RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social Capital and Political Efficacy: A Review of Theories and Applications in the Context of Cambodian Youth

Sovanna Huot

Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India;
shuot@polscience.du.ac.in | https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8335-442X

ABSTRACT

This review aims to describe the relation between social capital and political efficacy within the youth of Cambodia by suggesting the possible integration of the sociological, political, and development theories vis-a-vis Cambodia, and the possible applications that pertain to the suggestion of such integration. In this case, it is suggested that the social infrastructures of civic capital: bonding, bridging, and linking through five families of mechanisms that are social learning, information flows, norms and sense of belonging, trust and reciprocity, and the reduction of participation costs, build political efficacy, albeit in very different ways. The review aims to propose a Cambodia-specific pathway model wherein the internal political efficacy or self-belief confidence is sustaining and more community oriented through the schools, universities, families, peers and community learning structures, and the external political efficacy or belief of self-responsibility is more institution oriented, and more variant on the availability of linking social capital and the presence of the institutional feedback mechanisms. In this review, a hypothesized outcome is illustrated: youth have the potential to be politically active and engage in risk-committed actions. This calls for a research agenda that seeks to study theoretical pathways, context-specific metrics, moderator sensitive mechanisms, integrated qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and temporally extended methodologies.

FULL PAPER

Introduction

Analysing youth political participation through the prism of resource availability relative to the time, financial, educational, and access inequalities creates understanding gaps. Participation literature points to the absence of the civic skills, confidence, and socially supported pathways to meaningful participation; young people become willing to abstain from participation. In the civic voluntarism framework, Verba et al. (1995) state the case for political activity and apathy being psychologically motivational, while engagement is instrumental through recruitment networks, facilitating the acquisition of civic skills and the receiving of participatory invitations to opportunities. This is especially the case in Cambodia, where the social and civic expression is what the situation and the system allow.

The framing of everyday talk and participation in civic activities, as well as the issues that can be publicly contested, is done by families, peer groups, schools and universities, and community organizations. These everyday environments can either help develop or limit the social-political voices of the youth. From an institutional perspective, the youth are socialized to views of authority and institutions as being either responsive or unresponsive. If civic participation is closed and if there are no consequences to active participation, the youth will not perceive participation as rational or meaningful. Studies on youth mobilization in Cambodia show that participation can be channelled and constrained in ways that limit contestation (Huot, 2025a). While Vong (2022) sees pro-government youth mobilization as state-sponsored youth mobilization to quell potential instability resulting from an increasing number of young people, Norén-Nilsson (2021) argues that youth mobilization can result in the reproduction of power even as youth activism becomes more prominent.

In this view, political efficacy is an important concept. Political efficacy has a two-part belief system structure, with internal efficacy referring to belief in one's ability to effectively participate in civic matters and external efficacy relating to the belief that institutions and systems respond to an individual's participation. Reliable competence belief measures for internal efficacy have been established in foundational work by Craig et al. (1990). External efficacy is less measurable as there is a greater emphasis on perceived responsiveness of the system than there is on

the belief in system responsiveness. In a similar vein, Niemi et al. (1991) elucidate how a more refined measurement of internal efficacy can capture civic competence more accurately as a political-psychological resource. To put it succinctly, efficacy often acts as a belief gateway that links social experience to political action, translating civic learning and social encouragement into a motivator and participation, while beliefs of responsiveness serve to filter whether action to civic participation is warranted.

It is also worth stating that efficacy can be an outcome of participation. Finkel (1985) illustrates reciprocal effects of participation and efficacy in a panel analysis, suggesting that engagement experiences may lead to an increasing sense of efficacy over time. He explains that this reciprocal logic is an illustration of cumulative advantage, where in the civic arena, the first opportunity to engage in a supportive, civic network and meaningful activities is likely to increase a sense of efficacy which, in turn, may lead to an increase in the likelihood to engage actively in civic participation. This is especially true for young participants who are in a civic setting that is unclear or partially open. This review concentrates on social capital and political efficacy as the two fundamental constructs for how community contexts influence the political beliefs of Cambodian youth.

Social capital includes networks, trust, reciprocity, and collective norms that help people work together. In this regard, Coleman (1988) views social capital as a resource that aids social action, while Bourdieu (1986) argues that socially networked resources are unequally distributed and convertible to a position of advantage, emphasizing the significance of power in determining who benefits from social networks. For development-oriented synthesis of social capital, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) view social capital as norms and networks that make collective action possible and outline different theoretical families that associate social capital with a variety of outcomes based on community cohesion, networks, institutions and state-society relations. In this review, social capital is structured on the well-established bonding-bridging-linking framework: bonding social capital is tight, inward networks (families, close friends), bridging social capital is horizontal and connects disparate groups, and linking social capital descends from power and authority and connects individuals to institutions across social hierarchies. Szreter and Woolcock (2004) clarify this tripartite framework and examine its implications for the interplay of social relations and institutions.

Political efficacy consists of two dimensions: internal and external. Internal political efficacy is having the capacity to comprehend the political system, articulate points of interest, assess different arguments and engage in political activities

(Niemi et al., 1991). External political efficacy is the belief that government actors and institutions respond to the concerns and participation of the people (Craig et al., 1990). The difference is important when it comes to Cambodia. Young people through education and peer networks may develop civic competence and self-confidence but may still see civic responsiveness as conditional and uncertain, leading to divergent internal and external efficacy. In this review, scope delimitations are as follows. The focus is on youth, in particular students and young adults, as they are in active civic learning spaces and are the most frequent targets for civic engagement mobilization and participation. For the purposes of this review Cambodia is the main setting, but comparative illustrations are drawn from Southeast Asia and the Global South to assist the understanding of the social capital and civic efficacy nexus under varying institutional frameworks.

The paper is primarily focused on theory and applied practice. As such it integrates the various debates on mechanisms and measurement and is not limited to the simple description of instances. This paper attempts to merge the theories of social capital and political efficacy to develop a model applicable to the context of Cambodian youth. It is structured around the following questions:

1. What do the principal theories of social capital offer on the normative dimension of civic competence and political belief?

2. What processes, on the social capital side, are related to the political efficacy both in terms of internal and external?

3. What do the available data from Cambodia (and similar contexts) speak to, in relation to these questions?

4. What do the measurement issues and context-related factors add to the complexity of the relationship?

5. What is the best suited research agenda for the context of Cambodian youth?

This review aims to contribute to three main areas. Conceptually, the youth engagement of Cambodia needs to be looked at as a belief mediated process and not as a resource-based process. Effectiveness, in this respect, is the belief that connects community engagement to political belief and action (Craig et al., 1990; Verba et al., 1995). From an empirical perspective, it integrates the Cambodia-focused literature on youth mobilization and civic engagement to contextualize the gap of why internal agility may develop, but the belief of civic x democracy contradiction persists (Norén-Nilsson, 2021; Vong, 2022). Practically, it advances the design of policy and programs by identifying which types of social capital are

more likely to foster internal efficacy (social, skills, and learning discussions) and which are more likely to foster external efficacy (open access, responsive, and institutional contact). This is a significant consideration, given that Cambodian youth articulate needs and expectations around development and governance, reinforcing the demand for directed structures of voice and responsiveness (UNDP, 2024).

