IMAGINED
MALAYSIA

A HISTORY OF
Student
Activism
IN MALAYSIA

CHAPTER 3:
Theoretical
Framework and
Methodologies

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Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

"Hence, in addition to only examining student activism from the political science perspective, namely as a tool for nation-building, we also utilise this approach in exploring the sociological aspect of student activism, in terms of its contribution towards the self-development of the students themselves."

There are growing appeals for exploring student activism, due to its power to not only influence university-level reforms but also to initiate larger shifts in national politics (Altbach, 1989). Older literature regarded activism as being synonymous with controversial politics and non-institutionalised ways of claim-making, such as strikes, boycotts, and movements (Barnes and Kaase 1979). However, these actions require concerted and direct intervention in current concepts of activism to bring about political and social change (Fisher 2012). Student activism is uniquely positioned to address both sociological and political science perspectives, unlike social movement in general (Costain, and McFarland, 1998). Hence, in addition to only examining student activism from the political science perspective, namely as a tool for nation-building, we also utilise this approach in exploring the sociological aspect of student activism, in terms of its contribution towards the self-development of the students themselves. To further elaborate on this view by Costain and McFarland, we will also adopt other approaches including Pascarella's general model for assessing change[1] and Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome models in conjunction with Altbach's theoretical framework of student activism.

This research draws from Altbach's theoretical framework and understanding of student activism in terms of its causes, organisational and ideological orientation and outcomes, as well as the backgrounds and identities of student activists, taking into account the national and institutional environment that led to the emergence of student activism and protests. For over 40 years, Altbach's academic contribution, particularly to the empirical and historical studies of student activism in North America, Europe, and some parts of Asia within the 20th century, has set him apart from other scholars specialising in a similar topic. This is complemented by his personal experience as a student activist back in his alma mater days, which eventually led to his role as national chairperson of the nationwide Student Peace Union in the late 1950s (Luescher, 2005).

Altbach believes that student activists are the 'conscience of their generation', setting the trend of their time as leftists, democrats, environmentalists, or simply young people who fight for equality (1992). While his study covers almost every aspect of student activism including the time- and space-specifics to explain the dynamics of student activism, much of his conceptual framework largely represent movements in the West and India, and may not necessarily resonate with student activism specifically, particularly in regions which he refers to as 'developing countries in Third World' (Altbach, 1984). This was admitted by Altbach himself in his work "Student Movements in Historical Perspective: The Asian Case", which merely served to suggest further explorations concerning student movements in Asia, rather than providing a theoretical framework for it (1970). Taking into account the fluidity and ever-evolving nature of student activism in a globalised world, it should be noted that Altbach's theoretical perspectives are meant to provide a more generalised idea on what constitutes student activism and activist, as well as the dynamics of student activism as a whole. The historical and cultural context of Malaysia greatly differs from that of North America and India, which appears to be lacking from Altbach's work, and which this research aims to explore. In doing so, Meredith Weiss' research on student movements in Malaysia was considered, and whose conceptual framework on student activism will be compared to that of Altbach's.
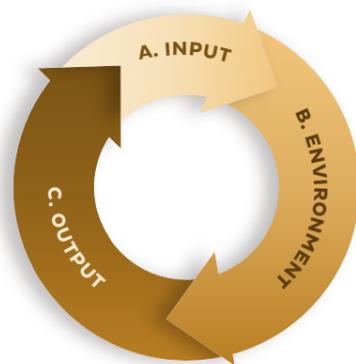

Figure 1: Astin's Input-Environment-Output Model (1970)

[1] *Pascarella proposed a model for the assessment of student development, or change, in which he considered the direct and indirect effects of a college or university's structural characteristics as well as its campus culture. He proposed that five sets of variables influence the growth and development of students: the pre-college characteristics of students, the institutional or operational characteristics of the college or university, the environment or culture of the school, socialising agents on the campus, and the level of effort put forward by the students (Pascarella, 1985).*

We derive our framework from Astin's Input (I) – Environment (E) - Output (O) model (Figure 1) used for assessing the impact of studying in college. He aimed to create a multivariate model that would direct those interested in evaluating causal relationships through a statistical model, thereby helping researchers to avoid inference pitfalls that might arise from believing that an accomplished result is a college effect, is not a college effect or, in some cases, draws incorrect conclusions from both. The college effect research design may have several common validity risks. Even the use of the pre-and post-test methodology to assess the impact of colleges may be problematic, considering the turnover of students who drop out of colleges and the possibility of believing that the impact of the college experience is attributable to all changes in college. (Astin, 1970). Therefore, many of the research on the college effect takes place in non-experimental environments[2], and these variances are statistically controlled (Pascarella, 2001). The I-E-O model "addresses the basic methodological problem of all non-experimental studies in the social sciences, namely the non-random assignment of people (inputs) to the program (environment)" (Astin & Sax, 1998, p. 252).

In his original model, input "refers to those personal qualities the student brings initially to the education program (including the student's initial level of talent at the time of entry)". Environment, or in a simple mediator model called mediator, "refers to the student's actual experiences during the educational program". Lastly, outcome refers "to the 'talents' we are trying to develop in our educational program" (Astin 1993, p 18). Based on Astin's observation, the majority of college effect analysis is focused on examining 'B', which is how the environment affects outcomes (Astin, 1970). 'A' reflects the fact that the students who are a part of it are influenced by the environment. 'C' corresponds to the direct link of inputs to outcomes. Astin advises that observing only parts of the model raises the probability of inference errors and that in the framework of any studies on college effect, all three issues need to be discussed which what this research will try to carry out. The model will also adhere to Pascarella's General Model for Assessing Change as we want to see the positive development in student activism as well as nation-building. Pascarella (1985) argues that what the student carries to the institution in the context of qualities, talents, and attributes will engage with the institutional environment, along with the degree and quality of student efforts, leading to positive transformation and improvement.

