
ISLAMOPHOBIC VIOLENCE FACING MUSLIMS AND U.S. COLLEGE CAMPUSES DURING THE ONGOING WAR IN GAZA

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ABSTRACT

Antisemitism and islamophobia are both deplorable sentiments that fuel violence. Since the resurgence of the Israel-Palestine war in 2023, Islamophobic violence in the United States surged dramatically, witnessing a 178 percent increase following the events of October 7 with 3,578 anti-Muslim complaints recorded. This paper aims to spotlight Islamophobic violence in the United States by presenting profiles of hate crimes facing minority Muslims in the country, including a hijabi woman harassed by an Israeli faculty member at Arizona State University, a six-year-old Muslim boy who was fatally stabbed 26 times while his mother sustained multiple injuries, and a group of Muslims of Palestinian descent being verbally harassed and shot with guns. Non-Muslim students also emerged as victims of Islamophobic violence for supporting Palestinians across American college campuses.

KEYWORDS

Islamophobic violence in the United States, Israel and Palestine war, Gaza, freedom

INTRODUCTION

Antisemitism is widely brought up in the discourse of Israel and Palestine without factoring in islamophobia, which has become increasingly rampant since the events of October 2023 leading to the present. Both antisemitism and islamophobia are downright objectionable sentiments that fuel violence. However, I was struck by an episode hosted by American political commentator, Candace Owens on her YouTube podcast titled *A Message to My Jewish and Muslim Friends* where she shared that sometimes antisemitism is conveniently used to silence minority groups (Candace Owens Podcast, 2024). I am not verbatim quoting Candace here but what she said in her podcast resonated with me. Antisemitism is sometimes weaponized to silence Palestinians who are trying to fight for a basic human right—freedom. The history of the Israel-Palestine conflict did not begin on October 7, 2023. The Palestinians' plight for freedom is rooted in history, trauma and suffering. The world was only struck by

the intensity of the Israel-Palestine war during the period from October 7 to the present, and rightfully so because in my opinion, the conflict was never given its fair share of media coverage in the past—until recently.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Record of Violence in Palestine

Before highlighting case studies of islamophobic violence facing Muslims in the United States, I will draw on the history of violence in Palestine. Under the Balfour Declaration, the British chose to establish a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. Jewish people began settling in Palestine, and from 1922 to 1935, the Jewish population increased impressively from 9 percent to 27 percent. The Balfour Declaration was designed to allow Jewish people to settle in Palestine in a bulk and to establish authority over Palestinians (Al Jazeera, 2018). This statement holds merit because what resulted following Jewish settlements in the region was the 1948 Nakba that led to the ethnic cleansing and displacement of more than 750,000 Palestinians and the massacre of 15,000 Palestinians (Al Jazeera, 2017). What followed after the Nakba was the 1967 Naksa, a war between Israel and the Arab world that resulted in Israel's victory. Israel was successful in further displacing 300,000 Palestinians, including victims of the 1948 Nakba (Al Jazeera, 2018). These historical events go unnoticed in today's political discourse of an unresolved, ongoing war in Palestine. At present, at least 39,000 Palestinians have been murdered by the Israeli government compared to 1,139 Israelis who died since October 7, 2023 (Al Jazeera, 2024). The discrepancy in the number of casualties highlights the intensity of killings carried out by Israel in a deliberate, long-term quest to completely wipe out Palestinians from the world map. Israel found the events of October 7 as an excuse to bombard and murder innocent Gazans in what I would call continuous acts of terrorism. Hamas is equally responsible for perpetrating terrorist attacks but Israel does not get a pass for "defending itself" in the guise of committing terrorism in the region.

