



IMAGINED  
MALAYSIA



A HISTORY OF  
**Student  
Activism**  
IN MALAYSIA

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CHAPTER 4:  
**Research and  
Data Analysis**



# Acknowledgements

A History of Student Activism in Malaysia is a research project run by Imagined Malaysia, supported by Malaysia Reform Initiative (MARI), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur. The research project lasted for approximately four months, starting from late August until December 2020. This research project was conducted with two goals in mind: to probe the development of student activism in Malaysia from pre-Independence period, including the issues activists championed and how these changed or remained the same. We also aimed to probe and highlight the various narratives within student movements, and to propose a series of recommendations for various parties to further empower youth- and student-led initiatives in Malaysia. We conducted our research through literature reviews, surveys, and a series of focus group discussions and interviews. The research project is also Imagined Malaysia's attempt to create opportunities for analytical historical research outside academia and institutions.

Imagined Malaysia would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who directly and indirectly played a role towards the success of this project, from our funders, survey respondents, to participants of our focus group discussions, our interviewees, and last, but not least, the project team that built this work.

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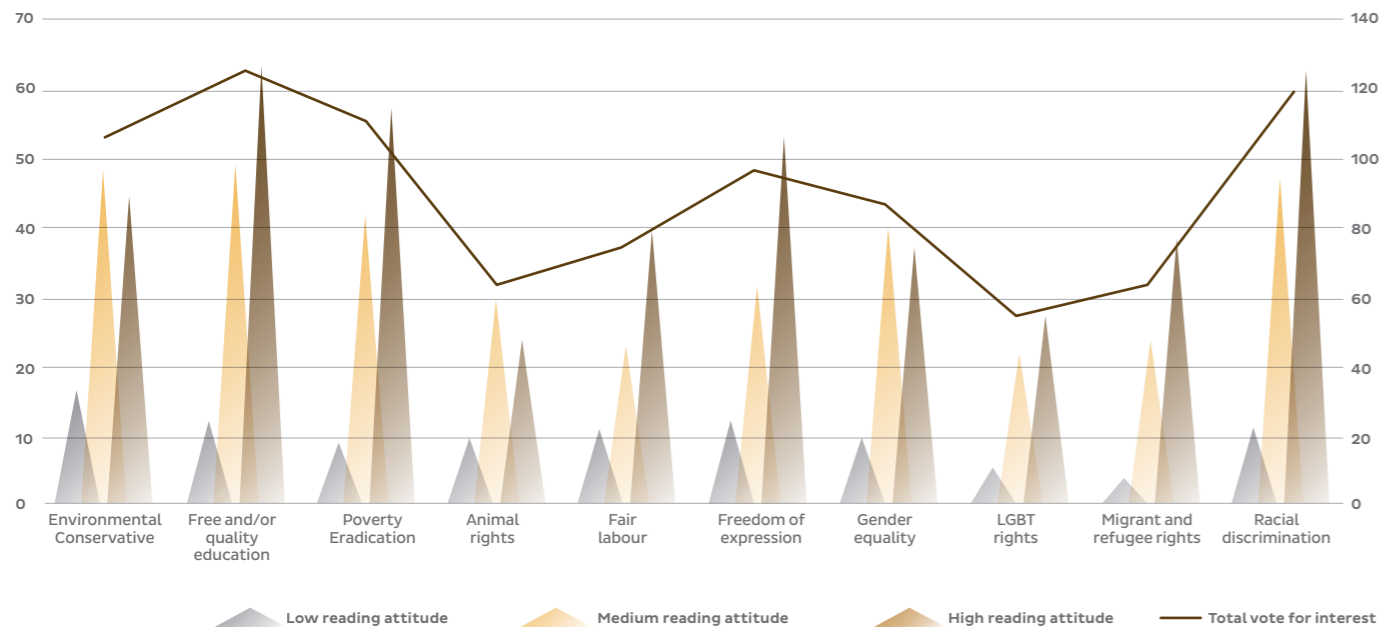
Survey Analysis

**“The results demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between the various issues that students are interested in and their frequentness in following the news to get updates on current issues, especially in Malaysia.”**

**Survey Analysis**

We conducted the following analysis based on the list of the hypothesis that was suggested in the earlier part of this report.

**1) Knowledge/information on student activism impact on the participation attitude/intention and participation behaviour**



**Figure 1: Level of Reading Attitudes among Students based on Interest in Issues (%)**

Figure 1.1 presents the levels of reading attitudes within each issue of interest among students. It attempts to demonstrate that higher levels of interest in an issue will lead to a higher reading attitude. This is reinforced by the regression run in Table 1.a, Table 1.b, and Table 1.c below. The results demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between the various issues that students are interested in and their frequentness in following the news to get updates on current issues, especially in Malaysia. The p-value is less than 0.05 at 0.004(\*\*\*). Additionally, the relationship between the issues of interest of “animal rights” and “gender equality” with how often one reads

the news are statistically significant with the p-values at 0.025 and 0.03 respectively. Based on this analysis, it is fair to say that majority of students who have an interest in social issues will tend to read more and have a higher awareness of issues happening within society. The more awareness students have, the higher the chances are for them to register more empathy for society, and the higher the chances are for them to participate in the nation-building process. This can be further concretised with the various examples provided in our literature reviews such as the Demonstrasi Baling and the Teluk Gong incident.

**TABLE 1.a: MODEL SUMMARY**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.338 <sup>a</sup>	.114	.074 <sup>a</sup>	2.378

a. Predictors: (Constant), Interest 10, Interest 4, Interest 3, Interest 6, Interest 5, Interest 2, Interest 8, Interest 7, Interest 9

**TABLE 1.b: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	143.740	9	15.971	2.824	.004 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	1114.173	197	5.656		
Total	1257.913	206			

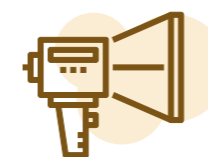
a. Dependent Variable: Reading news

b. Predictors: (Constant), Interest 10, Interest 4, Interest 3, Interest 6, Interest 5, Interest 2, Interest 8, Interest 7, Interest 9

**TABLE 1.c: COEFFICIENTS<sup>a</sup>**

Model 1	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	6.356	.371		17.155	.000
Interest 2	.136	.360	.027	.379	.705
Interest 3	.299	.360	0.61	.830	.408
Interest 4	-.821	.363	-.154	-2.262	.025
Interest 5	.053	.370	.010	.143	.886
Interest 6	.490	.362	.099	1.355	.177
Interest 7	-1.176	.395	-.235	-2.979	.003
Interest 8	.245	.458	.043	.534	.594
Interest 9	.805	.421	.152	1.914	.057
Interest 10	.576	.358	.115	1.606	.110

a. Dependent Variable: Reading news



**“The more awareness students have, the higher the chances are for them to register more empathy for society, and the higher the chances are for them to participate in the nation-building process.”**

**2) Age relation to participation/intention/attitude and participation behaviour**

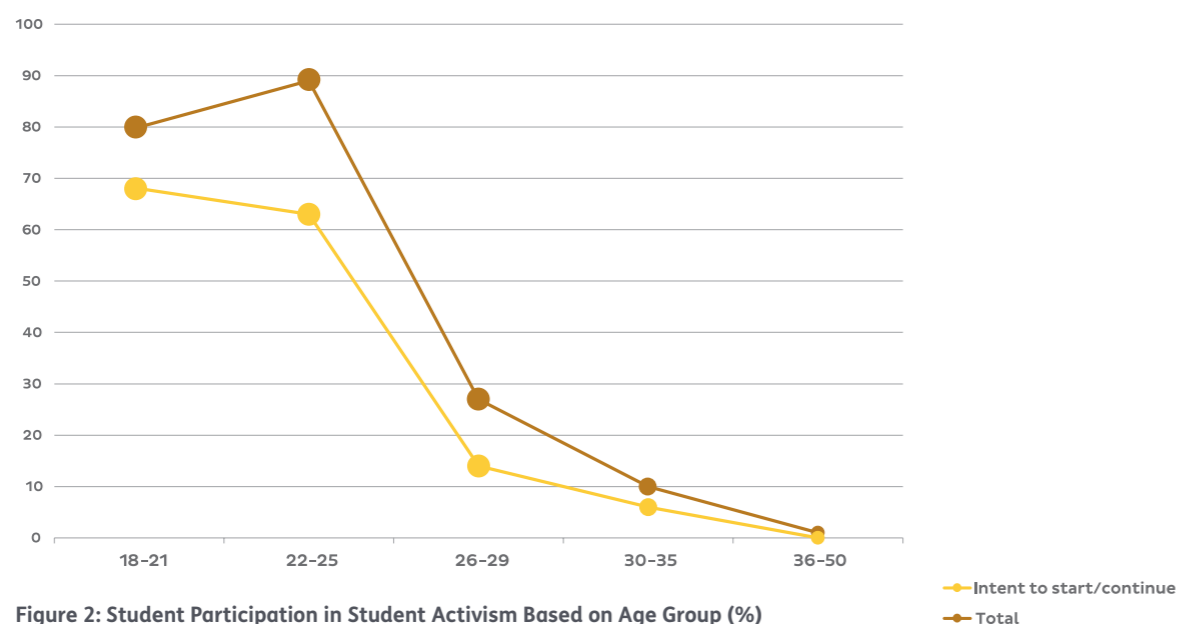


Figure 2: Student Participation in Student Activism Based on Age Group (%)

Figure 2 suggests that younger students are more likely to start or continue to participate in student activism or movements in the future. Following the age group of 22-25 years old, the student's intention to start or continue reduces significantly from 63 to 14, and this decline persists to the age group of 36-40 years old. This pattern

is considered normal and supported by our participants in the Focus Group Discussions with the justification that students will shift their priorities according to their circumstances or situation. Hence, their focus after graduation will heavily depend on factors such as career, family, and change in interest.<sup>1</sup>

**3) Race effect on the participation attitude/intention and participation behaviour**

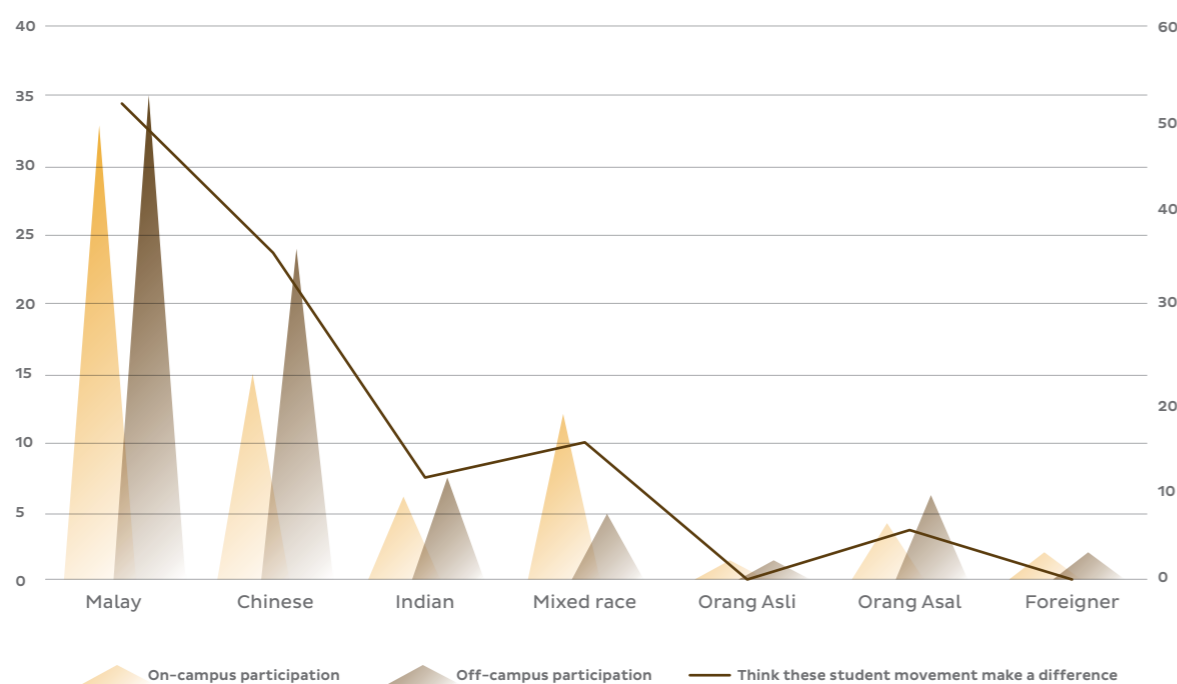


Figure 3: Students' Attitudes and Behaviour based on Race

<sup>1</sup> This can be referred to Page 29 of this chapter – Focus Group Discussion Rapporteur Report.

