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Policy Reforms to Climb Mount Everest: Economic, Social, and Safety Implications of Nepal's New 7000m Prerequisite Rule

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Abstract

Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world, attracts hundreds of climbers each year into Nepal. This paper focuses on the following regulatory reforms proposed by Nepal: (i) imposing new permit fees to USD 15000 from current USD 11000 effective September 1st, 2025, (ii) prerequisite to summit a 7000 m peak in Nepal – under review by Nepal's National Assembly, (iii) fee waiver for a certain peaks ranging up to 7132 m for two years to develop least visited western region. These could change climbers' behaviour, manage risk, and support sustainable mountaineering in Nepal. Considering this, the study investigates the impact this policy shift may have on climber demand and destination choices. By connecting permit rules with climbers' decision-making and local economic impacts, this study aims to provide practical strategies for policymakers seeking to balance safety, sustainability, and tourism income on overcrowded peaks. Previous research on adventure tourism highlights growing concerns about overcrowding, waste, and risk on Everest. This research paper combines a comparative analysis of Everest and substitute peaks, with a literature-based study of impacts. This paper argues that a well-designed permit system requiring prior high-altitude experience and higher fees would reduce inexperienced climbers, promote safer expeditions, and shift demand toward other peaks such as Aconcagua, Denali, K2 or other 7000/8000m peaks within Nepal. While this reform could increase income for sherpas and porters, reduce risk and minimise low-budget climbs, it may also temporarily reduce job opportunities if overall Everest demand declines as climbers may have to realign their plans when the new rule comes into effect.

Keywords: Mount Everest, high-altitude mountaineering, tourism policy reform, adventure tourism, permit regulation, Sherpa economy, sports economics

1. Introduction

Mount Everest, the peak of the world, has been the ultimate symbol of high-altitude mountaineering and one of the most

iconic parts of global adventure tourism. Despite its extreme altitude, unpredictable weather conditions, and life-threatening risks, this peak attracts hundreds of mountaineers every year (Huey et al., 2020). Since the landmark first ascent of Sir Edward Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953, Everest has transformed from an Elite exploration to a commercialized industry, with rapid growth in expeditions raising increasing concerns about safety, environmental degradation, overcrowding, and long-term sustainability (Hassani & Shokouh Saljoughi, 2024).

Everest industry faces challenges such as inexperienced climbers relying heavily on Sherpa support, avalanches and unpredictable weather (Huey et al., 2020; Miner et al., 2020) The tragic incidents in 2014 and 2015 - when avalanches claimed dozens of lives (BBC News, 2015; Parker, 2014) and the international media portrayal of "traffic jams" in 2019 at Hillary Step further cemented Everest's reputation as both a triumph as well as tragedy of modern adventure tourism (BBC News, 2019). In response to these, the Nepal government announced its plan to require climbers to first scale a 7000m peak within Nepal prior to applying for a permit to climb Mt. Everest (Reuters, 2025b). However, this has generated debate among stakeholders—climbers, Sherpa guides, and expedition companies regarding its feasibility and unintended consequences.

According to Fundytus (2021), Everest's loosely regulated permit system lets in many unqualified climbers, which increases the danger while on the mountain and forces Sherpas to take most of the risks for little benefit. Gilchrist et al. (2024) suggest that these pressures have made it harder for Nepal's policymakers as they struggle to balance income from high permit fees with the urgent requirement to manage risk, safety, environmental impact, and the mountain's long-term competitiveness as a destination. A part of the main question is whether imposing stricter permit rules could drive away unqualified climbers as the huge number of people climbing unsafe decreases, while increasing safe, sustainable, and higher-value expeditions. Insights from the Falk (2013) study of climate-based shifts in Austrian winter tourism and Deason et al. (2023) findings on tourists' views on climate change in Mexican mountain ecotourism both show how changing external factors like environment and/or regulations can push visitors to reconsider their destination choices.

As a 15-year-old young mountaineer, I have summited Mt. Elbrus (5642m) in Russia, a.k.a. "Top of Europe," during April 2025 and Mt. Kilimanjaro (5895m) in Tanzania, a.k.a. "Roof of Africa," during June 2025, both of which do not have a specific age requirement. I intend to summit Mt. Aconcagua (6961m) in Argentina, a.k.a. "Top of South America," during January 2026. It is my ambition to summit Mt. Everest at age 16 as part of my Seven Summits mission, following both the Messner and Bass lists (Figure 1), which I kickstarted in early 2025. Nepal's policy reforms will have a direct impact on my Mount Everest climbing schedule, motivating me to explore their overall implications and possible paths forward.