Record of Israel Violating International Laws

Israel, on multiple occasions, has violated international laws. In December, 2006, the Security Council reaffirmed that Israel's establishment of settlements in Palestine hold no legal basis, and is a "flagrant violation of under international law and a major obstacle to the vision of two States living side-by-side in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders" (United Nations, 2016). A more recent report to the General Assembly issued in 2022 by the United Nations stated Israel's clear-cut intentions in Palestine. They will continue the occupation in Palestine and have policies in place to control occupied Palestinian land. Israeli wishes to alter the demography in the region and impose a repressive environment for Palestinians and a favorable environment for Israeli settlers (Report to General Assembly, United Nations, 2022). Again, these occupations were declared unlawful under international

law, considering draconian annexation policies adopted by the Israeli government (United Nations, 2022).

Since October 7, Israel has reacted mercilessly towards Palestinians more than Hamas. The Israeli government stopped food from reaching 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza (The Associated Press, 2024). The government cut off electricity, food and water supplies, creating unlivable circumstances. This is not the first time Israel has controlled Palestinians so barbarically. Dov Weisglass, former advisor to then Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, once blatantly said, “The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger.” This statement was made in 2006 (The Guardian, 2006). We are now in 2024. Barbarity has been a practicing norm in Palestine and Israel is to be blamed solely for the worsening state of human life in Gaza.

The Israeli government has been exercising unlawful policies against Palestinians. BBC News reported that Israel was forced to reveal government research detailing the number of calories Palestinians in Gaza should consume to avoid malnutrition—about Dov Weisglass’s quote (BBC News, 2012). The United Nations warned if the research indicated a policy measure that limited food imports in Gaza, it would violate humanitarian principles. An Israeli human rights group, *Gisha*, which stood against Israel’s blockage in Gaza back in the day, pressured the Israeli ministry to release the 2008 document after a long legal battle. *Gisha*’s report titled *Food Consumption in the Gaza Strip - The Red Lines* revealed that Israel was supposed to allow 106 lorryloads of supplies in Gaza to meet the daily humanitarian portion, inclusive of food, medical supplies, hygiene and agricultural products, but the government allowed merely 67 lorryloads (State of Israel Ministry of Defense, 2012). A discrepancy was pointed out by the humanitarian nonprofit that held the Israeli government accountable for several misdemeanors, further proving a violation of humanitarian principles in Gaza.

At present, the situation is no different; it is far worse. As emphasized earlier, more than 42,000 Palestinians have been murdered and more than 88,000 have been wounded by the Israeli government (Al Jazeera, 2024). A quarter of the population living in Gaza is experiencing starvation, according to United Nations (The Associated Press, 2024). Palestinians are resorting to grass as food. Israel is responsible for placing checks and balances on food items in the Gaza strip. Healthy foods such as kiwi, almonds, cherries, pomegranate and chocolate are strictly prohibited (Salon, 2024). Palestinians were already food insecure a year prior to the events of October 7. 65 percent of Gazans experienced food insecurity at the hands of the Israeli government in 2022, witnessing a jump from the previous year (62.2 percent) (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2023).

Islamophobia Following October 7 Events—2023-present

I will reinstate in this section of the paper that antisemitism is as bad as islamophobia. Centering my paper around islamophobia does not negate antisemitism at all. However, I am deeply concerned about antisemitism being used by pro-Israel lobbyists as a political talking point to silence Palestinians and their supporters. I take issue with that because that politicizes and justifies war crimes in Gaza. According to a source, anti-Muslim hatred increased by 180 percent in the United States alone since the events of October 7 (Reuters, 2024). Digital media further fueled Islamophobic violence against Palestinians. A string of anti-Palestinian advertisements, encouraging violence against Palestinians, were approved by Facebook (The Intercept, 2023). Some ads demanded the murder of Palestinians with one advertisement specifically calling for a Holocaust of Palestinians, and “to wipe out Gazan women and children and the elderly” (The Intercept, 2023). Facebook also approved an ad to assassinate a pro-Palestinian activist. Digital spaces have been triggers of violence for the Arab Muslim population in addition to the hostilities they are already experiencing in the Middle East. The following case studies further highlight Islamophobic violence facing Muslims in America.

