



Addressing Transnational Repression on Campuses in the United States

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ON THE COVER

People gather on November 28, 2022, at Columbia University in New York for a protest in support of demonstrations held in China calling for an end to COVID-19 lockdowns. (Kena Betancur / Getty Images)

Key Findings

1

International students, visiting scholars, and faculty in the United States are being targeted by foreign governments and their agents. Tactics of transnational repression on campuses include digital and physical surveillance, harassment, assault, threats, and coercion by proxy.

2

The biggest threat to international students and scholars studying and working in the United States is the government of China. However, other governments, including those of Egypt, India, Rwanda, and Saudi Arabia have also perpetrated transnational repression within the United States. Globally, Freedom House has identified 38 governments that use tactics of transnational repression.

3

University administrators lack sufficient awareness of the threats posed by foreign governments to members of their campus communities. As a result, targeted individuals have to try to protect themselves. This unfairly places the onus for addressing transnational repression on the shoulders of those most vulnerable to it.

4

Institutions of higher learning should establish reporting mechanisms for transnational repression that are accessible to students and faculty. They should feature clear guidelines about the process of handling reports, and should respect the rights and freedoms of targeted individuals as well as of those alleged to be perpetrators.

Introduction

Foreign governments are harassing and intimidating international students, faculty, and visiting scholars on university and college campuses across the United States. They are threatening families in home countries after international students attend prodemocracy rallies. Classroom discussions are surveilled and relayed to staff at foreign embassies. Event organizers are pressured not to host guest lectures, and public events on human rights are disrupted. Visiting scholars and faculty members whose research is critical of foreign governments are being intimidated.

Strengthening transnational ties in teaching and research can deliver widespread benefits, but only if students and scholars are protected from transnational repression and allowed to exercise their fundamental freedoms.

These are examples of transnational repression: a set of physical and digital tactics used by governments to reach across borders to silence dissent among members of the diaspora. These tactics not only infringe on the rights of the targeted individuals; they also spread fear and encourage self-censorship at institutions of higher learning. Transnational repression undermines academic freedom.

The problem is serious, growing, and in need of urgent attention. In 2022, there were 1.36 million international students studying at colleges, universities, and vocational schools across the United States.¹ Foreign scholars and researchers have also flocked to US institutions, attracted by academic opportunities or compelled to move abroad by worsening repression in their origin countries. Strengthening transnational ties in teaching and research can deliver widespread benefits,² but only if students and scholars are protected from transnational repression and allowed to exercise their fundamental freedoms.

To protect students, faculty, and scholars, university and college administrators should recognize the threat posed by transnational repression, empower affected individuals to report incidents, and adopt practices that reinforce academic freedom.

The Problem on Campus

Students and scholars are forces for democratic change.³ But in the United States, international students, visiting scholars, and faculty are routinely harassed, surveilled, and intimidated by foreign governments employing tactics of transnational repression.

Between 2014 and 2022, Freedom House recorded 854 incidents of physical, direct transnational repression perpetrated by 38 governments in 91 countries.⁴ These incidents include assassinations, assaults, detentions, unlawful deportations, and credible threats. They represent the tip of a much larger iceberg. In the United States, physical incidents are relatively uncommon, with only 6 confirmed cases, but nonphysical forms of transnational repression, like online harassment, digital surveillance, hacking and spyware, threats, and the intimidation of family members still living in an origin country are pervasive.

On US campuses, transnational repression is an everyday threat. For international students, transnational repression severely constrains their ability to participate in classes where discussion of politics or world events may be monitored. It limits their opportunities to make connections among like-minded members of the campus community, and prevents them from studying democracy or advocating for human rights. For visiting scholars, some of whom have relocated to the United States specifically because academic freedom has disappeared in their origin country, transnational repression extends the reach of authoritarian control into their new

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workplaces. Targeting by foreign governments means that faculty cannot speak freely about their research findings and, in some cases, may not be able to continue their life's work without endangering themselves or their families.

This report is a survey of existing responses to transnational repression on US campuses. About a dozen students, scholars, and administrators spoke to Freedom House on the condition of anonymity; their observations and the materials they shared are described here in as much detail as is possible while still protecting their identities. That so many interviewees asked for their names and affiliations to be withheld speaks to the difficulty of addressing the threat of transnational repression by authoritarian governments, who employ both violence as well as economic pressure to exert influence in the United States. Nevertheless, better protections for students, scholars, and faculty members are both needed and possible. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for university and college administrators on how to support those targeted by transnational repression and strengthen academic freedom.

