

# 2019 Year in Review:

Movement for Palestinian rights thrives despite censorship

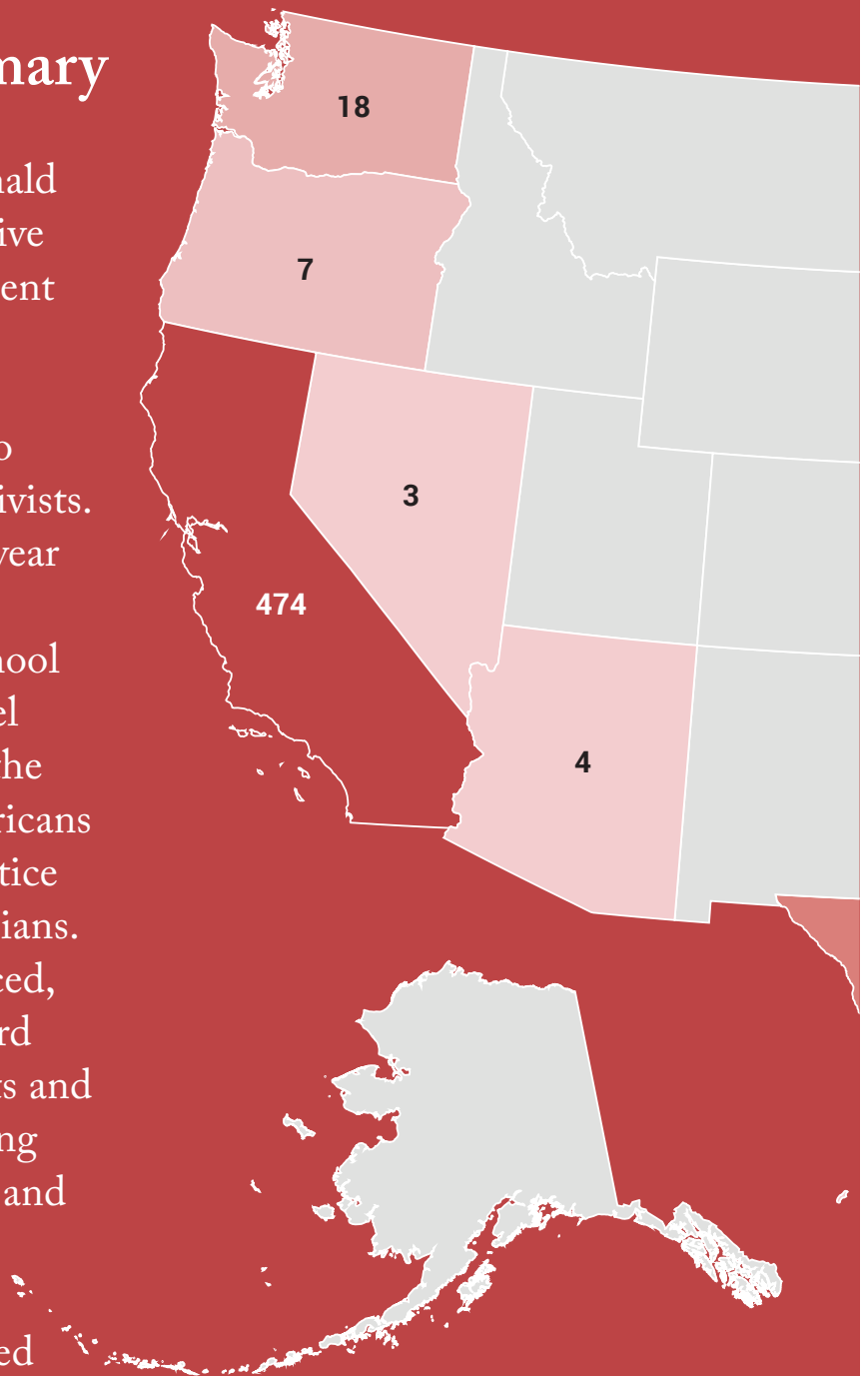


**PALESTINE  
LEGAL**

# Executive Summary

In December 2019, Donald Trump signed an executive order directing government agencies to consider a distorted definition of antisemitism designed to censor human rights activists. This move capped off a year of heightened efforts by government officials, school administrators, and Israel proxy groups to silence the growing chorus of Americans demanding freedom, justice and equality for Palestinians. Rather than being silenced, activists pushed back hard against censorship efforts and smear campaigns, winning key victories on campus and in court.

