

Key Findings

# COOQUAL

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Equity Series, Part 3

## Equity and Ethnicity at Work: A Global Exploration

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# Introduction

Workplace conversations about race and equity are becoming more common. But they are often US-centric, sometimes alienating employees in other countries—and making them feel excluded from diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) efforts.

To be truly inclusive, multinational companies need a more nuanced approach to racial and ethnic marginalization. This involves a deeper understanding of ethnicity, which goes far beyond race in many cultures. For example, we find that while 60% of professionals in South Africa define their ethnicity based on race, that's only true for 22% of professionals in India.

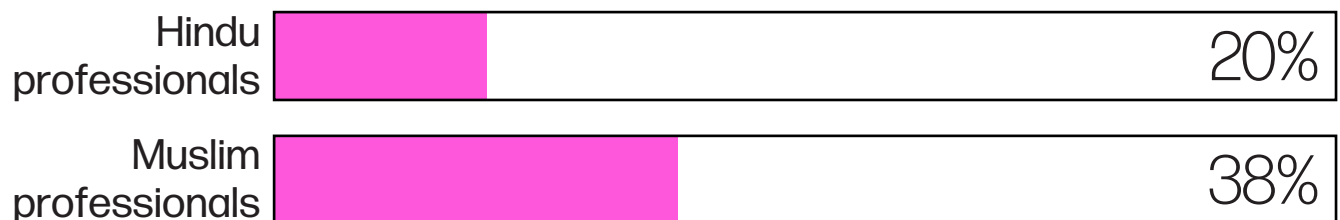
Understanding the needs of marginalized ethnicities across the globe can seem overwhelming, particularly when there are legal or social obstacles to talking about them openly. In India, for example, we find that nearly two in five Muslim professionals fear physical harm if they disclose their ethnicity at work.

Companies need guidance. That's what Coqual provides in this report so employers can better understand marginalized groups in each country. Applying a five-step process and a robust method, we give examples from five markets.

## Concerns professionals have for disclosing data on ethnicity

### Fear of physical harm

● India ● China



### Concern over how this information will be used



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# A Process for Beginning Global Equity Work

Our process consists of five steps. It's intended to be fluid and dynamic, and you may pursue more than one step simultaneously.

## **Step One** Acknowledge a cultural starting point.

Recognize your cultural lens, question your assumptions, and own up to blind spots.

## **Step Two** Identify marginalized groups.

Census data and other reputable sources can help surface ethnic groups in need of support, as well as provide rich background on local contexts.

## **Step Three** Collect qualitative and quantitative data.

A mix of interviews, focus groups, and surveys will help you understand the experiences of employees from different ethnic groups.

## **Step Four** Partner and collaborate.

Interpreting your findings will require on-the-ground partners in business and civil society who can provide local perspective and ensure responsible engagement.

## **Step Five** Distill and disseminate information.

Sharing insights and establishing an ongoing feedback loop with DE&I teams and local leaders will help your DE&I strategy stay current.

**“The better equipped we are to define diversity, the better equipped we are to measure and improve it.”**

- Tamara Vasquez, Global Head of Diversity & Inclusion, S&P Global

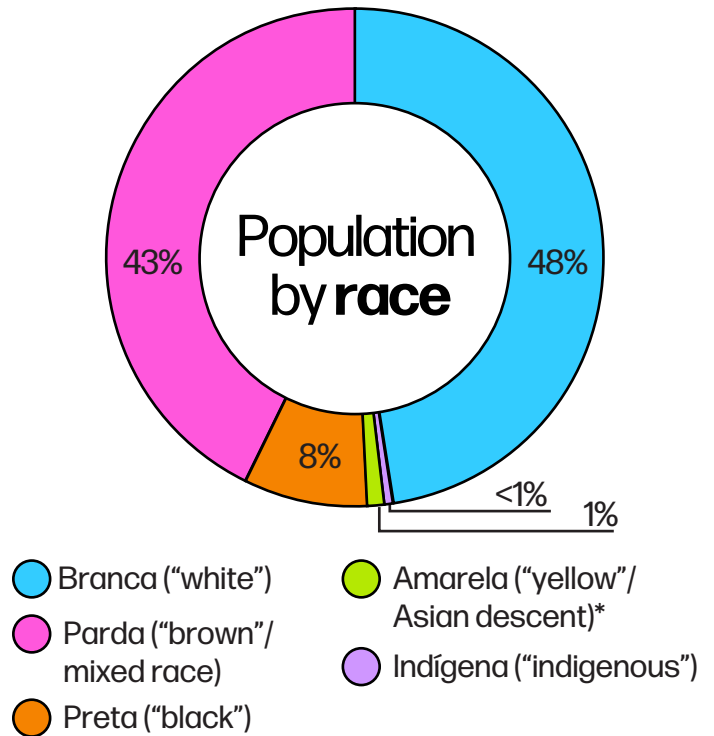
To illustrate how ethnicity varies, we applied this process in five markets. We selected two salient aspects of ethnicity in each and examined the experiences of professionals who are from marginalized backgrounds.

