

separated from parents and brainwashed to socialism as well as taught torture methods with animals. Children were a "dictatorial instrument of the party"^[7] and were given leadership in torture and executions.^[1]



Flag of [Democratic Kampuchea](#)

One of their mottoes, in reference to the [New People](#), was: "To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no loss."^[8] The ideology of the Khmer Rouge evolved over time. In the early days, it was an orthodox [communist](#) party and looked to the Vietnamese Communists for guidance.

It became more [anti-intellectual](#) when groups of students who had been studying in [France](#) returned to Cambodia. The students, including future party leader [Pol Pot](#), had been heavily influenced by the example of the [French Communist Party](#) (PCF).

After 1960, the Khmer Rouge developed its own unique political ideas. Contrary to [Marxist](#) doctrine, the Khmer Rouge considered the farmers in the countryside to be the [proletariat](#) and the true representatives of the [working class](#), a form of [Maoism](#) which brought them onto the Chinese side of the [Sino-Soviet Split](#). They started to incorporate Khmer nationalism into their ideology, as well as anti-intellectualism by this time. This was evident in the persecution of ethnic Chinese, Thais, Muslims, Christians (most of them Catholics), etc^[citation needed].

By the 1970s, the ideology of the Khmer Rouge combined its own ideas with the [anti-colonialist](#) ideas of the PCF, which its leaders had acquired during their education in French universities in the 1950s. The Khmer Rouge leaders were also privately very resentful of what they saw as the arrogant attitude of the Vietnamese, and were determined to establish a form of communism very different from the Vietnamese model and also from other Communist countries, including China.

After four years of rule, the Khmer Rouge regime was removed from power in 1979 as a result of an [invasion](#) by the [Socialist Republic of Vietnam](#) and was replaced by moderate, pro-Vietnamese Communists. It survived into the 1990s as a [resistance movement](#) operating in western Cambodia from bases in [Thailand](#). In 1996, following a [peace agreement](#), their leader Pol Pot formally dissolved the organization. Pol Pot died on 15 April 1998, having never been put on trial.^[9]

The Khmer Rouge is remembered mainly for the deaths of an estimated 1.5 million people or 1/5 of the country's total population^[10] (estimates range from 850,000 to 2.5 million) under its regime, through [execution](#), [torture](#), [starvation](#) and [forced labor](#). Because of the large number of deaths, and because ethnic groups and religious minorities were targeted, the deaths during the [rule of the Khmer Rouge](#) are often considered a [genocide](#) as defined under the UN Convention of 1948.^[11]

Name history

The term "Khmer Rouge," [French](#) for "Red [Khmer](#)", was coined by Cambodian [head of state Norodom Sihanouk](#) and was later adopted by [English speakers](#). It was used to refer to a succession of [Communist parties](#) in Cambodia which evolved into the [Communist Party of Kampuchea](#) (CPK) and later the [Party](#)

[of Democratic Kampuchea](#). The organization was also known as the **Khmer Communist Party** and the [National Army of Democratic Kampuchea](#).

Origins

The Cambodian Left: the early history

The history of the communist movement in Cambodia can be divided into six phases: the emergence of the [Indochinese Communist Party](#) (ICP), whose members were almost exclusively Vietnamese, before [World War II](#); the ten-year struggle for independence from the French, when a separate Cambodian communist party, the Kampuchean (or Khmer) [People's Revolutionary Party](#) (KPRP), was established under Vietnamese auspices; the period following the Second Party Congress of the KPRP in 1960, when Saloth Sar ([Pol Pot](#) after 1976) and other future Khmer Rouge leaders gained control of its apparatus; the revolutionary struggle from the initiation of the Khmer Rouge insurgency in 1967–68 to the fall of the Lon Nol government in April 1975; the [Democratic Kampuchea](#) regime, from April 1975 to January 1979; and the period following the Third Party Congress of the KPRP in January 1979, when Hanoi effectively assumed control over Cambodia's government and communist party.

In 1930 [Ho Chi Minh](#) founded the [Vietnamese Communist Party](#) by unifying three smaller communist movements that had emerged in northern, central and southern Vietnam during the late 1920s. The name was changed almost immediately to the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), ostensibly to include revolutionaries from Cambodia and Laos.

Almost without exception, however, all the earliest party members were Vietnamese. By the end of World War II, a handful of Cambodians had joined its ranks, but their influence on the Indochinese communist movement and on developments within Cambodia was negligible.

