



HS031

## Decreasing Voting Turnout and Increasing Youth Population in Cambodia

Kotaro Minamikawa<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In Cambodia, there had been five times of national elections since Paris Peace Agreement. Each of them marked high voting turnout. However, it had been decreasing since 1998 in which marked highest turnout. There indicated many factors which might have negative influence on turnout. Especially, this research focused on demographic change which solidly increasing ratio of youth population within total. In addition, previous research found lower interest of youth in politics. Many of other factors were not new, but rather improving. Therefore demographic change can be said as a significant factor of decreasing turnout. At the first election in 1993, UNTAC had tried hard to educate people in political participation, and then the people became habitual voters. However it seems that the influence is getting expired. Thus, when considering increasing youth population and generational change, education will be more important.

**Keywords:** Voting Turnout, Youth Population

---

<sup>1</sup> Naresuan University



## 1. Introduction

Since 1991 Paris peace agreement, there had been five times of national election in Cambodia. Each of them marked higher turnout which suggest strong interest in the election and the politics of the people. However, the turnout reached at its peak in 1998 election which marked 93% and it had been decreasing. Recent election in 2013, turnout was merely less than 70% (68%)<sup>2</sup>. Especially, the research by Asia Foundation in 2014, pointed out lower interest of younger generation<sup>3</sup>, although there were many reports which mentioned that the active participation of young Cambodian before and after 2013 elections. There indicated some factors which caused turnout decline, such as irregularities during polling and counting, lack of information for voters how to register and where to vote, and voting stations were far from residences for voters who migrated from their hometown<sup>4</sup>. However, these problems were not new. Although these might have bad

influences on turnout, these should be treated as inadequacies of growing democracy in Cambodia. In 2013, there was biggest youth population since 1995.<sup>5</sup> Population in Cambodia has been increasing year by year, especially ratio of the youth (15-34) in total population has been significantly increasing. And same as other common democratic countries, young people less likely to have interest in politics than older people.

### 1-2. Context

Cambodia has large number of young population; more than 70% of total is under 35 year-old, especially, population at age range 15-34 is 39.7% based on the estimation by United Nation (2015).<sup>6</sup> In 2013 national election, around 3.5 million of 9.5 million registered voters were between the ages of 18 and 30.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, political participation of the young generation is the important factor which has an influence over Cambodian politics as well as viewing from the long-term standpoint. Before 2013

<sup>2</sup> IDEA: Voter turnout data for Cambodia, <http://www.idea.int>, accessed on 30.07.2016

<sup>3</sup> Asia Foundation (2014), pp. 37-38

<sup>4</sup> COMFREL (2013-a): The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (2013): 2013 National Assembly Elections Final Assessment and Report, p.47, pp58-59

<sup>5</sup> UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015), <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/>, accessed on 30.07.2016

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The Phnom Penh Post: Cambodia's tipping point, 16.08.2013, accessed on 30.07.2016



national elections, there were many articles which reported that many young Cambodian's participation in the political process, such as "Youth Showing More Political Engagement as Election Approaches" (VOA Khmer).<sup>8</sup>

According to the Asia Foundation report (2014), they collected data through face to face interview all over Cambodia, the responses of the question whether voted in the 2013 election show that the most significant determining was age. Those least likely to vote were younger people between 18 and 24.<sup>9</sup> And another question which asked about interest in politics, 53% of respondents answered that they are somewhat interested or very interested in politics. The report pointed out interest in politics increases gradually with the age of respondents as well.<sup>10</sup>

COMFREL (Committee of Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia) reported that their observers alone observed total 11,402 cases of irregularities in 2013 national elections, such as missing names on the voter's list,

misspelled, used by someone else, and so on. Most of irregularities were observed during polling.<sup>11</sup> Even though many irregularities were indicated and definitely they were obstacles to progress of democracy in Cambodia, this research basically accepts the final decision of NEC.

In general, older people are more likely to go to vote than younger people as well as political interest. In Cambodia, it seems that there is similar tendency, according to the findings of the Asia Foundation's report.

**Hypothesis:** There is relationship between increasing youth population and decreasing voting turnout in Cambodia.

**Objective:** To know; why voting turnout in Cambodia had been decreasing, why younger people tend to have lower interests in politics.

