

FALL 2015

CAMPUS TRENDS REPORT



ISRAEL on
CAMPUS COALITION

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February 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of Israel on Campus Coalition's (ICC) mission to provide partner organizations and stakeholders with an updated and realistic picture of the Israel environment on U.S. campuses, ICC tracks thousands of Israel-related events at colleges and universities each semester. We collect reports from our national partner organizations, local campuses, and open-source material. ICC analysts use this data to identify trends and assess changing needs at individual campuses and across the broader campus community.

The fall 2015 semester was a critical time for Israel on campus. In a central development on American campuses, anti-Israel groups maximized the benefits of existing coalitions, capitalizing on partnerships formed during previous years. Efforts to collaborate with fellow campus groups sparked dramatic changes in the BDS movement, with anti-Israel students contributing to causes unrelated to Israel. Cooperation between Israel's detractors and their allies resulted in shared ideological platforms, with students issuing joint "lists of demands" to campus administrations. By expanding relationships with campus and community partners, BDS supporters broadened the reach of their activism. This development posed a significant challenge for pro-Israel students, who must redouble their efforts to build relationships on American campuses.

As BDS advocates strengthened ties with allies, they evolved their approaches to anti-Israel activism. Throughout the fall 2015 semester, anti-Israel activists launched sophisticated attacks against pro-Israel students and campus administrators. Professional groups provided significant support for these efforts, providing students with legal support and strategic guidance. At the same time, anti-Israel students increased their dependence on aggressive tactics, staging dramatic protests and publicizing their efforts through online media.

Despite increased collaboration and coalition-building, the fall 2015 semester marked a period of considerable division in the anti-Israel campus movement. A growing minority of student activists, primarily on the East Coast, began to challenge the role of BDS initiatives in anti-Israel advocacy. Criticism of divestment sparked tense debate among Israel's detractors, with campus groups engaging in public arguments on the value and efficacy of BDS efforts. Alongside these vocal disagreements, subtle ideological differences created rifts among anti-Israel activists, dividing students over the Syrian civil war and other issues.

These developments coincided with broad structural changes in the anti-Israel movement. During its national conference in October 2015, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) – a major anti-Israel group with more than 150 campus chapters – transformed its leadership model and strategic orientation. By creating an executive board and adopting its first national agenda, SJP initiated its transition from a grassroots organization to a structured advocacy movement. This shift marked a critical change for the student group, strengthening its ability to lead coordinated efforts across the country.

As anti-Israel students evolve their tactics, pro-Israel students are pushing forward with effective advocacy initiatives. Throughout the fall semester, pro-Israel campus groups expanded their

activism, organizing proactive campaigns in nearly every part of the country. ICC and its partners will continue to support the efforts of Israel's campus advocates, recognizing that student contributions remain critical to the greater pro-Israel movement. Through the implementation of forward-thinking strategies, pro-Israel students can minimize the impact of BDS and deepen support for Israel on American campuses.

PRO-ISRAEL AND ANTI-ISRAEL ACTIVITY Fall 2015

The following analysis summarizes campus detractor and supporter events¹ during the fall 2015 semester relative to previous years. ICC analyzed campus activity based on the number of schools affected, the geographic regions in which events took place, and types of pro-Israel and anti-Israel activity. The analysis also includes assessments of campus opinion articles, popular anti-Israel speakers, and actors outside the pro-Israel and anti-Israel movements.

During the fall 2015 semester, ICC recorded a drop in the number of detractor events relative to 2014, with anti-Israel activity returning to levels observed in previous years. The decline underscores the impact of Israel's 2014 operation in Gaza, which triggered an unusually high number of anti-Israel events during the fall 2014 semester. Despite an overall decrease in detractor activity, a higher percentage of anti-Israel events attracted sponsorship from groups unrelated to Israel, reflecting the impact of coalition-building among BDS activists. Finally, ICC analysts tracked a significant increase in pro-Israel events – including rallies, lectures, and tabling activities – with terrorism against Israelis prompting a national trend of solidarity on U.S. campuses.

Number of Events by Campus

		DETRACTOR						SUPPORTER					
t= Aug1-Dec31		2012	2013	2014	2015	Diff 15-14	RoC%*	2012	2013	2014	2015	Diff 15-14	RoC%*
Events	Record Count	482	520	759	649	-110	-14.49%	1,001	1,127	1,531	1857	326	21.29%
	Schools Impacted	105	105	159	162	3	1.89%	108	130	163	193	30	18.4%

¹ A "detractor event" is an event on campus related to Israel that has as one of its primary organizers a group that A) clearly denies the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish and democratic state with secure and recognized borders and/or B) actively promotes an agenda of boycott, divestment, and sanctions against the State of Israel. A "supporter event" is an event on campus related to Israel that has as one of its primary organizers a group that A) supports the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish and democratic state and B) respects the right of the Israeli people to make their own decisions within their democratic process.

