



How Anti-Palestinian Repression is Building Authoritarian Precedent in America

The attacks, trends and legal mechanisms that are creating bipartisan complicity in the weakening of American rights and democratic norms: an overview, what to expect, how groups are fighting back, and recommendations.

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Statement from Our Director



This urgent and timely report discusses the intersections of anti-Palestinian repression and broader anti-immigrant attacks, and specifically how these forms of state and institutional violence serve sinister anti-democratic movements in the United States.

This American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) report offers a critical overview of the escalating efforts to silence advocacy for Palestinian rights, criminalize immigrant communities, and suppress dissent through legal, legislative, and extralegal means. **What begins as targeted repression of pro-Palestinian activism has become a blueprint for broader assaults on civil liberties, academic freedom, press integrity, and democratic norms.**

Grounded in a deep commitment to human rights and the core values of American civil liberties at AMP, this report documents not only the tactics used to erode our freedoms, but also the courageous and creative resistance being led by grassroots organizers, civil rights advocates, student movements, and legal organizations. **It includes concrete recommendations for how institutions, policymakers, and community leaders can push back—and why they must.**

I urge allies to treat this report as a resource, a warning, and a call to action. We call on advocates, journalists, scholars, and public officials to engage with these alarming trends, share the report widely, and use it as a tool to expose and confront the anti-democratic forces reshaping our country.

The fights for Palestinian freedom, immigrant justice, and civil rights are inseparable—and essential to the future of democracy itself. Let us meet this moment together in solidarity and courage to refuse the exceptionalization of Palestine from the cause of democracy and liberty.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "O. Abu Irshaid".

Dr. Osama Abu Irshaid
Executive Director

Executive Summary

Since the beginning of the second Trump presidential administration, the U.S. government has dramatically escalated campaigns to punish pro-Palestinian activism in ways that create templates and legal precedents for the suppression of immigrants and minorities across the country. Indeed, these attacks go beyond a chilling effect — they move to punish and criminalize protest of U.S. government policy wholesale. The Trump Administration has weaponized federal agencies and regulatory bodies—including the U.S. court system—and a GOP-dominated Congress to bolster the power of the Presidency and uphold unconstitutional moves to silence and disempower the interconnected struggles of Palestinian rights, immigrant rights, and racial justice.

Federal Attacks on Students and Activists

Starting with the targeting of students and activists on U.S. campuses, this report outlines the scale of the attacks, starting with the [illegal kidnapping](#) of Columbia student Mahmoud Khalil and the [revocation](#) of hundreds of international student visas along with deportation [proceedings](#) initiated against pro-Palestinian activists in particular. While many of those visas have since been reinstated and Mahmoud Khalil has finally been granted freedom to return to his firstborn child and wife, the broader fight—and attacks—continue across the country. **From illegal detentions or [arrests](#), to kidnappings, deportations, and [raids](#) on [students](#), [immigrants](#), and activists' homes, these attacks represent the frontline of Trump's far-right wing takeover in service of white supremacist and Christian Zionist ideals.**

Institutional and Legal Pressures

While many universities and related institutions have [participated](#) in anti-Palestinian repression and capitulation to [attacks](#) on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) prior to the Trump Administration, university-based repression has gone further under the hammer of this administration. Weaponizing [all categories](#) of federal [funding](#) for research and education, the Trump Administration leveraged the Department of Education's authority to threaten the withdrawal of billions of dollars universities receive in order to force [compliance](#) with strictures on academic programming which would [hamper](#) academic freedom and bolster right-wing ideologies and Zionism on campuses. Institutions like Columbia and Harvard have [cut programs](#) or submitted to [conservatorship](#) on subjects related to Palestine and the Middle East while also [allowing](#) the weaponization of anti-Semitism to vilify anti-genocide student activists.

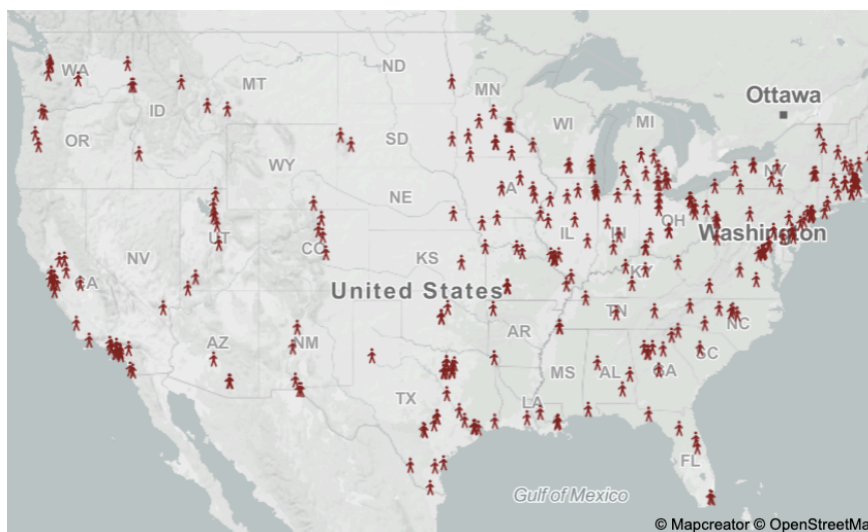
Wider Implications & Agendas to Reshape Governance

While thrusting campuses into a chaotic climate of repression, the Trump administration also moved to [gut](#) the immigration appeals system, [reduce](#) the size of the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), scraped [data](#) on immigrants from multiple government bodies, [fired](#) judges and [DHS](#) staff, and leveraged local law enforcement to wage war on non-white immigrants to the U.S. — including those with legal U.S. residency like Mahmoud Khalil. These actions fit within the broader agenda of Project 2025 and Project Esther; they form a Christian nationalist, white supremacist, and Zionist agenda led by longtime champions of these ideologies. This report identifies those key figures such as Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, Chief of Staff for Policy Stephen Miller, and other Trump Cabinet Members and appointees in addition to longtime organizational players such as the ADL. Prominent Democratic figures have also played a key role in enabling these attacks and [conflating](#) anti-genocide activism with anti-Semitism in ways that build the basis for broadbased repression.

Conclusions & Recommendations

This crackdown on Palestinian activism is a stress test on the systems of governance and democracy that uphold all U.S. freedoms and legal or international norms. The case studies of Palestinian repression are a test which bipartisan leaders and advocates are already failing — and in the wake of these attacks, the Trump administration is dismantling free speech, academic freedom, and immigrant rights. Still, resistance from legal, grassroots, and campus-based groups is growing. We discuss a range of lawsuits and actions that may push back against these and future violations of constitutional and human rights. As this fight continues, defending Palestinian advocacy becomes—even more than before—inseparable from defending democracy itself.

Scale of the Attacks - Map of Student Visa Revocations April 2025



The map on the left excludes additional cases in Alaska and Hawaii.