To assess the relationship between race and student participation attitude and behaviour, questions were posed to participants on their perspectives of efficiency within student activism and their participation behaviour in student activism. Based on the results as shown in Figure 3, it was found that most Malay students participating in student activism (45.95% and 43.75%) strongly believe that student activism is efficient (44.44%). These participation percentages are followed by Chinese (20.27% and 30%), Mixed race (16.22% and 6.25%), Indian (8.11% and 8.75%), Orang Asli (5.41% and 7.5%), Foreigner

(2.7% and 2.5%) and Orang Asli (1.35% and 1.25%). As for the participation attitude, the order is also similar with corresponding percentages of 29.06%, 12.82%, 9.4%, 4.27%, and 0% for both foreigner and Orang Asli. However, due to our small sample size, the result may not accurately reflect the actual context. Interestingly, participants within the Malay, Mixed race, Orang Asli, and foreigner ethnic groups are more active in on-campus student activism than off-campus student activism. Inversely, those from the Chinese, Indian, and Orang Asli ethnic groups are more active in off-campus student activism.

TABLE 3.a: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2.745	6	.457	2.201	.044 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	41.372	199	.208		
Total	44.117	205			

a. Dependent Variable: Do you consider yourself an activist?

b. Predictors: (Constant), Mixed, Orang Asli, Foreigner, Orang Asli, Indian, Chinese

TABLE 1.c: COEFFICIENTS<sup>a</sup>

Model 1	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero Order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.330	.046		17.155	.000					
Chinese	-.119	.076	.027	.379	.705	-.134	-.111	-.108	.871	1.148
Indian	-.163	.117	0.61	.830	.408	-.096	-.098	-.096	.924	1.082
Foreigner	.170	.326	-.154	-2.262	.025	.041	.037	.036	.989	1.011
Orang Asli	.170	.168	.010	.143	.886	.082	.072	.070	.961	1.040
Orang Asal	-.330	.362	.099	1.355	.177	-.066	-.072	-.070	.989	1.011
Mixed	.216	.108	-.235	-2.979	.003	.175	.141	.137	.931	1.096

a. Do you consider yourself an activist?

TABLE 3.c: CORRELATIONS

		Do you consider yourself an activist?	Chinese	Indian	Foreigner	Orang Asli	Orang Asal	Mixed
Pearson Correlation	Do you consider yourself an activist?	1.000	-.134	-.096	.041	.082	-.066	.175
	Chinese	-.134	1.000	-.191	-.061	-.124	-.061	-.214
	Indian	-.096	-.191	1.000	-.031	-.062	-.031	-.107
	Foreigner	.041	-.061	-.031	1.000	-.020	-.010	-.032
	Orang Asli	.082	-.124	-.062	-.020	1.000	-.020	-.070
	Orang Asal	-.066	-.061	-.031	-.010	-.020	1.000	-.034
	Mixed	.174	-.214	-.107	-.034	-.070	-.034	1.000

**TABLE 3.c: CORRELATIONS**

		Do you consider yourself an activist?	Chinese	Indian	Foreigner	Orang Asal	Orang Asli	Mixed
Sig. (1-tailed)	Do you consider yourself an activist?		.028	.084	.282	.120	.171	.006
	Chinese	.028		.003	.191	.038	.191	.001
	Indian	.084	.003		.331	.187	.331	.063
	Foreigner	.282	.191	.331		.388	.444	.313
	Orang Asal	.120	.038	.187	.388		.388	.160
	Orang Asli	.171	.191	.331	.444	.388		.313
	Mixed	.006	.001	.063	.313	.160	.313	
	N	Do you consider yourself an activist?	206	206	206	206	206	206
	Chinese	206	206	206	206	206	206	206
	Indian	206	206	206	206	206	206	206
	Foreigner	206	206	206	206	206	206	206
	Orang Asal	206	206	206	206	206	206	206
	Orang Asli	206	206	206	206	206	206	206
	Mixed	206	206	206	206	206	206	206

a. Do you consider yourself an activist?

In the regression, as shown in Table 3.a, Table 3.b, and Table 3.c, the race category of “Malay” is the baseline and acts as the constant. The overall relationship between race/ethnicity and their identification of themselves as an activist is statistically significant as the p-value is less than 0.5 at 0.044. However, the Pearson correlation coefficient for each of the race categories shows a weak relationship between them and the question of “do you consider yourself an activist?”. The strongest negative correlation is the race category “Chinese” at -0.134 and the strongest positive correlation is the race category “mixed” at 0.175. Both these values are far from the values of 1 and -1, suggesting that there is

a weak strength of association between the individual race categories (I) and the identification of themselves as an activist (O). This is further enforced from the individual p-values of each race category generated, with none of them being less and 0.05. This is in line with the findings by Sullivan (1996), Hart and Atkins (2002), Ginwright (2007), and Sherrod et al. (2010) which demonstrate a significant relationship between a student’s race and their attitudes towards student activism. Besides that, based on our first round of focus group discussions with current student representatives at various local universities, many have pointed out that they believe that ethnic background plays a very important role in one’s participation in activism.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> According to one FGD participant:

“I think it (ethnic background) plays a very important role. But it depends on the demography of the university. Like University Malaya juga, I think, no offence to other universities, I mean this is just my personal opinion. But UM is a clear mirror of a mini Malaysia because the composition of all races are quite similar (to that of the real world) of course.”

4) Role of religion on the participation attitude/intention and participation behaviour

**TABLE 4.a: CORRELATIONS FOR INTERNAL PARTICIPATION**

		Internal Participation	Christianity	Buddhism	Hinduism	Atheism	Agnosticism	Und	Sikhism	Taoism	Others	
Pearson Correlation	Internal Participation	1.000	.005	-.071	.018	.082	-.014	.050	-.075	-.075	-.033	
	Christianity	.005	1.000	-.178	-.094	-.078	-.103	-.072	-.041	-.041	-.058	
	Buddhism	-.071	-.178	1.000	-.097	-.081	-.107	-.075	-.043	-.043	-.061	
	Hinduism	.018	-.094	-.097	1.000	-.043	-.056	-.039	-.022	-.022	-.032	
	Atheism	.082	-.078	-.081	-.043	1.000	-.047	-.033	-.019	-.019	-.027	
	Agnosticism	-.014	-.103	-.107	-.056	-.047	1.000	-.043	-.025	-.025	-.035	
	Undecided	.050	-.072	-.075	-.039	-.033	-.043	1.000	-.017	-.017	-.024	
	Sikhism	-.075	-.041	-.043	-.022	-.019	-.025	-.017	1.000	-.010	-.014	
	Taoism	-.075	-.041	-.043	-.022	-.019	-.025	-.017	-.010	1.000	-.014	
	Others	-.033	-.058	-.061	-.032	-.027	-.035	-.024	-.014	-.014	1.000	
	Sig. (1-tailed)	Internal Participation		.472	.155	.397	.120	.419	.237	.144	.144	.321
		Christianity	.472		.005	.091	.134	.070	.153	.279	.279	.203
Buddhism		.155	.005		.082	.125	.063	.144	.272	.272	.194	
Hinduism		.397	.091	.082		.272	.211	.288	.375	.375	.325	
Atheism		.120	.134	.125	.272		.252	.321	.395	.395	.353	
Agnosticism		.419	.070	.063	.211	.252		.269	.362	.362	.308	
Undecided		.237	.153	.144	.288	.321	.269		.403	.403	.364	
Sikhism		.144	.279	.272	.375	.395	.362	.403		.444	.421	
Taoism		.144	.279	.272	.375	.395	.362	.403	.444		.421	
Others		.321	.203	.194	.325	.353	.308	.364	.421	.421		
N		Internal Participation	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205
		Christianity	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205
	Buddhism	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	
	Hinduism	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	
	Atheism	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	
	Agnosticism	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	
	Undecided	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	
	Sikhism	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	
	Taoism	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	
	Others	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	

**TABLE 4.b: ANOVA<sup>a</sup> FOR INTERNAL PARTICIPATION**

Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.261	9	.140	.594	.801 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	46.026	195	.236		
Total	47.288	204			

a. Dependent Variable: Internal Participation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Others, Taoism, Sikhism, Undecided, Atheism, Hinduism, Agnosticism, Christianity, Buddhism

**TABLE 4.c: CORRELATIONS FOR EXTERNAL PARTICIPATION**

		External Participation	Christianity	Buddhism	Hinduism	Atheism	Agnosticism	Undecided	Sikhism	Taoism	Others
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	<b>External Participation</b>	1.000	-.078	-.043	-.124	.069	.119	.038	.022	.022	.031
	<b>Christianity</b>	-.078	1.000	-.179	-.089	-.078	-.099	-.072	-.041	-.041	-.059
	<b>Buddhism</b>	-.043	-.179	1.000	-.093	-.081	-.103	-.075	-.043	-.043	-.061
	<b>Hinduism</b>	-.124	-.089	-.093	1.000	-.040	-.051	-.037	-.021	-.021	-.030
	<b>Atheism</b>	.069	-.078	-.081	-.040	1.000	-.045	-.033	-.019	-.019	-.027
	<b>Agnosticism</b>	-.119	-.099	-.103	-.051	-.045	1.000	-.042	-.024	-.024	-.034
	<b>Undecided</b>	.038	-.072	-.075	-.037	-.033	-.042	1.000	-.017	-.017	-.025
	<b>Sikhism</b>	-.022	-.041	-.043	-.021	-.019	-.024	-.017	1.000	-.010	-.014
	<b>Taoism</b>	.022	-.041	-.043	-.021	-.019	-.024	-.017	-.010	1.000	-.014
	<b>Others</b>	.031	-.059	-.061	-.030	-.027	-.034	-.025	-.014	-.014	1.000
	<b>Sig. (1-tailed)</b>	<b>External Participation</b>		.133	.272	.039	.163	.044	.293	.378	.378
<b>Christianity</b>		.133		.005	.102	.133	.079	.152	.279	.279	.202
<b>Buddhism</b>		.272	.005		.094	.124	.071	.143	.271	.271	.193
<b>Hinduism</b>		.039	.102	.094		.283	.233	.298	.381	.381	.333
<b>Atheism</b>		.163	.133	.124	.283		.261	.321	.395	.395	.353
<b>Agnosticism</b>		.044	.079	.071	.233	.261		.278	.368	.368	.316
<b>Undecided</b>		.293	.153	.143	.298	.321	.278		.403	.403	.364
<b>Sikhism</b>		.378	.279	.271	.381	.395	.368	.403		.444	.421
<b>Taoism</b>		.378	.279	.271	.381	.395	.368	.403	.444		.421
<b>Others</b>		.329	.202	.193	.333	.353	.316	.363	.421	.421	
<b>N</b>		<b>External Participation</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	<b>Christianity</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	<b>Buddhism</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	<b>Hinduism</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	<b>Atheism</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	<b>Agnosticism</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	<b>Undecided</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	<b>Sikhism</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	<b>Taoism</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	<b>Others</b>	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204

**TABLE 4.d: ANOVA<sup>a</sup> FOR EXTERNAL PARTICIPATION**

Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2.104	9	.234	.975	.462 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	46.524	194	.240		
Total	48.627	203			

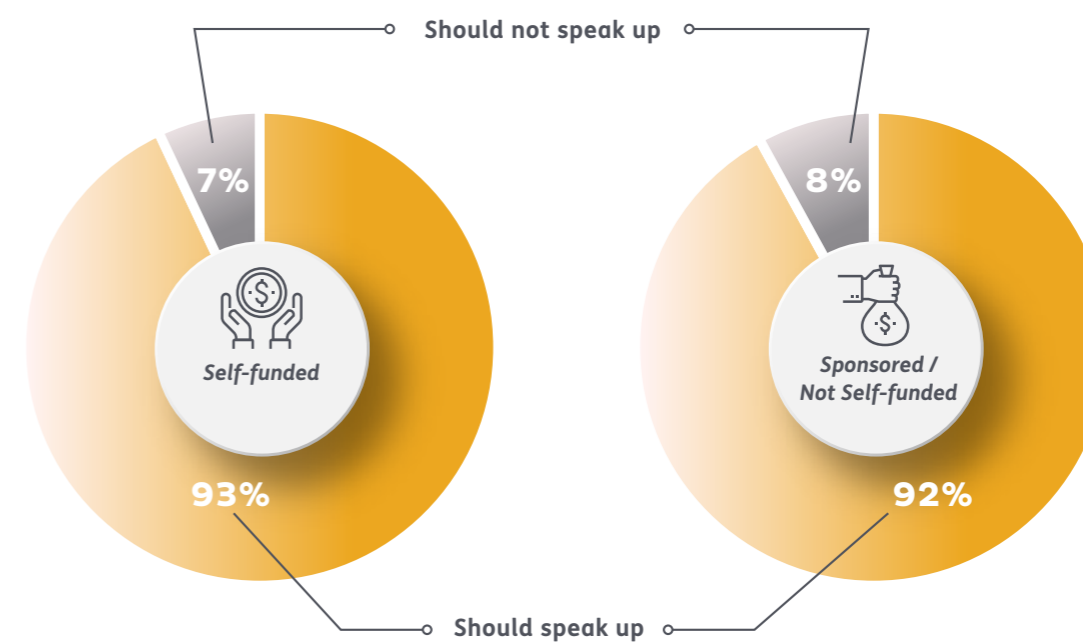
a. Dependent Variable: External Participation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Others, Taoism, Sikhism, Undecided, Atheism, Hinduism, Agnosticism, Christianity, Buddhism

Although religion seems to play a role in the literature reviews we provided earlier, the relationship between religion and both internal and external participation is not statistically significant in our survey result as both have a p-value larger than 0.05 as shown in Table 4.a, Table 4.b, Table 4.c, and Table 4.d above. Therefore, we cannot reject the null hypothesis. The Pearson Correlation figures do not show any strong association between religion and

internal/external participation. This analysis however does not indicate religion's role vitality in the overall sphere of student activism. Religion might not be closely related to the participation of students in student activism, but it is proven important as a medium of unity and deployment as highlighted in the literature review. In terms of strategy, religion is a crucial tool to unite the people, both in activism as well as the nation-building effort.

