



RESEARCH PAPER

A Pragmatic Deconstruction of the Theoretical Myths Pertaining to Nationhood and National Integration

¹Arshad Ali and ²Dr. Abdul Basit Khan

1. Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Political Science, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: abdulbasit@gcuf.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of turning a large number of people into compact nationhood has been the focus of attention for many social scientists since it requires very fine and delicate architectonic skills on the part of political/ruling elite to accomplish the desired objectives in letter and spirit. The issue becomes more interesting when a deeper insight into the sense of being a nation reveals that no singular factor has solely been the reason of this social bonding but various complex factors like religion, language, race, culture etc. gelled together various segments of the human tribes at various intervals of history. Many of the post-colonial states including Pakistan even dismembered or disintegrate because of the failure of the ruling elite to truly comprehend the sensitivity of the phenomenon of nationhood and national integration whereas the remaining Pakistan is once again facing the problems of regionalism, subnationalism, ethnic diversity in the form of Baloch, Pahstun, Saraiki, Mohajir and Sindhi identities which situation demands from the decision-makers that the underlying theoretical foundations of nationhood should be carefully revisited and the power-sharing model/instrument currently followed in the state should be redesigned to address the grievances of the marginalized segments of the society. Keeping in view this background, the current study intends to explore the theoretical dimensions of some of the important concepts related to nationhood and nationalism extending to national integration so that a conceptual clarity might be obtained for the policy makers and think tanks in Pakistan and other countries which are facing alike issues and problems and the process of policy formulation and execution in relevant domain can be improved. Accordingly, by applying qualitative method of reasoning, the study examines the ways in which nationalism can both bind and divide societies, and probes the effects of integration policies in multi-ethnic and multicultural states. It finds that although heterogeneity/plurality exists almost everywhere but all rests with the ruling elite of any particular territory to articulate such policies which effectively and meaningfully assimilate various sub-nationalities into a larger national whole.

KEYWORDS: Theoretical Dimensions of Nation, Nationalism, National Integration

Introduction

Nationalism and national integration are not only two sides of the same coin, they also mutually reinforce each other to foster national identity, national unity and political stability. Nationalism is the collective identification attached with a certain place, history, culture, religion or language, which force people to strive for a degree of political and territorial autonomy; national integration, on the other hand, is the tendency that seeks to minimize rivalry between different ethnic, linguistic or religious groups inside a state by developing a sense of togetherness to create a nation. Nationalism is a slippery thing, though, and it comes in many flavors—civic nationalism, which sees a comparable, shared system of values and political establishments as reason to create a national identity, versus ethnic nationalism, which holds identity as having its roots in ancestry and culture. Nationalism can bring people together, but when taken to extreme, it may result in

exclusionary politics, discrimination against minorities, and confrontation with other countries.

In multiethnic and multicultural states, integration involves efforts to breakdown cultural, religious, and linguistic barriers, creating an environment in which different communities live together in peace. A successful national integration is achieved in societies that respect, provide equal chances and establish all-inclusive institutions for all members of the communities irrespective of their ethnic or societal origins. Moreover, it is essential to avoid tensions, caring for the stability of the political process, and cultivating brotherhood/good feelings among all groups in the nation's progress. National integration also needs deliberate policies, educational activities, and socioeconomic measures that favor inclusiveness and equality (Yaseen, et. al., 2021). In this respect, governments have a significant role to play in introducing programs about the dialogue among different nationalities, ethnic communities, and religious groups, and struggle against discrimination, as well as for a balanced representation in political and social bodies. Media, education, and culture-sharing similarly forge a unified national identity that does not neglect minority groups. Furthermore, the economic policies ensuring equal opportunities and access to resources minimize socio-economic inequalities that could prove potential obstacles to integration.

Working in this background, the current study examines the basic attributes of nationhood, focusing on the theories of nationalism and national integration to justify how nations grow and sustain themselves amidst diversity.

Nationalism: Origins and Development through the Ages

The idea of a nation has changed throughout the centuries, depending on political landscapes, historical backgrounds and popular narratives. As per Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism", the nation is a social construction created through common symbols, myths and collective recollections. Nation is not stable, but it is a process which has been affected and shaped by history, society, economy and politics. Nationhood goes through evolution in several stages, with progress in each stage determined by certain events, which may lead to the growth or dismemberment of national identity (Anderson, 2006).

