

Public Opinion and Repression in  
Anti-war Student Protests from  
1960-2024: Vietnam War and  
Palestine Protests

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In the last two years, student mobilization has increased to levels comparable to the Vietnam War student anti-war movement. As history repeats itself with harsh repressions by law enforcement, it is important to examine the history of these movements and the subsequent reactions from the public, law enforcement, university administration and legislative entities. This paper will examine the history of these factors in anti-war movements from 1960 to 2024 and will explore their influence on one another to better understand how movements and reactions are shaped. It aims to understand the public's response to student protests as well as efforts to repress these and subsequent reactions. Focus is placed on the Vietnam War and Palestine student protests, comparing the reactions between periods. This topic has become increasingly significant today as support for the Palestine Movement grows in the United States and worldwide.

My hypothesis was that media portrayal of protesters would be highly critical in both the Vietnam War and Palestine periods. In order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between these factors, content analysis of protest coverage of the Palestine protests was conducted, as well as content analysis of public opinion through TikTok comments. Archival data related to public opinion on the Pro-Palestine protests was also analyzed. The analysis of news articles was important to understand the portrayal of Pro-Palestine protesters according to the news stations Americans rely on for political news, as these could influence public opinion. Similarly, archival data provided a more direct analysis of the public's reaction to the Pro-Palestine protests. Lastly, analysis of TikTok comments provided a different outlook into public opinion and its connection to social media. Methods used include both qualitative and quantitative data.

## **The History of the Vietnam and Palestine Conflicts**

The Vietnam War, called the 'American War' in Vietnam, began in 1954 and ended in 1975. The conflict emerged between North Vietnam, their allies Viet Cong, and South Vietnam. The former wanted to unify the country as a communist administration, modeled after their allies: China and the Soviet Union (Spector, 2024). South Vietnam wanted instead to preserve ties with their allies, the United States. This struggle between communism and western capitalism saw itself as a manifestation of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and part of a larger regional conflict, the

Indochina Wars (Spector, 2024). By 1961, U.S. military advisors were stationed in Vietnam and active combat began in 1965. Military presence peaked in 1969, with more than half a million U.S. military units stationed in Vietnam. China and the Soviet Union also provided weapons, supplies and advisors to North Vietnam (Spector, 2024). In 1973, the United States withdrew from the war after high expenses and casualties, and South Vietnam fell in 1975. In 1995, Vietnam released an official estimate of the casualties, approximating 2 million civilian casualties on both sides and 1.1 million North Vietnamese and Viet Cong combatant casualties (Spector, 2024). The U.S. military estimated the deaths of 200,000-250,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and 58,100 U.S. military (Spector, 2024).

The Israel-Palestine conflict can be traced back to 1947, when the United Nations adopted the Partition Plan which separated British Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. The following year Israel was founded, leading to the first [Arab-Israeli War](#) (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). When the war ended in 1949 with Israel's victory, 750,000 Palestinians had been displaced (referred to as the Nakba), and the territory was divided into the State of Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In June 1967, Israel attacked Egyptian and Syrian air forces, starting the [Six Day War](#), in which Israel gained control over the Palestinian territories, the Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights from Syria (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). In 1973, the [Yom Kippur War](#) began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel to regain the territory lost six years prior, but did not result in any significant gains. In 1979, the Camp David Accords, a peace treaty, was signed by Egypt and Israel, ending conflict between the two states (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). Amid growing repressions in Palestine, a revenge killing of 4 Palestinians by an Israeli driver sparked the [First Intifada](#), where thousands of Palestinians fought back against the Israeli government. This conflict ended in 1993 with the Oslo I Accords, which allowed self-governance of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and established mutual recognition between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government. Two years later, the Oslo II Accords were signed, which mandated a complete withdrawal of Israel from the West Bank. Following a suicide bombing in Israel that killed 30 people in 2002, Israel launched an operation to reoccupy the Palestinian territories and the construction of a wall around the West Bank despite the opposition of the ICJ (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). This led to the [Second Intifada](#), which resulted in 4,300 casualties, with Palestinian fatalities at 3 times the rate of

Israeli fatalities. In an effort to suppress the uprising, 200 assassinations of Palestinian military operatives and political leaders were carried out by Israel (Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

