

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Political Motivation and Cambodian Youth: A Historical and Systematic Review of Community Support Factors in Emerging Democracies

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review shows evidence of community support and how it shapes political motivation for youth and young Cambodians and emerging democracies. Taking into consideration political socialization, self-determination, expectancy-value and cost, social identity and normative influence, the review considers motivation socially driven through networks, support, social, norm and opportunity perceived responsive and risk. In multiple Cambodia-focused and comparative studies, the patterns show that, for bonding ties, participation is duty based and socially sanctioned; for bridging ties, civic education and interest become broader; and for linking ties, motivation is predicated on perceived influence. However, the unequal participation in the bridging and linking ties spaces by gender, SES, rural-urban, political knowledge, and the like, explains why motivation is often expressed through low-risk political engagement. The review ends with a Cambodia-sensitive framework and forward-looking priorities that focus on context-appropriate tools for measurement, longitudinal studies, and mixed method pathway testing with an explanatory focus.

Keywords: Cambodian youth; community support; social capital; social identity

FULL PAPER

Introduction

Access to educational and financial resources, information, and even organizational resources are just some of the barriers that are commonly identified as hindering the political engagement of young people. However, an extensive body of research has identified that psychological barriers stem from a lack of motivation and are often far more significant. Young people participate in political acts when they have a sufficient number of instigators or justifications to care and participate, or what a theory of social action identifies as the psychological permission, in a social context, to act when it is warranted engaged citizenship (Ajzen, 1991; Verba et al., 1995). Motivation to participate in one or more civic activities is a driving force, or what Deci and Ryan (2000) and Eccles and Wigfield (2020) term the psychological engine that harnesses the civic potential of citizens. Some examples of civic activities include involvement in initiatives or movements, the act of expressing one's viewpoint in public, and online the act of being involved in activities, voting, and interest in public issues. The importance of a motivation-oriented approach is even more pronounced in recently developed democracies. In such systems, even though formal electoral competition is present, various issues such as organizational civic responsiveness, issues of public trust and safety, as well as varying social responsiveness, place the democracy at risk (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Schedler, 2002).

Cambodia presents a rich opportunity for analysis on the social construction and historical patterning of youth motivation. First, youth motivation is context-bound; in the family, peers, school, and community influence what young people consider as appropriate civic engagement, what discussion topics are safe, and what kind of participation is seen as respectable versus risky (Len & Sokphea, 2021; Tan, 2008). Second, motivation for political engagement in Cambodia is likely influenced by historical context, or, in other words, the legacies of the past. The post-conflict reconstruction, and the emerging state–society relations, can cause youth to develop certain ways of seeing or interpreting authority, the balance between stability and voice, and the potential and the risks of political engagement (Hughes, 2006; Norén-Nilsson, 2021). Last, Cambodia's rapid technological advancement has both increased (and, in fact, created) civic learning and youth mobilization, and, on the other hand, new simultaneous forms of pressure, including harassment, reputational risk, and (self) censorship. Research on youth and digital activism in Cambodia documents the ways in which online youth participation functions as a

civic space, but also the ways in which participation is evidence of self-censorship (Ly, 2023; Vong & Hok, 2018).

The influences of community surroundings, legacy of history, and digital evolution imply that political motivation is not an inner trait of an individual, but driven by context, interest, obligation, identity and meaning, and anticipated outcome. Reports and research documents from programs targeting youths in Cambodia, have some supporting insights. Cambodian youths' express priorities and concerns that are the result of unequal opportunities, and different perceptions of the voice and responsiveness in the various communities. This makes Cambodia an interesting country for a review that is explanatory, not just descriptive. The review wants to explain the lack of motivation and the role of community support in shaping the lack of motivation.

In doing so, the paper justifies a dual review approach. A review of history is needed because motivational orientations especially duty, trust, fear and deference are not easily understood without reference to the political and social historical context that young people have. It is that context that forms what young people construct as the meaning of politics and what participation means (Hughes, 2006; Tan, 2008). A systematic review is equally important since the debates around community support factors tend to be more subjective. Systematic review is a valuable approach to evidential synthesis and draws attention to what the evidence consistently demonstrates, what remains contested, and what are limits in methodological rigor in emerging democracy (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Verba et al., 1995).

For this paper, political motivation is described as the psychological factors that activate and focus an individual's political interest and action. There are four different elements that are described separately. First, civic interest and curiosity describe an individual's engagement caused by the enjoyment of learning about political matters and from articulating rational, informed opinions. This form of motivation aligns with the self-determination theory, as motivated engagement stems from personal internalization of the cause (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Second, obligation motivation represents the civic duties and moral expectations that motivate individuals to demonstrate good citizenship. This form of motivation is often described by social and self-imposed norm and civic duty (Blais & Achen, 2019; Cialdini et al., 1990). Third, rational motivation describes the psychological engagement caused by perceived benefits or costs from participation and aligns with the expectancy-value theory and the rational choice theory (Downs, 1957; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Finally, the motivation that is derived from the social

engagement of political activities is described as identity-based motivation and is supported by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Zomeren et al., 2008).

The review analyses components of community support as a system of social-psychological and relational conditions that explains these motivations. Components include social capital (bonding, bridging and linking), sense of belonging social support, social identity support, normative influence (injunctive and descriptive norms), community participation and economic opportunity structures (Bourdieu, 1986; Huot, 2025b). This selection of factors is based on theoretical reasoning. motivation is not simply triggered by information; relational security, normative cohesion, identity significance, and supportive contexts are what facilitate participation (Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). For the most part, emerging democracies are viewed as a certain type of political system that have competitive elections and formal avenues of political participation, but have asymmetric and uneven responsiveness of institutions, civic freedoms, and trust, which can produce mixed incentives for political participation (Diamond, 2008; Schedler, 2002).

This study focuses on the patterns of Cambodian youth, while still being able to be compared cross-contextually, on the integration of motivation theory and community support frameworks and asks Sub questions of the main question: what is the influence of community support mechanisms on the political motivation of youth, considering Cambodia as an emerging democracy? Given Cambodia's historical trajectory, what stimulative pathways (interest, duty, fear, efficacy, and trust) have been motivational over time? What community support mechanisms operate: political efficacy, social identity, sense of belonging, and perceived responsiveness? What measurement and methodological constraints cause us to be most cautious about the relationships? What is the most suffice integrative framework that explains Cambodia's patterns while being analytically portable across comparable frameworks?

This review offers advances in three areas. Conceptually, it offers greater clarity on the dimensions of political motivation, while noting that it is not a merely a willingness to participate construct. Theoretically, it combines and links community support systems, as seen in Cambodian youth, across the familial, educational, youth organization, civil society, and digital community contexts, including where civic education and norm climates are expected to catalyse participation, while being conditioned on a lack of closed responsiveness.

