# Pro-Palestine protest disrupts Cambridge graduations amid escalating campus tensions



A recent protest at Cambridge University has thrown into sharp relief the escalating tensions surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within academic institutions, revealing a troubling trend that mirrors wider societal divide. On May 23, a pro-Palestine demonstrator disrupted graduation ceremonies by chaining himself to the gates of the Senate House, clad in a boiler suit smeared with red paint. His chants of "Free Palestine" pierced the air, as supporters waved Palestinian flags, drawing attention away from the solemnity of the occasion. This confrontation starkly illustrates a growing movement at UK universities, pushing for radical accountability from administrations that appear increasingly out of touch with the values of the wider community.

Notably, this act of protest was both brazen and strategically timed, coinciding with graduation events for three colleges—Queen's, St Catherine's, and Jesus Colleges. It comes on the heels of a High Court injunction granted to the university just two months prior, aiming to restrict pro-Palestinian protests on campus until the end of July. This legally enforced limitation reflects not only Cambridge’s struggle to maintain order but also the blatant disregard for free speech at a time when radical elements press for unfettered expression of their views, regardless of the consequences for others.

In the wake of heightened activism, King's College recently made headlines by announcing its decision to cease investments in arms companies, yielding to demands from a student-led faction that decried these investments as "complicit in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine." This capitulation, however, showcases a disheartening trend where university leadership bends under student pressure, ignoring the potential ramifications for the wider academic environment. Similar protests at Oxford, Newcastle, and Manchester amplify the reality that this call for societal change may come at the expense of balanced discourse on campus.

The situation at Cambridge has raised alarm among Jewish students, with the Union of Jewish Students expressing deep concern. The protests, they argue, foster an atmosphere that diminishes safety and inclusivity, forcing a reckoning with the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue in spaces that should encourage open and respectful engagement. This complicates the narrative further, as campuses are meant to be havens for the free exchange of ideas, not battlegrounds for polarizing political conflicts.

The ramifications of these protests extend beyond mere disruption. Incidents like the recent camping out at the Senate House have compelled university administrations to seriously re-evaluate their policies on protest and free speech. In May 2024, the university had to relocate graduation ceremonies due to these escalations, illustrating the gravity of unchecked activism. Although the university has framed its stance as a commitment to free speech, it must grapple with the uncomfortable truth that the rights of some can infringe upon the rights of others.

In a telling development, the High Court's refusal in 2025 to grant a long-term injunction prohibiting protests at multiple university sites underscores a significant legal challenge to institutional authority. This moment serves as a stark warning that the balance between asserting authority and respecting students’ rights is becoming increasingly precarious.

As Cambridge navigates this charged environment, its approach to ongoing protests will undoubtedly influence not only its own policies but also the landscape of student activism across the UK. The university's silence in the face of escalating tensions speaks volumes, and the growing activism signifies a larger societal rift that demands a more nuanced dialogue on justice and accountability—core values that should be championed rather than stifled. Without a clear strategy to address the multitude of voices within its community, Cambridge could find itself on the wrong side of history in this critical moment for social discourse.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/gallery/pro-palestine-protester-padlocks-himself-31710724> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/cambridge-university-students-set-up-29120477> - In May 2024, students at the University of Cambridge established a pro-Palestine encampment outside King's College in the city center. The protesters set up tents and displayed banners on the lawn, demanding that the university disclose and divest from its financial and professional support for Israel's actions in Gaza. This encampment was part of a broader movement, with similar protests occurring at other UK universities, including Oxford, Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, and Sheffield. The Union of Jewish Students expressed concerns about the hostile atmosphere these protests created for Jewish students.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cl40yv51e1yo> - In May 2024, pro-Palestinian protesters set up a camp outside the University of Cambridge's Senate House, disrupting graduation ceremonies. The protesters, part of the 'Cambridge for Palestine' group, left after the university agreed to negotiate. The encampment had forced the university to relocate graduation ceremonies from Senate House to another location. The university stated its commitment to freedom of speech within the law and acknowledged the right to protest.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/students-stage-pro-palestine-occupations-at-five-more-uk-universities> - In May 2024, students at five UK universities, including Cambridge, staged pro-Palestine occupations to pressure their institutions into divesting funds from and ending partnerships with Israel. The protesters set up encampments at the University of Cambridge, demanding that the university divest from companies linked to Israeli actions in Gaza. Similar protests occurred at other universities, including Oxford, Liverpool, and Edinburgh. The protesters called for universities to end ties to Israel and divest from companies complicit in the conflict.
5. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/cambridge-university-students-deliver-demands-university-29125728> - In May 2024, students at the University of Cambridge's pro-Palestine encampment delivered their demands to the university administration. The protesters, part of the 'Cambridge for Palestine' group, set up tents on the lawn outside King's College and handed over a series of brown envelopes addressed to pro-vice-chancellors at the university. Their demands included that the university disclose and divest from its financial and professional support for Israel's actions in Gaza and reinvest in affected academics.
6. <https://www.icjpalestine.com/2025/03/03/high-court-rejects-bid-by-the-university-of-cambridge-for-a-long-term-injunction-on-palestine-protests/> - In March 2025, the High Court of Justice refused to grant the University of Cambridge a long-term injunction that would have banned pro-Palestinian protests at four university sites until 2030. The university had sought the injunction in response to a series of high-profile encampments and demonstrations led by the 'Cambridge for Palestine' group, which were part of a broader movement demanding that Cambridge divest from companies and institutions linked to Israel's actions in Gaza.
7. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/cambridge-bid-ban-senate-house-palestine-protests-shameful> - In February 2025, the University of Cambridge applied for a five-year injunction to prohibit pro-Palestinian protests at its Senate House and Old Schools sites. The application was in response to a series of protests led by the 'Cambridge for Palestine' group, which had disrupted graduation ceremonies and other events. The university's attempt to ban these protests was criticized by civil liberties groups and unions as an attack on freedom of expression and assembly.