Enforcing Equity Joyce A. Hughes: A Celebration

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ENFORCING EQUITY

Daiquiri J. Steele

ABSTRACT—Federal administrative agencies that enforce workplace laws have dual responsibilities: (1) to prevent or remedy noncompliance with the underlying workplace law and (2) to prevent or remedy noncompliance with the law’s antiretaliation provisions. Disparities based on race, sex, and their intersection exist with respect to both of these types of employer noncompliance, as female workers and workers of color experience more violations of the substantive provisions and the retaliation provisions of these laws. While effective enforcement is vital to preserving workplace regulation as a whole, there is also an equity component to enforcement. Because workplace law violations disproportionately harm women and people of color, ineffective enforcement by administrative agencies disproportionately harms these groups.

Retaliatory conduct by employers is an impediment to the enforcement of workplace laws that administrative agencies are charged with enforcing. Antiretaliation provisions in workplace statutes are crucial enforcement tools for these agencies, but—where these laws were once broadly construed—their construction is narrowing. Restrictive interpretations of workplace laws can make obtaining redress more difficult for victims of retaliation and can deter other employees from reporting employer misconduct. Moreover, Black workers and female workers experience retaliation in the workplace at a much higher rate than other workers. Consequently, retaliatory conduct by employers is not only an impediment to effective enforcement of workplace laws, but the conduct itself can implicate racial discrimination, exploitation, and subordination.

These agencies find themselves facing a dilemma with respect to the other branches of government. The judiciary is issuing restrictive interpretations of antiretaliation laws and affording no deference to agency interpretation. Congress is slow in legislatively correcting the courts’ limiting interpretations. Because retaliation protections are so vital to the regulatory scheme Congress developed, narrow interpretation by the courts causes underenforcement and stifles the ability of administrative agencies charged with enforcing workplace laws to fulfill their missions.
This Article examines the challenges administrative agencies face in providing robust protections against retaliation, given the current postures of the legislative and judicial branches of government. The Article proposes a shift in administrative agencies’ predominant enforcement model—from an individual-complaint-based model to a compliance-audit-based model—and data collection that will incentivize employers to comply with nonretaliation mandates, leading to stronger antiretaliation safeguards.

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INTRODUCTION

Fear of retaliation is a leading reason why employees do not report violations of workplace law. \(^1\) Apprehension of retributory employer conduct is a major reason why many employees accept working conditions that are noncompliant with workplace laws and that range from subordinating, discriminatory, and exploitative, to outright dangerous. This fear of employer retaliation is quite rational. More charges of retaliation were filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 2022 than any other kind of discrimination charge, \(^2\) and a high percentage of retaliation


charges are found to be meritorious\(^3\) by the agency.\(^4\) Simply put, employees who report wrongdoing in the workplace face retaliation at startling rates.\(^5\)

In addition to being rational, the fear of retaliation is also foreseeable. The federal government is well aware of the impact that fear of retaliation can have on effective enforcement of workplace laws, as Congress has included an antiretaliation provision in workplace laws passed in the last century to assist with effective enforcement.\(^6\) While the text of these provisions varies,\(^7\) the purpose is the same—to ensure individuals are free to exercise rights under the statute without employer retribution. Even older statutes from the nineteenth century have been interpreted to contain implied

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\(^3\) Charges resolved with a favorable outcome for the charging party or charges with substantiated allegations are considered “merit resolutions” by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Negotiated settlements, withdrawals with benefits, successful conciliations, and unsuccessful conciliations comprise this category. Definitions of Terms, EEOC (2020), https://www.eeoc.gov/statistics/definitions-terms [https://perma.cc/B5RG-PEMY].


\(^6\) See, e.g., 29 U.S.C. § 215(a)(3) (prohibiting retaliation under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)); 42 U.S.C. § 2000f–6(f) (proscribing retaliation under the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA)); id. § 2000e–3(a) (making retaliation unlawful under Title VII); 29 U.S.C. § 623(d) (barring retaliation under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)); 42 U.S.C. § 12103(a) (outlawing retaliation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)); 29 U.S.C. § 2615(b) (prohibiting retaliation under the FMLA); id. § 660(c)(1) (proscribing retaliatory behavior under OSHA); id. § 158(a)(4) (outlawing retaliatory actions under the National Labor Relations Act).

\(^7\) See Alex B. Long, Employment Retaliation and the Accident of Text, 90 OR. L. REV. 525, 528–29 (2011) (describing the textual differences in antiretaliation provisions of workplace statutes).
antiretaliation provisions where no express provision was present in the statutory language.\(^8\)

Despite this foreseeability, some recent judicial decisions have all but ignored this reality. In the mid-twentieth century, the U.S. Supreme Court noted that fear of retaliation may well induce employees to accept substandard working conditions.\(^9\) Understanding the importance of antiretaliation provisions in workplace statutes, the Court construed these provisions broadly for over half a century.\(^10\) However, the Court has now started issuing restrictive interpretations of antiretaliation provisions. Whereas the Court previously prioritized employee protection over workplace retaliation, some of the Roberts Court’s recent decisions, including *University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center v. Nassar*, have relied on the plain meaning rule and the excuse of the fear of a flood of retaliation claims to curb protections available to employees.\(^11\) Additionally, lower courts have started narrowing the scope of antiretaliation protections by making it more difficult to recover for retaliation.\(^12\) Specifically, lower courts are refusing to find that some retaliatory behavior indeed constitutes an adverse action and are raising the threshold for what activity is protected.\(^13\)

These narrow interpretations undermine rights created by the workplace statutes. Furthermore, they make it more difficult for employees to recover for retaliation and can deter employees from reporting violations of workplace law. Underreporting can have detrimental effects on these employees, their coworkers, the employers’ contractors and corporate

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\(^9\) See *Mitchell v. Robert DeMario Jewelry, Inc.*, 361 U.S. 288, 292 (1960) ("Plainly, effective enforcement of [the Fair Labor Standards Act] could thus only be expected if employees felt free to approach officials with their grievances.").


\(^13\) Federal courts have ruled that the following types of retaliatory behavior do not constitute an adverse action: threatening to discipline an employee, negative performance appraisals, removing an employee from the office, alterations in work schedules, threatening to fire an employee, and filing lawsuits. *See Sandra F. Sperino, Retaliation and the Reasonable Person*, 67 FLA. L. REV. 2031, 2036 (2015).
business partners, compliant businesses in competition with the noncompliant employers, and society as a whole. This can allow various types of employer misconduct to persist, including wage theft, benefits theft, harassment and other forms of discrimination, family and medical leave violations, and occupational safety and hazard violations.

Adding to the already troubling nature of the narrowing of retaliation protections is the racial disparity in retaliatory behavior. In addition to a racial disparity with respect to workplace law violations, race and gender disparities also exist with respect to which employees are retaliated against for reporting suspected employer misconduct. Black workers and female workers report retaliation at higher rates for engaging in protected activity. 14 The racial disparities in both workplace violations and employer retaliation lead to different levels of workplace justice.

The three branches of government are troublingly discordant on the issue of retaliation protections, which has undermined the effectiveness of the protections. 15 The judiciary is issuing narrow interpretations of workplace laws, and Congress has not yet intervened legislatively to override these restrictive interpretations. 16 Despite the courts' weakening of statutory


15 See infra Part I.

16 Congress has legislatively overridden workplace law court decisions on several occasions. For instance, the Civil Rights Act of 1991 abrogated the following decisions in whole or in part: EEOC v. Arabian Am. Oil Co., 499 U.S. 244 (1991), which holds that Title VII does not apply extraterritorially to regulate conduct of U.S. employers who employ U.S. citizens abroad; W. Va. Univ. Hosps., Inc. v. Casey, 499 U.S. 83 (1991), which disallows the shifting of fees for services rendered by expert witnesses in civil rights litigation to losing party; Patterson v. McLean Credit Union, 491 U.S. 164 (1989), which limits the application of § 1981 in the employment arena to making contracts; Lorance v. AT&T Techs., Inc., 490 U.S. 900 (1989), which holds that an employment discrimination claim based on facially neutral seniority system begins to run when the seniority system is adopted; Martin v. Wilks, 490 U.S. 755 (1989), which holds that white employees who did not intervene in earlier employment discrimination proceedings in which consent decrees were entered could challenge employment decisions that were taken in accordance with those decrees; Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio, 490 U.S. 642 (1989), which holds that statistical evidence showing high percentage of nonwhite workers in employee's cannery jobs and low percentage of such workers in other jobs did not establish prima facie case of disparate impact; Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins, 490 U.S. 228 (1989), which allows mixed motive Title VII claims; and Library of Cong. v. Shaw, 478 U.S. 310 (1986), which holds that when Congress passed Title VII, it did not waive the federal government's traditional immunity from interest. See also Matthew R. Christiansen & William N. Eskridge Jr., Congressional Overrides of Supreme Court Statutory Interpretation Decisions, 1967-2011, 92 Tex. L. Rev. 1317, 1492-94 (2014). For a comprehensive discussion of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (1991 CRA), see Michael Selmi, The Supreme Court's Surprising and Strategic Response to the Civil Rights Act of 1991, 46 Wake Forest L. Rev. 281 (2011).

17 Among subject matter areas in which Congress legislatively overrides court opinions, civil rights laws and workplace laws ranked second and fourth respectively in highest frequency of congressional overrides. Christiansen & Eskridge, supra note 16, at 1357.
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antiretaliation provisions—the federal agencies’ primary enforcement tool—agencies must still fulfill their missions of enforcing workplace laws effectively. The fact that noncompliance with these laws is more likely to impact workers of color and female workers means issues of equity are inherently implicated in administrative enforcement of workplace laws. It becomes clear, then, that ineffective enforcement due to government discord will have a disproportionately pronounced effect on female workers and workers of color.

