

Dictionary of (non-)politically correct words

Understanding the words
that shape our society

Institute for Minority Rights

The Dictionary of (non-)politically correct words explores how the language of diversity, equality, and minority rights has become increasingly contested. At a time of growing polarization, it offers clear, accessible insights into why these concepts matter and how they shape democratic societies and everyday life. It highlights why these principles remain essential for social cohesion, informed dialogue, and inclusive societies.

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Dictionary of (non-)politically correct words: understanding the words that shape our society

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the previously favorable stance toward minority rights, diversity, and equity – long regarded as fundamental components of democratic societies – has begun to show signs of fatigue, if not outright resistance. In many parts of the world, concepts that were once widely embraced as pillars of inclusion and social justice are increasingly questioned, reframed, or even rejected. This shift has contributed to a gradual erosion of established minority rights standards and to growing uncertainty about the legitimacy of claims related to equality, representation, and recognition.

Public debates around these issues have become more polarized. Terms associated with minority protection, anti-discrimination, gender equality, and cultural diversity are often labeled as “politically correct,” sometimes in a dismissive or pejorative sense. As a result, the language itself has become contested terrain. Words that once signified progress and expanded rights are now frequently misunderstood, misrepresented, or deliberately distorted.

Yet the questions underlying these concepts are far from abstract. They pertain to how we coexist in diverse societies, how we treat one another, and how we ensure that all individuals have equitable opportunities for participation. They concern social cohesion and the construction of communities grounded in mutual respect, dialogue, and shared responsibility.

This booklet brings together a series of short, accessible texts that clarify why these concepts matter. We explore why the rights and concerns they represent deserve protection, why research and informed discussion are necessary, and how recognition – or denial – of these principles shapes everyday life for individuals and communities alike.

Language shapes how we understand social realities. The way we define and use certain words influences public policy, institutional practices, and everyday interactions. By revisiting and explaining these contested concepts, our aim is to support informed dialogue and to encourage reflection on the values that hold societies together.

The texts collected here are intended for schools, non-governmental organizations, educators, students, and all those who wish to engage thoughtfully with questions of minority rights, diversity, and social inclusion. We hope they will serve as a resource for discussion, reflection, and further learning.

The booklet was presented on 21 May 2026, on the occasion of the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (often abbreviated as the World Day for Cultural Diversity), a United Nations–sanctioned observance dedicated to promoting diversity, intercultural dialogue, and inclusive development.

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01

#Minority
[mɪnɔːrɪti]
singular noun

Throughout our lives, anyone can be, has been, or will be a minority. Being a minority means being different—in one way or another—compared to the rest of a group, a community, or even an entire population. However, not all forms of diversity necessitate legal protection. For instance, possessing a larger shoe size than one's peers or having blond hair in a predominantly brown-haired community does not justify legal safeguards or promotion.

The need for minority protection typically arises from historical or ongoing discrimination, injustice, or unequal treatment. Such protection may be warranted, for example, due to experiences of discrimination, enslavement, subjugation, or the occupation of ancestral lands by foreign powers. Under such circumstances, both the community and its members may possess specific rights aimed at ensuring equal opportunities with the rest of the population that has not endured such injustices.

A prominent example of protected minorities can be found in Article 27 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which explicitly recognizes ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities. According to this provision, individuals belonging to these minorities shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

But who qualifies as a minority under this provision? It is generally acknowledged that the existence of a minority depends on a combination of objective and subjective factors. Objective factors include distinct ethnic, cultural, religious, or linguistic characteristics. Subjective factors, on the other hand, encompass a sense of solidarity, the collective will to preserve a distinct identity, and self-

identification—in other words, the group members' awareness of belonging to a minority. Accordingly, the existence of a minority is not a static condition but rather depends on the willingness of its members to maintain their distinct group identity and their ability to preserve or reconstruct that identity over time. The concept of minority has evolved over time, encompassing not only historically established and traditional minority groups (old minorities) but also the so-called 'new minorities' that have emerged as a result of more recent patterns of migration and mobility.

But why do we study minorities and the protection of minorities? And why are minority rights important?

Protecting minority rights is essential for maintaining peace and security at national and international levels. Discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of minorities often lead to social unrest, political instability, and even violent conflicts. Historical and contemporary conflicts—such as ethnic wars, civil unrest, and inter-religious tensions—have often been fueled by grievances of minority groups who feel their rights are being violated.

The protection of minorities is a fundamental human rights issue. Ensuring minority rights helps uphold principles of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination, which are at the core of human rights frameworks. Failure to protect minorities often results in systemic oppression, loss of identity, and severe human rights violations, including forced assimilation, statelessness, and even crimes against humanity.

Minorities often possess unique cultural traditions, languages, and knowledge systems that enrich national and global heritage. The loss of minority cultures due to assimilation, discrimination, or forced displacement leads to a decline in cultural diversity, which weakens the fabric of societies. Protecting minorities ensures the survival of their languages, customs, and traditional knowledge, which contributes to humanity's collective identity.

Inclusive democracies thrive when all groups, including minorities, have the ability to participate in decision-making processes. Democratic pluralism, which values diversity in political and social life, leads to stronger institutions, better governance, and more inclusive policies. Without the protection of minorities, democracy risks becoming a system where only the majority's interests are represented, leading to authoritarian tendencies and social divisions.

