

## **International Students' Experiences with Changing Policy: A Qualitative Study from Middle Tennessee**

Phattra Marbang

*University of Georgia, USA*

Ashleigh E. McKinzie

Jackie Eller

Ida F. Leggett

*Middle Tennessee State University, USA*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

*This qualitative study utilizes seventeen F-1 international students' experiences in the U.S. Specifically, we examine the aspects of immigration regulations and policies regarding F-1 international students and the students' reactions to those policies—from becoming a legal alien, to maintaining lawful status, to job planning after graduation. This research suggests the current United States administration has created a moral panic over immigration, or the threat of immigration. As a result, this political rhetoric creates negative emotions for F-1 international students and impacts their decision-making after graduation.*

**Keywords:** culture of fear, immigration policy, moral panic, political rhetoric, student visa

---

## INTRODUCTION

International students tend to be drawn to host countries that demonstrate a “welcoming nature.” However, in recent years the immigration policy trends of host countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States have shifted significantly to slow down international student enrollment in the face of the economic challenges of an aging population, a decline in fertility, and the internal migration of the local population (Akbari & MacDonald, 2014). This agenda has led many host countries like Australia and New Zealand to toughen policies on obtaining permanent residence status. All of these policies contributed to a decline in international students from India and China in some host countries in 2004–07 (Akbari & MacDonald, 2014). Likewise, as the U.S. and U.K. move forward with protectionist political agendas, they may increase the constraints posed on current and prospective international students (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018).

The current U.S. administration has implemented changes in their policy that create the impression of the U.S. as an unwelcoming place to study abroad (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017), such as cuts to scholarship programs in some countries (i.e. Saudi Arabia and Brazil), increasing difficulties in obtaining a U.S. visa (Elturki et al., 2019), limiting work opportunities (Choudaha, 2018), and decreasing Optional Practical Training (OPT) opportunities (Institute of International Education, 2019). Moreover, the current political climate and changes in U.S. policies after the 2016 election have deterred international students from choosing to study in the U.S. As a result, the United States experienced the slowest growth rate of international student enrollment in school year (SY) 2016 - 17 since 2009 - 10 (Zong & Batalova, 2018).

In 2017, President Trump instituted a “Muslim Ban,” which continues the trend of fear of “foreign others” in the current American context (Johnson, 2018). Research shows that the travel ban has affected international doctoral students from the banned countries who are residing in the U.S. in material, practical and emotional ways, and the “Muslim Ban” has also alarmed students from other countries. Many international students from countries that were not on the banned list changed their travel plans such as going to conferences or postponing their visits home. After the ban, international students feared that the immigration rules might suddenly change and affect their visa status (Tadoran & Peterson, 2019). Visa policy changes are significant for immigrants because it reflects changes in the processes governments use to select immigrants (Demirci, 2019) and filter skilled migrants (Grimm, 2019).

We examine how national discourse and the resultant moral panics affects F-1 students at the micro level in terms of every-day interactions and emotions that F-1 students experience, particularly during this significant moment and proposed political change. In this paper, we argue that the changes in U.S. regulations relating to immigration and student and/or work visas constrict international students' lives such as obtaining a student visa, maintaining legal status, and planning for their trajectories after graduation. These unpredictable and swift changes in policies—that are already strict and rigidly controlled—shape what current international students can or cannot do during their statuses, such as attending all their classes, getting a driver's license, and employment regulations, both during study and postgraduation. Thus, these changes in policy or regulation may cause international students to rethink their lives due to their precarious legal status, which often results in anxiety, fear, and turmoil over an uncertain life and future.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This paper examines U.S. rhetoric about immigration using the concept of moral panics. We are interested in how rhetoric and moral panics influence F-1 international students' attitudes toward maintaining legal status, their everyday experiences, and their emotions toward proposed changing policy about immigration, in general, and F-1 international students, in particular. An F-1 student visa is a temporary/nonimmigrant visa available to people who enroll in a U.S. academic institution, including a language training program (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Our research demonstrates how power imbalances are experienced by F-1 students, and we pay particular attention to students' English proficiency and countries of origin. We also discuss how these students perceive they are categorized by their race/ethnicity, and what assumptions others make about their legal status. Ultimately, this research asserts that existing literature on international students does not provide an understanding of how international students are racialized during times of heightened political rhetoric, particularly rhetoric about "foreign" racial others.

We studied only international students who hold an "F-1" visas since J-1 and M-1 visas do not have the same pathway after graduation as F-1 visas (U.S. Department of State, 2018). We pay specific attention to the last stage of being an F-1 visa student, which is the transition to the job market after graduation (for those who desire to work or have an internship in the United States). For F-1 visa holders, applying for - and receiving - the Optional Practical Training (OPT) or H1-B visa allows them to be in the U.S. with documented status (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018d). This

status provides them the opportunity to legally participate in the U.S. labor market (Demirci, 2019) and transition to permanent resident status (Grimm, 2019).

The post-graduation stage is the focus of this research due to current political discussions on immigration. The current political climate seems to harmfully portray immigration as a whole, and Androff and Tavassoli (2012) suggest that the criminalization of undocumented people contributes to discrimination that affects all immigrant communities in the United States. In order to understand why U.S. society fears immigrants, not only undocumented but documented as well, it is important to consider common rhetoric about them. This rhetoric is often fueled by media that contributes to a “culture of fear” and demands action against these groups through policy (Altheide, 2009). The resulting policy engenders fear, anxiety, and concern for many immigrants and consequently, immigrants with legal status frequently feel unwelcomed.

For F-1 students, in particular, the following headlines from both governmental and public sources undoubtedly produce undesirable feelings for international students leading them to feel unwelcomed: “USCIS Strengthens Protections to Combat H-1B Abuses” (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018c), “Buy American, Hire American: Putting American workers first” (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018a), and “H-1B Visa: an uncertain path after college” (Lerner, 2018). In addition, these types of media headlines lead to stress over whether students will have an opportunity to stay in the United States through the OPT and H-1B visa status. The changing regulations, both proposed and enacted, and consequently students’ feelings of precariousness lead us to our research questions:

1. How are international students’ life experiences (receiving and maintaining status) and life adjustments impacted by policy/regulations and political changes?
- 2a. How do international students perceive the current political rhetoric?
- 2b. If their perceptions are negative, what contributes to these perceptions?

In the next section, we introduce the theoretical framework—moral panics. We explore the political rhetoric that frames immigrant groups as a whole, and how this powerful narrative affects the F-1 international student.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We begin this section with a discussion of fear and the concept of moral panics to understand the United States' trepidation about immigrants and/or racial others, including the subgroup of F-1 international students, who come from various ethnicities and countries of origin. Then we discuss how this rhetoric affects students' emotions.

