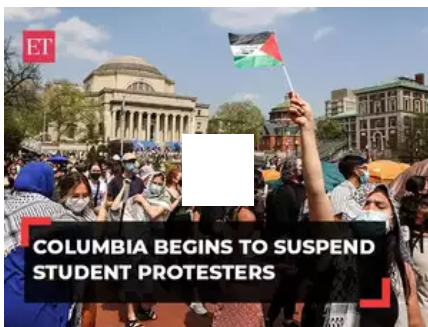


# "No grace period": The consequences Indian students will face if caught protesting in US universities

By Ankita Sen, ET Online | Last Updated: Apr 30, 2024, 01:57:00 PM IST

## Synopsis

Indian students in the US are facing uncertainty due to Israeli-Palestinian conflict disruptions. Protesters risk detention, impacting their F-1 visa status. Experts warn of serious consequences like removal from the US for violating visa rules.



Columbia University suspends pro-Palestinian student protesters for refusing to clear out encampment

Campus disruptions due to escalating tensions surrounding the [Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#) have left Indian students in the United States, as well as their families back in India, feeling anxious and uncertain about their futures.

Indian students have faced a range of challenges in recent weeks. Those participating in protests have been detained, risking their visa status and scholarships. Meanwhile, other students have experienced campus lockdowns or a switch to online classes due to safety concerns.

Immigration and education experts have raised serious concerns about the potential impact on international students' visa status.

"International students are required to obey laws and policy at three levels. They are bound by U.S. federal law, the state law in which the university is located, and the policies of the two levels of government as well as the school. Violation at any level can be considered a violation of their student status leading to removal from the United States," Rajiv Khanna, Managing Attorney at Immigration.com, said.

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### **What happens if an Indian student is expelled in the US?**

International students in the US on F-1 visas must maintain their student status to remain in the country. If a student is expelled or suspended from their school, their F-1 visa status is at risk.

"If a student is expelled or suspended from the university, college, or school, his/her F-1 student status is in jeopardy. Once a student is expelled or suspended, the academic institution must terminate the student's enrollment in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), and this is an immediate violation of the F-1 legal status," Poorvi Chothani, Managing Partner at LawQuest, explained.

Chothani further noted that students in this situation have limited options. Students in this situation must immediately depart from the United States. In other words, there is no grace period after termination. "Extended stay in the U.S. once you are out of legal status has serious ramifications. An unlawful stay of 180 days or more could trigger a three-year ban into the U.S. and if the unlawful stay is more than 12 months the ban is for ten years," Chothani explained.

### **For dependents**

For students with spouses or children in F-2 status, the implications are equally severe. They, too, will accrue days of unlawful presence from the date the F-1 student's SEVIS record is terminated. "If an F-1 student is arrested during a protest that turns violent, their visa is likely to be revoked, requiring them to leave the U.S.," added Chothani.

"From time to time, a country may use discretion in issues and renewing visas, particularly when someone on a visa is involved in protests. In the US, we have also seen university grants (and therefore scholarships) being impacted at campuses post the Israel-Palestine flare-up," Pritish Gandhi, director - leadership & rewards, Khaitan & Co, told ET.

### **What's happening in the US?**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has caused disruptions at several universities in the United States, leading to significant challenges for international students, particularly those from India. Institutes like Columbia University have shifted to online learning, and other institutions like New York University, Harvard University, University of Michigan, and the University of Southern California have also been experiencing varying levels of disruption.

According to the University Living Indian Students Mobility Report 2023-24, Indian students collectively spend about \$50 billion annually on higher education overseas, with a substantial portion directed toward institutions in the Americas and Europe.

In Video: **Columbia University suspends pro-Palestinian student protesters for refusing to clear out encampment**