[Viet Minh](#) units occasionally made forays into Cambodian bases during their war against the French, and, in conjunction with the leftist government that ruled Thailand until 1947, the Viet Minh encouraged the formation of armed, left-wing [Khmer Issarak](#) bands. On April 17, 1950 (twenty-five years to the day before the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh), the first nationwide congress of the Khmer Issarak groups convened, and the United Issarak Front was established.

Its leader was [Son Ngoc Minh](#) (possibly a brother of the nationalist Son Ngoc Thanh), and a third of its leadership consisted of members of the ICP. According to the historian [David P. Chandler](#), the leftist Issarak groups, aided by the [Viet Minh](#), occupied a sixth of Cambodia's territory by 1952; and, on the eve of the [Geneva Conference](#), they controlled as much as one half of the country.^[12]

In 1951 the ICP was reorganized into three national units—the [Vietnam Workers' Party](#), the [Lao Itsala](#), and the Kampuchean (or Khmer) People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP). According to a document issued after the reorganization, the Vietnam Workers' Party would continue to "supervise" the smaller Laotian and Cambodian movements. Most KPRP leaders and rank-and-file seem to have been either [Khmer Krom](#), or ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia. The party's appeal to indigenous Khmers appears to have been minimal.

According to Democratic Kampuchea's version of party history, the Viet Minh's failure to negotiate a political role for the KPRP at the 1954 Geneva Conference represented a betrayal of the Cambodian movement, which still controlled large areas of the countryside and which commanded at least 5,000 armed men. Following the conference, about 1,000 members of the KPRP, including Son Ngoc Minh, made a "Long March" into North Vietnam, where they remained in exile.

In late 1954, those who stayed in Cambodia founded a legal political party, the Pracheachon Party,

which participated in the 1955 and the 1958 National Assembly elections. In the September 1955 election, it won about four percent of the vote but did not secure a seat in the legislature.

Members of the Pracheachon were subject to constant harassment and to arrests because the party remained outside Sihanouk's political organization, Sangkum. Government attacks prevented it from participating in the 1962 election and drove it underground. Sihanouk habitually labeled local leftists the Khmer Rouge, a term that later came to signify the party and the state headed by Pol Pot, [Ieng Sary](#), [Khieu Samphan](#), and their associates.

During the mid-1950s, KPRP factions, the "urban committee" (headed by [Tou Samouth](#)), and the "rural committee" (headed by [Sieu Heng](#)), emerged. In very general terms, these groups espoused divergent revolutionary lines. The prevalent "urban" line, endorsed by North Vietnam, recognized that Sihanouk, by virtue of his success in winning independence from the French, was a genuine national leader whose neutralism and deep distrust of the United States made him a valuable asset in Hanoi's struggle to "liberate" South Vietnam.

Champions of this line hoped that the prince could be persuaded to distance himself from the right wing and to adopt leftist policies. The other line, supported for the most part by rural cadres who were familiar with the harsh realities of the countryside, advocated an immediate struggle to overthrow the "[feudalist](#)" Sihanouk.

In 1959 Sieu Heng defected to the government and provided the security forces with information that enabled them to destroy as much as 90 % of the party's rural apparatus. Although communist networks in Phnom Penh and in other towns under Tou Samouth's jurisdiction fared better, only a few hundred communists remained active in the country by 1960.

The Paris student group

During the 1950s, Khmer students in [Paris](#) organized their own communist movement, which had little, if any, connection to the hard-pressed party in their homeland. From their ranks came the men and women who returned home and took command of the party apparatus during the 1960s, led an effective insurgency against Lon Nol from 1968 until 1975, and established the regime of Democratic Kampuchea.

[Pol Pot](#), who rose to the leadership of the communist movement in the 1960s, was born in 1928 (some sources say in 1925) in [Kampong Thum Province](#), northeast of Phnom Penh. He attended a technical high school in the capital and then went to Paris in 1949 to study radio electronics (other sources say he attended a school for printers and typesetters and also studied civil engineering). Described by one source as a "determined, rather plodding organizer," he failed to obtain a degree, but, according to the [Jesuit](#) priest, Father [François Ponchaud](#), he acquired a taste for the classics of [French literature](#) as well as for the writings of [Marx](#).

