

# *i*POLITICS

## Israel causing a wedge in Canadian electoral politics: research

Both the Liberals and Conservatives have worked hard to convey a pro-Israel stance, but considering the Jewish Canadian community makes up only 1.1 per cent of the country's population, one question remains — why?

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New [research](#) is suggesting that Israel is a wedge issue in Canadian electoral politics.

“There’s a sharp polarization between Jewish and Muslim Canadians on the Israeli issue, and it’s reflected in their vote choice,” said Marc-Antoine Rancourt, a PhD student at the University of Toronto who co-authored the study.

“If you know someone’s stance on Israel, you most likely know who they’re going to vote for.”

Rancourt and his co-authors found the Jewish-Canadian community underwent a significant voting shift toward the Conservatives when former Prime Minister Stephen Harper came to power.

“One of our main contributions is showing this shift happened when the Harper government took a stronger pro-Israel stance,” Rancourt told *iPolitics*.

“No one has looked at this issue with a huge amount of data across time.”

While the article noted that “Harper’s government is the most pro-Israeli government in Canadian history,” the findings were particularly interesting because Harper’s election did not represent a substantial change in Canada’s stance on Israel from the previous government.

The paper references how Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin was the first to amend Canada’s policy on Israel, as several of his cabinet ministers “pushed for the modification of Canada’s traditional positions with respect to the Israel/Palestine conflict.”

“However, since Paul Martin was in power for only two years and the Harper government adopted such strong pro-Israel positions for nearly 10 years, we tend to forget that the recalibration toward Israel was initiated by the Liberals,” reads the report.

The study determined that Jewish-Canadian voters have largely remained loyal to the Conservatives, despite Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s efforts to emphasize his party’s pro-Israel position.

“When Trudeau rose to power, he played up his visit to Israel and really tried to win back some of the important people in the Jewish community across the country,” said Rancourt.

Shimon Fogel, the president and CEO of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, agreed that Trudeau has made a “huge effort” to convey to the Jewish community that there is no difference between his government and Harper’s government when it comes to Israel, though he said it will likely come to no avail.

“Segments of the Jewish community have endorsed the Conservatives because there has been greater support and more sensitivity toward the Jewish community,” Fogel told *iPolitics*.

“Data shows that communities generally shift to the right the more they stay in a particular place.”

Fogel also emphasized that, when discussing these issues, one must be careful not to overgeneralize an entire community.

“No community is monolithic, and they don’t vote on a single issue,” Fogel told *iPolitics*.

It should be noted that attempts were made to contact representatives from both the Muslim Association of Canada, as well as The Canadian Muslim Vote, but neither responded.

That being said, a critical question remains — why are Canadian parties trying to outdo each other when it comes to supporting Israel?

Are the Liberals and Conservatives pro-Israel because of political reasons (to diversify and strengthen their voter base)? Or is it due to moral reasons (as the paper puts it — “the duty to support Israel because it shares Canadian values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights in a region marked by authoritarianism, hatred, and intolerance”)?

According to the authors, it remains unclear.

At first glance, one would assume underlying political motives, but the paper found this theory makes little sense. The Jewish community makes up 1.1 per cent of Canada’s population, which is less than the Canadian Muslim community (3.2 per cent).

In fact, the paper argues adopting such a strong pro-Israel position may in fact hurt the Conservatives in the long run.

“Considering that there are more than twice as many Muslims than Jews in Canada, the Conservatives’ strategy of the last few years might be electorally costly in the middle or long term,” the study reads.

As for the moral argument, the authors were unable to demonstrate its validity.

As such, the paper concludes by noting how the politicization of Israel by Canadian political parties will remain a mystery for the time being.

“Jewish-Canadian voters have little electoral impact, given the community’s small size, and, if anything, Muslim-Canadian voters have even less impact, despite the community’s larger size. If the rationales for politicizing Israel are eventually uncovered by researchers, the votes of Muslim and Jewish religious

minorities will turn out, we suspect, to have had nothing to do with it,” reads the study.