

**IMMIGRANTS AND AMERICA'S COMEBACK FROM
THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

BY STUART ANDERSON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Covid-19 health crisis caused a halt to much of the economic activity Americans long took for granted. The economic harm is likely to endure, while the social implications are only now being realized. History and economics show America will be better – and the economic and societal recovery will be stronger – if the country embraces openness rather than fear. Major immigration problems are taking shape: In the Fall 2020, enrollment of new international students at U.S. universities could fall to the lowest level since after World War II, while U.S. average annual labor force growth, a key component of economic growth, may be 59% lower due to Trump administration policies that have reduced legal immigration.

One consequence of the coronavirus pandemic is Americans have become acquainted with people and companies who have proven instrumental to Americans during the crisis. That includes companies providing or working on medical responses, entrepreneurs whose innovations have made our lives easier and immigrant workers in health care and the food sector. While this report provides important data, it also focuses on one of the most important and often overlooked aspect of immigration – the immigrants themselves and their contributions.

In addition to contributions made by immigrants, the study found trends on labor force growth, economic growth and the ability to attract international students that must be addressed in any recovery. Among the findings:

- Restoring legal immigration to the level prior to when Trump administration policies reduced it will help America's comeback from Covid-19 and enhance U.S. economic growth. The National Foundation for American Policy projects that legal immigration will fall by 49% (or 581,845) between FY 2016 and FY 2021 due to Trump administration policies. Average annual labor force growth, a key component of the nation's economic growth, will be approximately 59% lower as a result of the administration's immigration policies, if the policies continue. Economic growth is crucial to improving the standard of living, which means lower levels of legal immigration carry significant consequences for Americans. Without immigrants contributing to the quantity and quality of the labor supply, the majority of the economic growth gains America saw between 2011 and 2016 following the recession would have been eliminated, according to economists at Oxford University and Citi.
- The enrollment of new international students at U.S. universities in the Fall 2020-21 academic year is projected to decline 63% to 98% from the 2018-19 level, with between 6,000 to 12,000 new international students at the low range, and 87,000 to 100,000 at the high range, according to a National Foundation for American Policy analysis. The decline of as many as 263,000 students from the 2018-19 academic year

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

total of approximately 269,000 new international students would be the lowest level of new international students since after World War II when the numbers started to be tracked. The 12,000 level represents new international students if only new students from Mexico and Canada enrolled. Given uncertainties surrounding even Mexican and Canadian students, the most pessimistic forecast would put the number of new enrolled international students at only half the 12,000 level. The enrollment of new international students was approximately 7,800 in 1948-49, the first year on record.

- U.S. consulate closures, travel bans and other difficulties will contribute to the low enrollment of international students. The Trump administration has enacted restrictions that will discourage international students at the same time Canada has continued to adopt a more welcoming approach to such students. This includes a Trump administration [announcement](#) on July 6, 2020, that currently enrolled international students would have to leave the United States if their university did not offer in-person classes during the coronavirus pandemic, reversing a policy that allowed for online classes only in the Spring 2020.

The research finds immigrants and immigrant-founded companies have played a key role during the Covid-19 crisis:

- Moderna, the first company to ship a vaccine for testing against the novel coronavirus, was founded by an immigrant. Immigrants fill many of its key leadership positions, including CEO. Moderna's story is one of welcoming talent from all over the world.
- Zoom Video Communications, the company connecting Americans during the Covid-19 crisis, almost didn't happen, at least not in America, because Chinese-born immigrant Eric Yuan was denied an H-1B visa 8 times before finally making to America.
- Instacart, which provides grocery shopping services, has become a lifeline for many American consumers. Founded by immigrant Apoorva Mehta, the company has provided up to 500,000 new jobs in the United States since March 2020.
- A charity run by immigrant chef José Andrés has served over 19 million fresh meals in cities across America to relieve hunger during a crisis that has left many Americans without a means of support. This comes only three years after the life-saving efforts of Andrés and his team of volunteers in Puerto Rico.
- Gilead Executive Vice President of Pharmaceutical Development and Manufacturing Taiyan Yang was a key figure behind remdesivir, which in medical trials have proven to be one of the few effective treatments for the novel coronavirus. Yang, an immigrant from Taiwan, first came to America as an international student.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

- Peter Tsai, an immigrant from Taiwan, arrived in America as an international student and invented the N95 respiratory mask, which has saved the lives of many Americans during the global pandemic.
- By providing a way to work at home, Peloton has made life easier for Americans. Peloton was co-founded by Yong Feng, an immigrant from China. The company has seen its sales increase by 66% in 2020.
- Slack, which has three immigrant co-founders, has helped make parts of the U.S. economy more productive and has seen exponential growth in its team communication platform as businesses need to connect employees who are working in many different locations due to the pandemic.
- Immigrant doctors and nurses have lost their lives while treating Americans with Covid-19. In America, more than 28% of physicians (281,000) and 15% of registered nurses (570,000) are foreign-born.
- Immigrants have proven crucial to maintaining America's food supply at meat packing plants, where many have contracted the virus while working, as well as in the fields, at grocery stores and behind the wheels of trucks.
- More than 56% of U.S. researchers in life sciences and medicine with a Ph.D. are foreign-born.

The Trump administration and Congress should consider enacting immigration policies that will facilitate America's economic recovery from Covid-19 and alleviate the impact of the virus. These policies include:

- Restore legal immigration to the levels that existed prior to Trump administration policies that reduced immigration. This is important because immigrants play a vital role in economic growth, which improves a nation's standard of living, and it will also conform to America's historical tradition.
- Develop policies to help international students retain their status and work in the United States after graduation, rescind administration policies that prevent or discourage international students from choosing or remaining at U.S. universities, waive interviews for international students as feasible and develop a national strategy to recruit international students to America.
- Enact policies to make it easier for physicians, nurses, medical researchers and others in the healthcare fields, including making it easier for visa holders to move across state lines and provide more temporary visas and employment-based green cards (as well as relief from the per-country limit). Ensure the family members of health care providers who fall sick or die are taken care of via rational immigration policies.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

- Rescind policies, such as the June 22, 2020, [presidential proclamation](#), that prevent the entry of many foreign nationals on H-1B, L-1, H-2B and J-1 visas. Business leaders have criticized the policies and issued statements noting such restrictive immigration policies only encourage more jobs and resources to be transferred to Canada and elsewhere.

In March 2020, Ali Noorani, executive director of the National Immigration Forum, wrote, “History shows us that opportunistic politicians will weaponize coronavirus to scapegoat immigrants and further curtail immigration.” America should fight the impulse to close its borders – and to keep them closed. For a full recovery from the social and economic impacts of the coronavirus, America should be open to the world rather than become more isolated.

COMPANIES AND PEOPLE HELPING AMERICANS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The coronavirus pandemic has led more Americans to become acquainted with people and companies who have helped during the crisis. That includes companies providing or working on medical responses and entrepreneurs whose innovations have made our lives easier. It is helpful at times to put aside numbers and focus on the immigrants themselves and their contributions. These contributions usually take place when America offers opportunity and immigrants are allowed to follow their dreams.

