

July 17, 2025

International Student Visa Issuances Dropped in May

An analysis of State Department data shows fewer visas were issued this May than last. Experts worry the trend will continue.

By Ashley Mowreader



Photo illustration by Justin Morrison/Inside Higher Ed | Uladzimir Zuyeu/iStock/Getty Images

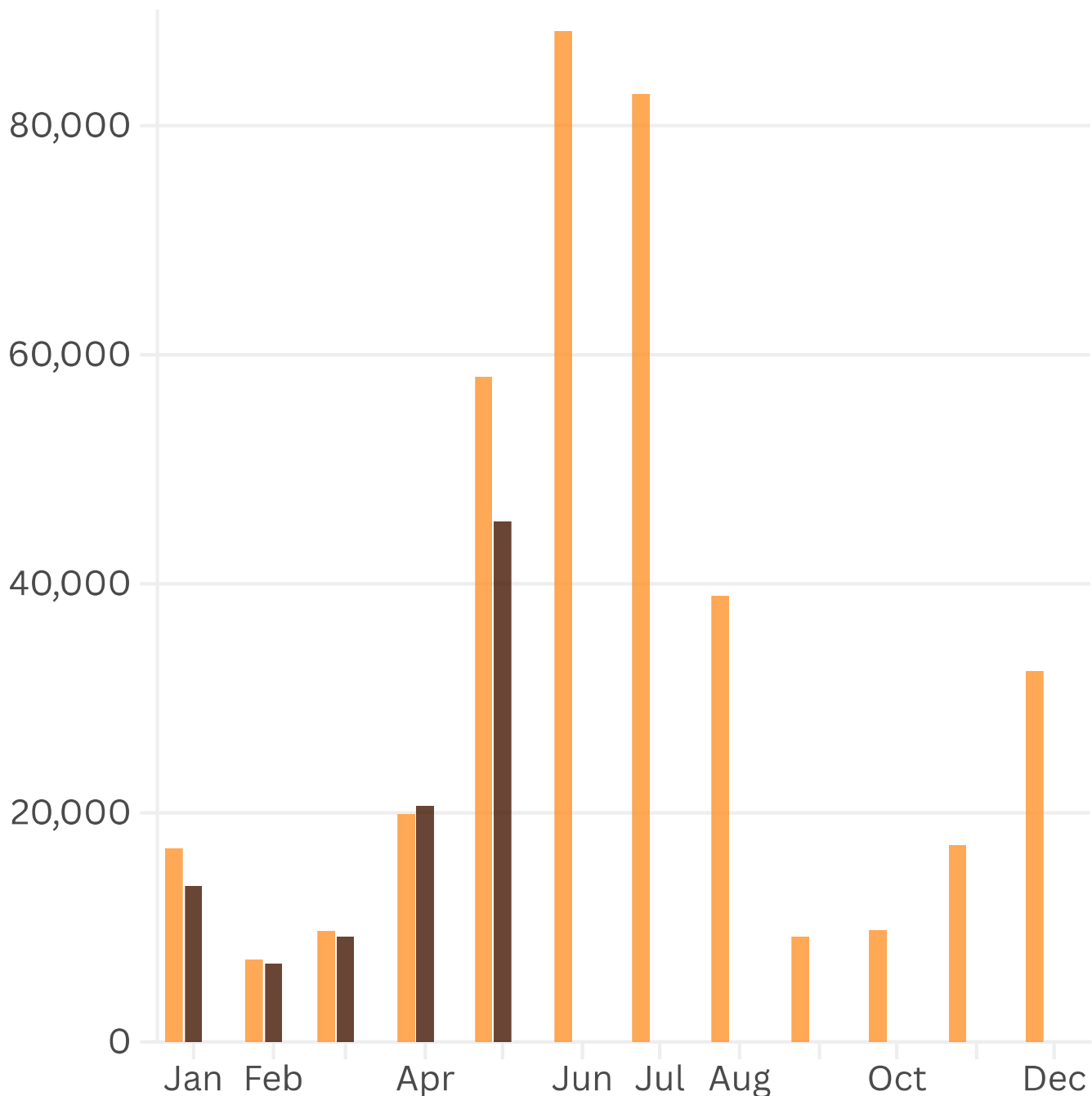
The U.S. Department of State issued 12,689 fewer F-1 visas in May 2025 compared to the May before, which

could forecast a decline in international students able to attend U.S. universities this fall.