Historical Genesis: New nations are frequently formed through a series of shared historical experiences, such as wars, revolutions, or cultural waves. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) was a watershed moment in consolidating the idea of nation-states, as it laid down the concept of the territorially sovereign state (Murthy, 2018). This is the agreement that moved from loose empires and feudal states to recognized nations with political autonomy and governance systems, while fed by the overall environment of pluralistic diversity.

Linguistic and Cultural Homogeneity: A people becomes stronger when it has a common language and culture. National literature, folklore and education systems are important in forming identity. Thus, the French Revolution (1789) consolidated the national identity of France, and initiated the common ideal of a republic (Stovpets, 2023). Likewise, the 19th century unification under Otto von Bismarck tied together different parts of Germany on the basis of a shared language and culture that fostered the development of a solid national identity.

Political Institutionalization: The growth and development of government, law, and national policy turn a nation into a nation-state, where sovereignty and power help unifying the people. The genesis of advanced democratic polities most notably the United States, was based on founding precepts that guaranteed representation, sovereignty, and unity (Saeed, 2011). Many a time, the success of nationhood is based on political

organization. A united country is the result of an inclusive rule, while divisive/opportunistic politics can balkanize the nation.

Economic Development and Technological Progress: Industrialization and modernization promote national integration by generating mutual dependence among its people, narrowing down regional disparities and raising the quality of infrastructure. The experience of the European Union deserves special attention as a way of showing that interconnected economies can actually contribute to the stability of a region, while not erasing its distinct subnational identities (Stovpets, 2023). On the other hand, intra-state economic inequality can contribute/lead to regional disintegration that may undermine national unity as well.

Challenges and Response: National identity is often fragmented by globalization, migration, and ideological shifts. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent—both culturally and economically—traditional conceptions of nationhood can become blurred. Immigration and diaspora communities contribute to the formation of multicultural societies, presenting governments with the challenge of balancing diversity while maintaining national unity (Muhammad, 2019). The United Kingdom's struggles over the Brexit mirror the global tension between preserving sovereignty and engaging with global integration. In Spain, separatist movements like the Catalonia represents how the historical grievances and ethnic differences effect shaping the nationhood.

It is also noteworthy that a nation is a group of people with a combination of common factors such as language, history, culture, and territory; although final authority over a territory in question is always held by one entity, the term is not always synonymous with a "state." A nation is not a state in the vernacular sense rather it is defined by a shared community which unites people, creating a sense of home and continuity. The idea of the nation, or the creation of a national identity, is constructed not only through history and national events, social-political connections, cultural usage, but also with the economy (Anderson, 2006). From this way of looking at it, a nation is not made of solid stuff but ever-changing, shaped by the stories and symbols people tell each other. The word "nation" itself comes from the Latin *natio*, meaning birth or tribe, and the term originally referenced kinship and common ancestry (Saeed, 2011).

Accordingly, the nations can be distinguished based on the:

Shared Culture: Language, tradition, custom and shared stories of the past is shared culture (Croe, 2023). Japan is a classic case of a country with an integrated culture: its language, its tea party-like rituals, its historical narrative of the Samurai (the warrior class) all feed into national consciousness (BitGlint, 2025b). Similarly, the Mexican cultural identity is deeply tied to its indigenous heritage, influenced from Spain, and shared national celebrations such as Día de los Muertos (October 31 to November 2) every year (Drew, 2023).

Territorial Connection: Not always the case, but the existence of a geographical identity tends to engender a sense of belonging. It is worth-noting here that, with no national territory for hundreds of years, the Jewish diaspora held its nationhood largely together, but it was given a major boost when the state of Israel was founded in 1948 (Saeed, 2011). Another such example is of Kashmir which has been struggling for autonomy and territorial claims since a long time.

Political Sovereignty: Certain countries develop into nation states and the government becomes a part of their identity (Stovpets, 2023). The US is the model of national sovereignty where it controls its own destiny and is not influenced by foreign interference. The case of Brexit of UK provides another example of recovering political sovereignty from the European Union (EU) (BitGlint, 2024).

