

Public Opinion and Canadian Jewry, 2024

This two-part essay deals with subjects of great interest to Canadian Jews: the pro-Palestinian encampments established at more than two dozen of the country's public universities in spring 2024, and Canadian attitudes toward Jews and Israel in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war that began on October 7, 2023. It is based mainly on the results of two surveys conducted in February and May 2024. Initial results of the February poll were published in April.¹ Part 2 of this essay provides ten new insights derived from analysis of the data from that survey. Part 1, based on the May survey, provides a brief overview of the encampment movement and analyzes the characteristics of its Canadian supporters and opponents.

Part 1

Who are the Supporters and Opponents of the Pro-Palestinian Encampments?

Robert Brym and Jack Jedwab

The Rise and Decline of Pro-Palestinian Encampments

Between April 22 and June 10, 2024, twenty-five pro-Palestinian encampments were established at Canada's seventy-eight public universities.² At their most numerous, encampments stretched from Halifax to Nanaimo. Many of them housed a few dozen people, with the largest attracting two hundred or more individuals at their peak. If the McMaster University and University of Toronto encampments just before their demise are anything to judge by, they were populated by about one hundred individuals at McMaster and two hundred students at the downtown campus of the University of Toronto. Some of the people who participated in the encampments were not university students. Judging by the names of most participants who spoke to journalists on behalf of the encampments, Muslim students featured prominently in the encampment movement.



The University of Toronto's pro-Palestinian encampment at the University College Quad, May 28, 2024. Photo by David S. Koffman

An organization called National Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) was instrumental in mobilizing students to form encampments across the United States and at McGill University, which arguably housed the most raucous and destructive encampment in Canada. SJP's largest sponsor is an organization called American Muslims for Palestine (AMP). Recent US lawsuits allege that AMP is affiliated with Hamas. Many AMP leaders were in organizations that were found to be associated with Hamas and were subsequently forced to disband by the US government.³

At a few universities, administrators got police to break up the encampments soon after they were established. The shortest-lived encampment was York University's, which existed less than a day. At most universities, encampments endured for months. The longest-lived encampment was the University of Vancouver Island's, which began on May 1 and ended on August 15. Because authorities enjoy considerable discretionary power, variation in the duration of individual encampments depended largely on the propensity of university presidents to initiate their closure, the inclination of judges to issue injunctions, and the disposition of police chiefs to order officers to remove encampment participants.

The aims of encampment participants closely mirrored those of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. They demanded that universities disclose all their investments, divest from companies with ties to Israel's military industries, and abandon academic collaboration with Israeli institutions of higher learning. For the most part, universities refused to accede to these demands. The most conciliatory universities were in southern Ontario: the University of Windsor, the University of

Waterloo, McMaster University, and Ontario Technical University (OTU) in Oshawa. For example, the OTU encampment, established on May 7, was peacefully dismantled just thirteen days later, after OTU's administration agreed to (1) publish a report by the fall outlining all its investments and financial holdings; (2) strike a committee to review best practices and make recommendations about future investments with "particular attention to companies involved in arms manufacturing and delivery and/or benefitting from military action in Palestine;" (3) fund three undergraduate scholarships for Palestinians displaced by the Israel– Hamas war beginning in the fall; and (4) protect students and faculty who participated in the encampment from "academic and/or employment–based retaliation."⁴



The University of Toronto's University College Quad after the pro-Palestinian encampment was dismantled, July 12, 2024. Photo by David S. Koffman

Supporters and Opponents

The encampments were supported by just over 16 percent of the country's adults according to a poll of 1,519 Canadians undertaken by Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies. Conducted by web panel over the period May 17–20, 2024, the poll results were weighted by population characteristics taken from the 2021 Census of Canada. A probability sample of this size would have a maximum margin of error of ± 2.5 percent, nineteen times out of twenty. The poll also showed that 40 percent of Canadians opposed the encampments and almost 44 percent said they neither supported nor opposed them, replied "don't know," or declined to answer the question (Table 1).

