

Cambodian National Assembly Election in 2013: A Sea Change in the Cambodian Political Landscape*

Kin Phea**

Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of the Cambodian National Assembly Election in 2013, with regard of electoral institutional settings, political parties, electoral campaign, voter turnout, as well as the election results and their implication for political change in Cambodia. The July 2013 election signaled a sea change in the Cambodian political landscape. For the first time since the re-introduction of multi-party election in 1993, the steady increase of vote for the Cambodian People's Party(CPP) has been broken. Political competition has now crystallized into a polarized duel between two contending blocs, offering a first credible challenge to the CPP's hold on power. Whether the dynamics set in motion by the 2013 election would lead to long-term change or will be stifled in the cradle, the year 2013 stood out as a landmark year. This paper argues that the government's failure to address social issues gave credit to the Cambodian National Rescue Party

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** Director, Department of Diplomatic Studies, International Relations Institute of Cambodia, Royal Academy of Cambodia, kinpheaa@gmail.com

(CNRP), and the successful merger between the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) and the Human Rights Party (HRP) into the CNRP and its seven-point populist manifesto coupled with the opposition party's promise to fight corruption, such as land grabbing and forced eviction, illegal logging and deforestation, illegal migration from Vietnam, and to protect territorial sovereignty, in this case, referring to the border issues with Vietnam, greatly contributed to the CNRP's rising popularity. The election itself has significant impact for political change in Cambodia.

Keywords: Cambodia, National Assembly, Elections, Political Change, National Election Committee, Political deadlock

I. Introduction

Elections are nothing new in Cambodia, but genuinely competitive ones have been rare. Problems related to the elections since 1993 include ongoing, although fewer, instances of political violence, unequal access to the media for opposition parties, and a perceived CPP bias concerning access to voter information. In the end of each election, politics undermined the election process and led to turmoil and bloodshed. However, the July 2013 election was a critical moment in Cambodia's politics.

The fifth Cambodian National Assembly election was held on 27 July 2013 with participation of eight political parties. The election gave Cambodians a clear choice between the two leading parties, with the CPP—in effect the dominant power group since 1979, touting

economic development, infrastructure improvement and national security—and the CNRP, led by former Finance Minister Sam Rainsy, a party newly formed in 2012 as the result of a merger between the eponymous Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) and the Human Rights Party (HRP) led by Kem Sokha, focusing on strict immigration policies, better wages and reduced corruption. As the previous ones, the election used the closed party list proportional representation system, and provinces and municipality as constituencies. The National Election Committee (NEC) was mandated to organize the election.

Having received a royal pardon, Sam Rainsy returned from self-exile just in time the final week of the electoral campaign. Thousands of CNRP cheering supporters turned out to greet him (The Guardian 2013). However, he was not permitted to register as a candidate (McCargo 2014). Kuch Naren (2013) reported that Sam Rainsy's return, the biggest political development in Cambodia for many years, was completely ignored by TV stations or other media, which are all owned either by the government or by regime cronies. The Cambodia Express News was the only local news website that published a series of stories, including an analysis that attempted to forecast whether Mr. Sam Rainsy would protest the results of the election, which independent election monitors have long said is shaping up to be the least fair election in 20 years.

Cambodian elections since 1993 have frequently been stuck in controversy, but given the strong showing of the ruling CPP in both the 2008 general election and the 2012 commune election, the CPP was widely expected to win comfortably in 2013. In contrast, the 2013

election results presented a huge setback and unexpected loss for the CPP as it received less than 50% of supports among valid ballots with 68 of 123 parliamentary seats, down from 90 seats in 2008. CNRP, a main challenger to the CPP, gained markedly 44.50% of votes with the remaining 55 seats, increased 26 seats from 29 seats of the SRP and the HRP combined in 2008. The other parties failed to secure any seats in the National Assembly. In the event, the election proved dramatically illustrative of seismic changes in Cambodian society that were sure to have lasting ramifications.

However, the opposition lawmakers refused to take their seats, demanding an investigation into alleged election irregularities (Grömping 2013a) by establishing an independent investigation body, but the ruling CPP did not accept it, considering such mechanism was outside the constitution and the Law on the Election of Members of the National Assembly (LEMNA) frameworks (Press and Quick Reaction Unit of the Office of the Council of Ministers 2013, 12). Anti-government forces staged several large protests over many months, accusing the Prime Minister of rigging the vote (Grömping 2013a).

After a year of political deadlock, the opposition CNRP and the ruling CPP agreed to settle their differences. On 22 July 2014, both parties reached an agreement and on 8 August 2014, 55 CNRP members of parliament took their seats at the National Assembly to bring to an end a year-long boycott over alleged CPP vote-rigging. The concluded power-sharing arrangement between the two parties involves reform of the NEC and the National Assembly. Each party

elected four members to the NEC and one independent member was selected based on the consensus of both parties. The position of vice-president and chairperson of five commissions out of ten in the National Assembly went to the CNRP (Vannarith 2014b).

The July 2013 election signaled a sea change in the Cambodian political landscape. For the first time since the re-introduction of multi-party election in 1993, the steady increase in the CPP's vote has been broken. Political competition has now crystallized into a polarized duel between two contending blocs, offering a first credible challenge to the CPP's hold on power. Whether the dynamics set in motion by the 2013 election will lead to long-term change or will be stifled in the cradle, the year 2013 stood out as a landmark year (Dosch 2014).

This paper argues that the government's failure to address social issues gave credit to the CNRP, and the successful merger between the SRP and the HRP to form the CNRP and its seven-point populist manifesto coupled with the opposition party's promise to fight corruption, such as land grabbing and forced eviction, illegal logging and deforestation, illegal migration from Vietnam, and to top it all, to protect territorial sovereignty, in this case, referring to the border issues with Vietnam, greatly contributed to the CNRP's rising popularity. The election itself has significant effect for political change in Cambodia.

This paper is structured into nine sections; following this introduction I examine and provide analysis on the Cambodian National Assembly election in 2013 focusing on the electoral institutional settings, political parties, electoral campaign, voter

turnout, an analysis of election results, and change in political landscape. In the final section, I provide conclusion on general aspects of the Cambodian National Assembly election in 2013 and their implication for political change in Cambodia.

II . Institutional Settings

Like the previous elections, the main law governing the 2013 National Assembly election is LEMNA, adopted by the National Assembly in 1997. In addition to LEMNA, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Political Party Law, the Press Law and the Law on Assemblies are also integral to the election process (Transparency International Cambodia 2013, 5). In accordance with the constitution and the LEMNA, the 2013 election was conducted in accordance with the principle of multi-party liberal democracy. According to the Cambodian Constitution and the LEMNA, the members of the National Assembly are elected through the Proportional Representation System based on Party-Closed List. Currently, there are twenty four capital/provincial constituencies for the entire country. The number of the parliamentary seats was increasing from 120 to 123 based on the change of the numbers of capital and provinces, at the time of the election. Nine provinces were single-member constituencies including Koh Kong, Mondul Kiri, Preah Vihear, Ratanak Kiri, Sihanoukville, Stung Treng, Kep, Pailin, and Oddar Meanchey, while the other 15 provinces were multi-member districts, ranging from three members in

Kratie, up to 18 members in Kampong Cham (The Electoral Reform Alliance 2013, 16).

The general election for the Cambodian National Assembly used a “party-based” system rather than a “candidate-based” system. Political parties may decide in which provincial elections they will participate based on their political strength. After making this decision, the party must put forth twice as many candidates as there are National Assembly seats available in a particular province. On the election day, voters receive a ballot listing only the party name, which they use to directly vote for a party. Cambodia utilizes a proportional representation system wherein seats are distributed after the election based on the proportion of votes a party receives in each province. For each party, the election to a National Assembly seat is based on the order of the names on the candidate list. For example, Kampong Cham province had 18 available seats and the CPP provided a list of 36 candidates to the NEC. After the election the CPP won 8 seats in Kampong Cham province, the first 8 names on the candidate list were elected to the National Assembly. If a representative from the National Assembly resigns or is otherwise unable to perform their duties as a member of parliament, replacement will be selected from the names on the candidate list.

With this system, a participating party is responsible for providing a list of candidates to the electoral districts in each province. However, the candidates are elected based on the order of the names on the list; the candidates themselves do not even need to participate in the campaign or meet with the electorate. Under this system a political

party needs only to meet NEC requirements at the national level and provide a list of candidates to participate in an election.

The party's candidates need not concern themselves with their connection to the voters in the electoral district nor be concerned whether the electorate identifies with them. It is left up to voters to trust the party. The result of this system at the national level is that the CPP relies on just the three main leaders of their party for their campaign signs. No hard work is required from the candidates and they have no incentive to build relationships of trust with the voters in their respective electoral districts. Voters feel that they lack even a basic understanding of who the candidates are from their own electoral district and feel no need to get to know them.

Another consequence of this system during this election is that it removes any opportunities for independent candidates to participate. A citizen, no matter how talented or capable, must be a party member to run in an election; they cannot qualify as a candidate without party membership. Another problem arises when a party is no longer viable. As soon as that occurs the candidates of the party no longer have anything to stand on, are stripped of their qualification to run, and can no longer perform their duties. Generally speaking, most international political systems subscribe to the principle that any citizen has the right to elect others and be elected. If, on the other hand, a citizen must rely on a political party to be eligible to run, they will undoubtedly find ways to push back against such a system. Furthermore, the "party-based, not candidate-based" system seems very peculiar in practice; none of the parties have strong candidates to hit the campaign

trail to bring in votes, just a few of a party's top leaders are used in campaign pictures and rarely are any other party member shown.