Another member of the Paris student group was Ieng Sary. He was a Chinese-Khmer born in 1925 in South Vietnam. He attended the elite [Lycée Sisowath](#) in Phnom Penh before beginning courses in commerce and politics at the [Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris](#) (more widely known as *Sciences Po*) in France. Khieu Samphan, considered "one of the most brilliant intellects of his generation," was born in 1931 and specialized in economics and politics during his time in Paris. [\[citation needed\]](#) In talent he was rivaled by Hou Yuon, born in 1930, who was described as being "of truly astounding physical and intellectual strength," [\[citation needed\]](#) and who studied economics and law. Son Sen, born in 1930, studied education and literature; Hu Nim, born in 1932, studied law.

These men were perhaps the most educated leaders in the history of Asian communism. Two of them, Khieu Samphan and Hou Yuon, earned doctorates from the [University of Paris](#); Hu Nim obtained his

degree from the [University of Phnom Penh](#) in 1965. In retrospect, it seems unlikely that these talented members of the elite, sent to France on government scholarships, could launch the bloodiest and most radical revolution in modern Asian history. Most came from landowner or civil servant families. Pol Pot and Hou Yuon may have been related to the royal family. An older sister of Pol Pot had been a concubine at the court of King [Monivong](#). Three of the Paris group forged a bond that survived years of revolutionary struggle and intraparty strife, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary married [Khieu Ponnary](#) and Khieu Thirith (also known as [Ieng Thirith](#)), purportedly relatives of Khieu Samphan. These two well-educated women also played a central role in the regime of Democratic Kampuchea.

The intellectual ferment of Paris must have been a dizzying experience for young Khmers fresh from Phnom Penh or the provinces. A number turned to orthodox [Marxism-Leninism](#). At some time between 1949 and 1951, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary joined the [French Communist Party](#), the most tightly disciplined and orthodox [Marxist-Leninist](#) of Western Europe's communist movements.

In 1951 the two men went to [East Berlin](#) to participate in a youth festival. This experience is considered to have been a turning point in their ideological development. Meeting with Khmers who were fighting with the [Viet Minh](#) (and whom they subsequently judged to be too subservient to the Vietnamese), they became convinced that only a tightly disciplined party organization and a readiness for armed struggle could achieve revolution. They transformed the [Khmer Students' Association](#) (KSA), to which most of the 200 or so Khmer students in Paris belonged, into an organization for nationalist and leftist ideas.

Inside the KSA and its successor organizations was a secret organization known as the Cercle Marxiste. The organization was composed of cells of three to six members with most members knowing nothing about the overall structure of the organization. In 1952 Pol Pot, Hou Yuon, Ieng Sary, and other leftists gained notoriety by sending an open letter to Sihanouk calling him the "strangler of infant democracy." A year later, the French authorities closed down the KSA. In 1956, however, Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan helped to establish a new group, the [Khmer Students' Union](#). Inside, the group was still run by the Cercle Marxiste.

The doctoral dissertations written by Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan express basic themes that were later to become the cornerstones of the policy adopted by Democratic Kampuchea. The central role of the peasants in national development was espoused by Hou Yuon in his 1955 thesis, *The Cambodian Peasants and Their Prospects for Modernization*, which challenged the conventional view that urbanization and industrialization are necessary precursors of development.

The major argument in Khieu Samphan's 1959 thesis, *Cambodia's Economy and Industrial Development*, was that the country had to become self-reliant and end its economic dependency on the developed world. In its general contours, Khieu's work reflected the influence of a branch of the "[dependency theory](#)" school,^{[[citation needed](#)]} which blamed lack of development in the [Third World](#) on the economic domination of the industrialized nations.

Path to power and reign

KPRP Second Congress

After returning to Cambodia in 1953, Pol Pot threw himself into party work. At first he went to join with forces allied to the Viet Minh operating in the rural areas of [Kampong Cham Province](#) (Kompong Cham). After the end of the war, he moved to Phnom Penh under Tou Samouth's "urban committee" where he became an important point of contact between above-ground parties of the left and the underground secret communist movement.

His comrades, Ieng Sary and Hou Yuon, became teachers at a new private high school, the Lycée Kambuboth, which Hou Yuon helped to establish. Khieu Samphan returned from Paris in 1959, taught as a member of the law faculty of the University of Phnom Penh, and started a left-wing, French-language publication, *L'Observateur*. The paper soon acquired a reputation in Phnom Penh's small academic circle. The following year, the government closed the paper, and Sihanouk's police publicly humiliated Khieu by beating, undressing and photographing him in public—as Shawcross notes, "not the sort of humiliation that men forgive or forget."

