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ARTICLE

State Mobilization in Authoritarian Regimes: Youth Politics and Regime Legitimation in Cambodia

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Abstract

This article explains the political significance of the Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia, the quasi-youth wing of the ruling Cambodian People's Party in Cambodia. I argue that pro-regime events organized by the youth wing are a form of state mobilization designed to help the ruling party pre-empt the threat posed by the country's growing youth population. In doing so, the youth wing draws upon the monarchy, culture, and nationalism to regenerate the ruling party's legitimacy claims to make them more appealing to the target group. The article contributes to our knowledge of how authoritarian regimes mobilize citizens to maintain power.

Keywords: state mobilization; legitimation; authoritarian regime; youth wing; Cambodia

Introduction

Besides building elite cohesion at the top through the distribution of power and patronage (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Brownlee 2007; Svolik 2012), ruling parties also mobilize citizens on the ground through mass organizations such as youth wings. The latter strategy is *state mobilization,* as opposed to *social mobilization*. Historically, whenever the term "mobilization" is brought up, the point of reference for most is civic organizing in the pursuit of socio-economic development, or more zealously, the gathering of tens of thousands of people in the streets marching and chanting, exacting demands from their governments; a recent example of which is the Arab Spring in the early 2010s. Often received with less attention is the fact that citizens not only mobilize *against* governments but are also mobilized *by* governments. Social mobilization helps break a regime; state mobilization helps strengthen it. This article is concerned with this distinct form of mobilization and how it works in the context of dominant party regimes where multiparty elections for the national executive office are held, but the playing field is highly skewed in favor of the incumbent, making the prospects of an opposition victory slim, although not impossible (Levitsky and Way 2010).

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This article advances knowledge of state mobilization by exploring the political significance of the youth movement led by the Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia (UYFC), the quasi-youth wing of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) in Cambodia.[1] Rich in financial resources and manpower, the UYFC has organized a wide range of humanitarian, economic, educational, and cultural activities such as camping, scholarships, capacity building, cultural and sporting events, exhibitions, job fairs, blood donations, emergency relief, and free healthcare services. Two major UYFC projects are analyzed: *40km into History*, a 40-kilometre walk by 700 people to commemorate the foundation of the political movement that later gave birth to the CPP, and *Angkor Sankranta*, a mass celebration of the Khmer New Year which features cultural events and world-record-breaking mass spectacles. In doing so, I address two interrelated questions: What drives the youth mobilization led by the UYFC? and what problems does it intend to solve?

In power since 1979, the CPP regime has become one of the most durable electoral autocracies. Under Prime Minister Hun Sen, it survived the civil war in the 1980s and 1990s against remnants of the previous regimes, a post-Cold-War democratic transition overseen by the United Nations, and, most recently, the opposition challenge in the electoral arena in the form of a near loss to the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in the 2013 general elections. The CPP's electoral setback was followed by a massive opposition mobilization calling for re-election and for the prime minister to step down, and a historic worker unrest demanding pay hikes. The most recent electoral challenge to the CPP rule was seen as a youth-driven phenomenon, as those under the age of 25 made up more than half of the eligible voters (Un 2015, 104). Also, young people's growing economic power because of employment has enabled them to influence the voting behavior of their dependent relatives by threatening to withhold remittances if they do not vote for the CNRP (Norén-Nilsson 2017, 86). Therefore, it was observed that the CNRP received a high level of support in areas with high rates of young people working in cities and overseas (Un 2019, 46). The ruling party's surprisingly poor performance left observers wondering whether the party's legitimacy claims would continue to strike a chord with the younger population (see, e.g., Strangio 2014, 259; Eng and Hughes 2017; Un 2019, 46). Supplementing previous research on this issue of legitimation (Norén-Nilsson 2021a; Ngoun 2022), this article examines how the CPP has sought to remedy the deficit in regime legitimacy through state mobilization.

Using the case of Cambodia, this article contributes to the emerging literature on regime-sponsored citizen mobilization. Previous studies predominantly focus on its repressive function to counter acute and existential threats such as mass protests and elite revolts. While it is correct, this perspective cannot explain the case of the UYFC because it performs a non-repressive form of mobilization in response to a more latent form of threat. As I will discuss in detail, although the CPP's survival is under no immediate threat—thanks to weak political opposition and low coup risk—the presence of a youthful and potentially rebellious population is a threat that cannot be ignored. The role of the UYFC in regime maintenance is structured by such a threat environment. Its function is to ensure the ruling party's legitimacy claims resonate with the younger voters, using carefully crafted propaganda that is broadcast through pro-regime events organized on days of historical and cultural

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significance to imbue the narrative with meanings. The UYFC's legitimation strategy constitutes a new mechanism for inducing gratitude towards the CPP rule and generate excitement about its continuity. The case of Cambodia demonstrates that state mobilization is not only valuable for authoritarian regimes facing an existential threat but also for those regimes that are relatively safe from a coup, electoral defeat, or revolution in the short term, but are vulnerable to the long-term possibility of instability.

The argument was developed using evidence from both primary and secondary sources. I interviewed 16 leaders and activists from the youth wing, civil society organizations, and political parties between mid-December 2019 and late January 2020 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. I also relied on various secondary sources, such as party documents, UYFC publications, documentaries, newspaper articles, and Facebook pages. Posts on the UYFC's Facebook page between 2015 and 2020 were scraped and extracted into a spreadsheet to conduct a text analysis. From the exercise, I was able to discern the UYFC's activities and the ideas it promotes. The outcome of this text analysis is the themes that anchor the analysis of the UYFC's legitimation strategy.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I review the literature on regime-sponsored citizen mobilization and authoritarian legitimation to lay out the analytical framework for empirical analysis. The empirical section illustrates the threat environment in Cambodia and how state mobilization is deployed as a response to it. Then, I discuss the effectiveness of the UYFC's mobilization against its intended goals. I conclude by summarizing the argument and highlighting the theoretical implications of the case study.

State mobilization in nondemocratic regimes

Conceptualized as revolution, social movement, or civil society, the political impact of spontaneous and coordinated citizen activism in democratic and nondemocratic contexts has generated a vast body of literature. In authoritarian settings, mass uprisings by social forces, be they the middle class, workers, or students, have culminated in the collapse of authoritarian regimes in Portugal (1974), Peru (1980), the Philippines (1985), Indonesia (1998), Serbia (2000), Tunisia (2011), Egypt (2011), and others. As insightful as social mobilization is in explaining regime change or breakdown, the opposite dynamic is also crucial: authoritarian rulers have mobilized supporters and ordinary citizens to stabilize their regimes. Tactics of state mobilization have evolved as authoritarian regimes adapt to different threat environments. Yet we do not possess as much theoretical knowledge of how this process works and even less on how much and in what ways the process contributes to the survival of authoritarian regimes.