MODERNA

Moderna, the first company to ship a vaccine for testing against the novel coronavirus, was founded by an immigrant. Not only did an immigrant found Moderna but many of the people in key leadership positions, including its CEO, are immigrants. Moderna's is a story of welcoming talent from all over the world.

Noubar Afeyan, co-founder and chairman of Moderna was born to Armenian parents in Lebanon and immigrated with his family in his early teens to Canada. After attending college, Afeyan came to the United States and earned a Ph.D. in biochemical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He started his first company at age 24 and ran PerSeptive Biosystems for 10 years, during which time he founded or co-founded five additional companies.

The U.S. immigration system has no startup visa for founding a company, which can be a major obstacle for foreign nationals with a good idea. However, Afeyan gained permanent residence through another route and is credited as a founder or co-founder of at least 38 companies, primarily through [Flagship Pioneering](#) (formerly Flagship Ventures). He also has over 100 patents.

In 1999 he started Flagship Ventures to develop new companies through its in-house division VentureLabs. In addition to investing in startups he wanted to be more systematic in developing companies. VentureLabs decided to conduct its own research and form new companies if the research proved promising. In 2009, Afeyan co-founded Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Moderna, Inc.

Moderna's CEO is Stéphane Bancel, who immigrated to America from France. He earned a master of engineering degree from École Centrale Paris (ECP), and came to the United States as an international student, receiving a master of science in chemical engineering from the University of Minnesota and an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

Other immigrants in key leadership positions at Moderna include Chief Medical Officer Tal Zaks, in charge of clinical development at the company. Zaks earned an M.D. and Ph.D. from the Ben Gurion University in Israel before coming to the United States for post-doctoral research at the National Institutes of Health, as well as clinical training in internal medicine at Temple University Hospital. Chief Digital and Operational Excellence Officer Marcello Damiani immigrated from France. Moderna's Chief Technical Operations and Quality Officer Juan Andres immigrated from Spain. Both Damiani and Andres have extensive international business experience.

Today, the company has approximately 820 full-time employees and a market capitalization of approximately \$24 billion. Moderna, traded on Nasdaq as MRNA), describes itself as “a clinical stage biotechnology company pioneering messenger RNA (mRNA) therapeutics and vaccines to create a new generation of transformative medicines for patients today.”

On February 24, 2020, the company made worldwide news when it announced the release of the first batch of mRNA-1273, a vaccine intended for human use against the novel coronavirus. It made news again on May 18, 2020, when the company “announced positive interim clinical data of mRNA-1273, its vaccine candidate against novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), from the Phase 1 study led by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).”¹ A third, larger trial is expected in the summer.

“RNA vaccines are great if a vaccine has to be built as fast as possible,” according to Dr. Ivan Martinez, associate professor at West Virginia University, in an interview with *USA Today*. “It’s a technology that could potentially give us a vaccine within a year from now.”² Bill Gates wrote in the *Washington Post*. “An RNA vaccine essentially turns your body into its own vaccine manufacturing unit.”³

Americans are fortunate Noubar Afeyan immigrated to the United States and that the individuals who form most of the leadership team at Moderna soon followed him to America.

ZOOM VIDEO

Zoom Video Communications, the company connecting Americans during the Covid-19 crisis, almost didn't happen, at least not in America. When Eric Yuan was a university student in China, he grew tired of the 10-hour train rides to visit his girlfriend. He came up with the idea of a video conferencing application.

¹ <https://www.flagshippioneering.com/press/moderna-announces-positive-interim-phase-1-data-for-its-mrna-vaccine-mrna-1273-against-novel-coronavirus>.

² George Petras, Ramon Padilla and Veronica Bravo, “Why a coronavirus vaccine is more than a year away, despite medical researchers' progress” *USA Today*, March 11, 2020.

³ Bill Gates, “Here are the innovations we need to reopen the economy,” *Washington Post*, April 23, 2020.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

After attending university, Yuan wanted to work in America but encountered a problem – he couldn't get a visa. "I decided to come to the U.S. in the mid '90's because of the Internet, which I knew was the wave of the future," he [said](#). "It was red hot here, but hadn't yet taken off in China. The first time I applied for a U.S. visa, I was rejected. I continued to apply again and again over the course of two years and finally received my visa on the ninth try."⁴ He was denied [an H-1B visa 8 times](#).

Yuan brought a strong technical background to America. In China, he earned a bachelor of engineering at the Shandong Institute of Business and Technology and a master of engineering management at China University of Mining and Technology. In the United States, he worked for WebEx. When Cisco acquired the company in 2007, Yuan was appointed vice president of engineering at Cisco. In 2012, he left Cisco to start Zoom, putting together a team of 40 engineers.⁵

"Immigrants have started more than half (50 of 91, or 55%) of America's startup companies valued at \$1 billion or more and are key members of management or product development teams in more than 80% of these companies," according to a 2018 National Foundation for American Policy study.⁶ Zoom was one of those companies.

Zoom went from "a maximum of 10 million daily meeting participants in December 2019 to more than 200 million per day in March," writes Elizabeth Nolan Brown in [Reason](#). "Videoconferencing technology has been helping to keep people connected, employed, and semi-sane in these unprecedented times . . . Zoom has emerged as a crowd favorite since the Covid-19 pandemic's start."⁷

"Stories about lax data privacy practices, leaked videos, and hacked meetings have made the news recently, and these are certainly worth keeping a media and privacy watchdog spotlight on," writes Brown, who sees a market solution to the problem. "For its part, [Zoom notes](#) that it 'was built primarily for enterprise customers – large institutions with full IT (information technology) support,' and that 'usage of Zoom has ballooned overnight.'"⁸

There is no denying the importance of Zoom during the Covid-19 crisis. "After the coronavirus contagion brought an end to many of the rituals of everyday life, many of them reappeared on Zoom, a video-call service that has exploded in popularity across a nation almost entirely locked indoors," writes Drew Harwell of the *Washington Post*.

⁴ Yitzi Weiner, "The Inspiring Backstory of Eric S. Yuan, Founder and CEO of Zoom, Medium, October 2, 2017.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stuart Anderson, *Immigrants and Billion-Dollar Companies*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, October 2018.

⁷ Elizabeth Nolan Brown, "Zoom Is Keeping Pandemic-Stricken America Connected. Cue Congress's Tech Panic," *Reason*, April 8, 2020.

⁸ Ibid.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

"Weddings, funerals, company layoffs, kindergarten classes and official government meetings have been streamed on its platform, leading the Silicon Valley firm's market value to double to roughly \$35 billion this year."⁹

Zoom Video is valued at about \$71 billion and the company employs approximately 2,500 people.¹⁰ The company's product has turned into a vital source of business and personal communication during the Covid-19 crisis, helping facilitate everything from daily company chats to remote Happy Hours and celebrations of religious holidays. If Eric Yuan had not received a visa on his ninth try, then the benefits many Americans are receiving from Zoom might not have come to pass.

