NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

Civic Update
Inclusion of Ethnic and Religious Groups

Across regions, ethnicity and religion are among the key factors that differentiate people and can create fault lines that lead to discrimination, exclusion and inequality. Relationships between groups are often complex and the result of historic factors that shape social, cultural, economic and political interactions. Likewise, religious and ethnic identities are often intertwined, which can more starkly distinguish the identities of one group from another.

The United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights and international proclamations on indigenous rights and religious freedom recognize and advance the principle that all religious and ethnic groups are entitled to equal rights and protections.[1] However, there continue to be egregious cases of abuse and discrimination all over the world. Many ethnic and religious communities are denied basic rights, lack political representation and are exploited. Certain ethnic

Participants of a "living library" exchange in Hungary

groups are also more likely to live in poverty, such as Dalit and Muslim minorities in India and the Roma in Eastern Europe. Indigenous populations represent one of the largest and most historically disenfranchised groups, with a population of over 370 million people across continents.[2] Indigenous groups are highly vulnerable and are subject to forcible removal from their lands, erasure of their culture and outright hostility from other communities.

Religious minorities face similar threats. There are 71 nations with blasphemy laws criminalizing speech against religion, which has resulted in individuals being imprisoned or even put to death for expressing their own religious beliefs.[3] In 2017, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Ahmed Shaheed, said that 70% of the world lives in a nation with "a high level of social hostility involving religion or belief."[4]

Current events like increased migrant flows and ongoing refugee crises have exacerbated ethnic and religious intolerance in many regions.

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Concurrently, the rise of right-wing nationalist movements across the globe has further intensified xenophobia. Authoritarian leaders also leverage fear of outsiders for political gain and mobilize identity factors such as race, religion or national origin to inflame tensions between groups. Some of these trends are intensified by disinformation and misinformation campaigns that aim to disrupt peaceful intergroup relations or widen existing divisions. In locations where political space is closing, minority groups tend to be disproportionately targeted by increased government scrutiny and repression.

Women and LGBTI activists working at the intersection of ethnic or religious rights experience additional layers of vulnerability, including gender-based violence, in these contexts.[5] When the space for participation constricts, populations that are marginalized lose critical opportunities to use political processes to pursue their interests and protect their freedoms. As NDI has witnessed, political parties and movements are increasingly drawn along ethnic or religious lines. In many places where the Institute works, ethnicity, tribe, religion or sect is predictive of what political party an individual may belong to or what candidate they will support. These allegiances can sometimes result from geographic distribution among identity groups. However, they more often arise as a response to histories of polarization and conflict between ethnic and religious communities and these dynamics are perpetuated through the political process.

In extreme cases, the exclusion of religious or ethnic populations from political power can lead to radicalization among those who do not feel they have the ability to express their voice within existing government institutions. Many current conflicts that are associated with religious or ethnic divisions have been sown by undemocratic actors who seek to gain, politically or economically, from exacerbating these divides.

Definitions and Key Terms

Ethnic Group: A category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, language, history or culture.

Religious Group: A category of people who share common religious creed, beliefs, doctrines, practices or rituals.

Intersectionality: The concept that each individual has multiple identity factors, such as race, gender, ability, sexuality and class. These overlapping identities contribute to the specific type of privilege or discrimination an individual experiences.

Discrimination: Actions based on conscious or unconscious prejudice that favor one group over others in the provision of goods, services, opportunities or rights.

Minority: A group of people who, because of certain identity factors, are singled out and face disproportionate barriers to economic, social and political rights. These groups are not always smaller in terms of relative population size. Minority status results from lesser access to power within a society, not from demographics.

Tolerance: Acceptance and open-mindedness to different practices, attitudes and cultures.

Access: Creating the necessary conditions to ensure that all individuals and organizations have equal opportunities, resources and representation.

Inclusion: The degree to which people enjoy equitable access to public information, resources and decision-making.

Equity vs Equality: Equality is the right for everyone to receive the same treatment and opportunities, while equity recognizes that certain groups must overcome barriers to access those same opportunities.

