

WHAT CAN CANADIAN JEWS EXPECT FROM JUSTIN TRUDEAU?

By [Sheri Shefa](#), *Staff Reporter* -

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When the votes in last week's election were counted and it became clear the Tories – unapologetically pro-Israel and economically conservative – would be replaced by a Liberal government, many in the Jewish community who were supporters of outgoing Prime Minister

Stephen Harper took to social media to express fears about what Canada will look like under Justin Trudeau's leadership.

But according to Jewish community leaders and scholars, there's no reason to think Trudeau won't be supportive of Israel and Jews.

"I think it's foolish to doubt that Mr Trudeau will be anything but a friend of Israel," said Avi Benlolo, president and CEO of Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies. "I think he will continue to foster a close diplomatic relationship with Israel, as he has given no indication of doing otherwise. I do feel, however, that it is unlikely that he will be as consistent and intense in his support of Israel as his predecessor."

During the 2014 conflict between Israel and Gaza, Trudeau released a statement that said, "Israel has the right to defend itself and its people. Hamas is a terrorist organization and must cease its rocket attacks immediately."

He condemned Hamas for rejecting an Egyptian proposal for a ceasefire while commending Israel for accepting it "and demonstrating its commitment to peace."

In March, when McGill University students were called on to vote in support of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel, Trudeau tweeted, "The BDS movement, like Israeli Apartheid Week, has no place on Canadian campuses. As a @McGillU alum, I'm disappointed."

Benlolo said he's encouraged by that kind of rhetoric.

"This is a good starting point, and I have no reason to expect that Mr. Trudeau will disappoint the Jewish community in Canada."

Nelson Wiseman, a professor of political science at the University of Toronto, said he suspects that under Trudeau's leadership, Canada will continue to support Israel, as it has traditionally.

"It might abstain more in the UN on issues. Its diplomats are going to be given a looser leash in the area... I think it will be more the way it was during the Chrétien years, which isn't really, in terms of content, much different," Wiseman said.

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs president and CEO Shimon Fogel, suspects that there will be differences in "style and emphasis."

"However, Prime Minister-designate Trudeau has been clear that his government's policies on the core issues of concern to the pro-Israel community will entirely reflect the positions staked out by the previous government," Fogel said.

"We believe that Canada's positions on these issues will reflect a degree of continuity and stability, including unequivocal support for Israel – diplomatically, in terms of security, opposition to radicalism, the demonization of Israel and the legitimacy of the Jewish state."

Karen Mock, co-founder of the left-leaning Zionist organization JSpace and the former director of the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada, said she's confident Trudeau will make Canadian Jews feel as safe and supported as Harper did.

"I think he will be as good a friend in the kinds of things he says about Israel. I think he will be a better friend in having the ability and credibility and the commitment to actually put into practice the peacekeeping, the negotiations, the bringing of parties together and regaining our stature on the world stage," said Mock, who ran as a Liberal in 2011, when she lost to Tory Peter Kent in Thornhill.

Myer Siemiatycki, a professor of politics and public administration at Ryerson University, said he thinks Trudeau is off to a good start on the Israel file.

"He has signalled his commitment to the security of Israel, and he has also signalled, in a way that may prove to be more beneficial to Israel, a kind of openness to dialogue and to Canada playing something of a mediating, honest broker role, and significantly promoting a two-state solution. That might actually prove to be much better in Israel's interests in terms of getting to a point of security, peace, etc.," Siemiatycki said.

On the economic front, part of Trudeau's platform was to introduce an income tax cut for the middle class – reducing the 22-per-cent tax rate for people who make between \$44,701 and \$89,401 a year, to 20.5 per cent – while creating a new tax bracket of 33 per cent for those earning more than \$200,000 a year.

Trudeau also proposed a plan to run a \$10-billion deficit every year for three years to stimulate the economy and pay for such things as public transit and affordable housing for seniors.

"He is certainly being recognized as the boldest in terms of the three leaders, on the fiscal approach, and all will depend on how it pans out, what the money gets spent on, what the impact of that spending is," Siemiatycki said.

"If it's a disaster, it'll become another argument, for 'No, no, no, you should never get into deficits.' But we have the irony that in virtually every one of

his years, that is exactly where Mr. Harper took us. So no one is particularly consistent.”

Although the Conservatives had raised the federal deficit to \$36 billion in 2010, earlier this year, the Harper government balanced the budget and Canada boasted the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio among the G7 countries.

But the Bank of Canada announced on Oct. 21 that it’s reducing its prediction for economic growth for 2016, from 2.3 per cent to two per cent.

Mock said a deficit is nothing Canada can’t handle, as long as “we invest in better infrastructure and creating more jobs.”

Fogel said Trudeau will be judged by his record and achievements.

“While economic performance is an important element of that record, so, too, are other considerations, like social policy and health care, the environment and foreign policy, law and order and federal-provincial relations. It is a bit early to get out the scorecard just yet.”