

# The Washington Post

## Trump immigration plan could keep whites in U.S. majority for up to five more years

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President Trump's proposal to cut legal immigration rates would delay the date that white Americans become a minority of the population by as few as one or as many as five additional years, according to an analysis by The Washington Post.

The plan, released by the White House last month, would scale back a program that allows people residing in the United States to sponsor family members living abroad for green cards, and would eliminate the “diversity visa program” that benefits immigrants in countries with historically low levels of migration to the United States. Together, the changes would disproportionately affect immigrants from Latin America and Africa.

The Census Bureau projects that minority groups will outnumber non-Hispanic whites in the United States in 2044. The Post's analysis projects that, were Trump's plan to be carried out, the date would be between 2045 and 2049, depending on how parts of it are implemented.

(The Post's methodology for estimating the annual impact of Trump's proposed cuts is explained in more detail at the bottom of this story. Projecting this far into the future entails certain assumptions that could alter the range, but demographic experts said The Post's approach was reasonable.)

All told, the proposal could cut off entry for more than 20 million legal immigrants over the next four decades. The change could have profound effects on the size of the U.S. population and its composition, altering projections for economic growth and the age of the nation's workforce, as well as shaping its politics and culture, demographers and immigration experts say.

“By greatly slashing the number of Hispanic and black African immigrants entering America, this proposal would reshape the future United States. Decades ahead, many fewer of us would be nonwhite or have nonwhite people in our families,” said Michael Clemens, an economist at the Center for Global Development, a think tank that has been critical of the proposal. “Selectively blocking immigrant groups changes who America is. This is the biggest attempt in a century to do that.”

Trump's plan calls for eliminating all family-based visa programs that are not used for sponsoring either minors or spouses. That means several family-based visa programs — including those that allow sponsorship for siblings, adult parents and adult children — would be canceled. It also calls for the elimination of the diversity visa lottery and the reallocation of its 50,000 visas to reduce the number of immigrants already on a backlog and to go to a new visa based on “merit.”

The Post analyzed a low-end and high-end estimate for cuts to legal immigration under the Trump plan. The low-end estimate, provided by Numbers USA, a group that favors limiting immigration, suggests that about 300,000 fewer immigrants will be admitted legally on an annual basis. A high-end estimate from the Cato Institute, which favors immigration, suggests that as many as 500,000 fewer immigrants would be admitted. Cato bases its number, in part, on assumptions that more family visa categories will be cut.

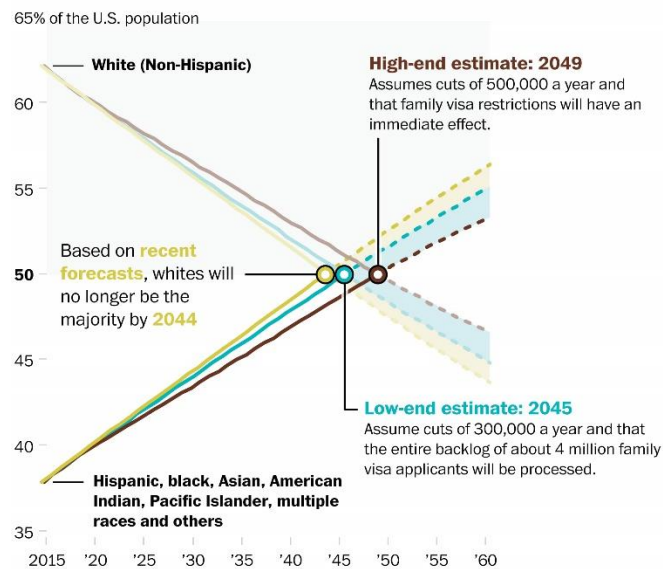
Last August, Trump endorsed a Senate bill written by Sens. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) and David Perdue (R-Ga.) that would cut legal immigration levels by close to 500,000 people annually, according to estimates by the bill's authors. The White House has not released estimates of its own plan.

