

# Lebanese Americans in Michigan feel abandoned by Democrats



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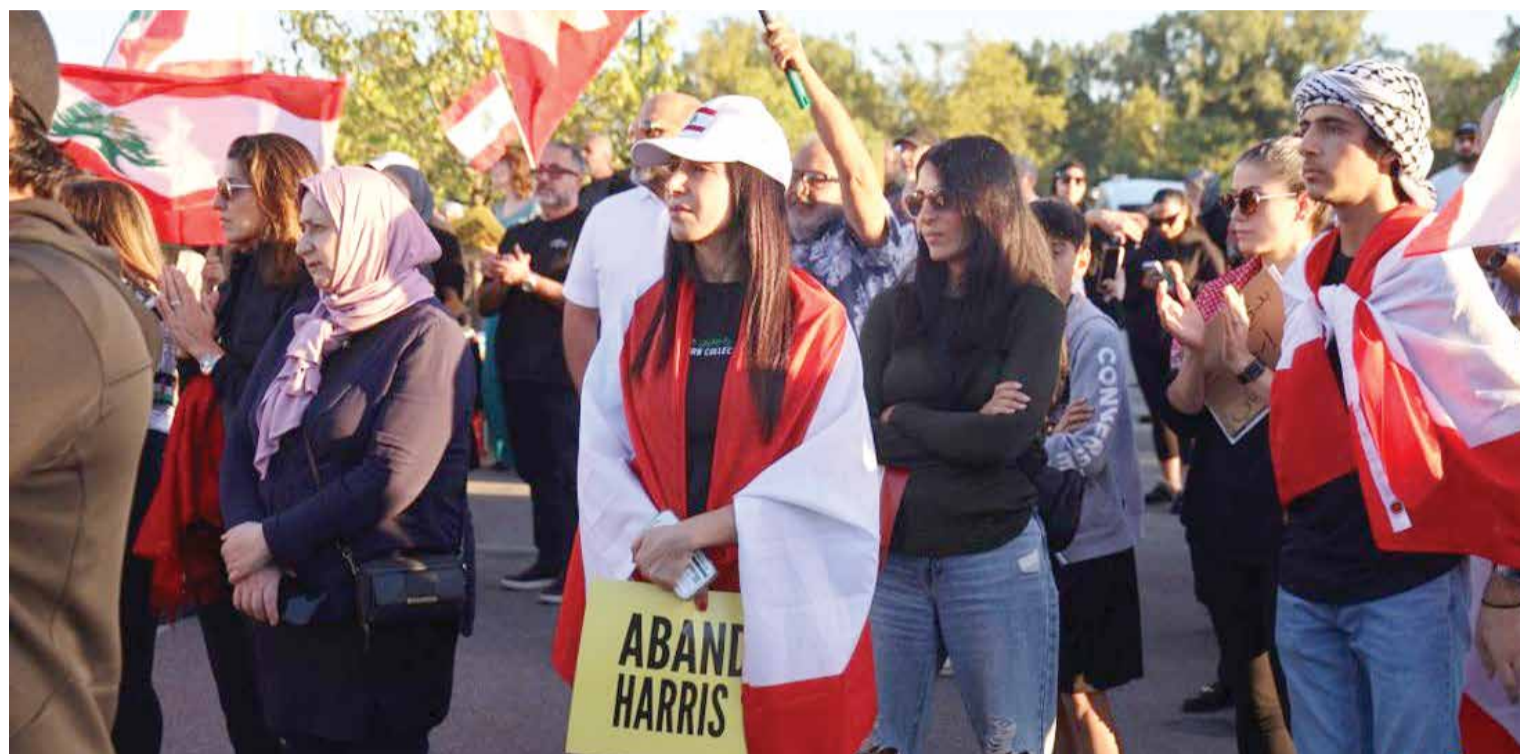
## OPINION

As Israel expands its military campaign in southern Lebanon amid escalating conflict in the Middle East, a Lebanese American community in a key swing state could

leave its mark on this year's US election.

Michigan — where Vice President Kamala Harris and former president Donald Trump are polling neck and neck — is home to more than 82,000 Lebanese Americans, including nearly 23,000 in the city of Dearborn. Most have roots in Lebanon's south, and they are no strangers to conflict: Some are the children of parents to immigrated to Michigan after Israel's invasion and occupation in 1982, while others fled the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War.

Lebanese Americans in Dearborn say that this latest round of conflict is different. There has never been an active interstate war involving Lebanon during a US presidential election, and their fear and anger about the situation will shape their decisions when they vote on November 5. This month, large demonstrations in support of Lebanon and against US military aid to Israel took place in Dearborn. Protesters carried signs criticizing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as Harris and US President Joe Biden.



In August, Arab Americans in Michigan told Foreign Policy that they did not see a difference between Harris and Trump on the issue of Palestine; they now echo a similar sentiment regarding the crisis in Lebanon. Democratic Dearborn Mayor Abdullah Hammoud, 34, whose family hails from southern Lebanon, said that Israel's recent campaign has affected much of the community personally — including his own family. "People in our community ask themselves, 'Who in our family has been killed today?'" Hammoud said in early October.

"People in the city are attending funerals [to honor people who died in Lebanon] daily now. Lebanese American families are being carpet-bombed and killed by Israeli forces indiscriminately. All this stems from the fact that our government refuses to put its foot down and end this war, which would end tomorrow with a phone call," Hammoud said.

