

World Status Report on Prejudice, 2025

Understanding Prejudice



John Hain/<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/tribalism-antagonism-opposition-1201697/>

Summary

This comprehensive report documents the state of prejudice across human societies and their relationship with nature in 2025. Drawing on recent global data and critical theoretical frameworks, it reveals a crisis of belonging and othering that manifests across multiple dimensions: interpersonal relationships, institutional structures, ecological systems, and spiritual-ethical dimensions. Prejudice, understood not as individual bias but as a systemic process of othering embedded in power relations, has intensified in 75% of countries studied since 2015[1]. The report shows that discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, caste, disability, and species—alongside ecological violence against nature—reflects deeper structures of domination, exploitation, and the denial of the Other's humanity and worth.

Part I: The Crisis of Prejudice in Global Context

1. Global Discrimination Trends: A Worsening Landscape

The evidence is stark and sobering. The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, drawing on surveys of 154,000 households and 3,600 experts across 140 countries, found that 70% of countries experienced worsening discrimination between 2021 and 2022[1]. More critically, since 2015, three-fourths of countries studied have seen discrimination increase [1], suggesting not a momentary fluctuation but a systematic expansion of prejudicial practices.

The global average score for equal treatment and the absence of discrimination is merely 0.57 out of 1.0, with only six countries scoring above 0.80 [1]. Nations performing worst include Afghanistan (0.27), Sudan (0.31), and Nicaragua (0.36), while even "developed" nations like the United States (0.48) and Hungary (0.41) score poorly, with the U.S. ranking 103 out of 140 and showing a 13% decline since 2015[1].

This data reveals a fundamental crisis: in most societies, equal treatment remains a distant aspiration rather than lived reality.

2. Mapping the Scope: Forms and Categories of Prejudice

Recent global research identifies prejudice spanning multiple, intersecting categories:

Primary discrimination categories globally (UNESCO 2025):

- Race: 38% of reported discrimination cases
- Sex and Gender: 33%
- Ethnicity: 20%
- Notably, 18% of discrimination cases involve physical attacks, underscoring the violence embedded in prejudicial systems [2]

Regional variation reveals patterns of severity:

The OECD (2025) reports striking regional differences in self-reported discrimination experiences [3]:

- Northern America and Oceania: 54% report lifetime discrimination
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 31%
- Africa and Middle East: 26%
- Europe: 23%
- Asia: 20%

These variations correlate strongly with unequal institutional arrangements (measured by gender equality indices) and socio-economic inequality (Gini index)[3], suggesting that prejudice is not random but systematically structured by power and resource distribution.

Part II: Gender-Based Violence and the Othering of Women

3. The Persistent Crisis of Violence Against Women

Violence against women remains perhaps the most pervasive and normalised form of prejudice globally. In November 2025, the World Health Organisation and UN partners released landmark findings revealing a crisis that has barely changed since 2000:

Lifetime prevalence:

- 840 million women (nearly 1 in 3) have experienced intimate partner or sexual violence during their lifetime [4]
- This figure has remained virtually constant since 2000, reflecting minimal progress in two decades

Recent violence (past 12 months):

- 316 million women (11% of those 15 years and older) experienced physical or sexual violence by intimate partners [4]
- 12.5 million adolescent girls (ages 15-19) experienced partner violence in the past year alone [4]

Sexual violence by non-partners:

- 263 million women have experienced non-partner sexual violence since age 15, with experts warning this figure is significantly under-reported due to stigma and fear[4]

Rate of change:

- Progress has been painfully slow, with only a 0.2% annual decline over the past two decades [4]
- Despite mounting evidence on effective prevention strategies, funding has collapsed—in 2022, only 0.2% of global development aid targeted violence prevention programs, with funding declining further in 2025[4]

Regional disparities:

- Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand): 38% prevalence of intimate partner violence
- Central and Southern Asia: 18%
- Latin America and Caribbean: 7%
- Europe and Northern America: 5% [4]

The gendered nature of this violence reflects what critical theorists understand as the systematic othering of women—their construction as subordinate "Others" whose bodies, autonomy, and humanity are subject to male domination. This violence is not aberrant but embedded in patriarchal structures that normalise women's subordination across family, community, workplace, and state institutions.

