

Utilizing Data Visualization and Linear Regression to Identify Trends Behind Campus Deplatforming Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Anya Vani Prakash
anyavani.prakash@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Campus deplatforming is the intentional censorship of speakers or events in college environments. Deplatforming speaks to the growing problem facing many U.S. universities: blocking people's expression. This weakens the coexistence of different views and democracy itself. This study focuses on deplatforming events specific to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has been at the forefront of polarization in U.S. universities.

We used the Freedom for Individual Rights and Expression's Campus Deplatforming database and its definitions of successful and unsuccessful deplatforming (i.e., attempted censorship) to identify contextual patterns.

Our data visualizations revealed that campus speech was the most targeted form of expression. Students initiated the most deplatforming events targeting campus speech, but administrators were responsible for most successful deplatforming events across all expression categories, including campus speech.

We applied a linear regression model to identify keywords in each event's description provided by the database. We assigned coefficients to represent the importance of these keywords for successful or unsuccessful outcomes. Our model had an 84.34% accuracy and identified 'spoke' as a positively weighted word, reinforcing that most successful deplatformings are associated with speech-related expressions.

INTRODUCTION

Campus deplatforming, when someone's ability to speak or express themselves is intentionally disrupted, has become increasingly common in higher education settings. Two types of deplatforming exist: unsuccessful and successful. Unsuccessful deplatforming includes attempts to disrupt, cancel, or disinvite an event or speaker. Successful deplatforming exists when an event or speaker has been canceled,

Sep 2026
Vol 11, No 2.

significantly disrupted, postponed, revoked, or rejected. If a speaker withdraws from an event and there were attempts to censor that speaker, that is also a successful deplatforming. In recent years, successful deplatforming has overtaken unsuccessful attempts, and the number of deplatforming events has increased. This calls into question the state of free speech and expression at universities nationwide.

It is important to acknowledge that deplatforming is often viewed not merely as "censorship," but as a political strategy in which actors attempt to prevent speech they perceive as harmful. While this paper examines the negative implications of deplatforming for democratic discourse, we must engage with the simultaneous reality that for many, such as those protesting against the genocide in Gaza and throughout Palestine, deplatforming is viewed as a morally necessary tool of protest. Understanding these motivations is critical in understanding why deplatforming occurs.

Campus deplatforming ranges from a university prohibiting an artwork display to a commencement speaker being unable to speak due to a controversy. Often, deplatforming occurs when deeply controversial topics result in fear of pushback from students, the general public, or others. Campus deplatforming events were especially prevalent in 2023 and 2024, and a large majority of these events were related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which reemerged during that same time period following the October 7, 2023 attacks in Israel. Deplatforming events regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have continued at a higher rate than other controversies like race, abortion, or gender. In 2026, at the University of Maryland, Students for Justice in Palestine, among other organizations, protested a panel hosted by the university's business school called "Working Across the Divide." The student protesters claimed the featured speakers should not be brought onto campus because of their "anti-Palestinian rhetoric", despite the panel's aim to bridge differing ideologies (Roth and Quattrin, 2026). Although the outcome was a disinvitation attempt, and therefore an unsuccessful deplatforming event, it is still concerning that there was a deplatforming attempt at all. The problem here is not that there were student protesters, but that there was an attempt and intention to completely stop an event from taking place because of differing views. Events like the one described speak to the large tension that exists on college campuses when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, making this controversy an important focus.

As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been causing a majority of campus deplatforming events in the last few years, it is a useful focus for studying censorship at universities. Protests regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially pro-Palestinian movements, have reshaped US higher education policies. Following escalating protests in 2024, many universities banned encampments and face masks to identify students protesting (Emesa, 2026). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has had a large impact on college campus protests, and consequently, also the censorship of these protests. This suggests this controversy has been especially problematic, resulting in deplatforming and censorship.

The patterns identified in this study can broaden our understanding of how deplatforming occurs, who is most involved (students, administrators, faculty, etc.), and perhaps how key players at universities, such as administrators and students, can address deplatforming.

To begin addressing the basic trends behind Israeli-Palestinian conflict-related deplatforming, we need to contextualize the deplatforming events. To do this, we used a data visualization and linear regression model, a machine learning approach that assesses the relative importance of deplatforming event word descriptors and their correlation with either a successful or unsuccessful deplatforming.

Our study found that campus speech was by far the most targeted form of expression, which can also involve performances and commencement speakers. Campus speech had more deplatforming attempts for Israeli-Palestinian-related events as opposed to all other controversies, including Race and Gender. This reinforces how central the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been to campus deplatforming.

