

Nepal

# *Ethnicity in Nepal*

## *Group selection*

In Nepal, there is a multitude of overlapping and cross-secting axes of group identity, ranging from ethnicity over caste, religion, language, and on to region (<sup>3684</sup>, 3; <sup>3685</sup>, 25). The diversity is immense, with the 2001 census data for example revealing the existence of more than 60 ethnic groups, 92 languages and at least seven religions (<sup>3686</sup>, 25; <sup>3687</sup>, 366). The classification into discrete ethnic groups receives an additional complication from the fact that the borders between ethnicity and caste are often "blurred in practice" (<sup>3688</sup>, 5). This is due to the 18th and 19th century state-building process, when Nepal's ruling elite incorporated ethnic minorities practicing religions other than Hinduism into its hierarchic caste system, often allocating them the lower to medium castes (<sup>3689</sup>, 11). Additionally, many contemporary ethnic labels "lack historical depth and have often shifted over time"; however, a "rise of identity politics" can be discerned for at least the time since 1990 (<sup>3690</sup>, 6).

<sup>3684</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3685</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3686</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3687</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

<sup>3688</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3689</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3690</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

Despite this diversity, Nepal's ethnic groups can be roughly classified into a much smaller set of four (six) main linguistic, religious and regional groups.

## *Caste Hill Hindu Elite*

First, there is the caste hill hindu elite (CHHE), consisting of Bahuns (the priest caste in the hill region, which is first in the caste hierarchy), Chhetris (the warrior caste, which is second in the caste hierarchy), Thakuris, Sanyasis and other smaller castes (<sup>3691</sup>, 366; <sup>3692</sup>, 4). Throughout Nepal's history, this group has dominated the political realm of the central state (<sup>3693</sup>, 366).

<sup>3691</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

<sup>3692</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3693</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

## *Dalits*

Second, there are the low caste Dalits, who have traditionally been divided into the "impure but touchable" and the "untouchable" categories (<sup>3694</sup>, 11). With very brief exceptions, they have been excluded from participation in higher politics throughout Nepal's history on the basis of their caste (<sup>3695</sup>, 5; <sup>3696</sup>, 369).

<sup>3694</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3695</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3696</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

### *Madhesis & Muslims*

Third, there are the Madhesis, who are mostly caste Hindus from the plains in Nepal's South, but include a small local Muslim population as well (<sup>3697</sup>, 4; <sup>3698</sup>, 25). Despite strong internal heterogeneity, they are united by generally speaking languages other than Nepali which are of the "plains language category" and which include Hindi, Urdu and Bengali among others (<sup>3699</sup>, 157). Through most of Nepal's history, they have been excluded and marginalized by the central state on the basis of their different languages and suspected ties to India (<sup>3700</sup>, 158). As most Muslims of Nepal live in the Tarai, they are often reported as a part of the Madhesi category (<sup>3701</sup>, 4). However, as they differ heavily in terms of religion, culture and self-identification from the high-caste Hindus otherwise included in the Madhesi category, they are here reported separately.

<sup>3697</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3698</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3699</sup> [Kantha, 2010]

<sup>3700</sup> [Kantha, 2010]

<sup>3701</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

### *Adibasi Janajati & Newars*

Fourth, there are the Adibasi Janajati (indigenous nationalities). These live in all three regions (mountains, hills and plains) and are internally extremely diverse as well (<sup>3702</sup>, 5). However, like the Madhesis, they are united by their "opposition to caste Hindus" (<sup>3703</sup>, 5), by a common history of marginalization, by their speaking of languages other than Nepali (mostly of the Tibeto-Burman family) and by their practice of religions other than Hinduism (mostly Buddhism) (<sup>3704</sup>, 60). While Newars also see themselves as indigenous nationalities, they practice Hinduism (with their own caste system) and do not speak a Tibeto-Burman language. Also, their socio-economic status is different from the other members of this ethnic cluster (<sup>3705</sup>, 10), which is why they are reported as a separate group in the EPR coding.

<sup>3702</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3703</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3704</sup> [Hangen, 2005]

<sup>3705</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

### *Group sizes*

All group sizes are based on the 2001 census, as previous census data (intentionally) does not include measures on ethnicity (<sup>3706</sup>, 13).