4. Gender Discrimination in Economic and Political Life

Beyond direct violence, women face systematic discrimination in employment, representation, and economic participation:

- Women's labour force participation is 25% lower than men's globally, reflecting discriminatory norms that privilege male breadwinner roles, confine women to unpaid caregiving, and perpetuate occupational segregation [3]
- In G20 countries, women are 1.5 times more likely than men to be employed in low-paying jobs [5]
- In 2024, only four women were elected presidents in 27 national elections, while 16 countries fielded no female candidates at all [5]
- Women experience multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination: in Northern America and Oceania, 37% of women report multiple discrimination forms compared to 28% of men [3]

Part III: Racialised Prejudice and the Colour Line

5. Racism as Structural Othering

The construction of racial categories as natural and hierarchical—with "whiteness" positioned as universal and superior—represents perhaps the most foundational othering process in modern societies. The data reveals racism's pervasive presence:

Global scope:

- Race accounts for 38% of globally reported discrimination cases, the highest single category [2]
- Germany alone recorded 3,700+ racist discrimination cases in recent reporting, with workplace discrimination being the most common form, followed by discrimination in public institutions, education, housing, healthcare, and the judiciary [6]

Manifestations in supposedly "advanced" nations:

- The United States, despite being a wealthy nation, ranks 103 out of 140 countries on equal treatment and has seen discrimination worsen significantly
- It ranks particularly poorly on discrimination within the justice system: 106 out of 140 on impartial criminal justice and 121 out of 140 on absence of discrimination in civil justice [1]

The persistence of racialised discrimination in the judiciary and criminal justice systems is particularly significant, as it demonstrates how prejudice is institutionalised through law and state power, reflecting what critical race theorists identify as structural racism—discrimination embedded not in individual attitudes alone but in institutional design, policy, and practice.

Part IV: Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability

6. The Systematic Violence Against Dalits and Scheduled Tribes

Caste discrimination represents one of the world's most entrenched systems of hereditary othering, affecting over 160 million people in India and diaspora communities globally[7]. Unlike discrimination based on attributes that might theoretically be changeable, caste discrimination marks entire communities as ritually impure and socially subordinate from birth, denying them access to fundamental human dignities.

Recent violence statistics:

- 57,789 cases of atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs) in 2023, representing a crime rate of 28.7 per lakh population [8]
- 12,960 cases against Scheduled Tribes (STs), reflecting a dramatic 28.8% year-on-year increase, with Manipur seeing cases rise from 1 in 2022 to 3,399 in 2023[8]

Geographic concentration:

- Uttar Pradesh: 15,130 cases (highest)
- Rajasthan: 69.1 per lakh population rate
- Madhya Pradesh: 72.6 per lakh population rate (highest rate)
- Bihar: 42.6 per lakh population rate [8]

Manifestations of caste discrimination:

Access denial across fundamental human needs:

- Denied access to places of worship, clean water, housing, and land
- Children kept out of or ill-treated within schools
- Forced into menial and degrading occupations, including manual scavenging [7]
- Largely excluded from businesses, educational establishments, judicial services, and bureaucracy despite affirmative action policies [7]

Sexual violence and "honour" killings:

- Dalit women subject to constant sexual assault by upper-caste men
- Dalit individuals raped and murdered for aspiring to land ownership, electricity, drinking water, and non-caste-hierarchical relationships
- Inter-caste marriages, particularly between lower-caste men and upper-caste women, result in murders, kidnapping, and public punishment [7]

Institutional underreporting and weak accountability:

- 263,512 cases pending investigation under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act
- Conviction rates remain disturbingly low: 36% for SCs, 28.1% for STs [8]
- Delays in investigation, lack of police sensitivity, and underrepresentation of SC/ST personnel contribute to poor enforcement [8]

Emerging crisis in education:

- Reported cases of caste-based discrimination in universities increased 118.4% over five years (from 173 in 2019-20 to 378 in 2023-24) [9]
- This rise reflects both increased reporting awareness and genuine escalation of campus discrimination

The systematic nature of caste violence across centuries leads researchers to describe it as slow-motion genocide: while the Nazi genocide murdered six million Jews in six years, caste

discrimination—if extended historically—represents approximately 2,190,000 murders, 3,285,000 rapes, and 75 million assaults against Dalit communities over three millennia [7].