The most reasonable solution for Cambodia would be to have a system where both party and candidate were parts of the election. The party could select the candidates, who would then display loyalty to the party and participate in campaign events in their designated electoral district. This way, when elected, they would represent the interests of their constituencies in parliament, having had direct contact with the citizens of their district during the campaign. An election system based on districts and candidates would also provide more opportunities for independent candidates to join in as well as provide more choices for voters at the ballot box. However, the attraction of the system is that it is simple and easily understood by voters who only have to select the party of their choice. Dina (2014), a former opposition party leader and currently Cambodian Ambassador to South Korea, expressed his support of the system and argued that the system was suitable for Cambodian political context; he argued that as there are nine provinces having one seat, this means that single-member constituencies system is applied.

There have been some suggestions for highest remainder formula used by United National Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in the 1993 election (Alex & Van 2003), the 2013 election used the highest average formula to allocate the seats to each political party in the province or municipality based on the number of seats and the result of the election in the province or municipality (NEC 2013a, 5 & Art. 118 [new] of the LEMNA). The highest average formula is seen

advantageous for the larger parties and it seems to discriminate the small parties (Alex & Van, 2003). If the highest remainder formula is applied, the election results might be changed in seats in the national assembly.

With some reforms in its working processes (NEC 2013a, 3-4), in accordance with LEMNA, NEC was mandated to manage and organize the 2013 election. NEC is consisted of nine members, five of them were previously judges and lawyers by profession (NEC 2013a, 4), and assisted by the lower electoral bodies, such as Provincial/Municipal Election Commissions (PECs), Commune/Sangkat Election Commissions (CECs), and Polling Station Commissions (PSCs) to carry out its work (Art. 11 of the LEMNA). In the 2013 election, the NEC had 24 PECs, 1,633 CECs and 19,009 PSCs (NEC 2013b), and employed 347 officials and staffs at the Headquarters, 927 officials and staffs at PECs, 8,180 officials and staffs at CECs, and 114,054 poll workers at PSCs (NEC 2013c, 6).

In its White Paper after the election, the NEC said it was committed to abide by the Constitution, LEMNA and the Regulations and Procedures. The NEC performs its duties in the spirit of independence, neutrality, integrity, transparency, efficiency, professionalism and service-mindedness (NEC 2013d, 2), the common measurement principles against which an election commission's work can be assessed (Alan et al. 2006, 22). The NEC also confirmed that the recruitment of officials and staffs for the PECs, CECs, and PSCs was done by the prescription of LEMNA, conforming to the neutral and independent principles. The NEC recruitment did not gear toward

political party, as the application was open to all Cambodians without socio-economic, religious, or political discrimination, and provided that they have the professional requirements to perform the task accordingly (NEC 2013a, 8).

However, numerous domestic and international organizations and election experts have raised concerns over the NEC's neutrality and competence. The NEC is housed under the Ministry of Interior (MOI), and does not have an autonomous budget allocation or its own constitutional status, like election management bodies in other countries. There is little transparency in the NEC's operations, with limited public access to documents and meetings. The NEC refuses to release results of various polls, media monitoring efforts, and surveys and even the voter list was removed from the web database of the NEC one day prior to the election while the election results and some regulations were removed from the website before the election (Transparency International Cambodia 2013, 5).

Downie (2000, 50) argues that the CPP was widely perceived to control the electoral machinery as two important laws governing the elections, the LEMNA and political party law were passed in 1997 when the National Assembly was CPP-dominated in the absence of Prince Ranariddh and 20 of his MPs, and the NEC and its lower electoral bodies were established in favor of CPP. Sanderson and Maley (1998) concluded that it was never the intention of the CPP to allow an independent and impartial election commission: "It sought from the start to control the entire apparatus... and it certainly achieved its objective." However, Gallup (2002, 41) noted that the perception of

a pro-CPP bias in the NEC counted more than the reality of its performance. The NEC would never enjoy the confidence of the opposition parties and much of the public.

The ‘Democracy Index in 2012 Report’ indicated that Cambodia ranked the 100th with overall score of 4.96, in which electoral process and pluralism is 5.67; civil liberties is 6.07; the functioning of government is 3.33; political participation is 5.63; and political culture is 4.12. With this rank, Cambodia was categorized as Hybrid regimes. This proves that Cambodian democracy is still comparatively higher than a number of countries such as Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam and so on. The electoral management does not yet meet the international standard as seen by average score on 5.67 on electoral process and pluralism. Cambodian average score in 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2011 was 4.77, 4.87, 4.87 and 4.87 respectively (The Economist 2012, 6&12).

The outcome of the Electoral Integrity Project released by Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government and the University of Sydney’s Department of Government and International Relations in February 2014 on Perception of Electoral Integrity (PEI) Index, Cambodia was ranked the 69th with average score of 45.6. Cambodia scored the 5th rating by PEI, especially poor in voting registration (Electoral Integrity Project 2014).

Based on current electoral institutional settings in Cambodia, it is suggested that some shortcomings need to be urgently addressed in order to have free and fair elections, and full and consolidated democracy, such as inconsistency of electoral regulations and laws, electoral system, and questionable NEC’s neutrality and competence.

III. Political Parties

Cambodia boasts a multi-party system and political parties may be formed freely. However, not all political parties are qualified to participate in parliamentary elections; they must meet certain threshold requirements to participate. Cambodia has dozens of political parties but only a few meet the requirements. In 2013 election, only 8 parties met the requirements to have their party listed on the ballot, including CPP, CNRP, FUNCINPEC, League for Democracy Party (LDP), Khmer Anti-Poverty Party (KAPP), Cambodian Nationality Party (CNP), Khmer Economic Development Party (KEDP), Democratic Republican Party (DRP), but there were only two parties – the ruling CCP and the opposition party, CNRP – were seen as major contenders for power.

The number of political parties markedly decreased from eleven in 2008 to eight in 2013. The decline in the number of political parties does not indicate that voters have no choice among a plurality of political parties, but indicates that only a few political parties succeed to establish themselves as main political challengers to the established political parties. Latter originate from the Cambodian Civil War (1979-1991) including the CPP and the FUNCINPEC, while new political parties which were successful to obtain seats in the National Assembly in the previous elections (Committee for Free and Fair Elections 2012a, 65).

Major changes of the current one-dominant political party system into a real multi-party system cannot be expected. Reasons for it are

that currently no other political parties than the CPP has the capabilities in terms of human resources and finances to establish itself as a ruling party. Also no social movements are visible out of which a new political party with a similar strength than the established parties could emerge (Committee for Free and Fair Elections 2012a, 65).

The political configuration inherited from the 2008 election initially included five political parties. Due to strategic merging, only three remained in the National Assembly at the end of the five-year term: the CPP, the FUNCINPEC, and the CNRP. Each of them has its roots in a specific situation in Cambodia's modern history (Denis et al. 2013, 50).

According to its official stance, the CPP rooted from the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), founded in 1951 as the result of the dismemberment of the Vietnamese-based Indochina Communist Party into national parties (Denis et al. 2013, 50-51). It gained additional credibility with the Cambodian people by its resistance against the Khmer Rouge, finally toppled by the Vietnamese invasion in 1979, which also explains the CPP's close and complex relationship with the Vietnamese Communist Party (Frings 1997, 807-846). In 1990s, in tune with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of Communism internationally and the economic necessities of reconstruction, the party officially abandoned its Marxist-Leninist ideology, orienting itself towards reformist socialism. In defiance of various changes of political systems, what became known as the CPP from 1991 on, was able to establish itself as a solid entity in Cambodian political history. The CPP still bears the scars of its history. A strong hierarchy

and meticulously organized structures are still main features of the organization, partly explaining its efficacy. The elites' socialization to Vietnamese socialism also explains the CPP's still solid inroads into the society, as well as its reticent posture with respect to participatory approaches and bottom up democratic mechanisms (Denis et al. 2013, 51). Mezzera et al. (2009, 49) noted that the CPP is the most institutionalized and sustainable party in the political landscape. Since the 1993 election it has continued to solidify its power base and hold of the country. However, according to Peou (2015) and other scholars¹⁾ this does not mean the CPP enjoys unconditional legitimacy. It uses its control of the state and security structures to intimidate voters and opposition. Over time, the party has become less dependent on individual leaders, although Hun Sen is still regarded as the undisputed leader.

The FUNCINPEC was created by then-Prince Norodom Sihanouk in February 1981 as an armed resistance to the Vietnamese-installed regime in Phnom Penh, and went on to win the 1993 U.N.-organized national election under Prince Norodom Ranariddh after the negotiated close to the country's decade-long civil war (Alex & Kuch 2014). FUNCINPEC's popularity never ceased decreasing throughout

1) Author conducted interview with a number of scholars including Prof. Dr. SOK Touch, International Relations Institute of Cambodia, Prof. Dr. GO Seon Gyu, Korean Civic Education Institute for Democracy (KOCEI) of Korea, Prof. Dr. LEE Han Woo, Sogang University, Republic of Korea, Prof. Dr. JEONG Yeon Sik, Changwon National University, Republic of Korea, Prof. Dr. CHHEANG Vannarith, University of Leeds, UK, Dr. KA Mathul, Royal Academy of Cambodia, Dr. YANG Peou, International Relations Institute of Cambodia, Dr. ROS Ravuth, Researcher, Cambodia, and Dr. OUCH Mony, Researcher, Cambodia.

