

The Effects of Multi-Party Conditions on Cambodian Politic Challenges

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Abstract

This paper explored the multi-party conditions in Cambodian politics, focusing on the effects of multi-party situations that influenced the Cambodian politic challenges, Cambodia's liberal, and multi-party democracy from 2013 to 2023. Since the adoption of democracy in 1993, Cambodia maintained the framework of a multi-party system, and the political dominance of Cambodian People's Party (CPP) raised questions about the strength of democratic competition. The analysis highlighted key effects of multi-party on Cambodian politic challenges, including the solution for the Cambodia's multi-party systems, political rights, electoral regularities, and human rights. Political parties emerged, reflecting continued demand for pluralism. Cambodian Economics needed to develop under CPP leadership, with the balance between stability and democratic freedoms. International perspectives remain divided; China and Russia recognize its elections as legitimate. The findings revealed that Cambodia's democracy caught between maintaining constitutional principles of multi-party participation and the reality of a dominant-party system.

Key words: *Multi-party system; dominant-party; democracy; human rights; politic challenge*

1. Introduction

Cambodia is known for its liberal, multi-party democratic political system and its notable effects of multi-party on politic challenges. With the liberal and challenges, multi-party politics in Cambodia met in the way the country developed and its political system from 2013 to 2023. In Cambodia, political development was adopted in democracy in 1993 after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime and the end of the civil war. The first elections marked the beginning of a liberal, multi-party-political system, but political competition at that time was unstable (Carothers, T 2015). The political dominance of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) is evident in Cambodia's multi-party system, with the CPP being the most influential party. The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won several elections, increasing its political influence (Un, K. 2019). In 2013, the CPP faced a major challenge when the opposition

party, such as Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) gained significant popular support. With this condition, the Cambodia's multi-party system was increasingly competitive. This posed a major challenge to the multi-party system in Cambodia, and the CPP exercised control over all parliaments and the government in Cambodia. (Freedom House, 2018).

New parties emerged with the aim of strengthening the multi-party system in Cambodia. Some of these parties were satellite parties of Cambodian People's Party, and the emergence of new parties presented a competitive political landscape to masses 419 Cambodia (Freedom House, 2018). The integration of political and economic issues under the leadership of the CPP led to significant economic development, and the CPP focused on the economic development for the benefit of the country (Un, K2019). This development led to economic growth, but it also increased pressure on the political system to maintain stability. One of the major challenges to the multi-party system in Cambodia is increase in the political system. International organizations such as Amnesty International argued that the tightening of the law increased political stability. (Amnesty International, 2020).

The extent of multipartyism is a challenge and suggests that multipartyism in Cambodia can develop through political change and public support. In 2023, communes across the country showed an increase in the number of voters for new parties, marking a significant shift in the Cambodian political system. (National Election Committee [NEC], 2023). The multiparty system in Cambodia was challenged, such as political control. However, this political development also met the rise of new parties seeking to strengthen the political system.

2. Conceptual Framework of Literature

2.1 The democratic Process in Cambodia

Democracy was the participation of all political groups to maintain the well-being of the country. Cambodia implemented a democratic system since 1993 through free, multi-party elections. However, this system faced challenges in the process of discussing the multi-party issues in the democratic process in Cambodia. Cambodia had a system of government dominated by Cambodian People's Party, which led the country for more than three decades. Civil society reported that media outlets expressed views contrary to government closed down. (Freedom House, 2018). The democracy in Cambodia can also be attributed to the work of the multi-party systems. Party leader, Kem Sokha, acted in a manner that was in conflict with foreign interests (Un, K 2019). This case stifled political competition.

Political competition in Cambodia also faced challenges for public funding various political parties. Public funding was often used through the control (Transparency International, 2020). The multi-party was significant due to

the human rights and political rights. The politicians and human rights were challenged in democratic system (Amnesty International, 2020). This raised the international concerns about the human rights situation in Cambodia. Electoral legislative council was about the body responsible for conducting elections can be considered a CPP-controlled entity (NEC, 2023). This legislative council should be empowered and independent to hold elections in Cambodia accountable.