Fear is an emotion that is a crucial aspect of social reality. In this context, the United States' fear of immigrants is disseminated by various media. For example, the media implies that immigrants disturb every aspect of social life such as safety, jobs, health care, values, and language. Fear is meaningful within socio-historical contexts and contributes to secondary emotions like anxiety, hope, shame, and regret (Eller & Doherty, forthcoming). Altheide (2009) suggests that the “fear of” something creates consequences and concerns for social relations, and it is used for managing social control. For example, fear of crime and victimization in both local and global contexts penetrate broader social anxieties that lead to a moral panic (Cohen, [1972] 2002; Garland, 2008; Goode & Ben Yehuda, 1994).

Altheide (2009) suggests that various media use fear to construct the narrative of what we should be fearful of, which sometimes generates political engagement and action, which can then be used by governing bodies to enact policies. When we look at immigration, some immigrants are painted as “folk devils” who are powerless to change the perception of themselves in the face of public outrage. Immigrants have difficulty challenging these dominant narratives in American society. They supposedly adversely threaten the morals and norms in American culture (such as language and religion) as well as taking what actually “belongs” to Americans, such as jobs and social services (i.e., health care and education). Moral panics occurred after 9/11 and resulted in the Homeland Security Act. To give another example, after Micah Johnson shot and killed police officers in Dallas in 2016 which was part of the reasoning for the “Blue Lives Matter” act.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) illustrate that there are varying levels of motivations and theories that can illuminate the creation of a moral panic. The idea that moral panics are created by elites when aligned with elite's material interests is similar to the approach that we take in this paper. This is a classic Marxist approach, that elites are moral entrepreneurs defined as “movement activists who push for a given cause” (p. 154). However, as Goode and Ben Yehuda conceptualize, we too argue that middlemen, such as police officers and media journalists, internalize these moral panics. Thus, while politicians and leaders certainly influence (and sometimes create) moral panics, what is sociologically interesting is how the public disseminates or

reinvents moral panics, and, how in turn, these moral panics affect a population that is not necessarily the original target, but by proxy (as the racialized “other”).

Moral entrepreneurs, such as the media (including well-known journalists, talk-show hosts, etc.) are commonly crucial to the effectiveness of moral panics, and they “leave behind a diffuse feeling of anxiety about the situation” and “play on the normative concerns of the public and by thrusting certain moral directives into the universe of discourse, it [they] can create social problems suddenly and dramatically” (Cohen, [1972] 2002, p.10).

Indeed, online articles, newspapers, and television cable news, regularly frame immigrant groups as a threat to the United States by introducing and manipulating emotions such as fear, anxiety, and panic relating to particular groups (Altheide, 2009). Media trends of fear and immigrants are many: fear of terrorists (War on Terror), fear of criminals (War on Crime), and fear of a potential decline in the economic system (for instance the “Buy American Hire American” executive order). Research shows that the internet plays an important role in the creation and perpetuation of a cyber-moral panic against Latinx in the United States by using recycled information that is spread via anti-immigrant websites, blogs, forums, and other social media, which accelerates the moral panic process due to the ability to quickly spread information to those who have access to online technologies (Flores-Yeffal et al., 2011). Some U.S. media outlets target Latinx immigrants by arousing fear and anger, particularly in suggesting that they take jobs from working-class white Americans. Research shows that in turn, Latinx people experience racial profiling and harassment by law enforcement (Eversman & Bird, 2017).

The fear of immigrants, as we mentioned earlier, seems to tag nearly all immigrant groups as unworthy of membership (Longazel, 2012), even international students, though they hold legal status. These fears and concerns could influence citizens’ support for tougher immigration reforms. Fear and anxiety about immigrant groups are sometimes materialized in policy and law to control the immigrant groups—through rules and regulations—as well as citizens’ perceptions of immigrants. The resulting moral panics then negatively influence international students’ emotions. For instance, Pottie-Sherman (2018) points out that the President’s recent restrictive migration regime—symbolized by border walls, Travel Bans, and “Hire American” policies—creates new concerns for international students, the practitioners who advise them, and the institutions that rely on their tuition dollars. These concerns include, for example, unpredictability at border crossings, feeling

unwelcome in the U.S., concerns for physical safety on campus, and their ability to secure post-graduation work.

In sum, the U.S. government, and particular politicians, act as moral entrepreneurs who push narratives and laws that control immigrants, for example, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE was instituted in the U.S. in 2003 shortly after 9/11 (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2020a). It effectively and literally controls, and is responsible for, the deportation of immigrants (the folk devils) in vast numbers (e.g. 267,000 removals in 2019, see U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2020b). These regulations and practices also do ideological work, drawing and redrawing society's moral boundaries (Garland, 2008).

Finally, since international students come from many countries, the United States (and elsewhere) defines them by races/ethnicities and countries of origin, visa entries, as well as their religious beliefs. Lee (2018) suggests that immigration policy and resulting issuance of entry visas and selection of certain people and not others acts to stratify people. Immigrants from different countries of origin have various postmigration experiences. For example, Latinx people often seem to have more adverse experiences because they are negatively targeted by the U.S. administration. Such examples show that moral panics can be the result of institutional discrimination, they are racialized moral panics.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Nativist anxieties about immigration and immigrants have been studied widely, especially highlighting undocumented immigration. Some U.S. politicians and media outlets criminalize undocumented immigrants. A recent example is President Trump portraying Latinx immigrants as 'criminals' and 'rapists' during the 2016 presidential campaign (BBC News, 2016). This language is dangerous and influences micro-interactions, such as the embodiment of undesirable emotions (Flores-Yeffal et al., 2019). For instance, research shows that this political rhetoric led Latinx early adolescents to feel more unwelcomed and caused their daily stress to increase (Zeiders et al., 2020).

Interestingly, the impact of a moral panic on documented immigrants is understudied even though many international students also face racial prejudice and racially motivated violence (Pottie-Sherman, 2018). Similarly, Quinton (2019) finds that international students experience multiple components of prejudice: feeling as if they don't belong, negative intergroup interactions, being perceived as a threat, being the target of racialized

stereotypes, and subject to the whims of political ideology). We argue that these experiences undoubtedly result in feelings of precarity.

Research on international students in the U.S. has generally focused on topics such as: adjustment to language, cultural differences, and food (Alakaam et al., 2015; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Wang et al., 2017). Other research examines debates about the advantages (or as we discuss, ostensible disadvantages) of hiring international students (Amuedo-Dorantes & Furtado, 2019; Barta et al., 2018; Demirci, 2019; Lobnibe, 2009; Zong & Batalova, 2018). Some previous research investigates life after graduation due to different policies. However, these studies lack consideration of how those adjustments might be impacted by a host country that has a sordid history of racializing immigrants, the stress of maintaining a documented status, and students' reactions due to sudden proposed change and/or changing immigration policies.