Data comes from [Inside Higher Education](#), aggregated from reports across the country with over 1800 cases of visa revocations.

Landscape of Attacks on Students and Pro-Palestinian Speech

Attacks on students and institutions have been pervasive and only accelerated under the Trump Administration with new legal and illegal force. The following sections summarize the extent and reach of these attacks, itemizing the steps taken to crack down not just on immigration but particularly on Palestinian activism as a way to gain bipartisan support for the precedent-setting infringements on students' and immigrants' rights.

Attacks on Individuals:

- Arbitrary revocation of [student](#), [teaching](#), and [work](#) visas (F-1 and J-1, H1-B, TPS)
- Illegal detention and/or deportation, and revocation of legal U.S. residency
- Kidnapping by plain-clothes federal agents providing no warrant and often [falsifying](#) reasons for inquiry
- Police forces, FBI and other Justice Department subsidiary institutions [invading](#) pro-Palestine [activists'](#) homes, similar to [attacks](#) on anti-COP city activists in Atlanta

Attacks on Institutions

- [Threats](#) to suspend funding for research across [60+](#) universities
- Threats to suspend [funding](#) for headstart and public education programs on basis of anti-DEI measures
- Pressure to fire or end various faculty positions and [programs](#) or put them under [conservatorship](#) if they deal with the question of Palestine

Indirect Attacks by Institutions

- Shutting down academic programs [preemptively](#) in accordance with the Trump administration's threats or [self-censoring](#) on [Palestine](#)
- Terminating or silently not renewing teaching positions for Arab, Muslim and Palestinian academics
- Shutting down campus [events](#) on Palestine due to undisclosed threats to safety
- Ending all [funding](#) to events supporting racial or other minority ethnicities
- Adoption of IHRA anti-Semitism definition to silence critique of Zionism, Israel
- Pre-cursors under the Biden administration: student suspensions, denial of graduation or degrees, and other punishment of student activism or lack of protection for students doxxed, harmed, or threatened for their activism.
- Using new [technologies](#) to [monitor](#) students with support from law enforcement on the [basis](#) of anti-genocide protests

Visa and Status Revocations

“Agitators will be imprisoned/or permanently sent back to the country from which they came,” President Donald Trump posted on X (Twitter) in March 2025.

In April 2025, under 100 days since President Trump took office for the second time, the State Department worked with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to suddenly revoke the student and [faculty](#) visas of [over 1800 international students across close to 300 university campuses](#). Beyond the known cases, the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) [estimates](#) up to 4,700 international students may have had their immigration system record terminated. Some students were informed of the visa revocations by their universities, others received notifications directly from ICE, and others received no notification at all—universities discovered the visa revocations during routine checks of the visa system interface. Some of these sudden visa revocations came with equally sudden arrests or total revocation of legal [status](#). Most notably, the wave of attacks on students began with the illegal [arrest](#) of Palestinian-Algerian Columbia University student Mahmoud Khalil, in what became a viral [video](#) of him being torn from his 8-months-pregnant wife by plain-clothed federal agents in New York City.

Map of Student Visa Revocations April 2025



Map excludes additional cases in Alaska and Hawaii. Data from [Inside Higher Ed](#).

By late April, over 100 lawsuits were filed to push back against student visa revocations and illegal arrests. Over 50 such [cases](#) were suddenly [moot](#) when on April 24th, 2025, ICE [reversed](#) hundreds of these visa redactions through the federal student visa system, SEVIS (Student Exchange and Visitor Information System). Now, the number of visas still revoked is unclear, but thousands of students are left feeling [uncertain](#) about how long their status as students will remain as they continue their studies and pay tuition. A few students had already [self-deported](#) for fear of ramifications. Among the most high-profile cases in which student visas were not reinstated are pro-Palestine activists: such as Tufts University graduate student and Fulbright Scholar [Rumeysa Ozturk](#), and English student [Legaa Kordia](#) of Uceda Paterson.

Academic institutions have had varied responses to these federal attacks on students, and particularly student activists. Some institutions, like Columbia University, have been either indifferent or [active players](#) in this federal round-up. Columbia graduate student Mahmoud Khalil [wrote](#) to his university days before his arrest requesting support because he feared for his safety. Columbia not only ignored this request, it took [no action](#) even to speak out about the right of students to free speech in the weeks after his and Mohsen Mahdawi's political kidnappings. Other universities, like Tufts in Boston, Massachusetts, have taken [active roles](#) to support students in getting legal support in the face of illegal kidnapping and baseless or politically-motivated visa revocations.

In addition to having visas revoked, some students were notified by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that their *status* was revoked. This means that in addition to an expired or cancelled visa, which can be renewed for example when someone continues to be a student after a visa's expiration, they have lost any right to be in the country (status) as a student. This makes their presence in the country instantly illegal. It is unclear how many students whose visas were terminated also had their status terminated.

While several hundred non-citizen students have had their visas reinstated, Trump Administration figureheads have been clear that more revocations of status and deportations are coming. For several top schools, as [many as](#) 1 in 5 students are from outside the United States—and pay a premium tuition for their U.S. educations: for example, New York University, Boston University, Northeastern University, Columbia University, Arizona State University, among others that host the U.S.'s over a [million](#) international students. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has openly [stated](#) that international students are expected to study, not “lead activist movements,” suggesting that silencing dissent and free speech is a key objective of their attacks.

Threats to Institutional Funding

In the first month after Trump took office, the DoE [issued](#) a warning to all higher education institutions, saying that any actions to increase diversity that would advantage some students over others on the basis of race or ethnic background were illegal and could threaten a university's federal funding. The letter cited the precedent [set](#) by the SFFA v. Harvard Supreme Court case of 2023, which determined that race-conscious admissions were unlawful. That case has become notorious for [upending](#) decades of precedent surrounding affirmative action that has [ensured](#) gender, racial and ethnic diversity alongside merit-based admission practices.

Dozens of universities have since received threats from the DoE regarding federal funding they receive; the DoE issued notices to [60 universities](#) in one day regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion programs or those that may have programming allegedly at odds with a [problematic](#) definition of “anti-semitism.” Also cited were [programs](#) in Middle Eastern Studies and insufficient redress of claims of “anti-Semitic” campus activity, weaponizing the claim of anti-Semitism [in reference](#) to pro-Palestinian protest that critique Israeli and U.S. state policies.

In addition, the **Trump Administration** [froze](#) **billions of dollars** in research grants and federal funding **to universities across the country**. An Associated Press [analysis](#) estimates that upwards of \$33 billion in federal revenue is at stake, not including federal tuition aid, for the universities the Trump Administration is investigating on claims of not doing enough to combat “anti-Semitism.” This number accounts for 10-13% of revenue from federal or research related funding sources across all of these schools—but **up to half of all revenue for some universities** (such as MIT and John Hopkins).