Profiles of Islamophobic Violence**Six-year-old Muslim Boy Stabbed to Death While Mother Endures Injuries**

A six-year-old Muslim boy, Wadea Al Fayoume, was fatally stabbed to death in Illinois 26 times with a knife, while his mother, Hanaan Shahin, sustained serious injuries in an act of Islamophobic violence. Before the violence escalated into a deadly killing, Joseph M. Czuba, the landlord of the Muslim family, was angry at Shahin and her son for what was unfolding in Jerusalem. Shahin responded, “Let’s pray for peace” before Czuba attacked her with a knife. The mother heard Czuba utter anti-Muslim words as he pursued his attack, “You Muslims must die!” Shahin was able to lock herself up in the bathroom but her son was left behind and was being stabbed as she called 911. Czuba was charged with first-degree murder, attempted first-degree murder, two counts of a hate crime and aggravated battery with a deadly weapon, according to the Will County Sheriff’s office. On account of multiple injuries inflicted on the mother, she was unable to attend her son’s funeral. The Department of Justice investigated this attack as a hate crime. This case study is especially alarming, considering that the murder took place only days after the events of October 7. President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden condemned the attacks, while the Chicago Mayor, Brandon Johnson issued a statement claiming how destructive islamophobia can be for an American society (CNN, 2023).

Texas Woman Attempts to Drown Children of Palestinian Descent

A 42-year-old woman, identified as Elizabeth Wolf, tried to drown a 3-year-old girl and her sibling, a 6-year-old boy, in a swimming pool. The mother of the two children,

wearing a hijab, heard Wolf spew racial slurs, claiming that she was not American. Wolf snatched the scarf from her head to hit her with it in an attempt to keep her away as she tried to kill the 3-year-old underwater. The boy managed to escape. An eyewitness to the harrowing incident intervened and rescued the girl. In a distressful statement, the mother said, “We are American citizens, originally from Palestine, and I don’t know where to go to feel safe with my kids. My country is facing a war, and we are facing that hate here. My daughter is traumatized; whenever I open the apartment door, she runs away and hides, telling me she is afraid the lady will come and immerse her head in the water again.” Wolf has been charged with attempted murder following this incident, which is being described as a hate crime by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Muslim civil rights and advocacy group. CAIR advised the authorities to investigate the matter as a hate crime (The Guardian, 2024).

Three College Students Fatally Shot

Three college students of Palestinian descent were fatally shot in Burlington, Vermont. Two of the victims were wearing keffiyeh, a traditional garment worn in the Middle East. These three youngsters, who happen to be Muslims, were speaking Arabic when the attack against them took place. The perpetrator, Jason J. Eaton, a 48-year-old white man, was seen shouting and harassing the three men before firing four gunshots. One of the victim’s mother, Elizabeth Price, shared the horror of seeing her son hospitalized with a bullet in his spine. “I’m shaking, I’m hollow inside,” she said, in part. “He may have to be in a wheelchair...I believe that he’ll be able to walk, but his life has been taken away from him as it is, and he’s gonna have to recreate this new life.” Price added (Reuters, 2023).

A Group of Muslims Verbally Attacked; One of Them Fatally Stabbed

A group of four Muslims, who were protesting at the state Capitol in Texas, were provoked and later one of them was attacked and stabbed by assailant Bert James Baker, a 36-year-old white man. Baker approached a vehicle that was carrying the four Muslims when he tried to rip off a scarf on the vehicle that read “Free Palestine.” Baker was accused of trying to open the truck’s tailgate and spewing racial slurs at the four Muslim protestors, trying to escalate a fight. One of the victims, a 23-year-old Palestinian-American Zacharia Doar, was stabbed by Baker during a confrontation. One witness of the attack tried to stop the bleeding using keffiyeh. The Austin Police Department ruled this attack as a hate crime (BBC News, 2024).

