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EXPLAINER

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# Who are the students Trump wants to deport?

Mohsen Mahdawi, Rumeysa Ozturk, Mahmoud Khalil and Badar Khan Suri are among the students targeted by US President Donald Trump.

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Video shows arrest of student activist Mahmoud Khalil

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Some international students have won legal victories against US President Donald Trump's administration amid a government crackdown on immigration that led to students being detained and having their United States visas revoked.

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- 'Columbia let me down': How Indian scholar expelled by Trump fled the US



On May 14, a federal judge [ordered the release](#) of Georgetown University scholar [Badar Khan Suri](#) from immigration detention after more than two months of detention. The order for Suri's release came after similar orders allowed the release of two other prominent US university students targeted for deportation, Turkish Tufts University PhD student [Rumeysa Ozturk](#) and Palestinian Columbia University student [Mohsen Mahdawi](#).

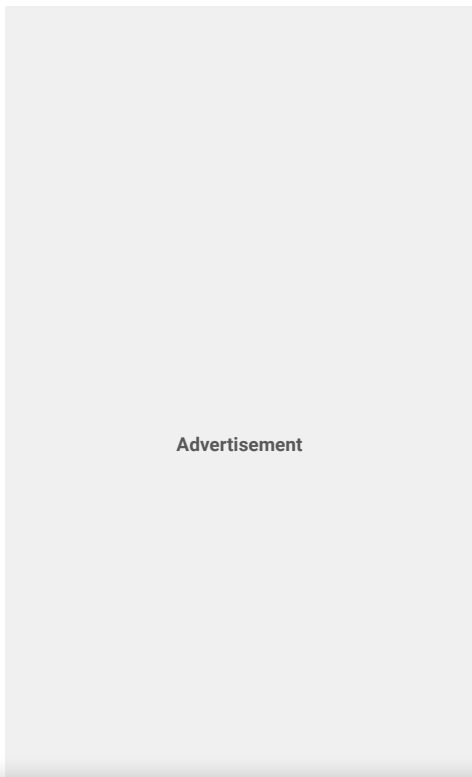
More than 1,000 students have had their visas revoked, according to estimates by the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers. Other estimates say this number is higher. Some have been detained by immigration authorities while others have left the US.

Several international students are suing the Trump administration for unlawfully revoking their student visas. In April, two class-action lawsuits were filed by Chinese and Indian students alleging that the government revoked their F-1 visas unlawfully.

Here is more about the US university students who have been detained so far, or have had their visas revoked:

### Why does Trump want to deport US students?

The Trump administration alleges that the students who participated in pro-Palestine protests spread anti-Semitism and pro-Hamas sentiment on campus — a claim students, lawyers and activists have all rebutted. Jewish activists and groups have been at the forefront of many of the most prominent protests in the US against the Gaza war.



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Hamas sympathizers on college campuses, which have been infested with radicalism like never before.”

His administration has since targeted multiple international students and scholars in the US.

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## Rumeysa Ozturk

On March 25, US authorities detained and revoked the student visa of Tufts University student [Rumeysa Ozturk](#), a Turkish national who had voiced her support for Palestinians affected by the Gaza war.

Security camera footage showed six individuals in plainclothes taking Ozturk into custody near her apartment in Somerville, Massachusetts. Some of these officers were partially covering their faces. Ozturk had headed out alone to meet her friends for iftar, the evening meal to break her Ramadan fast.

The 30-year-old is a Turkish national and a Fulbright scholar in Tufts’ doctoral programme for Child Study and Human Development. She has been in the US on a valid student visa.

Almost a year earlier, in March 2024, Ozturk had co-written an opinion piece for her university’s student news website, the Tufts Daily, with four other students. In this piece, the authors criticised the university’s President Sunil Kumar, who sent an email dismissing resolutions passed by the Tufts Community Union Senate, which called for the university to divest from companies linked to Israel and “acknowledge the Palestinian genocide”.

Ozturk’s lawyer Mahsa Khanbabai filed a petition in a Boston federal court, arguing that Ozturk had been unlawfully detained. As a result, US District Judge Indira Talwani ordered US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) not to move Ozturk out of Massachusetts without 48 hours’ notice.

Despite this, Ozturk was moved to Louisiana within a day, according to her lawyer.