INSTACART

While many companies in America have frozen or cut their level of employment, immigrant-founded Instacart has expanded. [Instacart](#), which provides grocery shopping services, also has become a lifeline for many American consumers during the Covid-19 crisis.

On March 23, 2020, Instacart founder and CEO Apoorva Mehta [announced](#) the company would hire an additional "300,000 full-service shoppers to support cities nationwide." A month later, Instacart [said](#) it would hire another 250,000 workers. "As more people look for immediate, flexible earnings opportunities during this time, we hope that Instacart can be an additional source of income for those looking to earn while also delivering for the communities in which they live," Mehta announced.

Apoorva Mehta was born in India and moved with his family to Libya for a time before settling in Canada. He received a B.S. in electrical engineering from the University of Waterloo. In the United States, he worked at Blackberry and Qualcomm as a design engineer. He then gained valuable experience at Amazon.com as a supply chain manager.

After leaving Amazon, during the summer of 2012, Mehta spent time at Y Combinator. The idea for Instacart came from experiences gained during earlier startup attempts. "It was 2012, people were ordering everything online, meeting people online, watching movies online, yet the one thing everyone has to do every single week – buying groceries – we still do in an archaic way," Mehta told the [Los Angeles Times](#). "In less than a month, he'd coded himself a crude version of an app that could be used by people who needed groceries, and a version for those who were shopping in-store for customers. On its first test-run, because Mehta hadn't hired any shoppers yet, he ordered through the app, went to the store and delivered the groceries to himself."¹¹

⁹ Drew Harwell, "Everybody Seems to be Using Zoom, but at what risk?," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2020.

¹⁰ Zoom Video.

¹¹ Tracey Lien, "Apoorva Mehta had 20 failed start-ups before Instacart," *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 2017.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

In response to litigation, Instacart made its grocery shopper part-time employees rather than independent contractors. “We went from having zero part-time employees to having people at thousands of individual store locations,” noted Mehta.¹²

Instacart has added more than 14,000 personal shoppers in New York City and, “with a [more than 400 percent](#) increase in sales since March, Instacart has seen a greater rise since the pandemic than any other company – even Amazon or Walmart,” according to the *New York Times*.¹³

Instacart shopper Gerald Timothee, an immigrant from Haiti, has developed a sanitizing routine after he enters a store in New York City. “For many of these workers, their initial terror has been steeled with a sense of duty and pride,” reports the *New York Times*. “It’s all about us right now,” Mr. Timothee said. “We are holding this city together. I feel like a hero.”¹⁴

Apoorva Mehta showed skill in creating Instacart and his company’s ability to provide shopping services has become crucial to those unable to shop themselves during the Covid-19 crisis, as well as a source of employment for many Americans.

CHEF JOSÉ ANDRÉS

José Andrés immigrated to the United States and became one of the best-known chefs in America. He is also an entrepreneur and well-loved public figure. After Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico, he proved to be the most hands-on philanthropist in America. During the Covid-19 crisis, he is once again helping Americans.

The story of José Andrés began in Spain, where he was born. At 21, he was working in a restaurant near Barcelona when his boss, who later became a good friend, fired him. “So there I am in the middle of Spain, it’s raining, and I’m out of a job at a place I thought I would spend my entire career,” [wrote](#) Andrés in 2011. “Within a week, I moved to New York to try something different. I had never thought about trying to be a chef in America, but I thought now was the right time, and I didn’t have any other choices. That was 20 years ago, and moving to the United States really was destined for me. America gave me the opportunity to open successful restaurants, start a TV show and write books.”¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Aaron Randle, “‘I Feel Like a Hero’: A Day in the Life of a Grocery Delivery Man,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ José Andrés, “Jose Andres on Getting Fired From El Bulli,” *Newsweek*, October 2, 2011.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

Given the Covid-19 pandemic, some people may forget the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria and the inadequate federal government response in Puerto Rico, whose residents are American citizens. Andrés mobilized a team of volunteers and led a remarkable effort on the island, cooking and distributing 100,000 meals a day in Puerto Rico within days of the hurricane striking.

It's said that heroes run toward danger, rather than away from it. After the most visible sign of Covid-19 appeared just off the coast of California in March 2020, José Andrés boarded a flight to San Francisco. "At the port of Oakland, where the *Grand Princess* finally docked, Andrés' team made its own statement," reported Sean Gregory of *Time* magazine. "Setting up a tent at the side of the ship, it forklifted fresh meals not only for the quarantined passengers but also for the crew."¹⁶

Andrés has addressed suffering across America. By early April 2020, through his charity [World Central Kitchen](#), Andrés and his team were operating in [22 cities](#). By July, his charity had helped serve over 19 million fresh meals.¹⁷ In [Washington, D.C.](#), World Central Kitchen worked with the Washington Nationals used the stadium's kitchens "to provide thousands of free meals each day to Washington, D.C. residents who may have difficulty accessing food during the coronavirus crisis."

"Andrés is a lesson of leadership in crisis. In a catastrophe in which the response of the U.S. government has been slow, muddled and unsure, his kitchen models the behavior – nimble, confident, proactive – the general public needs in a crisis (and, so far, has provided it more reliably than the federal government)," writes Gregory.¹⁸

"When we hear about a tragedy, we all kind of get stuck on 'What's the best to way to help?'" [said Hamilton](#) playwright and producer Lin-Manuel Miranda. "He just hurries his ass over and gets down there."¹⁹

TAIYAN YANG (GILEAD)

The stock market rose and hopes increased after positive news became public about the drug remdesivir and its use as a treatment for Covid-19. People paid less attention to a key figure behind remdesivir, Taiyan Yang, an immigrant from Taiwan.

Taiyan Yang is executive vice president of pharmaceutical development and manufacturing at Gilead. She has "responsibility for all the company's investigational compounds and marketed products," according to Gilead. "Under

¹⁶ Sean Gregory, "'Without Empathy, Nothing Works.' Chef José Andrés Wants to Feed the World Through the Pandemic," *Time*, March 26, 2020.

¹⁷ <https://wck.org/chefsforamerica>.

¹⁸ Sean Gregory.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

her leadership, Gilead developed the world's first HIV single tablet regimen and advanced more than 25 compounds from early-stage development to market, reaching millions of people around the world.”²⁰

Yan earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from National Taiwan University and came to the United States as international student. She earned her Ph.D. in organic chemistry from the University of Southern California. After receiving her Ph.D. and an employment visa in the United States, Yang worked for Syntex, and joined Gilead in 1993, rising to oversee pharmaceutical development and manufacturing.

