

Youth Readiness in Electoral Participation for Sustainable Governance: A Study of University Students in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of UNDI18 in 2019 significantly reshaped Malaysia's political landscape by lowering the voting age to 18 years old. This study examines the factors that influence youth readiness for electoral participation, which consist of political literacy, political exposure, and youth perception among undergraduate students in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Samarahan campus. The study highlights the role of youth participation in the electoral process as a vital component in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16), which emphasizes the importance of inclusive and participatory decision-making for sustainable societies. The study also explores the role of personality traits through the usage of the HEXACO model of personality and how it can relate to shaping youth electoral engagement. A total of 382 students aged between 18 and 30 years old from various faculties have participated in the survey. The findings reveal that among the HEXACO model of personality dimensions, extraversion and openness to experience emerge as the dominant traits associated with electoral readiness amongst youth. As a result, such findings suggest that outreach programs designed to appeal to extroverted and open-to-experienced youth individuals, such as interactive forums, campus debates, and digital engagement through creative media, will enhance youth voter turnout. Based on the historically low youth participation before the 14th Malaysian General Election (GE14), leveraging these personality traits could be the key to mobilizing a larger segment of the electorate in Malaysia.

Keywords-Youth Readiness, Electoral Participation, Voting, HEXACO, Model of Personality, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Youth have always been recognized as the future leaders, innovators, and changemakers who shape the social, economic, and political landscape of a nation. Their active participation in political processes is essential for strengthening democracy, particularly in the digital age, where social media platforms amplify their influence on governance [1]. According to [2], such active participation and role in influencing decision-making in the country's electoral process aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), which emphasizes the promotion of peaceful, inclusive societies and the need for responsive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels. The introduction of UNDI18 in Malaysia, which allows 18-year-olds to vote in elections significantly altered the political landscape by adding approximately 5.8 million new votes, granting youth a greater role. However, concern arises regarding the youth political maturity, as only 29.0% of youth are actively engaged in political participation, potentially impacting democratic representation [3].

That said, understanding the factors influencing youth readiness for electoral participation is crucial for fostering active participation. This study aims to examine youth readiness for electoral participation, which encompasses political literacy, political exposure, and youth perceptions of elections, through the lens of personality traits and their influence on these aspects. In this case, the HEXACO model of personality traits developed by [4] was used to explore how the different dimensions of HEXACO can influence the youth electoral participation amongst UiTM Samarahan undergraduates. Thus, the dimensions of HEXACO, which comprise honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, provide a structured framework for analyzing which among the dimensions can significantly

influence the readiness of youth in electoral participation.

It is essential to note that understanding youth readiness for electoral participation is not only important for academic theoretical inquiry but also for practical purposes. Reference [5] argue that during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15), low voter turnout among youth may have contributed to the formation of a hung parliament, requiring constitutional intervention by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (YDPA). This highlights the potential negative impact of low youth electoral participation, as many eligible young voters are reportedly disengaged or apathetic in their role during elections. Therefore, understanding what motivates the youth to vote in elections is key, as from a sustainability standpoint, increased youth participation in elections contributes to building a strong institution that ensures governance systems that reflect the voices of all segments of society [6]. With a more politically literate and exposed youth in the electoral process, it could then help shape a clearer democratic mandate and reduce post-election uncertainties in Malaysia.

Through the insights of youth personality traits through the HEXACO model of personality and youth readiness for electoral participation, the government, civil society, and political parties can craft data-driven initiatives that can increase youth electoral participation, which will also boost the voter turnout rate. For example, civic education campaigns tailored to individual youth values and psychological traits could help address apathy and improve participation in future elections. In doing so, it will not only strengthen Malaysia's democratic fabric but also advance global sustainability goals by fostering inclusive, accountable, and participatory political systems in line with SDG16. Overall, this study will be able to contribute to enhanced youth engagement strategies and Malaysia's democratic development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Personality Traits