Students most frequently targeted campus speech about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though these events had success rates closer to 50% compared to those of university administrators, who maintained a much higher deplatforming success rate.

BACKGROUND

Other studies have examined which factors may contribute to campus deplatforming events as a whole as well as their outcomes. This is important as we try to understand why deplatforming occurs, not just what successful and unsuccessful deplatforming looks like.

A study by Anna Boch (Boch, 2020) published in the *Social Problems Journal*, Volume 69, Issue 1, used a factorial experiment to examine characteristics associated with controversial speakers that eventually led universities to debate whether to allow those speakers on campus. The study found that concerns over controversial speech causing harm were a partial driver of negative reactions towards controversial speakers. This ultimately led to deplatforming events.

Another study by Aiden Buehler (Buehler, 2024) examined how deplatforming attempts rooted in higher levels of speech liability had an overall negative effect on campuses, resulting in a “chilling effect.” This effect involved greater self-censorship among students over contentious topics. The study was tested using the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression’s (FIRE) cross-sectional data on college students from the years 2022 to 2023.

Boch’s study speaks to how polarization has led universities to be more wary and censor speakers who may be controversial. This deplatforming does little to stop growing polarization. In many ways, especially in Buehler’s study, deplatforming leads to greater polarization and censorship that extend beyond others to oneself.

FIRE found that a majority of US college students are opposed to controversial speakers being on campus, indicating that tolerance for different speakers has been increasingly falling among students specifically (Betts, 2025). Others, however, including Harvard University President Alan Garber, believe

that faculty are to blame for increasing intolerance of others' and students' ability to speak out against a controversial topic that professors may bring up in the classroom (Abrams, 2026). These comments highlight the wide variety of actors who are perhaps behind overall deplatforming and other free speech obstacles in higher education settings.

Less research has been done on deplatforming events concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the previously referenced studies do provide important context for how to view deplatforming in general, especially the roles of different actors and their influence on censorship. This study similarly uses data from FIRE to examine deplatforming, focusing on the patterns associated with successful and unsuccessful deplatforming related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

DATASET

This study uses FIRE's Campus Deplatforming Database. FIRE has collected data on various forms of censorship since 1999. Its Campus Deplatforming Database documents how and why deplatforming events occur on college and university campuses from 1998 to the present ("Campus Deplatforming Database"). This study's results reflect the data from this database in September of 2025. Since then, FIRE has continued to add deplatforming events to the database.

We also use FIRE's formal definition of deplatforming as "the successful censorship of, or the attempt to censor, campus events open to the public"("Campus Deplatforming Database"). FIRE specifies that deplatforming attempts do not include criticism or protest that is not motivated by an effort to shut down the controversial expression.

The specific columns from the Campus Deplatforming Database used in the data visualization and linear regression processes were the type of expression, controversy topics, source, outcome, and controversy explanation.

Type of Expression	Controversy Topic(s)	Source(s)	Outcome	Controversy Explanation
Campus Speech	Israeli-Palestinian Conflict	Student(s), Student Group(s)	Disinvitation Attempt	The university's business school hosted a panel called "Working Across the Divide" featuring Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib, Van Jones, Simon Greer, Ilana Redstone, and Yassin. Before the event, UMD Students for Justice in Palestine and the Palestinian Cultural Club condemned the panel's speakers as

				promoting “anti-Palestinian rhetoric” and as figures who had built careers on “normalizing occupation, genocide, and apartheid.” Protesters argued there was no legitimate “both sides” discussion to be had on Israel-Palestine and urged that such speakers not be brought to campus. The groups then rallied outside the event, and at least some students confronted speakers after completion of the panel discussion.
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Table 1: Sample Row of Selected Columns from FIRE’s Campus Deplatforming Database. This entry was referenced before in the introduction. For context, this deplatforming attempt happened in 2026 at the University of Maryland. The target in this entry was Nuseir Yassin, one of the featured speakers at the business school’s hosted panels. The outcome was a disinvitation attempt, which would be classified as unsuccessful deplatforming according to FIRE definitions (“Campus Deplatforming Database”).

We removed several columns from the dataset. These features were not as relevant to the linear regression approach we wanted to use for analysis.

Our linear regression method focused on deplatforming events related to the 'Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', identified in the controversy topics column. We created a filtered dataset to isolate these events.

