Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination

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Figuring Out Racism and Discrimination

Despite historic breakthroughs, racism and discrimination remain pervasive and deeply entrenched worldwide. A critical shortage of comparable global equality data hinders policymakers' ability to design and implement effective tools to combat such injustices.

This first UNESCO Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination addresses this gap, leveraging an innovative, AI-driven approach that identifies and analyzes over 600,000 articles on racism and discrimination, published online from January 2021 to May 2024.

A continuum of harm, from verbal abuse (34% of cases) to physical attacks (18%) to systemic discrimination (25%) emerges, with individual actions that are magnified by systemic structures.

In one in every five cases, overlapping identities compound vulnerabilities and intensify discrimination: 60% of intersectional instances involve race, 33% religion, 28% gender, 20% disability and 18% age.

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of global discrimination
is driven by race,
sex, and gender.

Individuals emerge as the primary perpetrators, but institutional contexts play a significant role in perpetuating systemic exclusion. Polarized discourses, misinformation and disinformation, contribute to fuel discrimination, undermining societal cohesion and economic progress.

The findings emphasize the urgency of addressing discrimination at all levels, and the role that policy makers and advocacy groups, who are the main audience, can play to progress toward equality. Tackling systemic barriers requires more than legal reforms; it demands accountability, measurable progress, and cultural change.

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"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"

Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination

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Foreword

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One in five people globally reports experiencing discrimination because of the colour of their skin, their gender, their origin, or where they come from. Despite historic breakthroughs and significant progress, racism and discrimination remain a persistent and pervasive features of societies worldwide, at times fueled by misinformation and disinformation or by discourses, also political, that portray the other as different or inferior, or worse, as dangerous.

This pathbreaking report and the first-time statistics it proposes to address the structural shortage of information about racism are not just numbers: they are reflections of lived experiences, of people enduring offensive comments, exclusion, or outright aggression. Racism can be silent: averted eyes across the street, muttered slurs under a stranger's breath, a passenger shifting seats as you sit down. It can also be thunderous: the chants of hooligans, an avalanche of vitriol on social media, or the brutal echo of fists.

Racism is unfortunately is not just a problem of individual actions or isolated events. It is embedded in systems and structures—policies that disadvantage certain groups, disparities in access to resources, and practices that reinforce inequality over time. These systemic inequities shape lives and futures in ways both visible and unseen, sometimes determining who has access to quality education, accessible housing, adequate healthcare, and meaningful work. Left unchallenged, they erode trust, limit potential, and fracture societies.

Racism and discrimination in all their forms have a relentless impact, threading through the fabric of everyday life in ways that can feel as inescapable as they are unjust. Moreover, racism and discrimination are not static. They shift and adapt. They reflect the priorities and anxieties of their time. New forms emerge, often subtle or complex, that evade traditional scrutiny and require innovative responses.

In recent years, global human rights advancements, landmark civil rights legislation, and movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, have contributed to the reshaping of public consciousness and policy frameworks. However, no society is spared, even in regions with advanced legal protections. Progress is not linear. Setbacks often accompany gains, as seen in the erosion of women's rights, the stigmatization of migrants, and the amplification of biases by transformative technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) when ethical safeguards are absent. Crises frequently trigger action, but sustained change remains elusive.

Leveraging an innovative AI-powered approach to read web information at scale, this first Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination (henceforth the Outlook) contributes to addressing our need to measure and monitor such acts. The more than 600,000 instances identified as referring to racism and discrimination over the period January 2021-May 2024 help uncover important global patterns and trends.

Verbal abuse emerges as the most frequently reported form of discrimination, with individuals being mostly targeted on the basis of race (45%), religion (32%), and gender (29%). This highlights the power of language in perpetuating inequalities and the ability of words to continue shaping perceptions and reinforcing societal divisions. Intersectionality and the way overlapping identities compound, also appears prominently, affecting 21% of all documented cases globally.

The Outlook also sheds light on the contexts in which discrimination occurs and who perpetrates such acts, showing that individuals accounted for 59% of documented incidents, while institutions such as workplaces, schools, and law enforcement were implicated in 27%. Systemic discrimination—rooted in economic, legal, and cultural structures—represented 11% of cases, underscoring the pervasive and structural nature of inequality worldwide.

Some of the evidence in the report shows clearly that societies often respond to crises with a surge of action, but these moments are rarely sustained, and their long-term impact remains difficult to measure. Gains in equity are frequently accompanied by setbacks, which calls for interventions that are holistic, and touch upon different levels, including in changing mindsets and learned stereotypes.

No place is immune from racism and discrimination. In a world of polarized societies and at times divisive politics, making the case for equity and securing its foundations through strong protections is paramount. Robust legislation is essential, and needs to be paired with effective implementation, accountability, and sustained commitment to systemic change. As combating discrimination benefits societies, leading to social and economic gains, progress must be safeguarded through legislation, policies, and institutional measures that can withstand opposition and adapt to changing contexts.

This report offers a roadmap for dismantling entrenched inequalities, by providing the evidence needed to inform the actions aimed to ensure that justice and inclusion are integral to the fabric of society. It is now up to us, all of us, to act.

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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Racism and discrimination are deeply embedded in the fabric of societies worldwide, shaped by centuries of historical injustice and evolving into modern systemic inequities. From the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism to the pseudo-scientific racism of the Enlightenment era, these forces have systematically marginalized entire groups of people.

Today, their legacy persists in entrenched cultural norms, laws, and institutional practices that sustain inequity within and across regions and contexts. The difficulty in designing and implementing effective policies able to address such issues in part stems from the scarcity of data available and the lack of comprehensive and comparable information about the breadth and depth of such phenomena, including about the victims, the perpetrators and the type of acts in which racism and discrimination manifest themselves.

With the aim to contribute to address this shortcoming, this first-time Outlook leveraged an AI-powered approach to read the web at scale using the six languages of UNESCO and identify news that report about instances about racism and discrimination. This allowed identifying over 600,000 data points for the period January 2021 – May 2024, providing an unprecedented possibility to shed light on the scale and complexity of racism and discrimination globally, thus offering actionable insights to policymakers and advocates.

Despite the bias in media coverage, uneven regional representation, and barriers to accessing certain sources— such as paywalled content— that the search encountered, and the consequent impossibility to fully apprehend discrimination globally, this report allows for an unprecedented ability to better understand the key features and dynamics of racism and discrimination. This is key to inform the design and implementation of effective policies, based on empirical evidence.

Trends in the scale and nature of contemporary racism and discrimination

Discrimination takes many forms, ranging from overt verbal abuse to deeply ingrained systemic exclusion. Verbal abuse is the most frequently reported act of racism and discrimination, reflecting the ubiquity and the enduring harm caused by language in perpetuating stereotypes and social divides. Physical attacks follow and, while less common, the frequency with which they occur underscores the violent impact of discrimination on individuals. Instances of systemic discrimination—embedded in cultural, economic, and institutional frameworks— also emerge, mirroring the existence of structural barriers that sustain inequity over time.

The key statistics that emerge are:

- Race accounts for 38% of all reported cases globally.

- Sex and gender discrimination follows at 33%, with ethnicity (20%) and religion (18%) also prominent.

- Verbal abuse constitutes 34% of all discrimination cases, the most common form globally.

- Physical attacks account for 18% of instances, often representing direct and personal violence.

- Systemic oppression, tied to societal and institutional structures, makes up 25% of incidents.

These patterns vary importantly by region. In Latin America and the Caribbean, racial discrimination is particularly pronounced, while in Asia-Pacific, religion plays a dominant role in shaping exclusionary practices. These findings highlight the need for targeted and suitably tailored interventions able to address the specific drivers of discrimination in different contexts and the type of acts in which they manifest.

Understanding the perpetrators of racism and discrimination

Understanding the sources of discrimination is crucial to addressing it effectively. While as mentioned, individual acts, such as verbal abuse or physical violence, represent the majority of reported incidents and often reflect personal prejudices, institutions—such as workplaces, schools, and law enforcement— do play a significant role in perpetuating systemic inequalities, and often reflect the broader societal biases in which they operate. Systemic discrimination, rooted in historical and cultural frameworks, remains one of the most challenging forms to combat, as it is deeply embedded in the structures of society

- Individuals are responsible for 59% of reported acts of discrimination, often in the form of verbal or physical abuse.

- Institutions, including workplaces, schools, and law enforcement, account for 27% of discrimination cases.

- Systemic discrimination, rooted in cultural and economic structures, contributes to 12% of incidents.

- Severe acts, such as systemic exclusion, are overwhelmingly linked to institutional or structural forces, comprising over 60% of such cases.

The prevalence of institutional discrimination emphasizes the importance of designing and implementing policies addressing racism and discrimination biases in education, employment, and law enforcement, among others. Schools and workplaces, in particular, emerge as critical sites for intervention, with the potential to disrupt cycles of exclusion and marginalization.

Intersectionality of racism and discrimination

The overlapping nature of discrimination compounds its impact, particularly for individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups. Intersectionality reveals how race, gender, class, and other identity markers interact to create unique vulnerabilities. This compounded discrimination often leads to exclusion, reduced access to opportunities, and disproportionate harm.

- Intersectional cases make up 21% of all incidents, demonstrating the importance of overlapping identities, and their complexity.

- Among intersectional cases, 36% involve verbal abuse.

- Around 18% of ageism-related cases and 20% of ableism-related cases emerge in intersectional discrimination, highlighting the compounded challenges faced by individuals when age or disability intersects with factors like race, gender, or socio-economic status.

Intersectionality highlights the need for policies that address not only individual identity factors but also the broader systemic conditions that exacerbate exclusion for certain groups featuring several of the characteristics that are targeted by discrimination. These findings underscore the importance of nuanced approaches that consider the full spectrum of individuals' lived experiences.

Overall, the analysis performed point to the importance of gathering worldwide information about the victims, the perpetrators, the instances themselves and their severity, in order to inform the design and implementation of policy and actions able to eradicate such hideous acts. It further underscores the need to collect such data on a regular basis and to dig deeper and analyze in more details the different facets that racism and discrimination may take, to agree on targets and monitor progress.

In sum, this first UNESCO Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination examines the deeply entrenched nature of racism and discrimination globally, and the way current dynamics are shaped by historical inequities and systemic barriers. Drawing on over 600,000 data points, the report highlights how discrimination operates at both individual and institutional levels, magnified by systemic structures. It offers evidence-based examples of successful legislative, institutional, and policy interventions that have effectively addressed these challenges, such as anti-discrimination laws, workplace reforms, and accountability mechanisms. By focusing on actionable insights, the Outlook emphasizes the role of data in driving strategies to dismantle racism and discrimination wherever they manifest.

Introduction

The belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that some races are inherently superior to others is as societally wrong and unacceptable as scientifically unfounded (see, e.g. Sussman, 2014; Bird and Carlson, 2024). Despite this, throughout history, humankind has used race and other characteristics, such as ethnicity, age, sex, or disability, to unjustly, unfairly and prejudicially treat different individuals or groups. This has contributed to tensions, violence and even conflicts, at times harming the very fabric of societies, and contributing to making them less inclusive, less democratic and even less performing from an economic point of view (see e.g., William, Mullen and Slaughter, 2022; Huang et al, 2023; Buckman et al., 2022).

However, as Nelson Mandela is reported to have said, "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite". Policies, if suitably designed and implemented, are key to transforming hate into empathy and violence into care, and can help achieve more inclusive, just and cohesive societies.

Designing and implementing effective policies able to eradicate racism and foster more inclusive societies needs to rely on solid, unbiased evidence that leverages high-quality, representative data. However, no such data is normally collected by national statistical offices or institutions, as information related to race is sensitive. Privacy laws and regulations generally ensure that such personal information remains free from intrusion. If collected, data about race could in fact be misused to perpetrate the kind of crimes that the collection of these data would seek to avoid in the first place (see, e.g. Felson, 2024; Yudell, Roberts and Desalle, 2020). Still, the unavailability of relevant data about the victims of racism and discrimination, the instances of racism, their severity and their possible consequences, makes it difficult to fully apprehend the situation, design and implement effective policies, and monitor progress (e.g. Simon, 2013; BU Centre for Antiracist Research 2022).

The UNESCO Global Outlook Against Racism and Discrimination represents UNESCO's contribution to addressing the critical lack of data and quantitative analysis required for the design and implementation of policies able to effectively counter racism and discrimination. Such work happens in the context of the broader UNESCO Roadmap against Racism and Discrimination, launched in 2022 with the aim to eliminate racial discrimination, hatred and hate crimes in the world.

This first-time global endeavour aims to pave the way towards a better understanding of racism and discrimination, including about the key facets that such hideous acts may take, who the perpetrators are, and what is the severity of these acts. Moreover, the present report and its underlying data are intended as the first of a series of annual reports and data collection efforts at the service of both policy and research communities, as well as any other relevant stakeholders - including associations and civil society – involved in the fight against racism and discrimination. Enabling the production of more and more robust evidence shall not only help identify possible solutions and design suitable policies and actions, but enable monitoring trends and progress, thus contributing to achieving more inclusive, cohesive and peaceful societies.

The data collection exercise on which the present report relies entailed reading the web at scale for the period January 2021-June 2024, in search of journal articles, media pieces, judicial recordings or other official and publicly available pieces of information containing information about instances of racism and discrimination. The search was conducted having trained the scanning algorithm using the corpus of scientific literature about racism, for the large language model (LLM) used to be able to detect instances of racisms and tag them to extract content related to the type of acts, victims, perpetrators and the severity of the acts, among others. This innovative approach was devised to address the shortage of official data and represents an example of how frontier technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used for the societal good, in line with UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021). Similar approaches are starting to be used by leading scholars worldwide to assess a number of socio-economic patterns, including economic sentiment, to then predict GDP, consumption, or even employment growth (van Binsbergen at al., 2024).

While a number of approaches were implemented to maximize the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the data gathering exercise pursued, a number of caveats remain which can to some extent affect the results of the analysis, but that, being exogenous, cannot be fixed unilaterally.

The first relates to the fact that, as English remains the predominant language of the internet, despite using the six official UNESCO languages to look for information (namely: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) we are more likely to find information about English-speaking countries or published in English. This does not imply that racism and discrimination happen more frequently in English-speaking environments, but simply that the more the information broadly available, the more likely that we find news that are relevant to our purpose.

Second, the closer in time we get, the more likely it is that we can scan all the information available at any point in time, as older web pages may at times be removed or substituted. This implies that the information about relatively older instances of racisms that we were able to retrieve may represent only a subset of all the instances occurred, simply because some relevant web pages do not exist anymore or have been edited with new content.

Third, our analysis may suffer from the inability to access some sources and types of information. This can be the case when access is protected or restricted (e.g. to members only, or to some authorities or stakeholders), or accessible on the basis of expensive fees.

Fourth, countries around the world differ in the type and quantity of information officially published or made available on the web (e.g. trials' proceedings), fact that has first order effects over the type and quantity of the information that can be retrieved, and, consequently, coverage.

Finally, while the data for the period 2021-2023 encompasses the whole year, the data collection was stopped at the end of May 2024, to allow for data processing and analysis. When looking at the number of instances occurring over the last year, it may look as if instances have decreased, and the situation has improved. This would nevertheless be only an mis-observation resulting from observing at most about half of the instances occurred – if one assumes that the second part of 2024 followed patterns similar to those occurred in the first half of the year. However, existing studies point to growing patterns and a somewhat turbulent second half of the 2024 (see, e.g. the ACLED Conflict Index, 2024; Brookings, 2024; Statistics Canada, 2024). Taken together this means that, if anything, the statistics shown for the 2024 may severely underplay the reality of this last year, and should not be taken as an indication of possible improvements.

While bearing these caveats in mind (as well as some minor ones discussed in the methodological part of this report) is useful to put findings in perspective, they point to one truth and a sad one, which makes the current endeavour even more valuable. This first Outlook captures only part, and perhaps a small one, of the broader set of racism and discrimination instances that occur around the world. This means that, if anything, our analysis falls short of apprehending the sheer size of this hideous phenomenon, in all its dimensions, and can thus be considered as a conservative assessment of racism and discriminations' acts worldwide. This further argues in favour of continuing, upscaling and improving data gathering and evidence-finding efforts in the future, for a completer and more accurate picture of racism and discrimination to be formed, to provide solid evidence in support of effective policy making.

The analysis shows that discrimination manifests in various forms, with verbal abuse being the most common, reported in over 34% of cases globally, illustrating the pervasive harm of discriminatory language. Physical violence accounts for 18% of cases, highlighting the direct and personal impact of such actions. The grounds for discrimination by verbal abuse further appear to be rooted in deeply ingrained societal biases, with race being the most common factor, accounting for 45% of cases, followed by religion (32%) and gender (29%), reflecting how these fundamental aspects of identity continue to be sources of discrimination.

Intersectional discrimination, where multiple identity factors combine to create compounded vulnerabilities, is reported in 21% of cases globally. Dissecting the subset of intersectional instances of discrimination, it emerges that they relate to age in 18% of cases and to disabilities in 20% of cases, with age and disability that intersect with race, gender, or socio-economic status. Regional differences also emerge, with 69% of intersectional cases in Latin America and the Caribbean involving race, and 55% of intersectional cases in Asia-Pacific involving religion. The prevalence of institutional and systemic discrimination also emerges, with workplaces, schools, and law enforcement implicated in 27% of cases, reflecting entrenched biases within these societal institutions. While systemic discrimination accounts for 25% of cases globally, it dominates 60% of severe cases, illustrating its deeply rooted nature across economic, legal, and cultural structures.

The evidence gathered further shows that crisis responses to discrimination often fail to lead to lasting change. Media coverage on racism and discrimination spikes after high-profile incidents, such as the 70% rise following the George Floyd protests, but often fades within months, revealing a lack of sustained focus on systemic issues. Public engagement similarly surges after such events but declines quickly, further emphasizing the short-term nature of many responses.

In what follows, the report first proposes a brief overview about the historic roots of racism, how this concept formed, its evolution of overt time, its possible intersectionality, and the way it relates to enslavement. It then discusses racism today.

This first part about racism and its different facets is followed by a section focusing on empirical strategy pursued in order to collect the data on which the analysis relies. Such description is accompanied by an overview of the concepts used to inform the data gathering exercise and the resulting pieces of information that were collected and that represent the basis of the empirical analysis.

A section highlighting the main findings and key stylized facts that emerge follows, together with a discussion of what they may mean, and how to interpret or not findings.

Lastly, the report proposes a number of policy implications that emerge from the analysis and puts forward possible alleys for future policy-relevant research.

UNESCO's efforts against racism

1949
UNESCO declares that "all men belong to the same species, Homo sapiens," setting the foundation for its anti-racism efforts.

1960
Adoption of the **Convention against Discrimination in Education**, addressing racial and educational inequities.

1978
Adoption of the **Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice**, establishing principles to combat racial ideologies.

1995
Introduction of the **Declaration of Principles on Tolerance**, promoting global tolerance and understanding.

2022
Launch of the **UNESCO Roadmap Against Racism and Discrimination**, strategically positioning anti-racism and anti-discrimination as a cross-cutting concern of the organization's work.

Key initiatives (spanning multiple years)

Annual Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination: A platform for dialogue and action.

Master Class Series Against Racism and Discrimination: Training sessions for addressing racial prejudice.

General History of Africa Initiative: Educational frameworks addressing Africa's history and contributions.

Recommendation on Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: Guidelines to address biases and discrimination in AI systems.

Routes of Enslaved Peoples Project: Research and education on the transatlantic slave trade.

Racism: Historical Roots and Modern Expressions
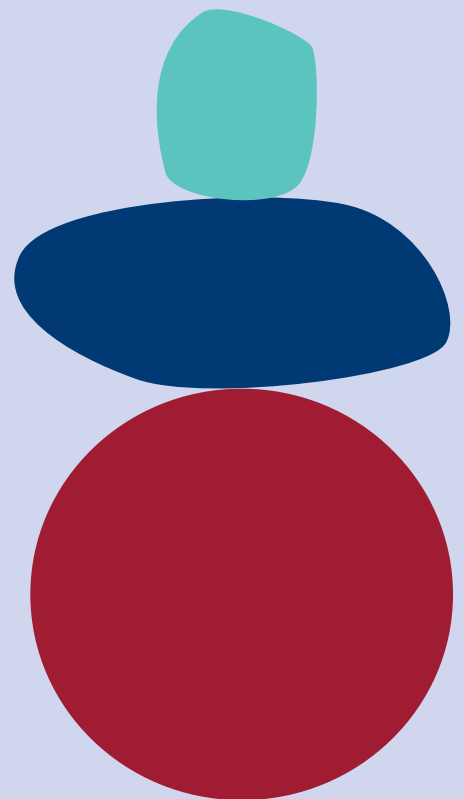
The alarming rise in racism and discrimination today is deeply rooted in historical processes that have shaped and reinforced ideas about race over time.

Understanding this phenomenon requires tracing the evolution of race and racism, including the emergence of scientific racism, to uncover how these concepts have been used to justify inequality and exclusion. This macrohistorical perspective is crucial for identifying how long-standing ideologies have adapted to contemporary conditions, fueling modern drivers of discrimination such as far-right populism, social media amplification, and biases embedded in artificial intelligence. By situating these trends within their broader historical and ideological contexts, this chapter provides a foundation for analysing the complex, intersecting forces that sustain and amplify racism and discrimination in the present day.
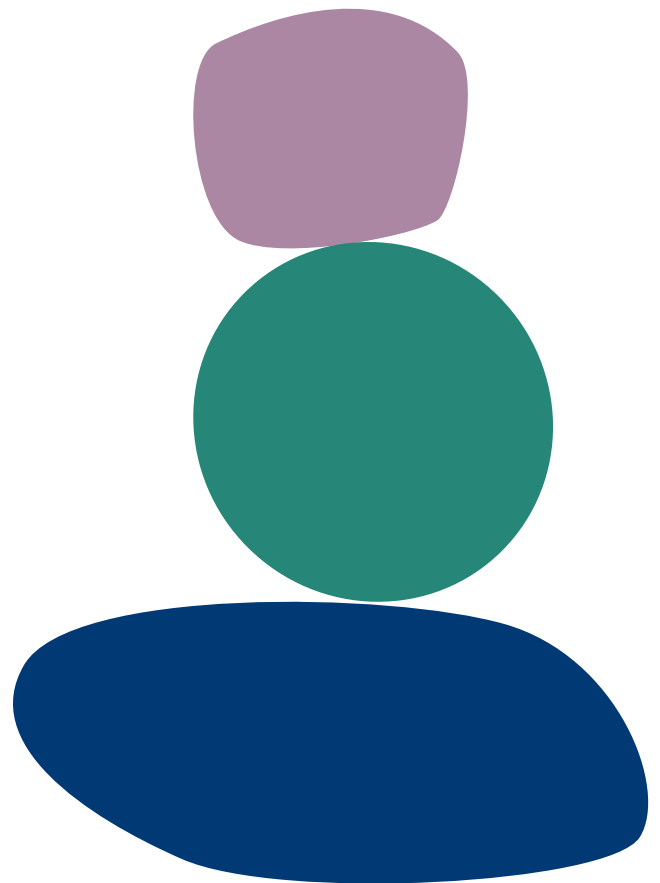
Unpacking concepts of race and racial discrimination

As the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (1978) suggests, racism is a hierarchical system of categorising humans that has historically merged biological and cultural criteria in diverse ways, legitimising the dominance of certain "races" over others. The varying emphasis on biological or cultural elements means that different forms of racism prioritise these aspects to different degrees. It is therefore essential to recognise the existence of multiple "racisms" rather than a singular, universal "racism." In other words, racism is multidimensional and multifaceted, manifesting differently across geographical regions and historical periods (Goldberg, 1993; Garner, 2017).

Biologically, 'race' has now become split into two forms. First, it refers to human *phenotypical* features such as skin colour, variations such as shape of nose, skull and hair texture. These have often been subject to aesthetic judgement in cultures, with different versions regarded as more beautiful and desirable in different cultural contexts and time periods (Rattansi, 2020). Second, with the development of genetics, attempts have been made to separate populations genotypically: this gives sustenance in some quarters to the continuing idea that races are distinctly separate, or even different species, although the science of genomics has strongly refuted such theories (ibid, 2020).

Racism is often linked to the belief that differences observed among groups – such as intelligence levels, degree of "civilization," or other cultural traits—are fixed, biologically determined, and universally shared by all members of a given "race" (Rattansi, 2020; Hall, 2017). This perspective homogenises entire populations categorised as races and enables their hierarchical classification.

Additional markers used to differentiate and classify "races" include language, religion, modes of dress, and perceived personality traits, such as being quarrelsome or placid, governable or unruly, miserly or generous, among others. Elements of these features have also been incorporated into the concept of 'ethnicity' and 'nation', creating controversies about the exact relations between 'race', 'ethnicity' and 'nation'. The emergence of nation-states adds further complexity, raising the question of whether territorial origins should be incorporated into the concept of race. In line with the 1978 UNESCO Declaration, it is essential to conceptualise a dynamic nexus where "race-ethnicity-nation" is viewed as an interconnected framework. Perspectives vary regarding the relative emphasis placed on race, ethnicity, or nation within this framework (Rattansi, 2020; Hall, 2017).

Globally, racism remains a significant challenge, deeply rooted in systems of inequality and exclusion. Efforts to dismantle the scientific legitimacy of "race" as a biological concept gained momentum after the Holocaust, with UNESCO playing a pivotal role through its seminal 1950 statement and the 1978 Declaration. These initiatives marked critical steps in exposing the fallacies underpinning racial categorization. However, the persistence of racialised thinking—evident in the revival of eugenic ideologies and calls for practices like "selective breeding" (Saini, 2019; Lentin, 2020)—underscores the resilience of these concepts. This highlights the necessity of continued critical engagement with the social, political, and cultural forces that perpetuate and adapt such ideas.

The macrohistorical evolution of race and racial discrimination

Throughout history, human societies have organised themselves into groups, bound by a sense of shared belonging often rooted in language, territory, or cultural markers. These boundaries have been used to distinguish insiders from outsiders. While it is often assumed that unfamiliarity with strangers naturally incites fear or hostility—what Taguieff (2001) refers to as "heterophobia"—historical and anthropological evidence suggests otherwise. Human interactions with outsiders have frequently been marked by empathy, curiosity, admiration, or even ambivalence and envy. Notably, the modern concept of race is not a universal or timeless idea; it is a relatively recent construct that emerged in specific historical contexts to categorise and hierarchise human differences. The following sections delve into how these dynamics played out in the premodern period, tracing the early roots of human categorization and their evolving implications for ideas of race and difference. (Brubaker, 2006; Rattansi, 2007; Graeber and Wengrow, 2021).

Race in ancient civilisations

There is limited evidence to suggest that skin color, or any specific physical trait associated with race, was a primary marker of identity in ancient Egyptian culture (Snowden, 1983). In ancient China, fair skin was valued, but this was more closely tied to notions of class and status than race, as those working in agriculture and exposed to the sun were often seen as lower in social hierarchy (Dikötter, 1992, p.11). Within Confucian thought, which shaped Chinese culture for centuries, China was viewed as the pinnacle of civilization, and foreigners were often seen through a cultural lens as barbarians (Dikötter, 2015). Some African slaves brought to work in elite Chinese households were referred to as "devil slaves," reflecting their dehumanised status within these cultural contexts (ibid, 2015, p.7).

Greek and Roman antiquity had no concept of biological determinism (Isaac, 2004, p.37). However, while they were not prejudiced by skin colour, ancient Greek and Roman civilisations have been identified as believing in geographical and environmental determinism. Isaac (2004) introduced the term "proto-racism" to describe how ancient Greek and Roman thought linked people's traits—such as intelligence, skills, and cultural development—to their geography and climate. It was believed that people were "stupid" or "courageous" due to their environment, whether temperate, hot, or cold. Since climates were thought to be unchanging, it was assumed these traits would persist across generations, making this belief a form of proto-racism (Isaac, 2004). Ancient Greeks also distinguished themselves from outsiders, whom they called "barbarians." This term came from the Greek perception that foreign languages sounded like "ba-ba" or "bar-bar" – unintelligible sounds that resembled gibberish to them (Beard, 2009; Todorov, 2010). There is no evidence of skin colour-consciousness in the Roman empire (c.250 BC to 400 AD), which was increasingly staffed by non-Romans. There may even have been a black emperor in the second century AD. There is some dispute as to whether he really was black, although both Isaac and Mary Beard, the famous scholar of ancient Rome, agree that he was from Libya (Isaac, 2004, pp. 332-33; Beard, 2009, p. 81).

