The Interview of a Lifetime: An Analysis of Visa Denials and International Student Flows to the U.S.

PRESIDENTS’ ALLIANCE | ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND IMMIGRATION

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Welcome and Agenda

• The Data and Trends
• The Human Impacts of Disparate Outcomes & Missed Opportunities
• What's Next & the Policy Implications for the U.S.
• Q&A
What is the issue?

• Anecdotal reports and narratives suggest that students from certain countries and world regions are more likely to be denied visas

• A “blaming-the-victim” approach

• No clear evidence or data to refute or support these claims

For many students, the few, tense minutes of a visa interview can define or confine their future.
Guiding Questions & Data Sources

• Are there visa denials trends from different world regions that negatively affect the number and diversity of students in the U.S.?

• What is the demand amongst African students and what do current enrollments trends indicate? Is there a demand-supply gap created by visa denials?

• What is the impact on the ability of the U.S. to attract global talent?

Our data sources:

- **F-1 Visa Refusals data** obtained by Shorelight from the U.S. government; **F-1 issuance data**
- **Open Doors data** on international student enrollment
- **UN and World Bank global data**
Is there a pattern of visa denials?
What does the data tell us…

• Eight-year span, 2015 - 2022
• Covering three administrations
• Spanning the start and continuation of the pandemic
Visa denials globally, 2015

F-1 visa refusal rates by world region, 2015
Visa denials globally, 2019

F-1 visa refusal rates by world region, 2019
Visa denials globally, 2022

F-1 visa refusal rates by world region, 2022

Visa denials to study in the U.S. grew significantly from 2015-2022, especially for Global South countries.
By 2022, the denial rate for African students had risen to 54%, indicating that just over half of all African student visas were denied as compared with 36% from Asia and just 9% from Europe.
### A Deeper Dive into Africa

#### African regional visa refusal rates by year, 2015 - 2022

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Africa</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Africa</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Africa</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Africa</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>44%</strong></td>
<td><strong>45%</strong></td>
<td><strong>49%</strong></td>
<td><strong>48%</strong></td>
<td><strong>54%</strong></td>
<td><strong>60%</strong></td>
<td><strong>47%</strong></td>
<td><strong>54%</strong></td>
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Enrolling more African students: A missed opportunity for the U.S.?

African students rejected for F-1 visas over a five-year period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Visas Issued</th>
<th>Visa Denial Rate</th>
<th>Missed Opportunity Students</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>17,661</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>16,302</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>16,855</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>19,786</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>5,776</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>9,034</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>20,254</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>38,215</td>
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<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>24,676</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>28,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85,222</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>92,051</td>
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Looking ahead…

By 2030 $\Rightarrow$ 42% of the world’s youth will be African

By 2050 $\Rightarrow$ they will number 1.1 Billion

By 2050 $\Rightarrow$ Sub-Saharan Africa’s tertiary population could swell to 90 million, with over half from Nigeria
Implications for the U.S.

• How to interpret the complex findings of this report?

• Demographic, economic and labor market implications for the U.S.

• Growing competition from other countries vying for global talent