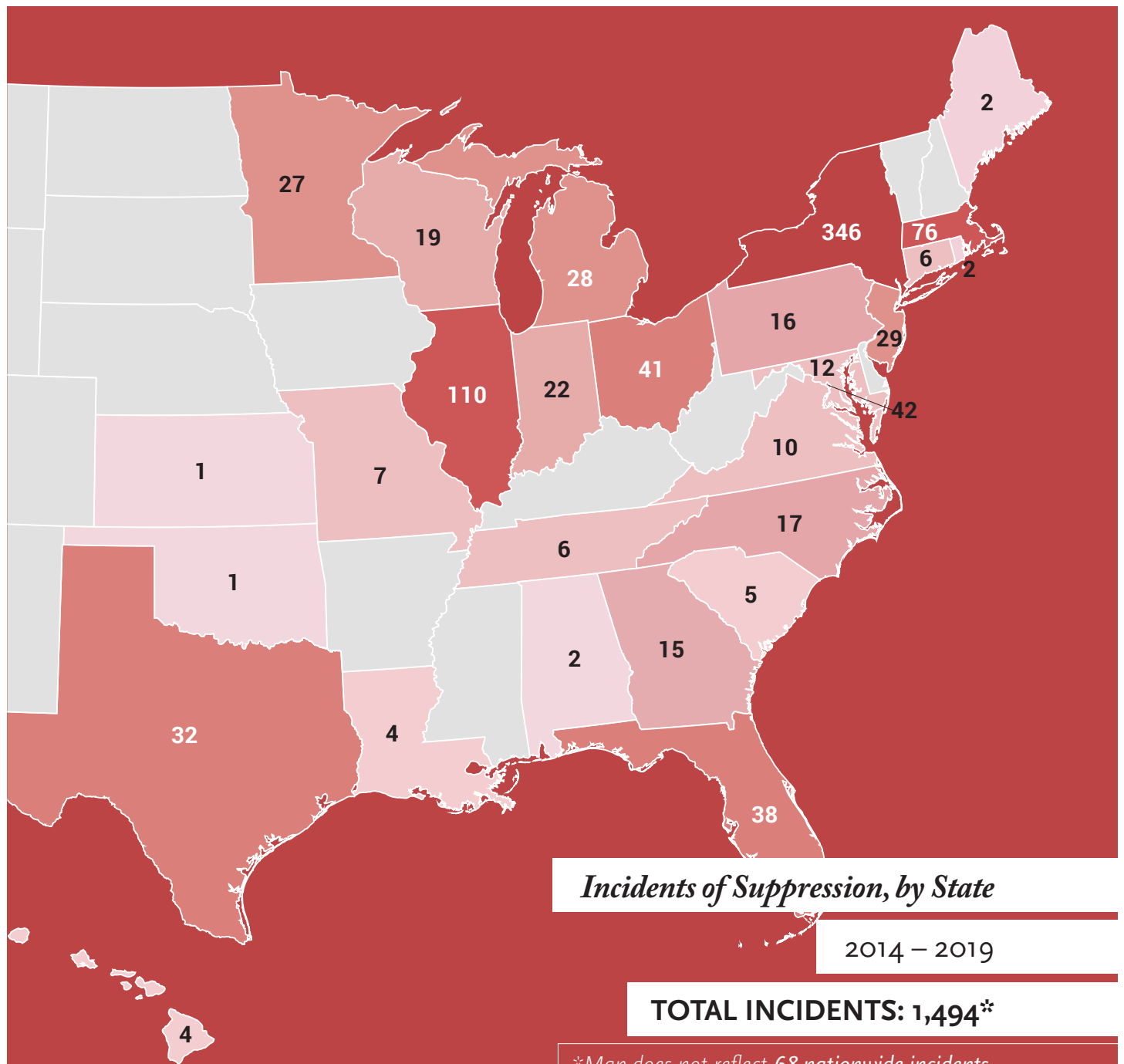
Palestine Legal responded to **247 incidents** of suppression of U.S.-based Palestine advocacy in 2019. This brings the number of incidents Palestine Legal responded to in six years, from January 1, 2014, through December 31, 2019, to a total of **1,494 incidents**. This data reflects only what was directly reported to



Palestine Legal, and therefore is not an exhaustive account of the suppression.