**Brazil**

# Race

As the last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery, and with a long history of immigration, Brazil has a complex mix of ethnic and racial identities.<sup>1</sup> While more than half of Brazilians identify as Black or Brown/mixed race, less than 5% of executives in Brazil's 500 largest companies identify as such.<sup>2</sup> Our data highlights this experience of inequity: Black professionals in Brazil are the most likely to say they feel discriminated against and see bias at work.

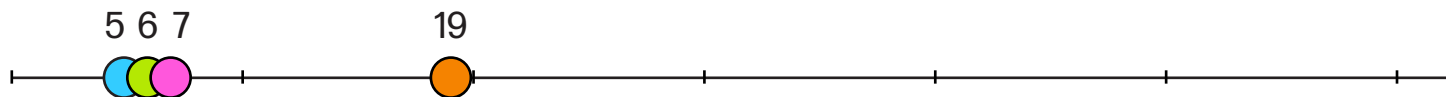
\*NOTE: Brazilians with Asian heritage are referred to as "Amarela," the Portuguese word for "yellow." We will refer to this racial group as Yellow/Asian, and refer to the other racial groups using English translations.



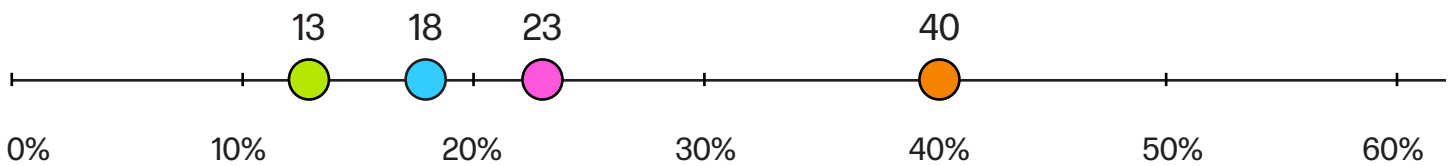
Source: Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2010<sup>3</sup>

## Professionals who:

### Feel discriminated against at work most of the time



### Say there is bias against members of some ethnicities at work

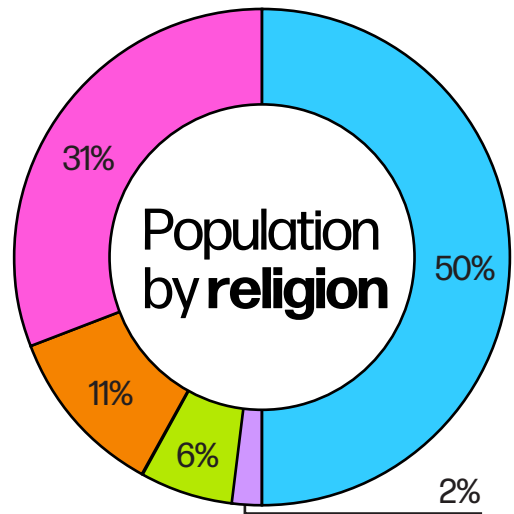


Percentage of professionals

**Brazil**

# Religion

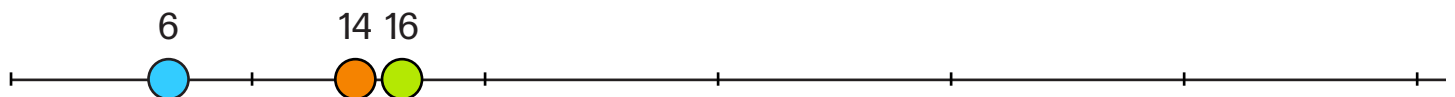
Despite the growing Protestant/Evangelical population, Roman Catholic tradition is still enmeshed in Brazil's culture and institutions.<sup>4</sup> Brazilians of other religions may occupy a lower socioeconomic status or face intolerance and even hate crimes.<sup>5</sup> This experience of othering exists at work, too: non-Catholic Brazilians are more likely to feel misjudged and excluded at work, we find.



