Racial Justice and Contentious Politics: The Impact of Racial Bias in Employment

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Abstract

Contentious politics focuses attention on collective actions and lobbying efforts to remedy injustices, particularly in the workplace, where racial inequalities continue to influence hiring procedures, promotions, and compensation. Despite anti-discrimination legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, racial and ethnic prejudice continues to limit economic possibilities and exacerbate systemic disparities. Subtle kinds of bias, such as implicit and aversive racism, worsen the problem, influencing hiring decisions and maintaining socioeconomic disparities. Case studies from the United States, Brazil, and Malaysia show that racial bias in the workplace is a global problem, showing itself in behaviors such as neighborhood-based recruitment, cultural stereotyping, and implicit preference for dominant ethnic groups. Intersectionality exacerbates these processes, as those who face many forms of discrimination, such as race and gender, are marginalized even more. Emerging solutions, such as the use of artificial intelligence for blind hiring, diverse hiring committees, and broad policy changes, have the potential to reduce bias and promote inclusivity. However, establishing actual racial justice necessitates confronting both apparent and unconscious biases, as well as removing structural inequities entrenched in historical and systematic oppression. By promoting fair employment practices, societies may maximize the potential of a diverse workforce and promote equitable economic opportunities for all.

Introduction

Contentious politics draws attention to the collective actions, advocacy, and policy debates that emerge as a response to injustices. This is especially true in areas such as employment, where racial biases continue to have an impact on hiring processes, career promotion, and salary. Racial justice in employment remains a pressing issue as discrimination based on race and ethnicity continues to impact economic opportunity, career progression, and social equity. Racial bias continues to subtly and widely impact hiring decisions despite the many rules and regulations that support fair hiring practices. Both individuals and communities are affected by this bias, which contributes to the perpetuation of cycles of economic hardship and restricts opportunities for professional development for people of color. Examining the intersection of racial justice and employment practices is essential to understanding and addressing the broader implications of systemic inequality, as it exposes the ways that ingrained biases in hiring perpetuate socioeconomic divides. When it comes to hiring decision-making, discrimination can take place in two ways: openly, through overt prejudice, and implicitly, through subconscious prejudices that impact judgments. For example, studies show that Black and Latino job applicants often receive fewer interview callbacks than their White counterparts with equivalent qualifications (Quillian et al., 2017). This bias not only has an effect on individuals on a personal

level, but it also leads to the deepening of socioeconomic gaps along racial lines, which in turn reinforces patterns of marginalization and limited upward mobility. Racial bias in employment restricts opportunities for people of color, revealing patterns of exclusion and inequity within hiring, promotion practices, and workplace environments. Examining these systemic patterns and the policies addressing them underscores the need for comprehensive reforms to achieve genuine racial justice in the labor market.

Historical Context

Employment discrimination is the unfair or unequal treatment of an individual's race, ethnicity, gender, or other protected attribute in hiring, promotion, pay, or other employment practices. Mainly in the United States, anti-discrimination legislation has been developed to correct these disparities. Key legislation includes the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, which broadens enforcement power. These rules provide the basis for guaranteeing equal job opportunities, but their efficacy is still restricted when it comes to more subdued kinds of discrimination that transcend apparent prejudice. Employment discrimination can take two forms: overt and subtle racial bias. Overt racial bias refers to explicit, intentional behaviors that overtly favor one racial group over another, such as refusing to hire someone based on race. However, racial prejudice can also occur in subtler, more implicit ways. However, racial prejudice can also occur in subtler, more implicit ways. Ziegert and Hanges (2005) found that implicit racial bias, even when unintentional, can result in discriminatory treatment in recruiting and promotion decisions. Implicit biases are unconscious attitudes and prejudices that gently influence decisions and interactions, resulting in a less obvious but persistent form of discrimination. These subtle biases might be difficult to detect and rectify under current legal systems, which are frequently better suited to combating explicit discrimination. Aversive racism complicates our understanding of bias in employment. Racial biases in hiring often reflect historical systems of inequality and segregation. Loury (2009) highlights how societal stratification and implicit assumptions about racial inferiority shape opportunities for people of color.

Aversive racism is a phenomenon in which people may cognitively support egalitarian principles while harboring unconscious negative thoughts or attitudes toward persons of color. Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) discovered that even persons who scored low on explicit measures of prejudice exhibited bias in ambiguous hiring situations, favoring White candidates over equally qualified Black prospects when the decision was not clear-cut. Aversive racism often leads to subtle, indirect forms of discrimination, reflecting implicit biases that are difficult to address with traditional anti-discrimination laws. These theories show that racial bias in the workplace is influenced by both overt prejudice and implicit prejudices, as well as societal structures. Addressing these biases requires understanding how both individual attitudes and structural factors shape discriminatory practices in hiring.

Case Studies

From hiring policies to systematic inequalities molded by historical and sociopolitical factors, racial bias in work is a recurring problem throughout many civilizations in many different forms. Emphasizing case studies from the United States, Brazil, and other nations, including Malaysia, real-world instances of racial bias in employment are shown. It looks at patterns, including network-based discrimination, recommendation systems, employer neighborhood prejudices, and the intersectional discrimination people face depending on race and gender.

Racial bias in employment has been well-recorded in the United States, especially against African-American and Latino candidates. With White candidates getting 36% more callbacks than African Americans, a key meta-analysis of recruiting studies spanning several years indicated no appreciable drop in prejudice against African Americans (Quillian et al., 2017). Companies in primarily White communities show a propensity to avoid Black neighborhoods and direct recruitment efforts to places with racial demographics. Black candidates also frequently encounter prejudices during interviews, which highlight cultural and experiential characteristics that methodically hinder them (Neckerman & Kirschenman, 1991). Intersectional relationships African American women experience exacerbate difficulties and run against both racial and gender stereotypes. Studies show that women of color are disproportionately directed into low-paying or unstable jobs, therefore restricting their economic mobility and career advancement (Howard & Borgella, 2020).

Brazil's history of slavery and the concept of racial democracy, which minimizes the influence of race on social inequality, help to uniquely create its racial dynamics (Edward, 1994). Still, there are really clear differences, especially in employment. In Brazil, even among people from identical socioeconomic situations, skin tone substantially impacts employment outcomes. Despite national narratives stressing integration, darker-skinned Brazilians find more difficulty assuming higher-status roles (Layton & Smith, 2017). This dynamic reflects both the enduring legacy of colonial and slavery-era racial hierarchies and the country's entrenched socioeconomic stratifications. Interestingly, racial discrimination is not uniformly distributed across all levels of society. Research by Layton and Smith (2017) highlights that highly educated Black professionals often encounter the most pronounced forms of workplace discrimination. This paradox suggests that as Black Brazilians ascend the social and economic ladder, they challenge traditional stereotypes and hierarchies, provoking heightened bias and exclusion from predominantly White professional spaces.

Racial bias in the workplace is a well-documented problem in Malaysia, especially when it comes to the preference for Chinese applications over Malay ones. This prejudice has frequently been shown in hiring procedures, where an applicant's ethnicity heavily influences decisions. Chinese people are preferred over Malays in the job market for a variety of reasons, including ingrained social attitudes as well as cultural, linguistic, and perceived economic considerations. Hwok-Aun Lee and Muhammad Abdul Khalid (2016) carried out a field experiment in which they submitted fake resumes with either Malay or Chinese names to job adverts, making their study one of the most prominent on this topic. Despite having the same qualifications, Malay candidates had a much lower chance of getting callbacks than Chinese

candidates. The applicant's ethnic identity was significantly more important than the quality of their resume. Chinese applicants with mediocre qualifications were nevertheless given preference over Malay applicants with superior qualifications (Lee & Khalid, 2016). The study also showed that language proficiency significantly influenced the observed bias. Foreign-owned and Chinese-controlled businesses usually demand that candidates speak Mandarin fluently, hence rejecting Malays who are not native speakers. The preference for Chinese applicants frequently stems from the belief that Chinese-majority companies will be more culturally compatible. Malaysian employers frequently link Chinese applicants to traits like diligence, hard work, and productivity. These culturally based prejudices make Chinese candidates seem more appealing in business settings.

Intersectionality and Factors Contributing to Discriminatory Hiring Practices

Often extending inequalities in the workplace, hiring decisions are greatly influenced by implicit bias and ideological ideas. Implicit bias is the unconscious attitude or stereotype influencing impressions, assessments, and behavior. This shows up in hiring as minor preferences for applicants that suit the recruiter's competency standards, professionalism, or cultural fit. Studies show, for example, that resumes with "ethnic-sounding" names get fewer callbacks than those with typically White names despite the same qualifications (Hardy et al., 2021). Often unconscious, such prejudices support the systematic exclusion of underprivileged populations. Ideological convictions, encompassing political and cultural values, significantly influence recruitment practices. Companies could prioritize " cultural fit," choosing applicants with comparable backgrounds or attitudes, excluding those from underprivileged groups (Chamberlain, 2016, p. 200). Recruiters with conservative leanings, for instance, could show prejudices against diversity projects and see them as quotas instead of tools for fairness. On the other hand, progressive-leaning recruiting officials could unwittingly choose applicants who reflect diversity without giving merit equal weight. Many times, these elements interact to create discriminating results. Implicit prejudices of a recruiting manager could unintentionally coincide with their political views, reducing the pool of qualified candidates. This dynamic limits access to chances by disproportionately affecting women, racial minorities, and other underrepresented groups.

Driven by systematic disparities, implicit preconceptions, and structural impediments, a complex network of interacting elements sustains racial bias in recruiting and employment. Intersecting these relationships helps one to see how people at the junction of several oppressed identities typically face compounded prejudice. Deeply ingrained mechanisms called structural inequalities cause unequal access to resources, education, and opportunities, therefore disproportionately affecting underprivileged racial groups. Often stemming from past practices like segregation, redlining, and discriminatory policies with long-lasting consequences on social mobility, these disparities reflect Structural constraints in the recruiting environment that restrict access to the professional networks, qualifications, and experiences companies value, hence disadvantaging racial minorities systemically. Because of historical and continuous housing discrimination, Black and Latino populations sometimes live far from economic centers. This geographical split limits employment possibilities. Employers located in primarily White areas are less likely to accept Black applicants, therefore perpetuating systematic exclusion

(Agan & Starr, 2020). Because of their prejudices linking Black or Latino neighborhoods to low productivity or crime, companies in primarily White areas are less inclined to recruit candidates from those neighborhoods. This accentuates differences in job possibilities (Pager et al., 2009). Significant causes of employment inequalities are geographic and network segmentation, supporting the systematic marginalization of underprivileged populations. Policy improvements, workplace reforms, and community investment help to remove structural and social barriers, thereby enabling more fair access to career possibilities and economic mobility.

Often overlapping are racial and gender prejudices, which aggravate the challenges women of color experience in the workplace. Stereotypes regarding race and gender influencing opinions of ability, professionalism, and leadership potential anchor this dynamic. During the recruiting process, Black and Latina women generally encounter more significant obstacles than White women or males of color. While women of color are rejected because of stereotypes casting them as less obedient or unduly forceful, employers may favor hiring White women for professions deemed as "feminine." In contrast, women of color are excluded due to stereotypes that cast them as less compliant or overly assertive (Di Stasio & Larsen, 2020).

Social Movements

Social movements and advocacy campaigns have revived public conversation on the widespread problem of racial bias in employment in recent years by highlighting its institutional causes and broad effects. Emphasizing the economic inequalities and workplace injustices disproportionately affecting people of color, movements, including Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the Times Up movement, demand systematic reforms to remove these barriers. These initiatives have encouraged institutions to face their part in maintaining racial inequality, as well as raised awareness of both implicit and overt prejudices in hiring and workplace regulations. These movements seek to bring about long-lasting change by combining grassroots activity, legal advocacy, and public responsibility, promoting labor markets that respect justice and inclusivity above ingrained discrimination.

Through demonstrations, legislative initiatives, and collaborations with corporations, the BLM movement has become a potent force for workplace diversity and fair hiring practices, combating systemic racial bias in the workplace. Initially concentrated on police violence, BLM has broadened its agenda to include economic justice, stressing how disproportionately Discriminatory hiring policies impact Black workers, pay differences, and career development obstacles. The movement exposes these injustices and increases calls for change via public demonstrations and social media. Apart from increasing consciousness, BLM works with businesses and groups to support anti-racist laws and practices. These include starting diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) projects, improving workforce demographic openness, and pledging recruiting policies prioritizing equity over ingrained prejudice. Another important component of BLM's work is policy campaigning; the movement backs laws like Ban the Box, which aim to lessen hiring discrimination against people with criminal records, many of whom are disproportionately Black. BLM keeps structural obstacles that uphold racial inequality in the workplace under threat by combining grassroots activity, public responsibility campaigns, and

institutional alliances. Its efforts have given the struggle for fair labor policies fresh impetus and encouraged more general debates about fairness and inclusiveness in the workplace.