Approaches for Ethnic and Religious Groups

To ensure all members of society have a voice in the political process, NDI considers ethnic and religious dynamics and conducts programs to address exclusionary barriers, create safe spaces for engagement and build working relationships between communities. Key programming principles include:

Consider the Context: Ethnic and religious differences are present everywhere NDI works, but they manifest in vastly different ways. For example, in the Central African Republic and Kosovo, ethnicity and religion are defining issues associated with violent conflict. Bridging intergroup divisions is the critical factor for NDI to consider in these polarized settings. Elsewhere, the primary barrier to social and political inclusion is pervasive discrimination against specific minority groups, such as Roma in Central and Eastern Europe or indigenous populations in Latin America. In those contexts, NDI will typically work directly with representatives from these communities to build their political power and help them use democratic avenues to address their marginalization. Often this entails strategies to challenge the general population's discriminatory social attitudes and shift negative stigma, which are the underlying forces of exclusion. Finally, in many diverse societies, the interplay of identity and politics is a contextual factor that must be considered in everything NDI does, even when ethnic or religious inclusion is not a targeted program objective. For instance, in Kenya, geography and political affiliations are usually intertwined with ethnicity. Therefore, NDI is intentional about distributing program activities and party support across all regions, mindful that this distribution enables all ethnic groups to participate and contribute to its programs. Similarly, after the appointment of a new Prime Minister in April 2018, NDI conducted an assessment of Ethiopia's political and social context to identify entry points for potential NDI programming. The strong ties between ethnicity and party affiliation in Ethiopia were one of several key factors addressed in the resulting report, underscoring the importance of managing ethnic divisions in places that are transitioning towards a more democratic system.

Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitivity: The Do No Harm principle emphasizes that external interventions – like NDI programs – always interact with a society's existing conflict and vulnerability factors. Nuanced analysis is required to ensure interventions do not create or exacerbate conflicts, pose undue risk for partners or deepen discriminatory power imbalances. Such analysis typically results in an understanding of what factors divide or connect people, which should inform all aspects of program design and implementation. Do No Harm refers both to how NDI activities approach ethnic and religious differences between communities, as well as NDI's own conduct as an actor in the context.

Building Trust: The complex history of many religious and ethnic minorities entails structural discrimination, political and economic disenfranchisement, and even violent persecution or genocide. In some places this has created a fear or mistrust of outside communities and government institutions. Groups with these histories of trauma and exclusion may not see the benefit of participating in democratic practices that have failed them in the past. In these instances, NDI programs require a greater emphasis on trust-building and basic civic education to build inclusive linkages between political institutions and communities that are marginalized. NDI uses approaches such as partnering with local organizations that have established, credible networks in their community, and emphasizing long-term relationship building to develop confidence. In order to build trust between polarized communities, NDI will often facilitate dialogue and promote cooperation by helping different groups form coalitions to pursue shared priorities.

Nothing About Us Without Us: This concept captures the rights-based approach to development, which supports local partners to be the leaders on decisions that impact their communities, rather than passive objects of choices made

on their behalf. When working with marginalized ethnic and religious groups, Nothing About Us Without Us is critical to ensure that these historically disenfranchised communities are able to claim agency, build their political power and define issues that are most relevant to them. NDI operationalizes Nothing About Us Without Us by always conducting targeted inclusion programs in close partnership with representatives of marginalized populations; while NDI brings technical expertise in the democratic process, local groups are the experts when it comes to their communities.

These principles are further explored in the following program examples from Bahrain, Central and Eastern Europe, Honduras and Southeast Asia.

Addressing Divisions in Bahrain

Since the violent suppression of the 2011 political uprising, sectarian divisions have deepened in Bahrain. The continued intimidation and detention of opposition leaders and human rights activists, many of whom are demanding greater representation for the country's majority-Shia population and accountability for the Sunni-controlled regime, has left little space for Bahrainis to work together across political and sectarian lines. While the magnitude of the challenges is great, NDI has been working with moderates on both sides of the aisle to develop skills and relationships that help transform attitudes and build stronger communities. Between 2013 and 2018, NDI worked with 57 Bahrainis and conducted 10 international exchanges to provide participants with skills-based learning opportunities in conflict resolution, negotiation and community organizing. NDI utilizes third-country programming in places with a history of identity-based conflict or political transition, such as Northern Ireland and Tunisia. Due to the politically sensitive context in Bahrain, NDI chose to conduct program activities outside of the country. NDI identified and recruited participants using the "snowball" method, where participants recruit other participants, and then

NDI balanced participant representation across the political and sectarian spectrum.

