

Cambodia

Ethnicity in Cambodia

Group selection

Most Cambodians consider themselves to be **Khmers**, descendants of the Angkor Empire that extended over much of Southeast Asia and reached its zenith between the 10th and 13th centuries ⁽⁶⁵⁴⁾.

⁶⁵⁴ [CIA, 2014]

The rights of minorities under the nationality law are not explicit; constitutional protections are extended only to “Khmer peoples” ⁽⁶⁵⁵⁾. Cambodia has an estimated population of 15,205,539 people.

⁶⁵⁵ [United States Department of State, 2013]

The group size estimates are drawn from the 2013 Census which reports population by mother tongue as follows: Khmer 95.4%, **Vietnamese** 0.8%, **Chinese** 0.2%, **Lao** 0.2%, **Thai** 0.0%, **Cham** 2.2%, **Khmer Loeu** 1.2% (of which: Tompuong 0.4%, Krueng 0.2%, Bunong (Phnong) 0.2%, Stieng 0.1%, Kraol 0.2%, other 0.1%).

Given the proximity to the Thai and Lao borders, the decline in these language groups suggests substantial out-migration due to conflict in the border regions.

The Chinese presence in Cambodia has increased since 1993 but remains underreported and their exact numbers remain difficult to ascertain: it is thought that they may number as many as 300,000 to 400,000 (the Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission of the Republic of China gives a 2005 estimate of 343,855). The CIA World Factbook ⁽⁶⁵⁶⁾ talks about 1% Chinese.

⁶⁵⁶ [CIA, 2014]

The exact number of Vietnamese in Cambodia today is a matter of some uncertainty, as many of them are possibly in the country illegally or prefer not to be identified as ethnic Vietnamese. They are thought to number between 100,000 (Taipei Times, July 2003) and 750,000 (CIA World Factbook: Cambodia, 2013; based on the estimate that the Vietnamese represent about 5 per cent of the total population of the country).

There is no consensus concerning the number or even classification of the various Cambodian hill tribes, although a UN estimate in 1992 noted six larger tribes numbering over 10,000 and twenty smaller groups of less than 3,000, perhaps in total numbering about 120,000 people, though some estimates suggest that today’s population may be closer to 200,000. Cambodia’s census in 1998 gave a figure of 101,000, though this was based on language affiliation and was undoubtedly an underestimation at the time. The largest among these minorities are the Kuy, Mnong, Stieng, Brao, Tampuan, Pear, Jarai and Rade. The first five speak Mon-Khmer languages, whereas

Jarai and Rade are both languages of the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family. The 2013 Census reports a total number of about 157'000 people, with the Tompuong (Tampuan), Krueng, Bunong (Phnong), Stieng and Kraol as the largest among these minorities.

Approximately 500,000 people (Ethnologue gives a figure of 220,000 based on 1992 Cambodian government sources; a 2004 Radio Free Asia report refers to as many as 700,000) concentrated around Kampong Cham, Kampot and Phnom Penh are ethnic Cham of Malay-Polynesian origins. The 2013 Census reports a total number of about 278'000 Cham.

Power relations

1953-1970

The neutralist regime of Norodom Sihanouk (1953-1970) pursued a fiercely nationalist policy. Ethnic Chinese, mostly urban Sino-Khmer participated in the government and other state institutions and still had very significant economic and political power. However, Cambodian independence saw a decline in the treatment of ethnic Chinese by state authorities and the previously existing autonomy was eliminated by the new government. The French had brought with them a system devised by the Vietnamese Emperor Gia Long (1802-1820) to classify the local Chinese according to areas of origin and dialect. The French system of administering the Chinese community was terminated in 1958. During the 1960s, Chinese community affairs tended to be handled, at least in Phnom Penh, by the Chinese Hospital Committee and in 1971 the government authorized the formation of a new body, the Federated Association of Chinese of Cambodia, which was the first organization to embrace all of Cambodia's resident Chinese.

The large Vietnamese minority, partly Cambodian, partly Vietnamese citizens, was without political influence. Sihanouk's anti-Thai policies (conflict with Thailand on the Preah Vihear temple) led to wide-spread discrimination against the small Thai minority in Koh Kong province (ceded by Siam in 1904).

The Khmerisation program vis-a-vis the non-Buddhist hill tribes (Mon-Khmer and Austronesian), Khmer Loeu, led to wide-spread unrest in the northeastern provinces bordering Laos and Vietnam during the second half of the 1960s. In the late 1960s, an estimated 5,000 Khmer Loeu in eastern Cambodia rose in rebellion against the government and demanded self-determination and independence. The government press reported that local leaders loyal to the government had been assassinated. Following the rebellion, the hill people's widespread resentment of ethnic Khmer settlers caused them to refuse to cooperate with the Cambodian army in its suppression of rural unrest. Both the Khmer and the Vietnamese communists took advantage of this disaffection, and they actively recruited Khmer Loeu into their ranks.