This paper primarily focuses on the new reforms proposed by Nepal related to the prerequisites for climbing a 7000m peak in Nepal, its implications on Mount Everest, and other 8000m peaks in Nepal. The scope is limited to Nepal, while comparative insights are made from Pakistan (K2), Argentina (Aconcagua), and the USA (Denali). The study primarily relies on existing literature and secondary data, considering that this is a new reform under review and evidence is lacking on long-term impacts.

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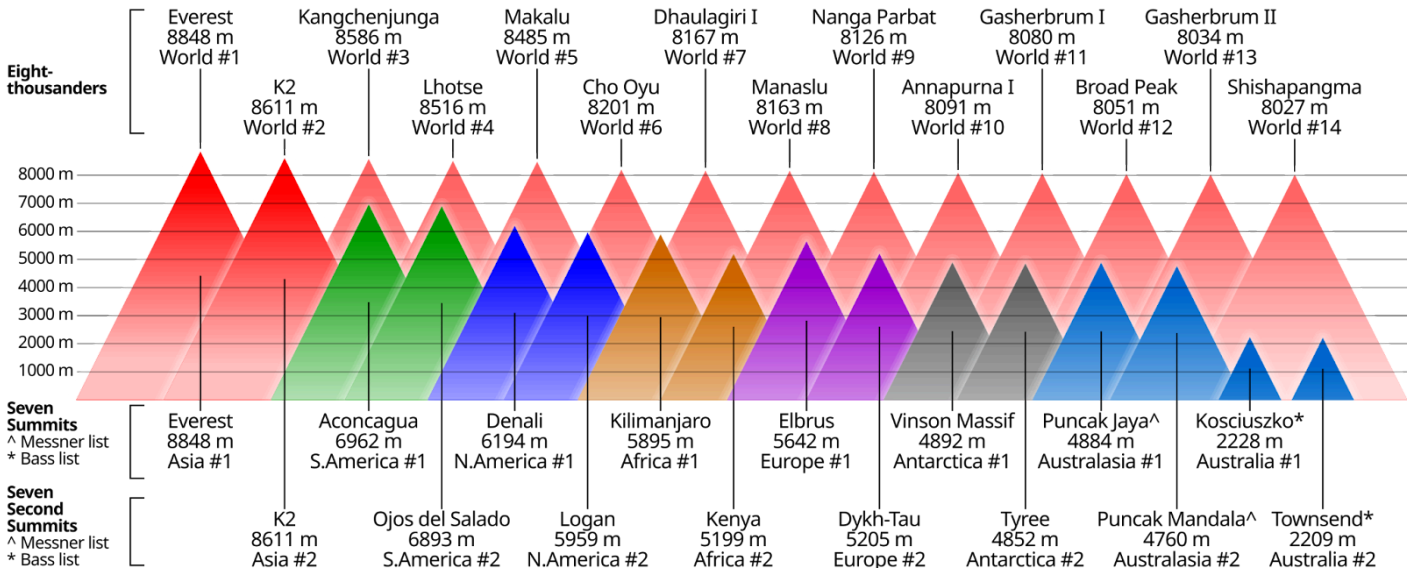

Figure 1: The Highest Mountains on Earth.

Note: Figure taken from PMFIAS (2019).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Everest Tourism & Risks

The rapid commercialization of Everest has increased risks for Sherpas and inexperienced climbers, with Sherpas taking part in life-threatening tasks in harsh weather conditions while their protection and pay still remain insufficient (Fundytus, 2021). As commercial expeditions took over, Mount Everest is now within the reach of less experienced climbers, which raises safety concerns for the climbers and the workers. Gilchrist et al. (2024) further explain how Everest has become a crowded stage of national pride, personal ambition, and performative achievement—fueled by expanding commercialization and the prestige tied to summiting Everest.

Insights from Hansen (2023) state that Everest has experienced rapid commercialization with guided expeditions, according to lower technical entry barriers, and socio-economic access has increased the number and diversity of climbers (by age, nationality, amateur climbers) and expanded operator business models, creating new management and safety challenges.