Political competition in Cambodia continued to involve the international community to maintain peace and human rights. International community and the United Nations consistently supported the progress and human rights in Cambodia (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The multiple and unique challenges facing Cambodia in its democratic process were important for advancing the progress and human rights. Political parties must be independent and receive support from the international community to ensure equality and democratic rights for the Cambodian people.

2.2 Consequences of Implementing Democracy in Cambodia

One of the consequences of implementing democracy in Cambodia was the disagreement of political views. Cambodia was still considered a country that implemented the liberal, multi-party democracy, even though the National Assembly in previous term had a single party. This also explained by senior officials of the Cambodian People's Party after some circles suggested that Cambodia no longer had a multi-party system because the National Assembly was controlled by a single party. According to the official report on the preliminary results of the election issued on the July 29, 2018, all seats in the National Assembly fell to the Cambodian People's Party, with Samdech Hun Sen as the party leader, receiving an overwhelming majority of votes. Other parties that competed in the election did not receive any seats. Therefore, in the past term, the 6th and 7th terms, in particular, the National Assembly of Cambodia was led by a single party, while Article 51 of Constitution stated that Cambodia implements liberal, multi-party democracy.

There were different interpretations of the above question, with Chheang Vun, a senior official in the Cambodian People's Party who was elected to the parliament. Chheang Vun answered without hesitation that "even if there was only one party in the National Assembly, the National Assembly can still function and a new government can still be formed legally." In an interview with the press, he emphasized that "there is no content of any law, no word that says the National Assembly cannot function when one party wins the election alone." (thmeythmey.com 2018). Chheang Vun mentioned the term "multi-party", stating that "multi-party" referred to a regime with parties, and parties competed in the election. Multi-party did not mean that there were many parties in the National Assembly. For Chheang Vun, criticism of the

election from various circles, including some international communities, seemed normal. He claimed that Cambodia is not concerned about such criticism, but what Cambodia should be concerned about was the lives of its citizens. He finally stated “The word ‘one-party rule’ is all they say. It’s not just today. It’s even worse. But the National Assembly of Cambodia is still functioning, democracy is still alive, and we will continue to strive to serve the will of the people.” (thmeythmey.com. 2018).

At the same time, Sok Sam Oeun, a famous lawyer in Cambodia, did not say definitively whether Cambodia was still a liberal, multi-party democracy or not, leaving this matter to the competent institutions to clarify. However, he spoke in two ways about the word “multi-party” by saying “If interpreted broadly, Cambodia is still a liberal, multi-party democracy, but if interpreted narrowly, it may not be.” The lawyer explained broadly, “If multi-party refers only to organizing many parties to participate in the election.” Therefore, Cambodia was still a multi-party country, because during the election, up to 20 parties participated. However, if multi-party referred to having many parties in the National Assembly, then Cambodia was no longer called multi-party. This interpretation was only for the Constitutional Council to interpret and provided opinions (thmeythmey.com. 2018).

Chhim Phalvarun, a spokesperson for Cambodian People’s Party and a doctor of constitutional law, stated that “multi-party” referred to a political and social regime that allowed for multiple parties. Multi-party was a political and social regime where the people can express different opinions and views, not just in National Assembly. He added that “in the past, when the National Assembly made laws, they could express their opinions outside the National Assembly! That is a multi-party liberal democracy” (thmeythmey.com. 2018). In the previous Senate elections, the Cambodian People’s Party won outright, as was the case in the 2018 National Assembly elections. The only difference was that the Senate had 2 out of 62 members from FUNCINPEC party. But those two members were not elected but were appointed by the National Assembly. The other two members were appointed by the King, and the rest were all from the Cambodian People’s Party.

