

## Is Joe Biden's Gaza Policy Leading to a Repeat of 1968?

History has shown Democrats that victory depends on making policy in line with what Americans truly want.



The year 1968 may be repeating itself. The United States is again experiencing an incumbent Democratic administration supporting an unpopular war, disruptive protests on college campuses, police repression against nonviolent demonstrators, a Republican challenger promising to [restore](#) law and order and, to top it off, a Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

It is axiomatic in politics not to alienate your base in an election year. Yet, this is what Joe Biden and Congressional Democratic leaders are doing. While [polls](#) show that 83 percent of Democrats support a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, the Biden Administration and the Democratic leadership continue to oppose it. Only a minority of Democratic voters agree with Biden's continuous [unconditional military assistance](#) to Netanyahu's far right government. And, despite Biden's [angry denials](#), a full 56 percent of Democrats say that Israel is committing genocide with only 22 percent believing otherwise.

A poll [published](#) in March shows that nearly three times as many Democrats believe that "Israel has gone too far and its military actions are not justified" as those who believe that "Israel is defending its interests and its military actions are justified." While that number has almost certainly grown in light of subsequent [Israeli atrocities](#) and condemnations by the [International Criminal Court](#) and the [International Court of Justice](#), the Democratic administration and the vast majority of Democrats in Congress continue to say just the opposite.

Despite 62 percent of registered Democratic voters [supporting](#) a suspension of military aid to Israel, the Biden Administration, along with [all but three](#) Democratic Senators and [173 out of 213](#) House Democrats, approved

nearly \$18 billion in additional unconditional military aid to Israel in recent weeks. Even though Biden suspended one shipment of particularly lethal ordnance in April, he has continued [to approve additional arms transfers](#) despite ongoing Israeli violations of U.S. and international law. This could have a real political impact, as [a more recent poll](#) shows that a majority of Democrats would prefer a presidential nominee who does not support military aid to Israel.

More significant to the outcome of the presidential race, a [recent poll](#) shows that 20 percent of voters in five swing states are less likely to vote for Biden because of his support for Israel's war on Gaza.

Biden's policies are particularly damaging with core constituencies, such as Arab Americans, who compose a large enough percentage of the voting population to affect the outcomes in swing states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Virginia. Close to 60 percent of Arab Americans [supported](#) Biden in 2020 while only around one-third supported Donald Trump. This year, a recent [poll](#) of Arab American voters in those swing states shows that, as a result of the war in Gaza, Biden's support has dropped to only 20 percent.

Other minorities in the Democratic coalition are becoming alienated as well, with growing evidence that support for Israel's bombardment of Gaza by Biden and Congressional Democrats could negatively impact electoral support among [Black](#) and [Latinx supporters](#).

Perhaps the most dramatic shift is among the country's diverse base of 2.5 million Muslim voters, 86 percent of whom [supported](#) Biden in 2020. That support has [now dropped](#) to 36 percent.

But it is with young voters that support for Israel's war could have the biggest impact for Biden and Congressional Democrats. Recent elections [have shown](#) that when youth turnout is high, Democrats win. When it is low, Democrats lose. All indications suggest that the Gaza war will depress the youth turnout and lessen the enthusiasm necessary to recruit the army of young volunteers to canvas and get out the vote. Nearly three-quarters of voters under the age of thirty [oppose](#) Biden's policy in Gaza, a higher percentage than opposed George W. Bush on [Iraq](#), Ronald Reagan on [Central America](#), or even Richard Nixon on [Vietnam](#).

Whenever there is such a huge gap between public opinion and government policy, the legitimacy of the entire political system is called into question, prompting disruptive protests. There have been [more than](#) 8,000 anti-war and pro-Palestinian demonstrations in the United States since October, attracting more than 1,000,000 people, with particularly high numbers of younger Americans taking part. Even [College Democrats of America](#), the official student organization of the Democratic Party, has not only called on the President to support a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, but has endorsed the protests as well.

Despite 97 percent of campus protests being [completely nonviolent](#), the crackdown against student demonstrators have been [far more repressive](#) than comparable pro-divestment protests targeting South Africa during the 1980s, with more than 3,600 arrests and hundreds of injuries from police assaults, and hundreds of student suspensions. Notably, the colleges and universities with the [most arrests](#) of pro-Palestinian protesters have been in cities led by Democratic mayors and located in states led by Democratic governors.

Such repression, along with ongoing atrocities in Gaza by U.S.-backed Israeli forces, is leading to greater anger and more militant protests, with massive demonstrations [planned](#) this August at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. *The New York Times* and others [have noted](#) how this can play into the Republican narrative, as it did in 1968, enabling them to give the impression that, under Democratic leadership, the country is falling apart and things are getting out of control, thus requiring a strong Republican leader to restore order.

Using Nixon's playbook, Biden has tried to depict the anti-war movement by its most extreme elements. In his [nationwide address](#) on May 2, Biden reiterated the right to peaceful protest, but implied that the majority of

protesters were engaged in such practices as “threatening people, intimidating people, [and] instilling fear in people” as well as “vandalism, trespassing, [and] breaking windows”—in spite of the fact that such incidents have been extremely rare among the more than 130 encampments that sprung up in colleges and universities across the country. Biden even blamed demonstrators for “forcing the cancellation of classes and graduations” even though these were decisions made by school administrators and were not being advocated for by the protesters.

A [recent poll](#) shows that only 41 percent of registered Democrats approved of Biden’s response to the protests.

The Biden Administration has falsely [claimed](#) that a [popular slogan](#) calling for a democratic secular state in historic Palestine and the use of an [Arabic word](#) traditionally connoting civil resistance are antisemitic hate speech. Congressional Democrats have joined Republicans in an effort to [codify a definition of antisemitism](#) so broad as to make it possible to suppress pro-Palestinian activism under civil rights statutes.

Democratic politicians have also joined Republicans in [attacking](#) anti-war and pro-divestment protesters as “pro-Hamas,” “pro-terrorist,” and “antisemitic,” citing incidents involving a tiny minority of extremists within the ranks of these protesters as somehow being representative of the entire movement and even portraying peaceful demonstrators as violent mobs who have threatened the physical safety of other students. Some Democratic officials, using language reminiscent of the 1960s, have also [insisted](#), without evidence, that protesters were outside agitators [paid](#) by foreign authoritarian interests.

All of this will only fuel the resentment and cynicism of Democratic-leaning young voters angry at being slandered by Democratic politicians, having their [anti-war organizations](#) banned, and seeing Democrat-led city governments bring in cops to beat and pepper-spray them.

As a result, for many young Americans, this election has gone well beyond Israel and Palestine. They see it as a question of democracy—showing that Democrats are not only willing to ignore the vast majority of their constituents in pursuing what they see as a fundamentally immoral policy of aiding and abetting a far right government engaging in war crimes on a massive scale, but also [attacking international legal institutions](#) and [human rights organizations](#) seeking accountability, supporting corporate interests profiting from an illegal war and occupation, and actively suppressing dissent.

In order to get the necessary turnout among young people, minorities, and progressives to prevent a Republican victory in November, pointing out how Trump would pursue even worse policies in regard to Israel and Palestine—and how his election would threaten American democracy itself—is not enough. The Biden Administration needs to change its policies, and soon.