<sup>3706</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

- Caste Hill Hindu Elite (CHHE): 31%
- Adibasi Janajati (excluding Newars): 31%
- Newars: 6%
- Dalits: 15%
- Madhesi (excluding Muslims): 12%
- Muslims: 4%
- Others: 1%

### *Power relations*

Nepal's political history since 1946 has been mainly one of autocracy and monarchy, mostly dominated by the caste hill Hindu elite (sometimes joined by Newaris), interspersed with three attempts for a democratic transition, as well as with a large-scale civil war from 1996-2006. In the following, all the periods used for the EPR coding (1946-2017) and groups' access to the two dimensions of power during these periods (central executive organs and territorial autonomy) are reported.

### *The Rana period (-1951)*

Nepal took its modern geographical form in the eighteenth century under the Gurkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah who forcibly united the areas that span the country today and brought to power an exclusive circle of Hindu caste elites (<sup>3707</sup>, 130; <sup>3708</sup>, 7). However, in 1846 a bloody power struggle brought to power an aristocratic family who established the oligarchic Rana rule (<sup>3709</sup>, 130).

<sup>3707</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

<sup>3708</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3709</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

The Rana kept the monarchic state form for a facade of legitimacy. True power, however, was bestowed on the prime minister's office, which was made a hereditary post (<sup>3710</sup>, 130). During the Rana rule, the caste system was codified in the Muluki Ain legal code of 1854, and all ethnic groups were assigned a position within this strictly hierarchical system (<sup>3711</sup>, 11; <sup>3712</sup>, 373). In ethnic terms, the ruling regime included the same high-caste Hindu elites as during the previous Shah monarchy (<sup>3713</sup>, 7, 12), while excluding other ethnic groups and at the same time actively discriminating against the further marginalized Dalits through land redistribution, education policies and differential punishment for crimes (<sup>3714</sup>, 373). Ethnic tensions resulted in sporadic violent outbursts, especially in the East of the country, and in the Kathmandu valley, where the excluded Newars were among the first to organize against the regime (<sup>3715</sup>, 34).

<sup>3710</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

<sup>3711</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3712</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

<sup>3713</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3714</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

<sup>3715</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

The Rana regime was built on friendly relations with the British colonial administration in neighboring India (<sup>3716</sup>, 130; <sup>3717</sup>, 151). However, during the years of the World Wars, pressure on the regime intensified due to the return of combatants serving in the British army (<sup>3718</sup>, 131), which peaked after Indian independence from British rule: The newly empowered Indian Congress Party started supporting the opposition, namely its Nepali equivalent, the Nepali Congress Party (<sup>3719</sup>, 131; <sup>3720</sup>, 21; <sup>3721</sup>, 152). In 1950, violent protests and the escape of reigning king Tribhuvan to India forced the Rana prime minister to start negotiations for an end of Rana rule, which resulted in a new, formally democratic, constitution in late 1951 (<sup>3722</sup>, 131; <sup>3723</sup>, 152).

<sup>3716</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

<sup>3717</sup> [Mojumdar, 1975]

<sup>3718</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

<sup>3719</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

<sup>3720</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3721</sup> [Mojumdar, 1975]

<sup>3722</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

<sup>3723</sup> [Mojumdar, 1975]

Throughout this period (1946-1951), the CHHE were coded as having monopoly government, as they were represented by the Rana prime minister, who disproportionately favored them in political, social and economic realms. Dalits are coded as discriminated against,

because of the active, constitutionally-enshrined, discriminatory penal laws. Muslims are coded as irrelevant, as there seem to have been no organizations representing them politically. All other groups are coded as powerless. As Nepal during the time was a unitary state, no group was coded as having regional autonomy.

### *Transition years and democratic experiment (1952-1960)*

After the ouster of the Rana regime in 1951, the Shah monarchy returned to Nepal. King Tribhuvan, hoping to re-establish royal rule, cooperated with the emerging political parties, and a series of unstable interim governments were established, incorporating both elements from various former opposition parties and the former Rana regime (<sup>3724</sup>, 131; <sup>3725</sup>, 21). During these transition years, a constitution was established that was based on a British model and which called for a multi-party democracy (<sup>3726</sup>, 21). While the state was still dominated by the CHHE ethnic group, the political opening allowed excluded ethnic groups to organize, resulting in the formation of a multitude of ethnically colored political organizations (<sup>3727</sup>, 35).