02

#Equality

[ɪ'kwɒlɪti]

singular noun

Equality is not just an abstract ideal – it is the very foundation of any truly democratic society. It ensures that every individual enjoys the same political, social, and economic rights, preventing privilege, background, or circumstance from determining opportunities. In the European Union, equality is more than a principle – it is a core value embedded in the architecture of our shared legal and political framework (Art. 2 TEU).

However, in practice, achieving real equality requires more than simply treating everyone the same. It demands active intervention to address systemic imbalances. Equality is not just about blind uniformity; it is about recognizing that some individuals begin life's race with heavier burdens. A truly fair society does not ignore these differences; it seeks to correct them. Thus, equality means both treating everyone the same and, where necessary, treating people differently to eliminate inequalities and promote social justice. Affirmative measures, such as employment and admission quotas, are not acts of favoritism but essential tools for achieving genuinely fair outcomes, regardless of a person's starting position. If women remain underrepresented in leadership roles or historically marginalized communities struggle for institutional representation, proactive steps must be taken to redress these long-standing injustices.

Some may argue that such measures distort meritocracy. But how can true meritocracy exist if not everyone starts from the same position? This is precisely the rationale behind equality of opportunity, that is, the fair distribution of resources to ensure that everyone has a chance to succeed. This means, for example, offering everyone free basic education. However, genuine equality also requires equality of outcomes, meaning targeted measures that aim at achieving a proper-

ly fair final outcome. This means, for example, offering free academic education to the poorest, who otherwise, because of the high cost of education, would not be able to enter universities and acquire the necessary qualifications to achieve their career ambitions.

Democratic societies cannot afford to be indifferent to inequality. Promoting equality does not mean forcing people into identical molds or erasing individuality. It means ensuring that everyone has a real and fair opportunity in life.

03

#Diversity

[dʌɪ'və:sɪti,

dɪ'və:sɪti]

singular noun

Diversity is a fundamental aspect of both individual and group identity. A person's identity can encompass various dimensions, including citizenship, nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, regional ancestry, language, religion, and profession. Within this spectrum of affiliations, individuals can prioritize different aspects of their identity depending on the context. People should have the freedom to define who they are, choose their identities, and live accordingly. Recognizing multiple and complementary identities – where individuals see themselves as citizens of a state while also belonging to ethnic, religious, or other cultural groups is considered one of the cornerstones of democracy. However, maintaining social cohesion while protecting individual and group identities remains a complex and unresolved challenge in many contemporary societies. Failing to achieve this balance can lead to polarization, frustration, and grievances, ultimately undermining social stability and overall societal wellbe-

ing. How, then, can the demands of diversity be reconciled with the need for unity, stability, and social cohesion? How can ethnically diverse societies maintain social bonds, reduce tensions, and prevent conflicts while ensuring equitable access to rights and the fair distribution of resources? How can a political community be structured to promote both cohesion and stability while also addressing the legitimate aspirations of minorities? What level of diversity is sustainable for a stable and cohesive state?

Policies aimed at reconciling unity, social cohesion, and diversity must navigate a landscape filled with dilemmas. If they prioritize unity, they risk alienating minorities, provoking resistance, and ultimately endangering the very unity they seek to preserve. Conversely, if they prioritize diversity, they may struggle to manage conflicting community interests, pursue common goals, and risk societal fragmentation.

Different societies adopt various approaches to managing cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity, each with distinct implications for minorities and social cohesion. Exclusionism is based on the idea of ethnic homogeneity and national superiority, often leading to discrimination against minority groups. This model denies minorities their civic rights, restricts the use of their languages, and, in extreme cases, can escalate into policies of ethnic cleansing or even genocide. Assimilationism, by contrast, seeks to integrate minorities by encouraging them to abandon their cultural identities in favor of the dominant culture. While intended to promote national unity, this approach can leave minority groups feeling alienated and pressured into conformity. Rather than fostering harmony, it often deepens social divisions and fuels resentment. Multiculturalism embraces cultural diversity and encourages the preservation of minority identities. However, in its more extreme forms, it risks leading to societal fragmentation. By prioritizing cultural relativism, it can create ethnic enclaves where minority communities become isolated from broader society, ultimately weakening social cohesion. A more balanced approach is pluralism, which incorporates two key components. On one hand, it recognizes and protects religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities and the groups associated with them. On the other, it seeks to preserve unity and social cohesion through the promotion of a shared core of common values, rooted in universal human rights and adapted to specific societal contexts. This model fosters mutual respect, shared values, inclusion, conflict resolution, and the prevention of polarization.

However, while pluralism is often regarded as the most effective approach to balancing unity and diversity, its success depends on historical, social, and political contexts. Each society must adopt a model that aligns with its traditions, economic development, and the specific nature of its minority communities. Despite its advantages, pluralism presents challenges for both majority and

minority groups. Minorities must navigate unfamiliar environments and the risk of marginalization, while majorities must accommodate diversity in education, workplaces, and public life requiring a high degree of openness. Some groups may be reluctant to engage in dialogue, while others may resist changes to their cultural identity.

Therefore, it is essential that all stakeholders, including both majority and minority communities, commit sincerely to respect diversity and cultivate shared values and principles that foster a sense of belonging and unity. Achieving this balance requires ongoing engagement, mutual adaptation, and a willingness to accommodate differences while upholding unity and social cohesion. And this is certainly not an easy task to accomplish in our contemporary, troubled societies.