Following the end of the Second Intifada in 2005, Hamas won the Palestinian Authority's elections in 2006, gaining control of the Gaza Strip. Conflicts between Fatah and Hamas erupted, ending in a unity government in 2014. That same year, confrontations between Hamas and Israel led to the deaths of 73 Israelis and 2,251 Palestinians (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). In 2018, conflicts restarted when Palestinians crossed the border between Israel and the Gaza strip throwing rocks, leading to the deaths of 183 Palestinians and 6,000 injuries at the hands of Israel. Further conflicts and political tension caused by this event led to the disunity of Fatah and Hamas (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). Under the administration of President Trump, funds aimed at providing aid for Palestinian refugees were halted and the U.S. embassy was relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The administration also aided in passing the Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Bahrain, the UAE and Israel. Both Fatah and Hamas rejected the accords (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). In 2021, a court ruling expelled Palestinian families from Jerusalem properties, leading to 11 days of armed conflicts between Hamas and Israel, killing 250 Palestinians and 13 Israelis, and displacing 72,000 Palestinians. In December 2022, Netanyahu and the Likud party rose to power, prioritizing the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank (Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Hamas launched rockets into Israel in a surprise attack that killed 1,300 Israelis, injured 3,300, and took hundreds of hostages (Center for Preventative Action, 2024). The following day, Israel declared war against Hamas. As of September 2024, 41,431 Palestinians have been killed, 95,818 injured and 1.9 million out of 2.2 million have been displaced, with large numbers of people still missing (Abrams, et. Al, 2024). Many of these deaths have resulted from a humanitarian crisis, as in December 2024 the last functioning hospital in Gaza was targeted, and blockades have prevented 83% of required food aid from entering into Gaza (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024). Although figures remain unclear, estimates believe thousands of Hamas fighters have been killed by Israel and 62 hostages still remain in Gaza as of December 2024 (Bisset, et. al, 2024; Garman, et. al, 2024). Since October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, the United States has provided

at least 12.5 billion dollars in direct military support (Masters & Merrow, 2024).

### **Vietnam and Palestine Student Protests:**

Student protests against the Vietnam War began to escalate in 1965 when 20,000 students amassed in front of the White House to demand an end to the war in Vietnam. Later that year, 350 protesters were arrested at a demonstration on Capitol Hill (Gregory, 2019). In April 1967, 40,000 students marched in San Francisco, and in New York 125,000 people rallied at the United Nations Plaza, accompanied by Martin Luther King who called an end to the war. Throughout this time, protests amassing thousands remained relatively consistent in states like California, New York, Pennsylvania and Illinois. Following Nixon's speech announcing plans to invade Cambodia in 1970, demonstrations were attended by tens of thousands of people across the country (Cornell University, 2017 & Gregory, 2019). On May 4<sup>th</sup>, the Ohio National Guard broke up a protest at Kent State University using tear gas while the students resisted and threw rocks at law enforcement. The National Guard opened fire against the students, killing 4 and injuring 9. After this shocking event, known as the Kent State Massacre, students protested in solidarity and remembrance, some amassing tens of thousands of people (Cornell University, 2017). April 1971 saw the last massive wave of protests with a reported 200,000-750,000 gathering in California and 175,000 marching in Washington DC (Gregory, 2019). The protests continued to attract thousands in states like California, New York and Illinois until the end of the war (Gregory, 2019).

The Palestinian Movement has been present in academia since the 1960s. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and Students for a Democratic Society stimulated anti-war student organizing in the 60s and both included support for Palestinians in their cause (Deeb, 2024). After the Six Day War in 1967, support for the Palestinian movement grew and an alliance with the Black Civil Rights Movement consolidated. In 1969, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) circulated a memorandum alleging that college campuses were sites of Arab propaganda campaigns against Israel (Deeb, 2024). In the 70s and 80s, Palestinian activism saw an increase in publications and was highly intersectional (Deeb, 2024). The dismantling of apartheid South Africa was incredibly important in shaping the Palestinian movement, modelling the BDS movement on South Africa's own boycott and divestment movement

(Deeb, 2024). In 1983, ADL produced a ‘black book’ with the names of scholars they accused of antisemitism (Deeb, 2024). Similarly, in 1993, the Hillel branch at UC Davis targeted an Israeli Professor of Palestine and Israel relations, accusing her of being a self-hating Jew (Deeb, 2024). Amidst growing Zionist pressures in academia, Jewish Voice for Peace was founded in California in 1996 (Deeb, 2024). In the early 2000s, support for the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) movement grew following the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, leading to the founding of Campus Watch, the David Project, and the Israel on Campus Coalition (Deeb, 2024). These organizations monitored academics and students, labelling them as Anti-Israel, unpatriotic and complicit in terrorism. Some had connections to U.S. and Israeli intelligence, as well as AIPAC and Hillel International (Deeb, 2024). During this time, Hillel International also issued a ‘standards of partnership’ which blocked Anti-Zionist events (Deeb, 2024). In 2014, law enforcement killed a Black man in the United States the same day Palestinians were killed by the IDF, further bounding the movements together. The following year, ‘Black Solidarity Statement with Palestine’ garnered over 1,100 signatures (Kelley, 2019). In 2018, CNN fired Marc Lamont Hill for making a speech at the United Nations in favor of a one state solution. He was accused of being antisemitic and a Hamas supporter due to his usage of the phrase “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Also that year, Angela Davis was suddenly withdrawn from an award in Human Rights with no explanation following the release of a book that criticised Israel’s occupation (Kelley, 2019).