Part V: Religious Persecution and Discrimination

7. The Global Crisis of Religious Intolerance

Religious persecution remains one of the most severe and systematic forms of prejudice globally, with governments, militant groups, and community actors creating environments where individuals face violence, imprisonment, forced conversion, and death for their faith commitments.

Scale of the crisis:

- 388 million Christians face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith [10]
- In the top 50 countries alone, 315+ million Christians face "very high or extreme" persecution [10]
- Over 4,400 Christians are killed annually because of their faith [10]
- 62 countries classified as under persecution or discrimination, home to 64.7% of the global population [11]

Geographic hotspots and forms of persecution:

North Korea (extreme persecution):

- Christianity effectively prohibited; Christians treated as political traitors
- Punishment includes labour camps, torture, and execution
- Those associated with Christians also severely punished
- Citizens cannot publicly acknowledge faith or leave the country [10]

Nigeria (highest Christian deaths):

- Ranks 7th on World Watch List but 1st in number of Christians killed
- Islamist militant groups conduct brutal attacks, killing men and kidnapping women for sexual abuse
- Destruction of homes, churches, and livelihoods
- Christians in northern states under Sharia law face severe discrimination
- Converts from Islam rejected and threatened by families
- Millions displaced to camps [10]

Pakistan (8th on World Watch List):

- Violent mob attacks and systematic government persecution
- Blasphemy laws weaponised by Muslim extremists with government complicity
- Occupations "deemed degrading"—sewer cleaning, brick kiln work—reserved for Christians
- Growing kidnapping of Christian girls for forced conversion and marriage [10]

Myanmar (13th on list):

- Violent persecution from government
- Religious minorities face conversion pressure from majority communities
- Government military conscription of men and women, including against their own communities
- Mass refugee flight to Thailand [10]

Bangladesh, Egypt, and other contexts:

- Converting away from Islam subjects individuals to severe community and family pressure
- Government structures often complicit in religious discrimination
- Digital and social media harassment campaigns escalating [10]

Persecution of other religions:

- Muslims in Europe face increasing targeting and discrimination
- Antisemitism remains persistent globally
- Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Ahmadiyya Muslims face targeted persecution in multiple contexts
- Women and girls disproportionately affected by religious restrictions, particularly in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan [11]

Part VI: Prejudice Against People with Disabilities and Other Marginalised Groups. Disability Discrimination and Labor Exclusion

8. While less visible in public discourse, discrimination against people with disabilities represents a severe and systematic barrier to full human participation and dignity:

Employment barriers:

- People with disabilities are 25% less likely to be in the labour market globally compared to those without disabilities [3]
- This disparity results from limited workplace accommodations, direct discrimination, and fewer opportunities for education and work experience [3]

Discrimination rates by category (Germany case study):

- Disability discrimination: 2,476 reported cases (second most common after race)
- Age discrimination: 1,091 cases
- Religious discrimination: 626 cases [6]

Intersectional vulnerability:

- Women with disabilities face compounded discrimination
- Marginalised groups (indigenous women, migrants, women with disabilities) remain severely underrepresented in discrimination research and data collection [4]

Part VII: The Self and the Other—Theoretical Dimensions of Prejudice

9. Othering as Social Process: Beyond Individual Prejudice

Critical contemporary research reveals that prejudice cannot be understood solely as individual attitudes or cognitive biases[12]. Instead, othering operates as a complex social process involving power relations, knowledge structures, and categorization mechanisms that work together to construct certain groups as fundamentally different, inferior, and non-belonging.