Courts need to recognize the crucial role of administrative agencies in fostering compliance and enforcing workplace laws outside of the courts, and give agencies appropriate deference. For example, agencies like the EEOC and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) provide valuable technical assistance to employers regarding compliance and notices of rights and responsibilities to employees. The EEOC serves as a gatekeeper agency, with complainants required to exhaust administrative remedies for the majority of the statutes the EEOC enforces before accessing the courts. Imposing restrictive interpretations of antiretaliation laws, particularly interpretations that are antithetical to the EEOC’s interpretation as exhibited by its manuals and court briefs, hinders the performance of the agency’s mission. Interestingly, this hindrance by the judiciary may lead to an increased number of complainants receiving right-to-sue letters from the EEOC, leading to an actual increase in the judiciary’s workload.

While certain enabling statutes, like those governing the EEOC, require exhaustion of administrative remedies, others, like the one governing DOL’s Wage and Hour Division (WHD), do not. Nevertheless, they are still integral to promoting compliance with workplace laws. Agencies like WHD investigate and settle many complaints of noncompliance, further alleviating the workload for the judiciary. Moreover, their ability to provide attorneys to employees unable to afford their legal fees plays a vital role in access to justice by ensuring employees are informed of their rights.

Finally, there are some workplace laws for which no private right of action exists. For instance, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which articulates occupational safety and health standards for covered employers, is enforced by DOL’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). There is no private right of action, so aggrieved employees must go through OSHA. Hence, in instances like these, any redress to which an employee is entitled must come through an administrative agency.

19 Id. at 1017.
20 Id. at 1019.
The judiciary’s decisions play a pivotal role in agency enforcement. However, Congress also has a crucial part to play. Because antiretaliation provisions are enforcement tools, Congress should prioritize strengthening them to provide the most robust retaliation protections possible. Congress can help fortify these provisions by legislatively overriding the judiciary’s narrow interpretations of existing antiretaliation provisions. The legislative branch has the power to legislate away court decisions that are not in accordance with congressional will, and it has done so in the past with respect to workplace laws. However, Congress has not legislatively corrected this problem as of the time of this writing. These actions also take time, and in the past an average of eleven years has elapsed between the time the Court issues a decision and when Congress overrides it. Moreover, congressional attempts to fortify antiretaliation provisions in statutes based on U.S. Supreme Court antiretaliation jurisprudence are typically not comprehensive. Additionally, Congress could strengthen retaliation protections by drafting new antiretaliation provisions in a manner that clearly establishes broad interpretation as the legislature’s intent. Congress could also override the inconsistent interpretations stemming from varied language of antiretaliation provisions across myriad workplace statutes by issuing an omnibus retaliation statute to apply universally to all workplace statutes.

Because antiretaliation provisions are contained in each workplace statute, the statutory language of these provisions can vary, leading to inconsistent interpretations. An omnibus retaliation statute would include regulatory reforms regarding retaliation to be implemented across numerous workplace statutes.

Though Congress has effective tools and strong rationales for intervening to strengthen retaliation protections, Congress could not possibly anticipate every scenario that would arise concerning these provisions. Hence, in addition to congressional action, administrative agencies ought to structure their internal processes in a manner that deters employers from retaliating against those who report employer misconduct.

21 Civil rights laws and workplace laws are some of the most popular areas for congressional overrides. 1991 CRA and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) provide examples. See Christiansen & Eskridge, supra note 16, at 1357.

22 Id. at 1355.


24 Steele, supra note 18, at 1026.

25 See id. at 1031–32.

26 Long, supra note 7, at 528–29.

27 See Steele, supra note 18, at 1032.
No agency can have certainty that its interpretations will receive deference from the courts. Consequently, the agencies that enforce workplace laws will have to find ways to ensure they are fulfilling their missions despite not being able to rely on the judiciary for deference or to ensure agency complaint receipts do not affect judicial interpretation of antiretaliation laws.

It is important to understand why agencies are key actors in the workplace law enforcement scheme. At the same time, it is also important to understand why the agencies are now swimming upstream when they attempt to enforce workplace laws, including antiretaliation laws. Though the agencies must enforce the applicable statutes, the power to interpret the law and decide how much, if any, deference to give to the agencies’ interpretation of the laws the agencies enforce rests with the judicial branch. Because antiretaliation provisions are enforcement tools, broad interpretation of these provisions is vital to a healthy regulatory regime, yet both the U.S. Supreme Court and the lower courts are issuing restrictive interpretations of antiretaliation provisions in workplace statutes. In addition to needing to fulfill their mission despite the impeding actions of the judiciary, administrative agencies must also continue to be diligent about enforcement despite the silence of the legislature. While the legislative branch has the power to change restrictive interpretations through subsequent legislation, this process requires elusive consensus and consciously prioritizing this issue over other pressing issues. Moreover, the piecemeal nature of antiretaliation law would require amendment of multiple different statutes.

For successful enforcement of workplace antiretaliation statutory provisions, it is imperative not only that the branches of the government align on enforcement goals but also that employers be incentivized to comply. This compliance project is twofold. First, employers must comply with the underlying labor standards required by law (e.g., payment of minimum wage, nondiscrimination in the workplace, adherence to occupational safety and health standards, etc.). Second, employers must abide by antiretaliation laws by not retaliating against employees who report suspected noncompliance and not threatening to retaliate in an attempt to prevent employees from reporting.

The latter principle especially underscores that employees must be empowered to bring claims of noncompliance without fear of retaliation. The retaliation claims filed with agencies only represent instances in which employees have brought underlying noncompliance claims and are alleging retaliation as a result of those claims. Not represented in the number of claims are those instances in which employees were too fearful of employer retaliation to raise noncompliance issues on behalf of themselves or others.
This fearful deterrence from filing claims also hinders the agencies’ enforcement of the rights and duties created in the statute they enforce. In addition, other employees are also deterred from reporting misconduct, and the regulatory scheme Congress has created for enforcing workplace laws—which is dependent upon employees serving as complainants and witnesses—is weakened.

Employer retaliation is a formidable foe for administrative agencies because employers may be violating workplace laws on several fronts. While compliance with workplace laws has always been important, the equity issues that arise from noncompliance heighten the importance of the compliance function. No longer can we look at workplace law violations as simply a minimum-labor-standards issue. Even violations of a minimum labor standard like minimum wage requirements—a law that is not considered an antidiscrimination law—have discriminatory implications.28 Consider the example of an employer who violates the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA), which prescribes the federal minimum wage requirements, but does so exclusively or predominately with respect to its Latinx employees.29 While the adverse action itself (i.e., wage theft) may seem only to violate the FLSA, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is also implicated, as the decision to target Latinx employees for wage theft is discriminatory.30 In other words, employers may be discriminating under a different treatment theory, a disparate impact theory, or both in their selection of which employees to target for violations of workplace laws that are not necessarily classified as antidiscrimination laws. Additionally, employers may be discriminating with regard to which employees they retaliate against for reporting violations of workplace laws. Regardless of the type of workplace law being violated, antiretaliation provisions are a crucial tool for the enforcement of workplace regulation.

This Article proposes two primary interventions that administrative agencies can implement to increase employer compliance, decrease instances of retaliation, and promote equity. The first is enhanced demographic data collection from complainants and employers to help reveal discriminatory patterns. For instance, if most meritorious claims of pension theft are filed by women over age forty, the data will show a pattern of sex and age discrimination in pension theft. This can be tracked across all industries, specific industries, states, job titles, and individual employers.

The second intervention is use of that data to transition from an enforcement model primarily based on individual complaints to a model grounded in compliance reviews. While most federal agencies do some combination of both, the proportion of an agency's investigations of individual complaints as compared with compliance reviews can vary drastically from one agency to another, even within the same federal department. For instance, DOL's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) maintains a caseload that is dominated by compliance reviews, though the agency also receives individual complaints. Contrarily, agencies like the EEOC have a caseload dominated by individual complaints. 31 A compliance review-oriented framework better effectuates the purposes of federal workplace law while alleviating fears of an overloaded judiciary.

This Article contends that the weakening of retaliation protections is contributing to the disparate administration of workplace justice. Diluted retaliation protections, coupled with agency reliance on employees reporting workplace misconduct as the primary method of triggering an investigation into possible noncompliance, leads to underenforcement. Because workers of color and female workers are disproportionately subject to workplace abuses, such anemic enforcement hinders racial and gender equity in the receipt of services of the administrative state. This Article argues that enhanced data collection from complainants and employers is vital to effective enforcement. An agency enforcement model that is primarily based on compliance reviews, rather than individual-complaint investigations, would incentivize employers to comply with workplace laws and frustrate the purpose of employer retaliation.

Part I of the Article examines the equity component of administrative agency enforcement. It outlines the scholarship on racial disparities in administrative enforcement and its causes. It explores three primary areas of scholarship: explicit racist enforcement and administration of laws, representative bureaucracy, and administrative burdens. Each of these areas of literature examines how agency equity outcomes are affected by agency policies, processes, and procedures. Part I also introduces the notion that agency decisions regarding enforcement models influence agency equity outcomes.

