



2020 YEAR-IN-REVIEW

The Movement Will
Not Be Canceled



DESPITE

the pandemic placing much of the country on lockdown during 2020, activism for Palestinian rights continued to flourish in the United States. With universities going remote, students voted online to divest from companies complicit in Israeli human rights violations, professors organized webinars supporting Palestinian freedom on Zoom, and activists looked beyond geographic limitations, collaborating across the country and the world to hold a seemingly unprecedented number of virtual events about Palestine.

Amid this upheaval, one thing that remained consistent with past years was an amplified form of “cancel culture,” backed by the machinery of the state, that continued to target the movement for Palestinian rights. Palestinians and their allies faced false accusations, censorship, harassment, doxing, and condemnation for principled speech supporting Palestinian freedom.

University administrators wasted valuable time and resources criticizing student activism when they should have been focused on keeping the campus community healthy. Coordinated campaigns sought to remove Palestinian students and their allies from campus leadership positions. Israel advocacy groups and the federal government abused civil rights mechanisms to intimidate students and faculty. Legislators introduced new bills designed to discourage and vilify the movement for Palestinian equality and freedom. Big

tech censored postings and events on Palestinian resistance, and cyberharassment sites and apps rallied online trolls to file baseless complaints against activists.

Palestine Legal responded to 213 incidents of suppression of U.S.-based Palestine advocacy in 2020. In seven years, from January 1, 2014, through December 31, 2020, Palestine Legal responded to a total of 1,707 incidents. This data reflects only what was directly reported to Palestine Legal and is therefore not an exhaustive account of the suppression.

Eighty percent of incidents Palestine Legal responded to in 2020 targeted students and scholars at 68 campuses across the country. Additionally, we responded to 40 legal questions from activists who were concerned their rights were threatened.

State and federal lawmakers introduced at least 21 legislative measures in 2020 aimed at silencing, condemning, or punishing advocacy for Palestinian rights. These included bills targeting boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) as well as those adopting a distorted definition of antisemitism in an effort to shield Israel from criticism.

UNIVERSITIES PRIORITIZE ISRAEL AMID COVID CRISIS

While students and faculty struggled with questions around health, safety, and education in the early weeks of COVID-19 campus closures, administrators devoted time and energy to clamping down on campus activism for Palestinian rights.

In March 2020, just two days before announcing a campus shutdown that would last through the end of the year, in the city hardest hit at the start of the pandemic, **Columbia University** President Lee Bollinger issued a statement condemning a planned



2017 Photo of the alma mater sculpture at Columbia University wearing a keffiyeh scarf, a symbol of Palestinian identity.

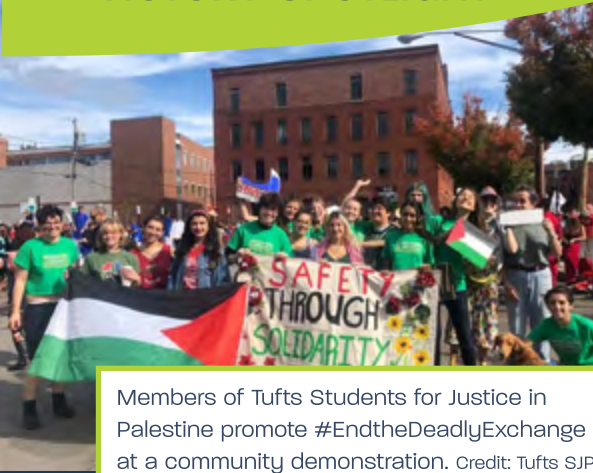
Credit: Columbia SJP

VICTORY SPOTLIGHT

Columbia Students Demand Divestment

In September, students at **Columbia University** resoundingly voted to divest from Israeli apartheid. Over 60 percent of students who participated in the referendum voted in favor of divestment.

The victory was the result of years of work by the **Columbia University Apartheid Divest** coalition, which has been campaigning on campus for divestment since 2016 in the face of repeated administrative condemnations belittling the group's economic activism in support of Palestinian rights. The university president issued a second statement opposing the vote the same day results were announced in October.



Members of Tufts Students for Justice in Palestine promote #EndTheDeadlyExchange at a community demonstration. Credit: Tufts SJP

Tufts Votes to End the Deadly Exchange

In November, Tufts students voted to #EndTheDeadlyExchange, calling on the university to apologize for and end its police department's training with the Israeli military. With 42 percent of students participating in the

referendum—and over 68 percent of voters supporting a ban on military training for Tufts police—the campaign to #EndTheDeadlyExchange brought out the highest special election turnout in Tufts' history. The landslide win was a fitting response to the administration's efforts to sideline the campaign, described above.

student referendum calling on Columbia to divest from companies complicit in Israeli human rights violations. Bollinger's statement falsely equated support for Palestinian rights with antisemitism.

In April, a week after Pennsylvania's statewide stay-at-home order went into effect, the president of **Point Park University** published an op-ed claiming that BDS "has no place at Point Park University" and that support for BDS was a form of antisemitism.

Later that month, **Tufts University** administrators published a statement condemning an award given to SJP for its work engaging dozens of diverse student organizations in a campaign to #EndTheDeadlyExchange between campus police and the Israeli military. In Tufts' first non-COVID-related statement since February, the administration stated that the award "should not have happened" and falsely accused the group of antisemitism over its support for BDS campaigns for Palestinian freedom.

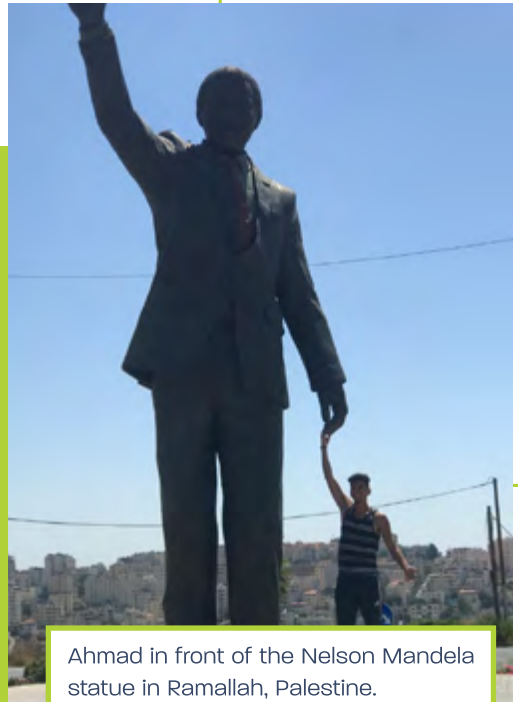
2020'S TARGETS OF THE YEAR: PALESTINIAN

STUDENT GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND THEIR ALLIES

Echoing attacks on Palestinian political leaders at the national level, Palestinian students and their allies faced an uptick in smear and harassment campaigns when elected to leadership positions while supporting equal rights for Palestinians. The campaigns to drive these students and their allies out of their positions often carried racist and anti-Muslim undertones and placed an additional burden on student leaders already juggling their work, their studies, and their health amid a global pandemic. Despite the harassment and intense backlash from off-campus critics, these student leaders often enjoyed support from their peers on campus.

At **Florida State University**, Florida politicians joined a politicized witch hunt against college junior Ahmad Daraldik, who was elected as president of the student senate, for social media posts he had made against the Israeli occupation. Daraldik maintained student support, surviving a no-confidence vote and initially remaining in office before being removed via a legal challenge. Daraldik faced attacks from across the state and the world, including:

- **Dozens** of Islamophobic, racist, violent, and misogynistic private messages to Daraldik;
- **Four** Florida legislators trying to pressure students to take action against Daraldik, including two who attended a student



Ahmad in front of the Nelson Mandela statue in Ramallah, Palestine.

Credit: Ahmad Daraldik

senate meeting where one of them implicitly threatened a withdrawal of state funding for the school;

- **Three** petitions calling for Daraldik's removal and even expulsion;
- **Two** university measures adopting the distorted IHRA definition of antisemitism and its examples designed to shield Israel from criticism;
- **Two** resolutions passed by city councils in Florida condemning Daraldik for posts critical of the occupation, including one resolution sponsored by a councilwoman with a history of Islamophobic, anti-Palestinian remarks;
- A statement released by the FSU administration condemning Daraldik for "anti-Israel rhetoric," which was later edited to refer to "antisemitic remarks";
- A mission on Act.il, an app partially funded by Israel, urging social media users to send pre-drafted messages to FSU complaining about Daraldik in return for rewards, badges, and online points; and
- A demand for Daraldik's removal by the director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, a department responsible for the state's COVID-19 response, while cases surged in the state.

The attacks on Daraldik have taken place against a backdrop of anti-Palestinian sentiment in Florida government. In 2019 Florida governor Ron DeSantis defied state law to hold a cabinet meeting in Israel, where he signed into law the controversial HB 741, which characterizes advocacy for Palestinian human rights as discrimination against Jews. Florida lawmakers have proposed 19 measures targeting advocacy for Palestinian rights since 2014.

At **CUNY Law School**, student body vice president Nerdeen Kiswani faced a character assassination campaign in September after posting an old video of herself waving a lighter while criticizing a friend for wearing a T-shirt promoting the Israeli military. The same Israel-funded Act.il app that had targeted Daraldik facilitated mass complaints to Kiswani's school, falsely claiming that the video depicted a threat against a fellow student. The law school hastily issued multiple

Butler Students Defeat Measures Censoring Palestine on Campus

Despite an effort to exclude Palestinian voices from the debate, students at **Butler University** in Indiana mounted a successful campaign in October against two resolutions cracking down on the right to advocate for Palestine on campus. The resolutions were proposed in retaliation against an art exhibit displaying posters about Palestinian and other boycotts and a know your rights event hosted by SJP and student government earlier that month.

One of the proposed resolutions condemned BDS while the other called for adopting a distorted definition of antisemitism designed to suppress criticism of Israel. The Butler administration sent a campus-wide email implying that the resolutions were the solution to the baseless allegations of antisemitism made against the exhibit and event.

During the initial debate on the resolutions, members of student government **excluded the only two Palestinians** in student government from participating in discussions. The student leaders, both Palestinian women, were unable to share the direct impact the resolutions would have on Palestinians and Palestine activism on campus.

Ultimately Butler student groups, Indianapolis community organizers, and Palestine Legal pushed back against the campaign to vilify and silence student activism. After hearing from students and community advocates about the harmful impact these anti-Palestinian measures would have, the student sponsors of the resolutions withdrew both resolutions.



“Boycott! The Art of Economic Activism” poster exhibition, created by American Friends Service Committee and the Center for the Study of Political Graphics.

statements on social media that seemed to credit the false narrative around the video.

Activists from around the country counteracted the anti-Palestinian pressure with a grassroots solidarity campaign, proudly declaring #WeStandWithNerdeen. The solidarity campaign helped persuade the school to delete its ill-informed postings. However, attempts to manufacture opposition to Kiswani continued, with an anti-Palestinian website featuring her in an “Antisemite of the Year” competition, where votes were solicited with a sweepstakes for Amazon gift cards.