Yet the experience did not prevent Khieu from advocating cooperation with Sihanouk in order to promote a united front against United States activities in South Vietnam. As mentioned, Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon, and Hu Nim were forced to "work through the system" by joining the Sangkum and by accepting posts in the prince's government.

In late September, 1960, twenty-one leaders of the KPRP held a secret congress in a vacant room of the Phnom Penh railroad station. This pivotal event remains shrouded in mystery because its outcome has become an object of contention (and considerable historical rewriting) between pro-Vietnamese and anti-Vietnamese Khmer communist factions.

The question of cooperation with, or resistance to, Sihanouk was thoroughly discussed. Tou Samouth, who advocated a policy of cooperation, was elected general secretary of the KPRP that was renamed the [Workers' Party of Kampuchea](#) (WPK). His ally, [Nuon Chea](#) (also known as Long Reth), became deputy general secretary; however, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary were named to the Political Bureau to occupy the third and the fifth highest positions in the renamed party's hierarchy. The name change is significant. By calling itself a workers' party, the Cambodian movement claimed equal status with the [Vietnam Workers' Party](#). The pro-Vietnamese regime of the [People's Republic of Kampuchea](#) (PRK) implied in the 1980s that the September 1960 meeting was nothing more than the second congress of the KPRP.

On July 20, 1962, Tou Samouth was murdered by the Cambodian government. In February 1963, at the WPK's second congress, Pol Pot was chosen to succeed Tou Samouth as the party's general secretary. Tou's allies, Nuon Chea and [Keo Meas](#), were removed from the Central Committee and replaced by [Son Sen](#) and [Vorn Vet](#). From then on, Pol Pot and loyal comrades from his Paris student days controlled the party center, edging out older veterans whom they considered excessively pro-Vietnamese.

In July 1963, Pol Pot and most of the central committee left Phnom Penh to establish an insurgent base in [Ratanakiri](#) Province in the northeast. Pol Pot had shortly before been put on a list of 34 leftists who were summoned by Sihanouk to join the government and sign statements saying Sihanouk was the only possible leader for the country. Pol Pot and Chou Chet were the only people on the list who escaped. All the others agreed to cooperate with the government and were afterward under 24-hour watch by the police.

From enemy to ally: Sihanouk and the GRUNK

The region Pol Pot and the others moved to was inhabited by tribal minorities, the [Khmer Loeu](#), whose rough treatment (including resettlement and [forced assimilation](#)) at the hands of the central government made them willing recruits for a guerrilla struggle. In 1965, Pol Pot made a visit of several months to North Vietnam and China.

He received some training in China, which had enhanced his prestige when he returned to the WPK's liberated areas. Despite friendly relations between [Norodom Sihanouk](#) and the Chinese, the latter kept Pol Pot's visit a secret from Sihanouk. In September 1966, the party changed its name to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK).

The change in the name of the party was a closely guarded secret. Lower ranking members of the party and even the Vietnamese were not told of it and neither was the membership until many years later. The party leadership endorsed armed struggle against the government, then led by Sihanouk. In 1967, several small-scale attempts at insurgency were made by the CPK but they had little success.

In 1968, the Khmer Rouge forces launched a national [insurgency](#) across Cambodia (see also [Cambodian Civil War](#)). Though North Vietnam had not been informed of the decision, its forces provided shelter and weapons to the Khmer Rouge after the insurgency started. Vietnamese support for the insurgency made it impossible for the Cambodian military to effectively counter it. For the next two years the insurgency grew as Sihanouk did very little to stop it. As the insurgency grew stronger, the party finally openly declared itself to be the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK).

The political appeal of the Khmer Rouge was increased as a result of the situation created by the [removal of Sihanouk as head of state in 1970](#). Premier [Lon Nol](#), with the support of the National Assembly, deposed Sihanouk. Sihanouk, in exile in [Beijing](#), made an alliance with the Khmer Rouge and became the nominal head of a Khmer Rouge-dominated government-in-exile (known by its French acronym, [GRUNK](#)) backed by the [People's Republic of China](#).

Sihanouk's popular support in rural Cambodia allowed the Khmer Rouge to extend its power and influence to the point that by 1973 it exercised *de facto* control over the majority of Cambodian territory, although only a minority of its population. Many people in Cambodia who helped the Khmer Rouge against the Lon Nol government thought they were fighting for the restoration of Sihanouk.

