Political Threats, State Mobilisation and Authoritarian Survival: Cambodia and Malaysia in Perspective

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Cambodia and Malaysia in Perspective

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Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Mun Vong
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Disclosure
The research project was undertaken under Griffith University human ethical clearance no. GU Ref No: 2019/917.

Abstract

This dissertation is about state mobilisation as a political survival strategy which has a long history in nondemocratic regimes. It had been deployed by totalitarian regimes to supplant independent organisations such as political parties and labour unions, nurture blind belief in the dictator and his ideology, meet production targets under a centralised economic system, and mobilise people to fight in wars. Yet this description of state mobilisation does not reflect the reality of less repressive, more pluralistic authoritarian regimes in modern times. In these regimes, opposition parties and civil society organisations have been allowed to co-exist with mass organisations; rigid ideology has been relegated or replaced with pragmatic policies; free markets have overtaken central planning as the organising principle of productive activities; and instances of war have become less frequent or less demanding of manpower. In short, totalitarian-style state mobilisation has become less doable and desirable in the context of authoritarian regimes. What explains, then, the persistence of state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes? This dissertation argues that state mobilisation is a survival strategy driven by authoritarian regimes' threat environment. The type of state mobilisation deployed is shaped by the nature of the threat confronting the regime. Some threats manifest in street protests, military coups, party defection, or opposition challenges in the electoral arena. Some are more latent, taking on a more subtle and mundane form of resistance or activism, either physically or virtually. Once triggered, state mobilisation performs three regime stabilisation functions: *legitimation*, *cooptation*, and *repression*. In performing these functions, state mobilisation can help authoritarian regimes overcome the threat that triggers it in the first place. The success of state mobilisation, however, varies. The argument is developed based on the cases of Cambodia and Malaysia.

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List of Abbreviations

ABIM	Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement
BN	Barisan Nasional
CCTU	Cambodian Confederation of Trade Unions
CLUF	Cambodia Labour Union Federation
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CNRP	Cambodia National Rescue Party
CWLFU	Cambodian Workers Labour Federation Union
CWPD	Cambodian Women for Peace and Development
CYCPP	Central Youth CPP
DA-UYFC	Doctor Alliance of UYFC
DAP	Democratic Action Party
FUNSK	Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation
KPRP	Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party
ISA	Internal Security Act
MCA	Malayan (later Malaysian) Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MIC	Malayan (later Malaysian) Indian Congress
NACC	National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia
NEP	New Economic Policy
PAS	Parti Islam Se Malaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party)
PH	Pakatan Harapan
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
UMNO	United Malay National Organisation
UYFC	Union Youth Federations of Cambodia
YAC	Youth Association of Cambodia

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Part I: Introduction and Theory

Chapter 1: Introduction

Historically, whenever the term 'mobilisation' is brought up, a point of reference for most is civic organising in the pursuit of socio-economic development, or more zealously the gathering of tens of thousands of people in the streets marching and chanting, exacting demands from their governments; a recent exemplar of which is the Arab Spring in the early 2010s. From grassroots associations to urban non-governmental organisations to democratic revolutions, civil society and social movements have occupied a central place in the study of state and society.

Often received with less attention is the fact that citizens not only mobilise *against* governments but are also mobilised *by* governments. The latter is called *state mobilisation*—defined as the formation of civilian organisations by authoritarian regimes or their agents to advance the regime's agenda through pro-regime events. As such, it is a phenomenon that contrasts sharply with *social mobilisation*. Whereas social mobilisation helps break the regime; state mobilisation helps strengthen it. This observation aligns well with recent evidence that party organisation on the ground is as critical for authoritarian survival as the management of elite conflicts at the top (Handlin 2016; Reuter 2022). Besides building elite cohesion through the distribution of power and patronage (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Brownlee 2007; Svolik 2012), ruling parties also mobilise citizens through mass organisations such as youth wings and labour unions. It remains to be explored in-depth how these organisations help the party rule and with what challenges and consequences.

This dissertation is about state mobilisation as a political survival strategy which has had a long history in nondemocratic regimes. Indeed, it was a hallmark of public life under the repressive rule of Mao, Hitler, and Stalin—who embodied the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. These regimes cajoled and coerced the majority of citizens into mass organisations

such as the Komsomol, the Hitler Youth, and the All-China Women's Federation to exert total control by the state over society. These state-controlled organisations were deployed to supplant independent organisations, foster blind belief in the dictators and their ideologies, meet production targets under a planned economy, or mobilise people to fight in wars.

However, such a portrayal of state mobilisation does not reflect the reality of more pluralistic, less repressive authoritarian regimes in modern times. In these regimes, opposition parties and civil society organisations have been allowed to co-exist with mass organisations; rigid ideology has been relegated or replaced with pragmatic policies; free markets have overtaken central planning as the organising principle of productive activities; and instances of war have become less frequent or less demanding of manpower. In short, totalitarian-style state mobilisation has become less doable and desirable in the context of authoritarian regimes. What explains, then, the persistence of state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes? More specifically, what drives state mobilisation? What functions does it perform? And to what extent is state mobilisation effective? With authoritarian regimes increasingly turning to more innovative forms of governance (Morgenbesser 2020a), it is necessary to revisit the basis and dynamics of state mobilisation. This dissertation is concerned with this distinct form of mobilisation and how it works in the context of dominant party regimes where multiparty elections for the national executive office are held, but the playing field is highly skewed in favour of the incumbent, making the prospects of an opposition victory slim, although not impossible (Levitsky and Way 2010). This new authoritarian context presents a fertile ground for examining how state mobilisation has evolved as a survival strategy.

This dissertation proposes an answer to the question about the persistence of state mobilisation based on a structural perspective that the creation and maintenance of institutions or organisations are driven by authoritarian regimes' strategic choices which are shaped by the threat environment in which they are embedded. The nature of the threat determines the

functions of state mobilisations which can be classified into legitimation, cooptation, and repression. The theorisation of the function of state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes is informed by the regime-sustaining role of political institutions which have been demonstrated extensively in the comparative authoritarianism literature.[1]

The argument is illustrated with a multiple-case study of three mass organisations in two Southeast Asian countries: Cambodia and Malaysia. For Cambodia, the youth wing of the Cambodian People's Party, the Union Youth Federations of Cambodia, and government-aligned labour unions led by the National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia will be examined. For Malaysia, the youth wing of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the UMNO Youth, will be explored.

In investigating state mobilisation, this dissertation rides the momentous revival of autocracy studies since the early 2000s after an almost exclusive focus by regime studies on democratisation in the 1980s and 1990s (Levitsky and Way 2015, 97; McCarthy and Thompson 2020, 5). From 1974—the year identified by Huntington as the beginning of the third wave of democratisation—to the end of the twentieth century, more than 80 authoritarian regimes ended, and more than 60 democracies were established or restored (Brownlee 2007, 1). However, this trend has been challenged by the persistence of authoritarian rule in some industrialised countries such as China, Malaysia, and Singapore. Indeed, the experience of these outliers goes against the postulation of modernisation theories that economic development leads to democratic transition (Lipset 1959).

By the turn of the 21st century, this theoretical deviation, based on growing empirical evidence, has directed scholarly attention to investigate the sources of durable authoritarianism. Scholars have made an "institutional turn" (Pepinsky 2014) to study how formal political

[1] See Lust-Okar (2005); Schedler (2006); Magaloni (2006); Brownlee (2007); Gandhi (2008); Ginsburg and Moustafa (2008); Levitsky and Way (2010); Blaydes (2010); Svolik (2012); Morgenbesser (2016); Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018). For critical review see Schedler (2009); Art (2012); Brancati (2014); Pepinsky (2014).

institutions that serve representative and constraining functions in democracies are ironically subverted by autocrats for regime durability. Such interest defines the third wave of autocracy research[2] catalysed by Geddes' field-shaping article published in 1999 (Geddes 1999). Most commonly studied are parties and party-related institutions, namely legislatures and elections. These institutions have captured the attention of researchers because their existence in an authoritarian context was considered puzzling, as Gandhi puts it: "If these institutions are costless window dressing that provides reputational benefits on the international stage, why do not all dictators have them? In turn, if these institutions have the potential to undermine autocratic rule, why would any incumbent create or tolerate them?" (Gandhi 2008, xvii). The conclusion is that these political institutions are neither window-dressing nor necessarily regime-subversive. Instead, they contribute to the durability of authoritarian regimes by performing crucial functions including but not limited to deterring opponents from challenging the incumbent; acquiring information about social discontent; distributing patronage; maintaining elite cohesion; and facilitating monitoring of the incumbent (see Brancati 2014). In a recent review, Frantz (2018, 89) suggests that we need to "dig deeper into the full range of institutions that dictatorships employ to maintain control." This points to a gap in the literature whereby the full range of regime-sustaining functions of political institutions and organisations still needs to be systematically documented and theorised. This dissertation takes up this intellectual challenge with the conviction that our collective understanding of authoritarian politics will benefit from greater attention being paid to the role of auxiliary organisations.

[2] For a summary of the waves of autocracy research, see Gerschewski (2013).

The Puzzle

The puzzle of state mobilisation lies in its persistence despite the extinction of the background conditions that brought it into being. In Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, and Hitler's Germany, state mobilisation played a critical role in developing a "pseudo-religious adoration" of the dictator and his ideology (Brooker 1991, 131); "the destruction and reconstruction of economic, social, and political institutions" (Huntington 1970, 38); "the permanent domination of each single individual in each and every sphere of life" (Arendt 1951, 326); or the "[complete] [organisation] of political life and society" (Linz 2000, 4). In doing so, these regimes coerced the vast majority of the population into joining mass organisations and politicised supposedly apolitical aspects of life such as sports and leisure (Linz 1970, 256). In his seminal work on "administered mass organizations", Kasza (1995) outlines three major functions of mass organisations as being a "weapon" to suppress autonomous organisations, fight wars, and pursue socioeconomic change. Mass organisations are established to supplant independent organisations like political parties and labour unions, and to absorb anti-regime movements like separatist and communist groups. To fight wars, mass organisations facilitate conscription, limit consumption to reduce the economic cost of warfare, and diffuse state propaganda to persuade citizens to support the war effort (Kasza 1995, 74). To exert state control over economic production, mass organisations check the power of big landholders and private enterprises, strengthen members' control over the means of production, and facilitate wealth distribution (Kasza 1995, 103, 126).

Yet the transition to competitive politics has profoundly altered the impetus for state mobilisation. After claiming that, by the 1970s, totalitarianism no longer "adequately capture[ed] the political reality of Soviet-type regimes", Linz establishes authoritarianism as a political system with the presence of limited political pluralism and predictable exercise of power, and the absence of an elaborate ideology and widespread mobilisation. The structural

constraints imposed by the new authoritarian context have made the execution of totalitarian-style state mobilisation less feasible and desirable (Linz 1970, 255; 2000, 3).

First, authoritarian regimes have sacrificed the tool proven to be crucial for mass mobilisation. Exercising complete subordination of society to political control requires extensive and intensive mobilisation which in turn needs an elaborate ideology, a profile that most authoritarian regimes lack. Linz (2000, 164) argues that without an ideology, it is difficult to mobilise people to "create the psychological and emotional identification of the masses with the regime." Furthermore, "[t]he absence of an articulated ideology, of a sense of ultimate meaning, of long-run purposes, of a prior model of ideal society reduces the attractiveness of such regimes to those for whom ideas, meaning, and values are central." While ideology remains fundamental to such one-party regimes as China and North Korea (Dukalskis 2017), most authoritarian regimes today do not have the capacity or appetite to furnish revolutionary ideologies like Leninism or Nazism to mobilise support. Instead, these regimes aim to win the hearts and minds of their citizens by trumpeting their development performance or nationalist credential (see Tannenberg et al. 2020).

Second, authoritarian regimes need to cater to emergent interests. Effective functioning of the political system in a society with diversifying interests, Huntington (1970, 41) explains, requires the softening of political control that permits more autonomy for the system's economic, social, and technical components. As such, authoritarian regimes are constrained by the presence of opposition parties that challenge the ruling party for political power, and a variety of interest groups that seek to influence policy directions such as private capital that emerged from the state's retreat from the economic system. In this regard, totalitarian-style state mobilisation could be perceived by other components of the more pluralistic polity such as the military, the bureaucracy, religious institutions, and other interest groups as a threat to

their "distinct constituencies" (Linz 2000, 166). Persisting with totalitarian-style mobilisation would require the regime to become more totalitarian to defeat the constraints (Linz 2000, 166).

Third, economic change has weakened authoritarian regimes' capacity for totalitarian-style state mobilisation. Linz (2000, 262) and Schapiro (1972, 41) suggest that only when the regime has full command of the economy can it use livelihood incentives to coerce dependent citizens into the participative direction it desires. In a centrally-planned economy, material coercion is deployed to render members dependent on membership in mass organisations for basic necessities, dispute resolution, education, healthcare, jobs, and the like (Kasza 1995, 53–55; Kubicek 1996, 32; Bunce 1999, 24). As the sole employer, the state can directly determine the livelihood of every individual; it can dismiss dissenting individuals from their workplaces and make sure that they are not able to find alternative employment elsewhere (Schapiro 1972, 41). But it is now a rarity for states to have such extensive control over the economy. Even single-party states like China and Vietnam, which formally uphold the Marxist doctrine, have embraced capitalist development. Without economic coercion, the likely outcome is that participation in political and quasi-political organisations, either coerced or voluntary, is limited and sporadic. Citizens' attitude towards the regime is more about "passive acceptance" than "enthusiasm", as used to be expressed in political rallies and other mass events (Linz 1970, 259).

Finally, contemporary authoritarian regimes are more likely to tolerate competitive politics, seeking to capitalise on it. More often than not, authoritarian regimes allow opposition parties and civil society organisations to co-exist with state-controlled organisations. The former is often victimised by various forms of repression to ensure that they do not become the catalysts of the regime's downfall.[3] However, rarely are they destroyed or usurped entirely

[3] Civil society can also enable the rise of authoritarianism and foster social division (McCarthy and Thompson 2020, 6–7).

because of their usefulness in exhibiting the regime's democratic trappings (Lorch and Bunk 2017; Wischermann et al. 2018). Adopting a limited form of freedom is in the best interest of authoritarian regimes because high-intensity coercion can come with "high international costs" such as international condemnation, diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions, or prosecution by international courts (Way and Levitsky 2006, 392).

Despite these massive changes to its original impetus, state mobilisation persists and evolves. What does state mobilisation in contemporary authoritarian regimes look like? What has it achieved or intended to achieve? Analysing state mobilisation points to the need to refocus on the traditional means of authoritarian rule, and it is precisely the lack of interest in this approach due to the enthusiasm in the innovative means of authoritarian rule that this puzzle has received little attention in the existing literature. Assessing the growing interest in authoritarian elections against Linz's dimensions of authoritarianism (i.e., pluralism, leadership, mobilisation, and ideology), Snyder (2006, 220) comments that it enriches our understanding of the pluralism dimensions of authoritarianism but "overlooks other fundamental dimensions that are critical for analysing regimes." Snyder's observation provided the cue for this research. It suggests that important gaps still need to be filled if a more comprehensive understanding of authoritarian politics is to be achieved.

The Argument in Brief

Ekiert and Perry (2020), and Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020), have recently proposed theoretical frameworks for understanding the role of state mobilisation in authoritarian rule. Their works represent the few attempts to go beyond single-country case studies to investigate this phenomenon from a comparative lens. Yet these existing works largely equate state mobilisation with repressive street mobilisation. I argue that in addition to this critical function, state mobilisation also performs more subtle and innovative functions that play out off the

street. Confining the focus to either dimension would produce an incomplete understanding of state mobilisation on the ground.

Hence, this dissertation advances a more comprehensive framework of state mobilisation as a set of authoritarian survival strategies. My central hypothesis is that *the type of state mobilisation strategy employed is shaped by the nature of the threat confronting the regime*. Political threats vary in their intensity and hence severity. Some manifest in street protests, military coups, party defection, or opposition challenges in the electoral arena. Some are more latent, taking on a more subtle and mundane form of resistance or activism, either physically (see Scott 1985) or virtually (see Sinpeng and Tapsell 2021). Once triggered, state mobilisation performs three regime stabilisation functions: *legitimation*, *cooptation*, and *repression*. In performing these functions, state mobilisation helps authoritarian regimes overcome the threat that triggers it in the first place. However, the outcome is not uniform. My studies of Cambodia and Malaysia show examples of both successful and unsuccessful state mobilisation as well as those with indeterminate results.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of three parts. In Part I, chapter 2 outlines the dissertation's theoretical framework. The chapter begins by defining the study's independent (political threats) and dependent (state mobilisation) variables. Then the literature on the origins and functions of state mobilisation is reviewed. It is concluded that there is a broad theoretical consensus on political threats as a major driver of state mobilisation, but not on the functions of state mobilisation in responding to those threats. Thus, instead of proposing an alternative hypothesis on the driver of state mobilisation, I will test the existing hypothesis that state mobilisation is a product of political threats in the context of Cambodia and Malaysia. My contribution is thus empirical. On the role of state mobilisation, I hypothesise that it performs

three regime stabilisation functions: legitimation, cooptation, and repression. The classification of these functions is aimed to capture a variety of ways that state mobilisation is deployed, i.e., beyond the kind of mere street counter-mobilisation identified by Ekiert and Perry (2020) and Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020). The chapter is concluded by discussing the empirical strategy used to test the hypotheses, case selection issues, and data collection processes.

The empirical analysis consists of two parts—Part II covering Cambodia and Part III on Malaysia. Each Part begins with an overview chapter (Chapter 3 on Cambodia; and Chapter 6 on Malaysia) which provides a concise illustration of the threat environment of the regimes which includes an account of the foundation of the ruling party, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) in Cambodia and the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in Malaysia; the various threats the regimes faced; and the role of state mobilisation in responding to those threats. The purpose of these chapters is twofold. First, it describes the authoritarian profile of these regimes to contextualise state mobilisation as an authoritarian survival strategy. Second, in demonstrating the historical effectiveness of state mobilisation as an authoritarian survival strategy, these chapters lay the foundation for understanding why authoritarian regimes are incentivised to deploy state mobilisation as a tool to handle new and ongoing threats—even when the outcome of state mobilisation is hard to measure, like the case of Cambodia which I will explain.

Following these country overview chapters, an in-depth empirical analysis of the functions of state mobilisation in each country is undertaken over the subsequent chapters in each Part: chapter 4 on *legitimation* in Cambodia; chapter 5 on *cooptation* in Cambodia; and chapter 7 on *repression* in Malaysia.

Chapter 4 delves into the legitimating function of state mobilisation. This chapter examines how the Union Youth Federations of Cambodia (UYFC) idealises the CPP rule and signals its cohesion to renew the party's legitimacy following its poor performance in the 2013

elections. The empirical analysis focuses on two UYFC mass events—(i) 40km into History, a 40km long walk by 700 people to commemorate the foundation of the political movement that later gave birth to the CPP, and (ii) Angkor Sankranta, a mass celebration of Khmer New Year that featured cultural and entertainment events. I also explain how the UYFC's leadership composition that incorporates scions of the party's factional leaders may function as a signal of the CPP's cohesion.

Chapter 5 turns to the cooptative function of state mobilisation. The chapter assesses how pro-government labour unions led by the National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia (NACC) have supported the implementation of the ruling party's labour management strategy that has, since the 2013 elections, put more emphasis on material cooptation to complement repression. The focus of the analysis is on their role in the minimum wage setting process and the NACC's cooperation with the UYFC in delivering free healthcare services to workers to gain their support.

Chapter 7 examines the repressive function of state mobilisation. The chapter investigates the role played by UMNO's youth wing, the UMNO Youth, in suppressing and deterring opposition mobilisation against the government. I first focus on two successful case studies to explain the UMNO Youth's repressive role: the 1969 racial riots known as the May 13 incident; and the 1987 state repression known as Operation Lalang. I then probe an unsuccessful case of state repression and the factors that may prevent state mobilisation from achieving its intended goal of helping authoritarian regimes overcome threats. This is done by analysing the UMNO Youth's attempts to suppress an influential social movement, Bersih, in the context of UMNO's electoral loss in 2018.

Part IV contains two chapters. Chapter 8 summarises and reviews the evidence from the empirical analysis against the hypotheses. I conclude that although the evidence supports the hypotheses that state mobilisation is driven by the threats to regime survival and performs

legitimation, cooptation, and repression to stabilise the authoritarian regime, its outcome varies. While the case of Cambodia provides examples of successful and indeterminate outcomes of state mobilisation, the case of Malaysia supplements these insights with an example of the failure of state mobilisation. Then, I extend my argument to other Southeast Asian countries. The chapter shows that state mobilisation of various shapes has been employed by authoritarian regimes across the region to counter threats to their survival. Chapter 9 concludes the dissertation by discussing its analytical contributions and suggesting future research pathways. The chapter emphasises the utility of state mobilisation beyond street mobilisation and repression, and that future research should establish how significant state mobilisation is for the survival and durability of authoritarian regimes.

Chapter 2: Political Threats and State Mobilisation

Conceptualised as revolution, social movement, or civil society, the political impact of spontaneous and coordinated citizen activism in democratic and nondemocratic contexts has generated a vast body of literature (for example, Tilly 1978; Skocpol 1979; McAdam et al. 1996; Tarrow 1998; Thompson 2003). In authoritarian settings, mass uprisings by social forces, be they the middle class, workers, or students, have culminated in the collapse of authoritarian regimes in Portugal (1974), Peru (1980), the Philippines (1985), Indonesia (1998), Serbia (2000), Tunisia (2011), Egypt (2011), and others. As insightful as social mobilisation is in explaining regime change or breakdown, the opposite dynamic is also crucial: authoritarian regimes have mobilised supporters and ordinary citizens to respond to threats. Tactics of state mobilisation have evolved as authoritarian regimes adapt to threats of different natures. Yet we do not possess as much theoretical knowledge of how this process works and even less on how much and in what ways it contributes to the survival of authoritarian regimes.

This dissertation takes the first step in filling in this lacuna. I argue that state mobilisation is a product of the threat environment authoritarian regimes find themselves in. Depending on the nature of the threat, state mobilisation is deployed to perform three regime stabilisation functions—namely, cooptation, repression, and legitimation.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the theoretical argument on the regime-strengthening functions of state mobilisation—informed by both deductive reasoning drawn from the comparative authoritarianism literature and inductive empirics collected from contextual cases in Southeast Asia. The section that follows defines state mobilisation, the dependent variable, and political threats, the independent variable, to establish the conceptual elements of the theoretical framework. The third section surveys existing research on state mobilisation to situate the research in the broader literature, acquire the background knowledge

on this phenomenon, and identify the gaps to which this research can contribute. Thereafter, I develop a framework of state mobilisation to explain the mechanisms through which state mobilisation supports authoritarian regimes in their response to threats. The chapter is concluded with the research design in which I respecify the hypotheses and how to test them.

What is State Mobilisation?

State mobilisation refers to the formation of civilian organisations by authoritarian regimes or their agents to advance the regime's agenda through pro-regime events such as counter-demonstrations and mass performance. Three key concepts need to be elaborated on: regime, state, and mobilisation. I define regime as a set of formal and informal rules that structure the access to and exercise of power (Geddes 1999, 116) *and* a group of individuals who enact these rules. Following Mann (1993, 18), the group in power is constituted by "an alliance of dominant ideological, economic, and military power actors, coordinated by the rulers of the state." A regime is authoritarian when there is "the absence of fair reasonably competitive elections through which citizens choose those who make policies on their behalf" (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018, 1).

I use the term state broadly to refer to the public institutions controlled by the regime, including the state bureaucracy, the police and other coercive forces, the legislature, and the judiciary. These institutions constitute the regime's infrastructural power—its capacity to penetrate society to implement policies or exert authority more broadly (Mann 1984). The term 'state' instead of 'regime' is emphasised because state mobilisation is a broad phenomenon and not necessarily the exclusive province of regime actors. It can also be organised by the regime's agents working in state institutions. Thus, state mobilisation captures the processes set into motion by regime actors as well as state actors.

In the existing literature on the role of social groups in political change, mobilisation refers to "the process by which a group goes from being a passive collection of individuals to an active participant in public life" (Tilly 1978, 69). By definition, this process is not necessarily unique to democratic regimes. In some nondemocratic regimes, "citizen participation in and active mobilization for political and collective social tasks are encouraged" (Linz 2000, 65). In the context of one-party states, for example, Brzezinski and Huntington (1977, 95–96) note the benefits of having citizens participate in the political system: it increases their "identification with the regime and their feeling of responsibility for its success and failure," and provides a necessary check on the "inertia, inefficiency, and abuses" in the system. But for state mobilisation, the regime, not individuals or intermediaries, pulls the strings. The latter are most often than not the subjects to be mobilised. If mobilisation is "the process by which a unit gains significantly in the control of assets it previously did not control" (Etzioni 1968: 388-389), state mobilisation allows the regime to gain and perpetuate control over individuals' labour, time, and loyalty. In being mobilised by the regime, individuals are also being demobilised because they may have to withdraw from other obligations or social organisations opposing the regime.

Civilian organisations at the heart of state mobilisation are distinct from military organisations. Although members in these civilian organisations may be armed to execute their mission, these organisations should not be conflated with armed groups such as paramilitary forces or militias. For the latter, militarisation for combative purposes through armament and specialised military training is a permanent feature, and their primary role is to augment the regular state coercive apparatus (see Böhmelt and Clayton, 2018). Given the militarisation and specialisation, members of these armed groups cannot be just randomly recruited. Civilian organisations, on the other hand, are formed primarily by ordinary citizens, and they are meant to stimulate the form but not the substance of a civil society organisation. This façade has

helped authoritarian regimes advance their interests domestically and internationally (see Naim 2009; Cooley 2015).

These organisations provide state mobilisation with a stable organisational structure to coordinate and sustain activities. Having a formal organisational structure facilitates the management of members, such as registration and training. The mobilisation of members with adequate capacity is vital for the successful orchestration of mass events that require thorough planning, coordination, and supervision. Having an existing membership base is also helpful for ad hoc mobilisation when participants have to be recruited quickly on short notice.

Pro-regime civilian organisations are not created equal in terms of their access to power. Some have a formal relationship with the regime, having been led by a key member of the decision-making organisation such as the ruling party's politburo or central committee, and are financially supported by it. Some are endorsed by the regime through their leaders' positions in state institutions. These leaders are not necessarily members of the ruling coalition (i.e., the powerful group that one identifies as the regime). This means that they may have limited or no access to political funding. These organisations thus have a semi-formal relationship with the regime. Others are outsider organisations that align informally with the regime because they support the government's policies or the ruler's claims. A regime actor usually serves as the patron of these organisations. Robertson (2009, 545) calls these pro-regime organisations collectively "ersatz social movements" that are "deliberately designed, created, organized, supported, and, if need be, marginalized, by important regime players." The corporatism literature emphasised the role of these organisations as "auxiliary and dependent organs of the state" (Schmitter 1974, 102) that are "a means of social and political control" (MacIntyre 1994).

The principal pro-regime organisations are mass organisations. Variably called "social control organizations", "social-mobilization organizations", "mass-member organizations", or

"administered mass organizations", mass organisations are civilian organisations with a formal and semi-formal relationship with the regime, such as youth wings and labour unions. As authoritarian regimes use political participation in pro-regime civilian organisations to simulate civil society, it can be challenging to distinguish mass organisations from non-governmental organisations or civil society from "uncivil society", based solely on their outward activities. Huntington (1968, 1), for example, once considers the Soviet Union comparable to the United States and Britain in terms of "popular participation in public affairs". But Roeder counters that what actually took place in the Soviet Union was the suppression of autonomous organisations by enlisting citizens in "the joint production of public goods and services between state bureaucracy and auxiliary organisations, and civilian volunteers" (Mattson 1986 cited in Roeder 1989, 861).

To distinguish mass organisations from civil society organisations, more attention has to be paid to their formation and objective. Youth mass organisations, for instance, provide vocational training and promote civic engagement just like what a youth non-government organisation would do. The distinction is that non-governmental organisations and civil society more broadly are organized spontaneously from below to seek political accountability or influence policies. In contrast, mass organisations are "created by incumbent regime officials to augment their control over the rest of the society" (Kasza 1995, 8). It is the "implementation of decisions already made" (Roeder 1989, 861). In short, mass organisations are the primary agent of state mobilisation. They are established to *support* government decisions and *strengthen* the political system, whereas civil society organisations seek to *influence* government decisions and *limit* the political system. For that matter, a mass organisation is always a political tool.

What Constitutes a Political Threat?

Authoritarian regimes, Schedler (2013, 21) argues, have to be constantly vigilant and devise strategies to preserve power. They have to prevent or crack down on people rising up against their rule. They often need to buy votes or rig the electoral system to prevent the opposition party from winning. The authoritarian leader often packs the ruling institutions with his loyalists and appeases them with perks to prevent them from turning against him and ensure that they will defend him when there is a revolt from the masses. As such, authoritarian regimes have "a problem of *security.* They can never lean back and relax. They have to continually prevent, detect, and contain threats to their hold on power" (Schedler 2013, 21, emphasis in original). In short, how long an authoritarian regime can stay in power is contingent on how well it manages the threats to its survival.

Political threats vary in their level of intensity, duration, and the composition of the social and political forces that drive them. In this dissertation, I classify threats as high-intensity and low-intensity. A high-intensity threat can be referred to as a crisis. This kind of threat is acute and manifest and poses an existential threat to the regime, thus requiring the incumbent to take "immediate" and "unmistakable" actions to preserve power (Merkel 2014, 17; Gerschewski 2018a, 3). Svolik's (2012) analysis of authoritarian rule provides an encompassing set of high-intensity threats. Emanating horizontally from above, there are elite defections, military coups, or assassinations. These are the upshot of internal elite splits triggered by disruption to a stable distribution of patronage, succession disputes after the death of the autocrat, or alliance formation between regime reformers and moderate opposition. High-intensity threats can also arise vertically from the political opposition, their mass base, and ordinary citizens. Examples include credible prospects of an opposition victory in elections and any form of contentious politics that disrupts the normal functioning of society, such as post-election protests, labour strikes, ethnic riots, social movements, or separatist insurgencies.

While a high-intensity threat is characterised by public acts of defiance, a low-intensity threat is the hidden acts or discourses of dissatisfaction or resistance that cannot be directly observed by the regime (Kuran 1989, 42; Scott 1990, 4; Dimitrov 2017, 22). The concept of low-intensity threat is developed at greater length below where I outline the theoretical framework.

The concept of political threat draws upon Gerschewski (2018a). Gerschewski (2018a, 3) defines crisis as "an urgent situation requiring immediate action by the incumbents to maintain power." He classifies a crisis as either manifest or latent, but this distinction introduces unnecessary confusion and subjectivity into the concept. Gerschewski (2018a, 3) suggests that a crisis is latent when it is "building up in the background and about to break out." This definition, however, contradicts the very attributes of a crisis which has to be "urgent" and requires "immediate action" as he defines it. Departing from Gerschewski, I contend that a crisis is manifest by definition; therefore, the manifest label is unnecessary. Also, I argue that a more appropriate label for events that Gerschewski refers to as latent *crisis* should be latent *threat* or more specifically low-intensity threat. Indeed, given this conceptual fuzziness, I argue that political threat is a more fitting label than regime crisis to describe emergency situations that threaten authoritarian survival. By extension, the concepts of high-intensity threat and low-intensity threat capture the varied intensity of a threat environment more fully than the concepts of manifest and latent crisis.

Existing Research

This section surveys the literature to discern the role of state mobilisation in advancing the interests of nondemocratic regimes. Then, I critique the existing explanations of this relationship before outlining my own theoretical framework. The literature review revolves around the drivers and functions of state mobilisation, beginning with these dynamics in the

totalitarian regimes[4] and other highly repressive regimes of the 20th century, which due to their state power elevated the practice of state mobilisation to an unprecedented level. Although states had mobilised citizens long before that, state mobilisation in the modern era represents a critical turning point as the centralised states acquired the unprecedented capacity to wield power across their territories (Kasza 1995, 15). Kasza (1995) starts with observations in his seminal book on the "administered mass organizations", noting the "ability of many nondemocratic regimes to mobilize millions of their subjects for the implementation of state policy" as "a striking feature of 20th-century politics" (Kasza 1993, 81). Kasza's work has made a valuable contribution to this subject and will inform a significant part of this survey.

The review concludes that there is considerable theoretical consensus on the drivers of state mobilisation, but not on the functions of state mobilisation. Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes converge in their goal of staying in power, despite the variation in their institutional configurations. Although nondemocratic regimes do many things other than surviving (Pepinsky 2014, 20–21), survival is fundamental to other decision-making processes because they need to rule uninterrupted to be able to make those decisions. Thus, state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes is as much likely, as in totalitarian regimes, to be driven by threats to regime survival. Yet the authoritarian institutional landscape necessitates alteration to the ways similar outcomes can be achieved via state mobilisation. In short, state mobilisation in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes is driven by similar sources, but its functions once triggered exhibit substantial variation. Recent scholarship has shed much light on the functions of state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes but overlooked some subtle and innovative functions. Therefore, more effort needs to be put into observing and theorising the functions of state mobilisation to gain a more complete understanding of this phenomenon.

[4] Totalitarianism was studied extensively in the 1950s, most famously by Friedrich and Brzezinski, and Arendt. Friedrich and Brzezinski (1956) proposed six general traits of a totalitarian regime: ideology, a single party under a personalist dictator, terror system, monopolisation of communications, monopolisation of coercion, and centrally planned economy. Arendt's (1951) definition is narrower, focusing on ideology and terror.

The Origins of State Mobilisation

The scholarship on state mobilisation was pioneered by research on totalitarian dictatorship, most thoroughly informed by Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, and Hitler's Germany. According to Kasza (1995, 15), mass mobilisation is made possible by "the growing organizational, extractive, and coercive powers of the state, which in turn are products of novel technologies in weaponry, transportation, communications, and information gathering." Yet it was war that stimulated the formation of mass organisations. Guided by the mantra that "the outcome of future wars will not be determined by the strongest army, but by the strongest populace," the onset of World War I drove the Japanese imperial state to create the Great Japan Youth League to mobilise boys between the age they left school and the age they became eligible for military draft and reserve service (Kasza 1995, 18). Looming war threats in subsequent decades stimulated the mobilisation of women, local residents, and industrial workers (Kasza 1995, 19). When civil war broke out in 1918 in the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks converted trade unions from interest groups into "official arms of the regime" responsible for recruiting members and drafting them to support the armed forces. The youth organisation, the Komsomol, was likewise made an "auxiliary body for military conscription" and assisted in "[collecting] funds for the army, [combating] desertion, [treating] the wounded, and [aiding] soldiers' families" (Kasza 1995, 20).

Political threats as the driver of state mobilisation are similarly evident in contemporary authoritarian regimes. In Venezuela, Handlin (2020, 217) contends that the deployment of state mobilisation "mirrors" the "seriousness of the threat posed by the opposition". When there was little opposition threat shortly after Chavez came to power, the regime focused on driving citizen participation in local governance through community-based organisations such as the Water Tables and Urban Land Committees to undergird the government's commitment to improving rural public services. During the early 2000s and 2010s, when the opposition

threatened to oust him through street protests and a recall referendum, Chavez countered by launching the Bolivarian Circles for counter-protest, and Communal Councils for electoral mobilisation. The regime experienced a heightened crisis after Chavez died in 2013, followed by the opposition's surging support in the post-Chavez elections and an economic fallout. Succeeding Chavez, Maduro responded by forming and reactivating more grassroots organisations to double down on counter-protests and electoral mobilisation. Opposition threats as the driver of state mobilisation were similarly observed in Egypt (Anderson and Cammett 2020), Ukraine (Beissinger 2020), and China (Perry and Yan 2020). Having examined the experience of state mobilisation in a range of regimes, Ekiert and Perry (2020, 8) point to the commonality of their motives, concluding that "all sorts of regimes…have sought to forestall revolutionary challenges by sponsoring counterrevolutionary contention."

The overview above shows that there has been substantial theoretical consensus on the driver of state mobilisation across time and regime subtypes. Whether they are totalitarian or authoritarian, nondemocratic regimes mobilise citizens under state-controlled organisations to respond to threats to their survival. The same, however, cannot be said of the functions of state mobilisation. The structural constraints and opposition strength faced by authoritarian regimes necessitate a substantive change in the types of state mobilisation tactics deployed. I contend that totalitarian-style state mobilisation is no longer appropriate in a modern authoritarian setting. The structural and institutional realities of authoritarian regimes today require that ruling elites adapt state mobilisation over time to maintain its efficacy in countering threats. This requirement warrants closer scrutiny and theorisation and uncovering the variety of functions performed by state mobilisation is the avenue through which the most fruitful contribution to knowledge accumulation can be made. The rest of this section reviews existing empirical and theoretical arguments on the functions of state mobilisation in nondemocratic regimes to identify the issues to be addressed in this dissertation.

The Functions of State Mobilisation

a. State Mobilisation: Totalitarian Style

In totalitarian regimes, rulers used the single party and its network of mass organisations—supported by the terror police—to execute extensive and intensive mobilisation to exert control over "the livelihood of every single individual" (Schapiro 1972, 41). In the early days of communist rule in China, Barnett (1951, 76) finds that mass organisations were "the principal agencies through which the weight of the Communist apparatus makes itself felt upon the average individual; they are the means through which the Communist Party has its widest impact." Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union explained how these "transmission belt" organisations helped the communist party rule:

> The Party is the "directing force," with each sector of the "working people" having its own "lever" or "transmission belt" functioning as the connecting link between Party and group. The Party draws the most advanced elements in the transmission belt organizations into its own ranks and through them directs the activities of the mass organizations and thus of the masses. The Party must not take the place of the mass organization, but rather must exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat through these transmission belts (Stalin 1954 quoted in Harper 1969, 87).

Stalin's statement made clear that the party and mass organisations engaged in a division of labour: the former was an elite organisation, while the latter was a mass-based organisation (Kasza 1995). How significant is such a division? According to Arendt (1951, 366), totalitarian regimes segregate the masses who have been "won through propaganda" into sympathisers or "fellow-travellers," and members. As expressed by Hitler, sympathisers were "too lazy and cowardly for anything more than mere theoretical insight, and only a minority want to fight for their convictions" (ibid). Consequently, mass organisations were a necessary political tool for encapsulating these sympathisers. Huntington (1970, 15) suggests that an indicator of a strong one-party system is the "premium" placed on membership of the party.

"If party membership becomes universal, it becomes meaningless," he adds. Being a party member in a totalitarian state "must be an honor worth striving for" (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956, 36). In these single-party dictatorships, mass organisations create the space for political participation without party membership.

Membership Recruitment

The importance of state mobilisation for totalitarian rule is evident from the magnitude of people under the control of mass organisations and the effort made to recruit them. Totalitarian regimes strive to enlist "all or nearly all individuals who possess certain ascriptive traits or belong to a particular social sector" (Kasza 1995, 31). The Committee for the Defense of the Revolution in Cuba claimed to have 85 per cent of the population as members at different points (Colomer 2000, 119). The Komsomol, the youth organisation of the Soviet Union, had more than 19 million members in 1962, or about 45 per cent of the 15-26 age group (Brzezinski and Huntington 1977, 82). The Nazi Party's youth organisation, the Hitler Youth, had a membership of 3.5 million by 1934 (Brooker 1991, 130). In East Germany, the Union of Consumer Co-operatives (*Konsum*), the Confederation of Free German Trade Union, and the Women's Democratic League had 4.6 million, 9.5 million, and 1.5 million members, respectively, in 1987 nearing the regime's collapse (McCulloch 2014, 136). In China in the early 1950s, it was estimated that more than half of the adult population were tied to mass organisations of various types (Chao 1954, 755). The All-China Women's Federation established its presence in each administrative or work unit, a coverage so complete that explicit recruitment of members was unnecessary (Guo 2007, 466).

Both coercive and cooptative methods are used to recruit members for mass organisations. Most common in dictatorships with a centrally-planned economy, material coercion was deployed to render members dependent on membership in mass organisations for basic necessities, dispute resolution, education, healthcare, jobs, and the like (Kasza 1995, 53–

55; Kubicek 1996, 32; Bunce 1999, 24). This strategy is possible when the state controls all aspects of political, economic, and social life. Schapiro (1972, 41) argues that by monopolising private properties, the state becomes the sole employer and directly determines every individual's livelihood.

The fact that non-coercive methods are used indicates the political attention dedicated to maximising state mobilisation. More benign strategies to recruit members involve flattery and nationalist sentiment. “Model workers” in China, for example, were bestowed “red banners, medals, press coverage, and travel privileges.” On its significance, Kasza (1995, 58) maintains that “medals do not convert everyone into an ally of the regime. But for many…such recognition may suffice to ensure conformity with the AMO’s [administered mass organisation] regulations and to render an autonomous alternative less attractive.” In their comparative study of political participation in the Soviet Union and the United States, Brzezinski and Huntington (1977, 90) argue that nationalism in the former contributes to “an intense commitment to the political system,” and greatly aids its politicisation project. This nationalist sentiment originated from the nation’s breakthrough in space technology, military victory over Nazi Germany, and the possibility of narrowing the industrial gap in relation to the U.S., all achievements that the Soviet regime took “full credit” for.

Once encapsulated, members need to be kept on their toes. One tried and true method is co-opting the leaders of mass organisations' base units, which have the most interaction with members. For example, the Japanese colonial government acquired active cooperation from the Taiwanese chief of residential mass organisations with “a regular scheme of favors” including “educational benefits, business opportunities, and appointments to government posts” (Chen 1975, 400). Illicit benefits such as expropriations, illegal trade, graft, and the like

were also attached to leadership positions in residential mass organisations in Cuba (Colomer 2000, 126).[5]

State Mobilisation as a System for Social Control

Classic studies on highly repressive regimes have painted state mobilisation as a ruling strategy for the complete domineering of citizens (Arendt 1951; Huntington 1970; Schapiro 1972; Brooker 1991; Linz 2000). This is most obvious from the rigid system of social control performed by grassroots mass organisations. Colomer (2000, 122–23) reports that residential mass organisations in Cuba kept track of people moving in and out of the neighbourhoods, inventoried vacant houses for expropriation, made identity cards, registered new births, and monitored residents' activities and expressions. On the security front, these organisations performed night patrol, reported irregularities to the police, and carried out arrests if necessary. Moreover, they engaged in judiciary-related activities such as providing information about residents involved in court cases, collecting evidence, and serving as witnesses. Joining other mass organisations, attending university, or seeking social mobility in general required their stamp of approval for having the "correct revolutionary orientation" (Aguirre 1984, 534). Indeed, residential mass organisations' control over its members in Cuba was so complete that Fidel Castro once remarked "[w]ho can make a move without the CDR's [Committee for the Defense of Revolution] knowing about it? Not even an ant!" (Colomer 2000, 122).

Designers of mass organisations also shift the cost of monitoring from the state to the people by making residents perform surveillance on each other. During their occupation of

[5] To be sure, individuals also had their own reasons for wanting to participate in state mobilisation. Instead of losses from non-participation, this is about gains from participation. One motivation is the accumulation of "moral capital" to exchange later for "relative advantages in other areas of life" (Aguirre 1984, 550). Relatedly, members seek to build their influence from within. For example, although members in the Soviet Union agreed that they had little influence on government decisions over policies and leadership of mass organisations, they felt a sense of "internal efficacy" when they could exert control over peer members and become a "little boss" (Bahry and Silver 1990, 826).

Taiwan, for example, the Japanese instituted the rule of "collective responsibility" in which all members of each residential mass organisation were held collectively responsible (e.g., fined) for a member's wrongdoings and rule violations. This was designed to disincentivise residents from harbouring criminals and concealing crimes (Chen 1975, 398). Similarly, members of Cuba's residential mass organisations were blamed in "repudiation meetings" for failing to prevent or report criminal incidents (Colomer 2000, 131).

The social control system is often reinforced by the diffusion of official ideology to cultivate political loyalty. From "political study circles" to "spiritual training", indoctrination is a vital control mechanism employed by dictators. In East Germany, mass organisations promoted the virtues of socialism, obedience to the state, and ways to "establish, promote and maintain communist rule" (McCulloch 2014, 140). In South Korea, the military regime under Park Chung-hee (1963-1979), through its New Community Movement, promoted the idea that democracy was attained "not through elections but through gradual training and practice in carrying out state-supported projects" (Han 2004, 87).

b. Tension and Change

The collapse of totalitarian regimes means that there are few empirical cases that fit the concept of totalitarianism (Gerschewski 2013, 15). The usefulness of the concept was challenged by Linz (2000, 3) on the ground that "by the 1970s and thereafter it did not adequately capture the political reality of Soviet-type regimes." This led to the gradual obsolescence of the concept and gave rise to the new concept of authoritarianism. To contrast it with totalitarianism, Linz (1970, 255) characterises authoritarianism as a political system with the presence of limited political pluralism and predictable exercise of power, and the absence of an elaborate ideology and sweeping mobilisation.

These new institutional conditions have important implications for the dynamics of state mobilisation. In China, for example, economic liberalisation after the death of Mao

substantially altered the relationship between the party and the country's only union federation, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). Gone is the unification of labour, management and party interests found under socialism (Harper 1969, 95; Chen 2009, 665). The ACFTU had to reinvent itself to balance the interests of the party-state, its members, and private enterprises, which were often in conflict. The necessity to maintain peaceful industrial relations compelled the communist party to relax its labour policy, allowing ACFTU greater institutional space to navigate the paradox (Chen 2003, 1011). Similarly, in Russia, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), the Russian equivalence of the ACFTU, managed to obtain labour concessions through threats of strikes, settled labour-government disputes in favour of workers, and opposed government policies detrimental to labour interests (Kubicek 1996, 37–39). In Putin's Russia, the pro-regime youth organisation Nashi—modelled on the Komsomol in the Soviet era—reoriented its position to provide a viable platform for the fulfilment of meaningful personal goals to attract members (Hemment 2012).

The above examples seem to suggest that mass organisations are no longer exclusively an instrument of state power, having assumed additional representative and service functions and sought greater autonomy from the regime. Nevertheless, the power basis of a mass organisation remains its institutional status as a regime organ, rather than its organised mass base as in the case of a social movement. As Read (2012, 52) interprets the changing role of the residential committees in China, "each arrangement of the institutional furniture has carefully stayed in the same basic architecture: firm party and state control, incorporating some degree of popular participation in selective and structural ways." Therefore, emergent institutional freedom cannot be isolated from political concession by adaptive authoritarian regimes. Despite their transformation, mass organisations at best *look* like, rather than *act* like, civil society organisations. Complementing the party and the state remains its central mission. Thus, China's ACFTU remains steering clear of collective disputes involving organised

protests deemed politically destabilising and intolerable to the regime (Chen 2003, 1016), and Russia's Nashi remains a pro-regime youth organisation involved in counterdemonstrations, harassment, and vote mobilisation (Robertson 2009, 543).

c. State Mobilisation in Authoritarian Regimes

Until recently, our understanding of state mobilisation and its role in authoritarian survival had been informed by idiosyncratic case studies. There was a lack of theory building that explained this relationship more broadly. The edited volume *Ruling by Other Means* (Ekiert, Perry, and Yan 2020) is a valuable recent contribution to the theorisation of state mobilisation. Drawing on the empirical findings from 11 countries across five continents, Ekiert and Perry (2020) propose a typology of "state-mobilized movement". While Kasza's (1995) typology was based on membership criteria of mass organisations such as age, gender, occupation, and place of residence, and their broad economic and political functions; Ekiert and Perry's typology explicitly links the functions of state mobilisation to political threats. It has two main categories: defensive or reactive mobilisation, and spoiler or proactive mobilisation. Reactive mobilisation is the organisation of countermovement to "slow down or stop" the challenging mobilisation. Proactive mobilisation is deployed to intimidate opposition forces and "preempt" their mobilisation.

