The intersection of social identity, normative influence, and political efficacy:

A literature review of Cambodian youth in national elections

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Abstract

This conceptual review examines how social identity and normative influence intersect with political efficacy to shape Cambodian youth's engagement in national elections. Drawing from social psychology and political science, the paper explores how group affiliations, such as ethnic, political, and generational identities, interact with normative pressures from families, peers, and communities to influence both internal efficacy, confidence in understanding politics, and external efficacy, belief in institutional responsiveness. The findings indicate that youth embedded in politically active networks or aligned with activist movements exhibit stronger political efficacy and greater engagement, while those in disengaged environments often show apathy and reduced participation. These insights carry critical implications for Cambodia's democratic trajectory. Fostering youth political participation requires more than information, it demands the cultivation of collective democratic identities and supportive social norms. Civic education must engage families and local communities, while youth organizations should leverage peer influence and digital platforms to foster inclusive, participatory spaces. Future research should include longitudinal studies to examine how political efficacy evolves over time, comparative analyses across Southeast Asia, and focused inquiries into rural–urban disparities and the role of online political communities. Ultimately, this review offers a framework for understanding and enhancing youth political engagement in Cambodia, contributing to broader efforts to sustain democratic development in post-authoritarian societies.

Keywords: Social identity, normative influence, political efficacy, youth political engagement, Cambodia, political behaviours

I. Introduction Cambodia's political landscape has been characterized by ongoing transitions since the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979 (Kiernan, 2002; Yin, 2021). Although the country has made significant strides toward democratic governance, its political system remains heavily influenced by authoritarian practices, which often limit the participation of youth in national elections (Un & Ledgerwood, 2002). Youth, who make up more than 60% of Cambodia's population (Worl Bank, 2021), represent a crucial demographic for the future of the country's democratic development. However, their political engagement, especially in national elections, has often been low due to limited political efficacy, a lack of access to political information, and a general sense of disillusionment with political institutions (UNDP, 2010). Political efficacy, the belief that one can influence political processes, plays a pivotal role in motivating youth to engage in elections and political activities. For Cambodian youth, who face challenges related to political apathy and trust in institutions, understanding the factors that influence political efficacy is essential for fostering greater participation in democratic processes. Social identity and normative influence are two key psychological constructs that have gained attention in the study of political engagement (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). These constructs help explain how group affiliations and social norms shape political behaviours, particularly in societies undergoing democratic transitions. Social identity refers to the way individuals define themselves in relation to social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the context of Cambodia, youth's political behaviours are often influenced by their sense of belonging to broader political or cultural groups, e.g., ethnic groups, political parties, youth organizations. This sense of social identity provides the psychological foundation for political participation by fostering feelings of shared responsibility and collective efficacy (Campbell & Converse, 1972; Campbell & Miller, 1954). Similarly, normative influence, the pressure individuals feel to conform to the behaviours and attitudes of their social groups, plays a significant role in determining whether youth engage in political activities, such as voting or participating in protests (Finkel, 1985). Normative influence from family, peers, and community can act as a catalyst for political engagement by encouraging youth to conform to the expectations of their social networks (Cohen & Wills, 1985). This intersection between social identity, normative influence, and political efficacy is particularly important in the Cambodian context, where political identity is heavily shaped by historical experiences, familial networks, and broader cultural practices (Tan & Rajendran, 2020). By understanding the ways in which these constructs

influence youth political behaviour, it is possible to develop more targeted interventions that can increase youth participation in national elections.

The primary purpose of this review is to examine how social identity and normative influence intersect with political efficacy to shape political engagement among Cambodian youth in the context of national elections. This paper will provide a conceptual exploration of the relationship between social identity, norms, and political behaviour, with a particular focus on Cambodia. The review will critically assess existing literature to determine how these psychological constructs have been applied to understand Cambodian youth's political efficacy and participation in electoral processes. In doing so, this review aims to (1) identify theoretical models and frameworks that best explain the relationship between social identity, normative influence, and political engagement in the Cambodian context, (2) synthesize findings from various studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role these factors play in motivating youth to participate in national elections, and (3) highlight gaps in the literature and suggest avenues for future research that could further deepen our understanding of youth political behaviour in Cambodia.