<sup>3724</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

<sup>3725</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3726</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3727</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

During the first democratic elections in 1959, the Nepali Congress party won the majority of seats (<sup>3728</sup>, 131). However, only one year later in 1960, newly-crowned and more assertive king Mahendra dissolved the parliament and declared that the country was not ready for multi-party democracy (<sup>3729</sup>, 131; <sup>3730</sup>, 21).

<sup>3728</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

<sup>3729</sup> [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

<sup>3730</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

Due to the variegated inclusion of ethnic groups in the interim governments, the CHHE were coded as being a "senior partner", while the Adibasi Janajati, the Madhesi and the Newari were coded as "junior partners". Muslims are coded as irrelevant, as no organization seems to have represented their interest during the period, and no large-scale discrimination against them seems to have taken place. Dalits are still coded as "discriminated" due to the persistence of the caste-based legal code. No group has territorial autonomy, as Nepal still was a unitary state throughout the period.

### *Panchayat years (1961-1963 and 1964-1990)*

After the royal takeover and the abolishment of parliamentary democracy, king Mahendra introduced a new, "partyless" and pseudo-democratic system, based on representation through committees (Panchayats). This system would survive largely unchanged for almost three decades.

The Panchayat years were characterized by nearly unchecked dominance in the political realm by the king and by his appointed high-caste officials all stemming from the CHHE group (<sup>3731</sup>, 18; <sup>3732</sup>, 9, 11; <sup>3733</sup>, 22). The period also saw increased nationalistic state-building, assimilation and homogenization efforts (<sup>3734</sup>, 3, 12), for example through the planned resettlement of large numbers of the hill-based population into the plains to weaken the Madhesi identity (<sup>3735</sup>, 19). In the same vein, in the 1962 constitution, Nepal

<sup>3731</sup> [Geiser, 2005]

<sup>3732</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3733</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3734</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3735</sup> [Geiser, 2005]

officially adopted Hinduism as a state religion, the monarchy as its state form, and Nepali as its only official language, thus intentionally excluding “cultures, histories, and languages of Nepal’s ethnic groups” (3736, 12).

Two small changes during this remarkably durable period in Nepal’s history are noteworthy: First, in 1963, king Mahendra abolished the caste system as part of the homogenization efforts, thus ending the constitutionally enshrined and officially sanctioned discrimination of the Dalits (3737, 7; 3738, 19). Second, in the 1970s, the Panchayat system increasingly came under internal pressure, leading to a 1980 referendum on whether to establish a multi-party democracy in Nepal (3739, 133; 3740, 22; 3741, 160). While the result of the vote very narrowly indicated a continuation of the Panchayat system, the referendum itself served to energize ethnically-based parties, which used the partial political opening to mobilize (3742, 19; 3743, 22). Also, it led to a number of limited political reforms (3744, 22).

Many ethnicity-based parties formed during the years surrounding the referendum continued to organize covertly (3745, 19; 3746, 34), which eventually culminated in the 1990 people’s movement that was able to re-establish democracy by applying pressure from street demonstrations.

Clearly, the Panchayat years saw a resurgence of CHHE monopoly power, who used nationalism as a tool for their assimilation efforts. The CHHE are thus coded as the “monopoly” group. Muslims are coded as “irrelevant”. All other groups are coded as “powerless”, with the exception of Dalits, who are coded as “discriminated” until 1963, with a change to “powerless” in the time after the constitutional change that at least abolished their formal discrimination and prohibited caste-based marginalization.

### *Multi-party democracy (1991-2002)*

In 1990, a people’s movement, led by the Nepali Congress Party and its associated umbrella organization, the United Leftist Front, forced the king to restore multi-party democracy, with pressure starting in the Newari areas of the Kathmandu valley (3747, 13; 3748, 22; 3749, 365). Nepal was transformed into a constitutional monarchy, thus greatly lowering royal powers, leading to the recognition of the ethnic diversity of the country and enabling three parliamentary elections as well as the formation of twelve (weak and unstable) successive governments until 2002, which posed a clear contrast to the Panchayat years (3750, 134-5; 3751, 13; 3752, 23; 3753, 365).

