

# Malaysia: Stop restricting student participation in politics

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**The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has recently drafted a guideline under the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (UUCA) with the purpose of regulating student involvement in politics on and off campus. This guideline contains many restrictions to which Pemuda Sosialis greatly opposes.**

First and foremost, the ability to freely participate in politics coincides with every citizen's right to freedom of speech, assembly, and association which is guaranteed by the federal constitution under Article 10. Considering that many students spend most of their time on campus during the course of their education, limiting their participation in politics violates this right. Just like any other adult citizen, Malaysian students should be allowed to be active in politics. Without the unconditional freedom to set up a political branch or division on campus, students would be discouraged from joining political groups — which would result in an apolitical and apathetic attitude amongst the youth. Allowing this to happen would be detrimental to the nation and its future democracy.

Besides that, new legislation has made it possible for citizens as young as 18 years old to vote in elections. This development forms the impression that the government encourages youth participation in politics, given that every voter should be involved and aware of political issues to ensure a functioning democracy. However, the decision to draft a restrictive guideline contradicts that very progress that the country has made. It is therefore illogical for the MoHE to limit the political activity of students who are of legal age to vote. In fact, it is a step backwards, as it negates the decision made by parliament, and an insult to the democratic process.

Furthermore, it is apparent that the current national education system — up until secondary school — does not adequately inform students of their political rights. As soon as they leave school, their only opportunity to gain such knowledge would be through activities organised by political parties and NGOs. If those activities are prevented from being held on campus, students would then have no choice but to travel outside of campus in order to do so. Since many students staying in hostels are campus-bound, they do not have the privilege and means of leaving campus as they please, disproportionately affecting the chances of underprivileged students gaining political literacy, and inevitably stifling the voices of low-income groups in the nation's political arena.

In summary, the deliberate decision to limit student participation in politics is backwards and is evidently a very overused tactic by a power-hungry government interfering with democracy. Pemuda Sosialis not only demands for the MoHE to scrap this guideline, but to also achieve absolute abolishment of the UUCA. Students, just like everyone else, deserve to have no unnecessary restrictions on their ability to participate in politics. Thus, we urge all youths and politically-involved organisations to oppose this guideline and to continue carrying out their work in student politics.

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