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# **D I S S E R T A T I O N**

## **DEEPENING DEMOCRACY THROUGH POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION: THE CASE OF CAMBODIA**

Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**The name and assignment of the supervisor:  
Associate Professor, Dr. Tamás Kaiser**

**The Author:**

**CHUM Chandarin**

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## **DECLARATION**

This study is the original intellectual work of the author, Chum Chandarin. The research and analysis have complied with the ethical standard of social science research. I hereby declare that no part of this dissertation has been submitted or accepted for any other degrees in any other institution. It contains no material previously written or /and published by any other person, except where appropriate citation and acknowledgment is made.

## **ABSTRACT**

Democracy is such a contested concept that has been continuously refined and redefined according to forms of the governing regimes across time and space. Theories of democratization explain different approaches and condition that democracy either prevail or derail. Political decentralization is arguably deepening democracy if appropriately designed; however, there are inconclusive accounts of such merit, and there is a need to be studied contextually. Situating Cambodia in a hegemonic electoral authoritarian state, I investigate whether or not political decentralization is deepening Cambodian democracy by analyzing four central propositions, and the findings are as the followings.

First, the policy linkage to democracy is low due to the lack of the effective mechanism to ensure public participation and debate rigorously; thus, the chance of public scrutiny, engagement, and support is not desirable. Second, the emergence of opposition politic is crucial to democracy; however, the opposition party in Cambodia has not yet exerted it fullest influences that can strengthen democracy. Third, the local representatives from both of ruling and opposition party have played a limited role in increasing citizen participation, improving accountably, and acting responsively. Finally, local citizens prove that they understand the basic concept of democracy but do not yet actively and effectively take part in the democratic space, which enables them to have a considerable impact on the deepening democracy.

Despite all the challenges revealed in this study, more investigation shall be made to examine the role of the ruling party concerning the deepening democracy. Motivational factors to encourage local representatives and people to participate in governing should also be scrutinized. All in all, it is noted that deepening democracy is possible through political decentralization, yet delegating political power without resources to local government may hinder the effectiveness of the policy that is aimed to increase the responsiveness, improve accountability and encourage active citizen participation, which is the cornerstone to democracy.

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## **ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS**

BLDP	Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party
CDP	Commune Development Plan
CNRP	Cambodia National Rescue Party
COMFREL	Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia
CPK	Communist Party of Kampuchea
CPP	Cambodian People Party
CSCS	Common Statute of Civil Servant
D&D	Decentralization and De-concentration
HRP	Human Rights Party
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
KPRP	Kampuchean People Revolutionary Party
KR	Khmer Rouge
MCS	Ministry of Civil Service
NCDD	National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development
NCSC	National Committee to Support Communes
NP-SNDD	National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPA	Paris Peace Agreement
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
SRP	Sam Rainsy Party
UNTAC	United Nations of Transitional Authority in Cambodia

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to study

Cambodia is located in Southeast Asia surrounded by Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand, all of which are ranked not free according to the Freedom House 2015. That may not be surprising to some countries, but what catches attention is that all countries in this region are not improving their freedom score at all over the last decade. Some are stagnant, fluctuating, and derailing. Indonesia and the Philippines were noticed to be the champion of democracy, but they still cannot move to a free country. The military coup and the new constitution adopted in August 2016 in Thailand to give more power to the military significantly worry democratizers. The landslide winning of the opposition party in the latest national election in Myanmar and the increasing opposition voices in Singapore, Malaysia, and Cambodia look less promising as each country is situated in what Thomas Carothers called the Gray Zone, the trap that countries move somewhere within the authoritarian rules without heading to deeper democracy nor falling to absolute dictatorship (Carothers, 2002). Asian scholars notice that ruling elites in these countries "have been able to ride the wave ... to their own benefit" (Kuhonta, Slater & Vu, 2008, p. 327). This also echoes to Carothers' feckless pluralism and dominant power where political power keep entertaining each other without attempting to make any serious reforms toward democracy (Carothers, 2002). As highlighted, some of the reasons of the democratic regression in these countries are the election of autocratic leaders, the failure to reform its governance, and the inability to promote democracy from global actors such as the Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN) and the United States (Kurlantzick, 2014). Countries in Asia usually justify their rejection of Western liberal democracy by arguing that it is unfit with Asian values; this sparks rigorous debate in the 1990s among scholars across the world (see for example in Emerson, 1995; Fukuyama, 1995; Neher 1994; Robison, 1996; Rodan, 1996). Although the

debate was academically ended, it practically still exists in Asia, especially embedded with "good governance" discourse (Thompson, 2015).

Liberal democracy has been introduced into the Cambodian constitution again after the Paris Peace Agreement signed in October 1991 to end the decades of civil war. Since then five national elections have been consecutively held in 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2012. Along with the apolitical good governance agenda, a decentralized program has also been introduced in 1991 to facilitate the repatriation of Cambodian refugee who lives along Cambodian-Thai border during the period of war and relocate as well as rehabilitate them. This program is later known as Decentralization and Deconcentration (D&D) program that Cambodian government is running across the country until today. Decentralization is defined as the "transfer or delegation of legal and political authority" to other levels of authority so that they able to plan, manage and be responsible for their activities in forms of Deconcentration, Delegation, and Devolution (Rondinelli, 1981, pp. 137-138). As envisaged by the government of Cambodia, D&D is to strengthen and expand local democracy as well as to promote local development and reduce poverty. The decentralization in Cambodia takes all forms of deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Political decentralization is done at the lowest level of the government, which is at Commune/Sangkat level. So far citizen directly elected their local chief and councilors from the party list through proportional basis for four executive mandates in 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

Constitutionally, Cambodia is "one of the most liberal" countries in Asia, yet the "implementation of laws remains problematic" (Bhagat, 2015, p. 398). The separation of power between executive, legislative, and judiciary is blurring. Political deadlock has always been observed after national elections. Recent years since after the national election in 2013, the political climate is not conducive to democracy. A number of

members of parliament from the opposition party and human rights have been jailed. The leader of the opposition party (Cambodia National Rescue Party) is facing many legal charges and self-exiled in France while his deputy, facing similar court cases, confining himself the party Headquarter, and at this moment is in prison under the charge of treason. Democracy in Cambodia is still described as "illiberal" (McCarthy & Un, 2015, p. 1) and not yet consolidated (Un, 2004). A skeptic is predicting that Cambodia is moving toward authoritarianism (Un, 2013). I argue elsewhere that democracy in Cambodia is trapped in the political Foggy Zone coined by Andreas Schedler (Chandarin, 2016). It was claimed that Cambodian culture is not receptive to democracy (Ashley, 1998; Heder & Ledgerwood, 1995; St John, 1995; Roberts, 2001). Also, the election law in Cambodia encourages "upward accountability" to a political party rather than the citizen (Rusten et al. 2004, p. 5).

The various scholarly literature describes the closed relationship between decentralization and democratic consolidation (Grindle, 2011; Öjendal & Lilja, 2009; Ribot, 2011). Democratization and decentralization scholarship as discussed empirically in Chapter 2 of this dissertation suggest that it is possible to deepen democracy through political decentralization regardless of any cultural, geographical and socio-economical factors under certain conditions.

It is argued that if appropriately designed and with political will, decentralization does deepen democracy (Blunt & Turner, 2005; Faguet, Fox & Pöschl, 2015; Rondinelli, Nellis & Cheema, 1984;). However, the empirical reviews provide inconclusive merit of decentralization policy outcomes (Eaton & Connerly, 2010; Oxhorn, 2004; Tresman, 2007; Wunsch, 2014) and need to be contextually assessed and examined for its sustainability (Smoke, 2015; White, 2011).

Taking a look at Cambodia, decentralization was introduced in the 1990s in a similar period with some Asian states such as the Philippines or Indonesia. As described above, Cambodia conducted local elections at their lowest tier of administration for four

consecutive mandates; thus, it has about 20 years experiencing the decentralization. However, a recent development is suggesting that the democracy not be even stagnant; it is rolling back. Thus, there is a need to contextually examine the decentralization in relation to democratization in Cambodia and explore what lessons we could learn.

### **1.3 Statement of purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand decentralization in Cambodia, specifically, focusing on political decentralization and its relation to deepening democracy. Political decentralization is defined as a mechanism to increase citizen participation, enhancing people power and authority, to influence a political decision in making public policy, mobilizing resources, and bringing social benefit (Cheema & Roninelli, 2007). Through the political decentralization, there is a broader space for opposition politics and the opportunity to demand the public goods from the citizen. Therefore, this study is to explore what have we learned from political decentralization in Cambodia by examining its policy linkage to democracy, the role of the opposition party in strengthening democracy, the ability of elected local representatives in enhancing democracy and the knowledge of citizen about democracy and their local performance.

The propositions to analyze, thus, are the followings:

1. The policy of decentralization in Cambodia influences deepening democracy;
2. With the political space obtained from the political decentralization, opposition party emerged and influenced to democracy;
3. Local elected representatives will play a crucial role in facilitating democracy in their local context;
4. Moreover, with the knowledge of democracy, local citizens take part in and influence to the decision-making process.



## 1.4 Research questions

For the purpose as mentioned earlier, the core research question of this study is as follows:

***How has the political decentralization deepened democracy in Cambodia?***

Asking the question "how" determines the way in which this study intends to. It is explicitly interested in exploring and explaining the political decentralization process and assessing its democratic linkage, which is necessary to understand the deepening level of democracy in Cambodia. Consequently, this study examines three levels with sub-questions, in addition to the central one above.

The first level of the study is to examine the policy of decentralization. This is to understand: *To what extent does the policy of political decentralization promotes democracy?*

The second level of the study is to examine the role of the opposition party in Cambodia in order to explore: *How has it influenced to democracy?*

The third level is to go to the local context and explore first with the elected local representatives in order to find out: *how have they encouraged and facilitated democracy in their local setting?* Last, the study further crosscheck with the citizen in order to determine: *Are there any significant differences between knowledge of democracy understood by the citizen at different local settings: commune/Sangkat controlled by ruling and opposition party members? If so, what can be explained?*

## **1.5 Overview of research methodology**

Two levels of studies will be employed by using both of qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the above questions. At the policy level, all legal documents, regulations, and reports regarding decentralization in Cambodia will be scrutinized. There is the conventional distinction between studies of policy and studies for policies. The former is "the academic-explanation focus, describing policy practices, and explaining past policy developments" while the later is "the applied-professional focus, producing briefings and options analyses intended to assist practitioners or influence decision-makers" (Crowley & Head, 2016, pp. 2-3 [emphasis original]).

Adopting the "interpretivist and experiential studies" approach (Crowley & Head, 2016, pp. 3-4 [emphasis original]), this study will use the available literature on decentralization in Cambodia to analyze the policy strength and weakness in relation to democracy promotion. Ingram and Schneider (2006) provide useful a framework to analyze the policy linkage to democracy. Also, the party linkage to democracy model developed by Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister (2011) will be used to examine the opposition party in Cambodia and determine its influences to democracy concerning its party's campaign, participation, ideology, representative, and policy.

As political decentralization in Cambodia is done at the commune/Sangkat level, the commune chiefs, councilors and the local citizens in four selected communes will be the main subject of study. In-depth interviews will be made with the opposition party leaders, elected local representatives, and local citizens.

## **1.6 Research significance**

The main research question is to explore how political decentralization has deepened democracy in Cambodia. Operationally, this will attempt to seek the relationship

between policy designed, the influence of political party, and the elected local representatives in encouraging citizen participation and making local authority accountable and responsive to the local citizen. This research contributes enormously to those who are interested in local politics and public administration in Cambodia. Besides this will enrich by contributing the Cambodian case to theories of democratization and decentralization. The study in this dissertation will strengthen the hypothesis that decentralization can deepen democracy regardless of geographical, cultural, and socio-economical factors if there is strong political will, not by the incumbent, but the opposition party and civil society in demanding the political space at the local level. Besides, the case is interactively heuristic approach to learning, which can be contributed to broader theoretical development for the Southeast Asian region, which hopefully could academize the excessive literature that mostly relies on European and Latin America cases.

## **1.7 Organization of the dissertation and summary of key findings**

This dissertation is organized into the following chapters. Chapter 1, "Introduction," introduces the main problem to be studied and outlines certain proportions to be examined, following by research methods and significances.

Chapter 2, "Cambodian past: Challenges to public administrative reform?" provides brief background knowledge of Cambodian historical, political, and public administrative system. It will also follow by the analysis of public administration reform to generate better knowledge about Cambodian political, social, economic, and technological context. The chapter reveals that the inability to politically reconcile among the political groups hinders the attempt to reform the public administration sector. Despite the well-written policy platform, findings from this raise doubt of the effectiveness of the reform due to the possibility of political instability, economic

sanction, possible social chaos, and limited improvement of information communication technology.

Chapter 3, "Theoretical Conception and Research Framework," investigates the theories of democracy, democratization, and decentralization. The primary purpose of this chapter is to review relevant literature and conceptualize into a research framework to guide the study. According to the framework developed, to understand the political decentralization in Cambodia in relation to democracy, there is a need to examine the policy designed, the role of opposition party, the role of elected councilors, and the knowledge of democracy shared by the citizen.

Chapter 4, "Research Design and Approaches," rationalizes the mixture of qualitative and quantitative research approach. It also outlines the key units to study and describes the research settings. Also, it also explains the data collection techniques and analysis approach, following by the ethical consideration and limitation of the study.

Chapter 5, "Decentralization and Democracy," answers the question: to what extent does political decentralization policy promote democracy? This chapter concludes that the political decentralization policy linkage to democracy in Cambodia is "low." There was a good intention, from the policy perspective, to deepen democracy; however, if it is assessed to how the policy discourse and issue framing are conducted, policy messages communicated, public engagement supported, and accountability perceived, its linkage is "low."

Chapter 6, "Opposition Party and Democracy," answers the question: how has the opposition party influenced to democracy? It is found that political decentralization enhances the opportunity for the opposition party to generate support from the grassroots level. Despite all the challenges, the opposition does make some "moderate" influence to the democracy.

Chapter 7, "Elected Councils and Democracy," answer the question: How have the local elected representatives encouraged and facilitated democracy? It is concluded that the councilors play a very limited role in enhancing democracy through encouraging people to participate actively in the community. Both councilors and citizen have limited understanding of their roles and responsibility. Moreover, the ability of the councilors to be accountable and responsive is also challenging in deepening democracy.

Chapter 8, "Local Citizen and Democracy," seeks to understand and answer the question: "Are there any significant differences between knowledge of democracy understood by the citizen at different local setting: commune/Sangkat controlled by ruling and opposition party members? If so, what can be explained?" It is found that the majority of people understand democracy concerning civil liberties and citizen rights. The result suggests that there is no significant association between the knowledge of democracy shared by different groups led by different political councilors.

Chapter 9, "Summary and Conclusion," summarizes and concludes the findings from previous chapters. It also draws lesson learned from the central question of the study: How has the political decentralization deepened democracy in Cambodia? Finally, it will raise possible implication and suggestion for future research that may help generate more understanding in the field of political decentralization in the Cambodian context and beyond.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **CAMBODIAN PAST: CHALLENGES TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM?**

There are many factors, ranging from lacking qualified personnel, limited knowledge of the individuals, weak institutions, corruption, and low paid, currently challenging the Cambodian civil service sector. Realizing the issues, both of the developing partners and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) have been working from a mandate to another mandate to tackle the challenges in order to turn the civil service into a competent partner for social and economic development of the country and become an efficient provider of services to all citizens. To promote good governance, the RGC has committed to a number of strategic efforts, one of which is the strategic framework for Public Administration Reform. As of the fifth legislative mandate 2013 – 2018 under the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2014 – 2018 and the Rectangular Strategy Phase III (RSIII), the National Program for Public Administrative Reform has been formulated and officially approved by the Council of Ministers on 9 January 2015. Despite the effort, there are indicators that Cambodia is not performing well toward better governance and reform. Thus, exploring what had happened and is happening in Cambodia will significantly contribute to guiding this research study.

This chapter aims to provide background knowledge of Cambodian historical, political, and public administrative system as well as to set the stage in order to understand the Cambodian past, trends and future reform. In order to reach this goal, the chapter starts with a brief of historical overview. Then, it relates what had happened in the past to what this chapter argues as an obstacle to building a robust state in Cambodia. Next, the chapter scrutinizes the current government structure and its achievements and challenges that have been identified in the public administrative policy reform. Finally, it follows by the analysis of the weaknesses and strengths of the political, social, economic, and technological context in Cambodia.

## **2.1 Historical overview**

A brief historical overview in this section will be found useful for those who are not familiar with Cambodian context. This overview will also provide a clearer picture for any attempt to thoroughly analyze the Public Administration in Cambodia.

When writing a historical account, Cambodians have never forgotten to mention both to the moment that Chandler (2008, p. 35) described as "period of greatness" during Angkor Empire between 802 and 1431 and the darkest period during the genocide (1975-1979). The recent discovery from an Australian archaeologist, reported by Dunston (2016), confirms that the Angkor Empire was the "world's largest empire in the 12th century." No one is sure why Angkor Empire declined and led to the darkest and most disastrous history for Cambodians. The reasons could be manifold, but possible assumptions can be referring to poor leadership leading to internal conflicts, which threaten the legitimacy of the ruling elites. The lack of legitimacy upset many adversaries, and each does not have any choice but to take the arm and revolve, causing trouble until today.

After the decline of the empire, the Kingdom of Cambodia, politically, had to rely upon foreign countries for her internal stability and survival (Muller, 2006; Szaz, 1955; Thomson, 1945). The establishment of French protectorate and later colonization in 1863 secured Cambodia from the neighboring invasion as well as internal strife for throne among the royal family members. French once noted that in the early nineteenth century Cambodia "had no government at all" (cf. Chandler, 2008, p. 125). The government was loosely structured, and Cambodian leaders were unpopular and less commitment to govern (Muller, 2006). As noticed during French colonization, although Cambodian was "culturally homogenous," they were separated into social classes: the Royal, Royal's in-law, priest, common people, and slaves (Muller, 2006, p. 58). Cambodian king, similar to other Asian Kings, stayed out of touch from his citizen and

relied mostly on the loyalty of his subordinates to collect the tax and manage everyday affairs (Chandler, 2008). Under French colonization, there was still a political upheaval, and the government was unable to manage state affairs effectively. There were incidents of rebellions, for example, led by King Norodom's half-brother Si Votha in 1876-1877 and the 1916's affair that drew thousands of people to protest (Osborne, 1978). Because of the lack of cooperation between the ruler and the ruled, relationship between the state and the citizen was neither responsive nor accountable. Rebellion against French control as well as the Royal conflict even ignited further fury between the colonized and the colonials. Muller (2006, p. 8) noted: "... the French considered the superiority of Western civilization. Confronted with French claims to dominance, Cambodians neither surrendered nor fought back but instead turned away and went about their business, smiling politely and paying no further attention." Cambodians viewed the colonization in both positive and negative ways. The former thanked French for protection the country from the hungry neighbors such as Thailand and Vietnam while the later accused French for not being serious enough to develop her colony but just extracted the resources as much as she could from Cambodia.

Cambodia got independence from France in 1953, and Prince Norodom Sihanouk was enshrined. The independence was seen as a strategy used by "Franco-Sihanouk ... to block a Cambodian revolution" challenged from the nationalist and communist at the ground level (Vickery, 1999). The king was one of the only two most popular kings, one of whom is Ang Duang who reigned from 1848 to 1860. The popularity was given only these two kings since the fall of Angkor Empire (Chandler, 2008). Sihanouk's charismatic leadership gained much support from most people in the Kingdom; however, he failed to lead the country successfully, confronting the ideological affairs in the Cold War. After the independence, people rejoiced as they normally did for the past century, yet the management seemed not working well. There was still a big gap between the rich in the city and the poor just a few kilometers away from the city. The farmers were still "a slave to the climate" (Porter & Hildebrand, 1976, p. 20). There was miss management between education and employability (Hollister, 1958). The myth



perception of contemporary Cambodians who always viewed that the education system was so strict during the 1960s that not many students could pass through secondary school was, however, revealed that it was the deliberated purpose by the government to fail the students, as they could not be offered the job once they graduated (Hollister, 1958). To most Cambodians, education at that time was a means to "status and wealth," which was different from that of in the West or Eastern Europe that the education was aimed to "supply skills needed in industrial societies" (Vickery, 1999, p. 21). The king did little to deal with these issues besides proposing them to go to the rice field while they did not want to.

In retrospect, the process of decolonization caused by the weakening of the western states as well as the rise of nationalism in their colonies marks one of the causes to the second wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991). With the influence from this wave, Cambodia experienced its first formation of parties and election for the Consultative Assembly to the King in September 1946 that led to the 1947 constitution (Chandler, 2008) although France was reluctant to grant full independence until 1953. Struggling for independence led to break up among the political parties whose leaders were royal princes in the Assembly. The Democrats led by Prince Yuthevong who won the majority seats in the assembly was seen as a threat to King Sihanouk as he proposed to reduce the powers of the King and strengthened the role of the assembly. However, the death of Prince Yuthevong for his disease and the assassination of his successor, Ieu Koeuss in 1950 alleviated the political tension.

The country under Sihanouk's Sangkum (societal) Period was described as a country without parties since he was able to dominate all election contests (CUP, 1967). Sihanouk saw "the assembly as a personal possession and a rubber stamp" (Chandler, 2008, p. 235). The inability to lead as a neutral state in the middle of the cold war after independence in 1953 brought Cambodia into the Vietnam War that million tons of the US bombs were dropped in Cambodian territory. Growing much dissent with the king's domestic policy and international deals, General Lon Nol and his associates staged a

bloodless coup in 1970 and established the Republic of Cambodia. The corrupted Republican government, which was heavily supported by the US, could rule only a few years. In 1975, under Pol Pot, the communist – Khmer Rouge or Red Khmer, ousted Lon Nol and built a Democratic Kampuchea (Cambodia). Almost 2 millions of innocent lives, mostly aimed at the intellectuals and city people, were killed through starvation, execution, overwork, and diseases. The Vietnamese soldiers, however, toppled the regime in 1979 and installed a puppet government to run the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which was not internationally recognized but mostly funded by the Soviet Union. The Khmer Rouge, the Khmer Republic, and the Sihanouk's loyal group went to the west border and formed guerrilla warfare against the PRK. Cambodian factions, sponsored by different superpower countries, continued to fight each other along Thailand's border for decades later. The ripple effect from the Berlin Wall's fall down in 1989 brought the end of Cambodian conflict under a Paris Peace Agreement signed in 1991, and an election was set up under the supervision of the United Nations Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1993.

In sum, the post-Angkorean era marked the decline in the popularity of kingship, internal conflict, and foreign power intrusion, which undermined the "social, economic and political stability" in the Kingdom of Cambodia (Chandler 2008, pp. 115-117). After nearly a century of colonization, Cambodia got its independence from France in 1953. The electoral act in 1946 opened ways for Cambodian King to rule the country by a constitution. The elections for the consultative assembly in 1947 and 1951 showed that Cambodian elites preferred Democratic Party to any others. The Democratic Party led by Prince Sisowath Yutheavong won 50 out of 67 seats in 1947 and 55 out of 78 seats in 1951.

However, the power struggles among the Cambodian elites continued to exist. Subsequently, the political and legal system had been transforming from the constitutional monarchy to the Republic, extreme Maoist (Genocide), and the Communist. Finally, after the Paris Peace Accord in 1991, Cambodia held its election in

1993 under the constitutional monarchy that adhered to the principle of liberal democracy as stated in its constitution. Table 2.1 below briefly describes the transition of the political, legal, and economic system in Cambodia.

**Table 2.1 The Cambodian legal, political, and economic system from 1953 to 2018**

<b>Era System</b>	<b>Legal System</b>	<b>Political System</b>	<b>Political Power</b>	<b>Economic</b>
1863 – 1953	French-based Civil Code	Under French Protectorate	Held by French	Colonial Type
1953 – 1970 (The Kingdom of Cambodia)	French-based Civil Code	Constitutional Monarchy	Held by Prince Sihanouk as Prime Minister	Market and then Nationalization
1970 – 1975 (Khmer Republic)	French-based Civil Code	Republic	Held by General Lon Nol	Market, war economy
1975 – 1979 (Democratic Kampuchea)	Legal system destroyed	All previous system abolished, extreme Maoist Agro-communist	Khmer Rouge	Agrarian, Central Planned
1979 – 1989 (The People Republic of Kampuchea)	Vietnamese oriented model	Communist party, central committee and local committee	Cambodian People Party (CPP)	Soviet Style central planning
1989 – 1993 (The State of Cambodia)	Greater economic rights	Communist party, central committee and local committee	Cambodian People Party (CPP)	Liberalized central planning
1993 – 2013	French-based Civil Code combined with common law in certain sectors	Constitutional Monarchy	Shared between CPP and FUNCINPEC Party	Transition to a market economy
2013 – present*	French-based Civil Code combined with common law in certain sectors	Constitutional Monarchy	CPP	Market economy (Stage 1 – Factor-driven economies)**

Source: Compiled from Chandler (1991), Cambodia Investment Guide (May 1999), Cambodia: Enhancing good governance for sustainable development Chapter 3, p. 5. ADB 2000.

\* Updated information in 2016. \*\* First stage of development as indicated in the Global Competitiveness Index 2012-2013

## **2.2 The Cambodian past: Obstacle to build a state?**

Fund for Peace has consistently categorized Cambodia into its high warning Fragile State Index for more than a decade: 85.7 in 2017 with 0.0 points change over the last ten-year. According to this, Cambodia is vulnerable to conflict and collapse. Out of Fund for Peace twelve indicators, the "state legitimacy" and "factionalized elites" indices indicate the most concerning point of 8.3 (10 suggests the least stable state) for the last few years. In line with this, Human Rights Watch (2017) notices severe state repression of targeted groups like civil society organizations, rights activists, intellectuals, and political party. As the national election is due in July 2018, the country is facing possible "war," warned by Hun Sen who has ruled Cambodia for decades, if he loses the election (Chanthol, 2017). Cambodia is indeed profoundly entrenched systems of patronage and clientelism (Roberts, 2002). According to Roberts (2002), the political culture and the elite struggling to powers seem to encourage more creation of state intuitions to accommodate the patronage-client relationship. Thus, it is questionable about a possibility to move Cambodia from the patronage state system to a modern state that is less personalized bureaucracy.

What constitutes a state and approaches to studying it depend on various standpoints (Jessop, 2016). The definitions of the state are also debatable. For example, classical definitions of a state can be drawn differently from two notable scholars: While Weber, Gerth, and Mills (1946, p. 490) define a state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory," Tilly (1975, p. 70) defines a state: "an organization which controls the population occupying a defined territory is a state in so far as (1) it is differentiated from other organizations operating in the same territory; (2) it is autonomous; (3) it is centralized; and (4) its divisions are formally coordinated with one another." Following to any specific definition of the state will lead to the different approach to state building. As this part situates Cambodia in a post-conflict society, state building conceptualized by OECD is more relevant.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has identified why "weak," "fragile," and "failing" states are concerning policymakers across the globe as they can be a "source of oppression and insecurity" (OECD, 2009, pp. 61-148). According to this, state building shall be defined as "purposeful action to develop the capacity, institutions, and legitimacy of the state in relation to an effective political process for negotiating the mutual demands between state and societal groups" (OECD, 2009, p. 13). The definition emphasizes the political process that the societal groups negotiate and build. Elaborated further from this, Fritz and Menocal (2007, p. 24) indicate the most important factor to state building, which is the political settlement. To them, a political settlement is "the restoration of a functioning and legitimate government and of constitutional rules," including three main functions of the state: public governance, legitimacy, and the rule of law (Fritz & Menocal, 2007, p. 24). From the start, Cambodian political settlement has always been problematic. Political elites were to participate in the election without recognizing each other's legitimacy (see, for example, in Roberts, 2002). Tracing the political relationship between conflicting parties, I claim that political reconciliation is needed in Cambodia before any effective attempt to build a strong, robust state that can deliver better public services. Murphy (2010, p. 180) defines political reconciliation as the process of rebuilding a "political relationship" which is usually destroyed during conflicts and under repressive regimes; processes of political reconciliation aim to "cultivate political relationships premised on reciprocity and respect for moral agency." According to her, these two aspects of reciprocity and respect for a moral agency are the backbone of three dimensions: the rule of law, political trust, and relational and basic capabilities that are important to political reconciliation. Thus, if a country like Cambodia has to build a state, it has to strengthen the political relationship by building political trust, respecting the rule of law, and improving relational capabilities.

### **2.2.1 The Problem of trust building**

Paris Peace Agreement (PPA) in 1991 brought the four political groups: the Royalist, the Republic, the Khmer Rouge (KR), and the Communist to the negotiation table and arranged national election in 1993. In retrospect, the four conflicted groups had never trusted each other for decades. They sometimes cooperated to achieve their political goals, yet the relationship was not based on genuine commitment but manipulation and benefits. The following will briefly describe the relationship between the four groups.

KR took power in 1975 and killed about 2 millions of Cambodians, but the leadership split into two competing groups during its era – the communist supported by China and the communist supported by Vietnam. The split is more about nationalism than ideology. The Cambodian communist movement known as Kampuchean People Revolutionary Party (KPRP) was founded in 1951 under the endowment and inspiration from the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), led by a Vietnamese leader.

However, Pol Pot, the KR leader, changed this name into Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) in September 1966 as a way to "lessen Vietnamese influence and strengthen relations with China" (Dy, 2007, p. 9) Later instruction was to mark 1960 as the birth of the party rather than 1951 so that there would be a "clean break" from the ICP (Chandler, 1993, p. 264). The conflict of the two groups became intensified in 1978, leaving a group escaped to Vietnam. In 1979, the group (People's Republic of Kampuchea - PRK) with the military support from Vietnam removed KR from power and put them on trial. The revolutionary tribunal sentenced the KR's leader Pol Pot and its foreign minister Ieng Sary to death in absentia although the trial was described as a "show trial" done by "Vietnam's puppet government" (Ainley, 2012). KR and its remaining troops escaped to the Western border between Cambodia-Thai and started their guerrilla warfare under the recognition from the United Nations.

Along the border, two other non-communist groups identified themselves against the Communist and KR. These were the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia with its French acronym FUNCINPEC led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) led by the republican Son Sann. These two groups, however, created a coalition government with KR in 1982 to gain international assistance as well as leverage to fight their warfare against and negotiate with the PRK after the Cold War ended. Historian describes the cooperation between the non-communists and KR as "neither a coalition, nor a government, nor democratic, nor in Cambodia" (Kiernan, 2002, p. 488). Under the facilitation and encouragement from 18 countries, the four conflicted groups signed the Paris Peace deal in 1991. This agreement obliged all factions to cease fire and participated in an election under the supervision of United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1993, but the fighting was still going on between the KR and State of Cambodia (changed from PRK in 1989). KR refused to disarm alleging that there was Vietnamese troop, which was also obliged to withdraw under the PAA, still present with SOC. The CIA's file, which was available recently, confirmed that this was true (see Wright, 2017). The royalist was also discontent with KR and preferred to bring them to trial. Before the election, Prince Sihanouk announced to the crowd in Phnom Penh while he was first visiting after he was ousted in 1970, "In Buddhism, we have to forgive, but we can never forget what the Khmer Rouge did to the Cambodian people" (Peang-Meth, 1992, p. 35). KR decided to leave the peace agreement and did not participate in the election, but continued to cause trouble along the border until it was finally dissolved in 1998. After the election in 1993, the elected government of FUNCINPEC and Cambodian People Party (changed from State of Cambodia) outlawed the KR and sought international community for bringing it to trial. In a letter dated 21 June 1997, Cambodian co-prime ministers wrote a letter to request UN's assistance to create a tribunal which was similar to the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda (ICTR) and the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The amnesty was also given to Ieng Sary in 1996. In contrast, it turned out to be that the request was to put pressure to KR's leaders and their remaining

forces of about 5000 men to defect to either of the political faction, CPP or FUNCINPEC (Hammarberg, 2001), as there was conflict in the coalition government. CPP ousted the first prime minister from FUNCINPEC in a bloody coup in July 1997. FUNCINPEC from then has been divided into small parties and started to lose its political strength. Finally, FUNCINPEC was eliminated from politics, as its party did not win any constituency in the latest election in 2013. CPP under Hun Sen, who was also a commander from the eastern side in the KR regime, is still ruling Cambodia until today. He has ruled Cambodia for three decades and always warns of turning Cambodia into a bloody war if he loses his power. His biggest challenge now is the strongest emerged of an opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), whose leaders are former finance minister from FUNCINPEC and a senator from BLDP.

Trust is what Cambodians currently lack. A recent survey conducted by Asia Foundation (2014) indicated that ninety-four percent of the sample population reported that they did not trust each other. This is not surprising, for Cambodia has gone through many political changes. Lives during the genocide period, for example, teach people how to lie to survive. Telling the truth about the job or education will be executed as the KR killed nearly most of the literate citizens. According to Murphy (2010, pp. 135-136), indirect contribution to political trust is the commitment of each political group to be opened and see each other as "competent, lacking of ill will, and decent." This is, unfortunately, absent among the Cambodian political factions. Political factions deny each other exist and manage to manipulate each other group for their popularity. Political deadlock after 2013 election forced the two dominant party leaders to create what they called a "culture of dialogue"; unfortunately, the legacy from the past keep haunting the politicians, and it is hard for them to cooperate. The CNRP's leader, Sam Rainsy, has kept naming his counterpart, Hun Sen, as a former KR and is serving Vietnamese purposes, while Hun Sen kept accusing Rainsy as a son of a traitor, referring to his father Sam Sary who was considered as a traitor to the royalist regime in the 1950s. Responding to what Rainsy describes current Cambodia is turning into a dictatorship leader, Hun Sen rebukes:



*"I cannot keep calm because of this insult by the son of a traitor," ... "Your Excellency called me a dictator, and today I called you son of a traitor, but it is not me who insulted your family ... I am following the word used by the former regime," ... "I know in our modern society it is difficult to be accepted [as a traitor], but I cannot change the historic traitor to [a nationalist]," ... "The leaves do not fall far from the base of the tree." (Sokheng, 2015)*

Trust is essential and will be the backbone of the political settlement. Unfortunately, it is hard to believe that each political faction in Cambodia currently is managing to build it by genuinely working and respecting each other existence.

### **2.2.2 The Problem of the rule of law**

Influenced by legal philosopher Lon Fuller, Murphy (2010, p. 135) identifies four conditions that are important to maintain the rule of law: "[O]ngoing cooperative activity," "congruence between law and informal social practices," "legal decency and good judgment," and "faith in law." Little has been found in the political relationship between the four main factions described above. Political tactics and benefits that each group planned to gain from each other masked the cooperation facade. The PPA in 1991 established Cambodia a liberal state by the constitution. Cambodia is "one of the most liberal" country in Asia, yet the "implementation of laws remains problematic" (Bhagat, 2015, pp. 389-401). Cambodia is moving toward an "illiberal regime" (McCarthy & Un, 2015). Recently, the ruling party CPP is using laws to suppress opposition party and members of civil society whom it sees as a threat to their ruling. At this moment, Licadho, a human rights watch organization, has documented 25 political activists and civil society members who are currently under detention and ten had already been released after serving a number months in prison on politically motivated charges (LICADHO, 2017). The violent assault on members of parliament from the opposition party in front of the national assembly was also the worst example of how the law in

Cambodia is abused and misused. Two of the opposition members were brutally beaten just in front of the national assembly in 2017.

Another worst case is the assassination of a well-known political critic Kem Ley, whose analysis was always sensitive to the ruling elites. Days after criticizing Hun Sen's administration and family over a considerable corruption report from Global Witness, Ley was shot three times to death in a gas station where he always had his coffee. In its latest Rule of Law Index in 2016, World Justice Project situates Cambodia the second last to only Venezuela, which is at the bottom of the 113 ranking countries in the world. Cambodia scored 0.33 and ranked 112, marking the worst performance compared to previous years.

There has been several difficulties that impede the strengthening of the rule of law identified in Cambodia: the lack of independence of the judiciary; a lack of political will to establish an independent judiciary; the political interference in judicial affairs; absence of adequate laws and sub-decrees; weak and discriminatory enforcement of laws; prevalence of corruption in the judiciary; scarcity of human and financial resources available to the judiciary; low level of citizens' knowledge about laws and regulations due to inadequate legal education; and the reconstitution of the Supreme Council of Magistracy (SCM) that deals with recruitment, promotion, transfer and disciplinary measures of judges and prosecutors (NDI, 2004). The development of the rule of law that is another dimension to build a political relationship is not found in Cambodia; laws are usually used as tools to repress and maintain tight grips of the ruling party over oppositions. Thus, this also questions the ability to strengthen the state in the future.

### **2.2.3 The Relational capabilities**

Murphy (2010, pp. 101-102) indicates four capabilities influencing political reconciliation processes: The ability to be "recognized as a member of a political community," "respected by others," "a participant in the political, economic, and social processes of one's community," and to keep "bodily health," be "nourished," and have "sufficient income." A general condition that indirectly contributes to this is to stop and reform all forms of "unjust actions and structures" that violate those basic rights and alienate political groups from the political community (Murphy, 2010, p. 136). Following her arguments, these capabilities are usually destroyed during the repressive regime. Cambodians have suffered from the devastated genocide and civil war period. After the PPA in 1991, the country opened for economic assistance and liberalization. It is undeniable that the government is trying to reform its governing institutions, and various policies have been introduced. However, political violence, social inequality, and economic oppression are undermining the attempt to build citizen capabilities to share a sense of community, respect each other, and participate in social and political process equally. Cambodia today is ruled by a "personalist dictator" who "acted as a gatekeeper for political positions, appointed his relatives, created a paramilitary group, controlled the security apparatus, exercised a monopoly on decision-making, and managed membership of the party executive" (Morgenbesser, 2017, pp. 191-208).

Worldwide Governance Indicator reports no improvement in Cambodian Government Effectiveness Indicators, which fluctuates from 18.7 percentile rank in 2010 to 19.9 in 2011 and 22 in 2012 to 18.7 again in 2013. This could be suggested that the quality of public services and the implementation of the rule of law in Cambodia are low and the political pressure still primarily influences it. Transparency International Cambodia (TIC, 2014) conducted a research assessment on National Integrity System in Cambodia's governance aiming at evaluating level of corruption and the effectiveness of anti-corruption mechanism, which focuses on 13 core governance institutions: Legislature, Executive, Judiciary, Public Sector, Law Enforcement Agencies, National

Election Committee, Ombudsman, National Audit Authority, Anti-corruption Institution, Political Parties, Media, Civil Society, and Business. The result revealed that there was a weak integrity system to uphold the rule of law and ensure sustainable development and a good quality of life in Cambodia. The Corruption Perception Index (CPI, 2014) still indicates that Cambodia remains the most corrupt country in the Asia Pacific Region which ranks 156 and scores 21 in 2014. For the last three years, 2012, 2013, and 2014, Cambodia did not make any improvement (score 22, 20, 21 respectively). The quality of life had not been improving very much. With its value 0.584, Human Development Index (2014) ranks Cambodia in 136 out of 187 countries. The value of HDI of Cambodia is still low comparing to the two neighboring countries – Thailand and Vietnam with the rank 89 and 121 respectively.