The outcome of each event was categorized as 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' based on whether the word 'attempt' was in the outcome. Deplatforming events whose outcome contained the word 'attempt' were classified as unsuccessful and coded as 1, while events with a successful outcome were coded as 0.

After one-hot encoding the outcome column, the controversy_explanation column was vectorized using CountVectorizer. This limited features to the top 800 most frequent words. Custom stop words ('him', 'had', etc.) were excluded to increase the relevance of the extracted features. We focused our analysis on words that were supported by our initial understandings from the data visualizations.

The data visualization and analysis examined the counts of different sources and types of expression, of both unsuccessful and successful deplatforming events from the filtered dataset.

METHODOLOGY

Linear Regression is a common method for analysis in research because it efficiently predicts outcomes and thoroughly models relationships between inputs and outputs. The input is the predictor value for the output.

The formula for the linear regression line is $y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x$. This equation helps the linear regression model find associations between the selected inputs (x) and outputs (y). These associations and relationships between the input and output are represented by coefficients β_0 and β_1 . The correlation coefficient, also known as r, indicates the degree to which the input can predict the output. Correlation coefficients range from -1 to 1. Positive and negative values determine whether the relationship has positive or negative correlation. If there is no correlation at all between input and output, the correlation coefficient will be 0.

We used a Simple Linear Regression, which means one independent variable. Our independent variable was the vectorized explanation of controversy. This was used to predict the dependent variable. Our dependent variable was the deplatforming outcome, and whether it was successful or unsuccessful.

For our linear regression model, positive correlation coefficients mean that the input predictor or key text word was associated with an unsuccessful deplatforming outcome. Negative correlation coefficients mean the keyword had an association with a successful deplatforming attempt.

DATA VISUALIZATION

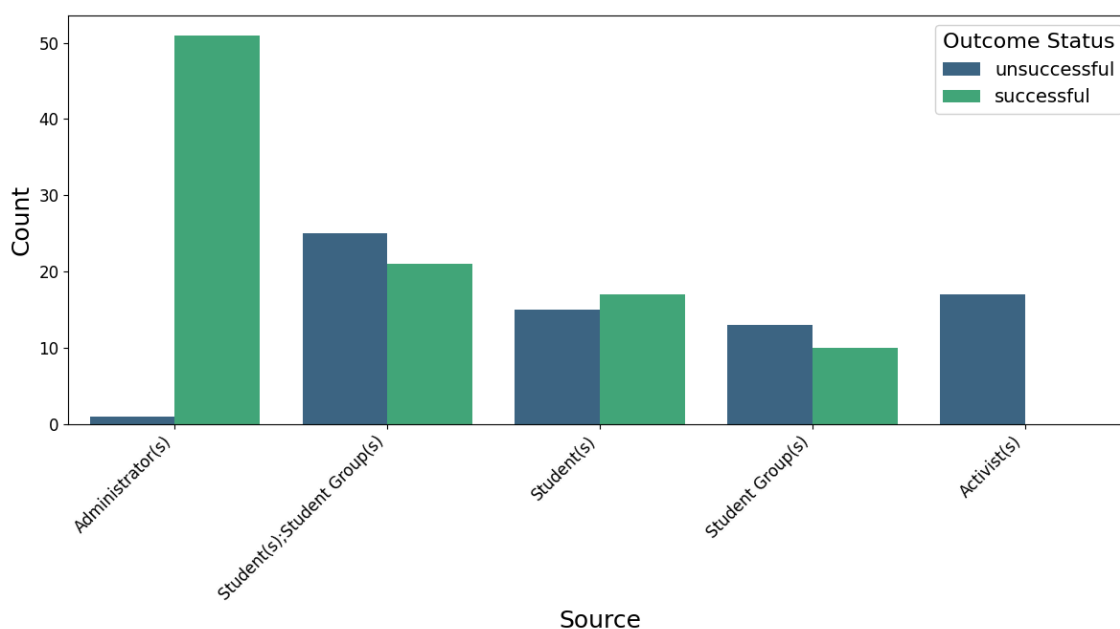


Figure 1: Count of Unsuccessful and Successful Deplatforming Events by the Top 5 Most Prevalent Sources for Israeli-Palestinian Related Events. This data visualization reveals that administrators are behind the most amount of successful deplatforming attempts. Student(s); Student Group(s), in comparison, have fewer deplatforming events attributed to them. These sources are mostly split in the outcome of their deplatforming, but have slightly more unsuccessful deplatforming events than

successful ones. Activists, on the other hand, had only unsuccessful or attempted deplatforming linked to them.

