

With distrust sown in institutions and political opposition, is there a path back in this time of division?

Canadians more likely than Americans to find value in disagreement

April 10, 2025 – The world order feels like it's being remade in real time as U.S. President Donald Trump upends traditional economic, political and defensive allegiances in his second term. The American-led upheaval comes on the tails of worldwide political unrest brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic turmoil caused by inflation. The pandemic created a [sharp dividing line](#) between the vaccinated and those who rejected vaccine mandates while inflationary prices increased the divide between the haves and have-nots – and between [positive and negative economic vibes](#).

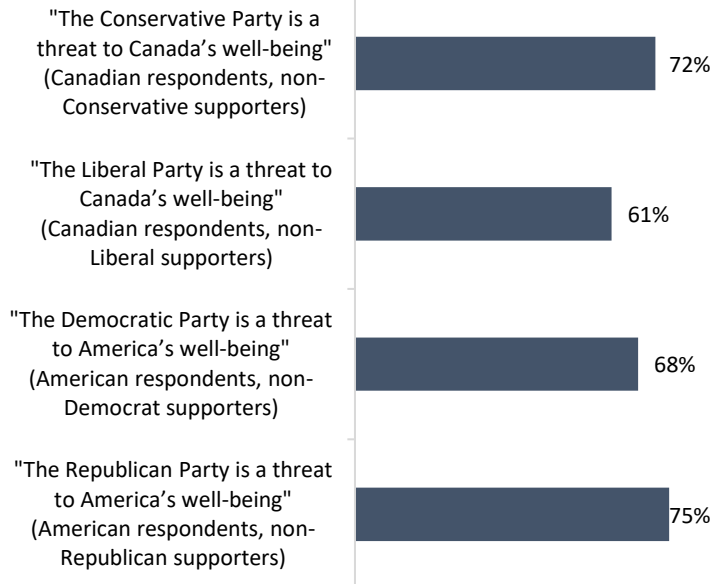
The cost of a dozen eggs may have helped usher in [a change in administration in the U.S.](#) despite otherwise strong economic indicators – and may well [have done the same](#) in Canada had there been an election.

But is there a path forward from this era characterized by political polarization?

In a landmark cross-border study of more than 10,000 Canadian and Americans conducted in partnership by the non-profit Angus Reid Institute and [Cardus](#), new data finds evidence of both political division but also the potential to cross the divide. However, this potential is greater in Canada than in the U.S.

First, the state of political division in Canada and the United States: There has been much written in both countries about this era of political polarization, and these data illustrate the phenomenon. In Canada and the U.S., majorities of partisans of all stripes believe the party on the opposite side of the aisle is a “threat to their country”.

Percentage who agree...



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute in partnership with Cardus conducted an online survey from March 12-21, 2025, among a randomized sample of 5,003 Canadian adults who are members of Angus Reid Forum. The sample was weighted to be representative of adults nationwide according to region, gender, age, household income, and education, based on the Canadian census. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 1 percentage point, 19 times out of 20.

ARI and Cardus conducted a second online survey from March 12-21, 2025, among a randomized sample of 5,001 American adults who are members of Angus Reid Forum. The sample was weighted to be representative of adults nationwide according to region, gender, age, household income, and education, based on the American census. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 1 percentage point, 19 times out of 20.

Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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Conservatives (87%) say this of the Liberals; Liberals (84%) say this of Conservatives; Republicans (80%) say this of Democrats; and Democrats (89%) say this of Republicans.

This distrust of political opponents is also paired with a lack of trust in key institutions in both countries. In the United States, only a minority profess confidence in media (37% have confidence), the courts (39%) and the education system (44%). Canadians are more confident in these respective institutions, but it is hardly resounding (52% media, 50% courts, 54% education).

Still, this is perhaps why Canadians strike a more hopeful tone when it comes to the concept of mending the country's divisions and finding a path forward. Canadians disagree with the statement "Canada is so divided that nothing is going to bring it back together" by a two-to-one (63% to 32%) margin. Americans are more likely to agree (51%) than not (41%) when it comes to a similar question about their own country.

