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**MONGOLIAN
INSTITUTE FOR
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POLICIES**

YOUNG MONGOLIANS AND THE WORLD IN 2021

(National Opinion Poll Results)

Ulaanbaatar 2021



FOREIGN POLICIES & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THROUGH THE EYES OF
YOUNG MONGOLIANS.

This survey was conducted by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in partnership with the Mongolian Institute for Innovative Policies. The contents of this publication should not be construed as reflecting the views of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the Mongolian Institute for Innovative Policies.

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FOREIGN POLICIES & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THROUGH THE EYES OF YOUNG MONGOLIANS.

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INTRODUCTION

There have been no prior surveys in Mongolia specifically focused on the youth's views and the public perception of international relations, Mongolian foreign policies and other countries. For instance, other research organizations and institutes have conducted surveys on the public perception on social and political issues by only in relation to Russia, China, and Mongolia's "third neighbours". However, these are limited in their ability to conduct in-depth research on public perception, specifically on youth perceptions on particular issues of international relations and foreign policies as they include a wide range of social, economic and political issues.

Decisions on Mongolian foreign policy issues and policy discussions are typically formulated based on the views of policymakers, while taking into account the views of Mongolian scholars, researchers and experts in relevant fields. However, they often do not consider the public opinion and in particular, Mongolian youth, who are rhetorically addressed as the "future of the nation", in how they assess international relations and global affairs, and their position of what the government should take on foreign policy. Yet, in the domestic sphere, public opinion and especially the participation of the general public and interest groups have a significant impact on the foreign policy decisions of any democratic country. There are also currently no adequate sample surveys of youth in Mongolia examining where and

how they receive information about the outside world, and how they value and rank foreign countries, languages, and cultures.

Therefore, the Mongolian Institute for Innovative Policies, with the generous support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung of Germany, conducted this survey and published the results in an effort to clarify the perceptions, values, knowledge, level of information, and stances on the issues of international relations, Mongolian foreign policy, and views on other countries of Mongolian youths between 18-35 year old. The survey was conducted in Ulaanbaatar city, Erdenet city, Tuv aimag, and Bulgan aimag between September-October 2021. A total of 1,809 people participated in the survey based on random sampling. In addition, a focus group discussion of 11 people was conducted during the study.

EIGHT KEY FINDINGS

1. Eighty percent of survey respondents are somewhat interested in international news and global affairs. This general interest should form the basis in defining future Mongolian foreign policies and reveals the general perception of international relations among Mongolian youth.
2. Among the survey respondents, sixty-eight percent said Mongolia belongs to Central Asia. It is interesting to note that the youth consider it so based on geographic proximity and historical, cultural similarities regardless of the fact that more Mongolians live and work in the Northeast Asian countries.
3. When researching on general opinions about other countries, more than 80 percent of respondents have positive views towards South Korea, Russia, Japan and the USA, while 44 percent of respondents have negative views towards China. When asked to clarify their perceptions about the future of the two world powers - China and the USA - more than half of respondents said that China would become the biggest economy in the world, and have an important role in solving global issues whereas 38 percent of respondents said that the influence of the USA would grow.
4. In regards to Mongolian foreign policy, attracting and sustaining foreign direct investments and diversifying foreign trade are the most important two matters to keep in mind. The youth believe that Mongolia, which is heavily dependent on its mining sector, has potential to develop fast if it uses its windfalls from natural resources properly.
5. Soft power projections from foreign countries through music, films and arts have notable impacts on Mongolian youth. It is common for youths to keep up to date on UK, US and Korean movies, music and learn their languages.
6. Forty-two percent of respondents said that activities of religious institutions need to be under strict monitoring. While there is freedom of religion, such views might be related to the social opposition towards religious institutions that have been banned elsewhere internationally but continue to operate in Mongolia.
7. It is found that youth have less knowledge and information about global and regional organizations on security cooperation. Fifty-three percent of respondents said they do not know whether or not Mongolia should join the Shanghai Cooperation of Organization.
8. However, there were not any undecided-

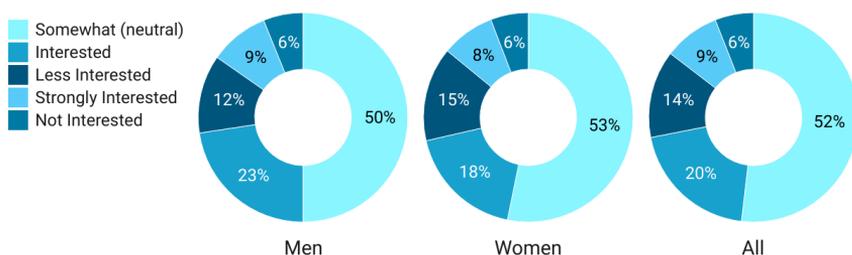
ed responses about the participation of Mongolian Armed Force in peacekeeping operations, and 77 percent respondents said that Mongolia needs to expand its peacekeeping operations abroad.

CHAPTER ONE: Are youth interested in foreign policy and international relations?

We find that Mongolian youth are quite interested in international news and foreign affairs. One out of three respondents said that they are “interested” in international news whereas half of them say “somewhat or neutral” to the same question. However,

6 percent and 14 percent of them said “not interested” and “less interested,” respectively. There is not a significant difference in the responses when considering gender, but a slightly higher number of men said “interested” than women (Figure 1).

Figure 1: How interested are you in international news?

