Product: TGAM PubDate: 11-14-2026 Zone: GTA Edition: 1 Page: OPINION_6284005 User: DODonnell Time: 11-11-2026 17:46 Color:

DATA DIVE WITH **NIK NANOS**

THERE'S STILL HOPE FOR THE U.S.-CANADA RELATIONSHIP

The midterms were the latest signal that the cost of living is a serious issue for Americans – just as it is for Canadians. That could provide a path to common ground on trade talks

OPINION

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The Democrats may have regained control of the Senate and the House of Representatives earlier this month, but the results of the midterm elections are not ultimately a game-changer for the U.S.-Canada relationship. The reality is that the primary personalities defining bilateral relations, Donald Trump and Mark Carney, remain the same.

But the midterms did deliver two lessons. One, the MAGA movement is bruised but far from dead. And two, to quote Democratic operative James Carville: "It's the economy, stupid."

The economy, and the way it affects the cost of food, gas and housing, is an issue that Americans on both sides of the aisle agree on. More than four in 10 Americans (44 per cent) say they have trouble paying for basic necessities. And around nine in 10 Americans in exit polls asserted that the cost of living was either "crucial" or a "major" factor in who they voted for in the midterms.

But Canadians across the political spectrum feel the same way. Almost one in two (49 per cent) say they have cancelled a major purchase, find it difficult to afford basic necessities, or both.

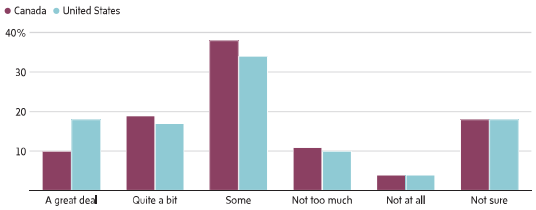
So the cost-of-living crisis represents an enhanced opportunity for Canada-U.S. trade discussions to find a potential shared path forward. The midterms show as much: There is a political price to ignoring this issue at the negotiating table, and that intersection of Canadian and American interests could represent a path forward for trade talks between two countries with more in common than recent rhetoric might suggest.

While the survey was conducted before the midterms, October polling conducted by Nanos in Canada and Ipsos in the U.S. for the New North America Initiative at the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy suggests there is now an opening for proper trade negotiations that take down tariffs. That opportunity remains possible thanks to a reservoir of goodwill and pragmatism that still exists on both sides of the border. While Americans see turbulence today, they don't see a permanent decline in the relationship. Although only 10 per cent of Americans describe the current Canada-U.S. relationship as positive – and 43 per cent describe it as negative – this flips when one asks about how they view it 10 years from now: Thirty-five per cent see it as being positive, and only 10 per cent as negative. Canada also still enjoys substantial goodwill among Americans, who are much more likely to hold a favourable view of Canada (56 per cent) than an unfavourable one (11 per cent). And while it will take more political stick-handling to address the very strong majority of Canadians (86 per cent) who describe the current Canada-U.S. relationship as either somewhat or very negative, Canadians still envision that things will recover in the future, with only about 20 per cent having a negative outlook.

> Worries about the cost of living, most recently expressed by the midterm results, point to the conclusion that tariffs on Canada have lost their appeal among average Americans.

In America, meanwhile, the word "tariff" has become a four-letter word in the political lexicon. Only one in five Americans strongly support (6 per cent) or somewhat support (14 per cent) the U.S. placing of tariffs on imported goods from Canada. Likewise, only 4 per cent see tariffs as being positive for their personal finances, while 38 per cent see them as having a very negative (12 per cent) or somewhat negative (26 per cent) effect.