The above is perhaps driven by the difference in mindsets on either side of the border when it comes to approaching political disagreements. Three-in-five (57%) Canadians say they find it "informative" when they converse with someone that doesn't share their view, while two-in-five (43%) find it "stressful and frustrating". Americans are slightly more likely, but not by much, to say the latter (53%) than the former (47%).

More Key Findings:

- Regardless of political affiliation, people report distrust of political parties and leaders. Most Canadians say they have little or no confidence in the federal government (54%), political leaders (68%) and political parties (71%); likewise Americans (69%, 74%, 76% respectively).
- Most in Canada (63%) and the U.S. (57%) believe "it's impossible for people like me to have any real influence on the political decisions that affect me".
- Two-thirds (65%) in Canada believe the recent trade war ignited by U.S. President Donald Trump has permanently damaged the two countries' relationship. Americans are split between believing it will eventually blow over (37%) and that the U.S.-Canada connection is irreparably harmed.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

About Cardus

*Founded in 1974, **Cardus** is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.*

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Part One: Confidence in institutions

The differences between Canadians and Americans have become a point of focus as U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened to annex Canada in recent months.

Related: [51st State: Canadian resolve in saying 'no' continues, while a massive gap between Trump & Americans is revealed](#)

Perhaps one of the clearest delineations between the two countries in current times is faith in institutions. Previous ARI data has found that Americans are generally more critical of their own country than Canadians are of theirs. In January 2024, Canadians were more likely than Americans to say their country had a good system of government (43% vs. 26%). Though it is worth noting that only two-in-five (43%) believing Canada's system of government was good was not exactly a ringing endorsement.

Related: [State of the Nations: Canadians proud of country, but see 'Trump-style politics' as a risk](#)

Cross-border differences in confidence in education, media, faith leaders

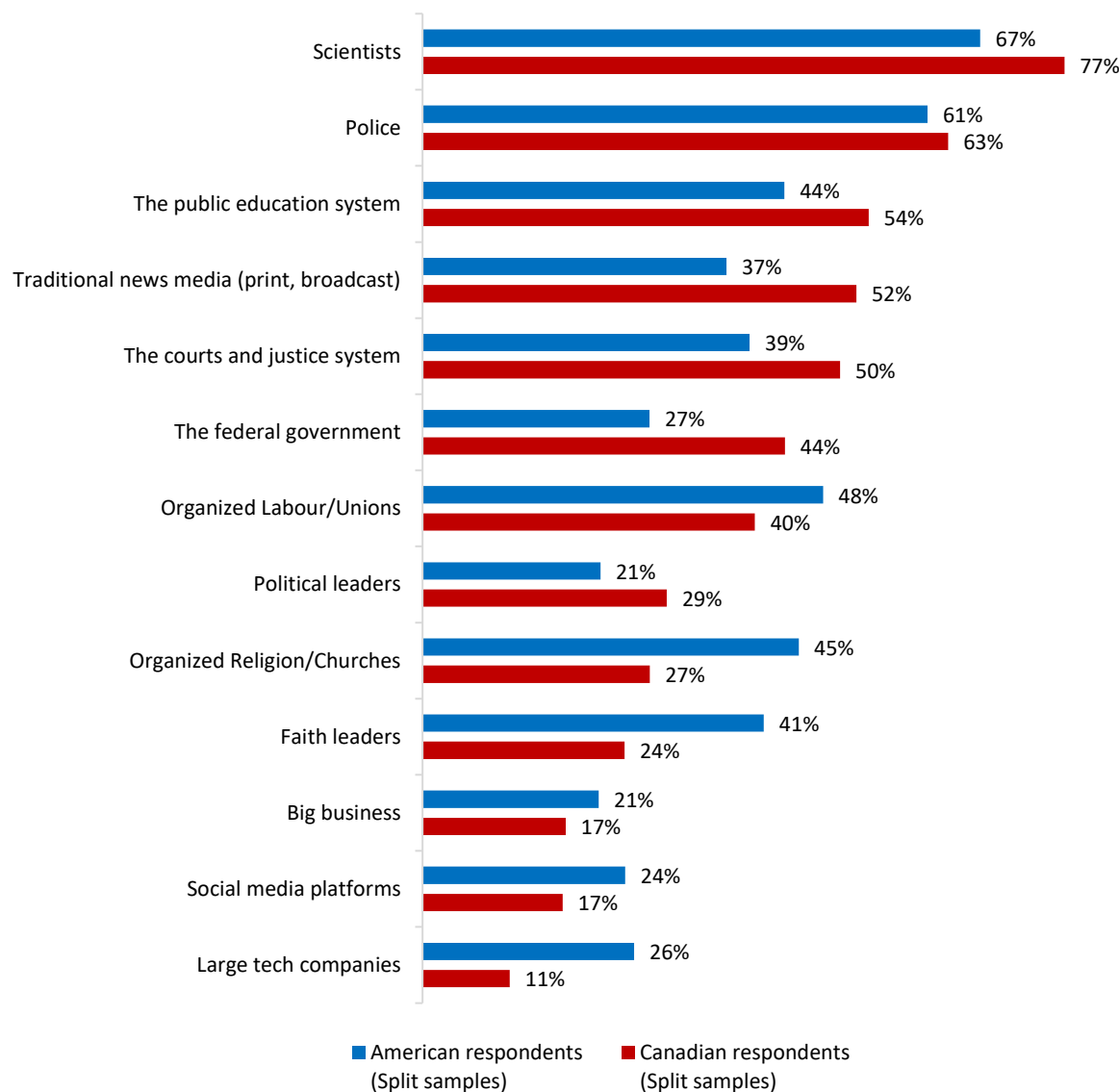
Americans express much less confidence in public education (44% vs. 54%), news media (37% vs. 52%), the courts (37% vs. 50%), the federal government (27% vs. 44%) than Canadians. Meanwhile, Americans express more confidence than Canadians in organized religions (45% vs. 27%) and faith leaders (41% vs. 24%).