During the 2015 program, participants worked through a negotiation simulation in a fictional country, "Numetra", which was in the midst of a political crisis involving protests and violence. The participants reversed their roles for this exercise: for instance, Bahraini government loyalists played the role of opposition members and opposition members played the role of loyalists. This experiential learning activity gave participants the opportunity to work through conflict in a no-stakes scenario, and contributed to development of skills like active listening, critical thinking and empathy required to approach reconciliation in Bahrain. These competencies are key to transcending conflict over sectarian differences, and allow for open dialogue necessary for working towards a more peaceful society.

Manual for the Numetra simulation

A major aspect of this program was partnering with young people and providing them with tools to play a more active and constructive role in their communities. In January 2017, NDI organized a group of 13 young Bahraini activists for the first iteration of the Youth Learning Academy in Tunisia. This academy trained participants on identifying stakeholders and potential entry points, identifying possible allies and opponents, and techniques for engagement in a divided society. To gain first-hand experience in organizing and project management, 11 program

NDI partner, the Kosovar New Romani Party, campaigns in Prizen, Kosovo ahead of the 2014 parliamentary election

participants interned with Tunisian CSOs focused on youth development, women's empowerment, art, and parliamentary and election monitoring.

NDI's work in Bahrain has succeeded in forming lasting relationships across sectarian and political divides. A 2018 survey of participants showed that 75 percent of respondents believed their participation in the program made it easier for them to communicate with people who hold different political, cultural or religious views. 92 percent of respondents reported that they have maintained contacts with participants from other groups since the end of the program. Over the course of these initiatives, NDI presented participants with opportunities to interact outside of a polarized setting, illustrating the impact of dialogue to promote reconciliation between groups.

Supporting Roma Political Participation in Central and Eastern Europe

The Roma are the largest cross-border minority group in Central and Eastern Europe. They have a long history of marginalization, which has contributed to low literacy rates, education outcomes and economic status. While the Roma account for approximately ten percent of the population in many countries in the region, they are extremely underrepresented politically, and in recent years, rising xenophobia and right-wing nationalism have led to an increase in prejudice. NDI has partnered with Roma communities for the past fifteen years to address their political exclusion and marginalization. Because of long-standing distrust between the Roma community and government, long-term partnerships are critical to establishing trust and developing sustainable initiatives that increase Roma political participation. NDI programs seeking to increase Roma participation in politics strive to build inclusive political space, strengthen their political voice, and increase accountability between the Roma and their representatives. The Institute currently supports Roma partners in Hungary, Macedonia, Serbia, Romania, Slovakia and Albania.

Under the current program, NDI provides targeted support to Roma candidates and political leaders. In Hungary, NDI led a training for six Roma representatives on strategies to utilize social media in electoral campaigns. Recognizing

that Roma women do not have access to the same opportunities for engagement or political representation, NDI focuses elements of its program on increasing their political participation. In Slovakia, NDI worked with the Roma Maternals Center (RMC) on their project, "Roma Women to Municipal Governments." The RMC identified women candidates, who were then incorporated into NDI's regional election training. The participants were able to improve their campaign and fundraising skills, build political networks, and gain experience working across party-lines. In November 2018, approximately 24 NDI-trained Roma mayors and 100 local councilors were elected in local Slovak elections.

NDI also works to increase the civic participation of Roma community leaders and activists. This includes facilitating public fora between Roma and the local government, during which citizens are able to vocalize their concerns in front of decision-making bodies. With NDI's guidance, a civil society advocacy group, Roma SOS, organized a public discussion on housing in the Macedonian town of Kocani, which brought together the mayor's staff and 20 members of the Roma community. Prior to presenting before the council, NDI held simulation exercises and provided feedback to the group on how to improve their presentation skills. As a result of the discussion, the local government committed to build houses for 26 Roma families who were living in old army barracks.

