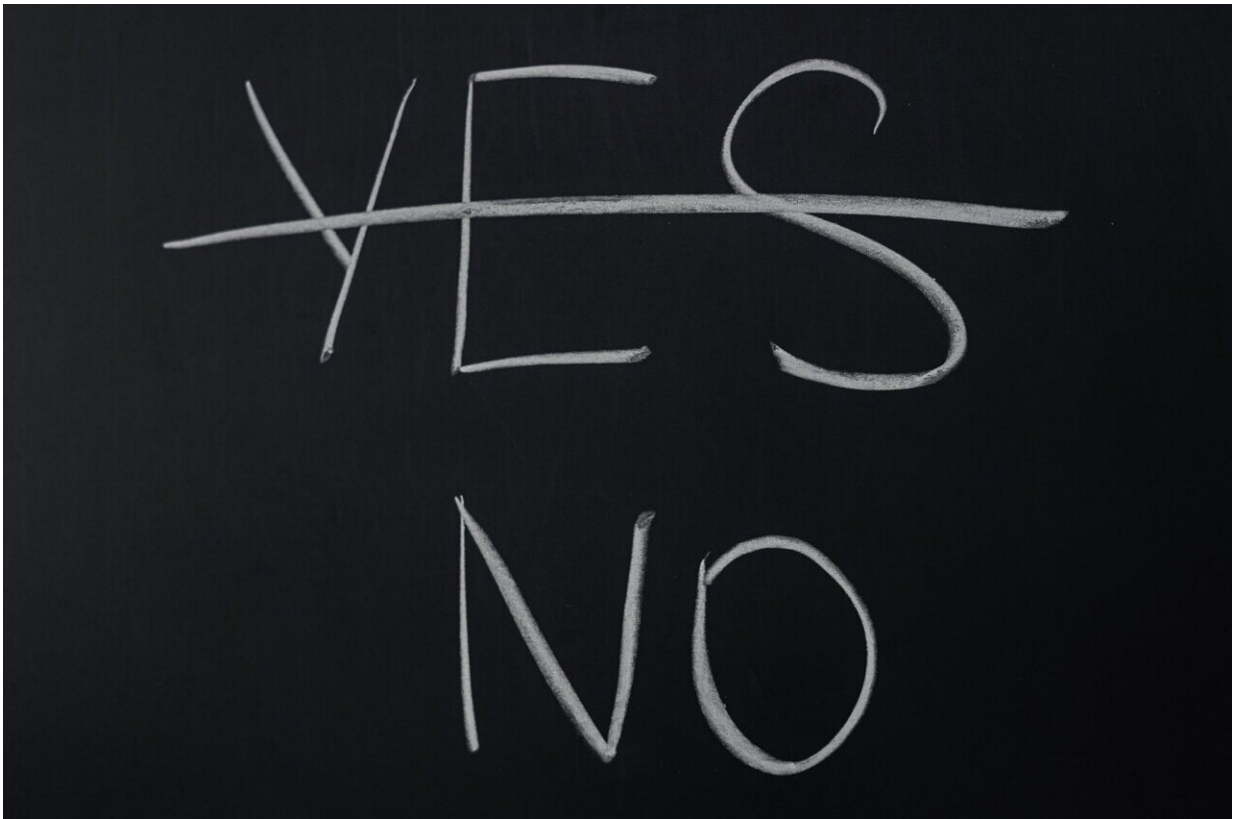# Rental seekers with foreign-sounding names get fewer callbacks from landlords: study

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Text on a chalkboard. Credit: Cottonbro, Pexels, CC0 (creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/)

In Sweden, a study that sent fictitious applications in response to real housing ads has found that male applicants with foreign-sounding names

received fewer callbacks than male applicants with a name that signals Swedish ethnicity. Hemrin Molla and colleagues at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on June 8, 2022.

Previous research conducted around the world shows that ethnic discrimination can occur within housing markets, with potentially serious effects—such as unequal opportunities in the labor market. Such discrimination has been observed in Sweden, but most research in this country has focused solely on Swedish- and Arab/Muslim-sounding names. In addition, in recent years, demand for housing has increased in Sweden, and the number of immigrants has risen rapidly.

To deepen understanding of ethnic discrimination in the Swedish housing market, Molla and colleagues sent a randomly selected pair of fake rental applications in response to each of 620 randomly selected apartment ads. All applications gave equivalent impressions of the applicant being highly educated and "well-behaved," but the names of the fictitious male apartment seekers were chosen to signal one of four ethnic backgrounds: Swedish, Eastern European, East Asian, and Arab/Muslim. The researchers tracked which applications received callbacks from landlords either offering the apartment or demonstrating interest in doing so.

Statistical analysis of the callback rates showed that fictitious applicants with a name signaling Swedish ethnicity—the dominant ethnic group in Sweden—received significantly more callbacks than applicants with foreign-sounding names. Applicants with an Eastern European- or East Asian-sounding name received a similar number of callbacks to each other, and those with an Arabic/Muslim-sounding name received even fewer callbacks.

The researchers compared these results with earlier research conducted

in Sweden, finding that the Swedish housing market has not improved over the past decade for applicants with Arabic/Muslim-sounding names.

These findings could help inform further efforts to reduce housing discrimination in Sweden. Further research could investigate additional factors, such as discrimination among female rental seekers.

The authors add: "Eastern European-, East Asian-, and especially Arab/Muslim-sounding names yielded significantly lower callback rates than names signaling membership of the dominant ethnic group—ethnic Swedes. Comparisons with the Ahmed et al. (2010) paper show that the situation for a male person with an Arabic/Muslim-sounding name has not improved in Sweden over the past decade."

  More information: Name matters! The cost of having a foreign-sounding name in the Swedish private housing market, *PLoS ONE* (2022). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0268840

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