If Trump's plan is not implemented, the white share of the population is expected to fall from above 60 percent in 2018 to below 45 percent in 2060, as the light green lines in the chart below show. The teal lines show The Post's lower estimates of the impact of Trump's proposal, in which whites stay the majority group until 2046. The brown lines show the upper bound of the potential impact of Trump's proposal.

### Crossing over

The racial and ethnic composition of the U.S. could be changed significantly by the Trump administration's immigration policy, but estimates vary.

**When the U.S. will become a "majority minority" country:**



Note: Models rely on population forecasts made in 2014, the most recent date available. It's assumed that cuts will be equally distributed across populations.

Sources: Census Bureau (population projections); Pew Research (fertility); White House, NumbersUSA, Cato Institute, Migration Policy Institute and Center for Global Development (policy assumptions); State Department (visa backlog)

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To its defenders, the White House proposal offers a reasonable compromise. Trump would move the United States to an immigration system based less on bringing families together or encouraging diversity and more on bringing in those with skills that contribute to the economy. (He also proposes protecting about 1.8 million young immigrants known as

“dreamers” in exchange for a significant boost to funding for border enforcement and a border wall.)

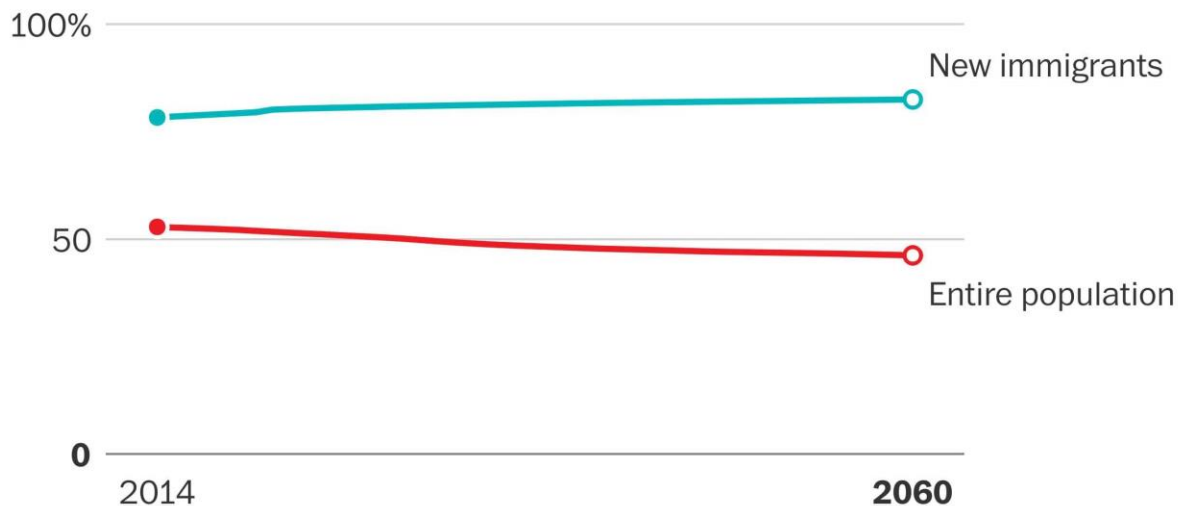
“It is time to begin moving toward a merit-based immigration system — one that admits people who are skilled, who want to work, who will contribute to our society, and who will love and respect our country,” Trump said in his State of the Union address last week.

But by reducing the country's overall population, the plan would eventually reduce the overall growth rate of the American economy. Under Trump's plan, the American economy could be more than \$1 trillion smaller than it would have been two decades from now. That's largely because the economy would have fewer workers.

The plan could also raise the median age of the American worker. About four of every five immigrants is projected to be under the age of 40, while only half of the country's overall population is that young, according to Census Bureau data. A demographic crunch is already expected due to millions of upcoming retirements from the aging “baby boomer” generation, raising concerns about the long-term solvency of programs such as Social Security and Medicare that rely on worker contributions.