Since the first election in 1993, the 2018 election was the first time that the Cambodian National Assembly led by a single party. However, before 1993, it was not the first time that the Cambodian National Assembly had a single party. During the socialist era in 1955, the Cambodian National Assembly was also led by a single party. At that time, the Socialist Party of King Norodom Sihanouk received more than 80 percent of the vote and controlled National Assembly (thmeythmey.com. 2018). Im Chhunlim, President of the Constitutional Council, emphasized that “multi-party liberal democracy” was the foundation of Cambodia’s modern political order. With Royal Ceremony

to Commemorate the 30th Anniversary of Promulgation of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia on the morning of October 6, 2023 at the Koh Pich Palace, Cambodia adhered to a multi-party liberal democracy. Cambodia achieved new steps of progress through implementation of constitutional principles, such as The Khmer people were the masters of the nation's destiny. All power belonged to people and was exercised through National Assembly, Senate, Royal Government, and the Judiciary. There was a principle of mutual balance, namely the National Assembly gave confidence to form the Royal Government. At the same time, the National Assembly cannot be dissolved before the end of its term, except in the case of the Royal Government being overthrown twice in 12 months (AKP, NEWS. 2023).

2.3 Operation of Democracy in Cambodia

Cambodia operated a multi-party electoral system, maintaining multi-party diversity, a space for political freedom and ensuring the preservation of electoral participation. With liberal, multi-party democratic politics was taken root in Cambodia's political culture and evolved in stages. National power was devolved to sub-national levels to promote and promote development in a sub-national democratic manner, based on the fundamental principles of respect for human rights and liberal, multi-party democracy. Parliamentary democracy was based on the spirit of broad political alliances, which were procedures for determining the leadership of National Assembly, the quorum for the National Assembly session, and the granting of trust to form a new government for the purpose of creating a culture of dialogue between political partners. For this case, Im Chunlim said “A good partnership alliance and a culture of dialogue are not consistent, depending on the nature of extreme politics, leading to a deadlock in the process of organizing the government and social instability after each election for the term of office.” (AKP, NEWS. 2023). National Election Committee was reformed to level of a constitutional institution. A step to strengthen the order of political parties by defining red lines regarding the obligations required of each political party to respect the constitution and the law. As a preparation to strengthen the spirit of patriotism was defined with the qualifications to have Khmer nationality by birth only for position of the top leader of national constitutional institution. As a way to fill the gaps in the constitutional procedures to ensure that the top national institutions, especially the executive power, had a smooth and sustainable process (AKP, NEWS. 2023).

Some opinions, especially from the United States and the West, criticized that “multi-party liberal democracy in Cambodia is going backwards.” However, Cambodia firmly adhered to the principle of multi-party liberal democracy. Democracy meant a country with a democratic government, a country or administration that used people as a majority in choosing its representatives

to decide the affairs of the country. Liberal meant having full power, being able to do whatever they want but under the law. “Multiple” meant having many, in this sense, many was more than “two.” Therefore, “multi-party liberal democracy” was a principle in which the people had full power to choose their representatives from among many political parties to lead the country’s affairs.

Cambodia held the 2018 general election on July 29, 2018 to choose its representatives. Preliminary results from the National Election Commission (NEC) showed that 20 political parties competed for the election and that 82.89% of the 8,380,217 registered voters cast their ballots to elect their preferred leader. These two indicators clearly demonstrated that the country firmly adhered to the principles of liberal, multi-party democracy. The NEC stated that “more than 500 international observers from over 70 countries. International institutions included European Community, ASEAN countries, International Conference of Asian Political Parties, the Asian Parliamentary Assembly, ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, and European Council on International Relations, inviting to witness the preparation of Cambodia’s elections and unanimously assessed that Cambodia organized elections in a neutral, free, fair, and democratic manner, which was better than elections in other democratic countries around the world, especially better than Western countries and the United States, where only 55.70% of the population voted in 2016. This led to the conclusion that the information the United States received information (freshnewsasia.com. 2018). Each statement stated that “the elections in Cambodia were organized in a free, fair, secure, orderly and free from violence, and there was consensus among observers from political parties in Cambodia, approximately 90,000, and another 80,000 from national associations and organizations.”

