



Nepal — Va-PoReg Country Report

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09/25/1768 Start Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]: Nepal first reached its sovereignty on 09/25/1768. The Kingdom of Nepal has been ruled by the Shah dynasty since it was founded in 1768.¹ The circumstances altered significantly when Nepal succumbed to British control and was compelled to sign the Sugauli Treaty in 1816, effectively placing Nepal under British protection and reducing its territorial extent. Similarly, the Betrawati Treaty signed with Tibet resulted in a reduction of Nepal's northern borders. Nonetheless, Great Britain officially acknowledged Nepal as an independent and sovereign state through the 1923 treaty (Bhatta 2022). On 09/15/1846 Jung Bahadur (later Rana) and his brothers killed about 40 members of the palace court including the prime minister Fathe Jung Shah and rendered King Rajendra Bikram Shah powerless.² Bahadur became prime minister, exiled the king, and began the concentration of power in his own hands that resulted in the marginalization of the royal family and the establishment of Jung Bahadur's family as hereditary prime ministers and de facto rulers of Nepal. They controlled all executive, legislative, and judicial power. According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. In this timeframe, V-Dem's JCE is classified as absent, indicating no judicial oversight of the executive. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

12/21/1923 Continuation Autocratic Monarchy [as independent country]: On this date, the Nepal-Britain treaty was signed with immediate effect, changing Nepal's status from a British protectorate to a sovereign state with the authority to conduct its foreign policy. The treaty was officially recorded in the League of Nations in 1925.³ The departure of the British from India in 1947 left the Ranas without a crucial external source of support and subjected the regime to fresh risks.⁴ Nonetheless, by 1950 the Rana family owned three fourths of the arable land in the country and consumed about half of the state's income (Levi 1952: 185-88, Hayes 1975: 620, Heitzman 1993, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 81). For that period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1923 to 1949, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1950, V-Dem's JCE is classified as limited, indicating weak judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

02/18/1951 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Autocratic Monarchy: On this date another revolt by the Nepali Congress forced the Rana family into political exile. The popular king Tribhuvan returned to the throne with promises of creating a democracy. After the triumph of the Indian Independence Movement, in which Nepalese activists participated with India's backing and the cooperation of King Tribhuvan, the Nepali Congress succeeded in overthrowing the Rana regime and establishing a parliamentary democracy.⁵ The Rana family, which had assumed decision-making authority as hereditary prime ministers since the nineteenth

century, was compelled to restore the hereditary monarch due to an insurgency, protests, and pressure from India (Levi 1952: 185-91, Heitzman 1993). King Tribhuvan arrived back in Kathmandu on 02/15 and announced a modification in the governing regulations of the country on 02/18 (Levi 1952: 191, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 81). This revolution resulted in the establishment of a new dynasty; however, it marked not at all the formation of the first democratic government in Nepal.⁶ In 1951 universal suffrage was introduced.⁷ Following the downfall of the Rana government, the Nepali Congress assumed leadership in three out of the five administrations established before the elections. Matrika Prasad Koirala, the first commoner to hold the position of Prime Minister, governed from 1951 to 1952 and from 1953 to 1955, while Subarna Shamsher Rana led the government from 1958 to 1959. The long-delayed elections took place in February 1959, resulting in Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala becoming Nepal's first democratically elected Prime Minister after the Nepali Congress secured 74 out of 109 parliamentary seats.⁸ According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period, with the exception of the year 1959, in which only multiparty legislative elections were held. For the period under consideration, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous regarding the status of political liberties. From 1951 to 1956, based on Polity5's evaluation, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. From 1951 to 1958, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. In 1959, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. For the same year, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. In 1960, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. Regarding our criteria the regime does not fulfill the criteria of a constitutional monarchy. For 1960, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. A parliament existed only on a brief period 1959 to 1960. However, Nepal's monarchy held supreme authority during this period, exemplified by King Mahendra's dissolution of parliament in December 1960. There was in this brief period no separation of powers: the elected parliament lacked institutional safeguards to counterbalance royal authority, enabling unchecked executive dominance. On 12/15/1960, King Mahendra, seeking to restore order in the political system and declaring that democracy had failed, suspended the constitution, dissolved the legislature and assumed again direct executive rule in an auto-coup. Nepal was further governed by a Panchayat system that heavily restrained political parties. The Panchayat System centralized power under King Mahendra's rule. It consisted of four levels of governance, from village, town, district to national level.⁹ During the Panchayat regime of Nepal, the Panchayat served as the official legislative body, operating effectively from 1961 to 1990.¹⁰ Each village panchayat nominated a representative to serve on one of the 75 district panchayats, representing between 40 to 70 villages; the urban panchayat selected one-third of the members for these assemblies. Members of the district panchayats then elected delegates to fourteen zone assemblies, which acted as electoral bodies for the National Panchayat. Furthermore, there were various class organizations at the village, district, and zonal levels representing peasants, youth, women, elders, laborers, and ex-soldiers, with their representatives elected to the respective assemblies.¹¹ The system was heavily criticized by members of the opposition because of its lack of democratic representation. The National Panchayat, consisting of approximately 90 members, was prohibited from scrutinizing the royal government, deliberating on the tenets of party-less democracy, proposing budgetary bills without royal consent, or passing bills without the king's endorsement.¹² Inspired by the international support and the democratic movements occurring throughout the world after the disintegration of the USSR in 1989, the Nepali Congress and the United Left Front launched a mass movement on 02/18/1990 to end the Panchayat regime and the installation of a democratic interim government represented by various parties and people.¹³ For 1961, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. For 1962, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints

on the executive were moderate. For 1963-1970 and 1972-1979, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. In 1971, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. According to LIED, legislative and executive multiparty elections were present since 1963. In this period LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent since 1962. In 1961, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. From 1962 to 1980, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. Since 1981, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. Per FH, from 1972 to 1978, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. In 1979 the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. In 1980 the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. FH doesn't provide information for 1981. From 1982 to 1988 the country scores again between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. In 1989 the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. In 1990 the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. For the span of 1980-1989, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1990 and 1991, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. Again, V-Dem's JCE and LCE seem not be very reliable indicators, while Polity5 is in line with our interpretation of the research literature on Nepal.

05/12/1991 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Constitutional Monarchy: On this date, general elections took place. King Birendra had lifted the ban on political parties in 1990 and allowed for an interim government headed by a coalition of opposition leaders. A Constitution Recommendation Commission (CRC) drafted a new basic law, setting the stage for parliamentary elections in May 1991 (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 45). The transition to a constitutional monarchy was signaled by multiparty elections, which were won by a pro-democracy party (Rahim 1993). In 1990, the king consented to constitutional amendments that introduced multi-partyism and imposed constraints on the monarchy. However, given that the king appointed the interim government and had the potential to backtrack on the agreements, we refrain from categorizing the regime as concluded until the first election ushered in parliamentary governance (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 81). The general elections in May 1991 resulted in a narrow majority for the Nepali Congress (110 of 205 seats) and a strong opposition of the Communist Party of Nepal (69 seats). The 'Pancha Partys' associated with the old system won four out of 205 seats. The outcomes were seen as a robust approval of the political changes in 1990, leading to G.P. Koirala being nominated by the NC and appointed by the king to lead the newly elected government.¹⁴ On 02/13/1996 a civil war broke out between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and the Kingdom of Nepal when members of the Communist Party tried to replace the royal parliamentary system with a people's republic.¹⁵ On 06/01/2001, Birendra's potential successor Dipendra killed King Birendra and his entire family.¹⁶ Dipendra was crowned while in a coma, through his self-inflicted wounds, but died shortly after.¹⁷ The new king, Birendra's brother Gyanendra, took an active role in defending the monarchy.¹⁸ Throughout the conflict, the government maintained control over the main cities and towns, while the Maoists dominated the rural areas.¹⁹ According to LIED, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are present until 2000 and are somewhat present afterwards. Different from LIED we code executive elections as absent, since we argue that the king was the center of executive power, and he was not elected. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. From 1992 to 1999, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. For the year 2000, V-Dem's JCE is

interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 2001, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. As per FH's classification in 1991 and 1992, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. From 1993 onward a score of 6 to 7 for the assessed regime period designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free.

10/04/2002 End Constitutional Monarchy/Start Autocratic Monarchy: King Gyanendra dismissed the prime minister and imposed his direct rule on the nation after Bahdur refused to call elections: King Gyanendra removed the Prime Minister from office, assumed executive authority, and canceled the scheduled parliamentary elections, thereby bringing an end to the preceding era of constitutional monarchy (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 81).²⁰ On 02/01/2005 King Gyanendra dissolved the government again and ruled directly for several years in order to try to end ongoing political instability and an insurgency with Maoists. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. According to FH, in 2002, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. In 2003 and 2004 the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. In 2005 the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. For the relevant period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are somewhat present. For the years 2002-2006, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive.

04/24/2006 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Constitutional Monarchy: Extensive protests compelled the king to restore the previously elected parliament on 04/24. Subsequently, in June 2006, Parliament significantly curtailed the king's authority, effectively restoring the country to a constitutional monarchy (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 81).²¹ According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. As per Polity5's categorization, the executive's authority was significantly constrained, nearing parity with other branches, placing it in the third intermediate category.