In both countries, a minority express confidence in social media platforms and large tech companies, but in America, those minorities are larger:

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Percentage who have 'a great deal' or 'fair amount' of confidence in the following



There is an evident political divide on trust in institutions. In the U.S. and Canada, those who support right-aligned parties – the Conservatives and the Republicans – are more likely to say they lack confidence in the public education system, traditional news media, and organized labour. Partisans on the left side of the spectrum – those who voted for former Vice-President Kamala Harris and the Democrats in 2024, and current Liberal and NDP supporters – report more trust in scientists, public education, media, and organized labour.

The left-right dynamic isn't the only that is affecting confidence, however. Left-leaning party supporters in Canada have more trust in the courts and the justice system than Harris voters in the United States, but

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that is perhaps owing to a series of rulings by that country's Supreme Court which currently has a Republican majority.

Related: [SCOC: Most say Canada's top court is impartial, but one-third say politics play into judicial appointments](#)

Percentage who have 'a great deal' or 'fair amount' of confidence in the following by politics						
	Canadian respondents – Federal vote intention				American respondents – 2024 Presidential Vote	
	CPC	Liberal	NDP	BQ	Trump/Vance	Harris/Walz
Scientists	56%	94%	91%	95%	50%	88%
Police	65%	65%	39%	86%	77%	49%
The public education system	30%	73%	66%	64%	31%	59%
Traditional news media (print, broadcast)	27%	72%	56%	75%	28%	50%
The courts and justice system	31%	67%	52%	69%	44%	39%
The federal government	15%	73%	53%	39%	36%	21%
Organized Labour/Unions	21%	53%	72%	32%	33%	68%
Political leaders	12%	49%	24%	36%	32%	13%
Organized Religion/Churches	39%	23%	16%	19%	60%	34%
Faith leaders	33%	21%	21%	9%	56%	30%
Big business	21%	14%	10%	26%	30%	14%
Social media platforms	23%	12%	17%	13%	27%	22%
Large tech companies	12%	8%	10%	14%	31%	21%

Part Two: International and domestic political divisions

Trump provides a useful guiding star when it comes to navigating the political differences between Canada and the U.S. He's contested three straight presidential elections collecting an increasing volume and share of votes over time. More than 77 million Americans voted for him in November when he won his second term in the Oval Office. In August, prior to tariffs and annexation threats altering the Canada-U.S. relationship, fewer than one-in-five (18%) Canadians had a favourable view of Trump, while two-thirds (65%) said they held him in a very negative light.

