

ISLAMIC POLITICAL AWARENESS OF GENERATION Z IN THE ERA OF DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 20-06-2026

Revised : 18-07-2026

Accepted : 22-07-2026

KEYWORDS

Awareness;
Political Islam;
Generation Z;

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the Islamic political awareness of Generation Z students specifically those from the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies at UIN North Sumatra in the era of digital democracy. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with purposive sampling, the study selected informants based on specific criteria, active Generation Z status, experience accessing political information via digital media, and prior involvement in campus political discussions or activities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, limited participant observation, and documentation of digital activities, then analyzed using an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that the students' Islamic political awareness tends to be normative and symbolic rather than fully developed at a critically reflective level. While social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X serve as primary sources for shaping political perceptions, limited digital political literacy renders students vulnerable to the simplification of discourse and polarization. Political participation manifests predominantly through digital expressions such as likes, shares, and comments rather than through substantive deliberative engagement in academic forums. These findings highlight a gap between the ideals of Islamic political values and the practice of digital democracy among Generation Z; consequently, there is a need to strengthen critical and integrative Islamic political literacy within Islamic higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of democracy in the digital era has fundamentally changed the pattern of participation and political awareness of the people. The development of the internet, social media, and interactive communication technologies has created new public spaces that allow citizens to engage directly in political discourse without the intermediaries of conventional institutions. Especially Generation Z, which includes individuals born in 1997-2012,

is one of the important focuses in today's political studies. In addition to occupying the position as the second largest population group in Indonesia after the Millennial Generation, they are also known as a generation that since the beginning of their lives has been familiar with the development of digital technology. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2020 shows that Generation Z reaches 27.49% of the entire Indonesian population or around 74.49 million people. This large number, supported by high adaptability to digital technology, makes Generation Z have a strategic role in encouraging social and political change in Indonesia. Their involvement can be seen in various public issues such as democracy, human rights (HAM), sustainable environment, gender equality, and various other socio-political issues. (Sulaiman et al., 2024) (Al Fatih et al., 2024)

However, the high level of access to information is not always directly proportional to the depth of political understanding. In the context of Islamic politics, a symptom emerges that can be called a crisis of political consciousness, which is a condition when political participation takes place symbolically, reactively, and emotionally without an adequate epistemological basis. Islamic political consciousness is not only concerned with support for religious symbols or identities in politics, but includes a comprehensive understanding of Islamic normative values such as justice, deliberation, trust, and the public interest in the governance of power. (Ilham & Junaidi, 2025)

Students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies UIN North Sumatra are part of Generation Z who are in an Islamic-based academic environment. As an Islamic higher education institution, UIN North Sumatra has a strategic role in shaping the religious literacy and political awareness of its students. Normatively, students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies UIN North Sumatra are expected to have an integration between Islamic insight and moderate national understanding. However, the reality of digital democracy presents new challenges. The rapid flow of information, the fragmentation of opinions on social media, and the rise of identity politics have the potential to affect students' political mindsets and orientations. (Silviah, 2025)

This phenomenon can be seen in the dynamics of political discourse among students who are often more active in the digital space than conventional academic forums. Social media is a major arena for political expression, but it does not necessarily reflect the depth of analysis or consistency of substantive Islamic values. Studies on digital political literacy show that without the ability to think critically and verify information, the younger generation is vulnerable to disinformation and simplification of religious teachings in political discourse.

Several previous studies have discussed Generation Z's relationship with digital media, political participation, and political literacy, but the study still tends to focus on general aspects of the political behavior of young people in the digital space. The research emphasizes more on the social solidarity of Generation Z in the perspective of Ibn Khaldun's Ashabiyyah theory, while it focuses on the influence of social media on the political participation of the younger generation. Meanwhile, the research examines digital political literacy as a form of political communication in the era of digital democracy. However, these studies have not specifically examined how Islamic political awareness is formed, understood, and practiced by Generation Z in Islamic Universities, especially in students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies of UIN North Sumatra. Harriyani (2025) Firmansyah & Dede (2022) Sarasvati & Student (2025)

Based on these conditions, there is a research gap in the form of limited studies that connect Islamic political awareness, digital literacy, and digital democracy dynamics in the context of Islamic university students. This research is here to fill this gap by analyzing the construction of Generation Z's understanding of Islamic politics, the factors that influence Islamic political awareness, and the dynamics and challenges faced by students in the digital democracy space. Thus, this research not only expands the study of contemporary Islamic politics, but also provides an empirical picture of the pattern of Islamic political awareness of students in the digital era.

