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New Challenges, Old Hatred: The Role of Super-diversity, Immigration, and Political Polarization in the Rise of Antisemitism in Contemporary Canada

Megan S. Hollinger

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Article abstract

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New Challenges, Old Hatred: The Role of Super-diversity, Immigration, and Political Polarization in the Rise of Antisemitism in Contemporary Canada

Megan S. Hollinger, University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

This paper examines the rise of antisemitism in contemporary Canada and explores some emerging social trends that may exacerbate and enable it. Specifically, the rise and maintenance of antisemitism in Canada may be, in part, due to the multifaceted diversification of the West known as super-diversity, as well as increasing political polarization. By examining super-diversity and its implications, this paper explores the connections between immigration and diversification, the growth of political polarization, and the rise in antisemitism across Canada. This paper argues how the aforementioned social trends may lead to the existence of more antisemitic manifestations and motivations in Canada. Of particular concern is the importation of certain anti-Israel and anti-Zionist biases found within populations arriving in Canada and coming from parts of the world where tensions with Israel are present. Additionally, political polarization heightens intergroup tensions in Canada and may foster a broader atmosphere of prejudice.

Keywords: antisemitism in Canada, social trends, super-diversity, immigration, political polarization

Introduction

In Canada, words such as tolerance, acceptance, diversity, and multiculturalism are discursively significant. Canadians use these words to portray themselves in an increasingly diverse society. Despite the above, hate crimes are increasing across the country. According to Statistics Canada, between 2019 and 2021, hate crimes in Canada increased by 72%. In 2021, Jewish people were the most targeted religious group for hate crimes. Anti-Jewish hate crimes have risen by 47% since 2020. It is important to note that this study refers to anti-Jewish crimes as "religiously motivated" because that is how Statistics Canada categorizes them, despite the many ways by which Jewish people express and experience their identities. Jewish people can express their identities religiously, ethnically, or culturally.

Despite many people acting warmly and positively toward those different from themselves, hate is rising in Canada and, in the case of antisemitism, shows no signs of slowing. The country's Jewish community experienced an unprecedented spike in antisemitism in 2023, especially after the October 7th (from this point October 7th) terrorist attacks on Israel. Even though there does not yet exist any available data on hate-motivated crimes for 2023, B'nai Brith Canada notes that there were 5,791 antisemitic incidents in 2023, a 109.1% jump from the 2,769 incidents the organization

recorded in 2022.⁴ All of these current statistics contradict the positive and multicultural attitude Canadians claim to have.

People use several adjectives to describe Canadian society, including multicultural and pluralistic; one thing is sure: Canada is not only diverse but, according to Steven Vertovec, superdiverse. Super-diversity refers not only to the increasing diversity of Western societies but to the increasing, multifaceted diversity of new immigrant groups migrating to the West. This super-diversity, he explains, has several implications. One of these is the high potential for increases in racism and prejudice between migrant groups and host societies.⁵ If prejudice can increase with the arrival of new migrant groups, and if Canada is a super-diverse society, a peculiar situation arises regarding Jews and antisemitism. Antisemitism is not only increasing but is the highest type of religiously motivated hate in Canada, even though the Jewish people have been an established minority community in Canada since the mid-18th century.⁶ If prejudice is likely to increase towards incoming migrant or existing minority populations, why is the highest number of religiously motivated hate crimes in Canada experienced by a long-established minority community? In addition to this question, this study poses a few smaller ones. 1. Is antisemitism coming to Canada with immigrant communities coming from particular parts of the world? 2. How does increasing political polarization affect antisemitism?

This paper argues that in Canada, emerging social trends, such as multifaceted demographic diversity and political polarization, contribute to and maintain antisemitism. Specifically, this paper suggests that Canada's super-diversity and its resulting trends play vital roles in the rise of antisemitism, in part due to the growth of negative attitudes towards Israel found in populations coming from countries with political grievances against the State of Israel (e.g., antisemitism arising from Arab and Muslim communities). The more significant problem, however, is not necessarily particular immigrant communities but a heightened atmosphere of prejudice and polarized political ideologies that all contribute to the maintenance and rise of antisemitism stemming from the increasing diversification of contemporary Canada. In other words, political and demographic diversity create the conditions needed to fuel antisemitism in

Canada. It is also worth noting that although this thesis can be applied to other Western states, its scope will remain within Canada to retain focus.