04

#Indigenous
[in'diɪdʒɪnəs]
singular noun

According to the United Nations, there are more than 470 million of indigenous individuals worldwide, characterized by distinct languages, cultures, social, economic, political systems, and strong connections to their ancestral territories, divided into about 5,000 different groups speaking, at least, 7,000 languages. They range from Tribal peoples (Adivasis) in India to forest peoples (including, those in voluntary isolation) in Amazonia and indigenous peoples in the Andean region, from the Aborigines peoples of Australia to Inuit in the Arctic, representing an immense cultural richness. The groups are present in approximately half of the world states (more than 90 countries), most of the times divided among

bordering states. In some of these countries Indigenous peoples represent even more than 50% of the total population (e.g. Bolivia).

If we give a look to a standard dictionary, under the word “indigenous” we can find the following synonyms: “originating”; “innate”; “native”. For the word “aborigine”: “original”, “who first inhabited a land/territory”. Both these adjectives have similar significance in English and in Italian, while in French the word for “indigène” is depreciative; hence, the word “aborigène” is preferred. In Spanish (Castellan) the word “aborigen” is not used while referring to indigenous peoples who are referred to as “indígena”.

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, after the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, acknowledged that “the [UN] system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following: self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member; historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic or political systems; distinct language, culture and beliefs; form non-dominant groups of society; resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.”

The 1989 International Labour Organization (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ Convention (Convention no. 169) and the 2016 American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples prioritize the principle of self-identification and self-recognition since Indigenous peoples have suffered for too long of definitions imposed by others (e.g., in some states even based on blood percentages). Historically, indigenous peoples have been victims of genocide, of deceptive treaties with colonisers (from the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand/Aotearoa to the treaty (Parlamento) of Quillín in Chile), land dispossessions, and targeted and structural forms of discrimination. At the same time, they have donated immense parts of their traditional knowledge, from biodiversity and land management to climate adaptative measures. At recreational level, one may not ignore the Maori battle chant (Haka) adopted by the rugby team “All Blacks” of New Zealand and copied and performed by thousands of rugby teams worldwide. While the majority of indigenous peoples today live in urban contexts, many have not left behind their traditions, that have transformed and adapted to the urban dimensions. Studying indigenous peoples, indigenous methodologies, indigenous knowledge and other dimensions is part of our human inheritance and, as in the case of minorities or other historically marginalized groups, ignoring indigenous realities and demands may lead to social tensions, instability and, most importantly, lack of democracy and cultural losses.

05

#Discrimination

[dɪˌskrɪmɪˈneɪʃn]

singular noun

Discrimination remains one of the most pervasive challenges in our increasingly diverse societies. Individuals and groups can face discrimination based on characteristics such as language, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation. This discrimination can take many forms, including threats, harassment, and exclusion from employment, housing, and education.

Why is the principle of non-discrimination important?

When minorities face significant inequalities and discrimination in their economic, social, or cultural lives, they may lose trust in the legitimacy and responsiveness of the state. Persistent discrimination can create frustration and resentment, making it easier for political actors to mobilize conflict along ethnic or religious lines. This, in turn, can escalate tensions into violent conflicts that are difficult to control, posing a serious threat to stability. Thus, ensuring equal treatment and legal protection against discrimination is crucial to fostering a stable and peaceful society and for maintaining social cohesion.

Which types of discrimination exist?

Both international and national laws prohibit various forms of discrimination, including direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favorably than another person in a comparable situation due to factors like ethnicity, religion, or disability. For example, a hotel manager refusing service to someone based on their perceived minority status constitutes direct discrimination. Indirect discrimination arises when an apparently neutral rule disproportionately disadvantages minority groups unless it is objectively justified by a legitimate aim. For instance, requiring all street-cleaning job applicants to pass a written language test could disadvantage individuals from ethnic

communities where the national language is not their first language—especially if the test is unnecessary for the job. If the requirement lacks proportionality, it is considered discriminatory.

How to balance the principle of non-discrimination and affirmative action?

There is an ongoing debate about how to balance equal treatment with affirmative action measures that ensure substantive, rather than just formal, equality. Not all differences in treatment amount to discrimination. If a distinction is based on reasonable and objective criteria and serves a legitimate purpose, it may be justified. The key question is determining when differential treatment becomes unacceptable and when distinctions are legally permissible. For instance, the principle of non-discrimination does not prevent the implementation of positive measures in favor of disadvantaged groups. The goal of anti-discrimination laws is to eliminate unfair and unreasonable distinctions, not to enforce absolute uniformity. Equality does not always mean identical treatment; in some cases, the law may legitimately differentiate between individuals or groups. However, if poorly designed, affirmative action policies can conflict with non-discrimination principles. While affirmative action seeks to promote equality, excessive measures may go too far and violate non-discrimination rules. Therefore, positive measures must be carefully structured to ensure they do not undermine the very principle they aim to uphold. Legal cases highlight these challenges.

In *Ballantyne, Davidson, and McIntyre v. Canada*, the UN Human Rights Committee ruled that banning commercial advertising in English was unnecessary to protect the Francophone minority in Canada. The restriction was deemed excessive, as the objective could have been achieved through other means without limiting freedom of expression. Similarly, in *Diergaardt v. Namibia*, the UN Human Rights Committee ruled that Namibia's policy of using only English for official government interactions constituted language-based discrimination. The government had instructed civil servants not to use Afrikaans in public interactions, even when they could do so easily. Since Namibia failed to provide a reasonable justification for prioritizing English over Afrikaans, the UN Committee ruled that this policy violated international law.

