

Study: Protests harmed trust in higher education



By Josh Moody
Journalist

PERSPECTIVE

Pro-Palestinian campus protests during the spring semester appear to have further undermined public trust in higher education, according to a study that the marketing firm SimpsonScarborough.

The protests, which sprawled across more than 100 US campuses from coast to coast, captured national headlines and drew the wrath of congressional Republicans, who chastised college presidents for how they dealt with encampments and student demands to divest from Israel and companies allegedly profiting off its war against Hamas.



Pro-Palestinian students and activists protest at an encampment on the campus of California State University, Los Angeles, in Los Angeles, California, on May 6, 2024.
● ETIENNE LAURENT/AFP

According to the SimpsonScarborough survey, which included responses from 641 college-bound high school students and 1,000 parents of high school-aged students, parents were more likely than their children to be aware of campus demonstrations and tended to have a more negative view of the protests.

Drilling down into political affiliation, the survey showed that trust in higher ed decreased most among Republican parents. Nearly half (49 percent) said their trust was diminished by the protests, while 47 percent said it was not affected; the remainder said the protests actually increased their trust. Democrats and independents were less impacted by the demonstrations, though 22 percent of Democratic and 30 percent of independent parents noted that their trust in higher education had declined. The findings come after public trust in higher education hit an all-time low last year.

Parents and students alike associated only a handful of institutions with the protests, namely Columbia University, Harvard University, and the University of California, Los Angeles. All three saw contentious pro-Palestinian encampments, and the leaders of all three institutions have appeared before Congress in separate hearings on campus antisemitism since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7.

Some institutions have attributed other campus troubles to the protests; for instance, Emerson College has alleged that the protests negatively affected enrollment. Earlier last month, Emerson announced layoffs due to declining enrollment, which officials partially attributed to "negative press and social media" related to the protests and the arrests of more than 100 students in April.

The article first appeared on Inside Higher Ed.

Crackdown on US campus protests just beginning



By Adam Federman
Journalist

PERSPECTIVE

On April 24, as students were wrapping up their semester at Indiana University (IU) in Bloomington, the school's provost convened an ad hoc committee to discuss a planned protest against the war in Gaza that was set to begin the following day. It was less than a week after Columbia University had called in the NYPD to break up an encampment in Manhattan, arresting more than 100 students, and tensions were running high nationwide. Already, over the winter, Indiana University had suspended a professor for sponsoring a talk by the student Palestine Solidarity Committee and canceled a major retrospective exhibition — in the works for years — by the 87-year-old Palestinian American painter and IU alumnus Samia Halaby, an

outspoken critic of the Israeli occupation.

On the eve of the April protest, without informing faculty or students, the provost's committee — composed only of members of the administration, including the university's chief of police and the vice provost for student life — rewrote a longstanding policy governing speech and assembly on campus. Specifically, they prohibited the use of tents or other structures without prior approval. The next morning, students began assembling tents to occupy Dunn Meadow, a large field in the middle of campus that's been the site of protests going back to at least the 1960s, including an anti-Apartheid "shantytown" that stayed up for two semesters in the mid-1980s and an encampment against the first Gulf War that lasted for 45 days.

But this time, students were told, without explanation, that it wasn't allowed. When they went ahead anyway, unaware of the new policy, school administrators called in heavily armed state troopers that day.

In an alarming show of force, snipers armed with rifles were positioned on the roof of the Indiana Memorial Union building overlooking the meadow. By late afternoon, 33 Indiana University students and faculty members had been arrested, charged with criminal trespassing, and banned from campus for a year. David Anthony McDonald, a professor of ethnomusicology who was among those arrested, said he only learned of the policy change as troopers brandishing batons and plexiglass shields began advancing on the students.

"That is everything you need to know

about the coordination that was taking place between the IU administration and the state police, with no coordination between the administration and the actual students they are supposed to be protecting," McDonald said.

It was only late that night, at nearly 10 pm, that IU President Pamela Whitten emailed faculty to explain the creation of the ad hoc committee and its decision. Students were not officially informed until a campus-wide email was sent three days later. While Whitten claimed that the new policy "enables us to balance free speech and safety in the context of similar protests

occurring nationally," numerous faculty members pointed out that the administration's abrupt change of policy and lack of consultation with the wider community is precisely what led to the dangerous confrontation with law enforcement.

