



[The Suppression of Anti-War Demonstrations on College Campuses Contradicts Standards of Academic Freedom](#)

As the fall semester begins, colleges and universities are expecting another surge of anti-war demonstrations and solidarity movements to take place on their campuses. During the previous spring semester, a few universities justly agreed to engage in dialogue with students, however, far too many other school administrators faced criticism from human rights and free speech advocates over their heavy-handed response – which often included calling in law enforcement to quell the protests with violence and physical force. Now, a host of schools have revised their policies regarding activism and freedom of speech. This is a move that critics argue will come at the expense of standards of constitutional and academic freedoms on campus. They also point out that the increased restrictions will negatively impact a school’s ability to serve as a place for open discussion and expression.

Historically, campuses in the United States have been one of the centerpieces of dialogue and public discourse on key contemporary societal issues. During the Vietnam War, campuses nationwide were at the core of social and political activity that challenged support for the conflict. In their day, these activists and the causes that they were advocating for may have sometimes been seen as unconventional, but gradually over time, their opinions began to become more widely accepted and helped to shift public discourse and sentiment. This is precisely what evolved viewpoints, and ultimately policies, regarding the United States’ involvement in the war. As was the case during the time of the Vietnam War, the space for dialogue, expression of free speech, and protest that educational institutions provide and facilitate is vital – especially during times of crisis, as is occurring with Gaza. Thus, restricting the ability of students to take part in expressions of free speech on campus is problematic.

The suppression of anti-war demonstrations is also in contradiction with standards of academic freedom. It violates essential aspects of this, and the fundamental component of freedom of expression and discussion that should be indispensable to any academic and learning environment. Restricting this reduces the flow of information that can be used to learn from and challenge societal shortcomings. It also hinders efforts to spur changes regarding policy and behavior in areas where this is needed. Many schools appear to be implementing restrictive measures largely due to pressure from various pro-Israeli voices who seek to derail and demonize legitimate human rights-related concerns. These have included major financial donors, pro-Israeli organizations, politicians, and other powerful entities that are compelling many university administrations to suppress anti-war demonstrations and free speech, and in doing so, undermine the academic freedom and impartiality of these institutions.

A notable policy that various schools have wrongfully and dangerously opted for is the conflating of fair criticism of the Israeli government’s actions with antisemitism. Many of those taking part in the anti-war demonstrations and solidarity movements are merely expressing concern and opposition to abusive Israeli policies and behavior. Therefore, labeling their activism as antisemitic is inaccurate and used as a means to try and shield Israel from justified criticism. There is a clear and important distinction that should be made between condemning the actions of a government versus being bigoted towards an entire group of people. The aforementioned conflation has made it extremely difficult for human rights defenders to speak out against the actions of the Israeli government, as they may be unfairly labeled as antisemitic. It is also important to note that a significant number of those taking

part in the anti-war demonstrations are young Jewish students themselves, highlighting the absurdity of the erroneous conflation. Organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and many others have demonstrated how denouncing Israeli human rights violations and war crimes has come from a diverse array of individuals with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, including many Jewish Americans. The persistence of those taking part in anti-war demonstrations, even in the face of suppression attempts, also shows their unyielding resolve in support of human rights. Despite what some critics may try to argue, the movement is the organic consequence of growing outrage over war crimes and human rights abuses that are being perpetrated by the state of Israel.

The efforts by some authorities to quell student demonstrations and freedom of expression on college campuses could have long-term implications for the nation as a whole. As attention on the anti-war movement persists, it will continue to remain within the public consciousness and spur legitimate questions regarding the nature of the United States' relationship with Israel. Simply implementing measures aimed at suppressing or restricting anti-war freedom of expression will not cause pro-human rights sentiments to disappear. In fact, on the contrary, it could ultimately grow the presence of the movement as a whole. In light of what is happening in Gaza, an increasing number of people are becoming disillusioned with U.S. policies towards Israel and attempts to suppress this, as opposed to constructive and tangible changes in policy, are not likely to deter these concerns moving forward.