

# Racial Ideology and Implementation of the Khmer Rouge Genocide



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## Abstract

In the 1970s Pol Pot devised a ruthless Cambodian regime known as the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge adopted a strong sense of nationalism and discriminated against the Vietnamese and other racial minorities in Cambodia. This form of radical communism led to the Cambodian genocide because the Khmer Rouge cleansed the minorities of their culture and committed mass murder amongst their people in order to establish power. Pol Pot established the Democratic Kampuchea which forced what he called the “New People” to work on the farms and in the factories. The Khmer Rouge went as far as to convert the schools into prisons and destroyed all traces of books and equipment to rid Cambodia of their education system. This project will analyze how Pol Pot’s regime created systematic racism amongst the Cambodian minorities and developed a social hierarchy.

## Racial Ideology

Under Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge imposed a forced cleansing of Cambodia, both in culture and race. The Cambodian government persecuted and committed mass genocide against multiple cultural populations. Cutting deep into the culture, the regime banned all religions, barred all languages aside from Khmer, and discriminated against cultural and racial minorities. One of the ethnic minorities that suffered horribly during the Khmer Rouge were the Cham. According to author Ben Kiernan in *Pol Pot: Race, Power, and Genocide*, citing survivors of this genocide, “Some Muslims were forced to eat pork, on pain of death” (Kiernan, 2).

It was not only ethnic minorities that suffered under Pol Pot’s regime; the majority Khmer population was also unsafe from oppression. Cambodian soldiers, who had aided the southern side of Vietnam and the US, upon returning to Cambodia, were persecuted. Propaganda from the Pot administration stated that they had “Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds.” (Kiernan, 3). This was likely due to their association with the “imperialist” United States and “ethnically inferior” Vietnamese.

## Reasons for Racial Discrimination

- “Prerevolutionary Cambodia was 80 percent peasant, 80 percent Khmer, and 80 percent Buddhist” - described as “ethnically homogenous (Kiernan, 4-5).” This cleansing was part of a wider effort to “Khmerize” the population and make it ethnically and culturally homogenous (Form, 892).
- The collapse of the French “superspace” established in Indochina may have aggravated racial tensions and encouraged a competition between races to fill the power vacuum; this may have been further pressed when the French ceded Cochinchina to Vietnam rather than Cambodia in 1954 (McHale, 368).
- “The Cambodian genocide was also ideological; the Khmer Rouge wanted to return the country to a mythic past by eliminating all foreign and, in their view, corrupting influences and return the nation to a pure and agrarian society (Alvarez, 50).”

## Indochina



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a4/French\\_Indochina\\_subdivisions.svg/2000px-French\\_Indochina\\_subdivisions.svg.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a4/French_Indochina_subdivisions.svg/2000px-French_Indochina_subdivisions.svg.png)

## Implementation

Communism in Cambodia began as early as the 1940s during the time of Joseph Stalin. Its presence was elevated when Pol Pot became the prime minister and leader of the Khmer Rouge. In 1975, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge implemented their new government the Democratic Kampuchea. This government was meant to replace the existing one in every way possible by any means necessary. The Khmer Rouge imposed a forced cleansing of Cambodia, both in culture and race. This meant that the Cambodian minorities were to be weeded out, tortured, and murdered. This was called the Four Year Plan.

The Khmer Rouge started by separating the minority groups within the country. The Khmer Rouge wedged a division between the urban and rural populations, categorizing between the “New People” (Urban, educated people), and the “Old People” (rural farmers and industrial workers). They then launched an exodus from urban areas, forcing the “New People” to work in the farms and factories. The “New People” who were forced by the DK to work on farms were worked literally to their deaths. Entire families on these farms were executed by the Khmer Rouge by being beaten with blunt instruments such as hoe handles. There was no reasoning behind these executions other than to exhibit the power of the Khmer Rouge.

The Khmer Rouge demonstrated their power in other ways as well such as making sexual intercourse before marriage a capital offense. In one instance a couple was beaten to death in front of their entire commune. It is likely that acts such as these were implemented in order to destroy anything that resembled family bonding amongst the minorities. The Khmer Rouge benefitted from this because this isolated their hostages giving more power to the Khmer Rouge as a unit.

## Statistics

GROUP	1975 Pop.	Number of Deaths	Death Rate (%)
<i>New People:</i>			
Urban Khmer	2,000,000	500,000	25
Rural Khmer	600,000	150,000	25
Chinese (all urban)	430,000	215,000	50
Vietnamese (urban)	10,000	10,000	100
Lao (rural)	10,000	4,000	40
Total new people	3,050,000	879,000	29
<i>Base People:</i>			
Rural Khmer	4,500,000	675,000	15
Cham (all rural)	250,000	90,000	36
Vietnamese (rural)	10,000	10,000	100
Thai (rural)	20,000	8,000	40
upland minorities	60,000	9,000	15
Total base people	4,848,000	792,000	16
<b>Total Cambodia</b>	<b>7,890,000</b>	<b>1,671,000</b>	<b>21</b>

<https://sites.google.com/site/cambodiangenocide6000ahal0/statistics>

## Conclusions

After the French left Indochina, the region was left in a power vacuum. In Cambodia, the communist group Khmer Rouge came to power. The Khmer Rouge, in an attempt to purify their country of both class and minority, set out to purge Cambodia of both. They evacuated the cities, forced everyone into the countryside, when they were worked to death. Entire races were targeted, especially the ethnic Vietnamese and the Cham people. In all, 21% of the Cambodian population was killed during the genocide. The genocide was only halted by a war with Vietnam.