



2014-2015  
**CAMPUS TRENDS REPORT**



**ISRAEL ON CAMPUS COALITION**  
STRATEGY.ACTION.IMPACT

## INTRODUCTION

A national network of students, faculty, and professionals dedicated to strengthening the pro-Israel movement on campus, Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC) provides partner organizations, stakeholders, and the wider pro-Israel community with a picture of the Israel environment on campus, tracking Israel-related activity at hundreds of colleges and universities each year. ICC uses reports from national partner organizations, local campuses, and open-source material to identify trends and assess changing needs at individual universities and across the campus community.

Over the past several years, campuses across the United States have seen a steadily increasing amount of Israel-related activity. In recent years, anti-Israel activists have become more organized, launching student groups on more than 150 campuses that criticize Israeli policies and deny the right of the Jewish state to exist. These activists have also become increasingly sophisticated, pairing their cause with social justice issues on campus to increase their base of support and their reach.

## SUMMARY

The 2014-2015 academic year saw an increase in activity by both Israel's supporters and detractors on campuses nationwide. During the 2014-2015 academic year ICC tracked 1,630 anti-Israel events at 181 colleges and universities nationwide and 3,753 pro-Israel events at 213 schools. In the wake of the summer 2014 conflict in Israel and Gaza, the number of U.S. campuses with anti-Israel activity jumped by 31.2 percent, from 138 during the 2013-2014 academic year to 181 during the 2014-2015 academic year. Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) established a presence on more than 40 new campuses, bringing the total number of campuses on which it operates to more than 150, and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) established its first-ever student chapters at 14 colleges and universities.

Calls for anti-Israel boycotts, divestment initiatives, and sanctions continued to rise on college campuses, particularly on the West Coast and in the Midwest, but were defeated at approximately the same rate as the prior academic year. The anti-Israel boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement (BDS) ran 44 campus campaigns, a 132 percent increase over the 19 campaigns we saw during the 2013-2014 academic year.

SJP and its allies continue to deepen their involvement with social justice-oriented organizations on campus. This year saw efforts by anti-Israel groups to build coalitions with progressive campus organizations that deal with issues such as LGBT rights, fossil fuel divestment, private prison reform, racial discrimination, and immigration reform. SJP supports these social justice groups in their causes and in turn receives support from these campus organizations and their supporters. Anti-Israel campus activists have adopted a deliberate strategy for engaging

these largely progressive organizations by forming personal relationships with influential activists. In addition to this crossover support, anti-Israel campus groups increasingly share members and leadership with these organizations.

## FINDINGS

The anti-Israel movement on campus is also benefiting from significant professional support, with national organizations such as the U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USCABI), American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Palestine Legal, and JVP offering cost-free legal representation, political strategists, researchers, web developers, graphic designers, and communications services. In February 2015, AMP opened an office in Washington, D.C., headed by the organization's national director of media and communication<sup>1</sup>. In April 2015, JVP hired its first full-time national employee dedicated to campus affairs<sup>2</sup>.

Palestine Legal (formerly known as Palestine Solidarity Legal Support) bills itself as “the only legal organization in the United States exclusively dedicated to supporting the movement for Palestinian rights.”<sup>3</sup> The organization, which has four full-time lawyers positioned across the country, is part of the broader National BDS Campus Support Team<sup>4</sup> that provides resources and on-the-ground assistance to anti-Israel students promoting BDS on their campuses.

The 2014-2015 academic year saw several firsts for pro-BDS activists on campus, among them the adoption of the referendum strategy, in which an entire student body is asked to vote on an anti-Israel BDS measure. Seen at only one campus prior to this past academic year, referenda were introduced on six campuses this year<sup>5</sup>. This academic year also saw the first BDS battle at the community college level.

