Can education bring democracy to Cambodia?

A case study of the potential of Sweden's and the European Union's development assistance to Cambodia's education sector

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Abstract

This thesis utilises congruence analysis to investigate if education can be expected to contribute to democratisation in Cambodia, and if Sweden's and the EU's development assistance to Cambodia's education sector can be considered to contribute to democratisation. The study identifies six causal mechanisms in current literature that links education to democratisation. The conditions for each mechanism are compared with the situation in Cambodia. The results illustrate the uncertainty and limitations of available theory and empirical evidence.

According to theory, Cambodia's universal access to primary education, expansion of higher education, an emerging middle class and wide-spread access to internet and social media promote democratisation. However, considering the mixed findings in literature, the quality issues and poor academic outcomes which hamper Cambodia's education system, as well as the country's political and socio-economic context, it is difficult to establish with certainty that education is contributing to democratisation. The study finds that the impact of Swedish and European development assistance to education have been more limited than expected, mainly due to political and institutional factors. In all, while education provides opportunities for individuals, the effect on democratisation can be questioned.

Key words: democracy, democratisation, education, Cambodia, development assistance
Words: 9901

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CCHR	Cambodian Center for Human Rights
CFS	Child-Friendly Schools
COMFREL	Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia
CNRP	Cambodian National Rescue Party
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
EU	European Union
HRW	Human Rights Watch
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1 Introduction

"Education is education. The government realized that if they want to become a more advanced country, they need people with good education. And this also means more aware of their rights, the values of the country, a say in what they want for the future."

The quote comes from the head of the political department at the EU delegation in Phnom Penh, who I interviewed in 2019. We talked about how the European Union could improve the human rights situation in Cambodia. In spite of decades of work promoting democracy through diplomacy, trade agreements and development cooperation, the country was becoming increasingly authoritarian. The diplomat explained that he did not believe liberalisation would occur under the current regime; instead he was hopeful that a younger generation would be able to bring change. The same sentiment is found in Swedish development assistance strategies, where aid to education and research has been maintained even as funding to other areas has been restricted as a consequence of the Cambodian regime's crackdown on political opposition (Regeringskansliet 2018, p 20).

Investment in the education system is a central part in the EU's and Sweden's development assistance to Cambodia. Education provides opportunities for individuals to improve their living standards, but is also expected to contribute to democratisation (SIDA 2020). Benavot (2002, p 52) writes that education in our time is regarded as a panacea to solve all kinds of societal issues. It is commonly assumed that education helps drive democracy, but the underlying mechanisms are rarely reflected on and articulated (Sanborn and Thyne 2014, p 774; Wells, 2008). So, is it realistic to believe that education can bring democracy, or is it an idealistic hope without scientific support? In this thesis I will analyse if, and how, education can be expected to contribute to democratisation in Cambodia based on current research. I will also evaluate whether the EU's and Sweden's development cooperation in the field of education is likely to support democratisation.

2   Research questions

In this thesis I aim to investigate if, according to theory, it is reasonable to believe that education can aid democratisation in Cambodia. I also want to find out if the EU's and Sweden's development assistance in the field of education can be said to contribute to democratisation. My research questions are:

How can education contribute to democratisation in Cambodia?

– *Through which mechanisms can education be expected to contribute to democratisation?*

– *Under what conditions can education be expected to contribute to democratisation, and to what extent are those conditions met in Cambodia?*

– *Is there theoretical and empirical support for the belief that Swedish and European development assistance to Cambodia contribute to democratisation?*

Thus, my goal is to look closer at a narrow segment of democratisation theory, and to analyse how education as a contributing factor can have effect in a case that has proven difficult for democratisation. Based on the analysis, I hope to draw conclusions about the efficiency of development assistance to education in terms of democracy promotion. A central purpose of the study is to contribute to a more nuanced and critical discourse. A connection between education and democracy is often assumed, but it is worth asking what support exists for such a connection. Even if education contributes to democratisation, the nature of the connection is rarely made explicit. Furthermore, education in the context of democratisation is often treated as single, unitary concept rather than a multifaceted, complex institution.

Although the main purpose is not theory development, findings about the usefulness of theoretical approaches can contribute to the scientific discourse (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p 32). The outcomes should also be of interest to development cooperation partners who wish to effectively contribute to democratisation.

I would like to emphasise that my objective is not to predict the likelihood of a democratisation process in Cambodia, or how democratisation would occur. It is not good research to attempt to predict the future and in addition, democratisation is a complex process involving a multitude of interacting factors and mechanisms of which education is only one (Grugel and Bishop 2014, p 3). Instead, I aim to

examine how theory on the effect of education on democratisation can be applied to the case of Cambodia and to the actions of donors of development assistance.

3   Method

3.1   Case studies and congruence analysis

Based on the research questions, I have chosen to conduct a theory-consuming case study using congruence analysis as described by Blatter and Haverland (2012). Democratisation is the subject of an array of theories, which appear to have varying explanatory power at different times in history and in different parts of the world (Edwards 1994). If we accept that democratisation does not follow the same path in all countries, it makes sense to study the conditions for democratisation on a state level using case study design (Sanborn and Thyne 2014, p 774). Furthermore, case studies allow for using a broader theoretical scope and studying empirical situations in more detail than large-N studies. They provide opportunity to study one or more causal mechanisms in depth, which suits the purpose of this thesis as I wish to analyse the applicability of multiple theories on the case of Cambodia (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p 7-8; George and Bennett 2005, p 21, 181). In addition, the research questions stem from a "real world" situation, namely the expectation that a new and better educated generation will be able to succeed where many other attempts to bring democracy to Cambodia have failed. Therefore, I am primarily interested in the case itself. While multiple-case studies has advantages such as opportunity to make comparisons, observe trends and draw generalizable conclusions, those are not central to this thesis.

Within the field of case study methods, congruence analysis is a good fit for the research questions. According to Blatter and Haverland (2012, p 144), congruence analysis is a means to elucidate and compare the explanatory power of competing or complementary theories. First, a number of theories is selected. Then, a set of expectations, predictions or implications is extracted from each theory. These are subsequently compared with empirical data so that conclusions can be drawn regarding each theory's strength or relevance for the case (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p 165). As I expect that education can contribute to democratisation in multiple ways, I assume that theories can complement each other to form a more comprehensive explanation (Sanborn and Thyne, 2014, p 792; Blatter and Haverland 2012, p 145).

