



Canada could benefit from Trump challenges

Canada has an opportunity to bring in, through immigration, the best and brightest students and academics who are alienated by Trump's policies.

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Donald J. Trump's election to the US presidency triggered seismic shockwaves across the world, waves that are continuing to have deep ripples. The implications of his administration for Canada are continually debated among journalists, reporters, policy analysts and government officials. Though there is a general consensus about the challenges this new administration is bringing, no serious attempt has been made to explore how the challenges can be turned into opportunities for Canada.

Much of the debate about Trump's remarks on Canada-US relations has focused on his declared policies to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), slash corporate income tax rates, and dismantle the previous administration's tightening of banking and financial regulations. Clearly some of these policies could have negative ramifications for the Canadian economy. However, it is imperative that we not equate Canada with Mexico. Mexico is competing with the US on low wages and is in fact the prime target of Trump's determination to renegotiate NAFTA.

What seems to have received less attention is Trump's immigration policy and international diplomacy, which, in my view, will have unintended consequences. These provide a golden opportunity for Justin Trudeau's government to translate Trump's hostile policy on immigration into significant advantages for Canada and its economy. These advantages could include attracting more of the best and brightest students and academics through immigration, increasing investment, and enhancing our stature on the international stage.

Regardless of the outcomes of court challenges to Trump's controversial ban on immigration from certain countries, his

bellicose remarks on immigration have already fostered a climate of hostility toward immigrants who are already in the United States, and they have resulted in deep trepidation in the hearts of potential immigrants who envisioned building their lives in that country. In the past, the American dream attracted skilled immigrants to fulfill their aspirations in the US. This was construed as a major contributor to America's prosperity and its greatness on the world stage.

Now, the negative attitude toward immigrants in the United States could induce qualified and skilled immigrants who would have otherwise chosen the US as their destination to come to Canada instead. With a dextrous and carefully calibrated immigration policy, the Canadian government could seize this opportunity to replace the American dream with the Canadian dream. As well, with a wise and calculated investment policy, Canada could pull in more investors. After all, it is clear that investors and skilled immigrants do not choose their destinations only on the basis of the lower tax rates the Trump administration has promised. There are other factors that shape and influence their decisions, such as quality of life, political stability, respect for diversity and institutional inclusiveness, all of which Canada can offer.

The Conservative government's introduced a points-based system, Express Entry, in 2015. Their program put heavy emphasis on matching skilled workers with employers. The Liberals made important changes to the Express Entry system. Among other things, the new rules give greater weight to applicants with a high level of education, and technical and language skills. This change is conducive to attracting more international graduate students. John McCallum, former minister of immigration, refugees and citizenship

in Justin Trudeau's government, underlined the importance of attracting international students, saying: "If I think about what group in the world would make the best future Canadians, the group that comes first to my mind is international students."

It is also crucial that Canadian universities enhance their programs and degrees to be more competitive to attract mobile international graduate students. In order to keep the best and brightest in Canada, in addition to scholarships, some kind of work experience could be incorporated into their programs and degrees. They should be able to get work permits during their studies and after graduation, so that they can be integrated in the emerging knowledge-based economy. In addition, international students should have the opportunity to become permanent residents and eventually Canadian citizens. Thus, applications for permanent residency and citizenship by international graduate students should be fast-tracked, as delays in processing applications can easily become cause for despair.

Canada's academic sector has the potential to become a powerhouse of academic excellence and world-class research. Enticing more world-class researchers and academics should become a key ingredient of Canadian public policy. Trudeau's government has taken some steps in this regard. In its 2017 budget, it committed to provide \$117.6 million over eight years for the Canada 150 Research Chairs program, housed in Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. It should increase the level of funding for this program. While increasing public expenditure in the academic sector might cause concern in some quarters, these concerns are short-sighted, as today's expenditures are likely to become tomorrow's socioeconomic gains. As Meric Gertler, the president of the University

of Toronto, has pointed out, an “influx of talent will foster a virtuous circle, attracting even more brilliant academics and gifted students from around the world.”

Finally, the Canadian government should treat the Trump administration’s fear-mongering discourse on the deportation and banning of undesired immigrants as an opportunity to enhance our international stature. The ambiguity and uncertainty caused by the hazy and contradictory discourse coming out of Washington on international diplomacy, in general, and the future of NATO, in particular, opens up a space for Canada to increase its role on the world stage. In order to galvanize our moral leadership, the government could capitalize on Canada’s cherished core values of inclusion, human rights protection and humanitarian missions.

Furthermore, the government should clearly enunciate Canada’s support for multilateral institutions and agreements. It should deepen cooperation with other countries, particularly European states, in order to solidify agreements on crucial issues such as the environment and climate change. International moral leadership is measured by concern for humanity and the common good, not by the projection of military power. Canada has already displayed its intrinsic proclivity to be a peace-loving country, and to act as such. We should not miss the golden opportunity that the Trump administration’s controversial and alienating course of action presents for Canada to become a beacon of hope for talented immigrants and investors in the 21st century.

Photo: July 6, 2017. Andrew Mannett, of Boston, holds a sign supporting President Donald Trump during a “Here to Stay” rally at the Irish Famine Memorial in Boston, where immigration activists

and labor groups gathered to oppose the president's crackdown on illegal immigration. John Cunningham, a businessman and former chair of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Boston, was deported to Ireland the previous day. Immigration and Customs Enforcement data provided to The Associated Press show that more than 1,300 Europeans were deported through June 24. About 1,450 Europeans were deported in 2016. (AP Photo/Charles Krupa, File)

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