UK project The Business in the Community (BITC) Race Equality Campaign aims to create inclusive environments and solve racial inequality in the workplace. Working with businesses, the Race Equality Campaign challenges institutional obstacles impeding racial justice in employment as part of a more significant group committed to ethical business practices. It offers tools, advice, and practical solutions to enable companies to apply equitable hiring, retention, and promotion policies for staff members from ethnic and racial backgrounds. The Race at Work Charter, introduced in 2018, lists five essential guidelines companies can follow to encourage diversity and combat prejudice, and is a significant part of the campaign. These include guaranteeing zero tolerance for racial harassment in the workplace, assigning executive sponsors for race equality, and gathering and acting upon data to correct discrepancies. Using corporate alliances, BITC fosters responsibility through workforce demographic transparency and support for underrepresented group leadership development. To enable companies to build fair working environments, the campaign also provides a wealth of materials, including case studies, benchmarking tools, and training courses (Creegan et al., 2003). BITC's Race Equality Campaign has grown to be a significant tool for promoting systematic change and reaching racial equity in the labor market of the United Kingdom by bridging policies with action (Miller, 2019).

Leveraging its platform to encourage companies to address and destroy the underlying prejudices sustaining workplace inequity, Time's Up has become a vociferous supporter of business diversity and fair hiring practices. Time's Up, started in 2018 in reaction to systematic harassment and discrimination underlined by the #MeToo movement, emphasizes building fair, safe, and inclusive workplaces, especially for women and underprivileged groups. The company stresses that, as a pillar of workplace reform, there is a need for fair recruiting policies. It inspires companies to adopt structural reforms promoting inclusion at all levels, transcending attempts at surface-level diversity. These programs call for open hiring and promotion policies, more women and people of color in leadership roles, and anti-bias training to confront unconscious prejudices. Time's Up advocates responsibility through public campaigns by asking businesses to share worker diversity statistics and pledge to quantifiable progress. Time's Up emphasizes that reaching parity in the workplace calls for consistent efforts to challenge established prejudices and build conditions where skill is valued above prejudice by working with businesses to set actionable standards and fight for systemic change. It's campaigning motivated.

Established in 2007, HINDRAF is a well-known Malaysian advocacy group meant to solve systematic racial discrimination and socioeconomic issues confronting the Malaysian Indian population (Kuar, 2011). Mostly descended from indentured servants introduced during colonial times, this minority population still struggles greatly to attain fair chances in education, employment, and economic advancement. HINDRAF has outspoken supporters of tearing down these disparities, particularly about employment discrimination. The company emphasizes how ingrained racial prejudices and regulations favoring other groups cause Malaysian Indians to be often excluded in both public and commercial sectors. Many Malaysian Indians find it difficult to

find fair job possibilities, which results in more poverty and economic exclusion inside the society (Sivachandralingam et al., 2013). To demand fair treatment in the labor market and the elimination of standardized practices excluding or disadvantaging Indian people, HINDRAF has coordinated demonstrations, legal actions, and public campaigns. Advocacy of HINDRAF spans policy changes that prioritize merit-based hiring, openness in recruiting practices, and affirmative action to level the playing field for underprivileged groups. Through increasing awareness of these systematic problems, HINDRAF has drawn national and international attention to the situation of Malaysian Indians, promoting more responsibility and inclusivity in Malaysia's social and economic systems.

The Bersih demonstrations have significantly promoted systematic changes in Malaysia, including more justice and openness in many spheres of life. Though mostly recognized for supporting fair and honest elections, the movement has also shaped more general conversations on equality, including corporate diversity and inclusive hiring policies. Given that these prejudices may support workplace inequities, Bersih's ideas appeal to calls for tackling structural inequalities and latent prejudices in employment. Scholars contend that implicit prejudices, especially in hiring and promotions, disadvantage underprivileged groups and support systematic inequality (Ziegert & Hanges, 2005). Bersih's public opposition to inequality fits studies supporting the destruction of discriminatory employment policies, including diversifying leadership and generating fair opportunities. Furthermore, structural disparities, including spatial and network segregation, are still important, restricting access to opportunities for underprivileged populations (Agan & Starr, 2020). By supporting fairness and openness, Bersih offers a vital forum to urge companies to solve workplace injustice, promoting a diverse and accountable culture. These initiatives highlight the more significant societal movement toward justice and inclusion, which is essential to solving structural inequalities in Malaysia and beyond.