Regarding student adjustment, many researchers show that international students struggle in their new environment socially, culturally and psychologically (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). In this first stage, international students often have difficulty adjusting in language ability (anxiety about speaking with American students, see Wang et al., 2017), food familiarity and dietary practice (Alakaam et al., 2015),

How do international students impact the United States? Many researchers suggest that international students provide positive aspects to the U.S. such as cultural diversity (Barta et al., 2018; Lobnibe, 2009) and economic. For example, they pay higher tuition fees than (in-state) students and international students contributed roughly \$39 billion to the U.S. economy in 2018 (Zong & Batalova, 2018). However, the United States' change of the H1-B cap made it significantly harder for immigrants to secure legal employment in the country (Amuedo-Dorantes & Furtado, 2019). For instance, Demirci (2019) shows these uncertainties about obtaining work visas hinder international STEM students' participation in the U.S. labor market and increases the likelihood of return migration.

Post-graduation is an important period for F-1 students to transition to the host country job market. These F-1 students not only need to know how they can seek jobs effectively, (developing their self-confidence, learning what a company requires, and establishing professional connections see Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Knouse et al., 1999; Perrone & Vickers, 2003), but they also need to effectively navigate immigration regulations and paperwork at the time of graduation because they must understand the complex and restrictive nature of U.S. immigration policies to make decisions about their future (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). For example, the 9/11 attacks

resulted in significant delays or denials of Muslim male students' visa applications (Urias & Yeakey, 2005). Germane to our study, Amuedo-Dorantes, Furtado, and Xu (2019) studied the impacts of a 2008 policy extending the OPT period for STEM graduates. They found that the OPT extension influenced international students' life decisions such as changing their major to a STEM field, non-STEM students deciding to double major in a STEM field, and to consider staying permanently.

Regardless of the tendency to focus on cultural and social adjustment, some recent research indicates that President Trump may bear some responsibility for the overall drop in America's attractiveness to potential international students, though there is evidence that this decline started prior to his election. In 2016, only 34 percent of institutions who participated in the Institute of International Education's "Hot Topics" survey reported that visa delays and denials were a reason for declining international student enrollment. In 2018, this jumped to 83 percent of institutions who participated in the same survey (Usher, 2019).

Not only do the written visa rules or regulations about immigration and immigrants affect international students' concerns about their lives, but President Trump's words and actions have also affected students' worries, especially when he commented that he would restrict talented legal immigrants, such as H1-B, J-1, and F-1 visa holders. Though previous research on how racist rhetoric impacts highly documented migrants (such as international students) is scarce, our findings—discussed below—align with this small number of previous research (Johnson, 2018; Tadoran & Peterson, 2019). The sudden change of rules also creates traveling uncertainties. Tadoran & Peterson (2019) argue that international students are afraid that their countries of origin might be suddenly added to the "banned" list.

In sum, policy practices seem to affect students in every stage while they are holding an F-1. Indeed, our findings shows that immigration policies directly affect international students' emotions, their ability to do certain things, and making decisions about their life trajectories.

## RESEARCH METHOD

In order to address the research questions, the first author interviewed seventeen international students from various fields of study and included both undergraduate and graduate students (see Table 1) Our sample includes diversity of various student experiences (such as country of origin and field of study). This variation influences their plans, desires, future job opportunities, and life course trajectories. due to students' political situation in their home countries and how that is perceived by the U.S. government.

The first author utilized face-to-face, qualitative, in-depth interviews. She first reached out to three participants through her connections. Then, she used snowball sampling from these participants which resulted in seven more students. She also attended the OPT workshop and asked the international student coordinator to send emails about her research to listservs of international students. The rest of the participants voluntarily replied via email. The interview data collection started in January and ended in April 2019.

The first author used a digital recorder during the interviews. The interviews were conducted in English, and all were conducted at the university library. After each interview, the first author wrote detailed fieldnotes that described how she felt during the interview, the context where the interview occurred, any body language that she observed, and other information that she deemed useful, for example, she paid close attention to students' negative feelings that arose during the interview. Every participant was given a pseudonym.

The first author transcribed data and then engaged in initial coding, endeavoring to take notice of any new themes or ideas that were emergent in the data. Then, she ascertained recurring themes and codes that were the most salient and engaged in a second round—focused coding. During the whole process, the first author also wrote analytic memos that helped her start to write the results of the analysis. The essence of students' experiences and the coping strategies that students use to regulate their plans after graduation was analyzed through statements, meanings, and themes (Creswell, 2013).

If students planned to find a job with OPT or H-1B, they provided an opportunity for the first author to be an insider as she shares a similar life path as a documented minority in the host country (Kusow, 2003). She examined participant's norms, practices, and thoughts because they were affected by the same policies/proposed policies as she is. Moreover, the first author's race, Asian, likely made her an insider with Asian international students, especially Thai students.

The first author and many of the participants had similar life experiences, that is, we are in the same boat. For instance, their education levels are similar and many times their social statuses are similar. Additionally, many participants experienced the same post-graduation fears as the first author due to the heightened rhetoric about immigration and international students. These similar life circumstances likely built trust and created a context for participants to share their insights in a way that they might not have if the first author was an outsider. We argue that this builds trust and seemed to provide opportunities for candid discussions.

**Table 1:**  
*Demographic Information*

Name	Nationality	Race/ Ethnicity	Country of Origin	Pursuing Degrees	F-1 Visa Issued
Nakanya (F)	Thai	Asian	Thailand	B.S. Aerospace	2016
Patara (M)	Thai	Asian	Thailand	M.S. Engineering Management	2017
Xiao Qi (F)	Chinese	Asian	China	M.S. Computer Information Systems	2015
Rakhi (F)	British	Asian	India	B.S. Computer Science	2015
Sierra (F)	Kenyan	Black	Kenya	M.A. Sociology	2018
Dave (M)	Gabon	African/ Black	Cameroon	B.S. Mechatronic Engineering	2016
Drew (M)	Bahamian	Black	The Bahamas	B.S. Aerospace	2016
Arya (M)	French	Middle Eastern	France	M.S. Aerospace	2016
Hoyan (F)	Malaysian	Asian/ Chinese	Malaysia	B.S. Audio production	2016
Sahba (F)	Iranian	Persian	Iran	B.S. Industrial Organization	2018
Rocky (M)	Nepalese	Asian	Nepal	M.S. Chemistry	2017
Carolin (F)	German	White	Germany	B.A. Political Science	2017
Maria (F)	Columbian	Hispanic	Columbia	M.A. International Affairs	2016, 2018
Traveler (M)	Saudi Arabian	Middle Eastern	Saudi Arabia	M.S. Aerospace	2016
Titi (F)	Nigerian	African/ Black	Nigeria	M.A. Finance	2018
Luis (M)	Venezuelan	Hispanic	Venezuela	M.S. Information Systems and Analytics	1998, 2002, 2018
Sara (F)	Venezuelan	Hispanic	Venezuela	B.S. Basic and Applied Sciences	2014, 2017

However, at the same time, she was also an outsider in other ways based on her race, gender, accent, and cultural differences. The degree of “outsiderness” or “insiderness” emerges through a process that links the researcher and the participants in a collaborative process of meaning-making in the particular moment in which the research takes place (Kusow, 2003). On the one hand, interviewing people with different characteristics such as language, culture, gender, and background could cause some difficulty during the interview (in terms of how to act in ways that are culturally appropriate and limit the ability to notice a significant body language while they were sharing their information). The first author had to consider these cultural differences, and she had to be reflexive about how she acted and spoke to participants because it could lead her to unintentionally misinterpreting or misunderstanding the results.

