

11 national organizations condemn detention of Tufts University student op-ed writer

March 28, 2025

We, the undersigned 11 free speech and free press organizations, strongly condemn the detention of Tufts University Ph.D. student Rumeysa Ozturk by federal immigration authorities.

It has been widely suggested that Ms. Ozturk's arrest is in direct response to her opinion piece published in *The Tufts Daily*, the university's student newspaper. Such a basis for her detention would represent a blatant disregard for the principles of free speech and free press within the First Amendment, and we call on Tufts University officials, Massachusetts lawmakers and federal authorities to take immediate action to secure her release.

According to [The Tufts Daily](#), Ms. Ozturk — a Turkish national and graduate student at Tufts — was detained by ICE agents on March 25. Widely circulated video shows her being arrested by plain clothed federal agents, many of them masked. She is reportedly incarcerated at a facility in Louisiana.

More than a year ago, in March 2024, Ozturk co-authored an [opinion piece](#) in the student newspaper critical of the university's response to Israel's attacks on Palestinians in Gaza. A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson told the [Associated Press](#) that federal authorities detained Ms. Ozturk and revoked her visa after an investigation found she had "engaged in activities in support of Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization that relishes the killing of Americans." The only publicly known activity, however, was her op-ed.

Ozturk's attorney has said [she is not aware of any criminal charges](#) against Ozturk and when asked to detail the specific activities warranting the student's visa being revoked, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio would not do so. Meanwhile, a Tufts spokesperson has said Ozturk is a student "in good standing" and that her op-ed did not violate university policies on protests and expression.

While the op-ed is critical of the Israel-Gaza war, many Americans across the political spectrum, regardless of where they were born, are similarly critical. The authors say nothing in the op-ed remotely supportive of Hamas or terrorism. Instead, it focuses on their university's actions and calls upon its administration to engage with and listen to its students. This is precisely the type of speech that should be welcomed and protected at universities.

The opinion pages of student newspapers have a long tradition of open dialogue and debate on the important issues of our time. Student voices matter, and students must have the room to lawfully express themselves free from government interference. Rounding up a student for an article that she published is a clear attempt to chill speech and interfere with Ozturk's First Amendment protected speech.

This alarming incident echoes the Trump administration's unlawful targeting of student speech, most notably the [March 8 arrest](#) of Columbia University student Mahmoud Khalil for his peaceful protest and social media posts. Khalil's case marked the beginning of a dangerous pattern — using immigration enforcement to silence dissenting student voices, a tactic straight out of the playbook of authoritarian regimes. The U.S. must not follow the lead of authoritarian governments it has worked for decades to counteract by weaponizing visa status against criticism. When students face detention or deportation for lawful expression, it sends a chilling message to all that the price of dissent is exile.

Further, we note that these efforts may start with students, but it [likely will not end there](#). If the federal government can take these steps for an op-ed in a student newspaper, what will prevent it from doing so with journalists and others with whom it disagrees?

The First Amendment is an asset, not an inconvenience. Citizens and noncitizens alike are entitled to free speech. Institutions that value free speech rights don't seek out opportunities to disregard them. Student visas may be the lowest hanging fruit for now, but those who revoke visas of op-ed writers are sure to seize upon any legal theory that might permit them to punish others with whom they disagree.

Tufts University, as an institution committed to free inquiry, must urgently advocate for Ms. Ozturk's release. Academic freedom cannot thrive if students face deportation for participating in campus discourse, and there is nothing more central to the American tradition of free speech on campus than student commentary on America's participation in foreign wars. We urge President Sunil Kumar and the Tufts administration to:

1. Publicly demand ICE release Ms. Oz turk and clarify that her detention undermines the university's values.
2. Reaffirm protections for international students' free speech rights.

Doing so will set an example to other universities in the United States questioning whether to stand up for their students under attack from the administration. It will place Tufts on the right side of history — a status that will benefit the university long after the current political moment passes.

Furthermore, we applaud [statements](#) denouncing Ms. Ozturk's detention and call on Massachusetts Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey, as well as Representatives Ayanna Pressley and Katherine Clark, to intervene with ICE and the Department of Homeland Security to effect Ms. Ozturk's immediate release.

We stand with Ms. Ozturk, *The Tufts Daily* and all student journalists and student contributors who face intimidation for their work. Journalism is not a crime. Criticism is not a crime. We

expect those at Tufts and in Congress who believe in free speech to do what's right. Now is the time.

Sincerely,

Student Press Law Center
Freedom of the Press Foundation
PEN America
New England First Amendment Coalition
National Press Photographers Association
Society of Professional Journalists
Associated Collegiate Press
National Scholastic Press Association
Quill and Scroll
College Media Association
Journalism Education Association