This review contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and social factors influencing youth political engagement in Cambodia. By examining the intersection of social identity and normative influence with political efficacy, this paper provides new insights into how these constructs can shape political participation among Cambodian youth. These insights are crucial for designing strategies and interventions that can enhance youth participation in the democratic process, particularly in the context of national elections. Furthermore, the findings of this review will be of significant value to policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations in Cambodia. These groups can use the insights gained to develop civic engagement initiatives, youth education programs, and political campaigns that are tailored to the unique social and cultural realities of Cambodia. Understanding the role of social identity and normative influence in shaping political behaviour will help create engagement strategies that resonate with Cambodian youth, increasing their political efficacy and their willingness to participate in electoral processes. Finally, this study will inform future research in the field of youth political behaviour in emerging democracies, offering a theoretical foundation for further exploration of how social identity and normative influences operate in other countries with similar democratic transitions and youth demographics. By expanding this body of knowledge, we can better understand the

psychological mechanisms that drive political participation in young populations across the Southeast Asian region and beyond.

II. Theoretical Framework: Social Identity, Normative Influence, and Political Efficacy

Social Identity Theory (SIT), originally developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), posits that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept and social identity from their membership in various social groups. These groups, which can include familial, cultural, political, or ethnic groups, play a pivotal role in shaping an individual's attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions. According to SIT, individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity by distinguishing themselves from out-groups and aligning with in-groups that provide a sense of belonging, validation, and solidarity. In the context of political behaviour, Social Identity Theory is highly relevant. Youth in Cambodia, like elsewhere, often identify with political parties, activist groups, or ethnic or cultural communities that shape their political attitudes and actions (Calhoun, 1994; Gamson et al., 1995). When youth feel a sense of belonging to these political or social groups, they are more likely to engage in political activities, such as voting or participating in protests, particularly during national elections. Social identity influences political behaviours by creating a sense of collective efficacy, where individuals believe their participation as part of a larger group can influence political outcomes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, in Cambodia, youth often identify with groups based on their regional or ethnic background, and political engagement can be shaped by group affiliations in terms of support for political parties or social movements. When youth identify strongly with a political group, they are more likely to engage in voting behaviour and political activism because they believe that their group's collective action will lead to meaningful changes in governance. Thus, social identity serves as a foundation for youth to perceive themselves as active participants in the democratic process (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Normative influence refers to the social pressure exerted by others in a person's social circle to conform to established norms, values, and behaviours. This influence is an essential factor in shaping individual and collective behaviours, particularly when individuals seek social acceptance or avoid rejection from their groups (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In political contexts, norms within a community or society strongly influence how individuals participate in political processes, including voting, attending political meetings, and engaging in political discussions. In the case of

Cambodian youth, normative influence plays a critical role in shaping political attitudes and behaviours, especially during national elections. For instance, youth may feel compelled to vote or participate in political movements because of the expectations of their family members, peers, or the broader community. If political participation is considered a social norm within their community, youth are more likely to adopt these behaviours to conform to group expectations. Similarly, if political participation is stigmatized or discouraged, youth may be less likely to engage, even if they personally feel motivated to do so. Furthermore, normative influence can directly impact political efficacy. When youth observe that their participation in political activities is not only accepted but expected by their community, it enhances their sense of political efficacy, both internally, confidence in their ability to understand and influence politics, and externally, belief that the political system responds to citizen actions. In Cambodia, where political participation can sometimes be suppressed, social norms within youth networks and family support systems can either encourage or discourage engagement based on prevailing community attitudes towards democratic processes.

