



ELECTION COMMISSION

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Students' Union Elections 2025-26: Voting Eligibility

The Election Commission, in accordance with its mandate to uphold the principles of fair and transparent elections, hereby issues the following official notice regarding the voting eligibility of Integrated First Degree Students admitted in the academic year 2025 for the upcoming Students' Union elections.

Eligibility Restrictions:

Following the approach adopted in the last election cycle and in light of the success it yielded, the Election Commission has decided to continue to *disallow* the Integrated First Degree Students admitted in the year 2025 from voting in the Students' Union elections for the offices of General Secretary and President of the Students' Union. However, they remain a part of the electorate for the elections to all other posts in the Union Council, including Hostel Representatives and Day Scholar Representatives, and may contest the elections for these posts as well.

Rationale:

We maintain that it is of utmost priority for the Students' Union and its organs to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for students on campus and to further prevent reprobate individuals from taking advantage of their inexperience or leveraging their power dynamic as seniors to gather votes. This decision is in keeping with the spirit of the Constitution of the Students' Union, which mandates that all campaigning be done in an unobtrusive and merit-led manner. A review of past editions led to the establishment of a consistent pattern of first-year students being subjected to unethical campaigning.

A few select instances of such are:

- Physical and verbal abuse
- Campaigning at inappropriate times
- Intimidation and threats of violence or **exclusion**
- **False promises** related to campus commitments
- **Confiscation** of phones to prevent recording
- Coercion through spam messages on social media
- Persuasion with **intoxicants**

Enhancing the First-Year Experience:

The paramount objective behind this injunction is to promote a healthy political environment for first-year students on campus by shielding them from negative political experiences. The first few weeks are crucial for first-year students to settle into a routine; however, an overenthusiastic election cycle deteriorates their overall experience. It has been observed in previous election cycles that first-year students are particularly vulnerable to political malpractices such as:

- Anti-campaigning and Bribery: Coercion through promises or financial incentives.
- Intimidation and Misinformation: Threats of violence or spreading false information.
- Unethical Campaign Practices: Invasion of personal space, physical altercations, and verbal abuse.
- Social Media Harassment: Spam messages on first year WhatsApp groups with demands to support specific candidates. This dilutes other topics of discussion among first years.
- Coercion into Participation: Pressuring students to run for office or support certain candidates.
- Disruption of Peace: Late-night campaigning and forced room entries

Furthermore, it has been observed that most candidates' campaigns revolve around improving the quality of life for first-year students (such as academic drives, information drives, etc.) and are less catered to students in their 2nd year or above. We believe that this move should incentivise candidates to pitch for initiatives in the interests of these students in hopes of creating and fostering a better student environment at BITS Pilani. Simultaneously, this move also reduces the ongoing and negative politicisation of campus commitments, including but not limited to clubs and associations, wherein they become vessels to gather favours from first year students. These favours are then used as leverage to solicit political support and votes.

This move is a decisive step towards preserving the integrity of Students' Union elections. The Election Commission is committed towards creating a campus environment where elections are fought on the basis of ideas, policies, and merit, not coercion or fear. By restricting the voting rights of first-year students for chief offices, the aim is to put an end to a large number of exploitative and unethical practices while protecting the welfare of the newest members of the Union. This measure underscores the Election Commission's aim to uphold the principles of democracy and integrity within the Union.

Note: The Election Commission seeks to take multiple steps to ensure that all General Body Members are aware of their rights and responsibilities during the elections and have access to ways to report and resolve their grievances effectively. Further information regarding this will be communicated in due time.

We are continuously engaged with all relevant stakeholders, and any further updates will be communicated ahead of time.