Further research is warranted regarding the impacts of globalization on the rise of global and Canadian antisemitism due to various factors resulting from globalization, including demographic interconnectedness and access to multitudes of knowledge via sources such as the Internet. Roland Robertson (1938-2022) argues in one of his seminal works, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, that globalization is the increasing "interdependence and consciousness" of the world's people and systems. Considering this well-known understanding of globalization, one can posit that not only is antisemitism a product of increasing multifaceted diversity in Canada but also of the growing interconnectedness and accessibility of discourses and ideologies from around the world. With these ideas in mind, the need for further research about the impacts on global cultures and trends becomes evident. What is clear is that social trends in Canada are most certainly affecting antisemitism negatively, as this paper will explore in the following sections. This paper will explore both super-diversity and political polarization as prominent social trends contributing to the rise of antisemitism in Canada.

New Antisemitism

This paper examines an emerging and common form of antisemitism in Canada. First, B'nai Brith Canada notes three main bases, or sources, of antisemitism in contemporary Canada, which are as follows: Islamist extremists, radical Arab nationalists, and white supremacists. In recent years, white supremacists may have been the most active of these three groups in Canada today. Increasingly, however, anti-Jewish hatred is motivated by opinions and views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and political grievances towards the State of Israel. Experts call this *new antisemitism*. New Antisemitism has been present and powerful following the October 7th terrorist attacks on Israel.

In its most basic form, new antisemitism is motivated by anti-Israel and anti-Zionist sentiments. Anti-Zionists argue against the existence of a Jewish nation-state in the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people: Israel and the Levant area. What new antisemites and purveyors of this discourse overlook, however, is that stating that the Jewish people ancestrally hail from the

Levant area does not in and of itself negate the existence and experiences of other populations in that region; rather, the statement implies that Jews originated in the region. Many Jews see anti-Zionism as antisemitic because it often delegitimizes Israel and, therefore, the idea of a Jewish nation-state. Delegitimization, in turn, negatively impacts Jewish self-determination and distorts historical, religious, and ethnic realities for the Jewish people. Anti-Zionists often draw on traditional antisemitic tropes and accusations to support their claims about Jews and Israel, thereby heightening anti-Jewish sentiments.¹¹

More specifically, new antisemites adapt traditional perceptions and assumptions about Jews and project these onto Israel, portraying Israel as one "collective Jew." Despite what is happening in Israel or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, new antisemites tend to distort facts and assumptions to further their cause. These distortions, in turn, provide a platform for antisemitic rhetoric and behaviour to manifest.¹³ Additionally, anti-Zionist motivations exist mainly on the political Left and in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Tensions between Jews and Israelis and Arabs and Muslims are strengthened and maintained by deeper tensions resulting from the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Antisemitism coming from the Arab and Muslim worlds is primarily motivated by political grievances against Israel, resulting in rhetoric and actions that appear political.¹⁴ Naturally, grievances against a country or its policies are not necessarily racist or, in this case, antisemitic. How these grievances are expressed and what they are expressing demonstrates whether antisemitism is present. Using anti-Israel and anti-Zionist sentiments as covers for anti-Jewish tropes can also be antisemitic. Some tropes accuse Jews of trying to dominate the world or of being loyal to Israel over their home countries and societies (this is an accusation of treason based on many Jews' support for the existence of a Jewish state). 15 The following, however, is essential: not all Muslims and Arabs are against Jewish people and the State of Israel.

Returning to the issue of antisemitism in Canada, and before October 7th at least, Jews have conflicting views of how they experience and perceive antisemitism. Canadian Jews generally believe antisemitism is a growing problem in Canada but also tend not to feel any less safe. The safety of Jews in Quebec remains uncertain due to Quebec's ongoing, complicated

relationship with minorities, immigrants, and public displays of religion (laïcité). Jews have often been viewed as outsiders in Quebec, and particularly the visibility of religious Jews there, namely the Hasidic community, may put Jews at a greater risk of attacks.¹⁶

Related to perceptions of antisemitism in Canada and worthy of note is Robert Brym's recent survey on Canadian attitudes towards Jews and Israel. Brym suggests in their study that in Canada, the rate of antisemitism may appear differently depending on whether the research is measuring attitudinal antisemitism or behavioural antisemitism, the latter referring to outward expressions of antisemitism rather than internally held ideas and opinions about Jews. Brym also states that in terms of attitudes towards Jews, at least before October 7th, Canadians typically held more favourable views about Jews. Regarding Israel, Brym suggests that the correlation between anti-Israel attitudes and anti-Jewish attitudes varies according to the demographic group in question. Brym's study indicates that Canadian public opinion of Israel may be falling overall. In Canada, amongst the general non-Jewish adult population, a lower-end moderate correlation was found that anti-Israel attitudes predict anti-Jewish attitudes and vice versa. Brym explains that these attitudes are "related but not the same." The case that this paper makes considers behavioral antisemitism, and so it accepts antisemitism as being unequivocally on the rise in Canada.

