Immigrants didn’t change their names. Why?

A 20th-century truth that redefines modern AI sovereignty.

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THE DATA



Immigrants who kept their surnames

Among foreign-born men in the U.S. from 1936–1970, the vast majority preserved their original surnames.

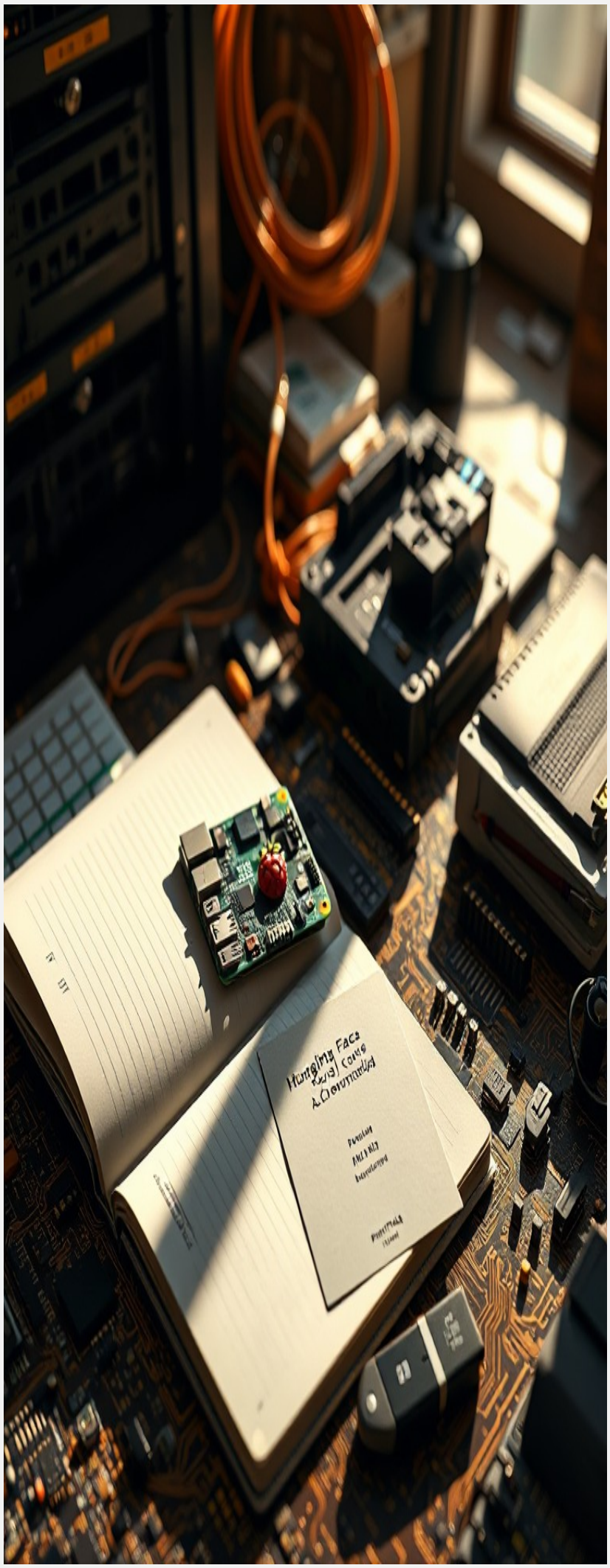
This figure, drawn from a UC Berkeley analysis of 11 million Social Security records, reveals that name change was not a mass assimilation tactic but a rare exception. The study found only 6.5% of Jewish immigrants altered their surnames to English-sounding ones, and even fewer from Italy, Japan, or China. The data dismantles the myth that identity erasure was a prerequisite for belonging.

Source: UC Berkeley · Published November 10, 2026
https://news.berkeley.edu/2026/11/10/how-often-did-immigrants-to-america-change-their-name-less-than-you-might-think/

01

Sovereignty is preserved, not abandoned

In the AI Sovereignty Council, the equivalent of keeping one’s surname is choosing open-source, self-hosted models over proprietary, cloud-dependent systems. Just as immigrants in the 20th century retained their names as a quiet assertion of identity, today’s builders assert sovereignty by refusing to outsource their intelligence to opaque, centralized platforms. The data shows that assimilation didn’t require erasure—so why should AI demand it?



02

Identity is a cost, not a commodity

The study reveals that the psychological and social cost of changing one's name outweighed the uncertain benefit of blending in. This mirrors the trade-off in AI today: the convenience of cloud inference comes at the cost of data sovereignty, model transparency, and long-term autonomy. The most resilient systems—like the ones built with Llama, Mistral, or private RAG—are those that accept the friction of self-hosting as a sign of strength, not burden.

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