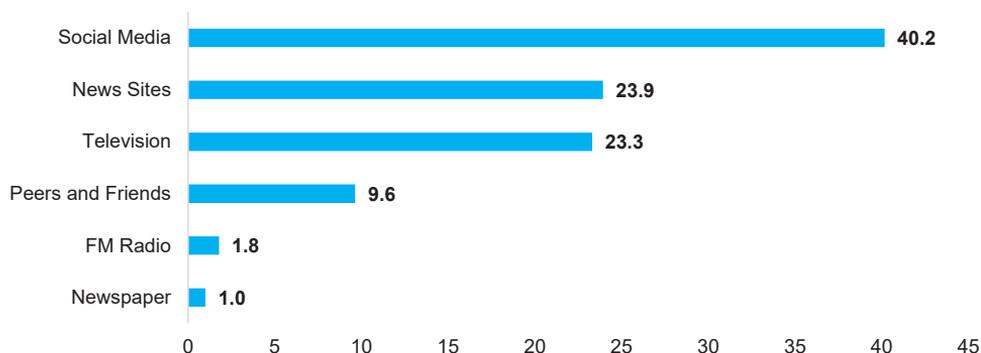


Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

The majority of youth surveyed, or 40.2 percent, get the information of international events and foreign news through mostly social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Television and news sites are still considered

the main sources of information for youth, whereas radio, newspapers, and word of mouth are not considered the main sources (Figure 2).

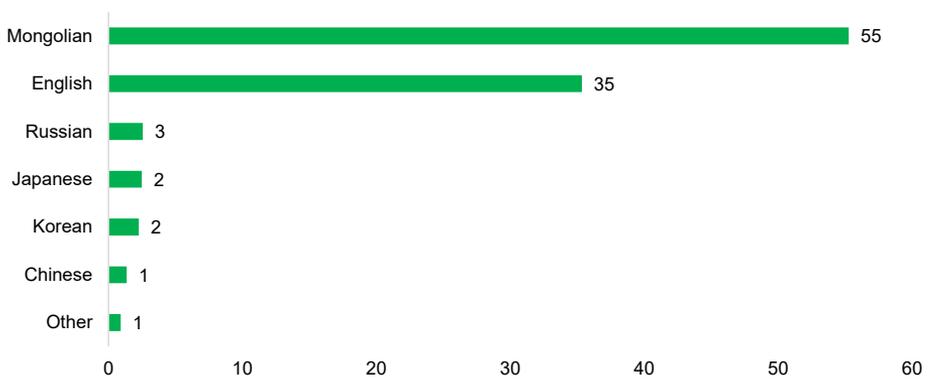
Figure 2: What sources do you mostly use for international news? (%)



Fifty-five percent of youth receive international news mostly in the Mongolian language while 35 percent receive them mostly in the English language. This shows

that the usage of English among youth is high. Conversely, the results of the survey show that the usage of other languages is quite low (Figure 3).

Figure 3: What language do you use for international news? (%)

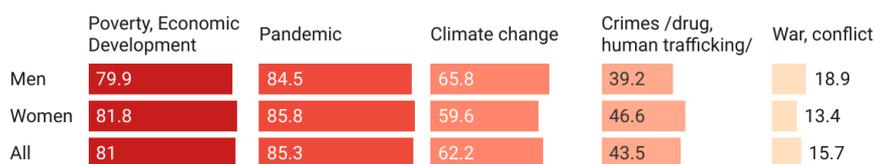


CHAPTER TWO: What do youth say about global challenges and other countries?

From the list of global issues, youth who took part in the survey gave priority to the pandemic, poverty and economic development. Undoubtedly, the current pandemic situation has contributed to this ranking. About 60 percent of respondents see climate change as a global issue, while about 40 percent see transnational crimes (drug and human trafficking) as the next global

issue. It is found that more male respondents focused on climate change whereas more female respondents focused on crime. However, the respondents have not considered wars and conflicts significantly as Mongolia is situated in a relatively peaceful region with relatively few armed conflicts and among the world's great powers (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Global issues (%)



Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

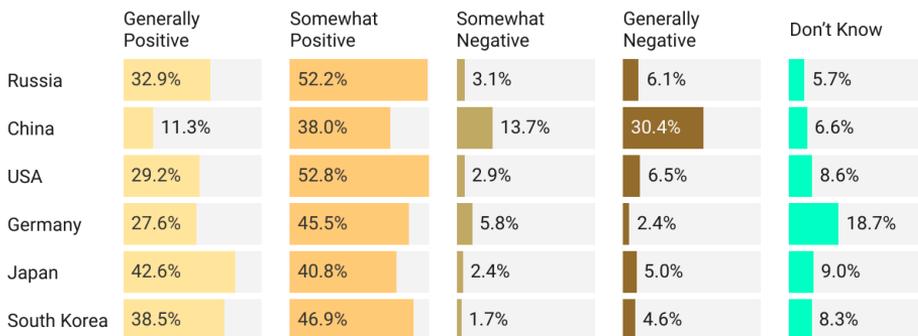


Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

According to the survey on perceptions of other countries in the world, the vast majority of youth, more than 80 percent of respondents, chose as South Korea (86), Russia (85), Japan (84), and the United States (82) as being positive. Only 49.3 percent had positive views towards China. In other words, 44.1 percent of youth have negative views towards China, which is higher than that of other countries. Among Asian countries, Japan and South Korea have the most positive views (Figure 5).