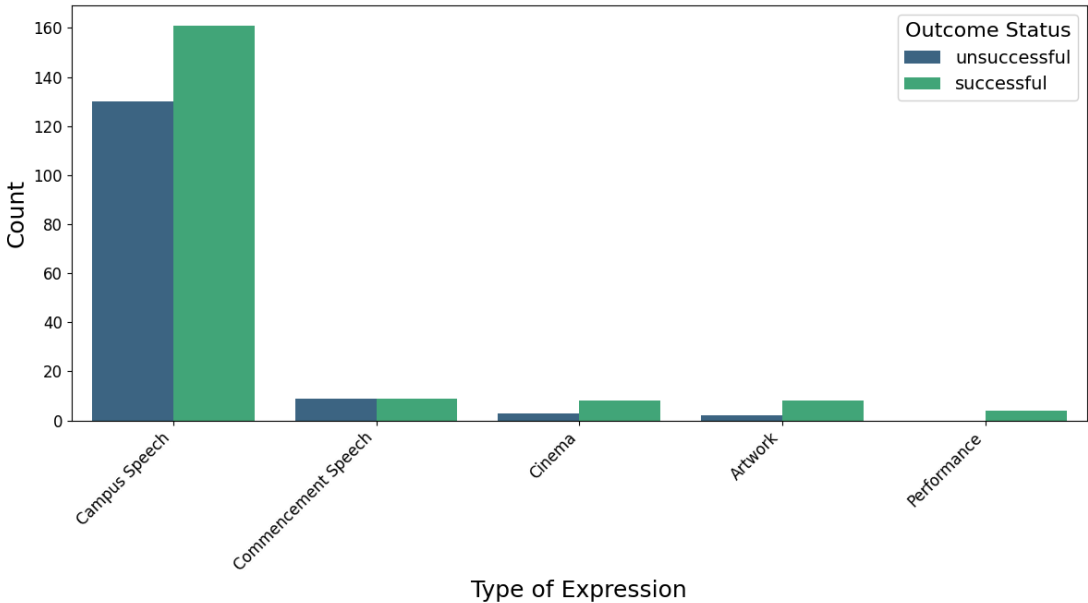


Figure 2: Count of Unsuccessful and Successful Deplatforming Events by the Top 5 Most Prevalent Types of Expressions for Israeli-Palestinian Related Events. This data visualization reveals that campus speech was by far the most common type of expression being deplatformed for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict events. Notably, there are more cases of successful deplatforming compared to unsuccessful deplatforming when campus speech is the main form of expression.