## Separate ways

Share of each group who are under 40 years of age



Note: Based on projections made in 2014.

Source: Census Bureau

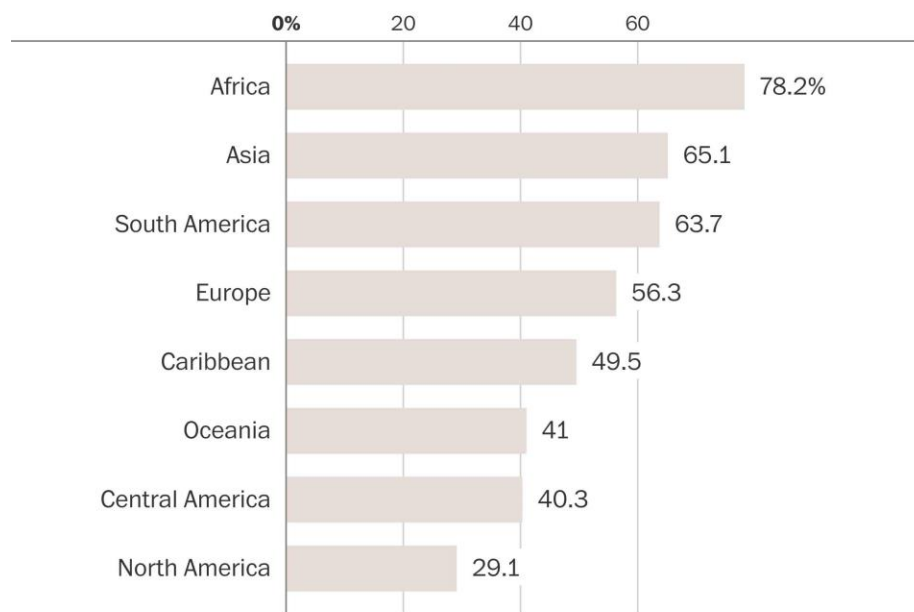
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The plans could have long-term ramifications for America's political system, given that about 54 percent of all immigrants are naturalized within 10 years and thus able to vote, although naturalization rates vary widely based on immigrants' country of origin, according to the latest data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Hispanic immigrants who are registered voters favor Democrats over Republicans by a 70 to 18 margin, and registered voters who are Asian immigrants favor Democrats by a 50 to 33 margin, according to the most recent data available from the Pew Research Center. (Similar data was not available for African immigrants.) Approximately 78 percent of immigrants from Africa and 65 percent of immigrants from Asia were naturalized within 10 years.

### Likelihood of Citizenship

Share of immigrants arriving in 2004 who became naturalized citizens by 2014



Source: Department of Homeland Security

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But while these effects of delaying America's diversification would be significant, they would not fundamentally change the country's demographic destiny. Experts say the main driver of diversification in America is the native-born Hispanic population, which grew by about five million from 2010 to 2016, just as the native-born white population shrank by about 400,000 over the same time period, according to Census Bureau data.

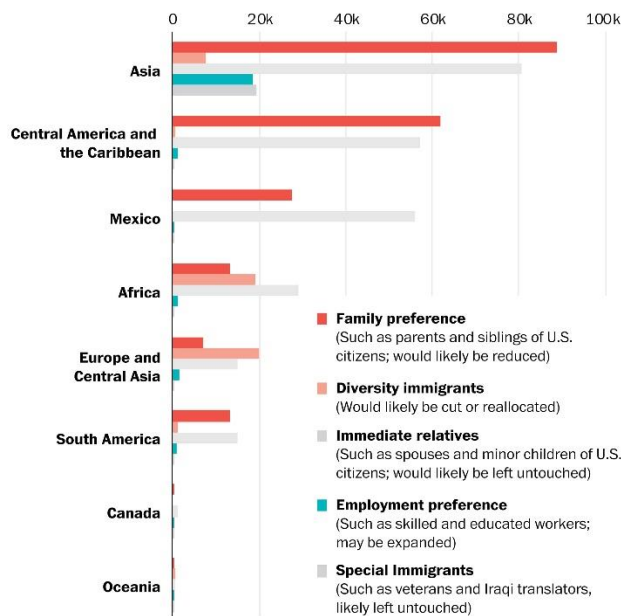
Among young Americans, the share of the non-Hispanic white population is already under 60 percent — a number that falls close to 50 percent among newborns and toddlers.