This part questions the possibility to build a state in Cambodia as there is absent of political trust, the rule of law is weak, and citizen capabilities are limited. According to Murphy, reforming important institutions can improve political relationship as that the law can be strengthened, trust developed, and citizen capability built. However, there is little commitment from the political groups in Cambodia to reform such institutions to accommodate a meaningful relationship.

This part also reiterates the need to build political relations among the Cambodian factions. It asserts that political settlement is significant to build a post-conflict state like Cambodia as the past legacy that the political factions had makes them difficult to trust each other. The highlighted relationship above suggested that Cambodian political groups cooperated each other to serve their mutual interest rather than build necessary institutions to develop the trust, enforce the equal rule of law, and build citizen capabilities so that they can participate equally in the social and political context in Cambodia.

## **2.3 The Current government structure**

From Article 1 to Article 50 in the constitution, Cambodia is a country that rules according to the constitution recognizing and respecting to all aspect of human rights, women's rights, and children rights as enshrined in the United Nation Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other treaties related to those rights. The King is the Head of State but does not rule any power. Article 51 also declares that Cambodia has a separated power between Executive, Legislative and the Judicial Power. Besides, Article 128 stipulates well that the Judicial Power is impartial and protects citizen's liberties and rights. The Constitutional Council of Cambodia is the only supreme institution that interprets the constitution and guarantees all laws adopted are abided by the interpretation. However, there is still a concern about the independence of this body as the majority of them are from the ruling political party.

Followed by the National Election in 2013 and the cabinet reshuffling in March 2016, the fifth mandate of the new cabinet of Cambodia (2013-2018) consists 27 Ministers, 14 Ministers attached to Prime Minister, 9 Deputy Prime Ministers and 19 Senior Ministers and more than 400 of secretaries and under-secretaries of state led by the Prime Minister Hun Sen from CPP (The ruling party since 1979). Figure 2.1 below describes the Cambodian government structure 2013-2018.

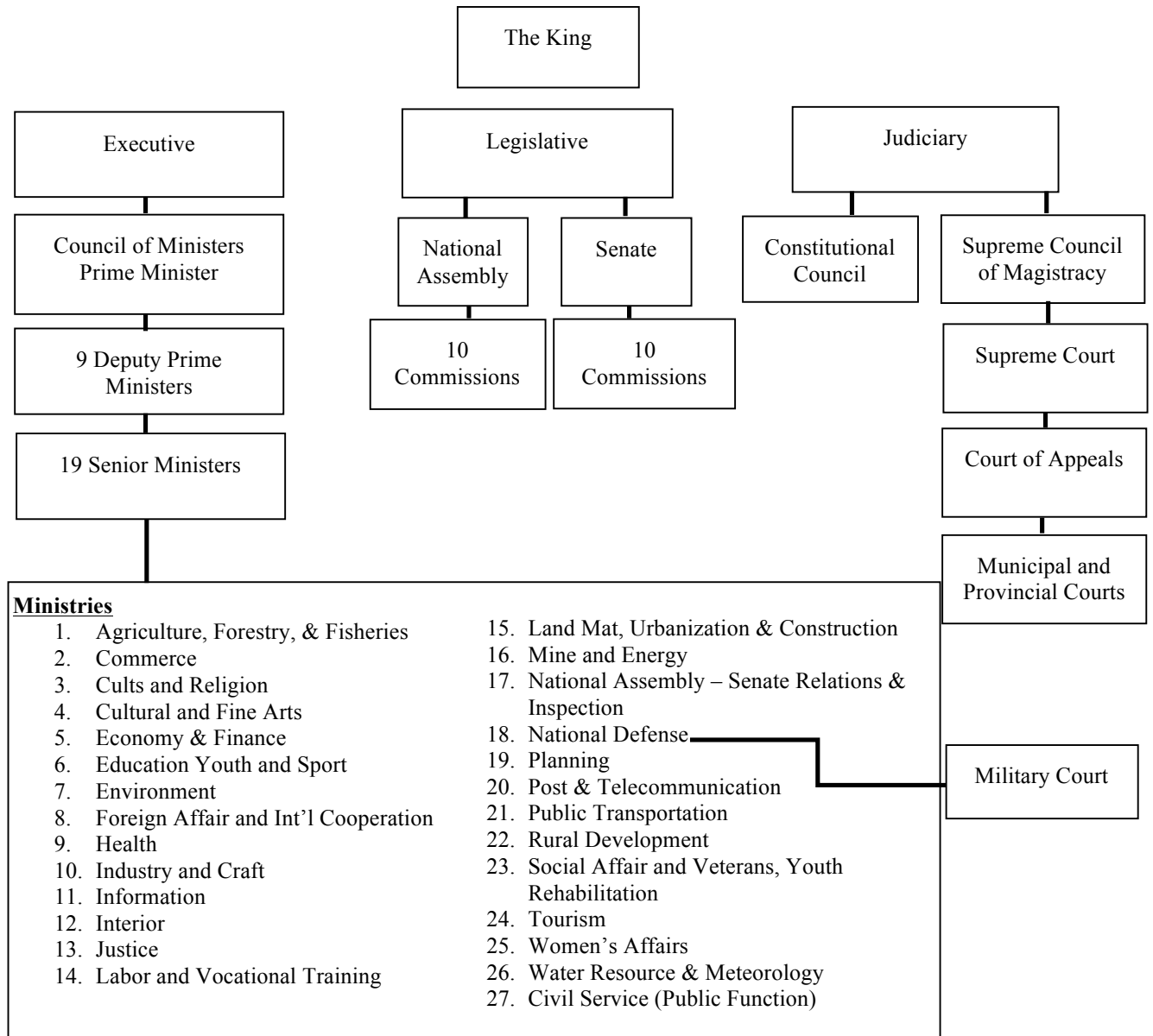
In addition, the Kingdom of Cambodia consists of 24 Provinces and 1 Capital (Phnom Penh), 197 Krong (municipality)/District/Khan, and 1633 Commune/Sangkat.<sup>1</sup> Figure 2.2 below describes the administrative divisions that are under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior. As a unitary state system, Cambodia governs its sub-national administration under the organic laws. This administration consists of three tiers of governance: Capital City/Provinces, Khans/Districts/Municipalities, and Sangkat/Commune. The policy of decentralization and deconcentration has been applied to all three level of the administrative system; however, the citizen can only

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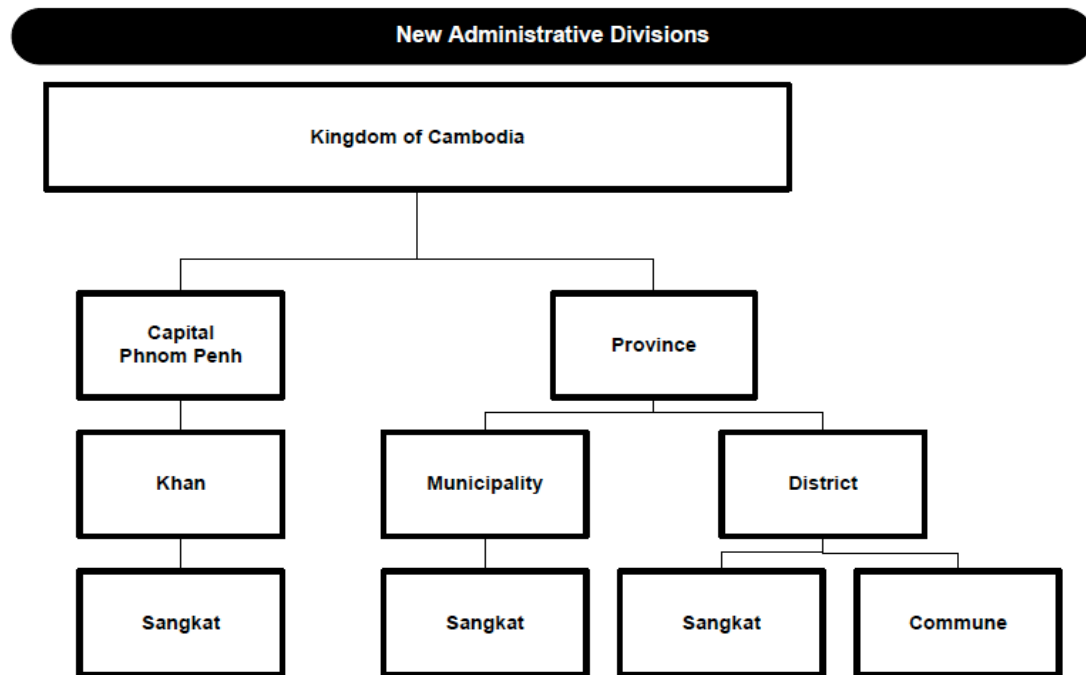
<sup>1</sup> The number is updated on May 6, 2016.

elect their commune/Sangkat chief and councilors every five-year term. The elected communal chiefs/ councilors, then, elect capital/provincial and district/Khan/Municipal councilors, but the government appoints the chiefs of the capital/province/district/Khan/Municipal.

**Figure 2.1 The government structure 2013-2018**



**Figure 2.2 Cambodian administrative divisions**



Cambodia is considered having the biggest cabinet in South East Asia if comparing with its size and population to, for example, Thailand with just 19 ministries of about 70 million or Indonesia 34 ministries of about 260 million. The government argues that such a cabinet is for the effectiveness and efficiency of managing the task. However, general views see it as a way to patronize the political and social system.

## **2.4 Public administrative reforms: Achievement and Challenges**

The Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) has recently been re-established in the fifth mandate of the Royal Government of Cambodia (2013-2018) with a vision to lead and manage all related civil services in Cambodia. The MCS was first established in 1993 after the UN led-election; however, it was downgraded to a State Secretariat for the Civil Service in 1996. It was reestablished again in the fifth mandate after the election 2013. The mission of MCS is to lead, manage, develop and enforce any strategic policies in the public administration reform in order to strengthen civil services in

Cambodia. The MCS also has its role to monitor and solve any conflict or complaint raised by Civil Servants who are under the Common Statute of Civil Servant (CSCS). It is also noted that the Public Administration is regulated under the CSCS.

Public Administration Reform (PAR) has always been a priority of the RGC. With the fifth legislature of the National Assembly, under the NSPD (2014-2018) - the Rectangular Strategy Phase III, the National Public Administration Reform (NPAR) has the vision to transform public administration into effective service provider and trusted partner to serve the people better. The goals of this NPAR are as the followings:

1. Strengthening the quality and delivery of public services through the implementation of the Policy on Public Service and the Guide on Public Services Standards to improve their responsiveness, reliability, effectiveness, and efficiency;
2. Strengthening the management and development of human resources within the Civil Service through the implementation of the Policy on Human Resources to enhance performance within the Civil Service and uphold values of service, motivation, loyalty, and professionalism, and
3. Further reforming pay and allowances.

So far, as illustrated in the policy paper, there are a number of noteworthy results and achievements including:

1. Managing an appropriate size of civil service while almost doubling the average monthly salary of civil servants.
2. Establishing Special Operating Agency (SOA) including the introduction of a public service database and the expanded scope of the "single window" mechanism to 24-municipal/district/khan offices.
3. Restructuring the administration system and other organizational structures at the capital, province, municipality, district and khan levels in accordance with



the Law on Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts, and Khans.

4. Developing and establishing the sub-national financial management system in compliance with the Law on Financial Regime and Property Management of Subnational Administrations.

Hitherto, the critical public administrative reform achievements have been attained as follows:

1. Strengthen the quality of the public service
  - The pay system has been revised and amended to ensure the correct and timely payment of the salaries without deductions in the fourth week of each month
  - The banking system has been used to pay to the civil servants
  - A "Drag and Drop System" has been designed for transferring and receiving payroll is ready to launch at 2015
  - Automatic system to tax deduction has been used
  - Automatic family allowances have been paid for civil servants' children up to the age of 21
2. Human resource management and development
  - The civil servants' category and rank has been promoted and adjusted
  - The statute and structure of the Royal School for Administration has been amended in order to provide effective training
  - Training has been provided to all related ministry
3. Pay and remuneration reform
  - Salary of civil servants has been increased
  - Functional meal allowance has been revised

Contrasting to the achievements, the government has also acknowledged the following challenges in Public Administration and believes that it will be solved through the effective implementation of the 2015-2018 strategic action:

1. The CT in public administration is still limited and the service delivery is still complicated, centralized, and bureaucratic
2. The information workflow within and between the ministries/institutions are not effective
3. The implementation of monitoring and the evaluating system is not effectively implemented
4. Career management and development are not yet effectively applied and the clear the description of the role and responsibility of the civil servants has not been developed
5. The capacity of human resources and institutions are still limited
6. The pay system is not responsive and consistent

Besides what it is seen by the government its self, it is necessary to look from the outside perspective. In order to adapt to the changing environment of the public service organization, strategic management ideas such as public SWOT, PEST analysis could "provide a framework for structuring" the understanding of such change (Osborne & Brown, 2005, pp. 12-13).

#### **2.4.1 The Political context analysis**

After the July 2013 election, the political landscape has dramatically changed. The opposition party – Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) was able to secure 55 out of 123 seats in the National Assembly. Alleged by the opposition that the election was irregular and full of fraud, the CPP was still able to form its government while the opposition refused to take up the seats in the Assembly and took to the street to protest against the result of the election and called for serious investigation and re-election.

Clashes broke out between the labor activists, and the supporters of the opposition party led to four dead and several injuries. Twenty-three people were detained under the accusation of threatening the national security. After a year of political deadlock, the opposition agreed to take up the parliamentary seats under the promise from the CPP to reform the National Election Committee in late 2014.

The political tension was at tense lately in May 2016 after the leader of the opposition party was forced to flee out of the country, and the deputy leader is facing an arrest warrant under a charge of what Billy Chia-Lung Tai (2016), an independent human rights and legal consultant, describes as a "legal fiction". According to this legal procedure, four human rights activists and one member of the National Election Committee have also been detained. A number of non-governmental organizations are calling for a release by wearing a black T-shirt on every Monday (Black Monday).

While CPP is under a considerable pressure to make a meaningful reform as described in its policies, especially in the public service sectors so that it can win favor back from the people, it is repressing the political activities by using the court to threaten and arrest those who have an opposing voice. The Bertelsmann Transformative Index (BTI, 2016) describes Cambodia as "Autocracy" with its democratic status index of 3.7 in 2016. Majority of the people reported that the government is heading in the wrong direction in its governance. Corruption was the main reason why the majority of the people were reportedly dissatisfied with the government in the survey by Asia Foundation (2014).

Public service delivery without corruption is less likely to succeed due to the political patronage system that has deeply rooted in Cambodia. Mark Turner (2016) argues that this patronage system makes it difficult for Cambodia to reform its bureaucracies since it diverts state resources into the private hand, which enhances inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the delivery of government services. The systems of patronage, creating rent-seekers, will lead to weak accountability and, thus, weak institutions. The

reducing the dominance of one-party governing at the local politics with the increase of opposition party will undoubtedly improve the accountability; in contrast, strong political will and commitment of the ruling party to fight corruption and nepotism remain a critical question.

However, in November 2017, the ruling party CPP took a critical step to eliminate the viable opposition party—Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) by accusing its leader on treason by colluding with the United State to topple down the government. The court, which everyone believes under the order from the Prime Minister, issued an order to dissolve CNRP and ban 118 of its senior members from doing politics for five years. In addition to this, the 55 elected seats of opposition members in the parliament were redistributed to other small political parties that took part in the previous election but without having won any single seat. Some parties refused to accept, and the current distribution is as the followings:

1. CPP has gained from 68 parliamentary seats in 2013 to 79 in 2017
2. FUNCINPEC has gained from zero in 2013 to 41 seats in 2017
3. Cambodian National Party (CNP) has gained from zero in 2013 to 2 seats in 2017
4. Khmer Economic Development Party (KEDP) has gained from zero in 2013 to 1 seat in 2017

The local commune chiefs of about 500 and the local councilors of about 5,000 were removed from their post as CNRP was ordered to close down from the court. CPP took all the CNRP's local seats. The political context in Cambodia is currently under a critical moment in which it can be sliding toward a one-party state, which is opposite to what has been declared in the constitution as a liberal and multi-political party state. CNRP has called for its supporters, representing about 44% of the total voter in the commune election 2017, not to participate in the upcoming election in July 2018. The boycott, argued by the former exile opposition party leader Sam Rainsy, will

delegitimize the election. The international community, namely the United States and the European Union, expressed their grave concern and warned for possible sanction if the government does not ensure that the democratic election process is back on track. The US administration keeps calling for a free and fair election and has already suspended its direct financial assistance to the Cambodian government by stating, "American taxpayer funds are not being used to support anti-democratic behaviour" (BBC, 2018). Meanwhile, the European Union spokesperson stated, "An electoral process from which the main opposition party has been arbitrarily excluded is not legitimate" (VOA, 2017). In addition, it is reiterated, "Respect of fundamental human rights is a prerequisite for Cambodia to continue to benefit from the EU's preferential Everything But Arms scheme."

It is unlikely that without political opposition party the government can focus more on strengthening its well-planned policy paper and implement it effectively. Political instability is expected and the political will and commitment to further reform the public administration is in question. The strength and weakness of the political context can be summarized in Table 2.2 below.

**Table 2.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the political context**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-planned policies</li> <li>• Pressures to reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abuse of political power</li> <li>• Lack of political will</li> <li>• Political instability</li> </ul>

#### **2.4.2 The Economic context analysis**

According to World Bank (2015), the gross domestic product (GDP) in Cambodia continuously grows from six percent in 2010 to seven percent in three years consecutively (2011, 2012, and 2013). Euromonitor International (EI, 2014) anticipates that Cambodia is able to sustain its economic growth to seven percent in real GDP due to the low labor services, the region's most dollarized economy, and its proximity to key

markets such as China. The growth of GDP looks promising to the increment of civil servant salary which is the third strategic reform of the government; however, the increment remains low, for example, a teacher and nurse's basic salary is 550.000 riels (approximately 137USD). The ratio of the government wage to per capita gross domestic product in Cambodia is low comparing to the other ASEAN countries. The ratio in Cambodia is 1.1 comparing to Thailand 4.7, Malaysia 2.8 and Singapore 2.9 (Moon & Hwang, 2013).

Corruption remains the critical challenge to the economy, as ten percent of the GDP is reported loss every year (VOA, 2014). As illustrated earlier in the National Integrity System, Transparency International Cambodia (TIC) reveals that there is a weak integrity system to uphold the rule of law and ensure sustainable development and a good quality of life in Cambodia. As also mentioned in the previous section, Worldwide Governance Indicator (2013) reports no improvement in its Government Effectiveness Indicators, which fluctuates around 18.7 percentile rank (2010-2013). Thus, economic growth will likely ensure that the government can increase the civil servant's salary and budgeting the reforms; however, corruption is still a significant obstacle that has to be taken seriously to deal with.

Furthermore, due to the above political context, a possible economic sanction is expected from the EU and US. The main export markets are in the US and EU. Cambodia received special duty-free privileges to export to the US under the Generalized System of Preference (GSP) and the EU under the Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme. These attract many investors in garment and footwear industry, which is the primary source of national revenue as it covers up to 70 percent of the total exports and creates more than half a million jobs to Cambodian workers. The precise data obtained illustrated that the amount of total export to the EU and the US market is about more than 6 thousands millions of US Dollar and 3 thousands millions of US Dollar respectively in 2016. Table 2.3 below summarizes the Cambodian export to the potential markets from 2012 to 2016.

**Table 2.3 Export to major market (in thousand US Dollar)**

Year	Asean	EU	US	Canada	China	Japan	S.Korea	Australia/ NewZealand
2012	1.499.333	3.023.388	2.799.684	598.756	215.314	404.271	126.359	54.027
2013	1.265.887	3.967.073	2.870.575	677.128	363.635	583.033	136.313	84.723
2014	1.703.173	4.885.669	2.951.402	748.703	482.915	772.003	193.988	116.121
2015	1.973.407	5.447.288	3.145.596	806.876	666.595	968.544	216.527	133.497
2016	2.711.926	6.259.277	2.916.669	897.898	830.513	1.204.231	239.773	175.534

Source: Report dated 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017 from the ministry of commerce (no. 5316, អមណ្ឌ) to the Prime Minister

The European Commission Vice-President Federica Mogherini has recently expressed that the "respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms is part of the EU's trade policy and underpins the legal basis of our trade preferences" (Kjewski, 2018). A fact-finding mission will be visiting Cambodia in June 2018 in order to assess the situation. It was reported that the EU would likely to put the sanction if the election is not democratically conducted.

Even though the government expects that the economy will keep growing by exploring different option to alleviate the financial deficit once there is a sanction, the analyst warned that this is not likely possible (Vicheika, 2017). The government hopes to promote growth by improving infrastructure, strengthening revenue collection and attracting more foreign investment. The deepening dependency on Chinese loans and market in order to get away from EU or US influences is also the government strategy to maintain the growth. If the economy does not hurt, this will have a positive impact to readjust the salary increment to the low salary staff in the public sector strategic reform; however, possible sanction from EU and US in couple with the little ability or willingness to fight corruption, rooted deeply in Cambodian society, will be negatively impacted to the effectiveness of the reform in the public administration section as planned in the policy. Recently, a report from a global credit rating agency, Moody's Investment Services, also warns that the Cambodian economy may be vulnerable to external shocks due to low diversity of exports. "Garment and textiles production and a

few other low value-added manufacturing dominate Cambodia's exports, which are largely destined for the US and the European Union, exposing the economy to the sector- and market-specific shocks," the report highlighted (Circosta & Sheth, 2017). Table 2.4 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the economic context although there may be other possible variables that are affecting the growth.

**Table 2. 4 Strengths and weaknesses of the economic context**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic growth (with the influence from China's economic aids)</li> <li>• Ability to increase civil servant salary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corruption</li> <li>• Possible economic sanctions</li> </ul>

### **2.4.3 The Social context analysis**

The population who is under the age of 35 stands about 70 percent in the country. This young population can be an advantage or a threat to the society. It can be an advantage because it can provide a dynamic labor force; in contrast, this can also create problems if there is no job available. Announcement from the government claimed that the employment rate in 2016 is 99 percent; however, both civil society and opposition party rejected the claim by arguing that the definition of the employment is too broad and that most people do not have a decent work. With its value of 0.584, Human Development Index 2014 ranks Cambodia in 136 out of 187 countries. Adult literacy is 83 percent for male and 66 percent for female (World Bank, 2015). Youth literacy is higher with 88 percent for male and 86 percent for female. Although we can see the high literacy rate among adult, the manpower in implementing the strategic reforms relies hugely upon the local authority. Research surveys reveal that most of the commune councilors are old (average age is 56) with little education (KAS, 2007 & CDRI, 2011). The number stands at 37.38 percent to those who are between one to six years of education, and 29.62 percent are between seven to nine years, and only 8.22 percent have 13 years or



more. Two main reasons that hinder the effectiveness, for example, in implementation the decentralization process are the lack of human resources and participation among citizen at the local level.

The above information could explain that the government needs to attract young and educated people to work in the sub-national level if it wants to implement its policy effectively because they are more educated and adapted to the changing social phenomenon. However, the big challenge for the government again is the salary allowance. Commune chiefs and councilor receive their monthly salary for about 74USD – 98USD. This little salary does not seem to attract young adult to work at the local level as they instead like to migrate to urban and the neighboring countries because the salary is much higher. Due to the low wage received, civil service servants have to have secondary jobs as an additional source of income; this also results in frequent absenteeism and corruption in the public sector.

Thus, the strategic reform should be focus first on salary increment and how to motivate the young adult to work at under national level.

Against the backdrop of possible political instability and economic sanction as described in the above parts, it is likely to predict that there will be social chaos after the election in July 2018. The main opposition party appealed to its supporters not to participate in the coming election and to the international community not to recognize such an unfair election that excluded the major opposition party, which is more than 45 percent of the voters are its supporter despite the election is generally known rigged. The recent crackdown on civil society organizations and media is even infuriated the public as well as the international community. One of the US-funded organizations -- (National Democratic Institute) that has been working with political parties and civil society was ordered to shut down and its expat staff to leave the country in August 2017. The government accused this organization of having an "ill-intended" plan to overthrow the government. The non-governmental organizations that are working on human rights and the election have also been under threat. In November the same year,

Prime Minister Hun Sen publicly instructed his police ministry to investigate and close down the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights (CCHR) for the accusation that this center is providing support to opposition party members to conduct "revolution" (Baliga, 2017). A week later the government decided to withdraw its decision by allowing CCHR to continue its work but put it under the government watch list. It is unquestionable that such a threat has the most impact on the ability of the organization to work independently to support the value of standing for human rights and democracy.

A Situation-Room, which was founded by more than thirty non-governmental organizations to monitor the electoral process and report the findings during and after the election, was also ordered to close down. Committee for Free and Fair Election (COMFREL) and Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (Niefec) are the two leading and vocal NGOs that received a warning letter from the Ministry of Interior about the possibility of legal action if they continue their activities in which the government sees as against to the controversial NGO law that it adopted (Sokhean & Paviour, 2017). These two have decided not to register as election observers in the coming election 2018 by arguing that the election will not be democratically conducted.

In addition to the political opposition party and civil society oppression, independent media was also targeted to crack down. Local radio stations were instructed not to relay their broadcasting from international radio station such as Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA) that were funded by the US government and known mainly for their democratic agenda. Local and foreign journalists have been subjected to arrest and expel from the country under the charge of espionage. Currently, two of former RFA reporters and an Australian filmmaker are under detention. The Cambodia Daily and Phnom Penh Post are the only two rated favorable newspapers known for their independence and report in English and Khmer. They have been forced to shut down and bought under the allegation of tax fraud, which everyone believes that the government intends to repress the freedom of speech.

In summary, there is room for the government to effectively reform its public administration due to the young population and high rate of youth literacy factors. However, there are significant issues that may hinder the reform. First is the unattractive wage to young potential local leaders. Second, the local communities that are led by the local authority with limit education and low participation from citizen remain critical. Last, the absence of robust civil society and opposition party may generate distrust that inclines to be either uncooperative or chaos. Table 2.5 below summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the social context analysis.

**Table 2. 5 Strengths and weaknesses of the social context.**

Strengths	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High youth literacy rate</li> <li>• Young population</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low literacy among commune councillors</li> <li>• Low motivation to attract young worker to public office</li> <li>• Corruption and absenteeism which threaten the work efficiency and effectiveness</li> <li>• Low participation from the local citizen</li> <li>• Possible social chaos</li> </ul>

#### **2.4.4 The Technological context analysis**

The government initiated an e-government project known as Government Administration Information System (GAIS) and implemented in 2002 to promote better government services and generate revenue with the purpose to reduce corruption. A research study aiming at examining the e-government project reveals three significant challenging factors that policymakers could consider as the weakness or threat to the strategic reform of the government, which aimed to provide its effective and efficient public services (Sinawong, Jeong-Dong & Jongsu, 2009). The first one is the Management Factor where it needs more attention from governing leadership in the government. The second is the Infrastructure Factor. This factor concerns with the

financial constraints as well as the lack of technical equipment and expertise (The Network Readiness Index 2008 was 0.29). The last one is the Human Factor. There is a high turnover rate among government information technological staff due to uncompetitive salary; thus, this leads to the staff shortage in the public sector.

In the NSDP (2014-2018), government also prioritised the policy on ICT. The master plan for ICT in Education 2009-2013 suggests a commitment of the government to "establish and develop human resources of the very highest quality and ethics in order to develop a knowledge-based society within Cambodia" (MoEYS, 2016). However, another study reveals that research and innovation capacity is minimal (CICP, 2016). The knowledge gap between the administrator and younger generation remains a crucial concern to policy implementation.

In an attempt to understand student perception toward computer and Internet, a case study was conducted at three urban high schools in Cambodia (see Richardson et al. 2014). The study of 1, 137 sample population of the high school students reveals that the students have a favorable attitude toward the technology once they have more opportunity to access the computer and Internet. However, the electricity expense and the availability of the computer at school remain key challenges, not to mention to the connectivity of the Internet. This study suggests that the current high school students are still challenged with the knowledge of technology let alone the local authority leaders who can barely read and write.

Global Information Technology (GIT, 2015) scores Cambodia 3.3 in its Network Readiness Index (NRI) with the sub-index of 3.4 in Environment, 3.9 in Readiness, and 3.0 in Usage. This score has slightly improved if we compare to 2008, which suggest that there is an opportunity for Cambodia to transform its society and economy through ICT. However, it is still observed that due to the contributing factors such as old age people (most of the commune councilors are computer illiterate) in the local level, lack of motivation (competitive salary) for IT staff, and little attention from the top

management, the strategic reform by promoting accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency in delivering public service is less likely to achieve through ICT.

Looking at the policy platform as spelled in the policy for reform, we can be sure that there are an explicit acknowledgment and intention that the government is taking the initiative and committing to build an e-infrastructure and e-knowledge to update with the current needs of the society so that it can deliver better public services. Nevertheless, the reality suggests that there is a lack of competent staff, especially at the local level, to fulfill the plan. The knowledge in ICT shared among the local authority leaders is in question, and the ability to motivate dynamic young youth to narrow the knowledge gap in ICT remains unknown. Consequently, there is still a concern whether or not the government will be able to implement the reform successfully. Table 2.6 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the technological context.

**Table 2. 6 Strengths and weaknesses of the technological context**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear policy framework</li> <li>• Commitment to e-infrastructure</li> <li>• Commitment to building e-knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of competent staff</li> <li>• Low motivation to work</li> <li>• Knowledge gap in ICT</li> </ul>

## 2.5 Summary and conclusion

This chapter starts with a brief historical overview of Cambodian legal, economic and political system. It reveals that France's legal system has primarily influenced the Cambodian legal system, but Cambodians have been bitter or worst starting from the absolute monarchy to communism and genocide. This chapter sees that the political legacy that each political faction has in the past is threatening the ability to build a healthy state in which it can deliver better public service.

Although Cambodian public administrative reform is underway and there are notable achievements in the public sector reform, the political, economic, social and technological (PEST) analysis raises some concerns that could hinder the effectiveness of the reform. Most importantly it is the political environment. With the current political oppression that excludes thousands of local opposition councilors from their local representative and the elimination of the major opposition party, it is likely that there is political instability in the coming years and this will disturb the public administration reform commitment due to lack of funding, political co-optation, and citizen participation. The competitive electoral authoritarian system in Cambodia is slowly moving into a one-party hegemonic state as the 2018 election sees the CPP win all the parliamentary seats.

Economic sanctions from the international community can also trigger social chaos as more than half a million garment employees could lose their job, which indirectly supports millions of their family. Despite the government trying to find alternative sources of economic growth and exploring different options to diversify the exports, there is a little room for positive outcome due to the inability to reduce corruption and attract foreign investments. The export products are still solely based on EU and US's market, and this is vulnerable to the economic deficit. Thus, this will hinder the ability of the government to increase a competitive salary to a public administration staff, which is one of its main strategic reforms.

In addition, the two factors above will contribute to social and technological factor that will undermine the policy reform as envisaged. Lack of political trust, cooperation from citizen and the incentive to attract young and potential youth to work in the public sector, the government will face many challenges in reaching the vision of increasing efficient service, building the e-infrastructure, and providing better leadership and management at the local community.

As a result, the overall assessment is that there is a little hope for the government to be able to reach their policy goals, which are to introduce ICT to the public system, to create information workflow within the government intuitions, to implement the practical system of monitoring and evaluation, to precisely manage and develop civil servants career, to build capacity to public staff, and to provide responsive and accountable services to citizen. Reports from credible and international organization also seem to support the analysis of this chapter. See summary of key indices and rank below in Table 2.7.

**Table 2.7 Summary of the international indices and rank**

<b>International Indicator</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Score/Rank</b>
BTI	2016	3.7
CPI	2014	21/156
Fund for Peace	2017	85.7
GIT	2015	3.3
HDI	2014	0.584/136
Rule of Law	2016	/112
WGI	2013	18.7

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THEORETICAL CONCEPTION AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

This chapter empirically reviews literature considered relevant to guide the research study, which can answer the question posed in Chapter 1, i.e., *how political decentralization has deepened democracy in Cambodia*. The Chapter has four main parts: First, it reviews the concept of democracy by looking at its foundations and definitions generated from various scholarly literature. Second, it explores and reviews some explanatory or causal factors that could deepen democracy. Third, it highlights a number of factors that political decentralization deepens democracy. Finally, it proposes the analytical framework that will guide the whole study.

### **3.1 Democracy**

#### **3.1.1 The Foundations**

This section deals particularly with what cause democracy and explore what democracy means. It is acknowledged that there are many possible paths to democracy and not all authoritarian regimes have transited to democracy. Democracy connotes different meanings in different societies, yet it is claimed a "universal value" that almost every society has no objection to (Sen, 1999). Take a look at Cambodia; the concept of "Democracy" is very perplexing to Cambodian in various ways. Democracy provides a conflicting connotation, for example, it can be referred to elections as the electoral act introduced in the summer of 1946, or massacre and repression as introduced by the Kampuchea Democrat (Khmer Rouge-Pol Pot's genocide) in the 1970s, or freedom and human rights as introduced from the West in 1991's Paris Peace Agreement and later claimed in the Constitution. Each of the regimes rhetorically used the term democracy either through their lips or written constitution. This different concept has still been



recently found in Cambodia as explored by Mona Lilja whose research finding suggests that democracy has been understood differently among politicians, non-governmental organization, and local citizen and even reluctant to positively perceive as the western's view (Lilja, 2010). The below are the potential concept derived from her interviews:

Pol Pot killed all educated people in Cambodia. No one has education now. People are not educated. At that time the leaders called themselves democrats too. Even the country was named a democracy. Therefore, people lose their faith in democracy. Before they did not know what democracy was. Do they know that now? (Interview with a politician in Phnom Penh, 19 April 2007, Lilja, 2010, p. 298)

There is no history of education and democracy in Cambodia. There is no strong culture and education, that is, education to understand the elections ... We must also fight the picture that democracy is a Western idea, which is created by the Asian value debate. (Interview with an Executive Director of a local NGO, Phnom Penh, 3 July 2007, Lilja, 2010, p. 298)

It took time to understand democracy due to the fact that the Khmer Rouge used the word democracy. The language is not that clear. What means democracy? People understood a few points, but not the nuances of democracy. They understood elections, but not how they are exercised. Now we must understand the nuances. What is, for example, equality? (Interview, Executive Director of a local NGO, Phnom Penh, 3 July 2007, Lilja, 2010, p. 299)

The United Nations has introduced the concept of "liberal democracy" in the 1990s to Cambodia, yet this concept is not clearly communicated by the citizen, politician, and civil society. Mikael Baaz and Mona Lilja argue that the intended meaning of liberal

democracy – the politics of ideas, is understood differently in the context of Cambodia because most of them see it as the politics of presence, which personal identification is more important than party's ideologies (Baaz & Lilja, 2014). They also warn that the democracy in Cambodia has been hybridized and need to be understood clearly in the local context so that the democratization can be successfully consolidated. Although positively connoted to "democracy," most citizen still paternalistically see government as their parents, which suggest that the concept is weakly understood among the people (Asia Foundation, 2014).

The conceptual confusion among Cambodian citizens toward the term of democracy has probably resulted from the absent of enforcing the democratic values inherited along with the democratic institutions. The Cambodian political cultures, described as absolutism with less tolerant of political differences and the patron-client relationship among the elites, are seen as blocking the democratization process (Roberts, 2001). Democracy is sometimes "artificial" because it is just introduced in its "forms" such as stating in the rules and laws or creating certain institutions but fail to inculcate the "spirit" which is about ways of practicing under the "democratic social norms and behavior" (Rogers, 2005). A review of democratic conception in the broader sense will be explored later in this chapter, but first, let's explore in the first place why a regime decides to adopt democratic rules. To put it precisely, this means why a regime chooses to liberalize itself. Liberalization is different from democratization since the former focuses on "the process of redefining and extending rights" and then later on "the processes whereby rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to political institutions ... or expanded to include person not previously enjoying such rights and obligations" (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986, pp. 7-8). Concept explored in this part is necessary to guide and frame the whole part of this research study.

The dominated analysis of what causes democracy in the past decades has been focused on the work of Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Moore (1969) asserts that the path to democracy is the rise of the middle classes who

are struggling to deal with the ruling elites to claim for a balance share in the political and economic spheres. With the historical comparative and case studies analysis of England, France, the United States, Japan, India, China, and Russia, Moore (1969, p. 418) claims, "No bourgeois, no democracy." However, Robert Dahl is not satisfied with such an idea that the capitalism endangers parliamentary democracy. Arguing with insufficient cases and long historical processes analysis, Dahl (1971), in his historical sequences condition, postulates that there are three possible paths that a regime becomes a polyarchy – an alternative term for democracy which will be discussed later in this section. These paths are first a regime (closed hegemony) opens for public competition then follow by public participation. Second, in contrast to the first path, a regime opens for public participation first and then follows by public competition. Finally, in an accelerated way, a regime is "abruptly transformed into a polyarchy by a sudden grant of universal suffrage and rights of public contestation" (Dahl, 1971, p. 34). Dahl's other conditions determine whether or not a regime follow each of the paths. Those additional conditions are "the degree of concentration in the socioeconomic order, level of socioeconomic development, inequality, subcultural cleavages, foreign control, and the beliefs of political activists" (Dahl, 1971, p. 32). Dahl (1971, p. 39) warns that only the first path is the "safest"; however, this is no longer available since more or fewer countries are already opened for competition. "Evolutionary processes" taken by the old regimes leaders and "revolution" taken by the new regimes once the old are overthrown are the main causes to force countries to widen their political competition (Dahl, 1971, pp. 40-41). The elites either in the ruling incumbent or the opposition are still seen the main actors to cause the evolution and revolution.