Defining state mobilization

This article defines such a process as state mobilization[2] or the formation of civilian organizations by authoritarian leaders or their agents to advance the regime's agenda through pro-regime events.[3] Robertson (2009, 545) labels these pro-regime

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organizations collectively as "ersatz social movements" that are "deliberately designed, created, organized, supported, and, if need be, marginalized, by important regime players." The corporatism literature emphasizes the role of these organizations as "auxiliary and dependent organs of the state" (Schmitter 1974, 102) that are "a means of social and political control" (MacIntyre 1994). The principal pro-regime organizations are mass organizations. Variably called "social control organizations," "social-mobilization organizations," "mass-member organizations," or "administered mass organizations," mass organizations are civilian organizations with a close tie to the regime, such as youth wings and pro-government unions.

Authoritarian regimes use participation in pro-regime civilian organizations to simulate civil society, so it can be challenging to distinguish these organizations from non-governmental organizations or civil society from "uncivil society," based solely on their outward activities. More attention must be paid to their formation and objective. The distinction is that non-governmental organizations and civil society more broadly are spontaneously organized from below to seek political accountability or influence policies. In contrast, mass organizations are "created by incumbent regime officials to augment their control over the rest of the society" (Kasza 1995, 8). It is the "implementation of decisions already made" (Roeder 1989, 861). In short, mass organizations are the primary agent of state mobilization. Whereas civil society organizations seek to *influence* government decisions and *limit* the political system, mass organizations are established to *support* government decisions and *strengthen* the political system. For that matter, a mass organization is always a political tool.

The drivers of state mobilization

A survey of the literature suggests that state mobilization often originates from major challenges to the regime's hold on power. Kasza (1995), for example, identifies wars as the stimulus for the formation of "administered mass organisations" in totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union under Stalin. More recently, Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020) argue that "pro-government mobilization" is a powerful weapon against elite-driven and mass-driven threats. Similarly, Ekiert and Perry (2020, 8) argue that the purpose of "state-mobilized movements" is to forestall "revolutionary challenges." This is the case in Venezuela (Handlin 2020), Egypt (Anderson and Cammett 2020), Ukraine (Beissinger 2020), and China (Perry and Yan 2020), among others. These are manifest threats that require the regime to take "immediate" and "unmistakable" actions to preserve power (Merkel 2014, 17; Gerschewski 2018, 3). In this article, I argue that state mobilization can also be sparked by a latent threat.

While a manifest threat is characterized by public acts of defiance, a latent threat is the hidden acts or discourses of dissatisfaction or resistance that cannot be directly observed by the regime (Kuran 1989, 42; Scott 1990, 4; Dimitrov 2017, 22) except through periodic or subtle revelations in public opinion polls, protest voting for the opposition party, or various everyday political activities (see Scott 1985; Kerkvliet 2005; Vong and Hok 2018). A latent threat is a risk to regime survival because it can be inspired by a seemingly trivial event and transform into a mass revolt; it is thereby worthy of long-term planning. Using Mao Tse-Tung's analogy

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of "[a] single spark can start a prairie fire," Kuran (1989, 60) puts forward the scenario of "relatively minor events [making] a few individuals reach their boiling point and take to the streets in protest [that] kicks off the latent revolutionary bandwagon, and the opposition darts into power." The tragic act of a street vendor setting himself ablaze out of frustration with police harassment sparking the mass uprisings that overthrew the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia is a perfect example (Honwana 2013, 69; Roberts 2015, 960). The powerful force behind seemly secure regimes suddenly falling prey to "unanticipated political revolution," Kuran (1989, 60; 1991) argues, is "preference falsification"; that is, individuals concealing their true political preferences by continuing to express "outward loyalty" to the regime despite having become "sympathetic to the idea of change."

Actions taken by the regime in response to a latent threat are part of its long-term, pre-emptive survival strategy so that a threat is contained, gradually weakened, or resolved altogether. I call this proactive approach future-proofing. Future-proofing entails taking preventive measures even when the regime does not possess sufficient information about the threat environment. The UYFC's legitimation-driven mobilization is such a strategy. Having foresight about something unobservable or difficult to be observed directly, however, is a high bar for many authoritarian regimes with weak capacity. It is more likely in durable regimes ruled by long-serving dictators such as the CPP under Hun Sen who through experience can learn from past domestic and international events to inform their survival strategy.

State mobilization as an authoritarian legitimation strategy

The literature survey above suggests that a substantial theoretical consensus exists on the driver of state mobilization across time and regime subtypes. Whether they are totalitarian or authoritarian, classic and modern nondemocratic regimes mobilize citizens under state-controlled organizations to respond to threats to their survival. The same, however, cannot be said of the functions of state mobilization. The structural constraints faced by authoritarian regimes necessitate substantive changes in the types of state mobilization tactics employed.

For example, under the repressive rules of Mao, Hitler, and Stalin, the notorious totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, state mobilization played an important role in developing a "pseudo-religious adoration" of the dictator and his ideology (Brooker 1991, 131); "the destruction and reconstruction of economic, social, and political institutions" (Huntington 1970, 38); "the permanent domination of each single individual in each and every sphere of life" (Arendt 1951, 326); or the "[complete] [organization] of political life and society" (Linz 2000, 4). In his seminal work on administered mass organizations, Kasza (1995) specifies their functions as a "weapon" to suppress autonomous organizations such as political parties and labor unions, conscript citizens to fight wars, and facilitate state control over economic production.

However, such a portrayal of state mobilization does not reflect the reality of more pluralistic, less repressive authoritarian regimes. In these regimes, opposition parties and civil society organizations have been allowed to co-exist with mass organizations; rigid ideology has been relegated or replaced with pragmatic policies; free markets

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have overtaken central planning as the organizing principle of productive activities; and instances of war have become less frequent or less demanding of manpower. In short, the structural constraints of authoritarian regimes have made the execution of totalitarian-style state mobilization less feasible and desirable. A question thus arises: What is the role of state mobilization in the authoritarian context? With authoritarian regimes increasingly turning to more innovative forms of governance (Morgenbesser 2020), it is a timely exercise to comprehend the various forms of state mobilization.

Scholars have recently made significant progress in this regard. Rodan's (2018) mode of participation (MOP) is an example. The mode of participation most relevant to this study is "societal incorporation," under which the state determines the problems to be discussed and who can participate in the process (Jayasuriya and Rodan 2007; Rodan 2018). In this mode of participation, Rodan focuses on creative institutions like the public feedback mechanism, Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry @ Home (REACH), in Singapore which is meant to complement or supplant "established institutional mechanisms of political co-optation" because they have become less effective in the face of new social dynamics (Rodan 2018, 49). This article highlights how authoritarian regimes can still employ established institutions like party youth wings to respond to new challenges.

