



## **Integrating Community Support and Political Efficacy in ASEAN Youth Political Engagement: Cambodian Context**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on community supports, political efficacy and youth political engagement in Cambodia. After primary framing of the dimension of community social supports, the systematic reviews are synthesised, and community factors are framed as influence on youth political activity behaviour. Young adults involved in a robust community and immensely increase community voting, civic participation, political discourse, and collective action. Youth have robust strongly bonded trusting community and informal social support demonstrate high political activity. supportive family and peers are influential. The review community support, political efficacy and youth political engagement indicates substantial absence of reviews regarding restricted digital political engagement, the univocal urban focus, and community social support exclusion of empirical studies in political activism time series. The review presents community social support, political efficacy and youth political engagement as primary civic education, youth community organizing, and social support for youth-led activities democracy.*

**Keywords:** Cambodia, youth political engagement; community support; political efficacy; Southeast Asia; social capital; peer influence; civic education

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Youth political engagement in Southeast Asia is emerging as a critical factor in the region's democratic development, civic renewal, and institutional legitimacy. With a youth demographic comprising more than half the population in countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines, the ASEAN youth development index 2022 offers comprehensive data on youth populations and their engagement in the region, young people possess the potential to shape political futures not just demographically but also ideologically and behaviourally (ASEAN, 2023).

Despite their numerical strength and growing access to education and digital technology, however, youth political participation remains uneven and often symbolic. Many young Southeast Asians continue to face barriers to formal engagement, including limited political education, state repression, social alienation, and distrust in political institutions and elites (Peou, 2018; Un & Ledgerwood, 2002). This disengagement is not simply the result of apathy but is rooted in region-specific historical and political developments that have shaped how youth perceive politics. A growing body of comparative research highlights the divergent yet dynamic roles that youth have played in Southeast Asian political transformations. In the Indonesian context, the post-Suharto *Reformasi* era ushered in a wave of democratic openness, allowing new civic spaces to emerge in which youth activism gained momentum and visibility

(Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010). These reforms created institutional and discursive openings for youth-led movements to influence governance, civil society, and public accountability.

In contrast, Thailand's political landscape has witnessed a longer historical arc of student mobilization. From the 1973 democratic uprising to the more recent pro-democracy movements demanding constitutional and monarchical reforms, Thai students have consistently positioned themselves at the forefront of political contestation and reform (Hewison, 2012; Teeratanabodee, 2025). These cases demonstrate how differing political transitions, and historical legacies shape the modes and intensity of youth participation, underscoring the contextual variability of civic engagement across Southeast Asia. Conversely, in Cambodia and Vietnam, civic spaces remain tightly regulated, and independent political expression by youth is often suppressed. These diverse national trajectories reveal a common tension between the desire of youth to participate meaningfully in public life and the institutional constraints that shape or suppress their involvement.

Central to understanding this dynamic is the concept of political efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to understand political affairs and influence political outcomes. Political efficacy is generally distinguished into two dimensions: internal efficacy, or confidence in one's own political competence, and external efficacy, or the perception that the political system is responsive to citizen input (Niemi et al., 1991). Research shows that both forms of efficacy strongly predict political behaviour, youth who believe in their political competence and in the responsiveness of institutions are more likely to vote, protest, join civic groups, and engage in political discussions (Beaumont, 2010; Galston, 2001).

However, political efficacy does not develop in isolation; it is embedded in and shaped by the social environments in which young people live. This is where community support becomes essential. Defined as the networks, relationships, and informal institutions that provide youth with social reinforcement, community support plays a vital role in fostering political socialization and participation (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995). These support systems may take the form of family discussions, peer networks, religious organizations, student unions, village councils, and local NGOs. Scholars such as Coleman (1990) and Putnam (2000) emphasize that social capital, comprised of norms of reciprocity, trust, and shared civic responsibility, creates the social infrastructure necessary for political cooperation and participation. In many Southeast Asian societies, where state-sponsored civic education is limited or ideologically constrained, such community-based relationships become the primary spaces in which youth encounter politics and develop a sense of civic duty.

In Cambodia, despite a political system dominated by the ruling party and characterized by limited electoral competition and suppression of dissent, youth are increasingly turning to community organizations and peer-led initiatives for civic learning and action (Hughes, 2020; Hughes & Eng, 2019). Programs led by organizations such as the Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP) and partnerships with international NGOs like The Asia Foundation have demonstrated measurable improvements in youth political awareness and community involvement (The Asia Foundation, 2023).