International support skyrocketed in 2023 after Israel’s deadly response to Hamas’ October 7<sup>th</sup> attack. Massive protests emerged in 45 out of 50 states, encampments spanning 80 campuses and resulting in over 2,000 arrests as of May 2024 (Buheji, 2024). The main demands of the Pro-Palestine protests have included: stopping business with weapons manufacturers that supply arms to Israel, ceasing the funding of United States military upgradation by Israel, halting investments of financial managers who profit from Israeli companies and more transparency on the money universities receive from Israel (Buheji, 2024). Probably the most notorious demonstration was the Columbia encampment, which led to the arrests of 100 students (Buheji, 2024). In UCLA, protesters were attacked by pro-Israeli counter protesters, leaving 5 people hospitalized (Buheji, 2024). April 30<sup>th</sup> and May 7<sup>th</sup> were the dates with highest numbers of arrests, amounting to 400 and 200

respectively (Matthews, 2024). Protests mainly emerged on the East and West coasts, with some protests in the Northeast and the South. Most arrests were conducted in California, New York, Massachusetts and Illinois (Matthews, 2024).

## **Literature Review**

### ***The Protest and Anti-War Culture of the 60s and Today***

The 60s were a time of change, with the struggle for Civil Rights and Women's Liberation at the forefront of the political culture of the United States. As previously mentioned, the Civil Rights Movement was intimately tied with anti-war culture, with Martin Luther King calling an end to the Vietnam War. The emergence of these movements led to a culture of protest, as people demanded equal rights and fought against the government and its repressions. As the Vietnam War progressed and casualties rose, distrust in the government also grew. Many also criticized the funds allocated towards military conflict at the expense of social programs (Othmeni, 2021). In fact, many of the Vietnam anti-war protests at the time were highly intersectional. A Professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice who participated in the Civil Rights and Vietnam protests of the 60s and 70s recalled the time when he and his classmates shut down New York City Technical College for a day during his freshman year. The demands of the protests involved both an opposition to the Vietnam War and the aim to incorporate Black studies into the college. He highlighted the coalition between the Civil Rights and Vietnam anti-war movement despite the fact that many anti-war protesters were White. In 1970, the college had a festival where he spoke on stage against the Vietnam War as the chairperson of the African American Student Association, criticizing Nixon.

Furthermore, it is important to note that this culture of protest aided in involving new people. Cochran (2001) highlights the importance of local issues in expanding the movement. At Southern Illinois University (SIU), many protests began due to regulations on co-ed dormitory schedules. Students in fraternities and sororities, among others, became interested in the issue and many eventually got involved in the antiwar protests as protest culture grew on campus. Cochran also signals the importance of a local catalyst, such as the

Vietnamese Study Center at SIU, which brought more momentum to the anti war rhetoric on campus. Lastly, he signals party culture as another major element, as music and drugs brought people together and facilitated the sharing of opinions.

Today, protest culture seems to be on the rise. From 2009-2019, the annual protest average increased by 11.5% globally, and in the United States demonstrations spiked in 2020 with the BLM Movement, with higher levels continuing into 2021 (Brannen, et. al, 2020 ; Jones, et.al, 2021). The Black Lives Matter protests attracted millions of protesters despite the ongoing pandemic, and Fridays for the Future and similar environmental campaigns have gathered more popularity in recent years. This is reflected in mainstream culture, as NPR named 2020 the year of protest music (National Public Radio, 2020). The impact of protest culture can also be seen more recently with the nationwide and worldwide Palestine protests and encampments, as well as Macklemore's release of *Hind's Hall*. As President Trump begins his administration, many opposed to his policies and executive orders have also gathered to make their voices heard. With protest culture making its way back to the forefront of a tense political landscape and the rise of criticisms such as military spending, its effect on social programs and high distrust in the government, our political climate is not dissimilar to that of the 60s.

### ***The Geography of Dissent and Repression***

As seen in the outlined timeline of the protests, the largest demonstrations were most consistent in states such as California, Pennsylvania, New York and Illinois. These states were mostly considered liberal and politically tolerant. Gibson (1989) found that repressive state and criminal legislation implemented to curb protests was strongly correlated with the frequency of disruptions. Although it may seem contradictory that more liberal and tolerant states implement repressive legislation, Gibson proposed that more liberal and tolerant states would create the conditions for more frequent disruptions. The exposure to different opinions and the legitimization of these produced an environment more conducive to protests. Moreover, the frequency of these disruptions highly affected the legislation passed per state, making more liberal and tolerant states more repressive during the Vietnam War



protests. Gibson (1989) also proposed that the protests may have been too radical even for liberal and tolerant states.

Furthermore, the geographical pattern of the pro-Palestine protests and repression is extremely similar to that of the Vietnam War student protests. The states with the highest number of pro-Palestine demonstrations were New York and California, closely followed by Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Illinois (Doyle & Ho, 2024). According to a map by CNN, arrests were mainly carried out on the East and West coasts, with some arrests in the Northeast and South of the country. Most arrests were also conducted in the states of California, New York, Massachusetts and Illinois (Matthews, 2024). The geographical similarity of these movements serves to illustrate the importance and validity of Gibson's findings (1989). During both movements, more tolerant and liberal states saw more demonstrations and repressions. Furthermore, opposition to the country's official stance and involvement could be considered too radical even in liberal states and across time periods. Lastly, both movements saw great focus on the demonstrations at Columbia University specifically.