Seventy-four percent of incidents we responded to in 2019 targeted students and scholars at **61 campuses** across the country. Additionally, Palestine





### *Incidents of Suppression, by State*

2014 – 2019

**TOTAL INCIDENTS: 1,494\***

*\*Map does not reflect 68 nationwide incidents. Legislative measures are not included in the map, or in the total number of incidents.*

Legal responded to **67 legal questions** from activists who were concerned their rights were threatened.

Palestine Legal identified **19 bills and four non-binding resolutions** introduced at the state and federal level with the intent of condemning,

silencing, or punishing advocacy for Palestinian rights. These included both laws targeting boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) and laws adopting a distorted definition of antisemitism in an effort to shield Israel from criticism.



## Trump Redefines Antisemitism

Days after delivering a blatantly antisemitic speech, Trump signed an executive order requiring federal agencies conducting civil rights investigations, including the Department of Education, to consider an overbroad redefinition of antisemitism. The definition could classify virtually all speech critical of Israel as antisemitic. Complaints against campus activism citing the distorted definition—both before and after Trump's order—confirm that the redefinition is being used primarily to target Palestine advocacy on campuses, and not to combat the disturbing rise in violent antisemitism perpetrated by white nationalists.

The same definition has been pushed by Israel advocates for over a decade in various forums to conflate criticism of Israel with hatred towards Jewish people, in an effort to censor and punish Palestine

*Photo: Students at UC Berkeley protesting Trump's Executive Order.*



advocacy. Trump unilaterally adopted it after the U.S. Congress refused to push forward two bills proposing the same definition and while the third bill was pending.

In 120 incidents, or nearly half the incidents we responded to in 2019, activists were falsely accused of antisemitism or anti-Jewish bias due solely to their support for Palestinian rights. Over the year, at least four bills were introduced on the state and federal level attempting to codify the distorted definition, though only one state adopted the redefinition in 2019. The right-wing legislative group ALEC has indicated it is pushing such legislation, and we expect other states to introduce similar measures.

This redefinition tactic was also reflected globally in 2019, including in France, Greece, Cyprus, and Hungary. In some cases, such as the Canadian cities of Vancouver and Calgary, redefinition efforts were blocked due to public opposition. The Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs praised many of the countries adopting the distorted definition and has taken credit for its role in these adoptions.

## **Department of Education Cracks Down on Activism and Academic Freedom**

In 2018, Kenneth Marcus, a man who had championed the use of civil rights law to target campus criticism of Israel, was appointed by Trump as head of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the Department of Education. Predictably, Marcus's position at OCR has resulted in an increase in federal complaints and investigations into campus advocacy for Palestinian rights. This is especially the case after Marcus unilaterally declared in late 2018 that he would use the distorted definition in adjudicating allegations of antisemitism, a move now bolstered by Trump's order.



In 2019, at least **eight complaints** were filed under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act alleging discrimination by colleges and universities against Jewish students, with the aim of suppressing criticism of Israel and support for Palestinian rights. At least **three such complaints were publicized in the three weeks** following Trump's executive order. This is a sharp increase from the two complaints reported to Palestine Legal in all of 2018. No OCR complaints were reported to Palestine Legal in the previous three years, after Obama's Department of Education dismissed several such complaints.

In January, a complaint was filed with OCR in an effort to cancel a February 7th event with author Miko Peled at **Bucknell University**. There were no reports that any investigation had been opened and the event proceeded without incident.

In April, a complaint was filed against NYU days after NYU Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) received the school's President's Service Award. In November, OCR opened an investigation into the school.

In October, the Israel proxy group StandWithUs filed a complaint against **UCLA** over a May 2019 guest lecture in an anthropology course where professor Rabab Abdulhadi spoke about the history of Islamophobia and its interplay with concepts such as settler colonialism, imperial feminism, and "shared values" between settler-colonial states. A student complained about Abdulhadi's remark that in the aftermath of the 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, white nationalist Richard Spencer had proudly proclaimed himself a "white Zionist." After a five-month investigation into the student's complaint, UCLA concluded that there was no wrongdoing. StandWithUs then filed a complaint with the federal government alleging that UCLA's response was insufficient. OCR opened an investigation in January 2020.







