

How Does AI Reinforce Racial Discrimination and Racial Inequality?

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Abstract. This article analyses how AI can amplify racial bias and exacerbate racial inequality and then attempts to identify solutions to this problem. AI should not be viewed simply as a value-neutral and unbiased tool; since the algorithms and databases that underpin it are inevitably influenced by existing racial biases and inequalities in society and international relations, the outputs generated by AI are consequently, and often unintentionally, shaped by racial bias. If AI is blindly integrated into the operations of social institutions, it risks exacerbating existing racial inequalities beyond the boundary. Therefore, this paper argues that people must remain vigilant against the potential negative impacts of AI regarding racial bias. Through technical improvements, the promotion of AI education, and the fostering of international cooperation, people can mitigate the influence of existing racial biases and inequalities on AI, thereby enabling AI to better serve the public good.

Keywords: AI, Ethics, Racial Discrimination, International Relationship

1. Introduction

"The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it" [1]. When technology becomes ordinary, people often treat its results as neutral. One of the most revolutionary technologies of modern time is perhaps AI which is increasingly reshaping contemporary life while remaining invisible.

However, the fact that this technology operates behind the scenes is not only a sign of its success but also comes with potential risks. Earlier industrial revolutions show that technological progress is never purely positive. The First Industrial Revolution increased production but also produced harsh labor conditions and overcrowded cities. The Second brought electricity and mass production but also deepened inequality in various ways. The Third created the recent digital age, expanding the boundary of information, while also producing job displacement and digital exclusion. AI is now often described as part of the "fourth industrial revolution" or the "second machine age" [2]. Like earlier technologies, AI can improve efficiency while reproducing social problems, such as racial discrimination and racial inequality.

Artificial intelligence is often imagined as more objective than human decision-making because it appears mathematical and impersonal. A global Ipsos survey found that 56% of people in 2023 trust AI not to discriminate against particular groups [3]. This belief also appears in some specific political or institutional ways. For example, some people prefer automated border controls because

they assume a machine "will not discriminate against me" [4]. However, this confidence can be misleading. AI is not created outside society as something neutral. It learns from human-produced data, is designed by human engineers from all kinds backgrounds, and finally is deployed by institutions that already contain unequal power relations.

Moreover, the issue mentioned above operates not only on a domestic level. AI is also shaped by international relations. Powerful states and international corporations control many datasets, computing resources, technical standards, and platforms. As a result, AI bias can travel across borders, while AI's benefits may remain concentrated in certain wealthy countries and dominant groups. International organizations increasingly recognize AI's global risks and treat them as a global governance issue. The UN General Assembly adopted a 2024 resolution on safe, secure, and trustworthy AI for sustainable development, and UNESCO's AI ethics recommendation emphasizes human rights, fairness, transparency, and non-discrimination [5, 6].

This essay inquires: How does AI reinforce racial discrimination and racial inequality? I argue that AI reinforces racial injustice in four connected ways. First, it inherits bias from unequal historical data and human design. Second, it spreads biased outputs through large-scale institutions. Third, it institutionally turns discrimination into material inequality by shaping jobs, income, services, and mobility. Fourth, international power relations influence which data, languages, and political interests are built into AI. AI is therefore not only technical, but also ethical and political.

2. AI inherits human bias

Human bias can enter AI before an AI system produces any output. Chen [7] explains that algorithms depend on many stages that include human judgment, such as data construction, target formulation and feature selection. The dataset decides what information the system learns from. The target formulation decides what the system is asked to optimize. Feature selection decides which characteristics are treated as relevant. Because these choices are now made within unequal social background, AI systems can inherit inequality even when developers do not intentionally design them to discriminate.

The problem begins with data. AI systems learn patterns from historical records, but history itself is not neutral. As Chen pointed out "In the bentwood of these data sets, none of them is straight." Even history is not 100% fair [7]. Historical records are produced by specific people or institutions which locate in certain historical context. Inequalities arising from these specific circumstances will quietly seep into the records. Some voices are recorded more often, while others are ignored, erased, or treated as less authoritative. Binney's discussion of Māori oral narratives and Pākehā written texts is a nice example here because it shows that written colonial records can become more visible than Indigenous forms of knowledge [8]. If AI systems are trained on data that overrepresents dominant groups and underrepresents marginalized communities, then the system may learn the world from an already unequal archive.

