

# **Exploring the Effectiveness of Youth Outreach Programs: The Case of Singapore**

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### **Abstract**

In recent decades, some governments have sought greater youth participation in government and public life. This study examines Singapore's efforts to foster youth participation in government-led community service projects, public conversations, and opportunities for citizen feedback. Using a mixed-methods design that combines a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, we explore the effectiveness of these government outreach programs in the eyes of youth themselves, and whether they meet the government's goal of promoting the active and engaged participation of young Singaporeans over the long term. We find that while local youth value the opportunity to participate meaningfully in governance, they also critique the government-led youth participation initiatives as top-down, choreographed, and inauthentic, saying that the views expressed therein do not sufficiently represent youth in Singapore. They also suggest feasible strategies to achieve genuine, inclusive youth participation in the public decision-making process.

**Keywords:** Youth participation, outreach program, youth perspective, citizen satisfaction, Singapore

## Introduction

This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease. (Kennedy, 1966, para. 31)

Since the 2000s, there has been a gradual shift in countries' approaches to public policymaking. Public policymaking has become more consultative, and in particular, countries have begun to offer the public, including young people, a greater say in the policymaking process (Bingham et al., 2005; Bryson et al., 2013; Checkoway et al., 2005). According to Quick and Bryson (2016), although the purposes and methods of public participation vary, there has been a general understanding that public participation in governance consists of "the direct or indirect involvement of stakeholders in decision-making about policies, plans or programs in which they have an interest" (p. 158). In other words, it refers to the engagement of people, groups, or organizations in formal or informal decision-making and management in government (Quick & Bryson, 2016).

This study examines opportunities for youth participation in public affairs. Farthing (2012) describes youth participation as "[t]he process where young people, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision-making power about issues that affect them" (p.91). Of course, these opportunities may vary according to the regime or based on the degree of cultural diversity in society. Rather than merely informing youth about policies adults have designed, the government may invite youth to play a role in the development of policies that affect them or their communities (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017). Although youth may be a small segment of society and a traditionally under-represented group, scholars and practitioners alike have begun to consider young people a resource who have important roles to play as citizens. For example, they may have particular knowledge of a subject or new points of view on old or familiar social issues (Checkoway et al., 2005; The United Nations, 2023). Indeed, as digital natives who grew up

with access to the internet and social media, young people may be better placed to create and leverage newer forms of political participation. Unsurprisingly, many young people and youth organizations have thus begun to express their socio-political viewpoints across diverse policy areas, such as urban planning and design, environmental affairs (Frank, 2006), education (Koller & Schugurensky, 2011), and community health (including mental and sexual health, welfare, and food access and distribution; Martinez et al., 2020).

Following this global trend, over the past decade Singapore has acknowledged the value of young people's passions and interests and taken action to invite them into the public decision-making process and provide them with opportunities to engage in community service (e.g., volunteering). Singapore has launched outreach programs to solicit youth participation in public policy design and evaluation (for more information, see Appendix A).<sup>1</sup> Singaporean youths' civic consciousness and engagement in government-led events have increased as a result. However, they have remained relatively passive in their participation, with most having engaged only in information-seeking about current social or political issues (69%), and only a small proportion (10%) having attended the government-led Youth Conversation events held in 2018 (National Youth Council, 2021b). One could argue that the current initiatives have not maximized local youth participation, particularly in terms of soliciting authentic youth voices. In this study, we hypothesize that the challenges to successfully engaging young people in the public policy decision-making process may arise from local youths' low levels of satisfaction with the quality of the offerings, or the governments' communication and outreach methods.

To frame the analysis, this study takes citizen satisfaction as its central underlying theoretical approach. As with the existing public administration literature that focuses on understanding citizen satisfaction based on citizens' experiences and perceptions, or "expressed satisfaction" (e.g., Stipak, 1979; Van Ryzin, 2004; Wong et al., 2011), this study

examines how the government's current youth initiatives are perceived by university students. Most previous empirical studies of youth participation have been conducted in Western contexts and have tended to focus on youth political engagement (e.g., voting). Thus, little is known about how Singapore might inspire more youth participation in public decision-making. We attempt to fill this gap in the existing literature through focused and exploratory research that employs a mixed-methods design consisting of survey questionnaires and interviews with youth. This allows us to collect realistic evidence about potential obstacles to the success of the current youth participation initiatives from the perspective of youth themselves and inform policymakers how they might develop more genuine, inclusive, and participatory spaces for youth in the long term.

In the following sections, we review the literature on youth participation, focusing on widely cited obstacles and facilitating factors, and then discuss the conceptual framework used for our analysis. Next, we present a case selection and description, introducing background on Singapore's youth-centric government initiatives, followed by the research methods and our findings. Finally, we conclude with a summary of the major findings, their broader implications, and some limitations of this study that may inform future research.

## **Literature Review**

Young people are a demographic group of particular interest when it comes to citizen participation, in that they may have "shared social, political and economic contexts and understandings that differ from the previous generation" (Woodman & Wyn, 2015, as cited in Pruitt, 2017, p. 508). However, their participation in public decision-making (e.g., issue identification in the policy planning or evaluation stages) has received little attention in the existing literature compared with, for example, their political participation (e.g., voting). Nonetheless, a few studies from two lines of research offer clues. One line of research

examines the barriers to effective youth participation, while the other identifies facilitating factors that contribute to inclusive, participatory spaces for youth.

The first line of research has identified several real-life factors that prevent young people's engagement in such programs, including lack of time due to work or school commitments (e.g., Anderson et al., 2011; Percy-Smith, 2007), negative emotions like shame (e.g., Howarth et al., 2012), or skepticism that their ideas will be embraced (e.g., Coad et al., 2008). Specifically, while examining a consultative exercise that addressed the healthcare needs of youth in the UK, Percy-Smith (2007) found that most students noted lack of time as one of the biggest constraints on their participation. In the same vein, Anderson et al. (2011), who assessed a youth participation program that addressed the ethical use and retention of young offenders' DNA in Wales' national database, highlighted that young participants tended to cite the time commitment as their main reason for not participating in the trial stage of the program, despite their enthusiasm for earlier stages of the process. Aside from lack of time, Coad et al. (2008) found in qualitative interviews that UK youth who believed their ideas were unfairly dismissed due to their age experienced decreased self-esteem that deterred them from future participation. Similarly, Howarth et al. (2012) found that in addition to the prior experience of having their opinions dismissed, feelings of shame or embarrassment stemming from personal experiences with abuse or violence could deter youth from participating.

In the specific context of Singapore, scholars have identified apathy as a deterrent to youth participation. For instance, Zhang (2022) found that youths' disengagement was linked to institutional factors like their inability to vote (e.g., due to Singapore's voting age of 21, higher than in neighboring countries like Malaysia or mature western democracies, or because they lived in walkover constituencies where the opposition does not field candidates to compete with the governing party), as well as emotional factors such as fear of state

surveillance or judgment, or a desire to stick with the *status quo* due to satisfaction with the nation's socio-political stability.