Three Palestinian-Americans Attacked After Attending a Birthday Party

A group of Palestinian Americans were attacked out of nowhere while walking when a man pulled out a gun and shot at them. Two of the victims were injured but one of them was critically harmed as the bullet hit his spine. The family feared that the 20-

year-old would not be able to walk for the rest of his life following the brutal attack. The three young men were attacked because of their Palestinian roots, according to the relatives, because at the time of the attack, two of the victims were wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh and were speaking English and Arabic. “Granny, I’ve been shot,” said the 22-year-old boy who was injured in the spine (BBC News, 2023).

Hijabi Woman Harassed by Arizona State University Faculty Member

A video of a hijabi Muslim emerged on social media where two men were seen verbally abusing and harassing her. One of the men identified in the video is a U.S. Israeli academic, Jonathan Yudelman, a faculty member at the Arizona State University (ASU) (Daily Sabah, 2024). The men used derogatory words such as “bitch” and spewed insensitive religious remarks, “Go back to jihad.” Many spectators yelled at the men, telling them to leave the woman alone while another witness shouted, “Hate crime, hate crime right here!” The unnamed, defenseless victim whose personal space was being invaded by Yudelman remarked in the video, “You are disrespecting my religious boundaries.” The incident sparked outrage among users on Twitter (X) and Instagram, demanding immediate investigation into the matter. ASU has since fired Yudelman (Anadolu Agency, 2024).

Palestinian Artist Malak Mattar at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Campus

I recall attending Palestinian activist and artist Malak Mattar’s talk at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa campus in 2023 (Ka Leo O Hawai‘i, 2023). This talk was organized by Students and Faculty for Justice in Palestine at the University of Hawai‘i (SFJPUH), a student and faculty-led initiative that supports Palestine. The organizers took strict security measures to ensure the safety of Malak. The event was neither heavily publicized on social media nor endorsed openly to the public due to safety concerns. Despite precautions, a pro-Israeli group barged inside with an Israeli flag while Malak signed books and interacted with UH Mānoa students. This unexpected confrontation was completely uncalled for but the students and faculty members were prepared to protect Malak Mattar as they gathered around her, while she sat calmly and watched. In response to the disruption, UH organizers and students chanted in unison, “Free Palestine.” At the end of the confrontation, many students were seen crying and embracing each other. This islamophobic, nonverbal violence in the guise of a fear-inducing confrontation was heartbreaking for me to witness firsthand. There appears to be a strong sense of support for Palestinians in Hawai‘i because the local community understands what it feels like to be colonized, to be deprived of freedom, language, land rights, and most importantly, their unique identity as Hawaiians.

Student Protests Across the United States Expand Globally

The United States Constitution grants everyone the right to free speech, which includes the right to peaceably assemble (Constitution Annotated, Analysis and

Interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, n.d.). Since the devastation that has unfolded in Gaza over the past few months, at least 2,000 people have been arrested across college campuses in the United States simply for voicing support for Palestinians (The Associated Press, 2024). Student protests in the United States have been rooted in history—the 1960s protests of the Vietnam War and the 1980s protests of the South African apartheid. A common factor that connects the anti-apartheid South African protests with the current pro-Gaza protests is divestment—an economic move that ensures that universities cut ties with companies that fund countries involved in violence. Columbia students rallied in the 1980s, pressuring the campus administration to divest in South Africa which had imposed apartheid in the country, segregating whites and blacks to uphold white supremacy (Vox, 2024). Despite the pressure, threats and expulsion that these students experienced, Columbia University ultimately budged and divested following 5 months of protests, and 155 campuses across the United States followed suit. These student protests resulted in the United States government passing a divestment policy.

Fast forward to the current student protests that favor Palestinians, these students are also demanding that universities divest from Israel, meaning cut ties with any company that funds Israel any form of financial support to continue bombardment in Gaza (The Associated Press, 2024). The current Gaza protests and the 1985 anti-segregation protests at Columbia University reflected anti-war sentiments. College students are only voicing support for Gaza to demand peace, recognition of Palestine's freedom and an immediate ceasefire that has killed at least 42,000 Palestinians since October 7, 2023.