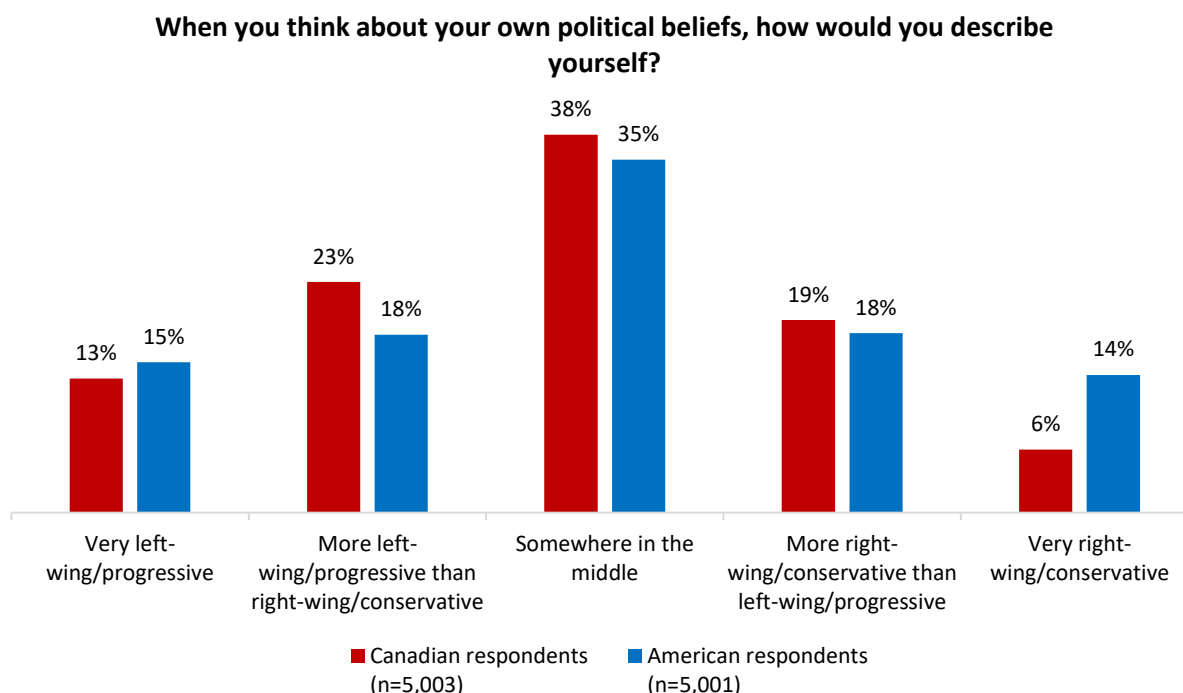
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Related: U.S. Election: Canadians keen on Kamala, but say women generally walk a harder road to high political office

It is perhaps no surprise then that Canadians are more likely to identify as left than Americans, while vice versa is true:



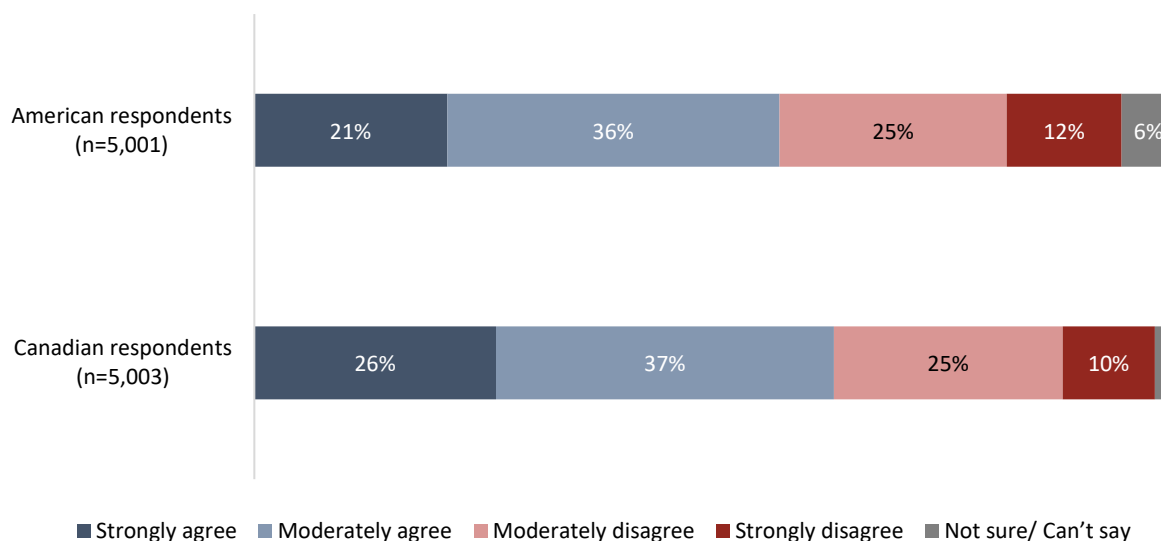
Most feel disconnected from political decisions

