

Impact of Ethnic Marginalization on the Political Stability of the State

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of ethnic marginalization on the political stability of states, highlighting the social and economic challenges faced by ethnic, religious, linguistic, and ideological minorities. It emphasizes that the lack of integration of these groups poses significant threats to national security, leading to unrest and instability. The research identifies that the mere existence of ethnic minorities does not inherently threaten stability; rather, the danger arises when these groups feel insecure about their identity and future. The study aims to explore the causes and consequences of ethnic marginalization, providing insights into how multi-ethnic societies can be managed effectively. By employing a case study methodology, the research delves into the systemic issues of ethnic marginalization, aiming to draw lessons from successful experiences in managing ethnic diversity. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how to foster political stability in multi-ethnic contexts, addressing a critical yet underexplored topic in contemporary political discourse.

Keywords: Ethnic Marginalization - Political Stability - Multi-Ethnic Societies - Social Integration

I. INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to shed light on the social and economic marginalization of ethnic groups and its impact on the political stability of the state. Issues related to the lack of integration of ethnic, religious, linguistic, or ideological minorities are among the most significant threats to national security. Such issues can lead to the exploitation of key threat sources and the squandering of national and regional capacities. The phenomenon of ethnic minorities and the problems arising from them are not confined to a specific region; most countries worldwide host ethnic or religious-linguistic minorities grappling with the challenges of ethnic pluralism, particularly due to overlapping religious, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences.

This phenomenon has long been a subject of research, and many nations have accumulated scientific and empirical knowledge about the causes of minority mobilization, manifestations of their grievances, and approaches to addressing these issues.

Undoubtedly, the mere existence of ethnic, linguistic, or ideological minorities does not inherently threaten national security. The danger arises when minorities perceive insecurity regarding their survival, future, and identity. In such cases, unintegrated minorities become a risk requiring resolution. From this perspective, this study aims to explore ethnic marginalization.

Research Problem: The issue of ethnic marginalization has become one of the most pressing challenges facing nations globally. Undoubtedly, the disturbances caused by ethnic groups, which often escalate into alarming situations, stem from internal factors rooted in flawed approaches to addressing these issues. In light of the critical importance of racial inequality, this study attempts to answer a central question: How can multi-ethnic societies be managed peacefully and effectively? What key lessons can be drawn from successful experiences in this field?

Research Objectives: The study has two primary objectives:

1. To highlight the dangers of ethnic marginalization and its role in undermining political stability.
2. To examine ethnic marginalization as a phenomenon with specific causes, consequences, and multidimensional components that shape its form and define its essence.

Significance of the Study: This study is noteworthy, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, as it addresses a rarely explored yet critically important topic: ethnic marginalization and the resulting divisions that threaten a state's unity and stability. Recently, many governments have struggled to develop legitimacy for their systems and programs, while existing political institutions have failed to integrate ethnic groups, leading to widespread unrest.

II. Methodology

This study employs a case study methodology, as it is particularly suited to the research topic. The focus is on analyzing ethnic marginalization within the state. The goal of this approach is to provide an in-depth examination of ethnic marginalization as a systemic issue.

Hypotheses:

The study is guided by a hypothesis that examines the impact of ethnic pluralism on political system stability. It posits that ethnic pluralism is a multidimensional problem arising not from a single variable but from multiple factors, including:

- The nature of systemic interactions with minority groups, which often involve unequal treatment, discrimination, and favoritism.
- The tendency of majority groups to disregard legitimate minority objectives, particularly equitable access to wealth, which heightens friction between minorities and the broader social fabric.

Study Structure:

To address the research questions and achieve its objectives, the study is divided into four main sections, in addition to an introduction and conclusion, as follows:

1. Part I: Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups.
2. Part II: The Socioeconomic Marginalization of Ethnic Groups.
3. Part III: The State's Role in Managing Multi-Ethnic Societies.
4. Part IV: Lessons from Successful Case Studies in Managing Multi-Ethnic Societies.

Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the study's key findings regarding the relationship between the state and its ethnic groups.

III. Results and Discussion

Part I: Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups :

Since the 1970s, social science literature has engaged with the concept of ethnicity, primarily to analyze differences between human groups—not class disparities between two ethnic groups in cooperative or conflictual relationships. In this section, the researcher clarifies the definitions of race, ethnicity, ethnic group, and multi-ethnic societies, while distinguishing these terms from overlapping concepts to eliminate ambiguity and establish their core meanings.