The work of Dankwart Rustow suggests a different approach. Rustow (1970, p. 342) argues that the structural theory developed, for example, by Seymour Martin Lipset in which high level of economic growth and social development are seen a precursor to democracy cannot be interpreted as "preconditions" or causation to democracy. Lipset is "careful to speak of 'Some Social Requisites,' not prerequisites, 'of Democracy,' and, thus, to acknowledge the difference between correlation and cause," Rustow (1970, p.

342) reiterates. Alternatively, Rustow (1970) theorizes that when political elites are struggling over conflicts but try to refrain from polarizing the nation, they will adopt a compromised strategy, which is conducive to democracy, no matter or not the democracy is the end goal. He asserts "a country is likely to attain democracy not by copying the constitutional laws or parliamentary practices of some previous democracy, but rather by honestly facing up to its particular conflicts and by devising or adapting effective procedures for their accommodation" (Rustow, 1970, p. 354). Thus, democracy is the result of the strategies used by the political elites who are trying to resolve the conflicts, and they agree to follow certain rules of the game. Rustow (1970) does not suggest what cause conflict as he opens for more possibilities. The strategic interaction used by political elites to deal with conflict among the "hard- liner" and "soft-liners," can also cause to democracy (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986).

What causes a country to liberalize from the first place is ambiguous as there are many possible variables. Rather than interested in what causes a single regime to democracy, Samuel Huntington intellectually groups regimes that move from non-democratic to democratic into three waves of democratization (Huntington, 1993). "A wave usually involves liberalization or partial democratization in political systems that do not become fully democratic," according to Huntington (1993, p. 15). Arguing that not all non-democratic regime ends with a democratic regime, Huntington places more emphasis on the democratization processes, which involves three stages: the fall down of authoritarian rule, the establishment of the democratic institution, and the consolidation of that institution (Huntington, 1993, p. 35). The first wave of democracy occurred in the American and French revolutions in the 1820s and ends in 1926. There are many roots cause to this first wave of democratization, including the economic and social developments and the triumph of the western allies in the First World War. The second wave happens in 1943 and ends in 1962. This has mostly affected from the democracy imposed or intervention by the western allies after the Second World War. The third wave starts with Portugal revolution in 1974 and continues until the 1990s. Huntington reasons the following causes and times as the followings:

1. The deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian systems in a world where democratic values were widely accepted, the dependence of those regimes on performance legitimacy, and the undermining of that legitimacy by military defeats, economic failures, and the oil shocks of 1973<sup>74</sup> and 1978<sup>79</sup>;
2. The unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960s, which raised living standards, increased education, and greatly expanded the urban middle class in many countries;
3. The striking changes in the doctrine and activities of the Catholic Church manifested in the Second Vatican Council in 1963<sup>65</sup> and the transformation of national churches from defenders of the status quo to opponents of authoritarianism and proponents of social, economic, and political reform;
4. Changes in the policies of external actors, including in the late 1960s the new attitude of the European Community toward expanding its membership, the major shift in U.S. policies beginning in 1974 toward the promotion of human rights and democracy in other countries, and Gorbachev's dramatic change in the late 1980s in Soviet policy toward maintaining the Soviet empire; and
5. "Snowballing" or demonstration effects, enhanced by new means of international communication, of the first transitions to democracy in the third wave in stimulating and providing models for subsequent efforts at regime change in other countries. (Huntington, 1993, pp. 45-46)

Not all countries in the third wave, unfortunately, ends with democracies. Some ends with "one party systems," "military regime," and "personal dictatorship" (Huntington, 1993, p. 110). Observing the breakthrough of the dictatorship in post-communist countries in Europe and the former Soviet Union, Michael McFaul (McFaul, 2002, p. 213) argues that those countries should not have been grouped in the third wave as it is "more accidental than causal" and he proposes to name it the Fourth Wave of regime changes. They are not "stalemate, compromise, and pacts" that lead to democracies or autocracies, but the powerful groups who are inclined to either of the former or later

will determine the regime; the balance will produce prolongation of uncertainty, "yielding unconsolidated, unstable partial democracies and autocracies" (McFaul, 2002, pp. 213-214). Examining the cases in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, McFaul (2005) further elaborates seven conditions that turn those countries to democracy. First is the growth of opposition supports in the semi-autocratic regimes. Although the elections are normally rigged, opposition parties gain more support due to the unpopularity of the incumbent parties, which is the second condition to the breakthrough. The third condition is the ability of the opposition to unite their political partner to challenge the incumbent. The capacity of the opposition to gather mass protest marks the fourth condition. The roles of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also important in mobilizing the people. NGOs can also help monitor the election process and able to provide independent, fast and reliable election report, which can reveal the election frauds that the incumbent parties find it difficult to manipulate and gain trust from the citizen. This marks the fifth condition. The sixth condition is the advent of technology and the growing number of independent media that facilitate communication and mobilize mass support. The last important condition is the split between the authority forces. Armed forces are reluctant to obey the order to bloodily crash the mass protests, which are nonviolently conducted. These conditions strengthen the claims that previous theories emphasis on "the level of economic development," "the split between hard-liner and soft liner," and "the relationship between the incumbent and the west" are less potent to democracies (McFaul, 2005, pp. 15-18).

So far we have seen that it is impossible to find a single root cause to democracy because this has evolved from interrelated causes. What cause to democracy (liberalization) is usually treated as what cause to democratization (processes to liberalization) especially after the third wave. The role of middle classes in supporting democracy as suggested by Moore (1969) may not be applied to all cases as it is revealed that the middle classes are supportive of "early liberal reform", but they reject the "call for full parliamentary government", and it is also the middle class in Latin America that support the military coups (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992, p. 271). The

modernization theories that usually suggest that they are economic growth, urbanization, and education level that cause to democracy have also been proven negatively correlated to the democracy; instead these positively correlated to preventing democracy breakdown (Teorell, 2010). One conclusion can be drawn from the review above is that the democracy (the concept of rights, freedom, election...) was introduced to Cambodia in the Second Wave as the country adopted its first constitution in 1947 after having been under French colonization for nearly a hundred years. Then, it fell into the reverse wave in the 1960s that the country was under one-party dominant and led by the only King and led to a coup and genocide in the 1970s. Cambodia, again, was introduced to democracy in the Third Wave after the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991 and national election in 1993. Scholarship focusing on democracy and democratization after the third wave period puts more efforts in finding ways to deepen democracy rather than tracing the root cause of democracy as most countries have already been liberated.

### **3.1.2 Democracy: The conception and stagnation**

The term "democracy" has been claimed originally rooted in Athens, and under the Cleisthenes reforms that the first democratic system emerges. The word itself in that time does not ascribe any conception that one could learn much as Anthony Birch argues "the Greeks gave us the word but did not provide us with model" (Birch, 2001, p. 71). Birch claims that the term itself is not really perplexing, but what matter is the confusion resulted from "the vagueness of the terms commonly used to define a democratic political system, the difficulty of clarifying these terms in a value-free way, and the array of partially incompatible justifications for democracy advanced by democratic theorists" (2001, p. 73). However, David Held asserts that the conception and principles of Athenian democracy do shape, guide, and influence to various thinkers until today (Held, 2006). Held's *Models of Democracy* (2006) traces the developmental conception of democracy and its characteristics from Athens to this temporary world. Held models democratic governance into ten, namely the Ancient Athens, the

Republican (Protective and Developmental), Liberal (Protective and Developmental), Marxist's direct, Competitive Elites, Pluralism, Legal, Participatory, Deliberative, and Autonomy/Cosmopolitan Democracies. The principles and characteristics of each model have some certain weaknesses, strengths, and overlapping areas that each advocated group fills in each other's gaps across the time and space. In the last conception of "Autonomy Democracy," Held defines a democratic state as:

Persons should enjoy equal rights and, accordingly, equal obligations in the specification of the political framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them; that is, they should be free and equal in the processes of deliberation about the conditions of their own lives and in the determination of these conditions, so long as they do not deploy this framework to negate the rights of others (Held, 2006, p. 282).

This model stresses the vital role of state and civil society, which are accountable and operating under the rule of law that can guarantee the meaningful participation of the citizen in equal shares in the realm of political, social, and economic. Held's model is considered as one of the many "thick version" of democratic conceptions (Coppedge, 2012; Sørensen, 2007).

Democracy has also been conceptualized according to four main dimensions, which are constitutional, substantive, procedural, and process-oriented (Tilly, 2007). To say a country is democracy, constitutional types focus on the "constitution", substantive on the "condition of life and politics", the procedural on the "elections", and the process-oriented on the "minimum set of processes" which is mainly derived from Robert Dahl's Polyarchy (Tilly, 2007, pp. 7-9). Arguing that Dahl's conception cannot be examined and "awkwardly to comparison and explanation", Tilly (2007, p. 10) proposes that a democratic country should be identified according to "the degree that political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected and mutually binding consultation"; democratization should be observed to the degree of those "conformity"



(Tilly, 2007, pp. 13-14). From this, we note that the relationship between state and its citizen in all countries has been moving back and forth on the four dimensions (breadth, equality, protection, and mutually binding consultation). This, however, does not suggest any precise way to deepen the relationship.

Robert Dahl (Dahl, 1982, p. 4) describes types of regimes that are "relatively democratized nation-states (countries)" as Polyarchies. The conception of Polyarchy is referring to political institutions that characterize a democratic regime that meets the following criteria (Dahl, 1982, pp. 10-11):

1. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
2. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
3. Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
4. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for the suffrage.
5. Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socioeconomic order, and the prevailing ideology.
6. Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law.
7. To achieve their various rights, including those listed above, citizens also have a right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.

According to Dahl, "democracy" is a governing system in which government can "response to citizen preferences" by opening up for political competition and inclusion (Dahl, 1971, pp. 1-2). To him, democratization is the changes of regimes from

"hegemonies and competitive oligarchies into near-polyarchies," from "near-polyarchies into full polyarchies," and from "full polyarchies" to further polyarchies (Dahl, 1971, p. 10). He affirms that "no large system in the real world is fully democratized" but just "...are closest to the ... polyarchies" (ibid., p. 8). Dahl's conception of democracy lies within the dimension of the citizens' rights to contestation and participation in politics under free and fair regulations. The first four requirements suggest the minimal aspect that "elections are inclusive, fair, and competitive," and the last two are "necessary not only during but also between elections" so that they can be "fair and competitive" (O'Donnell, 1996, p. 35). This "minimal procedural" requirement is not enough to describe "modern political democracy" (Schmitter & Karl, 1991, p. 81). In addition to the seven requirements of Dahl's Polyarchy, Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lunn Karl (1991) claim that other conditions are necessary for democracy that the elected government is able to govern without interference from an internal force, for example, the military or the external political system. This, of course, has to be practiced under certain rules or norms that require cooperation between the ruled and the ruler, free and fair competition, and the ability of civil society to influence to the public decision (Schmitter & Karl, 1991). Schmitter and Karl (1991, p. 76) define modern political democracy as "a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives." This definition has been elaborated further: "and in which citizens comply voluntarily with their rulers' decisions—even when they have not explicitly approved these decisions—because they regard them as having been taken legitimately" (Schmitter, 2015, p. 36).

Dahl's conception is usually labeled as "liberal democracies" (Schedler, 1998, p. 92). Andreas Schedler indicates two opposite direction of regimes that can be classified on the negative end, which are authoritarian regime and electoral, while liberal and advanced democracy on the other positive end (Schedler, 1998). Schedler (1998) claims no democratic regime is ever consolidated but can be moving backward and forward over the four categories. These clear dimensions make us assume that countries are

democratizing if they are moving from an authoritarian regime toward advanced democracy. However, the assumption that countries are democratizing themselves toward democracy just because they are liberating or reforming its economic and political governing can be a flaw. The belief that countries are transitioning toward democracy is a fault if they fall into what Thomas Carothers (2002) describes as "gray zone," in which regimes have certain democratic institutions but are less accommodated to political oppositions and civil society participation. The political gray zone is a space where countries are "neither dictatorial nor clearly headed toward democracy" (Carothers, 2002, p. 9). This gray zone produces subtypes of politics in which either the competitive political parties are not serious enough to democratize – "feckless pluralism," or the dominating ruling parties are controlling the state to ensure that they always win the election – "dominant-power politics," asserted Carothers (2002). Citizens in this gray zone context do not meaningfully participate in the polity besides voting, and the political parties are entertaining each other without making any serious reform toward a deeper democracy. Similar to the Gray Zone context, Schedler (2002) introduces the term "Foggy Zone" where two types of regimes, electoral democracy and electoral authoritarian, are produced in between the closed authoritarian and liberal democracy. To him, an election is needed for a democratic country, but it has to go beyond the election to be a liberal one where "rule of law, political accountability, bureaucratic integrity, and public deliberation" are institutionalized (Schedler, 2002, p. 37). What distinguishes between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism is that there are certain rules in which people have equal rights to contest and participate in a free and fair election in the former while those rights are absent or rarely implement in later.

Democracy is such a contested concept that has been continuously refined and redefined according to the forms of the governing regimes that emerge. Democracy can be described as a "principle or doctrine of government," "set of institution arrangement or constitutional devices," and "type of behavior" (Crick, 2002, p. 5). While electoral democratic regime connotes the minimalist concept of democracy, which abides by

rules and norms to ensure that there is the inclusive, free, and fair election, liberal democracy is substantial since it goes beyond the election to the social and economic equality, accountability, and the rule of law. Advanced democracy is usually attached to the concept of democratic consolidation where democratic rules and norms have become "the only game in town" (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 15).

As democracy has been declared a "universal value" (Sen, 1999) and liberal democracy have great victory over any type of government (Fukuyamar, 1999, 2010), regimes have transformed its governance from the closed authoritarian into the blur zone that what distinguishes between a democratic regime and non-democratic regime is not writ large; however, what vary between regimes to regimes are the quality dimensions of their democratic institutions. Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino have precisely laid down those quality dimensions that one can evaluate and seek the way to improve quality within the dimensions (Diamond & Morlino, 2004). They outline eight quality dimensions with their definitions followed by conditions that those qualities can be enhanced as well as the means to improve them. The Table 3.1 below briefly describes those aspects of democratic quality.

**Table 3. 1 Aspects of democratic quality**

Quality Dimensions	Definitions	Conditions	Means
1. Rule of law	Laws are equality fairly, and consistently applied to all people	Democratic values among elites; strong, effective, impartial bureaucratic system	Build up independence, capacity, and authority of law courts; mobilize and raise awareness by civil society
2. Participation	The rights to fully participation in politics and civil society organization must be granted	Citizen with basic and civic education; knowledge of government and political affairs	Tolerate to different cultural and political beliefs

	not only to vote but also to any decision making process		
3. Competition	Recurring free and fair election	Legal and constitutional guarantee of fair funding and access to media	Set up accountable and independent electoral commission
4. Vertical Accountability	Elected political leaders are to communicate their decision with their constituencies	Lively participation and competition; fair power distribution	Enhance process of evaluation and assessment through relevant stakeholders – civil society, media, and think tank.
5. Horizontal Accountability	Officeholders are to check each other for appropriate and lawful conducts	Legal system enforcing checks and balances	Build capacity; train leaders; encourage responsibility
6. Freedom	Freedom of political, civil, social and economic activities	Fair, vertical and horizontal accountable, and independent institutions; inclusiveness; competitions;	Mobilize citizen through civil society to help check and defend the freedom
7. Equality	Equal rights to access legal protection	Political, social, and economic equalities; political will; strong horizontal accountability	Increase political space; develop autonomous groups;
8. Responsiveness	Answer to what citizens need and demand	Strong vertical accountability with robust civil society; functional party system	Increase public resources; shape public interest

Source: Diamond and Morlino (2004)

In this section, a number of democratic conceptions have been reviewed. It is generally agreed that "democracy" is an "essentially contested concept" (Gallie, 1956). As Gallie's criteria of an essentially contested concept explain, democracy is appraisable, complex, differently describable, opened, contestable, exemplifiable, and progressively competitive. Democracy, therefore, is conceptualized around the relationship between the state and its citizens, institutions, and quality governance. The overall core values of democracy are about the freedom, equality, and check-balance of the political power. The relationship between state and citizens has to be constitutionally guaranteed that citizens have rights and freedom to elect their representatives, to demand proper response and to hold their representatives accountable. In addition, citizens have legitimate rights to organize their groups so that they can mobilize or advocate for certain specific issues. This can be either in forms of a political party or civil society. State institutions will be able to facilitate and strengthen the relationship in a way that government can effectively and efficiently manage to respond to citizens' demands by either informing, persuading, rejecting or proposing some certain needs for better society. The state must also make sure that their governance must be under the democratic principles, in which both leaders and citizens are mutually responsible to each other under the rule of law. Democratization is the process of enhancing the three dimensions above, which are to make relationship closer and broader and to create effective institutions that can respond with quality public services. Theories of democratization explain some different approaches and condition that democracy either prevail or derail. However, these have not been helpful to guide this research study yet. Ways to deepen the democratic dimensions have to be revisited.

### **3.2 Deepening democracy**

Francis Fukuyama published a paper in the Journal of Democracy in 2015 posing a question why democracy is not improving so well (Fukuyama, 2015). With the diminishing quality of freedom as pointed out by Larry Diamond, the influence of big

authoritarian states such as Russia and China, and the instability of states emerged from the Arab Spring, Fukuyama is not sure with the future of democracy in the world. However, one thing he seems to be sure about, which is hindering democracy, is the "failure of institutionalization" (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 12). To him, state institutions must be able to secure its legitimate power, under the rule of law, to provide better public services. To have a modern government and successful democracy while "the initial mobilization against tyranny gets institutionalized and converted into durable practices", Fukuyama (2015, p. 19) urges further steps by, first, transforming "social movements into political parties that can contest elections" and, last, using "legitimate authority and provide basic services to population". With the two-stage suggestion, he sees less important role of civil society organizations and grassroots pressure by claiming "the motive of creating modern governments was not grassroots pressure from informed and mobilized citizens but rather elite pressure" and "civil society organizations usually focus on narrow issues and are not set up to mobilize voters" (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 16-19). He also affirms "the legitimacy of many democracies around the world depends less on the deepening of their democratic institutions than on their ability to provide high-quality governance" (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 15). Elsewhere he also connects government legitimacy to the public governance by asserting "the government actually had to deliver better results if it was to be regarded as legitimate and needed to be more flexible and responsive to changing public demand" (Fukuyama, 2014, iBook, p. 111). Failing to modify its governing and justify its legitimacy to rule lead to Political Decay (Fukuyama, 2014). While his claims and arguments may be valid to some certain circumstances, these are perplexing in many ways. It seems that there is a dichotomy between deepening the democratic institutions and high-quality governance. It can be questioned whether or not a state can build its legitimacy without deepening its democratic institutions and providing better quality services to its citizen. How can public demands be heard and responded with weak democratic institutions or to put precisely under the authoritarian government? State institutions under authoritarian rules should not be described as legitimate because its governing has never been accountable to people and its rule of law is mere just ruled by authoritarian law.

Authoritarian states do not possess legitimate power and strong state institutions to respond to public demands, which are under the rule of law and democratically accountable to its citizen. Although he doesn't claim that "state modernization can be achieved only under conditions of authoritarian rule" (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 19), question would be about the legitimacy of the authoritarian regimes and the willingness of elites to modernize their governance since they possess financial resources and political means necessary to trap the state in their consolidated authoritarianism.

The current challenge of the democratizers today is the weakening of the global rules, where liberty and freedom of citizen are less priority. The rise of populist governments, the threats of terrorism, and the weakening of post World War II liberal world order have strengthened the facade democracies that resulted in a hybrid form of democracies. Following Larry Diamond, hybrid regimes are the combination of both democratic and autocratic elements in their ruling (Diamond, 2002). It is not an essay task to classify regimes into a clearly divided line; however, Diamond (2002, pp. 25-26) with reference to Levitsky and Way's competitive authoritarianism and Schedler's uncompetitive authoritarian or Satori's hegemonic regimes outlines six types of regimes: liberal democracy, electoral democracy, ambiguous regimes, competitive authoritarian, hegemonic electoral authoritarian, and politically closed authoritarian. Diamond (2002, p. 31) classified Cambodia into hegemonic electoral authoritarian type since 2001. Essentially, the rise of the opposition party in Cambodia in the national election in 2013 and the local election in 2017 could have moved it into a competitive authoritarian. The Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), emerged from two leading opposition party – Human Rights Party and Sam Rainsy Party, secured nearly 45 percent of the popular votes while the ruling Cambodian People Party (CPP) declined from 58 to 49 percent in 2013. The popularity of CNRP continued to increase in the local election in 2017 where the CPP's led only about 7 percent in the popular vote. Surprisingly, CPP decisively used the court to dissolve CNRP, arrested its opposition leader, and banned more than a hundred of its senior political leaders from doing politic. In 2018 national election, CPP won 100 percent of the parliamentary seats in the National Assembly and controlled 95



percent of the local councils. For the next five year, all tiers of government, starting from the commune, district, provincial, capital, assembly, to the Senate will be controlled by CPP. Consequently, Cambodia is still under hegemonic party control, and it is likely moving toward a closed authoritarian state as the independent media was cracked down and civil society was under pressure to limit its activities (Chandarin & Heiduk, 2018).

From Latin America, Eastern Europe, to Asia, deepening democracy is necessary for democratic survival or to prevent democratic derailing (Adams, 2003; Diamond et al. 1997; Goldfrank, 2011; Huber, Rueschemeyer, & Stephans, 1997). It is claimed that political decentralization "can deepen democracy without compromising state strength" (Faguet, Fox & Pöschl, 2015, p. 61). The concept of deepening democracy underlies the "maximization of popular control by expanding opportunities for direct citizen input, oversight, and participation in the policymaking process and by enhancing the accountability of elected representatives to their constituents" (Roberts, 1998, iBook p. 26). The definition is also in line with Dahl's level of inclusiveness and contestation and Diamond and Mornilo's aspect of democratic quality. Deepening democracy is also referring to the extent that citizen participating in demanding for a more responsive government (Goldfrank, 2011). Decentralization is supposed to fulfill that obligation which is to deepen democracy. The below is the review of the relationship between decentralization and democracy.

### **3.3 Decentralization and democracy**

Decentralization has become one of the prior governance policies in developing countries in just recent decades. It is believed that decentralization can solve certain issues resulted from centralized administrative deficits. Governments are encouraged to decentralize because this will reduce poverty and ensure that citizen benefit equally from the growth (Rondinelli, 1981). By transferring of "authority, responsibility, and

resources" decentralization is seen in types of deconcentration, delegation, devolution, and privatization (Rondinelli et al., 1984). The evolution of the conception has been divided into two waves. From the 1970s to 1980s it has been focusing on "deconcentrating hierarchical government structures and bureaucracies," and from the mid of 1980s it extends to "include political power sharing, democratization, and market liberalization, expanding the scope of private sector decision-making" (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007, p. 2). With the pressure from globalization, decentralization is not only referring to the "transfer of power, authority, and responsibility within government but also the sharing of authority and resources for shaping public policy within society"; thus, it further has in forms: administrative, political, fiscal, and economical" (Cheema & Rondinelli 2007, p. 6). As political decentralization is the main focus of this study, it is necessary to look at the definition developed by Cheema and Rondinelli. They define political decentralization as the following:

Political decentralization includes organizations and procedures for increasing citizen participation in selecting political representatives and in making public policy; changes in the structure of the government through devolution of powers and authority to local units of government; power-sharing institutions within the state through federalism, constitutional federations, or autonomous regions; and institutions and procedures allowing freedom of association and participation of civil society organizations in public decisionmaking, in providing socially beneficial services, and in mobilizing social and financial resources to influence political decisionmaking. (Cheema & Rondinelli 2007, p. 7)

The definition suggests the role of elected representatives to provide better public services to the community with the involvement of civil society and citizen. This also posits that deepening democratic institutions need to be both maneuvered by the government and strengthened by political oppositions and civil society. In addition, theories of decentralization put forward the closeness of the citizens and their

representatives, which allow the former to have "more influence" over the later, increase "competition among local government," and reduce "corruption through improved transparency and accountability" (Smoke, 2015, p. 98). The closer gap is also identified advantages:“(a) superior information on local conditions and needs, (b) greater participation of citizens in decision making and the production of local services, and (c) greater accountability of public officials to voters" (Channa & Faguet, 2012, p. 2).

Participatory approaches to decision-making that involve local citizens are believed to have positive outcomes when decentralizing the state and increasing citizens' participation. This, however, could lead to the "new tyranny" (Cooke & Kothari, 2001, p. 4). Cooke and Kothari (2001, pp. 7-8) identify the possible oppressive climate where the facilitators exert their influence to undermine the "legitimate decision-making processes," or the existing powerful groups dominate the decision made, or the "participatory methods" used are not inclusive enough. This relies mostly on the role of the facilitators in effectively organizing the participatory decision-making process. Ineffective facilitation in participatory approach fails to reach inclusive decision-making. However, others warn that inclusiveness is also a threat to democracy. Zakaria (2007) mentions of ineffective decision when it is made under unspecialized and inexperienced citizen who involve in the decision-making process. For Zakaria (2007, iBook. Concluding Ch.), "what we need in politics today is not more democracy but less." Although he does not prefer some kind of dictatorship, he intends to make sure that state institution has to function properly without interference from mass participation. Huntington (1975, p. 113) used to warn the American government about the consequences of the "excess of democracy" in the 1960s. He asserts, "The vitality of democracy in the United States in the 1960s produced a substantial increase in governmental activity and a substantial decrease in governmental authority [emphasis original]" (Huntington, 1975, p. 64).

Huntington (1975, p. 84) hypothesizes that:

1. Increased political participation leads to increased policy polarization within society;
2. Increased policy polarization leads to increasing distrust and a sense of decreasing political efficacy among individuals;
3. A sense of decreasing political efficacy leads to decreased political participation.

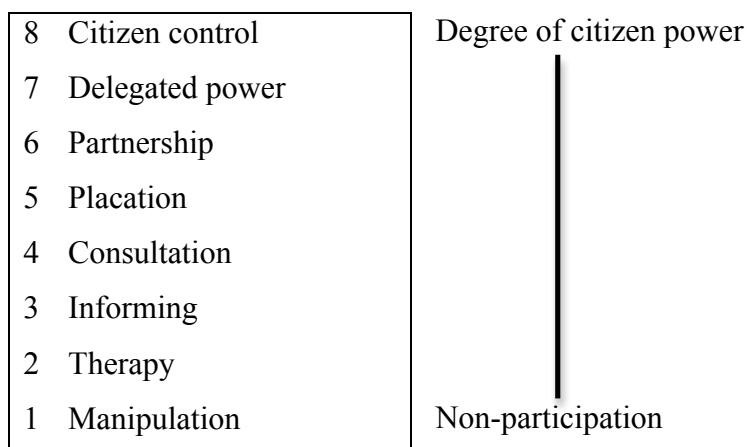
According to Huntington, political participation decreases once the citizen loses trust in the authority, which is resulted from biased policies. Those who are opposed to the idea decentralization and participation have been observed since the ancient time from Plato to Mosca and it is Schumpeter, who averred that "too much participation leads to inefficiency, ungovernability, and citizen frustration, and that centrally organized government is a better locus of decision making" (Goldfrank, 2011, pp. 19-20). From the adversary perspectives, decentralization is not inclusive when facilitators dominate the decision-making process. Also, if those who influence the decision are not experts, the policy response to the citizen is not sufficient. In addition, if policies are inclined to serve one particular group and prejudice against another group, polarization is likely to occur, thus, discourage participation.

Advocates for decentralization and participation, on the other hand, argue that firmly fixed democracy needs a certain level of participation to ensure that democracy is working well (Pateman, 1970). This needs "some degree of congruency between the structure of authority of government and non-governmental authority structures close to it, and then, stability can be maintained" (Pateman, 1970, p. 14). Analyzing Rousseau's participatory system, Pateman (1970) claims that by participating in the decision-making process citizens will learn how to be responsible for their actions and their surrounding. The participatory approach will enhance individual to become "(and remain) his own master," "dependent on each other and equally subject to the law," and have a sense of "community" (Pateman, 1970, pp. 26-27). John Stuart Mill's political

theories also "reinforced" Rousseau's claims, Pateman (1970, pp. 27) argues. The concept of Tocqueville' independent townships is also crucial to decentralization (Goldfrank, 2011). This creates "active and public-spirited citizens, while centralization diminishes 'civic spirit'" (Goldfrank, 2011, p. 17). Observing what happens in Latin America last decades ago, Campbell (2003, p.3) describes the decentralization process as a "quiet revolution" that both of national and international agents' roles are taken into account. Lesson suggests that it is the "political power sharing" that push Latin America to "decentralize decision making and spending" and "the consolidation of political power at the local level was the most important factor in the long-term financial sustainability of decentralized governance"(Campbell, 2003, pp. 6-7). However, there is also an attempt to limit the reform at the local level by national and international policymakers because there is a concern about "fiscal instability" so that there are some difficulties that hinder the success of the decentralization process. These are the "poor leadership, distorted incentives, and unclear rules of the game" (Campbell, 2003, p. 11).

Citizen participation is always the "cornerstone" of democracy, and people's participation is a "categorical term for citizen power" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). According to Arnstein's analytical ladder of people participation, we can see there are desirable and undesirable modes of participation as shown in Figure 3.1 below.

**Figure 3.1 Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation**



Source: Arnstein, 1969, p. 217

As illustrated, the most desirable mode of participation is to allow citizens to control the decision-making that is affecting their own community. Citizens will be able to initiate and negotiate between the power holders in order to obtain the power to decide, manage, and control in the level of partnership and delegated power to citizen control. This could mean that citizens are not only able to demand more responsive and accountable social services that directly benefit them but also are entirely responsible for their activities that they have the authority on. The least desirable rests on the level of manipulation and therapy. These levels, Arnstein (1969, p. 217) noted, enable the power holders to "educate" or "cure" the participants rather than encourage citizens to have meaningful participation.

Citizen participation indeed provides certain advantages and disadvantages, depending on contextual differences. In a very detail analysis of literature published in the Journal of Public Administration Review, Irvin and Stansbury (2004) offer wide-ranging key considerations to determine if the participation is beneficial. As shown in Table 3.2 below, there are two tiers of benefits (process and outcomes) and two beneficiaries (government and citizen) that have been noticed.

**Table 3.2 Irvin and Stansbury's advantages of citizen participation**

Advantages of citizen participation in government decision making		
	Advantages to citizens	Advantages to government
Decision Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education (learn from and inform government representatives)</li> <li>• Persuade and enlighten government</li> <li>• Gain skills for activist citizenship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education (learn from and inform citizens)</li> <li>• Persuade citizens; build trust and allay anxiety or hostility</li> <li>• Build strategic alliances</li> <li>• Gain legitimacy of decisions</li> </ul>

Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break gridlock; achieve outcomes</li> <li>• Gain some control over policy process</li> <li>• Better policy and implementation decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break gridlock; achieve outcomes</li> <li>• Avoid litigation costs</li> <li>• Better policy and implementation decisions</li> </ul>
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Source: Irvin and Stansbury, 2004, p. 56

In the decision process, both government and citizen receive crucial information from each other over certain policy choices. The benefits and challenges of a particular policy will be discussed with the informed and engaged citizen. This process is beneficial because they can inform and persuade each other over the area where agreement cannot be done without each other's consent; thus, trust can be built between citizen and government. If the decision is made through this process, the government will be able to legitimize its own policy governing, and the citizen can also gain knowledge and skills in advocating or challenging the government to make sure that citizen's benefit is acceptable. One of the beneficial outcomes from this process is the compromised policy choice where citizen's input and government intention are conveyed in a non-confrontational atmosphere. This will also reduce the public backlash that could be costly in litigation. When the citizens feel that they belong to policy choice and think that they can control it, the chance for the success of the policy implementation is high.

In contrast, Irvin and Stansbury (2004) also warn about the possible disadvantages that policymakers have to consider as illustrated in Table 3.3 below. One obvious disadvantage is time-consuming. Both government and citizen participants may spend unnecessary time to decide over an issue that may be decided by just one single administrative officer who has enough knowledge of what is going on in the community. Besides, it is costly. The participation process may be expensive in term of arranging the participation and paying an officer to conduct the discussion. The citizen may lose their other cost also because they are not paid to participate.

Furthermore, while citizens believe that they have particular influence during the decision-making process, and the decision, in fact, has already been made, it is creating more hostility and resentment to the government; Thus, citizen participants may consider attending the discussion is useless. The policy outcomes can, furthermore, be dangerous if a specific group of people, for example, partisan politics or business group, has more influences than ordinary people. The benefit of the policy will be mainly serving those specific interests rather than the citizen in general. Citizens may also be unwilling to participate once they realize that the government does not have enough budgets to fulfill their demand. This also demotivates their future involvement in the decision-making process that could happen in the future in their community.

**Table 3.3 Irvin and Stansbury's disadvantages of citizen participation**

Disadvantages of citizen participation in government decision making		
Decision Process	Disadvantages to citizens	Disadvantages to government
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time consuming (even dull)</li> <li>• Pointless if decision is ignored</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time consuming</li> <li>• Costly</li> <li>• May backfire, creating more hostility toward government</li> </ul>
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worst policy decision if heavily influenced by opposing interest group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lost of decision-making control</li> <li>• Possibility of bad decision that is politically impossible to ignore</li> <li>• Less budget for implementation of actual projects</li> </ul>

Source: Irvin and Stansbury, 2004, p. 58



According to Irvin and Stansbury (2004, p. 62), there are ideal situations that the citizen participation is less cost and produces better outcomes. It is low cost if, first, citizens are ready to work for their community voluntarily. Next, they are easily connected due to their proximity (time, space and relationship) in the community. Last, citizens have enough income to support their time in the decision-making process. In addition, it will produce high outcomes if there is a real need for citizen approval to break the deadlock and implement the project effectively as the level of hostility maybe high if without the citizens' consent. Also, the administrator who facilitates the discussion should be credible, and the citizen representatives are influential to the community. Conversely, participation from the citizen is less active and wasteful if there are following conditions: It is costly if, first, citizens are less engaged because they think it is the government job to do the task. Moreover, when the geographical location of the community is very dispersed, a regular face-to-face meeting is not possible. Next, the many competing factions and socioeconomic groups that require sizeable participatory meeting are also discouraging. Also, low-income residents may not be able to attend the meeting, as the priority of the family and their job is more important. Too complicated technical knowledge of the project that may consume much time for participants to digest and decide is also not rewarding. The government should instead make its own top-down decision if the public is less hostile and ready to follow. Also, if the population is large, it will be difficult to involve them all to decide over a small portion of impact on a specific group of people.

Success and failure of a participatory approach to deepen democracy from the comparative study in three cities: Porto Alegre, Montevideo, and Caracas in Latin America, confirm that deepening democracy through decentralization is possible at the local level when there are enough supports from the central level as well as the party structure that allows genuine participation from citizens with transparent and responsive leadership (Goldfrank, 2011). The institutional designs also play a significant role in determining this success and failure. Participatory programs that are more open to broader participation, more informal in its setting and faceless institutionalized political

parties tend to encourage more participation from the citizen (Goldfrank, 2011). Even though decentralization moves powers and resources to the local level, it is not enough to make local government accountable. There has to be a system to ensure that citizens can fully participate in "governing their own communities by monitoring the government, holding it accountable and limiting state power," and there also has to be an "affirmative political action in order to give voice to the needs of the poor and thus actively promote social justice, i.e. to usher in more progressive and social justice politics" (Antlöv, 2005, p. 248).

It is noted that institutional transformation from a very centralized socialist state to a decentralized form of institution to accommodate the transfer of political power and administrative decision is not without challenges. Both exogenous and endogenous factors shape the institutional choices (Wollmann, 1997). In a comparative analysis of institutional developments in East Germany, Hungary, and Poland during the transition period after the fall of Berlin Wall, Wollmann (1997) concludes that institutional structures that influenced from the past and party politics competition determine the pace of the institutional building and adaptation. Michal Illner and Hellmut Wollmann also offer very insightful lessons from what happened in central and eastern European countries as well as in the Commonwealth of Independent States to democratic reformers (see Illner & Wollmann, 2003). Although the challenges can be country-specific, they both acknowledge that the success of decentralization depends on the combination of political, administrative, legal, cultural, and economic factors, and the successful implementation requires specific prerequisites (Illner & Wollmann, 2003, pp. 319-322). The first requirement is the political will of different political actors in the country. We can see this, for example, happened in Hungary's negotiated transition in 1989-1990 between the opposition party and the reformist in the communist party (Batt, 1991). However, a formal declaration to accept the reforms in legal documents but with the intention to delay or co-opt should not be considered as a political commitment. Resources independency is the second aspect for the success. Personnel, as well as financial means, should go together with the legal responsibility from the

central/national to the local or sub-national government. Local autonomy is not possible without these resources. In addition, the capacity of local representatives to democratically interact with citizen or civil society in their community is the third condition. A formal institutional setting has to go along with informal practices of democratic presentation and participation. This requires a certain capacity of the local elected leaders to facilitate the policy formulation and implementation in which effective participation from all relevant actors is necessary. The fourth condition rests with the institutional capacity of the local government to adapt to the changing policy structures that requires institutional adjustment to efficiently and effectively delivers social services. This adjustment requires being more open, transparent, accountable and responsive. That also needs fifth factor, the readiness of the sub-national personnel who can translate the changing institutional setting to effective implementation with the different knowledge and practice that they used to have in the past socialist state system. The sixth condition is the cultural and attitudinal aspect that cannot be easily changed through the constitution or legal acts. The values, beliefs, conviction, and habits have to be gradually transformed along with the organizational changes. Last but not least is the context-specific that each country possesses. Illner and Wollmann (2003, p. 322) reiterate, "The decentralization schemes must be sensitive to circumstances in different countries and must refrain from imposing uniform models and strategies."

Up to this part, we have reviewed the concept of democracy, both of its minimal and maximal ones, in which the former is referring to the rights and liberty to participate in a free and fair election, and the later is focusing on the strengthening and broadening of the former rights in addition to social and economic equality and the rule of law. Political decentralization is a promising policy that ensures citizens participation in decision-making and can move them closer to the government, control over their resources and receive better social services. These require both of institutional design and active citizen participation strategy. However, as highlighted above, approaches to active participation, which citizens can control the policies that directly affect them is contextual dependence.

The empirical reviews provide inconclusive merit of decentralization policy outcomes (Eaton & Connerly, 2010; Oxhorn, 2004; Treisman, 2007; and Wunsch, 2014) and need to be contextually assessed and examined for its sustainability (Smoke, 2015; White, 2011). Along with participation, accountability and responsiveness are also crucial to democracy. Citizen participates in the decision-making process only if their opinion and concerns are valued; thus, this also requires the ability to be accountable and responsible to the needs and concerns.