**Importance:** Cambodia has large number of young population; more than 70% of total is under 35 year-old. Political participation of the young generation is the important factor which has an influence over Cambodian politics as well as viewing from the long-term standpoint. Encouraging

---

<sup>8</sup> VOA Khmer: Youth Showing More Political Engagement as Election Approaches, 10.07.2013

<sup>9</sup> Asia Foundation (2014), p.42

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp.37-38

---

<sup>11</sup> COMFREL (2013-a), pp.58-59



them to participate in politics will lead growth of democracy in Cambodia.

### 1-3. Method and Framework

Dependent variable “voting turnout” is referred from each data of national elections in Cambodia, Independent variable “youth population” is referred from United Nation’s Cambodian demography data. To test hypothesis of this research, compare between voting turnout and increasing ratio of the youth population.

Main data source is The Asia Foundation’s research (2014) which national public opinion poll on democracy in Cambodia, by 1,000 which national representative sample face to face interview with questionnaire.

To describe voting action in Cambodia, this research employ the model of adaptive learning theory; Arai (2010). Arai tried to construct the dynamic model of citizens’ political participation, and to reveal the mechanism of the citizens’ political participation. He revised the learning theory that applied from psychology in order to construct the voting attendance model, and described the political participation by analyzing through various methods such as

simulations and experiments.<sup>12</sup> Arai (2010) confirmed that experience of voting in their youth has strong influence on their future probability of voting, and then creates their voting habit.<sup>13</sup> And the voters who experienced a winning streak of supporting party or candidate in their youth, have tendency to more likely to turn out. It can explain higher turnout of older people and lower turnout of younger people.

### 2. Literatures of theories for voting

The approaches for describing political participation of citizens can be divided into three typical groups. First, social scientific approach which define main factor of political participation as mobilization from social groups such groups which political elites and citizens affiliated. Second, psychological approach which attempt to describe political participation with psychological behavior of individuals such as political efficacy and behavior which try to evade public instruments. Third, economical approach which has been constructed elaborate model that is based on rational choice theory.

---

<sup>12</sup> Arai, Kiichiro (2010),

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp.38-56



Many of studies for voting turnout have studied based on rational choice theory. Downs (1957) suggests a formula for describing voting turnout which is;  $R = P*B - C$ .<sup>14</sup>

R is the Reward in utilities of voting, P is Probability that citizens think whether their vote will matter to the outcome, B is the benefit that expected to be obtained when supporting candidate win compared with opponents win, and C is the cost of voting. In a population of 100 million voters, Downs assumed that P would always be 1/100,000,000. Thus, any positive C would make R negative. According to Downs, rational citizens never vote. However, reality is very different from this theory. Even though many democratic countries face decreasing turnout, still majority of electorates vote. This is the Paradox of non-voting. The question was reformed from “why people don’t vote” to “why people vote”.

Riker and Ordeshook (1970) insert D into the formula.  $R = P*B - C + D$ . D represents citizens’ sense of civic duty, satisfaction from voting, desire to affirm

partisanship or efficacy, etc.<sup>15</sup> Thus, C and D become the most important figure since  $P*B$  would be nearly zero. In addition, the authors estimates higher P than Downs did. When the election was much closer race, P would become higher. However, there are critics that Riker and Ordeshook didn’t explain where D comes from (Geys, 2006).<sup>16</sup> Unless we can explain some people have higher D than others, then it leads just tautological theory: People vote because they get benefit from voting. But this formula is still useful and many scholars have tried to find appropriate explanation of each term.

Gerber, Green and Shachar (2003) mentioned D term as a habit and it changes in response of previous experiences of voting. They describe habit-forming by employing adaptive learning which one of the psychological theory: “People learn good strategies by observing what worked

<sup>14</sup> Downs, Anthony (1957): *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, New York, Harper and Row

<sup>15</sup> Riker, W., and P. Ordeshook (1970): *A theory of the calculus of voting*, *American Political Science Review*, 1970, pp.25-41

<sup>16</sup> Geys, Benny (2006): ‘Rational’ theories of Voter Turnout, UK, *Political Studies Review*, 2006, vol.4, no.1, pp.16-35



well for them in the past”. People learn either voting is worth it or the opposite.<sup>17</sup>

Bender, Diameter and Ting (2003)<sup>18</sup> and Fowler (2006)<sup>19</sup> applied learning model into simulation on computer. On their model, actors were assumed to be “Adaptive Satisficers” those who pursue only better outcome than last time, rather than “Prospective Optimizers” those who maximize their expected utility (because of this difference, there are discussions whether learning model can be included in the rational choice theory).<sup>20</sup> Their model indicated that citizens who have such adaptive rationality vote whenever the cost was higher and the probability was lower. And Fowler, by comparing between data obtained from simulation and actual times of voting of electorates found from public opinion survey, found that there were two groups which electorates who never vote

and another always vote in both data. So, Fowler concluded that there is a strong possibility political participation of electorates is based on the adaptive learning, and electorates who have such behavior are “Habitual Voter” who always participate or never, rather than “Causal Voter” who decide whether participate or not at each event.