31 For evidence that the EEOC's caseload is dominated by individual charges, compare Commissioner Charges and Directed Investigations, EEOC, https://www.eeoc.gov/commissioner-charges-and-directed-investigations [https://perma.cc/V9PZ-MXQW], which shows the numbers of Commissioner Chargers from FY2020 to FY2022 and Directed Investigations from FY2015 to FY2022, with EEOC, supra note 2, which shows the numbers of charges filled from FY1997 to FY2022.
Part II describes the current enforcement model for federal agencies that enforce workplace law and details the problems with this model. It illustrates that complaints by applicants or employees are the principal mechanism for triggering an investigation of noncompliance. It also explains some of the constraints that agencies have in launching compliance reviews without a triggering complaint and describes the variation in these constraints among the different agencies.

Part III proposes enhanced data collection and details the types of data that should be collected, as well as the methods of collection. It argues for the collection of data from complainants and the establishment of affirmative reporting requirements for employers. It compares such a mandatory disclosure requirement in workplace law generally to disclosure requirements in other areas, including securities regulation and federal contractors, and addresses the importance of agency information sharing.

Finally, Part IV explains how the collection of this data can inform strategic enforcement by the agencies. This Part also details the structure and characteristics of a compliance-review-based enforcement model needed to address existing inequities and maximize deterrence.

I. THE EQUITY COMPONENT OF AGENCY ENFORCEMENT

On the day of his inauguration, President Joseph R. Biden Jr. issued an executive order instructing federal agencies to "assess whether, and to what extent, its programs and policies perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups." 32 While agencies that enforce antidiscrimination laws have a clear role in advancing equity, the advancement of equity is the responsibility of the administrative state as a whole. Even agencies that enforce so-called universalist laws 33 that do not explicitly implicate discrimination on the basis...
of a protected class become conduits of inequity if ineffective enforcement or administration disproportionately affect historically marginalized communities.

This Part briefly discusses the explicit and implicit racist and sexist history of the administrative state across areas of law and describes how modern ineffective enforcement of workplace laws can lead to the perpetuation of inequity by administrative agencies.

A. The Myth of the Neutral Administrative State

The administrative state is often associated with neutrality, but it has been shaped by historical, social, and environmental narratives. Systemic racism is embedded in American society, and this racism has influenced public administration. Administrative agencies have contributed to the marginalization and subordination of women and people of color, sometimes intentionally and at other times unintentionally, and in many ways the administrative state controls the level of access certain groups receive.

The literature exploring the racial and gender disparities in administrative enforcement can be categorized into three scholarly areas—racist laws and methods of administration, representative bureaucracy, and administrative burdens. Racist and sexist enforcement scholarship explores how enforcement of racist laws or racist administration of neutral laws has affected the fulfilment of administrative agencies’ mission with respect to racial and ethnic minorities. Representative bureaucracy explores how the composition of a bureaucracy’s personnel affects its success in enforcing its mission. Administrative burdens scholarship addresses how the burdens to accessing services through administrative agencies impacts agency efficacy. The common thread running through the literature is disparate agency enforcement by race, sex, or both, whether this disparity is intentional or negligent on the agency’s part. This Section discusses each of these categories and argues that agency enforcement models can also indirectly propagate racial and gender disparities in administrative enforcement.

1. Racist Laws and Methods of Administration

Racism has been embedded in the administrative state from its beginning. Administrative agencies are charged with providing certain services to the public. However, these services are not always administered equally. The racism entrenched in society has led to the enforcement of racist policies by administrative agencies. There is a myriad of examples of agencies enforcing explicitly racist laws or enforcing facially neutral laws discriminatorily.

In several instances, Congress passed laws that excluded people of color from certain worker protections and welfare entitlements. These exclusions were written into the statutory language, though not all of them would actually use explicit racial terms. During the New Deal Era, many of the statutes passed specifically excluded agricultural and domestic workers, most of whom were people of color. For instance, the Social Security Act of 1933 and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 both contained exemptions of agricultural and domestic workers. The introductory letter President Franklin Roosevelt sent accompanying the FLSA bill called for the setting of maximum hours and minimum wages for industrial and agricultural workers. Nonetheless, the original version of the bill that became the FLSA excluded agricultural and domestic workers. At the time these statutes were passed, approximately 2 million of the 5.5 million Black workers in the United States were in agricultural jobs and an additional 1.5 million Black workers were engaged in domestic service. These exclusions left two-thirds...
of the nation’s Black workers uncovered by laws intended to improve worker well-being and working conditions.\textsuperscript{41}

These statutes contributed to a pattern of exclusion of racial minorities and women that began with previous New Deal legislation and persisted throughout the twentieth century. For example, the same type of racialized exclusions was included in workplace legislation like the Occupational Safety and Health Act, passed almost four decades after the FLSA.\textsuperscript{42} Because of these exclusions, the agencies enforcing these statutes were not charged with serving many people of color.

Even in the statutes in which there was no express language that excluded workers of color, the administration and enforcement mechanisms set up by the statutes themselves or by federal agencies at times led to discriminatory administration. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (NIRA) is one example.\textsuperscript{43} NIRA required the establishment of codes of fair competition that set minimum wages and maximum working hours in different industries, and the National Recovery Administration—a federal agency that President Roosevelt created via executive order—enforced these laws.\textsuperscript{44} During the code hearings, the agency considered inserting an express race-based wage differential in which white workers would be paid more than Black workers.\textsuperscript{45} While the overt differential was rejected, distinctions based on occupation and geography allowed employers to pay most Black workers a lower wage based on facially neutral factors.\textsuperscript{46}

In some instances, the federal government gave administrative authority to state and local officials.\textsuperscript{47} For instance, Congress passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 (AAA) in an effort to increase farmers’ incomes by raising crop prices and providing other subsidies.\textsuperscript{48} Black farmers, however, were regularly cheated out of payments. Yet, the authority to settle disputes was given to committees comprised of locally elected members, and these committees routinely disfavored Black farmers.\textsuperscript{49} In the South, no Black farmer ever served on a local committee.\textsuperscript{50} This type of exclusion of Black workers persisted throughout the twentieth century.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[41] Id.
\item[42] See 29 C.F.R. § 1975.6.
\item[43] NIRA was declared unconstitutional on nondelegation grounds in \textit{Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States}, 295 U.S. 495, 541–42 (1935).
\item[44] Exec. Order No. 6173 (June 16, 1933) (establishing the National Recovery Administration).
\item[45] Perea, \textit{supra} note 37, at 104.
\item[46] Id. at 125.
\item[47] Id.
\item[49] Perea, \textit{supra} note 37, at 108–09.
\item[50] Id. at 109.
\end{footnotes}
Though many of the overt exclusions have been rectified, the effects still linger. President Biden’s executive order acknowledges the racial disparities entrenched in both the nation’s public and private institutions, some of which have been perpetuated by administrative agencies.\textsuperscript{51} The executive order calls on agencies to help remedy social injustices by addressing inequities in agency policies and programs that create obstacles to equal opportunity in society. But employer retaliation remains the primary obstacle to effective enforcement of workplace laws.

2. \textit{Representative Bureaucracy}

Representative bureaucracy focuses on the relationship between the demographics of an agency’s personnel and the agency’s effectiveness at achieving its mission. While systemic racism has been perpetuated in some instances by administrative agencies in an intentional and direct way, propagation of racial inequality has at times been less direct, as is the case when the demographics of an agency’s personnel do not resemble the demographics of the population the agency serves. In such cases, actions and processes created by administrative agencies have impacted the agencies’ efficacy in fulfilling their mission and providing bureaucratic services to people of color.

At its core, representative bureaucracy theory posits that the more the demographics of personnel in a bureaucracy look like the demographics of the bureaucracy’s constituency, the more effective the bureaucracy will be in fulfilling its mission. Representative bureaucracy theory has its origins in the 1940s work of J. Donald Kingsley.\textsuperscript{52} Studying the English Civil Service, Kingsley’s work noted that members of society’s upper class staffed the upper levels of the civil service system in Britain, while the lower levels were staffed by people in the working class. Kingsley questioned the ability of a class-biased civil service system to serve the needs and interests of the working class and suggested that a bureaucracy should be representative, with all social groups being represented among its workforce. He asserted that, to govern effectively, the civil service’s composition should reflect the class-based demographics of the society it serves.\textsuperscript{53}

Decades later, Frederick C. Mosher expounded upon Kingsley’s work, arguing that a bureaucracy can be representative through passive or active representation.\textsuperscript{54} Passive representation occurs when underrepresented

\textsuperscript{52} Norma M. Riccucci & Gregg G. Van Ryzin, \textit{Representative Bureaucracy: A Lever to Enhance Social Equity, Coproduction, and Democracy}, 77 J. PUB. ADMIN. REV. 21, 21 (2017).
\textsuperscript{53} Id. at 22.
\textsuperscript{54} See Frederick C. Mosher, \textit{Democracy and the Public Service} (1968).
groups are included in a bureaucracy’s workforce, typically in proportion to their representation among the population being governed.55 Active representation occurs when employees in administrative agencies perform acts, consciously or unconsciously, to ensure the interests of those who belong to their same social group(s) are considered when making policy.56 Because an individual’s background influences their bureaucratic decisions, passive representation yields active representation.57

Despite Black civil servants’ substantial numbers in the federal workforce during and after Reconstruction, the policies of President Woodrow Wilson regarding the racial composition of the federal workforce removed many Black civil servants from the federal workforce.58 Those who were not forced out were relegated to low-level positions.59 Moreover, Black applicants to the federal civil service were discriminated against in hiring.60 During Wilson’s presidency, the civil service began requiring photographs to be submitted with employment applications.61 While the Pendleton Act of 1883 and Civil Service Commission were created to ensure the neutral, merit-based selection of job applicants, administrative officials were able to circumvent the hiring of many qualified Black applicants by filtering the applications by race based on the applicants’ submitted photographs.62 The civil service gains Blacks made during and after Reconstruction were overshadowed by the losses inflicted as a result of the Wilson administration’s segregationist policies.63

After the segregationist policies were relaxed, personnel of color now constitute nearly 40% of the federal government’s workforce.64 However,

56 See MOSHER, supra note 54.
57 Bradbury & Kellough, supra note 55, at 160.
59 Wolgemuth, supra note 58, at 161.
60 Id. at 162.
61 Id. at 161.
62 Alexander & Stivers, supra note 34, at 1481.
most of these employees, particularly Black employees, are concentrated at the lowest levels of government.65 Empirical research shows that the harmful effects on Black wealth have been long lasting.66 In addition to the harmful effects on Black civil servants, active representation theory would predict that the dearth of Black civil servants at the higher levels of the federal workforce negatively impacts bureaucratic service provided to Blacks throughout the country.