At **Rutgers University**, the newly elected vice president of student government, Carolyn Assaf, faced backlash in April for old social media posts about freedom for Palestinians. The Anti-Defamation League, a pro-Israel group that is widely criticized for undermining justice movements, stated that Assaf was unfit to be a public leader because of her advocacy. Despite demands for removal, Assaf retained her position.



Allies in student government also faced and overcame backlash over their support for Palestinian rights. In May, **Stanford** student Mià Bahr was reelected to the university’s undergraduate senate despite a smear campaign that attempted to undermine her candidacy over posts criticizing Israel and police and military violence. In April, Anteaters United, a progressive slate of candidates for student government at the **University of California, Irvine**, was criticized

for receiving SJP’s electoral endorsement. The group proudly advertised SJP’s endorsement and went on to sweep the election with 26 of its 27 candidates winning seats.

EFFORTS TO ENFORCE TRUMP'S ANTI-PALESTINIAN EXECUTIVE ORDER

In late 2019, Donald Trump issued an executive order directing federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education, to employ a definition of antisemitism that encompasses virtually all criticism of Israel when evaluating civil rights complaints under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. In 2020, this executive order encouraged pro-Israel groups to file new threats against universities and resulted in multiple federal investigations. None of these investigations have revealed any wrongdoing by students, faculty, or the universities themselves. In July 2020, Kenneth Marcus, believed to have been a driving force behind these complaints and investigations, stepped down from his role as head of the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and returned to the Israel advocacy group Louis D. Brandeis Center.

In 2020, OCR opened at least four investigations into complaints against Palestine activism, at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Bard College, the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). As of March 2021, the UCLA, Bard, and UIUC investigations were still under way.

The **UCLA** investigation, opened in January 2020, centered around two complaints: one against the 2018 National Students for Justice in Palestine Conference and another against a May 2019 lecture on Islamophobia by Professor Rabab Abdulhadi.

The **Bard** investigation, opened in March, was based on a complaint against an October 2019 protest by Palestine solidarity activists during a panel featuring Ruth Wisse, a retired Harvard professor with a history of making bigoted anti-Palestinian remarks.



Members of Bard Students for Justice in Palestine, including clients Ben and Akiva.
Credit: Ben — Bard SJP

The **Georgia Tech** investigation, also opened in March, focused on a “Palestine 101” event and a decision by organizers not to admit a Hillel employee into the event after she announced what they understood were plans to disrupt the event. In January 2021, the Hillel employee agreed to drop the case in exchange for Georgia Tech posting a statement stating that antisemitism is unacceptable and recognizing Trump’s executive order.

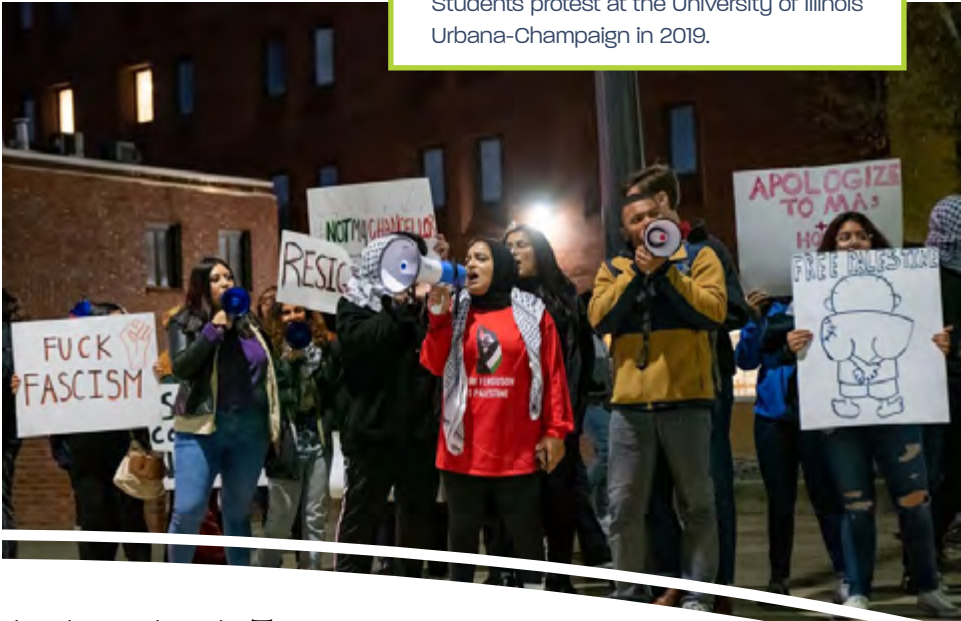
The **UIUC** investigation, opened in November, was based on a March 2020 complaint that focused primarily on advocacy by Palestinian students and their allies, including a divestment resolution, rallies against racism, and a presentation on protests in Gaza. The complaint also referenced several unrelated incidents of antisemitic vandalism on campus. Days after the investigation was opened, UIUC issued a joint statement with the groups that filed the complaint describing Zionism as an integral part of the identity of some Jewish students. The statement also included a line that could be read as requiring students to include campus groups that oppose Palestinian rights in “activities aimed at

fighting racism and achieving social justice.” Students and faculty spoke out forcefully against the statement for equating criticism of Israel with antisemitism and for disregarding the needs of other students on campus.

OCR also closed an investigation at **New York University** (NYU) in September 2020. After the NYU chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) received a school award for their on-campus organizing and coalition building in 2019, Israel advocates filed a complaint with OCR, and OCR opened an investigation. OCR ultimately closed the investigation with no findings of wrongdoing. Instead, it entered into an agreement with the university to revise its policies to include a statement prohibiting “discrimination on the bases of shared ancestry and ethnic characteristics, including anti-Semitism” as defined in Trump’s executive order; to issue a statement by the university president against antisemitism; to meet with students, faculty, and staff to discuss concerns about discrimination; and to include antisemitism in its anti-discrimination trainings.