Firstly: Definition of Ethnicity:

The Arabic term "العرقية" (ethnicity)—derived from the English "ethnicity" and the Greek "ethnos" (meaning "people," "nation," or "race")—has increasingly entered Arabic academic discourse. Among ancient Greeks, it referred to a human group sharing common ancestry (1). The term evolved significantly in the 20th century, particularly after World War I, to encompass methods and criteria for classifying human entities and differentiating their identities based on:

- Organic traits (e.g., race, lineage)
- Cultural characteristics (e.g., customs, lifestyles) (2).

The concept of ethnicity (or racism) denotes the association between physical traits, cultural/social environments, and their implications for the perceived superiority of certain lineages over others (3).

Lexical Definitions:

- Al-Misbah Al-Munir Dictionary: Defines "عرق" (race) as "any distinct lineage of birds, horses, etc.," with the plural "أعراق" (4).
- Al-Wasīṭ Dictionary: Similarly states that "عرق" means "the origin of all things" or "a dense, impassable mountain" (5).
- Al-Munjid Dictionary: Defines "أعراق" as "those of noble lineage" and emphasizes ancestral roots (6).
- Dictionary of Political Terms: Describes race as "a group sharing physical traits presumed to stem from a common genetic heritage" (7).
- Duncan Mitchell: Views race as "a term applied to populations with shared biological traits determined by heredity, though no genetic factors fully separate racial groups" (8).
- Al-Mawrid Dictionary: Notes that while race is a biological term, its adoption in social sciences has led to conceptual ambiguity (6).

The Concept of Biological Race : The idea of biological race is rooted in the following core beliefs (7):

1. Humanity is divided into distinct, isolated, and discrete categories.
2. These categories are ancient and immutable.
3. An individual's behavior and biology can be explained by their racial affiliation.
4. Races are hierarchically ordered.

1.1 Ethnic Group :

There is significant divergence among social scientists, particularly anthropologists, regarding the definition of an ethnic group (Ethnic Group). Some equate it with a racial group (Racial Group), while others use it synonymously with nation (Nation). A notable group of scholars conflate the term with minority (Minority), though disagreements persist not only over defining "minority" but also over its labeling. For instance:

- Some simply use "minority."
- Others specify "national minority" (National Minority).
- Still others prefer "ethnic minority" (Ethnic Minority) (8).

Definitions:

- Royal Anthropological Institute (UK): Defines an ethnic group as "a biological group sharing specific hereditary traits that distinguish it from other groups" (9).
- Mahmoud Abu El-Enein: Describes it as "a group living within a broader society, united by perceived shared ancestry and cultural traits such as language, religion, or traditions" (10).
- Mohamed Ahmed Bayoumi: Views it as "a temporary aggregation of standardized, hereditary traits tied to a geographic region" (11).
- Others: Define it as a human collective sharing physical (e.g., common ancestry) or cultural (e.g., language, religion, history) characteristics (12).

1.2. Racial or Ethnic Minorities :

These minorities are distinguished by physical traits (e.g., skin color, race), such as Black Americans, Indigenous peoples, or Asians in the Americas, or Black communities in North Africa. The stark contrast between a minority's race and the majority's (e.g., Black vs. White) often hinders integration and fuels conflict (13).

Key Distinctions:

1. Ethnonational Groups: Regionally concentrated peoples with histories of organized autonomy and separatist goals (e.g., Kurds, Basques) (14).
2. Ethnic Castes: Distinct racial/cultural groups descended from migrants, often occupying specific economic roles and lower social status (e.g., the Romani in Europe) (15).
3. Ethnic Movements: Organized socio-political movements emerging within non-dominant ethnic groups (typically minorities) (16).

Secondly: Ethnicity and Overlapping Concepts :

The term ethnicity overlaps with several others, such as race, nation, nationality, minority, and sect, necessitating clear differentiation:

1. Race vs. Ethnicity

These concepts are often conflated. Many scholars use "ethnicity" interchangeably with "race" or "ethnic group," and Arabic-English dictionaries frequently mirror this ambiguity (17).

a. Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to shared cultural practices, language, religion, or historical experiences that bind a group, distinct from biological traits. For example:

- Arab ethnicity: Tied to language, heritage, and cultural norms rather than genetics.
- Race, by contrast, is a socially constructed categorization based on perceived physical differences.

Fredrik Barth was among the first to conceptualize ethnicity as a dynamic phenomenon. He argued that ethnicity does not represent rigid, fixed groups but fluid human collectives whose membership and boundaries evolve with social changes. Barth emphasized that ethnic identity is formed, affirmed, and transmitted through interactions between decision-makers and individuals (18).

