

# **Democratic Reversal in Cambodia: Counter-movement and Shifting Dependency**

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In 2017, the Cambodian government dismantled the Cambodian National Rescue Party, clamped down on civil liberties and organized elections in 2018 without the presence of a credible opposition party. The presentation examines the reasons underlying the government's decision to close down democratic space by focusing on the following arguments. First, the presence of some semblance of democracy in Cambodia was the outcome of the Western community's pressure through its granting financial assistance and preferential trade access to Cambodia. So long as this order permitted the Cambodian People's Party to maintain its domination, it conceded to Western demands. Second, by the 2013 elections, key socio-economic and political changes culminated in a counter-movement to the CPP's patronage-based politics. When the CPP felt that its grip on power was threatened, it instituted hegemonic electoral authoritarianism. Third, since Cambodia's democracy is a product of Western intervention and continued engagement, Cambodia's recent return to authoritarianism can to great extent be attributed to China's role as a counter-leverage to Western pressure.

**Kheang Un** (Ph.D. Northern Illinois University) is an associate professor of Political Science. His teaching and research interests include democracy, democratization, human rights, non-governmental organizations and political economy focusing on Cambodia and the developing world. In 2008-2009 he was a visiting research fellow at the University of Louisville's Center for Asian Democracy; in 2010, he was a visiting scholar at the Netherlands' Royal Institute for Southeast Asian and the Caribbean Studies at Leiden University, and in 2011-12, he was a Fulbright Scholar based at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. He has consulted on issues of political economy, governance reform and democracy for the World Bank, the Department of International Development of the United Kingdom, AusAid, UNDP/the Cambodia Development Resource Institute, the United States Department of State and London-based Overseas Development Institute. He also serves as research advisor to the Cambodia Development Resource Institute and as a Board Member of Build Cambodia, a US based non-profit organization and an academic advisor for the Center for Khmer Studies, Cambodia. From 2008 to 2011, he was In-Country Coordinator for Tracking Development, a multidisciplinary and multi-country project based at Leiden University, examining the trajectory of development in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Through this project Dr. Un has developed comparative analysis of the politics and political economy of Uganda and Cambodia.

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**12:00 Noon**

**Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue**