



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on March 7, 2025

State Department Rolls Out AI to Track Online Activity, Revoke Student Visas

The State Department has launched an AI-powered program to revoke student visas based on social media activity. This follows President Donald Trump's [recent threats](#) to deport foreign students for engaging in "illegal protests" — a term applied to pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

This development represents a drastic expansion of AI-driven political policing in the United States. The system, reminiscent of China's social-credit model, raises urgent concerns about its future scope and the precedent it sets. What begins as a tool for scrutinizing visa holders could quickly extend beyond foreign students, evolving into a powerful instrument of surveillance capable of monitoring, blacklisting, and punishing American citizens for their political speech, online activity, or participation in protests.



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Once AI-driven monitoring is normalized, its potential for weaponization becomes undeniable. The very mechanisms designed to target noncitizens today could just as easily be turned against journalists, activists, and dissenting voices tomorrow.

“Catch and Revoke”

According to an [Axios report](#), Secretary of State Marco Rubio is implementing an AI-powered “Catch and Revoke” program. It will scan the social media accounts of tens of thousands of foreign student visa holders. Per Axios:

The reviews of social media accounts are particularly looking for evidence of alleged terrorist sympathies expressed after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, officials say.

If the system deems a post suspicious — or, as Axios put it, believes it “*appears*” to support Hamas — the State Department may revoke the student's visa. (Notably, as [reported](#) by *The New American*, the narrative surrounding the October 7 Hamas attack as an isolated act of brutality is now rapidly crumbling, implicating the Israeli government itself.)

Officials also plan to examine internal databases. They will check whether any visa holders were arrested but remained in the country during the Biden administration. Additionally, authorities are reviewing news reports of “anti-Israel” demonstrations and analyzing lawsuits from Jewish students that allege foreign nationals engaged in “antisemitic” activity without consequences.



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The State Department is coordinating with the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in what one senior State official described as a “whole of government and whole of authority approach,” per Axios.

Unanswered Questions

Despite its sweeping implications, the State Department has yet not provided clear answers regarding how the AI-powered visa revocation system functions, raising serious concerns about due process, transparency, and potential abuses of power. Among the many unanswered questions:

What specific criteria trigger visa revocation? Is it merely expressing pro-Palestinian views, or does the AI system require explicit endorsement of violence? The government has not disclosed its classification system.

Will visa holders be given a chance to contest their revocation? As of now, officials have provided no indication that they will warn affected students or allow them to appeal decisions.

How does the AI determine intent? Social media posts often lack context — will the system wrongly penalize sarcasm, reposted news articles, or academic discussions?

What safeguards exist against bias? AI surveillance tools have a history of disproportionately targeting minority groups. How will the system ensure fair enforcement?

Can U.S. citizens be flagged? If a citizen interacts with or shares flagged content, will they be placed under surveillance?

Will this technology expand beyond foreign students? Considering the broad government crackdown on “antisemitism,” does the administration plan to extend AI monitoring beyond students to include university staff, administrators, or organizations involved in pro-Palestinian activities?

A Dangerous Expansion of Government Power

Even if the government were to provide answers to these questions, the mere existence of such a sweeping AI surveillance system is a direct path to government overreach. Historically, once the government establishes an infrastructure for surveillance and policing, it rarely keeps it limited in scope. Such a system:

Creates a precedent for future expansions. Today, it’s foreign students — tomorrow, it could be U.S. citizens, journalists, activists, or opposition voices.

Turns political speech into a punishable offense. If AI can determine who holds “undesirable” views, the government can systematically silence dissent through visa cancellations, surveillance, and blacklisting.

Enables cross-agency coordination for mass monitoring. The “whole of government and whole of authority” approach suggests a broad collaboration between multiple agencies, raising concerns about how far-reaching this surveillance effort could become. The involvement of the State Department, DOJ, and DHS signals the potential for a much larger surveillance apparatus, with implications beyond visa holders.

Does not make clear what role due process will play. A major concern is who will decide who can remain in the country. Opaque algorithms with no meaningful oversight may make these decisions, instead of judges or legal experts.



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If AI becomes the sole or primary decision-maker, individuals could lose their visas unfairly. They may have little recourse to challenge wrongful revocations.

Without transparency, accountability, and safeguards, this system is more than just visa screening. It sets a new norm for AI-driven political control, with no clear limits on whom it can target next.

AI Surveillance in America: A Broader Trend

The AI-driven monitoring of foreign visa holders is not an isolated development. It is a part of a broader expansion of government surveillance.

The U.S. government has increasingly outsourced its surveillance operations to private technology firms. These companies operate with minimal public oversight.

For instance, Palantir, co-founded by Peter Thiel, has become a key player in this ecosystem. Thiel, a known business associate of Elon Musk and a major donor to Donald Trump, has helped position Palantir as an essential tool for law enforcement and intelligence agencies. The company develops AI-powered data analysis tools, enhancing the government's ability to track, categorize, and monitor individuals.

Originally backed by the CIA's venture arm, Palantir has built systems capable of tracking individuals based on their online activity, financial transactions, and personal networks. Federal agencies such as the FBI, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Health and Human Services (HHS) have used Palantir's technology to monitor immigrants, compile activist watchlists, and even [track journalists](#).

During the Covid pandemic, Palantir expanded its reach further. The company [gained access](#) to vast amounts of American healthcare data through contracts with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HHS, and state governments. While officials presented these initiatives as public health measures, they set a precedent for AI-driven mass data collection on American citizens.

With the new State Department AI visa revocation system, alarm over AI-driven monitoring expanding beyond foreign nationals is growing. The infrastructure for automated political policing already exists. If repurposed, AI surveillance could monitor, flag, and penalize anyone, suggesting a future where no individual is beyond the system's reach.

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