Similarly, in Indonesia, youth participation is often rooted in religious student groups and neighbourhood-based activist collectives that foster engagement, particularly in rural and peri-urban settings (Aspinall, 2003). Community support also bridges the institutional gap between formal education and political reality. In countries where civic instruction is marginal or ideologically restricted, youth often acquire their understanding of politics through informal conversations with family members, peer debates, religious teachings, and community service. These alternative forms of political learning not only impart knowledge but also cultivate emotional and moral motivation to engage politically. Studies in political psychology and sociology affirm that a sense of group identity, belonging, and moral obligation, shaped

through community experiences, are powerful motivators of political behaviour (Huddy, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Political Efficacy and Community Support**

Political efficacy is a foundational concept in political psychology and civic studies, referring to an individual's belief in their ability to understand political affairs and influence the political process (Campbell & Miller, 1954). It is widely recognized as a psychological mechanism that links personal beliefs with participatory behaviour, especially in democratic or transitioning political systems. Scholars distinguish between two interrelated components: internal political efficacy, which reflects confidence in one's own political knowledge and competence, and external political efficacy, which pertains to the belief that political institutions are responsive to citizen input (Niemi et al., 1991).

Alongside efficacy, community support is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that encompasses the social environments, networks, norms, and relational resources available to individuals. It includes both bonding ties, close-knit relationships, such as family and religious groups, and bridging ties, connections across diverse communities, often grouped under the term social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). These structures influence political behaviour by shaping access to information, political norms, emotional support, and civic opportunities.

### **2.2 From Concepts to Mechanisms**

Internal political efficacy is typically fostered through civic education, political discussions, and personal experiences of participation. It is strengthened when individuals feel capable of understanding political systems, articulating their views, and navigating civic spaces. High internal efficacy among youth is often correlated with political knowledge, cognitive development, and access to dialogue or mentoring (Beaumont, 2010; Niemi & Weisberg, 2001).

In contrast, low internal efficacy is prevalent in contexts where political discourse is restricted or politicized. External political efficacy, on the other hand, is closely tied to perceptions of institutional accountability. It increases when political systems demonstrate responsiveness, transparency, and inclusiveness. Youth who believe their voices are heard and their actions have impact are more likely to participate in both electoral and non-electoral activities (Huot, 2025a; Verba et al., 1995a). This form of efficacy is often influenced by exposure to responsive civic processes such as consultations, participatory budgeting, and open dialogues with officials.

Community support is operationalized through four interrelated dimensions that collectively shape youth political behavior. First, social capital refers to the networks of trust, shared norms, and reciprocal cooperation that enable individuals to participate in civic life and pursue collective goals (Putnam, 2000). Second, social networks encompass the informal relationships that youth maintain with family members, peers, educators, and local leaders, through which political knowledge, values, and encouragement are transmitted (Klofstad, 2009; McClurg, 2006). Third, civic engagement opportunities involve participation in activities such as volunteering, youth forums, community organizing, or involvement in non-governmental organizations, which allow young people to develop political identities and practice democratic values in action (Huot, 2025b; Youniss & Levine, 2009).

Finally, a sense of belonging support captures the psychological and social affirmation that arises from being a recognized and valued member of a political or civic group, which fosters motivation to engage in political behavior and strengthens internal and external political efficacy (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Taking together, these dimensions

of community support offer the motivational, informational, and emotional scaffolding necessary for meaningful and sustained youth participation in civic and political life.

### **2.3 Application to Southeast Asia and the Cambodian Context**

In Southeast Asia, political efficacy and community support function within varied institutional contexts, from emerging democracies like Indonesia to semi-authoritarian systems like Cambodia and Vietnam. While political transitions in some states have opened space for youth activism and civil society engagement, structural barriers continue to limit youth participation. These include weak civic education systems, repression of dissent, surveillance, and the co-optation of youth organizations (Hewison, 2012).

In Cambodia, internal political efficacy among youth is often weakened by limited access to independent sources of political information and a formal education system that emphasizes state-centric narratives. However, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and peer-based networks have emerged as vital alternative spaces for political education and civic engagement (Hughes & Eng, 2019).