Cambodia's recent history, going from winning the first democratic election in 1993 to not being able to secure a seat in the National Assembly in the 2013 election. The party has had difficulties becoming more than "the King's party" and creating a clear political identity with a distinct program. Its regular alignment to the CPP, with which it shared power in a coalition from 1993 until 2013 election, also made it hard for voters to clearly identify the FUNCINPEC's line (Denis et al. 2013, 52). Hughes (2003, 59) argued that FUNCINPEC's weakness in policy terms, its failure to build on its 1993 electoral victory through forging strong ties with a sympathetic electorate, the risk associated with its military policy and bribes offered by the CPP, led to a splintering of the FUNCINPEC into several different parties between 1995 and 1998, although the lack of success of these splinter groups in the 1998 election led to a return to the fold following the 1998 election. The retirement of King Sihanouk in 2004 and his death in 2012 weakened the party's identity even more, along with several dissidences. The most recent of them led to the creation of the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP) in 2006, on account of a conflict between Prince Norodom and the FUNCINPEC's secretary general Nhek Bunchhay. As a result, the royalist vote in Cambodia became more divided and more confused, as NRP's platform was hard to differentiate from the FUNCINPEC's or, to a certain extent, the CPP's (The NRP and the FUNCINPEC both won two seats in the 2008 General election, receiving respectively 5.62 per cent and 5.05 per cent of the votes). The endeavor did not last and, following the Prince's retirement from politics in 2012, the party was

renamed Nationalist Party. Later on, its merging with the FUNCINPEC was decided (Denis et al. 2013, 52-53).

The two other parties that secured seats in the National Assembly in the 2008 General election are the SRP and the HRP (the two parties secured 26 and 3 seats respectively). In 1995, FUNCINPEC dissident and fierce critic of the government Sam Rainsy founded the Khmer Nation Party, later re-named SRP. In 2003, Kem Sokha, also a former FUNCINPEC member, set up an NGO - Cambodian Centre for Human Rights (CCHR) with the objective of creating a public forum to advance human rights. After being temporarily detained for defamation, and supported by a 200,000 strong thumbprint petition, Kem Sokha turned his Centre into the political party - HRP in 2007. These two parties SRP and HRP are younger, and rooted in a different period of the history of Cambodia (Denis et al. 2013, 50-51).

Realizing that a divided opposition carried diminishing electoral potential, the SRP and the HRP finally merged to form a new party under the banner of the CNRP in July (Un 2013a, 144), a year before the election to challenge the CPP. The newly formed CNRP is under the leadership of Sam Rainsy as the president (Committee for Free and Fair Election 2012b, 24). The successful merger between the two parties coupled with increased attention among young first-time voters, the stakes were perceived as higher than ever (Grömping 2013b). However, responding to the merger, Prime Minister Hun Sen characterized the CNRP as a “storm in a clay pot” (Un 2013a, 143-144). But in the aftermath of the election results announced on the evening of July 28, 2013, Prime Minister Hun Sen shocked at how well

the opposition had fared (The Economist 2013).

Denis et al. (2013, 54) noted that the tendency of personalization of the party, such as Hun Sen's almost thirty-year rule in the CPP or the royal family in the FUNCINPEC, is also sometimes unfortunately recurrent. Owing to its long history, the CPP outplays its opponents in membership numbers and organizational structure at all administrative levels. It is now clear that the CPP and the CNRP are major actors in Cambodian political landscape, while the FUNCINPEC is facing uncertain future.

IV. Electoral Campaign

On 27 June 2013, tens of thousands of supporters thronged the streets of Cambodia's capital to officially kick off campaigns for political parties contesting national election, as the country's main opposition leader, Sam Rainsy, was in exile to avoid serving 11 years in prison on charges many consider politically motivated. The CPP and at least five opposition parties, considered including the CNRP, held separate rallies in Phnom Penh in preparation for the vote on 28 July 2013. The CPP at that time was widely expected to comfortably win the vote.

The Cambodian government announced on July 12, 2013 that opposition leader in exile Sam Rainsy had been pardoned and was free to return to the country ahead of the general election scheduled for July 28, 2013. Prime Minister Hun Sen had sent a request for a royal pardon

to Cambodia's king, asserting that to promote national reconciliation. The prime minister's move might be seen as an empty gesture helping primarily him and his legitimacy (Grömping 2013b). Sam Rainsy's return thrilled supporters of the CNRP, the coalition of key opposition parties formed to contest the election. The group remained the only serious challenger to Hun Sen's ruling CPP. However, Sam Rainsy was not allowed to register as a candidate, but he campaigned freely in the run-up to the vote and drew large crowds of supporters, suggesting his return had given a boost to the opposition.

The eight parties participating in the election utilized marches, meetings, television debates, leaflets, voter outreach, and internet social media to share their party's political ideals and basic policies in order to gain voter support. The major political parties campaigned focusing on very different policy agendas. While urban dwellers generally favored the opposition, the CPP appeared to have built up a bed rock of support in rural areas, especially in the lowland provinces around Phnom Penh, which had benefited from rapid economic growth over the past two decades. Both parties campaigned on the basis that Cambodia was a nation of farmers (McCargo 2014, 73).

"If Cambodians sympathize with me, like, love and are satisfied with my leadership and have confidence in me, Hun Sen, for leading our country to the peace, stability and development that now exists, please vote for the Cambodian People's Party," was a common phrase in Prime Minister Hun Sen's speeches before the 2013 election (Colin & Kuch 2013). This phrase became a core slogan used by the CPP's campaigners during the 2013 electoral campaign, while the CNRP

campaigning using the simple refrain “*Change!*”, leaving the CPP to respond rather lamely, “*No Change!*” (McCargo 2014, 74). A year before the election, the CPP announced Hun Sen’s candidacy for the future prime minister (Paul 2010) and his premiership candidacy for the 5th and successive National Assemblies was also put in the CPP’s political platforms. Hun Sen had previously indicated that he intended to remain prime minister until 2026 (McCargo 2014, 73).

In its major plank of the political platform, the CPP focused on peace, stability and economic development. It was emphasizing its achievements in peace building and national reconciliation, political stability, public order, infrastructure development, high economic performance, poverty reduction and increasing its presence on the international stage. Moreover, the CPP has promised to deepen comprehensive reforms in all sectors from security to economic and educational reforms (Vannarith 2013).

By contrast, the CNRP announced a seven-point populist manifesto, pledging to raise wages for both workers and government employees and to reduce the price of basic goods such as oil, fertilizer, and electricity (McCargo 2014, 73-74). The CNRP also concentrated on eradicating corruption; increasing employment opportunities for the youth; providing free healthcare for the poor; eliminating land grabbing, forced eviction and illegal logging (Vannarith 2013). Denis et al. (2013, 54) described the CNRP’s policy agendas as issues that were usually found among traditional NGO-topics, and fell short of offering a comprehensive and sufficiently developed political platform.

However, the CNRP presented a set of ways and means to fund its offer of pay rise to government employees: effective collection of taxes and customs duties; tourism charges; US\$70 annual tax per hectare on economic land concessions; licensing fees and royalties on the extraction of gold, coal, oil and gas; taxes on gambling; reduction of wasteful public expenditures through open public bidding, elimination of ghost public servants and soldiers, and of bodyguards and advisors (Women's Media Centre of Cambodia 2013, 11).

FUNCINPEC's primary guiding principle was pursuing a policy of founding father Norodom Sihanouk's philosophy with ethnic harmony. If the FUNCINPEC were to win, the nation would return to the prosperity, progress, social tranquility, political stability, lack of corruption, and non-aggression of the People's Pact time period; Public servants, teachers and doctors would command high salaries (The World and China Institute 2014).

As in previous elections, the CPP invoked the legacy of January 7, 1979, the day on which the Khmer Rouge was removed from power. In his speeches, Hun Sen stressed that the CPP had brought peace, order, and development to the country, asserting that the only alternative to the CPP rule was a return to civil war (McCargo 2014, 73). Meanwhile, opposition leadership continued to promote anti-Vietnamese sentiment during the CNRP election rallies, promising to expel illegal Vietnamese immigrants as one of his party's policies. The derogatory term for Vietnamese, *Yuon*, was repeatedly used by the CNRP leadership (Transparency International Cambodia 2013, 9). The CPP had first come to power with support of Vietnam in 1979 providing the

CNRP a platform of allegations against the CPP to be not ‘truly Khmer’ (Committee for Free and Fair Elections 2014, 17).

McCargo (2014, 74) noted that in Phnom Penh, both parties mobilized young people to front their campaigns: banner-waving youths on motorbikes cruised the city in packs, especially in the evenings, while the CPP stationed groups of chanting students at key locations, especially near the Independence Monument. Woe betide any passers-by sporting opposition logos: they were pulled over and their CNRP stickers torn off. While the CPP campaign was well-equipped and funded—most of those taking part were paid—CNRP activists were overwhelmingly volunteers. An NGO leader described the CPP campaign as “weak, robotic and heartless” compared with the more impassioned and spontaneous electioneering of the CNRP. But the same paradox afflicted both campaigns: kids out on the streets, dancing and cheering beneath images of old men. Most CPP posters featured the jaded triumvirate of Chea Sim, Hun Sen, and Heng Samrin, while those of the CNRP depicted Sam Rainsy clasping hands with Kem Sokha, all those are at their eighties to sixties. For all the façade of youth, this was a campaign featuring lots of aging faces and well-worn themes.

