STATE OF DISCRIMINATION SURVEY
MALAYSIA 2023
Architects of Diversity (Persatuan Pendidikan Diversiti) is a youth-led non-profit organisation that bridges communities and identity groups among youth in Malaysia for justice, peace and a sustainable future. Since 2018, AOD has worked towards the promotion of diversity and inclusion in Malaysia by empowering young leaders as champions of inclusivity, pioneering ideas and processes for social cohesion, and building an enabling environment for legislative change towards equity and inclusion.
Introduction

This survey aims to provide a baseline study on the quantitative nature of discrimination in Malaysia relating to various identities, including religion and race.

At the very heart of human rights law, lies the trite provision that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Article 2 of the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) codifies protected grounds in which discrimination is prohibited. They include "race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." Article 7 of the UDHR further affirms that "all are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law."

UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, with Target 16.b aiming to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Malaysia (2021 to 2025)’s Strategic Priority 4: Peace outlines its outcome aspiration as: “By 2025, Malaysia has strengthened democratic governance, and all people living in Malaysia benefit from a more cohesive society, strengthened governance and participation.” SDG Indicator 1 highlights Indicator 16.b.1, “Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law.

In Malaysia, the Federal Constitution expressly provides under Article 8 that all citizens will be afforded equal protection under the law and that discrimination is prohibited based on religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender. However, weak to non-existent laws and institutions for non-discrimination have allowed for the proliferation of discrimination in various dimensions of social and political life. Equal Rights Trusts notes that “Some non-discrimination provisions are found in legislation governing other legal fields: criminal law, family law, and law related to domestic violence. However, this protection is rarely rights-based, and is very limited, patchy, and inconsistent.”
Survey Methodology

Questionnaire Development

Questions were adapted from various international and regional questionnaires, including the SDG16 Survey Initiative (Q1-5) and Pew Research Center’s Survey on Religion and Social Life (Q6) in India, as well as developed internally by Architects of Diversity using research on racial discrimination and religious freedoms.

Deployment & Technicalities

The survey was administered from 4 to 23 August, 2023 to adults ages 18 and above. Respondents were able to answer the survey in English or Bahasa Melayu. Q5 was redeployed due to technical errors and recapture rate was 73%. 3,241 responses were collected while 3,238 responses were included in the final sample after exclusion of responses with invalid demographic data and non-Malaysians.

The survey was administered to Vase.ai’s online representative panel using an active quota sampling method, where only people contacted were allowed to participate. Respondents ages 18 and above were quota sampled according to the 2020 census statistics by race, gender, age and state. Vase.ai’s online panel ensures duplicate entries are prevented by the use of unique survey links and the limitation of one entry per link. Identifying demographic information was cross-validated with Vase.ai’s existing information on the survey respondent. Speed and straight line checking were also performed to exclude low quality responses.

Non-random online panel samples may have lower and non-equal probabilities of sampling rural populations with lower Internet connectivity.

Weights were constructed to improve the representativeness of the survey sample. Four demographic characteristics were used to ensure consistency with the actual population based on Census 2020 and reduce bias from non-random sampling: race, gender, age and state. Iterative proportional fitting (raking) - one of the most standard weighting methods - was used. The maximum weight value used was lowered to 3 due to the ease of sample convergence, indicating that the sample did not require much correction. Additionally, the general design effect (1.2) of the weighted sample suggests minimal increase in variance.

Access detailed survey results by demographic, respondent and representative statistics and open data at:

www.aodmalaysia.org/sods
Main Findings

1. The majority of Malaysians (64%) reported having experienced some form of discrimination in the past 12 months.
   a. Malaysians primarily reported having experienced discrimination in the past 12 months related to socio-economic status (38%), age (33%) and ethnicity (32%).
   b. Gen Z (18–24) were more likely to report having experienced ethnicity-related discrimination (43%) than their older peers (22% for 60+ and 23% for 40–59).
   c. Hindus were more likely to report having experienced religious-based discrimination in the past 12 months (40%), compared to their Muslim (20%), Christian (26%) and Buddhist (22%) peers.
   d. Both men and women reported having experienced gender-related discrimination in the past 12 months at similar rates - 21% and 27% respectively.

2. Discrimination was primarily experienced on social media (32%), and at the workplace while looking for jobs (30%) and at work (29%).
   a. Indians reported having experienced higher levels of discrimination than their peers when applying for jobs (51%), when looking for housing (35%) and when dealing with the police (21%).