Notably, organizations such as the YRDP and local student associations actively organize workshops, public forums, and mentorship initiatives aimed at enhancing youth confidence in civic discourse. These programs are specifically designed to promote leadership development, political awareness, and democratic participation (YRDP, 2025, March 7). For example, YRDP's YIELD Program, Youth Investment for Employment and Leadership Development, offers youth-focused training sessions, dialogues, and leadership forums that contribute to building civic competence and critical engagement. Complementing these grassroots efforts, broader research such as the Youth Situation Analysis in Cambodia by UNFPA (2020) also provides critical insights into the challenges and opportunities for youth engagement in democratic development across the country. External efficacy in Cambodia remains low due to widespread perceptions of state unresponsiveness and the dominance of a ruling party.

However, community-based mechanisms, such as local consultations, informal town halls, and youth-led advocacy campaigns, offer alternative models of responsiveness at the grassroots level. These experiences can reintroduce trust in collective action and by extension, in the efficacy of youth participation (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Huot, 2025a). The Social Capital Theory is highly applicable to the Cambodian setting, where bonding social capital, manifested through family ties, religious institutions, and close-knit community relationships, continues to offer youth moral guidance and a strong sense of identity and belonging (Paxton et al., 2007; UNDP, 2010).

Similarly, evidence from the Cameroonian context reinforces this dynamic. In conflict-prone settings such as Cameroon, bonding capital is often reinforced in response to insecurity and sociopolitical uncertainty, serving as a buffer against external threats and fostering intra-group solidarity (Balgah et al., 2025). At the same time, bridging social capital has increasingly emerged in Cambodia through digital platforms and online networks, enabling youth to interact with peers across geographic, socio-economic, and ideological divides (Ly, 2023a; Vong & Hok, 2018). This facilitates the diffusion of civic values, exposes young people to diverse political discourses, and expands their avenues for participation in democratic processes.

In both Cambodian and Cameroonian contexts, therefore, bridging capital serves as a conduit for wider social integration, though its impact is conditioned by technological access and political openness. The comparative insights suggest that while bonding capital consolidates identity and resilience within homogeneous networks, bridging capital fosters broader civic engagement, particularly among youth navigating polarized or transitioning societies.

Social Identity Theory developed by Campbell (2009) explains how youth movements such as environmental campaigns, e.g., Mother Nature Cambodia, cultivate group-based motivations for political action. Collective Action Theory demonstrates that trusted community leaders and selective incentives, such as emotional fulfilment or social recognition, can lower participation costs and overcome fear or apathy (Klandermans, 2004).

Finally, Political Socialization Theory underscores the role of informal education through family, peers, and religious leaders in contexts where civic instruction is absent or censored (Jennings et al., 1974; Ngov, 2024; Ung, 2014). These theoretical models reveal that youth political engagement in Southeast Asia, particularly in post-authoritarian or semi-democratic contexts, is neither spontaneous nor individualistic. Rather, it is cultivated through sustained interaction with supportive community structures that build both political capability and perceived legitimacy.

Understanding and investing in these structures is therefore vital to empowering Southeast Asian youth as democratic participants and civic leaders. The Integrative Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA), proposed by Zomeren et al. (2008), explains collective action through three key factors: group identification, perceived injustice, and perceived efficacy. In Cambodia, this model helps explain why youth engage in civic activism. Many young Cambodians identify with social groups seeking reform, feel marginalized by political and economic systems, and increasingly believe their actions, especially through social media, can make a difference,

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study follows a five-step review protocol adapted from narrative and qualitative systematic synthesis models. These steps include formulating the research question, developing a search strategy, applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, extracting and organizing data, and conducting thematic synthesis. The guiding research question is: How does community support, including social capital, civic engagement, social networks, and perceived social support, affect youth political efficacy and engagement in Southeast Asia? A comprehensive search was conducted using five academic databases: JSTOR, Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, and Web of Science. These platforms were selected to capture literature spanning political science, sociology, youth studies, and psychology. The search was limited to peer-reviewed publications between 2000 and 2023 to reflect regional political shifts, democratization efforts, and the rise of youth movements. Keyword phrases such as youth political engagement, community support and political efficacy, and social networks and civic participation were used iteratively to identify studies relevant to Southeast Asia.

Boolean operators enhanced precision, and backward citation tracing was used to locate foundational texts. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed empirical studies that analyzed youth political participation in Southeast Asia and assessed the impact of community-level variables on political efficacy. Eligible studies involved youth aged roughly 15–30 and addressed behaviors such as voting, civic activism, and online participation. Articles that were conceptual, non-peer-reviewed, outside the region, or excluded efficacy as a primary construct were removed.

