



International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science

e-ISSN: 2544-9435

Operating Publisher
SciFormat Publishing Inc.
ISNI: 0000 0005 1449 8214

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ARTICLE TITLE	NATIONAL RESILIENCE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS, INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES, AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN MONGOLIA
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DOI	https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.3(51).2026.6288
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RECEIVED	19 July 2026
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ACCEPTED	22 September 2026
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PUBLISHED	28 September 2026
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NATIONAL RESILIENCE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS, INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES, AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN MONGOLIA

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary international security environment is increasingly characterized by the coexistence of traditional and non-traditional security threats, including geopolitical competition, great-power rivalry, climate change, pandemics, cyberattacks, disruptions to energy and food security, and vulnerabilities in global supply chains. These interconnected risks have demonstrated that national security can no longer be understood solely in terms of military capabilities or the preparedness of state institutions. Instead, states must develop the capacity to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, recover from, and transform in response to complex and multidimensional crises.

This study examines the theoretical foundations of national resilience, reviews major international approaches to resilience-building, and explores their implications for Mongolia. Drawing upon a qualitative research design that combines literature review, comparative analysis, and policy analysis, the study examines national resilience as a multidimensional concept encompassing national security, governance, economic stability, social cohesion, critical infrastructure, public participation, and cross-sectoral cooperation.

The study argues that national resilience should be understood as a continuous process that extends beyond post-crisis recovery to include preparedness before crises, resistance during crises, adaptive recovery after crises, and long-term sustainable development. It further contends that strengthening national resilience requires an integrated governance approach that coordinates government institutions, the private sector, civil society, and citizens in managing increasingly complex security challenges. The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of national resilience and provide policy recommendations for strengthening Mongolia's national resilience within an evolving international security environment.

KEYWORDS

National resilience, National security, Risk governance, Adaptive capacity, Continuity of government, Sustainable development

CITATION

Bataa, E. (2026). National resilience: Theoretical foundations, international perspectives, and development challenges in mongolia. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*, 3(51). [https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.3\(51\).2026.6288](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.3(51).2026.6288)

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1. Introduction

The international security environment has become increasingly complex, uncertain, and multidimensional over the past two decades. During the post-Cold War era, national security was primarily understood in terms of conventional military threats, interstate conflict, and external aggression. Today, however, the concept of security has expanded considerably to encompass a broad spectrum of traditional and non-traditional threats. Pandemics, climate change, natural disasters, cyberattacks, disruptions to food, energy, and water supplies, economic instability, and information-related threats have demonstrated the capacity to undermine not only national security but also economic development, social stability, and the continuity of government. These interconnected risks transcend national borders and increasingly require comprehensive and coordinated policy responses.

Against this backdrop, ensuring national security can no longer rely solely on military preparedness, defense capabilities, or the effectiveness of law enforcement institutions. Instead, governments, private enterprises, civil society, local communities, and individual citizens must collectively possess the capacity to anticipate, withstand, adapt to, recover from, and transform in response to crises and disruptive events while maintaining essential societal functions. This broader understanding of security is reflected in the concept of national resilience, which has emerged as a central pillar of contemporary security policy and strategic planning.

National resilience extends beyond the traditional notion of crisis response or post-disaster recovery. It encompasses the entire cycle of risk management, including preparedness before crises, resistance during emergencies, adaptive recovery following disruptions, and the continuous enhancement of institutional and societal capacity. Consequently, resilience has evolved into a comprehensive governance framework that integrates national security, public administration, economic stability, critical infrastructure, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Rather than focusing exclusively on preventing threats, national resilience emphasizes strengthening the capacity of states and societies to maintain core functions under conditions of uncertainty and to emerge stronger from future crises.

For Mongolia, strengthening national resilience has become a strategic necessity. Mongolia's unique geopolitical and socioeconomic characteristics—including its landlocked location between two major powers, vast territory, low population density, resource-dependent economy, and harsh climatic conditions—create both significant development opportunities and structural vulnerabilities. These characteristics increase the country's exposure to geopolitical competition, economic shocks, environmental hazards, and disruptions affecting critical infrastructure and supply chains. Consequently, enhancing national resilience is essential not only for safeguarding national security but also for ensuring sustainable development and long-term national stability.

