



# A NEW GENERATION FOR LIBERATION

HISTORIC STUDENT PROTESTS DEFY  
UNIVERSITY CRACKDOWNS

2024 YEAR-IN-REVIEW

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Report design by Design Action Collective

Cover design by Joshua MacPhee, who notes: The abstracted outlines of the figures are assembled from photographs of both contemporary Palestine solidarity protests and images of the 1971 Attica rebellion. This is a small gesture to acknowledge growing Black-Palestinian solidarity, as well as Palestine's movement into the center of social justice organizing in the US.



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION:

A NEW GENERATION FOR LIBERATION.....	2
ENCAMPMENTS, OCCUPATIONS, AND THE FIGHT FOR DIVESTMENT.....	8
REPRESSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION CAMPUSES.....	11
LAW ENFORCEMENT REPRESSION.....	20
REPRESSION ON K-12 CAMPUSES.....	24
CENSORSHIP.....	28
WORKPLACE ORGANIZING AND DISCRIMINATION.....	31
LAWFARE.....	34
AFFIRMATIVE LITIGATION.....	37
LEGISLATION.....	40
CONCLUSION.....	46

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# INTRODUCTION: A NEW GENERATION FOR LIBERATION

2024 was a year characterized both by devastating political developments—as the United States backed Israel’s genocide in Gaza to the hilt and rolled out unprecedented repression at home—and by massive pro-Palestinian mobilization, as the US solidarity movement rapidly expanded to include *a new generation for liberation*. Both the weight of the joint US-Israeli atrocities throughout Palestine, Lebanon, and beyond and the new faces of the movement for Palestinian liberation will shape our political landscape for the foreseeable future.

With the student movement at the forefront, people of conscience across the nation rose up to make their voices heard. In institutions, in communities, and in the streets, the movement for Palestinian

liberation registered bold dissent against the war on Gaza and demanded an end to US support for Israel. From the encampment wave to the Uncommitted Movement, to the ceaseless street actions, organizers successfully disrupted business as usual.

Young people, many politicized for the first time, reacted with righteous indignation at the genocide unfolding in Gaza, visible in real time online, being perpetrated with US weapons and unfettered political, diplomatic, economic, and logistical support. In addition to popularizing the organic boycotts of companies like Starbucks and McDonalds via social media, this new generation of organizers took to the streets en masse to demand justice for Palestinians.

Despite this unprecedented mobilization, the Biden administration refused to cut the flow of weapons to Israel even as it witnessed mass defection from its electoral base over the genocide. Instead, it escalated its repression against the student movement, taking the lead from Israel advocacy groups advancing their own repressive campaigns with familiar, McCarthyite tactics.

In 2024, Palestine Legal received 2,099 total requests for legal support, an increase of 55% from 2023, and an over 600% increase from the 290 total requests in 2022.<sup>1</sup> These requests included 1,750 reports of people targeted for their Palestine-related advocacy and 349 legal questions from individuals regarding their Palestine-related advocacy. The requests came from people in 45 different states and the District of Columbia.

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**IN INSTITUTIONS, IN COMMUNITIES, AND IN THE STREETS, THE MOVEMENT FOR PALESTINIAN LIBERATION REGISTERED BOLD DISSENT AGAINST THE WAR ON GAZA AND DEMANDED AN END TO US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL.**

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## REQUESTS FOR LEGAL SUPPORT MADE TO PALESTINE LEGAL 2022-2024<sup>2</sup>

2022



290

2023



1,352

2024



2,099

Of the 1,750 reports of people targeted, 1,162, about two thirds, were campus-related, including 101 at K-12 institutions. 2024 saw a significant increase in incidents related to university administration investigations and sanctions—Palestine Legal received over 580 such reports, more than five times the year prior. And across the board, Palestine Legal recorded increases in nearly every category of reported incidents: this included 248 reports of criminal investigations, 317 reports of adverse employment decisions, 283 reports of harassment, and 107 reports of threats of physical violence. These figures are partial, as many incidents go unreported or are reported to other lawyers and organizations.

PALESTINE LEGAL REPORTS BY CATEGORY<sup>3</sup>

CATEGORY	# OF REPORTS
UNIVERSITIES	1,061
K-12	101
EMPLOYMENT	537
ADVERSE EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS	317
TERMINATIONS	162
DOXING	255
CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS	248
HARASSMENT	283
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE / THREAT OF	107

FROM ATTACKS ON IMMIGRANTS TO THE TARGETING OF UNIVERSITIES, TRUMP AND ALLIES ARE USING PALESTINE ACTIVISM AS THE TIP OF THE SPEAR TO SILENCE ALL DISSENT FROM THEIR FASCIST AGENDA.

Palestine Legal grew its capacity to respond to these intakes in 2024, both to take on more cases internally and to expand its nationwide attorney network and referrals.

## PALESTINE LEGAL AND ATTORNEY NETWORK CASES IN 2024<sup>4</sup>

**1,123**

**REQUESTS FOR LEGAL  
SUPPORT TO WHICH  
PALESTINE LEGAL  
DIRECTLY RESPONDED**

**CLOSE TO  
2,000**

**ATTORNEYS IN  
NETWORK AS OF  
END OF 2024**

**1,266**

**REFERRED TO  
PARTNERS OR  
ATTORNEYS IN  
OUR NETWORK**

Anti-Palestinian racism was a driving force in the crackdown, mirroring the racism fueling Israel's genocide. In a survey of 257 students and educators from across the country in March-April 2024, the Institute for the Understanding of Anti-Palestinian Racism found that nearly three-quarters of students, faculty, and staff supporting Palestinian rights had experienced harassment, silencing, or exclusion.<sup>5</sup>

Donald Trump's electoral victory in November 2024 over a Harris campaign that actively spurned calls from the democratic base on Palestine set up a new challenge for the movement. Though a short-lived ceasefire deal was reached in the period between administrations—due in no small part to the pressure built by the anti-genocide movement—the Biden administration's and other bipartisan and institutional targeting of the Palestine movement paved the way for Trump's even more authoritarian, repressive crackdowns. From attacks on immigrants to the targeting of universities, Trump and allies are using Palestine activism as the tip of the spear to silence all dissent from their fascist agenda.



The unabashedly undemocratic president, his unelected accomplices, and the elected officials in Congress who have swiftly abdicated their role as a constitutional check on executive power are already abusing every tool at their disposal. They are using surveillance, investigations, prosecution, funding cuts, immigration sweeps, and more to try to crush movements for justice and liberation that challenge their unbridled, unaccountable power. The flurry of executive orders, the swift dismantling of government agencies, and the erratic foreign policy stances in early 2025 directly targeted and impacted the Palestine movement and Palestinians already utterly devastated by the genocide in Palestine. They also targeted any gains made over decades toward racial, climate, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ justice.

The gravity of the attacks on vulnerable communities must fortify efforts across movements to challenge not only this administration's actions, but the very systems of extraction, inequality, and injustice that they aim to expand.

How the new generation for liberation responds in this extreme environment will shape the future of the Palestine solidarity movement. Its resilience through a year of relentless targeting is already a model for how our justice movements can persist and find opportunities to advance collective liberation, especially in moments of upheaval and uncertainty. The vast mobilization in March 2025 against the unlawful abduction of Mahmoud Khalil by ICE for his outspoken role in Columbia University protests is one indication that the movement is undeterred, even by such draconian actions.<sup>6</sup>

The stories shared in this report aim to reflect the widespread and extreme repression that characterized 2024, but also the resilience that kept Palestinians and allies speaking out despite it, and the many victories that were won along the way. Uplifting and learning from such victories, whether in the courts, in boardrooms, or on the streets, will be critical fuel in facing the shock and awe repression of the coming months and years.



Brown University Solidarity Encampment. Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

# ENCAMPMENTS, OCCUPATIONS, AND THE FIGHT FOR DIVESTMENT

On April 17, 2024, Columbia University's president, Minouche Shafik, testified at a McCarthyite congressional hearing in which members of Congress questioned her and other members of the university's leadership about their response to Palestine activism on campus, which the members of Congress falsely claimed posed a threat to Jewish students.