However, despite the increase in activity by Israel's detractors on campus, ICC data reveals a sharp uptick in pro-Israel activism at campuses nationwide.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, ICC recorded the formation of more than 100 new local pro-Israel campus organizations. Pro-Israel students are increasingly disciplined, coordinated, and strategic thanks to the leadership of a broad coalition of national pro-Israel organizations. These pro-Israel students are organizing gatherings for influential student leaders, public celebrations of Israel, and film screenings and lecture series, among other activities. According to ICC data, the number of campuses hosting pro-Israel activity has increased, from 167 campuses during the 2013-2014 academic year to 213 during the 2014-2015 academic year.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ampalestine.org/index.php/newsroom/articles/623-exciting-move-to-washington-dc>

<sup>2</sup> <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/content/staff-and-board>

<sup>3</sup> <http://palestinelegal.org/about/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.endtheoccupation.org/downloads/CampusResources.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> A referendum at UAW2865, a union representing Academic Student Employees (ASEs), was attempted and passed in December 2014.

The first student government resolution opposing BDS passed at Liberty University this academic year<sup>6</sup>, and resolutions in support of Israel passed at several colleges, including University of Georgia<sup>7</sup>, Texas A&M University<sup>8</sup>, and the University of Nevada, Reno<sup>9</sup>.

## SJP INFLUENCE OVER STUDENT GOVERNMENTS

Across the country, ICC has observed an increasing number of SJP-backed slates and candidates winning legislative and executive positions within student governments. These candidates are running on platforms that call for reform on a wide range of social issues; BDS is now mentioned alongside other issues such as private prison divestment, minority rights, and fossil fuels.

Over the past several years, ICC has observed a series of attempts, primarily on West Coast campuses, by anti-Israel activists to take over student governments. Student legislative bodies in the University of California system have seen a steady increase in the number of SJP-backed or SJP-aligned student government officials. At UC Davis, the issue of divestment has been taken up by the student government every academic year since 2011-2012, failing each time until the spring of 2015, when two-thirds of the student government's legislators voted in favor of divestment (8-2-2). The resolution was then challenged in the school's judiciary court<sup>10</sup>, where it was ruled unconstitutional. A second divestment resolution was passed 10-0-2 by a newly elected pro-BDS student government at the end of the spring semester.

At another school in the UC system, the University of California, Los Angeles, an SJP-aligned student government passed a divestment resolution in November 2014<sup>11</sup> following several years in which similar resolutions were defeated. Following this episode, the UCLA pro-Israel community organized a focused campaign to elect pro-Israel student government candidates. As a result, pro-Israel students now dominate the student government<sup>12</sup>.

## REFERENDA

This academic year saw the widespread implementation of the referendum tactic. Not content with student government resolutions, pro-BDS activists gathered signatures for anti-Israel measures that they then put up for campus-wide votes. These referenda, which were attempted on six campuses this year<sup>13</sup>, failed across the board. At Bowdoin College, more students signed a petition to allow the question to be put to a referendum than actually voted in favor of divestment<sup>14</sup>. Prior to a campus-wide referendum, the University of Toledo student government twice voted on divestment during the spring semester, passing it on the second attempt. Not satisfied with this

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<sup>6</sup> <http://unitedwithisrael.org/increased-pro-israel-activity-on-campus-challenges-bds/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://atlantajewishtimes.com/2015/02/uga-israel-resolution/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://tamuhillel.org/a/texas-am-student-senate-passes-pro-israel-resolution/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://nevadasagebrush.com/blog/2015/04/14/senate-recap-april-8/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1Bq3M0r7Z8>

<sup>11</sup> <http://dailybruin.com/2014/11/18/usac-passes-divestment-resolution-with-8-2-2-vote/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://dailybruin.com/2015/05/01/bruins-united-dominates-council-after-controversial-election-season/>

<sup>13</sup> Bowdoin College, Northeastern University, Princeton University (undergraduate), San Diego State University, The Ohio State University, University of Toledo

<sup>14</sup> <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/10309>

victory in the student senate, anti-Israel activists then launched a referendum campaign at Toledo<sup>15</sup>. The referendum failed to win passage when the issue was brought before the entire student body.