### **3.4 Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework of this study does not have to be neither too broad, general, nor difficult to operationalize so that it allows the researcher to collect data within the research timeframe and resources practically. Since the primary purpose of this study is to explore to *what extent political decentralization has deepened democracy in Cambodia*, it is necessary to examine first at the policy design level. This is to find out how political decentralization policy in Cambodia promotes democracy. The conception of democracy reviewed above suggests that democracy is imbedded with the value of freedom, equality, and control of political power. Since Cambodia is situated in hegemonic electoral authoritarian and is about to move to a closed authoritarian state, democracy in this study will be operationalized only to the extent that citizens participate in the local governance process and how their local administrators (commune councilors) are responsive and accountable to the social services. As shown in the literature, policy formulation about participation, accountability or responsiveness alone is not enough to deepen democracy. There is a need to examine the inside and outside impact factors influencing the government's decision. Examining the political decentralization policy in Cambodia will help identify possible tools where they can be obstacles or catalysts for deepening democracy.

In addition, the second examination is to look at how elected local representatives promote democracy in their local context. Local elections produce local representatives in Cambodia. This study also explores if there are different approaches used to promote democracy by different political parties in term of the level participation, accountability, and responsiveness. The opposition party is also the central part of the study. Actually, despite the critical role of the opposition party to democracy, the knowledge of it is under-theorized and attracts little attention (Garritzmann, 2017). According to Levitsky and Way (2010, p. 37), there are three possible paths that a regime after the Cold War will be likely transitioning either into stable authoritarianism, unstable authoritarianism, or democratization. Levitsky and Way (2010) posit both domestic and international dimensions are the essential triggering factors to democratization. Following their claims, a regime will likely democratize if the international linkage is high; however, when it is medium or low, the regime outcomes depend on the international leverage and the incumbent organizational factors. When the organizational factors are high, and the linkage is medium or low, an authoritarian regime is likely to remain stable. The authoritarian regime also remains stable when the organizational factors are either low or medium, and the leverage is either low or medium. However, when the leverage is high, and the incumbent institutions are low or medium, the regime will be unstable. In their analysis, Levitsky and Way (2010, p. 337) situate Cambodia in "Stable Authoritarianism" as the international linkage is "Low," but "Leverage" is high while the organization power is "Medium High." What has been missing in their analysis is the dynamic opposition factor. They argue that the Cambodian opposition party is "poor" and less organized (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 69).

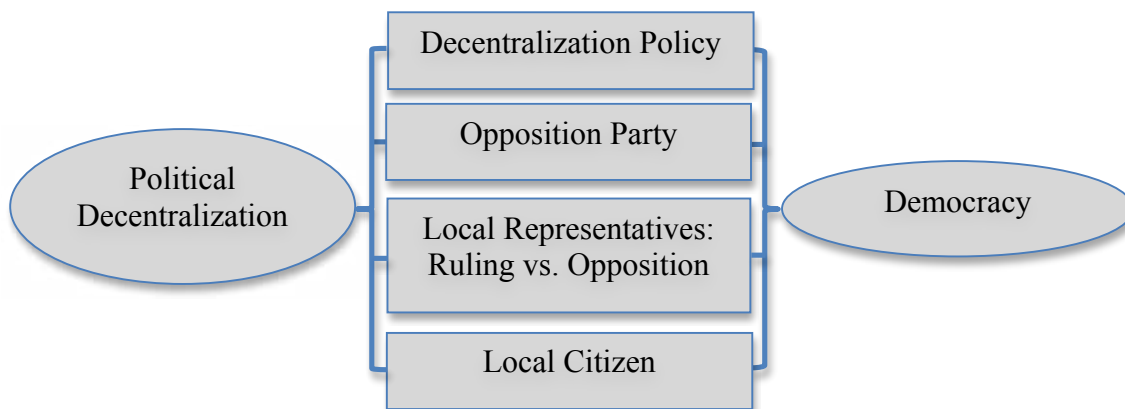
This study, in contrast, sees the vital role of Cambodian opposition party in democratizing Cambodia. Using similar theoretical grounds employed by Levitsky and Way, Alexander (2008, p. 951) theorizes that the process toward democracy cannot be just merely explained by "state capacity, opposition, and international influence." He argues that the influences of the structural factors can only facilitate the regime toward either democracy or authoritarian, but the strategic actor pursued by the elites can

accelerate the process. Unfortunately, this framework is not helpful to explain under what conditions that opposition parties can determine future democracy in a regime when power is transferred to them. To the extent that opposition party can be a driving force to democracy, there is a need to examine the role of the party in relation to it. Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister (2011) provide an excellent framework to assess the party in relation to democracy with five-linkage mechanisms: campaign, participation, ideology, representative, and policy. These criteria are argued best described the linkage between voters and state in a representative democratic context. "When there is a strong connection between each of these linkages in the chain of party government, then the representative government can function well as a means to connect citizen preferences to the outcomes of government," claim Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister (2011, p. 7). Although the level of the party system and party institutionalization in Cambodia is questionable (Peou, 2014), this research sees opposition party functions are necessary to examine and predict future democracy if the opposition wins the future election. Using the five-linkage mechanisms to assess opposition party function will most likely to determine best whether or not the party is turning citizen preference to policy outcome, which is fundamental to democracy.

Politically, decentralization grants certain rights to the citizen to participate, advocate and demand more accountable and responsive government; in contrast, democracy faces a serious problem if the citizens do not understand this role. Besides looking at the policy designed, opposition party, and the role of local representatives—both from the opposition and ruling parties, this study will finally look at how citizen play their role in deepening democracy. The primary purpose is to determine how much understanding of democracy that the citizen has and how they use it in their local context. Knowledge of democracy and the perception of the influence of citizen to the government are also essential to evaluate democracy (Almond & Verba, 1989). This also confirms to what extent political decentralization that opens political space for the citizen to elect local representatives has the democratic impact.

In summary, three levels of examination were proposed in order to investigate how political decentralization had deepened democracy in Cambodia. First, this study explored the political decentralization policy linkage level to democracy. Second, the role of the opposition party at the national level was investigated to understand the level of its influences to democracy. Last, the commune councilors and citizen at the local level were studied to confirm the democratic linkage. Figure 3.2 below summarizes the conceptual framework that guides this research study. The next chapter will discuss the approach further and show how the framework is operationalized in the context of this particular study.

**Figure 3. 2 Conceptual frameworks**



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACHES**

#### **4.1 Introduction and overview**

The purpose of this study is to explore *how political decentralization has deepened democracy in Cambodia*. In order to answer this question, I conducted three levels of study employing a mixed-method of qualitative and quantitative analysis approaches. The first level of the study is to look at the policy designed. That is to explore to what extent the political decentralization policy designed in Cambodia can promote democracy. The second level is to examine the political opposition party. That is to analyze how much contribution it can influence to democracy. The last level is to find out whether or not democracy is encouraged and facilitated at the national and local level. As reviewed in the previous chapter, political decentralization enables political parties to compete for a political space at the local election; thus, it is necessary to describe how local elected commune/Sangkat councilors, with the influence of opposition political party members, promote democracy, and how citizens understand democracy at different local settings. Therefore, to answer the main question, there are some sub-questions needed to explore. The research questions are as the followings:

#### **Main research question**

How has political decentralization deepened democracy in Cambodia?

#### **Sub-research Questions**

At the policy level:

- To what extent does political decentralization policy promote democracy?



At the national level:

- How has the opposition party influenced to democracy?

At the local Level:

- How have local elected representatives encouraged and facilitated democracy?
- Are there any significant differences between knowledge of democracy understood by the citizen at different local setting: commune/sangkat controlled by ruling and opposition party members? If so, what can be explained?

## **4.2 Rationale for a mixed-method approach**

As this study is aimed at exploring at two different levels with comparative questions that need both of qualitative and quantitative answers, a case study in Cambodia with multiple-case sampling at different local settings is needed. Multiple-case sampling generates "confidence" to "findings" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, Ch. 4). The Qualitative adopted in this study is to review decentralization policy designed and related literature, interview local elected representatives from both of ruling and opposition parties, and interview with local citizens. Data obtained from the review of related regulation was used to describe democracy linkage. Besides, data generated from field interviews, especially with citizens in different local settings, is developed into variables that can be statistically tested to find the significant differences and relationship to explain the propositions.

King, Keohane, and Verba (1994, p. 5) claim the concept of combining both research approaches to explore social phenomenon as "best" approach. In the field of comparative politics, both of description and explanation with a certain "degree of

precision" is very important to social science (King et al., 1994, p. 44). To conduct comparative studies, a researcher could choose either to compare many cases across many countries or a single case in a country; each of the methods has its weakness and strength. Some advantages could be generated from a single case country study (Gerring, 2007; Landman, 2008). The finding from a single case study can allow us to find the followings: first, it generates "new classification and type" that are necessary for other comparative purposes; second, it can offer generality to set of hypothesis or theories; last, it can "trace significant political processes and examine possible causal mechanisms" that may not be found in many-country comparative study (Landman, 2008, pp. 86-90). To deal with the criticism of "n=1" identified in King et al. (1994, p. 208), the number of observation in relation to "time, space, and level of analysis" shall be increased (Landman, 2008, p. 92).

Based on the above argument, this study justifies its single case study in Cambodia with four observation sites to describe and explain how political decentralization has deepened democracy in Cambodia. This is appropriate, as this study does not intend to test hypotheses but to explore and explain whether or not political decentralization has deepened democracy in Cambodia.

### **4.3 Key units to be studied**

Literature in Chapter 3 showed that political decentralization was meant to deepen democracy by bringing citizen closer to the government and, there, the citizens' rights would be strengthened and the government became more responsible and accountable. To understand if political decentralization has deepened democracy in Cambodia, I first looked into the policy document in order to find out if there was democratic linkage to the policy formulation. As argued, most analysts overlook the critical linkage of the public policy to democracy; thus, evaluating it requires more than just "simply measuring effectiveness and efficiency" of the policy (Ingram & Schneider, 2006, p.

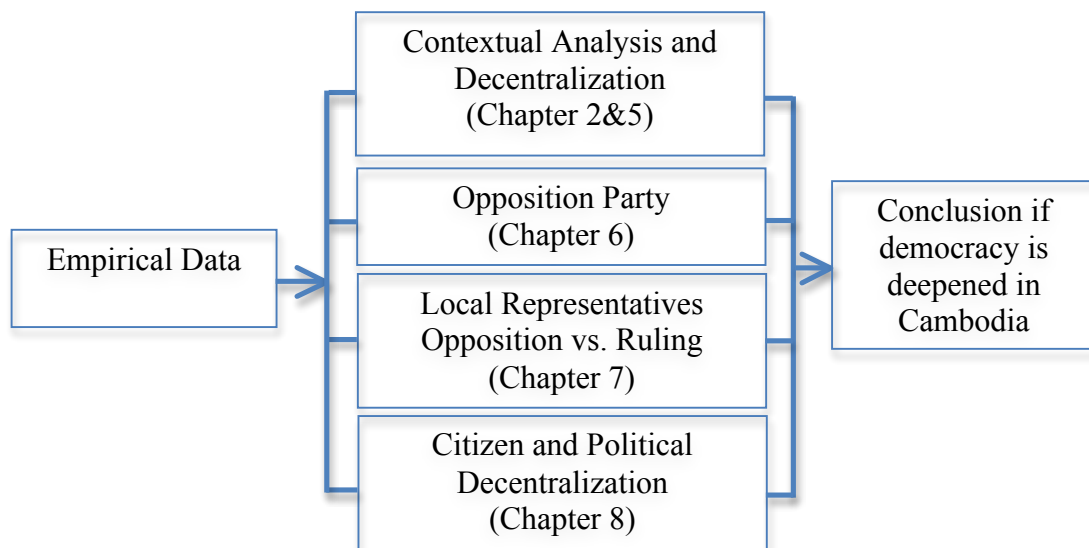
184). Following this, the study examined the policy issues framed, the citizen engagement and support, the impact of the policy on the citizens and the accountability mechanism of the policy. This will be empirically discussed in Chapter 5.

In addition to the extensive reviews of decentralization policy and relevant research reports, the Cambodian opposition party, local representatives, and local citizen are the units of the analysis to find out their contribution to the strengthening of democracy at the local level. There is a general agreement that the opposition party plays a very crucial role in democracy; however, the knowledge of the opposition party is under-theorized and attracts little attention (Garritzmann, 2017). To the extent that opposition party can be a driving force to democracy, there is a need to examine the role of the local leaders elected from the opposition party to see how much contribution they made to strengthen democracy. The evolution of the opposition party in Cambodia and its influences on democracy will be discussed in Chapter 6.

A study of different settings at the local offices, which are governed by the ruling and opposition parties, would generate more excellent knowledge of the policy impact to democracy and if there is a different approach found from the two different parties to strengthening democracy. This will discuss in Chapter 7.

Finally, citizen at the local settings was also studied to find out the impact of the decentralization policy. This was to explore to what extent they benefit from the decentralization policy in term of how much knowledge of democracy that they gain. Is the knowledge spread differently from two different communal leaders—the opposition versus the ruling party? Such knowledge of democracy and citizen perception of influencing to the government is necessary to evaluate the level of democracy (Almond & Verba, 1989). Chapter 8 discusses the findings. The logic of this study design is shown below in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1: The Logic of the research study**



#### **4.4 Research sites**

Four communes from two different provinces, Siem Reap and Prey Veng, were purposefully selected to obtain the wide range of political situations and circumstances as much as possible. Geographical location, social and economic situations, and political representation were the most important factors for consideration. Currently, Cambodia consists of 24 provinces and one capital (Phnom Penh). There are 1633 communes/Sangkat<sup>1</sup> with 11,166 commune/Sangkat councilors and 1,594 commune/Sangkat chiefs. For confidentiality and security protection to respondents, the communes selected in the two provinces were coded. This is very critical as the political environment in Cambodia is very intimidating during the writing. The Supreme Court dissolved the opposition party in November 2017. All of the parliamentary seats at the national assembly and the commune councilor's seats at the local level that belong to the opposition party were reallocated to the ruling party.

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<sup>1</sup> The number of the commune/Sangkat increased to 1646 in 2017 commune election.

<sup>2</sup> All of the population of the four selected communes is 18 years of age up. The

Two communes, SB and ST, were chosen in Siem Reap province. Siem Reap is 314km from Phnom Penh, situated in northwestern Cambodia and well known for tourists of its Angkor Wat temple; however, according to the Asian Development Bank (2014), it is one of the ten poorest provinces in Cambodia. Siem Reap is allocated six seats in the National Assembly, with four members from the ruling party CPP and two from the opposition party CNRP. SB commune is about 60km from the city center with the population of 4,469.<sup>2</sup> Most of the people are farmers, but four percent of them have less than a hectare of farming land. There are five elected commune councils, four from CPP and one from the opposition; the commune chief is from the ruling party for three consecutive local elections in 2002, 2007, and 2012. ST, on the other hand, is located in the remote part of the province, 86km from the city center. The population is 2,982, and 93 percent of them are farmers. There are also 5-elected commune councils, three from the opposition and two from the ruling party. The commune chief is from the opposition. The local people in this particular commune always vote to different political party in their local elections. Interestingly, there are three commune chiefs elected from three political parties since the first local election in 2002. The first chief is from FUNCINPEC, the second from the ruling CPP, and the last in 2012 from SRP, the current opposition party.

Two other communes were selected in Prey Veng province, the eastern part of Cambodia. Situated about 90km from Phnom Penh, Prey Veng is one of the largest constituencies, allocated 11 seats in the National Assembly. The last national election in 2013 saw significant gain to the opposition party as it won 6 of the seats, leaving the other 5 to the ruling party. PN is a busy commercial commune, which is about 30km from Prey Veng city center. There are five villages with the population of 5,000. Seven elected councils were governing PN, five from the ruling CPP, two from the opposition (1SRP+1HRP) in the local election in 2012. CPP chief has been ruling this commune

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<sup>2</sup> All of the population of the four selected communes is 18 years of age up. The number is based on the commune database available in 2010 at <http://db.ncdd.gov.kh/cdbonline/home/index.castle>

since the first election in 2002. In contrast, another commune, PP, is located about 80km from Prey Veng city center with the population of 2,334. There were five commune councils elected in 2012, three from the opposition party (HRP) and two from the ruling party CPP. The commune chief is from the opposition party. The people in this commune used to vote for the ruling party for two consecutive mandates in 2002 and 2007, but in 2012 they vote for the opposition to lead the councils.

In summary, the four communes selected were located in two different provinces with some key distinctions. Table 4.1 illustrates this. Geographically, they are very far from each other even though they are located in the same province, but they were chosen from two different districts. Politically, they were selected because they have local representatives that are from the opposition party as a leader. Identifying for local leaders from the opposition party was difficult because in 2012 there were only 40 commune chiefs elected from the opposition party. Thus, the representatives of the opposition members were widely spread across the country. There was a similarity which is that the two communes governed by the opposition are in the remote area of the provinces, while the ruling is in the urban ones.

**Table 4.1 Basic characteristic of the study location and sample**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Commune</b>	<b>Majority led by</b>	<b>No. Councilors</b>	<b>Population Total<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Population Sample</b>
Siem Reap, Western, majority led by CPP	SB	CPP	5	4,469	100
	ST	SRP/CNRP	5	2982	100
Prey Veng, Eastern, majority led by CNRP	PN	SRP/CNRP	7	5000	88
	PP	CPP	5	2334	80
<b>Total Study Sample</b>			<b>27</b>		<b>368</b>

<sup>3</sup> The number of the total population is based on commune database registered 2010 available at <http://db.ncdd.gov.kh/>

## **4.5 Data collection and analysis**

The fieldwork of this study had been undertaken from October 2016 to March 2017. I had spent most of the six-month period staying at the four selected sites in order to obtain in-depth insight related to the studied subject. However, as a Cambodian, the interest of exploring the topic has not just come with the doctoral program that I undertaking at the university; this has been my curiosity for a long time since I started working with a development non-governmental organization (NGO) focusing on education and development in Cambodia. In addition, I also involved in a capacity training with the opposition party since 2008. I had mostly worked with the commune councilors from both opposition and ruling parties at the local level. Thus, this 'ethnographic' role enables me to gain a deep understanding of how things work in Cambodia. I understand that most research approaches require the researchers to distance themselves from the research topic so that the outcome is perceived more scientific, yet this study situates itself with the important role of current autoethnographic studies and ethical consideration in International Relation and Political Science (see e.g., in Dauphinee 2010, 2013; Doty, 2010; Neumann & Neumann, 2015), in which the researcher engages himself and voices the concern that he thinks are essential sources of insight.

The qualitative approach to the study consists of both documents analysis and interviews with political leaders, local representatives, and local citizen. I had extensive reviewed relevant policy documents and research reports related to decentralization in Cambodia (see details in Chapter 5). I employed Ingram and Schneider's (2006) framework to analyze the relevance of policy to democracy. These were the key baseline information. In addition to this I had an inclusive interview with three key opposition leaders at the national level: Mr. Kem Sokha (24 March 2017), the CNRP president, Mr. Eng Chhai Eang (21 March 2017), the CNRP vice president, and Mr. Yem Pohnearith (10 March 2017), the CNRP director of administration and 22 (4 female) locally elected councils of the four communes. Each interview lasted about one

hour. The main topics of the discussion were about the implementation of the decentralization policy, the role of commune councilors in facilitating the policy, and the knowledge of democracy among citizen. The key questions asked to the political leaders at the national level are the followings:

1. What challenges do you see in promoting democracy through decentralization at the lowest tier of the administrative level?
2. What could the opposition party do to mitigate the challenges and promote better democracy by encouraging for more engaged citizens and improving responsiveness and accountability?
3. And, if the opposition party wins the national election, what changes in the decentralization policy will they make?

The commune councilors were also asked the following questions, in addition to their basic information:

1. What role do you play in promoting democracy in your community?
2. What difficulties do you have in playing that role and how do you manage the challenges?
3. How is conflict is solved in your community? Is there any political obstacle in implementing the decentralization policy?

Moreover, semi-structured interviews were also conducted face-to-face with total 368 (209 female) respondents. The sample of 100, 100, 88, and 80 respondents was interviewed respectively from SB, ST, PN, and PP commune. Based on Slovinc's sampling formula  $[n=N/(1+Ne^2)]$ , this represents about 90 percent of the total



population in the four communes whose age were 18 upward. Table 4.2 below describes the demographic overview of respondents. Each interview would start with the selected point, which was the house of the village chief in each commune; it was done by a random walk using the left-hand rule and selecting respondents from the eighth households, men or women whose age was from 18 years old up. The respondents would be asked for approval to interview with the promise of confidentiality.

**Table 4.2 Demographic overview of respondents**

Gender	Percent	Family Status	Percent
Female	56,8	Single	21,2
Male	43,2	Married	73,1
Age Groups	Percent	Divorced	2,4
18-24	24,5	Widow/widower	2,4
25-34	20,1	Not answer	0,5
35-44	22,3	Education	Percent
45-54	17,1	Cannot read or write	19,8
55-64	16,0	Can read/write but never go to school	6,2
Income (\$) per day	Percent	Attended primary school	21,5
Under 1,25	34,5	Primary school completed	13,0
From 1,25 – 2	17,4	Grade 9 completed	14,1
Under 2,5	14,7	Grade 12 completed	23,1
From 2,5 – 5	18,5	Bachelor	0,5
Over 5	14,7	Not tell	1,6

The interviews were not recorded because this would be intimidating to the local citizen, as discussing the political matter was a sensitive during the study because of the coming local election in 2017. They were noted in a comprehensible document that later can be transcribed into both of qualitative and quantitative analysis in MAXQDA12 and SPSS 20.

The questions to the citizens were divided into three main parts. The first part was about their basic data including their gender, age, marital status, level of education, and income. The second part was about the knowledge of democracy (see chapter 8 for details). Finally, the last part is about the citizens' perception toward the local councilors at their communes.

The key concepts discussed with the respondents at the local level were to find out whether or not their local representatives facilitate the democratic process determined by the policy and how much knowledge of democracy the local citizen have within their community. Ordinary people usually perceive the concept of democracy in three broad categories: civil rights and liberty, political process, and social benefits (Dalton, Shin & Jou, 2007). The first category is referring to the political rights, freedom of speech, freedom of participation, and protection of those rights. The second focuses more on political institution determined into the election, the rule of law, and accountability of the government. Finally, the last emphasizes the social and economic benefits that democracy produces such as equality, justice, peace, and stability. Respondents were not given any clue and requested to think of what came to their mind if we talked about democracy. The first three responses were recorded and coded in the three categories. That also determined if there were significant differences in the setting where opposition or ruling party led the communes.

Questions regarding the role and responsibility of the commune councilors were also asked to crosscheck with the interview results from the party leaders and commune councilors, where possible. The questions to this part are mainly about how citizens feel about the benefit of local elections. Are there any changes they noticed when there is a change in commune's leadership? Are they satisfied with the councilors' performance? Do they think their councilors are responsible and accountable? Do they participate in a monthly meeting with the councilors? What challenges do they think in term of moving themselves closer to the decision-making process in their community?

Document analysis technique is also complementary to this study. As Bowen (2009, p. 27) defined, document analysis is a "systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents." It is a form of qualitative research in which researcher interpret the meaning of documents. Meaning, understanding, and knowledge were gained during this process of analysis, which serves the heuristic purpose of this study. I read some legal and policy documents related to the decentralization in addition to monthly reports, minutes of meetings, project planning, internal rules, and accountability guidelines available at communes I visited. Elements of content and thematic analysis were developed. Relevant documents were examined in order to get the category of information, and key themes were studied to understand the level of participation, responsiveness, and accountability that are necessary for deepening democracy in Cambodia.

#### **4.6 Ethical consideration**

This study follows strictly to the ethical standards in the research study. The data collected was meant only to gain real insight knowledge. Respondents involved were explicitly informed about the role of the researcher, and they agreed to provide insight knowledge as much as possible. The information that related to specific individuals and local setting that may be easily identified them will not be revealed for confidentiality and security purposes.

#### **4.7 Limitation of the study**

Although the statistical significance can represent the four population sites of the research study, this cannot be overstated to represent the whole of Cambodia. This study also focuses only at the local level where limitations are worth to highlight. As a

young democratic country, decentralization was just introduced to Cambodia in 2002 and had not been implementing very well due to many factors. These included but not limited to the capacity of the local councilors, the opposition party performance and the willingness of the government to fully implement the policy. There are possible hidden agenda to the success or failure of the democracy promoted by the policy of decentralization that this research may not be able to cover all aspect. Therefore, the conclusion may only initiate for further investigation.

Collecting data from the context, I am aware of that it can also yield advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that I had a good relationship with the local representatives as I used to know most of them; thus, the discussion is more open and in a friendly environment. I am also aware of sensitive issues and can manage to generate discussion without challenges as we speak our own native language. This also produces a possible disadvantage toward the assumptions that have been presumed. There is also unavoidable of personal experience, and the liberal values used to analyze and interpret the qualitative data.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DECENTRALIZATION AND DEMOCRACY**

Ingram and Schneider (2006, p. 169) posit that analyzing policy contribution to democracy one should not just focus on the "efficiency, effectiveness, and political feasibility." There are a number of democratic conditions that need to be examined in order to assess whether or not the policy is enhancing democracy. They propose that to understand policy linkage to democracy we need to explore "how the elements of design found in policy content impact framing, constructions, implementation, and information/transparency, and through these the opportunities offered to citizens" (Ingram & Schneider, 2006 p. 172).

This chapter, in agreement with Ingram and Schneider's argument, will examine the content of the policy linkage to democracy in order to answer the question posed in Chapter 4: *To what extent does political decentralization policy promote democracy?*

With reference to chapter 2 that starts with a brief overview of historical and political context as well as the PEST analysis of public administration reform, this chapter will update with the current development of legal and policy framework that supports the decentralization in Cambodia. Then, it will empirically discuss the above question. In addition to the document analysis technique that was described in Chapter 4, secondary data and historical analysis were also used to triangulate the information. What is new is the attempt to interpret the democratic linkage to the political decentralization in Cambodia. This chapter found that the political decentralization policy linkage to democracy in Cambodia is "low."

## **5.1 Foundation of decentralization**

It was noticed that in pre-Angkorian society (before the year of 802) Cambodia was decentralized into "multiplicity of centers" and "acted independently of each other or were related in sporadic ways" (Chandler, 2008, p.24); however, little is known why it was so. One could assume that it is a nature of the ancient society while it is separated into lords and king fields where the relationship is based on loyalty rather than any clear legal codes. Although it was claimed that "for administrative purpose French preferred to deal with a society that was ... arranged vertically rather than horizontally" (Chandler, 2008, p. 199), it was French who introduced considerable reforms to Cambodian public administration such as, for example, the abolishment of slavery and land and tax reform despite the fact that such reforms were generally observed as a means to politically and economically control from France rather than devolving power to local authority.

Oberndorf (2004) and Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL, 2007) outline some legal framework that influences decentralization under French protectorate and post-independence as the followings:

1. Royal Decree dated 5 June 1908 marks the birth of Cambodian commune. This is to define the composition of the commune and the election of the commune chief by the people.
2. Royal Decree dated 24 September 1919 provides commune chief with budget, finances and the authority to govern.
3. Royal Decree dated 15 November 1925 clearly describes roles and responsibilities of the administrative, judicial and financial organization of the commune. This also encourages electing commune council to make a collective decision that the selected commune chief has to be responsible for. However, the election was banished from the 1940s. The exact year was not able to verify.

Oberndorf (2004) stated that the abolishment of the commune election was in 1943 while COMFREL (2007) in 1948. The provincial governors appointed the commune chief and its deputy with the approval from French resident.

4. The law on the election of commune councils was adopted in 1959 but a few months later, the public poll did not agree with the commune council; thus, their relevant governors appointed the councils.

There was no clear explanation about the abolishment of the election at commune level but some reasons could be the influence from the "reorganization of communes due in large part to World War II" (Oberndorf, 2004, p. 10) and the rebellious movement to France colonization across the country in the colonial time. Some attempts had been made to restore the election after the independence in 1953, but that never happened.

The United Nations-led election in 1993 marked another democratic attempt which had generally been seen as a hybrid regime, where there were a number of democratic institutions, but the practices were unlikely followed the democratic norms, values, and procedures (Öjendal & Lilja 2009; Un 2004; Hughes 2003). That, at least, brought another life to decentralization in Cambodia. It started with the initial program in 1991 aimed at facilitating the repatriation and relocation of Cambodian refugees who had escaped to settle along Thai/Cambodian border during the war for decades. Under a project of Cambodian Resettlement and Rehabilitation Program (CARERE), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) worked collaboratively with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to "support for the process of peace, reconciliation and the reintegration of displaced populations" (UNDP 2001, p. 12). This project, however, was implemented only in four provinces at northwest Cambodia, investing heavily in agriculture, education, infrastructure, health, and community development. To encourage participation and cooperation between local and provincial level, an elected Village Development Committee was set up and pilot in a province and then phased out to CARERE2 aiming at nationalizing the program in 1995. This

CARERE2 was named to Seila (the foundation of stone in Khmer Sanskrit) Program. Seila was meant to reduce poverty and encourage good governance through local development and participation under the support from development partners. This program also aimed to strengthen local capacity within the context of decentralization and deconcentration (D&D). It also helped enhance "participate democracy" in Cambodia (UNCDF 2010, p. 20). The project was not as smooth as planned due to political instability after the election in 1993, however. It is noted that the Khmer Rouge refused to participate in the UN-led election and continued to cause trouble along the northwest Thai/Cambodian border. The political situation was deteriorated in 1997 when the Second Prime Minister, Hun Sen, ousted the First Prime Minister, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, from the post in a bloody coup. Under pressure from the international community, the two competing parties agreed to go to the national election again in 1998, and in 2002 the election of commune/Sangkat councils was held, which marks the birth of political decentralization in Cambodia.

## **5.2 Current public administration reform and decentralization**

Along with public administrative reform, as discussed and analyzed in chapter 2, D&D has been an integral part of the decentralization policy that RGC has aimed to tackle the challenges above. D&D has been implemented widely across the nation at the lowest tier level – the commune/Sangkat. The Law on Administration and Management of Communes/Sangkats were promulgated in 2001, and the commune/Sangkat chiefs and councils were directly elected through party lists in a proportional representation system from the people in 2002. Four consecutive commune/Sangkat elections have already been held in 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2017. The law on the management and administration, from article 41 to 52, defines the roles and functions of commune/Sangkat councils that must adhere to the national policies in enhancing good governance and managing resources to ensure sustainable development according to the local needs. Commune/Sangkat councils have to be responsible and accountable to both



local citizen and central government. On one role they must be locally represented to their local within their bound territory. On the other role, they must be responsible to the delegated authority instructed by the central government. These roles and functions can be summarized as the followings:

1. Ensure security and public orders;
2. Manage and arrange necessary public services;
3. Encourage for the contentment and well being in the community;
4. Promote social and economic development and increase the living standard of the people;
5. Protect the environment, national resources, and cultural heritage;
6. Facilitate and reconcile public opinion to be tolerable;
7. Perform general affairs that are responsive to the needs of the citizen;
8. Perform other necessary duties delegated by the central authority as indicated by relevant laws.

The commune/Sangkat councils have the authority over the execution and legislation deciding within their territory unless those are in line with the constitutional law and other relevant international conventions ratified by the government. However, the councils have no authority to decide over forestry, telecommunication, defense, security, currency, foreign affairs, fiscal, and other relevant policies outlined by the relevant laws. Commune/Sangkat activities (Administration and Development) are funded under the Commune/Sangkat Fund (C/SF) allocated from the national revenue of about 2.8 percent in the year 2016 and other development partners. This budget has been increased from 1.5% in 2002 and 2.75 in 2009. According to the plan, the budget of 2.8% will be allocated until 2018. Table 5.1 below is the budget transferred to commune/Sangkat through C/SF with estimation in 2017.

**Table 5.1 Fiscal transferred to Commune/Sangkat (in US\$ millions)**

<b>Description</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>C/SF</b>	59.31	67.98	78.44	90.21
-Administration	26.3	34.94	37	38.28
-Development	33	33.03	41	51.9
<b>% Contributed by government</b>	98	100	98	99

Source: National Program – Implementation Plan 3 (NP-IP3) 2015-2017; exchange rate 1\$ = 4000 riel (Cambodian currency).

D&D has also been implemented at the capital/provincial and district/khan/municipality level with the introduction of Law on Administration and Management of Capital, Province and Municipalities/Khans/Districts (Organic Law) adopted in 2008. The governors at the municipalities/khans/districts (M/K/D) and capital/provincial (C/P) levels are to be appointed by the central government, however. Only their councils are directly elected from the commune/Sangkat councils in every five-year term. The councils at C/P and M/K/D have been consecutively elected in 2009 and 2014 and work within their territory authorized under the law. The objective of the Organic Law declared in Article 2 is to manage and govern under the principles of a unified administration in order to establish, promote, and sustain democratic development through the policy of D&D. Article 12 defines "democratic development" as public representation; local autonomy; consultation and participation; responsiveness and accountability; promotion of quality of life at the local level; promotion of equity, transparency, and integrity; and measure to fight against corruption and abuse to power. Section 2 (Article 96-105) of the law instructs district councils to work cooperatively with commune/Sangkat to establish, promote and sustain democratic development within their territory by being accountable, transparent, consultative and responsive to the commune/Sangkat and local citizen. The M/K/D councils are funded under the District and Municipal Fund (DMF) allocated from the national revenue of 0.8 in 2012, and it is increased to 0.9 percent in 2016. The budget is planned to increase to 1 percent

in the three years ahead – 2017, 2018, and 2019. Table 5.2 the following describes the fund allocated to the M/K/D in the last few years with an estimated budget in 2017.

**Table 5.2 Fiscal transferred to M/K/D (in US\$ millions)**

<b>Description</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>DMF</b>	20.9	19.4	61.4	107.7
% Contributed by government	98	100	98	99

Source: National Program – Implementation Plan 3 (NP-IP3) 2015-2017; exchange rate 1\$ = 4000 riel (Cambodian currency).

A National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) was created in 2009 to replace the National Committee for the Support to the Communes (NCSC), created in 1999, in order to support the national decentralization policy. The Minister of Ministry of Interior chairs NCDD and all ministers of other ministries are members. In its 10 year-plan of National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD 2010-2019) formulated in 2010, five program areas are to be focused on (1) developing sub-national institutions, (2) developing robust human resources management systems, (3) transferring functions and resources to the sub-national level, (4) managing sub-national budget, financial and property systems and (5) supporting institutions for D&D reform process. This plan is divided into three years of the implementation plan (IP3). Currently, the implementation plan is in phase II (IP3-II, 2015-2017). The main focus of IP3-II is to transfer functions and resources to the sub-national level. There are many legal codes and policy guidelines as summarized below in Table 5.3 that are influential to the reforming phases.

**Table 5.3 Phases of D&D reform**

2006 Preparatory Phase	2007-2009 Initial Phase	2010-2012 Transition Phase	2013- Transformational Phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation on draft organic laws</li> <li>• Approval of organic laws</li> <li>• Design of Implementation Strategy</li> <li>• Design of Implementation Authority</li> <li>• Information campaign</li> <li>• Preliminary design of donor modalities to support Initial Phase</li> <li>• Pledges of external assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commune elections 2007</li> <li>• Design of modified sub-national structures and systems</li> <li>• Establishment of the Implementation Authority</li> <li>• Establishment of policy management process</li> <li>• Establishment of RGC/donor instruments and facilities Indirect election of district and provincial councils (2008-2009)</li> <li>• Functional assignments, structural changes, transfer of resources</li> <li>• Inter-government fiscal arrangements</li> <li>• Capacity building (national, sub-national level)</li> <li>• Review/redesign of donor modalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation of reform</li> <li>• Process (especially in additional priority sectors)</li> <li>• Capacity building (national, sub-national level)</li> <li>• Review of fiscal decentralization framework</li> <li>• Review of impact of changes in complementary areas</li> <li>• Commune election 2012</li> <li>• Review/redesign of donor modalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidation of reforms</li> <li>• Readjustments of systems and structures</li> <li>• Election of the district and provincial councils</li> </ul>

Source: Rohdewohld and Porter (2006).

### 5.3 Policy linkage to democracy

Political decentralization in Cambodia started at the lower tier at the commune/Sangkat level. The formal objective stated in the government document is that the decentralization is aimed to promote democracy, good governance and quality of life, give ordinary people more significant opportunities to determine their future, ensure sustainable development and deliver essential services. To answer to what extent the policy is linked to democracy a number of policies and legislation related to decentralization were reviewed as shown in Table 5.4. The relevant pieces of literature were also scrutinized to assess the democratic linkage.

**Table 5.4 Policy documents reviewed**

<b>Policies/Legislations</b>	<b>Date Formulation</b>
Law on the Administration Management of Commune/Sangkat	2001
Law on the Election of the Commune/Sangkat Council	2001
Sub-decree on the Establishment of the “Commune/Sangkat Fund”	2002
Sub-decree on Decentralization of Powers, Roles, and Duties to Commune/Sangkat Councils	2002
Strategic Framework for Decentralization and Deconcentration Reform	2005
Law on Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans	2008
National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD): 2010-2019	2010
First Three Years Implementation Plan (2011-2013) of NP-SNDD (IP3)	2010
Law on Financial Regime and Property Management of Sub-National Administrations	2011

Strategic Plan for Social Accountability in Sub-National Democratic Administrations	2013
Implementation Plan for Social Accountability Framework	2014
Operational Guideline for NGO Partners: Implementation of the Social Accountability Framework 2015-2018	
Three Year Implementation Plan, Phase II (2015-2017) of NP-SNDD (IP3-II)	2014

### **5.3.1 Policy discourse and issue framing**

Public discussion and debate are the criteria to evaluate whether or not the policy discourse and issue framing are closely linked to democracy (Ingram & Schneider, 2006). From the national policy perspective, however, it is agreed that the democracy is secondary to economic development. The policy adopted in Cambodia was driven by "stability rather than crisis" (Turner 2006, p. 260). It was designed from the international community and donors under the idea of promoting good governance and improving the quality of public services, under the notion that the administration is "highly centralized" and "no local civil administration directly representing the people" (Kato et al., 2000, p. 43).

