

Constitutions of Multilingual Countries

Other countries have crafted constitutions that protect and promote their many languages—the **Philippines** can do the same!



The South African constitution recognizes 11 official languages. These correspond to the languages with the biggest populations—9 indigenous languages and 2 European languages. Provincial governments must use at least two official languages based on their local context. The constitution commands the State to promote indigenous languages. Furthermore, it establishes a South African Language Board to promote many languages.



Spain recognizes the Castilian language as the official language of the State. Spain also grants other languages official status in the respective regions ("Communities").

Languages

6.
 - (1) The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.
 - (2) Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.
 - (3)
 - (a) The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.
 - (b) Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents.
 - (4) The national government and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor their use of official languages. Without detracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.
 - (5) A Pan South African Language Board established by national legislation must—
 - (a) promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of—
 - (i) all official languages;
 - (ii) the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and
 - (iii) sign language; and
 - (b) promote and ensure respect for—
 - (i) all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu; and
 - (ii) Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes in South Africa.

Section 3

1. Castilian is the official Spanish language of the State. All Spaniards have the duty to know it and the right to use it.
2. The other Spanish languages shall also be official in the respective Self-governing Communities in accordance with their Statutes.
3. The richness of the different linguistic modalities of Spain is a cultural heritage which shall be specially respected and protected.



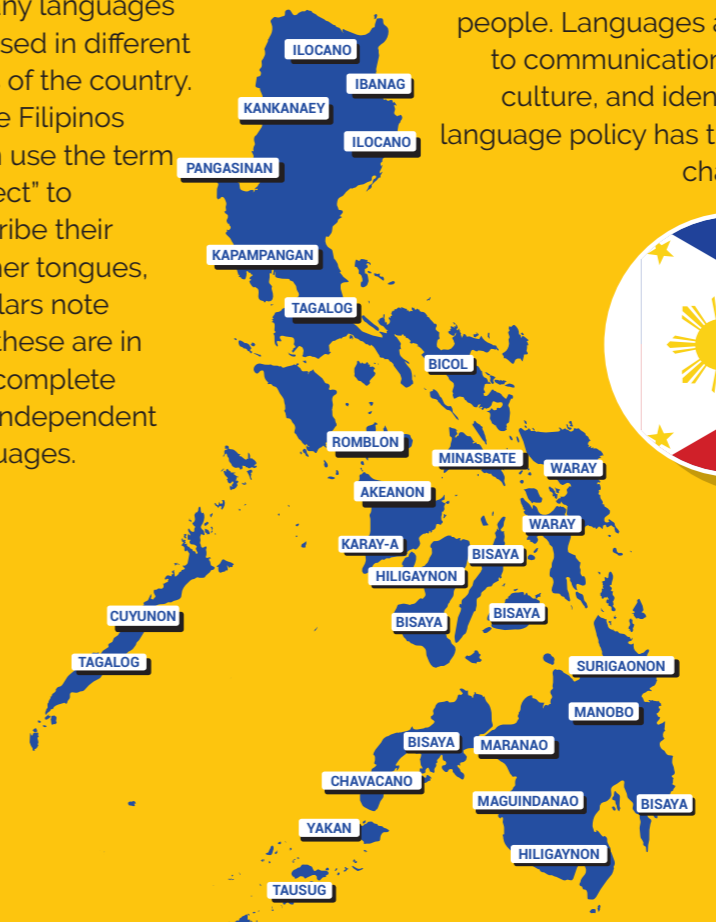
The Swiss Constitution recognizes 4 national languages. Besides that, it does not have any other specific provisions about language because it leaves it up to the administrative divisions ("cantons") to flesh out language policy at the local level.

Article 4

National Languages
The National Languages are German, French, Italian, and Romansh.

The Philippines is multilingual

—many languages are used in different parts of the country. While Filipinos often use the term "dialect" to describe their mother tongues, scholars note that these are in fact complete and independent languages.



A multilingual country needs a carefully crafted language policy to account for the diversity of its people. Languages are essential to communication, education, culture, and identity. A sound language policy has the following characteristics:

- ✓ makes citizens feel included
- ✓ is fair to different groups
- ✓ preserves, rather than destroys, language and cultural diversity
- ✓ gives people more ways to communicate, learn, and succeed
- ✓ contributes to sustainable development
- ✓ respects people's language rights: like the right to learn and use one's mother tongue, and the right to learn and use other languages too



Problems with the 1987 Constitution:

- ✗ Does not adequately recognize and support the Philippines' multilingual character
- ✗ Only declares one national language: Filipino
- ✗ Only declares two official languages: Filipino and English
- ✗ It explicitly promotes the use of Filipino for official communication and instruction, but does not do the same for other native languages, nor English
- ✗ Regional languages are only "auxiliary" languages. They are given token status.
- ✗ It enjoins Congress to create a commission that puts more emphasis on Filipino than other native languages
- ✗ Does not uphold language equality, pluralism, and diversity

Examples of well-crafted language provisions:

There are many examples of multilingual countries that have progressive language policies in their constitutions. These can be studied and considered while our own constitution is being revised.