Pro-Israel groups also relied on the executive order in threatening additional complaints against universities. In January 2020, an anti-Palestinian lawyer relied on the executive order to try to shut down a Palestinian youth conference at the **University of Michigan**. The university defended the students’ right to host the conference, and it took place without interference. In February, a right-wing attorney accused **Pomona College** and **Pitzer College** of civil rights violations for allowing student and faculty activism and campus events on Palestine. In March, a pro-Israel group demanded that the government reopen an earlier investigation of **Duke University**, in part because it failed to punish a student for social media posts critical of Israel. In April, a student who had dropped out of the **City University of New York** (CUNY) School of Law said she was in talks with a number of pro-Israel groups about filing a civil rights complaint alleging that widespread support for Palestinian rights on campus had made

Students protest at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2019.



the climate hostile. To our knowledge, none of these threats have resulted in an investigation, but students and an administrator have reported a chilling effect on campus activism.

Republicans Demand Inquiries into Middle Eastern Studies

Republican members of Congress also cited Trump's executive order when urging the Department of Education to investigate and potentially cut funding to Middle Eastern studies departments at the **University of Arizona, University of California, Berkeley, and Yale** because students and faculty at these universities voiced support for Palestinian rights. This followed threats by the Department of Education to defund the Duke-University of North Carolina Consortium for Middle Eastern Studies after it held a conference on Gaza in 2019. It is unclear whether the Department of Education opened investigations into any of these universities.

RESISTANCE CONTINUES

PALESTINIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT • INDEPENDENT JEWISH VOICES • FACULTY FOR PALESTINE • TORONTO BDS NETWORK

ISRAEL AS A RACIST ENDEAVOUR UNPACKING THE IHRA



MONDAY NOVEMBER 2
6:30PM EST

PANEL DISCUSSION

DR. SHERYL NESTEL
FAISAL BHABHA
KHALED MOUAMMAR
DR. GREG SHUPAK
DR. NAHLA ABDO

The Palestinian Youth Movement, Independent Jewish Voices, Faculty for Palestine, and the Toronto BDS Network organized an event in November directly challenging the legitimacy of the IHRA definition. Art by Elias Ayoub (eliasayoub.com)

Challenging IHRA

Pro-Israel groups continued to lobby for the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism in an effort to curb growing criticism of Israeli policy. They tried to leverage Trump's 2019 executive order on IHRA to push social media companies to use the definition as a censorship tool. Student governments at FSU and at least six other universities adopted the IHRA definition in 2020. Students have reported similar definitions appearing in mandatory antidiscrimination trainings at both UC Berkeley and UIUC.

The Trump-endorsed definition radically departs from a traditional understanding of antisemitism in its illustrative list of examples, which include “claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.”

Civil rights groups have long warned that this overbroad redefinition of antisemitism has been and will continue to be used as a tool to censor speech in support of Palestinian rights and to tar those who support such rights as anti-Jewish. Efforts to promote the redefinition may have played a role in an uptick in false and politically motivated accusations of antisemitism against supporters of Palestinian rights: Of the incidents Palestine Legal responded to in 2020, **66 percent** included false accusations of antisemitism.

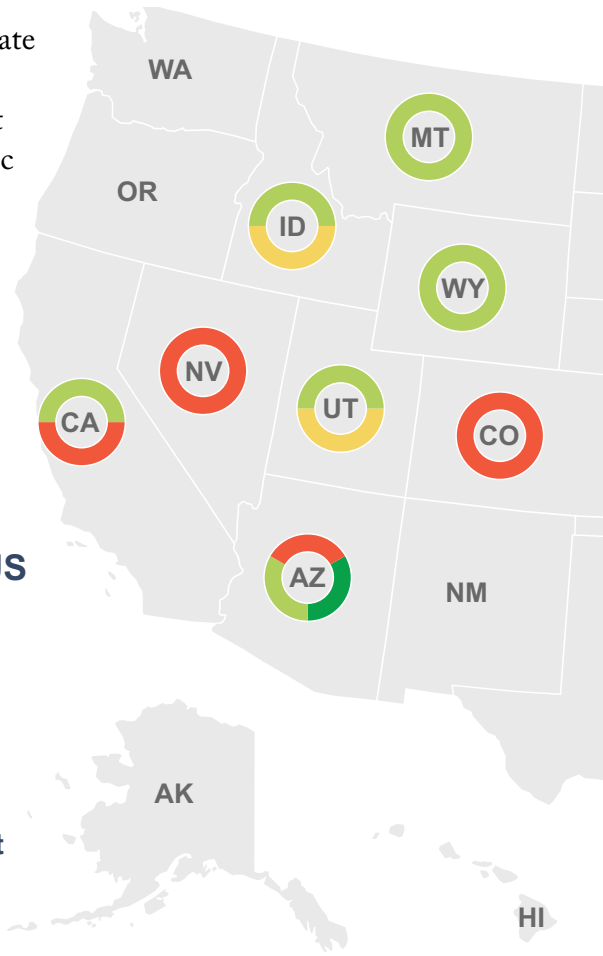
But advocates for Palestinian rights refused to be muffled by a redefinition that seeks to silence them. In February 2020, hundreds of academics in Canada signed an open letter opposing the redefinition. In April, students at Santa Monica College successfully pushed to remove Israel-related content from an antisemitism resolution proposed in student government. In September, 56 scholars urged Facebook not to adopt the IHRA definition. In October, students at Butler University defeated a proposed student government resolution adopting the IHRA definition. In early November, a coalition of organizers held an educational panel titled “Israel as a Racist Endeavour: Unpacking IHRA” to directly challenge the redefinition. Also in November, over one hundred Palestinian and Arab scholars and intellectuals issued an open letter challenging the legitimacy of the definition. Coalitions have also banded together to compile resources, including Independent Jewish Voices’ IHRA Report.

