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Social Sciences, Volume 2

**Minorities**  
New Challenges and Horizons

*Edited by John R. Hermann*





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# Minorities - New Challenges and Horizons

*Edited by John R. Hermann*

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Minorities - New Challenges and Horizons

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Edited by John R. Hermann

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# IntechOpen Book Series

# Social Sciences

## Volume 2

### Aims and Scope of the Series

The social sciences, as a form of scientific knowledge anchored on epistemological foundations, theories, and specific methodologies, both in their fundamental and applied dimensions, are paramount for understanding and, consequently, developing instruments that contribute to improving social and environmental living conditions. This Social Sciences book series, based on the concept of the social sciences as key elements in the promotion of scientific knowledge and its inherent consequences, has as its primary goal to be a space for the dissemination of relevant information on various objects of study, aimed at specialists, students, policymakers, and others interested in the challenges facing humanity. Thus, the aim is to promote scientific progress through the sound and rigorous dissemination of studies that, from the perspective of the social sciences, either through a specialised disciplinary approach or through interdisciplinary perspectives, foster a deeper understanding of the objects under analysis, clarifying the issues addressed and their implications.



# Meet the Series Editor



Dr. Sandro Serpa is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of the Azores (UAc), Portugal. His career in social sciences and education began at UAc in 2000. He earned his Ph.D. in Education, specializing in Sociology of Education, from UAc in 2013. He is also an integrated researcher at the Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences of the Azores Centre (CICS. NOVA. UAçores). Dr. Serpa has demonstrated a strong commitment to higher education throughout his career. He has served in various positions at UAc, including Head of the Department of Sociology, Director of the Bachelor's in Social Work, Coordinator of the Scientific-Pedagogical Supervision Team for Social Work Internships, Member of the Pedagogical Council of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, and Member of the Quality Commission. Additionally, he held the position of Deputy Director of CICS. UAc. Currently, he serves as Senior Editor (Sociology Section) for Social Sciences & Humanities Open (Elsevier), among several other journals. He previously held the position of Senior Editor - Sociology Section for Cogent Social Sciences (Taylor & Francis) from 2020 to 2022. Dr. Serpa maintains a distinguished research profile, evidenced by over 400 publications in international journals, books, and other scientific outlets across a wide range of countries: Brazil, Canada, China, United Arab Emirates, Germany, India, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America. His research interests encompass Teaching Sociology, Sociology of Education, Sociology of Organisations, Organisational Culture, Scientific Communication, Digital Society, Digital Literacy, Society 5.0 and Sociology of Artificial Intelligence. Dr. Serpa emphasizes the importance of integrating academic knowledge with service to the university and society at large.



# Meet the Volume Editor



Dr. John R. Hermann is a tenured professor in the Department of Political Science at Trinity University in Texas. He has published twenty-five peer-reviewed papers. His research focuses on protecting vulnerable and marginalized groups in our constitutional republic and higher education pedagogy, focusing on the changing demographics in the United States.



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to Increase Society's Acceptance of Minority Groups  
*by Jacob Richard Thomas*

# Preface

With the rise of autocratic, right-wing, and populist movements across the globe, many minorities feel stigmatized and ostracized. The threat is real, as many minorities feel as helpless and hopeless as right before the beginning of World War II. To that end, *Minorities – New Challenges and Horizons* explores minorities from four dimensions. First, Chapter 1 by John R. Hermann, the academic editor, titled “Introductory Chapter: Minorities – New Challenges and Horizons”, surveys the challenges that minorities face and how they have – in some instances – tried to overcome the daunting hurdles. His focus on minorities has a comparative element to it. Still, its focus is primarily on minorities in the United States.

The second section of *Minorities – New Challenges and Horizons* systematically examines the many issues minorities face in the all-important area of education. Access to quality education is fundamental for upward social mobility and can be perceived as the great equalizer. Unfortunately, minorities face systemic hurdles. For example, in Chapter 2, “Barriers, Challenges, and Horizons for Indigenous Minorities in STEM: Lessons from Three Continents”, the authors Rechel Shrisunder and Dwight Figueiredo explore the intersection between higher education and Indigenous cultures. STEM is widely known as having the most challenging pre-professional programs in higher education. Indigenous cultures have not had access to or the opportunity to succeed in STEM-oriented curriculum as compared to other groups, including many minority groups. Chapter 3, “Perspective Chapter: Challenges of Ethnic Minority Schools in Georgia”, by Giorgi Momtselidze, offers an insightful study into the barriers that ethnic minority schools play in the nation-state of Georgia. Chapter 4, “Barriers and Discrimination in Higher Education: The Case of Arab Society in Israel”, by Waleed Dallasheh, offers a timely topic, especially given the horrific bloodshed that has existed since the October 7th Israel-Hamas War. While the war has been extensively detailed, the treatment of Arabs inside Israeli society in the area of education has received less scholarly attention. In this regard, Dallasheh makes an important contribution to the academic literature.

The third section focuses on a recurring and pervasive issue of studying minorities: The case of discrimination against Muslims. While a growing religion, Muslim groups have experienced systematic exclusion from mainstream society in Western and Eastern political cultures. Treated as the “other” in many societies, Muslims experience both explicit and implicit discrimination. In *Minorities – New Challenges and Horizons*, the three studies focus on the discrimination of Muslims in India, a rising global power. In Chapter 5, “Navigating Marginality: The Complex Realities of Muslim Minorities in India”, Deepa Nair examines the nuances of studying Muslims in the rising nation of India. Similarly, Chapter 6, “Mapping Modern Islamophobia: A Contextualizing BJP’s Hindutva Ideology and Muslim (Mis)Representation in Indian Media”, Muhammad Asad Latif details how discrimination is well-rooted in the powerful institution of media.

Finally, the fourth section of the edited volume explores new ways of examining minorities in the hope of gaining more acceptance by mainstream society. In a hopeful social science analysis in Chapter 7, “Dealing with Discomfort toward Social Minorities: Exploring New Approaches to Increase Society’s Acceptance of Minority Groups”, Jacob Thomas details how society can be more inclusive toward minority groups.

Special gratitude must be extended to Marica Novakovic, the Publishing Process Manager. She did an exemplary job creating this edited book, working tirelessly to ensure everyone stayed on task and made the best final product possible. This book would not have been possible without her help.

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Section 1

# Introduction

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## Chapter 1

# Introductory Chapter: Minorities – New Challenges and Horizons

*John R. Hermann*

## 1. Introduction

Right-wing movements across the globe are on the rise. Invariably, there is an ushering in of a movement that is friendly to far-right regimes, which alienates or diminishes certain rights of minority groups. For example, President Jair Messias Bolsonaro (Brazil), President Donald J. Trump (United States of America), and Prime Minister Viktor Orban (Hungary) share authoritarian tendencies. Their leadership spans three separate continents. In all three countries, basic civil rights and liberties of minorities are in a precarious situation [1]. Through economic reforms that protect oligarchs, authoritarianism, nationalism, natural law/traditions, stigmatization of certain religions, a rise in Populism, and draconian immigration policies are leading to a right-wing revolution that protects and even promotes autocrats, dictators, and fascists [1, 2].

With a focus mainly on the United States, the Introductory Chapter explores the three central ways that minorities are examined by social scientists. First, scholars detail how minorities face stigmatization, marginalization, exclusion, and assimilation through implicit and explicit government discriminatory policies [3, 4]. Second, the literature explores social movements led by minorities that help raise their voices on issues and may even mitigate discrimination. Third, research examines how government policies are codified to protect minorities. And, even when minorities are explicitly protected by governments, implicit discrimination stubbornly remains [5].

## 2. Policies that discriminate against minorities

First, there are explicit policies that discriminate against minorities. For example, President Trump issued an executive order making English the official language of the United States [6]. Making all citizens assimilate to the dominant language and culture has been a tried and tested strategy of authoritarian leaders, one that Trump used during his second term as President. Similarly, Trump issued six executive orders directing the Department of Homeland Security to remove non-violent immigrants from neighborhoods across the nation and to end birthright citizenship (although birthright citizenship is expressly mentioned in the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution) [7]. Another example

of authoritarian leadership can be found in Brazil with President Bolsonaro. The Brazilian military was used successfully against Bolsonaro's political opponents as well as the other branches of government. Using military as a strategy to help the dominant regime rule is textbook authoritarianism [8].

Perhaps, no leader has been more authoritarian than the Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán. Hungary looks very different than prior to Orbán's rule: The freedom of the press has been curtailed, new draconian immigration policies have been implemented, checks and balances are dismantled, elections are fixed, a rise in nationalism, and the elimination of criticism of the dominant regime was codified [9]. Like President Trump, Prime Minister Orbán also appeals to the uneducated, poor, and rural voters—those who feel disaffected and threatened by the changing society. While Bolsonaro, Trump, and Orbán are extreme cases, and it is challenging to find a society that has not oppressed certain basic rights of minorities.

### **3. Minority groups institute change**

Minority groups are not powerless to combat these authoritarian tendencies. While challenging, minorities can actively work to include policies that represent their interests. As early as the late nineteenth century, Standing Bear, a member of the Ponca tribe in the United States, decided to trade physical resistance for using the court to redress his grievances. According to Standing Bear:

*You have got into court for us and I find that our wrongs can be rightened there! Now I have no more use for the tomahawk. I want to lay it down forever [10].*

Almost a 100 years later, Associate Justice William J. Brennan, on behalf of the Supreme Court of the United States, reaffirmed Standing Bear's position in *NAACP v. Button* (1963): Namely, that groups that lack access to or clout in the electoral process regularly turn to courts to redress or lobby for their grievances. The Court laments that:

*Groups which find themselves unable to achieve their objectives through the ballot frequently turn to the courts. ... And under the conditions of modern government, litigation may well be the sole practicable avenue open to a minority to petition for redress of grievances [11].*

Minorities' use of the courts is only one strategy of many, however. Other approaches are equally effective as using the courts: Protests (e.g., Black Lives Matter), interest group activity (e.g., Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons), violence (e.g., January 6th 2021 insurrection of the Capitol), educational and corporate policies (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), riots for expanded LGBTQIA+ rights (e.g., the riots at Stonewall in Greenwich Village, New York), civil obedience (e.g., Ghandi), and many other strategies. Minorities must seek agency to bring about change.

#### **4. Government policies that protect minorities**

Third, government policies are put into place to vigorously protect minorities. In *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020), for example, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects transsexuals from sexual identity discrimination in the workplace [12]. In democratically-based governments, minorities can be protected through constitutional (14th Amendment Equal Protection Clause) and statutory (Voting Rights Act of 1965) guarantees. In governments that are not democratic, minorities frequently face more grave threats, such as Muslims in China or Christian minorities in the majority (Arab) dominated Sudan. In the latter case, minorities frequently have to emigrate elsewhere to have basic rights and liberties.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Minorities are under significant threat with the rise of far-right extreme groups, governments that turn a blind eye to the minority group's plight, and the transition from more democratically run countries to ones that are dominated by Populist and Authoritarian leadership. With these seismic changes occurring, it becomes increasingly important to not only to study minorities, but to understand the root causes of discrimination to mitigate or eliminate it.


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Section 2

# Challenges – The Case of Education

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## Chapter 2

# Barriers, Challenges, and Horizons for Indigenous Minorities in STEM: Lessons from Three Continents

*Rechel Shrisunder and Dwight Figueiredo*

### Abstract

Sustainable science and engineering strive to solve the most pressing problems involving all strata of society and communities. Realization and addressing such pressing problems necessitate the involvement of minorities in science to gain unique and diverse perspectives. In this review, we cover the barriers and challenges faced by minorities in STEM from three geographical contexts. Further, we discuss factors associated with heavy dropouts, including racism, isolation, language and cultural barriers, and socioeconomic strata. Focusing on the Indian context, we delve into the educational policies that have pledged and promised to make inclusive and equitable changes that benefit all people along the socioeconomic spectrum. We introduce the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its 12-point plan for inclusive and equitable STEM education in India. In addition to governmental policies, we provide examples of professional bodies and NGOs that are currently impactful in supporting indigenous people involved in STEM. Finally, in this chapter, we highlight new upcoming digitization and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies that have the potential to level the playing field and are capable of being extremely impactful for minorities in the STEM discipline, helping to retain them in STEM education and thereby supporting them in sustainable STEM careers.

**Keywords:** minorities in STEM, equity in education, diversity in science, barriers to access, STEM empowerment, intersectionality in STEM

### 1. Introduction

Indigenous minorities across various continents encounter significant barriers when it comes to accessing and thriving in STEM education and careers. Systemic issues, such as socioeconomic constraints, discrimination, cultural identity conflicts, and inadequate representation, contribute to high dropout rates and underrepresentation in the STEM field. This chapter examines these challenges in three geographical contexts—North America, India, and Australia—highlighting both historical and contemporary factors that impact indigenous participation in STEM [1].

We have specifically broadened our discussion to analyze the legal systems, self-determination policies, and socioeconomic situations of indigenous groups in these areas. We investigate whether certain continents have more advantageous laws that support indigenous self-governance or whether policies are mostly consistent across regions. This addition will offer a more comprehensive understanding of the systemic and systematic challenges faced by indigenous minorities in STEM fields within various geopolitical contexts. These are as follows:

*(North America) Canada:* The Canadian constitution explicitly acknowledges and safeguards Aboriginal and treaty rights through Section 35, which gives robust legal standing to indigenous claims [2].

*Australia:* Unlike Australia, the rights of indigenous people in Canada are enshrined in the Canadian constitution. Specifically, this protection is provided through Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, which was included at the time the constitution was patriated in 1982. Section 35 recognizes and affirms existing “Aboriginal” and treaty rights. (It is important to note that the term “Aboriginal” encompasses Indian, Inuit, and Metis peoples) This protection includes rights that currently exist or may be obtained through a land claim agreement. Moreover, Section 25 of the constitution ensures that the rights and freedoms outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms cannot be interpreted to negate or undermine any Aboriginal treaty or other rights. Due to Section 35, Aboriginal rights if it meets the stringent justification criteria established by the supreme courts in the sparrow decision [2].

In India, the constitution provides for the rights of Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis), yet the implementation and enforcement of these rights frequently face challenges [3].

We also explore the intersection of traditional knowledge systems with modern scientific education, emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy to ensure inclusivity and equitable opportunities.

Despite these challenges, various initiatives and policies have emerged to support indigenous minorities in STEM. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a framework for inclusive education, focusing on regional language instruction and community engagement [4]. Similarly, organizations such as the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) in North America and ISTEM in Australia are working to improve indigenous representation through mentorship programs, scholarships, and advocacy efforts [5]. However, while these initiatives address some structural barriers, disparities persist, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach that integrates indigenous knowledge and enhances accessibility to STEM education.

Emerging technologies, including digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI), offer potential solutions to level the playing field for indigenous students in STEM. AI-driven personalized learning and digital illiteracy initiatives can help mitigate systemic disadvantages and increase educational engagement. Nonetheless, ethical considerations, infrastructure gaps, and cultural sensitivities must be carefully addressed to ensure that technology-driven solutions genuinely benefit indigenous learners [6]. This chapter stresses the importance of sustained efforts at the policy, institutional, and community levels to create a more inclusive and diverse STEM landscape, ultimately empowering indigenous minorities to make meaningful contributions to scientific advancements.

## **2. Methods**

The chapter employed a systematic approach to synthesize existing research on the barriers, challenges, and future opportunities for indigenous minorities in STEM

across three continents: North America, India, and Australia. We used the following search strategy and inclusion and exclusion criteria to systematically review the relevant studies:

**Search strategy:** A comprehensive search string was developed incorporating key terms related to indigenous populations, STEM education, cultural and socioeconomic barriers, dropout rates, and inclusive policy initiatives. This string was rigorously tested for reliability across multiple academic databases, including major platforms such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, along with relevant institutional repositories. The search focused on peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and non-government publications available up to January 2025.

**Inclusion and exclusion criteria:** Studies were included if they met the following criteria.

- Focus on indigenous or ethnic minority groups in the context of STEM education.
- Explored barriers or challenges, whether cultural, economic, or systemic factors affect the STEM pipeline and contribute to higher dropout rates.

Examined intervention policies (both governmental and non-governmental) aimed at promoting equity and inclusivity in STEM.

Articles that did not address these aspects or were not published in English were excluded from this review.

**Data extraction and synthesis:** Following the initial screening of titles and abstracts, full-text reviews were conducted to extract relevant data. Information regarding the study design, demographics, identified challenges, and outcomes of the interventions were systematically recorded. A thematic analysis approach was then employed to consolidate the findings from the three geographical contexts, ensuring consistency with the constructs defined in the search string.

**Validity and reliability:** The reliability of the search strategy was confirmed by cross-checking key concepts across the selected studies. To ensure validity, the constructs under investigation (e.g., cultural identity conflicts, socioeconomic constraints, and policy impacts) were carefully compared against the predefined inclusion criteria. This process ensured that the studies included in the review provided a strong basis for a cross-contextual comparison of the STEM educational challenges faced by indigenous minorities.

### **3. Indigenous minorities across the globe: Barriers and challenges while they navigate through the STEM pipeline**

#### **3.1 Indigenous people: Minorities on their own land**

Indigenous people are frequently recognized as semi-sovereign and sovereign entities by various nation-states, as evidenced by the numerous treaties established between indigenous communities and governments of the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and India [7, 8]. A widely referenced interpretation of the term “indigenous” is found in the study conducted by José R. Martínez Cobo, which addresses the issue of discrimination against indigenous populations [9]. These foundational definitions of indigenous people are particularly relevant

in specific contexts: many regions of the Pacific, the Americas, the Arctic, and Russia. However, in significant portions of Asia and Africa, this definition is less applicable, wherein colonial powers did not displace entire populations or replace them with settlers of European descent [10, 11].

In this chapter, we review the barriers and challenges associated with indigenous peoples in three contexts: North America, India, and Australia.

### **3.2 Indigenous minorities in the North American continent: Barriers and challenges while navigating through the STEM pipeline**

#### *3.2.1 Extent of the issue*

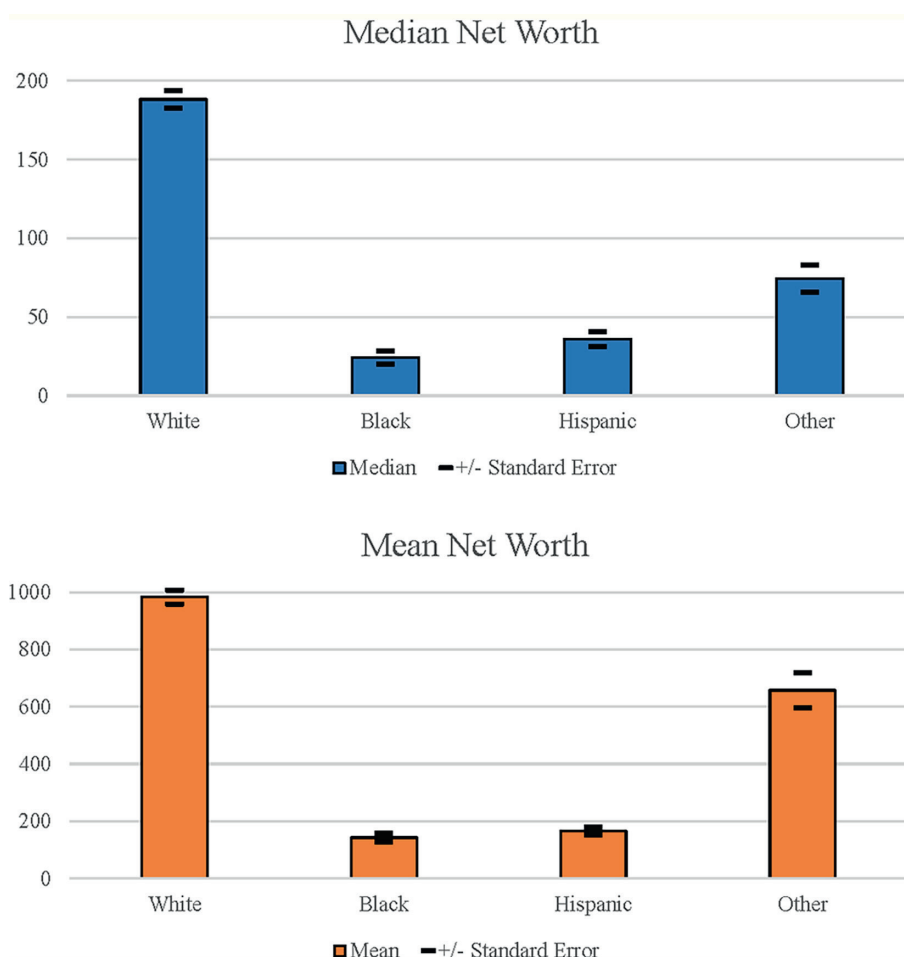
The barriers and challenges that impede indigenous minorities in North America, specifically Native Americans, from effectively navigating the STEM pipeline are substantial. The legacy of pervasive nineteenth- and early twentieth-century “scientific” racism, which propagated erroneous beliefs regarding biological, intellectual, and physiological differences among various racial groups, continues to be present in contemporary society [1]. A notable consequence of such an ideology is the prevailing perception that STEM fields are predominantly occupied by white males [12]. This view is frequently supported by actual demographic data, which prolongs the underrepresentation cycle. Nonetheless, STEM occupations are becoming increasingly accessible to traditionally underrepresented populations in these sectors. However, it is reasonable to state that this transition occurs at an inadequately rapid rate [13].

#### *3.2.2 STEM experience and attitudes of Native Americans*

Through the findings and conclusions from studies of Native American STEM experience, perceptions, and attitudes, we aim to fill a knowledge gap regarding the comparatively low proportion of Native American engagement in STEM. Studies suggest that Native Americans’ lack of participation in STEM is mainly due to perceived personal costs, such as financial constraints and identity concerns. In 2021, 2.6% of the US population was identified as partially Native American; however, that same year, Native Americans received less than 0.294% of the engineering bachelor’s degrees conferred in the US. This gap reflects their underrepresentation in the STEM field. Although research into the causes behind indigenous people’s lower involvement in STEM education compared to other racial and ethnic minority groups is sparse, numerous possible answers have emerged. These include the financial cost of schooling, societal attitudes of scientific and engineering professionals, and alignment of individual objectives with the opportunities offered in these disciplines [13]. In terms of earnings, Native American households typically earn much less than the US median. In 2016, single-race Native American households had a median income of USD 39,719 compared to the general median of USD 57,616. Furthermore, in comparison to the national poverty rate of 14.0, 26.2% of single-race American Indian and Alaska Native individuals lived in poverty (**Figure 1**) [15].

The economic inequality, often seen as an obstacle for Native American students pursuing higher education, significantly influences their academic opportunities [16]. This disparity is reflected in the fact that Native American students are less likely to view themselves as potential scientists compared to students from other ethnic backgrounds. This seemingly simple discovery may be one of the more intriguing and

modern theories explaining the low percentages of Native American STEM degree attainment [17]. The Draw-A-Scientist test evaluates Native American children's perceptions of scientists based on criteria such as ethnicity, gender identity, and cultural traditions. The investigation revealed that grade 12 students exhibited less stereotypical representations of scientists compared to those in grades 9–11, as well as female students [17]. Regarding goal alignment, studies have shown that Native American students pursuing science and engineering often have aspirations that do not match the objectives emphasized in college STEM programs and courses. Researchers explored goal congruence theory, which posits that people are more likely to stay engaged in activities that align with their personal values and objectives. For Native American students, a significant mismatch was observed between their goals and those of STEM fields. This theory also supports earlier findings indicating that students across all ethnicities view STEM as more focused on individual rather than communal objectives [13]. Studies have revealed that Western and masculine norms in science and education contribute to the perception of STEM as predominantly



**Figure 1.** Comparison of wealth between white families and Black, Hispanic, and other or multiracial families in the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances [14]. Median in the top panel and mean wealth by race and ethnicity, expressed in thousands of dollars in 2019.

white and male-dominated. This perception is linked to the prevalence of individualistic career goals among most white men. Native American students, who are historically underrepresented in STEM, find it challenging to shape goal-setting processes. Among the study participants, discrimination was found to be one of the least significant factors in predicting STEM self-efficacy. This finding supports interventions at educational, institutional, and societal levels [13]. The research and conclusions presented in this chapter aim to address a knowledge gap concerning the relatively low participation of Native Americans in STEM fields. The studies concentrated on Native Americans in academic environments. All three investigations suggest that the limited involvement of Native Americans in STEM is attributed to perceived personal costs, including financial burdens and identity-related concerns.

### **3.3 Indigenous minorities in India: Barriers and challenges while navigating through the STEM pipeline**

#### *3.3.1 Indian knowledge systems (IKS) at odds with STEM education: Need for harmonization*

Indigenous minorities face unique challenges and opportunities within STEM fields, influenced by cultural, ethical, and educational factors. Incorporating traditional knowledge from indigenous cultures into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curricula can improve both the educational outcomes and retention rates of students from indigenous backgrounds. In these situations, most individuals, including educators and learners, are unfamiliar with the meaning of the STEM acronym. When the abbreviation “STEM” is mentioned in an educational context, people often associate it with stem cell research or something related to flowers. Although indigenous knowledge systems are frequently seen as being at odds with STEM education, they are actually very effective teaching tools. STEM education should be inclusive for indigenous students by fostering links between indigenous and Western STEM. Indigenous peoples often bear responsibility for their communities and lands, which extends beyond just the living. This obligation encompasses not only current human inhabitants but also non-human entities, ancestors, and future generations, compelling them to assume various duties and commitments.

#### *3.3.2 STEM education compromising cultural identity*

Indigenous students often encounter ethical and cultural conflicts in STEM disciplines, particularly when standard practices clash with community taboos [18]. Higher cultural identity correlates with an increased perception of these conflicts, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive approaches to STEM education [19]. Tension has arisen between traditional indigenous knowledge and school science because science and STEM education tend to emphasize Western science knowledge at the expense of alternative ways of knowing, undermining indigenous worldviews in the process. It is noted that scientific literacy is impeded when they have to compromise on their cultural identity. The education system for indigenous people in India is often viewed as a curse rather than a blessing, with many children being disadvantaged due to their cultural misunderstanding and limited language proficiency, leading to academic decline. Tribal children in India face significant challenges in completing their primary education, with a high dropout rate of 70.9 percent. This issue is exacerbated by language and cultural differences, as the mother tongues of

these children differ from the official language. Certain government and national educational policies (i.e., the 1986/1992 National Policy on Education and the 2005 National Curriculum Framework), which vouched for the three-language formula, stressed teaching children in their native language, though advantageous in terms of enhancing ability, tended to bring about additional challenges for minorities. A push for educational instruction in regional languages was endorsed by the 2019 Draft National Education Policy, which advocates for multilingual education.

Besides such policies and initiatives, major issues persist for minorities in terms of institutional attitudes, medium of instruction, lack of expertise, and accessibility. Discrimination based on caste and disability persists in both overt and subtle forms. However, certain schemes and initiatives have shone brightly in terms of the culturalization of educational delivery for minorities. Initiatives like the DINE (Dine Institute for Navajo Nation Educators) project highlight the significance of culturally appropriate teaching techniques, allowing educators to develop STEM curricula that connect with indigenous students [20]. These programs have positively influenced curriculum design and teaching methods, promoting a more inclusive educational environment. Moreover, integrating TEK into STEM education not only acknowledges indigenous perspectives but also enhances scientific inquiry by positioning elders as experts [21].

### **3.4 Indigenous minorities in Australia: Systemic changes and sustained attention to equity and access remains indispensable**

Access to STEM education in Australia has seen significant changes in recent years, driven by the introduction of a national curriculum aimed at improving scientific literacy and engagement in STEM fields [22]. Nevertheless, obstacles persist, particularly for marginalized populations, encompassing indigenous learners and individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Initiatives aimed at fostering inquiry-based pedagogies and enhancing the caliber of teaching are imperative for rendering STEM education more inclusive [23]. Moreover, the resolution of impediments such as funding inequities and geographical constraints is vital for ensuring equitable access. Programs designed to bolster participation and interest in STEM, particularly among female students and minority cohorts, are essential for nurturing a diverse workforce [24]. In summary, while advancements have been made, sustained attention to equity and access remains indispensable. To enhance vigilance, the National Indigenous Science Education Program (NISEP) highlights insufficient representation in STEM, barriers to education, cultural relevance, the need for community engagement, and mentorship opportunities as key areas for development [25].

### **3.5 Common factors related to heavy dropout rates in STEM: Learning from three contexts (i.e., American, Indian, and Australian contexts)**

The high dropout rates among indigenous people in STEM fields can be attributed to a combination of cultural, academic, and personal factors. Understanding these elements is crucial for developing effective strategies to enhance the retention and success of indigenous students in STEM education. Additionally, the absence of indigenous role models in these fields further discourages students, as they lack the inspiration and motivation to persist in their studies.