06

#Bias
[ˈbaɪ.əs]
singular noun

Bias refers to both favourable and unfavourable predispositions toward a particular person, group, or perspective. It is shaped by societal stereotypes, cultural norms, personal experiences, and institutional structures. Bias can be either unconscious – operating implicitly without awareness – or conscious, explicitly held and expressed. Traditionally, disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and law have examined bias due to its profound impact on decision-making, either reinforcing or challenging social inequalities. More recently, concerns about bias in technology have gained prominence, particularly in data science and artificial intelligence. Unintentional biases embedded in AI systems can produce harmful outcomes, exacerbating existing disparities in a feedback loop of discrimination. Studying bias from a minority rights perspective is particularly important, as marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by prejudice and systemic discrimination. These groups, often lacking legislative and institutional power, face heightened vulnerability to biases embedded within legal and bureaucratic structures. Bias manifests in critical areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and criminal justice, restricting opportunities and impeding social progress. Addressing these biases is crucial for ensuring fair treatment and equitable representation for all individuals, regardless of background or identity. Several cases illustrate the impact of bias in institutional decision-making. Notable examples include the UK government's wrongful accusations of students cheating on language tests, which led to threats of deportation. In the Netherlands, tax authorities employed biased profiling techniques that falsely labelled parents from minority backgrounds as fraudsters, resulting in severe financial and social consequences. The COMPAS algorithm, used in the US to predict recid-

ivism, was found to be biased against Black defendants, assigning them higher risk scores than white defendants who committed similar offenses. Differently, one study showed that resumes with names perceived as belonging to racial or ethnic minorities receive fewer callbacks than those with traditionally “white-sounding” names, even when qualifications are identical. Additionally, facial recognition systems have exhibited higher error rates when identifying individuals with darker skin tones, leading to significant misidentifications, particularly in law enforcement.

These cases highlight the pressing need to address biases embedded within institutional systems, as they often result in distorted representations of reality that disproportionately harm minority communities. Therefore, from a minority rights perspective, recognizing and mitigating these biases is essential to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. By acknowledging their impact and implementing corrective measures, democracies can move toward greater fairness and justice for all.

07

#Ethnicity

[ɛθ'nɪsɪti]

singular noun

Joseph Marko, former IMR Head of Institute, elaborated three different meanings of ethnicity in the book chapter “Law and sociology: the constructivist and interpretative turn / The interplay of social and system integration: a typology of societies” (Joseph Marko, Human and Minority Rights Protection by Multiple Diversity Governance – History, Law, Ideology and Politics in European Perspec-

tive, Routledge 2019, pp. 160–161). Ethnicity refers to a group of people who share a common cultural background, ancestry, language, traditions, and sometimes religion or nationality. Ethnic groups often have shared customs, beliefs, and historical experiences that distinguish them from other groups. Unlike race, which is often based on physical characteristics, ethnicity is more about cultural heritage and identity. It is a social and cultural identity rather than a strictly biological or genetic one, although there are different theories explaining the process of ethnification and polarization of societies:

Primordialist theories argue that ethnicity is a fixed and natural part of human society. They see the world as divided into ethnic groups based on common ancestry, language, religion, and traditions. These groups are believed to be naturally in conflict with each other because of their differences. Ethnicity, in this view, is a built-in social structure that determines who is included or excluded in a community.

Constructivist-Instrumentalist theories argue that ethnicity is not natural, but socially constructed. It is based on stereotypes about shared ancestry or national origin. Political leaders, or “ethnic entrepreneurs,” use these stereotypes to create and maintain ethnic divisions for their own benefit. Ideally, they argue, society should move beyond ethnicity – in a world without class divisions.

The Constructivist-Structuralist perspective suggests that, while ethnicity is socially constructed, it becomes deeply ingrained in society over time. In many places ethnic divisions are not just imaginary—they shape people's realities and limit their choices. This happens because power imbalances and economic inequality reinforce ethnic divisions, making them seem even more real and unavoidable.

Ethnicity is important because it shapes identity, culture, history, and social experiences, therefore it is also essential to approach it with an open mind, avoiding stereotypes and embracing it as a positive aspect of human diversity.

08

#Racism

['reɪsɪz(ə)m]

singular noun

Though the last few decades have witnessed increasing awareness about racism—epitomized by the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21st and, more recently, the global mobilization surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement to address police violence against Black communities—racism remains a pressing issue in our society. Therefore, it is imperative to continue reflecting on and discussing the presence of racism, its various manifestations, and how to address it.

To talk about racism, we must first define what it is. In narrow terms, racism refers to the flawed theory that humanity is biologically divided into superior and inferior races—a belief that, in its most extreme form, led to the Nazi exterminations. More broadly, racism can be understood as the tendency to categorize individuals and assign them certain characteristics based on skin color and/or other physical traits, and by extension, their cultural origins and practices, creating hierarchies among groups of people. This tendency is not exclusive to European or Western civilizations; it exists in many other societies and nations, from Japan to countries in the Global South. As a result, individuals are often essentialized and first identified as “Black,” “Jewish,” “Roma,” “Arab,” or “Muslim” and judged accordingly. Racial discrimination arises from these hierarchical categorizations, leading to prejudice and exclusionary actions.

Crucially, racism is not only an explicit or conscious choice; it is also linked to institutional and structural factors that foster widespread yet less overt discriminatory attitudes, behaviors, and policies. Racism, in this sense, is embedded in power structures that protect the interests of dominant groups and sustain policies and practices that benefit some people while disadvantaging and discriminating against others.