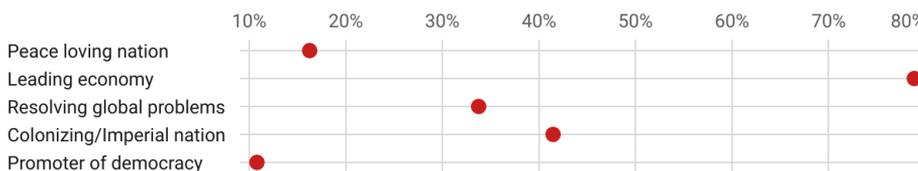
When asked about the future of the two most influential countries in the world from the above countries, 76 percent of youth agreed that China would be the world's leading economy, but interestingly a significant proportion of those surveyed said China would be a colonizing/imperial nation. On the other hand, a small number said that China would have an important role to play in resolving global challenges. However, only a small percentage believe that China would be a peace-loving nation in the future (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Views about the following countries



Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 6: Perceptions of the future role of China

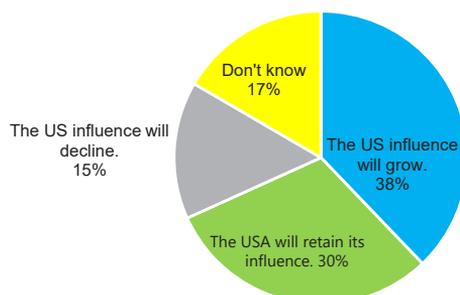


Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

When looking at youth perceptions on the future of the United States in international relations, 38 percent of respondents said the country's influence would increase in

the future while 30 percent said the USA would retain its influence. However, 15 percent said the US influence would decrease (Figure 7).

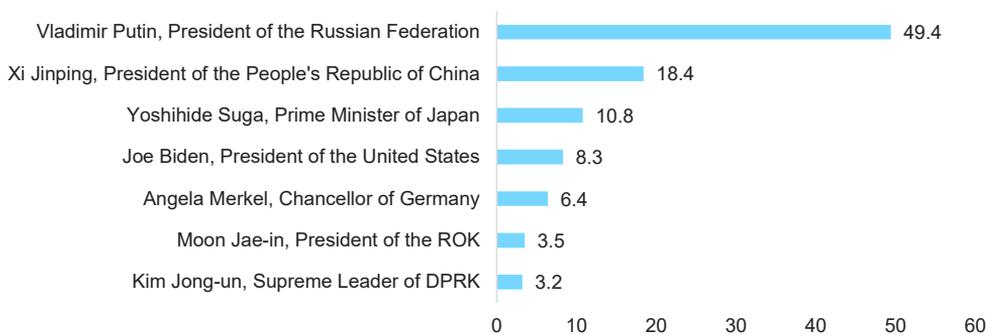
Figure 7: The USA's influence in the future



Youth consider Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation and Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China to be leaders, who lead their countries well. During the focus group discussion, the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel was also named a good

leader, which is also a sign that gender bias is unlikely to be a factor. Mongolian youth also point out that different governance approaches affect their respective international positions and socio-economic situations (Figure 8).

Figure 8: In your opinion, from the following leaders, who is leading one's respective country well? (%)



As for international organizations, almost all youth know about the United Nations while most know about the European Union. However, the majority of them do not know about the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Organization for Se-

curity and Cooperation in Europe. Regardless of tertiary, vocational, or secondary education, responses to international organizations that youth provided are similar (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Do you know about these international organizations?



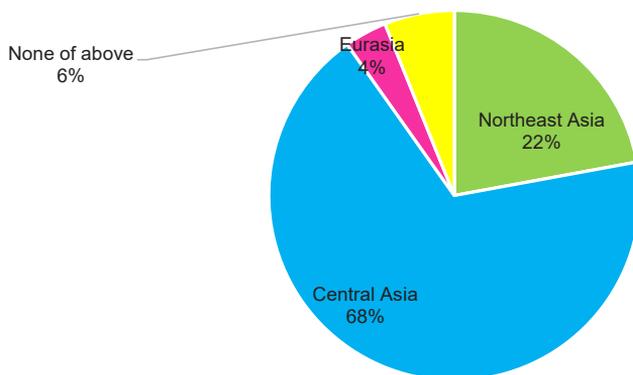
Source: MIFIP • Created with Datawrapper

CHAPTER THREE: Mongolian foreign policies and youth opinion

When asked to which region Mongolia belongs, 68 percent of the youth surveyed said that Mongolia belongs to the Central Asian region while 22 percent said that it belongs to the Northeast Asian region. The summary of these answers is about 90 percent (Figure 10). Although many Mon-

golians live and work in Northeast Asian countries, the youth in the focus group discussions emphasized that Mongolia belongs to the Central Asian region in terms of geographical proximity and historical and cultural similarities.

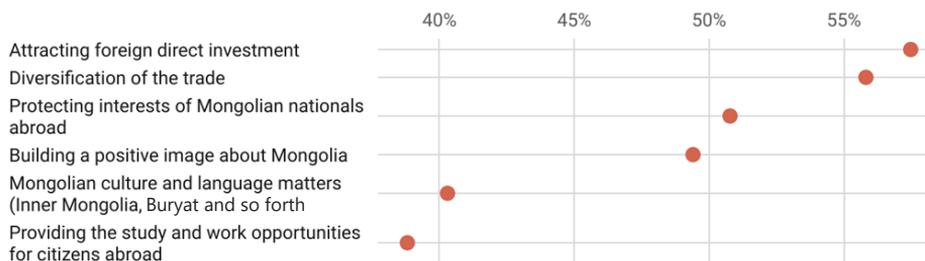
Figure 10: In your opinion, which region does Mongolia belong to?



Youth think that the three most important issues of Mongolia's foreign policy are, first, to attract foreign direct investment, second, to diversify trade, and third, to protect the interests of Mongolian nationals abroad (Figure 11). As a country rich in

mineral resources, the respondents from the focus group emphasize that it won't be difficult for Mongolia to develop if it can attract and sustain foreign investment and use the gains from its natural resources properly.

Figure 11: The most important issues for Mongolian foreign policy



Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

In terms of the current biggest foreign threats to Mongolia, 87 percent of respondents named the loss of economic independence, 60 percent named concerns about the pandemic, and 55 percent said influence of foreign culture and religion.

Youth are paying more attention to foreign cyber-attacks than the threat of military invasion. This shows that youth are more concerned about economic, cultural and cyber threats (Figure 12, 13).