In the form of decentralization and deconcentration the elected local commune/Sangkat councilors have to act two distinctive roles as prescribed in article 42 of the Law on Commune/Sangkat Administrative Management: To serve local affairs for the interests of Commune/Sangkat and of its citizen and to be an agency representing the State under designation or delegation of power of the State Authority. The Article 43 and 44 also further describe the details of the roles by outlining the following duties:

1. Serving local affairs and the interests, Commune/Sangkat administration shall
  - Maintain security and public order;

- Manage necessary public services that these services work well;
  - Encourage the creation of contentment and well-being of the citizens;
  - Promote social and economic development and upgrade the living standard of the citizens;
  - Protect and preserve the environment and natural resources;
  - Reconcile people's concepts for the sake of mutual understanding and tolerance.
  - Perform general affairs to respond to people's needs.
2. Representing the State by performing in compliance with Laws, Royal Decrees, Sub-decrees, Proclamations, and other legal instruments. The State may delegate power and resources necessary to fulfill.

The government issued another sub-decree dated 25 March 2002 to further describe the details duties and functions of the Commune/Sangkat councilors to manage their territory in order to implement the laws. Article 30 of this sub-degree describes the rights and duties of the local citizen by instructing that the local people can attend in every public meeting conducted by the councilors but have no rights to decide on any issues. Any question or complaint shall be made in accordance with the internal rule of each Commune/Sangkat. It is noted that after elected to their office, the councilors have to adopt an internal rule for their mandate in the first meeting. That internal rule has to be in line with the guidance of the Ministry of the Interior and the National Committee to Support Commune/Sangkat (NCSC). Each commune/Sangkat can adopt his/her internal rule that usually has 11 chapters. Chapter 5 outlines the rights of the citizen when proposing or complaining about the local issue. Depending on the size of the commune/Sangkat, 50 to 100 local people could sign up and request the councilors to insert a concerned issue to the meeting agenda. People also can assign up to 3 representatives to attend and question the councilors. The internal rule obliges the councilors to deal with the issue they can immediately, but in case they cannot solve

within their capacity, the issue has to be brought to upper level – either the district and the province without stating any precise deadline of the response.

Article 12 of the sub-decree instructs that the councilors have to facilitate the democratic development by creating consultation mechanism with local people, civil society, and local community within their own territory. However, article 58 suggests that the councilors cannot sign any agreement without the approval from the Ministry of Interior.

It is the government vision that the policy of decentralization is to deliver public services and reduce poverty, as these are the recurring messages in the policy documents although there are democratic principles that the policy aims to promote as described in Chapter 2 of the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD-2010-2019):

1. Public representation;
2. Local autonomy;
3. Consultation and participation;
4. Responsiveness and accountability;
5. Quality of life of the local people;
6. Equity;
7. Transparency and integrity;
8. The fight against corruption and abuse of power.

All of the policy issues that are framed are in the hand of ministerial managements that include:

1. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) who chairs the NCDD;
2. The Ministry of Civil Service (MCS);
3. The Ministry of Finance and Economic (MoFE);



4. The Ministry of Planning (MoP);
5. The national league of commune/Sangkat (NLC/S).

The role of NLC/S is considered as an important step in promoting grassroots participation through its public forums conducted with commune/Sangkat councilors, district/provincial councilors and other relevant stakeholders that range from ordinary citizen to civil society. NLC/S is registered with the MoI as a local association funded by development partners. The primary mission of NLC/S is to strengthen local commune/Sangkat councilors the skills and knowledge and promote democratic participation that influences policymaking.

The analysis of these documents suggested that there is policy intention to reform the administrative management through a democratic mechanism, namely to increase citizen participation, improve accountability and provide better social services (responsiveness); however, the mechanism to generate public debate and discussion that encourage robust public participation was not yet put in place; thus, the level of the policy linkage to democracy in this part is "moderate."

### **5.3.2 Policy messages**

Public policies are not merely about achieving the stated goals but are more about the message they convey; they "carry messages by socially constructing the intended targets in positive and negative terms" (Ingram & Schneider, 2006, p. 179). Democratic message sent through the policy to empower citizen and encourage them to participate actively is crucial to democracy.

The policy of decentralization reform in Cambodia suggests a different focus. In the first three-year implementation plan (NP-SNDD-IP3-2011-2013), the policy focuses on strengthening the capacity of the higher tier at the Districts and Municipalities level so

that they can be both local governance and development institutions to ensure effective cooperation with the Commune/Sangkat consisting of:

1. A policy and legal environment that shapes and supports the reforms set out in the Organic Law, in particular, (a) supporting and enabling the exercise of local autonomy and regulatory oversight and (b) widening the scope of the reforms to allow, over time and in an orderly fashion, the reassignment of functions from national to sub-national administrations;
2. Autonomous SNAs, as institutions (organizations and procedures) with related organization, human and financial capacities to transform the sub-national system of governance and public administration and (a) enable democratic local governance institutions to deliver services and other outputs to local citizens and (b) provide motivation for their consolidation by making possible a "learning-by-doing" process of capacity development;
3. And a framework and system of oversight, including legal, regulatory and strategic instruments, exercised by National authorities with the capacity to enforce them, replacing the current system of administrative control, and thereby allowing SNAs to exercise their autonomy and to be accountable for the results of their actions within an overall national framework.

The phrase "democratic accountability" has been mentioned but defined as "... exercised through periodic elections to the councils" (NP-SNDD-IP3, p 11). The concept, however, extends to another paragraph and implicitly describes "democratic accountability is more than just periodic elections - to function effectively, it requires transparency, openness with citizen access to councilors, measurement of results and public access to information between elections." That, in contrast, does not provide any practical sense to the public, as the system of patronage is still strong and lack of political commitment as the NP-SNDDP-IP3II has noted. The message, however, seems

to stress the important role of the Districts/Municipalities and Provincial and Capital authority to oversee the management and functioning of the Communes/Sangkats councils who are directly elected by the local citizen. The most notable influential one is the way where budget management is processed. The Communes/Sangkats have to get approval from the top tier management level before they can implement any plan they wish to develop their community. The poor capacity of the Communes/Sangkats councilors are the important message and argument to the challenges of the implementation of the policy as mentioned in the IP3II: "The expected achievement of the reform program is to strengthen capacity of the sub-national councilors so that they can manage better work in providing public services and raising living standard of the people at their local community" (NP-SNDD-IP3II, p 110). One recent study about the decentralization reform in Cambodia suggests that the lacking capacity of the local councilors is not the problem. What matter is the ruling party strategy to design and use the policy to "strengthen its grip at the sub-national level rather than as an exercise for improving accountability and democracy" (Eng, 2016, p. 250). Therefore, the message linkage to democracy is "low."

### **5.3.3 Public engagement and support**

Ingram and Schneider (2006, p. 180) highlight that a public policy that supports democracy has to "garner support, stimulate civic engagement, and encourage cooperation in the solution of problems. These are also the main goals of the decentralization reform as emphasized in the NP-SNDD 2010-2019 policy document. The policy recognizes supportive role from relevant development partners, national agency, and local citizen. Since 2002, there are notable increases in political space for political parties, women participation and citizen engagement since the political decentralization is aimed to empower citizen and devolve power to the local councilors; however, recent evaluation from an independent non-governmental organization identifies some challenges that cannot be ignored (see COMFREL, 2013). There is low

participation at village meetings which is unable to respond to the requirement set by the Ministry of Interior that demand for 60 percent of the total presence at each village meeting (COMFREL, 2013). The challenges of this low participation are usually referred to the followings (COMFREL, 2013; EIC, 2010; Plummer & Tritt, 2011):

1. Lack of explicit interest as there is no incentive for participation;
2. Poor facilitation style of the commune/Sangkat councilors;
3. People are informed rather than participate in a meaningful discussion;
4. For economic reason, people less value the public meeting.

This study in the four selected communes also confirms these similar challenges. Commune councilors usually make up a report to confirm that up to 40 or 50 percent of their village people attend every meeting, but the truth is less than 20 percent.

Not only at the local level that participation is a challenge but also is at the national level. The policy envisages all the ministries to transfer their function and decision making to the local commune/Sangkat councilor since the formulation of Organic Law in 2008 and the NP-SNDD 2010-2019. At the time of this writing, only five among twenty-eight ministries that starts to transfer the function and decision slowly. As a result, with all regards to the mentioned challenges, policy engagement and support is "low," which is threatening to the level of deepening democracy.

### **5.3.4 Accountability**

Accountability is the final important part that Ingram and Schneider (2006) advocate in analyzing the level of policy linkage to democracy. "The public must become more directly involved in holding governance structures accountable," Ingram and Schneider (2006, p. 182) reiterate. Decentralization reform in Cambodia has just recently been focusing on this area in its Strategic Plan for Social Accountability in Sub-National

Democratic Development in 2013. This plan will be implemented in 120 out of 198 districts in Cambodia from 2014 to 2017.

The primary purpose of this strategic framework is to empower local citizen to hold their councilors accountable at both of the district and the commune/Sangkat level. As expected from the policy, the following achievement is expected (WB 2014):

1. Improvement responsiveness from the sub-national administration through interaction between the citizen and their representatives;
2. Improvement of the capacity of citizen and their representatives as they engage in the democratic accountability;
3. More effective, equitable, and accountable public services and allocation of resources;
4. More empowered local communities and people with the understanding of their rights and responsibilities of the local authorities;
5. And, improvement trust between the local and their representatives.

CDRI (2015) has conducted a case study to examine the policy outcomes from the social accountability framework in the area of health, education, and clean water services. The result reveals that there is little impact on empowerment, state-society relation, and change in services as the policy has aimed since there is weakness in policy designing which is not encouraging to citizen to "exercise significant power" or have "confidence" to voice their concern because the authorities are not tolerated to public criticism but view it as threat to public disorder and security threat that needs to suppress (CDRI, 2015, p. 22). Another finding is distrust between the local authority and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is hard for the NGOs to gain cooperation as mobilization of the local people to demand more transparent management is also seen as the threat to the authority. The last finding is that social accountability challenges the existing "powerful national officials" and this has

discouraged local officials and front-line service provider from committing to the accountability prescribed in the rule and regulation (CDRI, 2015, pp. 22-23).

As reviewed in Chapter 3, accountability is not just referring to the vertical, which is mainly focusing between authority and local citizen but also horizontal, focusing on the transparent and accountable between the authorized personnel and the civil society. The policy has indeed encouraged that but due to the level of patronage system is high in current Cambodian and the opposition party and civil society are weak; thus, this level of linkage is "low."

## **5.4 Summary and conclusion**

This chapter aims to investigate the extent of political decentralization policy linkage to democracy by assessing four key criteria: policy discourse and issue framing, policy message, public engagement, and support, and accountability. The chapter also presents a historical, political and legal background that help understand the context of decentralization in Cambodia. There are a number of policy documents as well as the study reports found from various sources used to analyze.

The linkage of policy discourse and issue framing to democracy was identified "moderate" as there were positive intentions to introduce democratic governance through various legal framework; however, there is a need to create an effective mechanism to ensure that there were rigorous debates and public consultation. Policy messages that link to democracy were found "low." There were incongruences between the statement of intentions and goals and the real practices, which were jeopardized. Similarly, public engagement and support were also found "low." Structural challenges were ranging from lack of commitment from the national level to poor capacity of the local level. Finally, the last linkage to accountability was also identified as "low." The

government has just started to focus on the accountability framework in this last mandate, and this is expected to face trials and errors in the coming years.

This chapter concludes that the political decentralization policy linkage to democracy in Cambodia is "low." There was a good intention, from the policy perspective, to deepen democracy; however, if it is assessed to how the policy discourse and issue framing are conducted, policy messages communicated, public engagement supported, and accountability perceived, its linkage is "low."

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **OPPOSITION PARTY AND DEMOCRACY**

This chapter seeks to understand opposition politics in Cambodia and explore to what extent it influences democracy. As noted in the previous chapter, with the advocate of Garritzmann (2017) to study the opposition party, this chapter will empirically discuss the opposition party that emerges from political decentralization and its role to deepening democracy. That is to focus on Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), which is the primary and viable opposition party in Cambodia and attempts to answer the question posed in Chapter 4: *How has the opposition party influenced to democracy?* Using Dalton, Farrell and McAllister's (2011) framework in addition to the interviews and documents analysis, this chapter will assess the democratic linkage by examining the party's campaign, participation, ideology, representative, and policy.

What this chapter will show is that, with the influence of the decentralization policy, the opposition politics has slowly emerged and strengthened its base at the local level. However, the assessment below reveals that the opposition party has moderately influenced democracy. The chapter will start with the brief background of party institutionalization in Cambodia emphasizing on the opposition emerging from local election started in 2002. Then it follows by the analysis of CNRP's linkage to democracy.

#### **6.1 Political parties and the party institutionalization**

Built on various previous works, Scott Mainwaring identifies four dimensions of party-system institutionalization: (1) stability in its appearance in competition, (2) strong roots in the society where citizen can quickly think of, (3) legitimacy to their party and the electoral process, and (4) autonomy, cohesion, and discipline (Mainwaring, 1999).



Historically, Cambodia does not have such an institutionalized party-system. It is after the Paris Peace Accords in 1991 and UNTAC sponsored national election in May 1993, that the system started to grow in Cambodian politics.

The May election produced a coalition government with three main political parties, whose ideologies rooted with different grounds – the communist Cambodian People Party (CPP), the republic Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), and the royalist with French acronym FUNCINPEC (FUN). The coalition government failed in a bloody factional fighting Foreign observer would say it was a coup as the second prime minister Hun Sen from CPP overthrew the first prime minister from FUN, but CPP usually expressed frustration and threatened to take legal action against anyone who claimed that it was a coup. In 1997 between CPP and FUN, and many small political parties were created, which is generally believed resulting from the dividing and controlling strategy employed by the ruling CPP. The second election in 1998 brought two coalition parties (CPP and FUN) and a minor opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), whose former leader was then Finance Minister from the FUN party in the previous coalition government. The opposition SRP has significantly gained popularity in 2003 while the coalition FUN has dramatically lost confidence from voters and then split into another party – Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP), in 2008. Both NRP and FUN has been bitterly defeated in 2008 and completely eliminated from Cambodian politics in 2013 election. SRP continued to gain support in 2008, but at the same time, there was another opposition--Human Rights Party (HRP) whose leader was a former senior political leader from BLDP. What was remarkable and surprised to many, including the ruling party, was that the two opposition parties (SRP and HRP) has merged into one new political party – Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in 2012 and secured a dramatic gain in parliamentary seats in the latest election in 2013 despite the elections are typically known to many that they are not conducted in a free and fair environment. Table 6.1 illustrates the political parties and number of votes they obtained at the national election from 1993 to 2013. The next national election schedule is supposed to be held in 2018.

**Table 6.1 Political parties and their votes received from 1993 to 2013**

Parties	1993		1998		2003		2008		2013	
	%Votes	Seats	%Votes	Seats	%Votes	Seats	%Votes	Seats	%Votes	Seats
FUN	45,47	58	31,7	43	20,75	26	5,05	2		0
CPP	38,23	51	41,4	64	47,35	73	58,11	90	48,83	68
BLDP	3,81	10								
Molinaka	1,37	1								
SRP			14,3	15	21,87	24	21,91	26		
NRP							5,62	2		
HRP							6,62	3		
CNRP									44,46	55
Total Seats	120		122		123		123		123	

Source: National Election Committee and author's own compilation

Under the political decentralization reform, a first local election was conducted in February 2002, and this opened political space for political parties to have their representatives at the local communes/Sangkats. Each commune/Sangkat shall have 5, 7, 9, or 11 members of councilors from the political parties that the local citizens vote for. There are more than twenty parties to compete in the election; however, only a few that gain popularity over time. Table 6.2 describes the number of representatives that each competing party gained at the three consecutive local elections from 2002 to 2012.

**Table 6.2 Party representatives at local commune/Sangkat**

Election	Parties	Chief	1 <sup>st</sup> Deputy	2 <sup>nd</sup> Deputy	Councilors	Total
2002	CPP	1598	789	154	5162	7703
	FUN	10	547	852	801	2211
	SRP	13	285	615	433	1346
	Other	0	0	0	1	1
2007	CPP	1591	1125	185	5092	7993
	SRP	28	403	963	1266	2660

	FUN	2	47	155	70	274
	NRP	0	46	317	62	425
	Other	0	0	1	0	1
2012	CPP	1592	1056	250	5394	8292
	SRP	22	341	955	837	2155
	FUN	1	30	86	34	151
	NRP	0	5	24	23	52
	HRP	18	201	309	272	800
	Other	0	0	8	0	8

Source: National Election Committee in Cambodia

The latest local election in 2017 saw a significant increase of the representatives from the opposition party. CNRP, emerging from SRP and HRP in 2012, secured nearly 44 percent of the popular vote and had its representatives placed in the councilors position at the local offices more than 43 percent of the total seats. That was a critical gain comparing to the ruling CPP who always took up to more than 90 percent of the total seats from previous elections but dramatically lost to 56 percent. It has never been before that the opposition party has its representatives at the grassroots level all across the country. Although there are more than a dozen political parties, there are only two parties, which dominate the Cambodian politics. Table 6.3 illustrates the number of the representatives from the two parties, which they obtained from the 2017 election.

**Table 6. 3 Recent commune councils' election 2017**

	Political Parties		
	CPP	CNRP	Others
Number of Votes	3,540,056	3,056,824	377,031
% of Votes	50.76	43.83	5.41
Distribution of Seats in Commune/Sangkat Councilors			
Chief	1156	489	1
1 <sup>st</sup> Deputy	1139	503	4
2 <sup>nd</sup> Deputy	510	1087	49
Councilors	3698	2928	8
Total # of Seats	6503	5007	62
% of Seats	56.1	43.2	0.53

Source: National Election Committee

In addition to the ruling CPP, which was taken root in Cambodia since 1979, CNRP is arguably institutionalizing itself from the rural to capital constituency. The CNRP's political history and legacy can be traced back since 1991 as described in later section. That could be supported by the fact that although the party had changed its name due to political oppression and intimidation, it was stable and gained support from the local citizens from time to time. The current situation also confirmed that it is active with the capacity to work although its leader had been imprisoned and self-imposed exiled. Sam Rainsy, former SRP and CNRP's president, was self-imposed exiled due to many political crimes that have been charged by the court, which is known managed by the ruling CPP. Kem Sokha, former HRP and CNRP's vice-president who came to be the president of the party after Sam Rainsy left for France, was imprisoned under the charge of treason that international communities strongly condemned. The following section will discuss its democratic linkage.

## **6.2 CNRP and democracy**

Under the agreement dated 17 July, 2012 in Manila, the Philippines, HRP and SRP agreed to emerge into one political party (CNRP) to challenge the ruling CPP under the vision of building a genuinely democratic, independent, and sovereign state where people have equal opportunity and rights to build their future prosperity. Although CNRP just came in 2012, Cambodian had known its leaders since 1991. The president of CNRP was Sam Rainsy, who was then a finance minister from the FUN party. After a political conflict, he was stripped from his position and then he founded Khmer Nation Party (KNP) in 1995. Unfortunately, his colleague stole his KNP; he later changed the party to his name – Sam Rainsy Party in 1998 to prevent future stealing.

Senator Kem Sokha founded Human Rights Party (HRP) in 2007. Sokha was a member of parliament from BLDP, which merged with FUN, and he was elected as a senator in 1999. He resigned from his post in 2001 and founded the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) where he traveled across the country to train and encourage grassroots citizen to use their political rights. Finally, he resigned from the director of CCHR in 2005 and founded HRP.

During the writing up of this study, HRP and SRP are still present although their local councilors and member of the parliament are registered with CNRP. The following will be the analysis of CNRP linkage to democracy. Documentary data was a complementary analysis that I made in addition to the observation during the CNRP campaign period from 20 May to 2 June 2017 and the interview I had with the party leaders. Table 6.4 below briefly describes the documents selected and data analyzed.

**Table 6.4 Selected documents and data analyzed**

<b>Documents Selected</b>	<b>Data Analyzed</b>
Agreement to create CNRP dated 17 July 2012 in Manila, the Philippines	Importance of party commitment to democracy and build party structure across the country.
Law on political parties 1997, amended 2017	The tight control of the political party to their members, but the amendment is giving absolute power to the court to dissolve the party.
CNRP Statutes (By-laws) 2013, amended 2017	Importance of commitment to liberal democracy as stated in the constitution. Article 44 suggests the term limit (10 years) of party president. No party in Cambodia has this term limit.
CNRP Decision (1825/16) and Guidelines (1826/16)	The democratic and dominating procedure to select local representatives to the local election.
CNRP Internal Rules	The party control over funding, members recruitments, and the democratically elected representatives.
CNRP Booklet 2013	Stressed mainly on the social benefit to attract voters.
CNRP and CPP political deal in 2014	Commitment to reform national election committee, judiciary, and the permanent committee in the assembly to be more open, transparent and accountable.

### **6.2.1 The Campaign linkage**

The first linkage between party and citizen is to the extent of how the party dominates the electoral process during the campaign period. To determine the level of party dominance, Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister (2011) examine four indicators: ballot access rules, media access and campaign communication, party finance and regulation, and electoral system design. Using their party-centered index (Dalton Farrell & McAllister, 2011, p. 47), this chapter indicates that CNRP has firmly controlled the campaign in the electoral process since (1) the electoral system is party-centered. (2) Such a system allows the citizen to vote for a party rather than a candidate. (3) There are no state subsidies to or strict financial control over the party; thus the party fully coordinates the process to both collect fund and present policy choices with (4) somewhat free access to media. (5) State fully recognizes the role of the multi-party system in its constitution.

The Cambodian electoral law dictates tight control of parties over their closed-list candidates who will be elected through the propositional representation system. Thus, selecting and nominating candidates relies on party decision. For the commune/Sangkat election in 2017, CNRP rules out 14 articles in its decision (No1825/16គណៈ) dated 01 December 2016 on how its subnational executive committee selects its commune/Sangkat candidates. The selection is done in three steps. First, the public can apply to the selection committee at their respective commune, which consists of party members from the village, commune, and public movement. The selection committee has to prepare and list candidate chronologically by considering at least four criteria:

1. Meeting NEC requirements,
2. Respected with virtue and morale,
3. Participating actively with the party or community,
4. And being competent to work in the commune.

Once there is no agreement reached, the second step is to create a coordination committee comprised of the selection committee at the commune, district, and provincial party executive members chaired by one working member at the provincial level and one deputy member from the district level. If the list can still not be made, the final step is to invite all interested citizens in the commune to elect his or her preferred candidate. Party deliberation and decision is dominating. Out of 1646 communes, only 17 that the candidate lists reach the last step, which requires direct poll from the local citizen. Report from CNRP showed that ten communes from provinces of Prey Veng, 5 Siem Reap, 1 Kandal, and 1 Banteay Meanchey were in this final step. Terminating a candidacy remains under the party decision that is fully granted by party law. On 20 May 2017, the first day of commune election campaign Kem Sokha, CNRP leader, promised that the CNRP commune/Sangkat chief was to serve the people without corruption or nepotism. Once the people complained about such corruption or nepotism, the party would immediately investigate and if necessary, replace the commune chief.

Political parties in Cambodia are not funded from the state no matter what the percentage of the vote is received. Although article 28 of the party law suggests that state may equally fund political parties during the parliamentary election campaign, this has never been applied. There is regulation, however, to ban political parties to receive any fund from public state institutions or foreign companies. CNRP gets funding from its membership contribution. According to the internal rule of the party, elected senators and members of parliament have to contribute 12 percent of their monthly salary to the party. Provincial, district and commune elected councils have to contribute 10 percent. Working-group members at provincial, district, and commune level as well as in the three national committees: executive, steering, and discipline have to contribute about 10 to 13 USD monthly to the party. During the campaign, each constituency is responsible for financing his or her own campaign with some contribution from the party central office. Most of the fund is from supportive members abroad. The donation is usually made through individuals, which is rarely done through the party financial accounting system. That could be questioned about the transparency and managerial



ability of the party over funding, but this suggests a strong linkage between CNRP and its members. The party is entirely in charge of this.

Opposition party like SRP was known for its rhetorical racial appeal against illegal Vietnamese immigrants and border encroachment, yet since emerging to CNRP in 2013 national election, practical policy messages have been formulated. In 2017 commune election CNRP listed five main policies, one of which was for the upcoming national election in 2018. The first policy is to strengthen citizen power by creating a commune association in order that the citizen can effectively participate, evaluate, and advise to any development plan. Second is to raise the living standard by consulting over loan seekers as well as to guarantee that any development plan will not affect to living condition of the local citizen but to improve better. The third is to equally deliver public documents without delay or extra fee that is not required in the law. Fourth is to determine to take necessary action against local crime and violence. Finally is to allocate a national budget of about 500.000 USD, which is equal to about 16.5 percent of the total national expenditure in 2017, to each commune if it wins the national election. During the campaign period from 20 May to 2 June 2017, a committee was set up and chaired by the executive committee leader in its decision 008/17 dated 29 March 2017. President of the party was scheduled to travel across the 25 constituencies and speak at public places although the law restricts the freedom of campaign parade. Parties are not allowed to enter to the markets, use Public Square without requesting prior permission, or move across from one commune territory to another. During the 14-day campaign period, the state own television allows each party to equally have 7 minutes and 30 seconds daily to air the political message. Although the ruling party highly dominates public and private media, CNRP can still disseminate the messages through its Facebook page as well as the radio station. CNRP had yearly rented an hour daily from 105MHz and 93.5MHz radio stations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All the radio stations broadcasting the opposition party program, Voice of America, and Radio Free Asia were ordered to close in September 2017 without proper reasons.

### **6.2.2 The participation linkage**

Mobilizing people to vote is another democratic linkage that political party has played a very crucial role. As argued, although the party membership has declined and voter turn out has dropped, parties still "play an important mobilizing role in elections" (Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister 2011, p. 74). CNRP's strategy to mobilize people to vote and its assistance will be core analysis of the linkage criteria. Despite the challenges it has, CNRP actively engages voters.

Voting is not compulsory in Cambodia. Overall, voter turn out at the national level is declining over time after 1998: 86.78 percent of the total registered voters in 1993, 93.74 percent in 1998, 83.22 percent in 2003, 75.21 percent in 2008, and 68.49 percent in 2013. The declining is also seen at commune/Sangkat election: 87 percent in 2002, 67 percent in 2007, 60 percent in 2012, but surprisingly the percentage increased up to 90 percent in 2017. There are various reasons to explain, one of which is the unity of the two main opposition party and its effort to mobilize people although with limit capacity.

Cambodian opposition party, especially SRP, is argued to rely mostly on international community rather than focusing on local election campaign (Hughes, 2003). This is partly true to the extent that the party could do in a post-conflict society like Cambodia while being tightly controlled with repercussion and intimidation. The election campaign has never been equally and freely done since 1993. Without international community, it is hard to imagine what limited place it would be available for the opposition politicians. The amalgamation between SRP and HRP to CNRP has widened a considerable political space since election 2013. Former Senator Kem Sokha founded Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) in November 2002, where he traveled across the country to lecture on Human Rights and maneuvered people to demand them. Wherever his forum was, many people would have come to express their concerns and

complain nearly everything; unfortunately, he was arrested and imprisoned in December 2005 for a short period and then released after intense pressure from international community. He created HRP in 2007 and continued to give such a forum to grassroots people. Sam Rainsy is known as the "big boss of demonstration," described by most local news affiliated to the ruling party CPP and Hun Sen. Demonstrations after an election is common in Cambodia since 1998. However, as noticed by an analyst, such protests give place for people to "rediscover themselves as both individuals and as an empowered collective" (Springer, 2009, p. 150).

Following from HRP and SRP legacy, CNRP has rigorously engaged and mobilized citizen to participate in politics actively as well as to get out to vote in some ways since before the campaign and during the campaign period in 2017. Party forums that provide space for the citizen to express their consent and dissatisfaction remain a unique characteristic different from the ruling CPP. Interviews with senior opposition members reveal that this is one main strategy that the party could do to mobilize people. Besides, CNRP also relies on social media, especially Facebook that dominates Internet users in Cambodia, as the ruling party dominates the traditional ones.

The slogan of "change" has also been the main psychological appeal to the citizen, effectively used by CNRP in 2013 election. IRI survey suggests that the priority that people went out to vote for a particular party in the national election in 2013 was that the country needs a change (IRI, 2014). The campaign election in 2017, however, CNRP was forced to drop the slogan "Changing commune chief serving political party to the chief serving people" from their political slogan as CPP threatened with lawsuit although there was no legal ground (Sokhean, 2017). Despite this, during the campaign in 25 constituencies, CNRP president Kem Sokha still used the word "change" to inspire supporters and described what positive changes would that be when CNRP win at both local and national elections. CNRP had also instructed its local representatives to facilitate their local citizen in finding their names in the name list in the polling station. The interview reveals that the party was very concern with this matter, as

experienced, people's name would be disappeared or appeared in another polling station when the Election Day came. COMFREL (2013) reported there were 11,139 irregular cases during the election 2013, most of which was that people could not find their name in the voting day.

The latest mobilization also met some structural challenges. CNRP had strongly advocated and called for an arrangement for millions of diaspora, most of whom are migrant workers, to register and vote, but the ruling party had always rejected this. In a letter to NEC dated 18 October 2016, Kem Sokha called for help migrant workers in Thailand to register to vote along the Khmer-Thai border. As required by law, people are allowed to only register and vote at the place where they have their national identity issued. This means migrant workers who live far away from their origin cannot register and vote at the nearest border province that is nearer, for example, Thailand. The law does not apply the same though to military officers who can register and vote at their duty stations as it is believed the ruling party strategy to mobilize its supporter to vote where it thinks the opposition will lose with some small extra votes. Another indirect challenge is that garment employees were not encouraged to go to vote in the last commune/Sangkat election 2017 as they were not given enough day off at work and they also faced pay cut when they came back late to work after the election. Usually, the government orders the factories to close, but not in this latest election.

Even though CNRP met considerable challenges, they could manage to attract millions of supporter and made a significant gain at their local election of about 44 percent of the popular vote. Statistically, people prefer to vote for the opposition party at the national level rather than at the local level, and there is about 10 to 15 percent difference if comparing between the local and national election. Looking at this local popular vote, it is likely that CNRP will gain more than 50 percent in the coming national election in 2018; as a result, the participation linkage to democracy is strong.

### **6.2.3 The Ideology linkage**

Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister (2011) dedicate three chapters (4, 5 and 6) to demonstrate how the party ideology is closely linked to democracy. According to them, democracy demands that elections "provide the means for citizens to make party choices that reflect competing programs of government and thus represent their voters in the governing process" (Dalton, Farrell & McAllister, 2011, p. 153). To confirm the hypothesis, they test the Left-Right voters' preference comparing to the political parties' stance on the Left-Right dimension. This, however, is impossible to test with CNRP. There is no based line survey to precisely identify any particular political orientation that Cambodian value. Cambodia is not yet included in the World Value Data survey. In addition, political parties in Cambodia always claim they are democrats supplied with extensive democratic policy platforms. With the limitation and adapting to their model, this part assesses CNRP's ideology linkage through the following questions: (1) are people informed about policy choices and preference offered by CNRP? (2) Do people vote for CNRP based on the policy preference presented? These two questions are essential to determine of voter choice as this answer to the extent that political parties "help voter determine whom to vote for in an election" (Dalton, Farrell & McAllister, 2011, p. 217). It has found that this particular linkage is "moderate."

It is noted that in a nationally represented survey conducted by Asian Foundation from May 19 to June 9, 2014, after the 2013 national election, with 1000 sample across the country with an estimated margin of errors of plus or minus three percent reveals that political parties in Cambodia failed to inform voters about their policy differences significantly. In a question asked, "What difference do you see, if any, between political parties in Cambodia today?" Only 7 percent indicate "ideology," without any elaborated further while 9 percent said "no difference" and 31 percent knew that there was a difference but was unable to state it precisely (Asia Foundation, 2014, p. 29). Among those who saw the difference referred to "corruption" 28 percent, "commitment to

development" 24 percent, "numbers/power/members in parliament" 24 percent, and "responsiveness to citizens" 19 percent. This is nothing surprised, as the political observer would agree that policy choices and debate have not been rooted in Cambodian politics. Thus, we can assume that the party failed to inform policy choice to voters.

Many reasons explain the motive of people to instead vote for CNRP than the other party. First, as illustrated above, CNRP is led by two leading opposition figures that are well known to Cambodians and the international community. These two are believed the champions of democracy as they have fought for this for their entire lives. Sam Rainsy was elected to be the president of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), which is the only one regional alliance of liberal and democratic political parties in Asia, in 2012. Also, the slogan of "change" they proposed during the election attracted the voters who were fed up with the current government. As the recent survey revealed, 59 percent thought the country was moving into a "wrong direction," in contrasting to 81 percent thought it was into a "right direction" in 2003 (Asia Foundation 2014). Those who mentioned the "wrong direction" perceived "corruption" were the most concerning part, followed by deforestation and other economic issues. That was what CNRP advocated for.

Corruption was also found as an essential factor that determined the country was moving into a "wrong direction" in another public opinion survey funded by the International Republican Institute from October 28 to November 10, 2013 (IRI 2014). This survey was based on 2,000 face-to-face interviews with Cambodians whose aged were 18 up and represented across the country with the margin of errors of plus or minus 2.2 percent. Answering the question "which factors were most important to you when deciding which party to vote for in the July 2013 election?" 46 percent stated the "country needs a change," which is the highest percentage comparing to 35 percent on "party leaders," and 30 percent "campaign promise" (IRI, 2014, p. 15).

Another interesting finding from the survey to the question of "which political party best represents your view on each of these issues?" indicated that CNRP represents 56 percent to "protecting workers," 51 percent "protecting human rights," 49 percent "protecting freedom of speech," 45 percent "protecting farmers," and 43 percent "puts people's interests above their own political party" (IRI, 2014, p. 17). These percentages are higher than the ruling CPP. Table 6.5 below illustrates the comparison in percentage.

**Table 6.5 Which political party best represents your view on each of the issues?**

Parties	Workers	Human Rights	Freedom of Speech	Farmers	People's Interest
CNRP	56	51	49	45	43
CPP	32	35	34	43	41
FUN	1	1	1	1	1

Source: IRI (2014)

Although facing to the limitation, at least we can answer to the two questions about the CNRP's ideology linkage to democracy that, first, it had not yet informed its policy platform well enough to the people although observation suggested that the party had distributed leaflet, disseminating political messages through the limit media, and vigorously announced through public forums. The survey conducted by Asia Foundation (2014) suggested that limited numbers of people were informed. Finally, whether or not people had voted for CNRP because the party policies that represented the voters' preferences were well supported by IRI (2014) to the fact that people knew and credited CNRP. In conclusion, this ideology linkage to democracy shall be determined as "moderate."

#### **6.2.4 The representative linkage**

The congruence of "voter-party policy" will provide "good evidence of a healthy representative linkage" (Dalton, Farrell & McAllister, 2011, p. 218). The democratic representativeness of a political party is examined to the extent of how its performance reflects the people's will when the party is elected to the office. When attempting to use Dalton, Farrell and McAllister's (2011) framework to analyze CNRP's representative linkage, some limitations should be noted. Firstly, the ability of Cambodian people to use elections as a tool of democratic control is questionable as various sources independent reports suggest that elections in Cambodia after are always done under an unfair environment, where the ruling party subverts nearly every democratic institution. Last, CNRP is an opposition party that never forms the government with the ruling party; thus, its performance is not yet objectively able to evaluate. However, to satisfy this level of analysis, we shall look at how the party had tried to be accountable and representable to its voters and influenced to democracy after being elected after the election. This study agrees with Dalton, Farrell and McAllister's (2011, p. 186) notion that democracy is an "ongoing process of representation and accountability occurs through retrospective as well as prospective evaluations of government performance." CNRP's commitment to being accountable and representable after the election 2013 will be scrutinized. Unfortunately, this linkage has been found "low."

As illustrated earlier, the opposition party has emerged and evolved since the national election in 1993. In the 2013 latest national election, CNRP secured more than 44 percent of the popular votes, only about 4 percent behind the ruling party CPP despite election fraud and irregularities are registered. With this momentum, one can argue that it should have formed the government with the ruling party and delivered its policy as promised during the election campaign. This, however, would miss experience of what happened with FUN when it formed the government with CPP from 1993 to the current period that they did not even get elected a single commune chief in the 2017 local election. In retrospect, FUN won the majority in the 1993 national election, but its



popularity went down due to many factors ranging from poor leadership to political sabotage from the ruling CPP. An interview with the senior CNRP reveals that FUN experience was a good lesson for CNRP to learn and adapt. The CNRP leaders are very critical when dealing with CPP.

The government of Cambodia is formed through an absolute majority (50%+1) votes in the National Assembly, which consists of 123 elected members for the national election. So far the ruling CPP, with its majority voices, forms the government with ease. It can choose which party to partner with without any serious coalition agreement whenever it forms a government. The last election, however, made it difficult to go through, as CNRP was the only party that won 55 parliamentary seats, leaving CPP 68. Although CPP could form and run the government alone, the constitution requires that at least two thirds of the elected members get an endorsement from the King to run the first National Assembly meeting. CNRP, on the other hand, chose to boycott by conducting a peaceful demonstration against the irregularities and called for an immediate re-election and reform the flawed electoral system.

CNRP mobilized its supporters to demonstrate daily in the Freedom Park in Phnom Penh city. However, the one-year political deadlock ended with a bloody crackdown and a political deal to release seven opposition lawmakers, who were arrested under the charge of "insurrection" during the protest. Both parties agreed to create a "culture of dialogue" and reform the National Election Committee (NEC) to Judiciary, yet only the new composition of NEC looks more favorable. In the agreement dated 22 July 2014 to end the deadlock, CPP and CNRP agree to constitutionalize and reshuffle the National Election Committee, where previously dominated by CPP affiliated members. The new composition of NEC consists of 9 members, four nominated from the ruling party, four from the opposition, and one chosen on consensus between the opposition and ruling party in the assembly. Putting this composition into the constitution guarantees that it is not easy for any political party to manage or manipulate, as it requires two-thirds of the parliamentary members to make any amendment. Opposition leaders always claimed

this was a big success; however, besides this nothing else had been seriously reformed as spelled vaguely in the agreement regarding the judiciary, media, and military institutions.

By the time of this writing, the future of CNRP is not possible to predict as Sam Rainsy, CNRP president, has resigned due to the amendment of the party law. Kem Sokha, who became the president, has been arrested and put into prison under the charge of "treason." The "culture of dialogue" had embarrassedly failed and the election in 2018 is not guaranteed.

With the entire attempt to reform and delivered policy promise, CNRP faced serious difficulty to become a responsible and accountable party to its voters. Thus, the representative linkage shall be evaluated as "low."