The final dataset included studies applying both quantitative and qualitative methods across Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Study selection involved an initial title and abstract screening followed by full-text review. A data extraction sheet was developed to standardize information gathering. Key elements recorded included authorship, country of study, research design, population demographics, form of community support analyzed, and how political efficacy was conceptualized. Additionally, each study's

findings and theoretical underpinnings, such as Social Capital Theory or Political Socialization, were noted for cross-study comparison.

### **3.2 Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Thematic synthesis was conducted to distill patterns across the selected studies. Analysis centered on three dimensions: (1) how different types of community support influence internal and external efficacy, (2) the forms of political engagement that follow enhanced efficacy, and (3) the effect of political context on efficacy-outcome linkages. The synthesis revealed significant conceptual gaps, particularly regarding rural–urban disparities, digital civic space, and longitudinal effects. These gaps underscore the need for more temporally sensitive and geographically inclusive research designs. As a secondary review, this study did not involve direct interaction with human participants and therefore did not require ethical approval. However, ethical rigor was maintained by accurately citing and representing all included studies and by avoiding distortion or selective interpretation during the review process.

## **IV. RESULTS**

The last two decades have witnessed a significant change in the political engagement of the youth in Southeast Asia. Engaging factors include the region’s trajectory of democratization and subsequent political instability, and the rapidly expanding digital communication technology. Young people across the region are increasingly active in protest politics, cause-based campaigns, and digital activism. Nonetheless, this activism is inequitable, episodic, and reactive to elections and political crises. Literature on the region points to a mix of structural and psychological factors as explanations for the limited scope of sustained youth engagement in activism and protests: political authoritarianism, a closed elite political system, absence of grassroots civic education, and widespread political elite cynicism (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010; Hewison, 2012).

The best explanation for these patterns of political engagement is political efficacy. Internal and external political efficacy are adjustable and engender political attitudes and behaviours in particular socially defined contexts (Beaumont, 2010; Niemi et al., 1991). Internal political efficacy concerns the self-identified political knowledge and skills of the young people, while external political efficacy assesses the political responsiveness of the system toward the needs of the people. When a political system is perceived to be authoritarian and closed, external political efficacy is diminished. In such contexts, many young people opt to disengage from traditional forms of political participation and pursue alternative forms of participation in informal community-based frameworks and digital platforms (Galston, 2001; Verba et al., 1995b). Studies show community aid is pivotal in sustaining political efficacy and engagement in the youth especially when the institution and governance system is weak. Young people in a community with trust, reciprocity, and shared community norms, tend to view and participate in political activities as a worthwhile, legitimate and achievable goal (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000).

Social capital, in Family Structures, Religious Communities and Local Associations, lends members Emotional and Normative Support, Political Interest and Responsibility, and Moral Reinforcement. On the other hand, Bridging Social Capital crosses Social, Geographical, and Ideological Boundaries, civil societies and digital tools, and increases people’s access to Variety Political Information and other means of Political Mobilization (Ly, 2023b; Paxton et al., 2007). Social Networks of Peers, Intergenerational dialogues and Mentorships, are informal structures that serve and are crucial in facilitating the flow of Political Knowledge, attitudes and efficacy (Klofstad, 2009; McClurg, 2006). Also, ways to get involved civically, volunteering, youth councils, NGOs, and community organizing, offer learning opportunities that build political knowledge and confidence. These experiences help youth learn how to do

democracy, exercise democracy, and give democracy a strong purpose. They also develop a social cause (Huot, 2025a) ((Youniss & Levine, 2009). A consistent theme is that psychological belonging (being seen, appreciated, and included in a civic political group) boosts collective self-efficacy and emotional engagement, often moving young people from individual to social problems and causing them to act collectively (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The literature shows that youth political engagement varies greatly across Southeast Asia and is the result of different political regimes, civic structures, and cultural contexts. In Cambodia, youth participation is still limited due to authoritarian rule, media suppression, and a lack of civil liberty. Still, community-based approaches by the Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP) have created alternative civic learning and engagement spaces. Especially in the cities and among the youth in higher education, peer networks and civic education programs led by NGOs have contributed to a growing political agency (Hughes & Eng, 2019; UNFPA, 2020).

In Indonesia, post-authoritarian democracy has allowed youth participation through family ties, religious groupings, and campus associations. The digital mobilization of youth in the 2014 and 2019 elections shows how offline community networks combined with digital tools enhance participation and accountability (Aspinall, 2003; Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010). The youth activism of Thailand has also been a result of the political repression and democratic backsliding that Thailand has faced. The 2020-2021 pro-democracy demonstrations highlighted the importance of peer facilitation, a collective political identity, and collective action through digital means in the face of a legal obstruction (Teeratanabodee, 2025). In Vietnam, there is a lack of formal political participation, and informal peer networks and digital spaces serve as alternative civic spaces. Youth mobilize in less visible and adaptive ways to talk about governance, the environment, and social justice (Huot, 2025b; Vong & Hok, 2018).