Harvard and Columbia Universities have come under particular scrutiny. Starting with Columbia, the Trump administration [cancelled](#) \$400 million in federal grants and contracts for supposed [inaction](#) on campus anti-Semitism. Similarly, the Trump Administration [already cut](#) \$2.2 billion in grants to Harvard and then another \$450 million more when Harvard declared a lawsuit to protect its constitutional rights and academic freedom. Meanwhile, Harvard did [preemptively capitulate](#) to attacks on Palestine-related programming by [firing](#) the directors of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) and ending contracts with their Religion and Public Life Program faculty director and staff — a program the Trump administration explicitly [named](#) for further oversight. The full dismantling of the program's staff came after Columbia University faced [pressure](#) from the Trump Administration to place its Middle East, South Asian and African Studies Department under “academic receivership” — thereby introducing an unprecedented external oversight figure mandated by the federal government. Other Harvard academic programs targeted by the administration on claims of “anti-Semitism” include the university's Graduate School

of Education, Carr Center for Health and Human Rights, and Center for Middle Eastern Studies.

Other funds being threatened have [nothing](#) to do with student activism, although the President's public pretense consistently invokes anti-Semitism and "anti-woke" programming related to non-White people. Research funds are being leveraged for political acquiescence which threatens [funding](#) for global AIDS [programs](#), studies on [aging](#), wound [healing](#) for diabetes patients, cancer biology research and drug abuse and addiction research. In a more targeted fashion, the Trump Administration has canceled federal research [grants](#) to study online misinformation under the guise of "protecting the First Amendment."

The [National Science Foundation](#), [National Institute of Health](#), [Department of Health and Human Services](#), and [Defense Department](#) have all cancelled or attempted to redact grants for scientific inquiry at universities — leading not only to a hampered academic research environment but thousands of jobs cut at universities along with graduate student admissions and faculty positions rescinded. Some [grants](#) have been cancelled under notions of ending research or [funding](#) that has focused on transgender individuals or [underscored](#) racial and ethnic disparities or idiosyncrasies. But much of the research has no practical application or relevance to the politicized fight over racial equity, inclusion, and gender. Instead, like the issue of Palestinian rights and DEI, such attacks are being used as a cover for undermining the foundational freedoms of a healthy democracy: academic freedom and honesty, freedom of speech, and freedom of intellectual inquiry. Unfortunately, the previous Democratic administration and academic institutions were complicit in setting a precedent for such attacks by repressing, [vilifying](#) and [punishing protest](#) or [criticism](#) of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, facilitated by [billions](#) in U.S. weapons and taxpayer aid.

The attacks took direction from a December [report](#) from Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson suggesting that schools like Columbia, Harvard, and UCLA had failed to stop anti-Semitism by virtue of the anti-genocide student protest encampments that took place on these and dozens of other campuses in the Spring of 2024. The report is replete with [misinformation](#) that obscures inverse nature of campus suppression which [victimized](#) students, [including](#) many [Jewish students](#), for their protest of the genocide in Gaza. The report likewise obscures the actual purpose and [demands](#) of those encampments. Indeed, [AJP-Action](#) and other polling from last year found that this congressional account also vastly differs from public perception of these encampments, especially among young voters. The AJP Action poll [found](#) over 50% of Democrats in five swing states supported the student encampments, and roughly 20% of independents *strongly* supported them. A poll of 18-30 year-old voters [found](#) that 52% agree that what concerned them more about campus protests was "Pro-Palestinian protestors being silenced by university administrators and not being able to raise awareness about Israel's human rights abuses in Gaza."

University Action to Suppress Students & Critique of U.S.-Israeli Injustice

Over 50 universities have partaken in disciplinary action or arbitrary suppression targeting pro-Palestine activists or related academic disciplines. In fact, The Appeal [documented over 3,200 arrests of student protestors in the Spring of 2024 across 39 states and over 100 universities that had students engaging in sit-ins and encampments](#) calling for divestment from Israel's genocide in Gaza, apartheid, and military occupation. Such action to suppress free speech on campuses has a long history, well-documented by organizations such as [Palestine Legal](#) which has published extensively on the "[Palestine Exception](#)" to free speech and university [actions](#) to curtail student activism. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has likewise issued [repeated warnings](#) regarding [university](#) and federal actions taken to [suppress](#) Palestinians and pro-Palestinian [activists](#) on U.S. campuses. The student "popular university" encampments calling for divestment from the Israeli state and weapons companies complicit in the Gaza genocide were a flashpoint for such university repression, repression on echoed in the [condemnations](#) of [bipartisan figures](#). Under the Trump Administration's Education Department, those university measures are not opposed—but taken further.

Even purely aesthetic displays of institutional values in diversity have been removed [from many university web pages](#). Meanwhile, major universities like Harvard have moved to [institutionalize](#) a problematic definition of anti-Semitism (IHRA) which is widely [contested](#) and opposed for its consideration of anti-Israel critique as antisemitic. The move erases Jewish [students](#) who have been in some cases leading protests against the Israeli regime's genocide in Gaza; it also comes with a codification of "Zionist" — describing someone who ascribes to the political ideology that Jewish people be given a homeland with exclusive and preferential rights on Palestinian land — as a protected category almost synonymous with Jewish identity. Regarding Harvard's new rules adopted in January 2025, an organizer from a Harvard student group called Jews for Palestine [said](#), "I could easily imagine a situation in which a Palestinian student is disciplined simply for speaking out against the occupation and annihilation of their people. I could just as easily imagine a situation in which any one of the hundreds of anti- and non-Zionist Jewish students on this campus is charged with anti-Semitism."

Case Studies in University Suppression: The Gaza Solidarity Encampments

Universities Enabled Bigoted Suppression of Students' Rights to Speak on Palestine

Psychology student with highest honors brutalized then denied her diploma for pro-Palestinian speech

At Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)

Sereen Haddad, a 20-year-old Palestinian American was part of campus activism at VCU to raise awareness about Palestinian oppression and the genocide in Gaza. She has [lost](#) more than 200 members of her extended family during the genocide. In April 2024, she and other students [attempted](#) to set up a visible solidarity encampment on VCU's campus. But the same night, university administrators called police to remove the students. When students refused to leave the encampment, police pepper sprayed and violently attacked the students, seizing their property and arresting 13. Haddad had to be taken to the hospital when police slammed her onto the concrete six times, causing injury to her head, bleeding, cuts, and bruises. She was arrested but not charged. Later, she helped to stage a peaceful memorial for the victims of genocide in Gaza. But because the university was quickly [changing](#) the rules around campus protests, the memorial was considered a violation of university protocols for student protest. She was then denied her degree after four years, even though her grades granted her highest honors.