To end, this topic is worthy of study and appears to be especially important in the current context. It also sheds light on larger issues relating to the relationship between immigration policy and F-1 students as well as issues of immigration in the U.S. more broadly.

## FINDINGS

We present the demographic information table (Table 1) in order for readers to identify the background of each participant. We provide four sections starting with students’ life experiences of preparation to become an international student to plans after graduation. These sections allow us to explore ongoing experiences and emotions about their lives as F-1 students, as well as their reactions to political rhetoric. In other words, the following sections show how (changing) policy influences and impacts students’ lives.

### Becoming International Students

Before entering into the United States, a student usually has to be interviewed in English (though some do the interview in their own language), and they have to provide the visa application fee and required documents, such as the Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application (DS-160), an I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Students Status), and a bank statement for their F-1 visa.. The potential students also have to be prepared to answer questions about the school program, financial resources, and intentions to return to their home countries after finishing their degrees. The visa screening process is an important bureaucratic tool for filtering people and finding out if they have sufficient resources to study in the U.S. Most research participants seemed to express that the visa interview process was

“not too difficult.” However, some students were not confident in their English abilities, and this caused them to experience stress that their visa might be rejected. As Xiao Qi, a female Chinese student, admits:

[T]he most difficult part is like at that time … my English is not good. So, it’s hard for me to figure out the [DS-160] form . . . they’re all in English. So, that’s kind of hard, and I was afraid I would be refused by the embassy...

While English ability is not related to Trump-era policies, it is important to consider because the participants who experienced difficulty in obtaining a visa regarded these overall experiences as related to current rhetoric about immigrants, as we show below.

However, the failure of getting a visa was a frequently discussed topic. Sometimes participants guessed that it was because of the recent immigration policy: the Muslim ban. Carolin, a female German student, mentioned that “I think for me, [getting a visa] is easier because I’m German, but I feel like if you [are] another nationality, it could be more difficult. Just like my friend is from Baghdad, like Iraq.”

Additionally, political relationships and the perceptions the United States has toward Muslim countries seem to interrupt students’ lives, not only for themselves but for their families. Sabha, a female Iranian student, thinks that the current administration has made it more difficult to travel and receive U.S. embassy service. She knows that U.S. policy targets her country and explains that the visa process for getting an F-2 visa and changing from the F-2 to an F-1 was long and complicated because she is from “one of those countries.”

Sabha also mentions, “there is not any U.S. embassy in Iran. So, we had to go to Dubai. And yeah, we got our [F-1 and F-2] visas, the first visa in Dubai.” Moreover, it seemed to Sabha that it was almost impossible for her parents to obtain a visitor visa (B-2) to visit her in the U.S. because it is likely harder for people to prove their travel intentions (especially countries that are a part of the Muslim ban).

A damaging perception of Muslims not only allows some Americans to discriminate against them, but some non-Muslim students also seem to believe the stereotypes and limit their interaction with Muslim students. Rakhi, a female student from the United Kingdom whose family is Indian, agrees with the strict regulation on Muslim people because “they create so much trouble. Middle East people will come here, how 9/11 happened, [was] from [those] students. So, they have valid reasons to be worried.” Referring to rules and regulations that are based on protecting the U.S. from terrorism or preventing sham marriages (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services,

2018b). Rakhi also adds “because people have done that. The rule is based on it. So, it's because people try to cheat the system, which is why good people like us have to suffer. So, it's understandable...”

Other students, who were not from Muslim countries, also mentioned that their experiences were more difficult due to political tensions. Sara, a female Venezuelan student, suggested that getting a student visa in 2017 was more difficult than in 2014, “since [her] government has openly said that they don't support the U.S.” Maria also felt that getting a visa in 2018 was harder than in 2016 even though she was already familiar with the system. The political attitudes about non-white immigrants likely caused this undesirable assessment. She asserts, “I've heard from other people, even if you're student like, if you're going by yourself, it's like, kind of hard.”

One of the most important things, besides proof of financial assistance and intention to study at an academic institution, is that students must promise to return to their home countries after finishing the degree or course of study. That is, all international students have to sufficiently show that they plan to go back home.

The participants had varied visa interview experiences. We argue that this variation is connected to U.S. policy toward each country of origin, a student's country situation (i.e. Venezuela vs. Iran vs. German), and individual preparations (i.e. appropriate documents, their ease or difficulty in answering visa interview questions, and ability to give a good first impression). First of all, U.S. policy varies depending upon the country of origin and seems to define people from that country in generalized ways. By doing so, the U.S. policy overlooks the fact that students from a particular country are not a monolith. For example, Hoyan (a female Chinese Malaysian) student, is aware of the impact of the Muslim ban on her because her country is also considered a Muslim country, but she emphasizes that she is “not” Muslim. Carolin (a white female German student) recognizes the perceived superiority of her country of origin, which [she] contributes to the ease of getting her visa.

The second factor is a student's country's current and historical political situation and plays an important role in granting visas, such as being from a country like Venezuela which has also been sanctioned by the U.S. government in response to Venezuela's political and economic crisis under the leadership of Nicolás Maduro (Seelke, 2019). However, both Venezuelan participants, Luis and Sara were able to get their student visas in 2018 and 2017, respectively. Finally, a student's documents, preparedness for the interview, and their perception of whether or not they exuded a good first impression also seemed to play a critical role in obtaining a student visa.

## Maintaining Status

To maintain status there are general rules students must follow such as full-time university enrollment and regulations about international student employment. Most students in this research diligently follow the rules, but they expressed difficulty with the work restrictions, in particular that international students are usually only allowed to work on-campus jobs, and they are not supposed to work more than twenty hours per week (U.S. Department of State, 2018). At the time of this research, there were no additional or changing rules on F-1 work restrictions. However, it is important to know how participants regularly dealt with their living situations as well as their perceptions of these general rules. The anticipation of new regulations increased their feelings of fear and uncertainty. We argue that their daily living situation was already extremely controlled and regulated; however, moral panic about immigrants that is extended to international students makes these rules and regulations even more visceral and contributes to overall stress about policy changes.