Political efficacy refers to the belief that individuals can understand and influence political processes. It is a key factor in motivating youth to participate in national elections and other political activities. Internal political efficacy pertains to an individual's belief in their ability to understand and engage with political matters, while external political efficacy refers to the belief that the political system will respond to citizens' actions (Campbell & Miller, 1954). High levels of political efficacy are associated with increased participation, as individuals who feel that their involvement matters are more likely to engage in democratic processes, such as voting, political activism, and political discussions. Theoretical frameworks from political psychology and social psychology provide insights into how social identity and normative influence can enhance or diminish political efficacy (Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al., 1991). Social Identity Theory suggests that youth who identify with a political group or movement will likely perceive their actions as meaningful because they see themselves as part of a collective identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Calhoun, 1994). This group identification enhances internal political efficacy because it fosters a sense of shared responsibility and a belief that individual actions contribute to the collective success of the group. Similarly, normative influence enhances political efficacy by establishing a sense of social obligation. When youth are surrounded by a supportive community that encourages

political participation, they are more likely to feel empowered and motivated to engage in political activities. This sense of social endorsement not only increases their internal political efficacy but also boosts their external efficacy, as they come to believe that their participation will lead to political change (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Therefore, the intersection of social identity and normative influence plays a vital role in shaping political efficacy among Cambodian youth, with both factors contributing to increased engagement in national elections and the broader democratic process. In the Cambodian context, these theories suggest that youth are more likely to feel politically effective and motivated to engage in elections when they identify with political parties or social movements that align with their values. If they are surrounded by norms that value voting and political activism, they are more likely to develop a strong sense of political efficacy, both internally and externally. Conversely, in environments where political participation is discouraged or stigmatized, youth may feel disconnected from the political process and believe their participation will have little impact as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1. Theoretical Framework Explaining Cambodian Youth Political Engagement

Theoretical Component	Key Concepts	Application to Cambodian Youth	Key References
Social Identity Theory	Individuals form part of their self-concept through membership in social groups (e.g., ethnic, political, familial). This identity shapes their behaviours and perceptions.	Cambodian youth who strongly identify with activist groups or political parties are more likely to vote or protest due to a sense of belonging and collective action.	(Calhoun, 1994; Gamson et al., 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986)
Normative Influence	Social pressure from family, peers, or community influences	Youth political behaviour is affected by what is socially acceptable in their environment.	(Cohen & Wills, 1985)

Theoretical Component	Key Concepts	Application to Cambodian Youth	Key References
	individuals to conform to group norms and behaviours.	When political engagement is encouraged by peers or family, participation increases.	
Political Efficacy	Refers to internal efficacy (confidence in understanding politics) and external efficacy (belief that institutions respond to citizens).	Youth with supportive networks and positive role models are more politically efficacious and likely to engage. In contrast, suppressed environments reduce motivation.	(Campbell & Converse, 1972; Cohen & Wills, 1985)

III. Literature Review: Intersections of Social Identity, Normative Influence, and Political Efficacy in Youth Political Behavior

Social Identity Theory (SIT), as proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), posits that individuals' sense of self is largely defined by their group memberships, which can include ethnic, national, or political affiliations. In the context of youth political efficacy, social identity is a crucial factor that influences both individual and collective political behaviour (Clarke & Acock, 1989; Craig & Maggiotto, 1982). Research suggests that youth who strongly identify with political groups or national communities are more likely to feel that their participation in political activities is meaningful and impactful (Sani & Azizuddin, 2009). This connection between social identity and political efficacy is particularly important in emerging democracies like Cambodia, where youth's engagement in national elections is influenced by their group affiliations, such as ethnic or political identity, and their belief in the power of collective action. In Cambodia, the role of group identity is shaped by both historical and cultural factors. Youth in Cambodia often define their social identity through the lens of ethnicity, family ties, and political affiliations (UNDP, 2010). These identities not only influence how they perceive their role in political participation but also shape their beliefs about their political efficacy, the belief that their actions in the political realm will have meaningful outcomes. Studies from Southeast Asia have shown that ethnic identity and