Past segregationist policies and their lingering effects on the federal workforce have resulted in the normalizing of whites as the standard for bureaucrats.67 As a consequence, the level of services people of color receive has become linked to the proportion of the agency’s personnel that matches their identities. The same has not been the case for white bureaucratic clients.68 Scholars in this area continue to explore how representation in the federal workforce can improve administrative outcomes for communities of color.

3. Administrative Burdens

Another area of research exploring hindrances to the administrative state’s provision of equitable services to communities of color is the area of administrative burdens. Administrative burdens are the arduous experiences individuals encounter when attempting to access a public benefit.69 These burdens serve as obstacles to receiving benefits and services from administrative agencies.70 Administrative burdens include the challenges associated with learning about available services and the requisite eligibility criteria, onerous application processes that require extensive paperwork or

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65 Id.
66 For example, Black civil servants were less likely to own a home following Wilson’s segregationist policies than other civil servants, and this gap persisted decades after Wilson left office. The gap increased for Black civil servants but notably did not increase for other Black workers in comparable jobs outside of the civil service. Hence, Blacks who worked for the civil service had higher wealth losses than Black workers in comparable private sector positions. Aneja & Xu, supra note 63, at 4.
68 Id.
documentation, and the stigma associated with accessing benefits. Examples include traveling to administrative offices for in-person visits, navigating agency websites, and responding to inquiries about eligibility for services. Scholars have argued that administrative burdens are one of the primary tools administrative agencies use to discriminate against people of color. Some scholars suggest that racialized administrative burdens evolved once more direct forms of racial discrimination were outlawed.

Where administrative burdens exist, they fall disproportionately on people of color, as well as women, the LGBTQIA+ community, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly. Administrative burdens can make it more difficult to obtain certain services from the government, or in some cases, preclude acquisition of such services altogether. These can include rights and benefits ranging from the right to vote to the ability to access life-altering benefits. Governments have a long history of using administrative burdens to deny Black citizens rights and services. The use of literacy tests to

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71 Carolyn Y. Barnes, "It Takes a While to Get Used To": The Costs of Redeeming Public Benefits, 31 J. PUB. ADMIN. RSCH. & THEORY 295, 295 (2021).
72 Victor Ray, Pamela Herd & Donald Moynihan, Racialized Burdens: Applying Racialized Organization Theory to the Administrative State, 32 J. PUB. ADMIN. RSCH. & THEORY 139, 139 (2022) ("[A]dministrative burdens serve as the handmaiden of the racialized state: the experience of discrimination by state actors and processes often occurs via the experience of racialized burdens.").
73 See id. at 140–41.
75 Sunstein, supra note 69, at 1849.
76 Id.
disenfranchise Blacks is a prominent example. However, even where administrative burdens are not specifically targeted at Blacks, these burdens can nevertheless have a disproportionate impact on them.

The scholarship on administrative burdens underscores both the inequity that can stem from these burdens, as well as the benefits to the overall system of provision of bureaucratic services. Administrative burdens serve several laudable purposes, including protecting the integrity of governmental programs; avoiding waste, fraud, and abuse; useful data collection; protecting privacy; and ensuring scarce resources are allocated to the individuals who are willing to spend the most time trying to obtain them. Hence, some administrative burdens are necessary to achieve legitimate government objectives. However, agencies must be careful to ensure burdens are no more burdensome than absolutely necessary and work to eliminate the disparities based on race and other protected characteristics that exist with respect to these burdens. Experts have suggested that federal agencies engage in audits to assess the effect of burdens on equity. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget has acknowledged that mitigating administrative burdens is an essential element to advancing equity. Focusing on administrative burdens’ creation of a racial disparity in receipt of bureaucratic services allows for a type of exploration of systemic racism in the administrative state in a manner that focusing on individual discrimination does not.

B. Inequity in Modern Workplace Law

Racial disparities are rampant throughout many, if not all, facets of the administrative state. Indeed, agency assessments of compliance with federal laws show that people of color are disproportionately affected by noncompliance in a myriad of areas, including agriculture, criminal justice, fraud and other business practices, education, the environment, healthcare,

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77 See id. at 1864 ("[A]dministrative burdens have long been used to disenfranchise African Americans. For decades, literacy tests were a favorite instrument; they were eventually forbidden by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In recent years, administrative burdens have become less onerous, in the sense that voting is more convenient, and registration is generally easier. But such burdens continue to exist, and in some states, they are mounting. They are plainly being used as a political weapon, most prominently by Republican leaders seeking to impose sludge so as to increase their electoral prospects.").

78 Id. at 1865–72.

79 Cass R. Sunstein, Sludge Audits, 6 BEHAVIOURAL PUB. POL’Y 654, 666 (2020).

80 See OFF. OF MGMT. & BUDGET, supra note 70.

81 See Ray et al., supra note 69, at 139.
and housing. The disparities in workplace law are particularly prominent. Thus, compliance with equal employment opportunity and minimum labor standards laws are a vital component of advancing economic justice, and affecting outcomes in other areas like education, housing, and health.

Workplace law noncompliance is widespread, with many of America’s workers experiencing issues like wage theft, pension fraud, persistent occupational safety and health hazards, discrimination and harassment, unlawful family and medical leave denials, and many other workplace injustices. Female workers, workers of color, and those at the intersection experience disproportionately high rates of these types of workplace law violations. Workers of color also experience higher rates of occupational illnesses and injuries resulting from violations and underenforcement of workplace safety laws, with Latinx workers having the highest rate. The rates of work-related disabilities are also higher for Asian-American, Black, and Latinx workers than for white workers. Moreover, women of color experience sexual harassment in the workplace at a higher rate than white women. Hence, though certain labor and employment laws are considered

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universal laws, and do not apply specifically to members of protected classes, workers of color have a disproportionate need for these protections, as they are the most vulnerable to being victims of the violations.

Administrative enforcement of workplace laws by federal agencies is key to advancing workplace justice and employer compliance. However, most administrative agencies that enforce workplace laws rely on a complaint by an employee, applicant, or another community member to trigger an investigation of possible noncompliance. In general, as regulators uncover employer misconduct through the investigative process, they react by requiring the employer to implement reforms to come into compliance with statutory and regulatory mandates. This system, therefore, makes the detection and subsequent remedy of workplace violations contingent upon a person reporting the alleged noncompliance, despite the risk of employer backlash.

The central problem with the reporting system is that many employees do not report workplace misconduct out of fear of employer retaliation. As a result, employer misconduct can go undetected. Workers of color face disproportionately high rates of employer retaliation. While collecting data to get an accurate depiction of the number of workers who do not report employer misconduct out of fear of retaliation is impracticable, it stands to reason that if workers of color are more likely to experience employer retaliation, then they are less likely to report misconduct. This reticence to report employer noncompliance may lead to increased instances of

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89 See, e.g., Stephanie Bornstein, Disclosing Discrimination, 101 B.U. L. REV. 287, 294, 299 (2021) ("Because enforcement relies nearly entirely on private lawsuits brought by employees who fear retaliation if they complain, only a fraction of discrimination and harassment claims are ever pursued, leaving significant gaps in enforcement."); Andrew Tae-Hyun Kim, Culture Matters: Cultural Differences in the Reporting of Employment Discrimination Claims, 20 WM. & MARY BILL RTS. J. 405, 426–28 (2011) (noting that fear of retaliation is the most common explanation reported by employees for their failure to report perceived discrimination); Brake, supra note 5, at 37, 39–40 ("In this cost-benefit analysis, reporting discrimination is perceived to entail high costs. Fear of provoking retaliation, in particular, drives many persons to choose not to report or challenge discrimination."); Jennifer M. Pacella, Inside or Out? The Dodd-Frank Whistleblower Program’s Antiretaliation Protections for Internal Reporting, 86 TEMP. L. REV. 721, 755 (2014) ("The two most common explanations for why employees do not report internally are fear of retaliation and feelings of futility if they choose to report, with fear of retaliation supported by a very real risk that internal whistleblowers will be penalized for disclosing misconduct."); B. Glenn George, Revenge, 83 TUL. L. REV. 439, 465 (2008) ("Fear of retaliation is the most common explanation reported by employees for their failure to report perceived discrimination.").

noncompliance specifically toward these workers, creating a cycle that continues to exacerbate inequity.