Theoretical Foundations and Key Debates

Social capital: conceptual traditions and typologies

Part of the reason social capital is so widely and so variously used when it comes to explaining civic and political life is because it bridges the gaps between sociology and political science and development studies. Bourdieu (1986) views social capital through the lens of power and access inequality, who and how individuals can transform social networks into beneficial socioeconomic opportunities. Social capital is more than simple social connectivity or social contact; it is a resource that is stratified and distributed unequally across societal networks. Coleman (1988) conceptualizes social capital structurally as obligations, expectations, norms, and sanctions, as well as social contact and relational networks that can facilitate action or behaviour; thereby illustrating the access and flow of social actions and behaviours through social networks. Coleman (1988) emphasizes that social capital exists relationally to structures that engender collaboration even when supporting formal organizations are weak or not as accessible as the civil social structures.

The contemporary political science tradition that Putnam (1994, 2000) helped popularize, further develops social capital into a civic and associational framework. Putnam posits that dense civic networks and generalized trust enhance democratic performance by improving coordination, problem solving, and reinforcing the reciprocity norm. However, the focus on associational life requires social capital to be reconceptualized in that it is no longer seen solely as an individual's network resource; rather social capital becomes a social attribute that community possesses that can enhance its governance and civic ability. In development, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) argue that social capital, like in development studies, is best seen as the norms and networks that facilitate and support collective action, but they also point out that different theoretical families place different emphasis on community cohesion, network resource, and the structural arrangement of the institutions.

These traditions approach social capital in three different, though not necessarily exclusive, ways. First, social capital is treated as resources that exist

within certain types of social networks, where the main question is: what do networks enable people to do? To this, Lin (2001) posits that social capital is not only about social relationships, but about the ability to bring these relationships to bear for some actionable cause, and as such, social capital is tied to the position and the ties in the networks. Second, in some traditions of social capital theory, the social capital is about social norms and trust that facilitate collaboration (reciprocity, trustworthiness, and shared expectations), that position social capital as the elements that social phenomenon to reduce the transaction costs and social uncertainty (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). The third approach comes from some political and development scholars who argue that social capital serves as a civic substrate. Networks, trust, and associative spaces (or social networks) help to reduce the costs of civic engagement by providing information, social motivation (encouragement), and active recruitment to civic participation. In this approach to social capital, it does not simply predict civic engagement but provides the multiple options (or channels) through which civic education and active participation are organized (Verba et al., 1995; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

A central issue across these perspectives involves the understanding of social capital at the individual level versus the social capital at the level of the community. Social capital at the individual level comprises social networks, sources of social support, and informational and instrumental resources that individuals can access through social ties (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001). While social capital with the community can be conceptualized with attributes such as generalized trust, reciprocity, social cohesion, and social bridging institutions (Putnam, 1994, 2000). Critics claim that when social capital theorists collapse these levels of social capital, important conceptual ambiguities emerge. What is the specific micro-macro explanatory relations, and where does social capital reside? Portes (1998) warns that social capital has been used as an explanation too often and outcomes (e.g., civic participation) have been used as indicators of social capital, leading to tautological explanations.

For more conceptual clarity, many scholars categorize social capital by the kind of ties and the flow of social relations. For example, Putnam (2000) describes bonding and bridging social capital, where bonding ties are inward-looking, reinforcing exclusive identities and homogeneity, whereas bridging ties are outward-looking and span across social divides. Szreter and Woolcock (2004), building on the syntheses of development and public health, offer the notion of linking social capital to describe vertical ties across power differentials, where these are relationships that bridge individuals and communities with institutions, authorities, and the

powerful. This three-fold classification is particularly useful in youth politics given that the social capital operates differently depending on whether the ties offer some sense of safety and belonging, exposure and learning, or institutional leverage and responsiveness.

Bonding social capital refers to emotional safety, mutual aid, and identity reinforcement that comes from close connections to family, intimate peers, and other tightly knit groups (Huot, 2025a; Putnam, 2000). While scholars argue that bonding ties provide the emotional safety to facilitate civic discourse, which is especially pertinent for the youth developing their civic language and roles, bonding ties can create environments of increased conformity that serve to mitigate political discourse. In contrast, bridging social capital refers to the social ties that connect youth to different peers, perspectives, and civic activities (Huot, 2025b; Putnam, 2000). Bridging ties are theorized to facilitate more civic engagement and political sophistication by broadening informational flows, increasing tolerance, and exposing youth to disparate perspectives. Linking social capital involves connections of youth to hierarchy, institutions, and representatives, such as teachers, local officials, civil society leaders, and intermediaries, which impact perceptions of access, responsiveness, and the potential for impact (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Linking ties are particularly useful in terms of political efficacy, as they provide direct experience with institutions that either validate or refute beliefs in responsiveness.

A growing body of literature highlights that social capital by itself is not democratic or empowering; rather, it is highly contextual and can induce both inclusion and exclusion. On the positive side, social capital can aid learning, mutual aid, civic engagement, and cooperative problem-solving (Putnam, 1994; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). On the other hand, however, Portes (1998) points out the negative side by stating that strong ties can create obligations, curtail liberties and perpetuate inequalities. For instance, while bonding social capital might create out-group exclusion, boundary control, and social closure; solidarity in a negative sense might prevail. In political contexts, closed networks might further exacerbate patron-client dependency or loyalty in hierarchies, especially in contexts where resource accessibility is secured through personal ties and opaque structures (Bourdieu, 1986; Portes, 1998).

Political efficacy: structure, development, and contextual sensitivity

Political efficacy can be defined as a belief system that establishes an individual's connection to a particular political system through both an appreciation of system and a belief in one's competence to act within it. From the perspective of

the classic behavioural school of thought, efficacy was associated with the psychological underpinnings of a democratic citizenry and was viewed as a major predictor of political participation. Campbell et al. (1960) define efficacy as the belief that one's political and social actions can make a difference and situate this belief within the context of a broader theoretical framework of political attitudes and behavioural participation. Subsequent work has fine-tuned the definition of political efficacy by focusing on the internal and external dimensions of political efficacy. From this perspective, Niemi et al. (1991) posit that internal political efficacy is a reflection of one's belief in competence, one's ability to understand the political system, deliberate on the public issues, and make rational contributions to the discourse. Civic learning, which encompasses education, political discourse, and civic practice, is the foundation for the development of competence beliefs, as it equips the individual with the cognitive and communicative tools for political involvement.

Many scholars argue that IPE stems from a combination of interactive political discourse, situational civic education, and participatory experiences that empower young individuals as potential civic actors. Positioning from civic skills, Verba et al. (1995) posited that civic skills are acquired and unevenly distributed, often behavioural through the civic training institutions and networks of communication, organization, and leadership. In this light, self IPE is more than an attitude; it is a reflective self-cognition bolstered by a civic reasoning environment and civic practice that is inexpensive.

External political efficacy (EPE) describes the degree to which people believe political entities and actors pay attention and respond to public feedback. Craig et al. (1990) suggest that external efficacy must be seen independently from the internal efficacy dimension and instead linked to the perceived responsiveness, justice, and openness of institutions. While the IPE (internal political efficacy) dimension reflects the skills, resources, and confidence that can be gained in a given environment, the EPE dimension reflects the degree to which institutions practice fairness, representation, respond to and acknowledge the voices of the public, and provide opportunities to be heard. Relative to IPE, EPE is less stable and tends to vary more from one political context to another and in relation to perceived opportunities or restrictions in the participatory environment. On the other hand, EPE is not always evenly distributed in the same society. In the context of the same society, youth with linking social capital (mentorship, institutional access, and consultative forum participation) may demonstrate a stronger belief in political responsiveness compared to their counterparts without such capital. EPE is

psychological, but it is also social and institutional, shaped by political system encounters that demonstrate responsiveness.