Broadly speaking, the hypotheses we are aiming to test corresponds to the following diagram:

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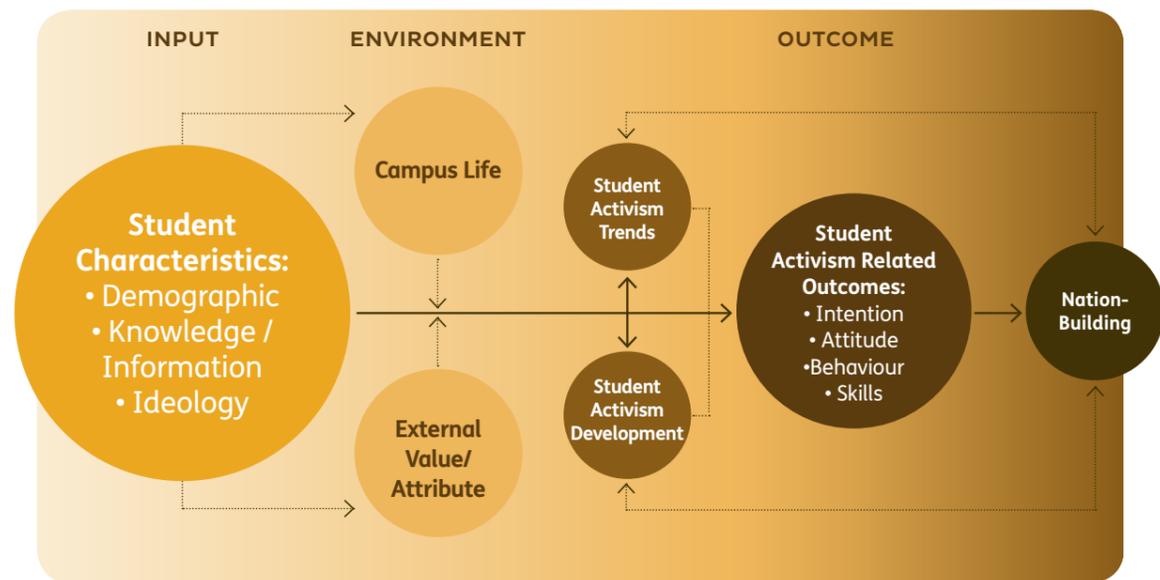
Figure 2: Modified Astin I-E-O model (Astin, 1970) to assess the contribution of student characteristics, including student background and knowledge related to student activism, towards their participation, intention/attitude, and behaviours that parallel the development of nation-building based on Altbach's theoretical framework on student activism.

[2] *Non-experimental research is the type of research that does not involve the manipulation of control or independent variable. In non-experimental research, researchers measure variables as they naturally occur without any further manipulation.*

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Method And Instrument

> **"It is important to use a multivariate regression so that net effects (i.e. the impact of one variable on another as other influences are taken into account) can be calculated since there are theoretically many relationships involving behaviours, intentions, context, and attendance."**

The research methodology adopted in this research is a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis. A thorough literature review of books, theses, journals, newspapers, and local magazines related to the subject was conducted, survey questionnaires handed out among Malaysian students in overseas and local higher education – both private and public institutes, focus group discussions with representatives of various bodies and organisations were held as well as semi-structured interviews with advisory personnel.

1 Content Analysis

Although content analysis is used by researchers from different fields such as social sciences, communications, psychology, political science, history, and language studies, it is most associated with social science and mass communication studies. It has been commonly used to explain a broad variety of topics such as social transition, cultural icons, evolving patterns in the theoretical content of various fields, authorship verification, changes in the content of mass media, the essence of news coverage of social issues or social problems such as atrocities on women, dowry abuse, social revolutions, misinformation trends, etc. The content analysis normally begins with a specific statement of the priorities to be studied or the study questions. The researcher raises the question "what do I want to find out from this material" and frames the reviewing goals. Therefore, the researchers must find a point of contact related to the study and pose questions that can be answered by reviewing the data. The general content analysis through a literature review is to map out the history of student activism in Malaysia.

This content analysis was used mainly in the literature review phase. We gathered over 50 articles, journals, and books about the history of student activism, specifically focusing on student activities in Malaysia. We also extracted data from news and reports mentioning student activism over five decades which we gathered from online sources, hard copies from libraries, and private collections. This data was divided into six different eras or themes spanning the Pre-Merdeka years to 2020, each highlighting the main trends or issues, the pertinent figures as well as the strategies involved during individual periods. Based on this, we started to draw deeper hypotheses for our following data collection process and the overall theoretical and conceptual framework.

2 Survey

The survey questionnaire was conducted to find out students' perception of student activism and the regulations around the activities, as well as to get opinions and recommendations on best practices regarding student activism.

a. INSTRUMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

For the survey, we were interested in assessing the relationship between student characteristics – including background and knowledge of student activism – with student participation, intention, and behaviour, which parallels the development of nation-building. In addition, we hoped to investigate how this relationship is moderated by several other key variables that are pertinent to the sphere of student activism. On top of that, we wanted to assess other interactions that occur within this model rather than solely focusing on the effect of inputs towards outcome variables as normally done through this framework. It is important to use a multivariate regression so that net effects (i.e. the impact of one variable on another as other influences are taken into account) can be calculated since there are theoretically many relationships involving behaviours, intentions, context, and attendance. It is worth mentioning that based on our data collection process, student activism is highly associated with political involvement. Hence, attitudes, intentions, or behaviour of student's participation in student activism as well as their knowledge, are related to the political scope. This is reflective of the term 'activism' itself, which invokes the idea of political engagement through public action.

We extracted a few themes from our literature review and adapted them into our main framework and data collection process which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Mirroring Altbach's theoretical framework, we divided variables from the themes into "input", "environment", and "outcome", which will contribute to our overall research analysis. The "input" encompasses student background, including demographic attributes such as gender (Verba et al. 1995, Verba et al. 1997, Burns et al. 2001, Gordon 2008, Booth-Tobin and Han 2010) and race (Sullivan 1996, Hart and Atkins 2002, Ginwright 2007, Sherrod et al. 2010). The "environment" factor for this study will cover both campus life (peer, lecturer, study program, institute, etc) and external value (law, national situation, international situation, information, and technology, etc). Meanwhile, the "outcome" covers the participation attitude/intention and participation behaviour for this survey.

Gender

In the case of gender, it is found that there is an observable difference in the level of political interest and participation between men and women. The puzzling gender gap is not only consistent over time (Delli Carpani and Keeter 1994) but is also detected in several democratic countries (Inglehart 1981). One factor cited to explain the gap is a female disadvantage in accessing resources correlated with political engagement such as education. Another factor is the difference in social roles and household duties between both genders (Flora and Lynn 1974).

While conforming with the pattern, Verba et al. (1997), found that men are more politically engaged and informed compared to women, more so in national politics compared to local politics. Interestingly, however, the study discovered that women have greater awareness in local education matters, which is consistent with American social norms that traditionally position education as part of women's domain. Gordon (2008) further argued that the reason women have visibly lower participation in community social movements is due to less familial autonomy, which restricts their mobility and opportunity to form larger networks, to join coalition meetings, to pick up organisational traits, and to understand the politics of their localities. The lack of mobility decreases the potential of young women to engage actively in politics.

However, there is research that challenges the notion that women have a lower interest in political participation. Booth-Tobin and Han's (2010) analysis of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, for instance, which displayed relatively high young women participation in campaign activism, indicated that the key factor in determining the level of women's political participation is motivation. While women are not as interested to participate in traditional politics as men, they respond enthusiastically to the possibility of creating real change in politics. In other words, women do not consider themselves to be "political" relative to men, but they participate strongly in politics when they feel they can contribute to systemic improvement.

In the Malaysian context, gender representation in student activism used to, and perhaps still is, not diverse. Apart from a few female icons, leaders of student movements in Malaysia tend to be men[3]. Female students in the 1970s, especially those living off-campus, tend to be the least active group in campus activities (Weiss 2011, 140). Fatimah Hamid-Don (1975) ascribed this situation to the low female proportion in public higher education institutions at the time. Male students represented about 70 to 75 per cent of major public universities in the 1970s (Hamid-Don 1975, 11-13).

This is more apparent during the height of the *dakwah* movement in universities where traditional gender roles were emphasised by Islamic student organisations. A study claimed that there is a positive correlation between women's acceptance of *dakwah* ideals and their willingness to tolerate subordination (Narli 1986). This observation may not apply to other religious communities as some Christian student organisations reported higher women participation compared to others (Weiss 2011, 214).

Social and Racial Background

The connection between demographics and youth political participation has been explored by some scholars. Hart and Atkins' (2002) study of urban America reveals that urban youths tend to be less active in civic participation compared to their suburban counterparts. The substantial presence of foreign-born or ethnic minority populations in urban areas coincided with a lower voting tendency amongst adults, and subsequently, their offsprings. Low levels of education and a high poverty rate contributed to lower civic development amongst urban youths. Not only that, the lower capability of urban schools contributed to lower involvement in clubs and teams that could promote civic competence.

These findings, however, do not necessarily mean that urban youths in America, who are predominantly Black, are not interested in civic engagement but rather lack the opportunity to do so. In other words, holding factors such as socioeconomic status and demographic characteristics constant, it is observed that black Americans have a greater level of political participation (Brown & Brown 2003). Their interest in civic engagement can be witnessed during the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, and anti-apartheid movements (Fisher 2012, p. 124).

Ginwright (2007) criticised the undertheorising of past researches, which tends to focus on understanding the causes of social problems such as violence, school dropouts, drug use, and crime. Instead of emphasising how urban decay and poverty contribute to negative behaviours, the author argued that more studies need to look at how critical social capital can empower black youths to participate in civic engagement within their communities. According to Ginwright, critical social capital encompasses collective networks of collective interests within neighbourhoods, collective identities, and mutual trust members' shared capacity to do good in the interest of the community. Through intergenerational ties, black youths may develop greater expectations about their ability to bring positive change to their lives. By first challenging the negative conceptions surrounding their community, they can develop and sustain the critical social capital through racial solidarity and political consciousness about personal issues. This perspective views incidents of police brutality, academic failure, and

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[3] *Interview with Adam Adli, October 21, 2020.*

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"The widespread use of modern technologies such as smartphones, the Internet, and social media platforms such as Twitter – all collectively known as Web 2.0 – connect people in novel ways (Wang & Wellman 2010)."

unemployment not as personal shortcomings but as institutional policies that directly affect the lives of youths.

Contextualising the research to student activism in Malaysia, it does present complex nuances regarding the relationship between demography and political participation. Weiss (2011) has described how Left-inspired students, mostly from urban settings, dominated campus leadership throughout the 1960s up to the early 1970s. For example, most of the students who participated in the National Student Service Corps – staying for a month in less privileged rural areas and perform community service – were in fact from urban backgrounds (Gopikumar, 1972). Levels of organisation also tend to be higher in urban universities (Weiss 2011, 248). This is understandable as college students in rural campuses usually have less interaction with the off-campus community, hence lack the opportunity to develop networks externally to the local community as well as other campuses (p. 238).

However, this by no means suggests that rural-based students were not interested in political engagement. The influx of Malay students from less privileged, rural families especially from the east coast, owing to state affirmative action policies, altered the discourse of student activism (p.116). From the mid-1970s onwards, campus leadership was dominated by Malay-Muslim students, who tend to identify closely with communal and religious interests such as national language and national education policy (Roff 1967, 319-21). Until the *Reformasi* period, Malay student activism centred upon religious student associations such as Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia (PKPIM). Yet, as Nagata (1980) pointed out, even urban Malay students were also engulfed in the *dakwah* phenomenon, represented mostly through Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM). It should be noted that religious revival also occurred in parallel with non-Muslim students during this period (Nagata 1980, 436-7).

Socioeconomy
The student movement and youth movement, though on two separate trajectories, overlap with each other and are strongly associated with political behaviour. This is evident in the literature used to explain the socio-economy influence on student activism. Fisher has summarised in her study that, "research finds that young people who come from families with a higher level of socioeconomic status tend to talk about politics more regularly, vote more

frequently, and [are] more generally engaged" (Fisher 2012: 122). Verba et al. (1995) substantiated this point by stating that "for each kind of participation, affluence and activity go together (p. 189).

However, Ozymy's (2011) study curiously found that the level of activism amongst less affluent college students is much higher than their wealthier peers. Developing from Campbell's (2003) argument that political activism is motivated by self-interest, Ozymy explained that it is in the best interest of less-affluent college students who have undertaken student debt to participate in politics despite their lack of resources (p. 104). While less-affluent members of the community face strong obstacles to participate in movements, low-income student borrowers acquire the greater capacity to engage due to their higher level of education. A higher level of education translates into a greater propensity to build civic skills, resources, and mobilisation that increase students' potential participation in politics (Ozymy 2011, p. 104).

Information Technology
The advancement of information technology has also been found to affect the political participation of youths. The widespread use of modern technologies such as smartphones, the Internet, and social media platforms such as Twitter – all collectively known as Web 2.0 – connect people in novel ways (Wang & Wellman 2010). While this modern advancement alters personal interactions, it functions more as a supplement, rather than a replacement, to face-to-face contact. Many studies have supported the conclusion that Web 2.0 encouraged political participation. Van Aelst & Walgrave (2002) found that this technological advancement deems political action "easier, faster and more universal" (p. 466). Dale & Strauss (2009) showed that text message reminders resulted in a three percentage point increase in voter turnout on election day.

The advent of Web 2.0 does not mean that political participation becomes less physical. Some studies have been conducted to investigate how the Internet affects collective action and how it brings change to social movements (Bennett et al. 2008). In fact, the increasing popularity of the Internet may have contributed to an increase in protest attendance among youths. Not only are protests easier to organise (Fisher et al. 2005), but the level of political embeddedness among protest participants

also correlates positively with reliance on digital media, as discovered by Bennett et al. (2008). In their words, "the hallmark of protest in the digital age appears to be rapid and dense networking behaviour that can (though surely does not always) cross-issue and organisational boundaries with a minimum of formal coalition brokerage and collective identity framing" (p. 286).

The positive contribution of the Internet to political activism is also observed in Malaysia. This was more apparent during *Reformasi* when the Internet became the primary outlet for spreading propaganda and mobilising collective action. Some examples of active portals during that period were KampusNegara.net and Idealist-Mahasiswa.net (Weiss 2011, p.270). The launch of the online news portal *Malaysiakini* also provided crucial information and resources for anti-establishment student movements. While Malaysian students were lagging relatively in terms of mobilising through the Internet, activists now have depended more on services such as Youtube and Facebook to gather participants and spread information (Weiss 2009, 753-55).

Based on the themes extrapolated from the literature review, the following hypotheses were produced and which were later incorporated into the questionnaire structure.

List of Hypotheses
a) Students' knowledge of student activism will affect their likelihood to participate in student activism (or have better attitudes towards it);

b) A student's age will affect their participation intention/ attitude and participation behaviour;

c) A student's race will affect the participation attitude/ intention and participation behaviour;

d) A student's religion will affect the participation attitude/intention and participation behaviour;

e) A student's socioeconomic status (based on the type of funding) will affect the participation attitude and participation behaviour;

f) Students' level of knowledge on current issues (environmental factors) will affect their participation attitude and behaviour;

g) The use of social media (to keep up with and educate the public) will affect students' participation attitudes in all states;

h) Students' participation intention/attitude and participation behaviour will affect their satisfaction with UUCA/other regulations;

i) Students' participation behaviour will affect their attitudes towards the efficacy of student movements;

j) Students' level of satisfaction with Malaysia's current situation will affect their attitudes towards the efficacy of student movements;

k) Students' level of satisfaction with Malaysia's current situation will affect their attitudes and knowledge towards student activism.

Based on the list of hypotheses, our questionnaire was constructed in a way to assess these causal relationships by studying the following variables.

List of Variables in Questionnaire
i) Student activism background (Input)
• item 1 – 5, 11,

ii) Student knowledge (Input)
• item 12, 19, 20, 22, 26,

iii) Campus life (Environment)
• item 6 – 10, 28 – 30

iv) External factors (Environment)
• item 20, 23, 25

v) Student activism intention, attitude, and behaviour (Outcomes)
• item 14 – 18, 26

vi) Nation-building behaviour (Outcomes)
• item 21, 24, 27

A vast majority of these measures will be assessed using a dichotomous scale following contingency questions in which participants need to give reason(s) for their first choice. A scale was used to categorise whether participants either agree or disagree and give specific rates with any given statement, and an ordinal scale for participants to rank specific issues. Furthermore, there were several multi-select questions where participants may choose multiple answers related to the question. As this type of question normally results in both false-positive or false-negative scenarios, participants were made to choose their top three from each answer without the requirement to rank these choices as it was not necessary to facilitate our analysis. Each measure was made available in English and Bahasa Malaysia. Measures for which a Bahasa Malaysia translation was not readily available were translated by members of the research team.

A statement of confidentiality was clearly outlined and highlighted in both, the information sheet and the consent form. Anonymity is ensured as participants were not asked to produce an identifiable participant code.

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b. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Based on a preliminary calculation made by the research team using the Qualtrics software, we obtained a minimum sample of 150 participants, although we were aiming to recruit approximately 300 participants. The survey was disseminated for two weeks (16/09/2020 – 30/09/2020) and we received 208 respondent and one emitted sample due to unmatched requirements.

The survey was administered using Airtable software. To recruit both the numbers and demographic profiles we were interested in, the following methods were employed to recruit participants:

i) online, by advertising web-links to the Airtable survey through Imagined Malaysia's social media channels, and;

ii) snowballing sample, where the link was freely shared among students (especially student leaders) in higher education institutes.

The survey requirements were only that participants be students between the age of 18 to 40 years old and currently enrolled in a Malaysia higher education institute or a Malaysian student currently enrolled in any higher education institutions abroad. We did not include any other exclusionary criteria as the aims of the study does not necessitate doing so. We ensured that participants were not obliged to remain in the study against their will by clarifying that their participation is voluntary. Clear statements on the information sheet and consent forms notify participants that they can withdraw their participation and that they will not be penalised or questioned for doing so.

c. DATA COLLECTION SUMMARY

Below are graphs to reflect the summary of our data collection in terms of the demography of the participants.

Based on Figure 3, the highest total number of feedbacks is students age 22 – 25 years old; 89 students, followed by age 18 – 21 years old; 80 students, age 26 – 29 years old; 27 students, age 30 – 35 years old, 10 students, and only 1 student for age 35 – 40 years old. From overall participants, 50.7% of our survey participants are female, 44.9% are male and 4.3% are unidentified/gender fluid/other.
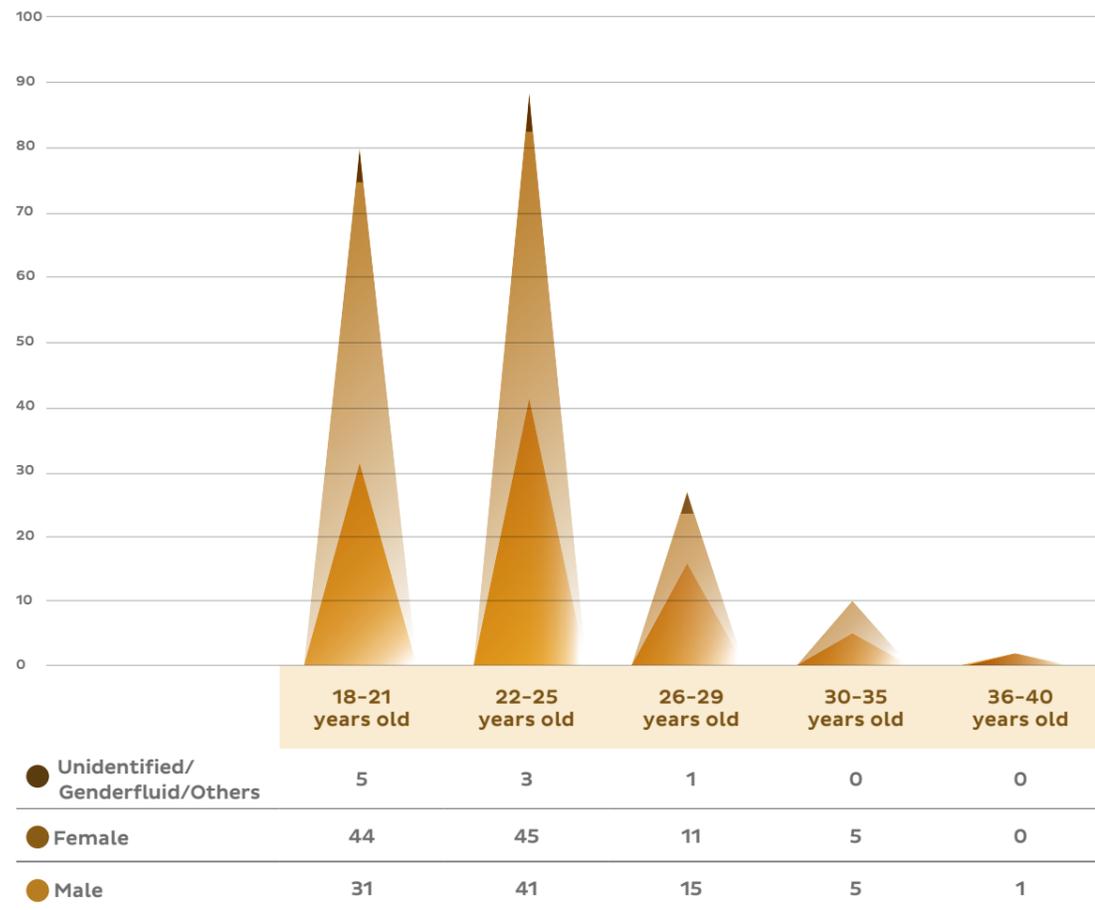

- ● **45.6%** Malay
- ● **28.2%** Chinese
- ● **10.7%** Mixed Race
- ● **8.7%** Indian
- ● **3.9%** Orang Asal
- ● **3.4%** Orang Asli
- ● **1.9%** Foreigner
- ● **1.9%** Others
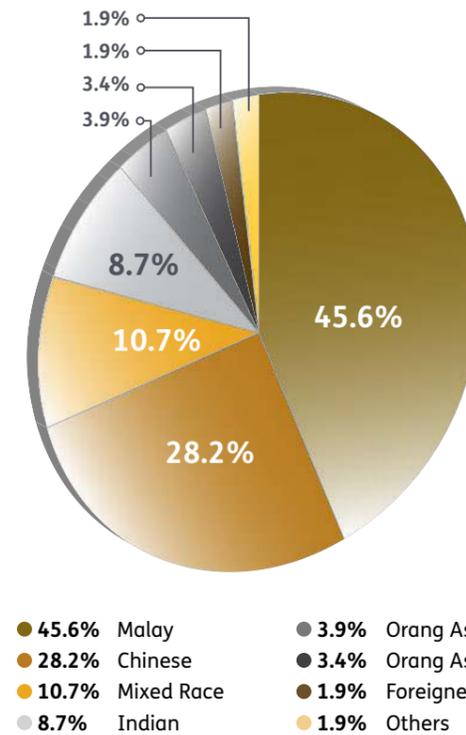
Figure 4: Breakdown of Participants by Ethnicity (%)

- ● **49%** Islam
- ● **15.5%** Buddhism
- ● **14.6%** Christianity
- ● **5.8%** Agnosticism
- ● **4.9%** Hinduism
- ● **3.4%** Atheism
- ● **2.9%** Undecided
- ● **1.9%** Others
- ● **1%** Sikhism
- ● **1%** Taoism
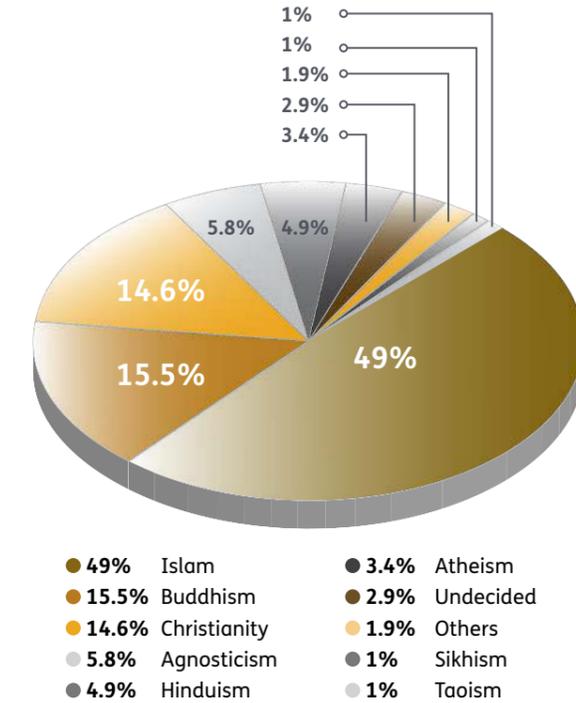
Figure 5: Breakdown of Participants by Religion (%)

Based on the official Department of Statistics Press Release (2018-2019), the 2019 data estimates of the demography of the population are as follows: Bumiputera - 69.3%; Chinese - 22.8%; Indian - 6.9%; Others 6.9% (Department of Statistics Press Release, 2019). These are the latest estimate of the Malaysian demography given that the last census collection was in 2010 and the 2020 data will not be available till next year. Although our sample is not exactly reflective of the racial percentages in Malaysia, the proportions between the various ethnicities are akin to the general proportions of the data collected by the Malaysian government, with the Malay ethnicity being slightly underrepresented at 45% (Figure 4). However, it is also equally important to take the proportion of students based on their racial identity, into account. However, this information is not readily available on any reliable governmental sources. Therefore, this report will rely predominantly on the demography of the total population in Malaysia provided by the Department of Statistics.

According to the Population and Housing Census 2010 report (Department of Information, Ministry of Communication and Multimedia, 2015), about 61.3% of the population in Malaysia practised Islam, 19.8% Buddhism, 9.2% Christianity, 6.3% Hinduism, and 1.3% practised Confucianism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions. In the remaining 0.4%, other religions, including animism, folk religion, and Sikhism, accounted for 0.4%, while 1.7% either stated no religion or gave no information. This situation can be seen in our survey data. Almost half of the participants practised Islam (49%), followed by Buddhism (16%), Christianity (15%), Hinduism (5%), and the rest.

Figure 3: Breakdown of Participants by Age and Gender

	18–21 years old	22–25 years old	26–29 years old	30–35 years old	36–40 years old
● Unidentified/ Genderfluid/Others	5	3	1	0	0
● Female	44	45	11	5	0
● Male	31	41	15	5	1

"**The survey requirements were only that participants be students between the age of 18 to 40 years old and currently enrolled in a Malaysia higher education institute or a Malaysian student currently enrolled in any higher education institutions abroad.**"

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ISCED[1]	LEVEL OF EDUCATION	ENROLMENT IN 2015	ENROLMENT IN 2016
0	Pre-School	934,318	943,022
1	Primary	3,107,870	3,101,007
2	Lower Secondary	1,432,681	1,391,757
3	Upper Secondary	1,368,758	1,367,896
4	Post-Secondary	0*	-
5	Short Cycle Tertiary	324,645	468,382
6	Bachelor's Degree	841,878	674,598
7	Master's	96,920	149,895
8	Ph.D	38,648	43,675

Note: 1. ISCED – International Standard Classification of Education
       *Revised date
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)

Figure 6: Enrolment in Malaysia by Level of Education
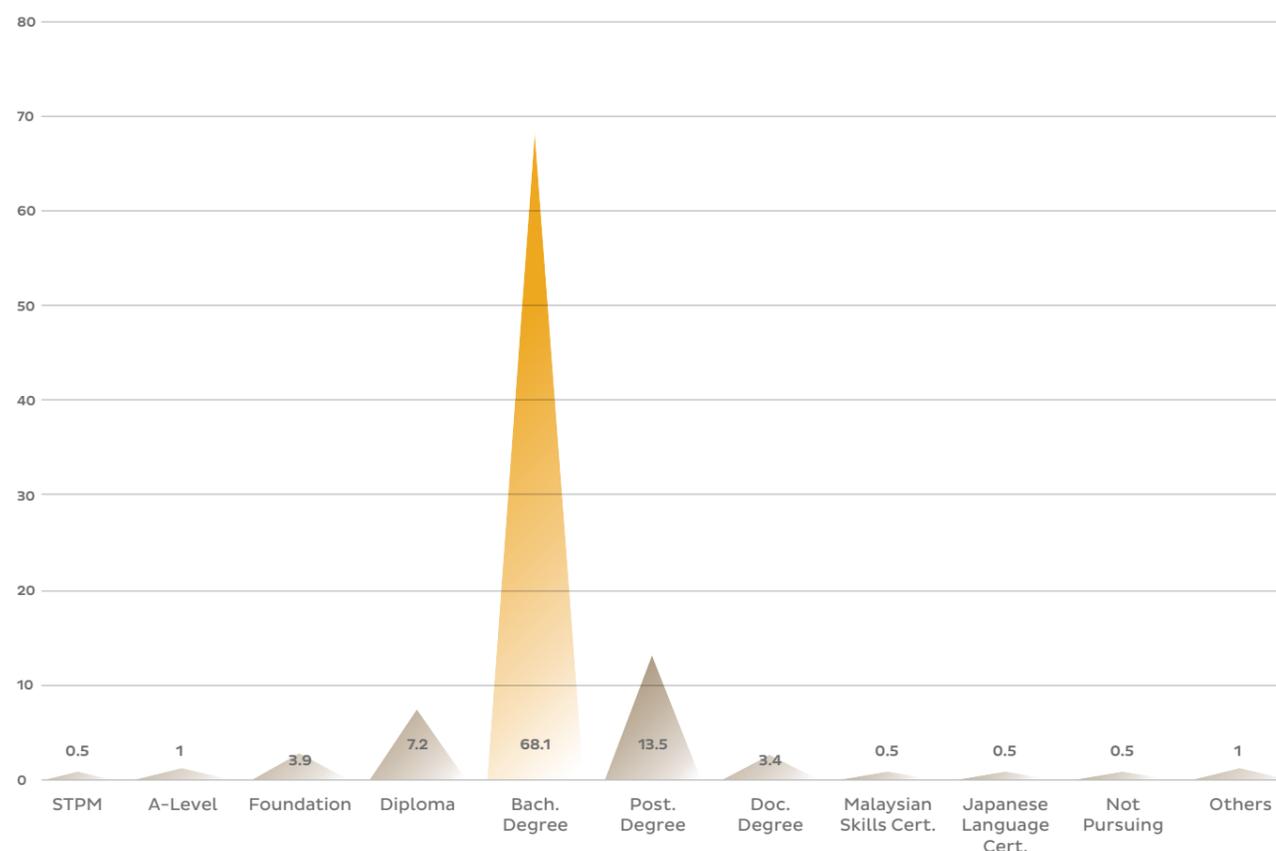

Figure 7: Percentage of Participants based on Level of Education (%)

Based on UIS' data collection for enrolment by the level of education in Malaysia shown in Figure 6 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018), student enrolment for a Bachelor's Degree is the highest post-secondary education at 674,598. This is reflected in our sample, with 68.1% of participants currently enrolled in a higher education institute for a bachelor's degree. This is followed with the next highest level of education post-secondary education with Masters (Post. Degree) and Doctoral degrees (PhD) respectively, which our sample follows.