Key findings

- Despite an overall decline in detractor activity relative to the 2014 fall semester, the number of schools affected by anti-Israel events increased slightly in 2015.
- Reduced detractor activity likely reflects the exceptional effect of Israel's 2014 Gaza operation. Another explanation lies in SJP's coalition-building efforts, which have focused increasingly on issues unrelated to Israel.
- ICC has observed an increase in supporter activity, noting a rise in pro-Israel events during the recent wave of terrorist attacks in Israel. The increase reflects a steady rise in the supporter community's campus footprint, which has expanded by about 20 percent each year since 2012.

Number of Events by Geographic Region

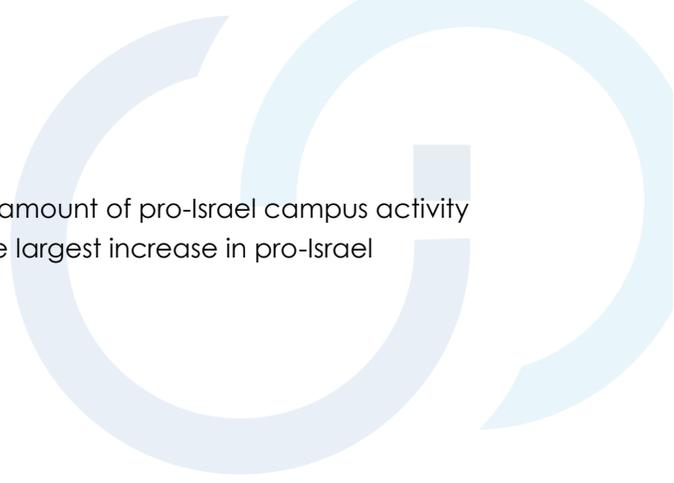
t= Aug1-Dec31	# OF DETRACTOR EVENTS						# OF SUPPORTER EVENTS					
Region	2012	2013	2014	2015	Diff 15-14	RoC%	2012	2013	2014	2015	Diff 15-14	RoC%
Central	114	107	165	174	9	5.45%	176	174	298	332	34	11.41%
Mid-Atlantic	65	130	118	87	-31	-26.27%	185	174	225	283	58	25.77%
New England	66	54	72	85	13	18.06%	47	141	158	247	89	56.33%
Pacific Northwest	7	15	18	5	-13	-72.22%	3	16	32	21	-11	-34.38%
Southeast	47	47	77	58	-19	-24.68%	97	84	178	195	17	9.55%
Tri-State	58	67	124	119	-5	-4.03%	169	239	268	340	72	26.87%
West Coast	115	84	153	97	-56	-36.60%	255	243	305	380	75	24.59%
Gulf Coast	10	16	32	24	-8	-25.00%	69	56	67	59	-8	-11.94%
GRAND TOTAL	482	520	759	649	-110		1,001	1,127	1,531	1857	326	

Regions: Central: IL, ND, SD, NE, IA, MN, WI, IN, MI, OH, KY, KS, MO // Mid-Atlantic: DC, MD, VA, DE, WV, PA // New England: ME, NH, VT, MA, RI // Pacific Northwest -- WA, OR, ID, MT, WY // Southeast: NC, SC, GA, FL, AL, TN, MS // Tri-State: NY, NJ, CT // West Coast: CA, AZ, NM, CO, NV, UT // Gulf Coast- TX, OK, AR, LA

Key findings

- There was a net decrease in anti-Israel campus activity in geographic regions across the country.

- By contrast, we have seen a steady increase in the amount of pro-Israel campus activity across all geographic regions. New England saw the largest increase in pro-Israel campus activity during the fall semester.



