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New State Department Social Media Requirement Expected to Cause Delays

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Foreign nationals are now required to provide a five-year history of social media usernames, telephone numbers, and email addresses when applying for U.S. nonimmigrant or immigrant visas. The plan to require more information from visa applicants has been in the works since 2017, when President Donald Trump called on the U.S. Department of State to [enhance the vetting](#) of individuals seeking immigration benefits from the United States. The State Department already requires social media histories from visa [applicants deemed to present a heightened security risk](#) to the United States, but this new requirement will greatly expand the number of applicants subjected to enhanced vetting. News reports suggest that as many as 15 million foreign nationals could be impacted. Given the sheer number of foreign nationals and the amount of information they are likely to provide, visa processing is expected to be delayed, perhaps significantly.

Who is impacted?

Applicants for both nonimmigrant (B-1/B-2, H-1B, L-1, etc.) and immigrant (green card) visas applying through a U.S. consulate or embassy are affected.

What information must be provided?

When completing either the DS-160 (for nonimmigrant visas) or DS-260 (for immigrant visas), foreign nationals must provide a 5-year history of their “social media presence” from a list of 20 predetermined platforms. This information includes:

- social media usernames/handles;
- telephone numbers; and
- email addresses.

If an applicant has not used any of the listed social media platforms, they may select “none” to reflect that. Passwords are *not* being requested.

What does this change mean in practice?

The change is likely to cause delays. It is not clear how the State Department plans to address the additional workload created by the new requirement, but practically speaking, the screening of social media accounts from approximately 15 million foreign nationals is likely to cause major delays in visa processing.

Besides longer wait times, foreign nationals may want to assume that their social media accounts will be reviewed by consular officers. They may want to be prepared to discuss the content of their social media posts when they appear for their visa interviews.



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What is the State Department looking for when evaluating social media information?

According to news reports, the State Department has said that they are expanding the amount of information requested, as well as the total number of people it is requested from, to strengthen vetting processes and confirm identities. Presumably, information posted on social media may be used to compare and confirm information provided in the visa application.

Is there anything foreign nationals can do to prepare for or mitigate the impact of this change?

Before completing the DS-160 or DS-260, foreign nationals may consider compiling a list of all of their social media accounts, telephone numbers, and email addresses dating back five years. They may also want to update the information in their social media profiles (including those on employment websites) to make sure that the information is accurate and up to date.

Similar Scrutiny by Other Agencies

The State Department is not the only agency with the authority to collect and review social media materials. Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement are both authorized to [search electronic devices](#), without a warrant, as part of their broad authority to conduct reasonable searches at (or near) the border and those places that function like a border, such as international airports. Officers may review and collect social media data while conducting searches of electronic devices regardless of whether they have reason to believe the individual has engaged in criminal activity. This is true not just for foreign travelers who seek to enter the United States, but for U.S. citizens as well.

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