This results in unequal access to goods, services, and opportunities in various sectors, including employment, housing, and education. It is also reflected in stereotypes and misrepresentations in mass media. In the justice system, racism manifests in practices like racial profiling, where police and law enforcement officers stop and question individuals based on only racial characteristics (rather than people’s behavior), thereby associating security concerns with skin color or ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

To address these structural aspects of racism, it is not sufficient for society—and, by extension, the state and its policies—to adopt a race-blind approach. Such “color-blindness” fails to address racial disparities and can even perpetuate inequality. Instead, proactive measures to promote equality, such as affirmative action, are necessary to combat racism effectively.

However, beyond blatant cases of racially motivated discrimination, racism can also surface in more subtle ways in daily life. For instance, someone may make slant-eyed gestures or mock the Chinese language and accent without considering the pain such ridicule causes. Similarly, jokingly using racial slurs—such as the “N-word”—disregards the harmful stereotypes and negative connotations the term carries, including assumptions about physical abilities or criminal tendencies. These are not harmless words or gestures; they recall centuries of racism, as well as the crimes and violence committed in its name. Addressing racism is not about enforcing political correctness, which—if imposed—can be ineffective or even counterproductive. Rather, it is about recognizing that racism is not merely a problem affecting a few individuals who experience discrimination; it harms society as a whole by eroding trust and mutual respect. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge that our society may still harbor racist attitudes—often because we are unaccustomed to recognizing that, in a globalized world, humanity is and always has been multicolored and multicultural. Becoming aware of this is an important first step toward addressing the problem of racism.

09

#Hate speech

[hert spi:tʃ]

singular noun

Hate speech is any way of communicating—through words, writing, images, or symbols—that targets people with hatred or prejudice because of who they are. This includes issues like their race, ethnic background, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or nationality. It's more than just being offensive; hate speech aims to make people feel less important, excluded, or even encourages others to harm them.

In modern times, hate speech has become more than just obvious insults. It now includes hidden language, memes, and subtle ways of speaking that spread prejudice without being easily noticed. Social media has made it easier for hate speech to spread quickly everywhere. The way social media works can accidentally promote hateful content, creating spaces where these ideas grow. Today, hate speech is a bigger problem than just individual prejudice; it's a problem caused by cultural biases, political polarization, and how technology works.

Understanding hate speech is crucial because it endangers people's dignity, how well society works together, and even the stability of democracy. When hate speech is present, certain groups may feel unsafe or unable to fully participate in society. Also, history has demonstrated that it can lead to violence and grave crimes like genocide or mass shootings. Hate speech also creates a difficult situation when trying to balance the protection of free speech with the need to protect people from harm. This requires careful thought and solutions.

The study of hate speech delves into numerous critical issues, including the challenge of differentiating hate speech from offensive yet permissible forms of expression, while acknowledging the influence of cultural and legal contexts on these definitions. It investigates the ways in which social media platforms, algo-

rithms, and disinformation campaigns contribute to the spread of hate speech, and examines the impacts of hate speech on society, considering its legal consequences leading to hate crimes and psychological effects on targeted individuals and its role in fostering social polarization and radicalization. Furthermore, it explores potential countermeasures, such as legal frameworks, technological tools, and educational initiatives, aimed at combating hate speech effectively without infringing on the fundamental right to freedom of expression. Hate speech is studied using law, sociology, psychology, and technology to understand what it is, how society helps spread it, why people believe it, and how it's amplified online. In conclusion, hate speech is more than just bad language. It shows deeper problems in society like prejudice, fear, and unequal power. By studying why it happens, what it does, and how to stop it, we can create a future where diversity is not attacked. Stopping hate speech needs teamwork from lawmakers, teachers, tech experts, and activists to create respectful environments.

10

#Intersectionality

[ˌɪntərˌsɛkʃu' næləti]

singular noun

Intersectionality is a theory, a concept, an approach and a methodological tool that facilitates the unveiling of the complex matrices of social inequalities that exist within our societies. Championed by the Afro-American law academic Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, it points at the intersection of social factors in which people may find themselves, depending not only on identity markers but also due to power dynamics and systems of oppression. Present also in other feminist

works (bell hooks, Patricia Collins), through her investigation, Crenshaw showed how United States courts were unable to identify the specific type of discrimination suffered by Black women, who had been (and continue to be) ill-treated for the compounded effects of gender and race. Crenshaw explained that, when an accident occurs at a crossroads, the car that caused it may have traveled from one or more directions, so a Black woman may be victim of gender-based discrimination or race discrimination or both.

From its initial conception, intersectionality has been vastly expanded, adopted and used, especially in gender and social studies but also by international organizations such as the UN, to identify how different axes may intersect and create a complex nexus in which a person experience discrimination due to some of their identity markers (e.g., age, class, disability, ethnicity) but also the power systems (e.g., patriarchy, colonialism) that govern a specific context. Lutz and Wenning have listed up top 13 factors that may intersect: gender, 'race'/skin colour, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class (socioeconomic status), culture (incl., language and level of education), disability, age, mobility, origins, religion, urban-rural. For instance, in Europe, intersectionality has helped to identify and address those specific vulnerabilities for those individuals at the nexus of ethnicity and religion, such as Muslims. Moreover, for national minorities, intersectionality is becoming a key research and analytical tool to assess the diverse and specific situations of those individuals, within the same minority group, who may suffer from the compounded effects of gender in their socioeconomic participation, that is, access to work, education, housing, land, resources, et al. This is the case not only for, for example, minority women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, but also for minority youth, elderly, and disabled, as recently flagged by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in its tenth set of Recommendations specifically focusing on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Social and Economic Life.