Many peaceful college protests have been intruded on by the police, who removed barricades, destroyed tents, arrested college professors and attacked them violently, pinning them down for supporting Gaza. Numerous tactics employed by law enforcement in dealing with peaceful protestors can be considered problematic. Hundreds of policemen barged inside Columbia University's Hamilton Hall with flash grenades and pepper sprays, where a dozen students of different faiths and cultural leanings locked arms together and protested in solidarity with Gaza. These policemen tried to silence student journalists on the spot, threatening them with arrests. Despite showing no resistance, students were jostled and pinned down on the floor of concrete. These were young students who were peacefully protesting. They were thrown, in what a student protestor who wrote a USA Today column, described as "animals; cells where the only toilets women could use lacked any privacy and where our naked bodies were in plain sight to throngs of male officers." New York mayor, Eric Adams, issued a statement claiming that no violence took place against these students, which the student journalist for USA Today claimed to be a blatant lie (USA Today, 2024).

An instance of this harrowing nature indicates the rise of misinformation, lies and bigotry that runs deep in American institutions that are designed to suppress marginalized, minority voices. Similarly, 25 peaceful protestors at the University of Virginia campus were arrested by the police, who used zip ties and chemical sprays on them (The Washington Post, 2024).

A Jewish professor, who served 34 years at Dartmouth University, was banned from campus following a violent arrest by the police. She was simply standing with pro-Palestinian supporters when she was floored twice by police officers (Middle East Monitor, 2024). A 64-year-old Columbia University professor was arrested outside his home for documenting on his mobile phone the handling of the protestors by law enforcement (USA Today, 2024). The police violated his right as a protestor by recording a video outside his apartment building (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). Police ordered at least a thousand pro-Palestinians at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) campus to leave. At the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Palestinian activists sparred with police who destroyed their tents meant for peaceful protests. A professor at the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville was brutally attacked by the police for participating in a pro-Palestinian protest at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. He was hospitalized following the attack (Anadolu Agency, 2024).

Although these student/faculty protests do not highlight specific examples of anti-Muslim hate crimes, many non-Muslims have inevitably become victims of Islamophobic violence for supporting Palestine. These student protests that have spread across college campuses in the United States since October 7, 2023, have expanded globally in countries such as Australia, Switzerland, Canada, Mexico and the United Kingdom (Al Jazeera, 2024). The quest for students the world over to hold Israel accountable for its misdemeanors in Gaza continues and has been considered the “largest student movement so far” on campus of the 21st century, according to New York University social studies and history professor, Robert Cohen (Vox, 2024).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the surge in Islamophobic violence against Muslim families in the United States following the escalation of the Gaza-Israel conflict.
2. To address the limited academic discourse on Islamophobia within political science in the United States, and to raise awareness of its severity in comparison to antisemitism, emphasizing the need for Muslim inclusion in political activism shaping U.S. politics.
3. To analyze the disparity in media coverage between antisemitism and Islamophobia in the United States, highlighting the underrepresentation of Islamophobic violence in comparison to antisemitic incidents.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study is evidence-based. I mostly used reputable news media reports as sources to corroborate my research and inform the readers about Islamophobic violence. Islamophobic violence currently shaping the contemporary politics of the United States.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As 2023 was coming to an end, I flew out to Seattle, Washington for my winter break. I was already familiar with pro-Palestine sentiments in Hawai'i given the history of colonization that the native and indigenous communities endured. Going to a state like Washington, where I had never been before, I did not know what to expect because the Israel and Palestine war was still fresh and it was just the beginning of a catastrophe unfolding in Gaza. To my surprise, I witnessed one of the biggest, if not the biggest pro-Palestine protest while strolling Downtown Seattle. Streets were crowded and some roads were jammed with traffic. Many pedestrians watched in silence while some were taken aback by the protest. It was hard to tell if spectators watching were happy or infuriated. I was in a rush to go somewhere but I captured the protest on my camera as I aligned myself with the protestors to symbolize my support for Palestine. It was an unforgettable moment for sure.