Cambodia not only implemented principle of liberal, multi-party democracy well, but also strengthened it. In 2013, only 69.61% of the population voted, compared to 82.89% in 2018, and the number of political parties increased from 8 in 2013 to 20 in 2018. In 2018, the election was conducted smoothly, peacefully, securely, and safely in accordance with the principles of liberal, multi-party democracy, in accordance with the Constitution, the Law on the Election of Representatives, the Regulations and Procedures for the Election of Representatives, the 6th Legislature, and other legal standards related to elections in Cambodia (Freshnewsasia.com. 2018). With Cambodia’s liberal, multi-party democracy regressing was politically motivated and belittled the will of the 6,946,164 Cambodian people who spent their valuable time voting for preferred leaders. Cambodia consistently adhered to and strengthened the principles of liberal, multi-party democracy, which reflected in neutral, free, fair, and elections in a democratic manner that was peaceful, secure, orderly,

and free from violence. Cambodia can progress further in the democratic process without turning back, so that Cambodia can maintain peace, long-term stability, and sustainable development, especially so that its own citizens can live in harmony and peace (Freshnewsasia.com. 2018).

3. Critical Arguments

3.1 Perspectives on Liberal, Multi-party Democracy in Cambodia

The National Senate of Cambodia considers the amendment to the electoral law to promote the values of liberal, multi-party democracy enshrined in the Constitution as the supreme law of the nation. At a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee chaired by Samdech Say Chhum, President of the Senate, on June 28, 2023, Senate Spokesperson Mam Bunneang said, “This law is to strengthen the responsibility of political leaders who are elected through democratic, liberal, multi-party elections at both the national and sub-national levels, which requires reforming the right to stand for election.” In this sense, citizens who intend to vote must have a high responsibility to motherland and people, starting from consistently exercising their right to vote by going to the polls, which is the main duty of good citizens with high responsibility in a democratic society. The constitutional amendment also stipulates that any person who act to affect the right to vote or citizens, as well as acted to affect or damage the electoral process, shall face temporary revocation of the right to stand for election or a ban on participating in the election. The Senate Standing Committee thoroughly review and discuss the draft law, and find it to be in accordance with the law and the constitution, and decide to include the draft law in the agenda of the 10th session of the Senate, 4th term, on June 29, 2023 (Freshnewsasia.com. 2018).

On the 70th anniversary of Cambodia’s independence from France in 1953, Prime Minister Hun Sen stated that “the government committed to protecting peace, national independence, and liberal, multi-party democracy with the respect for human rights.” (SEM, C. 2023) The Prime Minister stated in the presence of His Majesty the King and other leaders that Cambodia will unite as one to continue to protect its independence, territorial sovereignty, peace, the King, and the Constitution. The government continues to implement democracy and respect human rights. Hun Manet stated that there is a number of the principles. Cambodia, first, is needed to protect peace, independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and all achievements of national society to be sustainable. Second, Cambodia build the Kingdom of Cambodia as a democratic, free, multi-party, progressive, and strong state based on law, with a sustainable and equitable economic growth, and where the people have a prosperous life, live in harmony, with honor, dignity, and respect for human rights.

King Norodom Sihamoni said at the ceremony that “Cambodia is united as one nation under the umbrella of the Constitution and the laws of the state to participate in the defense and development of the homeland in all fields.” He added “In the past period, the Cambodian homeland and our people have undergone a new and admirable transformation.” The correct policies in implementing the good path and the noble political legacy that expects peace, solidarity, national unity, and national prestige, renown on the international stage. Cambodia enjoys and reaps positive results that stems from the strength of building and defends the nation and homeland with the harmony of its compatriots (SEM, C. 2023). The demand for and protection of true national independence depends on spirit of unity and national unity. By maintaining peace and respect for democracy in Cambodia, the Royal Government should provide a peace that is fair and non-discriminatory to the people, then it is a real and complete peace. By ensuring that peace is a complete peace, a peace that is fair for general public, without discrimination. With the democracy and free, the multi-party democracy in Cambodia seems to be complete from participating in July 2023 elections. This shows the right to freedom of political activity, which is in line with the principles of democracy (SEM, C. 2023).

3.2 Multi-party Democracy in Cambodia

The government’s commitment to respecting human rights and democratic principles is commendable. By addressing the human rights and democratic practices, particularly in relation to the political rights, there are challenges in competing with the political parties and political activists. Attention to human rights and democracy in the country should be open and free, as well as the adjustment of the electoral system to ensure that it is trusted by the people (SEM, C. 2023). However, Minister of Justice Keut Rith clarified that “the 10th Amendment to the Cambodian Constitution does not affect the liberal, multi-party democratic system and constitutional monarchy.” The Ministry of Justice held a plenary session of the National Assembly on the morning of July 28, 2022, discussing and approving the draft Constitution on the request to amend Article 19 (one), Article 89, Article 98, Article 102, Article 119 (one), and Article 125 of the Constitution, and Article 3 and Article 4 of the Constitutional Law, including four agenda items.