political party affiliation are strong determinants of youth political behaviour (Fukuyama, 2001). In Cambodia, political participation is often seen through the prism of loyalty to political groups, reflecting a broader social identity that motivates youth to engage with political processes (Chheang, 2011). For instance, Cambodian youth who identify with oppositional political groups may feel a heightened sense of political efficacy in opposing the current regime, which can motivate them to engage in activities like voting or protesting (Vong & Hok, 2018). Conversely, youth who identify with the government or more traditional political structures might be more inclined to participate in political activities that reinforce the status quo. Overall, the social identity of Cambodian youth plays a central role in shaping their political efficacy by determining whether they perceive political participation as a personal responsibility and whether they feel that their engagement can lead to desired political outcomes.

Normative influence refers to the pressure individuals feel to conform to the expectations or norms of the social groups they belong to. This influence is an important determinant of political behaviour, as it shapes both individual attitudes toward political participation and the willingness of youth to act in politically meaningful ways (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Norms surrounding political participation, such as voting, activism, and political discourse, play a critical role in shaping youth perceptions of their political efficacy. In Southeast Asia, social norms around voting and activism can significantly affect how youth perceive their ability to influence political outcomes. Research has demonstrated that when political participation is regarded as a socially acceptable or even expected behaviour within a community, youth are more likely to believe in their political efficacy and are motivated to engage in political activities (Verba et al., 1995). For instance, in countries like Thailand and Indonesia, norms surrounding voting and political activism have been shown to positively correlate with youth participation in national elections (Tan, 2012). The presence of peer influence, where youth are encouraged or socially pressured to vote or participate in political movements, can further strengthen their belief in their ability to impact political change. In Cambodia, the influence of social norms on political participation is particularly significant. Youth from familial and peer networks may feel socially obligated to engage in political processes that are in line with the norms established by their community. For example, in areas where political discussions are encouraged by families or peer groups, youth may be more likely to see political participation as a collective responsibility and feel more politically efficacious (Putnam, 1993,

2000). Conversely, in communities where political disengagement or apathy is the norm, youth may experience lower levels of political efficacy and be less likely to engage in voting or activism. Social norms around political participation are also deeply intertwined with political socialization, the process by which individuals acquire political values, attitudes, and behaviours. Cambodian youth's sense of political efficacy and engagement is shaped by the political culture fostered by family, community leaders, and educational institutions.

When examining the intersection of social identity and normative influence in Cambodia, it becomes evident that youth political engagement is shaped by both individual and collective factors. Cultural norms and family expectations heavily influence youth's perceptions of political participation. In Cambodia, where social cohesion and collectivism are highly valued, youth political behaviours are often driven by a strong sense of duty to their family and community. This sense of belonging can either encourage or discourage youth from engaging in political processes, depending on the prevailing political norms within the community. For example, in rural areas where political apathy is common, youth may feel less motivated to participate in national elections or political activities due to a lack of normative reinforcement from their social networks. On the other hand, urban youth, particularly those involved in youth organizations or political movements, may have access to more politically active social networks, which in turn increases their political efficacy and engagement. Studies have shown that Cambodian youth who are involved in student-led organizations or youth activism groups often experience heightened political efficacy due to the collective influence of their group identities (Vong, 2022). Cultural and political dynamics also play a role in shaping the intersection of social identity and normative influence. In Cambodia, the influence of family and community leaders in encouraging political participation can be seen in the way youth are socialized into political behaviours. During national elections, youth may be strongly encouraged by their families or peers to participate, reflecting the broader societal expectations and norms surrounding political engagement. Moreover, the political environment in Cambodia, which is often characterized by political centralization and government control, shapes the political norms that guide youth participation. Political efficacy among youth is thus not only shaped by personal beliefs but also by how political behaviours are normalized or discouraged within their social circles.