*Professor Rabab Abdulhadi*

↓ In December, two complaints were filed against **Columbia University** in the immediate aftermath of Trump's executive order. The first complaint, brought by the Lawfare Project, argued that speech supporting Palestinian rights – including educational events during Israel Apartheid Week and a campaign urging Columbia to divest from companies complicit in Israel's violations of Palestinian rights – created a “hostile environment” for Jewish and Israeli campus community members. The second, brought by a student who graduated in 1980, complained about an October 2019 book



## DeVos Meddles in Middle East Studies Programs While OCR Pushes Distorted Definition

In April, Rep. George Holding (R-NC) filed a complaint with the Department of Education over a March 2019 conference called “Conflict Over Gaza: People, Politics, and Possibilities,” held at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC). The conference included a performance of a satirical song by Palestinian rapper Tamer Nafar, which Nafar prefaced by mocking the accusations of antisemitism Palestinians often face. In his complaint, Holding misrepresented Nafar’s performance and also complained that many of the Gaza experts who spoke at the conference have engaged in boycotts of Israel over its treatment of Palestinians.

Three months later, the Department of Education published a letter threatening to withdraw funding from the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies, which sponsored the event. The letter, which makes no reference to the Gaza conference, criticizes the consortium for, among other things, decisions by its graduates to “pursue academic careers rather than in government or business.” The letter threatened to cut off Higher Education Act funding to Middle East Studies, giving Duke-UNC just four weeks to provide a revised schedule of activities.

The universities responded, defending the program but promising to institute increased oversight of the program’s activities. Reports in October showed that the program had received its funding.

The government’s threat against the program attracted widespread criticism from academics and others.





## OCR Investigates

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The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) also filed a complaint against the universities after the conference on Gaza. OCR opened investigations at both UNC and Duke. The universities entered into resolution agreements in October and December, respectively, ending the investigations before any findings were made. Among other requirements, the agreements specifically call on the universities to revise their anti-discrimination policies to include “a description of the forms of anti-Semitism that can manifest in the University environment.” This requirement, which UNC was given just over two weeks to fulfill, suggests an effort by the Department of Education or the ZOA to pressure the universities into adopting the examples of antisemitism included in the distorted definition, such as “claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.”

The threats against the Duke-UNC consortium are a continuation of nearly two decades of right-wing targeting of area studies programs, and Middle East studies programs in particular.



talk on international law and Palestine with Rutgers Law Professor Noura Erakat.

Also in December, the right-wing American Center for Law and Justice filed a complaint against **Georgia Tech** after the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) successfully appealed sanctions they faced for refusing to allow a non-student employee of Hillel to attend their general meeting and offer a “counter-narrative” promoting Israel.

## **Efforts in Congress to Entrench the Distorted Definition**

Trump’s executive order was the culmination of years of efforts by opponents of Palestinian freedom and equality to establish the distorted definition of antisemitism as enforceable law. The Anti-Semitism Awareness Act, which would require the Department of Education to consider a similar definition, was reintroduced in Congress in July. The bill, which failed to pass in 2016 and 2018 after civil liberties and human rights groups raised concerns that it would result in First Amendment violations, stalled in 2019 as well.

The distorted definition was also raised in Congress in other ways in 2019:





**House Resolution 72**, a resolution announced as a rebuke of Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) for their outspoken criticism of Israel, cited the distorted definition of antisemitism. The resolution failed to pass. A similar resolution targeting Rep. Omar, **House Resolution 183**, was reported to originally contain reference to the distorted definition, but was substantially revised before being introduced and adopted. The final version of the resolution instead addressed a broad range of bigotry, including death threats against Omar and other Muslim and Jewish members of Congress.

While introducing **H.R. 221**, a bill on monitoring and combating global antisemitism, Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) made it clear that the bill was intended to suppress efforts to support Palestinian freedom through boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS). Citing the foundational elements of the distorted redefinition, Smith argued that “targeting the State of Israel with the three D’s — demonization, double-standard, and delegitimization” was among “the most pernicious examples of ... the new anti-Semitism.” The bill passed the House but not the Senate.

## **Florida Adopts Distorted Redefinition**

In May, **Florida** became the second state to adopt a similar distorted definition for use in civil rights investigations in schools, following South Carolina, which passed a similar law in 2018. One example of antisemitism included in the Florida law is “focusing peace or human rights investigations only on Israel.” Florida governor Ron DeSantis signed the law during a cabinet meeting in Israel, a move that the First Amendment Foundation and four major news organizations argued in a court filing was a violation of Florida law.

Similar bills were also introduced in **Tennessee** and **New Jersey** in 2019, but did not pass.






