



ISRAEL on
CAMPUS COALITION

2016-2017 YEAR END REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its mission to provide partner organizations and stakeholders with an updated and realistic picture of the environment on U.S. campuses regarding Israel, Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC) tracks thousands of Israel-related events at colleges and universities each semester. ICC collects reports from 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 2016-2017 academic year was an important time for Israel on campus. Despite an overall decline in boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) campaigns targeting Israel, anti-Israel efforts at American colleges and universities strengthened in sophistication and intensity. With increasing support from professional groups, student activists led aggressive initiatives attacking and delegitimizing Israel. As in previous years, anti-Israel organizations invested a host of resources in campus activism, bolstering student efforts with strategic guidance, financial backing, digital media assets, and other forms of assistance. By concentrating these resources on a select number of high-profile campuses, professional groups maximized the impact and visibility of student-led campaigns. Nevertheless, pro-Israel organizations created considerable challenges for Israel's detractors, providing students with effective tools to strengthen support for Israel.

During the academic year, students employed a range of tactics to advance anti-Israel initiatives. In a continuing trend on U.S. campuses, detractor groups staged hostile disruptions of pro-Israel events, deliberately interfering with lectures and educational activities. On several campuses, protesters shouted down Israeli speakers and other guest lecturers, attempting to silence pro-Israel voices. In the spring, activists engaged in similar efforts to suppress debate, introducing BDS resolutions and other measures on and around religious holidays. With many Jewish students away for Passover, Israel's detractors succeeded in minimizing opposition to anti-Israel initiatives, leading several campuses to adopt divestment proposals.

While promoting BDS in student government, activists also focused their efforts beyond the student community. In targeted appeals to trustees and campus officials, students encouraged academic institutions to divest from Israel. These initiatives reflect important changes in anti-Israel outreach efforts, with students seeking to expand the influence of BDS activism.

Despite aggressive anti-Israel campaigns, the pro-Israel community achieved unprecedented success in deterring Israel's detractors. Through efforts to document anti-Israel activities, Israel advocates exposed dozens of BDS supporters, drawing attention to extremism and anti-Semitism on U.S. campuses. Recognizing the repercussions of anti-Israel activism, several students downplayed their support for BDS, while others concealed their involvement in anti-Israel causes. At the same time, some detractor groups denied their association with global divestment campaigns, distancing themselves from the wider BDS movement.

Throughout the school year, pro-Israel students increased collaboration and broadened outreach to campus allies, deepening support for Israel across the country. ICC and its partners worked to reinforce these efforts, providing students with necessary resources to promote pro-Israel activism. As detractors benefit from deceptive tactics and professional support, the pro-Israel community must continue to strengthen Israel's campus advocates. By implementing innovative strategies, pro-Israel students can limit the influence of BDS campaigns and bolster their success on American campuses.

DATA DOWNLOAD

→ ICC tracked 4,327 Israel-related events on college campuses nationwide. Of those, 1,172 were anti-Israel events, and 3,155 were pro-Israel activities. That marked an almost 20 percent decline in both anti-Israel and pro-Israel events (1,437 and 3,886 in 2015-2016, respectively). Nevertheless, pro-Israel events outnumbered anti-Israel events by more than 2-1 during the academic year.

PRO-ISRAEL
EVENTS
OUTNUMBERED
ANTI-ISRAEL
EVENTS BY MORE THAN
2-1



→ Nationally, BDS campus campaigns declined by almost 40 percent during the last academic year. During the 2016-2017 academic year, there were 20 BDS campaigns on U.S. campuses; during the 2015-2016 academic year, there were 33 campaigns.

BDS
CAMPAIGNS
DECREASED
40%



→ Relative to the 2015-2016 academic year, fewer campuses saw recurring BDS campaigns. Only one campus experienced multiple campaigns over the course of the last academic year, as compared to eight campuses during 2015-2016. Similarly, the number of campuses experiencing anti-Israel activity decreased by 19 percent (185 in 2015-2016; 149 in 2016-2017).

