

National Foundation for American Policy

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New Research Finds International Student and Legal Immigration Levels Falling Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic and Trump Administration Policies

Many Immigrants Making Important Contributions to Help Americans During the Covid-19 Crisis

Arlington, Va. – In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, major immigration problems are taking shape, including 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,” according to a [new study](#) from the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an Arlington, Va.-based research organization.

“History and economics show America will be better – and the economic and societal recovery will be stronger – if the country embraces openness,” said NFAP Executive Director Stuart Anderson, who was executive associate commissioner for policy and planning and counselor to the Commissioner of the INS in the George W. Bush administration, and is the author of the NFAP report. “A remarkable number of immigrant entrepreneurs, physicians, researchers and workers in a variety of industries have been instrumental to Americans during this crisis.”

The study, “Immigrants and America’s Comeback From the Covid-19 Crisis,” can be found at <https://nfap.com/>.

The study finds one consequence of the coronavirus pandemic is Americans have become acquainted with people and companies who have proven vital 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 providing important data, the research 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 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 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.
- 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 study recommends that 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.
- 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." The study concludes that 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.

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. The Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder, Cornell Law School professor Stephen W. Yale-Loehr and former INS Commissioner James W. 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)

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