The edited volume *Ruling by Other Means* (Ekiert, Perry, and Yan 2020) and the article by Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020) are valuable recent contributions to theorizing the role of state mobilization in authoritarian survival. Drawing on empirical chapters on 11 countries across five continents, Ekiert and Perry (2020) propose a typology of "state-mobilized movement": reactive and proactive mobilization.[4]

Reactive mobilization such as pro-government rallies or counter-demonstrations are common when authoritarian regimes are beset by mass protests or opposition mobilization (Yuen and Cheng 2017; Anderson and Cammett 2020). In turn, proactive mobilization is deployed when potentially threatening and destabilizing mobilizing processes are forming. In Russia, for example, the regime established the Nashi youth movement in the wake of the Orange Revolution that rocked Ukraine in 2004 to frame the revolution as "pawns of foreign power," imitate its mobilization technique, and provide the manpower for counter-demonstrations (Robertson 2009, 542–545; Horvath 2011, 15–18; Finkel and Brudny 2012; Smyth, Sobolev, and Soboleva 2013;). The goal was to prevent the regional protest wave from spilling over into Russia, a strategy also known as "diffusion-proofing" (Koesel and Bunce 2013).

Similar to Ekiert and Perry, Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020) highlight the counter-mobilization and diffusion-proofing functions of "pro-government mobilisation." But they also specify its coup-proofing function which is the signaling of the regime's "strength and mobilisation capacity" that leads coup-plotters to believe that it still has strong support and is thus hard to topple.

Ekiert and Perry's as well as Hellmeier and Weidmann's frameworks conceptualize state mobilization as synonymous with street mobilization for repressive purposes. For example, Hellmeier and Weidmann equate pro-government mobilization with "rallies" or "support in the street." Ekiert and Perry stress the pre-emptive nature of proactive mobilization, but their interest remains in "peaceful marches" and

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"rowdy rallies," both being mobilization techniques that draw regime supporters into the streets.

I argue that state mobilization also performs a legitimation function to future-proof the regime. Emphasizing this functional multiplicity is important because authoritarian regimes have deployed state mobilization for purposes beyond street rallies. For example, in countries such as Belarus, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Namibia, and Malawi, virtually no mass events such as pro-government rallies have occurred, but these regimes have organized a substantial proportion of their population into mass organizations (Coppedge et al. 2020).[5] If we were to focus solely on street rallies, we would not be able to account for such a mobilization pattern.

State mobilization uses propaganda to facilitate authoritarian legitimation. Propaganda is a set of information or messages, often biased, designed to persuade the population to behave in ways desired by the regime. Authoritarian regimes employ propaganda differently (Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022). Some pay less attention to the content, opting for communicating an overwhelming volume of crude, repetitive, or even preposterous messages. The purpose is to signal state power without necessarily gaining popular support (Wedeen 1999; Huang 2015).

Some regimes, on the other hand, use propaganda to legitimatize their rule. Such a purpose compels them to focus on persuasiveness in addition to the sheer amount of propagation by highlighting the regime's fit and right to rule and by blaming external actors for the country's problems (Rozenas and Stukal 2019; Guriev and Treisman 2020; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022). The CPP regime in Cambodia has taken the latter legitimation approach to propaganda. But in addition to state-controlled media, as in North Korea or Russia, the CPP reactivates and empowers its youth mass organization to organize pro-regime events and spread pro-regime ideas.

State mobilization in Cambodia

In this section, I elaborate on the theoretical points by tracing the driver of state mobilization in Cambodia to the presence of a potentially destabilizing social force and illustrating how the UYFC's pro-regime events help renew the CPP's legitimacy claims. I end the analysis with a discussion on how to make sense of the effectiveness of state mobilization in Cambodia.

The mobilizing agency: The Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia (UYFC)

The UYFC (សហភាពសហព័ន្ធយុវជនកម្ពុជា) is a mass organization boasting approximately 190,000 members in 2021.[6] The membership figure does not include the numerous volunteers that it recruited when hosting mass events. The UYFC's membership also includes public servants. One civil society activist suggests that their involvement in the UYFC is not entirely based on personal interest; it is also driven by a sense of "inevitability" to comply with institutional norms and secure career advancement.[7]

The UYFC is the successor of the communist-era Khmer Youth Association for National Salvation, which was established in 1978. When the communist regime[8]

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undertook a democratic transition in the early 1990s, the ruling party made a decisive reform to its mass organizations. The youth association was renamed the Youth Association of Cambodia (YAC) in 1990 and repackaged as a non-governmental organization (NGO). The new status as an NGO was said to be necessary to conform to "legality" and adapt to the "actual situation" as Cambodia transitioned to a democratic regime under the supervision of the United Nations (YAC 2012). In December 2012, YAC was renamed UYFC.

The UYFC has never shied away from the historical fact that it is the successor of the youth organization the regime leadership referred to as the party's "right hand." But at the same time, it has not officially claimed to be the CPP's youth wing. Instead, it declares itself a nonpartisan "youth front." Although many of their activities overlap, civil society actors have distanced themselves from the UYFC, arguing that they work for the "society," whereas the UYFC works for the "party."[9]

In the 2012 transition, a pivotal shift occurred at the leadership level where the baton was passed from party veterans[10] to a new generation of young elites led by the Prime Minister's youngest son, Hun Many,[11] who is planked by children of the party's other influential leaders. YAC's ageing leaders held high hopes for the new leadership's ability to recruit more members and mobilize financial resources from the private sector,[12] courtesy of influence inherited from their fathers. Indeed, it is widely agreed that the UYFC would not have been powerful if it was not under the leadership of the prime minister's son.

UYFC's leadership structure mirrored that of the ruling party. Hun Many, son of CPP president Hun Sen, is the president of UYFC. His deputies, Say Samal and Sar Sokha, are sons of CPP vice presidents Say Chum and Sar Kheng, respectively.[13] Joining them in the central committee, the organization's decision-making body, are politicians and technocrats from central ministries and local government. Individuals holding the positions of Secretary of State, Undersecretary of State, and Deputy Director General[14] make up nearly half of the committee, followed by Provincial Governor and Deputy Provincial Governor. These individuals are responsible for coordinating UYFC's activities in their respective ministries and local government areas. Norén-Nilsson (2021b) argues that many of them gained these positions because of their activism and reputation-building in the UYFC. As a senior UYFC official elaborated. "[t]he governors, from the beginning, were members of the UYFC. When they did good activities, the government saw that, and they are also the new blood of youth, so the government tested them by making them governors" (Norén-Nilsson 2021b, 275).

The threat environment

The salience of youth mobilization led by the UYFC needs to be understood in the context of the CPP's threat environment. In 2013 and after, the regime was under enormous pressure from an opposition challenge in the electoral and protest arenas. It reacted by deploying the full force of the state apparatus to stifle civil society, cripple independent media, and disenfranchise the opposition party. Underlying this crisis is the discontent over government performance and growing embrace of political change, especially among the younger population—a less intense threat

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building in the background to which state repression is ill-suited. State mobilization enters the picture as a complementary strategy to reinvigorate the CPP's right to rule.

Manifest threat: Elections and street protests

The 2013 general elections were a turning point in the CPP rule. Formed by popular opposition leaders Sam Rainsy and Khem Sokha only one year before the elections following decades of opposition fragmentation, the CNRP gained surprising traction by garnering 44 per cent of the popular vote, which gave it 55 seats in the 123-seat National Assembly, the lower house of the bicameral legislature. The CPP's share of the popular vote, on the other hand, declined from 58 per cent in 2008 to 49 per cent in 2013, resulting in the loss of 22 seats, from 90 in 2008 to 68 in 2013.

The 2013 elections represented the strongest stress test yet for the CPP since their electoral defeat in 1993 because a growing number of Cambodian voters had rejected the idea of incompatibility between peace and change.[15] Throughout the election campaigns, the CPP emphasized political stability and resisted the call for change by invoking the memory of king Sihanouk's demise at the hands of his general, Lon Nol, and the country's subsequent tragic path to the Khmer Rouge's brutal rule. The ruling party reasoned that its rule offered the only path to protect the hard-earned peace and the socio-economic progress that it has spawned. By contrast, the CNRP promoted the idea of "change" and a new leadership that was supposedly clean and competent. Governmental change was campaigned as the only answer to the entrenched "social inequality, land grabbing, depletion of natural resources, and the presence of illegal Vietnamese immigrants" bred by corruption and mismanagement under the CPP rule (Un 2015, 104). If the FUNCIPEC party's[16] (led by Sihanouk's son Norodom Ranariddh) victory in 1993 reflected Cambodian voters' nostalgia for the "good old days" under Sihanouk in the 1960s, a period often considered to be contemporary Cambodia's golden era (Strangio 2014, 53), the CNRP's surge represented a growing desire to imagine a post-CPP future, one in which a peaceful power transition enables a new leadership and government to advance alternative reform agenda.

Buoyed by its popularity, the CNRP reacted to the election results by organizing the largest mass mobilization in decades, claiming that the elections were fraudulent and that they should have won if the National Election Committee (NEC) were impartial. The scale of the protest appeared to confirm the urge for political change among the population as expressed through the ballots. Tens of thousands of opposition supporters camped at the Freedom Park––the government-designated area for protest––for months and later spilt onto the streets calling for re-elections and, in the final phase, the resignation of Prime Minister Hun Sen. The momentum was bolstered when tens of thousands of mostly female workers in the garment industry organized a historic mass strike demanding their minimum monthly wage be doubled. The twin protests presented an unprecedented challenge to the CPP's decades-long rule. Having earlier downplayed the threat of the CNRP,[17] the CPP seemed to be caught off guard by the opposition party's strong electoral performance and mass mobilization.

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The CNRP-led social unrest, however, was no match for the CPP's institutional weapons, as the ruling party and the prime minister have absolute control over the coercive, administrative, legislative, and judicial institutions. The regime's resilience has been secured by the lack of a credible threat of rebellion in the military (see Chambers 2015; Human Rights Watch 2018) with the prime minister's eldest son being the deputy commander-in-chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and commander of its army division, where he controls "all the real power, real soldiers" (Loughlin 2021, 254–255). Furthermore, the military has an elite bodyguard unit that directly answers to Hun Sen. This counter-balancing force is said to be the best equipped and renumerated force in the military (Peou 2020, 15). This institutional setup makes future coups only a remote possibility. Taking future-proofing actions in this context points to the regime's sophistication.

Backed by this institutional bulwark, the CPP government successfully killed off the opposition momentum. The security forces efficiently dispersed in *one day* the crowd that had been stationed in the Freedom Park for *months*. The workers' protest was likewise successfully suppressed after the government deployed specialized military forces (see Asia Monitor Resource Centre 2014).[18] In the aftermath of the suppression, the CNRP gave up street protests and accepted the election results. In exchange, the CPP offered important concessions. It greenlighted the CNRP to establish its own TV station. Kem Sokha was given the position of Vice President of the National Assembly. The CPP also agreed to appoint four CNRP leaders and a nonpartisan civil society activist to the nine-seat NEC. The CNRP claimed that such a composition would make the NEC an independent institution capable of administering fair elections. The deal moved the two parties into a "Culture of Dialogue" whereby Sam Rainsy promised to tone down his criticism of Hun Sen and the CPP. Yet, this political détente was never likely to work out in the long term. After all, Sam Rainsy gained widespread support precisely because he is perceived to be the most resolute politician in standing up against Hun Sen's authoritarianism. Appearing too cozy with the prime minister and the CPP would have cast Rainsy as weak and manipulable, thereby depleting his support base.

When Sam Rainy reversed course and resumed his opposition, the CPP realized that what cannot be co-opted has to be repressed. What followed was the unleashing of the ruling party's compliant state institutions to undermine civil society, independent media, and the opposition party. The CPP-majority National Assembly passed laws to impose restrictions on the operation of non-governmental organizations and labor unions, circumscribing their freedom to organize protests, receive foreign funding, and associate with opposition parties. The country's most respected English newspaper, *The Cambodia Daily*, was slapped with a multi-million dollar back tax by the Finance Ministry, forcing it to close. American-sponsored radio stations, Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, suffered from similar tax and licensing issues.

At the same time, a coordinated attack was launched on the CNRP. Sam Rainsy was forced to resign from the CNRP after the National Assembly adopted an amendment to the Law on Political Parties, which allows a political party to be dissolved if a leader is convicted of serious crimes. Sam Rainsy had earlier been sentenced to two years in prison for defamation. Succeeding Rainsy, Kem Sokha bore the full weight of repression. First, he was stripped of his Vice Presidency of the National Assembly.

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Then, he was entangled in an extramarital affair exposed by multiple, secretly taped telephone conversations posted anonymously on social media. The final blow was struck when his speech about his political activities was construed as his admission of collusion with the US to overthrow the Cambodian government. Kem Sokha was subsequently arrested and charged with treason. On the back of the arrest, *The Cambodia Daily* declared in its final issue in September 2017 that Cambodia had descended into an "outright dictatorship." The CNRP was eventually dissolved by the supreme court in 2017. With the most formidable barrier to its electoral domination removed, the ruling party went on to win all seats in the National Assembly in the 2018 general elections, having 'competed' with 19 minor parties. In short, the CPP faces no immediate threats to its power. The military's institutional setup renders a coup extremely unlikely and the political opposition is severely weakened by the CNRP's dissolution.