However, in terms of ethnic power relations, the break was not as remarkable as might be expected. On the contrary, domination by the CHHE elite (joined by newly empowered Newari party heads) actually increased due to the centralized unitary state, its majoritarian electoral institutions and their holding leadership positions in all major parties (3754, 134). On the one hand, ethnicity-based mobilization increased due to the political opening, as regards for

3736 [Hangen, 2007]

3737 [Bennett, 2005]

3738 [Geiser, 2005]

3739 [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

3740 [Hangen, 2010]

3741 [Kantha, 2010]

3742 [Geiser, 2005]

3743 [Hangen, 2010]

3744 [Hangen, 2010]

3745 [Geiser, 2005]

3746 [Hangen, 2010]

3747 [Hangen, 2007]

3748 [Hangen, 2010]

3749 [Lawoti, 2008]

3750 [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

3751 [Hangen, 2007]

3752 [Hangen, 2010]

3753 [Lawoti, 2008]

3754 [Ganguly & Shoup, 2005]

example the Madhesi, the Adibasi Janajati and even the Dalits. On the other hand, however, Nepal remained a Hindu kingdom and the political exclusion for minorities in the executive political organs was even more pronounced than in previous decades (<sup>3755</sup>, <sup>3756</sup>, <sup>370</sup>; <sup>3757</sup>).

<sup>3755</sup> [Hangen, 2010]  
<sup>3756</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]  
<sup>3757</sup> [Matles Savada, 1991]

Popular dissatisfaction with continued exclusion as well as persisting underdevelopment in many regions enabled the rapid growth of a Maoist-inspired insurgency that first started in the mountainous western periphery of Nepal in 1996 (<sup>3758</sup>, <sup>23</sup>; <sup>3759</sup>, <sup>160</sup>). The strong participation of ethnic minorities in both the Maoist insurgency and in the king-appointed cabinets after his usurpation of power have been argued to show the extent of minority dissatisfaction with the outcomes of electoral democracy (<sup>3760</sup>, <sup>160</sup>; <sup>3761</sup>, <sup>371-372</sup>; <sup>3762</sup>, <sup>146</sup>). Also, the Maoists took up ethnic minority rights and the breaking of the caste-based political domination of the CHHE as one of their core demands (<sup>3763</sup>, <sup>21</sup>; <sup>3764</sup>, <sup>142</sup>).

<sup>3758</sup> [Hangen, 2010]  
<sup>3759</sup> [Kantha, 2010]

<sup>3760</sup> [Kantha, 2010]  
<sup>3761</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]  
<sup>3762</sup> [Lawoti, 2010]  
<sup>3763</sup> [Geiser, 2005]  
<sup>3764</sup> [Lawoti, 2010]

Based on these arguments, the CHHE were coded as a senior partner, and the Newari as a junior partner. All other groups (including the newly, weakly mobilized Muslims) are powerless and have no regional autonomy due to the still unitary and centralized nature of the Nepali state.

### *The king's cabinets (2003-2006)*

Amidst the backdrop of this raging civil war, there was a homicide in the king's palace, during which crown prince Dipendra (allegedly) killed king Birendra along with his whole family in 2001 (<sup>3765</sup>, <sup>23</sup>). As a result, Birendra's brother Gyanendra took over the royal office. In 2001, in response to increased Maoist attacks, a state of emergency was declared, and in 2002, the elected government was dissolved, with king Gyanendra subsequently forming his own cabinets and eventually taking over complete power overtly in 2005 by dissolving the parliament as well (<sup>3766</sup>, <sup>23</sup>; <sup>3767</sup>, <sup>372</sup>). While Nepal's state form thus clearly took an authoritarian turn, ethnic representation of minorities increased greatly in the king's cabinets, probably as a measure to sway support away from the increasingly bold Maoist insurgents (<sup>3768</sup>, <sup>371-2</sup>; <sup>3769</sup>, <sup>146</sup>). Among others, various hill ethnic minorities were included in the cabinet, as were Madhesis, and for the first time even Dalits (<sup>3770</sup>, <sup>372</sup>).

<sup>3765</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3766</sup> [Hangen, 2010]  
<sup>3767</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

<sup>3768</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]  
<sup>3769</sup> [Lawoti, 2010]  
<sup>3770</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

The CHHE were thus coded as a "senior partner" during the period, Muslims as "powerless", and all the other groups as "junior partners", as all major groupings (except for Muslims) were included in the king's cabinets at one time or the other.