Number of Events by Activity Type

t= Aug1-Dec31		DETRACTOR						SUPPORTER					
Event Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	Diff 15-14	RoC%	2012	2013	2014	2015	Diff 15-14	RoC%	
BDS Activity*	3	1	9	3	-6	-66.67%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
Cultural Event	34	46	77	54	-23	-29.87%	221	282	251	431	180	71.71%	
Conference	6	7	5	4	-1	-20.00%	2	7	6	3	-3	-50.00%	
Discussion Group	5	1	5	6	1	20.00%	25	39	65	58	-7	-10.77%	
Film	51	46	49	46	-3	-6.12%	69	26	37	43	6	16.22%	
Fundraiser	14	14	31	28	-3	-9.68%	7	13	21	15	-6	-28.57%	
Lecture/Speaker	91	143	223	212	-11	-4.93%	138	245	359	437	78	21.73%	
Leadership Gathering+	1	0	0	2	2	100%	16	38	30	31	1	3.33%	
Organizing Meeting+	144	163	180	146	-34	-18.89%	372	374	565	480	-85	-15.04%	
Mock Wall	6	6	9	3	-6	-66.67%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
Petition	5	7	3	0	-3	-100%	3	0	3	0	-3	-100%	
Rally/ Demonstration	80	13	54	60	6	11.11%	25	2	34	96	62	182.36%	
Other Legislative Motions*	2	0	1	0	-1	-100%	0	2	2	1	-1	-50%	
Walkout	1	4	8	2	-6	-75.00%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
Tabling	22	33	41	37	-4	-9.76%	65	36	109	192	83	76.15%	
Theme Week	5	14	14	13	-1	-7.14%	2	5	7	3	-4	-57.14%	
Training Session	12	22	50	33	-17	-34%	56	58	42	67	25	59.52%	
GRAND TOTAL	482	520	759	649	-110		1,001	1,127	1,531	1857	326		

*BDS activity is defined as an action in direct support of a boycott, divestment, or sanction attempt, such as a divestment resolution in a student government. Other legislative motions include resolutions about Israel that do not directly call for BDS activity.

+A leadership gathering is a meeting of student leaders from a variety of student clubs and groups.

+ An organizing meeting is a regular meeting in which only the members of pro-Israel or anti-Israel student groups plan, train, and prepare for campus activity.

Key findings

- ICC recorded a rise in the number of anti-Israel rallies and demonstrations relative to the fall 2014 semester. This increase suggests anti-Israel groups are once again turning to protests, street theater, and public demonstrations to gain increased sympathy for their cause.
- The number of campus BDS campaigns declined in fall 2015, returning to the levels observed in 2012 and 2013. The fall 2014 semester saw an exceptionally high number of BDS campaigns, most likely a reaction to Israel's operation in Gaza.
- The number of pro-Israel rallies and demonstrations on campus has nearly tripled relative to the fall 2014 semester. This surge in visible pro-Israel activity is likely tied to terrorist

attacks in Israel and SJP's National Day of Action, which prompted students to respond by demonstrating support for the Jewish state.

- ICC also observed increased participation in professional training sessions for pro-Israel activists. Students expressed a growing interest in pro-Israel advocacy, taking advantage of opportunities to broaden their knowledge and increase their skills.

Top Detractor Speakers by Number of Campus Speaking Engagements

During the fall 2015 semester, the following speakers appeared on U.S. campuses to promote BDS and other anti-Israel themes:

- [Remi Kanazi](#) spoke at 25 campuses during the fall semester. The anti-Israel activist and author performed poetry from his new book [Before the Bomb Drops](#), a compilation of poems about “life under Israeli ‘occupation,’” which also explores issues such as racism, police brutality, militarism, colonialism, and Islamophobia. A prominent BDS supporter, Kanazi has appeared several times as a featured lecturer at national SJP conferences. He speaks frequently on Palestinian identity, “black-Palestine solidarity,” and other issues related to Israel.
- [David Sheen](#) spoke at seven campuses during the fall semester. In a lecture series titled “Israel & Palestine: The Bullet, The Ballot & The Boycott,” Sheen accused Israel of “racial violence” and criticized Israeli leaders for using aggressive and barbarian rhetoric. Working as a journalist in Israel, Sheen focuses most of his writing on racism faced by Ethiopian immigrants, asylum seekers, migrant workers, and other groups. His work frequently describes Israel as an apartheid state responsible for the oppression of non-Jewish minorities.
- [Bassem Tamimi](#) visited four campuses as part of a month-long speaking tour during the fall semester. Tamimi, a native of the West Bank, spoke to students about his involvement in organizing violent riots against Israeli soldiers.

EVENT SPONSORSHIP

ICC views student group sponsorship of campus events as the product of deliberate coalition-building. As such, ICC closely monitors the sponsorship of Israel-related campus events.

Key findings

- A significant number of student groups have joined anti-Israel causes on American campuses, offering support to detractor groups such as SJP. Fifty-one campus groups unaffiliated with Israel supported 58 anti-Israel events (with detractor events totaling 649).

As in previous years, pro-Israel students co-sponsored events with College Democrats, College Republicans, fraternities, sororities, and other campus groups. Forty-five campus groups without a direct focus on Israel sponsored or co-sponsored 54 pro-Israel events (with supporter events totaling 1,857).

EMERGING ANTI-ISRAEL TRENDS

Amid the current wave of general unrest on U.S. college campuses, SJP and its allies have doubled down on a strategy of co-opting the broader protest movement. Having enjoyed relatively limited success in securing passage of BDS resolutions and referenda on college campuses, a frustrated and opportunistic SJP has inserted anti-Israel language into the public demonstrations and grievance platforms of these campus agitators. These efforts constitute a defining trend within the anti-Israel movement, reshaping the strategy and reach of Israel's detractors on American campuses.