### *3.5.1 Ethical conflicts and cultural identity*

Indigenous students' engagement in STEM is heavily influenced by their cultural identity. Many face conflicts between their cultural values and the requirements of STEM fields, which can lead to disengagement [26]. Angelina et al. conducted research examining how cultural, ethical, and spiritual conflicts may affect indigenous students pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medical) pathways. The study revealed that most students acknowledged the impact of cultural, spiritual, and ethical factors on their career choices [27]. Participants reported intentionally avoiding certain fields or areas of study due to existing or anticipated cultural, ethical, and/or spiritual discord. Within this category, the majority of students found mathematical and biological sciences to be particularly challenging in terms of conflict.

### *3.5.2 Academic preparedness, teaching methods, curriculum reform, and decolonization*

The insufficient academic preparation, development, education, and tailored instructional approaches have created barriers between minority groups and STEM education. These obstacles include: (1) poor performance in fundamental STEM courses often beginning in early schooling, which reduces eligibility for higher education STEM programs [28]; (2) teaching strategies that fail to align with indigenous knowledge systems, leading to subpar academic outcomes and increased dropout rates [28, 29]; and (3) individual and community factors: personal obstacles such as health problems, familial obligations, and economic hardships significantly affect retention rates [30], while the lack of social support systems within academic institutions further compounds these issues, resulting in higher attrition [29]. STEM curricula may not be decolonized or may not incorporate indigenous viewpoints, causing a lack of relevance and engagement among indigenous learners. Modifying curricula to integrate an indigenous perspective is crucial for improving indigenous student retention in STEM [4].

### *3.5.3 Stereotype threat and lack of indigenous role models*

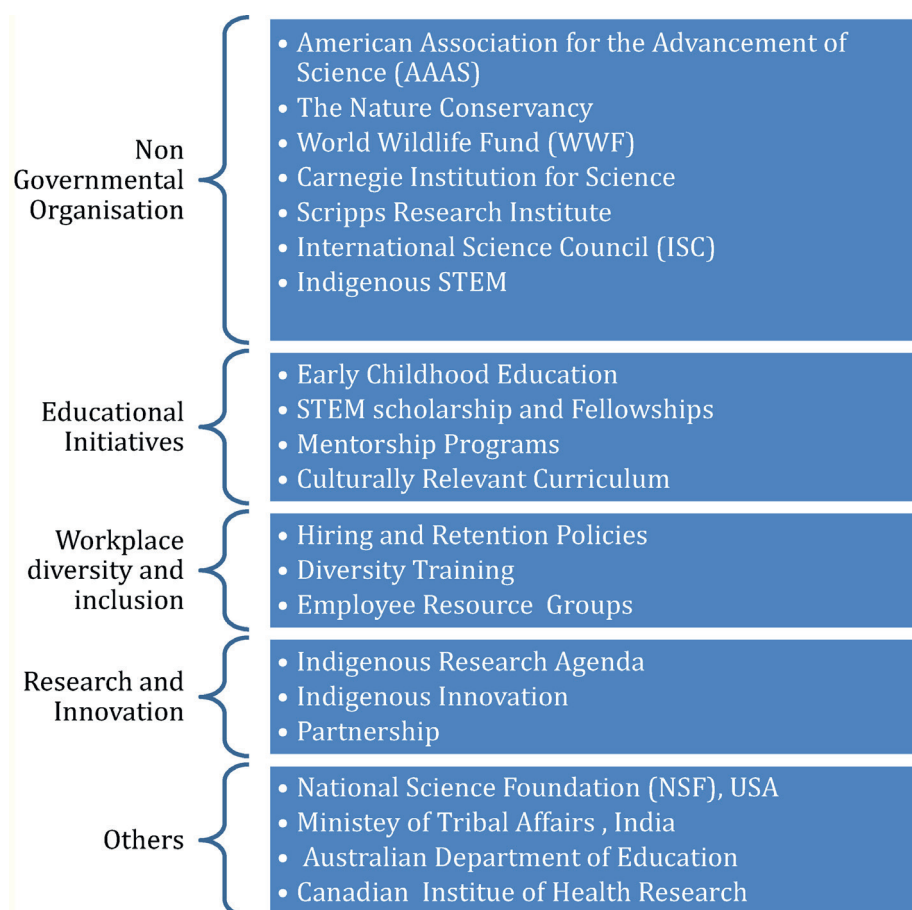
The concept of stereotype threat describes a psychological phenomenon where indigenous students experience anxiety and reduced performance in STEM subjects due to fears of confirming negative stereotypes about their group. This may contribute to high attrition rates, as students might feel out of place in STEM fields. Stereotype danger is characterized as a contextual issue that prevents members of negatively stereotyped groups from reaching their full potential [31]. In the absence of stereotype threat, graduate students and professors demonstrated greater acceptance of traditional gender stereotypes compared to undergraduate students. No differences were observed between the stereotype conditions [32]. The lack of indigenous representation in STEM fields can be discouraging for indigenous students considering STEM careers, potentially leading to increased dropout rates. Exposure to successful indigenous professionals in STEM can serve as inspiration and motivation for students to persist in their studies. To enhance indigenous student retention in STEM, it is crucial to improve the visibility of indigenous role models in these fields.

#### 4. Contemporary policies by governmental/non-governmental scientific organizations/bodies to improve indigenous minority representation in STEM

Many governmental and non-governmental scientific organizations are working to improve minority education and representation in the STEM educational discipline and workforce (Figure 2).

##### 4.1 A tailored educational policy by the government of India (GOI) toward an inclusive and equitable representation of minorities in STEM education and the workforce: NEP 2020

Research by Angelina and colleagues examined the impact of cultural, ethical, and spiritual conflicts on indigenous students pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medical) fields. The research revealed that a significant number of students reported that cultural, spiritual, and ethical factors



**Figure 2.** List of organizations and domains in which governmental and non-governmental organizations are working together to improve STEM reach, especially among minorities.

influenced their career choices [27]. These students described intentionally avoiding certain areas of study or academic disciplines due to existing or anticipated cultural, ethical, and/or spiritual disagreements. The fields of mathematics and biological sciences were particularly noted in this context.

#### *4.1.1 Key aspects of NEP 2020 for inclusive education: Will it work in STEM?*

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 outlines 12 key areas aimed at enhancing inclusivity in education, particularly in STEM fields:

(1) Fair Access: The policy strives to eliminate disparities across social groups, including gender, economic status, and location, with a focus on disadvantaged populations [4]. (2) Interdisciplinary Approach: The establishment of multidisciplinary institutions and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) enables adaptable learning pathways, encouraging students to venture into various fields, including STEM [31]. (3) Educator Development: Comprehensive training for teachers is vital to support diverse student needs and create an inclusive learning environment [32]. (4) Technology Adoption: The policy advocates for online education platforms to improve accessibility, though challenges like the digital divide persist [31]. (5) Adaptable Curriculum: The educational framework allows for diverse teaching methods, including project-based learning and evaluations tailored to students' abilities, interests, and skills [4]. (6) Holistic Education: The curriculum encompasses social sciences, humanities, arts, and sports to provide a well-rounded educational experience [4]. (7) Regulatory Structure: The policy establishes clear guidelines that foster innovation and creativity while ensuring transparency and efficiency through regular evaluations and public reporting [4]. (8) Community Engagement: NEP 2020 promotes community participation in teaching, learning, research, and services at higher education institutions (HEIs), encouraging community input in educational planning and raising awareness about accessibility, equity, and inclusion [4]. (9) Student Financial Support: Financial assistance will be provided to students from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) [4]. (10) Research and Innovation: The policy aims to cultivate an environment that stimulates research and innovation in HEIs to enhance educational access and equity [4]. (11) Multilingualism and Diversity Support: Promoting multilingualism helps students understand various cultures and enhances their community skills, fostering inclusivity and appreciation of India's diversity [4]. (12) Global Outlook: A primary objective of NEP 2020 is to internationalize higher education by supporting academic and research collaborations with foreign institutions and promoting "internationalization at home" [4].

Despite these initiatives, implementation challenges due to financial constraints and diverse sociocultural factors may limit the policy's effectiveness across different Indian regions.

## **5. Professional bodies/groups/online support groups involved in supporting indigenous people involved in STEM**

Historically, indigenous populations worldwide have faced systematic obstacles in accessing education and participating in STEM fields. To address this issue, numerous professional organizations, support networks, and advocacy groups have been

established to foster the inclusion of indigenous and minority communities in STEM. These entities strive to enhance educational access, offer mentorship and financial support, develop advocacy platforms, and acknowledge the accomplishments of underrepresented groups. This overview highlights organizations dedicated to promoting minority engagement in STEM education and related careers:

1. AISES (American Indian Science and Engineering): Established in 1977, AISES is a non-profit entity committed to increasing indigenous representation in STEM, including American Indian, Alaska Native Hawaiian, and First Nations individuals. With an annual budget of about \$5 million, AISES funds scholarships, conferences, and partnerships. It provides educational programs, internships, mentoring, and scholarships like the AISES Google scholarship, as well as professional accolades such as the Professional of the Year and Technical Excellence Award, to assist indigenous students and professionals in overcoming STEM-related barriers [5].
2. Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS): Founded in 1973, SACNAS aids underrepresented groups in STEM, emphasizing education and professional development through networking and mentorship. Operating with a \$6.5 million budget, SACNAS supports minority students and professionals, particularly Chicanos, Latinos, and Native Americans, from high school to postdoctoral levels. The organization funds scholarships, workshops, and conferences to promote diversity and recognize STEM contributions [33].
3. Indigenous STEM (ISTEM) Australia: ISTEM, a program by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), aims to boost Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in STEM fields through education and career support. With an annual budget of AUD 10 million for scholarships and training, ISTEM focuses on creating STEM learning that respects indigenous knowledge, encourages indigenous leadership in science, and strengthens communities and the scientific world [34].
4. First Nation Technology Council (FNTC): This Canadian organization enhances technology and STEM education access for First Nations communities, emphasizing equity and innovation in the digital realm. With a CAD 4 million budget, FNTC supports students and adults in rural areas by offering training, career development, and scholarships in technology. The council aims to improve digital skills, ensure high-speed internet access, and promote indigenous leadership in technology [35].
5. Indigenous Women in STEM (IWISTEM): Since 2016, IWISTEM has supported indigenous women in STEM, addressing their unique challenges through mentorship and networking. The group assists women at all career stages and raises awareness about their STEM contributions. With a budget of approximately \$500,000, IWISTEM funds scholarships and advocacy efforts to promote gender and racial equity in STEM careers [36].

These organizations and institutions have provided substantial support and funding to underrepresented groups, including women, in STEM disciplines, particularly

those who have demonstrated excellence in their fields. Their efforts have contributed to improving the representation of minorities in the STEM workforce within their specific geographic areas [37]. Additionally, they have been instrumental in promoting and showcasing individuals from minority backgrounds who have made significant contributions, serving as inspirational figures for upcoming generations. Many of these exemplary individuals have not only advanced their respective disciplines but have also made broader societal impacts (for instance, African American STEM women as exemplars: Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson, Dr. Angie Turner King, Dr. Beverly Wright, Dr. Juan Gilbert; Indigenous Australian STEM women as exemplars: Dr. Alexandra Campbell, Dr. Vanessa Pirota, Dr. Jessica Allen, Dr. Hannah Power; Indigenous Indian STEM women as exemplars: Dr. Tessy Thomas, Dr. Ritu Karidhal, Dr. Mylswamy Annadurai, Dr. Aditi Pant).

## **6. Leveling up STEM education for minorities using digitization and AI**

As technology becomes more powerful and accessible to individuals of all backgrounds, the once-prominent “digital divide” appears to be diminishing. However, to completely eradicate this gap, greater emphasis must be placed on digital literacy education, infrastructure enhancements, and inclusivity as part of systematic improvement initiatives. These systemic enhancements in education should particularly target regions and populations classified as minorities who have traditionally been excluded from mainstream practices [38]. In the context of STEM education, historically disadvantaged groups have had limited access to technological resources, resulting in lower educational achievement and weaker competencies among minorities, with socioeconomic status and the urban-rural divide serving as key factors in determining access to technology [39]. To address this issue, policymakers must prioritize funding for educational technology, especially for minority groups, and ensure that resources are utilized effectively and distributed fairly. Proper and appropriate use of digital technologies can then enable disadvantaged minority students to truly benefit from these advancements.

Moreover, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, particularly in STEM fields, has the potential to revolutionize educational attainment, skill development, and outcomes for minority students [6]. AI can contribute to equity, inclusion, and personalized learning among STEM graduates, thereby enhancing learning in areas traditionally inaccessible to academically disadvantaged and minority groups, such as research efficiency, individualized instruction, and academic productivity [40]. Additionally, generative AI can help overcome psychological barriers, leading to increased engagement, retention, and productivity among minority STEM students through adaptive learning environments, tailored instructional design, and improved collaborative skills. In essence, the efficient and equitable implementation of AI in education has the potential to transform STEM education globally, particularly by leveling access for disadvantaged minorities in STEM [41]. Nevertheless, addressing ethical, infrastructural, and inclusivity challenges associated with the implementation of AI-powered educational tools and their utilization remains a significant hurdle for policymakers to overcome [42]. Further research in the field of AI in education is necessary to achieve effective personalized learning and customized educational attainment, two crucial aspects that will undoubtedly benefit and retain minorities in STEM education.

## 7. Conclusion

Studies from three contexts, particularly focusing on indigenous minorities, demonstrate that these groups face disadvantages due to various sociocultural, environmental, and systemic obstacles. To address the issue of dropouts, it is crucial to identify and tackle factors specific to each context, especially those related to socioeconomic conditions, racial discrimination, and cultural adjustment. Notably, governmental and non-governmental organizations' policies and supportive initiatives are paving the way for emerging technologies (such as digitization and AI) that have the potential to promote equity in STEM education and training.


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## Chapter 3

# Perspective Chapter: Challenges of Ethnic Minority Schools in Georgia

*Giorgi Momtselidze*

### Abstract

One of the major challenges of modern educational policy remains addressing issues related to ethnic minorities, particularly in countries with densely populated ethnic minority communities. The aim of this article is to emphasize the problems currently faced by ethnic minorities within the Georgian education system. By employing research methods such as surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies, and data collection, organization, and analysis—along with synthesis—attention has been given to challenges arising during the implementation of state programs in ethnic minority secondary schools. The research focuses on three key problematic issues: the challenges of implementing state educational programs in non-Georgian schools, the authorization process for secondary schools and its specific challenges in ethnic minority schools, and management issues within non-Georgian schools. Key problematic aspects of public policy have been identified, and relevant conclusions and recommendations have been provided. These findings will be of particular interest to policymakers, international scientific communities, and education sector professionals. The research findings clearly demonstrate that Georgia's public policy lacks consistency when it comes to ethnic minority schools. There is no research-based action plan or strategy being developed, and the participation of non-Georgian schools in state general education programs reveals notable gaps.

**Keywords:** non-Georgian schools, education policy, national minorities, school management, public policy

### 1. Introduction

Within the framework of the ongoing education reform in Georgia, various state programs are being implemented, in which ethnic minority schools are directly or indirectly involved. The research focuses on state general education programs and their impact on the development of ethnic minority schools.

Based on this, the research question was formulated as follows: *What problems are identified in the process of implementing state general education programs in non-Georgian schools?*

To explore the underlying causes, meetings were conducted with target groups, including principals and teachers from non-Georgian schools in Tbilisi, Ninotsminda, Dmanisi, Gardabani, and Ninotsminda. Additionally, experts in the field and

representatives of the Ministry of Education participated. Surveys were carried out using questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

As a result of data analysis, three main factors were identified: the impact of state programs on the development of ethnic minority schools, the challenges of authorizing ethnic minority schools, and issues related to the management and administration of ethnic minority schools.

## **2. State programs and their effect on the development of ethnic minority schools**

Since 2009, the LEPL—National Center for Teacher Professional Development under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia has been implementing a support program for non-Georgian language schools [1]. The program's aim is to enhance the professional development of teachers and support the teaching process in non-Georgian language schools located in regions densely populated by national minorities. Additionally, it focuses on improving the professional development of teachers in non-Georgian preschool institutions and strengthening the state language through improved informal teaching practices at the school level [2].

The objectives of the program include ensuring quality education in the state language for national minorities at the general education level, providing training for qualified state language teachers in municipalities inhabited by ethnic minorities, and promoting the integration of national minority students into the broader cultural and educational space through nonformal education initiatives.

Program beneficiaries include local teachers of non-Georgian language schools/sectors in regions densely populated by national minorities, local subject teachers of non-Georgian language schools/sectors in these regions, and consultant teachers of the “*Support Program for Non-Georgian Language Schools*” (assigned to non-Georgian schools in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Kakheti).

To address teacher shortages in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, approximately 145 consultant teachers have been deployed to Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Kakheti.

While this program significantly contributes to improving the teaching and learning process in non-Georgian schools, research findings indicate the need for increased state support and resources. Regular monitoring and analysis of program results are also essential to ensure its further development and effectiveness.

This program significantly contributes to improving the teaching and learning process in non-Georgian schools. However, based on the research results, it is crucial to increase state support and resources for the program. Additionally, regular monitoring and analysis of the program's outcomes are essential for its further development and success.

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia also operates the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, which implements a state language teaching program. This program is available to any individual interested in learning or improving their proficiency in the Georgian language. The program is conducted in three regions of Georgia: Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Kakheti. Training takes place in 10 regional centers located in Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Gardabani, Tsalka, Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Lambalo, Lagodekhi, and Akhmeta, as well as through mobile groups operating in villages.

The state language teaching program follows the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and is fully funded by the state. The initiative

to train non-Georgian teachers in the Georgian language is commendable; however, research reveals that a lack of proficiency in the state language remains a significant challenge for most teachers working in non-Georgian schools.

Additionally, the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia implements a subprogram focused on the development of the national curriculum and the introduction of state standards in preschool and school institutions serving national minorities.

An analysis of the programs for 2023 and 2024 was conducted as part of this study. The content and essence of the 2023 and 2024 programs are nearly identical, with the same challenges, goals, and objectives remaining unchanged. This observation suggests that no substantial research or analysis of the 2023 program's outcomes has been conducted. Despite activities valued at approximately 3 million GEL being implemented in 2023, the challenges, goals, and objectives for 2024 remain the same, indicating a lack of progress in addressing the existing issues.

The aim of the program is to support the implementation of state standards in national minority preschool institutions and schools by using a bilingual education approach. This approach aims to increase proficiency in the state language and improve the overall quality of teaching and learning. The ultimate goal is to equip preschool children and schoolchildren from national minorities with the knowledge and skills necessary for full integration into modern social life.

The target group of the subprogram includes:

- Non-Georgian preschool institutions of national minorities: educators, assistant educators, children aged 3–5 years, school readiness groups, representatives of municipalities, methodologists, and preschool specialists from educational resource centers.
- Primary and basic school communities of non-Georgian public schools/sectors: teachers, students, school administrations, and parents.

It should also be noted that the program has not yet been implemented at the basic education level as of December 2024.

Tasks of Bilingual School Education:

*Task 1: Create and strengthen a bilingual communication platform to enhance effective communication with schools.*

To achieve this, bilingual experts/coaches have been trained since January 2023. These experts are actively involved in the development of subject curricula. Additionally, to strengthen the bilingual platform and facilitate effective communication with school principals and administrative teams, educational process administration consultants were engaged. These consultants assisted schools in understanding the basic concepts and standards of authorization and, when necessary, supported them in preparing for the authorization process.

It is important to note that, as of 2024, communication with school principals and administrative teams, as well as assistance in the authorization process, has been excluded from the implementation methods of Task 1. This issue will be further discussed in the present study.

*Task 2: Development and implementation of school curricula based on constructivist educational principles in both native languages and the state language (Georgian) for minorities.*

To this end, bilingual experts/coaches have been trained since January 2023. These experts have been actively engaged in the creation of subject curricula.

Furthermore, to strengthen the bilingual platform and improve communication with school principals and administrative teams, educational process administration consultants were involved. These consultants provided support to schools in understanding the fundamental concepts and standards of authorization and assisted them, when necessary, in preparing for the authorization process.

From January 2023, interventions were implemented in 41 schools, and starting from 2024, in 170 schools. The resources created through the integrated teaching method of language and subject, based on the national curriculum, were introduced in the following subjects:

- Fine and Applied Arts (Grades II–IV),
- Natural Sciences (Grades III–IV),
- Me and Society (Grades III–IV),
- Mathematics (Grades II–IV),
- Our Georgia (Grades V–VI).

At the same time, the preparation and translation of resources will continue to further create and improve bilingual curricula for these subjects. A bilingual Natural Science textbook for Grade III was developed, including a *student's book*, *student's notebook*, and *teacher's book*. Additionally, new tools have been introduced to enhance pedagogical practices.

At the school level, bilingual education specialists, along with local native language teachers, are actively involved in implementing the Georgian language teaching process.

Task 3: *Integration of Digital Technologies in the Teaching-Learning Process.*

To achieve this, the 2023 document outlined activities for various stages of program implementation. These included training target groups in the use of Office 365 software tools such as:

- Outlook Mail,
- OneNote,
- OneDrive,
- SharePoint,
- Teams,
- Calendar tools.

While Task 3 remains in the 2024 document, no details are provided regarding the methods for its implementation. It remains unclear how the goal will be achieved without specifying concrete steps or strategies.

*Task 4: Support the Development of Effective Approaches to School Management.*

In 2023, the planned and implemented work for strengthening school management was divided into three components:

- Strengthening the secondary level (department chairs) in schools;
- Monitoring the bilingual learning process and environment;
- Supporting nonformal education.

To facilitate this process, consultations on educational process administration were conducted in 10 schools in the capital. Training modules were developed to enhance the work of subject departments, and schools were prepared for the authorization process.

However, this task was completely removed from the 2024 program. Given the importance of preparing schools for the current authorization process—a state priority—the decision to remove this task raises questions about its motive and purpose.

*Task 5: Formation of a Bilingual School Community.*

To promote the formation of a bilingual school community, the following steps were planned for 2023:

- Creation of subject training courses in collaboration with the National Center for Teacher Professional Development, targeted at young individuals aspiring to become teachers.
- Dissemination of information and recruitment of new staff by communicating with universities, holding informational meetings with recent graduates or undergraduate and graduate students.
- Strengthening cooperation with universities, vocational schools, and other state organizations, as well as donors and NGOs, to support nonformal education. Additionally, fostering close collaboration with Armenian and Azerbaijani local community organizations.

It is noteworthy that while this task remains in the 2024 document, no details regarding implementation methods are provided. The absence of a clear plan raises concerns about how the intended goals will be achieved.

From January 2023, 41 non-Georgian language schools were involved in the program, including 10 schools in Tbilisi. In 2024, the number of participating schools increased to 170. However, although the program states that these 170 schools include 10 public schools, the research revealed that non-Georgian schools in the capital were *de facto* removed from the program under unclear circumstances. Notably, these schools are still listed as beneficiaries in the program document.

The ministry did not inform the schools about this change, and it remains unclear who made the decision to discontinue cooperation with these schools or for what purpose.

Another important issue is that, in 2024, the program included only Armenian-speaking and Azerbaijani-speaking schools. No emphasis has been placed on Russian-language public schools, despite their existence. The ministry must make a clear

decision: since Russian-language public schools and sectors are part of the education system, they should also be included in state programs. The lack of a clear and consistent policy in this area directly impacts the development of schools.

It is essential for the relevant departments of the ministry to plan and implement educational programs based on thorough monitoring and analysis.

One of the main challenges in the general education public policy of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia remains the uncoordinated policy toward ethnic minority schools. A clear problem is the lack of constructive cooperation between the Department of General Education and other departments within the ministry.

A notable example is the “New School Model” reform, which was launched as the main direction of general education reform in 2018. At its first stage, 2086 schools (out of 65 public schools initially planned) were involved in the process, with implementation beginning in grades I–IV. The aim was to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

To support this initiative, school-based support groups were created to provide consultations to teachers in the following areas:

- Development and implementation of school curricula;
- Development of effective approaches to school management;
- Integration of digital technologies into the learning process.

The ministry’s stated policy was that all public schools would be included in the New School Model by 2024. While the reform achieved some positive outcomes, significant discrepancies and misalignment between the ministry’s internal agencies created confusion within the school community. Despite the investment of tens of millions of GEL in the project, the reform was unexpectedly discontinued for several years without any explanation.

Furthermore, the ministry has not published any report or research on the results of the reform, leaving its effectiveness and outcomes unclear. A major issue is that this large-scale reform did not include non-Georgian language schools, which once again highlights the ministry’s inconsistent policy toward ethnic minority schools.

### **3. The problem of authorization of ethnic minority schools**

One of the major priorities of the 2023–2024 academic year in general education policy is the process of authorizing public schools. According to Georgian legislation, all secondary schools are required to undergo the authorization process. Authorization serves as an external mechanism for ensuring the quality of education. Its purpose is to assess institutions at an institutional level, determine their compliance with authorization standards, and provide relevant recommendations to address existing challenges within the institutions.

The authorization assessment is conducted by a group of authorization experts. It is based on the institution’s self-assessment and the analysis of information gathered during the authorization visit. Authorization is mandatory for all general education institutions.

The primary goal of authorizing educational institutions is to ensure their compliance with the necessary standards required for carrying out educational activities effectively.

Until 2016, only private secondary schools in Georgia were required to undergo the authorization process. The General Education Act introduced the regulation that all public schools must be authorized starting in 2016. However, due to inconsistencies in public education policies, this requirement was amended three times. The first amendment set the authorization deadline for 2021, the second for 2027, and the third for 2030 [3].

The process officially began in 2023. At the initial stage, out of 2086 general education schools in Georgia, only 339 schools successfully passed authorization. This highlighted the fact that the state was not adequately prepared to complete the process by the 2027 deadline. As a result, the deadline was once again postponed to 2030.

There are numerous challenges associated with this process. However, for the purposes of our work, we will focus specifically on non-Georgian, that is, ethnic minority schools.

The authorization process evaluates schools based on four key standards [4]:

1. School Philosophy
2. School Curriculum
3. Administrative and Infrastructural Support for the Educational Process
4. Student Support

Each standard is broken down into specific components:

- School Philosophy:
  - School mission, vision, and values
  - School planning and development
- School Curriculum:
  - Curriculum development
  - Curriculum implementation
  - Curriculum monitoring and evaluation
  - Curriculum revision
- Administrative and Infrastructural Support for the Educational Process:
  - Personnel management
  - Personnel development

- Process management
- Safety and security of people and processes
- Material resources and infrastructure
- Information resources
- Financial resources
- Student Support:
  - Protection of students’ rights
  - Student support measures

It is noteworthy that ethnic minority schools are still not actively involved in this crucial process. The need for their support in the authorization process became evident in 2023 within the framework of the subprogram of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education “*Development of the National Curriculum and Implementation of State Standards in Preschool and School Institutions of National Minorities.*” Under this program, 10 non-Georgian public schools in the capital were included and received training. However, under unclear circumstances, these schools were later removed from the authorization list.

What factors hinder the Ministry of Education in authorizing non-Georgian schools?

To address this question, it is essential to examine the issue in relation to the aforementioned authorization standards.

**First Standard—School Philosophy:** To meet this standard, schools are required to have a long-term, 7-year strategic development plan. However, the ministry’s ambiguous attitude toward Russian-speaking schools significantly complicates this process. Despite various programs implemented for non-Georgian schools, Russian-speaking schools are systematically excluded, leading to unclear long-term goals and obstructing their ability to develop and adopt comprehensive strategic plans.

**Second Standard—School Curriculum:** The relevant agencies of the Ministry have yet to reach a consensus on how many curricula non-Georgian schools and sectors should present and in what language the subject plans should be drawn up—whether in the state language or the language of instruction. If the subject plans are required to be in the state language (as stipulated by state legislation), the subject departments in Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian schools will face significant challenges in producing teaching materials in Georgian.

Addressing this issue and supporting schools is urgently needed. Otherwise, the state may be forced to once again postpone the already frequently delayed authorization process, or the very existence of non-Georgian schools could be jeopardized, leading to serious consequences.

Another major issue is the availability of textbooks in the languages of ethnic minorities for non-Georgian schools. This has historically hindered—and continues to hinder—the authorization process for ethnic minority schools. The National Curriculum of Georgia includes a provision requiring schools to use specific textbooks. However, to date, there are no officially classified textbooks in the languages of ethnic minorities.