Nevertheless, open expressions of antisemitism are clearly on the rise. Whether this is due to fewer people expressing their antisemitism more frequently or if more people in general are expressing their antisemitism, the safety of the Canadian Jewish community is in a precarious position. It necessitates a further examination of the social factors that may be contributing to the troubling rise of anti-Jewish hate in the context of Canada's super-diverse society. While the purpose of this paper is not to explore the correlation between incidents and attitudes about Jewish people amongst non-Jewish Canadians, Brym's data is essential to consider because it highlights the political diversity surrounding tense issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and demonstrates that demographic diversity may be contributing to, at least to some degree, the rise of antisemitism in Canada, particularly amongst groups who come to Canada from countries that

have political grievances against Israel due to at least some correlation between anti-Israel and anti-Jewish attitudes.

Super-diversity, Immigration, and a Heightened Sense of Prejudice

Statistics Canada projects that ethno-cultural diversity will increase significantly by 2031, with 29-32% of Canada's population potentially belonging to a visible minority group. Arab and West Asian groups account for the fastest-growing population amongst all minority groups and are expected to almost triple in size by 2031. Religious diversity will also increase by 2031. By that year, non-Christian religious groups will account for approximately 14% of Canada's population, with almost half being Muslim. Those identifying as non-religious will also increase from 17% of the population in 2016 to 21% by 2031.²²

According to the 2021 National Household Survey, Canada's religious diversity remains a defining feature of Canada's population. Jewish people, however, are disproportionately lower in population compared to other religious groups. In 2021, Christians accounted for 53.3% of Canada's population. Non-Christian religious groups accounted for 12.1% of Canada's population in 2021.²³ Muslims accounted for the largest non-Christian religious group, numbering 1.8 million. Jews only numbered 335,000, making up 0.9% of Canada's population. 282,000 reported "Jewish" as their ethnic or cultural origin.²⁴

Steven Vertovec appropriately describes Canada as a super-diverse society following these demographic trends. Super-diversity refers to not only the increasing ethnic diversification of the West, but also to the increasing religious, socio-economic, transnational, and linguistic diversification of populations making the West their home.²⁵ Super-diversity also refers to the growing number of people in the West who are of "mixed origin" (those who claim multiple ethnic ancestries).²⁶

Vertovec adds that super-diversity implies a series of methodological and theoretical challenges for social scientists due to increasingly complex identities in the West. While super-diversity can create new social challenges for communities within Western societies, including cooperation, cohesion, acceptance, and integration, it can also exacerbate prejudice, which can manifest in various ways.²⁷ Sometimes, the host majoritarian population is prejudiced towards

incoming immigrant populations, while other times, existing and established minority communities express prejudice toward the newcomers. Incoming populations can also import prejudices towards groups already living in the host country.²⁸

A related element is space, which influences how immigrants and minorities respond to those around them. Regarding diversity and social relations, space refers to the environment surrounding communities and how it impacts the responses of migrant communities toward their new home.²⁹ In some instances, space reinforces perceptions that immigrants and minorities are irreconcilably different from the host, majoritarian population.³⁰ New immigrant communities may also view established communities, such as Jews, as different. These perceptions reinforce the idea of separateness and, in turn, prejudices.

What does increasing diversity and immigration mean for the rise of antisemitism? As mentioned earlier, racism and prejudice are two consequences of these social phenomena.³¹ What is crucial to note is that there can be many different motivations behind the various types of prejudice emerging in Western super-diverse societies. Fear and bias are two of them. Ulrich Beck (1944-2015) offers their perspective on a possible motivation. Beck coined the term "risk society" to describe society's transition from traditional to modern.³² As societies become more interconnected through globalization, they open themselves to more social "risks." For example, someone who has never experienced extensive demographic diversity may view outgroups as threatening. Beck's quote, "Fear determines the attitude towards life," captures this idea well as fear leads to suspicion and motivates people to retreat into their communities and not come to know outgroups.³³

Canada's super-diverse context may foster general levels of fear and bias, contributing to new attitudes towards minorities and differences in general. Fear of a minority group may lead to further hatred against them. Stereotypes and generalizations about minority groups, therefore, flourish in societies that offer myriad social, cultural, and political options. By this logic, minorities are seen as threats to the dominant way of life in any given society. Minority groups, therefore, even long-established and largely integrated communities such as the Jewish community, can be seen as threatening the existing "Canadian" way of life. In the same vein, increasing diversity,

especially amongst communities that come from countries where conflict with Israel is present, raises the chance that preconceived antisemitic ideas will become more prominent in Canada. Historic antisemitic stereotypes reinforce fear towards Jews, and fear leads to a continuation of anti-Jewish perceptions and attitudes. These attitudes renew prejudice towards and misconceptions about Jews. The fear, bias, and prejudice are thus part of a self-feeding cycle.