Historical and Theoretical Foundations

Importance of History in Relation to Political Motivation

Political motivation can be understood as a disposition, level of interest, and engagement in politics, whether that be voting or volunteering, or issue discussion. Relatively few authors in the field of political behaviour examine motivation as something that is within the individual. More often than not, motivation has been socially learned, relationally upheld, and historically patterned. Political historians note social environments, such as family, school, peers and community. According to Jennings and Niemi (1974) and Sears and Valentino (1997), social environments serve as interpretive frameworks through which citizens evaluate politics as meaningful, safe, and worth the effort to participate. More recent social historians focus their interest on why motivation is created, as opposed to why motivation is simply transmitted, through a set of social experiences that affirm or undermine three central beliefs (1) politics can be understood, (2) political engagement is socially sanctioned, and (3) political participation is effectual (Dalton, 2017; Verba et al., 1995).

This historical contingency becomes especially pronounced in contexts that are post-conflict and developing. In these contexts, scholars contend that political motivation typically forms in conditions of institutional ambiguity and uneven civic opportunity structures. These conditions are transformative, affecting not just the quantity of motivation but also the quality (interest, duty, risk, or instrumental) (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Schedler, 2002). When the possibility for open contestation is uneven, the youth is likely to practice what has been labelled low-risk civic engagement, i.e., community service, issue-based volunteering, professionalized youth programs, or digital civic engagement that is socially constructive and non-politically disruptive.

Most importantly, historical legacies do not behave deterministically for youth conduct; they organize frameworks of motivation by contextually constructing what is plausibly and prudently safe. Tan (2008), for example, analyses civic and moral education in Cambodia, and argues that civic learning is in the cultural and social response for harmony and conformity, and in the pragmatic response to fear, and thus, defines the ways in which youngsters learn the boundaries of civic expressions. In the same way, studies of the civil society and youth civic engagement in the contexts of political changes evidence that youth activism is often mediated by the organizational frameworks that convert the political situation into activism frameworks and motivation (Huot, 2025a; Len & Sokphea, 2021).

Cambodia's historical-political context as a motivational environment

A Cambodia-sensitive account does not need a political history in full; it needs a developed narrative timeline that specifies the political history of why certain patterns of motivation, especially duty, caution, and instrumental calculation, paradoxically, may co-exist with authentic civic curiosity and civic engagement in the digital sphere, with the youth. Post-conflict Cambodia saw the emergence of a civic landscape characterized both by the development of political learning and political caution. The Paris Agreements of October 1991, and the subsequent establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) (1992–1993) impacted the democratisation of the Cambodian political landscape (United Nations, 1991). The background materials of the UN mission document state that the intended target of the settlement on the Paris Agreements was to create a situation conducive to the holding of free and fair elections and the achieving of a comprehensive political settlement after a period of sustained conflict. However, students of post-conflict democratisation seem to agree that external designs, even if they are well-intentioned, are likely to form the structures of a democracy, but will not fully alter the political culture, and the everyday incentives that motivate citizen participation (Öjendal & Sedara, 2011).

In societies recovering from conflict, the motivation of intergenerational memory is prominent. During times of continuum, families instil fear and uncertainty. They transmit to younger family members prudential civic lessons, about avoidance of risky speech, the importance of social relationships, preservation of social cohesion, and socially approved, limited participation, and civic contributions. This is a learned risk calculus. Tan (2008) describes the complicated pedagogy of civic morality and civic education in Cambodia where the values of social peace, harmony, and avoidance of conflict, and above all, adherence to a self-regulating code, all support the socialization of a more passive citizen. For the youth, the motivational implication is that politics as sensitive talk may persist as a cultural script. The absence of a confrontational approach to political participation, civically troubling, volunteer community advocacy, and program participation is an exercise of self-suppression of civic responsibility and moral obligation on the part of the youth (Huot, 2025b).

Post-conflict reconstruction, on the other hand, undoubtedly generated new pathways of motivation. The expansion of education, the provision of civics education community-based donor-funded projects, and the establishment of leadership and civic responsibility institutes offered youth the opportunity to learn public problem solving, leadership, and civic responsibility. The focus of motivation

is therefore weak to mixed. Growth is civic obligation and civic function, however, the call for positive political expression is limited and dependent on the perception of safety and the signals about the institutional democracy that the youth receive. While history forms the setting, the institutions frame the day-by-day adjustments of motivation. Political motivation increases when institutions are perceived as accessible, fair, and responsive, as these experiences enhance the value of engagement and decrease the sense of futility of participation. Political psychologists posit that motivation is expectancy based, that is, people will only put in the effort if they believe their actions will lead to an outcome (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020).

Cambodia's youth civic involvement ecosystem embodies this conditionality. Len and Sokphea (2021) assert that youth civic engagement is determined by the organizational milieu and prevailing political circumstances, meaning the encouragement of participation alters as the civic space and the configuration of institutions in relation to one another changes. In the same vein, Norén-Nilsson (2021) views youth mobilization as situated in dominant configurations of civil society that encourage some forms of engagement while discouraging others. The motivational translation is important. There are circumstances in which institutions may convey that certain actions are welcome (development of the community, service-oriented projects, consultation with the youth), and as a result, youth are likely to engage in such activities. On the other hand, when institutional cues indicate that direct and open contestation is likely to be very costly or of no use, motivation is often channelled to forms of engagement that are often termed participation of the least resistance, meaning participation that fosters a safe social position and personal security and civic apathy (Huot, 2026).

It is here that motivation in emerging democracies often becomes dual. Young people can be morally grounded and socially concerned, but also strategically selective. Citizens may serve the community by refraining from participation that is characterized as antagonistic and socially risky, whether through community engagement, organized youth activities, or sanctioned public discourse (Freedom House, 2023). In expectancy-value theory, while the perceived benefits of civic engagement are particularly high, the perceived risks, costs, and uncertainty associated with some political actions deflate the motivation.

Cambodia's education sector has historically provided new sources of political motivation for students and young people. With rapid urbanization and digital connectivity, new sources of political motivation emerge. Universities, and youth networks become identity laboratories and sites of civic curiosity. As youth

acquire different ideas and narratives, and practice public discourse, most notable is the impact of digitization. Vong and Hok (2018) argue that Cambodia's youth everyday politics through Facebook has become one of the most significant forms of engagement, particularly during and after the 2013 elections. They also believe that online activism leads to offline activism. In the same vein, Ly (2023) found a positive correlation between political activism and social media engagement among Cambodians students, further establishing that social media is a primary tool for political activism.

Cambodia undergraduate students' political engagement is a result of social media, but social media simply does not increase motivation, it reshapes it. Digital networks can also increase intrinsic motivation through the heightened exposure to political issues. Furthermore, identity-based motivation is heightened by connecting young people with likeminded peers, However, the perceived cost of participation can also increase. Social harassment, surveillance, and social pressure can all increase the potential cost of active participation in political engagement. Youth involvement in politics shows a combination of risk assessment and opportunity structuring. Understanding Vong and Hok's (2018) illustration of online activism as everyday politics encourages the involvement of youth on how to politically engage strategically rather than politically passively.

