



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on January 30, 2025

Federal Intervention in Campus Protests: Trump's New Antisemitism Order

President Donald Trump has signed an executive order targeting foreign students and university staff involved in pro-Palestinian protests. He directed federal agencies to investigate and potentially deport individuals deemed to be engaging in “unlawful anti-Semitic harassment and violence.”

Overview

[The order](#), signed on Wednesday, directs every executive department and agency to crack down on antisemitic activity. Federal agencies must submit reports within 60 days identifying legal tools to combat antisemitism on college campuses.



AP Images

Pro-Palestinian protest at NYU April 23, 2024

In justifying the new order, Trump condemned pro-Palestinian protests as a breeding ground for radicalization, stating:

[The Hamas terrorist attacks of October 7, 2023] unleashed an unprecedented wave of vile anti-Semitic discrimination, vandalism, and violence against our citizens, especially in our schools and on our campuses. Jewish students have faced an unrelenting barrage of discrimination; denial of access to campus common areas and facilities, including libraries and classrooms; and intimidation, harassment, and physical threats and assault.

The order mandates that universities report “inadmissible aliens” involved in protests. It references the [U.S. immigration law](#) that allows visa revocations for individuals suspected of associating with terrorist organizations or engaging in unlawful activity.

A White House [fact sheet](#) accompanying the order used even stronger language. It suggested a broader crackdown beyond direct acts of violence:

To all the resident aliens who joined in the pro-jihadist protests, we put you on notice: come 2025, we will find you, and we will deport you.

The order pledges to “marshal all federal resources” against the “explosion” of antisemitism.

Building on 2019 Order

The recent executive order builds upon Trump's 2019 Executive Order on Combating Antisemitism ([EO 13899](#)). The 2019 order significantly broadened the interpretation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to extend protections against antisemitic discrimination in higher-education institutions receiving federal funding.



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At the core of the 2019 order was the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

This definition is widely supported by pro-Israel groups. However, it has been controversial because it conflates criticism of anti-Zionism or the state of Israel with antisemitism. Critics worry that this could limit free speech. They argue that not all criticism of Israel is rooted in hatred toward Jewish people.

Enforcement and Expansion in the New Order

The new executive order reaffirms EO 13899, and goes further by expanding federal enforcement mechanisms. The new directive calls for the following:

- The Department of Education and the Department of Justice are required to assess past and ongoing antisemitism-related civil rights complaints.
- The Attorney General is instructed to use additional legal tools, such as [18 U.S.C. 241](#), which criminalizes civil rights violations, to prosecute antisemitic harassment and violence.
- Universities will be required to report incidents that may involve both foreign students and staff engaging in antisemitic activities, which could lead to visa revocations and deportations under U.S. immigration law.

The 2019 order focused on clarifying discrimination laws; the 2025 version shifts toward active enforcement. This change has raised concerns about its impact on university policies and free-speech protections.

Campus Protests

Following the onset of the Gaza war, U.S. college campuses experienced a surge in [pro-Palestinian](#) protests. Between October 7, 2023, and May 2024, there were over 3,700 protest events at more than 500 educational institutions across the country. This data comes from the Crowd Counting Consortium. Many demonstrations called for an end to violence against civilians in Gaza. Some protesters also demanded Palestinian liberation, while others urged universities to disclose and divest from financial ties to Israel and weapons manufacturers.

Notably, several Jewish-led organizations have actively participated in and co-organized these protests. Groups such as [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) (JVP) and [IfNotNow](#) have been at the forefront. They advocated for Palestinian rights and opposing Israeli policies. For instance, at Columbia University, JVP [collaborated](#) with Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) to organize campus demonstrations and engaged in legal actions against the university.

Amid these protests, rare incidents of violence have been reported against both Jewish and Muslim students. For example, at Columbia University in December 2024, a Jewish student was [punched in the face](#) during a pro-Palestinian protest at Barnard College.

At Stanford University in November 2023, an Arab Muslim student was [struck by a car](#) after the driver reportedly shouted anti-Muslim slurs. Similarly, in February 2024, a Palestinian-American student was



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[stabbed](#) after attending a pro-Palestinian rally in Austin, Texas. Authorities treated both attacks as hate crimes.

Harassment

Jewish students have reported instances of harassment during the protests, including antisemitic flyers and disruptions at universities. [According](#) to Hillel International, the world's largest Jewish campus organization, there were 1,854 such incidents during the 2023-2024 academic year. That marked a 700-percent increase from the previous year.

Meanwhile, Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian students have also filed complaints. They cited discrimination and bias in how universities have handled protests and disciplinary actions. Complaints prompted the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights to [initiate](#) multiple investigations into allegations of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab harassment across various universities.

The Associated Press [reports](#) that the Biden administration launched over 100 investigations into claims of antisemitism and Islamophobia on college campuses. Many cases were resolved before Trump assumed office.

Legal Considerations

Under existing laws, crimes such as vandalism, assault, harassment, and threats — regardless of the identities of those involved — are already prosecutable at the local and state levels. Universities also have internal disciplinary mechanisms to address misconduct.

Federal intervention, particularly measures involving deportations or sweeping legal actions, could erode free-speech protections and set a dangerous precedent for political expression on college campuses and elsewhere.

Rather than expanding executive authority, the focus should be on enforcing existing laws fairly and impartially. Local law enforcement and university administrations are fully equipped to handle criminal behavior while ensuring that political speech remains protected.

As the debate over campus protests, antisemitism, and student rights continues, the challenge remains to strike a balance between safety, free expression, and lawful enforcement without overstepping constitutional boundaries.



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