

# WHAT DO CAMBODIANS THINK?

Insights and attitudes towards society and politics  
in Cambodia





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Freedom, justice and solidarity are the basic principles underlying the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The KAS is a political foundation, closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU). As co-founder of the CDU and the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) united Christian-social, conservative and liberal traditions. His name is synonymous with the democratic reconstruction of Germany after the Second World War, the firm alignment of foreign policy with the trans-Atlantic community of values, the vision of a unified Europe and an orientation towards the social market economy. His intellectual heritage continues to serve both as our aim as well as our obligation today. In our European and international cooperation efforts, we work for people to be able to live self-determined lives in freedom and dignity. We make a contribution underpinned by these values to helping Germany meet its growing responsibilities throughout the world.

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## **About the study**

The study is based on a nationally representative survey of 1015 Cambodian citizens aged between 16 and 64 years old, across five main geographical locations - Phnom Penh, Plain, Mountain, Tonle Sap and Coastal. Fieldwork took place in October 2020.

## **DISCLAIMER**

The opinions and ideas presented in this paper represent those of the participants of the poll. Their presentation does not entail any endorsement of these views either by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Cambodia, Kantar or the editors. All policy recommendations are based thereon and on the sources highlighted in this document.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey aims to provide a greater understanding of social and political attitudes as well as opinions and perspectives in Cambodia. Its findings are clustered around the following topics: **daily life, political participation, media consumption, civic engagement and international relations.**

Key findings are as follows:

## 1. Most Cambodians feel that their lives have become better despite flooding and COVID-19.

Fifty-three percent of all respondents feel that their lives have become better over the past five years. The three issues that most concerned Cambodians in October 2020 were flooding (65%), the COVID-19 pandemic (56%) and the state of the Cambodian economy (21%). Forty nine percent of respondents felt that peace and security was an issue, followed by health services and corruption (both 42%), and land rights (37%).

## 2. Political participation is important to Cambodians but ranks behind other issues.

Almost all respondents (95%) said that they will vote in the next general election. Around half of respondents stated that they cared about politics to some extent, but this was higher amongst younger people. When asked about which qualities they valued in candidates for political office, most respondents named the ability to foster tangible change in their communities as well as a candidate's accessibility as their priorities. A correlation between more frequent social media use and greater interest in politics was noted.

## 3. Rural Cambodians still rely on word of mouth for information.

While a great majority of Cambodians (79%) now turn to social media as their primary source of information, face-to-face conversation is still the main way to receive new information for 31% of respondents. A further 24% named their village chiefs as their primary source of information.

## 4. Most Cambodians are not inclined towards active civic engagement.

Most respondents react passively when it comes to civic engagement citing 'respecting the law' as a way they can contribute to society (91%). Those that do partake in civic engagement do so mainly by helping others in need or working with local NGOs (71% and 11% of respondents respectively). Respondents from Ratanakiri are much more likely than those from other parts of the country to engage in any type of civic or voluntary activity (68% compared to 40% overall). When asked how they wished for public resources to be allocated, 59% wanted to see money spent on public health, which is unsurprising given Cambodians' awareness of COVID-19.

## 5. China is seen as Cambodia's best partner internationally, and the EU has a positive image.

Respondents viewed China as Cambodia's best international partner across nearly all fields. In trade, China is closely followed by Thailand and Japan, likely owing to direct aid. Two-thirds (67%) of those who are aware of the European Union (EU) view it positively, mostly due to its economic prosperity and focus on equal opportunities for its citizens. Yet 56% of respondents hadn't heard of the EU, and less than half (43%) are aware of the implications of the EU's decision to rescind its 'Everything but Arms' agreement with Cambodia.

Overall, the findings of this survey demonstrate that most Cambodians seem to value maintaining the status quo over taking any perceived risks. Cambodians are preoccupied with keeping their current standard of living and at best aiming for personal advancement through education and economic progress. This is mirrored both on the domestic as well as the international political stage, with respondents preferring actors that have a direct positive impact on their immediate environment and themselves.

# INTRODUCTION

What are the biggest issues Cambodians face in their daily lives today? What types of media do Cambodians consume when it comes to current affairs? How likely are people to vote in the next general election? Which countries are viewed as good partners for Cambodia on the international stage and what do Cambodians think of the European Union (EU)?

These are the questions that Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Cambodia together with Kantar have set out to answer in this survey. In October 2020, researchers interviewed 1015 respondents across Cambodia's five main geographic regions: Phnom Penh, Plain, Mountain, Tonle Sap and Coastal region. \*

Cambodia has undergone significant economic change and development over the past two decades, making it one of the fastest-growing economies in the world (the World Bank, 2020). Its rapid growth can largely be attributed to preferential trade agreements, strong foreign direct investment – especially from China – and an abundance of low-skilled labour (Beschorner et al., 2020). However, the global shock resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental effect on Cambodia's economy, particularly on tourism, construction, and manufacturing exports, which sectors combined account for more than 70% of the country's growth. The country is projected to face negative growth for the first time in its history in 2020, the 'sharpest decline in Cambodia's recent history', according to the World Bank (2020).

