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Endangered Scholars Worldwide

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Endangered Scholars Worldwide

Attacks on higher education communities are occurring at an alarming rate worldwide, threatening the safety and well-being of scholars, students, and academic staff, as well as the autonomy of higher education institutions. While we continue to publish regular updates in *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, in response to a global increase in threats to academic freedom, Endangered Scholars Worldwide (ESW) has expanded its presence as an online publication under the auspices of the New University in Exile Consortium (www.newuniversityinexileconsortium.org), sharing frequent updates on news and developing cases in contribution to the Consortium's efforts to create a supportive intellectual community for threatened, exiled scholars.



For the most current information and ways in which you can be involved in our efforts to defend academic freedom and free expression, we invite you to visit our website www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net or follow us at x.com/ESWNEWSCHOOL.

If you are aware of a scholar or student whose case you believe we should investigate, please get in touch with us at esw@newschool.edu.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

Special Delivery

The 2025–26 academic year commenced in the context of the continued repression of academic freedom under authoritarian regimes as well as its intensification and spread in the self-proclaimed democratic

regimes around the world. While the most outrageous violations of academic freedom still occur under authoritarian regimes, academic freedom is also threatened in several countries whose regimes are commonly labeled “democratic.”

In Afghanistan, the Taliban has banned the usage of close to 700 books, deemed to be contrary to sharia law, in university education. According to *University World News*, the list of banned titles includes 140 books written by women, making this yet another measure implemented by the Taliban to restrict the presence of women in higher education. In addition to specific books, the teaching of entire subjects, such as human rights and women’s studies, have also been banned through recent decrees.

A two-day internet blackout in the end of September also significantly disrupted higher education, especially for women, who depend on online networks for their education because Taliban has prohibited them from attending institutions of learning beyond primary education. Although the Taliban government has claimed the blackout was due to maintenance work, critics, supported by leaked government statements, argue that the blackout was intentional and part of a wider effort toward preventing “immoral acts.” Furthermore, the government prohibited university students, most professors, and some administrative staff from bringing smartphones to school on the grounds that they “cause distraction.” These measures not only constitute parts of a system that denies women their most basic rights, described as “gender apartheid” by international human rights organizations, but they also deal a severe blow to what remains of higher education in Afghanistan.


Beyond expressly authoritarian regimes, academic freedom is also being undermined in countries purporting to uphold democratic principles. A recently published annual report by Scholars At Risk (SAR) notes that the 2024–25 academic year “saw the escalation of new illiberal policies, laws, and extralegal action targeting higher education in democratic contexts, particularly in the United States.” For instance,

in some categories that SAR uses to document violations of academic freedom, such as “loss of position,” “travel restrictions,” “disciplinary actions against students for their expressive activity,” and “administrative actions, laws, and policymaking,” the United States, responsible for a significant portion of recorded incidents, is among the primary offenders.

The federal government continues to seek strict political control over American universities. In addition to using federal funding as leverage against top US universities, the administration sent a letter to nine universities on October 1, 2025, urging them to pledge support for President Donald Trump’s educational policy in return for favorable relations with the government over issues such as funding. The compact proposed in the letter would see universities adopt the government’s definition of gender and limit the admission of international students, among other changes.

Another set of controversies over freedom of speech stemmed from measures taken by some university administrations to comply with what the government claims to be efforts to “uproot antisemitism” on campuses. Recently, a controversial mandatory antisemitism bias training at Northwestern University, which, among other things, equates views of pro-Palestinian activists with those of David Duke, American neo-Nazi and former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, has prevented about 300 students, who refused to take it, from registering for classes. According to *The Nation* magazine, a Cornell University professor has retired after his classes were canceled and he was placed under investigation for discrimination after he reportedly asked an Israeli student, who was secretly recording class discussions, to drop his course on Gaza.

Allegations of “political violence” were recently deployed to attack freedom of speech following the assassination of the right-wing commentator Charlie Kirk on the Utah Valley University campus on September 10, 2025. According to *Inside Higher Ed*, following the assas-



sination dozens of faculty members nationwide have been put under investigation, placed on leave, or terminated for “inciting political violence” in their comments about Kirk’s politics. As of writing of this report, only two of them have been reinstated through court injunctions. At least two students have also been expelled for expressing their views after Kirk’s assassination.

Other self-proclaimed democratic regimes are also continuing attacks on higher education. In India’s South Asian University, a faculty member was fired in September 2025 after being suspended for two years for supporting student protests, which university administrators considered to be an “incitement” of students against the interests of the university. Professors in India, especially those critical of the government, are under increasing pressure. For example, at a recent event hosted by the Association of Indian Universities, the vice chancellor of Delhi University accused professors of indoctrinating students and “polluting their minds” with leftist ideologies. In Turkey, an MA student at Boğaziçi University was detained on September 8 and arrested the next day for criticizing the government’s crackdown on the opposition Republican People’s Party. More recently, on October 13, 2025, a Turkish academic was arrested for opening a poll on social media about the legitimacy of foreign interventions against dictatorship in response to the work of the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

ESW is deeply concerned about the intensification of attacks on higher education and academic freedom around the world. We condemn governmental attempts to exert political control over higher education institutions, efforts that further weaken the already precarious rights under authoritarian regimes and accelerate democratic backsliding in flawed democracies. We invite the global community to join our call.

Visit www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net for more information.