To bring attention back to Israel's genocide in Gaza and their campaign demanding that Columbia University divest from companies complicit in Israel's crimes, a group of students established the Gaza Solidarity Encampment. While the hearing took place in DC, the students brought tents and other supplies onto the quad, determined to occupy the space until the university met

their demands for financial disclosure and divestment from Israeli apartheid and genocide. Within the next 24 hours, Shafik authorized the New York Police Department (NYPD) to brutally repress and assault students, and the police proceeded to violently clear the encampment, arresting over 100 individuals.<sup>7</sup> At a press conference following the raid, police chief John Chell admitted that the students were “peaceful,” and that it was Shafik and not the NYPD who identified the students as a security threat.<sup>8</sup>

Despite this severe act of repression, students and community members of conscience reestablished the solidarity encampment and continued to organize protests, political education events, and walkouts. Inspired by the 1985 occupation of Hamilton Hall to protest Apartheid South Africa, students occupied the hall on April 30, 2024, and renamed it “Hind’s Hall,” in honor of Hind Rajab, a 6-year-old Palestinian girl in Gaza who Israeli snipers killed while she waited to be rescued after her entire family was killed around her. The image of a “liberated” Hind’s Hall reverberated across North America.<sup>9</sup>

Immediately following the start of the Columbia encampment, students on campuses across the US set up their own solidarity encampments. Adorned with hand-painted banners dubbing their campus spaces “Gaza Solidarity Encampments” and “Liberated Zones,” the wave of student-led encampments spread to more than 130 US public and private schools,<sup>10</sup> and 35 countries worldwide.<sup>11</sup>

Students also followed suit and occupied campus buildings, renaming them after Palestinians martyred by Israel. Morrill Hall at the University of Minnesota became “Halimy Hall” in honor of Medo Halimy,<sup>12</sup> the Institute of Politics building at University of Chicago became the “Liberated Casbah of Basel al-Araj,”<sup>13</sup> and a Harvard dormitory became “Sidra Hassouna Hall.”<sup>14</sup>

The administrative and police responses to the encampments and occupations were swift and brutal, with universities calling in law enforcement to arrest over 3,200 students, professors, and solidarity activists on more than 80 campuses.<sup>15</sup> Students nevertheless persisted, setting up new encampments and holding new protests.

In response, students in Gaza issued statements in support of students on American campuses, thanking them for insisting that while universities in Gaza were being bombed, university business could not continue as usual in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

Students were not alone in their struggle. In February 2024, faculty members launched “Faculty for Justice in Palestine” (FJP), a network of over 125 groups on campuses nationwide to support students and academic workers targeted for their Palestine activism.<sup>17</sup> Their stated goal was to “challenge the Palestine Exception and break the barrier of fear and stigma in standing with and for Palestinian liberation.”<sup>18</sup>

At the encampments, faculty and staff members formed human chains to protect students from arrests,<sup>19</sup> and many faculty were also arrested.<sup>20</sup> They circulated petitions garnering hundreds of signatures voicing opposition to the university crackdowns.<sup>21</sup>

While the campus encampments drew much of the media attention, more than half of recorded pro-Palestine demonstrations in 2024 occurred in communities off-campus, according to the Crowd Counting Consortium project.<sup>22</sup> The project notes that the spread of recurring actions is an important indicator of the pro-Palestine movement's salience and staying power. Recurring demonstrations can have an outsized and long-lasting impact on local and regional politics.<sup>23</sup>

The movement for Palestinian freedom, despite the tidal wave of anti-Palestinian repression, has sustained its strength and adapted to shifting circumstances on and off campuses. Students in particular have risked their physical, academic, and long-term professional prospects simply for exercising their right to protest a genocide. The wave of encampments and other protests marked a new chapter in the movement and helped forge a new generation ready to carry on the fight for divestment and, ultimately, Palestinian liberation. These actions in the face of brutal repression will be remembered in the decades to come as bold and creative expressions of solidarity with Palestinians during an ongoing genocide.



University of Chicago campus police clash with students at a graduation rally on June 1, 2024. Photo credit: @ahmedvisualz

# REPRESSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION CAMPUSES

Throughout the unrelenting student protests in 2024 against Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza and their own institutions' complicity, most universities tried to crush the protests through police and vigilante violence, severe disciplinary action, and changes to university policies. Rather than listening to their students' pain and engaging their demands to save lives, universities bulldozed free speech, due process, and shared governance principles in ways that have facilitated Trump's full-fledged attack on educational institutions, and that will impact the higher education landscape for years to come.

Palestine Legal received reports of 1,061 higher education campus-related incidents in 2024, representing 61% of all incidents reported directly. These reports included over 580 incidents related to university administration investigations and sanctions and hundreds of other incidents involving administrations using bureaucratic barriers to censor Palestine-related speech and advocacy, criminal investigations, and harassment.

## UNIVERSITIES FOSTER ANTI-PALESTINIAN DISCRIMINATION

Rather than protecting students from racism—a vital duty that universities must fulfill to carry out their educational mandate and to comply with state and federal civil rights laws—most universities across the country have neglected to take action against racist discrimination and harassment by administrators, faculty, students, and outside forces, and in some cases have facilitated such racism.

Soon after a Palestine solidarity encampment was established at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), on April 25, Zionist agitators began to harass encampment participants.<sup>24</sup> The attacks escalated from verbal harassment, including racial and homophobic slurs, to psychological torture tactics and widescale physical assaults—and they escalated in the week that followed, often with approval from UCLA administrators. Even though law enforcement watched as the Zionist agitators physically attacked the encampment, ninety-two students accused of participating in the encampment faced student conduct charges. The charges were eventually dropped in exchange for students agreeing not to violate UCLA's Student Code of Conduct.

## **ZIONIST MOB ACTIONS FACILITATED BY UCLA ADMINISTRATION:**

- » From April 28 through May 2, Zionist agitators placed a jumbotron with powerful speakers adjacent to the encampment “constantly playing footage of the October 7 attacks, audio clips of graphic descriptions of rape and sexual violence, sounds of gunshots, screaming babies, clips of President Biden pledging unconditional support for Israel, loud music, including a loop of the Israeli song ‘Meni Mamtera’, a children’s song Israeli soldiers used as a form of ‘noise torture’ on Palestinian captives,” with the approval of UCLA.<sup>25</sup>
- » In the middle of the night on April 29, opponents of the encampment released a backpack full of mice, sparking fears of a biological attack.
- » On April 30, then-UCLA Chancellor Gene Block issued a statement perpetuating a false narrative that the encampment was blocking Jewish students from accessing their classes. In fact, particular entrances to buildings had been closed off by campus security and construction activities, not by the encampment. Block also stated that the encampment was unauthorized and unlawful and announced the university had taken down barricades established to protect the encampment.
- » Less than 12 hours later, a pro-Israel mob of about 100 individuals carrying “bear mace and other chemical irritants, hammers, knives, stink bombs, high grade fireworks, baseball bats, metal and wooden rods” shot fireworks into and physically attacked the encampment, causing at least 25 students to be hospitalized.<sup>26</sup> Campus police and local law enforcement agencies, assembled on campus in response to panicked calls from people on the scene and watching livestreams of the attack, stood by for over three hours as the attack unfolded, arresting none of the attackers.
- » The next night, the mob attacked again, followed by a police sweep where over 200 people participating in the encampment, predominantly students, were arrested while police allowed attackers to leave freely. One attacker was arrested several weeks later, and two more arrests were made in August.



After these attacks, the cases against the over 200 students arrested continued, with some court dates scheduled for the summer.<sup>27</sup>

UCLA graduate students and Med Students for Justice in Palestine documented the publicly known outcomes of these cases, noting that one case led to a protestor spending a full week in jail.<sup>28</sup> The report also revealed that UCLA spent \$12.3 million—41% of the total University of California system's \$29.1 million security budget—on repressing Palestine protests.