This problem could be strengthened in a global context. The colonial-era examples mentioned above have already subtly highlighted the potential problems that global inequality can pose in terms of data. Today, with the expansion of data exchange and globalization, these issues are only further magnified. Many large AI systems are trained on internet data that privileges English-language materials, wealthy countries, and digitally connected populations. Communities with less infrastructure or fewer online publications can become less visible. This does not mean that AI itself always intentionally excludes them or people consciously trained AI in a biased way, but means that colonial histories, global inequality, and uneven digital infrastructure could all shape the data environment from which AI is built. This influence is subtle, yet profound.

Feature selection can also reproduce bias. In AI-enabled recruitment, engineers may choose features such as education, employment history or even speech patterns to predict whether a person is "employable." These features may seem neutral, but they actually also reflect social privilege. For instance, education can be influenced by racial inequality, and immigration status. Speech patterns is also to race, ethnicity, and language background. In this way, even if race is not directly included, other variables may function as proxies for race.

The engineer's own assumptions also matter. Vivek Wadhwa writes that "humans are biased beings" [9]. This does not mean that every engineer is personally racist. It means that designers work with their own normativity. If the engineering team is socially narrow, including people who come certain backgrounds with certain bias, then AI systems are more likely to reproduce people's bias.

For these reasons, AI should not be treated as naturally fair. It is rather a system that can inherit social patterns and all biases within them that already exist. The biases of the world are already serious before they enter AI. Once they are built into AI systems, they can become faster, less visible, and more difficult for individuals to challenge.

3. AI reinforces racial discrimination

AI would reinforce racial discrimination when biased systems are deployed in social institutions. The familiar problem of "bias in, bias out" means that unequal data and biased design choices can lead to unequal outputs [7]. However, the danger is not only that AI makes inaccurate predictions. The deeper danger is that biased predictions can become part of institutional decision-making. When AI is incorporated as a part of social institutions, a technical judgment can become a social judgment.

Facial recognition is an important example. Buolamwini and Gebru's Gender Shades study showed that commercial gender-classification systems had much higher error rates for darker-skinned women than for lighter-skinned men [10]. This leads to further social problems because facial recognition is not only used for entertainment or convenience but can also be used by social institutions such as police. If technology is less accurate for people with darker skin, those people face a higher risk of misidentification and thus are treated unequally.

Regarding social institutions, the international dimension is especially important in border and migration systems. Automated border control is often presented as neutral because it replaces a human officer with a machine. However, as mentioned before, AI could have biases. If AI is used in civic and international institutions, racialized groups can be harmed by errors that are difficult to appeal. The European Commission notes that the EU AI Act covers high-risk uses in biometrics, employment, migration, asylum, and border control [11].

Language technologies create a similar risk. Google's image-recognition system famously labeled two Black people as gorillas in 2015 [12]. More recently, some scholars show that AI systems can generate covertly racist judgments about speakers of African American English [13]. In their research, language models were more likely viewed as "more criminal, more working class, less educated, less comprehensible, and less trustworthy when they used AAE rather than Standardized American English (SAE)" [13]. Information with racial discrimination is increasingly present in ordinary lives, subtly influencing opinions in every corner of daily existence. Overall, AI's use across many categories fosters discriminatory behaviors and responses based on people's skin color and dialect, thereby spreading racially biased outputs into the world and reinforcing social discrimination. When people are affected by biased information regarding hiring employees, racial inequality is likely to occur.

These examples show that AI does not only reflect bias privately inside a computer system. It can also distribute biases into public life. When people interact with AI, they may receive outputs that reinforce stereotypes. Because AI systems can operate at enormous scale, the same biased pattern can affect many people at once. This makes AI different from one single biased individual. A biased person can discriminate in one workplace or one institution. A biased algorithm can be copied, sold, and deployed across many countries.