In response to statements by some civil society organizations, which are consistent with political analysts, the 10th Amendment to the Cambodian Constitution has affected the liberal, multi-party democratic system and constitutional monarchy by reducing the power of the National Assembly. Some statements are just additional voices, which are the words of some analysts and politicians or political parties. The 10th Amendment to the Constitution not only does not affect the liberal, multi-party democratic

system and the parliamentary constitutional monarchy, but also makes a significant contribution to promoting the liberal, multi-party democratic system in which the people own power, and makes the liberal, multi-party democratic system and parliamentary regime function smoothly and without obstruction. The 10th Amendment is to fill the gaps in the Constitution and ensure that state institutions, especially the executive branch, have the main mission of leading the general affairs of the state, and that their work is carried out smoothly, without any interruptions, and sustainably in all circumstances, in order to fulfill their mission of serving the best interests of the nation and the people of Cambodia (Freshnewsasia.com. 2022)

The draft Constitution on the request to amend Article 19 (one), Article 89, Article 98 (new), Article 102 (new), Article 119 (one), and Article 125 (new) of the Constitution, and Article 3 (new) and Article 4 (new) of the Constitution, was reviewed and approved by the Cabinet on July 8, 2022. The Cabinet stated that this draft law has two main objectives, such as (1) ensure that the supreme institution of the nation, especially the executive branch, whose main mission is to lead the general affairs of the state, has a smooth and sustainable process in all circumstances, and (2) ensure the protection and maintenance of peace, social security, public order, and political stability of the country at all times to be the foundation for the development of country in all sectors and well-being of Cambodian people (Freshnewsasia.com. 2022). On July 13, 2022, the Constitutional Council held a meeting to review the draft law on amending certain articles that do not affect the democratic, liberal, multi-party system and the constitutional monarchy. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, which was promulgated on September 24, 1993, has been amended 10 times. The amendments aim to ensure national sustainability as well as to ensure the supreme interests of the nation and the Cambodian people. The draft constitutional law on amending the eight articles of the Constitution and the Constitutional Law has the following detailed content⁴⁵⁷ (Freshnewsasia.com. 2022).

Article 19 New (Two): The King appoints the Prime Minister and appoints the Council of Ministers in accordance with the procedure set out in Article 119 New (Two). Article 89 New: At the request of at least one-tenth of the members, the National Assembly may invite one or more members of the Royal Government, accompanied by eminent experts in a particular field, to brief the National Assembly on matters of particular importance. Article 98 New (One): The National Assembly may dismiss a member of the Royal Government or remove the Royal Government from office by passing a motion of censure by an absolute majority of the total number of members of the National Assembly. In the event that the Royal Government is dismissed by the National Assembly, the Royal Government to be removed from office

shall only have the responsibility of leading the day-to-day affairs of the Royal Government until a new Royal Government takes office.

3.3 Principles of Multi-party Democracy in Cambodia

A motion of censure of Royal Government shall be submitted to the National Assembly by one-third of the total number of members of National Assembly before the National Assembly may discuss it. Based on article 102 New (One), the term of office of the Senate is limited to six years and shall expire when the new Senate takes office. In times of war or other special circumstances that make it impossible to hold elections, the Senate may, at the request of the King, extend its term once for one year. The extension of the term of the Senate shall be decided by the consent of at least two-thirds of the total number of members of the Senate. In the circumstances as described above, the Senate shall meet every day in succession. The Senate shall have the rights to decide to end the above special circumstances whenever the circumstances permit. However, the decision to end the special circumstances in which the country is in a state of emergency shall be decided jointly by the Senate and the National Assembly in a session of the National Assembly and the Senate, except for the implementation of Article 86 of the Constitution.