A prevalent expectation regarding Cambodia, and a number of emerging or hybrid civic ecosystems, is the compartmentalization of internal and external civic efficacy. This argument is taken in three parts. First, community encouragement and supportive learning environments may boost a sense of competence (IPE) by providing civic information, allowing for the practice of discussions, and fostering encouragement. This is in full alignment with civic skills and social learning theories (Niemi et al., 1991; Verba et al., 1995). Second, EPE is predominantly influenced by institutional frameworks and perceived responsiveness, which tends to vary in accessibility across different strata of the youth population Craig et al. (1990).

Lastly, in the case of civic spaces that are uneven and where there are opportunities to voice concerns, but the responsiveness is perceived to be selective, youth are likely to feel competent but not powerful. This discrepancy is important because it clarifies the phenomenon where the combination of civic education and community engagement raises political interests and competencies but does not produce a level of belief that the outcome of engagement will produce a change.

Mechanism-level theories linking social capital to efficacy

Mechanism-level theories focus on the way in which networks create efficacy through the enhanced opportunities for learning and practice. The social learning theory, for example, describes how networks facilitate the discussion, modelling and rehearsal of the civic discourse and the leader role, which promote political comprehension and reinforce IPE. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992) argue that citizens learn about politics in an interpersonal framework, where everyday interactions promote the acquisition of politically relevant knowledge and the motivation to engage. Civic voluntarism accounts operate in the same way by describing how networks incorporate people into participation and teach the civic skills that enable engagement (Verba et al., 1995). All these perspectives reinforce that social capital in its politically relevant form operates as an educational infrastructure. This is especially the case for youth who are in the process of acquiring political communication, self-assurance and role identity.

Another type of mechanism family pertains to information flow. Bridging ties can expand the range of information available, increase the number of issues to which people are exposed, and decrease the reliance on homogeneous stories, supporting higher levels of political competence and better calibrated political expectations. Research on discussion networks suggests that citizens are situated

within particular information environments determined by their conversation partners and the information that circulates through their social ties (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992). In that case, bridging social capital can enhance IPE by increasing political awareness and the capacity for political discussion, and can improve EPE by providing young people with more varied narratives about the performance and responsiveness of institutions.

A third mechanism focuses on normative climates and feelings of belonging. Social capital not simply ties; it is also the normative context that is constitutive of the social relationship. Coleman (1988) suggests that the norms and sanctions that are present in the social networks encourage co-operation. This means that social networks can stimulate civic engagements when social participation is valued. However, the same normative forces can do the opposite. They can discourage civic engagements, especially in the case of young people, when the social context views civic engagements as risky or inappropriate. Putnam (2000) suggests that, in a similar context, social ties reinforce an identity which provides strong in-group solidarity. This in-group solidarity is a double-edged sword. While it looks like a solid foundation of civic confidence, in some contexts, it also leads to a concerning level of conformity in other contexts. The implications for efficacy are clear. Positive normative context and a feeling of belonging, in many cases, supports an increase in self, psychological safety, as well as a belief that something can be done. However, in situations when a normative context is negative, it can lead to a withdrawal of civic participation, even in cases when a participatory competence is present.

The fourth mechanism worries about trust and reciprocity. Putnam (1994, 2000) claims that generalized trust and reciprocity solve collective action problems and sustain civic engagement. If generalized political trust (or at least a reduction in fear) occurs, youths may defuse the threat and opacity of involvement in politics, which may promote political participation and political efficacy. However, scholars caution that the absence of trust in the social system may inhibit trust in the political system, especially where the system is unresponsive. In this context, social capital is especially relevant: the vertical relational ties and affirmative encounters with the system may provide the actual evidence of responsiveness, which may directly enhance EPE in a way that is more effective than social bridging or bonding relations (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Thus, EPE is most significantly affected when social capital facilitates access for young people to authentic responsive channels.

The final mechanism family highlights the role of social capital in decreasing the costs of participation. According to the civic voluntarism model, resources are required to participate, and networks often offer the minimization of the costs

associated with recruitment and support, and the initiating of someone into the political arena (Verba et al., 1995). Social support, in the form of emotional, informational, and material support, can alleviate logistical obstacles, such as time, fear of social judgment, and lack of knowledge. This support mechanism is even more pronounced for young people. Initial participation experiences are often fragile, and supportive networks can convert initial participation into sustained civic activism. In this light, social capital strengthens the IPE by enhancing the sense of competence, and, by providing means to access civic and participatory social support, strengthens the EPE.
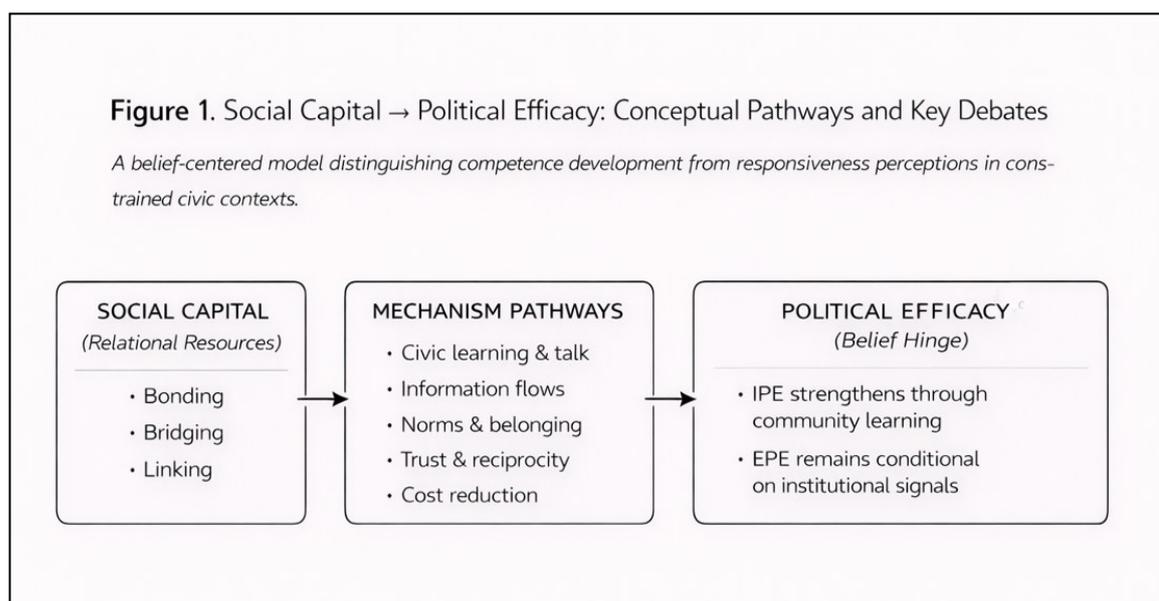
Conceptual and measurement debates

Empirical and theoretical disputes have been persistent, and many have remained unresolved. Definitional looseness and indicator overlap have been cornerstones of the critiques levelled against social capital research for decades. Although social capital research critiques have certainly evolved, the case with Portes (1998) remains relevant. He illustrates the perceived circular nature with civic participation when it is posited as both an effect and a cause of social capital. Although Putnam (2000) has been heavily criticized for his measurement strategy, his non-equivalent measurements of social capital are the most well-known and established. Critics agree, however, that the participation-type indicator is the worst social capital indicator when it comes to distinguishing social capital from civic engagement. The participation-type indicators of social capital that have often been used in youth research have made it increasingly difficult to accurately interpret student engagement and the social resources that stem from it.

Definitional ambiguity also afflicts political efficacy. Craig et al. (1990) warn that without careful item construction, external efficacy could be misinterpreted as political trust, and Niemi et al. (1991) show how measures of internal efficacy are often unrefined, capturing the belief in one's political competence rather than an interest in politics.

