

Trump, Trudeau and the patriarchy

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The Globe and Mail
May 27, 2017

As icons of masculinity, it would be hard to find a more vivid contrast than that between US president Donald Trump and Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau. One is a macho bully who demands deference, the other a people-pleasing metrosexual. These men are not one-of-a-kind phenomena but very much expressions of the societies that produced them.

This is the obvious conclusion from an analysis of the evolving social values in each country Environics has been conducting every four years since 1992.

In order to understand the orientation to the structure of authority in the family in each country, we periodically ask representative samples of people aged 15 and over if they agree or disagree with the statement: "The father of the family must be master in his own house."

In 2016, 50 per cent of 8,000 plus Americans surveyed agreed with the statement. In Canada, the equivalent proportion (with a sample of 4,000-plus) was 23 per cent.

When we first asked this question in 1992, the proportion in the US agreeing was 42 per cent. It rose to 44 per cent in 1996 and to 48 percent in 2000. It remained at that level throughout the post 9/11 George W. Bush years and then declined somewhat during the Obama era to 41 per cent in 2012. However, as American Republicans and Democrats were in the process of selecting Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton as their respective presidential candidates, the proportion returned to its historic high.

It will surprise no one that support for Donald Trump is highly correlated with support for patriarchy and, conversely, support for gender equality is highly correlated with support for Hillary Clinton.

Meanwhile in Canada, the proportion of patriarchy supporters has been hovering in the low 20s throughout the past two decades. This is in spite of the inflows of migrants from more male-dominated countries (35% of foreign-born Canadians believe Dad should be on top), as well as a mild backlash against feminism among Gen X men aged 25 to 44 (foreign-born and Canadian-born alike). In the United States, 56 per cent of immigrants opt for patriarchy in the home.

There was a time when informed Canadians felt the values of the two countries were converging, or that any observed differences in average opinion in the two societies were simply the result of the South pulling the U.S. number in a conservative direction and Québec pulling Canada the other way. When it comes to this measure of patriarchy, neither generalization stands up to the evidence. Yes, in the United States there is substantial regional variation. In the Deep South (Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi) 69 percent believe the father must be master chez lui whereas in New England the figure is only 42 percent; other regions falling in between. In Canada the range is from a high of 26 percent in Alberta (birthplace of former Republican contender Ted Cruz) to a low of 18 percent in Atlantic Canada. Canada's most patriarchal province is significantly less patriarchal than the least patriarchal region of the United States. So much for the theory that nations don't have national values.

Digging deeper into the demographics, we see some telling patterns. Sixty per cent of American men think father should be master at home compared to 41 per cent of American women. In Canada, only 31 per cent of men think Dad should be boss, compared to 16 per cent of women. Presumably some of these people live in the same house; must be interesting.

There is little variation by age in either country, or by income, occupational status or community size (rural to urban). In Canada there is not much difference by education either--but in the U.S. education matters a lot: 56 per cent with only high school or less think father should be boss; among those with post-secondary degrees it is only 39 per cent.

Consensus in Canada; some substantial variations in the USA. Patriarchy is only one of over fifty values we track but is clearly among the most meaningful. It is also a value that is highly correlated with other values like religiosity, parochialism and xenophobia and views on issues like abortion, guns and the death penalty.

Fifteen years ago, in 2002, EKOS asked Canadians if Canada was becoming more like the US or less like the US. At that time, 58 percent said we were becoming more like the US and only 9 percent thought we were becoming less like our American cousins. A few weeks ago we repeated this question in a national survey and found a change of opinion: today only 27 percent of us think Canada is becoming more like the US and a nearly equal proportion (26%) say we are in fact becoming less like our southern neighbour. Perhaps the latter group read the Globe and Mail.

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