



Canada Fears What Lies South of the Border

The growing possibility of a President Trump is fueling anxiety across the country.

By Randi Druzin Contributor April 25, 2016, at 9:26 a.m.

TORONTO — WHEN CANADIAN radio announcer Rob Calabrese unveiled a [website](#) earlier this year that encourages Americans to move to the island in Nova Scotia where he lives before Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump could win this fall's election, he had no idea what was in store. In the site's first 48 hours, he received hundreds of queries from Americans about moving north.

"Trump is taking a swipe at the establishment, which is refreshing," says Calabrese. "But it's easy to see why he scares the hell out of a lot of people."

As the GOP presidential front-runner enters into a period of state primaries this spring where he is expected to do well, Canadians are looking at Trump with a mixture of bemusement and alarm.

Canadians tend to be more moderate than Americans, favoring understatement over bluster and compromise over controversy. With his flamboyant persona and bombastic rhetoric, Trump couldn't be more unlike his neighbors to the north. Many Canadians view him as they would a strange, exotic bird.

Trump's brand of extremism is non-existent in Canada due in part to the country's political system. In [Canada](#), an independent, non-partisan body draws up the electoral map, so to win a given district, a candidate must woo swing voters. Moderation becomes a necessity.

That is not the case south of the border. In most [U.S.](#) states, politicians draw up congressional districts. That has given rise to gerrymandering, a practice in which parties redraw district boundaries to give themselves an electoral advantage. As a result, a district could be so heavily Republican that "a chimpanzee would win an election there as long as it was a GOP candidate," says Geoffrey Hale, a political science professor at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta. The same logic applies to heavily Democratic districts.

"This leads to extremism in the U.S. Congress that doesn't exist in Canada's House of Commons," says Stephen Azzi, an associate professor of history at [Carleton University](#) in Ottawa. "Canadian political parties tend to cling to the middle."

"We play our politics between the 30-yard lines," Hale says, adding that Canadian politicians on the left and right are more centrist than their American counterparts.

Unlike Trump, who has said he won't rule out the use of nuclear weapons, even in Europe, Canadian politicians are more measured in their rhetoric about foreign affairs. Canada is middle power and its leaders can't afford to alienate citizens of other states by threatening to build walls to keep them out.

Trump's talk on trade sounds alarm bells

With the Trump campaign gaining momentum in recent months, Canadians have had to confront the possibility that he could win the presidency. Bemusement is now coupled with concern — and it's easy to understand why.

Canada and the U.S. have the world's largest trading relationship. They trade more than \$2 billion in goods and services daily. Trade between the countries has more than doubled since 1994, when the North American Free Trade Agreement was implemented.

But Trump has attacked NAFTA and promised to renegotiate it or break it if elected president. "Every agreement has an end," he said in an interview with CBS's "60 Minutes." Needless to say, Canadians have found such comments unsettling.

"Canada depends on trade relations with the U.S. that are governed by rules and regulations," says Hale. "If the U.S. doesn't abide by them, Canada is in trouble — and Trump seems more inclined to ignore existing laws than [Democratic frontrunner Hillary] Clinton."

That means a Trump presidency could also jeopardize trade deals, such as the new Trans-Pacific Partnership, which includes the U.S., Canada and 10 other countries, and the controversial Softwood Lumber agreement, which governs the flow of Canadian lumber to the U.S.

Trump's approach considers U.S. interests only, says Donald Abelson, a political science professor at [Western University](#) in London, Ontario, and director of The Canada-U.S. Institute. "I don't think he would abolish these trade agreements altogether if he were president but he would definitely strong-arm the Canadians into agreeing to terms that would benefit the U.S. above all else."

Few were surprised when a national survey conducted earlier this year indicated that [67 percent of Canadians](#) believe an American presidency headed by Trump would be bad for Canada and, of those, 49 percent believe it would be *very* bad. Earlier this month, a random [sample of almost 1,500 Canadian voters](#) indicated that even those who support their own country's right-leaning Conservative Party would rather see Clinton in the White House than Trump.

"Trump is an entertaining alternative to the everyday politician," Toronto-based massage therapist Brian Clelland says, reflecting the view held by many Canadians. "But Trump as the Republican nominee would be no laughing matter. It would paint the U.S. in a bad light."

Rocky relations?

When Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited Washington, D.C. in March, the world witnessed the warm relations between the young leader and U.S. President Barack Obama. There would be next to no chance of a similar relationship developing between Trudeau and Trump, say analysts.

"Trump and Trudeau were both born into privileged families but that is where the similarity begins and ends," says Abelson. "Trudeau endeavours to bring people together. He emphasizes inclusiveness. Trump is just the opposite."

Trudeau, adds Azzi, has set ambitious goals for admitting Syrian refugees and has said Muslim women should be allowed to wear niqabs — veils that cover most of the face — while taking Canada's oath of citizenship. In contrast, Trump has suggested the U.S. temporarily bar all Muslims from entering the U.S.

History has shown that Canada-U.S. relations suffer somewhat when their leaders are at odds. U.S. President John Kennedy and Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker had such a toxic relationship that the president provided Diefenbaker's opponent, Lester B. Pearson, with tactical support in Canada's federal election of 1963. Kennedy persuaded America's leading pollster, Lou Harris, to become an unofficial campaign adviser to Pearson.

Political pundits here agree that a Trump presidency would not bode well for Canada. But they also agree that it's impossible to know where the GOP front-runner stands on certain issues.

"We can't say with certainty what Trump would be like in the White House, or if he would be different as a president than he is as a candidate," says Azzi. "With most presidential candidates you know what you're getting, but it's different with him. That is the danger of Trump."