Social Bonding: Nationalism might be termed as a mythic-symbolic matrix that brings people together to share in each other's lives and to struggle together. The example is the reconciliation measures by South Africa after apartheid, through bodies such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which contributed to strengthening national unity despite past schisms (Spacey, 2024). The multicultural policies in Singapore, on the other hand, foster the social cohesion between the different ethnicities living side-by-side (Bitglint, 2025a).

The Role of Historical, Cultural, and Political Factors in National Integration

As mentioned above, the sense of 'nationhood' is an ever-evolving one that is influenced by history, culture, and politics. All these factors jointly help shape this thing: 'how one group of people create a sense of belonging together and become a nation?'

Historical Factors: History is all-important to the construction of a nation, it is there that a common shared narrative is set and it is a foundation underpinning the unity of people. National identity is created with wars, revolutions, colonial experiences or independence movements. For instance, the American Revolution (1775–1783) and the French Revolution (1789–1799) were instrumental in crystallizing national identity through instilling independent and sovereign conceptions of the sovereignty and the self-regulation (Murthy, 2018). The Indian independence movement (1857–1947) also contributed to such unity, as people with different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds started identifying themselves collectively as Indians which was eventually culminated in the form of India and Pakistan (World, 2025).

Cultural Factors: Culture is the cornerstone of identity, including language, traditions, religion, and common habits. A shared language fosters communication and solidarity, and folklore, literature, and national symbols which, in turn, support national identity. For example, the 19th-century German nationalism largely focused on linguistic and cultural ties that helped square fragmented German states (Murthy, 2018). Moreover, indigenous movements around the world emphasize over the role of cultural survival in a claim to nation.

Political Factors: The form of political institutions and structures influence the birth of national feelings and national unity. It may be observed that there is no way to strengthen national unity other than to flourishing constitutions, legal systems, and democratic institutions. State formation in modern Europe was pushed by an alignment of centralized territorial authority, and political sovereignty (Murthy, 2018). Indeed, in some cases, weak governance and exclusionary policies can generate fragmentation, as we see in postcolonial states confronting with ethnic divisions.

The Fundamentals of Nationalism and Their Impact upon Group Identity

Nationalism is an ideological movement and a phenomenon that is based on the self-identification of a group of people with a 'nation' and stresses upon loyalty, commitment, and fidelity to the nation. It builds a certain community while creating shared experiences and purpose among people.

1. **Self-Determination:** The principle that a people, nation, or democracy has the right to govern itself without outside interference. This was core to the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and Asia (Kohn, 2025).
2. **Cultural Homogenization:** Nationalism asserts common language, customs and historical experiences as mark of identity (Croë, 2023) .

3. **National Sovereignty:** The concept that a nation is independent and has the right to its territory and power to govern itself.
4. **Patriotism and National Pride:** Promote feelings of pride within citizens for their nation's accomplishments and traditions (Kohn, 2025)
5. **Economic Nationalism:** Focus on domestic industries and policies which strengthen national identity (Anderson, 2006).
6. **Impact upon Group Identity:** Nationalism promotes solidarity by shaping common identity on the basis of similar values and historical experiences. It can work as a force for unity, such as in the Italian and German unifications of the 19th century, when nationalism pulled together slivers of fragmented states into unified nation-states.

Yet nationalism has a dark side as well: Excessive nationalism can be associated with exclusionary policies, ethnic violence, and aggressive expansionism (as was evident in nationalist movements of WWII-era) (Kohn, 2025).

Types of Nationalism

Civic Nationalism: Civic nationalism has more to do with common political values than ethnicity. It creates a shared national identity, that helps diverse people to live together in a single state. This is the case, for instance, in the United States and Canada, in which nationalism is based on democracy and cosmopolitanism (language, adherence to liberal ideals, what one might call "civic citizenship") rather than ethnic identity (Ricardo, 2024).

Ethnic Nationalism: Ethnic nationalism is the belief that an ethnic group has a right to political control over a state. Such nationalism fuels separatist movements like that of the 1990s disintegration of Yugoslavia into six independent countries, where ethnic divisions stoked civil war and territorial disputes (Kohn, 2025).

Economic Nationalism: Economic Nationalism refers to the importance given by a nation to the domestic industry and trade protectionism and which emphasize upon national identity. Tariffs, subsidies, and prohibitions on foreign holdings are used to maintain national economy. This idea has become a part of the economic strategy in recent years. This is also a trend of finding ways to get away from foreign markets (Ricardo, 2024).