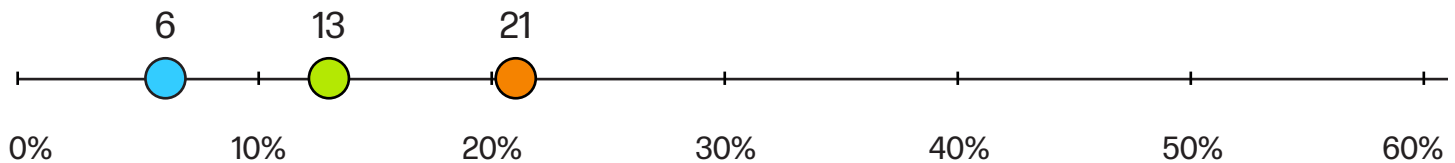
Source: Religlaw International Center for Law and Religion Studies, 2019<sup>6</sup>

## Professionals who feel:

### Misjudged at work most of the time



### They fit in at work less than their colleagues

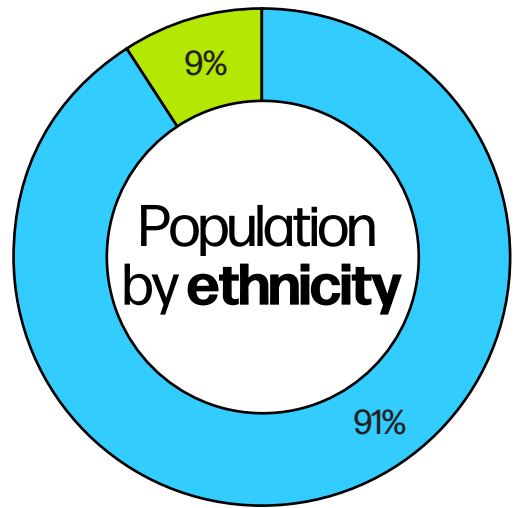


Percentage of professionals

**China**

# Ethnicity

The Han Chinese group has long been the country's dominant one, while non-Han groups have endured assimilationist government policies with severe penalties.<sup>7</sup> In China, opportunity is often determined by networking and personal connections.<sup>8</sup> In our data, non-Han Chinese professionals are less likely to value strong professional networks. They are also more likely than Han Chinese professionals to feel misjudged and excluded at work.



● Han Chinese ● Non-Han Chinese

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020<sup>9</sup>

## Professionals who:

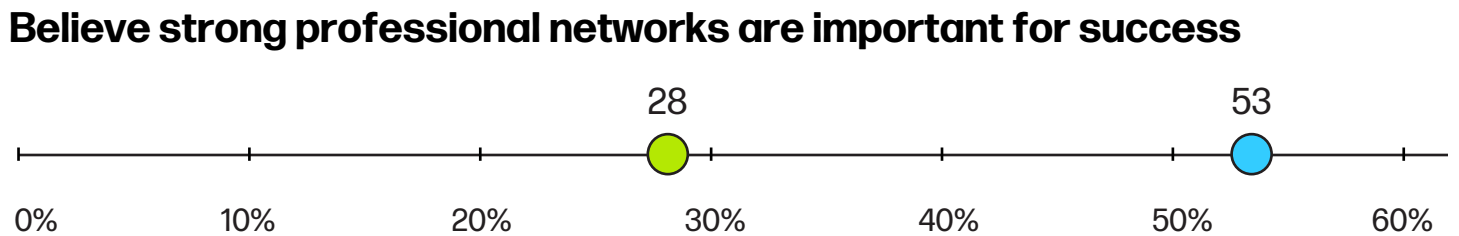
### Feel excluded at work most of the time