### ***The Repression and Criminalization of Student Protests***

The Vietnam War protests here were highly criticized and repressed by the United States government at the time. One of the methods was the use of FBI agents, red squads, NYSP and BCI. Upon taking office in New York, Governor Nelson Rockefeller appointed former FBI agents as top officials of the NYSP, aiming to develop its intelligence capabilities (Kershner, 2023). These capabilities were used to send NYSP officers undercover at college protests, often taking photographs and the names of those most involved. The NYSP often had informants in the schools they surveyed, often including students, faculty, and even the SUNY Chancellor's assistant, John Mather (Kershner, 2023). Under the command of former FBI agent Arthur Cornelius, the NYSP force doubled and began to have intelligence communications with the FBI (Kershner, 2023). Under Director J. Edgar Hoover, the bureau's COINTELPRO program was expanded with the aim to neutralize social movements, often working with local red squads. By 1969, 42 out of the FBI's 59 field offices were involved in the program's operations against the 'New Left' (Kershner, 2023). The FBI often used agents to provoke division in the

movement, whereas BCI and NYSP focused on intelligence and surveillance (Kershner, 2023).

The reactions to the Vietnam War protests also caused policy changes that make protest repression easier today. An example of this is the incorporation of police forces on campuses. According to the Department of Justice, today police forces are present at 95% of colleges and universities (Buheji, 2024). Similarly, the legislation of 44 universities grants these institutions the right to form their own police force (Buheji, 2024). The presence of on-campus police could have influenced the aggressive response of law enforcement during the Pro-Palestine student protests, as seen at Columbia University where hundreds of protesters were arrested. With the arrests of over 2,000 protesters nationwide as of May 2024, the present extensive and consistent involvement of police forces could have been affected by these legislations (Buheji, 2024).

### *Antisemitism and Freedom of Speech on Campus*

The Vietnam War protests were met with high criticality and efforts of repression. In an effort to stop the demonstrations, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech were both attacked. Aside from the systematic efforts of repression such as the NYSP and the COINTELPRO program, the Vietnam War protests saw more focused efforts to repress free speech on campus. One example includes regulations passed by UC Berkeley in the 50s and 60s that limited political activities on or around campus (Aichinger, 2009). In 1964, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM) was formed in order to combat the limitations imposed by the administration. Later that year, 5,000 students gathered outside the administration building and 1,500 participated in a sit-in (Aichinger, 2009). As a result, faculty voted in favor of FSM, the chancellor was replaced and the demands of the FSM were granted (Aichinger, 2009). Moreover, the most famous case on free speech during the Vietnam Protests was the 1969 Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines*. The case involved the suspension of high school students who had worn a black armband as an act of silent protest against the Vietnam War (United States Courts, 1969). Although the opposition argued that the armbands were a distraction and the school had the right to preserve a learning environment, the Court ultimately decided that neither students nor teachers shed their first amendment right at the school

door, and that school officials do not have the right to impose limitations of the basis of suspicion of distractions only (United States Courts, 1969).

Limitations on free speech on campus manifested differently during the Pro-Palestine protests. As can be seen in the history of the Palestinian movement in the United States, the accusation of antisemitism has long been leveraged against Anti-Zionists, and the 2023-2024 Pro-Palestine protests were no exception. Palestine supporters were also met with tactics such as doxing or attempted firings through online petitions (Deeb, 2024). However, recent policy changes have provided a legal basis for these claims. In 2016, the U.S. Department of State adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism, including criticism of Israel, and thus conflating antisemitism and Anti-Zionism. In 2018, the Department of Education adopted this definition when enforcing the Title VI Civil Rights Act which prohibits discrimination based on identity (Deeb, 2024). Trump's 2019 Executive Order Combating Anti-Semitism also used this definition and specifically focused on colleges and universities. This was later expanded by another Executive Order in January 2025, which reaffirmed this definition and centred on higher education after October 7<sup>th</sup> (The United States Government, 2025). After Palestinian support on campuses, the Department of Education opened an investigation in 2024 into violations of the Title VI Act explicitly focused on antisemitism (Deeb, 2024).

This change in the legal definition of antisemitism provided a basis for the accusations leveled at Anti-Zionist individuals and affected the right to free speech on campus. From October 7<sup>th</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2023 alone, Palestine Legal received 1,035 requests for legal support, four times the number received in 2022. The requests pertained to the silencing of Pro-Palestine speech on campus, with some individuals only calling for a ceasefire (Deeb, 2024). Between April and June 2024, Palestine legally filed 8 federal civil rights complaints in violation of the Title VI Act for anti-Palestinian discrimination. Additionally, Deeb (2024) found that 98% of assistant professors and 82% of faculty self-censored when talking about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Of this self-censorship, 88% curbed criticism for Israel, while only 11% curbed criticism for Palestine. This report shows a significant increase compared to previous years (Deeb, 2024).