The evidence collected from all cases demonstrates that active community support is crucial to fostering youth political efficacy and engagement. A strong sense of social capital, interpersonal connectivity, and civic belonging together reinforce civic the feelings that political participation is achievable and valuable. Advocacy and these social mechanisms aid youth in alleviating from political alienation, civic interest to action, and other structural political barriers. While explaining the evidence, the literature has been constrained primarily due to the lack of comparative study, under-theorization of digital political efficacy, rural-urban divide, and over reliance on cross sectional studies.

To summarize this evidence, the key thematic insights from the systematic review are collated and presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Findings of the Systematic Review on Community Support

| <b>Thematic Area</b>                     | <b>Key Insights</b>  |
|--|--|
| Youth Political Engagement Trends        | Engagement is increasing in informal arenas (e.g., social media), but formal participation remains low due to repression and institutional distrust. |
| Internal and External Political Efficacy | Internal efficacy empowers understanding; external efficacy depends on institutional trust. Both are shaped by civic exposure and social validation. |
| Role of Social Capital                   | Trust-based networks improve access to civic knowledge and encourage democratic participation.   |
| Influence of Social Networks             | Family and peers are essential for political socialization, particularly in collectivist societies.  |

| Thematic Area                   | Key Insights  |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Sense of Belonging and Identity | Group identity enhances motivation to act politically, especially under repression.                   |
| Digital Engagement              | Social media provides alternative civic pathways, especially where formal participation is curtailed. |
| Case: Cambodia                  | Youth mobilization is rising through NGOs and peer networks despite state repression.                 |
| Case: Indonesia                 | A democratic setting enables youth activism via religious, familial, and digital networks.            |
| Case: Thailand                  | Youth movements gain momentum via protest culture and civic dissatisfaction.                          |
| Case: Vietnam                   | Youth engage politically through digital channels and informal peer groups in a constrained system.   |
| Findings                        | Community support reinforces motivation and political capacity even in repressive regimes.            |

## V. DISCUSSIONS

The systematic review shows that community support serves as a primary structural and psychological factor of youth political efficacy and political engagement in Southeast Asia. Community support does not operate as a marginal factor, but rather, it actively determines how young people understand and conceptualize political systems, their own political competencies, and the extent to which they believe that meaningful outcomes can be realized through participation. This finding supports the critique in political psychology and civic studies that political engagement, and more specifically, young people's political engagement, is not a choice that individuals make, but is a social phenomenon that is the product of relational contexts (Coleman, 1990; Niemi & Hepburn, 1995; Putnam, 2000).

In all political settings, the presence of support systems enhances internal and external political efficacy. In more liberal political settings, like Indonesia, youth engagement during and post elections and movements for the reform of governance and social justice are often supported and sustained by strong peer, religious, and family networks. These networks give youth political information, social cues, and emotional support, ultimately enhancing their political comprehension and participation. In more closed settings, like Cambodia and Vietnam, where the channels of political participation are more limited, the informal civic networks, community-based organizations, and digital networks serve as alternate civic infrastructures. These networks help offset the low external efficacy of these communities through the development of collective agency, political cognition, and localized participation. The support of communities in parallel reflects both the motivating and enabling functions of support. The social network and the social capital of the community frame and advocate for participation in politics as a moral imperative and lower the psychological and practical thresholds for participation (Galston, 2001; Verba et al., 1995b). Youth, who are in the supportive role of the family, friends, and civic groups, tend to feel politically active and believe that what they do politically is important. A strong sense of community fosters a feeling that what a group does is a way to strengthen a cause, and that feeling causes the group to continue to act politically. That is what we have seen in the recent youth-led protests in Thailand (Hewison, 2012; Teeratanabodee, 2025).

Putting these insights into practice calls for collaboration across multiple sectors and seeing community advocacy as a key component of democratic consolidation. Governments in Southeast Asia need to go beyond tokenistic inclusion of youth and mainstream active youth participation by institutionalizing structures such as youth councils, participatory budgeting,

and public dialogue mechanisms. These structures not only provide civic experiential learning opportunities but also enhance external political efficacy by illustrating civic institutional responsiveness (Beaumont, 2010). Schools and universities have the same level of responsibility by providing civic education as part of the curriculum, encouraging student councils, and implementing service-learning programs that bridge the gap between theory and political practice (Youniss & Levine, 2009).