## Lawsuit Demands Censorship at UMass

↓ In April, an anonymous group of students relied on the same distorted definition in Trump's executive order when suing the University of Massachusetts in an ironic effort to block an event about censorship of pro-Palestinian voices.

After a disinformation campaign led by the Anti-Defamation League, Americans for Peace and Tolerance, the Massachusetts Republican Jewish Committee, and the Massachusetts Republican Party failed to bring about the cancellation of the event, anonymous students sued the university, demanding an emergency order from the court to prevent the event from taking place.

The judge denied this request and allowed the event—"Not Backing Down: Israel, Free Speech and the Battle for Palestinian Human Rights"—to proceed. An audience of 2,000 people attended the May 4 event, featuring Marc



*Photo: Marc Lamont Hill, Linda Sarsour, Vijay Prashad, Roger Waters and Dave Zirin speaking at UMass Photo.*

Credit: Media Education Foundation

Lamont Hill, Linda Sarsour, Roger Waters, Dave Zirin, and moderator Vijay Prashad.

After the event, the anonymous group of students tried to press the claim that the university had violated Massachusetts anti-discrimination laws and its contract with Jewish students by allowing the event to take place. In July, the judge ruled that the students could not hide behind a veil of anonymity if they wanted the case to move forward. After several rounds of delay, the students eventually dropped the suit in December.

Throughout the case, Palestine Legal provided support to Rachel Weber, an attorney representing the event's sponsors, including Jewish Voice for Peace-Western Mass and the Media Education Foundation.





## Students Persevere Under Pressure

Student activists continued to face — and in many cases overcome — false accusations and smear campaigns from right-wing Israel advocacy groups throughout 2019. The year also witnessed numerous university administrators issuing baseless public condemnations and conducting chilling investigations into campus activism. The trend likely reflects the emboldening of Israel advocacy groups by the Trump administration's commitment to cracking down on campus Palestine activism. As a result, these groups are increasing their pressure on universities and other institutions to censor and punish students. These kinds of pressure campaigns on universities are likely to result in more federal complaints in 2020 in the wake of Trump's executive order.

### **National Students for Justice in Palestine**

Withstanding another months-long campaign to shut down their annual conference, National Students for Justice in Palestine (NSJP) held a successful convening at the University of Minnesota

*Photos: (Left) Students at UIUC demand an apology from their chancellor; (Below) Logo for 2019 National Students for Justice in Palestine conference. Credit: NSJP*

(UMN) in November. An Israeli government-sponsored app directed people to complain of an unsafe environment on campus. Anonymous websites published meritless reports smearing conference facilitators with false accusations of support for terrorism. Israel lobbyists produced a report calling on UMN to cancel and monitor the conference. Despite these calls, UMN respected the right to hold on-campus discussion about Palestinian freedom. Throughout the conference, unidentified individuals took pictures of attendees entering and exiting the conference, while online trolls cyberbullied attendees. Despite this intimidation, the conference was a success, drawing over 350 attendees from across the U.S. and Canada.







## Arizona State University

A coalition of student organizations was falsely accused of antisemitism for protesting a November 13 event featuring Israeli soldiers. As the event was beginning, campus police prevented protestors from attending the event after advising the event hosts to designate the event as private. After the protest, administrators called in presidents of various student groups to meet separately with administrators in a move students saw as an attempt to divide their coalition. Despite these efforts, a broad coalition of student organizations, including Black Lives Matter Phoenix Metro, Movimiento Estudiantil (Chicanx de Aztlan) at ASU, Undocumented Students for Educational Equity, and Young Democratic Socialists of America at ASU, came together with ASU SJP in the weeks after the event to affirm their commitment to joint struggle against racism and repression and redouble their support for SJP's demand that ASU divest from companies profiting off of Israel's human rights abuses.

*Photos: (Top) Palestine Legal delivers know your rights presentation at 2019 NSJP conference; (Right) Students march at UIUC to draw attention to their demands for the administration.*



## Bard College

In October, Bard SJP protested a panel featuring Ruth Wisse, a retired professor at Harvard with a history of making bigoted remarks. Students held signs that included quotes from Wisse such as “Palestinian Arabs are people who breed and bleed and advertise their misery.” The event was moderated by Batya Ungar-Sargon, an editor at The Forward, and former Israeli official Shany Mor. Shortly after the panel began, one student began reading a short statement explaining that students were protesting the event because of the speakers’ anti-Palestinian views. During Q&A, the remaining students chanted for several seconds and were asked to leave the room. They complied and the talk was completed. After the event, Ungar-Sargon published a piece with the incendiary title, “I Was Protested At Bard College For Being A Jew.” As of January 2020, two students were still under investigation for their protest, which Bard policy permits.