The intersection of social identity and normative influence plays a significant role in shaping political efficacy and engagement among Cambodian youth, especially in the context of national elections. Group identities, whether defined by ethnicity, political affiliation, or social movements, can enhance or diminish youth political efficacy, depending on the norms established by their social groups. By understanding the theoretical relationship between social identity, normative influence, and political efficacy, we gain valuable insights into the psychological and social dynamics that drive political behaviour among Cambodian youth. Future research in this area should further explore how cultural factors, family networks, and peer influence interact to shape political participation and engagement in Cambodia, with a focus on national elections and democratic processes as summarized in table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Social Identity, Normative Influence, and Youth Political Efficacy in Cambodia

Subsection Topic	Key Insights	Implications for Cambodian Youth	Key References
Social Identity and Political Efficacy	Youth with strong ethnic, political, or group affiliations tend to report higher political efficacy. Group identity shapes political engagement through shared beliefs and collective purpose.	Political identity rooted in opposition or loyalty shapes voting behaviour and motivation. Youth participation depends on perceived group purpose and historical-political context.	(Chheang, 2011; Sani & Azizuddin, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979)
Normative Influence and Youth Political Behaviour	Youth are more likely to participate politically when social norms in their communities encourage civic behaviour. Peer and family influence significantly impact perceived efficacy.	When political engagement is normalized, youth internalize participation as expected behaviour. Absence of civic reinforcement lowers motivation.	(Cohen & Wills, 1985; Putnam, 2000; Verba et al., 1995)

Subsection Topic	Key Insights	Implications for Cambodian Youth	Key References
Intersection in the Cambodian Context	Cultural collectivism and social cohesion in Cambodia reinforce the influence of both identity and norms. Urban youth with activist ties engages more; rural youth often face normative disengagement.	Engagement depends on the alignment of identity with supportive norms. Family and community leaders play key roles in either reinforcing or discouraging youth political behaviour.	(Chheang, 2011; UNDP, 2010)

IV. Conceptual Intersections and Synthesis of Findings

The relationship between social identity and normative influence offers a powerful lens through which to understand political efficacy and engagement, especially among youth in emerging democracies like Cambodia. These two constructs are deeply intertwined, with social identity providing the foundation for an individual's belonging to a group, and normative influence determining the behaviours expected of them within that group. When combined, these factors significantly shape the political behaviours and attitudes of youth, especially regarding their participation in national elections. Social identity theory, as proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), suggests that youth who strongly identify with a specific social group, whether defined by ethnicity, political affiliation, or regional identity, are more likely to engage in political behaviours that align with the group's goals and values. This group membership provides a psychological framework within which youth interpret their political roles and responsibilities. However, normative influence can amplify or mitigate this influence by establishing expectations regarding how youth should behave politically. Norms, whether shaped by familial, peer, or community expectations, serve as behavioural guidelines, pushing youth to conform to practices that are either celebrated or discouraged by the groups they identify with. For example, in Cambodia, youth belonging to oppositional political groups may feel a sense of empowerment from their social identity and be encouraged by the norms of their group to engage in protests, voting, or activism. Alternatively, those who identify with the ruling party may be influenced by social norms that

prioritize obedience or support for the status quo, leading to different political behaviours. The interaction of social identity and normative influence can also be seen in how youth develop a sense of political efficacy. Social identity may create a sense of collective political efficacy, where individuals believe that their participation, as part of a group, can affect political change. However, normative influence can shape the level of political efficacy by reinforcing or challenging an individual's belief that their engagement is meaningful and impactful. In contexts where social norms strongly encourage political participation, youth are more likely to feel that their involvement is necessary and effective, thus increasing their political efficacy (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Coleman, 1990). Empirical studies have demonstrated that these two forces, social identity and normative influence, combine to create a vibrant dynamic in shaping youth political behaviour. Social identity can provide the motivational foundation for participation, while normative influence shapes the direction and form of that participation, either by encouraging or constraining youth political action based on prevailing social expectations. The combined effect is a stronger political engagement among youth who identify with politically active groups and experience positive social reinforcement to participate in national elections (Sani & Azizuddin, 2009).