Cambodia also suffered intense flooding during the past October, causing loss of lives, damage to property and infrastructure, and the displacement of entire households. Nineteen of Cambodia's twenty-five provinces were deluged by torrential rainfall and more Cambodians died in 2020 as a result of flooding than from COVID-19 (Hutt, 2020).

## Research questions and objectives

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of Cambodian citizens' political and societal attitudes, priorities and future expectations. It addresses the following questions:

- > What does life look like for Cambodians in 2020?
  - What do people value the most? What are their biggest challenges?
- > What is the level of civic engagement?
  - How do people consume information about current affairs? How likely are Cambodian citizens to vote in the next general election? Which factors influence their vote? In which ways are they participating in society?
- > What would strengthen Cambodia?
  - What types of social issues do people think the government should prioritise? Which countries are the best partners for Cambodia? How do citizens view the country's relationship with the EU?

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\* Please refer to table 2 in Appendix 1 for a detailed breakdown of which province was sampled within each geographical region.

# LIFE FOR CAMBODIANS IN 2020

This section outlines the current contextual challenges facing Cambodia, during the time the fieldwork was conducted. It then discusses the survey findings regarding the Cambodian way of life, how citizens see their lives and what they perceive as the main problems.

## Not everyone feels the same about Cambodia's development

Despite the economic developments in Cambodia over the last decade, not everyone feels the benefits. Just over half (53%) of respondents reported their life has become better over the last five years; one-quarter (25%) felt it has become worse.

Whether Cambodians feel their lives are improving is influenced by a range of factors such as where they live, their gender, and their socio-economic status. Those living in Phnom Penh were notably more likely to think their life had become worse over the past five years (39% compared to 25% overall), and only 37% felt it had gotten better (compared to 53% overall). This could be explained by the detrimental impact of COVID-19 on certain sectors such as the garment, textile and footwear (GFT) sector, as many of these factories are located in or around Phnom Penh. Furthermore, the urban poor in the city are faced with consistent issues arising

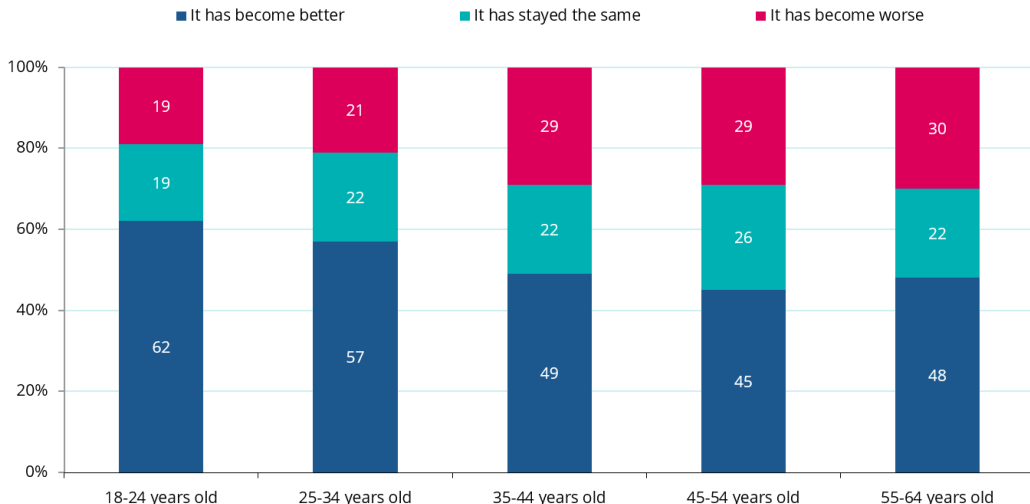
from flooding, which are cumulatively damaging at both an economic and social level (Chanvoitey, 2020).

## Younger and better educated feel more positive

Another factor which influenced Cambodians view on development is age: 62% of those aged 18 to 24 felt their life had become better, compared to 48% of those aged 55 to 64. Thirty percent of this older demographic felt their life had become worse.

This generational gap can likely be explained by Cambodia's younger generation growing up during a time of economic growth and structural change. They have experienced comparatively greater security and stability compared to the formative experiences of the older generation (Netra et al., 2019). Younger people are benefiting from better access to education; 32% of those aged 18 to 24 have received a high school education, compared to 13% of those aged 55 to 64, and they have greater access to technology.

Figure 1 – Outlook on life, by age (percent)





**Case Study: Women continue to face inequality**

While political, economic and social developments have opened new opportunities for men and women and challenged traditional gender roles, Cambodian society remains largely patriarchal and hierarchical, and women continue to be politically and economically marginalized. Deep-rooted cultural and social norms related to gender identity and tradition are pervasive in Cambodia.

The Ministry of Labour in Cambodia reported that as of November 2020, over 110 factories had closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kuntheart, 2020), and nearly 80% of affected workers were women (ILO, 2018). This study found that over a third of women (37%), compared to 25% of men, felt that the government should provide cash or in-kind transfers, loans or job assistance for emergencies or for individual households most in need.