Almost all student participants have on-campus jobs. Some students talk about “fairness” and suggest that international students should be allowed to work off-campus because a) the students pay taxes and are documented, and b) they desire to work off-campus for additional income, c) off-campus jobs seem easier to obtain. Maria (a female Columbian student) suggests:

...I don't think it's fair. I think you should be allowed [to work off campus]. As long as you can manage your hours, you know, your strengths and your weaknesses. You should be allowed to work. I mean, you're here legally, and you're incurring costs, so... and you're paying tax to the system. So, you should be allowed to make money too...but I don't wanna advise someone to work illegally, especially if you want to continue to stay here.

Moreover, there are three important documents that every international student has to obtain and must prove are valid. They are a passport, visa, and an I-20 (which includes student information, school instructions, and financial information). These three documents have different expiration dates. The passport works as an identification of a person and normally lasts for five years. Likewise, a student visa is often good for five years, but an I-20 depends on when the program of study ends.

Even though a student still might have some time left on their visa, it can be terminated if the I-20 expires, which means a student is no longer legally attending any school or continuing under any *other* documented statuses. In the other words, the different timeframes of these three documents

may cause an international student to be at risk for falling into an undocumented status, especially if they are from a country that is in conflict with the United States. For example, Luis, from Venezuela, admits that he is concerned. He applied for an extension of his passport in 2018 because it was going to expire in June 2019. He had not heard back from his country, and his visa lasts until 2023. Moreover, he is likewise worried about a valid document from his country due to the closing down of “all Venezuelan embassies in the US.” He states:

Yeah, so my worry more than the visa itself is more my country's document. And what will happen with my situation if my country's document does not get a [renewed one]. More than the visa itself right now...But then what? What if I want to continue OPT, or I want to get an internship or even a job and when they asked me for a valid document from my country that has not been given to me by my country, that's when I work.

We suggest this is perhaps why documented immigrants from Latin America are particularly worried about maintaining status, especially students from countries that are in conflict with the U.S. First, people may perceive them as being in the United States without proper documentation. Second, they worry about their future due to experiencing precarity that stems from their country of origin.

## **Experiences of Fear**

In this section, we explore students’ emotions that result from the moral panic over immigration. The most memorable discussions that the first author had with participants were about the Muslim ban, the restriction on undocumented immigrants, and the consequences of building the border wall between Mexico and the U.S. (we found the latter to be the case even with students who did not pay attention to the immigration topic).

A source of these undesirable feelings comes from social media, online news, and conversations with other people. We give the following experiences to be an example of concern and uncertainty that international students experience. Arya, a male student from France whose family is from the Middle East stated “Last news I've heard from my friend is that the students cannot get a green card here. I don't know if it's true though. If you're on an F-1 student, you cannot get a green card.”

Even though F-1 students strictly maintain their documented status and respect the laws and regulations, a negative perception of undocumented immigrants seems to cause some people to perceive international students as “folk devils.” This also results in international students differentiating

themselves from undocumented people. Moreover, they explicitly recommended that international students follow all the rules, as to *not* lose documented status. Rocky (a male Nepalese student) says “I just don’t suggest com[ing] illegally, to come here as a student and do illegal things. I d[on’t] ... suggest people do that. Because it affects other, other legal people.” Luis (a male Venezuelan student) also raises an important question, “why would somebody decide to come here illegally or to go anywhere illegally? Knowing that through legal means, anything is possible and better?” Similarly, Maria (a female Columbian student) is serious about keeping her documented status and would be devastated if she were to lose it. For example, there was a time when she was waiting for the OPT response and her current documents almost became invalid. She said, “like you have been here illegally?” And that freaked me out so much! So, I was like, Oh, my God, I don’t know what to do.” She also seemed offended when “Somebody asked me if I was a Dreamer.” She feels pity for them and says:

What Trump did is that he wanted to repeal all this, and he wanted Congress to figure out the situation because their status was actually coming to an end during the Trump administration. And Trump said that he was going to kick out all the dreamers, which all these kids that don't know anything else. You're like, “Yeah, I was barely born. I don't know, [from] Mexico? but I've been here since I was one [years-old].”

Students mentioned undesirable emotions about the administration and the President several times in terms of making their lives harder and tougher. For example, the first author asked Sara (a female Venezuelan student) to compare the experiences of her 2014 and 2017 visa interviews. She asserts that “I think it's gotten harder.” People often show their unfavorable opinions. Sierra (a female Kenyan student) experienced this and she gives an example that “they say you are a thief.” Carolin (a female German student) is also scared of finding a job after she graduates because she thinks the President puts restrictions on everything. She indicates:

[L]ike since Trump was [sic] in office... I just heard that it's super hard to get into that. And even working after, after you graduate is like, it's kind of like a lottery. Not a lot of people get it. And my friend, she graduated last year when she was from England, and she tried to stay here and find a job. But she has to go back to England now because she can't find a job... So, it's just super hard to get into that and then keep it and I don't know. That's what kind of scares me that I rather go back to Europe and go to university.

In sum, fear of the current American agenda seems to cause students to feel unwelcomed and like they do not belong because international students are separated as the “other” or even limited in terms of sharing opinions about a particular topic. The role of the media is also important to consider. The media constructs what and/or whom we should fear (Altheide, 2009). In this case, it contributes to students’ concerns about their future in the United States. Students receive the information and are often concerned about their pathway to stay in the United States because of the rhetoric around immigration. Significantly, it does not matter if a restriction may or may not be true, it often impacts many international students’ emotions regardless. Xiao Qi, a female Chinese student, also receives news from a Chinese channel and says:

They said Trump is gonna have a new policy about people who have working visa. The H1-B right? If you wanna apply for green card and something about that. Before, if your working visa expires...Even [if] it expired, you can still stay here to wait for your green card. But, he (the president) is gonna cancel that policy, especially Chinese people and Indian cause they have a really long line.

## Plans After Graduation

International students who desire to find an internship or a job after graduation seem to be significantly impacted by the political rhetoric concerning if they will have a pathway to stay in the U.S. This policy, Buy American, Hire American, could serve as a guideline and agenda for U.S. companies to hire Americans over international students. Seeking a job in the U.S. seems to be a huge challenge for international students, and the participants experience that obtaining a job in the U.S. after graduation is more difficult. This is because getting a job in the U.S. includes many hardships and limitations including language proficiency, paperwork, and sponsorship. Titi (a female Nigerian student) had been looking for a job since September 2018 and the situation as she states “is still the same. I feel like it’s getting worse every time because I guess it’s closer to graduation. I need a job, real quick.” Many students have tried and could not find a job. For example, Nakanya (a female Thai aviation student) asked the airlines, and none of them hire non-U.S. residents. She mentions “I talk [to] a lot of airlines, but then they don’t really know what OPT is. They don’t know how it works. They don’t think that their company will accept the OPT student to work with them.”