## University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

After University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) Chancellor Robert Jones sent a schoolwide email that called a Palestinian student’s presentation on Palestine antisemitic, a diverse



coalition of students organized to educate their peers and demand accountability. On October 23, the student government voted by a large margin to pass a powerful resolution demanding a retraction and apology from the chancellor and strongly condemning the false conflation of criticism of Israel with antisemitism.

## University of Florida

Around 80 students at the University of Florida (UF) silently walked out of a November 19 event featuring Yoni Michanie, a reservist in the Israeli military and employee of the anti-Palestinian group Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA). After the silent protest, Michanie took to social media to falsely claim that protestors called him a Nazi and a war criminal. Three days later, administrators sent a mass email calling the protest antisemitic and repeating Michanie's claim. UF SJP released a statement explaining that the protest was silent and that all signs were either printed or preapproved by the group. None called Michanie a Nazi or a war criminal. Witnesses supported SJP's account of the protest. After numerous calls and emails pointing out the false claim, the school quietly edited a version of the statement on their website to say that there was no evidence that protesters had made those remarks. After additional organizing, more than three weeks after the initial email, the school finally agreed to send notice of the correction to students and faculty who had received the initial email.

## Censorship in High Schools

In a trend we highlighted in 2018 and continued to see at the start of 2020, a number of high schools also censored discussion of Palestine.



In February, a Palestinian student at a California high school was told that he could not write a report about the boycott of Sabra hummus over its support for the Israeli military because it was not a “real boycott.” When the student later questioned her, the teacher went on a racist tirade saying that Palestinians are regarded as Taliban. With the help of CAIR and Palestine Legal, the student filed a complaint with school administrators. Instead of reprimanding the teacher, the student was pulled from class and given the option of switching to an online course. Despite statements from two other students who remembered hearing the tirade, the school district sided with the teacher, who denied making the comments. The student reported that the teacher’s comments had prompted classmates to laugh at him and call him Taliban. Two weeks after the investigation was closed, the student received an inexplicable visit from FBI counterterrorism agents, which the student suspected was the result of a call from the teacher.

In March, a substitute teacher in California was summarily fired for leaving a note for the teacher whose class he was teaching. The substitute saw pro-Israel propaganda on the walls of a classroom, including an exclusionary parking sign that said, “Parking for Israelis only,” and left a note for the teacher on his desk that said Israel is an apartheid state. The substitute was fired after the teacher called him antisemitic.

In May, a school district in Illinois publicly apologized for advertising a professional development course called “Teaching Palestine.” Days after sharing the course with staff, the school district responded to pressure from pro-Israel groups by issuing a statement distancing itself from the course, repeating the unfounded claim that the course, which had not yet been taught, was one-sided and saying that it had “created a sense of exclusion.”

*Photo: New Yorkers protest during global day of action to boycott Puma. Credit: Joe Catron*







## Women of Color Leading the Way

Palestinian and other women of color who advocate for Palestine are often the target of particularly virulent backlash, caught in the cross-hairs of both racism and misogyny. These attacks demonstrate the importance of a unified struggle for justice and reflect a deep-seated fear among supporters of Israel of the growth of cross-movement solidarity and intersectional analyses of oppression.

After inviting Angela Davis to accept its annual Fred Shuttlesworth Human Rights award in honor of her lifelong commitment to equality and justice, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) rescinded the award in January due to her outspoken advocacy for Palestinian freedom. Both locally and across the world, activists called out the hypocrisy of the decision, leading to the resignation of three BCRI officers and an offer to reinstate the award. Instead of the awards ceremony, Davis attended a grassroots celebration organized by the Birmingham Committee for Truth and Reconciliation, leaving it to the community to decide whether she accepted the BCRI award. In August, BCRI announced that Davis had agreed to accept the award.