Figure 12: The biggest foreign threat to Mongolia (%)

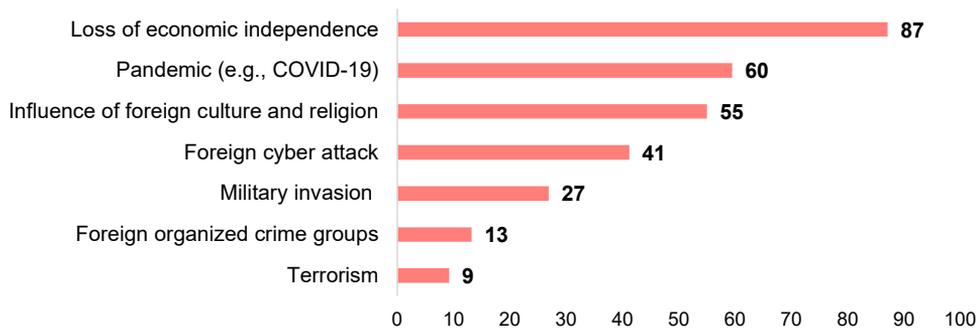
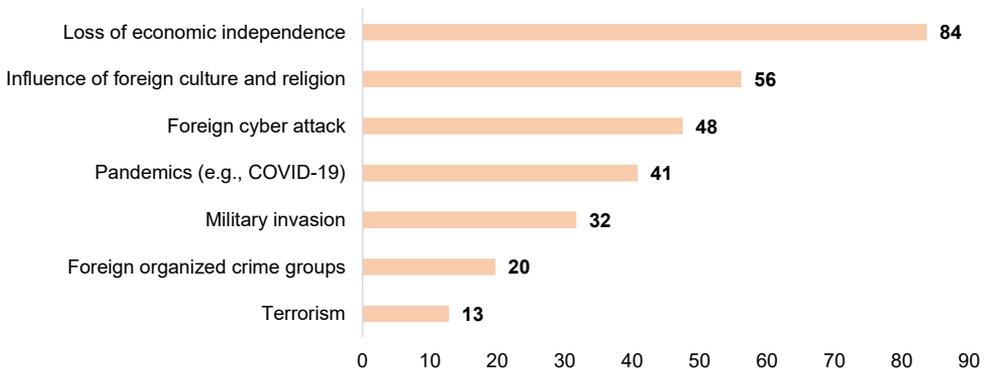


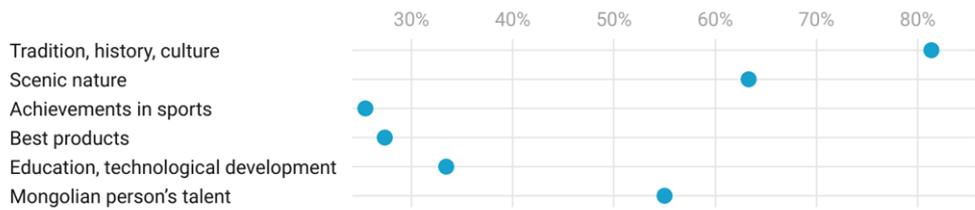
Figure 13: The biggest foreign threat to Mongolia in the next 10 years (%)



The majority of respondents believe that the best way for Mongolia to present itself on the international stage is to promote its national traditions, history and culture as well as its scenic nature. In addition, about 55 percent of the respondents said that the personal talents of Mongolians should

be shown (Figure 14). In particular, the focus group participants expressed confidence that Mongolian youth would be able to demonstrate their skills to the world if provided with the opportunities and conditions.

Figure 14: In your opinion, what is the most significant feature to present Mongolia in the international stage?

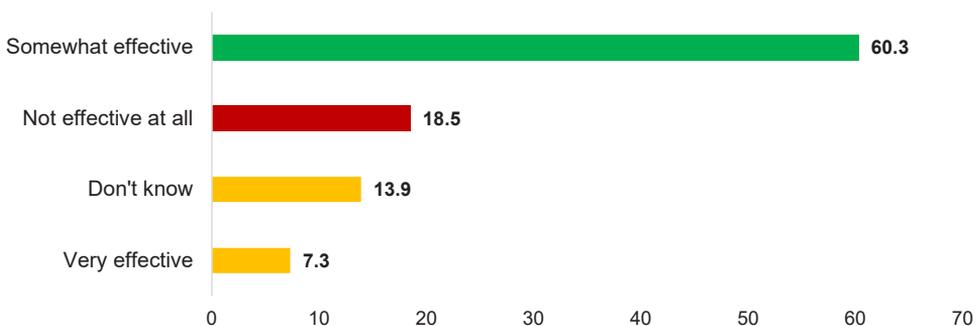


Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

18.5 percent of the respondents said that the official visits of Mongolian heads of state and government abroad were ineffective, 60.3 percent said that they were effective in some ways, and only 7.3 percent said that they were very effective. This

suggests that the goals and outcomes of the official visits by heads of the state and government need to be publicly understood, especially among youth. 13.9 percent of respondents could not answer this question (Figure 15).

Figure 15: How do you rate the Mongolian presidents' and prime ministers' official visits abroad? (%)



Youth believe that Russia and China have assisted Mongolia the most to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This shows that youth have little information about the support provided by Japan, the United States, the European Union or third neighbours in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 16). As for international

organizations, youth emphasize that the World Health Organization is more helpful, which may be due to the fact that its activities are more widely covered in the media (Figure 17).

