

Research finds immigrants more trusting of native-born Americans

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First-generation immigrants in the United States are as trusting of native-born American citizens as those native-born are of each other in their interactions, according to research by Georgia State University

economist and his colleague. However, these new immigrants do not show the same levels of trust among other immigrants.

For their research, "Trust and [trustworthiness](#) of immigrants and native-born Americans," James Cox of Georgia State and Wafa Hakim Orman (University of Alabama–Huntsville) used [experimental economics](#) and surveys using questions from a World Bank questionnaire on social capital to study the social interactions between samples of both populations. For comparison, they further studied [trust](#) and trustworthiness among new immigrants and among native-born Americans.

Cox is a Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar and director of the Experimental Economics Center in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies.

"Trustworthiness among immigrants is an important political and security question," said Cox. "Trust and trustworthiness are crucial to improving social situations where difficult choices must be made. They are also necessary to the general acceptance of [immigrant](#) participation in the mainstream economic activities of their adopted country."

The research initially appeared to find immigrants less trustworthy overall, but this finding disappeared when Cox and Orman controlled for demographic variables including income, education, life experiences, religious attendance and membership in secular organizations.

They found a strong correlation between trust and trustworthiness, for example, in immigrants who self-identified as "highly" religious by reporting more frequent attendance than once per week. This group was less trustworthy and less likely to trust. They also demonstrated a higher level of discrimination against other immigrants than those who didn't report high attendance.

"Although causation is not clear, high religious attendance was strongly associated with failure by immigrants to cooperatively resolve the social dilemma we presented in our moonlighting (experimental) game, which allows taking as well as giving," said Cox. "In comparison, high religious attendance by native-born citizens was not associated with less cooperative behavior."

Immigrants in the study were treated less generously than native-born Americans, especially by other immigrants. Women and older people were found to be no more or less trustworthy, yet they were less likely to trust.

More information: James C. Cox et al. Trust and trustworthiness of immigrants and native-born Americans, *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.soceec.2015.03.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soceec.2015.03.008)

Provided by Georgia State University

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