3.2   Selecting theory and operationalisation of concepts

Choosing theories is a vital part of congruence analysis. In accordance with Blatter and Haverland's advice (2012, p 155, 169), I begun by studying the structure and content of the theoretical field of democratisation. This was vital as the literature is vast and the dominant discourse have shifted over time (section 4.1). Based on the literature review I have attempted to choose theories that are viewed as central and relevant with regards to the contemporary scientific discourse, and that provide a thorough overview of the field (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p 169). For the purpose of comprehensiveness and clarity, the analysis is organised by causal mechanisms. I have sought to include as many causal mechanism as possible. Considering the political situation in Cambodia (section 3.3), I have mainly chosen theories focusing on transition to democracy rather than theories explaining how democracy is upheld (Welzel 2009, p 75). I have chosen theories at a mid-range level of abstraction as they are expected to be most suitable for the research questions and method. Variations or similar mechanisms have in some cases been combined. Three separate mechanisms has been derived from modernisation theory.

The research questions and the method do not call for precise operationalisations, as would have been the case in a comparative study. Instead, congruence analysis requires justifying the results, interpretations and conclusions of the analysis (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p 165-166). Even so, the concepts of democracy and education should be mentioned. I am interested in finding as many ways as possible in which education can contribute to democracy. Therefore, I have chosen to use an inclusive definition of democracy that allows for both procedural and substantive democracy (Grugel and Bishop 2014, p 6). Regarding the concept of education, I have chosen to limit the study to formal education from primary to tertiary level. I have not found other forms of education (e.g. early years education, non-formal education) widely mentioned in democratisation literature, making this a logical choice.

3.3   The case of Cambodia

For this thesis I have chosen the case of Cambodia. While I am primarily interested in the case itself rather than contributing to theoretical development, the fact that Cambodia has shown to be a difficult case for democratisation and for democracy promotion through development assistance makes it relevant for this study (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p 178).

Cambodia, one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia, has for decades been the target of significant international efforts to reduce poverty and promote democratisation. After the Khmer Rouge era 1975-1979 and the following civil

war, the UN stepped in 1991 with the purpose of establishing stability and democratic rule (Paul 2013, p 41). Elections were held in 1993, but rather than ushering in democracy they became the beginning of Hun Sen's increasingly authoritarian rule which is characterised by neopatrimonialism and corruption (Baaz and Lilja 2014, p 12; Paul 2013, p 39-42). Billions of dollars have been injected into the country by international donors in order to strengthen institutions and support social and economic development. Although a large proportion of the population remain poor or economically vulnerable, Cambodia has experienced strong economic growth over the last decade. In the aftermath of the 2013 election, civil and political rights and liberties have been increasingly restricted.

Demographically, Cambodia has a very young population. 25% are younger than 15 years of age; 33% are 15-30 years (Eng and Hughes 2017, p 397; Chu and Welsh 2015, p 152) The education system, which was eradicated during the Khmer Rouge era, reaches nearly all primary aged children but the quality of education is low (Chhinh, Edwards Jr., Williams and Kitamura 2016, p 4). Freedom House gives Cambodia a score of 5/40 regarding political rights and 20/60 in civil liberties (Freedom House 2020). Donors have had to acknowledge that democratisation efforts so far has had little effect (European Commission 2020; Andersen, Larsson and Öjendal 2019).

In all, Cambodia is a difficult case for more than superficial democratisation in spite of economic growth, domestic efforts from opposition and civil society and international interventions (Andersen et al. 2019, p 22; Morgenbesser 2017, p 149; George and Bennett 2005, p 33). Considering the state of the Cambodian education system over the past decades (section 5.1), Cambodia might also be a difficult case for education to contribute to democratisation. Both the EU and Sweden has education as a sector for development assistance as well as democracy as a central goal for their aid to Cambodia. This makes it relevant to study what *could* contribute to democratisation.

3.4 Empirical sources

The empirical material for this study consists of academic literature and publications such as programmes, plans and evaluations published online by the European Union, Sweden's Ministry for Foreign Affairs and SIDA. Additional information has been gathered from reputable sources such as UNDP and the World Bank, as well as from selected news media.

3.5 Previous research

Wells (2008) conducts a thoughtful review of theoretical and empirical literature on the role of education on democratisation, and concludes that the evidence for a link between the two is inconclusive. He finds that the available research rarely can be generalised to a wider context in place or time, and calls for more research on the effect of education in our era as well as further theoretical development of causal mechanisms.

I have not been able to find much research on the effect of development assistance to the education sector, and in particular not on the effect on democratisation. Andersen et al. (2019) have conducted a case study of education in their evaluation of Swedish democracy aid to Cambodia. Their analysis is based on a significantly more positive view of the links between education and democratisation than the ones this study has found (Andersen et al. 2019, p 107). Based on Swedish support for universal access to primary schooling and efforts to strengthen local school communities, Andersen et al. (2019, p 136) conclude that Swedish development aid is likely to have contributed to substantive and participatory democracy in Cambodia over the past decades. The findings are contingent on a belief that education leads to democratic values and increased participation.

Kelsall, Khieng, Chantha and Muy (2016) have investigated how politics and power relations have shaped the Cambodian education system. They outline how the characteristics of the Cambodian education system makes it resistant to change, whether from external parties or from progressive actors inside Cambodia. They also show how donors' efforts to reform Cambodian education often have had limited effect, due to fragmentation of aid, insufficient understanding of Cambodian institutions, and superficial implementation of projects.

4   Theory

4.1   Democratisation theory and education

Simply put, democratisation is the process by which democracy is introduced, deepened and sustained (Welzel 2009, p 74-75). How and why democratisation happens is the subject of a wide array of studies and literature covering a range of perspectives and theories. After the optimism created by a global increase in democracy at the end of the 20th century, political scientists are now trying to explain why many countries, like Cambodia, are resisting democratisation in spite of economic growth and democracy promotion by international actors (Berg-Schlosser 2009; Markoff 2009, p 66-67). Democratisation is now viewed as a non-linear, complex and often unpredictable process (Grugel and Bishop 2014, p 2; Carothers 2002, p 17-18; Edwards 1994).

Education is rarely mentioned in textbooks on democratisation and appears to have a marginal role in democratisation theory. The main exception is modernisation theory. Founded by Lipset in 1959, modernisation theory describes how economic growth drives expansion of education as well as changes in societal structures, resulting in democratisation (Grugel and Bishop 2014, p 76; Hoeffler, Bates and Fayad 2012, p 3). While the validity of modernisation theory in our era is debated, it forms the foundation for many links between education and democratisation in contemporary literature. Thus, modernisation theory is given significant room in this study (Barro 1999, p 159; Benavot, 1996, p 384).