Figure 16: In your opinion, which country has assisted Mongolia the most to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic? (%)

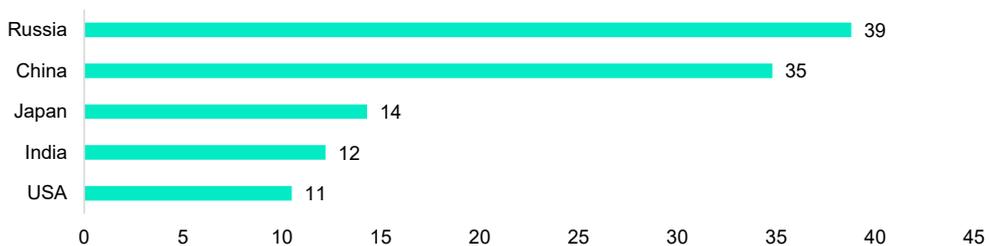
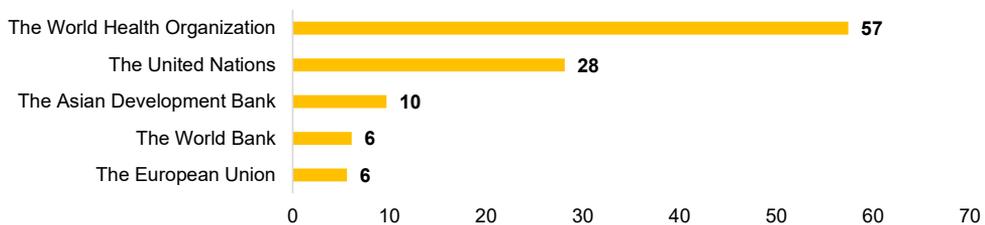


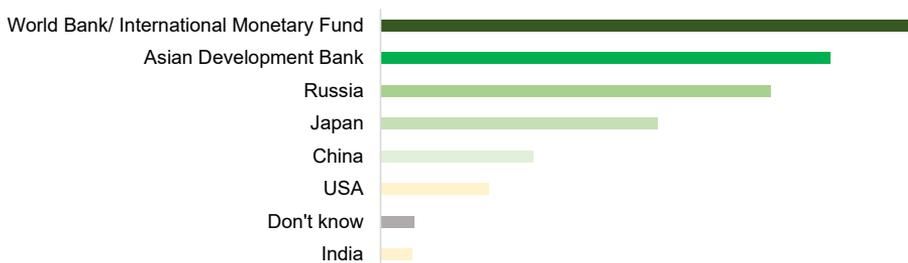
Figure 17: In your opinion, which international organization has assisted Mongolia the most to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic? (%)



Mongolia's economy is heavily dependent on foreign investment and assistance. Youth said it would be better to get more loans and assistance from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the

Asian Development Bank. However, for loans and assistance from countries, they believe that Mongolia should more rely on Russia and Japan (Figure 18).

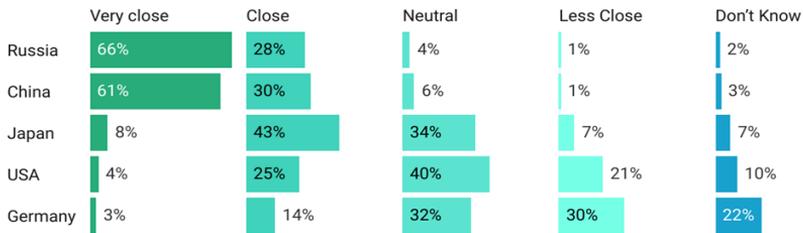
Figure 18: From whom should Mongolia receive most of its loans and assistance for the security implications? (%)



When asked about how they felt about their neighbouring countries, about 90 percent of youth surveyed said that China and Russia are close allies of Mongolia, and about 60 percent believe that the two countries have great influences on Mongo-

lia's future. Youth see the USA, Japan and Germany as neutral partners in international relations, but they believe the USA and Japan have big influences on Mongolia's future. (Figure 19, 20).

Figure 19: In your opinion, which country is Mongolia's closest ally?



Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 20: In your opinion, how much influence do these countries have on Mongolia's future?



Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

Mongolian youth most frequently indicated China as a “country should be cautious about”, which is juxtaposed by the view of the country also as an “economic opportunity”, followed by the views of it being an “old partner” and a “development model”.

(Figure 21). In the case of Russia, it is most frequently viewed as a an “economic opportunity”, followed closely by it being an “old partner”, as well as being a “development model”. (Figure 22).

Figure 21: How do you view China? (%)

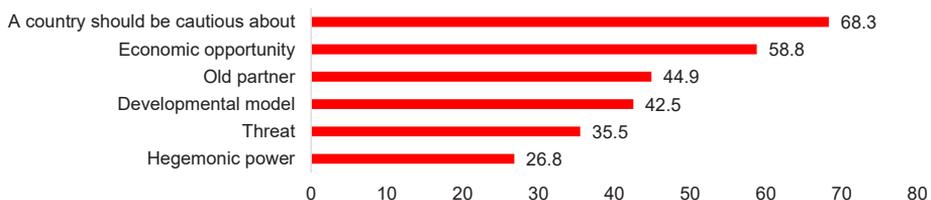
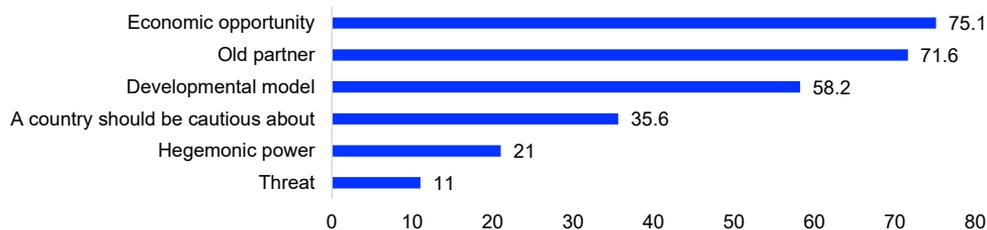