At UCLA, admin authorized LAPD's violent attack on dozens of students protesting peacefully against university investments in the Gaza genocide, failed to protect students from violent white nationalist and Zionsit agitators

University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)

One of the most notorious instances of university attacks on its pro-Palestine students is the case of UCLA's Gaza Solidarity Encampment. The students participating in the encampment [were beaten, faced](#) chemical attacks, and other violent harassment from a mob of pro-Israel and white nationalist figures, including with funding and coordination from outside the university. Later, the university sent LA police to disperse the peaceful encampment. In full riot gear, police brutally attacked protestors at nightfall and arrested around 200 students. The UCLA administration likewise [ignored](#) repeated, alarming reports from its expert Task Force on Anti-Palestinian, Anti-Muslim and Anti-Arab racism, which included documentation of violence also directed at Jews who expressed opposition to the war in Gaza or who engaged in pro-Palestinian speech. Ten students were also denied their degrees for these protests. The following year, when students staged an outdoor screening of the film *The Encampments*, university police in riot gear were [again](#) deployed on students, running into the crowd and detaining two. UCLA spent [millions](#) of dollars on its anti-protest measures while failing to discipline attacks on pro-Palestinian students, and then suggested it may seek to [fine](#) protest participants for a portion of these costs. Pro-Palestine [students](#) and [faculty](#) are suing.

The anti-Palestinian doxxing-to-deportation pipeline enabled by university inaction prior to Trump's election

In addition to these case studies, anti-genocide student protestors on campuses across the U.S. faced intense [doxxing](#) campaigns in which their names, faces, family addresses and other personal information was [shared](#) across the internet with defamatory and hateful [claims](#) about them, causing many to receive death and rape [threats](#), to have job offers rescinded, and to face calls from prominent [CEOs](#) and university donors for the students to be given no career prospects. Universities did little to address, much less curtail, these internet attacks on their students, even though the doxxing was often predicated by peers photographing and maliciously sharing information—and misinformation—on the protestors. One group behind doxxing efforts, ironically named "Accuracy in Media," [used](#) LED trucks circling campuses and students' home neighborhoods to claim students of those universities were "leading antisemites" and supportive of terrorism. Universities absolved themselves of responsibility for responding to these attacks beyond simple condemnations. As a result, students, faculty, and others took significant and increasing personal risk which was only amplified by university inaction to curtail such attacks. The chilling effect universities created preceded that of Trump's attacks on international students participating in protest, who now also fear visa revocation. Doxxing sites are now also being used as the [basis](#) for DHS investigations into and surveillance of international students.

In sum, these universities have *already* been silencing honest and free discourse among their students, staff, and visiting intellectuals. Meanwhile, universities like Harvard have given systematic preference to the complaints of pro-Israel students, largely of European descent, regarding discrimination or feelings of alienation from anti-Israel peers — [including](#) with a 500+ page report on the topic compared to a vague, smaller [report](#) documenting [widespread anti-Muslim](#) and [anti-Palestinian bias](#). In fact, even pro-Israel Jewish students found some of the former report's findings doubtful—one student [wrote](#) that the report's claim that 1 in 4 Jewish students feel physically unsafe is “an absurd statistic [he] struggle[s] to take seriously as someone who publicly and proudly wears a kippah.” Now, the Trump Administration has repurposed the tenuous claim that Harvard is not protecting its Jewish students as a way to cut funding for and bolster an attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts wholesale. Harvard's efforts to capitulate on such claims are a textbook example of the ways these institutions created the template for Trump and the alt-right's infringements on academic freedom and attacks on students, leading even to their detention and deportation by ICE.

A key starting point for that university capitulation to right-wing attacks was with their [quiet assent](#) to accusations that their students [were](#) anti-Semitic, “pro-Hamas,” or [that](#) students supported “the genocide of Jews,” as described especially by right-wing media [outlets](#) and pundits — and by Congressmembers like Rep. Elise Stefanik in Congressional [hearings under the](#) Biden Administration. Universities like Harvard went out of their way to issue [statements](#) to students, faculty and alumni condemning and [distancing](#) themselves from statements made by their students against Israeli attacks and the decades-long siege in Gaza—in essence agreeing to the conflation of students' protest of U.S. and Israeli warfare with support for Palestinian factions. Faculty were [disciplined](#) for insufficient reiteration of such Israeli talking points about October 7th, and universities faced public critique and compelled to re-issue [statements](#) along the same lines.

In a notorious Congressional hearing before her ostensibly forced [resignation](#), the President of Harvard Claudine Gay, the first Black President of Harvard, refused to say that “calling for the genocide of Jews” was speech that could be disciplined at the university—instead of pointing out the [facts](#): that *no students* had ever called for that either explicitly or even metaphorically. Gay, like other university presidents, assented to malicious pro-Israel narrative that [dangerously casts](#) Palestinian [chants](#) for freedom and popular protest as violent. In effect, Harvard, sometimes tacitly and other times vocally, agreed to vilify their students, calling the protests “outrageous” and taking a clear [stance against](#) pro-Palestinian demonstrators among their student body and staff. The right-wing attacks on Harvard's pro-Palestinian students then turned to spurious attacks on Harvard's first Black President—falsely claiming [that](#) she had committed plagiarism in her notable academic work and syndicating that claim across right-wing media. Soon after, she became the Harvard President with the shortest-ever tenure; and the alliance and playbook of anti-Palestinian and anti-diversity attacks had been solidified.

This precedent of capitulating to baseless right-wing attacks was also modeled by the Biden Administration, which often [labeled](#) pro-Palestinian protests as “antisemitic.”

Crippling of Immigrant Appeals Processes & Due Process

While the Trump Administration wages war on non-citizen activist students, it has also laid the groundwork for a more difficult appeals process for all immigrant visa revocation and deportation cases—seeking to [fast-track](#) deportation. For example, the Executive Office for Immigration Review houses the highest administrative body for immigration appeals: the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA). The EOIR has introduced a rule to reduce the size of the BIA from 28 to 15 members, essentially reducing the staff of adjudicators in immigration case appeals. The American Immigration Lawyers Association has [written](#) to the EOIR to oppose this new rule, citing over 127,000 backlogged appeals currently pending. Their letter states this move will “place undue pressure on the remaining adjudicators to complete cases at the expense of due process and fairness and fail to improve the efficiency of the courts.” These experts expect larger numbers of summary dismissals, reducing fairness and due process, and risking “politicizing the immigration court system” — and Palestinian student Leqaa Kordia’s [case](#) has already seen this “risk” play out. In this vein, the Trump Administration has already terminated nine BIA members appointed by the Biden Administration. Beyond the crippling of the immigration system, the Trump Administration also [fired](#) 1300+ staff of the Department of Homeland Security in what many have suggested is an effort to politicize this and other government agencies.