The overall consensus in literature seems to be that education contributes to democratisation (Sanborn and Thyne, 2014; Wells, 2008; Feng and Zak, 1999). Prominent authors like Dahl and Lipset argued that education is close to a necessary condition for sustained democracy (Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson and Yared 2005, p 44; Benavot 1996, p 384). Empirical studies confirm that education is a factor in democratisation processes (Glaeser, Ponzetto and Schleifer, 2007; Feng and Zak, 1999). Alemán and Kim (2015) found that the effect of education is larger in poor countries, measured as GDP per capita. However, it is not difficult to find research that contradicts or qualifies the hypothesis that education contributes to democratisation, which indicates that the connection is not clear-cut. Acemoglu et al. (2005) found no empirical relation between increased education levels and tendency for democracy. Barro (1999) found correlation between primary school attainment and democracy, but did not detect any effect of secondary and tertiary education on democracy. Benavot (1996) found weak or inconsistent effect of education on democratisation 1965-

1980, but a strong positive effect of tertiary education 1980-1988. Regarding the empirical research one can also question if the correlation found in many studies truly implies causation (Wells 2008, p 111). In summary, although much of available literature appears to support that education contributes to democratisation, the nature of its role and the size of the effect seem difficult to establish.

4.2   Democratisation in education literature

In order to comprehensively cover the intersection between democratisation and education, I have also revisited education literature. The arguably most seminal works concerned with democracy are Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). Dewey argued that education can, and should, teach citizenship, democratic principles and abilities by allowing students to experience democratic practices in school (Sanborn and Thyne 2014, p 776; Parry 1994, p 55). Freire saw education as emancipatory and transformative, empowering individuals to become conscious of their social circumstances and to overcome oppression (Torres 1994, p 186-187). Both have had influence on modern pedagogy and pedagogical discourse, but I cannot find that either has direct impact or relevance for the academic field of democratisation. Peters and Jandrić (2017, p 210) write that Dewey's vision about participatory democracy founded in the classroom has been pushed aside by neoliberalism. Similarly, there is little political room for Freire's radical education, closely linked to Marxism. Democracy and student involvement are core principles in most modern curricula, but democratic schooling[1] in its pure form is of marginal importance. Furthermore, it appears educational research focuses on the individual and rarely seeks to measure effects on a national level. In this study I have not included theories from educationalists since I have been unable to find a clear connection to democratisation on a national level.

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[1] For a description of this concept, see Apple and Beane (1999) *Democratic schools: lessons from the chalk face.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press

4.3 Causal mechanisms in this study

Based on a review of literature, I have chosen to include the following six causal mechanisms. Each will be outlined and analysed in the context of the case of Cambodia in section 5.

Mechanisms derived from modernization theory:

- *Socialisation and pro-democratic values*: Through education, individuals develop democratic values, motivation and ability to engage politically
- *Information and communication*: Education creates well-informed, politically aware citizens who are able to mobilise for democracy
- *Middle class formation*: Economic growth leads to the development of a middle class, who raises the demand for democracy

Other mechanisms:

- *Intellectual elite*: A highly skilled elite is necessary for effective political leadership and institutions
- *Student exchange programs*: Experience of life in democratic societies provides individuals with the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to promote democracy at home
- *Student protest movements*: Student-led protests have shown to be a powerful force for political change

5 Analysis

5.1 Cambodia's education system

In this section I will provide an outline of Cambodia's education system as context for the following analysis.

The Cambodian education system remains heavily affected by the country's history. The Khmer Rouge regime 1975-1979 abolished education, and teachers and other intellectuals were persecuted or killed (Williams, Kitamura and Keng 2016a, p 170). Today, the education system is showing both strengths and weaknesses. Capacity has been expanded and nearly all children enrol in primary schooling. The literacy rate has risen rapidly, and is significantly higher among young people (UNESCO no date). Young Cambodians are better educated than older generations (Eng and Hughes 2017, p 399). However, severe issues remain. Teachers are poorly trained and underpaid, particularly rural schools lack basic resources, the student-teacher ratio is high and corruption is widespread (MoEYS 2018, p 133-134; Kelsall et al. 2016, p 7. 17-18). School dropout rates remain high (Millar 2018). Only one in four Cambodians over the age of 18 have completed grade 9, and only about one in ten complete grade 12 successfully (Chhinh et al. 2016, p 4; Edwards Jr., Zimmermann, Chhinh, Williams and Kitamura 2016, p 149).

Cambodian education remains traditional regarding values and pedagogy. While contemporary Western education seeks to create "active citizens for a democratic knowledge economy", a main goal of Cambodian education is to instil discipline and good character (Kelsall et al. 2016, p 13). Although the situation has improved over time, Cambodian education is still characterised by teacher-centred transmission of knowledge and rote learning, practices that have proven difficult to change (Prigent 2019, p 16; Ogisu 2016, p 60). Donor-funded efforts to improve and modernise pedagogy have had little impact on practices and learning outcomes, and educational outcomes remain low in all school levels (Kelsall et al. 2016, p 8, 14-15). PISA found in 2018 that only 5-10% of 15 year-old students displayed basic proficiency in reading comprehension, maths and science, indicating that 1.4-2.7% of all Cambodian 15 year-olds have reached basic proficiency (MoEYS 2018, p 28). Chhinh et al. (2016, p 4) state that young Cambodians leave school unprepared for higher studies and employment.

5.2 Mechanisms from modernisation theory

5.2.1 Socialisation and pro-democratic values

Socialisation theory posits that education socialises people to become democratic-minded citizens. Through schooling students learn values, attitudes and behaviours that are consistent with democracy (Wells 2008, p 106-107). According to Benavot (1996), this hypothesis has substantial empirical support. However, few studies on the socialising effects of education take the content and ethos of the school system into account. Using data from World Values Survey, Zhang (2015) found a correlation between education and liberal values. On the other hand, he also found that type of political system acts as a moderating variable, where education has a larger effect on citizens' liberal values in free societies than in autocracies. Thus, education can be expected to have limited impact on liberal values in the relatively authoritarian Cambodia. Harber and Mncube (2011) found in their study of South Africa that while education can contribute to pro-democratic values, it can also reproduce authoritarian values and traditions.