GOVERNMENT'S ONGOING CRACKDOWN ON PALESTINE ACTIVISM

In 2020, state and federal officials continued to devote government resources to silencing activists in the movement for Palestinian rights.

Legislators Push Repressive Measures

By the end of 2020, **30 states** had laws on the books intended to suppress boycotts for Palestinian rights. **South Dakota** governor Kristi Noem's first executive order of the year required state contractors to pledge not to boycott Israel. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the midst of the uprising for racial justice, lawmakers in **Missouri** and **Oklahoma** prioritized passing laws punishing boycotts for Palestinian

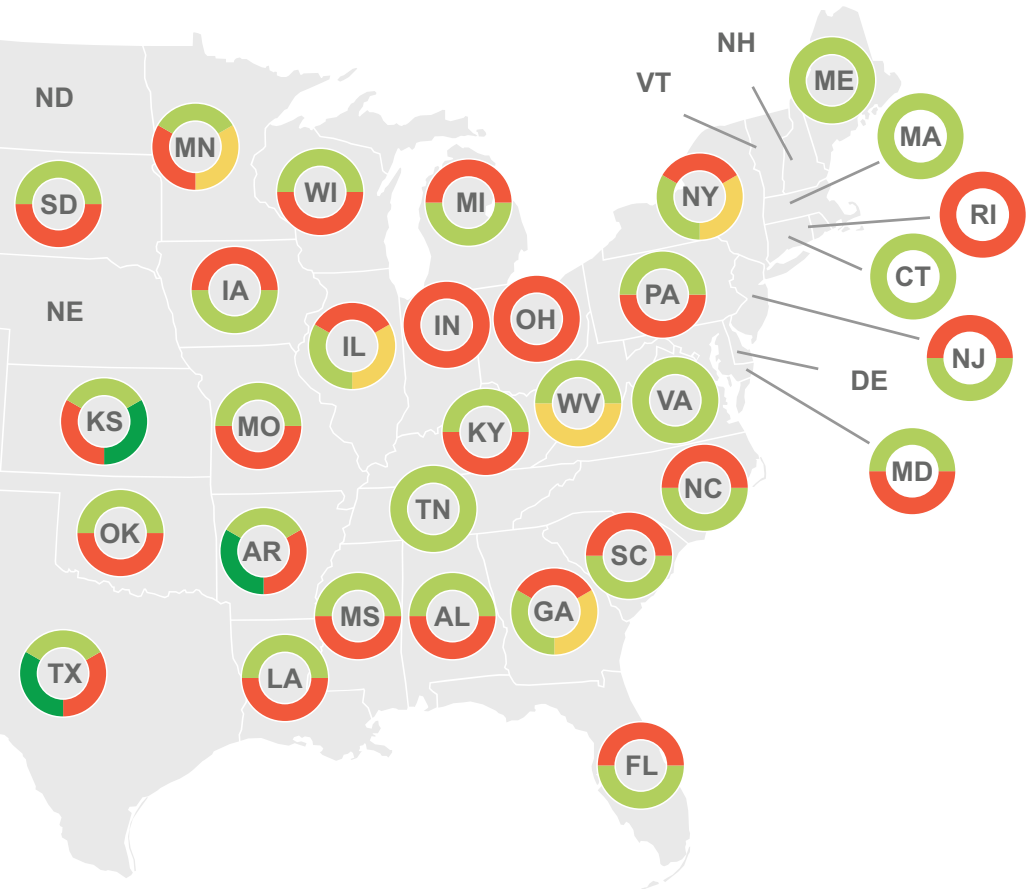


LEGISLATION STATUS

- ✓ No Legislation
- ✓ Pending
- ✓ In Effect
- ✓ Defeated
- ✓ Struck Down by Court

rights. National and state-level civil and human rights groups had organized to defeat similar bills in 2018 and 2019.

State lawmakers introduced at least 16 additional measures targeting advocacy for Palestinian rights in 2020. Nine of these were bills that aimed to establish a **distorted definition** of antisemitism aimed at silencing Palestine advocacy as enforceable law. In **Arizona**, lawmakers introduced a bill that would require the use of this distorted definition in hate crimes reporting and sentencing, meaning that criticism of Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights could be used as evidence of a hate crime or result in more severe sentences. The bill failed to pass after civil




rights groups and advocates raised concerns that it would chill protected speech.

In the **U.S. Congress**, federal lawmakers reintroduced the **Israel Anti-Boycott Act (IABA)**, which criminalizes participation in certain boycotts of Israel. The bill also prohibits “furnishing information” to the U.N. Human Rights Council’s database of entities contributing to Israel’s illegal settlements, in an effort to punish international accountability efforts. Violations may be punishable by fines up to \$1 million in criminal cases. As with previous versions, the 2020 IABA conflates coercive commercial boycotts with constitutionally protected political expression in support of Palestinian rights. The bill failed to pass.

RESISTANCE CONTINUES

First Amendment Lawsuits

In February 2020, the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund filed a lawsuit on behalf of journalist and filmmaker **Abby Martin**, who had been invited to speak at a conference at Georgia Southern University. The event was canceled after Martin refused to sign a pledge to not boycott Israel, required under Georgia law. As of March 2021, the lawsuit was still pending in federal court. In October 2020, a Maryland federal district court judge dismissed a lawsuit on behalf of **Saqib Ali** challenging Maryland’s anti-boycott executive order. The judge found that Ali did not have standing to challenge the law because he had not applied for or been awarded a state contract. Ali has filed an appeal with the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.



