

# A Workplace Divided

**A National Survey Exploring Workers' Perceptions of  
Discrimination and Unfair Treatment at Work and How  
Government and Employers Can Help Advance More  
Equitable Workplaces**

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FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

# Project Overview

## National online survey

3,277 full- and part-time U.S. workers

## Measure perceptions and experiences

Racial and ethnic discrimination at work

## Measure opinions

DEI policies and practices

## Collaboration opportunities

WorkRise, Delaware State University, NORC

## January 2022 - June 2023

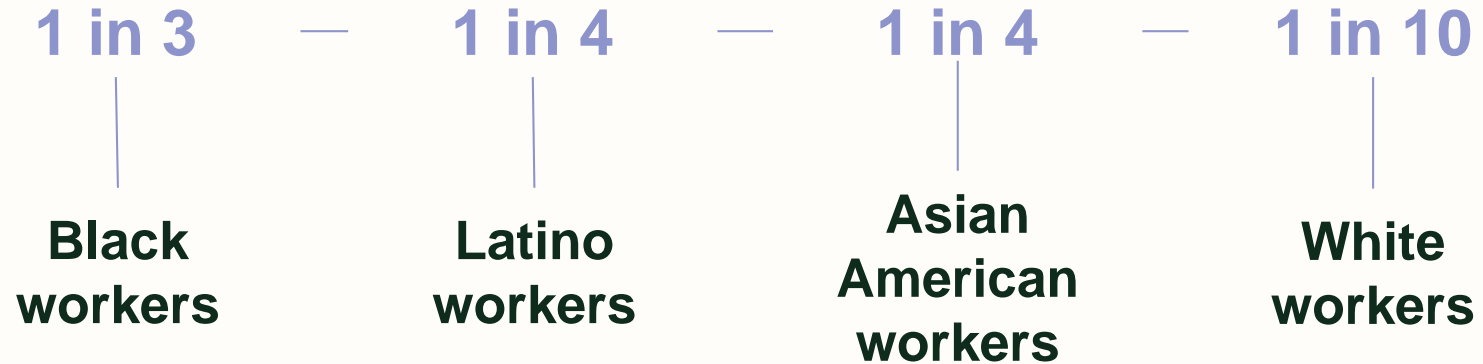
Pilot survey, experts, individual interviews

## Continued engagement

Survey questionnaire, public use dataset

# Perceptions of Workplace Discrimination

Treated unfairly, treated poorly, or discriminated against in their current jobs



# Perceptions of Workplace Discrimination

**Racial and  
Ethnic  
Discrimination  
is a Problem in  
Private  
Workplaces  
Today**

**6 in 10 U.S. workers**  
Major or minor problem

**1 in 2 Black  
workers**  
Major problem

**3 in 10 U.S. workers**  
Major problem

**1 in 4 White  
workers**  
Major problem

# Perceptions of Workplace Discrimination

Contributes “A lot” to Problem in Workplaces Today	Workers				
	U.S.	Asian- American	Black	Latino	White
Unconscious bias	43%	43%	53%	38%	41%
Intentional prejudice	28%	30%	44%	33%	22%
Existing policies, procedures, or systems	26%	25%	38%	31%	22%

# Perceptions of Workplace Discrimination

“Some people get better treatment because of their race or ethnicity” in their current jobs

47%

Black workers

37%

Asian-American workers

30%

Latino workers

18%

White workers



# Perceptions of Workplace Discrimination

57%

**Black female workers**  
say racial and ethnic discrimination  
is a problem in their own workplaces

# Perceptions of Workplace Discrimination

**Workers of color say the following situations occur most frequently in the workplace:**

- Being treated as less competent or valuable
- Earning less than a co-worker doing the same job
- Being assigned unwanted or undesirable shifts or tasks



# Perceptions of Discrimination and Mobility



Workers are more likely to report a discrimination experience in a **previous job**, than in their current jobs



1 in 4 Black  
1 in 5 Asian-American workers say they have **thought about quitting a job** because of discrimination-



1 in 3 Black workers say at work:  
- Hard work is no guarantee of success  
- Race and/or ethnicity has **made it harder** to succeed