British sociologist Anthony D. Smith uses the French term (*ethnie*) to describe groups sharing myths of common descent, a connection to a specific territory, shared cultural elements, and a sense of solidarity. Unlike a nation, which shares culture and origin myths but lacks intentional boundary maintenance, ethnic groups actively preserve their distinctive traits (19).

Clifford Geertz defines ethnicity as "the primordial tie stemming from birth into a religious group that speaks a specific language or dialect and follows distinct social practices" (20).

Panikos notes that ethnicity derives from the Greek *ethnos* (nation) and argues that ethnic groups and nations are inseparable. Ethnicity encompasses immigrants, minorities, and diasporas that maintain shared traits like geographic concentration, endogamy, and intergenerational cultural transmission (21).

In summary, ethnicity refers to human groups united by customs, traditions, language, religion, physical features, and other shared attributes (22).

b. Politicized Ethnicity:

Anthony Smith defines politicized ethnicity as groups possessing "a distinct sense of solidarity," self-awareness, pride, and shared values/symbols. Their political goals revolve around state power, whether expressed through religion, language, land, secularism, race, class, or a combination—all forms of politicized ethnicity (23).

Politicized ethnic groups vary in causes, demands, and intensity. For example, Kurds pursue secession, while Black Americans seek improved rights and integration within the existing state framework (24).

c. Ethnic Group:

- UNESCO: "A segment of society distinguished by culture, language, or physical traits" (25).
- Encyclopedia Britannica: "A social group or category within a larger society united by race, language, nationality, or culture" (26).
- Barth: "A human group characterized by mutual interaction, shared distinctive culture, and awareness of collective goals, rooted in racial, religious, or historical ties" (27).
- Schermerhorn: "A subgroup within society claiming shared ancestry, history, and symbolic cultural markers (e.g., religion, language) that foster a 'peoplehood' identity" (28).
- Everett Hughes: True ethnic groups require clear membership boundaries. If membership is easily renounced, the group lacks genuine ethnic cohesion (29).

Aguirre and Turner substitute "subpopulation" for "ethnic group," referring to communities with distinct histories, behaviors, institutions, and cultures (30). Others define ethnic groups as collectives bound by cultural traits (e.g., language, religion) rather than immutable biological traits, with identities shaped by socially constructed competencies (30).

Ethnic Group (Continuation): Saad Eddin Ibrahim defines an ethnic group as "a human collective whose members share customs, traditions, language, religion, or other distinctive traits, including ancestry and physical features" (31). Thus, an ethnic group (Ethnic Group) is an ethnic population (Ethnic Population) composed of individuals categorized by the broader society—and often by the group itself—as possessing a unique historical narrative, distinct behaviors, organizational and cultural characteristics, and a collective identity that differentiates them from others (32).

d. Social Characteristics of Ethnic Groups:

Ethnic groups are distinguished from others by variables such as language, religion, lineage, or national origin, in addition to two key features (33):

1. **Involuntary Membership:** Individuals are born into the group, inheriting ethnic traits like religion, language, or skin color, and gradually acquire other cultural and temperamental traits.
2. **Endogamy:** Most members marry within their ethnic group. While interethnic marriage is possible, empirical evidence shows it remains exceptional rather than the norm.

The primary distinction lies in the basis of differentiation:

- **Racial Groups:** Defined by physical traits (e.g., skin color, hair type, facial/body features).
- **Ethnic Groups:** Defined by social bonds (e.g., shared language, religion, cultural practices), irrespective of physical differences (34).

2. Identity (Ethnic, Racial, National) (35)

- **Ethnic Identity:** Focuses on shared lineage, cultural heritage rooted in common ancestry, and less on political goals like autonomy.

- **Racial Identity:** A utopian construct in American discourse (itself a phenomenon requiring interrogation), emphasizing shared lineage and cultural heritage—akin to ethnic identity—but

framed more broadly. For example, "Black identity" is often contrasted with "Wolof identity" (a specific ethnic group in West Africa).