Another point of consideration is that in a super-diverse society, minority-minority tensions can increase. Anti-Jewish sentiments could be exacerbated in Canada due to the growth of various communities that may hold, to varying degrees, anti-Israel and anti-Zionist attitudes. According to Paul Scheffer, migration can shock the already-established population in host countries.³⁴ Scheffer also explains that immigrants bring well-established values and ideologies to their psyches and worldviews.³⁵ Antisemitic attitudes could, hypothetically, be imported into the country with some migrants who arrive from countries that have grievances against and conflicts with Israel. Herein may lie a significant link between Canadian antisemitism and diversity and immigration.

This is not to suggest that all migrants carry these animosities and foster these tensions. On the contrary, bridge-building and pursuing peace are legitimate and valuable projects mutually carried out by Jews and non-Jews around the globe. Concern lies in the potential exacerbation of imported tensions that play on anti-Jewish ideas already flourishing in Canada (see section below). Researchers and policymakers need to develop strategies to lessen such tensions and foster harmony, balance, and empathy between fellow minority groups.

Political Diversity, Polarization, and Antisemitism

This study will now explore another layer of diversity that it argues is contributing to the rise of antisemitism in Canada. The layer in question is political diversity and polarization. Hence, political diversity refers to the variety of political positions and ideologies people identify with (i.e., right and left). It is well known in the literature that antisemitism exists on both sides of the political spectrum. Antisemitism, to varying degrees, can manifest amongst politicians but can also be incorporated into various political ideologies spanning the spectrum. Canadians have long identified with left and right political ideologies. However, the increase of opinions and available information (i.e., via the Internet), along with the popularization of contemporary forms of

antisemitism, namely anti-Israelism and anti-Zionism, may be fueling political polarization, particularly towards the Jewish community.³⁶ Justin Ling notes that political polarization has been a growing problem in Canada for several decades. The Covid-19 pandemic, the Internet, mainstream media, and the rise of cancel culture have exacerbated polarization, so Canadian politics will continue to become "less cooperative and more rigid." Polarization, even if motivated by, in some cases, social justice and demarginalization of marginalized groups, can have adverse effects.

Regarding new antisemitism, it exists more so on the left of the political spectrum because criticisms of Israel and its policies have become more prominent on the Left.³⁷ Left-wing antisemitism is generally different in motivation and even manifestation than that on the far-right, although there are some overlaps. Considering far-right antisemitism, it is evident that white supremacist, neo-fascist, and neo-Nazi ideologies pose a significant risk for Jews and other minorities in Canada. White supremacy, ideologically speaking, is hyper-focused on race and racial hierarchy. White supremacists insist on racial purity, and their ideology posits that they are superior to non-white people. In Canada, there have been various white supremacist groups, namely the Ku Klux Klan and The White Canada Association. No matter the group, antisemitism has been and remains a central talking point for white supremacists and far-right groups.³⁸

White supremacists and many far-right supporters are also primarily against immigration. The previous Conservative government's changes to the immigration system and policy provided white supremacists with an opening to spread their ideas despite this not being the intention of the government. Nonetheless, immigration and increasing diversity in Canada provide something for white supremacists to challenge, and this contributes to the spread of hateful ideologies, including antisemitic ones.³⁹ With the ability to spread these ideologies faster than ever due to new methods of communication, such as the Internet, white supremacists and far-right supporters and their ideologies risk gaining more traction in Canadian society.

Despite the threat of white supremacist politics and ideologies to Jewish Canadians, there exists the danger of anti-Jewish hate on the political Left as well. While white racial superiority is one of the main beliefs of the far-right antisemites, far-left antisemites tend to be motivated by

anti-Israel and anti-Zionist biases and opinions, fueled by both anger at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and an inclination toward social justice and activism. When antisemitism is often "open" in expression, meaning people openly promote anti-Jewish stereotypes under the guises of political criticism and rhetoric. Some of the stereotypes that circulate in left-leaning spaces include the infamous idea that Jews are bent on world domination or are greedy money-makers. While the farleft tends to focus on political and economic stereotypes of Jews, traditional anti-Jewish tropes often unite far-left antisemitism with traditional far-right antisemitism. In other words, new antisemites appropriate traditional anti-Jewish ideas. 41