Spine of Theory for Community Support and Political Motivation explanation

The phenomenon of community support and political motivation articulates a range of theoretically integrated approaches that centre on the same fundamental principle, which is the importance of community support for motivational continuity (Huot, 2025a). This support is instrumental in developing the individual's sense of being in the right place, gaining the right skills, and achieving the right level of concern to bring about change.

The theory of political socialization focuses on motivation that develops through the process of transmission and reinforcement of family units, educational institutions, peer groups, and social and community structures. Jennings and Niemi (1974) contend that the civic orientation of individuals is interpersonal and intuitional and is developed over a long period of time. More recent studies have identified adolescence and young adulthood as critical phases of political cognitive development and role identification (Dalton, 2017; Sears & Valentino, 1997). In Cambodia, this body of work focuses on family permission structures, school peer discussion climates, and the role of peer groups as motivational supportive structures.

Self-Determination Theory explains the variation across different communities for motivation fostering environments, and those that create fragile compliance environments. Motivation deepens in environments that support autonomy, competence and support, Deci and Ryan (2000). Meaningful, as opposed to coercive, stimuli internalize external regulations, Ryan and Deci (2017). Expectancy-value theory built upon SDT by specifying that the motivating factors include a perceived value, expected achievement, and perceived costs. While Eccles and Wigfield (2020) state that individuals will commit to an activity when they believe the task has value and when they believe that they can achieve a successful outcome, the most recent additions to the theory highlight the role of perceived cost (time, social stigma, emotional burden and risk). When this theory is applied to new democracies, it explains why the youth's motivation may be high in concern but low in action. Civic action may be deemed high risk by the youth, thus leading to low-risk forms of civil engagement when the cost of participation is high or the expected outcome of engagement is low.

A digital civic space allows for more of this reasoning by lowering the perceived risk to an individual's social reputation while increasing the value of information. Research on social identity theory and collective action explain motivation as meaning-making, people become involved when politics become part of who we are and where we belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Zomeren et al., 2008). These studies indicate motivation grows when youth are seen, feel pride as part of a group, and when a considerable action cause is supportive of an important identity. This is where a Cambodian-sensitive interpretation is critical because supportive identity may derive from youth groups, campus communities, religion or community associations, and online community identities. While supportive identity may be constraining when group identities centre on unity and an identity-based motivation may push youth to take on socially accepted civic duties and avoid challenging activism (Huot, 2026).

Normative influence theory explains how motivation is affected by injunctive (what people think one should do) and descriptive (what people think others do) norms. Cialdini et al. (1990) posit that norms direct conduct by signalling social acceptance and offering social behavioural scripts. In the study of political behaviour, especially voting, duty-based participation is seen as a moral norm that can promote participation even when the calculated rational or instrumental arguments are absent (Blais & Achen, 2019). However, the influence of moral or civic norms is twofold. While they can foster a sense of collective responsibility, on the flip side, they may also quell resistance or protest. In cases where open dialogue is

deemed socially injurious or unsafe, the emphasis in Cambodian culture on harmony, Tan (2008) represents a setting in which moral compulsion and restraint can coalesce, as a motivation of civic responsibility and civic strategic restraint, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. *Integrated theoretical traditions and what they predict about community support and youth political motivation*

Theoretical tradition	Core motivation	What community supports do
Political socialization	Motivation is learned through family, school, peers, and institutions	Build permission structures for civic talk; normalize participation as safe and legitimate
Self-Determination Theory	Motivation strengthens with autonomy, competence, relatedness	Design youth spaces that develop skills and protect voice and belonging
Expectancy-Value	Motivation depends on value, success expectations, and costs	Raise perceived value and expected impact; reduce social risk costs through supportive networks
Social identity collective action	Motivation rises when politics connects to identity and belonging	Provide identity-affirming civic roles; avoid identity climates that equate voice with conflict
Normative influence	Norms mobilize duty but can also suppress	Foster prosocial civic norms while preventing conformity pressures that silence discussion

Definitions of the Community Support Factors for This Review

The review defines community support as the specific relational and contextual components that influence political motivation via interest, duty, instrumentality, and identity. Each of these components is examined in a Cambodia-

sensitive context and has an explicit hypothesized association to motivation. Social capital is the value of relationships in society and is manifested in networks, trust, and the reciprocity and norms that enable collective action (Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000). In motivational terms, social capital is the information (what is happening), the encouragement (you can), and the opportunity (here and how to act). Emotionally bonded groups can help to provide a sense of safety and a moral boost in support of duty and confidence, and interest bridging groups can help to provide a host of diverse problems and different perspectives (Huot, 2025a). Especially for expectancy motivation, bridging groups can provide sense of access and responsiveness to the expectation that engagement would be result oriented.

Support of belonging encompasses the ways in which youth express and feel acceptance, recognition, and social inclusion in communities and civic spaces. The construct of belonging is positive and motivational as it reduces alienation, increases civic identification, and motivates the willingness of the youth to care and invest effort in civic activities when they feel that they have a place in the civic community (Huot, 2025b). The need for relatedness as described in SDT, offers a strong theoretical basis for this phenomenon (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Perceived social support is the belief that others are available to offer support in the form of emotional, informational, or material. This construct is important for motivation as it eases the support needed to overcome barriers to participation, including the time, stigma, and fear. Negative social support and the uncertainty of the system are important to participation. In Cambodia, support may be most important for first-time participants. Youth are more likely to participate in discussions, volunteer activities, or civic initiatives when they have supportive peers who make engagement feel socially safe and manageable. Injunctive and descriptive norms that dictate how civically engaged individuals behave under normative influence examine how positive, neutral, negative, and dismissive participation becomes the influence for duty-oriented motivation to consider participation as a moral obligation (Blais & Achen, 2019). On the other hand, the influence may be for instrumental motivation to consider participation because of the social repercussions involved (positive feedback, social esteem, negative feedback, social ostracism). For Tan (2008), Cambodia's civic culture illustrates how this dimension is of relevance since harmony-oriented civic norms may foster social participation, yet discourage active, confrontational participation.

The role of social identity support describes how valued civic engagement, as a social group, becomes defined and integrated with group identities and associated narratives. Such identities may be described as responsible student, community

member, modern citizen, or youth activist. Social identity theory postulates that when civic participation operates at the level of cognitive identity, motivation is enhanced, and when the collective frame is characterized by honour and esteem, motivation is further heightened (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Zomeren et al., 2008). Identity-based motivation, alongside the sense of collective purpose that is achieved in Cambodia's fast-growing youth networks, is particularly evident among the expanding youth networks within and beyond the civil society initiatives.