11/21/2006 End Constitutional Monarchy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: The comprehensive peace accord was signed, urging the king to give up all his political rights, also his property was nationalized under public trust.²² The assembly elections, initially planned for June 2007, faced multiple postponements, particularly after the Maoists withdrew from the government, insisting on the immediate abolition of the monarchy. It wasn't until December 2007 that an agreement was reached to abolish the monarchy, with elections scheduled for April 2008.²³ According to LIED, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are present. As per Polity5's categorization, the executive's authority was significantly constrained, nearing parity with other branches, placing it in the third intermediate category. For 2007, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free.

04/10/2008 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, parliamentary elections took place.²⁴ On 05/28/2008, more than two centuries of royal rule came to an end as the new assembly voted to declare Nepal a democratic republic.²⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since the transition towards an electoral regime the elections are classified as competitive, following LIED. Political demonstrations occasionally continue to be tainted by acts of violence, while corruption persists as a pervasive issue across politics, government, and the judicial system. According to FH until 2013 the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. In addition to that LIED considers that political liberties were absent for this period, whereas V-Dem's PCLI scores full political liberties since 2008. In our view V-Dem's PCLI seems unreliable in this case. For the years 2008, 2011, 2012 V-Dem's JCE and

LCE are interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

11/19/2013 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Electoral Democracy: The election on this date marked a decisive turning point in the country's post-conflict democratic trajectory after years of institutional paralysis and political deadlock following the failure of the first Constituent Assembly (2008–2012). Although the electoral and institutional environment prior to 2013 was characterized by volatility, weak constraints on the executive, and unclear electoral integrity, the 2013 election re-established a functioning legislature and initiated a renewed process of democratic consolidation. International observers assessed the election as broadly competitive and peaceful, despite some localized incidents. The resumption of multiparty parliamentary activity and the subsequent formation of a government based on the electoral outcome represented a restoration of meaningful electoral and legislative processes. The data corroborate this interpretation. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI point to a gradual improvement beginning in 2014, following the 2013 vote. Legislative and judicial constraints on the executive, while uneven, began to consolidate around this period. FH raised the political rights rating from a score of 8 in 2013 to 7 in 2014, suggesting a shift toward greater political openness and competitiveness. While the constitutional framework remained in flux until 2015, the November 2013 election re-established electoral legitimacy and enabled the institutional processes necessary for the eventual promulgation of the constitution. Challenges in Nepal include gender-based violence, underage marriage, and bonded labor. Transitional justice bodies have encountered difficulties in fulfilling their mandates.²⁶ In addition, V-Dem's CEI indicates an ambiguous state regarding the cleanliness of elections from 2009 to 2011 and for the following two years no cleanliness. Since 2014 the country gained back a somewhat electoral cleanliness. Furthermore, V-Dem's EF&FI indicates ambiguous overall election conditions until 2012, while the following four years underlined free and fair election conditions. Since 2017 the quality of elections according to V-Dem's EF&FI can be interpreted as somewhat free and fair. As per Polity5's categorization, the executive's authority was significantly constrained, nearing parity with other branches, placing it in the third intermediate category. General elections took place on 11/20/2022 to elect the 275 members of the House of Representatives. Following failed power-sharing negotiations among the Democratic Left Alliance on 12/25/2022, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, chairman of the CPN (Maoist Centre), assumed the role of prime minister. His eight-member cabinet comprised MPs from his party, CPN (UML), Rastriya Swatantra Party, and Janamat Party, with support from RPP, JSP, NUP, and three independents.²⁷ For the years 2008, 2011, 2012 and 2015-2018, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. For 2009-2010, 2013-2014 and 2019-2022, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. For 2023, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. The freedom of Nepalese citizens to exercise their political rights is sometimes restricted by intermittent instances of political violence, along with crackdowns on political demonstrations by security forces. There have also been reports of vote buying in recent elections.²⁸

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Baral 1994, Krämer 2001, Elklit 1994, Savada 1993)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_heads_of_state_of_Nepal

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jung_Bahadur_Rana

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal%E2%80%93Britain_Treaty_of_1923

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal/History>

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepali_Congress

- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepali_Congress
- ⁹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayat_\(Nepal\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayat_(Nepal))
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rastriya_Panchayat
- ¹¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayat_\(Nepal\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayat_(Nepal))
- ¹² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayat_\(Nepal\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayat_(Nepal))
- ¹³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayat_\(Nepal\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayat_(Nepal))
- ¹⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal/Constitutional-monarchy>
- ¹⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal>
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese_Civil_War
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese_Civil_War
- ¹⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal/Fall-of-the-monarchy>
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese_Civil_War
- ²⁰ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5283.html>
- ²¹ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5283.html>; <http://tinyurl.com/3jo7mu4>
- ²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comprehensive_Peace_Accord
- ²³ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal/Fall-of-the-monarchy>
- ²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Nepalese_Constituent_Assembly_election
- ²⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal/Fall-of-the-monarchy>
- ²⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nepal>
- ²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Nepalese_general_election
- ²⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nepal/freedom-world/2022>

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