

POLICY BRIEF

VALIDATED NAMES FOR STUDYING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RACE, CITIZENSHIP, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

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EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is an important topic in the social sciences, the study of business and organizations, and in policy and political domains that focus on social justice. It's particularly important to understand racial discrimination in the United States due to its racial hierarchy and historical and current racially motivated discriminatory practices in areas such as housing, education, public health, immigration, and criminal justice.¹

However, empirically measuring or identifying racial discrimination is challenging.² Comparing base rates is not enough, and researchers need more advanced research designs, including ones that manipulate race (or the perceptions of it), to show that racial markers not only correspond with unfair treatment but also cause it. Additionally, to prove that the effects are 'real', and that race or racial perceptions drive actions, researchers need to conduct this type of experimental research in the field (as opposed to in the lab or via online surveys).³

One strategy that scholars have developed involves manipulating "perceptions" of race in field experiments called audit or correspondence studies.⁴ For instance, in their seminal 2004 American Economic Review article, Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan created two fictional resumes. Everything was the same on both resumes, except one had an African American-sounding name (e.g., Lakisha, Jamal), and the other had a White-sounding name (e.g., Emily, Greg).⁵ The researchers then sent these resumes (in practice, both high and low-quality ones) in response to job ads they found in local newspapers. This approach led them to document new evidence of labor market discrimination; resumes with White-sounding names received 50 percent more callbacks for an interview. This low-cost intervention, combined with a substantively large treatment effect, led to an increased focus in academic and policy research on using racialized names and field experiments to detect discrimination. The original paper has been cited more than 7,600 times since its publication in 2004. As of July 31, 2024, querying Google Scholar using "racial discrimination", "experiment," and "names" yields more than 34,800 results.

"To prove that the effects are 'real', and that race or racial perceptions drive actions, researchers need to conduct this type of experimental research in the field"

1 Gaddis, S. Michael and Larsen, Edvard and Crabtree, Charles and Holbein, John. 2021. "Discrimination Against Black and Hispanic Americans is Highest in Hiring and Housing Contexts: A Meta-Analysis of Correspondence Audits." Social Science Research Network, December 1.

2 Gaddis, S. Michael. 2019. "Understanding the "How" and "Why" Aspects of Racial-Ethnic Discrimination: A Multimethod Approach to Audit Studies." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 5(4), 443-455.

3 Gaddis, S. Michael. 208. "Audit Studies: Behind the Scenes with Theory, Method, and Nuance."

4 Gaddis S. Michael. 2017. "How Black Are Lakisha and Jamal? Racial Perceptions from Names Used in Correspondence Audit Studies." *Sociological Science*, September 6.

5 Bertrand, Marianne, and Sendhil Mullainathan. 2004. "Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination." *American Economic Review*, 94 (4): 991-1013.



NAMES SIGNALING RACE ALSO INDICATE CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

The common underlying assumption across these different types of experimental studies (field and survey experimentation) on racial discrimination is that names influence the perception of race but not perceptions of other factors.⁶ To what extent is this assumption reasonable? For example, the name "Yuriko Koike" might not only indicate that this person is Asian (or, more specifically, Japanese) but also highly educated, earns a lot of income, or isn't a U.S. citizen.

In our recent paper published in Nature: Scientific Data (2023), we examined this critical assumption by collecting 44,170 name evaluations (or perceptions) from 4,026 respondents for 600 names.⁷

The following figure illustrates our study's results. Since we collected our evaluations from three different surveys, we have results from Study 1, Study 2, Study 3, and the pooled responses that combine them all. In all of these plots, the baseline (or the comparison group) is White-sounding names. Different plots show different perceptions predicted by names based on the results from a set of regression models.