Despite this, school-oriented and flexible changes to the national curriculum could help resolve this impasse. Schools currently have the right to develop educational programs tailored to their school communities. It is recommended that the ministry establish a group of specialists to assist ethnic minority schools in creating these educational programs.

Over the years, despite the efforts of the National Curriculum Department, the issue of program compatibility between Georgian and non-Georgian schools remains unresolved. The OSCE recommends adopting proactive approaches to minority rights, in line with the spirit of Article 31 of the Copenhagen Document [5], which calls for special measures to ensure the protection and promotion of minority rights [6].

## 4. Management and administration of ethnic minority schools

Research conducted in non-Georgian public schools revealed significant management-related challenges. The third standard of authorization “*Administrative and Infrastructural Support of the Educational Process*”—includes compliance with management requirements.

The study identified four main areas of concern: *case management, teaching and learning, school culture, and human resources*. These areas are analyzed based on the unique challenges characteristic of non-Georgian public schools, which are less prevalent in Georgian public schools.

### 4.1 Case management

Non-Georgian public schools face additional challenges in case management that are not as prominent in Georgian public schools.

- *Language of proceedings*: According to Georgian legislation, all official proceedings must be conducted in the state language. Therefore, there is a need to prepare statements, explanations, and letters in the Georgian language even in ethnic minority schools; the school regulations should be developed and electronic portals operated in two languages; in addition, the citizens are required to present notarized translations of documents. The mentioned factors create significant challenges for non-Georgian schools.
- *Administrative burden*: An additional challenge is the frequent requests from citizens for certificates needed to obtain residence permits. These specific requirements place an increased burden on schools, demanding extra time, effort, human resources, and material resources.

These management-related characteristics in non-Georgian schools highlight the need for additional support to ensure smooth operations and compliance with authorization standards.

*Recognition of education*—Additional needs in case management have been identified concerning the recognition of education obtained in foreign countries. It should be noted that the mechanism for recognizing foreign education operates in schools to facilitate the enrollment of students coming from abroad.

According to this mechanism and the regulations defined by Georgian legislation, the school determines the compliance of subjects completed by a student in a foreign

educational institution with the mandatory subjects outlined in the national curriculum. Based on this process, the school prepares a conclusion regarding the compatibility of the general education received abroad. This conclusion specifies whether all subjects taken in all grades during the period of study abroad align with the subjects provided by the national curriculum, along with the corresponding assessments.

If a student has not studied a subject required by the Georgian legislation for a particular grade, the conclusion outlines the necessity of completing that subject through an individual curriculum or externship. The prepared conclusion is then handed over to the student's parent, who is responsible for submitting it to the *National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement*. Once the National Center provides a positive response, the student is officially enrolled in the appropriate class through an individual administrative-legal act issued by the school director.

Students enrolled based on the recognition of foreign education must study the subjects specified in the report of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement either through an individual curriculum or by completing specific subjects as required by Georgian legislation.

These administrative measures, carried out by schools to accommodate students from foreign countries, demand significant additional time and effort. A key issue is the lack of monitoring regarding the implementation of individual educational plans, which are required to be drawn up in the state language. As a result, many schools promote students from grade to grade, and students who lack proficiency in the state language often graduate without acquiring sufficient language skills. This situation severely hinders their integration into society and limits their competitiveness in the labor market.

To address this challenge, it is crucial to implement state programs specifically designed for children returning from abroad to ensure their proper education and integration into the Georgian system.

**Suspension of Status**—Additional documentation in case management is required to comply with legislative requirements regarding the suspension of a student's status. According to the legislation, a student's status can be suspended based on a parent's application when the child is taken abroad or when the student is absent from school for 45 consecutive days.

However, there are frequent cases where, due to family work obligations or relocation, students must leave school and the country for short periods. This leads to a high rate of student movement in such schools, which in turn increases the workload related to case management.

A recurring challenge arises when families leave the country without prior notice. In such cases, the school cannot suspend the student's status without written notification from the parent. As a result, the school must undertake additional measures. Specifically, if a student is absent for 45 consecutive days without disclosure, their status must be suspended.

Before suspending the status, the school is legally obligated to carry out preventive measures, including:

- After missing 10 consecutive academic days, the class tutor must prepare a written report outlining the reasons for the student's absence, the measures taken to ensure their reintegration into the educational process, and the achieved results.
- After missing 20 consecutive academic days, further actions must be taken to document the situation and continue efforts for reintegration.

These legislative obligations place a significant administrative burden on schools, as they must implement all legally required measures before suspending a student's status. This process involves additional time, effort, and resources, further complicating case management in schools with high rates of student movement.

The above mentioned issues highlight the specific challenges of case management in non-Georgian public schools, which demand additional time, effort, and human and material resources.

These procedures sometimes lead to problematic situations for schools. In many cases, schools document that a student has moved abroad and subsequently stop any further investigation into the student's status. This practice poses a significant risk: the student may still be within the country, and their legal right to education could be violated.

The Ministry of Education must develop a monitoring mechanism to verify whether the student has, in fact, traveled abroad. For example, this could be achieved by cooperating with relevant state agencies to confirm whether a border crossing was carried out at the specified time.

#### **4.2 Direction of teaching**

*Teaching Subjects*—In non-Georgian language schools, the implementation of individual curricula remains a significant issue. This need arises because, based on conclusions developed through the recognition of education received abroad, students are often required to study specific subjects individually.

Once the school assesses and confirms the conformity of the education obtained abroad, it becomes evident that students have not completed subjects mandated by the national curriculum in Georgia. This creates the necessity for developing *individual curricula* in several subjects, such as *Georgian language, Georgian history, citizenship, and foreign languages*.

As a result, in approximately 3–4 subjects, teachers are required to create and implement individual curricula. This process demands additional time, effort, and resources from teachers, further increasing their workload.

#### **4.3 Difficulties in teaching the state language**

Significant challenges arise in teaching the state language (Georgian) in non-Georgian schools. It should be noted that students who lack Georgian language proficiency can be accepted into any grade, from the first to the twelfth. In such cases, the teacher is required to develop an individual curriculum for the newly admitted student, starting with teaching the alphabet.

At the same time, teachers face diverse classroom scenarios:

- Students for whom Georgian is the third or fourth foreign language,
- Students with no exposure or communication in the Georgian language at home,
- Students who have learned Georgian from the first grade, live in a Georgian-speaking environment, and possess a high level of proficiency.

Due to these varied factors, Georgian language teachers in each class must implement differentiated approaches. This includes:

- Developing individual curricula,
- Using additional resources,
- Employing diverse teaching and assessment methods tailored to each student's needs.

The effort required from teachers to achieve the goals outlined in the *National Curriculum* [7] is considerable. These demands place an additional burden on teachers, as the process requires extra time and resources.

As a result, the educational process in non-Georgian schools often struggles with implementing individual curricula and managing differentiated teaching approaches. This challenge can create significant gaps in meeting *authorization standards*, potentially hindering the school authorization process.

#### **4.4 School culture**

In non-Georgian schools, multicultural environments are often present, where students, teachers, and parents may differ in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, or other aspects. Individuals sharing the same school space must agree on common values, rules of conduct, and policies that focus on appreciating all cultures, providing equal support to representatives of all ethnic groups, and promoting universal values such as tolerance, respect for cultural diversity, openness, acceptance, equality, and mutual understanding.

The policy of a multiethnic school should purposefully introduce appropriate mechanisms to foster a positive learning environment rooted in democratic values. The school's internal regulations—such as the seven-year strategic plan, one-year action plan, school curriculum, tutoring programs, and action plans of structural units and school officials—should include the organization of additional activities aimed at promoting tolerance, intercultural dialog, civil integration, familiarization with the country's history and landmarks, and the reinforcement of democratic values.

*The school policy* regulates the process of integrating students from abroad into the school environment. This process requires a proper understanding of cultural differences and the careful planning and implementation of relevant activities by the school. Representatives of non-Georgian schools are responsible for introducing individuals from diverse cultures and traditions to the local school culture, as well as the country's culture, traditions, values, legislative framework, and customs. In turn, representatives of different cultures must adapt to the new environment.

The integration process can sometimes be time-consuming. Newly arrived students often carry behaviors, attitudes, and values rooted in their home country, society, or school, which may differ significantly from the internal culture of the host country, city, or school. Consequently, the class tutor plays a crucial role in managing this challenge, particularly by supporting students in adapting to the learning environment according to established guidelines.

Cultural differences significantly impact communication and understanding among people, which can create challenges in relationships between students, teachers, parents, administrators, and any staff members within a school. As a result, there is a high likelihood of conflicts, the management of which demands additional knowledge, time, effort, and qualified human resources. In such schools, the importance

of adhering to the principles of intercultural education and effectively managing the student adaptation process becomes even more pronounced. The student adaptation policy is based on the belief that starting and conducting the educational process positively is a critical prerequisite for the student's future academic and social success.

Managing a multicultural environment in non-Georgian schools requires a shared understanding and commitment from school management, teachers, students, tutors, parents, and administrative-technical staff to uphold general principles in daily school life. Therefore, addressing challenges related to cultural differences necessitates additional human, material, and financial resources from the school.

#### **4.5 Human resources**

Attracting, selecting, developing, and retaining staff in non-Georgian schools is a challenging issue. It is particularly difficult for non-Georgian schools to find bilingual staff who, in addition to their native language, possess sufficient competence in the state language to support bilingual educational processes, case management, and professional development.

The educational process in non-Georgian public schools is conducted using bilingual educational approaches. Teaching through this method requires bilingual competence from the teacher. Teachers must be fluent in both the state language and the teaching language, not only at a conversational level but also at a professional and subject-specific level. They must be able to conduct the teaching process equally in both languages, communicate effectively with students and parents, and develop appropriate teaching resources and documentation.

Since the official language of proceedings in the country is Georgian, non-Georgian-speaking staff are required to have proficiency in the state language. All platforms within the education system, such as ministry websites, public legal entity portals, electronic journals, the schools portal, e-flow, and e-school systems, are presented in the Georgian language. As a result, teachers must make additional efforts to keep up with system processes, actively engage in them, and access relevant opportunities and benefits.

The education system is undergoing constant changes, requiring teachers to continuously improve their professional skills. Given the intensive and large-scale reforms currently taking place in Georgia's education system, teachers in non-Georgian schools are also obligated to engage in these processes, familiarize themselves with, understand, and implement the innovations introduced within the system.

It should be noted that professional development opportunities—such as trainings, workshops, conferences, and courses—are conducted in the state language. Therefore, teachers must have proficiency in the Georgian language to fully participate in these self-development processes and perform their duties at a high level. Challenges remain in both professional development and career advancement. For example, teachers in Russian-speaking schools are not permitted to take professional exams in their native language, which hinders their ability to improve their competencies, advance their status, and receive appropriate remuneration.

Considering these factors, it becomes clear how crucial it is for staff in non-Georgian schools to be proficient in both their native language and the state language to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. However, there is a significant shortage of bilingual professionals in the labor market, limiting the employer's ability to select qualified candidates. In many cases, job competitions announced by schools are canceled due to a lack of applicants, or only one or two individuals apply and are

invited for interviews. This creates a less competitive—or, at times, entirely uncompetitive—hiring environment.

Due to these challenges, educational institutions must make additional efforts to address the shortage of bilingual staff. They are often required to hire candidates under uncompetitive conditions, invest in their development, and work to retain them over time.

The lack of qualified staff is also due to the fact that Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian language teachers are not being trained within the state. There are no such faculties in universities.

In recent years, the Georgian state has taken several measures to certify teachers. Teachers without the relevant status are not permitted to work in Georgian-language schools. However, teachers in non-Georgian-language schools have faced significant difficulties in passing the state certification exams. As a result, the system encountered a dilemma, leading to the postponement of this process year after year. To address this issue, the certification barriers for teachers in non-Georgian-language schools have been significantly lowered.

This situation represents an unequal approach between teachers of Georgian-language and non-Georgian-language schools. Additionally, it has led to the employment of unqualified staff, which negatively impacts the teaching and learning process in ethnic minority schools. Several local and international studies highlight the significant disparity in the level of knowledge between students in Georgian-speaking schools and those in non-Georgian-speaking schools.

One of the challenges in personnel policy is the role of resource officers in non-Georgian schools. Their primary function is to ensure and monitor safety within schools while maintaining direct communication with students and their legal representatives. However, effective communication issues often arise because some representatives of the Resource Officers' Service do not speak the language in which the teaching process is conducted. This problem hinders their ability to perform their duties effectively and has a negative impact on the overall school culture.

Another significant challenge is the issue of school principals. In 2023–2024, a state-organized selection competition for school directors was held. The number of applicants for directorship positions has significantly decreased compared to previous competitions, with the situation being particularly problematic in non-Georgian schools. The limited number of candidates who possess sufficient proficiency in the state language has created a substantial barrier, as passing the required exams is extremely challenging for many.

It is also important to note that, based on survey results, the position of public school director is one of the exceptions in Georgia's public sector. A school director, as an employer, receives a salary that is two to three times lower than that of some employees working under their supervision. This disparity serves as a major demotivating factor for applicants, which further explains the declining interest in the directorship role.

An uncompetitive selection environment and the insufficient qualifications of school leaders create numerous challenges for school management. These issues are directly reflected in the authorization policies for schools, leading to broader systemic problems.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is commendable that the state is actively working toward the development of ethnic minority schools. However, it is essential to take more effective

steps in planning, implementation, monitoring, and further development of this process. Based on the findings of the study, we can offer specific recommendations that will assist policymakers and field specialists in addressing the shortcomings identified during the research.

In implementing state programs related to ethnic minority schools, it is crucial to ensure better coordination of interagency activities led by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia. Additionally, the role of the Department of General Education must be clearly defined and effectively communicated. Part of the programs aimed at supporting ethnic minority schools is implemented by various institutions. The LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development oversees the *Non-Georgian Language Schools Support Program*, while the LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration runs the *State Language Learning Program*. Following several recommendations, the Department of General Education at the Ministry of Education created a subprogram focused on the *Development of the National Curriculum and Introduction of State Standards in Preschool and School Institutions for National Minorities*. However, an analysis of their work reveals that significant challenges remain in both planning and implementation. Coordination between these programs and institutions is weak, which further exacerbates the problem. Additionally, the National Center for Quality Enhancement carries out the school authorization process under the Ministry of Education, but ethnic minority schools receive little to no support within this framework.

The implemented state programs often appear fragmented and lack a cohesive strategy. Despite substantial funding allocated to the education of ethnic minorities, the outcomes could be significantly more effective under a unified policy. Addressing this issue requires a holistic policy-level approach.

It is therefore essential to establish an *Ethnic Minority Policy Service* within the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia. This service would be responsible for developing a comprehensive policy document and ensuring its implementation in collaboration with various state agencies, scientific institutions, international organizations, NGOs, and the Public Defender's Office. Its scope should encompass not only general education but also preschool education, higher education, and youth programs. Furthermore, this service should oversee the execution of recommendations issued by various agencies to ensure systematic and coordinated progress in this direction.


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# Barriers and Discrimination in Higher Education: The Case of Arab Society in Israel

*Waleed Dallasheh*

## Abstract

Higher education plays a pivotal role in fostering social mobility, economic development, and cultural preservation. Yet, for the Arab minority in Israel, access to higher education is fraught with systemic barriers and discriminatory practices that perpetuate socioeconomic disparities and hinder community advancement. Despite comprising approximately 21% of Israel's total population, Arab citizens have historically been marginalized within the educational system and face significant obstacles to their participation and success. This chapter is a research-based review that examines these systemic challenges, integrating theoretical frameworks and empirical data. By situating the Israeli case within broader theories of majority-minority relations and examining global models of minority integration, the analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. It also highlights how the presence of Arab students fosters cultural diversity within Israeli academia, enhancing creativity, critical thinking, and societal cohesion. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted policy interventions to bridge educational gaps and create a more inclusive system. A central conclusion is that addressing these barriers not only advances social equity for Arab students but also strengthens the overall societal fabric by promoting mutual understanding and collaboration across cultural divides.

**Keywords:** majority-minority, barriers and discrimination, higher education, Arab society, policy reform

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Palestinian Arab minority in Israel

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, only 156,000 Palestinian Arab residents remained, representing 13% of the new state's population. This group, which had constituted the majority in Mandatory Palestine, became a minority overnight due to the mass exodus of Palestinians during the Nakba [1]. This dramatic shift not only marked a significant demographic change but also fundamentally altered the sociopolitical landscape of the region. The Nakba, which saw the displacement of

hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, left those who remained in Israel isolated from their broader community and subjected to new and restrictive policies that shaped their minority status. Unlike many minority groups worldwide, Palestinian Arabs in Israel are not immigrants but an indigenous population, with deep historical, cultural, and familial ties to the land [2].

The Arab population in Israel is a both numerical and sociological minority. Numerically, they make up approximately 21% of Israel's population today [3], but their influence and representation in key sectors of society are disproportionately low. Sociologically, they face marginalization across multiple domains. Their minimal representation in political, military, and economic elites perpetuates their exclusion from the national decision-making processes and limits their access to resources and opportunities that are readily available to the Jewish majority. This exclusion is compounded by structural inequalities and discriminatory policies that reinforce their subordinate position within Israeli society [4].

Following the 1948 war, the Arab community in Israel found itself not only geographically fragmented but also culturally and economically disadvantaged. They were largely excluded from the state's infrastructural development, which left them with inadequate resources to sustain their communities. The establishment of the military government over Arab localities, which lasted until 1966, further restricted their movement, employment, and political activity. Channels for cultural exchange and connection with the broader Arab world were virtually non-existent until after the 1967 war and subsequent peace agreements, which began to open limited avenues for interaction [5].

Today, the Arab population in Israel includes Muslims (70%), Christians (21%), and Druze (9%). Despite their demographic significance, they continue to experience systemic discrimination and marginalization in various spheres, particularly in education. The educational system in Arab localities is characterized by chronic underfunding, larger class sizes, and fewer resources compared to Jewish schools. This lack of investment directly impacts the quality of education, contributing to significant disparities in academic achievement. Arab schools often emphasize rote learning, a pedagogical approach that fails to develop critical and independent thinking skills necessary for higher education. In contrast, Jewish schools benefit from more dynamic teaching methodologies that better prepare students for the rigorous demands of higher academic institutions [6–8].

These systemic disparities in education create dual barriers for Arab students pursuing higher education. First, their insufficient preparation in primary and secondary education leaves them ill-equipped for the academic challenges of university life. For instance, Arab students often struggle with the psychometric exam, which serves as a key admissions criterion for Israeli universities. The exam's language and cultural biases place Arab students, many of whom are non-native Hebrew speakers, at a significant disadvantage. Second, even when Arab students gain entry to higher education, they face additional hurdles related to institutional expectations and cultural dissonance. Academic environments in Israel often fail to accommodate the unique needs of Arab students, leading to feelings of alienation and increased dropout rates [9, 10].

These challenges extend beyond academics. Arab students in higher education frequently encounter social exclusion and limited support networks. This exclusion can be seen in the minimal presence of Arab faculty members and the lack of culturally relevant mentorship programs. The underrepresentation of Arab professionals in academia not only limits role models for Arab students but also perpetuates a sense of marginalization within the academic community.

The Palestinian Arab minority in Israel continues to navigate a complex web of historical, social, and structural challenges. These challenges underscore the need for comprehensive reforms that address systemic inequalities and promote equitable access to resources. The barriers in education are particularly significant, as they have far-reaching implications for social mobility and economic integration [11]. Addressing these barriers requires a concerted effort to reimagine the educational landscape in a way that is inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all citizens (**Table 1**).

Sociocultural factors, including gender, political status, socioeconomic conditions, and religious affiliations, significantly impact young Palestinian Arabs' experiences during early adulthood. These factors influence how they manage stress, anxiety, and uncertainty, particularly during transitions to higher education [13, 14]. Language barriers exacerbate these challenges. Many Arab students struggle with Hebrew, the primary language of instruction, which leads to anxiety, frustration, and difficulties integrating with Jewish peers. Their limited proficiency affects their ability to express themselves, impacting academic performance and their interactions with faculty and peers. This often results in academic failure and feelings of alienation [15, 16].

## 1.2 Rational

Higher education is a vital tool for achieving social mobility, economic growth, and cultural preservation. However, for the Arab minority in Israel, systemic discrimination and pervasive barriers severely limit their access to and success within higher education. These challenges are rooted in historical, sociopolitical, and economic inequalities that have persisted since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. As a marginalized group, Arab citizens face disparities in resource allocation, educational infrastructure, and pedagogical practices that reinforce their socioeconomic disadvantage. Investigating the mechanisms of discrimination and barriers in the higher education system is critical for understanding how these systemic inequities perpetuate a cycle of exclusion and hinder the full integration of Arab citizens into Israeli society.

The systemic barriers faced by Arab students in Israel's higher education system are not merely individual challenges but represent a profound missed opportunity for national growth and societal harmony. The exclusion of a substantial portion of the

| Population group        | Size      | % of total Israeli population |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Jews                    | 6,873,910 | 74.00%                        |
| Arabs                   | 1,957,270 | 21.10%                        |
| • Muslims               | 1,370,089 | 70%                           |
| • Christians            | 411,027   | 21%                           |
| Druze                   | 176,154   | 9%                            |
| Arab citizens of Israel | 1,595,300 | 17.20%                        |
| Others*                 | 458,580   | 4.90%                         |
| Total                   | 9,289,760 | 100.00%                       |

\*The category "others" includes non-Arab Christians and citizens with no religious affiliation.

**Table 1.**  
*Population of Israel by population group [12].*

population from equitable educational opportunities perpetuates entrenched socio-economic disparities, deepens social divides, and weakens Israel's capacity for collective progress. For instance, Arab students remain significantly underrepresented in high-demand fields such as technology, health care, and engineering—areas crucial for national development and economic resilience. This underrepresentation reduces the diversity of perspectives and skills that fuel innovation and limits Israel's ability to compete in an increasingly globalized economy. Studies from international contexts underscore the transformative impact of educational diversity. In the United States, for example, integrating minority students into higher education has been shown to enhance creativity, improve problem-solving capabilities, and foster social adaptability in multicultural environments [17]. Similarly, the presence of Arab students in Israeli academic institutions can create cultural diversity that enriches the learning environment for all students. This diversity fosters mutual understanding and innovation while demonstrating the social and economic benefits of inclusivity.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to highlight the structural factors that sustain educational disparities. These include unequal funding, inadequate facilities in Arab schools, and a curriculum that often neglects the cultural and linguistic needs of Arab students. Moreover, linguistic challenges such as limited proficiency in Hebrew—the primary language of instruction—further exacerbate the difficulties Arab students face, contributing to their underrepresentation in higher education and the labor market. Despite recent improvements, such as increased enrollment of Arab students in higher education, the gaps remain wide and entrenched.

By focusing on discrimination and barriers, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the systemic challenges and their implications for social equity. It underscores the importance of targeted policy interventions, such as equitable resource distribution, enhanced language support, and programs that promote intergroup integration. Exploring these issues is not only essential for addressing educational disparities but also for fostering a more inclusive society where all citizens can participate equally. Ultimately, this investigation seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on equality, minority rights, and the role of education in bridging societal divides.

Palestinian Arab students in Israel face systemic and cultural challenges that hinder their access to and success in higher education. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive policy interventions and institutional reforms to create an inclusive and equitable educational environment. Furthermore, acknowledging and embracing the contributions of Arab students to Israeli academic institutions offers an opportunity to foster societal cohesion and cross-cultural understanding, which are essential for the nation's shared progress.

The aim of this chapter is to analyze the barriers and discriminatory practices faced by Arab students in higher education, drawing on a theoretical framework that includes Critical Race Theory, theories of social dominance, and models of majority-minority relations. This research-based review further situates the experiences of Arab students within a global context by comparing their challenges to those faced by other minorities, such as African Americans in the United States, indigenous peoples in Australia, and Tamils in Sri Lanka. These comparative insights highlight how systemic discrimination and unequal access to resources are universal issues that contribute to the underrepresentation of minorities in higher education. Specifically, in the Israeli context, the analysis explores how historical, sociopolitical, and economic inequalities perpetuate cycles of exclusion and limit opportunities for Arab students.

Through this examination, the chapter seeks to not only identify these systemic barriers but also propose actionable policy interventions to promote equity and inclusion in higher education systems.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Majority-minority relations in a global context**

Smootha [4] argues that the difficulty in Jewish-Arab relations in Israel stems from the fact that the Arab minority is a well-defined national and religious minority that cannot be assimilated into the Jewish majority. Moreover, the Arab minority is subject to discrimination through the unequal distribution of societal resources. Israeli security and control policies toward the Arab population, along with systemic discrimination and exclusion, have instilled feelings of fear and insecurity among Arab citizens [18].

Many economists and scholars agree that the policies of successive Israeli governments have been a major factor in perpetuating discrimination, inequalities, and socioeconomic gaps between Arabs and Jews. Democratic and modern states worldwide tend to combine two of the four basic models of majority-minority relations:

- a. Nation-building model (assimilation): This model offers full rights in exchange for the voluntary renunciation of a minority's separate identity [4].
- b. Egalitarian pluralism model: This model promotes harmonious and egalitarian coexistence between majority and minority, often through autonomy arrangements. Both models are founded on recognizing minority groups and granting them full rights.

In contrast, the State of Israel does not adhere to these two models. Instead, it combines two alternative models:

- a. Unequal pluralism model: This model recognizes the cultural and linguistic diversity of the minority without granting them equality.
- b. Expulsion model: This model seeks to remove the minority from the territorial framework or even to destroy them physically.

Khayder [19] highlights this policy, particularly as it is expressed in the expropriation of economic resources and property transfer, such as through the Absentee Property Law. Land expropriation from Arab owners for redistribution to meet Jewish national needs is another example. The resources allocated by the state for the development of Arab localities are significantly lower than those allocated to Jewish localities. As a result, the differences in status between Jews and Arabs primarily stem from ethnic, national, and geographic affiliations, reinforced by the policies of control and repression [20]. In other words, citizenship status in Israel is closely tied to national identity.

These intertwined factors shape the disparities between Jews and Arabs in Israel. As these gaps continue to deepen, the risk of social unrest increases. When combined with political and national tensions, this unrest could further deteriorate Jewish-Arab

relations [6]. However, collaborative efforts by the government, working in partnership with the Arab population, could help reduce tensions. Such cooperation might foster a stronger sense of belonging among Arab citizens and lay the groundwork for equal citizenship.

Both Jews and Arabs agree that the divide between their communities is profound and significantly influences the development of Israeli society. This divide has always existed but intensified after the events of October 2000 [2]. In other countries, similar deep rifts have led to civil wars and regime collapses. In some ways, the situation of Arabs in Israel resembles that of minorities in other bi-ethnic countries with cultural and political ties to neighboring states, such as Tamils in Sri Lanka, Catholics in Northern Ireland, and Turks in Cyprus [21].

The dynamics of majority-minority relations in Israel can be understood in comparison with other societies with similar ethnic and national divides:

1. African Americans in the United States: African Americans, like the Arab minority in Israel, have historically faced systemic discrimination and exclusion from educational opportunities. The civil rights movement in the United States brought significant changes, but disparities in access to higher education and employment persist due to the legacy of segregation and structural racism [22].
2. Indigenous Peoples in Australia: Indigenous Australians face barriers similar to those experienced by Arab citizens of Israel, including underrepresentation in higher education and limited access to culturally appropriate educational resources. Policies aimed at addressing these disparities have had mixed success, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that consider the unique cultural and historical contexts of minority groups [23].
3. Tamils in Sri Lanka: The Tamil minority in Sri Lanka has faced discrimination and exclusion from educational and employment opportunities due to policies that favor the Sinhalese majority. The civil conflict between the two groups further exacerbated these disparities, resulting in significant socioeconomic and educational gaps [24].

The dynamics of majority-minority relations in Israel reflect broader global patterns of systemic *discrimination* and *barriers* faced by marginalized groups. The experiences of the Arab minority in Israel parallel those of African Americans in the United States, Indigenous Australians, and Tamils in Sri Lanka, all of whom encounter structural inequities in education and employment. These case studies underscore the pervasive nature of socioeconomic and cultural exclusion in divided societies and highlight the necessity of tailored policy interventions. Addressing these disparities requires not only equitable resource allocation and access to culturally relevant education but also a commitment to fostering inclusive societal frameworks. By examining these global parallels, it becomes evident that meaningful progress hinges on both acknowledging historical injustices and implementing strategies that promote integration, equity, and social cohesion.

### **3. Models of majority-minority relations: Insights from the Israeli context**

Understanding the dynamics of majority-minority relations is crucial for analyzing the systemic challenges faced by minority groups in various societies.