### *Transition period (2007-2021)*

In April 2006, king Gyanendra was forced to give up power and initiate a negotiated transition process by a people's movement in the streets (<sup>3771</sup>, <sup>372</sup>). In the following, a comprehensive peace agreement with the insurgent Maoists was reached in November 2006

<sup>3771</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

(<sup>3772</sup>, 1; <sup>3773</sup>, 156). In January 2007, a first Interim Constitution was formulated, abolishing the monarchy, transforming Nepal into a republic and preparing the ground for elections for a Constituent Assembly (<sup>3774</sup>, 152; <sup>3775</sup>, 156). These were held in 2008, with the Maoists becoming the largest party.

While ethnic inclusion in the Constituent Assembly elected in 2008 was high, owing to a mixed electoral system and ethnic quotas (<sup>3776</sup>, 153; <sup>3777</sup>, 230), representation of ethnicities other than the CHHE in the cabinet still seemed to be rare for most groups. This is because all major parties were still led by members of the CHHE ethnicity (<sup>3778</sup>, 312). However, after a wave of protests and the emergence of a strong Madhesi party in the 2008 elections, Madhesi politicians were included in subsequent cabinets and occupied prominent positions, such as the office of Vice Prime Minister and the foreign ministry (<sup>3779</sup>, 169).

The most salient issue in the drafting of a new constitution has been the issue of federalism. The initial draft of 2007 did not include a reference to a federalist re-organization of the Nepali state, sparking a year-long wave of violent protest by Madhesis and Adibasi Janajatis, especially in Nepal's Tarai region (<sup>3780</sup>, 1; <sup>3781</sup>, 156; <sup>3782</sup>, 372). While subsequently a provision was included declaring Nepal a federal republic (<sup>3783</sup>, 246), still no agreement has been reached regarding either the extent of autonomy or even the basic map of the new state structure (<sup>3784</sup>, 1). This is because support for federalism amongst most parties seems to be "lukewarm" at best, with even the Maoists being divided on the issue (<sup>3785</sup>, 2), and because most of the party elite stemming from the CHHE fiercely resists the call for real ethnicity-based provincial autonomy (<sup>3786</sup>, 313).

The CHHE, which still made up the majority of party leaderships, was coded as being a senior partner and the Newari, also included in various prominent party posts, as being a junior partner throughout the period. The Madhesis are coded as powerless before 2009 and as a junior partner after their inclusion in important cabinet posts for the years 2009 and afterwards. All other groups are coded as powerless and have no regional autonomy.

The election of a new Constituent Assembly in November 2013 ended a period of more than a year without an elected assembly and a democratically accountable government. The Nepali Congress returned to power and formed a multiparty coalition under the leadership of Prime Minister Sushil Koirala. The CHHE maintained its dominant role with the Bahun and Chetri castes (and other Hill elites) continuing to dominate politics, the judiciary, the cultural system, the economy, and all other spheres of public life (<sup>3787</sup>, 5). The "senior partner" coding of the CHHE is thus extended. The Newars also continue to have influence in the central government, where they held significant positions such as the Deputy Prime Minister (2014-2015) or the Chief Justice of Nepal (2015-2016). The same can be said about the Madhesi, despite ongoing Madhesi protest against under-representation in the government. According to BTI (<sup>3788</sup>,

<sup>3772</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3773</sup> [Kantha, 2010]

<sup>3774</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3775</sup> [Kantha, 2010]

<sup>3776</sup> [Hangen, 2010]

<sup>3777</sup> [Lawoti, 2013]

<sup>3778</sup> [Lawoti & Pahari, 2010]

<sup>3779</sup> [Kantha, 2010]

<sup>3780</sup> [Hangen, 2007]

<sup>3781</sup> [Kantha, 2010]

<sup>3782</sup> [Lawoti, 2008]

<sup>3783</sup> [Lawoti, 2013]

<sup>3784</sup> [Lecours, 2013]

<sup>3785</sup> [Lecours, 2013]

<sup>3786</sup> [Lawoti & Pahari, 2010]

<sup>3787</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

<sup>3788</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

33), the Madhesi are “well-represented” in the new coalition government. Evidence of significant Madhesi representation in the central government is further provided by <sup>3789</sup>. Hence, both the Newars and the Madhesi are continued to be coded as “junior partner”.