3 Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to investigate values and perspectives held by student activists/student bodies and by key authorities within the higher education sector on student activism. Insights obtained from the FGDs enhanced the findings from the quantitative survey and supply comprehensive input for the policy recommendations that were produced at the end of this research project.

a. INSTRUMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

The primary mode of data collection will be through audio and video recordings of participants' verbal responses throughout the FGDs. To pre-empt and assuage any concerns participants may have about the recordings being made public, any output produced and used for publication will be in written form only (following transcription of the video recordings), with individual quotes and statements not being attributable to specific persons.

b. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

We held separate FGD sessions for student activists/student bodies and the authorities, as their knowledge, understanding, and experience were likely to be very different. The FGDs took place over four sessions, held over several days online. Based on the number of participants and the volume of opinions/insights we were able to obtain, each session ran longer than the expected two hours, with roughly 30 minutes being dedicated to each theme (although this varied depending on the responses) and around 10-15 minutes allocated for introduction,

conclusion, and a short break. In line with the sample size recommendations made by Krueger & Casey (2015), we capped each session to a maximum of 10 participants.

The first focus group included leaders of student bodies in higher education institutes in Klang Valley. Student bodies based in Klang Valley were identified in particular and the focus on Klang Valley was due to its strategic location (e.g. central location of administration and major educational institutions, easy access to government and other NGO bodies for engagements and partnerships) which has allowed the most visible student bodies to thrive in the region. The main objective for the first FGD was to get views from active student bodies in Malaysia. The leaders of student bodies in higher education institutions outside Klang Valley were included in the second FGD. The objective remained the same, with an additional discussion about their perspective on the limitations and opportunities that come from living outside cities or urban areas.
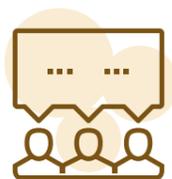
The third FGD had similar objectives, however, with a different group, i.e. institutional authorities, and the discussion was positioned as a dialogue session. As the parties who manage and oversee organisations or movements related to students, their perspective will allow for a more balanced conversation in this study. Their input was also important to gauge institutional support and/or control on developments within student activism. Meanwhile, the final FGD consisted of former student activists who currently leads various government-affiliated political bodies including MCA Youth and UMNO Siswa. The diversity of participants for all the FGDs was intentional; to account for varying and differing views and to provide for more comprehensive data for the research.

Content Outline for Focus Group Discussion

Each FGD was divided into several thematic sections. Each section was then divided into three parts. The first half of the session revolved around the students' backgrounds and campus experience before allowing for a break. The second half probes the role of external factors in influencing student activities. Accounting for time constraints during these sessions, certain elements, themes or issues were not explored.

"Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to investigate values and perspectives held by student activists/student bodies and by key authorities within the higher education sector on student activism."

A HISTORY OF
Student Activism
IN MALAYSIA

Final Report | Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodologies

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	THEME A Student Background	THEME B Campus Experience	THEME C External Factor
PART 1 General Questions[4]	1. What characteristics (of students, of secondary school activities, of institutions) predict involvement in activism? 2. How does student activism shape a student's growth and mission beyond campus life? What are the effects of involvement in student activism on the learning or skill outcomes of cognitive complexity, humanitarianism, knowledge acquisition and application, and interpersonal and intrapersonal competence? 3. Are the learning/skills outcomes associated with activism the same for all students or do they differ for students with different background characteristics (ie, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.)?	1. Under what university conditions do student activists emerge and succeed? 2. How do students utilise the student bodies/student activism to address current/trending issues on- and off-campus? To what extent do campus authorities assist or restrain the freedom of student mobilisation and participation both in- and off-campus? Does the location of the campus assist or restrain the mobilisation of student activists?	1. Under what national conditions do student activists emerge and succeed? 2. How do national regulations affect student activism? Does enforcement effectively define the extent of mobilisation, or has it further encouraged involvement among students? 3. To what extent have national or international issues constructed the values and objectives among student activists? Has the focus of student activism shifted from in-campus concerns to off-campus issues? Hoe do they balance their focus with their current capacity and power?
PART 2 Visual Prompts	Visual prompts corresponding to specific themes will be projected onto the screen. Participants will be asked to discuss the prompt.		
PART 3 Slides Sharing	Results from the survey and focus group discussions will be shared with participants for their input on the accuracy and intricacies of the data uncovered. Examples can be found in the document MAL105_Survey Analysis_vf.		

Figure 1: Topics for the Focus Group Discussions

[4] *The questions may or may not change according to the nature of discussion.*

c. DATA COLLECTION SUMMARY

A total number of 27 participants took part in all four FGDs, with 8 student activists/leaders taking part in the first FGD and another 7 in the second FGD, while the remaining 5 participants consisting of a combination of former student leaders/activists took part in the third FGD. To gain wider perspectives on the research, the fourth (and final) FGD was held, with participants being former student activists who are currently holding leadership roles in their respective political groups. Despite the participants coming from different backgrounds (professional designation, race, gender, and others) in all four FGDs, the topics of discussion remain the same, with each FGD divided into several sessions. The first session touched upon the background of a student activist, while the second and the third were focused on on-campus experience and external factors that influence student activism respectively. The same topics that were brought up in each FGD session interestingly led to various views shared by the participants, which were largely based on their observations and experiences that were formed by their personal (race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status) and professional (occupation) background.

It should be noted while there was an immense effort made to ensure the diversity of participants (mainly in terms of gender and race) by reaching out to as many participants of various backgrounds as possible within a short period to participate in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), 20 out of all 27 participants were men, with women being the remaining 7. 16 of these participants were Malay, 12 of them being Malay men. These gender and racial disparities were acknowledged by 10 out of all the 20 participants from the first 3 FGDs during the first session, who contended that men, particularly of the Malay race continue to be at the forefront of national politics, including student activism, not only because the Malay race forms the majority within the Malaysian demography, but also because the country's politics have always been dominated by men. In the second session for all FGDs, 17 participants revealed that the campus environment does influence student participation in activism/politics, with the environment being a result of four factors, namely location, peers, institution, and administration.