These dynamics are shaped by sociopolitical frameworks and institutional policies that determine the extent of inclusion, equality, and representation afforded to minorities. In Israel, the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian Arab minority is characterized by significant disparities, which are perpetuated by structural and institutional practices. To better comprehend these dynamics, this section will explore relevant theoretical frameworks, including Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Dominance Theory (SDT), alongside specific models of majority–minority relations. These models help contextualize the experiences of minority groups and provide insights into the mechanisms of marginalization and exclusion:

### **3.1 Critical race theory (CRT)**

Critical race theory (CRT) posits that racism is not merely an individual bias or prejudice but is embedded within the structures, institutions, and policies of a society [25]. In the context of Israel, CRT helps to explain how the state's educational policies and practices are constructed in ways that systematically disadvantage the Arab minority while privileging the Jewish majority [7]. The application of CRT to the Israeli educational system reveals how Arab students are marginalized through discriminatory admission processes, lack of representation in academic institutions, and the exclusion of Arab culture and language from the academic curriculum [13, 14].

### **3.2 Social dominance theory (SDT)**

Social Dominance Theory suggests that societies are structured in hierarchies based on social categories such as ethnicity, religion, and nationality [26]. In the case of Israel, the Jewish majority occupies the dominant position within this hierarchy, while the Arab minority is relegated to a subordinate status. This dominance is maintained through policies and practices that limit the socioeconomic and educational opportunities available to the Arab population. The theory also posits that discrimination against minorities is perpetuated through legitimizing myths, such as the portrayal of Arab citizens as a security threat, which justify their exclusion from full participation in society [4].

### **3.3 Models of majority-minority relations**

Several models have been proposed to explain the relationship between majority and minority groups in various societies: a. *Assimilation model*: This model advocates for the complete integration of minority groups into the dominant culture, often at the expense of the minority's cultural identity [4]. In the context of Israel, the assimilation model is not fully applicable because the Arab minority is not encouraged to assimilate into Jewish culture but is instead expected to maintain its distinct identity while being excluded from equal participation in societal institutions.

- a. *Pluralism model*: The pluralism model promotes the coexistence of multiple cultural identities within a society, with an emphasis on equality and mutual respect. In Israel, the state acknowledges the cultural distinctiveness of the Arab minority but does not provide the necessary resources or opportunities to support its full participation in the socioeconomic and educational spheres [21].

b. *Multiculturalism*: This model recognizes and celebrates cultural diversity, advocating for the equal inclusion of all cultural groups in societal institutions. While Israel has made some efforts toward multiculturalism, such as including Arabic as an official language, these efforts are often symbolic and do not translate into substantive equality for Arab citizens [13, 14].

c. *Unequal pluralism*: This model best describes the Israeli context, where the state recognizes the existence of the Arab minority but does not grant it equal rights or access to resources. The Arab minority is allowed to maintain its cultural identity but is excluded from full participation in political, economic, and educational institutions [7].

The various models of majority-minority relations provide valuable frameworks for understanding the complex dynamics between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel. These models highlight the systemic nature of inequality and exclusion, underscoring the need for comprehensive policy reforms. By addressing these structural disparities, Israel can work toward fostering a more equitable and inclusive society that recognizes and values the rights and contributions of all its citizens.

### 3.4 Education and pedagogy: Discrimination and barriers in Israel

A close examination of Israeli society reveals several deep divisions, with the Jewish-Arab divide being among the most pronounced. This divide stems from the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, religious differences, and the hegemony of the Jewish state, which often excludes Arabs [27]. The Arab population in Israel is heterogeneous, comprising Muslims, Christians, and Druze, with diverse socioeconomic statuses, cultural norms, levels of religiosity, and educational attainment [28]. These variations result in differing needs within the education system, which operates in the context of a Jewish-majority state.

Arab society views education as a key avenue for shaping, preserving, and advancing its cultural and social identity. Significant progress has been made since Israel's establishment, with the proportion of uneducated Arabs dropping from nearly half in 1961 to less than 5% by 2016 [29]. However, systemic discrimination remains prevalent, with the Arab education sector consistently receiving fewer resources compared to the Jewish sector. These disparities manifest in inadequate infrastructure, such as overcrowded classrooms and limited access to laboratories and sports facilities [18, 19].

The unequal distribution of resources leads to significant educational disparities. For example, the average annual investment per Arab student is significantly lower than that for Jewish students. While Jewish students receive approximately NIS 27,000 annually, Arab students receive only NIS 20,000, reflecting a clear resource allocation bias [7]. This underinvestment results in lower academic outcomes for Arab students, with only 23% meeting university entrance requirements, compared to 47% in Hebrew education [28].

In recent years, Arab society has made significant strides in higher education. Between 2009 and 2020, the percentage of Arab undergraduates rose from 10% to 18.3%, while the number of Arab students pursuing master's degrees tripled from 6.5% to 14.6% [12]. However, despite the increase in enrollment, a comparison with the percentage of Arab citizens in the relevant age group, who comprise 28% of Israelis aged 20–24, reveals that gaps between Arab students and their non-Haredi

Jewish counterparts persist. This disparity is partly due to the larger proportion of Arabs in this demographic compared to the general population and to the low participation rate of Arab men in higher education, with only 10% graduating annually with a first academic degree [30].

These improvements are largely attributed to comprehensive support programs that provide academic, social, and financial assistance. Such initiatives, often spearheaded by civil society organizations, have been instrumental in reducing *barriers* and fostering greater integration into Israeli higher education.

Despite this progress, challenges persist. Teaching methods in Arab schools often emphasize rote learning, which fails to develop critical and independent thinking skills. This pedagogical approach leaves students unprepared for the demands of higher education [6]. Additionally, language barriers exacerbate these challenges. Many Arab students struggle with Hebrew, the primary language of instruction, leading to feelings of alienation and underperformance [15].

Vocational education in Arab society also faces significant obstacles. Although vocational tracks comprise a substantial portion of the education system, students in these programs often experience higher dropout rates and lower academic achievement compared to their Jewish counterparts. In 2015, only 18.8% of Arab vocational track graduates pursued higher education, compared to 40.7% in the Jewish sector [28].

To address these disparities, pedagogical innovation is essential. This requires shifting from traditional teaching methods to approaches that promote active learning and critical engagement. Schools must also adapt their physical environments to support diverse learning processes. Moreover, vocational education should be restructured to provide students with skills that align with labor market demands and pathways to higher education.

The barriers faced by the Arab minority in Israel's higher education system are multifaceted and include structural, cultural, and linguistic obstacles. Data from recent studies highlight the extent of these disparities and their impact on Arab students' academic achievements and future opportunities:

#### *3.4.1 Underrepresentation and access to higher education*

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics [31], only 14% of Arab students aged 18–24 are enrolled in higher education institutions, compared to 43% of Jewish students (See **Table 2**). This underrepresentation is largely due to systemic discrimination in the admission process, particularly the psychometric exam, which is biased against Arab students [32]. The exam, which heavily influences university admissions, reflects cultural and linguistic biases that disadvantage non-native Hebrew speakers.

#### *3.4.2 Resource allocation and infrastructure*

Arab localities receive significantly less investment in educational infrastructure compared to Jewish localities. According to Gharrah [7], Arab localities receive 42%

| Indicator                             | Arab students (%) | Jewish students (%) | Gap |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-----|
| Enrollment in higher education        | 14                | 43                  | 29% |
| High school matriculation eligibility | 59                | 84                  | 25% |

**Table 2.**  
*Enrollment and educational achievement gaps between Arab and Jewish students.*

less funding for education than Jewish localities, impacting school quality and access to higher education (See **Table 3**). This lack of resources is evident in the poor quality of schools, limited access to academic programs, and inadequate support services for Arab students [7]. The disparity in resource allocation further limits the ability of Arab students to compete on an equal footing with their Jewish peers.

### 3.4.3 Language and cultural barriers

The dominance of Hebrew as the primary language of instruction in Israeli universities presents a major challenge for Arab students. The lack of academic support for improving Hebrew language skills, coupled with the absence of Arabic-language academic programs, creates an environment that is not conducive to the success of Arab students [33]. Additionally, the exclusion of Arab culture from the academic curriculum contributes to a sense of alienation and disconnection among Arab students [13, 14].

### 3.4.4 Economic barriers

The socioeconomic status of the Arab population is significantly lower than that of the Jewish population, with high rates of poverty and unemployment. According to Haddad et al. [12], Arab population poverty rate is 51% while Jewish population poverty rate is only 20% (See **Table 4**) [12]. The financial burden of higher education, including tuition fees, transportation, and living expenses, is a major obstacle for Arab families, who often lack the resources to support their children’s academic aspirations [28].

### 3.4.5 Discrimination and exclusion

Arab students report experiencing discrimination and exclusion within academic institutions, which manifests in negative stereotypes, cultural insensitivity, and a lack of support from faculty and peers [13, 14]. This hostile environment contributes to higher dropout rates and discourages Arab students from pursuing higher education.

Recent data from the Central Bureau of Statistics [31] indicate that while there has been a slight increase in Arab student enrollment in higher education, significant gaps

| Category                      | Arab sector | Jewish sector | Gap (%) |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------|
| Per-student funding (USD)     | 3200        | 5500          | 42%     |
| Schools with science labs (%) | 25          | 65            | 40%     |

**Table 3.**  
*Resource allocation gaps between Arab and Jewish sectors in education.*

| Economic indicator           | Arab population | Jewish population |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Poverty rate (%)             | 51              | 20                |
| Average monthly income (USD) | 1500            | 3400              |

**Table 4.**  
*Socioeconomic disparities between Arab and Jewish populations.*

| Indicator                   | % Arab graduates | % Jewish graduates | Gap |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----|
| Employment rate (graduates) | 56               | 86                 | 30% |

**Table 5.**  
*Employment rate disparities between Arab and Jewish graduates.*

remain. The employment rate for Arab graduates is 30% lower than that of Jewish graduates (See **Table 5**), with Arab women facing particularly high levels of unemployment [12]. These disparities highlight the need for continued efforts to improve access to higher education and employment opportunities for the Arab population.

#### 3.4.6 Outcomes of the formal education system

One of the foundational barriers to higher education for Arab students in Israel is the inequitable outcomes of the formal education system. There are significant disparities in matriculation exam participation and eligibility rates. While 57% of Arab students sit for these exams, the corresponding figure for Jewish students is 75%. More critically, only 28% of Arab students obtain a matriculation certificate that meets university entry requirements, compared to 51% of Jewish students [34]. This disparity stems from underfunded Arab schools, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of culturally relevant curricula, which fail to adequately prepare students for higher education [35]. For example, Arab schools often lack advanced placement courses and enrichment programs, which are more prevalent in Jewish schools. These deficiencies limit the academic preparedness of Arab students, creating a structural barrier that perpetuates educational inequality.

#### 3.4.7 Psychometric exam as a barrier

The psychometric exam, a crucial component of the university admission process in Israel, poses a significant challenge for Arab students. Data reveal a persistent 100-point gap (See **Table 6**) between the scores of Jewish and Arab test-takers, with Arab students consistently scoring lower. The most pronounced gaps are in the English section, followed by verbal and quantitative reasoning [36]. The disparity in English scores is particularly notable as English is effectively a fourth language for many Arab students, after spoken Arabic, literary Arabic, and Hebrew. Moreover, literary Arabic, which is used for the exam, functions as a second language for Arab students, further complicating their test performance [37]. These linguistic challenges hinder Arab students' access to competitive academic programs, reducing their opportunities for higher education and professional advancement.

**Table 6** highlights the significant disparities in psychometric exam scores between Arab and Jewish students, illustrating how structural inequalities in educational preparation and linguistic challenges contribute to the gap. These differences underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions, such as language support programs and equitable resource allocation, to level the playing field for Arab students.

#### 3.4.8 Dropout rates and degree completion

Arab students in higher education face higher dropout rates and longer timeframes to complete their degrees. The dropout rate among Arab students in 2015–2016 was 18%, compared to 11% among Jewish students (See **Table 7**). In publicly funded

| Category                               | Arab students | Jewish students | Gap        |
|--|---------------|-----------------|------------|
| Average total score                    | 485           | 585             | 100 points |
| English section (average score)        | 80            | 120             | 40 points  |
| Verbal reasoning (average score)       | 90            | 120             | 30 points  |
| Quantitative reasoning (average score) | 120           | 135             | 15 points  |

*Source: Adapted from findings of the National Institute for Testing and Evaluation (2020).*

**Table 6.**  
*Comparison of psychometric exam scores between Arabs and Jews, 2020.*

colleges, this gap widens significantly, with a 25% dropout rate for Arabs in engineering colleges compared to 14% for Jewish students.

Furthermore, only 36% of Arab students complete their degrees within the standard time frame, compared to 53% of Jewish students. This “degree dragging” phenomenon is exacerbated by a lack of academic support, cultural isolation, and financial challenges, which force many Arab students to work while studying [39].

**Table 7** highlights the systemic issues contributing to higher dropout rates among Arab students in Israel, emphasizing the need for targeted support programs, equitable funding, and language assistance to bridge the gap. It can be incorporated into discussions on policy interventions to reduce dropout rates and foster inclusivity in higher education.

### 3.4.9 Concentration in colleges vs. universities

Arab students are significantly more likely to enroll in colleges rather than universities, restricting their access to advanced academic and research opportunities. While only 11.5% of Arab students attend universities, a stark contrast is seen with 80% of Jewish students enrolling in these institutions (see **Table 8**). This disparity is largely attributed to the lower admission requirements in colleges and their closer geographical proximity to Arab communities, making them more accessible for Arab students.

Significant disparities also exist between universities in terms of Arab student representation. At the University of Haifa, Arabs constitute over 30% of the student body, reflecting its location in a diverse city. However, representation drops to less than 12% at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, under 9% at Tel Aviv University, slightly over 5% at Ben-Gurion University and less than 3% at Bar-Ilan University [31, 41].

| Institution type                | Arab students dropout rate | Jewish students dropout rate | Gap  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------|
| Universities                    | 15.4%                      | 10.8%                        | 4.6% |
| Public colleges (funded)        | 20%                        | 12%                          | 8%   |
| Engineering colleges            | 25%                        | 14%                          | 11%  |
| Private colleges (non-funded)   | Data unavailable           | Data unavailable             | N/A  |
| Overall higher education system | ~18%                       | ~11%                         | ~7%  |

*Source: Council for Higher Education (CHE) [38].*

**Table 7.**  
*Comparison of dropout rates between Arab and Jewish students in higher education in Israel, 2015–2016.*

| Category                   | Arab students   | Jewish students   |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| University acceptance rate | 48% of applicants accepted  | 68% of applicants accepted                              |
| College acceptance rate    | 64% of applicants accepted  | 75% of applicants accepted                              |
| Field preferences          | Nursing (36%), pharmacy (42%), education (24%), medicine (22%), and social work (18%) | Engineering (42%), exact sciences (35%), business (28%) |
| STEM enrollment            | ~6% (excluding medical and civil fields)  | ~28%  |
| Overall enrollment         | ~11.5% of Arab students in universities   | ~80% of Jewish students in universities                 |

*Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) [40].*

**Table 8.**  
*Comparison of enrollment and fields of study between Arab and Jewish students.*

The data in **Table 8** highlight significant disparities between Arab and Jewish students in higher education in Israel, particularly in university enrollment and field selection. These disparities underscore systemic barriers and differing educational opportunities.

**Table 8** also shows the following:

1. Acceptance rates: Arab students experience lower acceptance rates to universities (48%) compared to Jewish students (68%). This gap highlights the challenges Arab students face, including lower access to preparatory resources and systemic barriers like psychometric exam performance [42].
2. Field preferences: Arab students disproportionately gravitate toward fields such as education, nursing, and social work, which have lower economic mobility potential compared to high-demand fields like engineering and business that are dominated by Jewish students [43].
3. STEM representation: While STEM fields are critical for economic development and national innovation, Arab student enrollment in these areas remains at approximately 6%, highlighting the need for targeted programs to encourage diversity in these disciplines.
4. Geographic disparities: Arab students are less likely to attend institutions in central urban areas where resources and prestigious programs are concentrated, further limiting their access to top-tier education (CHE Report).

Efforts to bridge these gaps should include targeted initiatives, such as expanding scholarships for STEM fields, creating bridging programs for Arabic-speaking students, and increasing awareness about diverse educational opportunities. Programs to reduce systemic biases in admissions processes and enhance the cultural inclusion of Arab students in higher education institutions are also essential.

#### *3.4.10 Field of study disparities*

The distribution of Arab students across academic disciplines reveals significant disparities. Fields such as pharmacy (42%), nursing (36%), and medicine (22%) show relatively high Arab participation (see **Table 8**), reflecting societal demand for these professions within Arab communities [12]. In contrast, Arab representation in engineering and architecture is only 6% (excluding civil, chemical, and biomedical engineering), and even lower in business and management (5%) and agriculture (3%). These fields are critical for economic advancement and innovation, yet they remain underrepresented, limiting Arab students' career prospects in high-demand and lucrative industries [44].

#### *3.4.11 Internal academic equality and faculty representation*

The barriers extend beyond enrollment to systemic inequalities within academic institutions. As students' progress in their academic journeys, the representation of Arab students declines sharply. While Arabs make up 11.3% of undergraduate students, their share drops to 7% in master's programs and only 3% among doctoral candidates. The underrepresentation continues at the faculty level, where Arabs constitute merely 2% of academic staff [45]. This lack of representation in academic leadership and decision-making roles perpetuates an environment where Arab perspectives and needs are underrepresented, further entrenching systemic inequalities.

The barriers faced by Arab students in Israel's higher education system are both structural and systemic, spanning from the formal education system to the internal dynamics within academic institutions. These barriers manifest in lower matriculation and psychometric exam scores, higher dropout rates, limited representation in universities and certain fields of study, and minimal presence in senior academic and faculty roles. Together, these challenges perpetuate inequality and restrict the full integration and advancement of Arab students in Israeli academia. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach, including targeted educational reforms, enhanced support services, and policies aimed at promoting equity and inclusion. Initiatives like those implemented by the CHE, with significant financial investment and institutional support, represent important steps toward narrowing the gaps. However, sustained efforts and systemic changes are essential to ensure that Arab students have equal opportunities to succeed and contribute meaningfully to Israel's academic and professional landscape.

### **3.5 Integrating theory and practice: Toward an inclusive higher education system**

The theoretical models and frameworks discussed above, including Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Dominance Theory (SDT), offer essential insights into the systemic barriers faced by Arab students in Israel's higher education system. CRT underscores that discrimination is not merely the result of individual prejudice but is deeply embedded in institutional structures and policies. This can be seen in the unequal distribution of resources between Arab and Jewish schools, which results in significant disparities in educational outcomes. For example, Arab schools often lack advanced learning facilities such as science labs and computer centers, limiting

students' exposure to subjects like STEM [37]. Additionally, the psychometric exam, which plays a critical role in university admissions, systematically disadvantages Arab students due to linguistic and cultural biases. These biases contribute to their underrepresentation in high-demand fields such as engineering and computer science, which are pivotal for economic mobility.

SDT provides further context by explaining how societal hierarchies maintain the dominance of the Jewish majority and the marginalization of the Arab minority. This theory highlights the systemic exclusion of Arab students from leadership roles in academia. While Arab students account for 11.3% of undergraduate enrollments, their representation drops dramatically in advanced academic levels, with only 3% of doctoral students and 2% of faculty members being Arab [45]. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle where Arab voices and perspectives remain underrepresented in academic discourse and decision-making processes.

The models of assimilation, pluralism, and multiculturalism further illuminate the dynamics of majority-minority relations in Israel's education system. The "unequal pluralism" model best describes the current reality. Although Arab culture and identity are formally acknowledged, this recognition often remains symbolic rather than substantive. For instance, while Arabic is an official language, it is rarely used as a medium of instruction in universities, forcing Arab students to study in Hebrew, a language in which many lack proficiency [13, 14]. This linguistic barrier not only affects their academic performance but also contributes to feelings of alienation and exclusion within academic institutions.

Addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach. Comprehensive policy reforms must focus on equitable resource allocation, particularly in funding Arab schools to provide the necessary infrastructure for academic success. Additionally, targeted support initiatives, such as those implemented by the CHE, play a crucial role. Programs that offer financial aid, academic mentoring, and language support have already shown promise in improving Arab students' access to higher education. For example, initiatives that include pre-academic preparatory programs have helped bridge the gap by providing tailored support in Hebrew and English language acquisition [12].

However, for these efforts to have a lasting impact, deeper structural changes are necessary. This includes fostering culturally responsive pedagogies that incorporate Arab history, language, and culture into the curriculum. Moreover, increasing the representation of Arab professionals in academic leadership and faculty roles is critical for creating an inclusive academic environment. Such representation would ensure that Arab students have role models and advocates within the system, contributing to a sense of belonging and academic motivation.

Ultimately, integrating theoretical perspectives with practical solutions highlights the urgent need for a more inclusive and equitable higher education system in Israel. A system that actively works to dismantle systemic barriers would not only provide Arab students with equal opportunities for academic and professional advancement but would also strengthen social cohesion and contribute to economic growth in a diverse and pluralistic society.

While progress has been made through targeted initiatives, systemic discrimination continues to hinder the educational and social advancement of Arab students in Israel. Comprehensive reforms, including equitable resource distribution, pedagogical innovation, and enhanced support programs, are essential to fostering equal opportunities and building a more inclusive academic landscape.

### **3.6 Toward equality and integration: Bridging gaps between Arab and Jewish sectors**

Despite the ongoing conflict and historical tensions between Jews and Arabs in Israel, the national divide continues to shape Arab-Jewish relations profoundly. Civil society organizations have been instrumental in shedding light on the systemic discrimination and institutional barriers faced by Arab citizens. These organizations, such as Sikkuy, Mossawa, and Kav Mashve, have conducted in-depth studies and provided platforms for public and governmental discussions on issues of inequality. The findings consistently point to significant disparities across socioeconomic, educational, and employment sectors, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive reform [46, 47]. For instance, despite some progress, Arab citizens still experience limited access to quality education and professional opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion.

One of the critical barriers lies in employment. Arab women, in particular, face compounded challenges, including cultural expectations, limited access to childcare, and discrimination in hiring practices. According to the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies, the employment rate for Arab women remains around 40%, significantly lower than the 83% employment rate for Jewish women [48]. Even among Arab men, who have a higher employment rate, there is a significant wage gap compared to their Jewish counterparts, reflecting unequal access to high-paying industries such as technology and finance. Programs like Kav Mashve have attempted to bridge these gaps by creating pathways for Arab graduates to enter the private sector. However, these efforts are often hampered by systemic issues, including the lack of professional networks and biases in hiring practices [49].

The disparities extend to the educational system, which plays a foundational role in shaping long-term economic and social outcomes. Arab schools consistently receive less funding than Jewish schools, resulting in inadequate infrastructure, larger class sizes, and fewer resources such as laboratories and libraries. According to a 2021 report by the Israeli Ministry of Education, Arab students receive 20% less funding per capita, which directly impacts their academic performance and preparedness for higher education [50]. This funding disparity contributes to lower matriculation rates and poorer performance on the psychometric exam, a critical gateway to university admissions. The psychometric exam, administered primarily in Hebrew, poses a significant challenge for Arab students, who often score 100 points lower on average than their Jewish peers. This disparity is most pronounced in the English and verbal reasoning sections, reflecting broader issues of linguistic and cultural bias [37].

The underrepresentation of Arab students in higher education is another significant barrier. Although Arab students now make up 18.3% of undergraduates, this is still disproportionately low compared to their 28% share of the relevant age cohort [12]. The situation worsens at the graduate level, where Arab students account for only 7% of master's students and 3% of doctoral candidates. This underrepresentation continues into academia, where Arabs constitute just 2% of faculty members, effectively excluding them from leadership roles and decision-making processes within academic institutions [45].

Field specialization further illustrates the unequal opportunities faced by Arab students. While there is relatively high Arab participation in fields such as pharmacy (42%), nursing (36%), and medicine (22%), they are significantly underrepresented in technology, engineering, and business management, which are critical for economic mobility and innovation. For example, Arab students account for only 6% of enrollments

in engineering programs and 5% in business management [44]. These fields often provide pathways to leadership and high-income careers, yet systemic barriers in early education and university admissions limit Arab access to these opportunities.

Efforts to address these disparities must focus on both immediate and structural reforms. The Council for Higher Education (CHE) has implemented programs aimed at increasing Arab participation in higher education, including preparatory courses, language support, and financial aid. These initiatives have shown promising results, with more Arab students enrolling in universities and pursuing advanced degrees. However, these programs need to be expanded and supported by broader policy changes, such as increasing funding for Arab schools, reforming the psychometric exam to reduce cultural bias, and creating more inclusive curricula that reflect the diverse cultural identities of all students [51].

Integration initiatives also play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and mutual understanding between Jewish and Arab populations. Programs like “Hand in Hand,” which operate bilingual schools, demonstrate the potential for shared educational experiences to break down prejudices and build bridges between communities [52]. Additionally, intergroup dialogs and reciprocal teacher exchange programs can help reduce cultural barriers and promote mutual respect. For instance, integrating Arab teachers into Jewish schools and vice versa can expose students to diverse perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic educational environment [53].

Economic integration is equally vital. The establishment of industrial zones in Arab localities, coupled with incentives for businesses to hire Arab employees, could significantly boost employment rates and economic development in these communities. For example, the creation of technology hubs in towns like Nazareth has provided opportunities for Arab professionals to engage in high-tech industries, which are traditionally dominated by Jewish workers [49]. Expanding such initiatives could help narrow the socioeconomic gap and contribute to a more equitable distribution of resources.

Ultimately, achieving genuine equality requires a holistic approach that addresses both the symptoms and root causes of inequality. This includes dismantling discriminatory policies, promoting equitable resource allocation, and fostering environments where Arab citizens can fully participate in and contribute to Israeli society. By investing in Arab human capital and creating pathways for integration, Israel can work toward a more inclusive and cohesive society that benefits all its citizens.

### **3.7 Policy recommendations**

Addressing the barriers and discrimination faced by Arab students in higher education requires a multifaceted and systemic policy approach. This involves tackling structural inequalities, improving access to resources, and fostering inclusive academic and social environments. Below are expanded and detailed policy recommendations aimed at achieving these goals:

1. Establishing more Arab-local academic institutions.

One of the most significant barriers for Arab students is the lack of accessible higher education institutions in Arab-majority areas. Establishing more universities and colleges in these regions would reduce financial and geographical burdens, making higher education more attainable. For example, creating institutions in towns like Umm al-Fahm and Sakhnin could alleviate the need for students to commute long

distances or relocate to predominantly Jewish areas, which often presents cultural and logistical challenges [49]. Additionally, these institutions could offer culturally relevant curricula and programs that align with the needs of the local community, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement among Arab students.

## 2. Implementing affirmative action policies.

Affirmative action is crucial to addressing the historical and systemic underrepresentation of Arab students in higher education. This can include reserving a specific number of spots for Arab students in competitive programs, as well as providing targeted scholarships to alleviate financial constraints. Affirmative action policies have been successful in other contexts, such as in the United States, where they have helped increase minority representation in prestigious universities [54]. In Israel, these policies could also extend to graduate and doctoral programs, ensuring that Arab students are supported throughout their academic journey and represented in advanced fields of study and research.

## 3. Enhancing Language Support Programs.

Language remains a significant barrier for Arab students, many of whom struggle with Hebrew, the primary language of instruction in Israeli universities. Comprehensive language support programs are essential for leveling the playing field. Universities should offer intensive Hebrew language courses, both before and during academic studies, tailored to the needs of Arab students. Additionally, English language proficiency programs could help Arab students meet the global standards required for many fields, particularly in STEM and business disciplines [37]. Academic tutoring services should also be expanded to provide ongoing support, helping students navigate complex coursework and develop essential academic skills.

## 4. Promoting Intercultural Programs

Intercultural understanding is key to reducing prejudice and fostering a more inclusive academic environment. Universities should implement structured programs that encourage dialog and cooperation between Jewish and Arab students. Examples include joint seminars, workshops, and social initiatives that focus on shared interests such as entrepreneurship, technology, or environmental sustainability [52]. These programs not only promote mutual understanding but also prepare students to work collaboratively in diverse professional environments. Bilingual and multicultural events can further enhance these efforts by celebrating the rich cultural heritage of both communities, fostering a sense of unity and respect.

### *3.7.1 Integrating policy with broader social benefits*

To address systemic discrimination in higher education, the proposed remedies must be evaluated not only for their feasibility but also for their likelihood of being codified into policy. Among the suggested interventions, affirmative action programs, such as scholarships and reserved spots for Arab students, have shown significant promise in increasing representation in similar contexts globally. For instance, the success of targeted scholarship programs in the United States for underrepresented

minorities suggests that these approaches are both practical and impactful [55]. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching practices, including language support initiatives, can be effectively implemented with relatively low resistance, as seen in pilot programs already launched by the Council for Higher Education [56].