Identity support can also act to control or discipline people: if an inclusive group identity is formed around deference and caution, identity-based motivation may channel people's engagement into safe forms and away from disruptive, public forms of engagement. Community involvement and opportunity structures relate to the existence of frameworks where motivation can transform to action: these include clubs, volunteering initiatives, service learning, local associations, youth councils, and structured dialogue. This aspect is very important as motivation without opportunity is likely to deteriorate. Len and Sokphea (2021) demonstrate case studies of the organizational structures that mediate participation pathways in politically sensitive situations.

Systematic Review Design and Methods

Review type and rationale

This paper will be a systematic review with a historical contextual dimension, at times referred to as a historically anchored systematic review. The systematic aspect is especially important because the literature on youth political motivation and civic support is scattered across several disciplines; with no clear synthesizing approach, a review is likely to be unselectively biased. Similarly, a fully systematic review that is devoid of historical context would be a well-executed review that is, for the case of Cambodia, wholly inadequate. Motivation is far more than an individual psychological state; it develops through historical social experiences, which shape civic norms, the perceived risks, and the credibility of participation opportunities. Thus, the historical contextualization is meant to explain why different political situations yield different motivational profiles from the same predictors (e.g., social support, norms, identity).

This design seeks to mitigate two typical shortcomings in reviews of cross-context youth motivation. First, it tries to avoid treating political motivation as a monolith, with some single, constant meaning in each setting. Second, it avoids the tendency of overgeneralization from empirically robust but contextually limited evidence (i.e., politically open environments where the cost of civic engagement is

perceived to be lower and is in contrast to the cost sensitive civic environments that youth may occupy). This review is compliant with PRISMA 2020 to facilitate transparency in the reporting of the identification, screening, inclusion, and synthesis processes.

Eligibility criteria

To maintain transparency and limit the potential for bias in inclusion, the criteria were set a priori. Population of this review is limited to youth, operationalized as 15 to 30 years (or clearly defined adolescent and young adult samples). Studies that have a broader age range are eligible as long as youth outcomes are reported, or if the sample is predominantly youth (e.g., university students, vocational students, early-career adults). This concurs with the developmental discourse that late adolescence and emerging adulthood developmental phases, is a crucial period for political socialization and the consolidation of motivation.

Core outcome (phenomenon of interest). Studies must include some kind of measurement or qualitative assessment of political motivation, conceptualized broadly as: political interest and curiosity; duty or civic obligation (including duty to vote); intention to vote and participate; willingness to discuss politics; intention to engage civically or politically; intention to activism; or motivational orientations that function clearly as antecedents to engagement. Studies that measure participation frequency only, without any motivational indicators, are excluded; unless they provide a motivational explanation or interpretation of participation (e.g., reasons for participation or willingness to engage).

Predictors and exposures for this study must include community support factors as mentioned, among any of the eligible study variables. These include social capital (bonding, bridging and linking or network and trust measures), belonging support, or perceived social support, normative support (injunctive and descriptive norms), identity social support, or community engagement and opportunity structures (clubs, youth programs, civic education, incorporated participation). Studies that are limited to macroeconomic variables or individual (e.g., personality) or behavioural traits without any community support are excluded (Bourdieu, 1986).

Context, although Cambodia is the main application site for this review, comparable emerging democracies are intentionally included as triangulation cases (Southeast Asia and selective Global South settings) when they elucidate mechanism variations under comparable circumstances (uneven civic opportunities, mixed responsiveness cues, risk-averse civic cultures). Context is operationalized as environments with competitive or semi-competitive electoral systems with formal

participation frameworks and variable trust, freedom, and responsiveness paradoxes.

Study types of the review include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies. While peer-reviewed journals are prioritized, clear and methodologically sound reports of international organizations or research institutes, including prestigious controlled gray literature” are included when they are highly relevant (e.g., youth surveys at the national level, evaluations of programs, research embedded in policy). This choice is defensible in Cambodia-oriented scholarship, where applied research is often the source of high-quality evidence.

Timeframe and language. The review, in consideration of the educational expansion, evolution of civil society, and digital changes in Cambodia, focuses on the period after 2000 (or post-2010 for narrowly focused sensitivity analyses). Only studies published in English are included; however, if available and accessible Khmer-language sources contain verbatim methodological details, those sources may be included in a supplementary synthesis, as labelled, to ensure reproducibility.

Search Methods and Resources

The search methods are layered and reproducible. They include (a) searching bibliographic databases, (b) searching specific institutions to locate controlled grey literature, and (c) backward and forward citation searches for and about key studies. Databases, for the core databases, has been chosen Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed (for interdisciplinary public-policy and youth studies). For motivation and identity research and chosen PsycINFO. For education and civic learning, ERIC has been chosen. For additional searches, added Google Scholar to help reduce the likelihood of missing relevant studies, for the literature, conducted targeted searches for the open access institutional repositories and think-tank centres most relevant to Cambodia and Southeast Asia (i.e., national development research institutes, UN agencies, regional policy research centres).

Keyword Construction, for search terms are organized into blocks of synergistic outcome, predictor, population, and context terms, aiming to optimize tense and to maximize specificity. A reproducible search string that can be adapted to a database’s syntax will look like this:

Block A (motivation): (“political motivation” OR “civic motivation” OR “political interest” OR “civic duty” OR “duty to vote” OR “intention to vote” OR “political participation intention” OR “civic intention” OR “activism intention”).

AND Block B (community support): (“community support” OR “social capital” OR “network” OR “trust” OR “belonging” OR “social support” OR “peer support” OR “family support” OR “norm” OR “descriptive norm” OR “injunctive norm” OR “social identity” OR “community involvement” OR “civic opportunity”).

AND Block C (target population): (“youth” OR “young people” OR “adolescent” OR “student” OR “university” OR “young adult”).

AND Block D (geographical context): (“Cambodia” OR “Southeast Asia” OR “emerging democracy” OR “hybrid regime” OR “developing country”)

The selection procedure is documented in a manner akin to the PRISMA framework. Each step is documented, and includes the following stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. First, titles and abstracts are screened using the inclusion criteria as a checklist, and where applicable, the population, outcome, predictors, context, and study type are recorded. Next, arguments for exclusion are recorded (wrong outcome, non-youth sample, community-related or methodically vague predictors, etc.) when eligibility is reviewed for full texts, and in instances of this scenario. In instances of this type, double screening is used to minimize bias where feasible. Here, two reviewers are assigned to screen a specified proportion (20-30%) to calibrate any interpretational discrepancies and discuss how to resolve any outstanding issues. The remaining items are assigned to single reviewer, with consistency checks performed periodically. In instances where this screening zone is limited to a single reviewer, the documentation of the decision rules is kept, and a random exclusion audit is done to enhance reliability, as depicted in **Table 2**.