According to [7], personality traits can be defined as a consistent pattern of thoughts, emotions and behaviors that remain over time and across various conditions. To elaborate, it means that personality traits are qualities that make people think, feel and behave in a certain way that stays consistent over time. In this study, the personality traits that will be utilized are the HEXACO model of personality developed by [4], which groups personality traits into six dimensions, such as honesty–humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience [8]. These six dimensions play a crucial role in understanding human differences, and each has its own practical implications in various contexts such as psychology, organizational behavior and political settings. Based on [9], below is a set of components that describe each HEXACO dimension:

1. Honesty–Humility: sincerity, fairness, greed avoidance, and modesty
2. Emotionality: anxiety, fearfulness, dependency, and sentimentality
3. Extraversion: self-confidence, enthusiasm, high energy levels, and optimism
4. Agreeableness: patience, adaptability, kindness, and a willingness to forgive
5. Conscientiousness: self-discipline, high accuracy, perfectionism, and thoughtful decision making
6. Openness to experience: appreciation, inquisitiveness, creativity, and unconventional thinking

In the field of psychology, personality traits help explain individual behavior, motivation, and cognitive processes. According to [10], personality traits contribute to understanding personal uniqueness and behavioral patterns. For example, the Big Five model of personality is one of the dominant frameworks in personality research, providing insight into human behavior and responses to different stimuli [11]. Furthermore, in organizational behavior, personality traits are often used to see how they can influence job performance, satisfaction, and motivation. Studies by [12] and [13] states that personality traits play a key role in workplace success. Conscientiousness is strongly linked to job performance, whereas agreeableness and openness to experience contribute to better adaptability and teamwork.

Finally, personality traits can also be utilized in political settings, particularly because they influence how individuals engage in politics, ranging from the types of leaders or ideologies they support. For a specific example, in the works of [14], it was found that voters who score high in emotionality and agreeableness tend

to prefer a candidate with a charismatic and democratic leadership style during elections. When it comes to political ideology, individuals high in honesty–humility, and agreeableness are more likely to support progressive parties, while those scoring high in conscientiousness tend to favor more conservative ones [15]. These findings prove that understanding personality traits can offer insights into voters' behavior and preferences in political settings.

Past Research of the HEXACO Model of Personality in Malaysia

There has been limited application of the HEXACO model of personality in Malaysian research. Nevertheless, existing studies demonstrate their potential in explaining behavioral tendencies and social interactions within the local context. For instance, [16] investigated the influence of gaming on teenage behavior and found that adolescents who frequently play video games score higher on extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience compared to non-gamers. This suggests that gamers are generally more outgoing, organized, cooperative, and open to new experiences. The findings highlight the significance of personality traits in shaping gaming engagement, reinforcing the value of the HEXACO model in understanding behavioral patterns among Malaysian youth.

In another study by [17], the influence of the HEXACO model of personality on the comparison of perceptions of stalking behavior in Malaysia and England was examined. This study demonstrated the model's relevance in social psychology research. The findings of the study reveal that emotionality was negatively associated with perceived victim responsibility, meaning that those who score high in emotionality are less likely to blame the victim in stalking scenarios. Moreover, Malaysian participants perceived stalking as a less serious crime and assigned greater responsibility to the victim as compared to their English counterparts. Thus, the finding underscores the applicability of the HEXACO model of personality in studying psychological and social behaviors in Malaysia, despite its relatively lesser prominence when compared to the Big Five model of personality.

Electoral Participation in Malaysia

Malaysia has held regular elections since before its independence in 1957, with the first federal and state-level elections dating back to 1955. For decades, the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, led by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), dominated Malaysian politics, often winning by large margins and maintaining a semi-authoritarian grip on power [18]. According to [19], the reason behind these election results is largely due to the historic play influenced by ethnicity, with urbanization only emerging as a more recent but secondary factor. Despite that, a major shift occurred in the 14th General Election (GE14) in 2018, when the opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (PH) led by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad achieved a surprising historic victory, ending his own successor's Dato' Sri Mohd Najib BN's 61 years of long-standing rule as the government in Malaysia.

