

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Cambodia

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>3</td> <td>3</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>9</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	2	2	0	Democ:	3	3	0	Autoc:	1	1	0	Durable:		9		Tentative:		No		
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SCODE	CAM	CCODE	811	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	0	0	4	3	4																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date		30 November 1998		Begin Date																					
				30 November 1998																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1993																								
Executive(s)	Prime Minister Hun Sen (KPK); former Prime Minister from 1985 in the Heng Samrin-led government installed following the Vietnamese invasion that ousted the Khmer Rouge; elected co-Prime Minister in 1993 elections; seized power in July 1997 military coup; reelected as sole Prime Minister, 26 July 1998; reappointed by royal decree, July 2004																								
Legislature	Bicameral: National Assembly (123 seats; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 27 July 2008) Cambodian People's Party (CPP): 91 Sam Rangsi Party (SRP): 26 Other parties: 6 Senate (61 seats; 57 indirectly elected by commune councillors and members of the National Assembly, 2 appointed by king, 2 elected by National Assembly; first Senate election, 22 January 2006) CPP: 43 United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC): 9 SRP: 2 Appointed: 4																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Gradual Transition from Self-Selection (5)

Cambodia's constitution identifies it as a constitutional monarchy but, in reality, it continues to struggle to shed itself from the vestiges of its tumultuous and violent past. With the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces who occupied the country for a decade following their ouster of the disastrous Khmer Rouge regime, Prime Minister Hun Sen, a former-Khmer Rouge leader who disagreed with Pol Pot's brutality and came to power in 1985 under the Vietnamese-installed regime, sought reconciliation with forces loyal to King Norodom Sihanouk. A UN mission was requested to oversee this reconciliation process and supervise a return to constitutional government. However, this reconstruction process was temporarily halted in a July 1997 coup when Second Prime Minister Hun Sen ousted his coalition partner, First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh (a son of the King), ending the tenuous and ill-fated cohabitation government installed after the UN-supervised elections of 1993. In the aftermath of this "coup" by one executive against another, Hun Sen moved to consolidate his power through actions in the Courts and the rump National Assembly and through a systematic campaign of intimidation, torture and summary executions.

By the time Hun Sen agreed to hold elections in July 1998 there was little doubt over their outcome. The primary obstacle for the opposition (Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC and those parties headed by Sam Rangsri and Son Sann) was the determination of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) to control the political process and restrict basic freedoms. Tactics used by the CPP include: violence and intimidation that has stifled dissent; the dismantling of opposition party structures in the countryside; the domination of electoral oversight bodies by members of the CPP; an aggressive nationwide campaign to pressure voters into joining the CPP; and lack of access by the opposition to the media. After the July 1998 elections and months of political deadlock and protest over their outcome, a new coalition government in Cambodia's professed "constitutional monarchy" was formed on 30 November 1998, between the CPP and FUNCINPEC in which Hun Sen was selected as Prime Minister and Prince Norodom Ranariddh became president of the National Assembly. However, given the fact that the National Assembly does not provide a significant check on executive authority, Hun Sen and the CPP continued to control the political arena in Cambodia.

The CPP again won legislative elections held on 27 July 2003 but failed to secure the two-thirds majority needed to form a government. Both the SRP and FUNCINPEC refused to join a coalition unless Hun Sen resigned; the two main opposition parties formed an Alliance of Democrats to specifically oppose Hun Sen. After nearly a year of political stalemate, a new coalition government was finally confirmed by the National Assembly in July 2004, after Hun Sen was formally appointed Prime Minister through a royal decree. The National Assembly and the Senate had earlier passed a new law modifying the constitution to allow the legislature to confirm government and legislative officials in a single "package vote". The SRP bloc boycotted the legislative session passing the new bill, which the SRP leader characterized as an illegal "constitutional coup".

National Assembly elections were held in July 2008. The CPP garnered over 58% of the vote and took 91 seats in the National Assembly. The SRP came in second with 26 seats. While international observers claimed that the elections fell short of international democratic standards, nonetheless, they suggested that they largely reflected the will of the people and demonstrated a vast improvement over the 2003 polls.