In October, two UCLA students and two faculty represented by the ACLU of Southern California filed suit against the UC Regents for violating their free speech rights and for the unlawful arrest of students and faculty engaged in nonviolent protest activity. As of the time of writing this report, that lawsuit is ongoing.<sup>29</sup>

UCLA's one-sided intervention—dismantling students' protective barriers, standing down amid violent attacks by pro-Israel activists, and selectively arresting students and community members who had spoken out against genocide—reflected widespread institutional indifference to the needs and rights of Palestinian students and their allies across US campuses.

In other incidents across the country, in April, during the Muslim religious holiday of Eid-al-Fitr, a man broke into the Center for Islamic Life at Rutgers University, damaged religious property, and stole a Palestinian flag. He pleaded guilty to federal hate crime charges in October.<sup>30</sup>

That same month, a Palestinian law student was assaulted by a University of California-Berkeley professor when she attempted to deliver a pro-Palestine speech during a dinner at the professor's home, prompting a civil rights investigation.<sup>31</sup>

In May, Stanford's Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian Communities Committee released a report detailing physical assaults, threats, and harassment against members of those communities, the university's formal and informal efforts to silence speech supporting Palestine, the university's biased communications, and the institution's lack of scholarly depth in Palestinian and Arab studies.<sup>32</sup>



A similar task force at Harvard, the Presidential Task Force on Combating Anti-Muslim and Anti-Arab Bias, described in a June report that students “felt the words ‘Palestine’ and ‘Palestinian’ had in effect become taboo on campus” and pointed out that the university had failed to acknowledge anti-Palestinian racism in naming the task force itself.<sup>33</sup>

Palestine Legal received reports from students at Stanford, Columbia, and Scripps College about discriminatory efforts by their universities to ban Palestinian flags at dorms and at a student-run coffeeshop.<sup>34</sup>

In response to the egregious crackdowns and discrimination against Palestinians and allies on campus, students mounted defensive legal and advocacy campaigns. Students at dozens of universities filed Title VI complaints with the Department of Education alleging anti-Palestinian discrimination, including 10 filed on behalf of students by Palestine Legal.<sup>35</sup>

## STUDENT CONDUCT AS A CENSORSHIP TOOL

Throughout the year, universities across the country used and abused their student conduct policies to silence and punish student activists. Over the summer, they enacted harsh new policies that led to increased intimidation and punishment of student speech activities.

In September, Cornell suspended doctoral student Momodou Taal for engaging in a peaceful protest of weapons manufacturers participating in a campus job fair.<sup>36</sup> As an international student, Taal’s suspension meant his visa would be terminated, subjecting him to deportation. After widespread outcry over the university’s draconian punishment, Taal was allowed to remain in the country to complete his degree, but was prevented from teaching his course, “What is Blackness? Race and the Processes of Racialization.”<sup>37</sup>

Across the country, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) groups and other Palestine solidarity groups and allies faced bans via interim suspensions, short-term bans, or permanent derecognition in 2024, amid other policies restricting protest activities.<sup>38</sup> Students at five

campuses reached out to Palestine Legal for help because their universities refused to allow them to form SJPs.

Many students also faced interim suspensions for their campus activism, barring them not only from their classes and their homes, but also from campus jobs and access to food, medical care, and the communities they relied on for support. In the spring, many students were blocked from walking at their graduation ceremonies despite years of hard work earning their degrees, and one was expelled, leaving him without a degree despite having completed all academic requirements.<sup>39</sup>

At Harvard, the university's governing board took an unprecedented step in intervening to block the conferral of degrees to 13 students accused of violating conduct policies during a Palestine solidarity encampment.<sup>40</sup> Eleven of the students received their degrees in July after the conclusion of conduct proceedings while the degrees of the other two were scheduled to be released in the fall.<sup>41</sup>

At Pomona College, the president bypassed the student conduct process and invoked her "extraordinary authority" to suspend 10 students for an entire academic year based on wi-fi signals that the university claimed proved their participation in an October 7 protest, without any evidence linking specific students to alleged violations that took place during the protest.<sup>42</sup>

Because universities often turned to law enforcement to tear down Palestine solidarity encampments and funneled their students from mass arrests into conduct proceedings, many students faced a dual risk of criminal charges and student conduct proceedings, threatening duplicative punishment and making it impossible for them to speak freely with conduct investigators without risking self-incrimination. The slow-moving proceedings meant some students faced months of suspension before ultimately being cleared of the charges against them, with universities offering them no remedy for the harm they had unjustly caused their students.

At many universities where these processes interfered with graduation ceremonies, including at Auraria Campus, Columbia, New York University, Stanford, UCLA, University of California-San Diego, and University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, students and faculty organized alternative ceremonies to celebrate would-be graduates.<sup>43</sup>

Many of these charges were challenged, and some students successfully defeated or minimized student disciplinary charges,<sup>44</sup> while others have sued their universities for violating their speech and due process rights.<sup>45</sup>

## ASSAULTS ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Universities also targeted faculty and subverted institutional decision-making mechanisms to block solidarity efforts, fast track anti-Palestinian policies, and punish faculty and staff for their political views. In 2024, Palestine Legal received many requests for legal support from faculty and staff related to their employment in higher education.

In May, Maura Finkelstein, a tenured professor at Muhlenberg College, was fired for reposting a tweet by Palestinian poet Remi Kanazi calling on people not to cower to Zionists.<sup>46</sup>

In June, the University of Minnesota rescinded a job offer to Raz Segal, who had been hired to serve as the faculty director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, because of his scholarly analysis of the ongoing genocide.<sup>47</sup>

In July, Northwestern University suspended professor Steven Thrasher and canceled his Fall 2024 courses because he, like many faculty across the country, supported students at a Palestine solidarity encampment on his campus.<sup>48</sup> In January 2025, an ad-hoc committee of three professors found no cause for his suspension, and his reinstatement was secured for April 2025.<sup>49</sup> In March 2025, Northwestern denied Thrasher tenure and said his position would

not be renewed.<sup>50</sup> Thrasher is appealing these decisions, which were immediately condemned by Medill School of Journalism alumni and students.<sup>51</sup>

All three incidents sparked widespread outrage from faculty and students, as well as from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), a foremost authority on academic freedom, which sent a letter of concern to Northwestern and University of Minnesota and launched an investigation into Muhlenberg.<sup>52</sup>

Administrators and trustees intervened at various levels to derail faculty and other solidarity efforts with Palestine. At Sonoma State University, President Mike Lee was removed from his post in May for “insubordination” after he reached a deal with student protestors on his campus.<sup>53</sup>

The University of California Board of Regents voted in July to block faculty within the UC system from posting collective statements on “political issues” on departmental homepages.<sup>54</sup>

In October, the Brown Corporation blocked implementation of a student-led divestment initiative after 24 states attorneys general threatened the university with financial consequences if the measure was implemented.<sup>55</sup> The university chancellor, who signed the letter announcing that Brown would not divest, also serves as CEO of Bank of America, a financial institution that was identified by the UN as itself being complicit in Israel's human rights violations.<sup>56</sup>

Administrators at the Ohio State University,<sup>57</sup> Vanderbilt,<sup>58</sup> New School,<sup>59</sup> and the University of California-Riverside<sup>60</sup> also blocked voting or implementation of student-led divestment measures.

Administrators baselessly shut down both student and faculty events on Palestine. In March, Montclair State University blocked a student fundraiser for Gaza because one of the event sponsors called for the elimination of Zionism on campus.<sup>61</sup> After public outcry, the event went forward in April.<sup>62</sup>

Wake Forest University blocked an October 7 lecture by Professor Rabab Abdulhadi that was sponsored by five academic units at the

university.<sup>63</sup> The event was moved to a local church.<sup>64</sup>

At the University of Missouri, Mizzou Students for Justice in Palestine (MSJP) was banned from the school's homecoming parade based on allegations about SJP clubs at other universities across the country.<sup>65</sup> Students had applied to participate in August, but the university waited until October 16, just days before the parade, to inform MSJP that they would not be allowed to participate.