Following this, the election process introduced a new player with the introduction of UNDI18, which lowered Malaysia's voting age from 21 to 18 years old in 2019, alongside the implementation of automatic voter registration, significantly expanding the youth electorate and positioning young Malaysians as new changemakers in elections [20]. A study conducted by [21] stated that due to the two electoral reforms, young voters constituted the bulk of six million new voters since 2018, which naturally empowered more young people to be more involved in Malaysian elections, with their participation seen as crucial for a more representative, inclusive, and dynamic democracy. Reference [22] emphasized that while GE14 is seen as a historical breakthrough, it also ushers in a period of political realignment and instability, as the subsequent years saw shifting alliances, by-elections, and reforms, with the 15th General Election in 2022 resulting in Malaysia's first-ever hung parliament, reflecting deep party polarization and the lack of stable coalitions.

Youth Readiness for Electoral Participation

According to [3], readiness for electoral participation is shaped by various factors, including political literacy, political exposure, and youth perceptions of politics and elections. Firstly, political literacy equips individuals with the necessary knowledge and understanding of the electoral process. A research study by [23] indicates

that a lack of political literacy is linked to low voter turnout among young people, whereas a higher level of political literacy enhances self-efficacy, fostering confidence in electoral engagement. Hence, the result of the study finds that politically literate youths are more likely to feel empowered in their role as voters, as they understand the significance of their vote and its impact on governance.

Secondly, political exposure helps the youth shape their understanding of political rights, responsibilities, and societal issues, which significantly influences their readiness for electoral participation. A study by [24] emphasizes that exposure to political discourse through social media, educational curricula, and mass media helps young people develop critical thinking and engagement in political affairs. This is further supported by [25] whereby the findings of their study reveals a strong correlation between political exposure and youth readiness to vote. As a result, both studies highlight that individuals who have greater access to political discussions and information are more inclined to participate in elections.

Finally, youth perception of politics and elections plays a role in shaping their willingness to participate in electoral processes. This is because when young individuals perceive elections as fair and impactful, they are more likely to engage in voting. On the other hand, if they view the political system and electoral process as corrupt or ineffective, their readiness to vote diminishes. A study conducted by [26] found a significant relationship between youth perception and electoral participation, indicating that positive attitudes towards voting correlate with higher levels of electoral readiness. Thus, highlighting the importance of fostering transparency in the electoral process and within political institutions to encourage greater youth participation in democratic processes.

Past Research on the Model of Personality and Youth Electoral Participation

The relationship between personality traits and youth electoral participation has been widely explored, with numerous studies investigating how individual differences influence political engagement. Most research in this area relies on the Big Five model of personality to examine the role of personality traits in shaping electoral behavior among young voters. For example, [27] study finds that openness to experience and extraversion were positively associated with political engagement. Individuals who scored high in these traits were more likely to participate in elections due to their sociable and outgoing nature, which often translates into higher political involvement.

Similarly, in the research study of [28], which also utilizes the Big Five model of personality, it investigates how personality traits can influence engagement among Polish youth voters. From there, the study revealed that extraversion played a significant role in various civic activities, with highly extroverted individuals more likely to engage in political and social initiatives. Additionally, agreeableness was linked to greater social commitment and electoral participation, while conscientiousness was associated with increased political involvement. The study concluded that personality traits, particularly extraversion, influence youth engagement in political and civic activities, reinforcing the role of personality in shaping electoral participation.

Finally [29], which explored the connection between personality traits and youth political participation, identifies extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience as key predictors of political engagement. Extroverted individuals were found to be more proactive in political activities, often encouraging others to participate due to their assertive and outgoing nature. Conscientious individuals demonstrated a strong sense of duty and responsibility, leading them to stay informed and actively engage in political affairs. Openness to experience was associated with a willingness to explore new political opportunities and attend political events.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional research design and utilized a simple random sampling technique to assess the readiness for electoral participation among undergraduates at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Samarahan campus, located in Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, which was distributed both online (via WhatsApp, Facebook, and Telegram) and offline (using a