The urgency of this research lies in the increasingly strong influence of digital media on the mindset, attitudes, and political behavior of Generation Z. The rapid flow of information on social media not only opens up a wide space for political participation, but also has the potential to give rise to disinformation, polarization, and understanding of Islamic politics that are superficial and emotional. Therefore, this research is important to be carried out as an effort to understand how Islamic university students build Islamic political awareness that is critical, moderate, and in

accordance with democratic and Islamic values in the midst of an increasingly complex development of digital democracy.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the political awareness of Generation Z in the era of digital democracy in students. The focus of this research is on the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies of UIN North Sumatra. This approach was chosen because it focuses on exploring the meaning, experience, and construction of informants' political understandings in a natural social context. stated that the technique of determining informants using purposive sampling, namely the deliberate selection of research subjects based on certain criteria, includes: (1) active students of Generation Z, (2) actively using social media as a source of political information, and (3) having been involved in campus political activities and HMPS administrators of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies. The number of informants in this study was 10 people until data Adil et al. (2023) *saturation* (data saturation) was achieved. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, limited participatory observations, and documentation of digital activities. Data analysis is carried out using an interactive analysis model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The validity of the data is tested through triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure consistency and credibility of research findings. (Rachman et al., 2024)

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Understanding Islamic Politics in the Midst of the Dominance of Digital Media-Based Political Information

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with the informants, the researcher first reduced and grouped the data to find patterns of understanding and forms of Islamic political awareness among students. This process is carried out by identifying keywords, viewpoints, and ways in which informants interpret Islamic politics. The results of the analysis show that students' political understanding focuses more on issues of power, government, public policy, the state, elections, public ethics, and social responsibility.

Furthermore, the level of Islamic political consciousness is classified into three forms, namely symbolic, normative, and reflective. The symbolic category is aimed at informants who interpret Islamic politics only as a symbol of Islamic identity, a symbol of Muslim leadership, or support for a certain group without understanding the substance of Islamic political values in depth. The normative category is given to informants who begin to see Islamic politics as rules, moral responsibilities, and a system of government that is in harmony with Islamic teachings, although the understanding is still at the basic stage. The reflective category is given to informants who are able to relate Islamic politics to the values of social justice, public ethics, and the benefit of the people, and can understand political reality more critically and contextually. This grouping is carried out through the interpretation of informants' answers during interviews, so the following table shows the relationship between the focus of students' political understanding and the level of Islamic political awareness they have.

Table 1. Construction of Political Understanding and Islamic Political Awareness

No.	Initial informants	Political Understanding	Islamic Political Awareness
1.	THE DAY	Kekuasaan	Symbolic
2.	JP	Government	Normative
3.	GS	Public Policy	Reflective
4.	SS	Elections	Symbolic
5.	IM	Kekuasaan	Normative
6.	AND	Social responsibility	Reflective
7.	FN	Country	Symbolic
8.	RD	Public Policy	Normative
9.	OF	Kekuasaan	Symbolic

10.	ON	Public Ethics	Reflective
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This finding confirms that students' Islamic political awareness is still at the initial stage (Surface Level), has not yet reached a mature conceptual.

Through this categorization, it is clear that there is a direct correlation between the type of focus of students' political understanding and the originality of their political consciousness. Students who only focus on the aspect of Power or Elections, tend to be trapped in symbolic-pragmatic awareness. In contrast, students who highlight Public Policy, Public Ethics, or Social Responsibility manage to transform their thinking to a reflective-critical level. This proves that the strengthening of Islamic political awareness in the digital era is no longer determined by the quantity of access to information, but the quality of the depth of reflection on the information.