Table 1 “How strongly do you support or oppose the recent pro-Palestinian encampments at several Canadian universities?” (n=1,519; in percent)

Strongly oppose	25.5
Somewhat oppose	14.5
<i>Subtotal oppose</i>	<i>40.0</i>
Neither oppose nor support	27.4
Somewhat support	9.6
Strongly support	6.8
<i>Subtotal support</i>	<i>16.4</i>
Don’t know/no answer	16.2
Total	100.0
Note: The total percentage is not exactly 100.0 due to rounding.	

Who were the supportive 16 percent and how did they differ from the opposing 40 percent of Canadians?

Age

Encampment supporters tended to be young (Table 2). Excluding individuals who replied “don’t know” or did not supply information about their age, those who strongly supported the encampment ranged from nearly 18 percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds to 0.0 percent of those over the age of seventy-four. (All of the following percentages are based on the same exclusions.) Contrariwise, those who strongly opposed the encampments ranged from nearly 46 percent of those over the age of seventy-four to under 14 percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds.

Table 2 Support for and opposition to encampments by age cohort (n=1,273; in percent)

	Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither oppose nor support	Somewhat support	Strongly support	Total
Age cohort						
18-24	13.7	18.5	37.9	12.1	17.7	100.0
25-34	19.5	16.8	36.2	16.8	10.8	100.0
35-44	22.1	13.3	38.5	14.4	11.8	100.0
45-54	30.3	16.4	35.4	8.7	9.2	100.0
55-64	41.5	14.8	29.3	7.4	7.0	100.0
65-74	37.2	22.7	26.9	11.2	2.1	100.0
75+	45.6	19.4	25.2	9.7	0.0	100.0
Note: Some rows may not equal exactly 100.0 due to rounding. This table excludes individuals who replied “don’t know” or did not answer.						

Ideological Orientation

Encampment supporters also tended to be on the left wing of the ideological spectrum (Table 3). For example, just over 39 percent of those who said they are on the hard left strongly supported the encampments compared to a little more than 3 percent of those who said they are on the hard right. Conversely, nearly 58 percent of those on the hard right strongly opposed the encampment movement compared to under 17 percent of those on the hard left.

Table 3 Support for and opposition to encampments by left-right ideology (n=1,003; in percent)

	Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither oppose nor support	Somewhat support	Strongly support	Total
Ideology						
Left	16.5	10.4	13.9	20.0	39.1	100.0
Left of centre	15.4	25.6	26.1	24.4	8.5	100.0
Centre	29.2	17.8	39.7	8.9	4.4	100.0
Right of centre	60.2	11.6	19.3	5.5	3.3	100.0
Right	57.8	14.4	22.2	2.2	3.3	100.0

Note: Some rows may not equal exactly 100.0 due to rounding. This table excludes individuals who replied "don't know" or did not answer.

Also relevant to ideological orientation is the question of how many encampment supporters held a positive view of Hamas. Among Canadians who strongly supported the encampments, 36 percent said they have a “very positive” or “somewhat positive” view of Hamas. This result is more than three times higher than the percentage for Canadians who strongly opposed the encampments. Note too that an unusually large percentage of strong encampment supporters—41 percent—refused to answer the question on Hamas support. Such widespread reticence leads one to suspect that the actual percentage of Hamas enthusiasts among strong encampment supporters was higher, perhaps substantially higher, than 36 percent.

Racialization

A third characteristic of encampment supporters is that they tended to be racialized. Respondents were asked, “Which of the following best describes you?” This question was followed by a list of twelve ethnic and racial labels from which they could choose. Table 4 shows the breakdown for those who claimed to be White and those who did not. Non-White respondents were more than twice as likely as White respondents to strongly support the encampments (about 14 percent versus 7 percent, respectively). On the other hand, White respondents were more than 9 percentage points more likely to strongly oppose the encampments than were non-White respondents (around 32 percent versus 23 percent).