After long political stalemate over the drafting of a new constitution, and spurred by the disastrous earthquake in April 2015, Nepal’s new constitution passed on 20 September 2015 with 507 out of 601 members of the Constituent Assembly voting in favor (<sup>3790</sup>, <sup>3791</sup>). Like the interim constitution of 2007, the 2015 constitution declares Nepal to be a “multicaste, multilingual, and multicultural country committed to eliminating discrimination” (<sup>3792</sup>). The 2015 constitution expanded the prohibition of caste-based discrimination as contained in the 2007 interim constitution. The new constitution stipulated legal protections for Dalits in education, health care, and housing and furthermore established the National Dalit Commission to improve protection of Dalits (<sup>3793</sup>). However, despite these constitutional protections and the 2012 Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability Act, the Dalits continue to face exploitation and social exclusion (<sup>3794</sup>). This became evident after the devastating earthquake in April 2015, when Dalits were often excluded from vital post-earthquake relief (<sup>3795</sup>, <sup>3796</sup>). Although the earthquake aggravated marginalization of the Dalits, they are continued to be coded “powerless”, due to the constitutionally enshrined prohibition of discrimination and the proportional representation voting system that should improve their numbers in the legislature (<sup>3797</sup>).

The prohibition of discrimination also applies to the Muslim minority, which were mentioned in the 2015 constitution for the first time. The constitution furthermore granted them the right to serve in state bodies through the introduction of job quota for Muslims (<sup>3798</sup>, <sup>3799</sup>). The same applies to the Adibasi Janajati, who are also added to the list of marginalized groups in the new constitution with the right to social justice and the “right to employment in state structures on the basis of the principle of inclusion” (Article 42). Furthermore, the constitution also established the Adibasi Janajati Commission and the Muslim Commission. These developments justify the “powerless” coding of both the Muslims and the Adibasi Janajati to be continued until 2017.

The interim constitution of 2007 promulgated that “provinces shall be autonomous and vested with full authority” (Article 138), but left the boundaries, number, names, and structures of these provinces to be determined by the Constituent Assembly. However, decision-making has remained “highly centralized” since and power has remained “concentrated in the party headquarters in the Kathmandu Valley” (<sup>3800</sup>, 14). This has not changed with the passing of the constitution of 2015, which made Nepal officially a federal country with seven provinces. Two years after the passing of the constitution, there is an ongoing controversy regarding the way in which revenue should be shared among the different levels of government. According to Payne and Basnyat (2017) (<sup>3801</sup>), the central govern-

<sup>3789</sup> [Gyawali, 2013]

<sup>3790</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2016]

<sup>3791</sup> [International Crisis Group, 2016]

<sup>3792</sup> [Freedom House 2016]

<sup>3793</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

<sup>3794</sup> [Freedom House 2016]

<sup>3795</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2016]

<sup>3796</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

<sup>3797</sup> [Freedom House 2016]

<sup>3798</sup> [Khalid, 2016]

<sup>3799</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

<sup>3800</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

<sup>3801</sup> [Payne and Basnyat, 2017]

ment retains all major revenue sources and the practice of decentralization is being stalled. Another major point of concern is whether the new states should be ethnically delineated. Minorities, particularly the Madhesi, feared that the new federal setup would weaken the political influence of minorities and lead to over-representation for the Hill elites (<sup>3802</sup>).

After Nepal's new constitution was adopted in September 2015, Nepal has successfully held the first local, as well as provincial and national legislative elections in 20 years in 2017. The elections were also the first since the adoption of the 2015 constitution, and successfully implemented the elections in the newly established federal provinces. The elections have largely been considered fair and free at all levels. The elections were overseen by an unusual Maoist-Congress governmental coalition that agreed to share the prime minister's position one after the other. Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal oversaw the first phase of the local elections. He then handed over power voluntarily in June 2017 to Sher Bhadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress, who oversaw the latter phases of the local elections as well as the provincial- and national-level elections later that year (<sup>3803</sup>; <sup>3804</sup>).

The first successful government transfer since the 2015 Constitution occurred in 2018. While Nepal's political system remains fractionalized, the consolidation of the Communist Party of Nepal- Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) into a left alliance under the Communist Party of Nepal shows how consensus is increasing. The legislative elections of 2017 saw the success of this left alliance, with Khadga Prasad Oli becoming prime minister for a second time (<sup>3805</sup>; <sup>3806</sup>).