Latent threat: Social change and discontent

The threat to regime stability, however, is far from over. The CPP may have taken unmistakable actions to suppress the overt challenge to its rule, but substantial social discontent that contributed to the crisis remains. The CNRP's rise is symptomatic of an underlying attitudinal shift that has been unfolding for years among the population, especially the younger generation. Although the CNRP as the political outlet has been blocked, the risk remains that stability after the 2013/2014 government crackdown could take an unexpected turn into a destabilizing mobilization process in the future when the right conditions emerge.

What does this threat look like? First of all, preference falsification is a real possibility. For example, local authorities have long practiced social control by coding villages based on their party alignment: "White" for supporters; "Black" for non-supporters; and "Grey" for ambiguous groups. But the classification system turned out to be unreliable in the 2013 elections as one party official recalled: "I had 1200 villagers on my list under the 'White' (loyal) category, but only 300 voted for the CPP" (Un 2019, 46). The privately held dissatisfaction with the status quo was revealed by a public opinion poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) shortly after the elections, between October and November 2013, which shows that the proportion of respondents who thought that Cambodia was heading in the "wrong direction" reached an all-time high of 43 per cent, while the average in the last five years had been just 20 per cent (IRI 2013), with corruption and nepotism cited as the primary reasons. Forty-six per cent of the respondents also said that the country "needs a change." The sharp rise of discontent might have been due to individuals who previously may have concealed their preferences because they did not see a viable challenger to the CPP, but who were buoyed by the CNRP's popularity and decided that the time was right to voice their frustration and hope for greater concessions from the government. The IRI finding was corroborated by another national survey conducted by the Asia Foundation between May and June 2014 after the government crackdown on the CNRP-led demonstrations. The survey found that 59 per cent of the respondents believe Cambodia was going in the wrong direction (Everett and Meisburger 2014).

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The discontent was most prevalent among the younger population. They are different from the older "silent society" who are beset by memories of the Khmer Rouge atrocities and are more likely to prefer political stability over change. The younger "articulate society"[19] has no memory of or direct experience with the Khmer Rouge's extreme rule and is unsatisfied with having "Pol Pot's nightmare as a benchmark" (Strangio 2014, 259). They care more about their future, exhibit less trust in public institutions, and have higher expectations of the government with regard to job creation and personal freedom (Eng and Hughes 2017). Consequently, they do not "fit the mould for which [the CPP's social control] strategy was designed" (Hughes 2015, 13). For young people living in rural areas, Hughes argues, the small likelihood of owning land distances them from local authorities and the clientelist system, which focuses on small-scale development projects. For those who migrate to the cities or overseas for jobs, the social control system ceases to function altogether, making the task of local authorities in rendering them comprehensible to the ruling party almost impossible (Hughes 2015, 13).

Notably, the ambiguity over young people's political preferences is not a new phenomenon; the trend had been building "for years" (Hughes 2015, 10). Hughes and Kim (2004, 28) first report this observation from interviews with local authorities in 2003, when they admitted to having little knowledge about young people's voting preferences. As one village chief complained: "the father might be CPP, but the children not. It's difficult to tell" (Hughes and Kim 2004, 28). For Hughes (2015, 13), by the 2013 elections, the loosening grip of the social control strategy "has been predictable for a decade and yet the party itself has apparently not properly recognised or responded to this challenge."

These undercurrents point to the presence of a potentially rebellious youth population that cannot be taken for granted or simply removed by force. The history of regime change has made it abundantly clear that young people, be they students or workers, are at the forefront of mass uprisings toppling authoritarian regimes around the globe. In the case of Cambodia, even though young people have not taken to the streets in a threatening fashion after the post-2013 elections government crackdown and even when the CNRP was dissolved, the CPP has reasons to be concerned about the destabilizing potential of this social force. Arguably, the empowerment of the UYFC with a revamp to its leadership structure before 2013, which I will return to later, was driven by this latent threat that has been observed since at least 2003. This response suggests that the CPP was not ignorant of the shifting social dynamics. As the threat was brought into clearer sight by the 2013 elections, the UYFC has upped its game to pursue regime legitimation with mass events packed with propaganda as well as other regime-sustaining functions (for the latter see Norén-Nilsson 2021b).

State mobilization and regime legitimation

To understand the UYFC's legitimation strategy, it is essential to review how the CPP has claimed legitimacy for its rule, which is built around two overarching themes: 1) the CPP leadership's conscientious breakaway from the Khmer Rouge and the sacrifice they made to free Cambodian people from the regime's tyranny; and 2) its

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achievement in rebuilding the state and economy and its indispensable role in preserving these outcomes. Although the CPP's 2013 election setback suggests that such legitimacy claims have increasingly lost their persuasive power among the younger voters, the party has shown no sign of confining them to the dustbin of history. Indeed, the narrative is the party's backbone. It embodies the ruling elites' shared origin in the violent struggle for power and shared fear of political upheaval. Downplaying the narrative would also risk alienating the party's bedrock supporters, who genuinely believe that its legacy merits its continued rule. Therefore, the party's preference is to adapt its legitimation strategy. The role of the UYFC is to regenerate the narrative with propaganda that draws upon the monarchy, culture, and nationalism and then transmitted through two pro-regime projects: 40km into History and Angkor Sankranta. In the rest of this section, I illustrate how the projects and the messages they spread map onto each theme of the CPP's legitimacy claims.

Foundation and liberation: What the CPP claims

The first overarching theme of the CPP's legitimacy claims is the defeat of the Khmer Rouge through armed rebellion. The party holds that the historical juncture of the formation of the liberation political movement, the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (FUNSK), on December 2, 1978, which led to the eventual toppling of the Khmer Rouge regime on January 7, 1979, should be commemorated. The youth population should be grateful for the CPP's role in returning personal freedom and material well-being that they are presently enjoying. For the CPP, these positive outcomes would have been impossible without a decision by Hun Sen, who was a regiment commander under the Khmer Rouge, to defect on June 20, 1977 in order to ask for assistance from Vietnam in overthrowing the regime. He was later joined by Heng Samrin and Chea Sim and their followers, on May 25, 1978.

Hun Sen's escape journey to Vietnam was documented in the English biography entitled *Strongman: The Extraordinary Life of Hun Sen* (Mehta and Mehta 2013). Before the July 2018 elections, in January 2018, the Press and Quick Reaction Unit, the Council of Ministers' media arm, released the English-subtitled documentary entitled *Marching Towards National Salvation* which added extraordinary details of the escape. Although the defection was initially motivated by survival, the documentary highlighted Hun Sen's bravery and sacrifice, driven by a divinely given mission. The prime minister revealed in the documentary and a Khmer-language biography (Chhay 2019)[20] a miraculous dream that occurred in his last sleep before heading to Vietnam. In the dream, he was shocked by repeated and deafening screams of an old man telling him to "leave immediately." The voice was said to be from a banyan tree inhabited by a *nak ta*, an ancestral spirit worshipped in the indigenous Khmer religion (see Mabbett and Chandler 1995, Chapter 9), and whom he said had been taking care of him. The defection was thus not simply an escape from death but also a mission blessed by supernatural power.

