

**A Survey of Antisemitic Activity and Trends on U.S. Campuses in 2019  
And Efforts to Address It  
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**Antisemitic Activity and Trends in 2019**

A survey of antisemitic activity on college and university campuses in the United States in 2019 revealed approximately **300** incidents of harassment, vandalism and assault targeting Jewish students on more than **100** campuses.<sup>1</sup> Although the total number of such antisemitic incidents was about the same as in 2018, for the second year in a row those incidents identified as expressing **classic antisemitism**<sup>2</sup> **decreased** significantly in 2019 (**by 49%**), while **Israel-related antisemitic acts**<sup>3</sup> **increased** significantly (**by 60%**).

Other continuing and emerging trends highlight the hostility that pro-Israel Jewish students faced on many campuses in 2019:

***Continuing Trends – Rising Number of Academic BDS-Fueled Incidents and Faculty Complicity***

Efforts by students and faculty to promote and implement an academic boycott of Israel (academic BDS<sup>4</sup>) continued to be strongly linked to acts targeting Jewish and pro-Israel students for harm. This is because although academic BDS ostensibly targets Israeli universities and scholars, it cannot be implemented on a campus without direct harm to students who want to travel to, study about or advocate for Israel, a disproportionate number of whom are Jewish.

While compliance with academic BDS guidelines<sup>5</sup> can be linked to the significant overall increase in Israel-related antisemitic incidents from 2018 to 2019, it is most prominent in the following three categories of antisemitic behavior:

- **Discrimination** – Acts involving the unfair treatment or exclusion of students or staff because of their perceived association with Israel **increased by 51% to 62** incidents.
- **Denigration** – Acts involving the public shaming, vilifying or defaming of students or staff because of their perceived association with Israel **increased by 67% to 120** incidents.
- **Suppression of Expression** – Acts involving the shutting down or impeding of Israel-related speech, movement or assembly **increased by 69% to 49** incidents.

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<sup>1</sup> All data in this report compiled from AMCHA Initiative’s database of antisemitic incidents on U.S. campuses: <https://amchainitiative.org/search-by-incident#incident/search/display-by-date/search/>

<sup>2</sup> Examples of classical antisemitic incidents: swastika graffiti; posting of neo-Nazi recruitment flyers; anti-Jewish slurs such as “Kill Jews”; the vandalism of a Jewish group’s menorah.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of Israel-related antisemitic incidents: graffiti stating “Zionists to the gas chamber”; chants of “Zionists off our campus” at an anti-Israel rally; organized efforts to disrupt and shut down a student-organized pro-Israel event; vandalism of a Jewish student’s Israeli flag.

<sup>4</sup> BDS is the acronym for the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement.

<sup>5</sup> <https://usacbi.org/guidelines-for-applying-the-international-academic-boycott-of-israel/>

Here are some examples of how attempts to implement academic BDS have resulted in increased antisemitic activity in 2019, continuing the robust trend seen in 2018<sup>6</sup>:

- **Boycotting Israel-Related Educational Opportunities** - Faculty members' attempts to carry out the guidelines of academic BDS<sup>7</sup> by refusing to write letters of recommendation for students wanting to study in Israel and by faculty bodies voting to shut down their school's programs in Israel both threatened the rights of students to travel to or study in Israel. For the second year in a row, Pitzer College faculty voted to suspend their study abroad program at the University of Haifa, and along with Pitzer students, protested when the college president vetoed the vote. At New York University, the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis voted by a large majority to cut all ties with NYU's Tel Aviv program. And at the University of Michigan, where, in 2018, two faculty members refused to write letters of recommendation for their students wanting to study on university-approved programs in Israel, another faculty member publicly stated that he wanted to "go on record" by stating that, in compliance with academic BDS and in solidarity with his colleagues, he would not write a letter of recommendation for any student wanting to study abroad in Israel.

Anti-Zionist student groups on at least eight campuses undertook campaigns to stop students from participating in educational trips to Israel. For example, at the University of Vermont, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) circulated a letter, signed by 15 student groups, urging all students to refuse to go on a Hillel-sponsored trip to Israel. And at Harvard University, the Palestine Solidarity Committee sent a message through student group email lists that denigrated students who would participate in a spring break trip to Israel and the disputed territories, stating, "By going on this trip, you will be complicit in the whitewashing of...human rights violations against Palestinians."