Early results have shown remdesivir can be an effective treatment. “Preliminary results from the 1059 patients (538 assigned to remdesivir and 521 to placebo) with data available after randomization indicated that those who received remdesivir had a median recovery time of 11 days . . . as compared with 15 days in those who received placebo,” according to an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. “The Kaplan-Meier estimates of mortality by 14 days were 7.1% with remdesivir and 11.9% with placebo.”²¹

PETER TSAI, INVENTOR OF THE N95 RESPIRATORY MASK

When Peter Tsai, an immigrant from Taiwan, arrived in America as an international student he did not expect to invent a device that would save the lives of many Americans during a global pandemic. When Tsai studied for a Ph.D. at Kansas State University in 1981, he completed in excess of 500 credits, well above the 90 he needed. “His thirsty intellect drove him to take courses in subjects ranging from chemical engineering to physics and math,” according to the *Washington Post*.²²

In 1992, Tsai led a team at the University of Tennessee that produced a “breakthrough” on filtering out “unwanted” particles.²³ “His invention eventually became the foundation of the N95 respiratory mask,” notes the *Washington Post*. “Over the course of his career in textile manufacturing, engineering and teaching at the University of Tennessee, Tsai has earned 12 U.S. patents in filtration technology, including his latest [hydrostatic charging method](#), which makes respiratory masks twice as efficient as his initial invention.”²⁴

Tsai left retirement to help develop ways to safely reuse masks as a way to assist medical personnel facing the coronavirus pandemic. He has worked with a team at the University of Tennessee. “As a testament to his legacy, it

²⁰ Gilead.

²¹ John H. Beigel et al., “Remdesivir for the Treatment of Covid-19 — Preliminary Report,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, May 22, 2020.

²² Sydney Page, “The retired inventor of N95 masks is back at work, mostly for free, to fight covid-19,” *Washington Post*, July 7, 2020.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

was estimated that more than one billion people have used his technologies to protect and improve their health, with that figure coming before the pandemic," according to the University of Tennessee.²⁵

PELOTON

The *Wall Street Journal* recently singled out Peloton as one of the companies whose products are making life easier during the coronavirus pandemic, writing, "In the absence of gyms and studio fitness classes, Peloton became a much-needed respite for people stuck at home."²⁶

The need to avoid situations more likely to increase the chance of infection has encouraged more Americans to see the value of working out at home. "Before the pandemic, sweating profusely next to other fitness fanatics in a dark room with loud music was an experience worth \$30 a class," writes Nicole Nguyen. "Now, getting that same workout from the comfort of your well-ventilated home seems much more appealing. Peloton's internet-connected \$2,000-plus stationary bike and \$4,000-plus treadmill (\$39-a-month class subscription sold separately) was once regarded as an almost obscene extravagance."²⁷ Sales at Peloton increased by 66% in one recent quarter and its bike has become so popular people have needed to wait 10 weeks to receive one.²⁸

Yong Feng, an immigrant to the U.S. from China, co-founded Peloton and serves as the company's chief technology officer (CTO). "Feng was an interesting choice as the company's technical co-founder," writes tech writer Sarah Lacy. "He didn't come from the hardware world or the fitness world, rather his experience was on the technical aspect that would prove the most crucial and bedeviling to Peloton: Making sure streaming worked for a huge number of distributed riders, no matter where they'd positioned their bikes in their homes."²⁹

SLACK

Slack, which provides a platform for team communication, is another immigrant-founded company many Americans now view as indispensable as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The company's immigrant founders are Stewart Butterfield (Canada), Serguei Mourachov (Russia) and Cal Henderson (UK). In March 2020, Slack CEO Stewart Butterfield shared the exponential growth the company has experienced due to the lockdowns and remote work as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. "More signs of demand surge," Butterfield tweeted. He noted that it took nearly 1,600 days for the company to reach 1 million "simultaneously connected" users in October 2015. He showed how

²⁵ <https://tickle.utk.edu/the-man-behind-the-mask/>.

²⁶ Nicole Nguyen, "Our Habits Have Changed. These Gadgets Are Proof," *Wall Street Journal*, May 24, 2020.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sarah Lacy, "Streaming the Future of Fitness," *Startups.com*, December 12, 2016.

Immigrants and America’s Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

soon after the health crisis consumed the country, Slack reached 10.5 million users and a week later added another 2 million simultaneously connected users.³⁰

IMMIGRANT DOCTORS AND NURSES

At a news conference in May, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy recognized the deaths of an Indian immigrant and his daughter, both physicians who lost their lives treating patients with the coronavirus. “We remember two of our healthcare heroes, Dr. Satyender Dev Khanna and Dr. Priya Khanna,” said Murphy at a press conference. “They were father and daughter. They both dedicated their lives to helping others and we lost both of them to Covid-19. The Dad was a surgeon who served both on staff and as the head of the surgical departments for multiple hospitals across our state for literally decades. . . . His daughter, Dr. Priya Khanna, was double board certified in both internal medicine and nephrology. . . . We commit in their memory to saving as many lives as we can.”³¹

In June 2020, an Indian-born physician, Dr. Ankit Bharat, the chief of thoracic surgery and surgical director of the lung transplant program at Northwestern Medicine, performed a double lung transplant to save the life of a young woman with the coronavirus.³²

**Table 1
Foreign-Born Working in America in Health Care Occupations**

Occupation	Percent Foreign-Born	Number of Foreign-Born
Home Health Aides	35.2%	224,000
Physicians	28.5%	281,000
Personal Care Aides	24.7%	457,000
Pharmacists	22.4%	81,000
Nursing Assistants	20.9%	365,000
Surgeons	18.9%	11,000
Registered Nurses	15.0%	570,000
Respiratory Therapists	13.1%	17,000

Source: National Foundation for American Policy tabulation of Census Bureau’s 2018 American Community Survey. Note: Foreign-born excludes those born abroad to U.S. citizen parents.

An estimated 15,000 H-1B visa holders work in the United States as physicians, with many risking their lives daily. “A visa holder’s death could quickly change a family’s ability to stay in the U.S. – and as the coronavirus has spread, the likelihood of a doctor’s premature passing has increased dramatically,” write Russell Gold and Michelle Hackman in the *Wall Street Journal*. “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday that 294 health-care workers had died from Covid-19, adding that this tally was likely an undercount because of challenges

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/stewart/status/1243000497566441472>.

³¹ “Covid-19: Indian American father daughter duo hailed as ‘healthcare heroes,’” *American Bazaar*, May 8, 2020.

³² Denise Grady, “Covid-19 Patient Gets Double Lung Transplant, Offering Hope for Others,” *New York Times*, June 11, 2020.

Immigrants and America’s Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

in collecting data.”³³ If a physician on an H-1B visa holder becomes sick and cannot work for more than 30 days, he may be forced to leave the country. Family members of an H-1B visa holder waiting years for a green card could face deportation if the visa holder dies.

The toll on foreign-born nurses also has been heavy. “ProPublica reported that at least 30 Filipino health workers had died in the New York-New Jersey region . . . One in four Filipinos in the New York-New Jersey region works in hospitals and other medical fields,” reported the *Strait Times*.³⁴

Table 2
U.S. Researchers in Life Sciences and Medicine (R&D Primary Work Activity)

Nativity and Location of Degree	Doctorates in STEM	Professional Degree in Health	Total	Percentage
Foreign-Born	85,000	5,300	90,800	56.6%
Native-Born	67,200	2,400	69,600	43.4%
Total	152,700	7,700	160,400	100%

Source: National Foundation for American Policy estimates using the National Science Foundation's 2017 National Survey of College Graduates. Note: Includes only those with occupations in the life sciences who listed basic research, applied research, development, or design as their primary work activity. Does not include those in health practitioner occupations.