Arai (2010) revised Fowler’s model and attempted to get closer to the reality. He created the new model that explains citizens’ political participation with adaptive learning and social identity of citizen. His model indicates that electorates’ voting experience in their youth and experience of supporting competitors’ winning streak have a strong influence on electorates’ next participation. It may explain the gap of turnout between generation groups. Arai recommended that focusing on political enlightenment or education to the youth will have a positive effect on not only turnout, but also various political situations in the long term.

---

<sup>17</sup> Gerber, A. S., P. Green, and R. Schachar (2003): Voting May Be Habit Forming- Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment, USA, *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 47, pp. 540-550

<sup>18</sup> Bender, J., D. Diermeier and M. Ting (2003): A Behavioral Model of Turnout, USA, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, pp. 261-280

<sup>19</sup> Fowler, James (2007): Habitual Voting and behavioral turnout, USA, *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 68, no.2, pp. 335-344

<sup>20</sup> Arai Kiichiro (2010), pp.35-36



### 3. Conceivable factors of decreasing turnout in Cambodia

In Cambodia, there are many kinds of factors which indicated that have negative influence on political participation, such as lack of education, accessibility for political information and awareness for politics, difficulties of registration and access to the proper polling station. And violence, especially politically related killing had been indicated since 1993 election. In 1993, there were 380 politically related murder cases, in 1998, about 40 cases, in 2003, 28 cases, in 2008, 23 cases. In 2013, although no murder case was indicated, there still election related incidents were reported.<sup>21</sup> Also in general, large population can be a negative factor for voting turnout. This is P term argument (larger population means larger denominator of P). Population in Cambodia has been rapidly increasing year by year. Additionally, it seems that lower interest in politics of youth is important factor as well, because Cambodia has significantly larger population of youth and its ratio has been increasing since 1995.<sup>22</sup> One more thing for

youth, it was said that they didn't experience civil war and Khmer Rouge regime. The purpose of this chapter is to examine each conceivable factor by referring to other previous researches.

---

<sup>21</sup> COMFREL (2013-a), p.15

<sup>22</sup> UN, , Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015)



## Voting turnout in each national election

Year	Turnout	Total vote	Registration
1993	86.78%	4,134,631	4,764,430
1998	93.74%	5,057,679	5,395,595
2003	83.22%	5,277,679	6,341,834
2008	75.21%	6,111,210	8,125,529
2013	68.49%	6,627,159	9,657,453

(Data from IDEA)

### 3-1. Education

Eric Plutzer (2002) indicated habitual voters used to be abstainers and they made the transition. His research has focused on factors that help speed up or delay that transition. And he pointed that one of the factors is attending college. *“College graduates are better able to absorb and understand political information, link it to their own values, and come to believe their vote can make difference.”*<sup>23</sup> However in Cambodia, educational enrollment rate is still very low, for tertiary education, gross enrollment rate in 2011 is only 15.9%.<sup>24</sup> Despite such lower

education rate, Cambodia had kept higher voting turnout since the first election after Paris Peace Agreement in 1991. At the first election in 1993, people were well educated about voting by UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia), although most of people had not taken enough public education. Consequently, most of citizens went to vote. But after that, it seems that Cambodian government has not succeeded to penetrate the education into people, besides democracy. Asia Foundation pointed out educational problem which awareness and understanding of democracy. According to their research (2014), they found 60% of respondents answered “government is the father, the people are children”, while 38% answered “government and people are equal”. They also found that younger

<sup>23</sup> Plutzer, Eric (2002): *Becoming a Habitual Voter-Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood*, USA, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 96, no. 1, pp.41-56

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2014), country profiles, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/>, accessed on 30.07.2016





people are slightly more likely to see government as a father than older people. And add that, “*suggesting that direct and indirect influences like school curricula*”.<sup>25</sup> This paternalistic view may connect easily to authoritarian rule. It seems that this paternalistic view may have a negative influence on citizens’ political participation, because citizens who consider their government as father may accept any decisions by government without considering by themselves.