This is as expressed by Informant Aidil Yasin as the Chairman of Hmps PPI who stated that "Islamic politics is positioned more as a collective identity than as a comprehensive system of political values and ethics."

The researcher first examined the results of interviews regarding the intensity of the use of digital media and the platforms that students most often use to obtain political information. The results of the study showed that almost all informants used social media every day with a fairly high duration, which was around 5-10 hours per day.

The most widely used platforms include TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X. TikTok is the most frequently accessed media because it is able to convey political information in a short, fast, and interesting way through short videos. The high use of social media shows that digital media has become the main means of student political socialization in the midst of the development of digital democracy.

Table 2. Dominant Media and Platform Intensity

No.	Informant Initials	Intensity	Platform Dominan
1.	AY	8 Jam	Tiktok
2.	JP	5-8 Jam	Tiktok, Instagram
3.	GS	6 Jam	Tiktok, Youtube
4.	SS	9 Jam	Tiktok, Youtube
5.	IN	8 Jam	Instagram
6.	BUT	5 Jam	Instagram, X
7.	FN	7 Jam	Tiktok
8.	RD	6 Jam	Instagram
9.	OF	8 Jam	Tiktok, Instagram
10.	ON	5 Jam	X, Tiktok

Conceptually, Islamic political thought is an important part of the Islamic intellectual tradition that examines various basic concepts regarding governance. This study includes a discussion of the principles of justice, leadership, deliberation and the implementation of Islamic values and laws in the life of the state. As explained by informant Jesika Pebiola as Secretary of HMPS PPI that, "Islamic politics is related to the structure of government that is adapted to Islamic teachings".

From the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to the modern period, Islamic political thought has continued to experience developments influenced by the social and political dynamics that occur in Muslim society. Various thinkers such as Al-Mawardi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Khaldun, Hasan Al-Banna, and Abul A'la Al-Maududi, have made important contributions to thinking in formulating political concepts and systems that are in accordance with Islamic values. (Prince, 2025)

In the modern era, Islamic political thought seeks to address global challenges such as democracy, secularism, and leadership issues, and offers alternative systems based on moral values and social justice. This research aims to understand the evolution, basic principles, and relevance of Islamic political thought in the face of current political issues. In addition, every technological advancement always invites a double-edged knife. On the one hand, technological progress makes human life easier, and on the other hand invites harm. (Akmal et al., 2025)

In the context of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies, this condition indicates a gap between theoretical learning in the academic space and the internalization of Islamic political values in student practice questions. Although students learn concepts such as shura or deliberation, they continue to undergo changes and adjustments along with the times. Nowadays, deliberation is often associated with various ideas in modern politics, such as the republican system, democracy, parliament, people's representatives, and the mechanism of government formation. This concept is also related to the principle of government administration that places the people as the basis of power, both in the decision-making process and in the implementation of policies. Therefore, deliberation is not only understood as a means of reaching an agreement, but also as part of the relationship between the government and society, leaders and citizens. These values have not been fully actualized in the way they understand and respond to contemporary political dynamics. (Amaly & Armiah, 2021)

Thus, the Islamic political consciousness found in this study is not a crisis of participation, but a crisis of the depth of conceptual reflection. These findings confirm that Generation Z actually has a high potential for involvement, especially if given adequate space and political literacy. This condition demands strengthening the integration between substantive Islamic political education and critical digital literacy in the Islamic higher education environment. (Oktora et al., 2025)

The Influence of Digital Media on Islamic Political Understanding, Attitudes, and Participation

In this study, Generation Z students use digital media with a very high intensity (5–10 hours per day). This activity is not only consumptive in nature, but also interactive, where students are routinely involved in activities such as watching political content, reading opinions, and providing responses through *like*, *share*, and comment features. Informant Gunawan Safril as Chairman of Hmps IAT stated that "Social media is no longer just a means of communication, but the main public space for me." This is also strengthened by the statement of informant Sukri Siregar as Secretary of the IAT HMPS who stated that "political information is more obtained from social media than from academic sources."

