

Political discrimination of the system politics essay



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Political discrimination happens when the political system limits the opportunity of social groups to participate in political activities because they have certain social characteristics, such as ethnicity or race, language, religion, party membership, or political views.

While it is difficult to trace the origin of political discrimination, undoubtedly it comes with other discriminatory practices which have existed when societies become more stratified. In a stratified society access to certain conveniences or privileges, including political power, depends on the one's class status. Many stratified societies in ancient times, particularly those that practiced slavery, gave little or no political rights to members of the lowest social class. One of the oldest examples is the caste system practiced in India. Although the caste system is no longer relevant in power distribution in contemporary India, in the past the political power was almost exclusively reserved for members of the Brahmin and Kshatriya Castes.

Many of these indigenous discriminatory systems in Asia and Africa survived during the times of European colonialism. The existing social hierarchy was kept by many colonial powers which used it to control and manage its extensive colonies. The Netherland East Indies (now Indonesia), for example, effectively employed local members of aristocracy to rule many parts of the colony as well as to collect taxes on its behalf.

Political discrimination still can be found in many parts of the world although overtly racist practices of political discrimination have declined rapidly from the second half of twentieth century. The decline is partly due to the advance of democratization which guarantees individuals political freedom,

installation of politically more inclusive governments, as well as the growing global awareness of protection of human rights. International pressures and sanctions on deviant governments also have played an important part in this decline. The last significant state-sponsored political discrimination in South Africa was dismantled in 1994 when it fully restored the political rights of its Black citizens by abandoning the Apartheid system.

The main reason for political discrimination is to prevent individuals from certain backgrounds to change or influence the current political system which are favorable to other groups in power. This is most obvious in the case of minority rule, such as South Africa under the Apartheid system (1948-1994) and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) under the rule of Ian Smith (1965-1979). These White-minority regimes had to block political participation of their majority Black population in order to maintain their power.

Another reason, the potential security threat posed by segments of its population, may force the state to limit their political rights. Kurdish diaspora in central Asian countries has experienced some extent of political discrimination because of their ongoing separatist activities in the region. In Turkey, Kurdish based political parties have been banned. Similarly, the Kurdish had faced severe political restriction in Iraq under Saddam Hussein until 1991.

Political discrimination may also be a result of attempts to protect indigenous rights, usually at the expense of other non-native groups. Malaysia's constitution explicitly grants quotas for the bumiputra, the indigenous

people, in civil service recruitment. This together with other measures will eventually negatively affect the political advancement of the non-indigenous people. Similarly, the post-Apartheid South African government has implemented a series of affirmative action strategies to increase the portion of Black South African in civil service and security forces at the expense of its White citizens.

The desire to maintain cultural or national identity usually results in political discrimination against minorities, who are regarded as a threat to homogeneity. In 1952, the Japanese government and citizens welcomed enthusiastically the decision of Allied Occupation in Japan to denaturalize its Korean nationals. It was a culmination of efforts from the government to ostracize its Korean nationals in order to keep Japan as a monoethnic nation-state. Although many finally obtained their citizenship, they are still marginalized in some aspects of today's Japan. Another example was the doctrine of Aryan racial superiority preached by Adolf Hitler (1889-1945). He believed that a strong German only could be achieved after all elements which had attempted to contaminate the purity of Aryan blood of the German people, were driven out. This had led to series political discrimination against the Jewish population, Hitler's main target, and ended with millions of Jews perishing.

There are many kinds of political discrimination. Deprivation of citizenship and rights that come with it is the most paramount kind. Without citizenship, one will not be able to participate in elections to choose the government and parliament, will not able to stand for election, and will not be eligible to work in public service and armed forces. Non-citizens usually have limited access

to government facilities and support, as well as restricted residency and legal status. Cases of forced denaturalization include the Jews of their German citizenship in 1935, Koreans of Japanese in 1952, Kurds of Syrian in 1962, and Black Africans of their South Africa citizenship in 1971.

Another kind of political discrimination is through limiting citizens' exercising their political rights, such as the right to vote, to join the armed forces, to access civil service, to join political organization, and the right in judicial proceedings. For example, many authoritarian regimes disenfranchise legitimate voters during elections because their concern that these voters will vote for the opposition. Because of security concerns, some governments exclude certain citizens from occupying certain strategic posts. It is well known that Israeli Arab and Singaporean Malays are not given opportunities to serve the strategic senior military positions in their countries.

Although overwhelmingly ethnic or racial in nature, political discrimination does exist in other contexts. Different political views as well as perceived threats were the reasons behind denial of the New Order Indonesia (1966-1998) of political rights for millions of former communist members. Many of their descendants, who had no direct political connections with the communist party, had also been prosecuted and barred from joining the military and public service. In other contexts, membership of the ruling party can be crucial in many authoritarian regimes. In China, it is almost impossible for non-communist party members to occupy the real leadership positions in a given ministry or agency. Similarly, the New Order regime in Indonesia required all civil servants to be members of the ruling party, Golkar. Members of other political parties were generally not able to occupy

public office. Religion could also become a reason for discriminatory actions, such as the case of the Shiites Moslem in Iraq whose political role was controlled under Saddam Hussein (1979-2003).

Sometime political marginalization may be a product, intended or not, of other discriminatory policies. Lack of employment opportunities and education access as a result of systemic discrimination could be politically detrimental to the concerned groups. For instance, the African Americans were ostracized politically at least until 1960s, despite the fact that their political rights were protected by the constitution. Up to the early twentieth century many of them were unable to vote in the election since they could not pay the poll taxes because of their low economic status, or failed literacy tests because they were illiterate.

Severe political discrimination may lead to violent ethnonationalist or separatist movements. The separation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) from Pakistan in 1971 was a result political discrimination against its Bengali citizens. As the majority ethnic population in East Pakistan, the Bengali had complained about their very small representation at the top central government administration and military. Many conflicts involving minorities in other parts of the world could be traced back to unresolved grievances, including political ones.

However, not all political grievances ended in violence. Instead of inciting violence, some groups which experienced political discrimination may choose to thrive in areas other than politics. The Indonesian Chinese, for example, choose to become professionals in private sectors, including

business and academia, as careers in politics, bureaucracy, or military were almost closed to them. In other circumstances, the marginalized may decide to leave the country as migrants or as refugees.

Nowadays, although many countries have outlawed discrimination in their legal system, practices of political discrimination are still prevalent, particularly in developing world. Cases above have shown that countries which still struggle with their nation building, face minority issues or security threats, may exercise some kind of political discrimination against segments of their population. These governments usually place restrictions or conditions on their political activities. These policies are worded carefully and implemented cautiously to minimize extreme reaction from the affected population and to avoid international criticism.

Most remaining politically discriminatory policies are obscured, hidden under the administrative measures and procedures. These administrative requirements which appear neutral could potentially be used to exclude candidates from an undesirable background. For example, the state apparatus may require more paper work or extra security checks for certain occupations, to exclude overseas born applicants. Questionnaires and tests in the civil servant recruitment could be written in complex and sophisticated official language in order to screen applicants from minority backgrounds. These indirect and obscure political discriminations can be very difficult to monitor. The effects, however, are visible and sometime easily shown, for example through statistics.