In the summer and fall, universities across the country announced restrictive new anti-protest policies, at times bypassing the steps required for amending policies. The California Faculty Association, which represents 29,000 faculty, lecturers, and other workers, filed an unfair labor practice charge against the California State University system in September after the chancellor unilaterally implemented changes in the university system's time place manner policies in violation of state law.<sup>66</sup>

At NYU, the university's student conduct guidance was amended to explicitly make Zionism a protected class, making criticism of the ethnonationalist ideology a potential violation of the school's antidiscrimination policies.<sup>67</sup>

Just as students and faculty have drawn on a rich history of campus activism as inspiration for their protests in solidarity with Palestine, the draconian new policies, the discriminatory application of existing policies, and the extraordinary measures universities have taken to silence students and faculty also reflect darker chapters of history. The resilience of campus activists, some of whom created new encampments in the fall despite harsh punishments in the spring, proves that the efforts of administrators and the politicians who are pushing for harsher crackdowns will ultimately not succeed in silencing demands for freedom and justice.



Texas department of Public Safety troopers surround an encampment on the University of Texas at Austin campus on April 29, 2024. Photo credit: Julius Shieh for The Texas Tribune

# LAW ENFORCEMENT REPRESSION

In reaction to the upsurge in activism for Palestinian liberation in 2024, law enforcement engaged in intense repression reminiscent of the violent response to the George Floyd Uprisings in 2020 and previous eras of campus repression. Off campus, street actions were also met with aggressive police violence and punitive criminal charges.<sup>68</sup>

The National Lawyers Guild (NLG) received hundreds of reports of law enforcement repression against pro-Palestine activism across the US, noting a marked disparity in treatment by law enforcement of Palestine protests in comparison with any other political issue in 2024.<sup>69</sup> Protests with Palestinian flags resulted in increased deployment of police in riot gear, who would often “snatch any demonstrator at the slightest disobedience and charged them with every misdemeanor and felony they could attach to the conduct.”<sup>70</sup>

Additionally, NLG witnessed unwarranted and disparate police violence, questionable warrants, arrests for petty misdemeanors, overcriminalization of nonviolent direct actions, indiscriminate seizure of personal property, invasive surveillance, and the conflation of political speech with hate speech.

Within Our Lifetime, a pro-Palestine and anti-Zionist activist organization in NYC, exposed the surge in government surveillance, harassment, and prosecution of community members since October 7, 2023, in a report titled

“The Crackdown on Palestine.”<sup>71</sup> The report documented escalations like the NYPD increasing its usage of drones, deploying them to fly over protests and other political activities to surveil and make arrests.

On April 15, protestors in San Francisco blocked traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge, which resulted in the arrest of 26 protestors.<sup>72</sup> Those arrested initially faced 44 charges that included false imprisonment, trespass, interfering with a business, and more. In November, the judge on the cases dropped 32 of the 44 charges, but allowed felony charges against seven of the protestors to proceed.<sup>73</sup>

Chicago has also been the site of fierce law enforcement repression, with police arresting pro-Palestine protestors at protests, direct actions, campuses, and at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) held in the city in August. NLG Chicago reported that since October 7,

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**PROTESTS WITH  
PALESTINIAN FLAGS  
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DEPLOYMENT OF POLICE  
IN RIOT GEAR, WHO WOULD  
OFTEN "SNATCH ANY  
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SLIGHTEST DISOBEDIENCE  
AND CHARGED THEM WITH  
EVERY MISDEMEANOR AND  
FELONY THEY COULD ATTACH  
TO THE CONDUCT."**

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2023, affiliated attorneys represented 535 pro-Palestine protestors arrested for their activism.<sup>74</sup> Pro-Palestine protests, marches, and rallies at the DNC resulted in 76 arrests. These arrests resulted mainly in municipal citations for disorderly conduct, misdemeanors, and some felonies.<sup>75</sup> Four protestors were hospitalized as a result of injuries sustained during their arrests.

Law enforcement violence was especially severe during crackdowns on encampments in the spring. Over 3,200 arrests on campuses were recorded in response to student mobilizations.<sup>76</sup> For example, on April 22, NYPD arrested over 100 people, including students, faculty, and community members, dismantling the Gaza Solidarity Encampment at Gould Plaza at NYU as protestors were praying, due to complaints about “intimidating chants.”<sup>77</sup> A day after this mass arrest, the NYU administration erected plywood barricades to limit entry into school buildings. On May 3, students re-erected tents and were met with NYPD aggression, leading to the arrest of 13 people.

On February 9, students from SDS at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) engaged in a sit-in at the UWM administrative building, Chapman Hall.<sup>78</sup> The administration called on approximately ten law enforcement agencies, which arrested four students who remained in the building after it officially closed at 5pm. Students continued to organize, leading to protests at the UW-System Board of Regents meetings on June 6 and December 5, where students protested during the financial meeting of the open session to demand disclosure and divestment from Israel.<sup>79</sup> The protests led to 24 arrests.

On April 27, at Washington University in St. Louis, more than 100 students and faculty were brutally arrested as they marched to set up an encampment to demand an end to the University’s contract with Boeing.<sup>80</sup>

In late April, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers violently arrested more than 130 protestors at two different protests including the encampment and demonstration at UT Austin. Texas troopers arrived in riot gear and deployed pepper spray and flash bangs to halt protest activities.<sup>81</sup>



On April 30, NYPD stormed the bustling community encampment at the City College of New York (CCNY) in the heart of Harlem and arrested approximately 170 people.<sup>82</sup> Of those arrested, 28 were charged with various felonies and misdemeanors. Though charges against 20 of the protestors were dropped, felony charges have proceeded against the remaining eight protestors.

On May 1, SWAT officers and other law enforcement agencies surrounded and raided the encampment at Tulane University in New Orleans, arresting 14 protestors.<sup>83</sup> The encampment lasted for about 33 hours until the police and SWAT ended it.

On May 4, students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) set up an encampment on the lawn of the Art Institute of Chicago that Chicago police cleared within hours, arresting 68 students.<sup>84</sup>

On May 21, at the University of Michigan, the Department of Public Safety and Security utilized pepper spray to arrest and detain 4 protestors, leaving at least 3 people hospitalized.<sup>85</sup>

Law enforcement violence and prosecutorial overreach were major tools of anti-Palestinian repression nationwide in 2024. Organizers, both on and off campus, persisted in the face of these threats, ensuring that the call for Palestinian liberation would not be silenced.

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**LAW ENFORCEMENT VIOLENCE AND PROSECUTORIAL OVERREACH WERE MAJOR TOOLS OF ANTI-PALESTINIAN REPRESSION NATIONWIDE IN 2024. ORGANIZERS, BOTH ON AND OFF CAMPUS, PERSISTED IN THE FACE OF THESE THREATS, ENSURING THAT THE CALL FOR PALESTINIAN LIBERATION WOULD NOT BE SILENCED.**

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A school board meeting in Berkeley, California. Photo credit: Leon Kunstenaar

# REPRESSION ON K-12 CAMPUSES

While the protests taking place on college campuses nationwide against Israeli atrocities grabbed many headlines in 2024, K-12 students and teachers also demonstrated their solidarity with Palestine. K-12 students and educators faced harsh consequences, including suspensions, reassignments, false accusations of antisemitism, censorship, and termination.<sup>86</sup> Palestine Legal received 101 intakes concerning K-12 schools in 2024.

Amid this repression, K-12 students across the country made their voices heard,<sup>87</sup> calling for accurate education that includes Palestine, and brave teachers continued to steadfastly support their students' demands, teaching the truth about Palestine.<sup>88</sup> In the broader context of the Trump administration's push to curtail curricula that accurately address issues of race, gender, and imperialism,<sup>89</sup> this commitment to truth was more important than ever.

## ATTACKS ON TEACHERS

Most K-12 related incidents reported to Palestine Legal concerned teachers, many of whom faced termination, suspension, or reassignment, or were fearful of those actions. Many also had their lessons, bookshelves, classroom decor, or personal expressions censored.<sup>90</sup>

In December, three teachers at Philadelphia's Baldi Middle School were forced out of their roles after trying to support their Palestinian students. They filed a complaint with the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), alleging that the school discriminated against Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students; infringed on students' First Amendment-protected speech; and disciplined the teachers for their support of Palestinian students and Palestinian human rights.<sup>91</sup>

Other school districts faced competing civil rights complaints, including complaints from pro-Israel organizations that conflated expressions of support for Palestinian human rights with antisemitism, and complaints from students, parents, and teachers subjected to anti-Palestinian discrimination by their schools.