We argue that the nativist tone of immigration policy and regulations relating to the F-1 visa creates a power imbalance. Many international

students have few resources to negotiate their life situations. Students (from both countries that are banned and those that are not) feared that this political climate regarding H-1B proposed change might affect their chances of getting hired after graduation. They worried that employers might be reluctant to sponsor their H1-B visas due to the “Buy American Hire American” executive order (Tadoran & Peterson, 2019).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

When F-1 international students leave their homes and come to the U.S., they are expected to live under a different set of rules. The U.S. prevents F-1 students from participating in American society and the economy at the same level as its citizens, such as not being allowed to work off-campus and granting a work permit through the OPT program or H1-B visa.

At the macro level, immigration policy seems to portray immigrants overall including international students as a “threat” to American society. At the same time, at the micro level, it creates and draws the line between citizens who the U.S. protects and non-citizens who are likely to be eliminated through limiting pathways to stay which leads to deportation.

We suggest that immigration policy is an important aspect for students to consider during the adjustment period, in addition to language, food, and culture (Alakaam et al., 2015; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Wang et al., 2017). Moreover, immigration policy has an impact on students’ ability to find an internship and/or job. Finding a job effectively not only depends on students’ characteristics, connections, and qualifications (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Knouse et al., 1999; Perrone & Vickers, 2003), but is also based on the limits of a student’s legal status. For example, Nakanya (a female Thai aviation student) mentioned that the airlines do not know about the OPT and are less likely to hire non-U.S. citizens. Rakhi (a female Indian student) has spent countless hours researching her options. Therefore, in order to succeed in their pathway to stay after graduation, international students need to research their choices and job opportunities intensely, which may or may not lead to a pathway to stay.

Students experience the immigration rhetoric in several ways, such as interactions with U.S. bureaucracies, friends, and the media: both the news and social media. U.S. policy and politician’s rhetoric about immigration in general (and also specifically relating to this group) leads to negative feelings among students (Johnson, 2018). The effect of the undesirable perceptions about immigration is obvious when the President, as a moral entrepreneur, openly states that particular people are not welcome and are talked about as racial others or folk devils. He speaks for the American agenda at the national

level in order to raise public attention about immigration. His policies, both proposed and enacted, could allow Americans to think it is acceptable to discriminate against immigrants, as well as let immigrants as a whole know that they are a part of the problem and not welcome. For example, even though Sierra (a female Kenyan student) does not think of herself as part of a target group she does feel that the political rhetoric affects her. She says, “I mean, it affects everyone [even] if you are not part of it. But you feel it because you are an immigrant.”

Scholars credit mass media with promoting moral panics and contributing to exaggerated public fears that support social control efforts and public policy changes (Altheide, 2009). We give two examples of significant policies: the “Buy American Hire American Executive Order” and the “Muslim ban.” The first, an executive order, appeals to nativist anxieties about skilled migrants as job stealers who threaten the “economic interests” of American workers (Pottie-Sherman, 2018). Many international students face the prejudice and violence accompanying media rhetoric about immigration as well as some H1-B applicants who had been told by employers that “it may not be a right time for employer to hire an immigrant or an international student” (Pottie-Sherman, 2018).

Interestingly, adverse emotions resulting from the decrease in job opportunities for international students after they graduate and feeling that they are unwelcome was the impetus for some of the participants to recommend studying abroad elsewhere. For example, Drew (a male Bahamian student) says, “...I advise people ‘don’t just look at the United States.’” Similarly, Arya (a male French Middle Eastern student) states “it’s not about ‘I recommend yes or no,’ I would just say that ‘it depends.’ And but I would say that [I] do not have a high expectation from [the] U.S. anymore. Because this US is very different [compared] to U.S. 10 years ago, or 20 years ago...Yeah, I would rather go to Canada.”

In terms of the Muslim bans, even non-Muslim students in this research feel their Muslim friends face more challenges in getting visas and are less welcome than non-Muslims. Research conducted at two Texas institutions finds that from Fall 2016 to Fall 2018, international graduate applicants from non-Muslim-majority countries declined 18.36%. Over this same time period, applicants from Muslim-majority countries declined 33.37%. Most notably, applicants from the seven countries targeted in the travel ban declined 53.93% (Van De Walker & Slate, 2019).

This example could help in understanding the declines of new student enrollment as the previous literature suggested (Choudaha, 2018; Johnson, 2018). Some students prefer choosing Canada over the U.S. due to the

promise of more stable post-study work opportunities and clearer pipelines to immigration (Tadoran & Peterson, 2019).

The President's use of immigration rhetoric has raised and continues to raise (at least at the writing of this research), public attention. However, the administration and public overlook other causes of social problems in American society. As Garland (2008) suggested, moral panics should be studied with the assumption of being symptomatic of something else. We argue that the fear of immigrants and the panic over these groups are not because they are actually taking Americans' jobs or are likely to take Americans' jobs, but because they are symptoms of an American society that was built on racialized fears of other people. Moreover, there are already numerous complicated problems that the country has not been able to solve such as crime, drug use, lack of access to healthcare, and unemployment. Thus, panic over international students and immigration is likely symptomatic of institutionalized racism and other social problems.

It is not easy to conclude whether or not F-1 students are likely to stay in the U.S. after graduation. Research shows career decisions after graduation come from many factors such as career advancement opportunities in the home and host countries in the chosen field, personality, interest, aptitude and attitude, social influences (i.e. families, labor markets, societal values, and spiritual forces (Lee et al., 2018), students' beliefs relating to treatment by colleges in home country, quality of professional network, and potential personal prestige and resentment (Han et al., 2015). Finally, the uncertainty of pathways to stay after graduation with the OPT and H1-B visa influence their future plans. We suggest some remain in the country for job opportunities, but many international students decide to go back to their home countries. Nghia (2019) also indicated that not all of the students were immigration hunters. Many were willing to return their home for socioeconomic, cultural, and political reasons. Therefore, we suggest the fear of international students arriving in the United States to seek immigration opportunities is biased, especially when the host country (e.g. the United States) has the power to adjust its policies regarding international students.

We made the claim that types of students are racialized during heightened times of political rhetoric and it seems fairly straightforward to us that our non-white students, or students who speak English with a foreign accent, are racialized both at the level of interpersonal interaction and by policies and proposed policies. To give a current example that is undoubtedly affecting international students, recent reports show how students (and other types of immigrants) are the targets of racism if they look Asian, due to fears of the coronavirus ("The pathogen of prejudice," 2020). Moreover, concerns

about Muslims and the resulting Muslim ban, and the longstanding use of Latinx immigrants as folk devils and “taking away American jobs” or as “criminals” seems to show examples of how these students can be racialized. Moreover, though Lee (2018) offers the concept of a “racialized moral panic” in regard to Latinx folks, it appears that this concept works well for us to make sense of our findings. Indeed, the moral panic we discuss is racialized because it is panic over particular types of racial and ethnic others.