### Feel misjudged at work most of the time



### Believe strong professional networks are important for success

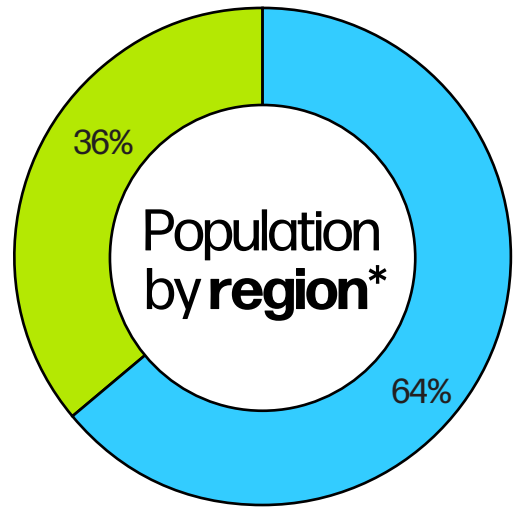


Percentage of professionals

**China**

# Hukou status

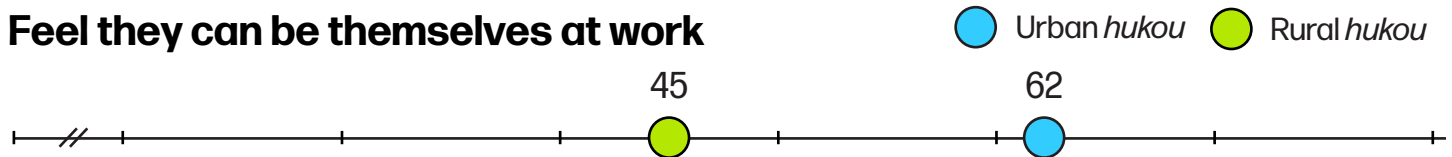
China's hukou registration system classifies citizens as agricultural (rural) or nonagricultural (urban) residents.<sup>10</sup> Rural hukou holders generally have less educational attainment and fewer career opportunities compared to urban hukou holders.<sup>11</sup> This divide surfaced in our data: rural hukou holders are more likely to feel like outsiders at work, and to de-emphasize the importance of networks in career development.



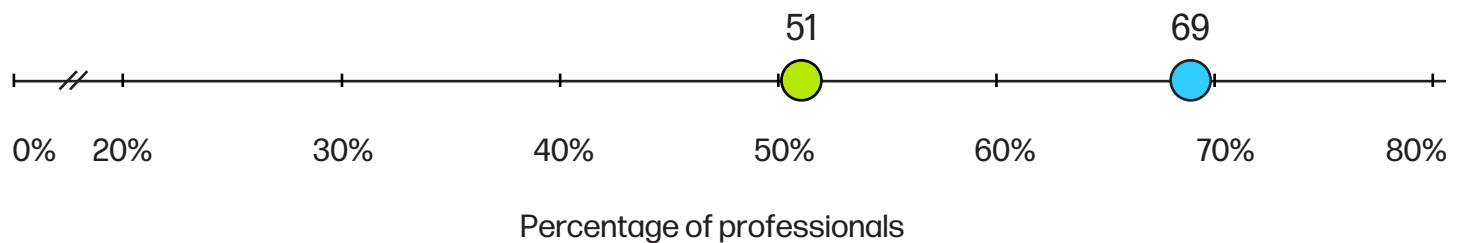
● Urban    ● Rural    \*NOTE: Data represents population across urban/rural regions; precise measures of hukou status were not publicly available.  
 Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020<sup>12</sup>

## Professionals who:

### Feel they can be themselves at work



### Believe knowing the right people is important for a successful career



“I’m still so underprivileged compared to people living in the cities...The rural-city difference in China is huge.”

- Woman with a rural hukou in China

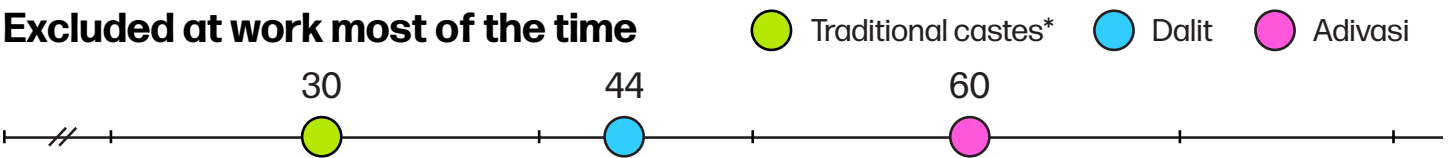
India

# Caste

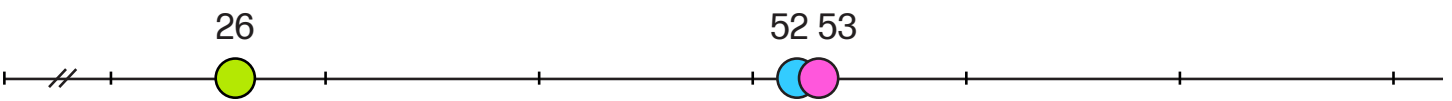
Despite a long history of legal protections and activism, striking disparities based on caste—a 3,000-year-old hierarchical social system—persist in India. This is especially true for those outside of the traditional caste system: Dalit (formerly referred to as “untouchable”) and Adivasi (indigenous) groups.<sup>13</sup> They make up about 16% and 8% of the Indian population, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Their outsider status carries into the workplace, we find. Dalit and Adivasi professionals are more likely than those from traditional castes to feel excluded, alienated, and invisible at work.