Some scholars argue that education not only promotes democratic values and enhances the individual's capacity to participate in political activities, but also leads to increased voting and other forms of political participation (Gorbunova 2011). Glaeser et al. (2007) hypothesise that schools teach individuals to interact and engage with each other socially, which would lead to increased political participation, voting and mobilisation and in turn favour democratisation over authoritarian regimes. They find a correlation between education and both political and apolitical civic engagement. Mattes and Luescher-Mamashela (2012) found a positive correlation between higher education and preference for democracy as well as for likeliness to hold critical views towards their government, but did not find that the students' preference for democracy presented itself in political participation. The theories assume that the spread of democratic values among individuals will have effect on democratisation on the national level (Benavot 1996, p 384). This assumption of causality between levels of analysis has been criticised by some researchers (Wells 2008, p 114).

Socialisation theory commonly advocates for mass education at primary levels, but studies also show effect at other levels of schooling. Wells (2008, p 107) describes the sentiment as "…at least a minimum amount of education", will socialise people to being good citizens even though more education is expected to have a greater effect. Mattes and Luescher-Mamashela (2012, p 162) found that pro-democratic attitudes increased with school level up to high school, but that tertiary education had little additional effect. Gorbunova (2011) found that particularly higher education was a predictor of pro-democratic attitudes and civic participation.

As outlined in section 5.1, nearly all Cambodian children have access to primary schooling. Young Cambodians are better educated than older generations (Eng and Hughes 2017, p 398). The average level of education is likely to continue to rise as a result of improved living standards and socio-economic policy goals. That would imply potential for increasing democratic values and participation. However, it is difficult to find literature on how the characteristics, quality and outcomes of a country's education system impacts political behaviour and democracy. It is difficult to believe that education consistently has the same outcomes regardless of school culture and curricula (Benavot 2002, p 55). Additionally, I have found little concern in theoretical democratisation literature for authoritarian regimes utilising the education system to inculcate values such as loyalty rather than democracy in its citizens, although this ought to be a concern.

Cambodia's education system appears inadequately equipped to instil democratic values. Efforts from the country's progressive Minister of Education, Hang Chuon Naron, as well as donors (sections 5.4 and 5.5) to improve resource allocation and teacher training has had limited impact. Likewise, introduction of alternative teaching strategies focused on developing critical thinking and creativity have met resistance (Black 2016; Kelsall et al. 2016, p 14-15). Even so, Cambodian youth act differently than their parents' and grandparents' generations. It is easy to imagine (but difficult to test) that an education system better prepared to meet modern expectations would not only make a difference for the individual students but also potentially have effects on a national level.

There is limited data available on the values and political engagement of Cambodian youth. An Asia Foundation survey in 2015 found that younger Cambodians were more critical of the government and had less trust in political institutions than older generations, and that the critique was linked to environmental issues, corruption and political oppression (Eng and Hughes 2017, p 401). Eng and Hughes describe Cambodia's youth as politically marginalised. While young people are to some extent active in NGO's and community-based organisations, the political system excludes most young people from political and economic power. Chu and Welsh (2015, p 153, 156) write that young people in Southeast Asia are less likely to vote, and that they resist joining traditional political organisations and patron-client networks. Young Cambodians benefit less from, and are less interested in, the ruling party's gift-giving practices (Vong and Hok 2018, p 229; Eng and Hughes 2017, p 405). Youth participation and representation in local and national politics is very low[2]. Chu and Welsh (2015, p 156) argue that young people simultaneously participate both more and less in politics; they are less active in traditional politics but at the same time has

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[2] COMFREL (2013, p 18) notes that out of three 'youth candidates' elected into parliament in 2013, one is Prime Minister Hun Sen's son and another is a son of the Minister of Interior. Aside from poor political representation for the country's youth, the example illustrates how the political elite grooms their children for positions of power.

widespread use of the internet led to new forms of political engagement and activism (section 5.2.2).

The 2013 national elections in Cambodia are often used as an example of the political potential of the country's youth[3] (Eng and Hughes 2017, p 396). They were the majority of the electorate, they were active in the campaigns leading up to the election and in the post-election protests and, judging by their support for the main opposition party CNRP, they wanted political change. Although no official data on youth turnout exists, surveys point to a relatively high interest in voting (Vong and Hok 2018, p 225). COMFREL found that 93.4% of youth claimed to have registered to vote in the upcoming election. A survey indicated that 70% of registered youth voters had voted, similar to overall voter turnout (COMFREL 2013, p 93). This would disprove the notion that young Cambodians are uninterested in voting. Huang, Su, Han and Weatherall (2017, p 550-551) suggest that citizens lose interest in voting (but may engage in other forms of activism or participation) if they do not believe that elections can bring real change. This hypothesis can help explain young people's engagement in the 2013 elections, when there was cautious but wide-spread belief that the election could result in political change.

In summary, there is some support for that the younger and better educated generations have other values and priorities, even though this may as much be a result of different life experiences as an outcome of education. It is difficult to draw conclusions on the comparatively well-educated youth's political interest and activity. Not much data is available, and the rapidly changing political situation has effect on the political space. External factors may impact political engagement. The topic would require more research, but it is worth reflecting on education as a vehicle for Cambodian youth to develop and enhance a political engagement they already possess, and that the quality of the education system is a relevant factor.

5.2.2 Information and communication theories

Another mechanism hypothesises that education contributes to democratisation not only by instilling democratic norms and values, but by enhancing people's cognitive skills. Improved literacy in a society enables more citizens to acquire information via mass media and allows them to interpret information more critically (Mattes and Luescher-Mamashela 2012, p 140). Better political awareness leads to demands for political influence (Benavot 1996, p 385). Furthermore, education equips people with skills to express themselves, to share their knowledge and to persuade (Glaeser et al. 2007, p 82). Mattes and Luescher-Mamashela (2012, p 140) write that education has been shown to be associated

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[3] The subsequent national elections in 2018 have been widely condemned. The ruling party (CPP) won all seats in the National Assembly as a result of the regime banning the major opposition party and utilizing the judicial system to criminalise its leaders and other regime critics (COMFREL 2018).

with higher interest in and knowledge of politics and higher consumption of newspapers as well as with various forms of political engagement. Their study of African students found that those with formal education are more pro-democracy, more knowledgeable about politics, more likely to use news media to acquire information, and more able to offer opinions in political matters. High school graduates displayed the same traits as university students, suggesting that the effects are established at lower levels of schooling. However, the study did not find support for higher participation in political activities among the students.