**5) Socioeconomic level (based on the type of funding) relation to participation attitude and participation behaviour**



**Figure 5: Tendency to Voice Out Opinion among Students based on Study Funding Status**

Figure 5 is categorised between those who are self-funded for their higher institution education versus those who are not. The non-self-funded categories include scholarships, research grants, *baitulmal / zakat*, and matriculation allowance. Based on the results of our survey, there is no significant difference between those who are self-funded and non-self-funded with their intention to speak up. Our hypothesis is drawn from Ozymy (2011), Cong et al. (2001), and Sears and Citrin's (1982) research that suggests having access to education, combined with a less privileged background influences political participation. In line with scholarship

and grant conditions, students are bound by the terms proposed when accepting these types of funding. Failure to do so may result in termination or rescindment of the funding. Therefore, our initial hypothesis predicted that students that are not self-funded are less likely to speak out due to the fear that their scholarships or allowance may be taken away.

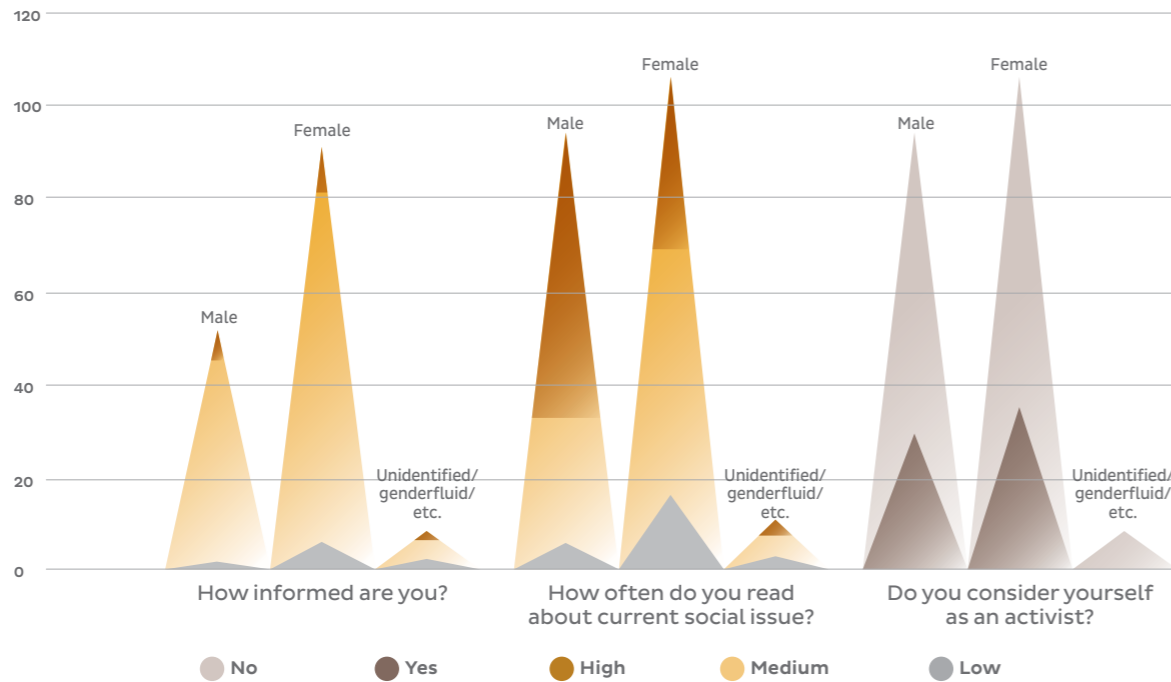
However, during our first focus group discussion, one participant who has experienced self-financing and non-self-financing pointed out that this did not influence their decision to participate in student activism. Furthermore,



other participants also pointed out that funding is not a good indicator for the financial status (socioeconomic factor) of students, and that it is more accurate to look at those who have accepted financial aid or otherwise. One

participant presented a counterargument that students from less privileged backgrounds may be more likely to participate in student activism, and therefore more likely to accept student loans or governmental scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

**6) Gender effect on participation attitude and behaviour in presence of environment (knowledge on the current issue)**



**Figure 6: Gender in Student Activism: Attitude/Intention and Behaviour**

Our research deliberately chose to include the question of gender with one's intention or behaviour towards student activism as there have been significant discourses regarding the matter in prominent scholarship on activism (Verba et al. 1995, Verba et al. 1997, Burns et al. 2001). In Malaysia and many other countries, the gender composition in government is not reflective of the gender composition in society. In the 14th Malaysian Parliament, there were 33 female representatives (14.86%) in the Dewan Rakyat. This disparity can also be observed on campus with regards to student activism, with fewer

women often involved in campus politics and activism. This was reinforced by participants during our focus group discussion, who highlighted that student activism and politics are often interconnected and that politics is still dominated by men.<sup>4</sup> This is partly due to the fact there is still an existing taboo against women being involved in campus politics. However, although more men read about current social issues more frequently, there is a higher number of women who consider themselves activists (34:29) and who believe they are highly informed (8:1) as compared to men, as shown in Figure 6.

<sup>3</sup> According to one FGD participant:

"My situation is quite unique. I self-funded my studies during my first year and in the subsequent year, I received a scholarship. So, I think whether or not you fund your own studies, it does not influence me that much. It's true that we do sign contracts when we receive a scholarship. But for me, just because you signed a scholarship contract that says you can't do certain things, it doesn't mean we can be apathetic. For me, you can still participate, care, and set an example like the UKM Democrats, where they serve as pressure group to the university administrators on issues such as student placement and facilities. For me, if you feel that you need to keep quiet after receiving a scholarship and let others to speak up instead, you need to realise that we all go to the same university. Self-funded or non-self-funded, the same thing will affect us all. So, for me it doesn't influence my participation. I will still participate."

<sup>4</sup> According to one FGD participant:

"You have to admit one thing. Student activism is closely linked to politics and politics are predominantly dominated by men. So, within the system of every organisation, we are still emphasising on the alpha male traits. When you are asking whether gender is related to student activism, then does it relate to student activism or interest and so on? Yes, it does. Because I think we can validate this in most of the student fronts or Student Leadership Council (MPP) or associations that are here today."



**"A female participant during the focus group discussion further asserted that although women may not be at the forefront of student movements ie. student leaders, representatives, etc., they are just as informed and involved as men are."**

A female participant during the focus group discussion further asserted that although women may not be at the forefront of student movements ie. student leaders, representatives, etc., they are just as informed and involved as men are.<sup>5</sup>

The third graph in Figure 6 indicates that the proportion of males and females who consider themselves activists are relatively equal. As our focus group discussion highlights, however, the term "student activist" is one that remains elusive and ambiguous. One participant points out that there is no gatekeeping when it comes to who is considered a student activist or not, but that

the term itself suggests an identity that is filled with a lot of responsibility.<sup>6</sup> While formal definitions have been provided, such as "the students' collective mobilisation in relation to the state, economic, societal, and campus powerholders, encompassing more than just a mere act of rebellion" (Weiss, 2011), the term itself can be attributed to varying interpretations when students take this survey. Another participant recognises that how one identifies with being a student activist or not is relative to their peers.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this question opens a whole new discussion of how students and society at large, perceive what student activism encompasses.

<sup>5</sup> According to one FGD participant:

"When it comes to the forefront, it's usually the men. Looking at history, it has always been the men in charge. The president has to be a man. It's always men everywhere. . But when it comes to the backstage, it's the women. It's usually the women who do the typing, secretarial work, preparing meeting minutes. I think it's the culture because we are still stuck with the idea "Oh, the Chairman has to be a man, not a woman". Yes, it's still like this till today. Or I think it could also be because we look value men. When it comes to women, women activists, it's usually "It's just temporary. Sooner or later she'll be done". But when it comes to men, they're given full applause. If we look at history, all the names are men. There are no names of the women."

<sup>6</sup> According to one FGD participant:

"When you ask someone, do you consider yourself an activist – actually, the responsibility to evaluate or define the person as an activist is placed on society, in my opinion. We cannot simply proclaim ourselves as activists. Not that we can't. We can. It's just that for you to proclaim yourself as an activist is a heavy thing to do. It's not that we have a gatekeeper who decides whether or not you're an activist. But for me, when a person is in-line with the objectives of activism, they will find it hard to proclaim themselves as activists. So, this graph may not tally with the definition of 'activism', because the definition of 'activism' isn't that clear, what more an 'activist'."

<sup>7</sup> According to one FGD participant:

"I think the concept of 'activism' is similar to that of a country. It's established by recognition. It's a little odd for us to proclaim ourselves as established, or as activists. And we actually don't know where the indicator is or what the characteristic would be like. So, I think the recognition from others would be most fitting. Regardless, I think being an activist is important. First of all, the person must have a cause to support. For example, in student activism, the person's interest will form the cause. If they struggle for students today, they might struggle for something further such as environmental issues in the future, so it's hard for us to determine whether that person is a student activist per se."

7) Use of social media (to keep up with and educate the public) related to participation attitude in all states

Location	Social Media	Public Protest/ Demonstration	Volunteer Work at Various Groups /Organisation	Traditional Media <sup>1</sup>	Public Event <sup>2</sup>	School <sup>3</sup>	Word of Mouth <sup>4</sup>	Others
KL & Selangor	79	32	39	24	47	46	18	2
Negeri Sembilan	6	4	1	2	6	3	2	0
Melaka	2	2	3	1	0	2	2	0
Johor	8	2	8	5	8	5	3	0
Pahang	5	2	2	1	1	3	2	0
Perak	14	0	6	6	10	9	3	0
Kelantan	1	2	0	0	2	1	0	1
Terengganu	1	2	0	0	2	1	0	0
Kedah	10	5	3	1	7	4	2	0
Perlis	2	1	0	0	2	1	0	0
Pulau Pinang	10	5	6	2	9	5	5	0
Sabah	10	2	3	3	5	4	3	0
Sarawak	7	2	3	3	5	4	3	0
Abroad	2	0	3	4	3	3	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>3</b>

- Note:** 1. Traditional media includes television / radio / newspapers / print advertisements and billboards  
 2. Public events include forums / talks / workshops  
 3. School includes subjects / programs  
 4. Word of mouth includes friends / family / other social groups

Figure 7.a: Students Perception of the Best Ways to Educate the Public on Social Issues

The research wanted to further explore the relationship between social media usage and students' opinions on the effectiveness of student movements. There have been many discussions regarding social media being a productive tool in disseminating students' agendas. Our survey result (Figure 7.b) also reflects the tendency of people to think that social media could be the best medium to educate people on current social issues.

While some have commended the use of social media as an effective mobilising resource in social movement theory, others have commented on its potential to act as a "double-edged sword." While social media can disseminate information and organise large masses of people at unprecedented rates, it can also promote "slacktivism" or "clicktivism" — a more passive form of activism that does not lead to actual change.

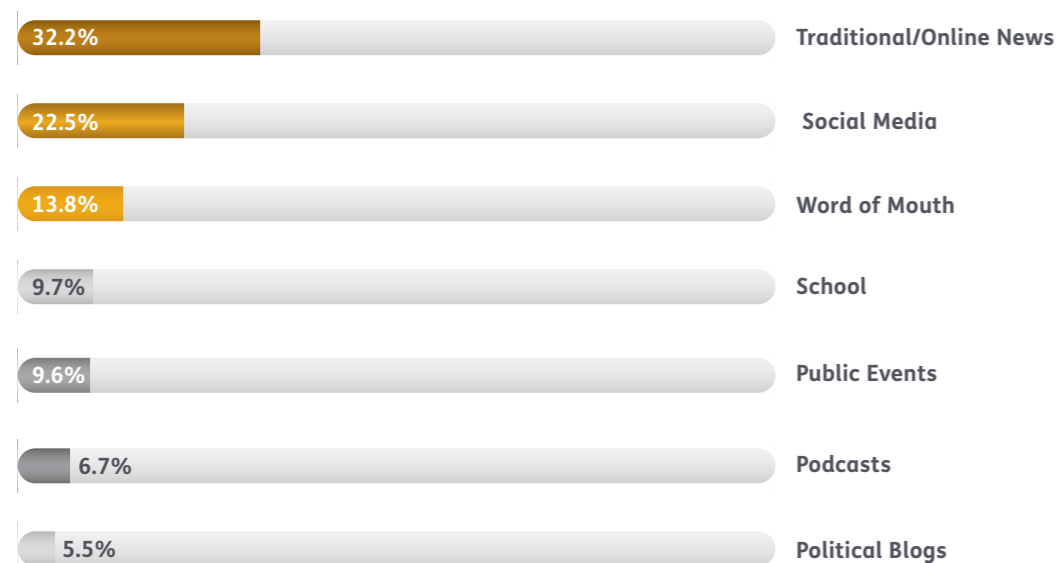


Figure 7.b: Mediums to Keep Up with Current Social Issues (%)

Our results from SPSS demonstrate that there is no statistically significant relationship between the two variables as the p-value is more than 0.05 at 0.526 as shown in Table 7.1, Table 7.2, and Table 7.3. During the focus group discussions, participants shared their individual experiences of using social media as a tool to push their agendas forward. One participant explained that while social media is useful in the dissemination of information, the information that is shared remains superficial or lacking in nuance and succumbs to petty

politics. Others reiterated this point, elaborating that social media appears performative and pushes people to bandwagon on existing trends with fixed narratives. Alternatively, some participants suggested that other methods such as hosting public events and discussions are more useful in the long-term. This is in line with the result from our survey as shown in Figure 7 which shows public events as the best way to educate the public on current social issues, receiving the second-highest vote at 112 votes followed by the school at 92 votes.

TABLE 7.a: CORRELATIONS

	Movement Opinion	Medium 1
Pearson Correlation	1.000	.045
	.045	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)		.263
	.263	
N	203	203
	203	203

TABLE 7.b: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	.136	1	.136	.403	.526 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	67.962	201	.338		
Total	68.099	202			

- a. Dependent Variable: Movement opinion  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Medium 1

TABLE 7.c: COEFFICIENTS<sup>a</sup>

Model 1	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero Order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.212	.101		11.975	.000					
Medium 1	.070	.111	.045	.635	.526	.045	.045	.045	1.000	1.000

- a. Dependent Variable: Movement opinion?

<sup>b</sup> According to one FGD participant:

"It's a double-edged sword. But it depends on how we use social media to deliver our message. The problem that Malaysians face right now is that social media is more like a place to play keyboard warrior, playing internet wars like people who spread information on defaming one another. So, it's more of a place for petty politics but I think student activism has a role to improve the whole environment to make it more personal in terms of discussing and doing political discourse or sharing opinions."

"From my perspective on the social media, it is true that it can reach more people but it is quite hard to have the in-depth discussion among the society because certain issues, it is easy to reach people and gain support but it also strengthens the mindset of certain people, make it harder for them to jump out of their comfort zone, and make it harder for different groups of people to come together and have some really constructive discussion."

"When it comes to social media, it's true that we can't deny that it helps with the dissemination of information because it reaches a lot of people. But the issue I think with social media is that it's not an in-depth kind of thing. People just see twitter threads or IG posts, a lot of slides and read it and think that's enough. But the thing is, sometimes it completely negates or forgets the depth and complexity that comes with some issues that you can't just explain with a twitter thread or an IG post. So, it also creates this bandwagon mindset. You know, on social media, you push it enough with a certain narrative, it gets a lot of people agreeing with it."





**“During our focus groups discussions, several participants alluded that many of their peers are neither ignorant nor apathetic, but rather, they are fearful of the consequences tied to UUCA and other regulations.”**

**8) The participation intention/attitude and participation behaviour are related to the satisfaction of the UUCA/ regulation.**

**TABLE 8.a: CORRELATIONS**

		Regulation	Future Interest
Pearson Correlation	Regulation	1.000	.058
	Future interest	.058	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Regulation		.217
	Future interest	.217	
N	Regulation	186	186
	Future interest	186	186

**TABLE 8.b: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	13.793	1	13.793	.615	.434 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	4127.153	184	22.430		
Total	4140.946	185			

**a.** Dependent Variable: Regulation

**b.** Predictors: (Constant), Future interest

The regression runs in Table 8.1, Table 8.2, and Table 8.3 shown above is between the participants' future interest in participating in student activism (IV) and whether they agree with the enforcement of UUCA and other regulations concerning student movements. The relationship is not statistically significant as it has a p-value of more than 0.05 at 0.434. Therefore, this suggests that even if students decide to participate in student activism or otherwise, it

does not affect their opinion of the enforcement of UUCA. During our focus groups discussions, several participants alluded that many of their peers are neither ignorant nor apathetic, but rather, they are fearful of the consequences tied to UUCA and other regulations.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, many students may have formed their own opinions about UUCA but do not feel as though their participation in student activism is worth the risk.

<sup>9</sup> According to one FGD participant:

*“When it comes to the Malays, I feel that some of my friends did say something similar. They do not want to participate in politics because sometimes when I attend these assemblies and whatnot to express my opinions, they would ask me, “Aren't you afraid of getting caught?”. It's like that. I think some of my own peers have experiences the same thing. It's not just the Chinese, but also the Malays.”*

**9) Race impact on campus attribute (UUCA/regulation opinion)**

**TABLE 4.a: CORRELATIONS FOR INTERNAL PARTICIPATION**

		External Participation	Christianity	Buddhism	Hinduism	Atheism	Agnosticism	Undecided	Sikhism	Taoism	Others
Pearson Correlation	External Participation	1.000	-.078	-.043	-.124	.069	.119	.038	.022	.022	.031
	Christianity	-.078	1.000	-.179	-.089	-.078	-.099	-.072	-.041	-.041	-.059
	Buddhism	-.043	-.179	1.000	-.093	-.081	-.103	-.075	-.043	-.043	-.061
	Hinduism	-.124	-.089	-.093	1.000	-.040	-.051	-.037	-.021	-.021	-.030
	Atheism	.069	-.078	-.081	-.040	1.000	-.045	-.033	-.019	-.019	-.027
	Agnosticism	-.119	-.099	-.103	-.051	-.045	1.000	-.042	-.024	-.024	-.034
	Undecided	.038	-.072	-.075	-.037	-.033	-.042	1.000	-.017	-.017	-.025
	Sikhism	-.022	-.041	-.043	-.021	-.019	-.024	-.017	1.000	-.010	-.014
	Taoism	.022	-.041	-.043	-.021	-.019	-.024	-.017	-.010	1.000	-.014
	Others	.031	-.059	-.061	-.030	-.027	-.034	-.025	-.014	-.014	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	External Participation		.133	.272	.039	.163	.044	.293	.378	.378
Christianity		.133		.005	.102	.133	.079	.152	.279	.279	.202
Buddhism		.272	.005		.094	.124	.071	.143	.271	.271	.193
Hinduism		.039	.102	.094		.283	.233	.298	.381	.381	.333
Atheism		.163	.133	.124	.283		.261	.321	.395	.395	.353
Agnosticism		.044	.079	.071	.233	.261		.278	.368	.368	.316
Undecided		.293	.153	.143	.298	.321	.278		.403	.403	.364
Sikhism		.378	.279	.271	.381	.395	.368	.403		.444	.421
Taoism		.378	.279	.271	.381	.395	.368	.403	.444		.421
Others		.329	.202	.193	.333	.353	.316	.363	.421	.421	
N		External Participation	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	Christianity	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	Buddhism	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	Hinduism	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	Atheism	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	Agnosticism	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	Undecided	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	Sikhism	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	Taoism	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204
	Others	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204	204

**TABLE 9.b: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	51.470	6	8.578	.377	.526 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	4097.985	180	22.767		
Total	4149.455	186			

a. Dependent Variable: Regulation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Orang Asal, Orang Asli, Indian, Mixed, Chinese, Malay

**TABLE 9.c: COEFFICIENTS<sup>a</sup>**

Model 1	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero Order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	4.333	2.755		1.573	.117			
Malay	-1.113	2.808	-.116	-.396	.692	.055	-.030	-.029
Chinese	-2.035	2.826	-.199	-.720	.472	-.086	-.054	-.053
Indian	-1.444	2.976	-.090	-.485	.628	-.001	-.036	-.036
Mixed	-1.561	2.937	-.107	-.531	.596	-.011	-.040	-.039
Orang Asli	1.167	4.356	.025	.268	.789	.057	.020	.020
Orang Asal	-.833	3.230	-.036	-.258	.797	.027	-.019	-.019

a. Dependent Variable: Movement opinion?

There appears to be no statistically significant relationship between race and the students' opinion of UUCA and other regulations related to student activism as the p-value is more than 0.05 and 0.893. This suggests that UUCA, as a whole, does not discriminate and

affects all students, whether or not to varying degrees. Participants in the focus group discussions too more pertinently touched upon the pernicious effects of UUCA on students, regardless of race or ethnicity.<sup>10</sup>

**10) Student participation behaviour affect student attitude on student movements efficiency**

**TABLE 10.a: CHI-SQUARE TESTS**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.369 <sup>a</sup>	2	.009
Likelihood Ratio	9.254	1	.010
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.471	1	.062
N of Valid Cases	201		

a. 1 cells (16.7%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.69

<sup>10</sup> According to one FGD participant:

"But with AUKU in place, it provides so many limitations that are unreasonable to the extent where in one section in AUKU, it is stated that students cannot express sympathy towards any political parties, be it within the country or overseas."

"I think AUKU drives a huge impact from the aspect of creating a culture of fear. Meaning, if AUKU is gone, so will the feeling of fear. And from there, there won't be any fear towards any regulations in this country..."

**TABLE 10.b: MODEL SUMMARY**

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	222.649 <sup>a</sup>	.045	.066

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001

**TABLE 10.c: VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION**

Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	B	S.E.	Wald	Hinduism	df	Sig.	98% EXP (B)	
							Lower	Upper
Movementopinion			9.063	2	.011			
Movementopinion(1)	.108	.611	.031	1	.859	1.114	.336	3.691
Movementopinion(2)	1.004	.344	8.542	1	.003	2.729	1.392	5.352
Constant	.480	.250	3.693	1	.055	1.615		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Movement opinion

The relationship between motivation opinion with the participation intention is statically significant with the Chi-Square less than 0.05 as shown in Table 10.1. However, based on Cox & Snell R Square in Table 10.2, it shows that only 4.5% of the variation in the participation intention can be explained by the motivation opinion. This suggests that there are other factors influencing students to have participation intention in student activism which

can be seen in other causal relationship analyses in this study such as student's background. This shows the complexity of casual relationship analysis as advised by Astin. The Movement opinion (1) or the category Yes has a p-value of 0.859 which is not statistically significant. The Movement opinion (2) or the category Not Sure has a p-value less than 0.05 which shows that it is a predictor of the participation intention among students.

**11) Satisfaction relationship with attitude and knowledge**

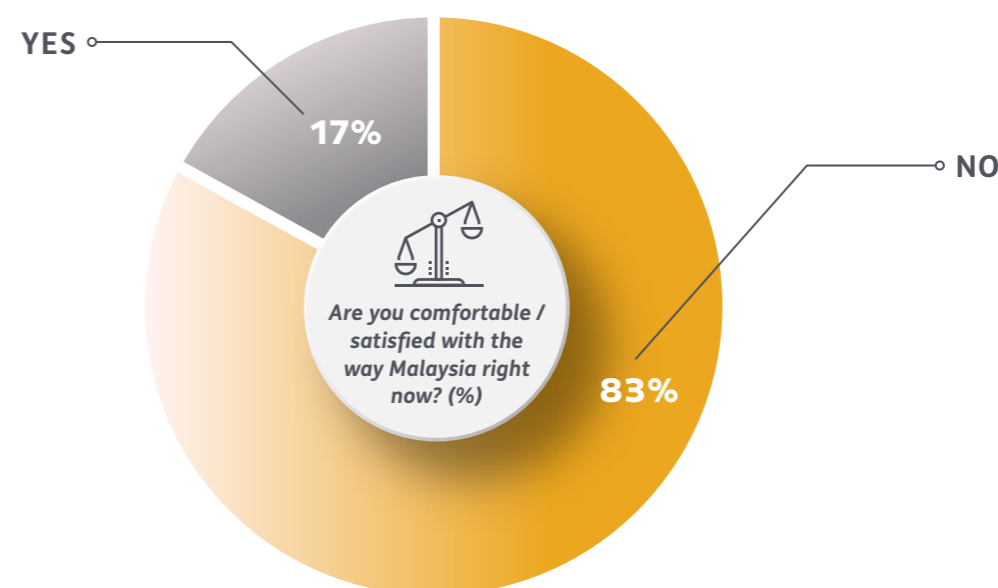


Figure 11: Student v on Current Situation in Malaysia

Our study indicates that 83% of participants are unsatisfied with the current situation, with 33.56% of those unsatisfied being dissatisfied with the political state of affairs in Malaysia as shown in Figure 11. What stood out the most in the results of this question is that “lack of youth involvement” only stands as the fourth most popular reason for dissatisfaction, given that this survey was aimed at Malaysian students. The top three ranked votes for the reason for dissatisfaction were “dissatisfaction with politicians / political system at large;” 33.56%, “Not enough progress has been made;” 22.82% and “Social injustices;” 18.79% which gives an overview of

Malaysia’s overall problem. This suggests that (1) students view themselves as a citizen first and student second, and (2) for better nation-building, the participation in student activism especially in the political area could be a solution. We then ran the regression to consolidate this relationship further. The identity of “student” is being foreshadowed by their identity as civic participants aiding the betterment of Malaysian society, which can be explained by why their dissatisfactions are nationwide, off-campus issues. However, this does not abet the students’ desire to change their on-campus situations, as this will also aid their goals in the nation-building processes as students.<sup>11</sup>

**TABLE 11.a: MODEL SUMMARY**

	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Model 1	.229 <sup>a</sup>	.052	.048	.431

a. Predictors: (Constant), Are you satisfied with Malaysia’s current situation?