The second debate issue deals with context and meaning equivalence: the same indicator may mean different things across cultures and even different subgroups in the same culture. For example, the item, "*I can contact leaders*" may in one context mean empowerment, while in another context, it may mean social risk, or social privilege. Cross-cultural measurement studies emphasize that constructs must show measurement invariance; otherwise, the differences observed may be due to differences in interpretation, and not due to differences in the true construct, as some researchers would argue (Steenkamp & Baumgartner,

1998). This is especially true for efficacy; the beliefs in competence and responsiveness are politically experienced and therefore, efficacy must not be seen as a purely personality trait. Efficacy is a belief system that is contextually dependent and is a product of the institutional environment in which the youth are situated (Craig et al., 1990).

The literature discusses the ambiguity regarding the direction of causation, and the presence of feedback loops. The primary causal narrative is social capital, efficacy and engagement. In this instance, a causal network is said to bolster competence and provide encouragement to remain active. However, scholars increasingly recognize the possibility of back-and-forth reciprocal causality. Engagement is claimed to also provide the network, trust and efficacy. Finkel (1985) is a name often referenced for the evidence of the reciprocal relationship between participation and efficacy. Finkel (1985) suggests that there is a time dimension to the political engagement of people and that this activism can, over time, reinforce one's belief in their own efficacy. This understanding complicates and makes cross-sectional studies more difficult in determining cause and effect. It lends the possibility that for young people, civic engagement is developmental. Initial participation in civic activities, with the support of a social network, enhances civic efficacy, which increases future participation, thereby building social capital. This is particularly the case in Cambodian youth. Cambodian youth experiences with social networks can elicit responsive behaviour across time and life stages. Thus, perceived efficacy and social capital may evolve and operate in a multi-dimensional, non-linear developmental system rather than a one-dimensional, linear, direct causation system as depicted in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Social Capital → Political Efficacy: Conceptual Pathways and Key Debates

A belief-centered model distinguishing competence development from responsiveness perceptions in constrained civic contexts.

SOCIAL CAPITAL (Relational Resources)	MECHANISM PATHWAYS	POLITICAL EFFICACY (Belief Hinge)
• Bonding • Bridging • Linking	• Civic learning & talk • Information flows • Norms & belonging • Trust & reciprocity • Cost reduction	• IPE strengthens through community learning • EPE remains conditional on institutional signals

Integrative Framework: How Social Capital Influences Political Efficacy

The literature on social capital has largely advanced parallel to the literature on political efficacy. This is unfortunate, as the causal mechanisms at play are highly interdependent. Show me one of the social capital theories. It states that there are Networks, norms and trust, that the three act as enabling conditions for purposeful action (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000). However, the political efficacy literature states that for citizens to participate, there is need for structural access, as well as a need for that citizens feel competent, and, most importantly, that there is a need for the citizens to feel that the system is responsive (Campbell et al., 1960; Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al., 1991). When the two traditions are integrated, social capital can be defined as the relational infrastructure that has to be in place for people to learn civic competence, as well as for people to acquire, test, and revise their beliefs of systemic responsiveness.

The proposed pathway model sees social capital as a multiform input, bonding, bridging, and linking, that shapes internal political efficacy (IPE), through learning and practice, more consistently, while external political efficacy (EPE) is shaped more conditionally through institutional cues and experiences of responsiveness. This ordering is not an indication that IPE must come before EPE in all instances, it is rather, that the dominant mechanisms vary by dimension. While competence beliefs are directly generated through a combination of civic learning initiatives and positive participatory supportive environments (Niemi et al., 1991; Verba et al., 1995), responsiveness beliefs are more closely tied to the behaviour of the relevant governing structures, and the observations and experiences of the youth when they attempt to express their concerns (Craig et al., 1990). Finkel (1985) shows that the effects of participation and efficacy are reciprocal, which means that youth can have their civic efficacy reinforced by positive experiences in participatory activities, while negative experiences can stigma the civic arena. The model is thus developmental as social capital does not merely cause efficacy; it positions youth to encounter civic experiences that can reinforce or undermine their efficacy over an extended period.

Two expectations are central to making the model Cambodia-sensitive. One is that IPE should be strengthened more consistently through community learning contexts, schools, universities, peer groups, community activities, because these contexts support practice in political discourse, civic reasoning, and authoritative leadership (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992; Verba et al., 1995). The second is that the expectation of EPE becomes more conditional and uneven as the youth groups are more stratified, as EPE is contingent on whether the youth perceive actual avenues

of voice and whether the institutional contacts provide feedback and responsiveness, and feedback, and responsiveness (Craig et al., 1990; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). In the context of Cambodia, where the organizational and political contexts can strongly condition youth civic engagement, the credibility and inclusiveness of participation spaces are crucial in determining whether linked social capital can be converted to EPE or just to managed forms of involvement (Len & Sokphea, 2021; Norén-Nilsson, 2021; Vong, 2022).

A final component of the framework is the optional addition of motivation and engagement. The reasoning is similar to that of civic voluntarism: in networks and civic skills (social capital), engagement is fostered by the recruitment of individuals and the lowering of the entry costs (Verba et al., 1995). In this instance, efficacy serves as the belief gateway that converts the sustaining social supports into motivation and action (Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al., 1991). The model thus evidences the organization of the framework while keeping the ideas separated, social capital as infrastructure, efficacy as belief, engagement as action, while also considering the dynamic feedback loops (Finkel, 1985), as summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1. *Integrative pathway map*

Social capital type	Dominant mechanisms	Expected efficacy pattern
Bonding (close ties)	Encouragement, psychological safety, norms and sanctions	IPE: strong and consistent (safe talk to confidence). EPE: indirect and limited (rare institutional feedback). May also discipline dissent via family or peer caution.
Bridging (cross-group ties)	Information diversity, civic exposure, broader learning	IPE: strong (more viewpoints to competence). EPE: indirect (comparisons may recalibrate expectations). Campus/digital bridging can also intensify echo chambers and social pressure.
Linking (vertical ties)	Access to institutions, navigation skills, responsiveness cues	IPE: moderate (know-how interacting with institutions). EPE: strongest but most conditional (rises only if institutions respond credibly).

Social capital type	Dominant mechanisms	Expected efficacy pattern
		Structured spaces can expand access for some while limiting others' voice.

The worth of this framework relies on whether the various mechanisms can be adjusted to the actual learning environments of Cambodian youth regarding civic engagement. The literature on social learning posits that political knowledge cannot be acquired in a vacuum. It needs to be practiced within the context of social discussions, modelling, and feedback (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992). In Cambodian classrooms and universities, the building of competencies is reliant on the quality of the discussion climate, classrooms that legitimise questions, debates, and reasoned arguments, do, in fact, enhance the IPE of students by encouraging and normalising civic discourse, giving students the opportunity to practice articulating their political thoughts. This is consistent with the argument by Niemi et al. (1991) that, to be politically effective, one must possess the belief that one can do so, and this belief can be strengthened by opportunities to learn and discuss the political system. In translating these ideas, a degree of realism remains important; while competence can be increased, there may be a lack of belief in active responsiveness, as EPE is contingent on the political behaviour students witness in relation to the responsiveness of the authorities (Craig et al., 1990).

While discussing identity and belonging, peer networks and youth groups interpret the framework. His analysis of social capital shows that bonding social capital provides identity and emotional support, whereas bridging social capital provides cross-group connections and can potentially widen civic involvement (Putnam, 2000). In Cambodia's youth networks, bonding social capital can create emotional safety, so that members can speak more freely about civic concerns. However, the social capital can create strong social norms relating to what forms of political activism are considered acceptable. In youth networks, Coleman (1988) has noted that social norms and sanctions can facilitate or inhibit action. In the context of IPE (Intercultural Political Engagement) and the readiness to use the ability in public, peer groups tend to either support the expression of civic engagement or make it clear that exercise of civic engagement and activism is not prudent.

