

Sikkim — Va-PoReg Country Report

Kailitz, Steffen, et al., 2026: Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg). Country Report Sikkim, Dresden: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JYEL7U>

01/01/1642 Start Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]: The Bhutia people started migrating to the region from Tibet in the 14th century. In 1642, when the kingdom of Sikkim was founded, the inaugural chogyal (a combined temporal and spiritual king), Phuntsog Namgyal, hailed from the Bhutia community. The Namgyal dynasty governed Sikkim until 1975.¹ Sikkim came under British protection through the Treaty of Tumlong in 1861.² Beside „British Sikkim,“ a residual entity known as „Independent Sikkim“ persisted, centered around the capital, Gangtok, governing approximately 2,500 square miles of territory. The former Chogyal was compelled to relinquish the throne in favor of his son, Sidkeong Namgyal, in 1863.³ LIED does not provide data for Sikkim.

12/05/1950 Continuation Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under India, Electoral Democracy]: The Indo-Sikkimese Treaty of 1950⁴ transformed Sikkim into an Indian protectorate, where India took on the responsibilities for the external relations, defense, and strategic communications of Sikkim. The treaty also stipulated enhanced public involvement in governance, leading to five general elections conducted on the basis of adult suffrage between 1952 and 1974.⁵ There is very few information on the political norms and procedures in this regime period. Neither LIED, Polity5 nor V-Dem provide data for Sikkim. From what we know, distrust along ethnic lines was a defining feature of society and discrimination against the ethnic majority of the Nepalese persisted in the political system. A „parity-rule“ prescribed a parity of seats on the council between two ethnic groups, although the Nepalese compromised 75 percent of the population and the Bhutia-Lepcha only 25 percent (Sinha 1975, Thapa 2002).

04/14/1975 End Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under India, Electoral Democracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of India, Electoral Democracy]: In 1975, discrimination against Nepali Hindus in Sikkim led to resentment against the Chogyal, prompting the Indian Army’s intervention in Gangtok. The army eliminated palace guards and surrounded the palace in April 1975. After disarming the palace, a referendum was held, with the majority favoring the abolition of the monarchy. Considering that the abolition of the monarchy was enabled by the Indian intervention, and assuming that the referendum reflected the will of the population (a claim contested by the Chogyal himself), we code this regime change event as a foreign-imposed regime change. From this point on the Chogyal is no longer part of the Sikkimese elite. Sikkim’s new parliament, led by Kazi Lhendup Dorjee, swiftly proposed a bill for Sikkim to become an Indian state, a move promptly accepted by the Indian government.⁶

05/16/1975 End Sikkim [Autocratic Monarchy]: after that day Sikkim became a federal state of India and ceased to exist as a distinct political entity. FH, LIED and V-Dem do not treat Sikkim in their datasets.

For the time after 05/16/1975, see India.

Notes

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sikkim#ref46212>

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

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Sikkim#:~:text=The%20history%20of%20Sikkim%20begins,as%20a%20state%20of%20India.

⁴ [https://ir.nbu.ac.in/server/api/core/bitstreams/5a2b34c9-9a87-420f-a8a7-de3ac3c9d768/content#:~:text=APPENDIX%20%2D%20I,-In%20do%20Sikkim%20Treaty&text=\(1\)%20The%20Government%20of%20India,whether%20within%20or%20outside%20Sikkim.](https://ir.nbu.ac.in/server/api/core/bitstreams/5a2b34c9-9a87-420f-a8a7-de3ac3c9d768/content#:~:text=APPENDIX%20%2D%20I,-In%20do%20Sikkim%20Treaty&text=(1)%20The%20Government%20of%20India,whether%20within%20or%20outside%20Sikkim.)

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sikkim#ref46212>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Sikkim#Accession_to_India

References

Sinha, Awadhesh Coomar (1975): Politics of Sikkim: A Sociological Study. New Delhi: Thomson Press (India), Publication Division.

Thapa, Sandhya (2002) Ethnicity, Class and Politics in Sikkim. Siliguri, University of North Bengal.