

**Politics in Canada:**  
**The Implications on Canada of Trump's Presidency**  
**Relative to Government Public Relations**  
**By Karlierae Lipsit**

Simply looking next door to our U.S. neighbours shows what some might argue is the largest threat to Canada in current news. Following the shocking election of Donald Trump into U.S. presidential power, conversation is spreading as countries around the globe question the threat to international relations the U.S. has recently projected. Individuals who reside in North America fear for what Trump's power could mean for their own country as he shifts the U.S. focus in new ways. Johnston (2018) states that "Canada and the U.S. share the longest undefended border in the world" (Johnston, 2018, para. 7). Notably, Canada and the U.S. are highly interdependent economically, ecologically and culturally (para. 8). This relationship between Canada and the U.S. has been quiet in the past that has served as a "bureaucratic approach to bilateral relations" between Ottawa and Washington (para. 9).

In recent years, Canada's relationship with the U.S. has become less informal and more institutionalized, politicized, competitive and confrontational; this condition has skyrocketed since the beginning of Trump's presidential term. With my research, I outline the meaning, purposes and significance of government public relations, along with and compared to, Trump's presidency in the U.S. since his 2016 election, including the campaign leading up to his victory. I highlight the concerns to Canada that Trump's power presents in relation to successful government public relations practice. Donald Trump's presidency could be detrimental to the

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relationship between Canada and the U.S. and is therefore the biggest political issue facing Canadians as the consequences effectively ramify on a global scale.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review is structured alphabetically by the last names of the key authors and reviews four academic sources to highlight the standpoints of scholars on this topic. Author Robert Jervis (2018) writes in the book *Chaos in the Liberal Order* about the potentially devastating implications that coincide with Trump's presidency in the U.S. (Jervis, 2018, p. xi). He effectively describes "Trump's rise [as] a threat" and explains the president's rhetoric as damaging and concerning (p. xi). In a 2017 article called "Trudeau's Trump Bump: How a Smaller America Gives Canada Room to Grow," Author Jonathan Kay explains that Canadians are generally unfavourable towards Trump's presidency and tells about a recent survey that proved, "Canadians consider the U.S. president bad for the environment, bad for the United States' image, and bad for global peace" (Kay, 2017, para. 7). However, Kay (2017) also effectually discusses the ways in which Trump's presidency has sparked national unity across Canada and encouraged Canadians to consider their country without harsh comparisons to the U.S.

Douglas Kellner (2016), author of the book *American Nightmare: Donald Trump, Media Spectacle, and Authoritarian Populism* discusses his worried thoughts on Trump's presidency and explains it as being a threat to U.S. democracy (Kellner, 2016, p. 1). Kellner describes Trump as a "media spectacle" who used celebrity status as a means to win the 2016 election with an emphasis on a variety of controversial political topics, which comparatively speaks for his character as president. Lee, Neely and Stewart (2012) explain the critical need and significance for GPR in today's political sphere. They also touch on the key role PR practitioners play in the

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function of government relations, especially in a democratic sense (p. 13). Together the written work of these authors supports the consideration of Trump's presidency on the political platform in Canada and where GPR best comes into play.

### **Government Public Relations**

Government public relations is a rising sector of communications with greater significance now than ever. Chapter two of the text "The Practice of Government Public Relations" explains the main purposes of public relations in conducting public administration (Lee, Neeley & Stewart, 2012). Lee, Neeley and Stewart state that, "public relations is both inherent to public administration and a tool for helping an agency accomplish its mission" (p. 12). They also explain that public relations can help a practitioner to (1) implement an agency's central mission and (2) fulfill the democratic responsibilities inherent in government. Additionally, the text states that, "public relations can help promote the democratic accountability of a government agency to the citizenry" (p. 12). Not only does this chapter effectively explain the purposes of public relations in the government sector, but it also delves into the importance of those purposes in a practical setting. The text outlines the reasons practitioners *have* to conduct public relations, but also why they *should*; these are known as the democratic and pragmatic purposes of government public relations, respectively. There is also a third use for public relation efforts in government, namely the political purposes of which are "intended to advance the agency's autonomy and power" (p. 12).

In a democratic sense, "communication is the basic prerequisite for democracy" (p. 13). The text explains that practitioners are given a key role in the consideration of public opinion within a democratic society, therefore making public relations essential to the functionality of government agencies, not just an accessory. From a pragmatic stance, the text summarizes public

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relations in the government sector as a way for “an agency to extend its reach without necessarily increasing its size and costs” (p. 19). Comparatively, the political purposes of public relations instill more power and popularity for an agency that help it succeed (p. 24).