For example, in March, the Anti-Defamation League and a lawfare organization called the Louis D. Brandeis Center filed a complaint alleging that expressions of Palestine solidarity in the Berkeley Unified School District in California were a threat to Jewish students.<sup>92</sup> One of the main examples in the complaint involved a Palestinian flag placed in a classroom window by a second-grade teacher, along with a display of many other flags, such as a Black Lives Matter flag and a Pride flag.<sup>93</sup>

In May, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) and Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) filed a complaint against the same Berkeley district alleging anti-Palestinian discrimination detailing experiences of numerous students, parents, and staff.<sup>94</sup> The complaint included a Muslim fourth-grade student who was told she could not give a presentation on Palestine in class, a student's hijab being ripped off, Muslim students being taunted as terrorists, and parents harassing students participating in pro-Palestine walkouts.

In addition to censorship and punishment experienced by individual teachers, curricula including accurate information about the oppression of Palestinians were concertedly attacked.<sup>95</sup> These efforts dovetailed with broader attacks on ethnic studies, which are now also under increasing attack by the Trump administration and allied anti-DEI crusaders.<sup>96</sup>

In a major victory over Zionist efforts to interfere with academic freedom and ethnic studies curricula, a judge dismissed a two-and-a-half-year-old lawsuit against the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium in November.<sup>97</sup> Despite the lawsuit's claim that the model curriculum—especially the inclusion of materials about Israel, Palestine, and anti-Zionism—was discriminatory and antisemitic, the Court ruled that the Plaintiffs were not able to show that they suffered any harm and that “learning about Israel and Palestine or encountering teaching materials with which one disagrees” does not constitute an injury.

Other significant advances in organizing in support of Palestine in the K-12 context included the expansion of the Middle East Children's Alliance's (MECA) Teach Palestine, a project “to support educators in bringing Palestine into their classrooms so K-12 students learn about a people often excluded from the curriculum and have historical context in which to situate current events.”<sup>98</sup>

In response to grassroots pressure and organizing, many teachers unions followed the trend of other sectors of organized labor in taking increasingly strong positions in support of Palestine, and even, in some cases, ratifying divestment from Israel.<sup>99</sup> In October, United Teachers Los Angeles, the union for employees in the country's second-largest school district, passed a resolution calling for the US to halt the sale of more than \$20 billion in arms to Israel.<sup>100</sup>

In December, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, the two largest teachers unions in the United States representing millions of educators, each called publicly for a ceasefire in Gaza.<sup>101</sup>

# ATTACKS ON STUDENTS

In 2024, K-12 students expressing their support for Palestine also faced repression in their schools, alongside their teachers and staff.<sup>102</sup>

On June 4, Palestine Legal wrote to Barrington High School in Illinois after three graduating students carried Palestinian flags while receiving their diplomas

and were verbally abused by members of the audience.<sup>103</sup>

Rather than condemn the racial harassment these students experienced at their graduation ceremony, the school's leadership sent out a message claiming, without evidence, that the students had demonstrated disruptive behavior.

In December, the Minnesota chapter of CAIR filed a discrimination complaint with OCR against Edina Public Schools after two students were suspended for three days for chanting “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” during a schoolwide walk-out.<sup>104</sup>

Many middle and high school students remained undeterred in the face of repression, continuing to organize in support of Palestine. At Somerville High School in Massachusetts, students, parents and community members demonstrated each weekday morning for several weeks in the spring semester.<sup>105</sup> And in Oakland, California, more than 100 students walked out of Westlake Middle School, accusing the Oakland Unified School District of suppressing discussions about Palestine after they canceled a planned event.<sup>106</sup>

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Writers Against the War on Gaza (WAWOG) protest at The New York Times headquarters on March 14, 2024. Photo credit: Julia Sharpe-Levine

## CENSORSHIP

2024 saw a continuation of anti-Palestinian censorship as institutions across sectors sought to suppress Palestinian voices and criticism of Israel.

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**DESPITE EFFORTS TO CENSOR PALESTINIAN AND PRO-PALESTINIAN VOICES, CALLS FOR PALESTINIAN LIBERATION CONTINUED TO GROW AS ADVOCATES FOUND CREATIVE WAYS TO AMPLIFY THEIR MESSAGES.**

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## FIGHTING CENSORSHIP AT HARVARD LAW REVIEW

In late spring, human rights lawyer and doctoral candidate Rabea Eghbariah wrote a 105-page article, “Toward the Nakba as a Legal Concept,”<sup>107</sup> slated for publication in the Harvard Law Review. Eghbariah’s article went through all the customary edits and cite-checks.<sup>108</sup> In an unprecedented move, Harvard Law Review editors voted to spike the entire article prior to publication.<sup>109</sup>

Students from the Columbia Law Review then reached out to Eghbariah to solicit a new article from him that they would edit and publish.<sup>110</sup> This time, the student editors received pressure from the law review’s board of directors, a group of faculty and alumni, to halt the publication.<sup>111</sup> The students refused the board’s request and published Eghbariah’s article online.<sup>112</sup> The board swiftly shut down the entire website for several days.<sup>113</sup> Eghbariah noted that this instance goes beyond the “Palestine exception to academic freedom,” signifying a “culture of Nakba denialism.”<sup>114</sup>

In attempting to silence Eghbariah, however, these institutions instead amplified his work. After the law review website was shut down, students uploaded the article to a publicly accessible one.<sup>115</sup> Eghbariah’s article went viral,<sup>116</sup> was featured in major newspapers, and a PDF was posted widely on social media, getting far more readers than is typical for legal scholarship.<sup>117</sup>

Eghbariah’s experience was representative of anti-Palestinian censorship and bias throughout arenas including the mainstream media, the federal government, educational institutions, and social media companies.



In 2024, the United States government was also complicit in erasing the gravity of the genocide in Palestine. For example, the US House of Representatives voted in an amendment to a State Department appropriations bill to prevent the department from citing the death toll figures provided by the Gaza Ministry of Health,<sup>118</sup> even though several international bodies, including the World Health Organization and the United Nations, verified the credibility of its data on Palestinians known to have been killed by Israeli military forces.<sup>119</sup> Representative Rashida Tlaib condemned the vote, which as of the time of this writing has not passed in the Senate, as “genocide denial.”<sup>120</sup>

Censorship was also a major tool of repression on university campuses to silence student advocates. The University of Southern California named graduating senior Asna Tabassum as valedictorian, then barred her from speaking at graduation because of her public support for Palestinian rights.<sup>121</sup> Though the Provost claimed he prevented her from speaking because of so-called “safety concerns,” there was no evidence that anyone’s safety was at risk from a valedictorian speech.<sup>122</sup>

Social media censorship likewise spiked, even after investigations documented bias against Palestinian content during the Palestinian unity uprising in 2021.<sup>123</sup> Instagram permanently deleted Within Our Lifetime (WOL) and WOL chair Nerdeen Kiswani’s accounts, alleging that they violated the platform’s community guidelines, including its “Dangerous Organizations & Individuals policy.”<sup>124</sup>

Social media platforms engaged in widespread censorship of Palestine content including unwarranted content takedowns, account suspensions, and other restrictions on users posting about Palestine, which the organization 7amleh concluded was an intentional effort to “aggressively over-moderat(e) Palestine-related content,” even while hateful incitement against Palestinians proliferated.<sup>125</sup>

Despite efforts to censor Palestinian and pro-Palestinian voices, calls for Palestinian liberation continued to grow as advocates found creative ways to amplify their messages.