QR code placed on a clipboard). The target respondents consisted of diploma and degree students aged between 18 and 30 years old. The target respondents were undergraduate students pursuing their diploma and degree, aged between 18 and 30 years old. A total of 382 valid responses were gathered and analyzed. The validity and internal consistency of the data were assessed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Table I Demographic Profile Of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency (n = 382)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	174	45.5
Female	208	54.5
Age		
18 – 20	219	57.3
21 – 25	153	40.1
26 – 30	10	2.6
Level of Education		
Diploma	279	73.0
Degree	103	27.0
Faculty		
Administrative Science & Policy Study	79	20.7
Applied Sciences	26	6.8
Computer & Mathematical Sciences	48	12.6
Civil Engineering	29	7.6
Hotel & Tourism Management	33	8.6
Contemporary & Islamic Studies	11	2.9
Business Management	41	10.7
Accountancy	31	8.1
Mechanical Engineering	5	1.3

Electrical Engineering	3	.8
Plantation & Agrotechnology	5	1.3
Art & Design	23	6.0
Sport Science & Recreation	17	4.5
Health Sciences	6	1.6
Architecture, Planning & Surveying	23	6.0
Built Environment	2	.5

Table I displays the overall demographic profiles of the respondents in the survey with their respective characteristics. A total of 382 undergraduate students from UITM responded to the questionnaire, with females comprising 54.5% (n=208) and males 45.5% (n=174). Most undergraduate students from UITM, 57.3% (n = 70), are aged 18–20 years old. Followed by 40.1% (n=153) aged 21–25 years old, and the remaining 2.6% (n=10) aged 26–30 years old. Among them, 73% (n = 279) are pursuing their diploma, while a smaller proportion, 27% (n = 103), are pursuing their degree.

The highest number of respondents is from the Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, comprising 20.7% (n=79). Followed by the Faculty of Computer & Mathematical Sciences, which accounts for 12.6% (n = 48). The Faculty of Business Management represents 10.7% (n = 41), while the Faculty of Hotel & Tourism Management contributes 8.6% (n = 33). The Faculty of Accountancy encompasses 8.1% (n = 31), and the Faculty of Civil Engineering accounts for 7.6% (n = 29). Meanwhile, the Faculty of Applied Sciences accounts for 6.8% (n=26), followed by the Faculty of Art & Design and the Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, each representing 6.0% (n=23). The Faculty of Sport Science & Recreation accounts for 4.5% (n = 17), while the Faculty of Contemporary & Islamic Studies contributes 2.9% (n = 11). Finally, the Faculty of Health Sciences represents 1.6% (n = 6), and both the Faculty of Plantation & Agrotechnology and the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering each make up 1.3% (n = 5). The Faculty of Electrical Engineering accounts for 0.8% (n=3). The Faculty of Built Environment represents the lowest respondent rate at 0.5% (n=2).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table II Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Hexaco Dimensions And Youth Readiness For Electoral Participation Variables

	H	E	X	A	C	O	PL	PE	YP
H	—								
E	0.69**	—							
X	0.70**	0.76**	—						
A	0.83**	0.75**	0.77**	—					
C	0.78**	0.72**	0.69**	0.88**	—				
O	0.81**	0.74**	0.76**	0.87**	0.86**	—			

PL	0.62**	0.50**	0.60**	0.64**	0.61**	0.63**	—		
PE	0.56**	0.62**	0.70**	0.61**	0.57**	0.68**	0.54**	—	
YP	0.72**	0.66**	0.69**	0.79**	0.76**	0.75**	0.67**	0.70**	—

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table II exhibits correlation analysis where all six HEXACO personality traits are significantly associated with political literacy, political exposure, and youth perception at the $p < 0.01$ level. Extraversion demonstrates strong positive correlations with political exposure ($r = 0.70$), political literacy ($r = 0.60$), and youth perception ($r = 0.69$). Conscientiousness is also positively associated with youth perception ($r = 0.76$) and political literacy ($r = 0.61$). Meanwhile, openness to experience exhibits consistently strong correlations across all three variables, particularly with youth perception ($r = 0.75$) and political exposure ($r = 0.69$). Finally, both agreeableness and honesty–humility display high correlations with youth perception ($r = 0.79$ and $r = 0.72$, respectively), indicating their relevance in shaping political attitudes among youth.