Similarly, the Trump Administration has dramatically [expanded](#) efforts to militarize the U.S.-Mexico border, suspended [all](#) refugee admissions, [ended several](#) South and Central American entry programs, and [removed](#) Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designations for several Global South countries (thereby eliminating the possibility of protected status for those whose visas expire). The Administration has also empowered local law enforcement and ICE with additional data, including [tax data](#) from the Internal Revenue Service, dramatically increasing the numbers of incarcerated immigrants and the [deputization](#) of local law enforcement to [act](#) as federal agents and apprehend individuals for even minor traffic infractions. Incarcerated populations have exploded, with over [50,000](#) people detained by ICE or CBP through such problematic round-ups which have been documented to upend due process and other constitutional rights not reserved for citizens alone.

The Trump Administration has similarly fired immigration court [personnel](#), including over 50 [judges](#), [fired](#) and threatened [lawyers](#) defending immigrant or student visa cases, and even apprehended an immigration court [judge](#) in Wisconsin who is a citizen of immigrant descent. Such practical and ubiquitous attacks on the immigrant justice system represent an all-out war on the notion of America as a nation of immigrants, a nation of due process, and a nation that guarantees the protection of human rights — free speech and freedom from unjust detention among them. Right-wing spokespeople and white nationalist leaders in support of the Trump Administration have uplifted these moves as a large-scale [promise](#) to deport *millions* of people of immigrant descent.

Key Figures and Players

While many of these moves are deeply unpopular when considering nationwide [polling](#), the Trump Administration has ushered in these attacks on the heels of precedent set under the previous administration, along with a playbook set out by the Heritage Foundation's [Project 2025](#) — and namely its related playbook for anti-Palestinian suppression defined in "[Project Esther](#)."

While many players are responsible for the implementation of these plans, those who bear significant blame cannot be held accountable if they seem amorphous and ubiquitous. Aside from the direct roles of ICE agents and contractors, below are some of the key figures and their roles in this repressive playbook. A fuller description of each is included in the Appendix:

Leading Villains - Mapping Key Players Enabling or Enforcing Repression



- **Secretary of State Marco Rubio**

"I'll continue to revoke student visas."

Has played a lead role in implementing and defending Trump's agenda of deporting pro-Palestine student activists, specifically naming their activism as grounds for visa revocation despite free speech constitutional protections. He led the efforts to ban TikTok in direct service of the pro-Israel lobby's effort to hamper public visibility of Israeli genocide in Gaza. He [claimed](#), "TikTok is a tool China uses to spread propaganda to Americans, now it's being used to downplay Hamas terrorism." Repeated inquiries found no [evidence](#) of Chinese interference in TikTok, but the TikTok [bill only passed](#) at last when the pro-Israel [lobby](#) problematized its role in the pro-Palestine shift of younger Americans. His history of far-right-wing support and pro-Israel support align with his historic funders.

- **Secretary of Education Linda McMahon**

Staff of the Education Department have been hampered in implementing the regulatory functions of their [jobs](#), leaving aside thousands of [cases](#) of discrimination [except](#) as they relate to supposed Title VI violations that implicate white or pro-Israel Jewish [students](#), as [suggested](#) by the letter against DEI issued to universities. During McMahon's Senate confirmation, she noted that universities would lose funding for failing to stop anti-Semitism on campuses, alluding to the weaponized [notion](#) of anti-Semitism as all anti-Israel critique.

- **Betar US, Betar International**

This violent, right-wing group promotes militant Zionism and has [actively](#) called for the murder of babies in Gaza and pandered to other right-wing talking points. The group claimed credit for supplying names of pro-Palestine student activists to the Trump Administration in advance of raids by ICE. Public facing figures [include](#) spokespeople Sloan Rachmuth and Daniel Levy.

Registered as a nonprofit in the State of New York, Betar has no public information on its employees but likely relies on a network of ultra-right-wing Zionist students and figures on university campuses. They now also have the [ear](#) of the Trump Administration.

- **Accuracy in Media (AIM) and Canary Mission**

These two [right-wing](#) organizations have been at the forefront of naming pro-Palestinian student activists on U.S. campuses and [circulating false information](#) about them such as affiliations with Palestinian political factions or claims that they have called for violence against Jewish students—all of which have been unsubstantiated. AIM is headed by Adam Guillette, and the organization has also been [behind](#) anti-DEI fights. Canary Mission, like Betar, has [supplied](#) the defamation lists used by the Department of Homeland Security, ICE, and others for criminal targeting of pro-Palestine activism.

- **The Anti-Defamation League (ADL)**

The ADL has played a significant role in attacks on students under the Biden Administration and celebrated the Trump Administration's moves to enhance repression of pro-Palestine activism on campuses under the guise of fighting anti-Semitism. The ADL similarly issued a [statement](#) acknowledging the "discussion of critical priorities" between Netanyahu and Trump after a February meeting in which Trump [said](#) he would like to have an ownership position in Gaza, implicating ethnic cleansing and illegal land seizure. Similarly, the ADL has not condemned — and even [praised](#) — the illegal kidnapping and litigation to deport Mahmoud Khalil or other pro-Palestinian student activists who have been openly targeted based on their viewpoints and ethno-religious backgrounds such as Rûmeysa Ozturk or Mohsen Mahdawi. The ADL has long been a [partner](#) to right-wing groups, as the campaign [Drop the ADL](#) of dozens of progressive groups has detailed. On similar grounds, the National Education Association also [dropped](#) all ties with the ADL in July 2025 and voted as a union to refrain from using or citing any of their materials.

- **Trump Administration Figures:**

- **Stephen Miller**, Chief of Staff for Policy and Homeland Security Advisor, is largely [seen](#) as the architect of Trump's anti-immigrant and racist policies to reverse the clock on America's growing, non-European diversity. By the same [token](#), Miller is a staunch Zionist who has [worked](#) with DHS to target pro-Palestinian academics for deportation.
- A few acting directors and leaders of the [Trump Anti-Semitism Task Force](#) have played a critical role in pushing a far-right and anti-immigrant agenda as they suppress pro-Palestinian activism. For example:
- **Leo Terrell** heads the Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism and has faced criticism for previous neo-Nazi-supporting social media posts.
- **Pam Bondi** is the Attorney General overseeing the task force. She is affiliated with the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) which is shepherding the wide-range of anti-democratic and anti-immigrant policies of Project 2025 and the Trump agenda.
- **Mario Bramnick** is co-chair of the task force, and he is a known Christian Zionist pastor with close ties to extreme right-wing figures like Florida Governor Ron DeSantis as well as Bibi Netanyahu himself, the Israeli Prime Minister originally from Philadelphia.

- **DHS Secretary Kristi Noem**

"There's no room in America for terrorist sympathizers." - [DHS Tweet](#)

The new face of the Department of Homeland Security has been unabashed in her support for violent and authoritarian measures against immigrants, even in the face of outcry about the upending of constitutional rights such as habeas corpus. As a congressional representative and state governor, Noem previously worked to ban abortions, infringe on indigenous land rights with Keystone Pipeline, ban BDS, and even repeal the Affordable Care Act. She also signed into law the problematic IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, essentially enshrining in legislation a mechanism to silence critique of the Israeli state. Noem and DHS oversee Border Patrol Agents and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), as well as their relevant private contractors.