In Chicago, Ijeoma Afuke, a Nigerian immigrant who was a certified nursing assistant studying to be a nurse, died of Covid-19 while working for MADDO Healthcare in Chicago. Her husband said the facility lacked sufficient personal protective equipment for the staff treating patients. An interview scheduled in April for citizenship was postponed due to the nation’s health crisis. “Before she could reschedule it, the 35-year-old Chicago woman became another casualty working on the pandemic’s front line in the health care sector,” reported the *Chicago Tribune*.³⁵

More than 28% of physicians (281,000) and 15% of registered nurses (570,000) in America are foreign-born. They have been critical in the response to Covid-19. Immigrants also comprise a significant share of other healthcare providers: Approximately 19% of surgeons (11,000), 22% of pharmacists (81,000), 21% of nursing assistants (365,000), 13% of respiratory therapists (17,000), 35% of home health aides (224,000) and 25% of personal care aides (457,000) are foreign-born.³⁶

³³ Russell Gold and Michelle Hackman, “Covid-19 Spreads Deportation Fears Among Immigrant Doctors in U.S.,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2020.

³⁴ Raul Dancel, “Filipino immigrant nurses pay heavy price as Covid-19 pandemic races across the globe,” *Strait Times*, May 18, 2020.

³⁵ Christy Gutowski, “Nigerian immigrant working as CNA dies of Covid-19 months before becoming nurse, citizen,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 2020.

³⁶ National Foundation for American Policy tabulation of Census Bureau’s 2018 American Community Survey.

Table 3
Foreign-Born U.S. Researchers in Life Sciences and Medicine (R&D Primary Work Activity)

Nativity and Location of Degree	Doctorates in STEM	Professional Degree in Health	Total	Percentage
Foreign-Born With U.S. Degree	40,000	300	40,300	44.4%
Foreign-Born With Foreign Degree	45,500	5,000	50,500	55.6%
Total	85,500	5,300	90,800	100%

Source: National Foundation for American Policy estimates using the National Science Foundation's 2017 National Survey of College Graduates. Note: Includes only those with occupations in the life sciences who listed basic research, applied research, development, or design as their primary work activity. Does not include those in health practitioner occupations.

Foreign-Born researchers are crucial to American science and medicine. In life sciences and medicine in the United states, nearly 57% (or 90,800) of U.S. researchers with Ph.D.'s is foreign-born whose primary work is research and development. Such researchers are educated both inside and outside of America. Among the 90,800 foreign-born individuals in the U.S. who are researchers in life science and medicine, 44% received a degree in the United States and 56% earned a degree abroad.³⁷ A National Foundation for American Policy analysis of approximately 1,500 biographies found more than 40% of researchers at America's top cancer research institutes are foreign-born.³⁸

ESSENTIAL WORKERS AND THE U.S. FOOD SUPPLY

The coronavirus pandemic has made clear how important immigrants are to America's food supply. The nation's meat supply became threatened after many immigrants working in conditions that resulted in many becoming infected, which forced several meatpacking plants to close.

"On April 10, Tony Thompson, the sheriff for Black Hawk County in Iowa, visited the giant Tyson Foods pork plant in Waterloo," reported the *New York Times*. "What he saw, he said, 'shook me to the core.' Workers, many of them immigrants, were crowded elbow to elbow as they broke down hog carcasses zipping by on a conveyor belt. The few who had face coverings wore a motley assortment of bandannas, painters' masks or even sleep masks stretched around their mouths. Some had masks hanging around their necks."³⁹

³⁷ National Foundation for American Policy estimates using the National Science Foundation's 2017 National Survey of College Graduates. Note: Includes only those with occupations in the life sciences who listed basic research, applied research, development, or design as their primary work activity. Does not include those in health practitioner occupations.

³⁸ Stuart Anderson, *The Contributions of Immigrants to Cancer Research in America*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, February 2013.

³⁹ Ana Swanson, David Yaffe-Bellany and Michael Corkery, "Pork Chops vs. People: Battling Coronavirus in an Iowa Meat Plant," *New York Times*, May 10, 2020.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

In May, *USA Today* reported a startling set of statistics: "As of May 20, 2020, officials have publicly linked at least 15,300 COVID-19 infections to 192 U.S. meatpacking plants, according to tracking by the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting. At least 63 workers have died."⁴⁰

Table 4
Foreign-Born Working in Food Supply Occupations

Occupation	Percent Foreign-Born	Number of Foreign-Born
Agriculture Workers (other)	42.1%	481,000
Butchers & other Meat, Poultry & Fish Processing Workers	29.1%	88,000
Bakers	27.2%	77,000
Food Batchmakers	24.0%	26,000
Driver/Sales Workers and Truck Drivers	17.0%	760,000

Source: National Foundation for American Policy tabulation of Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey. Note: Foreign-born excludes those born abroad to U.S. citizen parents.

H-2A agricultural temporary visa holders are so important to America's food supplies that the Trump administration waived interview requirements at U.S. consulates for returning workers to ensure they could come into the United States. Many agricultural workers who are not foreign-born temporary visa holders are unauthorized immigrants.

Immigrants also play important roles at supermarkets, and in trucking and delivery. According to the Census Bureau, the foreign-born in America represent approximately 42% of agriculture workers (other), 29% of butchers and meat, poultry and fish processing workers, 27% of bakers, 24% of food batchmakers (operate food processing equipment) and 17% of drivers/sales workers and truck drivers.⁴¹

IMMIGRANTS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

An important way to help America's comeback from Covid-19 and enhance U.S. economic growth, which is crucial to improving the standard of living, would be for the United States to restore legal immigration to the levels that existed prior to Trump administration policies that reduced it. In an analysis with important implications to the nation's economic growth, the National Foundation for American Policy projects that legal immigration will fall by 49% (or 581,845) between FY 2016 and FY 2021 due to Trump administration policies. (From the FY 2016 total of 1,183,505 down to 601,660 in FY 2021.)

⁴⁰ Sky Chadde, Kyle Bagenstose, Veronica Martinez Jacobo and Rachel Axon, "Cheap chicken, beef came at a cost. How American meat plants bred coronavirus hot spots," *USA Today*, May 22, 2020.

⁴¹ National Foundation for American Policy tabulation of Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey. Note: Foreign-born excludes those born abroad to U.S. citizen parents.

Immigrants and America’s Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

A 49% decline in legal immigration would mean in the long-term average annual U.S. labor force growth, a key component of the nation’s economic growth, will be up to 59% lower in America due to administration immigration policies. The significant decline in the annual level of legal immigration would mean lower long-term economic growth. Admitting fewer immigrants results in lower economic growth because labor force growth is an important element of economic growth and immigrants play a major part in both current and future labor force growth.

