

Change in Political Leadership

The forging of the Canada-U.S. FTA was facilitated by the compatibility of the perspectives on economic policy of the governments, which came into power during the 1980s (the Mulroney government in Canada and the Reagan Administration in the U.S.). Similar compatibility of economic philosophies prevailed in the 1990s, which saw the signing of the NAFTA by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and by President Bill Clinton. But, with political transition in the U.S. and political continuity in Canada, the political climate changed. Differences in political leanings have been exacerbated by trade frictions (e.g., softwood lumber, dairy and most recently the Canadian Wheat Board) and by differences in approach to the enforcement of UN resolutions concerning Iraq. However, the profound interest of both countries in avoiding disruption to the economy, supported by business on both sides of the border, and the breadth and depth of cooperation at the Ministerial and agency-department levels allowed rapid implementation of the new measures. One would not, however, conclude that political change played a key role in propelling change in this instance.

Mobilization of Public Support

Fourthly, a sign of change can be found in an upsurge in political interest and pressure from the public. When something big is happening in the world of trade, people who do not normally concern themselves with trade, begin to. In the 1980s:

“[t]he bilateral agreement between Canada and the United States sparked a heated debate in the Canadian public that was reminiscent of an earlier age when the tariff was a staple of electoral politics. For modern scholars of international trade, the sudden attention to trade policy was wholly unexpected. Studying most issues of public policy is a little like researching earthquakes: tranquility is the normal state, but when activity occurs, interest becomes insatiable, and anyone