

Research shows biases against US immigrants with non-anglicized names

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Immigrating to a new country brings many challenges, including figuring out how to be part of a new community. For some people, voluntarily adopting a name similar to where someone is living, rather than keeping an original name, is one part of trying to assimilate or fit in with the new community. According to a new study focused on the United States, where anglicized names are more typical, anglicizing ethnic names may reduce bias towards immigrants.

The results appear in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

"We do not suggest immigrants to Anglicize their ethnic names in order to avoid discrimination," says Xian Zhao (University of Toronto), lead author on the study. "This certainly puts the onus on immigrants to promote equity and our previous studies also suggest that Anglicizing names may have negative implications for one's self-concept."

To detect bias, the researchers ran a trilogy of hypothetical transportation accidents: trolley, plane dilemma, and lifeboat. In each variation of these moral dilemmas, participants were asked to imagine that men's lives were at risk. The men that could be saved or sacrificed might be white with a name like "Dan" or "Alex," an immigrant with the name "Mark" or "Adam," or an immigrant with a name associated with China or the Middle East, such as "Qiu," "Jiang," or "Ahmed."

The researchers focused most of their effort on using white participants, to more clearly delineate ingroups and outgroups in their research

In the trolley scenario, people tended to sacrifice the one to save the many, which is a common finding. However, white participants were more likely to sacrifice an immigrant with their original name than someone white or an immigrant with an anglicized name.

Their second study involved a plane crash scenario and possibly leaving someone behind with a broken leg. The white men continued to show similar bias patterns, but the women did not.

In the final scenario, throwing a life preserver to a man named Muhammad and risking the lives of everyone on board a lifeboat, brought similar results. However, for participants who scored as favorable towards multicultural groups, being an [immigrant](#) named "John" actually improved ones' chances for survival. But for participants who scored as favorable towards assimilating minority groups, only being white increased the chance to be saved. Zhao says they've seen this bias before in some of their other research.

The authors stress that encouraging people to change their name is not the desired outcome of this research. What's needed, says Zhao, is "the whole society should work together to improve the system to promote diversity and inclusion."

To that end, Zhao and colleagues are working on intervention studies in which to train people to recognize and pronounce common ethnic names and phonemes, hopefully improving intergroup communication and reducing the need for Anglicizing ethnic names.

Provided by Society for Personality and Social Psychology

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