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Measuring External Political Efficacy in a Post-Socialist Democracy: Empirical Evidence from SDG Indicator 16.7.2 in Mongolia

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Abstract

This study examines the level and socio-demographic determinants of external political efficacy among Mongolian citizens using the two-item SDG Indicator 16.7.2 instrument, which measures perceived inclusiveness and responsiveness of public decision-making. It draws on Easton's (1975) theory of political support and Norris's (2011) democratic deficit framework and, following Homer and Lim (2024), tests whether frameworks developed mainly in Western democracies hold in a post-socialist context. The study presents the first nationally representative application of the Oslo Governance Centre methodology in Mongolia, based on a 2022 telephone survey of 4,325 adults. The national estimate is 38.0 percent, well below the earlier proxy-based baseline of 57.1 percent. Age and location are the strongest determinants. External efficacy is higher among older and rural respondents. Gender differences are statistically significant but negligible, education loses significance in the multivariate model, and income has no effect. The direction of the age and location effects matches Western findings, but socioeconomic status does not predict external efficacy. The findings suggest that the age pattern may reflect a reference point formed under state socialism more than the rise of critical citizens.

1. Introduction

Whether citizens believe their government listens to them and acts on what they say is one of the most consequential questions a democracy can ask of itself. This belief is captured by the concept of external political efficacy, and Easton's (1975) theory of political support explains why it matters for democratic stability. When citizens perceive that decision-makers respond to public input, specific support for governing institutions is strengthened. When they do not, this support weakens, and over time the diffuse support and legitimacy that sustain democratic stability may also erode.

External political efficacy was first theorized by Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954). Craig, Niemi, and Silver (1990) later distinguished it from internal efficacy and developed measures for it, and Esaiasson, Kölln, and Turper (2015) distinguished it from perceived responsiveness. SDG Indicator 16.7.2 translates this construct into a standardized and internationally comparable measurement instrument. Established under Target 16.7, which calls for responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels, it measures the proportion of people who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive. In this study, the indicator is therefore treated as an operationalization of external political efficacy, not only as a development monitoring tool. United Nations sources are used for the definition and measurement of the indicator, while its interpretation draws on theories of political efficacy and political support.

Despite this conceptual clarity, official national measurement of SDG Indicator 16.7.2 remains limited. The two questions have been part of the core module of the European Social Survey since 2016, and its 2018 round covered 29 European countries, including post-socialist ones (UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2023, p. 5). Outside Europe, the evidence is much thinner. In post-socialist Asia, the metadata record only that the World Values Survey asked the first of the two questions in Kazakhstan (UNDP Oslo

Governance Centre, 2023, p. 5). Without valid and comparable baselines, governments cannot track whether citizens' sense of voice is improving, which social groups feel most excluded from decision-making, or whether participatory reforms are reaching those they are intended to serve.

Mongolia presents a theoretically important and empirically underexplored case. Since it transitioned from Soviet-aligned single-party rule to parliamentary democracy in 1990, Mongolia has established the formal architecture of participatory governance. This includes multi-party elections, constitutional rights to civic engagement, and legislated consultation procedures. However, formal institutions and citizens' lived experience of meaningful influence are analytically distinct. Formal participatory institutions were introduced relatively quickly after 1990, but the actual practice of responsive governance developed more slowly (Tsedev & Pratt, 2008).

Mongolia's existing SDG monitoring experience made these questions more urgent. Since 2018, the National Statistics Office (NSO) has reported data related to SDG Indicator 16.7.2 using a question asking citizens to evaluate the conduct of more than thirty state institutions. This question captures perceptions of institutional performance rather than the inclusiveness and responsiveness of decision-making specified in the official indicator definition. It produced a reported 2019 baseline of 57.1 percent. This baseline was included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Mongolia 2023 to 2027 as the foundation for a national target of 65.8 percent by 2027 (United Nations, 2022). NSO officials acknowledged in a March 2022 consultation that this proxy measure did not reflect the SDG Indicator 16.7.2 construct as internationally defined. This study responds directly to that measurement gap.

The study is a theory-driven secondary analysis of a nationally representative telephone survey of 4,325 adults, conducted in 2022 in cooperation with the NSO (National Academy of Governance, 2022). The survey was the first application of the official Oslo Governance Centre methodology in Mongolia and provides the baseline against which later measurement can be compared. The study integrates external political efficacy theory (Campbell et al., 1954; Craig et al., 1990), Easton's (1975) theory of political support, and Norris's (2011) democratic deficit framework. Following Homer and Lim (2024), who argue that theories developed mainly in Western contexts should be tested in other national contexts, it examines whether these frameworks hold in a post-socialist democracy. The study asks two questions. The first is what the overall level of external political efficacy is among Mongolian citizens. The second is which socio-demographic characteristics are associated with it, and whether these associations are consistent with expectations derived from research in other democracies. To answer the second question, the study tests three hypotheses on age, socioeconomic resources, and location, using t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and multiple linear regression. The hypotheses were derived from this established literature, not from the data. The study makes four contributions. First, it establishes a methodologically valid SDG Indicator 16.7.2 baseline for Mongolia and shows that the gap between the proxy-based estimate of 57.1 percent and the aligned estimate of 38.0 percent reflects a fundamental difference in what the two measures capture. Second, it takes frameworks developed mainly in Western democracies and tests them in a post-socialist context. The direction of the age and location effects matches

Western expectations, but socioeconomic status does not predict external efficacy once other factors are controlled. The age pattern may also reflect a reference point formed under state socialism rather than the rise of critical citizens. Third, the limited explanatory power of demographic predictors is itself a substantive finding, directing future research toward institutional and experiential determinants. Fourth, it offers a reference point for comparative research on the indicator, particularly in post-socialist Asia.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature. Section 3 develops the conceptual framework and hypotheses. Section 4 describes the methodology. Section 5 presents the results. Section 6 discusses the findings, and Section 7 concludes.