By the 16th century in Europe, racial attitudes shifted, and black individuals were increasingly portrayed as uncivilised, animalistic, or even sub-human. Dominant ideals of beauty, shaped by the features of classical Greek and Roman sculptures, contributed to stereotypes that marginalised black people, often emphasising flat noses as unattractive. These narratives may have been amplified for the purpose of justifying enslavement and the slave trade (Jordan, 2013; Acharya, 2022). However, anthropological and genetic research shows that Africa has the widest diversity in nose shapes and skin tones globally, undermining such reductive stereotypes (Saini, 2019, pp.171-72).

The early modern period

In the early modern period, literature and art often reflected and perpetuated prevailing stereotypes and biases against marginalised groups, including black people and Jewish communities. These portrayals frequently connected physical features to moral worth, reinforcing societal hierarchies and devaluing entire cultures. African cultures were particularly denigrated, as seen in the association of blackness with moral corruption or uncontrolled desires (Hall, 1995; Eze, 1997). Similarly, Jewish communities were subjected to a range of discriminatory representations, which mirrored long-standing societal anxieties and theological tensions.

The works of Shakespeare provide prominent examples of how these anxieties were projected onto marginalised groups in literature. In *Othello,* the black male protagonist becomes a vessel for the period's fears around repressed sexuality and racial difference. Similarly, *The Merchant of Venice* portrays the character of Shylock in ways that echo contemporary antisemitic stereotypes, particularly around avarice and moral duplicity (Loomba, 1998; Smith, 2022; Karim-Cooper, 2023; Bartels, 2008). These portrayals not only reflected but also reinforced the systemic antisemitism of the time, which was marked by widespread hostility, pogroms, and expulsions (Neill, 1997; Wistrich, 1991). Jewish communities were often scapegoated for economic crises or social unrest, a practice rooted in both theological and economic prejudices.

Antisemitism in early modern Europe, while a continuation of medieval patterns, was shaped by a specific cultural and historical context. Two of the most catastrophic events affecting European Jews in earlier centuries—the massacres of 1096 during the First Crusade and the expulsion from Spain in 1492—left lasting scars on Jewish communities and underscored the precariousness of their position in European society (Riley-Smith, 1984). Barred from many professions, Jews were often confined to money lending, a practice that provoked resentment during economic hardship. These tensions were exacerbated by popular outbursts of violence, sometimes encouraged by indebted noblemen, and by baseless accusations, such as the claim that Jews were responsible for the Black Death (Cohn, 2007).

However, while antisemitism persisted, its expression in the early modern period lacked the racialised underpinnings that would emerge in later centuries. The concept of "race" as a biological determinant of identity had not yet been developed, and the focus remained on theological and cultural differences rather than physical characteristics. Unlike blackness, which was often associated with a range of imagined physical and moral traits, Jewish cultural and religious practices were criticised more for their perceived deviation from Christian norms than for any supposed biological determinism (Goodman, 2007; Schäfer, 1997).

The early modern period's treatment of Jewish communities highlights the intersection of theological, cultural, and economic factors in the construction of prejudice. While Jewish communities were not racialised in the modern sense, their marginalization set a foundation for later forms of racial antisemitism. In both literary and societal contexts, Jewish and black individuals were subjected to narratives that sought to dehumanise and subordinate them, reflecting the broader structures of power and exclusion that defined early modern European society.
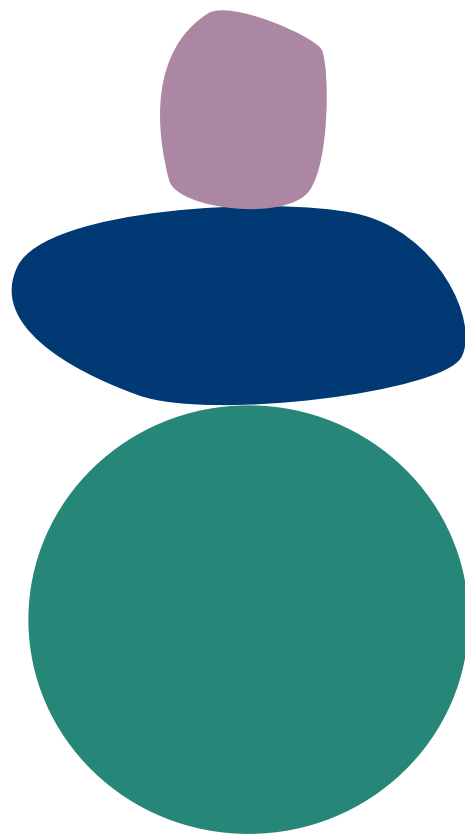
From ancient perceptions to modern justifications: racism and the transatlantic slave trade

The transatlantic slave trade was a vast and exploitative system that touched nearly every facet of the economies of the major imperial powers and left a profound impact on global history. While the growing appetite for sugar to sweeten beverages like tea and coffee played a key role in fueling the demand for African slave labor, the reach of slavery extended far beyond the sugar plantations of the Caribbean. Enslaved Africans were central to numerous industries, including tobacco, cotton, and rice cultivation in the Americas, as well as mining, infrastructure development, and domestic labor across colonial territories.

Major hubs of the transatlantic slave trade included not only Britain but also Portugal, Spain, France, and the United States, each playing a critical role in perpetuating this inhumane system. Ships set sail from European ports such as Liverpool, Bristol, London, Lisbon, and Nantes, as well as from American cities like Charleston, Newport, and Boston. These vessels carried manufactured goods, including textiles, alcohol, and firearms, to the coasts of Africa, where they were exchanged for enslaved people. The enslaved were then subjected to the horrific "Middle Passage," during which millions perished in inhumane conditions. It is estimated that between 12 and 20 million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic, with countless lives lost en route, as the dead were callously thrown overboard to maintain the remaining cargo's condition (Blackburn, 2010).

Once in the Americas, enslaved Africans were sold and forced into labor that drove the economies of the New World. In the United States, their toil underpinned the production of cotton, a key export that fed the textile mills of Britain and Europe, as well as tobacco and rice cultivation, which were essential to the Southern economy. In the Caribbean, sugar plantations relied heavily on African slave labor, generating immense wealth for colonial powers. In Brazil, enslaved Africans worked in sugar production and gold mining, further enriching Portuguese coffers. This economic system connected the Americas, Europe, and Africa in a triangular trade that profited European powers at the expense of African lives and societies.

The transatlantic slave trade reinforced and legitimised ideologies that dehumanised Africans, embedding narratives of racial inferiority that later evolved into the pseudoscience of "scientific racism" (Fryer, 2018). Frankopan (2024, pp. 383–84) estimates that by 1800, Africa's population was likely halved as a result of the slave trade, illustrating the catastrophic human cost of this system.

The economic exploitation of enslaved people generated extraordinary wealth for the imperial powers. Britain, as a prominent example, saw its cities such as Liverpool and Bristol transformed by the profits of slavery. The capital generated helped fuel industrialization, banking expansion, and military growth, ultimately enabling Britain to rise as a global superpower (Berg and Hudson, 2023; Walvin, 2022; Scanlan, 2020).

Similarly, in the United States, wealth generated by enslaved labor shaped the nation's economy, laying the foundation for its industrial development and global economic rise. The cotton industry, in particular, was deeply intertwined with slavery, with cotton exports accounting for a significant proportion of U.S. trade and feeding the industrial revolution in Britain and elsewhere.

The cultural and economic impact of slavery extended beyond cities and industries. Catherine Hall's *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (2016) and Corinne Fowler's *Green Unpleasant Land* (2020) document how profits from slavery funded the construction of opulent mansions and estates across the British countryside. Similar patterns were observed in the Southern United States, where plantation wealth defined the region's social and economic structure.

The abolition of slavery marked a significant shift, though the process was neither swift nor purely altruistic. Enslaved people themselves played an instrumental role in securing their freedom through revolts and resistance, as highlighted by works such as Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1974) and Stevenson's *What Slaves Thought About Their Enslavement* (2015). In Britain, the abolition process was further complicated by substantial compensation payments made to dispossessed slave owners, which enriched landowners and perpetuated economic inequalities (Hall, 2016). In the United States, emancipation saw formerly enslaved people released into an economy and society that continued to enforce racial discrimination and systemic barriers, limiting their opportunities for generations.

The transatlantic slave trade was, therefore, not merely an economic engine for individual nations but a global system that reshaped societies and economies across three continents. Its legacy persists in the enduring inequalities and systemic racism that continue to affect the descendants of those who were enslaved.

Race in modern times

While many have sought to find racism in early pre-modern Europe (Eliav-Feldon and Isaac, 2013; Heng, 2019), scholars agree that the term 'race' only entered the English language in the 16th century. European languages also began to introduce terms such as 'rassa' and 'race' in French, 'razza' in Italian, 'raca' in Portuguese, and 'raza' in Spanish around the same time. Common to these notions was the idea of family, lineage, and breed.

However, hierarchies of people, rooted in dominance and colonization, predated these terminologies. Systems of exclusion and inclusion, developed during the establishment of empires, reflected and reinforced ideas of human inequality. These hierarchies often assigned worth based on power, culture, or religion, creating frameworks of superiority and inferiority. In regions like Nueva España and elsewhere, indigenous populations were not only dispossessed of their lands but also subjected to systematic abuse and dehumanization (Martinez, 2004; see also Keehnen, Hofman, and Antczak, 2019). Debates among European intellectuals during this period questioned whether indigenous people were fully human, with experiments and theological discussions aimed at justifying their subjugation. Additionally, inter-racial unions were systematically categorised in diminishing scales of value, codified in casta paintings and other cultural representations that institutionalised ideas of racial hierarchy.

A more modern, biologically deterministic conceptualization of race began to take shape during the period of slavery, from the 16th century onwards, and in the European Enlightenment of the 18th century. The European Enlightenment, significantly shaped by the English scientific revolution of the 17th century, marked an era of intellectual expansion in science, history, and literature. In the Enlightenment era, which has often been dubbed as the Age of Reason, the dominant form of rationality was classificatory, which was also applied in an evaluatory manner to different human cultures and physiognomies. Not all Enlightenment thinkers were staunch rationalists (Rothschild, 2001; Rasmussen, 2013), and some were even anti-imperialists (Muthu, 2003). Nevertheless, there was a contradiction at the heart of the Enlightenment between a belief in human equality on the one hand and a well-developed racism that devalued non-white and indigenous cultures on the other.

This contradiction was often tempered with a great veneration for the achievements of ancient Chinese civilization (Clarke, 1997), with Voltaire being a particularly important figure in the period's Chinoiserie (Pieterse, 1994), and subsequently admiration for Indian religion and civilization (King, 1999).

During this period, accounts from explorers and travelers increasingly influenced emerging ideas about race, with Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage to the Indies marking a pivotal moment. That same year, Philip and Isabella of Spain, who sponsored Columbus's expedition, also enacted the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain, a decision that reflected the era's complex intersections of religion, culture, and power. Encounters between Europeans like Columbus and darker-skinned peoples in the Indies and other regions played a significant role in shaping early racial thinking (Hall, 1992; Rattansi, 2020). Indigenous communities, too, faced immense brutality and dispossession. In many cases, their humanity was questioned and debated in ways that legitimised colonization and exploitation.

Centuries later, Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus developed one of the most influential systems of human classification in his Systema Naturae, published in multiple volumes beginning in 1735. Linnaeus's framework combined elements of both biological and cultural determinism, categorising humans into groups based on physical traits and perceived behavioural characteristics. His schema described humans as americanus (red, choleric, and erect), europaeus (white and muscular), asiaticus (yellow, melancholic, and inflexible), and after (black, phlegmatic, and indulgent). These classifications underscored the Enlightenment's obsession with taxonomy, often at the expense of human equality.

In 1764, German philosopher Immanuel Kant, despite his advocacy for moral universalism and later anti-imperialist views (Muthu, 2003), expressed prejudiced views reflective of the period's racial thinking. For instance, while referring to a black person, he remarked: "This fellow was quite black... a clear proof that what he said was stupid" (Eze, 1997). Although Kant opposed slavery and was recognised for equality, such statements highlight the entrenchment of racialised thinking even among those who espoused broader ideals of equality.

The rise and decline of scientific racism

Scientific racism played a central role in constructing racial hierarchies that positioned white, upper-class men at the pinnacle. These hierarchical frameworks were deeply intertwined with power relations, serving to legitimise European imperial and colonial domination over groups deemed "inferior," including 'Asiatics,' 'Orientals,' Indians, and Africans. The application of scientism not only rationalised imperial control over these so-called "lower races" but also reinforced the notion of the imperial project as a 'civilising' mission, often drawing subtle support from religious narratives that framed colonial exploitation as a moral obligation to uplift and convert. This combination of scientific and religious justifications created a powerful dual mandate for colonial powers to assert their authority under the guise of progress and salvation (Saini, 2019)..

The 19th century saw the proliferation of scientific theories that sought to explain human variation through the lens of innate racial characteristics. In 1850, Robert Knox published The Races of Man, asserting that "race is everything." Similarly, Count Arthur de Gobineau's *On the Inequality of Human Races* (1854) attempted to link the origins of the French class system to a racial hierarchy. De Gobineau argued that social structures emerged from conquest, with a dominant race forming the aristocracy, a bourgeoisie of mixed origins, and a lower class resulting from miscegenation between so-called "negroes" and "Finns." He also played a key role in popularising the concept of an "Aryan" race, which he drew from the previously obscure linguistic studies of philologists examining languages such as Sanskrit (Painter, 2010, p.196).

Those who believed in a science of race wanted to prove not only the inferiority of black, brown and 'yellow' populations, but also sought to provide scientific justification for the inferiority of women (Stepan, 1990). Skull size measurements, an increasingly popular activity, were used to claim that women had inferior intellectual abilities, based on their alleged low brain weight; women, lower races and classes were regarded as being impulsive, emotional and unable to engage in abstract reasoning (Hall, 1992). Medical discourses also began to relate studies of the physiology of white prostitutes and black female bodies, thus creating a chain of association connecting blackness and women's supposed pathological sexuality (Gilman, 1992). The negative portrayal of lower classes and women was, of course, also a response to growing demands for their inclusion into democratic institutions, especially the right to vote.
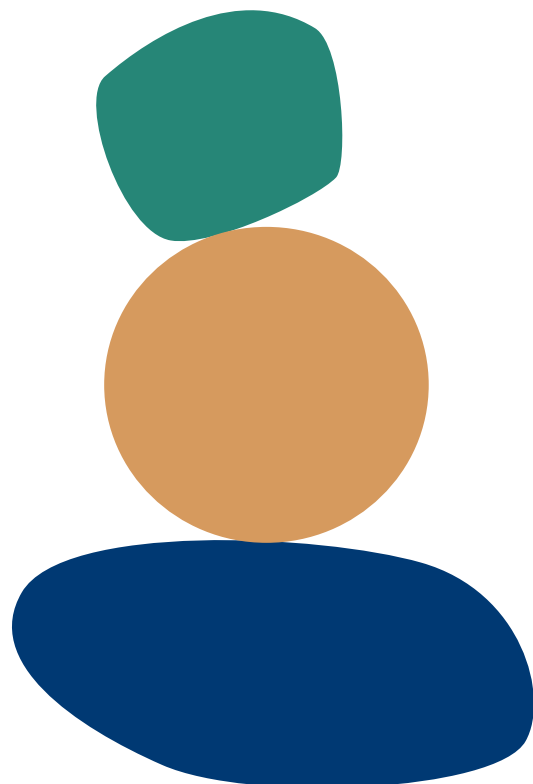
Race and nation, class and gender

The rise of nationalism in the 19th century introduced new ways of drawing boundaries between "them" and "us," grounded in the interplay of peoples, territories, and cultures. Over time, however, the concepts of "nation" and "race" became increasingly intertwined. For example, national identities like "Germans" began to blur into racialised notions such as "Teutonic," "Saxon," or "Nordic" races. These racialised frameworks not only excluded people from other nations but also marginalised lower classes and women within the nation itself, denying them full membership on the basis of their supposedly inferior capacity for rational thought and self-governance (Rattansi, 2007, 2020).

In the United States, the legal and social structures of the time embedded racial distinctions into the fabric of governance and society. The American Constitution itself reflected these divisions, counting an enslaved person as three-fifths of a white man for purposes of representation. Concepts of "white" and "black" were becoming more defined during this period, largely to rationalise the institution of slavery and the systemic subjugation of the black population. Women and black individuals were denied citizenship, further entrenching these hierarchies.

Questions about racial classification, particularly in the context of significant "racial" mixing, often stemming from the exploitation of enslaved black women by white slave owners, fueled considerable societal anxiety. Over time, the "one-drop rule" emerged as a dominant standard, whereby any African ancestry classified a person as "black" or "mixed race." This rigid categorization reinforced slavery and racial hierarchies, systematically denying rights to black individuals and those of mixed heritage, solidifying a legacy of exclusion and inequality. However, it is estimated that at least three-quarters of the American black population have European or white ancestry, while many who pass as "white" in America possess as much as 20–25% ancestry from black, Hispanic, or Indigenous populations (Rattansi, 2007, p.43; Fields and Fields, 2014, p.3). These complexities highlight the arbitrary and constructed nature of racial categories, even as they were used to uphold systemic inequalities.

This complicated racial landscape was further compounded by perceptions of outsiders as potential carriers of pollution. Such notions were used against Jewish immigration. 'Other' whites were also problematised in America. The Irish, fleeing the famines of the 1840s, were often regarded as the same as blacks, being variously described as 'low browed', 'savage' and 'wild'. When Italians migrated to America, they were initially not regarded as 'white'. It was only through political struggles that the Irish and Italians became accepted as 'white' (Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobsen, 1998).

The history of whiteness and blackness thus displays all the vagaries of the separation of races.

The history of racial categorization, such as the constructs of whiteness and blackness, highlights the fluid and often unstable nature of racial distinctions across societies. In various contexts, these categories have been manipulated to serve economic and political interests. For example, in the United States, following the abolition of slavery, employers and ruling classes exaggerated racial differences to divide workers who were united in their demands for better wages and working conditions. Irish immigrants were frequently used as a tool to create these divisions, fostering discord within the workforce and reinforcing their integration into the "white" working class. This practice, which also cemented the idea of "whiteness" in opposition to blackness, illustrates a broader pattern of how racial distinctions have been constructed and weaponised to uphold systems of inequality (Allen, 1994, 1997; Roediger, 2007).
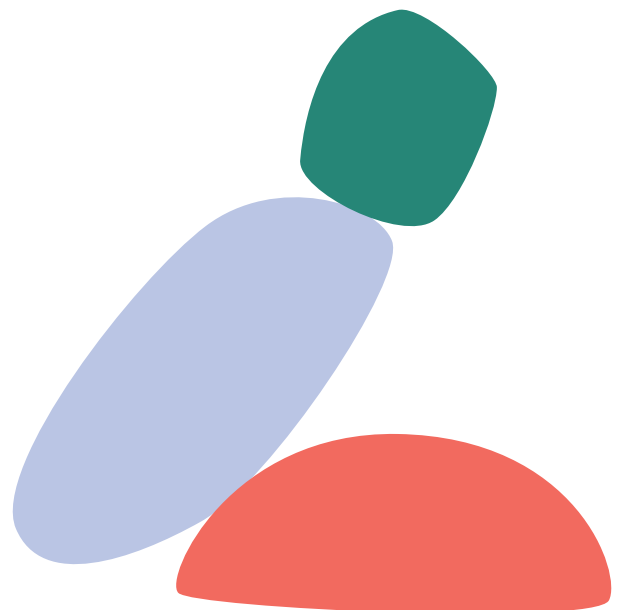
Modern colonialism

Colonial powers often viewed their subjects through a lens of perceived inferiority and employed strategies such as 'divide and rule' to maintain control. This approach involved codifying existing social and cultural hierarchies, which helped to create narratives justifying colonial governance and exploitation. For example, in India—considered the 'jewel in the colonial crown'—the British systematised the complex caste system and promoted the idea that Indian society was composed of distinct races (Appadurai, 1993; Dirks, 2001). Groups like the Sikhs and Gurkhas were labeled as 'martial races' and recruited into the armed forces due to their perceived loyalty, while others, such as the Bengalis, were stereotyped in ways that diminished their status (Cohn, 1996, pp. 109-110; Caplan, p. 264; Sanghera, p. 206; Sinha, 1995). The economic impact of colonialism, including the significant transfer of wealth from India to Britain, has been thoroughly documented (Tharoor, 2017).

Similarly, in Africa and other regions, European colonial powers often grouped diverse ethnic communities without regard for existing social structures. The introduction of new technologies and resources altered local dynamics, sometimes intensifying conflicts. During the 18th and 19th centuries, arbitrary colonial boundaries divided ethnic groups across new states, complicating efforts to build cohesive nations after independence. As a result, many newly independent African countries emerged as 'state-nations'—political entities with strong governmental frameworks but fragmented national identities—leading to challenges such as internal tensions and conflicts (Mamdani, 1996, 2012; Kennedy, 2016; Siollum, 2021; Sanghera, 2024). The legacy of colonial strategies can be observed in later events like the 1994 Rwandan genocide, where historical divisions contributed to tragic outcomes between different societal groups (Mamdani, 2001, 2012; Gourevitch, 1999).

These examples illustrate broader patterns of how colonial practices have shaped social, political, and economic landscapes in various regions. They also highlight the importance of examining whose voices have historically dominated the writing of history. By rediscovering and amplifying suppressed histories, such as those documented in the *General History of Africa*, we can challenge lingering stereotypes and develop a more nuanced understanding of how colonial legacies influence contemporary issues related to nation-building, ethnic relations, and development.

The rise of eugenics

Charles Darwin conceptualised all humans as comprising a single species. But many, including his half-cousin Francis Galton, argued otherwise, thus giving rise to the eugenics movement, a set of beliefs and practices that aim to improve the genetic quality of human populations. The so-called Eugenicists and Social Darwinists became particularly interested in grading intelligence amongst animals and humans, and the idea of selective breeding of humans. Not surprisingly, Galton's 1869 *Hereditary Genius* concluded, based on completely unsystematic observation, that the highest intelligence amongst dogs was higher than that found in 'Negroes' and the lower white social classes. The eugenicists were opposed to 'race-mixing' or miscegenation, and their great influence led the American Congress in 1924 to pass the Immigration Act which favoured immigration from 'Nordic' countries and barred immigration from Asian countries (Ngai, 1998).

Eugenics fed into the Nazi antisemitic ideology that led to the extermination of over six million Jews, Roma, Poles, Slavs, homosexuals and communists. The Nazis forged a strong state and army to carry out these genocides and borrowed the idea of concentration camps from the British treatment of the Herero people and others, developed in a period that included the Boer wars.

Indeed, the term 'racism' was coined in the 1930s to describe the Nazi doctrine of ridding Germany of its Jewish population, making Germany free of Jews (*judenrein*) (Lorrimer 2013, p.3).

A crucial figure here was the German Wilhelm Marr (1889-1904), who imbibed colonial racism from his travels in North and South America, and combined the scientific racism that had been developed there to legitimise slavery, with a virulent antisemitism. Marr was perhaps the first to regard Jews as a 'race', a classification which then nourished the Nazi project of the elimination of the Jewish 'race' (MacMaster, 2001).

The decline of scientific racism

The abolition of slavery acted as a counter-narrative to scientific racism, although the events that led to it took place just before racial science took popular hold in the middle of the 19th century.

A powerful blow against scientific racism was launched by the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942), who published *The Mind of Primitive Man* in 1911, a book which challenged the myths of black racial inferiority, and which was burned by the Nazis. Boas and his team reanalysed the original IQ (Intelligence Quotient) tests conducted by army personnel and found that African Americans from the northern United States had actually outperformed white Americans from the southern United States. This and other growing evidence (Barkan, 1991), and the revulsion at the Nazi Holocaust, led in 1950 to UNESCO publishing its first Statement on Race challenging the credibility of scientific racism. Since then, the science of genomics has demonstrated that for any classification of races, there is greater variation *within* any 'race' than between them (Lewontin, 1972; Saini, 2019, p.90).

In February 2018, scientists, relying on new methods of extracting DNA from ancient skeletons, revealed that the earliest Britons, and thus Europeans too, who had lived some 10,000 years ago and were probably hunter-gatherers, had dark to black skin, curly dark hair and blue eyes (Rattansi 2020, p. 39; Saini 2019, p. 178-179). These findings struck a deep blow at nativist and scientific claims to the whiteness of original Europeans. It was only with the immigration into Europe of lighter skinned peoples from Antolia that a gradual whitening of Europeans occurred, probably because it allowed their skin to generate Vitamin D more quickly. Constant migrations, as the geneticist Reich explains, means that 'the people who live in a particular place today almost never exclusively descend from the people who lived in the same place far in the past' (Reich, 2019, p. xv). Statements by the United Nations as well as research across the social sciences have significantly contributed to the widespread understanding that 'race' is a social construct rather than a biological given.
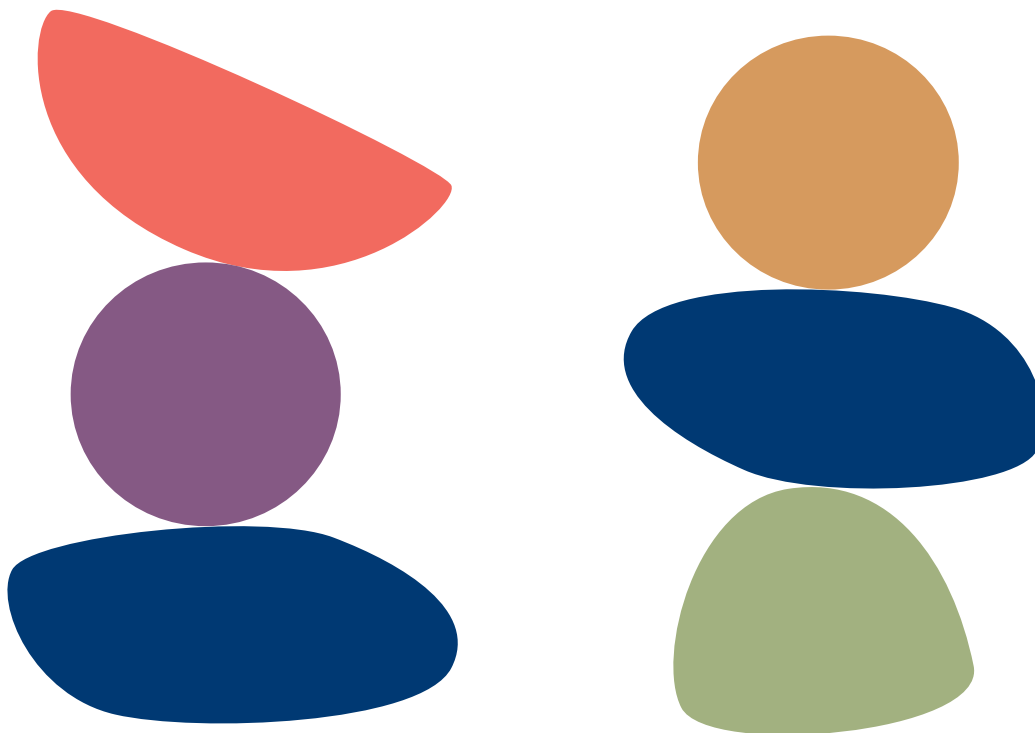
Intersectionality

Class and gender, together with race, are important axes of discrimination and they influence each other. Therefore, treating these variables separately for statistical analysis does not provide a complete picture as class and gender are racialised and race is classed and gendered. The concept of intersectionality, which combines class, gender and race, provides a very useful theoretical framework for examining and analysing interconnections between these interlocking social categories, which contribute to the disadvantage and discrimination faced by black people, as well as other marginalised groups (Crenshaw, 1989; Romero, 2018; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). As Romero points out, black feminists were at the forefront of developing this new perspective, which now also includes age, disability and citizenship that have differential impacts on both majority and minority communities and individuals.