International relations can intensify this spread. AI systems built in one country can be exported through international companies. If a system trained in one context is used in another, it may import racial and cultural assumptions into another local decision-making. Global dependence on foreign AI tools can therefore make discrimination transnational.

Overall, AI's use across many sectors can foster discriminatory responses based on various biases. Again, the problem is that AI can turn unequal social patterns into automated outputs and then present those outputs as neutral. When these outputs influence social institutional affairs, racial discrimination becomes more systematic.

4. AI reinforces racial inequality

Racial discrimination becomes racial inequality when it is institutionalized in social systems. Recruitment is one of the most obvious examples, as the author Oberhauser from MDSAA said, "AI-enabled tools are often promoted for their potential to enhance efficiency and objectivity" [14]. This led to many companies using the AI model in their recruitment system, which restricts many black people's career opportunities. For instance, a company uses AI-driven technology in candidate video interviews, which can analyze facial expressions, tone of voice, and word choice to predict a candidate's employability. The technology will discriminate to candidates who are potentially non-native speakers, such as AAE speakers, or people with different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, the AI facial recognition system and AI language model show a disadvantage to the candidates with darker skin tones, and the language model favors nonwhite associated names in 85.1% of cases [14]. This creates a direct threat to equal opportunity. If an AI system filters candidates before a human ever reads their applications, biased predictions can quietly exclude qualified people. The candidate may not know why they were rejected, and the company may not fully understand how the system made its decision. This opacity makes discrimination difficult to prove. It also makes discrimination easier to be justified, because the decision appears to come from a neutral technical system rather than from a prejudiced employer.

The economic consequences can be larger than one hiring decision. McKinsey's report on generative AI and Black communities note that new wealth created by digital and AI capabilities flows through an economy in which the median Black household has only about 15 percent of the wealth of the median White household [15]. This means that AI enters an economy that is already unequal. If access to AI-related jobs, training, capital, and networks is unequal, then the benefits of AI may go first to groups that are already advantaged.

Job displacement is another risk. Brown noted that Black workers are overrepresented in some occupations vulnerable to automation or AI-related change [15]. This does not mean that AI alone creates racial unemployment. The racial labor market was already unequal. However, AI can intensify existing inequality.

Again, the same pattern can appear internationally. Countries with more resources are more likely to capture AI's gains. Weaker countries may become consumers rather than producers of AI. UNCTAD's Technology and Innovation Report 2025 argues that inclusive AI requires global

cooperation and a voice for developing countries [16]. In this way, global economic hierarchies are connected to colonial histories and racialized development.

AI also depends on global labor that is often invisible. Data labeling is often outsourced to workers in lower-income countries. These workers help make AI appear intelligent and safe but may receive low wages and limited protection. Racial inequality is therefore present not only in biased outputs, but also in the labor relations behind AI production.

For this reason, AI-related racial inequality is not only a technological issue but also a political issue. The problem is not simply that algorithms sometimes make mistakes but that algorithmic systems can be inserted international economies. When this happens, AI can make old inequalities in a global manner.

5. AI, international relations, and global racial inequality

AI bias cannot be solved by one company or one country because AI systems belong to a global political economy. First, international competition can make states and companies prioritize speed over fairness. Governments see AI as a strategic technology, leading to pressure to deploy AI quickly. If AI becomes mainly a race for power, then bias audits and public consultation may be treated as secondary.

Moreover, international inequality also influences those who participate in AI governance. Countries with stronger industrial bases and greater financial resources will clearly have more advanced AI development and, as a result, greater influence in related matters. They may use this power to prioritize their own national interests over the broader interests of others. Although people have begun to set some ethical frameworks, like OECD AI Principles and UNESCO's AI ethics recommendation, wealthy countries and large technology companies still take advantage in having more experts and resources [17, 6]. This imbalance in resources may also lead to an imbalance of power.