Mitigating Bias and Promoting Racial Justice

Systemic and creative initiatives to solve ingrained inequalities and unconscious prejudices can help to reduce bias and advance racial fairness in employment policies. Aiming to lower implicit prejudices in hiring judgments, Trifilo and Blau (2024) provide a novel strategy using artificial intelligence (AI) to generate racially ambiguous avatars for job candidate interviews. According to their research, traditional hiring practices are nonetheless susceptible to unconscious prejudices that unfairly affect underrepresented groups, even in companies dedicated to justice. Racially ambiguous avatars anonymize candidates' racial identities during interviews, therefore freeing hiring managers to concentrate on abilities, credentials, and potential rather than be swayed by unconscious prejudices connected to appearance or cultural assumptions. The project consisted of iterative testing with hiring managers, improving the avatars to guarantee professionalism and neutrality while preserving a reasonable candidate count. This method faithfully replicates "blind hiring," a technique meant to eradicate visual signals that can set off prejudice. Early results show that this approach lessens unconscious prejudice and generates a more fair grading system, promoting workplace diversity. Crucially, the researchers underline that although these AI-driven tools can be transforming, their best efficacy is seen when combined with more general corporate diversity and inclusion policies, including bias awareness

training and standardized, open recruiting practices. The work of Trifilo and Blau (2024) emphasizes how technology may help to advance racial fairness and reduce prejudice in contemporary companies. Using AI-driven solutions like racially ambiguous avatars can help companies eliminate structural inequalities and solve the disadvantages of the hiring process. True equity also depends on constant efforts to build inclusive environments where many talents may flourish. This study offers a viable option for radical change in employment systems since it offers a vital route for companies trying to match their hiring policies with ideas of justice, fairness, and innovation.

Using diverse hiring committees is another essential tactic to fight racial bias in the workplace. Jamillah Bowman Williams' 2018 research shows how more fair hiring and promotion decisions result from responsibility to racially diverse committees. This research emphasizes the need for structural interventions in lowering implicit and explicit prejudices that may affect the course of decision-making. Diverse committees provide a spectrum of viewpoints for the assessment process, challenge preconceptions, and reduce the possibility of biased results by guaranteeing checks and balances throughout hiring. Committees that represent a range of racial and ethnic origins are more suited to evaluate applicants depending on their credentials than they are depending on unconscious prejudices for individuals who fit the dominant group. Such actions are crucial to solve the uniformity sometimes present in employment choices. Williams' (2018) studies, for instance, showed that diverse committees are more likely to support candidates from underrepresented groups, promoting greater diversity in leadership positions and improved retention rates for employees of color. This method encourages organizational responsibility as well. Collaborative hiring decisions help to reduce prejudices from individual decision-makers and hold companies accountable for guaranteeing diversity. Furthermore, different hiring committees let job applicants know that a company prioritizes equality and inclusiveness, therefore strengthening the company's appeal to a larger talent pool.

Ekmekçi (2024) investigates how widely latent prejudices affect recruiting, promotions, and the success of diversity initiatives in corporate environments. Implicit biases, or unconscious opinions or prejudices that people have, frequently influence hiring decisions in subtle but important ways, even in settings where overt discrimination is not evident, according to the study. These prejudices can cause majority group candidates to receive preferential treatment and impede the progress of underrepresented groups, extending systematic inequalities. Implicit prejudices in hiring procedures, such as the undervaluation of resumes with ethnic-sounding names or the subjective assessment of applicants, depend more on cultural fit than qualifications. Ekmekçi (2024) underlines how these prejudices disproportionately affect candidates of color, therefore lowering their chances of being hired or promoted even with equal or better credentials than their counterparts. Regarding promotions, underlying prejudices help to explain variations in leadership representation. Performance reviews, for instance, could be swayed by conventional ideas of leadership qualities or competency, which usually negatively affects workers from underprivileged backgrounds. These prejudices can jeopardize the desired results even in companies with diversity programs. Ekmekçi notes that programs aiming at only surface-level depiction without addressing underlying prejudices risk becoming performative and

useless. Research by Ekmekçi (2024) emphasizes how important it is to eliminate unconscious prejudices not just for fairness but also for entirely using a varied workforce. Companies that take decisive steps to offset these prejudices are more likely to reach genuine inclusiveness and long-term success.

In essence, racial bias in the workplace still stands as a significant obstacle to reaching racial equity, hence sustaining differences in employment practices, pay, and career progression for persons of color. Research and case studies provide evidence of how explicit and unconscious prejudices affect employment possibilities, aggravating systematic inequalities and reducing social mobility. These difficulties are exacerbated by network isolation, cultural preconceptions, and geographical restrictions, thereby stressing the need for structural reform. Organizations and legislators must create all-encompassing plans incorporating anonymous hiring procedures, skill-based assessments, diverse hiring committees, and strong anti-discrimination laws to help with these problems. These initiatives advance fairness and enable the full potential of a varied workforce, benefiting society at large. Eliminating personal and institutional obstacles will help create more inclusive employment markets so that merit, not race, defines opportunities. Building fair and affluent communities all around depends on reaching racial equity in the workplace.

Acknowledgement

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