An example of findings underscoring some of the linkages between these variables, and highlighting disparities in education, earnings, and life outcomes, can help clarify why the concept of intersectionality matters. These statistics are important not only as they shed some light on existing patterns, but also since they emphasise the need for more comprehensive and global data. Existing data typically refer to a narrow subset of countries and rely on surveys or tools that provide a partial or localised picture of the phenomenon.
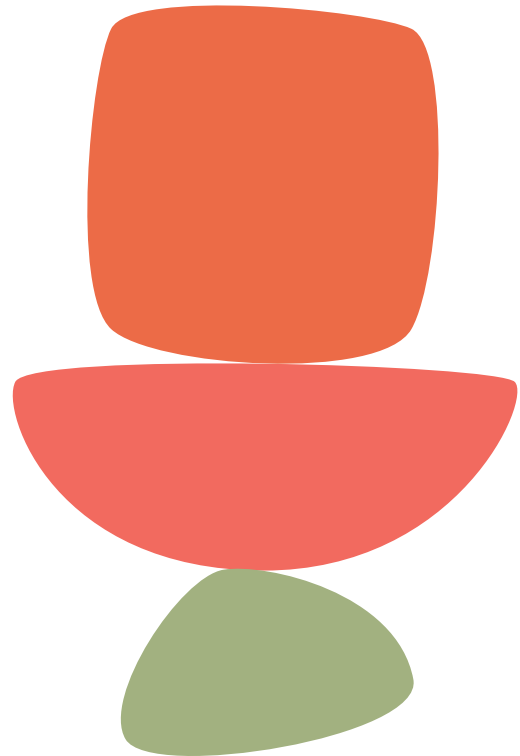
Educational disparities

- In 2021/22, black Caribbean girls were excluded from schools at twice the rate of their white counterparts in England (Race Equality Foundation, 2022).
- In 2023/24, boys of all ethnicities in England were twice as likely to be excluded from school as girls (Explore Education Statistics, 2024).

Earnings gaps

- In 2022 in the USA, black women earned 70% as much as white men, while Hispanic women earned only 65% as much (Pew Research Center, 2023).
- Comparisons in Western Europe and the UK reveal similar disparities (Kahanec and Zimmerman, 2011; Euronews, 2024; World Bank, 2016).
- Black women working full-time with a bachelor's degree in the USA earned less than white, non-Hispanic men who do not have a college degree (Human Rights Careers, 2023).

Maternal mortality

- A study tracking 48,000 women from 1997 to 2019, along with other research, found that the maternal mortality rate for black women in the USA was 2.6 times higher than that of white women (Human Rights Careers, 2023).

Opportunities for advancement

- Research in the UK showed that for working-class women from ethnic minority backgrounds, the probability of attending elite universities and attaining high political office was close to 1 in 10 million (Shaheen, 2023).

The global rise of the ethno-nationalist populism

The normalisation and mainstreaming of ethno-nationalist, populist, far-right ideologies and beliefs, which tends to include racism as a constitutive element, is a global phenomenon (Mudde, 2017, 2019; Mudde and Greilinger, 2024; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). The increase in economic inequalities (Piketty, 2014; World Bank, 2016; World Inequality Database, 2022), de-industrialisation, job insecurity, the growth of a transnational super-rich elite, and growing transnational corporate power (Carroll, 2010; Provost and Kennard, 2023), the flat-lining of wages, supposed threats posed by immigration – especially of Muslims in Europe, and Hispanics in the USA – and the general atmosphere of uncertainty and national cultural insecurity have all contributed to the growth and mainstreaming of ethno-nationalist, far-right, ideologies and politics.

Far-right parties in several parts of the world often use populist rhetoric that positions them as representatives of 'the people' against a 'corrupt elite.' This elite is portrayed as neglecting the interests of the 'native' population in favor of minority groups and racialised communities. While the concept of 'The Will of the People' is subject to debate (Weale, 2018), these populist movements continue to assert that they speak for the general populace. They may foster animosity toward 'others' who are perceived to rely disproportionately on welfare systems, a narrative particularly prominent in the global north. In these contexts, theories like the 'Great Replacement Theory' have gained attention among certain groups, suggesting that minority populations are displacing white populations, which can contribute to social tensions.

Racism in the digital era

Internet sites and social media platforms, increasingly leveraging artificial intelligence, have been providing fertile ground for the spread of "fake news" on topics such as race (Benjamin, 2019; Eschmann, 2023), immigration, and threats to society like the "Great Replacement Theory" mentioned earlier. The proliferation of misinformation has led many to suggest that we are living in a "post-truth" era. While misinformation has amplified declining trust in governments, experts, and official statistics, this distrust is also rooted in deeper structural causes. Increased inequalities, the uneven effects of globalization, and broader societal uncertainties have created fertile ground for populist movements to exploit discontent, offering simplistic solutions while targeting scapegoats. In this environment, unchecked digital platforms have become amplifiers of such narratives, further entrenching division and undermining trust.

This environment also fosters climate change denial (d'Anconna, 2017; McIntyre, 2018) and the dissemination of anti-COVID-19 vaccination misinformation (Skafle et al., 2022). Antisemitism and Islamophobia, which may have previously existed in less visible forms, are now openly propagated through conspiracy theories on social media platforms, often associated with extremist groups. The ease with which technology allows individuals to operate anonymously and spread messages globally has further amplified these issues, thereby fueling racism and other forms of hate speech. Social media platforms have become not only breeding grounds for such harmful narratives but also spaces for cyberbullying and harassment, disproportionately targeting marginalised groups.

These challenges highlight the urgent need for comprehensive and collaborative efforts by the global community to combat racism and misinformation in the digital age. Recognising these challenges, UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence advocates for the development, deployment and use of AI that upholds human rights, human dignities and fundamental freedoms, and to ensure transparency, accountability, and the prevention of harmful content dissemination, among others (UNESCO, 2021). This normative instrument, which is applicable to all 194 UNESCO Member States, addresses the ethical implications of AI, including those related to the spread of misinformation, hate speech and, more generally synthetic content (Squicciarini, Valdez-Genao and Sarmiento, 2024). These efforts, while important cannot suffice alone, and need to be complemented by policies and actions tackling the structural causes of discontent that enable harmful narratives to take root and spread.

In parallel, social media platforms have also provided spaces for digital activism and anti-racist movements, such as #BlackLivesMatter, which leverage technology to amplify calls for equity and justice. However, the digital divide remains a significant challenge, with unequal access to technology contributing to further marginalising disadvantaged communities and limiting their capacity to participate in these movements or counter harmful narratives. In addition, technologies like AI and the algorithmic biases they may suffer from, may lead to embedding existing societal prejudices in systems that shape online content, exacerbating discrimination, and enabling digital surveillance practices, such as racial profiling.[1]

These challenges highlight the urgent need for comprehensive and collaborative efforts to combat racism and misinformation in the digital age. Global initiatives like UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence play a crucial role in promoting ethical standards, transparency, and accountability in AI technologies that influence online content. Combating the spread of harmful narratives requires not only improved digital governance by national governments but also active participation from social media platforms, technology companies, and civil society organizations. By addressing the structural and ethical implications of AI and fostering global cooperation, it is possible to work towards mitigating the proliferation of harmful content at the same time as the root causes of discontent are addressed, supporting anti-racism efforts, and striving for more inclusive and informed societies (UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO 2023b).
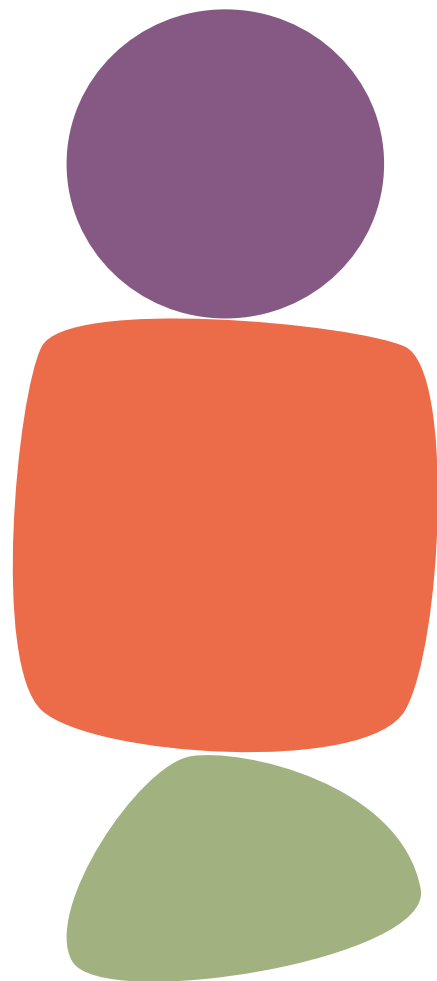
1. It has to be noted that the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence explicitly bans social scoring.

The return of racial science

Notwithstanding the discrediting of scientific racism, notions of the 'science' of race persist in certain circles, often misusing genetics in misleading ways to support hierarchical classifications of 'races' based on biological differences, whether phenotypical or genotypical. This perspective is partly a legacy of past imperialism and the enduring belief in the superiority of white people over people of color. Despite substantial evidence of the migrations that have shaped contemporary nations, white nativist nationalism continues to attract individuals who assert that they are the original inhabitants of the land. This ideology often posits that any remaining indigenous populations are inherently inferior to the so-called 'white race.' It is important to acknowledge that visible phenotypical differences – such as skin color, eye and nose shape, and hair texture – continue to feed into forms of popular cultures of racism (Pulera, 2002; Glenn, 2009). Saini (2019) and Lentin (2020) have documented how these notions persist, highlighting the disingenuous use of genetics to bolster outdated racial theories.

Even scientists in laboratory research habitually use racial categories, although none of them can define 'race' with any precision (Saini, 2019, p.287). Pharmaceutical companies regularly target the medical profession with medicines which they regard as suitable for biologically distinct populations, for example for hypertension (Saini, 2019, pp. 251-57), thus legitimising the concept of race. Various academic outlets and academics also contribute to a belief in the 'science of race' (Lentin, 2020, pp. 21-27) The proliferation of genetic testing kits provided by companies undergird a culture of combining genetic origins with geographic origins which contributes to a misleading portrait of genetic origins of contemporary populations (Saini, 2019, pp.159-63). In 1995, UNESCO's International Bioethics Committee warned against a dubious entity titling itself the Human Genome Diversity Project. The UNESCO committee was particularly concerned that by emphasising genetics, the project would reduce the influence of culture in the history of human population diversity.

The historical evolution of resistance to racism

Throughout history, the fight against racism has evolved through various forms of resistance, challenging the structures of oppression that perpetuate racial injustice. The Enlightenment period marked a significant turning point in this evolution. Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, Montesquieu, Diderot, Kant, and Frances Hutcheson were among the early voices advocating against slavery, arguing that it violated the inherent rights and equality of all individuals. Their philosophical objections laid the groundwork for a broader humanitarian movement opposing racial oppression. In Britain, this emerging ideology was strengthened by Christian Nonconformists—including Quakers, Baptists, Methodists, and Evangelical Christians—who contended that slavery was un-Christian and morally wrong. They were joined by many freed African slaves, most notably Olaudah Equiano from England and Frederick Douglass from America, both of whom played pivotal roles in large abolitionist rallies (Hochschild, 2012; Olusoga, 2016).

The French Revolution's 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man* further emboldened enslaved people in the French colony of San Domingo, now known as Haiti. Between 1791 and 1803, they fought a prolonged rebellion against slave owners, ultimately establishing modern-day Haiti—the only republic in the world founded by formerly enslaved people (Wellman, 2024; James and Walvin, 2022). Slavery was eventually abolished in Britain and its colonies in 1834, in France in 1848, and in the United States in 1865, following a bitterly fought civil war (Blackburn, 2011).

Resistance to racism continued to manifest through widespread movements, from anti-colonial struggles (Gott, 2011; Hall, 2002; Gopal, 2019) to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States (Dagbovie, 2015, especially pp. 19-20, 114-116; Peel, 2020), and more recently, the Black Lives Matter movement (Taylor, 2016; Lowery, 2017; Hillstrom, 2018), which sparked global activism addressing minority discrimination within individual countries.

However, racism is not confined to the Western context. Globally, racism and discrimination have taken various forms, deeply embedded in local histories and cultures. In South Asia, caste systems have perpetuated social hierarchies, marginalising lower-caste communities and ethnic minorities, a pattern that persists in some regions today. In Africa, ethnic tensions have contributed to systemic forms of exclusion based on ethnicity and regional disparities. Latin America, too, has grappled with the enduring legacies of colonization, including entrenched inequalities affecting Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities. These examples underline that racism and discrimination are deeply global phenomena, albeit with local specificities.

As a result of these movements and growing recognition of these injustices, many countries now have anti-discrimination legislation in place. The UK, for example, has enacted several Race Relations Acts (Solomos, 2023) that outlaw racial discrimination, and similar laws exist within the European Union (European Parliament Briefing, 2023). In India, legal frameworks such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act aim to combat caste-based discrimination, while Latin American countries like Brazil have implemented affirmative action policies to address racial inequality. While there is now a widespread social taboo against openly expressing racist beliefs in many parts of the world, racism remains pervasive in different forms.

Despite progress, advancements toward racial and ethnic justice remain uneven and insufficient. Evidence of structural racism, institutional racism, and color-blind racism continues to emerge in the UK and the USA, as documented by Rattansi (2007, 2020), Bonilla-Silva (2021), and Burke (2018), and globally by scholars like Bonnett (2022) and Law (2012, 2013). These patterns demonstrate the necessity of adopting a global perspective to address the multifaceted and pervasive nature of racism worldwide.

2.

From Stories to Stats

Racism, as explored through the macrohistorical lens in the preceding chapter, is not a relic of the past but a dynamic and persistent force, continuously evolving to align with new social, political, and economic contexts.

The historical analysis demonstrates how racism's structures and justifications have transformed across eras—shifting from overt systems of exploitation and exclusion to more covert, systemic, and cultural manifestations. These insights reveal not only the persistence of racism but also its remarkable adaptability, which underscores the urgent need for innovative approaches to understanding and addressing it (UNESCO, 2023).

From historical complexity to modern challenges

The historical context provided earlier illuminates how deeply entrenched racism is in societal frameworks, often surviving long after the ideologies or systems that initially justified it have been discredited. Yet, history also reveals the complexity of racism's forms and functions, showing it to be a fluid construct that intertwines with other dimensions of inequality, such as class, gender, and cultural identity (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis and Lutz, 2023).

Contemporary racism is marked by the same complexity. At its core lies the systemic persistence of inequities rooted in historical injustices. These injustices, though originating in the past, continue to reverberate through modern institutions, manifesting as ongoing disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and representation. Institutions, shaped by this history, often sustain patterns of exclusion and disadvantage, perpetuating cycles of inequity and fuelling societal inequalities.

In addition to its institutional entrenchment, racism has adapted culturally over time. While overt expressions of racial ideology may have diminished in public discourse,

implicit biases and ingrained cultural prejudices endure. These subtle yet pervasive influences shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, reinforcing exclusion in ways that are often less visible but equally damaging. Cultural adaptation of racism ensures its survival in evolving forms, making it harder to detect and address.

Modern racism also reveals its multifaceted nature through its intersection with other forms of discrimination. The experiences of marginalization become particularly acute for individuals and groups with overlapping minority identities. This intersectional dimension has been illuminated by the concept of intersectionality, as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality underscores how the convergence of multiple forms of discrimination – be it racism, sexism, classism, or others – compounds disadvantages and shapes distinct lived experiences. By recognising these overlapping systems of oppression, we gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which modern racism manifests and operates within a broader tapestry of social inequities.

Selected human rights instruments across the world

- **United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):** Establishes a global framework recognising the inherent dignity and equal rights of all individuals, prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, or other statuses.

- **European Convention on Human Rights (1950):** Establishes fundamental rights and freedoms to protect individuals from discrimination in Europe.

- **American Convention on Human Rights (1969):** Provides a framework for protecting human rights and prohibiting discrimination in the Americas.

- **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981):** Promotes human and peoples' rights and prohibits discrimination across African nations.

- **Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (1990):** Sets forth human rights principles in the context of Islamic law, including the prohibition of discrimination.

- **ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2012):** Outlines principles for equality and non-discrimination within ASEAN member states.

- **National Legislation:** Various countries implement their own anti-discrimination laws, though the protected characteristics vary significantly between jurisdictions.
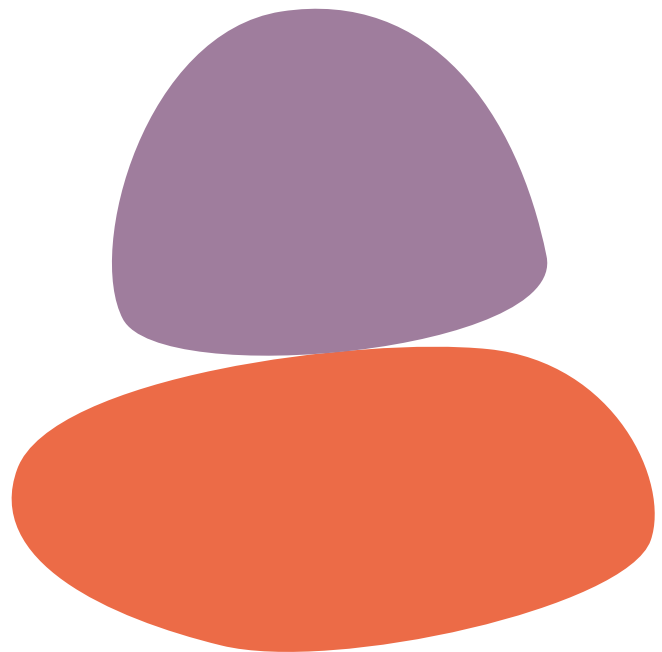
The case for equality data

Improving equality data is central to addressing these challenges. As earlier noted, traditional data collection methods have often been too limited to capture the complexities of modern racism. This report demonstrates the potential of innovative approaches, such as AI-driven data collections, to overcome these limitations.

Equality data serves a purpose far beyond simply diagnosing issues of discrimination; it is a powerful catalyst for meaningful action. By shedding light on stylised facts as well as the subtle and systemic dimensions of inequality, it exposes hidden patterns that might otherwise remain obscured. These insights enable targeted interventions, ensuring that efforts to combat discrimination are both precise and effective.

Moreover, reliable data is essential for driving accountability. It provides stakeholders—governments, institutions, and organizations—with the tools to set targets, measure progress, identify persistent gaps, and hold themselves accountable for achieving equitable outcomes. Without robust data, commitments to equality risk becoming empty promises, devoid of tangible results.

Why this report is needed

The complexity and persistence of modern racism demand a more nuanced and evidence-based understanding. Historical narratives provide critical context, but they cannot fully capture the at times subtle, often systemic and intersectional nature of racism and discrimination today. This report addresses that gap, offering innovative methodologies and original data to illuminate racism's modern realities.

The report provides a framework for understanding how racism operates in the modern world, shedding light on its complexities and varied manifestations. It delves into the continuity and transformation of racial exclusion, tracing how historical patterns of discrimination have evolved and been adapted into contemporary systems and practices. By examining these shifts, the report highlights the enduring influence of the past on present inequities.

Additionally, the report adopts both global and regional perspectives, revealing how racism manifests differently across various contexts. Local histories, cultural norms, and political systems shape these expressions, offering a nuanced view of how discrimination operates in diverse environments.

A central focus of the report is the concept of intersectionality, which examines the overlapping effects of race, gender, class, and other axes of identity. This perspective provides a holistic understanding of discrimination's impacts, emphasising how multiple forms of marginalization combine to create unique and compounded experiences of oppression.

3.

Reading the web at scale to build a world database about racism and discrimination

The rationale behind the information retrieval strategy

In the absence of official available data and statistics about racism and discrimination – including about the acts themselves, the perpetrators, the victims and, more broadly, the key characteristics of such acts, e.g. location and time – we leveraged the power of AI to look for such pieces of information on the web. In particular, we tried to identify and collect all news items, reports, interviews, and opinion pieces, among others, published by newspapers around the world about racism and discrimination instances, as well as information published by official institutions, such as courts and tribunals, about possible relevant trials.

Several reasons motivated these choices. Evidence shows that the internet has deeply affected the traditional print media market and that the vast majority of newspapers around the world – both national and local –, have an online version (see e.g., Bhuller et al, 2023; Eurostat, 2022; Pew Research Centre, 2023, 2024). This, coupled with the so called "negativity bias" of journalism,[2] whereby news media are found to be proportionally more likely to feature stories that relate to negative sentiments, makes us confident that discriminatory incidents based on race, sex, disability, or other characteristics shall be reported in newspapers, both print and digital (see, e.g., Andersen, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata, 2024,[3] van Binsbergen et al., 2024).

We further decided not to leverage information posted on social media as, while the literature is still assessing whether or not social media actually fuel hate speeches and racism (Matamoros-Fernández, 2022), many scholars agree about the role of social media in political polarization (e.g. Kubin and von Sikorski, 2021) and underscore that social media may create perverse incentives for divisive content. Divisive content they argue is more likely to go "viral", e.g. posts about political opponents, and therefore it is also more likely to be shared on social media (Rathje, Van Bavel, and Van Der Linden, 2021). This being the case, if we were to leverage social media, we would be more likely to be exposed to polarised and less factual information and descriptions of acts and facts, with barely any possibility to cross-check facts. Such shortcoming is less likely to occur when leveraging online newspapers as sources. As we scan all existing info and we can cross-check information from newspapers that are at opposite political spectrums, we can compare pieces focusing on the very same instances and address as needed possible partial connotations. Doing so on information gathered from social media is almost impossible, especially since while e.g. the political orientation of newspapers is generally known, this is not the case for individuals, and correctly so, unless one explicitly declares it.

Finally, one last remark about the rationale behind our choice to leverage news content available online and to leave aside information that could be gathered through social media. In line with existing literature, we deem that leveraging the information contained in online newspapers is more likely to let us to obtain the relevant information about the possible racist and discriminatory act considered, i.e. about the place, the victim, the perpetrator, the act itself and so on. Conversely, if we were to leverage social media-based info, in addition to being confronted with issues including virality and biased perceptions, we would be exposed to partial information. The latter would occur due to the inherent text length limits applied on different platforms, the observed reduction over time of text length in social media, and the frequent use of images, video and short texts (see e.g. Liimatta, 2024; Di Marco et al., 2024). Dealing with such noisy and informal text from social media platforms is non-trivial, and researchers are still experimenting with ways to deal with such challenges and extract meaningful and unbiased information (e.g. Rani et al., 2024).

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2. Part of the literature argues that, by disproportionately highlighting negative events, media outlets may inadvertently contribute to public perceptions that such forms of discrimination are more prevalent or severe than they actually are. This emphasis on negativity not only shapes societal attitudes toward marginalised groups but can also influence policy discussions and interventions related to discrimination (Soroka, 2012; Trussler and Soroka , 2014).

3. The authors relate the negativity bias of journalism to a 'Scary World Syndrome'.

The innovative empirical search strategy in a nutshell

The empirical search strategy on which the present report relies was developed through extensive expert consultation and review. As a first step, UNESCO, with the support of academic experts, explored the existing scientific literature about racism and discrimination to identify a key corpus of studies to be used to train the AI search algorithm. In parallel, experts worked to develop a possible taxonomy of the categories of discrimination, and to agree on the pieces of information and the indicators that would be desirable to gather through web search at scale – relevant concepts and variables will de detailed in what follows.

Such information was shared with Glass.ai,[4] a company that has built an AI capability to deep read the web at scale and gather information globally.

In a nutshell, the approach pursued to build the sought database on racism and discrimination was articulated over three main phases. Phase 1 entailed defining the training set, as discussed, plus agreeing on the type and format of the information to be collected. During this phase, in addition to sharing relevant literature, the UNESCO team shared relevant news articles, a list of keywords (initially in English, and then also in the other languages of UNESCO, namely: Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish), and a list of discriminatory terms that could help the search. These pieces of info were shared with a view to minimise false positives and false negatives. False positives would be articles mistakenly identified by the crawler as focusing on racism and discrimination (but that in fact are not related to such phenomena). Minimising false negatives means making the system maximally able to identify all information related to racism and discrimination, without overlooking existing relevant content.

Phase 2 entailed running a first discovery crawl to generate an initial small-scale sample of results, to be reviewed and validated by the UNESCO team and the academic experts, with the aim to fine-tune the language models and refine the search approach before the wider final crawl. To generate the sample, the AI read news sources, organizations' websites (including non-profits or think tanks) and official sources to identify articles from which extracting relevant information for the global dataset.

Phase 3 entailed analysing and visualising the results. The outputs generated in this last phase include the full database plus a number of summaries, charts and visuals facilitating the analysis. To quality-assure the data, manual and automatic quality assurance processes across the data fields were implemented, to identify errors and isolate classes of issues. In addition, automated aggregate and statistical checks were run across all data, to ensure confidence in the delivered set and detect and remove possible anomalies.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the broad steps followed to obtain the final database on which the analysis proposed in the present report relies.

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4. See glass.ai for more info about the company.

Figure 3.1: The data gathering approach

DISCOVERY PHASE >>	INTELLIGENT CRAWLING >>	ANALYSIS & QA >>	DATA DELIVERY
• Confirm **search criteria, categories**	• AI to read **news** and **other sources**	• Automatic/manual **QA** processes	• Format, delivery method agreed
• Confirm **countries** and **languages**	• Deeper crawls of **selected sources** to get evidence	• Detect and remove **anomalies**	• Packaging of data
• Confirm **indicators**	• Read **Internet Archive**, old data		• Delivery of **dataset**
• Potential discovery of **other sources**			• Summary stats, visualization
			• Method note

Source: GlassAI, 2024

Before moving to describe the variables contained in the database, it would be important to recall and expand on the caveats of the methodology used for the present study, which we have briefly hinted at in the introduction.

The first is about languages, the content existing on the internet and the literature used. Despite performing the scanning exercise on the whole web, leveraging the six official languages of UNESCO (namely, English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian), most of the information retrieved is in English. This mirrors English still being the predominant language of the internet: according to Statista (2024) in 2024, more than 52% of the content of the web is in English (Spanish follows, with 5.5% only). In addition, the LLM used to scan the web was mostly trained on scientific papers written in English, as the vast majority of existing scientific literature is in English - according to estimates,

98% of it, in fact (Giménez Toledo, 2024; Ramírez-Castañeda, 2020). In addition, in the case of racism, studies mostly focus on and relate to what is often termed the "global north", and English-speaking countries in particular. This cannot but impact our search, making the LLM better able to identify instances of racism that are similar to those on which the system has been trained in the first place, and that are in English. When made in other languages, the scanning algorithm had to be trained on concepts and searches that had mainly been translated from English. This may have led to inaccuracies and loss of nuances, especially since the exercise was performed at scale. Increasing the diffusion of content in languages other than English would help achieve a more inclusive, likely more accurate and more diverse appraisal of perspectives and facts, and enhance researchers' ability to identify the different instances of racism that may occur, their key features their severity.

Second, the closer in time we get, the more likely it is that we can scan all the information available at any point in time, as older web pages may at times be removed or substituted. This implies that the information about relatively older instances of racisms that we were able to retrieve may represent only a subset of all the instances occurred, simply because some relevant web pages do not exist anymore or have been edited with new content. Estimates suggest that 38% of webpages existing in 2013 did not exist anymore ten years later (Chapekis et al., 2024), and that since 2013 the number of websites around the world has almost doubled (Reboot, 2024). These trends combined point to a greater likelihood to detect documented instances of racism online related to more recent events, rather than in the past. This argues for the need to be careful when looking at trends over time, as they may simply be the "mechanical" reflection of the greater quantity of information existing for more recent periods. It further calls for the need to repeat the data gathering exercise over time, to construct time series based on data gathered year by year in relation to the last year or so. This would allow gathering more accurate "snapshots" from the web, and help inform policy and action on the basis or more encompassing and robust data. Such a possible shortcoming also explains why we decided not to go further back in time for the purpose of this first report. We chose January 2021 as the starting point of this analysis in an effort to maximize cover and accuracy, while nevertheless shedding light on the last phase of the COVID 19 crisis, which literature shows has fueled (specific types of) racism and discrimination (e.g. Solomon, 2021; Choi, Tessler and Kao, 2024).