Furthermore, integrating Arab students into higher education institutions has far-reaching benefits for all students, particularly in fostering cultural awareness and mutual understanding. Studies show that exposure to diverse cultural perspectives enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills [17]. In the Israeli context, Arab students bring unique linguistic and cultural insights that enrich classroom discussions and encourage Jewish peers to engage with different worldviews. For example, the inclusion of Arabic as a course language or cultural projects centered on Arab traditions has led to increased intercultural dialog in some institutions [37]. These interactions not only prepare students for a multicultural workforce but also contribute to breaking down societal prejudices, demonstrating that diversity is a resource that benefits the entire academic community.

### 5. Improving Employment Prospects

The transition from academia to the workforce is fraught with challenges for Arab graduates, who often face discrimination and limited opportunities. To address this, the government and private sector must collaborate to create job opportunities tailored to Arab graduates. This includes expanding internship programs and entry-level positions in high-demand industries such as technology, engineering, and health care. Initiatives like the Nazareth-based high-tech hub have demonstrated the potential for regional economic development to provide meaningful employment opportunities for Arab professionals [12]. Additionally, mentorship programs that connect Arab students with industry leaders can offer guidance, networking opportunities, and career development support.

### 6. Increasing Funding for Arab Education.

Substantial investment in Arab education at all levels is essential for addressing systemic disparities. This includes increasing funding for early childhood education, primary and secondary schools, and higher education institutions that serve Arab communities. Enhanced funding can be used to improve infrastructure, provide advanced learning materials, and train teachers in innovative pedagogical methods. Moreover, investment in vocational and technical education could offer alternative pathways for Arab students, equipping them with the skills needed for specialized industries [51].

### 7. Reforming the Psychometric Exam and Admission Criteria

The psychometric exam, which heavily influences university admissions, has been widely criticized for its cultural and linguistic biases. Reforming this exam to include more culturally neutral content and alternative assessment methods could significantly improve access for Arab students. Additionally, universities should consider adopting holistic admission criteria that evaluate a broader range of student capabilities, such as personal statements, interviews, and extracurricular achievements [13, 14].

## 8. Strengthening Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in supporting Arab students through mentorship, financial aid, and advocacy. Strengthening partnerships between these organizations and academic institutions can amplify their impact. For example, collaborative programs can provide comprehensive support systems, including counseling services, academic workshops, and career guidance. Organizations such as Sikkuy and Mossawa have already demonstrated success in bridging gaps and advocating for policy changes [53]. Expanding their reach and resources could further enhance their ability to support Arab students.

## 9. Encouraging Arab Representation in Academic Leadership

Representation matters, particularly in shaping institutional policies and creating inclusive environments. Increasing the number of Arab faculty members and administrators in universities can provide role models for Arab students and ensure that their perspectives are considered in decision-making processes. This could be achieved through targeted recruitment, leadership training programs, and initiatives to support Arab scholars in advancing their academic careers [45].

By implementing these comprehensive policy recommendations, Israel can take meaningful steps toward bridging the gap between Jewish and Arab populations in higher education. Such measures would not only promote equality and integration but also enhance social cohesion and contribute to the country's overall economic and social development.

## 4. Conclusions

The barriers and discrimination faced by Arab students in Israel's higher education system are deeply entrenched in the historical, sociopolitical, and economic fabric of the country. These obstacles, ranging from inadequate funding and limited access to quality education to systemic biases in university admissions and employment opportunities, highlight the broader inequalities that persist between Jewish and Arab citizens. These challenges are not isolated incidents but are instead part of a larger pattern of exclusion and marginalization that affects Arab participation in many facets of Israeli society.

The dynamics of these barriers can be contextualized using theories of majority-minority relations, including models of assimilation, pluralism, and multiculturalism. Israel's current approach aligns most closely with the model of "unequal pluralism," in which the Arab minority is formally recognized yet denied equal access to resources and opportunities. This model perpetuates disparities by granting limited inclusion while preserving systemic inequities [4]. In contrast, transitioning toward a model of egalitarian pluralism—marked by harmonious coexistence and equal rights—would require substantive policy changes that dismantle these systemic barriers.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) further illuminates how institutional structures perpetuate these inequities. Discriminatory policies in resource allocation, admission processes, and curriculum design reflect broader societal hierarchies that maintain the dominance of the Jewish majority. Social Dominance Theory (SDT) contextualizes this within a framework of societal stratification, where the Arab minority's marginalization is both a product and a reinforcer of the dominant group's privileged

position. For example, the limited representation of Arab students and faculty in STEM fields perpetuates underrepresentation in high-status professions, further entrenching socioeconomic inequalities [26].

Addressing these issues requires a multi-layered and systemic approach. Policy reforms are essential to dismantling institutional barriers and promoting equitable access to higher education. These reforms must go beyond surface-level adjustments and tackle the root causes of inequality, such as discriminatory funding policies, biased admission criteria, and the lack of representation of Arab citizens in academic leadership roles. Revising the psychometric exam to reduce linguistic and cultural biases is a critical starting point for leveling the playing field for Arab students, who are currently at a significant disadvantage.

Expanding on this, targeted policies must identify and prioritize solutions that are most likely to succeed and be codified as long-term strategies. For instance, affirmative action policies that reserve spots for Arab students in competitive fields, coupled with substantial financial aid programs, can significantly enhance representation and alleviate socioeconomic barriers. Studies have also demonstrated that cultural diversity within academic environments benefits all students by fostering critical thinking, innovation, and empathy. Jewish students, for example, gain valuable insights and cross-cultural competencies through meaningful interactions with Arab peers, contributing to a richer academic experience for all [13, 14, 37].

The transformative potential of Arab students' inclusion extends beyond academic environments. Their presence in universities fosters intercultural dialog, which is critical for reducing societal tensions and promoting national cohesion. For example, studies in the U.S. highlight how the integration of minority students enriches campus diversity, fostering creative problem-solving and mutual understanding [17]. In Israel, such diversity could similarly enhance social adaptability and innovation, strengthening the nation's economic and social fabric.

Increased investment in educational infrastructure is equally crucial. Arab schools often operate with fewer resources, larger class sizes, and outdated facilities compared to their Jewish counterparts. This disparity in funding not only affects the quality of education but also limits the ability of Arab students to compete on an equal footing in higher education. Targeted investments in early childhood education, secondary schools, and preparatory programs can help bridge these gaps and provide Arab students with the foundational skills needed for academic success. Programs focusing on STEM education and technology, fields where Arab students remain underrepresented, could further bridge critical gaps.

Moreover, fostering a more inclusive higher education system requires a commitment to recognizing and preserving the cultural identity of the Arab minority. This includes integrating Arabic language and culture into academic curricula and promoting bilingual and multicultural education programs. Universities should also prioritize initiatives that encourage intergroup dialog and collaboration, which can help break down prejudices and build a more cohesive and inclusive academic community. Programs like "Hand in Hand" schools demonstrate the potential of shared educational experiences to promote mutual understanding and respect.

The role of civil society organizations in supporting these efforts cannot be overstated. Organizations such as Sikkuy and Kav Mashve have been instrumental in advocating for policy changes and providing targeted support for Arab students, including mentorship programs, financial aid, and career development opportunities. Strengthening these partnerships and expanding their reach can amplify their impact and contribute to a more equitable higher education landscape.

Ultimately, the integration and advancement of Arab students in higher education is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic necessity for Israel's long-term socioeconomic development. A more inclusive and equitable higher education system would unlock the full potential of Arab citizens, enabling them to contribute more effectively to the economy and society. This would not only benefit the Arab community but also strengthen the social fabric and economic resilience of the nation as a whole.

Comprehensive reforms, coupled with sustained investment and a genuine commitment to equality, are critical to overcoming the barriers that have long hindered Arab students' access to and success in higher education. By addressing these systemic challenges and fostering collaboration between stakeholders, Israel can take significant strides toward creating a more inclusive society where every citizen has the opportunity to thrive. The ripple effects of such reforms—enhanced innovation, improved socioeconomic outcomes, and stronger intercultural relations—underscore the importance of addressing educational disparities as a national priority.


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Section 3

Challenges – The Case  
of Islamaphobia

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# Navigating Marginality: The Complex Realities of Muslim Minorities in India

*Deepa Nair*

## Abstract

This paper examines the contemporary multifaceted experiences of Muslims as a minority group in India. With over 200 million Muslims, India is home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Yet, their position in the nation's political and social landscape remains fraught with complexities. This paper delves into historical and contemporary challenges faced by Muslims, including communal violence and the rise of majoritarian nationalism. Through case studies, media analysis, and policy reviews, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the precariousness of Muslim identity in India's democracy and the struggles for equality, security, and representation in the face of growing religious polarization.

**Keywords:** Muslim minorities, India, marginalization, majoritarian nationalism, religious discrimination

## 1. Introduction

India is home to 200 million Muslims; they constitute more than 14% of the population and are the largest Muslim minority population in the world. The Muslim presence in India represents a multilayered historical phenomenon that has profoundly shaped the subcontinent's sociopolitical and cultural landscape over the past millennium. This enduring influence emerged through a complex interplay of factors, including military conquests, extensive maritime trade networks, and sustained cultural exchanges that connected South Asia with the broader Islamic world. These multifaceted interactions fostered unprecedented synthesis in intellectual thought, artistic expression, and political organization, creating a joint Hindu-Muslim syncretic culture and giving rise to what scholars' term "Indo-Islamic civilization" — a distinctive cultural formation that continues to influence contemporary India's social fabric [1].

The enduring influence of Muslim culture, forged through centuries of interaction, took on a distinct political dimension with the rise of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and the subsequent Mughal Empire (1526–1857), fundamentally reshaping India's sociopolitical order. The Mughal period witnessed the development of sophisticated administrative mechanisms that facilitated the integration of diverse

religious and ethnic communities. Their governance model, characterized by strategic alliances with regional powers and selective adaptation of indigenous practices, fostered a distinctive syncretistic culture. This synthesis manifested in multiple domains: the emergence of Urdu as a hybrid linguistic medium, the development of Indo-Persian architectural traditions exemplified by monuments like the Taj Mahal and Qutb Minar, and the evolution of composite artistic traditions in music, literature, and visual arts. The Mughal administrative framework, emphasizing pluralistic governance, established precedents for managing religious and cultural diversity that would later influence modern Indian statecraft after India's independence in 1947.

However, the established Mughal framework, despite its emphasis on pluralism, eventually succumbed to the forces of change, leading to a significant rupture in the sociopolitical status of Indian Muslims with the decline of the empire and the rise of British colonial rule. British colonial policies, informed by orientalist epistemologies and imperial strategic imperatives of divide and conquer, systematically reconfigured existing power relations. The implementation of new land revenue systems, educational policies, and administrative reforms disproportionately affected Muslim elites, precipitating significant social and economic displacement. The aftermath of the 1857 rebellion witnessed targeted policies that accelerated the erosion of traditional Muslim institutions and power structures. This period of transition generated complex responses within Muslim communities, ranging from reformist movements like the Aligarh Movement to various forms of political mobilization, ultimately contributing to the emergence of distinct Muslim political consciousness in colonial India [2].

This shift in Muslim fortunes was not isolated; the British colonial presence fundamentally reshaped the entire social, economic, and administrative fabric of India, creating a complex and often disparate experience for various communities. This transition had complex and varied impacts across Indian society, creating a starkly contrasting experience for different communities. While some Hindu elites, particularly in urban centers like Bengal's presidency towns, actively engaged with British educational institutions and administrative opportunities, this engagement was neither uniform nor universal. Many other Hindu communities, especially in rural areas, faced significant economic and social disruption under colonial rule. The notion that Hindu communities uniformly benefited from or adapted to British rule oversimplifies the complex reality of colonial impact. British educational policies and administrative recruitment practices did create new pathways for social mobility, particularly for English-educated urban elites. However, this transformation was selective and stratified, benefiting specific social groups while marginalizing others. The relationship between Hindu communities and colonial governance was thus marked by both adaptation and resistance, collaboration and contestation, reflecting the complex nature of colonial power relations in British India.

While different communities experienced the effects of British rule in diverse ways, as outlined above, the systematic dismantling of traditional power structures, particularly those that had sustained Muslim influence, created a unique set of challenges and transformations and reshaped the political landscape. This transition was incredibly disruptive for Muslim elites, who had held positions of authority within the Mughal administrative framework. The period witnessed a complex realignment of political loyalties and economic relationships as the colonial administration established new patterns of governance and patronage. While some Hindu mercantile and professional classes successfully adapted to these changes, particularly in the presidency towns, many Muslim communities experienced significant social and economic

displacement. Historian S.R. Wasti argues that the British, by strategically favoring Hindu collaborators, intentionally marginalized Muslims and fostered a lasting division between the two communities [3]. As noted by Jim Masselos, this displacement had lasting psychological implications as Muslim communities grappled with the loss of political authority and cultural prestige [4]. However, it is essential to note that these experiences varied significantly across regions and social classes, and the British East India Company's policies of selective collaboration and strategic alliance-building created differential impacts across communities, leading to new patterns of social mobility and economic opportunity. This complex restructuring of social and political hierarchies during the colonial period, with its inherent divisions and tensions, laid the groundwork for the schisms that would later manifest in the lead-up to and aftermath of India's independence [5]. Post-World War II economic pressures compelled Britain's withdrawal from the subcontinent. In the years leading up to this, the Indian National Congress, under Gandhi and Nehru, advocated for independence through civil disobedience. In contrast, the All-India Muslim League, led by Jinnah, sought a separate Muslim state—this volatile socio-political climate culminated in the partition, resulting in mass migrations and heightened religious polarization.

Building upon the legacy of partition and its resulting communal divisions, India's Muslim population today navigates a complex socio-political environment where constitutional secularism and democratic institutions are challenged by evolving societal dynamics. Recent legislative measures, particularly the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the revocation of Article 370 have triggered significant debates on minority rights and religious identity within India's democratic framework [6]. These policy changes, occurring against a backdrop of heightened political polarization and communal tensions, directly threaten the core principles of Indian secularism [7]. In conjunction with the CAA, the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) has further exacerbated anxieties among Muslim communities concerning citizenship rights and constitutional protections, leading to widespread civil society mobilization and public discourse on the nature of Indian democracy. Understanding the complex socio-political environment faced by India's Muslim population requires a deeper examination of the concept of marginality, which provides a framework for analyzing their experiences within the broader societal structure.

## **2. Understanding marginality and minority status**

Marginality, as defined by J. von Braun and F.W. Gatzweiler, denotes 'an involuntary position and condition of an individual or group at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological, and biophysical systems, that prevent them from access to resources, assets, services, restraining freedom of choice, preventing the development of capabilities, and eventually causing extreme poverty' [8]. Fundamentally, marginality signifies exclusion from, or a peripheral existence within, mainstream society, characterized by limited participation in social, economic, and political spheres. This complex social phenomenon is marked by structural exclusion from dominant systems, restricted access to resources and opportunities, diminished involvement in decision-making, and a subordinate position in power dynamics. To fully understand the complexities of marginality, it is essential to consider the theoretical frameworks that elucidate its underlying mechanisms and manifestations.

Theoretically, marginality is analyzed through various frameworks. Postcolonial Theory elucidates how historical colonial legacies perpetuate marginalization,

particularly for historically oppressed groups. Intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 [9], underscores the interconnected nature of social identities (e.g., race, religion, gender, class) and their contribution to multifaceted marginalization. Critical Race Theory examines the interplay between racial identities and power structures, analyzing how institutional practices perpetuate racial marginalization, especially in the context of the United States. Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner [10], explores the impact of group membership on self-concept and intergroup relations. The concept of social exclusion, initially popularized by René Lenoir in 1974 to describe the exclusion of vulnerable populations from French government services [11], refers to the mechanisms that partially or wholly prevent individuals and groups from full societal participation due to biases, economic deprivation, geographical location, or identity-based discrimination. Amartya Sen further developed the concept to understand poverty and underdevelopment [12]. A thorough examination of Muslim marginalization in India necessitates an analysis of the economic, political, and social structures that produce and maintain this condition. Building upon these theoretical underpinnings, the concept of minority status provides a more specific lens through which to examine the experiences of marginalized groups within a society.

## **2.1 Minority status**

The United Nations Human Rights Commission defines an ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority as a group within a state comprising less than half the total population and characterized by shared cultural, religious, or linguistic attributes. Membership in such a minority is voluntary and not contingent upon citizenship or residency. Further clarification of minority status, based on Human Rights Committee jurisprudence, includes: (a) the potential for indigenous populations to concurrently hold minority status; (b) the designation of the entire state, rather than its subdivisions, as the relevant ‘territory’ for minority determination; and (c) the numerical criterion of constituting less than half the state’s population [13]. Sociologist Louis Wirth expanded upon this, defining a minority group as one ‘who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination’ [14]. This definition emphasizes the experience of unequal treatment and perceived discrimination, extending beyond mere numerical minority. Consequently, minority status is understood not only as a numerical distinction but also as a reflection of power imbalances and social disadvantage. A minority group, therefore, is characterized by its distinct racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural identity, which results in diminished power and exposure to discrimination, exclusion, or assimilation pressures within the larger society. Minority status encompasses a group’s numerical, political, and social positioning, extending beyond simple demographic representation to include the dynamics of power and social standing. As Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris outlined, minority groups are identified by five characteristics: (1) unequal treatment and limited control over their lives; (2) distinguishing physical or cultural traits; (3) involuntary group membership; (4) awareness of subordinate status; and (5) a high rate of endogamy [15]. Building on these definitions, we now consider the specific case of Muslim minorities in India.

### 3. Muslim minorities in India

India's National Commission for Minorities Act of 1992, Section 2(c), designates Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis as minority communities. These groups constituted approximately 19.3% of India's total population in the 2011 census, with Muslims comprising 14.2% of the minority population [16]. However, the experience of Indian Muslims extends beyond mere statistical representation. This statistical overview, however, belies the complex social realities faced by Indian Muslims, particularly the internal stratification that challenges the notion of a homogenous community. While officially recognized as a minority group, the Indian Muslim community itself is far from monolithic, exhibiting a complex social stratification that contradicts the Islamic ideal of unity.

#### 3.1 Social stratification among Muslims in India: A complex reality

Islamic doctrine emphasizes a unified community (*Ummah*) without hierarchical caste, contrasting sharply with the Hindu *varna* system. The *varna* system, rooted in texts like the *Manusmriti*, categorizes society into four tiers: Brahmins (priests and scholars), Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and farmers), and Shudras (laborers), with *Avarna* groups (including Dalits) outside this structure. While the *varna* system has faced internal criticism, its influence remains significant. Despite Islam's theoretical rejection of rigid social stratification, the Indian Muslim community exhibits complex hierarchical distinctions influenced by historical and social factors. This is evident in the categorization of Muslims into three primary groups: Ashraf, Ajlaf, and Arzal (Pasmaṇḍa). The *Ashraf*, meaning 'noble' or 'high-born,' trace their lineage to foreign origins (Arab, Persian, Turkish, or Afghan). Within the Ashraf category, the Syeds, considered direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad, hold an esteemed position, traditionally wielding significant social and religious authority and often practicing endogamy. The broader Ashraf group is historically associated with power and privilege. The Ajlaf, on the other hand, encompass local converts and those involved in traditional occupations like agriculture and crafts, representing a more diverse social spectrum. It is noteworthy that remnants of the Hindu *varna* system are evident within the Ajlaf, with some members retaining pre-conversion caste identities, such as Muslim Rajputs [17]. The Arzal, primarily known as Pasmaṇḍas, comprise the vast majority of Indian Muslims (approximately 85%) and occupy the lowest position in the social hierarchy. Their Persian name, meaning 'those who have fallen behind,' highlights the discrimination and political underrepresentation they face. According to Ejaz Ali, founder of the All India Backward Muslim Front, and Dr. Khalid Anis Ansari, Pasmaṇḍa Muslims encompass backward, Adivasi (indigenous tribal), and Dalit groups. They argue that the Muslim political space is exclusionary, disproportionately benefiting upper-caste Ashraf Muslims and marginalizing the majority of Muslims [18]. This exclusionary dynamic, where Pasmaṇḍa Muslims are sidelined, is directly reflected in and reinforced by the deeply ingrained social distinctions that permeate the Indian Muslim community, impacting daily life and contradicting core Islamic principles. Though less rigid than the Hindu *varna* system, these distinctions impact social interactions, including marriage, social gatherings, and resource access. Social taboos and spatial segregation persist. The Quran's emphasis on unity and equality (exemplified in verses like Al-Baqarah 208) [19] contrasts these social divisions. Though contradicting Islamic ideals, these enduring social distinctions have deep historical roots that have shaped

the contemporary manifestations of social stratification within the Indian Muslim community, most notably the Ashraf-Ajlaf divide.

### **3.2 Historical and contemporary manifestations of Muslim “caste”**

The Ashraf-Ajlaf divide, a social hierarchy absent from the Quranic mandate, arose during historical Muslim influxes into India during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal periods. This division results in significant political underrepresentation for Dalit Muslims, exemplified by the disproportionately low number of Pasmanda parliamentarians: only 60 out of 400 Muslim members between the First and Thirteenth Lok Sabha -the lower house of the parliament of India. While Ashraf constituted 2.01% of the population, their representation was 4.5%, indicating a disproportionately higher presence in the legislature [18]. This political marginalization is a stark reality that demands attention and action, further compounded by deeply entrenched social practices that perpetuate segregation.

As political scientist, Dr. Aftab Alam observes, “caste and untouchability is a lived reality for Muslims living in India and South Asia,” and “untouchability is the community’s worst-kept secret” [20]. Studies corroborate this, revealing the existence of “concepts of purity and impurity; clean and unclean castes” within Muslim groups [20].

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, architect of the Indian Constitution and champion of Dalit rights, recognized the existence of caste-like divisions within the Muslim community. Based on the 1901 Census Report, he drew parallels to social evils prevalent in Hindu society, stating, “Take the caste system. Islam speaks of brotherhood. Everybody infers that Islam must be free from slavery and caste... But if slavery has gone, caste among Musalmans has remained... There can thus be no manner of doubt that the Muslim Society in India is afflicted by the same social evils as afflict the Hindu society” [21].

Building on Ambedkar’s observation of caste-like divisions within the Muslim community, as evidenced by the 1901 Census Report, he further details the specific forms of discrimination faced by Dalit Muslims. He notes, “With them no other Mahomedan would associate, and they are forbidden to enter the mosque or to use the public burial ground,” highlighting the stark social exclusion they endured. This segregation, he argues, starkly contrasts with Hindu society, where social reform movements actively sought to combat caste. Ambedkar observes, “The Muslims... do not realise that they are evils and consequently do not agitate for their removal. Indeed, they oppose any change in their existing practices” [21]. This lack of internal reform, he suggests, perpetuates the very social evils that plague Hindu society, demonstrating that the problem of caste discrimination transcends religious boundaries.

Dr. Ambedkar’s analysis of caste-like divisions within Muslim society establishes a crucial historical foundation. We turn to empirical research to understand how these divisions manifest in contemporary India, specifically a groundbreaking study conducted in Uttar Pradesh by Trivedi et al. This study, surveying over 7000 households, builds upon the foundational observations of scholars like Ali Anwar and Dr. Alam, who highlighted the presence of caste-based discrimination in Muslims. Trivedi et al. provide a critical mass of empirical data, revealing concrete examples of the marginalization faced by Dalit Muslims. Their findings paint a disturbing picture: Dalit Muslims experience social segregation at weddings, are often seated and served separately at feasts, and may even use distinct utensils in upper-caste Muslim homes. Children face segregation in schools, and the deceased are frequently denied burial in common grounds. While mosque attendance is generally shared, instances

of discrimination persist. Furthermore, a significant portion of Dalit Muslims are relegated to menial labor, reinforcing their marginalized status [22].

This stark empirical evidence of caste-like discrimination within the Muslim community, as highlighted by Trivedi et al., provides a crucial foundation for understanding how broader theories of marginality play out in the specific experiences of Indian Muslims, as we will explore through several case studies.

#### **4. Intersectionality in practice: Class, space, and Muslim victimization**

Building upon the foundational understanding of caste-like divisions within the Muslim community, as evidenced by Trivedi et al.'s study, it is crucial to recognize that factors of class and spatial distribution further complicate the victimization of Muslims in India. The violence and discrimination faced by Muslims are not uniform across the community. Instead, it is deeply stratified and targeted. Violence often targets specific Muslim spaces, particularly subaltern spaces such as slums, where lower-caste Muslims predominantly reside. The Muzaffarnagar violence of 2013 exemplifies this, where rioting mobs targeted Muslim colonies but spared those of Muslim Jats and Muslim Gujjars, highlighting how social identities intersect with vulnerability [23]. Victims of violence are disproportionately from lower socioeconomic strata, often migrants from states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to urban centers like Mumbai and Ahmedabad, who reside in vulnerable communities. Notably, while Pasmanda Muslims are disproportionately victimized, the “beneficiaries of Muslim victimhood,” according to Dr. Khalid Anis Ansari, are often the Ashrafs, who are over-represented in positions of power and influence [18].

The fear of Hindutva and the perceived threat to their existence often prompt Muslims to close ranks, a phenomenon that inadvertently reinforces Ashraf political dominance. As Dr. Khalid Anis Ansari argues, ‘Hindutva seeks to homogenize the Hindu community, but it has also, ironically, led to the homogenization of the Muslim community. Hindutva has been beneficial for both upper caste Hindus and upper caste Muslims’ [18]. This paradoxical outcome of Hindutva, where both Hindu and Muslim upper castes benefit from a homogenized community response, sets the stage for examining the gap between constitutional protections and the lived experiences of Muslim minorities [24], a disparity that necessitates a critical analysis through frameworks like Critical Race Theory.

#### **5. CRT and the Indian judiciary: Examining the disparity in minority rights enforcement**

India's 75-year-old Constitution [25] protects religious freedoms and minority rights, aiming to uphold secularism and prevent discrimination. Articles 25–30 form the basis of these protections. Article 25 affirms the freedom of conscience and the right to practice and propagate religion, subject to public order. Articles 29 and 30 grant minority communities' autonomy in managing their educational institutions, preserving their cultural identity and priorities without excessive state intervention. These provisions reflect the Constitution's commitment to fostering diversity while protecting minority rights within the broader democratic framework [26].

However, the reality of these protections is subject to the judiciary's interpretation, leading to a complex and evolving application. This nuanced and sometimes

contradictory nature of India's legal approach, particularly concerning minority rights, underscores the necessity of employing a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. CRT allows for a deeper examination of how racialized power structures shape legal interpretations and contribute to the ongoing challenges faced by minority communities.

Landmark cases, such as *St. Xavier's College v. State of Gujarat* [27], have expanded the autonomy of minority educational institutions, reinforcing constitutional safeguards against state encroachment. Conversely, rulings like *Ahmedabad St. Xavier's College Society v. State of Gujarat* [28] have imposed limitations, demonstrating an evolving judicial understanding that sometimes prioritizes broader educational standards. This oscillation between protection and restriction underscores the judiciary's effort to balance constitutional guarantees with the need for a unified legal structure. Therefore, the interpretive latitude of the judiciary plays a crucial role in shaping the scope of minority protections. The nuanced and sometimes contradictory nature of India's legal approach, particularly concerning minority rights, is starkly illustrated by the controversy surrounding the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the proposed National Register of Citizens.

### 5.1 The CAA and NRC: Challenging the foundations of Indian secularism

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) [29], passed by the Indian Parliament on December 11, 2019, and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) have ignited significant controversy regarding India's constitutional principles of equality and secularism, particularly concerning their impact on the Muslim population. The CAA [30] amends the Citizenship Act of 1955, offering expedited citizenship to non-Muslim religious minorities—Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians—from neighboring countries while explicitly excluding Muslims. It also excludes approximately 58,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. This act marked the first instance of religion being overtly used as a criterion for Indian citizenship [31], drawing global criticism for its discriminatory nature and perceived violation of secular principles [32]. Critics argue that the CAA establishes a religious hierarchy of citizenship, potentially undermining Article 14's guarantee of equality [33]. The proposed NRC, requiring documentary proof of citizenship, has further heightened anxieties among Muslims, who fear potential statelessness due to documentation challenges [34].