Glorifying foundation and liberation: What the UYFC does

The UYFC sought to extoll this historical event with the 40km into History (40 km ទៅកាន់ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រ) project. 40 km into History was initiated in October 2018 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of FUNSK's and the mass organization's foundation.

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It involved approximately 700 people taking a 40-km journey by foot to reach the historical site where FUNSK was formed, in Snoul District, Krati Province. The walk took four days, from November 29 to December 1, 2018. I argue that the event was designed to reinforce the liberation rhetoric with a physical experience to deepen participants' understanding of the past and hence increase their appreciation of the present benign situation.

The 40 km into History event was purported to socialize youth and, more importantly, to simulate the struggle experienced by CPP leaders. At the individual level, it was aimed to enable youth to discover their level of "patience" and "problem-solving capacity" (UYFC 2018d). Participants were expected to form friendships and develop team spirit via group activities such as trekking, singing, cooking, camping, storytelling, and playing musical instruments (UYFC 2018d). At the collective level, the energy-sapping event was intended to impart participants with the lived experience of the CPP leaders' escape from the Khmer Rouge. Participants, themselves incurring minor injuries through the walk, were encouraged to reflect on the strain and danger these leaders had to endure when venturing on landmine-ridden paths across the dense forest at night to avoid being seen and captured by Khmer Rouge soldiers (UYFC 2018a; 2018b). In resurrecting the past, it was hoped that participants could develop a greater appreciation of the present (ibid).

The event was creative because it substituted coercive transmission and uptake of indoctrinating propaganda with ordinary voluntaristic activities that enabled a gradual absorption of the more profound meaning implicit in the activities. To what extent such an outcome was achieved is unknown.[21] But the UYFC had a prototypical expression that it wished to see, as expressed by its president (Met 2018):

> I am exhausted, but I am not exhausted of thinking back to 40 years ago when our leadership sneaked through this field at night without knowing whether they would survive or die for the cause of liberating the nation from the Khmer Rouge's grip. I am exhausted, but I am walking on a road without landmines and in a circumstance full of peace. I know clearly that nothing will happen to me and other youths. In contrast, the previous generation leadership didn't have answers to these issues when they were walking down the same road. I am exhausted, but I know that my family and the whole Cambodian family are living well when I am walking down this road. In contrast, the previous generation of leadership wouldn't have the same feeling as I do now. But at the last moment, our leadership at that time could do it. What about our youth in this generation?

The 40 km into History event was a key element in the UYFC's broader initiative to popularize the notion of the "December 2 Spirit" (ស្មារតី ២ ធ្នូ), which was invented to propagate the CPP leaders' "voluntary," "devotional," and "altruistic" actions (Hun 2019). Defined as the prioritisation of national interests over self-interest, its members were encouraged to preserve and diffuse the spirit to prepare for "social chaos" and "risks" that may threaten Cambodia's "sovereignty" (Hun 2019). It was joined by other slogans such as "UYFC, One Spirit" (សសយក ស្មារតីតែមួយ) and "One Khmer, One Future" (ខ្មែរតែមួយអនាគតតែមួយ) (Hun 2019). Together, these can be understood

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as forming part of the UYFC's objective to forge a national community that transcends political polarization. This portrayal involved framing the CPP and its leaders as representing the interests of the Cambodian people in general, rather than those of the CPP supporters. This was reflected in nationalist terminologies such as *nation* (instead of *party*) and *our leaders* (instead of *party leaders*) in UYFC's discourse.

The UYFC's nationalist drive drew on the "usable past" of Sihanouk (see also Norén-Nilsson 2021a). This intention was evident in its public statements celebrating Sihanouk's legacy. Drawing on Sihanouk's call for "people from all walks of life to unite under the Constitution and state laws to protect and develop the motherland" (UYFC 2018c), youth were urged to circumvent confrontational politics and instead realize their aspirations in a stable political order established and sustained by the CPP government (Hun 2019). I make sense of this effort as follows: For the UYFC, if the Independence Day of November 9 is celebrated as a national holiday because sovereignty is an undisputable national triumph that belongs to all Cambodians regardless of their political affiliation, then January 7––which the CPP considers to be the Cambodian people's 'second birthday'––should be celebrated with as much enthusiasm. Similarly, if the former king is revered as the Father of Independence for his role in the struggle for sovereignty, Hun Sen and other CPP leaders should deserve similar heroic status for liberating Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge.

In invoking Sihanouk, UYFC rationalizes its determination to counter "incitements or attempts to disrupt peace, social stability, and public security that cause chaos and revolution in Cambodia" as the preservation of not only the CPP's but also Sihanouk's legacy (UYFC 2017). This approach was a fundamental part of its strategic plan construed as serving the "cause of the motherland" (បុព្វហេតុជាតិមាតុភូមិ) (UYFC 2017). The UYFC's strategy can be understood as an attempt to harness Sihanouk's legacy by weaving liberation from the Khmer Rouge with independence from the French to form a singular historical process that it says gave Cambodia the opportunity for "self-determination" (UYFC 2018c).

Peace and stability: What the CPP claims

The other overarching theme of the legitimacy claims is the integration of remnants of the Khmer Rouge regime, leading to a complete end of civil war and the ensuing political stability. Following the CNRP's ostracization in more recent times, the CPP stepped up the peace narrative through the "Thank You Peace" (អរគុណសន្តិភាព) slogan drummed up by Hun Sen and imprinted on banners displayed on government buildings across the country.

In addition to glorifying its achievement, the CPP focused on attacking supposed challengers of the legacy. The blaming of the political opposition reached a new height amid the Arab Spring, the anti-government popular uprisings that ousted multiple dictators in the Middle East and North Africa in the early 2010s. The instability caused by the unrest provided the materials on which the regime drew to replenish its legitimacy claims. Indeed, how the anti-government mobilization plunged countries such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen into civil war played into the CPP's hands.

Government propaganda highlighted the political stability and economic progress the country had made since 1979 to contrast with war-torn countries in the Middle

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East. A CPP editorial likened the mass uprisings to "the most dangerous virus in the 21st century" that had to be eliminated (Lor 2016). The overall message was that only by keeping the CPP in power could Cambodia avoid the fate of these countries. Regime change was considered a perilous game that was already vindicated by the Khmer Rouge's revolution. The Arab Spring's disastrous aftermath only served as a powerful reminder of how things could go wrong.

