

US House Passes Controversial Bill That Expands Definition of Anti-Semitism

Rights groups warn that the definition could further chill freedom of speech as protests continue on college campuses.

By [Al-Jazeera](#)

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The United States House of Representatives has overwhelmingly passed a bill that would [expand the federal definition](#) of anti-Semitism, despite opposition from civil liberties groups.

The bill passed the House on Wednesday by a margin of 320 to 91, and it is largely seen as a reaction to the ongoing antiwar protests unfolding on US university campuses. It now goes to the Senate for consideration.

If the bill were to become law, it would codify a definition of anti-Semitism created by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

That is a federal anti-discrimination law that bars discrimination based on shared ancestry, ethnic characteristics or national origin. Adding IHRA's definition to the law would allow the federal Department of Education to restrict funding and other resources to campuses perceived as tolerating anti-Semitism.

But critics warn IHRA's definition could be used to stifle campus protests against Israel's war in Gaza, which has claimed the lives of 34,568 Palestinians so far.

What Is the Definition?

IHRA's working definition of anti-Semitism is

“a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities”.

According to the IHRA, that definition also encompasses the

“targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity”.

The group also includes certain examples in its definition to illustrate anti-Semitism. Saying, for instance, that “the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor” would be deemed anti-Semitic under its terms. The definition also bars any comparison between “contemporary Israeli policy” and “that of the Nazis”.

However, IHRA does specify that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic”.

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