2. Literature Review

Understanding why citizens believe or do not believe that government listens to them requires examining three connected areas of research. The first is the concept of external political efficacy and how it is measured. The second is theories about how states respond to citizens and how this responsiveness affects political support and legitimacy. The third is the governance challenges faced by countries that have moved from socialist systems to democracy. The review moves from the individual level to the institutional and structural levels, following the layering used in the conceptual framework in Section 3. It also notes where studies disagree and where their evidence comes mainly from Western contexts, since this affects how far their conclusions apply to Mongolia.

2.1 External Political Efficacy: Concept and Dimensions

The study of political efficacy began with Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954, p. 187), who defined it as the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process. When citizens feel that their actions matter, they are more likely to engage in civic life. When they feel powerless, the participatory foundations of democratic legitimacy may erode (Campbell et al., 1954; Easton & Dennis, 1967). Political efficacy remains one of the most reliable predictors of democratic engagement, institutional trust, and satisfaction with democratic performance (Oser, 2025).

Easton and Dennis (1967) introduced an early distinction between citizens' beliefs about their own political competence and their beliefs about the responsiveness of governing institutions. Craig, Niemi, and Silver (1990) later formalized this as the two-dimensional structure that remains standard in the literature. Internal efficacy refers to an individual's perceived capacity to understand and participate in politics. External efficacy refers to beliefs about whether government institutions respond to what citizens want (Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al., 1991). Hayes and Bean (1993) confirmed through factor analysis that the two dimensions are distinct and comparable across four countries, with external efficacy reflecting perceived government responsiveness (p. 269).

This evidence of cross-national consistency has an important limit. The countries studied by Hayes and Bean (1993), like the American samples used by Craig et al. (1990), were established Western democracies. Their findings show that the construct travels across similar political systems, but not that

it works in the same way in post-socialist societies with a different history of relations between state and citizens. Esaiasson, Kölln, and Turper (2015) raise a further conceptual point. They argue that classic external efficacy items capture general beliefs about the political system, while perceived responsiveness concerns whether specific actors respond to citizens. The two concepts are related but not identical. This distinction matters for SDG Indicator 16.7.2, whose items ask about the government in general and therefore sit closer to the classic external efficacy tradition.

2.2 Measurement: From Established Scales to Contemporary Operationalizations

The two-item instrument used in this study follows the official measurement approach for SDG Indicator 16.7.2 (UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2023). Its two questions ask whether the government listens to citizens' views and whether citizens' views influence decisions. They were standardized by the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre as the agreed global methodology for measuring inclusive and responsive decision-making.

These questions ask about the same core beliefs that Craig et al. (1990) identified as the content of external efficacy, namely whether the political process is open to citizen input and whether citizens' views have real influence. Studies differ, however, on how many items are needed to measure the construct reliably. Craig et al. (1990) validated a four-item external efficacy scale with a Cronbach's alpha of only .61 (p. 299) and an average inter-item correlation of .29 (p. 303). Kevins (2022, p. 4) reports a much higher alpha of .80 with three items, while Dyck and Lascher (2008, Appendix) measured external efficacy with two items from the American National Election Studies. These differences suggest that reliability depends more on how closely the items match the construct than on the number of items. Shorter scales are efficient, but they cover a narrower range of content. The two SDG Indicator 16.7.2 items are therefore best understood as a focused measure of the core of external efficacy rather than a full multi-item scale.

Oser et al. (2023) examined the socio-demographic correlates of political efficacy in 46 countries between 1996 and 2016. They found that education and income were positively associated with external efficacy, that these associations were relatively consistent across countries, and that they remained stable over the period (p. 6). This suggests that the same patterns should appear in Mongolia. Whether this stability extends to post-socialist democracies in Asia, which are rarely represented in comparative efficacy research, remains an open question. Measurement alone cannot answer it, so the next section turns to the institutional and contextual conditions in which these perceptions are formed.

2.3 State Responsiveness, Political Support, and Legitimacy

Dahl (1971) treats the continuing responsiveness of government to citizens' preferences as a key characteristic of democracy. External efficacy is the citizen's perception of this responsiveness, and its significance is best understood within theories of political support. Easton (1975) distinguishes specific

support, which concerns citizens' satisfaction with what the authorities do, from diffuse support, which reflects a more durable attachment to the political system and includes legitimacy. Easton does not place efficacy directly within this scheme. It can nevertheless be understood as a perceptual antecedent of specific support. On this view, consistently low perceived responsiveness weakens specific support and may, over time, reduce diffuse support and legitimacy (Easton, 1975; Norris, 2011).

Craig et al. (1990) add an important qualification, showing that external efficacy and political trust are related but empirically distinct, with a correlation of only .25 (p. 303, Table 5). Low efficacy therefore does not automatically mean low support. The link from perceived responsiveness to legitimacy should be treated as a theoretical expectation rather than a fact.

Norris (2011) develops this link at the system level. In her comparative analysis of more than fifty societies, a democratic deficit arises when satisfaction with democratic performance falls short of citizens' aspirations for democracy (p. 5). Education raises aspirations and also encourages more critical evaluations of how democratically a country is governed, so the deficit is larger among the better educated (p. 131). This is the critical citizens argument.

Karp and Banducci (2008) offer a different emphasis. Their study of twenty-seven democracies, including eight new democracies, shows that efficacy depends on electoral institutions as well as on individual characteristics. Efficacy is lower where electoral systems are disproportional and where governments rest on broad coalitions, and it is higher among older and more educated citizens. Their measure concerns whether voting makes a difference, which is one aspect of external efficacy. Norris thus locates the explanation mainly in citizens' changing expectations, while Karp and Banducci point to institutional design. The two also differ on education. In the critical citizens argument, education raises expectations and makes citizens more critical. Karp and Banducci find that education raises efficacy. Neither addresses how a recent history of state socialism might shape citizens' expectations or resources.