Everest's overcrowding and accidents are a threat to Nepal's economy: despite tourism contributing about 6% to GDP in 2024 (ABM 2025), poor safety and management could harm the country's international reputation, reduce climber demand, and weaken the sustainability of relying on mountaineering as a stable growth source. Stronger permit rules and experience requirements are needed to protect both revenue and sustainability.

Collectively, these sources highlight the necessity to reform Everest's permit system by prioritizing Sherpas' safety by strictly restricting inexperienced climbers with stronger prerequisites, long-term sustainability, fairness in their income, and tourism policy. The old policy required climbers to have summited at least one peak above 7000 meters before being granted a permit

to climb Mount Everest. The revised policy makes this requirement stricter by recognizing the "7000-meter peak" only if it is located within Nepal.

Huey et al. (2020) summarize that a climber having prior high altitude experience may enhance the success rate of a summit to Mount Everest, and in addition, climbers with prior experience in climbing peaks in Nepal have higher success rates than those without any experience. This might reflect the direct benefit of adequate experience and rate of success. They further went on to analyse the success and death rates for first-time climbers during period 2006-2019 (3600 climbers with paid permits), using the same statistical methods to climbers during period 1990-2005 (2200 first time climbers), and concluded that two third of climbers now reach the summit, versus one third earlier, and the overall death rate of around 1% hasn't changed. It is also noticed that more women are attempting the climb to Mount Everest in recent years (14.6%) compared to the previous period (9.1%).

2.2. Destination Competitiveness

Destination competitiveness is influenced by various supporting factors, essential resources, and policy mechanisms (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Their thorough framework emphasizes the importance of effective destination management, improving stability, economic benefits, and tourist satisfaction. A key concept in this is that policy tools like pricing, regulations, policies, and limited access directly have an effect on destination perception, perceived quality, and long-term competitiveness.

In this context, Nepal's updated Everest permit policy, which now requires climbers to have summited a 7000-meter peak within Nepal (not just anywhere), presents an example of intentional competitiveness repositioning- to alter its position in the global tourism market to improve sustainability, increase revenue, or respond to problems like overcrowding. The policy shifts from a loosely enforced prerequisite to one that benefits both Nepal's economy and Sherpa-climber safety. By ensuring that only experienced climbers qualify for an Everest permit, the policy helps reduce the number of unprepared climbers, lowers expedition risk, and channels more climbing traffic to Nepal's other high-altitude peaks while generating additional income for local communities. This not only strengthens Nepal's financial stake but in mountaineering tourism by also supports a safer and more sustainable model for Everest expeditions.

In a comparative analysis of tourism in Barcelona and Catalonia, Alvado et al. (2021) illustrate how tourist flow management, product diversification, and coordinated public-private strategy can improve resilience and sustainability. Their findings highlight the importance of coordinated leadership and strategic planning—especially in times of crisis—for tourist destinations to remain competitive and sustainable. Applying this to Nepal, the revised policy shows a shift away from mass-market tourism towards a model focused on value, safety, sustainability, and experience-driven mountaineering.

2.3. Climate and Demand patterns

Shifting climate and environmental conditions influence the tourism demand, especially for high-altitude destinations such as Mount Everest. Falk (2013) provides empirical evidence from the Austrian ski industry, showing that demand declines when climatic conditions worsen or when prices rise. The study found that visitors adjust their travel plans based on both weather and price; they often choose alternative destinations as a result. Although Falk's work focuses on winter sports, it is similar to high-altitude mountaineering: climbers are likely to adjust their expedition plans, choosing alternative peaks such as K2, Denali, or Aconcagua when faced with reduced accessibility or higher costs for Everest until they are well prepared to meet the regulations and the increased fees.

Deason et al. (2023) further strengthen this similarity by demonstrating that tourists' perception of environmental risk

directly influences destination choice. In their survey of mountain ecotourism in Southern Mexico, they found that negative perceptions of climate change impacts, such as safety concerns or degraded conditions which significantly increased the number of visitors switching to other alternative destinations. This behaviour is similar to how climbers are reacting to Nepal's updated Everest regulations, which now strictly require climbers to complete a 7000-meter climb within Nepal.

