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The Nexus of Political Consciousness, Socialization, and Participation: A Quantitative Analysis of Civic Education at Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia

Ali Musa Harahap[1] and Anwar Koma[2,*]

[1]*Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Ponorogo 63471, Indonesia*
[2]*Faculty of Political Science, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani 94000, Thailand*

([*]Corresponding author's e-mail: anwar.k@psu.ac.th)

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Abstract

This quantitative study examines the development of civic competence by investigating the interrelationship between political consciousness, political socialization, and civic participation among final-year undergraduate students at Universitas Darussalam Gontor (UNIDA Gontor), Indonesia. Grounded in the framework of citizenship education, the study hypothesized that deliberate socialization processes and heightened political awareness significantly contribute to the formation of active democratic citizens. Utilizing a structured questionnaire distributed to 179 students in the International Relations and Communication Studies programs, the research explores how the pedagogical environment and socialization impact the extent and nature of student engagement. Data analyzed through descriptive statistics and correlation analysis revealed that both political consciousness and socialization are significantly correlated with participation levels ($r = 0.46$ and $r = 0.44$, respectively). A key finding indicates that students in the International Relations program exhibited significantly higher levels of civic agency compared to their peers in Communication Studies, suggesting that disciplinary orientation acts as a primary agent of socialization. These findings underscore the necessity of integrating civic education and political literacy across various academic disciplines to ensure equitable civic development. The study offers critical implications for curriculum designers and university administrators seeking to strengthen democratic values and foster more politically engaged young citizens.

Keywords: Civic education, Political socialization, Democratic agency, Higher education, UNIDA gontor

Introduction

Political participation stands as a cornerstone of democratic societies, reflecting the extent to which citizens are involved in shaping public decisions and influencing governance (Fadhli, 2024). This participation can take many forms, including voting, joining civic or political organizations, attending demonstrations, engaging in advocacy efforts, or contributing to public discussions (Abdullah et al., 2024). In Indonesia's developing democratic context, the engagement of young people, particularly university students are increasingly important for sustaining democratic values and ensuring inclusive decision-making processes in the future (Wahyuningroem et al., 2024). Universities play a vital role in cultivating informed, socially responsible, and politically engaged citizens. Beyond delivering academic knowledge, higher education institutions serve as dynamic environments where students are introduced to diverse perspectives, encouraged to question societal structures, and provided with opportunities for civic and political involvement. However, political engagement among students is not uniform (Candraningrum et al., 2025). Various influences such as family background, media consumption, peer interactions, and academic focus may shape how students perceive and participate in politics. Academic discipline, in particular, is a noteworthy

factor, as some fields naturally integrate political discourse and critical analysis, while others may offer fewer opportunities for such engagement (Hngokchai, 2025). Majors like International Relations or Political Science tend to expose students to political structures and theories more frequently than majors that emphasize technical or communication skills. This disciplinary divide may lead to differences in political awareness and participation across student groups. This research focuses on final- year undergraduate students at Universitas Darussalam Gontor (UNIDA), an Islamic university in Indonesia that promotes comprehensive education rooted in moral and spiritual values. The study compares students enrolled in two academic programs, such as International Relations and Communication Studies, selected for their distinct curricular orientations yet sharing a common purpose, which is the social public sphere. International Relations typically emphasizes political theory, diplomacy, and global affairs, while Communication Studies focuses more on media, public relations, and message delivery, with comparatively limited political content. By examining these two groups, the study seeks to understand how academic training influences students' political behavior. The investigation centers on three key dimensions: political consciousness (students' understanding of political systems and their belief in personal political influence), political socialization (the process through which individuals acquire political knowledge and values), and political participation (both formal and informal involvement in civic and political activities). Although prior studies have addressed youth political behavior in general, limited attention has been paid to how these constructs interact within the context of Islamic universities, or how differences in academic discipline might contribute to variations in student political engagement (Harahap, 2025).

This research seeks to answer three questions: What are the levels of political consciousness, political socialization, and political participation among final-year students in International Relations and Communication Studies at Universitas Darussalam Gontor? How are political consciousness and political socialization related to political participation? And are there notable differences in political participation between the two academic majors? Addressing these questions contributes to a better understanding of how education shapes political behavior in higher education, particularly within faith-based institutions. The findings offer practical recommendations for educators, curriculum designers, and university leaders who aim to foster a more politically aware and engaged student body.