The National Foundation for American Policy used information provided by the Census Bureau to calculate the growth in the U.S. labor force based on a 30%, 40% and 50% reduction in legal immigration from the FY 2016 level of legal immigration. The NFAP analysis assumes the reduction would remain in place through 2060. Part of the impact is not only from fewer immigrants working but also fewer immigrants having children in the United States who eventually would have entered the labor force.

A February 2020 report from the U.S. Census Bureau concluded, “Higher international immigration over the next four decades would produce a faster growing, more diverse, and younger population for the United States.”⁴² Given the importance of immigration to estimates of future U.S. population, the report made projections of population size, which included information on the working age population.

**Table 5
U.S. Labor Force Growth Under Different Immigration Scenarios**

	Census Base Case for 2016-2060 Growth	With a 30% Reduction in Legal Immigration (2016-2060)	With a 40% Reduction in Legal Immigration (2016-2060)	With a 50% Reduction in Legal Immigration (2016-2060)
Size of U.S. Labor Force	193,227,000	180,394,000	176,100,000	171,806,000
Percentage of Labor Force Growth 2016-2060	22.0%	13.9%	11.2%	8.5%
Average Annual Labor Force Growth 2016-2060	0.45%	0.30%	0.24%	0.19%
Change in Average Annual Labor Force Growth From Census Base Case	—	-35%	-47%	-59%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, National Foundation for American Policy. The Census Base Case for 2016-2060 is based on immigration patterns and projections for 2017 and later. Note: Analysis assumes labor force participation rates derived from the 2018 American Community Survey. Estimates based on immigration reductions remaining in place over the time periods covered.

⁴² Sandra Johnson, *A Changing Nation: Population Projections Under Alternative Immigration Scenarios*, Current Population Reports, P25-1146, U.S. Census Bureau, February 2020.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

Reducing legal immigration by approximately 50% would mean the U.S. labor force would grow 59% less as compared to pre-2017 levels. The average annual labor force growth would be only 0.19%, compared to 0.45% without the 50% reduction. Instead of the U.S. labor force growing by 22% to 193,227,000 in 2060, it would only grow by 8.5%, to 171,806,000. That would mean in 40 years America's labor force would have only about 6 million people more than the current level of approximately 165 million.

An April 22, 2020, [presidential proclamation](#) added a “suspension” on the entry of immigrants that will prevent the entry of the parents of U.S. citizens and immigrants in the family-sponsored preference categories, the vast majority of whom normally obtain immigrant visas at consulates (rather than adjustment of status in the United States). And the suspension will also prevent the entry of Diversity Visa recipients.⁴³

Table 6
Legal Immigration Projections

Persons Obtaining Lawful Permanent Residence	FY 2016 (Actual)	FY 2021 (Projected)	Change from FY 2016 to FY 2021
Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens	566,706	269,131	-297,575 (53%)
Refugees (including Cuban Adjustment Act)	120,216	35,000	-85,216 (-71%)
Asylees	37,209	25,000	-12,209 (-67%)
Family-Sponsored Preferences	238,087	19,000	-219,087 (-92%)
Employment-Based Preferences*	137,893	220,000	+82,107 (+60%)
Diversity	49,865	0	-49,865 (-100%)
Rest of Legal Immigration System	33,529	33,529	0 (0%)
OVERALL LEVEL OF LEGAL IMMIGRATION	1,183,505	601,660	-581,845 (-49%)

Source: National Foundation for American Policy, Dept. of Homeland Security. *Assumes presidential proclamation on suspension of most immigrant visas and other Trump administration immigration policies continue in FY 2021 and a spillover of unused numbers from FY 2020 family-based preferences will be used for employment-based category in FY 2021 up to the highest recent level of approximately 220,000 in FY 2005.

The NFAP analysis assumes the presidential proclamation on the suspension of most immigrant visas and other Trump administration immigration policies will continue in FY 2021. In addition, it assumes a spillover of unused numbers from FY 2020 family-based preferences will be used for employment-based category in FY 2021 up to the highest recent level of adjustments of status, which was approximately 220,000 in FY 2005. However, it is possible

⁴³ *The Impact of Administration Policies on Immigration Levels and Labor Force Growth*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, February 2020.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

USCIS will not achieve that level of processing and legal immigration in FY 2021 will be lower, particularly given the financial difficulties experienced by USCIS.

Economists know the importance of growth in the labor force to an economy. "In summary, slowing workforce growth is likely to be a continuing headwind for U.S. economic growth," according to Robert S. Kaplan, president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. "Finding ways to grow the workforce will be critical to improving GDP [Gross Domestic Product] growth prospects for the U.S."⁴⁴

Kaplan leaves no doubt that labor force growth is crucial to economic/Gross Domestic Product growth. "As baby boomers increasingly leave the workforce, U.S. labor force growth is slowing," writes Kaplan. "Slower labor force growth is critically important because *GDP growth [economic growth] is made up of growth in the workforce plus growth in labor productivity. Unless slower workforce growth is offset by improved productivity growth, U.S. GDP growth will slow.*"⁴⁵

"Labor force growth has been a key aspect of sustained U.S. growth over the past several decades," explains Kaplan. "Throughout our history, immigration of workers has also been a key aspect of U.S. labor force growth."⁴⁶

"The Dallas Fed does a substantial amount of research on immigration trends. Pia Orrenius, senior economist at the Dallas Fed, has pointed out that more than 50 percent of workforce growth over the past 20 years has come from immigrants and their children. . . . Her work suggests that if the U.S. is to improve workforce growth in the years ahead, immigration is likely to be a key element of this effort."⁴⁷

According to the Conference Board: "The U.S. will not be able to maintain its current standard of living unless the U.S. government acts to significantly increase immigration, improve labor force participation, and, together with employers, raise labor productivity growth."⁴⁸

Over time, the impact of hundreds of thousands of fewer immigrants per year will have a significant negative cumulative effect on the U.S. economy and America's ability to deal with its aging population. Without immigrants contributing to the quantity and quality of the labor supply, the majority of the economic growth gains America saw

⁴⁴ Robert S. Kaplan, "Economic Conditions and the Key Structural Drivers Impacting the Economic Outlook," Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, October 10, 2019.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Gad Levanon, Elizabeth Crofoot, Frank Steemers and Robin Erickson, *U.S. Labor Shortages: Challenges and Solutions*, The Conference Board, February 2020.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

between 2011 and 2016 following the recession would have been eliminated, according to economists at Oxford University and Citi.⁴⁹

"In the past decade, population growth, including immigration, has accounted for roughly half of the potential economic growth rate in the United States," concluded Morgan Stanley's chief global strategist Ruchir Sharma. "Virtually no nation has ever sustained rapid economic growth without strong population growth. And at a time when every major country including the United States faces continued decline in population growth, workers are an increasingly precious source of national economic strength."⁵⁰

Michael R. Strain, an economist at the American Enterprise Institute and author of the book, *The American Dream Is Not Dead: (But Populism Could Kill It)*, said, "There are two ways to fuel economic growth: a larger workforce and workers who are more productive. Immigration accelerates the former, and can accelerate the latter. In the United States, immigrants have been responsible for important innovations, along with relatively high rates of entrepreneurship."⁵¹