Recently published data from the State Department shows a 22 percent drop in F-1 visas issued across the world and a 13 percent decline in J-1 visas.

F-1 Visa Issuance Drops 22%

In May 2025, the State Department issued 12,000 fewer F-1 visas and 7,000 fewer J-1 visas to international students, compared to the same period in 2024.



Source: [U.S. Department of State, Monthly Nonimmigrant Visa Issuance Statistics](#), Finn Reynolds/Lawfully • Ashley

Most Popular

How Colleges and States Can Make Workforce Pell a Reality

Americans Recognize Nuances of Higher Ed's Value

Report: NIH to Dismiss New Grant Reviewers

While visa issuances can help predict international student enrollment trends, they don't tell the full story, said Rachel Banks, senior director for public policy and legislative strategy at NAFSA, the association of international educators. Still, the trend line isn't positive.

"We're not really going to know until we get through September to know everyone who arrives, to know what the enrollment really looks like," Banks said. "But it's certainly not encouraging."

Over the past few months, President Donald Trump has cracked down on international students via arrests, travel bans and revocations of legal status. Those moves and other executive orders could affect the number of F-1 and J-1 visas issued.

In May, the administration said it would revoke visas from Chinese nationals who have ties to the Chinese Communist Party. The number of Chinese nationals issued a F-1 visa in May declined by 15 percent (or about 2,578 students). The State Department also paused visa interviews in late May while the agency developed a policy to screen international students' social media profiles. Interviews resumed in June once the policy was in place.

The interview pause may have contributed to but cannot fully explain the decline in visa issuances, said Finn Reynolds, head of market research at Lawfully, a legal tech start-up focused on immigration.

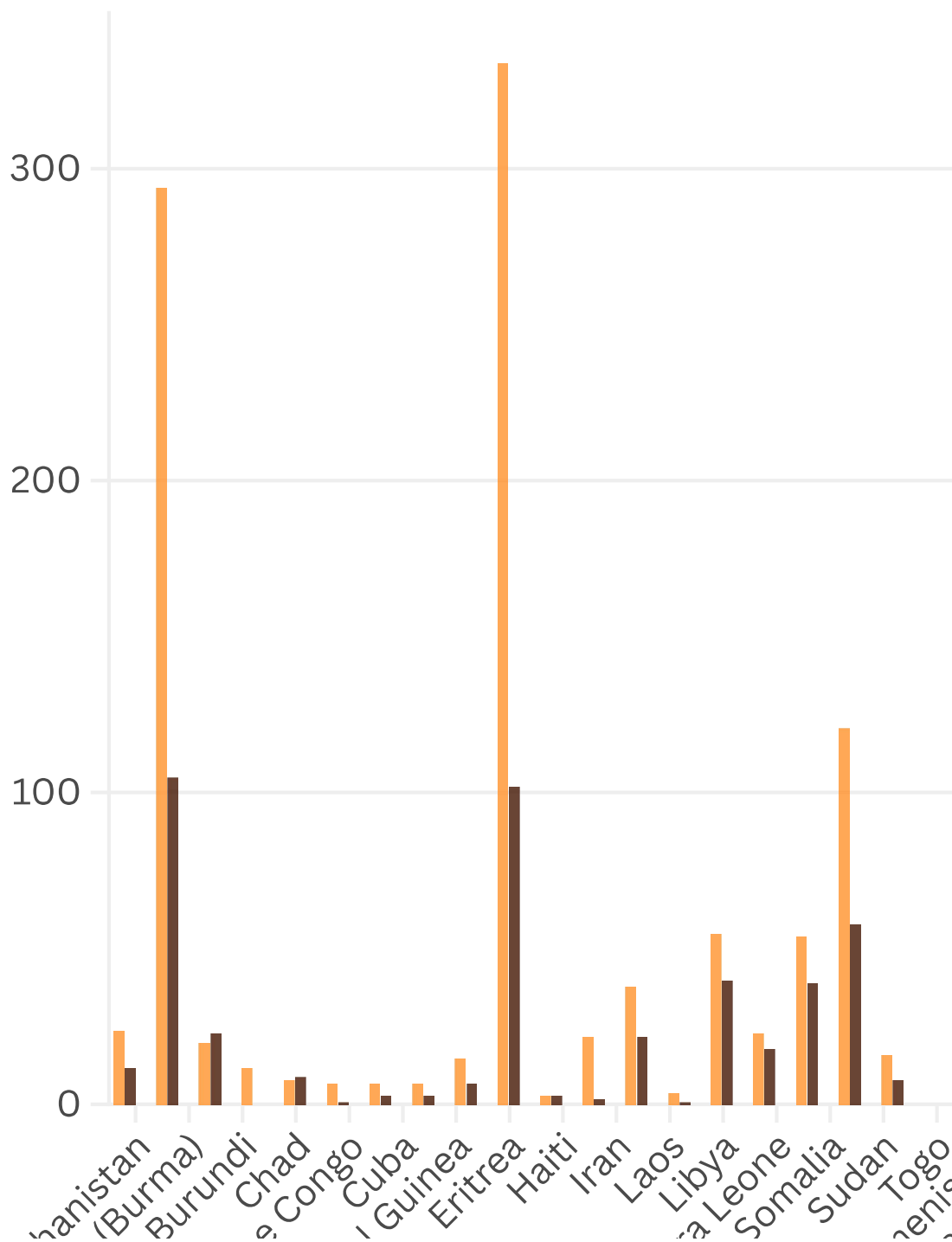
The State Department doesn't publish the number of visa applications or interviews it engages in, which means the decline could be tied to a decreased demand or slower processing by the department, Reynolds added. A May 27 survey by Study Portal found student interest in studying in the U.S. has dropped to its lowest point since COVID-19, with fewer students interested in U.S. programs and instead considering other English-speaking nations such as the U.K. or Australia.