### 3-2. Accessibility for information

Vergne (2009) indicated the relationship between media freedom and voter turnout in 60 developing countries. He investigated this pattern with combining the data which from international IDEA data on electoral participation and Freedom House index of media freedom.<sup>26</sup> Vergne found that a freer media is associated with higher voter turnout in developing countries. Especially, he indicated radio ownership has the most significant relationship with

turnout, rather than TV ownership and newspaper circulation.<sup>27</sup> Freedom House is the independent watchdog organization. Their index of media freedom rates each country in three areas of potential state influence over the media: legal environment, political influences and economic pressures, to determine an overall score. Cambodia’s score is 69 (0 is the most free, 100 is the least free), and categorized as “Not Free” (there are three levels, free, partly free and not free).<sup>28</sup>

In Cambodia, people’s main source of information is TV, according to Asia Foundation’s research. 93% watch TV at least some to regularly without matters of socio-economic group they belong to. However, Freedom House indicated on their report that “*all 15 national television stations and nearly all of Cambodia’s roughly 160 radio stations are owned or controlled by either the ruling party or prime minister Hun Sen’s family or associates*”.<sup>29</sup> And also they pointed out that strong pressure on journalists and

---

<sup>25</sup> Asia Foundation (2014), P. 34

<sup>26</sup> Vergne, Clemence (2009): Turnout in Developing Countries- The Effect of Mass Media on National Voter Participation, France, Archives- Ouvertes, HAL, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00553622>, accessed on 30.07.2016

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp. 25-26

<sup>28</sup> Freedom House (2016): Freedom of the Press 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/cambodia>, accessed on 30.07.2016

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



media from government, and lack independence of courts have negative influences on people's accessibility of balanced information. And it seems that information was not enough for electorates when looking at other factors, such as voters' registration and access to the polling station.

### 3-3. Voters' registration

Voters' registration is not compulsory, and not be given automatically in Cambodia. Cambodian government has issued national ID cards for all citizens age over 15. Eligible citizens can register to vote with their ID cards. However, Freedom House (2015) indicated that Cambodian government has failed to provide national ID cards to all citizens and create an accurate and complete civil registry. Although national ID cards are profitable not only for voter registration but many other ways, people who don't have ID card can register with certificate of identity or "Identification Certificates for Electoral purpose (ICEs)" complementary with the birth certificate or the family book. People can request for certificate of identity at commune office

with two witnesses and two photos.<sup>30</sup> (Many observers claimed that ICEs were systematically misused to influence the election result.)<sup>31</sup>

The first voter registration system in Cambodia was provided by UNTAC beheaded to 1993 election, and registration rate was 96%. Compare with 2013, National Election Committee in Cambodia (NEC) which conducted internal audit of 2012's voters' lists through fieldwork at 24 capital/provinces with 2,472 eligible voters, reported 91% of eligible citizens registered to vote.<sup>32</sup> It slightly decreased, but it seems that registration rate is still high. In addition, surveys by COMFREL<sup>33</sup> which conducted survey by interviewing with 2,600 eligible voters from 223 stations nationwide, and NDI<sup>34</sup> (National Democratic Institute for

---

<sup>30</sup> NEC (2013): The 2013 National assembly Election- Voter Registration in Cambodia, The Audits on The 2012 Official Voters' Lists, and Issues Briefing for The International Observers, p. 4

<sup>31</sup> COMFREL (2013-a), pp. 52-55

<sup>32</sup> NEC (2013), p. 26

<sup>33</sup> COMFREL (2013-b): Final Report on Survey of Voter List, Voter Registration, and Audit of the Voter list plus Verification of the Deletion forms for the 2013 National Election (SVRA-PLUS)

<sup>34</sup> National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2013-a): Report on the Voter Registry Audit (VRA) in Cambodia 2013