## *Protest Coverage and Public Opinion on the Vietnam War Protests*

At the time, the massive Vietnam War student protests garnered a lot of coverage by the media. Boyle (2005) analysed protest coverage in Wisconsin from 1960-1999 and found that war protests were represented as more deviant and were covered more critically than social or labor protests. War protests were treated more critically by the media in the 1960s, but criticism diminished with time. Boyle proposed that the more protests challenge the status quo, the more critically they are covered by the media. This relates back to Gibson's hypothesis that the protests were too radical, or too challenging of the status quo, even for liberal and tolerant states.

An analysis of 1968 public opinion on the Vietnam War protests found that the American public greatly opposed the protests (Schreiber, 1976). On a scale from 0 being very unfavourable and 100 being very favourable, the American public rated the protesters at 28.4 on average (Schreiber, 1976). As support for the war diminished over the years, opinions on protesters remained the same, meaning that public opinions on the conflict and opinions on the protesters were majorly unrelated. This suggests that the overwhelming opposition towards the Vietnam War protests was not due to their anti-war stance, but rather the 'deviant' behaviour they engaged in (Schreiber, 1976). Furthermore, a survey sent out to Columbia students and faculty in 1968 found that attitudes towards the demonstration goals were related to attitudes towards the Vietnam War and opinions were completely unrelated to the draft status of the individual (Barton, 1968). The survey showed that 70% of students and 69% of faculty on the Columbia University campus opposed the war. Of those against the war, 75% supported the goals of protesters, but the tactics used were generally disapproved. This finding further shows that the Vietnam War protests were generally opposed due to the behaviour protesters engaged in and the tactics used, rather than the demonstration goals or opinions on the Vietnam War.

Understanding public opinion on pro-Palestine protests is difficult at this time, especially as both the conflict and the protests are ongoing and incredibly volatile. Although there have been demographic trends in age, religion and political affiliation, opinions can change drastically even in one

group. For example, a report from Cal Poly Humboldt found that Jewish student's opinions on the protests varied. Some Anti-Zionist Jews felt welcome at the protests and expressed the sense of community brought them closer to Judaism, whereas some Zionist Jews felt the students hated Judaism if they hated Israel (El Leñador, 2024). To better understand American reactions to the Pro-Palestine protests and its relationship to protest coverage, content analysis of news sources and TikTok comments were done, as well as archival data analysis of public opinion.

## **Methodology**

The methods used to analyze data are content analysis and archival data. Content analysis was employed as a way to analyze the bias of protest coverage and reported violence of the top 5 news sources Americans rely on for political news ahead of the 2024 election. This method allowed the analysis of more extensive sources and provided an insight into protest coverage and its influence on public opinion. Latent and manifest analysis were both conducted in order to increase the validity and reliability of this method. A second content analysis of comments on Pro-Palestine protest Tik Tok was conducted to gain a better understanding of public opinion on social media. Latent analysis was done. Additionally, archival data was used to deepen the understanding of the relationship between protest coverage and public opinion. Archival data provides a unique insight into the opinions of the masses and variations between demographics. This method provides opportunity for in-depth analysis but is limited by the reduced quantity of information.

### ***Content Analysis of Protest Coverage***

The most recent pro-Palestine student protests in 2023 and 2024 were highly publicized in the media. In order to better understand how the pro-Palestine protests have been portrayed by the media a range of news articles from different news sources were analyzed. Five news stations were selected based on research from the Pew Research Center which surveyed Americans on the most popular news sources for political news ahead of the 2024 election. The top 5 sources were found to be CNN, Fox News, the New York Times (NYT), NBC and ABC (Pew Research Center, 2024). A total of 15 articles were analyzed, 3 from each news station. These included an initial

report of the events of October 7<sup>th</sup>, an article during the height of the encampments in early-mid 2024 and a more recent coverage of pro-Palestine student demonstrations.

Manifest data analysis of 10 articles, excluding the initial October 7<sup>th</sup> reports, was conducted to better understand the difference in coverage between stations. To do so, special attention was paid to the phrasing of headlines, such as the use of active or passive voice. This was important as Boyle (2005) found that levels of criticality in headlines and the reported levels of deviance had a strong relationship during the Vietnam War protests. Additionally, headlines covering the events in Gaza after October 7<sup>th</sup> have been a major critique of the Palestinian movement due to accusations of implicit bias. Therefore, it was necessary to analyze if the headlines of protest coverage followed a similar relationship to bias. Expanding on this relationship between headlines and reported levels of deviance, mentions of both protester and law enforcement violence were analyzed. This data will also help determine the relationship between bias and the levels of reported violence. The analysis of the number of arrests and injuries mentioned will provide further insight into the aspects of the reported violence. The amount of negative adjectives used to describe both protesters and counter-protesters, along with the terminology used to describe them (pro-Palestine, Anti-Israel, etc.) will provide a better understanding of explicit bias in recent protest coverage. Furthermore, mentions of antisemitism were noted. As previously mentioned, the accusation of antisemitism due to the criticism of Israel has been consistent throughout the history of the Palestinian Movement in the United States, and the recent protests have been strongly met with these same criticisms. The number of mentions of antisemitism will provide a better comprehension of implicit bias and the level of deviance attributed to protesters. Finally, mentions of the historic conflict between Israel-Palestine were noted, as these could impact the interpretation of readers. Supplemental latent analysis of all 15 articles was conducted to understand the overall bias and highlighted topics of each article. Lastly, initial October 7<sup>th</sup> reports were analyzed to establish a clearer relationship between these and the subsequent protest coverage and bias. My hypothesis was that pro-Palestine protesters would be portrayed negatively, especially by news stations that originally showed bias towards Israel after October 7<sup>th</sup>.