**TABLE 11.b: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2.086	1	2.086	11.234	.001 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	37.690	203	.186		
Total	39.776	204			

a. Dependent Variable: Future interest

b. Predictors: (Constant), Are you satisfied with Malaysia’s current situation?

The regression between students’ satisfaction with the current situation in Malaysia (IV) and their future intention to participate in student activism (DV) is statistically significant as the p-value is less than 0.05 at 0.001(\*\*\*). We can therefore reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that the level of satisfaction among students will affect their intention to be involved in student activist activities, thereby demonstrating that students are important constituents of the state and expressing their dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the current sociopolitical climate can act as an important signifier to the government with what can be improved. It has been suggested that political protests not only send signals, but they also activate people politically activated through the act of protest and other forms of activism (Madestam et al, 2012). Larger involvement in various forms of activism has lasting effects on voting, political contributions, ideology, and future participation in politics. Furthermore,

political activism does not only benefit the public by creating awareness through highlighting certain issues but the interactions at rallies also “affect citizen’s social contexts in ways such as a movement for political change persists autonomously” (*ibid*, p. 44).

We chose “reading news” as our dependent variable in conjunction with whether students are satisfied with Malaysia’s current situation as it was the most popular medium (both online and traditional news) students used to keep up with current social issues at 32.2% as shown in Figure 7.b. The results show that the regression between the two is statistically significant with the p-value at 0.028. This implies that there is a relationship between reading the news and satisfaction levels with the country. It reinforces the idea of student apathy and how more informed individuals are more likely to be more well-read and aware of the current social issues in the nation.

<sup>11</sup> According to one FGD participant:

“It does touch upon a lot of things and student voices are given much weight because we are the future of the country, right? The heirs of the country, as what people say. We do touch upon many issues such as the economy and the welfare. Because we will be the ones who will live in the future. Let’s say the decisions we make today are wrong. If I can give an example, let’s say the government introduced a bad policy today, say, the education policy. Perhaps in the future, our children and grandchildren will be greatly affected. This is why it’s important for students today to participate in activism so that we can ensure that any policy introduced by the administration, the national politics, government and others can be raised by the students today because students are the society’s intellectuals.” “We speak negatively of other races and label them, which isn’t helping the nation to progress. Instead, it disrupts our country’s development. So, the important issue here is that, one, when we fight for one issue, the most important thing, the outcome that we should focus on is togetherness. Meaning, one, can we achieve the objective of our struggle, and two, it does not harm other parties.”

**“The participant’s view has made us probe further to explore how Malaysia’s cultural setting has influenced student activism within this country’s context, and how students can continue to engage in activism, despite the current challenges posed by restrictive laws and cultural norms, utilising it as a tool to lead the nation’s progress.”**

**Focus Group Discussions Overview**

Despite our effort in reaching out to as many student leaders and activists as possible within a brief period to participate in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and in ensuring diversity of the representatives, the participation in the first FGD was represented by a total number of four Malay participants and four non-Malay participants (of Chinese ethnicity), with six of them being male. In the second FGD, all participants were either Malays or Bumiputera in Sabah, with only one person being a woman. However, in the third FGD, we managed to get one Indian participant and two Chinese participants, totalling up to three non-Malay participants, with the remaining two being from Malay ethnic background. While all participants in the first two FGDs were either student activists or representatives of student bodies within their respective institutions, the participants in the third and fourth FGDs come from more diverse backgrounds. Two participants in the third FGD works as a university administrator and legal advisor (one is assigned to a public institution while the other works at a private institution). Three out of a total of five participants in the third FGDs were non-Malays, with two of them being Chinese. Meanwhile, three out of a total of seven participants in the fourth FGD were non-Malays, with two of them of Indian-descent. The

participants for the final FGD were former activists who are currently taking leadership roles in various youth political groups such as MCA Youth and Ahli Parlimen Belia Malaysia. It should also be noted that due to the sensitive nature of the topics of discussion, some participants from the FGDs have requested anonymity where their identity and affiliation are concerned.

Issues on gender and racial diversity/disparity were discussed during both sessions. While almost all participants agreed to the fact that both men and women are equally well-informed on current issues in today’s world, many of the participants agreed to the fact that the majority of student activists in Malaysia are men – a phenomenon that has always been apparent ever since the pre-Merdeka period.<sup>12</sup> As raised by one of the participants in the first FGD, the over-representation of the Malay people has primarily been due to issues concerning extreme poverty experienced by the Malay community since the 1960s and before, which led to the struggle for Malay rights in the country. Forming the majority race within the Malaysian demography, the Malays also possess the advantage of having greater access to political participation, as contended by one participant in the second FGD.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> According to one FGD participant:

“When it comes to the forefront, it’s usually the men. Looking at history, it has always been the men in charge. The president has to be a man. It’s always men everywhere. . But when it comes to the backstage, it’s the women. It’s usually the women who do the typing, secretarial work, preparing meeting minutes. I think it’s the culture because we are still stuck with the idea “Oh, the Chairman has to be a man, not a woman”. Yes, it’s still like this till today. Or I think it could also be because we look value men. When it comes to women, women activists, it’s usually “It’s just temporary. Sooner or later she’ll be done”. But when it comes to men, they’re given full applause. If we look at history, all the names are men. There are no names of the women. ”

<sup>13</sup> According to one FGD participant:

“I am actually interested in participating within campus and off-campus because if I’m not mistaken, in 2019, all 20 MPPs in Malaysia were first of all, men, and secondly, Malays. If I’m not mistaken. If I’m wrong, tell me. So, for that, to me, tknow that I said this, that I think the involvement of all races on campus is because there’s a platform given to them. People can say this platform is open to all but don’t want to, we cannot deny that there is a discrimination towards other races when it comes to them trying to rise in their positions. Maybe they have all the merits but there’s always something missing. Maybe they only want the Malays here, right? They want the men, the Malays, and all that. That’s what I think. That’s the first. Secondly, we cannot deny that the university student demographic is such that because we have quotas for the Chinese, Indian, and other races and so on. So, whether you like it or not, the Malays would ultimately have it all because they form the majority on campus.”





**“The participant’s view has made us probe further to explore how Malaysia’s cultural setting has influenced student activism within this country’s context, and how students can continue to engage in activism, despite the current challenges posed by restrictive laws and cultural norms, utilising it as a tool to lead the nation’s progress.”**

Several of the participants have also noted the presence of men, specifically Malay men that have long dominated not only within the student activism sphere but also in the national politics of Malaysia as a whole. This observation is not solely based on an isolated incident or experience.<sup>14</sup> While circumstances may have changed with time as more women and persons of other races participate in activism in Malaysia, Malay men continue to dominate the political scene.<sup>15</sup>

Where a student’s right to participate in activism or politics is concerned, one participant from the first FGD raised that the root of the issue (whereby students are not allowed to be involved in political activities) does not lie within AUKU or any other relevant national regulations

that are implemented. Rather, it has more to do with societal expectations of being fearful and respectful towards the elders and those in authority, which has long been part of the cultural norms in Malaysia. Culture and law have always been closely related, with scholars such as Post asserting that law is deduced as “the arm of a coherent antecedent culture that is the ultimate source of society’s identity and authority” (Post 2013, p. 486). The participant’s view has made us probe further to explore how Malaysia’s cultural setting has influenced student activism within this country’s context, and how students can continue to engage in activism, despite the current challenges posed by restrictive laws and cultural norms, utilising it as a tool to lead the nation’s progress.

<sup>14</sup> Such finding is also reflected in the work of Farish A. Noor titled ‘Trauma and History: Accepting Complexity in the Past and the Present’, where it was stated that the discursive and productive domain of history production remains dominated by those within the ‘4M’ class: Malay, male, Muslim, and Middle-class, with the frontiers of that domain remaining closely-guarded, thus rendering it difficult for alternative voices to penetrate. More can be found here: Farish A. Noor (2014), ‘Trauma and History: Accepting Complexity in the Past and the Present’, in *Trauma, Memory and Transformation: Southeast Asian Experiences, Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Malaysia*.

<sup>15</sup> This notion rings true with Wan Azizah’s “Perempuan Dalam Politik: Refleksi Dari Malaysia”, in *International IDEA, 2002* where it was said that Malaysian society is still male-dominated.

## Focus Group Discussions Report

### Full Reporting During all Sessions

#### 1 Introduction

For the last 90 years since pre-Merdeka days, student activism in Malaysia has undergone a lot of changes which include issues of contention, student identity, national regulations, cultural context, and many more. The focus of this report is to look at those changes from the perspectives of today’s student activists while taking into consideration their opinions and suggestions for our proposed policy recommendations.

#### PART 1

#### 2 What is student activism to you?

Scholars such as Asef Bayat have distinguished student activism from youth activism based on the issues being contended, among others, whereby the former is focused on ‘student issues’ such as university fees. However, within the Malaysian context, history has shown that it is common for student activists to participate in national struggles such as poverty and the National Economic Policy (NEP), voicing out on matters beyond the university campus.

To further explore student activism within the Malaysian context, particularly regarding the history behind it, the reason behind students’ participation in it, and what it means to students; surveys were distributed among young students aged 18 to 40 years old, who may or may not be student activists themselves, to help complement our hypothesis formed from the literature review. Findings from the surveys such as on what student activism means were then presented to actual student activists whom we approached and who have consented to participate in the discussion to get their feedback on the accuracy of the information while exploring their more in-depth understanding of student activism.

#### A delivery or platform (1 participant)

- A form of delivery or platform for students to continue to move independently, remain idealistic, and continue to highlight issues that are non-existent and existential.

#### An initiative (4 participants)

- A student initiative with a bottom-up approach, to advocate and catalyse changes in society, and a process of nation-building.
- Two students agree that it is an initiative to affect change in a certain issue- be it on equality or other issues.
- An attempt to find solutions for certain issues

#### An idea/idealism (5 participants)

- An idealism that is still in touch with reality. We have the passion to make changes, but we are also realistic about the changes we want to bring to students and society.
- An idea and movement by students to develop and advocate changes in various aspects of national development
- Three participants agreed that activism is about a conclusion, manifestation, or movement of ideology involving struggles towards an objective.

#### A collective movement (6 participants)

- An idea and movement by students to develop and advocate changes in various aspects of national development
- It is more to a movement that is not involved with the organisation of authority consisting of a cause advocated and made relevant to society.
- A movement to demand the rights of the university or the people.
- One person stated that activism is a collective involvement
- Two persons agree that it is a movement to express students’ voice, which may vary according to period

#### A political act (2 participants)

- One participant responded that activism itself is a political act, which does not refer to affiliations to any political party but being political towards any issues such as poverty and oppression.
- A political act which, however, should not be influenced by external political parties or individuals

#### A form of advocacy (4 participants)

- Two persons stated that it refers to an act on issues and bringing about changes
- One participant stated that activism refers to advocacy actions and manifestations of ideologies by students, which are practical, political, and require space for demonstrations.
- A movement that must be based on a certain issue, and expressed through proper channels; not simply for the sake of opposing.

**Fighting for student rights (3 participants)**

- 1 participant stated that student activism refers to fighting for the rights of a student, which differ across decades.
- Another participant contended that student activism refers to the struggles of students that are neutral and not influenced by any political parties.
- One participant stated that while student activism plays an important role in shaping the higher education institution, activism, in general, is strongly linked to social welfare.

**Fighting for human rights (4 participants)**

- One activism contended that while student activism refers to students fighting for rights, the rights are not necessarily limited to the rights of students, but also encompass the impacts on society as a whole.
- 2 participants stated that while it refers to fighting for rights that are concerned on national issues, the actions are to be conducted at the right place and time, and not out of impulse.
- One participant mentioned that student activism can be divided into several components, namely the students themselves, human rights, education, and decision-making process. However, the concept of student activism itself goes back to influencing government policies and decisions which include matters concerning students and human rights.

From the responses received, it was found that most of the participants understood student activism as a form of movement that advocates for changes in society. From this, it can also be deduced that there must be a contentious issue at hand for student activism to happen.

**3 How does a person's background influence their participation and behaviour in student organisation/activism as well as any nation-building activities?**

**Exposure at higher education institution (4 participants)**

- One person mentioned that despite growing up with a certain mindset and behaviour, university life turned out to be a cultural reset, where higher learning institutions served as space for students to question their identity and purpose.
- Another participant contended that students who major in a certain academic discipline such as social sciences and liberal arts tend to be more active in politics than those who are enrolled in science programmes.
- Another participant argues that while exposure at higher education institution influence activism behaviour, it should be insulated from political party influence
- One participant feels that while faculty, cliques etc play an important factor, the most important is the awareness the students themselves have on current issues and problems.