Deason et al. (2023) in their studies indicate that the demand for climbing Mount Everest is not fixed; rather, it is highly responsive to changes in environmental conditions, perceived risks, and economic costs. This finding has important policy implications: while stricter regulations may decrease the number of inexperienced climbers and enhance safety, they could also drive climbers to switch to less-regulated peaks instead. For Nepal, understanding these shifts in demand is essential for achieving a balance between safety, environmental sustainability, and maintaining long-term competitiveness in the global high-altitude climbing market.

2.4. Crowding, Regulation, and Behavior

Understanding how climbers respond to crowding and regulation is crucial to predicting the impacts of Nepal's revised permit system. Manning (1999) discusses outdoor recreation, and visitor behavior in crowded wilderness environments is shaped not only by physical capacity limits but also by perceptions of crowding, fairness, and regulation. In Everest's context, "the human traffic jam" waiting at bottlenecks such as the Hillary Step shows how high demand can transform an expedition into a traffic jam, increasing risks like frostbite, altitude sickness, and even death at alarming rates. Manning's findings suggest that well-designed permit policies can regulate climber flows, reduce crowding, and improve climbing experience - strengthening Nepal's reputation as a sustainable and competitive adventure tourism destination.

Huey et al. (2020) statistically tested crowding effects and found surprisingly very limited evidence that crowding increased death probability in their analysis, though they caution that crowding raises other operational hazards and risks, such as exhaustion.

Hall & Page (2014) explain this further by situating tourism within broader systems of governance and place management. They show how tourism destinations must constantly negotiate between growth, sustainability, and regulation. Their work in tourism geography emphasizes how destinations operate within global competition while managing overcrowding, community impacts, and environmental damage. They argue that regulations are a necessity for sustainable growth. Applied to Everest, this means that the challenge is not only the number of climbers but how Nepal manages that flow through permit systems, guide regulations, and prerequisites.

Manning (1999) and Hall & Page (2014) show that regulations work best when seen as fair and necessary, while overly strict or weakly enforced rules risk dissatisfaction and danger. For Everest, the 7000m-in-Nepal rule may reduce the number of climbers but also reinforce that only well-prepared mountaineers should attempt the peak. Overall, the literature suggests that Everest's new permit regulation will reshape the climbing experience. It influences climber decisions and redistributes demand; this regulation serves as an essential tool for managing safety, promoting environmental sustainability, and controlling competition. They are not a simple way to earn money, but a strategic tool to improve safety, protect the environment, and regulate competition.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology in combination with a case comparison and literature synthesis to examine the effects. The core research question remains as to how Nepal's new 7,000m prerequisite and existing Everest permit costs

affect its competitiveness in the global high-altitude climbing market, and what is the impact on climber demand and the unintended consequences.

1. *Literature-based analysis.* Drawing on Dwyer and Kim's (2003) model of destination competitiveness as a conceptual framework, the analysis integrates peer-reviewed studies on tourism demand elasticity, mountaineering risk perception, and regulatory impacts with recent policy developments in Nepal's high altitude climbing sector.
2. *Comparative case analysis.* Comparative cases are incorporated to contextualize between Everest and three alternative peaks: K2, Denali, and Aconcagua. This aligns with Gilchrist et al. 's (2024) framing of Everest as a "global mountain" and makes it an iconic climbing destination in the global climbing market.

These parallels enable a structured assessment of policy effectiveness by considering both intended outcomes—such as enhanced safety and sustainability—and unintended consequences, including a shift in climber demand towards alternative destinations.

Case Comparison: Everest vs. Other High Peaks

Several research scholars and policy analysts examine how the permit pricing, quotas, and governance measures influence volume, operator behaviour, and local economies. Commercial mountaineering across the world's highest peaks brings in a vast amount of differences in risk, economics, and the way they are guided. Comparative parameters of Everest, other 7000-8000m peaks in Nepal, and non-Himalayan peaks such as K2, Aconcagua, and Denali are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative Case Analysis of Different Peaks, both in Nepal and outside the Himalayas.