## ***Archival Data Analysis of Public Opinion***

Although the analysis of news articles provides an insight into public opinion, it is important to consider that these might not be an accurate depiction of the opinions of the masses. To better understand the opinions of the public, data gathered by YouGov in May 2024 and the Pew Research Center in April 2024 was examined using crosstabs analysis. This data provides an insight into the public's reactions to these protests, as well as variations according to different demographics. One of the main factors analyzed was the relationship between the levels of support for Palestine and Israel and the levels of support for the pro-Palestine protests. Crosstabs analysis was also conducted on the basis of education level, religion, and partisan ideology.

## ***Content Analysis of Public Opinion on TikTok***

To understand the relationship between public opinion and social media, 25 TikTok posts on the Pro-Palestine protests were analyzed, focusing on the comment section. TikTok was chosen over other social media applications as it has seen the largest number of publications related to the conflict, which has been highlighted by both the Israeli and United States government. In order to refrain from algorithmic bias, a new account was created and used on a different device. The publications were chosen by searching 'Palestine protests United States' and selecting the top 25 videos, excluding irrelevant posts. Latent analysis of the comments and content of the posts was done.

## **Findings**

### ***Content Analysis of Protest Coverage***

When analyzing the gathered data, several patterns emerged. To begin with, CNN had higher and more consistent mentions of violence than any other news station and was also the only news source that mentioned injuries. While one ABC article reported similar levels of violence, this finding was not consistent throughout all articles. Furthermore, higher mentions of protester violence were typically associated with more negative depictions of protesters.

This was associated with CNN, the NYT and ABC as these news sources provided the most details on the protests, especially during the height of the encampments in April-June 2024. Additionally, data showed that the New York Times criticised the universities' response more than other news stations. The NYT and ABC were also the only stations to mention antisemitism in all their articles, whereas neither article from NBC or Fox News mentioned antisemitism. One CNN article had the most mentions with 4, but this finding was not consistent, as the other article had none. Lastly, when analysing the original October 7<sup>th</sup> publications, CNN and ABC showed more implicit bias towards Israel due to subtle flattery and a highlight on retaliation. No clear pattern involving headlines emerged. Deviation in the arrests numbers in one of the New York Times articles is explained as it is a summary of different protests.

The analysed data found strong associations between the original reports on October 7<sup>th</sup> and the levels of reported violence during protest coverage. CNN consistently reported more violence and ABC mentioned more violence than most news stations, and accounted for the most negative depictions of protesters. Both of these were identified as having bias towards Israel in the October 7<sup>th</sup> reports. Therefore, these findings prove that news stations that showed bias towards Israel after October 7<sup>th</sup> had higher mentions of protester violence.

**Table 1:**

	HEADLN	NEGADJI	NEGADJP	VIOLPRO	VIOLPOL	HISTORY	TERMS	ARRESTS	INIPRO	INIPOL	ANTISEM
CNN2	2	3	1	4	1	2	1	27	5	6	0
CNN3	1	0	1	5	0	0	1	350+	0	0	4
FOX2	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	227	0	1	0
FOX3	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
NYT2	1	0	3	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
NYT3	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3050	0	0	2
NBC2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	33	0	0	0
NBC3	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0
ABC2	1	0	7	5	1	1	1	250+	0	0	1
ABC3	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	25	0	0	1

However, there are several limitations stemming from the reduced quantity of articles. Due to the larger number of news stations analysed and the time consuming nature of content analysis, not many articles from each station could be included. If more articles were included, the data would be more accurate. Particularly, it was surprising that Fox News did not have higher mentions of violence or antisemitism, as the station is very supportive of Donald Trump, who has highlighted these events and has expanded legislation

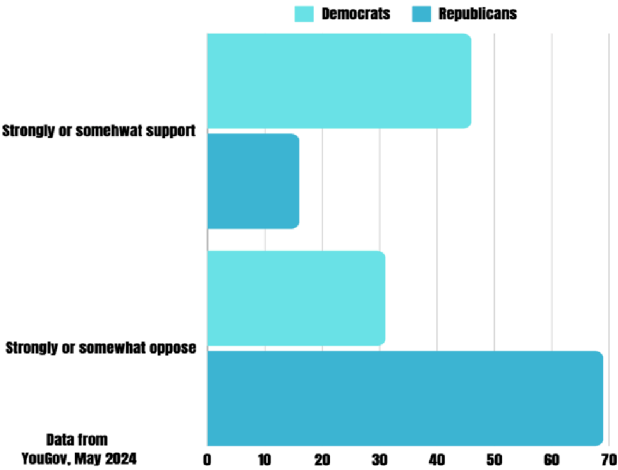


on antisemitism as previously mentioned. However, this might be due to the fact that the articles analysed were shorter, vague and superficial.