The relation between the massive carpet bombing of Cambodia by the United States and the growth of the Khmer Rouge, in terms of recruitment and popular support, has been a matter of interest to historians. In 1984 [Craig Etcheson](#) of the [Documentation Center of Cambodia](#) argued that it is "untenable" to assert that the Khmer Rouge would not have won but for U.S. intervention and that while the bombing did help Khmer Rouge recruitment, they "would have won anyway."[\[13\]](#)

Conversely, some historians have cited the U.S. intervention and bombing campaign (spanning 1965–1973) as a significant factor leading to increased support of the Khmer Rouge among the Cambodian peasantry. Historian [Ben Kiernan](#) and Taylor Owen have used a combination of sophisticated satellite mapping, recently unclassified data about the extent of bombing activities, and peasant testimony, to argue that there was a correlation between villages targeted by U.S. bombing and recruitment of peasants by the Khmer Rouge.[\[14\]](#)

In his 1996 study of Pol Pot's rise to power, Kiernan argued that foreign intervention "was probably the most significant factor in Pol Pot's rise."[\[15\]](#)

By 1975, with the Lon Nol government running out of ammunition, it was clear that it was only a matter of time before the government would collapse. On April 17, 1975 the Khmer Rouge captured [Phnom Penh](#).

The Khmer Rouge in power

Main articles: [Democratic Kampuchea](#) and [Khmer Rouge rule of Cambodia](#)

The leadership of the Khmer Rouge remained largely unchanged from the 1960s to the mid-1990s. The leaders were mostly from [middle-class](#) families and had been educated at French [universities](#).

The Standing Committee of the Khmer Rouge's Central Committee ("Party Center") during its period of power consisted of:

- [Pol Pot](#) (Saloth Sar) (died 1998), "Brother number 1", [General Secretary](#) from 1963 until his

death, effectively the leader of the movement

- [Nuon Chea](#) (Long Bunruot), "Brother number 2", Prime Minister, arrested in 2007[16])
- [Ieng Sary](#) (Pol Pot's brother-in-law), "Brother number 3", Deputy Prime Minister, arrested in 2007
- [Ta Mok](#) (Chhit Chhoeun) (died July 21, 2006), "Brother number 4", Southwest Regional Secretary, final Khmer Rouge leader, died in custody awaiting trial for [genocide](#)
- [Khieu Samphan](#), "Brother number 5", President of Democratic Kampuchea, arrested in 2007
- [Son Sen](#) (died 1997), Defense Minister, Superior of [Kang Kek Iew](#), tried 2009
- [Yun Yat](#) (died 1997)
- [Ke Pauk](#) (died 2002), "Brother number 13", former secretary of the Northern zone
- [Ieng Thirith](#), arrested in 2007

In power, the Khmer Rouge carried out a radical program that included isolating the country from foreign influence, closing schools, hospitals and factories, abolishing [banking](#), [finance](#) and [currency](#), outlawing all [religions](#), confiscating all [private property](#) and relocating people from [urban areas](#) to [collective farms](#) where forced labor was widespread. The purpose of this policy was to turn Cambodians into "Old People" through agricultural labor. These actions resulted in massive deaths through executions, work exhaustion, illness, and starvation.

In Phnom Penh and other cities, the Khmer Rouge told [residents](#) that they would be moved only about "two or three kilometers" outside the city and would return in "two or three days." Some witnesses say they were told that the evacuation was because of the "threat of American bombing" and that they did not have to lock their houses since the Khmer Rouge would "take care of everything" until they returned. These were not the first evacuations of civilian populations by the Khmer Rouge. Similar evacuations of [populations](#) without possessions had been occurring on a smaller scale since the early 1970s.

The Khmer Rouge attempted to turn Cambodia into a classless society by depopulating cities and forcing the urban population ("New People") into agricultural [communes](#). The entire population was forced to become farmers in [labor camps](#).

Money was abolished, books were burned, teachers, merchants, and almost the entire intellectual elite of the country were murdered, to make the agricultural communism, as Pol Pot envisioned it, a reality. The planned relocation to the countryside resulted in the complete halt of almost all economic activity: even schools and hospitals were closed, as well as banks, and industrial and service companies.

