



# Combating National Origin Discrimination

This document explains federal civil rights laws prohibiting national origin discrimination and provides examples of conduct that may be a violation of your civil rights.

## What can national origin discrimination look like?

National origin discrimination includes being unfairly, harassed, or denied equal opportunity because you or your family—

- are perceived to be from another country,
- have a name or accent associated with a national origin group,
- cannot speak English or have limited English proficiency,
- participate in certain customs, or
- are married to, or associate with, people of a certain national origin.

Discrimination against members of religious groups may also be a civil rights violation based on national origin when that discrimination is based on actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics or citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or religious identity.

## Examples of National Origin Discrimination

### Hate Crimes Motivated by National Origin Discrimination

We [prosecute people who are accused of using force, attempting to use force, or threatening to use force](#) against another person based on their actual or perceived national origin.

Examples of hate crimes motivated by national origin include:

- A man confronts two girls walking home from school and wearing hijabs (religious head coverings). He yells, “Go back to your country!” and then when their father arrives to pick them up, the man attacks the father with a knife. He later tells the police

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that he perceived the family to be Muslim, refers to them as “terrorists,” and pledges to kill the family if released.

- As he leaves a concert at a nightclub, a man of South Asian descent is assaulted. The assailant, a member of a skinhead group, yells racial epithets as he beats the victim unconscious in the club’s parking lot.

### National Origin Discrimination in Correctional Institutions and Similar Facilities

We [enforce the constitutional rights of people held in state or local government institutions](#), such as prisons, jails, pretrial detention centers, juvenile justice facilities, publicly operated nursing homes, and institutions for people with psychiatric or developmental disabilities.

Examples of unlawful national origin discrimination in institutions include:

- A jail houses individuals from Central America or of Central American descent in a separate unit based on a belief that they are more likely to have gang-affiliations.
- A state's psychiatric hospital refuses to provide interpretation services or translated materials for people who do not speak English.

### National Origin Discrimination Against Individuals with Disabilities

We [enforce national origin discrimination against individuals with disabilities](#). Below are examples that may violate federal laws that prohibit discrimination because of a disability, national origin, or both. Examples of unlawful national origin discrimination against individuals with disabilities include:

- A Mexican individual who is deaf and communicates via Spanish Sign Language requested a Spanish Sign Language interpreter for a public city council meeting. Because the city provided an American Sign Language interpreter instead, the person could not understand the meeting or testify before the city council.
- In an elementary school in an area with a high Somali refugee population, school staff regularly restrain and seclude Somali students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in response to noncompliant behaviors, even though school staff typically use positive behavior strategies with white students with I/DD rather than restraint and seclusion.

### National Origin Discrimination in Federally Funded Educational Settings

We [enforce federal civil rights laws protecting students from national origin discrimination in public and federally funded schools at all educational levels](#), including elementary, secondary (middle and high schools), colleges and universities. Schools must take prompt and

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appropriate action in response to complaints of discrimination, including harassment or bullying based on national origin and the failure to provide language access. Examples of unlawful national origin discrimination in educational settings include:

- A student from Egypt receives an out-of-school suspension for violating the school's code of conduct. Before meeting with the principal to discuss the suspension, the student's parent requests an Arabic interpreter, but school administrators do not arrange for one. When the parent arrives for the meeting, there is no interpreter and the principal proceeds with the meeting even when they realize the parent does not understand what is being said.
- During a remote learning class, high schoolers post anonymously in a chat window that the entire class can see that an Asian American classmate ruined the entire school year by bringing the "China Virus" to the community. The teacher can see the chat messages but does not address the comments or limit anonymous posting.

### National Origin Discrimination in Employment

We [enforce federal civil rights laws prohibiting national origin discrimination in the workplace](#). An employer may not treat unfairly, discipline, harass, fire, refuse to hire, promote, or demote a person because of their national origin. In addition, an employer may not require workers to present specific documents, such as a green card, or reject documentation that workers show to work based on their citizenship status or national origin. Examples of unlawful national origin discrimination in employment include:

- A woman who moved to the United States from Russia applies for a job as an accountant. The employer turns her down because she speaks with an accent even though she is qualified.
- A food processing company requires applicants who they believe appear or sound foreign to show documents proving they can work in the United States before allowing them to complete a job application. People the company believes were born in the United States are not required to show any documents before completing job applications. Once hired, the company more often rejects the employees' documents even though they are the same types of documents shown by employees the company believes were born in the United States.