While Canadians express more confidence in political institutions and their government, there are similar levels of political apathy in both countries. A majority in Canada (63%) and the U.S. (57%) believe they have no ability to influence political decisions that affect them.

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**Agree vs. disagree -
"It's impossible for people like me to have any real influence on the political
decisions that affect me"**



Did Trump's tariffs shatter the Canada-U.S. relationship?

These findings – especially on the American side – are perhaps illustrative of the disconnect between the Trump administration and voters on his tact towards Canada since taking office for his second term. Trump has taken an aggressive approach to Canada, levying tariffs and threatening annexation. [In January](#), most Americans opposed the then-proposed 25-per-cent tariff on Canadian goods. A few months later, [in early March](#), most Americans, including most 2024 Trump voters, believed their government should be approaching Canada on at least friendly terms. [Although there are signs this general positive sentiment is perhaps turning negative](#) as Trump continues his rhetorical onslaught.

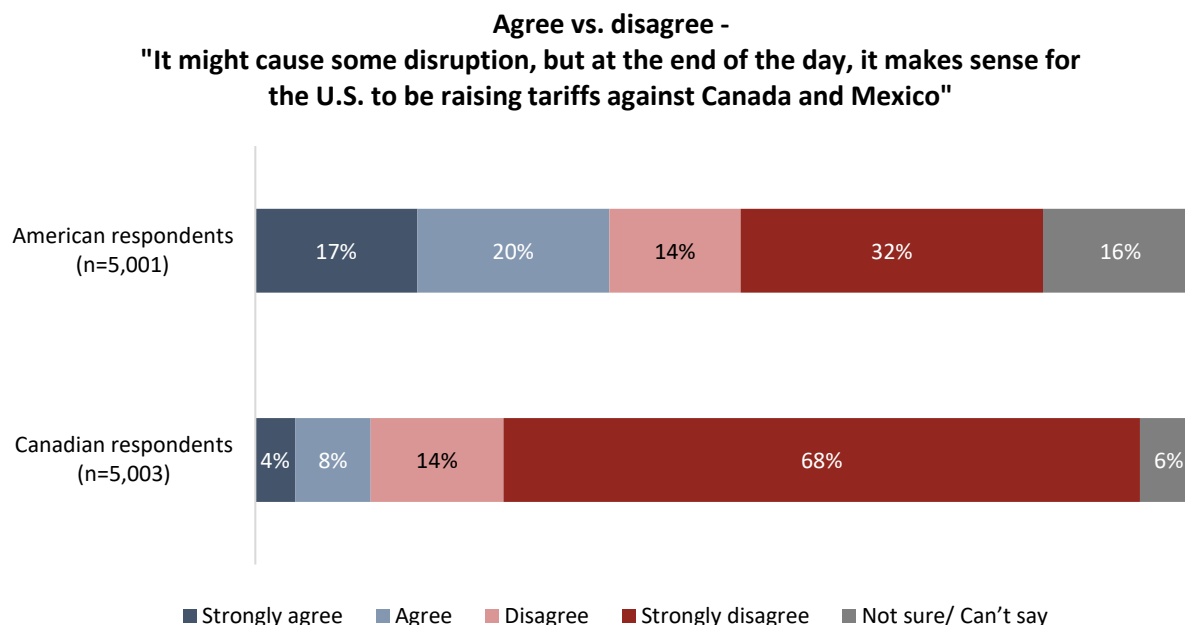
Related:

- [Americans oppose Trump's tariff against Canada 2:1; support drops further when they consider the price of gas](#)
- [Most Americans say Canada is 'valued partner', most Canadians view U.S. as threat](#)

Americans lean towards believing it's unwise (46%) to raise tariffs against Canada and Mexico, the country's two [largest trading partners](#), than sound policy (37%). Most Canadians (82%) believe it doesn't make sense:

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After Trump's round of reciprocal tariffs on "[Liberation Day](#)", Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney described the global economy as "[fundamentally different today than it was yesterday](#)".

