

Immigration

Trump administration to crack down on Chinese visas, Rubio says

He said the State and Homeland Security departments will work to “aggressively revoke” visas of Chinese students in the United States, “including those with connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields.”

Updated today at 3:34 a.m. EDT

By [David Nakamura](#) and [Katrina Northrop](#)

Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Wednesday announced plans to crack down on Chinese holders of student visas and ramp up scrutiny of new visa applicants from China and Hong Kong, escalating the Trump administration’s confrontational approach to Beijing.

In a statement, Rubio said the State Department would work with the Department of Homeland Security to “aggressively revoke” visas of Chinese students in the United States, “including those with connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields.”

He did not specify which areas of study would be targeted — of the 277,398 Chinese students at U.S. universities last year, more than 110,000 were pursuing math, engineering, science and technology courses — or define what “connections” meant. About 100 million people belong to the Chinese Communist Party, with membership often used as a fast-track to higher social and economic status rather than an act of ideological commitment.

Rubio also did not provide details about what additional measures the department would take to scrutinize new visa applicants, and whether this applied to student visas only or all categories of visas. The State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

But Bill Bishop, author of the influential [Sinocism newsletter](#), said that he doubted the Trump administration would narrowly define “connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields.”

“So this move will likely have massive repercussions and unintended consequences, some of which may benefit [China] and harm the U.S., not to mention the personal cost for those students already studying at U.S. schools who will now be kicked out of the country,” Bishop wrote in his Wednesday night newsletter.

Trump presidency

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Rubio's announcement comes as the Trump administration has sought to penalize U.S. colleges and universities accused of violating the president's executive orders on antisemitism and diversity by threatening to curtail the number of [international students](#). The State Department previously moved to strip visas from some foreign students whom the administration has accused of leading pro-Palestinian demonstrations on college campuses.

Last week, the administration [revoked Harvard University's](#) ability to enroll foreign students and said thousands of enrolled students must transfer or leave the country, a move that has been temporarily [blocked by a federal judge](#). The largest proportion of foreign students at Harvard — [almost 1,300](#) — are Chinese.

Trump told reporters Wednesday that there should be a 15 percent cap on the number of foreign students that Harvard or other universities can admit relative to their overall enrollment.

During Trump's first term, the Justice Department prosecuted scientific researchers and professors of Chinese descent at American universities, under a program called the “China Initiative,” accusing them of taking money from the Chinese government in exchange for providing sensitive research materials, a charge some of them denied.

The Biden administration continued to target academic researchers before ending the China Initiative in 2022, amid criticism that it was racially targeting Chinese Americans and others of Chinese descent.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning on Thursday called the visa crackdown “unreasonable,” saying that the move “exposed the lie of so-called freedom and openness that the U.S. has always advertised, and will only further damage the U.S.'s own international image.”

Washington’s latest move was already generating alarm in China on Thursday.

Cathy Tu, a Chinese AI researcher who runs an education consultancy in Beijing, said that many students she works with are now applying to universities in other countries — including England and Singapore — due to the uncertainty.

“I studied in the U.S. because I loved what America is about: it’s open, inclusive and diverse. Now my students and I feel slapped in the face by Trump’s policy,” she said.

“I’m hoping American democracy retains its ability to self-correct and welcomes international students back,” Tu said.

Aaron Schaffer, Pei-Lin Wu and Lyric Li contributed to this report.

What readers are saying

The comments overwhelmingly criticize the Trump administration's decision to scrutinize Chinese student visa-holders, viewing it as a misguided, xenophobic, and racist policy that undermines U.S. education and global competitiveness. Many commenters argue that Chinese students... [Show more](#)

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