

scholars and students interested in human rights, Myanmar, global contemporary art and performance art a means of accessing the complex entanglements of persecution, displacement and artistic practice.

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The Politics of Coercion: State and Regime Making in Cambodia.
By Neil Loughlin. Cornell University Press, 2024. 172 pp.

In 2023, the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) ran virtually uncontested in national elections for the second term in a row, marking the continuation of the party's four-decade dominance of politics in Cambodia and ushering in a generational transfer of power from long-standing Prime Minister Hun Sen to his son Hun Manet. The extraordinary durability of autocratic rule under Hun Sen and his allies begs the question: how has the CPP managed to maintain cohesion and sustain its dominance amid real contention and opposition?

In this book, Neil Loughlin offers a fresh perspective on the source of the CPP's dominance. Marshalling evidence from an impressive roster of high-level CPP interviewees and a variety of historical and contemporary sources, Loughlin contends that coercion constitutes the "entire architecture of the regime's authority over society" (p. 3). In positioning coercion as the primary explanatory variable in the CPP's four-decade rule, Loughlin pushes back against a substantial literature tracing the party's political success to its aggressive pursuit of vote-buying and clientelistic developmentalism. He further rejects the notion of the CPP as a mass-patronage organization, asserting instead that the party's origins in a period of violent conflict and as an externally imposed political force have rendered the CPP machine uniquely suited not to the delivery of rewards but to repression.

The book opens with a two-chapter overview of the origins and consolidation of the CPP from the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979 to the violent defeat of the royalist FUNCINPEC party in the late 1990s. In chapter 1, Loughlin provides a thorough account of the legacy of the CPP's origins under the Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime, pointing to the importance of military and intelligence institutions in the party's early survival and the corresponding lack of investment in societal embeddedness. As shown in chapter 2, the party's significant coercive and administrative power built up during the PRK period allowed the CPP to strong-arm its way into a power-sharing deal in 1993 and ultimately eliminate its royalist political opponents through a bloody coup in 1997. Through both episodes, Loughlin convincingly shows how the coercive apparatus proves decisive when the party's efforts to court citizens fail to deliver.

Chapter 3 offers the most compelling evidence for Loughlin's argument. Using the example of land-grabbing, Loughlin demonstrates that the CPP's demand for elite cohesion comes at the direct expense of the masses—stolen land provides the fuel for the CPP's coercive apparatus, which in turn deals with the consequential popular discontent by meting out violence. In revealing the zero-sum nature of the party's patronage strategy, Loughlin convincingly argues that the CPP's poor electoral performance in 2013 reflects not the waning effectiveness of mass clientelism, but a long-standing lack of regard for placating an electorate that previously had lacked a credible political alternative.

In chapter 4, Loughlin turns his attention to the CPP's legitimating narratives, arguing that the failure of the party's "patronage project" (p. 76) prompted the regime to resort to a variety of other tactics, ranging from the promulgation of new slogans like "Thank You, Peace" to the invocation of stability as a justification for the Constitutional Court's dissolution of the Cambodian National Rescue Party. Perhaps this is the chapter where Loughlin's analysis could have gone deeper. How are we to interpret the CPP's increasing reliance on lawfare and legitimation, rather than outright violence, to quash opponents?

The final two chapters round out the empirical analysis through detailed examinations of the CPP's management of the military forces and economic elite, respectively. Loughlin's impressive research tracing the shifting leadership of key coercive units provides compelling evidence for Hun Sen's cunning ability to secure his supremacy within the ruling alliance. In this way, chapter 5 constitutes a major empirical contribution, documenting the inner workings of notoriously opaque institutions. Chapter 6 maps the web of overlapping economic and political elites, demonstrating how the CPP's monopoly over much of the economy has married the fate of tycoons with that of party leaders. Together, chapters 5 and 6 offer tacit explanations for the enduring cohesion of the political elite, including the consolidation of powerful military forces under the Hun family and the need for elites to band together to resist calls for redistribution from a populace largely left behind amid Cambodia's recent economic growth. However, both explanations remain undertheorized, given that they were not anticipated by the theory of dominance proffered in the book's introduction.

If one were to identify a shortcoming of this comprehensive and meticulous book, it is perhaps that, in the absence of an overarching theoretical framework, the book's insights are largely confined to the Cambodian case. In this way, Loughlin eschews the opportunity to bring Cambodia into the larger political science literature on comparative autocracy. Notwithstanding its limited ambition in this regard, *The Politics of Coercion* offers a remarkably well-researched and compelling account of contemporary Cambodian politics and an important corrective to overdeterministic arguments privileging culture, personalism or neo-patrimonialism, rendering it required reading for students of Southeast Asia and autocracy alike.

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