- **Shutting Down Zionist Expression** - Compliance with academic BDS's guidelines to "boycott and/or work towards the cancellation" of on-campus events or activities that "promote the normalization of Israel in the global academy" resulted in numerous protests, disruptions and cancellations of Israel-related events hosted by students and faculty in 2019. For example, at Arizona State University, an event featuring injured IDF veterans organized by Jewish and pro-Israel student groups was disrupted by protesters, who initially blocked the event entirely, causing it to be moved, and then intimidated participants of the event upon their exit from the new destination. At CUNY Brooklyn College, members of SJP stood directly in front of a pro-Israel student group's display in a campus quad, loudly chanted "Long Live the Intifada, " "Netanyahu, We Indict You with Genocide," and "Free, Free Palestine," called pro-Israel group's board members "murderers," and ripped up one of the group's flyers, calling it "fascism." And at Duke University, a student-launched petition titled "Can't Learn about Justice from a War Criminal," with over 500 signatures, called on Duke University to cancel a departmentally-sponsored talk with former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni.
- **Boycotting Zionist Groups and Individuals on Campus** - Anti-Zionist student groups also complied with the guidelines' call for anti-normalization in their pursuit of boycotting and

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<sup>6</sup> <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Eliminationist-Anti-Zionism-and-Academic-BDS-on-Campus-Report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://usacbi.org/guidelines-for-applying-the-international-academic-boycott-of-israel/>

excluding Jewish and pro-Israel students and student groups from campus life. At Williams College, for example, the student government voted against recognizing Williams Initiative for Israel as an official registered student organization as a result of the group's support for Israel, making it the first group in more than a decade to comply with all the council's bylaws for recognition but fail to receive it. At Columbia University, SJP issued a statement to the campus community arguing that "social ostracization is a powerful tool that the student body can use to voice their rejection of Zionism," calling for the "deplatforming" of Israel advocacy groups and encouraging their "peers and allied organizations to boycott all pro-Israel advocacy groups and clubs." An op-ed in the Princeton University student newspaper urged students not to vote for a Jewish candidate running to be president of the student government, "given his front-and-center background as a member of the Israeli Defense Forces...[that] calls into question both his ability to represent the student body and his moral standing." And at University of California Davis the SJP organized a petition to recall the Jewish, pro-Israel student body president, which stated that the "student body will not tolerate Zionism."

- **Denigrating Zionist Groups and Individuals on Campus** - The academic BDS guidelines' promotion of a "common sense" boycott that calls for "conscientious citizens" to respond with "due criticism" to "egregious individual complicity in, responsibility for, or advocacy of [Israel's] violations of international law" can be linked to dozens of instances of public shaming and denigration of pro-Israel students and student groups. For instance, SJP members at Georgia State University issued a statement accusing pro-Israel students of "anti-blackness, harassment, and genocide support." During a guest lecture in an anthropology class at UCLA, the speaker accused a Jewish student in the class of having "alliances with white supremacists" after she expressed that she was offended at the speaker's anti-Israel lecture. At the University of Michigan, anti-Zionist students demonstrating outside of the campus Hillel during Passover services charged Hillel with "contributing to Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism on campus." And at a meeting of the Swarthmore College student government that included a vote on an anti-Israel divestment resolution, members of SJP called Jewish and pro-Israel students who opposed the resolution "fascists" and "racists."

Finally, it is important to note that while student activists play an important role in the promotion and implementation of academic BDS, it is primarily a faculty-driven boycott, whose rise in prominence and popularity on campuses across the country over the last few years is linked to the increased participation of faculty in the anti-Zionist rhetoric and behavior associated with it. Although the overall contribution of academic departments and individual faculty to antisemitic behavior and expression was about the same in 2019 as in 2018 (86 incidents and 87 incidents, respectively), the number of department and faculty-related incidents involving the targeting of Jewish and pro-Israel students for discrimination, suppression of expression and denigration rose from 16 incidents in 2018 to 24 incidents in 2019. In addition, incidents involving individual faculty or departmentally sponsored anti-Zionist expression were very strongly correlated with Israel-related behaviors targeting students for harm ( $R = .51$ ;  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that anti-Zionist rhetoric expressed by faculty in classrooms and at departmentally-sponsored events may well encourage hostile behavior towards Jewish and pro-Israel students.