Kevins (2022) adds that external efficacy also shapes citizens' views about how democratic influence should be distributed, suggesting that perceptions of responsiveness have consequences for legitimacy beyond the individual level.

2.4 Post-Socialist Democratic Transitions and Participatory Governance in Mongolia

These theories become especially relevant in post-socialist contexts. The legacy of one-party governance and the uneven development of democratic norms create conditions that differ considerably from those of established Western democracies, where most of the theories above were developed. Studies of post-socialist states have identified a tension between formal democratization, involving the adoption of electoral systems and constitutional rights, and substantive democratization, requiring the development of civic culture and citizens' experience of meaningful political voice (Liebert et al., 2013).

Pritchett et al. (2012) describe a related risk, in which organizations adopt the outward forms of modern institutions without their function.

Mongolia's democratic transition, which began in 1990, illustrates this tension clearly.

As Tsedev and Pratt (2008) document, the Mongolian state at that time was a highly centralized, party-controlled bureaucracy with virtually no domestic experience of democratic public administration. They identify three successive waves of reform after 1990. From 1990 to about 1997, Mongolia built a civil service system emphasizing hierarchy and rule-bound neutrality. From 1997 onward, New Public Management elements were introduced, emphasizing performance and decentralization. From around 2000, a participatory approach was formally introduced through the UNDP Good Governance Project. These waves produced overlapping and often contradictory results, so that Mongolia came to pursue decentralization through centralized mechanisms and participation within hierarchy (Tsedev & Pratt, 2008).

This history shows how participatory institutions can be adopted formally while responsive practice develops more slowly. It also suggests two ways in which Western theories may not apply directly to Mongolia. First, older citizens may evaluate current government against a reference point formed under state socialism, which differs from the reference point assumed in Western research on critical citizens. Research on other post-socialist countries offers a further idea relevant to age differences. In ten Central and Eastern European countries, Ekman and Linde (2005) find that older respondents are more likely to express nostalgia for the communist system (p. 363). They conclude that this nostalgia is mainly oriented toward system output, and that many citizens miss the security of the past, when they could rely on a pension and did not have to worry about jobs, prices, or rents (pp. 370–371). Research on electoral winners and losers shows in addition that citizens who support the winning party are more satisfied with democracy than those who support the losing side (Norris, 2011, p. 213). Where the successor of the former ruling party is in government, older citizens who associate it with that security may feel closer to the government, and age differences may partly reflect this.

Second, under state socialism the link between material status and political influence was shaped by state control rather than market participation, so socioeconomic resources may not predict efficacy as they do in Western studies. SDG Indicator 16.7.2 is well suited to examining these questions because it focuses not on whether consultation procedures formally exist but on whether citizens actually experience decision-making as inclusive and responsive.

Summary

The literature establishes external political efficacy as a well-validated concept, and research on political support shows its significance for democratic legitimacy (Easton, 1975; Norris, 2011). Comparing these studies reveals three limitations. First, the evidence on measurement equivalence and socio-demographic patterns comes mainly from established Western democracies. Second, studies differ on whether efficacy is driven mainly by citizens' expectations or by institutional design. Third, the link

between efficacy and legitimacy is theoretically expected but empirically weaker than often assumed. Homer and Lim (2024) argue that theories developed mainly in Western contexts should be tested in other national contexts to see where they hold. Nationally representative evidence on external efficacy in Mongolia remains limited, particularly evidence based on the standardized methodology of SDG Indicator 16.7.2. This study addresses that gap by providing a national baseline, examining variation across demographic and territorial groups, and testing whether patterns found in Western research hold in Mongolia's post-socialist context.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework draws on two bodies of political theory and research, external political efficacy and political support. External political efficacy is the construct measured in this study, and SDG Indicator 16.7.2 provides its global measurement framework. Political support theory is used to interpret why the measured levels of efficacy matter for democratic governance. Following the micro-meso-macro layering described by Homer and Lim (2024), these concepts are organized as connected levels of analysis.

At the micro level, the central concept is external political efficacy. It refers to a citizen's belief about whether government institutions respond to what the public wants. In this study, it is captured by citizens' perception that decision-making is inclusive and responsive, as measured by SDG Indicator 16.7.2. Research shows that this belief varies across social groups. The cross-national evidence reviewed in Section 2.2 links higher education to higher efficacy (Karp & Banducci, 2008; Oser et al., 2023) and finds the same for income (Oser et al., 2023). The critical citizens argument points the other way for education. Norris (2011) finds that more educated citizens evaluate the democratic performance of their country more critically (p. 131). Evidence on age is mixed. Older citizens report higher efficacy in Karp and Banducci (2008) and greater satisfaction with democratic performance in Norris (2011, p. 134), while Oser et al. (2023) find almost no relationship between age and external efficacy. No study reviewed here compares urban and rural residents directly. The expectation tested here extends the critical citizens argument, since urban residents are on average more educated.

At the meso level, state responsiveness refers to the actual practices of governing institutions in responding to citizens' preferences. For a government to remain responsive, Dahl (1971) argues, citizens must be able to signify their preferences and to have them weighed equally in the conduct of government (p. 2). This study does not measure institutional responsiveness directly. It examines how citizens perceive it, and the two indicator items ask whether citizens experience these conditions. In Easton's (1975) terms, such perceptions are an antecedent of specific support. Where citizens consistently feel that government does not respond to them, specific support weakens, and over time diffuse support may weaken as well. Legitimacy is one of the main expressions of diffuse support. Easton (1975) describes it as the belief that the authorities and the regime conform to one's own moral principles and sense of what is right and proper in the political sphere (p. 451). Norris (2011) describes the gap between what citizens expect from democracy and what they actually experience as a

democratic deficit. This gap may be especially relevant in newer democracies, where democratic institutions exist formally but may not yet give citizens a real sense of political voice.