Furthermore, women and girls are more likely to spend time on unpaid care and domestic tasks compared to men and boys, and the preventative measures of the government to close schools and switch to virtual learning, have exacerbated

the already disproportionate burden of responsibilities on women (UN Women, 2020).

Unsurprisingly, women's perspectives on life differed from those of men; 30% of women felt their life had become worse over the past five years compared to 20% of men (and 25% of respondents overall). This can likely be attributed to the impacts of COVID-19 on the GFT sector and on general household structures.

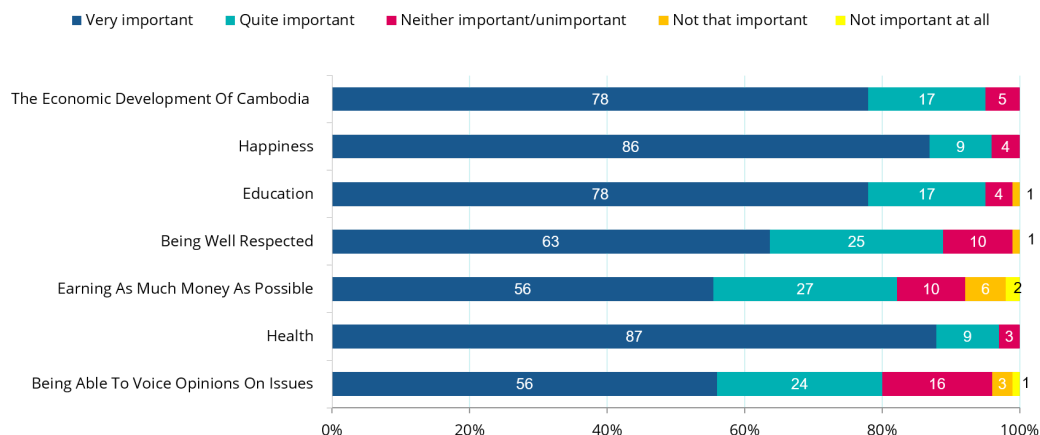
Women are also in need of support with basic needs such as food; 28% felt government intervention on the issue of food prices was needed, compared to 18% of male respondents. This finding is consistent with the increasing food prices in the wake of the pandemic and the impact on female-headed households in particular, which are more likely to shoulder the responsibility for overall household food consumption (FAO, 2008).

Level of education also determined how Cambodians view development, with those who received a university- level education more inclined to think that their life had improved over the past five years (81%) compared to those with no literacy and those who received no schooling (33%). Additionally, differences were seen along the lines of socio-economic class (SEC); 59% of those of SEC A (those earning more than \$800 per month) felt their life had improved over the last five years, compared to 49% of SEC F (those earning less than \$100 per month).\*

**Health, happiness and education matter the most to Cambodians**

Reflecting the real and measurable increase in national standards of living, Cambodians' responses to questions on what they consider important and what they worry about indicate that they value basic needs – for example, health, education and happiness – over material things.

**Figure 2 – Important values (percent)**



\* Please refer to the table in Appendix 2 for a full breakdown of SEC groups.

Cambodians rated health highly (96% felt this was important to them, with 87% considering it to be 'very' important) and also ranked their happiness as a priority (95% felt this was important to them, with 86% saying it was 'very' important). Health and happiness were prioritised by all demographic groups, which is perhaps unsurprising given the outbreak of COVID-19, and the serious health security threat it poses to the Kingdom.

Education was also listed highly by respondents; 95% think it is either 'very' or 'quite' important. \*

Both men and women tended to value the same things, and age did not appear to have a significant influence, although younger groups (those aged 18 to 24) were more likely to place importance on earning money and buying items such as a house or modern equipment (66% said this was 'very' important compared to 56% overall), possibly owing to their recent entry into the labour force and access to technology.

Generally, people were somewhat less concerned with their personal earnings or having their voices heard in the political sphere; 56% felt that earning as much money as possible and being able to voice their opinion on issues that concern them were 'very important', although both issues still ranked highly overall.

Those with some level of interest in politics were more inclined to prioritise being able to voice their opinion (89%, compared to 80% overall). Furthermore, they put more emphasis on being well respected in their neighbourhood (95%, compared to 88% overall), and the economic development of Cambodia (98%, compared to 94% overall).

## Flooding, COVID-19 and the economy are the greatest challenges

When asked about the most pertinent challenges currently facing Cambodia, around two-thirds (65%) of respondents cited flooding, which is consistent with the severe flooding which affected large parts of Cambodia during the time when the fieldwork for this survey was conducted. Fifty-six percent cited COVID-19, and around a fifth (21%) stated economic challenges, which is again unsurprising given the negative effects of income loss and economic uncertainty rippling across society in the wake of the pandemic.

Interestingly, despite COVID-19 being cited as the second-biggest challenge for younger people (after flooding), they were less likely to consider it a grave problem compared to older groups.

\* For further research on Cambodian's view on education please refer also to Hunkin and Schmücking (2021).

## Peace and security, corruption, health services, and land rights were the greatest issues faced by Cambodians

Respondents to this survey were asked to put themselves in the government's shoes: if they wielded decision-making power, what issues would be the most pertinent and which would they prioritise?