Park / Region	Height (m)	Permit Cost	Avg Annual Climbers	Success Rate	Fatality Rate	Park Rules	Challenges
Everest (Nepal)	8849	USD 15000 (was 11000)	600-800	60-65%	~1%	Age: Min 16 years	Crowding, Altitude, waste management, climate conditions
Other 8000m Peaks (Nepal)	7000-8200	USD 1800 - 3000	50-150	30-50%	2-5%	Age: Min 16 years	Harsh weather, limited infrastructure
K2 (Pakistan)	8611	USD 3500 - 4000	50-200	~ 25%	~20%	Min age not specified, 18+ typical	Extreme difficulty, limited infrastructure, avalanches

Aconcagua (Argentina)	6961	USD 800-1200	3500+	40-60%	<1%	Age: Min 14+ years with consent	Altitude sickness, Load carry, and weather swings
Denali (USA)	6190	USD 350 - 400	1000+	~ 50%	3-4%	Age 12+ recommended, under 18 with guardian	Technical glacier travel, harsh storms, need for high endurance, and load carrying

Note: Data for Everest are taken from Arnette (2024), Reuters (2025a), Sabrang India (2024), and *The Guardian* (2025). Data for other 8,000 m peaks in Nepal are taken from *Kathmandu Post* (2025a, 2025b). Data for K2 are taken from ExplorersWeb (2024) and K2 Karakoram (2023). Data for Aconcagua are taken from Andes Vertical (2025) and PubMed (2024). Finally, data for Denali are taken from the U.S. National Park Service (2025).

The comparative cases (Everest, Other 8000m peaks inside Nepal, K2, Denali, and Aconcagua) were chosen based on three criteria:

a. *Global significance.* Each peak is an epicenter in the Seven Summits or 8000m climbing market.
b. *Policy variation.* They represent diverse governance models: Nepal's high-cost, permit-intensive Everest; Pakistan's lightly regulated but dangerous K2; the U.S.'s safety-driven Denali; and Argentina's mid-priced, mass-market Aconcagua.
c. *Substitution potential.* Each peak is a realistic alternative for climbers halted by Everest's stricter rules, making them the perfect example for testing substitution behavior.

Drawing from Gilchrist et al. (2024) and official tourism reports, Everest remains the most accessible high-altitude icon in terms of marketing, but the new prerequisite significantly narrows the eligibility pool. In contrast, K2 and Denali rely on inherent difficulties and environmental factors rather than policy restrictions to limit the number of climbers.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. Economic Dependence

Bloomberg News (2020) narrates that Nepal's reliance on the Everest expedition and Himalayan climbs is unparalleled. Reuters (2023) suggests that mountain climbing and trekking attract thousands of foreigners to Nepal every year, contributing more than 4% to Nepal's economy. The country earned $5.8m in permit fees—$5m from Mount Everest alone for the Mar-May 2023 climbing season, with the permit cost being the highest among any of the 8000m peaks. The U.S. National Park Service (2023) indicates that Denali mainly contributes to the Alaskan regional economy, UIAA (2023) indicates that Aconcagua primarily supports the Mendoza province in Argentina, and Karim, R. (2023) indicates that the support from K2 in Gilgit-Baltistan to Pakistan's economy is not very significant.

4.2. Volume of Climbers and Safety Measures

Arnette (2024) indicates that despite having the highest permit fees, Everest attracts anywhere between 600-800 climbers annually. Its fatality rate of around 1% is relatively low compared with other 8000m peaks, while its success rate remains comparatively high, particularly when contrasted with K2 and other high Himalayan peaks, which experience lower

summiting rates and higher mortality due to technical difficulty and harsher environmental conditions (Himalayan Database, 2024; Arnette, 2024).

4.3. Distribution of the Sherpa Economy

The Everest climbing industry is heavily dependent on Sherpas for guiding, load carrying, and rope fixing, providing them with substantial economic opportunities, albeit with considerable occupational risks (Bloomberg News, 2020). Expanding demand for 7000m as a minimum attainment prior to issuance of permit to Everest will help redistribute economic benefits to other regions and peaks, potentially supporting communities and Sherpa groups that have historically received less income and attention from high-altitude expeditions, according to THT Online (2025).

4.4. Prerequisites and Challenges

Most high-altitude peaks, including Mount Everest, have a minimum age requirement of 16 years for obtaining a climbing permit. In some 7000m peaks, exceptions are granted for younger climbers, contingent upon medical clearance and parental consent (Nepal Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2025). Climbers attempting these peaks must contend with extreme environmental conditions, altitude sickness, technical climbing challenges, and the need for exceptional physical and mental endurance (Himalayan Database, 2024). Despite these demanding prerequisites, a successful ascent of Mount Everest remains highly aspirational, earning its reputation as “the roof of the world” and continuing to attract climbers of diverse experience levels from across the globe (Arnette, 2024).

