

University of Michigan student leaders impeached over opposition to Gaza genocide

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On Tuesday, November 12, the University of Michigan (UMich) Central Student Government (CSG) voted overwhelmingly to impeach and ban Alifa Chowdhury, president of the Central Student Government, and Elias Atkinson, the vice president, from holding any office in the CSG.

Chowdhury and Atkinson, alongside roughly two dozen other CSG representatives, were elected in the 2024 CSG election in March on the Shut It Down platform opposing the US-Israel-led genocide in Gaza and its connection to the university.

CSG Representative Margaret Peterman proposed the impeachment motion, which claimed Chowdhury, and Atkinson, would “remain a threat to student safety, democracy, and the All-Campus Constitution if allowed to remain in office, and has acted in a manner grossly incompatible with self-governance and the rule of law.”

Three of the motion’s five articles were directed against Chowdhury, claiming she resorted to “inciting violence” against the CSG and the student body, alongside charges of “cyber theft of CSG property” and “dereliction of duty.” The motion directed two articles against Atkinson for “incitement of violence and dereliction of duty.”

The “violence” in question refers entirely to a public CSG meeting held on October 8 where students, responding to a post by the Shut It Down platform on its Instagram account, led a peaceful protest. Shut It Down’s Instagram post called for students to “Pack CSG” to support the Rebuilding Education in Gaza Act. The act, which was up for a vote during the meeting alongside the Wolverines’ Budget Act, would have provided “\$440,000 to rebuilding education in Gaza.”

During the meeting, the CSG passed the Wolverines’ Budget Act and rejected the Rebuilding Education in Gaza Act. Student protesters denounced the vote upon its announcement. Following the meeting, Chowdhury utilized the official CSG Instagram account to post a video denouncing the vote outcome.

The impeachment motion cites Chowdhury’s now-deleted post as evidence of the charge of “cyber theft of CSG property.” The article claims Chowdhury was not authorized to use the CSG Instagram account and withheld the account from the CSG. Additionally, the article and other comments made by Peterman

falsely claim Chowdhury labeled all representatives who voted against the Rebuilding Education in Gaza Act as “Zionists.”

A week after the October 8 meeting, Peterman published an op-ed in the *Michigan Daily* titled, “Student government is no place for political violence,” joined by over 40 co-authors on the CSG, demanding Atkinson and Chowdhury resign. In line with the aims of the UMich administration, Peterman’s article conjures an image of a university campus caught in a maelstrom of antisemitism. She describes the peaceful protest as a violent menace, claiming CSG representatives were “verbally assaulted” and faced “physical harassment” from protesters.

The charges of “inciting violence” are deliberately provocative and false, and follow the example of the Democrats and Republicans, as well as the capitalist press, of labeling all forms of protest against genocide in Gaza as “violent.”

In propping up her claims of “political violence,” Peterman presents several videos depicting pro-Palestinian protesters peacefully speaking in favor of the Rebuilding Education in Gaza Act and against the genocide in Gaza, alongside scenes of protesters chanting “shame” and other slogans protesting the outcome of the vote during the October 8 meeting.

Nowhere in this “evidence” do any of the CSG representatives appear in danger or scared for their safety. The Vice Speaker and other meeting directors are seen jovially conversing near the end of the meeting amid the protest chants.

The actions of the CSG reflect a coordinated campaign at universities across the country, directed primarily through the Democratic Party, to suppress all opposition to genocide and war among students on college campuses. At UMich there has been a steady escalation of anti-democratic and authoritarian measures aimed at suppressing all who oppose the Gaza genocide and the university’s connection to US imperialism.

Peterman’s op-ed calling for impeachment also seized on an alleged “bias-motivated assault” reported by the *Michigan Daily* on September 15 against a 19-year-old Jewish individual, which she claims was driven by the “hateful rhetoric” of the pro-Palestinian protesters.

UMich President Santa Ono issued three stand-alone emails to the entire university between September 15 and Oct 7 denouncing an alleged “increase in anti-semitism,” referencing a robbery at a location forty miles off campus as part of this “atmosphere.” While the CSG swiftly passed a resolution denouncing antisemitism on September 17, resolutions against the Gaza

genocide remain banned.

The political backgrounds of many of the students involved in the CSG impeachment campaign reveal a collaboration of Democratic and Republican party operatives, including several with ties to openly far-right and Zionist political groupings.