New Yorkers protest Governor Cuomo's executive order attacking the right to boycott for Palestinian rights.

Credit: Sainatee Suárez

State Department's Anti-BDS Offensive

In the final weeks of the Trump administration, the State Department made a frantic push to act on earlier promises of a “whole-of-government approach” against boycotts for Palestinian rights. Early reports stated that the State Department would designate prominent human rights and humanitarian organizations Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Oxfam as antisemitic over advocacy work that was critical of Israel and affirmed Palestinian rights, which the State Department perceived to demonstrate support for BDS. Ultimately, the department released graphics stating that “anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism” and announced plans to identify organizations that support BDS, but did not name any organizations before the change in administrations. The State Department also announced that products produced in illegal Israeli settlements would be labeled “Made in Israel” and that Palestinian products made in the West Bank and Gaza had to be labeled with either “West Bank” or “Gaza.” The moves were viewed as part of an effort to legitimize Israel’s illegal settlements and undermine Palestinian identity.

California Cuts Palestine Out of Ethnic Studies

The California Department of Education buckled under a pressure campaign launched by pro-Israel groups. The groups were outraged that a model curriculum for teaching ethnic studies released in 2019 contained two references to BDS in lists of potential topics for lesson plans on Arab American studies and social movements. Revisions to the curriculum in 2020 removed all mention of not only BDS but also Palestine, and demoted Arab American studies to a secondary appendix. The changes to the curriculum so undermined the purposes of ethnic studies that the entire 20-person advisory committee of ethnic studies experts appointed to create the curriculum removed their names from the draft. The Save Arab American Studies Coalition organized throughout the year and into 2021 to return the curriculum to the principles of ethnic studies and restore Arab American studies to the curriculum.

CYBER TOOLS AND BIG TECH ENLISTED TO CENSOR AND HARASS

Israel proxy groups and right-wing organizations escalated the use of technological tools in service of a well-documented strategy to “cancel” Palestine solidarity advocates online and attempted to influence tech companies in their censorship campaigns.

After Zoom Censors Class, Big Tech Blocks Events and Posts on Censorship

In September, right-wing Israel advocacy groups pressured tech companies to censor an online class featuring Palestinian activist Leila Khaled. The class was jointly organized by **San Francisco State University** (SFSU) professors Rabab Abdulhadi and Tomomi Kinukawa. It featured a panel of Palestinian, Black, Jewish, and South African activists.



Zoom censors Palestine at University of Hawai'i and NYU

Zoom, the platform being used to teach SFSU classes during the pandemic, threatened to terminate the license for the entire California State University system if the class included Khaled, because of her involvement in two hijackings fifty years ago and her role in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The professors refused to change the content of their lesson, and the university did not cancel the class. Instead Zoom unilaterally canceled the class session. When SFSU failed to provide the professors an alternative platform, they attempted to livestream the class on Facebook and YouTube. The tech giants also blocked the stream, leaving students with no live access to the class. In December, Abdulhadi and Kinukawa filed a claim against the university for violating their rights.

In October, on the one-month anniversary of the censored class, professors from across the country and around the world planned a series of solidarity events featuring a video of Leila Khaled. Events at the **University of Hawai'i-Manoa** and at **New York University** were blocked by Zoom, while eight events at other universities went ahead as scheduled. Like SFSU, the universities failed to press Zoom to respect academic freedom and failed to provide professors an adequate alternative that would allow them to go forward with live events. At both schools, the panels had to be recorded privately and posted online.

In the aftermath of these events, Palestine Legal received multiple reports of social media users having accounts suspended, placed under review, or partially disabled for sharing the events or even posting about the censorship.

VICTORY SPOTLIGHT



WHAT ARE WE DOING AT SFSU?

We are trying to pass a divestment resolution in relation to the overall BDS campaign

What does this mean?

It means we are calling on San Francisco State trustees to review their investments and to divest from companies that violate international humanitarian law by:

Facilitating state repression against Palestinians by Israeli security forces.

Facilitating Israel's collective punishment of Palestinian civilians.

Maintaining the illegal infrastructure of the Israeli occupation, in particular settlements, and separation walls.

Boycott . Divest . Sanction

Infographics about the Divestment Campaign from the General Union of Palestine Students at SFSU. Credit: SFSU GUPS

SFSU Associated Students Call for Divestment from Israeli Occupation

Students at **San Francisco State University** successfully passed a student government resolution calling for the university to divest from companies complicit in the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The resolution won a sweeping victory, with 17 votes in favor, 1 against, and 2 abstentions.

The General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) worked closely with other social justice student organizations on campus, including MeCHxA, the Black Student Union, and Students Against Displacement. Elected representatives were intimidated on social media to vote against the resolution, and GUPS thanked them for voting their conscience nevertheless.



The Israeli Headquarters of Act.il, an app with funding from the Israeli government that mobilizes an army of trolls around the world to target advocacy for Palestinian rights.
Taken from Electronic Intifada Article, "Inside Israel's Million Dollar Troll Army"

Blacklists and Weapons of Mass Complaints

Online blacklists and other cyberharassment sites continued to collect personal information about Palestinian rights advocates and falsely accuse them of antisemitism and terrorism in 2020.

Targeted harassment websites such as “BDS Report” and “StopAntisemitism” have fueled cyberbullying campaigns against student groups and organizers by portraying them on social media as antisemites and violent extremists. The StopAntisemitism website organizes petitions, articles, and social media graphics with false information and often tags the social media accounts of schools of targeted students and professors. At the **University of Massachusetts, Amherst**, the website BDS Report facilitated a petition falsely linking SJP to campus vandalism in an effort to get students expelled from the university. SJP rejected the baseless allegations.