Neither party seemed really to grasp the changing dynamics of the electorate. While most Cambodians nominally live in rural areas, villagers of working age of ten spend much of the year selling their labor in and around Phnom Penh, in neighboring Thailand, or even further afield. Although they vote in the country side, they live and work in cities, and their dreams and aspirations are almost entirely

urban. These “urbanized villagers” feel no debt of gratitude to the CPP for having developed the nation, and the 70% of the population aged under 30 have no memories of the collective renewal following the 1975–79 Khmer Rouge era. They were repelled by the emotionalism of slogans such as “If You Love/If You Pity/If You Like/If You Trust/Hun Sen/Vote CPP,” and by the ubiquitous ruling party logos on the villas and luxury cars of regime beneficiaries (Mc Cargo 2014, 74-75).

Besides being strongly visible through display of campaign materials, the CPP has overwhelmingly dominated most media coverage. For the 2013 national election campaign, the CPP dominated 87.98% of the airtime of Bayon News channel, which is owned by Prime Minister Hun Sen’s daughter, and 75% of all political coverage on Cambodian Television Network (CTN) (The Electoral Reform Alliance 2013, 11-12). Radio is more balanced, with a few independent stations providing objective reporting. However, these stations are under threat. In 2012, the government shut down independent broadcasting by stations Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA) during the campaign. In 2013, the Ministry of Information issued a ban on local radio stations from rebroadcasting Khmer-language radio programs from foreign broadcasters such as RFA, VOA, Radio France International, and ABC Radio Australia. However, this was later withdrawn when the ban sparked heavy criticism from foreign and local rights groups and the broadcasters themselves (The Electoral Reform Alliance 2013, 12).

It was observed that the 2013 election marked the first time social

media and other Internet services (for example, Facebook YouTube) played an important role in Cambodia's electoral process. It is estimated that currently about one million Cambodians, mostly between ages of 18 and 30, use Facebook for information exchange, including discussions about politics and elections. This has shifted the election campaign strategies of the main contesting political parties, which now increasingly use the Internet to reach supporters and share information through web pages, videos, online interviews, and Twitter (The Electoral Reform Alliance 2013, 12-13). Now cell phones have emerged as perhaps also the most effective tools that contribute to the formulation of public opinion. Their audio-visual mode helps a great deal in assimilating views and opinions expressed even in the remotest part of the country. They help in converting views into the most representative public opinion and also in communicating it to all concerned.

The opposition party clearly had more supporters on social media, most of whom were young. The opposition party used social media to organize campaign events which has helped garner support among young people and has been a game changer in gathering support where the ruling party has monopolized television coverage. The CPP also made use of social media in advance of the election. Profiles called Samdech Hun Sen and Cambodian Prime Minister were set up on Facebook by activists supportive of the CPP and used to deliver political messages to the public. In addition to showcasing the achievements of the CPP, the sites were also used to disseminate

negative images of the opposition and describe the problematic consequences should the country change leadership.

It's worth noting that in late 1990s, the ensuing gift-giving by the political parties had great appeal to rural voters, and widely used by major political parties, but this strategy might not work in most recent election. According to the survey by the Asia Foundation found that, virtually all Cambodians think it is okay to accept money from a political party but to vote for the party they like. This is a significant change in perceptions of "vote buying" from its 2003 survey, where just 81% of respondents thought it was okay to take the money and still vote their choice. Recent research suggested that, in most cases, vote buying (money or gifts) occurred between candidates and their supporters rather than non-supporters. The gift is a symbol of the ties between candidates and constituents (which is particularly important in patron/client or feudal societies), and its purpose is more to turn out the vote than to alter political choice. In Cambodia, it is now clear that vote buying is not an effective tactic for changing political choice, as 98% of respondents say it would be okay to take the money from any candidates and then vote for the party they like (The Asia Foundation 2014, 46).

The most remarkable thing in the electoral campaign was that there were thousands of people turning out to support both the CPP and the opposition CNRP during their rallies throughout the country (Transparency International Cambodia 2013, 8). However, the other contesting political parties lacked this dominance during the official

campaign. Solely FUNCINPEC attracted some attention. It was observed that in the provinces of Kampong Cham, Takeo and Phnom Penh, the rallies of the FUNCINPEC attracted some 10,000 voters (Committee for Free and Fair Elections 2013, 26). Smaller political parties relied less on large rallies but gatherings, meetings and door-to-door campaigns. Also campaign materials were more often displayed from the main contesters CPP, CNRP and FUNCINPEC than from other contesting political parties. Smaller parties lacked often the financial resources for an intensive election campaign. Considering additionally the uneven level-playing field in the election competition clearly favoring the ruling CPP, they were the most disadvantaged, though smaller parties gained some minor coverage in state and private TV and radio stations.

Many critics have suggested that unequal access to the media was the most significant factor that contributed to the opposition parties' failure to capture a plurality of votes. This allegation has not been substantiated by empirical research; but the experiences of other transitional and post-conflict societies suggest as a matter of principle that unequal access to the media creates an uneven playing-field; this allows the dominant party to monopolize the provision of information and thus shape voters' perceptions. Cambodia is no exception (Un 2008).

V. Voter Turnout

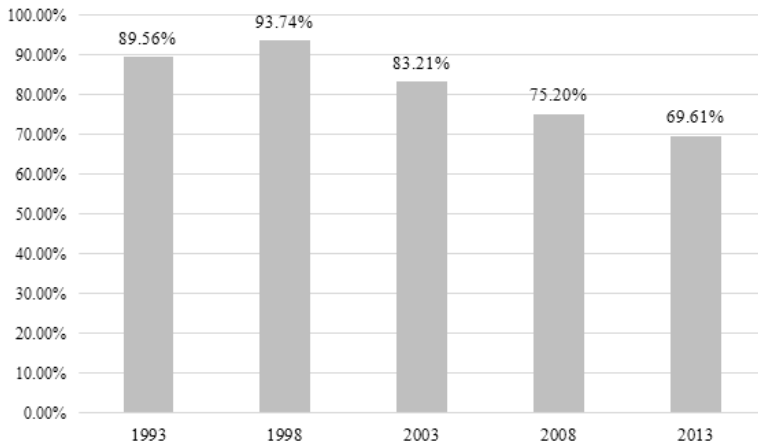
National turnout in the 2013 election was only 69.61% of registered voters, according to the NEC. This was a modest decrease from 75.20% in 2008, and it has steadily declined since the 1998 election. However, it remained reasonable high compared with the other countries ranging from the Philippines to India to the United States (Press and Quick Reaction Unit of the Office of the Council of Ministers 2013, 3). In the 2013 polling station results, the NEC did not include the number of invalid votes. The valid votes and invalid votes were shown by provinces, and the national total invalid votes were 1.60%.

The decline in voter turnout in Cambodia can be explained in many factors. An observation made by an NGO working on elections found that one cause for the decline in voter turnout was that the voter lists were erroneous leading to the disenfranchisement of voters. In many cases voters were refused in this election because they were not on the voter list or wrongly registered. Additionally not all Cambodian citizens have national ID cards, requiring voters to obtain alternate documents of identification, Identity Certificate for Elections (ICEs). Also this process was often accompanied by errors. It was found that many voters were refused to vote on the election day because they lacked proper identification, obtained no or ICEs with wrong data or being registered wrongly on the voter list (Committee for Free and Fair Elections 2013, 90).

Other explanatory factors for the declining voter turnout were that

polling stations were sometimes too far from residences of voters implying high transportation costs, were unreachable because of bad weather conditions (elections in Cambodia are always held during the rainy season in July) or because elections were held during days, when citizens were pre-occupied with their work. Other factors were that some Cambodians were simply ignorant of elections, whereas some citizens reported not to vote because they did not find any of the contesting political parties attractive, while others found that their vote would make no difference. Other factors were lack of voter education, lack of information and lack of political awareness, in particular among youth voters (Committee for Free and Fair Elections 2013, 90).

Figure 1: Percentage of voter turnout since 1993



Source: Prepared by author based on NEC (2013, 5) and <http://neclect.org.kh> (Accessed on 24 December 2014)

In a rapid survey of 4,103 voters made by Committee for Free and

Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL) during the election day revealed that 48.30% of eligible voters interviewed could not vote, because they had not found their names on the voter list, lacked voter information in which polling station to vote or found discrepancies between their identification documents and the information recorded on the voter list at the polling station and subsequently lost their voting right. 41.5% of the people who didn't vote said that they wanted to vote, but they didn't go because they didn't register, because they were sick, were busy with work, did not get proper information or had not the money to vote. Among those some wrongly believed they need the voter information notices (VIN) to be able to vote. 10.2% of voters who had not voted said they did not vote because they were not interested in the election. Among the voters who did not vote the survey found no discrepancies in terms of gender and age. Women as well as youth voters stated similar reasons than others, why they did not go to vote (Committee for Free and Fair Elections 2013, 95).

As observed by author there were some workers residing in Phnom Penh did not return to their villages to vote, duplicate voters on the list was another factor, for example one of my neighbor, her name was listed in three different polling stations where she used to vote there since 1993. In addition, according to election monitors and NGOs that work with migrants, roughly 600,000 migrant workers currently estimated to live and work in Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea both legally and illegally, were unlikely to cast their vote (Dene-Hern & Khuon 2013). These were the primary factors behind the declining voter turnout.

