

# U.S. Will ‘Aggressively’ Revoke Visas of Chinese Students, Rubio Says

*Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the students who will have their visas canceled include people with ties to the Chinese Communist Party and those studying in “critical fields.”*

**By Edward Wong**  
**New York Times**

Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced on Wednesday evening that the Trump administration would work to “aggressively revoke” visas of Chinese students, including those with ties to the Chinese Communist Party or who are studying in “critical fields.”

He added that the State Department was revising visa criteria to “enhance scrutiny” of all future applications from China, including Hong Kong.

The move was certain to send ripples of anxiety across university campuses in the United States and was likely to lead to reprisal from China, the country of origin for the second-largest group of international students in the United States.

Mr. Rubio’s brief statement announcing the visa crackdown did not define “critical fields” of study, but the phrase most likely refers to research in the physical sciences. In recent years, American officials have expressed concerns about the Chinese government recruiting U.S.-trained scientists, though there is no evidence of such scientists working for China in large numbers.

Similarly, it is unclear how U.S. officials will determine which students have ties to the Communist Party. The lack of detail on the scope of the directive will no doubt fuel worries among the roughly 275,000 Chinese students in the United States, as well as professors and university administrators who depend on their research skills and financial support.

American universities and research laboratories have benefited over many decades by drawing some of the most talented students from China and other countries, and many universities rely on international students paying full tuition for a substantial part of their annual revenue.

“I think it is terribly misguided, counterproductive and another way in which we are shooting ourselves in the foot,” said [Michael S. Roth](#), president of Wesleyan University.

The move against Chinese students comes as the Trump administration has sought a broader crackdown on elite universities and international students. And it coincides with heightened tensions between the United States and China over President Trump’s

trade war. The foremost target of Mr. Trump's expansive tariffs is China, which he has asserted has taken unfair advantage of the international trade system for decades.

It is unclear how quickly the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security will move to cancel the visas of affected students, or whether China will now take retaliatory actions on the relatively fewer number of American students in the country and move to expel some of them.

Until now, family members of most Chinese Communist Party officials could study at American universities. Many top party officials sent children to American universities in recent decades. Mr. Xi sent his daughter, Xi Mingze, to [attend Harvard](#) under a pseudonym. Harvard administrators and a few professors knew who she was before her graduation in 2014.

Around the same time, [Bo Guagua](#), the son of a prominent former Politburo member who is now imprisoned in China, got a master's degree at Harvard Kennedy School and attended Columbia Law School.

In 2020, officials in the first Trump administration [canceled the visas](#) of more than 1,000 Chinese graduate students and researchers after announcing they were banning from campuses Chinese citizens with direct ties to military universities in their country. It was the first time the U.S. government had moved to bar a category of Chinese students from getting access to American universities, a ban the Biden administration kept in place.

U.S.-China relations were in a fraught state throughout the Biden administration, but Chinese officials sought to stabilize them in part by emphasizing the need for more person-to-person exchanges, including at educational institutions. The number of American students in China has been tiny compared with that of their Chinese counterparts in the United States. On a visit to San Francisco in November 2023, Mr. Xi announced that China was ready to welcome 50,000 American students over five years while it would keep sending its students to the United States.

"America has always thrived by welcoming the brightest minds from around the world," said Gary Locke, a U.S. ambassador to China in the Obama administration and chairman of the Committee of 100, an advocacy group of prominent Chinese Americans. "Shutting the door on Chinese students doesn't just betray our values — it weakens our leadership in science, technology and innovation."

A [report](#) published last year by the State Department and the Institute of International Education, a nonprofit group, said that China had the [second-largest](#) share of the more than 1.1 million international students who enrolled in American higher education institutions in the 2023-24 term. More than 277,000 students came from China, behind India, with its more than 331,000 students. The number of Chinese students had dropped 4 percent from the previous academic year, while the number from India had surged by 23 percent.

In another move on visa restrictions, Mr. Rubio announced Wednesday that the State Department would not give visas to foreign officials who engage in censorship of the speech of American citizens.

“It is unacceptable for foreign officials to issue or threaten arrest warrants on U.S. citizens or U.S. residents for social media posts on American platforms while physically present on U.S. soil,” he said in a statement.

He added that “it is similarly unacceptable for foreign officials to demand that American tech platforms adopt global content moderation policies or engage in censorship activity that reaches beyond their authority and into the United States.”

Trump administration officials have criticized European governments and Brazil for what the officials call efforts to censor free speech on social media platforms run by American companies. Those include Meta and X, a platform once called Twitter that is owned by Elon Musk, the billionaire adviser to Mr. Trump who was by far the biggest donor to the president’s 2024 election campaign. Some European governments ban certain types of online posts by far-right groups.

Mr. Rubio’s latest announcement on visa restrictions came a day after he sent a cable to U.S. embassies and consulates telling them to [halt interview appointments for foreign citizens](#) applying for student and exchange visas. Those are the visa categories called F, M and J.

The Homeland Security Department announced last week that it was revoking the certification that allows Harvard University to enroll foreign students, although a federal judge [temporarily blocked the move](#). In the policy’s announcement, Kristi Noem, the homeland security secretary, said the administration was seeking to hold Harvard “accountable for fostering violence, antisemitism and coordinating with the Chinese Communist Party on its campus.”

The words “Chinese Communist Party” were emphasized in boldface, though Ms. Noem did not explain what she meant by that coordination or provide evidence of such activities.

“It is a privilege, not a right, for universities to enroll foreign students and benefit from their higher tuition payments to help pad their multibillion-dollar endowments,” she said.

Mr. Trump said on Wednesday that Harvard University [should have a cap](#) on the number of international students it admits to create more spots for Americans. About one-quarter of Harvard’s student body is from abroad. Mr. Trump suggested that the figure should be no more than 15 percent.

On Chinese social media, the immediate reaction to Mr. Rubio’s announcement appeared to be limited. But broader discussion of the Trump administration’s various

announced restrictions on international students and on universities, and on Harvard in particular, had been trending for days.

Those who commented on Mr. Rubio's announcement expressed both resignation and triumph. Some nationalist citizens celebrated the notion that Chinese students who had previously looked up to the United States would be disillusioned, or that Chinese universities would benefit from the return of talent.

Shen Yi, a professor of international relations at Fudan University in Shanghai, said in a post that Mr. Rubio had acted "as expected."

*Bernard Mokam contributed reporting from New York, and Vivian Wang from Beijing.*