StopAntisemitism has offered monetary incentives to the public for disseminating its false accusations, including awarding Amazon gift cards to sweepstakes participants who cast votes in its “Antisemite of the Year” contest. Half the people listed in the contest were listed solely for their support for Palestinian rights, including Palestinian activist Nerdeen Kiswani, IfNotNow co-founder Simone Zimmerman, and Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN), who was listed for introducing a bill that would prohibit U.S. taxpayer funding for the military detention of children by any country, including Israel.

STOPANTISEMITISM
use \$360 Amazon gift
cards to collect votes
in its “Antisemite of
the Year” contest.



A mobile phone app called Act.il has taken filing complaints against Palestinian rights organizers to a new level. With ties to Israeli intelligence and military and partially funded by the Israeli government, this software fast tracks the process of filing complaints by generating pre-drafted grievances and directing its base of users to send them to schools. In return, the app offers rewards for completing these “missions” with badges and points.

The complaints often targeted campus administrators demanding disciplinary action against activists. In a number of cases, including at Florida State University and CUNY Law described above, the Act.il app played a significant role in raising a false alarm and pushing universities to inquire into otherwise protected campus protest and speech.

Palestine Legal and allies called on people to report the mobile app to Google and Apple for encouraging harassment after the app targeted CUNY Law student Nerdeen Kiswani. Subsequently, the app shifted gears and targeted an advocacy organization that Kiswani founded and chairs, Within Our Lifetime, in order to “deplatform” the organization from its primary fundraising source.

Activists Persuade Court to Prevent Blacklisting

In 2019, a right-wing attorney with ties to the Israeli government sued the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to force the university to reveal the list of presenters at the 2018 National Students for Justice in Palestine (NSJP) conference, which took place at UCLA.

In September 2020, eight of the conference speakers intervened anonymously in the case to assert their right to privacy. The activists, represented by Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus, Palestine Legal, and the Law Office of Matthew Strugar, argued that in light of the well-documented backlash machine dedicated to doxing and smearing young advocates for Palestinian rights, revealing their names would expose them to unwarranted harassment and intimidation. In March 2021, court ruled in favor of the activists, finding that disclosing their names would not be in the public interest and would violate their rights to freedom of association, anonymous speech, and privacy.



THE PALESTINE EXCEPTION TO ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Students and educators who criticize Israel in their scholarship or who vocally support equal rights for Palestinians continued to face a well-documented nationwide campaign to censor and punish their speech.

In January 2020, **Ethical Culture Fieldston School** fired Jewish high school history teacher JB Brager for making statements critical of Israel and Zionism. Nearly 80 Jewish spiritual leaders, as well as students and alumni and other supporters, called on the private Bronx school to reinstate Brager. The school ignored these calls.



Illustration by Dr. JB Brager, who was fired from their job at a New York City private school over statements critical of Israel.

In February, **Case Western Reserve University** in Ohio replaced a Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) workshop on antisemitism with a workshop led by the anti-Palestinian Anti-Defamation League in a school-sponsored Social Justice Teach-in. The university claimed that a different workshop about Palestine had to be “balanced” with a pro-Israel point of view.

In May, **George Washington University (GWU)** announced that Dr. Ilana Feldman would be the interim dean of the Elliott School of International Affairs, where she serves as vice dean and as a professor. Israel advocacy groups immediately called on GWU to remove Feldman because of her scholarship on Palestine and her criticism of Israeli policies. The campaign generated thousands of signatures on a petition calling for Feldman’s removal and sparked hate mail to Feldman, including the message that her family should have perished in the Holocaust. GWU defended its decision, and Feldman continued to serve as interim dean until the university filled the position in January 2021.

In November, **Northeastern University** SJP organized a radical reading group to read, discuss, and critique excerpts of the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine’s 1969 pamphlet “Strategy for Liberation of Palestine.” The group, which had previously read works by Franz Fanon, Angela Davis, and Winona LaDuke, faced immediate backlash. After complaints, Instagram censored the post advertising the event, reportedly because of a drawing of a firearm on the pamphlet cover. Complaints were also filed with Northeastern administrators, who questioned students about the event. Though they found no grounds for disciplinary action, they have asked the students to remove other social media posts that include depictions of armed Palestinians. Northeastern’s concern about depictions of weapons on social media stands in contrast with the presence of armed police on campus and an active Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC).

RESISTANCE CONTINUES

A photograph of four young adults, two women and two men, standing behind a table at an outdoor event. They are holding up a large Palestinian flag (black, white, and green horizontal stripes with a red triangle at the top left). The group is smiling and making peace signs. The background shows a building with a glass facade and a sign for the Residence Hall Association (RHA).

Members of Fordham SJP tabling at a Fall activity fair. Credit: Fordham SJP

Fordham Students Seek to Preserve SJP's Club Status

After the 2019 court ruling ordering Fordham to recognize SJP as an official student club, students organized reading groups, movie nights, museum outings, speaker events, and more to connect and educate students about Palestine. Nevertheless, at the start of 2020, Fordham University filed an appeal, seeking to reinstate its ban of SJP. In a December ruling with minimal analysis, the appellate court sided with Fordham. The students, represented by Palestine Legal, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and attorney Alan Levine, have sought review from New York's highest court, asking the Court of Appeals to reinstate their right to equal recognition on campus.

RIGHT-WING PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

While campaigns against Palestine activists in the U.S. are generally characterized by calls for censorship, hateful messages, and threats against people's reputations and livelihoods, in several instances in 2020, harassment crossed the line into physical aggression.