At the national level, in 2023, Spain passed the so-called 'Ley Trans' (Law no. 4/2023) to try to guarantee the effective equality of non-binary people as well as the rights of LGBTIQ+ people. This law foresees direct actions to combat the unemployment rate of non-binary people and the possibility to self-determine one's gender. Also, it specifies that, when discrimination is based on the combined effects of gender identity and expression or sexual characteristics, these aspects interact and therefore this specific form of discrimination is intersectional. Intersectionality continues to spread across not only academic disciplines but also different policy and public sectors. In addition to contributing to human rights and equality monitoring, a more nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural nature of discrimination can help strengthen policy development, programs, and services. By unveiling the complex matrices of social inequalities

that exist within our societies, we also uncover hidden power relations and their impact on marginalizing different groups of people.

11

#Marginalization

[mɑː.dʒɪ.
nə.laɪ'zeɪ.ʃən]
singular noun

The concept of marginality (derived from the Latin *margo*, meaning 'edge' or 'margin'), as well as the notions of vulnerability, exclusion and minorities, is a frequently used concept in social science with varying interpretations and perceptions. It is generally acknowledged that marginality and marginal regions have, at least, two broad interpretations and meanings.

The first is a more traditional understanding of marginality as an economic concept, where a region is considered marginal if it is distant from markets, dependent on primary resources, has a small and sparse population, and lacks political or economic autonomy.

A second understanding of marginality is one in which marginalization is viewed as a social construction in which marginality is seen as a power relationship between a group that sees itself as a 'centre' viewing all minorities and non-members as marginal or 'other'. As a consequence, their participation in economic, cultural, and political life is significantly limited. It impacts communities across multiple dimensions, including ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability, migration status, and more.

The study of marginalization addresses a wide range of pressing issues: poverty, unequal access to education and healthcare, housing discrimination, labor ex-

ploitation, environmental injustice, and digital divides, to name just a few. It also raises questions about belonging, voice, and who gets to shape society's norms and values.

Studying marginalization through the lens of minority rights is especially crucial, as marginalized communities are often disproportionately impacted by prejudice, structural inequality, and systemic discrimination. Marginalization is far more than academic jargon— it's a reality that shapes who gets heard, who gets helped, and who gets (systemically) left out. The marginalization and exclusion of minorities, therefore, often lead to social unrest, political instability, and even violent conflicts.

Understanding these dynamics requires more than statistical analysis; it demands serious engagement with the lived experiences of marginalized individuals. By centering these voices and challenging dominant narratives, researchers and advocates can uncover the deeper roots of inequality and begin to envision more just and inclusive futures.

12

#Identity
[ˌɪdɛntɪti]
singular noun

Identities are complex and multilayered because they are shaped by a wide range of influences—personal, cultural, social, and historical. A single individual can hold multiple identities simultaneously, such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, profession, and more. These layers often interact in unique ways, creating a rich and dynamic sense of self. According to the UN Special Rapporteur

on Minority Issues, Nicolas Levrat, there are three levels of identities: national identity, minority (collective) identity and individual identity, and three types of identities: assigned identity, self-identification and relational identity (<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/54>).

Identity is not fixed but constructed through social interactions, balancing continuity and dynamic change. Exclusive identity frameworks can lead to social divisions, whereas open identities allow for integration and diversity. In an open society, the interaction between majority and minority shapes inclusive identities, which contribute to a broader national identity rather than existing in opposition. Minorities whose rights are respected and protected tend to form a less exclusive identity, which can integrate with national identity. However, for this integration to occur, national identity must remain open and inclusive, allowing space for minority identities.

While the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, or Linguistic Minorities focuses on the rights of individuals belonging to minorities, not the minorities as groups, the collective identity of minorities can be protected through the exercise of individual rights. This leads to the question about the legal concept of subjective rights, where rights are typically seen as belonging to individuals, not groups. Minority protection arises from individuals within the minority group collectively exercising their right to identity, which the state must then protect, without defining or promoting that identity itself. States have the responsibility to protect and encourage the conditions for interaction between national, individual and minority identities – the recognition of their identities is equally important for their full enjoyment of human rights.

The multilayered nature of identity, emphasizing not only its individual, minority, and state-level dimensions, but distinguishes also between assigned identity (externally imposed), self-identification (internal perception), and relational identity (socially perceived identity). Self-identification is a key aspect of minority protection, allowing individuals to shape their identities through evolving cultural and social practices. The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe) emphasizes the importance of free self-identification and warns against imposed categorization. But unlike gender identity, which is primarily personal, minority identity is also relational, as it is shaped by an individual's connection to both the minority group and the majority.

In inclusive societies, there is the need to balance national identity with multilayered identities, allowing individuals to identify as both minority members and citizens of the state. This aligns with the Framework Convention on Minority Protection, which upholds free self-identification and multiple affiliations.

Therefore, states committed to inclusivity must actively encourage and protect minority identity, and prevent tensions between minority and dominant groups, while enabling society to flourish in its diversity.

13

#Culture

['kʌltʃə]

singular noun

Culture is inherent to human beings and their societies. However, culture is also contested as a term and as a concept. It is often defined as a set of shared beliefs, practices, norms, values, and artifacts that characterize a group or society. Culture encompasses language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and arts, among other elements. It provides a framework through which individuals understand their world and interact with others, serving as a blueprint for societal behavior and cohesion.