## Professionals who feel:

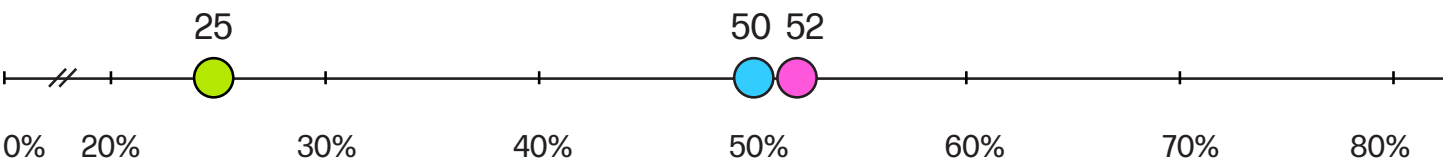
### Excluded at work most of the time



### Invisible at work most of the time



### Alienated at work most of the time



\*Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra have been grouped together

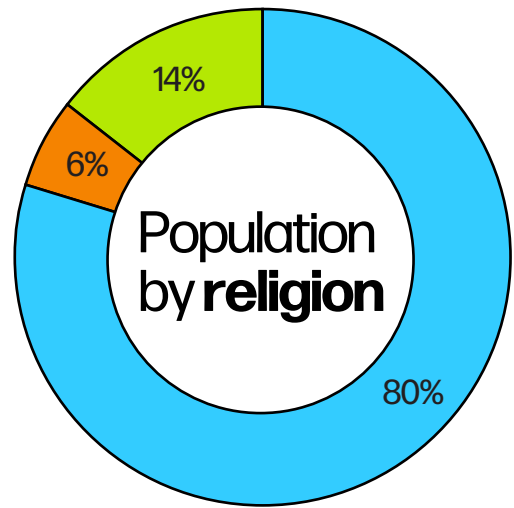
Percentage of professionals



India

# Religion

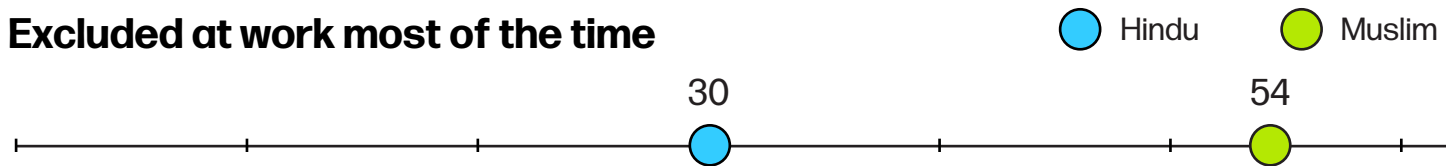
Social, political, and sometimes physical conflict between the majority Hindu religious group and the Muslim religious group has intensified in a political climate favoring Hindu nationalism.<sup>15</sup> In the workplace context, we find that Muslim professionals are far more likely than Hindu professionals to say they feel excluded and misjudged at work most of the time.



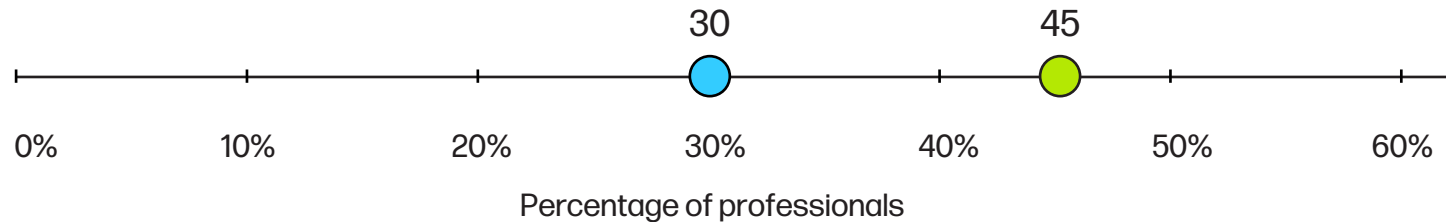
● Hindu ● Muslim ● Other

Source: India Religion Census, 2011<sup>16</sup>

## Professionals who feel: Excluded at work most of the time



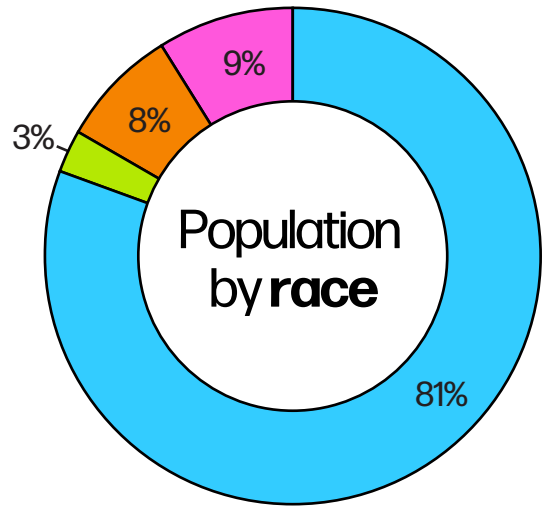
## Misjudged at work most of the time



**South Africa**

# Race

The brutal legacy of apartheid persists in South Africa today, where race remains a raw topic and is associated with stark inequality across domains, including the corporate sector.<sup>17</sup> Professionals who identify as Coloured are most likely to face obstacles to career advancement, we find. Through expert interviews, we learned this is likely due to their occupying a liminal social space between White and Black Africans.