The DHS is also [moving](#) to use AI and other tools to screen immigrants' social media activity for "anti-Semitism" which seeks to conflate critique of Israel with support for Palestinian factions.

- **Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense**

Pete Hegseth, a former Fox News host and military veteran, has also played a role in the Trump administration's campaign to criminalize speech and perspectives at odds with the administration. For example, Hegseth has moved to [dismantle](#) DEI and ban books at military schools serving over 60,000 students. Even [speech](#) about this repression threatens to lose staff their jobs. Hegseth is also responsible for administering the Trump agenda in the use of military force against protestors, including defending ICE agents in Los Angeles. Notably, Hegseth is also an ardent dominionist Christian Zionist who believes in shepherding the End Times through war, chaos, and mass suffering—an apocalyptic vision that fuels both his pro-Israel hardline stance and his broader political agenda.

There are several other players that are worth noting for their role in furthering harmful narrative, misleading news and even inaccurate information related to these attacks. Right-wing media syndication networks include publications and [outlets](#) like: Fox News, The Washington Free Beacon, The New York Post, [right-wing Twitter](#) or [X](#) commentators, Truth

Social, The Daily Wire, the Free Press, and [right-wing](#) YouTubers, podcasters, and streamers.

In addition to formal media outlets, social media platforms and their leaders such as Elon Musk with X/Twitter, Mark Zuckerberg with [Meta](#) (Instagram and Facebook), [YouTube](#) and [Twitch](#) streaming leadership, and even leadership within TikTok have [censored](#) and [suppressed pro-Palestinian](#) and anti-genocide content. At the behest of these right-wing figures and organizations, these platforms have redesigned their “community guidelines” to allow users to flag posts with Palestinian freedom chants to be deleted, while allowing for [pervasive](#) anti-Palestinian [disinformation](#), [explicit calls](#) for [violence](#) against Palestinians and Muslims to go unchecked, including by large-follower accounts.

In addition, of course, several members of Congress have [been](#) at the forefront of these attacks even prior to Trump’s second term. Predictably, these members [take significant](#) campaign donations from AIPAC, the most prominent pro-Israel lobby, and are propped up by many pro-Israel lobby organizations. As AIPAC has directly supported and endorsed all Congressional leadership in both parties (as of July 2025), the attacks coming from Congress on faculty, students, and immigrant communities, along with the refusal to stand up for the constitutional rights of these communities, has been a bipartisan issue. Among the pro-Israel champions are: House Speaker Mike Johnson, Rep. Elise Stefanik, Rep. Ritchie Torres, Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, Rep. Chuck Schumer, and many others.

White Nationalists, Christian Zionists, and the Christian Right

The connective tissue between these figures is often not just a commitment to Zionism and a secular Israeli state, or even a commitment to ridding the U.S. of immigrants, but an intertwined [commitment](#) to Christian Zionism and White Supremacy. The relationship between these figures’ actions and the crippling of all public-serving institutions and protections in the U.S. is part of an explicit vision for the end of times which is predicated on Jewish settlement in Palestine and a period of intense suffering and warfare. Moreover, these armageddonist views are deeply anti-Semitic in their visions of the end of times: anticipating either mass conversion or excusable mass casualties among Jewish Israelis in the violence that these war hawks are ushering in. As for the American public, their suffering due to the dismantlement of civil and constitutional rights along with social protection, education, and health protections are all [perceived](#) by Christian Zionists as positive signs of the end of times and Jesus’s imminent return to Jerusalem. As institutions have [overlooked](#) these extremist views, they have allowed sinister precedents to unravel American democracy wholesale—and Project Esther, described below, is an effort to institutionalize those precedents once and for all.

Bipartisan Precedents and Anti-Palestinian Playbook

Capitulating to right-wing players, following the guidance of the ADL in attacking student activists, ignoring pleas from progressives to stop the right-wing efforts to stifle free speech and capitulating to baseless claims of plagiarism to attack BIPOC leadership figures — these are all actions that university administrations, Democratic leaders, and the Biden Administration were taking prior to Trump taking office. Harvard and Columbia, while one of them is now being celebrated for some [resistance](#) to the Trump administration's attacks on intellectual freedom, actually played a key role in setting a precedent for the vilification, silencing, and abandonment of pro-Palestine students that is central to the Trump policy and central to the wholesale attack on DEI and immigrant rights. Consider [the figures](#) on some of the university Anti-Semitism Task Forces and their related recommendations: for example, Harvard's Task Force included [founding](#) members of Harvard Faculty for Israel among them, marking clear political influence in the investigation. Recommendations unsurprisingly included [adoption](#) of a definition of anti-Semitism that conflates Jewish identity with Israel and Zionism, an attempt to insulate anti-Israel critique. University statements and disciplinary [measures](#) effectively corroborate and participate in right-wing smear campaigns against students, and [unequally](#) broadcast of sympathies for violence faced by Israelis versus Palestinians (one [review](#) found that university statements after October 7th were more likely to address impacts on Jewish or Israeli students than Muslim or Palestinian students). University presidents' testimonies in Congress never contested the [basis](#) for claims of anti-Semitism or "calling for the genocide of Jews" even when there was no basis whatsoever for those claims. In like manner, Biden himself referred to the May 2024 anti-genocide encampments on campuses as both [chaotic](#) and [anti-Semitic](#).

Congress's votes last year related to campus protests and legal definitions of anti-Semitism [found](#) bipartisan support for the right-wing attacks on pro-Palestinian free speech. GOP Speaker of the House Mike Johnson in December 2024 published a [report](#) representing "House-Wide Efforts to Combat anti-Semitism." Much of the report's findings are deeply influenced by pro-Israel propaganda and agendas, seeking to criminalize and re-frame anti-genocide protests as part of some spontaneous campaign of anti-Semitism linked to foreign governments and Palestinian political factions—with no evidence or interrogation of those claims. But importantly, the report was not only used as a basis for the attacks on non-citizen student activists described in this report, but it also weaponizes this claim of anti-Semitism to recommend a total gutting of federal student aid and loan programs (through the ironically named "[College Cost Reduction Act](#)"). In essence, the committee explicitly utilizes a boogie man of pro-Palestinian activism to call for higher education opportunity itself to be weakened across the country—part of a broader anti-intellectual and alt-right agenda.