CAMPUSES
EXPERIENCING
ANTI-ISRAEL
ACTIVITY
DECREASED
19%



Although BDS activity saw an overall decline, BDS campaigns were more sophisticated and aggressive, with professional organizations investing greater resources in campus divestment efforts. As a result of this support, four universities with large student populations – **University of Michigan**, **University of Wisconsin-Madison** (UW), **The Ohio State University** (OSU), and **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign** (UIUC) – experienced major BDS initiatives.

For the second consecutive year, detractor events in the Midwest outnumbered those in other regions, reflecting Chicago’s role as a hub of anti-Israel activism. The city is home to American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and other groups that provide financial and strategic support to anti-Israel students.

In California, where anti-Israel activity declined dramatically last year, the number of detractor events increased by nine percent (219 in 2015-2016, 239 in 2016-2017). Nevertheless, pro-Israel events exceeded anti-Israel events by more than 2-1.



→ Across the country, there was a 40 percent decrease in the number of anti-Israel lectures and speakers hosted on U.S. campuses (515 in 2015-2016; 309 in 2016-2017).



→ In addition, there was a 25 percent reduction in Israeli Apartheid Weeks, continuing a decline in these events during recent academic years (83 in 2014-2015; 60 in 2015-2016; 45 in 2016-2017).



→ Simultaneously, pro-Israel theme weeks increased by 14 percent (36 in 2015-2016, 41 in 2016-2017). Students organized 170 events during the week of Israel's Independence Day, marking a 91 percent increase relative to last year (89 in 2015-2016).



KEY OBSERVATIONS

While tracking events on campus, ICC closely assesses the activities of Israel's supporters and detractors. In the following sections, we offer an in-depth analysis of campus-related events, highlighting key developments during the 2016-2017 academic year.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR ANTI-ISRAEL EFFORTS

Throughout the school year, anti-Israel organizations expanded support for student activists, increasing the sophistication and reach of Israel's campus detractors. As in recent years, a broad range of professional groups – including AMP, AFSC, Palestine Legal, the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights, and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) – sought to influence U.S. campuses, investing resources in key BDS battles nationwide. With strategic and financial backing from these organizations, BDS supporters led fierce campaigns to attack Israel and intensify anti-Israel sentiment among students.

Professional groups applied a variety of tools and techniques in their efforts to affect U.S. campuses. Across the country, anti-Israel organizations implemented a robust digital engagement strategy, managing websites and social media channels intended for American students.

These outlets represent just one component of a sophisticated information war against Israel and its campus-based supporters. As pro-Israel outreach enjoys greater success on U.S. campuses, detractor groups have increased their efforts to shame and malign Israel's defenders. In several cases, organizations have

embarrassed Israel advocates by distorting pro-Israel statements and amplifying them globally through online media.

While working to shape the Israel-related discourse, professional groups have provided strategic guidance to students, helping detractors expand their campus influence. One such group, Palestine Legal, regularly intervenes in campus affairs to assist anti-Israel activists and their allies. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the organization played a crucial role in student divestment efforts, drafting the texts of multiple campus BDS resolutions. According to information available to ICC, activists generally seek Palestine Legal's guidance before introducing these measures, demonstrating the group's influence over anti-Israel students.

In the past year, Palestine Legal issued multiple threats and warnings to academic institutions. When **Fordham University** rejected SJP's request to create a campus chapter, Palestine Legal took aggressive action, waging a protracted legal battle against the university. In May, the group wrote a public letter attacking Jane Close Conoley, president of **California State University, Long Beach (CSULB)**, after she opposed BDS in [a message](#) to student senators. While denying the link between BDS and anti-Semitism – which Conoley's statement to student government strongly emphasized – Palestine Legal [accused CSULB](#) of “suppressing campus debate” by confronting bigotry among BDS supporters. The group issued [a similar letter](#) in February, when students considered a divestment referendum at the **University of South Florida (USF)**, accusing USF administrators of stifling free speech and manipulating the measure's outcome. At **San Francisco State University (SFSU)**, Palestine Legal defended anti-Israel groups against a religious discrimination claim after detractors were accused of excluding Jewish students

from a campus Know Your Rights fair. Taken together, these events emphasize Palestine Legal's growing role as an advocate for anti-Israel students and campus BDS campaigns nationwide.