1971-1975

In 1970, the Khmer Republic is proclaimed by the pro-American regime of Lon Nol. The regime initiated anti-Vietnamese pogroms and forcibly expelled more than one half of the ethnic Vietnamese inhabitants. The year 1970 also marked the beginning of almost two decades of severe repression of the Chinese minorities in Cambodia.

Before 1975, Khmer and foreign estimates numbered Cham at between 150,000 and 250,000. During the Sihanouk and Lon Nol eras, Cham, unlike ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese, were citizens. During the Khmer Republic of 1970 to 1975, one of the elite military units was made up of members of the Cham and other ethnic minorities.

1976-1979

After a bloody five-year civil war, the radical Communist Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, seized power in April 1975. During the Pol Pot regime (Democratic Kampuchea) more than one million of the country's seven million inhabitants were either killed or died of hunger and disease. When the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975 perhaps as many as 150,000 Vietnamese who had not fled or been expelled during the Lon Nol years were expelled to Vietnam. Those Vietnamese who remained, often because they were married to Khmer, were massacred, along with children of mixed Khmer-Vietnamese families ⁽⁶⁵⁷⁾. The few ethnic Vietnamese who remained in the country after 1976 were persecuted and many of them killed when the border conflict between Democratic Kampuchea and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam escalated at the end of 1977.

⁶⁵⁷ [Minority Rights Group International, 2008]

During this period, the Khmer Leou were recognized as Cambodian citizens, and thus avoided some of the disadvantages and discriminatory measures affecting minorities like the Chinese and Vietnamese. The Khmer Rouge had tried to recruit the Cham to their camp in the preceding struggle of their rule. As this attempt had remained mostly unsuccessful, the Cham were singled out for particularly brutal repression and more than one third of Cham in Cambodia were killed under the Khmer Rouge regime.

1980-1993

Following the Vietnamese invasion in December 1978, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was proclaimed in January 1979, toppling the murderous Pol Pot regime and ending discrimination based on ethnicity. A broad revolutionary program was set forth by the Kampuchean (or Khmer) National United Front for National Salvation, which was formed on December 2, 1978, in a zone liberated from the Khmer Rouge. On January 1, 1979, the front's central committee proclaimed a set of "immediate policies" to be applied in the "liberated areas." One of these policies was to establish "people's self-management committees" in all localities. These committees would form the basic administrative structure for the Kampuchean

People's Revolutionary Council (KPRC), decreed on January 8, 1979, as the central administrative body for the PRK. The KPRC served as the ruling body of the Heng Samrin regime until June 27, 1981, when a new Constitution required that it be replaced by a newly elected Council of Ministers. Pen Sovan became the new prime minister. He was assisted by three deputy prime ministers—Hun Sen, Chan Si, and Chea Soth⁶⁵⁸). From sanctuaries in Thailand, the Khmer Rouge, joined by remnants of former royalist and republican regimes in Cambodia and backed by China, the ASEAN states and the West, waged a guerrilla war. A rough stalemate continued for a decade until 1991, when the warring factions signed a peace agreement in Paris. The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) took control until elections were held.

⁶⁵⁸ [Library of Congress, 1987]

During this period, minority groups were integrated into the ruling government. In 1981 the government structure included four Khmer Loeu province chiefs, all reportedly from the Brao group, in the northeastern provinces of Mondol Kiri, Rotanakiri, Stoeng Treng, and Preah Vihear. According to a 1984 resolution of the PRK National Cadres Conference entitled “Policy Toward Ethnic Minorities,” the minorities were considered an integral part of the Cambodian nation, and they were to be encouraged to participate in collectivization. The PRK actively courted the Cham, and in 1987 a Cham was a member of the party's Central Committee and minister of agriculture. The establishment of the People's Republic of Kampuchea was not only positive for the Chinese minority but was clearly an improvement. However, during the 1980s ethnic Chinese faced a subtle discrimination caused by the political and military support of the People's Republic of China for anti-Vietnamese resistance groups.