Given the methodological heterogeneity of the evidence base, the review employs the 2018 Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), a diverse yet coherent way of assessing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs within a single framework. The MMAT framework begins with screening questions and a review of research question clarity and whether the associated data sufficiently answers the question. Each design has criteria and the reviewer evaluates that associated criteria, which include, for example, sampling strategy, treatment of measurement, confounders, and quality integration for mixed methods. Studies do not receive quality ratings and are not given a simplistic pass or fail filter, unless the studies are critically deficient (e.g., methods are unclear, measurements are not traceable, and claims made analytically are invalid). Studies of higher quality are afforded greater interpretive weight in the synthesis. Studies with lower quality are used in a synthesis of claims or to outline the areas in which the evidence is weak.

A structured extraction sheet was developed and piloted with an initial subset of studies to refine the extraction categories and ensure coding remained consistent. The coding focused on the following aspects:

1. Study identifiers, which include the following: author, year, publication type (peer-reviewed, or controlled literature), country or context, and setting (school, university, community program, online).
2. Sample and subgroup characteristics, which include age range, student status, gender, rural vs urban location, socio-economic status (SES), and any other indicators of marginalization.
3. Outcome type classification (motivation type): intrinsic interest and curiosity; duty and obligation; instrumental intention; identity-based motivation; general civic intention; activism intention.
3. Predictor type classification (community support factors): social capital (bonding, bridging and linking or proxies), belonging support, perceived social support, normative influence, social identity support, community involvement and opportunity structures.
4. Mechanisms and conditionalities: mediators (efficacy, trust, belonging, identity) and moderators (gender, SES, urban–rural, political knowledge, perceived openness and responsiveness cues).
5. Context notes: civic risk sensitivity indicators, institutional responsiveness, and digital risk environment components (e.g., exposure to harassment, self-censorship), when applicable.

Table 2. *provides the core coding map linking constructs to extraction decisions*

Coding domain	Operational coding categories	Examples of how it appears
Motivation outcome	Interest and curiosity; duty; obligation; intention to vote and participate; activism intention; civic intention	“Political interest,” “duty to vote,” “intention to engage,” “willingness to discuss”
Community support factor	Social capital (bonding, bridging and linking); belonging; perceived support; norms; identity support; involvement or opportunities	“Network trust,” “peer support,” “family encouragement,” “injunctive norms,” “civic clubs”

Coding domain	Operational coding categories	Examples of how it appears
Mechanism variable	Efficacy; trust; belonging; identity; perceived responsiveness	“Voice matters,” “institutions listen,” “civic confidence,” “group pride”
Moderator or inequality	Gender; SES; rural–urban; education access; political knowledge	subgroup comparisons; interaction models; stratified analyses
Context sensitivity	Civic openness; risk cues; institutional access; digital risk	repression perceptions, safety concerns, consultation experiences, online harassment

Results and Thematic Analysis

The Cambodian-focused and comparator literature have a wide range of empirical evidence dealing with youth political motivation, which can be best described as methodologically mixed and conceptually uneven. Most of the existing knowledge can be identified in three partially overlapping streams: (a) education and civic learning studies that view motivation as a phenomenon resulting from the civic curriculum, discussion climate, and school–community partnership; (b) studies on governance, civil society, and participation, that view motivation as a mobilization problem influenced by organizational and structural opportunity; and (c) digital politics studies that conceptualize motivation as a result of everyday informational practices, peer discussion, and networked visibility.

In Cambodia-related resources, recent studies and reports note that while youth engagement is genuine, it is often channelled into safer, socially acceptable, or institutionally recognizable ways, for example, volunteering, community development projects, student organizations, and online forums, especially when politically active behaviour is regarded as risky (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017). Regarding research and evidence, Cambodia is better described as rich when it comes to where and how youth get involved civically and how they view the barriers compared to the more causal, less rich, research and evidence focused on the community-based reasons for the barriers faced and the differing motivational

reasons (e.g., sense of obligation, enhancement, or interest-based efficacy) that community factors appear to provide.

In comparison to other Southeast Asian countries, the region shows a higher dominance of urban youth and undergraduates in the sample. Evidence suggests political participation and engagement are interconnected to networks based out of academic institutions, institutional credibility (real or perceived), and social media and opportunities and threats (Saat et al., 2025). This speculation is a necessary addition to the synthesis as it shows youth motivation is an ensemble of varying, (contextually) expressed, and merged drivers articulating out of settings. These drivers include but are not limited to, curiosity and interest, moral or ideological ownership, identity pride, a sense of efficacy, optimistic expectations, and in the context of opportunity, norms, and perceived responsiveness, a risk-adjusted pragmatic motivation.

In the region, cross-sectional surveys are a common methodological approach in the field as a whole, while in Cambodia, the empirical landscape is enriched with qualitative case studies and policy-oriented participatory reports related to the identification and documentation of pathways and barriers to participation (Len & Sokphea, 2021; UNDP, 2024). The synthesis that follows is therefore constructed on the presumption that empirical patterns are attributed to specific contextual factors that lead to the finding of effect-size conclusions. The better the case is conceptualized the more it coincides with the other. This means that the synthesis will assess where the collective evidence points concerning the mechanisms, as well as where the evidence diverges. This is the case where motivation is conceptualized and measured as interest, duty, or activism versus the social context as an open civic climate as versus a community context with risk-sensitive civic engagement.

Theme 1: Social Capital and Political Engagement

Most researchers note that social capital provides a motivational framework. Social capital determines who gets access to political information, who receives encouragement and a sense of belonging, and who can transform an apathetic interest into a strong civic engagement (Lin, 2001; Putnam, 1994, 2000). However, an insight that is particularly relevant to Cambodia is that the same social networks can move youth motivations in a duty-bound participatory, low-risk community action, online civic debates, or civic engagement and withdrawal, based on civic activism norms and the perception of civic mirror safety (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017).

Bonding social capital, the close ties that appear in family and close peer group networks, consistently offers two scaffolding forms for motivation (Bourdieu, 1986). First, it offers emotional support and micro-encouragement: there is a greater likelihood that youth will focus on civic engagement, discourse on public issues, and contemplate voting when participatory activism gets an endorsement from a closely trusted adult, and they see political activism as appropriate and constructive (Coleman, 1988). Second, family and peer ties create permission structures: in situations where political engagement can be regarded as a sensitive issue, youth often learn to care and voice political issues through family cues, intergenerational memory, and peer norms.

The motivation profile created by bonding capital in Cambodia focused discussions is of an obligation, respectability, and community harmony type, which does not focus on negative or adversarial participatory motivation. This is consistent with analyses of education policies that suggest civic and moral education are integrated with a dominant cultural preference for social harmony, civility, and moral order which determine the boundaries of legitimate civic impulsion (Tan, 2008). Nonetheless, bonding social capital can also produce what has been described as the dark side of social capital, that is, an emphasis on conformity, social ease, and a self-imposed civic activism deficit, especially when the discourse surrounding politics is deemed socially dangerous or inappropriate (Portes, 1998). In these arrangements, youth motivation may still exist but is strategically channelled. That is, they may feel the need to volunteer in their community but stop short of any form of activism that could be seen as controversial.