### **Emerging Trends: Challenging the Definition of Antisemitism and Jewish Identity**

In recent years, disputes surrounding the definition of antisemitism and related issues have dramatically increased and even taken center stage on some campuses. Specifically, the question of whether anti-Zionism is a form of antisemitism and should be treated as such, as well as the related questions of whether Zionism is an implicit part of Jewish identity and who gets to define antisemitism or represent Jewishness, have been discussed and debated with increasing frequency in the campus square, the student senate, classrooms and conference halls, often with negative consequences for many Jewish students.

This controversy appears to have arisen as a response to efforts from the Jewish community to ensure Jewish students are afforded the same protection from anti-Zionist-motivated harassment as they are from harassment motivated by classic antisemitism, which has not been the case historically. These efforts have primarily included attempts to get universities and the U.S. Department of Education to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism<sup>8</sup> when enforcing university harassment policies or federal anti-discrimination law. The IHRA definition, which has been adopted or recognized by 18 countries, including the U.S. Department of State,<sup>9</sup> and is widely accepted by worldwide Jewry, identifies several examples of anti-Zionist rhetoric as antisemitic. The proponents of the IHRA definition believe that if it is used by school and government officials as the basis for adjudicating the motivation of harassing behavior, then anti-Zionist motivated harassment will be addressed identically to harassment motivated by classic antisemitism, and Jewish students will be adequately protected from all forms of antisemitism.

But as efforts to promote the use of the IHRA definition in the context of higher education have increased over the last few years, so, too, have the efforts of anti-Zionist individuals and groups to dispute the linkage between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. In 2019, rhetoric denying a link between anti-Zionism and antisemitism or between Zionism and Judaism was reported **126 times, nearly four times** the number of instances found in 2018. For example at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, a student government resolution entitled “Condemning Ignorance of Racism and Equating Anti-Zionism with Anti-Semitism” was passed by a large majority of student senators. At DePaul University, SJP hosted an event entitled “How Anti-Zionism Does NOT Mean Anti-Semitism,” featuring a representative from the anti-Zionist group Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). At Portland State University, buttons with the slogan “anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism” were on sale at a campus event hosted by the school’s JVP chapter, and an op-ed by JVP leaders at Stanford University was entitled “White supremacy is anti-Semitic, anti-Zionism is not.”

Expression denying the link between anti-Zionism and antisemitism was often accompanied by accusations that Zionists, including Jewish and pro-Israel students on campus, were acting in bad faith by using the charge of “antisemitism” to silence pro-Palestinian speech. Zionists were also accused of themselves being antisemitic in their defense of Zionism and denigrated for claiming to speak for all Jews. For instance at UCLA, the Anthropology Graduate Student Association issued a statement claiming, “Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism... [and] we hope UCLA students and the Daily Bruin will employ a more intellectually rigorous perspective before weaponizing false allegations of anti-Semitism to erode academic freedoms.” At University of Michigan, a panel discussion hosted by the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies included a Stanford University professor who stated, “Zionism as manifested today in the state of Israel is not only fascistic but also anti-Semitic in that it assumes a monolithic Jewish identity [and] denies all Jews

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<sup>8</sup>[https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/press\\_release\\_document\\_antisemitism.pdf](https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/press_release_document_antisemitism.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Working\\_Definition\\_of\\_Antisemitism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Working_Definition_of_Antisemitism)

that do not conform to that profile any place in the state of Israel.” And at San Francisco State University, the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Program in the College of Ethnic Studies posted to its official Facebook page an open letter to the university president stating, “Arab, Muslim and Palestinian communities...[and] other indigenous communities, communities of color and marginalized communities, including our Jewish sisters and brothers...are equally insulted by the continued attempt of Israel apologists to claim that Israel and Zionism speak for all Jews and own Jewishness.”

Moreover, expression denying the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism or between Zionism and Judaism was very strongly linked to the Israel-related harassment of Jewish and pro-Israel students: schools with one or more incidents involving such expression were **more than twice as likely** to host acts of Israel-related behavior targeting students for harm ( $\chi^2 = 31.7$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and **the more such expression, the more Israel-related acts of aggression** ( $R = .68$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Given that **70%** of such rhetoric was expressed by members of anti-Zionist student groups such as SJP and JVP or at events hosted by these groups, and that members of these same anti-Zionist groups were responsible for a majority of the incidents of Israel-related harassment, denials of the antisemitic nature of anti-Zionism may have been efforts to ensure that their anti-Zionist behavior would not result in disciplinary or legal action.

