



International Division
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Undue Influence and Transnational Repression

International Safety and Security
University of Wisconsin–Madison

This module addresses two risk areas associated with UW-Madison's globalized community – one typically is encountered abroad, and the other may be encountered in the United States and even on campus.

The first is undue influence, an attempt to exploit and manipulate the work or well-being of those traveling abroad. The second is transnational repression, an attempt to coerce or silence the free expression and rights of persons or groups working and studying in the United States.

Most of us are unlikely to ever encounter either of these risks, but when they take place, the outcomes can represent a real and lasting threat to the personal and professional well-being of those involved.

Each of these important topics is discussed here for your awareness.

Undue Influence Risks

Some countries, especially those with authoritarian governments, place restrictions on or attempt to suppress real or perceived anti-government actions and/or speech, including dissenting or subversive opinions posted to social media or other communications.

The tips in this part of the module may help you avoid unwanted interactions while abroad and consider your public posts/profile history before travel.



Review Your Online History and Presence

- Consider your documented positions that might be viewed as subversive to the host-country government or give reason for unwanted scrutiny.
 - Documented positions may include social media posts, e-mail, other web-based communications, public conversations and speeches, and text messages.
 - This includes communications that are written, posted, and transmitted while in third countries, including the United States.
- Do not post negative comments about the host government before or during travel.
- If you have a history of activism related to the destination country, you may need to reconsider your travel plans. Your activities may be considered illegal by the destination government.



If travelers determine their previous activities, posts, or communications could pose a problem, even if subsequently deleted, they should seriously re-consider travel or seek specific advice from U.S. government authorities.

The ISSD can place you in touch with the right office to ask these types of questions.

While Abroad



Do not post anything adverse or unflattering about the host government.



If authorities ask for your ID/passport or question you for any reason, comply with their request, cooperate, remain respectful, and answer them honestly.



Do not photograph any government, police, or military facility, personnel, vehicles, etc., or political protests, demonstrations, or similar events.



If you are detained or arrested by authorities for any reason, notify your nearest embassy/consulate when able, and later notify your UW-Madison unit or the ISSD.

While Abroad



- Beware of anyone trying to entrap you by cultivating a relationship now to coerce cooperation later. *It is very unlikely but has happened in the past!*
- If your interaction with someone seems questionable, odd, or contrived for any reason, politely discontinue the conversation or relationship and report it to the embassy or contact the ISSD on your return to UW.
- Do not accept any sort of payment for services or items in your possession; it can present the appearance of wrongdoing and it can be manipulated to coerce or entrap you.
- Avoid politically charged or contentious social discussions while abroad, especially in public places with host-country nationals.

Transnational Repression

Transnational repression is when foreign governments, or their representatives, attempt to stalk, harass, intimidate, or even assault people in the United States, usually for a politically motivated purpose but sometimes to coerce cultural conformity!



Transnational Repression

Repression often targets members of ethnic, religious, or spiritual minority groups or those who evince political ideologies or policy positions deemed subversive or embarrassing by their government at home.

Such actions violate U.S. law concerning individual rights and freedoms!

Transnational Repression

Some governments use transnational repression tactics to silence divergent perspectives from their citizens who are abroad (or non-citizens connected to the country or who are addressing issues associated with the country), get information from them, or coerce them to return home.

- Any of the above actions or outcomes may be considered transnational repression. *These actions are illegal in the United States, and you can get help to stop them!*
- Some countries' governments may harass and intimidate their own citizens living in the United States. These governments may also target naturalized or U.S.-born citizens who have family overseas or other foreign connections.



Transnational Repression

Transnational Repression may run a spectrum of actions and take a variety of forms, including:

Stalking to intimidate and create fear

Hacking into private social media or other personal accounts

Social pressures or harassment to conform to a specific perspective without any divergent expression

Online disinformation campaigns – even trolling or cyber bullying a particular individual or group

Assaults

Attempted kidnapping

Forcing/coercing the victim to return to the home country

Threatening or detaining family members or close friends in the home country to leverage actions by the target

Freezing or threatening financial assets in the home country

Report Suspicions and Get Help



If you believe you may have encountered an attempt at undue influence to exploit you or your professional work while traveling abroad, notify your nearest embassy/consulate as soon as able. Later notify your UW-Madison unit or the UW-Madison ISSD.



If you are subjected to or become aware of actions that you believe may constitute transnational repression, contact the ISSD who can place you in touch with the right agencies and experts who can help. Such actions must not be allowed to fester and continue, burdening students and others in the UW-Madison community.



In either situation, your circumstance will be considered thoughtfully to ensure your professional work and well-being are not placed at risk.



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