Graham and Avery (2013) describe GPR as having challenges and opportunities that communications in the private sector would likely not present (Graham & Avery, 2013). The challenges and opportunities of GPR include: politics, public good, legal constraints, devaluation of communication, poor public perceptions, lagging professional development and federalism. Graham and Avery (2013) also highlight the significance of transparency to successful government relations. They state that transparency on a government’s behalf “allows the public to develop a more accurate picture of what is happening in government,” which allows the public to effectively hold the government in power accountable and consider the success of its performance (Graham & Avery, 2013). Similar to the explanation of Lee, Neeley and Stewart (2012), Graham and Avery (2013) explain that GPR “is a pragmatic practice as well as a moral obligation that derives from the principles of democracy” (Graham and Avery, 2013). Finally, the authors explain that the most important aspect of GPR is that governments are communicating in an open, honest and timely manner with their publics, all without the deceiving manipulation of information.

Lee (2007) argues that GPR is “an oft-neglected tool in the toolkit of the public administrator” (Lee, 2007, p. 1). GPR is a tool that can aid in the successful implementation of problem prevention measures, marketing, public notification and communication. Similar to the explanation of Graham and Avery (2013), Lee states that “public relations helps fulfill the democratic obligations of the government manager, such as media relations and reporting to the citizenry” (Lee, 2007, p. 1). The author argues that with the rise of the digital age and social

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media, managing informal relationships is more important now than it has been in the past (p. 4). Lee (2007) suggests eight main purposes to GPR: (1) media relations, (2) public reporting, (3) responsiveness to the public, (4) increasing the utilization of services and products, (5) public education and public service campaigns, (6) seeking voluntary public compliance with laws and regulations, (7) using the public as the eyes and ears of an agency and (8) increasing public support (p. 7). Collectively, the efforts and purposes of GPR are arguably the most important factors in the success of government relations, as they maintain open communication between a government and its publics.

### **Who is Trump?**

The book *Chaos in the Liberal Order* by Robert Jervis effectively considers the factors leading up to Trump's 2016 election win, as well as the international repercussions that are associated with his place in power (Jervis, 2018). It explains that because America is typically at the center of world politics, changes and significant developments are bound to make their way through the international system (p. ix). Jervis (2018) writes that Trump's "happy-go-lucky disregard for basic norms, and his gleeful challenge to the old shibboleths of postwar diplomacy, may do serious and lasting damage" (p. xi). He also describes Trump's actions as single-handedly disrupting the international trust that has been built on a global-scale over many decades (p. xi).

This book touches on Trump's display of character in both his election campaign and his presidency and provides indication of Trump's relational work. Jervis (2018) mentions that Trump's "approach to renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement does not appear to look for changes that would render all three countries in a better position," showcasing the general charisma of the U.S. president (p. 5). In fact, the author describes Trump's presidency as

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a threat, and says his “transactional style of politics,” meaning his tendency to give and take, heavily contrasts with the logical approach from international institutions, therefore negatively influencing international relations (p. xi). The book describes other presidential figures around the world who have provided input on the Trump administration, stating that the days when Germany and the European Union could rely on the U.S. are over (p. xii). Jervis (2018) writes that Trump “broke the mold” and forced the U.S. to question its own traditional beliefs (p. xv).

Author Douglas Kellner (2016) discusses his thoughts and opinions on the Donald Trump phenomenon, the man who now holds power over America, and how he got to be where he stands today (Kellner, 2016). The author explains that Trump is a “master of media spectacle” which he has used to his advantage to create the images of himself that he wants the public to hold (p. 1). These images he presented to his publics helped to frame his business career, his celebrity status and his political campaign. Kellner (2016) outlines Trump as a character of Authoritarian Populism that emphasized on racism, nationalism, xenophobia and islamophobia to catapult his 2016 election. He highlights Trump’s presidency as a “danger to the traditions of U.S. democracy as well as economic security and world peace” (p. 1).

Kellner (2016) defines his term “media spectacle” as “media constructs that present events which disrupt ordinary habitual flows of information, and which become popular stories which capture the attention of the media and the public” (p. 3).

Kellner (2016) states that Trump:

Dominat[e] the news cycle on the ever-proliferating mainstream media and social networking sites. Hence, Trump is the first celebrity candidate whose use of the media and celebrity star power is his most potent weapon in his improbable and highly surreal campaign. (Kellner, 2016, p. 6)

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He argues that because media spectacles have become so significant in U.S. politics and influential in elections and government, Trump – a successful media spectacle – was empowered to run for presidency.