According to Peterman's LinkedIn page, she has played a significant role in the Democratic Party. In a recent post made on her account, Peterman states she served as a fellow in the Democratic Party's One Campaign, worked with the Michigan Democratic Party on Vice President Kamala Harris' US presidential election campaign, met with members of the German Bundestag (parliament) to discuss "America's critical role in protecting democracy and order around the world"—likely referring to US imperialism's plans with NATO in its proxy war against Russia in Ukraine—and served as an intern during the summer in Washington D.C. for Iowa Republican Party Representative Randy Feenstra.

CSG representative Alex Richmond gave an interview about his role in the impeachment to the right-wing news outlet Campus Reform, which is produced by the Leadership Institute. The Leadership Institute is a far-right think tank that helped produce Project 2025, an authoritarian package of policies that will likely guide the incoming Trump Administration. Richmond claimed that his training at the Leadership Institute's Student Government Leaders Retreat had prepared him for how to conduct a campaign against the anti-genocide protesters. He also campaigned for the far-right Republican Congressional candidate John James.

Akhila Mullapudi, the CSG Director of Government Relations, works with Michigan Political Consulting, where she served as a project manager for BlueBonnet Data, whose founder, Nathan Goldberg, assisted Texas Democratic politician Beto O'Rourke's campaign for the Senate in 2018. Michigan Political Consulting partnered with Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, providing her election campaign donor and opposition research while assisting with recruiting volunteers and its text banking program.

It was recently revealed that the UMich Regents, many of whom contributed to Nessel's campaign, recruited her office to investigate and charge 11 protesters involved in the UMich pro-Palestinian solidarity encampment.

Several more CSG members have interned with Democratic and Republican congressmen. Others are identified with the Zionist-connected Hillel Center on campus, and multiple CSG members publish articles in the right-wing *Michigan Review* newspaper.

Despite a vote of 30 to 7, with one abstaining, for impeachment, it remains clear that the openly pro-Zionist and witch-hunting motivations of those leading the impeachment campaign do not represent the sentiments of the student population at UMich.

During the CSG election, the Shut It Down campaign drew the support of thousands of students opposed to the genocidal war in Gaza, winning approximately 20 seats in different positions. Chowdhury and Atkinson won 4,396 of the 9,238 votes cast in the executive race.

However, once elected, the Shut It Down candidates initiated their program, which ultimately appeals to the UM administration—and the bi-partisan capitalist ruling class forces that lead it—to divest from its Wall Street and Pentagon endowment

connection. One of the mechanisms the Shut It Down elected representatives used to try to win support on the CSG for this position was cutting off all funding for other programs until their divestment demands were met.

Such a strategy is politically bankrupt, first and foremost, because it bypasses the need to politically convince students and workers of the fight to unify against the genocide, in favor of coercion and retribution. More fundamentally, it continues to lock students inside campus politics, with an outlook based on the false conception that pressuring the ruling class can change its class policies of war and genocide. Students must reach out to and unite with the working class, which is impossible within the scope of the Shut It Down campaign's perspective.

The UM Board of Regents—composed of millionaires, financiers and politicians from the Democratic and Republican parties—has remained completely impervious to the pressure campaign over the last six months. They have made clear their support for imperialist war and genocide will not be swayed by student protest.

The leaders of the impeachment campaign have relied on the growing anger among sections of students frustrated with the Shut It Down program to push through their motion. The motion's articles on "dereliction of duty" directed against Chowdhury and Atkinson directly cite their administration's intentional refusal to pass funding and use funds for student programs as grounds for their impeachment.

Chowdhury and Atkinson's impeachment comes just four days after Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE UMich), a pro-Palestinian student organization at UMich and the local chapter of the Students for Justice in Palestine, announced that the Student Organization Advancement and Recognition office had issued a complaint against them threatening to suspend the club for two to four years.

The attack on Chowdhury, Atkinson and Shut It Down, led by members of the Democratic and Republican parties, is an additional escalation of a coordinated witch-hunting campaign. This ruling class campaign aims to intimidate students and workers at UMich and attack their democratic rights to protest peacefully.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the youth section of the Socialist Equality Party, denounces the growing attack on the democratic rights of all UMich students, faculty and staff, and demands UMich rescind its complaint against SAFE and allow pro-Palestinian organizations to operate politically on campus.



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