Both literacy rates and access to information are changing rapidly in Cambodia. Although reading comprehension skills remain low, the literacy rate has risen from 67% in 1998 to 80% in 2015. Among 15-24 year-olds, the literacy rate is 92% (MoEYS 2018, p 28; UNESCO no date). It is difficult to conclude that ability to read local newspapers would be associated with critical attitudes towards the government, as newspapers, radio and TV are controlled by the regime and critical media outlets have effectively been banned. However, Chu and Welsh (2015, p 153, 157-158) find that young people have more exposure to foreign news and ideas than older generations, and that they report higher political efficacy and sense of political empowerment than other cohorts. The efficacy is explained by higher levels of education, better access to information and more opportunities to build networks. The use of internet, smart phones and social media have spread quickly among young Cambodians. Smartphone ownership rose from 20% to 48% between 2013 and 2016 (Vong and Hok 2018, p 219). The internet is providing increasing numbers of people with opportunities to access and share information as well as discuss politics beyond the government's control (Morgenbesser 2017, p 142). Studies confirm that young Cambodians widely use the internet and social media to access news outlets such as Voice of America and Radio Free Asia, which offer information and perspectives unavailable in Cambodian media (Eng and Hughes 2017, p 402).

According to Vong and Hok (2018, p 230-231), while young people's use of Facebook displays a shift in the way they view the regime, it cannot realistically be expected to lead to major societal reforms or political change. They argue that Cambodian youth are neither apathetic or "slacktivists", nor is their use of social media likely to lead to political confrontation and street protests due to the risk of retribution. Instead, young Cambodians engage in "micro-activism", an online discourse that in the authors' opinion serves to increase both political awareness and conventional participation in e.g. elections. Chu and Welsh (2015, p 161) argue that Southeast Asian youth have yet to exercise their political power, but that their education, competence and ability to engage in politics in new ways provide them with the potential to be agents of democratic change.

The political opposition's ability to mobilise youth via social media became a central feature in the CNRP's campaigning leading up to the 2013 elections (Eng and Hughes 2017, p 396, 402; COMFREL 2013, p 39). The regime took longer to

grasp both the value of new technology and the threat it posed[4]. There are examples of Hun Sen making decisions in minor political matters based on suggestions submitted via Facebook but more significantly, the regime has begun using the judicial system to crack down on criticism on social media (Sun 2019; Vong and Hok 2018, p 226).

In conclusion, Cambodians are increasingly able to attain and use political information. It remains to be seen to what extent they are able to, and allowed, to utilize their knowledge and skills to mobilise for democratisation. An aspect that I have not been able to find any research on, but that seems worth bringing up in the context, is the increasing English language proficiency among young Cambodians. Considering the restrictions on domestic media, I would hypothesize that formal and informal education provides more and more young Cambodians with English language skills that enable them to use the internet to access foreign media and thereby more critical accounts of the political situation in Cambodia and abroad.

5.2.3 Middle class formation

Central to modernisation theory is a chain reaction where economic growth brings education to a wider segment of the population, leading to career opportunities, higher incomes and the formation and expansion of a middle class. The middle class is seen as a requirement for democratisation and political liberalisation, as it will have the resources to demand political freedom and influence (Paul 2013, p 3, 16; Kurzman and Leahey 2004, p 940). Mass education leads to a shift in the social order which can destabilise authoritarian regimes (Sanborn and Thyne 2014, p 776).

Recent developments have contradicted modernisation theory's claim that economic growth and development brings liberalisation. The foremost example is China, which has experienced exceptional growth and improvement in living standards under its authoritarian regime (Paul 2013, p 23). Paul (2013, p 17) provides examples of countries in Southeast Asia where the middle class has played a role in political liberalisation, but also warns that in cases where the middle class has strong ties to the regime, or where improved living standard keeps the middle class satisfied with status quo, this mechanism may not be viable. When education leads to improved quality and standard of living, individuals may be less interested in protesting against the government even if they disapprove of its policies (Dahlum and Wig 2019, p 9). Thus, the matter is not only if a sufficiently large middle class exists, but whether it has the motivation to seek political change.

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[4] A minor controversy broke out when local media reported that foreign "click farms" had been used to bolster the Prime Minister's popularity on Facebook (Turton 2016).

Cambodia is since 2015 classified as a lower middle income country, and the government's explicit goal is to continue the rapid growth of the country's economy (World Bank Group 2018, p 35). The poverty rate has fallen from 47.8% in 2007 to 13.5% in 2014, although a significant proportion of Cambodians still live near the poverty line (World Bank 2020a; Marshall 2017). According to various measures, 10-20% of Cambodians can be considered middle class (Morton and Kimsay, 2014). It is difficult to ascertain their effect on democracy. Chu and Welsh (2015, p 155) argue that young Southeast Asians have grown up in an era of strong economic growth, and expect more of their political leaders than older generations. On the other hand, many Cambodians still live by the motto *'first rice, then democracy'*, meaning that fundamental material needs must be met before one is concerned with politics (Strangio 2013). Paul (2013, p 29, 45) does not believe that the middle class in Southeast Asia is sufficiently large to pose a challenge for the region's authoritarian regimes, but that the situation may change with time and further growth. In summary, although there is an emerging middle class in Cambodia, a large part of the population is still in a precarious situation financially. I have not been able to find data to indicate whether higher standards of living has made the Cambodian middle class more or less inclined to demand democracy.

5.3 Other mechanisms

5.3.1 Intellectual elite

Higher education enables individuals to develop advanced analytical thinking skills. A country's future leaders are likely found at its universities. Sanborn and Thyne (2014, p 778) write that highly educated individuals are more interconnected and better able to analyse the world around them, compare the performance of their political leaders with that of other countries, and evaluate how best to accomplish change. Mattes and Luescher-Mamashela (2012, p 142) argue that democracy requires an intellectual elite that not only upholds democratic values but also has the skills required to effectively develop, lead and run the complex institutions of a democratic state. Such skills are commonly gained from higher education. While developed states almost always have a highly educated elite, this is rarely true for developing countries. Mattes and Luescher-Mamashela (2012, p 143) notice that there is little research on this condition for a functioning democracy. Kurzman and Leahey (2004) have shown that a country's intellectuals, defined as individuals with higher education, have effect on the likelihood of transition to democracy. Their study found that countries with higher proportions of intellectuals were more likely to democratise than countries with lower ratios.