King Sihanouk abdicated the throne 7 October 2004. A hastily devised nine-member Royal Throne Council unanimously approved Sihanouk's recommended successor, Prince Norodom Sihamoni, his sole surviving son with his current wife Queen Monineath.

Executive Constraints: Moderate Limitations (4)

Neither the National Assembly nor the Courts, as yet, offer an effective check on executive power. While the return to constitutional rule in 1998 and the implementation of political compromises that brought Cambodia's royal family and their supporters back into the government following the 1997 coup do provide some restraint on executive actions, nevertheless, Hun Sen was able to effectively strengthen his institutional powers during 1997-98 when the rump National Assembly consisted only of CPP supporters.

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Also, providing some check on the executive is the King's popularity. However, Hun Sen is adamantly opposed to the continuation of the monarchy and further political struggles are likely over this issue upon the passing of the present King. In addition, while Hun Sen is the dominant figure within the CPP, its organizational structure provides some restraint on his autonomy. In this sense, although Cambodia functions much like a traditional one-party state, there are emerging institutions that may provide greater constraints on executive power if they are allowed to strengthen their organization and constituency base. International involvement has been crucial in fostering compromises and pressuring for greater liberalization in Cambodia's contentious political arena. The judiciary is weak and politically controlled by the executive branch.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization: Persistent Overt Coercion (8)

Politics in Cambodia labors under the legacy of extreme factionalism, revolution, and civil war. Intense and often violent competition between Sen's CPP, Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC, and, until 1997, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, has been the defining characteristic of Cambodian politics for much of the country's recent history. With the cessation of Khmer Rouge guerilla activity in 1999, along with the tenuous political reconciliation between Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh in late 1998, political participation moved from "factional/restricted" to, tentatively, "democratic liberalization;" persistent coercion continues to detract from this process as fundamental differences remain among the contending political forces.

While political parties are allowed to function in Cambodia, nevertheless, they are subject to systematic harassment and intimidation. Thirty-nine parties competed in the 1998 parliamentary elections and the two main opposition parties gained control of nearly 48% of the seats in the National Assembly. Despite the competitive appearance of these elections, authorities denied the political opposition access to media outlets, infringed on their rights to freedom of assembly, and used coercive mechanisms to create a climate of violence and fear. Moreover, when it appeared that the CPP would not achieve a majority in the legislature, the CPP-dominated National Election Commission altered the electoral formula to ensure a parliamentary majority for their benefactors. In February 2002, the first-ever multi-party elections for 1,621 local commune councils were held after a widely reported campaign of intimidation, vote-buying, and violence by the ruling CPP during which 20 opposition candidates and activists were killed. Preliminary results showed that the CPP won control of 1,600 commune councils, the royalist FUNCINPEC won 10, and the opposition Sam Rainsy Party won 11. While the opposition parties have sought to chip away at the power of the CPP by raising the issue of corruption, the ruling party's legitimacy and support remains high. The continued success of the CPP stems from their ability to create and maintain an extensive web of patronage networks through the distribution of state largess.

In 2005 tensions between the government and members of the Sam Rainsy party dominated the political affairs of Cambodia. In an effort to crackdown on opposition criticism in the country, the government filed charges against Sam Rainsy and two other MPs, claiming that they were involved in slandering the Prime Minister and of forming an anti-Hun Sen militia. Under the increasing threat of prosecution, Rainsy fled the country and members of his party boycotted the National Assembly. While the legislative boycott was ended in August 2005, the political intrigue continued to unfold throughout the rest of the year. In early 2006 a court sentenced Rainsy in absentia to 18 months in jail for defaming Prime Minister Hun Sen. However, the King brokered a deal in which Rainsy was granted a pardon in exchange for a formal apology to Hun Sen. Sam Rainsy returned to Cambodia in February 2006 and promised that he would be "less abrasive" toward the government in future.