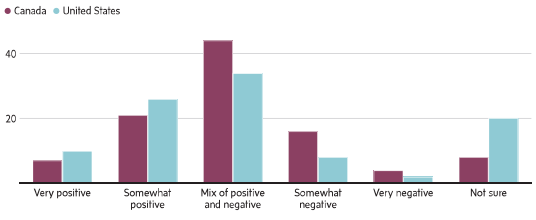
In the trade negotiations between Canada and the U.S., how much do you think each of the following should be willing to compromise?
Per cent share of American respondents



Survey of 1,023 American adults, conducted Oct. 2-4, 2026. The "not sure" shares combine respondents who answered "not sure" with those who skipped the question. Figures are rounded to the nearest percentage point and may not sum to 100.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: IPSOS/UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

How will the U.S.-Canada relationship look 10 years from now?
Per cent of respondents in each poll choosing each answer



Canadian figures are from a Nanos Research survey of 1,048 adults conducted in October, 2026; U.S. figures are from an Ipsos survey of 1,023 American adults fielded Oct. 2-4, 2026. The U.S. "not sure" share combines respondents who answered "not sure" with those who skipped the question; the Nanos survey had no skip option. Figures are rounded to the nearest percentage point.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: IPSOS/UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY; NANOS RESEARCH

Worries about the cost of living, most recently expressed by the midterm results, point to the conclusion that tariffs on Canada have lost their appeal among average Americans. That said, this does not diminish the political muscle that the commercial interests of very specific parts of the American economy have on elected officials.

The most striking finding in the study of Americans is their openness to compromise in the trade negotiations between Canada and the United States. Four per cent say America should not compromise at all, while another 10 per cent assert the U.S. should compromise not too much, but two in three Americans are open to compromise. Eighteen per cent are willing to compromise a great deal, 17 per cent quite a bit, and another 34 per cent say they are willing to see some compromise.

Considering the oversized economic heft of the Americans in the bilateral relationship, these numbers should be an eye-opener on both sides of the border. They speak to Americans not only having a favourable view of Canada, but being open to the government negotiating meaningfully with its neighbour to the north. The appetite for possible compromise also exists in Canada, with six in 10 Canadians open to some sort of compromise.

Even as leaders and their proxies jockey to protect domestic interests, the public opinion suggests a mandate for repair, not rupture. Negativity exists, especially in Canada, but that is tempered by more long-term pragmatism. When the next round of serious discussions take place, Canada is well-positioned to earn a fair negotiation, with average Americans viewing Canada favourably and tariffs on Canadian goods negatively, and having an openness to compromise on the trade file.

Regardless of what happens after the Republicans' midterm setback, both U.S. political parties need to understand that stability in the Canada-U.S. relationship, achieved through reversing tariffs and good-faith negotiations between two important economic partners, is what Americans want. With voters on both sides of the border asking for relief at the checkout, a trade deal that delivers it would be good politics for everyone.

Will the GOP become a pro-democracy party once again?

MATTHEW LEBO

OPINION

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With the Democratic landslide in the midterms, we can begin to imagine a path toward a more stable democracy in the U.S. Political polarization is a common diagnosis of what's wrong in American politics, but the term misses a key asymmetry – the ideological gap is mostly owing to the Republican Party's transformation from a traditional conservative party under Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush into an anti-democratic and White nationalist party under Donald Trump. By comparison, Democrats' shift from the ideological centre is minimal.

A basic definition of democracy is a system in which parties lose elections and accept it as a legitimate outcome. A democracy requires at least two such parties. How many does the U.S. have? In 2020, it was not only Mr. Trump who rejected the outcome of the presidential race, but 139 of 209 Republican House members and eight of 51 Republican senators who refused to certify Joe Biden's victory.

The Republican Party has been more concerned with manipulating elections and the electorate than with convincing voters. The Republican-nominated Supreme Court justices have dismantled the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The party sought to enact the Save Act, which would have disenfranchised millions, and many states redrew congressional districts to dilute minority voting power.

Republicans' drift is also evident in their attempts to undo decades of progress toward racial equality. Redefining who does and doesn't belong in American society has been a part of immigration policy, foreign policy and purges of the military.