Around half of respondents (49%) felt that peace and security was the biggest issue facing Cambodia. This was followed by health services and corruption (42%). Peace and security was felt universally, and there were no notable differences across gender or age lines. However, younger people were more likely to cite corruption as an issue compared to older groups (53% of 16-24 year olds compared to 37% of 55-64 year olds).

Thirty seven percent of Cambodians also cited land rights as their biggest concern, and there were some notable differences across gender and age lines: men were more likely to cite this issue compared to women (40% compared to 34% respectively), and older groups were also more inclined to feel this was an issue (44% of 55-64 year olds compared to 34% of 18-24 year olds).

### Case study

Land disputes have been a prevalent problem in Cambodia and over the past decade, and there have been at least three major land disputes in Koh Kong alone. Findings from this study found that residents in Koh Kong were more likely to feel that land rights were an issue (44% compared to 37% overall), and this can likely be attributed to the above-mentioned recent disputed cases in the regions.



# MEDIA CONSUMPTION

The following section describes the media consumption of Cambodians in relation to current affairs.

According to a recent report by 'We Are Social', internet penetration in Cambodia stood at 58% in January 2020, an increase of 15% compared to the previous year. Similar trends were seen for social media usage, with the number of users increasing by 17% in 2020, reaching an overall penetration of 58% (Kemp, 2020). Despite a surge in digital adaptation among Cambodians, evidence suggests that many use Facebook almost exclusively when they are online which is an important source for information and social interaction.

## Many turn to social media for information about current affairs

Findings from this study show that 79% of people use social media as their primary source for information about current affairs, followed by television (48%). Among all age groups, young people were most likely to use social media; 93% said they used social media. However, the share of citizens getting information from social media was high across all age groups, including those aged 55 to 64, of whom 55% are active social media users. TV news was more popular with older groups; just over two-thirds (69%) of those aged 55 to 64 cited TV as their main source of information (compared to 39% of those aged 18 to 24). Those of lower SEC (group F) were also more likely to turn to TV for information (59% compared to 48% overall).

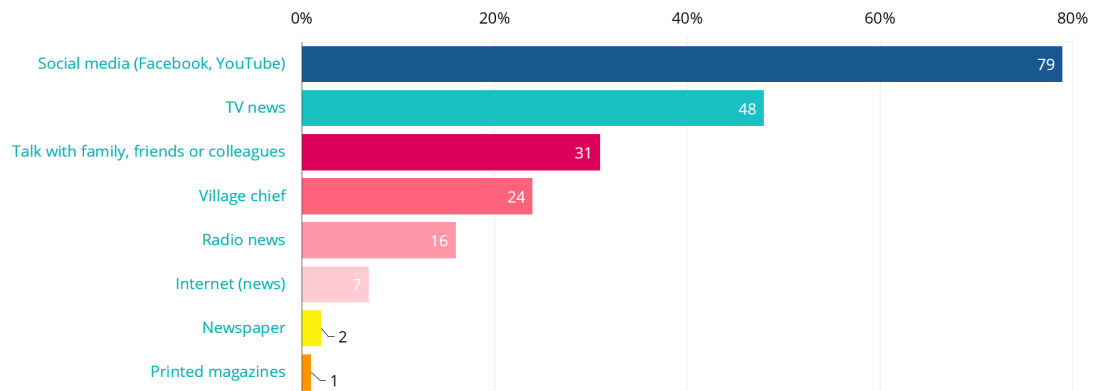
However, face-to-face discussion should not be undervalued. Thirty-one percent of respondents cited their family, friends, or colleagues as their main source of information about current affairs, and 24% turned to their village chief to receive such information. This was slightly more pronounced in Kampong Thom where 51% and 47% respectively named the village chief and their families as their key source of information.

Social media and the internet provide a new space for people, particularly younger groups, to participate in political and societal discussion. While this may have changed the way that people engage with politics, it may not have had an impact on the overall quality of these discussions (Chenda, 2017). In line with this, findings from this study point towards a link between the usage of online media platforms and increased interest in politics, possibly owing to the availability of independent news and media online. However, further research is needed to evaluate the size and direction of this correlation.

## The majority of social media users are active online each day

Almost all (95%) of those who cited social media as their preferred means of information consumption about current affairs used a social media platform at least once per week. Seventy-three percent revealed themselves to be daily users, with men more likely to report daily use (75%) than women (70%). The findings were similar for those who turned to television: 85% watched at least once per week, with 54% reporting daily use.

Figure 4: Media usage, by channel (percent)



# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The following section discusses political and societal participation, and voting habits.

## Half of Cambodians care about political issues, while a third are ambivalent

Forty-six percent of Cambodians said they cared about politics either 'a little' or 'a lot'. However, almost one-third (29%) said they were neutral on the subject. The chapter explores how civic and political engagement is distributed amongst societal strata.

Significant differences were seen across age groups; 53% of people aged 18 to 24 cared about politics, compared to 38% of people aged 55 to 64). Those who are better educated, of higher SEC, and who are unmarried were more likely to show an interest in politics.