## SJP CO-SPONSORSHIP OF EVENTS

On campuses across the country, anti-Israel activists gained momentum and legitimacy by building coalitions with key campus constituencies.

The 2014-2015 academic year saw an unprecedented increase in the number of SJP events that are co-sponsored by other campus groups. According to ICC data, co-sponsored SJP events increased significantly between the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 academic years. During the 2013-2014 academic year, 96 unique student groups across the country co-sponsored 114 SJP events; during the 2014-2015 academic year, 167 student groups co-sponsored 224 events. This increase indicates that SJP is successfully forming partnerships with student groups that focus on issues unrelated to Israel and the Middle East.

At Columbia University, a group calling itself Columbia Prison Divest<sup>16</sup> co-sponsored and advertised SJP's Israel Apartheid Week<sup>17</sup>. ICC also noted significant activist crossover: A portion of Columbia Prison Divest's membership also enjoys membership in Columbia's SJP chapter.

## REGIONAL TRENDS

During the 2014-2015 academic year, ICC observed the co-opting of progressive causes by anti-Israel activists on many college campuses. The causes tend to vary by geographic region: a push for divestment from Turkey was seen in the University of California system, whereas support for causes related to the private prison system and fossil fuels was largely limited to schools in the Northeast.

Student governments at six University of California schools — UCLA<sup>18</sup>, UC Irvine<sup>19</sup>, UC Davis<sup>20</sup>, UC Riverside<sup>21</sup>, UC Santa Cruz<sup>22</sup>, and UC Berkeley<sup>23</sup> — have passed resolutions to divest from Turkey due to the Turkish government's denial of the Armenian genocide. These resolutions were prepared by Armenian student groups with strong support and guidance from SJP. ICC anticipates that in the coming year SJP will cite these country-specific resolutions as a precedent for divestment from Israel.

At schools in the Northeast, student activists loosely linked with the BDS movement attempted to push watered-down human rights and environmental resolutions through student governments. These campaigns, in which BDS is lumped in with other social causes, create the perception that BDS is part of a legitimate grassroots movement

<sup>15</sup> <http://utdivest.blogspot.com/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/columbiaprisondivest>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/columbiaprisondivest/posts/1564224590513247>

<sup>18</sup> <http://dailybruin.com/2015/01/21/usac-passes-resolution-for-uc-to-divest-from-the-republic-of-turkey/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://ayfwest.org/news/uc-irvine-student-government-passes-resolution-calling-for-divestment-from-turkey/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.theaggie.org/2015/05/26/asucd-senate-urges-uc-regents-to-divest-from-turkish-government/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://ayfwest.org/news/uc-riverside-student-government-passes-turkey-divestment-measure/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://ayfwest.org/news/uc-santa-cruz-student-government-votes-to-divest-from-turkey/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.dailycal.org/2015/02/19/asuc-senate-passes-divestment-republic-turkey-unanimous-vote/>

that pursues justice vis-a-vis pressing social issues. The conflagration of these three themes (BDS, human rights, and environmental issues) is partially a result of strategic planning that took place at the SJP National Conference at Tufts University in the fall of 2014<sup>24</sup>. In the spring of 2015, student activists — including many affiliated with SJP — participated in the 2015 Prison Divestment National Week of Engagement<sup>25</sup>, with events taking place at four schools in the tri-state area. In addition, SJP members from chapters across the country attended the 2015 Prison Divestment Youth retreat in Los Angeles, August 6-9, 2015<sup>26</sup>.

At Brooklyn College, a group called CUNY Prison Divest was formed in January 2015<sup>27</sup>. During the spring of 2015, the organization shared activists and co-sponsored events with SJP. Particularly close collaboration between SJP and progressive groups was also seen at the University of Pennsylvania and Wesleyan University.