Bridging social capital connecting youth across different social groups can encourage interest-based engagement through increased exposure to different perspectives and more opportunities to engage in political conversations (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992). In developing democracies, bridging social networks are typically created with the help of universities, NGOs, volunteer opportunities, and, more recently, social media. These help diversify the informational diets of youth and stimulate their interest. In synthesis, the most important aspect is not the size of the social network, but the heterogeneity and the quality of the social ties: bridging social ties that encourage quality discussions can be interest-boosting, while bridging ties that promote misinformation or polarize social networks can lead to disengagement and cynicism. The evidence from Cambodia demonstrates that the online and the offline space can spill into each other. The analysis of everyday politics on Facebook argues that everyday acts of sharing, commenting, and circulating information can lead to political offline action and can even shape policy

(Vong & Hok, 2018). The potential of bridging social ties is that they can stimulate civic curiosity and motivation for political discussions, even in contexts where formal political action is low. The low cost of political engagement means that young people can participate, as they can read about political issues, react to posts, engage in discussion about politics without having to formally participate in politics.

The potential for bridging capital is limited by specific constraints. In environments where there are risks involved, greater exposure may result in heightened awareness of risks and potential punitive measures. This may shift the underlying motivation from active participation to passive compliance or socially accepted behaviour. Bridging capital leads to either (a) the development of interest and the intention to act, or (b) interest tempered by caution depending on the perceived risk and the surrounding institutional context.

Social capital of linking position (i.e., social capital of linking position is social capital of linking to) authorities and institutions is particularly important with respect to social motivation that is based on the anticipated outcome. In expectancy–value models, young people are willing to put forth effort into an activity when they perceive it to be valuable and believe that it will ultimately result in something (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Linking social capital is important because it demonstrates the potential for responsiveness. Direct interactions with local leaders, school officials, program gatekeepers, or civic intermediary agents convey the message that people are being listened to and that tangible opportunities are available.

Indirectly, civil society research focused on Cambodia illustrates this mechanism. According to Len and Sokphea (2021), the youth civic engagement process can be influenced by the recruitment strategies of specific organizations, as well as the formation of civic spaces, such as state-related and independent entities that construct participation ladders. In this case, when opportunities for linkage are structured as open dialogues and feedback, youth are encouraged when civic norms are perceived to be of influence. In the absence of linkage, or if participation is viewed as tokenistic, the motivation is likely to be less civic and more developmental (skill-oriented, service-oriented, self-help, self-improvement, etc.).

Evidence at the regional level reinforces the argument that linking capital tends to be stratified, with youth of higher socio-economic status, urban location, elite schooling, or membership in organizations more likely to be able to access institutional pathways that provide efficacy-based motivation (Saat et al., 2025). This stratification is not simply the absence or presence of access; it is the

motivational dividends that results from this access. The same civic curriculum may inspire two students equally, but only one of them is likely to engage with institutions that are responsive enough to warrant sustained political engagement.

Theme 2: Motivation scaffolding through belonging and perceived support

Another area of empirical convergence is the motivational nutrients of belonging and perceived support. Self-Determination Theory posits that motivation is fuelled by the fulfilment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A clear relational fit in youth civic life is the support of belonging: With a social anchor, young people are morally motivated to care about the public good. From the perspective of civic engagement, belonging can motivate in three primary ways. It can reduce alienation and withdrawal: young people who feel excluded are less likely to engage in community problem solving. It can create identity-based attachment: civic engagement is meaningful when it expresses belonging, pride, and a sense of responsibility. Finally, belonging creates a safe space for political talk, which can motivate young people to engage in political discourse. When peers and mentors encourage political talk, young people can feel the motivation to engage in the discourse, rather than avoid it.

Civic engagement in Cambodia is influenced by social norms that can be established through civic expression in the family and community. With the norms around expression and the expectations about what participants should do, the feeling of belonging may work both ways. While it may encourage young participants saying, “*people like us should show up*”, it may also restrict dissent, saying “*people like us should not speak up*”. This is in line with policy-focused literature stating that community and cultural contexts act as filters to civic engagement practices (Tan, 2008).

Social support, in the form of emotional, informational, and at times tangible resources, also reduces the costs of participation. Youth are sensitive to costs when considering if participation is worthwhile given the time required, the social stigma, the risks, the chance of not achieving a desired outcome, and so on (Verba et al., 1995). The supportive network reduces the costs of participation as they want to help the politically interested interpret the instructions or information and help to eliminate the anxiety associated with the social system, which reduces the use of the network for that purpose. With social support, youth receive the incentive to start participating in relatively simple civic activities. For instance, they may get involved by attending a meeting, joining a civic engagement club, undertaking community service, or participating in social media activism.

Theme 3: Normative influence: duty-based motivation vs. silencing effects

Normative influence is a youth motivation driver that has somewhat disparate effects. Social norms literature discusses injunctive norms (approval from significant others) vs descriptive norms (behaviour of others) (Cialdini et al., 1990). In the context of emerging democracies, injunctive norms, by carrying the frame of moral obligation, influence voting and respectable civic actions. In contrast, descriptive norms can result in either facilitation of civic engagement (e.g., ‘everyone participates’) or civic apathy (e.g., ‘no one participates’).

From a Cambodia-sensitive perspective, it is reasonable to assume that civic engagement duty-based motivation would thrive if participation were framed more as a moral obligation than a demonstration of individual opinion or preference, and social harmony. In the context of civic education, researchers have noted the integration of social control, order, and cultural traditions, and described their influence in promoting certain civic motivations over others (Tan, 2008). As a result, youth may adopt the civic duty discourse advocating volunteering and community enhancement, while exclude radical political activism. Simultaneously, there are forms of social control that can impose silence. If political discourse is socially coded as dangerous, immature, or simply inappropriate for young people, injunctive norms can discourage active participation and actually focus attention on forms that are more muted, such as private discussion, apolitical volunteering, or self-censored online activity. Cambodia-focused briefs are clear on obstacles and a limited enabling environment, and this context does not mean that motivation is absent (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017).

A primary interpretive focus is on normative influence, not simply adjusting motivation up or down. It often instrumentalizes a certain kind of motivation. Norms can encourage a sense of obligation and social responsibility while stifling expressive and oppositional motivation. This selection effect goes a long way in explaining the phenomenon of low youth participation in formal politics and high youth participation in civic engagement, community problem-solving, and political discussion.

