

# Harvard student deported over friends' social media posts

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US immigration officials turned away an international student accepted into Harvard University last week. Ismail B. Ajjawi, a 17-year-old Palestinian resident of Tyre, Lebanon, was deported just hours after he arrived at Boston's Logan International Airport. According to a written statement obtained by the *Harvard Crimson*, immigration officers questioned him for hours and searched through his cellphone and laptop. His visa was subsequently cancelled and Ajjawi was sent back to Lebanon.

Ajjawi wrote in his statement that he spent eight hours in the airport before being refused entry into the US. He was questioned by immigration officials along with other international students. After the other students were allowed to leave, Ajjawi said he was still questioned about his religion and religious practices at home.

The officer questioning Ajjawi asked him to unlock his phone and laptop, and left to search through them for about five hours. After the officer returned, Ajjawi was called into a separate room and grilled about social media posts his friends allegedly made.

"When I asked every time to have my phone back so I could tell them about the situation, the officer refused and told me to sit back in [my] position and not move at all," he said. "After the 5 hours ended, she called me into a room, and she started screaming at me. She said that she found people posting political points of view that oppose the US on my friends list."

Ajjawi replied that he had not made any of the posts himself and should not be held accountable for others' social media activity.

"I responded that I have no business with such posts and that I didn't like, share or comment on them and told her that I shouldn't be held responsible for what others post," he said. "I have no single post on my

timeline discussing politics."

Ajjawi's student visa was cancelled at the end of his interrogation. He was told he would be deported and was allowed to call his parents. Ajjawi is now in Lebanon and in contact with a lawyer and advocacy groups, hoping he will be allowed to enter the US before classes start on September 3.

The State Department declined to comment on Ajjawi's case, citing the confidential nature of visa records under US law. In an e-mail to the *Crimson*, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) spokesman Michael S. McCarthy wrote that CBP found Ajjawi "inadmissible" to the US.

"Applicants must demonstrate they are admissible into the U.S. by overcoming ALL grounds of inadmissibility including health-related grounds, criminality, security reasons, public charge, labor certification, illegal entrants and immigration violations, documentation requirements, and miscellaneous grounds," McCarthy wrote. "This individual was deemed inadmissible to the United States based on information discovered during the CBP inspection."

Ajjawi's deportation is a flagrant violation of democratic rights, linked to the Trump administration's war on immigrants. Ajjawi was deemed "inadmissible" for simply being friends with people critical of the United States. Beyond condemning Ajjawi for his "guilt by association," denying admission into the US because of a critical point of view conflicts with the First Amendment.

International students are increasingly becoming targets of xenophobia and virulent nationalism. In Australia, Chinese students have been branded as "useful idiots" of the Chinese regime after opposing protests that alleged that Beijing is taking over

Australian universities. Hysterical assertions that Australian institutions are being infiltrated by agencies serving the Chinese Communist Party, along with conflicts surrounding the ongoing Hong Kong protests, prompted the Australian government to create an intelligence task force responsible for combating “foreign influence” in universities.

In the US, academics and military officials are also calling for limitations on the influx of international students. The FBI, State Department and Department of Justice have ramped up efforts to vet Chinese students amid claims of “academic espionage.” Arguments claim students coming to the US to study sciences such as engineering, aeronautics, astronautics and quantum mechanics present a threat to national security.

The US government is already in the process of cracking down on international students. The House version of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act included a provision requiring the Department of Defense and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to develop a list of foreign entities that could conduct “research espionage.”



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