The newly elected government is far more diverse than any other in Nepal's past, with people from diverse backgrounds being represented. However, various minorities, in particular people belonging to the Madhesi, Adivasi Janajati, Dalits and Muslim communities, remain vulnerable to exclusion and discrimination (<sup>3807</sup>; <sup>3808</sup>). The Caste Hill Hindu Elite continues to dominate the political sphere, and is still coded as senior partner. An alliance of several smaller Madhesi parties were threatening to boycott the 2017 local elections, but in the end won several seats during the elections (<sup>3809</sup>). Some of the Cabinet Ministers also belong to the Madhesi ethnic group (<sup>3810</sup>). Thus, they are continuing to be coded junior partner. Also the Newars are still coded as junior partner, as few Cabinet Ministers belong to this ethnic group (<sup>3811</sup>).

While people from the Dalits, Adivasi Janajati, and Muslim communities still suffer from regular discrimination, they are officially recognized and protected by the constitution (<sup>3812</sup>; <sup>3813</sup>), and thus continue to be coded as powerless.

Since the passing of the 2015 Constitution, Nepal is officially a federal democracy. The local and provincial elections held in 2017 consolidated the federal system of Nepal. However, the federal structure has not yet been properly implemented and the basis for ad-

<sup>3802</sup> [International Crisis Group, 2016]

<sup>3803</sup> [BTI, 2020]

<sup>3804</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2020]

<sup>3805</sup> [BTI, 2020]

<sup>3806</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2020]

<sup>3807</sup> [BTI, 2020]

<sup>3808</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2020]

<sup>3809</sup> [BTI, 2020]

<sup>3810</sup> [Nepal Research, 2020]

<sup>3811</sup> [Nepal Research, 2020]

<sup>3812</sup> [BTI, 2020]

<sup>3813</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2020]

ministrative restructuring is still being drafted, including devolving power over justice and policing (<sup>3814</sup>; <sup>3815</sup>; <sup>3816</sup>).

<sup>3814</sup> [BTI, 2020]

<sup>3815</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2020]

<sup>3816</sup> [Human Rights Watch, 2020]

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## Political status of ethnic groups in Nepal

*From 1946 until 1951*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Caste Hill Hindu Elite	0.31	MONOPOLY
Adibasi Janajati	0.31	POWERLESS
Dalits	0.15	DISCRIMINATED
Madhesi	0.12	POWERLESS
Newars	0.06	POWERLESS

*From 1952 until 1960*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Caste Hill Hindu Elite	0.31	SENIOR PARTNER
Adibasi Janajati	0.31	JUNIOR PARTNER
Dalits	0.15	DISCRIMINATED
Madhesi	0.12	JUNIOR PARTNER
Newars	0.06	JUNIOR PARTNER

*From 1961 until 1963*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Caste Hill Hindu Elite	0.31	MONOPOLY
Adibasi Janajati	0.31	POWERLESS
Dalits	0.15	DISCRIMINATED
Madhesi	0.12	POWERLESS
Newars	0.06	POWERLESS

*From 1964 until 1990*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Caste Hill Hindu Elite	0.31	MONOPOLY
Adibasi Janajati	0.31	POWERLESS
Dalits	0.15	POWERLESS
Madhesi	0.12	POWERLESS
Newars	0.06	POWERLESS



Figure 733: Political status of ethnic groups in Nepal during 1946-1951.



Figure 734: Political status of ethnic groups in Nepal during 1952-1960.



Figure 735: Political status of ethnic groups in Nepal during 1961-1963.



Figure 736: Political status of ethnic groups in Nepal during 1964-1990.

