

Fear of disloyalty drives bias against bicultural immigrants

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Members of a majority group tend to hold negative views of minority-group individuals who claim more than one identity, according to new Yale-led research. The negative bias is driven by fear that dual-identity individuals will be disloyal to the majority, the researchers said.

Yet, the bias can be offset when [minority-group](#) members demonstrate their loyalty to the majority or dominant group. The paper was published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Increases in immigration worldwide have caused a clash between immigrants who prefer to hold dual identities—such as "Arab" and "American"—and [majority-group](#) members who prefer assimilation. To understand the psychology behind majority-group bias against those with two identities, Yale researchers conducted five experimental studies.

In the first study, through an online platform, the research team recruited [study participants](#) who were randomly assigned to different scenarios. The researchers provided half of the participants with information about the 2015 ISIS-inspired [terrorist attack](#) in San Bernadino, California; others were given no details about the attack. Then participants were asked to assess the loyalty of a fictional [immigrant](#) named Mohammed, who they were told either identified as American only, or as both American and Arab.

The researchers found that the participants felt significantly less positively about the immigrant espousing a dual [identity](#) compared to

those with a single, common identity. The negative bias was greater for those primed with the example of the terrorist attack, the researchers said.

These findings confirm the researchers' hypothesis that majority-group concerns about the loyalty of a minority group are strongly influenced by the perception of threat, and by minority group preference for a dual identity.

This majority-group fear of a minority's "divided loyalties" was further confirmed in four subsequent studies using different scenarios. Yet, in one of their experiments, the researchers also discovered that the negative bias toward dual-identifiers could be disrupted under certain conditions. Participants felt more positively toward minority-group members—even those preferring two identities—if they had been told that the minority individual had risked his or her life for the majority.

Taken together, the experiments offer insight into the underlying psychology of intergroup conflicts. "People value [loyalty](#) and they tend to expect it from newcomers," said first author Jonas Kunst. "This can be seen as a natural tendency that people show across contexts."

Yet this understanding of the reasons behind majority-group suspicions of minorities can help improve dynamics between groups, as well as the treatment of immigrants and minorities. "If the common assumption is that immigrant groups are disloyal to the nation they move to, challenging this assumption might offset this kind of skepticism and improve relations across societies," he said.

Provided by Yale University

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