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How Trump's immigration plan would affect Asians -- in charts

The way people arrive influences poverty levels once settled in the US

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LONDON -- A new immigration framework proposed by the White House last month could significantly change the makeup of Asian communities in the U.S., particularly the poorest.

If enacted, the framework would see significant reductions to the number of people admitted to the country on asylum claims or sponsored by relatives. The diversity visa lottery, designed to increase numbers from countries with low immigration rates, meanwhile, would be scrapped completely.

As such, the poorest immigrant groups would see the largest cuts -- groups that Trump described in rather less favorable terms last month.

The proposed immigration framework could have a profound effect on Asian communities in the U.S. © Reuters

According to the Pew Research Center, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act paved the way for the growth of Asian immigration to the U.S. Since the turn of the millennium, Asians have been the fastest growing group of immigrants, increasing by 72%.
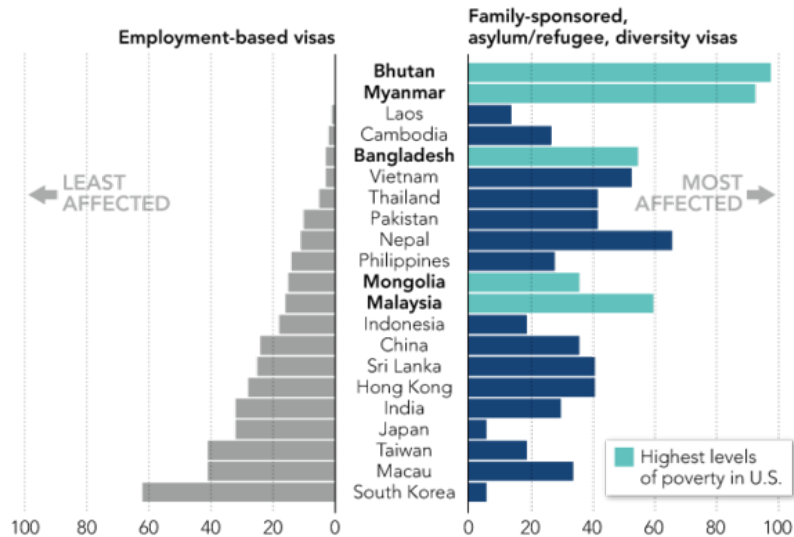
But once settled in their new homeland, the fortunes of different Asian nationalities vary significantly.

How different groups would be affected by proposed immigration framework
U.S. permanent residency by admission category *(in percent)*

Our analysis looked at the share of people living in poverty among selected Asian immigrant groups, taking into account factors such as median age and English language skills.

As expected, younger and less educated groups tend to experience higher levels of poverty.
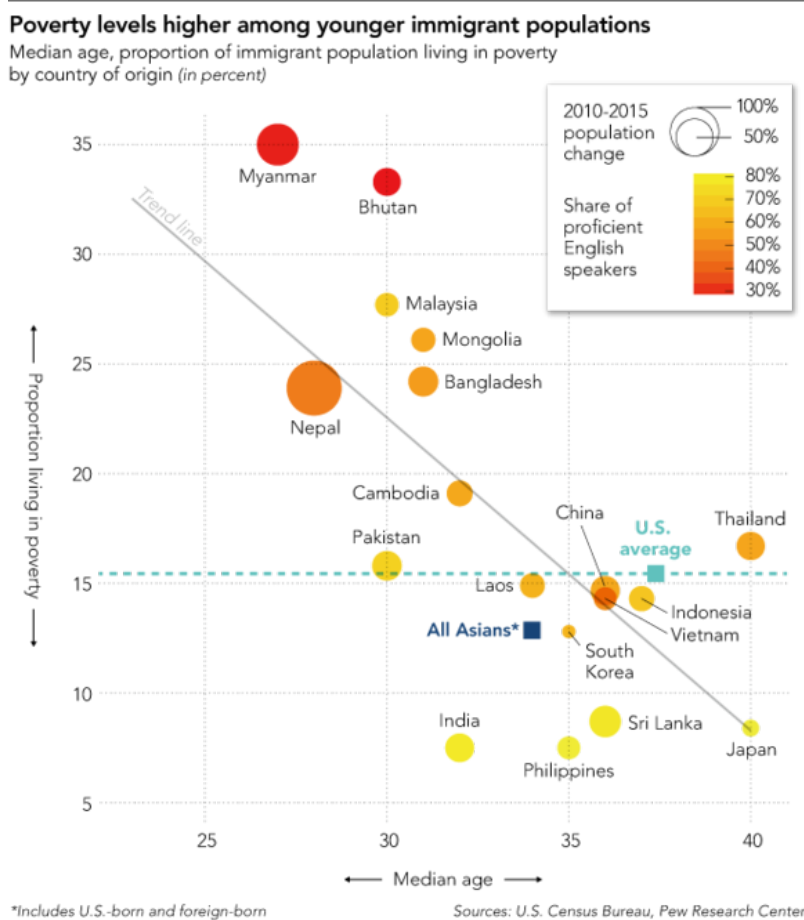
However, Neil Ruiz, associate director of global migration and demography at Pew Research, pointed out that the way people enter the country has the greatest bearing on their education, employment and economic prospects.