At the macro level, Mongolia's post-socialist democratic transition forms the structural environment in which these processes operate. As Section 2.4 showed, participatory rights and procedures were established in law soon after 1990, while the habits of responsive administration took much longer to form (Tsedev & Pratt, 2008). This gap between formal institutional change and citizen experience shapes how Mongolian citizens perceive government responsiveness. Generational differences may partly reflect different political socialization experiences and reference points formed before and after the democratic transition.

The macro level also raises a question about the theories themselves. Homer and Lim (2024) argue that many widely used theories were developed mainly in Western contexts. They suggest that such theories lose contextual detail as they become more general, and that they should be tested in other national contexts to see where they hold. Norris's democratic deficit framework and much of the research on external efficacy are based largely on data from Western and European democracies. Mongolia therefore offers a useful context for this kind of test. Two questions are especially relevant. The first is whether differences between age groups reflect the critical citizen pattern found in Western research, or a different reference point shaped by the experience of state socialism. Nostalgia for the security of the socialist period, combined with support for the governing party, is a further possible explanation, although the survey used here does not measure either. The second is whether socioeconomic status predicts external efficacy in Mongolia as it does in many Western studies. In post-socialist societies, the link between material status and political engagement was historically shaped by state control rather than market participation. The discussion section returns to both questions to show where the Mongolian evidence confirms these frameworks and where it calls for contextual qualification.

In this study, based on the framework above, the study addresses two research questions.

RQ1. What is the overall level of external political efficacy among Mongolian citizens, as measured by SDG Indicator 16.7.2?

RQ2. Which socio-demographic characteristics are associated with external political efficacy in Mongolia, and are these associations consistent with expectations derived from research in other democracies?

RQ1 is descriptive and carries no hypothesis. The following hypotheses state the expected answers to RQ2. In testing them, external political efficacy is measured by the composite External Efficacy Score, which is described in the methodology section.

H1. Younger citizens report lower external political efficacy than older citizens.

H2. Citizens with more socioeconomic resources report higher external political efficacy. (a) Citizens with higher education report higher external political efficacy. (b) Citizens with higher income report

higher external political efficacy.

H3. Urban residents report lower external political efficacy than rural residents.

Gender is examined as an additional demographic variable without a directional hypothesis.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Data Collection

This study is a theory-driven analysis of cross-sectional survey data collected by telephone in 2022 in cooperation with the National Statistics Office of Mongolia (NSO), following the official SDG Indicator 16.7.2 methodology. The NSO designed a stratified probability sample with the five regions of Mongolia as strata. To allow estimates at both national and regional level, the target sample was allocated equally across regions, with 1,200 respondents per region and 6,000 in total. The sampling frame consisted of adults aged 18 and above covered by the 2021 Household Socio-Economic Survey. Within each province and district, respondents were selected by simple random sampling, and reserve units were selected in advance. Of 9,105 households contacted, 4,325 respondents completed the interview, giving a response rate of 47.5 percent. Because of the equal allocation, less populated regions are overrepresented in the unweighted sample and Ulaanbaatar is underrepresented. The NSO therefore calculated sampling weights so that weighted estimates represent the adult population. Some degree of nonresponse bias cannot be ruled out, since people who did not participate may differ in their views about government responsiveness.

4.2 Instrument and Operationalization

External political efficacy was measured using the standardized two-item instrument specified for SDG Indicator 16.7.2 (UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2023). The first item measures perceived inclusiveness by asking to what extent the government listens to citizens' views. The second measures perceived responsiveness by asking to what extent citizens' views influence government decisions. Both items use a five-point scale from 1, meaning not at all, to 5, meaning very much. Following the indicator methodology, responses of 3, 4, or 5 were counted as positive, and "Don't know" and "Refused" responses were excluded from the calculation. For inferential analysis, the External Efficacy Score was calculated as the mean of each respondent's valid answers to the two items on the full five-point scale.

4.3 Measurement Reliability

The two items are strongly correlated ($r = .567$, $p < .001$, $N = 3,892$), indicating that they capture closely related aspects of the same concept. Cronbach's alpha for the External Efficacy Score is .724. This is higher than the .61 reported for the four-item scale of Craig et al. (1990, p. 299) and somewhat lower than the .80 reported for the three-item scale of Kevins (2022). The score therefore shows acceptable reliability for a two-item measure.

4.4 Sample Characteristics

The sample includes 4,325 adults aged 18 to 94 years, with a mean age of 43.28 years. Table 2 in the Results section compares the unweighted sample with the weighted population estimates. The sample is close to the population in gender and broadly similar in age, although adults aged 18 to 34 are underrepresented and those aged 45 and above are overrepresented. The largest differences concern location and region. Rural residents make up 45.7 percent of the sample but 31.8 percent of the population, and Ulaanbaatar residents make up 23.1 percent of the sample but 46.5 percent of the population. These differences follow mainly from the equal allocation of the sample across regions. Because rural and older respondents report higher external efficacy, the unweighted SDG Indicator 16.7.2 value is 39.6 percent, compared with 38.0 percent after weighting.