International Affairs) which conducted an audit of voter registration through interviewing with 4,893 citizens chosen from both the voter list and deletion list over 830 villages within 414 communes throughout Cambodia's 24 provinces in both urban and rural areas, in 2013, COMFREL found that 96.8% of respondents answered voting registration as either “not difficult at all” or “not very difficult”<sup>35</sup>, and 98.26% have “no fear” during voter registration.<sup>36</sup> NDI found that 97.1% of respondents answered “NEC’s registration process is simple and easy”, and 91.3% has confidence in the voter registration.<sup>37</sup> According to them, voter registration process may not be the significant factor to decrease turnout. However, there was another problem in voters’ registration which indicated by NDI, such as over registration, duplicate names, and deleted names.<sup>38</sup> In addition, NDI also indicated that there are no current and accurate population figures for Cambodia, and different government bodies reference

different figures.<sup>39</sup> Even though registration process was simple and easy for citizens, the system of registration was still not much sophisticated.

#### 3-4. Access to the proper polling station

Access to the polling station was also said as difficulty or obstacle for voting. COMFREL indicated that “*polling stations are sometimes too far from residences of voters implying high transportation costs, are unreachable because of bad weather condition*” “*or because elections are held during days, when citizens are pre-occupied with their work*”.<sup>40</sup> However, Asia Foundation found on their research that 74% of respondents answered they would vote “where I am from”, especially 87% who have moved answered as same.<sup>41</sup> Asia Foundation commented on this finding that “*it may seem counterintuitive that people prefer to travel and vote far from where they live and work*”. Additionally in fact, according to the Law on Election of the Members of National Assembly (LEMNA) which created and adopted in December

<sup>35</sup> COMFREL (2013-b), pp.26-27

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.31

<sup>37</sup> NDI (2013-a), p.22

<sup>38</sup> NDI (2013-b): Joint Report on the Conduct of 2013 Cambodian National Elections, pp.24-30

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.27

<sup>40</sup> COMFREL (2013-a), p. 90

<sup>41</sup> Asia Foundation (2014), p. 57



1997, as a Cambodian first electoral law (written by the Cambodians and the foreign experts after UNTAC time), “LEMNA never requires an eligible registered voter to return to his/her home town to register to vote”.<sup>42</sup> Voters can choose their voting place at least on the regulation, although acknowledgement to citizens may not enough. And election schedule should be set more convenient for citizens, such as implementing the early voting.

### 3-5. Population and Demographic change

As it was mentioned at the beginning, population in Cambodia had increased rapidly since 1993. Especially, ratio of the youth population within the total has been significantly increasing. In general, it is said that large population have a negative influence on voting turnout, because the matter of P term. When population increases, people may consider their efficacy would decrease. And also youth generally tend not to have lower interest in politics and political participation than older. This tendency of youth can be observed in Cambodia, according to the Asia Foundation’s research. “53% report that

*they are somewhat interested or very interested in politics”, “interest in politics and willingness to speak with friends about politics increases gradually with the age of respondents”.*<sup>43</sup> And NEC reported that voters’ registration rate in 2013 was 91%, but when dividing it into age groups, only 67% of eligible citizens who were 18-24 year-old registered, while 95% of 25-34 year-old, 99% of 35-44 year-old, and 99% of above 45 year-old registered.

One more finding by Asia Foundation, asked whether voted in 2013 election, 86% of respondents said “yes”.<sup>44</sup> But the most significant factor in determining was age. Those least likely to vote were younger people between 18 and 24, just 72% said “yes”. It may be a D term matter. There might be the interview effect that some of respondents who actually didn’t vote might answer “yes” (actual turnout was lower than this result, assume that sampling was accurate), because of their sense of duty or awareness for democracy. They may think of voting is the “right” thing or duty of citizen. Lower ratio of “yes” answer from youth can be

<sup>42</sup> NEC (2013), p.4

<sup>43</sup> Asia Foundation (2014), pp. 37-38

<sup>44</sup> NEC (2013), p. 27



described as their lower awareness for democracy.