It was freeing to realize that I was in a safe place because I witnessed a pro-Gaza protest in a city, I knew very little about. It was equally freeing to realize that a country like the United States that will possibly fund Israel with \$3.8 billion dollars of aid every year, and will probably continue until 2028, comprises of small but loud communities that fully support Palestinians (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). Even Jewish citizens living in America have expressed their sympathy for Palestinians. Two of the largest Jewish advocacy groups, *Jewish Voice for Peace* and *IfNotNow*, organized a rally on Capitol Hill in October, 2023 to support Palestine and call for an immediate ceasefire (CNN, 2023).

There is an understanding of clear-cut war crimes in Gaza that people world over have realized over these past few months, particularly considering the disinformation in the media and denial by the Israeli government that have blurred the lines between lies and reality. If these pro-Gaza sentiments exist in states such as Hawai'i and Washington, it is evident that Israel is doing something wrong. In fact, Chicago's City Council approved a resolution earlier this year, demanding a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. San Francisco, Detroit and Atlanta also passed similar resolutions to put an end to an ongoing war in the region (The Associated Press, 2024). You cannot have Americans blatantly voicing support for Gaza for no reason. There are legitimate grounds to believe that Israel is working towards a common goal—to continue to commit war crimes in Palestine.

The two student protests I mentioned earlier: the 1960s Vietnam War protests and the 1985 Columbia University protests that were anti-segregation, advocated for peace and antiwar, calling out racial segregation and demanding interventionism to end. Students who were part of these historic protests stood on the right side of history, and any individual who would read about these protests would side with them, but somehow that is difficult to do in the context of Gaza because of antisemitism. Criticizing Israel based on illegitimate policies targeting Palestinians in the form of land rights and war crimes should not be tied to antisemitism. As aforementioned, antisemitism is conveniently used as a political talking point to suppress supporters of Palestine, and oftentimes, this political tactic is enforced through institutions, including law enforcement (discussed earlier). It is an apparent double standard for Israeli supporters to call pro-Palestinians antisemitic, but somehow the constant bombardment and displacement in Gaza are not tied to Islamophobic, anti-Muslim sentiments.

The antisemitic argument also holds no merit because many Jewish individuals were part of pro-Gaza protests and wholly supported Palestine and the unjust treatment in Gaza by the Israeli government (see in this section the two Jewish advocacy groups I mentioned that showed support for Palestinians). Hence, it is equally hypocritical of Israel to uphold the right to defend itself while its government gets a pass for relentlessly bombarding Gaza, murdering women, children and men, dispossessing and displacing them, and imposing food restrictions and preventing only certain humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza strip. These genocidal patterns that are rooted in history are what I would call a modern-day Holocaust being committed against Palestinians in Gaza by Israel. Silence is another enabler of violence. The amount of noticeable silence in the United States regarding Palestinian deaths and the situation in Gaza overall is not only indicative of islamophobia but this behavioral pattern is enabling anti-Muslim violence and hate crimes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

More research can be conducted on how Muslims and non-Muslims are pursuing novel anti-Islamophobic movements across the world, taking the United States college campus protests as a reference point.

Further research should investigate how the younger demographic in the United States mobilized to fight for Palestine's freedom. What avenues and pathways did young Americans, especially college-going students utilize to collectively mobilize and advocate for Palestinians?

Research can be conducted with Palestinian journalists and victims of violence in Gaza. These personal stories will unearth realistic perspectives because they are coming from people who have been at the core of genocidal violence.

Case studies of Islamophobic violence presented in this paper can be independently

pursued by directly interviewing victims and their families, and investigating if the U.S. government has reached out to them to offer support and protection.

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