The main objective of this study is to explore the influence of political consciousness and political socialization on political participation among university students, and to compare the levels of engagement between International Relations and Communication Studies students at Universitas Darussalam Gontor.

Literature review

This section examines the key theoretical constructs of political participation, political consciousness, and political socialization, focusing on their role in shaping civic engagement among university students. Drawing on established research, it also highlights the role of academic discipline and the Indonesian political context, particularly within Islamic higher education, to identify knowledge gaps that this study aims to address.

Political participation

Political participation refers to actions by individuals aimed at influencing political decision-making and governance. These actions include voting, demonstrations, campaign involvement, civic dialogue, and even digital activism. Lipset (1983) emphasized that political participation is rooted in one's social base and is vital for sustaining democracy. Historical student movements, such as those in Indonesia during the 1998 Reformasi era, demonstrated the power of youth in driving political change (Ayub, 1991). However, as Weiss (2009) and Harahap (2020) noted in the Southeast Asian context, political participation among students is often muted due to restrictive political climates. In Malaysia, although formal political involvement among students is regulated, studies show students remain politically aware and engage in civic matters through informal channels (Abdul Rahim, 2001). Similarly, Barton (2004) and Wilson (2008) demonstrated that institutional factors and campus culture significantly shape the extent and form of student participation in political life.

Political consciousness

Political consciousness refers to an individual's understanding of political systems, awareness of civic responsibilities, and belief in their ability to affect change often linked to political efficacy (Galston, 2004). Higher political consciousness is often associated with a greater likelihood of engaging in political activities. Colby et al. (2007) emphasized that structured civic education fosters critical thinking and a sense of political responsibility among students. Abdul Rahim (2001) found that students from political science-related fields had higher levels of political awareness than those from non-political disciplines. This reinforces the idea that academic content directly influences the development of political knowledge and engagement. Galston (2004) also warned that without deliberate educational intervention, youth may remain disengaged from political life. This highlights the crucial role universities play in cultivating political awareness among students.

Political socialization

Political socialization is the lifelong process by which individuals acquire political values, beliefs, and behavior patterns. According to Almond et al. (2001), key agents include family, peers, education, religion, and media. During the university years, exposure to diverse viewpoints and critical debates intensifies the socialization process. Gorsche (2002) noted the increasing influence of media, particularly digital platforms, on youth political orientation. In Islamic institutions such as Universitas Darussalam Gontor, political socialization is further influenced by religious norms. Religious teachings and campus ethos may reinforce civic values like justice and public responsibility (Jomo & Cheek, 1992). However, they may also establish boundaries around political expression, shaping a distinct model of civic engagement. Azeem et al. (2011) found that structured civic education projects in Malaysia contributed significantly to students' political awareness and active citizenship. In southern Thailand, a survey of peace influencers shows that religious leaders (Ulama) remain the most popular peace actor in the conflict-affected areas (Koma & Tuansiri, 2022). This is because they are the primary agents of socialization. These findings underscore the need to explore how political socialization operates within Islamic university settings.

Academic discipline and civic engagement

Academic discipline significantly influences how students acquire political knowledge and translate it into civic action. According to Colby et al. (2007), students in fields such as International Relations or Political Science are more likely to engage in political activities, as their studies involve exposure to policy debates, institutional analysis, and governance structures. In contrast, students in disciplines with less political content, such as Communication Studies, may have fewer opportunities to critically examine political systems, though they may still be active through media-related civic engagement. Abdul Rahim (2001) found that the political engagement levels of IIUM students varied by faculty, indicating the powerful role academic orientation plays in shaping political attitudes and behaviors. This distinction forms a core focus of the present study, which compares International Relations and Communication majors.

Political participation in the Indonesian context

Indonesia's post-Reformasi era has created broader democratic spaces, especially for youth. However, challenges such as political disillusionment, corruption, and elite dominance persist (Fadhli, 2024). Youth participation is often paradoxical, in that high levels of political interest coexist with low trust in formal institutions. Despite these limitations, Indonesian youth remain highly active in informal and digital spaces. Movements like #SaveKPK exemplify how students express political views and mobilize support through social media. These forms of engagement represent a shift from traditional participation to more dynamic, issue-based activism as echoing trends found in Malaysian youth (Merdeka Center, 2008). At institutions like Universitas Darussalam Gontor, where religious education shapes campus life, political engagement may be framed within moral and Islamic principles. However, no existing research has explicitly examined how differing academic programs within such an institution influence political behavior. While these studies provide valuable insights into student political engagement, several knowledge gaps remain. First, research focusing on

Islamic universities, particularly in Indonesia, is still limited, with most studies concentrating on secular public institutions. Second, although existing research addresses youth political behavior broadly, few studies compare political consciousness, socialization, and participation across academic disciplines. Third, there is a lack of integrative frameworks that examine how these three constructs interact to shape political engagement among university students. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the correlation between political consciousness and political socialization with political participation, and by comparing students from International Relations and Communication Studies majors at Universitas Darussalam Gontor.

Methods

Research design

This study applied a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the interrelationship between political consciousness, political socialization, and political participation among university students. The survey method was selected for its effectiveness in collecting uniform data across a sizable population within a limited timeframe, and it also permitted comparative analysis between two academic disciplines: International Relations and Communication Studies to evaluate how disciplinary orientation may influence political engagement.

Population and sample

The target population of this study consisted of all final-year undergraduate students enrolled in the International Relations and Communication Studies programs at Universitas Darussalam Gontor, totaling N = 179 students. Given the relatively small and accessible population, this study employed a census-based purposive sampling approach, in which all eligible students who had completed at least six semesters were invited to participate. A total of 179 questionnaires were distributed, and 179 valid responses were returned, resulting in a response rate of 100%. This high response rate was achieved through in-class, supervised data collection. The final sample consisted of 97 Communication Studies students and 82 International Relations students, allowing for meaningful comparative analysis between the two academic groups. The adequacy of the sample size is supported by methodological guidelines suggesting that census sampling is appropriate when the population is relatively small and accessible (Israel, 2026).

Data collection method and instrument

Data was collected exclusively through offline, paper-based questionnaires administered in-person during regularly scheduled class sessions. The instrument was developed based on prior empirical and theoretical literature on political behavior (Galston, 2001; Gorsche, 2002; Kovacheva, 2005) and was structured into four main sections. The first section gathered demographic data, including age, gender, academic major, year of study, prior voting experience, and involvement in student organizations. The second section assessed political consciousness through a series of Likert-scale statements measuring students' awareness of political systems, interest in political affairs, sense of civic responsibility, and perceived political efficacy. The third section examined political socialization by evaluating the frequency of exposure to political information via various agents such as family, peers, lecturers, classroom discussions, and traditional media. The final section measured political participation by identifying both formal activities (such as voting and organizational membership) and informal actions (such as participating in demonstrations or sharing political opinions).

Validity and reliability

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha, yielding values of 0.81 for political consciousness, 0.78 for political socialization, and 0.84 for political participation. These values exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Hair et al., 2010).

Data collection procedure

All data collection occurred during the second semester of the 2025 academic year, strictly through in-person distribution. Surveys were handed out and completed in classrooms with the cooperation of lecturers and academic staff, ensuring high response rates and data completeness. Participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of anonymity and voluntary participation. Ethical approval

was obtained from UNIDA's institutional research ethics board, and informed consent was secured from all respondents prior to participation.

Data analysis and visualization

The collected data were processed and analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize demographic profiles and to compute mean scores and standard deviations for each of the three core variables. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between political consciousness, political socialization, and political participation. An independent samples t-test was used to assess whether there were statistically significant differences in political participation between students from the International Relations and Communication Studies programs. Additionally, cross-tabulations were applied to explore patterns of engagement across variables such as gender, prior voting behavior, and involvement in student organizations. Prior to these analyses, normality and homogeneity of variance were tested and confirmed, ensuring the appropriateness of parametric statistical methods. Data visualization was presented in the form of descriptive tables, bar graphs for comparative analysis, and scatterplots to illustrate correlation trends. Minor variations in sample size across specific tables (e.g., N = 174-178) are due to missing responses in individual questionnaire items. These cases were handled using pairwise deletion, ensuring that valid responses were retained for each analysis.

Limitations

Despite the methodological rigor, this study acknowledges several limitations. Being cross-sectional in nature, the research captures only a single moment in time, thus preventing any observation of changes in political engagement over the course of students' academic development. Moreover, the study was confined to a single university setting, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other institutions, especially public or secular universities. The use of self-report questionnaires also introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly in responses related to political behavior. Nevertheless, these limitations do not undermine the study's value in offering empirical insights into how academic discipline, particularly in International Relations, influences students' political attitudes and actions.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on data collected from 179 final- year undergraduate students at Universitas Darussalam Gontor. The participants came from two academic departments: International Relations and Communication Studies. The results are organized into four primary categories that reflect the study's objectives and theoretical framework: political consciousness, political socialization, political participation, and statistical relationships among these variables.

Political consciousness

Political consciousness was measured through ten items on a 5-point Likert scale. The overall mean score among all respondents was 3.76 (SD = 0.62), indicating a moderate to high level of political awareness. However, students from the International Relations department demonstrated a higher level of political consciousness (mean = 3.91, SD = 0.55) than those from the Communication Studies department (mean = 3.62, SD = 0.67). A deeper examination revealed that 76 percent of International Relations students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have a duty as a citizen to be politically active," whereas 67 percent of Communication Studies students expressed similar sentiments. In terms of confidence in understanding Indonesia's political system, 71 percent of International Relations students felt confident, compared to only 58 percent of Communication Studies students. Likewise, 65 percent of students from International Relations believed that they could influence political decisions either directly or indirectly, while only 47 percent of Communication Studies students shared this belief. These findings suggest that academic exposure to political themes and discourses significantly affects students' political efficacy and awareness. The curriculum in International Relations likely offers more structured engagement with political institutions, theories, and global affairs, thereby reinforcing a stronger sense of political identity and responsibility.

Table 1 Items of political consciousness

	Level of agreement (%)					Overall (%)	*M*	*SD*	N
	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Undecided**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**				
I believe that students should be politically active.									
IR students	3.7	11.0	8.5	56.1	20.7	75.8	3.79	1.02	82
CS students	4.1	19.6	20.6	47.4	8.2	67.2	3.36	1.02	97
Total	**3.9**	**15.6**	**15.1**	**51.4**	**14.0**	**71.2**	**3.56**	**1.04**	**179**
To be a good citizen implies being politically active.									
IR students	1.2	9.8	11.0	61.0	17.1	76.6	3.83	0.87	82
CS students	1.0	27.1	25.0	42.7	4.2	68.6	3.43	2.13	96
Total	**1.1**	**19.1**	**18.5**	**51.1**	**10.1**	**72.2**	**3.61**	**1.68**	**178**
I personally believe in my own ability to formally influence the government decision-making.									
IR	2.4	12.2	22.0	53.7	9.8	71.2	3.56	0.92	82
CS	1.0	17.7	38.5	34.4	8.3	66.2	3.31	0.90	96
Total	**1.7**	**15.2**	**30.9**	**43.3**	**9.0**	**68.6**	**3.43**	**0.91**	**178**
I personally believe in my own ability to informally influence the government's decision-making.									
IR students	2.4	9.8	22.0	53.7	12.2	72.6	3.63	0.91	82
CS students	0.0	15.5	34.0	40.2	10.3	69.0	3.45	0.88	97
Total	**1.1**	**12.8**	**28.5**	**46.4**	**11.2**	**70.8**	**3.54**	**0.89**	**179**
I do not trust people in general, other than my family.									
IR	6.1	31.7	14.6	34.1	13.4	63.4	3.17	1.19	82
CS students	7.2	26.8	15.5	37.1	13.4	64.6	3.23	1.19	97
Total	**6.7**	**29.1**	**15.1**	**35.8**	**13.4**	**64.0**	**3.20**	**1.19**	**179**

**Strongly disagree = 1-20%; Disagree = 21-40%; Undecided = 41-60%; Agree = 61-80%; Strongly agree = 81-100%*

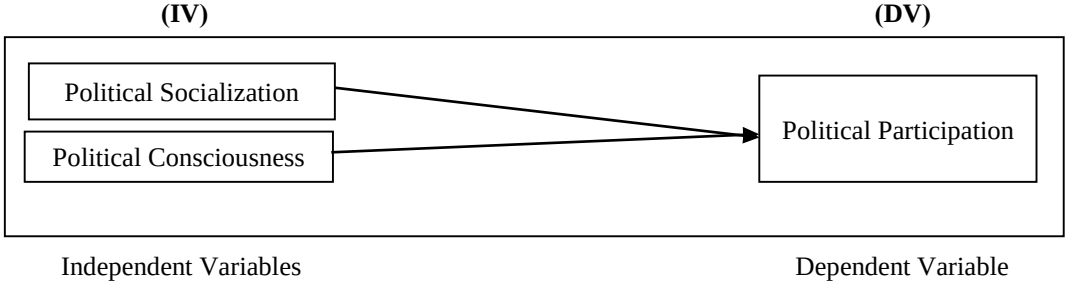


Figure 1 Determinants of political participation

Source: Adapted from Lipset's Voting Turnout Model (1983)

Political socialization

The process of political socialization was examined through students' reported exposure to political agents such as media, interpersonal networks, and educational environments. Responses were collected using a 5-point frequency scale (1 = never to 5 = very often). In terms of media consumption, the most frequently accessed sources for political information were the internet (mean = 4.31), social media (mean = 4.06), and television (mean = 3.81). Students from International Relations reported higher interaction with academic sources such as print media and political seminars (mean = 3.88), while students from Communication Studies were more engaged with visual and interactive media, with an average of 3.99. Regarding interpersonal communication, political discussions among peers occurred frequently across both departments, with a slightly higher frequency reported by students from International Relations (mean = 3.95) compared to those from Communication Studies (mean = 3.66). Political conversations within the family were less frequent overall, averaging 3.21 across the sample. The educational setting emerged as a significant source of political socialization. A large majority, 81 percent of International Relations students, reported attending political seminars at least once per semester, whereas only 42 percent of Communication Studies students had comparable experiences. Moreover, 68 percent of International Relations students reported that they participated in classroom discussions on political issues "often" or "very often," while only 41 percent of Communication Studies students reported the same.

These results underscore the influential role of academic discipline in shaping political socialization. The International Relations program, with its emphasis on governance, public policy, and global affairs, provides students with a more consistent and structured exposure to political content, which contributes to their development as politically aware individuals.

Political participation

Political participation was assessed through various forms of involvement, both institutional and non-institutional. Students were asked to report on their participation in political activities during the past two years. With regard to voting, 86 percent of all respondents reported voting in campus elections. Among them, students from International Relations had a slightly higher participation rate (89 percent) compared to students from Communication Studies (83 percent). Participation in national elections was markedly lower at 11.2 percent, which can be attributed to the age distribution of respondents, many of whom may not have reached voting age during the previous national election cycle. In terms of organizational membership, 63 percent of International Relations students were active in student organizations, such as student councils or political clubs, compared to 47 percent of Communication Studies students. Volunteering in civic or religious organizations was also more common among International Relations students (41 percent) than their Communication Studies counterparts (34 percent). When examining non-institutional forms of participation, such as activism and online engagement, the difference between the two departments remained notable. Twenty-eight percent of students from International Relations reported having participated in peaceful demonstrations or issue-based campaigns, compared to only 15 percent of students from Communication Studies. Similarly, online political activity, such as sharing political content or participating in online debates, was reported by 55 percent of International Relations students and 49 percent of Communication Studies students. These findings reveal that students from the International Relations department consistently exhibit higher engagement across all forms of political participation. Their academic background, which emphasizes civic responsibility, diplomacy, and governance, appears to foster more robust and multidimensional political involvement.

Correlation analysis

To understand the interrelationship among the core variables such as political consciousness, political socialization, and political participation, the Pearson correlation analysis was employed. The results revealed statistically significant and positive correlations between all pairs of variables. There was a moderate positive correlation between political consciousness and political participation ($r = 0.46$, $p < .001$), indicating that

students who possessed greater political awareness were more likely to engage in political activities. A similarly moderate correlation was found between political socialization and political participation ($r = 0.44$, $p < .001$), suggesting that more frequent exposure to political content through media, peers, or academic settings tends to increase students' likelihood of political involvement.