In response to the question, Do you think when the Covid-19 crisis ends, the U.S. economy will be stronger and will recover faster if the country embraces openness on trade and immigration, rather than fear and protectionism toward the world outside the United States?, Strain said, "Over the longer-term, absolutely."⁵²

A recent analysis by economists Pia Orrenius and Chloe Smith at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas summarized its conclusion in the title: "Without Immigration, U.S. Economy Will Struggle to Grow."⁵³

IMMIGRANTS HAVE NO NEGATIVE IMPACT ON NATIVE UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

For more than a century, some have argued immigrants "take" jobs from natives and, therefore, increase the unemployment rate. An April 22, 2020, [presidential proclamation](#) suspended the entry of most new immigrants for at least 60 days, although it has since been extended and could last indefinitely. The proclamation asserted the reason for the suspensions is that "we must be mindful of the impact of foreign workers on the United States labor market, particularly in an environment of high domestic unemployment and depressed demand for labor."⁵⁴ Similar logic was used in a June 22, 2020, [presidential proclamation](#) to suspend the entry of high-skilled visa holders, even

⁴⁹ Ian Goldin, Andrew Pitt, Benjamin Nabarro and Kathleen Boyle, *Migration and the Economy*, Citi and Oxford Martin School, Oxford University, September 2018.

⁵⁰ Ruchir Sharma, "To Be Great Again, America Needs Immigrants," *The New York Times*, May 6, 2017.

⁵¹ Stuart Anderson, "Populism Threatens the American Dream Warns Economist," *Forbes*, May 11, 2020.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Pia Orrenius and Chloe Smith, "Without Immigration, U.S. Economy Will Struggle to Grow," Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, April 9, 2020.

⁵⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-suspending-entry-immigrants-present-risk-u-s-labor-market-economic-recovery-following-covid-19-outbreak/>.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

though a National Foundation for American Policy [analysis](#) found the unemployment rate of individuals in computer occupations has declined since January 2020.

The Trump administration has used the Covid-19 crisis to enact policies that could not make it through Congress. The proclamation contains nearly identical legal immigration provisions to those of a White House-designed bill the U.S. Senate rejected on February 15, 2018. That bill was [voted down on a "cloture motion" 60-39](#). Like the bill, the proclamation would prevent U.S. citizens from sponsoring a parent, as well as adult children and siblings (the family preference categories).⁵⁵ The legislation would have ended the Diversity Visa lottery, which the proclamation does as well. While the presidential proclamation asserts suspending immigration in almost the same categories targeted in the Senate bill was necessary due to the nation's unemployment rate, in February 2018, when the bill was considered, the [U.S. unemployment rate](#) was only 4.1%.⁵⁶

Economic research reveals the premise of the proclamation – that reducing legal immigration would lower the U.S. unemployment rate – is without merit. "The results of the state-level analysis indicate that immigration does not increase U.S. natives' unemployment or reduce their labor force participation," according to a [study](#) for the National Foundation for American Policy by Madeline Zavodny, an economics professor at the University of North Florida (UNF) in Jacksonville and formerly an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. "Instead, having more immigrants reduces the unemployment rate and raises the labor force participation rate of U.S. natives within the same sex and education group."⁵⁷

Zavodny used a state-level analysis to research the impact of immigrants for the years 2005 to 2013 and controlled for economic conditions that could affect the number of immigrants in a state. The study found:

- "A 1 percentage point increase in the share of the labor force comprised of immigrants appears to reduce the unemployment rate of U.S. natives in the same sex-education group by 0.062 percentage points, on average.
- "A 1 percentage point increase in the share of the labor force comprised of immigrants appears to raise the labor force participation rate of U.S. natives in the same sex-education group by 0.045 percentage points, on average.
- "There is no evidence of significant adverse effects among less-educated U.S.-born workers, while immigration appears to boost labor force participation among more-educated U.S.-born workers.

⁵⁵ Congressional Record, February, 15, 2018, see page S1036 [here](#).

⁵⁶ See "Lawsuit Asks Judge To Stop Trump Immigration Order," *Forbes*, April 27, 2020.

⁵⁷ Madeline Zavodny, *Immigration, Unemployment and Labor Force Participation in the United States*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, May 2018.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

- “Having more immigrants overall does not significantly affect U.S. natives’ unemployment or labor force participation rate.”⁵⁸

Zavodny concluded, “Immigrants may boost consumer demand, start their own businesses, and reduce offshoring . . . of manual-labor intensive jobs in the U.S.” She also pointed out immigrants tend to work in different sectors, in different parts of the country and even in different parts of the labor market within a state, which limits some of the competition with natives. For both high- and lower-skilled jobs, “U.S. natives tend to move into communications-intensive jobs in response to an inflow of immigrants.”⁵⁹

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The enrollment of new international students at U.S. universities in the Fall 2020-21 academic year is projected to decline 63% to 98% from the 2018-19 level, with between 6,000 to 12,000 new international students at the low range, and 87,000 to 100,000 at the high range, according to a National Foundation for American Policy analysis.⁶⁰ The decline of as many as 263,000 students from the 2018-19 academic year total of approximately 269,000 new international students would be the lowest level of new international students since after World War II when the numbers started to be tracked. The 12,000 level represents new international students if only new students from Mexico and Canada enrolled. Given uncertainties surrounding even Mexican and Canadian students, the most pessimistic forecast would put the number of new enrolled international students at only half the 12,000 level.⁶¹ The enrollment of new international students was approximately 7,800 in 1948-49, the first year on record, based on an analysis of historical data from Institute of International Education.⁶²

An administration [announcement](#) on July 6, 2020, that currently enrolled international students would have to leave the United States (and new students could not come) if their university did not offer in-person classes during the coronavirus pandemic reversed a policy that allowed for online classes only during the Spring 2020. It created concerns of a departure of international students.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ An NFAP analysis of data in *Open Doors*, Institute of International Education, November 2019: <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment>. Enrollment of new international students for Canada and Mexico in 2018-19 estimated (and rounded upwards to 12,000) based on the proportion of new international students as a percentage of total enrollment (i.e., not including OPT) in 2018-19.

⁶¹ International students from Mexico and Canada are exempt from border restrictions.

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-05-22/pdf/2020-11145.pdf>.