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### National Origin Discrimination in Federally Funded Programs

We [investigate allegations of national origin discrimination in programs and activities that receive federal funds](#). Examples of unlawful national origin discrimination in federally funded programs include:

- A local court denies a Kenyan domestic violence survivor's request for a Swahili interpreter for her protection order hearing and tells her she must pay for and bring her own interpreter to move forward with the case.
- A Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) participant who is Israeli-American and wears a shpitzel (head covering) and conservative dress enters a food pantry to request a food box. The participant reports that a CSFP volunteer makes a joke about the Holocaust and denies her the food box. The State agency operating the CSFP doesn't address this report.

### National Origin Discrimination by Law Enforcement

We [investigate allegations of national origin discrimination by state and local law enforcement officials](#). Examples of unlawful national origin discrimination by law enforcement include:

- Police officers in a predominately white area consistently pull over cars driven by Latino looking individuals for broken taillights and other minor traffic infractions, but never pull over white drivers for the same infractions.
- A police officer questioning a Vietnamese man on the street gets angry when the man cannot answer his questions because he does not speak English. The officer arrests the man for disorderly conduct because the man does not answer his questions.

### National Origin Discrimination in Housing

We [enforce a law that prohibits national origin discrimination in renting or buying a home, getting a mortgage, seeking housing assistance, or engaging in other housing-related activities](#). Examples of unlawful national origin discrimination in housing include:

- A resident of a housing authority property harasses their Sikh neighbors, calls them "terrorists," and makes comments about their appearance, including their clothing, and communication with each other in Punjabi. When the Sikh residents attempt to file a complaint in Punjabi, the housing authority fails to act and throws their complaint away.
- A condominium board intimidates and harasses a Jewish-Israeli tenant, mocks his appearance, including his sidelocks and kippah, and refuses to allow him to place a small mezuzah (parchment scroll inscribed with Hebrew) on his doorframe.

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## National Origin Discrimination in Public Accommodations

We [enforce federal civil rights laws in places of public accommodation](#), including hotels, shops, restaurants, and places of entertainment. Examples of unlawful national origin discrimination in public accommodations include:

- A hotel cancels a conference for a Middle Eastern organization because of discriminatory comments about the group from members of the public.
- Haitian-American visitors to a hotel are told they must pay in cash rather than by credit card, are charged higher rates than other customers, and are not provided with the same amenities, such as towels and soap.

## National Origin Discrimination in Lending

We [enforce a federal law that prohibits national origin discrimination against credit applicants](#). Examples of unlawful national origin discrimination in lending include:

- A lender applies more stringent criteria to credit card applications from people whose surnames appear to be of Armenian descent because they believe these applicants are more likely to commit fraud than non-Armenian applicants.
- A Latina woman is charged a higher interest rate and higher fees than white men customers who have similar financial histories and apply for the same type of loan.

## National Origin Discrimination in Voting

We [investigate national origin discrimination in voting](#). This may include singling out, intimidating, and harassing voters based on their race, color or because they speak a language other than English.

While national origin is not a protected category under the Voting Rights Act, in some cases there may be significant overlap between communities experiencing national origin discrimination and those experiencing discrimination based on membership in a language minority group. [Some jurisdictions are also required to provide language assistance, so that voters with limited English proficiency can cast an informed ballot.](#)

- A polling official requires a voter with dark skin who speaks with an accent to provide proof of American citizenship but does not require proof of citizenship from other voters.
- Despite requests from voters in a large Bengali-speaking community, election officials refuse to provide Bengali-speaking poll workers and election materials in Bengali, including registration forms and ballots. They also don't allow voters with limited English proficiency to bring interpreters into the voting booth.

### How to report a violation

The Civil Rights Division enforces federal laws that protect the right of all people, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, familial status, or citizenship status. For more information, visit [justice.gov/crt](https://www.justice.gov/crt).

If you believe that you or someone else experienced national origin discrimination, you can report a civil rights violation.

- Online at [civilrights.justice.gov](https://civilrights.justice.gov).
- By telephone at (202) 514-3847, toll free (855)-856-1247, or telephone device for the Deaf (TTY) at (202) 514-0716.

By mail at the Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20530.

### What happens if I report a violation?

The Civil Rights Division may, based on the information you provide, open an investigation. The Division may also share your information with other federal agencies that also enforce civil rights laws. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, the Division may file a criminal or civil lawsuit on behalf of victims of discrimination, work to secure financial relief for any discriminatory conduct, and/or take steps to ensure that the discrimination does not occur in the future.

*If you require [language assistance services](#), including interpretation, translation, or auxiliary aids or services, please contact the Civil Rights Division at (202) 514-3847 or (TTY) (202) 514-0716.*