At the University of Pennsylvania, students formed Penn Divest from Displacement<sup>28</sup>, a group that opposed the displacement of communities and peoples around the world. Though Israel is not described as the primary target, more than half of the companies targeted by Penn Divest from Displacement had been previously targeted in BDS resolutions at other universities.

## COLLABORATION WITH NATIONAL MOVEMENTS AND STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

This year, SJP formed official ties with United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS)<sup>29</sup>. USAS joined MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, the Chicano liberation student movement), which until this year was the only other national organization to officially align itself with SJP.

Pro-Israel students on some campuses on which social justice causes are championed by broad segments of the community reported feeling marginalized as a result of anti-Israel groups deepening their relationships with progressive campus organizations.

### BLACK LIVES MATTER

Nationwide, anti-Israel groups have coupled Palestinian rights with the struggle for racial justice by focusing on the alleged power and privilege of Jewish and pro-Israel Americans. Anti-Israel protesters at large-scale protests across the United States, which began in August 2014, have attempted to link the Black Lives Matter campaign with the anti-Israel movement. The slogan “From Ferguson to Palestine, occupation is a crime” has been used in dozens of protests across the country.

This dynamic also played out on campus. ICC observed strong ties between SJP and many African-American student groups during the 2014-2015 academic year. SJP devoted a substantial portion of its October 2014

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/events/1469905996613845/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.enlaceintl.org/#!mobilizeagainstprisons/c9yt>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/events/542081669265854/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/CUNYPrisonDivest>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.penndivestfromdisplacement.com/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://laborforpalestine.net/2014/10/20/united-states-against-sweatshops-endorses-bds/>

national conference, titled “Beyond Solidarity: Resisting Racism and Colonialism from the U.S. to Palestine,” to strengthening the organization’s ties with the African-American community<sup>30</sup>.

As recently as May 2015, SJP student activists were actively involved in Black Lives Matter-linked demonstrations<sup>31</sup>. SJP presidents from Washington, D.C.-area universities (George Mason University and American University) actively participated in protests in Baltimore, Md., following the death of Freddie Gray<sup>32</sup>.

Stanford University student activists and community members attending a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day march in California’s Bay Area capitalized on the publicity surrounding the event, unfurling a large Palestinian flag<sup>33</sup> mid-march, drawing a direct connection between African-American and Palestinian struggles. In January 2015, a delegation of African-American activists traveled to the West Bank with a group called Dream Defenders<sup>34</sup>, which describes itself as “an uprising of communities in struggle, shifting culture through transformational organizing.”<sup>35</sup>

## QUAKER MOVEMENT

The 2014-2015 academic year saw efforts within the Quaker community to deepen the group's involvement<sup>36</sup> in the campus BDS movement. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) continues to provide extensive support to students promoting BDS<sup>37</sup>, and the National BDS Campus Support Team, a group of professionals from various anti-Israel organizations tasked with providing sophisticated assistance to campus BDS activists, utilizes its resources. AFSC organizes BDS summer camps for undergraduates and during the 2014-2015 academic year hired a full-time professional focused on campus affairs. Two Quaker schools, Guilford College and Earlham College, are hotbeds of anti-Israel activity.

## STREAMLINING OF SJP ACTIVITIES AT THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

Over the past year, SJP has invested time and resources into strengthening its national and regional networks. At least seven regional networks, each comprising between five and 35 SJP chapters, are now fully operational. These networks allow SJP members to participate in weekly and monthly conference calls among chapters within the same regions, and encourage engagement and regular communication via email, text messages, and Facebook. The regional networks allow members to share best practices and benefit from a more unified movement. For instance, by operating in regional networks SJP chapters are able to pay anti-Israel speakers reduced fees while bringing them to multiple campuses.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/bdss-useless-politics-of-confrontation>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/hopkinssjp/posts/929210010476311>