Collaboration between BDS supporters and other activists reflects the growing popularity of *intersectionality*, a worldview that describes the ways in which systems of oppression intersect and interact. Intersectionality on American campuses has united student groups around common themes of oppression, motivating them to establish shared goals and agendas. This trend has emerged as a defining feature of anti-Israel activism, prompting BDS activists to connect their causes with the demands of self-defined oppressed groups on campus. Anti-Israel organizations have exploited intersectionality to advance Palestinian narratives, drawing comparisons between anti-Israel grievances and broad social justice causes.

During the past three academic years, shared narratives have allowed BDS activists to expand outreach to fellow student organizers. Throughout the fall 2015 semester, BDS supporters capitalized on this growing network, launching unprecedented initiatives on American campuses. By exploiting years of coalition-building efforts, anti-Israel groups merged their agendas with those of fellow organizations. In many cases, these efforts produced shared issue platforms, which combined anti-Israel demands with support for other causes.

On several campuses, student organizations compiled joint "lists of demands," confronting campus administrators with common grievances among students. Anti-Israel groups relied on these lists as important channels of influence, exploiting the visibility of other causes in order to promote their own. In some cases, these demands reflected the priorities of BDS activists, promoting divestment initiatives alongside unrelated goals. A list from the [University of North Carolina, Greensboro](#), for example, demanded that the institution "join the growing movement of divestment from companies and other financial entities profiting from fossil fuels, private prisons, and the Israeli Occupation of Palestine." Students from [Oberlin College](#) called for "an increase in black administrators and faculty" alongside "divestment from all prisons and Israel." Lists of student demands have also included calls for BDS at [City University of New York](#); [Lawrence University](#); [University of Massachusetts, Amherst](#); [University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill](#); [Temple University](#); and [University of California, San Diego](#).



For more than a year, ICC has closely monitored SJP's efforts to build relationships with minority groups on American campuses. During the fall semester, ICC marked a significant increase in SJP's involvement with [Black Lives Matter](#) – a national campaign alleging unjust law enforcement action against African Americans. Collaboration between the movements followed years of close ties, including three national SJP conferences that highlighted outreach to black communities as their central theme.

Following events at the University of Missouri, SJP Midwest – which represents 22 SJP chapters – released a [statement](#) in support of the school's black students. A short time later, a black student group at **Loyola University Chicago** published a statement calling on the university's administration to divest from "corporations profiting [from] human rights abuses in Palestine." Loyola students combined their calls for divestment with demands for other reforms, including the increased hiring of black faculty and cultural-sensitivity training.

Upon calling for racial justice at **Northwestern University** (NU), the school's Black Lives Matter chapter highlighted provisions of a BDS resolution passed last year. In a statement [published on Facebook](#), the group demanded that administrators respect "the goal of divesting from corporations profiting off human rights violations, especially those occurring in Palestine."

Recently, campus BDS group NU Divest [relaunched a divestment campaign](#) targeting G4S, a British security company that services Israeli prisons. The campaign received support from SJP, Black Lives Matter NU, and MEChA de Northwestern, a campus group committed to fighting racial and ethnic oppression. Throughout the fall, the groups accused G4S of enabling the torture of Palestinian prisoners, as well as the cruel detainment of migrants illegally crossing the U.S.-Mexican border.

At **Oberlin College**, the school's Black Student Union [promoted several divestment initiatives](#) sponsored by Students for a Free Palestine (SFP). Support from black students reflected increased cooperation between the two groups, including anti-Israel participation in Black Student Union demonstrations. During the fall semester, SFP [joined forces](#) with Oberlin Fossil Fuel Divest, introducing divestment initiatives that were ultimately rejected by the school's board of trustees.

On several East Coast campuses, SJP chapters supported the Million Student March, a movement that promotes minimum-wage increases, tuition reform, and greater support for victims of sexual assault. During [a rally at Temple University](#), SJP students added anti-Israel demands to the movement's agenda, demanding that Temple divest from companies tied to the "illegal military occupation of Palestine." Activists also called on the university to criticize U.S. policy toward Israel.

In November 2015, during a Million Student March rally involving activists from **City University of New York** (CUNY), SJP activists began chanting [slogans against "Zionists" on campus](#). Anti-Israel students [blamed Zionism for tuition increases](#) and – like activists at Temple – exploited the march to promote their own demands. Following the demonstration, protesters [expressed discomfort](#) with the anti-Israel interjections, criticizing SJP activists for co-opting the rally's agenda.

