



By: TA | AP Insight

# Trump saying 600,000 Chinese students could come to the US draws MAGA backlash



President Donald Trump seemingly caught his loyal conservative base off-guard and sparked backlash by saying he would allow 600,000 Chinese students into American universities.

That would be a departure for the Trump administration after it added new **vetting** for student visas, moved to block foreign **enrollment** at Harvard and expanded the grounds for **terminating** international students' ability to study in the United States.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has singled out China, the second highest source of international students in the U.S., **saying** in May that the State Department would revoke visas for students tied to the Chinese Communist Party and boost vetting of new applicants.

Trump's announcement Monday adds to the confusion about the administration's restrictive visa **policies** and its approach to China as the superpowers tussle over trade and intensifying tech competition.

It also marks another **divide** with figures in Trump's "Make America Great Again" base, who tout an "America First" agenda and had contested the U.S. inserting itself in the recent Israel-Iran war.

Some of Trump's most ardent supporters — from U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene to former adviser Steve Bannon and far-right activist Laura Loomer — rejected the idea of welcoming more Chinese students.

It's not immediately clear why the figure Trump cited was so high — more than twice the number of Chinese students enrolled in the 2023-2024 school year.

The total also has been falling in the past few years. The White House and State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Here's what to know about Trump's announcement and the reaction:

## What did Trump say about Chinese students?

During a **meeting** with South Korean President Lee Jae Myung in the Oval Office on Monday, Trump was asked by reporters if he would meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"President Xi would like me to come to China. It's a very important relationship. As you know, we are taking a lot of money in from China because of the tariffs and different things," he said. "I hear so many stories about 'We are not going to allow their students,' but we are going to allow their students to come in. We are going to allow it. It's very important — 600,000 students."

Trump doubled down at a Cabinet meeting Tuesday, sitting next to Rubio, where he said he was "honored" to have Chinese students in the U.S. and said they help colleges stay afloat.

**It was a shift after the State Department announced in late May that it would aggressively revoke visas for Chinese students**

"I told this to President Xi that we're honored to have their students here," Trump said. "Now, with that, we check and we're careful, we see who is there."

The Chinese Foreign Ministry also said that Trump told Xi in a June phone call that "the U.S. loves to have Chinese students coming to study in America."

It was a shift after the State Department announced in late May that it would "aggressively revoke visas for Chinese students, including those with connections with the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields."

## How many Chinese students come to the US?

After decades of growth, the number of Chinese students in the U.S. **peaked** at 372,532 in the 2019-2020 academic year, just as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold. The number slipped to 289,526 in 2022 and further dipped to 277,398 in 2023.

In the past year, several U.S. universities, including the University of Michigan, have ended their joint partnerships with Chinese universities after Republicans raised **concerns** that U.S. dollars have contributed to China's tech advancement and military modernization.

Experts say the number of students is likely to fall further because of tense U.S.-China relations and China's declining population.

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There's growing bipartisan consensus that U.S. schools should not help train Beijing's top talent in critical fields such as quantum computing, artificial intelligence and aerospace technology.

Kurt Campbell, deputy secretary of state in the Biden administration, has said he would like to see Chinese students coming to the U.S. to study humanities and social sciences, "not particle physics."

During his first term, Trump banned Chinese graduate students who had attended schools with Chinese military ties.

## How are Trump's supporters reacting?

Bannon, one of Trump's former advisers, criticized the announcement Tuesday, saying "there should be no foreign students here for the moment."

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick was asked Monday on Fox News' "The Ingraham

Angle" how such a shift would be consistent with Trump's "America First" push. Lutnick argued that Trump was taking a "rational economic view" and asserted that 15% of American universities and colleges would go out of business without those foreign students.

"I just don't understand it for the life of me. Those are 600,000 spots that American kids won't get," host Laura Ingraham said.

At Tuesday's Cabinet meeting, Trump said international students are helping keep some U.S. schools afloat.



*International students studying at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$43.8 billion to the U.S. economy and supported 378,175 jobs*

"And you know what would happen if they didn't (come)? Our college system would go to hell very quickly and it wouldn't be the top colleges. It would be colleges that struggle on the bottom," Trump said.

An analysis by NAFSA, an association of international educators, found that international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$43.8 billion to the U.S. economy and supported 378,175 jobs during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Greene, the Republican congresswoman from Georgia, raised questions.

"If refusing to allow these Chinese students to attend our schools causes 15% of them to fail then these schools should fail anyways because they are being propped up by the CCP," Greene said, referring to the Chinese

Communist Party.

## What is China saying about student visa restrictions?

The Chinese Embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment. The foreign ministry has called out the U.S. for what it says is “discriminatory, politically driven and selective law enforcement” against Chinese students arriving in the U.S.

Mao Ning, a ministry spokesperson, said Friday that students have been treated unfairly and subjected to extended interrogations.

Mao said some students had their visas revoked and were banned from entering the country after they were told they “might endanger national security.”

**The U.S.'s moves severely violate the legitimate and lawful rights and interests of Chinese nationals  
- Mao Ning**

“The U.S.'s moves severely violate the legitimate and lawful rights and interests of Chinese nationals, impede the flow of people between the two countries and dampen China-U.S. people-to-people exchanges,” she said.

The embassy issued an advisory Monday urging Chinese students not to enter the U.S. through Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport, alleging several students were harassed and interrogated by customs officials.

The embassy said at least one student was detained for more than 80 hours before being sent back to China.