Conversely, the second line of research has highlighted facilitating factors that encourage youth participation in public initiatives, including the presence of facilitators who played supportive roles as moderators or promoters (Horwath et al., 2012; Warwick, 2008; Wong, 2016) and the means to leverage the influence of the internet with young people (Skoric & Zhu, 2016). Specifically, Warwick (2008) examined 27 citizen consultation exercises in the UK. Based on feedback collected from these exercises, he found that positive interactions between facilitators and the audience helped trigger the audience's interest in the topic and fostered their engagement. Facilitators were successful when they could create an environment of trust and demonstrate respect and empathy (Warwick, 2008). Likewise, a study by Horwath et al. (2012) that collected data from youth in the UK, Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus found that supportive facilitators contributed to a safe environment where youth felt supported and could express themselves freely during the decision-making process.

In a similar vein, previous studies in Singapore have found a positive, motivating role of government agencies and official communication channels that directly appeal to the younger generation. For example, in a stakeholder analysis that examined youth participation in Singapore, Wong (2016) found that government agencies like the Ministry of Education could revise their existing curriculum to increase youth inclusion in community services, working toward the country's goals of creating a more holistic curriculum while also increasing youth participation in public life. More recently, the Forward Singapore exercise, a year-long series of engagements launched by Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, allowed youth to share feedback and indicate their interest in participating in sessions to influence the future of Singapore and its policies. As for the influence of communication channels on youth participation in Singapore, using survey data collected from telephone

interviews, Skoric and Zhu (2016) found that youth who ‘very often’ get their information from social media (e.g., reading blogs and/or receiving news from Facebook) were more likely than others to attend resident dialogues and participate in election rallies, including volunteering for a political party. More recently, in a thematic analysis of self-produced podcasts available to the public during Singapore’s 2020 General Election (GE), Kwan (2021) found similar evidence of a positive correlation between youths’ participation in the podcasts and their desire to build awareness of the election and take action via online campaigning.

In addition, scholars who have examined facilitating factors have focused on how youth voices are reflected in the public decision-making process, both during and following such initiatives (e.g., Arches & Fleming, 2006; Charles & Haines, 2019). Arches and Fleming (2006), in their case study of youth participation, observed two community improvement initiatives in the UK and the US, and identified youth-centered planning as one of the critical pillars of a successful, inclusive space. Granting young participants the autonomy to choose the discussion topics and activities to be conducted in the community made the consultation exercises more meaningful, increasing youth motivation to participate in them (Arches & Fleming, 2006). Charles and Haines (2019), in focused interviews with youth engaged in a participatory project called the UR Community, found that using and communicating the opinions of the youth who participated was a catalyst that increased their attention and engagement later on, as they realized that their input had the potential to shape policies.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As noted earlier, the 2019 National Youth Survey (National Youth Council, 2021b) hints at the challenges policymakers face when promoting youth engagement events, particularly ensuring that they are meaningful and satisfying to the participants. This presents a unique

opportunity to examine the factors that produce more genuine, active, and inclusive programs for youth in the long term. Successful participatory programs could help foster interactions between different generations, allowing them to co-design policies and services together with the government and other stakeholders (Checkoway et al., 2005; The United Nations, 2023). Given these benefits, this study posits that it is worth studying whether Singapore’s current youth initiatives are successful in engaging youth and meeting their expectations.

We frame our analysis around Quick and Bryson’s (2016) concept of public participation. Next, we incorporate theory on citizen satisfaction, a widely cited topic in the public administration field, to extend our arguments to the specific context of youth participation in Singapore. As mentioned earlier, Quick and Bryson (2016) describe public participation in governance as the direct or indirect involvement of stakeholders—individuals, groups, or organizations—in decision-making in line with their interests, allowing them to contribute to decisions about policies, plans or programs (p. 158). For example, this may include providing new information, offering different perspectives on a social issue, or generating potential solutions to public problems (Fung, 2007; Quick & Bryson, 2016; Renn et al., 1993). Working from this perspective, it is reasonable to argue that youth, a small but integral part of society, can provide fresh viewpoints on policymaking by identifying priorities and goals and designing and conducting activities that reflect their lived experiences, interests and needs (e.g., see Checkoway et al., 2005; The United Nations, 2023).

This study considers youth satisfaction an important indicator in the diagnosis and evaluation of outreach efforts such as participant recruitment, communication, and follow-up. In our critical evaluation of Singapore’s government-led engagement sessions targeted at youth, we examine “expressed satisfaction” (Stipak, 1979), which can offer insights into stakeholders’ satisfaction with government efforts or organizational performance (Wong et

al., 2011). In the public administration field, scholars have long recognized that citizens' voices and their reactions to service delivery and government performance, collected for example via satisfaction surveys, interviews, or observations, can serve as a useful source of information for decision-makers who want to better understand the perceptions and experiences of citizens as customers or service users (e.g., see Brudney & England, 1982; Kim & Kim, 2022; Van de Walle, 2018). It is reasonable to argue that although citizen satisfaction is subjective (Brown & Coulter, 1983), it can complement objective quantitative indicators (Lee & Kim, 2024; Swindell & Kelly, 2000; Van Ryzin, 2004). Further, recent research has suggested that citizens' current satisfaction with public services, programs, or providers may influence their future expectations of related policies and stakeholders, their willingness to participate in public affairs, and even their levels of public trust, confidence, or loyalty toward the government (e.g., Beerli et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2024; Morgeson et al., 2021; Oh et al., 2022).

In the context of Singapore's youth participation efforts, we posit that a citizen-centric perspective would dictate that if youth participation is important, youth satisfaction with such opportunities is also important to solicit. Policymakers may need to course-correct in response to youths' low satisfaction with the current outreach programs. Like previous studies that have addressed the significance of policy feedback mechanisms (e.g., Hecló, 1974; Kim et al., 2021; Pierson, 1993), in this one we claim that understanding the perspectives of young people can help identify implementation gaps and instigate 'policy-learning effects' among stakeholders including policymakers, thereby leading to better policy development in the long term.

### **Case Selection and Description: Focus on the History of Youth-Centric Government Initiatives in Singapore**

A small-sized city state in the Asia-Pacific region with a political system known as an illiberal democracy or a competitive authoritarian regime, Singapore has evolved significantly over decades of nation-building, particularly by engaging in rapid modernization and economic development (Abdullah & Kim, 2020; Kim et al., 2021; 2022). Given its unique socio-demographic profile as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, Singapore has long proceeded with policy initiatives in a more straightforward, top-down fashion than its neighbors. One could argue that traditionally, public decision-making in Singapore has been centralized in the hands of the government and key organizational stakeholders, as well as, and youth have generally been excluded from public decision-making. Thus, the country's history of encouraging youth participation in the public sphere has been relatively short. However, in tune with recent shifts in the strategic priorities and national narratives extended by Singapore's government, the country has begun launching engagement opportunities for youth and attempting to diversify youth participation. As little is currently known about Singapore's approach to fostering youth participation in government-led community service projects, public conversations, and feedback exercises, we believe that examining the Singapore case can be illuminating. We thus present a brief history of youth-centric government initiatives in Singapore.