Third, our analysis may suffer from the inability to access some sources and types of information. This can be the case when access is protected or restricted (e.g. to members only, or to some authorities or stakeholders), or accessible on the basis of expensive fees. While the company performing the web reading at scale for the present report, GlassAI, did do its outmost best to access all existing webpages related to the time span considered, including those with restricted access (especially fee-based ones), we cannot exclude that some pages have been overlooked or remained inaccessible despite our best efforts. Also, it is important to remember that countries around the world differ in the type and quantity of information officially published or made available on the web (e.g. trials' proceedings), fact that has first order effects over the type and quantity of the information that can be retrieved, and, consequently, coverage.

Finally, as said, it is important to remember that the data for the last year only account to instances of racism and discrimination happened until the end of May 2024, i.e. the first half of the year. Consequently, the overall lower number of observations contained in the report for the year 2024 shall not be considered as a sign of improvement as, if anything, additional information available point to a further deterioration of the situation for the second part of the year.
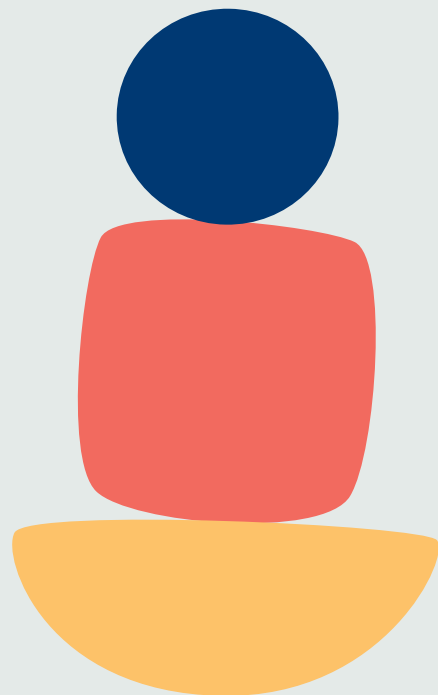
The variables contained in the first UNESCO database on racism and discrimination

The UNESCO dataset on racism and discrimination features three main sets of data.

To begin with, per each relevant instance of racisms and discrimination retrieved, the database displays several pieces of information aimed at clearly identifying the article/piece itself. These are: the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) where this information can be found; the very title of the piece; the source type (e.g. media, NGO, blog, International Organization, academia, Government,) as well as the publisher's country; the date in which the information was published; a snippet of the article itself, to facilitate inspection and cross checking: and the type of article, e.g. general news, report, book, academic paper, interview, etc.

A set of variables related to each racism and discrimination act considered follow, including information about: the action or event (i.e. death, violence leading to significant injury, physical abuse, verbal abuse, etc.); the specific place in which the instance occurred; the region and the country where this place is located (which can be different from the country of the publisher); and the exact date when the act took place. These pieces of information were complemented by information about the age and gender of the impacted person and the perpetrators' type. The latter were subdivided into individual, institutional, systemic, and cultural, as described in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Perpetrators' type

INDIVIDUAL	Persons who engage in discriminatory actions or behaviours based on personal biases, prejudices, or stereotypes against individuals or groups. Examples of perpetrators that may be found in this group include peers, employers, community leaders, netizens, and family members.
INSTITUTIONAL	Organizations or entities, such as schools, workplaces, healthcare providers, and law enforcement agencies, that implement policies, practices, or procedures that intentionally or unintentionally result in unequal treatment or disparities among individuals or groups. A few examples of perpetrators that may be found within this group include universities and schools, law enforcement, workplaces and placement agencies, hospitals and medical offices, financial institutions (bank or loan institutions), private sector, and real estate agencies.
SYSTEMIC	Overarching systems and structures within society that produce and maintain inequalities and discriminatory outcomes. This includes legal, economic, and social systems that collectively contribute to discrimination against certain groups. Examples of perpetrators that may be found within this group include governments at all levels and judiciary.
CULTURAL	Societal norms, values, traditions, and media representations that reinforce stereotypes, stigmatise certain groups, and perpetuate discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. Cultural discrimination can manifest through language, symbols, rituals, and cultural narratives. Examples of perpetrators that may be found within this group include media organizations, religious institutions, advertisers, museums, public facilities, and leisure spaces.

Source: Authors own compilation.

Finally, indicators about the "categories of discrimination", the "severity" of the act, and the "sentiment" of the identified pieces of information were created and included in the database, together with variable allowing to identify two or more pieces talking about the very same event, and/or tracing the same event over time.

The categories of discrimination relate to the characteristics along which people are commonly discriminated against. The categories used in the Outlook were developed aligning with and leveraging the following international conventions, human rights principles, and anti-discrimination legislation, namely: the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965); the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

Nine categories of discrimination, encompassing fourteen underlying characteristics were created, as follows:

Categories of Discrimination	
Racism	Any theory, doctrine, ideology, or sets of ideas that assert a causal link between the phenotypic or genotypic characteristics of individuals or groups and their intellectual, cultural, and personality traits, including the false concept of racial superiority. (Art. 1(4), 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)).
i. **Colorism**	Colorism is the privileging of light skin tones over dark skin tones.
Sex and gender-based discrimination	Rooted in principles of gender equality and non-discrimination as articulated in international documents such as the UDHR, which affirms the principle of equality before the law without distinction of sex.
i. **Gender-based discrimination**	Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)).
ii. **Sexual orientation-based discrimination**	Any form of prejudice or hostile attitude towards persons on the basis of sexual orientation including but not limited to exclusion, stigma, harassment, criminalization, and/or violence. (Derived from United Nations Free and Equal Definition).

Religion-based Discrimination		Religion-based discrimination involves prejudice, exclusion, or differential treatment based on an individual's religion or belief system, which can lead to marginalization or violations of religious freedom. This is based on the rights articulated in international documents such as the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and the UDHR.
Political Opinion-based Discrimination		Political opinion-based discrimination refers to unfair treatment, harassment, or persecution of individuals or groups due to their political beliefs or affiliations. (Derived from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).
Origin-based Discrimination		Deriving from the principles enshrined in the UDHR, ICERD, ICCPR, ICESCR, and other documents, Origin Based Discrimination may be defined as unfair treatment, prejudice, or differential treatment against individuals or groups based on their national or social origin, including factors such as ancestry, birthplace, or socioeconomic background.
i.	**Xenophobia**	Deriving from the principles enshrined in the UDHR and ICERD, xenophobia can be defined as fear, prejudice, or hostility towards individuals or groups perceived as foreign or different. It encompasses attitudes, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices directed at immigrants, refugees, or cultural minorities based on their nationality, ethnicity, or perceived outsider status.
ii.	**National Origin-based Discrimination**	National origin discrimination involves treating people (applicants or employees) unfavorably because they are from a particular country or part of the world, because of ethnicity or accent, or because they appear to be of a certain ethnic background (even if they are not). National origin discrimination also can involve treating people unfavorably because they are married to (or associated with) a person of a certain national origin. Discrimination can occur when the victim and the person who inflicted the discrimination are the same national origin. (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)).
iii.	**Social Origin-based Discrimination**	First of all, social origin and socio-economic status must not be conflated. The notion of social origin concerns how a person's upbringing, origins, and starting point in life can cast a shadow or leave markers that can disadvantage them throughout their lifetime, in various spheres of life and regardless of whether their socio-economic status has changed over the course of their lifetime (Tackling discrimination based on social origin, Report1 Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination Rapporteur: Ms Selin Sayek Böke, Turkey, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group).
iv.	**Caste-based Discrimination**	The discrimination perpetuated by high caste groups on lower caste groups on the basis of case, which leads to oppression and exploitation (UN Nepal).
v.	**Indigeneity-based Discrimination**	Deriving from the principles of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigeneity Based Discrimination can be defined as any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on indigenous identity that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by indigenous peoples, on an equal footing, of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Socio-economic status-based discrimination		Unfair treatment of individuals or groups due to their perceived or actual social standing (e.g., based on occupation, income, education, etc.).
i.	Class-based Discrimination	Deriving from the principles of the UDHR and the ICESCR, Class Based Discrimination can be defined as the unfair treatment or prejudice against individuals or groups on the basis of their social class.
Ethnic-based Discrimination		Deriving from the principles enshrined in the UDHR, ICERD, ICCPR, ICESCR, and other documents, Ethnic Based Discrimination may be defined as unfair treatment, prejudice, or differential treatment against individuals or groups based on their ethnic identity or cultural heritage.
Ableism		""Discrimination on the basis of disability" means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation;" (Article 2, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).
Ageism		The stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age (Global Report on Ageism (WHO)).

The indicator of severity aims to proxy the gravity of different discriminatory acts or incidents, based on a modified version of Allport's Scale of Prejudice and Discrimination (see Katz, 1991, for a review) conceived on a series of consultation with the experts. The scale categorises the progression of prejudicial attitudes and behaviours towards individuals or groups using a five-step scale. As the impact of different discriminatory acts varies across contexts and circumstances, such 'linear' pathways of severity shall be seen as somewhat theoretical, while remaining very useful to distinguish acts on the basis of the severity of the harm caused. Moreover, less severe acts of violence do not necessarily result in smaller impacts on those who are discriminated, due to the different contexts and circumstances for every individual.

The five step severity scale of racism and discrimination we use features antilocution, avoidance, discrimination, physical attack and extermination.

Antilocution refers to verbal prejudice. It involves acts of verbal expressions of negative feelings or stereotypes about a group, such as derogatory jokes, slurs, or hate speech. Even if no direct physical harm is intended, such language fosters a hostile environment and can cause severe psychological distress.

Avoidance refers to social exclusion. It involves people consciously avoiding individuals they dislike, and results in social exclusion and segregation, reducing opportunities for interaction and understanding between groups.

Discrimination refers to actions that deny equal access to opportunities and services including unjust practices in employment, education, housing, and other areas, disadvantaging specific individuals, groups or communities.

Physical attack corresponds to violence and aggression and can take the form of assault and battery, hate crimes or even murder. Finally, extermination relates to genocide and ethnic cleansing, including lynching and genocide.

Table 3.3 below provides a non-comprehensive list of examples related to each severity category.

Table 3.3: Severity Indicator

Antilocution and Verbal Prejudice	Avoidance and Social Exclusion	Discrimination and Systematic Oppression	Physical Attack, Violence and Aggression	Extermination, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing
Microaggressions • Everyday slights or insults • Subtle put-downs based on race **Racial Slurs and Jokes** • Derogatory language • Racist humor **Hate Speech** • Public denouncements • Online hate speech • Derogatory comments in public forums • Cyberbullying and online harassment targeting racial groups	**Social Exclusion** • Avoiding interaction with certain racial groups • Excluding individuals from social events • Online exclusion and blocking based on race **Segregation** • Segregated neighborhoods • Public space segregated by race • Separate schools and facilities • Digital segregation in online communities and forums **Workplace Exclusion** • Excluding colleagues from work activities • Not including certain racial groups in decision-making processes • Online professional network exclusion	**Employment Discrimination** • Bias in hiring practices • Unequal pay for equal work • Lack of career advancement opportunities • Online recruitment biases **Housing Discrimination** • Redlining • Discriminatory lending practices • Denial of rental applications based on race • Online housing platform discrimination **Educational Disparities** • Underfunded schools in neighborhoods with particular racial demographics • Biased academic tracking • Cyberbullying in educational settings	**Assault and Battery** • Physical attacks based on race • Beatings, stabbings, and other forms of violence • Online threats escalating to real-world violence **Hate Crimes** • Vandalism targeting racial minorities • Arson of homes or businesses owned by racial minorities • Physical assaults driven by racial bias **Murder** • Homicides driven by racial bias and hate • Physical attacks resulting in death	**Lynching** • Public executions to instill fear and maintain racial subordination • Lack of due process and legal protections **Genocide** • Systematic extermination of racial or ethnic groups • Mass killings and other acts intended to destroy a group in whole or in part • Online incitement and organization of genocidal activities

Source: Authors own compilation.

The sentiment-related indicator was created on the basis that, while every specific news article reports on an incident of racism and discrimination, some articles focus on the incident itself and the negative impact of it (i.e. negative sentiment). Conversely, there are articles that focus on possible solutions or ways forward, i.e. for instance specific policies against racism – in such a case articles are tagged as being positive, when it comes to the sentiment of the article. Finally other articles were tagged as neutral. Table 3.4 below shows some examples that can help clarify the meaning of sentiment in the present report.

Table 3.4 below provides examples of publications that could fit in each category, drawn from our database.

Table 3.4: Example of articles' sentiment

	Negative Sentiment	Positive and Neutral Sentiment
Specific News	Reports on incidents of discrimination E.g.: Courier Journal, 'Lawsuit: Southern Indiana town rejected man for police job because he has HIV,' April 26, 2022	Reports on incidents that work to counter discrimination or topics generally related to discrimination E.g.: NBC News, 'Tom Daley calls for Olympic ban on countries where being gay is punishable by death,' October 8, 2021
General News and Others	Opinions, observations, summaries, reports and so on about discrimination worsening E.g.: Jamaica Observer, 'With abortion in jeopardy, America's minority women have most to lose,' May 5, 2022	Opinions, observations, summaries, reports and so on about positive acts countering discrimination or topics generally related to discrimination E.g.: Dianah Msipa, Book Review of *Oche Onazi: An African Path To Disability Justice: Community, Relationships And Obligations (2020)*, May 16, 2021

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

The taxonomy of discrimination categories as well as the broader data collection approach were discussed, refined and validated also through at an expert meeting bringing together experts from different fields – including intercultural communication, technology, economics, sociology, public policy, ethnic studies, history, human rights issues, and development – and institutions and organizations. These included Global Black (US), the Movement for Black Lives (US), Glass AI (UK), the University of Washington (US), Rutgers University (the US), as well as representatives from UNESCO Sectors and the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent.

4.

Racism and Discrimination — key stylized facts
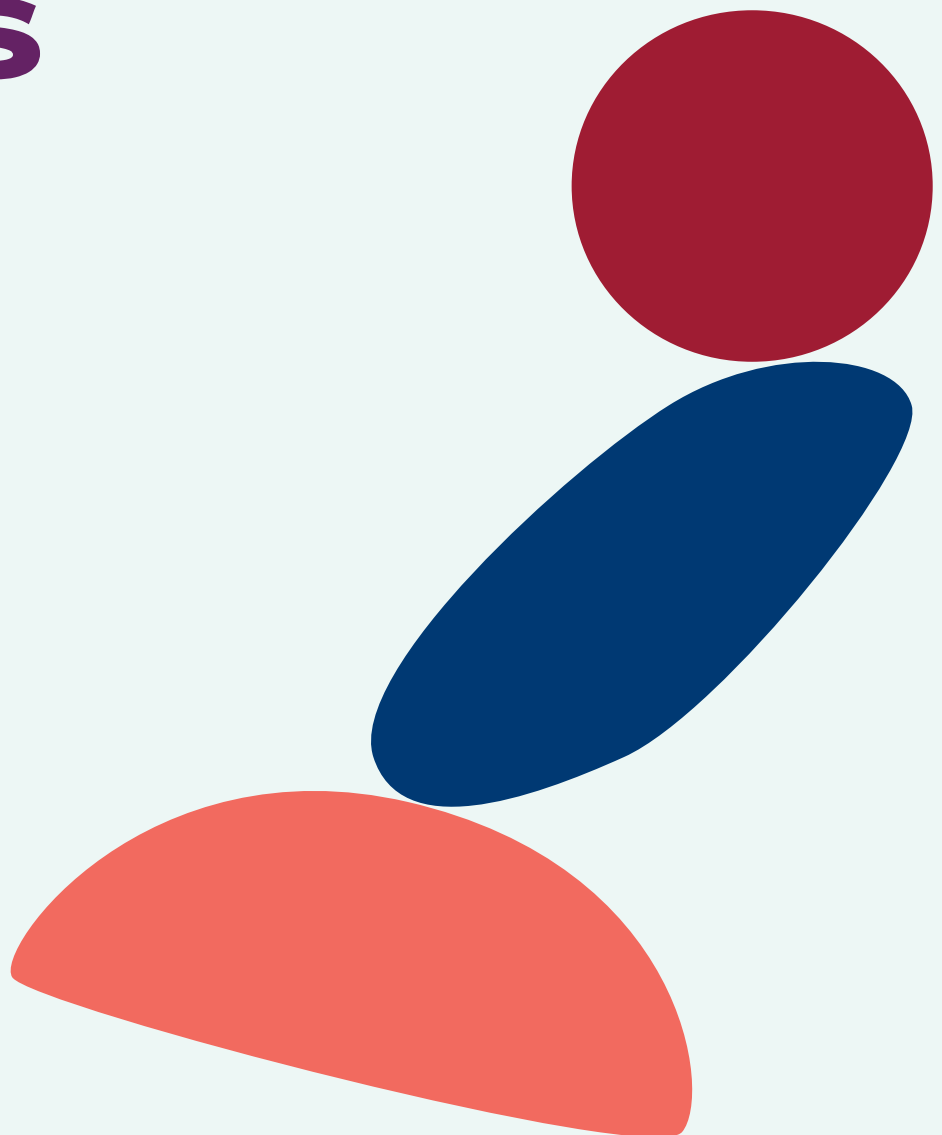
A first glance at racism and discrimination worldwide

Racism and discrimination remain highly pervasive in modern societies. Eradicating them requires designing and implementing effective policies able to contain the different ways in which racism and discrimination manifest themselves, while at the same time addressing the very causes leading individuals to discriminate against one another in society. However, as is well known, "the devil is in the details", and designing effective policies requires a thorough appraisal of underlining drivers and dynamics. To this end, it is important to shed light on who is being discriminated against, which types of discrimination acts occur and where; and to understand whether and to what extent society is aware about such acts and it reacts to them or not, and in which way.

The first-time evidence proposed in what follows aims to address fundamental questions, including:

- **Who** is being discriminated against?
    - → Which category is most targeted by racism and discrimination?

- **What** type of racism and discrimination do people experience?
    - → What are the most common types of discriminatory actions perpetrated?
    - → Does the type of racism and discrimination acts change over time?
    - → Are some racism and discrimination acts more common towards some categories?

- **When** are individuals being discriminated the most against?
    - → Did the number of racism and discrimination incidents within each discrimination category change over time?
    - → To what extent were trends impacted by global events?

- **How** is discrimination discussed online?
    - → Who publishes about racism and discrimination?
    - → How many articles on racism and discrimination appear per year?
    - → How many articles on racism and discrimination focus on incidents themselves, and how many others focus on positive acts countering discrimination?
    - → Which racism and discrimination categories receive the most attention online?
    - → Has media attention on different racism and discrimination categories changed over time?
    - → Have the discussions around these racism and discrimination categories translated into action?

Some first statistics about the data collected

Racism and discrimination manifest differently depending on factors such as who is targeted, the discriminatory actions itself, and the way societal mood gets influenced by global events and local contexts. Although the latter is notoriously difficult to quantify, the digital age has made online discourse increasingly influential in shaping public opinion (Lippman, 1922; Rahn et al., 1996) and looking for online articles about racism and discrimination can thus help detect the instances occurred and monitor societies' attitudes towards them.

In total, the Outlook's dataset contains 634,094 articles, spanning the period 1 January 2021 – 31 May 2024. The articles collected can be subdivided into news, and other types of sources. When saying news we refer to specific news, such as news articles reporting on specific discriminatory incidents; general news, intended as news on discrimination in general; and opinion pieces, such as op-eds and editorials. The other types of sources leveraged include academic research papers, books, and book reviews; blogs, government publications and reports; international organizations' publications and reports; and non-governmental organizations' (NGO) and Think Thanks' publications and reports.

Articles contained in specific news account for the vast majority of items in the dataset, at 66%, followed by general news (22%), and other types of news (12%).

Figure 4.1: Outlook's articles by source, 2021-2024*

Source Type of Publications on Discrimination (overall)
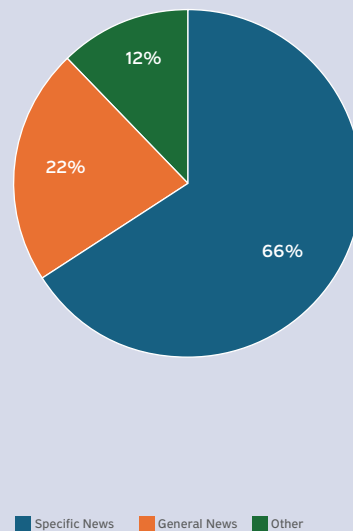
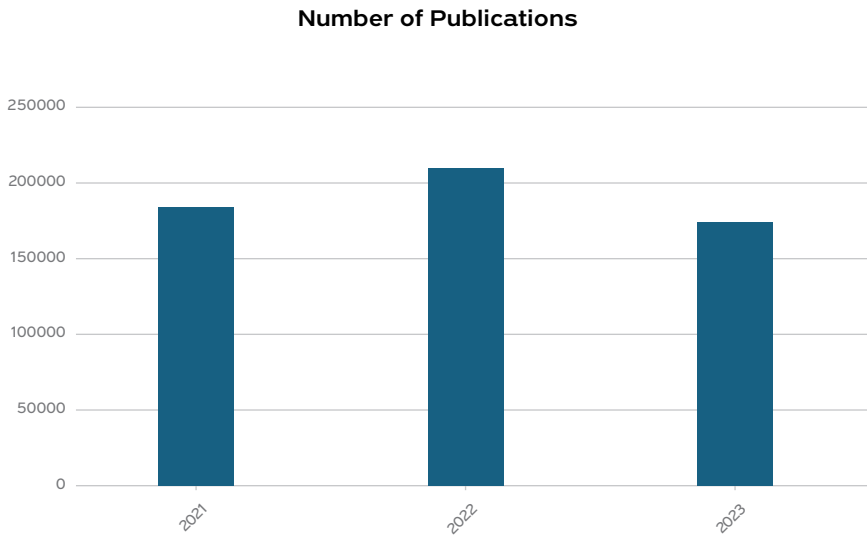Specific News   General News   Other

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data refer to the period 1st January 2021 – 31 May 2024.

Between 2021 and 2023, the online scanning approach leveraged for the purpose of the present report identified at least 150,000 publications on racism and discrimination per each year, with over 200,000 identified articles in 2022.
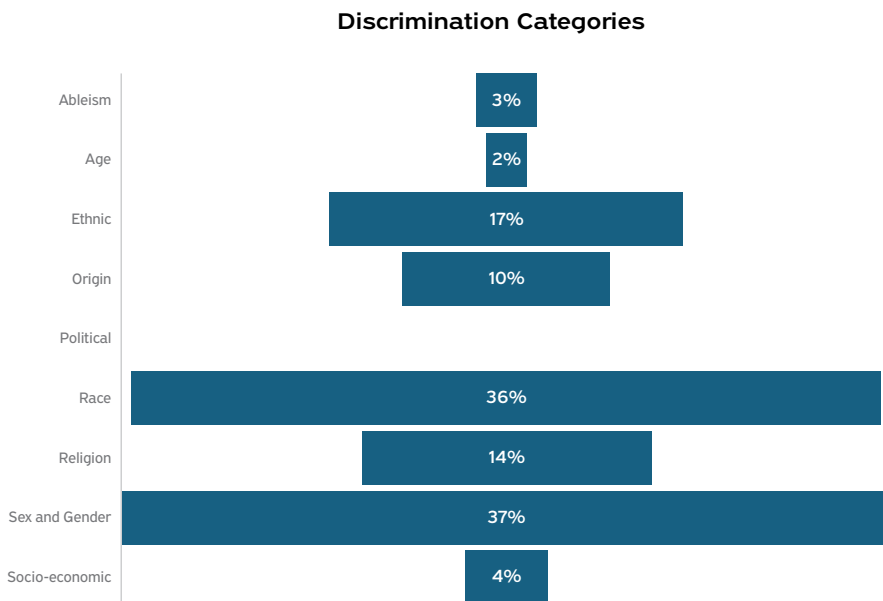
Figure 4.2: Number of articles describing instances of racism and discrimination, by year

Number of Publications

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Figure 4.3: Frequence of different discrimination types, all articles

Discrimination Categories

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data refers to the period 1st January 2021 – 31 May 2024. The percentages in the chart do not add up to 100%, as incidents involving several discrimination categories are included in every relevant category.

In "The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity" (2018), Kwame Anthony Appiah highlights how our understandings of identity – encompassing aspects like sex and gender, credo, national affiliation, race, class, and culture – are not fixed truths but constructed narratives. As such, these narratives are based on stories we tell ourselves and others – including news' stories – about who we are and what binds us together. Discriminatory acts arise from the narratives that different groups construct about themselves and about the others, and the acceptability of acting on such narratives in ways that oppress others.

Also, evidence shows that social media algorithms can contribute to reinforce conflicts between different identities, by creating echo chambers that amplify existing beliefs and biases. Designed to maximize user engagement, these algorithms curate content that aligns with individuals' sets of preferences, inadvertently isolating them from opposing viewpoints. This selective exposure can deepen divisions and misunderstandings between groups, as people are less likely to encounter perspectives that challenge their own. In the context of Appiah's analysis, these algorithm-driven echo chambers perpetuate the "lies" of fixed identities, hindering the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue and reinforcing the very boundaries that contribute to social conflict (Appiah, 2018).

Race and sex and gender emerge as the discrimination categories receiving the most media coverage when considering all publications, irrespective of the sentiment of the article, i.e. whether negative, positive, or neutral, as well as when considering articles of negative sentiment only.

Figure 4.4: Type of articles describing instances of racism and discrimination (i.e. negative sentiment)

Article Type for
Negative Sentiment

- Specific News
- General News
- Other

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI
data, 2024.

Note: Data refer to the period 1st January 2021 – 31 May 2024.

The majority (73%) of online information on racism and discrimination with negative sentiment comes in the form of specific news articles, typically reporting individual incidents. In contrast, when the scope is expanded to consider all publications on discrimination, regardless of their sentiment (i.e. positive, negative, neutral), these publications are much more likely to come in the form of general news (22%) and other document types (12%).

Different types of articles on racism and discrimination may affect public opinion differently, and for different amounts of time. Coppock, Ekins, and Kirby (2018) find that newspaper opinion pieces have a persuasive effect on their readers for at least a month after the initial exposure to the op-ed, suggesting a somewhat lasting attitudinal change.

Figure 4.5: Race and Gender Dominate Global Reports of Discrimination, 2021-2024*

Percentage of cases per discrimination category

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.
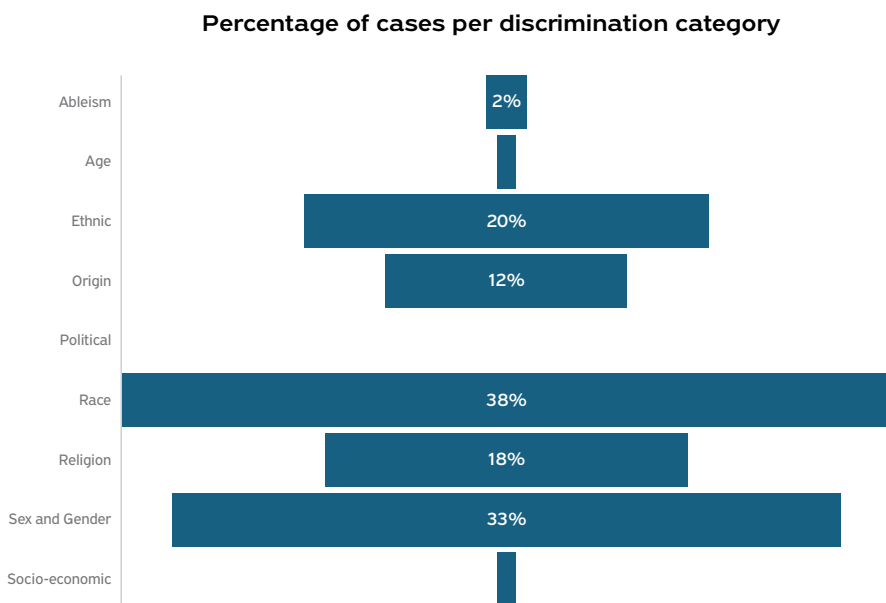
Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

Note: Data refer to the period 1st January 2021 – 31 May 2024. The percentages in the chart do not add up to 100%, as incidents involving several discrimination categories were included in every relevant category.
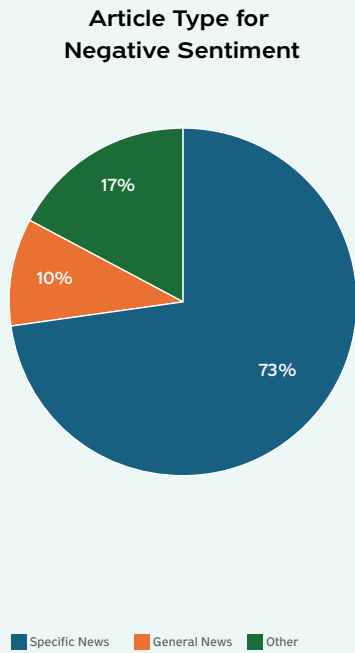
Figure 4.5 reveals that discrimination based on race (38%) and sex and gender (33%) are the most frequently reported categories of discrimination acts worldwide, followed by ethnicity (20%), religion (18%), origin (12%), and ableism (2%).