"Indians do really well and are selected according to their skills, especially in information technology. They come already employed and are usually well paid," explained Ruiz. "Other groups enter as refugees, or claim asylum, such as Burmese and Nepalese."

At least one in four immigrants from Bhutan, Malaysia, Myanmar or Mongolia lives below the poverty line. They are also generally younger than other groups and have lower levels of education, all characteristics that correlate with higher numbers entering through diversity visas or family sponsorship, or as refugees or asylum seekers.

Arrivals from Myanmar are a particularly indicative case. They have accounted for 23% of the roughly 700,000 refugees admitted to the U.S. since 2007, more than one-third of whom now live in poverty. The community is also one of the youngest among all Asian groups and has one of the lowest levels of English language proficiency.

Low-income groups are those that are growing the fastest. Roughly half of the 19 groups analyzed more than doubled in size between 2000 and 2015, with the number of arrivals from Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar increasing most.

Poverty levels higher among younger immigrant populations
Median age, proportion of immigrant population living in poverty by country of origin (in percent)

*Includes U.S.-born and foreign-born

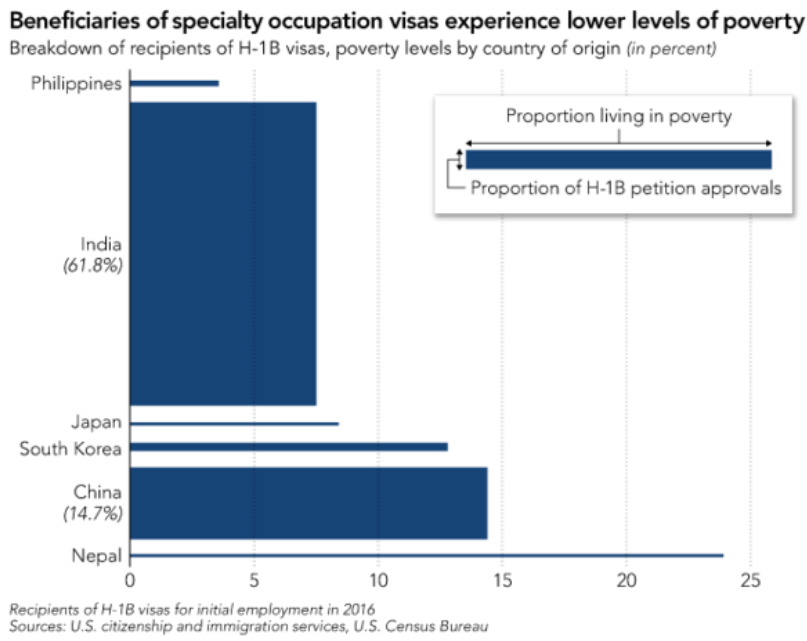Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Pew Research Center

According to the Cato Institute, the proposed cuts would reduce legal immigration rates by nearly half, 61% of which would be effective immediately, and the rest phased in on a gradual basis.

An end to the diversity visa lottery would eliminate one of the key methods of entry for low-income groups, while reductions to the numbers entering through family sponsorship would pose a more complex problem.

More than half the immigrants arriving from Vietnam or Bangladesh in 2016 came on family visas, and the cuts would affect the chances of reuniting families more in these communities than any other.

At the other end of the scale, immigrant groups that enjoy higher standards of living are less likely to be affected by the potential changes.

Census data collected by Pew Research shows that Indian and Chinese immigrants enjoy higher standards of income and education than average among Asians in the U.S. These are also the groups with the highest percentage of beneficiaries of the H-1B visa program, which allows employers to hire immigrants in specialty occupations.

Beneficiaries of specialty occupation visas experience lower levels of poverty
Breakdown of recipients of H-1B visas, poverty levels by country of origin *(in percent)*

Proportion living in poverty

Proportion of H-1B petition approvals

Philippines
India (61.8%)
Japan
South Korea
China (14.7%)
Nepal

Recipients of H-1B visas for initial employment in 2016
Sources: U.S. citizenship and immigration services, U.S. Census Bureau

Trump's "Buy American and Hire American" executive order issued in April last year proposed cuts to the program. But while the process of obtaining H-1B visas would become more bureaucratic and expensive under the new framework, there would be minimal changes to the numbers granted; in fact, a temporary increase was even proposed.

Indians and Chinese accounted for over 75% of the recipients of initial H-1B visas in 2016, and would therefore be among those least affected.

Together, they enjoy a 17% lower unemployment rate than other Asian groups, a 15% higher rate of home ownership and a 38% higher level of median household income.

There is one very notable anomaly. Malaysians enjoy the lowest unemployment rate, at 3.8%, but experience one of the highest levels of poverty at 28%.

Datawatch is a new series jointly produced by the Nikkei Asian Review and FT Confidential Research.