Nationalism as a Tool to Promote Unity and National Integration

Global Perspective: Nationalism binds together by creating a sense of identity among the group of a certain people. A nation is a theme believed to be frequently held together via shared language, culture, customs, and historical interpretation. There was a formative impact on national consciousness after the 1789 French revolution which created the preconditions for modern national sovereignty by uprooting the cultural hegemony of monarchy, replacing its state-form organization of governance with one which imposed the willingness of nation to impose popular sovereignty on an emergent state. Values of liberty, equality, and fraternity promoted by the revolution became the basis of the modern nation-state and of the new form of nationalism. So too the uniting of Germany in 1871 under Otto von Bismarck was mostly driven by nationalism and a desire to cement together German-speaking states into one nation-state. While utilizing the principles of linguistic and cultural harmony, nationalism fabricated powerful, centralized states and promoted patriotism and unity (Giunta, 2024).

Nationalism also unifies through social bonding (even in times of emergency). It is often used by governments and politicians who seek to mobilize people around national symbols, traditions and experiences of shared history. National holidays, cultural festivals and sports events strengthen collective identity, offering a sense of belonging to the people. For example, the post-WWII nationalism in Japan accelerated the economic restoration because people were united to work for nation-building and technological development (Wave, 2024). Nationalism can also enhance economic resilience by developing domestic industries, insulating local economies from the potential of foreign competition, and supporting innovation. Economic nationalism, through measures like local manufacturing and self-reliance, helps to keep a country stable in the global economy. But nationalism can also divide, especially when it becomes exclusive. Ethnic nationalism, which advances the cause of one exclusive ethnic or religious group at the expense of others, has often resulted in conflicts, discrimination and separatism. The dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s perhaps offers the best example: Serbs, Bosnians, and Croats let nationalism rip, and the result was a bloody fight to subjugate each other as well as redrawing of borders. Similarly, in pre-WWII Germany, extreme nationalism was invoked to justify military buildup and territorial expansion, and aggressive nationalist policies under Nazi rule. They offer instances of the way in which nationalism, if based on exclusionary stories and myths, can subvert social peace and breed regional instability.

Furthermore, with extreme nationalism also comes political polarization. Nationalism can unite a group, but it can also mean political division between the national versus global perspectives (Jamil, et. al., 2024). Nationalist ideologies often focus on sovereignty and cultural purity, while globalist beliefs speak for cooperation between nations and multiculturalism. Such ideological differences may play out in policy discussions, social movements, and electoral disputes, as was witnessed in the case of Brexit through which nationalists played a critical role in the UK's withdrawal from the EU. In addition, nationalism can result in trade barriers, isolationism, and diplomatic disputes as states subsume the foreign relations to domestic concerns (Giunta, 2024).

One of the central drivers for national integration is social peace. In multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-linguistic societies, frictions occur when competing social groups fight for political representation, economic opportunities, or cultural affirmation. National integration is the panacea which shall replace these friction points with dialogue, mutual respect and inter-community participation. A driving example of a prosperous national integration is post-apartheid South Africa where attempts have been made to integrate the society previously divided along the racial lines including the promotion of national symbols as per Government of National Unity initiatives, for instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. By addressing past injustices and creating a more inclusive political dispensation, South Africa was able to prevent further strife following the dismantling of the apartheid system (Bangwar, 2022). Another is the issue of economic development aside from social stability on why national integration is important. It might be noted that a homogeneous society allows strong effort for economic development instead of internal struggle. Integrated societies depend on shared resources, collaborative labor markets, and inclusive policy formation to build national industries and to reduce income differentials. The fact, that economic opportunities promote a common sense of nation-ness, was seen in post-WWII Germany, whose economic integration was fostered by industrialization and integration of workers from different communities. On the other hand, countries that are fragmented with clear ethnic-cleansed-cum-dehumanized borders, such as the pre-South Sudan seceded from Sudan (2011), were often characterized by economic stagflation because of continued ethnic wars and political chaos (Testbook, 2025).