4 Interview

The purpose of the interview is to examine what principles and strategies were employed for student organizing as well as getting an opinion on the results and issues raised during the survey.

a. INSTRUMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

As part of the research process in highlighting the development of student activism in Malaysia, interviews with prominent student leaders and activists were conducted by the team. Here, the curated interview sessions led by the Research Workstream focused on expanding and acquiring primary data as well as for archiving and media collaterals development. The perspectives provided by the interviewees about their active participation in activism and student movements will provide us with a valuable dimension to expand on for our project deliverables.

The core objectives of the interview process were:

1 Expanding on the data acquisition process
The curated interview proved to be critical in expanding on the engagement process. The interview process provided thorough discussions that embark not only retrospectively but also on an introspective dimension of key themes, moments, and discourses around student activists.

2 Assists in the research process
As part of our engagement and research process that was conducted via FGDs, literature review, and survey findings, the utilisation of the interview process allows for the research team to engage in an active dialogue with the interviewees. This process will strategically enhance the research process as it provides a more focused and intimate understanding of the collective history of student activism.

3 Strategy for collaterals dissemination
Discussions in the public sphere on the student movement in Malaysia occur in a vacuum and do not reach a wide audience, specifically in academia. This interview documentation will provide strategic intervention to access uncharted demography, particularly on social media. Apart from that, it will also expand multiple forms of documentation to be accessed as future archival material.

A set of about 10 to 15 questions was formulated based on historical analysis of student activism through existing literature, media reports, and other sources. Findings from the survey and FGDs were also incorporated in the formulation of questions. The group of interviewees will consist of student activists who were active since the 1960s up until recent years. The main themes that the interview questions will focus on:

i) the motivation behind their participation in student activism

ii) the organization method of their activities

iii) the perceived outcome of their movements

iv) the response of university and formal authorities to their actions

v) the existing social and cultural context amongst students

vi) the national legal setting during their active period

vii) the heterogeneity of student movements

Similar to the FGDs, the interview process involved audio and video recording. Based on advice from the Content & Engagement team, and due to movement restriction caused by Covid-19, we conducted most of our interviews virtually through Microsoft Teams, Google Hangout, and Jitsi. Only one interview was conducted physically in Setia Alam, Selangor. All interviewees were aware that their statements were recorded and had given consent for Imagined Malaysia wish to publish their statements as quotes on the project website or social media platforms.

b. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

In terms of interviewee selection, the team focused on two main aspects:

1. In-depth participation and contribution to student activism

The selected interviewees for the process are thoroughly curated by the Research Team in providing an important perspective of student activism in Malaysia. Through their active participation and contribution, the focus would be to dissect the emerging pattern of student activism, not only from the collective perspective of the student organisations but also one's role within the movement.

2. Strategic knowledge exchange in expanding research findings

With multiple outputs from this project, the strategic knowledge derived from student activists' experience, perceptions, and historical awareness will expand on the project's dimension. Here, the input from the initial research process through survey findings and FGDs rapporteur reports will be utilised to allow in-depth exchange and expanding on the theoretical framework directly from the interviewees.

Due to resource and time constraints, the research team had to be strategic in choosing the interviewees in such a way that different periods and research themes are represented. The final list of former student activists comprised of Dr Khong Kim Hoong (the 1960s-70s), Raja Ahmad Aminullah (1970s-80s), Dato' Sri Ahmad Shabery Bin Cheek (1980s), YB Sim Tze Tzin (1980s-1990s), Khairul Anuar (late 1990s-early 2000s), Adam Adli (Early 2010s) and Anis Syafiqah (Post 2010s).

Apart from former student activists, the research team also interviewed NGO Undi 18 co-founders Qyira Yusri and Tharmelinggem Pillai to explore the current behaviours and characteristics of digital activism amongst Malaysian youths. Undi 18 has empowered many local youths in political and social activism through programmes such as Parlimen Digital.

Besides exploring the spirit of activism amongst students and youths, it was vital for the research team to understand the legal institution concerning university autonomy and student rights. Understanding this would enable us to formulate effective policy recommendations to the Malaysian government, which is among the primary objectives of this project. Therefore, we also interviewed Dr Wan Chang Da and Mr UK Menon as they were able to provide valuable insights and perspectives regarding

the Universities and University Colleges Act as well as university administration processes.

The interview sessions were organised within one month from early October to early November. Due to movement restriction under the conditional movement constraint order (CMCO), all but one of the interviews was conducted through online platforms. Each interview session which contains about 10 to 15 questions lasted between one to two hours.

All of the interview sessions were transcribed by the research team and summarised in the section below.

c. DATA COLLECTION SUMMARY

We conducted ten interviews in approximately four weeks (07/10 - 9/11). The first set (6 of them) of interviewees were identified as prominent student activists from each decade starting from the 1960s to the present day by the researchers from existing literature. We observed a few interesting themes that participants pre-*Reformasi* period highlighted, which predominantly revolves around racial discourses and competing strands of ideologies in student activism. Dr Khong noted the various emerging student organizations that emerged on campus during a period where activism was relatively lively. Religious activism especially flourished during the 1980-90s period when UUCA and its subsequent amendments were introduced. YB Sim spoke about the effect of UUCA and its restrictions particularly amongst non-Bumiputera groups in Malaysia. Another prominent student activist in the 1970s is Dato' Sri Ahmad Shabery Cheek. During his time at UM, he was the president of the Muslim Students Association and spoke about the emergence of the student Islamic movement (*dakwah*). As the former Minister of Agriculture and MP for Kemaman, Terengganu, he also gave insight into the development of UUCA from a politician's perspective. The post-*Reformasi* period engendered a new period of revived activism, with changing dynamics of Malaysian politics and larger involvement in student-based issues as well as politics. Anis Syafiqah and Adam Adli touched upon students' motivations to move beyond student-based movements, as well as themes of gender and socio-economic class within the collective consciousness and how this affected student activism.

The second set of interviews focused on individuals who were familiar with the legal structures of Malaysia, particularly with regards to higher education. We identified these individuals as Wan Chang Da and UK Menon. Additionally, we interviewed Qyra Yusri of the Global Alliance group to gain more insight into the Undi18 initiative to lower the voting age from 21 to 18. The interviews focused on the legal history and structures of higher education in Malaysia. Our team produced a set of policy recommendations for the government and higher learning institutes based on our research, surveys, and focus group discussions. We presented these recommendations to the interviewees at the end of the session to gather their suggestions and opinions. Based on their comments, we have amended these sets of policy recommendations appropriately.

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