New York City Labor for Palestine rally. Photo credit: Labor for Palestine National Network and United Auto Workers Labor for Palestine

# WORKPLACE ORGANIZING AND DISCRIMINATION

At the end of 2023, following a wave of Palestine-related terminations across many sectors, the United Auto Workers (UAW) became one of the largest unions in the US to support a ceasefire in Gaza.<sup>126</sup>

President Shawn Fain, recalling progressive labor’s anti-war and anti-militarist legacy, called on “the rest of the labor movement to join us in the mission for peace and social justice for all of humanity.”<sup>127</sup> By July 2024, a coalition of seven unions<sup>128</sup> including the UAW, United Electrical Workers, American Postal Workers Union, and more, sent a letter to Biden demanding the end of US military aid to Israel.<sup>129</sup>

On the heels of a historic strike and contract win, the relative strength of UAW's worker power was able to shift the tide of the labor establishment, which has historically broken from the rank-and-file in its support of Israeli apartheid.<sup>130</sup> Rank-and-file organizing continued to lead the way, highlighting that the UAW, while calling for an end to military aid, continued to hold potentially up to \$1,000,000 in investments in Israel Bonds. On the morning of October 7, 2024,<sup>131</sup> UAW Labor for Palestine confronted Fain, pressuring him to vote for the union's full divestment, in solidarity with the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions supporting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement.

Attempts to silence labor's opposition to genocide in 2024 created a climate of fear and self-censorship but were ultimately unsuccessful. Teachers unions continued to speak out,<sup>132</sup> and groups like Healthcare Workers for Palestine and No Tech for Apartheid continued to raise public consciousness about US-funded and enabled genocide. Graduate and faculty unions were central players in defending the encampments on campuses, and, in some instances, filed Unfair Labor Practice charges for universities' violent repression of students and workers.<sup>133</sup>

At the same time, anti-Palestinian workplace repression and discrimination continued unabated, especially in non-unionized sectors. In 2024, Palestine Legal received reports of 537 workplace related incidents, including 162 terminations.

While in 2023 high-profile terminations sent shock waves through media and cultural industries, in 2024 there was an increased number of low- to median-wage workers impacted: bank receptionists, drug store cashiers, grocery store clerks, forklift drivers, retail workers, and more. Certain industries continued to be affected at a higher rate, including tech workers, cultural workers, K-12 educators, and healthcare workers.

Many of these individuals were disciplined and retaliated against for expressions of Palestine solidarity or targeted based on their

national origin. For example, Palestine Legal documented the cases of many Lebanese and Palestinian workers who were treated with open hostility and discrimination for their expressions of mourning during the genocide in Gaza and attacks on Lebanon.

In September, three gallery attendants were fired at the Noguchi Museum in New York for wearing kuffiyehs, in alleged violation of a dress code updated a month prior.<sup>134</sup>

In December, CAIR-CA and Legal Aid At Work brought legal action demanding the reinstatement of a nurse in California who was terminated merely for having a Palestine sticker on a water bottle.<sup>135</sup>

At Cisco, employees were subjected to workplace harassment for raising concerns about the use of the company's technologies in support of Israel's military operations

in Gaza. Complaints filed in December by Legal Aid At Work on behalf of employees alleged that these concerns were unlawfully suppressed in violation of federally protected rights to engage in concerted activity.<sup>136</sup>

At a historic juncture for the future of the labor movement, workers across the nation continued to risk their jobs and livelihoods organizing in support of Palestine. Such organizing will surely prove to be a crucial node of resistance against the authoritarian, anti-labor agenda of Trump and his backers.

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## THE CIVIL RIGHTS LAW SHUTTING DOWN PRO- PALESTINE SPEECH



Screenshot of article in Jewish Currents featuring Palestine Legal on weaponization of Title VI laws

## LAWFARE

Across the country, Zionist organizations continued their longstanding strategy of lawfare—the aggressive use of lawsuits and other legal proceedings as a form of political repression—to target advocacy groups, individual activists, institutions, and international organizations demonstrating solidarity with Palestine in 2024. While many of those efforts were vigorously challenged, there were also concerning decisions in some cases, demonstrating that courts will continue to be a site of struggle.

Israel advocacy groups continued to abuse anti-discrimination law in 2024, bringing federal lawsuits and administrative complaints with OCR against universities for alleged antisemitism based on Palestine organizing on campuses, under Title VI of the Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

In August 2024, one such lawsuit against UCLA resulted in a federal judge issuing a preliminary injunction ordering that the university stop providing “ordinarily available programs, activities and campus areas to any students,” in the event that any of these areas become unavailable to Jewish students “who hold certain religious beliefs concerning the Jewish state of Israel.”<sup>137</sup> The court found that the plaintiffs, Jewish students who support Israel, had “put forward a colorable claim” that UCLA acts had violated their Free Exercise Clause rights, purportedly from pro-Palestine protests that had occurred on campus—even though it was Palestinian and allied students who were violently attacked in their encampment by pro-Israel mobs.<sup>138</sup>

In New York, NYU settled a Title VI lawsuit against the university, and shortly after announced that its non-discrimination and anti-harassment policy includes Zionism as a protected identity class—a serious blow to freedom of political expression on that campus.<sup>139</sup>

In Massachusetts, a federal judge dismissed a Title VI lawsuit filed by the Israel advocacy organization StandWithUs alleging antisemitism against MIT on the grounds that the university had taken steps to suppress pro-Palestine student protestors, including with arrests, suspensions, and criminal trespassing charges.<sup>140</sup>

Of the Title VI complaints filed by Israel-aligned groups with OCR, several led to resolution agreements between OCR and universities. The University of Michigan,<sup>141</sup> North Carolina State University,<sup>142</sup> City University of New York,<sup>143</sup> and Brown University,<sup>144</sup> among others, agreed to revise their anti-discrimination policies in resolution agreements with OCR.

Israel-aligned groups also brought a number of “SLAPP” (strategic lawsuit against public participation) suits in 2024 aimed at silencing Palestinian and pro-Palestinian voices. For example, in New York, five current and former Columbia students sued twenty-one defendants, including Ilhan Omar; Jamaal Bowman; Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez; Columbia-AAUP; a number of students, including alleged leaders of Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace; and a number of leaders and representatives of International

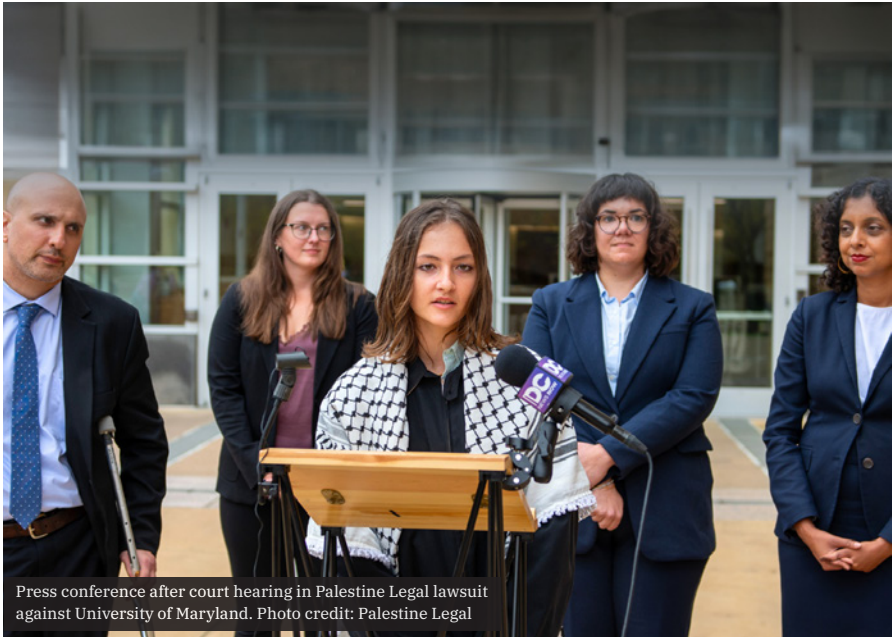
Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), over alleged speech activity supportive of Palestine, raising a host of specious claims and demanding monetary damages.<sup>145</sup> The ACLU and other lawyers representing the defendants moved to dismiss the complaint as a SLAPP suit in January 2025.<sup>146</sup>