"The system of global trade anchored on the United States, that Canada has relied on since the end of the Second World War ... is over."

These data were taken prior to the global application of tariffs. And Canada was spared that round – for now. But even prior to those [global economy shaking tariffs](#) most Canadians (65%) believed their country's relationship with the United States had been permanently harmed. One-quarter (23%) believe that the trade dispute between the U.S. and Canada will eventually blow over.

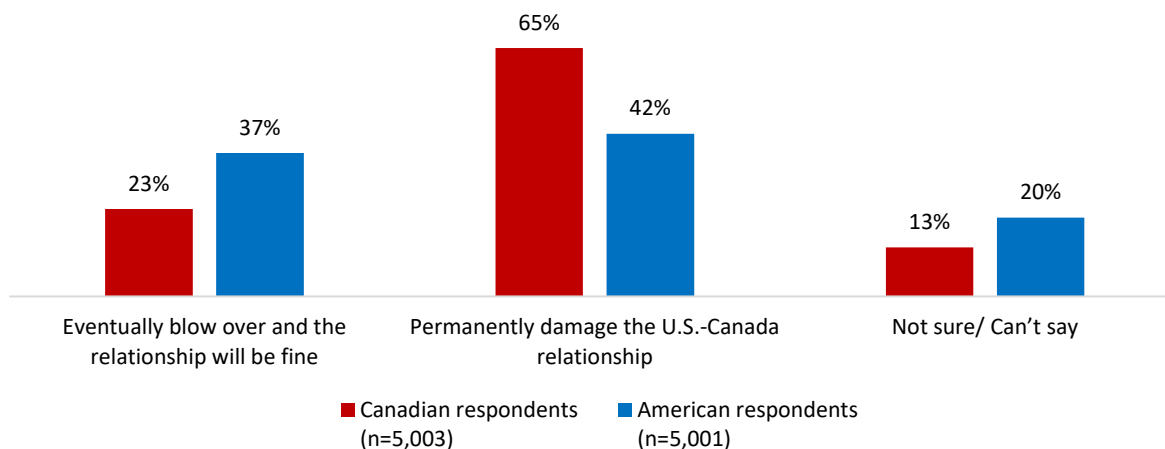
Americans are more divided on the ramifications of the trade war initiated by their president. Two-in-five (42%) believe it has irreparably damaged the U.S.'s relationship with Canada, while a similar number (37%) say the two countries can eventually restore relations to where they used to be:

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In your opinion, what impact will this trade dispute have on the relationship between the United States and Canada?



Internal political divisions

With the future of their cross-border relationship uncertain, there are also concerning internal political dynamics within both Canada and the United States. The topic of political polarization is well-tread in both countries, and though the spotlight has been on it during the Trump era, perhaps has its roots deeper than that.

Within these data is evidence of significant fear and distrust of those on the other side of the political divide among both Canadians and Americans. This survey posed a statement to Canadians and Americans about domestic political parties they do not support – are they a threat to their country's well-being?