From its early post-independence<sup>2</sup> days through the 1980s, few government initiatives promoted the civic or political participation of youth. In fact, early in this period, the government was inclined to restrict youth participation. For instance, following the arrests and deportations of student activists from the University of Singapore who had campaigned for social causes, including Tan Wah Piow and Juliet Chin, widespread protests erupted among students from several other tertiary institutions. The government's response was to brand these Communist activities, and directly "[amend] the constitutions of all student organizations at the universities" to "[curtail] the scope of activities of these bodies" (Sim &

Chow, 2018, p. 765). In turn, the University of Singapore Amendment Act, which was passed on November 20, 1975, terminated the autonomous status of the student union, allocating its funds to the university administration. According to Liao (2010, p. 87), this had the effect of “decentraliz[ing] student leadership, compartmentaliz[ing] student power and limit[ing] political participation.” During this turbulent era, the government’s main policy regarding youth was the promotion of Outward Bound Singapore, which, at its outset in 1967, was aimed at “build[ing] a ‘rugged society’ by preparing young men for national service” (National Youth Council, 2021a). Given the focus on national survival early in the post-independence period, and the top-down approach of the government at the time, youth participation in this era was extremely limited.

The 1990s marked the first major inflection point in the government’s attitude toward youth participation in public life. Singapore introduced the Community Involvement Program (CIP) in October 1997, as part of its new National Education (NE) curriculum. Having accomplished the core goal of national survival, Singapore began efforts to instill elements such as social conscience, civic responsibility, and a sense of belonging to its communities via a hands-on approach based on the CIP (Koh, 2006). There were a variety of activities targeted at different age groups—for instance, secondary school students would provide assistance in welfare homes, teaching skills to senior citizens, or take on existing community upkeep projects, while older students could take up leadership roles in youth groups or school camps and assist with grassroots events (National Library Board (NLB), 2014). Greater focus began to be placed on developing young people as individuals and increasing their relevance in society.

By the 2000s, the extent of the autonomy granted to youth in Singapore was rapidly widening, and more opportunities were made available to them. Among the host of youth participation initiatives implemented, for instance, the SHINE Festival and \*SCAPE,

introduced in 2005 and 2007, respectively, allowed young people to showcase their creativity in artistic domains such as music, dance, and sports. Youth with a desire to enact change within their communities could submit project proposals for grants such as the National Youth Fund and the Young Changemakers Grant from organizations such as the National Youth Council. Together, these examples demonstrate the government's attempt at a more bottom-up approach, as well as the greater value it began to place on youth for their unique perspectives and creativity.

As these 21<sup>st</sup> century initiatives gradually increased the vibrancy, substance, and organic nature of youth participation in Singapore's public life, youth themselves began to demonstrate greater empowerment, increasing the supply of youth civic participation alongside the increased demand for it. For example, according to the 2019 National Youth Survey conducted by the National Youth Council, the number of young people who had engaged in at least one form of civic engagement increased from 65% in 2016 to 88% in 2019, a huge change over a relatively short period of time (National Youth Council, 2021b, p. 15).<sup>3</sup> In addition, according to the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Center (NVPC) (2017), youth volunteerism rates almost doubled, from 18% in 2008 to 34% in 2016. As of 2018, youth volunteerism rates among school-aged youths aged 15 to 24 stood above 40%, higher than the national average (Saad, 2024). Lastly, according to Youth Corps Singapore, more than 5,000 youth volunteered in 2022—a 20% increase from pre-pandemic times (Toh, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic could also be considered a catalyst for youth participation—for instance, the government initiated the SG Together Emerging Stronger Conversations, a virtual ministerial dialogue hosted by the National Youth Council, to give youth space to share their visions of a more resilient post-COVID community. In addition, Forward Singapore was launched in 2022, based on the government's recognition that Singapore was at a "crossroads" (Wong, 2022), and that a public consultation exercise was key for the

government to refresh itself. This was estimated to create close to 3,000 new opportunities for youth to volunteer for various causes, such as environmental conservation or helping the elderly (Low, 2022). Indeed, these statistics highlight that alongside the government's increased efforts to support youth participation—manifested through the slew of new initiatives rolled out since the 2000s—youth have also jumped on the bandwagon, making more active contributions to society.

Taking these developments together, it can reasonably be argued that youth in Singapore have an increasing say in public decision-making and have seized the opportunities presented to them. However, while the government certainly weighs youth participation more heavily today than it used to, the goals of its youth-centric initiatives are typically developing youths' talents or careers and improving the local community (i.e., fostering social cohesion), rather than eliciting young people's views on current social, political, or global issues. Further, one could argue that while youth participation has increased (especially in terms of civic activities), this does not necessarily translate to participation in the political realm (or in areas of strategic interest), nor participation of a confrontational manner.

## **Methods**

Our goal was to explore how youth in Singapore perceive the effectiveness of the government's youth outreach programs and what improvements they might suggest to policymakers and public managers to help them achieve successful youth participation in the long term. We therefore sought to recruit participants between the ages of 15 and 35, in line with Singapore's definition of youths (NYC, 2012). From May 2022 to April 2023, respondents for this study were selected through purposive and convenience sampling. Upon approval of this study by the XXX (*anonymized for review*) University Institutional Review Board, we attempted to contact undergraduate and postgraduate students in the schools of

humanities and social sciences.

To collect multiple in-depth data on a single topic, we employed a mixed methods research design that included a web-based survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. We began with the quantitative phase and followed it with the qualitative phase, in an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). We were able to collect a total of 114 valid survey responses.<sup>4</sup> The survey examined the young people's general awareness of opportunities for participation in public policy-making, the potential importance of their participation in the process, and their perceptions of the government's current efforts to develop and execute youth-centric initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, focus groups and individual interviews lasting between 30 minutes and one hour were conducted to elicit details about young people's past and recent experiences engaging in youth-centric initiatives, if any, and to identify and discuss factors or conditions that might need to be revamped or improved, especially those that were particularly memorable or challenging. Our intention in collecting the qualitative data was that it could both validate the evidence collected in the quantitative phase and explain the initial results in greater depth (Creswell, 2018).

For the interviews, following a lack of voluntary participation, snowball sampling was incorporated. We stopped recruiting additional respondents when we began to get very similar responses and determined that we had reached saturation in our sample. Our final pool of interviewees consisted of 31 individuals.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that due to the lack of previous studies in this context, our data analysis process was *inductive*. Building on the thematic analysis approaches of Braun and Clarke (2006) and Chi (1997), we analyzed the transcripts line-by-line using clustering techniques and cross-checked the analyses of the different researchers to identify and formulate the key themes. We used NVivo 12 software to affirm the emerging themes using evidence from the narratives and to organize sequences to

address based on the relative and absolute frequency of the coded word groups. We focused on codes that corresponded with our main research questions, including words such as “barriers,” “challenges,” “experience,” “inclusiveness,” “improve/recommend,” and “engagement.” Following previous studies that analyzed interview narratives using exploratory methods (e.g., Kim, 2017; Kim et al., 2021; Kwa & Kim, 2022), we also included particular themes that occurred at a lower frequency but still seemed relevant to the discussion.

## **Findings**

When analyzing the evidence using the mixed-methods approach, we restricted our focus to the following two large categories: (1) general perspectives on the current status of youth participation in government-led outreach programs and (2) barriers to effective youth-centric government initiatives, accompanied with potential considerations to promote active and inclusive youth participation. The evidence in the first category was obtained from the survey data, whereas the evidence in the latter one was observed and constructed from the two main interview questions: “What do you think are some barriers to youth participation in Singapore?” and “What do you think can be done to increase youth engagement and inclusiveness in the area of politics and beyond in Singapore?”

### ***General perspectives on youth participation in Singapore’s government-led outreach programs***

As displayed in Figure 1, given that the survey responses were given on Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), local youths in Singapore have relatively positive attitudes about the growing opportunities for youth-centric engagement, and most of them believe that the increased inclusion of youth in the public decision-making process can make a difference in governance. Specifically, it is notable that more than 77% of

respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” that local youth have more opportunities to engage with the government than they did in the 2010s. In addition, most respondents responded positively regarding the importance of youth participation in policy planning and policy evaluation. Among the 114 total observations, about 81% of the respondents answered “agree” or “strongly agree” to these statements.

[Figure 1 and Figure 2 Here]

However, it is worth noting that younger Singaporeans have expressed some dissatisfaction with the governments’ outreach efforts pertaining to youth-centered initiatives. As seen in Figure 2, in 114 total observations, only about 23.6% of the sample reported that local youth currently enjoy enough opportunities to engage with the government. In addition, a considerable number of survey respondents indicated that the government pays insufficient attention to youth voices and that it does not do enough to ensure that all youth have equal input. Regarding the current youth participation channels linked to politics or policy decision making, local youth generally seem to view these as tokenistic (or “just for show”) (42% *agreed* and 25% *strongly agreed*).

### ***Barriers to effective youth participation initiatives and potential next steps***

As in the survey findings noted above, respondents expressed mixed views of government-led public engagement opportunities for youth. To better understand the underlying challenges that limit youths’ genuine, active participation in such spaces, we analyzed their interviews to identify key themes. As in Table 1, the themes identified in the collected responses include: (1) top-down controlled characteristics, (2) cultural and psychological barriers, and (3) unequal opportunities in recruitment. In addition, we were able to identify ideas and suggestions that could make these youth initiatives more successful in the future.

(For related interview quotes, see Appendix B). While the government has the ultimate constitutional (and institutional) prerogative to engage in policymaking as it sees fit, our findings suggest ways it could better respond to the genuine concerns and opinions of young Singaporeans, particularly by improving communication and outreach.

[Table 1 Here]

(1) *Top-down* controlled characteristics

The majority of respondents reported a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the *top-down* nature of the current initiatives organized by government agencies and partnering institutions such as universities, especially regarding the narrow scope of the agenda topics discussed and the one-sidedness of the dialogues at such events, where contrasting points of view were not typically expressed. Many participants expressed that the larger the scale of the outreach programs (e.g., talks or forums), the more scaffolded or controlled the direction of the outreach or dialogue. Specifically, they argued that the topics discussed in youth engagement events do not reflect young people’s actual concerns and are pre-determined to proceed in a hierarchical way. Interviewees further pointed out that certain topics (e.g., race or religion) are less discussed in larger group settings, and discussions at youth forums are frequently subject to political correctness and self-censorship. According to a few respondents, sensitive issues are swept under the rug, perhaps due to young people’s lack of agenda-setting power. Especially in cases where a government ministry is directly involved in an event, the dialogue topics follow the government’s official agenda. The following quotes reflect this view:

“Most of the time these dialogue sessions are tightly moderated...[with] pre-planned questions...and...we don’t really go [in]to the more touchy subjects... they, armchair warriors per se, are kind of answering your question, but not really in the way...the students might want to hear.” (Interviewee #2)

“You [as a youth or participant] get to have issues like, for example, sensitive issues like race be swept under the carpet.” (Interviewee #8)

“Truly and undoubtedly, they are engaging the youths, but I think the content they actually present, for example, presenting...politically correct answers, [the youth are] not interested in this.” (Interviewee #11)

“When we as student leaders are told to propose topics, the debates that we propose might not actually accurately reflect the larger concerns of the youth....For example, in [the] case of REACH, [the organizers] will sort of accept more of the safer topics and see what ministers would be available or...willing to speak about it, which then again, narrows the topics which are offered.” (Interviewee #24)

In addition, recalling their experiences participating in recent youth engagement events, interviewees reported that the related programs have tended to be one-sided lectures where organizers share talking points or PowerPoint slides prepared in advance rather than two-way conversations between presenters and the audience. According to them,

“It’s more of a way for them to brief us, to tell us why the government is doing...things....I think the goal is for us to understand, [so] we can have more alignment....So we should not confuse participation and just briefing.” (Interviewee #4)

“From a participant point of view, I think it’d be the same as well, you would want to be able to get either very candid responses or certain insights....I think very rarely are these expectations met...especially if there is a senior minister that’s invited, they would usually prepare a PowerPoint or lecture....Whilst the floor is always opened up for questions or Q&A, the responses never usually deviate from what one can find in a press release and things like that.” (Interviewee #14)

Overall, there is a common perception among our youth participants that these government-led dialogues and events for youth usually revolve around the same thing, that is, limited, safe topics that align with the government’s narrative and agenda and present its views rather than soliciting those of youth. When invited to propose improvements to these events, respondents suggested that the events could instead take a bottom-up approach in which questions raised by a majority of participants are addressed at the event or in some sort of follow-up format. Examples of interview data that address this theme are presented in Appendix B.

## (2) Cultural and Psychological Barriers

Based on interviewees’ shared stories, it was clear that there are cultural and psychological

barriers to youth participation. When probed, some youth expressed cynical views of the events, mentioning that they do not see any purpose in participating. Several respondents commented that Singapore's unique and dominant culture that places a high value on pragmatism (which includes thinking practically and placing a high value on achieving benefits in the future) and conformity (not wanting to be seen as different from others in the community) plays a part in how local civic participation occurs and the level of intensity of that participation. This culture was strongly reflected in respondents' attitudes toward the youth-related initiatives. They speculated that youths' willingness to engage in dialogues and activities is tied to whether there are tangible or observable benefits of participating in a given program in the short term. This is well illustrated in the following quotes:

“I think all our school students in Singapore are very...pragmatic, like only scared of jobs and resumes... Focusing on that, they don't really have the time to participate...or [are] not really interested in participating.” (Interviewee #9)

“In Singapore, I think, the younger generation, we are too pragmatic. And we think that there's not going to be any use in participating in these kinds of programs, because there's no monetary benefits. And even if there were going to be improvements, it's kind of intangible, right?...I think that's the issue.” (Interviewee #18)

In addition, a few participants mentioned that a culture of fear leads youth to remain silent even when they have strong views on certain issues. Sometimes, this is coupled with so-called cancel culture related to stigma or peer pressure, where young people believe that saying something different from their peers can be embarrassing, as revealed in the following interview quotes:

“I feel like...there's this climate of fear around talking about government issues, if we're talking specifically about policies and politics.” (Interviewee #13)

“I hope that my views are not [so challenging]...that I [think] I may get myself into trouble...I think it is about the degree of acceptance by the government or by society on several unique views, you know, very unconventional views.” (Interviewee #17)

“[W]ith social media, you can just sort of like, just shame anyone online, that kind of stuff. Because you're afraid of, like, how people will perceive or judge you. So definitely cancel culture. And I think, increasingly now, there's...things like the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA),...so maybe

people feel that they don't have as much freedom to talk about maybe certain...like, taboo topics. So that could affect youth.” (Interviewee #19)

In response to such barriers, the interviewees agreed that there is a need to promote opportunities for those who are indifferent to government-led events as well as those who prefer being passive in their engagement, finding ways to attract each group. Specifically, as citizens, rather than discussing heavy subjects or international events and issues that feel too distant, youth in Singapore hope to be consulted on the mundane issues<sup>7</sup> they face in their everyday lives as they enter adulthood. The interviewees also shared positive views of the government’s attempts to diversify its communication channels (e.g., by using online platforms that allow ‘passive engagement’).