Key theoretical insights:

Three dimensions of intergroup inequality:

Social psychological research identifies three interconnected processes in prejudice formation[12]:

- Cognitive dimension: Stereotypes—categorical simplifications that obscure internal group diversity
- Emotional dimension: Prejudice—ffective devaluation of outgroups
- Behavioral dimension: Discrimination—enacted differential treatment[12]

However, reducing othering to these individual-level processes obscures critical dimensions:

Power asymmetries and discourse:

- Othering cannot be explained by mere ingroup/outgroup formation or group-based conflict alone
- Power asymmetries—historically rooted hierarchies—determine which groups can other whom and whose othering is institutionalised and normalised [12]
- Discourse-based approaches reveal how belonging and non-belonging are constructed according to power relations, not objective differences [12]

Intersectionality and dynamic power:

- Othering manifests intersectionally—through simultaneous constructions of race, gender, caste, class, sexuality, ability, and other categories [12]
- Power relations between marginalised groups themselves become visible intersectionally (e.g., marginalised whites othering racialised migrants) [12]
- These power dynamics remain invisible in one-dimensional analyses focused on single oppression categories [12]

Postcolonial dimensions:

- The construction of "the West and the Rest" represents a foundational othering process that legitimised colonialism, extractivism, and continuing global domination [12]
- Colonial othering persists in contemporary international relations, development discourse, and the Global North's positioning as universal standard-bearer [12]

The Self-Other dialectic:

- Identity and otherness are inseparable: the Self only exists in relation to constructed Others
- The difference within each group is systematically underestimated while difference between groups is exaggerated
- This cognitive bias improves apparent group coherence and stability, facilitating stereotyping and discrimination [12]

Visibility and invisibility:

- While attitudes-based approaches seek to make certain groups' prejudices visible and changeable through consciousness-raising, this approach:
 - Often fails to address structural conditions rooted in historically grown dominance relations
 - Leaves unclear where motivation should come from for dominant groups to undergo such reflection
 - Does not address power asymmetries in access to resources [12]

Part VIII: Prejudice Against Other Species and Nature

10. Speciesism: Othering Beyond the Human

The prejudicial treatment of non-human animals and nature represents an extension of othering logic to the more-than-human world. Termed speciesism—discrimination based on species membership analogous to racism or sexism—this form of prejudice drives ecological destruction and animal suffering at industrial scale.

Psychological mechanisms:

- Speciesism operates through shared psychological mechanisms as prejudices toward human outgroups
- Individuals scoring high on speciesism simultaneously score high on racism and sexism [13]

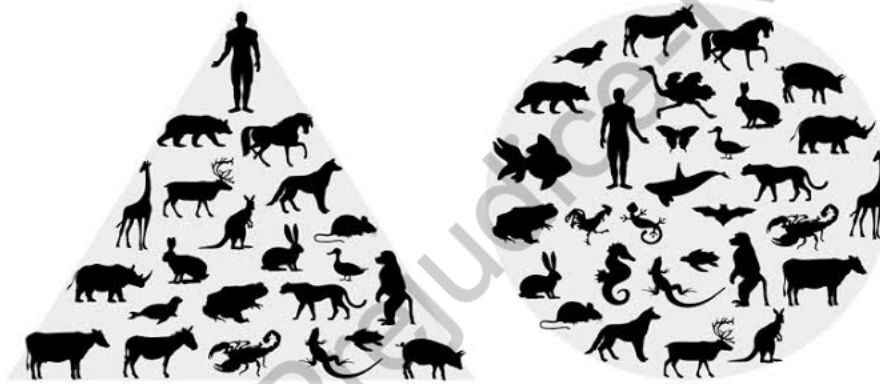
- The underlying shared mechanism is social dominance orientation (SDO)—the desire to achieve and maintain group dominance [13]

Industrial agriculture and confinement:

- Animals confined in industrial systems (pigs, chickens, cows) unable to move or express natural behaviours constitute one of humanity's cruellest interactions with non-human animals [14]
- Institutional structures systematise animal suffering through commercialised agriculture, urbanisation, and industrialisation [14]

Ecological violence:

- 420 million hectares of forest lost since 1990 (Food and Agriculture Organisation) [2]
- 852 fin whales and other marine species slaughtered, alongside widespread fishing and hunting practices [2]
- Wildlife habitat destruction through development, zoning policies, and "green" developments that romanticise human-animal separation while maintaining anthropocentric priorities [14]