Hellmeier and Weidmann (2020) is the other notable attempt to supply a theoretical framework to the field. They argue that pro-government mobilisation is a powerful weapon in the authoritarian toolkit against elite-driven and mass-driven threats. First, it helps coup-proof the regime by "demonstrating the regime's strength and mobilization capacity," leading coup-plotters to believe that the regime still has strong support and hence is difficult to topple. Second, as demonstrated by pro-government mobilisation, the regime's air of invincibility helps diffusion-proof the regime by dissuading protest organisers from mimicking anti-government protests in neighbouring countries. These two functions parallel Ekiert and Perry's

proactive mobilisation. Third, pro-government mobilisation serves the repressive purpose by promoting the risk of violent conflict, shifting blame from the coercive institution, justifying violent disbursement of the protest, and depriving anti-government protestors of significant public space. This function corresponds to Ekiert and Perry's reactive mobilisation.

Reactive mobilisation is common when authoritarian regimes are beset by mass protests or opposition mobilisation. For example, the pro-China regime in Hong Kong sponsored demonstrations to counter threatening democratic mobilisations like the Umbrella Movement. Counter-movements like the Silent Majority of Hong Kong and the Blue Ribbon Movement attacked pro-democracy protestors with tacit support from the police through their inaction (Yuen and Cheng 2017, 620–23). In Egypt, pro-government thugs attacked demonstrators calling for Mubarak's resignation with whips, rocks, and other "assorted weapons." Pro-government mobilisation "successfully amassed thousands of citizens to express support for the state apparatus, providing a pretext for the continual harassment and repression of government opponents even after the fall of the Mubarak regime" (Anderson and Cammett 2020, 267).

In turn, proactive mobilisation is deployed when potentially threatening and destabilising mobilising processes are forming. In Russia, for example, the government established the Nashi youth movement in the wake of the Orange Revolution that rocked Ukraine in 2004, inspiring the so-called colour revolution that brought down authoritarian regimes in Serbia, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia. Government turnover in these countries forced the Putin regime to treat it as an existential threat prompting the development of counter-measures to prevent the regional protest wave from spilling over into Russia, a strategy known as "diffusion-proofing" (Koesel and Bunce 2013). As the "cornerstone" of Putin's counter measures (Horvath 2011, 15), Nashi was responsible for framing the colour revolution as "pawns of foreign power", imitating its mobilisation technique, and providing the manpower

for counter-demonstrations (Robertson 2009, 542–45; Horvath 2011, 15–18; Finkel and Brudny 2012; Smyth, Sobolev, and Soboleva 2013).

To be sure, *Ruling by Other Means* is not a book concerned only with reactive and proactive forms of state mobilisation, and Ekiert and Perry's typology is more encompassing than what has been discussed above. Besides reactive and proactive mobilisation, state-mobilised movements rein in local or regional authorities or act "as a tool of factional *intra-state conflict* and struggle," undertake "*infrastructural development* to accomplish tasks that are not easy to carry out by routine bureaucratic policy implementation strategies", and advance the regime's agenda on the international stage to "support territorial claims, destabilize international adversaries, or otherwise advance geostrategic interests" (Ekiert and Perry 2020, 9).

But it is clear that repressive forms of state mobilisation, either reactive or proactive, are the core theme of *Ruling by Other Means*—seven of the 12 empirical chapters analyse this form of state mobilisation. These include "state-led contentious mobilization" in Poland; "proletarian counterprotest" in China; "civilian counterrevolutionary mobilization" in Ukraine; "pro-Kremlin youth movement" in Russia; "loyalist counterprotests" in Venezuela; "government-hired thugs" in Egypt; and "state-sponsored organizations and agents" in Hong Kong. In sum, the main argument of existing research is that authoritarian regimes maintain and adapt state mobilisation because it helps them respond to high-intensity threats.

This dissertation builds on this argument by addressing two issues. First, the frameworks of Ekiert and Perry as well as Hellmeier and Weidmann conceptualise state mobilisation as synonymous with street mobilisation for repressive purposes. Hellmeier and Weidmann equate pro-government mobilisation with "rallies" or "support in the street." Ekiert and Perry stress the pre-emptive nature of proactive mobilisation, but their interest remains in "peaceful marches" and "rowdy rallies", both being mobilisation techniques that draw regime

supporters into the streets. This approach emphasises the *demonstrational* dimension of state mobilisation, but state mobilisation also has an *organisational* dimension. The demonstrational aspect of state mobilisation refers to the organisation of mass events such as counter-street protests, the process at the centre of Hellmeier and Weidmann's, and Ekiert and Perry's frameworks. The organisational aspect of state mobilisation, however, is concerned with the encapsulation of citizens into mass organisations, for purposes that may or may not be related to street protests.

Lopsided state mobilisation in some authoritarian regimes alludes to the importance of making such a distinction. Table 1 lists the authoritarian regimes[6] that have a low rate of mass event but a high rate of mass organisation. The rates of mass event and mass organisation are measured by the "mobilization for autocracy" and "engagement in state-administered mass organizations" variables of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)[7] dataset, respectively (see Appendix I for measurement information).[8] It shows that state mobilisation in some authoritarian regimes is low in terms of mass event but high in terms of mass organisation. For example, there have been virtually no pro-regime mass events in Belarus, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Namibia, and Malawi, but these regimes have a medium concentration of mass organisations. This pattern suggests that state mobilisation has been deployed for purposes beyond street rallies. If we were to focus solely on street rallies, we would not be able to account for such patterns. Thus, we must pay attention to processes both *on* and *off* the street.

[6] The list of authoritarian regimes, their start and end dates, and their types are from (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014).
[7] V-Dem is a multi-institutional academic project to conceptualise and measure democracy (Coppedge et al. 2020).
[8] The rates are the average value of each variable between the start of the regime and 2010 which is the cut-off year of Geddes, Writing, and Frantz's dataset.

Table 1: Authoritarian Regimes with Low Rate of Mass Event and High Rate of Mass Organisation

N.	Regime	Start	End	Regime Type	Mass Event	Mas Organisation
1	Algeria	1963	1992	party-military	Very Low	High
3	Belarus	1995		personal	None	Medium
4	Bulgaria	1945	1990	party-based	Very Low	Medium
5	Eritrea	1994		party-personal	None	Medium
6	Haiti	1958	1986	personal	Very Low	Medium
7	Kyrgyzstan	2006	2010	personal	None	Medium
8	Laos	1976		party-based	Very Low	Medium
9	Malawi	1965	1994	personal	None	Medium
10	Mozambique	1976		party-based	Very Low	Medium
11	Namibia	1991		party-based	None	Medium
12	Romania	1946	1989	party-personal	Very Low	Medium
13	Rwanda	1995		party-military	Very Low	Medium
14	South Africa	1911	1994	oligarchy	Very Low	Medium
15	Tunisia	1957	2011	party-based	Very Low	Medium
16	Yemen	1979	2012	personal	Very Low	Medium

Source: Author's compilation based on V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al. 2020) and Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014).

My second point of departure from these authors concerns how proactive mobilisation is conceptualised. Whereas Ekiert and Perry as well as Hellmeier and Weidmann contend that proactive mobilisation is used for diffusion-proofing, I argue that future-proofing is a better indicator of proactiveness. While diffusion-proofing is activated when a threat is looming, future-proofing is undertaken when a threat is forming. Such strategy demands vigilance and foresight in anticipating unforeseen challenges despite the regime not being under duress from emergencies. Widespread popular protests in a neighbouring country that necessitate diffusion-proofing should not qualify as such a situation, because it is already an emergency once diffusion-proofing is deemed necessary. Proactive mobilisation is considered in this dissertation as a long-term strategy to pre-empt less urgent and alarming situations. Whereas

Ekiert and Perry as well as Hellmeier and Weidmann identify proactive mobilisation as a response to high-intensity threats, I aim to establish it as a preventative response to low-intensity threats.

A Framework of State Mobilisation: A Structural Approach

This dissertation investigates the puzzle why state mobilisation has remained a persistent feature of authoritarian rule despite the background conditions that fuelled its organisation ceasing to exist. This is a case of institutional adaptation and I study this behaviour from a structural perspective. This theoretical approach explains behaviour as an outcome of "objective, physical and material" factors not directly controllable or manipulable by agents, such as resource scarcity, demography, economic globalisation, geopolitics, natural disasters, and the like (Parsons 2007). Structural factors constrain actors more strongly than "man-made" institutions (ibid) such as constitutions, election systems, and democratic accountability.

In this dissertation, I focus on the threats to regime survival as the structure that shapes the regime's behaviour. The threat environment is the manifestation of the struggle for power between the regime and other social and political forces that the former cannot dictate at will; it can only adapt and respond to it using the resources at its disposal. For example, the regime can find it challenging to contain social mobilisation in the context of a weakening economy where individuals suffer from declining wages or economic opportunities. While it can dispense clientelistic and programmatic economic support, employ local surveillance to monitor social sentiments, harassment to discourage group formation, or repression to crack down on rebellion, the regime is hamstrung by the inability to influence transnational dynamics that exert consequential impacts on the state of its economy such as the policy behaviours of foreign governments and multinational corporations, as well as climate change which exacerbates existing drivers of conflict.

The causal power of a structure lies in its function as an "environment of incentives and prohibitions" for various actors in the pursuit of their goals (Little 1991, 105). Therefore, to understand how agents would behave in a particular situation, we have to know what their goals are and what choices are available to them to pursue these goals (ibid). Depending on their positions in the structure, actors are constrained differently by it and hence the choices available to them (Parsons 2007). Relative to ordinary citizens, the ruler and other actors that comprise the regime are in a privileged position to pursue their goals, the constant and ultimate one being survival. The regime's control of state power and material resources provides it with abundant advantages to compete with other social and political forces for political domination and wealth accumulation. Thus, it has the incentive and capability to invent and reproduce institutional arrangements that represent and advance its interests.

This approach is in line with the class-based/social conflict approach that has been applied to explain the origin of political institutions, most fruitfully in the context of Southeast Asia (Jayasuriya and Rodan 2007; Rodan 2018; Hameiri and Jones 2020). The social conflict approach emphasises that the analysis of institutions must be situated in the political economy context in which they take place. The primary contextual factor is social conflict or the struggle for power among actors seeking to protect and advance their economic and political interests, the driving force of which is the inherent tension and contradiction of the capitalist system. Once reaching a point, these conflicts threaten the dominant interests that necessitate powerful actors to devise strategies to manage social and economic change and contain the resultant conflicts (Rodan 2018). The dominant group that I examine in this dissertation is the regime leader and his ruling coalition or what Bueno de Mesquita and colleagues (2003, 51) term "winning coalition", the minimum set of people whose support is required for the regime leader to remain in power. These actors coalesce into a dominant party (e.g. Cambodia, Malaysia) or

a military organisation (e.g. Myanmar) and exercise their power with the support of the state bureaucracy and other coercive and legal institutions.

Based on this structural perspective, I argue that the persistence of state mobilisation is a product of authoritarian regimes' strategic choices guided by their threat environment. The nature of the threat environment interacts with authoritarian regimes' interests to determine the forms that state mobilisation takes. Similar to scholars of social conflict, I argue that state mobilisation is a strategy devised to serve the ruling coalition's interests which are threatened by new social dynamics represented by emergent demographic groups as in the case of Cambodia and changing ethnic coalitions as in the case of Malaysia. The remainder of this section lays out this argument.

To begin, examples of what a threat environment may look like are in order. In the case of Cambodia, the threat environment faced by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) regime since it came to power in 1979 has been comprised of power struggles with the supporters of previous regimes and took the form of a civil war that dragged on for much of the 1980s. It has also involved struggles with the opposition parties and their supporters in the electoral and street arena. So far, the CPP regime has managed to overcome these threats with the most recent action taken being the dissolution of the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) in 2017. Nevertheless, the regime remains alert to the low-intensity threat that has been observed by local party agents since the early 2000s as being the young people's unpredictable political preferences relative to their CPP-supporting parents. These young people went on to form a dynamic support base for the CNRP that nearly knocked the CPP from power in the 2013 elections. Although they were effectively disenfranchised following the dissolution of the CNRP, their presence cannot be discounted if the CPP takes seriously Mao Tse-Tung's warning that "a spark can start a prairie fire". In short, the CPP's threat environment in recent times is defined by *demography*.

With respect to Malaysia, the crux of the threat environment is *ethnicity*. Being a party that emerged from a nationalist movement to protect Malay special rights from the perceived encroachment of ethnic minorities, primarily the Chinese, the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) had established itself as the indispensable representative of Malay interests. UMNO's Malay exclusivity precluded the Chinese from seeking political power through it, an arrangement to balance out the Chinese' domination of the economic sphere. Over time this ethnic-based division of power engendered resentment from both sides. The Chinese had protested against the UMNO government's pro-Malay socioeconomic policies and their lack of political voice. The Malays, on the other hand, had had the anxiety of losing their political supremacy to the Chinese either through the victory of a Chinese-majority political party or Chinese-led anti-government mobilisation. Thus, ethnic tension had been the defining character of Malaysian politics under UMNO's rule. By the late 2000s, the threat environment started to grow more complex. The electoral system that long favoured UMNO was being challenged by the social movement called Bersih. More alarmingly, the Malays and Chinese found their common ground when Bersih led the protest against prime minister Najib Razak's corruption scandal and Malaysia's growing economic hardship, issues that transcend ethnic division.

When facing threats, state mobilisation is a rational choice for authoritarian regimes because they need a substantial proportion of the population to support, comply with, or submit to their rule to survive. To this end, authoritarian regimes deploy state mobilisation strategically which can be shaped by the locus of the threat (national vs regional) (Ekiert and Perry, 2020) or the intensity of the threat (high vs low) which is the approach that I adopt. The latter approach has the advantage of accounting for low-intensity threats such as the presence of a social force that has a record of opposition activities; in addition to high-intensity threats such

as “intra-state conflict”, a “threatening mobilization process”, or the “diffusion of contention across [a] national border” that are at the centre of Ekiert and Perry’s typology.

A low-intensity threat such as the population’s privately held frustrations is a risk to regime survival because it can be inspired by a seemingly trivial event and transform into a mass revolt, thereby worthy of long-term planning. Using Mao Tse-Tung’s analogy of “[a] single spark can start a prairie fire,” Kuran (1989, 60) puts forwards the scenario of “relatively minor events [making] a few individuals reach their boiling point and take to the streets in protest [that] kicks off the latent revolutionary bandwagon, and the opposition darts into power.” The popular uprising that overthrew the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia is a perfect example. Honwana (2013) argues that Tunisian youth played a defining role in the revolution who had vented their discontent and formed groups through social media. Their boiling point was reached when a street vendor, Mohamed Bouazzi, set himself ablaze out of frustration with police harassment (Honwana 2013, 69; Roberts 2015, 960). This tragic act sparked the “revolutionary bandwagon” in Tunisia as well as other Arab countries that came to be known as the Arab Spring.

Based on the French, Russian, and Iranian Revolutions and more recently the revolutions in Eastern Europe, Kuran (1989; 1991) argues that such “unanticipated political revolution” often took everyone by surprise. Clouded by regime strength, general disorders in the lead-up to the crises were dismissed or downplayed as “too weak”, “nothing serious”, or a “minor disturbance” by the optimistic rulers, foreign observers, as well as intelligence organisations like the CIA. Even the protest leaders themselves privately admitted that the regimes would be able to weather the storm (Kuran 1989, 44-45). The powerful force behind seemly secure regimes suddenly falling prey to mass uprisings, Kuran (1989, 60; 1991) argues, is “preference falsification”; that is, individuals concealing their true political preferences by

continuing to express "outward loyalty" to the regime despite having become "sympathetic to the idea of change."

Assessing the severity and trajectory of a low-intensity threat is a subjective process full of ambiguity, and some regimes miscalculated and suffered like the historical cases examined by Kuran. Some are more sensitive and cautious, and even sophisticated by consciously detecting the public expressions of frustration such as citizen complaints, protest votes for the opposition parties, and various subtle forms of political activities (see Scott 1985; Kerkvliet 2005; Vong and Hok 2018). They make strategic use of this monitoring to more accurately gauge their level of support and revise government policies to improve their governance capacity, thereby avoiding the threat deepening (see Morgenbesser 2020). In the process, sophisticated authoritarian regimes balance the benefits and risks of opposition activities. This is the approach taken by the Chinese Communist Party when it allows citizens to express negative views about government policies and leaders on social media to gain a better idea of popular sentiment, but censors those the party believe "represent, reinforce, or spur" social mobilisation (King, Pan, and Roberts 2013, 326). Thus, King, Pan, and Roberts (2013, 339) conclude that "the Chinese people are individually free but collectively in chains."

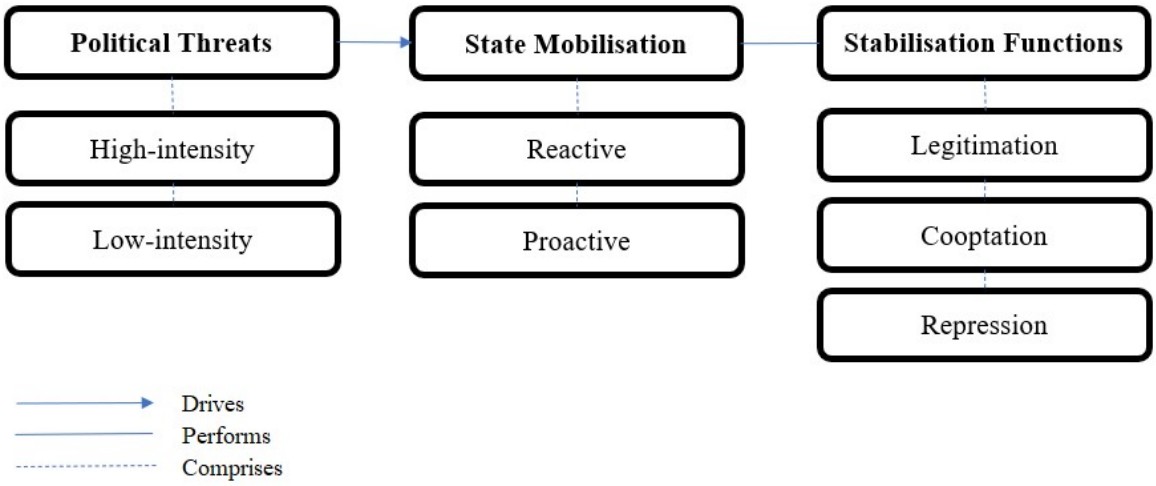
Overall, actions taken by the regime in response to a low-intensity threat are part of the regime's long-term, pre-emptive survival strategy so that a threat is contained, gradually weakened, or resolved altogether. I call this proactive approach *future-proofing*. Future-proofing entails taking preventive actions even when the regime does not possess adequate information about the threat environment because of preference falsification or other dynamics. If the situation turns out to be overestimated, the regime loses valuable resources to excessive investment. But, like rehearsing a fire evacuation, the regime can benefit from enhanced readiness that should serve it well if a crisis does break out in the future. In other words, smart authoritarian regimes rather err on overpreparation than take a low-intensity threat for granted

and be caught by surprise by a crisis outbreak. Having foresight on something unobservable or difficult to be observed directly, however, is a high bar for many authoritarian regimes with weak capacity. It is more likely in durable regimes ruled by long-serving dictators who through experience can learn from past domestic and international events to inform their survival strategy.

Once triggered by a threat, state mobilisation performs three regime-stabilising functions—legitimation, cooptation, and repression—commonly known as the "three pillars" of authoritarian stability (Schedler 2013, Chapter 2; Gerschewski 2013; Maerz 2020) which can be reactive or proactive. Figure 1 depicts my theoretical framework. Cooptation helps the authoritarian ruler mobilise cooperation from elites and citizens by making policy concessions and distributing spoils (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006). Repression attempts to control rebellion by employing violence, intimidation, and other barriers to defer the opposition activities of individuals and organisations (Way and Levitsky 2006; Davenport 2007). Legitimation intends to develop identification with the regime by permeating regime-friendly norms and beliefs (Schedler 2013, 56). These "carrot and stick" strategies enable authoritarian regimes to reduce the cost of repression and reap the benefits of concession.[9]

[9] A point to note here is that understanding how these pillars reinforce each other for regime stabilisation is a critical part of Gerschewski's framework. But this is not manageable in this dissertation given the multiple case study research design. How these strategies interact and reinforce each other must be researched in a context where all three strategies exist at the same time. In my survey of Southeast Asia countries, I have not discovered any case where mass organisations perform all three functions that can allow for such an analysis. Nevertheless, it is a valuable research goal when suitable cases can be identified.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



A high-intensity threat such as mass protests organised by the opposition party typically activates repression-driven mobilisation as a reactive response. Meanwhile, legitimation-driven mobilisation is a proactive strategy to future-proof the regime against a low-intensity threat such as the presence of a potentially destabilising social force that might hold a disturbing level of discontent despite the absence of its public expression. Cooptation-driven mobilisation is an apt strategy for both high-intensity and low-intensity threats, and thus can be a reactive or proactive strategy. In cooptation, material benefits are delivered to a rebellious social force to tame their desire to protest. When this succeeds, the continuation of delivery can cultivate their identification or compliance with the regime, and thus further discourages the inclination to protest.

How are we to know if state mobilisation is deployed to legitimatise the incumbent, co-opt potential challengers, or repress regime opponents? As Table 2 shows, each function can be observed from two indicators. The remainder of this section explains each function and its respective indicators in turn.

Table 2: Observable Indicators of the Functions of State Mobilisation

Functions	Indicators
Legitimation	Idealisation
	Signalling
Cooptation	Communication
	Distribution
Repression	Containment
	Aggravation

State Mobilisation as Legitimation

Like their democratic counterparts, authoritarian leaders claim their rule is legitimate. They expect popular consent to their rule through public "actions" to "confer" legitimacy, if not the "belief" in the regime (Beetham 1991, 91). While legitimacy is an attribute, legitimation is an empirically observable process to seek legitimacy (Gerschewski 2018b, 655). What makes legitimation effective? Resources, both material and nonmaterial, matters (Soest and Grauvogel 2017; Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017). Following Beetham, I argue that size also matters. Beetham (1991, 94) stresses that "political legitimation has to be mass legitimation." It can take two forms—legitimation by election and by mobilisation. The usefulness of mobilisation lies in its potential for complementing elections as a legitimation strategy which enables the incumbent to reap the benefits of domestic and international legitimacy without succumbing to power loss under the right socioeconomic conditions (Miller 2020). As authoritarian elections are interval events often held every four or five years, state mobilisation can be deployed during the interlude to replenish the legitimacy gained from multiparty elections when authoritarian regimes feel the need to step up their legitimation game. If state mobilisation is designed to facilitate legitimation, we should observe two legitimation mechanisms: *idealisation* and *signalling*.

a. Idealisation

Idealisation means to deepen the regime's appeal to citizens. As I will demonstrate in the case of Cambodia, state mobilisation has been used to remake and broadcast the narrative that not only *can* the regime rule because it won the elections; it also *should* rule because of what it has accomplished for the nation. While more frequent diffusion of the regime's accomplishments and benevolence may be appealing, crude and inflated forms of propaganda can fail to resonate with the audience and worsen citizens' views of the regime (Huang 2018). Hence, it is important that idealisation is conducted in a calculated manner. One option is to time state mobilisation to coincide with annual holidays with historical or cultural significance such as national independence or ethnic New Year. Such timing enables authoritarian regimes to harness broadly embraced historical legacies and cultural values to enhance the resonance of its legitimacy claims.

State mobilisation uses propaganda to facilitate authoritarian legitimation. Propaganda is a set of information or messages, often biased, designed to persuade the population to behave in ways desired by the regime. Authoritarian regimes employ propaganda differently (Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022). Some pay less attention to the content, opting for communicating an overwhelming volume of crude, repetitive, or even preposterous messages. The purpose is to signal state power without necessarily gaining popular support (Wedeen 1999; Huang 2015). Some regimes, on the other hand, use propaganda to legitimatise their rule. Such a purpose compels them to focus on persuasiveness in addition to the sheer amount of propagation by highlighting the regime's being fit and right to rule, and by blaming external actors for the country's problems (Rozenas and Stukal 2019; Guriev and Treisman 2020; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022).

As I will demonstrate in the case of Cambodia, in authoritarian regimes that came to power via national liberation, propaganda revolves around the notion that voting for the ruling

party is an act of expressing gratitude or appreciation for the regime's achievements in post-conflict state-building. By tapping into traditional values such as piety, state mobilisation seeks to reframe political support into an act of upholding a cherished moral code. The participants and audience of state mobilisation are oriented into thinking that supporting the regime, like honouring selfless individuals who have sacrificed for the collective good, is a virtuous behaviour devoid of contingency or self-seeking intentions as in a patron-client relationship (Hicken 2011). The expectation is that the diffusion of the regime's narrative in a nonpartisan and depoliticised manner induces interest from citizens who are informed enough to be exposed to the narrative but not sophisticated enough to question or resist it (Geddes and Zaller 1989).

b. Signalling

Signalling means to render the regime legitimate by appearing strong. If idealisation is to emphasise that the regime *should* rule or has the *right* to rule (Gilley 2009), signalling is to showcase that it *can* rule or has the *might* to rule. This conception of legitimacy is most applicable to fragile states that have recently emerged from civil war. In such context, the risk of recuring violent conflicts is so real that citizens might value the regime's ability to maintain social control and political order and tolerate its lack of ability to spur economic development or deliver quality public services. The regime's ability to govern in turn depends on its internal cohesion—the alignment of interests within the ruling coalition. This requires the authoritarian leader to strike deals with members of the ruling coalition such as military generals, party officials, and business elites so that they are satisfied enough to vest interest in the survival and stability of the regime.

The notion of legitimacy in this sense is based on regime strength, not procedural fairness, socio-economic development, state effectiveness, or other tangible outcomes that directly benefit the citizenry and develop their identification with the regime. This kind of legitimacy, then, is *asserted* rather than *gained*. It demands a great deal of delivery from the

regime but little reciprocation from citizens. For that matter, legitimation through signalling regime strength is not meant to generate support but to induce compliance, that is the restraint to rebel against the regime. Most modern authoritarian regimes do not mobilise to achieve "exclusive and comprehensive mass indoctrination" as in Nazi and Stalinist regimes (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017, 255), nor to enact "enforced participation in rituals of obeisance" as in Syria under Hafiz al-Asad (Wedeen 1999, 6). In less politicised polities, acquiescing to the regime is as desirable as participating in it.

This alternative goal is valuable because of the precariousness and ambiguity of the regime's mass base. Besides its genuine supporters, the regime's mass base also contains apathetic followers who demonstrate pro-regime behaviour but are indifferent in their belief in the regime, as well as opportunists who display the same behaviour but harbour anti-regime beliefs (Gerschewski 2018b, 656). Gaining compliance from these groups of people is akin to defusing a time bomb—the regime does not gain support, but neither is it hurt—and this is a win in itself.

The inducement of compliance (i.e. asserted legitimacy) via the demonstration of strength is consistent with the signalling theory of authoritarian power. Huang (2015), for example, argues that the function of (preposterous) propaganda in China is not to breed belief in and satisfaction with the government. Instead, by committing massive resources to present a comprehensive propaganda message and impose it on its citizens, the government transmits a "credible signal" about its capacity to maintain social control and political order. His evidence showed that Chinese university students who have undergone the communist party's "ideological and political education" did not develop higher satisfaction with the government. Instead, they became more convinced of the government's capacity to uphold social stability, which lowered their proclivity to challenge the government, especially in the form of student strikes. Similarly, Timoneda (2020) argues that in times of crisis, authoritarian leaders expand

the ruling coalition by adding new loyalists to the party and legislature. The expanded institutions are used as "signalling devices" to communicate with participants of a potential coup that the autocrat is resilient with a robust elite support base, making any coup less likely to succeed.

As the case of Cambodia will show, state mobilisation can signal elite cohesion. The regime's youth wing provides the platform for emerging elites to build their personal power base and prepare for internal leadership contests. These junior elites typically assume positions that mirror their parents in the ruling apparatus to reflect their status and privilege. This organisational structure is important because a different set-up, that is the junior elites' undeserved role in the organisation, might invite unwanted outsider speculation. It might be interpreted as a punishment for their parents' deviation or resistance. It may also be interpreted as an attempt by more powerful party rivals to undermine their power in favour of other political contenders. It can also be a sign that their long-term position in the ruling apparatus is unsecured. Any portent of elite fracture is harmful to the regime because it boosts the opposition's confidence in overcoming the incumbent—either in the electoral arena or through street mobilisation. I expect a lack of elite division and generational elite unity to be conducive to the regime's public image of "invincibility" or "permanence" (Magaloni 2006; Robertson 2009). This impression of omnipotence is a reminder to the opposition that the regime is "unbeatable". It is also a reminder to the elites that remaining loyal to the regime is the most assured way of achieving political and economic advancement (Magaloni 2006).

State Mobilisation as Cooptation

Cooptation is a critical pillar of political stability in autocratic regimes (Gerschewski 2013). Research shows that autocratic regimes that institutionalise cooptation face fewer coup attempts (Frantz and Stein 2017) and labour protests (Kim and Gandhi 2010), making them generally more durable than less institutionalised regimes (Geddes 1999; Geddes, Wright, and

Frantz 2018). Adapting Selznick (2014, 34), I define cooptation as the process of absorbing strategic actors into a political institution to avert threats to its stability and survival. In autocratic regimes, these "strategically-relevant actors" (Gerschewski 2013, 22) include the military, landowners, capitalists, organised labour, ethnic groups, and opposition politicians (Schmotz 2015). Since a coup is the most common way for dictators to exit from power (Svolik 2012, 5; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018, 179), military generals are perhaps the prime target for cooptation. To facilitate cooptation, institutionalised autocracies use formal political institutions such as parties and legislatures to distribute the spoils of political power (Magaloni 2006; Brownlee 2007), regulate elite conflict (Brownlee 2007), formalise power-sharing (Magaloni 2008; Svolik 2009; Boix and Svolik 2013), and undertake policy bargaining with opposition parties (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Gandhi 2008).

Autocratic regimes also rely on clientelism to co-opt the masses. A reciprocal relationship between the ruler and his subordinates/subjects, clientelism is often treated synonymously with vote-buying—the dominant mode of mass cooptation in electoral autocracies. Given that most autocracies exclude citizens from political power (Blaydes 2010; Neundorf, Gerschewski, and Olar 2019), mass cooptation via the distribution of patronage such as government jobs, protection, infrastructural projects, or consumable goods is a sensible method to compensate citizens for disempowerment with some semblance of material enrichment. The focus of this thesis is on mass cooptation as it is most relevant to the function of state mobilisation. If state mobilisation is deployed for cooptation, we should observe two cooptation mechanisms: *communication* and *distribution*.

a. Communication

Communication is the rhetorical component of cooptation. This mechanism entails ensuring that government policies and development outcomes are broadcast to the lowest level of society. Dissimilar to the abstract, generalised values and beliefs used in legitimation, the

narrative used in cooptation—for its goal is to generate specific or outcome-based support—needs to be concise, numerical, and comparative. For example, if the authoritarian regime depends on development outcomes for legitimising its rule, its narrative would be dominated by figures of annual growth in national and personal incomes, the number of jobs created, the number of public facilities built, and the like. Wherever viable, the progress is compared with other similar countries, which have not achieved a similar level of performance, to make the case that the progress is extraordinary and praiseworthy. Importantly, the delivery of policy concessions is framed as government foresight and accountability rather than a reaction to political pressure.

As I will illuminate in the case of Cambodia, inculcation is key to the efficacy of communication. The optimal effect can be achieved if the actors and the audience share similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Hence, it is vital that the regime creates grassroots organisations in targeted sectors led by co-opted influencers or opinion leaders who can engage in regular interaction and trust-building with members in the sector. As the example of Cambodia will show, a viable strategy is the implantation of ruling party cells in factories in the form of pro-government labour unions. This local organisational structure serves as the party's transmission belt whereby qualified party supporters are recruited from within the organisations and assigned to disseminate party policies via formal avenues such as union meetings or informal personal interactions. The presumed importance of rapport gained through personal interaction in the uptake of the regime narrative is the key factor that merits the deployment of state mobilisation in addition to propagation through the mass media.

b. Distribution

Despite the importance of rhetorical persuasion, cooptation is ultimately defined by material distribution. The deployment of cooptation requires the regime to possess adequate revenues from natural resources, state-owned enterprises, income taxes, contributions from business

cronies, or illegal activities. The Achilles heel is the disruption to resource flow caused by an economic crisis, which may compel the dictator to maintain elite cohesion on an alternative, nonmaterial foundation (Levitsky and Way 2012); or adjust the size of the ruling coalition as patronage shrinks (Shih 2020).

Since patronage is sourced and allocated by the regime, mass organisations play a facilitative role in its distribution. With the regime determining who gets what, the role of mass organisations is to determine when and how targets are to be co-opted and receive their allocated benefits. Distribution in this manner is clientelistic because it is contingent on clients offering political support to patrons in exchange for the targeted provision of goods and services (Hicken 2011, 291). Yet in practice, it is always better to be feared *and* loved; that is, autocratic leaders also want to appear as generous benefactors who genuinely serve the target group without strings attached. In this regard, communication is useful in downplaying or expunging the transactional appearance of material distribution to promote an imagery of benevolent rule.

As I will illustrate in the case of Cambodia, mass organisations also conduct cooptation in a manner that makes the regime stand out from the state. This involves setting up a regime-sponsored material distribution channel paralleling or mirroring public service delivery. The benefit of this parallel system is that it can filter out the contributions of extra-regime actors, such as foreign governments and civil society, and enable the regime or the autocrat to claim full credit for the material distribution.

State Mobilisation as Repression

Anti-government protests are destabilising for authoritarian regimes. They affect the level of electoral support for the regime (Tertytchnaya 2020); cause elite tension over how to handle the situation (Collier and Mahoney 1997); and help dissenting elites coordinate a coup (Casper and Tyson 2014). Due to the risk of instability, repression is widespread in authoritarian

regimes. Following Davenport (2007, 2), repression is defined as "the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions." The stabilisation effect of repression is exemplified by the durability of authoritarian regimes that maintain a loyal and well-equipped coercive apparatus (Bellin 2004; Levitsky and Way 2010; Levitsky and Way 2012; Escribà-Folch 2013).

Repression is often conducted with strategic considerations because the use of force can backfire, especially against nonviolent protests. Internally, nonviolent protests are more likely to induce sympathy and, in some cases, defection from members of the regime, especially the security forces who may consider the cost of shooting unarmed protestors too high to bear (Stephan and Chenoweth 2008). If it occurs, a "backlash movement" may follow (Aytaç, Schiumerini, and Stokes 2018). Violence against "early risers" can motivate bystanders to join the demonstration when they begin to consider "whether it is fair to prioritize their wellbeing while others make sacrifices for a cause in which they also believe" (Pearlman 2018, 885). Externally, the repression of nonviolent protests invites strong international denouncement and sanctions, inflicting reputational damage on the regime (Stephan and Chenoweth 2008). Therefore, when it comes to repression, autocrats have to make strategic choices over whom to target, which type of repression to use, and when to use it. The cost of repression thus compels authoritarian regimes to pursue a variety of repressive tactics, in which state mobilisation is one. If state mobilisation is employed as a repressive strategy, we should observe two mechanisms: *containment* and *aggravation*.

a. Containment

Containment refers to the suppression and deterrence of anti-government mobilisation. Through acts of violence, pro-government supporters cause injury or death to anti-government

protestors. Violent state mobilisation is most effective when counter-protestors have a history of committing violence. This is most likely where protestors belong to different social cleavages (e.g., Malay and Chinese in Malaysia, Hindu and Muslim in India) with long-standing hostilities. As I will illuminate in the case of Malaysia, pro-regime actors from the majority ethnic group who wield political power often exploit communal sentiments to mobilise supporters by framing protests led by the minority group as a malicious attempt to upend the former's political power, and thus put group members' privileges in jeopardy. Often conceived as inviolable, the emotional impulse to preserve the status quo usually translates into offensive actions against the challengers.

Violence can suppress as well as dissuade future mobilisation. The key to this outcome is the extent of fear incurred from such violence. Existing research has identified fear as a powerful deterrence of collective action. For example, Pearlman (2013, 392) argues that fear is a type of "dispiriting" emotion that "increase[s] individuals' tendencies to make pessimistic assessments, discount prospects of change, privilege information about danger, have a low sense of control, [and] avert risk". Fear, Pearlman argues, was the reason Algerians did not embark on a democratic revolution like in other Middle Eastern and North African countries. They were "scarred by childhoods of witnessing bloodshed" caused by the civil war in the 1990s; and this pre-existing fear was reinforced by the "messy transitions" in Libya where authoritarian collapse was preceded by political chaos (Pearlman 2013, 400).[10] Fear likewise played a crucial role in discouraging political dissent in Zimbabwe. Young (2018) argues that fear makes opposition supporters more risk-averse and pessimistic about the likelihood of others participating in dissent.

When does violence-induced fear cease to be a barrier to anti-government mobilisation? The example of Malaysia points to the centrality of shared grievances over the regime's

[10] For a counter argument, see Panta (2017).

legitimacy deficit, such as that caused by government corruption or economic underperformance, that affect all ethnic groups. Such a crisis gives rise to unifying reformist movements. When anti-government protests cross the communal divide and gain the support of the majority ethnic group, state mobilisation loses its ability to frame regime-challenging mobilisation as an ethnic conflict, rendering the threat of communal violence less credible.

b. Aggravation

Aggravation refers to the act of worsening a condition. Aggravating the consequences of threatening mobilisation processes benefits the regime when it creates the pretext for state repression. The pretext provides a 'legitimate' reason for the regime to justify repression if it chooses to do so. The tactic of escalating social instability to justify the necessity of state intervention is a viable possibility if we consider the counterintuitive phenomenon that regime and state actors can benefit from seemingly adversarial circumstances. For example, local officials in China perpetuate social unrest to justify the demand for an increased budget and demonstrate the importance of their department. Negotiation with protestors lands them "lavish dinners" with "cooperative" protest representatives. "Good performance" in protest settlement yields "annual bonuses", "symbolic honors and prizes", and "promotion from the street to the district and municipal governments" (Lee and Zhang 2013, 1493–94).

In Russia, Putin reacted decisively to prevent the effect of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine from spilling over into Russia. Yet Mendelson and Gerber (2005, 85) argue that Putin was only trying to capitalise on the event to consolidate power. They base this conclusion on the survey findings that the majority of Russian youth "definitely do not want" a Ukraine-style revolution in Russia. These youth also echoed the Russian government's accusation that foreigners bought off the Ukrainian protestors. Their attitude suggested that the revolutionary threat to the regime was low. What explains the Putin government's strong measures, then, is "knowing full well that a revolution is highly improbable, Kremlin insiders cynically stir up

Orange hysteria in order to keep Putin in, the population down, and the Western donors out" (Mendelson and Gerber 2005, 86).

Against this backdrop of invented instability, state mobilisation can be deployed to trigger or aggravate political disorder by provoking a clash or setting up the likelihood of an imminent clash between anti-government protestors and pro-government protestors. Pro-government protestors can transform the dynamic of the protest scene by committing or threatening to commit acts of violence. As I will show in the case of Malaysia, violent or potentially violent protest events give the regime the pretext to send in the security forces, the repressors proper, to disperse the crowds from both camps and arrest recalcitrant actors, putting a halt to the threatening mobilisation process. Justifying state intervention on the ground of protecting the safety of peaceful protestors and restoring political order tends to draw empathy from non-protestors who feel threatened and disturbed by the escalating tension and protracted instability (Edwards and Arnon 2019).

Summary of the Argument

This dissertation poses the research question: what explains the persistence of state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes? More specifically, I am interested in investigating what drives state mobilisation, what functions it performs, and to what extent state mobilisation achieves its intended goals. My overarching argument is that the persistence of state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes can be explained by the regime's response to its threat environment. To advance its interest which is survival, state mobilisation is deployed to support the execution of repression, legitimation, and cooptation. Three hypotheses are derived from this central claim:

Hypothesis 1: State mobilisation is driven by threats to regime survival.
Hypothesis 2: Depending on the nature of the threat, state mobilisation performs three regime stabilisation functions: legitimation, cooptation, and repression.
Hypothesis 3: State mobilisation helps authoritarian regimes overcome the threats.

This framework of state mobilisation complements the existing research, which focuses on coercive forms of state mobilisation, most visible in street protests to diffuse and repress popular and elite revolts. This dissertation highlights non-coercive forms of state mobilisation to incorporate more subtle and innovative processes that play out off the street. Crucially, the non-repression-driven utilisation of state mobilisation shows that its benefits are shared by authoritarian regimes facing different threats—those which face an existential crisis such as an imminent coup attempt or street mobilisation *as well as* those who are relatively safe from a coup, electoral defeat, or revolution in the short term, but not without the long-term possibility of instability. This dissertation will examine how these dynamics play out in Cambodia and Malaysia. The remainder of this chapter outlines the dissertation's research design.

Research Design

Hypothesis Testing

In the literature review above, I conclude that there is a theoretical consensus that state mobilisation is often driven by threats to regime survival. This gives me a reasonable level of confidence that while a threat may not be *the* cause of state mobilisation, it is likely to be *a* cause. So instead of proposing an alternative explanation, I aim to test to what extent this causal relationship (Hypothesis 1) applies to the context of Cambodia and Malaysia—my case selection decision will be explained below. This within-case approach or in-depth analysis of a single case provides causal leverage through "causal-process observations" which reveal "the

causal pathway, process, mediator, or intermediate variable by which a causal factor of theoretical interest is thought to affect an outcome" (Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2004, 277). When conducted across multiple cases, within-case analysis allows us to demonstrate the causal relationship in different political contexts and levels of economic development (Fairfield 2013, 47) and thus strengthens the causal leverage. Within-case analysis is chosen over cross-case comparison because I am interested in the relationship between a known causal variable and an outcome. Cross-case comparison is more appropriate when the research purpose is to pinpoint the unknown causal variable(s) affecting the outcome of interest.

To test Hypothesis 1, I review the regime's threat environment and episodes of state mobilisation since regime foundation. If the hypothesis is correct, state mobilisation should be temporally preceded by a threat. Then it needs to be proven that state mobilisation is devised as a responsive strategy. The strongest evidence to make the causal inference comes from official statements about the intended functions and goals of state mobilisation and how the institutional design is based on the regime's trust in the effectiveness of state mobilisation.

While Hypothesis 1 is causal, Hypothesis 2 is descriptive. The empirical task is to demonstrate that state mobilisation indeed performs legitimating, cooptative, and repressive functions. To test Hypothesis 2, I focus my analysis on the observable indicators explained in the section above. If state mobilisation performs each of the stabilisation functions, six indicators—two indicators for each function—should be observable. If state mobilisation performs a legitimation function, two activities should be observable: *idealisation* or rendering the incumbent rule more appealing to the target population and *signalling* or promoting the regime's public image of strength. If state mobilisation performs a cooptative function, the observable activities should include *communication* or promoting the awareness of government policies and *distribution* or meeting the material needs of the rebellious social forces. Similarly, if repression is the function of state mobilisation, it should be indicated by two activities:

containment or causing physical harm and fear and *aggravation* or creating the pretext for state repression.

These indicators are developed deductively and inductively. The literature on authoritarian politics provides the necessary theoretical underpinnings for formulating the essential regime-sustaining functions and their observable indicators. Yet I also aim to uncover functions and indicators that have not been captured adequately by the existing theories. This is when an inductive approach like the heuristic case study is useful (Eckstein 2000). This is a research method used to "stimulate the imagination towards discerning important general problems and possible theoretical solutions" (Eckstein 2000, 137). It is a theory-building approach that engages with, but is not shackled by, existing theories. An advantage is that when the researcher is not restrained by a theory-prescribed set of variables, s/he is more likely to discover "critical variables and relations" and arrive at a "preliminary theoretical construct" that can refine existing theories or develop new ones (Eckstein 2000, 138). It is through this approach that I develop the legitimating and cooptative functions of state mobilisation and the signalling indicator for the legitimation function and the aggravation indicator for the repressive function.

To test Hypothesis 3, I collect evidence on the state of affairs post-state mobilisation to measure the extent to which the outcome meets the intention of deploying state mobilisation. State mobilisation's different functions present different levels of measurement challenges. If state mobilisation is effective at legitimation, we should expect the target population to identify more closely with the regime. But as the literature suggests, measuring legitimacy is a daunting task even through large-scale surveys. I do not attempt to resolve this issue in this dissertation. Instead, I focus on the process of legitimation (the *seeking* of legitimacy) and explain why the outcome of legitimation-driven mobilisation is not measurable. Measuring the outcome of cooptation-driven mobilisation presents similar challenges. While cooperation as a result of

cooptation is more observable, for example, from the absence of or a decrease in protests, we still face the challenge of discerning whether factors other than cooptation cause the outcome. As repression-driven mobilisation is about containing and suppressing overt opposition activities, measuring its outcome is more achievable. If it is successful, we should observe the dispersal of street protests and a decrease in future anti-government mobilisation. Testing Hypothesis 3 requires that I examine both positive and negative cases where I can observe both types of outcomes. This is a case selection issue to which I now turn.

Regional Context and Case Selection

This dissertation examines the relationship between political threats and state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia. Before justifying the selection of the cases from within Southeast Asia, however, it would be helpful to review the political character of the region.

a. Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is constituted of 11 countries, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. The region had been under prolonged colonial rule by the British, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Americans. What unifies their disparate colonial past is these countries' long history of authoritarianism. Yet their authoritarian regimes differ in the institutions through which they wield power and the level of political contestation they allow. As a result, Southeast Asia has a highly diversified collection of regime types.

There are single-party regimes in Laos and Vietnam where multiparty elections for the national executive office are not held. Conversely, dominant party regimes in Singapore, Malaysia and Cambodia have sanctioned multiparty elections. But in these competitive authoritarian regimes, Levitsky and Way (2002, 52) argue, "formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority.

Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy." Focusing on their democratic features, Diamond (2002, 24) posits that these hybrid regimes "lack an arena of contestation sufficiently open, free, and fair so that the ruling party can readily be turned out of power if it is no longer preferred by a plurality of the electorate. While an opposition victory is not impossible in a hybrid regime, it requires a level of opposition mobilization, unity, skill, and heroism far beyond what would normally be required for victory in a democracy." It appears that the best way to eschew democratisation is to adopt the form but not the substance of democratic procedures (Case 2015, 3). Yet even when the incumbent enjoys all the advantages in an uneven playing field, multiparty elections still present meaningful opportunities, however slim, for the opposition to turn the table (Levitsky and Way 2002, 54). For example, the ruling party in Malaysia was finally ousted in the 2018 elections after it had been ceding ground to opposition parties since the 2008 elections (Case 2009b).

In contrast to these party-based regimes, the authoritarian regime in Myanmar, known as Burma before 1989, ruled both directly and indirectly from 1962 to 2010 through the military apparatus (*Tatmadaw*). Like other regimes in the region, the military regime in Myanmar sought to benefit from the legitimacy bestowed by elections, but it had failed miserably. In both competitive elections sanctioned in 1990 and 2015 respectively, when the NLD was allowed to contest the military junta (State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)) directly, and later the military-backed ruling party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the opposition party won with landslide victories. Although the 2015 elections led to the formation of a new civilian government, the military retained its coercive apparatus through its mandated seats in the national and state parliaments, and its control over the Ministries of Defense, Internal Affairs, and Border Affairs, all facilitated by military-drafted 2008

Constitution. The 2021 coup following the 2020 elections in which the NLD were re-elected confirmed their extraordinary grip on power.

In neighbouring Thailand, democratic rule has been consistently disrupted by multiple periods of military rule between the 1940s and 1980s, and again in the 2000s and 2010s. Military coups had propped up dictators such as Sarit, Thanom, and Prem Tinsulanonda whose combined reign lasted more than 30 years. In more recent times, Thailand's democratic politics was rejuvenated with the election of the tycoon-turned politician Thaksin Shinawatra as prime minister in 2001. Yet his popularity among the poorer Thai became a threat to the royalist establishment, resulting in a military coup in 2006 followed by the dissolution of his Thai Rak Thai party. A subsequent government led by his sister, Yinluck Shinawatra, suffered from the same fate with the most recent coup occurring in 2014.

Thaksin's reign, however, was not all good news for Thailand's democracy. Like Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines more recently, both men were accused of abuses of power as evidenced in their suppression of Muslim insurgencies (Southern Thailand) and their wars against drugs where many people were summarily killed. Both rose to power on populist agendas, appealing to voters' desires for increased order and pro-poor policies. Thaksin and Duterte's populism put them in tension with the establishment: the pro-monarchy and military elites in Thailand, and the oligarchs in the Philippines.