In Illinois, plaintiffs sued a number of movement organizations and individuals for “false imprisonment,” among other claims related to an autonomously organized protest action on the highway leading to Chicago O’Hare airport.<sup>147</sup> Two separate lawsuits were filed against the anti-war organization CODEPINK and other groups for a protest held outside a synagogue where real estate in illegal West Bank settlements was being put up for auction.<sup>148</sup>

Zionist groups also brought a number of specious lawsuits against grassroots pro-Palestine organizations and individuals alleging violations of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), which provides civil remedies for victims of acts of international terrorism. Though one such suit that was filed against USCPR in 2019 was defeated in January 2024,<sup>149</sup> several others were filed through the year. One lawsuit, filed in Virginia, falsely alleges that American Muslims for Palestine and National Students for Justice in Palestine operate as the propaganda wing of Hamas.<sup>150</sup> Another suit targeted UNRWA USA, alleging without evidence that the US affiliate of the UN aid agency aided and abetted the October 7 attacks.<sup>151</sup> A similar suit against AP News alleged that it aided and abetted the October 7 attacks because its freelance photographers in Gaza were allegedly “Hamas affiliates.” The lawsuit was decisively dismissed in December by a Florida federal court.<sup>152</sup>

The longstanding Zionist strategy of lawfare to silence Palestinian and pro-Palestinian voices accelerated in 2024, requiring significant legal resources to defend against frivolous claims. Despite these attempts to litigate the movement into silence, the solidarity movement has remained undeterred, and organizers continue to insist on the justice of the call for Palestinian liberation.





Press conference after court hearing in Palestine Legal lawsuit against University of Maryland. Photo credit: Palestine Legal

# AFFIRMATIVE LITIGATION

Palestine advocates brought a number of legal actions challenging unlawful attempts to silence and punish their speech, and aiming to hold perpetrators—from universities, to employers, to government officials—accountable. While the lawsuit brought on behalf of Palestinian victims of the genocide by the Center for Constitutional Rights against President Biden, Secretary of State Blinken, and Secretary of Defense Austin for aiding and abetting genocide was again dismissed by a federal circuit court in July 2024 even after the district court recognized it was plausible that Israel was committing genocide,<sup>153</sup> efforts towards accountability continue.

Students, in particular, have challenged the repression they have faced on campuses, filing lawsuits in state and federal court in

addition to Title VI complaints with OCR.<sup>154</sup> Many of these cases are still winding their way through the courts, but 2024 saw two important victories for campus-based political expression.

In October 2024, a federal district court held that Texas Governor Greg Abbot's Executive Order GA-44, which directed universities to incorporate the politically motivated IHRA definition of antisemitism into policies, violated the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. In his order, Judge Robert Pitman stated, "the Court finds the incorporation of this specific definition of antisemitism is viewpoint discrimination."<sup>155</sup>

The lawsuit, *Students for Justice in Palestine v. Abbot*, was brought by several student groups at the University of Houston, the University of Texas (UT) Dallas, and UT Austin. The plaintiffs alleged that by labeling as antisemitic activities such as educating the campus community on why SJP "and so many others view Israel as an apartheid state" and calling "Israel's conduct a genocide in Gaza and an apartheid system elsewhere" antisemitic, the speech activity was proscribed.

The court agreed. In its order, the court took specific issue with the IHRA definition's contemporary examples, noting that the policies which label "calling the State of Israel a racist endeavor" and "drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis as antisemitic," "make that speech punishable, thereby chilling it."<sup>156</sup> The decision was an important first blow by a court to the definition, which Israel groups have been pushing for years, and the Trump administration is championing as a tool to punish Palestine advocates.

After the University of Maryland (UMD) revoked permission it had previously given to UMD Students for Justice in Palestine (UMD-SJP) to hold an interfaith vigil on October 7, 2024—and subsequently banned all non-university hosted expressive activity on that day—Palestine Legal and CAIR filed a preliminary injunction on behalf of the student group, arguing that UMD's action violated the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.<sup>157</sup>

On September 30, 2024, a federal district court judge granted the injunction, holding that the university could not bow to threats from



pro-Israel individuals by shutting down UMD SJP's event, noting that if the university was allowed to do so, SJP "will lose the opportunity to express its grievances and commemorate the loss of life on what it believes is a sacrosanct day."<sup>158</sup>

UMD's censorship came after it was heavily lobbied by pro-Israel groups and individuals to bar the vigil, with one letter claiming that if the university were to allow students to say that Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza or use the phrase "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free"

(a call for equality<sup>159</sup>) it would violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>160</sup> In response, the court noted that these "are expressive of ideas" and that "[t]here is no reason why they should not be given protection as speech when they are used in the forum of a public university."<sup>161</sup>

The University responded to the lawsuits by claiming that it was forced to cancel all events due to racist threats from pro-Israel individuals, who had threatened to

organize a KKK rally and come to campus armed if SJP's vigil was allowed to proceed.<sup>162</sup> At the hearing, University of Maryland Police Chief David Mitchell noted that pro-Israel individuals even threatened UMD President Darryl Pines's family and used the N-word.

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**PALESTINE ADVOCATES  
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CHALLENGING UNLAWFUL  
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AND PUNISH THEIR  
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HOLD PERPETRATORS—  
FROM UNIVERSITIES, TO  
EMPLOYERS, TO GOVERNMENT  
OFFICIALS—ACCOUNTABLE.**

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## Anti-Mask Laws Target Gaza Protests, But They Threaten All Progressive Movements

By Lewis Raven Wallace, TRUTHOUT

May 21, 2024



Screenshot of article in Truthout on anti-mask laws

## LEGISLATION

2024 saw a proliferation of bills that directly aimed to suppress the movement for Palestinian liberation. Lawmakers on both the federal and state levels introduced legislation to adopt distorted definitions of antisemitism that would quash criticism of Israel, target students' ability to receive federal financial aid, and ban masks due to the rise of protests in support of Palestine. They also continued the effort to prevent boycotts of Israel.

Proponents of these anti-Palestinian bills were the same lawmakers driving other right-wing legislation targeting other movements and marginalized communities. The following highlights only some of the many examples of repressive legislation against the movement for Palestinian liberation introduced in 2024.

# LEGISLATION TARGETING STUDENTS AND STUDENT GROUPS ON CAMPUSES

Legislation targeting students who advocate for Palestine was introduced on the federal level in 2024, aimed at undermining tuition assistance and loan forgiveness.

In April, the House passed a bipartisan resolution condemning the common protest chant, “From the River to the Sea” as antisemitic.<sup>163</sup>

A federal bill introduced in May, H.R.8242, would make anyone convicted of any offense under federal or state law related to their conduct during a protest at an institution of higher education ineligible for federal student loan forgiveness, cancelation, waiver, or modification.<sup>164</sup>

Introduced in November, H.R. 10257, the Protect Economic Freedom Act, would cause colleges and universities to lose their ability to receive federal student aid if they engage in a “non-expressive commercial boycott” of Israel.<sup>165</sup> The bill would also require colleges and universities to certify that they are not engaging in such a boycott.

A similar bill introduced in September in New York, NY A10721, would target individual students who are “found guilty of anti-semitism by any administrative tribunal or court of competent jurisdiction.”<sup>166</sup> NY A10721 states that such students would have their tuition assistance rewards suspended and would lose their award entirely if they did not repay all existing student loans or other relevant financial aid.

## ATTEMPTS TO CODIFY IHRA

There were multiple efforts to incorporate the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which primarily seeks to prohibit criticism of Israel, into anti-discrimination law and adjudicatory processes.

In New Jersey, S. 2940 was introduced in March, attempting to stifle student organizing for Palestine by adopting the IHRA definition. This bill would also prohibit higher education institutions from

“authorizing, facilitating, providing funding for, or otherwise supporting any event or organization promoting antisemitism or hate speech on campus.”<sup>167</sup>

Federal H.R. 7945, introduced in April, would direct federal officials to rely on IHRA when deciding whether antisemitism was motivating an alleged violation of a relevant civil rights law, like Title VI.<sup>168</sup> It would expand the scope of the first Trump Administration’s 2019 Executive Order 13899 directing executive agencies to consider IHRA in discrimination cases. The bill would require the inclusion of IHRA in federal agency and department anti-discrimination trainings and materials, as well as in federal jury instructions in criminal or civil actions involving antisemitism. The bill would also require federal agencies and departments to take IHRA into consideration when considering potential Title VI violations.