These policies have triggered widespread public protests [35] and civil society mobilization [36] symbolizing resistance against a perceived threat to India's secular ethos and the democratic compact. Civil society organizations, scholars, and activists contend that the CAA and NRC could marginalize Muslims [37], exacerbate communal polarization, and destabilize India's social fabric [38]. The policies redefine state intervention in religious identity and risk institutionalizing discrimination. Beyond legal implications, these changes deepen communal divisions and reinforce perceptions of exclusion among Muslims. The CAA and NRC have ignited debates about the ethical limits of state intervention in citizenship and religious identity, representing a paradigm shift that necessitates a reevaluation of India's identity as a secular democracy [39].

While the CAA and NRC raise fundamental questions about citizenship and identity, understanding their full impact requires examining the existing political and socio-economic vulnerabilities of the Muslim population. It is precisely within this context of contested legal interpretations that the lingering effects of colonial legacies, social identity dynamics, and the tangible realities of social exclusion become acutely visible.

## **6. The architecture of marginalization: From theory to socio-economic reality**

Post-colonial theory illuminates how historical power dynamics, rooted in the legacy of British rule, continue to shape the contemporary marginalization of Muslim minorities in India. This framework reveals how colonial constructs of “otherness”, and the perpetuation of communal divisions have fostered systemic discrimination. Social identity theory further explains this marginalization by highlighting how the categorization of Muslims as a distinct “out-group” leads to prejudice and discriminatory behavior from the Hindu majority, who perceive themselves as the “in-group.” This “in-group/out-group” dynamic, coupled with the reinforcement of negative stereotypes, fuels social exclusion, manifesting in limited access to education, employment, and political representation. The concept of social exclusion, therefore, encapsulates the tangible consequences of these theoretical frameworks, demonstrating how Muslims are systematically denied full participation in Indian society, resulting in their economic and social marginalization. Building upon the theoretical understanding of marginalization, it is crucial to examine the tangible ways in which these dynamics translate into concrete socio-economic disadvantages experienced by Muslim minorities in India.

Muslims in India face discrimination in employment, education, and housing, limiting their access to political power, wealth, healthcare, and essential services [40]. Reports like the Sachar Committee Report [41] highlight this persistent marginalization [42]. Systemic barriers contribute to educational disenfranchisement, including inadequate education, poor infrastructure, and lack of institutional support. This leads to limited access to quality employment, particularly in the public sector, which further restricts socio-economic mobility and participation in policymaking. Government initiatives addressing these inequalities have been insufficient due to poor implementation, limited outreach, and bureaucratic hurdles. This results in a widening socio-economic gap between Muslims and other communities, hindering social mobility [43].

Beyond these systemic socio-economic challenges, Indian Muslims also encounter significant obstacles in the realms of justice and political representation, further compounding their marginalization. They also struggle to obtain justice after experiencing discrimination despite constitutional protections [44]. Muslim representation in parliament has stagnated, with only 5% of seats held by Muslims after the 2019 elections, partly due to the rise of the BJP, which had no Muslim members in parliament by mid-2022 [45]. A 2019 report revealed anti-Muslim bias among police, hindering their intervention in crimes against Muslims [46]. There is also widespread impunity for those who attack Muslims, with courts and government bodies sometimes overturning convictions or withdrawing cases against Hindus involved in violence against Muslims [47]. This pattern of legal and political marginalization is further exacerbated by increasing restrictions on religious freedoms and the implementation of punitive extrajudicial measures.

States in India have increasingly passed laws restricting Muslims’ religious freedoms, including anti-conversion laws [48] and bans on wearing headscarves in school [49]. Authorities have also used extrajudicial means, such as ‘bulldozer justice’, to punish Muslims [50]. In 2022, authorities demolished homes, primarily targeting Muslims, under the pretext of lacking proper permits. Critics argue that these demolitions were retaliatory actions against Muslims, particularly those who participated in protests [51]. Despite the Supreme Court’s statement that demolitions ‘cannot be

retaliatory’, the practice continues [52]. These multifaceted challenges manifest in tangible socio-economic disparities, as evidenced by housing segregation and stark economic indicators.

Indian Muslims also face housing discrimination that forces many into disadvantaged neighborhoods with limited access to essential services [53]. Housing discrimination, both overt and covert, based on religious identity, leads to residential segregation and spatial marginalization and reinforces social stigma, further restricting access to quality healthcare, education, and public services. A 2023 data analysis by the Hindustan Times, drawing from the All-India Debt and Investment Survey (AIDIS) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), reveals that Indian Muslims have the lowest asset and consumption levels among major religious groups in India. The survey indicates that they are the poorest religious demographic and are disproportionately represented among India’s poor [54]. Furthermore, research indicates that Muslims, who comprise less than 15% of India’s population according to the 2011 census, account for approximately 25% of the country’s beggars [55]. Gallup polls have also highlighted that Indian Muslims are more likely than any other religious group, including non-religious individuals, to report ‘suffering’ [56]. This socio-economic disenfranchisement severely limits social mobility, perpetuates negative stereotypes, and reinforces poverty cycles. Adding to the burdens of socio-economic marginalization, Indian Muslims are also increasingly subject to violent attacks by Hindu mobs.

Vigilante violence against Muslims has become increasingly prevalent in India. ‘Cow protection’ mobs have become a common source of anti-Muslim violence in India [57], leading the Supreme Court to caution against their normalization [58]. These vigilante groups, who attack individuals suspected of trading or killing cows, considered sacred by many Hindus, have caused the deaths of at least forty-four people, mostly Muslims, according to a 2019 Human Rights Watch report [59]. Muslim men have also been attacked and arrested under accusations of ‘love jihad’ [60]. The escalating threat of vigilante violence, communal riots, [61] coupled with the state’s often inadequate response [62], underscores the precarious position of Muslim minorities in India and necessitates urgent action to safeguard their fundamental rights and security.

## **7. Conclusion**

The contemporary socio-political environment in India reveals a widening chasm between constitutional ideals and societal realities, particularly for its Muslim minority. As this paper has demonstrated, Indian Muslims face systemic discrimination across multiple fronts, including socio-economic marginalization, limited political representation, restrictions on religious freedoms, and the alarming rise of vigilante violence. This multifaceted discrimination underscores the urgent need for inter-communal dialog and understanding, as media portrayals and political narratives often perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce social divisions.

These developments raise critical questions regarding the viability of India’s secular democratic framework and its capacity to protect minority rights while promoting inclusive citizenship. The escalating violence and persistent socio-economic disparities challenge the very foundation of India’s pluralistic society. Addressing these disparities requires a comprehensive approach, including educational reform, equitable employment representation, financial inclusion, and effective policy implementation

to create a more just and inclusive socio-economic environment. This involves robust legal enforcement and policy reforms and a commitment to fostering a culture of tolerance and mutual respect. Ultimately, the future of India's secular democracy hinges on its ability to ensure the equitable treatment and protection of all its citizens, regardless of religious affiliation.


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## Chapter 6

# Mapping Modern Islamophobia: A Contextualizing BJP's Hindutva Ideology and Muslim (Mis) Representation in Indian Media

*Muhammad Asad Latif*

### Abstract

The vast variety of linguistic, social, political, and economic disparities that the people of India are subject to is reflected in the country's complex and diversified media landscape. The propagation of false information and divisive stories about Muslims in online media is a contemporary example of an Islamophobic tendency in Indian media, which has fueled social, religious, and political division and repeated acts of violence against Muslims. It appears that a particular mindset has emerged and that Islamophobia is dominating the entire nation. Analyzing modern Indian society reveals that severe Islamophobia permeates every aspect of the society. In recent times, the spread of Islamophobic content in the media, especially social media, has become a serious danger to the social cohesion of India. This content is frequently promoted by political figures and their allies to push xenophobic political agendas. This chapter will look at instances of Islamophobia, the government's position on the subject, and the purposeful and well-planned spread of factually incorrect narratives. It will also look at the Islamophobic media coverage in India.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, Hindutva ideology, Muslim identity, Indian media, ethnicity

### 1. Introduction

The percentage of Muslims in India is 14.2%, whereas the percentage of Hindus is 79.8% [1]. The country's partition, the misrepresentation of medieval history, the divide-and-rule policies of the British government in India at the time [2], the ensuing social and political developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [3], and the hateful agenda of communal fascism all had a lasting effect on Hindu-Muslim relations in India [4]. The Muslims in India are now the most marginalized, easily overlooked [5, 6], and intentionally discriminated against minorities due to a combination of these circumstances. Frequently, they are portrayed as "Son of Babar", "overpopulous", "Snakes", "unpatriotic" [7], "Mughlai", "invaders" [8], and "outsiders" [9]. Although there has always been hatred and violence toward Muslims in India [10], the tide of Islamophobia has considerably increased since Narendra Modi took

office, giving extremist Hindu organizations more confidence [11]. Islamophobia creation and maintenance is currently a lucrative and satisfying endeavor [12]. The political establishment partakes in the activity and seems to inspire others [13]; hence, it becomes normalized since the State's administrative apparatus does not view it as a danger to the integrity and national security of the nation [14]. Even political figures in positions of constitutional authority are creating an Islamophobic narrative [15].

It is vital to remember that the ascent of the rightist political party in the center since 2014 has been largely attributed to Islamophobia [1]. Thus, the existing political system also requires politics of dread based on Islamophobia [16]. India's Islamophobic tendency has resulted in violence against Muslims on a regular basis as well as communal tensions [17]. The demonization and character assassination of Muslims in India currently employ the same techniques that were used to demonize and destroy the Jewish people in Germany through radio [18], newspapers [19], and motion pictures [20]. In this study, the scholar argues that a major issue that has lately surfaced is the spread of Islamophobic material in the media, especially on social media, which is frequently done by political figures or those who support them in order to push their own political agendas [21]. This unsettling tendency should also be considered and examined in light of the dangerous triangle formed by embedded media [22], crony capitalism, and other factors [23]. In nearly every society, this development is a challenge to democracy [24]. Studying this trend requires a whole new paradigm that goes beyond the insights of Antonio Gramsci, who astutely observed the intellectual hegemony and domination of the capitalist class, and Karl Marx, who concluded that the economically dominant class is invariably the politically dominant class.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Racialized Muslims**

The dangers of Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims [25, 26] pose a threat to the community's fundamental human rights [27]. Islamophobia in India has become more commonplace by the day. Noting that attempts were underway to mainstream Islamophobia in the nation, novelist and activist Arundhati Roy drew a comparison between Nazi Germany and modern-day India. Regretfully, the media—the fourth pillar of a thriving democracy—works hand in hand with the establishment of Islamophobia and incites animosity and fear toward Muslims among India's majority population [28]. In addition to normalizing Islamophobia, this type of media atmosphere fuels anti-Muslim communal violence and lynchings [29] as well as other acts of collective violence against Muslims [30]. The attempts by a portion of the media to justify the horrifying acts of violence against Muslims are the most unsettling aspect of this epidemic. In light of these facts, the word “lynching” was introduced to Indians' communal memory in 2014 [20].

The ascension of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) to central government and the appointment of Modi as prime minister has given the rightist forces more confidence to attack Muslims, Christians, Dalits,<sup>1</sup> Communists, and rationalists throughout the nation [31]. It all started on June 2, 2014, when Mohsin Shaikh, an IT specialist,

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<sup>1</sup> About 200 million people make up the Dalits minority, who were traditionally marginalized by the Hindu hierarchy and tended to work in lowly jobs.

was brutally murdered in Pune for growing a beard as he was making his way home from evening prayer [32]. It is evident from the government's response to the horrific murders, the blame game, the style of reporting in the mainstream media, and the subsequent responses on social media that this is the new normal under the current political system [33]. One coordinated type of group violence is lynching. It cannot occur unless a sizable portion of the populace in a particular culture believes that collective violence against an actual or imagined enemy is warranted at this moment [34]. Thus, lynching may thus look or be falsely shown as an act of violence that happens on its own, but in fact, it is the result of a protracted hate campaign and coordinated propaganda in which the media plays a significant part [35]. It is the outward expression of ingrained biases, prejudices, and hate that a sizable portion of the populace in a certain culture possesses. Collectively dehumanizing and discrediting a community is also known as lynching [36]. A community's other members are informed that their fellow citizens are weak and should yield to the will of the majority when a member of that community is lynched [37].

Data on lynching instances has not been published by the BJP-led administration in power. However, lynching instances are reportedly on the rise due to the current right-wing government, according to media reports [38]. Since 2015, there have been 117 violent events in India connected to cow protection, according to India Spend. Quint reports that since 2015, 88 individuals have died in lynchings that have occurred around India [39]. According to media reports, there were 23 mob lynching occurrences in India in 2020 as opposed to 107 instances in 2019. There appears to be a connection between Islamophobia and the lynching instances that have been on the rise since 2014 [23]. The deliberate misinformation that Hindutva<sup>2</sup> organizations have been spreading about Muslims is to blame for the recent spike in acts of collective violence against Muslims [40]. A dedicated and paid army of rightist force's IT Cell manages social media campaigns to generate hate, which eventually creates anxiety and fear among the majority [41]. These organizations purposefully bring emotive issues, such as love jihad,<sup>3</sup> Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) jihad, Bhoomi-jihad [42], corona jihad, population explosion, cow slaughter, Islamic terrorism, etc., into the political and social arena [1].

In order to strengthen social and political links among the majority communities—which are otherwise split both horizontally and vertically—it is simple to take advantage of this desired dread and anxiety [42]. It brings to mind a comment made by Huntington [43]: “People use politics to define their identity as much as to advance their interests”. Only when we are aware of who we are not, and frequently only when we are aware of whoever we oppose, can we know who we are? This “*fear of the minority*” would bring the majority together to cast their votes in the way that they intended [44]. Regretfully, rightist forces appear to be benefiting from this design. But the deliberate misinformation directed at minorities, particularly Muslims, has not only given right-wing groups the dreaded terror they seek, but it has also fostered a sort of public acceptance for single-handedly destroying the Muslim community and

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<sup>2</sup> The term Hindutva was first used in 1892 to promote Hindu traditions by Chandranath Basu (1844–1910). However, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966) modified the phrase in 1923 to fit his own philosophy, and the term thereafter became a symbol for other Hindus. According to Asad Ul Din Owaisi Hindutva is “In Popular Parlance, In Popular Understanding, Basing on Theory and Basing on Everything Called Hindutva”.

<sup>3</sup> As a result, non-Muslims began to believe that Muslim males pushed Hindu women to convert to Islam, cheated, and supported the Muslim-Indian conflict.

teaching its members a lesson [45]. Some Hindus are influenced by the propaganda and carry out horrific violent crimes. For example, a highly motivated Hindu fanatic named Shambhulal Reger gravely injured a migrant Muslim laborer before burning him alive after being incited by the rhetoric of “*love jihad*” [46].

The horrific deed of the victim being burned alive and wounded by his assistant was captured on camera, and the video was then posted on social media with an explicit threat to Muslims opposing the so-called “*love jihad*”, demonstrating the extent of hatred directed toward Muslims [47]. In order to punish Muslims, he also encouraged Hindus to get together and organize. One way to measure the normality, rather than the promotion, of violence against Muslims is to look at the fact that on March 25, 2018, in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, Hindu costumes brought out a tableau of Shambhulal Reger during the Ram Navami (a Hindu celebration celebrating the birthday of Rama) parade [19]. Even during the epidemic, there was a fresh wave of lynchings, despite Prime Minister Modi’s awareness of the occurrences twice in the nation following a protracted period of calculated quiet. Even a government minister was seen decorating eight Hindus found guilty of lynching a Muslim with garlands [23].

## **2.2 Hindu to Hindutva and Muslims as “*other*”**

The situation in Kashmir is also exploited to promote anti-Muslim sentiment. The story of Asifa Bano, an 8-year-old girl, who was abducted, tortured, raped, and then brutally killed in Kathua, is an example of pervasive and deep-rooted hostility toward Muslims [48]. By apprehending eight men—four of whom were police officers—for the crime and evidence destruction, the police were able to unravel the enigma surrounding a challenging case. The rightist Hindu organizations resisted the arrest of those accused of this horrible act [49]. While two ministers from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in Jammu and Kashmir marched shoulder to shoulder in a demonstration in favor of the accused, attorneys attempted to stop the police from submitting a charge sheet [50]. It is noteworthy to remark that a large number of Hindus actively fought the communal movements in addition to disapproving of these violent activities. For instance, despite several threats from rightist organizations, Hindu woman attorney Deepika Singh Rajawat took up the case of Asifa [51].<sup>4</sup>

It is important to carefully examine how the media’s division plays a part in the development, maintenance, and legitimization of Islamophobia as well as the climate of hatred toward Muslims that gives rise to such graphic instances. It is important to note that this is more than just an act of violence that happened on its own or an issue with law and order [52]. There exists an intellectual paradigm that justifies the collective aggression directed at Muslims. It is important to note that Golwalkar, an ideology of the Sangh Parivar,<sup>5</sup> portrayed Communists, Muslims [5, 6], and Christians as internal enemies [50]. In essence, those who commit acts of collective violence are addressing the internal dangers that Golwalkar has outlined. The goal of this deliberate onslaught on Muslims is to demoralize them mentally, damage their

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<sup>4</sup> The top central hiring organization in India for central government employees is the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). In September 2020, the achievement of Muslim youngsters in the UPSC services and other high-level occupations was referred to as a *jihad* by the right-wing Indian news station Sudarshan News.

<sup>5</sup> The broad phrase “Sangh Parivar”, which means “united family”, refers to the Hindu extremist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its allied groups, which include the Bharatiya Janata Party, which is now in power.

economy, isolate them socially, and render them useless in politics [14]. This ideological narrative of “othering” is fueling a terrible mass rage that is causing lynchings every few moments and has the power to release enough emotional lava to demolish the ideals of a composite culture as well as a delicate intercommunal peace [42]. Genocide might result from this pattern if it is not stopped by great political resolve and societal mobilization. The US-based well-known global human rights organization Genocide Watch has also claimed that there were early signs and processes of genocide in the Indian State of Assam and Kashmir [23].

While there are several nonprofit groups that are really and unceasingly striving to uphold interpersonal benevolence, social harmony, and the spirit of peaceful coexistence among communities, they are undoubtedly calling for help [33]. Even more regrettable is Indian society’s reticence in cases of ruthless killings. India is replete with examples of “unity in diversity”, with hundreds of them [46]. After 2014, though, something unexpected happened: mobs started baying for the murder of Dalits [39], Muslims [27], and everyone else who dared to question their conduct or voice an opposing opinion [24]. The truth is that prejudice has intensified and that anti-Islamic sentiment is spreading everywhere [30]. The harsh reality is that Hindutva has sparked mob lynchings of minority groups throughout India, particularly targeting Muslims and Dalits, as well as acts of terrorism. On March 6, 2019, the UN human rights commissioner stated: There are indications that harassment and targeting of minorities—particularly Muslims and members of historically marginalized and disadvantaged groups like Dalits and Adivasis—are becoming more common [1]. A crime against a Dalit is committed every 15 minutes, six Dalit women are raped every day, and hundreds of thousands of Dalits are forced to work as bonded or child laborers due to the widespread untouchability that persists in hundreds of villages. The Dalit groom still requires the court’s assistance to be married on a horse or an elephant, even after 74 years of independence, and he gets harassed merely for growing a mustache [41].

In India, hate crimes against Muslims have been more frequent, especially after the new coronavirus epidemic [36]. Extremists have claimed that Muslims are the cause of the epidemic, citing allegations that certain Indian hospitals separated Muslim patients from Hindu patients [11]. They have been influenced by the radical Hindu organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Two newborn infants perished in April 2020 as a result of hospitals rejecting their Muslim moms due to an increase in Islamophobia linked to the coronavirus [39]. When this virus initially began to spread in India, pro-government media outlets and TV hosts began attacking Muslims, disseminating false information and invented conspiracies, and attempting to blame the community for the illness’s spread [40]. Targeting Muslims began in March 2020, using a religious gathering of the Islamic missionary outfit Tablighi Jamaat at the Nizamuddin Center in New Delhi as a pretext. All over the nation, a socioeconomic boycott of Muslims has been officially launched [4]. Additionally, the Twitter hashtag corona-jihad was created. Ministries within the Indian government have persisted in attributing the COVID-19 pandemic on the Muslim community.

Additionally, Islamophobia has grown commonplace in many Indian businesses and educational establishments. The most esteemed central university in the nation is Jawaharlal Nehru University [46]. It is renowned for having secular credentials and excellent standards. The university’s student council and teachers’ association had rejected the contentious counterterrorism course, which was authorized in September 2021. The optional course, Counter Terrorism, Asymmetric Conflicts,

and Strategies for Cooperation among Major Powers, had garnered attention due to its purported promotion of RSS ideology and preference for a certain faith [48]. The course attempts to denigrate Islam and Muslims by focusing on jihadi terrorism. The introduction of a course on Islamic terrorism is a clear example of Islamophobia, which is regrettably being encouraged by the government in a nation with a sizable Muslim population like India [29]. Even more regrettable is the fact that this is being done via an institution that is known for being progressive, secular, and scientific around the world [18].

### **3. Note for method**

This research will examine some of the gender inequities that exist in Indian society and are getting worse because of the current political system using Gooden's [53] social equity framework. Gooden [53] highlights the concern that governments throughout the globe have when it comes to tackling issues of inequality, noting that these areas of governance are generally regarded as delicate, disagreeable, difficult, or troublesome. In order for a country to develop, its leaders must take on and tackle these challenging challenges. The fundamental causes of the widening gaps in India under the BJP-led administration, which has a Hindutva agenda, are these uncomfortable subjects: caste, class, gender, and religion. Hindutva is not just a phenomenon of culture but also a political, social, and economic force in India. Brahmanical ideology, the source of Hindutva, sees women as objects to be subjugated and controlled in order to maintain a hierarchy of caste and gender in society. The strategy will involve three main components: (I) naming the inequality/ies means claim; (II) investigating the root causes of the inequality/ies means blame; and (III) providing recommendations for substantive action to eliminate the inequality/ies means claim. I also use the intersectionality lens in my study to look at complex issues pertaining to gender, caste, religion, and class in India. This research claims that since Muslims carry the "triple burden" of gender bias, caste prejudice, and ethnicity-based violence, they suffer specific and unique obstacles. By going further into their lives, the current study seeks to give a thorough picture of the socioeconomic and cultural conditions Muslims in India endure. Inequality in India contributes significantly to disparities in political representation, resource accessibility, and vulnerability to violence and discrimination. This is because researchers have long been interested in how media portrayals of race, caste, community, and religion reflect the attitudes of dominant populations toward minority groups. There is no other religious group in the world that has sparked as much controversy and discussion as Muslims. This study's main goal is to comprehend how Muslims, India's largest minority population, have been portrayed in the media. There is a free press in India, the biggest democracy in the world. The way Muslims are portrayed in India is greatly influenced by the media. The way that Muslims are portrayed and slanted varies greatly throughout English newspapers. In contrast to its counterpart in the communal language press, the English language press presented and interpreted the Gujarat communal riots in a way that was overwhelmingly favorable to Muslims, revealing the communal components of the disturbances during the research period. However, mainstream narratives adhered to a traditional framework that has not done much to alter perceptions of the Muslim population in India. The following are the research questions of the study:

- RQ 1: How Muslims and Islam are portrayed in Indian media?  
RQ 2: Are Indian Muslims has been racialized?  
RQ 3: What kinds of prejudices are faced by Muslims in India?  
RQ 4: What role did religion have in the constitution of India?  
RQ 5: What is the global response to the growing instances of prejudice in India?

## 4. Results and findings

### 4.1 Mediatic (Mis)representations: History to legend

One of the main sources of the increased hostility, jealousy [39], and resentment that Indians have for one another appears to be the media [24]. Electronic and social media are dubious sources of blame for undermining India's communal harmony and unity and separating the country on religious lines [30]. It appears that the media has been waging a hate campaign against the nation's Muslims for the past few years by formalizing it as a party. The media unilaterally targets Muslims and works to incite hatred against them in all of these circumstances, whether it is a marriage, divorce, polygamy, the topic of a growing population, or a campaign to halt the spread of COVID-19 [46]. It has now gotten to the point where every event that occurs anywhere in the globe is linked to Islam and Muslims in an attempt to discredit Muslims. If Saudi Arabian oil supplies drop, Muslims in India will bear the brunt of it. When Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan speaks of the unity of Muslims, the seeds of treachery start to sprout among Indian Muslims [1].

The state of affairs has gotten so bad that the shift occurring in Afghanistan is also being directed at the Muslims of India [51]. The Taliban's comeback to power in Afghanistan has provided Hindu extremists in India with yet another justification to incite fresh Islamophobia against the Muslim minority [23]. All Indian talk shows heavily included hateful rhetoric directed toward Muslims, while television news stations covered Afghanistan, the Taliban, Muslims, and terrorism around the clock. Television stations seem to be trying to improve the public's perception of Muslims in Afghanistan after the recent changes [32]. Prominent Hindi- and English-language television news outlets were seen making a lot of effort to demonstrate that Indian Muslims were involved in the Afghanistan tragedy. Additionally, the ruling party and its officials are heedlessly inciting anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia in India through the Taliban's entrance [54]. Electronic media serves this function as a tool of the ruling party. Simultaneously, the identical phenomenon is observed on blogs, social media platforms, and individual users' Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and so on [19]. Poisonous anti-Muslim content abounds on social media, and the number of people spreading it is rising daily. The community as a whole has suffered for a long time from the chilly and callous attitude that certain media outlets, TV shows, and social media platforms have taken against Muslims for their character assassination. Character assassination, lying, and propaganda have become the media's top priorities [21].

In addition to social media, the film industry has been used as a weapon in this full-scale offensive against Muslims, which has stoked animosity across communities in India. *72 Hoorain* (2023), *The Kerala Story* (2023), and *The Kashmir Files* (2022) are three recent films that propagated Islamophobia and accused the Indian Muslim minority of practicing a harsh, barbaric, and uncivilized religion [19]. Hindutva activists vowed to expel Muslims from a hamlet in Uttarakhand in April 2023 after being

influenced by *The Kashmir Files*. The media landscape in India is characterized by extensive coverage of hate speeches made by political figures, primarily those affiliated with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other rightist political groups. The speeches' passages are frequently taken out of context and used to spread hateful remarks about Muslims [47]. The reporting in print media and prime-time talk shows, news items, and the so-called Big Fights on mainstream TV channels like *Zee News*, *Sudarshan News*, *Republic TV*, *Times Now*, *India TV*, *Aaj Tak*, and so forth seem to indicate a connection between the media and the hate-mongering leaders [39].

The media has frequently covered BJP officials' statements in public that Indian Muslims should be treated suspiciously because they pose a threat to the nation's social and political structure. Prime Minister Modi himself accused rival political parties of pandering to Muslim voters at the expense of Hindu voters in 2017 during his campaign for state elections [30]. He accused the opposition-led Uttar Pradesh government of catering to the Muslim minority by allocating more funds for Muslim cemeteries than for Hindu cremation sites. The media has also documented incidents in which RSS officials have made inflammatory and divisive comments in the community. For instance, in March 2017, a prominent member of the Rashtriya Sangh Parivar claimed that during the anti-Muslim riot in Gujarat state in 2002, Hindus had put 2000 Muslims to the cemetery [35]. In January 2021, Anand Swaroop Shukla, the minister of rural development for Uttar Pradesh, stated that many Muslims were slain in encounters and that it was a plot for them not to leave India during the partition. In April 2020, Uttar Pradesh-based BJP politician Suresh Tiwari publicly urged people not to purchase veggies from Muslim farmers [10].

