



Insight

# The Future of Foreign Students in the United States

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## Executive Summary

- President Trump made a major shift in immigration policy last week, reversing the recently announced ban on international students with F1 visas taking only online classes this fall.
- The regulation would have affected up to over 1 million international students enrolled in universities in the United States, encouraged universities to open despite the public-health risk, or both.
- International students support both local economies and the national economy, and banning those taking only online classes during the pandemic would have likely exacerbated a trend of declining international student enrollment in the United States.

## Introduction

Last week, the Trump Administration released new regulations that focused on foreign university students with F1 visas in the United States. These regulations would have required these students to enroll in in-person classes or a combination of in-person and online classes for the fall 2020 semester in order to remain in the United States legally. Students with F1 visas committed to taking classes only online would have their visas terminated. These new regulations were quickly rescinded by the administration early this week.

Historically, students with F1 visas must take the majority of classes in-person. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, U.S. universities turned to online-only classes in the spring and summer semesters of 2020. U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) issued new guidelines in early 2020 allowing and encouraging students to stay in the United States and finish their online classes through the spring and summer terms. In early July, however, the administration shifted to banning F1 visa students if they were taking only online classes. These new regulations arrived as schools such as Harvard and MIT announced they would move to exclusively online classes for fall 2020. Over 200 universities moved to sue ICE over the new regulations and pressured the president to rescind the order, which he soon did.

Limiting the F1 visas could have detrimental effects on the lives of foreign-born students, the interests of U.S. universities, and both local economies and the national economy.

## Consequences of Limiting F1 Visas

If the administration's most stringent policy were to have been enforced, it could have affected and displaced around [1 million](#) international students in the United States. The Trump Administration argued that this regulation would encourage universities to open up in the fall, although public-health considerations seemed to be the primary concern of universities that were deciding to stay closed.

The regulation would also take away opportunities from the international students that could benefit the U.S.

economy in the short and long term. Recent data show that international student enrollment at U.S. universities has been on a downward trend since 2017, with international students choosing to study in other countries over the United States. The United States saw international student enrollment [fall by 7 percent](#) from the 2016-17 academic year to the 2017-18 academic year and further decrease 0.09 percent the year after. In other words, the regulation would have discouraged international students from studying in the United States on top of a trend of fewer students wanting to study in the United States. If the administration were to limit F1 visas, it stands to reason that fewer international students would come to study in the United States and perhaps stay after graduating to contribute to the U.S. economy.

Furthermore, U.S. universities depend on international students for boosting enrollment and strengthening their balance sheets. In 2019, international students [made up 5.5 percent](#) of the total U.S. student body. International students tend to pay full tuition, contribute to the housing sector, and add to local economies. In 2018, international student contributed [\\$45 billion](#) to the U.S. economy overall.

### Conclusion

The president's flip-flop on immigration policy went from banning students with F1 visas that planned to take only online classes in the fall semester to then allowing them to stay through the fall 2020 semester. This shift came as a result of extensive backlash from not only universities, but also the students affected. Limiting F1 visas in the United States would have short- and long-term effects on the U.S. economy both locally and nationally.