Finally, AI affects cultural power. As mentioned above, large language models and search systems are influenced more from the data of the developed state. If dominant models are built mainly on English resource and trained on Western or majority-language content, then they may marginalize the minority. This will result in epistemic inequality: some groups become more visible and authoritative, while others are easily ignored. It stands to reason that cultures and nations with greater influence in the globalized world will find it easier to legitimize their own narratives and thereby gain an advantage in international competition. Meanwhile, the interests of culturally marginalized cultures and nations may be overlooked.

Now, it's clear that international relations not only shape AI but are also shaped by AI. Global power structures influence which systems are developed, what data are available, and which rules are adopted. At the same time, AI can exacerbate inequalities in international relations in various ways, placing countries with advanced AI capabilities at a cultural and economic advantage. In this way, an international perspective is essential for examining the impact of AI on racism. If AI reinforces racial inequality because algorithms are embedded in unequal global relations, then resolving this dilemma also requires a re-examination of those unequal relations. Once again, this is not merely a question of how technology is used, but a matter of politics and international relations.

6. How to reduce AI-driven racial discrimination and inequality

A direct response would be technical reform. To decrease the AI output that reinforces racial inequality and racial discrimination. Detecting biased data from the database and avoiding the

unification of the engineer's racial bias will be a solution. The MIT technology institute explores the first step, which is "try balancing the training dataset by removing data points until all subgroups are represented equally." In this way, MIT invents a new technique called "TRAK," which can find out which of the data will lead to the most incorrect prediction. Then, remove the incorrect data and redo the step to detect the remaining data [18]. Second, the engineer is also a big factor that affects the data correction, as Appen, the train algorithm company CEO, said, "historical data that tends to exclude certain populations" needs to be deleted. So Appen "uses crowdsourcing to ensure data workers come from a variety of backgrounds" [19]. Let people that are affected by different conditions work together and make unbiased data.

A more important response would be education. From the educational perspective, changing people's minds about AI can avoid excessive racial discrimination and racial inequality among small racial groups. "Workshops such as the Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency in Machine Learning meeting" [20]. Spread more knowledge about AI to warn people. The limitation of this solution is that people are still affected by biased information from AI. Letting technical reform and education work together will be the more effective way, because when technology deletes biased data from the database, even if it still has bias, people will not fully trust AI as before, which decreases the use of AI in highly sensitive and important decision areas.

The last response is international governance. As mentioned, AI systems go beyond national borders, so single nation's regulation only has limited effect. It must be first recognized that the connection between international relations and AI and incorporate this understanding into AI education. In addition, encouraging countries and companies to share methods for bias detection and independent auditing is also very important. International agreements should ensure that high-risk systems remain transparent and are subject to cross-border human review. In particular, support should be provided to countries in the Global South in AI education, and regulatory capacity building. Ensuring that vulnerable parties in international relations are included in the dialogue is a key element in mitigating bias generated by AI. In this regard, the United Nations has already made some positive efforts; for example, in 2024 it emphasized global cooperation and equitable access to AI's benefits [5].

7. Conclusion

AI is part of a new technological transformation, but its effects are not neutral. Like earlier industrial revolutions, AI can increase efficiency while intensifying inequality. This paper has argued that AI reinforces racial discrimination and racial inequality through four mechanisms: it inherits bias from historical data and human design; it spreads biased outputs through institutions; it turns discrimination into unequal access to employment, wealth, and services; and it is shaped by international relations, because global inequalities influence whose data, languages, labor, and interests are built into AI.

The central danger is that AI can make discrimination appear objective. A racist human judgment may be challenged as prejudice, but an algorithmic judgment may be accepted as data-driven and neutral. This is why AI bias is not only a technical defect. It is an ethical and political problem. It changes how power is exercised and how inequality is justified.

The international dimension strengthens AI's risk. On the one hand, the influence of AI controlled by large multinational corporations extends far beyond national borders. On the other hand, imbalanced international relations have exacerbated disparities in AI capabilities among nations. These factors could lead to existing racial biases and inequalities being amplified by AI in the context of international relations. AI may reproduce racial and global hierarchies under the language

of innovation. Reducing AI-driven racial inequality therefore requires not only better technology but also better education and international governance. AI should not be left to machines alone, because the values built into AI will shape the society and world humans live in.

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