If agencies use enforcement models that rely on employee complaints to trigger an investigation and employers can prevent employees from filing complaints through actual or threatened retaliation against employees, then employers can effectively cause underenforcement of workplace laws. However, the promotion of racial equity seems to be part of the Biden administration’s political agenda, and administrative agencies have been directed to assess the ways in which policies and programs propagate obstacles to equal opportunity for people of color and other marginalized groups and allocate resources to advance those opportunities.91

One way to accomplish this could be transitioning to an enforcement model whereby the majority of agency investigations are initiated by a compliance audit that can help minimize the effects of employer retaliation and bring issues of noncompliance to light without the need for an employee complaint. However, this transition will only reach its maximum effectiveness if the agencies have the data needed to inform strategic enforcement efforts. This will help agencies that enforce workplace statutes to fulfill their missions and is critically important given the weakening of retaliation protections by the judicial branch and the failure of Congress (to date) to fortify antiretaliation provisions through legislation overrides.

II. ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCIES’ ROLE IN WORKPLACE JUSTICE

Private enforcement is the hallmark of the workplace law regulatory scheme.92 The regulatory framework Congress has established relies on employees to file complaints and provide information in investigations of alleged employer misconduct. Compliance with workplace laws can be costly to employers, and market forces often incentivize noncompliance. For most administrative agencies that enforce workplace laws, the current structure is one in which complaints trigger the overwhelming majority of investigations.

This Part explores the crucial role federal administrative agencies play in the advancement of equity in the workplace and explains the integral position of administrative agencies in securing workplace justice, given the

91 OFF. OF MGMT. & BUDGET, supra note 70, at 10.
92 See J. Maria Glover, The Structural Role of Private Enforcement Mechanisms in Public Law, 53 WM. & MARY L. REV. 1137, 1151 (2012) (“In various domains of public law, as in Title VII and the FLSA, Congress has vested in private parties a great deal of responsibility for enforcement by extending the statutory mechanisms provided to private parties in order to facilitate and incentivize private suits.”); David Kwok, The Public Wrong of Whistleblower Retaliation, 69 HASTINGS L.J. 1225, 1242 (2018) (highlighting the problems and benefits of treating whistleblower retaliation claims as private disputes).
workplace regulatory scheme created by Congress. It also describes the current enforcement model of most federal agencies that enforce workplace laws and the inefficiencies and inequities associated with these models.

A. Current Agency Enforcement Approaches

Many of the federal agencies that enforce workplace laws have enforcement tools available to them that are akin to compliance reviews. 93 Two prominent tools are directed investigations and Commissioner charges. Directed investigations are ones in which the agency does not need a member of the general public to file a charge in order to trigger an investigation. 94 Commissioner charges are charges that are filed by an EEOC Commissioner rather than a member of the general public. 95 Directed investigations, which are authorized for use by the EEOC and DOL, and Commissioner charges, which are exclusive to the EEOC, can be used by agencies to trigger investigations without a complaint being filed. However, both directed investigations and Commissioner charges have attributes that distinguish them from compliance reviews and lack many of the features needed to create maximum deterrence incentives.

Prior research shows that while compliance levels rose where there were more prior directed investigations, the same was not true for prior individual complaints. 96 In a study of the effects of prior WHD investigations on deterrence in the fast food industry, Professor David Weil found that prior investigations, whether triggered by a complaint or a direct investigation, had a deterrent effect on employers. 97 However, the impact on the likelihood of compliance increased from 33% for any type of previous investigation to 56% where the prior investigation was a direct investigation. 98 He found

93 Most federal administrative agencies that enforce workplace laws use a combination of enforcement and nonenforcement tools. Technical assistance is an example of an agency nonenforcement mechanism designed to promote compliance. However, the appropriate balance between enforcement and nonenforcement tools can be a point of contention. There are those who adamantly oppose taking an agency's already limited resources away from enforcement activities. Other employers may feel that assistance that is provided by the government disadvantages firms that use their own resources to promote compliance. Technical assistance has great value, but primarily for employers who are actually seeking to comply with regulations. Technical assistance is not helpful in obtaining compliance from employers who possess the opposite goal: to find ways to violate workplace laws.

94 See Commissioner Charges and Directed Investigations, supra note 31.

95 Id.


97 Id. at 54.

98 Id.
similar results when studying employers in the hotel industry.\textsuperscript{99} Professor Weil aptly sums up the finding, stating: “The shadow cast by directed investigations is longer and more influential than that of complaint investigations.”\textsuperscript{100}

Regulatory systems are designed to influence behavior, and enforcement is the mechanism that brings about these behavioral changes.\textsuperscript{101} While antiretaliation provisions in statutes function as enforcement tools, narrow interpretations of retaliation protections weaken their efficacy, thereby decreasing the ability of the respective agencies to affect employer behavior. Additionally, weakened retaliation protections foster a regulatory system in which the employees provide agencies with information that helps agencies fulfill their missions, but subsequently experience retaliation against which agencies are incapable of protecting them.

The complaint-based model that many administrative agencies currently use has several deficiencies. Pursuing enforcement predominantly through individual complaints can be resource-intensive.\textsuperscript{102} Moreover, because the most vulnerable workers are subject to reprisal for reporting workplace misconduct, they may be the least likely to file complaints, making a complaint-based enforcement model ineffective for the workers who need enforcement the most. Additionally, when an employer is settling a complaint, both the employer and the agency are typically focused on remedying the discrete harm at issue in the complaint instead of implementing more comprehensive reforms.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{B. Proposal for a Compliance-Review Enforcement Model}

Administrative agencies must use the tools at their disposal that are independent of the individual complaints to help incentivize employer compliance with antiretaliation laws and the underlying statutory rights and responsibilities these laws reinforce. One significant way to do this is to transform agencies’ caseloads from being driven by individual complaints to compliance reviews. Transforming administrative agencies focused on regulating workplace misconduct from an individual-complaint-dominant model to a model with a heightened focus on compliance reviews will help disincentivize employer retaliation. A compliance review focus will lead to

\textsuperscript{99} Id. at 74.

\textsuperscript{100} Id. at 71.


\textsuperscript{103} Root, \textit{supra} note 88, at 1018.
more manageable individual-complaint caseload while transforming workplace culture in organizations to a culture that disincentivizes retaliation. As compliance reviews increase, employers will be incentivized to comply, without an employee having to report and risk retaliation or not report out of fear of retaliation. Creating a system whereby an employee complaint is not needed to initiate an investigation will create deterrence incentives for employees.

The likelihood that a violation of workplace law will be detected depends on (1) the probability that an investigation or audit will be conducted and (2) the likelihood that the investigation or audit will uncover any wrongdoing.104 While conventional wisdom would suggest that engaging private actors—employees—in the regulatory process will increase the likelihood of detection, the prevalence of employer retaliation undermines this principle. The overarching rationale for retaliation is to ensure that workplace misconduct is not discovered or remedied by regulators. Because most agencies use an enforcement model that heavily relies on complaints to trigger an investigation, actual and threatened retaliatory conduct decreases the number of complaints filed. This decrease in filings results in a decrease in enforcement to the benefit of noncompliant employers. However, an enforcement model in which covered employers were randomly selected for compliance audits would lessen the need for employees to report, making employer retaliation ineffective at warding off regulatory enforcement.

III. ENHANCING DATA COLLECTION

A highly salient model that encourages compliance with workplace laws is strategic enforcement. Strategic enforcement seeks to use limited agency resources in a tactical manner to sustain compliant behavior.105 Strategic enforcement is particularly concerned with heightening detection106—data is an integral component of the model, as it helps agencies identify patterns of noncompliance across multiple sectors.107

This Part argues that administrative agencies should enhance their data collection in two ways. The first one is by altering internal agency processes to collect demographic information on the individuals who are filing

105 David Weil, Creating a Strategic Enforcement Approach to Address Wage Theft: One Academic’s Journey in Organizational Change, 60 J. INDUS. RELS. 437, 437 (2018).
107 Data collected by administrative agencies is also used by Congress to support proposed legislation. Yakus v. United States, 321 U.S. 414, 424–25 (1944).
complaints. In the event the complaint is not filed by the person aggrieved by the misconduct, the agency should seek to collect demographic data about the aggrieved party. The second way is by instituting affirmative reporting requirements for employers. This augmented data collection will provide administrative agencies with the information they need to improve enforcement of workplace regulations and track whether suspected noncompliance is being disproportionately levied against women and people of color.

A. Agency Collection of Complainant Demographic Data

It is well settled that data collection is a pivotal function of federal administrative agencies. Agencies collect data on almost every facet of societal life, including work. In some instances, particularly where exhaustion of administrative remedies is required, administrative agency data provides the most comprehensive information on the types of misconduct occurring in the workplace. However, most agencies that enforce workplace laws do not require, or even request, that individuals who file complaints provide demographic data. In fact, even the EEOC—the agency charged with enforcing employment discrimination laws—does not require that complainants provide demographic information such as race or

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108 See Opp Cotton Mills, Inc. v. Adm'r of the Wage & Hour Div. of the Dep't of Lab., 312 U.S. 126, 145 (1941) (noting that the data supplied by administrative agencies enables Congress to fulfill its constitutionally mandated legislative function); Yakus, 321 U.S. at 424–25 (acknowledging that administrative agencies collect data that is then used by Congress to support proposed legislation); see also Nicholas Mader, The Big Data Era and an Integrated Mode of Inquiry for Social Policy-Relevant Research, 11 I/S: J.L. & POL'Y FOR INFO. SOC'Y 97, 103 (2015) (“Public agencies from school district offices to health and human services, to juvenile and adult criminal courts, to child and family welfare, to employment security, to city public health departments maintain records on human populations from literally birth to death, and a wide range of critical human welfare concerns in between. These domains represent, by design, the most important human affairs for which we consider improvements in social policy.”).