4.5. Unintended Consequences and Impact on Different Stakeholders

Nepal’s new policy requiring climbers to summit a 7,000 m peak before obtaining an Everest permit aims to enhance safety and manage overcrowding, yet it may produce unintended economic, social, and labor-related consequences across various stakeholder groups.

Impact on expedition operators. Smaller expedition companies may face disproportionate challenges in adapting to the policy. Unlike larger operators with extensive logistical networks, financial reserves, and client bases, smaller firms may struggle to organize additional 7,000 m expeditions, manage increased operational costs, and maintain competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). This could lead to market consolidation, where only well-funded operators dominate the Everest industry, potentially reducing diversity in services and pricing options for climbers.

Impact on local communities and the Sherpa economy. Sherpas and high-altitude guides are central to expedition success, yet the policy may redistribute economic benefits to regions hosting the newly required 7,000 m climbs. While this could create opportunities in previously underdeveloped areas, it may also strain local infrastructure and increase occupational risks for Sherpas, who already face significant physical and mental demands at high altitude (Bloomberg News, 2020; Macdonald et al., 2015). Communities that rely indirectly on Everest tourism—such as accommodation providers, porters, and regional businesses—may experience shifts in income that could exacerbate inequalities if some groups are unable to capitalize on the new expeditions.

Broader environmental and market effects. A potential consequence of stricter Everest requirements is climbers diverting to alternative peaks, both within Nepal and internationally, which could inadvertently transfer overcrowding, environmental pressures, and economic benefits to less-regulated areas. Wealthier, well-prepared climbers and commercial clients are more likely to comply with the new policy. However, climbers who cannot afford additional expeditions may reduce participation, impacting Nepal’s long-term competitiveness in the global high-altitude tourism market (Global Rescue, 2025).

Incorporating these multidimensional impacts into policy evaluation provides a more nuanced understanding of the trade-offs involved and highlights the importance of complementary measures, such as supporting small operators, strengthening local infrastructure, and monitoring environmental effects, to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes.

5. Discussion

5.1. Policy Effectiveness and Safety Outcomes

The primary reason Nepal proposes this new prerequisite is purely for the safety of climbers, per se. By mandating prior high altitude experience within Nepal, policymakers aim to reduce fatalities that are caused due to inexperience. While this pre-requisite shall enhance climber safety and regulate overcrowding on Mount Everest, its effects extend into multiple domains such as Nepal's economy, the livelihood of sherpas and the community, and the nation's competitive standing in global mountaineering.

5.2. Economic Trade-Offs

This policy has both positive and negative spillovers. On one hand, this will create new demand for climbs of 7000m peaks that shall help distribute tourist inflow away from Everest, spreading the revenue generation. On the other hand, higher permit costs and added requirements may deter budget-conscious climbers, potentially reducing the volume of climbers impacting foreign exchange earnings.

5.3. Nepal's Competitive Advantage in International Mountaineering

The challenge for Nepal lies in balancing safety, competitiveness, and sustainability. Historically, the country has been focused on high-volume, affordable cost mountaineering to attract global mountaineers as a strategy. Western countries rely on strong institutional frameworks, rescue services, and standardized guide certifications. In the Asia region, Nepal holds a significant brand advantage due to Everest's symbolic status, Sherpa expeditions, and extensive infrastructure.

5.4. Sherpa's Livelihood and Safety Considerations

For Sherpas, the rule could lead to both opportunities and trade-offs. On the positive side, the policy could create broader demand for guiding services on underutilized 7,000-metre peaks (e.g., Himlung Himal, Baruntse, or Putha Hiunchuli), redistributing income across regions that have not historically benefited from Everest tourism. This would reduce over-concentration of risk and economic dependence in Khumbu. On the downside, if overall climber volumes decrease due to higher costs and stricter requirements, aggregate income opportunities could shrink. Sherpas heavily rely on the seasonal influx of climbers, and their livelihood his eavily dependent on mountaineering expeditions. Nepali sherpas often perform the most dangerous tasks under conditions of wage inequality compared to foreign guides. While these policy reforms may spread economic activity, they may also reinforce structural inequities unless paired with better labor protections and insurance reforms.

