

The First Amendment, specifically the right to assemble, the very thing the country was built on as a group of settlers escaped religious persecution, has become a highly controversial topic in the United States following an influx in demonstrations. Are certain protests treated differently than others? Whether peaceful or violent, a trend follows as right-wing protests are met with far less police interference than others such as Pro-Palestine, BLM, and immigrant reform movements, that are labeled as liberal issues.

Following the Columbia University Pro Palestine encampments, many other schools took inspiration. Students from both UW-Milwaukee and UW-Madison set up camp and soon started to protest against the war on Palestine, following the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians. The rage came not only from the thousands of deaths still being counted but also the billions of dollars the country has spent funding the war. Since the events of October 7, 2023, the United States has provided Israel with \$17.9 billion in security assistance. Protesters disagreed with this use of taxpayer money, further fueling the need for demonstrations.

On the UW-Madison campus, students were met with police after only 20 minutes of setting up, facing 60 police officers in full riot gear. Police and students started to push each other, resulting in 10 protesters being taken away in makeshift zip-tie handcuffs. On the other hand, the UW-Milwaukee protesters were allowed to remain in the encampment for roughly two weeks. By that time, the school reached an agreement and soon agreed to join a cease-fire pledge.

Despite being roughly two hours away from each other, the schools had completely different responses to the same issue. This became controversial as UW-Madison enforced a rule that prevented protests on either side, remaining a neutral campus. After the Pro-Palestine protests, Pro-Israel students roamed campus with flags, going as far as being interviewed and claiming fear, this completely contradicted the school's previous statement. On the other hand, the Milwaukee school allowed students to protest peacefully and went as far as to join a pledge.

How is it that an 83.5-mile distance can completely change how student protests are treated?

Protests are seen everywhere, one of the most significant being the January 6, 2021 attacks on the capitol. This was a result of the 2020 election results, after which President Donald Trump encouraged this violence. In total, an estimated 150 police officers were injured, 5 people died, and an additional 4 officers committed suicide within a year of the event. Since then, roughly 562 rioters have been sentenced to prison. With this past election, Donald Trump claims he will pardon those who were imprisoned in connection to the riot in the capitol.

Are our protests in danger? Is this a violation of our first amendment?

Honorable Mention

– Emily Montes Laguna - Cristo Rey Jesuit High School Milwaukee, Milwaukee - 12th grade