# Perceptions of Inclusion



8 in 10

U.S. workers say

**feeling included and/or welcomed** in the workplace is a very or somewhat important aspect of their job

# Perceptions of Inclusion



31%



**Black workers**

Feel included at work, regardless  
of race/ethnicity



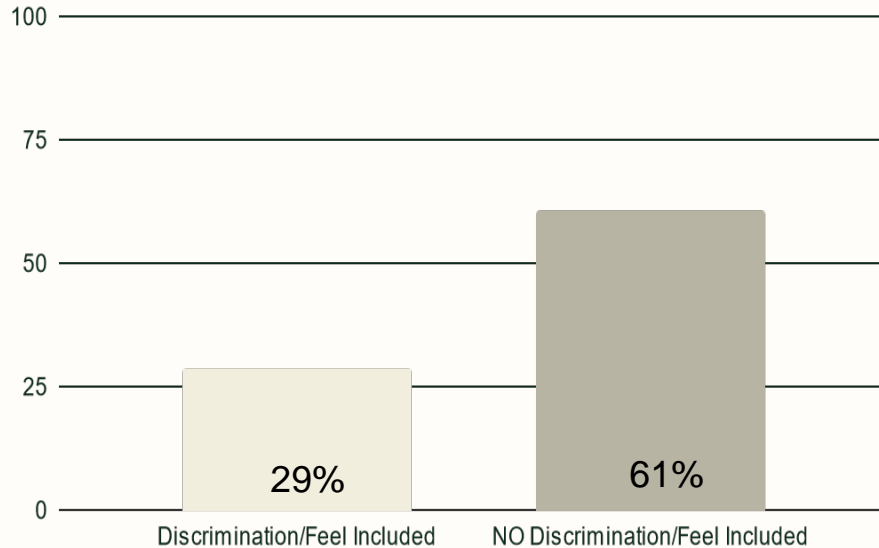
52%



**White workers**

Feel included at work, regardless  
of race/ethnicity

# Perceptions of Inclusion



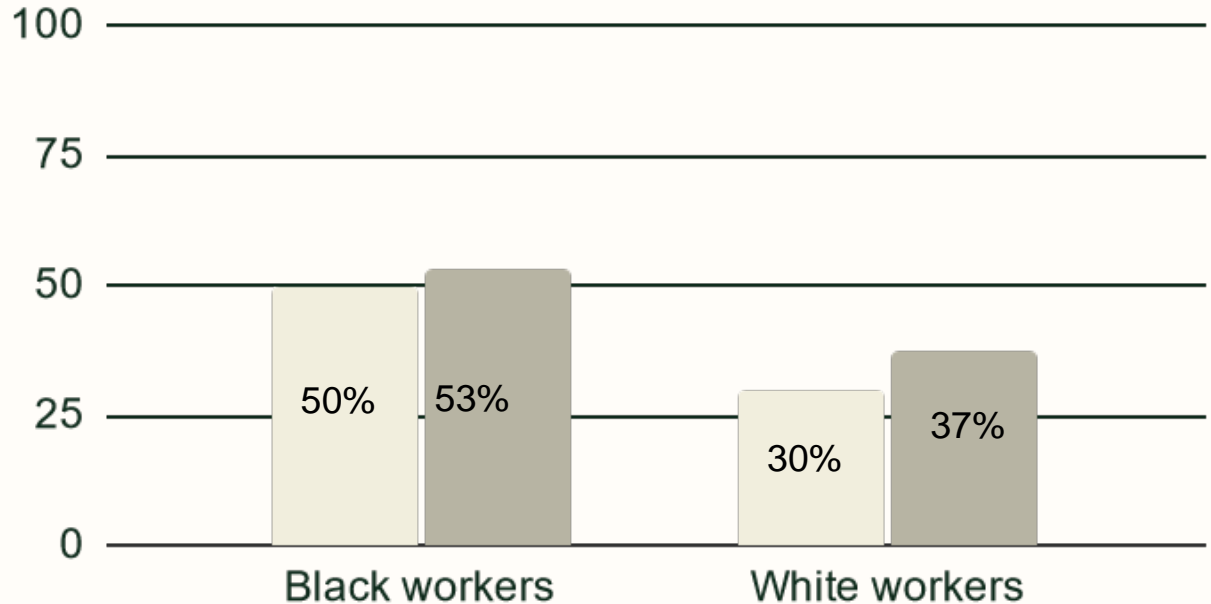
**29% of workers who say discrimination is a major/minor problem** in their own workplace also strongly agree that they feel included at work, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

