

Feature 2.1 The *Minorities at Risk* data set—quantifying cultural exclusion

The *Minorities at Risk* data set, created by researchers at the University of Maryland's Center for International Development and Conflict Management, collects data on groups that suffer discrimination and disadvantage and that organize politically on the basis of their group identity. Discrimination and disadvantage include exclusion through public policy and through social practice, both current and the lingering effects of historical patterns of discrimination.

These data track a group's status relative to that of the majority. If the minority groups are not worse off than others in the country, their situation is not reflected in the data. While this may miss many people living in countries where cultural freedom is restricted for all, focusing on discrimination is at the heart of this Report—capturing the different treatment of cultural groups in society and the suppression of cultural identities.

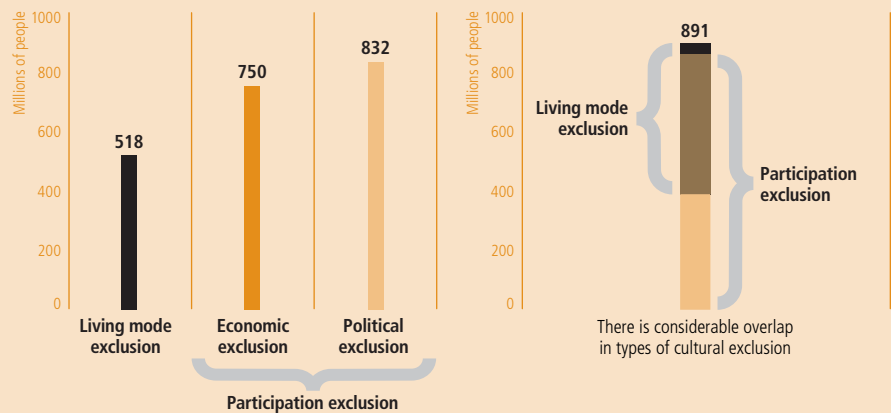
What is a minority at risk?

The project deals with “communal groups” whose members share a “distinctive and enduring collective identity” based on shared history, religion, language, ethnicity or other factors. Group identity is not seen as rigid, unchanging or inextricably linked to a particular feature of the group, but as a perception shared by the group or society.

While the project tracks many variables for each group, of particular interest for this Report are the variables on cultural (living mode), political and socioeconomic discrimination and disadvantage. Data used for this report are current through 2000 and are derived from the project's most recent global survey, completed in 2002.

- *Cultural (living mode) discrimination and disadvantage* were assessed according to discriminatory policy and practice in several fields: restrictions on religion (affecting groups with some 359 million members); on the use of language, including for instruction (334 million); on ceremonies (305 million), appearance and family life (144 million); and on cultural organizations. For each category the project assessed restrictions giving a value from zero (no restrictions) to three (activities sharply restricted). The scores were summed to give a broad overview of cultural restrictions. The project found that 129 groups with around 518 million people face at least some of these restrictions (figure 1).
- *Political discrimination and disadvantage* were graded on a five-point scale. Zero means no discrimination, and one signifies a situation in which public policies are actively trying to remedy historical patterns of discrimination. Two refers to situations where there are historical patterns of discrimination, but no

Figure 1 **Discrimination and disadvantage of culturally identified groups can be cultural, political and economic—with considerable overlap**



remedial public policy. Three refers to exclusion based on prevailing social practice without remedial public policy. And four refers to cases in which public policy actively discriminates against a group. There were also detailed assessments of discrimination in key political rights: freedom of expression, freedom of movement, rights in judicial proceedings, freedom to organize, right to vote and access to the police and military, civil service and higher office. For the last case, the absence of minorities in these fields is not enough to signal discrimination. There needs to be evidence of discriminatory policy or governmental practice. According to the project 191 groups, with around 832 million people, were considered to be discriminated against politically (figure 2).

- *Economic discrimination and disadvantage* were also graded on a four-point scale. For the 189 groups with about 750 million people that faced economic discrimination, zero refers to the case where public policy aims to reduce

disadvantages, for example, through affirmative action. Four refers to the case where both policies and prevailing social practice actively discriminate against the group.

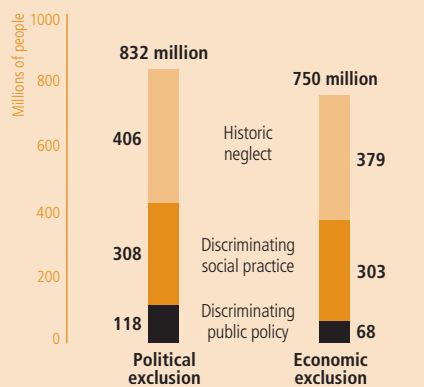
The data from the *Minorities at Risk* data set can be used to reveal a good deal about the living mode and participation exclusions faced by members of culturally identified groups, showing not only how extensive these exclusions are but also how frequently they overlap (see figure 1). The data set can also reveal some specific aspects of the living mode exclusion that some minorities face, as well as the varying causes—from discrimination by the state to historic neglect of cultural groups that has not been remedied (see figure 2).

Caveats

The data set is a pioneering effort to measure the conditions that minority groups experience and the policies affecting them. Subjective data capture aspects of the traits and challenges of groups not available through other means. The Minorities at Risk Project consults multiple sources—including journalistic accounts, international organization reports, human rights reports, government accounts and expert opinion—when scoring groups on their various characteristics. Every effort is made to ensure consistent coding across cases and to minimize the dangers of ideological bias. Additional information on the project is available online at www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar. Data updated through 2003 will be available by the end of 2004.

This Report uses the data carefully, to give a broad overview of the immense challenges of cultural discrimination, not as an attempt to rank or evaluate specific countries for their policies. Used in that way, the data set is a useful tool and a great step forward in measurement.

Figure 2 **Political and economic exclusion have different causes**



Sources: Gurr 1993, 2000; MAR 2003; Kymlicka 2004.