Despite the growing international emphasis on resilience, its theoretical foundations, governance mechanisms, and practical implementation remain insufficiently examined within the Mongolian context. Existing studies have primarily focused on sector-specific resilience or emergency management, while relatively limited attention has been devoted to developing an integrated framework for national resilience that reflects Mongolia's strategic environment and institutional characteristics. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the theoretical foundations of national resilience, reviews major international approaches to resilience-building, and analyzes their relevance for Mongolia. By integrating theoretical perspectives with international experience, the study seeks to provide a conceptual foundation and policy recommendations for strengthening Mongolia's national resilience in an increasingly complex and uncertain security environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Evolution of the Concept of Resilience

The concept of resilience has evolved considerably over the past five decades, expanding from its origins in ecological science into a multidisciplinary framework widely applied in psychology, engineering, disaster risk management, public policy, and national security studies. The term was first introduced systematically by Crawford Stanley Holling, who defined resilience as the capacity of an ecosystem to absorb external disturbances while maintaining its essential structures and functions. Unlike traditional concepts of stability that emphasize equilibrium, Holling argued that complex systems survive by adapting, reorganizing, and evolving in response to environmental change. This perspective fundamentally shifted resilience from a passive notion of resistance toward a dynamic process of adaptation and transformation.

Subsequent research expanded the concept beyond ecological systems. In psychology, resilience came to describe the ability of individuals to overcome adversity and recover from traumatic experiences. Engineering studies conceptualized resilience as the capacity of physical infrastructure and technical systems to restore functionality rapidly following disruption. Within disaster risk management, resilience became closely associated with preparedness, emergency response, recovery, and long-term adaptation to natural and human-induced hazards. These diverse disciplinary perspectives share a common understanding that resilience reflects the capacity of complex systems not only to survive shocks but also to adapt and improve under conditions of uncertainty.

Since the early twenty-first century, resilience has become an increasingly important concept within national security studies. Rather than focusing exclusively on military threats or external aggression, scholars and policymakers have applied resilience to explain how states and societies anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from a broad spectrum of interconnected risks. Consequently, resilience has evolved into a comprehensive framework encompassing governance, economic stability, critical infrastructure, social cohesion, and national security, reflecting the multidimensional nature of contemporary security challenges.

2.2 Conceptualizing National Resilience

Although no universally accepted definition of national resilience exists, international organizations and scholars generally agree that the concept refers to the capacity of states and societies to prepare for, withstand, adapt to, recover from, and learn from crises while maintaining essential national functions.

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines resilience as the ability of a system, community, or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform, and recover efficiently while preserving its essential structures and functions. This definition emphasizes resilience as a continuous process encompassing preparedness before crises, effective response during emergencies, and sustainable recovery afterward.

Similarly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development conceptualizes resilience as the capacity of institutions and societies to maintain continuity of essential functions, recover rapidly from disruptions, and strengthen preparedness for future risks. Unlike traditional emergency management approaches, the OECD links resilience directly with governance quality, institutional learning, and sustainable development, emphasizing that crises should serve as opportunities for institutional improvement rather than merely temporary disruptions.

Within the Mongolian academic literature, national resilience is increasingly regarded as an integral component of the national security system. Existing studies emphasize that resilience extends beyond emergency response and encompasses all phases of national development, including peacetime preparedness, crisis management, emergency response, post-crisis recovery, and long-term institutional development. This perspective highlights the importance of integrating government institutions, economic systems, civil society, and critical infrastructure into a unified resilience framework.

Synthesizing these perspectives, national resilience may be understood as a dynamic national capability characterized by five interrelated dimensions: preparedness, absorptive capacity, adaptive capacity, recovery, and transformational learning. Accordingly, resilience should be viewed not as the ability to resist change, but as the capacity of states and societies to maintain essential functions while continuously adapting to an increasingly uncertain security environment.