During their four years in power, the Khmer Rouge overworked and starved the population, at the same time executing selected groups who had the potential to undermine the new state (including [intellectuals](#) or even those that had stereotypical signs of learning, such as glasses) and killing many others for even breaching minor rules.

Cambodians were expected to produce three tons of rice per hectare; before the Khmer Rouge era, the average was only one ton per hectare. The Khmer Rouge forced people to work for 12 hours non-stop, without adequate rest or food. They did not believe in western [medicine](#) but instead favoured traditional peasant medicine; many died as a result.

[Family](#) relationships not sanctioned by the state were also banned, and family members could be put to death for communicating with each other. In any case, family members were often relocated to different parts of the country with all postal and telephone services abolished.

The total lack of [agricultural](#) knowledge by the former city dwellers made [famine](#) inevitable. Rural dwellers were often unsympathetic or too frightened to assist them. Such acts as picking wild fruit or berries was seen as "[private enterprise](#)" and punished by death.

The [Khmer language](#) has a complex system of usages to define speakers' rank and social status. During the rule of the Khmer Rouge, these usages were abolished. People were encouraged to call each other "friend" or "[comrade](#)" ([Khmer](#): មិត្ត *mitt*), and to avoid traditional signs of deference such as bowing or folding the hands in salutation, known as *sampea*.

Language was also transformed in other ways. The Khmer Rouge invented new terms. People were told to "forge" (*lot dam*) a new revolutionary character, that they were the "instruments" ([Khmer](#): ឧបករណ៍; *opokar*) of the ruling body known as "[Angkar](#)" ([Khmer](#): អង្គការ pronounced ahngkah; meaning "The Organization"), and that nostalgia for pre-revolutionary times (*choeu stek arom*, or "memory sickness") could result in execution. Also, rural terms like *Mae* ([Khmer](#): ម្តាយ; mother) replaced urban terms like *Mak* ([Khmer](#): ម្តាយ; mother).

Many Cambodians crossed the border into [Thailand](#) to seek [asylum](#). From there, they were transported to [refugee camps](#) such as [Sa Kaeo](#) or [Khao-I-Dang](#), the only camp allowing resettlement in countries such as the [United States](#), [France](#), [Canada](#), and [Australia](#). In some refugee camps such as Site 8, Phnom Chat or Ta Prik the Khmer Rouge cadre controlled food distribution and restricted the activities of international aid agencies[17].

Crimes against humanity



Skulls of Khmer Rouge victims



Remains of victims of the Khmer Rouge in the Kampong Trach Cave, Kiry Seila Hills, Rung Tik (Water Cave) or Rung Khmao (Dead Cave)

The Khmer Rouge government arrested, [tortured](#) and eventually executed anyone suspected of belonging to several categories of supposed "enemies":

- Anyone with connections to the former government or with foreign governments.
- [Professionals](#) and intellectuals—in practice this included almost everyone with an [education](#), or even people wearing glasses (which, according to the regime, meant that they were literate).

Ironically and hypocritically, Pol Pot himself was a university-educated man (albeit a drop-out) with a taste for [French Literature](#) and was also a fluent [French](#) speaker. Many artists, including musicians, writers and film makers were executed. Some like [Ros Sereysothea](#), [Pan Ron](#) and [Sinn Sisamouth](#) gained posthumous fame for their talents and are still popular with Khmers today.

- Ethnic Vietnamese, ethnic Chinese, ethnic Thai and other minorities in Eastern Highland, Cambodian [Christians](#) (Most of whom were Catholic, and the [Roman Catholic Church](#) in general), [Muslims](#) and the [Buddhist monks](#).
- "Economic saboteurs:" many of the former urban dwellers (who had not starved to death in the first place) were deemed to be guilty by virtue of their lack of agricultural ability.

Through the 1970s, and especially after mid-1975, the party was also shaken by factional struggles. There were even armed attempts to topple Pol Pot. The resultant purges reached a crest in 1977 and 1978 when thousands, including some important KCP leaders, were executed.

Today, examples of the torture methods used by the Khmer Rouge can be seen at the [Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum](#). The museum occupies the former grounds of a [high school](#) turned [prison camp](#) that was operated by [Khang Khek Ieu](#), more commonly known as "Comrade Duch". Some 17,000 people passed through this centre before they were taken to sites (also known as [The Killing Fields](#)), outside Phnom Penh such as [Choeung Ek](#) where most were executed (mainly by [pickaxes](#) to save bullets) and buried in [mass graves](#). Of the thousands who entered the [Tuol Sleng Centre](#) (also known as S-21), only twelve are known to have survived.