The advancement of information and communication technology, especially social media, has had a great influence on the change in the lifestyle of the Indonesian people. The rapid development of the internet shows that society has entered the digital era that is globally connected. This shows that the functions of families, educational institutions, and social groups have been displaced by digital media as the main agents of political socialization. In the context of Generation Z, digital media has evolved from a means of communication to a major instrument in the formation of political awareness. This marks a shift from the classic Almond & Verba theory that places the family and school as the main pillars of socialization towards the dominance of social media in building the political perspectives of the younger generation. Students no longer depend on academic books, campus discussion forums and formal organizations, but on social media content, political influencers, digital da'wah accounts, and various online news channels. (Nurmansyah et al., 2026)

The development of information technology has also resulted in what is called a "digital democracy ecosystem". This ecosystem is a socio-political environment formed through the interaction between social media, digital technology, and citizen participation in online public spaces. In this ecosystem, the processes of public opinion formation, political participation, and communication between citizens and the government are no longer limited to physical public spaces. As a result, digital literacy capabilities are essential to determine how citizens, particularly Generation Z, interact in the digital democracy ecosystem. (Judijanto et al., 2024)

These changes have opened up a wider space for different groups of people to engage in political discussions. Public participation, especially from the younger generation and groups previously underrepresented in conventional political channels, is increasing. The presence of social media such as Instagram, Twitter, and Tiktok allows people to express their views, rally support for a movement, and influence public policy quickly, broadly, and directly. Therefore, while digital media increases political participation and increases access to information, the lack of digital knowledge actually results in weak political awareness and is vulnerable to disinformation. (Syah et al., 2026)

The Level and Form of Islamic Political Awareness of Generation Z in the Context of Digital Democracy

The results of the study show that quantitatively the level of political participation of Generation Z students is still low, Informant Iqbal Maulana as Chairman of Hmps IH revealed that "the involvement of political activities is often limited to liking, sharing content, and commenting on political topics." This shows a shift in the tradition of political involvement from the conventional to the digital space. This phenomenon in Indonesia shows that the younger generation has made social media the main arena for political participation. Informant Muckhlis Ansari as the Secretary of HMPS IH, stated that "this participation is more expressive and symbolic than deliberative and substantive participation". In Indonesia, the use of social media as a means to convey political messages is increasingly dominant, especially among the younger generation, this phenomenon hints that Generation Z is not only a passive consumer, but also an important agent in the formation of a digital political discursive space. (Ramadhan et al., 2026)

The emergence of digital democracy has radically changed Generation Z's perception of political reality, especially as it relates to Islamic politics. Generation Z forms their understanding through fast, open, and interactive digital media, rather than relying solely on traditional sources such as books, lecturers, or academic forums. Islamic political awareness in the realm of the internet is developed through the presentation of various materials that are often fragmented, not in a complete and methodical manner. Generation Z has access to a variety of Islamic information, including short lectures, the viewpoints of community leaders, and political video clips, which they then interpret according to their personal tastes and experiences. This process shows that Generation Z's perception of Islamic politics is dynamic and vulnerable to simplification of meaning.

This means that students can express their opinions briefly without conducting a thorough analysis. This phenomenon can be categorized as *low-cost* digital political participation, where individuals can easily engage without requiring a high commitment of time, knowledge, or structural involvement. In many cases, this kind of participation does not lead to real action, but rather to an interaction on social media. However, although social media opens up greater opportunities for people to get involved in politics, not all individuals have the same level of ability to utilize this technology. (Rini et al., 2022)

Digital literacy is an important factor in this regard, because individuals' ability to access, analyze, and use information on social media can affect the intensity and quality of their political participation. This political awareness is seen in the statements of several informants who affirm that political participation is not only a right, but also a moral responsibility. One of the informants stressed that elections for the younger generation are important because "young people will feel the impact the longest", signaling the emergence of reflective thinking and historical awareness in them. Another informant said that elections are an "obligation as a citizen", which shows an understanding of substantive democratic values.