### **6.2.5 The policy linkage**

The final party-linkage model to democracy ends with the extent that political parties' policies keep serving and attracting voters. The core argument of the party-linkage model is that political parties "undertake a range of functions that are essential for the operation of representative democracy" (Dalton, Farrell & McAllister, 2011, p. 198). For this particular linkage, Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister (2011) argue that political parties will not play any "substantial" role if they are "unable to make systematic changes to public policies" as they usually appeal to its voters (Dalton, Farrell & McAllister, 2011, p. 198). To confirm the proposition, Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister (2011) use public expenditure to measure the influencing policy outputs. Following this proposition and with the limitation as noted above, this part will evaluate the level of influences that CNRP could have over the government policy. CNRP's senior leaders claimed that the party should have won 2013 if the national election committee had been fair enough. CNRP claimed victory since immediately after the election. In the

interview, they did believe that they won the election. Independent observers reluctantly shared the same view; however, they raised the same concern over the election fraud. With the rise of support, does CNRP influence to the performance of the ruling party although it does not yet govern? It is necessary to compare what policy programs that CNRP proposed to voters during the election campaign to the government performance in this mandate to evaluate this. This linkage has been found "moderate."

In its 72-page booklet distributed during the national election campaign in 2013, CNRP described its manifesto and highlighted seven priority policies that the party would immediately execute when it comes to power.<sup>2</sup>

The seven-point political platform were the followings:

1. Provide state pension of 40,000 riels (about 10 US Dollar) to the senior citizen whose age is from 65 and above.
2. Set a minimum wage of 600,000 riels (about 150 US Dollar) to garment factory employee.
3. Increase monthly salary to the public servants with the basic of 1,000,000 riels (about 250 US Dollar).
4. Secure the price of agricultural products by ensuring that the rice product will at least be bought not less than 1,000 riels (about 0.25 US Dollar) per kilogram.
5. Poor citizen will receive free health care services.
6. Youth will have equal access to education and job. There will be a student-loan for students.
7. Reduce the price of gasoline, fertilizers, electricity and the interest rate.

Up to today, there are positive influences that can be observed as the followings. First, the government decided to revise the minimum wages for garment factory yearly with a

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<sup>2</sup> The policy booklet can be downloaded in Khmer at [http://www.cnrp7.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/20130212\\_Policy\\_Book-1.pdf](http://www.cnrp7.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/20130212_Policy_Book-1.pdf)

group that consists of factory-owner representatives, labor unions, and government officials. It is noted that this garment sector contributes immensely to Cambodian economy as it is home to about 600,000 workers; however, little attention has been paid to the working conditions – inadequate health care system, long working hours, job insecurity, and most importantly low wage. The minimum salary before 2013 was about 61 USD. In contrast, this was surprisingly increased to 80 USD in mid-2013, 102 USD in 2014, 128 USD in 2015, 140 USD in 2016, and 153 USD in 2017. The latest announcement is that the salary for 2018 is 170 USD. It is about more than 250 percent increase starting from the pre-election in 2013. This 153 USD in 2017, however, did not respond to the demand from the unions, who asked for 171 USD due to the rising of living cost. Another significant achievement in this sector is a Health Insurance Scheme (HIS) was expanded to cover health care, treatment, and sick leave in early 2016. It is noted that the HIS was to be implemented in 2001, as the Labor Law formulated since 1997 required it; however, nothing serious had been done. In 2013, the governing body of this Social Security Fund decided unanimously to implement the HIS and expanded the coverage of more than 900,000 workers across the country from January 2016.

Furthermore, there is also an increase in civil servant salary. Before the election, the wage was about 50 USD and increased to 125 USD in 2014. The government declared a plan to increase by about 20 percent yearly to the basic salary, and it will reach 250 USD by 2018; this is what CNRP outlined in the policy platform, but the ruling party used to disregard by suggesting it was just a populist policy that cannot be done (Ponniiah & Channyda, 2014). The salary of the commune/Sangkat councils is another crucial point to examine. The government sub-decree dated July 11 in 2013, just a few days before the July 28 election, indicated that the salary of a commune/Sangkat chief would increase from 37.5 USD to 75 USD in January 2014. Their salary kept increasing to 100 USD and 187.5 USD in the two last consecutive years of 2015 and 2016. The year of 2017 a commune chief's salary increases to 280 USD according to the sub-decree dated 17 March 2017. It is more than 500 percent increase in the last four years.

The price of electricity had also been reduced. In March 2016, the government had decided to reduce the cost of electricity to 0.12 USD per kilowatt-hour for those who consume 10 or fewer kilowatt-hours of energy per month. In April 2017, the price was reduced to 0.15 USD for those consuming less than 50 kilowatt-hours, while previously they pay around 0.21 USD. The gasoline price is also problematic in Cambodia. Whenever the price at the international market increases, it immediately increases, yet, it takes a longer time to reduce it although the international price dramatically drops. A group of civil society organization used to call for government intervention or it could "fuel unrest" as the price is the highest among the neighboring countries and this is hurting people's daily expense (RFA, 2012). The opposition party argued that the government fails to regulate and protect against the elite monopoly firm as most of the owners are from the ruling family members. In 2015, the Ministry of Mine and Energy announced a plan to consider fuel price legislation and called for the company to reduce the price immediately according to the market. In March 2016, the Ministry of Commerce announced a ceiling price that would be calculated based on Means of Platts Singapore (MOPS) benchmark, taxes, VAT, and local operating costs that relevant ministries and private sectors agree in every tenth-day meeting – namely on 1st, 11th, and 21st of the month. According to the Prakas (legal announcement at Ministerial level) dated 6 March 2016, any petroleum retailers that do not follow the "ceiling price" would face a legal fine. Until this point in time, there is no law adopted yet, but this is a significant development to secure the fair price that could help reduce the cost of production and living expense of the citizen. Opposition leader urged for a fair deal with this issue as he reiterated, "A legislative approach could be positive by possibly bringing about more transparency and being more conducive to public debate the now opaque petrol distribution industry" (Morton, 2015).

As illustrated above, almost the entire priority policy platform that CNRP proposed during the election campaign was immediately reformed and improved. This was a significant change in this fifth mandate. However, there remain serious challenges to tackle corruption, deforestation, land grabs, forced eviction, and political oppression. It

seems that the government has tried to respond to the losing electoral votes by sticking with the mild reforms, which were easily visible to the public rather than committing itself to strengthen the rule of law and building a more democratic society. In contrast, the government has passed a controversial law on the political party on 10 July 2017 to ban Sam Rainsy from being the CNRP's president effectively. The vice-president, Kem Sokha who later became the president, was arrested in the mid-night 3 September 2017 and now was under custody. Radio stations that broadcasting from Radio Free Asia and Voice of America were ordered to shut down. The vocal independent English and Khmer newspapers (The Cambodia Daily and Phnom Penh Post) were being forced to shut down under the tax issue, which was believed a political motivation.

Answering the question whether or not CNRP influences to public policy can be dichotomous. On the one hand, it does have influences as some social policies that have been described above were reformed and improved. On the other hand, CNRP popularity is seen as a threat to the ruling party, thus, need to be weakened and destroyed. This is threatening to the survival of democracy in Cambodia. This party policy linkage is "moderate."

### **6.3 Summary and conclusion**

The chapter seeks to answer to what extent the opposition party has influenced to democracy at the national level. The chapter starts with a brief background of the opposition party and how it evolves. Using Dalton, Farrell and McAllister's (2011) party and democratic linkage model, the analysis has found that (1) the opposition party has strongly engaged with the campaign linkage through its tight control over the campaign in the electoral process. The party takes control of the selection of the candidates for the election and dominates the campaign process. With the current electoral system and regulation, the party is even stronger and entirely in charge in the campaign; (2) it has firmly engaged in mobilizing people to vote. Although it faces some structural issues,

the unity of the opposition attracts voters and makes it gain popular support in both of national election in 2013 and local election in 2017. Voter turned out at the last local election was around 90 percent that was the highest percentage if we compared to the four previous elections; (3) the ideological linkage that determines how parties help voters to vote for a particular course has been found "moderate." Cambodians are not able to distinguish ideological differences between political parties. As there are only two main parties – opposition and the ruling, people who are suffering from social and economic situation tend to prefer a change and see the opposition party as an alternative; (4) the representative linkage has been found "low." The opposition party has faced many challenges in term of trying to be accountable and representative. When trying to exert its leverage to change through negotiation with the ruling, there is only one positive move that it can make, which is the constitutionalized national election committee; (5) the last policy linkage criteria has been scrutinized. To attract voters, the opposition party has highlighted 7-point important policy priorities. The government has positively responded to most of these policies; however, this popular policy cannot be claimed as highly influenced to democracy as other's account such as civil society, independent media, and the opposition party itself have been subjected to intimidate and oppress. As a result, this last linkage is found "moderate." The summary analysis is shown in Table 6.6 below.

**Table 6. 6 Summary of party linkages and description**

	Description Level
Campaign	Strong
Participation	Strong
Ideology	Moderate
Representative	Low
Policy	Moderate
<b>Total</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

This chapter concludes that political decentralization enhances the opportunity for the opposition party to build their party support from the grassroots level. The despite all the challenges, the opposition party does make some "moderate" influence to the democracy.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **ELECTED COUNCILS AND DEMOCRACY**

This chapter aims to investigate the role of commune councilors and answer the question posed in Chapter 4: *How have local elected representatives encouraged and facilitated democracy?* Chapter 5 discussed the policy of decentralization and found that the policy linkage to democracy is low. Previous chapters defined the roles and democratic responsibility of the councilors who are supposed to be a public representation, make autonomous decision, facilitate public consultation and participation, be responsive and accountable, enhance the quality of life of the local people, promote equity, transparency and integrity, and fight against corruption and abuse of power. For the feasibility of the analysis, this chapter will start with the review of past performance of the commune councilors in Cambodia. Then, it will discuss findings to the above question by examining the performance of local commune councilors (CC) in three areas that are considered necessary for deepening democracy: participation, accountability, and responsiveness.

#### **7.1 The Past performance**

Asia Foundation conducted the very first-ever assessment of the commune councilors' performance and reported in 2005 highlighted both positive and negative results (See also in Kim & Henke, 2005). This national survey of 310 random samples of communes with 620 commune councilors (CC) revealed that the participatory process in commune planning and budgeting was weak. Citizen normally did not know who were the members of the planning and budgeting committee in their communes, and the face-to-face communication between the commune councilors and their constituencies was low. There were reports about corruption and nepotism in providing administrative services – namely official public certificates; however, in general people were satisfied with the

CC's performance. The significant challenges to CC lacked the knowledge and skill to perform their task. Besides, building infrastructure such as schools and roads were significant demands from the citizen, yet there was a limited budget to response (Asia Foundation, 2005).

Another assessment conducted by the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL), a civil organization committed to promoting democracy, in the first mandate 2002-2007 shared the same concerns (COMFREL, 2008). Collecting secondary data from various sources in addition to its analysis, COMFREL (2008) noted that there was an improvement of accountability if compared to what the commune councilors used to perform in the 1980s. The elected representatives fulfilled their responsibility as what had been planned and promised, which were mainly about physical infrastructures such as road, channel, and dam. This provided opportunities to alleviate poverty. However, councilors faced difficulty in providing feedback to their provincial superiors, which threatened the vertical accountability of services they could offer. The level of consensus in their decision-making process was also another concern. The majority councilors, mostly from the ruling party, dominated the decision making process without consideration to the minority voices from the minority councilors, who were from the opposition party. Communication between councilors who were from different parties was also a challenge. It was reported that the chief of the councilors who were from the ruling party rarely shared essential tasks to the deputy, who were from the opposition one. On the contrary, the chiefs who were from the opposition would lack coordination and cooperation from their superiors at the district level, who were mostly appointed by the government and the ruling party. Public awareness and participation in the commune planning process were also weak. It was about poor facilitation and coordination skills of councilors that were matter. The majority of the councilors had limited knowledge necessary for them to perform accountably and responsively. The findings also listed down significant difficulties in delivering public services to the local citizen as follows:

1. There was a general lack of clarification and delineation of mandatory and optional tasks in service delivery. This had a negative impact on accountability and opportunities to establish proper linkages between functions and funding arrangements.
2. It was difficult for each government tier to be responsive and provide efficient services, given the vast disparities in the size and capacity of the unit in each tier.
3. Provinces did not have incentives to develop a well-coordinated development program, because they lacked funds. Provincial public infrastructure depended solely on national government finances and maintenance plans. Transparent and approved service delivery plans were nonexistent.
4. The centralized and delegated service delivery system was considered not sufficiently demand-driven or based on local priorities, with flexibility and adjustments not ensured.
5. Quality of service delivery was difficult to judge and sometimes unacceptable. Monitoring performance systems were weak.
6. Payments of unofficial fees were frequent in many sectors. There is a need to clarify the areas and sectors where user payments and charges are applied formally and informally and where the services are provided free of charge. (COMFREL, 2007)

In the latest follow up study to the CC's performance in their second mandate (2007-2012), COMFREL noted a slight improvement in the performance and a "minimal change" to devolution and political distribution (COMFREL, 2013, p. 2). Vertical accountability, from CC to local citizen, had improved. Participation remained low, and

people were not motivated to participate in the commune planning or budgeting process. The main reason found was that they lacked interest in the affairs. This influenced mainly from many factors ranging from economic, cultural, facilitation skills, and lack of information. COMFREL (2013) identified the critical role of the village chief, who was appointed by the commune chief, in informing the citizen. Other crucial factors were that CC could not respond to the needs of the citizen, for example, to build the road or channel that the villagers requested. This was related to the limit budget that was provided by the national level. Some issues such as deforestation or land conflict could not be solved at the local level; thus, this lack of CC's jurisdiction over the problems was likely to discourage people from participating in the commune meetings.

A recent study continued to outline the same challenges regarding the participatory approach in planning and budgeting. Local people lacked interest, and they thought the council meeting, which was conducted monthly as mere "symbolic" as everything had already been decided, most likely from the central ministries (Muny, 2016, p. 150). It was also argued that the capacity of CC was low to make any decision. In addition, there was not enough incentive to encourage CC to fulfill their tasks prescribed in the laws.

Up to this point, according to the information above, we have seen that CC has performed limited roles according to what was expected regarding the ability to encourage participation, be responsible in delivering public services, and be accountable to the citizen. In order to seek for further knowledge, the study took the four selected communes as a case to investigate the CC's role and explore if the challenges described above still exist and if any different explanations can be drawn. Also, this was to examine if the commune led by the opposition party could perform better than their counterparts.

The following will be the discussion of the key findings derived from field interviews from 22 (4 female) councilors at the four selected communes (PN=7, PP=5, ST=5, SB=5). There are 13 councilors from the ruling party CPP, five from opposition SRP, and four from opposition HRP. Hence, the councilors from the opposition party (CNRP) are 9. Table 7.1 below describes the basic information of the councilors.

**Table 7.1 Commune councilors interviewed**

Age Group	Percentage	Experiences in offices	
		Times	Percentage
55-64	50.0	3 mandates	54.55
65 Above	31.82	2 mandates	36.36
45-54	9.09	1 mandate	4.55
35-44	9.09	1 new	4.55
Total	100.0		
Education			Percentage
Grade 9			31.82
Finished primary			31.82
Attended primary			27.27
Can read and write but never go to school			1
Grade 12			4.55
Total (n=22)			100.0

From the necessary information in the table above, we can see that local councilors possess minimal education, as only about 5 percent of them graduated high school (Grade 12). About 32 percent attended grade 9 and finished grade 6 (primary school), and another 27 percent attended the primary school but not finished it. Despite this, their seniority in the communes makes them perfect choice of the leadership role in the community. Culturally, local citizen respects the senior people, not necessarily to the position they hold but age. As a result, political parties usually aim to recruit such a person to represent their party and compete in every election.

As noted in the methodology section, the interviews with the councilors were not recorded in either a tape or a digital recorder. When I obtained the permission, mostly made by a cell phone, from the councilors to conduct the interview, a selected place was decided by the councilors that they felt comfortable to talk. It is noted that councilors who are from the ruling party preferred to talk in the commune offices, whereas councilors from the opposition party, preferred somewhere else such as at a coffee shop or his/her house. Different physical buildings where councilors work can also explain why.

**Figure 7.1 ST Commune**



Figure 7.1 above is the ST commune located in Siem Reap province, and Figure 7.2 below is the PP commune situated in Prey Veng province. The chiefs from both of the

communes are from the opposition party. While ST has a small desk for the chief and a clerk, PP does not even have a chair. There is only a small bed in front of the building, and during this research study, there was no a single meeting conducted in the PP's commune. The clerk of PP commune lives nearby the office, corner to the right. This clerk is the person who mostly deals with the people who need some public documents.

**Figure 7.2 PP Commune**



The two communes below belong to the chiefs who are from the ruling party. Figure 7.3 is the SB commune in Siem Reap, and Figure 7.4 is PN commune from Prey Veng province. It is also important to note that behind the SB and next to the right of PN there is a building of the Cambodian People Party (CPP), the party that rule the government. When I questioned about the building, councilors and chiefs from the opposition revealed that the budget from the government had already been approved to build a new building, but it had never been transferred to the commune budget accounts.



**Figure 7.3 SB Commune**



**Figure 7.4 PN Commune**





I began each interview with some background introduction, and after that, I asked guiding questions where I could theoretically and practically related to the analysis of participation, accountability, and responsiveness. All the questions are open-ended but not limited to the followings:

#### Questions on participation

1. What role do you play in the communes?
2. How would you call people for a public meeting?
3. Why do you think people are not enthusiastic to participate in the meeting?
4. What would you do to encourage people to participate in future meeting?

#### Questions on accountability

1. What does "accountability" mean to you?
2. To whom do you think you should be accountable?
3. How do you demonstrate that you are accountable to people?

#### Question on responsiveness

1. Do you know what people need and want in your community?
2. Are you satisfied with the services you provide to the people?

During the interviews, I noted most of the keywords or phrases I considered essential to understanding what was going on there, and immediately after the interviews I wrote memos and used MAXQDA12 to help with the coding and frequency counts of the critical perception that each councilor mentioned into categories. I decided to code a particular concept once it was either repeatedly reported or explicitly pointed by the councilors.

Furthermore, I also coded and categorized the concept depending on the knowledge from the various literature and reports I thought they were relevant. I called most of the councilors to double-check what I was not sure about. Where necessary I also present

the citizen responses in order to validate what the councilors had expressed. The below are the findings.

## **7.2 Finding on participation**

As conceptualized in Chapter 3, citizen participation is crucial to democracy (Arnstein, 1969; Diamond & Morlino, 2004; Pateman, 1970). Diamond and Morlino (2004) count the participation from the citizen as one of the democratic qualities necessary for evaluation of better democracy. In addition, it is also the goal of political decentralization that brings citizen together and closer to the authority. Thus, the facilitative role of CC to encourage meaningful participation is even more crucial. This study defines citizen participation as a voluntary decision made by the citizens to take part in any formal or informal meetings or gathering facilitated or operated by local commune councilors. Therefore, to determine whether or not the local representatives can influence democracy is to look at how they encourage and facilitate citizen participation in their communal decision-making process.

It is necessary to note that after the election result has been formally announced and starting from the first day of the commune councilors' mandate, the councilors are required to decide on a 5-year commune development plan (CDP). CDP is a master plan to manage the communal development projects within their five-year mandate to cover five main parts: economic, social, environment, administrative and security, and gender. The councilors have to make use of their commune/Sangkat fund, which is about 15,000-20,000 US Dollars per year, allocated by the central government. In addition, commune councilors can present their development proposals to different development partners in their community to raise more funds needed to implement any projects they wish. The development partners can be from the partner government ministries, NGOs and other rich people, who are mostly senior government officers or businessmen. It is the role of the councilors to conduct monthly meetings to inform the report progress of

the CDP. In each meeting, citizens can also provide feedback to the project and raise any problem that they face, not necessary just about the CDP.

According to the interviews, each commune conducted the same processes in order to decide on the CDP. First, the councilors formed a committee that consists of councilors, village chiefs, and senior citizen from each village to identify the needs of the communes. Second, they discussed and prioritized the development projects that were mostly dominated by building dams, roads, and canal. Third, they conducted public meetings with the villagers. Usually, the meeting was conducted from one village to another village. The meeting places were usually in either pagoda (WAT) or the house of the village chief. After disseminating the CDP, villagers gave inputs, and the demand of the villagers made the adjustment; however, this study found that there were no significant changes after the CDP was decided at the first committee meetings. Finally, the councilors submitted the CDP to get approval from the central government, and after it was approved, the councilors needed to report and announce to the citizen.

As guided in the internal rule, each commune in Cambodia is encouraged to gather citizen to public meetings of about 60 percent, especially, in the planning and budgeting process at the beginning of their 5-year development plan. In practice, however, the ability to encourage people participation faced challenges. As shown in chapter 8, only about 29 respondents among 368 interviewed showed up in at least one meeting in the last six months. In the commune reports to the ministry, on the contrary, revealed that the councilors always marked it around 35 to 50 percent. The councilors admitted that they had to cook the figure so that their commune looked good from their superior and other development partners.

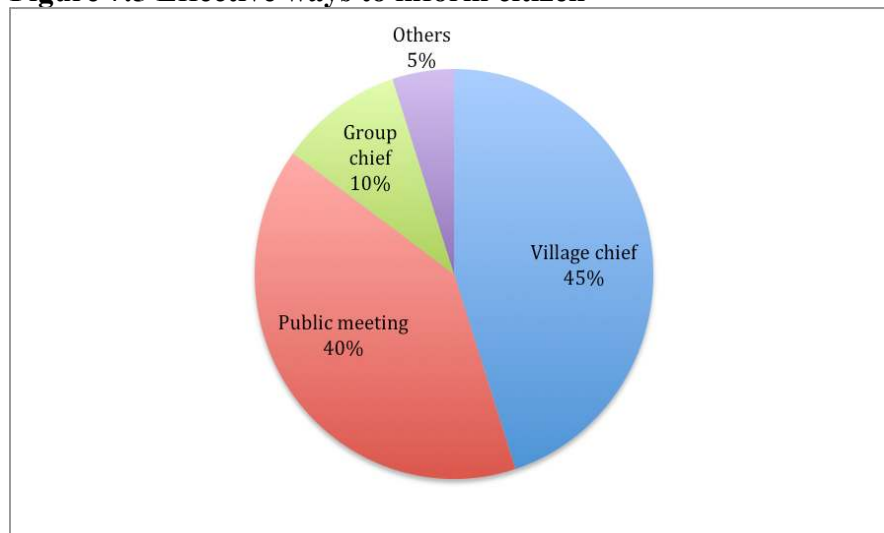
The internal rule suggests that citizen from 50 to 100, depending on the size of the commune, could request an agenda to be added to the council meeting that is monthly and regularly done or any other special meeting that is conducted. The chief of the council, who is the commune chief, has to either immediately respond in written or oral

form. The information about the meeting has to be published on the information board that each commune decides to place, usually in the commune or any other public gathering such as market or pagodas.

Data generated from the councilors, with the confirmation from local villagers, revealed that the channel of information from communes to citizens about each public meeting and the direct benefit that citizens received from such meetings were vital challenges to bring citizens to participate in any meeting.

About 40 percent of the councilors understood that public announcement about the commune meetings could be made effective through public places such as pagodas or markets. Also, 45 percent of them believed the role of the village chief could reinforce the information flow to the citizen better. Figure 7.5 describes the answer to the question "What do you think is the most effective way to inform the local people about public affairs?" Another 10 percent of the councilors mentioned about the group chiefs who were very close to the local people. It is noted that in a village, in addition to a village chief, the commune can appoint group chiefs according to the need as they are working on a voluntary basis. The information can immediately flow through the channels.

**Figure 7.5 Effective ways to inform citizen**



What had been interestingly found, especially when interviewing with councilors who were from the opposition party, was the creative way of using loudspeakers to announce at special traditional occasions such as a festival, wedding party, or a religious ceremony.

*I think it is the most effective way to challenge the village chiefs or group chiefs [mostly in favor of ruling party] who only inform their party members (A councilor, PP, 28 November 2017).*

The answer above suggests that the village chief is the main the source of information, but also a barrier to the citizen who is identified as opposition supporters. However, the answers were not congruent. Other councilors who were also from the opposition party revealed that usually the village chiefs or group chiefs tried informing all citizen about the CDP meeting except other occasions such as gift giving.

*The village chiefs customarily informed all people in the community about the commune development plan or report every six-month about the development of the plan; however, they are biased to some occasions such as calling to receive the gift from generous people (A councilor from SB, 12 December 2016).*

It is noted that gift giving is normal in Cambodian politics. Typically, when a senior government officer or wealthy businessman going to inaugurate a building of a new bridge or new dam, people are gathered to listen to some speech that generally related to the party achievement (mostly ruling party) in bringing the development to the community, and at the end of the speech people are usually given something back home such as a pack of rice, food, cloth, or money.

Empirical findings from the discussion, interviews with the citizen, and local knowledge there suggested that the village chief and group chief played a very

significant role in disseminating information to the local citizen as they stayed closer to the citizen. Unfortunately, they were generally believed as the right hand of the ruling party, as the majority of the commune chiefs in Cambodia were from the ruling party and it was the chiefs to recruit the village chiefs and group chiefs.

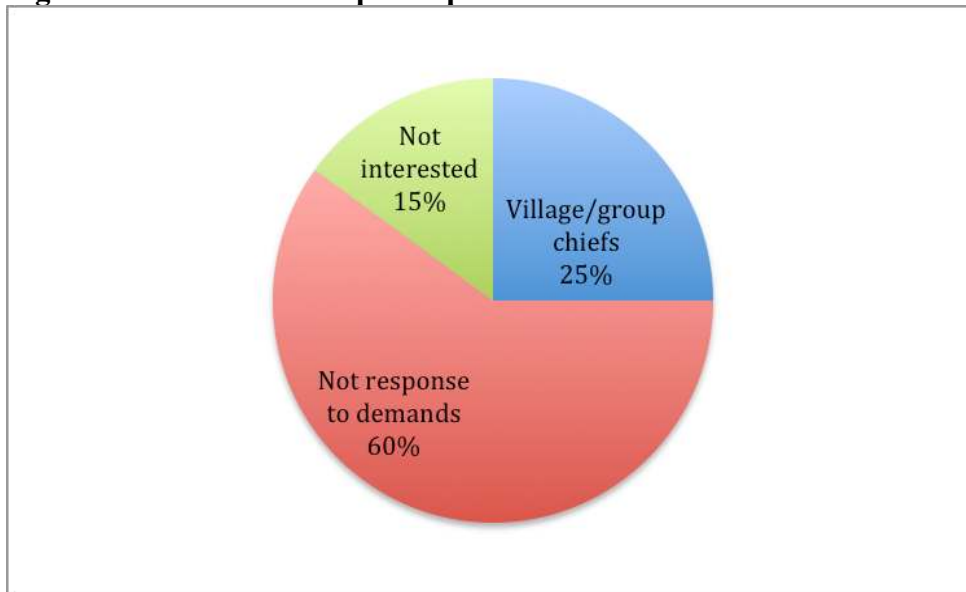
In addition to their essential role to channel the communication from the commune to the people, village chiefs and group chiefs were also part of responsibility found necessary blocking the information flow as shown in figure 7.2 below. Many councilors, from both the opposition and ruling party, complained about the poor performance of the village chiefs that they could not call enough people to come by pointing to the fact that village chiefs had their own business to care about than fulfilling the responsibility to disseminate the information. A councilor noted:

*Since most of the information relied on the village chief to disseminate, we trust him to fulfill the job, yet we know he did not perform as expected as he has his work to do. Village chief is merely a voluntary job as he has to take care of his rice field too. (A councilor at PN, 21 December 2016)*

Currently, a village chief is given a monthly salary of about 56 USD per month according to the sub-degree dated 17 March 2017. The salary is much increase from the previous four years, which is less than 15 USD per month.

The final factor that hinders citizen participation found in this study was the benefit that the citizen expected to receive from meetings. Councilors of about 60 percent reported that it was the inability of the commune to response to the citizens' demand that made them not attend most of the meeting. Figure 7.6 describes three main factors that councilors believed to be the constraints to citizen participation.

**Figure 7.6 Constraints to participation**



As shown in the above figure, about 15 percent of the frequent answers were that the local people were not interested in the meeting. Councilors also complained about having to spend money on a snack when calling people to a meeting. Most of them shared the same ideas that when inviting people to participate, they were asked about a gift or snack. There were various meetings in the commune. Generally, meetings that were sponsored by NGOs working related to women or children committees had a budget for the snack; however, the development plan meeting that was funded by the commune through the national level did not have such a budget. Councilors noted that people come to see them only when the people had a problem with their community such as conflict or violence, but they were not interested in the meeting as they always said busy with their fieldwork. The interviews with local citizens also confirmed this phenomenon. Most people who say they did not come to a meeting always refer to their business in the rice field or farm. One villager explained:

*I do not have time to participate, as I have to take my cows to the field. I leave early in the morning and come back home at late evening; thus, I*

*do not want to take part in the meetings. (A villager at ST, 2 January 2017)*

Through discussion, nearly all of the councils did not even satisfy with their works since they could not respond to the demand of their citizen. A councilor said:

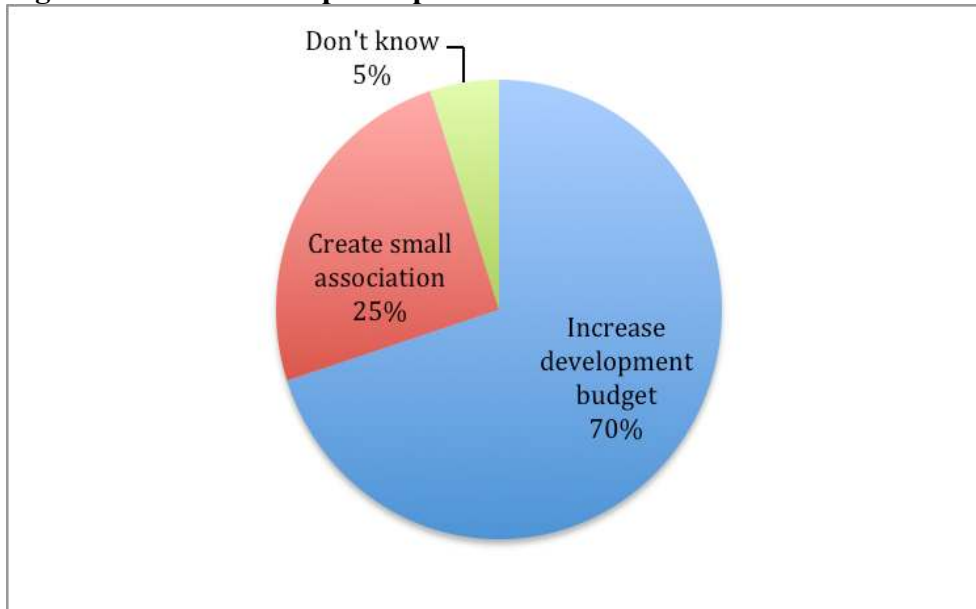
*Honestly, I am not happy, as we cannot repair the road as they [people] requested. We have to prioritize where we should repair first when the raining season arrives. People do not understand that we have a limited budget. When we do not do what they want, they decided not to come and participate in the next meeting although we invite them many times. (A councilor at ST, 29 November 2016)*

The passage above suggests that the commune councilors understand their situation and it seems that nothing much has improved or different from previous research reports. The poor performance of the village and group chiefs and the lack of fund to respond to the needs of the citizen are the recurring factors raised by nearly every councilor in the communes.

I tried to find out if the councilors could think of any other solution to attract citizen participation. The result found was that 70 percent of the answers were about increasing development budget. Other 25 percent thought of creating a smaller community group or association on various sections such as rice, fish, or agricultural product that could help disseminate information to the local citizen. The councilors who mostly shared the idea of creating group or association were from the opposition party, as they believed the communal spirit was weak. Figure 7.7 describes the findings on the solutions that councilors think of how to encourage citizen participation.



**Figure 7.7 Solutions to participation**



However, the lack of budget dominated most of the answers. A councilor boldly claimed:

*It does not matter how we inform people, but if they think they do not have benefit from the meetings, they will not come. The only solution is to find more budgets so that we can develop more according to the demands of the villagers. When people come and can see that their village benefits from the plan, they will join. (A councilor at SB, 13 December 2016)*

Up to this point, we can see that there are remaining challenges that hinder participation starting from the budget constraints to the channel of communication. Councilors seem to have some creative idea about creating a small group of association; however, this probably can only disseminate the information. The most motivating factor is the ability to respond to the villagers' demands, which require an increase of budget to local commune.

### 7.3 Finding on accountability

Accountability is argued to be one of the most important aspects of democratic decentralization (Blair, 2000; Crook & Manor, 1998; Grindle, 2011; Schmitter 2004). The citizen can hold their government accountable through elections, collective actions to demand the functional needs, and claims for rights (Gindle, 2011). In Cambodia, there is an accountability mechanism, yet it is not in a democratic one but rather a patron-client relationship network (Hughes, 2003).

At the local level in Cambodia, a strategic plan on social accountability for sub-national democratic development has just been clearly defined under the national program dated 11 July 2013. According to the strategic framework, this is aimed to:

"Empower citizens and local communities, particularly women, youth and disadvantaged groups, to strengthen the allocation and use of budgets and the delivery of local public services through improved access and use of information and citizen-led monitoring of budgets and the performance of Sub-National Administrations." (NCDD, 2013, p. 2)

The framework focuses on four components that are (1) to enhance citizen's access to information (rights and budget), (2) to open for public scrutinize official performance, (3) to build capacity to local service providers, including councilors, and (4) to create a culture of "learning by doing", in which feedback from the implementation process will be taken into lesson learned (NCDD, 2013, p. 3). In the first three-year (2016-2018), only three sectors (health, education, administrative) will be implemented in 120 districts.<sup>1</sup> SB, ST, and PN are participating in the implementation plan, but not PP in Prey Veng province. Since the framework is very young, this part explores the perception shared among councilors over their understanding of how they are

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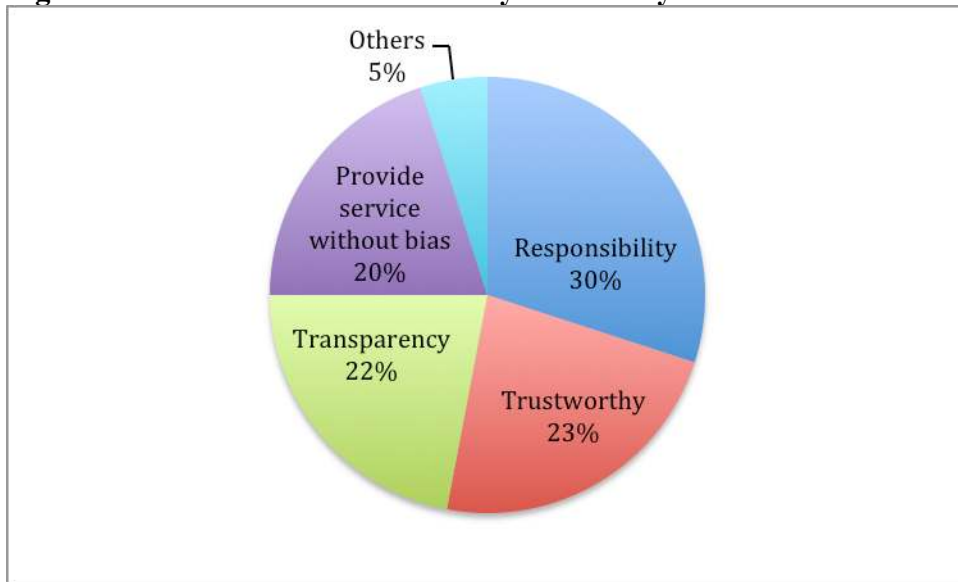
<sup>1</sup> There are 163 districts in total.

accountable to their citizen. To put it precisely, councilors will be requested to share what they will do in order to be more accountable to their voters.

It is noted that Kanak Neya Phap is the Khmer translated from the English "Accountability." This word, however, was newly introduced in the 1990s. There was no this word in the Khmer dictionary before. The meaning of it is usually attached to the Khmer words of Ka totourl khus trov "Responsibility" which is referring to one has to be responsible for one's action or the answerability of one to another. Previous scholars who study this concept always note the different understanding from different Cambodian people (See Vuthy et al. 2007; Kimchoeun et al. 2007). Thus, to understand the meaning of this word shared among councilors is necessary before we can seek to understand it further.

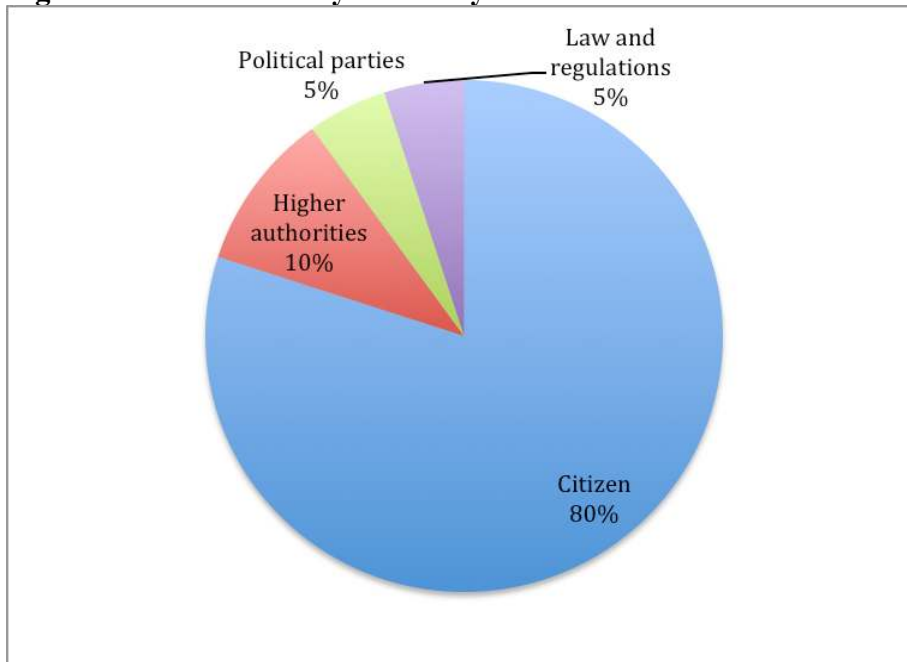
In the interviews, when answering to whether or not the councilors have heard the word "Accountability," councilors of about 100 percent responded "yes" they have heard. However, the explanation further of how it was referring to provided a mixed concept that can be summarized in Figure 7.8 below. About 23 percent of the understandings related "accountability" to trustworthy. "It is ka tuk jit (the trust) that people have on us that make us accountable," most councilors shared this view. Another 22 percent thought that it was "transparent" leading that made us accountable. "We need to arrange things openly; this is accountable," a councilor at PN reiterated. About 20 percent referred "accountability" to providing services without bias, and other 5 percent suggested that it was about listening and caring what people need and being humble and respectful to the citizen.

