

Trump's visa crackdown plunges 275,000 Chinese students into uncertainty

Chinese students make up nearly up nearly a quarter of all international students in the United States. Here's who they are and what they're studying.

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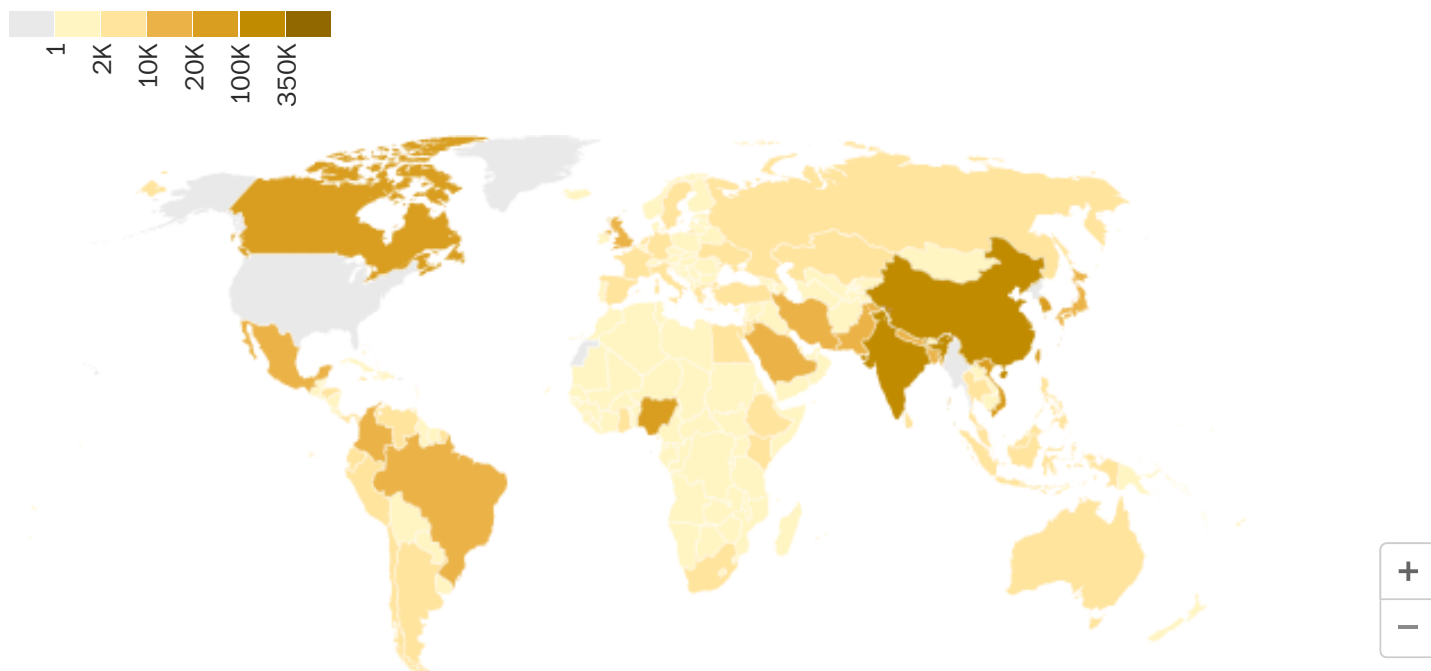
By [Kim Bellware](#) and [Angie Orellana Hernandez](#)

More than a quarter-million Chinese students attending college in the United States saw their futures plunged into uncertainty Wednesday when the Trump administration announced an aggressive crackdown on student visa holders from that country.

With an estimated 277,398 students pursuing primarily undergraduate and graduate degrees, China ranks only behind India among foreign countries with the highest number of students attending college in the U.S., according to data from the Institute of International Education. Since China's middle-class boom in the early aughts, its students have flocked to U.S. institutions, which in turn welcomed the enrollment boost and mostly unsubsidized tuition fees.

Now, China increasingly sits in the crosshairs of the Trump administration and congressional Republicans, who cast Beijing as an economic, military and national security threat to U.S. power and have often linked people and policies from China with the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

International students in the U.S. by country of origin



Data for the 2023-24 academic year.

Source: Institute of International Education

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in his Wednesday announcement that the Trump administration would work to “aggressively revoke” visas of Chinese students, “including those with connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields.” Rubio also pledged to ramp up scrutiny of new visa applicants from China and Hong Kong. The administration did not detail how it would determine “connections” with the CCP or define “critical fields” of study.

The majority of Chinese students study subjects related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics, according to the Institute of International Education. For the 2023-2024 academic year, nearly a quarter of students were pursuing math and computer science, while 17 percent were majoring in a form of engineering.

Business and management was chosen by 12.7 percent of students, while another 12.8 percent selected “other fields of study.”

Nearly half of Chinese students in the U.S. — 44.3 percent — are seeking graduate degrees, while about 32 percent are enrolled as undergraduates, the IIE data showed. About 22 percent of students are participating in optional practical training, which offers temporary employment directly related to an F-1 visa holder's field of study.

The IIE estimated that Chinese students in the U.S. have an economic impact of \$14.2 billion. Its report listed New York, California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Illinois as the most popular landing spots for the students.

After a recent peak in 2020, enrollment of Chinese students at U.S. colleges has dipped about a quarter since the coronavirus pandemic.

The aggressive approach to Chinese student visa holders comes as Trump, in his second administration, has broadly sought to control the levers of power in U.S. colleges and universities and clamp down on policies and programs he determines to be insufficiently conservative or ideologically aligned with his views. His administration has moved to purge diversity, equity and inclusion policies; deport students who took part in pro-Palestinian protests; and ban international students from Harvard.

With Chinese nationals making up nearly a quarter of all international students in the U.S., restricting their ability to study here would have deep effects across not only college campuses, but also the local communities that surround them and the American labor market, where international students have historically fueled entrepreneurship and innovation.

“International students are particularly entrepreneurial — it’s kind of a risk to come to a new country to study — and approximately a quarter of the billion-dollar start-up companies have at least one international student founder,” Stuart Anderson, executive director of the nonpartisan think tank National Foundation for American Policy, previously told The Washington Post.

What readers are saying

The comments reflect a range of perspectives on the Trump administration's crackdown on Chinese student visas. Many

express concern that this policy will harm U.S. colleges and universities by reducing the number of international students who contribute significantly to research,... [Show more](#)

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