IU declined to comment for this story. "They reversed a policy of 50 years overnight and then they proceeded to enforce this new policy the next day at the point of a gun," explained IU historian Alex Lichtenstein in an email. Over more than three decades in academia, and 12 at IU, he wrote, "I have never seen anything like this, in any institution I have been a part of."

At least a dozen colleges and universities have changed their policies to make it harder to protest the war on Gaza. More may follow this summer.



Columbia University faculty members protect students in the pro-Palestinian "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" in New York City on April 29, 2024. The students were given a suspension warning if they did not meet the university's deadline to clear the encampment.
● MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO/GETTY IMAGES



Pro-Palestinian protesters are being arrested at Indiana University on April 25, 2024, by the State Police riot squad. All the arrested protesters, including professors, have been banned from Indiana University's campus for a year.

● JEREMY HOGAN/SOPA IMAGES

Indiana is not alone in making sudden changes to policies dictating when and where students can gather and what they can say as the war in Gaza enters its ninth month. As colleges and universities have become the focal point of Gaza protests, at least a dozen have overhauled campus conduct rules in ways that will effectively limit speech and make it riskier to protest. And this marks an abrupt change from the direction academia had been moving in. Over the past decade, universities including Indiana have become more lenient in allowing protests and encampments to stand without resorting to the kind of force we've seen recently, in a vivid example of what some call the "Palestine exception".

Brian Soucek, a law professor at UC Davis and a member of the American Association of University Professors' Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure, says schools are both clarifying or tightening their rules and making new decisions about how to enforce them. Brown and UC Berkeley, for example, negotiated with students and reached agreements to reconsider divestment from Israel, which led to the voluntary dismantling of encampments.

But elsewhere changes to policy have led to the overwhelming use of state power — typically law enforcement dressed in riot gear — to clear encampments on campuses across the country. Policy changes have also led to widespread disciplining of students and faculty through suspensions or expulsions and, in some cases, withholding diplomas. In some cases, it's prompted the walling off of the university itself. Columbia, for example, was on lockdown through the end of the semester while NYU erected a plywood wall around part of its campus.

As a result, colleges are coming to look more like a police state than institutions of higher learning. And this is just the beginning. With students leaving for the summer and most encampments removed, at least for now, university administrations have the chance to overhaul campus policies and implement newly repressive measures in the fall.

"I have a feeling there's going to be a lot of changes made over the summer," said Laura Beltz, director of policy reform at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), which has been tracking policy changes at colleges and universities since October. "I do have concerns that they're going to be adopting more restrictions in the

days to come."

Many schools, including the University of Pennsylvania, which recently banned encampments and "overnight demonstrations" anywhere on campus, have implemented interim or temporary policies that could be made permanent in the coming months. Others, like the University of Michigan, have floated sweeping new proposals redefining "disruptive activity" and introducing new enforcement mechanisms that could be finalized before the fall semester begins. According to Beltz, these overly broad changes could have far-reaching implications for future student movements.

"Rules designed to suppress protests on this particular issue can just as easily be applied to restrict protest on a variety of issues on campus," Beltz wrote in an email.

Changing policies to target a particular movement or opinion — eschewing the so-called viewpoint neutrality — is a violation of the First Amendment, but that appears to be what several universities have done. (The ACLU and FIRE have challenged many of the new policy changes on First Amendment grounds. Public universities, which receive government funding, are bound by the First Amendment while private institutions are not. However private colleges and universities usually have free speech policies that mirror those of their public counterparts.)

IU's President Whitten even acknowledged in her email to faculty that the policy change was made in response to student plans to set up an encampment in Dunn Meadow. Shortly after the Hamas attacks of October 7, Columbia created a Special Committee on Campus Safety that, like IU's ad hoc group, is composed solely of top administrators, with no student or faculty representation. While colleges and universities typically consult student and faculty governing bodies before implementing consequential changes, one of the Columbia committee's first moves was unilaterally updating the university's events policy to grant the administration "sole discretion" over disciplinary matters — effectively making itself judge and jury. Less than three weeks later, the new policy was used to suspend campus chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish Voice for Peace. (SJP has been suspended or banned from at least half a dozen universities across the country.)

In May, as protests spread across the country, University of Virginia's (UVA) Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) made a last-minute

change to its regulations to require administrative approval for any temporary structures erected on campus, whereas previous guidelines had allowed for the recreational use of tents as long as they were under a certain size. Several hours after the policy was altered, UVA's encampment was cleared and more than two dozen students were arrested. (In a statement, UVA said the OEHS regulations posted on its website in May were out of date and the university was merely clarifying existing policy.)

