

# Trump's new immigration stance

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In a podcast, former US President and Republican candidate — for the US 2024 Presidential election — Donald Trump said that if he were to become President he would grant green cards to foreign graduates from US colleges.

“.. I think you should get a Green Card automatically as part of your diploma, a Green card automatically as part of your diploma, a Green card to be able to stay in this country. And that includes junior colleges too”.

A Green card grants the holder permanent resident status.

## Trump's anti-immigrant stance in 2016

It would be pertinent to point out that Donald Trump won the 2016 election while taking a strong stance on immigration even for professionals. In 2016, Trump had said that he would not allow the H1B (a non-immigrant visa which enables US companies to employ foreign workers in specialised occupations) as a “cheap labour program” and ensure that American workers get preference. Before the 2020 presidential election, Trump had sought to introduce restrictions to the H1-B program (several Indian professionals working on H1B visas in the US, moved to Canada due to Trump's unpredictable stance regarding issues pertaining to H1B visas as well as international student visas).

In the podcast, the former US President said that he knew of cases where students wanted to stay on but could not and went back to their countries and set up companies which provide employment. While referring to students from India and China, Trump said:

“They go back to India, they go back to China. They do the same basic company in those places and they become multi-billionaires employing thousands and thousands of people”.

The former US President while stating that the US was losing jobs due to such individuals returning to their home countries, also referred specifically that the US was losing talented individuals from top institutions.

Trump's announcements come days after US President, Joe Biden (June 18, 2024) had made an announcement that half a million undocumented immigrants married to US citizens would get citizenship. Under this plan, undocumented spouses of US citizens who have been living in the US can apply for lawful permanent residence. There are some conditions; first, the Department of Homeland Security would consider the applications on a case-by-case basis. Second, for being eligible for this program the

spouses should have been married for at least 10 years and should not pose a threat to security. These new changes will prevent families from getting separated as spouses and their children will be able to apply for permanent residence without traveling abroad.

According to the Pew Forum, 59% of voters believe that undocumented immigrants should be permitted to stay in the US legally.

### **Timing of Trump's announcement in the current context**

The timing of Trump's announcement is also important because several western countries, such as Australia and Canada, are introducing revisions to their student visa programmes. One of the advantages US possesses is that in spite of the anti-immigrant stance adopted by several quarters, the US still remains an attractive destination for international students – due to the high-quality education and an enabling eco-system for entrepreneurs. In 2022-2023 the total international students enrolled in US higher education institutions was estimated at well over a million.

While states like California, New York, Texas are the preferred destinations for international students, the international student community is spread out across the country. According to estimates, international students contributed 40 billion to the US economy. Students contribute not just by way of tuition fees, but also spending on transportation, real estate. It would be pertinent to point out, that Chinese and Indian nationals account for a significant percentage of the international student community (in 2022-2023 this number was estimated at well over 50%). In 2023, the US Embassy and consulates processed over 1,40,000 F1 student visas.

The timing of Trump's announcement is important, because several countries have also become attractive not just for entrepreneurs, but also for professionals as well as students, due to their increasing thrust on attracting skilled and talented individuals. One prominent example is United Arab Emirates which has introduced the "Golden Visa Program". It is not just the UAE, but Asian countries like South Korea and Japan which are seeking to attract skilled workers to fulfil shortages. While Anglo-Saxon countries remain the preferred destination for Indian students, an increasing number is beginning to explore opportunities in countries such as Singapore, Finland, UAE. This phenomenon is likely to increase.

In conclusion, the former US President's statement needs to be taken a pinch of salt, since he is unpredictable, but it highlights the fact that while an increasingly anti-immigrant sentiment may have grown globally, no country can afford to shun talent – rhetoric of course is one thing. While the nature of globalization may not be what it was 2 decades ago, even the sceptics and die-hard critics can not ignore inter-linkages in certain areas. Similarly, US higher education has been a steady component of 'US Soft Power', while there is no doubting the fact that US Soft Power may have waned in a changing world order – economic and political, but it clearly has advantages vis-à-vis

other countries in being a magnet for students seeking to pursue higher education – not just because of the high quality education provided at institutions, but also an enabling eco-system for innovation and entrepreneurship.

If the US actually does focus on retaining skilled graduates and introduce policies along the lines of those mooted by Trump, countries like UK, Canada, Australia which have introduced changes seeking to restrict the inflow of international students could lose out. As the US has been seeking to reduce its dependence on Chinese students (there has been a slight dip in the inflow of international students from China), one country from where there could be a rise in inflows of international students is India.

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