Examples of Transnational Repression on Campus

Incidents of transnational repression on campuses often go unrecognized, making it difficult for targeted individuals to report them and weakening the effectiveness of responses. Raising awareness is therefore the first step in countering transnational repression. The examples below are real incidents recorded by Freedom House that were anonymized to protect the privacy of the individuals targeted.

1

Students and members of the academic community gathered on campus to express solidarity with prodemocracy protests happening in a foreign country. Participants were photographed and video recorded by observers at the event. Later, relatives of people who attended the protest were contacted by law enforcement in their origin country. Some were arrested, while others were told to discourage their family members studying overseas from voicing criticism of the government.

2

A graduate student who attended a small seminar class covering topics in human rights was asked by officials from her origin country's embassy to report on contributions made by fellow students from her country.

3

An academic who was relocated to a US university as part of a scholars-at-risk program delivered public remarks criticizing the authorities of his origin country. Those authorities accused him of criminal acts and undertook efforts to have him deported from the United States.

4

A student organization invited a prominent activist to campus to speak about human rights violations in a foreign country. Embassy officials from that country contacted university administrators to ask for the event to be canceled. When the university refused, the event was disrupted by individuals recruited by the embassy. Posts disseminated on social media warned students from that country not to attend the event.

5

A professor who is a member of a religious minority community wrote about the challenges faced by that minority in her origin country. Anonymous threats were sent to her university email account, and the website of the regional institute where she was a faculty member was disrupted by distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks when it posted updates about her media interviews and research publications.

The Limits of Self-Help: Responses By Students And Scholars

Today, international students and faculty targeted by foreign governments have largely been left to manage the threat themselves. Some international students have organized groups dedicated to raising awareness of abuses at home, and these have both prompted instances of transnational repression and provided a degree of community for those targeted. While students have focused on self-organization and speaking out, affected faculty members have designed individual workarounds and lobbied university administrations from the inside. Though laudable, these self-help efforts have clear limitations. Transnational repression is an unfair battle that pits the resources of a government against individuals. Those targeted by it cannot be left to face the threat alone.

Student groups

Although the threat of transnational repression is ever-present on campuses, international students often self-organize during times of political upheaval in their origin countries, when antiregime sentiments become more pronounced. During the last decade, US-based international students have mobilized in support of protests in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria,⁵ Hong Kong,⁶ Cuba,⁷ and Iran.⁸

In the fall of 2022, international students organized in support of antigovernment protests in China. At the time, unprecedented demonstrations against restrictive COVID-19 lockdowns were spreading across Chinese cities. They were sparked by an apartment fire in Ürümqi, Xinjiang, in which at least 10 people were killed because pandemic-related restrictions on movement prevented rescuers from reaching them.⁹ Protesters held up pieces of A4 printer paper to demonstrate their opposition to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and to highlight its severe restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression. Like protests in Iran that were sparked a few months before by the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, a young woman who died in custody after being detained by Iran's morality police, the White Paper protests inspired solidarity demonstrations across campuses in the United States and elsewhere.

Following these protests, students at George Washington University formed the GW Independent Chinese Student Union, also known as the Torch on the Potomac, which was announced publicly in April 2023.¹⁰ The union was established for the purpose of providing “Chinese students and scholars... as well as their peers in the diaspora, with a platform, social support, and community independent from the Chinese Communist Party and its puppets.” One of the union’s founders told Freedom House that the group also aimed to push university administrators to support students engaged in related activism. A statement from the union noted that Chinese nationals on campus have been subjected to “a systemic campaign of repression...intimidation, surveillance, harassment, blackmail, and other infringements upon our rights.”¹¹

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A similar, though less formal effort was undertaken at Columbia University, where students formed the White Paper Society in 2022.¹² One of the organizers told Freedom House that the White Paper Society sought to maintain the momentum of a “political awakening” among Chinese international students following the protests in China. These groups and others were supported by the Athenai Institute, a nonpartisan organization founded by US-based university students in 2020 in part to support communities, including Hong Kongers and Uyghurs, who face pressure or are otherwise targeted by the CCP on university campuses.¹³

These groups have encountered several obstacles that limit their effectiveness. First, some members, despite taking precautions to maintain their anonymity, have experienced targeted harassment and have had their families pressured by

authorities in China.¹⁴ The psychological impact of this type of repression is extreme and can discourage even the most committed student activists. These international students are also in the United States on student visas¹⁵ and many return to their countries of origin after completing their degrees, at which point they may pay a steep price for past activism abroad. Uncertainty about where they will live after graduation can lead some students to self-censor.