Number of deaths

The exact number of people who died as a result of the Khmer Rouge's policies is debated, as is the cause of death among those who died. Access to the country during Khmer Rouge rule and during Vietnamese rule was very limited. In the early 1980s, the Vietnamese-installed regime that succeeded the Khmer Rouge conducted a national household survey, which concluded that over 4.8 million had died, but most modern historians do not consider that number to be reliable.^[*citation needed*]

Modern research has located thousands of mass graves from the Khmer Rouge era all over Cambodia, containing an estimated 1.39 million bodies. Various studies have estimated the death toll at between 740,000 and 3,000,000, most commonly between 1.4 million and 2.2 million, with perhaps half of those deaths being due to executions, and the rest from starvation and disease.^[18]

The [United States Department of State](#)-funded Yale Cambodian Genocide Project gives estimates of the total death toll between 1.2 million and 1.7 million.^[19] [Amnesty International](#) estimates the total death toll as 1.4 million.^[*citation needed*] [R. J. Rummel](#), an analyst of historical political killings, gives a figure of 2 million^[20]. Former Khmer Rouge leader [Pol Pot](#) gave a figure of 800,000, and his deputy, [Khieu Samphan](#), said 1 million had been killed.^[*citation needed*]

Fall of the Khmer Rouge

Main article: [Cambodian–Vietnamese War](#)

By December 1978, because of several years of border conflict and the flood of [refugees](#) fleeing [Cambodia](#), relations between Cambodia and Vietnam collapsed. Pol Pot, fearing a Vietnamese attack, ordered a pre-emptive invasion of Vietnam. His Cambodian forces crossed the border and looted nearby villages. These Cambodian forces were repulsed by the Vietnamese.

Along with the [Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation](#), an organization that included many

dissatisfied former Khmer Rouge members[21] , the [Vietnamese armed forces](#) then invaded Cambodia, capturing [Phnom Penh](#) on January 7, 1979. Despite a traditional Cambodian fear of Vietnamese domination, defecting Khmer Rouge activists assisted the Vietnamese, and, with Vietnam's approval, became the core of the new [People's Republic of Kampuchea](#), quickly dismissed by the Khmer Rouge and China as a "[puppet government](#)".

At the same time, the Khmer Rouge retreated west, and it continued to control certain areas near the Thai border for the next decade. These included [Phnom Malai](#), the mountain areas near [Pailin](#) in the [Cardamom Mountains](#) and [Anlong Veng](#) in the [Dângrêk Mountains](#). [22] These Khmer Rouge bases were not self-sufficient and were funded by diamond and timber smuggling, military assistance from China channeled by means of the Thai military, and food from markets across the border in Thailand. [23]

Despite its deposal, the Khmer Rouge retained its [UN](#) seat, which was occupied by [Thiounn Prasith](#), an old compatriot of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary from their student days in Paris, and one of the 21 attendees at the 1960 KPRP Second Congress. The seat was retained under the name "Democratic Kampuchea" until 1982, and then "Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea" (see below) until 1993. Western governments repeatedly backed the Khmer Rouge in the U.N. and voted in favour of retaining the Cambodia's seat in the organization. Margaret Thatcher stated that "So, you'll find that the more reasonable ones of the Khmer Rouge will have to play some part in the future government, but only a minority part. I share your utter horror that these terrible things went on in Kampuchea." [24] Sweden on the contrary changed its vote in the U.N. and withdrew support for the Khmer Rouge after a large number of Swedish citizens wrote letters to their elected representatives demanding a policy change towards Pol Pot's regime. [25]

Vietnam's victory, supported by the Soviet Union, had significant ramifications for the region; the [People's Republic of China](#) launched a punitive invasion of northern Vietnam and retreated (with both sides claiming victory). China, the U.S. and the [ASEAN](#) countries sponsored the creation and the military operations of a Cambodian [government-in-exile](#) known as the [Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea](#) which included, besides the Khmer Rouge, [republican KPNLF](#) and royalist [ANS](#). [25]

Eastern and central Cambodia were firmly under the control of Vietnam and its Cambodian allies by 1980, while the western part of the country continued to be a battlefield throughout the 1980s, and millions of [landmines](#) were sown across the countryside. The Khmer Rouge, still led by Pol Pot, was the strongest of the three [rebel](#) groups in the [Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea](#), and received extensive military aid from China, Britain and the United States and [intelligence](#) from the Thai military