109 Jennifer Bennett Shinall, The Substantially Impaired Sex: Uncovering the Gendered Nature of Disability Discrimination, 101 MINN. L. REV. 1099, 1117 (2017) (“Charge-filing data, therefore, should provide the fullest and most representative picture of the types of discrimination going on in the workplace . . . .”).

gender when filing a charge of discrimination.\textsuperscript{111} The agency requests only the following information: the name and contact information of the person filing; the name and contact information of the employer; the name and contact information of the employment agency or union against which the charge is being filed; the employer’s number of employees; a brief description of the discriminatory act(s); the date of the discriminatory action; the basis for the complaint (e.g., race, color, national origin); and the filer’s signature.\textsuperscript{112}

Augmenting agency efforts to obtain data may help with future enforcement. For example, suppose an employer was systemically retaliating against workers of color and female worker. Collection of demographic data on the individuals filing retaliation complaints against this employer will assist the agency in identifying racial bias that is part and parcel of the retaliation. This type of identification would be particularly conceivable when the complainant demographic data is coupled with other disclosures that are already required in several areas of workplace law, including the disclosure of the racial and gender composition of an employer’s workforce.\textsuperscript{113}

Likewise, other agencies that enforce workplace laws also do not collect demographic information about complainants. For instance, the WHD website lists the information individuals will need to provide to file a complaint regarding employer noncompliance with workplace laws, but demographic data about the complainant is not requested.\textsuperscript{114} Similarly,
OSHA does not request complainant demographic data on its complaint form.\textsuperscript{115} OFCCP includes a section on its complaint form where the complainant may specify the reason the individual believes they have been discriminated against by checking a particular box.\textsuperscript{116} Some of the boxes allow the complainant to declare a protected class.\textsuperscript{117} For example, under the “race” category, the complainant can check a box to specify the race.\textsuperscript{118} Similarly, under the national origin category, a complainant may specify their national origin.\textsuperscript{119} However, there are no subcategories under the additional categories, including sex, sexual orientation, religion, or disability.\textsuperscript{120} Moreover, the question asks the individual why they believe their employer is retaliating against them, but it does not ask directly for any information about the individual completing the complaint form (other than contact information).\textsuperscript{121} Often an individual may believe they are being targeted by their employer because the employer perceives the worker as having a particular identity, even when the worker does not. This “perception discrimination” or “perceived-as” discrimination is also prohibited under antidiscrimination laws.\textsuperscript{122} Hence, the box selected under the basis of the misconduct may not match the complainant’s actual identity.

\textsuperscript{115} See OSHA Online Complaint Form, supra note 110.


\textsuperscript{117} See id.

\textsuperscript{118} See id.

\textsuperscript{119} See id.

\textsuperscript{120} See id.

\textsuperscript{121} See id.

\textsuperscript{122} For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act’s prohibitions against disability discrimination apply not only to individuals with disabilities or those with a record of a disability but also those who are regarded as having a disability, irrespective of whether this perception is correct. 42 U.S.C. § 12102; see also Employment Discrimination Based on Religion, Ethnicity, or Country of Origin, EEOC, https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/employment-discrimination-based-religion-ethnicity-country-origin#.text=Title%20VII%20of%20the%20Civil%20Rights%20Act%20Color%20or%20sex [https://perma.cc/4AD4-8LU6] (Title VII’s prohibitions include “harassment or any other employment action based on” perception, which is defined as “[h]arassing or otherwise discriminating because of the perception or belief that a person is a member of a particular racial, national origin, or religious group whether or not that perception is correct”); Dallan F. Flake, Religious Discrimination Based on Employer Misperception, 2016 WIS. L. REV. 87, 106 (discussing religious discrimination claims based on misperception).
Collecting demographic data on complainants would allow the EEOC to better identify patterns of systemic discrimination in employer retaliation. The first method by which the agencies can achieve this goal is through direct collection. The agencies should provide an area on complaint forms to allow complainants to provide demographic information, should the complainant choose to do so. This section may state that provision of this information is optional.

Many respondents do not answer questions about demographics such as race and sex because they are fearful that this information will be used for a discriminatory purpose. There are a few protections that can be implemented to alleviate respondents’ fears. The first is listing the purposes for which the information will be used, and explicitly excluding discriminatory purposes. The second is by educating investigators on the importance of obtaining this information, so that the investigators may adequately and accurately convey that importance to complainants, with the intent to persuade them to provide the information. The next option is to offer an opportunity to provide the information after the investigation. This way, individuals who fear that the use of this information will negatively impact their complaint will already have a decision on the complaint prior to providing the data. Finally, while the portion of the form that asks for the information should be mandatory (i.e., the complainant should not be allowed to continue to the next page or next question without responding), an option labeled “choose not to answer” or similar language could be provided.

In addition to having agencies collect data directly from complainants, agencies should also collect data from other agencies, which will require coordination. This will provide agencies with data that can assist with systemic enforcement. For instance, if WHD shares its complainant demographic data with the EEOC, then the EEOC would be able to observe certain patterns, such as a particular employer targeting only or mostly women for wage theft. While such behavior would certainly be a violation of the FLSA, which WHD enforces, it would also constitute sex discrimination, which the EEOC enforces. However, the lack of coordination between agencies has garnered much attention from scholars, and calls for more coordination abound. 123 Currently, coordination can originate from several sources, including legislative mandates, executive orders, and

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interagency agreements. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are the primary mechanism used for agency coordination.

Despite the general lack of coordination, many agencies that enforce workplace laws already engage in data sharing and other types of coordination. Professor Hiba Hafiz conducted a recent study of the MOUs between agencies that regulate labor and labor markets. Her analysis showed that data sharing was the most prominent purpose found in the MOUs. However, the existing data sharing scheme suffers from two primary flaws. The first is that the scheme is not comprehensive, as it does not incorporate all agencies that are responsible for enforcing workplace law. An approach where only some workplace agencies participated in data sharing fails to provide robust protections. The second flaw is simply that if the agencies are not collecting demographic data on complainants, then no matter how robust or comprehensive interagency sharing agreements may be, the agencies will not have this data to share.

B. Affirmative Reporting Requirements for Employers

Increased data collection and disclosures will advance the mission of workplace agencies to equitably enforce workplace laws in light of employers’ myriad tactics to keep employees from going to court or to administrative agencies with complaints. One such tactic is retaliation. Another popular tactic is the use of mandatory arbitration agreements to keep allegations out of administrative agencies and courts. To combat these tactics, scholars have called for affirmative reporting requirements in a

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124 Id. at 205.
125 Id. at 224.
126 Id.
127 Id.
128 Id. at 222–23.
variety of contexts, including workplace laws,\textsuperscript{130} securities laws,\textsuperscript{131} nonprofit organizations,\textsuperscript{132} and environmental law.\textsuperscript{133}

In addition to pursuing the collection of information from complainants, many of whom are workers or advocacy groups, agencies should also obtain data from employers directly. Employer disclosure of information is already required in several areas of workplace law, including disclosure of the racial and gender composition of an employer’s workforce and known safety and health hazards.\textsuperscript{134} Expanding these disclosures will further the mission of agencies that enforce workplace law in a number of ways. First, by placing the onus on employers to track and disclose certain information, disclosure requirements will force employers to actively monitor what is happening in their organizations and help promote employer compliance.\textsuperscript{135} Second, disclosure requirements will help agencies monitor employer compliance with workplace regulations. Implementing mandatory disclosure will allow the administrative agencies to engage in strategic enforcement and employ their scarce resources towards enforcement in an efficient way.

Finally, several types of information should be disclosed annually. The first is the number of complaints filed internally within the last year and the steps the employer took in response to these complaints. The second is information on the individuals who filed these complaints. This information can be reported using an employee identification number or some other unique identifier besides the employee’s name. This should be accompanied by information that would indicate some type of proven or alleged adverse


\textsuperscript{132} Atinuke O. Adediran, Disclosures for Equity, 122 COLUM. L. REV. 865, 873 (2022).


\textsuperscript{134} EEO-I Data Collection, supra note 113; 29 C.F.R. § 1910.1200(b) (2018).

\textsuperscript{135} Bornstein, supra note 130, at 300.
action against the employee. Examples include whether the employee separated from the company since the complaint through a termination, resignation, or reduction in force (i.e., layoff); whether the employee was denied any opportunity for which the employee applied, including a promotion or training opportunity; and whether the employee’s working hours or wage rate changed after the complaint. To be clear, having an employee who, for instance, filed a complaint and was subsequently denied a raise or a promotion does not equate to wrongdoing by the employer. Rather, it can serve as an indicator to both the employer and the government that further investigation, internally or externally, is needed.

IV. IMPROVING ENFORCEMENT

Transitioning from an enforcement model dominated by complaints to one dominated by compliance reviews will improve enforcement while simultaneously frustrating the purpose of employer retaliation and incentivizing compliance with workplace laws. Given the prevalence of employer retaliation and the racial disparities in both workplace misconduct and retaliation, administrative agencies charged with enforcing workplace laws must ensure their enforcement schemes deter employers from retaliation. This Part provides a brief overview of deterrence theory and argues that making compliance reviews the dominant enforcement model will deter employers from violating workplace regulations. It also describes the characteristics of an effective compliance review dominant model and lists some limitations of the enforcement model.