Second, digital surveillance, which is a tool of transnational repression, has made planning public events and recruiting like-minded students to these organizations online difficult. As one long-time researcher on human rights in China pointed out in an interview, student activists may not post or participate in discussion on platforms like WeChat—the most popular messaging and social media platform in China—due to fears of CCP surveillance.¹⁶ WeChat accounts (known as Weixin inside China) are subject to widespread surveillance, much of which is enforced via CCP mandates for China-based tech companies.¹⁷ Many Chinese international students studying in the United States use WeChat to form connections in the diaspora, engage in cultural activities, and connect with family in China. WeChat is not a platform that can be used for prodemocracy organizing.

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Posting on platforms more commonly used in the United States, like X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram can also carry risks. Last year, a Saudi man pleaded guilty in a New York court to lying to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents about using Instagram to send threatening messages to Saudi dissidents living in the United States and Canada.¹⁸ Another man was convicted last year of transmitting the personal information of dissidents to Saudi authorities while he was an employee at Twitter.¹⁹ International students can also face imprisonment at home over social media activity while studying abroad. A Saudi graduate student from Leeds University was sentenced in 2022 to over 30 years in prison for following and retweeting activists on Twitter.²⁰ She was arrested while visiting family in Saudi Arabia.

Third, these groups have not, thus far, been able to develop links to university administrations. Universities and colleges often have complicated processes for recognizing student groups, including requirements that new groups be accepted by existing student organizations and the student government, and have faculty advisors. Interviewees noted that formal endorsement of their organizations by the universities would enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of other students and also provide some financial support for their activities.

Faculty responses

Faculty who are targeted by transnational repression often have little recourse and may even consider abandoning their field of study if their research provokes harassment or leads to threats against their families at home.

One Kashmiri academic, with US citizenship and working at a US college, told Freedom House that after a number of events she was speaking at were derailed by disruptive audience members accusing her of supporting terrorism, she began to warn event organizers of this possibility when accepting invitations. The same professor received threatening phone calls and had family members visited by the police in Indian Kashmir.²¹ While they continue for now to pursue their research, they have not returned to India to conduct fieldwork.

Online events have also been disrupted by what has come to be called “Zoom bombing.” For example, a presentation by Rayhan Asat, a lawyer and Uyghur activist, during an online event organized by Brandeis University in 2020 was disrupted by hackers who took over her screen and wrote “fake news” and “liar” across it.²²

In the classroom, instructors have begun to grapple with how to cover topics that may be perceived as politically sensitive and therefore put international students at risk of surveillance and harassment. A guide sheet for instructors in an Asian Studies department at one North American university shared with Freedom House lists topics ranging from “Tibetan independence” to “Hinduism from a critical perspective” that are deemed “potentially sensitive.” A note accompanies each topic describing whether monitoring of class discussion is “possible, likely, or extremely likely” and listing governments that may surveil students.

Another guide created by the faculty of a different university provides suggestions for instructors on how to warn students about the risks of transnational repression; these include adding language to the course syllabus that certain topics seen as sensitive by foreign governments will be covered, adjusting evaluations to avoid penalizing students who are uncomfortable publicly discussing certain sensitive topics in the classroom, allowing anonymous submission formats for assignments, and not recording lectures or classroom discussions.²³ In the same vein, in 2020, following the introduction of the National Security Law in Hong Kong that criminalized a wide range of speech and can be applied extraterritorially, the Association of Asian Scholars and several China studies professors released a risk assessment and recommendations for colleagues teaching remotely.²⁴

However, many instructors are not aware of the threat of transnational repression, while those who are aware are left

The absence of institutional support means that risk management and mitigation falls primarily to instructors and vulnerable international students.

to respond on their own. The absence of institutional support means that risk management and mitigation falls primarily to instructors and vulnerable international students. Seeking safety, international students and scholars may choose to avoid classes and events that may address democracy and human rights, limiting their experiences at US colleges and universities.