Table 4 Support for and opposition to encampments by White/non-White self-identification (n=1,274; in percent)

	Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither oppose nor support	Somewhat support	Strongly support	Total
Identity						
White	32.4	19.0	31.0	11.1	6.5	100.0
Non-White	23.2	11.4	38.6	12.5	14.3	100.0

Note: Some rows may not equal exactly 100.0 due to rounding. This table excludes individuals who replied “don’t know” or did not answer.

Pride in Canada

When asked to respond “yes” or “no” to the statement, “I am proud to be a Canadian,” only a small percentage of respondents said “no.” However, strong supporters of the encampments were nearly twice as likely as strong opponents to say “no” (approximately 13 percent versus 7 percent).

Urban, Suburban, Rural

Dividing the population into urban, suburban, and rural areas, strong opposition to the encampments was most widespread in rural areas (about 38 percent) and least widespread in urban areas (around 27 percent). Contrariwise, strong support was most widespread in urban areas (approximately 12 percent) and least widespread in rural areas (about 4 percent).

Attitudes towards Jews

Finally, Canadians with a strong positive view of Jews were more than 4.5 times more likely to strongly oppose the encampments than strongly support them (about 44 percent versus 10 percent; see Table 5). Moreover, strong opponents of the encampments were three times more likely than strong supporters to think that Jews are “the most likely” group to be “the victim of prejudice or hate in Canada” (more than 32 percent versus under 11 percent). On this last point, police hate crime statistics are in line with the view of strong encampment opponents.

Table 5 Support for and opposition to encampments by view of Jews (n=1,003; in percent)

	Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither oppose nor support	Somewhat support	Strongly support	Total
View of Jews						
Very positive	43.6	14.5	21.3	11.0	9.6	100.0
Somewhat positive	29.6	18.3	31.4	13.8	6.9	100.0
Somewhat negative	28.0	24.0	33.1	9.1	5.7	100.0
Very negative	26.4	12.5	25.0	12.5	23.6	100.0

Note: Some rows may not equal exactly 100.0 due to rounding. This table excludes individuals who replied “don’t know” or did not answer.

In sum, encampment supporters were more likely than encampment opponents to be young non-White urban dwellers on the left wing of the political spectrum who support Hamas. At the same time, encampment supporters were *less* likely than encampment opponents to take pride in being Canadian, regard Jews highly, and believe that Jews are the country's top victims of prejudice and hate.

Part 2

Jews and Israel 2024 Survey: Ten Further Insights

Robert Brym

"Jews and Israel 2024: A Survey of Canadian Attitudes and Jewish Perceptions," published in the spring 2024 volume of *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études juives canadiennes*, attracted considerable attention, particularly in Canada's Jewish community. Some readers of the report on the survey asked follow-up questions that seem to me to be of sufficiently general interest to require answers in a public forum such as this.

Below I list ten questions that I find especially intriguing. Each question is followed by my reply, based mainly on secondary analysis of the 2024 data. In the following, where I write that a finding is "significant," I mean that there is at least a 95 percent chance that it will be found in nineteen of twenty similar samples, so the finding is likely to reflect the situation in the population from which the relevant sample is drawn.

Do you know anything about how much and which kinds of media respondents have been consuming?

I collected data on media consumption for non-Jews only. I asked, "How often do you listen to, watch, or read about news happening outside North America?" Respondents could answer "never," "less than weekly," "weekly," "daily," or they could not respond. I followed up with the question, "How often do you listen to, watch, or read about news events happening outside of North America from each of the following sources?" A list of eleven news sources followed: the *Globe and Mail* (print or online); the *National Post* (print or online); CBC (TV or online); CTV (TV or online); CNN (TV or online); Fox News (TV or online); TVA (TV or online); *Le Devoir* (print or online); *La Presse* (print or online); social media (Facebook, X [formerly Twitter], Instagram, TikTok, etc.); and talking with friends or family. For each of these options, respondents could answer "never," "less than weekly," "weekly," "daily," or they could not respond. Respondents could select as many news sources as they deemed relevant.