As mentioned in the previous section, those who referred to online platforms as their main source of information had a greater interest in politics than those using more traditional resources.

## Almost all are likely to vote in the next election

The overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) said they were likely to vote in the next election (2023), with 93% reporting they were 'very likely'. There were no notable differences across segments such as gender, SEC and education, suggesting there are no determinants of voting turnout. However, it should be noted that there is a high likelihood of social desirability bias at play in relation to this question.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, people aged 18 to 24 were less likely to say they will vote in the next election, possibly owing to the fact they have only recently been legally able to vote and those aged 18 to 20 within this group would not have been old enough to vote in the last national election in 2018.

Interestingly, those who felt their life had become worse over the past five years were less likely to vote compared to those who felt it had gotten better; however, the overall likeliness to vote was still high.

## Cambodians show preference to candidates who can support their commune

Cambodians were likely to vote for a certain candidate for a variety of reasons, showing preference to candidates who

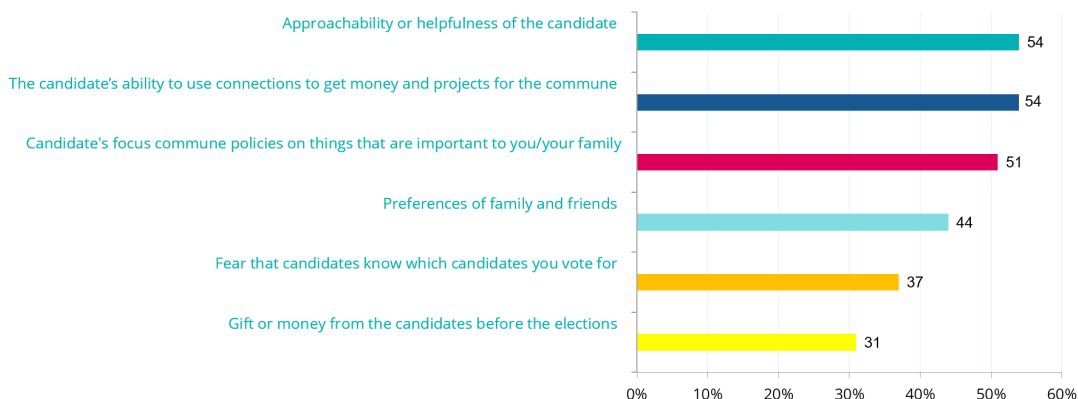


Two Cambodian men sitting on cyclos  
© Jon Tang

could help their community. The majority were most likely to cite the candidates' ability to obtain funding and projects for the commune (54%), their approachability/helpfulness (54%) or whether they will focus on commune policies that will help the respondent and their family (51%).

Interestingly, there were notable differences across regions. Residents of Phnom Penh and Svay Rieng were much less likely to favour a candidates' ability to obtain funding and projects for the commune (38% in both cases). Instead, what seems to drive voter decisions in Phnom Penh and Ratanakiri is fear of the candidate knowing who they have voted for. Concerningly, 43% and 44% respectively cited this as being important in their decision making.

**Figure 5: Reasons to vote for candidates (percent)\***



\*Includes respondents' top two reasons they would vote for particular candidates.

Those aged 18 to 24 were more likely to vote based on the preferences of their family and friends (39% compared to 27% overall), potentially because they are first-time voters.

### Cambodians cite many ways they can contribute to society, but report low levels of participation in societal activities

When asked in what ways they could contribute to society, the most commonly cited responses were respecting the law (91%) and helping others in need (71%). There were no notable differences across gender and age lines, but area of residence did appear to have an influence. People living in Ratanakiri were more likely to feel that actively raising awareness of important issues was one way they could contribute to society (68% compared to 40% overall).

Despite this, very few Cambodians engage in any societal or volunteer activities. Of those that do, they were most likely to

volunteer for a local organisation aimed at helping people in the community (11%). Those who had received no schooling and were of SEC F were more likely to report this (24% and 17% respectively); however, this could be due to the likelihood of these people being beneficiaries of such work. People living in Ratanakiri were much more likely to engage in such activities.

Those whose main information source is the village chief were also more likely to participate in societal or volunteer activities, perhaps reinforcing their role as key influencers.

When asked how the government should allocate money or resources, respondents felt it should be spent on public health (59%), road construction (59%) and education (51%). The recent flooding is likely to aggravate the need for road construction.



A young woman doing a household survey on the health condition of local children in Kratie Province as part of her community work. © Soun Ponleu



# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The following section discusses how Cambodians perceive foreign countries. Respondents were asked to name the countries they perceive as the best partner for Cambodia in the fields of international trade, foreign policy and for the people, meaning for the improvement of human security and culture.