2.3 National Resilience and National Security

The growing prominence of resilience has fundamentally reshaped contemporary understandings of national security. Traditionally, national security focused primarily on protecting state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national interests through military power, deterrence, and law enforcement. However, the emergence of multidimensional security challenges—including cyber threats, pandemics, climate change, supply chain disruptions, and economic crises—has demonstrated that security cannot be guaranteed solely through military capabilities.

Existing scholarship increasingly argues that national security and national resilience represent complementary yet conceptually distinct frameworks. While national security defines the strategic objectives of protecting the state and its vital interests, national resilience explains the institutional, societal, economic, and governance capacities through which these objectives can be sustained under conditions of crisis and uncertainty. In this sense, resilience serves as the operational foundation of contemporary national security by

enabling governments and societies to maintain continuity, adapt to changing circumstances, and recover effectively from disruptions.

Consequently, resilience has become a central pillar of modern security governance. Rather than seeking to eliminate all risks—a goal that is increasingly unattainable in today's interconnected world—resilience-based approaches emphasize preparedness, adaptability, continuity, and institutional learning. This shift reflects a broader transition from threat elimination toward comprehensive risk management and adaptive governance as the defining characteristics of twenty-first-century national security.

Despite the rapid expansion of resilience studies, existing research has primarily examined resilience from the perspectives of disaster management, emergency response, or sector-specific policy. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to developing an integrated theoretical framework that links national resilience with national security governance while examining its application to Mongolia's unique geopolitical, socioeconomic, and institutional context. Addressing this gap, the present study synthesizes international theories and policy approaches to establish a conceptual foundation for strengthening national resilience in Mongolia.

3. Results

3.1 NATO's Approach to National Resilience

Among international organizations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has developed one of the most comprehensive institutional approaches to national resilience. NATO conceptualizes resilience as an essential component of collective defense by integrating military preparedness with civilian readiness. Rather than relying solely on military capabilities, the Alliance emphasizes that effective national defense depends equally on the continuity of government, the resilience of critical infrastructure, the preparedness of civilian institutions, and cooperation between the public and private sectors.

At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO established seven baseline requirements for national resilience to strengthen the civil preparedness of member states. These include continuity of government, resilient energy supplies, secure food and water provision, reliable civil communications, robust transportation systems, the capacity to manage large-scale population movements, and the ability to respond effectively to mass-casualty incidents. Collectively, these requirements demonstrate that resilience extends beyond military institutions and encompasses all sectors essential to maintaining national functionality during crises.

The NATO framework further illustrates that failures in civilian governance, critical infrastructure, or essential public services can significantly undermine both military readiness and crisis response. Consequently, resilience functions as the first line of defence by ensuring that societies can maintain essential functions under conditions of disruption, thereby strengthening both deterrence and national security.

3.2 Singapore's Total Defense Model

Singapore provides one of the most successful examples of developing national resilience under the constraints of a small state. Since introducing the Total Defense concept in 1984, Singapore has adopted a whole-of-society approach in which national security is regarded as a shared responsibility of government institutions, the armed forces, private enterprises, communities, and individual citizens.

Originally consisting of military, civil, economic, social, and psychological defense, the framework has subsequently expanded to include digital defense in response to growing cyber threats, information warfare, and technological transformation. This evolution reflects the changing nature of contemporary security challenges and demonstrates the adaptability of the Total Defense concept.

A defining characteristic of the Singaporean model is its emphasis on active citizenship. Citizens are regarded not merely as recipients of government protection but as essential contributors to national resilience through civic responsibility, information awareness, community participation, and social cohesion. For a geographically small state with limited natural resources, public trust, national unity, education, and institutional discipline constitute strategic assets that compensate for conventional limitations in military and economic resources.

Although Singapore's experience cannot be directly replicated due to differing historical and geopolitical circumstances, its whole-of-society approach offers valuable lessons for strengthening public participation, interagency coordination, and state–society cooperation in national resilience planning.

