

Bulgaria

Ethnicity in Bulgaria

Group selection

We identify the following politically relevant ethnic groups: **Bulgarians, Macedonians, Pomaks, Roma, and Turks.**

Power relations

1946-1957

At the beginning of the communist regime, policies towards ethnic minorities were comparatively liberal. Minorities regained rights to restore original names, publish newspapers and even establish schools. The constitution of 1947 is the only Bulgarian constitution ever to directly mention “national minorities”. Article 79 states that “the national minorities have the right to study their mother tongue and develop their national culture.” The constitution guaranteed equal rights to all Bulgarian citizens regardless of their nationality, origin, denomination and property (⁶⁷⁴, 5). On the other hand, all groups were partly discriminated due to communist attitude towards religion. As Kosseva et al. state, “religion was an exceptionally important segment of the national identity on the Balkans, many churches and other places of worship were closed and through various forms of repression, people were diverted away from the religion” (⁶⁷⁵, 11).

⁶⁷⁴ [Hajdinjak, 2008]

⁶⁷⁵ [Kosseva et al., 2009]

Political representation was limited to the Communist party. However, this can hardly be qualified as discrimination of any of the ethnic groups. The largest minority groups had a significant voice in the communist party (⁶⁷⁶, 12). Yet, since ethnicity was not politicized during these years, access to state-decision making much rather went via the CP, we code all ethnic groups as irrelevant.

⁶⁷⁶ [Kosseva et al., 2009]

1958-1989

In 1958, the Communist Party Politburo decided to limit minority rights and started a new assimilation policy. “The ultimate goal was to turn Bulgaria into a mono-national country, and to turn its people into an ideologically and ethnically homogeneous nation” (⁶⁷⁷, 12). A policy of discrimination of all ethnic groups - limited possibilities to participate, mandatory change of names, forced settlement of Roma and event deployment of army units in resisting villages - was the core means to reach the goal of assimilation. The regime

⁶⁷⁷ [Kosseva et al., 2009]

even denied the existence of other ethnic groups in Bulgaria. Thus, Bulgarians had a monopoly on power, while all other politically relevant ethnic groups were “discriminated”.

1990-1998

After the fall of communism, the ruling elite still continued the policy of denial of ethnic identities. However, due to a lack of means of repression, ethnic nationalism flourished (⁶⁷⁸, 5). “(...) The first democratic Constitution, adopted in 1991, did not include the term ‘minority’ nor its definition, it did specifically mention ‘citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian’ (article 36) and added that everyone had the right to ‘develop their own culture in accordance with their ethnic affiliation, which is endorsed and guaranteed by the law’ (article 54)” (⁶⁷⁹, 6). Even more, article 11 says that “there shall be no political parties on ethnic, racial or religious lines”. Thus, discrimination ended in 1990 but the Bulgarian majority still held a monopoly of political power.

⁶⁷⁸ [Rechel, 2008]

⁶⁷⁹ [Hajdinjak, 2008]

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) party was legalized in 1992. Although the party denies being a Turkish party, as ethnic parties are forbidden in the constitution, it is dominated by the Turkish minority. Other minorities (Pomaks and Muslim Roma) are also to some extent represented by MRF. MRF is the 3rd largest party in Bulgaria and played an important coalition-forming role in virtually all post-Communist governments (⁶⁸⁰, 1211).

⁶⁸⁰ [Rechel, 2008]

The second largest minority group, the Roma, was unable to reach any significant representation on the national level. Because of large political fragmentation, none of the Roma parties has ever played a significant role in national coalition building. Although there is no direct limitation for Roma people to participate in politics, they are affected by an overall discriminatory environment (especially poor access to public goods, including education, etc...). Roma are coded as “powerless” throughout.

