

# THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION IS USING STUDENT DEBT TO BUILD A MILITARY STATE

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The Trump Administration is advancing policies that solely benefit its anti-immigrant, military state agenda. A clear example is the administration's offering of taxpayer-funded loan forgiveness to **incentivize** more applicants for openings at Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Simultaneously, the Trump Administration seeks to **strip** loan forgiveness pathways from educational institutions, non-profit organizations, government employees, and others who are deemed obstructors to Trump's political goals.

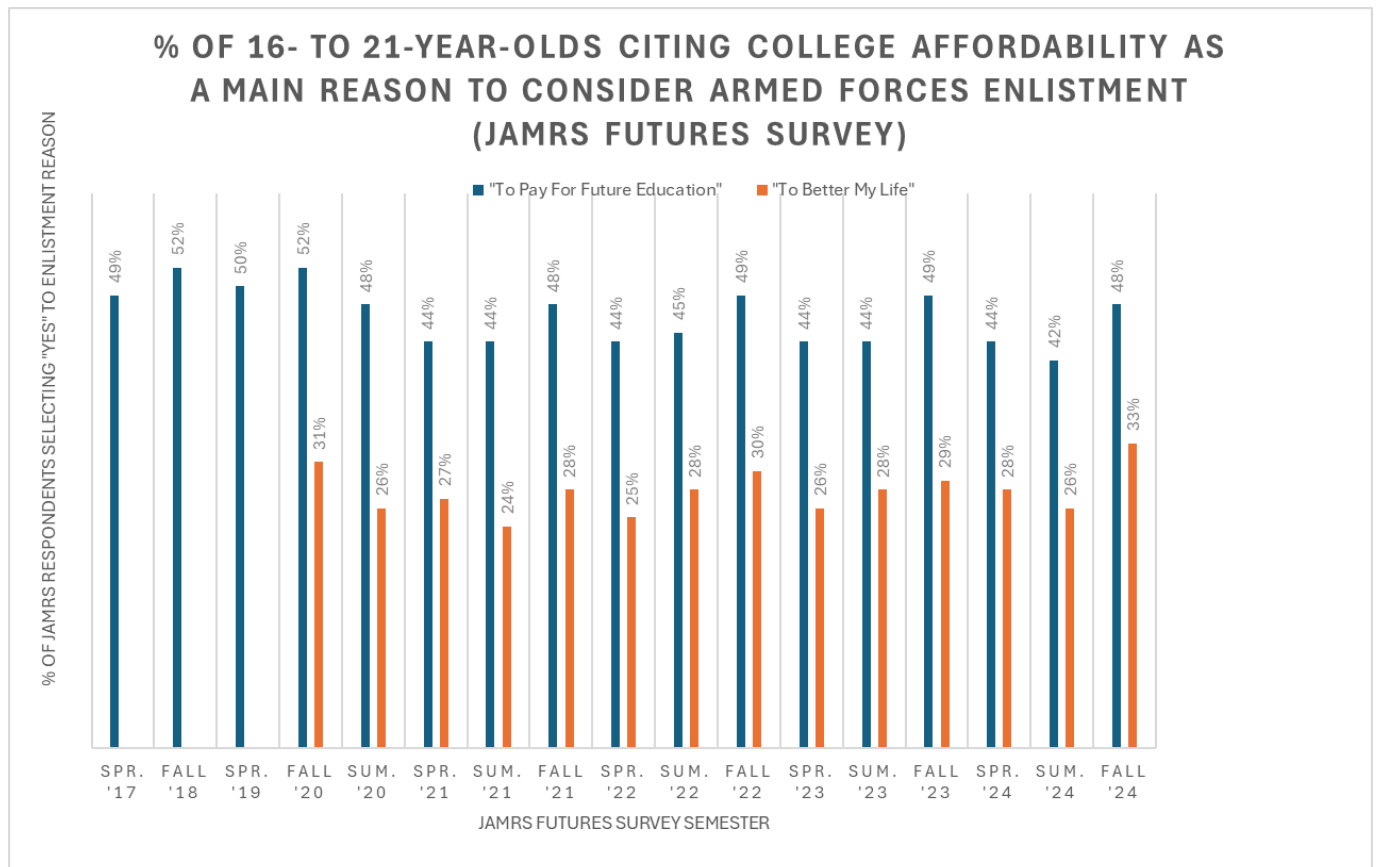
Along with the administration, Congressional leadership has also taken various steps to make higher education less attainable for students. Through their **proposed** government funding bill, Congressional leadership is signaling their support for the administration's actions by deepening cuts to federal financial aid and loan forgiveness. They have already **facilitated** the administration's agenda through reconciliation legislation that eliminated all existing income-based repayment plans and raised payments for all borrowers, especially those with lower incomes, through the new Repayment Assistance Plan. Additionally, Congress placed financial barriers for current and future students through new restrictions on **basic needs** support programs and the **Pell Grant** program. The reconciliation bill also **tripled** ICE's budget for 2025, vastly expanding funds available for recruitment amongst other purposes.