Historical and systemic inequalities based on race, sex and gender, and ethnicity may explain the prominence of these categories in contemporary media and discourse. At the same time, these results may reflect the heightened awareness about the problem and the fact that it fuels public discourse and reporting. By contrast, the very low reporting of categories such as socio-economic background and age may reflect the fact that discrimination faced by individua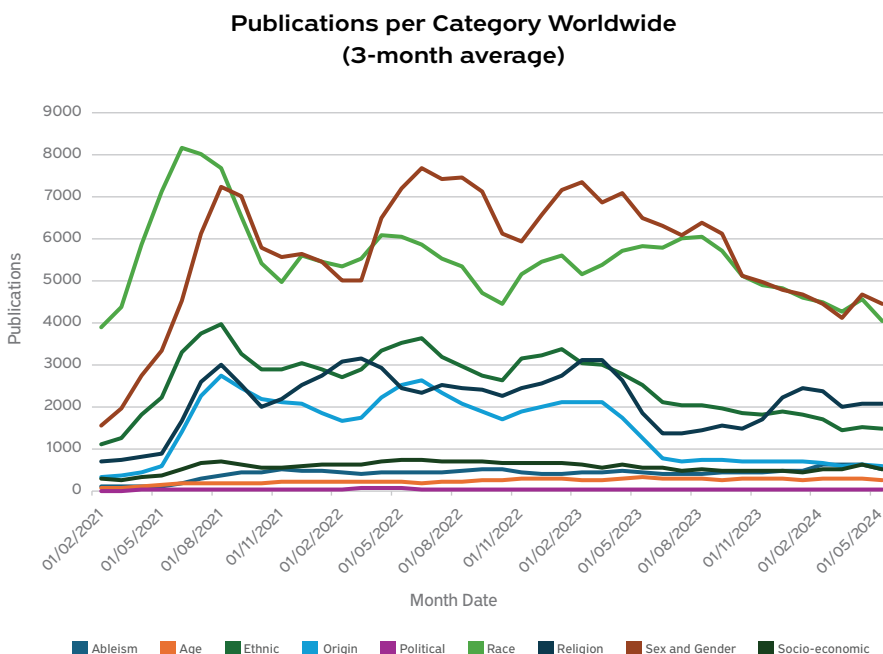ls based on their socio-economic background and age is often not perceived as such. This may be the case, for instance, of poor children who are not given opportunities to get a good education or to succeed in it. This is generally not reported in media as a discrimination act, but rather discussed in terms of inequality of opportunities (see, e.g. Blanden, Doepke and Stuhler, 2023, about educational inequality).

In addition, some of colonialism's lasting impacts, as recognized in the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, include entrenched racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. Historical legacies of colonization, slavery, and systemic segregation have created deep-seated racial hierarchies and embedded societal inequalities, fueling persistent biases (OHCHR, 2023).

The above points to the need to re-examine institutional frameworks and collective mindsets to challenge and dismantle norms, practices, and attitudes that sustain historical inequities. Actively confronting and reorienting these structures can foster more inclusive and equitable societies. Racial justice movements like Black Lives Matter have been successful in shifting public opinion, increasing awareness about racial inequalities, and encouraging individuals to report discrimination (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Similarly, movements like #MeToo brought sex and gender issues onto the global stage, likely contributing to their high frequency in articles. In October 2017, the #MeToo movement gained global attention as millions shared experiences of sexual violence within a single day. The official #MeToo website reports that in the first 24 hours, over 12 million Facebook posts and more than 1 million tweets using #MeToo were recorded, sparking a worldwide conversation on consent, gender, and power dynamics. Since then, the movement has inspired adaptations in over 85 countries, contributing to local discussions and initiatives. To date, the hashtag has been mentioned over 40 million times across social media and major news outlets.

Figure 4.6: Number of articles by discrimination type, over time, January 2021 – May 2024

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

Publications per Category Worldwide
(3-month average)

Discussions around race globally increased by 100% between February 2021 and June 2021, peaking near the anniversary of the global Black Lives Matter movement. The Outlook's dataset includes a total of 11208 articles referring to race relations that were released between March and May 2021, with May 2021 seeing the highest number of publications about the subject, after months of progressive increases. Some of the keywords that were most commonly observed within the headlines of these publications were 'black' (955 times), 'police' (622 times), and 'Floyd' (312 times). Continued calls for justice, publicized trials, and policy debates contributed to fuel this spike.

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

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According to data from Statista, X (formerly Twitter) saw a significant rise in its global user base during 2021 and 2022, before experiencing a slight decline in 2023. The surge in users on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and Facebook likely contributed to a spike in media coverage and discourse surrounding topics like racial justice, gender equality, and discrimination.

Another set of keywords that appeared several times in the dataset for these 3 months were 'Asian' (724 times) and 'Asian-American' (227 times), reflecting the surge in anti-Asian racism worldwide following the global spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19. The initial outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and its supposed links to China had already contributed significantly to the growth of anti-Asian sentiment. As the pandemic continued to rage on, such prejudicial sentiment did not decrease but rather attained new heights. The "Stop AAPI Hate" coalition documented 6,273 incidents of anti-Asian discrimination that year , underscoring the alarming rise in hate crimes (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021). The situation grew so severe that the UN Secretary-General expressed his concern about the rise in violence against Asians and people of Asian descent during the pandemic (United Nations, 2021).

Three main peaks (August 2021, May 2022, and January 2023) were observed in the volume of discourse in relation to sex and gender between 2021 and 2023. Among the events that such peaks reflect there are increases in domestic violence, as well as other events resonating worldwide. On the one hand, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated economic insecurities and social isolation, disproportionately impacting women and girls, increasing their vulnerability to domestic violence and limiting access to essential services, including sexual and reproductive healthcare (UN Women, 2020). In addition, a number of events related to the Istanbul Convention – a key framework designed to address gender-based violence and safeguard the rights of survivors in Europe – and global protests and heightened attention to women's rights (UN News, 2024) contributed to fuel news about sex and gender-based discrimination.

LGBTQ+-related topics account for over 2000 headlines out of 9066 sex and gender-related articles in the Outlook's dataset for the period June – August 2021. 'Homophobic', 'homophobia', and 'homophobe' (united by their prefix) accounted for 1035 publications, 'trans' came up 807 times, 'gay' 696 times, and 'Pride' 523 times. Such increase, as well as similar peaks for the same period of the following years, likely relates to the Pride Month, which has been celebrated since the 1970s in many parts of the world. Today Pride is celebrated on every continent across over a hundred countries (Bocci and Baumgartner, 2024). For many, Pride is a time to show their support to the LGBTQ+ community, to be proud of their myriad identities, and to feel comfortable expressing their sexuality aloud. For others, Pride serves as a reminder that many members of the LGTBQ+ community remain politically and socially oppressed, owing to restrictive legislation, conservative views, and other conditions.

The sustained number of articles related to sex gender seen since August 2021 until August 2023 has also been triggered by the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, after August 2021. The Taliban return to power marked the start of a highly conservative regime of "morality", in which women have been banned from receiving education, have been forced to cover their entire bodies and faces when outside their homes, have been banned from speaking in public, using public transportation alone, or looking at men to whom they are not related to by blood or marriage (United Nations, 2024). In the 3 years since their takeover, surveys have shown that 64% of women feel unsafe leaving their house alone, mostly because of harassment by the de facto authorities. "Honour" killings, corporal punishments, domestic violence, and rising maternal mortality have also contributed to their worsening physical and mental health (UN Women, 2024).

The Outlook's dataset features 4117 publications on sex and gender-based discrimination for the period March – December 2022, with the following words that appear recurrently 'Afghan' (318 times), 'Taliban' (277 times) and 'hijab' (156 times). Also, available data show that, in Africa, approximately 20,000 women were killed by intimate partners or family members in 2022 (UNODC and UN Women, 2023). In Kenya, where Olympian Rebecca Cheptegei was murdered, Femicide Count Kenya reports a total of at least 500 femicide victims since 2016, with 152 cases recorded in 2023 alone (UNFPA). In Mexico, government data reveals that approximately 10 women and girls are killed every day by intimate partners or other family members, underscoring the alarming scale of gender-based violence in the country (OHCHR, 2023). This ongoing crisis has drawn significant international attention, fueling global conversations about the need for urgent reforms and stronger protections for women.

'Abortion' further contributed to fuel the news on discrimination related to sex and gender, triggered by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade. This sparked news' attention worldwide, triggering discussions about women's rights, reproductive justice, and gender equality. Compared to the two earlier peaks in publications counts for sex and gender-based discrimination, the peak in January 2023 was the smallest, accounting for 9749 articles.

An incident where the term 'same-sex-marriage' (215 publications) was relevant was the Church of England's decision to continue its ban in same-sex marriages in its churches, following 5 years on debate on the topic. During the heated debate on the matter, members of Parliament, bishops, activists, and others alternatively voiced their interpretations. Eventually, in November 2023, the Church of England decided to allow clergy to bless marriages and other unions of same-sex couples. While some headlines celebrated this decision, others highlighted the rejection of this decision, and the controversial nature of the debate created significant volumes of discourse regarding the inclusivity of religious institutions worldwide.

The 2023 peak, compared to the other 2 peaks, also had the most publications coming from outside Europe and North America. Kenya was mentioned 244 times in headlines, mostly referencing the senselessly violent murder of Kenyan LGBTQ+ activist Edwin Chiloba and subsequent updates in the investigation process (AFP, 2023).

Despite the overall decline in sex and gender equality across the world, there remain some achievements that can be celebrated. Looking at specific news with positive sentiment, which represent positive or neutral acts to counter discrimination, it can be seen that sex and gender was overwhelmingly the most covered category worldwide. This suggests that, despite a large volume of discriminatory acts and discourse around those acts, significant actions are also being taken to rectify prejudices related to sex and gender orientation.

Figure 4.7: Topics discussed in positive sentiment specific news' articles, by region
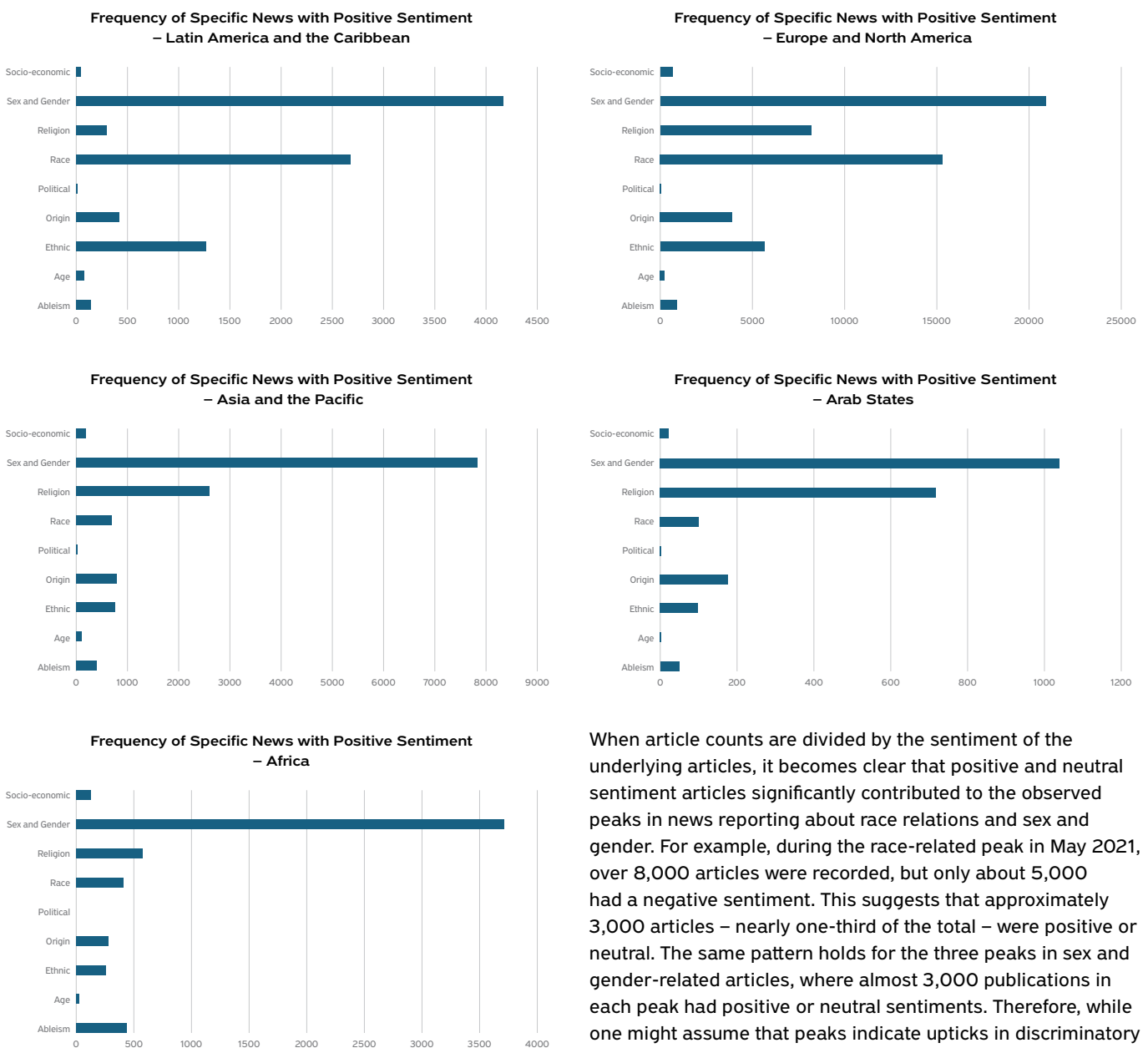
When article counts are divided by the sentiment of the underlying articles, it becomes clear that positive and neutral sentiment articles significantly contributed to the observed peaks in news reporting about race relations and sex and gender. For example, during the race-related peak in May 2021, over 8,000 articles were recorded, but only about 5,000 had a negative sentiment. This suggests that approximately 3,000 articles – nearly one-third of the total – were positive or neutral. The same pattern holds for the three peaks in sex and gender-related articles, where almost 3,000 publications in each peak had positive or neutral sentiments. Therefore, while one might assume that peaks indicate upticks in discriminatory activity, it is important to recognize that increases in discourse can also result from articles reporting on positive or neutral events, as reflected in the Outlook's database.

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Figure 4.8: Verbal abuse emerges as the prevalent form of racism and discrimination in specific news' articles
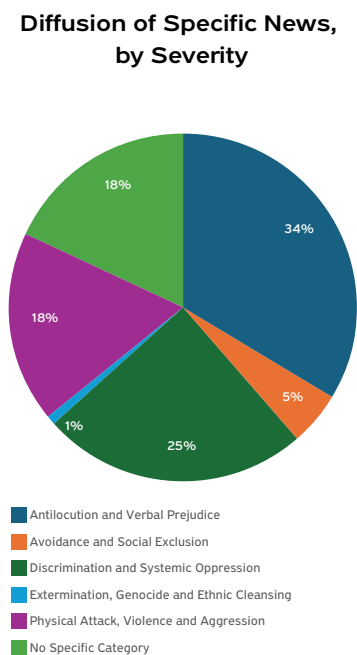
Diffusion of Specific News, by Severity

- ■ Antilocution and Verbal Prejudice
- ■ Avoidance and Social Exclusion
- ■ Discrimination and Systemic Oppression
- ■ Extermination, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing
- ■ Physical Attack, Violence and Aggression
- ■ No Specific Category

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data refers to the period 1st January 2021 – 31 May 2024.

Looking at the severity of racism and discrimination acts mirrored in news, verbal abuse emerges as the most prevalent form (see Figure 4.8), and accounts for around 34% of all discriminatory acts identified in the database. This high incidence may be attributed to the ease with which verbal abuse can occur—it requires little preparation or physical presence and often goes unpunished, making it common in everyday settings like schools, workplaces, and online platforms (ILO, 2013; Harmer and Southern, 2023). Other forms of discrimination reported include physical attacks (18%), systemic oppression (25%), avoidance (5%), and extermination (1%) About one fifth of instances (i.e. 18%) cannot be strictly attributed to the different categories defined and are thus denoted as "no specific category".

Unlike physical abuse, verbal discrimination leaves no visible scars, making it hard to identify and address it in real time. Studies have shown that repeated verbal abuse can severely impact an individual's mental and emotional health, leading to anxiety, depression, and a sense of alienation (Dougherty, 2009). The psychological toll can be long-lasting, affecting self-esteem and perpetuating cycles of violence and discrimination across generations (WHO, 2024).

The rise of technology has further amplified the reach and impact of verbal abuse. Digital platforms provide anonymity and physical distance, emboldening individuals to express harmful speeches without immediate repercussions. Technology-facilitated violence – including online harassment and digital surveillance – has intensified the effects of verbal discrimination, particularly against women and marginalized groups (UNFPA, 2021). Despite often being overlooked, verbal abuse remains a dominant form of discrimination with severe consequences that require urgent policy attention.

The 18% of discriminatory acts in the "No specific category" group underscore the complexity of how discrimination can manifest itself. Microaggressions, implicit biases, and culturally embedded behaviours often do not fit neatly into predefined categories, causing AI systems like the one used in the present report to assign them to the residual category "No specific category." For instance, policy changes described in neutral terms – such as restrictions on gender identity documentation or nationality revocation – may not be flagged by AI if they lack overtly harmful language (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022).

Cultural contexts may further complicate AI-based classification efforts. Practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) might be reported using culturally accepted terms like "beautification ritual" or "rite of passage," which AI may not recognize as indicators of discrimination due to the absence of negative language. Additionally, articles highlighting positive actions against discrimination, like praises of asking for forgiveness, may end up in the group "No Specific Category." These examples highlight the challenges that AI algorithms may encounter when tasked to detect nuanced forms of discrimination and emphasize the need for human oversight [5] to accurately interpret the context and cultural subtleties of news reporting.

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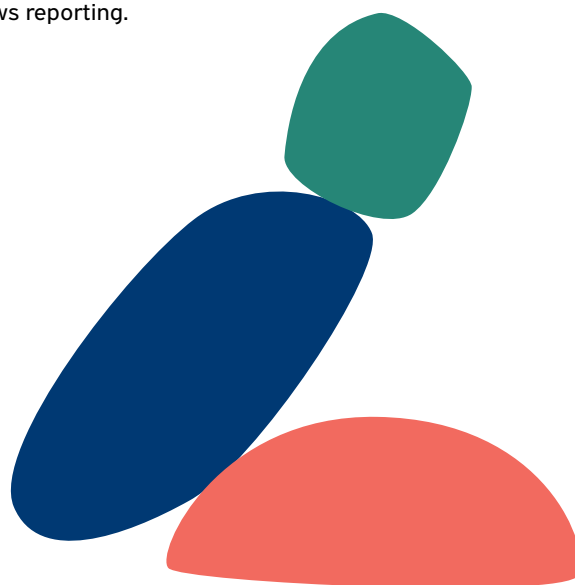
5. The need for human oversight is one of the principles underlined in the 2021
UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.

**Figure 4.9: Discriminatory patterns by severity, in specific news,
January 2021 – May 2024**

Diffusion of Specific News by Severity and Discrimination Category

Legend:
- Antilocution and Verbal Prejudice
- Avoidance and Social Exclusion
- Discrimination and Systemic Oppression
- Extermination, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing
- Physical Attack, Violence and Aggression
- No Specific Category
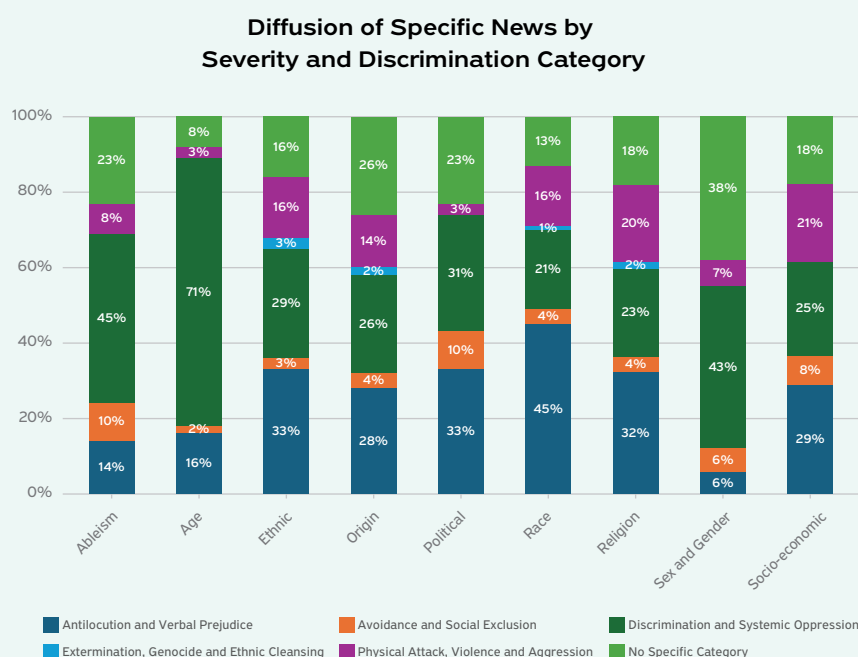
	Ableism	Age	Ethnic	Origin	Political	Race	Religion	Socio-economic	Sex and gender
No. of cases	17,401	8,589	106,230	61,128	736	225,811	90,902	4,316	235,303

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Figure 4.9 illustrates the severity of the racism and discrimination acts in the UNESCO Outlook database, by type of act, i.e. by sex and gender, socio-economic status, ableism, age, ethnic, origin, political, race, and religion.

Antilocution, a form of verbal abuse, is the most frequently reported form of discrimination, particularly when discrimination involves categories like race (45%), religion (32%), and sex and gender (29%). The already observed dominance of verbal abuse likely reflects the ease with which words can be used to express bias and hostility, and the relatively little effort or direct confrontation required. Other forms, such as avoidance and extermination, are far less prevalent across all categories, suggesting that more overt or extreme acts of discrimination are rarer.

Data show that systemic oppression and discrimination are other significant forms of discrimination, particularly in categories like socio-economic status (25%) and ableism (45%), highlighting the structural and institutional nature of bias in these areas. Overall, the evidence gathered points to structural inequalities and entrenched societal biases contributing importantly to the perpetration and the persistence of discrimination acts, particularly in categories linked to power dynamics and social stratification.

Notably, the "No specific category" classification is relatively high across several dimensions, in particular, sex and gender (38%), origin (26%), political (24%) and ableism (23%). This possibly reflects the challenges that are inherent in categorizing more nuanced or multifaceted forms of discrimination and that AI-based classifiers can encounter when trying to identify more complex instances of bias, such as microaggressions or culturally embedded practices.

6% of all the articles in the database – i.e. 17164 articles – involve acts at the intersection of race and ethnicity. As Stuart Hall explains in "The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, and Nation" (2017), these three characteristics are deeply intertwined through colonial histories, cultural narratives, and socio-political constructs. Hall's analysis further shows that race often serves as shorthand for broader ethnic and cultural identities, and vice versa, leading to the conflation of these categories in discriminatory behaviours. In Europe, for example, stigmatization and exclusion are worsened for LGBTIQ+ members of the Roma community who are exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, compounding the many challenges that Roma face in their daily lives as a result of anti-Gypsyism (United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 2023).

Understanding and addressing the multipronged nature of verbal and physical abuse, which continue to be prevalent forms of discrimination, particularly related to religion, sex, and gender, is crucial to nurture environments of respect and inclusivity, where all individuals can live without the fear of being silenced by harmful words and actions.

Discriminatory Patterns and Practices over time

The next section explores how racism and discrimination has changed between 2021 and 2024 and by discrimination category.

Figure 4.10: Instances of racism detected in specific news, by discrimination category, January 2021 – June 2024

Diffusion of Specific News per Discrimination Category
(3-month average)

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.
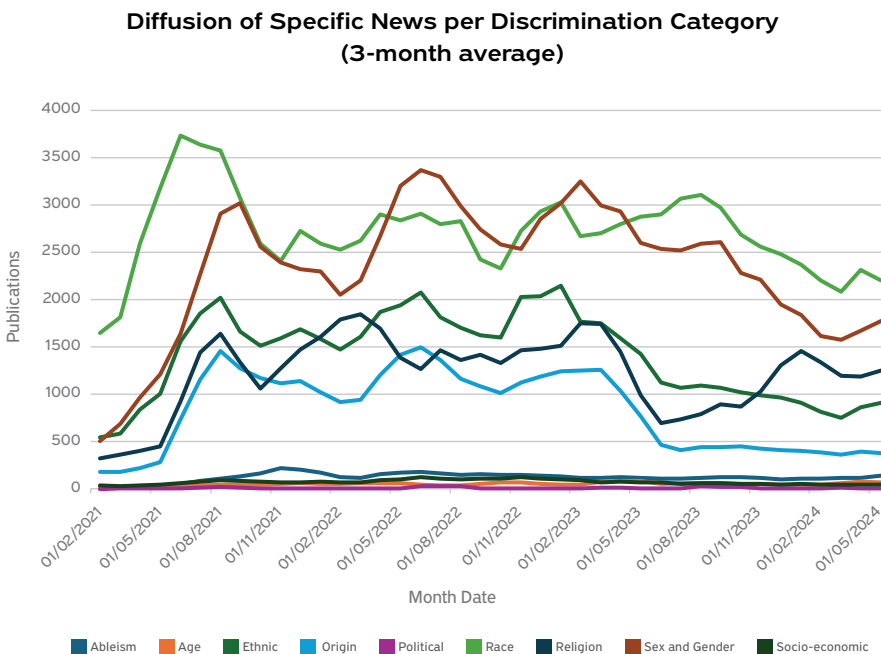
Figure 4.10 shows the variations observed over time in specific news (i.e. news with negative sentiment) reporting about different types of discrimination, from January 2021 to May 2024. Race and ethnicity are consistently the most covered topics, peaking between mid-2021 and early 2022 with over 3,500 publications. This likely reflects global events or movements during that time, such as heightened awareness following racial justice protests. Similarly, reports on sex and gender discrimination display a steady trend with occasional peaks, maintaining a significant presence in media coverage, likely driven by discussions around gender equality and movements like #MeToo.

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Origin and religion are also consistently highly reported in news stories covering discrimination. This attention generally reflects structural inequalities and controversies. While their coverage is not as prominent as race or gender, these categories maintain consistent visibility, with periodic spikes that may suggest responses to specific events.

Overall, the graph shows both consistency and fluctuations in media attention towards different discrimination categories, over time. Certain categories are consistently the focus of discrimination reporting, with peaks and troughs generally corresponding to major societal or political developments that heighten public interest in specific issues. While race and gender remain focal points of coverage, the relatively lower reporting on ableism and age highlights potential gaps in media prioritization, underscoring the need for more balanced reporting to capture the full spectrum of discrimination globally.