1999

Macedonians are the only minority group with an explicitly ethnic party. The party OMO “Ilinden” was registered in 1999, but banned by the constitutional court as a separatist party in 2000 (⁶⁸¹, 18; ⁶⁸², 336). The party remains active while being still banned from political participation. The number of Macedonians is a contentious issue in Bulgaria. According to the census there were about 200’000 Macedonians living in Bulgaria in 1956 (⁶⁸³, 18). The 2001 census was the first since 1965 to list Macedonians in the official results. But according to its results only about 5 000 Macedonians (0.06% of total population) live in Bulgaria (⁶⁸⁴, 335). Experts of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee hold it to be the Macedonian population at about 20’000 (⁶⁸⁵, 4). This estimation has been used for coding. Discrimination seems to have continued since 2009; for example, it is reported that the Census conducted in 2011 did not include the

⁶⁸¹ [Hajdinjak, 2008]

⁶⁸² [Rechel, 2008]

⁶⁸³ [Hajdinjak, 2008]

⁶⁸⁴ [Rechel, 2008]

⁶⁸⁵ [Hajdinjak, 2008]

possibility to self-identify as Macedonian, which is interpreted as a denial of the existence of the ethnic group itself ⁽⁶⁸⁶⁾. A report to the UN Human Rights Council ⁽⁶⁸⁷⁾ highlighted the need for the country to recognize Macedonians as an ethnic group and grant the appropriate, constitutionally guaranteed rights.

⁶⁸⁶ [Stoikov, 2011]

⁶⁸⁷ [UNHRC, 2012]

2000-2001

Codings as before, except Macedonians are coded as “discriminated”.

2002-2009

Starting in the second half of the year 2001, the MRF (Turks) participated in a coalition cabinet with the National Movement Simeon II. 2005 saw the emergence of the “self-avowed (ultra-)nationalist organization, Ataka (Attack), as the fourth-largest political formation” ^(688, 25) in the parliament. Although Ataka remains out of power, its rising popularity could lead to some changes in the power configuration in the future.

⁶⁸⁸ [Kavalski, 2007]

2010-2013

Due to the victory of GERB in parliamentary elections in 2009 and the single-party government that was constituted thereafter, Bulgarians are coded as being dominant for this period. After the elections in 2009, the MRF was excluded from government, which consisted of members of the party “Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria” (GERB) only. Therefore, the Turkish are coded as being powerless from 2010 to 2013.

2014

Parliamentary elections were held in 2013, resulting in no party winning a majority of the parliamentary seats. The government was formed afterwards by the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), the latter of which mainly represents the interests of the Turkish ethnic group. This implies that for the period after 2013, the Turks should be coded as Junior Partner. However, the government resigned shortly after its initial formation (in August 2014) due to criticism and protests ^(689; 690).

⁶⁸⁹ [Deutsche Welle, 2013]

⁶⁹⁰ [The Sofia Globe, 2014]

2015-2021

In October 2014, parliamentary elections were held again. The coalition formed afterwards consisted of members of GERB and the Reformist Bloc, and did not include any minority parties ⁽⁶⁹¹⁾. Thus, the Turks are coded as powerless again from 2015 on, while the Bulgarians regained a Dominant status.

⁶⁹¹ [Euractiv, 2014]

The Roma remain socially marginalized, underrepresented in national politics and characterized by a very high unemployment rate,

although initiatives of societal inclusion were taken by the government. However, no political discrimination is observable and on the local level, the Romani parties gain in influence ⁽⁶⁹²⁾. The Pomak political participation remains restricted to the local level and, to a certain extent, to their representation in parliament through the MRF ^(693; 694). However, only those Pomaks that feel close to the Turks feel represented by the MRF, which means that the specific Pomak ethnic identity is not politically active. The Macedonians are still politically discriminated, as their existence as an ethnic minority remains denied by the government ⁽⁶⁹⁵⁾.

The last Parliamentary elections were held in 2017. While the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DSP) a political party representing Turkish minority obtained 27 seats in the parliament, coalition government was formed between the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) and the far-right United Patriots alliance. As noted in Freedom House reports of the period 2017-2020, this has raised concerns about the normalization of xenophobia and discrimination ⁽⁶⁹⁶⁾. Due to these results of the 2017 elections and the consequent government coalition, Bulgarians remain coded as Dominant and the Turkish minority as Powerless until 2021.

According to the law, electoral campaigns can still only be conducted in the Bulgarian language, which limits the access to and the level of political participation of non-Bulgarian speaking minorities ⁽⁶⁹⁷⁾.

While some members of the Roma minority vote for DSP, there is no political party representing the Roma minority as such in the parliament. Racial discrimination of the Roma minority is reported at societal level. Representatives of this group hold some elected positions at local level but are underrepresented at national level.

No major changes have been observed for Macedonian and Pomak groups until 2021 ⁽⁶⁹⁸⁾.