Lagging Behind: Responses By Administrators

As accounts of the intimidation and harassment faced by international students have become more widespread, a few institutions have acknowledged the dangers posed by foreign governments through awareness raising and official statements of support.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison’s International Safety and Security Office has created an information guide outlining the purpose and tactics of transnational repression that directs targeted students to its offices, which can offer support and connect them with relevant experts or law enforcement.²⁵ An administrator at Yale University told Freedom House that a discussion of transnational repression is included during onboarding sessions for incoming faculty.²⁶

A handful of universities have proactively spoken out in defense of students who had studied in the United States and were subsequently targeted on campuses or abroad. Following reports in 2021 about the CCP’s efforts to crack down on US-based students from China, then

Purdue University president Mitch Daniels condemned the intimidation of a student and his family as “unacceptable and unwelcome,” and made clear that students found to have threatened other international students would be sanctioned.²⁷ The University of Chicago’s Center for East Asian Studies in early 2023 made a statement calling for the release of graduate Qin Ziyi, who was arrested in China for participating in White Paper protests there.²⁸

Public solidarity with students and scholars was among the most desired university responses cited by individuals interviewed by Freedom House. However, given security considerations, administrators should consult with the targeted individuals or their families before issuing statements to ensure that public support is welcome and useful.

Falling short

Despite a handful of positive examples, most colleges and universities continue to formulate responses to transnational

repression reactively and sometimes counterproductively. For example, in February 2022, George Washington University responded to complaints that posters on campus criticizing the CCP's hosting of the Olympic Games incited racial hatred by taking them down and promising disciplinary action for those involved in their distribution.²⁹ The university's president later acknowledged that the artwork was a political statement, not racism, and apologized for the posters' hasty removal³⁰ but the event signaled to international students a low tolerance for certain forms of prodemocracy activities. In another incident connected to China, the *Yale Daily News* refused to allow two Chinese students to anonymously write a story about a "zero Covid" vigil on campus because the publication's standards required a public byline for articles.³¹ The editor's choice to enforce the outlet's journalistic standard effectively resulted in the censorship of two students at risk of transnational repression.

University and college administrators also struggle to deal with foreign interference by Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs), which have been mentioned repeatedly in reports of transnational repression. As noted by the US Department of State, CSSAs are overseen by the Chinese Communist Party's United Front Work Department, "a sprawling worldwide network of party loyalists whose purpose is to influence local elites and community leaders." The CSSAs, which receive funding and guidance from Chinese diplomats, not only monitor international students, but also mobilize them to take action against individuals and events who voice criticism of China's domestic policies.³⁵ In the past, CSSAs have opposed university invitations to the Dalai Lama and to the Hong Kong activist Nathan Law.³⁶ In two cases, CSSAs have been suspended on campuses: in 2019, the student government of Canada's McMaster University banned the association after members disrupted a speech by a Uyghur activist by filming and shouting at her,³⁷ while Columbia University briefly disbanded the association in 2015 for unnamed violations of "financial and student organizational policies."³⁸ While CSSAs are common on North American campuses and can serve as sources of support for Chinese international students, their close links with the Chinese government—the leading global perpetrator of transnational repression—requires attention from administrators.

By far the biggest weakness in existing campus responses to transnational repression is the absence of established reporting mechanisms accessible to students and faculty. Without such a mechanism, departments, faculties, and student services that may have little awareness of the phenomenon must handle cases on an ad hoc basis, without established processes for responding to victims or upholding the rights of the accused. This lack of infrastructure likely encourages self-censorship among those targeted by transnational repression on campuses.