The strongest correlation emerged between political consciousness and political socialization ($r = 0.51$, $p < .001$), confirming that students who are more regularly engaged with political discussions and media are also more politically aware. These findings provide empirical support for the theoretical model presented in the literature review, which posited that political consciousness and political socialization act as antecedents to political participation. The interconnectedness of these variables illustrates a developmental pathway through which students evolve into politically active citizens.

Independent samples t-test

The independent samples t-test results presented in Table 4 indicate a statistically significant difference in political participation between the two groups, with International Relations students demonstrating higher participation levels than Communication Studies students ($t = 4.70$, $p < 0.001$). Students from the International Relations department had a higher mean participation score ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.73$), while students from Communication Studies had a lower mean ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.95$). This finding suggests that academic discipline is associated with differences in political participation. Students in the International Relations program tend to demonstrate higher levels of political engagement compared to those in Communication Studies. This statistically significant result reinforces the conclusion that academic discipline has a considerable effect on political behavior. The more politically intensive and policy-focused curriculum in the International Relations department appears to provide students with not only greater knowledge and awareness but also greater motivation and capacity for political action.

Table 2 Frequency of voting in local and/or state elections and student associations

	IR		**CS**		**Total**	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
I have voted in my local and/or state elections:						
None	70	85.4	89	91.8	159	88.8
Once	4	4.9	5	5.2	9	5.0
2 times	4	4.9	1	1.0	5	2.8
3 times	1	1.2	2	2.1	3	1.7
More than 3 times	3	3.7	0	0.0	3	1.7
Total	**82**	**100.0**	**97**	**100.0**	**179**	**100.0**
I have voted in student associations:						
None	9	11.0	16	16.5	25	14.0
Once	0	0.0	12	12.4	12	6.7
2 times	28	34.1	27	27.8	55	30.7
3 times	25	30.5	22	22.7	47	26.3
More than 3 times	16	19.5	16	16.5	32	17.9
Unspecified frequency	4	4.9	4	4.1	8	4.5
Total	**82**	**100.0**	**97**	**100.0**	**179**	**100.0**

Table 3 Overall political participation (Self-rated)

	Level of participation (%)					Overall (%)	*M*	*SD*	N
	Very low	**Low**	**Average**	**High**	**Very high**				
How would you rate your overall political participation?									
IR	5.0	12.5	66.3	15.0	1.3	59.0	2.95	0.73	80
CS	23.4	27.7	41.5	6.4	1.1	46.8	2.34	0.95	94
Total	**14.9**	**20.7**	**52.9**	**10.3**	**1.1**	**52.4**	**2.62**	**0.90**	**174**

**Very low = 1-20%; Low = 21-40%; Average = 41-60%; High = 61-80%; Very high = 81-100%.*

Table 4 T-test analysis on self-rated overall political participation

	M	***SD***	***t***	***Sig. (2-tailed)***
I would rate my overall political participation as				
IR	2.95	0.73	4.70	0.000
CS	2.34	0.95		

Table 5 Correlation between political participation and its determinants (political consciousness and political socialization)

	M	***SD***	**Correlation with political participation (r value)**
Political Consciousness	3.29	0.53	0.46**
Political Socialisation	3.32	0.94	0.44**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6 Correlation between political participation, political socialization, and political consciousness

	M	***SD***	**Correlation with political consciousness**
Political Socialisation	3.32	0.94	0.34**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

This study explored the relationship between political consciousness, political socialization, and political participation among final-year undergraduate students at Universitas Darussalam Gontor, with a specific focus on those from the Department of International Relations and the Department of Communication Studies. The findings confirm that both political consciousness and political socialization significantly influence political participation. Moreover, the results reveal clear differences in political engagement patterns between students from these two academic disciplines. This section discusses the implications of these findings in light of existing literature and offers theoretical and practical insights. The results indicate that political consciousness has a significant positive relationship with students' political participation. This finding supports previous studies suggesting that individuals with higher levels of political awareness are more likely to engage in political activities. Similarly, political socialization was found to significantly influence political participation, highlighting the importance of family, educational institutions, and peer groups in shaping political engagement among young people. These findings are consistent with earlier research on youth civic

engagement, which emphasizes that social environments play a crucial role in fostering participatory political behavior.