**Student participation as a reflection of personal values (1 participant)**

- "A person's background, encompassing his/her mindset or values he/she grew up with is reflected in the behaviour or pattern, which becomes apparent in the organisation that he/she aligns with or participate in."
- Students who want to participate in an organisation usually choose an affiliation that reflects the value closest to them. While values may change, it is usually the values that people grew up with that influence their choices.

**Family background (2 participants)**

- One participant agreed that a person's background plays a huge role in determining the level of exposure towards current issues, which leads to actions and existing forms of idealism. An example given was that a person from a well-off family would be more involved in activism whereas those who must endure hardships will be more focused to earn income to take care of their families.
- Another participant also stated that family background plays a role in influencing a student's involving in activism, noting his own father's involvement in activism as a chairperson of a socialist group.

**Principle/mindset (7 participants)**

- Five participants agreed that background identity such as race, religion, and socioeconomic status can influence a person's mindset in motivating him/her to participate in activism. While there have been disagreements among participants on whether there is a tendency of someone from a working-class or a more well-to-do background to participate, all participants agreed that those who are educated are more prone to be involved in activism.
- One participant argues that the mindset amongst the Chinese ethnic group is highly dependent on national politics

**Programme of study, ideology, political stance, race (4 participants)**

- 1 participant contended that the students' chosen field of study influences their participation in activism, based on observation, where it was found that students from the liberal arts department, such as political science, policy studies and law are more prone to participate in activism or politics.
- 1 participant mentioned that while a study programme influences student participation in activism, other backgrounds such as ideology, political stance, and race are also important factors.

**Based on university and faculty (1 participant)**

- One participant stated that student activism does not only refer to campus politics, but it also affects national politics. This is because universities such as UKM are strongly tied to the government. In addition, university faculties also influence student participation.

**Empathy developed through experience (2 participants)**

- "Every student is considered a marginalised community because we have always been belittled and we are not being taken seriously and in fact, we are even oppressed by the authority."
- "Students who know, experience, or see the struggles of the marginalised or minority communities tend to join student activism to advocate for themselves or on behalf of these groups. In some degree, the social setting of the students, whether it's their school or family largely affects the development of their mindset and influences their way of approaching problems where they would wither ignore and become cynical or become student activists or advocate in a non-activist way."

**Surrounding environment (1 participant)**

- One participant stated that it all goes back to the environment that shapes the student's character and interests that drive him/her to participate.

**4 Does gender play a role in student activism? Are women more involved in activism or more well-informed on current issues?**

**Yes, gender does influence participation (6 participants)**

- The proportion of men is greater than women in student activism is affected by the political environment in Malaysian higher learning institutions itself, which seems more favourable to male students as compared to female students.
- Student activism is closely related to politics and politics is predominantly filled by men. In any organisational structure, patriarchy is the norm. One male participant mentioned how male students are more easily approached as compared to female students in a campus selection.
- Another participant recalled a book titled Mahasiswa Menggugat by Muhammad Abu Bakar, where it was found that in the history of student activism, male students have always formed a larger portion of participation and as based on the author's observation, this was due to the aggressive nature of student activism itself, which involves a lot of demonstrations and other forms of confrontations.
- One participant claimed that while there is a less obvious difference between genders when it comes to being well-informed on current issues, the gender disparity on the type of tasks being taken by student activists based on their gender is apparent. Examples were cited on leadership roles that are often held by men, while most women are often handed secretarial roles.

**No, gender does not influence participation (6 participants)**

- Three participants agreed that the wide usage of social media has increased awareness among the public on social issues, regardless of gender.
- Two participants contended that gender has less influence on a person's participation as times have changed. Both added that it's more of a person's personality and mindset.
- One said that there is no difference between the involvement of women and men in activism.

## 5 Does financial status (self-funded vs. sponsored) influence one's participation in student activism?

### Not necessarily (13 participants)

- One participant stated that having a shift in her status from being self-funded to a scholarship recipient does not influence her participation in student activism because being a scholarship recipient who is bonded by the scholarship itself to excel academically does not mean a student should remain apathetic. This is because issues raised by student activists are issues that affect all students, regardless of their privilege or lack of.
- Another participant stated how 'privilege' itself is a tricky concept to navigate, particularly in this aspect where it is determined by the funding of education. This is because those with lesser privilege may tend to not be self-funded by receiving education scholarships, which, in a way, provides them privilege over their peers for not having to take up student loans. The participant further proposed that it would make better sense if the data were instead divided into students with a less privileged background who receive financial aid and students with a less privileged background who have to self-fund their studies.
- One person noted that scholarship recipients no longer face the same kind of restrictions as those in the 1970s and 1980s, where participation in activism does not automatically result in a cancellation of scholarship. He further added – which was also agreed by another participant – that being bonded by scholarship or loan contracts will not prevent or demotivate a person from participating in activism if they already have an interest in participating or speaking out against certain issues such as oppression or poverty.
- One participant pointed out that most students are not concerned about the sponsors or lenders, with whom they formed the loan/scholarship contract; rather, their concerns are more towards the university itself, which is responsible for the surveillance of students and capable of taking any actions against students who conduct any act that goes against the value/will of the university.
- Five students do not think that financial status necessarily impacts activism behaviour. One pointed out that students of different economic status often come in solidarity on various issues. Two of them reaffirmed that awareness is more important than financial status. One student highlighted that moral values and principles are stronger than financial condition.
- Four participants agreed that students' financial status does not determine their participation in student activism. As contended by one participant, four factors determine participation in activism, which are knowledge, awareness, action, and invitation to solidarity. One of them added that participation is based on awareness, social acquaintanceship, and types of activities.

### Yes (5 participants)

- One participant noted that based on his readings, it was found that most student unions were able to operate because they were funded. He further added that those with lesser privilege tend to focus on earning incomes to fund their studies or help their families, which makes it difficult for them to divide their time for student activism.
- Another participant also shared the same view, noting that those who are less financially secure tend to focus on their career to support themselves and their families.
- Two participants stated that a student who is a scholarship recipient will have a lesser tendency of being involved in politics due to the conditions imposed on the scholarship contract itself, which generate fear from participating.
- One participant stated that financial status does not determine one's inclination to participate in activism.

- One participant contended that student participation in activism is also driven by an economic factor, taking into account that having financial means allows for greater mobility. Those who have to fund their studies but do not come from wealthy families tend to be more focused on working to support themselves and their families financially.
- Another participant noted that students who receive scholarships to study often feel indebted to their families to focus on their studies and are less inclined to participate in politics or activism out of fear of the possibility of the scholarship being revoked.
- A participant noted that there is a need to find out what constitutes financial independence. In addition, the participant also contended that the tendency of participating in activism may differ between public and private institutions, where students from private institutions are less inclined to participate in activism since public universities operate on public funds.

## 6 Based on your experience, is there a tendency for students from only a certain ethnic group to participate in activism especially in student leadership positions?

### Yes (14 participants)

- One person contends that everyone has more equal opportunities now. This is because while ethnic background plays an important role in influencing a student's involvement in activism, the percentage of participation in student activism based on a race depends on the university's demography. As a university that operates on meritocracy, the university he studies at, namely UM (University Malaya) provides equal opportunities to everyone regardless of race. More Chinese and Indians were involved in student activism in the past as compared to the Malays.
- Another participant stated that the tendency of a student to participate based on his/her race depends on the issues being raised or faced/experienced.
- One participant mentioned that the extreme poverty faced by the Malays in the 60s and 70s has been the main factor for more Malays to be involved in student activism to help elevate their status in the country. This was made apparent during the Baling protest, among others.
- Two students agree that activism behaviour varies across the ethnic group. One pointed out that even within the same racial group, there can be a difference in activism level between sub-racial groups. Another pointed out that difference in activism can also be observed between students of the same ethnic group and location due to different political ideologies.
- One participant admitted that while there can be a difference in activism between ethnic groups, it also depends on the issue. The Chinese students, he thinks, are not so active because they are not affected by most issues. However when the issue of Jawi arises, for example, then Chinese students react passionately.

### No (7 participants)

- One participant stated how being a person of a minority race (Chinese) in Malaysia results in her often being told to focus on her issues first and not be involved in politics as those from the minority races are often used as scapegoats for any political changes in the country. In addition, her position as a student added extra pressure to solely focus on her studies.
- Another participant contended that racial background does not influence a student's tendency to participate in activism as it all goes down to the individual wills.
- Three participants claimed that the demography of Malaysia or local institutions made it appear that there is a greater tendency for the Malays to participate in activism because they form the majority race. One participant even contended that there is a slight inaccuracy/misrepresentation from the survey findings due to this factor.
- One participant mentioned that racial sentiments tend to lead to splintering student groups based on race.



- One participant admitted that while there can be a difference in activism between ethnic groups, it also depends on the issue. The Chinese students, he thinks, are not so active because they are not affected by most issues. However when the issue of Jawi arises, for example, then Chinese students react passionately.
- One participant agrees and feels that lack of activism in minority groups may be due to lack of icon. He related how interest amongst Indian students in campus politics increased after he became the first MPP Vice President.
- One participant contended that the reason why the Malays seem to dominate the student activism scene can be traced back to universities such as UiTM, where the majority of the students are Malays.
- Another participant relates to her experience in UKM, where much of activism and politics on campus are race-based.
- One participant who is of the Chinese race stated that from his observations and experience, most Chinese students prefer to remain quiet rather than joining politics or activism as they could not find issues that they can relate to.
- Another participant suggested that those from the minority race tend to not participate in activism due to lack of visibility.

## 7 Existence of fear from participating in student activism across communities

### Valid fear (2 participants)

- One participant mentioned discouragement from peers is often founded on fear towards authorities such as the police. This is a phenomenon that is not only faced by the minority groups, but also among the majority race such as the Malays.
- Another participant talked about that the younger generation tends to be discouraged by their elders consisting of older family members and even schoolteachers from being involved in politics for reasons being it is not 'their place,' it is a 'field solely for the elders,' and that the younger ones should only focus on their studies.

## PART 2

## 8 How does your campus life affect your participation in a student organisation? Do you think your campus environment encourages/discourages it?

### Yes, it does affect (15 participants)

- Three participants mentioned how location and peers play a role in influencing one's participation in student activism.
- Another participant noted how students' participation in politics/activism is dependent on the university administration.
- Eight participants agreed that the campus environment, administration, peers, lecturers, and social activities play a role in influencing student participation in a student organisation.

### No, it does not affect (2 participants)

- One participant noted how the four main factors (location, peers, institution, and administration) play a role in influencing student participation in politics. While the location may not matter when it comes to dispensing information (which can be done over the internet), it becomes an issue when it comes to mobilising student organisations in allowing them to advocate their causes. This is because urban areas tend to provide a more environment for students to gather and conduct their activities whereas students living in rural areas often face

- Three participants agreed that a campus environment largely influences student participation in activism. One of them stated that universities that seldom initiate campus activities that can involve all students tend to produce students that are not aware of current issues or apathetic. One of them further added that encouragement from lecturers is also a strong factor to participation. Another participant touched on geographical location, where students feel less compelled to participate if the events are not organised within proximity to the university or their place of stay.
- One participant noted students are either afraid or unwilling to advocate for certain issues due to the pressure of being told that it is not their place to do so.

a backlash or criticism from the local community. The participant further noted how the heavy discouragement from university lecturers made it more difficult for more students to join student organisations.

## 9 Does your activism touch on campus issues or national issues?

### Both as both are closely related (8 participants)

- One participant contended that while the survey result showed free and quality education as the most popular issue of interest among students, followed by racial discrimination, both campus and national issues are often closely tied with each other and affect both students and the public at large in an almost equal magnitude. Interestingly, he noted on the generational gaps that led to some issues being more popular among students than the older generation such as freedom of expression; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights; and gender equality.
- Another participant mentioned that while many student activists in the past acted as society's spokespersons, it is important for current student activists to get in touch with issues that are more relatable to students, i.e., within the campus ground before they can proceed towards national issues.
- Two participants stated that issues raised by students such as UUCA and PTPTN, and issues concerning the public such as poverty are often interlaced.
- Four participants contended that the issues raised by student activists usually touch upon national issues. As explained by one participant, the issues raised by students are often intended to for the improvement of the country, citing education as being among the important national issues. Another participant stated that political parties also tend to bring up issues raised by university students. One participant stated that the issues concerning racial discrimination, which are often raised by university students are also national issues. Another participant, who was supportive of issues concerning freedom of expression, stated that such issues are not just student issues, but also touch upon national policies and regulations.

### Depends on what the organisation stands for so it could be either one (1 participant)

- One participant contended that it depends on the student organisation's missions and social/political standing.

**The strict campus regulations become the main factor for student activists to focus only on on-campus matters (4 participants)**

- All four participants agreed that the increased level of restrictions imposed within the universities they study or work at have made it harder for students to participate in student movements or discuss national issues. Instead, students are only allowed to focus on matters relating to their campus and take part in campus-related activities. One participant mentioned students tend to be pressured by the university environment to only focus on matters relevant to their studies, or that are within the campus including being active in non-political co-curricular activities. Two of these participants stated that his university encourages students to participate in CSR programmes, but not in any form of struggle that demonstrates their struggles for any causes or makes them question the status quo.

**10 Do you intend to start/continue participating in any student activist or movements in the future or does age influence participation?**

**Yes, but different kind of activism/advocacy/ movements (4 persons)**

- Two participants stated that most students who are involved in student activism during their university years tend to focus on their career and personal life after graduation due to changes in priorities and the lack of free time for activism.
- However, both agreed that many of those who were actively involved in student activism end up participating in something similar such as joining civil society organisations (CSOs) or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Both admitted to seeing themselves in a similar position.
- One participant noted that there is a possibility of being involved in a different kind of movement after graduation – one that is not related to campus issues.
- Another participant noted the possibility of having a shift in perspective after graduation, citing the example of those who had more liberalistic points of view in their student years but gradually turning towards the conservative side as they get older.
- One person mentioned that it all goes back to what the student decides on after graduation.

**Based on commitment and finances (4 persons)**

- Four participants agreed that while it is a lot easier for students aged 18-25 to be involved in politics/activism due to lesser commitments, priorities will shift upon graduation, as most of them will be more committed towards their career and families.

**PART 3**

**11 How do the national regulations affect your motivation to contribute to nation-building? Does the enforcement limit mobilisation or does it encourage your involvement in politics?**

**The national regulations are repressive and resulted in a culture of fear among students (6 persons)**

- One person noted that while the national regulations have not directly affected him personally, regulations such as the Akta Universiti dan Kolej Universiti (UUCAs) have led to the growing culture of fear and silence among university students. This was further proven by his friend who once experienced having trouble with the authority for attending a political assembly, resulted in more fear and reluctance to participate.
- Another participant noted that the limitation of freedom of speech in Malaysia has further motivated her to participate in activism, despite the culture of fear created by national regulations.

**Will rebel more if the regulations are stricter (2 persons)**

- Two participants contended that stricter regulations will further fuel students' attempts to participate in activism, citing the Baling demonstration as an example.

**Lack of space (1 participation)**

- One person noted that the restrictions imposed on national regulations do not provide many avenues for students to speak freely on any contending issues.

**12 Are you comfortable and satisfied with the way Malaysia is right now? Will the abolishment of UUCA lead to more participation in student activism?**

**Yes, the abolishment of UUCA will remove the culture of fear (1 participant)**

- One participant stated UUCA is the root cause of the culture of fear among students and with UUCA being removed, so will this culture of fear.

**No, the abolishment of UUCA will not change anything (4 participants)**

- One participant noted that UUCA is not the major factor that leads to dissatisfaction among students with Malaysia as a whole. Instead, students are more affected by university management. However, while the implementation of UUCA may not directly and instantaneously affect students' political awareness and participation in politics, it will still create a slow domino effect that leads to stricter regulations higher learning institutions and the government, eventually affecting students as a while on a long-term.
- Another participant contended that regardless of whether UUCA is abolished, the greater concern that should be taken into consideration is the culture in Malaysia itself – where young people are discouraged from speaking up and expected to respect their elders. Therefore, removing UUCA is perceived as removing a small part of the obstacle, without looking deeply into the root of the problem, which is the culture of our society, which does not simply disappear after having a certain regulation removed.
- Two participants stated that there is a lack of participation in decision-making among the younger generation, which is a problematic situation. There is also a lot of dissatisfaction with national politics and politicians. However, the abolishment of UUCA will not drastically change anything for the better because the issues arising from the implementation of UUCA are only affecting a small percentage of students in Malaysia.

**13 How effective is social media in pushing forward student interests?**

**Depending on how social media is being used (7 participants)**

- One person noted social media can help create a more personal space to hold discussions and political discourse, so long as it is done professionally without spreading inaccurate information or defamatory remarks.
- Another participant contended that while social media can lead to higher outreach and gain support, it is difficult to have in-depth discussions on serious issues via the platform.
- Two participants stated that despite its usefulness in disseminating information to the larger public thus creating exposure and publicity, there is lack of depth in discourses held on social media, which is

**For virality and pressure (3 participants)**

- One participant stated the effectiveness of social media in creating trends and promoting actions, activities, and programs hosted by students. It can also work as a tool to pressure the public into acting on certain issues.
- Another participant noted that social media can even to some extent bear a stronger influence as compared to street demonstrations, which was exemplified by Veveonah's case.
- One participant stated that social media is important as a tool to disseminate information to the public and mobilising activists.

caused by the platform's tendency of highlighting trends that made advocacy and discourses appear performative at best.

- One participant contended that while social media may serve as an educational tool for the public, it may be manipulated as a tool to indoctrinate society to prevent them from having their agency to think.

**Not everything is accurate (2 participants)**

- While two participants agreed that social media helps spread information to the mass, thorough research is necessary before one can conclude this hypothesis. This is because not everything contained on the platform is accurate, especially with issues such as fake news and fake accounts at a rise.

**Can promote hate speech (1 participant)**

- One participant contended that while social media can be put to good use such as promoting a cause or inviting more people to participate in social movements, it cannot be denied that abuse of social media can result in the tarnishing of a person or institution's image or the proliferation of hate speech.

**Effective but only with limited means (1 person)**

- One person acknowledges the usefulness of social media to spread information to the public but noted the lack of depth in political participation among people due to the main purpose of the medium, which is to merely generate awareness.

**14 Feedback on Policy Recommendations**

**Resonates with students' needs (2 persons)**

- While one participant noted on the relevancy of the recommendations, he raised his concern over how the university administration's openness for discussion is dependent on implementations of current regulations.
- Another participant noted that the recommendations resonate with the contemporary student movement struggles. In addition, it was stated that while some universities such as UKM and UM are becoming more open towards students' freedom of expression, higher education institutions in rural areas are not as willing and it is hoped that more changes can be seen in those areas.
- "When we look at internal regulations, they usually apply to UiTM, which has a strict internal law that disallows active political participation among students. This needs to change in places like UiTM and rural universities because times are changing, students are more aware of their rights, they want to have their voices heard, and a lot of the decisions made by administrators will affect students. I think it's always important to include them in the conversation like how UKM UM is doing."

**Could be expanded further (1 person)**

- One participant contended that while it is possible for actions to be taken based on the recommendations listed, promoting student activism and student unions should not be a task that is placed solely on students themselves and require active support from higher learning institutions as well as the public.

**Abolish UUCA (2 participants)**

- While two participants agreed that social media helps spread information to the mass, thorough research is necessary before one can conclude this hypothesis. This is because not everything contained on the platform is accurate, especially with issues such as fake news and fake accounts at a rise.

**Amend UUCA without having to abolish it entirely (2 participants)**

- One participant contended that while social media can be put to good use such as promoting a cause or inviting more people to participate in social movements, it cannot be denied that abuse of social media can result in the tarnishing of a person or institution's image or the proliferation of hate speech.

**Grant more autonomy to a team of investigators specialising in human rights at universities by separating them from the student affairs division (1 person)**

- One participant expressed concern on Recommendation #5 under the Recommendations for Higher Learning Institutions in the policy recommendations document (establish a well-trained team of investigators specialising in human rights within the student affairs department to ensure that students are heard before the higher learning institution decides to take any actions against them), for the possible lack of autonomy should the team remains within the student affairs department.

The content of the table below provides holistic information of the curated interviews, with the focus on personal background, an active period in the student movement, key themes, as well as an overall interview summary:



**"We sensed that it was not a fair game. They were trying to prevent us unfairly... so it is with no choice that sometimes people resort to breaking the law."**

**Dr Khong Kim Khong**

President of Universiti Malaysia Student Union (UMSU), 1968-69. Currently, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) of HELP University.

**INTERVIEW THEMES**

1. Students' political participation and roles during the 1969 Malaysian General Election.
2. Emerging student organisations and competing for ideological strands inside and outside the campus.
3. The pre-and post-effect of UUCA's introduction to student activism.

**INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

1. Dr Khong recalled how UMSU organised a nationwide protest rallying electorate toward student's manifestos during the 1969 General Election. Apart from that, he spoke about the different dimensions of political issues at that time, from poverty to land ownership which has been the focus of student groups.
2. UM being the first university in Malaysia, it serves as a microcosm of how a Malaysian society is. Ranging from communal conflicts to the competing ideologies within the campus, Dr Khong reflected on how diverse student organisations position shaped the political discourse which affects the process of nation-building and formation of society.
3. Based on his experience as a student activist during the pre-and-post-UUCA, Dr Khong shared his insights on how it affects the way students organised themselves. Apart from that, being an academic himself throughout his life, Dr Khong provides an in-depth understanding of the development of UUCA and the process that follows from the administrative perspective.





**“The protest resulted in almost 150 students expelled from the university... most of them were women.”**

### **Raja Ahmad Aminullah Raja Ahmad**

Members of Organising Committee for Kesatuan Siswa Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM), 1975. Plying trade as a writer and poet.

#### **INTERVIEW THEMES**

1. Being in ITM, a Malay majority institute that enrolls only Bumiputera students, the interview focused on the competing ideologies of Malay nationalism and Islamist movement and how it has affected the development of student activism.
2. With multiple strategies of student activism, from demonstrations to dialogues, the interview attempted to establish the different strategies in capturing and expressing different political dynamics in Malaysia.
3. To understand how conflicts between student organisations influence the formation of the collective consciousness of diverse socio-economic class particularly among the Malay-centric student organisations.

#### **INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

1. Raja Ahmad Aminullah's vast experience in interacting with not only student organisations but also the intellectual class during Malaysia's formative years highlights how the university can be deemed as a vibrant ecology for knowledge and discourse amidst the competing ideologies, ranging from socialism, Marxism, nationalism, and Islamism, among others.
2. Through the interview, Raja Ahmad Aminullah also reflected on multiple scholarly works to understand the effect of UUCA which can be traced back to the depoliticisation process, economic trajectories of the country, and the nation-building process. Here, Raja Ahmad also highlighted how UUCA does not only affect student activism per se but also have consequences on a wider societal level, particularly in terms of political participation for years to come.



**“When I went into university in the 1990s, there was hardly any student activism... we were very afraid.”**

### **YB Sim Tze Tzin**

Founder, Malaysia Youth and Student Democratic Movement (DEMA). Currently serving as a Member of Parliament (MP) of Bayan Baru.

#### **INTERVIEW THEMES**

1. The factors affecting the changing dynamics of non-Malay student activism and mobilisation, particularly among Chinese student groups in Malaysia.
2. The effect of UUCA, specifically political conditions in Malaysia, in restricting non-Malay student movements.
3. The emergence of new media in influencing and amplifying student-led causes. Here, the interview attempted to relate it with new politics in Malaysia particularly among the youth.

#### **INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

1. YB Sim's active role during the Reformasi period as a student activist heavily influenced his decision to get involved in politics after his studies. He touched upon how the emergence of non-communal politics was a by-product of the Reformasi years. Although getting involved in student activism was not necessarily a steppingstone into politics for him, his involvement raised his awareness of the importance of the formal political system as a way forward to enact meaningful change.
2. The racial tensions amongst Chinese students, in particular, was highlighted throughout YB Sim's interview. He spoke about his upbringing in a predominantly Chinese area in Penang, the difficulties for non-Bumiputera students entering universities because of the quota system, and the narrative set for Chinese students at the time to focus on their studies and their lack of participation in student activism during the '90s.
3. With regards to UUCA, YB Sim talked about the legal constraints of the act on-campus activism. However, another restraint he mentions is the lack of autonomy to universities, particularly the concentration of power within the university administration i.e., the Vice-Chancellor and broader administration.



**“These days, we have multiracial student groups consisting of Malay, Chinese, and Indians. There was a process to get to this point.”**

#### **Khairul Anuar Ahmad Zainuddin (Jonah)**

Co-founder of Gerakan Mahasiswa Lantang Negara (GMLN) and Universiti Bangsar Utama (UBU), a youth and student-led group active during Reformasi. Currently an active politician affiliated with Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)

##### **INTERVIEW THEMES**

1. Highlighting on Khairul's multiple youths- and student-led organisations that focus on utilising cultural engagements which are significant in diversifying strategies and approaches.
2. With Khairul's close engagement with multiple former student leaders, the interview tries to establish the intergenerational context and motivations of student activism in Malaysia.
3. Having been detained and charged under multiple repressive laws, the interview attempted to understand how the state apparatus works in suppressing dissenting voices among student movements, particularly during the Reformasi period.