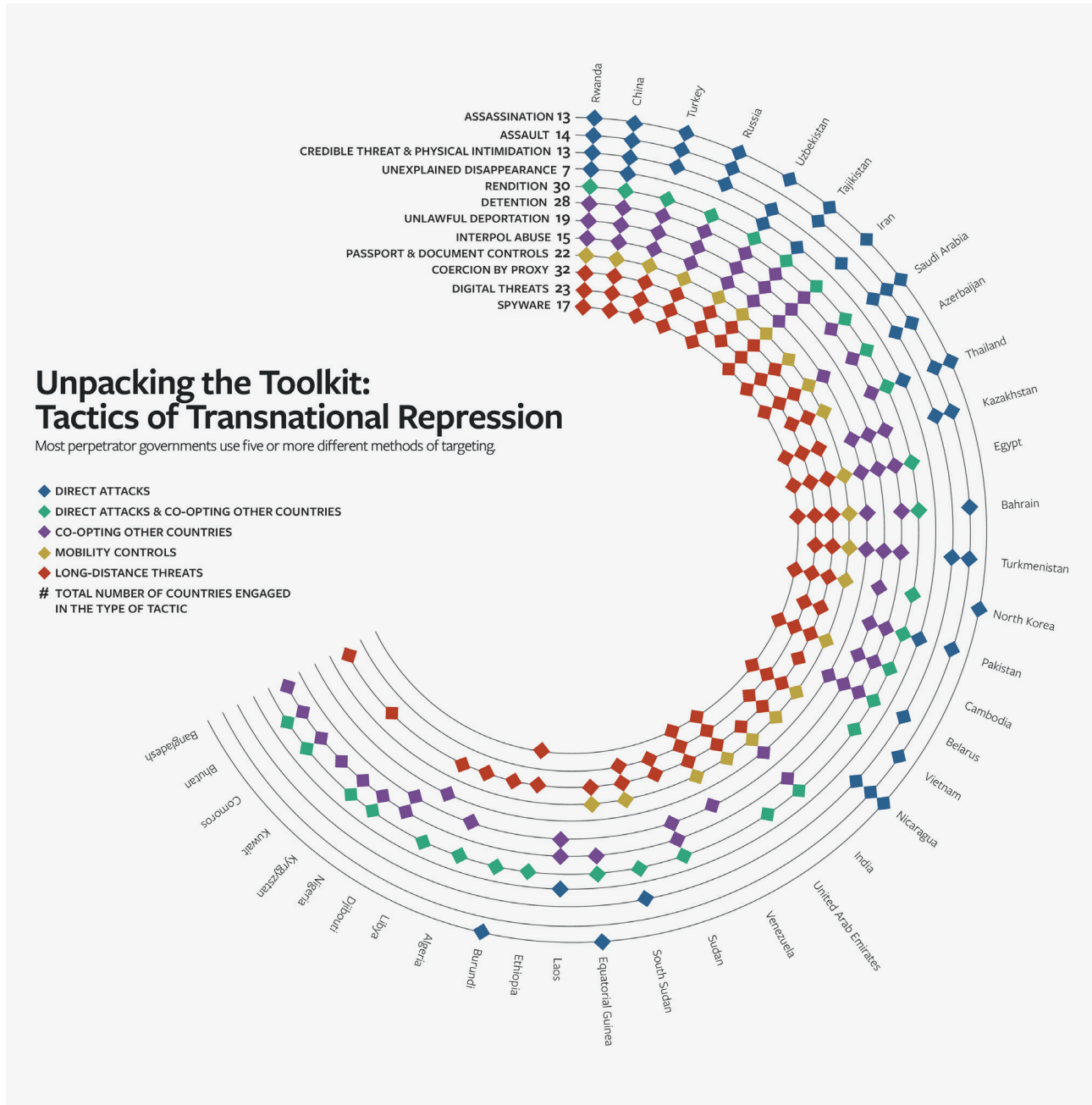
Some targeted international students and faculty may not feel comfortable reporting incidents even if they know how to do so. According to one independent researcher interviewed by Freedom House, a fear exists among many international students that relaying details about harassment may trigger unwanted attention from law enforcement agents or immigration officials.³⁹ For students wary of police based on experiences in their homeland, or uncertain of their rights in the United States, this may dissuade them from sharing information. Additionally, some may see the targeting

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Campus administrators have likewise had difficulty addressing physical incidents of transnational repression on campus. A student who was assaulted at a White Paper protest at Columbia University³² was offered mental health services by the university but, according to an interview with Freedom House, administrators declined their request to issue a campus safety alert that would have emphasized the university's intolerance for physical intimidation.³³ In extreme cases, universities have suspended faculty based on politically motivated charges leveled against them by the authorities of their origin countries. In 2009, Goucher College suspended Leopold Munyakazi, a French language professor from Rwanda, after a Rwandan prosecutor visited the university and alleged that Munyakazi helped perpetrate the 1994 Rwandan genocide.³⁴ Munyakazi was teaching at the college as part of a scholars-at-risk program and had fled Rwanda—a circumstance that did not seem to have been factored into the administrative response.

of students' family members back home as an issue that universities simply cannot fix or may believe that reporting will invite more pressure on their relatives.⁴⁰

To build better responses, it is crucial that administrators understand that transnational repression is a persistent, everyday threat that directly endangers specific individuals, and also undermines academic freedom and freedom of expression.