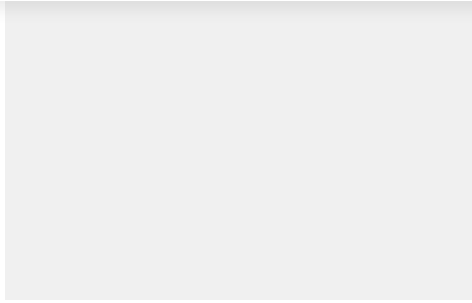
US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin wrote in an X post on March 26: “DHS + ICE investigations found Ozturk engaged in activities in support of Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization that relishes the killing of Americans.” McLaughlin did not specify what these activities were.

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“A visa is a privilege not a right. Glorifying and supporting terrorists who kill Americans is grounds for visa issuance to be terminated. This is commonsense security,” McLaughlin wrote.

Tufts University President Kumar said in a written statement that the university was not informed before the arrest. “From what we have been told subsequently, the student’s visa status has been terminated, and we seek to confirm whether that information is true,” Kumar said.

On May 9, Vermont-based US District Judge William Sessions [ordered Ozturk’s release](#). “The court finds that she does not pose a danger to the community, nor does she present a risk of flight. The court orders the government to release Ms Ozturk from custody immediately,” Sessions said. “In the last 45 days, I lost both my freedom and also, my education during a crucial time for my doctoral studies,” Ozturk told reporters after returning to Boston. “But I am so grateful for all the support, kindness and care.”



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## Mahmoud Khalil

On March 8, ICE agents arrested [Mahmoud Khalil](#), a recent Columbia University graduate who was the lead negotiator for Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD) during the campus protests last year. He was taken from his university-owned New York City apartment while his wife, Noor Abdalla, who was eight months pregnant at the time, recorded the arrest on her phone. This marked the first publicly known student deportation effort of its kind under the Trump administration.

McLaughlin alleged that Khalil “led activities aligned to Hamas, a designated terrorist organization”, but no evidence for this was provided. Abdalla said that the agents did not show a warrant while making the arrest. Khalil was transferred to an ICE processing facility in Jena, Louisiana.

At the time of his arrest, Khalil was a permanent resident with a green card. When the ICE agents were told that he had a green card, they said that

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Khalil, 30, was an Algerian citizen born in a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria. He arrived at Columbia in January 2023 to pursue his master's degree in public administration. Khalil was among a small group of students who organised the first campus protest on October 12, 2024, five days after Israel's war on Gaza broke out.

Amid the protests, Khalil was briefly suspended by Columbia, but reinstated after the university found no grounds for suspension. At the time, Khalil told the BBC that while he was a lead negotiator, he did not participate in the encampments, fearing he would lose his F-1 student visa.

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It is unclear when he received his green card, but his wife, Abdalla, is a US citizen.

"The government's unlawful policy of targeting noncitizens for arrest and removal based on protected speech is ... viewpoint discrimination in violation of the First Amendment," Khalil's lawyers, led by Amy Belsher, wrote in a court filing on March 13.

On April 21, Khalil's wife gave birth to the couple's first child in New York. Abdalla said in a statement that Khalil missed the birth of his son after he was denied temporary release to attend the birth. "My son and I should not be navigating his first days on earth without Mahmoud," Abdalla said in a statement.

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Student negotiator Mahmoud Khalil on the Columbia University campus in New York City at a pro-Palestinian protest encampment on April 29, 2024 [Ted Shaffrey/AP Photo]

## Badar Khan Suri

Indian national [Badar Khan Suri](#) was arrested on the evening of March 17 at his home in northern Virginia. Suri is a postdoctoral fellow at the Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. He had been in Virginia for three years and held a valid US student visa at the time of his arrest.

Georgetown University said in a written statement: “We are not aware of [Suri] engaging in any illegal activity, and we have not received a reason for his detention.”

McLaughlin attributed [Suri's arrest](#) to his “spreading Hamas propaganda and promoting antisemitism”. She wrote on X: “Suri has close connections to a known or suspected terrorist, who is a senior advisor to Hamas.”

Suri's wife, Mapheze Saleh, is an American citizen, she confirmed to Al Jazeera. In a post on X on February 13, the Israeli Embassy in the US said that Saleh was the daughter of a senior Hamas adviser. Ahmed Yousef, a former adviser to assassinated Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh, confirmed to The New York Times that he is Suri's father-in-law.