Glorifying peace and stability: What the UYFC does

Angkor Sankranta (អង្គរសង្ក្រាន្ត) is the UYFC's signature project to exalt political stability. The event has been held every year since 2013[22] to celebrate Khmer New Year in the area surrounding the famed Angkor Wat temple in Siem Reap province. Khmer New Year is Cambodia's biggest festival and is celebrated over three days, from April 14 to 16. Yet it is also a time that evokes tormenting memory. As former Prime Minister Pen Sovann ruminated, "[e]very New Year, people remember April 17, 1975, because less than 48 hours after greeting the New Year deity, the Khmer Rouge began treating the Khmer people as their enemies" (Pin 2007). The celebration of Angkor Sankranta signifies a sharp rupture from the Khmer Rouge-tainted memory and highlights the CPP's achievement in reviving time-honored social institutions.

I argue that this mass event is organized to achieve symbolic, collective triumphs to generate excitement and inspire a positive outlook on the CPP rule. A "promised land" narrative based on political stability and economic performance allows the CPP to "connect the regime's continued rule to a brighter future and allow it to legitimize … repression on the grounds that they have meaning and purpose" (Dukalskis 2017, 69). Angkor Sankranta's function is to augment the material manifestation of a brighter future with the production of nationalist symbols to, as Wallace (2019) notes, "[get] young people excited about [Hun Sen's] aging regime."

Angkor Sankranta is an exemplary demonstration of the UYFC's organizational power. The initial event in 2013 by the UYFC made possible the amalgamation of 2,500 student volunteers and tens of thousands of holiday-goers in Cambodia's center of past glory and symbol of national pride, where they took part in more than two dozen cultural events such as traditional games, oxen and water-buffalo racing, parades, martial arts performance, traditional dance, lantern floating, and more (UYFC 2020).

Mass spectacles were a major feature of Angkor Sankranta. These were extravagant performances and crafts aimed to stimulate the feeling of "national pride" through external validation. Two Guinness World Records were set in the 2015 Angkor Sankranta—the world's biggest sticky-rice cake and the largest performance of the Madison dance. Angkor Sankranta's success led to the formation of "GOGO Cambodia'" in the following year, which continued the enactment of mass spectacles beyond the framework of Angkor Sankranta. GOGO Cambodia described itself as:

> a national campaign aiming to mobilize Cambodian pride in various sectors from education to national defence and translate the will to a platform whereby every single Cambodian can show his/her individual pride as a Cambodian and Cambodia's pride at large to the international community.[23]

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Its first major achievement was another two world records—the world's longest *krama* (Cambodian scarf) (UYFC 2019) and the world's longest dragon boat (UYFC 2018e).

The performance of mass spectacles was framed around two themes: gratitude and national pride. The UYFC promotes the virtue of gratitude for peace by grounding it in the universally valued Khmer culture. I advance the claim that cultural values are crucial for the UYFC's legitimation effort because they can normalize gratitude for the CPP rule based on the grounds that it is *the right thing to do*. In this sense, supporting the CPP is an act of upholding a moral code rather than an act driven by the impetus that Cambodian people owe the CPP an existential debt.

This new propaganda was based on a deference-oriented interpretation of the Khmer culture. The framing was evident in a documentary on Angkor Sankranta released in June 2020 (UYFC 2020). Entitled *The Making of Angkor Sankranta*, the documentary opened with a brief introduction to the Khmer culture, elaborated on by cultural scholars and religious practitioners. The emphasis was on its religious foundation, which has deep roots in Hinduism and spiritualism despite the state patronage of Buddhism. According to these experts, given the Hindu belief systems, artistic manifestations of the Khmer culture, such as music, dance, architecture, painting, and carving serve—like Cambodia's great monuments—as "tributes" (កង្ហាយ) to deities. This practice, they claim, renders the Khmer culture a "culture of piety" (វប្បធម៌កតញ្ញូ) popularized by the Khmer proverbs '*appreciate the source when drinking water; appreciate the grower when shielding under a tree*' (ផឹកទឹកឱ្យនឹកដល់ប្រភព ជ្រកម្លប់ឱ្យនឹកដល់អ្នកដាំ). The message conveyed by this introduction was that the expression of gratitude reflects the Cambodian people's "morality" (សីលធម៌).

Although the UYFC has placed faith in the persuasive power of the Khmer culture's conservatism, it has also adapted to emergent values by promoting the notion of national pride. Represented by the slogan "Khmer Can Do It" (ខ្មែរធ្វើបាន), it is purported to project "positivity" (ភាពវិជ្ជមាន) onto the society (Hun 2019). I reason that, unlike occasions where youth are *consumers* of CPP-sponsored outcomes, employing national pride as the basis for collective action is intended to reconstitute them as *co-producers*. The outcomes then can be justified as national achievements worthy of protection not only from the ruling party but also from the youth themselves. In this sense, UYFC's activities are akin to "[creating] practices in which citizens are themselves 'accomplices'" (Wedeen 1999, 6), participating in sustaining the ruling party's idealized version of peace.

The unfinished business of regime legitimation

In future-proofing CPP rule, the UYFC's primary mission is to make the ruling party's legitimacy claims more appealing to the younger population through the organization of pro-regime events and the promotion of pro-regime messages. Both 40 km into History and Angkor Sankranta sought to tap into the monarchy, culture, and nationalism to construct the image of a benevolent CPP leadership and Cambodia under the CPP rule as a "promised land" full of progress and hope. In other words, the events conveyed the message that the party deserves to rule and the country stands to flourish as a result. In a context where competitive elections

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no longer exist, which would enable the ruling party to grasp its level of support and hence the effectiveness of state mobilization, an influx of young people joining the UYFC without elaborate recruitment is perhaps one proxy indicator of the extent people buy into its propaganda.

In their assessment, opposition politicians and civil society activists cast doubt on how much success the UYFC can achieve. For example, an opposition politician mentioned that the UYFC's mobilization is only attractive to youths who possess no prior experience of political socialization through civil society organizations or political parties. They are more likely to identify with the CPP or the national causes it promotes due to the opportunities to engage in various UYFC activities and the benefits these opportunities offer. He believes that the same benefits would not tempt young people who support the opposition parties. To them, if they joined the UYFC, it would be like joining the CPP. For this reason, he claims that the new source of support for the party can only come from young people without exposure to politics.[24] Other civil society activists raise the idea that the CPP does not expect tangible gains from the UYFC's mobilization in the short term. One activist expresses the view that even without an explicit display of support, the CPP would claim success if the UYFC's mobilization succeeds in forestalling the emergence of a consolidated anti-regime youth movement.[25] In other words, if support is not immediately achievable, the ruling party can lower the bar and settle for compliance—that is, restraint from protesting the government. Another activist stresses the CPP's uncertainty of the level of support it can generate from the UYFC's mobilization, reasoning that "if the UYFC was strong, the CNRP wouldn't have been dissolved."[26]

The doubt aside, assessing the success of state mobilization empirically in the context of Cambodia is challenging given the nature of the threat to which it responds. A threat is latent precisely because it is difficult to make a conclusion about its exact magnitude or its eventual manifestation. It may evolve into a more acute threat, or it may remain indefinitely latent. Under these conditions, an intervention such as state mobilization is based on imperfect information and carried out for pre-emptive purposes and is thus very much a *work in progress*, and we cannot conclusively determine the success of something that has not yet been completed.