“You can shut the door to everyone in the world and that won’t change,” said Roberto Suro, an immigration and demography expert at the University of Southern California. “The president can’t do anything about that. If your primary concern is that the American population is becoming less white, it’s already too late.”

But if Trump's plan were put in place, many of the family immigrants who would eventually be exposed to the cuts come from Latin America. In fiscal year 2017, about 28,000 Mexicans received family-based visas, with immigrants from Asia receiving almost 90,000 and immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean receiving more than 60,000, according to State Department data.

## Where The Cuts Could Come

Types of immigration visas issued, by continent or region, 2017 fiscal year



Note: The federal fiscal year ends in September.

Source: State Department

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The changes to legal immigration could vary widely depending on unforeseeable events, including increased economic development in Asian and African countries, dislocation caused by climate change or decisions made by future administrations.

William H. Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, produced a separate estimate of the impact of Trump's proposed cut to legal immigration. He found that the plan would delay the arrival of a "minority-majority" nation by three years, to 2047, and stressed his projections were the best possible with the publicly available information.

Another big factor is what happens to the population of roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants, including the "dreamers," currently in the country. The Post's calculations (like the Census Bureau's) currently assume they will stay. But their future status is unresolved, and if any significant number of them are forced to leave the country, it could push back the minority-majority date as well.

"The President has laid out a reasonable framework that addresses the key security issues identified by the frontline men and women" of the Department of Homeland Security, said Tyler Houlton, an agency spokesman, in a statement. "It secures the borders and ensures we can remove those we apprehend, including criminal aliens. It also seeks to protect nuclear family migration while ending two problematic visa programs that do not meet the economic or security needs of the country."

Trump's proposal is unlikely to be implemented in its current form. It requires congressional approval, and Democratic leadership opposes it.

Advocates of reducing legal immigration have offered a range of arguments, with some saying that high levels of low-skilled immigration hurt American-born workers and new legal immigrants by increasing competition and depressing wages. They also say today's levels of immigration are high by historical standards.

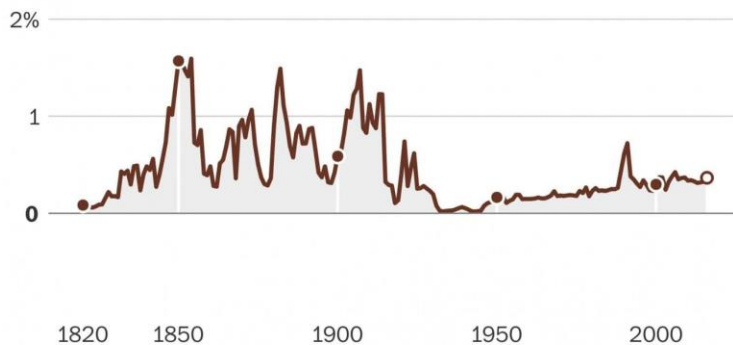
“These historically high levels of legal immigration only date back a few decades,” said Chris Chmielenski, director of content and activism at NumbersUSA. “The numbers we've seen recently are abnormal, and Trump's proposal would eventually return us closer to historical levels.”

Immigration advocates say that the percentage of the foreign-born population has been higher at several points in American history, even if the overall number of incoming immigrants has increased. Looking at the share of the population, which accounts for overall population growth, recent levels of legal immigration appear roughly in line with historical averages, with a decrease after World War II an outlier, according to Migration Policy Institute statistics.