***Archival Data Analysis of Public Opinion***

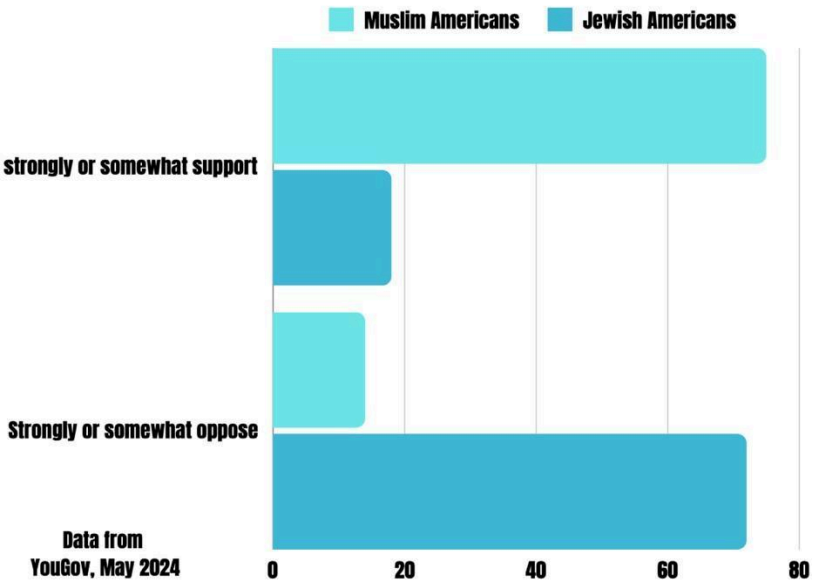
Analysis of archival data showed that 66% of those who oppose the Pro-Palestine protests are more sympathetic towards Israel (Pew Research Center, April 2024 & YouGov, May 2024). This means that 34% of those who oppose the protests are either neutral or more sympathetic towards Palestine, showing that levels of support for the cause and the protests can vary. Furthermore, findings showed trends in different partisan ideologies. Democrats were almost 3 times more likely than Republicans to support the Pro-Palestine protests, whereas Republicans were more than twice as likely to oppose the Pro-Palestine protests compared to Democrats (YouGov, May 2024). This clearly shows that Democrats are more likely to support the Pro-Palestine protests than Republicans. As Figure 1 shows, 69% of Republicans and 31% of Democrats opposed the protests, compared to the 46% of Democrats and 16% of Republicans that supported them.

**Figure 1:**



Additionally, major differences were found according to religion. Specifically, data showed Muslim Americans were 4 times more likely than Jewish Americans to support the Pro-Palestine protests (YouGov, May 2024). As shown in Figure 2, the differences between religions were overwhelming, with 75% of Muslim Americans supporting the protest and 14% opposing them, compared to 18% of Jewish Americans supporting the protests and 72% opposing them. These findings show that religion might be the most accurate predictor of attitudes towards the Pro-Palestine protests. Lastly, data also showed that college graduates are 1.6 times more likely to support the Pro-Palestine protests compared to non-college graduates (YouGov, May 2024). These findings may indicate that the environment on college campuses can be conducive to debate, the exchange of ideas and critical thinking. The presence of protests and encampments aimed to educate people on university campuses may also foster more support and engage populations that would not have otherwise been involved or informed on this particular issue.

Figure 2:



The findings of this data showed strong relationships between partisan ideology, religion, and support for the Pro-Palestine protests.

## *Content Analysis of Public Opinion on TikTok*

Of the 25 videos analyzed, only 9 had more support than opposition for the protesters in the comments. Two had fairly mixed reactions, and 14 had more negative than positive reactions towards the protesters. The posts that had more positive reactions towards the protesters mainly included the arrests of faculty and students or the direct confrontation towards a specific company, a university or President Biden. The comments mostly consisted of Palestinian flags, comments aimed at boosting the post and emphasis on the large amount of casualties in Gaza. Interestingly, the posts that received an overwhelming amount of negative comments towards the protesters included confrontations between protesters, law enforcement and counter-protesters, as well as posts where spokespersons shared their demands. Many of these comments called the protesters terrorists, dumb and/or brainwashed. They called for deportation, especially to Gaza, and highlighted how horribly they thought protesters would be treated at the hands of Hamas. Some even called for larger numbers of arrests and more extreme repression tactics, such as rubber bullets. More negative reactions were also associated with more extreme tactics used by the protesters, such as blocking traffic or banging on the windows of a Starbucks, although these findings were not always consistent. Overall, more violent content, either by protesters, law enforcement, or company employees, was associated with more negative comments.