With targeted assistance from NDI over the course of several years, Roma SOS has emerged as a leading organization for Roma rights in Macedonia. Their work has led to increased accountability and transparency of local governments when addressing issues faced by Roma communities. NDI has found that partnering with Roma community leaders, building community support, and fostering accountability with local governments are effective strategies for advancing Roma rights. While the Roma continue to face discrimination across Europe, the work of NDI's partners contributes to equal rights and inclusive representation.

Intergroup Coalition-Building to Combat Xenophobia and Religious-Based Discrimination in Europe

The ongoing refugee crisis has inflamed intergroup tensions and xenophobia throughout Central and Eastern Europe, including a rise in Islamophobia, anti-Semitism. To support local groups in countering these trends, NDI implemented a 21-month program in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland to mobilize communities against hate speech and religious and ethnic discrimination. Because these issues are deeply rooted in social and cultural norms, groups were encouraged to form coalitions that addressed broader challenges to discrimination. During the program, NDI organized 100 participants, including interfaith leaders and religious organizations, to build coalitions around common strategies for countering discrimination. The coalitions were able to garner more widespread attention than the individual efforts of one group. Furthermore, by working together publicly, the coalitions demonstrated the opportunities and advantages of inter-group cooperation. During the program, NDI applied social contact theory, which states that interpersonal contact provides an opportunity for members of different groups to interact and communicate, thus facilitating understanding and an appreciation of different points of views.[6]

Launch of the Book of Best Practices of Actions for National and Ethnic Minorities and Foreign Residents, funded by an NDI small grant

The first phase of the program involved empowering local activists from different communities, including Jewish, Muslim, and Christian groups, to participate in interfaith dialogues. The dialogues provided a safe space to learn about other ethnicities and religions and find points of agreement in order to build partnerships. NDI partnered with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), an organization committed to connecting ethnic and religious minorities and activists, to implement a set of workshops designed to strengthen participants' understanding of anti-discrimination legal frameworks and provide best practices in inter-communal dialogue and advocacy. At the conclusion of the workshops, NDI succeeded in connecting a number of advocacy organizations and continued to provide additional guidance to the groups.

In an effort to promote coalition-building throughout the region, NDI provided small grants to coalitions of three or more groups with different religious affiliations. The coalitions developed programs on a variety of issues including community education, awareness-raising among mainstream populations, bringing together religious and spiritual leaders, and developing networks of community organizers. The coalitions saw multiple successes, beginning with interfaith dialogues at middle and high schools. The speakers, consisting of an imam, priest, and rabbi, visited schools around the region to promote religious tolerance. Through interactive activities and education sessions, the religious leaders were able to foster understanding between groups by exposing young people to new perspectives on religious tolerance and correcting misconceptions that result in fear or hatred of other religions. As word spread about the trio, additional schools began to invite the leaders to speak about inter-religious tolerance. This project culminated with a final, public discussion on religious pluralism in Bratislava, which drew an unprecedented crowd of nearly 300 people.

Various religious communities and civil society organizations
came together at the Fair Play Football Tournament in
September 2017 in Budapest

Supporting Afro-Honduran Political Participation

Afro-Latin communities experience consistent discrimination throughout Latin America, resulting in low literacy and education rates, deforestation and forcible removal of their land, and lack of political representation.[7] As part of a regional human rights program, NDI's work in Honduras has contributed to the formation of an Afro-Honduran caucus of 11 Congress members. The caucus represents five political parties, demonstrating the representatives' willingness to work across party lines in the fight for minority rights in Honduras. In 2018, NDI completed a baseline assessment to identify the needs of marginalized groups, including the Afro-Honduran population. Primary issues identified by indigenous and Afro-Honduran populations included the standardization of an agenda of priority reforms across nine national indigenous and Afro-Honduran groups, the establishment of a Secretariat for Indigenous and Afro-Descendant populations and the implementation of Article 169 of the International Labour Organization Convention on the rights of indigenous populations to community consultations. NDI held separate outreach meetings with caucus members and local indigenous rights organizations to support them in further defining the priorities for a human rights agenda. In May, NDI presented these identified legislative initiatives to the Afro-Honduran legislative caucus to garner support for human rights legislative action. The deputies were receptive to the study and identified related initiatives currently being advanced by the caucus, including legislation for Equitable Participation of Black and Ethnic Populations in Honduras (*Ley de Participación Equitativa de los Pueblos Negros y Étnicos de Honduras)*. As a result of the outreach meetings with other deputies and vulnerable populations, the caucus agreed to incorporate identified legislative initiatives from the human rights baseline study into their strategic legislative action plan.