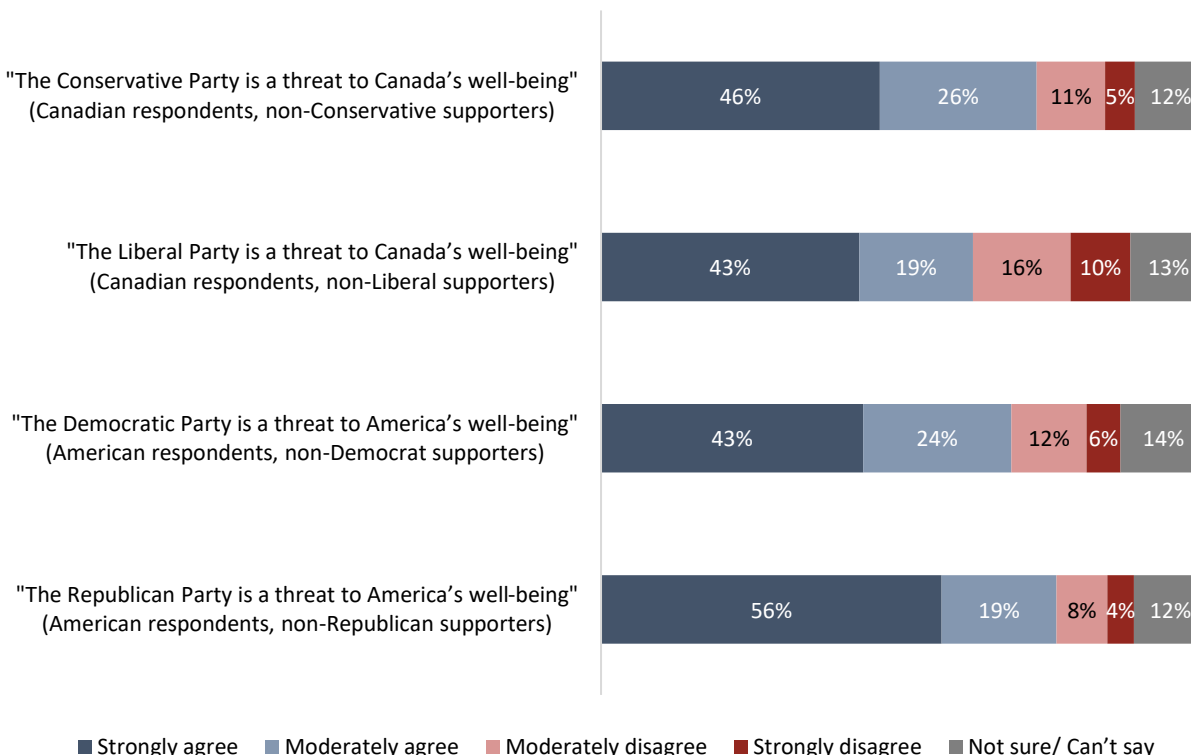
A majority (62%) of Canadians who do not support the Liberals believe that party poses a danger to the country; a majority (72%) of Canadians who do not support the Conservatives say the same of that party.

In the states, the same pattern emerges. Two-thirds (67%) of those who do not support the Democrats say that party will harm America; three-quarters (75%) of non-Republicans believe the Republican Party is a threat to the U.S.'s health:

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Agree vs. disagree



Is society too divided to mend?

The above distrust of political opponents comes amid a period of significant upheaval in both the United States and Canada ushered in by the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2022, two years into the pandemic, ARI found that most Canadians believed the pandemic “pulled people further apart” (82%), “brought out the worst in people” (79%) and weakened Canadians’ compassion for one another (61%).

Related: [COVID at Two: Vast majorities say the pandemic has pulled Canadians apart, brought out the worst in people](#)

The pandemic may be over, but societal turmoil has yet to cease. Lockdowns were followed by periods of [high inflation not seen in 40 years](#). Just as inflation abated, Canada now faces an “[existential](#)” economic threat brought on by a suddenly hostile United States, a historical ally and the country’s largest trading partner. In Canada, this external danger has perhaps had [a uniting effect](#) – for most, although there is [a threatened unity crisis](#) also looming.