<sup>32</sup> <https://twitter.com/RaniaKhalek/status/594309747668561921>

<sup>33</sup> <http://kron4.com/2015/01/19/protesters-block-westbound-lanes-on-san-mateo-bridge/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.ebony.com/news-views/dream-defenders-black-lives-matter-ferguson-reps-take-historic-trip-to-palestine#axzz3fu8VWxRy>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.dreamdefenders.org/about>

<sup>36</sup> <http://afsc.org/friends/resources/work-justice-israel-palestine>

<sup>37</sup> <https://afsc.org/story/boycott-divestment-and-sanctions-explained>

The creation of regional networks has also enabled deeper cooperation and coordination among chapters. On campuses facing BDS campaigns, members of nearby SJP chapters are shuttled in to bolster local efforts to mobilize anti-Israel activists.

ICC has been paying close attention to smaller and lesser-known schools as SJP chapters continue to grow and become active on those campuses. Out of the approximately 150 active<sup>38</sup> SJP chapters around the country, more than 40 were established during the 2014-2015 academic year. In the past, ICC has seen SJP gain traction at large elite schools, such as UCLA, Princeton University, Stanford University, and Northwestern University. During the 2014-2015 academic year, new SJP chapters formed at many smaller schools such as Occidental College, Seton Hall University, La Roche College and Oglethorpe University.

ICC is observing a national trend in which small SJP chapters receive mentorship from larger nearby chapters. On the West Coast, SJP chapters at UC Berkeley and UC Irvine provided guidance to nearby California State University Northridge. On the East Coast, Oglethorpe University, where divestment passed this spring, received mentorship from Emory University's SJP chapter. This exchange of strategies and ideas strengthens the smaller chapters and enhances the push toward unity within the SJP movement.

## PRO-ISRAEL AND ANTI-ISRAEL ACTIVITY ON CAMPUS

This year saw an increase in both pro-Israel and anti-Israel campus activity, which may be attributable to events in the Middle East, including the summer 2014 war in Israel and Gaza, the uptick in violent attacks against Israelis during the fall of 2014, and the Israeli election in March 2015. During the 2014-2015 school year, American college students organized 3,753 pro-Israel events at 213 campuses, an increase in events of 57 percent from 2013-2014, when 2,395 events were held on 167 campuses.

More than 100 pro-Israel events occurred at the end of April, when campuses across the country held Israel Independence Day celebrations that ranged from Israel festivals to guest lectures to leadership dinners<sup>39</sup>.

Expanded campus support for Israel is geographically consistent — in every region of the U.S., pro-Israel events increased. Between the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 academic years, pro-Israel events in the central and southeast regions of the country increased by 112 percent and 110 percent respectively.

## CONCLUSION

While there was a significant increase in campus BDS campaigns this academic year, the rate at which BDS campaigns were defeated on campuses nationwide remained relatively static. However, there is no doubt that Israel's detractors are increasing their efforts on college campuses across the country. They are using new tactics and in some cases reaching broad swaths of the campus population, simplifying a complex Middle East reality and latching on to other progressive social causes. They have also found success recruiting and supporting pro-BDS student government candidates who then introduce and pass anti-Israel legislation.

<sup>38</sup> An "active" chapter is defined as one that holds more than three events over the course of an academic year.

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.ins.org/news-briefs/2015/4/21/us-campuses-to-mark-israels-yom-haatzmaut#.VaWCk8ZViko=](http://www.ins.org/news-briefs/2015/4/21/us-campuses-to-mark-israels-yom-haatzmaut#.VaWCk8ZViko)



To counter these efforts, pro-Israel students continue to speak out against divestment, oppose anti-Israel student government resolutions, defeat campus-wide divestment referenda, and block efforts to boycott Israeli products. They are fighting back against anti-Israel activists, forming coalitions to educate the broader campus community, and working to build support for Israel on campus.

Recent months have seen a slew of media reports alleging that BDS is taking over college campuses, but ICC-gathered data disprove that theory. Nonetheless, if the current trends on campuses nationwide persist, the result could be dangerously close to that reality.