Grassroots civil society organizations have a distinctive role in providing context-specific civic education, especially in civic education and leadership training for marginalized and rural adolescents and youth. In Cambodia, for instance, the YRDP-led NGO programs demonstrate how community dialogue and mentorship, especially peer mentorship, can enhance levels of political activism and confidence in oppressive political contexts (UNFPA, 2020). For political parties, engaged youth go beyond symbolic youth wings, and this entails political parties giving youth real responsibilities in shaping policy, campaigning, and leadership to ensure advocacy remains for the long-term. Synthesizing these implications, **Table 2** summarizes the primary areas in which community support can be translated into strengthening the political efficacy and engagement of youth.

**Table 2.** *Community Support Implications for Youth Political Engagement in Southeast Asia*

| No. | Domain                      | Implications for Policy and Practice   |
|-----|-----------------------------|--|
| 1.  | Government Institutions     | Institutionalize youth participation through councils, consultations, and participatory governance to enhance external efficacy. |
| 2.  | Education Systems           | Integrate civic education, student governance, and service learning to strengthen internal political efficacy.                   |
| 3.  | Civil Society Organizations | Deliver community-based civic training, mentorship, and leadership programs, particularly for marginalized youth.                |
| 4.  | Family and Peer Networks    | Encourage intergenerational political dialogue and peer-led civic engagement as primary socialization mechanisms.                |
| 5.  | Digital Civic Spaces        | Leverage online platforms as complementary civic arenas while addressing risks of exclusion and surveillance.                    |

There are still gaps in research literature despite there being several published works available. The developed literature mostly uses cross-sectional studies, which limit understanding of how political efficacy evolves over time, particularly how life events or prolonged community activities affect it. To unravel the intricate relationship of community involvement and the political efficacy and engagement over a prolonged period, longitudinal studies are needed (Niemi et al., 1991). In addition, the role of the digital gap in political engagement also has a rural and urban divide that has been a gap in literature in the theorization of political engagement. This is mostly the case in semi-authoritarian regimes where there are no or limited political means (Ly, 2023b). In addition, digital political engagement in these regimes is often a rapidly developing area of research, yet the existing literature is often inadequately developed. Additionally, there needs to be a greater emphasis on researching the rural and urban divide and the lack of information, infrastructure, community resources, and the disparate available support for mobilizing youth political engagement in these areas.

Community support is vital, through social capital, civic networks, and belonging to a community, to youth political engagement in Southeast Asia. Improving these community-based civic infrastructures is a matter of civic empowerment and, ultimately, fostering resilient, inclusive, and participatory democracies in the region.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This review set out to examine how community support influences youth political efficacy and engagement in Southeast Asia. Through a systematic synthesis of regional empirical studies, it has become evident that social capital, peer and family networks, civic engagement opportunities, and a sense of belonging collectively underpin youth political behaviour. A core contribution of this review lies in its demonstration that political efficacy is not an isolated psychological trait, but a socially constructed capacity.

Youth who are affirmed, trusted, and engaged by their communities are more likely to believe in their political capabilities and in the responsiveness of political systems. Across contexts, from Cambodia to Indonesia, this relationship holds firm: empowered communities cultivate empowered citizens. Importantly, this study has also addressed structural inequalities in political access. It highlights the disparities that persist between rural and urban youth, the limitations of state-centric civic education, and the untapped potential of digital engagement. These findings suggest that efforts to increase youth political participation must adopt a more differentiated, context-sensitive approach that addresses both material and symbolic barriers to engagement.

This review also contributes to theory-building by integrating political psychology with community studies and youth development. In doing so, it shifts the analytic lens from individual attributes to relational and systemic conditions, offering a richer understanding of political socialization in transitional democracies. Looking forward, future research should move beyond static or institutional definitions of political participation to embrace the full spectrum of youth civic expression.

This includes attention to digital activism, cultural protest, local governance engagement, and transnational advocacy. Moreover, the inclusion of longitudinal and comparative data will be key to identifying how community support affects youth political engagement across time and space. Most importantly, the democratization of Southeast Asia depends not only on formal institutions but also on the strength of its civic foundations. Youth, as agents of continuity and change, are central to that process. Investing in community support systems that foster political efficacy is not just good policy, it is a democratic imperative.

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