

# Power, Voice, Space and Accountability



A summary analysis on Malaysian  
Youth Advocacy by NDI Malaysia



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About this booklet

# About NDI

National Democratic Institute, or NDI, is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that works in partnership around the world to strengthen and safeguard democratic institutions, processes, norms and values to secure a better quality of life for all. NDI envisions a world where democracy and freedom prevail, with dignity for all.

Since 1999, **NDI Malaysia** has worked with a variety of Malaysian stakeholders to support electoral, political party and parliamentary reforms, while also helping to build women's political leadership and promote transparency and accountability in Malaysia's governance.

To learn more about NDI Malaysia's past activities, log on to [www.ndi.org/asia-pacific/malaysia](http://www.ndi.org/asia-pacific/malaysia)



# Background

5.8 million new voters were recently introduced into Malaysia's electoral roll following the December 2021 implementation of the Undi18 (Vote18) bill and automatic voter registration. Out of the 5.8 million, an estimate of 1.2 million of them are currently aged between 18 to 20 years old, representing an influx of first-time youth voters.

This historic milestone was made possible by the country's first constitutional amendment in ten years, the **Undi18 bill**, which saw unanimous support across the Malaysian political divide. The bill, which was gazetted in Malaysia's Parliament back in July 2019, sparked excitement and optimism among Malaysian youth, as it renewed hope for youth voice and youth concerns to be highlighted in the national conversation.

However, since its 2019 gazette, the Undi18 bill and to a larger extent, the notion of expanding youth political participation in Malaysia, faced **numerous challenges** to be implemented, primarily due to the deep-rooted skepticism around youth maturity and leadership. The bill's delay was further exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia, which also saw a sudden change in government due to the now infamous 'Sheraton Move', which raised concerns about the progress of national reforms, inclusive of the Undi18 bill which was expected to be implemented by July 2021.



*Image by Azhar Ramli*

The fluidity of Malaysia's political situation and the pressing concern over the increasing number of local Covid-19 cases, led to then Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin declaring a State of Emergency until August 2021. This action suspended Parliamentary proceedings and subsequently threatened the status of the bill's implementation. With the July 2019 deadline drawing nearer, multiple digital and physical protests were conducted by youth collectives when it became apparent that a delay in the bill's implementation would be inevitable. By August 2021, a successful judicial review initiated by five Sarawakian youths finally saw the Kuching High Court ordering the Federal Government to officially implement the lowering of the voting age by the end of the year, 2021.

This long battle for the bill's implementation ultimately revealed the **prevailing reluctant attitudes** within the Malaysian government and society around uplifting youth voice, leadership, and political participation. To add, post-Sheraton-move, voter frustration and apathy among youth have increased - further exacerbated by authoritarian reactions towards youth activists during the youth-led protests as well. Between its initial gazettelement and implementation, the journey to realizing the Undi18 bill highlighted the ongoing challenges to center youth voice and youth power in local governance.

This marginalization of youth voices also **extends into the landscape of local civil society organizations** (CSOs). Major civil society coalitions in Malaysia lack youth representation and leadership, which leads to a decreased access and exposure for youth organizations to current, established power structures - further diminishing their potential for capacity-building and coordination, more so in areas of democratic reform. Based on National Democratic Institute's (NDI) prior discussions with Malaysian youth partners, NDI has also found that local youth CSOs have struggled to effectively participate due to an assortment of issues including lack of funding, organizational capacity, and opportunity. The majority of these organizations work in isolation and are unaware of the existence of other youth organizations working on similar causes.

Now, with the successful implementation of the Undi18 bill and rumors of general elections potentially around the corner, grassroots youth organizations critically need support to **build their agency and enabling environments** within the political sphere so their voices can finally be included as full participants in democratic reform.

However, a lack of support and viable entry points within political structures for meaningful youth participation severely limit the ability of youth to engage decision-makers or influence political outcomes. Changing this reality requires intergenerational relationship building involving interactions where understanding, trust, respect, and appreciation can emerge, space for meaningful participation in policy decisions is provided, and avenues for young people to collaborate within adult-led structures.

As such, NDI Malaysia has begun its **Youth Program**, an 18-month program to increase youth political participation and effective youth engagement in democratic reforms. The program is built on NDI's global theory of change for youth political participation, which emphasizes the role that young people themselves should play in driving change. Rather than being passive recipients of assistance, young women and men can be active in developing their agency and promoting a more supportive environment.

# Regions covered



Northern: Kedah,  
Penang, Perak



Central: Selangor,  
Kuala Lumpur



Sabah region



Sarawak region

The NDI Malaysia Youth Program seeks to:

- Build youth “agency” so that youth civic and political actors have the knowledge, skills, and networks to coordinate and engage in democratic reforms more effectively.
- Develop “enabling environments” that ensure youth perspectives and participation are valued by key civic and political actors, including civil society and elected officials.

The first phase of the program entailed **regional assessments and discussions** with various youth-led CSOs across Malaysia, primarily in Northern region, Central region, Sabah, and Sarawak. To gain greater insight into each CSO partner’s level of ability to influence political processes and outcomes, NDI conducted assessments and power analyses of these groups in the preliminary stages of program engagement. The information gained from this assessment will serve as a baseline to measure each group’s progress throughout the course of NDI’s assistance. This assessment also identifies strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and gaps in each region’s capacity to successfully execute their campaigns and provides recommendations moving forward.

# Analysis Frameworks

The Power Analysis framework recognizes that **Power** is not static nor one-dimensional. Failure to understand the complexities of power can result in missed opportunities and gaps in strategy. Therefore, NDI believes that it is essential that organizers, activists, and community leaders build a shared understanding of how power works and influences their priority issues, impacts the context in which they operate, and identify the power they have and wish to build. NDI's Power Analysis exercise helps to build and deepen this understanding and identify possible strategies and approaches for change, especially as collectives working in shared spaces or regions.

The VSA assessment framework was developed using NDI's theory of change for citizen participation programming, which rests on the intrinsic right of all citizens to be heard and the power of organized, informed citizen action to drive democratic change. The theory explains the role that participation plays in enhancing three key variables in the democratization process, **Citizen voice, Political space, and Accountable relationships**. At the intersection of these three variables, politics is practiced and new norms and expectations begin to emerge and become institutionalized.

## Methodology

The team conducted six regional group assessments across Penang (2 sessions), Kuala Lumpur (2 sessions), Kuching, and Kota Kinabalu. By using NDI's Power Analysis framework and baseline VSA assessment, the team conducted structured discussions and focus groups with a total of **42 youth activists representing 33 youth groups across Malaysia**. Five of the sessions were conducted in person, with the first Penang session being conducted fully online.

The participating youth organizations were identified through a series of consultations with NDI Malaysia's Youth Council committee and other youth partners. The organizations work on a wide range of issues, inclusive of but not limited to - civil rights, indigenous rights, migrant rights, education, youth empowerment, environment, and special-needs issues. Their individual and organizational identities are kept anonymous.

# List of Acronyms

- ADUN** - Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri (State assembly persons)
- AUKU** - Akta Universiti dan Kolej Universiti (University and University College Act 1971)
- BERSIH** - The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections
- BN** - Barisan Nasional
- CSO** - Civil society organizations
- GPS** - Gabungan Parti Sarawak
- JKKK** - Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung (Village Development and Security Committees)
- KBS** - Kementerian Belia dan Sukan (Ministry of Youth and Sports)
- KSU** - Ketua Setiausaha (Chief Secretary to Government of Malaysia)
- MBM** - Majlis Belia Malaysia (Malaysian Youth Council)
- MP** - Members of Parliament or Parliamentarians
- MUDA** - Malaysian United Democratic Alliance
- NDI** - National Democratic Institute
- NGO** - Non-governmental organizations
- NUTP** - National Union of the Teaching Profession
- PA** - Power Analysis
- PAS** - Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Party)
- PSM** - Parti Sosialis Malaysia (Malaysian Socialist Party)
- PWD** - Person-with-disabilities
- PYDC** - Penang Youth Development Cooperation
- ROS** - Registrar of Societies
- Section 377A** - Malaysian Penal Code, Section 377A
- SUARAM** - Suara Rakyat Malaysia
- SUHAKAM** - Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia)
- VSA** - Voice, Space, and Accountability (Framework)

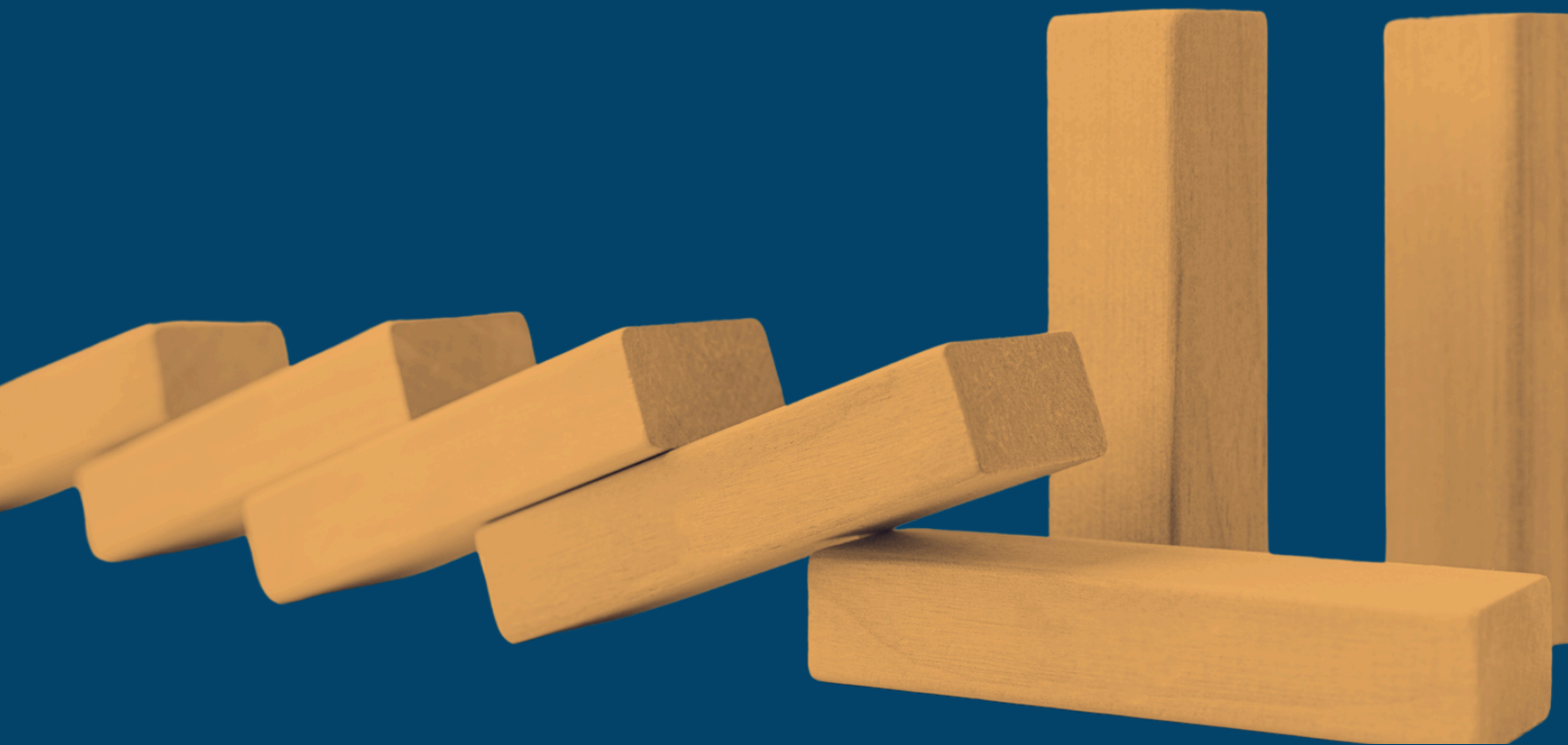




# Power Analysis

When first prompted to describe what 'power' means to them, local youth activists referred solely to traditional authorities such as local politicians, law enforcement, and other CSOs.

