

By Weaponizing Arrest Records and Suspending Due Process, the Trump Administration Has Targeted Over 1,000 Foreign Students

Facing sweeping deportation threats, international students and recent graduates—who have had their visas revoked or status terminated—speak out about living in fear and confusion.



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In March, protestors held a banner saying “hands off our students” during a demonstration across Manhattan—as thousands take part in a pro-Palestinian protest against Israel’s renewed airstrikes across the Gaza Strip. (Photo by Michael Nigro/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images)

**Names changed to protect their identity.*

On April 4, Lina*, a foreign citizen and recent graduate working legally in the U.S., got a call from her former university. Her student visa status had been terminated. Lina had been working on the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, availing herself of a path afforded to F-1 student visa holders to pursue work opportunities in the U.S. for up to a period of three years post graduation. That day, the school official who had called notified her of an update. They had spotted a termination notice in her record on the

Department of Homeland Security's Student & Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database. "Individual identified in criminal records check and/or has had their VISA revoked. SEVIS record has been terminated," her record read.

Lina had an arrest on her record from more than a decade ago. Back in 2013, she was arrested after a verbal argument with a friend. She was released soon after her arrest, she told Drop Site, and the case was dismissed in court. "I never had any conviction," Lina said in an interview with Drop Site. "I didn't do anything wrong. And all of a sudden, the country of free spirit is against me? For what? I still don't know."

At the time she was informed of her status termination, Lina had received no communication whatsoever from the federal government about it, though she has since received an email stating that her visa has been revoked.

Lina is one of hundreds of foreign students and recent graduates in the United States to have their visas revoked or status terminated in recent weeks and are facing potential deportation.

Drop Site interviewed several students and recent graduates, who testified to how the federal government appears to be terminating the status of student visa holders based on arrest records—not criminal convictions—regardless of what happened following that arrest. Many of the students whose visas have been revoked or statuses terminated spoke to Drop Site News on the condition that their identities be protected. Due to the ongoing threat of further action by immigration authorities, some of their names have been changed. The sources we spoke to are individuals on student visas, including some whose current or future employers had submitted applications for them to transition to the H1B work visa, and who had been selected in the H1B work visa lottery results announced in March.

More than 1,000 current students and recent graduates in the US have [reportedly](#) had their visas or statuses revoked this year, according to university statements and spokespersons.

This is taking place alongside the crackdown on pro-Palestine advocates across the country, from the arrests of Mahmoud Khalil to Mohsen Mahdawi, prominent Palestinian activists at Columbia University and green card holders, as well as Tufts student and Turkish national Rümeyza Öztürk and others. Their arrests sparked a firestorm of controversy, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio claiming the arrests are a measure to protect U.S. foreign policy goals. Similarly, the State Department revoked the student visa of Momodou Taal, citing his prominent participation in pro-Palestine protests, and he left the country just days later.

Less media attention has focused on the federal government targeting student visa holders who are not involved in political activism. What began as a concerted crackdown by the State Department on pro-Palestine protesters now includes efforts attempting to revoke hundreds of F-1 visas for international students—seemingly over past arrest records—often intimidating them into leaving the country on their own with the fear that they may otherwise be deported.

In response to a request for comment, the State Department gave Drop Site the same statement it has sent to other publications. "The United States has zero tolerance for non-citizens who violate U.S. laws," it said. "Those who break the law, including students, may face visa refusal, visa revocation, and/or deportation."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio had stated on March 27 that the Trump administration had revoked 300 or more student visas. In their reply to Drop Site on April 7, however, the State Department refused to answer

how many individuals have had their student visas revoked since the Trump administration came into office in January. The State Department spokesperson said, "Because the process is ongoing, the number of revocations is dynamic. The Department generally does not provide statistics on visa revocations."

For justification to carry out their actions, the State Department and the DHS both draw upon the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, but they cite different clauses in the legislation. Khalil, for instance, was detained on the grounds of allegedly causing "adverse foreign policy consequences for the United States," under section 8 U.S.C. § 1227(a)(4)(C)(i) of the act. By contrast, according to a State Department [rule](#) implemented in 2011, consular offices are authorized to revoke a visa at their discretion. This rule has been touted by U.S. officials as a blanket justification for revoking F-1 visas for international students.

Recently, a U.S. District Court filing has shown that a senior Homeland Security official informed the court that "Terminating a record in SEVIS does not terminate an individual's nonimmigrant status in the United States." But immigration attorneys say this statement obfuscates how SEVIS terminations are being used to change visa status and how that could determine the potential deportation process. Speaking to Drop Site, Nathan Yaffe, an immigration attorney working with international students, said, "ICE is entering this declaration for the express purpose of evading judicial scrutiny of their lawless actions. By claiming that SEVIS record termination does not cause loss of status, ICE can argue students have no basis to sue over the record termination."