11. Human-Wildlife Conflict: Environmental Justice Dimensions

The relationship between humans and large carnivores reveals how ecological prejudice intersects with economic injustice:

Unequal distribution of burden:

- 82% of large carnivore range falls outside protected areas, meaning rural communities bear conservation costs without protection [15]
- The poorest 40% of humanity suffer climate impacts 70% greater than the global average—the same pattern holds for wildlife conflict [15]

Economic impact on vulnerable populations:

- In Bhutan: Families inside Jigme Sigmye National Park lost an average 17% yearly per-capita income to tiger and leopard predation [15]
- In Tanzania: Communities on Serengeti edge lost over 19% annually from leopard and lion predation [15]
- For cattle keepers in developing countries: livestock loss from conflict represents eight orders of magnitude worse economic impact proportionally than for farmers in wealthy nations [15]

Psychological and health consequences:

- Fear of carnivore attack and hesitancy to move in darkness

- Grief over lost livestock
- Post-traumatic stress from loss events [15]
- Food insecurity when predation occurs during drought/climate stress [15]

Conservation-justice tension:

- Environmental conservation demands clash with food security and livelihood needs of Earth's poorest communities
- Current conservation models often exclude and burden those whose land overlaps with wildlife
- More than half of the world's largest carnivore species have over one-third of their habitat overlapping with economically vulnerable human communities [15]

Part IX: Institutional and Systemic Dimensions

12. The Institutionalisation of Prejudice

Prejudice becomes most powerful when embedded in institutions—legal systems, educational structures, economic organisations, and state apparatuses that translate individual prejudice into systematic denial of rights, resources, and dignity.

Justice system inequities:

The United States case illustrates how prejudice becomes institutionalised:

- Ranking 121 out of 140 on absence of discrimination in civil justice
- Ranking 106 out of 140 on impartial criminal justice
- These poor rankings in the justice system equate to systematic discrimination in law enforcement, prosecution, conviction, and sentencing [1]

Educational discrimination:

In India's universities, caste-based discrimination has increased 118.4% in five years, reflecting:

- Harassment and social exclusion of Dalit and tribal students
- Failure of grievance mechanisms to protect vulnerable students
- Institutional inaction despite high-profile suicides resulting from caste-based harassment [9]

Workplace discrimination:

Germany's data reveals concentrated discrimination in specific sectors:

- Workplace: 3,000+ cases (most common setting)
- Public institutions
- Education
- Housing
- Healthcare
- Police and judiciary [6]

This concentration suggests that certain institutional contexts systematise prejudicial treatment.

Religious freedom violations through state action:

State-sanctioned religious persecution demonstrates prejudice's political dimensions:

- North Korean government treating Christians as political traitors
- Pakistan's government weaponisation of blasphemy laws against religious minorities
- Afghanistan's Taliban implementing religious edicts restricting women and religious minorities

- Nicaragua's Ortega-Murillo regime imprisoning Catholic clergy
- China's systematic restrictions on Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and other religious groups [11]

Part X: Intersectionality and Compound Discrimination

13. Multiple, Overlapping Prejudices

Individuals often experience multiple simultaneous forms of discrimination, with effects that are qualitatively different from single-axis discrimination:

Gendered racialization:

- Black women, Indigenous women, migrant women, and women with disabilities face discrimination that combines gender with race, ethnicity, class, immigration status, or disability
- These compound prejudices create distinct barriers not reducible to the sum of individual forms [3]

Caste and gender:

- Dalit women face disproportionate sexual violence from upper-caste men
- Caste discrimination intersects with patriarchal control of women's sexuality, mobility, and autonomy [7]

Religious and gender persecution:

- Women and girls face disproportionate religious persecution (e.g., Taliban restrictions, forced conversions, kidnappings) [10],[11]
- Religious persecution often weaponises gender, targeting women specifically [4]

Disability intersections:

- Women with disabilities face combined gender and disability discrimination
- Marginalized racial/ethnic groups with disabilities face triple discrimination [3]

Part XI: Data Gaps and Underreporting

14. The Hidden Landscape: What We Don't Know

Comprehensive understanding of prejudice is hampered by significant data gaps:

Underreporting of sexual violence:

- Non-partner sexual violence figures (263 million women) are "significantly under-reported due to stigma and fear"[4]
- Actual prevalence likely substantially higher

Marginalised groups underrepresented in data:

- "Significant gaps remain—particularly on non-partner sexual violence, marginalised groups such as indigenous women, migrants, and women with disabilities, as well as data from fragile and humanitarian settings"[4]

Caste discrimination underreporting:

- West Bengal reported only 102 cases of SC/ST atrocities despite large populations, raising questions about "underreporting or systemic gaps in registration"[8]
- Institutional apathy, police insensitivity, and underrepresentation of SC/ST personnel contribute to low reporting [8]

Digital and technology-facilitated abuse:

- "Digital and technology-facilitated abuse, a key theme for the UN in 2025, is also rising, affecting 16–58% of women"—yet remains poorly tracked and understood [16]

These gaps mean the actual scope of prejudice is substantially larger than official statistics reveal.

Part XII: Movements Toward Justice: From Consciousness to Transformation

15. Pathways for Transformative Change

While the report documents extensive prejudice, it must also recognise emerging movements, practices, and frameworks oriented toward justice, healing, and liberation:

Consciousness and conscientization:

- Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization—developing critical consciousness of oppression and one's capacity to transform it—remains relevant as a foundation for change [17]
- Educational spaces can become sites of dialogical consciousness-raising where both oppressed and oppressor begin recognising othering's mechanisms

Intersectional analysis and organising:

- Contemporary social movements increasingly employ intersectional analysis, recognising how oppressions interconnect and require simultaneous resistance [12]
- Dalit feminist, indigenous feminist, and Black feminist analyses provide frameworks integrating caste/race/gender/ecological dimensions [7]

Restorative and transformative justice:

- Beyond punitive models, restorative approaches recognise humanity of all parties and seek to transform conditions enabling prejudice
- Truth, reconciliation, and healing-centred approaches (emerging from Indigenous, decolonial, and spiritual traditions) offer alternatives [18]

Dialogical democracy and participation:

- Deliberative, dialogical approaches to democracy—emphasising genuine participation of marginalised voices—can create conditions for mutual recognition and solidarity across difference [19]
- This requires dismantling power asymmetries that prevent authentic dialogue

Ecological and spiritual dimensions:

- Movements integrating eco-social spirituality, non-violence, and compassionate ethics (drawing on Gandhi, Thich Nhat Hanh, Indigenous cosmologies) model alternatives to domination [20]
- Recognition of interconnection with all life and commitment to non-harm offers philosophical grounding for movements against speciesism and ecological destruction

Conclusion: Toward a World Free from Prejudice

Prejudice, far from being an individual attitude problem or a natural human tendency, is systematic, institutionalised, and profitable for those benefiting from others' domination. The 2025 data reveal a world where:

- Discrimination is worsening in three-fourths of countries
- Gender-based violence affects one in three women with minimal progress toward change
- Caste systems continue systematising violence against 160+ million people
- Religious minorities face persecution in 62 countries containing two-thirds of global population
- Speciesism and ecological domination drive extinctions and environmental destruction
- Institutional structures—law, education, economy, state—encode and enforce these prejudices.

Yet this report also insists that prejudice is not inevitable. It is constructed through social processes, embedded in institutions, and maintained by power relations that are ultimately human creations and therefore changeable.

Transforming this world requires more than individual attitude change. It requires:

1. Structural transformation of institutions that systematise discrimination
2. Power redistribution enabling those most harmed by prejudice to lead liberation processes
3. Consciousness-raising and dialogical engagement where all parties recognise othering's mechanisms and humanity
4. Counter-hegemonic organising challenging systems of domination across multiple dimensions
5. Spiritual-ethical commitment to dignity, compassion, non-violence, and right relationship with all beings
6. Integration across struggles—recognising that liberation is interconnected, that justice for Dalit women connects to justice for animals, to justice for indigenous peoples, to ecological healing

The world we create will reflect the choices we make now—whether to deepen systems of othering or to construct communities of genuine belonging where dignity is not restricted by constructed categories but extended to all.

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