1994-2017

Cambodia is currently a constitutional monarchy with an elected government. The establishment of the Kingdom of Cambodia in 1993, despite the stronger commitment to human rights generally in the country's new constitution, did not necessarily entail more commitment towards respecting the rights of the Khmer Leou and other minority groups⁶⁵⁹). Elections since have been controlled by the ruling CPP party and Prime Minister Hun Sen following the forcible ousting of Prince Ranariddh, whose National United Front for a Neutral, Peaceful, Cooperative, and Independent Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) (3) party had won a plurality of seats in the 1993 elections. This coup was followed by a systematic campaign of intimidation, torture, and summary executions of at least forty-one FUNCINPEC members. In the subsequent 1998 elections, in areas including Phnom Penh, Kandal, Kompong Chhnang, and Sihanoukville, some communal officials vouched for the registration of underage applicants and ethnic Vietnamese unable to speak Khmer. At other voting sites ethnic Vietnamese were discriminated against - even those

⁶⁵⁹ [Minority Rights Group International, 2008]

showing proper documentation as Cambodian citizens - by being forced to take impromptu language tests or rejected because of their accents (⁶⁶⁰).

After national elections in 2003, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, and the FUNCINPEC, led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, formed a coalition government. Four members of minorities - two Cham and two other ethnic minorities - were elected to the National Assembly and six members of minorities to the Senate. At least eight officials in senior positions in the government were from minority groups. In the contested national elections in 2008, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, won 90 of 123 National Assembly seats. There were five members of minorities - four Cham and one other ethnic minority - in the National Assembly as well as three members of minorities in the Senate. At least eight officials in senior positions in the government were from minority groups (⁶⁶¹; ⁶⁶²).

In 2010, there were six members of minorities - four Cham, one Bunong and one Tumpuon - in the National Assembly and six members of minorities in the Senate - four Cham, one Brao and one Bunong.

In the most recent national elections held in July 2013, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) of incumbent Prime Minister Hun Sen (in office since 1985) won 68 seats in the National Assembly and 46 seats in the Senate. The opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) is the second largest faction with 55 seats in the National Assembly and 11 in the Senate (⁶⁶³). The CNRP formed in 2012 from a merger of the Sam Rangs Party (SRP) and the former Human Rights Party (HRP) (autociteIntelligence Agency, 2017). Observers indicated the scale of electoral irregularities warranted an independent investigation, but a full and transparent investigation did not occur. The CNRP boycotted the National Assembly until July 2014, when it reached an agreement with the ruling CPP to reform the National Electoral Committee (⁶⁶⁴).

No laws limited the participation of members of minorities in the political process in recent years (⁶⁶⁵). However, ethnic Vietnamese were still denied citizenship and therefore remained politically discriminated (⁶⁶⁶).

Khmer: The Khmer are the largest ethnic group in Cambodia and act as senior partners in government. Although some minority participation in government does occur, Khmer control of the media and the political system means that minority participation occurs according to the wishes of the majority.

Chinese: Ethnic Chinese citizens are accepted in society and the main political parties in Cambodia now appear sensitive to the economic and therefore political clout of the Chinese minority. All of them published campaign material in Chinese in the elections. While this minority faced serious discrimination until the 1980s, it appears that they no longer appear to be victimized by state authorities (⁶⁶⁷).

⁶⁶⁰ [Human Rights Watch, 1998]

⁶⁶¹ [United States Department of State, 2010]

⁶⁶² [United States Department of State, 2013]

⁶⁶³ [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

⁶⁶⁴ [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

⁶⁶⁵ [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

⁶⁶⁶ [?]

⁶⁶⁷ [Minority Rights Group International, 2008]

Vietnamese: The Vietnamese are the most vulnerable of Cambodia's minorities, and the most prone to discrimination. Their status has much to do with the difficult history and relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam. Some political groups continue to make strong anti Vietnamese statements, complaining of political control of the CPP by the Vietnamese government, border encroachment, and other issues for which they hold ethnic Vietnamese citizens at least partially responsible (⁶⁶⁸). The current citizenship law of Cambodia makes it difficult for ethnic Vietnamese to prove that they are citizens. This in turn severely limits their enjoyment of a variety of rights, and excludes them from fully participating as equal members in the political and economic life of the country. Even politicians generally considered 'democratic' periodically revert to slogans against the Vietnamese minority, describing them as a 'yuon' threat, a word with derogatory meaning. There have been reports of some recognized Vietnamese citizens being stopped from voting in 2003 and in later local elections (⁶⁶⁹).