U.S. consulates, nevertheless, have been emailing students whose statuses have been terminated saying the expiration dates on their visas have been amended. Moreover, they urge these individuals to leave the country, threatening them with possible deportation by immigration authorities if they don't. One such email from a U.S. Consulate, which Drop Site reviewed, noted that the visa holder was told that they might not even be sent back to their own country: "Please note that deportation can take place at a time that does not allow the person being deported to secure possessions or conclude affairs in the United States. Persons being deported may be sent to countries other than their countries of origin."

Weaponized Arrest Records

Lina's prior arrest has never posed a problem for her visa before. "I've disclosed this information every single time I apply for a visa," she said. "I also crossed the border multiple times after the case was dismissed. There was no issue." Drop Site spoke to several impacted students and recent graduates across the country who had been arrested previously and found instances where cases were either dismissed, charges expunged, or otherwise completely resolved through the justice system—leading to visa revocations that immigration attorneys are decrying as deeply unjust.

Joseph Murphy, an immigration attorney in Pennsylvania who is representing one such student, says, "They want to get these guys to leave, they want to make a spectacle, and they want to incentivize self-deportation. So they're doing this kind of lawless behavior to do what—prevent lawlessness?"

"Trump's promise was that, 'I'm going to deport all the criminals,'" said Rajiv Khanna, immigration lawyer based in Washington, D.C. with more than three decades of experience. "They didn't find very many criminals. So, then, they created criminals."

The use of prior arrest as a determining factor appears to be happening across the country. Two weeks ago, a coalition formed of international and former students—all of whom are on F-1 visas, or are enrolled in the Optional Practical Training (OPT). The anonymous database collects details of impacted individuals.

As of Tuesday, their [survey](#) had received 140 responses from individuals who stated that they had had their visa revoked or status terminated, with details provided about reasons of termination; past arrest records, if any; whether they were fingerprinted after an arrest, etc. 125 of them said they had been arrested in the past. To protect the safety of the students and recent graduates, the survey “did not collect names, student IDs, emails, or other identifying information.” Importantly, seventy-five responses stated that their cases were dismissed, dropped, or declined for prosecution.

“Even discretion has to be exercised according to legal principles,” said Khanna. “But here, the allegations themselves have become grounds for immigration action. That’s persecution, not prosecution. Due process is being hanged, shot, and then burned to death.”

Khanna pointed to the case of Kilmar [Ábrego García](#)—a Salvadoran man deported to a notorious prison in El Salvador by the Trump administration in what it called an “administrative error.” “The government doesn’t have a leg to stand on,” he said. “The Supreme Court’s [ruling](#) in the Kilmar [Ábrego García](#) case said that you have to give him due process.”

A statement by the apex court’s three Democratic appointees on the Garcia case, written by Justice Sonia Sotomayor and issued in accompaniment to order, said, “I agree with the Court’s order that the proper remedy is to provide Abrego Garcia with all the process to which he would have been entitled had he not been unlawfully removed to El Salvador. That means the Government must comply with its obligation to provide Abrego Garcia with “due process of law,” including notice and an opportunity to be heard, in any future proceedings.”

Khanna said, “There’s a parallel there. There’s a warning there for the government. What about due process for all these kids?”

Lina now stares at a terminated status and with her future in the United States thrown into uncertainty. “I’ve never ever feared for my safety in this country until now,” she said. “Over the weekend, my landlord came to collect a check and when he was knocking on the door, I was so afraid, I locked myself in the bathroom.”

Jayson Ma, a Chinese student at Carnegie Mellon University who had been arrested for driving under the influence a couple of years ago, found out on the afternoon of April 8 that his SEVIS status was terminated. Ma had been accepted into Pennsylvania’s Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition ([ARD](#)) Program, generally for first-time offenders who have no prior criminal convictions or prior ARD dispositions. Ma completed all the measures prescribed by the ARD Program last year.

Joseph Murphy, Ma’s immigration attorney, says, “It’s a shocking result. He was charged with a DUI but the charges were withdrawn, the case was dismissed and the charges were expunged—which means he is not guilty. So, we’re unable to figure out why his status was terminated.”

On the evening of April 8, not entirely sure about what was to follow in terms of his ability to complete the program, Ma ended up going to class as scheduled. “It was very difficult to focus,” he told Drop Site. “I wish

the process was more transparent, at least so we're in touch with what's happening."

Ma, who is months away from graduating, hasn't been able to get himself to inform his family either. "Both my parents are back home. My mother is terminally sick from cancer—I can't possibly tell her that they withdrew my status."

Ma is one of several individuals who have had their status terminated over past cases of driving under the influence (DUIs), including instances in which the law had run its course, and where any punitive or rehabilitative measures had been completed.

Threatened Futures

On the morning of March 28, a recent graduate from a Big 10 university in the United States was told by his manager at work that his application in the H1B work visa lottery had been successful. Adam* was overjoyed and began telling his friends and family the news. As the congratulatory messages began pouring in, Adam received an email from his university that was marked "Important."