**Figure 7.8 What does “accountability” mean to you?**



Concerning this also, I asked the councilors a question if they know to whom they should be accountable. It is interesting to learn that the first concept from the majority shared among all councilors was about the citizen. According to the summary in Figure 7.9 below, we can see that about 80 percent of the frequent words from the councilor during the discussion was the citizen. The referral to higher authorities, which usually refers to the district, provincial, and the ministerial level took up about 10 percent. Law and regulation were mentioned about 5 percent. The last interesting part was when talking about the political party. Both the opposition and ruling party suggested that they also had to be accountable to the party line too. It is known that according to the law, it is the party who can decide to appoint or dismiss any councilor. Although during the interview, the party was little mentioned, observation in real life was another different story. The question of whom should the councilors be reporting to could tell that it was mostly to the party line. As discussed in Chapter 5, the legal structures in Cambodia give power to a political party to fully control their members although the people directly elect them.

**Figure 7.9 To whom do you think you should be accountable?**



The question was asked to understand further how the councilors would enhance their accountability. Councilors at the three communes who just attended training about social accountability mentioned about the contents of the lessons which was about developing a list of services that the commune have described the price of the services and announced it on the board of at the commune. During the interviews, observation revealed that none of the communes developed the list of price and announced it in their noticeboard yet. The commune chief at ST noted:

*We somehow know what to do, but we do not have the time and resources to do it yet, as a clerk has just resigned. Moreover, there are many more things to do in the commune. Look at the signpost in our office. We do not yet have a new one yet as the old one was broken a long time ago (A chief at ST, 13 January 2017).*

Answering to the question of how the councilors would do to improve the accountability provided that any challenges they face cannot be solved in their hands,

about 45 percent of the perception shared was that to maintain their work transparently. Figure 7.10 describes it. A councilor also shared her opinion that:

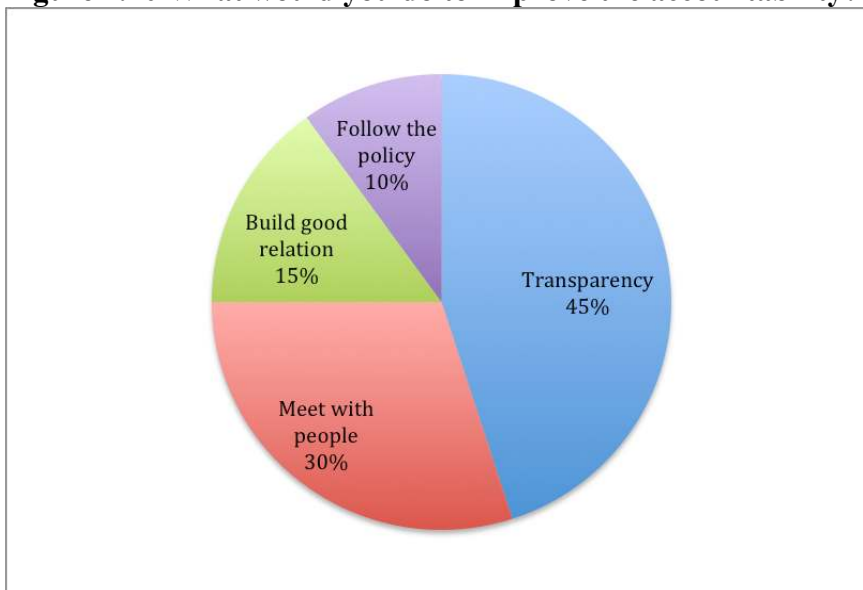
*We need to be opened to the citizen so that they would trust us. If people think that we are trustworthy, they will cooperate with us and join us to improve the community (A councilor at PN, 22 December 2016).*

Another councilor from the opposition party at SB explained:

*For us, we do not have enough ability besides trying to inform people in an honest way that we cannot do or deal with what they needed or wanted. We must inform them clearly about our challenges so they will understand our situation (A councilor at SB, 14 December 2016).*

About 30 percent of the ideas related to transparency also revealed that the councilors would go and meet people at their homes if they mean to be accountable. About 15 percent express that meeting people would be able to generate a good relation. The other 10 percent was referring to the commitment to the policy guideline that the government developed.

**Figure 7.10 What would you do to improve the accountability?**



To verify if the councilors did what they said, I asked the citizens some questions to find out if the councilors visited their houses and if citizens knew their councilors' name. During the interview with the local people, a question was asked: Can you name your commune chief, first deputy, and second deputy? The answer was surprising as only about 23 percent of the total respondents could correctly name their commune chief, first deputy, and second deputy while the other 32 percent did not know the names of their representative at all. Table 7.2 below describes the responses of the local citizen. If the answers are divided into groups, in Siem Reap province, we can see that there are about 42 percent of local people from ST, whose commune chief is from the opposition, can correctly name their three local leaders while only 5 percent of the people from SB, whose chief is from the ruling party, can identify the correct name. Prey Veng also shares the same story. About 24 percent of people from the opposition commune (PP) can identify their chief and deputies correctly comparing to only about 21 percent from the ruling chief at PN.

**Table 7.2 Can you name your commune chief, first deputy, and second deputy?**

Communes	ABC: Yes	AB: Yes C: No	AC: Yes B: No	BC: Yes A: No	A: Yes BC: No	AC: Yes B: No	ABC: No	Total
ST (CNRP)	42.0%	13.0%	2.0%	1.0%	28.0%	0.0%	14.0%	100.0%
SB (CPP)	5.0%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	10.0%	1.0%	82.0%	100.0%
PN (CPP)	20.9%	37.2%	0.0%	0.0%	25.6%	5.8%	10.5%	100.0%
PP (CNRP)	23.8%	6.2%	0.0%	0.0%	55.0%	0.0%	15.0%	100.0%
Total	23.0%	13.9%	0.8%	0.3%	28.4%	1.6%	32.0%	100.0%

A: name of commune chief; B: name of first deputy; C: name of second deputy

Up to this point, we see that nearly all of the councilors understand, more or less, the concept of accountability and it is the citizen that they think they should be accountable to. The efforts to improve the accountability that most councilors shared is to be more transparent with their work and meet more people; however, the evidence from citizen suggest that their ability to be more transparent and see people often is limited. What we

can see is that the citizen in the communes where the chiefs are from the opposition party seem to be able to identify more correct names of their representatives than those of in the communes led by the ruling party.

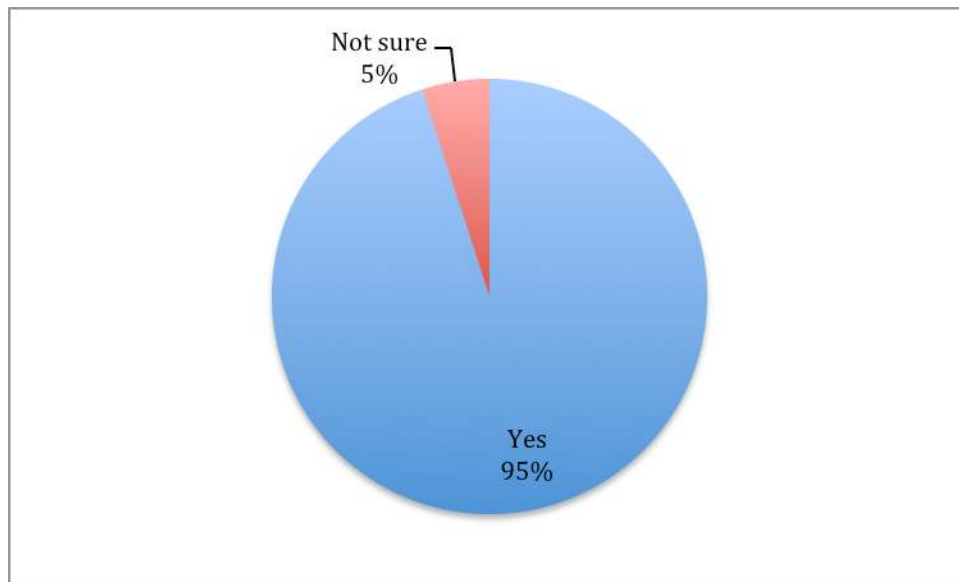
## **7.4 Finding on responsiveness**

The ability to respond to citizen's demands is what this part aims to understand. From the above parts, we see that the level of citizen participation is low due to the primary and critical challenges, which are about the limitation of budget and the performance of village/group chiefs. However, despite these, what could councilors do in order that they become a responsive elected councilor in a democratic society? It is argued that in order to be responsive, the local elected representatives shall provide services quickly in accordance with the preference of the citizen (Manor, 1999; 2008). This refers to the idea that local representative may have more local knowledge about the needs and will be able to respond quickly to deal with those needs. Drawing from this, with regards to the challenge they face, it is necessary to explore if the councilors still can act as a responsive elected representative.

In general, the interviews with councilors revealed that almost 95 percent of the answers suggested that there were confident in knowing what their people needed in the communes, only about 5 percent suggested that they were reluctant to claim, which could be categorized into "not sure" as described in Figure 7.11 below.



**Figure 7.11 Do you know what the local citizen need in the community?**



Discussion with the councilors confirmed the previous concern about the lack of funding, as most of them complained about the inability to respond although they know what exactly their villagers need. A councilor notes:

*The villagers are angry with us because their request to repair a road in their village cannot be put in this year plan. We tell them to wait until next year. We need to allocate our little budget to other villages, which is more necessary. We can try to find other partners to repair but no one can help yet (A councilor at PP, 3 February 2017).*

A councilor at SB also shared a similar view:

*We all know what we want in the communes as we live and work here for years; it is just about that we cannot fulfill the demands that require more than what we have right now (A councilor at SB, 13 December 2016).*

Answering to what they can do to mitigate the funding challenge, almost all relied on the funding from the generosity of other people. Mostly, councilors referred to the generosity of senior government officials or businessman to share their public spending on infrastructural projects. Some councilors thought of local contribution, but it was not easy to get people to share their budget even if it was small. A councilor at ST notes:

*We used to seek support from the local people to repair a dam. However, it is difficult as you can see the commune is very poor and most people go out to work in Thailand (neighbor country). There are only old age people who stay at home and look after the children as their parents go out to work for months. Thus, they have little money to contribute to the local project (A councilor at ST, 2 January 2017).*

Besides focusing on funding aspect, councilors also see the understanding of people at their communes a challenge for them to be responsive as they find it difficult to mobilize support from the citizen. Some councilors noted the uncooperative citizen to take part in various issues. A councilor at PP complained:

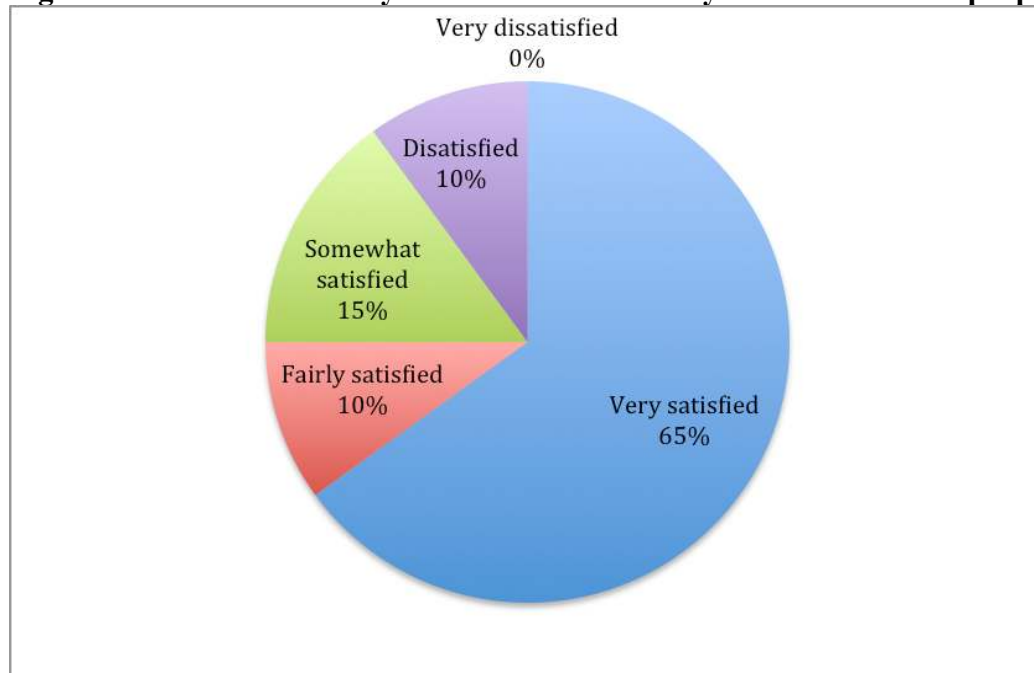
*Local people rely too much upon the outsiders such as rich business people or politicians, but they do not contribute their time and budget for their own community. Some of them are rich, but they just think it is not their responsibility to contribute to build, for example, a road (A councilor at PP, 4 February 2017).*

In addition to physical infrastructures that they always thought of, councilors also considered providing administrative services on time such as signing and stamping on the certifying letters on various matters in the commune. There were also some administrative challenges noted especially in the communes where chiefs were from the opposition party. Usually, the chiefs sign the letter, but it is the clerks who stamp on the letters. A case at ST revealed that the clerk always took the stamp with him to his home,

which was very difficult for people to get the certifying letters on time although the commune chief already signed. A councilor at PP reported the same situation. "When the clerk goes to have a meeting at the province, he takes the stamp with him; thus, people have to wait for him to come and stamp," the councilor complained. There is also a report of corruption in stamping the documents. Most councilors from, especially from the opposition, revealed that people have to pay more to get the document on time.

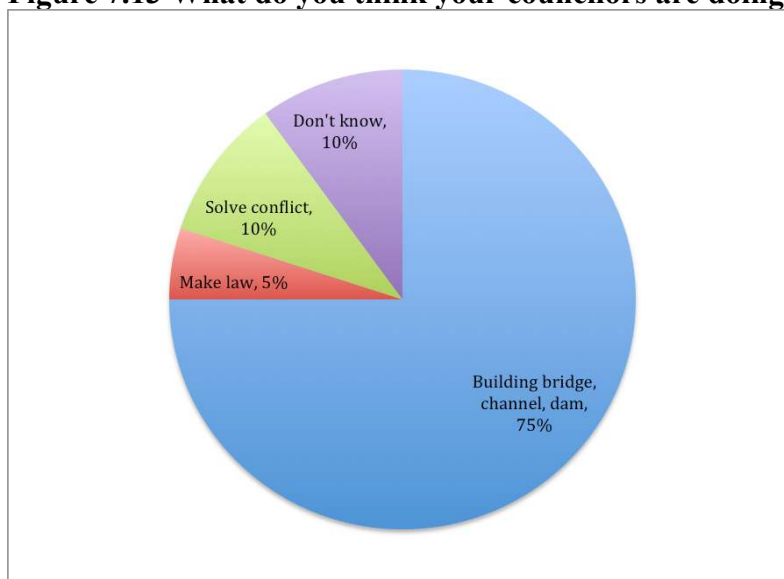
In an overall assessment as shown in Figure 7.12, councilors rated how much they thought they were satisfied with what they had been able to act responsively to citizen, the answer suggested that about 65 percent were satisfied while only about 10 percent of the answer indicated that they were not really satisfied with what they had been doing. Another 10 percent reported "fairly satisfied," and the other 15 percent said "somewhat satisfied." I learned that councilors mostly refer to the physical infrastructures as their most priority in the role of responsiveness although other tardy or delay of administrative services are also noted.

**Figure 7.12 How much are you satisfied with what you had served the people?**



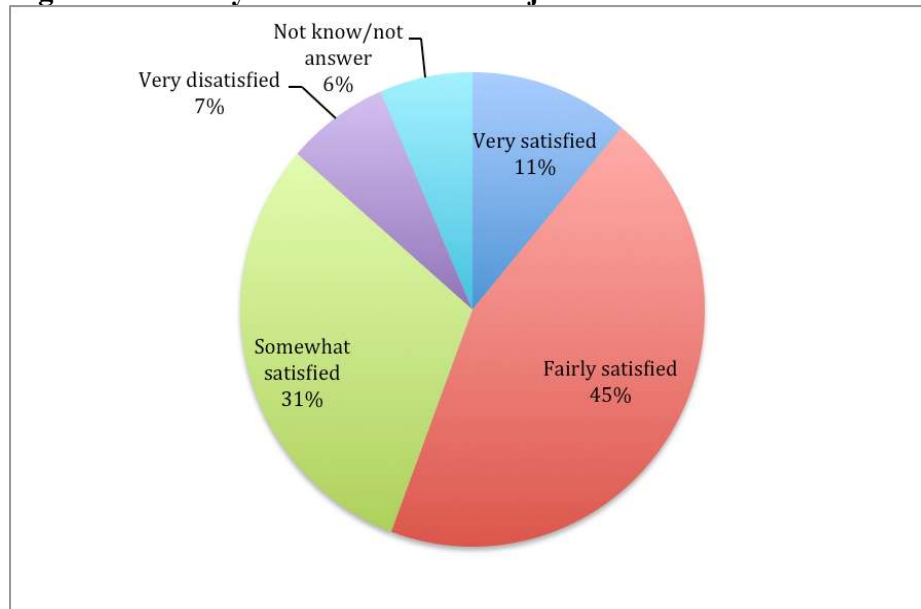
The comparison with citizens' responses suggested a somewhat noticeable result. I asked citizens about the role of their councilors in the commune, and the result was described in Figure 7.13 below. As we can see, about 75 percent of the people mentioned to the infrastructures in the communes as the job that they always saw the councilors involved. About 10 percent of them thought their councilors as the problem solvers, who especially solved a minor conflict in the community. Another 5 percent thought their councilors made the law to govern the communes, while the other 10 percent did not know what their councilors were doing in the commune. From this answer we can see that people are expecting councilors to be responsible for the infrastructures; thus, the complaint of the councilors above that the citizens did not take part or contribute in building the roads or dams was probably the lack of understanding of people to the roles and duty of the councilors.

**Figure 7.13 What do you think your councilors are doing?**



When I asked if the people were satisfied with their councilors' performance in the entire task mentioned above, it was revealed that only about 11 percent were very satisfied. About 31 percent expressed "somewhat satisfied," while other 7 percent were "very dissatisfied." Figure 7.14 describes the result.

**Figure 7.14 Are you satisfied with the job of the councilors?**



If we divide it further into different constituency and communes, we can see that in ST where the opposition chiefs were leading enjoyed a higher percentage of satisfaction more than their counterpart in PB commune in the same constituency in Siem Reap. The percentage of satisfaction was still higher with PP, the opposition chief, comparing to PN from the ruling party in Prey Veng. Table 7.3 below describes the citizen satisfaction by different constituencies and communes.

**Table 7.3 Citizen satisfactions by communes**

Constituency	Commune	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not know/not answer	Total
Siem Reap	PB (CPP)	15,0	57,0	20,0	4,0	4,0	100,0
	ST (CNRP)	18,2	64,6	12,1	1,0	4,0	100,0
Prey Veng	PN (CPP)	2,3	28,4	42,0	19,3	8,0	100,0
	PP (CNRP)	7,5	21,2	55,0	5,0	11,2	100,0
Total		11,1	44,6	30,7	7,1	6,5	100,0

The in-depth interviews with both of local citizens and councilors reveal that although the councilors from the opposition party cannot fulfill their responses to the citizen demand, they are able to explain and go close to the people whenever there is dissatisfaction. A councilor at PP elaborated:

*We do not have the budget to fulfill their [people] wishes, but we explain them and closely pay attention to what they requested. Although some people are not happy, it is not us that they are not happy with because the top authority decides on our funding (A councilor at PP, 4 February 2017).*

The study of this part finds that councilors have local knowledge of what the needs of the citizen are, but they do not have the ability to respond quickly and satisfactorily to those needs. Much focus has been put into local infrastructures. While councilors see budget constraint as a significant challenge and wish local to contribute, the citizen see it as the responsibility of the councilors that need to be fulfilled.

## **7.5 Summary and conclusion**

The findings in this chapter are crucial to the understanding of the political decentralization process in Cambodia. If we look at the role of councilors to promote democracy by increasing citizen participation, improving accountability, and being responsive, there are a number of interrelated issues that need attention.

First, the village chief and group chief play a vital role in disseminating information to citizen, yet councilors are concerned about their ineffective role in fulfilling the task; however, although they think of ways to improve it by, for example, using a loudspeaker to announce the information in the public space such as market or whenever there is a religious ceremony, people are not interested in participating

because the councilors cannot fulfill their demands as the commune has a limit budget. Gift giving is also an important aspect to consider when encouraging people to participate in the public meeting as the concept of participation is exchanged with benefit attached.

Second, the mechanisms to ensure the accountability in the communes are very young. This could be a perfect starting point as the government is introducing the social accountability framework. Councilors share the different understanding of the concept of the accountability as mostly they refer it to responsibility or trustworthy. Most of them know what to do to build trust by being more opened or transparent. They try to build the relationship with people through visiting them often, but the interviews with citizen find that the percentage of those who can correctly identify their chief and deputies well is where the chiefs are from the opposition party. This means that not all councilors often make regular visits to the citizens' home.

Finally, being responsive to citizen means to build and repair roads, dams, and canal in the community. Both citizen and councilors share more or less the same satisfaction. Although the councilors are not happy with the ability to respond, they are able to find a way to talk to people and make them understand the situation of their commune. People do not engage much in the community activity such as contributing fund to build a road, as they think it is the job of the councilors. The role of clerk found in this study warns the possibility of ineffective services providing to the citizen. The clerk is usually nominated by the councilors, and it is the Ministry of Interior who has authority to appoint the clerk.

This chapter concludes that the councilors play a very limited role in enhancing democracy by encouraging people to participate actively in the community. Both councilors and citizen have limited understanding of their roles and responsibility. Participation from the local level is a challenge due to the demand and response are not met. Accountability is usually attached to being open and transparent, but the practice is

still at a starting point where the government just started introducing the framework. More trials and errors are expected. We are still not sure if increasing funding to the commune can motivate people to join and demand more accountability and responsiveness.



## CHAPTER 8

### LOCAL CITIZEN AND DEMOCRACY

This chapter seeks to understand the knowledge of democracy shared among local citizen in the four selected communes in the two different constituencies. A general assumption is that the knowledge of democracy has been improved since citizen already elected their representatives for five consecutive mandates at the national level (1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2013) and three consecutive terms at the commune level (2002, 2007, and 2012). The chapter answers the question posed in Chapter 4: *Are there any significant differences between knowledge of democracy understood by the citizen at different local setting: commune/Sangkat controlled by ruling and opposition party members? If so, what can be explained?"*

To answer this, first, there is a need to find out the meaning of "democracy" from local citizens. The concept of "democracy" has been divided into three broad categories: civil rights and liberty, political process, and social benefits (cf. chapter 3). Dalton, Shin, and Jou (2007) refer the first category to the political rights, freedom of speech, freedom of participation, and protection of those rights. The second focuses more on a political institution that determines the election, the rule of law, and accountability of the government. Finally, the last emphasizes on social and economic benefits that democracy produces such as equality, justice, peace, and stability.

During the interviews, I asked: 'What "democracy" means to you?' Citizen described their understanding and the first three messages that repeatedly appeared during the discussion were noted. In agreement with Dalton, Shin and Jou (2007), the answers were grouped under the headings as the followings:

1. Civil liberties and citizen rights: if the answers were about the freedom of speech, political liberty, protection of individual rights, or freedom to participate in any public meetings.

2. Political process: if the answers were about the rule by the people, elections, majority rule, or transparent and accountable government.
3. Social benefits: if the included social and economic development or references to equality or justice, or peace and stability.

The answers that did not fall into any three categories above were grouped into the "Others" column; however, if citizens could not answer or refused to answer were grouped into "Don't know" column. Further analysis was made in the attempt to explain the meanings of democracy associated with the demographical factors such as gender, age, family status, and education.

Finally, the perception of influences on the decision-making process was also investigated. Conception illustrated in the previous chapter suggests that political decentralization empowers people to participate and influence to the decision-making process, which is responsive to the citizen demand. In agreement with Almond and Verba (1989, p. 138) who state that, "A democratic citizen speaks the language of demands," and citizen's influence perception (subjective competence) is essential to access the degree of democracy, I explored further whether or not citizens at the study sites realized that they had specific influences to their local representatives. During the interview, I asked various questions in order to determine the perception of influences they had on their local representatives. Almond and Verba (1989) reiterate the importance of the citizens' subjective competent by arguing that if the citizen feels that they have political influence, they will find ways to act. Therefore, I believe that having the knowledge of democracy and realizing the potential influences are not enough if the citizens do not act. Thus I asked further if they participate in the public meetings. Knowledge from the previous chapter suggested that citizen participation could be influenced by gift or pressure from the party line. As a result, I looked more to the demands or ideas that they had during the meeting. I believe that if they think they have

influences, they will not just participate but share ideas or debate during the public meetings with their councilors. Also, data from local councilors in the previous chapter indicated that the channel of information was a barrier to citizen participation; thus, I also examined if this was the case with local citizens. Last but not least, where possible, I tried to explore if there were any differences between the communes ruled by the opposition and ruling party.

The chapter will show first the meaning of "democracy" that the local citizens share. Next, it will explain whether the meanings are associated with the demographical factors such as gender, age, family status, and education. Then, it will describe if there are any different levels of influences in relation to participation in the public meeting under different political party leadership – namely the majority of commune councilors who are from different political parties. The overall goal is to explain and assess whether or not the councilors from the opposition party can encourage more participation and facilitate the communication than their counterpart, which will help conclude if the councilors from the opposition party can contribute better to the deepening democracy in Cambodia.

## **8.1 Finding on the meaning of democracy**

As Table 8.1 illustrates below, one hundred and seven citizens related democracy to "civil liberties and citizen rights" which was equal to 29.4 percent while 71 of them (19.6%) referred to "political process." Moreover, there were 80 (22%) respondents related it to both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." Only 6 (1.7%) of the citizen viewed democracy as "social benefits," and all of them were from ST commune. However, there was around 26 percent who could not describe what "democracy" meant to them. More than 63 percent at ST whose commune chief was from opposition party could not describe what democracy meant to them. This was surprising as this commune kept voting to change the commune chief. In the first

mandate (2002), people voted for the ruling party CPP. The second (2007) they voted for FUN, coalition party with CPP. The last mandate (2012) they voted for SRP, which was formed to CNRP. As chapter 6 found out, the commune chief from this particular place did not attend any decent school. He only went through the 3-month literacy program. If comparing to other commune chiefs, he had the lowest education.

**Table 8.1 The meanings of democracy**

Communes	Meanings					
	A	B	C	A&B	Don't know	Others
ST (SRP)	12.0%	11.0%	6.0%	4.0%	63.0%	4.0%
SB (CPP)	40.0%	26.0%	0.0%	22.0%	12.0%	0.0%
PN (CPP)	25%	21.6%	0.0%	36.4%	15.9%	1.1%
PP (HRP)	44.0%	20.0%	0.0%	29.3%	6.7%	0.0%
Total	29.4%	19.6%	1.7%	22.0%	25.9%	1.4%

A: refers to civil liberties and citizen rights; B: political process; C: social benefits

To find out if there was any significant association between the meanings of democracy shared among the four groups, Phi test had been utilized because statistical measurement of both variables was nominal. The relationship between the two variables was relatively high (0.648) and it was significant at 0.01 levels; therefore, it was confirmed that there were significant differences between the groups. Table 8.2 below shows the result of the test. The next step is to present what could be explained by the differences.

**Table 8.2 Democracy and the different groups**

Symmetric Measures		
	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal                      Phi	.648	.000
N of Valid Cases	363	

## 8.2 Explaining the association between the meaning

### 8.2.1 Gender and democracy

This part attempts to explain if the gender factor in the four selected communes can be explained by the different understanding of the meaning of democracy. As the Table 8.3 below shows, there are 205 female respondents. Fifty-seven of them (27.8%) believed that democracy meant "civil liberties and citizen rights." Forty-five of them (22%) referred it to "political process," where 40 of them (19.5%) thought it was both "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." However, fifty-six of them (27.3%) could not relate it to any meanings. There were only two (1%) of the female related democracy to "social benefits."

**Table 8.3 Gender and meaning of democracy**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>A&amp;B</b>	<b>Not Know</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>
Female	27.8%	22.0%	1.0%	19.5%	27.3%	2.4%	100.0%
Male	31.6%	16.5%	2.5%	25.3%	24.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	29.5%	19.6%	1.7%	22.0%	25.9%	1.4%	100.0%

A: refers to civil liberties and citizen rights; B: political process; C: social benefits

There were 158 male respondents; fifty of them (31.6%) thought that democracy meant "civil liberties and citizen rights." Another 26 (16.5%) referred it to "political process", and four (2.5%) related democracy to "social benefits". 40 males defined democracy as both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." There were 38 of them (24.1%) who say they did not know what democracy meant at all.

To determine whether gender can be explained by the different understanding of the meaning of democracy, Phi and Cramer's V test was utilized, as both variables were nominal. The result suggested that there was a very low correlation of (.155) with p value (0.121), which more than (0.05); thus, gender differences could not be explained

to the different meaning of democracy in the four selected sites. Table 8.4 describes the result of the test.

**Table 8.4 The association of gender and meaning of democracy**

Symmetric Measures		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.155	.121
	Cramer's V	.155	.121
N of Valid Cases		363	

### **8.2.2 Marital status and democracy**

Do Cambodians view democracy differently according to their marital status? This part assesses whether the marital status could be used to explain the different study groups. As it could be seen from Table 8.5 below, among 361 respondents, 78 were single; 264 were married; nine were divorced, and 10 were widow or widower.

From those who were single, there were 33(42.3%) of them defining democracy as "civil liberties and citizen rights" and 21 (26.9%) to both of "civil liberty and citizen rights" and "political process." Another 15 (19.2%) related democracy "political process," but eight (10.3%) of them did not have any idea about it. There was only one (1.3%) respondent referred democracy to "social benefit," and finally none of them defined to any other meanings.

There were also 80 (30.3%) of the married people who reported that they did not know the meaning of democracy. Other 69 (26.1%) defined it as "civil liberties and citizen rights," and 55 (20.8) related it both to "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." Other 50 (19.2%) mentioned democracy as a political process, but only five (1.9%) associated it to social benefit.

Among the nine divorced people, three (33.3%) of them related democracy to both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." Only two (22.2%) related the idea to "civil liberties and citizen rights" and also two (22.2%) to "political process" but two (22.2%) of them reported that they did not know and none of them referred democracy to "social benefit" and other categories.

Ten respondents were widow/widowers. Two of them (20%) thought democracy as "civil liberties and citizen rights," three (30%) "political process," and one (10%) both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." None of them related it to "social benefit."

**Table 8.5 Marital status and meaning of democracy**

<b>Marital status</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>A&amp;B</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>
Single	42.3%	19.2%	1.3%	26.9%	10.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Married	26.1%	18.9%	1.9%	20.8%	30.3%	1.9%	100.0%
Divorced	22.2%	22.2%	0.0%	33.3%	22.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Widow/widower	20.0%	30.0%	0.0%	10.0%	40.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	29.4%	19.4%	1.7%	22.2%	26.0%	1.4%	100.0%

A: refers to civil liberties and citizen rights; B: political process; C: social benefits

Testing of the variables proofed that there was no significant relationship between marital status and the meaning of democracy as it was justified by (0.242) in Phi and (0.140) by Cramer's V. The correlation was not significant at 0.05 because p value was more than 0.05 (0.134). Table 8.6 describes the result of the test.

**Table 8.6 Relationship of marital status to democracy**

<b>Symmetric Measures</b>			
		<b>Value</b>	<b>Approx. Sig.</b>
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.242	.134
	Cramer's V	.140	.134
N of Valid Cases		361	

### **8.2.3 Age group and democracy**

The meaning of democracy has been further explored across the different ages in the four communes. The findings are summarized in Table 8.7 below. Among citizen whose age was between 18-24, there are 35 (38.9%) respondents perceived democracy as "civil liberty and citizen rights." Another 21 (23.3%) thought it was both of "civil liberty and citizen rights" and "political process," and other 17 (18.9%) referred it to only "political process." However, the same number of 17 (18.9%) people could not define democracy. None of them saw democracy as "social benefit."

In the age range between 25-34, there were 24 (33.3%) respondents who did not know the meaning of democracy. There were 14 (19.4%) of them referring democracy to "civil liberty and citizen rights," 15 (20.8%) to "political process," and 12 (16.7%) both of "civil liberty and citizen rights" and "political process." There were 5 (6.9%) who saw it as "social benefit." Besides, there were 2 (2.8%) defining it to a different category.

As for those whose age between 35-44, there were 23 (28.4%) who defined democracy to "civil liberty and citizen rights," but another 21 (25.9%) said that they did not know about it. There were 19 (23.5%) who chose to refer it to both of "civil liberty and citizen rights" and "political process," while 15 (18.5%) referred to only "political process." Only 1 (1.2%) related democracy to social benefit and the rest 2 (2.5%) classified it to a different category.



**Table 8.7 Age groups and the meaning of democracy**

<b>Age</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>A&amp;B</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>
18-24	38.9%	18.9%	0.0%	23.3%	18.9%	0.0%	100.0%
25-34	19.4%	20.8%	6.9%	16.7%	33.3%	2.8%	100.0%
35-44	28.4%	18.5%	1.2%	23.5%	25.9%	2.5%	100.0%
45-54	25.8%	22.6%	0.0%	29.0%	21.0%	1.6%	100.0%
55-64	32.8%	17.2%	0.0%	17.2%	32.8%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29.5%</b>	<b>19.6%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>25.9%</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

A: refers to civil liberties and citizen rights; B: political process; C: social benefits

There were 62 people whose age was between 45-54 years old. There were 18 (29%) among them who defined democracy as both of "civil liberty and citizen rights" and "political process." Another 16 (25.8%) related it to "civil liberty and citizen rights," and the other 14 (22.6%) saw it as a "political process." However, 13 (21%) of them did not have any idea about democracy. Only 1 (1.6%) referred it to a different definition. None of them saw democracy as "social benefit."

There were 19 (32.8%) from the age group between 55-64 treating democracy as "civil liberty and citizen rights." However, the same figure suggested that they not know what democracy meant. There were 10 (17.2%) of the respondents in this age group who saw democracy as a "political process." Also, the same figure applied to both of "civil liberty and citizen rights" and "political process." None of the participants saw it as a "social benefit" or defined it to a different term.

There was a relatively medium relationship (0.305) which was significant at 0.05 level as p-value (0.028) was smaller than 0.05; therefore, age groups, to some extent, could explain the meanings of democracy at the four local settings. See Table 8.8 below for the test result. The majority of those who saw democracy as "civil liberties and citizen rights" were younger between 18 to 24 years old (38.9%). The majority of those who saw democracy as "political process" and both of "civil liberty and citizen rights" and

"political process" were those whose age was between 45 and 54. The majority of those who could not define democracy was at the age of 24 to 34.

**Table 8.8 Relationship of the age group to democracy**

Symmetric Measures		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.305	.028
	Cramer's V	.152	.028
N of Valid Cases		363	

### 8.2.4 Education and the meaning of democracy

This part further seeks to explain the meanings of democracy in relation to the formal education that the respondents obtained. As it could be seen from Table 8.9, those who said that they could not read and wrote were 72 people, of which 31 (43.1%) of them did not know what democracy meant. Another 20 (27.8%) referred it to "political process," and another 10 (13.9%) believed that democracy meant "civil liberties and citizen rights." Besides, seven (9.7%) respondents indicated it to both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." Only 2 (2.8%) of them saw it as "social benefit" while the other 2 (2.8%) people defined in another different meaning.

**Table 8.9 Education and the meaning of democracy**

Education Level	The meaning of democracy in percentage						
	A	B	C	A&B	Don't know	Others	Total
Cannot read or write	13.9%	27.8%	2.8%	9.7%	43.1%	2.8%	100.0%
Can read and write but never go to school	45.5%	9.1%	0.0%	40.9%	4.5%	0.0%	100.0%
Attended primary school	25.6%	10.3%	2.6%	21.8%	37.2%	2.6%	100.0%
Primary school completed	28.3%	17.4%	0.0%	26.1%	26.1%	2.2%	100.0%

Grade 9 completed	30.8%	23.1%	1.9%	23.1%	21.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Grade 12 completed	41.2%	20.0%	1.2%	25.9%	11.8%	0.0%	100.0%
Bachelor	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	105	67	6	80	94	5	357
	29.4%	18.8%	1.7%	22.4%	26.3%	1.4%	100.0%

A: refers to civil liberties and citizen rights; B: political process; C: social benefits

There were 22 of those who reported that they could read and write but never went to any decent school. Surprisingly, only 1 (4.5%) of them did not know what democracy meant. Ten (45.5%) of them referred democracy to "civil liberties and citizen rights" and 9 (40.9%) to both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." There were 2 (9.1%) who saw democracy as only a "political process." None of them saw it as "social benefit" or defined it to a different meaning.

78 people had attended primary school. Twenty-nine of them (37.2%) reported that they did not know the meaning of democracy. There were 20 (25.6%) who related democracy to "civil liberties and citizen rights," and another 17 (21.8%) saw it as both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." Only 2 of them (2.6%) defined it as "social benefit" and another 2 (2.6%) point to other meanings for democracy, which was not in the category.

Among those who had completed the primary school, there were 13 (28.3) giving meaning to democracy as "civil liberties and citizen rights." Another 12 (16.1) saw it as to both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." There was also another 12 (26.1%) reported that they did not know the meaning. There were 8 (17.4%) of those who thought that democracy was a "political process." Finally, only one (2.2%) of them defined it to a different category.

The other 52 respondents who had completed grade 9 expressed the meaning of democracy differently as follows. There were 16 of them (30.6%) defining it as "civil

liberties and citizen rights." Another 12 (23.1%) chose to describe it as "political process," and there was also another 12 (23.1%) referring democracy to both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." However, there were 11 (21.2%) who could not comprehend the concept. Only 1 of them (1.9%) thought democracy as a "social benefit" while none defined to any different meaning.