## **CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS**

To answer our first research question, we suggest that our participants were shaped and influenced by immigration policies and political rhetoric, such as the traveling of Sahba and her family, Luis’ getting documents from the Venezuela embassy, Sierra’s feelings of being unwelcomed, and post-graduation decision making of Nakanya, Titi, Drew, Arya, and Carolin.

We suggest the current administration portrays immigrants as a whole as folk devils, extending to F-1 students who are competing for a job opportunity with U.S. citizens. The current U.S. administration’s racialized rhetoric impacts F-1 students’ emotions at Midwestern universities and colleges (Tadoran & Peterson, 2019) in North Dakota (Johnson, 2018), and in our research which was conducted in Tennessee. However, the “threats” of international students seem to be exaggerated. Most participants were very specific about following rules, not engaging in crimes, and following the regulations for maintaining documented status. Though there have been recent policy reforms, the threats from the administration may not necessarily enforce these proposed policies like students think they will. In the case of the current administration, many of President Trump’s proposed policies seem to bellicose rhetoric that likely will not come to fruition.

This research expands the study of immigration moral panics by examining their impact on documented immigrants, especially F-1 students. Fear of immigrants likely impacts almost all immigrants, regardless of their legal status. This research is very specific to this particular moment in time and the current administration. Our research contributes to understanding the experiences and emotions that international students have in this unique and challenging time. F-1 students, whether they come from countries that are vilified or not, internalize the unwelcoming feeling along with their ethnic categorization and racialization in the United States. Race operates not necessarily in regard to legal status, but instead depending on the geopolitical context, history of immigration policies directed at particular groups, and how they fit into the U.S. racialized hierarchy. For example, Latinx students and Muslim students in this research experience different aspects of racialization.

Many Latinx students, were worried about being miscategorized as undocumented, that relations with their home countries would impact their ability to travel, or to come back to the U.S. Muslim students did not express concerns about being perceived as undocumented, however, they did worry over the larger geopolitical relationship of their home region and the U.S. and what that meant for their study as an international student. Moreover, most recently, Asian students have been the targets of hate crimes during the pandemic.

Epistemological quandaries about what qualitative research can and cannot tell us are beyond the scope of our discussion. However, it is important to mention one limitation and detail that we argue future researchers should explore. The participants were from a variety of countries of origin, which we argue is a strength. That is, even though our sample was relatively small, there were still patterns and findings across many students' varying racial and ethnic categorizations and countries of origin. However, their particular experiences are not generalizable to the overall experiences of other F-1 students from the same country because there are several factors to be considered such as socio-economic, self-presentation, and support system from family, university, and home and/or host countries. While generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, we mention this because future research should examine these topics using various methodologies.

The research site is also unique, in the U.S. South, it is possible that the political features of the Deep South of the U.S. influence attitudes about immigration, and students' internalization of those local and regional attitudes and political features. Thus, future research should examine other geographical contexts with varying demographics. To give an example, it would be interesting to explore if our findings are similar in other locations, such as the U.S. mid-south (Texas), Southwest (Arizona), the U.S. West (California), and other populous cities such as New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and other metropolitan areas that have experienced population booms due to immigrants and refugees.

## REFERENCES

- Akbari, A. H., & MacDonald, M. (2014). Immigration policy in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States: An overview of recent trends. *International Migration Review*, 48(3), 801–822.
- Alakaam, A. A., Castellanos, D. C., Bodzio, J., & Harrison, L. (2015). The factors that influence dietary habits among international students in the United States. *Journal of International Students*, 5(2), 104–120.
- Altheide, D. L. (2009). Moral panic: From sociological concept to public discourse. *Crime Media Culture*, 5(1), 79–99.

- Androff, D. K., & Tavassoli, K. Y. (2012). Deaths in the desert: The human rights crisis on the U.S. – Mexico border. *Social Work*, 57(2), 165–173.
- Amuedo-Dorantes, C. & Furtado, D. (2019). Settling for academia? H-1B visas and the career choices of international students in the United States. *Journal of Human Resources*, 54(2), 401–429.
- Amuedo-Dorantes, C., Furtado, D., & Xu, H. (2019). OPT policy changes and foreign born STEM talent in the U.S. *Labour Economics*, 61, Article 101752
- Barta, P., Chen, T., Jou, D., McEnaney, C., & Fuller, A. (2018, October 10). How international students are changing U.S. colleges. *The Wall Street Journal*. <http://graphics.wsj.com/international-students/>
- BBC News. (2020, August 24). 'Drug dealers, criminals, rapists': What Trump thinks of Mexicans. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-37230916>
- Callanan, G., & Benzing, C. (2004). Assessing the role of internships in the career-oriented employment of graduating college students. *Education + Training*, 46(2), 82–89.
- Choudaha, R. (2018). A third wave of international student mobility: Global competitiveness and American higher education. *Center for Studies in Higher Education Research and Occasional Papers Series*. <https://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/third-wave-international-student-mobility-global-competitiveness-and-american-higher>
- Cohen, S. ([1972] 2002). *Folk devils and moral panics*. Routledge.
- Demirci, M. (2019). Transition of international science, technology, engineering, and mathematics students to the U.S. labor market: the role of visa policy. *Economic Inquiry*, 57(3), 1367–1391.
- Eller, J. & Doherty, P. (forthcoming). Fear. *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 2nd Edition. Wiley publications.
- Elturki, E., Liu, Y., Hjeltness, J., & Hellmann, K. (2019). Needs, expectations, and experiences of international students in pathway program in the United States. *Journal of International Students*, 9(1), 192–210.
- Eversman, M. H. & Jason D. P. Bird, J. D. P. (2017). Moral panic and social justice: A guide for analyzing social problems. *Social Work*, 62(1), 29–36.
- Flores-Yeffal, N. Y., Vidales, G., & Plemons, A. (2011) The Latino cyber-moral panic process in the United States. *Information, Communication & Society*, 14(4), 568–589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.562222>
- Garland, D. (2008). On the concept of moral panic. *Crime Media Culture*, 4(1), 9–30.
- Grimm, A. (2019). Studying to stay: Understanding graduate visa policy content and context in the United States and Australia. *International Migration*, 57(5), 235–251.
- Goode, E., & Ben-Yehuda, N. (1994). Moral panics: Culture, politics, and social construction. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1994(20), 49–171.
- Han, X., Stocking, G., Gebbie, M., & Appelbaum, R. P. (2015). Will they stay or will they go? International graduate students and their decisions to stay or leave