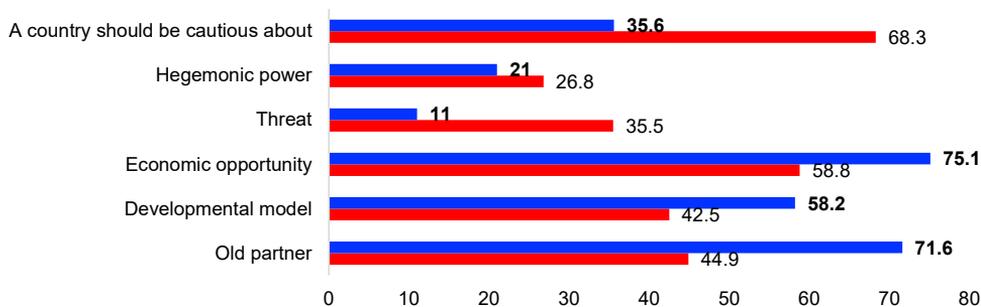
Figure 22: How do you view Russia? (%)



Comparing the answers about the two neighbours, the implication we found is interesting. While Russia was seen as an old partner, economic opportunity, and model

of development, respondents chose China as a country should be cautious about, a threat and a hegemonic power (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Views on two neighbour countries (%)



We asked youth about their views on a few foreign policy issues. While 28 percent of respondents agreed that it is not necessary to invite the Dalai Lama as Mongolia faces economic losses due to his visits, 32 percent of them opposed it. However, 40 percent said they did not know.

Thirty percent of the total respondents agree with the statement that Russia opposes to building a hydroelectric power

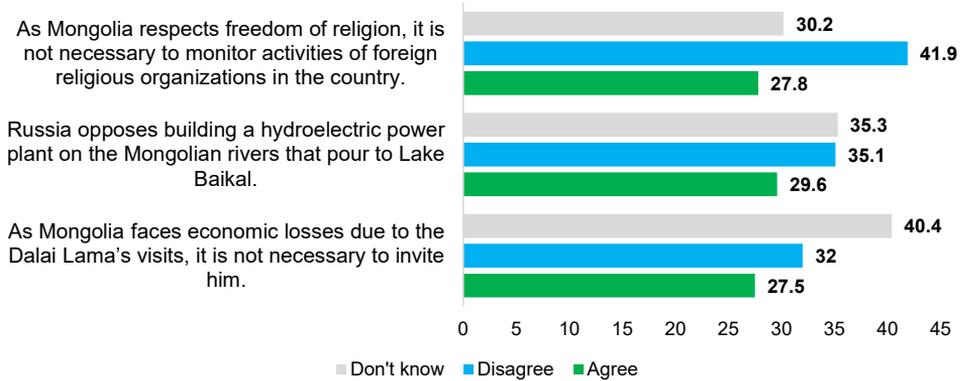
plant on the Mongolian river that flows into Lake Baikal. On the other hand, 35 percent disagree with it and one-third of them say they don't know.

Twenty-eight percent of the youth surveyed support the statement that it is not necessary to monitor activities of foreign religious organizations in Mongolia because the country respects freedom of religion, while 42 percent disagree and think

it needs to be under strict control. The rest of the respondents (30%) said they did not know about the statement. It can be concluded that one third of the youth par-

ticipated in the survey lack understanding and interest in specific foreign policy issues (Figure 24).

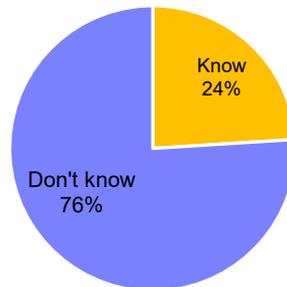
Figure 24: Do you agree with the following statements? (%)



In an effort to assess knowledge of economic relations, in particular free trade agreements, youth were asked about the following question. Seventy-six percent of

respondents did not know that Mongolia had ratified a free trade agreement with Japan whereas only 24 percent said they knew of the agreement (Figure 25).

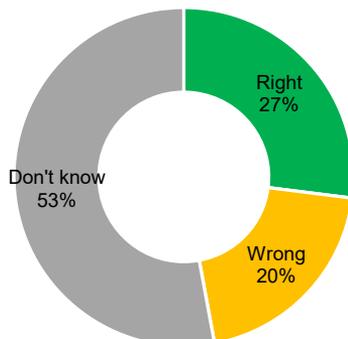
Figure 25: Do you know that Mongolia has ratified a free trade agreement with Japan?



When asked about Mongolia's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is one of the most controversial issues for policy makers, decision-makers, security and foreign policy

researchers, 53 percent of youth surveyed said they did not know. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents said it was right to join, while 20 percent said it was wrong and did not need to join (Figure 26).

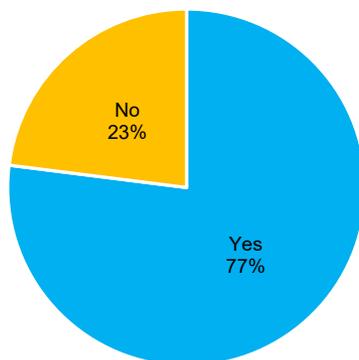
Figure 26: Is it right for Mongolia to become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organizations?



Seventy-seven percent of the total respondents agreed that the participation of the Mongolian Armed Forces in peacekeeping operations should be increased. No one answered as “don’t know” in this question (Figure 27). Since the vast majority of re-

spondents are in favor of participating in peacekeeping operations, it is possible to ask more detailed questions in the next survey by differentiating between the UN and other military alliances and state-sponsored military operations.

Figure 27: In your opinion, does Mongolia need to expand its peacekeeping participation?



CHAPTER FOUR: Soft power policy and the new generation

In modern international relations, the pursuit of soft power policies has become more widespread and relevant. Countries' policies of soft power have been implemented through their languages, religions, cultures, education, national values and foreign policy leadership. There are quite interesting findings when we surveyed the impact of soft power from foreign actors on Mongolian youth.