Additionally, the State Department doesn't share daily visa issuance numbers, meaning the drop could be tied solely to the pause in the final week of May, Banks said. The connection, over all, is unclear.

The data also points to the effect of travel restrictions on students from certain nations. The Trump administration banned visitors from 12 countries and implement heightened restrictions for seven other countries in June. The May numbers show a nearly 150 percent decline in F-1 visa issuances (or 451 visas) and a 105 percent decline in J-1 issuances (157 visas) to citizens from the impacted nations, even before the ban took place.

Banned Countries See Decline in Visas Issued

Despite travel bans or restrictions not yet taking place in May, the 19 countries impacted by Trump's June 6 executive order saw a dramatic drop in visas issued to international students.



Afganistan
Myanmar
Republic of the
Equatorial

Sierra Leone

Turkmenistan

Source: U.S. Department of State, Monthly Nonimmigrant Visa Issuance Statistics • Ashley Mowreader/*Inside Higher Ed*

*A Flourish chart

Editors' Picks

Successful Program for Migrant Students Is on Trump's Chopping Block

The King's College to Close Permanently

U.S. Army Reorganizes, Closes ROTC Units at Colleges

One factor not reflected in the data is the number of students returning to their institutions who already hold visas. Students don't need to receive a new visa if they remain in the U.S.; they only need one when traveling in and out of the country. Given the disruption to Student

Exchange and Visitor Information System statuses in April, many students chose to remain in the U.S. over their summer break, Banks said.

Reynolds expects to see a further drop in visa issuances for June and July, because social media vetting procedures result in fewer appointment slots.

Students in China, Ghana, India, Japan, Niger and Nigeria have had the most trouble getting appointments, according to NAFSA members.

“We’re halfway through July, and there’s still students who are struggling to get an appointment; that’s troubling,” Banks said.

Future policies could also bottleneck the visa pipeline for international students. A proposed rule at the Office of Management and Budget would end duration-of-stay policies and instead implement a fixed date for how long students can remain in country on their visa.

“We’re very concerned that if that were to go through, that sort of adds to further disruptions and hurdles that students have to jump over, that then gives students more reason to say, ‘You know, this seems like a hassle, this seems like I’m not welcome, I’m going to find another opportunity to pursue,’” Banks said.

Enrollment Declines Loom

Colleges and universities are already anticipating declines in their international student populations. The Institute of International Education found that 40 percent of institutions projected declines in their undergraduate population of international students, and 49 percent anticipated a drop in graduate student populations.

A NAFSA survey of about 150 members institutions this summer found 78 percent of institutions predict a decline in both undergrad and graduate international students.

Each year, institutions enroll 1.1 million international students, about 6 percent of all college students in the U.S.

Calculations by *The Financial Times*, published last week, found that a decline of even 10 percent in international student enrollment would cost U.S. colleges and universities \$3 billion in revenue. A significant portion of this loss would be in tuition revenue; a 10 percent drop would result in a \$900 million decrease in tuition dollars.

Written By

Ashley Mowreader

Share This Article