

## **Bhutan**

### **Rice**

Bhutan became independent from India in 1971. Geddes does not code a regime type for Bhutan. However, it seems fair to say that after independence Bhutan became a hereditary monarchy under the Wangchuk Dynasty (founded by Ugyen Wangchuk in 1907) (Morby 2002). Its first ruler as an independent state was Ugyen Wangchuk's grandson, Jigme Dorji. This is not a SOLS change, as the first leader after independence is not considered a SOLS change. Jigme Dorji died suddenly on 21 July 1972, and was succeeded to the throne by his son, Jigme Singye. This is not a SOLS change. During Jigme Singye's reign, Bhutan slowly began to modernize and end its isolation from the rest of the world by joining the United Nations.

In 1998, Jigme Singye's work to democratize Bhutan led to the creation of a Council of Ministers and the National Assembly, of which the latter was granted the authority to remove the monarch with a two-thirds vote (Mathou 1999). Though this technically is not the beginning of the constitutional monarchy (the Constitution went into effect in 2007), it did lead to the selection of a Prime Minister (Chief of the Council of Ministers), though all of the Prime Ministers were nonpartisan. In addition, all of the men who served as prime ministers until 2008 stayed in the cabinet at different posts (Archigos, 2009: 642). Though Archigos indicates that these Prime Ministers were the heads of government from 1998-2008 (when the first elections were held), the government did not officially become a constitutional monarchy until the passage of the Constitution in 2007 and the election in 2008. Therefore (and because all of the men who served as Prime Minister until 2008 were members of the same ruling Cabinet), we do not code SOLS changes for this period, and continue to classify Bhutan as a monarchy.

In 2006, Jigme Singye, satisfied with the progress of the democratization process, abdicated the throne, which was taken over by his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyal on December 14, 2006. Over the course of the next two years, preparations were made to hold Bhutan's first national elections, which took place in March, 2008. On 9 April 2008, Jigme Yoser Thinley, now a member of the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party, DPT) was elected Prime Minister. He remains in office in the present day. This last leader transition raises the question of whether this is a SOLS change or not. On the one hand, Jigme Yoser Thinley was formally affiliated with a party, not the monarchy, and won what were widely considered to be free and fair elections (Piano 2009). In the elections, the Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party (DPT) of Jigme Y. Thinley received 45 out of 47 available seats, and therefore provided the prime minister, and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) received the remaining seats (Piano 2009, Kaul 2008). On the other hand, based on our coding rules, the country is not considered democratic in 2008 and so we need to apply the pre-designated successor rule. In this context, it is important to note that despite these free and fair elections, the DPT and PDP did not differ in policy platform and were the only two parties that ran in the 2008 parliamentary elections (Piano 2009, Kaul 2008). Moreover, Piano (2009; 92) states that both parties have ties to the monarchy, but does not elaborate on these ties. In a footnote Hangen (2011; 130) notes that despite the fact that these two parties have a similar platform, the DPT is regarded to be more pro-monarchy by some observers. This information, in combination with the fact the Prime Minister Jigme Thinley served under the King,

both as minister and prime minister before, seems to indicate that the elections did not result in a SOLS change. Furthermore, the King still holds substantial power as the head of state (Whelpton 2009). For example the King has the power to reject decisions of parliament (Lawoti 2010); may appoint and dismiss the judiciary; and critique of the King is a punishable offence (Piano 2009). Also the King has the power to propose cabinet minister to the parliament for approval. On the other hand, the parliament officially has the power to dismiss the King with a two-thirds majority (Whelpton 2009). It is unclear to whether that power would hold in practice as there has yet to be a conflict between the King and parliament.

## References

- Central Intelligence Agency. "The World Factbook: Bhutan". Last edited 27 May 2010.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bt.html>
- Goemans, Henk E., Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Giacomo Chiozza. 2009. Archigos: A Data Set on Leaders 1875–2004 Version 2.9 Codebook.
- Hangen, Susan. 2011. 'Nepal and Bhutan in 2010: At an Impasse'. *Asian Survey* 51(1):
- Kaul, Nitasha. 2008. 'Power to the People', *The CSD bulletin*. 15(2): 1-2, 20.
- Lawoti, Mahendra. 2010. 'Nepal and Bhutan in 2009: Transition Travails?'. *Asian Survey* 50(1): 164-72.
- Mathou, Thierry. 1999. "Political Reform in Bhutan: Change in a Buddhist Monarchy." *Asian Survey* 39(4): 613-632.
- Morby, John E. 2002. "Bhutan, Kingdom of" in *Dynasties of the World*. Oxford University Press, Oxford Reference Online.
- Piano, Aili . 2009. *Freedom in the World 2009: The Annual Survey of Political Rights & Civil Liberties*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- The United States Department of State. "Country Background Note: Bhutan. Last edited 2 February 2010. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35839.htm>>, Accessed Dec, 17, 2011
- Whelpton, John. 2009. 'Nepal and Bhutan in 2008: A New Beginning?'. *Asian Survey* 49(1): 53-58.
- Coded by Meera Krishnan 6/5/2010  
Revised by Michaela Mattes 01/14/2012  
Revised by Michaela Mattes 01/24/2012  
Revised by Bryan Rooney 10/17/2012  
Edited by Andrew Wood (Rice) on 5/22/14