3.3 Poland's Recovery and Resilience Strategy

Poland has incorporated national resilience into its post-pandemic development strategy through the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan under the European Union Recovery and Resilience Facility. While initially designed to accelerate economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme has evolved into a broader framework for strengthening long-term national resilience.

Key policy priorities include reducing energy dependence, advancing the green and digital transitions, modernizing public administration, strengthening healthcare capacity, and reinforcing the rule of law. These initiatives demonstrate that resilience is increasingly understood as a multidimensional concept encompassing governance, economic sustainability, technological modernization, and institutional reform rather than emergency management alone.

The Polish experience highlights that national resilience depends not only on financial investment but also on effective governance, coherent public policy, institutional modernization, and legal accountability. Countries characterized by weak institutions, excessive economic dependence, aging infrastructure, or limited public trust are considerably less capable of recovering rapidly from major crises. Consequently, Poland illustrates the importance of integrating resilience into long-term national development strategies.

3.4 Comparative Findings

The comparative analysis of NATO, Singapore, and Poland reveals four common characteristics that underpin successful national resilience strategies.

First, national resilience is consistently approached as a whole-of-society undertaking rather than solely the responsibility of government or military institutions. Effective resilience requires coordinated participation among public authorities, private enterprises, civil society organizations, local governments, and citizens.

Second, continuity planning for critical infrastructure constitutes the institutional foundation of resilience. Governments must ensure that essential services—including energy, food, water, transportation, communications, healthcare, and public administration—remain operational during emergencies and recover rapidly following disruption.

Third, public trust, social cohesion, and information resilience are strategic assets comparable to physical infrastructure and military capability. Contemporary crises frequently involve cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and social polarization, making societal resilience an increasingly important determinant of national security.

Finally, national resilience should be understood as a continuous and adaptive process rather than a one-time policy initiative. Successful resilience strategies require regular risk assessment, institutional learning, interagency coordination, training exercises, policy evaluation, and continuous improvement to address evolving security challenges.

Overall, the comparative findings indicate that national resilience extends far beyond crisis response. It represents a comprehensive governance framework that integrates security, public administration, economic development, technological innovation, and social capacity into a unified strategy for managing uncertainty and strengthening long-term national security.

4. Discussion

4.1 Mongolia's National Risk Environment

The analysis indicates that the development of national resilience in Mongolia must be understood within the country's distinctive geopolitical, economic, environmental, and societal context. Mongolia's landlocked location between two major powers, its vast territory, low population density, and uneven infrastructure development simultaneously create strategic opportunities and structural vulnerabilities. These characteristics require not only a balanced foreign policy but also a high level of domestic preparedness and institutional resilience capable of responding to a broad spectrum of internal and external disruptions.

From an economic perspective, Mongolia remains heavily dependent on the mining sector, rendering its economy particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices, export disruptions, logistics constraints, and variations in foreign investment. Such structural dependence increases national exposure to external economic shocks and limits long-term resilience. Consequently, strengthening economic resilience requires not only economic growth but also greater diversification, enhanced domestic production capacity, and improved institutional capability to absorb external disturbances.

Environmental risks represent another critical dimension of Mongolia's resilience profile. Climate change has intensified the frequency and severity of droughts, dzud, desertification, water scarcity, and wildfires, posing significant threats to livestock production, food security, rural livelihoods, and sustainable regional development. These environmental challenges demonstrate that climate resilience has become an integral component of national resilience and should be incorporated into long-term security planning.

Social factors likewise exert considerable influence on national resilience. Accelerating urbanization, demographic concentration in the capital city, rural depopulation, unemployment, poverty, educational disparities, and the growing influence of digital information environments all increase societal vulnerability during periods of crisis. At the same time, national identity, cultural heritage, social cohesion, civic responsibility, and public trust constitute important sources of societal resilience. The findings therefore suggest that strengthening Mongolia's resilience requires not only institutional capacity but also investment in human capital, social solidarity, and public awareness.

