# Harvard reports reveal widespread bigotry and polarized climate amid pro-Palestinian protests



Muslim and Jewish students at Harvard University reported experiences of bigotry and abuse amid protests on the Massachusetts campus last year, according to two extensive reports released on Tuesday. The documents, exceeding 500 pages combined, were produced by two taskforces established by Harvard to investigate antisemitism and anti-Israel bias as well as anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian bias.

The reports emerged as Harvard and other universities faced heightened scrutiny under former President Donald Trump’s administration, which pressed institutions to address concerns about antisemitism and what it categorized as leftist bias. Harvard President Alan Garber, in a letter accompanying the findings, highlighted that the reports contained “searing personal accounts” from approximately 50 listening sessions involving around 500 students and university employees.

Garber outlined Harvard’s commitment to fostering “productive and civil dialogue” among students of diverse backgrounds and emphasised promoting “viewpoint diversity.” The taskforces recommended comprehensive reviews of admissions, faculty appointments, curricula, orientation, and training programmes, along with reforms in disciplinary processes. They also called for increased classroom teaching on the history and complexities of Israel, Palestine, and their conflict, and offered wide-ranging suggestions to encourage pluralism on campus.

Additionally, Garber said Harvard planned to initiate a research project on antisemitism and support an in-depth historical analysis of the experiences of Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians at the university. The university also intended to make its disciplinary processes “fair, consistent and effective.”

The Trump administration had demanded that Harvard curb what it considered the excessive influence of activist faculty, staff, and students. This came amid a crackdown following a surge in alleged antisemitism on college campuses after Hamas’ attack on Israel and the ensuing conflict in Gaza during 2023. The administration additionally sought audits within university departments to ensure “viewpoint diversity” and other corrective measures.

In response to the administration’s demands, Harvard condemned the move as unconstitutional interference and filed a lawsuit after the administration froze $2.2 billion in grants, largely funding medical and scientific research.

The antisemitism taskforce report included a caution against allowing external pressure to dictate reforms, stating that the proposed changes should stem from internal consensus within the Harvard community. “If they do so, they will make it more difficult for Harvard to fix itself,” the report warned.

On experiences of discrimination, the two taskforces conducted a joint online survey in 2023, collecting 2,295 responses from students, faculty, and staff. The results showed that 47% of Muslim respondents and 15% of Jewish respondents did not feel physically safe on campus, compared to 6% of Christians and non-believers. Moreover, 92% of Muslim respondents and 61% of Jewish respondents perceived academic or professional repercussions from expressing their political beliefs.

The taskforce addressing anti-Muslim bias documented that Arab-American students wearing keffiyehs in solidarity with Palestinians were frequently subjected to slurs such as “terrorist,” “baby-killer,” “towelhead,” and “antisemite.” It found a pervasive climate of fear and intimidation, exacerbated by doxxing incidents targeting pro-Palestinian students falsely accused of supporting terrorism. Participants reported marginalisation of Palestinian viewpoints in official university discussions and fear of retaliation for political expression.

The antisemitism taskforce observed that by late 2023, the campus atmosphere had evolved for many into a space dominated by intense pro-Palestinian solidarity and anger against Israel—a sentiment that many Jewish and Israeli students felt was directed personally at them. Due to the contentious nature of defining antisemitism, especially following events on 7 October 2023 and subsequent protests, the taskforce prioritised documenting community members’ experiences of hateful conduct and exclusion over strict definitional debates.

The report described the situation for many Jewish and Israeli students during the 2023-24 academic year as “triggering” and politically polarising, with these students often finding themselves “on the wrong side of a political binary that provided no room for the complexity of history or current politics.” Several reported bullying or social ostracism linked to their actual or perceived support for Israel or Zionism, including accusations of supporting genocide. Conversely, a smaller group of anti-Zionist Jewish students who joined some pro-Palestinian protests reported feeling alienated by Jewish campus groups.

Corey Saylor, research and advocacy director for the Council on American Islamic Relations, stated that the group stands by its designation of Harvard as hostile to Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians. “If the university actually acts on its task force’s report to improve academic freedom, free expression, and address the rampant anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia that have been downplayed or outright ignored in public discourse, this may indicate that it is time to change that designation,” he said.

In contrast, Vlad Khaykin, executive vice president of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, criticised the delay in Harvard’s confronting of antisemitism on campus. “Harvard is both a symptom and a progenitor of the problem, providing the imprimatur of academic legitimacy to naked antisemitism,” he said, calling the university’s response “a disgrace of historic proportions” and reflecting a broader trend in academia.

The Guardian is reporting these detailed findings, which paint a complex picture of campus dynamics amid political tensions and the broader debates surrounding free expression and diversity in academic settings.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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