Echoing the rest of Cambodia's education system, much has been done over the past decades to expand access, quality and management of higher education (Williams, Kitamura and Keng, 2016b). Tertiary education has expanded rapidly over the past decades, both in terms of enrolment and number of institutions (Williams et al. 2016a, p 176). The gross enrolment rate in tertiary education is 14% (World Bank 2020b). I have been unable to locate reliable data on completed tertiary education and attainment of academic degrees. Still, coordination and supervision of the country's 121 higher education institutions are weak (Sen, 2019). Williams et al. (2016a, p 180, 185) write that little information is available about the quality of higher education in Cambodia, but find that most faculty staff still have too limited training at graduate level to be able to research and teach effectively at university level. They conclude that although measures to improve higher education are underway, students graduate without necessarily acquiring the knowledge and skills employers expect. A World Bank study found that 73% of employers found university graduates unqualified for the available jobs (Black 2016). Thus, although the situation is improving it is reasonable to question if Cambodia has the intellectual elite needed to support democratisation.

The matter of how intellectuals influence Cambodia's institutions is potentially further complicated by the fact that the Cambodian political and administrative systems from the government to local level, are founded on patron-client relationships. Career opportunities are not primarily based on academic merits; power is instead distributed based on personal relationships, loyalty and monetary contributions (Fox 2008; Roberts 2002, p 525). Further research would be needed to explore if Cambodia's neopatrimonialism have effect on intellectuals' opportunities to reach positions of power, although the wealthy and powerful arguably also are the ones with the best access to education.

5.3.2 Student exchange programs

Another mechanism linking higher education to democratisation is via student exchange programs. By studying abroad and experiencing life in democratic societies, students bring knowledge, skills and attitudes to their home countries. Spilimbergo (2009) argues that Western countries utilise student exchange programs as a means of spreading democracy abroad. His quantitative study found a correlation between sending students to democratic countries and lagged[5] domestic democratic development, whereas the number of exchange students had little additional effect. Spilimbergo proposes a number of hypothetical causal mechanisms: a nation's leaders, often crucial for the democratisation process, are likely to come from the intellectual elite who are frequently educated abroad. Foreign-educated individuals may gain a lot of influence in countries where

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[5] The lag is intended to capture that the effect of foreign education on democratisation is not instant but takes time to develop.

higher education is scarce. Leaders educated abroad may wish for their country to keep up with the host country, and spread ideas from the host country at home. Individuals who have studied abroad may have easier access to foreign media as well as connections with foreign governments, which can be used to put pressure on autocratic regimes. Finally, foreign education can contribute to a sense of belonging to the international, democratic community. However, more research is required to establish the importance of such mechanisms (Spilimbergo 2009).

It is not easy to find data on the extent to which Cambodian students have access to exchange programs. According to UNESCO, the number of Cambodian internationally mobile tertiary students have risen from 4500 in 2013 to 6000 in 2017. Out of the 6000 students, about 1550 studied in Europe or North America (UIS no date). The European Union received 700 Cambodian students and staff through its Erasmus+ programme 2015-2019 (European Commission 2019). About ten Cambodian nationals are granted residence permit in Sweden for studies every year (Migrationsverket 2020). Given the shortcomings of the country's education system, wealthy Cambodians commonly send their children abroad for university education. Furthermore, as many Cambodians fled the country during the Khmer Rouge era and its aftermath, there exists a diaspora with experience both of Cambodia and the West (Chan 2018; Sok 2016). Prime Minister Hun Sen has little formal education but at least two of his children are educated abroad, among them his eldest son who is expected to succeed his father. Among the political opposition and prominent human rights organisations, leaders commonly have foreign education[6].

Overall, there is data to support that at least a small segment of Cambodian youth has access to higher education abroad and thus opportunity to experience democratic societies and gain ideas, competence and connections. Anecdotal evidence suggests that advocates for democracy often are educated abroad.

5.3.3 Student protest movements

High-profile student protest movements such as in Hong Kong, Tiananmen Square and during the Arab Spring have revitalised the idea that social movements for political change often originate from university campuses. Students are thought to be politically aware, critical of the government and skilled at mobilising and taking political action. They have motivation and opportunity for collective action. Thus, this form of mass mobilisation causally links education to democratisation according to Dahlum and Wig (2019) who found empirical support for the theory in their study of political protests in Africa.

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[6] For example Sam Rainsy, CNRP –France; Kem Sokha, CNRP –Czech Republic; Mu Sochua, CNRP – California; Ou Virak, Future Forum –California; Chak Sopheap, CCHR –Japan; Ou Ritthy, Politikoffee – India/Netherlands. Hang Chuon Naron, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport holds degrees from Ukraine, Russia, France and Thailand.

Glaeser et al. (2007, p 78) argue that student protest movements often have been influential in accomplishing political change, but that the evidence that students are interested in engaging in collective action regardless of ideational foundation is stronger than the evidence that they have a preference for democracy. Dahlum and Wig (2019, p 7) warn that the cost of protesting commonly is much higher in dictatorships than in democracies. Protests may be met with violence, arrests, or even death; risks that often deter political action. The cost for the participants is even higher if the movement has a low chance of success. For educated individuals the opportunity costs of participating in protest movements may be even higher (Dahlum, 2019, p 285). Huang et al. (2017, p 550) found that economic difficulties led people in authoritarian contexts to avoid political activism, reinforcing that the risks associated with political protests for many reasons may outweigh the benefits.

Southeast Asia has seen relatively few student protest movements. Chu and Welsh (2015, p 161) hypothesise that the economic growth has contributed to a relative absence of youth-led protests, as financial security makes young people less likely to participate in radical or violent social movements. This may be true in Cambodia, where many protest movements that do emerge engage poorer people in matters directly impacting their livelihood such as land rights or labour rights. The opportunity cost of participating in political protests have proven to be high. Although use of violence to crack down on opposition is less common than it used to be, it is not unusual. The regime also systematically uses the judicial system to silence political opponents, activists and critics (HRW 2020; Paul 2013, p 43). Political opposition is associated with high risk, which likely contributes to preventing the formation and spreading of protest movements.

5.4 The EU's development assistance to education in Cambodia

According to the EU, education plays an essential role in democracy as well as in poverty reduction (EEAS 2016). Education and skills development is one of three main areas for the EU's development cooperation with Cambodia, and receives a third of its budget (EU 2014, p 11). The EU contributed 241 million euro in development assistance to Cambodia's education sector 2002-2018 (Aid Atlas 2020). The EU's main strategy is to directly support the Cambodian government. Under the current budget support programme 2018-2021, 90% of the total 100 million euro is given to the government to support the implementation of the MoEYS's Education Strategic Plan (ESP). The EU's goals, in alignment with the ESP, are to increase equitable access to early childhood, primary and lower secondary education; to improve the quality of education measured as student learning outcomes; and to improve the efficiency and capacity of management in the education sector (EU 2014, p 14, 26).

