

**THE RELEVANCE OF NURCHOLISH MADJID'S
ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT ON DEMOCRACY TO
THE POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF GENERATION Z
WITHIN ISLAMIC STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN
MEDAN CITY**

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Abstract. This study examines the relevance of Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic political thought on democracy to the political orientation of Generation Z within Islamic student organizations in Medan City. The research employs a qualitative approach through field research supported by library research. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with members of the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI), Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII), and Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM), as well as documentation and literature review. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, while data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that Nurcholish Madjid's democratic principles such as deliberation (shura), justice, pluralism, openness, equality, and public participation remain highly relevant to the political orientation of Generation Z. Members of Islamic student organizations demonstrate democratic values through participatory decision-making, respect for diverse opinions, and active engagement in social and political issues. Furthermore, Generation Z tends to adopt a critical, rational, and issue-based political orientation rather than one centered solely on identity politics. Despite challenges posed by political polarization, digital misinformation, and declining public trust in political elites, Islamic student organizations continue to serve as strategic platforms for political education and leadership development. Therefore, Nurcholish Madjid's democratic thought remains a significant moral and intellectual foundation for fostering a moderate, inclusive, democratic, and responsible political culture among Generation Z in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: *Islamic political thought; democracy; Nurcholish Madjid; Generation Z; Islamic student organizations; political orientation.*

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a political system that continues to evolve and stands as one of the key indicators of modern governance. In the Indonesian context, democracy is understood not merely as a mechanism for general elections but also as a political culture that upholds public participation, freedom of expression, justice, and respect for human rights. Amid these developments, Islamic political thought has made an important contribution to enriching the discourse on democracy, particularly through the ideas of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. One figure with considerable influence is Nurcholish Madjid, who held that democracy is compatible with universal Islamic values such as deliberation, justice, openness, and respect for the plurality of society (Jamhari, 2020).

The development of information technology has given rise to Generation Z as a demographic group with characteristics distinct from previous generations. Having grown up alongside the internet and social media, this generation has developed different patterns of communication, ways of obtaining information, and a more dynamic political orientation (Hawi, 2019). In the 2024 general election, Generation Z was one of the largest voting blocs shaping the direction of Indonesian democracy. However, high levels of information access have also brought challenges such as political polarization, the spread of disinformation, and low digital political literacy. A framework of thought is therefore needed to shape a critical, democratic, and ethical political orientation for Generation Z in navigating contemporary political dynamics (Simanjuntak and Djuyandi, 2024).

Islamic student organizations such as the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI), Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII), and Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM) occupy a strategic position as spaces for cadre formation and political education for students. Through various intellectual activities, discussions, leadership training, and social movements, these organizations help shape the political orientation of young people on the basis of Islamic and national values. In this context, Nurcholish Madjid's thinking on democracy remains relevant because it offers a substantive concept of democracy oriented not only toward political procedure but also

toward morality, tolerance, and pluralism, as well as social responsibility in national and civic life (Madjid, 1992).

Based on this context, the present study aims to analyze the relevance of Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic political thought on democracy to the political orientation of Generation Z within Islamic student organizations in Medan City. This research is significant because studies linking contemporary Islamic democratic thought with the political orientation of Generation Z in Islamic student organizations remain limited. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of research on Islamic political thought, the political education of young people, and the strengthening of an inclusive, moderate democracy grounded in Islamic ethical values in the digital era.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach combining field research with library research (Sugiyono, 2022). The field research was conducted through in-depth interviews with Generation Z students active in Islamic student organizations in Medan City, namely the *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* (HMI), *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia* (PMII), and *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah* (IMM), while the library research involved reviewing Nurcholish Madjid's works, books, academic journals, and literature related to democracy, Islamic politics, and the political orientation of Generation Z. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, with the criteria of being active members of Islamic student organizations, belonging to Generation Z, and having an understanding of Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic political thought.

Data were collected through interviews, documentation, and literature review. The data were then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, comprising the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014). To ensure data validity, this study applied source and method triangulation, so that the findings meet an academically defensible standard of validity.

1. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model

a. Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic Political Thought on Democracy

Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic political thought is one of the ideas of Islamic renewal in Indonesia that positions democracy as a political system aligned with universal Islamic values. According to Nurcholish Madjid, Islam does not formally prescribe a specific form of state, but instead provides a set of ethical values that serve as the foundation for governance. These values include justice (al-'adl), deliberation (shūrā), equality (al-musāwah), freedom, and respect for human dignity. Democracy is therefore understood not merely as a political procedure, but as a mechanism for realizing the common good through the active participation of citizens (Madjid, 1992).

Nurcholish Madjid rejected the notion that democracy is a Western product incompatible with Islam. In his view, the principles of democracy share a substance consistent with Islamic teachings, particularly the concept of deliberation (shūrā) as explained in the Qur'an. Democracy is also viewed as a system open to change, allowing it to adapt to the development of society (Amir and Sembiring, 2025). In this view, democracy must be built on morality, not merely procedural legality. Democracy therefore requires a society with ethical awareness, a tolerant attitude, and a commitment to social justice.

In addition, Nurcholish Madjid developed the concept of civil society (masyarakat madani) as a foundation for democratic life. Civil society is one that upholds pluralism, the rule of law, freedom of expression, and respect for human rights. In such a society, religion functions as a source of moral values rather than as an instrument for legitimizing political power. This idea remains relevant in the Indonesian context, given its plural society, which requires democracy to be inclusive, dialogical, and respectful of diversity.

b. The Political Orientation of Generation Z

Political orientation refers to a person's attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and tendencies toward the political system, political actors, and public decision-making processes. In political science, political orientation encompasses cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions that influence an individual's political behavior (Evita,

2023). This orientation is formed through the process of political socialization that takes place within the family, school, organizations, mass media, and social experience.

Generation Z refers to the cohort born roughly between 1997 and 2012, who grew up alongside the development of the internet and digital technology. These characteristics give Generation Z broad access to information, a high capacity for technological adaptation, and a more open-minded outlook compared to previous generations. In the political sphere, Generation Z obtains most of its information through social media, so their patterns of political participation have expanded into digital spaces. They tend to actively voice their aspirations through online discussions, digital campaigns, and internet-based social movements (Simanjuntak and Djuyandi, 2024).

At the same time, the sheer volume of digital information also presents challenges such as the spread of hoaxes, political polarization, and low political literacy (Panggabean and Harahap 2024). Political education is therefore needed to strengthen Generation Z's political orientation by cultivating a critical, rational, and responsible attitude. In the context of this study, the democratic values developed by Nurcholish Madjid can serve as a moral foundation for Generation Z, encouraging them not only to remain politically active, but also to uphold ethics, tolerance, and the common good in democratic life.

c. Islamic Student Organizations as a Vehicle for Political Education

Islamic student organizations serve as a space for intellectual development, leadership, and political education for students. Organizations such as the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI), Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII), and Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM) play an important role in shaping leadership character, broadening national awareness, and increasing student political participation. Through cadre formation, academic discussions, leadership training, and community service, these organizations become a direct space for learning democracy.

From the perspective of political education, Islamic student organizations function as agents of political socialization that instill

democratic values, social responsibility, tolerance, and leadership. Students not only gain knowledge of the political system but also learn to manage differences of opinion, resolve conflict through deliberation, and build a democratic organizational culture. This experience becomes important capital for shaping a mature political orientation as students go on to participate in community life and the national political arena (Marzuki, Kamila, and Berutu 2025).

The connection between Islamic student organizations and Nurcholish Madjid's political thought can be seen in efforts to build a political culture that is inclusive and value-oriented. These organizations function not only as sites of ideological cadre formation but also as spaces for dialogue that foster a critical, moderate, and democratic younger generation. Islamic student organizations thus serve as a strategic medium for internalizing the substantive democratic values developed by Nurcholish Madjid among Generation Z, particularly in confronting the political challenges of the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. The Relevance of Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic Political Thought to Democracy

The Islamic political thought developed by Nurcholish Madjid represents an important contribution to the development of democratic discourse in Indonesia. According to Nurcholish Madjid, Islam is not incompatible with democracy, since both share the same goal of realizing justice, freedom, equality, and respect for human dignity. In Cak Nur's view, democracy is understood not merely as a mechanism for general elections or the constitutional transfer of power, but rather as a system of values that positions the people as the principal subject of national life. Democracy must therefore be built on the principles of morality, openness, responsibility, and respect for diversity. This view shows that democracy has a substantive dimension consistent with universal Islamic values, making it inaccurate to position democracy as a concept at odds with religious teaching (Madjid, 1992).

In addition to emphasizing the importance of political participation, Nurcholish Madjid also linked democracy to the values of pluralism and tolerance. In his view, a democratic society is one capable of accepting diversity as an unavoidable social reality. Differences of religion, ethnicity, culture, and political views are not a threat but rather social capital for building a better national life. In the context of this study, informants stated that differing views within the organization are natural as long as they are expressed through dialogue and deliberation (Syahputri and Katimin, 2024). Differences of opinion are not regarded as a form of hostility but as part of the process of arriving at the best decision. These findings show that the values of tolerance and openness that characterize Nurcholish Madjid's political thought are still implemented in the life of Islamic student organizations as part of cadre political education.

The relevance of Nurcholish Madjid's thought is also evident in his views on the relationship between Islam and the state. Cak Nur argued that Islam does not require a particular form of state but instead emphasizes the realization of justice, humanity, and welfare in governance. Democracy can therefore serve as an instrument consistent with Islamic principles when carried out honestly, fairly, and responsibly. This view received a positive response from the research informants, who felt that politics should serve as a means of advancing the public interest rather than merely a tool for acquiring power. They also believed that Islamic values should be reflected in political conduct through trustworthiness, honesty, and commitment to the public interest. Thus, the political orientation developing among students is no longer focused on religious symbolism but is directed instead toward strengthening political ethics as taught by Nurcholish Madjid (Amir and Sembiring, 2025).

The findings show that cadres of Islamic student organizations in Medan City generally display a tendency toward critical thinking on various national political issues. They not only follow political developments through social media but also actively discuss them in organizational forums, academic studies, and cadre-training activities. This activity shows that Islamic student organizations continue to

function as an effective space for political education in shaping young people's democratic awareness. In this context, Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic political thought provides both a normative and a philosophical foundation for keeping student political activity oriented toward moral values, justice, and the broader public interest. The relevance of Cak Nur's thought is therefore not merely conceptual but also has practical implications for shaping a democratic political culture among Islamic students.

Based on the discussion above, it can be understood that Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic political thought on democracy remains highly relevant to the development of Generation Z's political orientation within Islamic student organizations in Medan City. This relevance is reflected in shared values concerning the importance of deliberation, freedom of expression, tolerance, pluralism, political participation, and ethics in the conduct of democratic life. Although current political dynamics have been heavily shaped by the development of digital technology, the substantive democratic values articulated by Nurcholish Madjid remain an important foundation for building a moderate, critical, inclusive, and responsible political consciousness among young people in national and civic life.

b. The Political Orientation of Generation Z within Islamic Student Organizations in Medan City

The political orientation of Generation Z has undergone considerable change compared to previous generations. The development of information technology, social media, and easier access to various sources of knowledge have shaped a more open, critical, and participatory political character. Generation Z no longer views politics merely as a contest for power but as a means of advancing justice, transparency, and public welfare. In the context of Islamic student organizations in Medan City, this political orientation is reflected in students' active involvement in cadre-training activities, academic discussions, social advocacy, and the expression of aspirations on various national issues. Organizations such as the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI), Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII), and Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM) serve as spaces for political learning that instill not only Islamic values, but also build a

democratic awareness grounded in ethics, intellectualism, and social responsibility (Evita, 2023).

The findings show that most informants regard Islamic student organizations as a medium for shaping leadership character as well as for political education. Through a tiered cadre-formation process, students gain an understanding of their rights and obligations as citizens, the importance of political participation, and the ability to critically analyze various social issues. The informants explained that

“regular discussion sessions, academic forums, leadership training, and organizational deliberation serve as means of building the courage to voice opinions while also respecting differing views. This shows that the political orientation of Generation Z within Islamic student organizations is not built through indoctrinating political doctrine, but through a learning process that emphasizes dialogue, scholarly argumentation, and deliberation as the primary mechanism for organizational decision-making.”

The findings also show that social media has a very significant influence on shaping the political orientation of Generation Z. All informants acknowledged that political information is obtained more often through digital platforms than through conventional media. This development has had a positive effect by increasing access to national and international issues, making students more responsive to evolving political dynamics. However, informants also recognized that social media often becomes a space for the spread of disinformation, political propaganda, and social polarization. They therefore felt that digital literacy skills are a critical necessity so that students can distinguish valid information from manipulative content. This critical attitude toward political information shows that Generation Z is developing an awareness of not accepting every piece of information at face value, but instead verifying it before taking a political position (Auliya et al., 2026).

Besides being influenced by digital media, students' political orientation is also shaped by an organizational culture that upholds democratic principles. Based on the interviews, informants stated that every organizational policy is always produced through a deliberative forum that gives every member the opportunity to voice an opinion. The election of the organization's chairperson is conducted through an

open mechanism based on leadership capacity, integrity, and organizational management ability (Harahap, Ginting, and Saragih, 2024). This practice shows that Islamic student organizations have applied democratic principles in their internal organizational life. Deliberation is not merely a formal procedure but has become an organizational culture that shapes cadres to respect differences, accept criticism, and take responsibility for collective decisions. These values serve as important capital for building a democratic political culture among Generation Z.

Based on the findings, it can be understood that the political orientation of Generation Z within Islamic student organizations in Medan City shows a positive tendency. Students not only display a fairly high level of political participation but are also beginning to develop a more critical, open, and rational mindset in addressing various political issues. Islamic student organizations play an important role as a space for political education that shapes leadership character, a culture of democracy, and social awareness among young people. Although still facing challenges such as digital disinformation, political polarization, and apathy among some students, the cadre-formation process within HMI, PMII, and IMM has been able to strengthen a democratic and ethical political orientation. These findings show that Islamic student organizations remain one of the strategic institutions preparing Generation Z to become political actors capable of contributing to the strengthening of democracy in Indonesia.

c. The Relevance of Nurcholish Madjid's Democratic Thought to the Political Orientation of Generation Z within Islamic Student Organizations in Medan City

The findings show that Nurcholish Madjid's democratic thought has a strong relevance to the political orientation of Generation Z within Islamic student organizations in Medan City. This relevance is evident in the shared values between Cak Nur's ideas on democracy and the practical life of student organizations. Nurcholish Madjid viewed democracy as a system that prioritizes not only political procedure but also places moral values, justice, freedom, openness, and responsibility as the primary foundations of national life. These values are found in the activities of Islamic student organizations through

cadre formation, discussion forums, deliberation, and decision-making processes that involve all members. The informants explained that

“Democracy within the organization is not understood merely as a mechanism for electing a chairperson, but also as a culture of respecting differing opinions, accepting criticism, and prioritizing the common interest over individual or group interests. This shows that Nurcholish Madjid's democratic thought remains a relevant framework for building the political consciousness of young Muslims.”

This relevance is even more apparent in the way Generation Z understands the relationship between Islam and democracy. Based on the interviews, informants argued that democracy is not at odds with Islamic teachings as long as it is carried out on the principles of justice, deliberation, equal rights, and respect for human dignity. This view is consistent with Nurcholish Madjid's thinking, which rejected the dichotomy between Islam and democracy. According to Cak Nur, Islam does not prescribe a particular form of state but instead provides a set of ethical values that must be realized in governance. Democracy can therefore be an instrument consistent with Islamic principles when it delivers social justice, guarantees citizens' freedom, and provides space for participation for all members of society without discrimination. This shared outlook shows that the political orientation of Generation Z has moved toward a more substantive politics, no longer trapped in symbolic debates over the formalization of an Islamic state (Harahap et al., 2024).

This study also found that the pluralism developed by Nurcholish Madjid influences how students address diversity within their organizations and in society at large. Informants stated that differences in organizational background, ethnicity, and political views are a reality that must be accepted as part of democratic life. In various discussion forums, students prioritize scholarly argumentation over group fanaticism. They also felt that a diversity of opinion actually enriches the organization's decision-making process. These findings show that the concept of pluralism taught by Nurcholish Madjid is not only understood theoretically but has become part of the culture of Islamic student organizations. An open attitude toward difference is one indicator that the political orientation of Generation Z is moving

toward a democracy that is inclusive and respectful of the plurality of Indonesian society.

Based on the research findings as a whole, it can be understood that Nurcholish Madjid's democratic thought has a very strong relevance to the political orientation of Generation Z within Islamic student organizations in Medan City. This relevance is evident in shared values regarding deliberation, political participation, pluralism, freedom of expression, social justice, and the importance of ethics in political life. Islamic student organizations serve as a strategic space for transmitting these values through cadre formation and intellectual activities that shape the political character of young people. Amid the development of digital technology and various contemporary challenges to democracy, Nurcholish Madjid's thought retains its significance as a moral and intellectual foundation for building a moderate, critical, inclusive, and responsible political orientation among Generation Z. This study therefore affirms that Cak Nur's democratic ideas are not only conceptually relevant but also carry practical implications for strengthening a democratic culture among Islamic students as part of Indonesian civil society.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic political thought on democracy has a strong relevance to the political orientation of Generation Z within Islamic student organizations in Medan City. The democratic values developed by Nurcholish Madjid deliberation, freedom of expression, pluralism, justice, openness, and political participation are reflected in the activities of HMI, PMII, and IMM through cadre formation, academic discussion, and democratic decision-making. The political orientation of Generation Z also shows a tendency to be more critical, rational, and oriented toward policy substance rather than identity politics alone, although it still faces challenges such as political polarization, digital disinformation, and declining trust in some political elites. Nurcholish Madjid's democratic thought therefore remains relevant as a moral and intellectual foundation for shaping a moderate, inclusive, democratic, and responsible political culture for Generation Z in national and civic life.

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