Theoretical models of social identity and normative influence provide a critical lens through which to understand the political behaviour of Cambodian youth. These frameworks elucidate how group membership and societal expectations shape both political engagement and political efficacy, particularly in the context of national elections. As Cambodia continues its complex journey of democratic development, such models offer valuable guidance for designing targeted strategies to enhance youth political participation. In the Cambodian context, Social Identity Theory proves especially relevant, as political engagement is often closely tied to ethnic, familial, and political group affiliations. Youth who strongly identify with political parties or activist movements tend to view participation in elections and protests as an extension of their collective identity. This alignment with peer groups and family-based political preferences fosters a sense of belonging that can drive political action. For instance, youth who affiliate with opposition parties may engage in political activism as a means of asserting their identity in opposition to dominant power structures, using electoral participation and protest as forms of resistance and advocacy (Chheang, 2011). Similarly, young people in rural areas may be influenced by local networks or family loyalties, often mirroring the political inclinations of their elders when casting votes or

participating in campaigns. Normative influence further reinforces or constrains political engagement, depending on the prevailing expectations within familial and community networks. In a society where social cohesion is highly valued, Cambodian youth often find their political attitudes shaped by the behavioural norms endorsed by those around them. When political participation is framed as a civic responsibility within the household or local community, youth are more likely to view voting and civic activism positively. However, when fear, political apathy, or disengagement dominate the social climate, youth may internalize these norms, leading to diminished political efficacy and reluctance to participate (UNDP, 2010). The strength of normative influence in Cambodia is especially evident in intergenerational transmission of political attitudes, where youth inherit not only political preferences but also the perceived risks or benefits of engagement. Despite these constraints, Cambodian youth are increasingly navigating new spaces for political identity formation and participation. One of the major challenges remains the top-down structure of the political system, in which the dominance of political elites' limits opportunities for bottom-up civic engagement. This environment has historically discouraged autonomous political activity, thereby weakening youth confidence in their capacity to influence outcomes. Nonetheless, emerging trends such as the growth of youth-led organizations and the proliferation of social media platforms have created alternative arenas for political expression. These spaces allow youth to develop shared identities around democratic ideals, human rights, and social justice, while also transforming normative pressures. As such influences shift, they open new pathways for youth to experience political empowerment and reimagine their roles within the electoral process. Cultural, political, and social dynamics continue to shape these developments in significant ways. Cambodian culture, which prioritizes familial duty and communal values, profoundly impacts how youth interpret their political responsibilities. The enduring centralization of political authority often stifles dissent and narrows the scope of acceptable civic behaviour, particularly in rural areas where access to independent political discourse is limited. Yet within this restrictive setting, social movements and youth-led initiatives have begun to challenge prevailing norms and cultivate environments where political engagement is re-legitimized. These movements draw upon both social identity and normative influence to build cohesive communities that encourage democratic participation. Their efforts suggest a potential cultural and political

transformation in which youth are no longer passive observers but active contributors to Cambodia's democratic evolution.

In sum, the intersection of social identity and normative influence remains a decisive factor in shaping political efficacy and participation among Cambodian youth. The application of Social Identity Theory and Normative Influence Theory provides a robust conceptual framework for understanding how these forces interact to shape young people's political attitudes and behaviours. As Cambodia's political landscape continues to shift, a nuanced understanding of how identity and social norms affect political agency will be essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable youth participation in the country's democratic trajectory as indicated in table 3.