During the fall 2015 semester, No Red Tape – a **Columbia University** group devoted to combating sexual assault – took [a public stance against Israel](#), aligning itself with SJP and other anti-Israel groups. The organization defended its positions by highlighting similarities between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and sexual violence on American campuses. While some students supported the group's comparison, its position sparked a backlash across the country, attracting broad criticism and media attention. A [news article](#) by The Daily Beast quoted several women who condemned the organization's decision, including a group member who claimed the move had "effectively politicized anti-sexual violence work" at Columbia.

Collaboration between No Red Tape and anti-Israel students reflects previous examples of intersectionality at Columbia. During the 2014-2015 academic year, [Columbia Prison Divest](#) – a group that supports divestment from private prisons – co-sponsored and advertised SJP's Israel Apartheid Week. ICC has observed significant crossover between the two groups, with many students participating in both organizations.

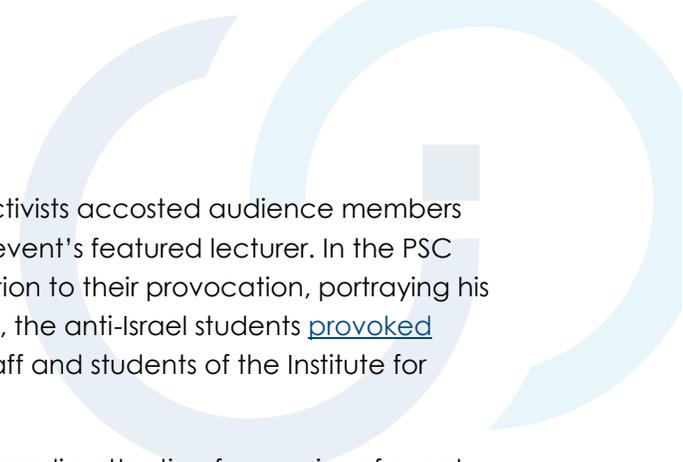
Left unchecked, the growing popularity of intersectionality could lend additional legitimacy to SJP and its allies. This trend is likely to define the anti-Israel movement in the near future, with students devoting more of their efforts to joint "lists of demands" than BDS resolutions. ICC believes it is an important strategic priority for pro-Israel activists to refocus on building meaningful personal relationships across the campus community in order to block further SJP inroads.

Throughout the fall semester, efforts connected with intersectionality extended beyond the college campus. Anti-Israel groups broadened their collaboration with surrounding communities, establishing common cause with local activists. Community participation gained considerable momentum in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, where SJP's local chapters met frequently with community activists and planned joint initiatives. In all three cities, community engagement transformed SJP's organizational model, expanding opportunities for involvement beyond the campus. SJP invested significant resources in these efforts, engaging community members through e-mail lists and social media. At the same time, community members initiated outreach to SJP, seeking opportunities to cooperate with the student group.

On the West Coast, cooperation between campuses and communities played an important role in promoting local BDS initiatives. In Berkeley, California, and Portland, Oregon, anti-Israel students enthusiastically supported BDS resolutions in local governmental bodies, asking both municipalities to divest from Israel. Although the measures failed, they demonstrated the usefulness of community outreach as a tool for influencing decision-makers.

Anti-Israel protests

Throughout the fall 2015 semester, anti-Israel activists staged aggressive demonstrations and published videos of their activities online. At the [University of Texas, Austin \(UT\)](#), students from the Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC) released doctored footage of a lecture hosted by the UT



Institute for Israel Studies. After disrupting the event, PSC activists accosted audience members and repeatedly shouted “Long live the Intifada” over the event’s featured lecturer. In the PSC video of the incident, students distorted a professor’s reaction to their provocation, portraying his response as an attack. On the basis of the doctored video, the anti-Israel students [provoked](#) national outrage and generated an ongoing ordeal for staff and students of the Institute for Israel Studies.

SJP and SJP-affiliated groups have also garnered national media attention for a series of event disruptions occurring on campuses in Minnesota, Maryland, and Massachusetts. In each of these incidents, anti-Israel students and non-student activists have interrupted lecturers or guest speakers. At the [University of Minnesota](#) School of Law, anti-Israel activists disrupted an Israeli speaker, shouting for more than 45 minutes before being arrested.

Public displays of anti-Israel activism represent a shift from passive tactics employed by SJP members in previous years. During the fall semester, SJP chapters at **Boston University** and **University of California, Santa Cruz** staged public “die-ins” and rallies during which demonstrators used hostile language and attracted attention from media outlets.

The second annual “National Day of Action for Palestine,” held on October 14, 2015, constituted a significant example of anti-Israel protest during the fall 2015 semester. The 2015 Day of Action featured large-scale rallies, die-ins, flyering campaigns, and other anti-Israel activities. Day of Action events were observed on 32 U.S. campuses this school year, an increase of 370% from 2014, when Day of Action events were held on seven campuses.

