



Post Election 2018 Analysis of Cambodia

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Cambodia witnessed its sixth national elections, where all the 125 seats of the National Assembly was won by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has been occupying this post from 1985.

Before the elections took place, the CPP did not face any major challenge from any political party, because of the dissolution of the largest opposition political force - the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in 2017. Though the elections were fought by 20 registered political parties, none of the parties could formidably challenge the CPP, as was done by CNRP in the 2017 provincial elections.

The following is the results of the 2018 elections as published by the Cambodian election commission.

Election Results 2018¹

	Party	Votes	Percentage
1)	Cambodian People's Party	4,889,113	77.36
2)	FUNCINPEC	374,510	5.89
3)	League for Democracy Party	309,364	4.86
4)	Khmer Will Party	212,869	3.35
5)	Khmer National United Party	99,377	1.56
6)	Grassroots Democratic Party	70,567	1.11
7)	Beehive Social Democratic Party	56,024	0.88
8)	Khmer Anti-Poverty Party	55,298	0.87
9)	Khmer United Party	48,785	0.77
10)	Cambodian Nationality Party	45,370	0.71
11)	Khmer Republican Party	41,631	0.65
12)	Cambodian Youth Party	39,333	0.62
13)	Dharmacracy Party	29,060	0.46

14)	Khmer Economic Development Party	23,255	0.37
15)	Khmer Rise Party	22,002	0.35
16)	Ponleu Thmey Party	13,509	0.21
17)	Cambodia Indigenous People's Democracy Party	10,197	0.16
18)	Our Motherland Party	9,174	0.14
19)	Democratic Republican Party	8,591	0.14
20)	Reaksmey Khemara Party	4,212	0.07

Among the above mentioned parties, many were formed months before the elections like the Reaksmey Khamara Party, Our Motherland Party etc. From 1993, political parties either supporting the monarchy, communism or specific regional ideas, experienced divisions, giving birth to new parties. During the current elections, allegations were made by exiled members of CNRP that many such parties participated in the electoral process to legitimise the election. They were accused of being manipulated by CPP, and exiled members of CNRP called the entire elections as nothing but an electoral circus.²

The voter turnout was 83.02 percent amongst all the registered voters and there were 6,956,900 valid votes. CPP got 4,889,113 votes which registers to 77.36 percent votes. The three closest competitors to CPP were FUNCINPEC with 374,510 votes, the League for Democracy Party with 309,364 votes, and the Khmer Will Party with 212,869 votes, which was not even more than 6 percent of the total vote share individually.³ For the first time since 1993, CPP managed to win all the seats of the national assembly. With the absence of any opposition in the parliament, Cambodia has turned into a one-party democratic system, in place of the multi-party semi-democratic structure it was till CNRP was not dissolved.

Cambodia has witnessed one party political system from the times of Norodom Sihanouk till the end of the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese occupation in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, from 1993, two dominant parties evolved in Cambodia's political framework, the Cambodian People's Party under Prime Minister Hun Sen and FUNCINPEC under Norodom Ranariddh. There has been a general apprehension amongst the masses, as the history of one party rule in Cambodia is associated with extreme violence, political instability and loss of life.

Before forming the new government, CPP constituted an informal Consultation Forum, which held its inaugural meeting on August 21. The Forum was made to provide a semblance of a multi party governing mechanism as well as to lessen down the allegations against the election process. For the moment the Forum has no formal power. Amongst the 20 parties which stood in the July 29 elections, 16 parties participated in the initial Forum. The Grassroots Democratic Party, the League for Democracy Party, the Khmer Anti-Poverty Party and the Our Motherland Party did not attend the initial meeting of the Forum. Participation in the forum has been kept voluntary and parties whose internal policies went against joining the Forum could stay away from joining it.⁴ The Grassroots Democratic Party and Our Motherland Party have, now, shown interest to be part of the Consultation Forum. Prime Minister Hun Sen has stated any party interested in joining the forum, post the inaugural meeting, should submit formal administrative requests to the government.

Western analysts have found the latest elections an attempt to bring former military leaderships and Prime Minister Hun Sen's son, Hun Manet, into mainstream national politics and as his political successor. The election of Pol Saroeun, the former commander-in-chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and two former armed forces deputy commanders-in-chief, Meas Sophea and Kun Kim, strengthens the presence of the military in the National Assembly. Five

other senior ex-military officials along with Prime Minister Hun Sen's brother-in-law Dy Vichea, deputy chief of the National Police, are prominent members in CPP.⁵

Due to the allegations of not conducting free and fair elections, countries and international institutions such as the United States, the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the UK, and Sweden refused to send any observers to Cambodia, as it was reported that there were chances that they might get arrested on charges of treason. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL), the Neutral and Impartial Committee on Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (NICFEC) and Transparency International Cambodia did not cover the elections as they felt that 'the political environment and conditions during the months leading to the July 29 election made it impossible for such institutions to mobilise enough resources to monitor the polls and contribute to the electoral process in a meaningful way. Absence of such international bodies diminishes the legitimacy of the elections and the present government. However, the Chinese leadership has been supporting the CPP government and continue to play a major role in various developmental projects of Prime Minister Hun Sen's government.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

Endnotes:

¹ Provisional Results, https://www.ncelect.org.kh/khmer/sites/default/files/images-attachment/provisional-result_0.jpg

² "Death of democracy' in Cambodia after elections", *PRI*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-07-30/death-democracy-cambodia-after-elections>

³ Taing Vida, "CPP wins all National Assembly seats", *Khmer Times*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50522959/cpp-wins-all-national-assembly-seats/>

⁴ Ben Sokhean, "PM invites forum members to focus on 'past problems'", *The Phnom Penh Post*, August 22, 2018, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/pm-invites-forum-members-focus-past-problems>

⁵ David Hutt, "The son rises in Cambodia after Hun Sen's rigged election", *South China Morning Post*, August 4, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2158246/son-rises-cambodia-after-hun-sens-rigged-election>