##### **INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

1. Khairul Anuar stressed the importance of Anwar Ibrahim's dismissal throughout the interview. It was both Anwar's dismissal and his calls for the people to rise that sharpened the focus of the student activists. It was the perpetual devotion and idealism of students and the people that led to the Reformasi period garnering popularity.
2. While there are forms of physical police brutality in student activism, Khairul Anuar also talked about the psychological intimidation that arose from acts such as the ISA (Internal Security Act).
3. According to Khairul Anuar, social media opened a space for democracy that was not there earlier. Rather than looking at social media as passive activism, he looks at how people are now able to be openly critical. However, Khairul Anuar also stressed on the importance of organising for student activism to be effective as well.
4. Khairul Anuar also compares the culture of student activism in Malaysia to that of Thailand and Philippines in several instances throughout the interview, suggesting that the youth in other countries are more involved in activism because of a difference in culture.



**“It was suggested that a ‘wow factor’ for our protest would be to have a woman lead it... At that time, I did object, saying ‘Why does having a wow factor mean having to make use of women?’”**

#### **Anis Syafiqah Mohd Yusof**

Active with the University of Malaya's Muslim Students Association. She is the Chairperson of Kesatuan Mahasiswa Malaysia and organiser with Pro-Mahasiswa. Currently, full-time social activist.

##### **INTERVIEW THEMES**

1. With the changing dynamics of Malaysian politics, the interview attempted to better understand the political engagement among contemporary student activists in addressing various issues inside and outside the campus.
2. With the considerable number of women in the universities, the research attempted to highlight the influential roles of women and how gender shapes student movement.
3. By identifying different conflicts within student movements, the interviews will probe further on how they influence the past and future tactics

##### **INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

1. Anis Syafiqah suggested that students act as neutral opposition and can hold governments and administrators accountable.
2. Previous causes that students were concerned with, such as PTPTN, were exclusively student issues. However, the TangkapMO1 movement was an issue that involved everyone beyond students. One of the ways Anis Syafiqah intended to capture the audience's attention was through female leadership. It was a way to offer a fresh perspective and reinvigoration to the movement. She also spoke against the perception that student activism is male-dominated, and that women have their circles despite not being at the frontline of movements etc.
3. The TangkapMO1 was a student-led initiative and Anis Syafiqah spoke about the various steps and precaution taken by students to avoid outside influences such as NGOs and political parties to hijack the movement. They also needed to prove a point that the student protestors were not puppets of the political parties/opposition at the time.



**“Our mistake was that we only shouted, “Abolish AUKU!”. But we never actually discussed or explained to the people why.”**

### **Adam Adli Abdul Halim**

Former President of Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia (SMM) and student-organiser at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris. Currently a full-time social activist in Penang.

#### **INTERVIEW THEMES**

1. The motivation in continuing activism beyond student-based movements.
2. With the significant shifts of demands of the student movement - ranging from student autonomy to free education, the interview attempted to understand the development and formation of issues within the student movement.
3. In questioning privilege, from the perspective of economic and social class, the interview attempted to understand how it has affected the collective consciousness among student activists.

#### **INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

1. Adam Adli alluded to the shift from more Islamic-based issues to civic-based issues for the first time with the establishment of LMP. There was a culture of diversity that existed during his time as a student activist and students had a similar mindset and goal to topple the government.
2. With regards to the “clicktivism” trend, Adam Adli does not believe it is relevant in today’s context. Given the recent circumstances with COVID-19, social media is an effective tool to maintain the public’s awareness and perpetuate student activism online through new and creative ways.
3. When Adam Adli returned to UPSI again in 20018, he noticed a change in the political culture on campus. Previously, students were private about keeping up with politics but in recent years, he is noticed that there are political student groups that hold various forums, talks etc., such as UMNO Siswa.



**“Now, every child has a smartphone. What does speaking up actually mean? What does having a voice mean?”**

### **Qyira Yusri and Tharma Pillai**

Together with Tharmelingem Pillai, she began the advocacy to lower the voting age to 18 in Malaysia under an initiative called UNDI18 after she graduated. Other initiatives she has been involved in includes Sekolah Rukun Negara, Seeds for Democracy, and Parlimen Digital 2020.

#### **INTERVIEW THEMES**

1. Their biggest struggle concerns the politically precarious situation in Malaysia and the rise of voter apathy from young people. Further, since the passing of Undi 18, they seek to stay relevant and push for other policies that affect broad segments of the Malaysian population.
2. They refer to all politics and identity politics in one way or another. It is a fundamental right of self-expression and they seek to challenge fixed perceptions and ideologies that people must encourage open discussion. This is a way to promote discussion and empower youths to stand up against an inherent gerontocracy. They also aim to shift the people’s identities to one that encompasses compassion and empathy for the collective good.
3. They also suggest that a large reason certain segments of the communities are marginalised is due to the problems of literacy and political education disparities. It is a combination of culture and systems that have caused the youth to be unwilling or unconfident of speaking up.

#### **INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

1. Nur Qyira and Tharma elaborate on the goals of Undi 18 to push for progressive, liberal discourse among Malaysians. As an NGO, Undi 18 champions an intersection between youth and democracy.
2. They discussed the use of social media as a double-edged sword: on one hand, it reaches a wide audience and increases public awareness; on the other hand, it can hinder participation as the language used can be exclusive and does not address the nuances of certain complex issues.
4. Qyira and Tharma also provide insight into their strategies as an NGO. Tharma shares his process of starting up an NGO as a business model in creating a clear and unique product and developing a product. Additionally, they both note the importance of engaging many different politicians and groups (not just Kementrian) to push forth their agenda. It does not necessarily mean bipartisanship, but to get certain political individuals that may be able to change narratives surrounding contentious issues.





**“AUKU has nothing to do with academic freedom, in any direct sense... I would not agree that AUKU has prohibited student expression.”**

### Dr Chang Da

Current Deputy Director at the National Higher Education Research Institute, Universiti Sains Malaysia. His primary premium is in advanced education strategy and has been associated with various examination and consultancy ventures identifying with issues of administration and the executives, key arranging, access and value, doctoral instruction, the scholastic calling and internationalisation, with a specific spotlight on agricultural nations. He has engaged with ventures such as UNESCO-Bangkok, UNICEF, OECD, MoHE Malaysia etc.

#### INTERVIEW THEMES

1. How much influence does UUCA have on students' participation in activism in Malaysia?
2. How university autonomy is defined in Malaysia and whether university autonomy can guarantee greater student rights in political engagement.

Feedback was given to the policy recommendations document.

#### INTERVIEW SUMMARY

1. According to Dr Chang Da, it was the amendment made in 2012 to UUCA that significantly restored the political rights of university students, where students were finally granted the rights to express support or opposition to a political group or party (which was prohibited previously), and prohibitions for students from participating in off-campus political activities were lifted. However, Dr Chang Da emphasised on the fact that UUCA only covers public universities whereas private universities are regulated under the Private Higher Education Act 1996. In addition, he also contended that while historically UUCA was implemented to limit student participation in politics and activism, UUCA is not the major factor to the repression of student rights to expression and political participation. This is because much of the repression has a lot to do with the fact that protests and demonstrations have always not been part of the Malaysian culture.
2. He mentioned that university autonomy is not necessarily defined by being financial independent (not depending on public funds) but by reducing the influence of external parties (specifically the Ministry of Higher Education) in the decision-making process of universities such as the appointment of Vice-Chancellors.

Dr Chang Da advised to include a list of recommendations for students, in ensuring that their awareness on their rights as students.



**“The rhetoric is that we are looking at a student-centred education, except that it is not student-centred. University education is centred on the development of the career of academics.”**

### UK Menon

Director of Studies and Group CEO of Stamford College and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Planning) at Wawasan Open University and Associate Director with the University of Melbourne's Asian Law Centre. Mr Menon's skill stretches out to the administration of instructive cycles and law and strategy administering private schooling. He was an individual from a few panels set up by the Ministry of Education to survey arrangements and laws administering advanced education.

#### INTERVIEW THEMES

1. Mr Menon compares the Malaysian higher education system to others such as Thailand and Tanzania, suggesting that we are far behind. In other nations, students are recognised as the core producers of education and a participant in the learning process. The rhetoric is always student-centred, and it is a place for students to develop their careers. Tanzania's educational structure is something we can refer to and he strongly recommends the Indonesian Higher Education Act as a place where Malaysia can draw inspiration from.
2. Throughout the interview, U K Menon reiterates the importance of 'students' as an important group in society. Student activism/participation is both fundamental to character development and critical thinking, as well as an important right that should not be suppressed by HLIs or the government. The three important rights of students he mentions are the individual right, the right as a community and the right to education.
3. Another suggestion U K Menon makes is the need to reformulate the way the government and HLIs approach the idea of making HLIs autonomous bodies and ensuring academic freedom. It needs to develop the idea that universities can respond to the needs of the nation, which would bridge the differences between total freedom and government. This aids the idea that our team has been suggesting all along as students being an important aspect in the nation-building process.

#### INTERVIEW SUMMARY

1. U K Menon highlights that disciplinary rules in Malaysia control every aspect of student activity on and off-

campus. The Malaysian government and higher education institutions have not allowed students to participate in any significant way. This contradicts the idea that the role of the government is to facilitate the development of students, and student activism and participation is crucial in developing students' critical thinking, as well as being a fundamental right of theirs as an important group in Malaysian society.

2. He elaborates on UUCA as a legislation that the government uses to provide the framework of all higher education institutes. However, it provides no guarantees or measures that students get what they deserve when they attend universities etc.
3. There is a need to harmonise the legislation to see whether there is a common platform upon which we can place all higher educational institutions, create a set of rules that are uniform across all those institutions.
4. The current Malaysian education blueprint does not synchronise the principles suggested with the policymaking process of higher education in Malaysia (the National Council of Higher Education) -- it has not been developed in the interests of the development of the student populations in the country.
5. Mr Menon agrees with most of the policy recommendation put forth by us for the Malaysian government and stresses our last recommendation as being especially significant. He cautions using large international organisations such as UNESCO and WHO to formulate key policy recommendations for the betterment of higher education in Malaysia. Rather, we should refer to it as a broad framework and adjust it to our local needs and structures.
6. However, Mr Menon suggests we need to rethink our policy recommendations for higher learning institutions. We need to differentiate between the types of higher learning institutions and see if an overarching set of policy recommendations are suitable for all the HLIs or if they need to be catered specifically for each one. We should also look to see if some of these internal recommendations will be compatible with existing governmental legislations.





**“Around 1971 to 1974... a blend of Islamism and nationalism became an attractive ideology to university students and hugely influenced student movements.”**

### **Dato' Sri Ahmad Shabery bin Cheek**

**Malaysian politician and former student activist in 1980s. He was the former president of Universiti Malaya's Muslim Students Association (1982 – 1983).**

#### **INTERVIEW THEMES**

1. *Students' political participation, views and roles pre and post-1980s.*
2. *The transition of student activism perspectives and participation after graduation into politics.*
3. *The amendment of AUKU and the effect of AUKU's amendment to student activism.*

#### **INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

1. Dato' Sri Shabery spoke about the different dimensions of political issues at that time, especially the freedom of speech which has been the focus of student groups. He mentioned that Islamic ideology emerged during his time and became the main trend and purpose of student activism. Especially during the Cold War period where the world was divided into the Western capitalist bloc and Eastern socialist bloc, the 1979 Iranian Revolution represented an alternative vision that challenged the previously set narratives from the two main blocs. The Islamic revival was seen not as call back to a devotion to religion, but rather a means of life that encompassed the political and social sphere of the nation. Some scholars and ideologies also saw Islam as a better solution to a multi-racial society that competed with the idea of segregated ethnicities at the time. Islamic revival was happening globally, which influence students both abroad and in Malaysia. This was immensely appealing to many student activists especially in the 80s and why the dakwah movement gained such prominence within Malaysia and on campus grounds.
2. Although the 80s was often viewed as a relatively subdued period of student activism due to AUKU,

Dato' Sri Shabery offers another argument that the 80s was, in fact, a period of a vibrant culture in discourse. He noted that many forums took place on and off-campus at the time, and questions of ethnicity, race, and Islam became the foundation of debate among students at the time. Discussions based on the writings and ideas of Islamic intellectuals were also explored during these forums. Although students were not allowed explicitly associate with any political parties, Dato' Sri Shabery spoke of “loopholes” that existed and how student activists managed to navigate through the context of the space available at the time. For instance, students were still able to invite representatives from political parties (such as those from PAS, ABIM etc) to speak at such forums on campus.

3. At a period where Malaysia was undergoing a “developmental stage”, Dato' Sri Shabery touched upon the government's efforts to do so through economic and politics in line with the BN government and affirmative action to benefit more bumiputeras. While students did accept the notion of advancing Malaysia towards a more developed economy and nation, he noted that many student activists wanted this development to be fair. In the event student felt any sort of injustice, there would be a significant backlash.
4. Dato' Sri Shabery highlighted the transition in the also informed us that many of his friends who actively participated and became leaders in student activism during study time in many universities are also involved in politics nowadays. Because of that, they can discuss and easily understand each other's ideology and goal which resulting in good political negotiation in parliament or political interest.
5. Dato Shabery provides an in-depth understanding of the development of AUKU and the process that follows from the former student activist and now a politician perspective.



**IMAGINED  
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