Political consciousness and its impact on participation

The observed positive correlation between political consciousness and political participation ($r = 0.46$, $p < .001$) is consistent with a substantial body of prior research. As noted by Carpini and Keeter (1996), individuals with greater political knowledge and self-efficacy are more inclined to perceive participation as meaningful and worthwhile. In this study, students who demonstrated a stronger understanding of political institutions and a belief in their ability to influence outcomes were more actively involved in voting, organizational activities, and advocacy. Students from the Department of International Relations exhibited significantly higher levels of political consciousness, which may be attributed to their curriculum's emphasis on political philosophy, international law, governance, and policy analysis. This supports Galston's (2001) argument that education in civics and politics cultivates democratic competencies and a strong sense of civic duty. In contrast, the curriculum in the Department of Communication Studies tends to focus more on media, public relations, and communication theory, offering fewer structured opportunities to engage directly with political content. These differences raise important considerations regarding the influence of academic content on political identity formation. While personal interest and motivation are important, the structured and frequent exposure to political theory and current events within certain academic programs appears to act as a critical catalyst in fostering political consciousness.

Political socialization as a pathway to participation

The strong correlation between political socialization and political participation ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$) reaffirms foundational theories in political sociology, particularly those advanced by Almond and Verba (1963). Political socialization through media, family, peer groups, and educational environments plays a central role in shaping individuals' political orientations and behaviors. In this study, digital platforms such as the internet and social media emerged as the dominant sources of political information among students, echoing global patterns in youth political behavior where decentralized and issue-based activism thrives online (Loader et al., 2014; Bennett, 2008). However, the widespread use of digital media also presents risks, including misinformation, hate speech, ideological echo chambers, and superficial engagement. Notably, students from the Department of International Relations reported more frequent engagement with traditional and academic sources such as newspapers, books, seminars, and lectures than their counterparts in the Department of Communication Studies. This distinction underscores the importance of not just quantity, but also the quality, of political socialization. Exposure to critical and diverse content fosters deeper understanding, whereas passive or homogenous consumption can lead to apathy or extremism. Moreover, interpersonal socialization, particularly discussions with peers and lecturers, was more prevalent among students in the Department of International Relations. This aligns with Kahne and Sporte's (2008) assertion that dialogue-based civic learning promotes more robust political development. Comparatively limited exposure to such discussions in the Department of Communication Studies suggests a missed opportunity for integrating civic education across disciplines.

Disciplinary differences in participation

One of the most striking findings of this study is the consistent difference in political participation levels between the two academic disciplines. Students from the Department of International Relations were significantly more active in nearly all forms of participation, voting, organizational involvement, demonstrations, and online activism than their peers from the Department of Communication Studies. This supports earlier research by Colby et al. (2007) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), which found that social science majors, particularly those studying political systems and global affairs, are more inclined toward civic engagement. The academic environment in the Department of International Relations likely reinforces political identity and efficacy through experiential learning, simulations such as Model United Nations, and critical analysis of real-world political issues. These experiences not only enhance students' political

knowledge but also build the confidence and motivation necessary for active citizenship. Conversely, students from the Department of Communication Studies do engage politically, particularly in digital spaces, and their participation tends to be less frequent and less diversified, potentially due to fewer academic incentives or opportunities to explore civic themes in depth. This observation does not suggest that students from the Department of Communication Studies are politically apathetic. Many do participate in campus elections and online discourse. However, their political behavior appears to be more situational and informal, which may reflect curricular structures that prioritize media production or communication theory over direct civic engagement. These findings highlight the need for universities to embed civic education more holistically across all academic programs, including those outside the political and legal sciences.

Implications for universities and policymakers

The findings from this study offer several important implications for educational institutions and policymakers, particularly concerning how political awareness and engagement can be nurtured across disciplines. First, Interdisciplinary Civic Education is needed. Universities should consider integrating civic education modules that transcend disciplinary boundaries. These modules could emphasize political literacy, critical thinking, ethical leadership, and social responsibility, and should be accessible to students across all majors. This is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where an engaged youth population is essential for sustaining democratic progress and reform. Second, Co-Curricular Opportunities are necessary. In addition to formal academic content, co-curricular activities such as debate forums, leadership camps, and student elections may provide valuable informal learning experiences. Encouraging students from disciplines with less political content, such as communication, business, or science, to participate in these activities can help bridge engagement gaps. Third, Digital Citizenship Education is required. Given the prominence of digital platforms in students' political lives, universities must prioritize digital literacy. Workshops and courses focused on media ethics, misinformation, online discourse/anti-hate speech, and digital literacy can prepare students to be informed and responsible digital citizens. Finally, Faculty Involvement is the key to success. Lecturers and academic advisors play a crucial role in shaping students' political development. Opportunities for guided discussion in class, during advising, or in seminars may help students connect theoretical concepts to real-world social and political issues, thereby reinforcing civic identity and agency.