In 1981, the Khmer Rouge went as far as to officially renounce Communism [22] and somewhat moved their ideological emphasis to nationalism and anti-Vietnamese rhetoric instead. However, some analysts argue that this change meant little in practice, because, as historian Kelvin Rowley puts it, "CPK propaganda had always relied on nationalist rather than revolutionary appeals". [25]

Although Pol Pot relinquished the Khmer Rouge leadership to [Khieu Samphan](#) in 1985, he continued to be the driving force of Khmer Rouge insurgency, giving speeches to his followers. Journalists such as [Nate Thayer](#) who spent some time with the Khmer Rouge during that period commented that, despite the international community's near-universal condemnation of the Khmer Rouge's brutal rule, a considerable number of Cambodians in Khmer Rouge-controlled areas seemed genuinely to support Pol Pot. [26]

While Vietnam proposed to withdraw in return for a political settlement excluding the Khmer Rouge from power, the rebel coalition government as well as ASEAN, China and the US insisted that such a

condition was unacceptable.[22] Nevertheless, in 1985 Vietnam declared that it would complete the withdrawal of its forces from Cambodia by 1990 and did so in 1989, having allowed the [government that it had instated there](#) to consolidate and gain sufficient military strength.[25]

After a decade of inconclusive conflict, the pro-Vietnamese Cambodian government and the rebel coalition signed a treaty in 1991 calling for elections and disarmament. In 1992, however, the Khmer Rouge resumed fighting, boycotted the election and, in the following year, rejected its results. It now fought the new Cambodian coalition government which included the former Vietnamese-backed Communists (headed by [Hun Sen](#)) as well as the Khmer Rouge's former non-Communist and monarchist allies (notably Prince [Rannaridh](#)).

There was a mass [defection](#) in 1996, when around half the remaining soldiers (about 4,000) left. In 1997, a conflict between the two main participants in the ruling coalition caused Prince Rannaridh to seek support from some of the Khmer Rouge leaders, while refusing to have any dealings with Pol Pot. [25][26] This resulted in bloody factional fighting among the Khmer Rouge leaders, ultimately leading to Pol Pot's trial and imprisonment by the Khmer Rouge. Pol Pot died in April 1998. Kieu Samphan surrendered in December.

On December 29, 1998, the remaining leaders of the Khmer Rouge apologized for the 1970s genocide. By 1999, most members had surrendered or been captured. In December 1999, [Ta Mok](#) and the remaining leaders surrendered, and the Khmer Rouge effectively ceased to exist. Most of the surviving Khmer Rouge leaders live in the [Pailin](#) area or are hidden in Phnom Penh.

Since 1990 Cambodia has gradually recovered, [demographically](#) and economically, from the Khmer Rouge regime, although the psychological scars affect many Cambodian families and [émigré](#) communities. It is noteworthy that Cambodia has a very young population and by 2003 three-quarters of Cambodians were too young to remember the Khmer Rouge era.

Members of this younger generation may know of the Khmer Rouge only through word of mouth from parents and elders. In part, this is because the government does not require that educators teach children about Khmer Rouge atrocities in the schools.[27] However, Cambodia's Education Ministry has approved plans to teach Khmer Rouge history in high schools beginning in 2009.[28] This has now started.[29]

Right now, the Khmer Rouge Case trials are taking place, with the charges accusing the Khmer Rouge regime of [genocide](#) and [crimes against humanity](#). [30] After claiming to feel great remorse for his part in Khmer Rouge atrocities, [Kaing Guek Eav](#), head of a torture center from which 16,000 men, women and children were sent to their deaths, surprised the court in his genocide trial on 27 November 2009 with a plea for his freedom. His Cambodian lawyer, [Kar Savuth](#), stunned the tribunal further by issuing the trial's first call for an acquittal of his client, even after his French lawyer denied seeking such a verdict.[31] On the 26 July, he was convicted and sentenced to thirty years. Many condemned the sentence as too lenient [32]. Theary Seng responded indignantly:

'We hoped this tribunal would strike hard at impunity but if you can kill 14,000 people and serve only 19 years - 11 hours per life taken - what is that? It's a joke. 'My gut feeling is this has made the situation far worse for Cambodia. 'It has taken a lot of faith out of the system and raised concerns of political interference.'}}