⁶⁶⁸ [United States Department of State, 2013]

⁶⁶⁹ [Minority Rights Group International, 2008]

Khmer Loeu: The movement towards local government structures and decentralization of authority in Cambodia led to the establishment of local council elections in 2002. Indigenous peoples have not benefited from this change and are in effect excluded or seriously disadvantaged in terms of the political process because of highly restrictive language requirements. Legislation requires that any candidate for local council - or any other elected position - must be able to read and write Khmer. As most indigenous peoples do not satisfy this requirement, the majority of the Khmer Loeu are in effect excluded from direct participation in this aspect of the political process. The social and cultural discrimination of indigenous peoples is strong and the governmental land policy of granting away huge tracts of indigenous land to mining companies and plantations has serious social, cultural and economic, but also political implications. It was thus difficult to decide how to classify the Khmer Loeu in general. Ultimately, although some Khmer Loeu individuals do hold executive positions, these must be seen as assimilated party elites, true to the official party line, rather than actual ethnic group representatives. Hence, the group is coded as powerless here.

Cham and Malays: Restrictions affecting the Cham have mostly been related to the practice of Islam and have not affected their overall access to political power in Cambodia.

Thai-Lao: The Thai-Lao group refers to the people of the north eastern border region towards Thailand who speak a dialect of Lao typically written with the Thai alphabet. As the Lao and Thai people are culturally closely related, this region is home to a fusion of the Thai and Lao cultures and has repeatedly changed hands over the past several centuries. Thai-Lao minority situated along the highly disputed border has been subject to restrictions relating to the current militarization of the border. Despite the escalation of the border conflict, this group has not been relevant to Cambodian national politics in recent years.

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Political status of ethnic groups in Cambodia

From 1953 until 1970

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Khmer	0.815	SENIOR PARTNER
Chinese	0.075	JUNIOR PARTNER
Vietnamese	0.05	POWERLESS
Cham and Malays	0.035	JUNIOR PARTNER
Khmer Loeu (incl. Kui)	0.015	DISCRIMINATED
Thai-Lao	0.01	POWERLESS

From 1971 until 1975

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Khmer	0.83	SENIOR PARTNER
Chinese	0.07	DISCRIMINATED
Vietnamese	0.05	DISCRIMINATED
Cham and Malays	0.035	JUNIOR PARTNER
Khmer Loeu (incl. Kui)	0.01	DISCRIMINATED
Thai-Lao	0.005	DISCRIMINATED

From 1976 until 1979

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Khmer	0.9	MONOPOLY
Vietnamese	0.045	DISCRIMINATED
Cham and Malays	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Chinese	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Khmer Loeu (incl. Kui)	0.01	POWERLESS
Thai-Lao	0.005	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 117: Political status of ethnic groups in Cambodia during 1953-1970.



Figure 118: Political status of ethnic groups in Cambodia during 1971-1975.



Figure 119: Political status of ethnic groups in Cambodia during 1976-1979.

From 1980 until 1993

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Khmer	0.89	SENIOR PARTNER
Vietnamese	0.05	DISCRIMINATED
Cham and Malays	0.02	JUNIOR PARTNER
Chinese	0.02	POWERLESS
Khmer Loeu (incl. Kui)	0.01	JUNIOR PARTNER
Thai-Lao	0.01	IRRELEVANT

From 1994 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Khmer	0.95	SENIOR PARTNER
Cham and Malays	0.022	JUNIOR PARTNER
Khmer Loeu (incl. Kui)	0.012	POWERLESS
Vietnamese	0.008	DISCRIMINATED
Chinese	0.002	JUNIOR PARTNER
Thai-Lao	0.002	IRRELEVANT

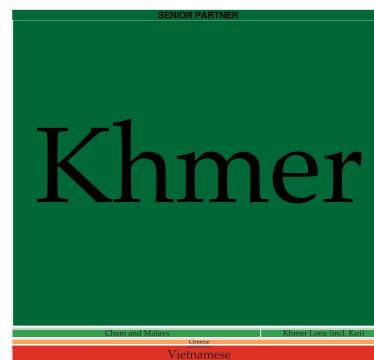


Figure 120: Political status of ethnic groups in Cambodia during 1980-1993.