Shedding Light on the Problem: Civil Society Responses

Civil society organizations working on academic freedom have examined issues related to transnational repression on campuses and have designed tools to raise awareness and provide protection for affected individuals.⁴¹

Since 1999, the Scholars at Risk (SAR) network has defended academic freedom, including by relocating scholars to host institutions in safer countries through its Scholar Rescue Fund.⁴² SAR coordinators brief host institutions about issues that the relocated scholar may encounter while on campus: universities are advised to avoid publicly disclosing personal details about these scholars, to allow them to use a pseudonym in their email address, and to help reduce the level of interaction with scholars from the same origin country.⁴³ These precautions do not eliminate the threat of transnational repression, but they do help mitigate risk and raise awareness. SAR is part of a larger network of universities and organizations supporting academy-in-exile programs that are beginning to address transnational repression as part of their security protocols.⁴⁴

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has created a 12-point Code of Conduct for universities to respond to CCP attacks on academic freedom, informed by interviews with academics from China working at institutions in Australia, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States.⁴⁶ The code recommends among other things that universities publicly defend and adopt policies to strengthen academic freedom, and record incidents that infringe on the rights of international students. This effort has significantly contributed to an understanding among civil society members of the threat posed by the government of China to students and academics. The focus on China is not without reason, as most international students in the US are from China and the CCP uses the sophisticated United Front Work Department to monitor its citizens on campuses around the world. According to the Wilson Center, the Chinese government's campaign to influence higher education in America is distinct from those of other authoritarian governments due to "its scale and its geopolitical ambitions."⁴⁷

However, other governments also actively pressure and harass students on campus. Researchers at the Freedom Initiative have documented how Saudi and Egyptian diplomats and security agents have closely surveilled Saudi and Egyptian students on campuses and at academic conferences. Scholars have produced similar research on Kazakhstan's program for students studying abroad, and have expressed growing concerns about India's influence on academic work that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) finds objectionable.⁴⁸ Freedom House spoke to academics from Turkey who have faced pressure from the Turkish government over attempts to organize events on US campuses.

Moving forward, civil society efforts should specifically reserve a portion of their resources for at-risk scholars and international students targeted by transnational repression, continue widening the scope of research beyond the role of Chinese authorities, and expand on existing recommendations and tools to offer comprehensive strategies for protecting members of the campus community from threats and intimidation from authorities in repressive home countries.

The focus on China is not without reason, as most international students in the US are from China and the CCP uses the sophisticated United Front Work Department to monitor its citizens on campuses around the world.

The threat posed by transnational repression has also been included in digital hygiene and data-security training offered to scholars. In September 2023, the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab led a digital security tutorial organized by the Academics in Solidarity Network, a transnational program connecting at-risk scholars with security experts.⁴⁵

A Divided Focus: US Government Responses

Over the last three years, the US government has adopted a number of policies designed to address the threat of transnational repression. These include awareness-raising programs by the FBI,⁴⁹ engagement with vulnerable diasporas by the Department of Homeland Security,⁵⁰ a report and recommendations compiled by the Government Accountability Office,⁵¹ as well as sanctions and visa bans overseen by the Department of State.⁵² The Department of Justice⁵³ and FBI have launched a number of investigations and prosecutions in response to reported cases.

However, efforts to address the threat posed by foreign governments specifically on campuses have been fairly limited and focused almost solely on the role of Chinese authorities. Additionally, the prevalent practice of viewing transnational repression as a national security issue runs the risk that victims themselves may be viewed with suspicion or otherwise marginalized, rather than seen as vulnerable individuals in need of assistance.