Arab Americans in Michigan have broadly shifted away from the Democratic Party this year, driven by what they see as US complicity in the suffering of Palestinian, and now Lebanese, civilians. During the Michigan Democratic primary, more than 100,000 people voted uncommitted in protest of the Biden administration's unwavering commitment to Israel. In the months since, the Uncommitted Movement has remained steadfast in advocating for an arms embargo on Israel and a seat at the table with the Democrats. Neither effort has borne any fruit: The Democratic National Convention declined to put a Palestinian American speaker on

stage in August, and the Harris campaign did not meet the Uncommitted Movement's demand for an in-person meeting with its leaders before September 15.

As a result, the Uncommitted Movement has refused to endorse Harris, Trump, or a third-party candidate. "Harris's unwillingness to shift to a conditional weapons policy or to even make a clear statement in support of upholding existing US and international human rights law has made it impossible for us to endorse her," said Abbas Alawieh, an Uncommitted Movement leader and Michigan electoral delegate. He emphasized that the movement did not recommend voting for a third-party candidate and thus likely delivering Trump a victory in Michigan.

The Abandon Harris movement (formerly Abandon Biden) has taken a different approach, explicitly endorsing Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein. According to a survey conducted in late August by the Council on American Islamic Relations, Stein is polling at 40 percent among Arab Americans in Michigan, followed by Trump at 18 percent and Harris at 12 percent.

In the closing weeks of the campaign, both Harris and Trump have engaged in a tug-of-war over Arab American and Muslim votes. Speaking in Waterford Township, Michigan, on October 18, Harris said, "I know this year has been very difficult given the scale of death and destruction in Gaza and given the civilian casualties and displacement in Lebanon. It is devastating." However, the fact that she did not explicitly acknowledge that it

was Israeli bombings with US weaponry that had caused such devastation in both Gaza and Lebanon rankles some Arab American voters.

Meanwhile, Trump has gone on the offensive. He has touted an endorsement from Yemeni American Mayor Amer Ghalib of Hamtramck, Michigan, and attacked Harris's endorsement from former Rep. Liz Cheney and former Vice President Dick Cheney, an architect of the Iraq War, both Republicans.

Polling now indicates that nationally, Arab Americans slightly favor Trump over Harris. In Michigan — which has only gone for a Republican presidential candidate thrice in the past 50 years, in 1984, 1988, and 2016 — polling averages show Harris with a less than 1 percent lead.

Rana — who lives in Dearborn but hails from Saida, Lebanon, where many displaced people have sought refuge from bombardment this month — said that she had lost dozens of family members since Israel's campaign in southern Lebanon began. She fears an Israeli reoccupation of Lebanon, recalling vividly the fallout of the 2006 war. (Rana requested a pseudonym out of concern for workplace retaliation and her family's safety in Lebanon.)

Rana expressed frustration and anger at the Biden administration, saying that she would not vote for Harris or Trump on November 5. "A family of 17 that I knew was killed outside their house when their children were outside playing. It all happened so quickly. I will not support either party — they are both complicit in the



People rally in solidarity with the Lebanese people, who are under Israeli bombardment, in front of the Dearborn Police Station, Michigan, in early October 2024.  
● dearborn.org



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crimes against Lebanon," she said. "When we see Democrats support the onslaught in Lebanon, it sends the message that we as Arab Americans are not seen."

The Lebanese American community in Dearborn is tight-knit: Rana said that she attended high school with Nadine Jawad, the daughter of Kamel Jawad, a US citizen and surgeon who was killed in Lebanon by an Israeli air strike while aiding injured Lebanese civilians on October 1. Other members of the community characterized his death as a direct result of US negligence in the Middle East.

Hammoud, the Dearborn mayor, said that many of his city's Lebanese and Arab American voters feel betrayed by the Biden administration for its support of Netanyahu as regional conflict deepens. There is a "feeling of betrayal in the sense that our government seems to have unlimited resources to supply bombs but not enough resources to address the domestic issues we have here," he said. "But there is also betrayal in the sense that the Democratic Party, a party that Arabs have been loyal to for two decades now, has abandoned them."

Israel's ongoing campaign in southern Lebanon has only compounded criticism of the Biden administration as the election approaches: Lebanese Americans in Michigan have continued to speak out against the White House's unwillingness to impose an arms embargo on Israel. And the issue could end up costing Harris votes in more states than Michigan. Polling from the IMEU Policy Project suggests that withholding weapons to Israel would help her win over independents in Arizona, Georgia, and Pennsylvania.

Mohamad, another Dearborn local who requested to go by his first name out of safety concerns, said that many people in the Lebanese American community have become indifferent toward the US election amid Israel's campaign in Lebanon. "For me, I won't be voting in this upcoming election. Neither candidate is good. A lot of people in Dearborn, especially Lebanese, feel they are doomed no matter which they vote, so they may stay home instead," he said.

"It hurts so much to see your countrymen die this way, and it hurts even more to know that I am here in the United States while this very country is responsible for what's happening in both Lebanon and Palestine," Mohamad said. "South Lebanon will be on the ballot come November."

The article first appeared on Foreign Policy.



Green Party presidential nominee Jill Stein (3rd-R) attends a rally in Dearborn, Michigan, on October 6, 2024, receiving endorsement by the Abandon Harris campaign, a Michigan-based Muslim group.  
● NIC ANTAYA/NYT