Bolivia declares Spanish and all of its native languages as "official languages". The national and local governments are required to use at least two official languages. In addition to Spanish, each local government ("department") is allowed to choose which of the other native languages it would like to use.

Article 5

- I. The official languages of the State are Spanish and all the languages of the rural native indigenous nations and peoples, which are Aymara, Araona, Baure, Bésiro, Canichana, Cavineño, Cayubaba, Chácobo, Chimán, Ese Ejja, Guarani, Guarasu'we, Guarayu, Itonama, Leco, Machajuyai-kallawaya, Machineri, Maropa, Mojeñotrinitario, Mojeño-ignaciano, Moré, Mosestén, Movima, Pacawara, Puquina, Quechua, Sirionó, Tacana, Tapiete, Toromona, Uruchipaya, Weenhayek, Yaminawa, Yuki, Yuracaré and Zamuco.
- II. The Pluri-National Government and the departmental governments must use at least two official languages. One of them must be Spanish, and the other shall be determined taking into account the use, convenience, circumstances, necessities and preferences of the population as a whole or of the territory in question. The other autonomous governments must use the languages characteristic of their territory, and one of them must be Spanish.



Czech Republic

The Czech constitution guarantees that ethnic minorities have a right to education in their own languages, and the right to use their languages when communicating with the government.

Article 25

- (1). Citizens who constitute a national or ethnic minority are guaranteed all-round development, in particular, the right to develop, together with other members of the minority, their own culture, the right to disseminate and receive information in their native language, and the right to associate in national associations. Detailed provisions shall be set down by law.
- (2). Citizens belonging to national and ethnic minority groups are also guaranteed, under the conditions set down by law: a) the right to education in their own language, b) the right to use their own language when dealing with officials, c) the right to participate in the resolution of affairs that concern national and ethnic minorities.



Russia

While Russian is the official language for the whole Russian Federation, the members of the federation ("republics") have the right to establish their own official state languages alongside Russian. All groups have the right to preserve, study, and develop their respective languages.

Article 68

1. The Russian language shall be a state language on the whole territory of the Russian Federation.
2. The Republics shall have the right to establish their own state languages. In the bodies of state authority and local self-government, state institutions of the Republics they shall be used together with the state language of the Russian Federation.
3. The Russian Federation shall guarantee to all of its peoples the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development.



India

The Indian constitution recognizes Hindi as the official language of the Union. However, individual States may adopt other languages "to be used for all or any of the official purposes of that State". In other words, while Hindi is the official language at the federal level, States do not have to use it as an official language at the state level. They can adopt their own official languages based on what is used within their territory, and also what its population demands.

Chapter II

Regional Languages

Official language or languages of a State. 345. Subject to the provisions of articles 346 and 347, the Legislature of a State may by law adopt any one or more of the languages in use in the State or Hindi as the language or languages to be used for all or any of the official purposes of that State:

Provided that, until the Legislature of the State otherwise provides by law, the English language shall continue to be used for those official purposes within the State for which it was being used immediately before the commencement of this Constitution.

Special provision relating to language spoken by a section of the population of a State. 347. On a demand being made in that behalf the President may, if he is satisfied that a substantial proportion of the population of a State desire the use of any language spoken by them to be recognised by that State, direct that such language shall also be officially recognised throughout that State or any part thereof for such purpose as he may specify.



Ethiopia

All Ethiopian languages enjoy equal recognition. According to the Ethiopian constitution, the working language of the Federal Government is Amharic, but regional states are allowed to choose their own working languages.

Article 5

Languages

1. All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition.
2. Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government
3. Members of the Federation may by law determine their respective working languages.



Senegal

The Senegal constitution declares 6 national languages, and enables additional national languages to be added as long as they are standardized. French, meanwhile, is the official language. In the Senegal case, national languages are symbolic and the official language is the practical, working language of government.

Article 1

The Republic of Senegal shall be secular, democratic and social. It shall ensure equality before the law for all citizens, without distinction as to origin, race, sex or religion. It shall respect all faiths. The official language of the Republic of Senegal shall be French. The national languages shall be Diolo, Malinke, Poular, Serer, Soninke and Wolof and any other national language which has been codified. ..."



Singapore

Singapore recognizes four official languages and one national language. The national language is more ceremonial, as English is the main working language of the government and the education system. Nevertheless, citizens have the right to teach and learn any language.

Official languages and national language

153A.

- (1) Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English shall be the 4 official languages in Singapore.
- (2) The national language shall be the Malay language and shall be in the Roman script: Provided that—
- (c) no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using or from teaching or learning any other language; and
- (d) nothing in this Article shall prejudice the right of the Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in Singapore.

More at the back!