However, the Trump administration has yet to make public any evidence that Suri had spread Hamas propaganda or promoted anti-Semitism.

On March 20, Judge Patricia Tolliver Giles of the US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia halted Suri's deportation. According to the ICE website, Suri was being held in the Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas.

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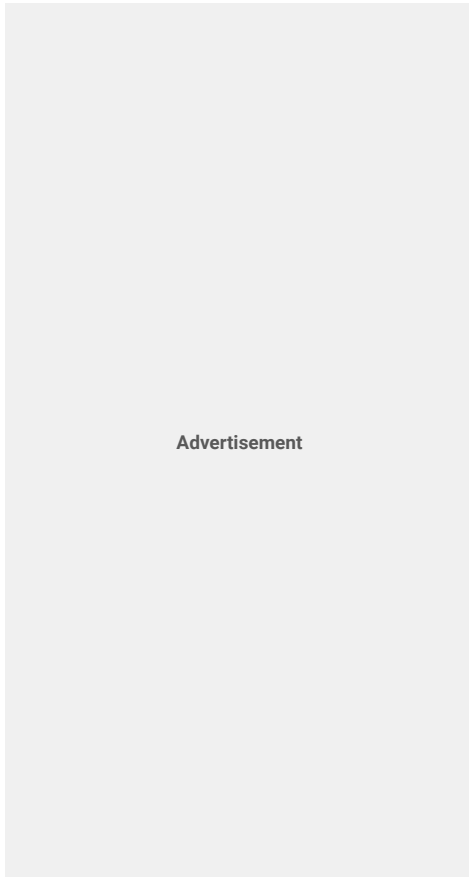
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Her legal team was informed in early March that her permanent residence was being revoked, according to the court filing. The lawsuit says that immigration authorities issued an administrative arrest warrant for Chung on March 8.

On March 25, US District Judge Naomi Reice Buchwald [temporarily halted](#) her deportation. “As of today, Yunseo Chung no longer has to fear and live in fear of ICE coming to her doorstep and abducting her in the night,” Chung’s lawyer Ramzi Kassem said after the ruling.

## Momodou Taal

As a doctoral candidate in Africana Studies at Cornell University, Momodou Taal participated in pro-Palestine protests last year, where he called on Cornell to divest from companies that sell weapons to Israel. A dual citizen of the United Kingdom and The Gambia, Taal was suspended from Cornell twice last year for his participation in protest activities and encampment.



Taal told Al Jazeera that he filed a lawsuit on March 8 alongside two other plaintiffs — a doctoral candidate and a Cornell professor who are both US citizens — after Khalil was arrested. The lawsuit challenged two Trump executive orders, including the one focused on university campuses.

On the morning of March 19, a day after a federal judge scheduled a hearing for Taal’s lawsuit, Taal posted a written statement on X that “unidentified law enforcement” came to his home in Ithaca, New York. He added that later in the day, Cornell students saw additional law

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## Alireza Doroudi

Alireza Doroudi, a mechanical engineering doctoral student at the University of Alabama, was detained by ICE agents early on March 25, the university's student news website, The Crimson White, reported. While the ICE website says that an Iranian individual named Alireza Doroudi is in ICE custody, it does not specify where he is being detained.

Doroudi was from Iran and obtained an F-1 student visa from the US embassy in Oman in January 2023. His visa was revoked six months after his arrival in the US, The Crimson White reported, citing a group chat that included Iranian students. It is unclear whether he was arrested for overstaying a visa.

University spokesperson Alex House said that, while international students are valued members of the campus community, the university "has and will continue to follow all immigration laws and cooperate with federal authorities."

## Ranjani Srinivasan

[Ranjani Srinivasan](#), 37, had her student visa revoked by the US Department of State on the night of March 5. She learned about this through an email from the US consulate in Chennai, the southern Indian state where she is originally from. She had been a PhD candidate in urban planning at Columbia University for five years and held a visa valid until 2029.

On March 7, individuals claiming to be immigration agents came knocking on the door of Srinivasan's university residential housing apartment, where she had lived since 2021. The individuals said that they planned to put Srinivasan through proceedings to remove her from the US, before eventually leaving.

After this, Srinivasan left her flat for a location she did not disclose in communication with Al Jazeera. A day after this, Khalil was arrested. "That's when I realised I have no rights in this system at all. It was only a matter of time before they caught hold of me," Srinivasan told Al Jazeera. "What truly unsettled me was that Columbia already knew ICE was operating on campus – yet seemed uninterested in intervening and even appeared to be colluding with them before Mahmoud disappeared."