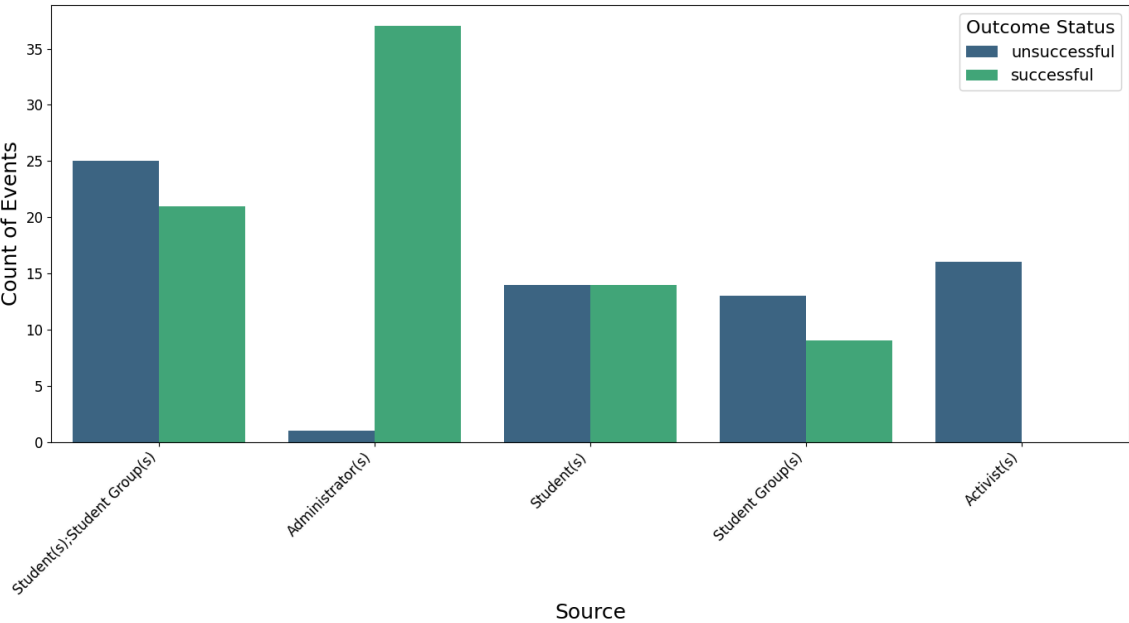


Figure 3: *Count of Unsuccessful and Successful Deplatforming Events by the Top 5 Most Prevalent Sources Targeting Campus Speech for Israeli-Palestinian Related Events. This data visualization goes deeper into the sources behind deplatforming, specifically when campus speech is the expression being censored. The data shows that Student(s); Student Group(s) had the most events of deplatforming campus speech, but were slightly more unsuccessful than successful. Their success rates were closer to 50/50. Administrators, on the other hand, were almost always successful in censoring campus speech.*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal different influential actors in campus deplatforming. University Administrators were responsible for 28.44% of deplatforming events related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Figure 2). While their volume is slightly higher than the baseline for other controversies, their impact is disproportionately high, likely due to their final decision-making power. The data also indicates that Administrator-sourced deplatforming events are almost always successful. Conversely, Students and Student Groups accounted for 26.35% of events, which is a significant increase from the 15.31% observed across all other controversy topics, yet their success rates are closer to 50/50. This suggests that while students are the most frequent prompters for deplatforming, the outcome of censorship remains an exercise of institutional power.

The overwhelming focus on "Campus Speech," which accounted for 87.16% of all incidents in this study compared to 52.65% across all FIRE categories (Figure 1), highlights the divisive nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unlike controversies that might target visual arts or performances, this conflict centers on historical narratives, legal and political definitions, and moral claims. As a result, most controversial events center on speech or verbal expression. This reinforces Boch (2020) findings that controversial speech itself is a primary driver of opposition and censorship actions in polarized environments.

LINEAR REGRESSION

The linear regression model demonstrated an accuracy of around 84.38%. The model generated various words along with the correlation coefficient from the vectorized controversy explanation column. These words, depending on the coefficient value, were most associated with either successful (negative coefficient) or unsuccessful (positive coefficient) deplatforming.

These are the top 10 words the model found most associated with an 'unsuccessful' outcome:

- place 0.332433
- took 0.268306

- spoke 0.244717
- successfully 0.175893
- interrupted 0.169608
- demanding 0.154787
- public 0.154673
- out 0.150737
- commencement 0.142324
- anti 0.136655

Notably, terms such as 'successfully' or 'interrupted' may reflect resistance to the deplatforming effort. The prevalence of action-oriented and situational words among the top predictors for unsuccessful outcomes suggests that narratives surrounding unsuccessful deplatforming events often focus on ongoing activity or public confrontation rather than resolution. Other words like 'place', 'took', and 'spoke' indicate that deplatforming was attempted but not successful, implying that the event or speech still occurred or that the individual ultimately spoke.

These are the top 10 words the model found most associated with a 'successful' outcome:

- removed -0.271757
- canceled -0.225268
- disinvited -0.204906
- speakers -0.199860
- later -0.171272
- audience -0.160114
- reinvited -0.158553
- ultimately -0.153463
- expressed -0.137404
- invitation -0.131238

The terms that are direct outcome verbs used by FIRE, including canceled, removed, or disinvited, are strongly linked with a successful deplatforming event by the model. The results also associate the term 'reinvited' with a negative coefficient and successful deplatforming, because if a speaker was reinvited, they were very likely to be deplatformed or removed beforehand. This is especially true if the initial invitation was rescinded.

Overall, successful deplatforming events are marked by clear, definitive actions against the targeted speaker or form of expression. Unsuccessful attempts are more likely to include ongoing activity or partial mitigation efforts. Expanded research on these patterns can help assess the effectiveness of various strategies to address deplatforming events in the future.

While this study examines the negative implications of deplatforming for democratic discourse and academic freedom, which is similar to FIRE's views on deplatforming, it is important to engage with other views and possible justifications for deplatforming. For many campus activists, deplatforming is not perceived as a mere rejection of free speech, but as resistance against certain harmful rhetoric or complicity in injustice, such as genocide. From this idea, providing a platform to certain speakers can be seen as a form of institutional violence that causes harm to marginalized communities. This tension between the democratic ideas of freedom of expression and the moral necessity to resist injustice is central to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both ideas can exist and are valid, revealing the highly complex nature of the conflict and its related discourse in college campus settings.