The Philippines's last dictator was Fernando Marcos who led a highly personalist regime from 1972 to 1986, including a long period of martial law from 1972 to 1981. Marcos' rule was defined by massive corruption that benefited his family and clique (see Hutchcroft 1991; Thompson 1998). The regime collapsed amid the People Power Movement galvanised by Marcos' 1983 assassination of Benigo Aquino Jr., Marcos' most prominent opponent, and his subsequent electoral fraud in 1986. The Suharto regime in Indonesia was similarly overthrown by student-led mass uprisings amid the economic downturn caused by the Asian

financial crisis (see Pepinsky 2009). But Suharto's rule had been much more durable having been backed by robust military and party institutions. The collapse of the Marcos and Suharto regimes makes the Philippines and Indonesia the paradigmatic cases of democratisation in Asia.

Southeast Asia's entrenched authoritarianism can be traced back to its colonial state-building. In countries like Singapore and Malaysia, the British colonial rule established strong state institutions initially to serve the objectives of social control and resource exploitation. After the colonial rulers left, the local ruling elites inherited and expanded the state apparatus to strengthen their power and reign over the society (Case 2009a). However, strong state capacity and party cohesion in Malaysia and Singapore are not simply an outgrowth of colonial rule. Instead, Slater (2010) argues, these outcomes are a product of "elite collective action" driven by endemic and unmanageable contentious politics. The absence of such a pattern of contentious politics, by contrast, led to weaker state capacity and more fragile regimes like the Philippines under Marcos.

Other scholars have examined the role of the ruling apparatus itself in the durability of authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia. Brownlee (2007), for instance, posits the presence of a ruling party as the primary cause of authoritarian durability in Malaysia and authoritarian breakdown in the Philippines. A ruling party, he argues, manages elite conflicts and prevents defections. Less attention, however, has been devoted to their auxiliary organisations such as mass organisations—the "rival fronts" to civil society organisations (Case 1996, 458-459), and how they support the ruling party in mobilising citizen participation to advance its agenda.

Rodan's (2018) modes of participation (MOP) framework represents a significant breakthrough in this direction. Rodan distinguishes modes of participation by their level of inclusion and site of participation. The mode of participation most relevant to this study is "societal incorporation", under which the state determines the problems to be discussed and

who can participate in the process (Rodan 2018, 37). Most extensively deployed by the authoritarian regime in Singapore to arrest the opposition's electoral gain, this mode of participation is designed to accommodate emerging social forces and contain social conflicts generated by capitalist development (Jayasuriya and Rodan 2007; Rodan 2018). Rodan (2018, 108) argues that the Singaporean party-state's central objective of engaging the "silent majority" is to convince them that direct interaction with the state through official channels such as the public feedback mechanism—Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry @ Home (REACH)—is the avenue for addressing national concerns, more superior to contentious and partisan politics. Success in such mobilisation would translate into less inclination to vote for the opposition parties.

Rodan's framework incorporates the underexplored, regime-sponsored, collective form of political participation and offers an insightful analysis of how these institutions stabilise authoritarian rule. He focuses on the creative political institutions that are meant to complement or supplant "established institutional mechanisms of political co-optation" such as pro-government unions which, he argues, have become less effective in the face of new social dynamics (Rodan 2018, 49). This thesis highlights how authoritarian regimes can still employ established institutions like youth wings and pro-government unions to respond to new challenges.

b. Why Southeast Asia

Two reasons merit the focus on Southeast Asia. First, outside of Europe, the field of comparative authoritarianism and comparative politics more broadly has focused on the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and East Asia. Southeast Asia is relatively underexplored (Kuhonta, Slater, and Vu 2008; Case 2015, 7–8; Pepinsky 2019; Pelke and Friesen 2019). Similarly, the literature on state mobilisation has a substantial concentration on countries with totalitarian roots such as China and Russia; whereas only two one-party states in Southeast

Asia were born from totalitarian ideologies (Laos and Vietnam) and each of these has evolved into a modern form of authoritarianism with capitalist orientations. This dissertation intends to fill the geographic gap in the scholarship by studying state mobilisation in two countries in Southeast Asia—Cambodia and Malaysia. Selecting relatively under-studied or neglected cases is also crucial for developing novel descriptive arguments. Gerring (2012, 741), for example, suggested that "true innovation in descriptive inference is established only by delineating a fundamentally novel empirical terrain, or by thoroughly revising our sense of an established terrain." Thus, selecting countries in Southeast Asia allows me to say something new about state mobilisation.

Second, Southeast Asia is the region where I came from. My language competency and cultural awareness especially in the case of Cambodia enable me to make observations that would have been impossible without these attributes. Yet these factors are not merely about practical convenience, they also have important methodological implications. Language proficiency enables me to gather relevant facts and organise them into evidence, which is the first step in developing a descriptive argument (Kreuzer 2019, 125). Developing new propositions or refining existing theories, accordingly to Eckstein (2000), can be achieved by the researcher's "imagination" and this exercise is made possible precisely by the researcher's familiarity with or ability to peer into the chosen cases.

The empirical backbone of this dissertation features the intensive study of three mass organisations in two Southeast Asia countries. Cambodia is selected to examine legitimation-driven mobilisation through its youth mass organisation, and cooptation-driven mobilisation through its workers' mass organisation. Cambodia has experienced a low-intensity threat defined by weak political opposition and low coup risk, but a youthful and potentially rebellious population, which makes it a typical case to demonstrate the value of state mobilisation in such circumstances as opposed to high-intensity threats emphasised in the

literature. The dominant party regime in Singapore has also been in a similar situation. But it has not used state mobilisation as a strategy of legitimation. And Cambodia is by no means the only case of legitimation-driven mobilisation in Southeast Asia. Another exemplary case of legitimation-driven mobilisation is the Philippines under Marcos who deployed the Citizen's Assemblies to legitimatise his rule after grabbing power through martial law. Yet the Philippines is a typical case for a different purpose: legitimation-driven mobilisation responding to a high-intensity threat.

One of the best cases for repression-driven mobilisation belongs to Malaysia through the ruling party's youth wing, the UMNO Youth. This is the case used for exploring the role of state mobilisation in response to a high-intensity threat. The Myanmar military regime's mass organisation, the Union Solidarity and Development Association, is also a good case for repression-driven mobilisation. But the organisation was a relatively recent creation and a less prominent institution. It ceased to function as a mass organisation after the regime converted it into a political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party, to contest the 2010 elections. The fact that Malaysia recently underwent political transition after more than six decades of dominant party rule makes it a good case for adding balance to the theoretical argument by enabling me to examine how state mobilisation may fail to perform its intended regime-supporting function.

Finally, selecting cases with sufficient data for testing the hypotheses is required for within-case analysis. Cambodia and Malaysia are among the most durable authoritarian regimes in the world. Thus, both cases meet this criterion as longevity translates into abundant data on the independent and dependent variables in question. Table 3 shows the selected cases (regimes and mass organisations).

Table 3: Selected Cases

Country/Regime	Mass Organisation	Type of threat	Type of State Mobilisation
Cambodia (The Cambodian People's Party, 1979-)	Union Youth Federations of Cambodia	Low-intensity	Legitimation
Cambodia (The Cambodian People's Party, 1979-)	National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia (and pro-government labour unions in general)	Hybrid	Cooptation
Malaysia (United Malays National Organisation, 1957-2018)	UMNO Youth	High-intensity	Repression

Data Collection

Conducting fieldwork in authoritarian countries is full of obstacles. Researchers raise the major constraints concerning people's unwillingness to speak critically, impracticality or unreliability in large-N surveys, as well as the problem of inaccessible or incomplete secondary data (Morgenbesser and Weiss 2018, 2–3). One way to mitigate these constraints is to diversify the sources from which researchers can collect data, and this is the approach undertaken in this thesis.

For the cases of Cambodia, I interviewed 20 key informants from mass organisations, civil society, labour unions, and political parties. The data obtained from one interview was not usable because the interviewee was not willing to answer the questions due to concerns over political sensitivity. The interviewees were selected purposively based on their understanding of, and their roles and responsibilities in relation to, the topic under investigation. All interviewees are elite-level professionals in the public and private sectors. They typically have good knowledge of the relevant political, social and cultural contexts pertaining to their area of work. After each interview, the interviewee was asked to suggest a person that could provide useful information for the research. The advantage of this snowballing approach is that it allows me to make the best use of local knowledge and engage actors that would otherwise be missed. Following the research ethics guidelines, the identities of the interviewees including their names and job titles are not revealed to protect their anonymity. Instead, each interviewee is

assigned a unique pseudonym that will only indicate their field of work. For example, interviewees from civil society organisations will be coded and referred to throughout the dissertation as CSO1, CSO2 and so on. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a complete list of interviewees and their pseudonyms.

The semi-structured interviews centred on several themes such as the history and evolution of state mobilisation; the political implications of state mobilisation; the structure and activities of mass organisations; the relationship between mass organisations and civil society organisations; and the role of mass organisations in government policy making. Please refer to Appendix II for a list of interview questions. Each interview was audio-recorded, and the interviewees were informed in advance. Most interviewees were comfortable with the recording given their experience talking to journalists and researchers. Only two interviewees did not wish the interview to be recorded.

A couple of challenges arose from the interviews. First, non-regime-affiliated interviewees knew little about state mobilisation. The added value of the interview with this group of individuals was mainly in gaining their opinion on state mobilisation. Interviews with regime-affiliated officials, on the other hand, provided limited data because of their unwillingness, as expected, to reveal details beyond those already available in the public domain.

The interviews were conducted between mid-December 2019 to late January 2020 in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia where the interviewees reside. The interviews were aimed at collecting baseline information that would allow me to refine the research design and inform the next round of fieldwork when more specific evidence would be collected to test the hypotheses. It was intended to be an iterative process of data collection, analysis, and writing. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic that began shortly after I finished the first round of fieldwork rendered the second round of fieldwork in Cambodia impossible.

The information that I gathered in the first round of fieldwork provided useful reference for further data collection from alternative sources such as news articles, government reports, party documents, government-sponsored documentaries and songs, and Facebook pages. Data from the mass organisations' Facebook page was particularly useful, but it was also very difficult to collect, which would not be possible without technical assistance from a computer science expert. The process involved the expert writing a customised computer code to extract texts from the mass organisation's Facebook page into a spreadsheet. From the texts, I was able to discern the mass organisation's activities, and the ideas it sought to promote. The outcome of this text analysis was the *themes* that anchored the dissertation's structure.

For the case of Malaysia, the most important data source was the archive. Old news articles from the English newspaper *New Straits Times* accessed through Google Archive allowed me to learn about the origin of historical events and the motivation and action of key individuals. These data were supplemented by scholarly works and recent news reporting. I had planned to conduct fieldwork in Malaysia to further test my hypotheses, which could have substantiated my findings. But the Covid-19 pandemic made any overseas trip impossible.

Limits of the Study

My original approach to explaining the persistence of state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes was to account systematically for its different forms across different periods and contexts. But as the research progressed, it appeared to me that a satisfactory explanation should also incorporate the questions of how it comes into being in the first place and whether it is successful at achieving the outcomes as intended by the regime. While raising new questions is important, answering them is challenging and I profess multiple limitations in doing so.

With regard to the driver of state mobilisation, I opted to test the existing threat hypothesis rather than propose an alternative explanation. In doing so, I prioritise making

empirical contributions over theoretical contributions. Thus, this dissertation probes the plausibility that state mobilisation is a product of political threats without accounting for whether other factors may be more causally relevant.

In terms of the effect of state mobilisation, my research design cannot address the issue of confounding variables. For example, when there is a decrease in worker protest in Cambodia, it cannot be concluded whether it was because of state mobilisation or state repression, and, in case both play a role, which one asserts more causal effect.

Finally, in developing the framework of state mobilisation I prioritised internal validity over external validity. Thus, I do not claim that the finding is generalisable beyond the studied cases. This limit has been largely proven through the extension of my argument to other Southeast Asia cases. Although state mobilisation in various forms was evident in the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Myanmar, and Vietnam, it did not match up fully with the theorised functions of state mobilisation. Thus, the framework's relevance beyond the studied cases would benefit from further testing and revision.

Conclusion

This chapter has proposed a framework to describe the core functions of state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes. The framework is aimed at presenting a fuller understanding of the various ways, other than repression, that state mobilisation is employed by authoritarian regimes to respond to threats. The in-depth empirical analysis that follows provides insights into the motivation and utility of state mobilisation, and to what extent it achieves the intended goals in the context of Cambodia and Malaysia.

In Cambodia, the authoritarian regime led by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has encountered major challenges from the main opposition party and its supporters in recent times—having to deal with an unforeseen electoral setback and unprecedented street protests.

Although it could avert future electoral scares by having the opposition party dissolved and disperse street mobilisation with its loyal security forces, the ruling party remains wary of the increasingly active voices that it cannot take for granted and simply do away with by force—the country's growing youth population, many of whom work in the country's sprawling garment industry. It is in this context that the activation of youth and workers mobilisation should be understood. In Chapters 4 and 5, the roles of youth mobilisation led by the party's youth wing, the Union Youth Federations of Cambodia, and workers mobilisation led by the pro-government union, the National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia, are explicated. It is argued that the function of state mobilisation in Cambodia is to legitimise the regime and co-opt workers who had been the opposition party's key support base.

In Malaysia, the role of state mobilisation in the regime's stability led by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) was most significant during the earlier days of its rule. This was when the tension between the country's two major ethnic groups, Malay and Chinese, was at its highest. Founded on the principle of preserving and advancing the interests of the majority Malays, the UMNO regime had relied on xenophobic narratives and repressive actions to hinder and suppress attempts from the minority Chinese, real or imagined, to challenge its political domination. It is argued in Chapter 7 that the role of youth mobilisation by the UMNO Youth is to repress such attempts.

Malaysia's different political trajectory relative to Cambodia—in which the UMNO regime was toppled by electoral defeat, while the CPP was able to rescue its political downturn and continue to rule—offers an opportunity to examine when and how state mobilisation can fail to perform its regime-sustaining function. In Malaysia, ethnic division was a major factor in powering repressive state mobilisation. By this logic, when such division was blunted by a shared idea—for example, frustration over the regime's governance—state mobilisation lost its efficacy in mobilising support for repressive purposes. This was apparent when the UMNO

regime failed to replicate the historical effectiveness of state mobilisation in the lead-up to the end of its rule. The next part of this dissertation will look into the history of state mobilisation in Cambodia (chapter 3); the role of the CPP's youth organisation (chapter 4); and pro-government labour unions (chapter 5) in contemporary Cambodia.

Part II: Cambodia

Chapter 3: The Threat Environment and State Mobilisation in Cambodia

This chapter begins the empirical analysis of the case of Cambodia to offer preliminary evidence that state mobilisation is driven by political threats to perform various regime stabilisation functions. I do so by providing a brief introduction to the rise of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) in Cambodia, charting the threat environment of the regime from its foundation in 1979 to recent times, and spelling out the pattern of state mobilisation as a result of these dynamics. This discussion provides the contextual groundwork for an in-depth examination of state mobilisation in the next two chapters.

As an overview, the CPP regime has faced both high-intensity and low-intensity threats. From 1979 to the early 1990s, the Khmer Rouge and other anti-communist forces threatened to overthrow the regime militarily. From 1993 to 2013, the CPP was challenged by the FUNCIPEC party, the Sam Rainsy Party, and the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in the electoral arena. These were the high-intensity threats. Having survived the threats and become a remarkably durable regime, the CPP is still plagued by a low-intensity threat with the rising popularity of the CNRP and the activism of its supporters being the breeding ground of mass uprisings. Therefore, state mobilisation in Cambodia is both reactive and proactive in design.

The Birth of the CPP

The authoritarian regime in Cambodia has been led by the CPP since 1979, which was then known as the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP). It was the fourth regime to have ruled the country after gaining sovereignty from French colonialism in 1953. Following independence, King (later Prince) Norodom Sihanouk ruled the country via a personalist dictatorship. In 1970, Sihanouk and the monarchy were replaced by Lon Nol's military

dictatorship in a parliamentary vote of no-confidence construed as an America-backed coup. Lon Nol declared Cambodia a republic, but the fragile regime quickly capitulated to Pol Pot's communist guerrilla movement, or the Khmer Rouge, who went on to establish a genocidal totalitarian regime in 1975. The KPRP became the new hegemon when troops of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (FUNSK) overpowered the Khmer Rouge on 7 January 1979.

According to the official narrative, FUNSK was the culmination of a group of Khmer Rouge soldiers and commanders led by Hun Sen defecting from the regime and seeking military support from Vietnam. It was the umbrella organisation that housed mass organisations, the civilian backbone of its military operation. Thus, the birth of mass organisations preceded the party itself. This mass-based origin gave the party the necessary foundational structure, and its elite-driven nature bestowed party leaders the essential attributes of legitimacy. As will be detailed in the next chapter, the motive of FUNSK's formation was used to justify the regime's right to rule when there were increased signs of social discontent.

FUNSK's success in toppling the Khmer Rouge was due in large part to Vietnam's military incursion. In late 1977, the relations between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam broke down after Vietnam launched a military attack against Cambodia, sending troops up to 32 kilometres deep into Cambodia, having been provoked by the Khmer Rouge forming closer ties with China (Chandler 1998, 222). By April 1978, almost a hundred thousand Vietnamese troops were stationed along the Cambodian border. In December 1978, Vietnam announced the formation of FUNSK to topple the Khmer Rouge regime (Chandler 1998, 223).

The official inauguration of FUNSK on 2 December 1978 was the precursor to replacing the Khmer Rouge regime with a pro-Vietnam regime that would become known as the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). Gottesman (2003, 32) argues that FUNSK served to rally Cambodian people who had suffered under the Khmer Rouge and to justify the

Vietnamese invasion.[11] The PRK took shape on 7 January 1979 under the tutelage of the Vietnamese military and civilian advisors who oversaw the reconstruction of the state apparatus.

Shortly after their victory, FUNSK was renamed the Solidarity Front for the Reconstruction and Defence of the Kampuchean Motherland (thereafter the Front). This in turn gave birth to the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), the ruling single party that did not fully take shape until 1981 (Peou 2000, 94). After the formation of the ruling party, the Front and its constitutive mass organisations continued to act as the bridge between the central authorities and the masses. They gathered "the ideas, opinions and wishes of the masses 'in order for the center to grasp [them]'" through monthly meetings between its members and the masses, and quarterly meetings between members and the Front's central leadership (Slocomb 2003, 58). The core mass organisations of the PRK were the Kampuchean Youth Association for National Salvation—which was first led by Hun Sen; the Kampuchean Federation of Trade Unions; and the Women's Association of Cambodia. Due to lower entry barriers and the nature of their work, these mass organisations had larger membership than the party, numbering 40,000, 200,000 and 900,000 people, respectively (Hughes 2003, 25).

The fact that the Front came into existence only several months before the installation of the regime posed an immense challenge for party-building that would require the active role of mass organisations. The party lacked an antecedent "sustained and coherent movement" that could supply it with members. As a result, it had only two hundred non-member cadres (Gottesman 2003, 48), and 100 members at the outset (Vickery 1986, 98–99).

[11] Gottsman did not elaborate on how FUNSK could justify the invasion. I suggest that the invasion could be justified because with FUNSK being marshalled by former Khmer Rouge commanders appointed by Vietnam after they fled the Khmer Rouge's purge, its overthrow of the regime would look like and function as a liberation movement, composed of and led by Cambodians, rather than an invasion contrived by the Vietnamese.

A dearth of members impeded the establishment of extensive party organisations in the state apparatus and other institutions. Instead, the party set up core groups (*ក្រុមស្នូល*) of "three to five politically trained cadres" that performed similar functions to traditional communist party cells—such as enforcing party discipline, surveilling mass attitudes, and performing self- and mutual criticism. Importantly, this became the training ground for party membership (Gottesman 2003, 48–49). Only when all members satisfied party membership criteria could a core group be qualified to become a party branch (Slocomb 2003, 132).

Member recruitment continued at a slow pace throughout the 1980s. The number of party members stood at 1,000 in 1984 and reached 30,000 in 1990, or just 0.36 per cent of the population (Peou 2000, 99). By staying true to communist principles, recruitment was done in a highly selective process. The party wanted "committed, ideological prepared members who would function as a real vanguard and leadership group" (Vickery 1994, 109). It required core group candidates to demonstrate absolute loyalty and a "clear personal history" that would syphon off the "bad elements", i.e., those who had a link with the previous Sihanouk or Lon Nol regimes. The people's distrust of the new communist regime was also a driver of lower party membership (Gottesman 2003, 99).

State mobilisation made a significant contribution to political stability in the regime's formative decades. First, state mobilisation supported the recruitment of party members. The party tasked mass organisations to identify candidates for core groups and put them through "political education" (Gottesman 2003, 59). Second, state mobilisation mobilised support for the new regime (Hughes 2003, 25). Mass organisations engaged significantly "in civic, health and sanitation education, in literacy campaigns, vaccination campaigns, and in assisting the families of soldiers lost in battle" (Mysliwiec 1993, 10), and "indulg[ed]" Cambodians in their pre-Khmer Rouge religious, cultural, and socioeconomic practises (Gottesman 2003, 70). It is then not surprising that despite members' suspicions of the communist regime, they generally

found the Front's work "rewarding and even cathartic" (ibid). Third, and critically, state mobilisation contributed to the regime's capacity to overcome insurgency. The following section examines this issue in detail.

State Mobilisation in Response to High-Intensity Threats

Beset by civil war since its formation, state mobilisation played a vital role in helping the fragile PRK regime survive the crisis. After the war was over and the regime adopted multiparty elections first overseen by the United Nations, state mobilisation was rendered useless to patronage distribution as the dominant regime stabilisation mechanism and thus persisted as the party's peripheral institution. The maintenance of these organisations ultimately paid off when state mobilisation was reactivated as the regime had to deal with a low-intensity threat.

Civil War

The civil war was fought between the Vietnamese-installed PRK and the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). The CGDK or more commonly known as the resistance was constituted by remnants of earlier regimes: the Khmer Rouge who fled to the Thai border following the Front's victory; Sihanouk's *Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique et Cooperatif* (FUNCINPEC); and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) put together by supporters of the Lon Nol regime.

The PRK was deprived of international legitimacy because the CGDK was recognised as the legitimate occupant of Cambodia's seat in the United Nations General Assembly and enjoyed financial, humanitarian, and military aid from Western powers, China and ASEAN member states. The PRK, on the other hand, was only recognised by the Soviet Union (Slocomb 2001, 195; Hughes 2003, 2). The resistance forces would launch military attacks

from its bases along the Thai-Cambodian border, attempting to oust the occupying Vietnamese troops and reclaim state power.

The military menace posed by the resistance compelled the PRK to set up the K5 Plan. Introduced in 1984, this project conscripted civilians to accomplish five objectives prescribed by the occupying Vietnamese, including "the destruction of the border bases, sealing off the border with Thailand, mopping up resistance units in sweep operations, consolidation of the PRK regime, and the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia by 1990" (Slocomb 2001, 196–98). But the bulk of the actual work concentrated on sealing off the border to prevent infiltration by resistance forces (ibid). This involved the construction of "a long fortification structure composed of a 700 km canal, doubled with a wall…repairing roads, building roads, cutting down trees along the side of the road, constructing storehouses, making camps, first-aid stations, digging ponds, [building] dykes, exploiting stone, timber, and so on" (Slocomb 2001, 198).

The burden fell on approximately 380,000 labourers at various points (Slocomb 2001, 199). The conscription drive was justified with a provision in the PRK constitution specifying that "the people as a whole participate in national defence." A foreign medical worker at that time recounted how conscriptions were conducted:

> Two or three times per year, the province recruited a contingent of labourers called 'Volunteers' for a period of three to six months, according to a quota proportional to its population determined by the central government. The provinces, in turn, determined the quotas for each district, the districts did the same for the communes and the communes for the villages. In principle, only men aged seventeen to forty-five could be requisitioned but often women or adolescents took the place of others within their families (Quoted in Slocomb 2001, 201).

Although the K5 plan brought extensive suffering to the conscripts due to the impacts of disease and landmines, it also weakened the security threat posed by the resistance to the survival of the PRK regime. Due to the infrastructural works put together by forced labour,

Slocomb (2001, 196) argues, Vietnamese soldiers and "auxiliary troops" from the PRK were able to mount a successful military offensive against the resistance forces in 1984-85. The PRK government itself acknowledged that this success was made possible by having "better access to the border provided by new and upgraded roads which had been built as part of the K5 Plan" (Slocomb 2001, 202). Prior to the operation, there were resistance bases along the full stretch of the Thai-Cambodia border. After the operation, resistance bases on Cambodian soil were all but decimated. The resistance's offensive capability was subsequently crippled by multiple waves of defection to the PRK. As the resistance's attacking capacity weakened, the PRK army was more assured to take over territorial defence from the Vietnamese troops who made the eventual withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989 (Slocomb 2001, 209).

Complementing the K5 plan in neutralising the insurgency threat was the introduction of agricultural collectivisation. Between 1982 and 1987, this policy was designed to rapidly increase rice production to feed a population emerging from hunger under the Khmer Rouge. The organisational unit of agricultural collectivisation was solidarity groups (ក្រុមសាមគ្គី), many of which were supervised by former Khmer Rouge officials. These were commune-based, small groups of farmers with little bureaucratic structure.

To avert the morale-defeating similarities between this system and that of the Khmer Rouge's, whose bitter experience still reverberated among Cambodians, the PRK leadership settled on limited collectivisation, incorporating measured restrictions and democratic practises. Solidarity groups were divided into three categories with varying degrees of collectivisation (Hughes 2003, 28). Farming tools and animals remained private property (Frings 1994, 49). To protect farmers from the arbitrary decisions of solidarity group leaders and local authorities, the government instructed that "the Groups should meet democratically to discuss and decide on such important matters as the distribution of produce and the system of distribution. Cadres from the Groups, villages, and wards shall respect these democratic

rights and shall not compel the Groups to follow the cadres' personal judgements" (Gottesman 2003, 93–94).

More strategically, the PRK leadership and their Vietnamese advisers agreed that solidarity groups were crucial for regime stability. The system enabled the state to control the production and distribution of scarce resources, especially to the coercive apparatus. It aimed to draw civilians "away from the resistance and keep them under the regime's control." Key to the control was the equal distribution of rice so that solidarity could be maintained. The contrary could mean "people not working and the rice falling into the hands of Pol Pot" (Gottesman 2003, 91–92).

Solidarity groups also conducted "re-education" of defectors from the resistance (Slocomb 2001, 205) to promote "political, ideological and organizational stability" at the local level (Hughes 2003, 27). Thus, in addition to their productive role, solidarity groups served as the regime's ideological apparatus (Frings 1994, 49). Political re-education was the responsibility of the Commission for the "Movement of Bringing Back the Misled" which was led by party politburo member Bou Thang, and in which mass organisations played a constitutive part. The purpose of the movement was to "consolidate the gains of the 1984-85 offensive and fend off the counter-offensive by the resistance" (Slocomb 2001, 204–5).

The Decline of State Mobilisation and Rise of Patronage Politics

After having overcome the existential threat from the resistance, the regime turned to consolidate its grip on post-war Cambodia. The result was a reduced role for state mobilisation. By the early 1990s, Cambodia had completed two major transitions: from a socialist economy to a capitalist economy, and from war to peace. Socialism was formally renounced when the regime undertook major reforms to strip off its communist trappings. The National Assembly adopted constitutional amendments to introduce changes to the flag, the national anthem, and

the coat of arms. The word “Revolutionary” was dropped from the names of state institutions, and the country's official name was changed to the State of Cambodia (SoC)

The civil war ended after the nation’s warring factions signed a Western-brokered political truce, known as the Paris Peace Agreements, in 1991. The pact put the country under the interim government of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which administered the first post-civil war general elections in 1993. Nineteen parties took part in the elections to contest the ruling CPP. The most prominent were the FUNCINPEC Party and the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party established by former resistance leaders. The Khmer Rouge boycotted the election and continued its guerrilla activities for a few more years. After the 1993 election, the country was proclaimed a constitutional monarchy under the official name the Kingdom of Cambodia, with Sihanouk returning as the ceremonial Head of State.

The new politico-economic context put off the original impetus of state mobilisation. ‘Enemies’ whom the population was once mobilised to defeat were being integrated into mainstream politics. Opponents were being transformed into allies for future government coalitions. National salvation gave way to economic development and regime consolidation. Mass organisations ill-suited to the new rules of the game were rendered obsolete. Some underwent institutional conversion to perform new functions in order to achieve new goals. Some like solidarity groups perished altogether when agricultural collectivisation was abolished, and the integration of resistance forces into the Phnom Penh government made the re-education of defectors redundant.

The rise of patronage politics as an upshot of economic liberalisation significantly shaped the fate of state mobilisation. Regime leaders sanctioned the use of public office for entrepreneurial and extractive activities to strengthen the state’s fiscal capacity and build political support. State mobilisation became peripheral to this new mode of regime stabilisation

where mass organisations were considered surplus to the institutional configuration because of their lack of revenue-generating potential. Yet the regime still maintained many of these organisations, which ultimately paid off when state mobilisation was reactivated as the regime encountered a renewed threat.

Patronage politics entailed a new kind of exploitative relationship between the central government, local governments, and society, facilitated by new sources of state revenue and personal enrichment. Increased revenue empowered the central government vis-a-vis local power holders. Instead of relying on local authorities to extract resources from the population, the central government fostered allegiance amongst local authorities by condoning and protecting "civil servants and military units in their entrepreneurial activities vis-a-vis the local population and locally available resources" (Hughes 2003, 39–40). The consequence was that "[r]ather than conspiring with local villagers to avoid the levies of the central government, local power-holders now conspired with central government and armed forces to extract resources from villagers" (Hughes 2003, 39–40). Hughes (2003, 19) argues that "the economic liberalization that took place within Cambodia swiftly came to be viewed by power-holders as offering a matrix of resources that could shore up exclusionary loyalties within the weak state apparatus, and reducing the field of action for resistance in rural villages, as a means to strengthen the state militarily and politically".

The rise of patronage politics was rooted in a shift in the power balance within the ruling party that had unfolded since the mid-1980s which put its apologists in command of the party. The losers from the power shift were party ideologues like Heng Samrin, Say Pouthang, and Bou Thang. Described as being too "ideologically rigid", Heng Samrin and others failed to adapt to the state's retreat from the economy and build personal power bases (Gottesman 2003, 330). As secretary-general of the single party, Heng Samrin prioritised ideological infusion for party building. He once lamented that the party's weaknesses lied in "ideological

work [lagging] behind the needs of the revolution and had not taken deep root among the workers and peasants…; the liaison between party members and the masses was weak and the masses had not been really mobilized to take part in party building" (Slocomb 2003, 198). He reprimanded the working class for low "revolutionary awakening" and lacking "class consciousness" (Slocomb 2003, 266). Mass organisations were also criticized by Heng Samrin for their shortcomings:

> Trade unions have not made building working class consciousness the focus point [of their activities] and have not realized their own huge responsibility in building the alliance of workers and farmers to act as the foundation of the revolution. The Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Youth Alliance is a youth organization of the working class. It is the righthand of the party but it does not yet have clear class consciousness either (Quoted in Slocomb 2003, 267).

Slocomb (2003, 200) suggests that this push for ideological strengthening among the masses "appeared to fall on deaf ears," and ideology lost its potency as the decade went on. It appears that state mobilisation had been under strain even before the rise of patronage politics.

The winners from this transition to patronage politics were more pragmatic leaders like Chea Sim and Hun Sen—the latter was described as having "an uncanny ability to bend with the political wind" (Strangio 2014, 34). These leaders had amassed power courtesy of their ability to nurture provincial networks of power whereby elite supporters were encouraged to engage in wealth-generating activities in the liberalising economy (Gottesman 2003, 299). The bureaucracy was increasingly filled by technocratic allies without "revolutionary credentials" but with overseas education qualifications or command of foreign languages (Strangio 2014, 35). For these pragmatists, ideology was dismissed as ineffectual in motivating state officials, and instead, "the enrichment of its officials" was considered necessary for a "stable regime" (Gottesman 2003, 299).

The emergence of patronage politics was also driven by international developments. The collapse of the Soviet Union inflicted massive damage to the PRK/SoC's aid-dependent

economy. It lost the critical cash flow and imports that impaired its capability to pay state employees and fight the remaining war against the resistance. This predicament prompted the regime to prop up the state coffers with new taxes, sales of state-owned enterprises, and foreign investments (Gottesman 2003, 316–20). Given the fiscal strain, the regime had to choose between laying off state officials to reduce government spending and condoning public officials seeking alternative revenue to complement or substitute government salaries. The leadership ruled out the former as jobless government officials would likely fall prey to the resistance's recruitment drive and put regime security at risk. The latter was thus sanctioned. Local authorities were given the discretion to extract resources and levy taxes/fees to become "financially self-sufficient." Superior patrons, in turn, wielded power through their ability to allocate these positions (Gottesman 2003, 328–29).

The implications of the rise of patronage politics were that the value of the party and state apparatus were assessed based on their "revenue-generating potential" rather than their revolutionary commitment. Youth and women mass organisations were considered "inefficient vehicles for patronage politics" and hence "superfluous" (Gottesman 2003, 329). In a bid to salvage their lifeline, heads of these organisations reminded the leadership that "the Youth and Women's Associations don't just do their own work. The organizations of the state authority also use them whenever they are needed", such as the K5 conscription. These organisations also suffered from member exodus as they saw greener pastures in the private sector or more lucrative state agencies (ibid).

Following the 1993 election, mass organisations persisted more as party-affiliated social organisations than as ostensibly party organisations. The workers mass organisation took the cosmetic step to reorganise into a conventional labour union—the Cambodia Federation of Trade Unions and later the Cambodian Federation of Independent Trade Unions—to assert itself in the country's emerging garment industry, and to comply with the international labour

norms on worker representation. The women mass organisation was renamed the Cambodian Women for Peace and Development (CWPD). International donors and NGOs once thought the CWPD was working to advance women's rights just like other women NGOs they supported. Yet Slocomb observed that the organisation's purpose was to "raise morale and guarantee popular (mass) support for the revolution [regime]. They had nothing to do with 'rights'—just the opposite."[12] It continued to be led by the CPP's female Politburo member, Men Sam Orn. The youth mass organisation was renamed the Youth Association of Cambodia and was most visible during election campaigns.

State Mobilisation in Response to Renewed Threats

The CPP regime became one of the most durable authoritarian regimes in the world as evidenced by its capacity to survive multiple high-intensity threats over the decades, with state mobilisation being a significant contributing factor. However, a growing young electorate who has increasingly embraced political change after decades of Hun Sen-led CPP rule began to pose a novel threat to the regime. Unlike other threats, this was a low-intensity threat that the regime could not take for granted and simply do away with by force. Therefore, state mobilisation had to assume a new form to mobilise support or induce compliance. This section examines the makings of the low-intensity threat and the revival of state mobilisation.

Since the regime's foundation in 1979, it had survived the civil war with remnants of the previous regimes, and a budget crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It had also withstood a democratic transition overseen by the United Nations after the end of the Cold War, at a time when the third wave of democratisation was sweeping across the globe (see Huntington 1993). Following the 1993 electoral defeat, the CPP succeeded in forcing through

[12] Interview with OB1, E-mail, 19/11/2019.

a power-sharing deal with the FUNCINPEC party, having threatened to secede part of the country under its military control. In an unprecedented institutional setup of a coalition government, Ranariddh became the first prime minister and Hun Sen the second prime minister. This fragile coalition lasted only until July 1997 when Hun Sen launched a pre-emptive military offensive on his coalition partner, crippling the armed forces loyal to Ranariddh and forcing him out of power. After crushing the FUNCIPEC party's military power, Hun Sen and the CPP took absolute control over Cambodian politics and went on to win consecutive general elections in 1998, 2003, and 2008 with large margins.

The 2013 general elections, however, were a turning point in the CPP's rule. Established by opposition leaders Sam Rainsy and Khem Sokha only one year before the elections, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) gained surprising traction by garnering 44 per cent of the popular vote, giving it 55 seats in the 123-seat National Assembly. The CPP's share of the popular vote, on the other hand, declined from 58 per cent in 2008 to 49 per cent in 2013, resulting in the loss of 22 seats, down from 90 in 2008 to 68 in 2013. The party retained the majority to form a government, but it no longer had the two-thirds majority needed (or 82 votes) to amend the Constitution unilaterally.

The 2013 elections represented the strongest stress test yet for the CPP since their electoral defeat in 1993 because a growing number of Cambodian voters had rejected the idea of an incompatibility between peace and change.[13] Throughout the election campaigns, the CPP emphasised political stability and resisted the call for change by invoking the memory of Sihanouk's demise at the hands of Lon Nol and the country's subsequent tragic path to the Khmer Rouge's brutal rule. The ruling party reasoned that its rule offered the only path to protect the hard-earned peace and the socio-economic progress that it has spawned. By contrast, the CNRP promoted the idea of "change" and a new leadership that was supposedly clean and

[13] For further analysis of the elections see Hughes (2015) and Un (2015).

competent, and most importantly, free from Vietnam's influence. Governmental change was campaigned as the only answer to the entrenched "social inequality, land grabbing, depletion of natural resources, and the presence of illegal Vietnamese immigrants" bred by corruption and mismanagement under the CPP's rule (Un 2015, 104). If the FUNCIPEC party (led by Sihanouk's son Norodom Ranariddh) victory in 1993 reflected Cambodian voters' nostalgia for the good old days under Sihanouk in the 1960s, a period often considered to be contemporary Cambodia's golden era (Strangio 2014, 53), the CNRP's surge represented a growing desire to imagine a post-CPP future, one in which a peaceful power transition enables a new leadership and government to advance an alternative reform agenda.

Buoyed by its popularity, the CNRP reacted to the election results by organising the largest mass mobilisation in decades, claiming that the elections were fraudulent and that they should have won if the National Election Committee (NEC) were nonpartisan. The scale of the protest appeared to confirm the urge for a political change among the population as expressed through the ballots. Tens of thousands of opposition supporters camped at Freedom Park—the government-designated area for protest—for months and later spilt onto the streets calling for re-elections, and in the final phase, the resignation of Prime Minister Hun Sen. The momentum was bolstered when tens of thousands of mostly female workers in the garment industry organised a historic mass strike demanding their minimum monthly wage be doubled. The twin protests presented an unprecedented challenge to the CPP's decades-long rule. Having earlier downplayed the threat of the CNRP,[14] the CPP seemed to be caught off guard by the opposition party's strong electoral performance and mass mobilisation.

The CNRP-led social unrest, however, was no match for the CPP's institutional weapons as the ruling party and the prime minister had absolute control over the coercive,

[14] Soon after the CNRP's establishment, Hun Sen downplayed the party's impact likening it to "a storm in the jar" (ព្យុះក្នុងក្អម).

administrative, legislative, and judicial institutions. The regime's resilience was also secured by a lack of a credible threat of rebellion in the military (see Chambers 2015; Human Rights Watch 2018). The prime minister's eldest son was the deputy commander-in-chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and commander of its army division, where he controlled "all the real power, real soldiers" (Loughlin 2021, 254–55). Furthermore, the military had an elite bodyguard unit that directly answered to Hun Sen. This counter-balancing force was said to be the best equipped and renumerated force in the military (Peou 2020, 15). This institutional setup made future coups only a remote possibility.

Backed by this institutional bulwark, the CPP government successfully killed off the opposition momentum. The security forces efficiently dispersed in *one day* the crowd that had been stationed in the Freedom Park for *months*. The workers' protest was likewise successfully cracked down after the government deployed specialised military units (see Asia Monitor Resource Centre 2014). In the aftermath of the suppression, the CNRP gave up street protests and accepted the election results. In exchange, the CPP offered important concessions. It greenlighted the CNRP to establish its own TV station. Kem Sokha was given the position of Vice President of the National Assembly. The CPP also agreed to appoint four CNRP officials and a nonpartisan civil society leader to the nine-seat NEC. The CNRP claimed that such a composition would make the NEC an independent institution capable of administering fair elections. The deal moved the two parties into a "Culture of Dialogue" whereby Sam Rainsy promised to tone down his criticism of Hun Sen and the CPP. Yet, this political détente was never likely to work out in the long term. After all, Sam Rainsy gained widespread support precisely because he was perceived to be the most resolute politician in standing up against Hun Sen's authoritarianism. Appearing too cosy with the prime minister and the CPP would have cast Rainsy as weak and manipulable, thus depleting his support base.

When Sam Rainsy reversed course and resumed his opposition, the CPP realised that what cannot be co-opted has to be repressed. What followed was the unleashing of the ruling party's compliant state institutions to undermine civil society, independent media, and the opposition party. The CPP-majority National Assembly passed laws to impose restrictions on the operation of non-governmental organisations and labour unions, circumscribing their freedom to organise protests, receive foreign funding, and associate with opposition parties. The country's most respected English newspaper, *The Cambodia Daily*, was served with an order to pay millions of dollars in back taxes by the Finance Ministry, forcing it to close. American-sponsored radio stations, Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, suffered from similar tax and licensing issues.

At the same time, a coordinated attack was launched on the CNRP. Sam Rainsy was forced to resign from the CNRP after the National Assembly adopted an amendment to the *Law on Political Parties*,[15] which allows a political party to be dissolved if a leader is convicted of serious crimes. Sam Rainsy had earlier been sentenced to two years in prison for defamation. Succeeding Rainsy, Kem Sokha bore the full weight of repression. First, he was stripped of his Vice Presidency of the National Assembly. Then, he was entangled in an extramarital affair exposed by multiple, secretly taped telephone conversations posted anonymously on social media. The final blow was struck when his speech about his political activities was construed as his admission of collusion with the U.S. to overthrow the Cambodian government. Kem Sokha was subsequently arrested and charged with treason. On the back of the arrest, *The Cambodia Daily* declared in its final issue in September 2017 that Cambodia had descended into an "outright dictatorship". The CNRP was eventually dissolved by the supreme court in 2017. With the most formidable barrier to its electoral domination removed, the ruling party

[15] An unofficial English translation of the law can be found at https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b51414.html.

went on to win all seats in the National Assembly in the 2018 general elections, having 'competed' with 19 minor parties. In short, the CPP faces no immediate threats to its power. The military's institutional setup renders a coup extremely unlikely and the political opposition has been severely weakened by the CNRP's dissolution.

The threat to regime stability, however, is far from over. The CPP may have taken unmistaken actions to suppress the overt challenge to its rule, but substantial social discontent that contributed to the crisis remains. The CNRP's rise was symptomatic of an underlying attitudinal shift that had been unfolding for years among the population, especially the younger generation. Although the CNRP as the political outlet has been blocked, the risk remains that stability after the 2013/2014 government crackdown could take an unexpected turn into a destabilising mobilisation process in the future when the right conditions emerge.

What would this threat look like? First of all, preference falsification is a real possibility. For example, local authorities have long practised social control by coding villages based on their party alignment: "White" for supporters; "Black" for non-supporters; and "Grey" for ambiguous groups. But the classification system turned out to be unreliable in the 2013 elections as one party official recalled: "I had 1200 villagers on my list under the 'White' (loyal) category, but only 300 voted for the CPP" (Un 2019, 46). The privately held dissatisfaction with the status quo was revealed by a public opinion poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) shortly after the elections, between October and November 2013, which shows that the proportion of respondents who think that Cambodia was heading in the "wrong direction" reached an all-time high of 43 per cent, while the average in the last five years was just 20 per cent (IRI 2013), with corruption and nepotism cited as the primary reasons. Furthermore, 46 per cent of the respondents also said that the country "needs a change". The sharp rise in discontent might be due to individuals buoyed by the CNRP's popularity, who previously may conceal their preferences because they did not see a viable

challenger to the CPP, deciding that the time was right to voice their frustration and hope for greater concessions from the government (IRI 2013). The IRI finding was corroborated by another national survey conducted by the Asia Foundation between May and June 2014 following a government crackdown on the CNRP-led demonstrations. The survey found that 59 per cent of the respondents believed Cambodia was going in the wrong direction (Everett and Meisburger 2014).

The discontent was most prevalent among the younger population. They are different from the older "silent society" who were beset by memories of the Khmer Rouge atrocities and were more likely to prefer political stability over change. The younger "articulate society" [16] had no memory of or direct experience with the Khmer Rouge's extreme rule and were unsatisfied with having "Pol Pot's nightmare as a benchmark" (Strangio 2014, 259). They care more about their future, exhibit less trust in public institutions, and have higher expectations of the government with regard to job creation and personal freedom (Eng and Hughes 2017). Consequently, they do not "fit the mould for which [the CPP's social control] strategy was designed" (Hughes 2015, 13). For young people living in rural areas, Hughes argues, the little likelihood of owning land distanced them from local authorities and the clientelist system that focuses on small-scale development projects. For those who migrate to the cities or overseas for jobs, the social control system ceases to function altogether, making the task of local authorities in rendering them legible to the ruling party almost impossible (ibid).

Notably, the ambiguity over young people's political preferences is not a new phenomenon; the trend had been building "for years" (Hughes 2015, 10). Hughes and Kim (2004, 28) first report this observation from interviews with local authorities in 2003 when they admitted to having little knowledge about young people's voting preferences as one village

[16] The terms "silent society" and "articulate society" are borrowed from Jowitt (1975).

chief complained: “the father might be CPP, but the children not. It’s difficult to tell” (ibid). For Hughes (2015, 13), by the 2013 elections, the loosening grip of the social control strategy “has been predictable for a decade and yet the party itself has apparently not properly recognised or responded to this challenge.”

Responsive actions were indeed taken by reviving state mobilisation to reconnect the masses to the party. It had been anchored in the formation of the CPP’s Mass Mobilisation Commission (MMC), an auxiliary body to the Central Committee, in May 2015. The MMC comprised four sub-commissions, each responsible for youth, women, workers, and NGOs/associations/development partners which mobilise other popular segments other than youth, women and workers. Some key duties of the MMC were as follows (CPP 2015):

- Manage mass movements in communities, private and public enterprises, NGOs, associations, and religious organisations to grasp firmly the needs, demands and sentiments to analyse the party’s strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to build appropriate response mechanisms to successfully implement the party’s political platform and policies.
- Study the sentiments of youth, women, workers, and all population strata to design plans, programs, and content for political education and training.
- Monitor, study, and analyse the activities and scams of unfriendly segments to develop appropriate and timely measures.

The impetus of state mobilisation under the current CPP rule is the same as it was previously: to counter social and political forces that threaten regime stability. State mobilisation was regarded by the party as a means to consolidate party unity and act as a bulwark against the opposition CNRP, which the ruling party accused of fomenting popular uprisings (the so-called “colour revolution”) to overthrow the government and stoke social upheavals. Short of describing them as the “enemy” (ខ្មាំង) as the Khmer Rouge had once been labelled, they were referred to as an “unfriendly domain” (មជ្ឈដ្ឋានអមត្តិ) or “negative group” (ក្រុមអគតិ). The party’s spokesman, Sok Eysan, said that “the goal of mass mobilisation is to build mass organisations as the bridge between the party and the masses to help them understand the party’s policies and build their trust in the party’s leadership…When there is strong party

cohesion," he added, "any attempt at dividing the party and dismantling national achievements would fail" (Mech 2019). In the same vein, the party's propaganda chief, Tak Sunyi, emphasised the MMC's role in "preserving peace and stability and preventing unscrupulous schemes to create chaos and instability…It is vital," he added, "that officials in charge of mass mobilisation penetrate all strata of the population to comprehend people's sentiments and make timely responses" (Lor 2019).