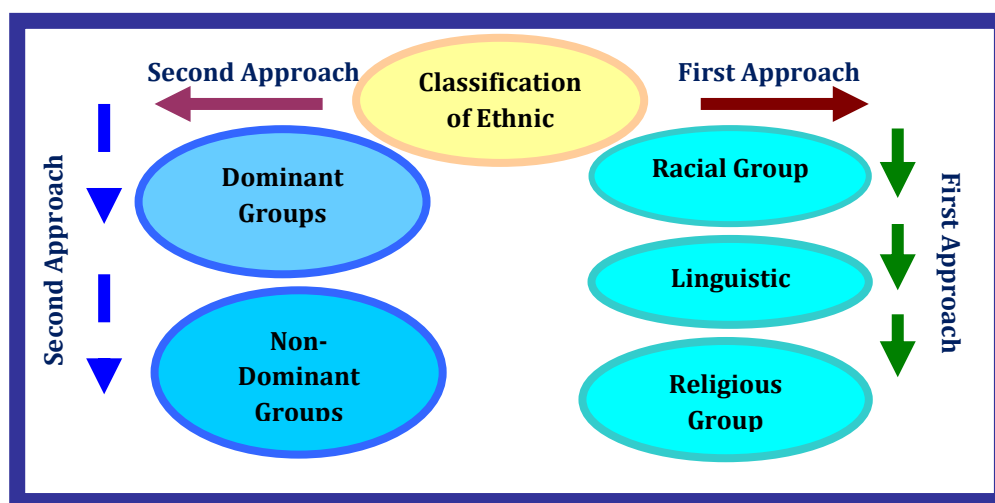
- **National Identity:** Centers on political boundaries and autonomy, often justified through narratives of shared cultural heritage.

Thirdly: Classification of Ethnic Groups (36)

Ethnic groups are classified through divergent approaches, reflecting the varied criteria scholars employ. Two prominent frameworks emerge:

1. Intrinsic Characteristics Approach: Classifies groups based on inherent traits (e.g., lineage, race, religion).
2. Socio-Political-Economic Status Approach: Classifies groups by their political, social, and economic positions within society.

Figure 1: Classification of Ethnic Groups (37)



First Approach: Classification by Intrinsic Traits

1. Racial Group: An ethnic group unified by shared ancestry or physical traits (e.g., skin color), which serve as the core marker of distinction from other groups in their society.
2. Linguistic Group: An ethnic group bound by a common language.
3. Religious Group: An ethnic group where religion is the primary determinant of identity and differentiation from coexisting groups.

Second Approach: Classification by Socio-Political-Economic Status

1. Dominant Ethnic Groups: Groups that control the levers of power in their society. Their members occupy elite social positions and represent the wealthiest stratum, often viewing their dominance as an expression of collective identity.
2. Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups: Groups marginalized from power. Most members occupy informal social roles and belong to the poorest strata, while a differing dominant group shapes the societal framework.

(2) Socioeconomic Marginalization of Ethnic Groups

The term "marginalization" is metaphorically employed in political, social, and economic discourse to signify absence of consideration, value, or care; denial of participation; and systemic neglect. It manifests at varying social and relational levels.

Marginalization is a multidimensional problem:

- Political: Monopolization of power by a party or elite.
- Economic: Concentration of wealth in a single class.
- Ethnic: Assertion of ethnic supremacy.
- Gender: Pervasive patriarchal cultures excluding women.

However, some interpretations reductively confine the term to a single dimension. Scholars note that marginalization often reflects societal tendencies to exclude "undesirable" or "unproductive" groups from protective systems and social interactions, thereby restricting their access to survival resources and opportunities.

In political and socioeconomic discourse, marginalization ranges from extreme forms—ethnic cleansing or xenophobia—to subtler economic and social barriers.

The Sudanese Context: A Critical Analysis

In Sudanese political rhetoric, "marginalization" is narrowly equated with Arab or Northern ethnic supremacy over others. This interpretation, however, conflicts with historical and logical realities:

1. Ethnic Supremacy as a Tribal Relic: Ethnic hierarchies persist across all Sudanese tribal and communal groups—a legacy of the country's underdeveloped social fabric.
2. Misconceptions of "Arabness":
 - No Sudanese group claiming Arab ancestry is ethnically "pure"; all have mixed heritage.
 - Groups like the Zubaydiyah and Rashaida—often labeled "Arab" in a racial sense—are themselves marginalized. Some factions even allied with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) to counter systemic exclusion.
3. Semantic Ambiguities:
 - "Arab" is conflated with "Bedouin" (referencing Quranic al-a'rāb), implying a "backward" nomadic lifestyle versus urbanization.
 - "Northerners" is geographically fluid:
 - It may denote all Sudan except the South.
 - Alternatively, it refers solely to Northern State residents—excluding Nubian-origin tribes (half the Northern population) from "Arab" identity.
4. Contradictions in Marginalization:
 - Northern states face marginalization comparable to other regions.
 - Political and economic marginalization—monopolization of power and wealth—affects even tribal/communal groups aligned with elites.
5. Urban-Rural Divides:
 - Disparities between rural and urban areas, and within cities, exist globally—even in ethnically homogeneous states—highlighting marginalization's diverse forms (38).