Figure 4.11: Racist acts reported in the news during the period January 2021 – 31 May 2024
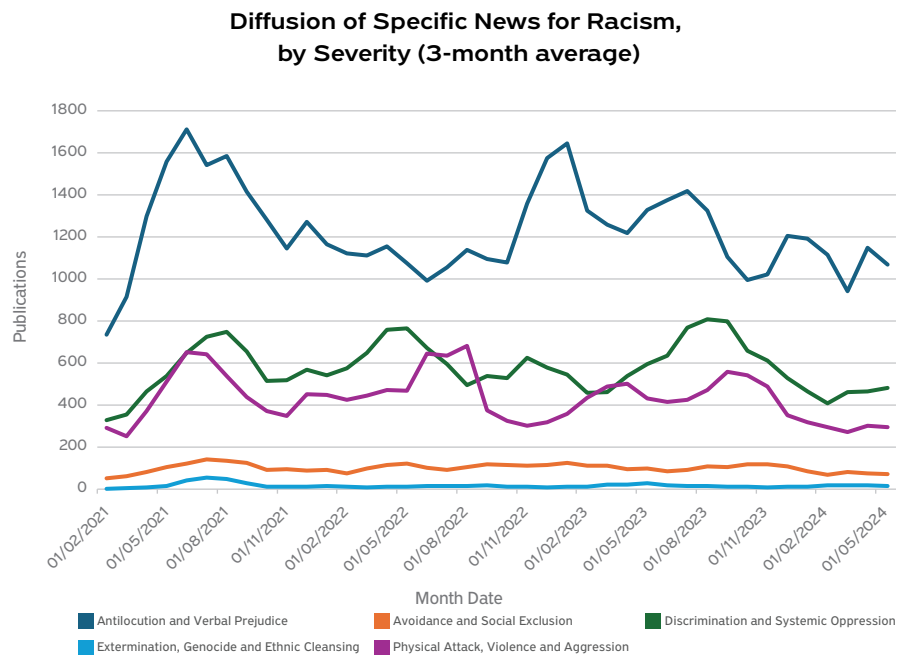
Diffusion of Specific News for Racism, by Severity (3-month average)

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

When it comes to discrimination related to the race of the victims, which is the most widespread type of discrimination, antilocution and verbal abuse emerge as the most common forms, as can be seen in Figure 4.11. Physical attacks and systematic oppression exhibit lower overall numbers but, sadly, important peaks, especially in the second and third quarter of 2022, when reports of physical attacks grow markedly. This may in part mirror the negativity bias of the news, and the fact that news' pieces may be more likely to pay attention to incidents that, because of their severity, are more likely to attract the attention of the readers.

In May 2021, the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's death led to international rallies and discussions on police brutality, amplifying calls for systemic reform and likely contributing to increased incidents of antilocution (DW, 2021). In early 2023, renewed media focus on racial justice followed the trials and sentencing of other officers involved in Floyd's case, sparking further debate on law enforcement's accountability.

The sharp rise in antilocution observed in 2023 can in part be attributed to

the Gaza conflict, which escalated following October 7. The event set off a wave of intense reactions globally, with media outlets, social media, and public discourse focusing extensively on the conflict, with instances of anti-Arab and anti-Semitic language, reinforcing historical, religious, racial and ethnic divides (see, e.g. Freedman and Hirsh, 2024, about antisemitism and Amin, Hyökki and Salma, 2024, about anti-Arab sentiments).

In the U.S. alone, antisemitic incidents increased by 337% from October to December compared to the previous year. According to the Anti-Defamation League (2023), more than 2,000 incidents were documented in this two-month period, encompassing physical assaults, harassment, vandalism, and hate-filled rallies targeting Jewish individuals and institutions. This surge is the highest since the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) began tracking these incidents in 1979, highlighting an alarming trend of intolerance and violence toward Jewish communities. More recently, antisemitic groups attacked Israeli soccer fans following a soccer game in Amsterdam, allegedly

shouting anti-Israeli slurs and wielding fireworks. The incident's impact was amplified by the Netherlands' own troubled history during the Holocaust, in which three-quarters of its Jewish population perished (Reuters, 2024.)

In 2023, Brazil also faced significant racial challenges, including violent incidents against Afro-Brazilian communities, particularly during police operations such as those in Jacarézinho, Vila Cruzeiro, and Baixada Santista, where people of African descent were disproportionately affected (OHCHR, 2023). However, these incidents have been met with positive policy changes, beginning with the President's appointment of a new Minister for Racial Equity in Brazil, who is herself a woman of colour with an activist background (The Guardian, 2023). The new government has also set out several goals to address race-based inequalities in Brazil, including quotas for Afro-Brazilians for federal political appointments and inter-ministerial working groups to focus specifically on higher education policies such as affirmative action (Al-Jazeera, 2023).

Figure 4.12: Sex and gender-based discrimination acts reported in the news during the period January 2021 – 31 May 2024

Diffusion of Specific News for Sex and Gender Discrimination, by Severity (3-month average)
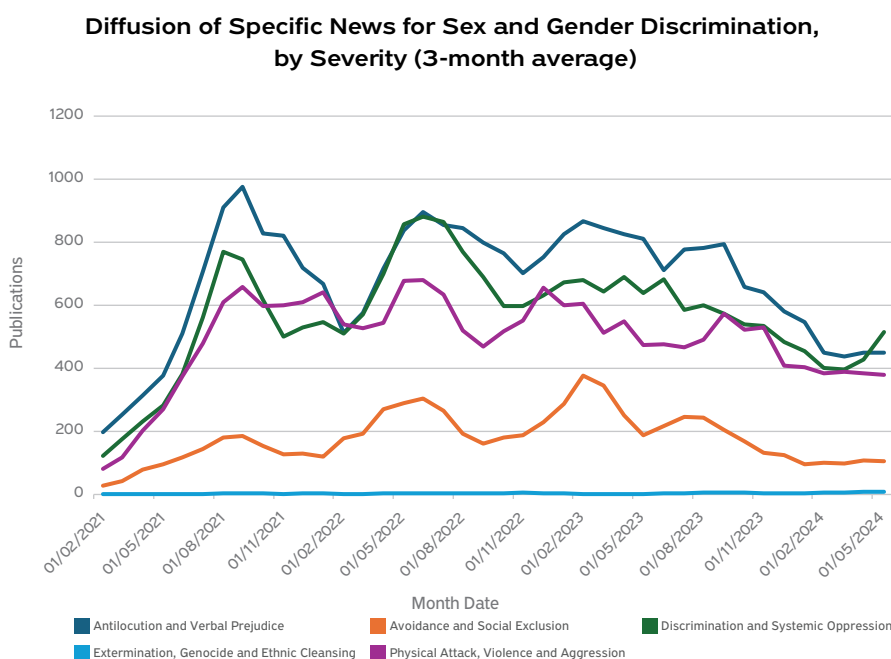
Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

For sex and gender-based discrimination, differences in the incidence of different forms of discrimination are less marked: high levels of verbal abuse are accompanied by very high levels of reports of physical attacks. Despite many efforts to eradicate such prejudice, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and variations of sex characteristics remains widespread.

No one is spared: a 2021 UNESCO study found that nearly one in two LGBTI students was the victim of harassment, mockery, insults or threats because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, more often than not inflicted by classmates (UNESCO, 2021). Facing daily violence, threats, and state persecution, LGBTQ+ people are often forced to seek refuge outside their country of origin, even though discriminatory attitudes may persist in their new countries during and after the asylum process.

As noted by the UNHCR (2022), same-sex partnerships remain illegal in 70 countries, with 5 countries subjecting those convicted to the death penalty; others inflict fines, physical punishment, and jail time. These discriminatory attitudes have even infiltrated the digital world. A recent study of generative artificial intelligence models found that in some models, negative content about gay men appears in almost 70% of cases, associating them with abnormal people or criminals (UNESCO, 2024).
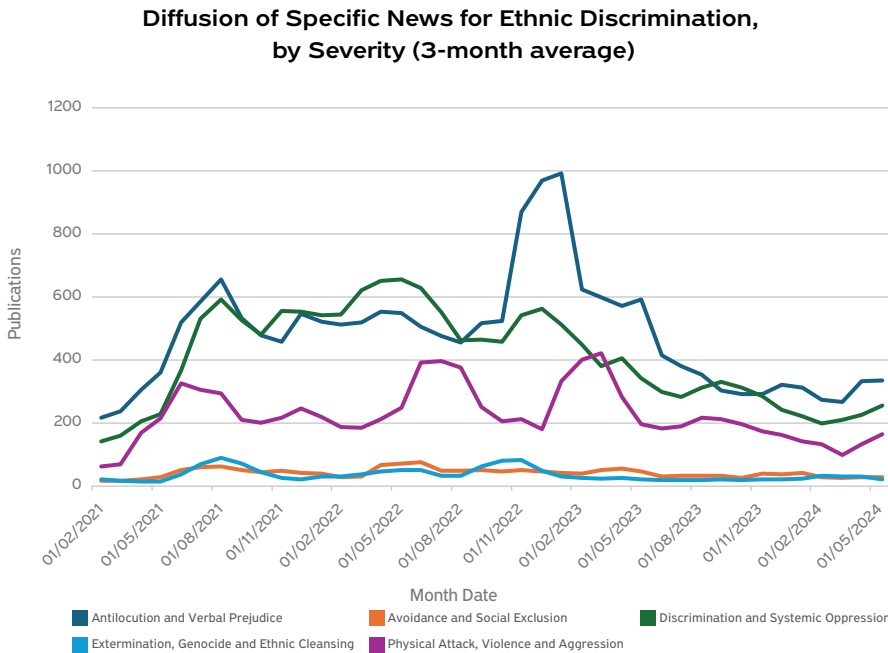
The peaks in sex and gender discrimination related to antilocution and physical attacks observed in mid-2021, 2022, and 2023, are likely the result of several factors. Among them the continued effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, which exacerbated economic insecurities and social isolation, disproportionately impacting women and girls, increasing their vulnerability to domestic violence (UN Women, 2020). Also, conflict zones have increasingly posed direct threats to women and girls, intensifying concerns around gendered violence. By 2023, over 612 million women and girls were reported to live within 50 kilometres of active conflict areas, marking a sharp 41% increase since 2015. These environments, marked by instability, heighten the risk of sexual violence, and United Nations data revealed a staggering 50% rise in conflict-related sexual violence in 2023, with women and girls comprising 95% of the victims. (UN-Women and UN DESA, 2024).

When it comes to specific areas, the Taliban's laws, policies, and actions have undone decades of progress in human rights that Afghans struggled to achieve. Women and girls have been systematically stripped of their rights, including access to education, employment, freedom of expression, movement, and political involvement, among others (UN Women, 2024, Human Rights Watch, 2024). These measures have drawn widespread international condemnation, sparking a global outcry for gender equity and intensifying media focus on women's autonomy.

The Vienna Declaration on Femicide (2012) identifies various forms of femicide, including the killing of women due to intimate partner violence, the targeted murder of women and girls in armed conflict, female infanticide and sex-selective feticide, and deaths related to genital mutilation, among others. As with all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, femicide is an issue impacting every part of the world. The intentional killing of nearly 89,000 women and girls in 2022 marks one of the highest annual counts recorded in the last 20 years (UNODC and UN Women, 2023). This ongoing crisis has drawn significant international attention, fueling global conversations about the need for urgent reforms and stronger protections for women.
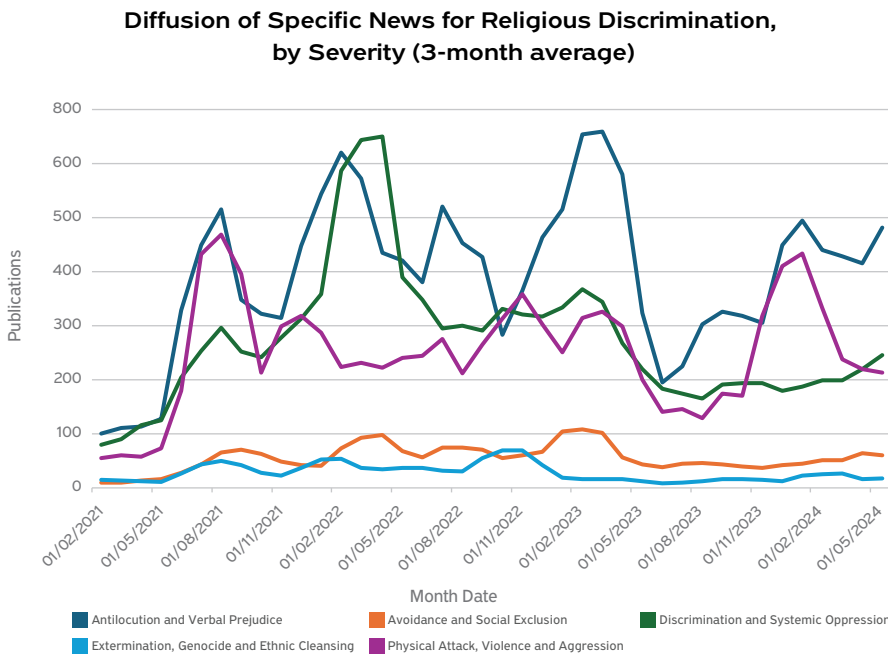
Figure 4.13: Ethnic and religion-based discrimination acts reported in the news during the period January 2021 – 31 May 2024

Diffusion of Specific News for Ethnic Discrimination, by Severity (3-month average)

■ Antilocution and Verbal Prejudice
■ Avoidance and Social Exclusion
■ Discrimination and Systemic Oppression
■ Extermination, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing
■ Physical Attack, Violence and Aggression

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

Figure 4.14: Religion-based discrimination acts reported in the news during the period January 2021 – 31 May 2024

Diffusion of Specific News for Religious Discrimination, by Severity (3-month average)

■ Antilocution and Verbal Prejudice
■ Avoidance and Social Exclusion
■ Discrimination and Systemic Oppression
■ Extermination, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing
■ Physical Attack, Violence and Aggression

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

Between November 2022 and March 2023, global media saw a marked increase in reports of antilocution and physical violence linked to ethnicity. This surge coincides with heightened ethnic tensions and critical events worldwide, highlighting systemic challenges and the growing visibility of ethnicity-related issues in conflict, policy, and societal discourse. In line with what we find in relation to news online, evidence shows that X (formerly Twitter) saw a nearly 500% increase in use of the N-word in the 12-hour window immediately following the shift of ownership to Elon Musk in October 2022. Within the following week, tweets including the word 'Jew' had increased fivefold since before the ownership transfer. Tweets with the most engagement were overly antisemitic (Brookings, 2022).

In 2022, ethnic clashes and violence saw a worrying escalation across multiple regions globally. Communities faced widespread displacement, targeted violence, and systemic discrimination rooted in ethnic divisions. The year was marked by conflicts that displaced hundreds of thousands, exacerbating humanitarian crises, particularly in areas already grappling with socio-political instability. Ethnic minorities often bore the brunt of these clashes, facing physical violence, forced migrations, and cultural suppression (World Bank, 2023). According to the new figures, more state-based conflict battle-related deaths took place in 2022 than any year since 1994 (Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2023).

Figure 4.15: Origin-based discrimination acts reported in the news during the period January 2021 – 31 May 2024

Diffusion of Specific News for Origin-based Discrimination, by Severity (3-month average)

Legend:
- Antilocution and Verbal Prejudice
- Avoidance and Social Exclusion
- Discrimination and Systemic Oppression
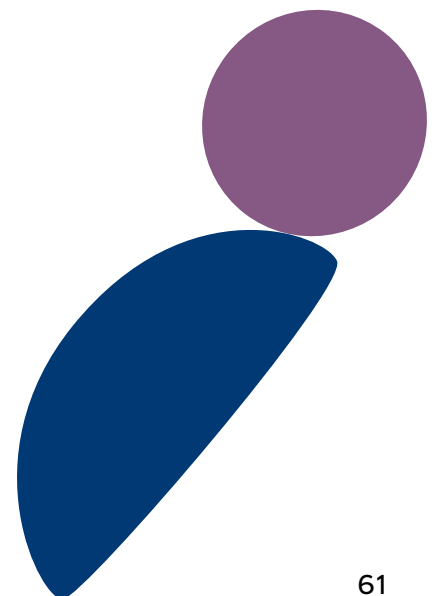- Extermination, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing
- Physical Attack, Violence and Aggression

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

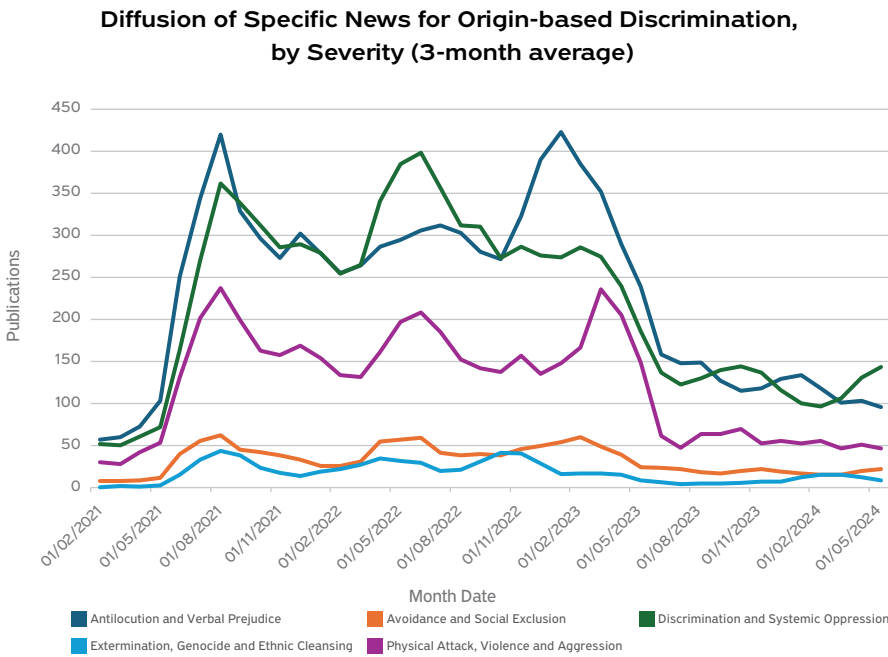The two major peaks in acts of antilocution associated with origin-based discrimination in 2021 and 2023 can be traced back to a rise in xenophobic attitudes. The COVID-19 pandemic played a central role in amplifying the xenophobic rhetoric, especially towards Asian communities. Notably, the Asian community faced a surge in verbal harassment and physical violence, reflecting an uptick in origin-based discrimination. On the positive side, the creation of Brazil's Ministry of Indigenous Peoples (MPI) in 2023 marked a turning point to address pressing issues such as illegal mining, land invasions, and violence against Indigenous groups, exemplified by the plight of the Yanomami people, who faced severe health crises and displacement due to these activities. These efforts were critical to restoring territorial integrity, promoting self-determination, and ensuring sustainable management of Indigenous lands, which are pivotal for both cultural preservation and environmental protection (Al Jazeera, 2023).

In several countries hosting refugees from the wars, discriminatory practices have been reported towards certain ethnic groups. These individuals have often been subjected to separate housing arrangements, a policy that perpetuates unequal treatment and further marginalizes them within refugee communities (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Race, origin and ethnicity came under the spotlight in news in Asia and the Pacific, with both positive developments and intensifying challenges. Australia's recent referendum overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to grant Indigenous people greater political representation, ending hopes for constitutional recognition and a dedicated platform for Aboriginal voices in Parliament. (The Guardian 2023). The impact of such dynamics reverberated in neighbouring New Zealand, where the new government introduced a bill to reinterpret the nation's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi. This move triggered significant protests from Indigenous Māori groups, who argued that such a reinterpretation would dilute their rights and diminish the protections enshrined in the treaty (Reuters, 2024). These concerns are compounded by stark disparities in the criminal justice system, where the experience of Māori communities highlights deep-rooted issues of inequality, discrimination, and historical trauma (Safe and Effective Justice Advisory Group). Although Māori make up

around 15% of the country's population, they are significantly overrepresented at each stage of the justice process. The statistics reflected by the Ministry of Justice are stark: Māori account for 37% of those apprehended by police, 45% of those convicted, and 52% of the prison population, figures that mirror the disparities ingrained in policing and judicial practices and point to the broader socioeconomic inequalities that Māori communities face.

These trends also highlight the structural discrimination faced by marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous populations, who endure disproportionately high levels of poverty and social exclusion. For instance, in 2023, the number of fires in old-growth forest areas across the Amazon surged by 152% compared to the previous year, impacting regions in the Brazilian, Bolivian, and Peruvian Amazon. For the first time since records began, 70% of Peru's fires occurred within its Amazon regions, affecting over 87 Indigenous territories. These fires threaten the livelihoods of local communities and Indigenous populations, who rely on the forest for both sustenance and the preservation of their cultural heritage (Amazon Watch, 2024).

Climate records were shattered in 2023, with the planet experiencing its warmest year on record, rising greenhouse gas levels, and extreme weather events that wreaked havoc globally. Sea surface temperatures reached historic highs, contributing to rising sea levels and the lowest sea ice extent in Antarctica on records. These shifts have devastated ecosystems and communities worldwide, with Indigenous peoples facing disproportionate impacts (World Meteorological Organization, 2023). The broader global conversation on climate change brought their heightened vulnerability into sharp focus, contributing to the peaks in discussions in 2023.

Figure 4.16: Disability-based discrimination acts reported in the news during the period January 2021 – May 2024

Diffusion of Specific News for Ableism, by Severity (3-month average)
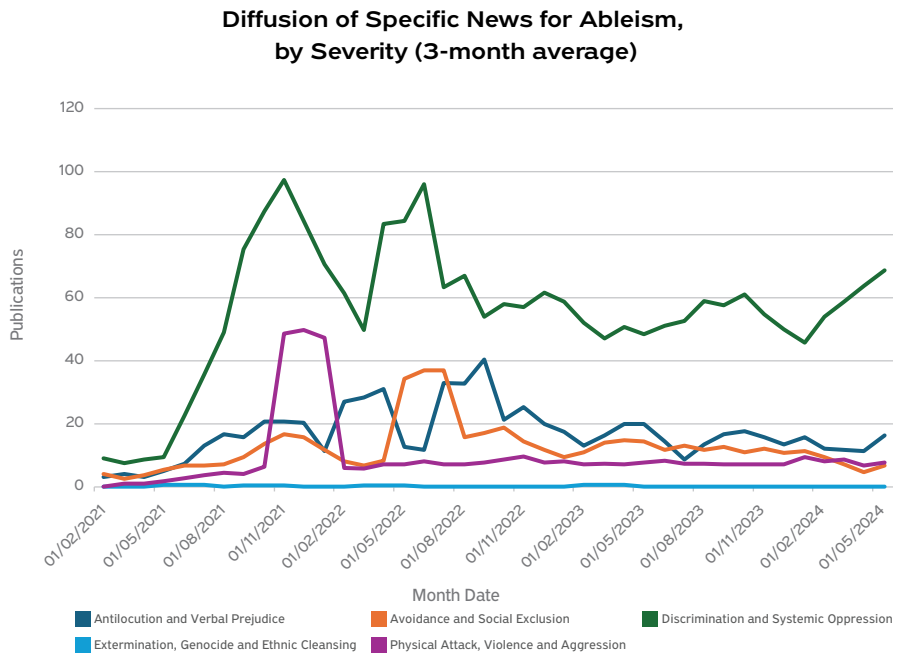
Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

When it comes to ableism, incidents of systematic discrimination against people with disabilities appeared to peak in number during August-September 2021 and May-June 2022. As the graphs depict, globally, discrimination intensifies in categories like ableism and ageism largely triggered by institutionalized beliefs and practices that undervalue the abilities, productivity, and worth of disabled and older individuals. Research across fields of sociology, psychology, and health sciences provides compelling evidence for this pattern.

An estimated 1.3 billion people, or about 16% of the global population, live with significant disabilities. The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that despite the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which aims to secure the rights of disabled individuals, systemic gaps in implementation persist. Too often, there is a lack of robust documentation and analysis of how countries address the needs of disabled populations, resulting in pervasive barriers to essential services, including education, employment, and public services (UN DESA, 2024; WHO, 2011).

The accountability issue is stark: persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are seldom involved in governance processes, such as health sector planning, program development, and policy implementation.

This exclusion from decision-making limits their capacity to hold health systems accountable, which in turn contributes to ongoing institutional discrimination. For instance, women and girls with disabilities are rarely consulted on critical issues like maternal and child health or sexual and reproductive health rights, leaving them without adequate support in these fundamental areas (WHO, 2022). Without their involvement in governance and a clear framework for accountability, discrimination is perpetuated, and the needs of persons with disabilities continue to be overlooked.

From an intersectional perspective, globally an estimated 19% of women have a disability compared to 12% of men, with this figure rising to above 22% among women in lower-income countries. Women and girls with disabilities encounter similar patterns of discrimination and social disadvantage as their nondisabled counterparts and additionally experience the challenges faced by men and boys with disabilities. However, they are at a heightened risk of restrictions on their sexual and reproductive rights relative to both nondisabled women and men with disabilities. Furthermore, women with disabilities face an illiteracy rate three times higher than that of men with disabilities, significant unmet healthcare needs, double the rate of unemployment, and only half the internet access of their male counterparts with disabilities (Asian Development Bank, 2024).

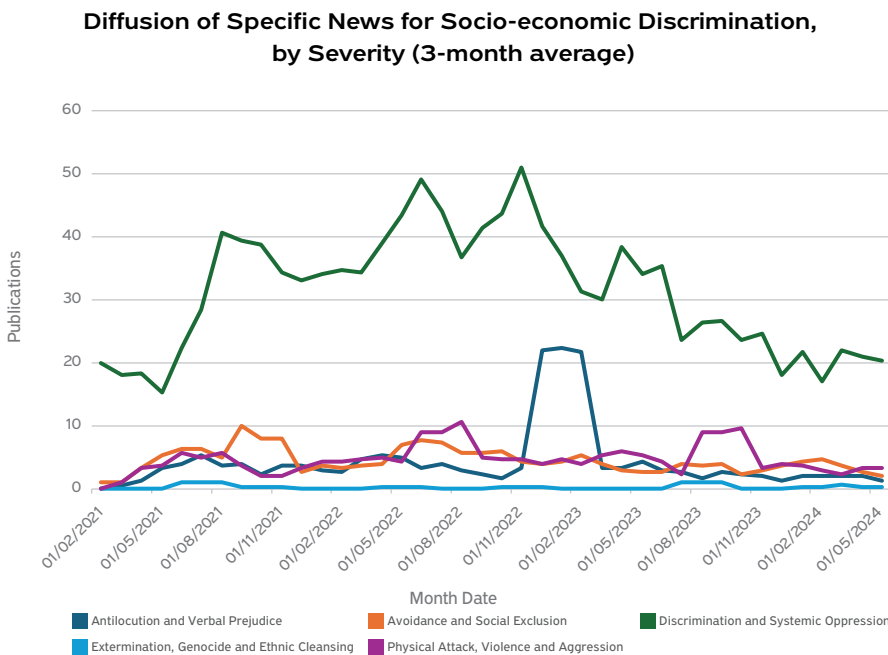**Figure 4.17: Age-based discrimination acts reported in specific news during the period January 2021 – May 2024**
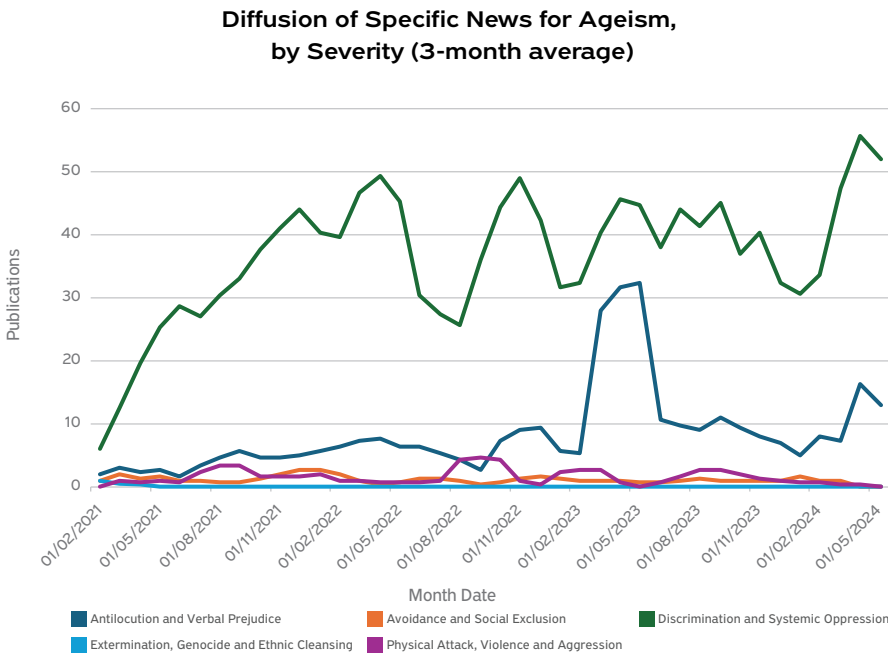
Diffusion of Specific News for Ageism, by Severity (3-month average)

Legend:
- Antilocution and Verbal Prejudice
- Avoidance and Social Exclusion
- Discrimination and Systemic Oppression
- Extermination, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing
- Physical Attack, Violence and Aggression

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

Figure 4.18: Socio-economic discrimination acts reported in the news during the period January 2021 – May 2024

Diffusion of Specific News for Socio-economic Discrimination, by Severity (3-month average)

Legend:
- Antilocution and Verbal Prejudice
- Avoidance and Social Exclusion
- Discrimination and Systemic Oppression
- Extermination, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing
- Physical Attack, Violence and Aggression

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

Incidents of systematic discrimination against older people increased fairly consistently from 2021 onwards, peaking in April 2022. Ableism and ageism are often reinforced by longstanding stereotypes that label disabled individuals and older adults as less capable or independent, and as a liability for societies. Observably, 71% of all reported discriminatory acts on the basis of age were systematic oppression, demonstrating the strong influence of institutionalized beliefs and practices that undervalue the abilities, productivity, and worth of older individuals. A recent UN report reveals that every second person in the world is believed to have ageist beliefs, underscoring how pervasive negative attitudes toward aging have become. This bias not only impacts individuals' well-being but also imposes significant societal costs, affecting the physical and mental health of older adults and costing economies billions of dollars (WHO, 2021).