*From 1991 until 2002*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Caste Hill Hindu Elite	0.31	SENIOR PARTNER
Adibasi Janajati	0.31	POWERLESS
Dalits	0.15	POWERLESS
Madhesi	0.12	POWERLESS
Newars	0.06	JUNIOR PARTNER
Muslims	0.04	POWERLESS

*From 2003 until 2006*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Caste Hill Hindu Elite	0.31	SENIOR PARTNER
Adibasi Janajati	0.31	JUNIOR PARTNER
Dalits	0.15	JUNIOR PARTNER
Madhesi	0.12	JUNIOR PARTNER
Newars	0.06	JUNIOR PARTNER
Muslims	0.04	POWERLESS

*From 2007 until 2008*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Caste Hill Hindu Elite	0.31	SENIOR PARTNER
Adibasi Janajati	0.31	POWERLESS
Dalits	0.15	POWERLESS
Madhesi	0.12	POWERLESS
Newars	0.06	JUNIOR PARTNER
Muslims	0.04	POWERLESS

*From 2009 until 2021*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Caste Hill Hindu Elite	0.31	SENIOR PARTNER
Adibasi Janajati	0.31	POWERLESS
Dalits	0.15	POWERLESS
Madhesi	0.12	JUNIOR PARTNER
Newars	0.06	JUNIOR PARTNER
Muslims	0.04	POWERLESS



Figure 737: Political status of ethnic groups in Nepal during 1991-2002.



Figure 738: Political status of ethnic groups in Nepal during 2003-2006.



Figure 739: Political status of ethnic groups in Nepal during 2007-2008.

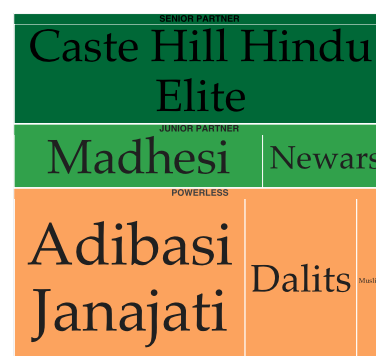


Figure 740: Political status of ethnic groups in Nepal during 2009-2021.

# Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Nepal

From 1946 until 1990

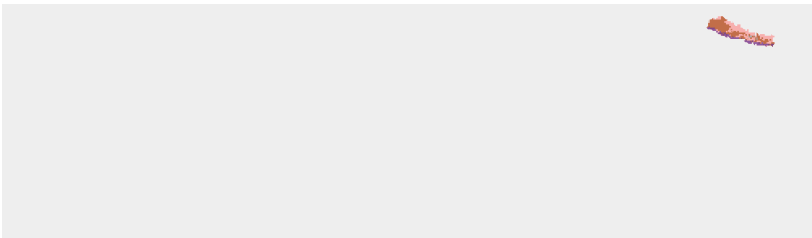


Figure 741: Map of ethnic groups in Nepal during 1946-1990.

Group name		Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
<span style="color: #f08080;">■</span>	Adibasi Janajati	147 158	Statewide
<span style="color: #800000;">■</span>	Caste Hill Hindu Elite	74 959	Regionally based
<span style="color: #800080;">■</span>	Madhesi	22 779	Regionally based
<span style="color: #add8e6;">■</span>	Newars	879	Regional & urban
<span style="color: #add8e6;">■</span>	Dalits	0	Dispersed

Table 279: List of ethnic groups in Nepal during 1946-1990.

From 1991 until 2021

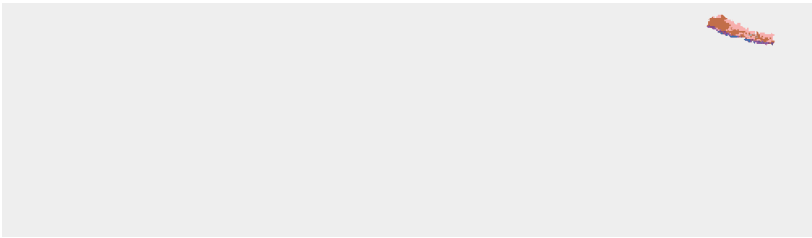


Figure 742: Map of ethnic groups in Nepal during 1991-2021.







	Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
	Adibasi Janajati	147 158	Statewide
	Caste Hill Hindu Elite	74 959	Regionally based
	Madhesi	22 779	Regionally based
	Muslims	4129	Regionally based
	Newars	879	Regional & urban
	Dalits	0	Dispersed

Table 280: List of ethnic groups in Nepal during 1991-2021.

Conflicts in Nepal

Starting on 1960-02-28

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Nepal	NC		1960-02-28			
Government of Nepal	CPN-M	Newars	1996-02-24	No	Yes, from EGIP	Split
Government of Nepal	CPN-M	Adibasi Janajati	1996-02-24	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Nepal	CPN-M	Caste Hill Hindu Elite	1996-02-24	Explicit	Yes	Yes