Pakistan's Perspective: Nationalism is helpful in strengthening unity and solidarity among the people by developing the sense of oneness, common history and cultural heritage. The only difference is, when channeled positively, nationalism is the glue that binds a people, creating social harmony and preventing the divisive dissention that

leads to the downfall of every good nation. Nationalism fosters a sense of belonging by focusing on shared cultural, historical and linguistic characteristics. In Pakistan, Two-Nation Theory condensed its concept of nationhood and found unity for independence by shaping a separate and distinct ideological identity of Muslims from that of others. Thus, national symbols, historical narratives, and cultural heritage all serve to help maintain such national identity (Saeed, 2011). Nationalist pressures override secessionism by engendering confidence in governmental institutions. Nationalism in governance ensures that subnational minorities are included in policy formulation process and are not disenfranchised. In Pakistan, federal legislation, in particular the 18th Amendment, seeks to enhance provincial autonomy without compromising the national sovereignty.

A common national identity allows for fair economic policies that distribute resources more evenly across the nation. Development, infrastructure and job creation programs foster economic unity among regions and reduce regional disparities. During the Soviet era, nationalism-oriented inclusive development programs “helped maintain stability and stimulate productive growth” in many countries (Manurung, 2023). Inclusive nationalism fosters interfaith and intercultural harmony. Pakistan Day and Independence Day serve to generate collective pride and solidarity celebrations (Sakeena, 2021).

Challenges to National Integration: Obstacles to national integration largely include ethnic and religious divisions, disparities in wealth distribution, and political unrest. Integration can face resistance in countries with historic grievances between disparate communities. The example of Lebanon, in particular, shows that national unity can be elusive, even when power-sharing arrangements have been adopted between religious communities. Likewise, economic inequalities can increase social tensions—especially where the economy is dominated by certain ethnic or regional groups at the expense of others (Bangwar, 2022). The essential strategy for national integration lies in embracing inclusive governance, education, economic policies and intercultural dialogue. This will require fair representation, investment in education that serve to create a national identity, balanced resource allocation, and the encouragement of interactions among communities. A successful approach is Singapore’s multicultural policy which proactively promotes ethnic harmony on public platforms through education, housing policies, etc. The policy has enabled Singapore, and its racially diverse society, to avoid the sectarianism that has plagued sections of the developing world, and with it, it become politically stable and developed (Testbook, 2025).

National Integration Theories and Their Contribution to Unity

National integration is not an easy task; rather it is a complex process through which all are brought closer to each other to achieve a domestic set of values, irrespective of caste, creed and race. A number of different theories have been proposed to account for how this process occurs and what the mechanism of unity might be. These theories highlight ways by which societies can attain national unity while at the same time accommodating diversity.

Modernist Theory of National Integration: The most prominent theories include the Modernist Theory of National Integration which holds that modernization through industrialization, urbanization and education, automatically brings national unity. According to this theory, with the advancement of economy and technology, the significance of traditional factors, such as ethnicity and religion will decline, and people will have more in common hence develop their national identity. The assimilation model, a part of modernist theory, has to do with the integration or ensuring the absorption of a minority culture into a dominant national culture and promotes homogenization as the key to integration. But, according to critics, enforced assimilation can pave the way for the repressing of cultures and provoke a backlash by confluent populations (Sakeena, 2021).

The Postmodernist Theory: The Postmodernist Theory of Accommodation, on the other hand, emphasizes on the need to acknowledge and maintain cultural variation in a society. This theory of multiculturalism prevails when groups of different races and cultural backgrounds live side by side and maintain their own unique racial and cultural identities. This theory originates the Consociational building block, which includes power-sharing while ensuring political representation, equality of access and opportunities among groups, and unity of the nation. In countries such as Belgium and Switzerland, this Consociational model of government has been applied to manage the ethnic and linguistic diversity (Dikici, 2021).

Functionalist Theory: Another important perspective is the Functionalist Theory which considers national integration as process of co-operation through common system of institutions and governance. This theory holds that educational systems, laws and national symbols, institutions are important for fostering unity. By establishing shared experiences and solidifying national identity, these institutions also serve to lessen the gap between various strata of society. The unity-in-diversity model, commonly associated with a functionalist approach, stresses that integration is facilitated by acceptance of diversity combined with common national values (Sheraz, 2023).