A February 3 Student Government meeting where students debated censoring a Bears for Palestine display at UC Berkeley was filled to capacity and included over three hours of public comment.

Students of color at **UC Berkeley** faced a slew of shocking physical attacks on campus during the Spring 2020 semester. A statement published by Bears for Palestine mentioned students being followed home, young women wearing headscarves physically assaulted and spat on, a Black student attacked with urine, and more. In February 2020, at a student government meeting about calls to censor a Bears for Palestine display on campus, a student publicly announced his plans to join the Israeli military in order to **“eliminate Palestinian nationalism and Palestinians from the world.”**

Palestine Legal, CAIR San Francisco Bay Area Chapter, JVP, and USCPR wrote to Berkeley Chancellor Carol Christ about the systemic harassment of Palestinian students and their allies, urging the university to work with students on meeting their needs.

In **Houston**, Palestinian Youth Movement Houston, SJP Houston, and the Palestinian American Cultural Center staged demonstrations in June and July against Israel’s plans to annex additional Palestinian land. During a June 30 demonstration where activists held flags and banners and used disposable cups to spell out Free Palestine in the fencing along a bridge, two counterprotestors tried to steal a banner from the activists, threatened them with a knife, physically battered them, and then called the police, falsely claiming that they were victimized by the activists.

OVERCOMING THREATS TO CROSS-MOVEMENT SOLIDARITY

The uprising that started in Minneapolis in the wake of George Floyd's murder released outrage and frustration with a society founded on anti-Black violence and demanded its transformation. The uprising also reaffirmed the importance of collective liberation and cross-movement solidarity. But as with the cross-movement solidarity campaign at Tufts which administrators rebuked, when solidarity includes Palestine, it is often attacked.

In July, a right-wing Israel advocacy group called on the Department of Justice to investigate **Black Lives Matter** for its support of boycotts for Palestinian rights, making absurd claims equating support for BDS with support for a “foreign terrorist organization” and demanding investigation

VICTORY SPOTLIGHT

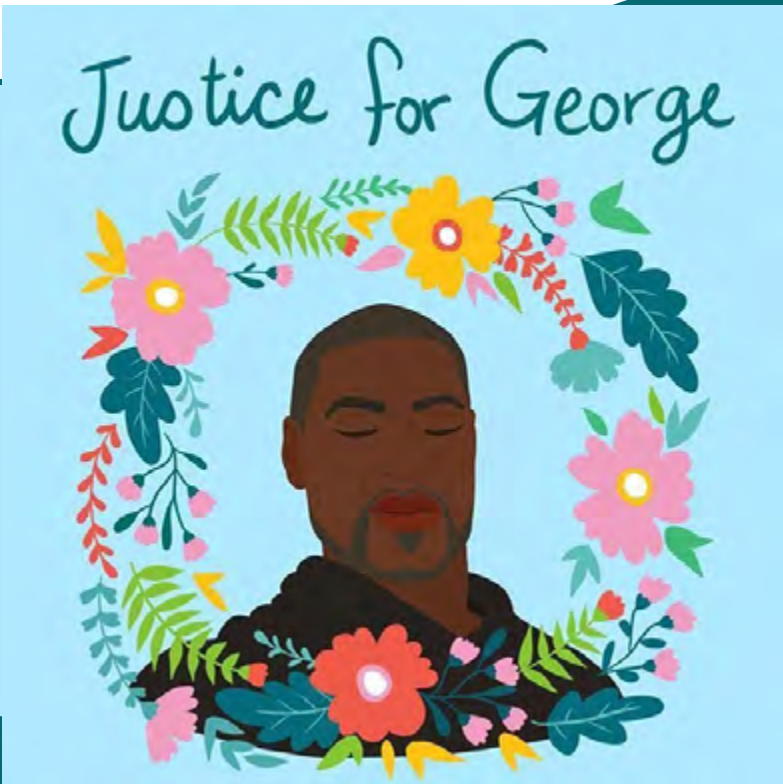
Berkeley Students Create Their Own Space

In April 2020, the student group Bears for Palestine at the **University of California, Berkeley**, defeated a student government resolution aiming to censor their photo display of women of the Palestinian resistance. During debate on the resolution, a student senator backing the resolution threatened to add students opposing the resolution to a shadowy Israel-aligned blacklisting website, and another student vowed to pursue a genocide against Palestinians.


Students of color raised concerns over their safety on campus in an environment of physical and verbal assaults. Confronted with administrative indifference, a coalition of students released a list of demands calling for a safer campus and formed a Chancellor's Committee on Muslim & Palestinian Student Life to take care of their community.

under an anti-mob statute. The group later took credit in a press release when the controversial acting head of the Department of Homeland Security, Chad Wolf, made an offhand remark on Fox News suggesting that the Department of Justice was investigating claims against Black Lives Matter leaders. Wolf made no mention of Black-Palestinian solidarity. It is unclear whether any investigation took place.

The same Israel advocacy group also called for the Los Angeles Police Department to investigate a July 1 **Day of Rage protest** organized by Palestinian activists against Israel's annexation plans, sending a cynical warning to the LAPD and the city mayor that Palestinian groups were exploiting the uprising to "recruit" people to their cause. A federal building parking lot where protesters had planned to gather was closed off in anticipation of the protest, but the demonstration otherwise proceeded without incident.



Drawing of George Floyd by @Shirien.Creates



On July 2, 2020, advocates for Palestinian freedom in the SF Bay Area organized a caravan of over 500 to protest Israel's threats to annex more land in the occupied West Bank.

Credit: Ryan Sin (cover and page 2)

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