“Recent immigration flows have been a small fraction of historical levels,” said Clemens of the Center for Global Development.

### Each Year's New Americans

People obtaining lawful permanent resident status, as a share of U.S. population



Note: LPR totals are for fiscal years, relative to population measured mid-year.

Source: Department of Homeland Security (LPR); Maddison Project (population)

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Others who favor immigration restrictions have pointed to the necessity of reducing what they call the social disruption of high levels of immigration, which strikes some liberal critics as code for keeping America's white population in the majority.

“We can’t restore our civilization with somebody else’s babies,” Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), an immigration restrictionist in Congress, said on Twitter last year.

One of the biggest unknowns is how long new immigrants will identify as racial minorities.

Some academics, as Duke Professor William Darity Jr. wrote in *The American Prospect*, argue that many Latino immigrants “identify less as Hispanic and more as non-

Hispanic white” the longer they stay in America — a phenomenon similar to the absorption of Irish and Italian immigrants into the idea of “whiteness.”

Other demographers say a real and important shift is underway, with important consequences for American politics. They note that many Hispanics already identify as white and yet still vote like a minority group. “The contention that [Hispanics] will think of themselves as white in the future is unsettled,” said Ruy Teixeira, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and author of a book about how demographic changes will affect American politics. “It definitely seems like they’re a different breed of cat.”

But perhaps the most lasting impact of Trump's policies would be not to America, but to the millions of immigrants from poor and developing countries that the United States would be denying entry to, said Angélica Cházaro, a law professor at the University of Washington who specializes in questions of immigration.

“We’re talking about susceptibility to pain and violence and economic and social instability for millions of black and brown people,” Cházaro said. “People have organized their lives around the possibility of legal immigration, and this forecloses that route.”

### **Methodology**

*In 2014, the Census Bureau projected the U.S. population by race, ethnicity, sex, age and nativity. Those projections, the most recent available, are the basis for the prediction that the country will become “majority minority” in 2044.*

*To adjust those forecasts, we assumed cuts of between 300,000 and 500,000 per year and we assumed the cuts would be applied proportionally to each race and ethnicity based on their forecast representation in the immigrant population. The 300,000 estimate from NumbersUSA comes from projections of the Trump administration's plan to cut several kinds of family-based immigration visas — those for siblings (65,000 visas annually), those for adult children (another 50,000) and those for adult parents of immigrants (another 125,000). NumbersUSA also projects a 55,000 reduction in annual visas awarded from the elimination of the diversity visa lottery.*

*The high estimate of Trump's proposal found by the Cato Institute starts with all of the cuts found by NumbersUSA. But Cato also says that other family-based visa programs are likely to be cut under Trump's plan. For instance, Cato says a program for visas for children of non-citizens will be cut, because a Senate proposal similar to the White House framework eliminates it. That accounts for an additional 95,000 fewer visas annually between the groups' projections. Cato also projects the annual impact of cutting visas for adult parents will be far greater than NumbersUSA does, because Cato looked at the number of these visas awarded in 2016, whereas NumbersUSA took a 10-year average of these visas. That accounts for an additional difference of 50,000.*

*We projected children that the lost immigrants would have had based on Census Bureau estimates of their female population of childbearing age, plus Pew Research projections of first-generation immigrant fertility by race and origin. In some cases, when it was the only data available, we used Census Bureau figures for “black only” and “Asian only” as a rough analog for “black, non-Hispanic” and “Asian, non-Hispanic.” Other groups were treated similarly.*

*The Census Bureau made no distinction between documented and undocumented immigrants. Our estimates only include the policy's direct effect on legal immigration, but our models of the race, age and sex of immigrants are based on the full immigrant population. We found that more complicated models produced similar results.*

*We arrived at rough estimates of GDP growth by comparing our predictions for the country's entire population under various scenarios with forecasts of per-person economic output by PwC, a global consulting firm. The estimates don't account for how the exclusion of certain groups of immigrants would change the overall age, education and skill level of the labor force.*