Theme 4: Social identity support: motivation as meaning, pride, and recognition

One more robust cross-context finding is that political motivation strengthens when participation is framed as identity meaning when as part of “who we are” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Zomeren et al., 2008), civic involvement is seen as and a way to realize “who we are.” The social identity route is very critical for younger members of society as identity is of a more salient developmental phenomenon: young people

want to be recognised, belong to a group, and to be given status. Politics can either be a hostile space that undermines identity or a safe one where identity can be freely expressed. In Cambodia, identity support can be based on student identity, youth leadership, community recognition, and national developmental and responsible narratives. When civic engagement is framed as community or nation-building, young people can be motivated by pride and recognition, as opposed to ideological debate. Research in civil society indicates that from an organisational perspective, the available pathways can shape how youth construct their civic roles and opportunities, effectively scripting responsible youth identities (Huot, 2025a; Len & Sokphea, 2021).

But identity can constrain civic imagination. If politics are seen as for certain groups (those with ties, those in validated groups, those with power), then support for the identity may become exclusionary and perpetuate inequalities. Here, insider motivation increases while alienation, cynicism, or silence fall onto the outsiders. This pattern concurs with the research on state-led mobilization and the role of youth organizations in Cambodia, which examines the legitimizing role of youth conduits to power and the regulation of dissent (Vong, 2022). The motivational outcome may be strong, but identity-based participation may lack in pluralism.

Theme 5: Community engagement and opportunity frameworks

A fifth convergent assertion is that motivation is likely to be lasting when youth are provided with multiple opportunities to act. Opportunity frameworks, be it student clubs, volunteer activities, youth councils, community forums, or project-based learning, serve to connect potential with sustained engagement. The literature consistently proves the point that participation should be treated as a continuum; the depth of engagement is of utmost significance.

Critically important for synthesis is drawing the line between symbolic involvement and agency-rich involvement. Symbolic involvement may raise the confidence and civic vocabulary of participants but leaves them with little to no expectation of impact and is unaccompanied by meaningful contributions. On the other hand, agency-rich involvement is more likely to sustain intent and create impact-focused motivation, as participants have decision-making power, meaningful feedback, and their actions have direct consequences. Research focusing on Cambodia and civic engagement programs highlights the participation ladder and the various boxes organizations have regarding youth engagement, pointing out that participation is affected by funding, the civic space, and the inter-institutional collaboration (Huot, 2025b; Len & Sokphea, 2021). When it comes to

digital opportunity structures, the situation is more complex. Although online networks can create multiple touchpoints for youth to create conversations, mobilize, and articulate civic concerns at virtually no cost, they also create other challenges. Vong & Hok's (2018) analysis of 'Facebooking' suggests that while politically charged posts may increase civic engagement, they may also be viewed as performing the act of engaging as opposed to participating in true civic engagement (slacktivism). Without certain civil elements, opportunity is rendered fragile, as it is overcome with terror, trolls, and misinformation, causing potential victims to withdraw. Ultimately, this creates a situation that is highly distracting but very little engagement, which is likely the inverse of what they hoped to achieve.

A compelling case can be made for the psychological sense of civic efficacy and civic competence as the driving motivators for the need for support and encouragement to sustain civic engagement (Campbell et al., 1960; Niemi et al., 1991). In Cambodia, the research showed that even in cases where the youth felt a sense of institutional indifference, the youth felt that their civic competence could be improved through civic education and discussion. This showed that while some community contexts could be selfless, their community could generate positive feelings. Another pathway is called risk compensation or risk adjusted motivation. In contexts where civic space feels constricted or sensitive, youth motivation can be steered toward less risky options such as community service, development activities, or strategic moderated online civic discussions. Cambodia-specific briefs draw particular attention to the cited barriers and the pejorative consequences attributed to political participation, which is consistent with the notion that the political participation motivation is likely to be suppressed in the face of perceived risks (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017). When an institution provides a corridor for civic education that reduces the perceived risks, they also place limits, and the limits can create a sense of caution to the point of stifling motivation. Ultimately, the meaning that sustains attention stems from belonging and identity. Civic engagement becomes significant, rather than abstract, when youth feel included and appreciated. This route is crucial in emerging democracies, where motivation may otherwise wither into a cynical collapse. Even when external efficacy is low, the motivation rooted in identity is likely to remain strong, as participation embodies a sense of responsibility and pride in the group.

An unequal distribution of community resources can explain why community support does not motivate every youth uniformly. Variations in gender, socioeconomic status, geographical location (rural versus urban), and political awareness determine who receives bridging ties and linking opportunities and who

can transform motivation into participatory action. Evidence from the region suggests a central role of campus networks and undergraduate cohorts, indicating a likely underrepresentation and divergent motivations of youths without higher education (Huot, 2026; Saat et al., 2025).

In Cambodia, survey-based consultations with youth across the provinces reveal a stark contrast in experiences, emphasizing the point that youth voice is not a singular construct (UNDP, 2024). In regions where bridging and linking social capital are absent, typically in rural and disadvantaged areas, motivated action leans toward local problem-solving rather than advocating for a national political framework. In contrast, where systems and networks are available and operational, motivation shifts toward a more sustained and effective orientation. The review shows some systematic contradictions best viewed as measurement and contextual artifacts rather than true theoretical conflict. First, studies operationalize political motivation differently (e.g., interest, duty, intention to vote, activism), so the findings are not comparable. Second, self-reports on contentious participatory behaviour are biased due to social desirability and political sensitivity, leading to underreporting of expressive motives and overreporting of socially desirable motives. Third, community support is sometimes measured by participation (e.g., organizational membership), leading to conceptual circularity. Fourth, the institutional contexts of emerging democracies vary significantly, so the same community variable can motivate activism in one context and service provision in a more cautious manner in another.

An appropriate way to resolve contradictions with respect to Cambodia is to interpret youth motivation as a portfolio. Thus, a single youth can simultaneously embody civic duty, curiosity, and caution. The empirical challenge is not to ask whether community support increases motivation, but rather to identify the specific type of community support, the operative mechanism, and the civic context, as summarized in **Table 3**.