4.2 Core Principles for Strengthening National Resilience in Mongolia

The comparative analysis of international practices, combined with an assessment of Mongolia's strategic environment, identifies five fundamental principles that should guide the development of national resilience.

First, national resilience should be based on a whole-of-society approach. Ensuring national security is not solely the responsibility of government institutions; rather, it depends upon the active participation of citizens, the private sector, civil society organizations, and local communities. Public awareness, civic responsibility, and community preparedness therefore represent essential components of resilience.

Second, resilience policies should adopt a risk-based planning approach. National resilience strategies should be grounded in systematic risk assessment, vulnerability analysis, resource evaluation, and evidence-based prioritization rather than broad policy declarations. This approach enables governments to allocate limited resources more efficiently while addressing the country's most critical vulnerabilities.

Third, continuity of essential functions should constitute a central objective of resilience planning. Government institutions, critical infrastructure, healthcare services, energy systems, transportation networks, communications, food supply, and water resources should all possess continuity plans capable of maintaining essential operations during periods of crisis.

Fourth, national resilience requires cross-sectoral coordination. Contemporary security challenges transcend institutional boundaries, requiring close cooperation among government agencies responsible for national security, defense, disaster management, public health, critical infrastructure protection, cyber security, and local governance. Effective resilience therefore depends upon integrated governance rather than isolated sectoral responses.

Finally, national resilience should be regarded as a continuous learning process. Every crisis provides opportunities for institutional learning and policy improvement. Regular training, evaluation, exercises, legislative refinement, and organizational adaptation are therefore indispensable for sustaining long-term resilience.

4.3 The Contribution of the Defense Sector to National Resilience

The findings indicate that national resilience should not be equated with defense capability alone. Rather, resilience represents a comprehensive national capacity encompassing governance, economic stability, social cohesion, and institutional preparedness. Within this broader framework, the defense sector functions as one of several critical contributors to national resilience rather than its sole foundation.

The Armed Forces contribute primarily through their constitutional responsibility to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, contemporary security challenges increasingly require military capabilities to support broader national resilience objectives. During natural disasters, national emergencies, infrastructure failures, and large-scale crises, the defense sector provides valuable organizational capacity, logistical support, command and control capabilities, engineering assets, transportation, communications, and emergency response resources that enhance national crisis management.

The analysis further suggests that Mongolia's territorial defense system, mobilization framework, reserve forces, and civil–military cooperation mechanisms possess significant potential to strengthen national resilience. Expanding civil–military cooperation, integrating territorial defense planning with resilience strategies, modernizing mobilization systems, improving emergency support capabilities, and strengthening defense education to promote civic responsibility and national cohesion would substantially enhance the country's overall preparedness for future crises.

4.4 A Whole-of-Society Approach to National Resilience

International experience consistently demonstrates that effective national resilience depends upon close cooperation among government institutions, citizens, the private sector, and civil society. As critical infrastructure, digital services, transportation networks, telecommunications, financial systems, and supply chains increasingly rely on private-sector operators, resilience can no longer be achieved through government action alone.

The findings indicate that private-sector organizations should play an active role in resilience planning by developing business continuity strategies, strengthening cyber security, enhancing workforce preparedness, reducing supply-chain vulnerabilities, and participating in national information-sharing mechanisms. Similarly, citizens should be regarded not merely as recipients of emergency assistance but as active participants capable of protecting themselves, supporting their communities, and contributing to local resilience through preparedness, volunteerism, and responsible information practices.

Accordingly, public policy should prioritize education, awareness, participation, and cooperation rather than relying solely on regulatory or coercive approaches. A whole-of-society model based on trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility offers the most sustainable foundation for strengthening Mongolia's national resilience.

4.5 Policy Implications

The findings of this study suggest several policy implications for strengthening national resilience in Mongolia.

First, Mongolia should formulate and adopt a comprehensive **National Resilience Strategy** that integrates the responsibilities of government institutions, the private sector, civil society, and local communities within a unified governance framework. Such a strategy would provide clear institutional coordination mechanisms while aligning resilience objectives with national security and sustainable development policies.

Second, establishing a **national risk assessment framework** should become a strategic priority. Evidence-based risk assessment would enable policymakers to identify critical vulnerabilities, prioritize resource allocation, and support informed decision-making across all sectors. Regular assessments should encompass geopolitical, economic, environmental, technological, cyber, and societal risks to ensure comprehensive resilience planning.

Third, continuity planning should be institutionalized across government agencies and operators of critical infrastructure. Public institutions, together with organizations responsible for energy, transportation, telecommunications, healthcare, water supply, food security, and financial services, should develop, regularly test, and periodically update business continuity and emergency response plans to ensure the uninterrupted provision of essential services during crises.

Fourth, greater investment is required in **public resilience education** and societal preparedness. National resilience depends not only on institutional capability but also on an informed and resilient population. Public education initiatives should therefore strengthen risk awareness, media and information literacy, civic responsibility, disaster preparedness, and national solidarity through formal education, professional training, and public awareness campaigns.

Finally, Mongolia should develop a **National Resilience Index (NRI)** together with a standardized monitoring and evaluation framework. A comprehensive resilience index would enable the government to assess institutional performance, identify capability gaps, monitor implementation progress, and benchmark national resilience against international standards. Such an evaluation mechanism would provide an evidence-based foundation for continuous policy improvement and long-term resilience development.

Taken together, these policy implications indicate that strengthening national resilience requires a comprehensive, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Rather than focusing exclusively on crisis response, Mongolia should pursue long-term investments in governance capacity, institutional coordination, critical infrastructure protection, public preparedness, and adaptive policymaking. Through sustained implementation of these measures, national resilience can evolve into a strategic pillar supporting both national security and sustainable national development.

5. Conclusions

National resilience has emerged as a foundational concept in twenty-first-century national security, reflecting the growing complexity and interdependence of contemporary security challenges. Rather than referring solely to the capacity to withstand external threats or recover from crises, national resilience encompasses the ability of states and societies to anticipate risks, absorb shocks, maintain essential functions, adapt to changing circumstances, and transform through continuous learning. It therefore represents a comprehensive governance capability that integrates political, economic, social, environmental, and security dimensions into a unified framework for sustainable national security.

The comparative analysis presented in this study demonstrates that successful national resilience strategies share several common characteristics. International experience highlights the importance of effective government leadership, whole-of-society participation, private-sector engagement, continuity planning for critical infrastructure, strategic reserves, information resilience, and social cohesion. These findings indicate that national resilience should not be understood as the responsibility of a single institution but rather as a coordinated national capability requiring sustained cooperation among government agencies, citizens, businesses, and civil society.

For Mongolia, strengthening national resilience is closely linked to the country's unique geopolitical position, economic structure, environmental vulnerabilities, demographic characteristics, and evolving information environment. The analysis suggests that resilience should be developed through risk-informed planning, continuity-of-government mechanisms, integrated civil–military cooperation, enhanced public preparedness, and stronger partnerships between the state, the private sector, and society. Building resilience in these areas would improve Mongolia's capacity to manage future crises while supporting long-term national security and sustainable development.

The principal contribution of this study lies in its conceptualization of national resilience as an integrated national security framework rather than as a sector-specific issue confined to disaster management, defense, or economic security. By synthesizing contemporary resilience theory, comparative international experience, and Mongolia's strategic context, the study provides a comprehensive analytical framework and identifies key policy directions for strengthening national resilience in Mongolia. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of resilience scholarship while offering practical insights for policymakers responsible for national security and governance.

This study is subject to certain limitations. As a conceptual study based primarily on document analysis and comparative policy analysis, it does not empirically evaluate Mongolia's current level of national resilience or measure institutional performance through quantitative indicators. Future research could address this limitation by developing a National Resilience Index, constructing quantitative assessment models, and conducting sector-specific empirical analyses to evaluate resilience across governance, critical infrastructure, economic security, cyber security, and defense systems. Such research would further strengthen the evidence base for resilience-oriented policymaking in Mongolia.

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