Though anti-Zionist Jews represent a small fraction of worldwide Jewry, it is important to note the outsized role they play in legitimizing the arguments that anti-Zionism is not antisemitism and that Zionism is not a fundamental part of Jewish identity. In 2019, **more than 40%** of rhetoric advancing these arguments were made by Jews identifying themselves as anti-Zionists or at events sponsored or co-sponsored by a Jewish anti-Zionist group, often in conjunction with SJP. The usefulness of including anti-Zionist Jewish voices was articulated by an SJP leader at Northwestern University, who stated in an article in the student newspaper that “working with Jewish students” was important for “making sure that the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is clear.”

JVP is by far the anti-Zionist Jewish group most active on college campuses across the country. Although the organization was established in 1996 as a Jewish group opposing certain policies and actions of the Israeli government,<sup>10</sup> in January of 2019 JVP’s leadership announced the group was officially an “anti-Zionist” organization,<sup>11</sup> opposed to the very existence of a Jewish state. In the same year, there was a **45%** increase in overall JVP campus activity, from 118 occurrences in 2018 to **171 occurrences** in 2019. Not surprisingly, schools with an active JVP student group were **3 times more likely** to have occurrences of expression denying that anti-Zionism is antisemitism or that Zionism is part of Jewish identity ( $\chi^2 = 25.9$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the more overall JVP-involved campus activity, the higher the occurrence of such expression ( $R = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### **Efforts to Address Campus Antisemitism in America in 2019**

As mentioned above, in recent years there have been concerted efforts to ensure that Jewish college and university students receive the same protection from harassment motivated by Israel-related antisemitism as from harassment motivated by classic antisemitism. In 2019, these efforts focused on urging universities and state and federal governments to adopt and utilize the IHRA definition of antisemitism in adjudicating acts of harassment against Jewish students, as well as

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<sup>10</sup>[https://web.archive.org/web/20070606214402/http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/publish/article\\_29.shtml](https://web.archive.org/web/20070606214402/http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/publish/article_29.shtml)

<sup>11</sup> <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/zionism/>

legal efforts to fight specific cases of anti-Zionist-motivated harassment using Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act:

- **Campus Efforts** – Student activists on several campuses sought to enshrine the IHRA definition of antisemitism, particularly its acknowledgement of the antisemitic nature of anti-Zionism, in resolutions considered by their student governments, with mixed results. At George Washington University, some aspects of the IHRA definition were included in “The Anti-Semitism Condemnation Act,”<sup>12</sup> but other clauses identifying demonizing claims about Israel as antisemitic were removed before passage of the resolution in the student senate. At Stanford University, a “Resolution to Recognize Anti-Semitism in Our Community,”<sup>13</sup> which quoted the IHRA definition but left out the definition’s examples of anti-Zionist expression, passed unanimously in the undergraduate student senate. At University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, despite strong support among Jewish students for including the IHRA definition in a resolution entitled “Combating Anti-Semitism,” not only was the resolution passed without any mention of the definition, but later that year an SJP-sponsored resolution declaring that anti-Zionism is not antisemitism was passed by a large margin in the student senate. Only at the University of St. Thomas was a resolution including the full IHRA definition passed by the undergraduate government.
- **State Efforts** – The Florida state legislature passed a bill<sup>14</sup> mandating that the state’s public schools and universities treat discrimination motivated by antisemitic intent in an identical manner to discrimination motivated by race. In addition, the bill contained the full IHRA definition and specified that it should be used in determining antisemitic intent.
- **Federal Efforts** – For the third year in a row, the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act,<sup>15</sup> requiring that the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) use the full IHRA definition of antisemitism in adjudicating cases of antisemitic harassment under Title VI, failed to pass into law. However in December 2019, President Donald Trump signed an executive order directing “all executive departments and agencies charged with enforcing Title VI” to use the IHRA definition of antisemitism, including its examples identifying anti-Zionism as antisemitism.
- **Legal Efforts** – In 2019, at least five Title VI complaints were filed with the DOE by legal groups alleging that Jewish students had been the victims of anti-Zionist-motivated harassment. Three complaints were filed before President Trump issued his executive order regarding campus antisemitism – at Duke University/University of North Carolina Chapel Hill (UNC),<sup>16</sup> New York University<sup>17</sup> and University of California Los Angeles<sup>18</sup> – with