Although the comments were more negative towards the protests, reactions varied. Nevertheless, comments opposed to the protests were a lot more explicit in their disapproval, many times calling for more repression or extreme consequences, while comments in support of the protests mainly consisted of Palestinian flags and aimed to boost the post. Interestingly, one commenter compared the tactics used by law enforcement at the UCLA encampment to those used during the 60s. Finally, two comments expressed that their disapproval of the protests had made them rescind their support for Palestine. Limitations of this analysis include the limited amount of posts analyzed, the lack of variety in social media apps and possible influence by the algorithm.

## Discussion

The Vietnam War and Palestine protests received similar reactions by both the public and law enforcement. Both movements followed similar geographical patterns and were especially popular in states such as California, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. The repression of these protests followed this geographical pattern, as more legislation was passed in these states after the Vietnam War protests, and more students were arrested in these states during the Pro-Palestine protests. This finding follows Gibson's (1989) finding that more liberal and tolerant states saw the most protests and therefore more repressions. The criminalization of protests following the Vietnam War, including the presence of police forces on campus, may have affected the levels of repression of the Pro-Palestine protests. Additionally, recent legislation conflating antisemitism with Anti-Zionism has led to the censorship and self-censorship of Israeli criticism on campus.

Furthermore, both movements saw high levels of criticality in protest coverage. Content analysis of news articles found that higher mentions of protester violence were associated with negative depictions of protesters. This association was identified for the NYT, ABC and CNN, which also accounted for the highest mentions of antisemitism. Both ABC and CNN were found to have bias towards Israel in their initial October 7<sup>th</sup> reports. This serves to illustrate the impact different news sources can have on public opinion, as individuals that consume these news sites may believe in higher rates of violence or antisemitism due to the nature of the articles. This supports Boyle's (2005) finding that war protests were covered more critically by the media and his hypothesis that media criticality depends on how much a protest challenges the status quo. The Vietnam War protests challenged the United States' fight against communism, and the Pro-Palestine protests challenged relations between the United States and Israel, as well as American control in the Middle East.

Similarly, public opinion towards both the Vietnam War and Palestine protests were mainly negative and did not necessarily depend on people's opinion on the cause, but rather the behaviors and tactics implemented by the protesters which labeled them deviant. Reactions to the Pro-Palestine protests were more positive in Democrats than Republicans and religion was the

biggest predictor for attitudes towards the protests. This association exemplifies the personal nature of this conflict, as an individual's own background and identity affects their opinion on the topic. College graduates were also 1.6 times more likely to support the protests, which may indicate that the environment on college campuses can be conducive to debate, the exchange of ideas and critical thinking, as reflected by the findings of the Vietnam War student protests. Opinions on TikTok varied but were mostly negative, and opposers were more vocal about their disapproval and encouragement of repression. More negative comments were associated with higher levels of violence, once again supporting Schreiber's (1976) findings. Interestingly, those that most strongly condemned the events of October 7<sup>th</sup> were also most likely to call for violent or extreme tactics against protesters, and one comment compared the repression tactics to those used during the Vietnam War.

The fact that negative opinions were continuously associated with protester behavior instead of approval of demonstration goals only serves to illustrate a culture that frowns upon protests even in the face of genocide. The media highlights protester violence and labels protesters as deviant, affecting the view of the public. American society denies legitimacy and validity to any disruptive behavior, even as a response to extreme levels of violence. Yet, those against these disruptions consistently call for more violence. This disruption, as extreme as the American public may perceive it, cannot compare to the true violence of the genocide they are protesting. Lastly, it is important to note that although the Vietnam and Palestine anti-war movements in the United States share many similarities, the United States' role in each war varies. While American troops were sent to Vietnam, the Palestinian genocide is only financially backed by the United States, which might affect public opinion and the movements themselves.

### **Future Recommendations**

In order to better understand protest coverage and public opinion, content analysis of news sources should be expanded. The amount of articles analyzed by news sources is low, limiting the accuracy of the findings. To establish a more comprehensive analysis of these news stations, more articles per news station should be analysed so as to gain a better understanding of the constancy of protest coverage and reported violence. These findings would be

invaluable in understanding how public opinion regarding the pro-Palestine protests of 2023-2024 was shaped, as well as its influence on the 2024 election.

Further analysis of TikTok comments and other social media platforms can also aid in understanding the relationship between public opinion and social media. However, it is significant to note that post selection and analysis was conducted before President Trump's influence on TikTok in the United States. If the dataset were to be expanded, it is important to understand that there may be differences in algorithmic bias. Additionally, archival data on attitudes towards the protests is especially limited, so a further collection and systemization of data through a survey would be invaluable in understanding the public's reactions. In particular, age has not been consistently systematized throughout the data, making crosstab analysis based on age hard to achieve. Due to the influence of young people in anti war protests, including the most recent pro-Palestine protests, it is necessary to expand the data available in order to analyze the influence of this essential demographic. Furthermore, more expansive databases would result in more accurate findings pertaining to the opinions of the masses. This data can also be used to more thoroughly explore the relationship between protest coverage, social media, and public opinion. More research is needed to understand if the response to the Pro-Palestine protests follows a similar legislative pattern to that of the Vietnam War protests.

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