While the GOP led that report, Democratic Congressional leaders [like Hakeem Jeffries](#), [Nancy Pelosi](#), and [Chuck Schumer](#) have all also participated in the misinformation,

misrepresentation, and even blatant lies about pro-Palestine protests and even initially [hesitated](#) to oppose the [illegal](#) kidnapping and detention of Mahmoud Khalil; some, like Schumer, avoided any mention of his innocence before free speech laws and habeas corpus. Under Biden, Democrats performed similar complacency or complicity in the face of anti-Palestinian attacks: 22 Democrats [voted](#) to censor the only Palestinian-American member of Congress (Tlaib) just two months after the start of the genocide, [participated](#) in witch-hunt or propagandist testimonies that vilified Palestinian rights organizations with no evidence, reiterated unproven claims Israel made about October 7th, and of course, voted for unlimited U.S. aid toward Israel's assault on Gaza.

Such attacks on Palestinians and pro-Palestinian activism have repeatedly been used to bolster xenophobia broadly while creating [political theater](#) to obscure systematic redaction of civil rights. In one example, President Trump [demanded](#) information on nearly 6000 Chinese students because of a sinophobic right-wing fixation, including notions of Chinese pro-Palestine agitation. This is just one of many such examples.

The Roadmap: The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 & Project Esther

While the infamous "Project 2025" outlined some of the Trump Administration and alt-right's goals for redacting public benefits, attacking immigrant communities, and criminalizing activism and free speech—Project Esther takes these Christian- and White-nationalist priorities further, using suppression of anti-genocide and pro-Palestinian groups as a mechanism to weaken protections for organizations that dissent to any other policy from the executive branch in particular. Anti-Palestinian lawfare and legislation as a [template](#) for suppression has a long history, as far back as an amendment to the [1969](#) Foreign Assistance Act, which sought to block U.S. aid from any refugees trained by the Palestinian Liberation Army "or engaged in any act of terrorism." As Palestinian-American researcher Tariq Kenney-Shawa explains, that law "effectively cast Palestinians—[particularly refugees](#)—as presumed perpetrators, embedding a bias that continues to shape US policy and public discourse to this day," even without an explicit definition of "terrorism."

Kenney-Shawa provides a [detailed overview](#) of Project Esther in an April 2025 policy brief for Al-Shabaka, noting how the policies it pushes for seek to financially cripple, reputationally damage, and legally dismantle pro-Palestine advocacy precisely because it is an issue Democrats have shied away from defending even when constitutional rights are at stake. Just as Democrats and so-called liberal educational institutions have done or allowed amid two years of U.S.-funded genocide, Kenney-Shawa writes, "The project conflates anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, leveraging state power and private resources to dismantle the pro-Palestine solidarity movement in the US through a systematic campaign of intimidation, defunding, and criminalization."

Such tactics are only a continuation of efforts to erode American rights and international law on the basis of anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim racism—just as racism predicated early 20th century [infringements](#) on [civil rights](#) and free speech [over](#) the “[red scare](#)” and [contestation](#) of Black civil rights particularly in the 1960s and 70s. The infamous case of the Los Angeles 8 or “LA 8” also [sought](#) to deport eight pro-Palestinian immigrants on the basis of political speech; seven of them were Palestinian, and one Kenyan. After 20 years of deportation proceedings on tenuous grounds, a Los Angeles immigration judge finally ended their prosecution, what he [called](#) “an embarrassment to the rule of law.” This and many other [cases](#) create a through-line of authoritarian exceptions to the rule of law drawn around Palestinian activism, Israeli warfare and state influence, and Muslim-American rights. These recurring exceptions are not isolated instances, but manifestations of a broader white supremacist logic—one that constitutes a non-white [racial “other”](#) to deflect and excuse aberrations in the rule of law. Such exceptions justified mass [surveillance](#) operations against anti-apartheid activists and pro-Palestine activists alike, which preceded the LA 8 case and continued thereafter. That surveillance predated the passage of the [Patriot Act](#) that broadened the amorphous category of Arab and Muslim while [weakening](#) constitutional rights to privacy and religious freedom under the banner of counterterrorism after 9/11. This context makes the Trump invocation of the antiquated [Alien Enemies Act](#) less surprising as a mechanism to deport [Palestinian](#) and other [racialized immigrants](#). These white supremacist escalations are a continuation of the logic that has long relied on anti-Palestinian, anti-Muslim, and anti-Black racism.

Recommendations & Suggested Legislation

Many of the ways pro-Palestinian activists and immigrants have been attacked involve myriad mechanisms of enforcement or enablement. Not all of these mechanisms are reversible at state or local levels, but some measures make this unconstitutional agenda more difficult to implement or can create the context for people-powered resistance to this agenda. For example, states can intervene somewhat on the linking of local law enforcement data to federal databases, and the deputizing of local law enforcement in service of ICE. States can also pass laws to prevent ICE agents from covering their faces and ensuring police forces must be uniformed with identifying information accessible. Below are some of those opportunities:

- **Oppose HR 9495 the “[Nonprofit Killer Bill](#)” and related legislation** which seeks to void the nonprofit tax status of organizations that oppose federal agendas by enforcing unsubstantiated accusations of ties to foreign political factions and terrorist organizations, a designation requiring no legal or evidentiary justification.

- **Raise the alarm on key players and policies that suppress anti-genocide activism and speech** in part because they build the basis for widespread suppression of human rights, including immigrant rights.
- **Oppose adoption of unconstitutional IHRA [definition](#) of anti-Semitism** which harmfully conflates Zionism and Judaism in ways that harm activists against Israeli apartheid and genocidal warfare, and which harms anti-Zionist Jews.
- **Support campaigns to [Drop the ADL](#) and [Reject AIPAC](#):** These campaigns have often been led in large part by groups like Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now, alongside dozens of groups committed to human rights and healthy democracy.
- **Support activist students seeking visa reinstatement and hold universities accountable** for complicity in the vilification of their students and lack of protection. Uplift their campaigns for accountability through hunger strikes, encampments, and other tactics.
- **Limit state contributions to federal databases:** States may pass laws to limit the transmission of certain records to federal criminal justice databases such as the NCIC (a national crime database) in order to protect against misuse of data on unproven offenses, expunged records, misdemeanors, and juvenile adjudication preventing its use for unlawful detention or imprisonment in contradiction with constitutional rights.
- **Pass laws to prevent anonymity of law enforcement:** require names of local deputized agents to be public given their employment on public dollars, require they present warrants, require agents and contractors to show their faces and badges or other identification on the job, and take measures to prosecute individuals abusing their roles as federal agents or contractors.
- **Pass laws to deny state employment and licensure of individuals who have contracted with ICE on basis of state interests in public trust and conflicts of interest:** This type of legislation would require disclosure of individuals' past law enforcement or detention contracting, agreement to uphold state sanctuary policies, and would deny certain licenses (over a defined timeframe) based on previous involvement in work that opposes state interests. The legislation would work against federal legislation like [287\(g\)](#) of the Immigration and Nationality Act which allows the deputization of local law enforcement for ICE and related financial incentives for ICE contractors. Such laws would prevent such individuals from certain forms of public employment in roles related to public safety or social services (police, public health workers, etc.). Some [models exists](#) in state and city-level policies concerning prior misconduct or affiliations with private prisons (e.g. in San Francisco and Seattle).
- **Pass laws to ban contracts with private immigration detention centers and law enforcement [training](#) from Israeli occupation forces:** such legislation on private detention centers has [passed](#) previously in California, [Illinois](#), and New York.

