

[Presidential] Lip Service

By Warren Lovely

Actions speak louder than words, or so the saying goes. Sometimes, however, words are what we have to go by. In some respects, that's the situation we find ourselves in, at least as it relates to the upcoming November 5th U.S. presidential election and the assorted plans/promises/priorities of the two rival candidates (and parties).

Full disclosure: What follows is a less-than-scientific assessment of what the standard-bearers for the Democratic and Republican parties have chosen to emphasize. We key on their (sometimes thoughtful, sometimes spontaneous) word choices. NBC's dedicated geopolitical analyst, Angelo Katsoras, has written much on U.S. politics. That includes an assessment of [what a second Trump presidency could mean](#) and a look at [what Harris' agenda is all about](#). Interested readers are encouraged to review our full suite of geopolitical analysis. Meantime, empiricists would remind us that the past actions/records of two candidates and their parties are also informative. We won't argue the point. Trump was president after all; Harris has been VP since 2021.

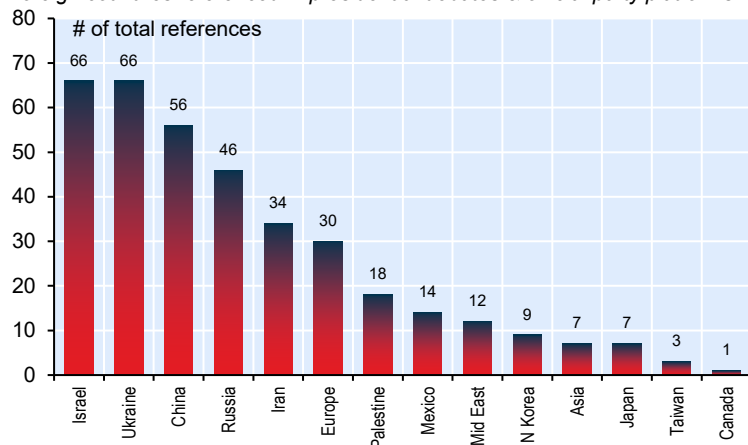
Back to the exercise at hand, which is a targeted tally of the written and spoken word. For source material, we lean into the two presidential debates (Biden-Trump in June; Harris-Trump more recently). We also scour both official platform documents, the Democratic offering quite fulsome vs. a Republican playbook that's comparatively light (targeted?). In all, more than 80,000 words have spilled onto red- or blue-tinged pages and out of the candidates' mouths. We infer plenty.

First off, an America-first mentality is bipartisan and on clear display. No real surprise there. It's rarely a bad strategy to drape yourself in the flag. Saying that, both candidates/parties have an eye on foreign conflicts. You see/hear this in the repeated references to: Israel-Iran-Palestine-Middle East or Ukraine-Russia. On trade, protectionism and overall strategic influence, China is most obviously in America's sights. Mexico continues to get plenty of attention too, generally as it relates to border controls, (illegal) immigration and drug trafficking.

What of Canada you ask? Well, based on what we've read and heard so far, the *Great White North* seems more like the *Minor Forgotten Land*. Canada didn't warrant a single utterance in either presidential

Chart 1: What regions/nations does America have eyes on?

Foreign countries referenced in presidential debates & official party platforms



Source: NBF, CNN, ABC, DNC, RNC | Note: Total references to countries/regions; based on two debates & both official party platforms; counts include derivatives (e.g., China & Chinese)

debate. And pouring over both party platforms, the only reference to Canada (and there's only one by the Dems) is a backward-looking toss-off: "[Biden] has strengthened bonds with our closest neighbors, Canada and Mexico, on issues ranging from border security to trade." So if you're counting, Canada has been mentioned precisely as many times as the Springfield, Ohio cats (and dogs) which Trump suggests are being devoured by immigrants. (You can't make this stuff up.)

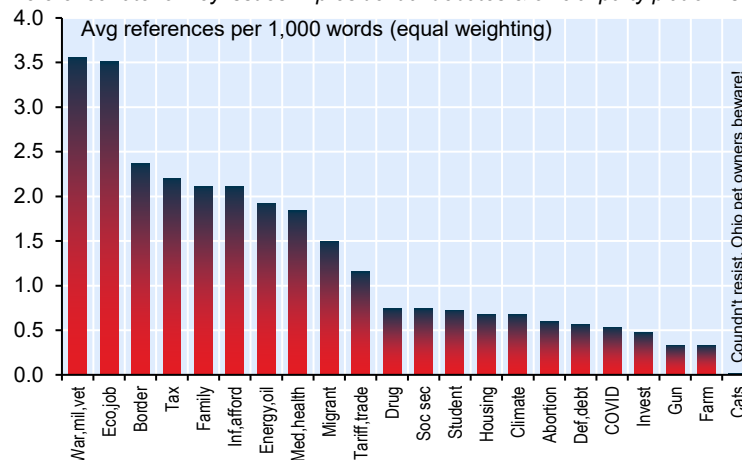
What do we make of Canada's seeming electoral irrelevance? Well, there's surely a multiplier effect at play. Canada is not the largest economic engine after all, ranking 16th in terms of global GDP share (at 1.3%). (In PPP terms, China is tops at 19% by the way.) It may be that, as a long-standing and close ally to the U.S., it's merely assumed that Canada will fall in line with America's chosen policy direction(s). That's not an unreasonable assumption. Close integration tends to preclude material (or sustained) deviation on tariffs, subsidies, environmental regulations and even corporate taxes. Come to think of it, perhaps it's best to stay off America's political radar... or out of the proverbial crosshairs as it were. All this suggests that Canada is not likely to be the intended target of mounting U.S. protectionism, which jibes with our general operating assumption. Sounds reassuring right?

We must caution, however, that what is spoken of on the campaign trail and what ultimately comes to pass can be two different things. Certain Canadian industries and trade practices were targeted during Trump's 2016-20 presidency, then-trade rep Lighthizer giving our exporters and leaders fits. Some trade irritants (like softwood lumber) have spanned multiple presidencies, from Dem to Rep and back again. Finally, Canada needn't be directly targeted by U.S. actions to be nonetheless impacted. Such is Canada's plight as a 'small open economy', where jobs, growth, income and wealth have long relied on predictable, rules-based access to the U.S. and overseas economies. Deglobalization does a country like Canada few favours.

Note: We get another test of Canada's relevancy (or lack thereof) when the VP candidates square off for debate on October 1st. In the meantime, we'll be reading and listening to campaign pledges carefully.

Chart 2: Can you repeat that? An assessment of select issues

Reference rate for key issues in presidential debates & official party platforms



Source: NBF, CNN, ABC, DNC, RNC | Note: Average reference rate; based on two debates & both official party platforms; selected issues/topics; counts include derivative references



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