While there are likely many explanations for this, one factor may be that the continued success of the CPP in every local and national election has led to voter apathy. If elections are not perceived to be a legitimate vehicle for holding leaders accountable or for influencing the composition of the government, frustration with the system discourages participation. If people see that the fifth National Assembly election does not bring political change, they may lose hope in the system.

VI. Analysis of the Election Results

In a country without a tradition of reliable opinion polls, the election's outcome is difficult to predict. However, Prime Minister Hun Sen has a great advantage in his tight control of the news media, the patronage machine he has built up over the years for the CPP and the ability to use the party's wealth to mobilize support (Thomas 2013a). Given the CPP had won successive both national and subnational elections since 1998, especially the land-slide victory in national election in 2008 and local election in 2012, it was expected that the CPP would comfortably win the 2013 election. But due to Sam Rainsy's return and the merger of his party and another major opposition party into the new CNRP, coupled with increased attention among young first-time voters, the stakes were perceived as higher than ever (Grömping 2013b). This put the prospective victory of the ruling CPP in question. Finally, the election results were not far behind

from what they were thought just some days before the election. The questions were then the recognition of the election results and the questionable legitimacy of the election.

In the evening of 28 July 2013, Sam Rainsy had initially announced a victory, but retracted his claim (Thomas 2013c). Around 7:40 pm, Khiev Kanharith, Cambodian Information Minister and CPP's Spokesperson rushed to announce in his Facebook that the CPP won 68 seats and the CNRP won 55 seats. In that evening, around 9:00 pm and a day after polls, the state-run Television of Kampuchea (TVK) announced the preliminary election results released by the NEC. The results showed that the CPP won a relatively narrow victory (Thomas 2013b). Based on preliminary results, the calculation of seats confirmed the announcement by Khiev Kanharith no change. Two days later, Sam Rainsy raised the stakes by declaring victory outright, claiming his party actually won 63 of the National Assembly's 123 seats. With both sides claiming to have won the election, Cambodia was then stuck in political deadlock. Similar periods of paralysis followed elections in 1998 and 2003, when the CPP failed to win the two-thirds majority then required to form a government. Although the actual counting of votes confirmed the victory of the ruling party, alleged irregularities on voter's registrations and manipulation of voter rolls to allow 'ghost' voters, improperly sealed vote tallies as well as vote buying led to a tampering of election results.

Table 1: Number of Votes Received by Parties by Province

Code	Provinces Municipalities	Name of Political Parties ordered as seen in Ballot Paper								Total Valid Votes
		CNP	FUNCINPEC	RDP	CPP	KEDP	KAPP	CNRP	LDP	
01	Banteay Meanchey	1,768	30,105	1,962	148,593		1,432	64,732	2,338	250,930
02	Battambang	2,582	15,815	2,696	223,733		2,741	162,527	7,755	417,849
03	Kampong Cham	6,464	26,202		376,812		8,938	457,819	6,748	882,353
04	Kampong Chhnang	1,281	14,533	1,315	123,341	1,803	1,441	96,210	1,606	241,530
05	Kampong Speu	1,958	12,449	2,146	180,099	3,111	2,471	186,867	4,008	393,109
06	Kampong Thom	2,326	22,934	2,740	128,799	4,127	2,344	115,880	2,634	281,784
07	Kampot	1,473	11,335	2,106	147,265	3,055	2,074	125,320	2,450	648,737
08	Kandal	2,152	8,285	1,434	261,587	2,579	2,533	366,056	4,111	648,737
09	Koh Kong	377	1,527	386	28,632		341	11,017	439	42,719
10	Kratie	1,417	4,750	1,337	71,052		1,294	59,774	1,266	140,910
11	Mondul Kiri	366	963	379	17,380			4,244	211	23,534
12	Phnom Penh	1,257	7,820	995	257,351		2,047	382,880	4,904	657,254
13	Preah Vihear	1,030	4,522	1,470	53,935		905	19,199	1,087	82,148
14	Prey Veng	3,582	13,243	2,324	251,689		3,465	287,778	6,536	588,617
15	Pursat	731	3,324	1,202	142,135	1,306	834	48,417	1,239	199,249
16	Ratanak Kiri	582	1,917	791	39,630		407	7,821	489	51,637
17	Siem Reap	3,239	30,338	4,362	193,093		3,785	140,737	11,319	386,873
18	Sihanoukville	458	2,310	505	50,110		555	30,558	679	85,175
19	Stung Treng	502	2,545	571	34,032		312	6,962	375	45,299
20	Svay Rieng	1,722	6,377	1,859	183,258		1,674	99,600	2,479	296,769
21	Takeo	1,713	14,724	1,992	245,387	3,171	2,455	236,686	3,615	509,743
22	Kep	101	739		14,299		209	4,165	109	19,622
23	Pailin	143	707	157	16,536		149	8,959	258	26,919
24	Oddor Meanchey	899	4,889	1,176	47,851		816	21,968	258	26,919
Total		38,123	242,413	33,715	3,235,969	19,152	43,222	2,946,176	68,389	6,627,159

Source: <http://necelect.org.kh> (Accessed on 24 December 2014)

Before the election, three major parties, CPP, CNRP and FUNCINPEC, expected too high for the election results. In his speech, Prime Minister Hun Sen expected that his CPP would win at least two-thirds of seats in the National Assembly (Qibing & Nguon 2013), while the CNRP calculated the prospective results in three possibilities: 1/3 or 42 seats based on the popular votes of the SRP and the HRP combined in 2008, gaining more 5 seats or 47 seats, and the

last possibility was over half of the seats. The FUNCINPEC believed it would win seats at least numbering into the double digits, 10 or above (The World and China Institute 2014).

The official election results were announced by the NEC on September 8, 2013. The results indicated the close vote share received by the two major contending parties, in which the CPP secured 3,235,969 votes (49% of the popular vote) and 68 seats (55%), down 22 from the 2008 election and the CNRP garnered 2,946,176 votes (44%) and 55 seats (45%), 26 more than SRP and HRP combined in 2008. The royalist party FUNCINPEC, victor in 1993, failed to gain a single seat, further evidence of the monarchy's precipitate decline. The other five political parties did not win any seat as well.

These results showed that support for the ruling party has slipped significantly while support for the opposition had increased considerably. Urban areas constituted the primary support for the opposition while rural areas continued their support of the ruling party. There was not much of a discrepancy between voter support and distribution of the seats, i.e. the ruling party's capture of 49% of the vote while holding 55% of the seats and the opposition's capture of 44% of the vote while holding 45% of the seats was fairly close. This phenomenon reflects a fundamental change in the political structure.

The CNRP won in particular in provinces and municipalities an absolute majority of votes and seats, which have the highest district magnitude. This includes Kampong Cham (10:8), Kandal (6:5), Phnom Penh (7:5) and Prey Veng (6:5)² In provinces where fewer

2) Numbers are indicating CNRP's seats against CPP's.

Table 2: Number of Seats Received by the CPP and the CNRP by Province

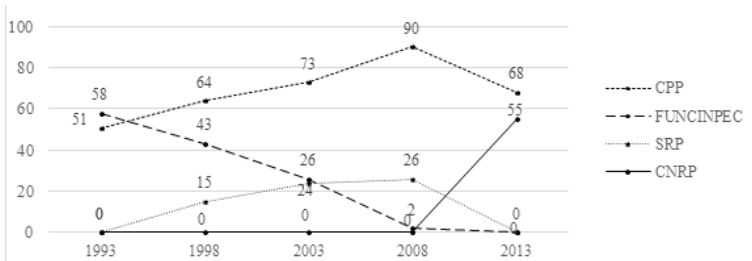
Code	Provinces/Municipalities	CPP	CNRP	Seats
01	Banteay Meanchey	4	2	6
02	Battambang	5	3	8
03	Kampong Cham	8	10	18
04	Kampong Chhanang	2	2	4
05	Kampong Speu	3	3	6
06	Kampong Thom	3	3	6
07	Kampot	3	3	6
08	Kandal	5	6	12
09	Koh Kong	1	0	1
10	Kratie	2	1	3
11	Mondul Kiri	1	0	1
12	Phnom Penh	5	7	12
13	Preah Vihear	1	0	1
14	Prey Veng	5	6	11
15	Pursat	3	1	4
16	Ratanak Kiri	1	0	1
17	Siem Reap	4	2	6
18	Sihanoukville	1	0	1
19	Stung Treng	1	0	1
20	Svay Rieng	3	2	5
21	Takeo	4	4	8
22	Kep	1	0	1
23	Pailin	1	0	1
24	Oddor Meanchey	1	0	1
Total		68	55	123

Source: <http://www.necselect.org.kh> (Accessed on 24 December 2014)

seats were distributed, the CNRP failed to win a majority of seats or had only an equal number of seats than the CPP. This indicates that a more proportional election system would be to the advantage of the opposition. Currently only 15 of the 24 provinces are multi-member electoral constituencies. Though the seat allocation brought a majority of seats for the CPP with 68 against 55 seats for the CNRP, the CPP won with only a difference of 289,793 in total number of votes against the CNRP. In the parliamentary election 2008 the CPP secured, in all 24 provinces and municipalities, a majority in total number of votes

and number of parliamentary seats allocated (Committee for Free and Fair Elections 2014, 18).

Figure 2: Comparison of Seats Received by CPP, FUNCINPEC, SRP and CNRP with Previous Elections



Source: Prepared by author based on Committee for Free and Fair Elections 2014, p. 17.