This phenomenon shows that Generation Z has a tendency to assess political participation idealistically, not just pragmatically. Directly or indirectly, political participation is the involvement of the community in various events related to the political process. Political participation is an action taken by citizens that aims to influence political decisions either directly or indirectly. This view views political involvement as the involvement of individuals in the effort to elect political leaders and develop public policies.

Political awareness, political education, and perspectives on the effectiveness of actions also influence political engagement. This view divides political involvement into elite actions (active participation) and audience behavior (basic participation such as voting). Understanding the difference between those who are only involved at a basic level and those who are actively involved in political activities is easier with this classification. Political participation has changed drastically along with the advent of the digital era.

With the use of social media, political activities now go beyond the physical environment and also enter the digital realm. that information technology gives people more access to participate in politics and defines new patterns in political campaigns and communication. For young people with great technological skills, this is quite relevant. Political awareness for Generation Z is a very urgent aspect in the context of contemporary democracy, especially in the digital era which is characterized by a fast, massive, and not always verified flow of information. (Purboyo et al., 2025)

Social media plays a very important role in increasing the political awareness of the younger generation in the current internet era. Informant Firdaus Nujula as Chairman of HMPS SAA stated that "Social media allows for the quick and easy dissemination of political information, but they can also cause misinformation that can reduce trust in the political system." Although Generation Z who are active on social media have a huge opportunity to engage in politics more critically and openly, a lack of political knowledge is often a major barrier. Where it is very important for them to understand politics and actively participate because they will be the next generation of the nation. This is also reinforced by Informant Raja Dalimunthe as Secretary of HMPS SAA who stated that "Generation Z's political participation is very important because they are responsible for decision-making that affects the stability of government and future progress". (Hafsa et al., 2025)

Generation Z is a generation that grew up with digital technology, social media, and instant information culture, so they have broad access to political issues, but at the same time are vulnerable to misinformation, disinformation, and polarization of public opinion. Without adequate political awareness, their involvement in politics can potentially be emotional, reactive, or simply trend-following, rather than based on a critical understanding of the substance of democratic policies and processes.

Dynamics and Challenges of Strengthening Islamic Political Awareness of Generation Z

The development of digital democracy presents a new dynamic in the formation of political consciousness, especially among Generation Z. Political awareness among teenagers in Indonesia faces several significant challenges, students as part of this generation are in a unique position, they have very wide access to information, but at the same time are faced with information flows that are not always verified. (Andriani, 2022)

Informant Dtm Imam as Chairman of Hmps AFI stated that "This condition makes the process of forming Islamic political consciousness no longer take place in a linear manner, but is influenced by the complex interaction between digital media, the social environment, and individual experiences." At the same time, when Generation Z obtains information from digital media, curiosity makes Generation Z act to find out more about the information.

In addition, Informant Najla Adelia as Secretary of Hmps AFI revealed that "it is necessary to control oneself to analyze or check the truth and accuracy of the information, so that Generation Z does not directly believe or share information through other digital media." This certainly makes Generation Z have good digital literacy. (Br Sinaga & Azhar, 2025)

One of the main dynamics seen is the shift in the source of knowledge authority. Before social media increasingly dominated the understanding of Islamic politics, religious leaders, educational institutions, or Islamic organizations were the source. Various online platforms offer a wide range of perspectives on Islamic politics, ranging from moderate to populist. This gives students the opportunity to gain a broad view, but it can also leave them confused about how to find credible references.

Conversely, the increasing tendency to adjust data is also a sign of this dynamic. Social media algorithms change content according to user preferences, so students are more likely to be exposed to information that suits their views. Situations like this have the potential to reinforce existing beliefs, but at the same time limit opportunities to consider different perspectives. This condition has the potential to hinder the growth of critical and open political awareness in the long term. Because political movements based on social media also tend to be more flexible and not tied to formal political structures. This can be seen from the emergence of new political movements that are not directly related to political parties, but have received widespread support from the public through social media. (Anwar et al., 2026)