A. Deterring Noncompliance

Orthodox deterrence theory is evolving to include workplace law concerns, and scholars have started to emphasize the role of strategic enforcement in deterrence theory. Deterrence theory assumes that regulated entities are rational, amoral, and act in their own self-interest. Whether regulated entities will be deterred from certain behavior depends on the certainty, severity, and swiftness of sanctions. When the probability of detection is high, and resulting sanctions are severe and swift enough, the actor is deterred from the noncompliant behavior. Although increased severity and swiftness of sanctions increase deterrence, even the fastest and most severe sanctions simply never get imposed if there is no detection of the underlying misconduct that would trigger the sanction. Indeed, empirical

\[136\] Hardy, supra note 106, at 136.
\[137\] Id.
\[138\] Id.
research shows that increased likelihood of detection has a greater effect on deterrence than increased severity of punishment. 139

Hence, this Article is particularly concerned with the certainty of sanctions, with the hope that a compliance-review-based model will increase this certainty in the short run and lead to greater severity and swiftness in the long run. Over time, increased deterrence will lead to increased compliance, allowing agencies to free up more resources to increase the swiftness of sanctions. More compliance will also decrease the likelihood that the agency will fall into the “deterrence trap”—a situation in which the size of the penalty is too much for the regulated party to bear, so agencies are reluctant to impose the penalty. 140

While orthodox deterrence theory may seem fairly straightforward, empirical deterrence studies reveal the complexity of the theory. Additionally, deterrence theory has its origins in criminal law, but application of the theory to employment contexts introduces nuances that further complicate matters. Specifically, the assumption of rationality, role of third parties, and adversarial nature of deterrence complicate the theory in the employment context. The Article discusses all of these complications below.

B. Structure and Characteristics of the New Model

Efficient and effective use of a compliance review dominant enforcement model by agencies would require that the compliance reviews have certain characteristics, including: (1) random selection from a comprehensive pool of employers to be audited; (2) a moratorium on additional reviews of an employer for a specified time after a compliance review is completed absent a complaint being filed; and (3) the ability to merge any pending complaints into the compliance review investigation, should any complaints be filed against the same employer at the time the compliance review is pending.

1. Bifurcating the Selection Process:
   Random and Targeted Selection

To be effective, compliance reviews should involve random selection from a pool of all employers covered by a particular statute. It is imperative that all covered employers be in the pool from which the “sample” of

139 Christine Parker & Vibeke Lehmann Nielsen, Deterrence and the Impact of Calculative Thinking on Business Compliance with Competition and Consumer Regulation, 56 ANTITRUST BULL. 377, 404–05 (2011); SALLY SIMPSON, CORPORATE CRIME, LAW AND SOCIAL CONTROL 93 (2002).
Employers will be selected for audit. Failure to have a comprehensive pool would leave some employers out of the system, and the deterrence incentives would not apply to them. Additionally, the selection must be random. Currently, many agencies that use directed investigation do not select the employers for audits randomly. Rather, other factors affect selection. One example is selection based on the size of the employer, with some agencies focusing enforcement efforts on the largest employers. The rationale behind this decision is that doing so will help the most workers, given the size of the employer. However, if employers know that an agency plans to target larger employers for compliance reviews, the smaller and midsize employers will have fewer deterrence incentives because they will know that their chances of being selected are small.

Random selection should also help avoid regulatory capture, a phenomenon by which administrative agencies act to serve special interests rather than the public interest. Rather than risk having special interests exert influence over the compliance review selection processes in a manner that will decrease the chances of a particular employer or industry being audited, a random selection policy would ensure that all covered employers are eligible for a review.

Another factor currently used by agencies in opening investigations without the filing of an initial complaint is the risk profile of geographic areas or industries. For example, at times OSHA focuses its resources on certain hazards within certain high-risk industries. However, as is the case with large employers, a focus on high-risk industries or even high-risk geographic areas would alert employers who are outside of these areas and industries that there is no need to be concerned about a possible compliance review; thus, deterrence incentives are decreased.

Yet another consideration is the likelihood of actually finding a violation. Violations lead to recoveries for employees, and it is axiomatic that agencies would want to direct investigatory resources where they believe violations exist. While this certainly serves the agencies’ objectives, a focus on companies with higher likelihoods of violations does not lead to deterrence incentives against all employers. Employers who are able to stay off the agencies’ radars through a variety of methods, including actual or

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141 See Weil, supra note 101, at 135.
142 Id.
143 M. Elizabeth Magill, Courts and Regulatory Capture, in PREVENTING REGULATORY CAPTURE 397, 401 (Daniel Carpenter & David Moss eds., 2014).
144 See Hardy, supra note 106, at 148.
threatened retaliatory behavior, would be less incentivized to comply with applicable workplace laws.

To be clear, all of the aforementioned considerations are relevant to agency mission. However, agency enforcement has two goals: relief for the victim of workplace misconduct and future deterrence. The first is accomplished through the type of direct pressure arising from inspections and subsequently levied penalties if violations are found. Considerations of employer size, risk level, and probability of finding a violation are certainly relevant to enforcement through direct pressure. The second enforcement goal is deterrence incentives—that is, stopping violations before they occur. Random selection is pivotal for optimal deterrence.

2. No Requisite Indicators of Noncompliance

Two key characteristics would mark the proposed transition to a compliance-audit-based enforcement model: political palatability and varying degrees of ease of transitioning to the new model across agencies. First, there should be no need for an indication of noncompliance to trigger a compliance audit. This should be politically palatable, as a randomized audit would not carry the stigma associated with investigations originating from individual complaints. Second, while transitioning to a compliance-review-dominant enforcement model would be beneficial to all agencies, as it would foster a culture of compliance that should decrease agency workload in the long run, enforcing workplace laws. However, the transition will be easier for some agencies than for others. This Section uses WHD and the EEOC as examples to illustrate the differing levels of difficulty.

WHD is an example of an agency that is progressing towards a lower percentage of complaint-triggered investigations. In 2010, Professor Weil conducted a study finding that directed investigations created more compliance incentives. In 2009, only 5.18% of WHD’s cases were directed investigations. In 2010, that number more than quadrupled to 27.01%. The numbers have mostly risen in the years since. The high-water mark came in 2018 when 53.16% of WHD’s cases were directed investigations. The rate with which WHD has increased the number of its cases that are directed investigations instead of complaints suggests that an agency like

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146 See Weil, supra note 101, at 131.
147 See Weil, supra note 96, at 50.
149 Id.
150 Id.
151 Id.
WHD would have a fairly smooth transition to a compliance-review-dominant model.

Other agencies, like the EEOC, for example, are poised to have a more difficult transition, as such a transition would ultimately require legislative action. In the 1970s, the EEOC started transitioning to a model focused on targeting its resources to investigations that would help large numbers of employees. Under the leadership of Eleanor Holmes Norton as Chair, the EEOC focused its efforts on large-scale employer compliance initiatives. This focus shifted to individual complaints in 1982 when the EEOC was under new leadership by then-Chair Clarence Thomas. This move was widely criticized. While the EEOC has attempted to focus on more broad-based enforcement through mechanisms like systemic enforcement over the years, an EEOC task force found in 2006 that EEOC investigators have very little incentive to look beyond individual charges.

Despite the lack of incentives to pursue a compliance-review-based model, the EEOC has the ability to assess compliance without a filed charge through two mechanisms: Commissioner charges and directed investigations. Congress gave the EEOC authority to investigate potential discrimination under Title VII, the ADA, and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act. Furthermore, the EEOC is authorized to conduct systemic investigations of discrimination in the workplace. These investigations can be initiated through various means, including private complainants, EEOC investigators, and other entities. The EEOC has a legal obligation to assess potential discrimination claims and take action if warranted. The agency's mission is to promote equal opportunity in the workplace and to ensure compliance with federal anti-discrimination laws.
Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) using Commissioner charges. Prior to 1972, Commissioner charges required reasonable cause that a violation of Title VII had occurred before filing. Since 1972, Commissioner charges have simply had to allege an unlawful employment practice. Investigations of Commissioner charges are conducted in the same manner as investigation of individual complaints. Persons who are the subject of a Commissioner charge or who are in the class being addressed are entitled to a right-to-sue notice upon request. While issuance of a right-to-sue notice typically ends the EEOC’s investigation, the EEOC has the authority to continue investigating a Commissioner charge despite a right-to-sue notice being issued. In addition to Commissioner charges, the EEOC has congressional authorization to investigate potential noncompliance with the Equal Pay Act (EP Act) and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) through directed investigations. Directed investigations are conducted in the same manner as the investigations stemming from individually filed ADEA or EP Act complaints.

Commissioner charges and directed investigations share the characteristic of being initiated by the agency, not an external complainant. The fact that no employee or applicant would have to initiate the complaint helps the agency decrease the likelihood of retaliation, as there is no complaining employee against whom to retaliate. It also ensures that in the event an employer threatens to retaliate against employees should they report misconduct, the retaliation threat would have no effect on the agency’s ability to investigate. Importantly, even the Supreme Court has noted the role Commissioner charges can have on antiretaliation enforcement efforts. In EEOC v. Shell Oil Co., the Court stated that when a victim of discrimination

158 See 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5(b) (noting that charges may be filed by Commissioners); see also Commissioner Charges and Directed Investigations, supra note 31.

159 This only speaks to Title VII because prior to 1972, neither the ADA nor GINA existed. See 29 C.F.R. § 1601.3(a) (referencing the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008). Prior to 1972, a Commissioner charge needed reasonable cause to proceed. See Commissioner Charge and Directed Investigations, supra note 31.


161 See Commissioner Charge and Directed Investigations, supra note 31.

162 29 C.F.R. § 1601.28(a)(1).

163 Id. § 1601.28(a)(3).

164 The Equal Pay Act, which was passed prior to the establishment of the EEOC, does not have a requirement that a charge be filed to commence an investigation. Id. § 1620.30(a).