4.5 Analytical Strategy

Analyses were conducted in SPSS. The SDG Indicator 16.7.2 proportions were calculated with NSO sampling weights. Group comparisons and regression analysis used unweighted data, since age and location, the main variables on which the sample differs from the population, are included as predictors. Responses coded as "Don't know" or "Refused" on each efficacy item were recoded to system missing. The External Efficacy Score was then computed as the mean of the available responses to the two items. Respondents who answered at least one item therefore received a score. To address research question one, the SDG Indicator 16.7.2 proportion was calculated following the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre (2023) methodology. For each item, it is the weighted share of valid responses scoring 3 or above, and the indicator value is the average of the two item proportions. The hypotheses were tested in two steps. First, bivariate group comparisons were conducted. Independent samples t-tests were used for location (H3) and gender, and Cohen's d was used to assess effect size. One-way ANOVA was used for age group (H1) and education level (H2a). For the ANOVA, education was grouped into four categories. Levene's test was applied in all group comparisons. Variances were not equal across groups in either ANOVA, so Games-Howell post hoc comparisons were used. Eta-squared was calculated from the ANOVA sums of squares to assess effect size. Second, ordinary least squares multiple regression was used to test all hypotheses together, with age, education, gender, location, and income (H2b) entered simultaneously. Age was entered as a continuous variable, education as a ten-category ordinal variable from no education to doctoral degree, and income as a nine-level ordinal variable. Standardized and unstandardized coefficients are reported with 95 percent confidence intervals.

5. Results

5.1 SDG 16.7.2 Indicator and Descriptive Statistics

The indicator was calculated as described in Section 4.2. In total, 39.6 percent of respondents gave a positive response to the first item about whether the government listens to citizens, and 36.4 percent gave a positive response to the second item about whether citizens' views influence decisions. The SDG Indicator 16.7.2 value is 38.0 percent, meaning fewer than four in ten Mongolian adults perceive public decision-making as inclusive and responsive. The 2022 survey report gave values of 36.8 and 34.1

percent for the two items and a composite of 35.5 percent. Those figures were also weighted but kept "Don't know" and "Refused" responses in the denominator. This study excludes them, as the indicator metadata specifies. "Don't know" or "Refused" responses were given by 355 respondents (8.2 percent) on the first item and 321 (7.4 percent) on the second.

Perceived inclusiveness at 39.6 percent is higher than perceived responsiveness at 36.4 percent, a gap of 3.2 percentage points, suggesting that citizens are more willing to accept that the government creates opportunities to listen than to believe their views actually influence decisions. This gap is in line with Esaiasson et al. (2015), who distinguish general beliefs about the openness of the political system from perceptions that decision-makers actually respond to citizens. The overall External Efficacy Score is M = 2.19 (SD = 0.91, N = 4,082), falling toward the lower end of the five-point scale. Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables

Variable	**N**	**Min**	**Max**	**M**	**SD**	**% Positive (≥ 3)**
SDG Indicator 16.7.2 value (average of Q1 and Q2)	-	-	-	-	-	38.0%
Q1: Government listens to citizens' views	3,970	1.00	5.00	2.22	1.03	39.6%
Q2: Citizens' views influence decisions	4,004	1.00	5.00	2.16	1.02	36.4%
External Efficacy Score (composite)	4,082	1.00	5.00	2.19	0.91	-
Age (years, continuous)	4,325	18	94	43.28	15.12	-

*Note. % Positive = weighted proportion of valid responses scoring 3 or above on the five-point scale, following the SDG Indicator 16.7.2 methodology (*UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2023*). "Don't know" and "Refused" responses were excluded (Q1: n = 355; Q2: n = 321). The composite value is the average of the two item proportions. N, M, and SD are unweighted. The External Efficacy Score is the mean of the available Q1 and Q2 item scores. Cronbach's α = .724; inter-item r = .567, p < .001, N = 3,892.*

Among respondents who gave a valid answer, 1,233 or 31.1 percent chose the lowest value of 1 on the first item, and 1,305 or 32.6 percent did so on the second item (unweighted). Table 2 presents the full sample composition.

Table 2
Sample Composition and Weighted Population Estimates

Variable	Category	n	Sample % (unweighted)	Population estimate % (weighted)
Gender	Male	1,988	46.0	48.2
	Female	2,337	54.0	51.8
Location	Urban	2,347	54.3	68.2
	Rural	1,978	45.7	31.8
Region	Western	598	13.8	12.2
	Khangai	771	17.8	18.6
	Central	1,202	27.8	15.8
	Eastern	753	17.4	6.9
	Ulaanbaatar	1,001	23.1	46.5
Education	Basic or below	1,215	28.1	20.9
	Complete secondary	1,211	28.0	30.9
	Vocational	655	15.1	13.8
	Higher	1,154	26.7	32.2
	Not reported	90	2.1	2.0
Age group	18–24	494	11.4	14.7
	25–34	886	20.5	25.2
	35–44	1,016	23.5	22.9
	45–54	885	20.5	17.7
	55–64	657	15.2	12.3
	65 and above	387	8.9	7.2

Note. Total N = 4,325. Population estimates apply the NSO sampling weights, which are scaled to official population totals. Education was grouped into four categories. Basic or below = no education, primary, and basic. Complete secondary = complete secondary education. Vocational = technical and vocational education and specialized secondary. Higher = higher diploma, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees.

5.2 Differences in External Efficacy Score by Location

An independent-samples t-test compared the External Efficacy Score between urban and rural respondents. Levene's test confirmed equal variances (F = 0.574, p = .449). The result was statistically

significant, t(4080) = -5.44, p < .001. Rural respondents scored higher (M = 2.27, SD = 0.91, n = 1,876) than urban respondents (M = 2.12, SD = 0.91, n = 2,206), with a mean difference of 0.155 points and a 95 percent confidence interval of [-0.211, -0.099]. The effect size was small (Cohen's d = 0.17). This result is in line with H3. Full results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Independent Samples t-test: External Efficacy Score by Location

Group	n	M	SD	t	df	p	95% CI	d
Urban	2,206	2.12	0.91	−5.44	4,080	< .001	[− 0.211, − 0.099]	0.17
Rural	1,876	2.27	0.91					

Note. Two-tailed test. Equal variances assumed. The negative t-value reflects the urban minus rural difference.