If the Senate cannot meet for necessary reasons, such as when a foreign force invades the territory, declaration of emergency shall automatically continue. Upon the proposal of the party with the largest number of seats in the National Assembly, the King shall appoint a member of the elite as Prime Minister to form the Royal Government (Article 119 New (Two)). The proposal of the party with the largest number of seats in the National Assembly shall be copied to the President of the National Assembly. The person to be appointed as Prime Minister must be a representative of Cambodian nationality who is the only one elected from the party with the largest number of seats in the National Assembly. The person to be appointed must bring his colleagues who are representatives of the people or members of the party represented in the National Assembly who are assigned to hold various positions in the Royal Government to seek the confidence of the National Assembly. This vote of confidence must be held on the list of the entire Cabinet. Once the National Assembly has voted in favor of the vote of confidence, the King shall issue a Royal Decree appointing the entire Cabinet.

Before taking office, the Cabinet shall take the oath of office as set out in Appendix 6. At the end of each term of the National Assembly, the outgoing Royal Government shall only be responsible for day-to-day operations until a new Royal Government takes office. In the event of the Prime Minister's temporary absence, the Prime Minister shall appoint a Deputy Prime Minister to act as Acting Prime Minister to assume the duties of temporarily leading the Cabinet (Article 125 New (a)). If the position of Prime Minister becomes

permanently vacant due to, for example, the resignation or death of the Prime Minister, a new Cabinet shall be appointed immediately under the conditions stipulated in Constitution. The President of National Assembly shall convene National Assembly immediately and take other necessary measures promptly within 7 days after receiving a request from the party with the largest number of seats in the National Assembly. In the event of position of Prime Minister becoming permanently vacant due to the resignation of the Cabinet, the outgoing Cabinet, under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister who has been appointed as the Acting Prime Minister, shall only be responsible for leading the day-to-day work until a new Cabinet takes office.

The resignation of the Prime Minister shall be made by means of a letter of resignation to be sent to the King and copied to the President of the National Assembly. In such a case, the outgoing Cabinet shall continue to lead the work of the Royal Government until a new Cabinet takes office. In particular, two articles of the Constitutional Law are. New Article 3 and New Article 4 of the Supplementary Constitutional Law aimed at ensuring the normal functioning of national institutions are amended. With New Article 3 (one), In the event that the procedures of New Article 82 (one) and New Article 119 (two) of the Constitution cannot be achieved, the National Assembly, upon the request of the party with the most seats in the National Assembly, may conduct a package election to elect the President, Vice-President of the National Assembly, as well as the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the National Assembly committees, at the same time as granting confidence to the Royal Government. Based on new Article 4 (one), The preparation of the list of members for the election and granting confidence shall be carried out. The list of members of President and Vice-President of the National Assembly, as well as the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of all specialized committees of the National Assembly shall be prepared and proposed by the political party with the most seats in the National Assembly and shall be sent to the Senate of the National Assembly. The President of the National Assembly shall be elected from among the members of the National Assembly who are Khmer citizens only. Upon the proposal of the political party with the largest number of seats in the National Assembly, the King shall appoint a person as Prime Minister to form the Royal Government. The person to be appointed as Prime Minister shall be the only representative of Cambodian nationality elected from the political party with the largest number of seats in National Assembly. The person appointed shall prepare various positions in Royal Government and submit a list of all members of the Royal Government to the Senate of the National Assembly.

The Senate of the National Assembly shall immediately and without delay prepare a list of names in a package including President and Vice-Presidents

of the National Assembly, as well as the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of all specialized committees of the National Assembly, as well as the Prime Minister appointed by the King, and all members of the Royal Government, for submission to National Assembly for election. The Senate of the National Assembly shall lead the National Assembly to vote and approve this list immediately. The Senate of National Assembly shall be elected by selecting the oldest member of National Assembly among all members of the National Assembly. In the event that the Senate of the National Assembly is unable to perform his or her duties, the position of Senate of the National Assembly shall be assigned to another member of the National Assembly who is older in the order of succession. After debate in National Assembly, the National Assembly voted unanimously to approve draft constitution on the proposal to amend Article 19 New (One), Article 89, Article 98 New, Article 102 New, Article 119 New (One), and Article 125 New of the Constitution and Article 3 New and Article 4 New of the Constitutional Law by 105 votes in favor out of 106, votes (Freshnewsasia.com. 2022).