Efforts by anti-Israel organizations have drawn effective responses from ICC and its campus partners. Through close cooperation, the pro-Israel community has brought major change to U.S. campuses, providing tools to bolster Israel advocacy and confront BDS. During the last academic year, pro-Israel students benefited from a range of professional resources, including digital media assets, leadership training, and customized strategic guidance. Since 2015, pro-Israel organizational assistance has created significant obstacles for Israel's detractors, reducing the incidence of campus BDS campaigns. Nevertheless, support from anti-Israel groups remains a considerable challenge, requiring the continued involvement of pro-Israel organizations on U.S. campuses.

SOPHISTICATED AND AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGNS

Rising support from detractor organizations has contributed to a gradual shift in the strategies of anti-Israel activists. During the past two years, ICC has observed a steady decline in BDS campaigns across the country. Nevertheless, campaigns have grown in strength and sophistication, with anti-Israel organizations concentrating their resources on a limited number of BDS battles. Recognizing the challenges posed by pro-Israel organizations, anti-Israel groups have sought to maximize their success by focusing on high-profile campuses. During the last academic year, activists led aggressive BDS initiatives at **Columbia University**, **The George Washington University** (GWU), **Georgetown University**, University of Michigan, UW, OSU, UIUC and other major schools.

In early March, anti-Israel students launched a highly-coordinated BDS campaign at GWU. Called "Divest This Time," [the initiative](#) promoted an Israel-related divestment resolution, highlighting GWU's failure to divest from apartheid South Africa. While leading efforts to lobby student representatives, anti-Israel activists secured an endorsement from Angela Davis, a known political activist who appeared on campus to introduce the campaign. Although the initiative failed narrowly in student government, its message resonated powerfully on campus, persuading many students that divesting from Israel could serve as an opportunity to correct an historical injustice.

EXPOSING AND DISCOURAGING ANTI-ISRAEL ACTIVISM

Through online platforms such as [Canary Mission](#), a database devoted to exposing hatred of Jews and Israel, the pro-Israel community has established a strong deterrent against anti-Semitism and BDS activism. By publicly documenting the actions of anti-Israel students, these platforms have created a detailed record of the prejudice and hostility regularly leveled against Israel on U.S. campuses.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, pro-Israel efforts raised noticeable concerns among Israel's detractors, causing activists to downplay their associations with BDS campaigns. Fearing the repercussions of public exposure, some students withdrew their support for campus divestment, while others severed their ties to anti-Israel causes.

Throughout the academic year, efforts to expose BDS activists created considerable challenges for detractor groups. During SJP's national conference in November, organizers

led a special session on Canary Mission's work, revealing growing anxiety among leaders of the anti-Israel movement. While deliberating support for a BDS resolution at CSULB, student representatives expressed strong reservations about the measure, noting recent pro-Israel exposure of BDS activists. At **Tufts University**, where student government meetings are usually filmed, representatives held a secret BDS vote, banning the use of video to protect the identities of divestment supporters. During a BDS debate at the **University of California, Santa Barbara** (UCSB), anti-Israel student representatives raised concerns about public exposure and demanded a secret balloting process. After denying these requests, UCSB's student government proceeded with an open session, and none of its members voted for divestment.

DOWNPLAYING BDS: A SHIFT IN ANTI-ISRAEL MESSAGING

While working to deter anti-Israel activism, the pro-Israel community has exposed considerable anti-Semitism and extremism in the BDS movement. These efforts have diminished the popularity of divestment on college campuses, causing anti-Israel activists to distance themselves from global BDS campaigns.

Across the country, student groups have downplayed BDS advocacy in their messaging for campus audiences. At CSULB, anti-Israel activists clarified their support for a campus divestment resolution, explaining that the measure was "not part of the greater BDS movement." Similarly, SJP's GWU chapter insisted that its divestment efforts focused narrowly on ten companies, making them unrelated to broader BDS causes.