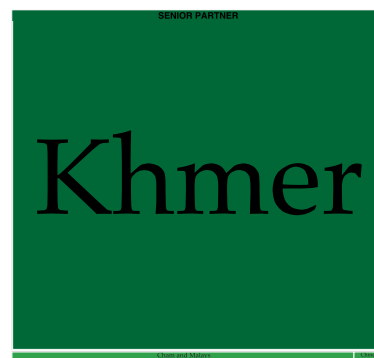


Figure 121: Political status of ethnic groups in Cambodia during 1994-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Cambodia

From 1953 until 1979

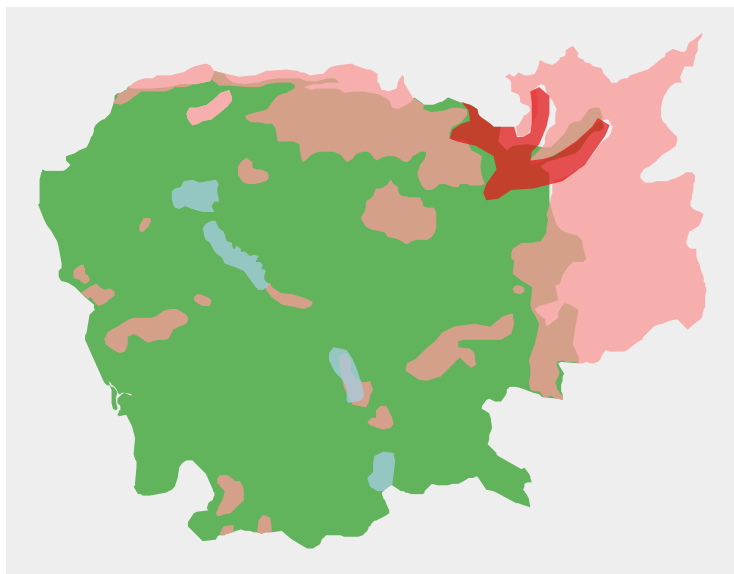


Figure 122: Map of ethnic groups in Cambodia during 1953-1979.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Khmer	146 992	Regionally based
■ Khmer Loeu (incl. Kui)	52 173	Regionally based
■ Thai-Lao	5164	Regionally based
■ Cham and Malays	3907	Regionally based
■ Vietnamese	3548	Regionally based
■ Chinese		Urban

Table 37: List of ethnic groups in Cambodia during 1953-1979.

From 1980 until 2017

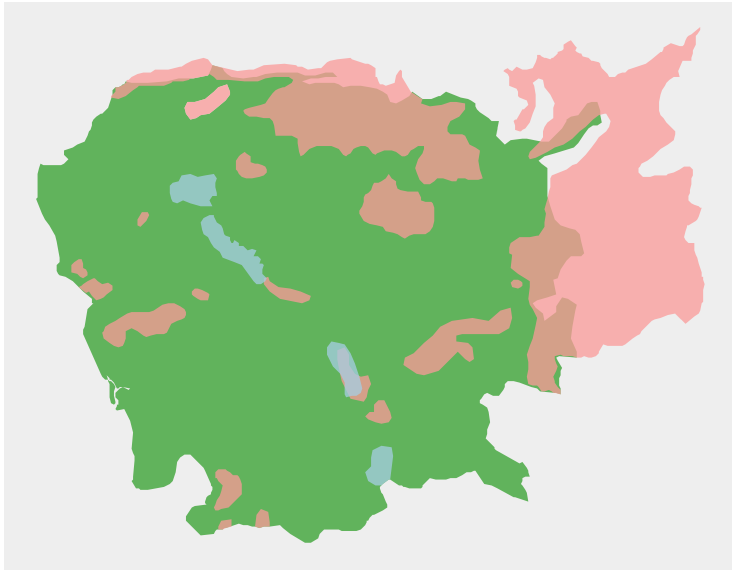


Figure 123: Map of ethnic groups in Cambodia during 1980-2017.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Khmer	146 992	Regionally based
■ Khmer Loeu (incl. Kui)	52 173	Regionally based
■ Cham and Malays	3 907	Regionally based
■ Vietnamese	3 548	Regionally based
■ Chinese		Urban

Table 38: List of ethnic groups in Cambodia during 1980-2017.

Conflicts in Cambodia

Starting on 1946-08-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	Khmer Issarak		1946-08-30			

Starting on 1967-04-29

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Cambodia (Kampuchea)	KR	Khmer Loeu (incl. Kui)	1967-04-29	No	Yes	No
Government of Cambodia (Kampuchea)	KR	Khmer	1967-04-29	No	Yes, from EGIP	No
Government of Cambodia (Kampuchea)	KNUFNS	Khmer	1978-12-29	No	No	No
Government of Cambodia (Kampuchea)	KPNLF	Khmer	1979-11-29	No	Yes, from EGIP	No
Government of Cambodia (Kampuchea)	FUNCINPEC	Khmer	1982-12-30	No	Yes, from EGIP	No

Starting on 1975-04-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Cambodia (Kampuchea)	Government of Vietnam (North Vietnam)		1975-04-30			

Starting on 1975-12-14

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Cambodia (Kampuchea)	Government of Thailand		1975-12-14			