Another aspect of NDI's project was monitoring of online political speech, which included training participants on identifying various forms of hate speech. During a seminar in Krakow, Poland, participants learned how to utilize the Hate Speech Reporting Platform, an incident-reporting tool developed by OSCE/ODIHR. Partners representing Jewish communities in Poland participated in a series of meetings with the Ministry and police officers to discuss how the platform can be used to monitor hate crimes and acts of anti-Semitism.

During the final component of the program, NDI and ENAR organized a study mission to Brussels with 20 program participants of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The delegation met with members of the EU Parliament, Open Society European Policy Institute, and European Parliament's Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup. They also met with the Mayor of Mechelin, a nearby multi-ethnic town, to discuss how to peacefully integrate multiple ethnicities. With a population of 84,000, the town has residents from over 138 different nationalities, including migrants and refugees. The mayor noted that a major step was the involvement of each community in efforts to clean up the city, so that both immigrants and locals would want to live there. The participants found this to be inspiring, and many planned to replicate elements of this project in their own communities.

Participant evaluations at the conclusion of the program showed an increased understanding of historical and root causes of inequality, increased trust and commonalities, and higher levels of confidence in their ability to collaborate across ethnic and religious divides. Over the course of the program, the participants demonstrated the positive impact of intergroup coalition-building and the importance of working across religious and ethnic differences.

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December 2018 congressional forum in Manila

Protecting Religious Freedom in East Asia and the Pacific

Freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) faces a unique and growing set of challenges. Rapid access to the internet and social media has led to new online venues to harass people of various faiths with little or no consequence for the perpetrators. Increasing political polarization severely curtails the ability of even well-meaning governments to address this issue. For example, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, historically was a model of religious tolerance, protecting freedom of religion for all of the city's residents. Over the past decade, however, FoRB violations have grown there in frequency and severity leading to a sharp increase in hate crimes and incidents of discrimination. In light of these challenges, it is clear that more must be done, with greater efficacy and sustained impact, to ensure incidences of religious intolerance become outliers, rather than a harmful new normal. Politicians and activists are actively engaged in protecting religious freedom and are seeking to amplify their impact, but face a dearth of resources, lack of institutional expertise and few channels for sharing best practices regionally and interna-

tionally. Parliamentarians, in particular, are well-placed to combat intolerance through their roles as legislators, political party representatives, and elected officials.

In partnership with the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)[8], NDI has been working with legislators and civil society activists from a number of Asian countries -- including Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, and the Philippines -- to build and support a network of knowledgeable and committed advocates for freedom of religion or belief across the region. In March 2018, NDI and APHR hosted a policy dialogue in Jakarta with over fifty attendees, including twenty legislators from across the region. The dialogue, *Developing a More Cohesive Approach to Mitigating Religious Tensions,* brought parliamentarians, media representatives, faith leaders and civil society advocates together over two days to highlight country-specific challenges, promote the formation of in-country coalitions, and identify an inclusive group of religious freedom champions to broaden APHR's networks.

In May, APHR organized a follow-on mission to Yogyakarta to connect and engage key stake-holders on FoRB issues (including government officials, civil society, and affected communities) with the goal of gathering information for an action toolkit. At the completion of the mission, members of parliament agreed on the importance of cross-sectoral efforts to resolving religious discrimination. A second NDI-APHR policy dialogue held in Manila in December, co-inciding with International Human Rights Day, was hosted by the Human Rights Committee of the Philippines House of Representatives. During the Manila dialogue, parliamentarians and FoRB experts from the region discussed ways to raise awareness about the challenges faced by religious minorities and promote legislation to advance religious freedom in Southeast Asia.

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