While disassociating themselves from BDS, students have reframed their activism as a struggle for equality and human rights. During the school year, Israel's detractors shifted their focus from divestment to social justice, emphasizing the daily challenges and frustrations of Palestinians. During the spring semester, for example, the National BDS Campus Support Team renamed itself the Campus Palestine Support Network, attempting to highlight its advocacy for Palestinian causes. Similarly, the U.S. Campaign to End the Occupation – which offers support to anti-Israel students nationwide – recently became the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights, and now [describes itself](#) as a coalition of groups "working together for freedom, justice, and equality." These changes represent major rebranding efforts, marking a deliberate shift in anti-Israel messaging.

COALITION BUILDING AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Throughout the academic year, social justice and human rights campaigns strengthened anti-Israel outreach to the student community. In a continuing trend on U.S. campuses, BDS supporters broadened the reach of their efforts by establishing common cause with fellow campus activist organizations. Collaboration between Israel's detractors and other students reflects the growing popularity of intersectionality, a concept that describes the ways in which systems of oppression overlap and interact. In recent years, this trend has experienced a renaissance on college campuses, uniting students around common themes of group identity and oppression.

During the academic year, anti-Israel groups continued to build campus coalitions, capitalizing on partnerships formed during previous years. Intersectionality allowed activists to tie their demands to broader social justice causes, and to equate Palestinian grievances with oppression suffered by other groups. Collaborative efforts on U.S. campuses sparked a number of anti-Israel campaigns, with Israel's detractors inserting themselves into the public demonstrations and

grievance platforms of fellow campus agitators. On several campuses, detractors and their allies published “lists of demands” containing the shared grievances of multiple student organizations.

In May, following [racist incidents](#) against black students at **American University**, activists sent a [list of thirteen](#) demands to campus administrators. The document – sponsored by SJP, NAACP, the Black Student Alliance, the Asian Student Organization, and other groups – promoted BDS alongside a range of social justice causes, calling on the university to “divest from fossil fuels, the Israeli Apartheid State, and private prisons.”

At the **University of Maryland**, activists [issued a similar list](#) of grievances, demanding opportunities for students to discuss Palestinian struggles and learn about the BDS movement. Although the initiative [excluded Jewish groups](#) on campus, it welcomed support from a broad coalition of minority organizations, including the Black Student Union, the Coalition of Latinx Student Organizations, the American Indian Student Union, the Pride Alliance, and the Muslim Students Association.

At UW, SJP and the Black Student Union (BSU) [demanded the resignation](#) of university Chancellor Rebecca Blank, protesting her opposition to a BDS resolution advocated by both groups. Weeks earlier, BSU members had taken an active role in promoting and passing the resolution, highlighting its connection to racial justice causes on campus.

On several campuses, Israel's detractors collaborated with minority activists to promote divestment from Israel and private prisons. By connecting these issues, SJP and its allies attempted to associate Israel with allegations of racism and abuse in America's prison system.

At Georgetown University, an [anti-Israel petition](#) urged the Board of Trustees to divest from “the violent private prison industry and occupation of Palestine.” In an appeal to intersectionality, the initiative condemned companies promoting “the destruction and degradation of black, brown, Native, low-income, Latinx, and Palestinian people (among others).” Similarly, a BDS resolution at OSU [targeted investments](#) in private prisons and “the illegal military occupation of Palestinian territories,” criticizing the school’s “complicity in human rights violations and discriminatory practices.”

In June, organizers of the annual Dyke March, a celebration of lesbian pride and LGBTQ rights in Chicago, ejected Jewish participants carrying rainbow-themed flags with the Star of David. In an [official statement](#) on the incident, march organizers defended their actions and declared “solidarity with Palestine,” explaining that the flags evoked “inherently white-supremacist” associations with Israel and Zionism. In late July, the Chicago SlutWalk, a demonstration against rape culture and gender discrimination, adopted the Dyke March’s ban on Zionist displays. Although the group eventually reversed its policy, it shunned pro-Israel marchers and invited prominent detractors to speak at the event. At both the SlutWalk and the Dyke March, event organizers included anti-Israel students who promoted restrictions on Jewish and Zionist symbols. Moreover, Chicago-area SJP chapters [expressed strong support](#) for anti-Zionist measures, lauding the Dyke March’s organizers and the exclusion of Jewish participants.