In sum, the exploration above points to the presence of a potentially rebellious youth population that cannot be taken for granted or simply removed by force. The history of regime change has made it abundantly clear that young people, be they students or workers, are at the forefront of mass uprisings toppling authoritarian regimes around the globe. In the case of Cambodia, although young people have not taken to the streets in a threatening fashion after the post-2013 elections government crackdown, and when the CNRP was dissolved, the CPP has reasons to be concerned about the destabilising potential of this social force. Arguably, the empowerment of the UYFC with a revamp to its leadership structure before 2013, which I will return to later, was driven by this latent threat that has been observed since at least 2003. This response suggests that the CPP was not ignorant of the changing social dynamics. As the threat was brought into clearer sight by the 2013 elections, the UYFC has upped its game to pursue regime legitimation with mass events packed with propaganda as well as other regime-sustaining functions (for the latter see Norén-Nilsson 2021).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a broad overview of the evolution of authoritarian politics in Cambodia and the role of state mobilisation in countering various threats to the regime. In wrestling power from the Khmer Rouge, the mobilisation of victims under the regime contributed manpower to the mass movement that founded the ruling party. During the

regime's formation, state mobilisation undertook recruitment and political education of party sympathisers and performed crucial social functions to increase identification with the regime. Grassroots state mobilisation in the form of agricultural solidarity groups was aimed at maintaining stability on the ground. Most critically, as the regime was plagued by civil war, state mobilisation in the form of forced labour constructed the strategic infrastructure to strengthen the regime's offensive capacity to maintain its military superiority over the resistance. These observations demonstrate the threat origins of state mobilisation.

Following the end of the civil war, the importance of state mobilisation to regime survival faded in the ensuing decades. This was because the combination of a power shift and economic change gave rise to patronage distribution as the new dominant strategy of regime stabilisation. State mobilisation was deemed to be a surplus to this process. Mass organisations as the principal agencies of state mobilisation were reduced to a peripheral position in the party hierarchy due to their lack of potential in generating revenue vital for the functioning of the patronage system. The regime, however, did not lose sight of the value of state mobilisation. It was reactivated in 2012 and intensified after the 2013 general elections to help the regime respond to a renewed threat in the form of a potential youth rebellion inspired by a democratic political vision promoted by the opposition CNRP. State mobilisation's recognised contribution to regime stability in the early days, as expressed by the regime's leadership, explains why mass organisations were neglected, but not eliminated, when the existential threat that required its services ended.

This chapter has provided preliminary evidence confirming the hypothesis that threats to regime survival spurred state mobilisation. But the hypotheses that state mobilisation performs regime stabilisation functions and that these efforts are successful at helping the regime overcome threats still need to be substantiated with more evidence. This is the task of the next two chapters. In Chapter 5, a study of the Union Youth Federations of Cambodia will

show how state mobilisation was used to legitimise the regime. A study of the National Union Alliance Chamber and other pro-government unions in chapter 6 will show how state mobilisation was used for co-opting workers in the garment industry. These chapters will also assess their success in achieving these outcomes.

Chapter 4: State Mobilisation and Legitimation in Cambodia

This chapter begins the in-depth analysis of the Cambodian People's Party's (CPP) youth organisation, the Union Youth Federations of Cambodia (UYFC), to test the hypotheses that 1) state mobilisation is a product of political threats, that 2) it performs a legitimating function in response to the threat, and that 3) it is effective in this regard. Legitimation-driven mobilisation is concerned with strengthening the authoritarian regime's legitimacy—or the *right* and *might* to rule. It is measured with two indicators: idealisation and signalling as spelt out in my theoretical framework. In observing idealisation, I will demonstrate how the UYFC makes the regime's legitimacy claims more appealing to young people by drawing on the monarchy, culture, and nationalism. With regard to signalling, I will draw on the UYFC's institutional structure and highlight the political message it intends to convey.

This analysis is expected to contribute to our understanding of state mobilisation by demonstrating its value in a low-intensity threat environment in addition to a high-intensity one as emphasised in the existing theories. Also, a study on legitimation-driven mobilisation should enrich our understanding of the CPP's adaptability after the 2013 elections. The most recent electoral challenge to the regime's survival was seen as a youth-driven phenomenon as those under the age of 25 made up more than half of the eligible voters in the elections (Un 2015, 104). Also, young people's growing economic power because of employment enabled them to influence the voting behaviour of their dependent relatives by threatening to withhold remittances if they did not vote for the CNRP (Norén-Nilsson 2017, 86). Therefore, it was observed that the CNRP received a high level of support in areas with high rates of young people working in cities and overseas (Un 2019, 46). The ruling party's surprisingly poor performance left observers wondering whether the party's legitimacy claims will continue to strike a chord with the younger population (e.g. Strangio 2014, 259; Eng and Hughes 2017; Un

2019, 46). Supplementing previous research on this issue which focuses on Hun Sen's quest for legitimacy (Norén-Nilsson 2021; Ngoun 2022), this chapter examines how the CPP has sought to remedy the deficit in regime legitimacy through state mobilisation.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The first section provides a brief introduction to the UYFC as the mobilising agency. Then, I review the CPP's legitimacy claims and examine the UYFC's major projects in renewing these claims. More specifically, the second section examines two mass events—'40km into History' and 'Angkor Sankranta'—to demonstrate how the first indicator of legitimation, idealisation, plays out. The third section examines UYFC's institutional structure to demonstrate the working of the second indicator of legitimation, signalling. I conclude by discussing to what extent the evidence supports the hypotheses.

Introduction to the UYFC

Historical Origin

The UYFC (សហភាពសហព័ន្ធយុវជនកម្ពុជា) is the quasi-youth wing of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Its predecessor is the Youth Association of Cambodia (YAC). When the ruling party transformed from a cadre party to a catch-all party in preparation for multiparty elections in 1993, it made a decisive reform to the operation of mass organisations. The YAC was repackaged as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and cut off from the national budget. Its new status as an NGO was said to be necessary to conform to "legality" and adapt to the "actual situation" as Cambodia transitioned to a democratic regime (YAC 2012).

In practice, however, it was less clear-cut. On the one hand, it implemented activities akin to an autonomous NGO delivering vocational training, organising field trips and camping, distributing emergency relief, and the like. On the other hand, it canvassed votes for the ruling

party. This relationship was most ostensible during election campaigns when YAC members could be seen campaigning for the CPP "wearing the association's shirt and the party's hat."[17] Outstanding members of YAC were selected to represent the ruling party in televised election debates organised by the American organisation, the National Democratic Institute.[18]

Having been relegated to a more peripheral position, YAC struggled to maintain its organisational structure. Before 1993, YAC had nearly one million members, and membership was classified into active and supporting members. But the organisation was not as successful in recruiting active members in the post-transition era, with "merely" around 150,000 active members (YAC 2012).

From 1993, YAC kept only some of its officials at the central level. The rest, including those at the subnational levels, were transferred to the Ministry of Education's Youth Department. The new arrangement to some extent reduced YAC's financial strain as the ministry's resources could be employed to implement its essential functions. For example, the organisation cooperated with the ministry to organise child councils at primary schools, youth councils at lower and upper secondary schools, and student associations at universities.[19]

In repackaging the YAC into the UYFC, a fundamental shift occurred at the leadership level. Organisational leadership was transferred from party veterans[20] to a new generation of young elites led by the Prime Minister's youngest son, Hun Many,[21] assisted by children of the party's other influential leaders. YAC's leaders held high hopes for the new leadership's ability to recruit more members and mobilise financial resources from the private sector,[22] courtesy of influence inherited from their fathers. Indeed, it was widely agreed that UYFC would not have been powerful if it was not under the leadership of the prime minister's son.

[17] Interview RP1, 05 January 2020, Phnom Penh.
[18] One debater has since risen to become UYFC's deputy president.
[19] Interview RP1, 5 January 2020, Phnom Penh.
[20] They held roles as members of the National Assembly and chief of the national election committee.
[21] He was made deputy president of YAC one year before it was reconstituted as UYFC.
[22] Interview with RP1, 5 January 2020, Phnom Penh.

Membership

The UYFC is a mass organisation with approximately 190,000 members in 2021, including public servants. The UYFC's membership figure does not include the numerous volunteers that UYFC recruits when hosting mass events. Concerning public servants, a civil society activist suggested that their involvement in UYFC is not entirely based on personal interest. It has also been driven by a sense of "inevitability" to comply with institutional norms and secure career advancement.[23] It should be noted that co-optation does not have currency only in relation to intimidation and repression. It was the experience of some people who feel that they have to join the UYFC to advance their careers, but it is not universal. In the case of pro-government unions in the next chapter, I conceive of co-optation as a proactive strategy that involves appeasing the target group with material distribution.

The UYFC differs from its predecessor in that it accepts individual members as well as institutional members, hence the term "union" in its name.[24] In addition to auxiliary CPP youth groups, UYFC incorporates labour unions, business associations, and private education institutions, collectively referred to as "cooperating partners."[25] This institutional arrangement has enabled UYFC to tap into private resources to sponsor its activities, which was something its predecessor was unsuccessful at doing. The UYFC's nonpartisan appearance makes it easy for civil society organisations and actors who want to engage with it while avoiding public scrutiny and cynicism towards its open association with the CPP. Indeed, the owners of a private school and a beer company sit among the UYFC's central committee.

[23] Interview with CS2, 22 December 2019, Phnom Penh.
[24] Interview with MO1, 19 December 2019, Phnom Penh.
[25] Interview with MO1, 19 December 2019, Phnom Penh.

The Web of CPP Youth Groups

Although the most ubiquitous, the UYFC is not the only CPP youth organisation. The CPP's youth movement comprises a web of other groups led by the UYFC and the party's official youth wing, the Central Youth CPP (CYCPP). The CYCPP is led by Hun Sen's eldest son, Hun Maneth,[26] who is also a member of UYFC's central committee. Some CPP officials sit in both CYCPP and UYFC's central committees.

Falling under the CYCPP and UYFC are auxiliary youth groups led by lesser CPP elites. Table 4 lists the youth groups, their leaders, and their patrons. Some groups receive patronage from one of the prime minister's sons more directly and explicitly than others.[27] For example, Hun Maneth is the founder of Group 157 and has acted as the benefactor of gift-giving of Group 8 and Group 12. Meanwhile, Hun Manith, the prime minister's second son, has an informal leadership role in the Pagoda Children Intelligentsia and Students Association (PCISA). Their engagement in other groups is less clear or not observational.

[26] Hun Manet was promoted in June 2020. He previously served as deputy president. The former president was a party veteran and was subsequently appointed Secretary of State for Education.
[27] This relationship was observed from the groups' publicising through their Facebook pages.

Table 4: List of CPP Auxiliary Youth Groups

Organisation	President	Patron
The Pagoda Children Intelligentsia and Students Association (PCISA)	Minh Bankosal (former Director General, Securities and Exchange Commission of Cambodia)	Hun Manith (informal leadership)
K77 Youth Activist Group	Mean Chanyada (Deputy Phnom Penh Governor)	*None/Unclear*
Cambodian Muslim Student Association	Sos Mousine (Secretary of State for Religion, also Deputy President of UYFC)	*None/Unclear*
Cambodia Youth Movement (Group 157)	Moeung Ponlok	Hun Maneth (non-executive founder)
Cambodia Youth Movement (Group 8)	Moeung Makara (Deputy Chief of Joint Staff of Royal Cambodian Army)	Hun Maneth (benefactor of gift-giving)
Voluntary Intellectual and Youth Association (Group 12)	Try Tray (Deputy director of National Anti-Counter Terrorism Committee)	Hun Maneth (benefactor of gift-giving)
Cambodian Federation for Human Rights and Development	Tav Veasna (advisor to Council of Ministers & member of the Press and Quick Reaction Unit)	*None/Unclear*
Cambodian Democratic Students Intellectual Federation (Group 22)	Chan Savuth (Secretary of State for Agriculture, also a member of UYFC's central committee)	*None/Unclear*
Youth Activist Group (Section 71)	Sry Kimyou member of Phnom Penh (Capital Council)	*None/Unclear*
Cambodia Youth Movement (Group 18)	*Unknown*	*None/Unclear*
Phnom Penh Party Youth Activist Group	*Unknown*	*None/Unclear*

Source: Author's compilation from various sources.

Given the number of these groups, the question arises: Why does the CPP set up various youth groups instead of one consolidated youth wing? There were no clear answers to these questions from the interviews I conducted. One opposition politician's view, however, could provide a clue to this puzzle. He posits that organisational multiplicity is designed to match the diverse preferences of potential party supporters. Having multiple youth groups offers choices for those who prefer to follow one leader over the other. On the other hand, if the party had only a single youth organisation, it would risk undercutting the scope of party member

recruitment if potential members shun the party because the youth organisation's leader lacked the desirable personal attributes. Having multiple channels of participation dilutes this risk. Ultimately, the party stands to benefit whichever group one chooses to join.[28]

The Façade of Civil Society

Rich in financial resources and manpower, the UYFC is socially active. It has delivered and organised a wide range of humanitarian, economic, and cultural activities such as camping, scholarships, capacity building, cultural and sporting events, exhibitions, job fairs, blood donation, emergency relief, free health services, and more.

Although many of their activities overlap, civil society actors beg to differ. They argue that the core difference distinguishing them from the UYFC is that they work for "society", whereas UYFC works for the "party".[29] Despite having acknowledged the cognitive and networking benefits that youth can obtain from UYFC's social activities and capacity building programs, civil society actors and opposition politicians express the view that these opportunities are ultimately designed to mobilise support for the ruling party.[30]

The UYFC has never shied away from the historical fact that it is the successor of the youth association that the PRK leadership referred to as the party's "right hand." But at the same time, it does not officially claim to be the CPP's youth organisation, and instead, it claims to be a nonpartisan "youth front" with the following declared objectives (UYFC 2012):

- Mobilise youth from inside and outside the country regardless of ethnicity, colour, gender, language, faith, religion, class, and political affiliation to form a solidary force to contribute to building an independent, peaceful, free, democratic, and progressive Cambodia.
- Represent and defend the rights and interests of Cambodian youth in relation to their livelihood, spirit, and association.

[28] Interview OP3, 30 December 2019, Phnom Penh.
[29] Interview with CS4&5, 24 December 2019, Phnom Penh.
[30] Interview with CS4&5, 24 December 2019; OP2, 28 December 2019, Phnom Penh.

- Engage and cooperate with social organisations, associations, and federations that work on youth issues.
- Engage and cooperate with national and international organisations, individuals, people, and youth of other countries to work towards peace, independence, democracy, social progress, and the bright future for youth.

Few, however, buy into the UYFC's nonpartisan claims. Civil society activists and opposition politicians consider it as a political organisation serving the interests of the ruling party.[31] Civil society activists complain that they would not be able to implement similar activities without being punished under the *Law on Associations and Non-governmental Organisations* ("NGOs law"),[32] which requires NGOs to be independent and nonpartisan. The fact that the UYFC has been able to do otherwise contradicts its own claims to be an NGO.[33]

Yet why has the UYFC insisted on maintaining its NGO status? A good example of the utility associated with having an NGO status was its involvement in election monitoring in the 2018 general elections. Without the participation of the dissolved CNRP, the election was generally considered to be the least competitive since 1993, and its result was a foregone conclusion. Indeed, the exclusion of Cambodia's main political opposition party prompted international and independent local election observers to abstain from the elections. Filling in the lacuna were mass organisations such as the UYFC and the Cambodian Women for Peace and Development, the ruling party's women mass organisations, as well as other pro-CPP youth groups. The UYFC alone provided almost half of the 77,534 election observers approved by the national election committee (Reuters 2018). Unconvinced of their autonomy and professionalism, a coalition of international election monitors called them "fake observers" (ANFREL 2018). Yet it is noteworthy that the deployment of the UYFC is not primarily to convince observers of the presence of a genuinely autonomous civil society. Although the

[31] Interview with nine civil society actors and opposition politicians, December 2019, Phnom Penh.
[32] An unofficial English translation of the law can be found at https://cambodia.ohchr.org/~cambodiaohchr/sites/default/files/Unofficial_Translation_of_5th_LANGO_ENG.pdf.
[33] Interview with CS2, 22 December 2019, Phnom Penh.

ruling party would have welcomed such an outcome, its covert purpose was to signal that the regime has a mass following and is able to acquire citizens' compliance (see Wedeen 1999; Huang 2015).

Notably, the rise of the UYFC represents the CPP's tactical shift away from repression-based mobilisation. Counterdemonstration used to be a prominent feature of street politics in Cambodia between the late 1990s and early 2000s. It was often carried out by the notorious Pagoda Boys' Association (Pagoda Boys for short), a formally registered NGO comprising male students residing at Buddhist temples across the capital city. The Pagoda Boys confronted and, when necessary, violently broke up protests led by the opposition party and its affiliated trade unions. Its self-proclaimed mission was to "crack down on inappropriate demonstrations in order to support the government led by Prime Minister Hun Sen" (Phann and Samantha 2005).

Yet counterdemonstration had declined from the mid-2000s onwards. The low mass-level threat might explain the decline, along with the exclusive deployment of security forces in occasional violent or contentious protests. The decline of counter-mobilisation by the Pagoda Boys can also be the result of the lack of reliable support for its cause. For example, when the Pagoda Boys canvassed students to participate in the ruling party's 2013 election campaigns, many obliged. But discontent and opposition disguised the outward exhibition of support as one youth campaigner professed to a journalist: "The head of the students at the pagoda wants all of us to vote CPP, but it is our right to vote how we want—I prefer the CNRP" (Aun 2013).

Idealising the CPP's Rule

Following an overview of the UYFC's historical background, membership, and activities, this section examines the UYFC's role in idealising the CPP's rule. Idealisation refers to making the incumbent rule more appealing to citizens. This objective can be achieved by organising

mass events on occasions with historical or cultural significance to enable the regime to harness broadly embraced historical legacies and cultural values to enhance the resonance of its legitimacy claims.

Before delving into UYFC's idealisation strategy, it is essential to review how the CPP claimed legitimacy to its rule, which is built around two overarching themes: 1) The CPP leadership's conscientious breakaway from the Khmer Rouge and the sacrifice they made to free Cambodian people from the regime's tyranny; and 2) its achievement in re-building the state and economy and its indispensable role in preserving these outcomes. Although the CPP's 2013 election setback suggests that such legitimacy claims have increasingly lost their persuasive power among the younger voters, the party has shown no sign of confining them to the dustbin of history. Indeed, the narrative is the party's backbone. It embodies the ruling elites' shared origin in the violent struggle for power and shared fear of political upheaval. Downplaying the narrative would also risk alienating the party's core support base who genuinely believe that its legacy merits its continued rule. Thus, the party's preference is to adapt its legitimation strategy. The role of the UYFC is to regenerate the narrative with propaganda that draws upon the monarchy, culture, and nationalist values transmitted through 40km into History and Angkor Sankranta. In the rest of this section, I illustrate how the projects and the messages they spread map onto each theme of the CPP's legitimacy claims.

Foundation and Liberation: What the CPP Claims

The first overarching theme of the legitimacy claims is the defeat of the Khmer Rouge through armed rebellion. The regime holds that the historical juncture of FUNSK's formation on 2 December 1978 that led to the eventual toppling of the Khmer Rouge regime on 7 January 1979 should be remembered and celebrated. Youth should be grateful for the CPP's role in returning personal freedom and material well-being that they are enjoying in the present. For the CPP, these positive outcomes would not have been possible without a decision by Hun Sen, who was

a regiment commander under the Khmer Rouge, to defect from the regime on 20 June 1977. He was later joined by Heng Samrin and Chea Sim and their followers from the eastern zone on 25 May 1978.

Hun Sen's experience escaping to Vietnam was documented in English in a biography entitled *Strongman: The Extraordinary Life of Hun Sen* (Mehta and Mehta 2013). Before the July 2018 elections, in January 2018, the Press and Quick Reaction Unit, the Council of Ministers' media arm, released an English-subtitled documentary adding extraordinary details to the escape. Entitled *Marching Towards National Salvation*, the 1 hour and 33-minute long documentary (PRESS OCM 2018) featured interviews with Hun Sen and his wife, his two travel companions (out of four) who have since risen to the rank of military generals, the Vietnamese villager Hun Sen met upon entering Vietnam soil, the Vietnamese commanders who interrogated and held meetings with him, and the doctor who treated him, among others.

Although defection was initially motivated by survival, the documentary highlighted Hun Sen's bravery and sacrifice driven by a divine-given mission. The prime minister exposed in the documentary and a Khmer-language biography (Chhay 2019)[34] a miraculous dream in his last sleep before heading to Vietnam. In the dream, he was shocked by repeated and deafening screams of an old man telling him to "leave immediately." The voice was said to be from a banyan tree inhabited by a *nak ta*, an ancestral spirit worshipped in the indigenous Khmer religion (see Mabbett and Chandler 1995, Chapter 9) whom he said had been taking care of him.

The prime minister's invocation of supernatural power to bolster his authority is not new. Hun Sen's effort in reinventing himself as the reincarnation of a sixteenth-century peasant who came to the throne by overthrowing a supposedly unjust king was analysed by Norén-Nilsson (Norén-Nilsson 2013; 2018). The defection was thus not simply an escape from death

[34] This account is not included in his English-language biography.

but also a mission blessed by divinity. What unfolded afterwards was consistent with the good omen. Hun Sen recounted meeting a villager who generously led him to the Vietnamese military base. There, Hun Sen and his companions were well-received with steamed rice and simple food, a feast they had not had for more than a year. He was allowed to stay in Vietnam after interrogation established his credentials as a genuine defector. His fate was radically different from those escaping to Vietnam earlier who were sent back and eventually killed by the Khmer Rouge.

The story was also animated by Hun Sen's sacrifice. By leaving for Vietnam, he left behind his pregnant wife. The journey was taken in the dark down a jungle path dotted by landmines planted by the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese army. With great uncertainty over Vietnam's reception of his defection, Hun Sen famously kept 12 needles that he could use to poke into his throat to commit suicide if the Vietnamese decided to turn him back to the Khmer Rouge. Showing his homesickness and desperation to liberate Cambodia, a doctor recalled that while being treated for malaria at a Vietnamese hospital, Hun Sen would often look westwards in the direction of Cambodia and wept. Hun Sen commented that there was no leader in the world that suffered more than him.

Glorifying Foundation and Liberation: What the UYFC Does

The UYFC sought to extoll this historical event with the 40km into History (40km ទៅកាន់ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រ) project. I argue that it was designed to supplement existing rhetoric with bodily experience to deepen participants' understanding of the past and hence their appreciation of the present. The event was initiated in October 2018 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of FUNSK's, and the mass organisation's, foundation. It involved approximately 700 people taking a 40-km journey by foot to reach the historical site where FUNSK was formed, in Snoul District, Krati Province. The walk took four days, from 29 November to 1 December 2018.

In sharp contrast to the mandatory participation of old mass organisations, 40km into History was a voluntary event in which interested individuals had to apply and pay to participate. This was a novel initiative relative to the CPP's usual practice of mobilising supporters with material incentives. Upon being shortlisted, candidates were interviewed and, when successful, were required to pay a 40,000 Cambodian Riel (KHR) (10 USD) participation fee and a 160,000 KHR (40 USD) deposit. The deposit would be returned after the end of the event if participants complied with the event's terms and conditions, such as not aborting the walk halfway. The event was widely promoted on social media and attracted interest from the public, including well-known artists and athletes. Participants were divided into small groups to prepare for the trek, each comprising one captain, one vice-captain, one assistant, one militia, two security guards, and two doctors. All participants underwent physical training with designated trainers for more than two weeks before the walk began.

The 40km into History event was purported to socialise youth and, more importantly, to simulate the struggle experienced by CPP leaders. At the individual level, it was aimed to enable youth to discover their level of "patience" and "problem-solving capacity" (UYFC 2018d). Participants were expected to form friendships and develop team spirit through group activities such as trekking, singing, cooking, camping, storytelling, and playing musical instruments (ibid). At the collective level, the energy-sapping event was intended to impart participants with the lived experience of the CPP leaders' escape from the Khmer Rouge. Participants, themselves incurring minor injuries through the walk, were encouraged to reflect on the strain and danger these leaders had to endure when venturing on landmine-ridden paths across the dense forest at dark to avoid being seen and captured by Khmer Rouge soldiers (UYFC 2018a; 2018b). In resurrecting the past, it was hoped that participants could develop a greater appreciation of the present (UYFC 2018a; 2018b).

To what extent such outcome was achieved is unknown.[35] But the UYFC had a prototypical expression that it wished to see, such as the one offered by its president (Met 2018):

> I am exhausted but I am not exhausted of thinking back to 40 years ago when our leadership sneaked through this field at night without knowing whether they would survive or die for the cause of liberating the nation from the Khmer Rouge's grip. I am exhausted but I am walking on a road without landmines and in a circumstance full of peace. I know clearly that nothing will happen to me and other youth. In contrast, the previous generation leadership didn't have answers to these issues when they were walking down the same road. I am exhausted but I know that my family and the whole Cambodian family are living well when I am walking down this road. In contrast, the previous generation leadership wouldn't have the same feeling as I do now. But at the last moment, our leadership at that time could do it. What about our youth in this generation?

The 40Km into History event was a key element in the UYFC's broader initiative to popularise the notion of the 'December 2 Spirit' (ស្មារតី ២ ធ្នូ), which was invented to propagate the CPP leaders' "voluntary", "devotional", and "altruistic" actions (Hun 2019). Defined as the prioritisation of national interests over self-interest, its members were encouraged to preserve and diffuse the spirit to prepare for "social chaos," and "risks" that may threaten Cambodia's "sovereignty" (ibid). The December 2 Spirit was joined by other unifying slogans such as "UYFC, One Spirit" (សសយក ស្មារតីតែមួយ), "One Khmer, One Future" (ខ្មែរតែមួយ អនាគតតែមួយ) (ibid). These jingles can be understood as being part of the UYFC's objective to forge a national community that transcends political polarisation. This portrayal involved framing the CPP and its leaders as representing the interests of the Cambodian people in general, rather than those of the CPP supporters. This was reflected in nationalist terminologies such as *nation* (instead of *party*) and *our leaders* (instead of *party leaders*) in the UYFC's discourse.

[35] A UYFC official said the organisation does not have a policy to measure the success of its activities. Interview with MO2, 20/12/2019, Phnom Penh.

The UYFC's nationalist drive drew on the "usable past" of Sihanouk. This was evident in its public statements celebrating Sihanouk's legacy. Drawing on Sihanouk's call for "people from all walks of life to unite under the Constitution and state laws to protect and develop the motherland" (UYFC 2018c), youth were urged to circumvent confrontational politics and instead realise their aspirations in a stable political order established and sustained by the CPP government (Hun 2019). I make sense of this trait as follows: For the UYFC, if the Independence Day of 9 November is celebrated as a national holiday because sovereignty is an undisputable national triumph that belongs to all Cambodians regardless of their political affiliation, then 7 January—which the CPP considers the Cambodian people's 'second birthday'—should be celebrated with as much enthusiasm. Similarly, if the former king is revered as the Father of Independence for his role in the struggle for sovereignty, Hun Sen and other CPP leaders should deserve similar heroic status for liberating Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge.

In invoking Sihanouk, UYFC rationalises its determination to counter "incitements or attempts to disrupt peace, social stability, public security that cause chaos and revolution in Cambodia" as the preservation of not only the CPP's but also Sihanouk's legacy (UYFC 2017). This approach was a fundamental part of its strategic plan construed as serving the "cause of the motherland" (បុព្វហេតុជាតិមាតុភូមិ) (ibid). UYFC members' active engagement in this cause was thus considered a "patriotic" act (ibid). The UYFC's strategy can be understood as an attempt to harness Sihanouk's legacy by weaving liberation from the Khmer Rouge with independence from the French to form a singular historical process that it says gave Cambodia the opportunity for "self-determination" (UYFC 2018c).

Eventually, framing youth mobilisation in nationalist terms, I reason, increases the cost of questioning the legitimacy claim: Challenging the CPP's idealised liberation, and peace, amounts to challenging not only the incumbent rule but also Sihanouk's legacy and ultimately

the notion of nation itself (i.e., being unpatriotic). In so doing, the UYFC constructs the moral ground for its pro-government policies.

Peace and Stability: What the CPP Claims

The other overarching theme of the legitimacy claims is the integration of remnants of the Khmer Rouge regime leading to a complete end of civil war and the ensuing political stability. When it gave itself a new name in 1991, the ruling party also adopted a new logo that best communicated this legacy. The logo depicted a Buddhist angel scattering power romanticised by a state newspaper editorial as "a symbol of goodness, hope, compassion and mercy to all humankind." The editorial went on to glorify the CPP's achievement:

> The CPP has worked hard to realize the sacred hopes and holy aspirations of the people. It supports reconstruction, unification and egalitarianism, and with one hand defends the country against the return of the genocidal regime, and with the other hand develops the country (Quoted in Frieson 1996, 193).

Conscious of the monarchy's popularity among rural voters, the editorial emphasised that it was the CPP who invited Sihanouk to return, restored him as head of state, and followed his policies (Frieson 1996, 193). Although propaganda failed to stop a FUNCINPEC victory in the 1993 elections, the centrality of the narrative was never in doubt. Voters were reminded in each election campaign not to bite the hands that feed them.

Following the CNRP's ostracisation in more recent times, the CPP stepped up the peace narrative through the "Thank You Peace" (អរគុណសន្តិភាព) slogan drummed up by Hun Sen and imprinted on banners displayed on government buildings across the country. On 29 December 2018, the 'Win-Win' monument was inaugurated to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the 'Win-Win' policy. Hun Sen credited the policy for being the recipe behind the Khmer Rouge leaders'

surrender to the regime;[36] something the interim UN government, the UNTAC, failed to accomplish. The political significance of the policy, Hun Sen claimed, went beyond peace and stability in the last two decades. It also brought about "total peace, national reconciliation, national consensus, and territorial integrity that didn't exist in the last 500 years of Cambodian history" (Fresh News 2018).

In addition to glorifying its achievement, the CPP focused on attacking supposed challengers to the legacy by framing political opposition as "a violent threat to the survival of Cambodia and Cambodians" (Ledgerwood 1996, 122–23). The blaming of the political opposition reached a new height amidst the Arab Spring, the anti-government popular uprisings that ousted multiple dictators in the Middle East and North Africa in the early 2010s. Succeeding FUNCIPEC as the regime's most formidable challenger, the CNRP was the next target of regime-sponsored propaganda. The instability caused by the uprisings provided the materials from which the regime drew to replenish its legitimacy claims. Indeed, how the anti-government mobilisation plunged countries such as Libya, Syria and Yemen into civil war played into the CPP's hands.

To substantiate its peace narrative, the government's Cambodian Human Rights Committee began circulating propaganda videos on social media to showcase the "peril" of anti-government mass protests or "colour revolution." At the same time, it trumpeted Cambodia's democratic trappings, namely its media and civil society density, to counter the portrayal of the country as a dictatorship. The propaganda highlighted the political stability and economic progress the country had made since 1979 to contrast with war-torn countries in the Middle East. A CPP editorial likened the mass uprisings to "the most dangerous virus in the 21st century" that had to be eliminated (Lor 2016). The overall message was that only by

[36] According to Hun Sen, 29 December 1998 is the date when Khmer Rouge leaders came to his residence to surrender.

keeping the CPP in power could Cambodia avoid the fate of these countries. Regime change was considered a perilous game that was already vindicated by the Khmer Rouge's revolution. The Arab Spring's disastrous aftermath only served as a powerful reminder of how things could go wrong.

In charge of the propaganda was a nine-member inter-ministerial working group created in October 2017 on the order of Prime Minister Hun Sen to "compile all the relevant information relating to the Cambodia National Rescue Party's purported attempt at a 'colour revolution' and produce a video to 'educate' the public" (Mech and Baliga 2017). The media campaign was followed by an 80-page white paper published by the Press and Quick Reaction Unit in February 2018 after the Supreme Court disbanded the CNRP. The white paper justified the CNRP's dissolution by stressing its 'collusion' with foreign governments and organisations to foment and instigate a colour revolution to overthrow the legitimate government and cause chaos in the nation.

Glorifying Peace and Stability: What the UYFC Does

Angkor Sankranta (អង្គរសង្ក្រាន្ត) is the UYFC's signature project to exalt political stability. The event has been held every year since 2013[37] to celebrate Khmer New Year in the surrounding area of the famed Angkor Wat temple in Siem Reap province. Khmer New Year is Cambodia's biggest festival celebrated over three days, from 14 to 16 April. Yet it is also a time that evokes tormented memory. As former Prime Minister Pen Sovann ruminated, "[e]very New Year, people remember April 17, 1975, because less than 48 hours after greeting the New Year deity, the Khmer Rouge began treating the Khmer people as their enemies" (Pin 2007). The celebration of Angkor Sankranta signifies a sharp rupture from the Khmer Rouge-tainted memory and highlights the CPP's achievement in reviving time-honoured social institutions.

[37] The planned 2020 and 2021 events were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I argue that this mass event is organised to achieve symbolic collective triumphs to generate excitement and inspire a positive outlook on the CPP rule. A "promised land" element based on political stability and economic performance allows the CPP to "connect the regime's continued rule to a brighter future and allow it to legitimize…repression on the grounds that they have meaning and purpose" (Dukalskis 2017, 69). Angkor Sankranta's function is to augment the material manifestation of a brighter future with the production of nationalist symbols to, as Wallace (2019) notes, "[get] young people excited about [Hun Sen's] aging regime".

Angkor Sankranta is an exemplary demonstration of the UYFC's organisational power. The initiation of the event in 2013 by the UYFC made possible the amalgamation of more than 2,000 student volunteers and tens of thousands of holiday-goers in Cambodia's centre of past glory and symbol of national pride, partaking in more than two dozen cultural events such as traditional games, oxen and water-buffalo racing, parades, martial arts performance, traditional dance, lantern floating, and more (UYFC 2000). A project of this scale would have been impossible without the backing of powerful elites. The project was hatched by a small group of young CPP elites headed by Hun Many and it was able to mobilise broad participation from state institutions and civil society: from the Apsara Authority who oversees the world heritage site to local governments in Siem Reap who were responsible for public order, to the Ministry of Culture who provided conceptual and technical expertise, to universities where student volunteers were recruited, to private companies who donated to the event in exchange for advertisements (UYFC 2000). The capacity for resource mobilisation was precisely why the Youth Association of Cambodia's leadership wanted to hand over the organisation to emerging party leaders. The mobilisation was made easy by the UYFC's embedded structure in central ministries, local governments, and other public institutions. Likewise, given the nature of patronage institutions, engagement in a well-publicised and politically salient project that

future party leaders invested in was a rational choice for party-state aspirants to demonstrate loyalty to their patrons. Student volunteers were equally enthusiastic, as claimed by the event organisers. They were said to be motivated by the nationalist sentiment of being able to do what other nations have done (UYFC 2020).

In holding Angkor Sankranta, the UYFC mobilised around 2,500 volunteers from universities to run more than two dozen programs (UYFC 2000). Personal interest aside, the politicisation of higher education institutions helped smooth the recruitment process. In most cases, university owners or presidents were members of the ruling party, enabling the party to exert control over the universities' operations (Sam and Dahles 2017, 1779). It should be noted that there used to be a brief period of resistance during the late 1990s and early 2000s led by nationalist student associations such as the Student Movement for Democracy and the Democratic Front for Khmer Students and Intellectuals. Students aligned with these groups could be seen holding demonstrations against corruption and the government's handling of border issues with Vietnam. The movement, however, faded away after state repression forced many of its leaders to go into exile abroad. In more recent years, the government doubled down on its control over academic institutions by banning political activities and unauthorised assembly, which critics considered to be an attempt to crowd out anti-government ideas and groups (Mech 2015). The decline of school-based opposition ensured that pro-government youth groups experienced few competing ideas and little resistance to advancing their agenda.

The main responsibility of student volunteers was to coordinate the event's various activities including popular games, animal racing, parades, music/art performance, martial arts, and the like. They were trained by experts from the Ministry of Culture and the Royal University of Fine Arts on the proper rendition of these activities. Student volunteers were broken into small groups headed by senior members of UYFC. They were then assigned to facilitate the participation of the audience in each program (UYFC 2000). Like 40km into

History, volunteerism was harnessed by the holding of Angkor Sankranta to signal a break from traditional state mobilisation based on coercion and monetary inducement.

Mass spectacles were a major feature of Angkor Sankranta. These were extravagant performances and crafts aimed to stimulate the feeling of "national pride" through external validation. Two Guinness World Records were set in the 2015 Angkor Sankranta—the world's biggest sticky-rice cake and the largest performance of the Madison dance. Sticky-rice cake is a traditional Khmer snack that usually weighs a couple of hundred grams. The world record sticky rice cake that was paraded through the streets of Siem Reap weighed approximately four tons. It was made by chefs from the Cambodian Chefs' Association, an organisation affiliated with the UYFC. The Madison dance was performed by 2,015 volunteers.

Angkor Sankranta's success led to the formation of 'GOGO Cambodia' in the following year to continue the enactment of mass spectacles beyond the framework of Angkor Sankranta. GOGO Cambodia described itself as:

> A national campaign aiming to mobilize Cambodian pride in various sectors from education to national defence and translate the will to a platform whereby every single Cambodian can show his/her individual pride as a Cambodian and Cambodia's pride at large to the international community.[38]

Its first major achievement was another world record—the world's longest *krama* (Cambodian scarf). The weaving of the krama lasted four months, from February to June 2018. The world record announcement ceremony was held on 1 July 2018, only weeks before the elections held on 27 July 2018. The 1,149.8-metre-long *krama* mobilised more than 40,000 weavers, nearly half of whom were guest weavers, including the king, queen mother, prime minister, and ministers (UYFC 2019).

The Krama event is another effort from the UYFC to harness Sihanouk's legacy that I discussed in the section on 40km into History above. When asked about the decision to hold

[38] See the Facebook page of GOGO Cambodia at https://www.facebook.com/gogocambodiaofficial.

the event at Veal Men, the royal cremation ground, UYFC leaders explained that it was to showcase national unity, thereby following Sihanouk's wish for "Cambodia to [be] united in order to be strong." They claimed that the event was to "lead from something old and be a bridge to something new" (Norén-Nilsson 2021, 12).

Another record was announced in November 2018 when the world's longest dragon boat was rowed on the Mekong River. The boat was 87.3 meters long with a carrying capacity of 179 people. It was made by 14,000 workers over 192 days. Like the CPP leaders in the inaugural post-Khmer Rouge Water Festival held in 1990, the UYFC commemorated the boat by drawing on its historical significance which symbolises the Khmer Kingdom's strong naval force under the Angkorean king, Jayavarman VII, who deployed them to defeat incursions from the Cham Kingdom (UYFC 2018e). As Ledgerwood (2008, 209) used to note, the tenet of this historical discourse is that "Cambodians, and particularly the leaders of the current government, are heirs to a long heritage of superior military skill, passed on continuously since ancient times."

The performance of mass spectacles was framed around two themes: Gratitude and national pride. The UYFC promotes the virtue of gratitude for peace by grounding it in the universally valued Khmer culture. I advance the claim that cultural values are crucial for the UYFC's legitimation effort because they can normalise gratitude towards the CPP rule based on the grounds that it is *the right thing to do*. In this sense, supporting the CPP is an act of upholding a moral code rather than an act driven by the impetus that Cambodian people owe the CPP an existential debt.

This new propaganda was based on a deference-oriented interpretation of the Khmer culture. This framing was evident in a documentary on Angkor Sankranta released in June 2020 (UYFC 2020). Entitled *The Making of Angkor Sankranta*, the documentary opened with a brief introduction to the Khmer culture elaborated by cultural scholars and religious practitioners.

The emphasis was on the religious foundation of the Khmer culture, which has a deep root in Hinduism and spiritualism despite the state patronage of Buddhism. According to these experts, given the Hindu belief systems, artistic manifestations of the Khmer culture such as music, dance, architecture, painting, and carving serve—like Cambodia's great monuments—as "tributes" (តង្វាយ) to deities. This practice, they claim, renders the Khmer culture a "culture of piety" (វប្បធម៌កតញ្ញូ) popularised by Khmer proverbs '*appreciate the source when drinking water; appreciate the grower when shielding under a tree*' (ផឹកទឹកឱ្យនឹកដល់ប្រភព ជ្រកម្លប់ឱ្យនឹកដល់អ្នកដាំ). The message conveyed by this introduction was that the expression of gratitude reflects the Cambodian people's "morality" (សីលធម៌).

Culture, however, is a fragile repository of legitimacy. Hughes and Öjendal (2006, 419) argue that "[w]here tradition is invoked as a legitimating device, power consists in the ability to privilege certain memories of past practice over others - and yet the memory of each individual also serves as a resource of resistance to the authorised account." Previous research has observed patterns of subtle resistance to the deferential imagery of the Khmer culture as manifested in everyday language, which Öjendal and Kim (2006, 518) label a "discursive paradigm shift." While far from being truly empowered, decades of political decentralisation and NGO-led community development have introduced notions of democratic representation and citizen participation that have motivated youth to critically reflect upon their relationship with local governments (Heng, Vong, and Chheat 2014). Also, the agitation of young people for leadership change was voiced clearly in the 2013 elections and post-election protests. In these phenomena, liberal ideas alien to the conservatism of the Khmer culture that the UYFC has promoted were evident.

Although the UYFC has placed faith in the persuasive power of the Khmer culture's conservatism, it has also adapted to emergent values by promoting the notion of national pride. Represented by the slogan 'Khmer Can Do It' (ខ្មែរធ្វើបាន), it is purported to project "positivity"

(ភាពរីដួមាន) onto the society (Hun 2019). I reason that unlike occasions where youth are *consumers* of CPP-sponsored outcomes, employing national pride as the basis for collective action is intended to reconstitute them as *co-producers*. The outcomes then can be rationalised as national achievements worthy of protection not only from the ruling party but also from the youth themselves. In this sense, UYFC's activities are akin to "[creating] practices in which citizens are themselves 'accomplices'" (Wedeen 1999, 6), participating in sustaining the ruling party's idealised version of peace.

Signalling the CPP's Cohesion

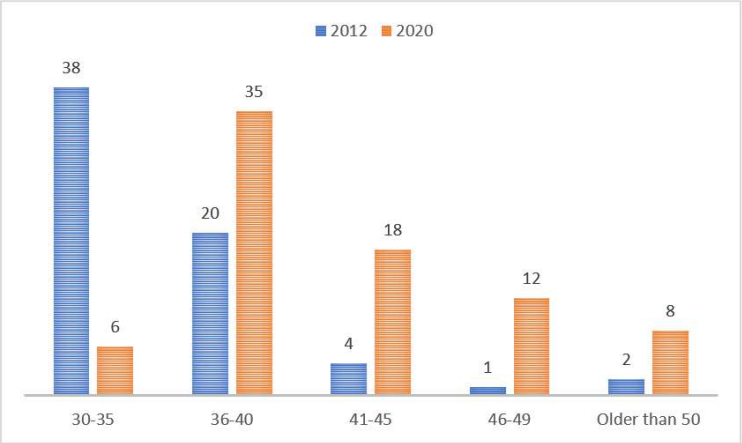
Having examined idealisation as an indicator of legitimation, this section turns to the second indicator, signalling. The UYFC's second legitimating function was to signal elite cohesion as an alternative form of legitimacy. While idealisation is concerned with highlighting the regime's virtue, signalling is about demonstrating the regime's strength. It is intended to persuade would-be challengers that the regime is too strong to be conquered. The legitimacy of this nature is *asserted* rather than *gained* because it does not involve delivering tangible or intangible outcomes amenable to developing citizens' identification with the regime. Asserted legitimacy is largely concerned with projecting the capacity to govern. For that matter, legitimation through signalling regime strength is meant primarily to induce compliance, rather than to gain support. As an institutional platform for the CPP's younger elites to implement party policies and initiate mass projects, the UYFC has the potential to fulfil this function. Essential to the signalling of regime strength is the UYFC's institutional structure. By having children of competing party leaders lead the organisation, the ruling party communicates that elite unity is not limited to the founding generation but will also be maintained into the future generations and such cohesion will not be crippled by factionalism.

A platform for Elite Cooperation

To begin with, the UYFC's leadership is constituted by emerging young elites holding key positions in the government. What is important is that their parents or grandparents are or were members of party factions, and the inclusion of their youngsters in the UYFC is a sign that the party has either survived the power struggle brought about by factionalism or thrived despite it.

The UYFC's command centre is the central committee, which had 78 members in 2012.[39] Figure 2 shows the age of central committee members in 2012 and 2020. True to its status as a youth organisation, nearly half of the members were 35 and younger. Another 20 members were between 36 and 40. Hun Many himself was 30 when he became president. Given the fairly young age at which UYFC leaders assumed their role, the majority were still under 40 by 2020. This age profile was significantly younger than the CPP's official youth wing, the CYCPP, whose many central committee members appeared to be in their 40s or 50s. Indeed, the CYCPP had been led until only recently by party veteran Ke Bun Kieng who was in his 60s when he was replaced by Hun Maneth, Hun Many's older brother, in June 2020.

Figure 2: Age of UYFC Inaugural Central Committee Members

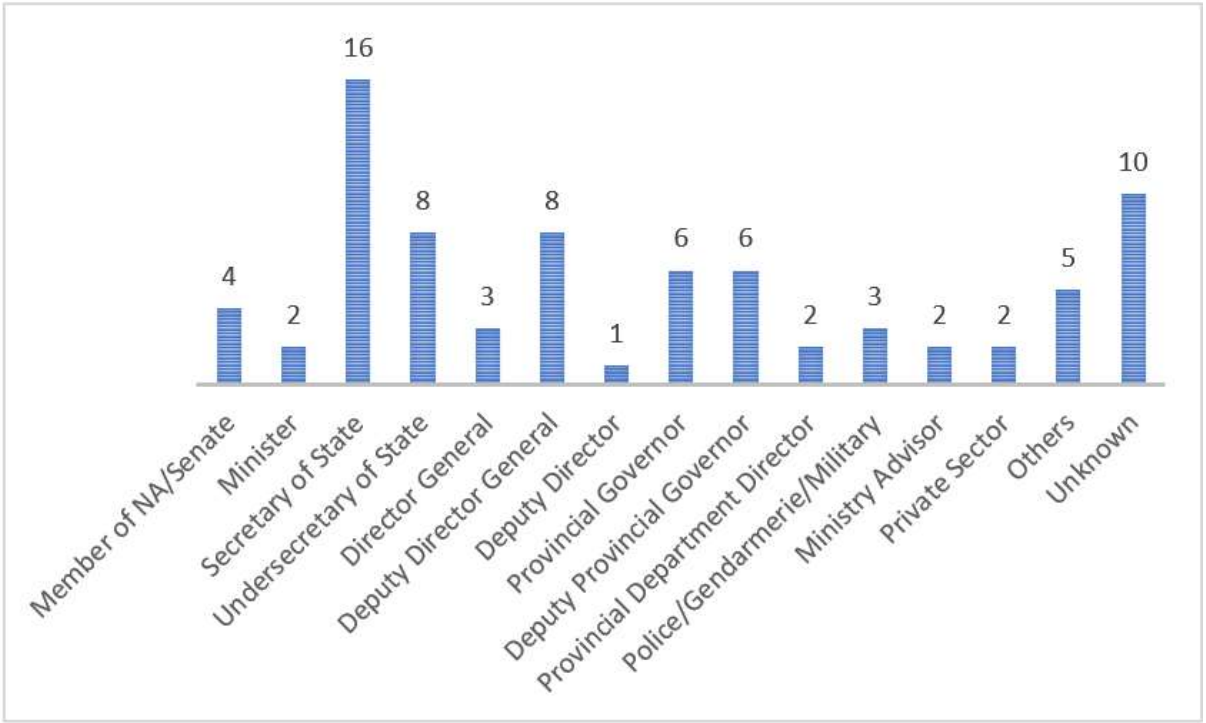


Source: Author's compilation based on UYFC publications.

[39] UYFC has since added more members to the central committee with the most recent addition occurring in June 2019. But a complete list of names and ages was not available for the descriptive statistics.

The UYFC's leadership structure mirrors that of the ruling party. Hun Many, son of CPP president Hun Sen, is the president of the UYFC. His deputies, Say Samal and Sar Sokha, are sons of CPP vice presidents, Say Chum and Sar Kheng, respectively.[40] Both Say Saml and Sar Sokha hold high-ranking positions in the government. The former is Minister for Environment while the latter is Secretary of State for Education. Joining them in the central committee are politicians and technocrats from central ministries and local governments. Figure 3 shows the government positions held in 2020 by the 78 inaugural UYFC central committee members. Individuals holding the positions of Secretary of State, Undersecretary of State, and Deputy Director General make up nearly half of the committee, followed by Provincial Governors and Deputy Provincial Governors.[41]

Figure 3: Government Positions Held by UYFC Central Committee Members in 2020



Source: Author's compilation based on UYFC publications and Internet research.