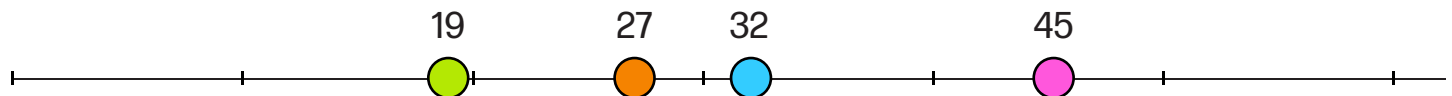


Source: Statistics South Africa, 2020<sup>19</sup>

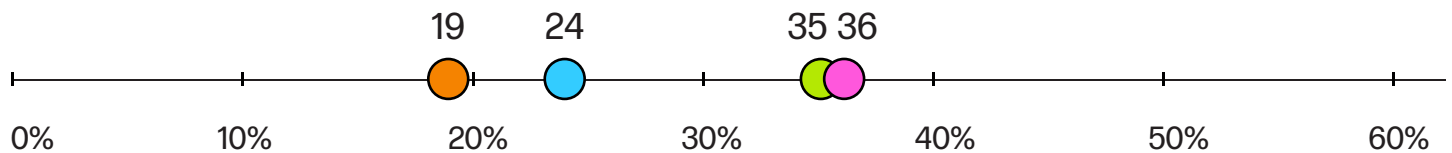
## Professionals who say:



### They have faced more obstacles to career advancement than their peers



### Colleagues have assumed they are at a lower job level than they currently are

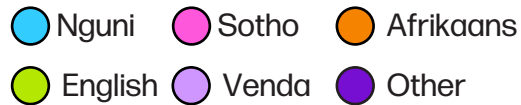
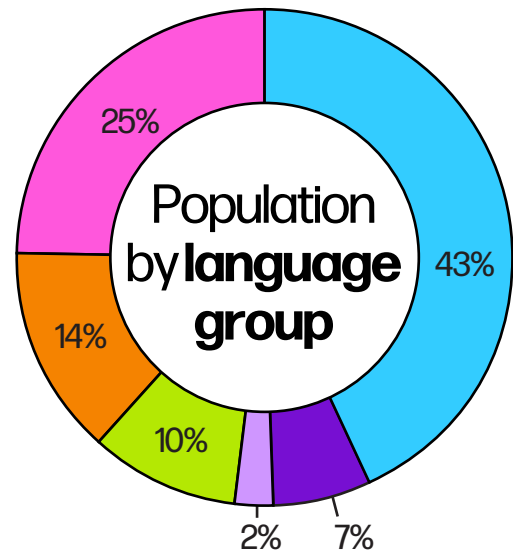


Percentage of professionals

**South Africa**

# Heritage

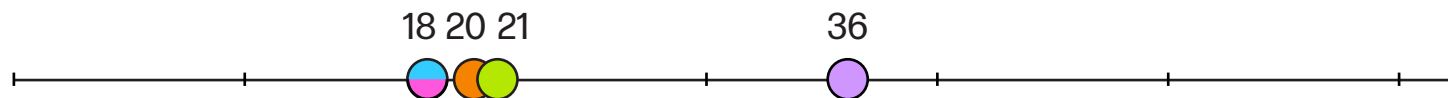
Heritage—often signified by native language—also shapes ethnic identity in South Africa.<sup>20</sup> The country’s history of linguistic and cultural tension affects some groups more profoundly, notably Venda-speakers who can be othered in society.<sup>21</sup> In our data, they are most likely to say they are evaluated more harshly and have colleagues who avoid working with them.