(3) The State's Role in Managing Multi-Ethnic Societies

The severity of societal conflict often hinges on political systems' approaches to ethnic pluralism—specifically, the neutrality or bias of the regime in mediating tensions. Ethnicity becomes a political problem when groups crystallize into polarized factions. Regimes employ public policies as tools to achieve goals, but without mobilizing resources to maintain stability, they risk collapse under demands and challenges posed by alternative elites. This compels regimes to leverage both material and non-material resources to preserve power and stability.

Political institutions play a pivotal role in managing ethnic diversity by:

1. Converting inputs (demands, grievances) into outputs (policies, laws).
2. Promoting shared symbols to foster societal integration.
3. Mitigating interethnic conflict through structured interaction.

This section examines two key state strategies: integration and assimilation.

Integration vs. Assimilation:

Both strategies aim to dissolve ethnic differences and conflicts but diverge in method:

- Integration: Seeks to forge a shared national identity for the state and society.
- Assimilation: Focuses on creating a common cultural identity through the melting pot model, typically imposed by dominant groups onto weaker subgroups (39).

These strategies often prioritize the identity of the dominant group, erasing minority distinctions under a singular framework (40).

Types of Assimilation (41)

1. Cultural Assimilation:
 - Dissolves distinct cultures into the dominant group's framework.
 - Advocates emphasize reducing ethnic differences through state tools (e.g., education, media).
2. Structural Assimilation:
 - Merges ethnic identities into an existing or new overarching identity.
 - Success markers include increased interethnic marriage, eroding boundaries between groups.
3. Institutional Assimilation:
 - Establishes political and social institutions where participation is non-ethnic.
 - Encourages collaboration across groups within neutral frameworks (e.g., civic organizations).

Table 1: State Policies for Integrating Ethnic Minorities (42)

Policy Approach	Culture	Economy	Policies
Assimilation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social and residential integration by class. - Dominant language/culture education reform. - Easier university access. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial allocations for development. - Health and recreational programs. - Job training. - Anti-discrimination laws. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guaranteed civil and political rights. - Selective promotion of dominant parties and governmental positions. - Minority group interests.
Pluralism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protection of cultural/religious differences - Multilingual education and media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Socioeconomic empowerment for minority groups. - Representation in public/private jobs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political parties and advocacy groups for minorities. - Representation in councils and ruling coalition's.
Power Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social and residential segregation. - Separate schools, media, and academic institutions. - Quotas for communal groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communal economic activities. - Localized public services. - Quotas in public/private jobs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minority political parties. - Participation in decision-making bodies. - Veto rights for communities on relevant policies - Administrative autonomy over public services.

(4) Lessons from Successful Case Studies in Managing Multi-Ethnic Societies :

Drawing from this study and successful global experiences in managing multi-ethnic societies, the following key lessons emerge:

1. Acknowledge Marginalization as a Multi-Dimensional Threat: Recognize that marginalization—economic, social, political, or ethnic—poses systemic risks to societal cohesion. Addressing it requires collaborative efforts to achieve equitable inclusion across all spheres.
2. Adopt Inclusive National Integration Policies: Governments must implement policies that foster national unity within diversity, ensuring equality and non-discrimination. Success depends

on the state's capacity to distribute resources fairly and make all ethnic minorities feel equally valued (43).

3. Prioritize Stability Over Domination: Political leaders should champion stability—political and economic—without resorting to state hegemony. Collaborative governance trumps coercive control in sustaining peaceful coexistence.

4. Cultivate Dialogue and Coexistence: Promote a culture of interfaith and interethnic dialogue. Recognize multilingualism (official and national languages) as a tool for shared development, fostering tolerance and participatory nation-building.

5. Forge Shared National Principles: Successful states unify multi-ethnic societies by establishing universal principles—applied equally to all—that serve as a binding thread between diverse groups.

6. Exercise Visionary Political Will: Effective leadership requires a clear vision to navigate policy alternatives and implement strategies at optimal times, steering societal growth inclusively.

7. Strengthen Communal Solidarity: Build a shared communal life where economic interdependence activates cooperation, reinforcing collective identity beyond ethnic divides.

8. Ensure Inter-Ethnic Political Representation: Create platforms for ethnic groups to influence policymaking, ensuring their voices shape political processes through structured participation.

9. Invest in Human Development: Education is pivotal for nurturing civic identity that transcends ethnic boundaries. Equip populations with skills, ethics, and creativity through training and knowledge-sharing, driving societal prosperity and stability.

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