3. Among those who reported having experienced discrimination at work, work conditions (62%) and pay (53%) were the related domains.
   a. East Malaysians were more likely to experience discrimination related to work conditions (72%).
   b. Malay (56%) and Indians (60%) were more likely to report having experience pay-related discrimination than Chinese (41%) and Other Bumiputera (51%) peers.

4. Among those who reported having experienced discrimination, the majority (55%) did not report it.
   a. Among those who did report their experience, employers (14%) or law enforcement (11%) were the most popular reporting lines.
   b. Among those who did not report their experience, respondents said they chose not to report mainly due to having no evidence or difficulty producing evidence (32%) and high barriers in terms of time or money (32%).

5. Among major religious groups – Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus – each felt that members of their own groups experienced the most amount of discrimination.
   a. 59% of Muslim respondents felt members of their own religious group experienced a lot or some discrimination, with that figure being 63% among Buddhist respondents, 76% among Christian respondents, and 81% among Hindu respondents.
   b. Most were unaware about discrimination relating to animists (beliefs of many indigenous groups), with 44% opting to respond with “don’t know”.

6. Discrimination literacy and agreement is generally low.
   a. For instance, less than half (49%) of respondents felt that being forced to not wear religious clothing at work is considered discrimination, while 37% felt it was not considered discrimination.
   b. Forms of behaviour with the highest rating in being considered discrimination were being called a racial slur online or physically (63%) and being unable to apply for a job due to specific language preferences (63%).

7. Malaysians were generally split when asked about their satisfaction with the current government’s initiatives to solve discrimination. 45% said they were very satisfied or slightly satisfied, while 40% said they were slightly dissatisfied or not satisfied at all.
   a. When asked what the government should do to solve discrimination, answers included creating a law for discrimination and raising awareness on discrimination.
Survey Results

**Q1**

Vignette Provided:
*Discrimination happens when you are treated less favourably compared to others or harassed because of the way you look, where you come from, what you believe or for other reasons.*

*You may be refused equal access to work, housing, healthcare, education, marriage or family life, the police or justice system, shops, restaurants, or any other services or opportunities.*

*You may also encounter comments, gestures or other behaviours that make you feel offended, threatened or insulted, or have to stay away from places or activities to avoid such behaviours.*

**In the past 12 months, do you feel that you personally experienced any form of discrimination or harassment based on your**

![Survey Results Chart]

Note: Weighted estimates. State of Discrimination Survey 2023 (n=3,228)
Q2

In what types of situations have you experienced these incidents?

[Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents experiencing discrimination in various situations.]

Note: Weighted estimates. State of Discrimination Survey 2023 (n=3,256)
Q3

Which of the following best describes the focus of the discrimination you experienced at work?

(n=982, Q2 = “At work”)

- Pay: 53%
- Promotion: 38%
- Work Conditions: 62%
- Harassment: 33%
- Fired: 10%
- Laid Off: 17%
- Others: 18%
- Don’t Know: 3%
- Prefer not to say: 2%

Note: Weighted estimates. State of Discrimination Survey 2023 (n=982)
Who did you report the incident or make the complaint to? (n=2,683, Q2 != “Did not experience discrimination”)

- Did not report: 55%
- Police and other law enforcement agencies: 11%
- Employer: 14%
- Non-governmental organisation (NGO): 7%
- SUHAKAM: 3%
- Private lawyer: 3%
- Other: 9%
- Don’t know: 10%
- Prefer not to say: 7%

Note: Weighted estimates. State of Discrimination Survey 2023 (n=2,233)
Q5

Why did you not report the incident or make a complaint? (n=1,492, Q4 = “Did not report”)

- Did not report: 55%
- Police and other law enforcement agencies: 11%
- Employer: 14%
- Non-governmental organisation (NGO): 7%
- SUHAKAM: 3%
- Private lawyer: 3%
- Other: 9%
- Don’t know: 10%
- Prefer not to say: 7%

Note: Weighted estimates. State of Discrimination Survey 2023 (n=1,492)
Just your impression, in Malaysia today, is there a lot of discrimination against..
Q7

Do you think this is considered discrimination?