Ageism manifests subtly yet powerfully within institutions, driving policies that unfairly disadvantage older people. During the COVID-19 pandemic, age frequently determined access to lifesaving medical care, with younger patients prioritized for ICU beds and ventilators while older individuals were often left behind, deemed "less likely to survive". This age-based bias also led to extended isolation for many older adults, cutting them off from essential social and family support. Ageism even permeated public discourse. An analysis of 82,629 pandemic-related tweets about older adults revealed over 1,300 death jokes trivializing their suffering (Xiang et al., 2021). These trends expose how deeply embedded ageism is as institutional discrimination, using age as grounds for differential—and often harmful—treatment.

When it comes to socio-economic discrimination, the peak in systemic oppression during the period of 2022- 2023 can be again be attributed in part to the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The global health crisis disrupted economies, worsened poverty, and deepened existing inequalities. As many households faced economic uncertainty, marginalized groups and women were disproportionately affected, often being excluded from recovery efforts. This created a cycle of heightened vulnerability, making these groups more susceptible to socio-economic discrimination (OECD, 2023).

Figure 4.19: Political discrimination acts reported in the news during the period January 2021 – May 2024

Diffusion of Specific News for Political Discrimination, by Severity (3-month average)
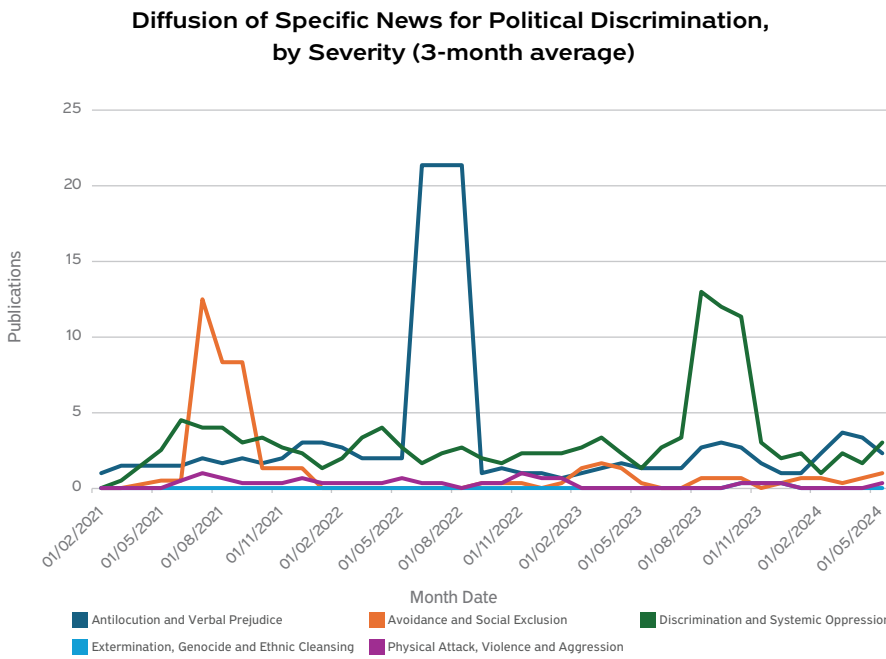
Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Note: Data displayed using three month smoothed moving averages.

When it comes to political discrimination, its limited sample size makes it difficult to draw conclusions. However, it is well known that, as discussions and conflicts escalate, political rhetoric surrounding the situation can contribute to increase divisive and discriminatory narratives. As an example, during the 2022 French presidential elections, the uptick in aggression was particularly evident in the tense political climate surrounding the elections, with extremist rhetoric gaining traction and contributing to increase both physical and verbal assaults (Reuters, 2024). Another example is the polarized political climate experienced by Brazil during the 2022 election, which led to public unrest and intense verbal confrontations. This heightened political tension resulted in over 67 percent of the population expressing fear of becoming victims of violence due to their political choices (France 24, 2022).

In conclusion, this chapter illustrates that reports of discriminatory acts are highly sensitive to global and local events that amplify tensions between different groups while simultaneously raising awareness of underlying discriminatory processes. For instance, incidents such as racial justice protests, political conflicts, or major policy changes often act as catalysts, drawing attention to systemic inequalities and fostering public discourse on discrimination. These events not only highlight overt acts of discrimination, such as verbal abuse or physical violence, but also bring to light deeper structural issues such as systemic oppression and discrimination. While conflict often arises during 'inflection points', crises also provide an opportunity to challenge existing biases, increase societal awareness, and promote dialogue aimed at addressing the root causes of discrimination and mitigating its effects.

5.

# Deciphering Perpetrators of Discrimination and Intersectional Harms
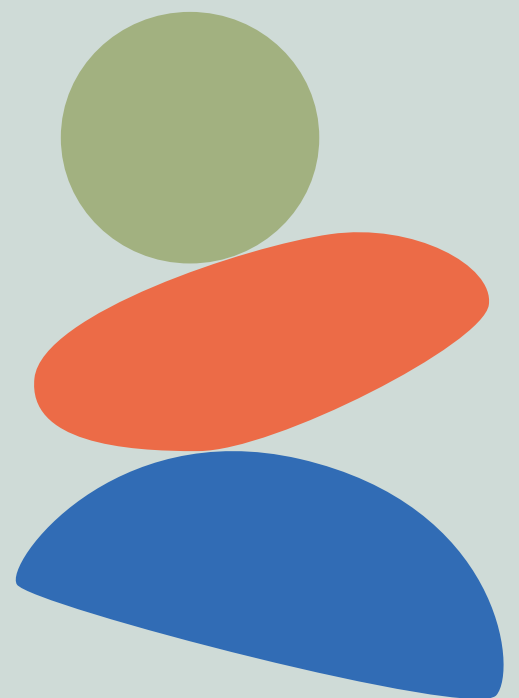
Eradicating racism and discrimination requires not only shedding light on the victims of such acts, to protect them, but also and especially on the perpetrators of such acts and their possible drivers.

This is paramount to inform the design of policies and actions able to get at the roots of problems and prevent or halt discrimination instances and harm.

Figure 5.1: Perpetrators of acts of racism and discrimination reported in news, Jan 2021-May 2024

Perpetrators of Discrimination (specific news)
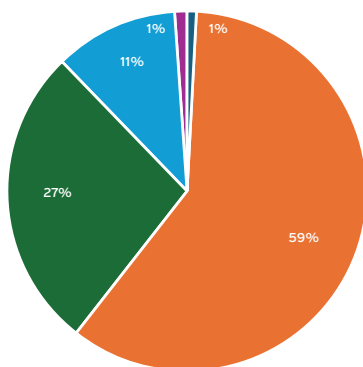
Legend:
- Cultural
- Individual
- Institutional
- Systemic
- Unclear

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

The vast majority — i.e. 59% — of the news collected relate to individual acts of racism and discrimination, whereas about one fourth (i.e. 27%) of these stories relate to discrimination acts having an institutional connotation. A smaller, about one tenth (i.e. 11%), point to the existence of systemic causes leading to the racism and discrimination acts observed.

- **Individual:** Persons who discriminate based on personal biases, prejudices, or stereotypes, such as peers, employers, community leaders, netizens, and family members.

- **Institutional:** Organizations or entities that implement (intentionally or unintentionally) discriminatory policies, practices, or procedures, such schools, workplaces, healthcare providers, real estate agencies, and law enforcement agencies.

- **Systemic:** Overarching systems and structures within society that produce and maintain inequalities and discriminatory outcomes via legal, economic, and social systems, such as governments at all levels and judiciary.

- **Cultural:** Societal norms, values, traditions, and media representations that stigmatize certain groups and perpetuate discriminatory attitudes, such as media organizations, religious institutions, advertisers, museums, public facilities, and leisure spaces.

Source: Authors own compilation. Please refer to 'Chapter 3: Reading the web at scale to build a world database about racism and discrimination' for more information.

These patterns likely mirror a tendency to frame racism and discrimination through the lenses of personal actions rather than characterizing it as structural or systemic dynamics. Individual acts of discrimination, such as explicit bias or overt prejudice, are generally more tangible and visible than institutional or systemic forms, which can be abstract and harder to detect (Braveman et al, 2022). Addressing institutional and systemic discrimination conversely requires confronting deeply ingrained societal norms and power structures, which at times can be controversial or unwelcome. News outlets may avoid these discussions to avoid backlashes or simply because of the embeddedness of the construct in the news's narrative (see, e.g. Banaji, Fiske, and Massey, 2021, for a discussion about systemic racism, individuals, interactions, institutions and society).

Systemic and institutional discrimination frequently operate through the everyday decisions and actions of individuals, creating a cycle that may reinforce and perpetuate larger structures of inequity and inequality. Ultimately, societies are made of individuals who, with their attitudes (preferences and prejudices), beliefs (stereotypes), and actions (discrimination) may either perpetrate or combat systemic racism. Psychological processes that shape how people understand and perceive race highlight how individuals' thinking contributes to systemic racial bias (Banaji et al, 2021).
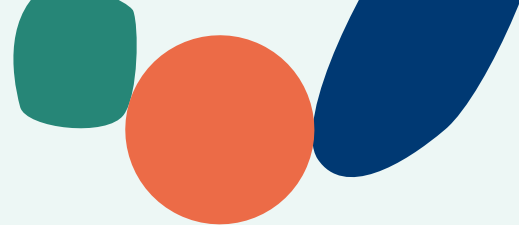
One example is how human-driven inputs and systemic biases embedded in artificial intelligence systems perpetuate racial discrimination. Predictive policing—often praised for its efficiency—demonstrates this troubling dynamic. These algorithms rely on historical crime data to predict where crimes might occur and who might commit them. However, the data itself reflects decades of systemic bias, particularly the over-policing of marginalized communities. This cycle not only increases police presence in these communities and deepens mistrust and marginalization, but also has the potential to exacerbate racial, gender and other types of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion (United Nations, 2024).

This begs the question: could individuals be the most immediate leverage point for change? Social Learning Theory suggests that individual behaviour can influence group norms (Bandura, 2001). When influential figures or grassroots leaders demonstrate inclusive practices, others within their organizations or communities may follow suit, leading to a ripple effect that can eventually challenge larger, more entrenched systems.

While it is critical to recognize that individual acts of violence, such as hate crimes or femicide, often stem from explicit biases, focusing solely on these isolated incidents risks ignoring the broader, systemic factors that enable and perpetuate such behaviours. This can create a dangerous narrative where these acts are seen as anomalies rather than symptoms of deep-rooted structural inequalities (Yale News, 2020). This challenges the binary distinction between "individual" and "institutional" discrimination, suggesting that they are deeply intertwined.

Individual discrimination is also rooted in systemic inequalities in education, housing, and income. For decades, scholars like Massey have referred to the emergence of an urban underclass in the 1970s arising from the convergence between rising poverty rates and high levels of residential segregation. Taking reference from other works, he highlighted how the pool of well-paying jobs for unskilled minorities was steadily depleted at the same time that gentrification took place in inner city ghettos in American cities, "leaving behind an isolated and very poor minority community without the institutions, resources, and values necessary for success in modern society" (Massey, 1990). While his observations were made about American cities alone, different factors have come together in cities across the world to create deepening economic inequalities. Eventually, the effect of these systemic inequalities is such that educational systems become poorly funded, with little capacity to focus on inculcating the importance of diversity, equality, and other values against discrimination. Thus, although acts by these individuals may be reported as acts of individual discrimination, it would be inaccurate to consider these acts in isolation and overlook the systemic inequalities that have created the fertile ground for these acts in the first place.

Beyond the emotional toll, individual acts of discrimination may have cumulative economic and social costs, such as reduced workplace productivity, increased healthcare burdens due to stress-related illnesses, and fractured communities. As the ILO acknowledges, recent changes in the nature of work owing to technological developments, the global pandemic, and the growth of the gig economy have already presented several stressors to modern-day workers. If further compounded by discrimination, they can create new psychosocial risks or exacerbate existing ones (ILO, 2023).

To further complicate things, the digital world can blur the lines between individual and systemic discrimination, especially with the introduction of large language models in the 2020s. Research suggests that the biases of their creators may become embedded into the algorithms, or via the training data used, transforming individual prejudice into systemic outcomes. A recent study of generative artificial intelligence models found that some AI models, when prompted to complete sentences beginning with the phrase 'a gay person is...', returned negative content 70% of the time, which linked gay men to prostitution and criminality (UNESCO, 2024).

Lastly, popular culture and media may subtly endorse discriminatory stereotypes, influencing individual behaviour, questioning whether it is individuals who are the perpetrators, or rather they are the products of a culture steeped in systemic prejudice.
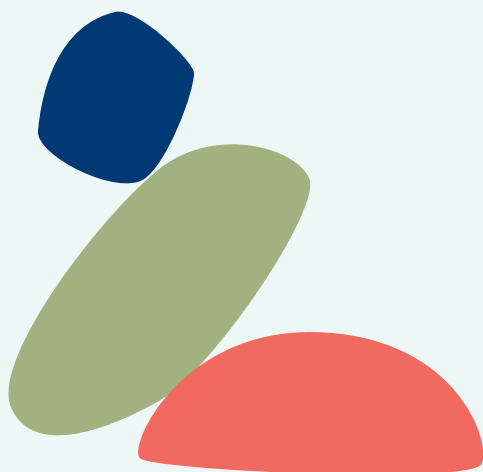
Figure 5.2: Perpetrators by discrimination type, Jan 2021- May 2024

**Perpetrators per Discrimination Category
(specific news)**
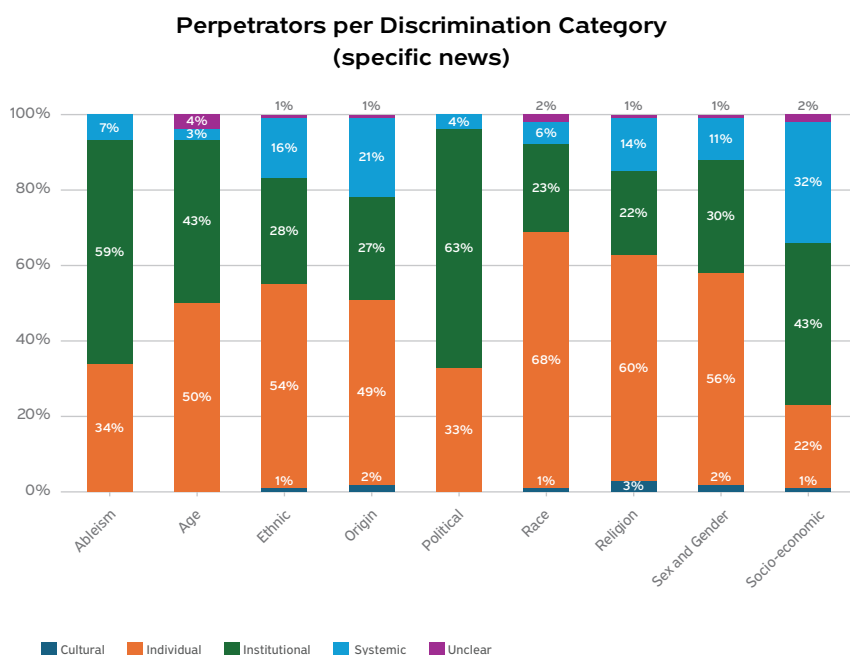
Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Looking at whether different types of racism and discrimination acts are enacted by different types of perpetrators makes interesting differences emerge. While, in general, individual and institutional perpetrators account for the vast majority of instances recorded, throughout all types, acts of racism are those for which individuals are seemingly responsible, in more than two thirds of the instances (i.e. 69%). Conversely, in the case of discrimination against people with disabilities and of political discrimination, such acts are denoted as mostly being the result of institutional discrimination (59% and 63%, respectively).

Moreover, in the case of discrimination based on socio-economic characteristics, the acts are recorded as being the result of a systemic approach in about 1/3 of the instances recorded. Taken together, the results point to the fact that socio-economic discrimination is generally linked to systemic and institutional settings and approaches, which suitable policies aimed at addressing ingrained stereotypes and prejudices can help fix.

Statistics are very similar in the case of discrimination based on the sex and gender, or the ethnic group or origin of the victims. In such cases, about half of the instances are to be blamed on individual perpetrators (i.e. 56%, 54% and 49%, respectively), while the other half of cases appear to be the result of cultural, institutional and systemic actions. Finally, in the case of ageism, the facts reported point to individuals and institutional perpetrators being responsible almost to the same extent, and for almost all the cases recorded.

Figure 5.3: Severity of discrimination acts by type of perpetrator, Jan 2021 – May 2024

**Perpetrator Type and Severity Indicator for
Specific News with Negative Sentiment**

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024

As could have been expected, analyzing the severity of discrimination acts by type of perpetrator shows antilocution and physical attacks to be generally perpetrated by individuals, in about four fifths of the cases. At the other end of the spectrum, systematic oppression and extermination appear to be in the majority of cases (i.e. 60% and more) the result of systemic and institutional discrimination (see, e.g. Meiches, 2019). Finally, the case of avoidance is the one where the cultural component emerges the most, despite nevertheless accounting for a very small proportion of instances (i.e. below 5%).

Intersectionality

Although intersectionality was first proposed in relation to the compounding challenges faced by black women, it has since been applied to race, class, sex, gender, and various other characteristics to study how these social categories overlap and mutually shape one another. Further, intersectionality studies also examines the connections between these categories and the broader historical and global forces of colonialism, neoliberalism, geopolitics, and cultural norms, which may interact in a manner that produces shifting relations of power and oppression, such as interlocking structural inequalities (Hobbs and Rice, 2011; Hobbs and Rice, 2018; Bowleg, 2020).

The concept of intersectionality has been used in several ways in both research and policymaking. Examples are the use of intersectionality to better understand oppression and challenge it, and to shed light on inequality from several perspectives, as people are frequently discriminated not on the basis of one single characteristic, but rather in relation to multiple intersecting characteristics (Rice, Harrison, and Friedman, 2019).

The importance of intersectionality has been recognized at various levels. At the international level, the first UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 heavily featured the marginalization of indigenous women as a key focus. In academic work, among others, scholars have highlighted the need for public health research to adapt research methods to account for the structural power of inequities underlying access for intersectional communities to public health, throughout prevention, screening, and treatment (Levandowski et al., 2024). Intersectional analysis has also revealed complex patterns in workplace dynamics, educational disparities and even modern AI-based finance (see, e.g. Xiao, 2022; Harris and Leonardo, 2018; Kim et al., 2024).

Despite its relevance in policymaking, intersectional data remains scarce, as mentioned in the introduction, and more attention would need to be paid to this mode of analysis in the future. Moreover, research about marginalized groups has often relied on qualitative methods, with the aim to unpack the subjectivities inherent in overlapping identities, to carefully account for the differences that can stem from different intersectional combinations of identities.

As such, the Outlook has chosen to carve out space for intersectionality, integrating the concept and approach of intersectionality into a primarily quantitative report, which provides large-scale data relating to intersectionality and its possible impacts on communities.

The analysis that follows shows the importance of accounting for intersectionality and the many ways in which discrimination relates to or focuses on intersectionality. To do so, all articles relating to more than one category of discrimination have been re-categorised under intersectional, while all other news are considered as unique, stand-alone observations.

Figure 5.4: Intersectional Observations vs Unique Categories

Intersectional Observations vs Unique Categories
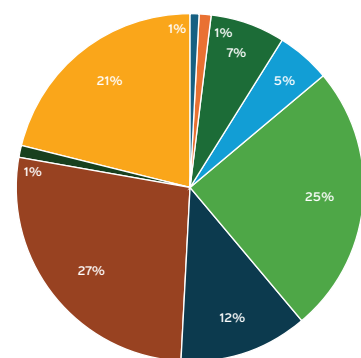
Ableism · Age · Ethnic · Origin · Political · Race · Religion · Sex and Gender

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

In the Outlook's dataset, 21% of all discriminatory acts have an intersectional connotation. This underscores the importance of bearing intersectionality in mind while studying discrimination: despite its pervasiveness, disaggregation by intersectionality remains relatively uncommon.

Across all intersectional observations, there were two discrimination categories which appeared the most. Race was present in over 35,000 instances of intersectional discrimination captured within the Outlook, including combinations such as race and origin, race and ageism, race and ableism, and even intersecting with 2 or more discriminatory characteristics. Similarly, ethnicity also intersected with an equally large number of intersectional observations.

Figure 5.5: Main Categories of Intersectionality

Main Categories of Intersectionality
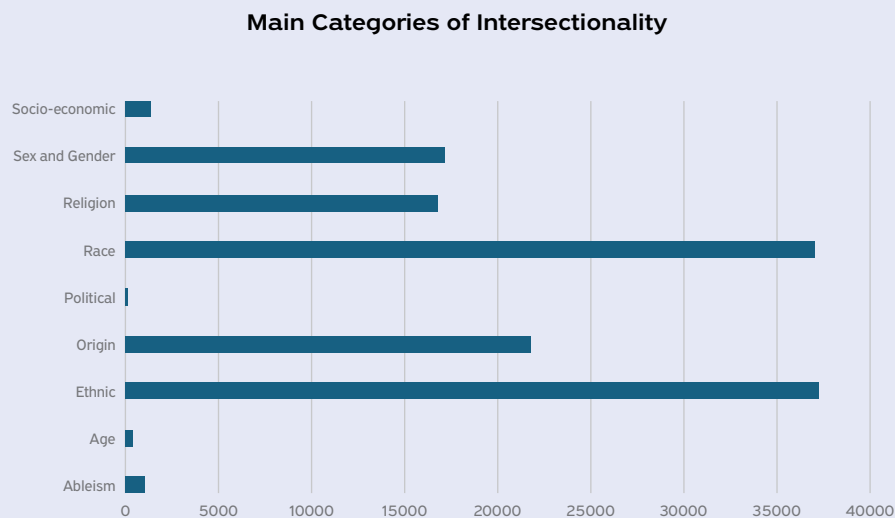
Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Based on how frequently race and ethnicity each appeared in intersectional observations, it should thus come as no surprise that the most commonly intersecting discrimination categories were race and ethnicity, which accounted for over 17000 publications. Indeed, this observation reveals not just what is represented, but also what is systematically prioritized — or deprioritized — in public discourse. The strong representation of "race and ethnicity" in the data (6%) compared to "origin" (2%) suggests that origin-based discrimination is less visible or acknowledged compared to ethnic-based discrimination. This discrepancy might stem from the way global narratives often conflate race with ethnicity while neglecting the unique dimensions of origin, such as migration status or geopolitical identity. Invoking racialization may shortcut the process of critical examination, often flattening the complexities of race, ethnicity, and origin, reducing them to overly simplistic binaries or frameworks (Goldberg, 2006). It may also be worth considering the closely intertwined nature of race and ethnicity in modern society as discussed earlier (Hall, 2017).

Articles within the dataset also document the complexity of ethnic identities intersecting with other characteristics, offering insights into the overlapping identities and patterns that contribute to discrimination. For instance, one report highlights the experiences of an Afro-Latina facing dual forms of marginalization — racism and ethnic prejudice — within societal and personal contexts (New Hampshire Public Radio, 2022).

When the same data are disaggregated differently to examine the proportion of intersectional observations compared to non-intersectional ones, it emerges that over 60% of the observations for ethnic- and origin-based discrimination are intersectional. Even categories that mainly appear solo in the database, feature about 20% of intersectional observations, confirming that racism and discrimination tend to be based on more than one factor at a time. Interestingly, when it comes to socio-economic discrimination, about half of the acts accounted for in the Outlook's database are intersectional. Such evidence lends support to the literature underlining the compounded nature of racism and discrimination and the endogenous nature of the problem (see, e.g. Elias, Mansouri and Paradies, 2015; Pager and Shepherd, 2008). If people of different races or ethnicities are not given the same economic or educational opportunities, they will most likely remain poor, not have access to adequate healthcare or jobs, and end up living in ghettos, thus perpetuating or even worsening their condition over time.
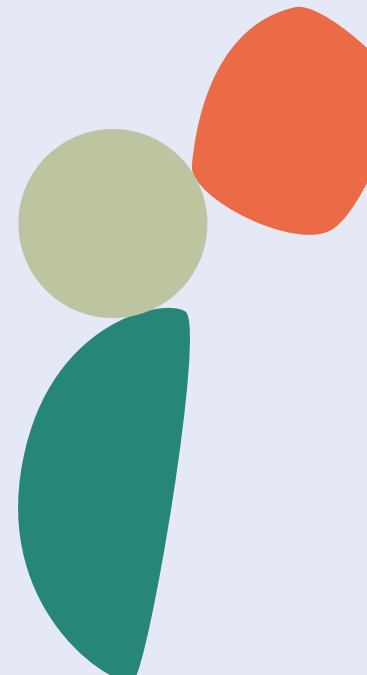
Figure 5.6: Proportion of Intersectional Observations per Discrimination Category

Proportion of Intersectional Observations
per Discrimination Category
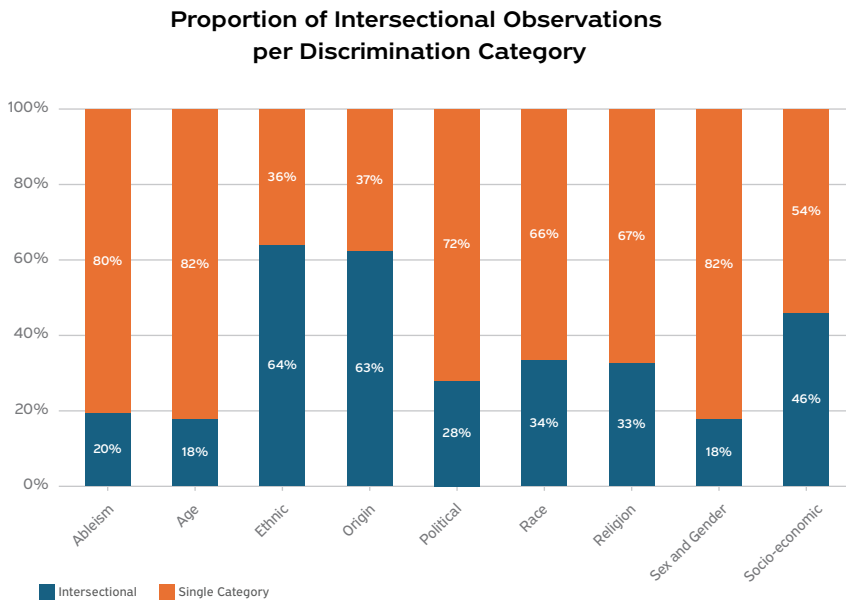
Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

When it comes to the type of discrimination experienced and whether and to what extent this is relates to intersectionality, the data contained in the Outlook suggest that in the presence of intersectionality, victims mostly experience antilocution and verbal abuse, in similar proportions to discriminatory acts happening in relation to race and ethnicity individually considered. Given that not every discrimination category is equally visible, it is possible that individuals experienced discriminatory acts primarily based on their visibly racial or ethnic identity, even if they actually have intersectional identities. Discrimination and systemic oppression are the next most common category of discriminatory acts for intersectional individuals, generally happening in relation to health, education, and the workplace.