In September, after the Women's March announced that civil rights lawyer Zahra Billoo would be a member of its new 16-member



Photo: Angela Davis.  
Credit: Columbia GSAPP

board, Billoo faced an Islamophobic smear campaign due to her unshakeable commitment to Palestinian human rights. Within two days, Women's March voted her off the board. The exclusion of Billoo, who had been active with the Women's March since its founding, came on the heels of the resignation of founders Linda Sarsour, Tamika Mallory and Bob Bland. Like Billoo, Sarsour has faced relentless attacks as an outspoken Palestine activist. Women's March groups throughout the country have increasingly been criticized for excluding marginalized voices.

Representatives Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN), the first two Muslim women in Congress and the first members of Congress to openly support boycotts for Palestinian rights, have also been targeted by smear campaigns. Supporters of Israel have spread lies and intentionally misconstrued their statements in an effort to isolate them and distract from their efforts to challenge the status quo. Buoyed by demands from President Trump, Israel banned Reps. Tlaib and Omar from entering the country ahead of a planned trip in August due to their support for Palestinian freedom. In February, *The Forward* attempted to fundraise off of Opinion Editor Batya Ungar-Sargon's bad faith attacks on Rep. Omar in an email criticized as an Islamophobic dog-whistle.



## Right to Boycott Still Under Attack

In the midst of a government shutdown in January, the first Senate bill of the 2019 session targeted the right to boycott. The **Combating BDS Act of 2019**, which passed the Senate but not the House, encourages state and local governments to pass laws that infringe on the right to boycott.

In July, the House passed **H. Res. 246**, a non-binding resolution condemning BDS. In response, Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) introduced **H. Res. 496**, a resolution affirming the right to boycott. Eighteen cosponsors signed on to H. Res. 496, but it has not passed.

States around the country continued to introduce legislation targeting the right to boycott:

- In 2019, **Mississippi** became the 27th state to adopt a law against boycotts for Palestinian freedom and equality.
- **Kentucky** and **Louisiana** legislatures passed new laws against boycotts, even though their governors had already issued similar executive orders.
- Bills targeting boycotts were also introduced in **Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, New York, and South Dakota**, but did not pass in 2019.
- In **Kansas**, a lawmaker introduced a bill to repeal the state's existing anti-boycott law, but it failed to pass.

*Photo: Reps. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and John Lewis (D-GA) were the original cosponsors of H. Res. 496.*




## Lawsuits defend the right to boycott

After winning multiple challenges against state anti-boycott laws in 2018, advocates spent 2019 resisting efforts by states to roll back these victories. In April, Arizona amended its anti-boycott law so that it would only apply to state contractors with 10 or more employees and more than \$100,000 in contracts. The state then asked the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to vacate a 2018 decision blocking enforcement of the law, since the amended law no longer applied to the plaintiff in the ACLU's lawsuit against the state. The appeals court granted the request in January 2020. Arizona's law now applies to a smaller subset of companies, but its unconstitutionality has not been cured.

In Texas, a district court declined to dismiss a case after the state employed a similar amend-and-dismiss strategy. Because the amended bill contains "likely unconstitutional requirements," the judge found in a July decision that the case, filed by the ACLU and CAIR, was not moot. The case is currently on appeal at the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, where in December, Palestine Legal and the Center for Constitutional Rights filed a friend-of-the-court brief in support of the lawsuit.

In Arkansas, a district court declined to block enforcement of the state's anti-boycott law, dismissing a lawsuit by the *Arkansas Times* in January. This case is currently on appeal at the Eighth Circuit, where the Center for Constitutional Rights, Palestine Legal, and the Law Office of Matthew Strugar also filed a friend-of-the-court brief in support of the ACLU's appeal. A decision is expected in 2020.

In Maryland, CAIR refiled its lawsuit against the state's anti-boycott executive order after the district court ruled in October that the plaintiff, who had never applied for a state contract, had not experienced enough harm to be in a position to challenge the anti-boycott law. The new complaint focuses on the chilling impact the law has already had on the plaintiff.



# Anti-Boycott Executive Order Used as Censorship Tool

The harmful impact of anti-boycott laws goes beyond their direct application, chilling a broader range of speech by their very existence and by both unintended and intentional misapplication of these laws to speech supporting Palestinian rights more broadly. In May, a New York City school principal ordered an educator to remove several items supporting Palestinian rights from his workspace and to stop wearing his Jewish Voice for Peace T-shirt. When the educator, Jon Cohen, asked why he could not wear the shirt or keep the items, the school pointed to New York's anti-BDS executive order.