These federal debt repayment changes, cuts to student aid, and vastly increased ICE funding are components of weaponizing the federal government against *all* postsecondary students and increasing the government's capacity for immigration enforcement. Now the administration has **proposed** rule changes on Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) to strip certain classes of employers from program eligibility. For two decades, PSLF has applied to all government and non-profit employees. The administration is seeking to **illegally** strip PSLF from political opponents, including government employees based in sanctuary states or cities; employees of nonprofits that provide legal resources to immigrant, LGBTQ, or racially marginalized communities; or hospitals that perform gender-affirming care. Though the proposed changes would not go into **effect** until next year potentially, the administration has a clear objective to continue dismantling vital avenues for student debt relief while championing the opportunities still available through military or ICE service.

## TRUMP'S ACTIONS CONTINUE A LEGACY OF MILITARIZATION THROUGH FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

The Trump Administration and Congress are targeting colleges and universities because of how fundamental these institutions are to maintaining American democracy. This is not the first time elected leaders have attempted to silence universities by cutting their budgets. During the Vietnam War, then-governor of California Ronald Reagan cut the state budget for public institutions by **20 percent** to punish students for anti-war protests, claiming that limiting educational pathways for California students was necessary to harm political opponents. Reagan's attacks on higher education **continued** during his time as president, laying the groundwork for the deep inequality across all levels of the educational system that we experience today.

The United States has used tuition assistance to fund the militarization of the country since the **passage** of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. By 1947, World War II veterans accounted for almost **half** of all college admissions nationwide. In the fall of 2024, **48 percent** of 16- to 21-year-olds surveyed by the Department of Defense stated "paying for future education" as a main reason they would consider joining the armed forces. This was the second most common reason expressed in the survey, only behind "pay/money," and has been one of the top two reasons in every publicly available **JAMRS Future Survey** since spring of 2017.



## ICE'S IMPACT WILL EXTEND BEYOND IMMIGRANT AND UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Promoting student loan forgiveness and other incentives to ICE applicants but withholding similar forgiveness for applicants in other sectors will devastate the future of American higher education. Moreover, the **threats** of campus immigration raids and schools potentially **assisting** immigration authorities in unlawful detainments extend far beyond immigrant and undocumented students; ICE has consistently **arrested** U.S. citizens for observing and protesting immigration raids. Black and brown students will suffer disproportionately from their activity, as the agency currently operates on a system of racial **profiling, upheld** by the U.S. Supreme Court, in determining who to detain. ICE jeopardizing the safety of students while the federal government closes off pathways to an affordable education will only exacerbate the public **decline** in perceived importance of a college education, possibly for generations to come.

The budget reconciliation bill passed by Congress allocated **\$29.9 billion** in ICE enforcement and deportation operations; as a result, the agency has created thousands of new positions it is trying to fill quickly. Including loan forgiveness as a hiring incentive means that student debt is being used as a bargaining chip to militarize the country against the estimated **51.9 million** immigrants living in the U.S., including over **1.9 million** immigrant and undocumented postsecondary students and their families. Immigrant students are a vital part of higher education; **90 percent** of national enrollment growth from 2000 to 2022 came from these students, with **additional** growth coming from international students through 2023 and 2024. In addition to eliminating the invaluable cultural exchange schools and communities experience from having immigrant students enrolled in American institutions, the economic impact of militarizing educational campuses against immigrant students will be devastating to every **state** and Congressional **district**.

## STUDENT DEBT IS A TOOL OF AUTHORITARIANISM

The current administration, along with Congressional leadership, are weaponizing student loan relief toward achieving its goal of bolstering federal authoritarianism. Though these actions have not yet coincided with a full academic year, *all* postsecondary students are already feeling the effects. Educational institutions are **morphing** from healthy learning environments to climates of fear, where students are no longer sure that their First Amendment rights or even their safety are guaranteed on the campuses they call home. Some universities are **reinstating** COVID-era classroom policies on remote learning because students are afraid of being kidnapped on the way to class, or must take on additional jobs to support family members who can no longer safely get to work.

The Trump Administration is **using** student loan forgiveness as a poverty draft, inflicting terror on immigrant communities through making loan forgiveness an economic survival necessity for others. Congress, states, institutions, and communities must disrupt the administration's efforts to weaponize student debt against our own country. Efforts like Connecticut's new statewide student debt forgiveness **program**; California's **prohibition** on campus police departments providing personal student information for immigration enforcement purposes; and Colorado's **adoption** of a

new state law requiring public campuses to limit federal agents' access of campus buildings are all ways that colleges and universities can help protect students from ICE. Resources for institutions and community members are available through the **Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration**, **Higher Ed Immigration Portal** and **Immigrant Legal Resource Center**.