The 2015 Day of Action immediately followed the fifth annual National Students for Justice in Palestine Conference in San Diego, California, which was attended by approximately 250 anti-Israel campus activists from around the country. Anti-Israel activists collaborated with the black-Palestinian solidarity campaign, releasing a solidarity video that gained significant traction on social media. A Day of Action event at **University of California, Berkeley**, in which a large crowd chanted “Intifada, intifada, we support the intifada,” was captured on video and posted to social media.

On several campuses, BDS activists organized strategic campaigns to attack and marginalize Jewish students. Anti-Israel groups demanded that Jewish leaders refrain from participating in student government, arguing that support for Israel would compromise their ability to serve as unbiased representatives. At the [University of California, Santa Cruz](#), a Jewish representative – also the vice president of the school’s Jewish Student Union – was told to abstain from voting on a BDS resolution, asserting he had been elected by “a Jewish agenda.” Students at the **University of Michigan** [demanded an ethics probe](#) of a Jewish student government representative who criticized an anti-Israel campus display following a terrorist attack in Israel.

Organizational support

BDS activists targeted pro-Israel students with the help of professional organizations, some of which provide legal advice to Israel's detractors. One such group, Palestine Legal, regularly publicizes its role in securing "victories" for anti-Israel students. In addition to offering legal guidance, the organization designs strategies for political influence on campus, including efforts to punish pro-Israel representatives. During the fall semester, the group counseled several anti-Israel activists, helping them file harassment complaints against pro-Israel students. Many of these allegations portrayed BDS supporters as victims of "Zionist bullying" while distracting from anti-Israel extremism on campus.

Palestine Legal employs a range of legal tactics to advance anti-Israel objectives. One of the organization's most common approaches is "baiting," a tactic designed to provoke negative reactions from university officials. At **The George Washington University (GWU)**, one student ignited a controversy after [hanging a Palestinian](#) flag from his dormitory window. In keeping with university policy – which prohibits hanging items outside residence halls – GWU officials asked the student to remove the flag from his window. With the help of Palestine Legal, the student filed a discrimination claim against GWU, prompting a public apology from the university's president. On its website, Palestine Legal framed the incident as a triumph over censorship, describing the president's statement as a "victory" for pro-Palestinian students.

The fall 2015 semester saw increased collaboration between SJP and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). A natural ally of SJP and other groups, JVP maintains strong connections to community resources and a network of national staff devoted to anti-Israel activism. Establishing a separate organization for Jewish anti-Israel activists allows SJP to preserve its identity as a Palestinian nationalist movement.

Before the start of the fall semester, JVP hired its first full-time employee dedicated to campus affairs. The fall semester saw a surge in JVP's activities after student governments recognized its chapters on several campuses. In late 2015, the group held its first [national student summit](#), hosting 25 student representatives from 15 campus chapters. Throughout the semester, JVP steadily evolved as an outlet for Jewish involvement in anti-Israel activism. The organization is expected to grow in the coming months, having recently announced plans to establish 50 campus chapters across the country.

Anti-Israel media channels

Throughout the fall semester, students promoted anti-Israel activities using Internet platforms and media resources. At the start of the school year, activists launched [Palestine in America](#), a student-run website popular among critics of Israel. The website's writers – all SJP students – published content related to campus and local events. The website constitutes the first anti-Israel outlet of its kind, generating content exclusively produced by SJP. Students used the website and other platforms to trumpet the success of BDS events on campus, creating an "echo effect" within the anti-Israel movement. The frequent promotion of anti-Israel initiatives emboldened BDS supporters, reinforcing their sense of achievement and encouraging anti-Israel activism.

Footage of students disrupting pro-Israel speakers – disseminated through Palestine in America and other outlets – proved effective in spreading anti-Israel sentiment during the fall semester. Anti-Israel videos fueled criticism despite their misleading content. In a few cases, the proliferation of anti-Israel images aided recruitment efforts, helping activists expand outreach and attract new supporters.

DIVISIONS IN THE ANTI-ISRAEL MOVEMENT

The fall 2015 semester marked a period of tense division within the anti-Israel movement. Even as SJP cemented its national strategy and leadership structure, disagreements obstructed consensus-building efforts among campus activists. While most students characterized BDS as the chief objective of anti-Israel efforts, others described it as insufficient to achieve the movement's broader goals. A growing minority of SJP activists identified divestment as a distraction, asserting that BDS had caused activists to neglect more overt efforts to attack and isolate Israel and its supporters.