On several campuses, SJP co-opted a wave of frustration with the Donald Trump administration, doubling down on its strategy of exploiting campus protest movements. Across the country, anti-Israel campaigns linked U.S. immigration policies to Israel’s treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. During a protest against the President’s travel ban on seven Muslim countries, **Northwestern University** students [unfurled a banner](#) reading, “If you support Israeli apartheid

you support a Muslim ban.” Similarly, in a clear reference to Israel’s security barrier, activists at **Boston University** and Tufts University chanted “from Palestine to Mexico: no ban no walls” during demonstrations against Trump’s border policies.

At **Stanford University**, SJP and JVP activists co-sponsored a [panel discussion](#) highlighting “parallels between regimes of separation, discriminatory profiling practices in Palestine, and Trump’s immigration policies.” Anti-Israel students organized similar events at [GWU](#), [New York University](#), [San Jose State University](#), [SFSU](#), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and other campuses.

UNDERHANDED TACTICS

Across the country, anti-Israel students employed a range of subversive tactics to advance their campaigns on college campuses. Throughout the academic year, Israel’s detractors deliberately excluded pro-Israel students from divestment debates, introducing BDS initiatives on Jewish holidays and other days of religious significance. These efforts represent brazen attempts to silence Jewish voices and obstruct dialogue in the wider student community. They also expose the limitations of BDS activists, who rely on deception and distortion to promote unpopular campaigns on U.S. campuses.

At Tufts University, SJP activists initiated a BDS vote just before the start of Passover, preventing Jewish students from debating and voting on divestment. With Israel’s supporters sidelined from student government proceedings, BDS passed by a significant margin on campus. At **Pitzer College** and UW, Israel’s detractors initiated BDS-related votes during the week of Passover, when many students were already home for the holiday. Similarly, a considerable number of “Israel Apartheid Week” events – including programs at the **University of Minnesota**, **Harvard University**, and UIUC – overlapped with Passover celebrations, enabling activists to avoid confrontations over their

extreme and often hateful activities. At the University of Michigan, anti-Israel students erected a mock “Israeli apartheid wall” during Rosh Hashanah. In a particularly offensive incident at UCSB, SJP announced a BDS campaign on Holocaust Remembrance Day, upsetting Jewish students and drawing harsh criticism from campus groups.

In similar efforts to suppress dialogue, anti-Israel activists staged multiple event disruptions on U.S. campuses, attempting to silence advocates of Israel. As in previous years, Israel’s detractors shouted over Israeli lecturers, organized event walkouts, and deliberately interfered with Israel education efforts on campus. In many cases, protesters resorted to heckling and name calling, subjecting Israeli speakers to visceral forms of harassment. Through these hostile and underhanded tactics, anti-Israel students demonstrated their determination to isolate Israel’s defenders and stifle debate on college campuses.

In February, anti-Israel protesters at Columbia University repeatedly interrupted a lecture by Israeli U.N. Ambassador Danny Danon. Video footage of the event shows activists shouting over the ambassador, chanting slogans such as “[racists not welcome](#),” “[Israel is a terrorist state](#),” and “[from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free](#).” At **City College of New York** (CCNY), SJP students disrupted a talk by Dani Dayan, Israeli Consul General to New York, hurling insults and slurs at the diplomat. During the event’s question-and-answer portion, activists drew Dayan into a tense exchange, accusing Israel of murdering

Palestinian children and other violations of human rights.

At the **University of California, Irvine** (UCI), SJP protested an event hosted by Reservists on Duty and the Gideon Project, organizations that bring IDF soldiers to American campuses. When Israeli reservists stood to address students, SJP activists began a half-hour long disruption, pledging “resistance” against Israel and prompting an intervention by UCI police. Students used similar tactics during a panel discussion at Georgetown University, where speakers gathered to discuss the career of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In a violation of the university’s Speech and Expression Policy – which permits individuals to speak on campus without interruption – students blocked the main stage and unfurled a banner reading “Netanyahu is a War Criminal” before police removed them from the venue.