⁶⁹² [Minority Rights Group International, 2015]

⁶⁹³ [Minority Rights Group International, 2015]

⁶⁹⁴ [Novinite, 2013]

⁶⁹⁵ [OMO "Ilinden" - PIRIN, 2017]

⁶⁹⁶ [Freedom House, 2017-2020]

⁶⁹⁷ [US State Department, 2017-2019]

⁶⁹⁸ [Minority Rights Group International, 2018]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria

From 1946 until 1957

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	IRRELEVANT

From 1958 until 1989

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	MONOPOLY
Turkish	0.1	DISCRIMINATED
Roma	0.05	DISCRIMINATED
Pomaks	0.017	DISCRIMINATED

From 1990 until 1998

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	MONOPOLY
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT

From 1999 until 1999

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	MONOPOLY
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	POWERLESS

From 2000 until 2001



Figure 113: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1946-1957.



Figure 114: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1958-1989.



Figure 115: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1990-1998.



Figure 116: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1999-1999.

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	MONOPOLY
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED

From 2002 until 2009

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	SENIOR PARTNER
Turkish	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED

From 2010 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	DOMINANT
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED

From 2014 until 2014

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	SENIOR PARTNER
Turkish	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED

From 2015 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	DOMINANT
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 118: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 2002-2009.



Figure 119: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 2010-2013.



Figure 120: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 2014-2014.



Figure 121: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 2015-2021.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Bulgaria

From 1958 until 1989

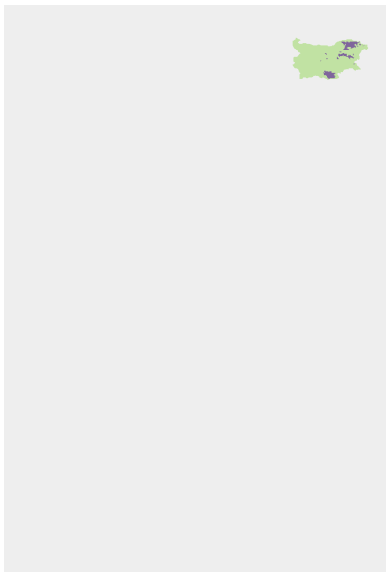


Figure 122: Map of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1958-1989.

Group name		Area in km ²	Type
■	Bulgarians	111 010	Statewide
■	Turkish	9990	Regionally based
■	Roma	0	Dispersed
■	Pomaks	0	Dispersed

Table 42: List of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1958-1989.

From 1990 until 1998

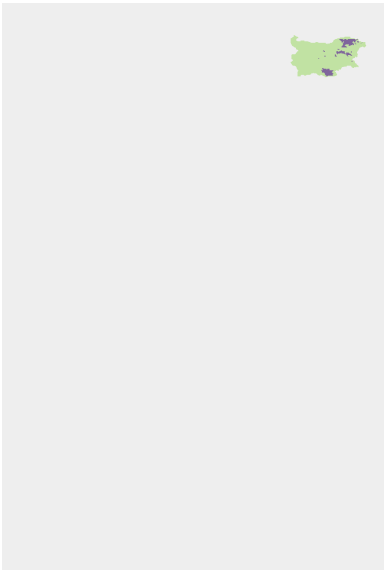


Figure 123: Map of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1990-1998.

Group name		Area in km ²	Type
■	Bulgarians	111 010	Statewide
■	Turkish	9990	Regionally based
■	Roma	0	Dispersed

Table 43: List of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1990-1998.

From 1999 until 2021

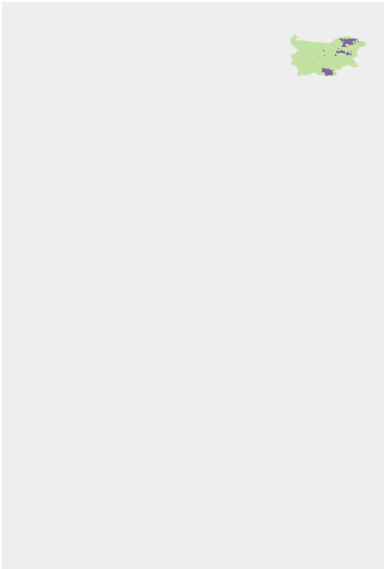


Figure 124: Map of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1999-2021.





	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
	Bulgarians	111 010	Statewide
	Turkish	9990	Regionally based
	Roma	0	Dispersed
	Macedonians	0	Dispersed

Table 44: List of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1999-2021.