165 The ADEA implementing regulations provide: “The Commission may, on its own initiative, conduct investigations of employers, employment agencies and labor organizations, in accordance with the powers vested in it pursuant to the ADEA.” Id. § 1626.4.

166 See 29 U.S.C. § 626; id. § 211(a); see also Commissioner Charge and Directed Investigations, supra note 31.
is reluctant to file a charge himself because of fear of retaliation, a Commissioner may file a charge on behalf of the victim. Yet, neither Commissioner charges nor directed investigations comprise a large component of the EEOC’s docket. In fiscal year 2022, there were 73,485 charges (i.e., individual complaints) filed with the EEOC. By contrast, there were only 29 Commissioner charges and 25 directed investigations commenced in the same fiscal year. Commissioner charges and directed investigations combined comprised less than 0.07% of the EEOC’s caseload.

Despite the EEOC’s ability to initiate Commissioner charges and directed investigations sua sponte, Commissioner charges differ from compliance reviews in that they allege noncompliance. A compliance review would simply audit the employer to determine whether the employer is compliant, without any allegation being made. However, the EEOC does not have the statutory authority to engage in an investigation not triggered by an allegation of wrongdoing, whether that allegation is from an employee, applicant, or the agency itself, under Title VII, the ADA, or GINA. As a result, while compliance reviews may be a viable option under the ADEA and the EP Act, they may not be allowed under the other statutes. Hence, the authority to trigger an audit in which there is no suspicion or allegation of wrongdoing by the employer would require Congress to amend the authority it has given to the EEOC.

3. Publication of Results Regardless of Outcomes

The results of compliance reviews should be made available to the public, whether or not noncompliance is found. Administrative agencies typically publicize findings of workplace law violations, as well as the remedies of sanctions that result from discovery of the violations. This should continue. The failure to publicize results can dilute the deterrent effects of enforcement. The ability for stakeholders to incentivize employers to make changes depends on transparency. Employers who are found to be in compliance should get publicity, just as the noncompliant employers. This not only rewards compliant firms but also incentivizes at

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168 EEOC, supra note 2.
169 Commissioner Charge and Directed Investigations, supra note 31.
least the compliant firms to avoid any tactics that may prolong the compliance audit.

Deterrence theory has expanded to include the role third parties play in compliance decisions. Numerous types of third parties are contemplated, including consumers, shareholders, insurance companies, employees, and the employer’s competitors. For one, noncompliant entities are able to pass the costs of noncompliance on to third parties, thereby decreasing the deterrent effect—a phenomenon which previous scholarship has explored.\(^{172}\) Employers can decrease the costs of noncompliance by simply transferring those costs to consumers or shareholders.\(^{173}\) Moreover, employers’ ability to purchase insurance to cover these costs could also decrease the deterrent effects.

Another factor that is starting to gain more coverage in the literature on deterrence theory is the effect of increased publicity of sanctions on regulated entities. Coupling increased publicity of sanctions with increased investigations results in higher compliance.\(^{174}\) While deterrence theory has traditionally focused on the entity setting the sanction and the entity receiving the sanctions, third parties play a vital role as well.\(^{175}\) For instance, publicity surrounding noncompliance could harm companies with their customers, as well as with their business partners.\(^{176}\) Because corporations are increasingly being held responsible for the conduct of other corporations with which they do business, they often enter into contractual arrangements whereby they obtain certain assurances of compliance.\(^{177}\) Hence, any subsequent noncompliance of which an entity’s business partners are made aware could not only expose the entity to legal liability but also hinder the entity’s ability to do business with future potential partners.


\(^{174}\) Johnson, *supra* note 170, at 1901.


\(^{177}\) Root, *supra* note 88, at 1017.
C. The Challenges and Benefits of Compliance Review

The language of antiretaliation provisions in workplace statutes varies from one statute to another.178 However, these provisions are generally comprised of at least one of three types of clauses—an opposition clause, an interference clause, and a participation clause.179 Opposition clauses protect employees from adverse actions taken against them by their employers if the employee has opposed an unlawful workplace practice.180 Interference clauses proscribe employer interference with any right granted in the statute.181 Lastly, participation clauses protect employees who have participated in investigations or other proceedings regarding the exercise of a right conferred by statute.182

Transitioning from an individual-complaint-dominant model to a compliance-review-dominant model would incentivize employers to comply with antiretaliation laws. Employers would be unable to keep the government from investigating them by threatening to retaliate against employees who filed complaints. Granted, being unable to keep the government from investigating would help would-be victims of participation clause violations to a lesser degree, as employers could still threaten to retaliate against employees who cooperate with the investigation. However, even if agencies were to embrace a compliance-review-dominant model, the government would still need employees to participate in compliance review investigations and could request employee participation, which the employer would have no power to refuse.

In its purest form, deterrence theory is adversarial.183 While the adversarial nature of it may be palatable in the criminal law arena, for political reasons it is much less so in the employment arena. Agencies have

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178 See Long, supra note 7, at 561–63 (discussing the differences in the texts of antiretaliation provisions in workplace statutes).
180 Daiquiri J. Steele, Protecting Protected Activity, 95 WASH. L. REV. 1891, 1919 (2020).
181 Id. at 1920.
182 Id. at 1919–20.
183 Hardy, supra note 106, at 136. See generally Gary Becker, Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach, 76 J. POL. & ECON. 169 (1968) (proposing a formula allocation of enforcement resources dependent on “social loss,” as opposed to more traditional justifications of vengeance, deterrence, safety, rehabilitation, or compensation); George J. Stigler, The Theory of Economic Regulation, 2 BELL J. ECON. & MGMT. SCI. 3 (1971) (positing that state regulation of industry sectors is done for the benefit of industry actors); Orley Ashenfelter & Robert Smith, Compliance with the Minimum Wage Law, 87 J. POL. & ECON. 333 (1979) (examining the extent to which minimum wage standards are complied with by firms who are profit-maximizing and subject to incomplete enforcement).
introduced mechanisms like outreach programs to dilute the adversarial nature of the enforcement. However, regulatory capture can be a problem. Additional features may need to be added to make transition to an enforcement model focused on deterrence politically palatable. For instance, another feature of an effective compliance-review enforcement model is having a specified amount of time between the completion of one compliance review and the start of another. The timing requirement will ensure the model does not overburden employers. Once an employer undergoes a compliance review, that employer should be shielded from another compliance review for a certain period of time. The time period should be long enough to provide the employer with some relief from the review by that particular agency, but short enough that the employer does not become complacent and consider itself shielded from an agency audit. OFCCP, for example, has already created its own audit timing rules. OFCCP will not audit a facility for which a prior OFCCP compliance review was closed within the past two years. Such a moratorium on audits for a certain amount of time after completion of one would only apply to compliance reviews, not complaints. For instance, if a complaint was filed the day after a compliance review was completed, that complaint would be investigated as usual.

The final characteristic needed for the effectiveness of the compliance-review-dominant model is the ability to merge complaints against the same employer with the compliance review. If a complaint is filed while a compliance review is ongoing, the complaint should be merged with the compliance review. This allows the investigation of all allegations pending against an employer at a particular agency simultaneously with the complaint. This helps ensure that the investigators assigned to the compliance review are aware of the complaint and helps minimize duplication of government resources.

One argument that will likely arise is that of agency overreach. These arguments are particularly surprising inasmuch as many decry administrative agencies that enforce laws related to the workplace as not doing enough to promote compliance. Many agencies that enforce workplace law are already hamstrung by lackluster regulatory power. For instance, the EEOC does not have the power to engage in substantive rulemaking with respect to Title VII, though it does have the power to make procedural rules.184 Hence, the proposed changes would simply provide the agencies that enforce workplace law with the same regulatory tools that many other federal agencies already possess.

Converting to a compliance-review-dominant model would by no means solve the problem executive agencies face in ensuring robust retaliation protections. The legislature still needs to engage in substantive antiretaliation reform to update and reinforce antiretaliation provisions in statutes. Likewise, the judiciary should allow procedural mechanisms to do the work they were created to do with respect to balancing justice and judicial economy, as narrow interpretations of antiretaliation laws are diluting the effectiveness of the underlying statutes and encumbering agency regulatory enforcement. While this Article’s prescription is not a perfect substitute for legislative intervention or sound reasoning by the judiciary, it is a step towards incentivizing employer compliance.

CONCLUSION

The federal government wants to promote equity in the provision of services. One barrier to providing services in the workplace-law context is employer retaliation. Violations of workplace regulations disproportionately affect women and people of color. Moreover, employers are more likely to retaliate against female workers and workers of color, leading to disparate enforcement of workplace laws. Administrative agencies therefore find themselves in a quandary. They are unable to prevent the courts from issuing restrictive interpretations of antiretaliation laws and they lack the authority to legislatively correct these interpretations. Nevertheless, they are charged with enforcing workplace statutes, despite the judicial weakening of antiretaliation provisions—the primary enforcement tool contained in the statutes.

The federal government should act to increase promotion of services and equity by deterring employers from violating laws that regulate work, including antiretaliation laws. Enhanced data collection through agencies’ direct collection and affirmative reporting requirements for employers will allow agencies to detect discriminatory patterns based on race and sex in workplace noncompliance, as well as strategically target enforcement efforts. Most importantly, transitioning from a complaint-dominant enforcement model to a compliance-based-dominant model will help deter employers from retaliating and bring the administrative state a step closer to ensuring equal protection and justice for all.

185 Sperino, supra note 13, at 2041–42.