- **Pass laws to reverse unconstitutional bans on boycott** of Israeli goods, divestment from Israeli weapons companies, Israeli government bonds, and similar. Pass state and federal laws similarly to reintroduce accurate [labels](#) of goods that originate on illegal Israeli settlements, that is, stolen Palestinian land.
- **Demand universities right the record on student protests**, including measures to provide accurate data on anti-genocide student complaints and victimization, and ensuring their students are not wrongfully associated with foreign states and political factions or viciously misrepresented in protests slogans.
- **Bolster public information campaigns** drawing out the full agenda of repression that implicates Palestinian rights, immigrant rights, racial justice, and democracy altogether.
- **Call on students, alumni, and faculty activists to remain focused on their demands for boycott and divestment**, and not only on the protection of students or faculty's free speech. Continue to rally large numbers to engage in protected speech against the genocide, helping to insulate non-citizen activists. Produce factsheets on numbers of student visas revoked and university action or inaction.
- **Pass state resolutions affirming the rights to due process for non-citizens and immigrants** and related rights to free speech and habeas corpus.

Beyond fighting with legal or legislative measures, targeted boycott and divestment campaigns can reduce the financial incentives surrounding these growing systems of oppression and leverage high-level stakeholder interests against the Trump Administration's actions. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) provides [detailed](#) information about companies complicit in both Palestinian and immigrant repression.

Similarly, policies that support overall population well-being and social services fundamentally undergird the ability of people-powered movements to protest unethical and unconstitutional attacks—making the fight to preserve Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, SNAP (food stamps), and other programs *essential* to the fight against fascism, authoritarianism, and supremacist doctrines linked with Zionism. Indeed, the Trump Administration is utilizing [shock doctrine](#) and generalized precarity to limit and privatize public programs while offering major financial [incentives](#) for individuals to join ICE contract jobs and other agencies enforcing this sinister agenda.

Conclusions and What's To Come

A Mandate To Fight Back Intersectionally

While attacks on pro-Palestine activism have long been a bipartisan collaboration, the far right has weaponized these attacks now at scale—to claw back free speech, academic freedom, immigrant and civil rights, notions of diversity and inclusion, and other fundamentals of a free and just America. From ivy league campuses to public universities and community colleges, federal funding is being weaponized to not only silence present political dissent to a U.S.-funded genocide and other policies—but to fundamentally reshape institutions to preempt dissent and knowledge production. The chilling effect from these crackdowns is impossible to measure but no less ubiquitous. This is why the cases of Mahmoud Khalil, [Legaa Kordia](#), Rümeyza Ozturk and others are vital to resisting Trump's attack on democracy.

Even as the recent attacks on immigrants, students, and universities are wide-reaching, they are also being opposed by grassroots movements across the country. But university leaders must wake up to their complicity in setting precedent for wholesale attacks on free speech, diversity, immigrants, and academic integrity in the face of human rights violations. Identifying the scope, key players, and anticipated next targets of these attacks on American freedoms and democratic norms is essential to enabling activists to take informed action. Our rights as Americans have rarely been guarantees; they must be asserted just as emancipation laws needed to be and just as the rights of people who were enslaved in this country needed to be asserted regardless of the laws of the land.

What must also be clear among those working in immigrant justice, racial justice, social protections, and pro-democracy work more generally, is that the Palestine exception to free speech and other rights has only enabled the degradation of institutional foundations of all of these causes. Just as racial and prison justice, along with immigrant justice, are the north stars of fidelity to American values, it can no longer stand that Palestinians, Muslims, or pro-Palestine advocates are excusable victims of state violence or media and institutional erasure. Authoritarian, anti-minority precedent is [set](#) by cases of anti-Palestinian suppression.

In June 2025, Trump also released his ban on [12 countries](#), the “[Muslim-Africa Ban](#)” version 2.0. This ban on foreign nations, along with the [halting](#) of all U.S. aid to foreign countries except Egypt and Israel, threatens to compromise the U.S.'s geopolitical positioning relative to other major countries and its role in international democratic norms. The countries range from Haiti and Venezuela to Laos, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia and Sierra Leon — all banned on the basis of tenuous national security rationale with a racist backdrop, using broad Immigration and Nationality Act powers. Justice and human rights organizations must be on alert for these and other precedent-setting moves that are changing the landscape of democracy and the very environment in which the public may resist these policies.

Defense Against These Attacks

A range of actions are being taken to fight back; below are some of the ways advocates are fighting back directly against the silencing and deportation attempts of anti-genocide activists and immigrants:

- **Using the law:** [Lawsuits](#) have been a primary way for [individuals](#) and groups to [fight](#) the attacks on anti-genocide activists and [immigrants](#); even states and various federal [courts](#) have been [engaged](#) in legal fights to stop or halt unconstitutional executive orders until they can be adjudicated for legality. At the same time, lawfare against universities and pro-Palestine advocacy [groups](#) has been a key tactic of far-right-wing and Zionist organizations, draining the resources of justice groups. The [ACLU](#), Palestine Legal, CUNY CLEAR, the Center for Constitutional Rights and several others are among those [suing](#) the Trump Administration for upending constitutional and civil protections for citizens and non-citizens alike. Among these cases, Harvard is fighting a lawsuit to resist academic censorship and the revocation of its international student visas
- **In the streets:** Large scale demonstrations and non-violent tactics to obstruct kidnappings of non-citizens have happened all across the country
- **Student & faculty solidarity:** Students have protested for their peers in various ways but maintained a focus on continuing their free speech on Palestine, including escalating to tactics like hunger strikes (such as at Stanford University). Faculty groups and alumni continue to track discrimination in renewed calls for Title VI violation enforcement for anti-genocide activists of Palestinian and Muslim descent. Affiliate faculty groups like [MESA have garnered support from nationwide faculty groups in a lawsuit](#) against deportation of student protestors
- **Protecting nonprofits:** Some nonprofits are moving to insulate their funds by securing funders committed to protecting advocacy or minority services work; some are also preemptively moving out of the non-profit model to ensure wrongful allegations against them cannot suspend all their resources and operations or implicate their staff members.

Alongside these measures to fight back against the Trump Administration and GOP-dominated Congress, states and localities have a significant role to play in pushing back on and slowing Project 2025 and Project Esther's efforts to unravel democracy by leveraging bipartisan complacency on anti-Palestinian precedent. **Without such efforts to fight back, much more than Palestinian rights will be lost** under the false guise of fighting bigotry, terrorism, or inequality.