LIMITATIONS

A primary limitation of this study is its reliance on the FIRE database's definition of 'success,' which focuses exclusively on institutional success (i.e., whether the event was officially canceled or disrupted). The reliance on pre-defined keywords in the linear regression model may overlook the nuanced linguistic shifts that occur as campus speech codes and institutional policies evolve (Abrams, 2026). Additionally, as we acknowledge other perceptions of how deplatforming is thought of and how it is justified, there are many reasons why these FIRE definitions don't reflect universal sentiments or college campus realities.

This study is also limited in fully identifying the key predictors of successful deplatforming. Many of the words found by the linear regression model were the same words that define successful deplatforming, like revoked, canceled, etc. A stronger linear regression model may reveal more new and diverse results; however, there is significantly limited correlation between most of the vectorized text and the outcome. Further research could use larger text descriptions that don't allude to the direct outcome. This would identify stronger patterns behind Israeli-Palestinian-related deplatforming and the main motivations of deplatforming among different sources.

The results in the data visualizations don't necessarily speak to whether individual belief is the root of censorship and deplatforming, although past studies seem to corroborate this idea, especially when a major controversial speaker is involved. But other factors, such as political pressure or university speech codes, also limit the extent to which our study's findings can be used to understand the why behind deplatforming. Understanding the extent to which different actors sourced the deplatforming is significant. The reasons and motives behind causing the deplatforming, however, remain less clear and likely too varied to be realized in a single study.

CONCLUSION

This study's analysis of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (IPC) deplatforming reveals a fundamental struggle within the modern university: the tension between protecting academic freedom and responding to demands for moral accountability. By analyzing the FIRE Campus Deplatforming Database, this research

also identified a distinct order of influence. Administrators were responsible for 28.44% of events with a near-universal success rate in censorship, while students initiated 26.35% of events but experienced slightly more attempts to deplatform than successes. This suggests that while students serve as the major catalysts for deplatforming events, the outcome of censorship is often sourced by administrators and their institutional power. At the same time, however, many factors influence these administrators, including pressure from students and student groups that initiated the deplatforming.

Our data visualizations also found that "Campus Speech" comprises 87.16% of all deplatforming incidents in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict context, significantly higher than other controversy topics. This suggests that protests and censorship regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are particularly centered on free speech. Our linear regression model reinforced this, demonstrating that successful deplatforming is distinctly marked by definitive, action-oriented language (e.g., "canceled," "disinvited," "removed"), and unsuccessful attempts are characterized by ongoing friction.

Deplatforming is rarely just an act of censorship; it is a clash of values. We must recognize that for many activists, deplatforming can be perceived as necessary. Moving forward, higher education should not simply reduce censorship in a vacuum, but shift institutional policy toward better engagement with opposing perspectives. Many universities have already started doing this, especially following controversial events on campuses regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Some universities are even allowing students to submit evidence that they can engage in meaningful and respectful public discourse through their work in Dialogues, a non-profit that lets teens from all over the world debate on different controversial topics (Sparks, 2025). The organization gives scores and ratings to students based on how well they listen and respond respectfully to their peers. While this may help deter deplatforming among students in the future, universities must continue to navigate the complexities of including all viewpoints and avoid the pressure to unnecessarily deplatform and censor speakers

By further understanding and emphasizing the roles of both administrators and students as drivers of deplatforming, universities can move towards a more civically engaged academic environment, where even the most contentious topics can be addressed without fracturing higher education's purpose.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was done through the Inspirit AI Mentorship Program. I am grateful to all the staff at Inspirit AI for providing me with this opportunity. I also want to thank Shreyaa Rhagavan, who helped me develop this project both technically and conceptually, and whose mentorship was incredibly valuable. I want to thank Linnea Logan, my computer science teacher, whose encouragement and engagement with my ideas have motivated me to continue pursuing interdisciplinary research. Finally, thank you to my parents, whose support has allowed me to make discoveries, grow as a researcher, and drive my thinking with curiosity.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anya Vani Prakash is a high school junior at Whitefish Bay High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She is interested in the intersection of social sciences and artificial intelligence, and hopes to explore how these areas can interact in research to address societal issues. Anya plans to study social studies and technology-related fields in college, with a focus on policy and data analysis.