Invited international observers from the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP) and the Centrist Asia Pacific Democrats International (CAPDI) claimed that the process had been “free, fair and transparent.” Nevertheless the election saw many complaints about voter registration processes and media biases, with Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) calling for an independent investigation (Grömping 2013a). International bodies such as the European Union (EU) decided not to send teams of election observers, in part because they were reluctant to rubber-stamp a foregone conclusion (McCargo 2014, 73).

Rather than celebrate the CNRP’s unprecedented success and seek to maximize their impact, Sam Rainsy immediately rejected the election results, alleging that over one million names had been removed from voter lists. He appealed to the UN and King Sihamoni to intervene, and announced that the CNRP would boycott the National

Assembly (McCargo 2014, 75-76). The FUNCINPEC, the long-term coalition partner with the CPP also joined the CNRP to request an investigation into election irregularities (Alex & Khy 2013). Despite these pleas, King Sihamoni promptly approved the election results, and Hun Sen was reappointed prime minister unopposed when the National Assembly reopened on September 23, 2013. The CNRP responded by organizing a series of protest rallies and called for the creation of a Truth Commission “to provide justice to voters.” While these rallies passed without incident, the wisdom of Rainsy’s approach was open to question, since the international community had a limited appetite for further interventions in Cambodian politics, and the CPP victory was now a *fait accompli* (McCargo 2014, 75-76).

Finally, on 22 July 2014, the CPP and the CNRP reached an agreement to end the year-long political deadlock (Sofia Diogo 2014). The agreement included the reforms of the NEC and the leadership of the National Assembly and Senate. In the agreement, The National Assembly leadership positions were shared among both parties in which the president must be from the CPP, the first vice-president from the CNRP and the second vice-president from the CPP. Both parties agreed to establish an additional parliamentary commission of investigation and anti-corruption division, and the leadership of the ten commissions was divided equally (The Phnom Penh Post 2014). On 5 August 2014, the 55 CNRP lawmakers swore into parliament at the Royal Palace under the auspices of the nation’s King Norodom Sihamoni, and started their parliamentary session for the first time three days later (Global Times 2014). The CNRP’s move suggests the

culture of post-election power-sharing in Cambodia as well as strengthening the legitimacy of the CPP-led government.

VII. Factors behind the Election Results

Despite the alleged election frauds, the election results represented a big change in voting attitude that the unbeatable ruling CPP's seats dropped and the opposition's rose for the first time since the 1993 UN-sponsored election. More interestingly, the opposition made inroads into the countryside, which had long been the CPP's territory; leading the CPP in at least three populous provinces and falling just behind it in others. Thus, it is important to reflect on a most-asked question – why so many people suddenly fell out of love with the CPP and shifted their allegiance to the opposition CNRP.

The CPP's decline and the CNRP's rising popularity lie on a set of factors including socio-economic issues, government's policy and leadership, the successful merging of the SRP and the HRP to form the CNRP and its populist manifesto, new modes of communication such as mobile phones and social media and the youth participation in politics, nationalism sentiment rhetoric, and the people's desire for change.

Socio-economic Issues

Over past decades, much of the credit for the CPP's success must

go to the collective CPP leadership in running a tight ship on the one hand and delivering roads, irrigation canals, schools, and clinics across the country on the other. Above all, there was a prevailing sense of stability in a country that had shed so much blood and so many tears (Verghese 2008). Since the early 2000s, the economy has been growing at an unprecedented rate. Many human indicators such as education, health, life expectancy, and literacy are improving. In addition, the number of people living below the poverty line has been significantly reduced since the early 1990s (Phoak 2014a), and rapid development in almost all fronts. Unfortunately, Cambodia also declined in other fronts, such as bridging the urban-rural divide, widespread discontent over issues such as social injustice, corruption, land concession, border issues and foreign immigrants, all of which eroded trust in the government and in the ruling CPP, but gave credit to the opposition party.

Peou (2015), attributed the CPP-led government's ignorance in taking efficient actions to combat rampant corruption in the country, unemployment, land grabbing, destruction of environment and natural resources, and legal or illegal Vietnamese immigrants living in Cambodia, to a major factor that caused the CPP lose support among the masses, especially the middle class. Ravuth (2015) suggests that the yawning gap between the materialized social classes and the ever poor rural folk could erupt into a political upset for the ruling party. Development has created a newly rich class — business tycoons, government elites, the military — while dispossessing the rural and the

urban poor. Yet instead of addressing growing inequality and corruption, the CPP campaigned on the memory of the Khmer Rouge, using the brutal regime as a yardstick for its own achievements, and reasserted the traditional Khmer patronage system (Un 2013b).

Land concession is one among other outstanding sensitive problems that shakes the CPP. Peou (2015) blames the CPP for 99-year long lease of land concession policy that created inequality in society; economic benefits go disproportionately to a small coterie of regime cronies. Ou Virak, former president of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, said that internally, the CPP is one big mess – from nepotism and family ties through marriage, to economic deals that favors close allies (Andrew & Chan Thul 2013). More million hectares of land concession provided to foreign companies – including some from Vietnam, a country much resented in Cambodia – is breeding discontent (Ellen 2013). Ravuth (2015) linked the land problems with discontent of the people with the government by arguing that land grabbing by the powerful and the rich and granting of land concessions for investors' plantation and logging often lead to land disputes and violence, people become landless, and lose their professions, dwellings and religious practice places.

Government's Policy and Leadership

Among other factors, some scholars emphasize the government's leadership style and its ignorance toward public servants creating discontent. Mathul (2015) views the CPP-led government as

oligarchical leadership style in which power effectively rests on a small number of people. Prime Minister Hun Sen's office to dominate other powers such as legislative and juridical branches could be the diminishing return of his power policy. Mony (2015) shares similar thoughts suggesting that a number of the public servants, military, police especially teachers, have been disappointed with their low pay and ignorance from the government, so they shifted their support from the CPP. Moreover, if public servants are not happy with their ministers, there is no way for them to get their message across within the party; they are left with no choice but to denounce their own party. It is no coincidence that anonymous letters accusing some ministers of corruption and nepotism have circulated in social media (Phoak 2014a). Of course, it is extremely hard, if not impossible, to verify the authenticity of these letters. Still, they suggest that discontent toward the government is real.

On the other hand, the CPP might misread popular support because of status quo and feel-good reports. Phoak argues that for many CPP members, loyalty is best expressed through actions that defend their leaders' credibility and reputation, even if that requires denying the obvious. This phenomenon is so entrenched that it has become one of the most important factors in deciding who will get what and when in the party. Anyone who seeks to defy the status quo faces isolation or even punishment. So even if they know that the government has made mistakes, party officials are reluctant to acknowledge them, for fear of being accused of lacking loyalty or being labeled as opposition sympathizers. Instead of speaking the truth, they attempt to cover up

the bad news, and hope that they can fix the problem before their superiors find out. The result is that leaders are not in touch with the situation on the ground, especially if they rely entirely on subordinates' feel-good reports. This problem has deep and serious implications. It seriously undermines the party's ability to accurately assess Cambodia's changing political landscape (Phoak 2014a). An example to confirm this, as previously claimed by Cheam Yeap, the CPP has 5.7 million members (Qibing & Nguon 2013), nearly half of the CPP members deserted their party on the election day, remarkable considering the nexus between party patronage, government jobs, and business opportunities (Ellen 2013).

Merging of the SRP with the HRP and the CNRP's Populist Manifesto

All negative social problems and the government's failure to address those problems gave credit to the CNRP. However, there is broad consensus among scholars that the successful merger between the SRP and the HRP to form the CNRP and its seven-point populist manifesto greatly contributed to the CNRP's rising popularity. Moreover, the opposition party promised to fight corruption head-on, such as land grabbing and forced eviction, illegal logging and deforestation, illegal migration from Vietnam, and to top it all, to protect territorial sovereignty, in this case, referring to the border issues with Vietnam. All in, it was an attractive package for voters.

During the electoral campaign, in its political platforms, the CNRP introduced the following 7-point policy goals that focus on social

welfare: providing the elderly aged 65 and above with a subsidy of USD10 per month, a minimum wage for workers at USD150 per month, minimum monthly salary for public servants at USD 250, guaranteeing stable agricultural product prices (setting the price floor for the rice crop at 1,000 Riels/Kg), providing free medical services to the poor, ensuring young people have equal opportunities for education and employment, and initiating policies to reduce prices for oil, fertilizer, electricity and reduce interest rates. This is for the first time in the 2013 national election, the opposition party offered a clear policy that promised to increase family household income, contrary to the previous elections, the opposition party promised, vaguely, to improve people's livelihoods.

Kimly (2014) suggested that this promise of aggressive increase in family household income appealed to both urban and rural dwellers and to voters of all age groups and has significantly boosted CNRP's popularity among voters. He argued that it is the magic of the numbers 10, 150, and 250 that has enabled the CNRP to penetrate CPP's rural power base and increase its popularity in urban areas. The garment and shoe industry employs more than 350,000 young workers, many of whom come from rural areas and send small amounts of money to their parents back home in villages. So when many of these 350,000 workers combined with approximately 200,000 public servants influenced their family members to vote for the party that promised them an increase in salary, we see a huge surge in the number of people casting votes for the opposition party.

By the way, given low literacy rate and poverty of Cambodian

people, Touch (2015) suggests that the campaign messages must be short, simple and easy to understand, and directly impact people's everyday lives tangibly. In this regard, the CNRP's 7-point policies were more competitive compared with the CPP's policies which were too long and complicated that ordinary people especially those in rural areas could not grasp the concepts and could not work out the direct relationship between these big ideas and their everyday lives.