The two most prominent government-led campaigns with components addressing foreign interference on US campuses were the Department of Justice’s China Initiative, which has since been shuttered, and government efforts to close Confucius Institutes. The China Initiative, which was announced in 2018, aimed to combat economic espionage, unauthorized technology transfers, and intellectual property theft. The effort, however, was widely criticized for stoking suspicion of Asian American scholars and contributing to a climate of fear among academics with legitimate working ties to Chinese institutions.⁵⁴ The initiative produced very few successful prosecutions and was ended in 2022. Freedom House learned through interviews that FBI involvement in the China Initiative, which included agents speaking on campuses about the proper way to report foreign ties, made international students more wary of contacting law enforcement to report transnational repression threats.

Confucius Institutes were first opened in 2004 and spread across 160 countries with the aim of improving China’s international reputation by showcasing its culture and language. The Institutes offer language instruction and organize cultural events in partnership with educational institutions around the world. Like the education system

in China, Confucius Institutes are supervised by the CCP and do not embrace academic freedom or freedom of expression for staff or students. In a recent report, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine noted that the institutes and the presence of faculty and staff appointed by a foreign government on US campuses may make students feel intimidated or uncomfortable engaging on topics that the foreign government finds inappropriate, and that the Institutes may disseminate propaganda.⁵⁵ Both issues can contribute to transnational repression by discouraging students from participating in prodemocracy events and from reporting incidents.

By the end of 2022, there were only 6 Confucius Institutes left in the United States, down from a peak of 118 in 2017.⁵⁶ This was largely due to the Department of Defense restricting funding for Chinese-language instruction to education institutions that hosted Confucius Institutes, and designating institutes a “foreign mission” of the Chinese government.

Much of the attention from policymakers that transnational repression has received can be explained by the serious national security issues it touches on. Targeting of individuals by foreign governments, often those that are adversarial to their North American and European counterparts, can undermine a state’s authority and sovereignty. Framing the issue as one that falls entirely within the scope of national security overlooks the human rights dimensions of the problem and risks stigmatizing targeted individuals, including by encouraging racism and xenophobia. This point was made

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repeatedly by witnesses at recent congressional hearings on the topic of foreign influence on US campuses.⁵⁷

University and college administrators should prioritize academic freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of association for members of the campus community in their policies aimed at guarding against transnational repression. Moreover, they can learn from the shortcomings of existing responses: for example, they should avoid creating processes or policies that portray targets of transnational repression as

threats to national security. International responses can also help to calibrate policy. Guidelines created by the University Foreign Interference Taskforce in Australia, for example, helpfully distinguish between foreign influence (open and transparent activities by governments that are a normal aspect of international relations and diplomacy) and foreign interference (activities that are clandestine or coercive and erode sovereignty or national security), and suggest recommendations that aim to protect individuals while maintaining the openness of the university system.⁵⁸

Recommendations for Addressing Transnational Repression on Campus

These recommendations are intended to help university and campus administrators respond to incidents of transnational repression while protecting academic freedom.



Adopt a standard definition and identify common tactics.

A definition of transnational repression can be used in trainings for staff, students, and faculty, and in informational materials to spread awareness of the issue. Because staff and faculty are often the first point of contact for affected international students, raising awareness among the community is crucially important to addressing the threat posed by foreign governments. Creating and disseminating best practices for classroom approaches to sensitive topics can help to create a safer campus environment and facilitate academic freedom.



Create a mechanism for reporting incidents.

A reporting mechanism would collect information about incidents of transnational repression on campus. The mechanism should not be linked automatically to the notification of law enforcement, and it should safeguard the rights of individuals accused of acting on behalf of a foreign government. Individuals who engage with the mechanism should be made aware of what to expect from the process. If appropriate, institutions should consider whether to assign responsibility for addressing transnational repression and overseeing a reporting mechanism to a specific office on campus.



Express solidarity with targeted students, scholars, and faculty.

Statements of support by universities and colleges should underscore their commitment to protecting academic freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of association.



Incorporate transnational repression into existing student and faculty codes of conduct.

Codes of conduct applicable to students, staff, and faculty should address transnational repression as a threat to academic freedom, a violation of the rights and freedoms available to everyone studying, teaching, and working in the United States, and incompatible with academic expectations set by the institution. It may be appropriate to include a module on transnational repression during orientation week for incoming students and during onboarding for new faculty members, especially those teaching social sciences and humanities.



Collaborate with academic associations and institutions to raise awareness and share best practices.

Higher education associations in the United States should bring together different university administrators to discuss experiences with transnational repression and share best practices. They can exchange information on successful responses and affirm support for international students, scholars, and faculty.

Endnotes

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