- Being called a racial slur in a derogatory way online or physically: 63% Yes, 21% No, 13% Don’t Know, 7% Prefer Not to Say
- Being told that you are unable to get promoted at work due to your gender: 62% Yes, 27% No, 6% Don’t Know, 5% Prefer Not to Say
- Unable to rent a place due to its specific racial preferences: 61% Yes, 27% No, 9% Don’t Know, 3% Prefer Not to Say
- Failed to get a place in a government college despite having the credentials: 58% Yes, 28% No, 11% Don’t Know, 3% Prefer Not to Say
- Unable to apply for a job due to its specific language preferences: 63% Yes, 27% No, 8% Don’t Know, 2% Prefer Not to Say
- Forced to not wear religious clothing at work: 49% Yes, 37% No, 10% Don’t Know, 4% Prefer Not to Say
- Unable to purchase a property or share due to racial restrictions: 59% Yes, 27% No, 10% Don’t Know, 4% Prefer Not to Say
- Unable to apply to a scholarship because of your race: 61% Yes, 25% No, 10% Don’t Know, 4% Prefer Not to Say
- Being unable to take time off for religious holidays: 56% Yes, 32% No, 9% Don’t Know, 3% Prefer Not to Say
- Ridiculed for your accent / dialect: 53% Yes, 34% No, 10% Don’t Know, 3% Prefer Not to Say

Note: Weighted estimates. State of Discrimination Survey 2023 (n=3,298)
How satisfied are you with the current government’s initiatives on solving discrimination within the country?

- Very satisfied: 12
- Slightly satisfied: 33
- Slightly dissatisfied: 21
- Not satisfied at all: 19
- Prefer not to say: 5
- Don’t know: 10

Note: Weighted estimates, State of Discrimination Survey 2023 (n=3,258)
**Q9**

**What do you think the government should do to solve discrimination within the country?**

*Selected sample of responses:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kem kesedaran. Kerajaan membuat kempen kesedaran kepada rakyat, khususnya pelajar dan ibu bapa, hal ini kerana dapat menghilangkan semangat rasisme.</td>
<td>rakyat perlu selalu diingatkan tentang kuota bumiputera hak mutlak yang tidak boleh dipertikaikan dari dulu lagi sampai dah bi-bila, jadi mereka yang bukan bumiputera akan faham &amp; ingat bahawa tiada diskriminasi di situ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply a stricted law to agaist discrimination whether they are Muslim, Hindus, Buddhist and others.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government provides municipal antidiscrimination services, which are usually existing antidiscrimination bureaus. As well as registering and processing discrimination complaints, these services can perform other tasks, such as providing information on discrimination in schools and businesses. In addition, they cooperate with the Public Prosecution Service and the police at local level to prevent and combat discrimination.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mengikut apa yang ada dalam perlembagaan negara dan setiap kaum harus menghormatinya.</td>
<td>Buat satu sekolah, tak ada sekolah tamil sekolah cina, belajar dalam 1 sekolah sahaja untuk semua kaum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perlembagaan adalah simbol kedaulatan negara kita.</td>
<td>Hapuskan system quota di Malaysia Selain itu juga kerajaan harus memupukan semangat perpaduan dalam kalangan remaja sekarang.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melaksanakn akta untuk membendung masalah diskriminasi kaum dan agama dalam segala hal, serta melaksanakan semua program dan aktiviti tanpa menhir kaun dan agama.</td>
<td>Remove quota to enrol local university. Provide more working opportunity to women and OKU. attire free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mengikut apa yang ada dalam perlembagaan negara dan setiap kaum harus menghormatinya.</td>
<td>Revoke Mandarin speaking when apply for job. This is the most discrimination in Malaysia. We’re Malaysian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perlembagaan adalah simbol kedaulatan negara kita.</td>
<td>implement anti retaliation program, educate workers about discrimination, ensuring equal access to all opportunities for citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mengikut apa yang ada dalam perlembagaan negara dan setiap kaum harus menghormatinya.</td>
<td>have no idea, seems like no solution at all can be done because of the politicians attitude towards socials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mengikut apa yang ada dalam perlembagaan negara dan setiap kaum harus menghormatinya.</td>
<td>Utamakan agama Islam kerana negara Malaysia adalah negara yang menegakkan agama Islam. Agama lain juga dibolehkan dalam apa-apa jua perkara, tetapi tidak boleh berada di atas... mestilah yang beragama islam yang berada diatas... agama lain mesti berada dibawah...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melaksanakn akta untuk membendung masalah diskriminasi kaum dan agama dalam segala hal, serta melaksanakan semua program dan aktiviti tanpa menhirka kaum dan agama.</td>
<td>Equal opportunities or reduce the gap difference. More housing, loans and work privileges. Be considerate towards other race appeals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mengikut apa yang ada dalam perlembagaan negara dan setiap kaum harus menghormatinya.</td>
<td>A more study is needed. Government may do survey and gather more feedbacks from the public so that government knows about the actual situation and looking for correct solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
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