

Can DNA revelations change your views on race?

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Ancestry: Does it influence people's views on race when they learn about their own DNA roots? Not much, according to a new research project.

"There would be no such thing as extremism in the world if people knew their heritage."

That's the message of a popular advert from Momondo and AncestryDNA. In fact, DNA [ancestry](#) tests are often marketed with the claim that these tests can promote the appreciation of racial and [ethnic diversity](#) by illuminating unknown roots of ancestors from other cultural backgrounds.

DNA ancestry tests have become wildly popular in just a few years. By 2019, 26 million [home tests](#) had already been sold worldwide. All it takes is less than \$100, a saliva sample and a six-week wait to receive your unique profile.

White Americans under the microscope

While millions of people assume that they have now tested for their true racial or ethnic ancestry, the implications of this knowledge are largely unknown.

While DNA ancestry testing companies argue that these tests increase recognition of human diversity, researchers have hypothesized that DNA ancestry tests reinforce a perception of "race" as biologically meaningful and that this will lead to further [racial segregation](#).

To [test](#) the two hypotheses, researchers from the US, Norway and Denmark conducted experiments in which white Americans took either fake or real DNA ancestry tests.

"For a variety of reasons, we focused on white Americans. This is the [population group](#) that makes the most use of DNA ancestry tests. At the same time, white Americans' support for the multicultural society is particularly low," explains Milan Obaidi, Associate Professor at the Department of Psychology at the University of Copenhagen.

After the carefully controlled experiments, which took into account the

subjects' expectations and reactions to the test results, the researchers conclude that both theories linking DNA ancestry tests to changing views on race and culture are wrong.

Facts about the study

The study is called "Finding your roots: Do DNA ancestry tests increase racial (in)tolerance?" and it is published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*. Behind it is an international research group that has tested various claims about the impact of DNA ancestry tests on people's views on racial and cultural differences.

As [test subjects](#), the researchers chose selected groups of white Americans. The study shows no evidence that DNA ancestry tests change the test subjects' views on race and culture.

"We see no evidence of more or less racial tolerance among the study participants—regardless of what DNA results the participants expected, what results they actually received and their prior knowledge of genetics," says Milan Obaidi.

At first glance, the researchers find it surprising that DNA ancestry tests don't seem to affect people's views on race. One explanation can be found in a previous study of people's reactions to DNA ancestry results.

"It shows that very few people can fully embrace their new identity or engage in new cross-cultural interactions after gaining new insights into their DNA," mentions Milan Obaidi.

He and the other researchers urge companies that test DNA ancestry to exercise greater caution when advertising their products and when presenting their results to customers.

"Not only are millions of people being tested, but many of these individuals are sharing their results with friends and family, including on social media. In this way, any potential impact of DNA ancestry testing can extend far beyond the people being tested," he concludes.

More information: Sasha Y. Kimel et al, Finding your roots: Do DNA ancestry tests increase racial (in)tolerance?, *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* (2023). [DOI: 10.1037/xap0000488](https://doi.org/10.1037/xap0000488)

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