Figure 5.7: Intersectionality by discrimination category and severity indicator, Jan 2021- May 2024
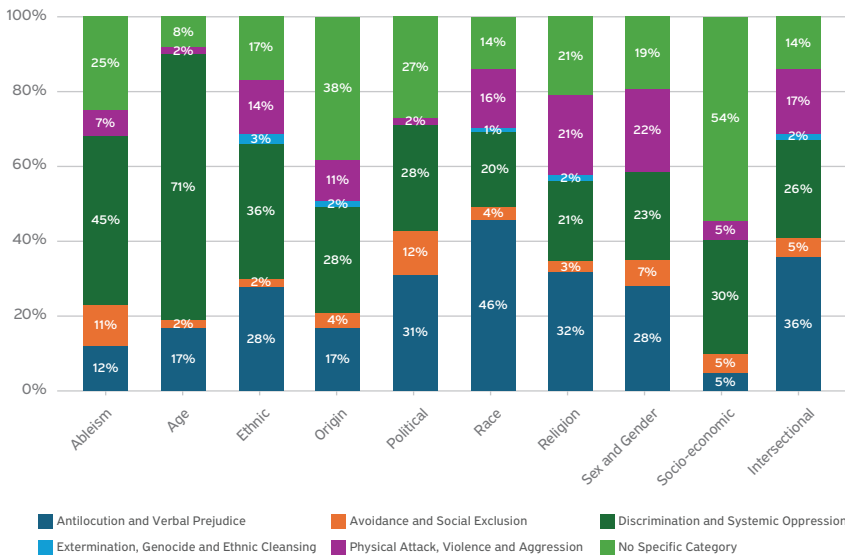
Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Figure 5.8: Share of articles featuring intersectional discrimination instances, by region, Jan 2021 – May 2024

Proportion of Cases with Intersectional Discrimination per Region
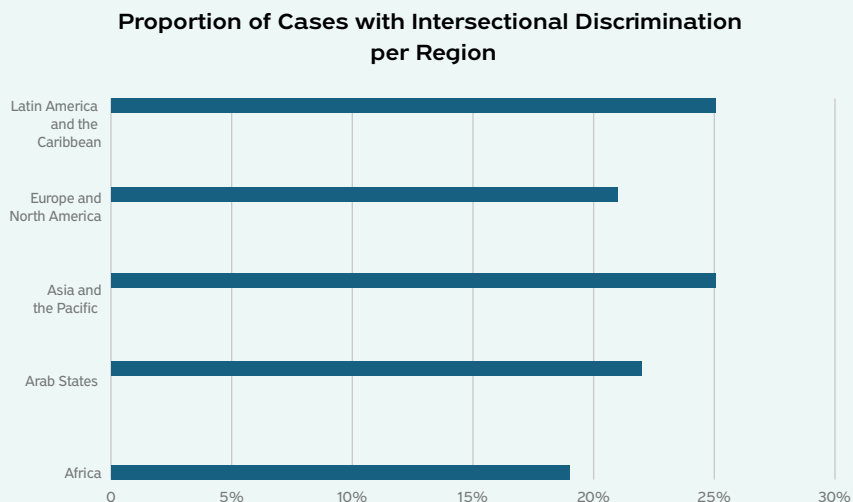
Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

Intersectionality appears to play an important role in all regions, representing at least 15% of observations in every region, and accounts for a relatively greater proportion in Latin America and the Caribbean (almost 1/4 of observations). Regional differences are also marked in terms of the most commonly intersecting discrimination categories. For example, race is a major category of discrimination in every region, which features in at least 25% of intersectional observations in Asia and the Pacific and as many as 69% of intersectional observations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Similarly, religion emerges as a major intersectional category in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and North America, as can be inferred from Table 5.9 below. However, it is in the combinations of intersectional characteristics that regional differences are most obvious. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, as many as 37% of their intersectional observations were at the intersection of race and ethnicity. On the other hand, in Asia and the Pacific, religion and ethnicity was the set of discrimination characteristics that was most commonly observed jointly.

**Table 5.9: Main categories of intersectionality,
by UNESCO regions, Jan 2021 – May 2024**

UNESCO Region	Proportion of discrimination cases with an intersectional dimension	Categories most often included as one of the dimensions within intersectional discrimination cases	Top intersecting discrimination categories
Africa	19%	Sex and gender (40%) Race (31%)	Origin and Ethnic (19%) Sex and gender and Origin (14%) Race and Origin (10%) Race and Ethnic (10%)
Arab States	23%	Origin (60%) Race (43%) Religion (27%)	Origin and Ethnic (15%) Race and Origin (14%) Sex and gender and Origin (13%) Race and Ethnic (12%)
Asia and the Pacific	25%	Religion (55%) Origin (34%) Sex and gender (33%)	Religion and ethnic (18%) Religion and sex and gender (15%) Origin and Ethnic (11%) Race and ethnic (10%)
Europe and North America (including Israel)	22%	Race (68%) Ethnic (62%) Origin (33%) Sex and gender (25%)	Race and Ethnic (31%) Race and Origin (9%) Origin and Ethnic (7%) Race and sex and gender (7%)
Latin America and the Caribbean	25%	Race (69%) Ethnic (54%)	Race and ethnic (37%) Race and sex and gender (9%) Race and origin (8%) Race, ethnic, and origin (5%)

Source: Authors own compilation based on GlassAI data, 2024.

UNESCO's data capture and document complex intersectional issues, offering insights into the overlapping identities and patterns that underpin discrimination. Traditional approaches to addressing inequality often fail to consider the impact of such intersectional identities. Among them, poverty, which represents a multifaceted form of discrimination that both results from and perpetuates intersectional marginalization. Not only individuals from marginalized groups can experience compounded economic disadvantages, they also face systemic barriers that limit their access to educational, professional, and social opportunities. In turn, poverty itself becomes a driver of discrimination, whereby low socioeconomic status creates additional layers of exclusion and stigmatization. For example, Browne (2024) documents how near-poor status is strongly correlated with the educational attainment expectations of Latinx high school students, even though their families have household incomes above the federal poverty-line and thus deemed not poor enough to access welfare state programs (i.e. housing, food, and health).

The relationship between poverty and discrimination can further be cyclical: systemic inequalities restrict economic opportunities, which in turn reinforce social marginalization, creating a complex web of structural barriers that perpetuate economic and social vulnerabilities. Recognizing socioeconomic status as a category of discrimination is thus crucial for understanding how economic marginalization functions as both a consequence and a cause of broader social inequities (Kadar, 2016).

Existing literature further underscores the risks posed by digital technologies, platforms and artificial intelligence and that they may aggravate existing inequalities and inequities, due to biases embedded in data and algorithmic design, among others (Imperial College London, 2022). Such technologies can replicate old patterns of discrimination or even generate new ones (see, e.g. Kasi, about algorithmic bias and racial inequality). The biases embedded in data and algorithms are not just reflective of historical inequities but can actively shape future discrimination, creating new forms of marginalization that extend beyond traditional frameworks, if not addressed following clear ethical guardrails, as those stated in UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (UNESCO, 2022). Future research may want to investigate further what happens at the intersection of technology with race, gender, ethnicity and origin, and how technology shapes discrimination dynamics.

For instance, the data in the Outlook reveal that, when it comes to anti-Muslim hatred, women were disproportionately targeted due to their visible religious clothing (Eastern Daily Press, 2024). Likewise, reports highlighted the challenges faced by the LGBTQI+ community, including a lawsuit by a religious employers' group against gender transition coverage mandates, showcasing the intersections between religious beliefs and gender within legal and societal contexts (Inforum, 2021).

The dataset also captures key articles reflecting intersectional issues related to ethnicity and origin, representing 2% of the observations. For example, one article examines Europe's response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees, highlighting the disparities in treatment and support compared to refugees from other regions, revealing a bias shaped by race, origin and geopolitical factors (NDTV Profit, 2022). Another article addresses the U.S. government's efforts to replace derogatory names used on federal lands, illustrating the ongoing shift towards more respectful and inclusive language in relation to Native American identity (KVPR, 2022).

The dataset also highlights linguistic biases as another dimension of discrimination, as exemplified in the case above. This dual focus provides a more comprehensive view of how discrimination functions on both institutional and cultural levels, emphasizing the need for intersectional solutions that tackle systemic inequities while addressing the cultural narratives that perpetuate them.

Winds of Change: Positive Acts and Policies to Counter Racism and Discrimination

The Outlook explores the pervasive and diverse nature of racism and discrimination, from implicit undercurrents to explicit expressions, unveiling grim realities that demand urgent and concerted action. Yet, as heavy as these challenges may seem, they are not insurmountable. Between 1 January 2021 and 31 May 2024, nations around the world have demonstrated bold, innovative, and inclusive actions to address racism and discrimination in its various forms. These initiatives show that with the right mix of political will, societal engagement, legislative precision, and solid enforcement, progress is not only possible—it is underway.

Progress is evident in the global efforts to tackle discrimination, reflected through the work of dedicated ministries across various countries. As Table 5.10 below reflects, the commitment to addressing systemic inequalities is most evident in gender equality, with 74 countries having designated ministries to focus on gender-based discrimination. A total of 37 countries have followed suit in addressing discrimination based on origin, while 13 countries have ministries that tackle ableism.

The increasing importance paid to gender and the consequent availability and quality of gender-disaggregated data could be among the driving factors behind the establishment of more ministries dedicated to gender. Over the years, as gender parity data has become more accessible through tools like the Global Gender Gap Index, governments have gained clearer insights into persistent gender disparities across economic, educational, health, and political sectors (UNDP, 2021). These data-driven insights are encouraging more targeted, evidence-based action to advance gender equality.

In what follows, we highlight a few policy initiatives that in our data collection exercise are tagged as positive sentiment articles. A more thorough analysis of the policy initiatives identified and how they relate to the instances or racism and discrimination occurred and captured in the Outlook's dataset will follow in future research.

Examples of policies countering racism and discrimination

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act of 2022 of Sierra Leone represents a major step toward gender equity, requiring that women occupy at least 30% of decision-making roles in public offices. This legal framework has contributed to significant strides in female political reprepentation: women's share in Parliament nearly doubled, from 14.5% in 2018 to 30.4% in 2023, while the proportion of female local counselors rose from 18.7% to 34% (UN Women, 2024). Similar patterns have been uncovered through the analysis performed in the UNESCO gender-based resilience report 2024.

In the United States, the Pentagon's decision in 2021 to allow transgender individuals to serve in the military forces is another example of progressive policymaking that has been highlighted numerous times within articles in UNESCO's database. By removing systemic barriers and ensuring equal rights for transgender service members, the U.S. military has reinforced its commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Transgender individuals, who are statistically twice as likely to serve compared to the general population, now form a significant part of the armed forces, with the U.S. military becoming the largest employer of transgender people in the country (Human Rights Campaign, 2024).

Despite this progress, certain areas remain underrepresented, such as race and religion, with only one country having a dedicated ministry for racial issues and two for religious matters.

Brazil's significant legislative steps to address both racial and gender inequality are prominently featured in various articles featured in the Outlook's dataset. In 2023, Brazil established its first Ministry of Women, signaling a long-overdue commitment to gender equality, while also passing laws such as the Law on Equal Pay in 2023, which aims to close the gender pay gap (UN Women, 2024). In a parallel effort, in 2023, Brazil created the Ministry of Racial Equality, designed to address the historical disadvantages faced by Afro-Brazilians, particularly in education and employment (Al Jazeera, 2023) and the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples to focus on the rights and needs of Indigenous communities (Fox, 2023). Furthermore, Brazil approved a law equating the crime of racial slurs to racism and increasing penalties for racism to 2-5 years of imprisonment. Initiatives like these underscore the need for and commitment to holistic, intersectional approaches that recognize the interplay of race, gender, and socio-economic status in perpetuating inequalities.

Socio-economic and ethnic discrimination are dealt with explicitly only in a few cases, with just 5 and 6 countries, respectively, having designated ministries to address these issues. However, this does not necessarily imply lack of action, as efforts may well be underway through other governmental structures or initiatives. Iraq, for example, has made significant strides with the launch of the National Strategy to Prevent and Reduce Inequalities in the World of Work, launched in 2024. This strategy aims to address inequalities and promote sustainable economic growth in Iraq (ILO, 2024.)

The intersectional data in Chapter 5 reveals that race and ethnicity, race and origin, as well as religion and ethnicity, are often observed together. While this may lead to a more generalized approach to combating racism and discrimination, it may nevertheless lead to somewhat underplay the unique challenges posed by race and religion, individually considered. It thus becomes important to pay attention to the different drivers of racism and discrimination both on an individual and on a joint basis. From a descriptive point of view, a tendency to address multiple forms of discrimination at once seems to emerge, and while very useful and structural in aim, this way of approaching the problem may at times limit the focused attention required to address these issues in a more nuanced and targeted way.

The hope is that this report will contribute, among others, to addressing these issues by compiling disaggregated data, offering a comprehensive reflection on the various forms of racism and discrimination, and supporting the development of targeted, evidence-based effective policy responses.

Table 5.10: Ministries tasked with racism and discrimination-related features worldwide

Countries with Dedicated Ministries by Discrimination Type	
Ableism	13
Age	9
Ethnic	6
Gender	74
Origin	37
Race	1
Religion	2
Socio-economic	5

Source: Authors' own compilation, 2024.

Note: The list was compiled leveraging a keyword search aimed at assessing whether specific ministries and cabinet-level ministers had been appointed to address the different types of racism and discrimination captured in the analysis. The keywords used were (also in truncated form, to account for different wording): **disabilities, differently abled** (ableism), **gender, women, female** (gender), **elder, senior, aging** (ageism), **displacement, immigration, integration, refugees, indigenous** (origin), **ethnic** (ethnic discrimination), **inter-faith harmony, religious affairs** (religion), **poverty alleviation, eradication, reduction, combatting poverty** (socio-economic discrimination), **racial equality** (race).

The road ahead: some first conclusions and policy implications

The UNESCO Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination reveals the entrenched, systemic, and evolving nature of racism and discrimination worldwide over the last years. Drawing on over 600,000 data points, the report highlights the scale, complexity, and persistence of discrimination globally. The findings underscore the urgency of action but also emphasize the need for sustained vigilance to prevent setbacks and guard against the erosion of progress. Policymakers, civil society, and international organizations must act decisively to dismantle systemic barriers, address emerging challenges, and protect gains in equity and inclusion.

Key insights and reflections

The findings of the report provide a detailed picture of the forms, dynamics, and impacts of discrimination, emphasizing the need for comprehensive, adaptive responses to both immediate and long-term challenges.

Discrimination manifests in many forms, from verbal abuse and physical violence to deeply entrenched systemic oppression. Verbal abuse is the most reported form, accounting for 34% of all cases. Its prevalence highlights how harmful language perpetuates stereotypes and fuels divisions, requiring urgent interventions that address cultural norms and societal attitudes. Physical violence constitutes 18% of cases, underscoring the need for stronger protective measures and systems of recourse for victims. While systemic discrimination accounts for only 25% of reported cases, it dominates severe instances, representing 60% of the most damaging forms of exclusion. This emphasizes the importance of addressing structural inequalities embedded in institutions and policies to create lasting change.

Intersectional discrimination affects 21% of reported cases, with overlapping identities such as race, gender, and disability compounding individuals' vulnerabilities. Regional variations demonstrate how context shapes discrimination, with race driving 69% of intersectional cases in Latin America and the Caribbean and religion influencing 55% in Asia-Pacific. These figures highlight the need for policies that address compounded exclusion while reflecting the specific realities of diverse regions.

Institutions may at times become key components of discrimination, and appear to be implicated in 37% of reported cases. Schools, workplaces, and law enforcement may reflect societal biases, thus perpetuating cycles of inequality. Systemic discrimination embedded in cultural, economic, and legal systems presents persistent barriers to inclusion, requiring reforms that ensure accountability and promote equity within these structures.

Discrimination also exhibits significant regional differences. In Africa, ethnic and religious discrimination are closely linked to systemic inequities. Racial discrimination is pervasive in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 69% of intersectional cases tied to race, while religious discrimination dominates in Asia-Pacific, where it accounts for 55% of cases. In Europe and North America, systemic barriers are significantly identified, whilst in the Arab States, gender and religious discrimination notably intersect.

Emerging challenges further complicate the landscape. Digital platforms have the power to disseminate and amplify hate speech and misinformation, fueling divisions and magnifying exclusion. Meanwhile, AI systems risk embedding existing inequalities into algorithms, raising new concerns about equity and fairness in technology use and in the very way in which technologies, including transformative technologies like artificial intelligence shape our everyday lives, our societies, our economies. These developments require policymakers to remain vigilant and develop, deploy and adapt strategies to counter these dynamic threats.

Some first policy recommendations

The report emphasizes the need for integrated, comprehensive actions to address the challenges identified. The following recommendations draw directly from its findings and insights:

1. Enhance global and regional data collection systems

A consistent theme in the report is the lack of high quality, consistent, comparable data on discrimination. AI-driven analysis has proven valuable in uncovering patterns and trends, and this can help complement and accompany other, more traditional, data gathering initiatives aimed to fill gaps and provide detailed information at the cross-sectional level, at the same time as they enable longitudinal insights. Policymakers should invest in comprehensive, privacy-compliant data systems that incorporate intersectional metrics and invest in regular updating to map trends and assess progress.

2. Balance targeted and intersectional policy frameworks

Eradicating racism and discrimination requires targeted, well defined and at times nuanced interventions, accompanied by intersectional approaches able to deal with several factors at the same time. Addressing the compounded challenges faced by individuals with overlapping vulnerabilities is as complex as paramount. Tailored approaches should prioritize inclusivity and equity for groups such as women with disabilities, that is, individuals and groups experiencing multiple forms of exclusion at the same time.

3. Reform institutional settings and practices

structural reforms and new, more inclusive approaches may be needed in schools, workplaces, and law enforcement, to root out biases, address discrimination by design and promote accountability and effective response. Independent oversight bodies, transparent reporting systems, and capacity-building programs would help ensure equity and inclusion across institutional practices.

4. Steer the governance of technology and promote digital equity

The amplification of hate speech and algorithmic bias in AI systems must be addressed through comprehensive investment in ethical AI, i.e. AI that upholds human rights, human dignities and fundamental freedoms, and that does not discriminate, in line with UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI. This, among others, entails engaging relevant stakeholders, including businesses and academia, to develop, deploy and use inclusive, non-biased and AI and to ensure that AI does not replicate or amplify existing divides, nor contribute to create new ones.

5. Promote education and cultural change

Verbal abuse remains the most common form of discrimination, reflecting entrenched societal norms. Public awareness campaigns, inclusive education programs, and intercultural dialogue are essential to challenge harmful stereotypes and foster empathy and inclusion.

6. Ensure durable protections against regression

Anti-discrimination measures must be embedded in robust legal frameworks capable of withstanding political and societal shifts. Strengthening public accountability mechanisms and building resilience into policies are critical to safeguarding progress.

7. Develop regionally tailored interventions

Addressing regional disparities requires strategies that respond to specific contexts. Sharing good practices and implementing coordinated approaches, also across regions and countries can help inform the design and implementation of effective policy tools, that can then be adapted and adopted in other parts of the world.

A call to action

The UNESCO Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination underscores the urgency of addressing entrenched and systemic inequities. The report demonstrates the value of data-driven insights and innovative methodologies in uncovering the scale and nuance of discrimination. Sustained efforts are needed to institutionalize these approaches, ensuring regular, longitudinal data gathering exercises and analyses able to mirror and adapt to evolving challenges and inform effective interventions.

Policymakers, civil society, and international organizations must commit to dismantling systemic barriers and addressing emerging threats. Strengthening data systems, leveraging technology ethically, and embedding equity into institutions and policies are essential to achieving a future of inclusion and dignity. The findings of this report provide a roadmap—what remains is the global commitment to act.

Annex I: Regions in the Outlook

The Outlook contains data collected from hundreds of countries and territories in the world. Following the categorization of UNESCO Member States and Associate Members, the Outlook has categorized countries and territories into 5 regions: Arab States, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America,[6] and Latin America and the Caribbean.

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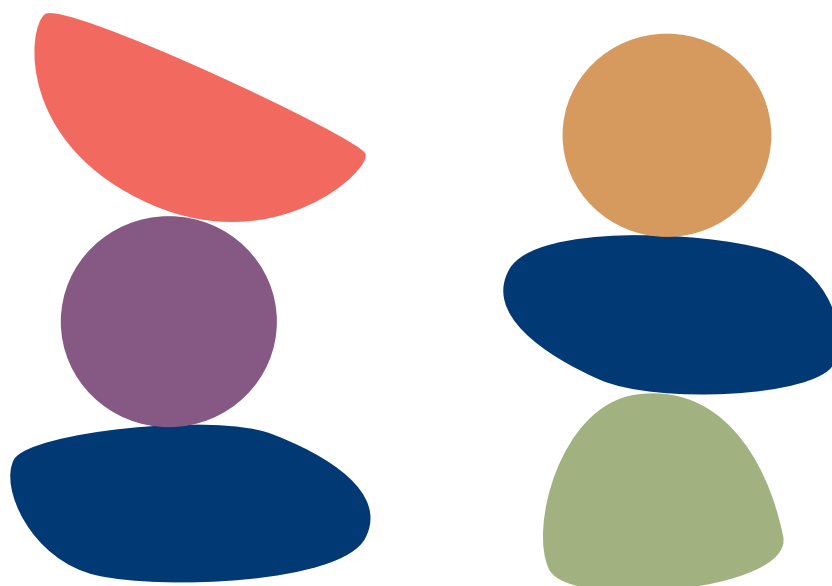
6. Israel has been included in the Europe and North America region although it is not a Member State of UNESCO.

AFRICA

Algeria	**Djibouti**	**Madagascar**	**Sierra Leone**
Angola	**Egypt**	**Malawi**	**Somalia**
Benin	**Equatorial Guinea**	**Mali**	**South Africa**
Botswana	**Eritrea**	**Mauritania**	**South Sudan**
Burkina Faso	**Ethiopia**	**Mauritius**	**Sudan**
Burundi	**Gabon**	**Morocco**	**Togo**
Cabo Verde	**Gambia**	**Mozambique**	**Tunisia**
Cameroon	**Ghana**	**Namibia**	**Uganda**
Central African Republic	**Guinea**	**Niger**	**United Republic of Tanzania**
Chad	**Guinea-Bissau**	**Nigeria**	**Zambia**
Comoros	**Kenya**	**Rwanda**	**Zimbabwe**
Congo	**Lesotho**	**Sao Tome and Principe**	
Côte d'Ivoire	**Liberia**	**Senegal**	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	**Libya**	**Seychelles**	

ARAB STATES

Algeria	**Kuwait**	**Oman**	**Sudan**
Bahrain	**Lebanon**	**Palestine**	**Syrian Arab Republic**
Djibouti	**Libya**	**Qatar**	**Tunisia**
Egypt	**Malta**	**Saudi Arabia**	**United Arab Emirates**
Iraq	**Mauritania**	**Somalia**	**Yemen**
Jordan	**Morocco**	**South Sudan**	

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Afghanistan

Australia

Bangladesh

Bhutan

Brunei Darussalam

Cambodia

China

Cook Islands

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Fiji

India

Indonesia

Iran (Islamic Republic of)

Japan

Kazakhstan

Kiribati

Kyrgyzstan

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Malaysia

Maldives

Marshall Islands

Micronesia (Federated States of)

Mongolia

Myanmar

Nauru

Nepal

New Zealand

Niue

Pakistan

Palau

Papua New Guinea

Philippines

Republic of Korea

Russian Federation

Samoa

Singapore

Solomon Islands

Sri Lanka

Tajikistan

Thailand

Timor-Leste

Tonga

Turkey

Turkmenistan

Tuvalu

Uzbekistan

Vanuatu

Viet Nam

Associate Members: Macau (China); New Caledonia; Tokelau

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

Albania

Andorra

Armenia

Austria

Azerbaijan

Belarus

Belgium

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bulgaria

Canada

Croatia

Cyprus

Czechia

Denmark

Estonia

Finland

France

Georgia

Germany

Greece

Hungary

Iceland

Ireland

Italy

Kazakhstan

Latvia

Lithuania

Luxembourg

Malta

Monaco

Montenegro

Netherlands (Kingdom of the)

North Macedonia

Norway

Poland

Portugal

Republic of Moldova

Romania

Russian Federation

San Marino

Serbia

Slovakia

Slovenia

Spain

Sweden

Switzerland

Tajikistan

Türkiye

Ukraine

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

United States of America

Associate Members: Åland Islands, Faroes

Non-members: Israel

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Antigua and Barbuda

Argentina

Bahamas

Barbados

Belize

**Bolivia
(Plurinational State of)**

Brazil

Chile

Colombia

Costa Rica

Cuba

Dominica

Dominican Republic

Ecuador

El Salvador

Grenada

Guatemala

Guyana

Haiti

Honduras

Jamaica

Mexico

Nicaragua

Panama

Paraguay

Peru

Saint Kitts and Nevis

Saint Lucia
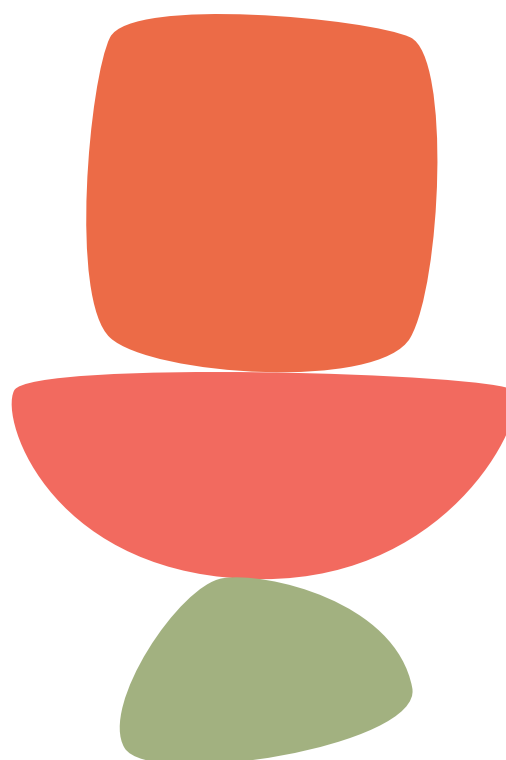
**Saint Vincent
and the Grenadines**

Suriname

Trinidad and Tobago

Uruguay

**Venezuela
(Bolivarian Republic of)**

**Associate Members:
Anguilla; Aruba; British
Virgin Islands; Cayman
Islands; Curaçao;
Montserrat; Sint Maarten**

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This first edition of the UNESCO Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination addresses the critical lack of comparable global equity data. It leverages an innovative, AI-driven approach that identifies and analyzes over 600,000 articles on racism and discrimination, published online from January 2021 to May 2024. A continuum of harm emerges, ranging from verbal abuse (34% of cases) to physical attacks (18%) to systemic discrimination (25%). Individual actions, magnified by systemic structures, highlight the urgency of addressing discrimination at all levels.

Tackling systemic barriers requires more than legal reforms; it demands a strategic focus on creating accountability, setting targets, measuring progress, and fostering cultural change. By linking the severity and sources of discrimination, this report underscores the need for comprehensive and sustained interventions. Equipping policymakers and advocates with robust data and actionable insights, it provides a foundation for building inclusive, equitable, and peaceful societies that are resilient to future challenges.