On the East Coast, SJP members publicly disputed the effectiveness of BDS, challenging the views of mainstream activists. Proponents of this view criticized an excessive focus on BDS resolutions, defining "Palestinian solidarity" as the movement's most significant aim. Activists in this camp urged students to consider alternative means of "supporting Palestinian resistance," expressing a preference for protests and community mobilization. A growing faction stressed the value of partnerships with campus minority groups. They encourage students to "participate in the struggles of oppressed peoples." Mainstream activists interpreted these calls as explicit attacks on BDS, leading to friction among anti-Israel students and community members.

In December, a public dispute between SJP New York City and the Palestinian Students Campaign for the Academic Boycott of Israel (PSCABI) reflected core disagreements in the anti-Israel movement. Weeks before SJP's national conference, SJP New York City published [an article](#) urging students to divert support for divestment resolutions to community outreach efforts. The post argued that "a near-exclusive focus on BDS" had prevented efforts to secure the downfall of Zionism and a "liberated Palestine." PSCABI [responded](#) to the claims with harsh criticism, describing the article as damaging to Palestinian solidarity efforts. Although SJP New York City issued a partial apology, its clash with PSCABI represented a broad debate within the anti-Israel movement. Throughout the fall, divisions formed along geographical and ideological lines, with BDS attracting more support in the West and more opposition in the East.

Disagreement over the Syrian civil war – a subject of growing interest among anti-Israel activists – marked another source of tension during the fall semester. Despite robust discussions on the conflict, activists avoided conversations on a political solution to the crisis. Meetings ignored topics related to the country's political future, focusing almost exclusively on Syrian refugees. Representing a national trend, SJP chapters at [Seton Hall University](#) and [Drew University](#) hosted

in-depth panel discussions on the refugee crisis, but neither event addressed the central question of political solutions.

Silence on the issue of a political solution suggests growing divisions among activists, who hold widely divergent perspectives on Syria. While some students support the country's rebel factions, others appear hesitant to articulate their views. Controversy among SJP activists over the plight of Syria's Palestinian refugees highlighted these divisions. When SJP's **Cornell University** chapter released [a statement](#) blaming rebel groups for Palestinian suffering in the Yarmouk refugee camp, prominent SJP activists [responded](#) with criticism, rejecting positions that "hold the armed resistance responsible for the crimes the Assad regime." Tensions over a political solution seem to be festering in SJP, highlighting the potential for pronounced disagreements in the future.

Alongside divisions within the campus movement, ICC has observed conflicts between anti-Israel students and an older generation of activists. Members of pro-Palestinian organizations have criticized SJP's coalition-building efforts, arguing that shared platforms are diluting support for "Palestinian solidarity" on campus. Troubled by the growing trend of intersectionality, traditional activists have urged students to confine their focus to Palestinian activism. These appeals have met with strong resistance from students, many of whom value their commitments to a range of social causes.

2015 NATIONAL SJP CONFERENCE: Laying a Foundation for Change

During the fall semester, SJP held its fifth annual national conference at San Diego State University. Called the National Students for Justice in Palestine Conference, the event hosted sessions for about 250 activists from October 9-11, 2015. The conference's theme – "From Campuses to Communities: Building a Vision for the Future" – emphasized SJP's expansion beyond college campuses, promoting efforts to engage community activists. In a departure from previous years, sessions focused on strategic initiatives, seeking to bolster the effectiveness of anti-Israel efforts.

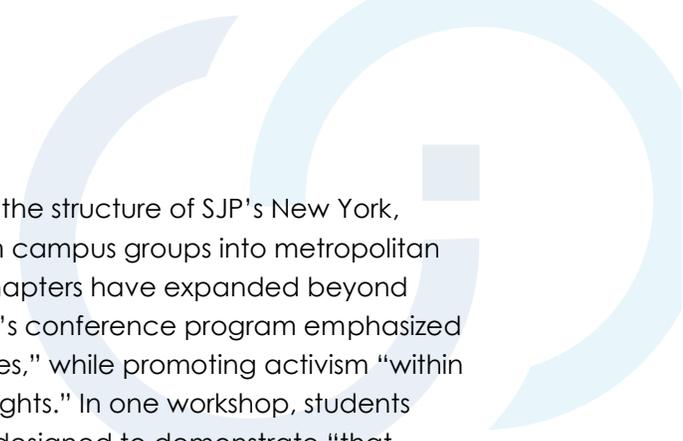
The conference marked a turning point for SJP, setting the stage for important developments in the anti-Israel movement. From student outreach to internal divisions, the national event reflected broad themes in SJP's evolution. In an important transition for SJP, students participated in coordinated planning sessions, yielding the group's first national agenda and leadership structure. These developments spurred a transformation in SJP's identity, initiating the trends that defined its efforts during the fall semester.