The Mongolian youth surveyed wanted to study in America, Japan and South Korea the most. In terms of gender, women are more interested in studying in South Korea (Figure 28). The majority of the respon-

dents mention the United States, South Korea and Japan, where many Mongolians live and work, which may be related to the notion that these countries have more opportunities to work while studying. The focus group discussions show that youth placed a high value on having relatives, friends, and family members who can help them in the countries they choose to study abroad. In addition, some of the focus group respondents said that they could easily "settle down" because of their previous experience working and living in the above-mentioned countries, especially South Korea.

Figure 28: If you get a chance to study abroad, which two countries would you choose to study?

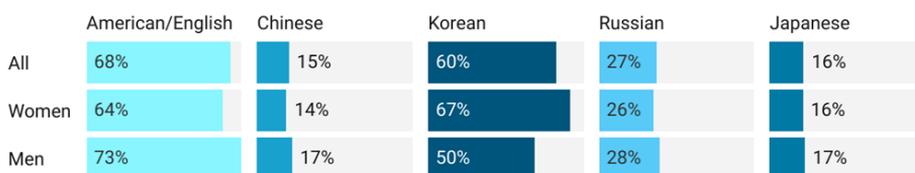


Source: MIFIP • Created with Datawrapper

Youth are mostly interested in American/English and Korean movies and TV content. While the popularity of American/En-

glish media is slightly more popular overall, women, in particular, prefer Korean movies (Figure 29).

Figure 29: Which two countries' movies and TV content do you like to watch?

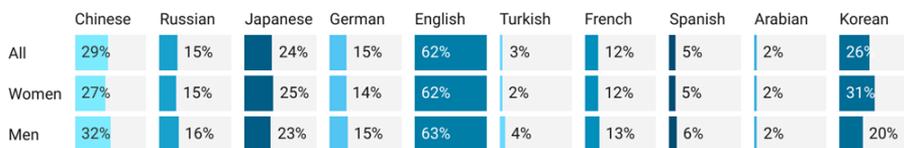


Source: MIFIP • Created with Datawrapper

Sixty-two percent of the young people surveyed were interested in learning English, 29 percent were interested in learning Chinese, and 26 percent were interested in learning Korean (Figure 30). The popularity of English among youth in Mongolia correlates with the status of English as a global language and the youth's high interest in learning and working in the West, while interest in Chinese correlates with China's importance as Mongolia's neighbour. The desire to learn Korean, meanwhile, correlates with the high cultural attraction towards South Korea, as demonstrated

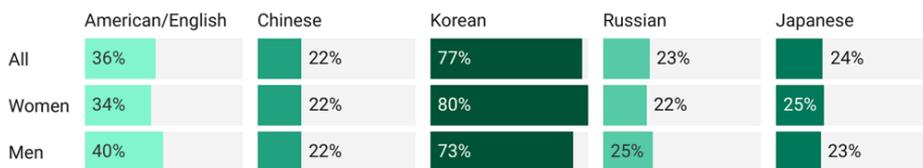
by the high popularity of its movies and TV, foods, as well as music, where Korean foods, in particular, are the most popular international cuisine for the young people surveyed. There is also a gender dimension of the greater popularity of these Korean cultural products amongst women. These trends are thus signs of the success of South Korean soft power policy through culture and arts. Nevertheless, Anglosphere or American soft power still remains prevalent in the dimension of movies and TV content, as well as in music (Figure 29, 31-32).

Figure 30: If you get an opportunity to learn any foreign language, what two languages would you choose to learn?



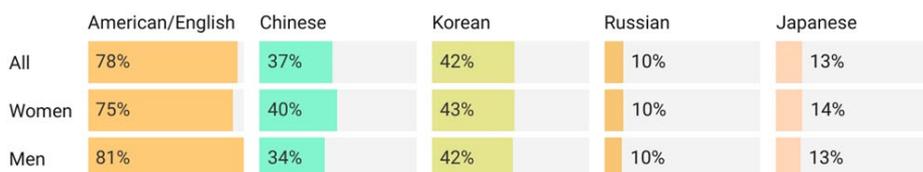
Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 31: What are your two favorite cuisines?



Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 32: Which two countries' music do you like to listen to?



Source: MifIP • Created with Datawrapper

CONCLUSION

- The survey shows that Mongolian youth are quite interested in foreign news and international relations. One-third of young people said they were “very interested” in foreign news, while about half said they were only occasionally interested. Only about 20 percent of the respondents are not interested in foreign news.
- The majority of these young people, or 40.2 percent, receive news of foreign events through social media, with 55 percent of them mostly in Mongolian, and 35 percent mostly in English.
- In the eyes of Mongolian youth, the current top challenges facing the world are the pandemic, poverty and economic development. In the case of Mongolia, economic dependence on foreign countries is the biggest security risk. However, Mongolian youth do not pay attention to war and conflict.
- The focus group discussions indicate that the mindsets of children and youth are hugely influenced by foreign languages, civilizational culture, and religions through the impact of globalization and the huge flows of information, which can be a major risk to the country’s future.
- Ideological and cultural influences through foreign music and films have a significant impact on the minds of young people. For instance, the majority of the respondents enjoy watching Western and Korean movies, listening to English/American, Korean, and Chinese music, enjoying Korean food the most, and they are interested living and studying in these countries.
- When studying youth’s perceptions of foreign countries, they have a positive view towards South Korea, Russia, Japan and the United States, and negative views towards China. When asked about the future roles of the two world powers, 76 percent said China was the world’s leading economy and, in the future, China might become a resolver of global challenges and imperial nation. On the other hand, in terms of the future role of the United States, 38 percent said “US influence will increase in the future,” 30 percent said “influence will remain,” and 15 percent said “US influence will decrease.”
- Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation and Xi Jinping, the President of the People’s Republic of China were named as the best leaders in the poll, while Angela Merkel, former German Chancellor was named as the best leader in the focus group discussion.
- Mongolia’s foreign policy should focus on attracting and sustaining foreign investment and diversifying foreign

trade. As a country with a mining-based economy, the youth believe that if Mongolia can properly utilize its natural resource endowments, the country can develop rapidly.