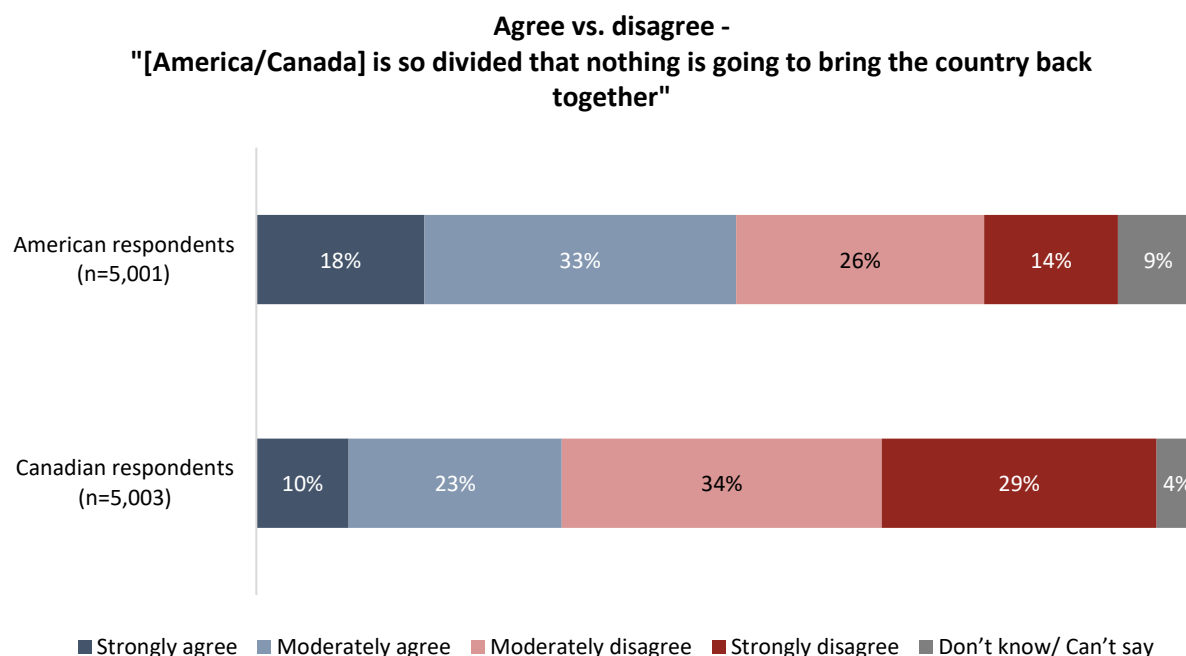
Related: [Pride in Canada rebounds in face of Trump threat; working to reduce interprovincial trade barriers seen as key to response](#)

Perhaps this rebounded nationalism in Canada explains the difference between Canadians and Americans on whether they believe their country can be mended after what has been a divisive era.

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Americans are more likely (51%) than not (40%) to agree that “nothing is going to bring” their country back together. By a two-to-one margin (63% to 33%), Canadians believe there is a path for their country to be united again.



Finding a common ground

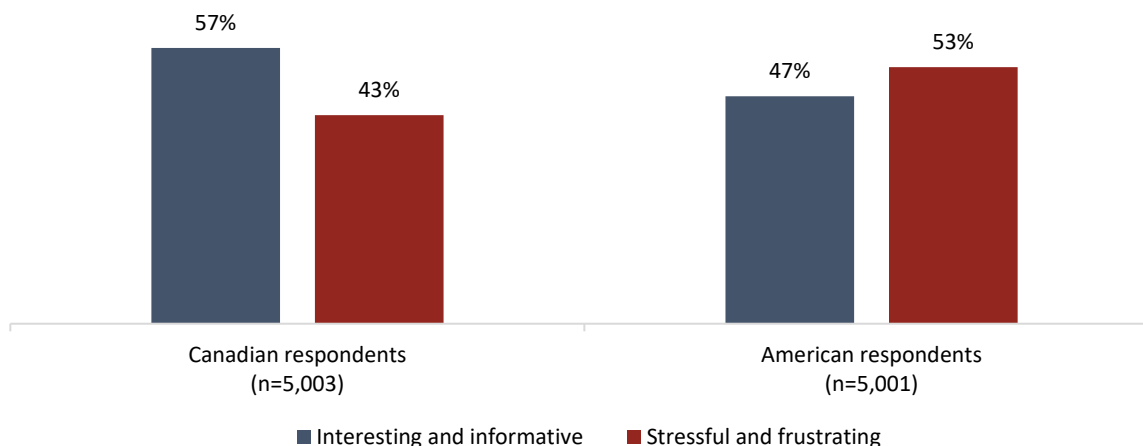
Fundamentally, is it about Canadians and Americans listening to and understanding viewpoints that are different from their own? Three-in-five (57%) Canadians say they find it “interesting and informative” when they talk to people they disagree with, two-in-five (43%) find it “stressful and frustrating”. Americans are near evenly split on this question:

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In your experience, when you talk to people you DISagree with, do you generally find it:



For detailed results for Canadian respondents by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results for American respondents by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

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