Other changes have been more carefully considered but no less troubling. American University, in a decision widely criticized by civil liberties groups, has banned all indoor protests and established strict new requirements on registering student groups and posting materials such as flyers on campus, which must be "welcoming to all students". This measure would effectively prohibit the dissemination of unpopular or controversial viewpoints. Meanwhile, Cornell, Harvard, Franklin & Marshall, Lehigh, Caltech, Barnard, and Columbia have all released statements clarifying or updating policies on speech and assembly on campus, many of which will restrict students' ability to engage in First Amendment-protected activity.

The crackdown on the Palestinian solidarity campaign is not only taking place within colleges and universities. At the federal level, the International Center for Not-For-Profit Law found, eight new laws have been proposed that would punish students arrested during campus protests, in some cases by revoking visas for non-US students or cutting off financial aid.

All of this is part of a broader legislative push, at the state and federal levels, to undermine social movements — from the anti-pipeline campaigns of the 2010s to Black Lives Matter and Stop Cop City — by enhancing penalties for common protest-related crimes such as trespassing or blocking traffic. Several states have cited recent protests against US policy on Israel as their motivation for creating stiffer punishments for blocking traffic. In its most extreme form, New York Democrats in a recent legislative session put forward a bill that would make blocking a highway or bridge an act of domestic terrorism. Trump, for his part, has reportedly said that, if he's re-elected, he will deport student protesters and "set that movement back 25 or 30 years".

The full article first appeared on *In These Times*.

Victory at Columbia University

Now, drop all charges!

OPINION Over six months after Hamas initiated the Al-Aqsa Flood in Gaza on October 7, students at Columbia University in New York City occupied Hamilton Hall on April 30. They protested the school's millions of dollars of investment in the apartheid, Zionist regime of Israel, along with Israel's ongoing racist genocide against the people in Gaza.

New York City Police Department cops brutally arrested 46 of those students, at the request of the school administration, for "criminal trespassing," considered a misdemeanor. In a bit of irony, the NYPD were the real trespassers.



Pro-Palestinian protesters arrested for seizing the Hamilton Hall (renamed to Hind's Hall) at Columbia University announce in a press conference that they will be refusing court deals, outside a Manhattan criminal courthouse after their court appearance on June 20, 2024.

● AP

The Washington Post carried an article that revealed that pro-Zionist billionaires — such as Daniel Lubetzky, Daniel Loeb, Len Blavatnik, and Joseph Sitt — pledged campaign donations to Mayor Eric Adams if he would allow the NYPD to "handle" the protesters in collusion with university President Minouche Shafik, a former financial adviser, and the Board of Trustees. (May 16)

These arrests took place following a student encampment set up the week before, which was dismantled by the New York Police Department. The encampment ignited the student Intifada that spread, first throughout the US and then globally, in solidarity with Palestine.

Of the 46 people arrested, 31 were Columbia students or others with a current tie to the university; charges were dismissed against the 30 students on June 20 due to a lack of evidence. One other student had their charges dropped earlier. The remaining arrestees — 12 of whom are considered "outsiders" by authorities — were eligible to have their charges dropped if they accepted an "adjournment in contemplation of dismissal". This is a provision in New York law that, if the ACD is accepted, the case against the arrestee will be dropped and put away for six months only if they are not arrested for another offense in the interim.

Fourteen of the 15 remaining defendants, proudly wearing their Palestinian keffiyehs defiantly in court, turned down the ACD deal and issued a joint statement stating the reason for their decision: "We stand here today united by our action and the Palestinian cause. The state has attempted, once again, to divide us — dismissing some of our cases and offering others deals in accordance with their outside agitator narrative."

"All of us who took part in the liberation of Hind's Hall [renamed in honor of a six-year-old Palestinian girl murdered by the Israeli Occupation Force] were driven by the same necessity to escalate, to escalate for Gaza, to resist the savage genocide of our siblings in Palestine."

"We exercised our shared right to oppose the US war machine by putting our bodies upon the years of Columbia, one of its most well-oiled domestic components." (June 21)

Workers World salutes these heroic students and their allies who refused to be bullied and divided by the pro-Zionist school administration, Mayor Eric Adams, and the state repression of the NYPD and the courts.

These young activists, an integral part of a global movement, have been inspired by the determined struggle for the Palestinian people's right to liberation and self-determination, including reclaiming their ancestral lands.

Long live the student Intifada!

The article first appeared on *Workers World*.