**61% of workers who say discrimination is NOT a major/minor problem** in their own workplace also strongly agree that they feel included at work, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

# Perceptions of Diversity and Equity

**Diversity is essential in private companies**

**Equity is essential in private companies**



# Perceptions of Inclusion



2 in 3

U.S. workers say  
their current workplace has  
***racial and ethnic diversity***

# Opinions of Employer Policies and Practices

	U.S. workers have:
6 in 10	Anti-discrimination policies
4 in 10	Required training
3 in 10	Optional training
3 in 10	Anonymous hotline
2 in 10	Single person responsible for DEI

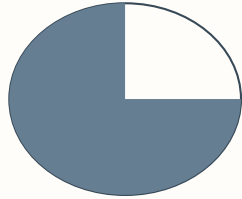
**2 in 10 workers don't know if they have policies, procedures, or programs related to racial and ethnic diversity, racial and ethnic equity, inclusion, or discrimination**

# Opinions of Employer Policies and Practices

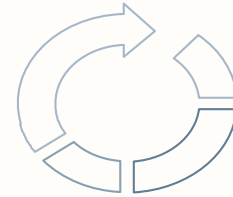
- **“Policies”** are thought to be the most helpful in reducing racial and ethnic discrimination in private workplaces today
- Majorities of workers say **they want to work for companies that actively speak out against racial and ethnic discrimination**, but fewer say this is actually the case
- 6 in 10 workers believe that **the diversity of a company should reflect the diversity of the community** where that company is located



# Opinions of Role of Government



**7 in 10** workers who say racial and ethnic discrimination is a problem in private companies today say that laws to prevent discrimination in hiring and promotions are needed



**9 in 10** Black workers 45+ but **6 in 10** white workers 45+ say laws are necessary

# Voices of Workers

“But if you have an anonymous online to report these issues, if something were to come up and you could call a corporate number to say this happened to me, **I don't know how helpful that would be to reduce the problem if it already happened to me.** I don't know how helpful that would be to reduce the problem if it already happened.”

—On why an anonymous reporting hotline is perceived by some workers as a reactive, rather than proactive mechanism

# Voices of Workers

“I think [the company is] doing what they’re supposed to be doing. But **there’s always room for human error**. Just because who’s in place at the store level, like as a corporation. Those are great policies and things to have in place, but at a store level where it’s local, unfortunately, things sometimes go a different way.”

—On why corporate-level policies may not be appropriate for, or fit, what’s happening in local stores

# Voices of Workers

“There was a lot more hands on that I thought was a lot more effective, which was to talk about real examples of things and check in on stuff like that, regularly, to say like, Okay, so where are we having issues with this? Where are we? **What are the specific things that are happening that we need to change to make this happen?**”

— On the “better” way of improving equity and inclusion and reducing discrimination in the workplace

# Voices of Workers

“{I’ve been} passed over for a lot of opportunities. Co-workers and I have discussed it. One co-worker had been trying to move up and the same thing happened to her. Experience, credentials do not matter. **Your color, your background, your gender matter.** I’ve been passed up on many promotional opportunities. Every time it was a male who got the position – even if less experienced.”

— **On the relationship between discrimination, identity, and mobility**

# Voices of Workers

“I don’t want to play the race card. **The last two companies –senior leadership was all one color. And I was not that color. And the person they promoted was the same.** In my last few companies –senior leaderships were alike. As a person, you tend to hire people with the same traits as you. If you’re into a sport, you want to hire someone so you talk sports with them (as an example). And you can tell. For me, to pick a workplace, I want to see diversified senior leadership. Not all the same color.”

— On moving between jobs and perceptions of the diversity of a company’s leadership

# Issues for Future Research and Action

- **Demonstrating that the organization values** diversity and speaking out against racial and ethnic discrimination
- **Reimagining the role** of human resources and DEI staff
- **Incentivizing companies (leaders)** to discover their employees' unique need for diversity, equity, and inclusion and addressing them specifically

# Thank you!

Please reach out to Dr. Carl Van Horn at [vanhorn@rutgers.edu](mailto:vanhorn@rutgers.edu) with questions.

Workplace Divided Research Page

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