Contextualizing in Indonesia's political landscape

Indonesia's political environment offers both opportunities and challenges for youth civic participation. As a young democracy with a substantial student population, the country's future relies heavily on the political engagement of university-educated citizens. However, persistent issues such as elite dominance, political patronage, and party fragmentation may contribute to political disillusionment among young people (Onyewuchi et al., 2024*)*. Nevertheless, as seen in youth-driven movements in recent years, young Indonesians have shown the capacity to influence political discourse through both offline and digital activism. Institutions such as Universitas Darussalam Gontor have a unique role in this process, combining academic, spiritual, and civic development. The study suggests that Islamic values such as *amanah* (trust), *maslahah* (public benefit), and *shura* (consultation) can be integrated into civic education in meaningful ways, contributing to a uniquely Indonesian-Islamic model of participatory citizenship. By fostering a generation of politically conscious, socially responsible, and ethically grounded students, religious universities may help shape a democratic culture that reflects both national and spiritual values.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between political consciousness, political socialization, and political participation among final-year undergraduate students at Universitas Darussalam Gontor. By focusing on students from distinct academic backgrounds, the research aimed to explore how individual awareness and exposure to political discourse shape civic engagement in a higher education context. The findings confirm that both political consciousness and political socialization are important contributors to students' political

participation. Students who possessed a clearer understanding of political structures demonstrated belief in their civic responsibility, and were regularly exposed to political content through media, peers, and academic discussion were more inclined to take part in various forms of political activity. These forms ranged from voting and organizational involvement to advocacy and online expression. The study also revealed that differences in academic orientation influenced the degree to which students internalized political values and participated in civic life. Such findings demonstrate that educational environments do not merely transmit knowledge but also play a pivotal role in shaping political identities and behavior. This study contributes to a broader understanding of political development among university students by emphasizing the interplay between structural exposure and individual engagement. Building upon these insights, future research should explore a more diverse range of academic disciplines in order to examine whether the trends observed in this study persist across other educational contexts. Including students from faculties such as law, Islamic studies, economics, or engineering could help uncover different patterns of political engagement shaped by varying curricular content and institutional missions. Additionally, longitudinal research would provide a deeper understanding of how students' political orientations evolve, rather than capturing a single moment in their academic journey. To further deepen the understanding of youth political behavior, future research could also integrate qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups. These would allow researchers to explore not just the frequency of participation, but also the motivations, experiences, and reflections behind students' political actions. Comparative studies involving different types of universities, such as secular versus religious or urban versus rural institutions, could also offer important insights into how institutional environments shape political identity and involvement. In an increasingly digital society, it is equally important to study the nature and impact of online political participation. While students are often active on digital platforms, it remains unclear to what extent this engagement leads to meaningful offline action. Examining the dynamics of digital activism, the reliability of online sources, and the influence of media literacy would be essential for understanding political participation in contemporary settings. In closing, this study affirms the important role of universities in nurturing democratic values and active citizenship. Higher education institutions should not limit civic engagement to certain disciplines but instead make it an integral part of the academic and social experience for all students. By fostering political awareness, encouraging informed discourse, and providing opportunities for civic participation, universities like Universitas Darussalam Gontor may play a transformative role in strengthening Indonesia's democratic culture. As future leaders and citizens, students must be empowered not only with knowledge but with the civic responsibility to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the broader society.

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Gemini in order to improve the readability and language of the manuscript such as grammatical error. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

CRediT author statement

Ali Musa Harahap: Writing- Original Draft, Methodology, Data Collection, Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Visualization, Writing- Reviewing. **Anwar Koma:** Supervision, Investigation, Validation, Writing- Reviewing and Editing, Conceptualization.

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