The Utility of National Integration Theories

It is said that in diverse societies the process of national integration holds the key for stability and unity. Assimilation, pluralism, and federalism, among others, provide diverse proposals for a nation's cohesiveness, among which the equilibrium between cultural, ethnic, and linguistic considerations will need to be established. These theories offer separate perspectives on how to create national unity, manage diversity, and provide fair representation to various sub-nationalities.

Assimilation Theory and National Unity: Assimilation is the longest-lived theory of national unity which supports the digestion of minority cultures by a dominant national culture. Following this method, unity is said to exist when citizens share the same language, traditions, value system, marginalizing ethnic/cultural differences. For instance, the French assimilation model espouses a single national identity through linguistic and cultural homogenization. Furthermore, the French government has long had an assimilationist policy which requires immigrants to assimilate into the French cultural identity (Dikici, 2021). Assimilation can contribute to unity by forming a common national identity, but has been accused of abandoning cultural diversity and alienating minority groups. Such efforts can breed resentment and opposition among indigenous populations, as in the case of forced assimilation policies in colonial education systems. Critics argue that true national integration would allow cultural identity to be preserved, rather than subsume it into a dominant culture (Obah, 2021b).

In this light, pluralism helps in unifying a nation through intercultural dialogue, legal safeguards for minority rights, and by increasing the level of inclusion of diverse groups within the political design. It makes people of all stripes feel respected and included, minimizing ethnic tensions and encouraging co-operation. But too much pluralism can slide into fragmentation, in which various groups, whether racial, religious or regional, place their own centrifugal interests above the imperative of national unity. Pluralism, when not well accommodated, can create, *inter alia*, parallel societies and limited interactions among cultures (Obah, 2021b).

Pluralism and Multiculturalists in the Integration of Nations: Pluralism instead of acculturation, accepts the existence of diversity in a nation. This theory maintains that unity is possible if different ethnic (or religious, or linguistic) groups live together side by side, each preserving its own unique identity. Multiculturalism, a variety of pluralism, has policy implications that support cultural expression and equality. A second structural

condition necessary for civic resolution is a pluralistic political arrangement under the umbrella of an integrative state. Canada and Switzerland, for example, have been able to integrate their 'minorities' in their body politic without denying them the right to culture and tradition (Obah, 2021a).

Federalism and National Integration: Federalism is a system of government in which authority is divided between a nation and its constituent parts such as regions or ethnic groups. This "loser's consent" theory works especially well in multi-ethnic, multilingual countries, where a centralized government may have a problem while handling regional variation. India as well as the United States and Germany for instance have relatively successfully executed these federal systems, whereby local governance in different states or provinces are allowed as long as it follows national laws (Kastoryano, 2018).

Federalism brings unity since it mitigates ethnic and regional frictions, encourages local administration, and ensures equitable resource allocation. It enables different communities to rule themselves, while staying within a wider national context. Yet federalism can be a double-edged sword when regional governments seek local interests over national harmony. If federal institutions are weak, these separatist movements could risk the national unity (Jathol, 2024).

Problems for the States in Securing National Integration

Notwithstanding the numerous theories on how to promote national unity, nations frequently face immense difficulties to genuinely achieve integration. These problems are rooted in their history, socio-economic imbalances, political instability and influence from external forces.

Ethnic and Religious Divisions: One of the barriers to national integration is ethnic and religious fragmentation. In large parts of the world, historical rivalries among various ethnic or religious groups have left a legacy of mistrust and resentment. In Pakistan, for instance, internal rivalries among different ethnicities have made it difficult to build a single sense of a national oneness. The continuing bloodshed of conflict between sects and regional separatist movements show how hard it is to transcend the nations' bitter pasts (Weiner, 1973).

Economic Disparities: Social inequality is a hard nut to crack for national integration. It is when wealth or resources are not equally distributed among different localities or ethnicities that one develops an affinity to the feelings of being marginalized and excluded. On a regional level, economic imbalance, such as in Nigeria, where the North has a higher poverty rate than the South, has encouraged separatist feelings and political instability. The case of the province of Balochistan of Pakistan serves as another example. These inequalities can only be addressed through economic policies which are inclusive ensuring that no one is left behind on the development ladder (Majeed, 2014).