5.5. International Cooperation

Nepal's policy will have an overall effect, and this cannot be seen in isolation. Effective governance often requires regional co-operation and alignment with international best practices. International mountaineering organizations provide

guidelines for sustainable mountaineering. Nepal could formally integrate its regulatory systems, rescue standards, and climber certifications. When this is done, it may enhance legitimacy, reduce overcrowding in the way, attract responsible climbers, and also reduce fatalities.

5.6. Implications for Nepal's Long-Term Economic Model

The results suggest that Nepal's reliance on Everest as a premium, high-volume product in its tourism portfolio is being recalibrated. If the 7,000-metre prerequisite successfully shifts demand toward other peaks, Nepal may gradually transition from a single-mountain dependency to a diversified high-altitude economy. This could reduce the economic vulnerability of relying too heavily on Everest expeditions, which are subject to seasonal risks, natural disasters, or global disruptions (e.g., earthquakes, pandemics). However, the model also risks price elasticity effects: higher cumulative costs of climbing (Everest permit + prerequisite climb) may drive budget climbers to alternative destinations like Aconcagua or even to Tibet's north side of Everest, potentially lowering Nepal's competitive advantage.

5.7. Everest via Tibet as an Alternate Option

A significant unintended consequence of Nepal's 7,000-meter prerequisite may be the diversion of climbers to Tibet's North Col route. Unlike Nepal, China does not impose prior high-altitude experience requirements, and permits are regulated through the China Tibet Mountaineering Association. While this route offers advantages such as direct road access to Base Camp and reduced avalanche risk compared to Nepal's Khumbu Icefall, it presents challenges of stronger winds, harsher conditions, and earlier technical demands. Economically, the shift of climbers to Tibet would redistribute revenue away from Nepalese Sherpa communities and local businesses toward a more centralized Chinese system, weakening Nepal's position in the global mountaineering market. Thus, Nepal's policy, though intended to enhance climber safety, risks creating cross-border competition that could erode its economic benefits.

Outcome 1: Reduction in the number of inexperienced climbers by requiring prior experience on a 7000-meter peak in Nepal, the policy aims to reduce the number of expeditions that require rescues and decrease fatalities in high-risk areas.

Outcome 2: Destination Substitution Climbers, particularly from outside of Asia, may choose to climb mountains with fewer regulations, like K2, Denali, or Aconcagua. Alternatively, they could choose to summit Mount Everest via Tibet. This aligns with Falk's findings on substitution in ski tourism, where participants switched resorts when access or conditions changed. Similar behaviour is supported by Deason et al.'s survey-based evidence of destination changes due to tourists' perception of risk.

Short-term effects:

1. Less crowding on Everest's fixed lines
2. Higher revenue for Sherpas per client, but fewer total expeditions could reduce total seasonal employment opportunities

Long-term effects:

1. Stronger Everest brand, safety-first climb
2. More sustainable mountaineering economy built on quality over quantity

6. Policy Recommendations

The policy can potentially reduce fatalities linked to inexperience, redistribute economic benefits to less-trafficked 7000m peaks, and create new opportunities for local communities and Sherpa guides. At the same time, the policy produces unequal impacts across stakeholder groups, with smaller expedition operators, budget-conscious climbers, and communities heavily dependent on Everest-specific tourism facing potential disadvantages. Additionally, the policy may shift climber activity to alternative peaks, potentially transferring environmental pressures and economic benefits elsewhere.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Stakeholder consultation and support.** Policymakers should engage with smaller expedition operators, Sherpas, and local communities to ensure equitable access to new climbing opportunities, financial support for small operators, and adequate labor protections.

2. **Monitoring and adaptive management.** Implement a robust monitoring system for environmental impacts, climber distribution, and safety outcomes to adapt policies in real time and prevent unintended ecological or social consequences.

3. **Balanced economic incentives.** Consider tiered permit pricing or subsidies for budget-conscious climbers and emerging operators to maintain Nepal's competitiveness in the global mountaineering market while encouraging safer expeditions.