Studying culture is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it helps us understand the diverse ways in which human societies operate and interact. By examining cultural practices, we gain insights into the lived experiences of different communities, fostering empathy and tolerance. Furthermore, understanding culture can enhance social harmony, as it allows for better communication and reduces stereotypes and prejudices. Cultural studies also inform policymaking, ensuring that decisions are more informed and contextually appropriate.

Culture is inherently dynamic and multifaceted. Different groups may have varying interpretations of what constitutes their culture. Additionally, culture is often used to assert identity and power, leading to debates over authenticity

and ownership. As societies evolve, cultural practices can transform, sometimes sparking conflicts between traditionalists and modernists. The fluidity of culture makes it a battleground for ideological, political, and social disputes.

Culture can be both a tool for protecting diversity and a means of justifying human rights abuses. On one hand, cultural preservation initiatives safeguard the heritage and practices of marginalized communities, promoting diversity and preventing cultural homogenization. On the other hand, some cultural practices have been used to justify actions that violate human rights, such as genital mutilation, child marriage, and gender discrimination. These practices are often defended as integral to a community's identity, making it challenging to address them without appearing to undermine cultural autonomy.

Cultural relativism, that is, the principle that an individual's beliefs and activities should be understood by others in terms of that individual's own culture. It advocates for viewing cultures without judgment and recognizing the context in which cultural practices occur. While cultural relativism promotes tolerance, it can also lead to ethical dilemmas when certain practices conflict with universal human rights, as mentioned above.

Cancel culture, on the other hand, is a contemporary phenomenon where individuals or groups are ostracized, boycotted, or pressured to conform due to perceived offensive or problematic behavior. It often involves public shaming and social media campaigns. Cancel culture raises questions about freedom of expression, accountability, and the balance between personal responsibility and societal norms. Examples of cancel culture can be seen in historical or public figures losing endorsements, or in social media influencers being deplatformed due to controversial statements or actions. It includes, e.g., the remotion of statues of those personalities who represents colonialism (e.g., Christofer Columbus) or were guilty of slave trade (e.g., Thomas Jefferson), or ill-treatment of Native Americans despite the fight against slavery (e.g., Abraham Lincoln).

In sum, culture enriches our lives, fosters innovation, and helps us understand one another better. Embracing cultural diversity enhances cooperation, reduces prejudice, and ensures that the voices of everyone are heard and respected. It prevents the loss of unique traditions and perspectives, making society more vibrant and fertile. Without cultural diversity, we risk a dull, homogeneous world devoid of the richness that different cultures bring.

14

#Activism
 ['aktɪvɪz(ə)m]
singular noun

Activism refers to actions taken by ordinary people to bring about social and political change. People may become activists to advance issues or causes that benefit the common good or are relevant for their personal interest. In contrast to activities like lobbying or representative politics, activism is linked to social movements and protest as a collective and sustained action. Activism involves bringing people together to raise awareness, organize, and mobilize around issues related to social justice, the environment, or gender equality. Activists often come together to challenge the status quo, express dissent, or confront elites and authorities. This confrontation with people or bodies in power is often described as “Speaking Truth to Power”.

Activism may also be centered on making new claims through the process of issue construction by identifying a problem or characterizing the victims, specifying the root causes of the problem and the perpetrators, and proposing a solution or response. For example, human rights activism ensures that people's human rights are respected and enforced. In these cases, activism is often directed at governments to draw attention to human rights violations and the need for reforms.

It is important to study activism because this is a key channel for people to use their voices together with others to effect change. Scholars research when and how activism is successful along with constraints on this collective action due to censorship, repression, or lack of political will. This means understanding the different strategies and tactics used; activism repertoires may encompass everything from strikes, demonstrations and marches to petitions, boycotts, and social media campaigns. Activism may also consist of acts of civil disobedience,

where activists may willfully break a law to unveil injustices or the use of artwork to present the issue. The work of organizing and recruiting activists involves reaching out to not only believers but also converts to a cause, long-term commitments, and alliance-building.

Activism usually involves campaigns and messaging that communicate the issue or claim or challenge dominant narratives and understandings. For this reason, activists must be attentive to how they frame a new issue or gain recognition for a marginalized group making claims. Activists may use the language of human rights, freedom or justice, to capture attention and mobilize others to join a movement or cause.

While activism offers the opportunity for people to create positive social and political change, the fact that such activities are often repressed and activists may even be criminalized. Indeed, many activists defend the rights of themselves and others at great personal risk. Constraints on activism and popular protest need to be understood as a threat to democracy and human rights. Currently, Amnesty International has a campaign called Protect the Protest to expose how the right to protest is violated and to support movements.

15

#Stereotype
 ['sterɪə(ʊ)tʌɪp]
singular noun

The term stereotype refers to an oversimplified – and often prejudiced – idea about a person or group, typically based on attributes like race, gender, religion, or ethnicity. Originating from social psychology, the concept of stereotypes has

since become central across multiple disciplines, including sociology, media studies, and human rights law. These fields study how group-based assumptions affect social dynamics, individual behaviour, and systemic structures – particularly in ways that marginalize minority groups.