The politics of White resentment was a key part of expanding the party's voter base. Recall that Mr. Trump rose to Republican presidential front-runner by pushing birtherism – insisting the country's first Black president was illegitimate. It was affirmed at the Charlottesville rally and in attacks on Haitian and Somali immigrants.

In all, the two parties see each other as existential threats to their own vision of America. In that, they are both correct. The Democrats' dream of a multiracial democracy is incompatible with the Republican project to Make America Great Again. The stakes rise and the willingness to bend or break democratic norms grows. American democracy has spiralled downward.

Perhaps there's now an opening to reverse course. Last week's Republican losers gave a lot of concession speeches, sparing us the conspiracy theories. Mr. Trump has not been shouting much about rigged elections either. The election passed without violence. Perhaps the results are too overwhelming to question, or perhaps it shows a step toward the party's recommitment to democracy.

The results show a repudiation of Mr. Trump and the party that allowed him to consolidate presidential powers by bending and breaking the Constitution. But Democratic victories are not a long-term strategy to fix democratic backsliding.

Paradoxically, the institutions most capable of reversing democratic erosion are the most hated ones: the political parties. How can the American system be rehabilitated so that at least two major political parties view upholding democracy as non-negotiable? American history has shown four paths to major party change, but most seem impossible in the modern era.

The first possibility is the rise of a new political party. This might sound viable since roughly 40 per cent of Americans claim to be political independents. But the U.S. hasn't had a new major party in 160 years for good reason. It would require slates of serious candidates in multiple branches and levels of government. Most difficult, it would require Americans to stop seeing a third-party vote as a wasted ballot. No third party has lasted long in America's 250-year history.

Second, there could be a complete or partial collapse of the Republican Party. The original rise of the Republicans in the 1850s came from the collapse of the Whig Party alongside various anti-slavery movements that splintered off from the Democrats. Suddenly, millions of voters were left partyless. The new Republicans consolidated them in 1856 and won the presidency under Abraham Lincoln in 1860. The current Republican Party is in disarray, but collapse seems impossible. Republicans are the more ideologically cohesive of the two parties, have strong organization, and a deeply loyal base. The party turned on Richard Nixon and George W. Bush but never neared collapse. It will survive souring on Mr. Trump.

Third, major ideological shifts between the parties could occur and leave the extreme-right elements without a party. There is a model for this: The Democrats went from being the pro-segregation party of the solid South from 1865-1932, to the party of Civil Rights in the 1960s and since. Change began as a slow evolution over decades, but a breaking point was reached when the party of George Wallace also passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act.

The Democrats then shed their southern White voter base and gained millions of people of colour. Over time, the Republican Party accumulated many disaffected White voters. The new system had two ideologically distinct parties.

Is a realignment like that possible now? Well, there is a divide in the Republican Party between people who do and do not identify with the MAGA movement. But the main fault line is not ideological – it's about devotion to Donald Trump. Non-MAGA Republicans may dislike him – and many abandoned the party last week – but divorce is unlikely.

Moreover, the key Trump critics among Republican elites – such as Liz Cheney, Adam Kinzinger, and Marjorie Taylor Greene – are not in government. That is, there is not an anti-Trump Republican faction in Congress around which the party could be rebuilt.

The last possibility, and one that seems more possible now, is Republican renewal as a pro-democracy party. American conservative and independent voters souring on Mr. Trump is a start, but they need to reward Republicans who reject where the party is now. The politics of White nationalism and creeping authoritarianism must become losing electoral strategies.

That is, when Republican candidates see supporting democratic norms as a bigger advantage than undermining them, things can slowly be fixed. Still, that is extremely tricky since the primary system pushes them to please the MAGA base.

Institutional reform can change incentives. For one, assigning states' House seats using multimember districts and proportional representation would eliminate redistricting shenanigans and racial and partisan gerrymandering. A Republican Party trying to maximize votes in each state would need to appeal to voters it now tries to marginalize. The party organization would need to find candidates who could do that, rather than more extreme candidates to win tailor-made districts. A Blue Wave might be the kick-start the party needs.