Structural and strategic changes

The 2015 conference laid the foundation for broad changes on the regional and national levels. For the first time since SJP's founding, conference sessions included conversations on strategy, encouraging participants to discuss issues of concern for the organization. A series of regional breakout sessions – called the Movement Building Track – involved students in the decision-making process, inviting activists to discuss comprehensive strategies for SJP's regional chapters. At the track's concluding session, representatives gathered for a vote on the group's national agenda, adopting an action plan for the 2015-2016 academic year. Similar sessions focused on best practices to promote BDS resolutions, reinforcing a tactical push toward political activism.

While defining SJP's strategic direction, the 2015 conference established an advanced framework for national leadership. Participants adopted major changes to SJP's organizational structure, voting to establish a national board with twenty regional representatives. The board's creation marks a significant departure from SJP's "horizontal" structure, deviating from the group's traditional preference for equal status among members. It also paves the way for coordinated national activity, establishing a cooperative framework for BDS efforts. ICC research indicates that students will elect the board's members during a series of regional conferences scheduled for early 2016. Ahead of these meetings, ICC has noted increased collaboration within SJP, with chapters launching joint initiatives across the country.

As reflected by the conference's theme, SJP chapters have accelerated collaboration with community activists, necessitating structural changes at the local level. With the help of social media and other recruitment tools, local SJPs have engaged an increasing number of



community members. Community outreach has changed the structure of SJP's New York, Philadelphia, and Boston chapters, transforming them from campus groups into metropolitan networks. Beginning as modest student coalitions, some chapters have expanded beyond American campuses, blending into local communities. SJP's conference program emphasized this trend, advancing plans to "bolster regional communities," while promoting activism "within the larger scheme of a worldwide struggle for Palestinian rights." In one workshop, students learned "different approaches to community organizing" designed to demonstrate "that student work can't be divorced from the larger community." Taken together, these events indicate a pattern of growth on the local level, bolstered by strategic training at SJP's national conference.

SJP's institutional development poses a critical challenge for pro-Israel activists. The emergence of a national agenda marks a shift toward strategic planning, an important precondition for effective activism. Much like its strategy-building efforts, SJP's updated leadership model lays the foundation for further organizational development.

Divisions

While it advanced collaboration between students and communities, the 2015 conference also reflected divisions within SJP's national movement. The gathering marked a critical juncture in SJP's national debate over BDS, providing opportunities for students to voice their differences. A workshop titled "The Future of Divestment: Where Do We Go from Here?" addressed the growing BDS divide, highlighting calls for alternatives to divestment initiatives. Disagreement over SJP New York City's article on divestment, published just days before the conference, drove a clear wedge between attendees, creating divisions along regional lines. Overall, the conference left an impression that the BDS movement was burdened by controversy – a sense that strengthened as the semester continued.

Organizational support

SJP's conference highlighted a trend of professional support for the group's activities. A "legal strategy workshop for SJP activists" featured advice from Palestine Legal, with an attorney presenting "strategies for creative campus actions" and guidance on free-speech rights. The session educated students on responses to discrimination, reflecting professional backing for efforts to pressure campus administrations. Palestine Legal's role emphasized growing assistance from various professional groups – including Jewish Voice for Peace and the National Campus BDS Support Team – which have provided SJP with significant strategic guidance and material support. During the fall, much of this advice focused on "structure building," inspiring the leadership models and strategies adopted during SJP's conference.

CONCLUSION



The fall 2015 semester marked a critical juncture for the campus BDS movement as evidenced by organizational and strategic changes on a national level. Anti-Israel activists maximized the benefits of existing partnerships, expanding outreach to their allies through shared ideological platforms. The spread of intersectionality has redefined campus activism, leading BDS activists to rely increasingly on the visibility of other campus causes.

Throughout the fall 2015 semester, BDS activists launched targeted campaigns against pro-Israel students, including initiatives to exclude pro-Israel representatives from student government. This coincided with the intensification of hostile demonstrations, reflecting a departure from passive techniques employed in recent years. At the same time, national anti-Israel organizations expanded their support for student groups, increasing the sophistication and reach of SJP and its allies.

Five years after its first national conference, SJP has adopted a sophisticated organizational framework. By expanding its infrastructure and embracing strategic adaptability, SJP has shown its determination to achieve greater national influence in the years ahead. Even as the anti-Israel movement evolves and expands, differences of opinion threaten to divide its members. With an increasing number of SJP activists challenging the efficacy of BDS initiatives in student governments, intersectionality has moved to the forefront of anti-Israel campus activism, reshaping the efforts of Israel's detractors.

A convergence of trends is transforming the anti-Israel movement on American college campuses. In this context, pro-Israel students must continue to build relationships beyond the traditional pro-Israel community. With resources and guidance from a broad coalition of national pro-Israel organizations, the pro-Israel community can overcome anti-Israel challenges and strengthen support for Israel on campuses across the country.