5.3 Differences in External Efficacy Score by Gender

An independent samples t-test found a statistically significant but very small gender difference. Levene's test showed equal variances (F = 2.289, p = .130). The result was t(4080) = -2.63, p = .009. Female respondents scored slightly higher (M = 2.23, SD = 0.92, n = 2,215) than male respondents (M = 2.15, SD = 0.90, n = 1,867), with a mean difference of 0.075 points and a 95 percent confidence interval of [-0.132, -0.019]. The effect size was negligible (Cohen's d = 0.08). Full results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Independent Samples t-test: External Efficacy Score by Gender

Group	n	M	SD	t	df	p	95% CI	d
Male	1,867	2.15	0.90	−2.63	4,080	.009	[− 0.132, − 0.019]	0.08
Female	2,215	2.23	0.92					

Note. Two-tailed test. Equal variances assumed.

5.4 Differences in External Efficacy Score by Age Group

A one-way ANOVA examined differences across six age groups. Levene's test showed that the homogeneity of variance assumption was not met (F = 5.212, df = 5, 4076, p < .001), so Games-Howell post hoc comparisons were used. The overall result was statistically significant, F(5, 4076) = 22.62, p < .001, with a small effect size (eta-squared = .027).

The lowest score was found in the 25 to 34 age group (M = 2.06, SD = 0.89, n = 835). The 18 to 24 group scored slightly higher (M = 2.19, SD = 0.83, n = 463). From age 35 onward, scores rose with each age group and reached the highest level in the 65 and above group (M = 2.59, SD = 0.99, n = 361). The difference between the lowest and highest scoring groups is 0.53 scale points. Post hoc tests showed that the 65 and above group scored significantly higher than all younger groups. The 55 to 64 group scored significantly higher than the 25 to 34, 35 to 44, and 45 to 54 groups. Differences among the four

groups below age 55 were not significant. 18 to 24 group does not differ significantly from the 55 to 64 group (p = .105). These results are in line with H1, although the pattern is not fully linear, since the lowest score is found among those aged 25 to 34 and not among the youngest group. Full results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
One-Way ANOVA and Group Means: External Efficacy Score by Age Group

Age group	n	M	SD	F	df	p	Post hoc significant differences
18–24	463	2.19	0.83	22.62	5, 4076	< .001	< 65+
25–34	835	2.06	0.89				< 55–64; < 65+
35–44	962	2.10	0.89				< 55–64; < 65+
45–54	838	2.16	0.90				< 55–64; < 65+
55–64	623	2.33	0.93				> 25–54; < 65+
65 and above	361	2.59	0.99				> all groups

Note. Games-Howell post hoc procedure used because variances were not equal (Levene's F = 5.21, p < .001). η^2 = .027. Post hoc column shows differences significant at p < .05.

5.5 Differences in External Efficacy Score by Education Level

A one-way ANOVA examined differences across four education groups. The original variable contained ten categories, from no education to doctoral degree. These were grouped as basic education or below, complete secondary, vocational, and higher education. Ninety respondents who did not report their education were excluded, leaving an analytical sample of 3,998. Levene's test showed that variances were not equal (F = 2.619, df = 3, 3994, p = .049), so Games-Howell post hoc comparisons were used.

The overall result was statistically significant, F(3, 3994) = 11.05, p < .001, but the effect size was small (eta-squared = .008). Respondents with basic education or below reported the highest score (M = 2.32, SD = 0.94, n = 1,146). The other three groups scored lower and were very close to each other, with means of 2.14 for complete secondary (SD = 0.90, n = 1,155), 2.16 for vocational (SD = 0.91, n = 615), and 2.14 for higher education (SD = 0.89, n = 1,082). The lowest education group scored significantly higher than the complete secondary group (mean difference = 0.189, p < .001), the vocational group (mean difference = 0.165, p = .002), and the higher education group (mean difference = 0.187, p < .001). Differences among those three groups were not significant. This result runs against H2a. The least educated group reports the highest efficacy, and no difference appears among the other three groups. Full results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6
One-Way ANOVA and Group Means: External Efficacy Score by Education Level

Education group	n	M	SD	F	df	p	Post hoc significant differences
Basic or below	1,146	2.32	0.94	11.05	3, 3994	< .001	> all other groups
Complete secondary	1,155	2.14	0.90				< Basic or below
Vocational	615	2.16	0.91				< Basic or below
Higher	1,082	2.14	0.89				< Basic or below

Note. Games-Howell post hoc procedure used because variances were not equal (Levene's F = 2.62, p = .049). η² = .008. N = 3,998. Post hoc column shows differences significant at p < .05. Basic or below = no education, primary, and basic. Vocational = technical and vocational education and specialized secondary. Higher = higher diploma, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees.

5.6 Multivariate Analysis of Determinants of External Political Efficacy

A multiple OLS regression was estimated with the External Efficacy Score as the dependent variable. Age, education, gender, location, and income were entered simultaneously. Education was entered as the original ten-category ordinal variable, which differs from the four groups used in the ANOVA. The analytical sample after listwise deletion was N = 3,998. All VIF values were below 1.25 and the highest condition index was 19.3, indicating no multicollinearity problem.

The overall model was statistically significant, F(5, 3992) = 21.49, p < .001, with R-squared = .026. The five predictors together explain 2.6 percent of the variation in the External Efficacy Score. Three predictors were statistically significant. Age was the strongest (beta = .125, p < .001), with each additional year increasing the score by 0.008 points. Location was the second (beta = .077, p < .001, B = 0.142), with rural respondents scoring higher. Gender also reached significance (beta = .038, p = .016, B = 0.070), with female respondents scoring slightly higher. Education (beta = − .022, p = .218) and income (beta = − .004, p = .792) were not significant after controlling for the other variables.