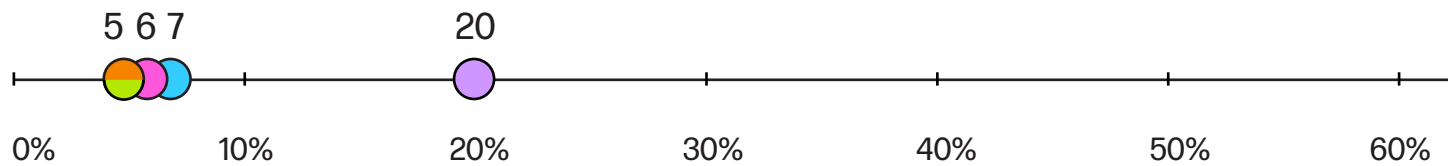
Source: Statistics South Africa, 2011<sup>22</sup>

## Professionals who say:

### They are evaluated more harshly than their peers



### Colleagues avoid working with them when they can

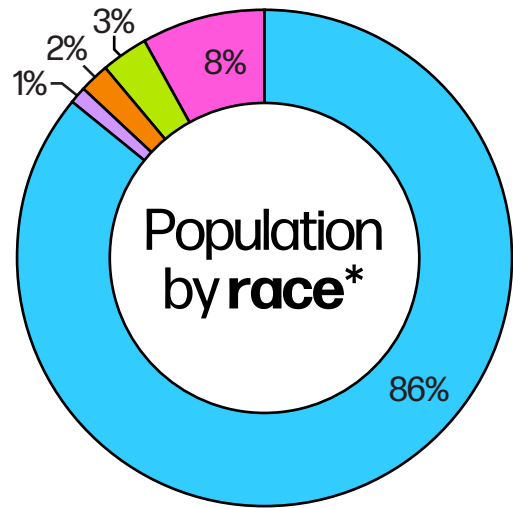


Percentage of professionals

**United Kingdom**

# Race

Currently, there are active controversies on whether race or class has more impact on individual life experiences in the UK.<sup>23</sup> A tradition of “colorblindness” in the UK often discourages discussions of race, we heard. At work, we find, Black and Asian professionals say their race affects the way they’re treated, and that they change aspects of themselves to fit in with their colleagues.<sup>24</sup>

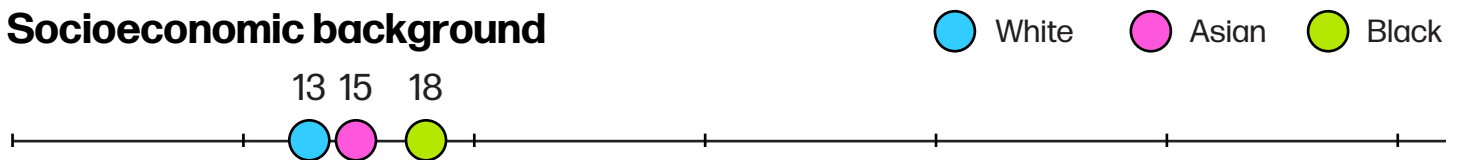


\*NOTE: This chart only includes data from England and Wales and not Scotland or Northern Ireland. Coqual's survey data includes respondents from England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

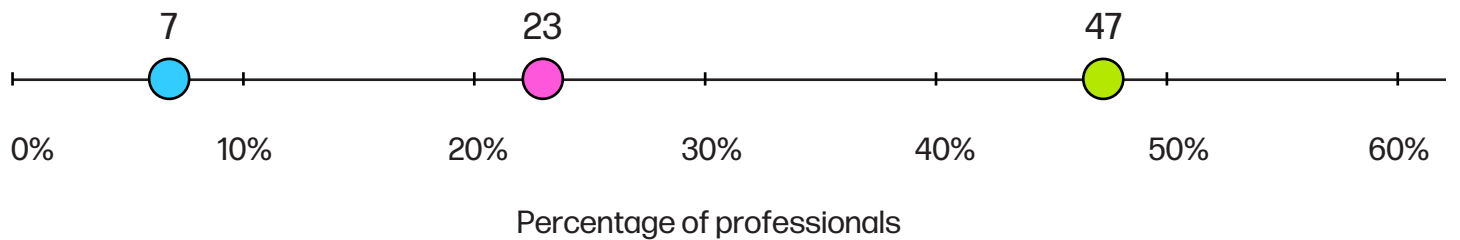
Source: UK Census, Population of England and Wales, 2011<sup>25</sup>