[40] UYFC had four more deputy presidents.
[41] The hierarchy of central ministry is as follows: minister -> secretary of state -> undersecretary of state -> director general -> deputy direct general -> department director -> deputy department director. The hierarchy of provincial government: governor -> deputy governor -> department director -> deputy department director.

These individuals are responsible for coordinating the UYFC's activities in their respective ministries and local governments. Norén-Nilsson (2020) argues that many of them have gained these positions because of their activism and reputation-building in the UYFC. As a senior UYFC official elaborated, "[t]he governors, from the beginning, were members of the UYFC. When they did good activities, the government saw that, and they are also the new blood of youth, so the government tested them by making them governors" (Norén-Nilsson 2020, 275).

Elite Cooperation as Strength

How does the UYFC's institutional structure signal regime strength? To answer this question, it is important to ascertain the degree of factionalism within the CPP. The ruling party's proclaimed invincibility has long been questioned by opposition politicians. The party's balance of power was thought to be in flux as a result of rivalry between the prime minister and then party vice president Hun Sen, and the then party president Chea Sim during the 1990s and early 2000s.[42] By 2003, Chea Sim had an edge as shown by the composition of the 19-member standing committee, the party's most powerful institution. According to Peou (2020, 20, footnote 1), Chea Sim had nine supporters including Heng Samrin, Sar Kheng, Say Chhum, Ker Kim Yan, Chea Soth, Mat Ly, Bou Thang, Ney Pena, and Sim Ka, whereas Hun Sen had 5: Sok An, Hok Lundy, Tea Banh, Pol Saroeun, and Ngoun Nhel. The rest, Men Sam Orn, Im Chun Lim, Kong Sam Ol, Dith Munty, and Say Phouthang, were the undecided. After the 2003 election, the balance of power had decidedly shifted in favour of Hun Sen (Morgenbesser 2018, 201; Peou 2020, 15).

Notwithstanding factionalism, Hun Sen had not pursued an elimination strategy or the purging of party challengers. Instead, Chea Sim's faction had been accommodated to incentivise them to continue investing in the party's survival. For example, after his removal

[42] Chea Sim died in 2015. Hun Sen succeeded him as party president.

in 2009 as Commander in Chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, Ke Kim Yan, Sar Kheng's in-law, was appointed deputy prime minister, which was technically a promotion. Meanwhile, Sar Kheng's influence in the party was reinforced, if not expanded, after being elected in 2015 to vice president along with Hun Sen who succeeded Chea Sim as party president. Say Chum's career followed a similar upwards trajectory. He was elected party vice president along with Sar Kheng, and succeeded Chea Sim as president of the Senate.

Members of the undecided faction too had been accommodated. Say Phouthang, for example, remained in the standing committee until his death in 2018. His granddaughter, Mithona Phouthang, was promoted to the governor (from deputy governor) of Koh Kong province in 2017. Given her young age, she also serves as UYFC president for the province. The promotion came one year after the death of Say Phouthang whom Hun Sen commemorated as one of the "main heroes who sacrificed everything to liberate the country from the Khmer Rouge regime" (Mech 2016). Hun Sen was reportedly grateful to Say Phouthang for being the leading voice of trust when the ruling party's central committee picked him to be the new prime minister in 1985 (Jeerawat 2016).

Having children and grandchildren of past and present party factional leaders in the UYFC is a sign that Hun Sen has not let the rivalry of the past affect the party's plan to bring together its future leaders and provide them with a platform to demonstrate such unity. Such generational strategy in itself may have healed the party's friction or at least prevented it from getting worse. It is unlikely that party leaders like Sar Kheng and Say Chum would contemplate challenging Hun Sen's authority now that their children are occupying top positions in the party and government. For outsiders, if anti-government mobilisation failed to cripple the regime during the height of party factionalism, party cohesion bolstered by the UYFC's cross-factional leadership would only make any future attempts even more challenging. This institutional structure of a united youth front should remain strong as long as it serves the interests of party

elites. But this elite cohesion will be tested if the regime faces a severe threat like an economic crisis that will disrupt its patronage foundation.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to test the hypotheses on the threat origins, legitimating function, and effectiveness of state mobilisation by examining how the UYFC has idealised the CPP rule and signalled its cohesion against the backdrop of the opposition CNRP's rise and the political activism it inspired.

It was found that the UYFC idealises the regime by organising pro-regime events on days with historical and cultural significance to make the regime's legitimacy claims more resonant with the younger generation of voters. The UYFC's events represent a new mechanism to induce gratitude towards the CPP's rule by highlighting the altruism of the CPP leadership and the virtue of piety rooted in the Khmer culture. It also works to generate excitement about the continuation of CPP rule by arousing the sentiment of national pride through symbolic collective achievements.

The UYFC signals party cohesion by serving as an institutional platform for the ruling party's younger elites to implement party policies and initiate pro-regime projects. Elite cooperation against the backdrop of party factionalism is expected to send a strong message that the party is cohesive, having been able to prioritise collective interests over personal differences. It can serve as a strong deterrence against elite-driven and mass-driven plans to challenge the regime. With these observations, I conclude that there is sufficient evidence demonstrating the threat origins and legitimating function of state mobilisation.

With regard to the success of the UYFC's mobilisation in achieving the intended outcomes, I conclude that it cannot be measured given the evidence I have mustered. While I have substantiated the proposition that state mobilisation performs regime stabilisation

functions in response to threats, it is another matter to adjudicate that state mobilisation functions effectively as expected. I will discuss this issue in chapter 8 together with the cases of pro-government labour unions in Cambodia and the UMNO Youth in Malaysia to present my consolidated findings on this hypothesis.

The case of Cambodia exemplifies the use of state mobilisation as a proactive strategy to anticipate a low-intensity threat. State mobilisation in Cambodia has been in full swing even though the regime faces little prospects of a coup or any anti-regime mobilisation following the dissolution of the CNRP. Thus, authoritarian regimes have the incentive to mass mobilise even in a relatively stable time. This finding contributes to the existing theories that focus on state mobilisation as a reactive strategy in response to high-intensity threats. The next chapter provides another example of state mobilisation conducted by pro-government labour unions in Cambodia.

Chapter 5: State Mobilisation and Cooptation in Cambodia

This chapter continues with another in-depth analysis of Cambodia to present further evidence on the drivers, functions, and effectiveness of state mobilisation. It examines the second function of state mobilisation, cooptation, using the case of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP)'s workers' organisations, the National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia (NACC) (សភាសម្ព័ន្ធសហជីពជាតិកម្ពុជា) and other government-aligned (GA) unions.[43] Cooptation-driven mobilisation is a strategy to acquire specific or outcome-driven support. This chapter focuses on two indicators of cooptation: communication and distribution. On communication, I will demonstrate how GA unions broadcast government policies and performance outcomes. On distribution, I will illustrate how GA unions navigate the minimum wage determination process and facilitate the delivery of free healthcare services.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it examines the CPP's party organisation in the garment sector and GA unions' efforts in representing workers' interests to highlight the distinction between them and non-government-aligned (NGA) unions. Following the discussion of the motive of the CPP's labour cooptation as contextual background, I analyse how GA unions facilitate the process, with a focus on their role in the minimum wage determination process and welfare provision. Then, the chapter discusses the ruling party's balancing of cooptation with repression to maintain its political control in the garment industry. I conclude by reviewing the evidence against the hypotheses.

[43] The labour movement in Cambodia has three levels of institutional structure: confederation, federation, and factory-level unions. By law, the formation of a factory-level union requires at least 10 members. Seven factory-level unions can form a federation, and five federations can form a confederation. The term 'union' is used in this chapter to refer to these entities in general, unless specified otherwise. For example, GA unions refer broadly to GA confederations, federations, and factory-level unions.

Pro-Government Labour Mobilisation

The CPP has a network of labour unions to execute its labour management strategy. These unions have their root in the Kampuchean Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU), the solitary union federation allowed to operate during the socialist era between 1979 and 1990 (Vickery 1986; Nuon and Serrano 2010). KFTU's members were state employees from "offices, factories, enterprises, hospitals, communication and transport, schools, ports, workshop, and state farms." By late 1983, the union had 62,000 members out of 145,000 state employees (Vickery 1986, 117). Therefore, employment by the government did not automatically earn one membership in the union. Members had to meet diligence and output targets to be admitted (ibid). State employees were incentivised to join the union, the most obvious reason being food security (Nuon Veasna and Melisa Serrano 2010, 21). When barter was prevalent between 1979 and 1980, the union ensured that its members received their fair share of rations in exchange for their productive work. Food sources were strengthened by growing fruit-bearing trees and crops and raising meat animals. Feeding members helped the union fulfil its duty of facilitating the supply of manpower to factories (ibid). The GA labour movement experienced a hiatus after Cambodia undertook economic and political transitions in the early 1990s, a trajectory shared by other mass organisations.

The GA labour movement was reactivated in 1999 when the Cambodia Federation of Independent Trade Unions (CFITU) was established by the socialist-generation leadership to organise labour in the emerging private sector (Serrano and Nuon 2018, 105). However, the organisation failed to make any significant strides. The old GA unionists' experience—derived from the organisation of civil servants and workers in state-owned enterprises—may have been irrelevant for navigating the post-Communist economic and political landscapes. The implementation of the ruling party's labour control strategy thus fell on a new generation of union leaders.

Party Organisation

The CPP's labour management strategy was specified in three directives that were first issued as a classified document in 2000. In that year, the CPP launched mass-based institution building in factories and workers' neighbourhoods ostensibly to get to grips with workers' livelihoods. This was purported to brush off the criticism that workers were ignored by the government in favour of capitalist extraction. The key actors were the municipal or provincial party committees, the party's local arm. Their central task was to create party branches in factories, which in turn were responsible for forming and supervising factory-level unions. Leaders of these unions were selected from workers who were party members (CPP 2000).

In 2010, the party issued a new directive on labour management. It generally followed the spirit of the previous one, but it also asked local party organisations to double down on worker mobilisation and education. Notably, the new directive specified the need to reduce incidents of demonstrations and strikes organised by "certain segments." Implicitly referring to the opposition party and NGA unions, these groups were considered to be engaging in acts of incitement, populism, and deception based on "unrealistic demands," most prominently the demand for a drastic increase in minimum wages (CPP 2010).

The bulk of the 2010 strategy was dedicated to union building. Central to worker control was the registration of GA factory-level unions and supporting them in achieving the Most Representative Status (MRS). This status confers factory-level unions the legal right to represent workers when engaging in collective bargaining and dispute resolution. It is likely that the bureaucratic red tape that NGA unions had been complaining about was part of the strategy to help consolidate GA unions. GA unions' strangled hold on labour organising also allowed them to meet the party's target of inducting "at least 70%" of the workers into the party (CPP 2010). In light of the stronger push, the number of GA confederations multiplied with 10 new confederations being established between 2013 and 2016 (Serrano and Nuon 2018, 111).

GA unions' stronger grip over workers also coincided with the fragmentation of the NGA labour movement. In 2014, there was a major split over issues such as "transparency, representation structure, participation in political activities, union strategies, internal democracy, and funding allocation among affiliates" (ibid).

The CPP's labour movement has been led by the Cambodian Confederation of Trade Unions (CCTU) and the National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia (NACC). They claimed to have 300,000 and 400,000 members, respectively (Franceschini 2020, 33). CCTU was formed in 2003 to integrate GA federations, including CFITU. A split in the CCTU led to the establishment of the NACC in 2007. Relative to the CPP's youth and women movements, the workers movement is less influential (though not less active) and more fragmented. The youth and women movements are more prominent because they are led by the prime minister's son and a deputy prime minister, respectively, while the GA unions are led by lesser party elites.

The workers movement's lesser status was also evident from its absence in the 2019 official event commemorating the 41st anniversary of the foundation of the ruling party's mass organisations. This event only featured the youth organisation, the Union Youth Federations of Cambodia (UYFC) and the women organisation, the Cambodian Women for Peace and Development. The main reason for their non-appearance was due to overlapping memberships. Given that most workers incorporated by GA unions are young people in their 20s, part of the worker movement was already absorbed into the youth movement.[44] The most prominent GA confederation, the NACC, is the UYFC's institutional member and its leader, Som Aun, is a member of the UYFC's central committee.

The worker movement is more fragmented because it is headed by two confederations, the CCTU and the NACC, and while they are not necessarily hostile to each other, they do

[44] Interview with MO2, 20 December 2019, Phnom Penh.

maintain separate support bases. This is a different pattern of organisation from the youth movement. Although there are many youth groups mobilising various segments of the youth population such as intellectuals, Muslim students, or student residents of Buddhist temples, they are all united and subordinated to the UYFC, forming its institutional members or affiliates. The women movement, on the other hand, is less active and thus is not known to have a similar wide network of members. The NACC was originally part of the CCTU which was established in 2003. But a leadership dispute resulting from the internal election for the presidency of the organisation led to a breakaway movement and the formation of NACC in 2007.[45]

Intra-movement conflict has also occurred at the lower level. For example, in August 2015, a GA federation raised a case of union interference, accusing another GA federation of forming a competing union and using illegal tactics to decimate existing factory-level unions by buying off union leaders and forcing workers to leave the unions.[46] These conflicts appeared to be driven by personal interests rather than ideological differences. The implication is that the party's control over the worker movement is not under threat. Similar to the youth movement, the appeal of union leaders' personal quality to workers may translate into varying degrees of success in labour cooptation for GA unions. Yet the party stands to gain from such competition with worker support flowing upwards from successful GA unions.

Both leaders—Chuon Momthol of the CCTU and Som Aun of the NACC—hold high-profile positions in the party and government. Both are members of the CPP's central committee and provincial party working groups and are advisors to a Minister or Ministry. Most significantly, both were appointed Secretary of State for Labour in 2021, a decision which appeared to be a reward for their services to labour mobilisation. While Momthol is an

[45] Interview with CS8, 7 January 2019, Phnom Penh.
[46] Letter by Nuon He, president of the Cambodia Workers Labour Federation Union, to Som Oun.

experienced unionist, Som Aun is a younger rising star and perhaps the most influential pro-government unionist. Aun's government and party portfolio is expansive. He serves as a member of the Kampong Speu party working group; member of UYFC central committee; vice chairman of the Ministry of Labour's Labour Advisory Council; vice chairman of the National Minimum Wage Council; and vice president of the Council of Ministers' Civil Society Alliance Forum. Like many political organisations in Cambodia, institutional strength is derived from leadership quality, including one's ability to build a personal power base, maintain relationships with top party leaders, deliver public speeches, and mobilise financial resources. As a member of the UYFC's central committee, Som Aun is able to deploy UYFC's medical arm to provide healthcare benefits to workers, which has become a central part of the ruling party's labour cooptation strategy.

Worker Representation

In the view of NGA unions, GA unions suppress worker struggles and serve the interests of employers and the government. For example, one NGA union leader said that while NGA unions gain popularity through their struggle for higher wages, GA unions build their membership through the rapid multiplication of factory-level unions and other ill-conceived means. This includes targeted cooptation by offering some workers better positions and other benefits to join GA unions,[47] and employers pressuring workers to join GA unions and threatening dismissal if they do not.[48] Herd mentality, or workers with little organising experience following the crowd after having fallen for GA unions' propaganda, was also cited as a factor.[49] The recruitment, either through pressure, propaganda, or genuine support, has given GA unions an added advantage in acting on behalf of workers and crowding out NGA

[47] Interview with LU3, 17 January 2019, Phnom Penh.
[48] Interview with LU2, 9 January 2019, Phnom Penh.
[49] Interview with LU3, 17 January 2019, Phnom Penh.

unions. GA unions, on their part, countered that NGA unions' confrontable approach lacks consideration for the long-term viability of the industry and harbours a politically motivated agenda to disrupt social stability.

Despite these accusations, GA unions are adamant that they serve workers' interests. How do they perform this function without compromising the interests of the party to whom they are accountable? I argue that GA unions' strategy is to downsize the protest scale from mass protests to smaller gatherings and shift the protest target from the government to employers or politicians. GA unions are no strangers to organising strikes, but they have done so at the factory level and have avoided escalation to a larger scale (Oka 2016, 666). Their grievances have centred on individualistic issues concerning employer misbehaviour, such as the firing of factory-level union leaders, rather than addressing government non-responsiveness to issues like low minimum wages.

For example, in June 2015, the Cambodia Workers Labour Federation Union (CWLFU) rallied workers from the province to the prime minister's house to demand that their factory complied with the Arbitration Council's ruling to reinstate union leaders. The federation blamed the factory for "ruining" the CPP's votes by causing problems for workers. It praised the provincial governor for ensuring workers' security while accusing a government official more powerful than the governor for backing the defiant factory, likening the situation to "the big giant eating the small giant" (CWLFU 2015). In August 2016, some 1,000 workers from the same federation protested the employer's intimidation of workers and union leaders, the dismissal of union leaders, and union discrimination (CWLFU 2016). And in July 2016, workers from the Cambodia Labour Union Federation (CLUF) gathered before the Phnom Penh lower court to demand that it issued an injunction to freeze the assets of a bankrupt factory whose owner fled without compensating workers (CLUF 2016a).

GA unions have also complained about employers using the court as a tool for suppression. For example, GA union leader Som Aun wrote in a Facebook post about incidents of unions being threatened with lawsuits from employers and that these incidents were incited by rival unions. Taking aim at misbehaving employers, he raised the case of employers hiring federation leaders as advisors who would go on to form a union at the factory. When the union fails to gain membership from alternative unions, the advisor would persuade the employer to suppress them through intimidation, cooptation, dismissal, or lawsuits. Som Aun stressed that it was important for the authority to investigate such incidents to protect the government's pro-worker policies (CLUF 2019b).

GA unions' claims of defending workers' rights also manifest in rare direct confrontations with party politicians. In 2019, for instance, senior CPP lawmaker Cheang Vun accused workers of fainting illness and colluding with doctors to exploit the National Social Security Fund. The GA union leader Som Aun reacted by asking Cheang Vun to present evidence of his accusation. He countered that Cheang Vun should have referred to specific misbehaving workers rather than pointed fingers at workers in general (CLUF 2019a).

The GA labour movement's implementation of the party's policy of industrial peace and the promotion of reasonable worker demands does not necessarily lead to a clash of interests. Unlike NGA unions, GA unions do not blame the government for failures or shortcomings in the garment industry. The blame is reserved for employer noncompliance with government regulations, and in rare circumstances, particular politicians' facilitation of that noncompliance. The government has positioned itself as a neutral arbiter aligned with employer and worker interests. In doing so, GA unions depoliticise industrial conflicts and turn them into issues that can be resolved by bureaucratic solutions such as stronger law enforcement. The GA and NGA labour movements converge on their support for improved compensation for workers. Yet whereas the NGA labour movement constitutes a struggle for wealth distribution

that raises the issues of inequality and exploitation and challenges the foundation of the political economy, the GA labour movement represents the strategic incorporation of collective actors into the political system with the explicit aim of maintaining its stability.

However, the GA labour movement should not be seen as a uniform enforcer of party policies. Although GA factory-level unionists are selected primarily based on their party loyalty, there were times when these grassroots unions deviated from the party line, owing to their proximity to workers, and demonstrated that they were on the side of the workers. Such pressure can elevate the advancement of worker interests above the party objective of industrial peace. The best example of this possibility is the participation of some GA factory-level unions in the 2013-2014 mass strike, which was supported by NGA unions as well as the opposition party (Serrano and Nuon 2018, 104).

The Context of Labour Cooptation

Ward and Ford (2021, 12) argue that tangible benefits offered to workers were part of the CPP's "long-term game-plan to win the hearts and minds of the workforce." Underlying this argument is garment workers' significance to the party's support base, which can be summed up by the statement of a pro-government union leader: "If you get one worker to support you, it means you receive 10" (Chuon 2017). This view highlights the point that workers can play the role of an opinion leader or influencer depending on how much their rural households depend on them financially. If they can be co-opted into supporting the ruling party, opinion leaders can persuade dependent members within their personal networks to pursue the same path. In this chapter, I add that a wage-focused protest agenda also makes workers vulnerable to cooptation. In other words, the increased use of cooptation has been facilitated by both the strength and weakness of the target group.

The strength of organised labour lies in the politicisation of this highly significant economic sector. The garment industry is Cambodia's most critical economic pillar, accounting for more than 70 per cent of the country's exports and employing more than 700,000 mostly female workers (ILO 2019). The sector also has the highest level of union density with an estimated 60 per cent of workers belonging to unions (Serrano and Nuon 2018). The politicisation of the sector had been driven by multiple non-state actors. These actors include the opposition Khmer Nation Party later renamed the Sam Rainsy Party and more recently the CNRP; the NGA labour movement constituted by recalcitrant pro-opposition unions, and independent unions without obvious party orientation but with strong links to the international labour movement; international labour groups such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the US-based labour organisation Solidarity Center; and international buyers and their governments.

Seizing on the CPP's dependence on job creation from the sector for generating legitimacy and fiscal capacity, the US government and the European Union attached human rights standards to trade preferences to incentivise the government to adopt pro-worker policies. To accommodate international conditionality and strengthen its competitive advantage, Cambodia has made some significant institutional reforms. First, the *Labour Law*[50] was passed in 1997. Like the Constitution, the law was hailed by observers as a comprehensive, pro-worker legislation embracing democratic principles with freedoms of association and assembly guaranteed.[51] Second, Cambodia ratified the necessary international laws and conventions covering all aspects of employment and adopted international best practices to improve working conditions.[52] One of the most prominent of these was the ILO's Better Factories Cambodia program. The program strengthened labour standards by conducting

[50] English translation of the law is available at https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/46560/89368/F135012943/KHM46560.pdf.
[51] Interview with CS8, 07 January 2019, Phnom Penh.
[52] Interview with CS8, 07 January 2019, Phnom Penh.

factory inspections and making the outcome public, contributing to Cambodia's appeal to international buyers as an ethical producer. By outsourcing labour-related inspections, traditionally a state function, to an external, trustworthy organisation, the government demonstrated its commitment to making the necessary compromises to boost the industry's competitiveness.[53] The other prominent institutional reform was the establishment of the Arbitration Council with support from the World Bank to mediate and resolve collective labour disputes. The Arbitration Council has been seen as a professional and autonomous organisation in handling labour disputes at a time when the existing judicial system lacks labour expertise and is often beset by backlogs and corruption.

Despite these reforms, major issues still hampered the industry, most critically the provision of liveable wages. The government's unwillingness to mandate acceptable wages until 2014 opened up the opportunity for the opposition party and NGA unions to rally workers and challenge the CPP in the protest arena. The momentum was started in late 1996 when the country's first NGA federation, the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC), was established, with opposition leader Sam Rainsy playing an instrumental role. The federation's founding president Chea Vichea and opposition leader Sam Rainsy spearheaded waves of labour protests demanding higher wages and better working conditions between the late 1990s and early 2000s. This movement was influential in convincing workers to throw their electoral support behind the opposition party. In sum, the confluence of international and domestic forces threatened to turn workers into a pressure group agitating for government accountability, or more radically, regime change.

This transformative potential appears to have manifested in the 2013 elections and their aftermath. The swing towards the CNRP reflected garment workers' growing discontent with the CPP (Ward and Ford 2021, 8) and their ability to convince their rural dependents to vote

[53] Interview with CS8, 07 January 2019, Phnom Penh.

for the CNRP (Norén-Nilsson 2017, 86). Furthermore, rank-and-file workers staged the strongest collective action in recent times to protest against stagnating wages. The demand for the doubling of minimum wages from US$80 to US$160 per month was fuelled by the CNRP's electoral pledge that workers' minimum wages would be raised to US$150 if it won the 2013 elections, as well as the Ministry of Labour's own survey showing that workers needed between US$157 to US$177 per month to survive (Asia Monitor Resource Centre 2014, 7). When the ministry refused to match workers' demands by raising wages to only US$95, the protest escalated leading to widespread factory closure and production standstill (Ward and Ford 2021, 9). The unrest was only stifled by a violent government crackdown (see Asia Monitor Resource Centre 2014).[54]

Yet, garment workers' unwavering pursuance of economic advancement also makes them a prime target for cooptation. Although workers' mass strikes coalesced with the CNRP anti-government demonstrations, forming a "counter-movement" (Un 2019), they advanced separate agendas. For the CNRP, it was a fresh election, having claimed that the elections were rigged, and the resignation of Prime Minister Hun Sen. For workers and their unions, it had always been higher wages. Rather than advocating for broad political reforms that would empower themselves vis-à-vis the state, organised labour saw the ruling party's declining popularity as a political opportunity to promote a narrower economic cause. Unlike other labour movements that "sought almost everywhere *not only* for higher wages and better working conditions *but also* for political democracy" (Therborn 1997, 34, emphasis in original), the Cambodian labour movement had largely been confined to the former (see Young 2021). Workers' economism may have signalled to the CPP that electoral integrity or the broader political ills can be overlooked if it is willing to make satisfactory policy concessions.

[54] Despite the deadly suppression in the capital city, worker unrest broke out elsewhere, indicating that there was a limit to the extent state repression could exert control over labour (Ford, Gillan, and Ward 2020, 7).

The Mechanics of Labour Cooptation

This section examines how labour cooptation has unfolded after the watershed 2013 elections. GA unions led by the NACC facilitate labour cooptation in two ways: communication and distribution. Communication is the rhetorical part of cooptation. It involves moulding workers' perceptions into agreeing that the government is pro-labour, and their interests are tied to the ruling party maintaining power. To be effective, this rhetoric has to be matched up with substantive outcomes, most importantly the annual wage raises and welfare provision. In this regard, the main role of GA unions is to moderate NGA unions' demands in the minimum wage determination process while striving to maintain its image of worker representation. Importantly, the NACC cooperates with the UYFC to set up mobile healthcare delivery to maximise the party's exposure outside of the public health system where its presence can be felt most strongly. In turn, to compensate for factory owners' willingness to increase wages, material distribution has been balanced by increased restriction on workers' freedom to assemble. This balancing act enables the government to maintain the allegiance of business elites in the sector.

Communicating Government Policies

A major plank of the CPP's labour cooptation strategy has focused on making workers think positively of its policies. The propagation of pro-government narratives is not new. But the popularisation of social media in more recent times has opened up new communication outlets, and the rise of younger union leaders like Som Aun has brought with them new ideas on persuading workers to trust the CPP's policy, elevating rhetorical cooptation to a new level.

Spreading pro-government messages was particularly important before 2013 when the party was less committed to satisfying workers' wage demands. The objective of this tactic was to turn workers into the party's "vanguard force" (កម្លាំងឈានមុខ) (CPP 2010) rather than

empowering workers in addressing their predicaments. Doing the latter would place the ruling party in the same ideological category as the political opposition in considering workers as the *disadvantaged* group, marginalised by the government's pro-business policy. Instead, as implicitly reflected in the party's labour education messages, being a vanguard force meant being *sacrificial*. They were encouraged to be tolerant of the less-than-ideal earnings for the sake of business competitiveness and sustainability, which was necessary for economic development more broadly. Workers were encouraged to consider factories as their "rice pot" (ឆ្នាំងបាយ), an asset to be preserved at all costs to protect jobs and livelihoods. It was emphasised that only by implementing this "duty" could workers obtain their "rights" in return (CPP 2000; 2010).

As a staple in government leaders' public speeches, the link between politics and economic development has been reiterated by union leaders. In his speech, Som Oun stressed that political stability brought about by the ruling party is the foundation for economic development and job creation. Workers were reminded that the new and modern items that they owned, although many were financed by loans, were made possible by their jobs and rising wages. Jobs in the garment industry were promoted as a gateway out of poverty. Households with multiple children, which had long been a burden trapping them in poverty, could now overturn their predicament thanks to more jobs being made available to their children whose remittances would lift their families out of poverty.

Key to the narrative is the emphasis that outcomes such as rising minimum wages and worker welfare are the result of long-term government planning rather than opposition pressure. GA labour unions often used the metaphor of cockcrow and sunrise to explain away the role of political contestation. Advocacy actions taken by NGA unions and the opposition party were likened to a cock crowing, while the aforementioned outcomes were likened to the sun rising. The message is that the sun will rise following its own law as a physical reality,

regardless of the cock crows. In essence, opposition protests demanding higher wages and better worker protection preceded but did not lead to the government adopting these policies. Such emphasis sought to stop NGA unions from taking credit for any improved working conditions.

The other key idea that GA unions want workers to take up concerns the benefits of the 2016 *Law on Trade Union*.[55] The law was likened to a "gift" from the government to build an "ordered democracy." In a Facebook post, Som Aun wrote that the law was needed to counter "economic insurgency" aimed at ruining progress in the industry. He claimed that before enacting the law, Cambodia was a "heaven" for opposition forces operating under the banner of union organisation. These organisations would hire individuals to incite and cause chaos in an attempt to force businesses to move their investments elsewhere or scare off potential investors. This narrative conveyed the message that labour disputes were often blown out of proportion for political gain and the law would bring back rule-based mechanisms amicable for both employers and workers (Som 2016).

In a petition to the National Assembly urging for the prompt passage of the law, a coalition of 72 GA federations cited their conviction that the "real purpose" of the law was to "protect the legal rights and benefits of workers, ensure freedom of collective bargaining; and promote industrial harmony."[56] It also raised the point that the current draft was an upgrade from the existing law and in some respects the law was superior to those in some countries in the region. In addition to the petition, GA unions mobilised workers to display support for the law by holding banners inside and outside their factories. A key message was that with the law

[55] An unofficial English translation of the law can be found at http://ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/103389/125600/F1146872348/KHM103389%20Eng.pdf.
[56] Petition on "The Request to Speed up the Passage of the Law on Trade Union" submitted to president of the National Assembly on 27 March 2016.

in force, the relationship between workers and employers became one of "partners" (CLUF 2016b; 2016c).

Specific commendation is reserved for Prime Minister Hun Sen who has been depicted as a father figure caring for his children without expecting reciprocal political support. In a song written by Som Aun, the prime minister was praised for being concerned and worried about the workers' suffering. The situation motivated him to work hard to attract investment to "give" jobs and salary to "feed" his "children", the workers. The song stressed that the prime minister wanted "nothing" besides seeing workers live a happy and prosperous life.

But the song was never going to reverse the transactional character of the CPP's policy. Beginning in August 2017, approximately one year before the 2018 elections, the prime minister embarked on an unofficial campaign trail by making weekend factory visits and gatherings with tens of thousands of workers, reminding them how workers had benefited and would still benefit from government policies. By the time of the 2018 elections, the prime minister had attended 49 gatherings over ten months with an estimated 700,000 workers, almost the entire workforce in the industry. The prime minister had been seen handing out US$5 to each worker in each gathering costing around US$3.5 million in total (Kann 2018). In one of his public meetings with workers before the 2018 elections, Hun Sen reminded that "I will continue to conduct the meetings for the next 10 years, but if on July 29 the Cambodian People's Party loses the election, I will not be prime minister and will not have a chance to be with you" (ibid). The prime minister's remark thus did little to hide the fact that material benefits from the government were contingent on reciprocal electoral support from the workers.

Distributing Material Benefits

The most crucial component of the CPP's cooptation is the provision of material benefits. It points to the party's recognition that winning the hearts and minds of workers rely on more than making them embrace the "rice pot" idea of exchanging low wages for stable employment.

The CPP's most tangible benefits delivered to garment workers are minimum wage increase and the provision of social security schemes.

a. Minimum wages

The most critical policy measure for the CPP is to address the industry's dismal minimum wages. GA unions support the party through their manoeuvring in the minimum wage determination process.

Until 2018, the determination of the minimum wage was the responsibility of the tripartite Labour Advisory Committee (LAC) chaired by the Minister for Labour. An employer representative and a GA union leader served as vice-chairs. The Committee had 28 members: 14 government representatives, seven employer representatives, and seven union representatives. Out of the seven union representatives, five were from GA unions. The selection of union representatives was a rather arbitrary discretion of the ministry. The inclusion of the two NGA union representatives was made based on their moderation and agreeability. The government's commitment to an ordered negotiation procedure saw the door shut to pro-opposition federations such as the FTUWKC.[57]

Before 2014, the LAC served only as a forum of formality with the labour minister as chairman of the LAC making unilateral decisions on minimum wage increases without justifying the decision (Serrano and Nuon 2018, 141). The decision appeared to be insulated from worker activism and catered to the interests of the industry. For example, no raise was made between 2000 and 2006, and again between 2010 and 2013. The 2013-2014 protest compelled the government to abandon this practice. It agreed to work with the ILO to adopt an evidence-based minimum wage determination mechanism and reactivate the LAC as a

[57] Interview with LU1, 22 May 2020, Phnom Penh.

deliberative forum, thus giving more voice to labour unions. In the revamped mechanism, the minimum wage setting would be based on five principles (ILO 2016, 2):

1. Minimum wages should be adjusted on a regular, annual basis;
2. A preferred model is gradual, steady, adjustments;
3. Recommendations should be based on a process of constructive discussions in the LAC;
4. Before making a recommendation on a specific minimum wage level, the committee should aim to achieve a consensus among all members, and only failing this, hold a vote; and
5. To achieve a balanced result, both social and economic criteria should be considered.

Following the ILO-brokered institutional reform, an annual review of the minimum wages was conducted, and wages were increased to over $190 by 2021. From 2018, the government added an additional institutional layer to the procedure by passing the *Law on Minimum Wage*[58] and establishing the National Minimum Wage Council (NMWC). Like the LAC, the NMWC is a tripartite mechanism. The NMWC significantly expanded the voice of each party with 17 members. For unions, the voice emanated primarily from GA unions because only two out of the 17 members were from NGA unions.

While the reactivation of the LAC resulted in a steady increase in minimum wages (see Figure 4) and a more reconciliatory negotiation process, the institutional mechanism also led to the substitution of contention with consensus. In the wage determination process, each party tabled its own preferred figure for a final vote. As the union composition was the most diverse, its negotiation could be expected to be the most contentious. Nevertheless, given their majority GA unions always had the advantage in pushing for their preferred figure, which often fell short of what NGA unions wanted. Yet the wage figure proposed by unions, the highest among the three parties, was only symbolic. It only received support from NGA union representatives

[58] Unofficial English translation of the law is available at https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/MONOGRAPH/110793/137916/F541182463/KHM110793%20ENG.pdf.

because it was far higher than the figure proposed by employer representatives. The government played a mediating role, proposing a figure that was slightly higher than the employer figure but left a significant gap with the union figure.

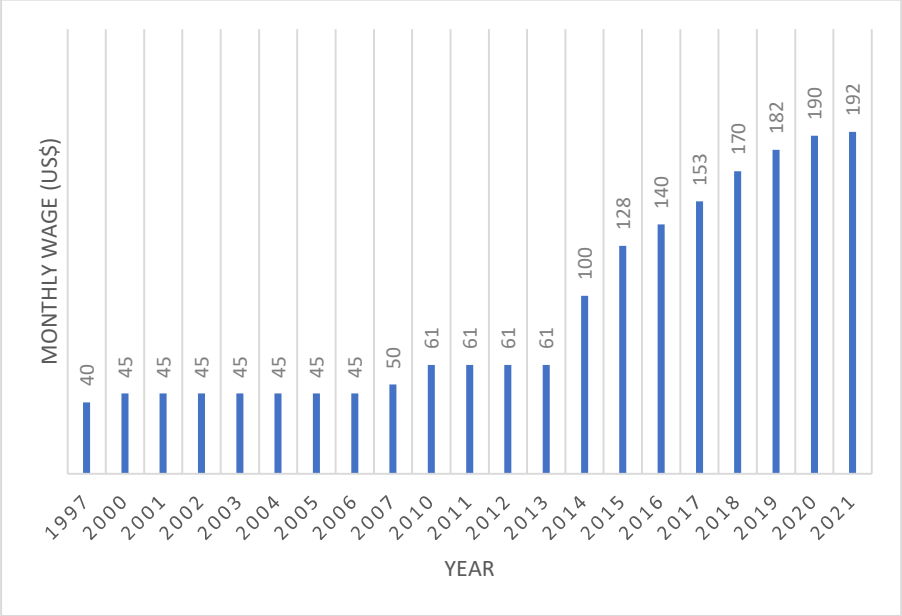
In the process, GA unions acted like a double agent. On the one hand, they engaged with the minority NGA unions in determining a wage figure, and this institutional mechanism could be understood as a sanitising process whereby GA labour unions could examine the basis of NGA unions' demands, present their viewpoint, experiment with persuasive methods, and make compromises. On other hand, GA unions followed the party line by voting for the government figure. This voting behaviour saw them abandoning the deal struck with NGA labour unions.

GA unions' change of tack could be rationalised by statements made on the ground like "If we demand too high a minimum wage they will shut down the factory or find another country to operate in. I can't afford that – I have a family to support" (McGrath and Ven 2015). At the same time, their behaviour conveyed the message that they were prepared to make compromises if employers, who also voted for the government figure, could make enough concessions to appease workers. The role of GA unions in this regard was to de-radicalise the workers' struggle by subjecting it to an institutional mechanism conducive to state control. While the outcome of the wage increase alone was unlikely to provide overwhelming support for the ruling party at election time, it may have been "just enough to keep [workers] off the streets" (Khoun 2016).

Although the government insisted that it was proactive in policymaking, it is hard to overlook the contributing role of political pressure in promoting government responsiveness. Over a 16-year period, from 1997 (when minimum wages for the industry were first set) to 2013, minimum wages had been raised by a mere US$21—from US$40 in 1997 to US$61 in 2013. A report by the Worker Rights Consortium, a US-based workers advocacy organisation,

shows that over a 10-year period from 2001 to 2011 workers' wages actually dropped by more than 20 per cent after being adjusted for inflation (D-H. Chen 2013). In response to far-reaching discontent and protests, the government almost doubled the minimum wage to US$100 in the following year. Over the ensuing years, minimum wages were substantially increased. Figure 4 shows the minimum wages from 1997 to 2021.

Figure 4: Minimum Wages of Garment Workers, by year (in US$)



Source: Cambodia Garment and Footwear Bulletin, ILO.

Alongside the surge in minimum wages, the government adopted complementary measures to maintain workers' income levels. Workers had long complained that landlords usually increase their rent following a wage increase, which cut into their disposable income leaving them with little gain from the increase. The government followed up with the prime minister's repeated personal appeal to landlords not to increase rent for workers' accommodation by passing the *Law on Rent Control* in 2015 (Kang 2015). The legislation was widely celebrated with support from both sides of the union movement, as well as the opposition party. The law mandates that landlords cannot increase their rent during a two-year contract and renters can withdraw from the contract at any time. With a stake in minimum wage

determination, GA unions were determined to help workers keep their hard-earned surplus. One initiative was to use its wide network to monitor compliance with the regulation. The GA union leader Som Aun reasoned that the rent increase commonly practised by landlords following the workers' annual wage increase was unsubstantiated because the cost of operating workers' accommodation did not increase. Therefore, he asked factory-level unions and workers to monitor rent and report any irregularity to their federations (Som 2019a).

b. Social Security

Social security is the Cambodian government's most systematic policy to galvanise worker support. The welfare program, established in 2016, has three major pillars: coverage for work injury, free healthcare, and a pension. The free healthcare program used to be financed by a co-contribution scheme whereby employers and workers each paid a monthly fee equal to 1.3% of workers' salary to the National Social Security Fund, the government agency operating the welfare program.

Yet in a further move to shore up workers' electoral support, the prime minister announced in August 2017, before the 2018 general elections, that from next year the welfare program would be entirely financed by employers, leaving workers better off with more take-home salary. In addition, workers were given free public transport for two years from August 2017 to August 2019. And from 2019, retired workers would begin to receive a pension, a scheme previously reserved only for civil servants.

The most significant contribution of GA unions in this domain is the provision of mobile healthcare services. In October 2016, the NACC led by Som Oun, signed an MoU with the Doctor Alliance of UYFC (DA-UYFC) to provide free health examinations for workers and their families. The DA-UYFC is the medical arm of the UYFC, and Som Aun was a member of the UYFC's central committee. The free, one-day examination was conducted by more than 300 voluntary doctors from DA-UYFC and held in a public space such as a school

ground. The health services provided were extensive including general examination, cardiovascular, ENT, skincare, psychotherapy, paediatrics, dental, pregnancy care, mobile lab, imaging, public health education and so on. To deliver such wide-ranging services, classrooms—which are also used as polling stations during election days—were turned into makeshift outpatient rooms. Medicines were dispensed free of charge.

Since it is a one-day event, its impact on public well-being is limited. This can be easily concluded because patients undergoing the above medical services in most circumstances would require more than a single examination or treatment. Nevertheless, this project should be viewed beyond healthcare delivery; it can also be viewed as a political event. Thus, while its health impact is very limited, its political impact should not be underestimated and can be understood in several respects. Like other gift-giving and ground-breaking events, the actual delivery of health services is preceded by lengthy opening remarks made by local authorities, NACC leader, DA-UYFC president, and others. With thousands of people attending, this event is a good opportunity for the NACC to reiterate its key political messages related to the government's pro-worker policies.

Yet why is this healthcare examination drive needed when workers are already entitled to free healthcare in public hospitals under the social society scheme? The NACC president clarified that despite social security, the project's objective is to "supplement" existing services (Som 2019b).[59] The felt need to supplement state-run healthcare can be understood as an effort to maximise support for the CPP by demonstrating that the party is capable of delivering sophisticated public goods where its presence can be most strongly felt, if not appreciated. This is important from the perspective of vote mobilisation because it helps renew the appeal of cooptation by diversifying and replenishing the ruling party's patronage resources which had

[59] For a broader analysis on authoritarian regimes' incentive to establish welfare programs see Knutsen and Rasmussen (2018).

historically been comprised of petty goods, cash handouts, and small-scale infrastructural projects. Voter defection from the CPP in the 2013 elections was a sign that such conventional strategy had lost much of its appeal. The project is therefore a good opportunity for the party to conduct politics where its importance can be most clearly felt. By contrast, the public healthcare run by the government has been 'tainted' by the presence of non-party actors such as international organisations, foreign governments, and civil society groups who have been pouring financial and technical aid into Cambodia's weak and underfunded healthcare sector. By providing this free health examination, the party moves to carve out a domain where it can monopolise credit claiming.

Balancing Cooptation with Repression

Having examined the government's efforts in pacifying workers, it must be stressed that workers' improved material well-being has come at a cost to workers' rights. The heightened regulation can be understood as a concession for employers for financing cooptation. The twin strategies are necessary for the ruling party to achieve the dual purpose of appeasing workers and business elites.[60] Employers in the garment industry had been highly frustrated with the mushrooming of unions and frequent wildcard strikes that the issue of industrial relations was considered the industry's "main problem", even more pressing than the country's rampant corruption (Kelsall and Heng 2014, 33). Dissatisfaction had been expressed over the government's tolerance of wildcard strikes (ibid). Without taking substantive actions to tackle the strikes, the government would risk heightened business discontent when employers were

[60] While most factories are foreign owned, it is widely understood that local elites hold stakes in those factories. Furthermore, most of Cambodia's special economic zones are owned by pro-CPP elites. See Young (2021, 361–62).

asked to shoulder the cost of cooptation by providing higher minimum wages and contributing to the social security scheme. The passage of the *Law on Trade Unions* in 2016 represents the government's strongest response in this regard. This law was decried by NGA unions and other civil society organisations as a severe encroachment on the freedoms of association and assembly. It was passed after the widely condemned suppression of the 2013-2014 mass protest, but it had been in the making since at least 2010. The protest only accelerated its adoption.

The law is designed to "contain" workers (Ford, Gillan, and Ward 2020). First, the law subjects factory-level union registration to cumbersome bureaucratic procedures. It was estimated that since the law was passed, almost 80% of NGA factory-level unions had been barred from registration with the Ministry (Yon and Chen 2017). Second, the law imposes barriers on the organisation of protests, causing workers to be increasingly self-dependent in seeking redress. For example, workers in a factory were forced to lead strikes demanding the factory pay for their annual leave and severance despite there being 16 unions in the factory. None of these unions would be involved in strike organisation for fear of state repression. A federation leader complained that "when workers protest we cannot show up or stay at the front lines with them. If we do, the authorities will make the excuse that we incited workers to protest" (Yon and Chen 2017). The law likewise cuts off the linkage between federations and workers. Prior to the law, workers could seek help from federations without having registered unions in their factories, which was no longer possible under the law.[61] This is further complicated by the legal requirement that only factory-level unions with the Most Representative Status can represent their members in collective conflict resolution at the Arbitration Council or the court. To obtain the Most Representative Status, a factory-level

[61] Interview with LU2, 09 January 2019, Phnom Penh.

union must cover at least 30% of workers, which is a very high bar for NGA unions given the competition from GA unions.

What transpired following the twin strategies of cooptation and repression were put into practice was a sharp fall in labour disputes. According to Better Factories Cambodia, the number of strikes decreased from 147 in 2013 to only nine by August 2018 (Better Factories Cambodia 2018, 9). This resulted in a simultaneous decrease in lost workdays from the peak of 888,527 in 2013 to 42,104 by August 2018 (ibid). Similarly, the number of labour disputes referred to the Arbitration Council dropped to 50 in 2017, down from 248 in 2016 (Arbitration Council 2017, 7).

While it is unclear whether repression or cooptation is the more important contributor to the more peaceful state of affairs, it is obviously a gain for employers who had to bear with massive workdays lost from strikes prior to the law. Between 2005 and 2015, the garment sector recorded an average of 330,647 lost production days per year due to strikes (Serrano and Nuon 2018, 88). According to the Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia, the post-2013 election labour protest over the minimum wages cost the industry US$200 million in sales and US$70 million in revenue over a 50-day period (Peter and Hul 2014). Given the cost of protests, it seems sensible that employers in the industry join the government's effort in worker appeasement. Thus, although complaining (Mom 2019; Khut 2020), they complied with the mandated wage hike and welfare schemes.

Finally, workers were expected to reciprocate by voting for the CPP in the 2018 general elections. The most ostensible role of GA unions here was to encourage workers to go home to vote in their respective provinces. This was facilitated by the government's incentives mandating that employers pay workers' salaries in advance and give them three days of paid leave so that they had enough time to travel. The voter mobilisation drive was particularly important for the 2018 general election as the ruling party had to neutralise the opposition

party's endeavour to delegitimise the election. A year before the election, the CNRP had been dissolved by the Supreme Court on the charge that its president, Kem Sokha, committed an act of treason. Unable to contest, the CNRP turned its effort into delegitimising the election by appealing to voters to boycott the election or deliberately invalidate the ballots. In doing so, the opposition party was hoping to dramatically reduce the election turnout. If successful, the party hoped that the CPP's electoral victory would be overshadowed by low voter turnout and thus would not reflect the will of the general population.

The elections, however, did not play out this way. Having competed with 19 minor parties with little prospects of winning, the CPP won all 125 seats in the National Assembly. The official election turnout stood at 7.64 million or 83 per cent, up from 69.6 per cent in the 2013 election (Prak 2018b). The 594,843 invalid votes or 8.4 per cent compared with only 1.6 per cent in 2013 (Prak 2018a) showed that a considerable number of voters heeded the opposition party's appeal. Yet for the ruling party, the turnout was what mattered. It helped the party avert an embarrassment to its electoral victory. Had the turnout been below 50 per cent, the ruling party's victory would have been assessed as not being representative of the popular will of the majority. Given the elections were a test of the ruling party's capacity to mobilise voters, the CPP seemed more concerned with their resolve to follow the opposition party's election boycott appeal than their actual level of support for the ruling party. The prioritisation of turnout over support meant that the party would not know for sure how effective cooptation could translate into support.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the role of GA unions led by the NACC in co-opting workers in the garment industry. Compared to the opposition-friendly young people in general whom I argued in the previous chapter are the embodiment of a low-intensity threat, the garment workers

exhibit attributes of both a high-intensity as well as a low-intensity threat. The post-2013 elections mass protest was apparently a high-intensity threat. The state repression that followed led to the death of street mobilisation and thus an end to the high-intensity threat. But like the younger population overall, the political activism of garment workers and their tendency to throw their support behind the opposition party remains a source of concern for the ruling party. State mobilisation in this case, thus, is both reactive and proactive.

