/policereported-hate-crimes-jump-47-percent-year-according-statistics-canada>.

Smith, Jordan Michael. 2012. "REINVENTING CANADA: Stephen Harper's Conservative Revolution". *World Affairs* 174 (6): 2012.

Wente, Margaret. 2018. "Who's Playing Identity Politics? Everyone". *The Globe And Mail*.
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-whos-playing-identity-politics-everyone/>