Surveys from students in Cambodia show that social media participation interrelates with the trust and engagement puzzle of the politics, revealing that

online social platforms serve the role of a bridging intermediary, at once facilitating the awareness of the user and reframing the perceived risks and stress (Ly, 2023). Bridging social ties have the potential to strengthen IPE by increasing contact with a variety of issues, breaking down barriers and increasing communication, but also have the potential to decrease the necessary psychological safety and social networks that underpin the ability to act, speak out, and advocate, a phenomenon that aligns with the ambiguity of the bright and dark sides of social capital espoused by Portes (1998). The family and intergenerational influence translate the framework most clearly in terms of bonding social capital and the social norm of hierarchy. Bourdieu (1986) argued that capital conversion is most relevant in the context of family networks, where access, legitimacy, and direction may be more easily channelled because the set of resources are relationally mediated. For youth effectiveness, family discourse may be a form of preliminary civic education, but the discourse may also be an expression of family-centric authority, thus shaping the boundaries of what is politically discussable. In Cambodia, where social control and the family or kin centred, social organization are documented to have historically influenced the youth's social behaviour, bonding may have a somewhat unique and distinguishable effect: an extreme endorsement of responsible citizenship and civic education, but a guarded attitude toward active public participation (Len & Sokphea, 2021). This form of translation is significant because it suggests that a high level of IPE is attainable and dispositional in social contexts where youth are refrained from expressing the influence and responsivity.

The community groups, pagodas, and local associations serve as important sites for translation because they have the potential to serve as bridging and linking sites. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) suggest that the impact of social capital on development is contingent on the relationship between networks and institutions; this is further supported by Szreter and Woolcock (2004) who argue that within bridging links, access to power and institutional accountability can be decisive. In Cambodia, the youth engagement and civil society structures have been described as working within constrained spaces where engagement with local authorities is monitored, co-opted, or integrated (Huot, 2026; Len & Sokphea, 2021). This intricate system of institutions has direct implications on EPE: the linkages that strengthen EPE will be compromised if youth participation happens within spaces that lack real feedback loops and substantive responsiveness; if the participation is tightly managed, or if the participation is merely symbolic, EPE will paradoxically remain low, even as the youth gain competence and organizational skills (Craig et al., 1990; Len & Sokphea, 2021). In the same vein, Norén-Nilsson (2021) observes that while

youth mobilization can expand participation, it can also restrict contestation, reinforcing the point that the degree of youth involvement is vital to explaining the extent to which linking experiences catalyse renewed beliefs in responsiveness or simply normalize managerial participation.

Vong (2022) states that the youth mobilization of state actors can serve as a means of legitimizing regimes, which sheds some light as to why access and involvement do little to strengthen the notion that youth voices will lead to meaningful changes. An essential part of this review framework is that social capital, even with some degree of social and political confidence, is not adequately translated to social action, efficiency, or effectiveness. In reference to the social strata, Bourdieu (1986) states that capital is hierarchically structured, and that access to network resources is uneven, which means that some social positions do not have the same political resources as others. Similarly, Lin (2001) asserts that the benefits of social capital are determined by one's social position and one's ability to activate the relationships within a network. When this is applied to youth, it suggests that while associational networks are available, they are unequal in the types of civic education that they offer, while integrated networks are usually hierarchically stratified in terms of educational opportunity, urban residency, and socio-economic status.

For this reason, they are treated as moderators rather than background noise. Socio-economic status determines whether youth can access bridging platforms (quality education, economic networks, organizational memberships) and linking platforms (institutional intermediaries, mentorship, civic programs). Rural-urban divides can also affect the civic opportunity structures and the presence (and density) of institutions that offer responsive gaps. Consultations with youth in Cambodia showed that the young people interviewed pointed to the absence of civic engagement opportunities as one of the most significant barriers, along with the absence of quality education and training opportunities, as well as the absence of sufficient financial resources, and the young age of the individuals, which resulted in marginalization (UNDP, 2024). The barriers reported here are consistent with the logic of the model's mechanisms: a poorly conceived opportunity structure diminishes the social learning and recruitment processes that are necessary to create an inclusive populist engagement (IPE), whereas poorly conceived opportunities to access voiced channels impede the necessary institutional encounters that would complement the expansive populist engagement (EPE). Gender also serves as a further moderator through both composition of the network and the normative climate. As Verba et al. (1995) show, there is a participation gap

because of unequal civic skills and recruitment patterns. In the context of Cambodia, the gendered informal civic structure may determine who is invited to take up leadership positions, who is publicly acknowledged, and which informal civic networks are safe for political conversations.

Political knowledge also moderates the conversion of civic engagement. In the case where bridging structural holes are diverse in terms of the civic information, the youth who possess the civic knowledge are able, in the stronger sense, to convert that exposure to belief in self-competence with civic engagement. In contrast, the youth possessing little civic knowledge are likely to experience cognitive overload or they will use the structure in a less heterogeneous way and will depend more on the same networks. All in all, social capital has conditioned effects, either positive or negative, depending on who has access to the bridging and linking structures and on the normative climate that may allow for tensions to be expressed. The framework produces several review propositions as integrated assertions rather than as a series of formal hypotheses. First, it is hypothesized that bonding social capital will strengthen IPE as close bonding social capital as social connections offer positive support, psychological safety, and recurring opportunities to engage in civic discourse and rehearse civic roles. This is similar to Russian Psychologist L.A. Verba's and American Psychologist J. Niemi's Teams thinking that Competence Beliefs develop through practice of a specific discourse (Niemi et al., 1991; Verba et al., 1995). On the contrary, the same close ties may undermine the conversion of social competence in to social cognition and expression, if the informal group social norms encourage more dismissive behaviours of dissent and advocacy, which is very similar to the view of norms posited by Coleman (1988) that social norms may simultaneously encourage and limit certain behaviours through rational choice theory.

Second, it is hypothesized that bridging social capital will strengthen IPE by increasing access to a broader range of information and different perspectives. This is consistent with the literature in interpersonal communication that evidences the more people you know and the more diverse the people you know, (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992; Putnam, 2000), the more information you obtain and the better you are able to make civic judgments in a political context. However, the bridging effect in social media contexts is more negative than positive. Social media increases social issue awareness, but it also increases social pressure and social issue polarization, which in turn increases psychological safety and civic voice (Ly, 2023; Portes, 1998).

Third, regarding EPE, linking social capital is likely to be the most predictive because it has the strongest social form likely to carry cues of institutional

responsiveness, direct social contact with power brokers, guidance on navigational pathways, and visible feedback loops (Craig et al., 1990; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Regarding this proposition in Cambodia, it is unconditionally so: in contexts where youth engagement is organized in participatory frameworks that are responsive in the sense of providing no real feedback, linking social capital may extend reach without expanding the belief in responsiveness (Len & Sokphea, 2021; Norén-Nilsson, 2021). The crucial empirical question is whether feedback is meaningful in such a way that young people perceive it as institutions listening.