This chapter analysed the cooptative function of state mobilisation by focusing on how the NACC and other GA unions communicate government policies and distribute material benefits to garment workers following workers' historic mass protests. It was found that their mission had been informed by the ruling party's labour management strategy which was first outlined in 2000, and was updated in the following decades. Before the 2013 general elections in which the ruling party performed poorly, the bulk of the strategy was focused on influencing workers' perceptions of the government. In this regard, the main role of the GA unions was to disseminate the party policy of industrial peace, highlighting the "rice pot" concept whereby workers were persuaded to link employer profitability to job security.

In light of its declining popularity and growing worker unrest, the CPP adapted its strategy to prioritise satisfying workers' material needs through substantial increases in minimum wages and the introduction of welfare programs. To facilitate this process, GA unions moderated NGA unions' wage demands and restrained the unions from proposing an unrealistic wage figure. By not voting for its own figure, GA unions reasoned that too much wage increase would force businesses to move elsewhere and hence cost workers their jobs. GA unions attempted to cater to factory owners' financial considerations while maintaining their image as representing workers' interests. Importantly, GA unions cooperated with the party's youth wing, the UYFC, to provide mobile healthcare services to maximise the party's exposure where its presence could be felt most strongly. Given these observations, there is

sufficient evidence demonstrating the threat origins and cooptative function of state mobilisation.

Decreased labour protest in Cambodia lends support to Kim and Gandhi (2010)'s observation that autocratic regimes that use formal political institutions for cooptation experience more peaceful labour relations. Yet the long-term viability of cooptation remains to be seen. One challenge is that some workers remained distrustful of the policy change of a government that had "for decades systematically undermined their living standards and political freedoms" (Ward and Ford 2021, 12). They also complained about the increase in production targets and the "psychological violence" that accompanied this pressure (ibid). If not addressed systematically, the cost of wage increase might outstrip its benefits in the long-term, which in turn can ignite a new round of protest.

Similar to the case of the UYFC's legitimation, I conclude that the case of GA labour unions' cooptation does not provide sufficient evidence to conclusively determine the effectiveness of state mobilisation. Like my conclusion in the previous chapter, despite the CPP's efforts in using state mobilisation for cooptation, it is impossible to measure its effectiveness in keeping the low-intensity threat from becoming a high-intensity threat or resolving the threat altogether. This issue will be further elaborated upon in chapter 8. The next part of this dissertation applies the hypotheses developed in chapter 2 to the second major case study country—Malaysia. It examines the history of state mobilisation in Malaysia (chapter 6) and the repressive role of UMNO's youth wing, the UMNO Youth (chapter 7).

Part III: Malaysia

Chapter 6: The Threat Environment and State Mobilisation in Malaysia

This chapter begins the empirical analysis of the case of Malaysia to offer further evidence that state mobilisation is driven by threats to regime survival to perform various regime stabilisation functions. I do so by providing a brief introduction to the foundation of the dominant ruling party in Malaysia, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), charting the threat environment of the regime from its foundation in 1953 to its electoral loss in 2018, and outlining the pattern of state mobilisation in response to these threats. This discussion provides the contextual groundwork for an in-depth examination of state mobilisation in the next chapter.

As an overview, state mobilisation—often carried out by the party's youth wing, the UMNO Youth—was a persistent feature throughout UMNO's political tenure. It had been deployed by the UMNO regime to counter ethnic provocation, the Islamic movement, intra-elite conflict, and the reformist movement. These are all high-intensity threats and thus the state mobilisation in Malaysia is predominantly reactive. When compared to the case of Cambodia, the nature of threats in Malaysia makes it possible to assess the outcome of state mobilisation.

The Birth of UMNO

UMNO, the ruling party in Malaysia until 2018, was born out of a crisis-induced, elite-led mass mobilisation. The party originated from the collective action of state-based Malay associations led by the Malay aristocrats. This elite-driven movement rallied against the British colonial government's plan to transform Malaya, known as Malaysia from 1963, into a nation with equal rights for all ethnicities. The change meant that the indigenous Malays' special privileges would be compromised. This nationalist origin established UMNO as the ultimate defender

and representative of Malay interests which had been used to justify the party's domination of post-independence Malaysian politics.[62]

The catalyst of party formation was the Malayan Union. Hoping to institute a new political structure as the precondition for independence (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 265), the British introduced the Malayan Union in 1946, a new constitutional scheme that would establish a unitary state composed of the nine Malay states and the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca. Under the proposed change, the traditional rulers, the Sultans, would surrender their sovereignty to the British monarchy but would be able to keep their thrones. States would lose their autonomy from the central government. The Chinese and Indian immigrants were to enjoy equal citizenship rights (Stockwell 1977, 488; Andaya and Andaya 2001, 266). The introduction of the Malayan Union was grounded in the British's conclusion that "the fragmentation of administration and ethnic divisions" were the factors leading Malaya to succumb to the Japanese invasion (Kuhonta 2011, 59).

Yet the intention to grant non-Malays equal citizenship rights was seen by the Malay elites as an encroachment on the majority indigenous Malays' special rights. This anxiety was rooted in the British's racially charged economic policy. To facilitate its commercial interests in Malaya, the colonial government implemented an "ethnic division of labour." The Chinese and, to a lesser degree, Indian immigrants would dominate the modern export economy through their ownership of, and labour in, rubber plantations and tin mines. At the same time, the indigenous Malays would remain in small-holding rice-paddy agriculture (Kuhonta 2011, 58). Kuhonta (2011, 59) argues that such a policy was designed to secure political stability by

[62] It should be added that UMNO's domination also benefited from an effective state that it ran. Unlike the Cambodian People's Party in Cambodia, which had to build the state from scratch after the previous regime abolished institutions and executed many intellectuals and bureaucrats, UMNO inherited a strong coercive and administrative apparatus from the British who engineered their creation and strengthened them to overpower a formidable communist insurgency (see Stubbs 1989).

preventing a joint force of different ethnic groups from challenging the colonial authorities. With predominantly Chinese non-Malays dominating the economic sphere, the reform to citizenship rights stoked the fear that the Malays would lose their "only advantage"—their dominance in the political sphere (Kuhonta 2011, 59). Such economic inequality would only be partially rectified after a deadly communal conflict in 1969, and a reactionary economic reform known as the New Economic Policy—a topic I will turn to later.

The locomotive driving the protest against the Malayan Union was the English-educated bureaucratic elites led by chief minister of Johor, Onn Jaafar (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 267). Onn started off by galvanising support from Malay associations based in various states of the country. In March 1946, he initiated the Pan-Malayan Malay Congress in Kuala Lumpur, attended by 200 delegates from 41 associations to discuss the protest. A historic decision was made when the meeting adopted a resolution to form a national organisation to spearhead the protest. In May the same year, UMNO was formed with Onn as its first president. Andaya and Andaya (2001, 267) describe the event as "highly significant" as it brought together "virtually all the key components in Malay society" for the first time. Similarly, Ongkili (1985, 47) observes that "[f]or the first time in their history the Malays throughout the Peninsula were avidly thinking and mobilizing as a community in which the state boundaries mattered far less than the overriding need to act in concert against a common threat." The nationalist movement was so successful that the proposal for a Malayan Union was revoked two years later in favour of the Federation of Malaya in 1948.

UMNO was by no means the only group that sought to become the representative defender of Malay rights. It had emerged by outperforming two other groups in the race for elite-led nationalist mobilisation in the pre-war era. The first group was led by religious reformists with Arab and South Indian ancestral origins rather than "purely" Malay (Stockwell 1977, 483). Beginning as a newspaper correspondence club with the purpose of "promoting

Malay literacy and a free exchange of ideas valuable to the Malay community as a whole," the group evolved into a national movement with a network of branches in several Malayan states and around 10,000 members by 1938. Although its appearance and official claim were as a social and cultural organisation to avoid British sanction, Roff (1994, 212–21) writes that its nationalist character derived from it being "a shared and politically safe outlet for a host of Malay anxieties and feelings of insecurity hitherto either mute or expressed in scattered and ephemeral local societies." However, this predominantly urban grouping was unable to mobilise rural Malays because the Islamic reformism that it promoted failed to resonate with rural Malays who held on to traditional beliefs and practices (Stockwell 1977, 483; Roff 1994, 220).

The second group was the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM) (Young Malay Union), whose leaders were primarily Malay schoolteachers. The KMM likewise expressed the nationalist intention of stopping "the Malays being exploited by other races." But its approach was more radical. It adopted a "non-co-operative" stance vis-à-vis the colonial government, denounced foreign capitalism and the feudal elites, and wanted political union with Indonesia. Like the first group, it failed to gain popular support and its membership never reached beyond a few hundred. Its political ideology was "too radical for the great majority of Malays" (Stockwell 1977, 483; Roff 1994, 232–34).

The third group comprised the administrative elites, sons of Malay ruling families who served in state governments, the Malay Administrative Service, and the Malay Civil Service (Stockwell 1977, 484). Unlike other groups, the forces that were to culminate in UMNO successfully galvanised Malay support due to their common allegiance to the traditional Malay establishment (Roff 1994, 243). Unlike the radicals, they were pro-Malay without being anti-colonial, an approach that was pivotal in gaining colonial forbearance for their political activities. By 1938, the Malay Association was created at the state level, but a unifying national

organisation failed to emerge despite continual discussion among the state associations in the pre-war era. Stockwell (1977, 493) argues that the success of post-war mobilisation was owed to the involvement of key actors from the Malay establishment, such as Onn, who "had more to lose" from the proposed Malay Union.

Several factors contributed to UMNO's success in overturning the Malayan Union. Ethnically, the consequences of the constitutional change united the Malays. The tension between the majority Malays and the minority Chinese had been high since the Japanese Occupation. The communist party and its armed group had sought to take action against the Malays, especially those whom they considered having collaborated with the Japanese in their repression. Malays reacted to this "Chinese aggression" by organising themselves under local leaders (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 263). The proposed Malayan Union only reinforced the impulse for an organisation to safeguard their interests.

Organisationally, the UMNO elites succeeded in mobilising the Malays. They were able to draw upon personnel in the state apparatus, including teachers, district chiefs, and village headmen, to mobilise Malay villagers against the proposed Malayan Union scheme (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 278). Without their participation, mass demonstrations supporting UMNO would not have occurred (Stockwell 1977, 511). UMNO leaders also successfully convinced the Sultans to abandon their earlier consent to the Malayan Union by threatening to withdraw their loyalty to them (Stockwell 1977, 494).

Finally, the British were forced to withdraw the proposal, having acknowledged the danger of "organized and widespread non-cooperation and disorder on the part of the Malay people" that risked a repeat of the anti-colonialism movement in India (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 267).

After the Malayan Union was replaced with a new constitutional arrangement acceptable to both the British and the Malay elites, the next challenge for UMNO leaders was

to sustain its mass movement (Stockwell 1977, 497). In relation to the individual associations that made up UMNO, Onn orchestrated an amendment to UMNO's constitution to allow individual members not represented by those associations to join the party. Opening up the party to individual members helped UMNO mitigate the risk of disintegration because there was a concern that only an existential crisis as threatening as the Malayan Union proposal could guarantee that the individual associations would remain united under UMNO (Tadin 1960, 70).

Other crucial actions were taken to consolidate the party's structure. A women's section was created to incorporate Malay women. A youth movement, led by Onn's son, Hussein Onn, was formed to lure supporters away from other radical youth organisations (Stockwell 1977, 506). A department of labour was instituted to organise Malay workers and dissuade them from joining the labour unions set up by non-Malays, especially those controlled by the communists (Stockwell 1977, 512). A department of religion was also set up to organise a national religious convention to exhibit UMNO's patronage of Islam (Stockwell 1977, 506–7).

These reforms strengthened the party's organisational reach. But it would take another crisis to generate the "state-party dynamic" that would enable UMNO to "take full advantage of all coercive levers in the state's arsenal" (Kuhonta 2011, 35). Not long after the Malayan Union saga, the Malay elites faced another existential crisis in the form of a communist insurgency led by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Differently this time, the insurgency posed a threat to both the colonial and Malay elites, culminating in a "protection pact" to safeguard their shared interests (Slater 2010, 5). The most important legacy of the colonial government's counter-insurgency operation was a robust state apparatus undergirding the post-colonial UMNO regime.

The crisis was set into motion by the radicalisation of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Having established its foothold after the end of the Japanese occupation of Malaya in 1945, the MCP and the labour movement that it controlled—the Pan-Malayan General Labour

Unions (PMGLU)—increasingly embraced a radical worldview and tactics. For example, the PMGLU vowed in its annual conference in April 1948 that "as long as capitalism remains, there is the cause for war" (Stenson 1970, 214). The PMGLU's subsequent ban by the government prompted the MCP to declare that there were "[n]o more open and lawful means; there is only one way to pursue – the secret and unlawful one" (Stenson 1970, 219). Such militancy was perceived by the Malay population and the returning British colonial government as a threat to be curtailed (Slater 2010, 80).

The MCP's radical turn from labour strike to guerrilla war in its anti-colonialism struggle compelled the government to declare a state of emergency from 1948 to 1960, a period known as the Emergency. The communist rebellion was ultimately put down by the government's "hearts and minds approach." Stubbs (1989, 155) wrote that the essence of the strategy was to "persuade the people of Malaya to abandon the MCP by threatening to punish those who aided the guerrillas and, at the same time, holding out to those who supported the Government the promise of greater security and a better social, economic, and political environment than the communists could offer."

Most significantly, the Emergency sparked an elite collective action in strengthening the state apparatus (see Slater 2010, 85–90). Stubbs (1989, 261) revealed that after the Emergency, the UMNO-led government inherited a "substantial" and "sizeable" security apparatus. The British also enacted the *Internal Security Act* (ISA)[63] to replace some regulations during the Emergency. The ISA supplemented the "impressive" state power to ensure that the government "had all the legal power it might require to repel any communist threat" (Stubbs 1989, 268). With the communist threat all but over after 1960, the ISA remained in place and

[63] Soft copy of the law is available at https://www.vertic.org/media/National%20Legislation/Malaysia/MY_Internal_Security_Act.pdf.

would later continue to serve the UMNO regime well in the suspension of democratic politics and the repression of political opposition—the themes to which I now turn.

State Mobilisation in Response to High-Intensity Threats

With the coercive (police), legal (ISA), and organisational (party) power at its disposal, the UMNO regime was able to blunt and overcome mass-based and elite-driven threats to its rule for decades. This section explores how state mobilisation played out in three major crises in Malaysia: the ethnic riots in 1969; the Islamic movement in the 1970s and 1980s; and the intra-party conflict in the late 1980s.

Ethnic Riots

In the 1969 ethnic riots, the UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation inflicted massive physical harm on the opposition supporters. It was a dire reminder that UMNO supporters would put up a fight against challenges to the Malay's political primacy. This section introduces the repressive role of the UMNO Youth during the communal conflict, with a more in-depth analysis provided in the next chapter.

Malaysia became an independent state in 1957. Succeeding the colonial government was the Alliance, a ruling coalition formed by three ethnic-based parties: UMNO representing ethnic Malays; the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) representing ethnic Chinese; and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) representing ethnic Indians. UMNO was the dominant party in the coalition with its president serving as prime minister. The institutional arrangement was designed to ensure stable ethnic relations, but the British colonial legacy of ethnic division made realising this political vision "a daunting task" (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 277).

Ethnic division has remained a major source of political instability in Malaysia. The most consequential example occurred on 13 May 1969 in an ethnic riot, an event known as the

May 13 incident. The precursor to the riot was the Alliance's unexpected poor electoral performance in the 1969 elections. The ruling coalition's setback was at the gain of the Chinese-dominated Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the newly established Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan). To the dismay of UMNO and its supporters, the electoral outcome was jeered by Chinese supporters of the opposition parties in post-election rallies as the Malays' decline and the Chinese' ascendance (Ongkili 1985, 21). This humiliating episode brought about a destabilising process after the UMNO Youth reacted with its mobilisation to "teach the Chinese a lesson" (Means 1991, 7). Incensed by the opposition supporters' provocation, Harun, chief minister of the state of Selangor (where Kuala Lumpur is located) and chief of the UMNO Youth, mobilised UMNO supporters to hold the party's victory rally. Although physical confrontation was not a declared goal, many demonstrators were armed with "parangs (knives) and other weapons" (Means 1991, 7) and "violence was clearly thought to be a distinct possibility by many of those invited to join the rally" (Reid 1969, 268).

For UMNO and its supporters, the decline in support was a cause for concern that "political power was 'slipping out' of 'indigenous' into 'immigrant' hands" (Goh 1971, 17). Their "insecure state of mind" was fuelled by an "overflow of racial emotion" with "insults and abuse" launched by the Chinese at UMNO and the Malay people (Goh 1971, 18). The UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation played a crucial role in putting down this unacceptable challenge to the Malay's political domination. Government data showed that the clash resulted in 196 people being killed and approximately 6,000 residents in Kuala Lumpur being made homeless, although unofficial tallies put the figures much higher (Hwang 2003, 72). The social disorder prompted the UMNO government to employ the *Internal Security Act* and declare a state of emergency which lasted until 1971, during which parliament was suspended, and government business was run by the emergency administration, the National Operations Council.

As will be shown in the next chapter, the UMNO Youth's mobilisation was intended to signal the dangers of challenging UMNO. Its consequence was also far-reaching: the casualties and devastation wrought by the riots haunted Malaysians for decades, demotivating them from undertaking pro-opposition political activism.

The May 13 incident was a watershed in Malaysia's post-independence political development for its aftermath led to the far-reaching overhaul of the economic system and the ruling coalition. On the economic front, the government concluded that Malay aggression against the Chinese was rooted in their frustration over the government's inertia in addressing entrenched economic inequality seeded by the British colonial government. Relative to the Chinese, the Malays had been poorer and had little control over the modern economy (Crouch 1996, 21). After independence, they expected UMNO to use its political power to advance their economic position. But by the time of the riots, existing government policies "had barely made a dent in the problem of Malay economic backwardness and poverty" (Crouch 1996, 22). The riots finally pushed the government to launch a far-reaching reform called the New Economic Policy (NEP) to drastically overturn the Malays' predicament. The NEP's stated goals were to "reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race," and "accelerating the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function" (Crouch 1996, 24–25).

Yet to achieve these goals, Malay-friendly policy measures were to be implemented. The government gave the Malays preferential access to licenses, concessions, contracts, and credits, and pressured non-Malay and foreign enterprises to accept Malay partners (Crouch 1996, 26). The *Industrial Coordination Act* introduced in 1975 required manufacturers to ensure that the Malays owned at least 30 per cent of the equity to obtain a license from the government. It was also compulsory for them to partner with Malay distributors. The purpose

of this was to ensure that the Malays controlled at least 30 per cent of distribution (Crouch 1996, 207–8). The crux of the economic reform was to nurture a new Malay middle class that could balance the Chinese's share of economic wealth (Kuhonta 2011, 92). This would be quantified by the target of having the Malays controlling 30 per cent of the national wealth by 1990 when the NEP was scheduled to end (Milne 1976, 238).

The supply of a talent pool was essential for supporting the Malays' ascendence in the economy. To produce enough Malay professionals to take up top positions in the industrial and commercial sectors, the government moved to increase the share of Malay students in science, technology, economics, business administration, and other professional courses (Milne 1976, 242). It also encouraged higher Malay participation in the universities by providing them with generous scholarships, while at the same time, putting restrictive quotas on non-Malays' university admissions (Crouch 1996, 26).

This battery of pro-Malay measures had caused resentment among the ethnic minorities, mainly the Chinese, who had to accept the erosion of their socio-economic position. Their children found it harder to attend universities and receive government scholarships. They complained of being treated like "second-class" citizens (Pak 2011). These predicaments forced many well-educated Chinese and Indians to leave the country (ibid). Chinese businesses reacted by sending more than $3 billion per year out of Malaysia between 1976 and 1985 (Crouch 1996, 208). Nevertheless, they were able to survive and thrive by banding together under business associations and the MCA to bargain with the government and forge a connection with the Malay elites to gain preferential treatments (Crouch 1996, 209–2010). For the Malays, the NEP did not benefit them equally. The major beneficiaries were those Malay capitalists, like the Chinese, with close ties to the political elites. They injected their newfound wealth into electoral campaigns to help UMNO buy votes. In the 1984 general elections, for

example, UMNO reportedly spent more than 20 million ringgit, "the first time more 'Malay money' was spent than 'Chinese money'" (Milne 1986, 1371–72).

With regard to the ruling coalition, under Prime Minister Abdul Razak who succeeded Abdul Rahman after the riots, the Alliance adapted to the electoral upset by incorporating competing parties, the Gerakan and the Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS), to become the Barisan Nasional (BN). The broader ruling setup diluted the influence of the MCA as the party was no longer the sole representative of Chinese interests in the coalition due to the Gerakan's inclusion. But this structure also benefited UMNO. Brownlee (2007, 96) argued that "UMNO leaders could now concede less to their subordinate partners, demand more from them and, when necessary, push dissenting parties out of the [BN] without losing power." The latter tactic was applied to PAS which joined the BN in 1973 but was expelled four years later.

Islamic Movements

From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, UMNO's political domination and Islamic credentials were challenged by the Islamic Movement led by the Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS) and the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM). UMNO's coping strategy featured pro-elite demonstrations and elite cooptation. As a preview, the pro-elite demonstration in 1977 was part of a coordinated plan to wrestle control over the predominantly Malay states of Kelantan from the PAS that was encouraged and participated by UMNO members. It was purported to exhibit support for the pro-UMNO PAS' chief minister in his ongoing feud with party opponents in the legislature. The demonstration sparked a state of emergency imposed by the UMNO-led federal government—then under the leadership of Prime Minister Hussein Onn—an event that was followed by the expulsion of the PAS from the BN. In response to the ABIM's rise, Mahathir Mohamad, Onn's successor, co-opted its president, turning the organisation from one critical of the government to an "officially accepted pressure group" whose criticism of the government was considerably softened (Camroux 1996, 859).

a. PAS

Although the BN swept to victory in the 1974 elections—the first elections held since the 1969 riots—the inclusion of the PAS in the BN was bound to be unsustainable. Led by Muslim clerics, the PAS adopted a more extremist view of Islam, promising to establish an Islamic state if elected. The PAS' hard-core approach enticed some Malay voters from UMNO in the 1969 elections. Yet its Islamic fundamentalism was a barrier for moderate Malay voters who remained faithful to the ruling party. Being UMNO's most important contender for the Malay votes, the PAS criticised UMNO for having been "un-Islamic", and "betrayed both the Islamic and Malay struggle" by embracing a secular state and allying with non-Malay parties (Crouch 1996, 66; Chin 1997, 109). This ideological rivalry would lay the groundwork for an uneasy relationship between the two parties in the BN.

But it was the PAS' grip on the overwhelmingly Malay states of Terengganu and Kelantan that sparked a coordinated, mobilisation-backed plan to expel the party from the BN. The PAS' control of these states was an obstacle for UMNO state leaders because they had to defeat the PAS in these states to get a chance to contest the UMNO leadership at the federal level (Crouch 1996, 105). These UMNO leaders would seek to overturn this political anomaly by both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means. In 1961, the dominant party persuaded several PAS legislators in Terengganu to cross the floor and thus obtained the majority to form a new government (Crouch 1996, 65). Kelantan, however, was a more challenging battleground for UMNO, and it took a pro-incumbent rally, a split vote, and a highly skewed electoral campaign to instigate the PAS's downfall (Chin 1997, 109–10).

Despite having joined the BN, PAS' suspicion of UMNO's goodwill persisted. The mistrust was solidified when Abdul Razak overrode the PAS' nomination to appoint the unpopular Mohamed Nasir as Chief Minister of Kelantan after the 1974 elections. His party colleagues disliked Nasir for being "politically naive" and collegially close to Razaleigh

Hamzah, chief of UMNO Kelantan. The friction between the party and Nasir was later exacerbated by the chief minister's anti-PAS policies (Crouch 1996, 105).

Having been unconvinced of Nasir's governance, PAS members in the Kelantan legislature revolted by asking him to resign and threatened to put forward a motion of no-confidence if he did not. Nasir reacted to the rebellion from his own party by organising street protests "encouraged and participated" by UMNO (Crouch 1996, 105–6). The demonstrations were followed by Nasir's dismissal from PAS, the passing of the no-confidence motion by the legislature, and more demonstrations from Nasir's supporters.

The social disorder and political crisis "gave the central government the opportunity to intervene" by placing the state under emergency rule in November 1977. A month later, PAS was kicked out of the BN (Crouch 1996, 105–6). Unlike the May 13 riots, the pro-Nasir demonstrations only inflicted "minor damage" to property. Yet using the demonstrations as a justification, an emergency rule was declared. Crouch (1996, 106) thus opined that the real motive of the emergency was to wrestle power from PAS so that UMNO Kelantan chief Razaleigh could use the victory as the ticket to ascend the federal party's leadership hierarchy.

b. The PAS-ABIM nexus

PAS's divorce from UMNO repositioned the party in the centre of the Islamic resurgence that unfolded in the 1970s. The PAS and the social forces that the movement bred, most predominantly the ABIM, would pose a renewed threat to UMNO. Unlike previous political episodes where state mobilisation was deployed to counter the challenge posed by the Chinese collective action, a similar strategy was ill-suited to counter the defiance from within the Malay community itself. I argue that this absence of state mobilisation was due to the comparative lack of racial animosity in this case. Although PAS and UMNO embraced divergent interpretations and practices of Islam, it did not appear to arouse the same kind of hostility based on a long-standing fear of a Malay decline that motivated previous state mobilisation.

Thus, UMNO under Mahathir Mohamad would rely on cooptation to blunt the movement, and I argue that this can be construed as a form of indirect state mobilisation, the conversion of the co-opted individual's organised mass base into a government-friendly social organisation.

Founded in 1971 by Muslim university students, ABIM reached its peak under its second president, Anwar Ibrahim. Also known as *dakwah* (missionary), the religious movement's main objective was to reassert the role of Islam in public life and thus strengthen Malay identity. The PAS and ABIM coalesced around the idea that "Islam should be not only a religion but also a guide to the organization of politics, the economy, and society as a whole" (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 82; Weiss 2006, 104). The PAS and ABIM formed a robust political synergy with their shared ideological persuasion: The PAS gained considerable new members from the ABIM, and some ABIM leaders ran as the PAS' parliamentary candidates (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 83; Weiss 2006, 114).

Cooptation was used by Mahathir to weaken the PAS-ABIM nexus. Shortly after coming to power in 1981, Mahathir successfully persuaded ABIM's charismatic leader Anwar Ibrahim to join UMNO in 1982. By putting Anwar in charge of the Islamic affairs portfolio and introducing a battery of Islamisation projects and policies, Mahathir hoped that the move would boost UMNO's Islamic credential and thus avoid losing supporters to the PAS (Funston 1980, 92–93; Camroux 1996, 859–60; Chong 2006, 31–32; Ufen 2009, 322). Anwar defended his UMNO move, explaining that his goal was to advance Islamic reform from within the system (Means 1991, 100). Anwar would see his power in UMNO rapidly grow over a short period, first being elected to chief of the UMNO Youth and UMNO vice president, and then deputy prime minister. The cooptation of Anwar successfully undercut the strength of the ABIM. Many supporters were exasperated by Anwar's "betrayal" and "opportunism", resulting in a "dramatic fall" in support. After Anwar's exit from the ABIM, the organisation "as a political force lost both support and direction" (Means 1991, 100).

Mahathir's cooptation of ABIM can be considered a form of *indirect* state mobilisation. The strategy did not get him a mass organisation that would faithfully execute the party's plans, but he was able to induce compliance and toleration from ABIM supporters who remained loyal to Anwar. The ABIM remained *institutionally* outside of the party-state, but the organisation aligned *ideologically* with it. Weiss (2004, 151; 2006, 114) suggested that "[a]lthough it continued to criticize UMNO's policies and projects, its preference for development along Islamic lines was no longer far removed from the government's own stance."

Intra-Elite Conflict and Renewed Communal Tension

In the late 1980s, UMNO under Mahathir was again under threat from elite-driven and mass-driven challenges. This time, the political tension stemmed from a power struggle between Mahathir and his rivals in UMNO. Compounding this issue was the coordinated protest from the Chinese community against the Ministry of Education's teacher recruitment policy that they perceived as detrimental to the characteristics of Chinese schools. These twin challenges were the context of the UMNO Youth's mobilisation. It was organised to counter the Chinese protest, resulting in mounting ethnic tension reminiscent of the May 13 incident in 1969. The tension triggered state repression whose declared objective was to pre-empt the reoccurrence of the 1969 racial conflict. Yet some argued that the repression was actually aimed at silencing Mahathir's opponents in UMNO. This section provides a brief introduction to this episode of state mobilisation. The contribution of state mobilisation to state repression will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

Understanding the importance of state mobilisation in these episodes of intra-elite conflict and communal tension must start by examining UMNO's internal problems. To begin with, UMNO's leadership and Malaysia's prime ministership quickly changed hands following the 1974 general elections; from Razak to Hussein Onn and then to Mahathir Mohamad who

would rule Malaysia for more than two decades from 1981 to 2003. His control over the party, however, was not absolute. Contention over the party leadership in the 1980s spawned intra-elite conflict that set the stage for the activation of state mobilisation.

The intra-party squabble stemmed from discord between Mahathir's faction and Razaleigh's faction, known as Team A and Team B, respectively. The conflict originated from the informal arrangement for leadership succession. When Mahathir's predecessor, Hussein Onn, was picking his deputy who would become party president and prime minister-in-waiting, the contest was between UMNO's three vice-presidents: Mahathir, Ghafar Baba and Razaleigh. Hussein made Mahathir deputy president in 1976 because he was older and more educated, downplaying his weak grassroots support (Hwang 2003, 128). Even though the most senior among the vice presidents, Razaleigh acknowledged that he recommended Mahathir to Hussein because he had an agreement with Mahathir that he would be picked as deputy once Mahathir became party president, which he did in 1981 (Hwang 2003, 128).

Mahathir, however, had a second plan after coming to power. Wary of Razaleigh's strength in the party and with a long-term plan to consolidate his power, Mahathir made the unprecedented move to organise a party election for the deputy presidency by encouraging another candidate, Musa Hatim, to contest against Razaleigh. Musa went on to win the contest. This practice contradicted the tradition of the party president hand-picking the deputy president. Ironically, Musa's subsequent ascendency increased his influence in the party resulting in him becoming the new source of concern for Mahathir (Hwang 2003, 129). Mahathir's strategy was to keep the defeated Razaleigh in the cabinet as a counterbalance to Musa, which was very much to Musa's dismay (Hwang 2003, 130).

In undermining rival elites, Mahathir sewed the seed of leadership strife that would evolve into open party factionalism. Resentful of Mahathir's treatment, Razaleigh and Musa entered into the race for party presidency and deputy presidency, respectively, in the 1987 party

elections. Mahathir contested by teaming up with Ghafar, setting up a "battle royal" (Shamsul 1988), with an eventual victory for Mahathir and his team.

Yet the friction was not mended by party competition. Instead, it was cushioned by state repression. State repression was in turn triggered by a racially charged state mobilisation. Racial tension was ignited when the Education Ministry under Anwar moved to appoint non-Mandarin-speaking Chinese to Chinese-medium primary schools. The policy was seen as an attempt to undermine the status of Chinese-medium primary schools and was met with strong protests from the Chinese community led by UMNO's ruling partner in the BN, the MCA and Gerakan, the opposition DAP, and many other Chinese associations. The MCA was driven to join forces with the opposition by the need to salvage its credentials as the protector of Chinese interests amid poor electoral performance. Similarly, UMNO's internal split compelled party leaders to substitute an accommodative approach on ethnic issues for a more assertive one to maintain support within the party. This assertiveness was why the UMNO-led government declined to respond to the MCA's demands (Crouch 1996, 107).

The UMNO Youth, led by then-acting chief Najib Razak, seized on the MCA's participation with the opposition to stage a mass rally of about 15,000 people on 17 October 1987 to demonstrate Malay strength and unity. The mobilisation voiced its disapproval of the Chinese collective action by invoking violent memories of the May 13 incident with slogans such as "May 13 Has Begun," and "Oct. 17: Second May 13". Like the May 13 incident, the demonstration was allowed to go ahead even though the government was conscious of the risk of a communal clash. Threatening to escalate the tension, UMNO leaders close to Mahathir planned (while Mahathir was out of the country) to follow up this rally with an even bigger one of about half a million people on 1 November to coincide with the 41st anniversary of the party's foundation. However, the planned rally was called off by Mahathir.

To reciprocate the calling off of the protest, Mahathir invoked the *Internal Security Act* to make more than 100 arrests of mostly opposition leaders and social activists (Crouch 1996, 107–13; Milne and Mauzy 1999, 107–9; Hwang 2003, 149–54). This police operation was known as *Operasi Lalang* or Operation Lalang. The police crackdown effectively put a stop to the racial contestation as well as UMNO's internal crisis. Among the few UMNO members arrested in Operation Lalang, all three were Team B supporters in the UMNO Youth (Khoo 1995, 286). Rais Yatim, a senior Member of Team B who contested the vice presidency, suggested that Operation Lalang "was quite successful in creating a culture of fear within dissident[ing] UMNO circles and thus served its purpose very effectively in the midst of Mahathir's own leadership crisis" (Hwang 2003, 154).

For most of the 1990s, until Mahathir stepped down in 2003, the UMNO regime would preside over a largely stable political order without overwhelming communal and intra-elite conflicts that necessitated state mobilisation. A long streak of robust economic growth strengthened UMNO's rule. As Case (2010, 99–100) argues, when voters benefited from the government's developmental outcomes, they were more likely to turn a blind eye to the regime's unscrupulous strategies such as election manipulation and cronyism to maintain power. Likewise, Mahathir's position in UMNO was consolidated through personalist rule that favoured his loyalists at the expense of rivals in both the party and state (Slater 2003).

This equilibrium was briefly disrupted by the 1997 financial crisis that swept across East and Southeast Asia. The most significant political casualty of this economic crisis was Mahathir's deputy at the time—Anwar Ibrahim. The passing of the financial crisis brought renewed intra-elite rivalry. Differences of opinion in handling the financial crisis saw Anwar, who was also the finance minister, collide with Mahathir. Anwar was promptly sacked from UMNO and the government in 1998 and arrested on charges of sodomy and corruption. Anwar's imprisonment sparked *Reformasi*, a broad socio-political movement advocating for

political and economic reforms (see Weiss 2006, Chapter 5). Opposition parties in the movement then launched the BA (*Barisan Alternatif*) to challenge Mahathir's BN in the 1999 elections. The BA succeeded in undercutting the BN's victory margin, but the ruling coalition held firm to its supermajority. Despite its promise, Reformasi activism petered out, and the BN consolidated its grip on power (Weiss 2006, 127).

State Mobilisation in Response to Renewed Threats

The social and political conditions in the 2000s and 2010s presented an altogether unfamiliar landscape for state mobilisation. Following decades of relative racial stability, the loosening grip of the menacing power of the May 13 riots, combined with UMNO leaders' own political missteps, gave rise to a sustained reformist movement supported by both the Chinese and Malays. As usual, the UMNO Youth reacted to this movement by mobilising to defend the government. Yet because of the movement's cross-ethnic identity, UMNO Youth failed to justify its counter-mobilisation on the grounds that the Chinese were contesting the Malay's predominance. This event serves as an excellent example of the factors that undermine the effectiveness of state mobilisation in supporting authoritarian rule. This section briefly discusses the failure of state mobilisation in blunting the renewed threat, the details of which will be provided in the next chapter.

The failure of state mobilisation was rooted in the ruling party's waning grip on Malaysian politics. Unlike the 1960s and 1980s, UMNO's popularity after Mahathir stepped down in 2003 had been hard hit by massive corruption scandals and rising economic hardship. With regard to the latter, Rodan (2018, 198) argues that the increased living costs that hit the lower classes of "all ethnicities" the hardest was generated by privatisation that benefits businesses with political connections. These conditions had contributed to higher levels of social mobilisation by the urban Malaysian population that was the precursor of Bersih—a

broad coalition of civil society organisations calling for electoral reforms. From 2007, the UMNO regime would be hit by waves of mass protests organised by Bersih. Supported by opposition leaders, most prominently Anwar, Bersih posed a sustained and intensive threat to the UMNO regime. Despite police bans and crackdowns, there were successive Bersih mass protests in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2016.

Facing intense pressure, UMNO's fortunes gradually dipped. The 2004 elections under Mahathir's successor, Abdullah Badawi, was the BN's last convincing performance. The BN's loss of supermajority to the Pakatan Rakyat (PR), the opposition coalition led by Anwar in the 2008 elections, was a "political tsunami" crushing UMNO's grip on Malaysian politics. Pepinsky (2009b, 109) argues that BN's setback resulted from Badawi being "unwilling to use the [coercive] tools at his disposal to ensure the BN's electoral dominance," in ways that his predecessors so successfully applied. Case (2010, 119) argues that BN's setback was also brought about by "the slippage in emotive attachment among bedrock Malay constituencies."

Yet Badawi's seemingly moderate leadership style did not stop him from endorsing state mobilisation as a strategy to shore up political support. UMNO under Badawi enjoyed a strong relationship with Perkida, a network of pro-UMNO Islamic organisations. The group was founded in the 1970s but only flourished significantly when Badawi came to power. The group thus considered him its "godfather" (Lemière 2014, 95). The group was known for organising violent demonstrations against opposition leaders, proclaiming that they were "ready to go anytime if UMNO's politicians need more muscles" (Lemière 2014, 98).

After the BN's 2008 electoral shock, Badawi resigned and handed over power to his deputy, Najib Razak. Najib's rule was rocked by three waves of Bersih protests between 2011 and 2016. But after the exposure of Najib's corruption, in which he channelled approximately US$700 million from the state-owned 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) fund into his personal bank account, the protests not only called for electoral reforms but also for his

resignation. In response to Bersih's 'yellow-shirt' protestors, UMNO organised its own 'red-shirt' countermovement. Chief among those participating in the countermovement was the UMNO Youth. It was joined by other government-linked organisations such as the Malaysian Retirees Association with 590,000 members (Malaysiakini 2011a) and the National Silat Federation—a martial arts organisation whose president Mohd Ali Mohd Rustam was the former Mallacca chief minister from UMNO (Teoh 2015).

Nevertheless, the clash between the pro-government and anti-government groups did not result in tragedy as it had in 1969. The nature of the confrontation was a significant factor in explaining the absence of violence. Unlike the Chinese mobilisation in 1969, the Bersih rally was a cross-ethnic movement advocating for democratic reform. Among them were young first-time voters mobilised by social media, or the "Facebook generation" (Koswanage and Ahmad 2011). The government even tried persuading Malays not to join the protest using the reason that it was "forbidden" by the Quran (Razak 2011a). Finally, Bersih directed its efforts towards exposing the political malfeasance that concerned Malaysian voters more broadly. It was, therefore, anti-UMNO rather than anti-Malay.

The end of UMNO's rule eventually came when it lost the general elections in 2018. Before the fall, the opposition PR coalition had won the majority of popular votes in the 2013 elections. However, due to the much-criticised seat allocation formula, the BN retained control over the lower house. This precarious control was broken when the BN was defeated by the new opposition coalition, the Pakatan Harapan (PH), in the 2018 elections, putting an end to UMNO's more than five decades of continuous rule. The BN's defeat was in a significant part sparked by Najib's 1MBD scandal and Mahathir's appeal as PH's candidate for the premiership following his breakaway from UMNO in 2016 (Abdulla 2019).

Conclusion

The cases introduced in this chapter demonstrate that state mobilisation had been an essential instrument of authoritarian rule in Malaysia. In the May 13 incident, state mobilisation physically put down racial provocation from Chinese opposition supporters. The riots triggered the imposition of a nationwide emergency that led to the suspension of competitive politics. The aftermath saw the strengthening of UMNO in the form of an expanded political alliance that helped UMNO balance ethnic relations and maintain political hegemony. In the 1987 intra-party conflict and communal tension, state mobilisation was reactivated to threaten the Chinse community's anti-government protests. The ethnic tension sparked state repression that helped Mahathir resolve UMNO's internal crisis by silencing his party critics. In both episodes, deep-seated communal tension provided an expedient emotional resource for the deployment of state mobilisation. These observations support the hypothesis on the threat origin of state mobilisation.

The case of Malaysia also provides an interesting example of what I called indirect state mobilisation. When the UMNO regime was threatened by the Islamic movement led by the PAS and ABIM, Mahathir used the tactic of cooptation rather than state mobilisation. If the Islamic Movement had been confronted directly in the streets, such state mobilisation would have been damaging to UMNO's Islamic credentials. Instead, Mahathir gained the service of the ABIM by persuading its leader Anwar to join UMNO. While Anwar continued to assert influence over his supporters in the ABIM, the once critical social force became a malleable force towing the government's line. This cooptation can be considered an indirect form of state mobilisation because even though the transformed ABIM could not be considered UMNO's mass organisation, it became a UMNO-linked organisation due to its ongoing relationship with Anwar.

The emergence of the pro-democracy social movement following Mahathir's rule presented a new challenge for state mobilisation. The nature of the Bersih movement meant that state mobilisation was no longer able to rely upon racial emotion as the impetus. Bersih's cross-ethnic composition and pro-democracy objective made it an example of political mobilisation rather than communal mobilisation. With communal tensions temporarily contained by Bersih's rally, the regime lacked the mobilising resource to activate state mobilisation that could facilitate high-intensity repression to weaken the momentum of societal challenges.

The next chapter explores these issues in more detail to provide more evidence on the repressive function of state mobilisation. In doing so, I will further investigate the role of the UMNO Youth in three case studies: the 1969 riots, Operation Lalang, and Bersih. The case of the 1969 riots will examine how the UMNO Youth's mobilisation caused physical harm to opposition supporters and reproduced fear of violence when the regime was challenged. The case of Operation Lalang will explain how the UMNO Youth's mobilisation created the pretext for state repression. The case of the UMNO Youth's counter-protest against the social movement Bersih will also demonstrate the youth wing's repressive function, but its primary purpose is to highlight how the UMNO Youth failed to blunt Bersih's pressure on the Najib government. Thus, the case of Malaysia is valuable for it allows me to test the hypothesis that state mobilisation is effective in overcoming threats.

Chapter 7: State Mobilisation and Repression in Malaysia

This chapter commences the in-depth analysis of the activities of the UMNO Youth, the youth wing of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in Malaysia. I examine its repressive function based on three crisis episodes: 1) the racial riots in 1969, known as the May 13 incident, 2) a state repression in 1987, known as Operation Lalang, and 3) the rise of anti-government mobilisation led by the social movement Bersih from the mid-2000s. Repression-driven mobilisation is measured by two indicators: containment and aggravation. In observing containment, I will demonstrate how the UMNO Youth counter-mobilised to suppress anti-government protestors in the May 13 incident (Case 1) and used this violent memory to sustain the fear among the broader population to discourage them from protesting against the government. In observing aggravation, I will show how the UMNO Youth inflated ethnic tension to create the pretext for Operation Lalang (Case 2). Finally, I analyse why the UMNO Youth failed to repeat its past tactics in response to the rise of Bersih towards the end of UMNO's rule (Case 3).

This chapter proceeds as follows. After an introduction to the UMNO Youth to establish its significance in the UMNO regime, I will examine Case 1, the May 13 incident, to analyse the UMNO Youth's activities in containing opposition mobilisation. The subsequent section examines Case 2, Operation Lalang, to observe the UMNO Youth's activities in aggravating ethnic tension. The last section probes the failure of the UMNO Youth to mount a successful counter-mobilisation against Bersih (Case 3). I conclude by reviewing the evidence against the hypotheses.

Introduction to the UMNO Youth

The UMNO Youth (or Permuda UMNO in Malay) was a mass organisation with approximately 670,000 members in 2019.[64] Being a youth organisation, it set an age limit of 40 for its members, except for its chief. From its formation in 1947 until UMNO's electoral defeat in 2018, the UMNO Youth had been led by 13 chiefs, some having gone on to occupy top party and government posts. With three party presidents/prime ministers and two deputy party presidents/deputy prime ministers coming from within its ranks, the UMNO Youth had been likened to a "factory" of political leaders. Table 5 shows the list of UMNO Youth presidents when UMNO was the ruling party and their last positions in the government.

Table 5: List of UMNO Youth Presidents

No.	President (UMNO Youth)	Year in Office	Last Government Position
1	Hussein Onn	1947-1950	Prime Minister, 1978-1981
2	Abdul Razak	1951	Prime Minister, 1972-1976
3	Sardon Jubir	1951-1964	Minister of Health
4	Abdul Rahman	1964-1971	Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports
5	Harun Idris	1971-1976	Chief Minister of Selangor
6	Syed Jaafar Albar	1976-1977	Minster of Rural Development
7	Suhaimi Kamaruddin	1977-1982	Deputy Minister of Education
8	Anwar Ibrahim	1982-1987	Deputy Prime Minister, 1993-1998
9	Najib Razak	1987-1993	Prime Minister, 2009-2018
10	Rahim Tamby Chik	1993-1994	Chief Minister of Malacca, 1982-1994
11	Ahmad Zahid Hamidi	1994-1999	Deputy Prime Minister, 2015-2018
12	Hishamuddin Hussein	1999-2008	Minister of Defense, 2013-2018
13	Khairy Jamaluddin	2008-2018	Minster of Youth and Sports, 2013-2018

Source: Author's compilation based on official records and Internet research.

[64] Interview, former party member, 20 December 2020, online.

Historically, the existence of counter-balancing forces within UMNO and its various alliances had restricted the party president's ability to wield absolute control over party institutions. For example, Mahathir Mohamad's struggle to see off a challenge from Razaleigh Hamzah in 1987, and Anwar Ibrahim in 1996, for party presidency was a testament to UMNO's internal contestation. The party president's lack of hegemony was conducive to the UMNO Youth's autonomy: it enabled the UMNO Youth chiefs and their patrons to establish personal power bases and take independent, sometimes overzealous, actions that occasionally put it on a colliding course with the party leadership.

Two historical events exemplified the UMNO Youth's autonomy. Firstly, in the struggle for independence from British rule, the youth movement successfully pushed for a change of the party's slogan from *Hidup Melayu* (Malay life) to *Merdeka* (independence), despite the opposition of UMNO's first president Dato Onn. Later, the youth wing got its way by forcing the party to demand from the British that independence be set on the date of 31 August 1957 (Funston 1980, 176). Secondly, the UMNO Youth had been more forceful than the party in protecting and advancing Malay special rights. This disposition was on display when the New Economic Policy (NEP) was rolled out after the 1969 racial riots to promote poverty reduction and Malays' economic ownership. Owing to its political orientation, Milne (1976, 254) suggests that the UMNO Youth was the "most thorough and pertinacious" organisation to monitor the implementation of the NEP. The UMNO Youth's oversight involved proposing viable projects that could be implemented by Malays; investigating racial composition in public institutions; and holding talks with government ministries. Some of these actions had to be warned off by top party leaders for being "overzealous" (ibid).

The UMNO Youth's autonomy was also reflected in the conflict between its chief and the party president. A good example was the role played by Zahid Hamidi, who led the UMNO Youth from 1994 to 1999, during the rivalry between party president Mahathir Mohamad and

deputy president Anwar Ibrahim. The rivalry was sparked by Anwar's tacit attempt to wrestle power from Mahathir as his influence in the party expanded. The last straw was the policy differences between the two in handling the economic impacts of the Asian financial crisis in 1998—after which Anwar was expelled from UMNO and imprisoned on sodomy and corruption charges. Anwar's threat to Mahathir was intense because the extent of the latter's power over the former was uncertain—the youth wing, along with the women's wing, was considered "very solid Anwar strongholds" (Hwang 2003, 297).