- the U.S. upon graduation. *PLoS ONE*, 10(3).  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0118183>
- Institute of International Education. (2019, November 19). *Number of international students in the United States hits all-time High*.  
<https://www.iie.org/WhyIIE/Announcements/2019/11/Number-of-International-Students-in-the-United-States-Hits-All-Time-High>
- Johnson, K. (2018). Opportunities & Anxieties: A Study of International Students in the Trump Era. *Lewis & Clark Law Review*, 22(2), 413–440.
- Khanal, J., & Gaulee, U. (2019). Challenges of international students from pre-departure to post-study. *Journal of International Students*, 9(2), 560–581.
- Knouse, S. B., Tanner, J. R., & Harris, E. W. (1999). The relation of college internships, college performance, and subsequent job opportunity. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 36(1), 35-43.
- Kusow, A. M. (2003). Beyond Indigenous authenticity: Reflections on the insider/outsider debate in immigration research. *Symbolic Interaction*, 26(4), 591–599.
- Lerner, S. (2018, January 8). H-1B visa: An uncertain path after college. *The Lantern*.  
<https://www.thelantern.com/2018/02/h-1b-visa-an-uncertain-path-after-college/>
- Lee, R. (2018). Immigrant entry visa categories and their effects on the children of immigrants' education. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(9), 1560–1583.
- Lee, M. C., McMahon, M., & Watson, M. (2018). Career decisions of international Chinese doctoral students: The influence of the self in the environment. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 27(1), 29–39.
- Lobnibe, J. (2009). International students and the politics of difference in US higher education. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 7(20), 346–368.
- Lomer, S. (2018). UK policy discourses and international student mobility: The deterrence and subjectification of international students. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 16(3), 308-324.
- Longazel, J. G. (2012). Moral panic as racial degradation ceremony: Racial stratification and the local-level backlash against Latino/a immigrants. *Punishment and Society*, 15(1), 96–119.
- Mesidor, J. K., & Sly, K. F. (2016). Factors that contribute to the adjustment of international students. *Journal of International Students*, 6(1), 262–282.
- Nghia, T. L. H. (2019). Motivations for studying abroad and immigration intentions. *Journal of International Students*, 9(3), 758–776.
- Perrone, L., & Vickers, M. H. (2003). Life after graduation as a ‘very uncomfortable world’: An Australian case study. *Education + Training*, 45(2), 69–78.
- Pottie-Sherman, Y. (2018). Retaining international students in northeast Ohio: Opportunities and challenges in the ‘age of Trump.’ *Geoforum*, 2018(96), 32-40.

- Quinton, W. J. (2019). Unwelcome on campus? Predictors of prejudice against international students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 12(2), 156–169.
- Rose-Redwood, C., & Rose-Redwood, R. (2017). Rethinking the politics of the international student experience in the age of Trump. *Journal of International Students*, 7(3), I–IX.
- Sá, C. M., & Sabzalieva, E. (2018). The politics of the great brain race: Public policy and international student recruitment in Australia, Canada, England and the USA. *Higher Education*, 2018(75), 231–253.
- Seelke, C. R. (2019, March 17). Venezuela: Overview of U.S. sanctions. *Federation of American Scientists*. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10715.pdf>
- Tadoran, C., & Peterson, C. (2019). Should they stay or should they go? How the 2017 U.S. Travel ban affects international doctoral students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 24(2): 440-455.
- Urbino, L. (2020, February 17). The pathogen of prejudice: The coronavirus spreads racism against—and among—ethnic Chinese. *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/china/2020/02/17/the-coronavirus-spreads-racism-against-and-among-ethnic-chinese>
- Urias, D. A. & Yeakey, C. C. (2005). International Students and U.S. Border Security. *Thought & Action*, 187–198.
- Usher, A. (2019). Has president Trump scared away all the foreign students? *Education Next*, 19(4), 40-46
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, (2018a, October 20). Buy American, Hire American: Putting American workers first. *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*. <https://www.uscis.gov/legal-resources/buy-american-hire-american-putting-american-workers-first>
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2018b, October 25). Immigration marriage fraud amendments of 1986. *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*. <https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary/immigration-marriage-fraud-amendments-1986>
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2018c, October 20). USCIS strengthens protections to combat H-1B abuses. *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*. <https://www.uscis.gov/news/news-releases/uscis-strengthens-protections-combat-h-1b-abuses>
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2018d, June 6). Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 students. *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*. <https://www.uscis.gov/opt>
- U.S. Department of State. (2018, June 6). Student Visa. *U.S. Department of State*. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html>
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (2020a, May 18). Who we are. *U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*. <https://www.ice.gov/about>
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (2020b, May 18). ICE Statistics. *U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*. <https://www.ice.gov/statistics>

- Van De Walker, D., & Slate, J. R. (2019). The 2017 Trump administration travel ban and international graduate applications at two Texas public universities. *Higher Education Politics & Economics*, 5(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.32674/hepe.v5i1.1173>
- Wang, I., Ahn, J. N., Kim, H. J., & Lin-Siegler, X. (2017). Why do international students avoid communicating with Americans? *Journal of International Students*, 7(3), 555-580.
- Zeiders, K. H., Nair, R. L., Hoyt, L. T., Pace, T. W. W., & Cruze, A. (2020). Latino early adolescents' psychological and physiological responses during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 26(2), 169-175. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000301>
- Zong, J., & Batalova, J. (2018, July 27). International students in the United States. *Migration Policy Institute*. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/international-students-united-states>
- 

**PHATTRAA MARBANG**, is a graduate student at University of Georgia. Her major research interests lie in the area of immigrant visa policy, social policy, education, and race and ethnicity. Email: [phattraa.marbang@uga.edu](mailto:phattraa.marbang@uga.edu).

**ASHLEIGH E. MCKINZIE**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Middle Tennessee State University. Her main research interests are long-term recovery from disaster, intersecting inequalities, and gendered violence. Email: [ashleigh.mckinzie@mtsu.edu](mailto:ashleigh.mckinzie@mtsu.edu).

**JACKIE ELLER**, PhD, is a Professor of Sociology at Middle Tennessee State University. Her specializations are social deviance, gender, drugs in society, and sociology of emotions. Email: [jackie.eller@mtsu.edu](mailto:jackie.eller@mtsu.edu).

**IDA F. LEGGETT**, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Middle Tennessee State University. Her main research interests are immigrant youth, girl cultures, and youth and globalization. Email: [ida.leggett@mtsu.edu](mailto:ida.leggett@mtsu.edu).

*Manuscript submitted: March 13, 2020*

*Manuscript revised: July 2, 2020*

*Accepted for publication: Sep 10, 2020*