"Your SEVIS record was terminated today (March 28, 2025) by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)," read the email. "F-1 students with a terminated SEVIS record must depart the U.S. immediately; there is no grace period following a SEVIS termination for this reason. We advise you to cease your OPT employment and depart the U.S. as soon as possible."

Those who haven't secured the H1B work visa yet, even if they've been informed they successfully passed the lottery process, only have a few months in which to complete the process so that they can officially change their status from a F-1 student visa to a H1B work visa. But they cannot do that if they're here in the United States and their visa is revoked following a SEVIS status termination.

"It felt like the world was collapsing around me," Adam said. "I felt so alone."

In 2023, Adam pleaded guilty to driving under the influence (DUI). Adam said he followed the requirements after his plea deal to the letter, including "paying a fine, taking an alcohol assessment, being under house arrest for a few days and having an ignition interlock device in the car." Except the ignition interlock, which he needs to have installed in the car for a few more months, he said all his other requirements had been fulfilled.

While applying for work authorization as part of the Optional Practical Training (OPT) on the F-1 student visa, Adam had voluntarily disclosed details of the DUI case and attached the court documents, even though the OPT application didn't specifically require it. When his OPT work authorization arrived and he began working after graduating in December 2024, he felt the DUI case was finally behind him. But, on March 28, as Adam received news from his university about his status being terminated, the reason provided in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database was, "Student identified in criminal records check." When Adam informed his employer, he was immediately fired.

If he gets deported, he's worried he'll be separated from his young child. As someone who lost his own father at a young age, the thought of being separated from his child affects Adam deeply.

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“First, the government started scaring universities, by opening up investigations and sending notices to Columbia. Then, they came for the protesters,” Adam said. Now, he says, they are coming for international students with arrest records, and could very well come after critics of Trump next.

Shubham* is an Indian graduate student currently attending a university in Arizona. He was scheduled to graduate in May, and he had secured a job offer already. Both his graduation and employment are now in jeopardy, he said, after his status was terminated earlier this month over a prior petty offense that he has challenged in court.

Like Adam, Shubham also had made it through the H1B visa lottery on March 28. “I was really happy, everything was going great.” When he saw the email from his university informing him of his SEVIS termination, he says he couldn’t understand what was happening. “I tried to do a quick Google search, but there weren’t any results—it was really early in the wave.” Then, he frantically began searching online for lawyers, “I was dialling as many attorneys as possible.”

He says he still does not have a lawyer finalized “because for a student to get an immigration lawyer, it’s really expensive.” Recently, he has been considering filing a case *pro se*, or on his own behalf, in court.

He could choose to ask his to-be employer to do overseas processing for his H1B visa. But that would require Shubham to go through the consulate and immigration authorities all over again—“What are the chances the people who revoked everything would give me a chance to come back?”

In a cruel irony, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services—another agency under DHS—approved Shubham’s application for an employment authorization document *after* his SEVIS status had been terminated. Shubham said the folly shows that “one department is trying to move too fast” and is acting in a disorganized manner.

To keep track of what’s going on, he has resorted to scrolling through Reddit, where threads such as [r/f1visa](#) have boomed in popularity as the number of impacted students has soared in recent days. “Every five minutes, I was just refreshing the internet trying to figure out—is there a solution? I have been trying to find a solution non-stop.”

There are times when Shubham despairs and considers taking a flight back home. “It hits me that what I am doing is too futile because you can’t just go and fight the government—being an immigrant, it just makes you feel powerless. There is a constant fear that you might just get detained.”

Shubham says that what made it worse for him is an email he received from a US Consulate in India. The email, a copy of which Drop Site has accessed, states, “Please note that deportation can take place at a time that does not allow the person being deported to secure possessions or conclude affairs in the United States.” More importantly, it adds, “Persons being deported may be sent to countries other than their countries of origin.”

“They could just send you anywhere according to it,” he says.

On April 9, as news broke of a federal judge saying she will order the Trump administration to temporarily [reinstate](#) the F-1 status of a Dartmouth College PhD student, whose visa was revoked last week, Shubham struck a cautious note. “We still have to wait for the end of the case,” he said.

As his own next few months seem uncertain, Shubham is warning others seeking to come to the United States to pursue higher education or employment opportunities. "The job market is going down, employers are scared to hire international students, and in a country where you never had to carry any ID to just go to classes, many colleges are now advising you to carry multiple documents with you—such as your passport, I20, and I94," he said. "If you have overseas dreams and aspirations, maybe do not think this country is the right place to come and fulfill them."

Update: This piece was originally titled "By Weaponizing Arrest Records and Suspending Due Process, the Trump Administration Has Revoked Over 300 Student Visas." This number was taken from the State Department's confirmed figures. The total number of targeted student visa holders is far higher with over 1,000 individuals reportedly having their visa revoked and/or status terminated.

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A guest post by

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TWO cartel political parties are so corrupted that they are letting foreign gangster governments take away Americans' First Amendment rights, intimidate university faculty, terrorize students, run American universities, and try to force Americans to cheer lead for the parties benefactors' genocide. To support either cartel party any longer feels un-American.

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