From a minority rights perspective, the study of stereotypes is vital because these assumptions not only shape public opinion but also influence policies and institutional practices. Stereotypes can dehumanize, justify discrimination, and reinforce social hierarchies. They obscure the complex, lived experiences of individuals and communities, reducing them to simplified categories serving the interests of dominant groups. As a major example, racial stereotyping against people of African descent was historically created to justify their enslavement. In other words, stereotypes are often non-grounded beliefs that influence decision-making processes that may harm the human rights of minoritised groups. In recent years, the intersection of technology and stereotype research has become a growing area of concern, especially in the context of artificial intelligence (AI). AI systems learn from data that reflect historical inequalities and societal biases. As a result, they can replicate and even amplify stereotypes. For instance, certain AI models have been found to associate specific racial or gender identities with criminality or incompetence. Differently, text-to-image models often produce hypersexualized depictions of women or link professional roles predominantly to men.

Research in this space is driven by interdisciplinary perspectives, including feminist technoscience and critical race theory. These frameworks challenge the myth of technological neutrality and advocate for accountability in how AI systems are designed, trained, and deployed. Crucially, they call for the inclusion of minority voices not just as data points but as co-creators of technology. For example, the study of intersectionality in AI fairness highlights the compounded and intersecting dimensions of diversity that contribute to biases and discrimination in AI technologies. This research emphasizes the need for technical, legal, and institutional mechanisms to address these issues without hindering the positive use of new technologies. Studying stereotypes in AI is not just about improving technical accuracy – it's about protecting rights, restoring dignity, and ensuring that technology works with and for everyone.

16

#Gender
[ˈdʒɛndə]
singular noun

Gender is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that extends beyond the traditional male/female binary. It encompasses the roles, behaviors, and expectations society associates to a certain gender, whether perceived or self-identified. Rather than being rooted in biological sex, which is typically associated with physical and reproductive characteristics, gender is shaped by cultural, historical, and institutional forces. Learned through socialization and reinforced by everyday interactions, gender can evolve over the course of a person's life. It influences social value, access to opportunities, and assumed responsibilities, often perpetuating longstanding inequalities, particularly between women and men.

At the same time, gender is profoundly personal. It includes one's internal sense of identity, how that identity is expressed outwardly, and how others interpret and respond to it. Due to its pervasive impact, gender functions as a vital analytical framework across disciplines such as education, healthcare, and human rights. It intersects with pressing social issues like access to care, experiences of violence, and fundamental rights to equality in all life spheres. The continued push for gender justice and inclusive policy highlights its central role in both shaping individual lives and challenging systemic injustices.

Because legal, political, economic, and cultural social structures are all deeply informed and shaped by gender norms, studying gender is essential. It enables critical reflection on how identities are constructed and how inequalities develop, function, and are maintained. Greater awareness of gender dynamics not only fosters more inclusive practices but also empowers individuals and institutions to challenge discriminatory norms, advocate for social justice, and build more equitable societies.

In today's world where gender diversity is more visible and contested than ever gender studies provide essential tools for informed, solidaric, and equitable engagement. Also, gender cannot be examined in isolation. It intersects with other dimensions of identity such as race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, and nationality, highlighting how various forms of privilege and marginalization are interconnected. Understanding these intersections helps explain why some individuals face disproportionate barriers.

Complementary approaches that range from legal and psychological to postcolonial to educational further expand our understanding of how gender is lived, regulated, and contested in various contexts. Freed from rigid binaries and limiting norms, gender should be thus understood as an expansive and empowering dimension of human experience. This understanding should be reflected, affirming a broad range of identities and expressions while promoting dignity and equity for all.

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#Sexuality
[ˌsɛkʃuˈæləti]
singular noun

Today, the term sexuality refers to the way individuals experience and express themselves as sexual beings. It encompasses various aspects of sexual behavior, including gender identity, orientation, attitudes, and activity. Sexuality also involves feelings of attraction, desire, and eroticism, and is influenced by broader cultural, social, and historical contexts. These contexts shape the norms, expectations, and roles that individuals may encounter when it comes to sex and relationships.

In contemporary understanding, sexuality is seen as fluid, diverse, and deeply personal. Importantly, sexuality is also considered a human rights issue – the ability to express one's sexual orientation and gender identity freely and without discrimination is seen as essential to human dignity, freedom, and equality. On its part, gender studies and queer theory analyze the relationships between sexuality and gender identity, challenging binary frameworks and heteronormativity. In medicine and sexual health, sexuality relates to reproductive care, sexual wellbeing, and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, while also addressing the specific health needs of transgender and intersex individuals.

Above all, in politics and policy, sexuality becomes a focal point in debates over rights, public morality, and the regulation of bodies and relationships, often reflecting broader struggles over democratic values and inclusion. Thus, studying sexuality is important because it addresses issues such as discrimination, gender inequality, sexual and reproductive rights, health disparities, stigma around gender identities, and the impact of social norms on personal freedoms. It also confronts violence, such as sexual abuse or coercion, and challenges systemic marginalization through inclusive policy and education.

The field is shaped by diverse perspectives – including feminist theory, queer theory, human rights, intersectionality, and postcolonial critiques – which challenge dominant norms and bring forward the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Researchers have contributed by, amongst others, documenting patterns of exclusion and inequality, influencing public policy, reshaping legal protections (e.g. around same-sex marriage or anti-discrimination), and improving sexual health outcomes. Their work has led to greater social recognition of diverse sexualities, advances in sexual rights, and more inclusive legal and medical practices, especially in areas like LGBTQIA+ rights, sex education, and access to reproductive healthcare.

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