3.4 International perspectives on the political landscape in Cambodia

China and Russia issue separate statements of support for the process of Cambodian election. China and Russia said that the election is held in a good and free atmosphere, while the United States expresses the concerns about democratic process and considers the recent Cambodian election to be free and fair. After a day of elections for the 7th term of National Assembly, which closed on July 23, 2023, the major world powers issue their own statements through spokespersons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representatives of their embassies in Phnom Penh. Starting with the United States, Matthew Miller, spokesman for United States Department of State, issued a statement on the Cambodian election. In the statement, it assessed that the election on July 23, 2023 was free and fair because Cambodian authorities continuously give rights to the media and civil society, reflecting the country's constitution and Cambodia's international obligations. The United States announced visa non-restrictions for the individuals to be democracy.

However, the United States argues its readiness to work with new Cambodian People's Party government as it forms a new government that has the opportunity to improve its international standing, such as restoring genuine multi-party democracy (Kourn, S. 2023). The United States, for the great power of China, expresses its warm congratulations to Cambodia for successfully holding 7th national election and congratulated the Cambodian People's Party for winning the election under the leadership of Samdech Hun Sen. At the press conference, it is stated as a good neighbor and a good friend; China warmly congratulates Cambodia for successfully holding 7th national election in a good atmosphere and congratulates the Cambodian People's

Party for winning the election under the leadership of Samdech Hun Sen. China also wishes Cambodia a smooth parliamentary and new government election. Mao Ning China is willing to work with Cambodia to continue the friendship from generation to generation and accelerate the building of a high-quality, high-level and high-standard China-Cambodia community with a shared future in the new era to better benefit the two peoples (Kourn, S. 2023).

Not unlike China, Anatoly Borovik, the Russian Ambassador to Phnom Penh, claimed that the election campaign in Cambodia is conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. Anatoly Borovik congratulates Cambodia holding democracy, assessing the free and independent elections. He stated that representatives of Central Election Commission of the People's Assembly of Russia, including the Russian Embassy, do not find any violence (Kourn, S. 2023). It was worth noting that the 7th term parliamentary elections concluded on July 23, 2023, with a voter turnout of over 8 million people, or over 84 percent, a high rate compared to 2022 commune and sangkat elections. According to unofficial preliminary results, the Cambodian People's Party won 120 seats and the FUNCINPEC Party won 5 seats, out of 18 political parties competing for seats (Kourn, S. 2023).

Meanwhile, the National Election Commission (NEC) on August 5, 2023, announced the official results of the 7th National Election, calculated in terms of votes. According to the official results table of the 7th National Election, 8,214,430 Cambodians voted in the general election on July 23, 2023, of which 7,774,276 were valid votes and 440,154 were invalid votes. Of all the votes, the Cambodian People's Party received the highest number of votes, up to 6,398,311. The Funcinpec Party came in second with 716,490 votes. The Khmer United National Party received 134,285 votes. The Cambodian Youth Party received 97,412 votes. The Democratic Party received 84,030 votes. Other parties received a small number of votes, (NEC, 2023). This indicates that the national election for the 7th term, held on July 23, 2023, is considered successful, free and fair, with approximately 84.59 percent of the 9 million registered voters voting. The election in Cambodia is the highest voter turnout and the highest number of national and international election observers in the history of Cambodian elections.

4. Conclusion

The trajectory of Cambodia's democratic development reveals both progress and persistent challenges. While the Constitution enshrines the liberal, multi-party democracy, political practices often reflect the CPP's overwhelming dominance, limiting meaningful competition. Nonetheless, the rise of new parties, high voter participation, and constitutional reforms indicate that the multi-party democracy retains a foundation for future growth. International

responses underscore the contested nature of Cambodia's political system – praised by allies for stability and economic progress and serving the political pluralism. Ultimately, Cambodia's democratic future significantly depends on strengthening the institutional independence, ensuring the fair political competition, and upholding the human rights to foster a more inclusive and resilient political system.

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