Table 3. Conceptual Intersections and Theoretical Application in Cambodian Youth

Focus Area	Key Insights	Examples in Cambodian Context	Implications	Key References
Integration of Social Identity and Normative Influence	Social identity shapes group-based motivation, while normative influence determines acceptable political behaviours within that group. Their intersection enhances or suppresses youth political efficacy.	Youth in opposition groups are empowered by identity and encouraged by group norms to protest or vote; norms in ruling-party circles may prioritize conformity over activism.	The stronger the alignment between identity and supportive norms, the greater the likelihood of youth engagement. Efforts must focus on reinforcing democratic group identities and civic norms.	(Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sani & Azizuddin, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979)
Application to Cambodian Youth	Political engagement in Cambodia is influenced by ethnic, familial, and group	Youth activism grows through social media and peer-led initiatives. Political	Strategies must address top-down political constraints and nurture local civic cultures.	(Chheang, 2011; Vong &

Focus Area	Key Insights	Examples in Cambodian Context	Implications	Key References
	affiliations. Normative expectations within families and communities either encourage or constrain youth political action.	elites still limit engagement, but cultural shifts and digital spaces are opening new channels for participation.	Youth empowerment can be enhanced through community leadership, education, and inclusive platforms.	Hok, 2018)

V. Discussion

This research has revealed that the interplay between social identity, normative influence, and political efficacy constitutes a critical framework for understanding political engagement among Cambodian youth, particularly in the context of national elections. One of the most salient findings is that Cambodian youth's sense of political efficacy is deeply shaped by their identification with social groups. Whether these group identities are based on ethnicity, political party affiliation, or regional associations, youth who strongly align with a particular collective are more inclined to believe that their participation in national elections is impactful. This dynamic reflects the principle of collective political efficacy, as outlined in Social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals feel more politically empowered when acting as part of a cohesive group pursuing shared objectives. Equally significant is the role of normative influence in guiding youth political participation. Within Cambodian communities, social norms serve as powerful forces that can either encourage or inhibit political behaviours. When actions like voting, joining protests, or engaging in civic discourse are regarded as socially desirable or expected, particularly by family members and peer groups, youth are more likely to adopt these behaviours. Such normative encouragement reinforces a belief that political participation is not only appropriate but necessary, thereby strengthening both internal and external dimensions of political efficacy.

The research further highlights that in the Cambodian context, these normative expectations are often transmitted through intimate social networks, underscoring the importance of interpersonal relationships in shaping political outlooks and actions. Moreover, the review emphasizes that Cambodian youth political engagement cannot be separated from the broader historical, cultural, and political conditions that define the nation's landscape. The legacy of authoritarianism continues to affect how young people view political institutions and the extent to which they believe those institutions are responsive to citizen involvement. This historical backdrop has contributed to varying levels of trust, optimism, and engagement across different youth populations. Nevertheless, there is increasing evidence, particularly from urban youth and members of youth-led political movements, that social identity and normative influence are beginning to serve as catalysts for renewed civic participation. The growth of digital activism and the formation of youth organizations have introduced alternative channels for political expression, allowing young people to cultivate a sense of agency and relevance within Cambodia's evolving democratic processes. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of understanding how psychological and social mechanisms, particularly those rooted in identity and norms, interact to shape political efficacy and behaviour among Cambodian youth. As the country navigates ongoing political changes, the integration of these constructs into civic education, policymaking, and community development will be essential for strengthening democratic participation among the next generation.

This highlights how social identity and normative influence significantly shape political efficacy and engagement among Cambodian youth. One key implication is the importance of leveraging group identity as a means of political mobilization. When young people view political participation as an extension of their affiliation with peer networks, activist communities, or civic movements, they are more likely to engage. Civic education and political campaigns should thus promote collective identities centred on democracy, social justice, and youth empowerment, emphasizing issues like education, employment, and equality to foster emotional investment in political processes. Equally important is the role of normative influence. Given the strong sway of family and peer expectations in Cambodian society, political dialogue must be normalized within households, schools, and community spaces. Encouraging civic responsibility through everyday conversations, youth-led forums, and peer-driven campaigns can help embed political engagement

as a social norm. Involving families, community leaders, and respected local figures in civic initiatives can further legitimize youth participation and create intergenerational support for democratic involvement. Digital platforms offer new spaces for engagement, allowing Cambodian youth to express political views and build civic networks. However, in a sensitive political environment, digital activism must be approached cautiously, balancing empowerment with awareness of risks. When used strategically and safely, these platforms can amplify youth voices, reinforce civic identity, and sustain long-term engagement in democratic life.