On March 9, Columbia unenrolled Srinivasan as a student. By March 11, she had flown out of New York to Canada on a visitor visa to stay with her family and friends. Her lawyers informed ICE that Srinivasan had departed from the US.

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Still from a security video shared on X by US Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem showing Ranjani Srinivasan [Screengrab]

## Mohsen Mahdawi

[Mahdawi](#), 30, was arrested by ICE agents on April 14 while he attended an immigration interview to obtain his citizenship at the US Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Colchester, Vermont. Mahdawi was a philosophy student, set to graduate from Columbia University in May, and was enrolled to begin another programme at Columbia later this year.

Alongside Khalil, Mahdawi co-founded the Palestinian Student Union at Columbia and organised campus protests until March 2024.

He told Al Jazeera last year that during the protests, a “counterprotester” had approached him, saying: “I’m going to take your life. I’m going to kill you.”

Mahdawi, who is Palestinian, has been a green card holder since 2015. He was born in a refugee camp in the West Bank and moved to the US in 2014, according to a petition filed by his lawyers in a federal court. Growing up in the refugee camp, Mahdawi recalled being shot in the leg by an Israeli soldier when he was 15 years old. He also remembers cleaning up after an air strike and an Israeli soldier killing his 12-year-old friend, Columbia University’s student-run newspaper, the Columbia Spectator, reported in November 2023.

“The Trump administration detained Mohsen Mahdawi in direct retaliation for his advocacy on behalf of Palestinians and because of his identity as a Palestinian,” said his lawyer, Luna Droubi, who does not know where Mahdawi currently is.

“His detention is an attempt to silence those who speak out against the atrocities in Gaza,” said Droubi. “It is unconstitutional.”

On April 30, US District Judge Geoffrey Crawford ordered the release of Mahdawi on bail to challenge the Trump administration’s efforts to deport him.

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Liu, 26, a Chinese computer science doctoral student at Dartmouth College, had his F-1 student visa revoked by the DHS on April 4.

Liu sued the US government with help from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of New Hampshire, alleging that his visa was revoked “without any notice and sufficient explanation”. He also said he had not participated in a protest or been charged with a crime.

On April 9, the federal court of New Hampshire temporarily restored Liu’s visa. This temporary restoration is in place until the federal court “makes a formal ruling in his case in the coming weeks”, according to an ACLU statement.

On April 29, a judge restored Chinese student Xiaotian Liu’s student visa, allowing him to continue his studies in the US while a lawsuit continues.

## Krish Lal Isserdasani

Krish Lal Isserdasani, 21, is an Indian national who is getting an undergraduate computer engineering degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

On April 4, Isserdasani was notified that his visa was cancelled and he would have to leave the country by May 2. US District Judge William Conley, on April 15, temporarily blocked Isserdasani’s visa cancellation.

## Which students have filed lawsuits against the government?

On April 11, Zhuoer Chen, a master’s student in architecture from the University of California, Berkeley; Mengcheng Yu, a master’s student at Carnegie Mellon University; Jiarong Ouyang, a PhD candidate in statistics at the University of Cincinnati; and Gexi Guo, a New York resident who has earned a bachelor of science and a graduate degree during his eight years in the US, filed a lawsuit ([PDF](#)) against the US government.

The suit names DHS Secretary Noem and acting ICE Director Todd Lyons as defendants.

All the plaintiffs named in the lawsuit are Chinese nationals with F-1 visas. The suit alleges that authorities either cancelled the visas of these students or terminated their SEVIS records in early April. SEVIS, or the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, is an online system that the DHS uses to maintain records of international students in the US.

While the plaintiffs were arrested in the past, they have never been convicted of any crimes. The suit was filed in the US District Court for the Northern District of California. The lawsuit alleges that the termination of the plaintiffs’ visa status infringes on their Fifth Amendment rights, which protect the right to a grand jury. “No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury,” the amendment states.

On April 18, ACLU’s New Hampshire chapter announced that it had filed a federal class-action lawsuit representing more than 100 students in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island and Puerto Rico who had their student F-1 visa, immigration status or SEVIS records “unlawfully and abruptly terminated with no specified reason as to why”.

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