Zahid assisted Anwar in his battle with Mahathir in two ways. First, he hinted at his disapproval of Mahathir remaining in power. To shield himself from Anwar's challenge, Mahathir's supporters initiated a "no-contest" election for the party's top two posts. This meant that no nomination could be made to contest the party presidency and deputy presidency, effectively allowing the incumbents to stay in power. In response, Zahid firstly urged the youth wing not to adopt the same method in electing the movement's top two posts. Zahid's action lent ammunition to Anwar's attempt to run against Mahathir. Anwar was quick to welcome Zahid's position and express the view that elections were the way to preserve "the spirit of the constitution as well as the democracy and the healthy culture in the party" (Hwang 2003, 300). Second, Zahid openly criticised Mahathir's government. The youth chief attacked Mahathir's leadership, with Anwar's "blessing", by bringing up the issues of nepotism and cronyism in the 1998 UMNO general assembly, defying Mahathir's warning before the assembly not to do so.[65] This was because Mahathir was receiving increased pressure after Indonesia's Suharto was forced to resign over the country's infamous practices of corruption, cronyism, and nepotism that saw the country ravaged by the Asian financial crisis (Hwang 2003, 300–302).

[65] Mahathir immediately retaliated by releasing the names of people, including Zahid, who had benefited from government contracts, the very system that he had criticised.

In sum, compared to the Union Youth Federations of Cambodia (UYFC)—the Cambodian's People Party's (CPP) youth wing, the UMNO Youth maintained a very different approach to supporting the party. While the former is an obedient executor of party policies, the UMNO Youth was an aggressive political actor, not shying away from expressing views or advocating policies that deviate from the party. But when external threats to the party's rule arose, the UMNO Youth was as committed as the UYFC in defending the party. While the UYFC specialises in strengthening the CPP's rule by making its legitimacy claims more appealing to the youth population, the UMNO Youth was prolific in organising rallies to contain opposition protests and aggravate opposition threats to create the pretext for state repression. The following two sections examine how such containment and aggravation played out based on two cases of repression-driven mobilisation undertaken by the UMNO Youth.

Case 1: Containing Opposition Protests – The 1969 Riots

This case study examines the racial riots on 13 May 1969 to examine the UMNO Youth's role in containing opposition protests. Containment refers to the suppression and deterrence of anti-government mobilisation. Key to UMNO Youth's success in this regard was the exploitation of communal divisions to frame Chinese-led protests as the minority's attempt to upend the majority Malay's political dominance. This was best exemplified by the counter-mobilisation after the general elections in 1969. At that time, hard-core UMNO supporters reacted violently to the incitement from Chinese opposition supporters which evoked the greatest Malay fear of being controlled by the minority "immigrants". The UMNO Youth's mobilisation inflicted physical harm on opposition protestors, and, as an unintended consequence, demotivated future opposition mobilisation. This section examines how such containment played out.

The Ethnic Riots

The May 13 riots were considered "the single most intensive case" of racial violence between the country's Malay and Chinese population. The violence broke out on the evening of 13 May 1969 in the Chinese-dominated neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur when "mobs" from both sides clashed. Based on eyewitness accounts that were admittedly "gruesome, conflicting, and incomplete," Gagliano (1970, 16–17) vividly painted the picture of what happened that evening:

> The Malays, some wearing white or red battle headbands, raged through the area randomly smashing, hacking and burning; any Chinese person or belonging became a target of opportunity. Enraged Chinese and Indian rioters (some with pistols and shotguns as well as homemade weapons) launched a similar mayhem of mutilation and destruction upon persons and things Malay. There are chopped limbs and savage decapitations. Scores of cars and scooters were smashed, overturned, and burned. Cinemas were raided and unsuspecting film watchers were killed in their seats. Homes and shops were looted and burned. Mob madness had seized the city.

As stated previously, the government reported that the riots resulted in 196 deaths and approximately 6,000 Kuala Lumpur residents made homeless, but unofficial sources reported a much higher tally of casualties (Hwang 2003, 72). The government attributed the cause of the riots to three factors: Malay discontent over government inertia in implementing policies with regard to language and education; anger over the ethnic Chinese challenge to Malays' special rights; and anxiety over the ethnic Chinese's domination of the economy (Hwang 2003, 73).

These old wounds were reopened by UMNO's electoral losses and the opposition's popularity gain. UMNO, through its coalition with the MCA and MIC (the Alliance) had prior to the 1969 federal and state elections maintained total control over the government. Yet such dominance was threatened when Chinese voters, and to a lesser degree Malay voters, withdrew their loyalty from the ruling coalition. The Alliance retained the majority of parliamentary seats to control the federal government, but it lost the two-thirds majority that would enable them to

amend the constitution. More alarmingly, the ruling coalition was defeated in state elections in Perak and Penang, while the elections in Selangor resulted in a stalemate where no party won enough seats to form the government alone. The major beneficiaries of the Alliance's setback were the Chinese-dominated Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Gerakan party. Despite the threat, the ruling party was never in danger of losing power, but the opposition parties' growing popularity showed that it was not invincible.

The opposition challenge in the electoral arena was followed by a racially charged street mobilisation. These two events combined to trigger the UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation. The battleground was in the centre of Selangor where the formation of the new government hit a deadlock. In the 1969 state elections, the DAP and Gerakan, which contested for the first time, performed unexpectedly well by capturing 13 seats in the 28-seat state parliament. The gain came at the expense of the MCA's steep decline—it won only one of the 12 seats it contested. With one seat being won by an independent candidate, the state elections produced a hung parliament with an equal number of Alliance legislators (14) and non-Alliance legislators (14). Given that Malays in the state voted for UMNO as they traditionally had done, which was evident by the party retaining all its seats except one, the MCA's poor showing was interpreted by UMNO supporters as "evidence that the Chinese had 'betrayed' the Alliance formula by voting for an opposition that had revived fundamental questions of language and Malay rights"—issues that had already been agreed upon by UMNO and MCA at the time of independence (Reid 1969, 266; Hwang 2003, 77).

Concern over the outlook of Malays losing control over state power was intensified when the DAP and Gerankan held exuberant parades on 11 and 12 May to celebrate their electoral gains. This behaviour fuelled an "overflow of racial emotion" when "insults and abuse" were launched at UMNO and the Malay people (Goh 1971, 18). UMNO's falling popularity was jeered by opposition supporters as the Malays' decline and the Chinese's

ascendance (Goh 1971, 21; Ongkili 1985, 204;). This caused grave anxiety among the Malays that "political power was 'slipping out' of 'indigenous' into 'immigrant' hands" (Goh 1971, 17). The official account of the riots described the opposition parties' parades as "noisy, racially provocative and intimidating," with humiliating and intimidating remarks, such as "The sailing boat is leaking!"; "Malays have fallen!"; "Malays now no longer have power!"; "Kuala Lumpur now belongs to the Chinese!"; "Malays may return to their villages!"; "Finish off all Malays", hurled at the Malays (National Operations Council 1969, 40). Some reportedly marched towards the residence of the chief minister of Selangor, Harun Idris, and "rudely invited" him to vacate the residence as they alleged that he was no longer the state's ruler (Goh 1971, 20).

The Role of UMNO Youth: Inflicting Harm and Generating Fear

The perceived humiliation and anxiety over losing political dominance undergirded the UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation. UMNO supporters reasoned that they too should have a parade because they were not defeated in the state elections and they could not bear the opposition's insults and humiliation (National Operations Council 1969, 38). Ahmad Razali, Harun Idris' secretary, said that the initiative came from a group of UMNO Youth members from Kampong Baru, a Malay neighbourhood in the Chinese majority city and UMNO's founding place (National Operations Council 1969, 38), who were reportedly "most enraged" by the opposition's behaviour (Goh 1971, 21). The Kampong Baru UMNO Youth and the chief minister enjoyed a strong relationship.[66] Thus, when the status of Harun and UMNO was threatened, it was not surprising that the idea to hold a counter-rally was initiated by UMNO members from the area.

[66] Goh (1971, 23) observed that Harun Idris was able to "strike up immediate and enthusiastic rapport" with them relative to other UMNO leaders who were either "too serious, too stilted or too dull." Kampong Baru UMNO Youth, which had a specially trained group of "pemuda2 Tahan Lasak" (rugged youth) for vote mobilisation, had actively assisted Harun throughout the election campaign (C. Goh 1971, 21).

Not everyone saw the UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation as a form of repression. For example, social activist Kua Kia Soong claims that the riots were a "coup" by the "emergent Malay state capitalist class" represented by deputy prime minister Abdul Razak to overthrow the "outdated Malay aristocracy" represented by prime minister Abdul Rahman (Kua 2007, 3). Yet Kua's evidence cannot prove that Razak plotted the riots.[67] Indeed, a report by the British High Commission that Kua cited acknowledged that "it is not yet possible to establish the extent to which the Malay counter-demonstration on the evening of 13 May was organized by certain leading members of UMNO…" (Kua 2007, 69). Abdul Rahman himself levelled the blame on the communists and the manner of the opposition parties' electoral celebration for sparking the riots. He claimed that UMNO's counter-rally was "inevitable…as otherwise the party members would be demoralized after the show of strength by the Opposition and the insults that had been thrown at them" (Rahman 1969, 203).

My view is that the UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation should be interpreted the way it appeared—as an act of repression, or from the Malays' perspective—to "teach the Chinese a lesson." I concur with Wilkinson (2006, 223) that the UMNO Youth's mobilisation was intended primarily to signal and exact the dangers of a direct challenge to UMNO.[68]

The success of the counter-mobilisation was premised on overcoming elite hesitancy and having a strong local mobilisation. Chief Minister Harun Idris initially tried to discourage the agitators from holding the counter-rally, expressing the concern that "something untoward might happen" (National Operations Council 1969, 40). Harun's hesitation was also based on positive development in government formation as the Gerakan decided not to form a coalition

[67] Crouch (1996, 112) concurred that the riots helped Abdul Razak take over the prime ministership from Abdul Rahman and marginalise his party allies.

[68] The post-election punitive action against the Chinese community first came from the MCA. Following the underwhelming election results, the party announced that while remaining in the Alliance it would not be joining the cabinet. According to Reid (1969, 263), the MCA leadership expressed strong feelings that "the Chinese electorate had been very foolish to ignore all that the MCA had achieved for them, and that withdrawal was the only way to drive home to the Chinese the necessity of giving the MCA a strong voice in Cabinet."

with the DAP, paving the way for UMNO to establish a new state government (Reid 1969, 268). He later consented to the counter-rally on the condition that it was given the greenlight by the police and held in a peaceful and cheerful manner (National Operations Council 1969, 38; Von Vorys 1975, 322). He also agreed to lead the rally to "lend respectability to it and ensure that the participants behave themselves" (National Operations Council 1969, 38). Yet Von Vorys suggested that Harun's hands were forced. The UMNO leaders under him were infuriated and desperate to take immediate action to counter the Chinese:

> Was UMNO really spineless (*dayus*) as the PMIP [Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party] charged or castrated as Dr. Tan Chee Khoon [Gerankan secretary general] asserted? If so, the Malay community would rise and set matters right. They could not stand the humiliation any longer (Von Vorys 1975, 322).

Given the explosive atmosphere at the time, the counter-rally would have been likely to go ahead even without Harun's consent (Wilkinson 2006, 223). Having agreed to the counter-rally, Harun emphasised that it should be one of "victory rather than tragedy" (Reid 1969, 268), but the preparation for the rally exhibited the characteristics of a retaliation more than a celebration. To prepare for the procession, Ahmad Razali, Harun's political secretary, spent four hours on the night of 12 May canvassing support from local UMNO leaders in a host of Malay neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur (National Operations Council 1969, 39). These local leaders took a militant stance, urging their people to "teach the Chinese a lesson." They were advised to bring weapons such as *parangs* (machetes), claimed to be for self-defence (Von Vorys 1975, 323). When marching to the assembly location at Harun's residence, the rally participants were seen wearing a white headband of "mourning" around their *songkoks* (traditional Malay cap), which symbolised UMNO's struggle against the British in the 1946 Malaysian Union controversy. Reid (1969, 268) suggested that "violence was clearly thought to be a distinct possibility by many of those invited to join the rally."

Given the intent of those participating in the rally, violence would only take a matter of time. Indeed, the riots broke out before the procession could start, which was scheduled to begin on the evening of 13 May at 7:30 pm. It was sparked by news circulating among the crowd of four to five thousand people who had already assembled at Harun's residence that several Malays on their way to join the procession had been killed by the Chinese (National Operations Council 1969, 50). The crowd unleashed its rage upon hearing the news and retaliated by burning a van and the two Chinese passengers inside were killed "on the spot." Harun was seen appealing to the crowd to calm down, but they shouted back "we cannot bear this anymore." Soon afterwards, a group of two to three hundred people broke away from the crowd to "clash with the Chinese" (National Operations Council 1969, 51).

The UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation in 1969 and the resultant riots not only imposed a physical cost on opposition supporters for their provocation but also perpetuated a debilitating atmosphere of fear in the ensuing decades. One survivor of an attack in the riots, for example, said that "the 'blind hatred' so severely affected him that for years afterwards, he couldn't go to crowded places 'without mentally preparing an escape route beforehand'" (Hiebert and Jaysankaran 1999). The possible re-occurrence of ethnic riots continued to cause a sense of apprehension that was likened to "having an ammunition dump in [the] backyard [that] can always explode" (Hiebert and Jaysankaran 1999).

This fear manifested vividly nearly two decades later. In October 1987, ethnic tension was again high when the Chinese community protested against the Ministry of Education's decision to appoint teachers without Chinese qualifications to administrative positions in Chinese primary schools. Amid the tension, Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim commented that "there was May 13, 1969 mood in the country." The streets of Kuala Lumpur were again on the verge of another Malay-Chinese confrontation following protests by the Chinese

community and the UMNO Youth's counterdemonstration. The latter was questioned by the opposition party whether it was trying to create the mood that Anwar talked about (Lim 1987).

This time, however, state repression was deployed before the tragedy could repeat itself. The government under Mahathir invoked the *Internal Security Act* to arrest more than 100 dissidents—a repressive event known as *Operasi Lalang* that effectively put an end to the racially-charged protests from both sides. Even though the repression was regarded as a dark episode of Malaysia's contemporary political development, the fear of chaotic street mobilisation resembling the May 13 riots prompted residents in Kuala Lumpur to receive the repression with "a great sense of relief" (Means 1991, 214; Crouch 1996, 111).

Case 2: Operation Lalang – Rekindling Ethnic Tensions

This case examines Operation Lalang (*Operasi Lalang*)—a repressive operation carried out by the Malaysian police in 1987. The purpose is to demonstrate how this episode of state repression can be traced to the UMNO Youth's aggravation of ethnic tension, which helped the government justify the repression. The government claimed that without taking this action, it was likely that the ethnic tension would descend into a May 13-style riot. How did the ethnic tension that originated from the Chinese community's peaceful protest against the Ministry of Education's teacher recruitment policy come to be seen as so threatening to social order? The answer lies in how the UMNO Youth made the *avoidable inevitable*. The UMNO Youth aggravated the ethnic tension by adding fuel to the dying flame, persisting with counter-mobilisation even after the Chinese-led protest had been cancelled, and unnecessarily picking a fight with the MCA despite the party's moderate stance in the dispute. The analysis that follows explores these intertwining events to explain the role of state mobilisation in state repression.

The State Repression

Operation Lalang (Lalang means Weeding in English) was a coercive operation undertaken by the Malaysian government on 27 October 1987 which lasted until January 1988. The police invoked the *Internal Security Act* to arrest and detain without trial more than 100 political dissidents and civil society leaders, citing how racial tension had reached a "dangerous level" (NST 1987t). Strong actions were apparently needed "for the sake of national security" (NST 1987s). The police operation was taken following renewed tensions between Malay supporters of the government and the Chinese community led by Chinese civic associations and political parties.

Despite the official announcement that Operation Lalang was necessary to pre-empt the reoccurrence of a May 13-style race riot, observers argued that Operation Lalang was actually orchestrated to crack down on intra- and inter-party challenges to Mahathir's rule. For one, many of the arrestees had played little to no role in *worsening* the racial tension (Means 1991, 214; Crouch 1996, 110–11; Milne and Mauzy 1999, 109). On the contrary, a prominent NGO leader who was detained, Chandra Muzaffar, for example, actually contributed to *lowering* the tension by appealing to both groups to call off their protests in an open statement (NST 1987j). On the other hand, Mahathir supporters who organised the counter-protest were not arrested. These were people critics called the "real culprits" (Crouch 1996, 111). Among the few UMNO members arrested in Operation Lalang, all three were supporters of Mahathir's opponents in the UMNO Youth (Khoo 1995, 286).

Rais Yatim, a senior member of the anti-Mahathir faction suggested that Operation Lalang "was quite successful in creating a culture of fear within dissenting UMNO circles and thus served its purpose very effectively in the midst of Mahathir's own leadership crisis" (Hwang 2003, 154). Chinese politicians spoke of a "hidden agenda" and them being held up as a "scapegoat." They claimed that the chain of political events—the rise of racial tension

followed by pro-government rallies and government repression—was orchestrated by Mahathir to consolidate his position in UMNO following an internal power struggle (Crouch 1996, 111; Hwang 2003, 153–54). Their suppression in Operation Lalang, they claimed, was rooted in their activities in exposing government mismanagement and corruption.[69]

In sum, critics considered the racial tension that Operation Lalang purportedly sought to ameliorate an orchestrated crisis to initiate repression for the purpose of regime stability. In this regard, the Mahathir regime leveraged a crisis to overcome another crisis. State mobilisation contributed to this plan by inflating an ethnic tension that was bound to be resolved peacefully.

The Ethnic Tension

The ethnic tension leading to the state repression was bred by the Education Ministry's decision to promote non-Chinese-educated teachers or teachers without proficiency in Mandarin to administrative positions (i.e., headmasters and senior assistants) at Chinese primary schools. The move was strongly opposed by the Chinese community. The dissenting voices were represented by a joint action committee comprising Chinese associations and political parties which included the opposition DAP and the BN's component parties—the MCA and the Gerakan party. The Chinese community objected to the appointments on the ground that the appointees' lack of language proficiency would restrict their communication with existing personnel and hamper the schools' operation. More importantly, the protesting camp raised the concern that the appointment of non-Chinese educated teachers to Chinese schools would alter

[69] DAP leaders, Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh, for example, had successfully convinced the Supreme Court to issue an injunction to stop the signing of a contract awarding a massive road-construction project to a firm owned by a UMNO-affiliate company whose trustees included Mahathir and other UMNO leaders. Furthermore, corruption and other misconduct issues raised by the opposition party and civil society provided "ammunition" for UMNO dissidents to forge a campaign against Mahathir (Crouch 1996, 110–13).

the character of Chinese schools—an educational feature the BN promised to protect in its election manifesto (NST 1987a).

Protests by the Chinese community began with a peaceful act of disobedience. Fifteen Chinese associations and five Chinese political parties met on 12 October 1987 at the Thean Hou Temple in Kuala Lumpur. The meeting adopted a resolution calling for parents and students to boycott classes in the affected Chinese primary schools in Selangor, Penang, Malacca, and the Federal Territory for three days from 15 to 17 October unless the ministry replaced all the teachers by 14 October (NST 1987u). They maintained that qualification, rather than race, was the cause of their protest, as validated by their rejection of non-Mandarin speaking Chinese teachers and their willingness to accept appointments from any race as long as they possessed proficiency in Mandarin.

The Education Ministry under Anwar Ibrahim defended the policy, affirming that it was not designed to compromise the status of Chinese schools. Rather, the decision was made because Chinese language proficiency was not the criterion in the promotion policy and the ministry's hands were tied by not having enough Chinese-educated teachers to fill in these administrative posts (NST 1987a; 1987d). However, the ministry compromised by transferring some teachers, but it stressed that it could not meet the deadline as the process would not be completed until year-end (NST 1987h).

Antagonised by the Chinese community's decision to challenge official decisions, the UMNO Youth launched its own protest to defend the government. It contended that the ministry's decision was not politically motivated but was meant to achieve "national integration". The UMNO Youth reasoned that since some Chinese-educated teachers had been promoted to administrative posts in Malay schools, there was no reason that non-Chinese-educated teachers should not be promoted to similar roles in Chinese schools (NST 1987c). The youth movement emphasised that with Mandarin remaining the medium of instruction, the

appointments would not alter the character of Chinese schools as the Chinese community complained (NST 1987e).

The UMNO Youth was particularly incensed by the MCA's involvement in the protest. On the same day the boycott was called, approximately 500 UMNO Youth members in Penang organised a street protest against the party. The rally demanded that the MCA put an end to its protest and stopped calling for the sacking or resignation of Education Minister Anwar over the controversy. The protest organisers described the issue as "petty" and that it had been "blown out of proportion" by the MCA. They also warned that such politicisation could lead to "chaos" (NST 1987v).

The acting chief, Najib Razak[70], was eager to demonstrate his support for Mahathir and secure permanent leadership of the UMNO Youth (Crouch 1996, 108; Wain 2012, 61). Under Najib, the UMNO Youth heightened the tensions between the Malay and Chinese communities, and within the BN, by organising a mass rally of 15,000 people on 17 October 1987 in Kuala Lumpur's Jalan Raja Muda Stadium. The UMNO Youth regarded the Chinese-organised protest as a challenge to Malay supremacy. In a pre-rally statement, Najib said (NST 1987i):

> We want the rally to state loud and clear that warning after warning from the UMNO Youth have fallen on deaf ears and to show the strength and firmness of our resolve not to allow the honour of UMNO and the Malays to be toyed with by any group.

The mass rally invoked violent memories of the May 13 riots with intimidating and inflammatory slogans such as "May 13 Has Begun", "Oct 17 = Second May 13", "Take a shower of Chinese blood".[71]

[70] Najib became permanent chief of the UMNO Youth in 1988.
[71] These slogans were seen in KiniTV (2017).

The Role of UMNO Youth: Aggravating the Ethnic Tension

In this section, I investigate the UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation. I argue that it unnecessarily worsened the tension, thus creating the pretext for state repression. Without the heightened racial tension that regime critics persistently labelled "contrived" and "orchestrated", the UMNO regime would have lacked the basis to justify the suppression of political dissent as a neutral state intervention to safeguard national security. Whether Operation Lalang was a foresighted government response to maintain social order or a smokescreen to suppress political dissent, the UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation in response to protests by the Chinese community produced the perfect storm for the Malaysian government to rationalise its repression. Central to the UMNO Youth's response was the unwarranted nature of the counter-mobilisation; that is the counter-mobilisation was rendered inevitable when it should not have been. The following section examines the unwarranted nature of UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation—persisting with counter-mobilisation despite the fact that the Chinese community had decided to call off its protest; and picking a fight with the MCA despite the party's commitment to an amicable resolution to the tension.

Evidence suggests that the UMNO Youth rally was not inevitable. For one, the situation had improved significantly before the rally. The turning point came when the planned boycott was called off by the joint action committee. The change of strategy was driven by the establishment of a cabinet committee headed by Anwar to resolve the issue. The committee included Primary Industries Minister Lim Keng Yaik from the Gerakan; Labour Minister Lee Kim Sai from the MCA whom Najib admonished; as well as Najib himself as the Youth and Sports Minister. The joint action committee had reached an agreement on cancelling the boycott after the MCA and Gerakan representatives assured that the two ministers from their

respective parties would assume "full responsibility" if the committee failed to come up with a resolution by 31 December (NST 1987k).[72]

The calling off of the boycott, however, was not reciprocated by the UMNO Youth. Although Najib welcomed the joint action committee's decision, calling it a "positive attitude", he insisted that the mass rally would proceed as planned to voice its dissatisfaction with the MCA cooperating with the opposition DAP (NST 1987l). Najib insisted on the rally despite pleas from political parties and civil society organisations to call it off. For example, chief of the MCA Youth criticised that "as a member of the committee, Datuk Seri Najib should by right concentrate on his responsibility and play a positive role in solving the problem. Instead of working hand in hand with his colleagues in the committee to settle the matter amicably, Datuk Seri Najib chooses to carry on with the rally" (NST 1987o). A civil society actor commented that "[i]t would seem incongruous if Datuk Seri Najib allows the rally to go on when he has been appointed to the special committee which has been formed to resolve the issue" (NST 1987m). The DAP meanwhile appealed to UMNO deputy president Ghafar Baba to stop the UMNO Youth protest as it could "undermine peace and unity in Malaysia" (NST 1987q).

In hindsight, the racial tension could have been eased had the UMNO Youth acted differently. Relative to the Chinese community's original plan of upscaling their protest if the boycott was unsuccessful in reversing the ministry's decision, what actually happened represented a move in the right direction in terms of averting a destabilising mobilisation process and mending the relationship between the government and the Chinese community.

[72] Citing the last-minute change and the importance of commitment, many state-level organisers and parents defied the decision and went ahead with the boycott. Turnout was poor on the first day, but there was a "big improvement" at most schools the following day after community leaders got their message through to parents (NST 1987p).

Had Najib chosen to produce and implement a policy solution via his role in the cabinet committee, it was very likely that there would have been an amicable end to the Chinese schools issue.

Having persisted with the counter-rally, the UMNO Youth zoned in on attacking the MCA, allegedly for siding with the opposition party against the BN-led government. But the evidence pointed to a different story. Although the MCA inevitably shared the stage with the opposition DAP in the protest against the government, the party demonstrated its commitment to resolve the issue peacefully and compete with the opposition party for the Chinese votes. The MCA's reconciliatory approach aligned more with the so-called BN spirit than with the DAP's hard-line tactic. In this regard, the MCA and the DAP were actually competing rather than cooperating. Regaining the Chinese electorate's trust after the electoral setback, if achieved, would only bolster the BN's electoral prospects. This makes the UMNO Youth's charge against the MCA, hence the reason for organising the mass rally, flimsy.

The UMNO Youth's protest against the MCA was based on familiar ground: Malay supremacy was under threat from the Chinese. In his speech to the crowd during the rally, Najib singled out MCA vice president Lee Kim Sai who was also Labour Minister for asking Anwar to resign over the Chinese schools issue. He appealed to the government to sack him from the cabinet and asked the MCA to leave the BN if they disagreed with the government's policy. Najib equated Kim Sai and the MCA's actions to "sins" that had to be "punished." He reprimanded that (NST 1987r):

> Datuk Lee's and the MCA's actions are direct threats to the political power of UMNO and Malays. Hence, we demand that the top leadership react firmly against these political leaders whose racial chauvinism threatens harmony in this country.

Did the UMNO Youth have a strong case against the MCA, one which would have rendered the protest necessary? Again, evidence suggests that the UMNO Youth rally was not

inevitable. From a strategic perspective, the MCA's deepening of its representation of Chinese interests was understandable, or even necessary, given its poor performance in the 1986 general election. Compared to the previous elections, the MCA's number of seats in the Dewan Rakyat (the lower house of parliament) was reduced to 17, down from 24. Indeed, it was the only party within the BN that saw its popularity plummet. By contrast, the opposition DAP significantly improved its popularity among the Chinese voters, with its number of seats increasing more than three-fold from six in the previous elections to 19, outnumbering the MCA (see Table 6).

Table 6: The 1982 and 1986 General Election Results, Peninsular Malaysia

Political Party	**1982**	**1986**
	Seats Won	**Seats Won**
UMNO	70	83
HAMIM	-	1
MCA	24	17
MIC	4	6
Gerakan	5	5
Barisan Nasional	***104***	***112***
PAS	5	1
DAP	6	19
Total Opposition	***11***	***20***

Source: Rachagan (1987).

The Chinese schools issue represented a good opportunity for the MCA to reassert itself as the champion of the Chinese population, regain their trust, and restore the party's credibility. Had the MCA (and the Gerankan) not participated in the protest on behalf of the Chinese community, it would have paved the way for the DAP to claim the credit as the sole Chinese political party willing to stand up against the Malay-dominated government to protect Chinese interests and reap the benefits of government concessions. The political mileage that the DAP

could have accumulated in this scenario would have very likely dealt a blow to the MCA's attempt to regain lost ground in the next general elections.

The UMNO Youth's feud with the MCA was also unpersuasive considering the party had largely been a moderate force in the protest. Throughout the controversy, the party had stated that the issue would be settled through a "Barisan mechanism", that is, negotiation, rather than confrontation, between the BN parties. The MCA's commitment to this approach was reflective of the party distancing itself from the DAP. It did so by shunning the DAP's proposal to form an alliance between the three Chinese parties—DAP, MCA and Gerankan—to settle the controversy, the so-called "Three-Lim Council" (NST 1987b).[73]

Despite scepticism from other protesting Chinese associations, the MCA reiterated that the Barisan mechanism could resolve the problem more effectively. The MCA president stated that "[a]ny meeting of the three leaders could arouse unnecessary suspicion among other Barisan Nasional component parties" (NST 1987f). The party's moderation was also reflected in the fact that it was more willing, compared to other parties in the joint action committee, to give the ministry more time to solve the issue. Although the joint action committee resolved to set 15 October as the deadline for the ministry to settle the problem, the MCA affirmed that it could wait if there was a guarantee that the problem could be solved by 31 December, which was the timeline preferred by the ministry. According to the party's deputy secretary general, this was to demonstrate that "the Chinese, and the MCA in particular, were not unreasonable" (NST 1987g).

Finally, it should be noted that the MCA was the only political party within the joint action committee in favour of calling off the boycott. Unsurprisingly, the DAP, which eventually left the committee after the final decision, was most strongly opposed to calling off the boycott. Joining the party were the Gerakan (also in the BN) and the United Chinese School

[73] The name referring to the Chinese family name shared by the presidents of the three parties.

Teachers' Association. Joining the MCA in supporting calling off the boycott were the United Chinese School Committees' Association and the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall. The MCA was "vehemently opposed" to persisting with the boycott once the cabinet committee had been set up. The party reasoned that the joint action committee "must show goodwill and faith in the five-man Cabinet committee …" To break the deadlock, the group supporting the call-off went as far as threatening that "they would go ahead and issue a statement leaving out those opposed to them" (NST 1987n).

To summarise, the pressure to rescue their popularity dip had compelled the MCA to share the stage with the opposition party as the champion of Chinese interests. Yet unlike the opposition party, its goals were to work out an amicable settlement for the Chinese community and the government in which it was a junior partner and to restore its credibility among the Chinese electorate after poor election results. Therefore, the MCA's role in the protest should have been seen as *competing* rather than *colluding* with the DAP. The racial tension that the Malaysian government eventually used to justify repression could have been forestalled had the UMNO Youth taken into consideration this aspect of the MCA's involvement in the Chinese schools issue.

Case 3: Bersih and the Limits of State Mobilisation

The previous cases demonstrated the utility of successful state mobilisation for the authoritarian regime in Malaysia. The UMNO Youth's mobilisation in 1969 triggered devastating racial violence that caused grave physical harm to Chinese opposition supporters. Its mobilisation in 1987 amid discord between the Chinese community and the government established the racial pretext for the activation of state repression based on the de-jure legitimate reason of maintaining national security. The violence of the UMNO Youth's mobilisation as epitomised by the 1969 riots does not only physically endanger protestors, it

also emotionally haunts bystanders. It had been reproduced by UMNO to respond to challenges to its governance. For instance, when issues related to the government's pro-Malay economic policy and the role of Islamic laws were questioned by critics, an UMNO leader could be heard making an intimidating remark in the 2006 UMNO general assembly:

> Malay rights cannot be challenged, otherwise the Malays will run amok and the May 13 riots will happen all over again…We are willing to risk lives and bath in blood to defend our race and religion. Don't play with fire. If they mess with our rights, we will mess with theirs (Kuppusamy 2006).

Although downplayed by UMNO, these kinds of remarks were clearly unsettling for the non-Malay community. For instance, one individual reacted: "I got the message…it simply means we non-Muslims cannot question the special status of Islam and Malays. If we do, it will be met with violence." Another individual asked sarcastically: "Is it time to pack our bags again" (Kuppusamy 2006). Alluding to how widespread the state of fear is, a feature article by the English newspaper *The Star* commented that "[just] the mention of 'May 13' invokes shudders and nervous glances." Opposition politicians agreed with the psychological scar caused by the riots saying that "In Malaysia, we grow up and live in a culture of fear in the shadow of May 13" (The Star 2008).

When it comes to election celebrations, the bitter experience of May 13 remained influential in people's behaviour. A good example of how the riots demotivated opposition supporters from getting to the streets is the case of the 2008 general elections, which had an "uncanny resemblance" to the 1969 elections (The Star 2008). It was another failure by the ruling coalition to win a two-thirds majority in the lower house, the first time since the eventful 1969 elections. The party likewise lost ground at the state level. For the opposition, it was a performance worthy of celebration, but because of the spectre of May 13, supporters "were urged not to go out and celebrate, but rather to maintain a low profile." The older generation

remained wary of the reoccurrence of May 13, advising young people to "stay home" (The Star 2008).

The UMNO regime's collapse in recent times provides a rare window of opportunity to look into the factors that might have loosened the grip of violence and fear on opposition mobilisation. The key to understanding the success or failure of state mobilisation via the UMNO Youth, I argue, lies in the shifting nature of the threat to UMNO's dominance. This threat has evolved from one that was dominated by the Chinese, who were perceived by the Malays as encroaching upon their racial supremacy, to one that was characterised by a shared discontent over the regime's legitimacy.

The emergence of a younger generation lacking the experience and memory of the traumatic event, the rise of alternative political participation platforms, and UMNO's internal friction contributed to transforming the characteristics of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation. Political movements formed by opposition parties and civil society organisations had been campaigning on broad-based issues such as electoral reform and corruption reduction with participation from both Malays and non-Malays. As a consequence, state mobilisation was less successful in exploiting the ethnic tension that had been its hallmark in the two previous cases.

In both the 1969 and 1987 events, the UMNO Youth targeted a specific group of 'outsiders'—ethnic Chinese, and used the preservation of Malay supremacy as the pull to draw participation. However, this 'us-versus-them' principle of mobilisation has been less effective in containing anti-government protests and aggravating opposition threats in recent times. This is in large part due to the emergence of a broad-based, cross-ethnic reformist movement—the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections, or Bersih—which presented an insurmountable obstacle for the UMNO Youth to weaponise racial sentiment for regime maintenance. The spectre of the May 13 incident may have haunted the country for decades, but its menacing power faded

as time passed and society changed. The remainder of this section explores how the UMNO Youth failed to replicate past success in the repression of this new wave of social mobilisation.

The Rise of Bersih

The UMNO's weakening domination of the electoral arena after Mahathir stepped down in 2003 opened the door for political mobilisation by those opposed to the government. Most prominent was Bersih, a reformist movement championing electoral reforms, mainly through street rallies. Its emergence posed an unprecedented challenge to the UMNO Youth and the new leadership of the regime more broadly. This was mainly through Bersih's ability to cross the ethnic divide and mobilise Malaysia's Malay and Chinese citizens to hold the government to account. This united social front upended the communal rivalry that the UMNO Youth historically depended upon to organise pro-government mobilisation.

Bersih was born out of talks between the People's Justice Party (PKR) led by Anwar Ibrahim, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)—the three parties that comprised the PR. When Bersih was formally launched in November 2006, it was a coalition made up of five opposition parties, twenty-four civil society organisations, and a labour union—the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (Rodan 2018, 188; Chong 2018, 116). Bersih began street demonstrations for electoral reform in 2007 with some of the largest participant turnouts in Malaysian history. Demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur on 10 November attracted an estimated 40,000 protestors, despite the government declaring the demonstration an "illegal gathering" and threatening to arrest those who participated (Lee 2008, 198).

Relaunched as Bersih 2.0 in April 2010 with a lesser role from political parties, the movement broadened to incorporate more than 60 secular, religious, and ethnic civil society organisations working in the areas of good governance, the environment, women's empowerment, education, welfare, and so forth (Rodan 2018, 199). The movement's second mass street mobilisation was held on 9 July 2010 with an estimated 50,000 participants (Keng

2011). Subsequent mass demonstrations were held in April 2012 (known as the Bersih 3 Rally), August 2015 (known as the Bersih 4 Rally), and November 2016 (known as the Bersih 5 Rally).

The Fall of Counter-Mobilisation

The UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation began in response to the Bersih 2 rally planned for 9 July 2011. Its strategy was to hold a march on the same day as the Bersih 2 Rally. The decision, however, appeared to be made without the support of the party. Home Minister Hishammuddhin Hussein, who was UMNO vice president and former UMNO Youth chief, warned against the counter-rally, stressing that "the UMNO Youth will have to face whatever consequences of their actions" (The Star 2011). Despite the prospect of receiving no favouritism from police action, the UMNO Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddih was adamant that the rally would go ahead. In response to his predecessor's warning, Khairy said:

> My Pemuda and I are ready to face whatever consequences. This is a new Malaysia. We have a right to assembly guaranteed by the constitution. The UMNO Youth will be marching on 9 July. And that's that (Teoh 2011).

Also active in the counter-mobilisation were government-linked organisations such as the martial arts organisation, the National Silat Federation, and the Malay rights organisation Perkasa who vowed to "go to war" with Bersih. The worst fears, however, were averted when the Bersih rally ended without any clash with pro-government demonstrators. This was due to an underwhelming show of counter-mobilisation on the part of UMNO Youth and others. The planned Perkasa rally of 15,000 was called off after having failed to obtain a police permit. It was reported that the group's vocal leader chose to stay at home and only a few dozen of its supporters showed up "stroll[ing]" around (Razak 2011b; Noor 2011). Similarly, the UMNO Youth rally was only able to mobilise around 500 people. The group dispersed "peacefully" after their march was blocked by the police (Lee 2011).

The failure of counter-mobilisation can be explained by the qualitative distinction of the Bersih movement. Unlike ethnic-focused mobilisation in the past, Bersih gained its support from both the non-Malay and Malay communities. Such broad-based support deprived the UMNO Youth of an *ethnic* frame that it could deploy and mobilise support for. Unable to frame the Bersih protest as a Chinese attempt to usurp political power from the Malays, its rhetoric against Bersih was merely *logical*, counter-arguing that "[i]f the Election Commission is not clean and fair, how could they have won five states and deny BN a two-thirds majority?" (Lee 2011).

Although the poor turnout for counter-mobilisation could also be due to UMNO's restraint in mobilising the full force of its supporters,[74] Bersih's Malay support base was clear. In the three rallies in 2007, 2010, and 2012, more than half of the participants were Malay (Rodan 2018, 205–6). Malay participation in Bersih was so strong that the government had to launch its own campaign across mosques and campuses to stem the tide. Anti-Bersih rhetoric was infused in Islamic sermons, citing the rally as "haram (forbidden) as it promoted the wants of individuals at the peril of society" (Razak 2011a). As a result, the government warned: "Muslims who love their religion, race and the nation are urged not to participate in this rally, which can destruct the religion and peace of this country...don't ever be involved in this demonstration called Bersih." The country's top university, the University of Malaya, also warned its students against participating in Bersih or they would face disciplinary actions (ibid).

Bersih's Malay support base originated from two sources. The first source was the spontaneous organisation of the urban Malaysian population. The main impetus was the general discontent towards the government over the re-arrest of Anwar who was charged with sodomy,

[74] For example, Najib claimed that UMNO was capable of mobilising three million supporters to counter Bersih had it wanted (Malaysiakini 2011b). Instead, he called on the party's "silent majority" to take to social media to voice their views (Sipalan 2011).

and the rising living costs experienced by *all* ethnicities (Rodan 2018, 198, 200). The imposition of the unpopular six per cent goods and services tax in 2015, in particular, enraged UMNO's Malay constituents who had developed a dependence on the government's policy of favouritism (Lemière 2018, 119). Bersih also made the strategic move to get its message out through social media, enabling it to gain participation that crossed "the gamut of social divides" (Weiss 2013, 601). Dubbed the "Facebook generation", Bersih was able to appeal to young, first-time Malaysian protestors (Razak 2011b).

The second source of Bersih's Malay support was political parties. Most significant was the PAS whose organisational strength was crucial for mobilising rural Malays. The PAS had the incentive to mobilise its supporters to advance Bersih's cause in the hope of drawing away Malay voters from UMNO. Indeed, PAS was so important for Bersih's Malay support base that when the party refused to mobilise for Bersih following the collapse of the PR coalition, Bersih's fourth rally on 29-30 August 2015 was overwhelmingly dominated by Chinese protestors, with Malay protestors making up less than a fifth of the total, compared with more than half in previous rallies (Rodan 2018, 205). The loss of the PAS's supporters was later offset to a certain degree by supporters from the National Trust Party (Amanah) founded by former PAS leaders, as well as the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (PPBM or Bersatu). Bersatu was founded in 2016 by Mahathir Mohamad and former deputy prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin, following their resignation from UMNO over their criticism of Najib's corruption scandal (Lemière 2018, 119; Rodan 2018, 209). As a result, Bersih's fifth rally in 2016, the last before the BN's electoral defeat in 2018, saw an increase in Malay participation, although the proportion never reached the previous levels (Malaysiakini 2019).

The domination of Chinese protestors in the Bersih 4 Rally gave the regime the opportunity to revive counter-mobilisation with racial rhetoric. Hardliner UMNO leaders and supporters were quick to portray the Bersih 4 rally as a DAP-led Chinese plot to usurp Malays'

political dominance (Rodan 2018, 206). A pro-government protest leader claimed that "90 per cent of those who turned up for the Bersih 4 rally were Chinese DAP…The other 10 per cent of other races is only a small amount whose thoughts have been brainwashed by the opposition" (Kumar 2015). In response, a "Red Shirt"[75] rally—in contrast to Bersih's Yellow Shirt[76] protestors—with an estimated 30,000 Malay protestors was held on 16 September 2015 purportedly to preserve "Malay dignity" (Murdoch 2015). The risk of violence increased after it was reported that Red Shirt protestors would be training with machetes and swords to counter Bersih protestors (Yahoo News 2015).

The UMNO Youth participated in, but did not lead, the rally. The major mobilising forces were the National Silat Federation and UMNO division chief Jamal Yunos who was a staunch Najib loyalist (Teoh 2015; Free Malaysia Today 2015). The counter-demonstration was endorsed by Najib, but it did not receive support from prominent Malay organisations such Perkasa, and UMNO elders such as Razaleigh Hamzah and Mahathir Mohamad (Teoh 2015; Malaysiakini 2015). Razaleigh countered that "[y]ou have got the government that is headed by a Malay, state governments headed by Malays...the civil service is mostly Malays, the army is mostly Malays and we also have Malay rulers. I don't know where the threat is coming from" (Murdoch 2015). Meanwhile, Mahathir, who had been urging Najib to step down, threw his support behind Bersih by briefly appearing at its rally, and was adamant that Bersih's demonstration "isn't a question about race, it is about overthrowing the government" (Kamarulzaman 2015). Malay participants in the Bersih 4 rally themselves disputed the depiction of Chinese dominance, claiming the true ratio was "50-50" (Zahiid and Lin 2015).

This evidence shows that the momentum of UMNO's counter-mobilisation was lost when the threat it intended to counter lacked an ethnic dimension that could be readily framed

[75] Red is UMNO's representative colour.
[76] As in Thailand, yellow signifies the monarchy, or monarchical support, although like Thailand, its significance in Malaysia is contested.

along the line of 'us-versus-them' as in the previous two cases. The cross-ethnic character of Bersih was successful in denying the UMNO Youth and other pro-regime organisations the ideological resources to construct the political movement as a threat to Malay domination. Failure on this front rendered the threat of communal violence less credible because a resurrection of a May 13-style violence likely saw Malays confronting Malays. Should this scenario materialise, it would undermine the Malay unity that counter-mobilisation forces sought to demonstrate and preserve. Lacking the ability to stir ethnic tensions, state mobilisation lost its role in this attempt to help the regime justify state repression on racial grounds.

Conclusion

This chapter examined three cases of opposition mobilisation and counter-mobilisation in Malaysia to illustrate the repressive function of the UMNO Youth. The analysis focused on how the UMNO Youth contained opposition mobilisation and aggravated ethnic tension to create the pretext for state repression.

It was found that the UMNO Youth's mobilisation inflicted harm on anti-government protestors and the resultant racial riots established the UMNO Youth's credentials for wielding violence when there was a perceived challenge to Malay supremacy, in particular after the ruling coalition experienced electoral setbacks. The fear generated by the violence served as a powerful restraint on the mobilisation of future opposition. Furthermore, the UMNO Youth used counter-mobilisation to escalate racial tension that was exploited by the government to justify repression. These observations demonstrate the threat origins and repressive function of state mobilisation.

However, the challenge of the UMNO Youth in countering Bersih's demand for institutional reform and Najib's resignation falsified the hypothesis that state mobilisation is

effective in overcoming threats. The nature of the threat facing the UMNO regime and the fact that the regime broke down made this assessment possible, complementing the indeterminate mobilisation outcomes of the UYFC and government-aligned unions in Cambodia. I will discuss this issue in more detail in chapter 8.

Through the case of the UMNO Youth, this chapter contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, repression is the reactive form of state mobilisation that has received the most attention in the literature. This chapter added nuance to the function of state mobilisation in buttressing authoritarian rule by examining the long-term consequence of violence: the lingering fear of the reoccurrence of violence when anti-government mobilisation emerges. Second, I analysed how state mobilisation makes systemic state repression justifiable. Based on the experience of former Soviet states, Beissinger (2020, 148) raised the point that "violent clashes between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary civilians can be used to justify emergency rule and the imposition of political order, legitimating harsher and more systematic government repression." This chapter built on this idea by detailing how state mobilisation fuels ethnic tension in Malaysia to create the pretext for state repression. Finally, this chapter suggests that the type of social mobilisation is an explanatory factor for the success and failure of state mobilisation. When social mobilisation is led and participated by the minority ethnic group, state mobilisation is more likely to exploit the majority ethnic group's anxiety to protect its privilege to mobilise support and wield violence. On the other hand, state mobilisation is likely to lose momentum when social mobilisation is a result of cross-ethnic cooperation between the minority and majority, unified by a shared grievance against the government.

Part IV: Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 8: Findings and Extensions

This dissertation has sought to explain why state mobilisation persists in authoritarian regimes. Inspired by previous research on authoritarian institutions, I adopted a structuralist approach to addressing this puzzle by investigating what drives state mobilisation, what forms it takes, and to what extent state mobilisation serves the regime's interests as intended. These aspects correspond to three hypotheses: 1) state mobilisation is driven by threats to regime survival, 2) these threats have different characteristics which in turn shape the type of state mobilisation, resulting in three major types: legitimation, cooptation, and repression, and 3) state mobilisation is effective in helping authoritarian regimes overcome threats. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the key findings from my empirical analysis of state mobilisation in Cambodia and Malaysia to validate the hypotheses. The discussion is structured by three points: the threat origin of state mobilisation; the regime stabilisation functions of state mobilisation; and the extent to which state mobilisation helps authoritarian regimes overcome threats. Following the summary, I extend my argument to additional cases in Southeast Asia to test its theoretical relevance.

The Threat Origins of State Mobilisation

This dissertation hypothesised that state mobilisation is driven by threats to regime survival. The case studies presented a number of observations that support this hypothesis. In the case of Cambodia, the survival of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) regime during the 1980s was threatened by a rebel group, the resistance, stationed at the Cambodia-Thailand border who sought to overthrow the regime through armed struggle. Surviving this crisis required the CPP to have a military superiority over the resistance and maintain social stability to prevent people from defecting to the group. This crisis led the regime to establish state mobilisation as a

survival strategy. First, state mobilisation in the form of forced labour was deployed to construct the strategic infrastructure to strengthen the regime's offensive capacity. Second, state mobilisation in the form of agricultural collectivisation was employed to disincentivise civilians from defecting to the resistance and indoctrinate defectors from the resistance into shifting loyalty to the regime. Third, state mobilisation was tasked to perform crucial social functions to mobilise support for the regime.

In more recent times, the growing opposition orientation of the younger population and the potential risk of mass uprisings they pose motivated the CPP to reactivate youth mobilisation conducted by its youth organisation, the Union Youth Federations of Cambodia (UYFC). This is a low-intensity threat that differs from previous threats. The attention to this threat was brought about by local leaders' observation of youth's unpredictable political preference since at least 2003 and later heightened by the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party's (CNRP) popularity among the younger urban electorate who are not as vulnerable as the older rural electorate to the ruling CPP's vote mobilisation tactics. State mobilisation conducted by the UYFC, therefore, is a proactive strategy to help the regime keep the younger population's desire for political change from exploding into an anti-government mass uprising as exemplified by the recent Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa.