Alternatively, the evaluation of the success of the UYFC's mobilization can move away from a focus on the outcome to taking into consideration the process: the fact that the CPP has started to take the latent threat more seriously than a decade ago as Hughes (2015, 13) notes in her analysis of the 2013 elections, which reflects its sophistication. Assessing the trajectory and severity of a latent threat is a subjective process full of uncertainties, and some regimes miscalculated and suffered like the historical cases examined by Kuran (1989, 44), whereby general disorders in the lead-up to crisis outbreaks were dismissed or downplayed as "too weak," "nothing serious," or "a minor disturbance" because the assessment was clouded by regime strength. Yet some are more sensitive and cautious, consciously detecting public expressions of frustration. They then make strategic use of this monitoring to more accurately gauge their level of support and revise government policies to improve their governance capacity and thus avoid the threat deepening (see Morgenbesser 2020). If the situation turns out to be overestimated, the regime loses valuable resources to excessive investment. But, like rehearsing a fire evacuation, the regime

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can benefit from enhanced readiness that should serve it well if a crisis does break out in the future. In other words, smart authoritarian regimes prefer to err on the side of overpreparation rather than take a latent threat in stride and be caught by surprise by a crisis outbreak.

Conclusion

The case of Cambodia has shown that besides being a repressive strategy designed to counter manifest threats as emphasized in the literature, state mobilization is also employed as a legitimation strategy intended to deter latent threats. I highlighted the CPP regime's proactivity, that of deploying state mobilization when it is not under immediate existential threats. By incorporating the possibility of authoritarian proactivity, we can better understand why authoritarian regimes mobilize their supporters and ordinary citizens even when coup risk is low and political opposition is weak. In the case of Cambodia, despite the unlikelihood of a mass uprising or military coup, a disappointing election result due to growing opposition support from the younger members of the electorate was enough to spur youth mobilization to regenerate the regime's legitimacy narrative. In short, state mobilization is a strategy in reaction to as well as in anticipation of threats to regime survival.

This study joins previous research in bringing attention back to citizen mobilization as a ruling strategy in authoritarian regimes. A crucial dimension in Linz's (1970) conceptualization of authoritarianism, mobilization has not received as much attention as other dimensions, such as institutional manipulation, in analyzing contemporary authoritarian regimes. Assessing the growing interest in authoritarian elections against Linz's dimensions of authoritarianism (i.e., pluralism, leadership, mobilization, and ideology), Snyder (2006, 220) argues that it enriches our understanding of the pluralism dimensions of authoritarianism, but "overlooks other fundamental dimensions that are critical for analyzing regimes." More recently, Frantz (2018, 89) suggests that we need to "dig deeper into the full range of institutions that dictatorships employ to maintain control." This article has taken the step towards this research direction. Enhancing knowledge of this classic authoritarian practice should refocus our attention on the authoritarian-looking features of authoritarian regimes after the sweeping interest in their democratic-looking features in recent decades (Art 2012).

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Notes

1. The CPP's official youth wing is the Central Youth CPP. For state mobilization in Cambodia before the CPP regime, see Raffin 2012.
2. I use the term "state" broadly to refer to the political institutions controlled by the regime, including the state bureaucracy, the police and other coercive forces, the legislature, and the judiciary. These institutions constitute the regime's infrastructural power or its capacity to penetrate society to implement policies or exert authority more broadly (Mann 1984). The term *state*, instead of *regime*, is emphasized because

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state mobilization is a broad political process not necessarily the exclusive arena for regime actors. It can also be organized by the regime's appointed agents working in the state apparatus. Thus, state mobilization captures the activities performed by regime as well as state actors.

3. The civilian organizations at the heart of state mobilization are distinct from military organizations. Although members in these civilian organizations may be armed to execute their missions, these organizations should not be conflated with armed groups such as paramilitary forces or militias (see Böhmelt and Clayton 2018).

4. To be sure, *Ruling by Other Means* is not a book concerned only with repressive forms of state mobilization, and Ekiert and Perry's typology is more encompassing. Besides what has been discussed above, state-mobilized movements rein in "local or regional authorities or as a tool of factional *intra-state conflict* and struggle," undertake "*infrastructural development* to accomplish tasks that are not easy to carry out by routine bureaucratic policy implementation strategies," and advance the regime's agenda on the international stage to "support territorial claims, destabilize international adversaries, or otherwise advance geostrategic interests" (Ekiert and Perry 2020, 9). Yet, it is clear that repressive forms of state mobilization, either reactive or proactive, are the core theme of *Ruling by Other Means:* seven of the 12 empirical chapters analyze this form of state mobilization.

5. The level of mass event is measured by the variable "mobilization for autocracy" and the level of mass organization by the variable "engagement in state-administered mass organizations" in the V-Dem v10 dataset.

6. The UYFC's constitution does not specify the age limit of its members. But it is safe to assume that it follows the CPP which defines youth as those between the age of 18 and 40.

7. Interview, December 22, 2019, Phnom Penh.

8. The CPP, then known as the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party, led Cambodia under a communist rule between 1979 and 1991.

9. Interview, December 24, 2019, Phnom Penh.

10. They held role as members of the National Assembly and chief of the National Election Committee.

11. He was made deputy president of YAC one year before it was reconstituted as UYFC.

12. Interview, January 5, 2020, Phnom Penh.

13. UYFC had four other deputy presidents.

14. The hierarchy of central ministry is as follows: minister, secretary of state, undersecretary of state, director general/director, deputy direct general/director.

15. For further analysis of the elections see Hughes (2015) and Un (2015).

16. FUNCIPEC is a French acronym for Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique et Cooperatif (the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia).

17. Soon after the CNRP's establishment, Hun Sen downplayed the party's impact likening it to "a storm in the jar" (ព្យុះក្នុងក្អម).

18. Despite the deadly suppression in the capital city, worker unrest broke out elsewhere, indicating that there was a limit to the extent state repression could exert control over labor (Ford, Gillan, and Ward 2020, 7).

19. The terms "silent society" and "articulate society" are borrowed from Jowitt (1975).

20. This account is not included in his English-language biography.

21. A UYFC official said the organization does not have a policy to measure the success of its activities. Interview, December 20, 2019, Phnom Penh.

22. The planned 2020 and 2021 events were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

23. See the Facebook page of GOGO Cambodia at www.facebook.com/gogocambodiaofficial.

24. Interview, December 29, 2019, Phnom Penh.

25. Interview, December 22, 2019, Phnom Penh.

26. Interview, December 17, 2019, Phnom Penh.

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