We must realize that “*Outsider*”, “*Us versus Them*”, “*Aliens*”, is the fundamental tenet of the RSS's philosophy. Jains, Buddhists, and Hindus are part of “*Us*”, whereas Christians and Muslims are part of “*Outsiders*”, “*Them*”, “*Aliens*”. The ideology of the Sangh Parivar holds that the creation of great texts in an advanced language like Sanskrit by the Aryans led to the development of a great civilization and culture in this region, whereas the contributions of subsequent languages, such as those of the Muslims and Christians, led to all sorts of abnormalities [52]. In Golwalkar's Bunch of Thoughts, the second Sarsanghchalak [head] of the RSS, Muslims are explicitly described as the nation's greatest threat and connected to an anti-Indian plot. Golwalkar [55] made a lot of patronized statements like:

*“The terrible lesson has been that enemies within the nation are a far bigger threat to national security than foreign aggressors. It would be suicide to fool ourselves into thinking that Muslims have suddenly become patriots following the establishment of Pakistan; on the contrary, the threat posed by Muslims has multiplied tenfold, serving as a launchpad for all of their upcoming aggressive plans against our nation”.*

Inspired by Bunch of Thoughts, the Rashtriya Sammelan Sammelans (RSS) boasts 6 million active members who meet in 70,000 branches daily throughout India [32]. Even prominent members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are openly displaying religious sectarianism and competing with one another in it. Since the BJP came to power in May 2014, and particularly since members of Parliament have been vocal in their anti-Muslim rhetoric, the Muslim community has been extremely concerned about the government's ability to feed Hindu nationalist extremism [33]. Since Yogi Adityanath, a hard-line Hindu monk, was appointed chief minister in 2017, anti-Muslim prejudice in Uttar Pradesh (UP) has gotten worse. There is a *Washington Post* article on him:

*“Adityanath is a divisive and very controversial character due to his violent, misogynistic, and anti-Muslim remarks. He has been a vocal advocate of the Love Jihad movement, which seeks to stop Muslim youth from being married to Hindu girls. Without offering any evidence, he claims that the campaign's real objective is to convert Hindu women to Islam. His adherents have insisted on raping Muslim women who are discovered in their tombs. In 2015, he said that if given the chance, he would install sculptures of Hindu deities in every mosque. In an undated video uploaded in 2014, he said, “If [Muslims] take one Hindu girl, we'll take 100 Muslim girls.” If they kill one Hindu, we'll kill 100 Muslims” [54].*

These quotes are from the 2006 documentary film *“Safron War: Radicalization of Hinduism 2006”*. Leading the charge among these leaders is Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who has a history of making extremely offensive remarks about Islam. On August 31, 2014, Adityanath stated, “We want you (minorities) to not kill anybody and live peacefully and concentrate on progress”, during a TV program called *Apki Adalat* (Your Court) [54]. In the language they can comprehend, we will educate them on how to maintain peace if the other side does not. Adityanath stated at a Uttar Pradesh rally that Muslim and Hindu cultures could never coexist and that a religious war would inevitably break out, so Hindus should organize and take the issue head-on. Adityanath's co-speaker at the rally demanded that “Muslim women be taken from graves and raped” [1]. Additionally, Sadhvi Pragya Thakur, an assertive member of the BJP, stated on the *Apki Adalat* [Your Court] program that “terrorist just has to be a Muslim” [56]. At the Press Club of India in New Delhi, a devout Hindu priest by the name of Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati was also observed publicly insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. On YouTube, there are hundreds of videos where hate speech is directed at Islam and Muslims, inciting the majority community to take up guns. For this, unfounded claims and made-up historical tales are embellished and told [4].

#### 4.2 Violating law against Muslims

A discriminatory statute known as the Citizenship Amendment Act<sup>6</sup> was occasionally passed, and when women and Muslim youth spoke out against it [23], they were put behind prison. Other times, the NRC (National Register of Citizens) harassed Muslims. While everyone is free to propagate and preach their religion under Article 25 of the Constitution,<sup>7</sup> the Sangh Parivar has long sought to outlaw religious preaching in India. Zakir Naik, an Islamic televangelist, was first singled out [49]. Following that, the Tablighi Jamaat was discredited, and as a result of exaggerating the significance of religious conversion, those who engage in preaching while abiding by the law today find it impossible to live [51]. All of the state's resources have been directed on repressing Muslims who practice their faith and those who follow it. In an

<sup>6</sup> On December 12, 2019, the new Citizenship Amendment Act of India came into effect, simplifying the process of obtaining Indian citizenship for non-Muslim immigrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The Act does not name Muslims directly, but it does grant Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians who are subject to religious persecution in these three countries. According to the Act, rather than the prior requirement of 11 years, Indian citizenship would be granted to refugees from the six communities named after they have been in India for five years.

<sup>7</sup> Every person has the equal right to freedom of conscience and the freedom “to profess, practice, and propagate religion” of their choosing, according to Article 25.

attempt to force religious conversion, the government has been more bigoted toward Muslims and Islam, as seen by the recent imprisonment of well-known Muslim cleric Maulana Kaleem Siddiqui [29].

Today, several Indian provinces have laws that apply two different standards. A Muslim girl will have all the support she needs if she marries a Hindu male, while a Hindu girl marrying a Muslim boy will be portrayed as *love jihad* [11]. A Muslim youngster is likewise depicted as using the ominous artwork to entice a gullible Hindu female. It's interesting to note that up until now, neither the province nor the government of India has disclosed any information about interreligious weddings [7]. This implies that the media is the one who created the problem of the so-called love jihad. It is known as "*his return to home*" when a Muslim converts to Hinduism and "*forced conversion*" when a Hindu converts to Islam. Social media posts that divide people and propagate hate speech are examples of this double standard in action [48]. If Muslims do such activities, law enforcement will not bother to arrest and torture them, but identical posts made by members of the majority community will not result in immediate police action. It is important to note that Article 25 of the Indian Constitution states explicitly that everyone has the same right to freedom of conscience and the freedom to freely profess, practice, and propagate their religion, subject to the preservation of public health, morals, and order. Social constructivist theory can help us understand these phenomena better. While an act of similarity by a Muslim communalist will be understood from the perspective of the "*other*", postings by a Hindu communalist are frequently interpreted in the framework of friendship (us) [36].

While actions of nationalism and patriotism are attributed to Hindu communalists, acts of division involving Muslims will always be viewed as a possible danger to the country's unity and integrity [37]. The conspiracy theory surrounding the Delhi rioting in February 2020 was limited to Muslims and civil society opponents of the citizenship reform. Police did not even look into the participation of BJP leaders Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Verma, and Kapil Sharma, who made controversial comments. Experts have observed that individuals who assault Muslims often go unpunished [40]; in the past several years, courts and government agencies have occasionally reversed verdicts or dropped charges accusing Hindus of participating in acts of violence against Muslims [52]. While all the agencies and institutions were busy supporting the government and avoiding their duties during the 1984 Delhi riots [29], when the Sikh community was the target of collective violence on the streets, during the 2020 Delhi riots, the government's opponents were imprisoned while the criminals were given impunity [1]. According to a 2017 report by the UK-based Minority Rights Group International (MRG) and the Mumbai-based Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS), violent moral policing vigilante groups like cow protection or anti-Romeo squads have been leading these attacks, and authorities' failure to look into or stop them has created an environment of impunity that could encourage more attacks [54]. Even though Ayyub [57] claims that seemingly normal guys are committing hate crimes in India, he claims that the Indian Parliament's aisles are giving these men's acts more legitimacy and impunity.

### 4.3 Web jihadism against Muslims

Hindus are being led to believe, through the ruling BJP's skillful use of social media, that they are in danger from an increasing number of Muslims [32]. There are two discernible patterns in the spread of misinformation about Islam in India. In the first case, the BJP's IT Cell is pushing a carefully contrived Islamophobic narrative [42].

Along with the IT Cell, the tales are covered by pro-government television networks and other mainstream media outlets [23], who communalize the problem by blaming Muslims [46]. The term “*jihad*” is frequently added to anything on these networks. Islam is based on love, narcotics, property, bureaucracy, economics, UPSC, bureaucracy, markings, and so on [1]. Following this, a hateful attitude is created by this misinformation spreading throughout all social media platforms. In the second case, right-leaning news and opinion websites like *TFIPOST*, *OpIndia*, *Swarajya*, *Gurus.com*, *Hindu Jagruti*, *Hindu Post*, and others are used as mouthpieces by Hindu extremists to promote a very inflammatory, anti-Muslim, and Islamophobic narrative [21]. Following that, the story gets taken up by mainstream media, which feeds the momentum of all social media sites [31].

Narratives that are Islamophobic are common on social media and other online venues. Numerous instances of right-wing “trolls” insulting mainstream journalists and Muslims [7] and other minorities who they believe are working against Hindu interests have been recorded by Indian media [11]. Opposition parties are being criticized by right-wing blogs for supposedly caving into Muslim demands and for severely misreporting the BJP government [51]. Intellectuals, some of whom have connections to the ruling BJP or its cultural organization, the RSS, have been encouraging the creation of news and opinion websites to counter mainstream media

| No | Type   | Explanations   |
|----|--|--|
| 1  | In case of threatening                           | Strong anti-Muslim attitudes were seen on at least 10 websites, which attacked the religious practices, political figures, and historical background of Indian Muslims [54]. Some more extreme sites utilize harsher vocabulary, while more mainstream sites use careful wording and generally assert that Hindutva is not against Islam or Muslims [46]. Several writers contend that while Indian Muslims “claim” to be peaceful and accepting of diversity, they actually have a covert, anti-Indian secret goal [11]. These websites frequently publish articles that list crimes perpetrated by Muslims and criticize authorities for caving into the Muslim community [48].  |
| 2  | In case of violating Islamic Beliefs             | Sites that criticize Islam on a regular basis claim that the religion is deadly by nature [36]. A number of publications claimed that the Islamic Call to Prayer is blasphemous and an assault on other faiths since it advocates monotheism [31]. Additionally, websites claim that Islam supports sexism and violence. While there was nothing wrong with choosing to follow Islam, one writer urged Muslims to label all of the Hadith and Qur’an passages that form the basis of extremism as hate speech [1].   |
| 3  | In case of Enumerating Muslim-Perpetrated Crimes | Websites regularly feature atrocities that they claim are committed by Indian Muslims but are usually covered up by mainstream media [24]. They frequently share reports on purported cases of love jihad. In addition, websites frequently report on shocking remarks made by Muslim religious leaders as well as rapes and domestic violence perpetrated by Muslim males [29].   |
| 4  | In case of Claims of Appeasing Minorities        | Websites often bemoan the political “appeasement” of the Muslim population in India, claiming that it’s done in the name of secularism or to win over votes [24]. For instance, Swarajya warned against caving into Muslim pressure and denounced the Telangana Chief Minister’s relentless efforts to improve Muslim representation in the workforce [52] and educational system. Meanwhile, a commentary published in <i>OpIndia</i> questioned the Uttarakhand Congress-led government’s decision to give its Muslim employees a ninety-minute break so they could attend Friday prayers [40]. Many websites use the Islamic tradition of triple talaq—in which a man can divorce his wife by using the word “talaq” three times—as an illustration of “Muslim appeasement” [19]. |

**Table 1.**  
*Racialized Muslims in India after BJP’s ruling.*

narratives they believe are hostile to India and Hinduism in an effort to leverage online support to establish and maintain a right-wing nationalist alternative media narrative [41]. Since 2014, a large number of these new websites have been launched, and they all contain Islamophobic themes (see **Table 1**).

Regrettably, anti-Islamic groups have also gained support via social media platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter [51]. It never ends, even when Muslims and other organizations demand that thousands of racist and prejudiced individuals upload information that is based on racism, anti-Islamic propaganda, and the humiliation of the Prophet [21]. These demands come from all over the world. Major social media platforms Twitter and Facebook were identified by the prestigious British newspaper *The Independent* in its investigative investigation of 2015 as continuing to aid in the spread of Islamophobia. In a study on fear speech, researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur examined two million messages in over 5000 Indian WhatsApp groups [1].

They discovered that one in three posts in these groups incites fear of Muslims and Islam [11]. YouTube is not the first platform to address the issue of Islamophobia in Indian media. On YouTube, false and provocative statements are also appearing and spreading very rapidly [18]. Several TV shows regarding the Tablighi Jamaat directed viewers to videos with anti-Muslim material and false claims, according to an examination of YouTube's suggested videos. For instance, a video captioned "If India is to be saved from #Corona\_Jihad. #BanTablighiJamat and immediate sanctions on foreign clerics" that Sudarshan News released shows viewers violent acts directed at Muslim groups and structures. The station, which is a fringe Hindu nationalist, shared this video and frequently uploaded fake and alarming films directed against Muslims [52].

## **5. Discussion: Encounters of Islamophobia**

The issue of Islamophobia in India has also drawn the attention of several foreign organizations. Concerns about the situation in India have been voiced by the US Organization on International Religious Freedom, an American organization [58] that monitors religious freedom. Remember that the USCIRF has already voiced worries about Muslims in India being singled out as a result of COVID-19. The study claims that the ruling BJP has allowed people to freely express hate speech and call for violence against Muslims, that Muslims' places of worship are being attacked, and that party officials are personally complicit in these acts. These leaders had threatened the activists opposed to the divisive CAA with severe reprisals. This article also mentions the Delhi riots in February 2020. For the first time since the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002, the USCIRF grouped India alongside nations where religious freedom is being infringed. According to US Ambassador for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback, there have been reports of regrettable COVID-19-related remarks and harassment in India, especially directed against the Muslim minority. Misinformation spread on social media and bogus news broadcasts have made this worse. Additionally, there have been incidents of Muslims being assaulted on suspicion of transmitting the coronavirus.

Not to mention, the Gulf nations have begun to come to an agreement and denounce the cases of Islamophobia in India. The Emirati princess Sheikha Hend

bint Faisal Al Qasimi, who is related to the Al Qasimi dynasty of Sharjah, has also responded to this matter. While several other Arab leaders called for the removal of Indian nationals spreading the RSS doctrine, Qasimi stated that prejudice against Muslims must not “go unnoticed”. A Twitter campaign against the increasing Islamophobia in India was being conducted in the Gulf countries. In April 2020, the Kuwaiti Cabinet conveyed its serious concerns about the way Indian Muslims are being treated [59]. In a recent assessment on democracy, the Sweden-based V-Dem Institute took a more critical stance, stating that India has devolved into an electoral autocracy. A German organization has released a study detailing many nations, including India, where authoritarianism is increasing and democracy is eroding and deteriorating in the wake of recent developments in India. This new paper claims that these developments have led to an increase in governments’ oppressive views and that COVID-19 also constitutes a danger to democratic governments worldwide. According to the *South Asia State of Minorities Report* [60], which expresses worry about the situation of minorities in India, India has become a dangerous place for minorities and anyone who do not agree with the government’s ideology under Modi. The rights and freedom of expression of Muslims and Muslim organizations have been impacted by a number of renewed and direct attacks on minorities and the weaker sections since the pro-Hindu party BJP came to power in 2014, according to the South Asia State of Minorities report on the protection of civil rights, democracy, freedom of expression, and secularism in South Asian countries.

## 6. Final thoughts

Without questioning it, the central administration of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) espouses an ideology built on hatred against the minorities in India, especially Muslims and Christians. The RSS and the ruling BJP are inextricably linked. The BJP is actually the political arm of the RSS. The creation of a monocultural India is the goal of RSS, as stated by its ideologues Savarkar, Golwalkar, and Hedgewar. In order to achieve this goal, the BJP’s leaders have been attempting to create a narrative in which Muslims are frequently portrayed as intruders and are associated with all negative traits. Therefore, Islamophobia has always been ingrained in the BJP’s philosophy. Unfortunately, the BJP has been somewhat successful in its objective of having a controlled media that tows to its line since coming to power at the center. In this backdrop, the Islamophobic media landscape of modern India has to be understood.

What is required is the halting of hate speech directed at Muslims and Islam, management of the fake news storm, maintenance of India’s standing as a tolerant country internationally, and legal action against those behind anti-Muslim propaganda. It is true that the government bears the task of upholding the nation’s secular values and promoting its vibrant diversity. It is also critical to ensure that the strongly opinionated anchors on mainstream TV do not create the climate by abusing the freedom of speech guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. It is not appropriate for them to launch an anti-Muslim campaign that distorts India’s reputation for fear that it would be equated with nations where minority lack freedom. Every Indian citizen is entitled to equal rights under the country’s Constitution, regardless of their caste, religion, sexual orientation, etc. In India, Muslims are endowed with all rights and powers. For Muslims in India, their country is superior to the entire globe.

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## **Author contribution**

The author confirms the sole responsibility for the conception of the study, presented results and manuscript preparation.

## **Competing interest statement**

It is to be declared that, no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.


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Section 4

# New Horizons

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# Dealing with Discomfort toward Social Minorities: Exploring New Approaches to Increase Society's Acceptance of Minority Groups

*Jacob Richard Thomas*

## Abstract

This chapter critically assesses how individuals deal with discomfort with those who are social minorities with respect to class, ethnicity, gender, racial, religious, or sexual identities. This seems important given how many educational systems either avoid discussion of such discomfort or even the existence of intergroup differences and inequalities between social majority groups and minority groups, but many algorithms lead to discomfort to develop into resentment and then into hatred of and even violence against minorities. I interviewed a small sample of both college and non-college-educated educators, students, and former students in various countries to better understand how they have responded to efforts (or a lack of such efforts) to address such discomfort. Approaches that emphasize interaction at the level of individuals and groups toward achieving superordinate goals may be more effective than lectures or many other short-term trainings by diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in reducing discomfort with minorities.

**Keywords:** minorities, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, inequality, discrimination, diversity, inclusion

## 1. Introduction

Suppose you have grown up in a small village with a homogeneous community and have never ventured outside it. All the people you encounter have a similar lifestyle. They are provincial/parochial in understanding this lifestyle to be the only such lifestyle. One day, you encounter a person who appears and behaves in some way very differently from anyone you previously encountered—they could speak an unknown language, follow a different religion and customs, be of a different racial background, be a low-income homeless drug addict, and/or be difficult to identify as clearly “male” or “female.”

You do not understand quite why, but affectively, your encounter with this individual makes you feel uncomfortable or uneasy, prior to any reflective or rational thought on how or why you feel the way you do. Your instinct is to move away from

them. However, intellectually, you believe you should treat all people fairly and should not be moving away from someone because they are different or unfamiliar to you. How do you handle and process this discomfort? How does that affect your interactions (or lack of interactions) with that individual? Although as a single individual this different human may merely be a distraction, an annoyance, or possibly an “exotic” fascination to you, your affect or reaction to their presence changes if you began to observe that this minority group began to bring their family to live next to you, or many other people so that they become a sizeable minority or even a new majority of your community? More generally, how should an educator who is more knowledgeable and familiar with this type of person—whether they be a kindergarten teacher, a high school teacher, or a college professor—teach others who have such uncomfortable experiences how they should deal with them?

A conventional approach in the academy is to tell the discomfited person that they should embrace this person that makes them feel uncomfortable as part of their community, without any acknowledgment of this discomfort with what they find unfamiliar, and often even dismiss the discomfort as unacceptable. Many influential, well-educated, and broad-minded educators and other professionals approach discomfort with distinct intergroup differences by encouraging students to treat all people equally, or reduce discrimination by ethnicity, gender, race, religion, or other aspects of marginalized identity in society. Ideally, many believe this should accelerate our society’s acceptance of minorities and diversity. Alternatively, some on the opposite side of the political spectrum strive to eliminate discussion or even mention of many important dimensions of intergroup identities like gender, race, and sexuality.

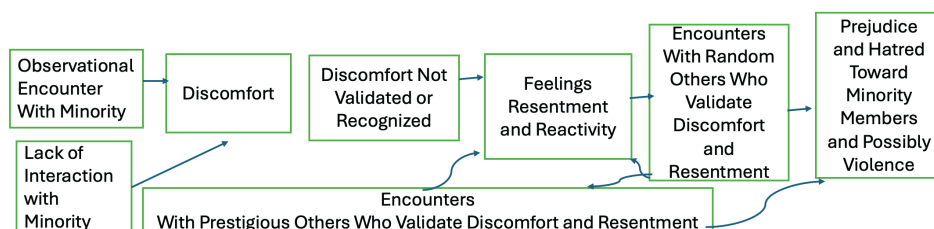
Yet, in doing so, such conventional approaches of educators do not acknowledge discomfort with minorities among those who experience it. This in turn may invalidate the experiences of students and reduce opportunities to process that discomfort and come to a better understanding of those that make them feel uncomfortable. Worse, this can foster psychological reactivity and resentment and later lead to more violent reactions when influential leaders come around that acknowledge and validate such feelings of discomfort and weaponize them. I think this risk points to a fundamental problem in how individuals in diversifying societies are learning to handle the discomfort that they experience in their encounters with minorities because of how it can exacerbate both those feelings of discomfort, discrimination against minorities, and distrust in institutions that strive to reduce intergroup prejudices.

The odds of any of the above transpiring may seem unlikely if such an educator is the only person who influences a person’s attitudes toward the minority. Yet that is unfortunately not the case. The internet, for example, provides abundant opportunities for any individual to go online and type some text like “discomfort with \_\_\_\_” and then have access to texts, images, and videos that provide justification to such feelings of discomfort. The initial information that emerges from such searches might merely consist of quite even-handed, moderated, and polite discourse of how, “I do not disagree with those individuals’ right to exist but I just do not want to be associated or interact with them.” Whether educators like it or not, these discourses acknowledge and validate such an individual’s discomfort with a minority before educators could do so in a classroom or other spaces. Furthermore, most algorithms on the internet and social media platforms function according to such a principle of positive feedback so that they lead to increasingly more antipathic discourses: The discovery of a discourse validating that discomfort leads to suggested links to discourses that foster a resentment

toward such minorities which generates links to a discourse justifying prejudice and hatred which can in turn recommend links to a discourse justifying violence toward such minorities. Although governments and the companies running such platforms have strived in some cases to censor or restrain such discourses, these efforts often conflict with principles of free speech, and moderating the content takes a considerable amount of resources. Moreover, after encountering such ideas from random, unknown individuals, as time passes, they hear more prestigious and famous influential leaders also acknowledge and validate such feelings of discomfort and weaponize them. I diagram this hypothetical process in **Figure 1**. I acknowledge that I have not empirically proven that this process exists, and think this will be valuable project for other social scientists to research whether it exists empirically.

Various theories are relevant to collect and examine techniques on how individuals have dealt with discomfort. Countless empirical studies have proven in diverse contexts that the classical contact hypothesis [1, 2] is broadly correct—the more individuals encounter those different from them, the less prejudiced they become, despite critiques of self-selection, lack of experimental/longitudinal evidence, and an over-reliance on samples of individuals younger than 25 years old [3]. Other researchers have found that the contact hypothesis is more likely to be true under four conditions: (a) majority group members and minority group members have equal status along some other dimension (e.g., background traits like education, age, gender, or SES), (b) have common goals (e.g., members of different groups perceive common superordinate interests or goals that require pooling together complementary resources of both groups), (c) the social climate is not unfavorable to intergroup contact, (d) intergroup cooperation (both groups work together without competition), and (e) support of authorities/laws/customs (e.g., both groups acknowledge authority that supports contacts/interaction between groups, egalitarianism, and condemning in-group/out-group comparisons) [4]. Classic ethnographic experiments like the Robbers Cave Experiment of Muzafer Sherif [5] have empirically demonstrated that these conditions do indeed succeed in strengthening and forming new group identities and, through prejudice against out-groups can decline between group members as they strive to achieve superordinate goals.

However, the negative contact hypothesis [6] suggests that intergroup contact can increase prejudice because it makes out-group members' social group more salient during encounters. Therefore, the path from intergroup contact to lower prejudice is far from smooth, and the strategies employed by educators and others are far from optimal. People who have positive interactions with outgroup members do not change



**Figure 1.** Model of how invalidated or unrecognized discomfort with minority group individuals can lead to resentment, prejudice, hatred, and violence against them.

their views of outgroup members after positive and negative encounters with them as much as those who have not had any positive interactions [7].

Several scholars and philosophers have also offered several concepts to help explain why this process is far from smooth. Social distance [8] is a quantitative psychological measure (based on a cumulative or Guttman scale) of how willing you are to have a member of a social outgroup as a non-citizen visitor, citizen, employer/employee, business partner, co-worker, neighbor, roommate, friend, relative, romantic partner, and spouse. Generally, studies of this demonstrate that individuals are decreasingly accepting of minority group members as we move from a non-citizen visitor to a spouse. We might therefore hypothesize that discomfort increases the closer the proximity of the relation. The psychological flexibility to deal with ambiguity and challenges in categorizing individuals into groups (e.g., mixed-race individuals, transgender/non-binary individuals, abstract/conceptual contemporary art) is known as cognitive fluency [9]. Individuals with greater cognitive fluency may be more capable of dealing with identities that are more ambiguous, as psychological experiments have demonstrated that inhabitants in Hawaii have more cognitive fluency in interacting with biracial individuals than those in other states of the United States [10]. The historian Yuval Harari [11] has suggested that a reaction of discomfort or disgust is a hard-wired evolutionarily evolved trait in the human mind that both encourages us to vomit or throw up food that is harmful to us, whereas Martha Nussbaum [12] has identified disgust as operating as a pre-reflective reaction to what the law defines as what is prohibited even if it often operates on a “I know it when I see it” basis that justifies much dehumanization. Individuals who experience discomfort in their encounters and interaction with minority group individuals may become more antagonistic toward them if they feel manipulated by others encouraging them not to feel such discomfort, a specific form of what political psychologists generally define as psychological reactance [13]. Finally, social contexts will vary in the extent to which majority group members can identify and understand the situation of minority group members due to what Ruiz-Junco [14] calls an empathy path. Such empathy paths often derive from the extent to which one can understand and relate to the experience of a given group that one has no direct experience of belonging, based on analogous experience of belonging to a different group that has undergone a similar experience (as opposed to sympathy, which is just feeling sorry for someone). This may induce what political psychologists describe as a sense of “linked fate” [15] with that group. All such concepts are useful in understanding why recognition of discomfort that individuals face may be a valuable tool to reduce prejudice toward minorities.

## **2. Data and methods**

I propose a critical analysis of pedagogical strategies to deal with discomfort that individuals experience when encountering different minority populations present in educational settings that could cast light on what approaches are productive and counter-productive in reducing prejudice toward minorities. As an initial method to explore how productive this approach may be, I propose collecting a small convenience or non-probability sample of data from exploratory interviews with educators and students of either K-12 educational institutions or colleges. Due to this sampling strategy, I do not claim that my sample is representative of the general population, and my goal is not to obtain results that are generalizable to the global population.

Instead, I only aim to learn from a variety of people about ideas or tactics they have observed of how students and educators can deal with discomfort when they encounter members of visible minority groups. Later studies would need to confirm how prevalent such practices are in different societies.

I purposefully sample to maximize the educational, ethnic, gendered, racial, and socio-economic diversity of my sample, even though the sample size is insufficient to be representative of all possible identities along these dimensions, much less intersectional or conjoint identities.

Many interviewees reported that they never encountered any opportunities in educational settings to discuss and deal with discomfort with minority groups—particularly those educated in previous generations, where issues of discrimination against minority groups and intergroup inequality were not even matters for discussion in educational settings. Furthermore, some interviewees have suggested to me that this was a very potentially controversial and inflammatory and therefore taboo subject to study, particularly among American academics due to their strong left-wing and progressive bias, which may lead some scholars to believe even educational strategies of acknowledging feelings of discomfort with minority groups would do more to exacerbate prejudice, discrimination, and stigmatization against minority groups than mitigate it. Of course, the emergence of a minority of more ideologically right-wing educational institutions in states like Florida and Texas would likely be equally hostile toward discussions of discomfort about differences among minorities given how they aim to legislatively and socially ban from educational institutions any discussion of intergroup inequalities and differences with respect to what many consider core dimensions of social identity (e.g., gender, race, and sexuality). For this reason, some have even warned that initiating research into how people deal with discomfort would be suicidal in terms of one's academic reputation in the United States.

However, I am optimistic that searching for pedagogical techniques to deal with discomfort felt toward minorities could improve intergroup interactions. To my knowledge, I have not encountered such an inventory of pedagogical methods for acknowledging discomfort with difference that we could empirically test to determine whether they would exacerbate or mitigate such phenomena, but I remain open to learning about any such studies. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is exploratory and theoretical insofar as I am just looking for worthwhile tactics but also to understand the obstacles. I believe that collecting any insights in this area can provide a theoretical foundation for more representative work.

For empirical material of this chapter, I will take advantage of the fact that I now teach in a particular society and polity—Hungary—that like many other post-Soviet Union Eastern European societies has until recent decades was more homogeneous than it is today and has had relatively less exposure to many minority groups than many Western European societies. Many human rights advocates believe Hungary treats both its domestic minorities (e.g., Gypsies/Roma), gender minorities, and non-White foreigners in very discriminatory and inhumane ways [16]. I interviewed 18 educators and students there, but since I encountered many other educators and present and former students in Europe and while conducting field research elsewhere, I include their perspectives as well to the extent that they are complementary. In the interviews, I inquire about how educators and students have come to understand the way they process discomfort about differences in both academic and non-academic settings. This type of reflective analysis is valid to better understand how members of majority groups and members of minority groups interact with each other as societies internationalize and diversify. I aim to demonstrate how the ways that individuals

handle discomfort with differences are important to understanding phobias and discrimination against minorities. The results from this study will be theoretically relevant even to more diverse and multicultural societies that also to a lesser extent and in different ways, struggle with the discomfort their people feel in confronting unfamiliar differences and reducing discrimination against minorities as such societies diversify and expose themselves internationally.