These results allow a verdict on each hypothesis. H1 is supported, since older citizens report higher external efficacy after controls. H3 is supported, since rural residents report higher external efficacy than urban residents after controls. H2 is not supported. Education is not positively associated with efficacy, and the only bivariate difference runs in the opposite direction and disappears after controls. Income shows no association. Full results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7
Multiple OLS Regression: Predictors of the External Efficacy Score (N = 3,998)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI [B]
(Constant)	1.602	0.106	—	15.15	< .001	[1.395, 1.810]
Age (years)	0.008	0.001	.125	7.71	< .001	[0.006, 0.010]
Location (urban = 1, rural = 2)	0.142	0.030	.077	4.71	< .001	[0.083, 0.202]
Gender (male = 1, female = 2)	0.070	0.029	.038	2.40	.016	[0.013, 0.127]
Education (ten categories)	−0.009	0.007	−.022	−1.23	.218	[− 0.024, 0.005]
Income (nine categories)	−0.002	0.008	−.004	−0.26	.792	[− 0.019, 0.014]
Model: $F(5, 3992) = 21.49$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .026$; Adjusted $R^2 = .025$						
Note. Unstandardized (B) and standardized (β) coefficients reported. 95% CI refers to B. All predictors entered simultaneously. Education entered as a ten-category ordinal variable from no education (1) to doctoral degree (10). Income entered as a nine-category ordinal variable.						

6. Discussion

The discussion follows the conceptual framework. It first considers the overall level of external political efficacy, then the hypotheses on demographic differences, then what the findings mean for theories developed mainly in Western democracies, and finally the methodological contribution.

6.1 The Level of External Political Efficacy

The SDG Indicator 16.7.2 value is 38.0 percent, and the mean External Efficacy Score is 2.19 on the five-point scale. This answers research question one. Fewer than four in ten Mongolian adults perceive public decision-making as inclusive and responsive. Within the conceptual framework, external efficacy is a perceptual antecedent of specific support in Easton's (1975) sense. A level this low therefore suggests that the basis for specific support is weak. The study did not measure political support or legitimacy directly, so this link is an interpretation and not a finding.

The result fits the gap between institutional form and practice described in the framework. Mongolia entered democratic transition in 1990 with almost no tradition of participatory public administration, and successive overlapping reforms have not yet produced a stable administrative culture of responsiveness (Tsedev & Pratt, 2008).

Pritchett, Woolcock, and Andrews (2012) offer a useful concept for this situation. They define isomorphic mimicry as "the ability of organizations to sustain legitimacy through the imitation of the forms of modern institutions but without functionality" (p. 14). Their analysis concerns state capability in general and not citizen participation in particular. The Mongolian result is nevertheless in line with it. Consultation procedures and participatory rights exist in law, yet most citizens do not feel heard.

The difference between the two items points the same way. Perceived inclusiveness at 39.6 percent is higher than perceived responsiveness at 36.4 percent. Citizens give the state somewhat more credit for listening than for acting on what it hears. Norris (2011) describes the gap between what citizens expect and what they experience as a democratic deficit. The present data capture only the experience side of that gap, since expectations were not measured.

6.2 Demographic Differences and the Hypotheses

Research question two asked which socio-demographic characteristics are associated with external political efficacy, and whether these associations match expectations from research in other democracies. The answer is mixed. H1 and H3 are supported. Older citizens and rural residents report higher external efficacy, and age and location remain the two strongest predictors after controls. The age pattern is not linear. The lowest score is found among those aged 25 to 34, and the sharpest rise begins at age 55. H2 is not supported. Respondents with basic education or below report higher efficacy than all other groups, which is the opposite of the expected direction, and this difference disappears once age and location are controlled, because the least educated respondents are on average older and more often rural. Income has no association. The gender difference is negligible. Together, the five predictors explain only 2.6 percent of the variance. Demographic position therefore tells little about who feels heard, and experiences with government are likely to matter more (Oser, 2025).

6.3 Western Frameworks in a Post-Socialist Context

Homer and Lim (2024) argue that theories developed mainly in Western contexts should be tested elsewhere to see where they hold. The Mongolian evidence confirms these frameworks in part and qualifies them in two ways.

The age association is in line with Karp and Banducci (2008), who find that older citizens report higher efficacy, and with Norris (2011), who finds that older citizens are more satisfied with democratic performance. It is much stronger than in the 46 countries studied by Oser et al. (2023), where age is almost unrelated to external efficacy. The difference between rural and urban residents has no direct counterpart in the studies reviewed here.

The first qualification concerns socioeconomic status. Oser et al. (2023) and Karp and Banducci (2008) find that socioeconomic resources raise efficacy. In Mongolia, neither education nor income is independently associated with efficacy, and the only bivariate difference runs the other way. Perceptions of exclusion are spread across income and education groups.

One possible reason is historical. Under state socialism, the link between material status and political influence was shaped by state control and not by market participation, and this link may still be weaker than in Western societies.

The second qualification concerns the reason behind the association with age. The critical citizens argument explains lower evaluations among the young through rising education and expectations (Norris, 2011). In Mongolia, there is no association between education and efficacy, and the largest differences lie at the older end of the age range. Respondents aged 55 and above in 2022 were already adults when the transition began in 1990. This suggests a different reference point and not only rising expectations. Citizens who lived as adults under the previous system may judge current responsiveness against that experience.

A further explanation noted in the literature review could not be tested, because the survey measured neither nostalgia nor party support. In 2022, Mongolia was governed (is still governed) by the successor of the former ruling party, which gives strong emphasis to social welfare. Older citizens who value the security associated with the socialist period may therefore feel that this government listens to them. This possibility deserves attention in future research.