An evaluation conducted in 2018 states that the EU's support has contributed to progress towards the ESP's goals, but that progress in many aspects has been slow and uneven. The budget support helped the government's reforms, but mainly in areas that were prioritised by the government. Equitable access to education has improved, in particular access to early childhood education (European Commission 2018, p 49). Although more students than before complete primary school, outcomes in terms of student enrolment, dropout rates and academic achievement were uneven and often weak (European Commission 2018, p x, 72).

5.5 Sweden's development assistance to education in Cambodia

Sweden has provided aid to Cambodia since the end of the Khmer Rouge era (Andersen et al. 2019, p 12). A main objective of the assistance is to promote democracy and human rights (Andersen et al. 2019, p 1). Sweden has contributed 87 million euro in development assistance to education in Cambodia 2002-2018 (Aid Atlas 2020). In 2019 Swedish aid amounted to 20 million euro, of which one third was designated for the education sector (Openaid no date). Education is regarded as a means for individuals to improve their opportunities in life but is also seen as essential for democratisation (Andersen et al. 2019, p 16, 23; SIDA 2017). Swedish development cooperation in the education sector has primarily been aimed at primary and lower secondary education, i.e. grades 1-9 (Andersen et al. 2019, p 106). The focus and forms have changed over time, and projects have achieved various levels of success. I will provide a few examples.

Andersen et al. (2019, p 132) write in their evaluation that aid during the late 90's and early 2000's contributed to the expansion of capacity that has allowed for Cambodia's near 100% primary school enrolment rate. Sweden has in particular contributed to increased access to education for girls and marginalised groups.

The Child-Friendly Schools programme (CFS) was initiated by UNICEF and SIDA in 2001 and expanded to national policy in 2007, with the purpose of addressing quality issues and poor academic outcomes. Among other aspects it includes equal access to education, child-centred, participatory pedagogy, and community involvement (Prigent 2019, p 8; Kelsall et al. 2016, p 15). Prigent (2019, p 9, 16) argues that CFS and similar programmes can be regarded as means to promote democratic values and children's empowerment, but that the values are unlikely to reach the students due to Cambodia's political culture. Evidence suggests that implementation of the programme has been superficial and had little effect on student learning (Kelsall et al. 2016, p 15).

School Improvement Grants were initiated in 2013 and currently accounts for half of Sweden's aid to education. The initiative aims to support capacity building

and provide operational funding at the school level, thus attempting to bypass corruption higher up in the education system and in the government as well as decentralising power to local communities (Prigent 2019, p 8; Openaid no date). While the goal has been to strengthen and empower local schools and communities, the school level councils receiving the funds have shown to have varying priorities, levels of competence and efficiency in improving the education they provide. In addition, they are vulnerable to being taken over by the ruling party. (Andersen et al. 2019, p 16, 129-130). Thus, the outcomes in terms of education quality are most likely limited. Andersen et al. (2019, p 19-20) conclude that Sweden's expectations for the outcomes of its assistance in terms of democratic value have not been realistic, and that more analysis of the political and cultural context is necessary for democracy promotion to be effective. Much focus has been placed on strengthening institutions, when in fact such efforts in authoritarian states may contribute to increasing the regime's control instead of driving democratisation.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Summary of results

It is commonly believed that education contributes to democracy. In this study I have used literature to identify six causal mechanisms for how education can contribute to democratisation. For each mechanism I have discussed to what extent its preconditions are evident in Cambodia today. Based on current research I cannot give a simple answer to if, or to what extent, education can bring democracy. However, I am able to provide a more nuanced picture of whether education has potential to contribute to democratisation, and how this may occur. A summary of the causal mechanisms and what speaks for and against the impact of each in the case of Cambodia can be found in Table 1. An important finding has been the uncertainty and contradictions that characterise the theoretical field and contemporary empirical research. This will be discussed in section 6.2. I have also compared the results with Sweden's and the EU's development cooperation in order to assess if their strategies to support Cambodia's education sector can be said to be aligned with literature. The conclusions can be found in section 6.3.

Table 1: Summary of causal mechanisms and their advantages and disadvantages in the case of Cambodia.

Mechanism	Advantages	Disadvantages
Socialisation and pro-democratic values	- Increased access to education - Increasing education levels in population - Youth holding different values, expectations than older generations	- Low educational outcomes - Traditional values underpin pedagogy - Current political climate may discourage participation
Information and communication theories	- Increasing literacy rates and access to education - Widespread internet access and use of social media	- Low educational outcomes - Unclear if information sharing leads to other forms of participation - Increasing risk for retribution from the regime
Middle class formation	- Rapid economic growth - Emerging middle class	- Middle class may still be too small - Contentment with improved living standards may outweigh political discontent
Intellectual elite	- Improved access to higher education - Increasing education levels - Government motivated to improve standard in order to support economic development	- Higher education capacity still relatively low - Questions about quality of education - Appointments to higher positions by personal connections and patron-client relationships
Student exchange programs	- Studies abroad common among elites - Many influential advocates for democracy are educated abroad	- Available to small segment of students
Student protest movement	- Student protests have recently gained much attention which may inspire action in more countries	- High risk of violence and legal retributions paired with low expectations of success may deter protesters

6.2 Limitations of existing theory and research

My main concern when planning this study was that the existing theory would not be sufficiently clear-cut or developed so as to allow for the identification of expectations that congruence analysis requires. George and Bennett (2005, p 182) warn that theory often lacks clarity and internal consistency, and cannot be tested in a rigorous manner. This concern has turned out to be valid on several levels. Due to limitations of existing theory, the analysis is perhaps not as rigorous I envisioned before starting the study.

Democratisation in itself is unpredictable, which is evident in literature. Recent events and research cast doubt on the validity of modernisation theory and the transition paradigm (Carothers 2002). Democratisation has proven to take different paths and be driven by different factors in different countries and eras. It is difficult to estimate the extent to which empirical evidence from other time periods and geographical settings can be applied to the context of this study. While much research supports a link between education and democracy, there are also contradictory results as well as a shortage of empirical studies and theory development. For example, theory often fails to explain how the causal mechanisms lead to a transition to democracy (Geddes 2018, p 595).

Furthermore, the lack of detail and specificity (e.g. use of 'education' as an entity) in theoretical literature on democratisation makes it difficult to assess the potential effect in the case of Cambodia, and there is not always empirical data to confirm its conclusions. On the other hand, numerous empirical studies find correlation between variables related to education and democratisation, but without being able to establish, develop and explain distinct causal mechanisms.

