

THE TRUMP PARADOX?

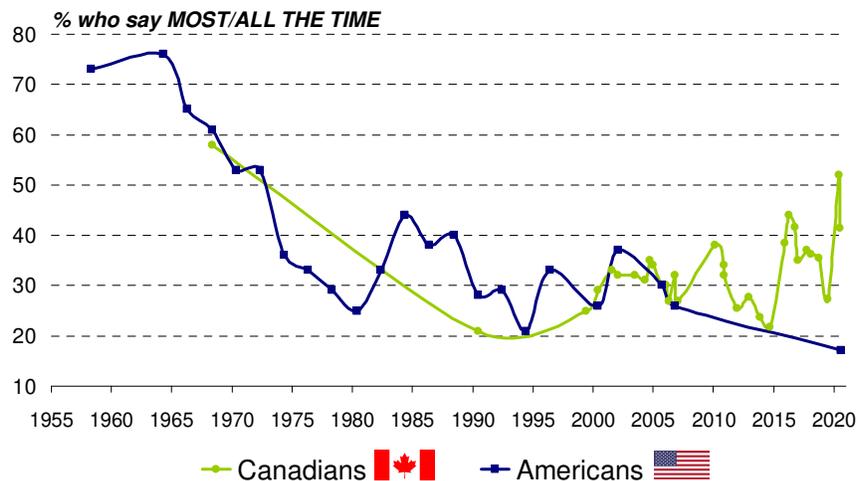
ORDERED POPULISM AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

[Ottawa – September 2, 2020] With the U.S. presidential election just around the corner, we would like to offer some insights into what might be the most important election in modern history. Our objective is not to contribute to the plethora of horserace polling that is already out there. Rather, our goal here is to offer perspective on the underlying forces affecting this election.

The situation in the U.S. looks rather grim. The economy (notwithstanding stock markets) is in horrific shape. Trust in the U.S. government is reaching a historical nadir; just one in six Americans trust their government to do what is right most or all of the time (by comparison, 41 per cent of Canadians express a high degree of trust in their government). Furthermore, just one in three Americans say their government is headed in the right direction (compared to six in ten Canadians).

Tracking trust in government

Q. How much do you trust the government in Ottawa/Washington to do what is right?



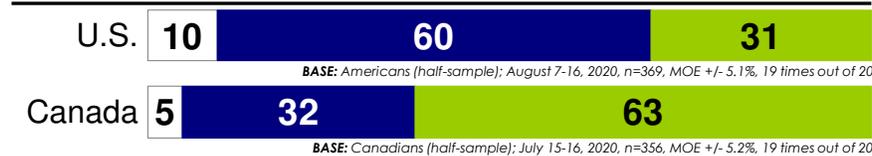
BASE (U.S.): Americans; August 7-16, 2020, n=710, MOE +/- 3.7%, 19 times out of 20

BASE (Canada): Canadians; June 24-30, 2020, n=1,021, MOE +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20

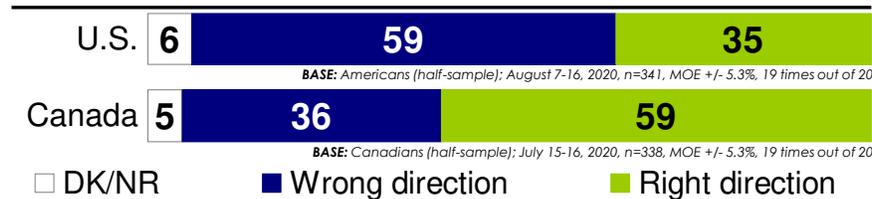
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Direction of country/government

Q. All things considered, would you say the country is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction?



Q. All things considered, would you say the U.S. federal government/Government of Canada is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction?

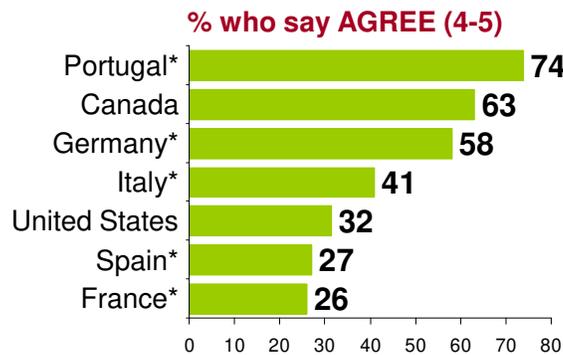


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Comparison of government approval ratings

Q. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

I feel that (my government) has risen to the challenge of COVID-19 well in its response



* European figures drawn from "10 Takeaways from the COVID-19 Crisis", a study conducted for the European Council on Foreign Relations (July 2020)

BASE (U.S.): Americans; August 7-16, 2020, n=710, MOE +/- 3.7%, 19 times out of 20

BASE: Canadians; July 14-21, 2020, n=1,052, MOE +/- 3.0%, 19 times out of 20

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To make matters worse, it would seem the most advanced and powerful society on the planet has fumbled a massive health crisis. The U.S. government receives terrible marks on its handling

of the COVID-19 crisis. Indeed, just 32 per cent approve of how the U.S. government has handled the crisis, an approval rating that is barely half that of its Canadian counterpart.

By Canadian standards, these marks are abysmal. If a Canadian government were rated so poorly by its populace, it would likely be looking at a meltdown similar to the Progressive Conservatives' two seats in the 1993 election. And yet, in what we refer to as the 'Trump Paradox', Donald Trump is very much in this race; our polling suggests he is just two points behind Joe Biden. All of this begs the question: if America is so down, why is Donald Trump still so competitive?

There are two factors underlying Mr. Trump's paradoxically competitive position in the upcoming election and the woeful outlook on the economy, the pandemic, and the country. First, voter fealty in the United States means that American voters are far more inelastic relative to other countries. Second and more importantly is the issue authoritarian – or what we prefer to call 'ordered' – populism. For a detailed background on ordered populism and its rise in Canada, we recommend *Northern Populism: Causes and Consequences of the New Ordered Outlook*.¹ In short, ordered populism is a significant political force that has come to replace the traditional left-right political spectrum. It emphasizes obedience, hostility toward outgroups, a desire to turn back the clock to a time of greater order in society, and a search for a strongman type to lead the return to a better time. It has created a heightened partisan polarization throughout much of the Western world and it is becoming an increasingly effective predictor of vote intention.

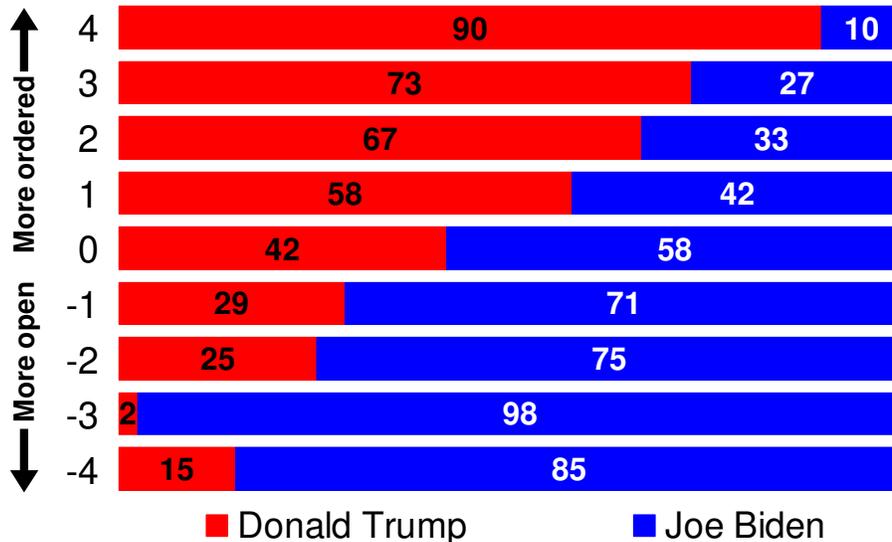
We created a nine-point index using four simple questions that ask nothing about politics, but rather about child rearing (questioning authority versus obedience, morality versus reason and evidence, creativity versus good behaviour, and order versus openness). This 'open-ordered' index tightly predicted support for the Conservative Party in the 2019 Canadian election and, similarly, we find a near-perfect linear correlation between ordered outlook and support for Donald Trump. At one end of the spectrum – the most 'ordered' – 90 per cent of respondents would vote for Donald Trump. At the other end of the spectrum – the most 'open' – 85 per cent would vote for Joe Biden.

Our findings also suggest that this ordered outlook is becoming increasingly concentrated among the U.S. electorate. In 2016, 68 per cent of those with an 'open' outlook were Clinton supporters. Today, 81 per cent are Biden voters. The percentage of 'ordered' Americans who are Trump supporters is similarly up four points. What is not clear, however, is whether this polarization is favouring Trump or Biden.

The 2020 presidential election is probably the highest-stakes election in modern history. It comes in the midst of a once-in-a-lifetime collision of economic, health, and democratic risks. Canadians tightly attuned and deeply concerned. Ordered outlook has become the most important political force in the advanced Western world and in will be a central factor shaping the U.S. election.

¹ Frank Graves and Jeff Smith, "Northern Populism: Causes and Consequences of the New Ordered Outlook", University of Calgary School of Public Policy SPP Research Papers, Vol. 13:15, (June 2020), University of Calgary.

Open-ordered index by vote intention (U.S.)



Note: Figures adjusted to exclude responses other than "Donald Trump" or "Joe Biden"

BASE: Americans; August 7-16, 2020, n=710, MOE +/- 3.7%, 19 times out of 20

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Open-ordered: 2016 vs. 2020

2016 election

Q. Which candidate did you vote for in the 2016 presidential election?



2020 election

Q. If the 2020 presidential election were held tomorrow, which candidate would you vote for?



■ Donald Trump ■ Joe Biden/Hillary Clinton

Note: Figures adjusted to exclude responses other than "Donald Trump" or "Joe Biden"/"Hillary Clinton"

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Methodology:

In an effort to reduce the coverage bias of landline only RDD, we created a dual landline/cell phone RDD sampling frame for this research. As a result, we are able to reach those with a landline and cell phone, as well as cell phone only households and landline only households.

Because U.S. regulations prohibit contacting cellphones through an autodialler, this survey employed two modes of data collection. Landlines were contacted using High Definition Interactive Voice Response (HD-IVR™) technology, which allows respondents to enter their preferences by punching the keypad on their phone, rather than telling them to an operator. Cellphones were contacted by live interviewer.

The field dates for this survey are August 7-16, 2020. In total, a random sample of 710 Americans aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/- 3.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Please note that the margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as region, sex, age, education). All the data have been statistically weighted by age, gender, region, and 2016 vote to ensure the sample's composition reflects that of the actual population of United States according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau.