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Political Apathy or Political Exclusion? Malaysian Youth, Generational Barriers and Inclusive Political Participation for Urban Development Planning in Penang

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1 Introduction

When a city or state government undertakes a large-scale development project, such governments may initiate or support activities that foster participation of the inhabitants. Participation is deployed as a policy method to ensure a prospected project is inclusive, and by extension, for the city to become more inclusive as a whole. Ideally, by creating a platform that takes the concerns of the (affected) inhabitants into consideration, the otherwise potentially forgotten issues, or otherwise excluded people, are thought to be accounted for. In practice, this is often less straightforward, particularly in societies where political liberties and civic space for its citizens are limited. The effectiveness of participatory activities depends on how receptive the authorities are towards unsolicited or unwanted advice and critique—activities we can refer to as "political participation," in contrast with solicited "citizen participation." To a political activist, their concerns voiced through activism cannot be properly addressed through state-initiated channels of participation. Yet, for a participatory development project to be truly inclusive, one could argue activist concerns should still be properly addressed, regardless of the political ambitions of the state, that may underpin the project. Furthermore, the quality of inclusive participation

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in development is related to the demographic makeup of those who are and those who are not able to give voice to their concerns. Particular groups in society can be excluded from participation—both implicitly and explicitly—based on their political position of ascribed and achieved statuses, for example, their occupation, class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and age. In other words, inclusive urban development can be established through participation, given the participation is inherently inclusive in itself; that is, if citizens are equally unobstructed in voicing their solicited and unsolicited views and concerns.

It is not new to research inclusive participation vis-à-vis the political status of groups associated with ethnicity, class, or religion, yet one defining aspect in this process is often overlooked: generational exclusion. By discussing a case study on Penang, a city-state in Malaysia, this chapter explores the complexities of establishing politically inclusive development, by addressing the intersectional barriers that hinder young adults' participation in political activities. The limited research done so far on political participation of Malaysian youth[1] suggests that younger generations are much less politically active than their elder counterparts, but insufficiently explains why. With Malaysia's median age of 28.9 years (in 2019), the absence of young adults in political arenas implies that close to a quarter of the population[2] is not (enabled in) expressing their ideas publicly. As such, this seriously dilutes the inclusive quality of urban development if such inclusion, understood as the state enabling and being receptive to solicited and unsolicited citizen input, is limited to those with political power in the first place.

Globally, scholars researching (political) participation have recognised the disengagement of youth with politics, as well as traditional forms of activism, describing a shift in the ways young people conduct participatory practices (Harris et al., 2010). This is also applicable for Malaysia; various quantitative studies argue that Malaysian youth are less politically active than their older counterparts.[3]

Furthermore, Mohd Hed and Grasso (2019) make a distinction between more political faction-oriented "conventional forms" of participation (e.g., voting and party membership), vis-a-vis more activist-oriented "unconventional forms of participation" (e.g., joining in boycotts, attending demonstrations). They report that, particularly regarding conventional participation, 21–40-year-olds participate much less than Malaysians aged between 41 and 70. Indicatively, 92.2% of Malaysians between 41-and 70-years-old voted in the 2013 elections, compared to 65.4% of the age group between 21 and 40.

Still, what is less well established is how and why young people in Malaysia seem less politically engaged, especially towards "unconventional participation", or activism. Various studies suggested political apathy among youth, with Salman

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[1] For example, Salman et al. (2017), Mohd Hed & Grasso (2019).

[2] Twenty-seven percent are aged between 15 and 29. Department of Statistics Malaysia, July 2019. Accessed on June 10, 2021. https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=155&bul_id=aWJZRkJ4UEdKcUZpT2tVT090Snpydz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09A

[3] Ibid.

and colleagues (2017) even mooting that youth do not participate "due to the lack of interest in politics, who are by and large comfortable with their lives and go unbothered by issues related to politics." Instead, based on our fieldwork research in 2019, we strongly argue the contrary. Even more so, regardless of whether Malaysian youth were interested in politics or not, the institutional barriers set by the (federal) state, university, and parental advice, strongly impacted the possibility for young people to openly express and engage with political issues at that time.

This case study research is situated in Penang, a geographically small state that houses Malaysia's second largest conglomeration of 1.77 million inhabitants as of 2017. The state has seen rapid economic growth and urban development over the last decades. As this led to issues regarding housing, traffic congestion, and public transport, the state government announced various large-scale development plans over the last 10 years. One example is the "Penang Master Transport Plan" (PTMP), which consists of a LRT system, various elevated highways running across hillsides, and an undersea highway tunnel. Another development project, the "Penang South Islands" project (PSR/PSI), aims to reclaim three large artificial islands, allowing the urban conglomeration to further expand, while financing the aforementioned mobility projects.[4] These plans are propagated as part of the state's development strategy "Penang2030," of which one of the four strategic "pillars"[5] aims to "empower people to strengthen civic participation." The strategy emphasises that "youth participation in decision-making and civil society will lay the foundation for the next generation of leaders." Yet, even though the development plans are promoted as sustainable and inclusive, they have been strongly opposed by various Penang-based civil society groups, who are concerned about the potential negative social and environmental effects. Notably, young adults have been almost absent in such civil society efforts.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section sets the context of how ethno-religious tensions and paternalistic federalism shape Malaysian orientations towards inclusive policymaking. The subsequent section then discusses the generational barriers that young adult Malaysians encounter in their daily interactions with the state, university, and parents that hinder political participation. These findings are derived from an ethnographic research conducted in 2019, which involved over 50 recorded ethnographic encounters through (participant) observation by the authors. Additionally, more than 40 interviews were conducted with civil society members, university students, and recent graduates with the latter two groups ranging in age from 18 to 30. The third section provides a detailed ethnographic account of Malaysia's first climate strike, offering valuable insights into the conditions that foster a sense of comfort and willingness among young adults to participate in political activities. The fourth and final section concludes this chapter by discussing the prospects for the political inclusion of youth in Penang's development strategy, which

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[4] The PSI project, which aims to reclaim over 1,800 hectares of land at sea, is previously known as the Penang Reclamation Project (PSR), will provide the financial means for the expensive PTMP projects through expected land-value addition.

[5] Those include "increase liveability and quality of life," "upgrade the economy to raise household incomes," and "invest in the built environment to improve resilience."

explicitly aims to include young people in their projects. The overall case study exemplifies how a semi-authoritarian political culture rooted in ethnic inclusion shapes often-overlooked generational barriers for youth to politically participate. In turn, this requires policy efforts that improve political inclusion of young adults in urban decision-making processes.

2   Malaysian Politics, Federal Paternalism, and Ethnic Inclusion

Like elsewhere, Malaysia's local development discourses do not occur in isolation from national politics, and therefore affect the possibilities for inclusive participation in the former. In particular, two characteristics of Malaysia's national politics shape and define the boundaries for participation in local urban development projects: paternalistic federalism and ethno-religious tensions.

Historically, in comparison to Malaysia in general, Penang has had a very lively activist scene that originated in the 1970s and 1980s. While these activist groups generally come forth with a rather critical agenda against state development plans, Penang's state-governing parties and activist groups have regularly become allies in opposing the federal government (Cheng et al., 2014). Malaysia practices a highly centralised form of federalism that skews heavily towards the federal government in Putrajaya (Loh, 2010). The states, to one degree or another, are dependent on the federal government for (urban) development, due to the latter's control over financial resources. This unequal dynamic allows the federal government to play a paternalistic role and exert tight control over many aspects of life in Malaysia.[6] In doing so, centralised federalism directs the marginal efforts of political activism against a federal juggernaut that holds control over laws, university, police, and all coercive powers they wield. These are oftentimes perceived by civil society groups as draconian, overwhelming, and severely punitive. This stifles prospects of political reform and limits the influence of civil society and (opposing) state governments to establish such. In other words, Penangite civil society groups may oppose state plans in local development, while simultaneously cooperating with the state government on federal issues, both restricted by the limited space for contestation that the federal government permits. Moreover, the tight federal control on political activities increases the threshold for citizens to voice on topics considered politically sensitive, which limits the support civil society groups could otherwise receive in their local development efforts.

A second defining and related characteristic of Malaysian politics is the dominance of ethno-religious discourse in the public sphere. As a multi-ethnic nation-state, ethno-religious tensions are present as a result of so-called consociational

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[6] How Malaysia copes with the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, is a manifestation of this highly centralized form of federalism.

politics. The interests of the main sectarian groups[7] are represented at the top eche-lons of government, primarily in the form of singular ethno-religious-based political parties (Lijphart, 1969). The lopsided ethno-religious dynamic mainly centers on the relationship between Malays and non-Malays, and by extension, Muslims and non-Muslims. Political parties and their supporters find it extremely difficult to move away from engaging in ethno-religious discourse, which in turn detrimentally affects the public sphere and how citizens in daily society interact with each other. While the chief aim of consociational politics is to dampen the majoritarian tendency of the main ethnic and religious group, and be inclusive of minority voices in the governing process, it often ends up hardening sectarian divides, since the relationship between political parties is not equal to begin with.

While the political space is highly restrictive, there are "pockets of activism" that are deemed "less threatening" by the federal government and are therefore tolerable to a certain yet limited extent. Activism that draws attention to issues related to urban development or environmentalism, are such pockets. For example, in regards to the Penang South Reclamation (PSR/PSI) project, many civil society protests have occurred over the years. Yet, a strand of discourse pits poor Malay fishermen against the ethnically Chinese-dominated state government, pressing for inclusion of a particular ethnic group. As such, urban or environmental issues can easily devolve into an ethno-religious discourse due to the sectarian nature of Malaysian politics, and thus curb the eagerness of people to join in activist political participation.

Consequently, many young Malaysians are hesitant to engage actively with the political discourse. Seeing it akin to navigating a minefield, a common perception is that it is easy to offend the sensibility of others, with the risk of incurring the wrath of the federal government by running afoul of its repressive laws. In this sense, ethno-religious tensions serve as a justification for repressive federal laws, as a necessity to maintain national stability. As such, we build towards the argument that the efforts to be politically inclusive on ethno-religious terms may be at the cost of the available political space for inclusion of other determinants for exclusion, like class and gender—or in this particular case, age.

3   Political Participation by Malaysia's Young Adults

On one of my first meetings to establish a network of research participants, I make my way to a popular Chinese-oriented food court. People from all stripes of life flog down to get a cheap meal. Here I meet James, a former classmate and a 23-year-old Chinese-Malaysian economics student. After exchanging pleasantries, I explain my interest in youth perspectives on Malaysian politics. Although James responds with enthusiasm, his body language changes. Almost whispering, James shares his

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[7] In Malaysia, three ethnicities are most prevalent and represented through one or more political parties, namely: Malay (Muslim), Chinese, and Indian. Less prevalent are the Orang Asli (indigenous groups).

vivid ideas on what has happened during the 2018 elections. Every minute or so, the student scans his surroundings, ensuring no one is eavesdropping. When the topic lands on the ethnic tensions in politics, I can barely hear James speak.

We decide to go to the car park, where James' volume noticeably increases. I ask why the secrecy was necessary, to which James responds: "You'll never know if someone is listening. Better not take the risk." Surprised at why he insisted on sharing his insights nonetheless, I ask what he thinks about politics. "All I want is a house, a job and a car," James tells me. "You know a lot about politics though," I reply. James responds: "I think politics are important, but I try not to care too much. But we do need change. And that change won't come for a very long time. Malaysia isn't ready for it." Without any encouragement on my part, James continues to vent his frustrations, ideas, and suggestions for the future of his country.

During this research, which was conducted in 2019, the authors addressed an ongoing debate on political participation by youth. One strand of the debate argues that youth have become increasingly politically apathetic, while others argue that youth have taken on "new" or "alternative" forms of political participation (see Mohd Hed, 2017). For this research, we interviewed both young adults and civil society members. In describing the former, one of the interviewed civil society members argued: "I think a lot of young people look at it from a sense of "What is in it for me? If I don't see a need or necessity, I will not speak out."" Though understandable, we strongly argue that the disengagement of Malaysian youth in politics cannot be solely attributed to apathy, as it provides an insufficient explanation. The vignette featuring James above, from a fieldnote of one of the researchers, displays the positionality of many young adults in Malaysia. It demonstrates that even the most basic acts of political engagement—such as privately discussing one's political ideas in public— are met with utmost caution by most young people, rather than disinterest. As such, we seek to elucidate the disengagement from participatory activities by looking at the external factors that limit youth participation in politics, rather than perceiving their disengagement as a characteristic inherent to the group itself.

Like James, most of the 22 young adults we interviewed told the researchers that they followed political news, discussed political matters with like-minded friends, and also cautiously shared articles on social media (in the political context of 2019). Young adults would be more likely to engage in political discussions if they are in a safe environment, especially when the topics being discussed are sufficiently distanced from ethno-religious matters. In other words, they prefer engaging in discussions in a manner where their words and actions cannot do harm. In a low-profile environment, many of the students and graduates have no problem with sharing their opinions. The interviewed young adults have demonstrated their preference for low-profile and non-controversial initiatives by actively engaging in activities such as volunteering at language programs in impoverished rural areas, raising funds for Palestinian refugees, or volunteering at welfare-providing (religious) NGOs (Salman et al., 2017). These findings demonstrate that the participants possess a political orientation, display an overall interest in politics, and possess knowledge about political issues. Consequently, they have the potential to engage in political discourses, as long as their actions do not cross the boundaries that are deemed by society as "sensitive."

When comparing the activities initiated by youth with the more "traditional forms of participation" carried out by Penang's activist civil society groups, many of the interviewed youth shared their reluctance to participate in protests or rallies, because engaging in such activities could jeopardise the successful beginning of their careers. Additionally, students mentioned the disapproval of parents as a significant factor that deterred them from getting involved in political protests. Some parents cautioned against engaging in such activities and instructed their children to "bide their time." Furthermore, as expressed by Hannah, a woman in her late 20s: "Of course, time and work are a limitation to join a protest, but I am also scared that they are arresting people. I don't want them to arrest me and get a record and stuff. That will affect me in my future, and I don't want that." In comparison to most of the interviewed civil society members, who were predominantly over the age of 30, established in their careers, were financially stable, and had resided in Penang for a longer time—the interviewed youth represented a different phase of life. Thus, in comparison, the decision of youth not to participate can be seen as a rational choice, influenced by their age-related positionality and status within society, rather than being driven by apathy or disinterest.

Due to their aging demographic, various civil society activist groups have an outspoken desire to attract more youth to their cause, but without much success (as of 2019). The absence of young adults in grassroots activism has led to frustration among civil society members, with much of this frustration directed towards Malaysia's educational system. One of the key reasons cited is that Malaysia's educational institutes do not provide political education to their students (Mohd Hed, 2017). Interestingly, when asked about their visions for Malaysia's future, many young adults expressed similar views to those of civil society members. Not only did the young adults aspire for greater transparency and accountability in politics, but they also emphasised the need for an improved education system. They believed that such a system should lead to "more critical thinking" (sic) among their fellow citizens. Many participants suggested the establishment of a political education program at schools.

In a similar vein, civil society members generally perceive educational institutes as fostering a docile and paternal relationship between students and the (federal) state, rather than igniting their political participation. According to one civil society member, "Activism against state plans is taught as 'a bad word' at schools." Another member argued that the "[federal] state influence in schools and universities discourages critical thinking, and gives the idea that [federal] politicians know how to govern and protect their best interests." As such, young people, and especially university students, experience the paternalism of the federal government most prominently on campus. The federal government exercises direct control over universities by appointing Vice-Chancellors and implementing measures to control and limit politically charged student activities. This control is facilitated through the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA), a law designed to sanitise campuses by suppressing elements critical of the government, with potential consequences such as expulsion for those who defy these regulations. As such, the federal state, the university, and,

indirectly, worried parents, impose significant limitations on the opportunities for youth to engage in political organising whenever they desire to do so.

In conclusion, Malaysian youth appear to be influenced both directly and indirectly towards a passive form of political invisibility, where they are encouraged to remain unseen and unheard in political spheres. Indeed, while some students may be unperturbed by these limitations, excepting them as given, others feel varying degrees of frustration towards them. Still, on both sides of the spectrum, Malaysian young adults are not politically apathetic. Instead, they navigate the boundaries of a political culture that restricts the possibilities for their active participation in the first place. Nonetheless, they find ways to engage within these limitations, demonstrating their interest and willingness to be politically involved despite the challenges they face.

4   Experimentation at the Boundaries: Malaysia's First Youth Climate Protest

"Do you think more people are going to show up?" asks a young woman, in her early twenties, as she glances doubtfully over her shoulder. Where normally just two would be present, about fifteen university guards are lined up at the university's entrance, dressed in blue police-like uniforms. The university had obviously gotten word of Malaysia's first youth climate protest.

While some of the participants worry about the guards or pondering if enough people will show up, one of the protest organisers opens the trunk of his car. A colorful pile of protest signs appears, with messages like "Save Penang, save the world," "A better climate starts with you," and "We want green cities." The leader adjusts his bandana, looks around the group, and asks: "Are we ready?".

Astonished students pass by as the protesters move towards the gate. While they take their position, another small group of students arrive accompanied by a few lecturers with colorful signs. Some female students start to call out to the cars that drive by, pointing towards a sign that says "Honk for the climate." As the first cars honk, the girls scream in celebration. A brief ten minutes later, a large group of civil society members joins the demonstration, wielding signs with slogans such as "No more land reclamation" and "Cancel the master plan" to oppose the state's development plans. By combining forces, the assembly is now about sixty-headstrong.

Eventually two police officers arrive at the scene. Most protesters notice them, and some get nervous. To their relief, the officers do not intervene. After asking some questions and noting down some names, the officers start managing the traffic on the street. Many civil society members are amazed by the ease of the situation. The protest can go on.

This scene at the university in March 2019 was a remarkable event for many reasons. It marked Malaysia's first climate protest[8] and also witnessed a notable

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[8] Oriented around the movement started by the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg.

group of young adults joining forces with Penang's middle-aged civil society groups in an assembly for the first time.[9]

This vignette demonstrates how perceptions and willingness towards political participation can undergo a transformation, as many participants experienced joining such "high-profile activity" for the first time. Four external factors can be identified for why some young adults joined the protest, despite the general reluctance of their age group to participate in such events.

First and second, while the turn-out of young adults was limited in comparison to that of civil society members, those who did participate felt encouraged to join, possibly due to the presence of supportive lecturers. The presence of these lecturers may have provided a form of guidance and reassurance, creating a supportive environment for the young adults to actively engage in the protest. Since the rally took place just outside the university and not on campus grounds, students were therefore also less likely to get into trouble. Presumably, although the university guards were alarmed by the event, they did not consider the protest to fall within their jurisdiction or violate any legal stipulations that required their intervention.

Third, the thematic approach of the protest, being part of a global movement rather than directly targeting or opposing Malaysian or local politics, positioned the participating young adults as advocates of a relatively safer and somewhat apolitical (non-ethnic) statement within the perceived "activist pocket." However, there was a contrast between the sign messages displayed by civil society members and students during the protest.

Finally, the timing of the event in relation to national political events was likely also a relevant factor. The rally was organised about a year after the last general election, which marked a brief period during which the coalition of federal opposition parties, which had been governing the state of Penang since 2008, temporarily gained control of the federal government (May 2018–February 2020). Their national victory led many to believe federal reforms were on the horizon and a "New Malaysia" was imminent. Various restrictions on political participation, including the law curbing the political activities of students, were expected to be eased. Thus, in the context of a national momentum that promised better political circumstances, and considering the local circumstances of the protest that minimised the risk of retribution by the police or university authorities, some young adults dared to challenge the norms surrounding political participation for their age group.

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[9] Moreover, the event was also the first sizable student-oriented demonstration held near the campus, taking place in a political climate that had seen the opening of political space following the unprecedented electoral upset of 2018 in the federal government.

5 Penang2030: Paving the Way for a New Political Culture of Inclusive Participation?

The climate strike discussed in this chapter serves as an instructive case study on fostering political engagement among youth, aligning with one of the goals of "Penang2030," the development strategy of the state government. The strategy emphasises that "youth participation in decision-making and civil society will lay the foundation for the next generation of leaders." It also states that "… In order to make democracy a way of life, public space must therefore be widened" (5).[10] Yet, as demonstrated in the sections above, various barriers hinder the political participation of youth in the first place. We conclude by suggesting that the positionality of youth can be improved through policy action that addresses four barriers discussed below.

Negating Federal Control
Despite the federal electoral momentum experienced by Penang state's parties in 2018, often referred to as a period of longing for "New Malaysia," significant federal reforms that promised increased political freedom remained largely absent. After 22 months, the national government entered a political crisis, wherein the parties that opposed the Penang state government regained control over the federal government.[11]

As such, paternalistic practices and repressive laws did not change over time. Thus, for Penang's state government to spur youth activism, or even to provide a platform for youth to voice their concerns, the state government still needs to negate the institutional obstacles in the face of its federal counterpart.

Steering Away from Paternalist State Roles
If these federal barriers can be negated, one should be wary that the state government's efforts do not simply shift the currently paternalistic role from the federal to the state level. The Penang2030 manifesto cites the focus of Penang's government as "the defender of democratic values and of multicultural inclusivity, which had been a key strategy in Penang, must [now] shift towards nurturing of democratic mind-sets and behavior" (Penang State Government, 2019: 4). This may suggest that the state government feels responsible for taking over the pedagogic function currently operating at the federal level, rather than widening political space for a checks-and-balances system through political participation. More specifically, Penang2030 seeks to boost youth volunteering at civic NGO-like organisations; even though young adults reported feeling more comfortable with the more passive civic participation over political activism, this should not be the sole modus operandi. A balance ought to

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[10] With Penang2030, Penang's development plans (PTMP, PSI) have been propagated by the slogan "a family-focused green and smart city that inspires the nation" (2019: 2) that "leaves no one behind as Penang moves on towards greater heights."

[11] In February 2020, a political crisis unfolded as the former opposition parties lost control of the federal government due to a coalition schism and defection to the former government parties. Unfortunately, many of the election promises aimed to addressinstitutional barriers to political participation have not been fulfilled.

be maintained between taking the lead to encourage political activity and preserving the political autonomy of citizens. This could be achieved if both governments abstain from dictating the political narrative of Malaysia's youth. The state government could thus make a good start by moving beyond old or new forms of paternalism, while facilitating the conditions in which young people can freely, and without dictation of the government, discuss their political ideas both in interaction with state institutions and in daily life.

Positive Encouragement Towards Challengers of Culturally Embedded Political Muteness

Given the deeply embedded practices of a political culture that discourages people from speaking up, resulting in even the reluctance of young adults to participate in everyday political conversations, it will indeed be a challenging objective to include youth in participatory decision-making processes. In fact, the policy ambition to attract youth to participate requires a socio-cultural behavioral change. As mentioned earlier, the majority of participants suggested improving political citizenship education in schools. However, since school curricula are determined by the federal government, the sphere of influence of the Penang state government is limited in this regard.

Still, other channels may be utilised to provide positive encouragement and easily accessible opportunities for youth to participate. The authors suggest that, by prioritising less sensitive "activist pockets" such as climate change or urban development, and by approving and supporting relevant initiatives whenever possible, the efforts of "early adopters" can be highlighted in a positive light. This can contribute to fostering a better socio-cultural image for youth participation. Furthermore, considering Malaysia's highly active online social media landscape, with an average usage of 3 h a day in the late 2010s—there are possibilities to explore of digital participation may be explored. The use of safe and anonymous platforms, as well as easy-access methods for digitally participating in decision-making processes, could be an avenue worth experimenting with.

Re-Approaching the Intersection Between Generational and Ethno-Religious Political Inclusion

Lastly, the ethno-religious tensions in Malaysian society were frequently cited by interviewees as a reason for not participating in political activities. Indeed, while it is important to prioritise inclusivity towards different ethnicities, policymakers must be cautious not to inadvertently neglect other important criteria in their pursuit of inclusivity. In other words, it is not favorable to have an ethnically inclusive gerontocracy where efforts to boost youth participation are overshadowed by the priority of maintaining ethno-religious stability. An inclusive political climate should allow for both a focus on multiculturalism and the presence of open space for state criticism.

In conclusion, inclusive policies should prioritise lowering barriers for youth to participate and express their voices, even in the face of challenges for the state government. These challenges include the complexities of federal–state relations and their

pedagogic positionality, the perceived duty to maintain ethno-religious stability at any expense, and a prevailing political culture that relegates youth to the (political) background. The case study of Penang, a city-state, demonstrates the challenges that policymakers in urbanised regions may encounter when it comes to identity politics, federal relations, and everyday civil practices in their efforts to improve political inclusion of young adults in urban decision-making processes. By recognising the significance of youth and moving beyond stereotypes of apathy or political disengagement, cities have the potential to create an inclusive political environment that promotes positive urban development. By setting an example and challenging national common beliefs and practices, cities can lead the way in fostering meaningful youth participation and shaping a more inclusive and dynamic political landscape.

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