The study has revealed a lack of integration between literature on education and literature on democratisation. As Benavot (2002) outlines, it is difficult to empirically establish a causal chain from educational content to impact on society. Education research commonly focuses on effects on the individual. Political science and democratisation research commonly operates on a national level. Research often uses operationalisations like average numbers of years of schooling, or proportion of the population who have completed certain school levels, but rarely concerns itself with the content or quality of education (Gorbunova 2011, p 234). Does an education system that relies on traditional transmission of knowledge and root learning instil democratic values and skills? Does an education system where few students reach basic proficiency in reading comprehension produce information-savvy citizens? It is reasonable to assume that these factors have an impact on the outcomes of education both on individual and national level, and in turn on education's potential effect on democratisation.

In summary, the conclusions from the analysis in this study needs to be viewed with a high level of uncertainty in mind. It cannot be taken for granted that

education brings, or contributes to, democratisation. The analysis shows how education can potentially promote democratisation, based on the premises in literature. A cautious conclusion is that depending on the circumstances, education may play a role in democratisation as the dynamic between the citizens and the autocratic regime shifts. However, there is little to suggest that education is a sufficient condition for democratisation or a cure or solution for autocracy. It is easy to agree with Wells (2008, p 115) that the causal mechanisms are too complex and not sufficiently researched to establish a link between education and democratisation, and that education currently is better viewed as benefitting the individual than as a means for democratisation.

6.3   A challenge for donors

Considering the uncertainty in the causal connection between education and democratisation, as well as shortcomings in expected outcomes of Sweden's and the EU's development assistance to the Cambodian education sector, donors might want to be careful in their expectations. Both Sweden and the EU have over a long period of time contributed significant sums to the Cambodian education sector. Both have focussed their support on primary and lower secondary education, which primarily aligns with the idea of mass education in modernisation theory. Considering all the causal mechanisms in this study, it could be argued that tertiary education also should be of interest to donors. On the other hand, good primary and secondary education are prerequisites for effective higher education. Additionally, support for higher education is likely to benefit fewer individuals than support for primary and secondary education. Overall, it seems a reasonable decision to focus spending on lower levels of schooling. The study has shown, however, that the strategy and effectiveness of the development assistance are as important for its impact as which education level it supports.

The EU has chosen to channel much of its funding to the Cambodian government to support the regime in its policies, while Sweden is directing its funds directly to the local level. Both strategies come with their own logic and risks. The EU risks contributing to funding a corrupt and autocratic regime, with limited control over objectives and implementation (Paul 2013, p 43). Sweden's attempts to empower local institutions finds support in Carothers (2002, p 19), who suggests democratisation promotion in dominant power-regimes like Cambodia should help build alternative power centres. However, the effectiveness of the institutions varies and they are susceptible to being taken over by the regime.

Efforts to reform pedagogy have had limited success. Traditional Cambodian school culture and pedagogy, as well as organisational culture on local and national level, have been resistant to change, and the values donors wish to instil rarely seem to reach the students (Prigent 2019, p 16; Reimer 2012). Evaluations show that although both donors have contributed to the expansion of the education

system, their development assistance has in many instances not been as effective as expected. A cautious conclusion would be that Sweden and the EU has had some impact on education in Cambodia, but that their impact is significantly restricted by the regime's interests, limitations in institutions and Cambodia's political culture. There are good reasons to improve the Cambodian education system, but the justification for doing so should probably focus on improving the lives of individuals rather than on democracy.

6.4 Generalisability and suggestions for further research

Results from case studies are not always generalisable, and the purpose of this study has been to learn more about the case of Cambodia rather than to draw conclusions that are valid in a larger context. Even so, I believe the results can be of interest for those interested in democratisation and in development assistance (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p 32). Foremost, both the review of existing literature and the analysis in the context of the case suggest that the effect of education on democracy and democratisation is highly situational. Further case studies, perhaps in particular of recently democratised countries, could shed more light on the role of education.

Democratisation is in itself an uncertain process, and it is easy to find contradictory findings regarding a link between education and democratisation. This study shows the difficulty in assessing the potential impact of education. While Cambodia may be a difficult case, many other developing countries are likely in a politically and economically similar situation. Donors of development assistance and other interested parties ought to not take the effect of education on democratisation for granted, but further seek to evaluate the impact of their funding and other support. The causal mechanisms described in this study would benefit from further research, both in terms of their potential impact and in terms of under what conditions they have the most effect.

6.5 Looking to the future

Unsurprisingly, I will not attempt to predict the future for democratisation in Cambodia. Arguing that democratisation is unlikely to occur, Carothers (2002), states that many countries remain in the "grey zone" between democracy and autocracy. It does not seem possible to establish a set of conditions (e.g. education) that, when fulfilled, lead to democracy. Furthermore, according to Carothers (2002, p 13), dominant-power regimes such as Cambodia's are often politically stable over time as opposition is suppressed. Considering Cambodia's political development, Carother's argument is convincing.

On the other hand, ongoing structural changes in Cambodia may lead to political change. Literacy rates are going up, affordable mobile technology is rapidly providing more people with better access to information, and economic growth is raising living standards although inequality remains a problem. Very interesting, but from what I can tell not discussed in literature, is the potential combined effect of demography and education on democratisation. Nearly two thirds of Cambodia's population is under 30 years of age. Chu and Welsh (2015, p 152) argue that young people in Southeast Asia are putting political pressure on their leaders merely by their numbers. Cambodia's youth are shaped by different experiences than older generations. They are accustomed to economic growth, they have grown up in a time of flawed, but regular, elections and a multi-party system, and they set higher expectations for their country's political leadership (Eng and Hughes 2017, p 397).

There is a lack of research on the effect of education quality on democratisation, but if we hypothesise that poor academic outcomes is an obstacle in Cambodia there might still be hope. Inadequate education has become an obstacle to the regime's goals for the country's long-term economic development. A World Bank study found that 73% of employers found university graduates unqualified for the available jobs (Black 2016). The regime is aware that the education system is not creating the competent, qualified workforce Cambodia will need in the future, and economic policy is likely to drive education reform. Sanborn and Thyne (2014, p 775) argue that the balancing act that is educating a skilled workforce without creating a population that demands democracy has not rarely lead to the downfall of autocratic regimes. If Cambodia's education system provides its youth with tools for political action, and national and international actors can find ways to open up the country's political space, the future will be interesting indeed.

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