- In the survey of young people about neighbouring countries, about 90 percent said that Russia and China are Mongolia's closest allies. The geographical location of our country may have influenced this answer. However, the study shows that other countries, such as Japan, the United States, and Germany, will have a significant impact on Mongolia's future.
- For Mongolian youth, China is seen as a "country we should be cautious about" and an "economic opportunity", while Russia is seen as an "economic opportunity" and an "old partner". Comparing the responses our about two neighbours, China is seen as "a country we should be cautious about" and a "threat" whereas Russia is seen as an "old partner" and an "economic opportunity". However, it is noted that over-dependence on Russia for fuel prices has created a negative perception of Russia during the focus group discussion.
- When investigating the views of youth on some foreign policy issues, they do not support any of these issues evenly. For example, 30 percent agree with the this idea that Russia is opposing the con-

struction of a hydroelectric powerplant on the Mongolian river that flows into Lake Baikal, and 35 percent disagree. 35.3 percent said they did not know.

- Twenty-eight percent support the view that there is no need to strictly control the activities of foreign religious organizations because Mongolia respects freedom of religion, while 42 percent do not support it and believe that strict control is needed. This may be due to the fact that in recent years, a number of internationally banned religious organizations have been operating actively in Mongolia under the name of freedom of religion or non-religion.
- Twenty-eight percent said that the Dalai Lama's visit was not necessary as it faces economic losses to Mongolia, while 32 percent opposed it. Forty percent said they did not know. Therefore, it can be concluded that one third of the respondents have a lack of understanding on some specific foreign policy issues.
- When asked about joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is one of the most controversial issues for politicians, security and foreign policy experts and researchers in Mongolia, 53 percent said they did not know. In addition, 27 percent of the respondents said it was right to join, while 20 percent said it was wrong and the membership was not necessary.

- Seventy-seven percent of respondents agreed that the participation of the Mongolian Armed Forces in peacekeeping operations should be increased. No one answered as “don’t know”. However, youth do not seem to have a clear understanding of the differences between UN and coalition military operations.

APPENDIX: Demographic indicators of the respondents

Sixty-six percent of the respondents were from Ulaanbaatar city, 23 percent from Erdenet city, 6 percent from Tuv aimag, and 5 percent from Bulgan aimag,

and 5 percent from Bulgan aimag, and 58 percent of the respondents were women and 42 percent were men (Figure 33-34).

Figure 33

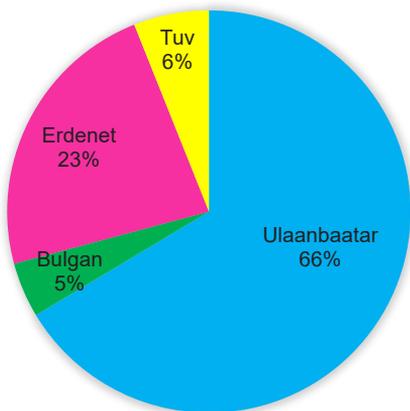
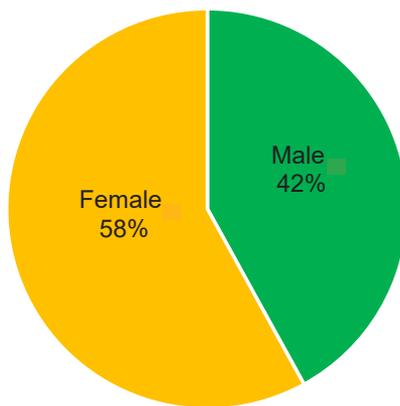


Figure 34



The age breakdown of the respondents was similar, with 99 percent aged 16-35 and 1 percent aged between 36-41 (Figure 35). In terms of employment, 39 percent

worked in the private sector and 25 percent in the public sector. Fifteen percent are students and 14 percent are unemployed (Figure 36).

Figure 35

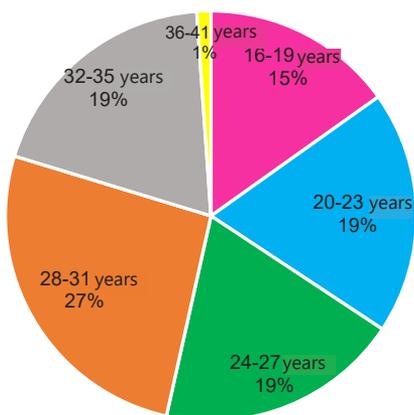
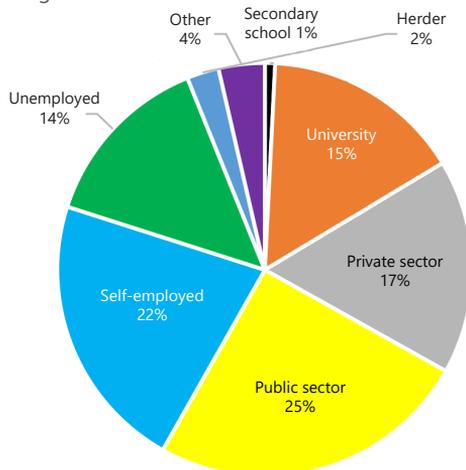


Figure 36



About the author:

The Mongolian Institute for Innovative Policies (MiFiP) was established in 2016 and its research is made more meaningful by focusing on issues that present pressing policy challenges in Mongolia. The MiFiP consists of Mongolian and international academic practitioners and professionals who combine research-based understanding and international experience with deep knowledge of the Mongolian context to provide training, consulting, and research services.

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