Among those who had completed grade 12, there were 35 (41.2%) who believed democracy "civil liberties and citizen rights." Another 22 (25.9%) referred it to both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process." There were 17 (20%) of them describing only about "political process," while 10 (11.8%) of the groups reported that they did not know what democracy meant to them. It was also noted that only 1 (1.2%) saw democracy as "social benefit" and none of those who had completed the grade 12 defined the meaning to any other different category. There were only 2 of those who had a Bachelor degree in this study. One of them saw democracy as "civil liberties and citizen rights," and the other 1 saw it both of "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process."

There was a medium (0.410) relationship between the selected groups to their level of education, which was significant at 0.01 because the p-value (0/001) was smaller than 0.01. To some extent, it was noted that those who were illiterate could not describe what democracy meant. Table 8.10 below describes the result of the test.

**Table 8.10 Relationship of education to democracy**

Symmetric Measures		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.410	.001
	Cramer's V	.184	.001
N of Valid Cases		357	

Up to this point, we can see that the majority (29.4%) of the citizen saw democracy as "civil liberties and citizen rights." Also, the meaning of democracy associating with both or "civil liberties and citizen rights" and "political process" came to second at 22% among the 363 respondents. There were only 19.6% of those who saw it as only "political process." Moreover, very few of them (1.7%) defined democracy to "social benefit." One concern was rested with those who could not define democracy. There were nearly 30 percent of them who could not express what democracy meant. The result, therefore, revealed that the concept of democracy in four selected groups is not strongly correlated to any demographical factors such as gender, age, marital status or education.

### **8.3 Level of influences and participation**

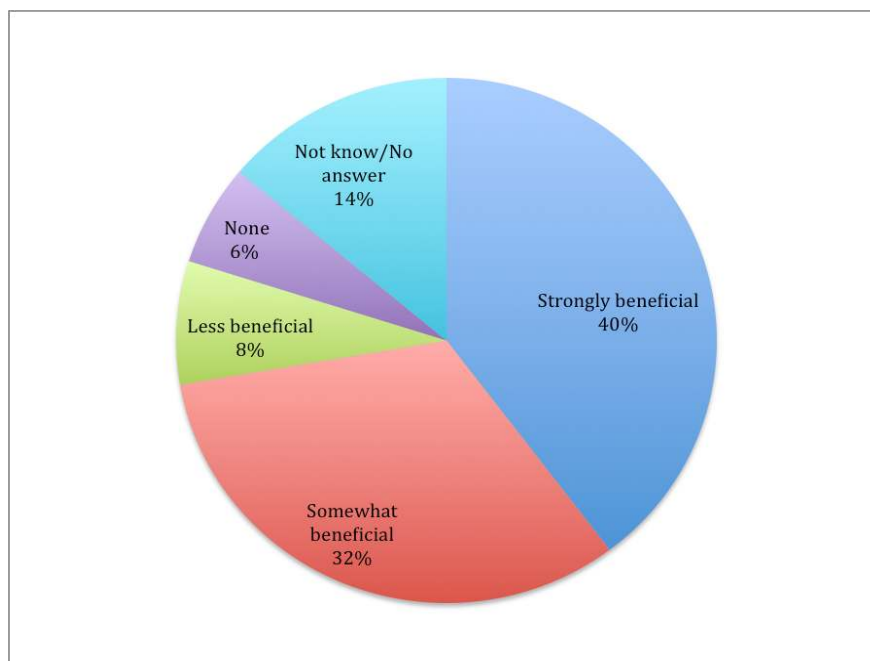
#### **8.3.1 Perception of influences**

It is essential to consider some other related issues in order to understand this part. There is no doubt that the level of participation is low at the commune level in Cambodia as previous studies and chapters suggested. The most cited arguments of low participation are that Cambodian people lack information because the communication between councilors to the people is poorly managed and transferred. In addition, people do not see any benefit from participation as their ideas are not valued, demands are not met or because they do not understand the roles and functions of the councilors (see COMFREL, 2013; EIC, 2010; Pellini & Ayres, 20017). Therefore, there is a need to understand the differences between the groups' perception of influences.

Answering the question whether or not citizen saw local elections were beneficial to them, about 40 percent of the respondents reported that the election "strongly beneficial," 32 percent "somewhat beneficial," 8 percent "less beneficial," and 6 percent "no beneficial" at all. There was 14 percent of the respondents who could not answer

the above question. Figure 8.1 below describes the summary of the finding. If we combine the "strongly beneficial" to "somewhat beneficial," it is up to more than 70 percent. That could be one reason why the percentage of voters turn out was high in the last commune election 2017.

**Figure 8.1 The benefit of local elections**

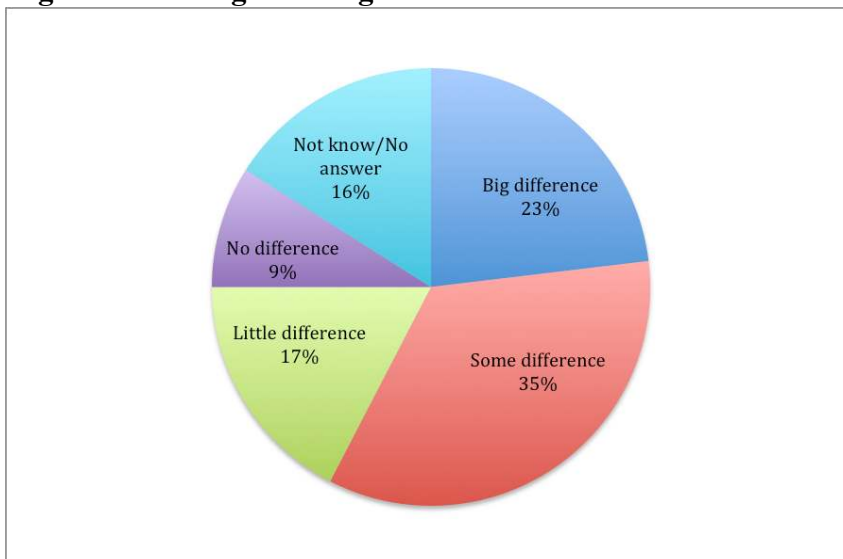


If we break down the answers into the four different communes at two constituencies that were under different leadership from different political parties, we can see that there was no much difference between the commune led by ruling and opposition in both constituencies. Similarly, there were relatively the same percentage of those who believed that local election was "strongly beneficial"; however, for those who saw the election "no beneficial" was slightly higher in the commune where the opposition led: about 4 percent at ST (CNRP) and about 19 at PP (CNRP). Table 8.11 describes the details. This cannot, however, be claimed that those who were with the commune councilors from the opposition party saw the different benefit of the local election than those who were not.

**Table 8.11 Groups and benefit of local elections**

Constituency	Groups	Benefit of local elections in percentages					
		Strongly beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Less beneficial	None	Not know/No answer	Total
Siem Reap	SB (CPP)	51.0	37.0	2.0	1.0	9.0	100.0
	ST (CNRP)	49.5	13.1	4.0	4.0	29.3	100.0
Prey Veng	PN (CPP)	26.1	45.5	13.6	3.4	11.4	100.0
	PP (CNRP)	28.8	36.2	12.5	18.8	3.8	100.0
Total		39.7	32.6	7.6	6.2	13.9	100.0

Another question was about how much change the local people thought that it could be brought from one local election to another. About 23 percent saw the election brought "big difference" and 35 percent reported "some difference." There were relatively the same percentage (17%) and (16%) who saw there was "little difference" and "refuse to answer." Only 9 percent said there was no "difference" at all. Figure 8.2 below illustrates the percentage of the answers.

**Figure 8.2 Changes through local elections**

If we continue to break down to understand this perception shared among the different local constituencies, we can see that there was a majority of people who were in the opposition communes who believed that there were significant differences: 48,5 percent at ST and 12,5 percent at PP. Table 8.12 below describes the details.

**Table 8.12 Changes through local elections**

Constituency	Groups	Changes through local elections in percentages					
		Big difference	Some difference	Little difference	No difference	Not know/No answer	Total
Siem Reap	SB (CPP)	18.0	47.0	15.0	4.0	16.0	100.0
	ST (CNRP)	48.5	11.1	4.0	3.0	33.3	100.0
Prey Veng	PN (CPP)	10.2	46.6	30.7	3.4	9.1	100.0
	PP (CNRP)	12.5	33.8	22.5	28.8	2.5	100.0
Total		23.1	34.5	17.4	9.0	16.0	100.0

When I asked to describe what benefits they were likely to have achieved so far, a respondent in ST proudly claimed during to the interview:

*I already experienced voting for local commune chief three times. People vote for a new commune chief who is concerned with the people affair. Who can build the road and fix the dam? New commune chief always tries to take care of us and always listen to our demand (A respondent in ST commune, 3 September 2016.)*

The answer, however, was not unique; nearly 90 percent of the respondents interviewed always referred to physical infrastructure such as building bridges, roads, channels and dams as their achievements they saw although they could not define it as a part of



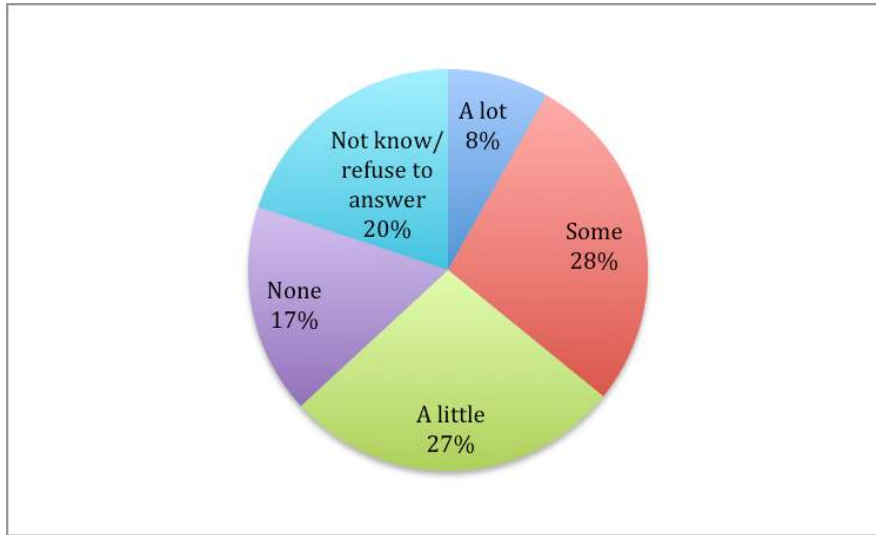
democracy as shown in the "social benefit" definition above. This, however, cannot be concluded that the change of commune chief to opposition party could bring new bridge or new road as there were circumstances that people complained at both of opposition and ruling communes that the councilors could not respond to their demand, namely to the request of repairing the new roads or dams. In general, the majority of people saw the condition of their community better when asking to compare to their previous election mandate. As shown in Table 8.13 below, more than 50 percent of the communes believed their community was better than the previous election mandate.

**Table 8.13 Condition of the communes comparing to the previous mandate**

Constituency	Groups	The condition of the commune in percentages			
		Better	Worse	Same	Total
Siem Reap	SB (CPP)	63.0	9.0	28.0	100.0
	ST (SRP)	88.9	6.1	5.1	100.0
Prey Veng	PN (CPP)	55.7	34.1	10.2	100.0
	PP (HRP)	51.2	38.8	10.0	100.0
Total		65.5	20.7	13.9	100.0

The next question asked was, "Do you think you have influences to decision making in any commune plan?" Only about 8 percent thought they influenced "a lot" while 27 percent "a little" and 17 percent said "none." The other 20 percent refused to answer or did not know if they influenced or not. See the illustration of Figure 8.3 below.

**Figure 8.3 Feeling of influences to decision making**



The answers can be broken down into four different groups in the two constituencies studied. As it is shown in the Table 8.14 below, about 8 percent thought they influenced "a lot" in SB while 29 percent "a little" and 38 "some". Similarly, the lowest percentage of about 6 thought they influenced "a lot" in ST while 25 percent "a little" and 33 "some." It is shown that the highest percentage of "some influence" 38 and 32 percent was observed at both of SB and ST respectively. In contrast, there was a high percentage of "a little influence" at PN and PP.

**Table 8.14 Feeling of influences at different groups**

Constituencies	Groups	Feeling of influences in percentages					
		A lot	Some	A little	None at all	Not know/refuse	Total
Siem Reap	SB (CPP)	8.0	38.0	29.0	12.0	13.0	100.0
	ST (CNRP)	6.1	32.7	18.4	12.2	30.6	100.0
Prey Veng	PN (CPP)	9.2	21.8	25.3	23.0	20.7	100.0
	PP (CNRP)	10.0	15.0	38.8	21.2	15.0	100.0
Total		8.2	27.6	27.3	16.9	19.9	100.0

The tests of the relationship between the different groups and the influence to commune plan suggested that there was a relatively medium relationship (0.301), which was significant at 0.01 levels as the p-value (0.001) was less than 0.01 as described in the Table 8.15 below. It, however, cannot be concluded that those who were from the opposition commune were more influential to the commune decision.

**Table 8.15 Groups and influences**

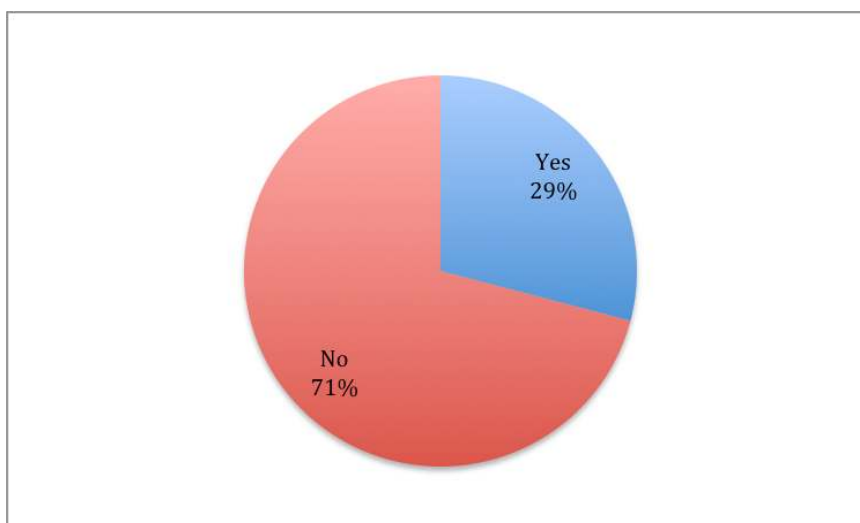
Symmetric Measures		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.301	.001
	Cramer's V	.174	.001
N of Valid Cases		366	

The above result suggested that citizen see the importance of local elections and the changes in physical infrastructure such as road, channel, damn, and school that the election brought about. However, they did not have much feeling of influences on the decision-making process.

### **8.3.2 Active participation**

It is understood from the above part of this chapter that people valued the changes through the election at their local level. Moreover, they believed there were changes in term of physical infrastructures that they thought beneficial, and it could be easily observed in their community. In contrast, very few citizens participated in the public meetings conducted in their community. Therefore, it is not strange that the participation in public meetings is low. When I asked respondents to recall whether or not they participated in at least once for the last six months in any meeting conducted by the commune councilors, 29 percent of them said "yes" but the majority of them, which is about 71 percent, reported "no." Figure 8.4 describes the answer.

**Figure 8.4 Citizen participation in any meeting in the last six months**



When examining further in their different local constituencies, we can see that the percentage of attendance in the commune where opposition ruled were higher compared to their counterpart: about 36,1 percent to 28 in Siem Reap and 37,5 percent to 15,1 in Prey Veng. Table 8.16 illustrates it.

**Table 8.16 Citizen attending meeting by the communes**

Constituencies	Communes	Attended meetings?		
		Yes	No	Total
Siem Reap	SB (CPP)	28,0	72,0	100,0
	ST (CNRP)	36,1	63,9	100,0
Prey Veng	PN (CPP)	15,1	84,9	100,0
	PP (CNRP)	37,5	62,5	100,0
Total		29,1	70,9	100,0

Does this mean that the councilors from the opposition party encouraged more participation than that of the ruling party? Based on Phi (0.214) and Cramer's V (0.151) there was a low correlation between the groups and their responses to the participation

although there was some significant at 0.01 levels, as the p-value for both tests was (0.010). See Table 8.17 below.

**Table 8.17 Association of participation to different groups**

Symmetric Measures		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.214	.010
	Cramer's V	.151	.010
N of Valid Cases		368	

As conceptualized above, it is understood that once citizens feel that they have influences, they will participate in the meetings. Besides, participation with the understanding of the power of influences will likely to encourage citizen to share their idea or debate during the meeting. I further explored with those who reported that they at least attended one meeting in the last six month if they felt influences or not. The result described in Table 8.18 suggests that about 36 percent who attended felt that they had some influences, but another 24 percent reported a little.

**Table 8.18 Cross-tabulation of the meeting attendant and feeling of influences**

Meeting in the commune?	Perception of influences to decision making					
	A lot	Some	A little	None at all	Not know/refuse	Total
Yes	21.0	36.2	23.8	9.5	9.5	100.0
No	3.1	23.3	29.2	20.2	24.1	100.0
Total	8.3	27.1	27.6	17.1	19.9	100.0

It is likely that those who attended the meeting feel more influencing to the plan than those who did not attend. Conversely, when I asked to those who used to participate in the meeting about the opportunity to express their concern regarding the planning that the commune councilors presented, the result suggested that 91 percent of the total respondents reported that they never shared any idea at all and only 9 percent said they used to talk especially only with the commune chief. Figure 8.5 summarized the responses.

**Figure 8.5 Citizen shared any ideas when attending the meetings**



If we continue to examine by the communes, about 7 percent reported that they used to share some ideas, but other 93 percent reported "no" in SB. About 11 percent of the respondents from ST confirmed "yes" that they used to comment to the commune councilors, but the other 89 percent said "no." Both of the percentages that confirmed "yes" to the question about the sharing ideas were low at PN (10.2%) and PP (8.8%), but there was a high percentage of those who reported "no" of about 90 and 91 percent respectively. Table 8.19 describes the responses.

**Table 8.19 Sharing ideas by groups**

Constituencies	Groups	Sharing Ideas in the meeting		
		Yes	No	Total
Siem Reap	SB (CPP)	7,0	93,0	100,0
	ST (CNRP)	11,1	88,9	100,0
Prey Veng	PN (CPP)	10,2	89,8	100,0
	PP (CNRP)	8,8	91,2	100,0
Total		9,2	90,8	100,0

The test of the level of association between the different groups and their response prove insignificant. It is approximately closed to zero (0.054), and it is not significant on the p-value of 0.777, which is higher than 0.05. Therefore, from the response, it is not possible to generate any conclusion that citizen from the communes led by opposition shares more ideas that the commune that led by the ruling. Table 8.20 below illustrates the result of the test.

**Table 8.20 Association of sharing ideas and groups**  
**Symmetric Measures**

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.054	.779
	Cramer's V	.054	.779
N of Valid Cases		368	

The knowledge generated from the discussion with the respondents revealed that those who attended the meeting understood the problematic circumstance that the councilors faced in responding to their demand. For example, most villagers mentioned about the inability of councilors to dig the channel across their village at PP commune as, first, the councilors could not allocate budget from their already limited budget plan provided from the national level and last it involved a lot of decision made, not necessary from the commune level. A villager noted:

*I do not know what to ask for because everything needs money. I know it is difficult to get the money from the upper level, and every request is complicated to handle alone by the commune. (A villager at ST, 2 January 2017)*

It is interesting to learn that they only went to communes to get the certificates such as birth certificate or marriage certificate and never asked or contributed any idea in the meetings. Citizens only go to meet their local representatives when they have problems directly concerning them.

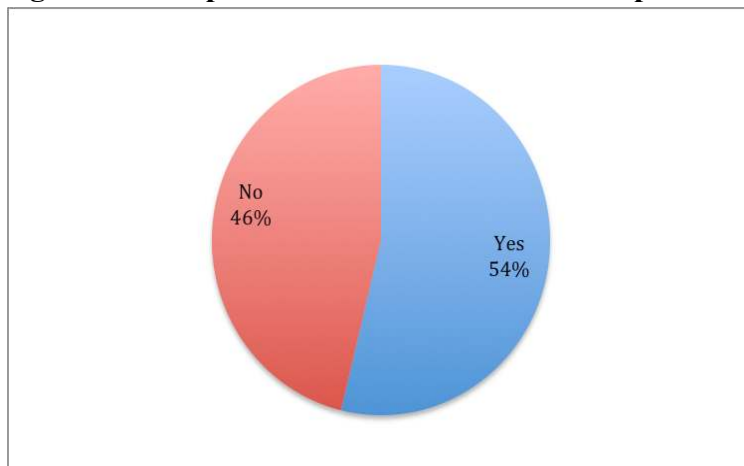
### **8.3.3 Information received**

To conclude this part we need to identify the channel of information from the councilors to the local citizen. The chapter on councilors revealed that the village and group chief could be the main barrier, blocking the information flow from the commune councilors to citizens. It could be argued that people were not participating more because they did not receive any information about the meeting in the commune. This part is also to describe if the councilors from the opposition party can effectively share this information, using strategies that they claimed from the previous chapter, for example, using a loudspeaker to attract people's attention in the public place.

Answering to the question of whether or not the people received any information about any public meeting related to their communes in the last six months, the respondents provided interesting answers for the analysis. It is revealed that the percentages of those who had received information was slightly higher (54%) comparing to those who reported that they never received any information about the meeting (46%), except about the information on encouraging people to register to vote in the commune election in 2017, which could be the influences from both of the councilors for different political parties, the election committee council, and the non-governmental organizations. The Figure 8.6 below describes the percentage.



**Figure 8.6 People received information about public meetings.**



If we further look at the answers from the different groups, we see that about 57 percent of the respondents got information about the meeting at SB where the ruling CPP is leading while 46.5 percent at ST where led by the opposition from CNRP. However, only about 37 percent said they know about the meeting at PN (CPP) comparing to about 54 percent at PP (CNRP). Table 8.21 below illustrates the numbers.

**Table 8.21 Information received in different groups**

Constituencies	Groups	Information received in percentages		
		Yes	No	Total
Siem Reap	SB (CPP)	57.0	43.0	100.0
	ST (CNRP)	46.5	53.5	100.0
Prey Veng	PN (CPP)	37.5	62.5	100.0
	PP (CNRP)	77.5	22.5	100.0
Total		53.8	46.2	100.0

When we crosstab the responses we can see that those who reported that they knew the information about the meeting, they were likely to attend the meeting. The result in Table 8.22 below shows that about 93 percent of those who had received the information attended the meeting, while 62 percent had not received the information did

not attend. Only about 37 percent of those who had received the information did not attend the meeting. Thus, it is likely that receiving information is still one of the important factors to encourage participation. However, the conclusion cannot be made that the level of receiving information from the councilors who are from the opposition party is much different from the ruling one.

**Table 8.22 Cross-tabulation of information received and attending the meeting**

Attended Meeting	Received information about the meeting		Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	93.4	6.6	100.0
No	37.6	62.4	100.0
Total	53.8	46.2	100.0

One notable thing to confirm is that the local people mostly received information through their village chiefs or the chief of the group. It is noted the commune councilors can decide to choose a village chief who can help organize various matter in the commune. Usually, the ruling party controls tightly in recruiting the village chief as they have been there since 1979. There was a situation in ST where the commune chief, who was from the opposition party, tried to recruit another village chief to replace the long and existing one who was believed bias against opposition party members. The interview was, fortunately, randomly selected into the going-to-be village chief. He had lost one of his legs while he was a soldier during the civil war. Nowadays he is just a farmer who can only earn less than 5,000 Riels, which is about 1.25USD per day. He told the researcher that he did not want to be a village chief as he expected bias from the ruling party. However, the local people encouraged him to do, and with the support from his wife, he agreed to be a candidate. This village in ST has two village chiefs, with one approved from the majority of the councilors who are from the opposition party and another is from the previous appointment that used to be known through the ruling party line. The observation in this particular commune revealed that there were

conflicts among the councilors who are from different parties. The information from the commune councilors ran through the local citizen by the two channels of village chiefs. One is from the ruling and the other from the opposition party. The problem of communication has also been shared across the four selected communes. However, the case of changing the village chief happens only one at ST. The researcher also asked the PP commune councilors, who are from the opposition whether there was the same problem, but that was not the case. They reported that the village chiefs were already performing well and there was no need to change.

Up to this point, no valid conclusion can be made that higher participation level is much likely to be facilitated by the councilor from the opposition party. The information shared across the commune can be one of the factors that can affect the level of participation in the community.

## **8.4 Summary and conclusion**

Findings from this chapter suggest that the knowledge of democracy that refers to civil liberties and citizen rights dominate the concept of the citizens in the four selected groups. When trying to find out what could be the factors influencing to the definition, it reveals that gender and marital status do not determine the differences, but there is a little association with age and education. The younger age (18-24) seems to relate the meaning of democracy to civil liberties and citizen rights. As for those who are illiterate, it is likely that they cannot define the meaning of democracy at all.

Majority of the respondents do not participate in the public meetings as they think it is not relevant to them. They go to see the communes only when they are in need. This is similar to a situation where Almond and Verba (1989, p. 140) describe as "stress situation." It is normal that the citizens go to their representatives only when they are in needs. There is a high percentage of 71 from those who report that they do not attend at

least once in any public meeting conducted by the commune councilors for the last six month, comparing to 29 percent that confirms that they attend the meeting. The result cannot confirm if the citizen participation rate is higher with communes that led by the councilors who are from the opposition party.

Attempting to explain what could be motivating factors for the citizen to participate in the meeting, this chapter finds that information about the meeting is crucial to encourage them to attend. Generally, people see the benefit of the local elections and changes through physical development such as roads, dams, and channels. However, there is no convincing evidence to support that local councilors from the opposition party can encourage more participation in their local communes. The village chief and group chief may play an important role to facilitate the information shared among the groups.

Another motivating factor that has been explored is the feeling of influence on the decision-making process in the communes. Not many people, however, feel that they have the influencing role during the decision-making process, even if they are under the leadership of the opposition councilors. It is also found that those who attended the meeting realize that they have the influencing role although they do not share any ideas during the meeting. The feeling of influences could contribute to the knowledge level of democracy – they demand their services, and the councilors have to respond or face repercussion such as losing the vote. However, citizens seem to understand the limit role of their representatives in responding to their demand. It is not yet sure if increasing the budget in the community can encourage citizen to participate more and demand more.

Consequently, this chapter concludes that there is no significant different knowledge of democracy shared by different groups of the citizen whose councilors are from different political parties.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Many findings from this research study enriched the knowledge of Cambodian political, legal, and administration system in connection with different theoretical approaches discussed so far. The analysis of Cambodian political, economic, social, and technological aspects revealed that Cambodia was unstable and about to collapsed state. The political conflict was deeply rooted among the political factions, and it was clearly shown that Cambodia was a de facto one-party government after the election without viable opposition party conducted in July 2018. The economy has heavily relied on foreign aids and debts but lack of diversity; thus, it will be easily influenced by external shocked such as economic depression or sanctions from the US and EU. The social and technological factors could have facilitated the public administration reform that the government aimed to, yet corruption and weak social structure made an effort less promising.

It was conceptualized that deepening democracy is possible through political decentralization; however, there were inconclusive accounts of this promising inspiration, and there was a need to examine these contextually. It is also found that the role of the opposition party is influential to democracy to the extent that it can mobilize its supporters to demand responsible and accountable government, but there is limit literature about this phenomenon.

Along with the national election in 1993 after the Paris Peace Accord, Cambodia started to decentralize their governance in the early 2000s, and the local representatives—the commune councilors, were elected since 2002 to the offices. They were prescribed with role and responsibilities to provide better public services and be accountable for the beliefs that this would engage citizen to actively participate in deciding on their local community, thus, improve democracy.

Situating Cambodia in hegemonic electoral authoritarian and is about to move to a closed authoritarian state, this study explored whether or not the political decentralization has deepened democracy. This study defines democracy only to the extent that citizens participate in the local governance process and how their local administrators (commune councilors) are responsive and accountable to the social services. It has examined three levels: the policy, the national, and the local by investigating the policy linkage to democracy, the influence of opposition party to democracy, the role of elected local councilors, and the knowledge of democracy shared in the four selected sites.

This concluding chapter will present three main parts. The first part will summarize the core findings from the three levels of examination discussed in the previous chapters. See each chapter for the detail discussion of the findings.

The second will conclude and highlight the significant lessons learned from the study. In the final part, the chapter will identify the possible implication that shall be further investigated in the context of Cambodia and beyond.

## **9.1 Summary of each finding**

### **9.1.1 Policy linkage to democracy**

In agreement with the argument that to understand the policy linkage to democracy we should explore the elements of the design that frame the policy discourse and issues framing, the policy message, the public engagement, and support, and the accountability mechanism (see Ingram & Schneider, 2006), this study examines the decentralization policy, focusing on the devolution of power, in Cambodia and determines that there is a "low" linkage to democracy.

From the policy perspective, there are real attempts to introduce democratic governance through various legal frameworks; however, there is a lack of determination to put the

effective mechanism in place. Policy discussion and debates are not rigorously and openly enough for public scrutiny. The policy messages that are embedded with the democratic concept are low as there is the inconsistency between the policy prescribed and statement of intentions to the real practices. There are also low public engagements and supports due to some structural challenges that generally derived from lack of firm commitment from the top level to the low capacity of the local level. The accountability linkage to democracy is also identified low as there has just been clear and concise policy framework but not yet sure about how it will be implemented with the local communes.

### **9.1.2 Opposition party and democracy**

Political decentralization introduces political space to political parties and opposition politics. This study investigates the role of Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), the opposition party in Cambodia, to determine its linkage to democracy. Inspired by Dalton, Farrell and McAllister's (2011) party linkage to democracy framework, the study examines CNRP's campaign, participation, ideology, representative, and policy and finds that it has "moderate" influenced to democracy in Cambodia.

The electoral regulation provides CNRP to have much influence on the selection of the candidates; it dominated and entirely controlled the campaign process. CNRP successfully mobilized people to vote in both at the national election in 2013 and local election in 2017 in a considerable percentage of voter turn out. There is a moderate linkage between the party to ideology as people voted for the party is seen as there is no other alternative rather than upset with the current ruling party. Also, the representative linkage has been identified "low" as there are challenges in term of being responsible and accountable due to many outside factors that are outside the scope of this study. There was a little positive move when the party was trying to exert its leverage to reform specific institution – electoral committee, yet there are many more that the party

failed to influence. Finally, its 7-point policy platforms do have some considerable influences on the way in which government behaves in this mandate.

### **9.1.3 Elected local representatives and democracy**

The elected local representatives are believed to play a crucial role in deepening democracy. This study selected four communes to investigate in order to determine how the representatives would influence democracy by looking at first to how they encourage people to participate in their local planning processes. Moreover, the study also looks at the ability of the representatives to performance in an accountable and responsive manner.

The finding suggests that the local councilors, both from the opposition and ruling party, play a very limited role to deepen democracy through encouraging people participation in the planning process. Limited budget from the central government is identified as a barrier to encourage participation, as the demands from villagers cannot be solved, and, thus, limit the councilors' role to be adequately responsive. Information channel through the village and group chief is also a factor hindering active participation. Local infrastructures such as roads, dams, or channels are seen as services that shall be provided from the communes. There is also a limited understanding of citizen to engage in social activities. The councilors know how to be accountable by being transparent and intimately engaged with citizen; however, feedback from citizen suggests that the councilors do not act as what they know. The accountability mechanism has just been put in place by the government, and yet it may take time to implement it effectively.

### **9.1.4 Citizen and democracy**

This part seeks to understand the knowledge of democracy shared among the local people in the four selected communes and attempt to find out if there are any



differences in the level of understanding in the different group. It is also to find out the level of influence perception concerning participation under the belief that if citizens know that they are influential to the decision-making process, they will participate and demand more responsible and accountable services in the public meetings with their local representatives. The study also investigates the role of local councilors who are from the opposition party to determine if they have any role to play in influencing the knowledge of democracy and active participation.

Finding reveals that majority of people relate democracy to civil liberties and citizen rights. When trying to find out what could be the explanation to the different definition defined by the citizen, it reveals that gender and marital status do not determine the differences, but there is a little association with age and education. The younger age (18-24) seems to relate the meaning of democracy to civil liberties and citizen rights. The councilors from the opposition party do not have any significant influences to the different knowledge of democracy across the study sites.

It is found that the majority of people do not participate in the local meetings and this low percentage is observed in all communes. It seems that information is one of the factors encouraging people to participate since those who are informed are seen to participate although they do not share any ideas during the meeting. Naturally, they just come to listen. Thus, the role of the informant such as the village chief or group chief is essential. Generally, people see the benefit of the local elections and changes through physical development such as roads, dams, and channels, but with little knowledge of their influential role to make a demand. However, there is no convincing evidence to support that citizen are more motivated to participate in communes where the chiefs are from the opposition party.

## **9.2 Lessons learned**

The overall aim of the study is to explore how political decentralization has deepened democracy in Cambodia. The purpose of this study is justified by the argument that deepening democracy is possible through political decentralization.

Some related critical questions were brought up to examine the claim by looking at the policy of decentralization, the role of opposition party, the elected local representatives and the democratic concepts shared by the local people, which are all necessary components to democracy. Without a doubt, democracy does happen in Cambodia through the introduction of decentralization.

First, the policy of decentralization opens avenues for people to elect their local representatives who have more understanding about the local needs and could respond to the needs effectively. This also generates another local institutions and mechanism which is more democratic in a sense that local citizen can communicate closer and their representative can response faster at their local level that they never experienced it as Cambodia has long been a centralized state. Although the policy introduced in Cambodia currently is found low linkage to democracy, it is a better point to start, and it thus needs the commitment from all related actors.

Second, along with the election, there is a rise of opposition politics that create a situation where political parties compete against each other to serve their local citizen. The competition has more or less shaped the attitude of the authorities, as they are no longer seeing themselves superior to the citizen. They have to be accountable and seek support from the citizen by promising or delivering better public services for the public good. This also reinvents how the political structure is set up at the local level. Usually, the ruling party controls tightly over their agents through the sole chief either at commune or village level. With the rise of other opposition party and competition for the legitimacy to lead, citizens define power to the political party. The political party,

both of opposition and ruling, will need to be restructured to make sure that their party is more responsive and more accountable. Political discourse and education will grow, which may significantly transform the nature of politics that Cambodia used to experience from the past decades.

Thirdly, local representatives start to learn to be performing their active role in serving their people. They start to know what they would do in order to maintain or gain support and attract local participation, which can threaten their legitimacy to rule. Besides, they learn how to communicate with their local people if they cannot fulfill any demands.

Finally, it is clear that citizen benefits from the local elections as they experience changes within their community. They learn how to voice their concern and demand. Such interactivity will develop more understanding and trust between the local authority and citizen. This soon changes the political culture and shapes the political institution in Cambodia.

However, political decentralization in the form of power devolution that only prescribed in the legal forms but without granting financial decision to make like in Cambodia can be a challenging task. As what Cambodia is experiencing, the national level determines limited budget and local councilors cannot generate their fund, for example through local tax, to respond to their local demands in term of infrastructural developments; this threatens the motivation to serve as well as the motivation of people to participate as the study has found. It is hard to imagine how to be accountable and responsible if there is a lack of resources, which is the incentive for both local representatives and people.

All in all, we can learn that although slowly progress, political decentralization does deepen democracy by giving political space to political party, introducing structural and administrative support to local representatives and citizen to take part in making a political decision in Cambodia. Both local councilors and citizen are getting slowly to

aware of their rights and democratic process. If all goes well, even if it is slower than it should be, this will be another quiet revolution we cannot repudiate in Cambodian politics.

### **9.3 Implication for future research**

The study so far presents that with the political decentralization democracy in Cambodia has slowly been deepened through the formulation of policy, the emergence of the opposition party, and the growth of democratic understanding of local councilors and citizen. It is necessary to focus on where this study finds as a weakness to further understanding.

Whereas citizen participation in making decision at their local context is limited, it is necessary to assess further the motivational factors that could increase the participation. This study finds that the inability to respond to citizen needs, due to the limited budget that the councilors have, hinder the active participation. Further research should also be done to the motivating factors for councilors to be more accountable and responsive to their citizen, and whether or not the budget increment is the answer to increase citizen participation.

The way in which communication is transferred through village chief or group chief shall be further investigated. There is a need to understand whether what can be done to improve the channel of communication between the elected councilors to the local citizen.

Political parties are the backbone of democracy; however, limited literature is found within Cambodian political context. Both of the ruling and opposition party commitment to democracy shall be the subject for further investigation.

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## **LIST OF PUBLICATIONS IN A PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL AVAILABLE ONLINE**

**AUTHOR: CHUM CHANDARIN**

1. Title: Transitional Justice and Political Reconciliation in Cambodia  
Year: 2018  
Journal: Journal of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Vol. 4, No. 1.  
Available: <http://www.jihhrs.com/index.php/jihhrs/article/view/63>  
Page: 31-68
2. Title: Opposition Party and Democracy in Cambodia  
Year: 2017  
Journal: International Journal of Education and Research, Vol. 5, No. 10.  
Available at: <http://www.ijern.com/journal/2017/October-2017/10.pdf>  
Page: 109-124
3. Title: Democracy and Decentralization  
Year: 2017  
Journal: UC Occasional Paper Series, Vol. 1, No. 2.  
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[http://uc.edu.kh/userfiles/image/2017/10.%20UCOPS%20Vol%201\\_Iss%202.pdf](http://uc.edu.kh/userfiles/image/2017/10.%20UCOPS%20Vol%201_Iss%202.pdf)  
Page: 113-136
4. Title: Transitional Justice in Cambodia: Whose goal to achieve?  
Year: 2017  
Journal: Jogelméleti Szemle 2017/3. szám  
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5. Title: Public Administration Reform in Cambodia: PEST Analysis  
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Available at [http://jesz.ajk.elte.hu/2016\\_3.pdf](http://jesz.ajk.elte.hu/2016_3.pdf)  
Page: 33-44

## **CO-AUTHOR**

6. Title: Cambodia: The Winner Takes It All: 2018 Elections Set Country Firmly on Path towards Authoritarianism  
Year: 2018  
Publication with German Institute for International and Security Affairs  
Available at: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/cambodia-the-winner-takes-it-all/>