Fourth, in civic contexts where there is a perception of low or inequitable responsiveness, IPE might increase while EPE stays stagnant. This divergence proposition emerges directly from the two-fold structure of efficacy: while learning environments can foster belief in one's own competence, beliefs in responsiveness are reliant on institutional cues, which may fail to align (Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al., 1991). Fifth, the normative climates woven into social capital are expected to function as a hinge mechanism: where supportive norms can mobilize a sense of duty and participation, constraining or restrictive norms can suppress action and lower the likelihood that a sense of competence is acted upon (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Finally, the framework perceives efficacy development to be dynamic: participation experiences can feed back into efficacy, reinforcing it when the engagement is meaningful and undermining it when the engagement is frustrating, or merely symbolic, in line with what reciprocal models would predict (Finkel, 1985).

These propositions do not romanticize social capital as an unqualified source of empowerment. Rather, it locates social capital as a differentiated infrastructure with both social capital, and, political efficacy, and EPE in particular, as the belief outcomes most sensitive to whether Cambodia's civic opportunity structures are designed to offer meaningful channels of voice and response.

Empirical Applications and Evidence in The Cambodia Youth Context

There is not an abundance of empirical evidence regarding the civic life of Cambodian youth that explains the complexity in the relationship between social capital and political efficacy. There exists not an absence of social networks that are conducive to political participation, but there is evidence of a conversion problem. Experiences in social networks and trust can develop internal political efficacy. Experiences, however, do not lead to external political efficacy. Cambodian youth paradoxically can be politically cautious and civic capable. This section attempts to synthesise what is known in the four areas of education, family, peer or community

networks, civil society programs and digital civic spaces, and then attempts to triangulate what is known about Cambodia and Southeast Asia and the Global South, before conducting a critical examination of the methodological weaknesses and the implications for programming.

Both studies and policy-oriented evidence believe that schooling can act as a type of civic infrastructure, especially when it develops multiple opportunities for discussion, deliberation, and participation in a participatory and structured way. Political contention can be sidestepped, but schools can further develop internal efficacy by bolstering one's confidence, one's ability to understand, evaluate, public speak and perform civic actions. In Cambodia, this logic of building competence can be seen in both the modernization of the curriculum and the broader institutional reform of the language of education. Consider for instance, the Ministry of Education's updating of the moral civic curriculum and modernization framed in the adjusting of the teaching of the newly incorporated civic-related content (i.e., the national law, anti-corruption, and global citizenship).

That said, the teacher's interpretations and enactments of the curriculum, in-situ, are not always aligned with the curriculum's objectives. Researchers in Cambodia on civic and moral education have argued for years that civic learning comes from the interaction of the informal political culture and the formal curriculum goals that includes hierarchy, controversy, and pragmatic risk (Tan, 2008). Classroom civics leads to the internal efficacy of students, but external efficacy depends on students having credible political calls. Political civic learning university experiences such as student clubs, volunteer opportunities, debates, and service-learning projects are more important than learning about civics. They are what political socialization theorists call practice fields: where the youth rehearse civically and develop the skills and confidence to do so. In relation to political efficacy, the most consistent contribution of educational settings is to increase internal political efficacy through supportive peer climates and skill formation, whereas external political efficacy is left to the extent to which educational institutions respond to youth initiatives. Cambodian youth engage with civic life through dense bonding networks, particularly with family and close friends. This bonding capital can operate like emotional scaffolding, providing reassurance and support, and stabilizing identity. It also alleviates the psychological burden of civic learning. However, bonding capital can also serve as a permission structure, determining which topics are safe, which modes of expression are appropriate, and what levels of participation are smart given the perceived risks. The most significant empirical implication is that bonding capital is likely dual use, cultivating internal efficacy through support and

instruction, while simultaneously socializing a significant external efficacy by an emphasis on caution in regard to the safe and responsive nature of civic activism.

The primary aim of this passage is not to highlight the unequivocal political repression of Cambodian families and peers, but to highlight the political prudence embedded within these relationships. While political sensitivity is a dominant feature of adult politics, youth may be encouraged to engage with politics as readers, discuss politics, volunteer in apolitical community service, etc., but discouraged from engagement in visible forms of contestation. This observation fits the expectations of the theory of civic engagement in constrained political environments. The social resources of the community that extend beyond the family, such as the pagoda, local community organizations, and neighbourhood circles, can be used again as resources for social bridging. However, the community and the circles and forums that are formed in a community may foster civic engagement by helping youth face a wide range of civic issues and informal networks, but again, the community simply serves the purpose of social closure of the community and diverges the civic activities of youth. In this case, these social resources will not connect youth to civic engagement and decision-making.

The most significant contribution to the participation as conversion problem comes from the scholarship on civil society organizations and youth civic engagement. A notable contribution from the Cambodian Development Resource Institute (CDRI) is the recognition that youth civic engagement is influenced not only by personal motivation, but also by the organizational ecology and the political opportunity structure of the youth program. In their qualitative study of three organizations in Phnom Penh and the provinces, Len and Sokphea (2021) illustrate how different types of organizations, within the same set of limitations, position youth differently and how political circumstances alter the scope of civic engagement. With regard to political efficacy, the distinction made here is between participation as mere attendance and participation as agency. Several youth initiatives focus on civic engagement (meetings, campaigns, civic training), and while these can enhance personal efficacy by teaching the language of civics and the procedural knowledge, they tend to have a limited impact on external efficacy. In contrast, participation that fosters external agency is more effective and involves youth in roles that require negotiation, decision making, and advocacy, as well as stakeholder engagement, and active responsiveness from decision-making authorities or institutions.

This means that civil society participation contributes to external efficacy the most when it has linking social capital, which can include connecting them to

decision makers, mentorship from certain civic professionals, and the presence of feedback mechanisms (e.g. consultations that lead to changes). Without these linking pathways, young people can gain knowledge and become active, but they will remain convinced that the system does not listen. Another pattern can be observed in youth-led governance activities that are not limited to electoral politics, such as involvement in climate governance. As noted by UNDP (2024), Cambodia youth-engagement roadmap for Nationally Determined Contributions sees youth participation as required and currently bottlenecked and defines meaningful participation as a design problem: youth require unimpeded entry into the policy process and an effective voice mechanism.

Cambodian digital civic spaces are emerging as critical sites for the political socialization of youth, although the effectiveness of these spaces is still being determined. Social media can facilitate the expansion of bridging social capital, as it increases the range of civic opportunities and civic-related communication. Digital social networks create and reinforce civic confidence, and political talk as an aspect of everyday life. This is illustrated by Vong and Hok's (2018) analysis of Cambodian youth politics, in which they argue that engagement in 'everyday political activities' on Facebook may motivate offline activism. However, the online civic spaces may also amplify the perception of risks associated with harassment and online self-censorship. This may lead to decreased civic self-efficacy, and in turn, negate the negative self-efficacy associated with civic activism. The latest survey-based studies continue to confirm the idea that social media serves not just as a channel but rather as a full ecosystem that interconnects trust, engagement with politics, and perceptions of politics. According to Ly (2023), a study of Cambodian students shows social media use as a variable associated with trust towards political systems and political participation. This study suggests that trust, combined with the information, can increase civic participation.

A good summary of the Cambodian digital context is IPE acceleration, EPE caution. Cambodian citizens perceive the use of internet bridging social capital as a tool that speeds up political education and the politically expressive participation of the Cambodian citizens. When political systems seem distanced, or online spaces are perceived as risky, external political efficacy may lag. This describes why, as shown in **Table 2**, youth may have a low perception of political system responsiveness and actively participate in civic acts that promote political issues, share information, or advocate politically without openly contesting the issues.