In addition, social media algorithms generally display political content that is emotional and controversial in nature because it is able to attract a higher level of interaction from users. This condition has the potential to strengthen polarization and hinder the creation of healthy and productive discussion spaces. To reduce this impact, better supervision of algorithm mechanisms, increasing people's digital literacy, and a deep understanding of how social media algorithms work. These measures are important to maintain a diversity of perspectives and encourage more balanced interaction and access and discussion of political information. (Hidayah et al., 2024)

Low digital and political literacy are other significant challenges. Many students actively obtain political information, but they cannot check it properly, which indicates that students cannot verify the data. Tabayyun is a concept in Islam that means verifying and researching information before believing it, especially from untrustworthy sources. According to M. Quraish Shihab, tabayyun is meticulousness in receiving news to ensure its truth. In the current information era, tabayyun is very important to prevent the spread of hoax news that can trigger conflicts and maintain community harmony. Every Muslim is expected to apply the principle of tabayyun as a noble moral, so as not to be trapped in fitnah and blasphemy against each other. (Sarasvati & Student, 2025)

The principle of tabbayun mentioned in Q.S Al Hujurat Verse 6 is that:

The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "I am not aware of it..... 6

Meaning: "O you who believe, if a wicked person comes to you with important news, then examine the truth so that you do not harm a people because of your ignorance which causes you to regret the deed.

Everyone should check the information before making a decision, contrary to this phenomenon from an Islamic point of view. Therefore, Islamic political consciousness demands not only active participation, but also a great responsibility to sift through data in the digital world. As a result, many people are trapped in spreading hoaxes or false stories. This phenomenon shows that good understanding does not automatically result from broad access to information. The Insight Center's data survey also shows that digital literacy in Indonesia has not reached a good level, from a score of 1-5 the national literacy index level is still at a score of 3.47 where digital literacy is at the intermediate level. The survey also showed that the ability to process information, data literacy and critical thinking still had low scores. (Prince, 2025)

In addition, increasing Islamic political awareness faces the problem of reducing the meaning of Islamic teachings in the digital world. Often, the actual complex principles of Islamic politics are reduced to slogans or symbols of identity. For example, the issue of Islamic leadership is often understood normatively without considering capacity, integrity, and justice. The consequence of this simplification is that the political consciousness that is formed tends to be superficial and unconscientious.

However, Generation Z has great potential to increase a more mature Islamic political awareness in the midst of these difficulties. In fact, their ability to adapt to technology and be open to information is essential. Generation Z can use media as a means of learning, not just information consumption, with the support of good digital literacy.

Therefore, there needs to be a systematic effort to increase Islamic political awareness. Colleges have a strategic responsibility to provide a space for discussion that encourages critical and reflective thinking. On the other hand, students also need to be encouraged to be more active in constructive discussion forums, both offline and online. Thus, the dynamics and difficulties faced by Generation Z in building Islamic political consciousness must be seen as an opportunity to build a more contextual, critical, and adaptive form of political consciousness. The ability to manage information and the desire to continuously deepen understanding are key.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the political awareness of Generation Z in students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies of UIN North Sumatra is greatly influenced by the development of digital media in the era of digital democracy. Social media such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X are the main sources for students in obtaining political information as well as shaping their understanding of Islamic and national issues. Nevertheless, students' understanding of Islamic politics is still dominated at the normative and symbolic levels. Islamic politics is more often understood as a religious identity, a symbol of Muslim leadership, and support for a particular group rather than as a value system that emphasizes justice, deliberation, trust, and the public good. This shows that high access to digital information has not been fully accompanied by critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of Islamic politics.

In addition, the political participation of Generation Z students is more visible through activities on social media, such as commenting, sharing content, and participating in political discussions online, than direct involvement in academic forums and substantive political activities. This condition shows a change in the pattern of political

participation from the conventional space to the digital space. On the other hand, low digital literacy and the ability to verify information make students vulnerable to disinformation, polarization, and simplification of the meaning of Islamic politics. Therefore, UIN North Sumatra, especially the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies, has an important role in strengthening critical, reflective, and contextual Islamic political education through the Center for Political Studies (PUKAPOL) to increase student awareness so that they are not only active in the digital space, but also able to build mature, moderate, and responsible Islamic political awareness in democratic life.

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