Table 3. *Thematic evidence map: Community support factors and political motivation outcomes (Cambodia-focused and comparator triangulation)*

Community support factor	Most typical motivation outcomes	Cambodia-sensitive interpretation
Bonding social capital (encouragement,	Duty-based motivation; willingness for low-risk	Bonding ties can nurture civic responsibility while steering youth toward

Community support factor	Most typical motivation outcomes	Cambodia-sensitive interpretation
permission structures, moral cues)	civic participation; selective political talk	harmony-preserving forms of engagement
Bridging social capital (information diversity, discussion frequency)	Interest-based motivation; civic curiosity; online discussion motivation	Bridging expands exposure and lowers entry costs, but may also intensify caution if risks become salient
Linking social capital (responsiveness signals, access pathways)	Efficacy-based motivation (“it’s worth it”); sustained intention when feedback exists	Motivation strengthens when youth encounter credible responsiveness; stratification can make these returns unequal
Belonging support (relatedness, recognition)	Identity-based motivation; persistence in civic attention	Belonging can stabilize motivation by making civic engagement feel safe and meaningful
Perceived social support (cost reduction, emotional buffering)	Participation intention for entry-level civic acts; resilience against withdrawal	Support absorbs time and psychological costs, enabling first steps and sustained interest
Normative influence (injunctive and descriptive norms)	Duty to vote; respectable civic participation; potential self-censorship	Norms can mobilize moral obligation while narrowing acceptable voice under sensitivity cues
Opportunity structures (clubs, volunteering, youth councils, forums)	Durable motivation when involvement is agency-rich; weaker when symbolic	Motivation consolidates when youth see outcomes and feedback, not just attendance

Conclusion

This review has proposed an argument. Political engagement for young people in newly emerging democracies is not a psychological phenomenon, rather an orientation socially constructed through their spatial and temporal contexts, historical circuitry, and the social and institutional opportunities available to them. The strongest synthesis is that community support factors matter, but not in the same ways, and certainly not in the same ways in terms of motivating distinct forms of political engagement. What community support tends to do most reliably is create a social context where young people can learn the civic vernacular, experience confidence cultivation, identity-based attachment, and emotional and political (practical) burdens of participation, and so on. However, the ultimate form of youth motivation (whether that comes across as curiosity, a sense of duty, compliant behaviour, risk averse participation, or, on the other side, participatory intention) is primarily shaped by the intersection of community support with risk and responsiveness.

The evidence base indicates that motivation clusters into three broad motivational profiles. The first motivational profile is duty and community-based participation. Participation of this type is often reflected in acts of voting, community volunteering, and other socially sanctioned civic acts. This type of motivation illustrates the influence of social norms and connectedness. The second profile is focused on civic learning interest, which typically includes the social and community-based volunteering educational and civic learning the use of the internet and the digital space. This profile is characterized by high engagement, frequent discussion, and high interest stimulation, which uses the learning space of the campus and the digital networks. The third profile is conditional motivation, characterized by the hypothesis that the motivation will only result in a positive outcome if the participation is safe and the organizations are open to listening. In this profile, motivation is highly influenced by the organization and the associated risks of the situation. Young people often demonstrate a high level of civic concern but remain disengaged from high-risk civic participation.

For Cambodia, the key interpretive conclusion is the case of the youth's motivation, characterized by a civic responsibility and strong learning component, but where the case of motivation transgresses into direct, politically visible action, such motivation becomes conditional. Put differently, youth can be motivated even where they may not be expressively motivated all citizens. Such a case does not illustrate an absence of civic engagement; rather, the case illustrates an example of youth motivation response that is contextually appropriate determined by what the

youth perceive as legitimate, safe, and likely to result in a positive and meaningful outcome.

The implication to consider therefore should be that to enhance and improve motivation among youth is obviously not a case of just telling young people to get involved, but rather the building of a civic ecosystem where not just the act of participating is deemed safe, meaningful, and of course in the end, a result. The top of the list should always be the aim to improve and enhance the existing bridging spaces and places, be they formal or informal, in existence to create a space for civil dialogue civic safe, where young people can participate. Schools and Universities, youth groups and local associations, and even informal groups, should not be the end of that aim. high quality, civil messaging, the message should never be the end, or one of the subjects, but rather. If civil muted, outside, there must be a need for dialogue, there must be a space. Bridging, civil space, motivation - driving the attention from one divided, civil sphere, to another.

A second priority is creating more equitable linking pathways that make institutions seem reachable and responsive. Motivation becomes durable when youth see that involvement yields feedback, and even occasional changes in policy or program activities. This requires non-tokenistic mechanisms such as direct youth engagement: structured consultations with guaranteed follow-up, youth councils with real agenda-setting authority, mentoring programs linking youth with civic mentors, and community-level feedback mechanisms that close the loop on youth-identified community issues. Linking should not be an elite privilege; it should be extended to rural youth and low resource settings.

A third implication is the need for autonomy-supportive civic education that integrates voice, competence, and safety. Civic education is the most motivating when it not only imparts civic values, but also teaches the necessary skills, encourages respectful discourse, and equally protects the legitimacy of youth voice. Supporting youth autonomy is critical as it shifts civic duty to civic commitment and changes the frame of civic education from mere compliance to ownership. With this in mind, programs should feature service learning (with structured reflection), debate, and other activities that support inquiry in a less judgmental environment.

Implication four centres on offering rural and low-SES youth access to civic opportunity structures. Motivational stabilization requires sustained opportunities for participants. Motivational divides are common in youth who are located far from civic initiatives such as community clubs and forums, civic project opportunities, and pathways to leadership. A further implication is the development of educational

programs in digital civic literacy that address the harms of misinformation and the unfounded fears that lead to disengagement. In digital spaces, while the interest and exposure to civic engagement may increase, so do the fears of anxiety, harassment, and reputational damage. Therefore, programs focused on building constructive civic engagement online and respectful discourse, while also building young people's capacity to deal with negative experiences that may disengage them from civic participation and undermine their motivation.

Future studies need to address three areas in the most advanced state: measurement, design, and pathway testing. With regards to measurement, greater specificity is needed in the field regarding interest-based motivation, duty-based motivation, and instrumental and risk-adjusted motivation as opposed to conflating them into a single index. The Cambodian context necessitates validation, as the terms "participation," "voice," and "influence," are contextually and culturally bound. Instruments must be tested for subgroup equivalence so that comparisons across gender, SES, and rural-urban divides do not confuse measurement artifacts with empirically real differences.

In regard to design, studies should advance from cross-sectional designs to longitudinal designs to study the formation and change of motivation. Longitudinal designs will best answer the questions of whether motivation increases due to civic education, whether it remains constant due to opportunity structures, and whether it decreases due to the absence of responsive prompting. Explanatory sequential mixed methods design with a predominance of qualitative data is useful when addressing paradoxical quantitative data, as these often justify interpretations of risk, legitimacy, and trust in the system that require qualitative elucidation. Regarding theory testing, subsequent studies should focus on the interconnected pathways from community mobilization to motivation through mediating variables such as agency, trust, belonging, and identity, and subsequent to that assess whether motivation translates to participation. Also, research should focus on Cambodia in contrast with other emerging democracies to analyse what is context-bound and what is a result of wider developmental structures in the youth population. The aim is not to measure the level of democracy in different countries but to understand how motivation is influenced by civic space, responsive democracy, and available opportunities.

The political engagement of young Cambodians can be conceptualized as a community-generated capacity-and-meaning system. Family and peer socialization, historical contexts of socialization that promote either warning or supportive orienting, and opportunity frameworks that socialized participants as safe versus

socialized participants as active and consequential determine contextual engagement. When Cambodia's civil ecosystem grows, in particular, the use of the positive potential of youth civil engagement, the motivational components of the ecosystem that is a positive youth civil engagement will be directed towards expansive private civically engaging activities.

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