Table 2. *Evidence map linking arenas to efficacy outcomes*

Setting	Social-capital form	Efficacy outcome pattern
Schools & civic curriculum	Bonding & institutional civic norms	IPE strengthened via civic language and knowledge; EPE depends on real dialogue and feedback loops beyond class.
Family & close peers (Cambodia youth qualitative tradition)	Bonding capital	IPE supported through encouragement and safe talk; may also reinforce caution and conformity, keeping EPE low where politics feels sensitive.
Civil society youth programs	Bridging & sometimes linking	Skills and exposure often raise IPE; EPE rises mainly when youth gain agency and institutions visibly respond (not just attendance).
Digital civic networks	Bridging high; linking uneven	Online learning and expression can raise IPE; misinformation, harassment, and self-censorship fears can depress EPE and visible participation.
Youth in governance domains	Potential linking	EPE can increase when participation is meaningful with clear responsiveness; bottlenecks and inequality can erode EPE if voice lacks uptake.

The Cambodian youth phenomenon can be further studied through comparative evidence. In recent ISEAS, Yusof Ishak Institute surveys, undergraduates from six Southeast Asian countries were studied, resulting in regional pilot surveys. It is noted that youth civic engagement is highly context specific, and that activism and civic engagement on university campuses is

influenced by the political climate of the country. The Cambodian-specific inference from the findings is that internal efficacy can be developed through civic education and participation at the university, while external efficacy is far more reactive to the macro-context of justice, accountability, and the existence of responsive and legitimate channels for civic engagement.

Scholarship emanating from the Global South captures the phenomenon of linking capital stratification. When institutions are perceived to be remote or relational access is poor, the responsive belief system becomes unevenly distributed, especially in relation to external efficacy across gender, socio-economic strata, and geographical divides. In effect, comparative studies suggest that initiatives focusing solely on opportunities for engagement are unlikely to enhance external efficacy unless they are specifically designed to create, in a credible, repetitive, and safe manner, direct links between the youth and the institutions.

The first challenge is design. Most of the available evidence pertinent to social capital and efficacy, particularly regarding students and the student population, is based on cross-sectional surveys. Such surveys can only establish association and not the relationship's timing and the mechanism of causation. This is particularly important given the plausibility of reciprocal relationships. Civic engagement, for instance, can develop social networks and self-efficacy, and social networks and self-efficacy can also reinforce civic engagement. Qualitative Cambodia-focused studies, especially the Central Development and Research Institute (CDRI) organizational analyses, add important context, though, nationally, such studies are often unable to generalize without adequate, balanced, and complementary quantitative studies. The optimal approach to this problem is triangulation longitudinal studies, quasi-experimental designs (for example, civic education and service-learning participation as civic engagement), and mixed-method studies examining the ways in which different age cohorts of youth construct meaning from their encounters with various institutions.

A second concern focuses on the limitations of measurement pertaining to transfer and conceptual meaning. Scales related to political efficacy and civic participation that have been imported likely neglect the Cambodia-specific meanings of influence, responsiveness, or participation. The response to an item like, *"I can influence government decisions"* can be interpreted as (a) influence through formal electoral means, (b) influence through informal relational access, or (c) influence through grassroots community problem solving, which is not state directed. Additionally, some measures of social capital and participation (e.g., organizational membership) are the same, leading to circular reasoning. There is an

emerging body of measurement literature that emphasizes the need to validate internal and external efficacy scales in different contexts, and to report on the variability of item functioning across contexts and groups, because external efficacy is contextually and culturally defined.

A good deal of Cambodia-specific data and reasoning by analogy points to an interesting interpretive possibility: it seems possible to claim that youths are likely to acquire civic engagement skills before most of them acquire civic engagement beliefs. While the institutionally sustained inequitable distribution and access to civic engagement linking ties and the perception of risk are likely to support low beliefs in civic engagement external efficacy, civic education reforms and the participation of youth on campuses are likely to provide the skills and sustain the active civic role advocacy (internal efficacy). It is also the case that social distance and less perceived risk decrease the belief in the efficacy of going public. As the UNDP Youth Voices Matter survey indicates, the perception and priorities of youth are influenced by the socio-economic context and the reality of their community. It also illustrates that youth civic engagement is context-specific and uneven (UNDP, 2024).

The data suggests that the most support Cambodia's youth civic ecosystem receives the most from interventions that view civic engagement as a two-pronged outcome - internal efficacy (competence) and external efficacy (credibility responsive civic engagement). Constructive civic engagement initiatives that create and sustain networking opportunities such as cross-school forums, inter-university partnerships, and community-based engagement focused deliberative and participatory civic engagement projects are likely to strengthen internal civic efficacy.

In terms of policy relevant implications, it is first and foremost important to strengthen pathways of linkage which are clear and replicable: youth-institution dialogues with structured and transparent follow-up, mentorship programmes that open civic engagements to youth, and youth-driven change feedback mechanisms. The youth engagement roadmap approach within the UNDP's governance work is an example of this. When engaging youth, the UNDP opts to focus on design issues as opposed to motivational issues (UNDP, 2024). In the end, interventions must be sensitive to sub-groups, considering that where there is a socio-economic, geographical, and gender-based stratification of linking capital, equilibrium in the access to contact points within institutions is not only a matter of fairness, but also a prerequisite for the internal and external efficacy to coexist.

Conclusion

This literature review has argued for an integrated understanding of social capital and political efficacy, and not as separate bodies of literature that happen to cross paths. The core theoretical contribution is that social capital can be considered civic infrastructure. A relational context that determines what, and how, young people are socialized to learn, what information they come across, what norms regulate their civic voice, and which institutional encounters are perceived to be responsive or closed. The presence of supportive networks around young people enables the acquisition of the pragmatic and psychological resources that renders politics comprehensible and participation apprehensible. Thus, social capital is an asset for political efficacy, not simply for providing support, but for concretizing civic opportunities, discussions, role rehearsals, and recruitment to participation, etc. In this context, political efficacy is the belief that socially derived experience can be translated into a sense of civic agency and political possibilities.

Unfortunately, Cambodia-related insights indicate that the two aspects of efficacy will likely evolve at different rates. Community-focused political efficacy includes the belief of self-competence as it relates to issue understanding, political discourse, and the ability to act. Such form of political efficacy is more community-buildable. This form of political efficacy can be fostered in educational settings, through peer support, in families through encouragement, and community-based learning that provides youth the opportunity to exercise and instil confidence. In contrast, external political efficacy is more institution-dependent and is more lack in regard to community action. Beliefs of political action are related to the degree of institutional responsiveness as it relates to citizens' voices, participation in civic action, and belief that youth voices can change the outcomes. Political efficacy shifts only when youth experience real responsiveness. Feedback systems, pathways for civic participation, and active consideration of youth voices in the decision-making processes demonstrate the need for inter-institutional change. This helps shed light to why Cambodian youth seem politically aware and engaged yet remain doubtful to their overall political efficacy. This explains the need for scholars to move from "*why don't youth participate more?*" to reframe the youth participation inquiry to focus on what conditions civic skills and confidence result in real participatory responsiveness and political influence.

The interpretive insight that the author would like the reader to take is that social capital is not linearly positive. While bonding social networks can provide safety and support, they can also reinforce conformity pressures that narrow the range of acceptable civic expression. While networked learning has many benefits

such as accessing diverse exposure and learning opportunities, it can also escalate conflict, pressure, and, especially in digitally mediated environments, more polarizing dynamics. Distributing linking networks, in principle, the most stride-by-step-accumulation response system. approachable, but they are also the most absent, paradoxically, in equal distribution. Therefore, youth civic development cannot be inferred from connectedness alone; it also requires examining civic infrastructure and the potential institutional interactions.

