

# Rutgers Must Protect Jewish Students From Antisemitic Referenda

by [Hen Mazzig](#) March 25, 2024



Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, is [awash](#) in a wave of antisemitic rhetoric and actions. This moment, with Jewish and Israeli students facing [unprecedented harassment](#) and challenges, is a dangerous time indeed for the university to proceed with two [referenda](#) demonizing Israel. The measures were placed by the Rutgers University Student Assembly on the upcoming Spring 2024 Assembly elections ballot. The administration must

step in now and cancel the BDS referendum to protect these students.

On October 7, 2023, the Jewish community faced its largest massacre in a single day since the Holocaust, as Hamas terrorists butchered more than 1,200 innocent people, including over 300 young people at a music festival, [raping and mutilating](#) many of the victims, and taking over 240 hostages, over 130 of whom are believed to remain in Gaza. In the months since, Israel has fought to prevent future atrocities, and rescue these hostages, who, according to both released hostages and the United Nations, are experiencing [ongoing sexual assault](#).

What a strange time for Rutgers students to be forced to vote on two referenda [delegitimizing](#) Israel, one demanding that the university end its investments in any firms that do business with Israel, and the other insisting that Rutgers terminate its longstanding partnership with Tel Aviv University.

We know that anti-Israel campaigns contribute to a [rise in antisemitism](#) on campus, and that anti-Israel activists have raised the climate of antisemitism in the United States to its highest level since before World War II.

At Rutgers specifically, the situation is stark. Between October 7 and February 15, Rutgers Hillel noted 49 individual [instances of antisemitism](#) on campus. When Rutgers' president wrote a letter expressing sorrow at the horrific deaths of the 1,200 civilians in Israel on October 7

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— just two days after the nightmare, on October 9 — he was [attacked](#) by a group of anti-Israel Rutgers faculty members for sympathizing with Israelis without mentioning Palestinians. In one instance, a student [wearing a kippah](#) — a Jewish religious head covering — in the student center was greeted with chants of “Murderer, murderer.”

Rutgers was already forced to [suspend](#) the radical organization Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), which called Hamas’ massacre of Jews “justified,” and was found to have exhibited “disruptive or disorderly conduct,” disrupted “classes, a program, meals, and students studying[,]” and sparked “allegations of vandalism.” Little wonder, then, that students are taking their cues from extremists on the faculty who hold seminars with [genocidal content](#), referring to Israel as a form of “white nationalism,” and calling for it to be destroyed as a country.

The Rutgers administration should take its cues from other universities that have boldly and appropriately stepped in to ensure that their schools are not hijacked by anti-Israel radicals, who make Jewish students feel so unsafe on campus that they are [uncomfortable](#) even wearing religious, Hebrew language, or other Jewish-identifying clothing.

Earlier this month, Ohio State University acted to [block](#) an Israel-targeting referendum placed on their ballot, after

the Ohio attorney general advised the school that divesting from Israel would [violate state law](#). Also, this month, Vanderbilt University's [administration blocked](#) an attempt to add anti-Israel language to the student government's constitution. Similarly, in December, the University of Michigan stopped a [referendum](#) that would have delegitimized and called for divestment from Israel. A New Jersey [law](#), [passed overwhelmingly](#) in 2016, calls for state pension funds to be divested from any company involved in the boycott of the State of Israel, and the state has [invoked this legislation](#) against offenders as significant as Unilever and Danske Bank.

New Jersey public policy is clearly against the [aims](#) of the BDS movement, which calls for the utter derecognition and dismantling of the State of Israel. Recognizing the climate of harassment Jewish and Israeli students face on campus, Rutgers must act now to remove the two antisemitic referendums from the ballot.

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