

Bhutan

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Bhutan is coded as an authoritarian regime from independence in 1971 until 2008. Geddes has not provided regime type coding for the country, but according to the U.S. Department of State, Bhutan was an absolute monarchy until 2008 when it completed its transformation into a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. The first elections were held in 2007 and 2008. However, according to our coding rules, Bhutan remains non-democratic even in 2008 and thereafter.

Archigos codes the King as leader until 1998. Jigme Dorji Wangchuk of the Wangchuk Dynasty ruled as king at independence. In 1972 Jigme Singye Wangchuk, his son and thus also Wangchuk Dynasty, became king. This is not a SOLS change. In 1998 Wangchuk devolved executive powers to an elected cabinet and introduced a vote of confidence for the king (Mathou 1999). Starting in 1998, Archigos considers the prime minister, not the king, as the leader of the country, so we code accordingly. ((Archigos lists all the prime ministers with the designation “Lyonpo.” According to Worldstatesmen.org and the US Library of Congress the designation is “Lonchen.”)) We code no SOLS changes from 1998 until 2007. The king nominated six ministers—Jigme Yoser Thinley, Sangay Ngedup, Yeshey Zimba, Khandu Wangchuk, Kinzang Dorji, and Jigme Yoser Thinley¹—who rotated the premiership every year (Mathou 1999, 619). There does not seem to be any opposition or change in winning coalition for this period. The monarchy (Wangchuk Dynasty) remains the source of leader support until elections are held in 2007. Starting in 2007, Cheibub et al. also consider the country a parliamentary democracy, but as noted before, based on our Polity coding we consider is non-democratic still.

In 2008 Jigme Thinley, now of the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa/Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party (DPT), once again became PM. 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 DTP 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 Thinle 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

¹ According to Cahoon (2010), political parties were banned until 2007.

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.

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