

Unfriending on Facebook more likely from politically active users

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Leaving politics at the door when talking to friends is a great rule for maintaining a friendship, but that may not be the case when it's a virtual door on Facebook. When large politically important conflicts play out in real time over the internet, comments and grand gestures seem to be the norm. But do these really play a part in people stopping their online friendships? A recent study published in the *Journal of Communication* by researchers at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University found that during the Israel-Gaza conflict in 2014, 16% of those in the study unfriended a Facebook friend based on political comments.

Nicholas John (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and Shira Dvir-Gvirsman (Tel Aviv University) published their findings in the *Journal of Communication*. They conducted an online survey among Jewish Israeli Facebook users between 3-7 September 2014 - between one week and ten days after the open-ended ceasefire of 26 August 2014. 1,103 respondents representing the Israeli population on Facebook were studied. They were asked about their political activity, ideological extremity and Facebook activity during the conflict.

The researchers found that 50% of the respondents reported being more active on Facebook during this time period and 16% of users unfriended or unfollowed a Facebook friend for political reasons during this time period. Users who unfriended others were more likely to be ideologically extreme and less supportive of free speech.

The data also supported that those with more Facebook friends were more likely to unfriend, indicating that having a greater amount of weak ties allows for more unfrinding.

"People unfriend people who have different political views to theirs. We already know that Facebook and search engines provide us with a feed and search results that are tailored to us. By unfrinding we are further contributing to the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, said John. "More than that, these findings suggest that the people most likely to unfriend are younger, more politically active, more active on Facebook, have lots of Facebook friends, and have more extreme political views - these are important people in online discussions."

More information: Nicholas A. John et al. "I Don't Like You Any More": Facebook Unfrinding by Israelis During the Israel-Gaza Conflict of 2014, *Journal of Communication* (2015). [DOI: 10.1111/jcom.12188](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12188)

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