NDI's Power Analysis (PA) framework helps participants acknowledge the multi-dimensional nature of power that can also manifest in social, economic, cultural, and political relations between youth CSOs, individuals, and groups.



## Permutations of power

### Visible Power

This refers to the visible and definable aspects of political power – the formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions, and procedures of decision making which affect their advocacy work.

Participants detailed the following as relevant examples of visible power in their line of work:

LOCAL POLITICIANS AND  
DECISION-MAKERS

LAW ENFORCEMENT/  
POLICE

POLITICAL PARTIES

LOCAL ACTS

GOVERNMENTAL BODIES

UNDI18 BILL

BILLS AND POLICIES

CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK

SHARIA LAW AND  
RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES

ROYALTY

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

## Hidden power

This refers to the way that certain powerful people and institutions maintain their influence by controlling who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda.

Participants detailed the following as relevant examples of hidden power in their line of work:

GOVERNMENT OFFICERS

POLITICIANS/  
POLITICAL PARTIES

BUREAUCRACY

COMMUNITY  
LEADERS/GATEKEEPERS

PROXIMITY TO  
CONSERVATISM

LOCAL MEDIA

SOCIAL MEDIA  
PLATFORMS

BUSINESSES, SPECIAL  
INTEREST GROUPS

INFLUENTIAL FIGURES/  
PERSONALITIES

OTHER CSOS

EDUCATION

CORRUPTION

## Invisible power

This refers to the type of psychological and ideological boundaries that influence citizen participation in advocacy/politics.

Participants detailed the following as relevant examples of hidden power in their line of work.

YOUTHS NOT  
TAKEN SERIOUSLY

POWER DISTANCE

SENIORITY/FILIAL PIETY

POLITICS IS A  
DIRTY WORD

POLITICAL  
DISTRUST/APATHY

ACTIVISTS ARE SEEN AS  
TROUBLEMAKERS

RACISM/XENOPHOBIA/  
HOMOPHOBIA

RELIGION

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

'KEEP IT SILENT'  
CULTURE

PATRIARCHY

URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
STATUS

## Regional Power Mapping



The following section represents an overview of stakeholders relevant to the participating youth CSOs and their respective influence and support towards youth CSOs' causes. To view clearer images of the power mapping grids, please refer to Appendix A to Appendix D.

### Clarifications on power mapping grids:

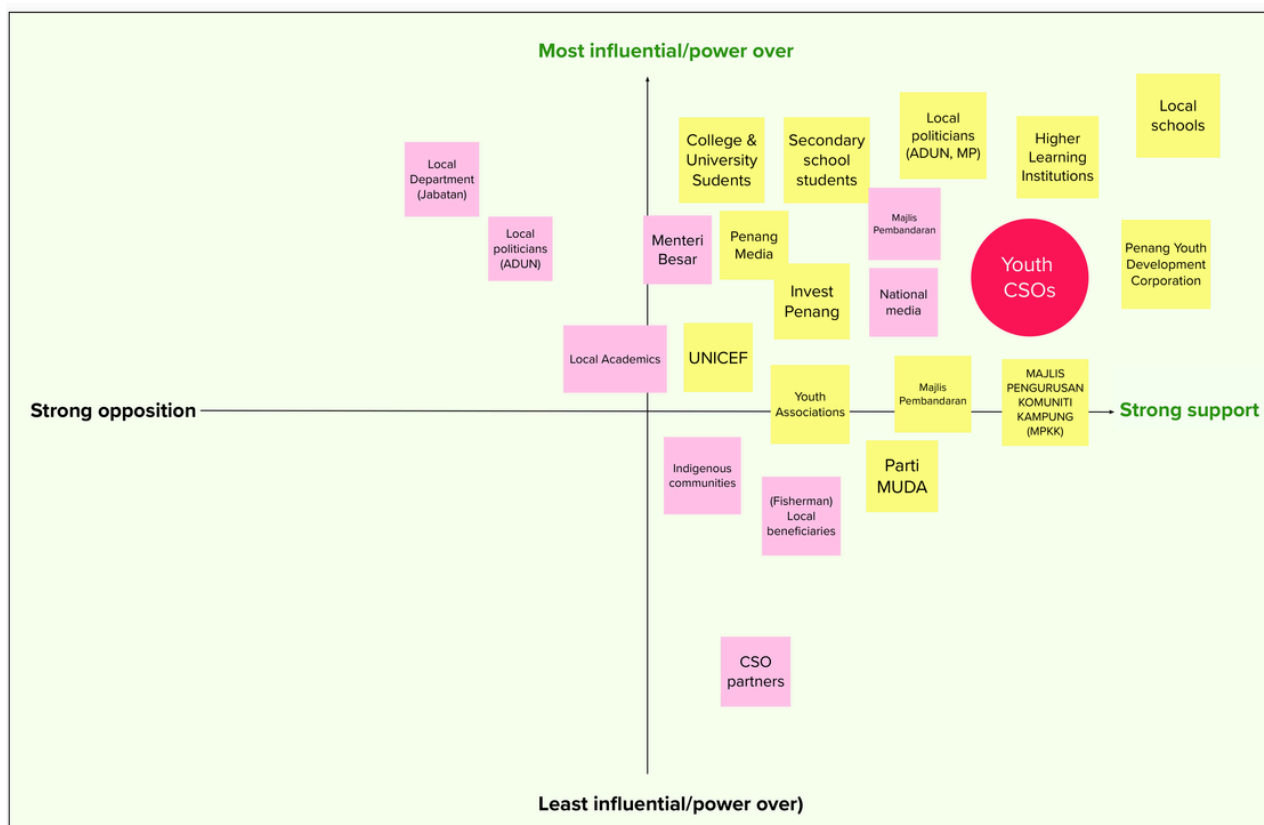
- The stakeholders listed in these grids are not fully representative nor exhaustive of the diverse stakeholders that youth CSOs in Malaysia interact with when advancing their respective causes. These grids simply serve us a high-level snapshot of the most relevant and influential stakeholders to participating youth activists at the time of discussion. For Northern region, participants sampled were mostly state-affiliated and therefore this affected the quality of the data collected.
- The naming and positioning of all stakeholders were strictly the voluntary articulation and interpretation of the participating CSOs.
- The stakeholders identified are phrased according to the original phrasings provided by youth CSOs, with only minimal corrections by NDI for clarity.
- Two sessions were conducted respectively in the Northern and Central regions, therefore these grids would display two types of labels (color-coded) to identify the two sessions in each region.
- Certain stakeholders may repeat themselves on the same grid, as they have fluid influence/support towards the diverse participating CSOs in the same region.

## NORTHERN REGION POWER MAPPING

Areas represented: Penang, Kedah, Perak

CSO Advocacy themes: Youth empowerment, Environmental justice, Farmers' rights, Welfare for the destitute.

*Note on limitations: Two sessions were conducted in the Northern region. In the first online assessment, PA Penang 1, most participating organizations were state-affiliated, which skewed the data collection process. Thus a second session, Penang PA 2, was conducted in person with non-state affiliated organizations to ensure more holistic data.*



*\*Legend - Yellow notes represent PA Penang 1, Pink notes represent PA Penang 2*

At first glance, youth CSOs in the Northern region report that they **benefit positively from influential and supportive stakeholders**, inclusive of local decision-makers in their state governments, beneficiary communities, and local media. This is due to CSOs' very close proximity and direct access to state government agencies such as the Penang Youth Development Cooperation (PYDC), which oversees a majority of youth enrichment activities in the state.

Youth CSOs in the Penang region focus primarily on youth empowerment, therefore their main stakeholders are **education-based stakeholders** such as students, schools, and higher learning institutions - whom they report to being very supportive of CSO activities. Kedah and Perak youth CSOs work on the ground with older, underprivileged beneficiaries such as fishermen, farmers, indigenous communities, and the destitute - who have less political capital thus being placed lower in the 'influence' quadrant. Non-Penang CSOs also showcase more diverse CSO partners, -

citing partners in the Central region such as SUARAM (Suara Rakyat Malaysia) - which they acknowledge to possess restricted power and influence due to the geographical distance.

When conducting the Power Analysis, Penang-specific youth CSOs reported a **positive experience working with public stakeholders**, reporting no significant challenge - unsurprising, due to their formal ties to state entities, with some participants representing the stage agency itself (PYDC). Penang youth CSOs were the only group in the nationwide VSA assessments to identify no opponents and report no hidden power when conducting their advocacies. This, however, is not the case with other youth CSOs from Kedah and Perak - these CSOs cited more **skepticism** towards the government due to various bureaucratic challenges and friction from the government bodies they engaged with.

Interestingly, there is very **minimal political party influence** in this region, as a result of northern CSOs preferring to remain neutral and/or non-political. Their advocacies are purely oriented around service-delivery, therefore, building relationships with political players was not cited as an advocacy strategy. MUDA (Malaysian United Democratic Alliance) was the only political party singled out in this region, likely due to the party's similar focus on on-the-ground youth community work. Additionally, although **local media** was remarked as an influential stakeholder, Northern CSOs did not detail any specific outlets, signifying that engaging media is not a main priority for their current advocacy work.

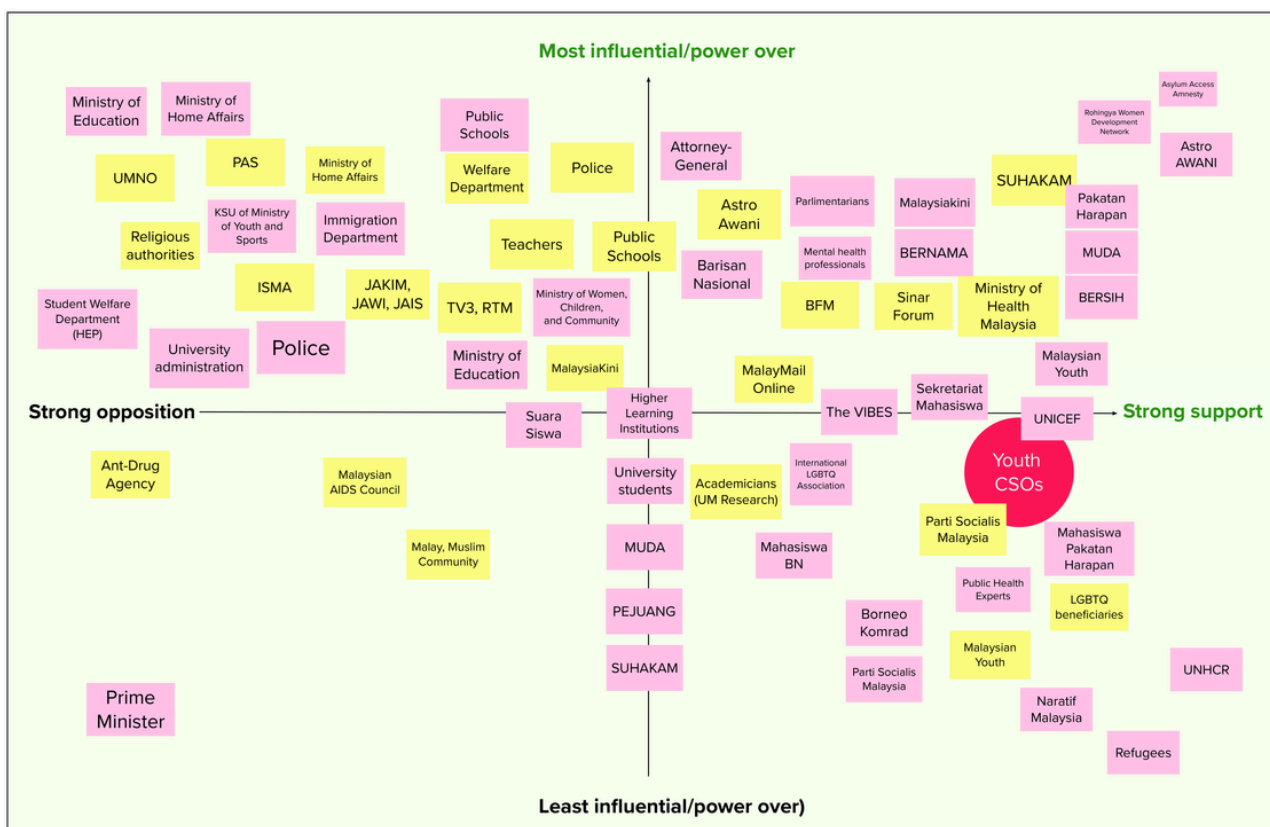
Overall, in comparison to all other regions, the Northern region youth advocacy scene is still comparatively **small and largely regulated** by their local authorities. Penang youth CSOs operate around state government priorities and government-linked stakeholders, unlike youth CSOs in Kedah and Perak, who operate more independently and possess a wider (yet still limited) network of stakeholders. Youth CSOs themselves report feeling empowered in their current position, stating that they do **hold considerable influence** within their community, as noted by their respectable position in the highly influential quadrant (red circle).

## CENTRAL REGION POWER MAPPING

Areas represented: Selangor and Kuala Lumpur

CSO Advocacy themes: Youth empowerment, political advocacy, voter rights, children's rights, refugee rights, LGBT rights, Islamic secularization, student activism, and mental health.

*Note: Two sessions were conducted in the Central region to recruit a more representative sample size. Major youth CSOs were unable to attend the first session, PA KL 1, thus necessitating a second session, PA KL 2, to capture more youth voices in the region.*



*\*Legend - Yellow notes represent PA KL 1, Pink notes represent PA KL 2*

The youth advocacy scene in the Central region is observed to be the **most vibrant and diverse**, aligned with the variety of rights-based advocacies that require a highly diversified network system. Local youth CSOs in the Klang Valley illustrated that they had formal and informal relationships with beneficiaries on the ground, political parties, government departments, ministries, media, and international coalitions as well.

This **breadth of the network** is unique to the Central region. A majority of the youth CSOs in Klang Valley operate around a **rights-based framework**, which necessitates **multilayer engagements** to address the systemic issues addressed by their advocacy. In addition, CSOs' immediate **geographical proximity** to the national capital makes it easier and more accessible for them to contact and visit-



stakeholders directly. This privilege also applies to youth CSOs being in proximity to traditional CSOs such as SUARAM, BERSIH (The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections), and SUHAKAM (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia) based in the Klang Valley, which provides younger activists access to their network and resources.

Political advocacy is a key advocacy theme for major CSOs in this region, and this is reflected in the influence of **local political parties** within their advocacies as well. Highly influential parties such as UMNO (United Malays National Organization) and PAS (Malaysian Islamic Party) were identified as opponents in most CSOs' networks, whereas MUDA, PEJUANG, and Barisan/Perikatan Nasional (BN) coalition were remarked to be largely neutral/indifferent towards CSOs' advocacies. PSM (Malaysian Socialist Party) and Mahasiswa Pakatan Harapan are reported to be more supportive, but still hold minimal influence in pushing forward the CSOs' agenda. Interestingly, when prompted to explain the 'low influence' positioning of the Prime Minister (Dato Seri Ismail Sabri at that time) in the grid, activists noted that civil servants such as KSUs and party leaders were more consequential towards their advocacies.

**Law enforcement and Islamic religious authorities** were also identified as key opponents by Central region activists. Due to the sensitive nature of some of their advocacies (working with marginalized communities, conducting demonstrations), Central region activists have had an increased number of interactions with police and consequently have had to enforce stronger security measures to protect themselves and their communities - a safeguard that is more commonly seen in Klang Valley CSOs compared to other regions. On a related note, such CSOs working with unrecognized communities such as refugees and the LGBT community declared receiving support from **international organizations** - a necessary step to access knowledge and resources that are otherwise unavailable locally due to the limited number of organizations working on these issues.

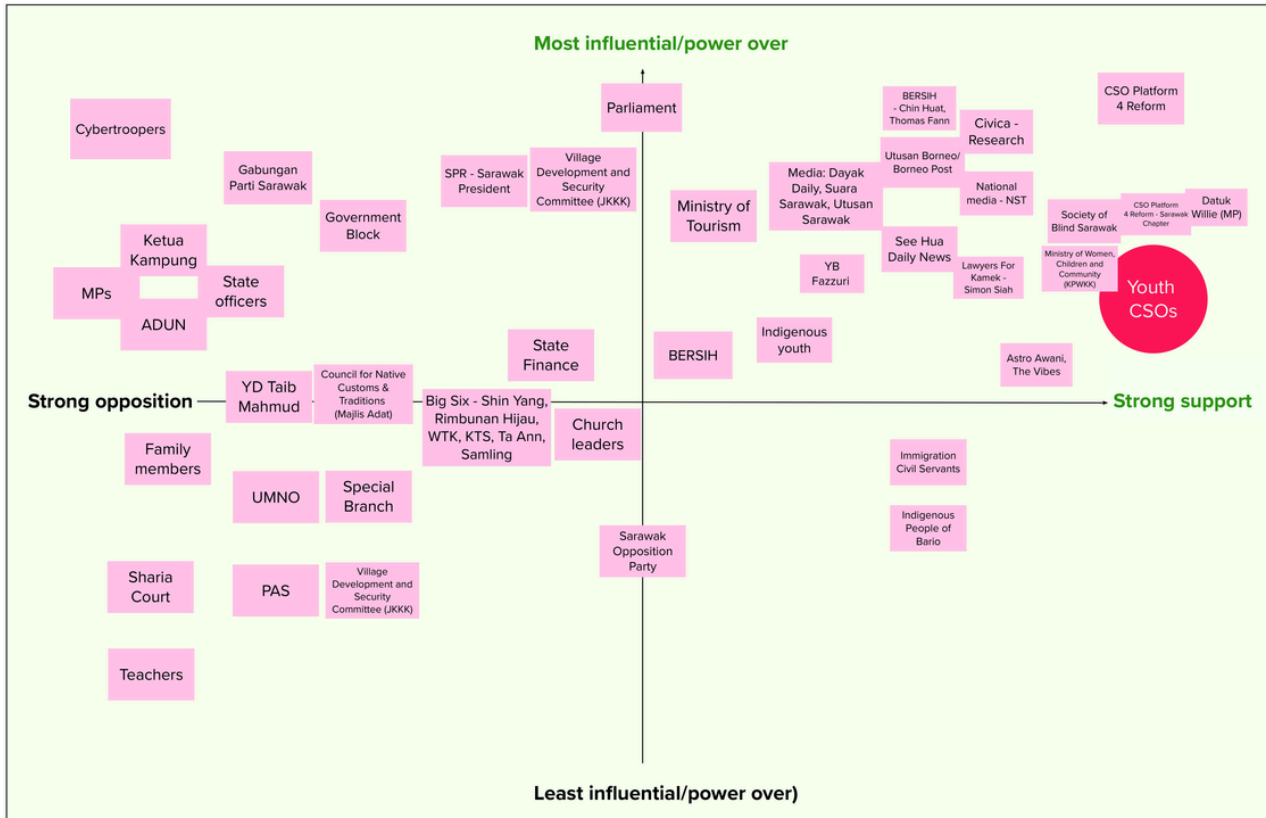
Furthermore, central region CSOs acknowledged the powerful influence of **local media** in shaping narratives around their advocacies, highlighting relationships with a variety of national media outlets, both traditional and digital. They stated that while government-linked media under the Radio-Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) umbrella such as TV3 is unsupportive of their work, English-driven media outlets such as The Vibes, Malaysiakini, BFM Radio, and Astro Awani tended to be more supportive.

These youth CSOs reflected the **power imbalance** they face in running their advocacies - as most of the country's influential stakeholders (dominant political parties, national media, law enforcement) were often in direct opposition to their causes. Though such activists have a diversified network, it is still not enough to exert their influence over decision-makers, therefore, they placed themselves as **less influential** in the larger context of local advocacy. This is likely due to the nature of the right-based framework that requires longer-term engagements and strategic planning to build influence and reach their vision of championing the rights of their respective beneficiary communities.

## SARAWAK REGION POWER MAPPING

Areas represented: Primarily Miri and Kuching

CSO Advocacy themes: Youth empowerment, political literacy, heritage preservation, special needs issues, and indigenous land rights.



Sarawak youth CSOs displayed an **active and vibrant political-advocacy scene**, working with diverse state-specific stakeholders inclusive of political decision-makers, village leaders, Sarawakian media, and local CSO coalitions too. Sarawak, which is the largest state in Malaysia, is populated by a wide variety of indigenous communities - reflected in the youth CSOs' equally diverse stakeholder list as well.

Sarawakian youth CSOs acknowledged that **federal powers** are influential in their state, as exhibited by the high influence of Malaysia's Parliament in this grid in addition to the various local Parliamentarians. National political parties such as UMNO and PAS were highlighted in their discussion, however, youth CSOs reported that local **state-specific political coalitions** are much more consequential - the most influential being Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) which forms the government in this state. The incumbent governor, **Taib Mahmud** was singled out as a major influential political player and opponent of most youth CSO's advocacies.

As most of the youth activists work on championing and uplifting indigenous communities, **Ketua Kampung**s are described as key stakeholders, taking precedence even before Parliamentarians, because they can gatekeep and restrict CSOs' access and influence on their respective indigenous villages - a common challenge for most youth CSOs. This focus on local natives beneficiaries is also illustrated by CSOs' relationships with related government entities which regulate their beneficiary interactions, such as the Village Development and Security Committee (commonly referred to as JKKK), Council for Native Customs & Traditions (commonly referred to as Majlis Adat) and the Ministry of Tourism.

Sarawakian youth activists cite **partner CSOs and coalitions** to be highly influential and highly supportive stakeholders to their work, as evidenced by CSO Platform For Reform and BERSIH's positioning in the top right quadrant. These two organizations have established strong state chapters and developed good working relationships with most of the participating youth CSOs.

Youth Sarawakian activists also describe a friendly relationship with **state-specific media** such as Dayak Daily, Borneo Post, and Utusan Sarawak which have strong readership with state citizens. This is reflected in these stakeholders' higher influence over national media outlets such as News Straits Times, Astro Awani, and The Vibes which cater to a more Peninsular-Malaysia audience.

Another key contrast to Peninsular Malaysia is also the primacy of Christianity instead of Islam in Sarawak, with Christianity being the largest religion in the state. Its influence extends into the political-advocacy scene as well, as **church leaders** are cited by youth CSOs as relevant stakeholders in their work, though typically in opposition. This reluctance is also reflected in activists' personal lives, as most of their **family members** are remarked as mostly unsupportive of their advocacy.

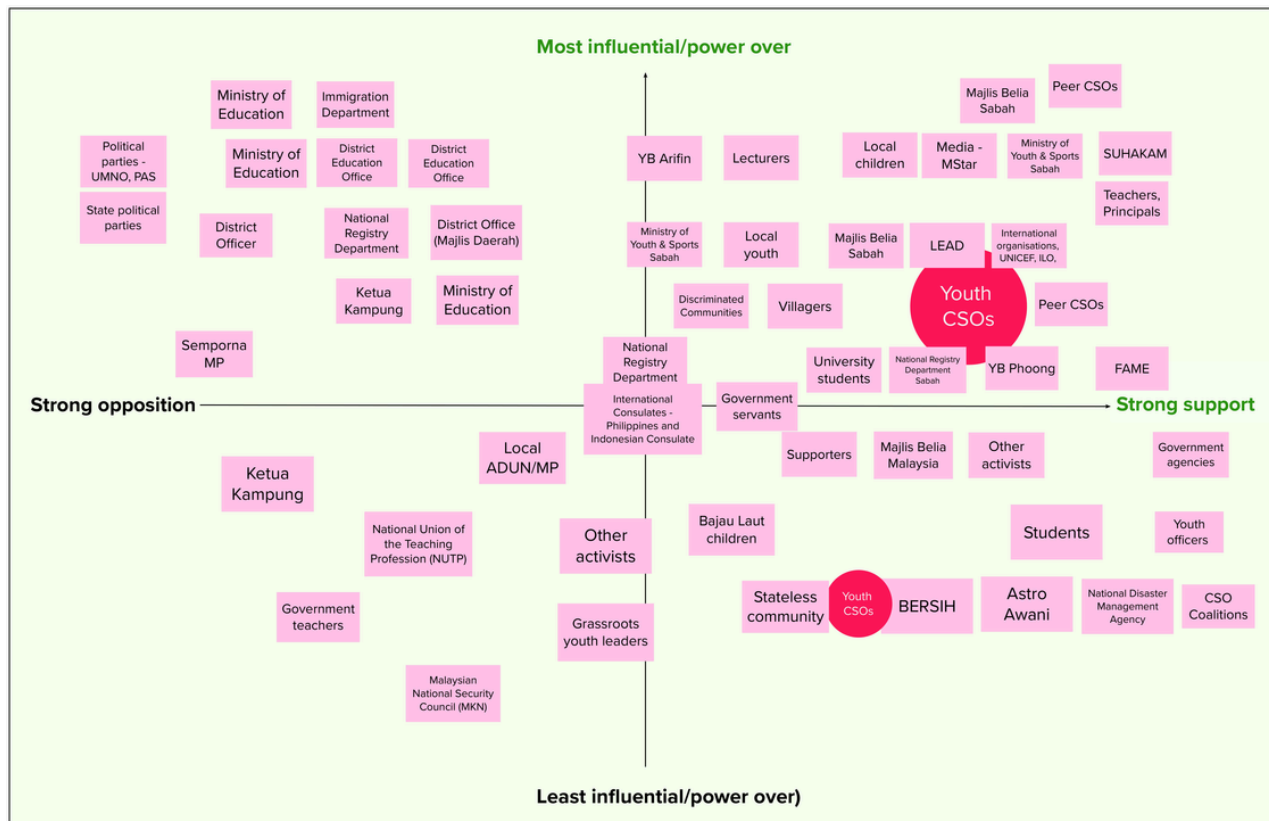
Uniquely, Sarawakian youth activists were the only ones across all regional assessments to highlight the influence of local businesses on their advocacy. They detailed the six biggest **multinational conglomerates** in the region which work primarily on timber, logging, land development, and oil palm plantations. They are noted as opponents in the CSO's key advocacy with indigenous populations, especially those that focus on land rights.

Overall, youth CSOs in Sarawak describe themselves to be **optimistic and empowered** in conducting their impact activities, primarily service-delivery within state boundaries. They recognize the need to further **expand political influence** within state government and note the existence of a **power distance** between them and Peninsular/federal powers.

## SABAH POWER MAPPING

Areas represented: Primarily Kota Kinabalu and Semporna

CSO Advocacy themes: Youth empowerment, political literacy, alternative education, statelessness, citizenship issues, and child rights.



Sabah has a comparatively **smaller and niche youth advocacy scene**, with participating CSOs focusing on **children and youth** in the region through service-delivery oriented impact work. Due to the CSOs' work with unrecognized communities and students, their power grid emphasizes a variety of **governmental stakeholders** who facilitate CSOs' access to such protected beneficiary communities.

Sabahan youth activists report minimal political party influence in Sabah's advocacy scene, with no citations of any singular party, be it national or state-specific. This shows a preference for these CSOs to remain neutral and/or non-political in their advocacy work and to instead focus on building relationships with civil servants in government offices directly. This is aligned with the service-delivery approach used by Sabahan youth activists. Hence the reduced priority to build strategic relationships with political players, and instead interact with civil servants who can directly relay aid and resources to their beneficiaries.

Similar to neighboring Sarawakian youth activists, Sabahan youth activists who work with indigenous communities acknowledge the important influence of **Ketua Kampung**s in allowing them access to their protected beneficiaries. Ketua Kampung are deemed more consequential towards their advocacy compared to local Parliamentarians and state assemblypersons. Youth activists report that their relationship with such political decision-makers can be highly inconsistent, thus their preference to collaborate with other **civil servants** directly.

Statelessness is a prevalent issue in Sabah, due to the state's mixed-migratory context and history. Half of the participating Sabahan youth activists work directly with **stateless communities** and therefore have to engage relevant governmental stakeholders to process and advance their cause, such as local District Offices, National Registry Department, Immigration Department, and the National Security Council. Malaysia's National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) is singled out by Sabahan youth CSOs, as flooding resulting from monsoons is also a challenge in this region, disproportionately affecting less privileged communities, such as the stateless communities.

Education is another key advocacy championed in this region, specifically political education and alternative education. As seen in the top left quadrant, The Ministry of Education and Local District Offices are emphasized multiple times in the grid. These **public education stakeholders** in addition to the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) have heightened influence on multiple Sabahan youth CSOs who work primarily with young students, although it is remarked to be a difficult relationship. As such, these education activists have to turn to alternate allies, often individuals, such as local teachers and principals to advance their work on the ground.

Almost all youth CSOs identified the aforementioned governmental agencies as opponents, due to the **sensitive and bureaucratic** nature of their work with protected communities. Only one youth CSO, which is state-affiliated, reported a very positive and supportive relationship with government agencies - unsurprising due to their close proximity to power.

As a result of the **clear power imbalance** between youth CSOs and their public stakeholders, these youth CSOs have to leverage resources and support from external sources. Compared to other regions, Sabahan youth CSOs displayed a high level of **mutual solidarity**, likely due to the niche and overlapping nature of their advocacies. In addition, they also cited good relationships with other **CSOs and coalitions**, primarily SUHAKAM and BERSIH. One CSO added that they also had to collaborate with **international consulates and organizations** (such as UNICEF) for their work on statelessness.

Sabahan youth activists interestingly report minimal relationships with **local media**, likely due to their singular focus on service-delivery. Mstar, the Malay arm of The -

Star Publications, and Astro Awani were the only two media outlets highlighted during this power mapping exercise. Both are identified as supporters, with Mstar holding a higher position of influence likely due to its wider readership and penetration - Malay is the primary language spoken in this region.

Overall, most youth Sabahan youth CSOs illustrate feeling **competent and empowered** in conducting their advocacy activities. Although there exists a power imbalance between CSOs and their relevant decision-makers, their strong emphasis on direct community work allows them to derive strong influence within their beneficiary communities and also from each other. This optimism, however, is not reported by everyone, as **geographical distance** disadvantages certain CSOs from leveraging the relevant networks and resources - thus the two markers (red circles) for youth CSOs in the Sabahan power mapping grid, signifying varying levels of general influence.



## Countering Imbalances and Building Power

As evident in the aforementioned analysis of the regional power mapping grids, the power imbalance is often present in the local youth advocacy scene, across Malaysian regions.

Noting this, youth CSOs identified and detailed a variety of strategies to counter the power imbalance and build their power for transformative change.

### Countering visible power

The following refers to strategies articulated by participating youth CSOs to counteract power imbalances resulting from formal laws, rules, and authorities.



- General advocacy to raise awareness
- Submitting petitions and memorandums
- Working within coalitions to build leverage and submit demands
- Arranging strategic meetings with decision-makers
- Inviting decision-makers into CSO programs/events
- Conducting protests/demonstrations
- Using data and research to support advocacy efforts

## Countering hidden power

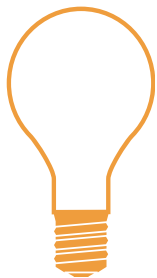
The following refers to strategies articulated by participating youth CSOs to counteract power imbalances resulting from individuals and/or institutions who gatekeep access to decision-making spaces.



- Consistency in building rapport to cultivate relationships with stakeholders
- Emphasizing collaboration, not 'antagonism' with stakeholders
- Meeting with higher-up stakeholders
- Engaging multiple, diverse political stakeholders
- Leveraging powerful allies, such as coalition members to access decisionmakers
- Leveraging media, through press statements and 'viral' posts, to apply pressure
- Conducting general protests to gain attention

## Countering invisible power

The following refers to strategies articulated by participating youth CSOs to counteract power imbalances resulting from psychological and ideological barriers that restrict citizen participation in politics/advocacy.



- Running education programs, campaigns, and events to build awareness
- Leveraging social media to spread awareness
- Providing educational resources such as toolkits
- Running forums and workshops in communities
- Providing volunteering opportunities for general citizens
- Cultivating personal relationships with stakeholders
- Incorporate local leaders in CSO activities to earn buy-in
- Sharing and publishing advocacy speeches
- Leveraging art as an attractive storytelling medium



# Voice, Space and Accountability

The VSA assessment framework was developed using NDI's theory of change for citizen participation programming, which rests on the intrinsic right of all citizens to be heard and the power of organized, informed citizen action to drive democratic change.

Built into this theory is the recognition that all citizens and civil society actors face certain obstacles that they must overcome in order to meaningfully take part in politics. The following section provides a high-level qualitative overview on the role that **Citizen voice, Political space, and Accountable relationships** play in Malaysia's youth social-political processes.



## General Impressions on Malaysian Youth CSOs

### ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The majority of participating youth CSOs are currently registered under the **Registrar of Societies (ROS) Malaysia**. Some cited difficulties in navigating the bureaucratic ROS processes such as registration challenges due to the sensitive nature of their past advocacy work (eg. working with unrecognized communities, past participation in protests).

Despite all this, all ROS registered CSOs emphasized that **legal verification** was necessary and beneficial to obtain bank accounts and lend legitimacy to their respective activities, as stated below:

### ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

At the present moment, Malaysian youth civil society is in a **developmental stage**, primarily in **service-delivery and awareness-building**, with a minority of established youth CSOs having a rising role in strategic advocacy. At the current time, the latter is more evident in CSOs in the Central region operating from a rights-based approach. They benefit from their immediate proximity and mentorship from older, established CSOs working similarly on human-rights issues.

Youth CSO leaders explained that their participation in civil society was a **reaction** to the lacking state in society and government, with most identifying or being a member of their respective beneficiary/minority communities (eg. a Sabahan youth who is advocating for Sabahan youth empowerment). Due to their close/direct access to their beneficiary communities, youth CSOs developed their respective advocacies by leveraging their members' personal history, interests, and skills, complemented with a **ground-up** strategy approach. This entails developing their organizational strategies around data collected from on-the-ground visits, consultations, and meetings with beneficiary communities on relevant issues, laws, and policies.

Youth CSO membership is often made up of **students and young professionals** with busy schedules, which results in a routine restructuring of organizational leadership, priorities, and activities - thus, creating inconsistent follow-throughs on their chosen strategies.

This spills over into the development of the CSOs' short-term and long-term goals. Most youth CSOs reported being **reactionary in nature**, thus focusing on flexible and spontaneous **short-term goals** driven by member, donor, and/or beneficiary priorities, ie. coordinating short-term meetings, direct welfare, programs, protests, campaigns, etc. Although youth CSOs may articulate mission statements that operate from a rights-based framework (fighting for youth rights, migrant rights, LGBT rights), in reality, youth CSOs prioritize direct service delivery as they can only act according to their limited manpower and funding. This relates to the **competitive nature** of the local CSO sector, which has to compete for funding, manpower, and public attention. Consequently, this project-based approach to advocacy often is not sufficient or sustainable to put pressure on decision-makers or to reorient incentive structures in favor of citizen priorities.

## General Impressions on Malaysian Youth CSOs

### PROXIMITY TO MALAYSIAN POLITICS

**Less than half of the participating youth CSOs declared themselves to be active in Malaysian political processes**, ie. directly through formal organizational partnerships, engagements with key decision-makers and/or indirectly through communications such as memorandums and press statements. Youth CSOs who are directly working on political advocacy added that most of their members were politically active and had political aspirations in their personal capacity as well.

Such organizations' active political participation and engagement also appear **leader-driven**, deriving political influence and access to decision-makers through their leader's personal relationships. This serves as a disadvantage for newer youth CSOs, especially undergraduate activists, who do not possess the same privilege nor networks to expand their influence.

The **majority of youth CSOs who declared being non-political** explained that it was due to the following:

- Organisations' strict non-political policy
- Focus on 'neutral' welfare
- Lack of capacity/skills to engage externals
- Lack of support from politicians
- The stigma of politics
- Youth voice not welcomed

### POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Although less than half the organizations declared being politically active, most of the youth CSOs admitted having attempted and to be **actively influencing decision-makers** such as government bodies, political parties, and more as a key advocacy strategy. While these groups have **varying levels of political influence** (in both state and federal level), the most commonly identified methods for youth CSOs to influence politics are **social media engagement in addition to advocacy visits and invites**.

Most local youth CSOs reported publishing press statements on their social media platforms in reaction to topical social issues, whereby they suggest and/or demand alternative solutions to the relevant issue of the day. Occasionally, the press statements are picked up by primarily English-driven, online press outlets. However, the efficacy of this strategy may vary depending on the sensitivity and novelty of the issue.

Youth CSOs recognize that such **communications are often one-way**, and do not always elicit the desired outcomes they demand from authorities as government bodies rarely respond back to them through online channels. However, the **transparent and democratic nature of their social media presence** helps cultivate organizational branding and community engagement, chiefly from their supporters. By publishing content and statements online, youth CSOs make their values and stances clear to the government and citizens simultaneously.

## General Impressions on Malaysian Youth CSOs

This however does not negate the importance of offline and traditional advocacy methods for youth CSOs - **advocacy visits and invites**, be it to local, state, or federal representatives, remains a key youth CSO tactic too. These advocacy visits may entail visiting a decision-maker, usually at their office, presenting issues and priorities, submitting petitions and memorandums, providing solutions and recommendations, and requesting government action. Advocacy invites loosely extends to the way established youth CSOs send out invitations to decision-makers to join as guests, speakers, panelists, etc for their existing events.

All participating youth CSOs emphasized the importance of face-to-face interactions with political leaders, other CSOs, community members, and general citizens. Relationships are more easily built through in-person meetings, and youth CSOs have more control in responding fluidly to their stakeholder's emotions and body language. One CSO shared that such engagements were necessary to seek alternative viewpoints, thus avoiding the trap of being stuck in an echo chamber.

For most of the youth CSOs, securing these advocacy visits was not described explicitly as part of their short-term or long-term strategic goals, as government invitations and responsiveness to youth civil societies remain scarce and inconsistent. **Opportunities for government engagement are typically limited** to those with critical access to decision-makers, be it through MBM, coalition networks and/or personal relationships with those in office. The small minority of CSOs who were able to engage government officials and key stakeholders cite that the meetings tended to be unsatisfactory and lacked follow-through, thus discouraging some of them from future engagements. Some challenges in securing and following up on advocacy visits are listed below:

- Change in governments
- Bureaucracy
- Political stakeholders lack understanding on the cause
- The cause lacks priority/political mileage
- Unclear expectations

In both online and offline engagements, all youth CSOs acknowledged an underlying fear of power and consequences, which results in **self-censorship** by youth CSOs when attempting to fully engage their relevant stakeholders and decision-makers.

The following reasons were commonly given for their self-censorship:

- To comply with local laws such as AUKU
- To avoid academic persecution
- To ensure organizational and impact sustainability



## Zooming into VSA components - Citizen Voice

### ORGANIZED

Most participating youth CSOs adhere to a **traditional, hierarchical power structure**, exhibiting a central committee led by one primary leader (typically described as founders, coordinators, or presidents), which is aligned to ROS' requirements for constitutional CSOs. The small minority that did not adhere to this structure described a preference for equal leadership and ownership across members, whereby leaders may be elected on a project basis.

Most of the general youth activists described having **minimal formal and professional experience** in advocacy prior to their current advocacy pathways. In addition to their contact and/or membership with beneficiary communities, they cited undergraduate experiences as key catalysts to joining advocacy, eg. being involved in community service, university-mandated community modules, and uniformed bodies which provided them their initial touchpoints with advocacy. A handful mentioned working in the same line of the course of study (eg. law, political studies, environment). It is usually the youth CSO leaders that acquire their relevant exposure, experience, and network in advocacy during their undergraduate years, later relaying these resources to their members who join them, as per the nature of leader-driven youth CSOs.

All youth CSOs have a strong **preference for service delivery** as their primary short-term goal, with very few youth CSOs having explicit, strategic, and measurable long-term goals. This is likely due to a lack of sustainable long-term funding in addition to the fluid nature of youth CSOs that experience routine restructuring in leadership and priorities, thus making it difficult to strategize and expand around a singular desired future outcome.

**Citizen participation** in CSOs is a key strategy for all youth CSOs, with most communication and engagements being conducted online. Youth CSOs confidently assert that they provide open opportunities for the general public to learn and contribute to their advocacy through membership drives, volunteering, crowdfunding, and programs/events. The preference for online platforms is also illustrated in resource-sharing, ie. youth CSOs publish infographics and resource packets on their social media, website, and messaging platforms such as Telegram. While appearing democratic in nature for all citizens to access these opportunities, such information is typically only accessible to those with internet access and interest/knowledge in the topic itself already, thus often creating a highly **homogeneous supporter group**. The reach of such information is also limited to the strength of the youth CSO's marketing strategies within the competitive landscape of social media. A minority of participating youth CSOs go on the ground to physically engage their local community members by conducting in-person meetings, consultations, workshops, and interventions. This method is utilized primarily by CSOs working with vulnerable communities such as refugees, stateless persons, and indigenous groups.

The citizen reception to such engagements varies according to region, averaging at a couple hundred (non-member) citizens supporting and directly engaging with youth CSO activities. Established youth CSOs within Kuala Lumpur report having the largest average number of supporters at 3000-10,000 annually.

