

## Bhutan

Bhutan, officially the Kingdom of Bhutan, is a landlocked country in South Asia bordered by China to the north and India to the south, east, and west. Bhutan covers an area of 38,394 square kilometers and has a population of 735,553 (2017 Bhutan National Statistics Bureau).

Bhutan is currently divided into 20 *dzongkhag* (districts), including the capitol Thimphu, 4 Class A *thromde* (self-governing municipalities), 34 Class B and *yenlag thromde* (municipalities), 15 *dungkhag* (sub-districts), 205 *gewog* (village blocks), and an unknown number of villages.

Bhutan has remained independent since its formation as a state in 1616. However, Bhutan has had close ties with India and Britain, through colonial India, since the late 1800s. Through two agreements, the Treaty of Punakha and the Treaty of Peace, India agreed to recognize Bhutan's independence and remain uninvolved in its domestic affairs in return for greater involvement in Bhutan's foreign policy. In addition to hereditary king, Bhutan had a hereditary Prime Minister until 1998, and has a National Assembly. A formal constitution was introduced in 2008. This constitution created a National Council to act as an upper chamber, while the already existing National Assembly became the lower house. The National Council consists of 25 members, one for each district and five appointed by the King (C2008, Art. 11). The National Assembly consists of 55 members selected based on population (C2008, Art. 12).

In 1972 Jigme Singye Wangchuck became King of Bhutan and enacted policies to modernize Bhutan and increase the decentralization of the government (Hofmann 2006). Included in the King's policies is the Gross National Happiness survey, in which the government of Bhutan surveys the happiness of the citizens. This is the only known government conducted

survey of its type (ibid). During this time the King decentralized authority to the *dzongkhag* level with each *dzongkhag* headed by a *Dzongdags* (governor), who is appointed by the center (Ura 2004). This decentralized authority included district level budgets and implementation of central directives. The Local Government Act of 2009 established *Dzongkhag* Councils, which are directly elected. *Dzongdags* are now solely tasked with implementing Council rulings (Local Government Act 2009).

The 2009 Act also instituted specialized municipal self-governance of the four largest and most developed *thromde*. These Class A *thromde* are governed by 7-10 member councils called the *Thromde Tshogde*, with a council head called the *Thrompon*. The *Thromde Tshogde* are designated with a range of development, health and safety, and urban regulatory tasks (Local Government Act 2009, Sect. 61-62). They are also endowed with the power to borrow in accord with national law (Sect. 63) and to set rates of property and land taxes (Sect. 64).

Despite advances in *dzongkhag* and Class A *thromde* authority in recent years, their populations fall well below our 150,000 person threshold. Therefore, we code Bhutan 0 on each of the dimensions of the RAI for 1950 through 2018.

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## References

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