Although this review provides key insights into the links between social identity, normative influence, and political efficacy, several gaps remain that warrant further exploration. A primary limitation is the lack of longitudinal studies that track how Cambodian youth develop and sustain political identities over time. Most existing research relies on cross-sectional data, offering only a snapshot rather than capturing the evolving nature of political socialization. Long-term studies are needed to understand how political efficacy is cultivated, reinforced, or weakened throughout different life stages. Moreover, much of the literature remains disconnected from Cambodia's unique socio-political context. Research often draws on broader global or regional frameworks, underestimating the country's specific historical legacy of authoritarianism, limited civic space, and evolving democratic institutions. Future studies must ground their analysis in Cambodia's cultural and political realities to better capture how these factors shape youth behaviour and attitudes. Likewise, rural-urban disparities in political engagement remain underexamined. Youth in rural areas frequently encounter limited access to information, civic platforms, and peer networks—conditions that may significantly affect their sense of efficacy and willingness to engage. Research should disaggregate data across geographic lines to inform more inclusive civic education and policy design. Another underexplored area is the impact of digital platforms on youth political engagement. While social media plays a growing role in shaping civic discourse, few studies have analysed how online identities, and digital communities interact with traditional social identity and normative pressures. Investigating this intersection would shed light on how digital engagement shapes offline political behaviour in Cambodia's youth population. Finally, there is a need for comparative research within Southeast Asia. Countries like Thailand, Myanmar, and Indonesia share similarities with Cambodia in their political transitions, youth activism, and governance challenges. Cross-national studies could reveal both shared dynamics and localized

differences, offering broader insights into how identity and norms influence political efficacy across varying systems.

At last, advancing the study of youth political engagement in Cambodia requires a shift toward longitudinal, contextual, and comparative approaches. Addressing rural-urban divides and the role of digital activism is especially critical. These research directions will contribute to building a more engaged, informed, and empowered youth electorate, essential for the sustainable development of Cambodia's democratic future.

VI. Conclusion

This study has explored how social identity and normative influence shape political efficacy and engagement among Cambodian youth, particularly in the context of national elections. Integrating psychological and sociological perspectives, it demonstrates that youth who strongly identify with political, familial, or activist communities are more likely to believe in the effectiveness of their political actions. This sense of group belonging nurtures confidence and motivation, reinforcing participation in civic life. Normative influence, stemming from family, peers, and local communities, also plays a decisive role. When political engagement is socially encouraged, youth feel a greater sense of responsibility and agency. Conversely, where disengagement or fear prevails, political efficacy declines. In Cambodia's culturally rooted and politically constrained environment, these social dynamics are particularly influential, reflecting how collective pressures and inherited norms shape individual behaviour. Despite institutional and cultural constraints, youth-led activism and digital platforms are broadening civic participation, allowing young people to challenge norms and redefine their political roles. This evolving landscape reveals a feedback loop: supportive social environments enhance efficacy, which in turn fuels ongoing engagement. For Cambodia's democratic development, fostering collective identities rooted in civic values and embedding positive political norms in families and communities is essential.

As its core, youth participation must not be seen merely as a personal choice but also as a product of social context. Policymakers, educators, and civil society actors must invest in inclusive spaces, youth leadership, and intergenerational dialogue to build a resilient democratic culture. Social identity and normative influence remain vital lenses for understanding and enhancing youth political engagement, not only in Cambodia, but across similarly transitioning democracies.

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