In the case of Malaysia, the 1969 general elections in which the ruling coalition, the Alliance, received a poor result led to a racially charged opposition rally. The opposition's jubilant street parades invoked a counter-rally from the UMNO Youth, the youth wing of the United Malays National Organisations (UMNO), to defend the party and ethnic Malays from perceived humiliation by ethnic Chinese supporters of the opposition parties. Renewed ethnic tension and intra-UMNO conflict in the late 1980s led the UMNO Youth to organise a mass rally to reiterate the unquestionable political supremacy of the Malays and avow its determination to defend the status quo. In more recent times, the cross-ethnic social movement,

Bersih, and its relentless street campaigns for institutional reforms sparked a counter-demonstration from the UMNO Youth and other pro-UMNO organisations.

These observations suggest that authoritarian regimes sanction state mobilisation when they need a tool to deal with threats to their survival. The effectiveness of state mobilisation in response to previous threats provides the critical incentives for authoritarian regimes to continue selecting it as the survival strategy in the contemporary era.

The Regime Stabilisation Functions of State Mobilisation

Having established the threat origins of state mobilisation, I proceeded to classify the forms of mobilisation once deployed. As the stability of authoritarian regimes commonly rests on how effective they are at legitimation, cooptation and repression, the value of state mobilisation to the regime, then, should manifest in how well it supports the execution of these strategies. This led to my second hypothesis that state mobilisation performs three regime stabilisation functions: legitimation, cooptation, and repression. To test this hypothesis, my empirical analysis focused on six observable indicators of these functions: idealisation and signalling for legitimation; communication and distribution for cooptation; and containment and aggravation for repression.

State Mobilisation in Cambodia

In Cambodia, state mobilisation performs legitimating and cooptative functions. Legitimation-driven mobilisation has been organised by the UYFC from 2013 onwards. The UYFC's legitimating function can be observed from how it has idealised and signalled the regime's legitimacy.

Idealisation refers to the deepening of the regime's appeal to citizens through the strategic infusion of political ideas. The UYFC's idealisation of the regime was conducted

through two major projects—40km into History and Angkor Sankranta. The former was planned to glorify the party leadership's (prime minister Hun Sen in particular) selfless defection from the Khmer Rouge regime in the pursuit of liberating the country from the regime's genocidal rule. Angkor Sankranta was aimed at glorifying the party's success in post-conflict peace building and socioeconomic development—both of which were supposedly contingent on the party's continued rule. Signalling means to render the regime legitimate by appearing strong. Legitimation through signalling strength is not meant to generate affection towards the regime, but to generate compliance. The UYFC's role in this regard has been to magnify the party's cohesion despite its history of factionalism.

The second function of state mobilisation in Cambodia was cooptation as performed by the National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia (NACC) among other groups. These government-aligned (GA) labour unions' cooptative function can be observed in how it has communicated government policies and distributed material benefits to workers in the garment industry.

Communication is the rhetorical component of cooptation. This mechanism entails broadcasting government policies and development outcomes to workers through regular interaction between party agents and workers. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of the slide in electoral support and workers-led mass protest, it has become clear that the persuasive power of political narratives needs to be complemented by material distribution. Consistent with the broad historical pattern of crisis breeding social reform (Kuhonta 2011), the CPP-led government has enacted substantive policy concessions targeting workers in the garment industry, most significantly minimum wage hikes and the introduction of welfare schemes. GA unions have facilitated this process by participating in the state-led minimum wage determination process and cooperating with the UYFC to deliver free healthcare services to workers and their families.

In sum, the activities of the UYFC and NACC demonstrate adequately that these organisations have been deployed with a clear intention to renew the ways the ruling party's legitimacy is communicated and perceived, and to mobilise support or compliance from workers in the garment industry. Intention, however, is not the same as effect. As will be explained later, the nature of the low-intensity threat makes assessing the success of state mobilisation impossible.

State Mobilisation in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the function of state mobilisation was repression as exemplified by the actions of the UMNO Youth. The UMNO Youth's repressive function can be observed from how it contained opposition activity and aggravated ethnic tension to help justify state repression.

Containment refers to the suppression and deterrence of anti-government mobilisation. Through acts of violence, pro-government supporters inflict harm on anti-government supporters, which is exemplified by the case of the 1969 racial riots when radical elements in the UMNO Youth clashed with ethnic Chinese supporters of the opposition party to retaliate against their provocation, perceived by the UMNO Youth as ethnically humiliating. In more recent times, the UMNO Youth and other pro-government organisations held counterdemonstrations with violent intent in response to street mobilisation by Bersih, a social movement campaigning for institutional reforms.

Aggravation entails worsening a situation to create a pretext for state repression. The UMNO Youth applied this tactic in the late 1980s when the government was under pressure from the Chinese community's threat to boycott Chinese schools over the Ministry of Education's teacher recruitment policy and when UMNO was experiencing factional fighting. The UMNO Youth held a racially charged counter-rally against the Chinse community's planned protest. The ethnic tension stirred up by the UMNO Youth led the government to

invoke the *Internal Security Act* to arrest hundreds of people, citing the need to prevent the ethnic tension from spiralling into an ethnic riot.

Unlike the UYFC and GA unions in Cambodia, the significance of the UMNO Youth's repression-driven mobilisation for the UMNO regime goes beyond intention. I have noted above that the actual benefits of legitimation-driven and cooptation-driven mobilisation for the CPP regime cannot be ascertained. But the nature of high-intensity threats in Malaysia makes assessing this aspect of the UMNO Youth's mobilisation possible, the subject to which I now turn.

State Mobilisation and Threat Survival

Is state mobilisation successful at averting threats to regime survival as intended? The case studies suggest that the results are mixed. In the case of Cambodia, evidence shows that state mobilisation manned by forced labour in the 1980s is a successful example of state mobilisation. The K5 plan as it was known was applauded by the regime leadership for strengthening the regime's offensive capacity. "[B]etter access to the border provided by new and upgraded roads which had been built as part of the K5 Plan" (Slocomb 2001, 202) was said to be a critical factor for a successful attack on the insurgency forces. The military operation eventually eliminated the resistance's bases on Cambodian soil.

State mobilisation in the same period such as socialisation and agricultural collectivisation which were aimed to develop identification with the regime and prevent defection to the insurgency force cannot be considered successful because there is no evidence suggesting that the target population's political tendency was positively influenced by the deployment of these state mobilisation strategies.

The same conclusion applies to state mobilisation by the UYFC and the NACC in the contemporary era, which was the main focus of the Cambodia case study. The UYFC's

legitimating function and the NACC's cooptative function as outlined in the sections above are merely the intentions behind state mobilisation, and intention does not translate into effect. While the empirical analysis can establish that state mobilisation is tasked to perform legitimation and cooptation in response to political threats, it cannot infer the success of these efforts.

There are three reasons for the case of the UYFC. First, research to validate the level of authoritarian legitimacy is relatively limited because measuring legitimacy in the autocratic context is a notoriously challenging enterprise. For one, citizens in an autocracy are unlikely to give honest answers to sensitive political questions. Preference falsification is widespread due to fear or self-censorship (Kuran 1989; Guriev and Treisman 2020). Even if this is not the case, legitimacy may hold a very different meaning for citizens in authoritarian regimes compared to those in a democracy (Nathan 2020, 160). So, what is legitimate for citizens in an autocracy might be inadequate or irrelevant for citizens in a democracy and vice versa. Thus, scholars have been more productive in discerning legitimation, because while legitimacy is an attribute, legitimation is an empirically observable process (Gerschewski 2018b, 655).

Second, while an influx of young people joining the UYFC without elaborate recruitment is perhaps one proxy indicator of the success of its mobilisation, opposition politicians and civil society activists cast doubt on how much success the UYFC can achieve. For example, an opposition politician mentioned that the UYFC's mobilisation is attractive to youth who possess no prior experience of political socialisation through civil society and party activism. They are more likely to identify with the party or the national causes it promotes due to the opportunities to engage in various UYFC activities and the benefits these opportunities offer. He believed that the same benefits would not tempt youth supporters of opposition parties. To them, if they joined the UYFC, it would be like joining the CPP. For this reason, he claims that the new source of support for the party can only come from youth without exposure

to politics.[77] Other civil society activists raise the idea that the CPP does not expect concrete gains from the UYFC's mobilisation in the short term. One activist expressed the view that even without an explicit display of support, the CPP can claim success if the UYFC's mobilisation succeeds in forestalling the emergence of a consolidated anti-regime youth movement.[78] In other words, if support is not immediately achievable, the ruling party lowers the bar and settles for compliance, that is the restraint from protesting the government. Another activist stresses the CPP's uncertainty of the level of support it can generate from the UYFC's mobilisation, reasoning that "If the UYFC was strong, the CNRP wouldn't have been dissolved."[79]

Third, the challenge of assessing the effectiveness of state mobilisation in the context of Cambodia concerns the nature of the threat in question. To recap, the CPP regime has entered a period when it has to deal with a low-intensity threat. The CNRP's rise and the political activism it spawned presented a massive challenge to the regime. Yet ruthless repression by the government successfully turned this crisis into a less threatening (for now) situation. This situation is characterised by a growing younger population who have been inspired by the CNRP's political vision, but somehow have not taken to the streets in large numbers to demand a government/regime change as in other countries that have experienced democratic revolutions. Yet the CPP can never be certain that this would not happen in the future when the right conditions emerge. The unpredictable evolution of the situation will keep the ruling party alert, and this explains the deployment of proactive state mobilisation in the form of the UYFC's legitimation and the NACC's cooptation to pre-empt the threat. However, its effect in stopping a low-intensity threat from exploding into a more severe threat or resolving the threat altogether is unknown. For example, questions may be posed: if young people are not revolting,

[77] Interview with OP2, 28 December 2019, Phnom Penh.
[78] Interview with CS3, 22 December 2019, Phnom Penh.
[79] Interview with CS1, 17 December 2019, Phnom Penh.

is it because they have been persuaded by the UYFC's idealisation and signalling? Can the CPP's level of support from state mobilisation be measured and trusted when there is not a strong contender like the CNRP in multiparty elections in which the CPP's popularity will be tested? The answer to these questions is negative.

The same logic applies to cooptation-driven mobilisation by the NACC. A relatively peaceful scene characterised by a dramatic fall in labour strikes since the 2013 elections presents an interesting outcome. It might be tempting to associate the outcome with cooptation, but at best it is only partially true. It might be true because the monthly minimum wage has steadily increased: by 2018 the minimum wage of $170 per month finally surpassed the $160 per month that workers risked their lives to demand in the 2013-2014 mass protest. By 2021, the figure has reached $192. Even when garment factories' profit was considerably impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the minimum wages were still being raised although just slightly. The government's policy concession should give workers the confidence that their material interests can be advanced without taking to the streets. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that cooptation explains the whole picture. It has to be recalled that in providing more material benefits, the CPP government at the same time legislated more restrictions on labour organising, making it tougher to launch protests. Therefore, it is also likely that the decrease in worker unrest is due to increased repression.

In sum, the case of Cambodia leaves many questions related to the effectiveness of state mobilisation unanswered. This conundrum mainly has to do with the nature of the threat in Cambodia. A threat is considered low-intensity precisely because it is challenging to come to a conclusion about its exact magnitude or its eventual manifestation. It may evolve into a high-intensity threat, or it may remain a low-intensity threat indefinitely. Under these conditions, an intervention like state mobilisation is done purely for pre-emptive purposes and is thus very much a *work in progress,* and we cannot conclusively determine the success of something that

has not yet been completed. Any effect of state mobilisation on the regime's capacity to overcome threats can only be theorised hypothetically.

Measuring the success of state mobilisation in Malaysia was less challenging. In contrast to a low-intensity threat which is abstract and ongoing, a high-intensity threat has a clear shape and outcome conducive to assessing the effectiveness of an intervention. The case of the UMNO Youth's mobilisation to counter crises threatening the regime's survival presented more evidence to address this question of success. Malaysia's ability to shed more light on this issue affirms the value of selecting it as a case study.

To begin with, the UMNO Youth's counter-rally in 1969 is a successful example of state mobilisation. Reacting to Chinese opposition supporters' provoking rallies, the UMNO Youth counter-mobilised to "teach the Chinese a lesson" (Means 1991, 7) and exact the "dangers of a direct challenge to UMNO" (Wilkinson 2006, 223), putting a disastrous and tragic end to the opposition parties' supposedly cheerful rallies to celebrate their satisfactory electoral performance. In the ensuing decades, this history of committing violence allowed regime actors to make credible threats of the recurrence of violence against dissidents. It also perpetuated a debilitating atmosphere of fear, demotivating people from undertaking pro-opposition political activism.

The UMNO Youth's counter-rally in 1987 is also a successful case of state mobilisation. I argued in chapter 7 that the UMNO Youth consciously added fuel to the dying flame of ethnic tension by persisting with a mass rally even after the protesting Chinese community called off their planned boycott of the Chinese schools over the Ministry of Education's teacher recruitment policy and by picking an unnecessary fight with the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), UMNO's junior partner in the ruling coalition, over its participation in the protest. The UMNO Youth considered the MCA's role in the protest as a collusion with the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) to challenge the UMNO and the Malays' political dominance.

I argued that this charge was unwarranted given that the MCA needed to reassert itself as the representative of Chinese interests following a poor performance in the 1986 general elections. In aggravating the ethnic tension, the UMNO Youth's provocative action created the pretext needed by the regime to deploy the coercive apparatus to silence its critics. Citing the need to stop the ethnic tension from worsening and thus pre-empt a 1969-style racial riot, the police invoked the draconian *Internal Security Act* to arrest and detain without trial hundreds of people, including supporters of Mahathir Mohamad's factional rivals in UMNO. The police operation, known as Operation Lalang, was widely regarded by opposition politicians and activists as a smokescreen orchestrated by Mahathir to consolidate his power in UMNO. Whatever the agenda, state mobilisation by the UMNO Youth served as the regime's strategic instrument to justify the use of force.

So far, I have discussed how state mobilisation might be effective in blunting political threats as intended by the regime. The case of Cambodia provided examples of success and indeterminate outcomes. What is still missing is how state mobilisation might fail to achieve its intended goals. This is why the case of Malaysia was valuable. The UMNO Youth's mobilisation towards the end of UMNO's rule when it lost the 2018 general elections enabled an exploratory exercise to reveal the challenges faced by state mobilisation in countering anti-government mobilisation.

Underlying the past success of the UMNO Youth's mobilisation was the communal foundation of Malaysian politics, and it was the unravelling of this very foundation that spelt the end of its success. The UMNO Youth had been able to leverage its historical identity as the defender of Malay rights to mobilise support against "outsider" protestors who threatened the political status quo. This 'us-versus-them' principle of mobilisation, however, was less effective in containing anti-government protests and aggravating racial tension in more recent

times. The main reason was the emergence of a broad-based, cross-ethnic reformist movement, the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections, or Bersih for short.

Unlike ethnic-focused mobilisation in the past, Bersih was supported by both the non-Malay and Malay communities driven by increased economic hardship and government corruption. When anti-government protests crossed the communal divide and gained the support of the majority ethnic group, the UMNO Youth was not able to frame regime-challenging mobilisation as an ethnic conflict. When a conflict is politically motivated rather than racially driven, the threat of communal violence that regime actors repeatedly make whenever the regime is challenged is less credible. This is because a resurrection of a 1969 May 13-style confrontation would see Malays clashing with Malays, which would be a backlash against the very Malay unity that the UMNO Youth and UMNO claimed to demonstrate and preserve. Without the ethnic tension or conflict that could be exploited, the UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation efforts towards the end of UMNO's rule lacked the ability to repeat their past repressive functions. Instead of confronting the minority ethnic group seeking to usurp political power, the last episode of the UMNO Youth's counter-mobilisation was more about insulating a weakening government from legitimate societal pressure and ensuring the autocrat's survival.

To summarise, this dissertation has discovered satisfactory evidence to confirm hypothesis 1 (state mobilisation is a product of political threats) and hypothesis 2 (state mobilisation performs legitimating, cooptative and repressive functions). Given the mixed outcomes of state mobilisation from this limited number of cases, I conclude that hypothesis 3 (state mobilisation is effective in helping authoritarian regimes overcome threats) requires further, more systematic testing.

State Mobilisation in Southeast Asia

To test how far my central argument can travel, I extend the empirical analysis to incorporate additional cases of authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia. Brief accounts on state mobilisation in the Philippines under Marcos, Indonesia under Suharto, Burma/Myanmar, Singapore, and Vietnam have identified the driver and patterns of state mobilisation similar to those found in Cambodia and Malaysia.

High-Intensity Threats and State Mobilisation in Military and Personalist Regimes

High-intensity threats in the forms of legitimacy deficit, communist rebellion, and a popular opposition party were present in Southeast Asia's military and personalist regimes. To begin, state mobilisation in the Philippines under President Marcos assumed a legitimating function, but it diverged from Cambodia in which legitimation was a form of proactive mobilisation in response to a low-intensity threat. State mobilisation under Marcos was aimed to overcome a high-intensity threat: a legitimacy deficit stemming from his refusal to adhere to the constitution. Marcos was elected in the presidential elections in 1965 and again in 1969. Instead of following the constitutionally mandated term limit, he declared martial law in 1972 when his second and last term as president was coming to an end and thus extended his reign. Marcos rose to power through democratic means but had to maintain it by autocratic means. Thus, the driver of state mobilisation in the Philippines was Marcos' motivation to maintain the democratic facades of his autocratic rule.

Marcos' political vehicle to legitimatise his rule after assuming dictatorial power was the Barangay Assemblies or Citizen's Assemblies. These grassroots mass organisations were formed in every *barangay* (village unit) comprising all citizens aged over 15. The *barangay* was the lowest level of local government, constituted by 100 to 500 families (Kendall 1976, 15), an administrative structure that dates back to precolonial times (Croissant and Lorenz

2018, 215). After declaring martial law, Marcos was eager to push through a new constitution to legalise his power, one that would allow him to govern by decree. It was at this time that the Citizens' Assemblies became useful as a platform for an "informal referendum." The national referendum ratified the constitution with an incredibly 95 per cent approval rate (Grossholtz 1974, 103; Turner 1990, 351). In addition to the new constitution, the Citizens' Assemblies also approved the prorogation of the national assembly and suspension of elections for seven years (Stauffer 1977, 402).

The referendum, however, was a sham. Grossholtz (1974, 104) wrote that the Commission on Elections, the agency overseeing elections, was not involved in the process. Citizens did not vote using secret ballots but by "acclamation or showing of hands." Nevertheless, Marcos heralded the vote as a form of direct democracy that empowered members of the Citizens' Assemblies. After the farcical plebiscite, Marcos announced that "the stakes for the Philippines were too high to permit a return to traditional democratic processes", and that he would "consult" directly with the people through the Citizens' Assemblies (Grossholtz 1974, 103).

Marcos would continue to deploy the Citizens' Assemblies to legitimise his rule three other times. The first was in July 1973 when voters were posed the question: "Do you want President Marcos to continue beyond 1973 and finish the reforms he has initiated under Martial Law?" The second was in February 1975, when the vote was concerned with issues related to local government and the national assembly. The final one was in October 1976, when the vote was about constitutional amendments. Unlike the initial one, secret ballots were used in these three plebiscites (Stauffer 1977, 402).

The use of mass organisations by Marcos to seek electoral legitimacy represents a distinct form of survival strategy that differs from the theorised legitimation-driven mobilisation. State mobilisation under Marcos did not involve the use of culture and

nationalism as in the case of the UYFC in Cambodia to idealise the regime or the making of an organisational structure that signals its power to gain compliance. Therefore, state mobilisations in the Philippines and Cambodia converge on their goal of seeking legitimacy but diverge on their mechanisms to achieve the goal.

Another case of state mobilisation occurring in response to a high-intensity threat appears in Indonesia under President Suharto. Having gained power four years earlier, Suharto also deployed grassroots mass organisations to dwarf a high-intensity threat in the form of communist militancy in the early days of his rule. The crisis can be traced to the critical period before Suharto's accession to the presidency. After declaring independence from the Dutch colonial rule in 1949, Indonesia under President Sukarno was politically unstable, in large part because of the conflict between the military and the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), the institutions Sukarno relied upon to run his "guided democracy". The tension eventually reached a breaking point when a military faction sympathetic to the PKI attempted a coup in 1965. But it was botched by the anti-communist faction led by then military general Suharto who retaliated with a violent crackdown on the party and its supporters. The open conflict between the military and the PKI led to Sukarno's demise and Suharto's rise.

After assuming power in 1968, Suharto had to continue his repression of remnants of the PKI to stamp out the destabilising force. Suharto's tool to eliminate the threat posed by the communists was the neighbourhood association, *rukun tetangga* (RT). Indonesia has an entrenched structure of state-sponsored local associations that dates to the short spell of Japanese occupation and persisted well into the post-Suharto era. During their occupation of Java in WWII, the Japanese reproduced their neighbourhood associations, *tonarigumi*, on the island. Members were made to monitor each other to eliminate espionage and anti-Japanese activities. Regular meetings were held to disseminate information from the colonial government and educate people on Japan's war efforts. After the end of Japanese rule, the

structure was retained and renamed *rukun tetangga*, because of its utility in mobilising people to fight the Dutch, maintaining security, and distributing living necessities (Kurasawa 2009: 61-62).

The RTs' role in Suharto's crackdown on the communists was to stop their infiltration into local communities. RT heads were instructed to monitor people moving into their neighbourhoods and demand from them letters issued by RT heads in their previous residence certifying that they were not affiliated with the communist party. This was designed to uproot communist sympathisers fleeing government crackdowns (Kurasawa 2009: 64-67).

Finally, state mobilisation for repressive purposes was also prevalent in Myanmar. Although it has been one of the most durable military regimes in the world, the generals in Myanmar have had to confront numerous episodes of separatism and social upheavals. One of the most ethnically diverse countries in the region, Myanmar has been mired in decades-long armed conflicts between the national armed forces and insurgency groups seeking autonomy from the state (Croissant and Lorenz 2018, 179). It has also been struck by mass protests led by Buddhist monks and supported by the opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) (see McCarthy 2008).

Violence is the regime's principal strategy against these destabilising forces. Supporting the use of coercion was the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). Formed in 1993, the USDA was the most prominent mass organisation in Myanmar.[80] On its origin, Steinberg (2001, 110) posited that even though the military junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC),[81] instituted its governance machinery—the Law and Order Restoration Councils (LORCs)—at all levels of the administrative structure, it lacked an

[80] The USDA expanded its membership rapidly from 5 million in 1996 to nearly 23 million in 2006 or almost half of the population at that time (Network for Democracy and Development 2006, 18–19).
[81] The SLORC was succeeded by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997.

expansive and effective means to propagate the official view, which necessitated the formation of the USDA.[82]

Under military rule, Myanmar was one of the most restrictive political systems in Asia. Civil society organisations were either dismantled or co-opted to undermine their influence on society. But the regime had tried to maintain the façade of civil society through the USDA, which was registered as a social organisation with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The organisation was involved in activities typical for non-governmental organisations such as welfare, development, and educational activities. Yet the clearest indicator to the contrary was the USDA's overt role in pro-regime mobilisation and political repression. The organisation staged mass rallies to support government initiatives—notably the 2006 National Convention to draft a new constitution—and denounce and intimidate the opposition party and any forces the regime considered destabilising and destructive. These rallies often involved the forced participation of hundreds of thousands of people. Furthermore, members of the USDA engaged in various forms of political violence aimed at terrorising politicians and opposition party members. The organisation created "people's militias" around the country and trained its members in weaponry and defence tactics. They were involved in security maintenance in villages, surveillance of opposition supporters, and, when necessary, the arrest of opposition activists (Network for Democracy and Development 2006).

The military regime in Myanmar also established a mass organisation in response to the country's politically active Buddhist monks. Following the SLORC's refusal to step down after the NLD's victory in the 1990 elections, as well as the *Tatmadaw*'s shooting of a monk and several students during a pro-democracy demonstration, thousands of monks in Mandalay instigated a rebellion and a religious boycott of the military. The military regime reacted by

[82] Steinberg did not elaborate on the causes behind such ineffectiveness given the level of penetration.

arresting hundreds of protesting monks and issuing an order to dissolve all independent Buddhist organisations and monk associations (McCarthy 2008, 302). The regime filled this civil void by creating the Union of Myanmar Sangha Organisation as the sole state-sanctioned *Sangha* (monk) organisation. To qualify as a member of the *Sangha,* monks were required to abide by its order to stay out of politics*,* whether or not they joined the organisation. Failure to do so would result in them losing their entitlement and thus face persecution (ibid). Supplanting independent organisations with mass organisations is a classic example of totalitarian-style state mobilisation. In making this move when democracy promotion was at its height as the Cold War was winding down, the military regime had incurred high international costs with decades of economic sanctions and international isolation. The regime, however, had also tried to act "kingly" to co-opt the *Sangha* (McCarthy 2008, 305). These gestures involved sponsorship of religious activities, donation to the monasteries, and the renovation and construction of pagodas (ibid). Nevertheless, such cooptation was carried out through the military apparatus and various state institutions, rather than through mass organisations. It is thus not qualified as cooptation-driven mobilisation.

State mobilisation in Myanmar partially conforms to the theorised repressive function of state mobilisation because, like the UMNO Youth in Malaysia, the USDA applied violence to inflict harm on opposition challengers. But there is no evidence of the mass organisation's role in the invention of crises to justify state repression of anti-government protestors. Perhaps the military junta's primary dependence on coercion to rule Myanmar for such a long time has culminated in a lack of instinct to even try to justify such an act. The fact that the regime has endured despite decades of economic sanctions and international isolation seems to have only emboldened its repressive disposition.

The case of state mobilisation in Indonesia, on the other hand, did not manifest the mechanisms to be considered as repression-driven mobilisation. Unlike the UMNO Youth or

USDA, the RTs did not cause harm to PKI members or supporters or spread fear to prevent them from future mobilisation. These tasks were the duties of the military and other security forces. The RTs played a supportive role, acting as the watchdog for these institutions.

Low-intensity threats and State Mobilisation in Party Regimes

Compared to these military and personalist regimes, the party-backed regimes in Singapore and Vietnam have experienced fewer political threats. If any do occur, threats in these countries are likely to be of low intensity. State mobilisation in this case is more likely to be non-repressive and proactive in character. Singapore under the People Action's Party (PAP) is a highly stable and prosperous authoritarian regime. It has been consistently raised as the prime example that economic development does not necessary propel the thriving middle class to rise up against the government to complement their wealth with political freedoms. The most common form of dissatisfaction expressed by the Singaporean people is the casting of occasional protest votes that would, in less manipulated electoral environments, lead to the introduction of more opposition members into the otherwise PAP-monopolised parliament. A good example is the victory of J. B. Jeyaretnam from the Workers' Party over a PAP candidate in the 1981 by-election, making him the first opposition party candidate to win a seat in the parliament since independence (Tremewan 1996, 57).

The PAP took the challenge to its political hegemony seriously with its strategy to consolidate popular support through having an important state mobilisation component. The most dominant form of state mobilisation in Singapore is cooptation-driven mobilisation, implemented by the People's Association's (PA) vast network of grassroots associations with a history that traces back to the colonial era. According to Seah (1980, 202–3), the idea of a community centre was hatched by the British government after WWII to promote community participation and solidarity in British colonies as a strategy to foster a commitment to the rebuilding of war-torn countries. When the PAP came to power, community centres were

harnessed to promote communication between the government and the people. The PAP's restructuring of community centres led to the creation of the PA. It is a statutory board established in 1960 to promote racial harmony by facilitating interaction between the government and its ethnic groups (Ooi 2009, 177). The objective was to induce "loyalty to and identification with the government" (Bellows 1970 cited in Tremewan 1996, 47). The PA's political significance is reflected in its chairman being the city-state's Prime Minister.

The equivalence of Indonesia's RTs in Singapore is the residents' committees (RCs). RCs are the lowest-level units in the grassroots organisation hierarchy. Their primary responsibilities involved maintenance, public security, monitoring residents' anti-social behaviours, and promoting ethical harmony through social and cultural activities. Apart from these core activities, RCs leveraged their proximity to the communities to mobilise participants for community events organised by the PA and other upper grassroots organisations. More importantly, RCs' mobilisation was crucial for socialising citizens into the government's development programs and policies, a role Ooi (2009, 181–83) claims to constitute a process of political legitimation. In the terminology of this dissertation, the activities of RCs' constitute the communication component of cooptation.

The best example of material cooptation in Singapore is the tying of the management of public housing estates to political support. This is possible because the vast majority of Singaporean citizens live in public housing. The Singaporean government announced the policy in 1985 that the Housing and Development Board, the government agency overseeing public housing, "would give priority to PAP constituencies in providing maintenance for lifts, water pipes, drains, roofs, etc." The policy was designed to "[force] Singaporeans 'to think a little more carefully before they cast their votes'" (Tremewan 1996, 64).

RCs and other grassroots organisations support this cooptation policy by running the housing estates with Town Councils. Town Councils are led by elected members of parliament

who recruit grassroots leaders from RCs and other grassroots organisations as councillors. This represents a form of elite cooptation by responding to their demand for an increased role in the management of public housing estates (Ng 2018, 472). Town Councils are allocated with a budget and delegated with power from the Housing and Development Board to administer and maintain the housing estates (Tremewan 1996, 63). Ng (2018, 472) argues that Town Councils make material distribution more effective because Town Council members, relative to central agencies, are closer to the ground and thus better understand local needs and preferences. Because of this awareness, they are able to allocate resources to target groups and maximise the prospect of vote gain. The case of Singapore is a good example of proactive mobilisation for power consolidation despite having low levels of threat from any political opposition. In such a low-threat environment, my theoretical framework points to the use of legitimation-driven and/or cooptation-driven mobilisation if authoritarian regimes plan to future-proof their rule. Unlike the CPP in Cambodia which has relied on its violent struggle for power to seek popular consent to its rule, the PAP's legitimacy has been built on the foundation of economic and governance performance delivered by its prudent and effective state apparatus. Thus, it is unnecessary for state mobilisation in Singapore to perform the kind of legitimation-driven mobilisation that occurs in Cambodia. Nevertheless, it remains helpful to explore this possibility with the PAP's other mass organisations such as the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). If the NTUC carries out a labour cooptative function, it could be a good case to compare with Cambodia's NACC.

Vietnam is among the few remaining communist regimes that survived the collapse of its ally, the Soviet Union. Under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, the Communist Party of Vietnam originated in 1930 as an anti-colonialist movement. The party, renamed the Workers' Party of Vietnam in 1951, has ruled North Vietnam since 1954 and the whole country since 1975 after the unification of North Vietnam with South Vietnam. Like the single-party regime

in China, the communist party shunned electoral legitimacy by not holding multiparty general elections. Instead, the party has based its rule on the historical struggle for independence as well as its strong economic performance in recent times. The regime, thus, has not encountered challenges in the electoral arena like Cambodia and Malaysia. Its suppression of opposition activities and the ability to deliver satisfactory developmental outcomes have also helped the regime avoid large-scale anti-government protests.

Historically, the primary role of state mobilisation was to mobilise citizens to fight for the independence and unification of the country. After the wars and the introduction of economic reform in the 1980s, mass organisations have adapted their functions to suit the new political-economic context. Valentin (2007, 309–10) notes that the role of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, regarded by the party as "the socialist school for youth", has shifted in focus from "independence" and "defence" to "development" and "modernization". The youth organisation has acted more like a non-governmental organisation when it diversifies its functions to include social activities such as community development and social work, physical exercise and games, and national celebrations—although in a way that does not depart too far from its institutional status as a state organ, and the duties expected from it. For example, leisure and fun activities are designed as a part of a "patriotic project in which socialist principles of discipline and collective spirit were enacted" (ibid). Likewise, the Vietnam Womens' Union has implemented a range of activities for its members including vocational training and entrepreneurship development, social and financial support for poor women, counselling, micro loans, and mass education (Waibel and Glück 2013, 341, 351). These NGO-style activities, however, have not altered the organisation's overall priority of "serving the nation and the party" (ibid, 357).

On the other hand, like its counterpart in China, the Vietnam Federation of Trade Unions has experienced tension with the party. It declared partial independence from the

communist party after changing its name to the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) in the late 1980s. The organisation increasingly sees itself not as a transmission belt but as a "mediator" between capitalists and labour. The VGCL advocated for a minimum wage law, the right to strike, and other demands from the workers. The right to strike was taken up by the VGCL and legalised by the state after workers in both state and private enterprises went to the streets to demand better pay and working conditions in the early 1990s when strikes were still illegal (Edwards and Phan 2003, 205–6).

Compared to Cambodia, mass organisations in Vietnam have not demonstrated explicit activities to bolster the communist party's legitimacy or co-opt the increasingly restive workers. This may be indicative of the communist party's confidence in the negligible level of threats to its rule or its ability to manage them because it does not have to encounter the occasional protest votes like the PAP in Singapore or fear an opposition takeover like the CPP in Cambodia. Apparently, this status quo rests on how well the party can maintain its governance effectiveness. A dip in this regard or the appearance of less tolerable threats may drive the party to consider the use of state mobilisation for legitimating or cooptative purposes.

To conclude, this brief analysis of additional cases in Southeast Asia demonstrates that authoritarian regimes in the region have employed state mobilisation to counter various threats to their survival, confirming threats as the driver of state mobilisation. With regard to the effect of state mobilisation, the conclusion is in line with those of Cambodia and Malaysia. State mobilisation is more likely to be effective against high-intensity threats, whereas its effectiveness against low-intensity threats remains to be seen.

On other hand, none of the examined instances of state mobilisation in the region fully exhibited the two mechanisms required for each function of state mobilisation. This limitation is primarily the result of the inductive approach used to develop the framework, as well as the peculiarity of the underlying cases. The exception here is the case of cooptation-driven

mobilisation in Singapore which largely manifested the theorised communication and distribution mechanisms of cooptation. The case of Singapore, therefore, can be a substitution for the case of Cambodia for future research into cooptation-driven mobilisation.

While I hope to have achieved internal validity through within-case analysis, external validity is still a goal to be aimed for. Future efforts thus should be devoted to exploring whether the framework applies to other instances of state mobilisation in Southeast Asia and other regions. Otherwise, this framework may need to be revised to broaden its theoretical relevance beyond the cases under consideration.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This dissertation set out to address the puzzle of state mobilisation in authoritarian regimes: its persistence despite changes to its impetus. Put differently, the passing of events that inaugurated state mobilisation has not led to its irrelevance. State mobilisation has evolved into a sticky authoritarian practice that assumes a life of its own. My central argument is that the persistence of state mobilisation is driven by authoritarian regimes' need to respond to their threat environment. When the regime is beset by high-intensity threats such as mass revolts and elite splits, reactive mobilisation in the form of repression inflicts danger on regime challengers, generates fear, and creates a 'legitimate' reason to justify the deployment of coercive forces. When a low-intensity threat such as the presence of a potentially destabilising social force is looming or perceived to be looming, the regime activates proactive mobilisation in the forms of legitimation and cooptation to idealise the incumbent rule, signal its cohesion, and meet the material needs of the targeted groups.

The persistence of state mobilisation is puzzling in an important way. Classic studies on the highly repressive totalitarian regimes painted state mobilisation as a ruling strategy for the complete domineering of citizens (Arendt 1951; Huntington 1970; Schapiro 1972; Brooker 1991; Linz 2000). In his pioneering research on "administered mass organizations", Kasza (1995) outlines three major functions of this institutional weapon: supplanting independent organisations, conscribing labour for warfighting, and facilitating a centrally-planned economy.

However, state mobilisation of this nature does not reflect the reality of more pluralistic, less repressive authoritarian regimes. For one, totalitarian-style state mobilisation is a taxing endeavour for authoritarian regimes wanting to appear democratic. Opposition parties and civil society organisations are subject to various forms of repression but are nevertheless allowed to

operate. Adopting a limited form of freedom is in the best interest of authoritarian leaders because, in the post-Cold War era, high-intensity coercion can come with "high international costs" (Way and Levitsky 2006, 392).

What explains the persistence of state mobilisation despite changes in its impetus? In answering this question, I took a structural approach to examine how the threat environment interacts with authoritarian regimes' desire to maintain power to drive state mobilisation in various forms with the intention to counter and overcome threats to the regime's survival. Previous studies have illuminated this question, and I sought to make several contributions as follows.

Analytical Contributions

This dissertation contributes to our knowledge of all forms of regime-sponsored and -organised mobilisation and authoritarian politics more broadly. First, I highlight mobilisation as a core feature of modern authoritarian regimes. Mobilisation is a key dimension in Linz's original conceptualisation of authoritarian regimes (Linz 1970; 2000), but it has not received as much attention as other dimensions, such as institutional manipulation as in the organisation of authoritarian elections, in the analysis of contemporary authoritarian regimes (Snyder 2006, 220). Revisiting and revising our knowledge of this classical autocratic practice turned our attention back to the authoritarian-looking features of autocracies after sweeping interest in their democratic-looking features in recent decades (Art 2012). This dissertation has taken steps to explore understudied organisations and processes to enable a fuller understanding of authoritarian politics.

Second, I highlight low-intensity threats as a driver of state mobilisation. Existing research has not sufficiently considered this possibility when analysing state mobilisation. Kasza (1995), for example, identifies wars as the stimulus of state mobilisation. Hellmeier and

Weidmann (2020) argue that pro-government mobilisation is a powerful weapon in the authoritarian toolkit against elite-driven and mass-driven threats. Similarly, Ekiert and Perry (2020, 8) argue that the purpose of "counterrevolutionary contention" is to forestall "revolutionary challenges." I built on these insights by illustrating how Cambodia's authoritarian regime employed state mobilisation to pre-empt a low-intensity threat. The case of Cambodia provides the example that state mobilisation is valuable for authoritarian regimes who face an existential crisis such as coup attempts or mass protests as well as those who are relatively safe from a coup, electoral defeat, or revolution in the short term, but not without the long-term possibility of instability. In emphasising low-intensity threats, I highlight authoritarian regimes' foresight: they can go the distance to plan for long-term instability to consolidate their success in overcoming short-term emergencies.

Third, I highlight non-repressive forms of state mobilisation. Ekiert and Perry and Hellmeier and Weidmann conceptualise state mobilisation as synonymous with street mobilisation for repressive purposes. Hellmeier and Weidmann equate pro-government mobilisation with "rallies" or "support in the street." Ekiert and Perry stress the pre-emptive nature of proactive mobilisation, but their interest remains in "peaceful marches" and "rowdy rallies", still mobilisation techniques that draw regime supporters or citizens into the streets. I complement these studies by examining legitimation and cooptation as non-repressive forms of state mobilisation. This is significant because authoritarian regimes have deployed state mobilisation for purposes beyond street rallies. For example, in countries such as Belarus, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Namibia, and Malawi, there were virtually no mass events such as pro-government rallies, but these regimes organised a substantial proportion of their population into mass organisations (please refer to Table 1). If we were to focus solely on street rallies, we would not be able to account for such a pattern.

Fourth, this dissertation provides more clues on why party-based regimes generally maintain power better than others (Geddes 1999; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018). Through symbolic legitimation, mass cooptation, and intergroup violence, state mobilisation is a potent tool to acquire compliance if not support. This mass-based strategy complements elite-centric strategies such as the distribution of the spoils of power as the mechanism for maintaining the stability of party-based regimes.

Finally, I explain when state mobilisation might fail to be an effective tool for authoritarian rule. While the bulk of this dissertation is dedicated to how state mobilisation succeeds or might succeed in overcoming threats, it is also important that we understand its limitations. In the case of Malaysia, since state mobilisation thrives in the presence of ethnic division, its absence spells the end of its vigour. Towards the end of its dominant rule, the UMNO regime was beset by its leaders' own corruption scandals, resulting in a solitary voice from both sides of the ethnic divide united behind a powerful reformist movement. Due to this social movement, rather than racial movement, state mobilisation failed to replicate its past success in sustaining authoritarian rule.

Future Research

My analysis of other cases in Southeast Asia confirmed that state mobilisation is an important authoritarian survival strategy in the region. Yet it has manifested in various forms that are largely incongruent with the theorised functions of state mobilisation. An exception is the case of cooptation-driven mobilisation in Singapore. In their efforts to consolidate support for the ruling party, the People Association's local arms have communicated the party's narrative to residents and distributed material incentives to them. It would be useful to dig deeper into the PAP's other auxiliary organisations such as the PAP Youth, to examine whether the youth wing has performed similar cooptative functions. If it has, it would be an ideal case to illustrate

cooptation-driven mobilisation in Southeast Asia. Future research that examines state mobilisation carried out by youth wings in Cambodia, Malaysia, and Singapore can make a valuable contribution to the literature on political parties. Such comparative study should also incorporate more discussion of state mobilisation by party youth wings in similar periods, something this dissertation lacks in its present form because of the need to focus on specific functions which necessitate a focus on different historical periods in each case.

The cases of Cambodia and Malaysia have offered some examples of how state mobilisation can be effective in overcoming threats. Yet the findings cannot be generalised to conclude that authoritarian regimes become more durable as a result of state mobilisation. This was because my research design did not have a controlled comparison that would enable me to isolate its causal significance. Thus, the logical next step is to pursue a more systematic analysis of the causal role of state mobilisation on regime durability. A simple correlation hints at this probability. Table 7 shows the relative longevity of mobilisational authoritarian regimes, those with medium to a high level of mass event (measured with V-Dem's 'mobilisation for autocracy' variable) and mass organisation (measured with V-Dem's 'engagement in state-administered mass organisations' variable). In 76 authoritarian regimes that survived for less than ten years, only one regime or one per cent is mobilisational. But the proportion increases among authoritarian regimes who have managed to survive longer. The largest number of mobilisational regimes (nine, or 31 per cent) occurs among the most durable authoritarian regimes, those who have survived for 40 years and longer. This pattern suggests that state mobilisation may have a causal role in regime durability.

Table 7: Longevity of Mobilisational Authoritarian Regimes

Regime longevity	Number of authoritarian regimes	Number (and proportion) of authoritarian regimes that are mobilisational
Less than 10 years	76	1 (1%)
10 to 19 years	44	3 (7%)
20 to 29 years	17	1 (6%)
30 to 39 years	13	2 (15%)
40 years and over	29	9 (31%)

Source: Author's compilation based on the V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al. 2020) *and Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014).*

Recent scholarship on the effect of local party organisation on authoritarian durability also points to this possibility. For example, Handlin's (2016) analysis of the effect of "communal councils" (grassroots organisations constituted of 150 to 400 families) on authoritarian durability in Venezuela shows that the presence of a commune council in a constituency significantly increased the likelihood of a vote for Chavez in the 2006 elections. This effect, however, manifests only in poor communities that receive material distributions. Hence, Handlin concludes that communal councils are only effective for mobilising political support when backed up by patronage spending. Handlin's emphasis on the salience of communal councils was premised on the logic that communal councils make patronage distribution more effective because it facilitates targeted distribution of materials and resources, enabling the ruling party and government to "effectively claims credit for the spending", and mobilise beneficiaries of the 'largess' to the polls (Handlin 2016, 1257).

More recently, Reuter (2022) examines the relationship between mass organisation and the longevity of party-based regimes. He defines mass organisation as the activeness of party personnel in local communities, the extensiveness of permanent party branches, and the party's ties with social organisations. Reuter's quantitative analysis of 169 countries reveals that

authoritarian regimes with ruling parties are more likely to survive when mass organisation is high, and more likely to break down when it is low.

Both studies provide the baseline for future research. Yet the focus on causal effect can be strengthened by the attention to causal mechanisms. Handlin's exertion on the effectiveness of communal councils in dispensing patronage and thus winning votes for the regime still need to be process-traced. Likewise, how mass organisation makes regime breakdown less probable still needs to be probed. There is also a need to distinguish the contribution of auxiliary mass organisations to regime durability from other party organisations such as party branches.

Another important subject for future research is to discern when state mobilisation succeeds in gaining support for the regime. The example of Cambodia has provided insight into state mobilisation as a response to low-intensity threats. It highlights the regime's preparedness, deploying state mobilisation when it is not facing immediate threats. But it is difficult to ascertain to what extent state mobilisation succeeds in strengthening regime legitimacy as intended. It is uncertain how much can be attributed to state mobilisation when a low-intensity threat does not lead to, or evolve into, a high-intensity threat. Without sufficiently competitive elections and a liberal civil society sphere, the case of Cambodia makes it especially challenging to pinpoint the effect of state mobilisation on regime survival and durability. Future research can overcome this challenge by identifying proxies for measuring the level of regime support so that the effect of state mobilisation can be probed.

Finally, more research is required to understand when state mobilisation fails as an authoritarian survival strategy in multiracial regimes. The case of Malaysia pinpoints ethnic solidarity as the graveyard for state mobilisation which historically draws upon ethnic schisms. However, there might be more factors that can explain this outcome, which should become clearer when future research examines the challenge of state mobilisation in other most similar cases.

Appendix I: Measuring State Mobilisation

The level of state mobilisation is measured by the level of mass event and mass organisation. The former is based on V-Dem's "mobilization for autocracy" variable. The latter is based on the "engagement in state-administered mass organizations" variable.

Mass Event

Level	V-Dem Code	V-Dem Indicator
None	0	There have been virtually no events
Very low	1	There have been several small-scale events
Low	2	There have been many small-scale events
Medium	3	There have been several large-scale and small-scale events
High	4	There have been many large-scale and small-scale events

Mass Organisation

Level	V-Dem Code	V-Dem Indicator
None	0	Virtually no one has been actively engaged
Very low	1	There have been less than 5% of the population
Low	2	There have been about 5% to 15%
Medium	3	There have been about 16% to 25%
High	4	There have been about 26% or more

Appendix II: List of Interviewees in Cambodia

No.	Referent	Category	Interview Location	Interview Date
1	OB1	Civil society	E-mail	19/11/2019
2	CS1	Civil society	Phnom Penh	17/12/2019
3	OP1	Opposition party	Phnom Penh	18/12/2019
4	MO1	Mass organisation	Phnom Penh	19/12/2019
5	CS2	Civil society	Phnom Penh	22/12/2019
6	MO2	Mass organisation	Phnom Penh	20/12/2019
7	CS3	Civil society	Phnom Penh	22/12/2019
8	CS4&5	Civil society	Phnom Penh	24/12/2019
9	CS6	Civil society	Phnom Penh	25/12/2019
10	CS7	Civil society	Phnom Penh	23/12/2019
11	OP2	Opposition party	Phnom Penh	28/12/2019
12	OP3	Opposition party	Phnom Penh	30/12/2019
13	MO3	Mass organisation	Phnom Penh	30/12/2019
14	MO4	Mass organisation	Phnom Penh	3/01/2019
15	RP1	Ruling party	Phnom Penh	5/01/2019
16	CS8	Civil society	Phnom Penh	7/01/2019
17	LU1	Labour union	Phnom Penh; Online	8/01/2019, 22/05/2020
18	LU2	Labour union	Phnom Penh	9/01/2019
19	LU3	Labour union	Phnom Penh	17/01/2019
20	LU4	Labour union	Phnom Penh	20/01/2019

Appendix III: List of Main Interview Questions

Questions on the role of UYFC in state mobilisation

- Where did the UYFC come from?
- What does the UYFC do?
- What does the UYFC want?
- What are the UYFC's sources of funding?
- How does the UYFC recruit members?
- What is the role of the UYFC's grassroots members?
- What do other youth organisations think about the UYFC?
- Has the UYFC been successful in achieving its goals?
- Why does the CPP have more than one youth group?
- Can the UYFC influence/mobilise non-CPP youth?
- What is the role of UYFC in government policy-making?
- Why does the UYFC insist on its status as an NGO?
- How does the UYFC benefit the CPP?

Questions on the role of pro-government labour unions in state mobilisation

- How has the pro-government labour movement evolved?
- What are the major characteristics of pro-government labour unions?
- How do they mobilise support for the government?
- What are the characteristics of protests led by pro-government labour unions?
- What explains the decline of labour protests after 2013?
- Relationship between pro-government and independent labour unions
- Are the government's pro-worker policies effective?

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