⁶² <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment>. NFAP estimated the number of new international students enrolled in 1948-49 by applying the same percentage of new enrollment vs. total enrollment from recent years.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

"It is not clear whether the State Department will resume processing in time to bring in new students in general," said Jeffrey Gorsky, senior counsel at Berry Appleman & Leiden LLP and former Chief of the Legal Advisory Opinion section of the Visa Office in the U.S. Department of State.⁶³ The State Department has indicated the travel bans in effect due to the coronavirus pandemic – covering China, the UK, Ireland, Iran, the Schengen Area and Brazil – may prevent students from those countries from obtaining visas to the United States.⁶⁴

Feldblum sees many obstacles working against international students arriving on U.S. campuses in the fall. "First, there are the Covid-19 travel bans and flight restrictions, combined with the visa processing challenges, especially if the State Department does not put into place more systemic solutions to expedite and prioritize processing," she said. "The increased rhetoric around presidential proclamations, threats to OPT and H-1B will present a picture of the United States as an unwelcoming environment." She said, "The prospects for enrollment of new international students may be dire," she said and notes that people working in international recruitment believe enrollment of new international students will decline significantly.⁶⁵

Even before the Covid-19 crisis, the United States was falling behind other countries in attracting international students. In the 2018-19 academic year, new enrollment of international students at U.S. universities was 269,383, compared to 300,743 in 2015-16, a decline of 31,360, or 10.4%, according to analysis of data.⁶⁶

Although new enrollment of international students in the United States declined for three straight years, at universities in Australia the enrollment of international students in higher education increased by 47% between 2015 and 2018, according to Australian government data.

The evidence indicates in recent years many Indian students were choosing Canada over the United States as the place to study and make their careers. More restrictive immigration and international student policies under the Trump administration and the difficulty of obtaining green cards in the United States are key factors.

The number of international students from India enrolled in graduate-level computer science and engineering at U.S. universities declined by more than 25% between the 2016-17 and 2018-19 academic years, according to an analysis by the National Foundation for American Policy.⁶⁷

⁶³ Stuart Anderson, "Inside Trump's Immigration Order To Restrict Chinese Students," *Forbes*, June 1, 2020.

⁶⁴ Stuart Anderson, "New International Students To U.S. May Hit Post-WW2 Lows," *Forbes*, July 13, 2020.

⁶⁵ Stuart Anderson, "Universities and International Students Face Tough Prospects in Fall," *Forbes*, June 15, 2020.

⁶⁶ An analysis of data in *Open Doors*, Institute of International Education, November 2019:

<https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment>.

⁶⁷ *Analysis of International Student Data for the 2018-19 Academic Year*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, June 2020.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

The number of international students from India studying at Canadian universities rose from 76,075 [in 2016](#) to 172,625 in 2018, an increase of 127%, according to the [Canadian Bureau for International Education](#).

"Canada is benefiting from a diversion of young Indian tech workers from U.S. destinations, largely because of the challenges of obtaining and renewing H-1B visas and finding a reliable route to U.S. permanent residence," said Peter Rekai, founder of the Toronto-based immigration law firm Rekai LLP. Canada allows for a smooth transition from international student to work after graduation. That creates a path to permanent residence.⁶⁸

Trump administration policies are likely to make it more difficult for U.S. universities to regain the allegiance of international students and recently, via a [presidential proclamation](#), the administration imposed visa restrictions against Chinese graduate students who study in science and engineering.

The administration has announced plans to restrict [Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#), which has been on the regulatory agenda for the past 3 years. Optional Practical Training permits international students to work in the U.S. for 12 months or an additional 24 months in a STEM-related job, usually after graduation. "Significantly restricting OPT would have a devastating effect on attracting international graduate students in science and engineering to the United States," said Alan W. Cramb, president of Illinois Institute of Technology. According to Cramb, at the master's degree level students in science and engineering use OPT to gain experience in their fields but also to earn money to pay back the cost of their education, and perhaps stay in the U.S. or at least go home debt-free. "If students cannot do Optional Practical Training, then they won't come to the United States. It's that simple."⁶⁹

The contrast with Canada is striking. The Canadian government has announced it will accommodate international students unable to resume or begin classes in person and ensure it will not affect their ability to work in Canada after graduation.⁷⁰ In May, both Australia and New Zealand announced plans to begin welcoming back international students to their universities as part of an overall approach to reopening their economies.⁷¹

CONCLUSION

The Trump administration and Congress should consider enacting immigration policies that will help America's economic recovery from Covid-19 and alleviate the impacts of the virus. First, since immigrants play a vital role in economic growth, which improves a nation's standard of living, an important way to help America's comeback from

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Stuart Anderson, "Universities and International Students Face Tough Prospects in Fall."

⁷⁰ "Flexibility in post-graduation work permit rules to help international students and Canadian post-secondary institutions," statement, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, May 14, 2020.

⁷¹ <https://monitor.icef.com/2020/05/australia-and-new-zealand-set-out-plans-for-reopening-to-international-students/>.

Immigrants and America's Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis

Covid-19 and enhance U.S. economic growth would be to restore legal immigration to the levels that existed prior to a series of Trump administration policies.

Second, the administration should develop policies to help international students retain their status and work in the United States after graduation, and rescind administration policies that prevent or discourage international students from choosing or remaining at U.S. universities. NAFSA: Association of International Educators has recommended the State Department consider funding scholarships, perhaps through the Fulbright Program, for international students who conduct research related to the pandemic. The organization has urged consular officers to waive many interviews for international students, for DHS to avoid new restrictions and extend or pause filing deadlines for individuals who need employment authorization documents and to “establish a national recruitment strategy to attract and retain international students and scholars.”⁷²

Third, enact policies to make it easier for physicians, nurses, medical researchers and others in the healthcare fields, including making it easier for visa holders to move across state lines and provide more temporary visas and employment-based green cards (as well as relief from the per-country limit. “An ‘emergency supplement’ of permanent visa numbers for skilled workers generally would help protect not only also the technologists and others working to maintain the critical infrastructures that allow American businesses to operate with remote staff (and thus continue to keep workers on payroll),” according to attorney William Stock. “In addition, Congress should look to provisions passed after the 9/11 attacks as a model to provide ‘special immigrant’ visa petitions for the families of workers who are victims of while stuck in these visa backlogs.”⁷³

Fourth, the administration should rescind policies, such as the June 22, 2020, [presidential proclamation](#), that prevent the entry of many foreign nationals on H-1B, L-1, H-2B and J-1 visas.

For a full recovery from the social and economic impacts of the coronavirus, America should be open to the world rather than grow more isolated.

⁷² “Revive and Restore International Education Impacted by Covid-19,” NAFSA, 2020.

⁷³ Stuart Anderson, “Immigration Can Save Lives During America's COVID-19 Crisis,” *Forbes*, April 6, 2020.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stuart Anderson is Executive Director of the National Foundation for American Policy, a non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization in Arlington, Va. Stuart served as Executive Associate Commissioner for Policy and Planning and Counselor to the Commissioner at the Immigration and Naturalization Service from August 2001 to January 2003. He spent four and a half years on Capitol Hill on the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, first for Senator Spencer Abraham and then as Staff Director of the subcommittee for Senator Sam Brownback. Prior to that, Stuart was Director of Trade and Immigration Studies at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., where he produced reports on the military contributions of immigrants and the role of immigrants in high technology. He has an M.A. from Georgetown University and a B.A. in Political Science from Drew University. Stuart has published articles in the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and other publications. He is the author of the book *Immigration* (Greenwood, 2010).

ABOUT THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN POLICY

Established in 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia, focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Cornell Law School professor Stephen W. Yale-Loehr, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder and former INS Commissioner James Ziglar. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at www.nfap.com.
Twitter: [@NFAPResearch](https://twitter.com/NFAPResearch)