Social Media and Youth Participation in Politics

The arrival of the social media and Facebook was attributed as another factor boosting the CNRP's popularity. This new mode of communication is altering Cambodia's political landscape and posing one of the greatest threats to the status quo in Cambodian politics (Colin 2013). According to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, the number of mobile subscribers reached 20 million in 2013, while the number of Internet users stood at 3.8 million. Meanwhile, Social Media Plus shows that there were almost 740,000 Cambodian Facebook accounts in 2012 (Phoak 2014b). This new medium has created a nascent and more pluralistic online political environment where Cambodians exchange different political viewpoints freely. These are significant emerging trends that will impact youth political behavior beyond the 2013 election (Sophat 2013).

Given limited access to traditional media outlets, the CNRP used social media as backbone in its campaign strategy while the ruling party was still skeptical to what extent this new technology can replace

the traditional one. However, prior to the July 2013 election, both the CPP and the CNRP did make heavy use of social media to connect with voters and give them a platform to criticize the other side (Phoak 2014b). The CNRP effectively used social media during the run-up to the 2013 general election by amassing vast crowds to advocate for political change. Their significant gain in the National Assembly, winning 55 seats out of 123, was most likely due to their organizing strategy (Sopheap 2014). Peou (2015) suggests that the new arrival of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogging and YouTube, had greatly energized the CNRP support.

The active youth's participation in politics in the 2013 election was broadly discussed. Despite skepticism around the election, some important takeaways have already emerged. CNRP's ability to spark strong interest among younger voters, particularly in urban areas, clearly demonstrates that youth under the age of 25, which accounts for 53.8 percent of Cambodia's population, have a radically different set of expectations than their parents. This new generation is more educated, consumerist, and in search of higher living standards. Increasingly drawn to urban areas for work, Khmer youths do not carry the same willingness as older generations to be detached from politics or bound by traditional social norms. Better jobs and improved access to services, especially in urban Cambodia, were emerging as priorities for youth in the election (Silas 2013). However, the influence of these young voters in the election was difficult to assess and particularly complex. But youths were nonetheless bound to hold weight more and more in Cambodia's political life, which could turn out to be a decisive

advantage for the opposition, as its platform seems to address their main concerns more than the current CPP program (Denis et al. 2013, 63).

In addition, the impact of young Cambodian migrant workers on the election results should not be overlooked. There were estimated 60,000 Cambodian migrant workers selling their labors abroad such as in Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea, for higher wage (Dene-Hern & Khuon 2013). Those migrant workers have experienced fast development, modernity and vibrant democracy in foreign countries where they were working. This prompted them to reflect on different condition in Cambodia, thus likely changing their perspectives on life and their relations with the state. According to a report in by the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Cambodian migrant workers in 2012 were estimated to have sent home \$256 million in remittances (Dene-Hern & Khuon 2013). This is a huge amount of money that could improve their family living condition, and they could influence their families in terms of economy. Mony (2015) said that most migrant workers, if not all, called to their relatives to ask them to cast their vote for change. Despite no study on this confirmed, but it suggests an impact on election results, and it would be an interesting topic for further research.

Nationalistic Sentiment Rhetoric

Hun Sen's long-running justification of his authoritarian rule has hinged on lingering fears of renewed genocide – but this tactic no

longer works in Cambodia where the majority of the population is under 30 years old, too young to remember the 1970s genocide or the Vietnamese occupation that followed (Ellen 2013). With this regard, Touch(2015) assumes that over-dependent foreign policy of the CPP with Vietnam and with China, put the CPP at risk in the election. Mathul (2015) views that the CPP became a victim of its past for the fact that its predecessor PRPK government was installed by Vietnam while Cambodia was under Vietnamese military occupation from 1979 until 1993, so it was frequently accused of being a Vietnamese puppet. He is convinced that this image, more or less, coupled with the throwing of anti-Vietnamese nationalistic rhetoric by the opposition party, negatively impact the CPP. Mony (2015) shares similar ideas with Mathul echoing the people's perceived loss of land of Cambodia to Vietnam referring to border issues between the two countries, being a reason for an alternative in the election.

Another factor that the opposition tried to take advantage was Vietnamese immigrants. Because of the past history, to some Cambodian people, Vietnamese immigrants were seen as invaders, and challengers of their works, property and heritage. In Siem Reap opposition leader Sam Rainsy told during the second largest rally in the country with 20,000 voters that he would return Angkor Wat from the Vietnamese by saying: "*We are full. We have been eating Vietnamese sour soup for 30 years. This time we need to eat a traditional Khmer Soup.*" He further claimed that land has been mainly lost to Vietnamese companies and illegal immigrants from Vietnam and promised: "*We have to kick the Vietnamese out and will collect our*

property back” (Khuon & Colin 2013). Estimates on the actual number of ethnic Vietnamese citizens vary widely. According to a commune survey by the Ministry of Planning in 2010, ethnic Vietnamese number about 90,000, while the U.S. CIA’s World Fact Book, which is not an authoritative source, estimates the figure to be about 5 percent of the country’s 15.2 million population, or more than 700,000 people, making them the single largest ethnic group (Colin & Khuon 2013). Peou and Mathul among other scholars, suggest this nationalistic rhetoric was one of the factors that gave the popularity to the CNRP.

People’s Desire for Change

Long-held power of more than three decades of the CPP and Prime Minister Hun Sen led to discussion of change. A survey by International Republican Institute (IRI) released early 2014, shows that among the main factors in deciding which party to support in the July 2013 election, voters’ most often stated reason was, “the country needs a change” (IRI 2014). Touch (2015) echoed this survey suggesting that there was a big trend of change in Cambodian society. But there were only two choices between the CPP and the CNRP for the people to vote for change. Touch (2015) explained that even though FUNCINPEC was the winner of the 1993 election, but this party has heavily relied on the legacy of the then King Norodom Sihanouk, they just took King Norodom Sihanouk’s reputation and used it for propaganda. They had no clear policies and they had not done much thing tangibly in the past,

so they lost support of the grassroots members. A significant number of voters were disappointed with the FUNCINPEC's collaboration with the CPP in the previous government, swinging their votes. Moreover, those who were disappointed with both the CPP and the FUNCINPEC, and those who suffered from social injustice, shifted their votes to the CNRP. And the other parties were small, unwell-organized, and often viewed as puppets of the ruling CPP to split the vote share from the opposition. Thus, he concludes that it was most likely that people voted for the CNRP because they needed change but no choice.

VIII. Change in the Cambodian Political Landscape

After the election, a big question was what might be a crucial change in Cambodian political landscape. Despite the CPP still dominates absolute majority in the National Assembly and leads unilateral government, it can't keep the status quo – the 2013 election results suggest people's desire of change. The election itself reflected some changes already. Some days before the election, under likely external pressure, at the request of Prime Minister Hun Sen, King Norodom Sihamoni granted royal pardon to the opposition leader Sam Rainsy, even though the pardon was not granted early enough for him to stand as a candidate but it allowed him to freely campaign. On the other hand, the election was a marked decrease in electoral-related violence, and the increased role of social media allowed for a more lively exchange of information and political views than transpired in previous

elections. And after the election, we could see at least two major changes – change in the ruling party and government leadership style with people oriented approach, and improved parliamentary roles with two-party system.

Known for its disciplined organization, the CPP was now faced with unprecedented and daunting challenges to effectively respond, adapt and move ahead to swiftly reform itself and the government to restore the public's trust and confidence in the party. The depth, breadth and pace of reforms need to be assessed within the time-binding constraints of the next five years and way beyond (Vichet Van 2013). Otherwise it will risk facing oblivion in the elections to come, if not in 2018, then the 2023 (Mohan 2014).

Changes have been made. We're seeing the CPP and its leader Hun Sen reshuffle the government, plugging in new blood – albeit sons of the elite – while repositioning old leaders into different posts, in addition to raising wages for civil servants and local government officials (Tan Keo 2013).

During the first cabinet meeting on September 26, 2013, Prime Minister Hun Sen pledged efforts to carry out deep-going reforms of legal and judicial systems, fight corruption and achieve good governance. He also promised pay rise for civil servants and armed forces, and better land and forest management (Global Times 2013). Whether it will be able to live up to its promises remains to be seen. Following his speech, Cambodian government ministries have been busy rolling out a laundry list of policies to address the problems that cost the CPP public support. The hope is that positive results can

enable the party to avoid further decline. For its part, the opposition argues that the attempt is just a façade designed to get public attention, and that the government will renege on its promises when the threats fade (Phoak 2014a).

Another remarkable thing, Hun Sen's cordial talks with the opposition come as a surprise considering his past ruthlessness with political opponents and his history of antagonism with Sam Rainsy (Andrew & Chan Thul 2013). In addition, the CPP members are now taking steps to present themselves differently — such as not showcasing their wealth and opulent lifestyle when travelling to meet the masses, especially in rural areas. Another important step for the CPP will be to promote capable and promising young leaders, giving them more responsibility within the party (Vannarith 2014b).

There are signs that politicians are paying more attention to what people have to say about the issues. This view seems to be shared at the highest levels of both parties. Prime Minister Hun Sen's Facebook account sometime asks visitors to opine on government policy (Phoak 2014b). Public forums have been made by all levels of authorities to open the floors to the people. People's voices are likely more heard (Touch 2015). People are allowed to play more roles in decision making process in public affairs (Poeu 2015). The people's voices have been the real catalyst for change here. That demand for change, we can say, is authentic (Tan Keo 2013). In addition, public servants are more paid attention by the government by increasing pays and benefits, adjusting their working status, and more reasonable promotion has been made (Touch 2015).