Another way that left-wing and right-wing antisemitism converges is through Holocaust denial and distortion. Although Holocaust denial and distortion feature prominently in white supremacist and neo-Nazi discourses, they can be found in some left-wing circles and are more mainstream in the Arab and Muslim worlds than in the West. ⁴² Meir Litvak and Esther Webman explain in their groundbreaking work, *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust*, that Holocaust denial and distortion in the Arab and Muslim worlds are frequently intertwined with sentiments regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Those who support Holocaust denial and distortion in these contexts often accuse Israel of exaggerating or fabricating the Holocaust to gain sympathy for itself, sometimes going so far as accusing Israel of having used the Holocaust as a ploy to gain sympathy for its creation. ⁴³ Denial and distortion propaganda in the Arab and Muslim worlds does not necessarily stem from ignorance amongst their perpetrators; instead, they often stem from these perpetrators selecting specific texts and then decontextualizing the material to promote messages about the Holocaust to various audiences. ⁴⁴ Statistics Canada predicts growth of communities that find their origins in the Arab and Muslim worlds. In that case, Holocaust denial and distortion originating from these worlds may become more prominent.

The challenge with left-wing antisemitism is for the researchers to determine which criticisms of Israel are antisemitic and which are legitimate. One method is to identify the messages underlying the criticism and how the criticism is expressed. Many pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel activists do not distinguish between Jews, Israel/Israelis, and Zionists.⁴⁵ By melting identities, critics portray Jews as monolithic and indivisible from Israel, and this, arguably, enables anti-

Jewish hatred, resentment, and prejudice. Left-wing antisemitism is less evident than traditional antisemitism because it is often entangled with many other causes and ideas for which the Left tends to fight. Some of these causes include racism, social justice and injustice, sexism, and capitalism, amongst others. These entangled causes disguise how extensive and embedded a problem anti-Israelism and anti-Zionism are on the Left and how easily anti-Jewish hate can become justified.⁴⁶

It is important to note that, based on Brym's survey, there is nothing statistically significant about anti-Jewish attitudes and political affiliation in Canada. Political diversity and polarization point to increased access to and affiliation with many available political positions. In theory, these factors exacerbate tensions and divisions in society. There has been an exceptional increase in antisemitism on the Left following October 7th, and general tensions surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more broadly could be exacerbating antisemitism in Canada. Relatedly, it is possible that tense political events risk exacerbating heightened emotional states in people, and so, in this way, political diversification and polarization can exacerbate antisemitism. While left-wing and far-right antisemitism appear to be mutually exclusive, they draw on similar ideas and stereotypes. So, it is essential to acknowledge how all these bases are dangerous and harmful to Jewish Canadians. Ideologically motivated antisemitism is problematic no matter where it manifests on the political spectrum.

Conclusion: Super-diversity and Canadian Antisemitism

How can all this information be helpful for understanding how people perpetuate antisemitism in contemporary Canada? Perhaps a definitive answer is not entirely possible as more research is needed into the root causes of antisemitism, as well as the influence of emerging social and demographic trends. This analysis, therefore, puts forth a set of working theories rather than a foregone conclusion. It was argued here that, in Canada, emerging social trends are contributing to the rise of antisemitism and that antisemitism in Canada is maintained by new forms of bias and prejudice, perhaps imported by immigrant and existing communities increasingly coming from countries with political grievances against the State of Israel. The more pressing issue, however,

is how super-diversity, a heightened atmosphere of prejudice, and increasing political polarization enable anti-Jewish ideologies to flourish in Canada, especially in a post-October 7th context.

Additionally, as Canada's population diversifies, more biases and ideologies will emerge, among them antisemitic prejudices. Multifaceted diversification could, consequently, increase the chances that antisemitism will continue to manifest in Canada in increasingly complex ways. Modern modes of communication, such as the Internet, also exacerbate the spread of these prejudices as people appropriate easily accessible ideologies from around the globe.

This paper explored the idea of how immigration and ethnic diversification may be contributing to the maintenance and rise of antisemitism in contemporary Canada. It also explored another type of diversity, political diversity, and how that may contribute to the increase in anti-Jewish hate. While immigration and politics are not definite causes of the current rise of antisemitism in Canada, it is suggested that super-diversity and its implications are significant contributing factors. Perhaps it is demographic diversity, coupled with political and ideological diversity, that poses the highest risk for antisemitism. Steven Vertovec's super-diversity is a valuable framework for better understanding the complexities of antisemitism in contemporary Canada. By examining different types of diversity and how they contribute to the rise of antisemitism in Canada, researchers can develop a more holistic idea of what could be happening at a deeper level. Just as populations diversify, so too does antisemitism.

Notes

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