

Allow students to experience election processes
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The Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) is extremely concerned over recent investigations on university students over their participation in the by-election campaign in Ijok.

A special committee with representatives from various universities is carrying out a probe to monitor student involvement. The Higher Education Minister Mustapa Mohamed has stated that action would be taken against a group of 30 university students who were reportedly involved in campaigning and organising political talks during the recent by-election. Quoting the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971, he stated that disciplinary action would be taken, the most severe punishment of which would be expulsion.

The CPPS would like to stress that this group was not 'actively taking part in politics', as barred by the UUCA. Direct contact with the concerned youth organisation confirms that activities were centred on exposure to Malaysia's election processes, through independent house-to-house surveys and an educational workshop. Such educational processes surely cannot be construed as active political participation.

Even if these were to be interpreted as active participation, there is an urgent need to review elements of the UUCA which bar students' political participation. The government cannot possibly expect young Malaysians to be politically aware and urge citizens over 21 to register as voters, whilst simultaneously stifling student expression at universities. Repressive action will discourage the approximately five million unregistered voters, large numbers of whom are youth, from registering as new voters. This further dissuades young Malaysians from later participating in public life as national leaders.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has emphasised the development of human capital through the creation of universities of international standing. Creative, critical and innovative thinking stems from the freedom of expression, which is also guaranteed by Article 10 of the Federal Constitution. For universities to achieve academic excellence, enhance competitiveness and become centers for developing human capital, Malaysia cannot be held back by an archaic piece of legislation that impedes upon a democratic process characteristic of a developed nation.

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