### (3) Unequal Opportunities in Recruitment

Another widely cited theme in the narratives addresses the “unequal” opportunity for youth to be recruited or invited to attend public engagement activities. Interviewees pointed out the so-called ‘skewed inclusiveness’ of such events, in that most dialogues and related programs are targeted at a select group of participants. For example, respondents felt that until recently, outside of school institutions, the outreach programs had not done enough to attract working-class youth. Even at the institutional level, most dialogues or engagement events have tended to remain limited to tertiary students from top-ranked local autonomous universities. Perhaps related to this, those invited to participate have typically been academic high performers or those in leadership positions. Thus, many youth feel that there is a tendency for participants to self-select, with the same faces repeatedly appearing at public engagement events. The following interview responses reflect this sentiment:

“Like the top 10 percent of the cohort in this school will be invited to this dialogue...which I don’t think is fair also. It’s very skewed, so everybody in the dialogue are the better achievers in their Co-Curricular Activities (CCA) as student leaders or their studies.” (Interviewee #3)

“It’s a spectrum...on one hand, there are people that I always see, like, the same faces ... Talking about the target groups also, I feel like a lot of the talks are targeted at university students, or maybe students in general. I don’t know about people like youths that are just working...[whether] they really, like, participate.” (Interviewee #9)

“Usually, the demographic is quite saturated in the sense where...they usually only invite[s] to the big universities, and then students from other small-sized institutions are very, very rarely there, even though there are current affairs societies in those unis as well.” (Interviewee #24)

In response, respondents suggested that policymakers could consider reworking existing initiatives, using different formats for dialogues in order to reach a more diverse group of participants. They also suggested that these engagement opportunities could be expanded to a wider target group through outreach efforts to certain minority or vulnerable groups and working youth.<sup>8</sup>

## **Discussion**

The goal of this study was to explore local youth perspectives on government-led youth participation initiatives in Singapore, both in terms of the landscape and current status of such events, and future steps that policymakers may want to take to improve their outreach efforts. Using a mixed-methods approach that includes survey questionnaire data and semi-structured interviews, this study elucidates the barriers and facilitating factors that may affect outreach efforts aimed at eliciting genuine youth participation.

Recent years have seen an increase in the quantity of youth engagement opportunities. But interestingly, according to the survey findings, young people in Singapore have mixed views on the effectiveness of the government’s current outreach programs. For example, survey respondents mostly agreed that there has been some progress in terms of the number and variety of opportunities available for participation, and also the level of autonomy granted to youths in the areas or activities they can participate in. Yet, their general impression of the government’s youth-centered events was not positive, especially with

respect to their depth and authenticity. Notably, some youth have faced discrimination when seeking opportunities to participate.

In the in-depth interview narratives, we found several fundamental challenges embedded in the current initiatives, including structural, cultural, and institutional vulnerabilities that may obstruct the active and meaningful participation of young citizens. First, interviewees pointed out that there is too much scaffolding of the discourse in instances where youth can directly communicate with the government (e.g., when ministry representatives are guest speakers at an event). For example, the organizers tend to allow only pre-written questions that are in line with the government's agenda, ruling out sensitive or heavy topics during the discussion. Thus, some participants expressed that it is difficult to say whether the participation and discussions are actually impactful. This evidence seems to align with a study by Arches and Fleming (2006) that noted that young people participating in public events are eager to decide on the discussion topics themselves. Further, in line with previous studies (e.g., Charles & Haines, 2019; Coad et al., 2008; Kirby & Bryson, 2002), our findings here both implicitly and explicitly demonstrate that when participants perceive that their ideas are dismissed, ignored, or modified without explanation, they become more reluctant to speak up or participate in related initiatives in the future. This observation seems to parallel the findings of the survey more broadly.

Respondents also expressed that widespread cultural and psychological barriers in Singaporean society reduce youths' motivation to partake in dialogues or related events. That is, a culture of prioritizing practical interests (e.g., career or financial benefits) and a fear of stigma or repercussions may lead youth to disengage, remaining apathetic about such dialogues and events or participating only passively. These findings echo Zhang's (2022) evidence from Singapore that young people's voices are relatively muted in comparison with other age groups and stakeholders. This may be due to youths' perception that they lack

sufficient knowledge to participate, because they fear repercussions if their opinions rub the authorities the wrong way, or because other communities may feel offended by their comments. These interesting insights may warrant more in-depth analysis in follow-up research. Lastly, interviewees pointed out the unequal distribution of engagement opportunities for local youth, echoing views expressed in the surveys. Specifically, youth reported that the events attracted an exclusive, non-representative group, that is, students who attend major local universities, academic top performers, and young people who hold leadership positions. These participants seem to be well-informed about the engagement opportunities, while others may feel ostracized. Certain youth-centric initiatives may, despite achieving some depth of discussion, still not feel authentic because they are not sufficiently inclusive.

### ***Implications***

Both survey and interview findings demonstrate that local youth are unsatisfied with the government-sponsored events and dialogues in which they have participated, especially vis-à-vis the intensity and quality of youth participation. More importantly, as recent citizen satisfaction studies in the field of public administration have indicated (e.g., Beeri et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2024; Oh et al., 2022), the overall findings of this study imply that in the youth participation setting, assessments of youths' satisfaction with current government outreach efforts reflect their perceptions and experiences, which may in turn affect their future expectations or participation in such events. While acknowledging that more research is needed, the evidence from this study can provide policymakers and organizers an opportunity to diagnose and monitor youth satisfaction with the current engagement programs and better mobilize resources to enhance the effectiveness of such events. That is, the barriers to the success of these events in the eyes of Singaporean youth present a learning

opportunity to improve the events. With the understanding that more active and inclusive participation spaces for youths can contribute to better policymaking, some ideas gleaned from the interview data are as follows. There is a need to broaden the scope of discussion topics and to include meaningful and tangible follow-up responses, beyond just addressing the typical bread-and-butter issues that have been raised in the ongoing initiatives. Better communication and outreach is needed to diversify the participant base. Rather than engaging in *ex ante* screening, organizers could instead leverage different-sized dialogues depending on the discussion topics, or employ different communication channels, including online platforms. Of course, these suggestions are open to further refinement. The evidence that we collected in this study suggests that government agencies and policymakers may need to engage in a continual learning process to identify, in Zhang's (2022, p. 8) words, "pre-conditioned young participants' comfortable way of engagement."

### ***Limitations and future research directions***

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. One caveat is that our analytical approach relies on responses gleaned from convenience and purposive sample and consists of self-reported subjective data, which may lead to social-desirability bias (Fisher & Katz, 2000). In addition, the survey respondents and interviewees represent only a small group of local youth in Singapore (i.e. university students majoring in the social sciences or humanities at XXX (*anonymized for review*)). Thus, there is a risk of over-representing a particular demographic group, and of selection bias due to cultural factors specific to the XXX community (Kim et al. 2021; Kwa & Kim, 2022). Readers should bear this in mind and take care when generalizing the results beyond the given setting. We recognize the importance of considering the proportionate composition of a university population in sampling. Therefore, a logical next step in this research would be to invite more students

from different disciplines, including science, engineering, medicine, business, education, communication, and arts and design, to participate in this research, or collaborating with other universities. Relatedly, future research could examine this topic using a larger sample size that incorporates other segments of the youth population, including students in other types of educational institutions or working youth. It would also be interesting to compare how youth in different age brackets perceive the effectiveness of the current youth participation initiatives. Admittedly, this study offers only an overview of the topic through the eyes of young people. Given that the ongoing introduction of new youth participation programs is expected to reshape youths' engagement experiences and expectations, follow-up studies should be conducted to capture shifts in attitudes toward these programs. It would also be interesting to replicate this study in other locations, comparing the views of young people in other countries with similar or different geographic, political, and cultural environments. In other words, allowing cross-national comparisons could not only confirm and verify our preliminary findings to provide a more universal explanation of similar cases, but also help broaden our understanding of the contextual factors that contribute to the differences.

## **Conclusion**

This study makes a substantive contribution to the existing scholarship on youth participation. First, it addresses the dearth of studies of youth participation in the Singaporean context. To the best of our knowledge, this study is one of the first to conduct preliminary in-depth analyses of young people's perceptions of the current youth initiatives, especially in the field of public administration and policy. Second, by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, we have gathered realistic evidence about the effectiveness of the current youth events and dialogues which can offer rich insights with implications for

policy improvement in line with local youths' demands and preferences. These contributions add to the literature and also have practical implications. In particular, in line with Quick and Bryson's (2016) argument that public participation is important for policymaking, we believe that the challenges we have identified are significant and must be surmounted to achieve genuine, inclusive youth participation in the public decision-making process. Of course, one may argue that young people lack expertise in certain policy areas. However, participation in ongoing youth initiatives could give them a sense of ownership that increases their confidence as individual citizens whose views and preferences can shape the way society functions. Further, it can reasonably be expected that youth-centered policy planning and evaluation could increase public trust in the government in the long term. Indeed, while the themes and subthemes drawn from our interview data are grounded in the particular context of this exploratory study (e.g., Singapore's unique culture that prioritizes pragmatism and the country's top-down institutional environment), the overall findings and affiliated implications of this study may have wider applicability as a useful departure point for future research, and in particular, as a basis for comparative case studies.

## Notes

1. The government has launched numerous youth participation programs led by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and the National Youth Council (NYC), with the aim to drive the partnership between youths and the government. The implementation of such measures began in 1967 with the launch of Outward Bound Singapore. Other initiatives include: Youth Expedition Project (2000), Shine Festival (2005), Young Changemaker Grant (2005), Singapore ASEAN Youth Fund (2007), \*SCAPE (2007), National Youth Fund (2013), Youth Corps (2014), and Youth Conversation (2018) (MCCY, n.d.). For the detailed information of each initiative, see Appendix A.
2. Singapore joined the Federation of Malaya, Borneo and Sarawak on September 16, 1963. Due to irreconcilable differences, Singapore was removed from the interstate alliance on August 9, 1965. Singapore's post-independence period is considered to follow this date.
3. A total of 3,392 youths participated in the 2019 National Youth Survey conducted by the National Youth Council.
4. The data was collected between May 2022 and January 2023. The response rate of the survey was about 38%. The demographic profile of the survey respondents was as follows: approximately 58% were female and 42% were male. In terms of ethnicity, 81.6% were Chinese, 8.8% were Indian, 2.6% were Malay, 2.6% were Eurasian, and 4.4% were other. In terms of educational level, almost all respondents were undergraduate students (about 95%), while a few were pursuing master's or doctorate's degrees (5%). As for their fields of study, approximately 80% were studying the social sciences, while 20% were studying the humanities.

5. The survey questions that were analyzed in this study are as follows: on a scale of 1–5, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree,” please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: (1) I think Singapore youths today (e.g., since the late 2010s) have more opportunities than before to engage the government; (2) I think that greater inclusiveness of the young population in the public decision making process can make a difference to governance like a current political system or public policy process; (3) I believe that youth participation in policy planning in Singapore is very important; (4) I believe that youth participation in policy evaluation in Singapore is very important; (5) I think that Singaporean youths (including myself) currently enjoy enough opportunities to engage the government; (6) I think the Singapore government has not paid enough attention to youths’ voices or perspectives in general; (7) I think the Singapore government has not worked towards greater equality of opportunities to the youth population; and (8) I think that youth political or policy participation channels currently available are tokenistic (or “just for show”) in general.
6. The interviews were conducted from May 2022 to April 2023. Approximately 74% were female ( $n=23$ ), while 26% were male ( $n=8$ ). A majority of the interviewees were from the School of Social Sciences (about 93.5%;  $n=29$ ) while the rest were from the School of Humanities (6.5%,  $n=2$ ).
7. For example, youth reported that they could speak up more about issues that are domestic, generational, or social (e.g., education and the environment)—that is, those are directly related to the youths’ current concerns or their near future, such as jobs and wages, housing, and the rising cost of living, rather than external-facing or unprecedented issues that may be more strategic. For the detailed narratives from interviewees, see Appendix B.

8. Specifically, the interviewees highlighted adjusting the size of government-led dialogues dealing with specific topics for youth may be helpful, such that certain groups could provide greater input in smaller settings, rather than including all the voices in the name of inclusiveness, since some specific issues matter more to certain demographic groups. For the detailed narratives from interviewees, see Appendix B.

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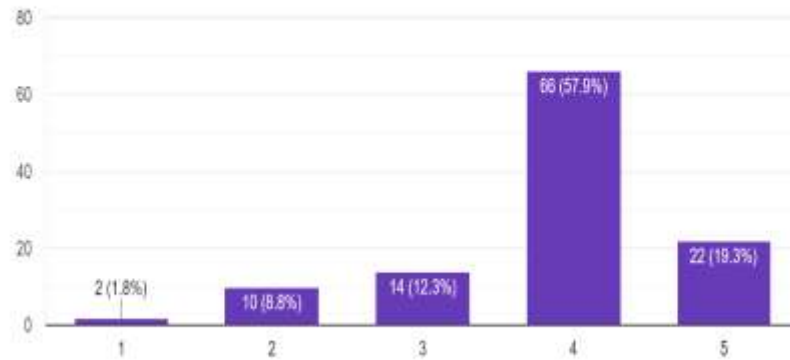
**Table 1.** Summary of Categories, Themes, and Subthemes Identified Using Thematic Analysis

| Category  | Selected Themes                      | Subthemes Explored   |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| Barriers to the Effective Youth-Centric Participation Initiatives | Top-down controlled characteristics  | Political correctness<br>Overlook issues of sensitive topics<br>Official government agenda<br>One-side dialogues (e.g., lecture or briefing)<br>Poor communication/responses |
|   | Cultural and psychological barriers  | Pragmatism<br>Judgement/Stigma<br>Cancel culture<br>A fear of state surveillance   |
|   | Unequal opportunities in recruitment | Tertiary students/student leaders<br>Self-selection (same faces)<br>Discrimination   |

**Figure 1. General Perspectives on Singapore’s Youth Participation Opportunities**

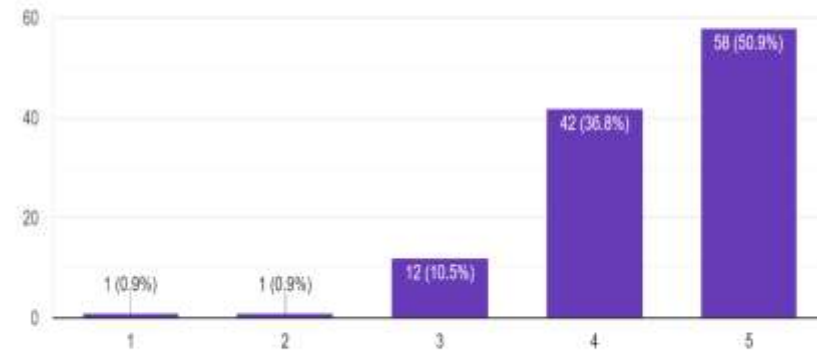
I think that Singapore youths today (e.g., since the late 2010s) have more opportunities than before to engage the government.

114 responses



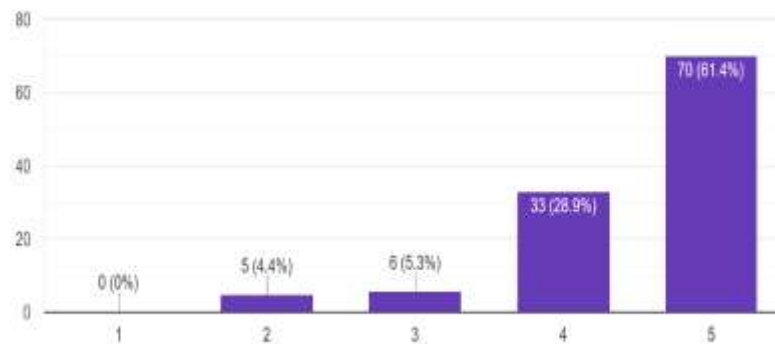
I think that greater inclusiveness of the young population in the public decision making process can make a difference to governance like a current political system or public policy process.

114 responses



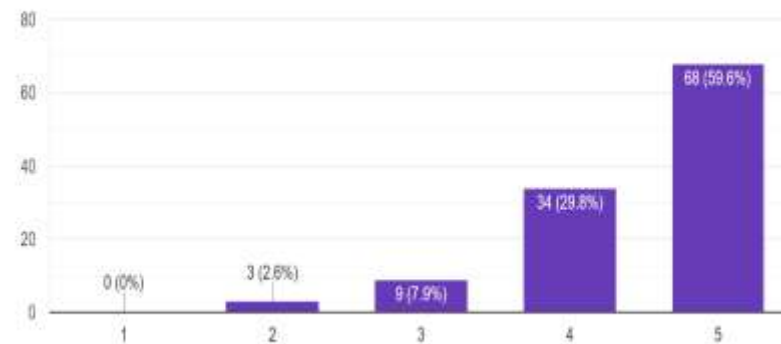
I believe that youth participation in policy planning in Singapore is very important.

114 responses



I believe that youth participation in policy evaluation in Singapore is very important.

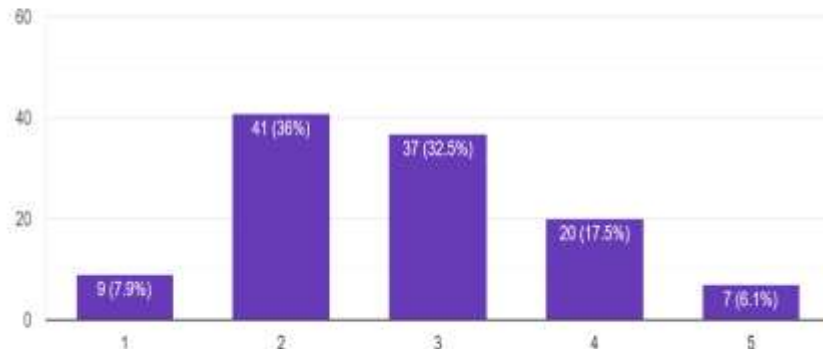
114 responses



**Figure 2. Reactions to the Current Government-led Youth-Specific Outreach Initiatives**

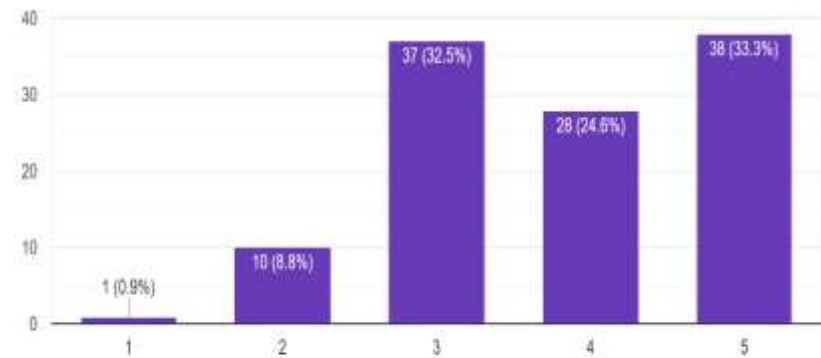
I think that Singaporean youths (including myself) currently enjoy enough opportunities to engage the government.

114 responses



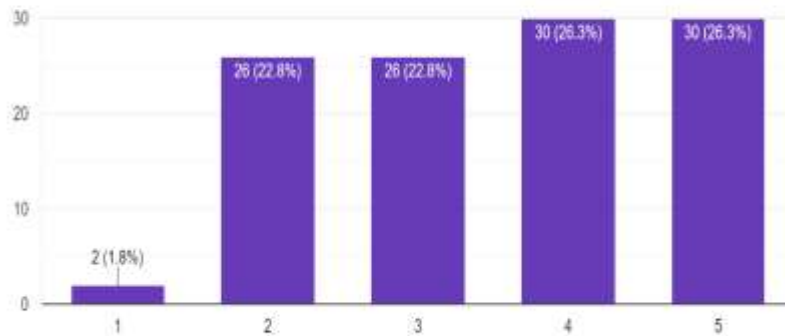
I think the Singapore government has not paid enough attention to youths' voices or perspectives in general.

114 responses



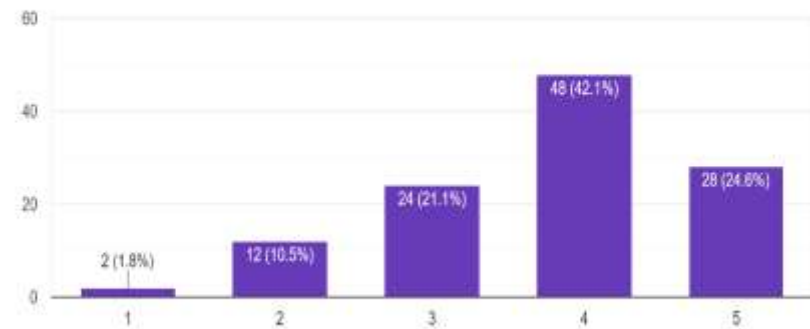
I think the Singapore government has not worked towards greater equality of opportunities to the youth population.

114 responses



I think that youth political or policy participation channels currently available are tokenistic (or "just for show") in general.

114 responses



### Appendix A. Overview of Selected Youth Participation Initiatives

| Name of initiative             | Year of initiative roll out | Rationale & Description   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Outward Bound Singapore        | 1967                        | Following the National Outdoor Adventure Education (OAE) Master Plan, all Secondary 3 students attend the 5-Day OBS Challenge Programme to nurture resilience, leadership and collaboration skills.   |
| SHINE Festival                 | 2005                        | SHINE Festival showcases talents in the areas of arts, dance, media and music in its annual celebration of the youth in Singapore. Concurrently, the SHINE X *SCAPE Talent Development Programme helps to hone the skills of youths and develop their talents.  |
| Young Changemakers (YCM) Grant | 2005                        | The YCM Grant offers seed funding and supports youth-led projects beneficial to the local community and society. In addition, the YCM's monthly Open Mic sessions allows youth to network with like-minded individuals and be nurtured with sharing feedback and resources.   |
| REACH Singapore                | 2006                        | REACH is currently the lead agency in facilitating government efforts to actively engage and connect with Singaporeans on national and social issues close to the people's hearts in Singapore. It aims to create a level of openness between the Government and the people, working together to establish continued conversations, community participation, and collaboration. |
| Singapore ASEAN Youth Fund     | 2007                        | The Youth Fund facilitates interaction and partnerships among ASEAN youths and youth sector organizations. It aims to improve understanding and forge closer bonds within the ASEAN Community, while increasing awareness of ASEAN's cultures.  |
| *SCAPE                         | 2007                        | *SCAPE is a venue located in the centre of Orchard Road that is supportive of a diverse range of youth aspirations in music, media, dance, entrepreneurship, and sports. Young talents are nurtured with access to resources, mentorship, and industry connections via *SCAPE.  |
| Youth Expedition Project       | 2012                        | The YCS conducts the YEP, a service-learning programme to foster active youth citizens with a desire to make a difference at home and abroad.   |
| National Youth Fund            | 2013                        | The NYF is established in support of ground-up initiatives and innovations for the co-creation of social change in the community in partnership with youth sector organizations. Concurrently, the NYF encourages youth leaders to pursue training and development to better lead community projects and start new social movements.  |

|                        |      |  |
|------------------------|------|--|
| Youth Corps Singapore  | 2014 | YCS offers opportunities to 160,000 youths to serve the community across a wide range of causes, such as education, environment, special needs and arts. The YCS' Leaders Programme has also empowered over 1,000 aspiring youth leaders to conceptualise and implement their own service learning projects.   |
| SG Futures Dialogue    | 2015 | Community engagement sessions aimed at better understanding youth aspirations for their futures, and the future of Singapore. This initiative is touted as a national platform for Singaporeans to collectively write the next chapter of the Singapore story.   |
| Youth Conversations    | 2018 | Youth Conversations serves as a platform for youths to discuss issues of concern. Concurrently, the youths gain diverse perspectives, and co-create with peers and the government on topics ranging from mental health, social inclusivity to migrant workers.   |
| Youth Action Challenge | 2020 | The key thrust of the Singapore Youth Action Plan, which empowers youths to champion ground-up initiatives in partnership with government, businesses and community organizations. This initiative aims to provide youths with opportunities to turn their ideas into reality, through guided workshops, and mentorship from experienced industry professionals. |

## Appendix B. Sample Quotes of Potential Considerations for More Active and Inclusive Youth Participation

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### Context 1. Enhancing Responsiveness to Youths' Feedback

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#### *Ideas from the bottom-up*

“I think one of the ways is ... with maybe some online surveys or a website where they can petition what type of topics they want, so the higher the petition for a certain topic then they can start a dialogue ... I mean we can still do that, but the secondary is like create some area where people can just vote for a topic.” (Interviewee #7)

#### *Follow-up*

“That’s one area that I think, like, following up... the organizers can come back and say ‘this is what we discussed, and this is what we’ve implemented.’ Because this will incentivize youths to be more politically active, knowing that actually what they say really has a stake in Singapore, and their opinions are being valued.” (Interviewee #6)

“I was thinking after every engagement with the youth, like those dialogues, what the organizers can do is to maybe make it formal, in the sense that they publish what was being talked about, what was the consensus, then what actions the government will be taking.” (Interviewee #25)

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### Context 2. Broadening the Scope of topics in Discussion

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#### *Topics of youths' current concerns and future career/life preparation*

“[Conversations on] foreign policy ... I don’t think youths will engage in that topic... [rather] housing and jobs, that’s definitely [something] that youths in Singapore can play a role in, you know, in the conversation about retirement and financial independence. I think that’s one area a lot of people, youths, especially like our age now, about to graduate, we talk about it.” (Interviewee #9)

“The current Built-To-Order (BTO) prices are pretty high, and there’s not enough houses, .... Like we could have a greater voice in terms of combating this housing issue, especially since we’re nearing the age where we’re thinking about marriage and buying a house.” (Interviewee #21)

#### *Generational/social issues*

“The closest I can think to an area that youths would generally agree on is generational issues—things that may not affect the older generation as much as for us. And that boils down, at least in the Singaporean context, to housing, capital inheritance, environment, and climate change in particular.” (Interviewee #13)

“I feel like sustainability and the environment could an important issue particularly for youths, because it is the future generations that will suffer if change is not made right now.” (Interviewee #31)

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### **Context 3. Encouraging a Culture of Diversity in the initiatives**

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#### ***Call-in minority or vulnerable groups/Working youths***

“... I think if we could have more of this, but...[an] “open-to-all” kind of thing, maybe at least have a more targeted effort to call in certain minority groups or more vulnerable groups, I think that would be a good step in the right direction.” (Interviewee #2)

“Working youths [should be recruited], because I think then, like, the challenges they face, or the opinions that they have would be different.... Maybe not just like social media, maybe more direct, like emails, or, like approaching companies to hear youths, like to get their younger workers, that kind of thing.” (Interviewee #19)

#### ***Passive engagement (via online channels)***

“[F]or those that are quite shy, like me, maybe it could also have a platform where you can anonymously...write in...to kind of...but take our words seriously as well, I think that’s also another important thing as well.” (Interviewee #5)

“I feel like youths are more likely to participate through online channels because it takes less effort, and also allows them to be more honest. If they don’t have strong feelings about any specific issues, I cannot imagine why they would make the effort to participate in any sorts of programs, especially offline.... And I also think that if there was some way to assure them of their anonymity, it could be possible to have more participation and also more honest views as well.” (Interviewee #31)

#### ***Small-sized niche dialogues/forums***

“It is still good to learn about different perspectives and views, but, just, from the long-term perspective, I don’t really see the fruition of discussion through those bigger kinds of talks and forums. We have to use, like, more strategic kind of talking points.... Maybe smaller scale dialogues, that one can be more in depth.” (Interviewee #9)

“To increase youth engagement, I would say think about interesting methods or mechanisms to perk the interest of the student body... the government can consider organizing targeted or niche dialogues/forums that cater to these student bodies.” (Interviewee #30)

#### ***Collaboration with other educational institutions***

“If the government actually...collaborated more with diverse universities, polytechnics and even secondary schools as well, just to hear what the future generation actually have to say about the current policies in Singapore, [I] think that would actually encourage us more to...participate in this kind of discourse.” (Interviewee #5)

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