## Zooming into VSA components - Citizen Voice

### CREDIBLE

Youth CSOs are often identified as **grassroots partners** within their informal CSO networks and partnerships with decision-makers, who identify them as credible stakeholders with unique access points to beneficiaries on the ground. Alternatively, youth CSOs, who primarily have limited access to funding, resources, and network to critical political actors, rely on the buy-in and participation of their partners to amplify their advocacy. For example, a couple of youth CSOs leverage their relationship with SUHAKAM to gain access to meetings with government stakeholders to present their findings and solutions.

They demonstrate having conducted background research on their respective issues to establish their **competence and understanding**, before presenting their tentative solutions. This is further enhanced for youth activists who have **personal lived experiences** as members of their own beneficiary communities. Almost all youth CSOs exhibit a **data-driven and bottom-up approach** to advocacy, having had multiple touchpoints with their respective beneficiary communities through discussions, surveys, feedback-collection, events, and even by living with the community (this tactic is utilized by youth CSOs working with stateless and indigenous communities who live in protected territories).

Citizen input is actively collected to further guide and refine most CSOs' advocacy goals via feedback forms, surveys, and meeting discussions. Youth CSOs displayed **initiative and structure** in actively seeking out public opinion to develop a stronger understanding of their respective advocacies and refine their strategies. A smaller number of youth CSOs reported no existing processes to collect citizen input, with one CSO adding that they only collect beneficiary input but not general citizen input due to their work with vulnerable, high-risk communities. While youth CSOs generally have a strong grasp of their communities on the ground, their understanding of political realities that affect their work varies depending on their (or their leader's) proximity to Malaysian politics.

Except for youth CSOs working directly in political advocacy, almost all other CSOs reported **minimal to no engagements with political parties**, thus reducing political influence from political parties, aligned with most CSOs' stance to be non-political. Youth CSOs added that they prefer to **collaborate/ally directly with individual politicians** with similar values and goals for their activities, but never with political parties. They focus on being **solution-oriented** instead of being ideologically or formally affiliated with any specific political parties. The youth CSOs that do work in political advocacy ensured that their interactions remained non-partisan, working with political parties from both government and opposition in an effort to appear impartial. Only one CSO declared political influence from political parties, driven by their leader's personal and professional relationships, which were built on mutual advocacy goals.

It is observed that most youth CSOs primarily derive their **credibility from their public communications**, community relationships, and on-the-ground activities, rather than interactions with political players or decision-makers. The latter is typically emphasized by the limited number of youth CSOs with the privilege of being affiliated with governmental entities, such MBM and state-specific youth councils.

## Zooming into VSA components - Citizen Voice

### INFORMED

All youth CSOs displayed **self-initiative in accessing political information**, with social media and local news media being their two primary sources. However, most did report not requiring nor using significant political analysis due to limited manpower and their organizational focus on service-delivery. A small number of participating CSOs also leverage existing relationships with other CSOs, lawyers, and decision-makers such as local ADUNs to acquire insider information relevant to their respective campaigns.

Most reported challenges in accessing political information, citing **accessibility issues** which then affect the relay of information from youth CSOs to the communities they work with. Information on public affairs is commonly documented on social media and government websites, typically with bilingual options for readers. However, youth CSOs suggest that important political information requires more translation into minority and indigenous languages. Youth activists supported the push for inclusivity to consider person-with-disabilities (PWD), adding that 'alternative texts' and PWD-friendly fonts need to be incorporated when presenting political information.

East Malaysian youth CSOs emphasized accessibility as a major challenge in their local advocacy as they have to invest extra labor to translate and relay crucial political information to their beneficiaries (who converse in a wide variety of indigenous languages), noting that some items might be lost in translation. These activists also highlighted that citizens needed **internet access and digital literacy** to access political information, a prerequisite not available widely in East Malaysia.

### COMPETENT

Youth CSOs are aware of the critical role they play in community development and in cultivating citizen participation in governance. They note that CSOs, in general, must act as neutral bodies that provide checks and balances on both government and political parties. They view themselves as the **bridge between citizens and government** - championing the rights and interests of underrepresented citizen groups who otherwise might not have the voice to speak up individually. They also note their responsibility in highlighting and filling in the gaps within governmental procedures/actions - innovating new solutions for the benefit of their communities.

### LEGITIMATE

The majority of youth CSOs derive their legitimacy from their ROS verification to operate legally and efficiently in their communities.

Earning a ROS status does provide funding opportunities from the government, although most youth CSOs report being self-funded. Funds are collected most commonly through membership fees, crowdfunding, and donations. Most organizations noted having applied for local and international grants however, such opportunities are very limited and competitive. Youth activists added that grants also often only fund short-term, one-off projects and do not account for the cost of labor and long-term goals, thus inhibiting the CSOs from scaling up their impact.

Local government has posed no barriers to CSOs obtaining funding, however, youth activists did provide anecdotes on the challenges in accessing government funding such as bureaucracy, unclear processes, and prejudice from civil servants (this is applicable for youth CSOs who work in direct opposition to governmental/conservative values).

## Zooming into VSA components - Political Space

### OCCUPIED

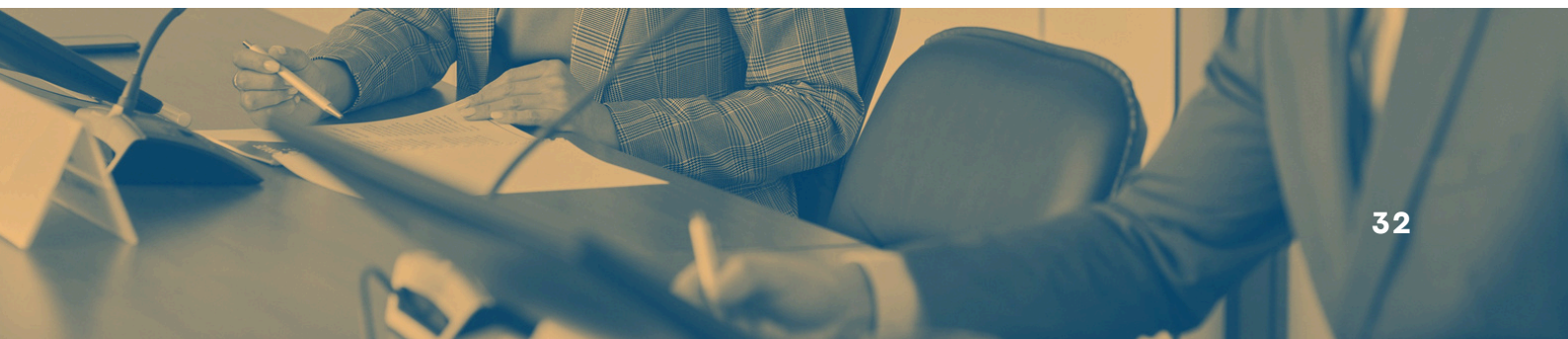
Youth CSOs utilize a variety of tactics to present local concerns which require government responses, including but not limited to issuing press/online statements, conducting advocacy visits, submitting petitions and memorandums, and performing protests. Most CSOs exhibited a **willingness to collaborate with decision-makers** to bring forth solutions, however, obtaining government responses is a privilege typically limited for those with existing relationships and formal affiliations.

Although CSOs prioritized a **diplomatic, conflict-avoidant pathway** where possible, several reported having faced financial, legal, cyber, and citizen retaliations when advocating publicly for their respective causes. To protect their organization and members, youth CSOs ensure due diligence in conducting in-house alignments and training sessions, preparing legal support, and moderating both online and offline communications. Certain CSOs also reported having primary and secondary layers of leadership, to ensure organizational sustainability in the event of intervention from authorities. These safeguard tactics are often employed by more established youth CSOs within Klang Valley, who work nearby and have direct mentorship from older CSOs with prior experience in these areas.

### NETWORKED

All participating local youth CSOs have successfully identified **allies in the local civil society sector**, however the same cannot be said for political allies. As reported earlier, youth activists related challenges in identifying, engaging, and collaborating effectively with local political players. This is likely a result of youth activists adhering to a stance of being non-political and/or not having direct access to such decision-makers, without the assistance of organizational leaders or other CSOs.

The majority of youth CSOs showcased **skepticism in cultivating political allies**, citing unsatisfactory past experiences whereby their advocacy was dismissed, halted, or even instrumentalized by politicians for political gain. Nevertheless, there remains a recognition by all CSOs that such relationships need to be pursued to address systemic issues, however, it was not articulated as a key advocacy strategy by most.





## Zooming into VSA components - Accountable Relationships

### OPEN

Due to most youth CSOs' **inability to access invited spaces** provided by the Malaysian government, youth activists commented that the decision-making process around their respective advocacies is not transparent nor fully open. This was further exacerbated by the change in government, which resulted in inconsistent policies and implementations.

Consistent consultations within invited spaces are limited to the privileged few, however, the results remain inconsistent and unsatisfactory for most. Youth CSOs note the **restrictions** that come with attending governmental meetings, such as the expectation of yielding criticism, follow-up questions, and even documentation. One CSO also articulated that the efficacy of consultations is highly unpredictable and **dependent on the civil servant** in charge - remarking that some civil servants they engaged in the past had been dismissive and out-of-touch towards youth concerns due to differing life experiences, whereas others were more attentive and diligent in the consultation process.

### RESPONSIVE

All youth CSOs experienced **challenges** when demanding government responsiveness, and even faced consequences such as reduced funding, threats, and even jail time for attempting to influence decision-makers publicly through campaigns and protests.

2021 saw a rise in youths publicly demanding government accountability, as illustrated by the many youth protests conducted during Malaysia's Covid-19 lockdown phase. Looking forward, youth activists communicated **mixed feelings on government responsiveness** towards youth and minority issues. Although some report optimism that the Undi18 bill has created heightened expectations for politicians to prioritize youth concerns, others remain skeptical. The activists showed an understanding that decision-makers still require political will and/or incentives to champion a cause, ie. politicians can take credit and claim political capital for addressing the issue presented to them.

The skepticism is further reinforced by past experiences whereby aid was only given to beneficiary communities after their community issues were made viral in social media. This has subsequently elicited a default reluctance for youth CSOs to engage politicians in the future, who have come to expect **one-way communication** in most of their advocacy.

Due to the service-delivery model practiced by most youth CSOs, it distributes power away from the government in favor of communities helping themselves address their community challenges. While this demonstrates yet again youth CSOs' solution-oriented approach and genuine commitment to improving the quality of life for their beneficiaries, it also points to their lack of experience in fostering long-term government accountability.

## Recommendations

### VOICE

Despite youth CSOs' strong and nuanced understanding of issues on the ground, they often operate from a narrow and focused service-delivery approach, thus never truly addressing the systemic issues that sustain their community problem. Understandably, youth activists may not have the prerequisite knowledge nor network necessary to move beyond service-delivery, however, it is worthwhile for more youth CSOs to develop **structured, longer-term strategic goals** to move towards. Such goals should revolve around the organization's evergreen values and mission so as to not be easily jeopardized by any change in leadership, which often happens in youth CSOs. Youth CSOs require support on developing CSOs' **Theory-of-Change** that can serve to illustrate whether youth CSOs' current activities are moving them effectively toward their ideal future.

At the current moment, most youth CSOs utilize social media as a primary advocacy strategy, be it as a platform for citizen participation, branding, community engagement, political monitoring, and crucially, communication as well. However as noted, followers and supporters chiefly come from homogeneous groups. An exercise in **building diverse allies and supporters** could be beneficial for youth CSOs, so that they can reach across a variety of identity groups and garner more support for their cause, especially in swaying public stakeholders and those who remain undecided about their causes. This also extends to increasing more physical engagements within their community groups, so that their advocacy is not misinterpreted as a virtual branding exercise or merely virtue-signaling on social media. Additional assistance should be given to push them to develop a vision for the social media campaign beyond the mere visibility and awareness of youth CSOs' causes; instead, their value and legitimacy should be directly tied to broader strategic goals that **pressure their targets** to take concrete action, such as direct-interventions and policy-development. This can be complemented with training on **offline advocacy strategies** led by impactful traditional CSOs who can provide a localized consultation to youth CSOs.

To add, many youth CSOs work with overlapping beneficiary community groups such as youths and students - yet cite having to compete with each other for resources such as funding and manpower. Youth CSOs can consider undergoing a movement-building exercise, should they be receptive to accepting it. Successful social movements, particularly those that attempt to shift attitudes about marginalized groups such as youth, typically take years to make progress. Considering the shared solidarity and shared memberships in national coalitions, Malaysian youth CSOs are positioned to develop a strategic youth movement, even if by specific themes, eg. environmental cluster or political advocacy cluster. Youth CSOs should be presented with **movement-building** training exercises complemented with successful examples to help them articulate and strategize around what each organization's unique role could be in a broader youth movement. This can help reveal other youth CSOs as **collaborators instead of competitors**, thus moving them slowly into a mindset of mutual resource-sharing and efficient service-delivery. -

## Recommendations

All the aforementioned is, of course, easier said than done, especially when considering the context of youth CSOs who are often strapped for cash and manpower. Therefore, their training should also include effective **grant-acquisition**, detailing grant-writing processes and opportunities to secure longer-term funding that can sustain youth CSO's advocacies. It is also worth conducting an additional session examining Malaysian laws that govern CSOs' advocacies and access to opportunities, especially those working with marginalized communities.

## SPACE

Youth CSOs face uphill barriers in accessing and occupying political space, due to various challenges in networking, censorship, and even laws that actively suppress the scale of their advocacy. Youth CSOs have to innovate their advocacy outreach to bypass and avoid financial/legal consequences that would affect the sustainability of the organization.

To help move the power slightly in their favor, youth CSOs can consider collaborating with local, regional, or international organizations that are well versed in running **creative advocacy campaigns** in similar social-political settings. This must be paired with training on setting up **security safeguards** that protect the legal, financial, privacy, and confidentiality structures of youth CSOs.

In pushing for more government responsiveness, youth CSOs can also benefit from training on **building public pressure** to influence decision-makers, such as highlighting the issues to higher-ups (state level, federal level). There is also an understated emphasis on **cultivating media relationships** by youth CSOs across Malaysia to take up more public attention. Youth CSOs can undergo training on strategic media communications to raise their cause's visibility and highlight injustices to a more national audience. Such assistance should include providing examples and lessons learned from other campaigns with an objective to shift social norms and apply public pressure.

In addition, it is also imperative to recognize that the majority of youth CSOs do admit to attempting to influence political stakeholders already, though with limited success which reinforced prevalent skepticism in building political allies. Due to a lack of political analysis, however, most youth CSOs lack the ability to identify opportunities for political leverage and often use a one-size-fits-all approach in existing political engagements. Youth CSOs are recommended to develop an **effective political engagement strategy** to further expand CSOs' political influence and buy-in from powerful public stakeholders, an initiative that would be necessary for their advocacy in the long run. Training on target identification, stakeholder mapping, political analysis, and value-based messaging would best complement this.

## Recommendations

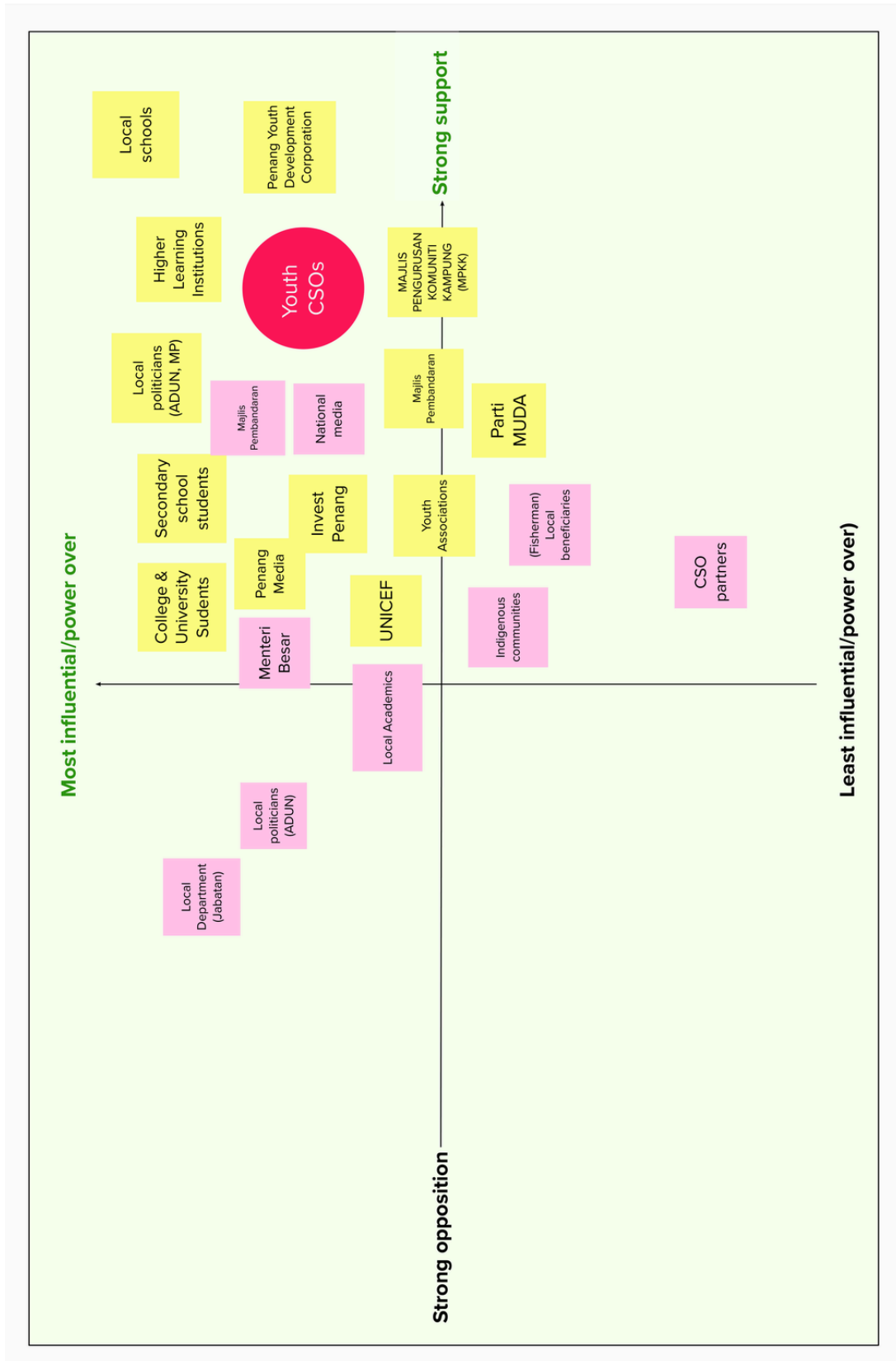
### ACCOUNTABILITY

A strong political engagement must be effectively followed up and monitored by youth CSOs to ensure their efforts are not in vain. To complement the aforementioned political engagement training (stated under Recommendations on 'Space'), youth CSOs should undergo an exercise in **consistent follow-up** with public stakeholders/political allies to ensure political buy-in. By intentionally keeping tabs and staying on their stakeholders' immediate radar, it may reduce the risk of youth causes being forgotten or instrumentalized by others. On this, more youth CSOs can also consider an additional exercise on identifying and **moderating incentives** structures for politicians, especially those that require political incentives/capital on issues before to taking action, eg. intentionally listing in meetings the areas where politicians can take claim for the advocacy projects, to obtain their political buy-in.

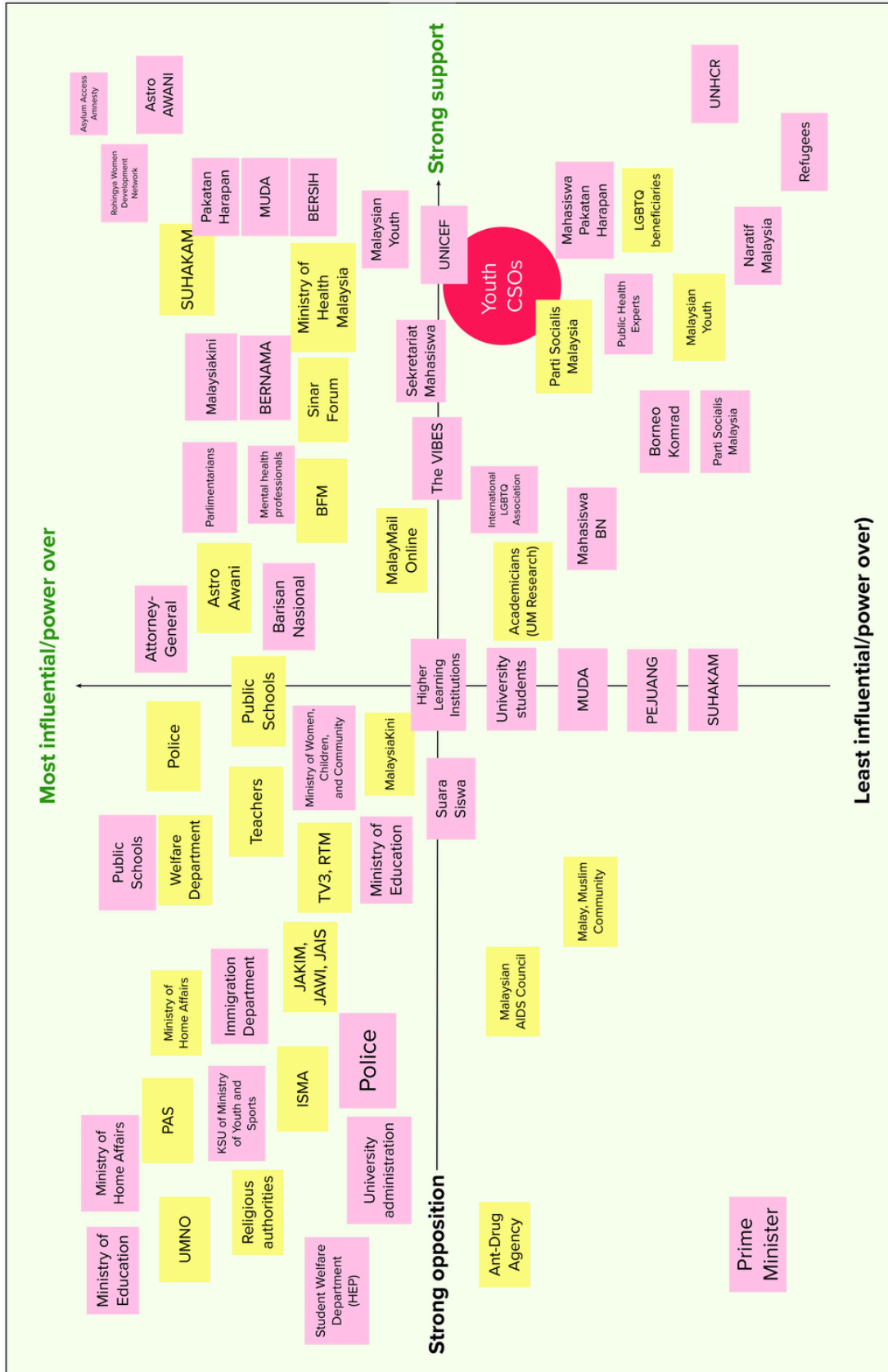
There is also an element of political **monitoring** that seems to be missing in most youth CSOs' strategy, which could be an opportunity for training. As youth CSOs continue growing and consider moving more and more into a rights-based advocacy model, it is crucial for them to continually observe the ongoing narrative around their causes and keep accountable the influential political allies/opponents that affect their advocacy. This **proactive strategy** can help youth CSOs identify the direction, potential threats, and opportunities then readjust their advocacy in advance, hence allowing them to be more well-informed, strategic, and convincing in their demands to the government, instead of reactionary - which is often the case when reacting to headlines/statements by politicians.

# Appendix

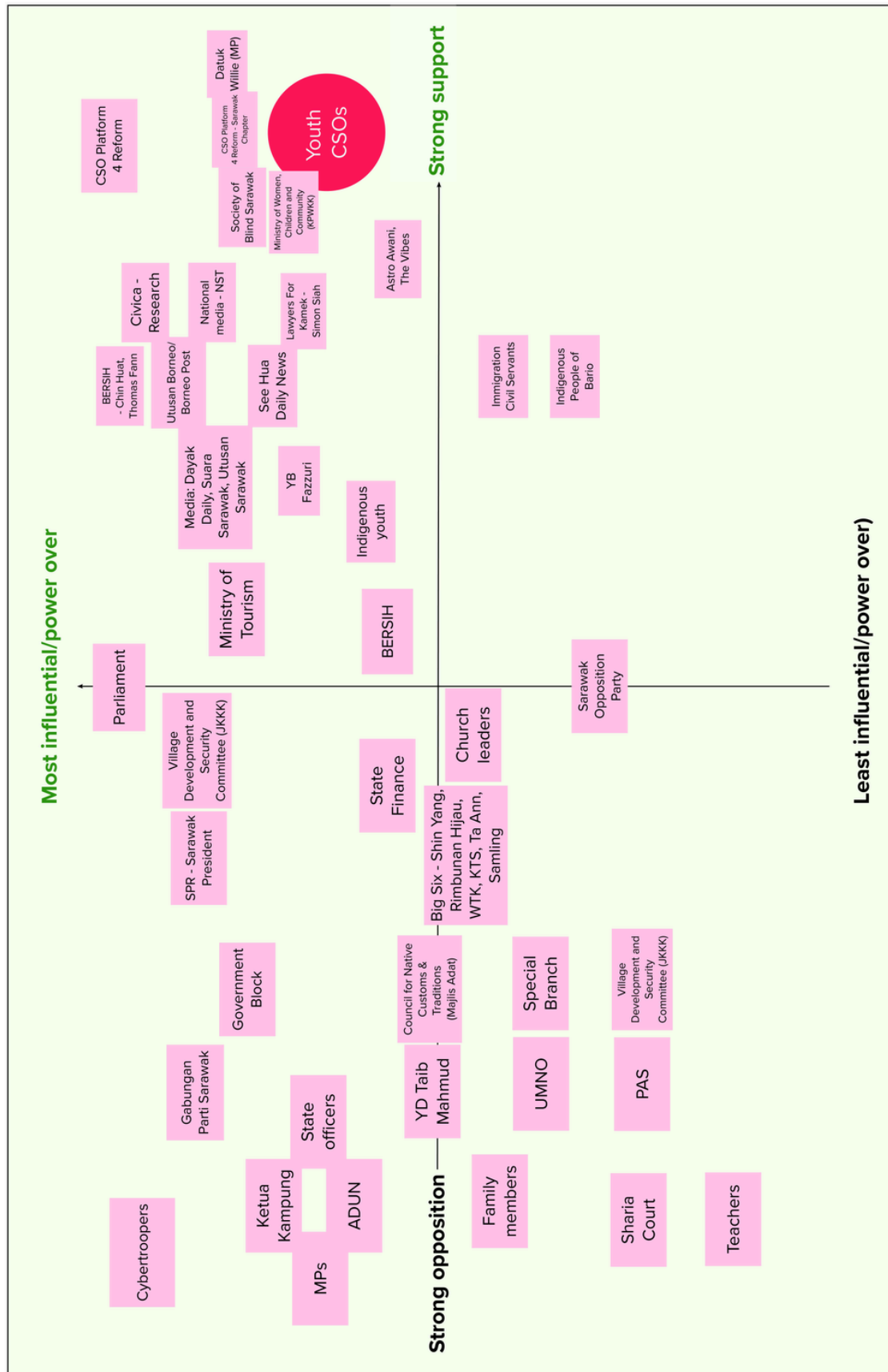
## Appendix A - Grid 1 - Northern Region Power Mapping grid



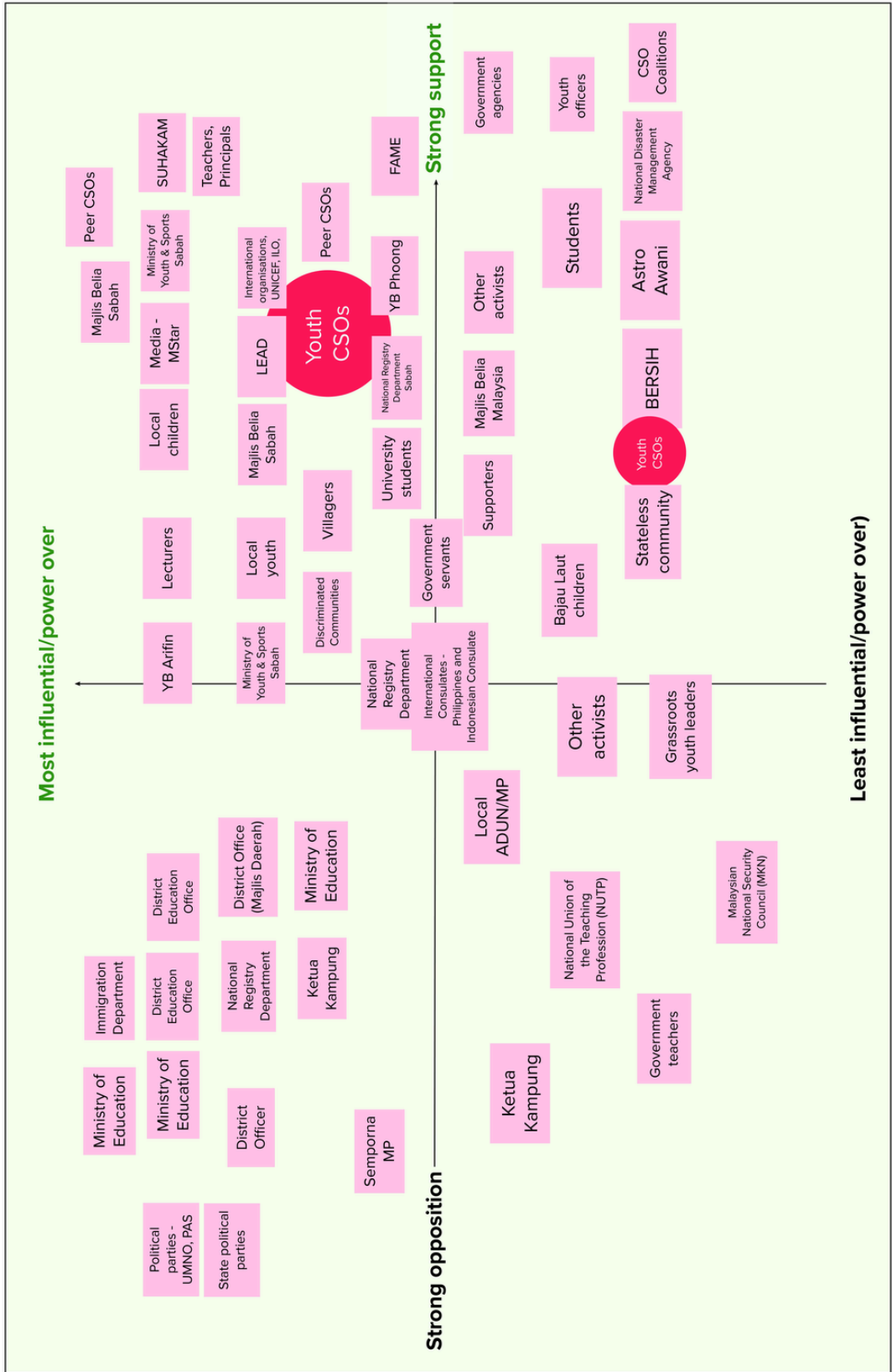
## Appendix B - Grid 2 - Central Region Power Mapping grid



# Appendix C - Grid 3 - Sarawak Region Power Mapping grid



# Appendix D - Grid 4 - Sabah Region Power Mapping grid







# About this booklet

This summary booklet was produced in 2022 by National Democratic Institute (NDI) Malaysia, as part of its 2022 Youth Program.

The booklet provides a result summary of the qualitative assessments conducted by NDI throughout March and April 2022. NDI Malaysia's Program Coordinator, Roshinee Mookaiah, led the assessment team, assisted by the Malaysian Country Director, Lena Hendry, Program Coordinator, Zharif Badrul, and former Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Kuan Ming Foong.

Roshinee Mookaiah produced the final analysis and report.

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