Political Uncertainty and Governance Crises: Under-institutionalization, corruption, and lack of, or limited access to, political representation can make some groups feel alienated of a political 'system' whereas the lack of democratic participation and genuine representation can end up dividing people more than uniting them (Ishaque, 2017). In some cases, where the neighboring states have interests in promoting internal conflicts within the territory of their neighbor, national integration may be weak. Indeed, foreign donor interventions in Middle Eastern and South Asian states have frequently served to aggravate ethnic and sectarian cleavages. As a result, the governments there are unable to craft a coherent national policy (Waseem, 2022).

Strategies to Overcome the Obstacles

To address these challenges, countries must embrace inclusive governance, egalitarian economics, and cross-cultural dialogue. Undoubtedly, a successful national integration everywhere needs establishing and building democratic structures, inculcating national-identity based education, and considering the equitable distribution of resources. Nations that overcome these challenges tend to be those that pursue policies that reconcile diversity and national unity, so that all citizens feel represented and valued (Jathol, 2024).

Equitable and Balanced Economic Development: Separatist movements and internal social unrest are feeding on economic disparities. To remedy this, governments need to pursue pro-poor economic policies, including:

- Just and fair distribution of resources to ensure that all parts of the country benefit from the country's wealth.
- Investment in infrastructure to overcome economic disparities between urban and rural regions.
- Jobs programs aimed at communities left behind to narrow economic gaps.

The Western Development Strategy in China, for instance, sought to narrow disparities in the regions through balancing the development of the western and eastern provinces hence improving the sense of national solidarity.

Education as a Tool to Develop National Identity: Education is a very important factor for the development of national identity and for the dispersion of ethnic conflicts. Governments should:

- Integrate multicultural education that instill respect for various traditions.
- Create national history curricula that emphasize shared history, rather than ethnic differences.
- Urge support for language policies to promote the coexistence of "national" languages with minority languages e.g. Singapore where education system works to unite its population ethnically as a nation, yet respect diversity.

Program for Intercultural Dialogue and Social Cohesion: The promotion of interaction among communities can help in creating trust among various ethnic and religious communities. Strategies include:

- National holidays and cultural exchanges to honor diversity.
- System of local conflict resolution, where grievances can be peacefully expressed and adjudicated.
- Media projects that promote unity and counter divisive narratives.

For example, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was instrumental in the nation's reconciliation following the apartheid.

Legal Instruments for the Protection of Minorities: Powerful anti-discrimination legislation with constitutional protections means minority communities are insulated from marginalization. Governments must:

- Implement laws for equal rights to stop discrimination in terms of ethnicity or religion.

- Create autonomous human rights commissions to better monitor such violations.
- Support affirmative action policies aimed at raising up long-term oppressed communities.

The European Union's anti-discrimination directives provide a blueprint for safeguarding minority rights and promoting integration.

Cooperative and Conflict Prevention Actions at the Regional Level: Foreign elements and geopolitical competition may impede integration at the national level. Nations must:

- Reinforce regional alliances so that the foreign elements will not be allowed to intervene,/take sides in intraregional conflicts.
- Pursue diplomatic conflict mitigation of cross-border ethnic strife.
- Foster economic relationships that render different regions interdependent.

For instance, regional-integration policies of ASEAN have contributed to stability and economic-based cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

Nationalism can be a dividing force and at the same time it can be a binding force as well. It depends upon the political elite in a certain society that how this doctrine and the related issues might be addressed. If proper socio-political assimilating policies can be formulated and implemented at the government level, then nationalism can contribute positively towards national consolidation but if the political elite ignore or do not want to address the issues related with sub-nationalistic tendencies then it would become problematic for national integration. The case of Pakistan can also be cited in this latter category where the political elite until now has been failed to resolve various issues related to the sub-nationalist tendencies and the state even had to dismember because of the said failure in 1971. The remaining Pakistan i.e. the now-a-days-Pakistan is once again facing the problem of national integration because of the dominance of Punjab across various significant state institutions. Furthermore, it is an un-denied fact that the economic development plays an important role in terms of national integration. The financial satisfaction brings the people closer to each other. Therefore, the ruling elite of ethnically fragmented societies should carefully design and implement the model of economic progress so that the people from all across the state may not develop the feelings of marginalization which otherwise would hamper the national progress.

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