

Common group identity may motivate Americans to help integrate immigrants

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Immigrants may experience less racism and receive more support when white American citizens believe in a common group identity that embraces everyone regardless of their birthplace, according to new research published by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

In a series of studies, participants who endorsed a common group identity were less racist toward immigrants and more likely to donate their own time and money to help immigrants adapt to their new homes, said lead researcher Jonas Kunst, a doctoral psychology candidate at the University of Oslo and a former Fulbright scholar at Harvard University.

"Immigration is a global phenomenon that is transforming societies around the world," Kunst said. "While immigrants need to integrate into a new society, the native [citizens](#) also must make some proactive efforts to accommodate immigrants. A common national identity that doesn't make "us versus them" distinctions can reduce racism toward immigrants and help a multicultural society succeed."

In an online study, participants who believed immigrants were in the same group as American citizens reported fewer racist views toward immigrants. They also were more willing to provide their contact information to volunteer for an immigrant support group and to share a monetary bonus with an immigrant. The study focused on the views of white Americans because non-Hispanic whites are the majority racial group in the U.S.

In a similar experiment with 102 white American citizens, participants who supported a common group identity donated a larger portion of a monetary bonus to help struggling immigrants. The study, which was published online in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, also included researchers from Harvard University and other universities in Norway, Denmark, Canada and Russia.

There are more than 42 million foreign-born residents living in the United States, representing 13 percent of the total population, according to a U.S. Census report. By 2060, the foreign-born population is projected to increase to more than 78 million people, or almost one-fifth of the U.S. population. By 2060, the United States will be a plurality of racial and ethnic groups with no single majority, as the current majority of non-Hispanic whites is projected to drop from 62 percent to 44 percent by 2060.

Thinking about a common group identity could influence people's views about immigrants, whether they realize it or not. In an experiment with 102 white American citizens, one group was asked about their agreement with statements that depicted immigrants and U.S. citizens as one unified group (e.g. "Because we all are immigrants or descend directly from the immigrants who time ago came to this country and built it, the United States of America and all its citizens are a true and proud product of immigration.") Another group responded to statements that put immigrants in a separate group (e.g. "Immigrants must realize the hard work and self-sufficiency it will take for generations to come before they truly become one of our people.") A control group didn't respond to any questions. Participants in the common identity group reported less racism toward immigrants and were more willing to donate parts or all of a monetary bonus to the American Civil Liberties Union to help immigrants.

"Our research suggests that acceptance of immigrants as equal members

of society also hinges on some fundamental questions about how we view ourselves," Kunst said.

An online experiment with 182 native Norwegians also showed the importance of a common [group identity](#) in contexts outside the US. Participants who believed Muslim immigrants belonged together with Norwegian citizens were less racist and more likely to support government policies and quotas to help immigrants.

To encourage acceptance and support of immigrants, government programs or non-profit organizations could highlight the fact that the United States is a nation of immigrants, Kunst said. People may be less prejudiced against immigrants if they remember that their own ancestors were [immigrants](#) as well.

More information: Kunst, J.; Thomsen, L.; Sam, D.; and Berry, J. (2015). "We Are in this Together": Common Group Identity Predicts Majority Members' Active Acculturation Efforts to Integrate Immigrants. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(9).

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