4. **Education and training programs.** Support preparatory high-altitude training programs in Nepal for aspiring climbers, fostering safety awareness, technical competence, and environmentally responsible climbing practices.

5. **International experience recognition.** Consider accepting successful ascents of internationally recognized peaks, such as Aconcagua (6,961 m) and Denali (6,190 m), as partial fulfillment of the Everest permit prerequisite, combined with supplementary verification to maintain safety standards.

7. Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. First, it relies entirely on secondary data, including academic literature, government reports, and news sources, limiting insights into real-time climber behavior, stakeholder perceptions, and economic impacts. Second, the comparative case framework cannot fully account for region-specific conditions, such as terrain, logistics, and cultural factors. Third, assumptions regarding economic redistribution, environmental effects, and climber responses are based on observed trends and analogous cases, rather than primary empirical measurement. Finally, perspectives of key stakeholders, particularly smaller operators and local communities, are inferred from literature rather than direct engagement. Despite these limitations, the study provides a conceptual foundation and comparative lens to evaluate policy trade-offs and inform sustainable, safety-focused high-altitude tourism practices.

8. Further Research

Future research could strengthen the evidence base for Nepal's 7,000 m prerequisite policy by incorporating primary empirical data. Surveys and interviews with climbers, Sherpas, and expedition operators would provide granular insights

into stakeholder perceptions, economic impacts, and behavioural responses. Longitudinal studies tracking climber flows, success rates, fatalities, and environmental indicators across Everest and alternative peaks could offer robust data on the policy's effectiveness and unintended consequences. Comparative studies examining international high-altitude climbs, such as Aconcagua and Denali, could inform decisions on recognizing prior experience outside Nepal. Finally, research integrating economic modelling with environmental assessments would help quantify trade-offs between revenue generation, local livelihoods, and ecological sustainability, supporting evidence-driven and adaptive policymaking in high-altitude mountaineering tourism.

9. Conclusion

The 7000m prerequisite policy underscores 3 key takeaways:

- **Safety:** Ensuring climbers have prior high-altitude experience is likely to reduce fatalities and improve preparedness, reinforcing Nepal's position as a responsible mountaineering destination.
- **Economic Impacts:** While the policy redistributes revenue to underdeveloped peaks and supports Sherpa livelihoods, it may challenge smaller operators and budget-conscious climbers, highlighting the need for equitable economic measures.
- **Sustainability:** By managing Everest overcrowding and encouraging tourism to other peaks, the policy has the potential to mitigate environmental degradation, though careful monitoring is essential to avoid shifting pressures elsewhere.

The success of Nepal's new Everest policy rests on striking a careful balance between safety, economics, and sustainability. By mandating 7,000-meter experience, the rules strengthen climber and Sherpa safety while easing overcrowding. Although higher costs may deter some climbers in the short term, they protect Nepal's reputation, sustain community livelihoods, and ensure Everest is seen not as the easiest high peak, but as the safest and most responsibly managed in the world.

Everest will remain the pinnacle of mountaineering not by being open to all, but by being managed as the safest, most responsible, and most sustainable high-altitude destination.

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At school, Nisha balances academic excellence with leadership initiatives, while outside the classroom, she uses mountaineering and sports as platforms to develop resilience, discipline, and courage. Looking ahead, she aspires to pursue higher education in economics and business while continuing her global climbing journey to inspire other young people to set bold goals and step beyond their comfort zones.

Mentor Contribution Statement

This project was conducted under the supervision of my Indigo Research Programme professors, Dr. Iva Bimpli and Dr. Daryn Howland, who guided me throughout the research and writing process. Their primary role was to provide academic direction and support in shaping the scope of the study. Specifically, they advised me on how to approach the paper methodologically, ensuring that my ideas are aligned with established practices in tourism policy research. My mentors also assisted in identifying relevant sources and recommended strategies for organising the literature review so that it connected empirical findings, theoretical frameworks, and policy implications.

As I developed drafts of the paper, my mentors offered detailed feedback on both the structure and clarity of arguments, highlighting areas that required refinement. After I incorporated revisions, my mentor reviewed the paper again to ensure that all arguments flowed logically and that the manuscript met academic standards. Importantly, all research design, analysis, and conclusions presented in the paper are my own. My mentors' contributions were advisory and editorial, ensuring that my work was rigorous, clear, and properly aligned with scholarly expectations.