**Population distribution by age group**

(thousand)	15-34	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	Total
<b>1990</b>	2,941 (32.6%)	900 (10%)	803 (8.9%)	665 (7.4%)	573 (6.4%)	9,010
<b>1995</b>	3,221 (30.1%)	827 (7.7%)	914 (8.5%)	811 (7.6%)	669 (6.3%)	10,694
<b>2000</b>	4,160 (34.1%)	1,630 (13.4%)	776 (6.4%)	922 (7.6%)	832 (6.8%)	12,200
<b>2005</b>	4,803 (36.1%)	1,605 (12%)	1,597 (12%)	730 (5.5%)	871 (6.5%)	13,320
<b>2010</b>	5,411 (37.7%)	1,679 (11.7%)	1,323 (9.2%)	1,733 (12.1%)	676 (4.7%)	14,363
<b>2015</b>	6,181 (39.7%)	1,573 (10.1%)	1,636 (10.5%)	1,282 (8.2%)	1,680 (10.8%)	15,578

(United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015))

Neak Klom Meul (COMFREL, 2007) pointed that “students with university-level education still do not pay much attention to participation in election”, “they only have their names registered for the elections because of their parents’ encouragement and they only follow other people”.<sup>45</sup> It may suggest the reason that the gap between higher voters’ registration rate and lower turnout. People who were

born after 1998 didn’t experience Khmer Rouge regime directly. Their attention to politics might not strong when compare with older people who directly experienced Khmer Rouge regime and civil war regime as well.

The first national election in 1993 after Paris peace agreement, voting turnout marked 86%. It seems that because it was the first free and fair election after a long period of conflict regime, and UNTAC tried hard to educate people about democracy,

<sup>45</sup> Neak Klom Meul: Participation of Youth in Elections, COMFREL paper, p.1



people enjoyed their right to vote, and believed that their vote can be effective. It seems that P, B, and also D of electorates were much higher. And the second national election in 1998, people still worried about the possibility reappearance of war, because they had faced military collision in 1997 and reminded the fear. Hence, many people voted to express their wish, turnout marked 93%. Both two elections, which most of citizens participated to vote, majority of them experienced win of supporting competitors or change in society. It might make people to become habitual voters. These elections were the “transition” for the people.

In those years, people had special opportunity and extra ordinary incentives to participate in politics. Therefore, their interest in politics was necessarily high, even young people in those years. In contrast, in these years after 1998, young people have enjoyed comparatively stable politics and economic growth. Thus, young people lost their interest and incentives to participate in politics gradually, as same as in many other countries. Such general tendency for young

people has been actualized with growing ratio of youth population.

#### 4. Conclusion

There indicated many kinds of factor which considered as causes of decreasing turnout in recent elections in Cambodia. However, most of them are not new factors such arose or got worse recently, but rather they are getting better. Politically related violence had been decreasing, and some factors which mentioned that decreasing turnout such as difficulty of voters’ registration and place to vote, were not likely the significant factors of decreasing turnout as mentioned above.

Thus, it is likely that the most significant factor of decreasing turnout is demographic change which significantly increasing ratio of youth population. Older people who have experienced their first voting at the 1993 or 1998 election which considered as that had strong incentives to electorates, then, they might become habitual voters. In contrast, young people tend to have low interest in politics, as same as in other countries. Demographic structure has changed solidly, therefore youth’s lower interest in politics clearly



actualized. Additionally, there are no strong incentives to make youth go to vote as early elections. And political education is not enough when compare with the first election which led by UNTAC.

Even though there appeared similar tendency to other democratic countries, it seems that turnout in Cambodia remained higher when compare with them, in spite of education standard and socio-economic standard those which considered as factors of changing in turnout generally, are still low. It seems that there exist influences of people who had experienced early elections and became habitual voters. Plutzer (2002) indicated that whether go to vote or not for electorates who obtain the right to vote for their first time, depend on their parents' level of partisanship, whether they have a habit for voting, level of education, and socio-economic status.<sup>46</sup> Thus, status of parents has certain influence on youths' voting action. However, because there has been increasing ratio of youth population, lower turnout will be predictable in next election. And viewing from the long-term stand point, if this tendency continues to

exist, turnout would more decrease with the change in generation.

Turnout can be also the measure of legitimacy of elected government. Thus, lower turnout is undesirable for the government as well. In order to increase the voting turnout, change the demographic structure in short time is not realistic. Then it has to be taken steps along with current and predictable future situation. The conceivable factor which is the most effective may be improving of education. Even though there are many problems which Cambodia facing and lack of education is just one of them, and also it's not easy to solve, improving education may make people improve their accessibility to and understanding of information, therefore lower understanding of election system and democracy will be also improved.

In Thailand in 2014 during the political conflict, anti-government group said that each country should have different democracy which applied for each country, Thailand has Thai-democracy. And famous scholar Seri Wongmontha gave a speech at the rally of anti-government that the opinion from 300,000 people of quality should be respected, rather than 1.5 million

---

<sup>46</sup> Arai (2010), pp.48-49



people of poor quality.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, there should be democracy which applied for each country however it also should be left for social choice of the people.