In short, the Western frameworks describe the direction of the main differences in Mongolia, but the reasons behind them appear to differ. This is the theoretical contribution of the study.

6.4 Methodological Contribution and Comparative Positioning

The earlier proxy-based estimate of 57.1 percent and the estimate of 38.0 percent from the official methodology differ by about nineteen percentage points. The difference reflects what the two questions ask. One rates the conduct of state institutions, while the other asks whether citizens' views are heard and influence decisions. The national target of 65.8 percent was set from the proxy figure, so it rests on a baseline that is not comparable with the official indicator. The present estimate provides one that is.

The two questions behind the indicator have been asked more widely than official SDG reporting suggests. The European Social Survey has included them since 2016, covering many post-socialist countries in Europe, and the World Values Survey asked the first question in fifteen further countries, including Kazakhstan (UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2023, p. 5). These were research surveys and not national statistical measurement of the indicator. To the authors' knowledge, Mongolia is among the first post-socialist countries in Asia where both items have been measured in cooperation with a national statistical office using the official methodology. The result therefore offers a reference point for comparative research, and comparison with the post-socialist countries covered by the European Social Survey is a task for future research.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the level and socio-demographic correlates of external political efficacy in Mongolia, using the first nationally representative application of the official SDG Indicator 16.7.2 methodology. The indicator stands at 38.0 percent, so fewer than four in ten adults believe that the government listens to citizens or that their views influence decisions. The mean External Efficacy Score is 2.19 on a five-point scale. Age and location are the strongest predictors, with older and rural citizens reporting higher external efficacy. The gender difference is statistically significant but negligible in size. Education and income do not predict external efficacy once other variables are controlled. Within Easton's (1975) framework, a level this low suggests that the basis for specific support for governing institutions is weak, although support itself was not measured.

The study makes four contributions. First, it establishes a baseline for SDG Indicator 16.7.2 in Mongolia that follows the official methodology and is therefore internationally comparable, in contrast to the earlier proxy-based estimate of 57.1 percent. Second, it tests frameworks developed mainly in Western democracies in a post-socialist context. The direction of the age and location effects matches Western findings, but socioeconomic status has no independent effect, and the age pattern may reflect a reference point formed under state socialism more than the rise of critical citizens. Third, it shows that demographic variables explain only a small share of the variance, which directs future research toward institutional and experiential factors. Fourth, it gives researchers a first point of comparison for the indicator in post-socialist Asia, where evidence has so far been very limited.

The study has several limitations. The data are cross-sectional, so the effect of age cannot be separated from that of generation, and no causal claims can be made. The survey did not measure political support, democratic expectations, nostalgia for the socialist period, or party preference, so the explanations offered for the age pattern remain untested. With two items, confirmatory factor analysis and tests of measurement invariance were not possible. The response rate was 47.5 percent, and nonresponse bias cannot be ruled out. Group comparisons and regression used unweighted data, although the indicator value itself is weighted. External efficacy was measured with two items, which cover the core of the concept but not its full range. Finally, the data were collected by telephone in 2022, and perceptions may have changed since then. Future research should add measures of expectations, nostalgia, and party preference, and should use repeated surveys to follow change over time.

The findings have direct policy implications. Governance reform in Mongolia should not focus only on expanding formal participatory mechanisms. Perceived inclusiveness is somewhat higher than perceived responsiveness, which suggests that the more pressing challenge lies in closing the gap between listening and responding. This requires showing how citizen input shapes decisions and making decision-making more transparent, especially for urban and younger citizens, who feel least heard. The national target of 65.8 percent was set from a baseline that is not comparable with the official indicator and should be reviewed. Regular measurement and official reporting of SDG Indicator 16.7.2 would allow progress to be tracked over time.

Declarations

Ethical Approval

The questionnaire and study methodology were reviewed and approved by the Methodology Standing Committee of the National Statistics Office of Mongolia. The study was conducted in accordance with the National Statistics Office of Mongolia's Professional Ethics Rules and the regulations of the Methodology Standing Committee, including provisions on ethical conduct and confidentiality (Regulation 9.2.2). Data collection and handling also complied with the Law on State and Official Secrets (2016), the Law on the Protection of Personal Information, and the Law on Transparency of Public Information of Mongolia.

Within Mongolia's official statistics system, ethical oversight of survey research is embedded within statutory methodological review procedures rather than a separate human research ethics committee.

Consent to Participate

Informed consent was obtained verbally from all participants prior to their voluntary participation in the survey. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and that their identity would not be recorded or linked to their responses.

Consent to Publish

Not applicable. This study reports only anonymized and aggregated statistical results. No individual-level data, personal identifiers, or identifiable information are included in this manuscript.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The microdata used in this study were obtained from the National Statistics Office of Mongolia through a formal institutional data-sharing arrangement, following an official request. The dataset is available in the Figshare repository at https://figshare.com/s/be00f2ced77d7a3bb666 . Variable names are in English. Value labels and the original codebook are in Mongolian, and an English codebook is provided with the dataset.

Author Contribution

Narantuya Jugder was responsible for study conceptualization, data processing, statistical analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript writing and revision. Batsukh Yondonjamts contributed to data

processing and technical support in the implementation of the study. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

The authors used Claude (Anthropic, Claude Sonnet 5) to assist with English language improvement of this manuscript. This included improving clarity, coherence, grammar, and flow of author-written text, and partial translation of content originally drafted in Mongolian. The corresponding author takes responsibility for checking the accuracy of the Mongolian-to-English translation. The tool was used solely for language improvement purposes and not for generating research content. All AI-assisted text was reviewed and verified by the authors. The authors confirm that the tool's terms of use are compatible with the publication requirements and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of this manuscript, including all references.

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Disclaimer

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