Author Monique Scotti (2017) summarizes in her article for Global News, the implications on Canada that have risen since Donald Trump was called into presidency in 2016 (Scotti, 2017). She touches on the shock that blanketed the world immediately following Trump's win of the election. Scotti (2017) explains that Trump's presidency, "has had a profound effect not only on American domestic policy, but on Canada's approach to its southern neighbour – and on Ottawa's outreach with the rest of the world" (para. 4). She also explains that, no one could have anticipated Trump's indecisiveness on various political issues, with Donald Abelson, professor and chair in the department of Political Science at the University of Western Ontario describing Trump as "predictably unpredictable" (para. 6).

Scotti (2017) provides a breakdown of the various Canadian political issues that Trump has influenced since his 2016 victory. On migration, Scotti (2017) says the Trump administration "isn't likely to renew Temporary Protection Status (TPS) for nearly 300,000 Salvadoran, Haitian and Honduran nationals," sending them fleeing to Canada as their statuses reach expiry. TPS is defined as a status that allows citizens of countries deemed unsafe, to remain on U.S. soil (Scotti, 2017). The various implications of Trump's decisions have pushed Canada to stand apart from the United States more now than ever and take political challenges into its own hands.

With consideration to the above research however, not all academics view Trump's presidency to be entirely negative. The 2017 article by Jonathan Kay titled "Trudeau's Trump Bump: How a Smaller America Gives Canada Room to Grow" describes Trump as a "singularly unpredictable elephant, prone to strange nocturnal rumblings on twitter" (Kay, 2017, para. 4).

Kay (2017) explains that rather than bowing down to Trump, Canada has become more aware of the “pluralistic values that inform [its] society and more full-throated in [its] defence of those values” (para. 4). Trump has arguably given Canada the elevation it has long desired.

### **Trump on Canada**

There is no doubt that Trump’s win of the 2016 U.S. election sparked both controversy and conversation worldwide. However, some Canadians might think, “who cares? It’s not our country, it’s not our problem,” but research shows that this is far from being true. The research provided shows the implications of Trump’s presidency not only on a national level but also internationally. With Canada and the U.S. having previously such a strong interdependent relationship, Canadians are bound to feel the repercussions on the north side of the border. Trump’s rejection of NAFTA and growing hostility towards Canada is quickly proving that Canadians are anything but out of harm’s way. A president should be a leader, as should a prime minister, but can one truly argue that Trump is a leader when he uses his celebrity status as a means for his white supremacist ways? The ideas of the academics discussed above highlight how Trump’s harsh and unique ways of executing power stem from anything but an intention of leadership.

Jervis (2018) effectively touches on the ways in which Trump has single-handedly disrupted what was previously known as world peace, as does Kellner (2016) in his effort to highlight Trump as a danger to international relations. Scotti (2017) evidently explains the ways in which Trump has changed Canada’s approach to its once-respected neighbour and damaged the relationship between Ottawa and Washington. In contrast, Kay (2017) argues that in spite of the negativity Trump has brought into the political world, his presidency has given Canada the spark it needed to stand on its own and effectively defend the values Canadians hold so closely.

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However, I argue that this pro to Trump's power is hardly worth the sacrifice of the relationship between our two countries. This "special" relationship that Canada and the U.S. have shared in the past is quickly being disrupted with the outrageous, devaluing and hypocritical actions of Trump.

One aspect of conducting successful GPR is the effort of one government entity to maintain a valued relationship with another. If Canada's relationship becomes entirely compromised with the U.S. as a result of Trump's decisions, will Canada just be another country in the news that America continuously has public arguments with? From a GPR standpoint, Canada needs to take advantage of the "room to grow" the U.S. has recently provided it with, but ensure a healthy, open and honest relationship with its own publics – unlike that of our neighbouring country. GPR is becoming increasingly more significant in the political actions of a country, so Canada must counteract the actions of Trump with valid communication within Canada, but also with the U.S. to avoid feeling the harsh implications of Trump's presidency.

### **Conclusion**

Trump's U.S. presidency is the largest and most significant political threat to Canada today. Academics Jervis (2018), Kellner (2016) and Kay (2017) effectively demonstrate the reasons to argue against Trump's hold of power in the U.S. and the political consequences Canada faces as a result. Comparatively, Lee, Neeley and Stewart (2013) and Graham and Avery (2013) collectively explain the importance and significance of GPR in today's political society. They highlight the pressure publics hold on government bodies to provide them with accurate and trustworthy information, which research shows is poorly demonstrated by Trump's presidency. Altogether, Canadian government officials must be acutely aware of the actions of

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the U.S. during this time, and counter them with its own demonstration of values with its publics and its fellow governments.

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