As Palestine Legal and the Center for Constitutional Rights argued in an August letter to the school district, the executive order, which bars the state from investing in companies that engage in boycotts for Palestinian rights, has no bearing on the clothing or workspace decorations of school district employees. While the district agreed that this was a misapplication of the executive order, it instead relied on a district policy prohibiting electioneering in public schools, incorrectly arguing that the policy forbids Cohen from displaying items in his workspace bearing the language "BDS" and "End the #Gaza Blockade" "due to their political nature." Palestine Legal continues to work on this matter in 2020.



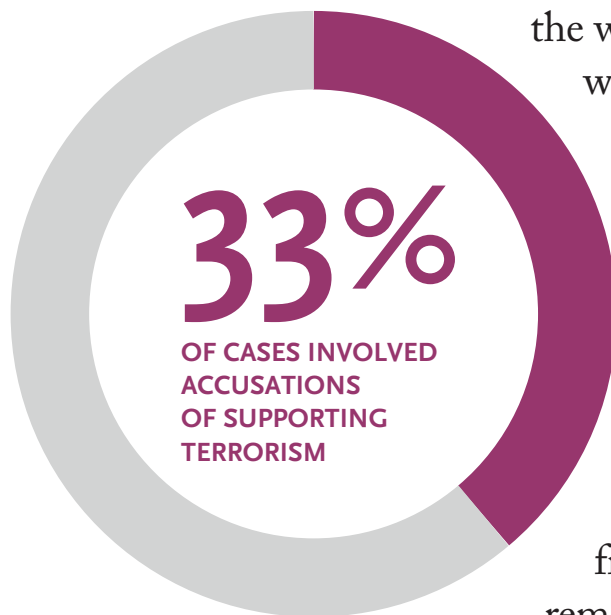
*Photo: One of the items Cohen was told to remove from his workspace was a postcard-sized handmade Palestinian flag.*

Credit: Jean-François Gornet

# Activists Smeared with False Accusations

In 77 cases, or nearly a third of the incidents Palestine Legal responded to in 2019, students and other activists were maliciously accused of supporting terrorism or violence by virtue of their advocacy for Palestinian freedom and equality. In some cases, the false accusations have become a routine part of the everyday vitriol activists face, taking an emotional toll but otherwise having limited impact. In other cases, accusations, sometimes shared with law enforcement agencies, employers and schools, have had real world consequences.

Palestine Legal received reports in 2019 that in the wake of such accusations, individuals were questioned by employers, in one case lost a position, and were called and visited by law enforcement.



In an escalation of this tactic, the Jewish National Fund, an organization that has displaced Palestinians and planted forests of non-native trees to hide villages from which Palestinians were forcibly removed, filed a lawsuit in November

against the US Campaign for Palestinian

Rights (USCPR). The lawsuit makes wild allegations that the human rights organization is liable for alleged damage from burning kites and balloons sent over the Gaza border during the Great March of Return. The lawsuit represents the intention of Israel and its allies to undermine and destroy U.S.-based advocacy for Palestinian rights through frivolous litigation intended to chill advocacy by making far-fetched claims invoking U.S. anti-terrorism laws. As USCPR explained in a statement to *Mondoweiss*, the solidarity movement for Palestinian rights “will not succumb to legal intimidation by those who would continue to deny the Palestinian people their right to live in safety and freedom.”



# AFTER FOUR-YEAR STRUGGLE, STUDENTS WIN RECOGNITION AT FORDHAM



*Fordham Students Win*  
Credit: Fordham SJP.

In August 2019, students won a landmark legal victory against Fordham University, which sought to prohibit them from forming a Students for Justice in Palestine club at their university.

As the first lawsuit in the country challenging institutional censorship of students advocating for justice in Palestine, this victory sends a powerful message to other universities.

The students, represented by the Center for Constitutional Rights, Palestine Legal, and cooperating counsel Alan Levine, sued Fordham in April 2017, arguing that the school violated its own rules when it vetoed a decision by student government to approve the formation of an SJP club on campus.

The court annulled Fordham's decision to deny SJP club status, finding it arbitrary and capricious. The court recognized that Fordham's "disapproval of SJP was made in large part because the subject of SJP's criticism is the State of Israel, rather than some other nation, in spite of the fact that SJP advocates only legal, nonviolent tactics aimed at changing Israel's policies."

Though the students who initially sued the school had graduated, a new generation of SJP members were finally given official club status in Fall 2019. They began organizing events in the fall and garnered significant interest from their peers. Fordham appealed the decision in January 2020.





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