## China is viewed as the best partner for Cambodia

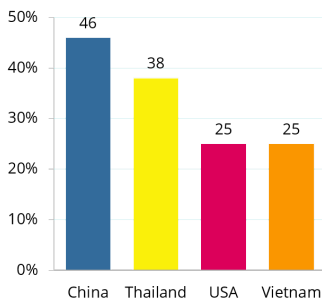
Cambodia and China have enjoyed a long history of strong political relations, forging a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2010. Both countries have committed to undertaking various measures across the domains of politics, security, economics and person-to-person relations. With such a strong reliance on China, both politically and economically, the strength of the Kingdom's diplomatic relations with other world powers such as the USA and the EU have become unclear. Awareness and perceptions of the EU amongst Cambodians will be discussed further in the subsequent section of this report.

In line with this, it is perhaps unsurprising that China was viewed by respondents as the best partner for Cambodia when it comes to trade, foreign diplomacy and people. Japan and the USA, which are the biggest donors of foreign aid to Cambodia after China, also ranked highly.

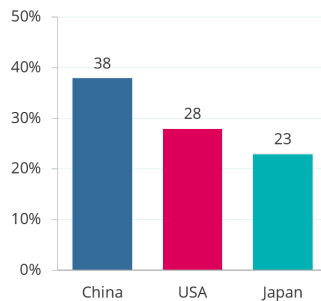


Her Majesty the Queen Mother of Cambodia, Norodom Monineath Sihanouk at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing with H.E. Xi Jinping  
© Office of The Council of Ministers

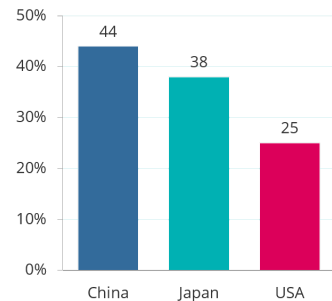
**Figure 6: Cambodia's best partner for trade (percent)**



**Figure 7: Cambodia's best partner for foreign policy (percent)**



**Figure 8: Infrastructure, economy, and public services (percent)**



## Trade

China was most often cited as a good partner for trade, followed by Thailand. Interestingly, women were less likely than men to name China as a good partner; 39% felt it was a good trading partner compared to 53% of men. Women were more likely to think Thailand would be a better option (41%). It should also be noted that 24% of women reported that they did not know (compared to 11% of men and 18% overall).

Those who have received a university education also felt that China makes for a good trading partner (50%) but were also more likely to name the EU (44% compared to 12% overall), the USA (41% compared to 25% overall) and Japan (39% compared to 21% overall).



One notable difference across age groups was that people aged 18 to 24 were more likely to think that Thailand is a good trade partner for Cambodia (47% compared to 38% overall).

Area of residence appears to influence opinions on trade partners. Respondents from Kampong Thom, Koh Kong, and Ratanakiri thought that neighbouring Thailand is the best partner (45%, 42% and 48% respectively, compared to 38% overall) while those in Phnom Penh felt that the USA and Japan would be more suitable partners (35% and 26% respectively, compared to 25% and 21% overall). However, China took the top spot in all groups.

## Foreign policy

Just over a third of respondents (38%) felt that China is a good partner for Cambodia for foreign policy and diplomatic relations.

There were notable differences along gender lines, with women less likely than men to think that China is a good partner (30% compared to 47%). Women were also more likely to say they didn't know (34% compared to 22% of men, and 28% overall).

As with trade partners, those of higher SEC were more likely to point to Japan and the USA; 40% of those in SEC B felt that the USA is the best partner for Cambodia when it comes to foreign policy (compared to 28% overall) and 32% felt Japan is the best partner (compared to 23%). Those in SEC A were still likely to cite China as the best partner (43% compared to 38% overall), followed by Japan (42% compared to 23% overall).

People living in Ratanakiri were likely to point to towards neighbouring Vietnam and Thailand (25% and 24% respectively, compared to 12% and 18% overall), yet the majority (45%) still named China.

## Infrastructure, economy and public services

Just under half of the people surveyed (44%) felt that China is the best partner in terms of infrastructure, the economy and public services. This was followed by Japan (38%) and the USA (25%).

Interestingly, those who felt their life had grown worse over the past five were less likely to think that China is a good partner for Cambodia in all areas: trade, diplomacy and people.



Shinzo Abe with His Majesty King Norodom Sihamoni  
© Website of the Prime Minister of Japan

## Travel outside Cambodia is limited

Eighty percent of Cambodians have not travelled outside of Cambodia and only 1% have ever left Asia.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those with a better education, of higher SEC, and who are unmarried were more likely to have left the country.

Findings do not indicate what their reasons for travelling were and it is possible that some journeys within Asia can be explained by migration for work purposes.



Secretary Kerry addresses Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen  
© US Embassy Phnom Penh

# THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

The following section discusses awareness and perceptions of the EU.

When asked what thoughts the word “Europe” evokes, the most commonly cited by respondents were “developed economy” and “progress across all sectors”.

Cambodians look favourably upon the relationship with the EU, although awareness was limited: 44% said they had heard of the EU while 56% had not. This was skewed along gender lines, with men more likely to be aware of the EU (54%) than women (34%). There were no notable differences across age groups, yet unsurprisingly those with a better education and of higher SEC showed greater awareness.

Of those who were aware of the EU, the overwhelming majority (81%) felt it was a good partner for Cambodia. Again, men felt this more acutely than women (87% compared to 82%). Women also showed more ambiguity, with 27% saying they did not know whether it was a good partner or not (compared to 8% of men). There were notable differences across provinces, with those in Phnom Penh likely to speak more favourably of the EU (94%) than those in Kampong Thom (67%), for example.

Interestingly, those who feel life in general is getting better are more likely to have heard of the EU (50%) compared to those who think it is becoming worse (38%).

Two-thirds (67%) of Cambodians feel positive about the relationship between Cambodia and the EU while a third (29%) said they did not know. Men felt more positively about this relationship than women.

In line with these positive sentiments, two-thirds (67%) of respondents feel the EU evokes a positive image.

## Areas of partnership are in line with key issues of importance

The majority of respondents felt that Cambodia and the EU should partner on economic and financial sectors (74%), followed by education (59%) and health (56%), in line with their overall priorities and concerns.

There were some differences across age groups, with younger people (aged 18 to 24) more likely to cite education (71%) and older groups (those aged 45 to 54, and 55 to 64) favouring partnership in the social and cultural sectors (56% and 51% respectively, compared to 44% overall).

Just under two-thirds (61%) of Cambodians feel that Cambodia gets as much attention and respect from the EU as other Asian countries, with a third (32%) saying they didn't know.

## Few understand “Everything but Arms”

The EU's ‘Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP)’ allows developing countries to benefit from paying fewer or no duties on exports to the EU, giving them greater access to the European market and contributing to their growth. Everything but Arms (EBA) is one arm of the GSP and allows for duty- and quota-free access to the European Single Market for all products except for ammunition and arms. Of Cambodia's total exports, 98% were eligible for EBA duties (European Commission, 2020). As such, EBA trade preferences have been an economic boost for Cambodia, fueling exports to the European Single Market, contributing to the countries' steady economic growth and aiding in alleviating poverty (KAS Cambodia, 2020).

The partial withdrawal of the EBA means that tariffs are set to return, and many factories have already begun the process of relocating to other countries. Concerningly, an estimated two million Cambodians depend on the textile industry, yet less than under half of all respondents (43%) had heard of the EBA, with even fewer understanding its meaning (16%). Of those who claimed to understand what it means, around two-thirds referenced either ‘tax exemption’ or ‘tax related to the import and export of goods’.

Almost all (96%) of those who had heard of the EBA felt that it was important for Cambodia's economic growth, and there were no significant differences when looking across demographics. \*

\* It should be noted that the base sizes for these breaks are small, for example across age groups the total sample size is under 50.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study shows that the major issues that concerned Cambodians in October 2020 were, unsurprisingly, flooding, COVID-19 and the difficult economic situation. All three were urgent issues that had direct impact on peoples' lives at that time. Other issues which were named were peace and security, health services, corruption and land rights.

## Media

Many Cambodians, particularly younger ones, are turning to social media for news about current affairs. However, TV remains popular and a third of respondents still rely on receiving news via word of mouth. With word of mouth still an important factor, an interesting avenue to explore in future research would be to analyze how often and with whom Cambodians discuss politics and current affairs. A further area of enquiry could look at levels of trust in both online and offline sources of information, particularly in the wake of COVID-19 and the emergence of fake news. Further research could also probe the types of information consumed relating to current affairs, and for example, whether this is local or international news and what platforms are used.

## Political participation

Cambodians feel strongly they are likely to vote in the next general election but remain apathetic towards politics in general. While this study has shown that many Cambodians feel there are different ways in which they can contribute to society, few are actually engaged. Further research could seek to explore the barriers, and enablers, to such participation. Voting is influenced by the approachability of candidates, their ability to obtain funding for the commune, and their focus on direct and local action. Notable differences between genders show that women are less engaged in political issues than men. Candidates for political office are measured primarily on their ability to provide direct economic advancement to their communities or even direct handouts. This is mirrored on a larger scale in Cambodia's foreign relations; these are not measured on political convictions but rather bluntly on the ability to provide economic opportunities. Respondents from Ratanakiri diverged markedly from those in other regions on issues related to civic engagement and so future research could unpack these differences.

The study clearly points towards the notion that young people are slightly more oriented towards progressive policies and view Cambodia's development more favourably. However, it would be interesting to explore differences between those age groups at a more discrete level.

## International partners

Cambodians point to China as the best foreign partner for their country across a range of issues, yet also ranked Japan, Thailand and the USA highly. Most have little to no knowledge about the EU. Those that do have a positive view of their countries' relationship with the EU, evoking notions of better employment opportunities, economic prosperity, better access to education, and equal opportunities for women.

While many can articulate their views on the best foreign partner for Cambodia, it is unclear from this research how much exposure people in Cambodia have to other countries. Many Cambodians have not travelled outside of the country (80%) or region (19%), yet internet and social media penetration continues to grow, which suggests that there is indeed exposure to other countries, at least via the media. Further research could look at what influences opinions on international partnership, for example media exposure, government messaging or affiliation to international NGOs in the community.

This study demonstrates that Cambodians in 2020 were preoccupied with the acute crises of COVID-19 and its implications. It becomes evident that preserving their current status quo was the most important for Cambodian people. They see a possibility of improving their personal situation through education and economic success and would support government actions which would have a direct positive impact on themselves and their immediate environment, such as public spending in infrastructure, health and education.

# APPENDIX 1 - METHODOLOGY

## Desk research

An extensive review of existing literature was conducted to understand the political and societal issues currently facing Cambodia. This literature review informed the design of the questionnaire. A further review was conducted prior to the analysis of the data in order to ground the findings in the current research landscape.

Key reports from the World Bank and the International Labour Organization were consulted, as well as reliable news sources to provide a foundation to the findings.

## Household survey and sampling strategy

The study employed a nationally representative quantitative survey which interviewed 1,015 respondents across five geographical regions: Phnom Penh, Plain, Mountain, Tonle Sap and Coastal region. The study surveyed the general population aged 18 to 64, using a stratified multi-stage sampling approach. This demographic was identified as the most relevant to meet the objectives of this study as it is active in the labour force and eligible to vote in the national elections.

Within each household two respondents were interviewed:

- Head of household (or spouse of household head) – in order to gather basic information about the household members.
- Randomly selected respondents – using a Kish Grid for true random selection of a respondent from each selected household for this survey.

## Sample provinces

In total, there are 25 provinces in Cambodia. All provinces are officially grouped into five regions including Phnom Penh, Plain, Mountain, Tonle Sap and Coastal region.

To ensure national representation across all five regions, one province per region was targeted for the study as follows:

- Phnom Penh (Phnom Penh)
- Svay Rieng (Plain region)
- Ratanakiri (Mountain region)
- Kampong Thom (Tonle Sap region)
- Koh Kong (Coastal region)

The selected provinces were chosen due to their similarities in terms of socioeconomics and living conditions with other provinces within their respective region, and can be deemed representative of their individual region.

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\* A Kish Grid is a method used for randomly selecting household survey respondents

# APPENDIX 1 - METHODOLOGY (CONT.)

## Sample size

The sample size for this survey was designed for national representation of the adult population aged 18 to 64. Based on the 2016 national commune database, the total population of Cambodia aged 18 to 64 is 9,914,087 (65%) out of a total population of 15,247,407.

For national representation, a total sample size of 1,015 was achieved with a confidence level of 95% and a 3% margin of error. Table 1 indicates the total sample size by age and gender, and table 2 depicts the required sample size.

**Table 1: Total population aged between 18 and 64 years old** (source: 2016 national commune database)      **Table 2: Sample distribution by province**

Region	Males aged 18-64	Females aged 18-64
Phnom Penh	466,388	539,148
Plain	1,903,287	2,023,179
Mountain	549,333	569,422
Tonle Sap	1,562,244	1,626,898
Coastal	327,907	346,282
Subtotal	4,809,159	5,104,929
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,914,088</b>	

Regions	Name of the province	Males	Females	Total sample
Phnom Penh	Phnom Penh	101	100	201
Plain	Svay Rieng	102	104	206
Mountain	Ratanakiri	96	107	203
Tonle Sap	Kampong Thom	102	100	202
Coastal	Koh Kong	98	105	203
<b>Total</b>				<b>1015</b>

Source: 2016 National Commune Database

# APPENDIX 2 - STUDY LIMITATIONS

As with all face-to-face survey methodologies there is a risk that the presence of an interviewer (as opposed to a self-administered questionnaire) may have an impact on respondents' answers, causing them to provide what they perceive to be more 'socially desirable' responses. In order to mitigate this impact, the following steps were taken:

- Well-trained and experienced interviewers were utilised, who underwent specific project training.
- During the interview, respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their answers, were not required to give a full name (a first name or nickname was acceptable) and were informed of their right to refuse to answer any questions.

## APPENDIX 3 - STUDY SAMPLE

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of study sample

Respondent demographics		% of total sample*
Gender	Male	49%
	Female	51%
Age	18-24	15%
	25-34	30%
	35-44	25%
	45-54	16%
	55-64	15%
Provinces	Phnom Penh	20%
	Plain region (Svay Rieng)	20%
	Mountain region (Ratanakiri)	20%
	Tonle Sap region (Kampong Thom)	20%
	Coastal region (Koh Kong)	20%
Education	No schooling (illiterate - cannot read nor write)	8%
	No schooling (literate)	2%
	Primary school	36%
	Secondary school	30%
	High school	18%
	University	7%
Socio-economic class (based on monthly household income)	SEC A (801 to more than 2,000 USD)	7%
	SEC B (401 to 800 USD)	20%
	SEC C (301 to 400 USD)	13%
	SEC D (201 to 300 USD)	23%
	SEC E (101 to 200 USD)	22%
	SEC F (Less than 50 to 100 USD)	15%

\* Some percentages amount to 101% owing to rounding.



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Two Cambodian men sitting on cyclo by Jon Tang, from <https://unsplash.com/photos/qyf115CV8IM>

A young woman doing a household survey on the health condition of local kids in Kratie Province as part of her community work by Soun Ponleu.

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