In April, S. 4127, the Antisemitism Awareness Act which previously failed to pass because of opposition, directs the Department of Education specifically to take IHRA into consideration when determining whether an alleged instance of harassment was motivated by antisemitism and therefore violated Title VI.<sup>169</sup> A new version of this bill was introduced in the Republican-dominated Congress in 2025, with its outcome still to be determined at the time of publishing.

Similarly, S. 5161, introduced in September, would amend Title VI to adopt a distorted definition of antisemitism that could encompass any and all criticism of Israel and would require the Department of Education to impose sanctions on institutions of higher education that violate Title VI with respect to antisemitic discrimination.<sup>170</sup>

## **LEGISLATION PRESSURING UNIVERSITIES TO SUPPRESS PALESTINE SPEECH AND PROTEST**

Several bills introduced in 2024 attempted to pressure universities to suppress campus speech and protests in support of Palestine. Federal

H.R. 8883, introduced in June, attempts to require higher education institutions to publicly disclose their campus protest policies and threatens the funding of institutions of higher education that do not suppress instances of “civil disturbance.”<sup>171</sup>

In California, high school students will be required by law, starting with the class of 2030, to complete a semester of ethnic studies. Lawmakers in California attempted to place “guardrails” on the law, via Assembly Bill 2918, in order to keep allegedly antisemitic content out of these courses.<sup>172</sup> These “guardrails” would have effectively quashed teaching about Palestine or Palestinians in the curriculum.

Numerous bills were introduced in an effort to prevent masks from being worn at protests in response to the rise in protests in support of Palestine, and the use of masking both as a health measure and to protect against widespread doxing of activists. In North Carolina, lawmakers stated that a law placing restrictions on mask use, which was eventually passed, was partly in response to widespread protests for Gaza on college campuses.<sup>173</sup> One facet of this law is an increase in punishment for crimes committed while wearing a mask.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost sent a letter to Ohio public universities in May explaining that an anti-KKK law could be used to bring felony charges against students who cover their face while protesting for Gaza.<sup>174</sup> In New York, Governor Kathy Hochul, Attorney General Letitia James, and New York City mayor Eric Adams also voiced support for a mask ban.<sup>175</sup> Such a bill was introduced in the New York State Senate in June.<sup>176</sup>

## **EFFORTS TO SUPPRESS BOYCOTTS AGAINST ISRAEL**

In Pennsylvania, Senate Bill 1260 was introduced in June to prohibit public entities, such as the State Employees’ Retirement System, from boycotting or divesting from Israel. It also would prohibit funding to institutions of higher education that engage in a boycott against or divestment from Israel.<sup>177</sup> H.R. 539 introduced in September in Pennsylvania was a non-binding resolution that would discourage

municipalities in PA from adopting local ordinances in support of the BDS movement.<sup>178</sup>

US Senate Bill 4770 was introduced in July and would prohibit federal agencies from contracting with companies engaged in a boycott of Israel and would require companies bidding for federal contracts to sign a written certification that they are not engaging in, and will not for the term of the contract, engage in a boycott of Israel.<sup>179</sup>

In April, Mississippi permanently extended its 2017 anti-BDS legislation and increased allowance for Israel bonds from \$20 million to \$50 million.<sup>180</sup>

One success from 2024 is the defeat, for the second year in a row, of legislation that would enshrine Governor Chris Sununu's anti-BDS executive order into New Hampshire law.<sup>181</sup>

Repeal efforts also continued in Minnesota. Introduced in February, SF3365 would repeal Minnesota's anti-boycott law, which prohibits the state legislature and state agencies from contracting with vendors that discriminate against Israel or persons or entities doing business in Israel.<sup>182</sup>

Anti-boycott and anti-divestment measures and efforts to enforce them often cause confusion about whether particular speech activities are affected by these laws. The vagueness of these bills contributes to an intended chilling of speech in support of Palestine.

## OTHER THREATS TO THE MOVEMENT FOR PALESTINE

Legislation was also introduced to criminalize protests in support of Palestine. Federal S. 4756 and its companion bill H.R. 9117, introduced in the wake of the Spring 2024 student encampments for Gaza, would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to immediately cancel visas for and expedite the deportation process of non-US citizens who are convicted of "Unlawful Protest-Related Activities."<sup>183</sup> The bill was a foreshadowing of Trump's early 2025

Executive Orders and actions targeting non-citizens for their advocacy on Palestine.

Federal S. 4136, along with its companion bill H.R. 6408, the so-called “non-profit killer bill,” was introduced in April to give discretion to the Secretary of the Treasury to terminate the tax-exempt status of nonprofit organizations based on a declaration that they are “terrorist supporting organizations.”<sup>184</sup> A letter signed by 134 civil liberties and other organizations noted to the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Committee on Finance that the bill appeared to be motivated by “anti-Palestinian bias aimed at stifling voices advocating for Palestinian human rights.”<sup>185</sup> A related bill, H.R. 9495, was introduced in September and also sought to terminate the tax-exempt status of “terrorist supporting organizations.”<sup>186</sup>

Successful mobilization prevented the passage of these bills in 2024.<sup>187</sup> If reintroduced and enacted into law under the new Congress and administration, such legislation would be used to justify the targeting of organizations that advocate for Palestinian human rights and liberation.

While the vast majority of the measures above did not pass, with a Republican trifecta in the White House and Congress, the likelihood that repressive legislation will be enacted has dramatically increased. The first months of the Trump administration reflected Trump’s willingness to bypass the legislative process by issuing executive orders that have already resulted in unlawful abductions, deportations, and revocation of lawful immigration status, among other consequences, for people expressing dissent on Palestine and Trump’s far right agenda more broadly. It is incumbent on all who support justice and freedom to continue to push back and challenge such legislation that could shape the legal landscape for decades to come.



University of Chicago 2024 student graduation. Photo credit: @ahmedvisualz

# CONCLUSION

2024 was a tremendous year of growth for the Palestine solidarity movement in response to ongoing horrors of the genocide in Palestine. Massive student mobilizations, capped off by the historic wave of encampments and building occupations, brought many new young people across the country into the struggle against genocide, apartheid, and settler colonialism. In the streets, on campuses, and in the workplace, people of conscience banded together in support of justice.

It was also a year marked by major repression, as state, institutional, and private actors opposed to Palestinian liberation sought to blunt the momentum of grassroots mobilizations. Universities, public and private, brought punitive and discriminatory disciplinary charges against student activists, censored Palestinian and pro-Palestinian



voices, subjected their students to law enforcement repression, and introduced new policies aimed at stymying criticism of Israel. K-12 schools also engaged in censorship and anti-Palestinian discrimination. Both on and off campuses, law enforcement agents engaged in violent repression of pro-Palestine protests and other forms of political expression. Israel advocacy groups launched smear campaigns and engaged in lawfare aimed at chilling criticism of Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza and US support for it. And lawmakers both state and federal sought to hamper the solidarity movement with new legislation.

In the face of these challenges from 2024—and new threats posed by the Trump administration into 2025—the movement for Palestinian liberation has stood strong and has continued to develop new and exciting forms of advocacy, protest, and mobilization.

As domestic repression inevitably increases with MAGA control of all branches, protecting free expression and political dissent will remain vital to sustaining the movement for Palestinian liberation and all other social justice movements in the face of an unfolding authoritarian crackdown.

The future, both in Palestine and in the US, may be uncertain. But regardless of what comes next, the new generation for liberation will carry the struggle for justice forward.

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# ENDNOTES

- 1 Data published in the 2022 Palestine Legal Year-in-Review report differs slightly because it excluded additional legal questions we received. This data reflects all legal requests that we documented between 2022 and 2024.
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