Throughout the academic year, Israel’s detractors organized several disruptions of events intended to promote social equality and diversity. When Miri Eisin, a former IDF spokesperson, visited **Wellesley College** to discuss female empowerment and advancement in the military, members of JVP and other student groups protested her lecture, attacking Eisin and accusing Israel of war crimes. At **Washington University in St. Louis**, where LGBTQ advocate Etai Pinkas discussed gay and transgender activism in Israel, SJP students held signs reading “No Pride in Apartheid” and staged a walkout of the event. Both incidents highlighted BDS activists’ refusal to recognize Israel as a model for equality in the Middle East, where most countries deny basic rights to women and LGBTQ individuals.

TARGETING TRUSTEES

While attempting to suppress debate on campus, Israel’s detractors led sophisticated campaigns targeting the leaders of academic institutions. On several campuses, SJP activists made

direct appeals to boards of trustees and university officials, urging them to divest campus funds from Israel.

At the **University of Chicago** (UChicago), students sent trustees [a petition](#) condemning “complicity with apartheid” and demanding the implementation of a divestment resolution passed in 2016. After publishing the petition online, activists launched an aggressive social media campaign, posting [photos of trustees](#) on Facebook and encouraging efforts to solicit their support. As noted, anti-Israel students led a similar effort at Georgetown, asking trustees to divest from Israel and private prisons. Like UChicago activists, Georgetown students initiated their campaign with an online petition, welcoming public pressure on the university.

Anti-Israel engagement efforts have met with limited success on U.S. campuses. In a formal [response](#) to Israel’s detractors, Georgetown validated students’ concerns about private prisons but wholly rejected divestment from Israel, characterizing BDS as shortsighted and counterproductive. Despite the passage of a divestment referendum at USF – which called for a “socially responsible investment committee” authorized to review Israel-related investments – university leaders rejected the measure and refused to implement it. At Pitzer, the Board of Trustees invalidated anti-Israel legislation passed by the school’s student government.

Opposition to BDS at Georgetown, USF, and [Pitzer](#) represents a significant achievement for the pro-Israel community. Nevertheless, SJP’s outreach campaigns have confronted pro-Israel students with considerable challenges on U.S. campuses. As anti-Israel initiatives continue, Israel’s supporters must redouble their efforts to educate trustees about the hateful and divisive agenda motivating BDS activism.

CONCLUSION

The 2016-2017 academic year was a time of challenge and opportunity for Israel's supporters. As a result of pro-Israel advocacy efforts, American campuses saw a continued decline in BDS campaigns nationwide. Nevertheless, students launched sophisticated divestment campaigns with assistance from anti-Israel organizations. As in past academic years, professional groups provided Israel's detractors with financial, material, and programming support. They also frequently intervened in campus affairs, drafting student BDS resolutions and taking legal action on behalf of campus activists.

In response to the growing unpopularity of BDS campaigns, students employed deceptive and underhanded tactics to advance anti-Israel initiatives. Using the language of intersectionality, they claimed the mantle of equality and social justice, even while promoting hatred against Jews and Israel. At the same time, detractor groups attempted to silence pro-Israel voices, disrupting Israel-related events and excluding Jewish students from divestment debates. On several campuses, anti-Israel activists sought to broaden the reach of divestment initiatives, making direct appeals to trustees and campus officials.

Despite these challenges, Israel's supporters made significant progress throughout the academic year. Across the country, efforts to expose anti-Israel extremism held BDS activists accountable for their actions. Moreover, students benefited from a range of professional resources intended to bolster pro-Israel activism. In the year ahead, ICC and its partners will continue their work to empower Israel's campus advocates. Taken together, these efforts promise to strengthen support for Israel, minimize hatred, and foster a more constructive dialogue on American campuses.