Numerous gaps arise directly from the synthesis. First, there is still a need for integrated pathway testing that models, bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, and maps their individual relationships with internal and external efficacy. Most of the existing work on social capital examines it as a single index. This approach overlooks the possibility that different types of social capital might produce different profiles of efficacy. Second, there is a need for context-specific adaptation and validation of measurement for research to go forward. Constructs like influence, responsiveness, participation, and even community may be interpreted differently in different contexts, and without the context-specific adaptations and validation, the research runs the risk of measuring Western, especially American, assumptions instead of the realities of Cambodian youth. Third, there is a need for models that are sensitive to moderators and account for systematic forms of inequality. Gender, socio-economic status, rural-urban residence, education, political awareness, and other factors are likely to influence how social capital is distributed and how social networks are converted into efficacy.

There is a need for more mixed-methods research to explain why internal and external efficacy are conditionally reliant on one another. A purely quantitative relationship will not sufficiently capture the lived experiences, perceived risk, and the institutional context that determine the responsiveness beliefs. Longitudinal studies focusing on feedback loops are also needed in the field. Such studies would examine the phenomena of how engagement experiences build (or erode) efficacy, how efficacy impacts future engagement, and how both are intertwined with changing social networks over the course of time.

A focused research agenda that does not overextend scope can make incremental contributions to the field. One promising option is a longitudinal panel study of university youth that investigates changes in bonding, bridging and linking social capital and internal and external efficacy across several waves. Such a study would allow researchers to investigate the extent to which competence beliefs increase with the learning and networking, and the extent to which the responsiveness beliefs decline following specific types of institutional encounters.

It would also provide the opportunity to examine subgroup differences in the civic experiences and efficacy trajectories of young women and men, students from rural and urban backgrounds, and students from different socio-economic strata.

The second research agenda should conduct field experiments or quasi-experiments integrated into civic education or community learning programmes. Instead of considering civic education to be a one-size-fits-all treatment, research can focus on the effectiveness of different programme designs based on their primary mechanism: pedagogy of discussion, service learning, debate, mentoring with civic role models, structured youth-institution dialogues with feedback, etc. The primary outcome of interest should also include a rise in internal efficacy, along with external efficacy, particularly when the programmes include elements of plausible responsiveness.

A further priority would be mixed-method explanatory sequential studies starting with a survey mapping categories of social capital and efficacy profiles, then interviews or focus groups aimed at explaining divergence, especially the capable but not influential profile. This would elucidate how youth understand and respond to institutional signals, the risks and opportunities they perceive, and what experiences lead to a revision of beliefs regarding responsiveness. A fourth suggested focus is comparative province-level studies that examine urban and rural civic opportunity structures in a contrasting way. Such studies would examine geography not simply as a demographic feature but as an institutional ecology feature, elucidating how the presence of social organizations, civic arenas, educational opportunities, and institutional access influences the distribution of bridging social capital and external efficacy. Across all these studies, the guiding principle should be methodological pluralism with conceptual discipline: social capital inputs, efficacy beliefs, and disengagement outcomes should be separated while still recognizing their co-development. The agenda, therefore, is quite specific and quite achievable, as it builds on existing research practices while enhancing them with a more sophisticated design, contextually appropriate measurement, and mechanism-centred comparison.

The review proposes that for the Cambodian youth political development the combination of education and community network's civic structure may be the most useful. This structure can transform young people into competent, civic actors by providing the knowledge, skills for civic discussions, and the self-confidence necessary. But for youth to be politically empowered, it depends on whether the structures provided by the institutions are adequate and provide the experience of responsiveness and whether the linkage pathways are available, and fairly, enough.

In this politically progressive era, the Cambodian youth may be illustrative of social capital in its most positive sense and demonstrates the need to strengthen civic infrastructure in the education and the community networks beyond the exposure and the knowledge to the structures of voice and responsiveness.

Works Cited

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In I. Szeman & T. Kaposy (Eds.), Cultural theory: An anthology (pp. 81–93). Wiley Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.2307/1175546

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). The American Voter: Unabridged Version. University of Chicago Press.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. American Journal of Sociology, 94, S95–S120. https://doi.org/10.1086/228943

Craig, S. C., Niemi, R. G., & Silver, G. E. (1990). Political efficacy and trust: A report on the NES pilot study items. Political Behaviour, 12, 289–314. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00992337

Finkel, S. E. (1985). Reciprocal effects of participation and political efficacy: A panel Analysis. American Journal of Political Science, 29(4), 891–913. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111186

Huckfeldt, R., & Sprague, J. (1992). Political parties and electoral mobilization: Political structure, social structure, and the party canvass. American Political Science Review, 86(1), 70–86. https://doi.org/10.2307/1964016

Huot, S. (2025a). The intersection of social identity, normative influence, and political efficacy: A literature review of Cambodian youth in national elections. Edumania-An International Multidisciplinary Journal, 03(03), 81–101. https://doi.org/10.59231/edumania/9140

Huot, S. (2025b). Theoretical reflections on social capital and political efficacy: Lessons for Cambodian youth participation. Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 8(2), 104–113. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.jpsir.20250802.18

Huot, S. (2026). Digital diplomacy in Cambodia: Embracing artificial intelligence for strategic engagement and national development. In A. Turan & H. Ucuzal

(Eds.), Diplomacy in the age of artificial intelligence (pp. 307–330). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-4937-4.ch013

Len, A., & Sokphea, Y. (2021). Civil society organisations and youth civic engagement in Cambodia. CDRI Working Paper Series No. 132. Phnom Penh: CDRI. https://www.cdri.org.kh/storage/pdf/Wp%20132_Civil%20Society%20and%20Youth%20Civic%20Engagement%20at%20a%20Time%20of%20Political%20Change_1637123445.pdf

Lin, N. (2001). Social capital: A theory of social structure and action (Vol. 19). Cambridge university press.

Ly, B. (2023). Social media and political involvement in Cambodia. Cogent Social Sciences, 9(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2194565

Niemi, R. G., Craig, S. C., & Mattei, F. (1991). Measuring internal political efficacy in the 1988 national election study. American Political Science Review, 85(4), 1407–1413. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1963953

Norén-Nilsson, A. (2021). Youth mobilization, power reproduction and Cambodia's authoritarian turn. Contemporary Southeast Asia, 43(2), 265–292. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27041355

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. Annual Reviews, 24, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1

Putnam, R. D. (1994). Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy. Princeton University Press.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. The New York Review of Books.

Steenkamp, J.-B. E., & Baumgartner, H. (1998). Assessing measurement invariance in cross-national consumer research. Journal of consumer research, 25(1), 78–90. https://doi.org/10.1086/209528

Szreter, S., & Woolcock, M. (2004). Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health. International journal of epidemiology, 33(4), 650–667. https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyh013

Tan, C. (2008). Two views of education: Promoting civic and moral values in Cambodia schools. Elsevier: International Journal of Educational Development, 28(5), 560–570. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2007.07.004

UNDP. (2024). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes. United Nations Development Programme, 1–111. https://www.undp.org/publications/youth-peace-and-security-fostering-youth-inclusive-political-processes

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics. Harvard University Press.

Vong, M. (2022). Political threats, state mobilisation and authoritarian survival: Cambodia and Malaysia in perspective [PhD Doctorate, School of Govt & Int Relations, Griffith University]. http://hdl.handle.net/10072/418252

Vong, M., & Hok, K. (2018). Facebooking: Youth's everyday politics in Cambodia. South East Asia Research, 26(3), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828X17754113

Woolcock, M., & Narayan, D. (2000). Capital social: Implicaciones para la teoría, la investigación y las políticas sobre desarrollo. World Bank Research Observer, 15(2), 225–249. https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/15.2.225