## Professionals who say the following affects the way people see or treat them at work:

### Socioeconomic background



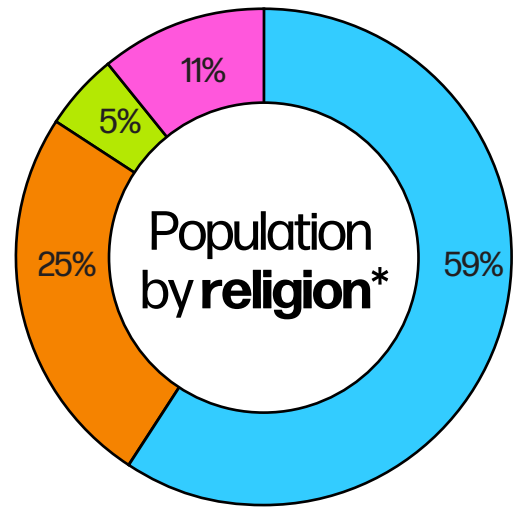
### Race



**United Kingdom**

# Religion

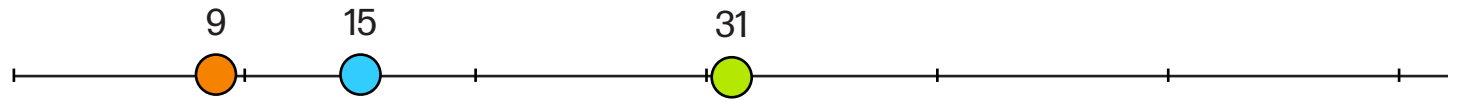
In recent years, anti-Muslim sentiments and discrimination have risen in the UK.<sup>26</sup> Our data shows that Muslim professionals are most likely to say that they receive less feedback and that their experiences related to ethnicity go unacknowledged by their colleagues. Muslim professionals are also more likely than Christian and nonreligious professionals to say they are penalized more than their peers for making the same mistakes, we find.



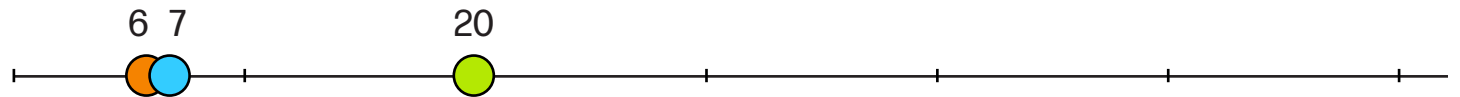
● Christian ● Muslim ● Other ● None  
 \*NOTE: This chart only includes data from England and Wales and not Scotland or Northern Ireland. Coqual's survey data includes respondents from England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.  
 Source: UK Office for National Statistics, 2020<sup>27</sup>

## Professionals who say:

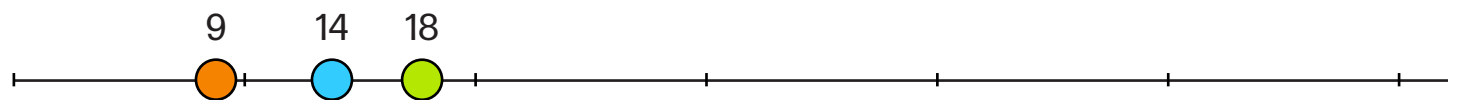
### They receive less feedback than their peers



### Their colleagues do not acknowledge their experiences related to ethnicity



### They are penalized more than their peers for making the same mistakes



0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%

Percentage of professionals

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# Conclusion

The insights surfaced in this report underscore the need for a tailored DE&I strategy that considers the wide range of marginalized ethnic identities across the globe—and the barriers to equity and opportunity professionals from these groups face.

Coqual's five-step process provides a road map for leaders looking to understand and support employees from marginalized ethnic groups in any market. Taking a nuanced approach to ethnicity in DE&I work may seem daunting, but when done right, the payoffs for employees and employers alike are enormous, resulting in an inclusive, equitable workplace where everyone feels valued for who they are and what they contribute.

“Equity is challenging to achieve, particularly when placed in a global context. It's through talking with others that we can begin to spark ideas, facilitate connections, learn together.

Then it doesn't feel quite so tough to tackle.”

- Joanne (Jo) Watson, Director of Global Inclusion Office, Intel Corporation

## Methodology

The research consists of a survey; focus groups; *Insights In-Depth*® sessions (a proprietary web-based tool used to conduct voice-facilitated virtual focus groups); and one-on-one interviews with more than 100 professionals, experts, and practitioners in Brazil, China, India, South Africa, the UK, and the US.

The survey was conducted online in August 2021 among 3,753 respondents (735 in Brazil, 817 in China, 790 in India, 707 in South Africa, and 704 in the UK), at least the age of 21 and currently employed full time in professional occupations, with at least a bachelor's degree. Data was weighted by gender and, where

available, race, using available benchmarks for each market. The base used for statistical testing was the effective base.

The survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago under the auspices of Coqual, a nonprofit research organization. NORC was responsible for the data collection, while Coqual conducted the analysis. In the charts, percentages may not always add up to 100 because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses from respondents.

## Endnotes

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