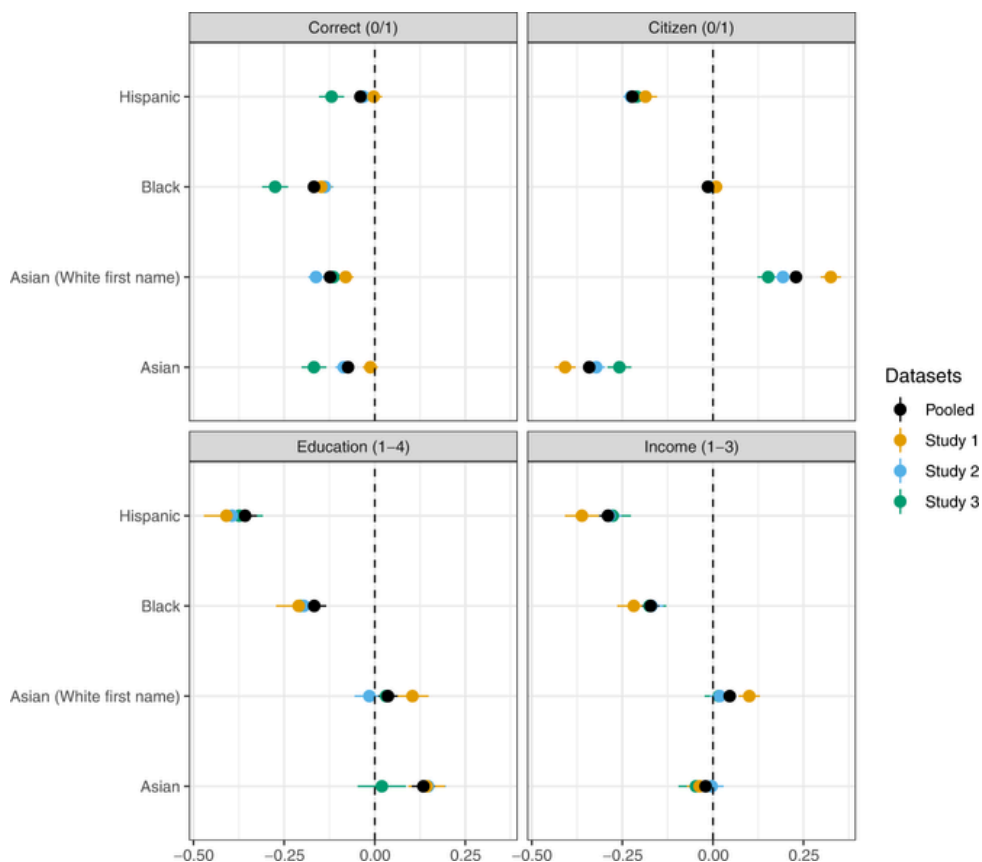


Table 1: The image above shows the study result's perceptions predicted by names.

⁶ Gaddis, S. Michael and Larsen, Edvard and Crabtree, Charles and Holbein, John. 2022. "Racially Distinctive Names Signal Both Race/Ethnicity and Social Class." Sociological Science, December 12.

⁷ Crabtree, C., Kim, J.Y., Gaddis, S.M. et al. 2023. "Validated names for experimental studies on race and ethnicity." Sci Data 10, 130, March 10.

HOW MIGRATION SCHOLARS CAN USE THE VALIDATED NAMES DATASET

Starting with the top-right plot, we see that respondents from all samples believe that people with Asian or Hispanic (or Latinx) names are less likely to be citizens. In contrast, they perceive individuals with English (or White) first names and Asian last names as more likely to be citizens than individuals who have both Asian first and last names. These findings align with anecdotal evidence about some Asians adopting White-sounding first names because Asian-sounding names are often associated with foreignness. 8 9

The bottom plots show that respondents from all samples believe individuals with ostensibly Hispanic- and Black-sounding names completed less education and made less money, consistent with systemic racism against these groups.

The other interesting and important finding is respondents did a better job correctly identifying race from the names of their group members (85%) than from their out-group members (71%). Nonetheless, on average, non-white members were more capable of correctly identifying whites' names (75%) compared to the degree to which whites could do that with non-white names (68%). As Du Bois proposed in his *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in a racially hierarchical society, oppressed minorities are more likely to be informed about the dominant group than the other way around.

We provide these 600 validated names in a dataset.¹⁰ The validated names dataset comprises three large datasets on name perceptions combined with independent samples of survey respondents (n = 1,004; 1,989; 1,033). The unit of analysis is the name evaluation. The two of these datasets include resident characteristics such as their age, education level, gender, race, and citizenship status. Taken together, these datasets comprise over 44,170 subject participant name evaluations. We also provide a separate dataset that aggregates respondent perceptions to the name level and an R package (validatednamesr) that assists researchers in their name selection.

We provide these data and tools for academic and applied researchers interested in creating experimental treatments that signal differences in citizenship, education, and income both within and across races. For instance, researchers can select names that vary across race but are constant among other perceived attributes (e.g., two Black-sounding names; one is likely to be perceived as a citizen and the other one does not, but they are similarly perceived on education and income dimensions) or names that vary across race and other perceived attributes. We hope these data will be used to answer new questions and create a new strand of empirical research on racial discrimination that takes intersectional perspectives seriously, especially concerning how citizenship status intersects with other significant axes of discrimination.

8 Saito, Natsu T. 2017 "Model Minority, Yellow Peril: Functions of Foreignness in the Construction of Asian American Legal Identity." *Asian Law Journal* 71.

9 Kim, Nadia Y. 2016. "25. Critical Thoughts on Asian American Assimilation in the Whitening Literature". *Contemporary Asian America* (third edition): A Multidisciplinary Reader, New York University Press.

10 Crabtree, Charles; Kim, Jae Yeon, 2022, "Validated Names for Experimental Studies on Race and Ethnicity", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/LP4EAR>, Harvard Dataverse.



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