### **3. Broaching the sensitive subject**

As alluded to earlier, the discomfort that individuals feel in encountering differences they have with minorities is arguably a taboo subject in many educational settings, regardless of the political ideology of the educators, its students, and the institution. The reasons for this are multiple. In the past few decades, most academic institutions have gradually shifted from discussing intergroup discrimination and inequality rarely or not at all to making the reduction of such inequalities one of the normative goals of their education. Some left-wing educators may believe it may harm the self-esteem of individuals who belong to minority groups *via* stereotype threat/promise [17, 18] and double consciousness [19], thereby reducing the extent to which they can feel included and therefore logically both the diversity—which much research suggests there are many societal benefits [20]—and equity—which can help restore the general belief in society that all individuals regardless of group membership have a fairer chance of being equally successful and encourage them to put in equal effort. More ideologically right-wing educators, in contrast, would more likely argue that the problem instead is that by highlighting differences of minority groups, and this defines individuals by their minority group status, reinforces their second-class status, and patronizingly minimizes their contributions as individuals based on their own merit and hard work. Therefore, I do not believe this is necessarily a right or left-wing issue, and that for K-12 teachers and untenured university faculty to open up a subject in a classroom can be extremely risky, irrespective of what institution they might belong to.

For my appreciation of why dealing with discomfort felt toward social minorities is important, I am very much indebted to one East Asian male student of mine in a discussion section about gender and sexuality for the course Introduction to Sociology several years ago at the University of California-Los Angeles. One day, we were discussing intergroup inequalities in terms of gender and sexuality. I had previously taught both university students and honor middle school students about American and European culture with an emphasis on its distinctiveness from Asian culture. I had recalled that many of my mainland Chinese students exhibited signs of being very uncomfortable with the subject of LGBTQIA+ identities, which often manifested itself in class as giggles and laughter. This made me aware that sexual education in many schools in some societies was substantially less than in the United States or even non-existent, and therefore presumably most of the students were likely learning about sex and sexuality from books, gossiping with peers, movies, music, and pornography. For example, I recalled my Chinese students not being able to tell me what the acronym LGBTQIA stood for. They also seemed surprised when I told them that some people—including in all probability some they have seen—were intersex and based on photos I showed them, that they appeared like most normal people. Therefore, I was aware that some of my students, particularly those with first-generation immigrant background, might have had limited encounters with such transgender minority groups.

For this reason, I did not want to make any assumptions as many of my colleagues did about the level of familiarity and comfort that my students had with this minority group. Before we began to discuss such inequalities, how much of American society was transphobic and how American institutions treated transgender people unjustly, I asked them how many had heard about transgender individuals. I would say nearly everyone had. However, when I asked how many had encountered transgender individuals, I found that some students had not raised their hands. Before asking them further questions, I described how, although I grew up in homophobic suburb at a more conservative time than today, I had made many gay, lesbian, and bisexual friends in high school because I would frequently visit San Francisco and spent much time in both the fine arts and poetry slam communities there. However, I admitted that I tended to observe most transgender people only at a distance and as a cis-gender heterosexual man raised in a (at that time) heteronormative society, I found them marginally more difficult to accept than other LGBTQIA individuals until I began to interact with them frequently during trips to San Francisco. I described how a lot changed for me in how I view transgender people after I learned that a very close friend from high school had transitioned from being a man to becoming a woman and then transitioned back to being a man while I had been away traveling around the world. I stressed to them that I consider myself very fortunate to have had more social exposure at an earlier age to LGBTQIA+ people than many other people of my generation who grew up even in less diverse settings. From this minority, I learned much more about arbitrary and socially constructed nature of heavily gendered identities, the importance of clearly and directly communicating sexual desire and boundaries rather than making assumptions in relationships, and the healthiness of embracing one's authentic identity over conforming to stifling social norms.

Typically, many educators are understandably reluctant to raise such personal perspectives with their students unless they are socially sanctioned. This is particularly true in recent years within the United States because of (a) several academics and other public intellectuals having their presentations canceled, (b) numerous people getting expelled from digital platforms like X/Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube that many consider important venues in civil society for public communication, (c) professors getting heckled in their classrooms so you cannot even hear what they are saying, (d) the banning of the books that teachers can use to teach, (e) the removal of books from libraries both officially and clandestinely by teachers, parents, school boards, and even state governments, (f) both tenured and non-tenured teachers/professors being fired or denied promotion or tenure allegedly for their normative views on controversial subjects, and (g) in even more serious situations, people facing death threats or attacks against them, their friends, and their family for things they have said and written. Yet I did not think that self-censorship was the best response to such authoritarian, censorious, and anti-civil behaviors. Drawing on what I learned from feminist philosophy that the personal was political, I believe sharing my personal experience with students was warranted here because whether we like it or not, educators are at least some degree role models for students, and important values to role model were intellectual honesty, humility, self-reflexivity, and freedom of speech on what I thought about sensitive subjects. My hope was that this would emphasize the relevance of the subject for that class—gender and sexuality—in the lives of students, rather than treating it as simply a reified intellectual subject. This enabled me to encourage students to open up in the discussion about how they first learned about transgender individuals and the first time they encountered a transgender individual.

One male student very slowly raised his hand and mentioned that he felt uncomfortable around transgender people. I told him, “That is okay. It is common to feel uncomfortable with people who are unfamiliar to us. It is not acceptable to hate them or attack them, but discomfort with the unfamiliar is normal.” I decided it was safest not to broach the subject further but I gathered from the writings of some immigrant students that they felt uncomfortable with transgender people because they came from cultures where they understood everyone to be either male or female which affected how they relate to them and they found categorizing transgender people in such a binary way cognitively challenging. I think it was important for them to cognitively process and express their discomfort with such minorities in an educational course, given the abundance of opportunities outside of formal educational settings to do so that may inflame prejudice. I was glad that those students were able to acknowledge and reflect on that discomfort and that I had not just told them that they should not feel that discomfort or dismissed any discussion of the minority groups they had encountered. I did not believe I was fostering or justifying transphobia in acknowledging this discomfort but instead enabling students to honestly and humbly acknowledge and come to terms with how they felt in their encounters with minority groups and recognizing their discomfort as real before I began to talk about intergroup inequalities or how this may be due to a lack of direct contact or interaction with such minority groups or knowledge about such minority groups. I do not believe this approach only pertains to sexual minorities but also groups who are minorities in terms of socio-economic class, ethnicity, race, and religion as well.

Based on the admittedly limited number of interviews I have conducted so far, I have found that an honest discussion about people’s experiences with minority groups is rare. This is especially the case for older individuals who attended school in an era when even social studies or social science classes educators did not even raise the subject of discrimination, exploitation, or marginalization of minority groups. As noted before, among younger cohorts of students and teachers, I found more generally that educators have sought to humanize and emphasize the various ways minority groups have become marginalized or faced discrimination, and discourage discrimination in general, even though discrimination is quite common in society. For example, one undergraduate student at a Hungarian university noted how at her school orientation, an administrator told all the students that no discrimination would be tolerated. No students commented or asked questions about this, according to her, although she regularly observed discrimination happening anyway. A Turkish student described this unspoken discomfort as well while she was taking classes in even a graduate studies program in the Netherlands: “When I walked into my classroom in the Netherlands, everyone looked at me. The teacher and I had to behave like I was another student, but I clearly felt that the other students did not perceive me that way. For this reason, I always sat in the seat at the center of the front row, so I did not have to see my classmates and be distracted thinking about what they thought of me.” In both contexts, the administrators and students would like to eliminate discrimination not just because it is unfair and unjust because it is also an obstacle to learning. The inter-generational difference is important to bear in mind in interpreting different results, as it suggests that many current educators have very different experiences regarding how they teach about minority groups in society. For this reason, I have not yet found many other examples of how educators have broached the subject of discomfort.

#### **4. Avoidance of discomfort**

A common way that professors deal with subjects that may induce discomfort is to avoid it altogether. In one quantitative method course within a Hungarian institution, an instructor asked their students for an example of a basic binary variable, and one student suggested gender. However, one student who identified as non-binary confronted the instructor about this, saying they were hurt by this. Although the instructor could have simply suggested ways that gender could be analyzed on a continuous scale, they dismissed the students' concern as an instance of how the student was intentionally looking for a reason to be offended, rather than having a genuine concern.

Many parents, as educators, also actively try to avoid situations where their children must learn about those different from them. One Polish professor who acknowledged that he is quite socially conservative spoke to me of how he believes, "confronting such differences is okay. If people want to be transgender person or be different in other ways that is fine." However, he strongly believed that such transgender people should not be influencing children who are more impressionable and liable to change their views of social reality. One might interpret his use of influence to refer, for example, to transgender teachers educating students about how it is acceptable to change one's gender. Yet the example he gave of a transgender person influencing his daughter simply involved that person exposing their genitalia in public: He spoke of how he was once in a very touristy spot in Venice with his daughter and caught sight of a transgender person dressed up with their genitalia exposed. "I did everything I could to avoid having my daughter see him," was all that he said. Like many educators, he did not want his daughter to even know that such people existed and to explain to her why they made him (and especially her seeing them) feel uncomfortable. Due to this, if she did see such a person (as she may very well have, even though he wished to believe she had not) or later saw someone like them, she would be left to trying to understand them and the discomfort caused by the sight of them on her own, rather than under the guidance of her father.

A Russian mother and Indian father in Toronto expressed a similar unease with how elementary schools were teaching their children about gendered identities. Yet they did not express their discomfort about this subject to the teacher at the parent-teacher meetings. The mother also explained that she preferred to live in the suburbs of Toronto rather than in the city center because there were many homeless drug addicts, which in her view made the city "dangerous." When I asked her for a specific example in which a homeless drug addict had harmed her or someone she knew, she could not come up with any specific example. The mother's sense of "danger" was probably more accurately described to be the discomfort she, I, and many others feel around such addicts because they are unbathed, make dramatic sounds, and are often "tweaking" (making dramatic and violent jerking movements that seem otherwise pointless and are in reaction to the chemical impacts of the drugs)—all behaviors that most non-drug addicted people do not engage in and therefore are unfamiliar. In sum, her way of dealing with discomfort with such a minority was not to ask herself what specifically about their behavior she found so unsettling and then rearticulate that to her daughter and point out this is exactly why you probably do not want to even try most addictive drugs. Instead, she simply described such individuals as "dangerous" and, like the Polish professor father, did what she could to minimize her and her children's interactions with such individuals.

Other professors, like one female international relations and public policy professor in Spain, avoided subjects like race and gender altogether because she believes her other colleagues teach enough about this but because “my students come from socio-economically privileged backgrounds, I strive to get them away from identities like race and gender and have them focus on the socio-economic superstructure, which I saw as lacking in their education.” Although this may be valuable as a corrective of the extent to which her colleagues teach about race and gender over class, this enabled her to avoid intersectional issues where class interacts with race or gender.

I thought grappling with such intersectional complexities might be a clever way to help them better appreciate the importance of socio-economic class given how this often intersected with racial and gendered inequalities. What the Spanish professor observed echoed with what one senior instructor told me they observed at UCLA:

The students were very enthusiastic and engaged when talking about inequalities of gender, race, and sexuality, but when it came to the subject of socio-economic class, they were uncomfortable as they considered this axis of disadvantage to be mutually exclusive with race and gender. This may relate to how institutions like UCLA are notable in offering substantial upward (and although not discussed, logically downward) socio-economic mobility through college education. Therefore, students as beneficiaries of this would be less enthusiastic, or have a non-intersectional habit (echoing many in the media) to view socio-economic inequality to be as primarily about the inequality of White working-class men. However, even if she did not want to grapple with such intersectionality, I could think of non-intersectional techniques she could employ to do so.

## **5. Techniques for confronting discomfort with minorities**

Typically, students may not be thinking about their discomfort in a way that addresses the very tensions that make it feel uncomfortable and connect it with what they learn in the classroom. To take the example of the above-mentioned students of the professor in Spain, like them, most students who inhabit or have inhabited a city and (although to a less extent) a semi-urban college town likely have had the experience of some more impoverished person approaching them and asking them for money. For many people, this is a discomfiting, if seemingly inevitable, experience in daily urban life that they may want to minimize, regardless of how important they believe it is to reduce socio-economic inequality. Although a beggar could spend any money given to them in ways (e.g., on drugs and alcohol) that would make the students regret giving money to them, beggars also need money for food and therefore to survive, which is why many prefer to give them food. Yet many people are uncomfortable giving them anything, as they believe that doing so may disincentivize them from working and possibly encourage further begging. This raises an important question to raise to students that is related to the subject of political economy: If distribution in resources is so unequal that certain unemployed individuals are begging, would you prefer that you and others (1) give some form of social support directly (either as individuals or through some charitable organization like a church or secular community center) or (2) pay more taxes to the government to employ bureaucrats to administer those resources systematically to the whole population (rather than the individual who makes the effort to approach us to beg) for which there will be what some economics professors have cryptically (and often critically) refer to as a “dead-weight loss” (a payment to the bureaucratic intermediaries for the service of

transferring taxpayer dollars to the destitute subpopulation). This is not necessarily a question that enters a student's head whenever they encounter a beggar on the street, or when they may be persuaded to vote for a candidate that promises to cut government spending in social welfare, arguing that this would lower tax bills. However, it is the type of scenario and critical question one can raise so students think more critically about their socio-economic identity, their current relation to disadvantaged socio-economic minorities, and how they would like to transform that relation. An instructor could also explore why encounters with different types of socio-economic minorities make them feel uncomfortable. For example, for a student from a middle-class background, what aspects of their identity does this make salient and bring into their consciousness that they usually take for granted, particularly if they only interact with others in their socio-economic class.

Yet the relevance of such discourses also varies depending on contextual information about a more disadvantaged socio-economic individual. For example, one male Danish professor described himself as very economically conservative when it came to dealing with these differences, yet he also recognized that he was sometimes too quick to jump to conclusions about strangers that he did not have much information about. He recalled being uncomfortable after a destitute-looking man asked him and his cousin for money in the New York City subway. "I was uncomfortable with that and very dismissive of him, but my cousin is a much nicer guy and asked him why he needed the money. The man then explained how he had served in the military and due to some traumatic experiences suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. This completely changed how I perceived him. I felt more open to giving him money. Yet if my cousin was not there, I don't think I would even start talking with him and would probably just dismiss him." This story suggests how often discomfort with minorities and those different from us derives from making assumptions about them that may or may not be true, and how in a classroom, we could add varied types of contextual information about such individuals to see how this affects the level of their discomfort and therefore behavior, in a similar way that you might do in a conjoint experimental design. This also highlights a broader point that when we feel this discomfort with difference, we also (1) are not taking the time to obtain more information about the individual that might alter our feeling of discomfort and (2) do not want to obtain further information because that may threaten some aspect of our identity. Since we cannot necessarily expect students to seek this information on their own, they potentially benefit from practice and training to do so.

Several students of mine explained to me that one reason they believe that college-educated people are more socially liberal and tolerant of minority groups was—echoing contact theory—simply due to more opportunities to interact with minority group members. In the words of one female Ukrainian student,

*"Because I come from an international school, we had like a whole mixture of students. And we had this like policy of no disrespect or discrimination. But students themselves naturally come to learn about each other and reduce discrimination that way. At first I remember a couple of students that ... I wouldn't say I felt like uncomfortable, but I kind of had like an avoidance feeling. Because of all those stereotypes. But I never met them, and you know, but once we started talking and they put us in, like, group projects together, all these kind of prejudices and stereotypes kind of disappear once you actually get close to them. At first I see a guy from Ghana but when you start interacting, then, I realize that I don't feel uncomfortable anymore or whatever."*

This can be especially productive in post-conflict contexts between members of groups that had previously been at war. One female Kosovar student described how,

*“In an NGO that I was working with, we would have these interactive games for the reconciliation between youth from Kosovo and Serbia. They would be invited into these activities as an opportunity to simply under training and taking photo. They built organic friendships between two different ethnic groups through interactive teamwork games. This would help us understand the other's perspective, their differences, what they went through, and perhaps what makes them different. So instead of, I don't know, holding trainings or lecturing to us on why we should accept the other people and treat them equally rather than bring them together to, we would come up with an interactive solution or problem solving ideas. This makes you understand more on why you shouldn't judge the other person and would bring you closer to them. I think an important aspect is that when they open up in vulnerable ways and tell more about themselves, people begin to give their trust to each other, they are not as fearful of each other. They even share some really deep secrets. This is what we call trauma bonding.”*

Although I had to proactively broach this subject, give my students time to reflect, and patiently encourage my students to provide examples, these suggestions demonstrate how many students know from their own experiences ways in which educational organizations have effectively reduced discrimination. This suggests that interactive activities between individuals or groups in a seminar-like setting are likely to reduce discomfort with minorities more than the lectures that are predominant in most universities. Of course, one often underappreciated benefit of university campuses is that they provide even more potential opportunities for intergroup interaction based on shared interest and cross-cutting cleavages that political scientists find moderate social conflict [21].

Such exercises would be valuable to correct what people think they know about each other and could potentially be extended to settings outside of college as is the case with the NGO. Some non-college-educated individuals primarily take in information that confirms what they already think, as suggested by one non-college-educated interviewee who embraced something that someone said on the internet because “it sounded right to me” even though he could not even identify the source of the information to me. Many I spoke with on this subject are in contrast highly skeptical of what the educational institutions have taught their children and others, especially as the instruction of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)-influenced curriculum often takes a very didactic approach. As one non-college-educated interviewee in Australia suggested of such efforts to reduce prejudice,

*“I don't care if he's transgender. I don't care if he's gay. I don't care if he's a White national-ist. But when he has an ideology that wants to change the world's ideology and nature itself, then there's a problem. That's where the problem lies. We don't care. When they want to go into bathrooms with women, and that's a man, and children, that's where everyone has a problem. You cannot change society for 1%. What I don't understand is, why can't we talk about this? We do, but they don't tolerate it. I've seen online many discussions, and the thing is, they are shut down by these people who only want it their way.”*

Many of the non-college-educated students I spoke with about this subject echoed this discourse. The above suggests that many DEI-driven attempts to increase

tolerance and acceptance of minorities inadvertently induce psychological reactance among their participants and exacerbate intolerance toward marginalized social minorities like transgender people. The approaches that some of my students suggested may be alternative ways for people to acknowledge their discomfort with differences, work through that discomfort, and form bonds with each other based on shared purpose.

Parents expressed a particular concern with this issue. One Australian mother told me when I brought up the issue of discomfort with various minorities, focused on transgender people too:

*“From what I learned, men have XX chromosomes, and women have XY chromosomes. If you choose to get cosmetic operation and have some part of your body taken off or whatever, that’s your choice. You can do whatever you want with your body. Don’t expect me to call you from that moment something you are not... You can call yourself a frog, but I am not going to call you a frog. In my daughter’s school, they have a trans lesbian gay day where they celebrate people with these identities. What about heterosexual day? Why don’t we get a day to celebrate our life? You can be trans or whatever else, but you’re not to put in trans men into women’s sport, or women’s bathrooms, or women’s prison.”*

This suggests that institutional efforts to increase inclusivity of gender and sexual minorities through providing special days also do not encourage people to work through their discomfort, but instead exacerbate it and increase resentment toward minorities. Although what I describe based on the diversity of interviewees suggests that discomfort with difference is a worldwide problem, the challenges of confronting it do exhibit some inter-societal variability that makes it even more challenging to process.

## **6. Cultural variability in the legitimacy of confronting difference**

Some cultural and institutional contexts will more greatly constrain the ability of educators to ask students to explore the reasons for their discomfort with minority groups. For example, one instructor in Germany explained to me that due to Germany’s history, Germans in public would proceed much more cautiously with broaching such subjects than in the United States or other societies that put a premium on freedom of speech. As he described it, “We have an atmosphere in which some subjects are not acceptable to discuss. Some subjects are just sensitive for us even to debate, you just cannot do so.” In fact, in Germany he described how they engage in what he called “non-explicit pressure” or “ambient pressure” to regulate perspectives that others may find offensive rather than “explicit confrontation.” As he described this approach, “The objective is just to enforce the rule that ‘We just don’t go there’ [discuss highly sensitive subjects] in Germany. It’s a social norm. For people that try to raise these subjects, what you do is you make others feel a little shame for bringing the subjects up, but you do not humiliate them.” Such cultural and institutional contexts will admittedly constrain the ability of educators and students to openly discuss discomfort they feel in their encounters with minority groups. However, the alternative to inviting people to explore their discomfort publicly in diverse settings may not be an absence of any discussion, but instead a discussion of the discomfort in a context that is much more conducive to fostering prejudice and hate.

This becomes especially tricky due to what this interviewee describes as a fragmented level of trust in institutions, science, and the rule of law, particularly among those who did not attend college and have had poorer job prospects, which deprives the individual of dignity and respect in society, according to this educator in Germany. For him, this dynamic is even stronger in Hungary than in Germany, where he lived. Echoing results from the contact theory research program, he described how he did not believe this was such an issue in a classroom because students had a superordinate identity as students and so were less likely to view each other as being members of an outgroup and to do so would cause cognitive dissonance. Although this might partly explain why many students did not view each other as members of a social minority group, this did not tackle the discomfort with minority groups outside of the classroom. He pointed out that this is only more likely as a collective identity as a nation or society declines, as he believed to be happening in recent years. In his view, those who did not attend college responded to efforts to ignore their discomfort in a very different way than the college-educated: Instead of viewing it as a well-meaning way to protect the historically marginalized, they view it as an attempt to culturally colonize the non-college-educated even though the college-educated believe it is rational and progressive. This German instructor described how in his experience the heavy level of censorship in German society and even higher levels a couple decades after the war in prohibiting people from expressing certain views in public makes them express them even more strongly at the ballot box and in private settings like social media fora where people can maintain an anonymous identity if they choose, and at pubs when people became drunk and they are more inclined to express candid views on social issues. He suggested that the contrast between the public and the private is especially the case in German society, where people are generally very kind and polite and do not express their innermost feelings in public.

This is also why he believed that programs to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion—although they did not hurt—also did not help much, especially in societies with strong cultural divisions along partisan lines. However, similar divisions between those with college education and those without college education exist in Germany as in other Western societies. Those with college education are likely to have more mercy or compassion or empathy toward minorities and strive to understand their experiences, whereas those without college education will assess whether minority group individuals work hard or not and are useful to the society and speak German, rather than the minority person's whole story. The main distinction of Germany is that working-class people had opportunities to obtain vocational education, which confers them with more respect in society than they would receive in other societies. Nonetheless, overall, they are very receptive to narratives about immigrants as invaders because they feel that the universe should have some type of God or savior guardian or a kind of hero that protects you and serves your emotional need, so that the universe is not something outside your control and that you cannot explain. In the German instructors' view, people who did not attend college are less capable of rigorously looking at things that offend them and are more manipulable to lies about people with whom they are not familiar and are more likely to act against them based on their fear of them. Although the case of Germany is unusual in all the regards, it highlights how important it is that both educators and students in developing strategies of how to productively process discomfort to increase acceptance and tolerance of minority groups to bear in mind how they have to adapt strategies to specific cultural, institutional, and social contexts, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach of applying what they believe to be a universally

applicable program. One Italian student noted how this is often the way university administrators have been implementing DEI programs across the world, typically approaching it in a “checking the boxes” type of way rather than periodically assessing the outcomes or consequences of such policies and how people are reacting to them. Thinking critically about how we approach discomfort with social differences between different groups provides a more granular and focused way of approaching the mission of DEI, but this requires reflexively glocalizing such programs and longitudinally evaluating their effectiveness.

## **7. Intellectualization, denial of vulnerability, and anger toward those who are different**

I also observed among adults without college education with whom I discussed this subject that they had a very hard time even acknowledging the fact that they were vulnerable. They would intellectualize the subject in a matter-of-fact way, denying any such emotional discomfort, and even become angry about my requests for them to recall specific encounters or incidents that informed their point of view. For example, one older Indian woman with a child in her final year of high school spoke of how they were having special days where they asked students to celebrate gay, lesbian, transgender, and other identities of sexual minorities. “How does your daughter react to this?” I asked her.

*“She usually just laughs it off, as she does not take it seriously at all. If they wanted to take celebrating transgender identities seriously, then why don’t they ever have a day for straight heterosexual identities. We never have an idea celebrating our own sexuality. That would be the fairer approach to it than they are doing. But they only celebrate non-straight identities, so I tell my daughter, you can stay home from school on the days they teach that subject.”*

She would stress to me that she had no problems with transgender people, but then said, “If come near me, I can just move away.” I pointed out to her that if everyone moved away from transgender people, then they effectively would become ostracized and stigmatized in the population. I asked her how they were supposed to have a job, befriend others, even purchase items, or engage in business, if enough people like her were moving away from them. By this point, the interviewee had become quite exacerbated with me, and as if to make her point, she simply told me, “I need to leave now. We are different from each other,” and left. Collecting data on how people are uncomfortable in confronting social minorities is certainly a challenge because often these people have not taken the time to reflect on why they are so uncomfortable with difference. Nonetheless, I believe this is a worthwhile if frustrating endeavor and will conclude by suggesting ways we social scientists could advance such a research program.

## **8. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored the way educators and current and former students have dealt—or usually not dealt—with the experience of discomfort in their encounters with minority groups that they have previously had little interaction

with. I suggested this is a worthwhile object of study because (1) in politically polarized societies, often educational systems have addressed this encounter either by humanizing such groups and didactically teaching students that they should not discriminate (among the progressive left-wing educators) or trying to eliminate discussions of such differences among many salient dimensions (e.g., race, gender, and sexuality) by banning material or lessons that bring up these subjects—both of which ignore and do not validate the discomfort many feel when encountering social minorities. Based on a hypothetical model that this non-acknowledged and non-validated discomfort could lead to prejudice, hate, or even violence against minority group members due to the positive feedback of algorithms in social media, I suggest that either of these approaches may be counter-productive, and we may more effectively improve majority group-minority group relations instead by encouraging more activities, communications, and exchanges between group that enable individuals in both majority and minority groups to clearly and openly communicate their honest feelings about the other instead of suppressing speech about such discomfort or even denying that the differences exist.

The above examples I provided are merely a first foray into aspects of these phenomena about which we could have far more research. I also recognize that although nearly all of the examples (except for one of my own) I offer are from the citizens of OECD countries other than the United States, the way I characterized this problem may seem US-centric. However, I believe that a divide between the college-educated and the non-college-educated in terms of their orientation toward these groups is a more generalizable phenomenon and believe it deserves comparative analysis. For this reason, I propose expanding the above analysis into five societies that I hypothesize would exhibit extreme views toward minority groups. The first is Brazil, because the country has historically had a very strong mestizo identity constituted by groups ranging from European settler colonial immigrants, immigrants from Japan, other Latin American countries, and Nazi refugees from Germany to large indigenous population and descendants of previously oppressed slaves from Africa, making it a marked contrast to many ethno-nationalist states. The second society is Hungary, due to its strong democratic support for a Prime Minister that remains strongly opposed to the extent to which the European Union would like Hungary to liberalize its immigration policy. The third is India, as it is an extremely ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse society, but also has shifted from a more democratic to a more autocratic form of government, and it has extremely stigmatized minorities and a long-entrenched class-based caste system that some have compared to racialized apartheid and Jim Crow regimes. The fourth case of interest is Nigeria because although it is very ethnically and linguistically diverse, it is also very culturally and religiously conservative, especially with regard to gender and sexual minority groups with less differences between the college-educated and non-college-educated. The final case is the United States which despite rhetorically identifying itself as a “nation of immigrants” in practice has had the governments of both parties adopt increasingly restrictive policies toward immigrants and has a society that is highly politically polarized with respect to what policies toward minority groups should be with regard to the rights of distinct types of minority groups. I think with a combination of surveys, field experiments, oral history interviews, and focus groups, researchers can further examine how individuals deal with discomfort around different types of minority groups and specifically how this varies between the college and non-college-educated. As the divide between these two groups in societies across the world becomes increasingly salient in terms of

consumption, culture, lifestyle, political preferences, and geographical settlement, additional research into how these two groups differ also in how they orient toward social reality and the acceptance of those different from themselves will become increasingly important to protect minority groups from the types of discrimination and oppression they have suffered in the past.


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*Edited by John R. Hermann*

With the seismic changes in society, with the rise of autocracies and right-wing and populist movements, minority groups are under increasing domestic and foreign threats. This makes the study of minorities more important than ever. *Minorities – New Challenges and Horizons* provides a novel and timely coverage of minorities from a comparative perspective. The edited book is divided into four discrete but interrelated subjects. The first section introduces the audience to the study of minorities, their discrimination, and strategies for overcoming that stigmatization. The second section examines the significant issue of minority representation in education. The third section examines the minority group of Muslims with a special focus on the nation-state of India. The fourth section offers new horizons for ways to improve minority's plight. This edited volume is a must-read for students and scholars of minority studies, education, and Islamophobia.

*Sandro Serpa, Social Sciences Series Editor*

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