The findings of this study highlights that all HEXACO dimensions significantly correlate with political literacy, exposure, and youth perception, aligning with past literature. For instance, the strong positive correlation between HEXACO’s extraversion and political variables supports findings [27] as well as [28], who noted that extroverted individuals are more likely to engage in political and civic activities due to their sociable and outgoing nature. The correlation involving conscientiousness reflects [29] conclusion that conscientious youth feel a sense of duty, making them more politically involved. Meanwhile, the influence of openness to experience mirrors observations by both [27] and [29], where openness led to exploration of political ideas and participation. Furthermore, agreeableness, conceptually like HEXACO’s honesty–humility, was linked by [28] to greater social and electoral commitment. Overall, these findings suggest that specific personality dimensions meaningfully shape youth political readiness, with youth perception emerging as the most strongly correlated factor.

Table Iii Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.841 ^a	0.707	0.702	0.46019

Predictors: (Constant), Honesty Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to experience

Dependent Variable: Youth Readiness for Electoral Participation

Table III indicates that the six HEXACO model of personality dimensions collectively explain approximately 70.7% of the variance in youth readiness for electoral participation ($R^2 = 0.707$). The adjusted R^2 value of 0.702 indicates that the model remains strong even after adjusting for the number of predictors. The R value of 0.841 indicates a strong positive relationship between the HEXACO traits and youth readiness for electoral participation. This implies that personality traits are strong predictors of youth readiness to participate in elections.

Table Iv Multiple Regression Coefficient Predicting Youth Readiness For Electoral Participation

Variable			95% CI			
	Beta	SE	LL	UL	β	p
H	0.096	0.053	-0.009	0.201	0.098	0.072
E	0.009	0.046	-0.081	0.099	0.009	0.849

X	0.289	0.044	0.202	0.376	0.329	0.000
A	0.124	0.080	-0.034	0.281	0.118	0.124
C	0.078	0.067	-0.054	0.209	0.078	0.247
O	0.267	0.064	0.141	0.393	0.286	0.000

Dependant Variable: Youth Readiness for Electoral Participation

Table IV presents the multiple linear regression analysis used to determine among influential factors in the HEXACO model of personality towards youth readiness for electoral participation. The results of the table displays that extraversion and openness to experience are significant factors in contributing to youth readiness for electoral participation ($p < 0.01$). For each one-unit increase in extraversion, youth readiness for electoral participation increases by 0.329 units, making it the highest influencing factor. Following that, for each one-unit in openness to experience, youth readiness for electoral participation increases by 0.286. Another aspect worth mentioning is while agreeableness recorded a standardized beta of 0.118, its p-value was 0.124, which exceeds the significance threshold ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that while agreeableness demonstrates some level of influence, it cannot be considered a significant predictor statistically.

The results of this study differ significantly from the initial literature review. According to prior studies by [27], all HEXACO personality dimensions should have some degree of significance in influencing youth readiness for electoral participation. However, the findings of this study indicate that only extraversion and openness to experience are significant predictors, while honesty-humility, emotionality, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are not. Despite these differences, there is one notable point of alignment: the strong influence of extraversion. The study of [28] and [29] both found that extraversion is the most influential factor, enabling the prediction of various forms of civic engagement, including individual political activity, social commitment, and political participation. This, as a result, aligns well with the present study's findings, where extraversion emerged as the most influential factor in predicting youth readiness for electoral participation.

While only extraversion and openness to experience were found to be statistically significant predictors of youth readiness for electoral participation in this study, this does not imply that the remaining personality dimensions are unimportant. For instance, [14] demonstrated that emotionality and agreeableness play a role in shaping voters' preferences in a candidate's leadership styles during elections. Voters who score high in these traits were more likely to favour charismatic and democratic leaders, indicating that such traits contribute meaningfully to leadership selection. Similarly, the dimensions of honesty-humility and conscientiousness, while not significant in this study's regression model, have been shown to correlate with political ideology in previous research. According to [15], individuals high in honesty-humility tend to support progressive parties, while those high in conscientiousness are more inclined toward conservative ones. These findings suggest that although not directly influencing electoral readiness in this context, these personality traits remain relevant in understanding broader patterns of political behaviour and voter orientation.

Table V Model Summary (Stepwise)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.795 a	0.632	0.631	0.51224
2	0.833 a	0.693	0.692	0.46834

a. Predictors: (Constant), Openness to experience

b. Predictors: (Constant), Openness to experience, Extraversion

c. Dependent Variable: Youth Readiness for Electoral Participation

The results in Table V indicates that openness to experience alone explains 63.2% of the variance in youth readiness for electoral participation ($R^2 = 0.632$), indicating a strong predictive power. When extraversion is added, the R^2 increases to 0.693, meaning the two predictors together account for 69.3% of the variance. This significant improvement suggests that both openness to experience and extraversion are key personality traits influencing youth readiness, with extraversion providing additional explanatory strength beyond openness to experience alone.

Limitation of Study

There are two primary limitations in this study: the use of simple random sampling and dependence on a relatively new model.

The reliance on simple random sampling posed challenges in collecting responses, as many students were hesitant to complete lengthy questionnaires. To mitigate this issue, the shorter 24-item Brief HEXACO Inventory was utilized instead of the HEXACO-60, which may have diminished the depth of the findings. Another drawback was the lack of balanced representation. For example, one gender was overrepresented, making comparisons between genders unreliable or biased. The second limitation was the adoption of the HEXACO personality model. Although increasingly recognized, it remains less established than the Big Five model. In Malaysia, research using HEXACO remains limited, and its application to youth electoral readiness is a novel approach. This lack of precedent affected the ease with which the findings could be interpreted and accepted.

CONCLUSION

This study has produced several important findings. First, youth perception is the most influential factor in motivating young people to engage in electoral participation, followed by political exposure and political literacy. Second, in terms of the HEXACO model of personality, extraversion is the most significant contributing factor to youth readiness for electoral participation. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and political institutions in designing personality-driven approaches to enhance political engagement among young voters. While extraversion was found to be highly significant, electoral awareness campaigns should not focus solely on extraverted youth.

Campaign strategies must be inclusive, catering to diverse personality traits and learning preferences. Interactive methods such as debates, forum discussions, and town hall meetings can be effective for extraverted individuals, while digital platforms, self-paced learning tools, and infographics may resonate better with more introverted youth. For those high in openness to experience, experiential learning through parliamentary visits, mock elections, and political workshops can provide meaningful exposure to the electoral process. Additionally, integrating political literacy into university curricula across various faculties ensures all students, regardless of personality, acquire the civic knowledge and participatory skills necessary for active engagement.

By tailoring electoral awareness initiatives to youth personalities, Malaysia can maximize youth engagement and increase voter turnout in the coming elections, specifically the 16th General Election (GE16), expected in 2028, and the 13th Sarawak State Election (SE13), anticipated in 2027. This demonstrates the practical importance of aligning electoral strategies with youth traits to ensure stronger political participation.

Theoretically, this study expands the application of the HEXACO model of personality within Malaysia's electoral context, paving the way for future research on personality traits and political behavior. Practically, it highlights how universities, political parties, and policymakers can design programs that foster youth engagement in more targeted and inclusive ways.

Overall, the findings affirm that youth, particularly those with high levels of extraversion and openness to experience, are capable and ready to participate in the electoral process. What remains is for society and

institutions to equip them with the tools, exposure, and knowledge that strengthen their political readiness. Doing so will not only ensure a politically conscious and participative youth generation for upcoming GE16 and SE13, but also contribute to institutional inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, in line with the goals of SDG16 for sustainable governance.

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