As supplementary for this research, small face to face interview for seven young Cambodian people (age 20-29) were conducted, which asked about national ID cards and voters' registration process. All of respondents had their national ID cards and answered voters' registration was easy, although all of them said that it was time consuming and inconvenient. Interestingly, one respondent said that he doesn't vote in order to avoid personal political expression, although it cannot be certain from this research that whether the tendency is only his own or can be observed particular amount in Cambodia.

In conclusion, for the sake of realization of citizens' aim which citizens think of the direction of the country how should be, and also when considering generational change which the people who experienced conflict regime and UNTAC regime will decrease, education for citizens will be important more and more.

Even though this research attempts to describe the factor of decreasing turnout in Cambodia and concluded as demographic change is the most significant factor, actually there couldn't find the concrete evidence that prove lower turnout of youth in Cambodia. Therefore more detailed research should be expected such as turnout of each age group. In addition, this paper is only an overview of voting and current situations in Cambodia, thus there might be more factors which should be considered that have influence on turnout, and more context as well. Many Cambodian workers have immigrated to other country, and they are also eligible voters. And credibility of official data in Cambodia, it is criticized from many foreign institutes. Nevertheless, finally, encouragement of political participation of youth is still considered as general topic in all over the world. Therefore, there will be more fruitful discussion all over the world and those will be beneficial for Cambodia as well.

## 5. References

1. The Asia Foundation (2014): Democracy in Cambodia- 2014, A

---

<sup>47</sup> Mainichi Shimbun: Shaking Kingdom- What is going on in Thailand, 28.01.2014





- Survey of the Cambodian Electorate
2. The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (1998): Final Report- 1998 National Assembly Election in Cambodia
3. The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (2003): Assessment Report on the Cambodian National Assembly Elections 2003
4. The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (2008): 2008 National Assembly Elections Final Assessment and Report
5. The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (2013): 2013 National Assembly Elections Final Assessment and Report
6. The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (2013): Final Report on Survey of Voter List, Voter Registration, and Audit of the Voter list plus Verification of the Deletion forms for the 2013 National Election (SVRA-PLUS)
7. Freedom House (2015): Freedom of Press 2015,
8. National Election Committee (2013): The 2013 National assembly Election- Voter Registration in Cambodia, The Audits on The 2012 Official Voters' Lists, and Issues Briefing for The International Observers
9. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2013): Report on the Voter Registry Audit (VRA) in Cambodia 2013
10. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2013): Joint Report on the Conduct of 2013 Cambodian National Elections
11. Transparency International Cambodia (2013): Final Election Observation Report on Cambodia's 2013 National Election
12. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015): World Population Prospects- The 2015 Revision, custom data acquired via website
13. Arai, Kiichiro (2010): Mechanism of Participation – Dynamics of citizens
- <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/cambodia>



- who adapt to democracy -, Japan, Waseda University, Faculty of Political Studies, Ph. D thesis
14. Bender, J., D. Diermeier and M. Ting (2003): A Behavioral Model of Turnout, American Political Science Review vol.97, no.2, pp.261-280
15. Downs, Anthony (1957): An Economic Theory in Democracy, New York: Harper and Row
16. Fowler, James (2006): Altruism and Turnout, The Journal of Politics, vol.68 (August), pp.674-683
17. Fowler, James (2007): Habitual Voting and behavioral Turnout, The Journal of Politics, vol.68, no.2, pp.335-344
18. Gerber, A. S., D. P. Green, and R. Shachar (2003): Voting May Be Habit Forming- Evidenced from a Randomized Field Experiment, American Journals of Political Science, vol.47, pp.540-550
19. Geys, Benny (2006): 'Rational' Theories of Voter Turnout: A Review, Political Studies Review vol.4, pp.16-35
20. Plutzer, Eric (2002): Becoming a Habitual Voter- Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood." American Political Science Review, vol.96, no.1, p.41-56
21. Riker, W., and P. Ordeshook (1970): A Theory of the Calculus of Voting, American Political Science Review 1970, pp.25-41
22. Vergne, Clemence (2009): Turnout in Developing Countries- The Effect of Mass Media on National Voter Participation, France, Archives-Ouvertes, HAL, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00553622>