



Demonstrators hold a banner during a “Stand Up for Internationals” rally on the campus of Berkeley University in Berkeley, California, April 17, 2025.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## EDUCATION

# THE NEW REALITY

## International students face rising uncertainty in the US

In the era of Trump 2.0, news has continually emerged providing backing to the claim that the US is “no longer a safe destination for international students”. Indeed, too much has changed in the past few months, from random threats of deportation for actions labelled as ‘un-American’ to checking phones and personnel for any signs of ‘un-American’ ways of thinking. The lives of international students living in the US are in a precarious position.

In addition, there is also the looming fear of many students losing access to their funding or scholarships. New sorts of threats constantly pop up with new administrative decisions being taken by the government. Students, amidst all of this, manage to live life with growing panic and uncertainty.

Kibria\*, an undergraduate student studying in the state of Alabama, shares her anxiety. “I haven’t particularly had to go through anything severe, nor have I had to face any major cut in my scholarship. Yet, I have developed terrible anxiety by simply watching the news and trying to follow what’s happening. I keep thinking that they will, someday, come for me. It has gotten to the point where the anxiety harms me on a daily basis.”

There is, of course, a very legitimate reason for paranoia of this nature. It was March 8, 2025, when Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist who graduated from Columbia University and holds an American green card, was taken into custody by the Department of Homeland Security without any warrants. As of writing this article, he remains imprisoned and is waiting for a hearing from the US Department of Justice that threatens to deport him on claims which, according to a video reported by CNN, have no merit or backing.

He is not the only victim either, as several other college students have reportedly been taken into custody in the weeks that followed. Their fault? Participating or helping in organising protests at their

respective campuses for Palestine. Many of these students have thus far been let go of, but Mahmoud Khalil still remains confined and awaiting a hearing.

This wave of events has had a major impact on international students currently in the US. As Anusha\*, a graduate student in the state of Georgia, puts it, “I have almost completely stopped talking about Palestine online in fear of deportation. Even when I am outside, I have to be extra careful and often delete all my social media apps if I think they will go through my phone. Travelling is completely out of the question at this point. I feel guilty because I often ask myself what I am even doing here if I can’t exercise my right to free speech, let alone attend a protest. But then, I am terrified of what might happen if I do.”

Tanvir\*, an undergraduate student currently in Texas, shares a similar sort of panic. “From what I can tell, those of us who already have a scholarship or receive an aid of some kind are not all that likely to lose it due to any funding cuts. That may sound like a relief, but the rate at which new things are happening, I can’t help but feel like that will change soon.”

Tanvir bemoans, “I am also, basically, stranded here. I cannot go back to my country anytime soon because there’s a huge chance I will just be denied re-entry to the US.”

Afia\*, a recent graduate living in New York, has also stated that there has been a notable lack of conversation around Palestine altogether. “Not just on social media, no matter where you go, college students have been silenced by the recent incidents.”

She adds, “Very few large-scale protests have taken place in the last few months. College administrations have tightened their rules against these demonstrations, so it has become scarier to actually participate in any of them.”

Since early May, reports of newly emerging pro-Palestine protests have emerged, particularly from Columbia University, Yale University, and the University

of Washington. However, most of these protests were quickly met with mass arrests, suspensions, and, in other contexts, withholding of degrees. While *Campus* was unable to identify any international students amongst the numbers, it is entirely possible that internationals who may be present will end up facing repercussions if not worse.

Amongst the onslaught of administrative processes becoming a reality, the most pressing one is the latest development with the US Government and Harvard. On May 23, the US Government announced that it would be halting Harvard’s ability to enrol international students. Amidst the chaos this has created, many have wondered if a government is even allowed to do such a thing.

*Campus* reached out to Bangladeshi students currently at Harvard, and while they are currently too distressed and in the dark to make any comments to shed light on the situation, they have notified us that Harvard is working tirelessly to inform all their international students of any further developments. Most recently, Harvard made a public post announcing their decision to protect their international students. While that can seem hopeful, the future still looks grim as the onslaught of draconian laws persecuting international students for their stance against genocide seems to have no end in sight.

In this complete lack of a silver lining, students from Bangladesh and worldwide continue under enforced silence, with their futures largely uncertain.

### References:

1. CNN (May 23, 2025). *Judge denies request to terminate Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil’s deportation proceedings.*
2. Axios (May 8, 2025). *Where Pro-Palestinian campus protests are emerging again.*

\*Names have been changed upon request.