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Trends. The July 26 Elections: Ignoring the Political Psychology of Cambodia

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Monitors of political, civil, and human rights have been bemoaning the significant electoral violations perpetrated by supporters of Second Prime Minister (and de facto ruler) Hun Sen in the run-up to the July 26 Cambodian elections. These observers report that opponents of Hun Sen have been threatened, tortured, disappeared, and killed.

In response, statements by Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk, volunteer Cambodian election observers, and representatives of the United Nations and two United States organizations (the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute) seemingly seek to reassure Cambodian citizens that their votes will still remain secret, be counted accurately, and count for something--i.e., be respected and lead to congruent political consequences.

These reassurances ignore the recent political psychology of Cambodian electoral history. For example, the 1993 Cambodian elections that were heavily created, funded, and monitored by the United Nations were won by Prince Norodom Ranariddh. The loser, Hun Sen, demanded entry into the government through threat of violence. He was made Second Prime Minister in a political capitulation by Ranariddh and the United Nations. The political "cohabitation" was followed by a violent coup that resulted in the deaths of supporters of Ranariddh and the functional removal of Ranariddh from power. In fact, Ranariddh could re-enter Cambodia only on penalty of arrest.

The vital question, then, is not the nature of the voting but its consequences. If Hun Sen wins, he wins. If Hun Sen loses, he wins. The issue of the election's fairness is moot. The election's aftermath seems inevitable. Is this the democracy reaped from what the United Nations has sown? (See Cohen, D. (1996). Law, social policy, and violence: The impact of regional cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 961-978; Crossette, B. (July 15, 1998). Cambodian government tries to bully voters, U.N. is told. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Dull, R.T., & Wint, A.V.N. (1997). Criminal victimization and its effect on fear of crime and justice attitudes. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 12, 748-758; Jack, R.A., Nicassio, P.M., & West, W.S. (1984). Acute paranoid disorder in a Southeast Asian refugee. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 172, 495-497; Markusen, E. (1992). Comprehending the Cambodian genocide: An application of Robert Jay Lifton's model of genocidal killing. *Psychohistory Review*, 20, 145-169; Rozee, P.D., & Van Boemel, G. (1989). The psychological effects of war trauma and abuse on older Cambodian refugee women. *Women and Therapy*, 8, 23-50.) (Keywords: Cambodia, Corruption, Elections, Hun Sen, Political Violence, Violence.)