This is a step in the right direction. Although the ruling elites will certainly not bow to all demands, neither can they simply ignore public opinion. If they are seen as using their power for personal gain, voters will hold them accountable at the polls. Thus the shift in perception on public opinion is no coincidence. It is also no bad thing. Some of the most critical problems facing Cambodia's ruling elites at the moment can be traced to a lack of information. So rather than seeing the rise of public opinion as a threat, government leaders would be wise to think of it as an opportunity. It is at such critical junctures that difficult reforms can be made (Phoak 2014b).

More interestingly, the National Assembly's role is seen improved. Greater legislative representation will give the opposition an institutional base, and — equally important — may reduce the perception among voters that the regime is electorally invincible (Daniela 2013). The battlefield is moving from the streets to the parliament and supporters of both parties have high hopes that their party will be able to win enough votes in the next election to form a government (Phoak 2014c). The political theater moves toward a bipartisan political system. For the first time, Cambodia has what could be described as a two-party system, and the CNRP appears united and energized, riding on a wave of popular desire for change (Sebastian 2013).

It is noted that the political changes began first and foremost with the reorganization of political power wherein the opposition parties began to merge once they had an understanding of their own political influence. The main opposition parties, the SRP and the HRP joined

forces to form the CNRP, in hopes of being competitive against the ruling party. The increased popular support for the opposition signals the desire of citizens to have a strong and constructive challenger of government actions and policies (Denis et al. 2013).

The CNRP could drive the political agenda, and probably entice the more reform-minded officials within the ruling party to also consider a renewed strategy towards more inclusive and participatory social and economic policies in the interest of the people. Given the current results, the CNRP would have a sufficient number of members of parliament to try and stamp their mark in the plenum and the parliamentary committees (Gabriel 2013).

But the CNRP faces huge challenges ahead. It needs to find effective ways to manage the expectations of its supporters, and implement its election policy platform. The CNRP is expected to be the driving force of reform. Vannarith (2015) suggests that there are three main scenarios for the CNRP's future development. First, it will be united under the umbrella of democratic alliance, national rescue mission and nation building. If it performs well in the legislature, it has chance of garnering popularity and expanding its political power base for the next election. Second, the internal unity of the party may face severe tests as factionalism and conflicts of interests between different groups develop. Bickering over posts could implode the party. Different interest groups may start fighting over power sharing arrangements within the party. Some potentially could be absorbed into the existing power establishment. Third, although the popularity of the CNRP increased remarkably after the last election, leadership and

performance will determine its future. The opposition was given a chance to prove itself. If it fails to deliver expected results, then it will lose public support and confidence. Fighting corruption, providing decent wages for factory workers, and resolving land disputes are the most urgent tasks that need to be tackled. The CNRP alone cannot address these structural complexities. It requires close working relationship with the ruling CPP, development partners, civil society groups, and private corporations.

At the same time, it is suggested the CPP has the real opportunity to gain back popular support it has lost if it is seen as leading the way to improve the electoral process. By not doing so, it is easy for the CNRP to inflame anti-CPP sentiment under the current conditions (Silas 2014). The ruling CPP will politically gain more from achievements of reforms. The executives are more visible to the general public. The opposition, through the National Assembly, will also get credit in this process for shaping the reform path. The majority of those who voted for the CNRP in the last election expressed dissatisfaction with the CPP's performance. They did not completely buy into the policies and leadership of the opposition. But they want a stronger opposition in order to have checks and balances. If the ruling CPP can improve its performance by changing its leadership style, revitalizing public institutions, and improving public communication to the grassroots, then it can restore public trust and confidence (Vannarith 2014b).

Vannarith (2014a) suggests that if the reform does not produce good results, the opposition will have high chances of winning the next election. But it will have to put all the blame on the ruling CPP. A core

question relates to power transition: will it be smooth and peaceful? It is more likely, however, that both the CPP and the CNRP will be blamed for failed efforts at reform. Their political support bases would shrink. And, in such a scenario, small parties are likely to have a greater opportunity to win parliamentary seats in the next election. This would also increase the likelihood of a coalition government in the future (Vannarith 2014b).

The political playing field will be transformed from bipartisan back to a multiparty political system. If more than two political parties get seats at the National Assembly, a coalition government is highly possible. Change is urgently needed. Both parties have to provide change and continue to co-exist. The ideal scenario would be for the CPP and the CNRP to work together to develop checks and balances, to strengthen democracy and good governance, to promote inclusive, sustainable and rights-based development, and to improve the justice system (Vannarith 2015).

Vannarith (2015) suggests that change is urgently needed. Cambodia's political outlook will depend on the ability of the CPP and the CNRP to cooperate and bring structural reform to the nation. The ideal scenario would be both the CPP and the CNRP working together – developing effective checks and balances, strengthening democracy and good governance, promoting inclusive, sustainable and rights-based development and improving the justice system.

IX. Conclusion

This paper provides an analysis of Cambodian National Assembly Election in 2013, with regard of electoral institutional settings, political parties, electoral campaign, voter turnout, as well as the election results and their implication for political change in Cambodia. The July 2013 election signaled a sea change in the Cambodian political landscape. For the first time since the re-introduction of multi-party election in 1993, the steady increase in the CPP's vote has been broken. Political competition has now crystallized into a polarized duel between two contending blocs, offering a first credible challenge to the CPP's hold on power. Whether the dynamics set in motion by the 2013 election would lead to long-term change or will be stifled in the cradle, the year 2013 stood out as a landmark year.

Not surprisingly that the CNRP secured 55 seats out of 123 in the National Assembly as votes of oppositions have not been much changed since 1993 but the opposition have split into parts, and the votes have been shared among them. The problem is not that one party is too strong and well organized - but rather that the other parties are too weak and poorly organized to play their proper role as opposition in a check and balance system. The successful merger of the SRP and the HRP to the CNRP, credible counterweight to the CPP, is one of the main reasons that the CNRP could secure 55 seats in the National Assembly.

The government's failure to address some social issues gave credit to the CNRP, and the CNRP's seven-point populist manifesto coupled

with its promise to fight corruption head-on, such as land grabbing and forced eviction, illegal logging and deforestation, illegal immigrants from Vietnam, and to top it all, to protect territorial sovereignty, in this case, referring to the border issues with Vietnam, greatly contributed to the CNRP's rising popularity.

Nevertheless, the CPP will be most likely to remain in power with majority due to its financial resources and long-standing relationship with the public especially in the rural areas, and if the reform can produce good results. However, the CNRP is gaining more ground in challenging and contesting the CPP's dominant standing in parliament. If the political and economic reforms do not deliver satisfactory results as promised during the election campaigns, the CPP may risk losing its predominant role in the future. Then emerging parties would possibly win some seats in the National Assembly.

For the CNRP, it is imperative for their members to stay united and to avoid internal conflicts, which is easier said than done once power arrangements within the party will not be evenly distributed. If they want to continue to gain the support of the masses, they must be passionate to push for positive changes, to insist for real reforms, to promote human rights and democracy because in Cambodia freedom is not free, truth must be fought for and justice must be demanded. Yet, the future of Cambodia depends on both parties to work cohesively and productively (checks and balances) together to deliver lasting results such as ending corruption and the culture of impunity, eliminating land grabs, stopping all illegal loggings, implementing pro-poor growth,

and applying the rule of law to all. On the other hand, Cambodians must learn to put their difference aside and unite during this challenging time as the ruling and the opposition party focus on finding the common grounds. What Cambodians really need most are solutions not empty promises as before.

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요약

2013년 캄보디아 국회 선거: 캄보디아 정치적 풍경의 대변혁

낀 페아(Kin Phea)

캄보디아왕립학술원 국제관계연구소 외교연구실장

이 논문은 2013년 캄보디아 국회 선거를, 선거제도, 정당, 선거운동, 투표율 및 선거결과에 따른 캄보디아 정치 변화에 대한 함의를 중심으로 분석한 것이다. 2013년 7월 선거는 캄보디아의 정치적 풍경에 대변혁이 있으리라는 신호를 보냈다. 1993년 다당제 선거가 재도입된 이후 처음으로 캄보디아인민당(CPP)에 대한 지속적 투표율 증가 추세가 깨졌다. 정치적 경쟁은 이제 경쟁적 두 블록 사이의 극단적 대결로 결정화되어 CPP의 집권에 처음으로 믿을 만한 도전을 제공했다. 2013년 선거에 따른 역동성이 장기적 변화로 이어지든지 또는 억압되든지 간에, 2013년은 획기적 해임은 분명하다. 이 논문은 사회적 문제에 대한 CPP 정부의 실패가 캄보디아구국당(CNRP)으로 하여금 신뢰를 얻도록 만들었고, 삼랑시당(SRP)과 인권당(HRP)의 캄보디아구국당으로의 성공적 통합, 야당의 7대 대중선언과 토지횡령, 강제퇴거, 불법 벌목 및 산림 황폐화, 베트남으로부터의 불법 이주 등 부패 척결 약속, 그리고 영토주권 보호(베트남과의 영토 문제) 등이 CNRP의 인기 상승에 기여하였다고 주장한다. 선거는 캄보디아 정치 변동에 중요한 영향을 미친다.

주제어: 캄보디아, 국회, 선거, 정치 변동, 국가선거위원회, 정치적 교착상태