<sup>12</sup>[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hjfrl2ZUADG9lXd1civMgL\\_U0hOXilBaDNgCTbvDi0M/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hjfrl2ZUADG9lXd1civMgL_U0hOXilBaDNgCTbvDi0M/edit)

<sup>13</sup> [https://docs.google.com/document/d/17SvDX8wf-XP3cNm9fPYrmr7\\_NWunJntyh8J3JpwsGCC/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17SvDX8wf-XP3cNm9fPYrmr7_NWunJntyh8J3JpwsGCC/edit)

<sup>14</sup> <http://laws.flrules.org/2019/59>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/852/text>

16 [https://zoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Letter-to-Kenneth-Marcus-re-UNC-Duke-Gaza-conference-4-17-19.pdf?utm\\_source=Unknown+List&utm\\_campaign=e84bd6e566-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2019\\_04\\_18\\_01\\_18&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-e84bd6e566-](https://zoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Letter-to-Kenneth-Marcus-re-UNC-Duke-Gaza-conference-4-17-19.pdf?utm_source=Unknown+List&utm_campaign=e84bd6e566-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_18_01_18&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-e84bd6e566-)  
[https://zoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Letter-to-Kenneth-Marcus-re-UNC-Duke-Gaza-conference-4-17-19.pdf?utm\\_source=Unknown+List&utm\\_campaign=e84bd6e566-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2019\\_04\\_18\\_01\\_18&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-e84bd6e566-](https://zoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Letter-to-Kenneth-Marcus-re-UNC-Duke-Gaza-conference-4-17-19.pdf?utm_source=Unknown+List&utm_campaign=e84bd6e566-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_18_01_18&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-e84bd6e566-)  
[https://zoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Letter-to-Kenneth-Marcus-re-UNC-Duke-Gaza-conference-4-17-19.pdf?utm\\_source=Unknown+List&utm\\_campaign=e84bd6e566-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2019\\_04\\_18\\_01\\_18&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-e84bd6e566-](https://zoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Letter-to-Kenneth-Marcus-re-UNC-Duke-Gaza-conference-4-17-19.pdf?utm_source=Unknown+List&utm_campaign=e84bd6e566-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_18_01_18&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-e84bd6e566-)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Antisemitism/NYU-antisemitism-investigation-ongoing-following-several-incidents-607954>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.standwithus.com/ucla-titlevi-complaint>

the DOE launching investigations into all of them. The complaint against Duke-UNC led to two separate resolution agreements, with UNC committing in November to respond to and investigate allegations of antisemitic harassment and to issue a statement that such harassment will not be tolerated,<sup>19</sup> and Duke University making similar commitments in the following month.<sup>20</sup> The other two complaints are still being investigated, as is a complaint about the harassment of Jewish students at Columbia submitted immediately after the President's executive order. Another Title VI complaint filed a week later at Georgia Institute of Technology<sup>21</sup> has yet to receive an official response from the DOE.

While in 2019 considerable efforts were expended pushing for the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism by universities and government agencies so that anti-Zionist motivated harassment would be treated as antisemitism, as noted previously in this report, these efforts elicited enormous pushback from anti-Zionist students and faculty, who adamantly denied the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. Given the extent of such pushback, as well as its linkage to acts of anti-Zionist motivated harassment, it remains unclear how effective efforts to combat Israel-related antisemitism using the IHRA definition and civil rights law will ultimately be. In the meantime, therefore, it is beneficial to explore additional approaches to ensuring that Jewish students are protected from anti-Zionist harassment, which focus solely on the harmfulness of the behavior and do not depend on the motivation of the perpetrator or the identity of the victim.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.jta.org/quick-reads/university-of-north-carolina-at-chapel-hill-agrees-to-resolution-over-anti-semitism-complaint>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.jta.org/quick-reads/duke-university-resolves-anti-semitism-discrimination-complaint>

<sup>21</sup> <https://aclj.org/israel/aclj-files-federal-complaint-to-combat-anti-semitism-on-major-university-campus>