

Digital Era Generation-Z Political Participation (A Study of Prime Minister Election Legitimacy in Nepal via Discord from the Perspective of Fiqh Siyasah)

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Abstract: The intersection of digital technology and political legitimacy has created unprecedented phenomena in contemporary democratic transitions. This study analyzes the September 2025 Nepal crisis, where Generation-Z successfully orchestrated Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli's resignation and supported Sushila Karki's inauguration as Nepal's first female interim Prime Minister through Discord platform coordination. Using qualitative methodology with case study approach, this research explores how fiqh siyasah concepts provide legitimacy frameworks for digital political participation. Data were obtained from credible international media sources, classical-contemporary fiqh siyasah literature, and digital democracy studies. Results indicate that Nepal's leadership transition, triggered by anti-corruption protests and social media restrictions, demonstrates alignment with Islamic political principles including syura (consultation), ijma' (consensus), and maslaha (public interest). Discord as digital deliberative space reflects modern implementation of Islamic democratic values, though formal constitutional legitimacy remains essential. This research contributes to developing Islamic political legitimacy theory in the digital era and provides new perspectives on fiqh siyasah implementation in political transitions led by digital native generations. The study reveals that 7,713 Discord participants voted, with Karki receiving 50% support (3,833 votes), marking history as the first world leader elected through a gaming platform..

Keywords: Digital Democracy, Fiqh Siyasah, Nepal, Political Legitimacy.

Introduction

The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed political participation paradigms, particularly among Generation-Z (born 1997-2012) who are digital natives raised within technological ecosystems. Nepal became the first country globally to experience the unique phenomenon of political leadership selection through Discord, a communication platform originally designed for gaming communities. This unprecedented event in September 2025 raised fundamental questions about political legitimacy from Islamic jurisprudence perspectives, specifically fiqh siyasah as the discipline examining relationships between Islam and politics.(Burstein, 2013)

The September 2025 protests in Nepal and the use of Discord to elect an interim prime minister

demonstrate how, in the absence of institutional channels, digital platforms can assume functions of political legitimacy. Over 7,700 votes were cast in the informal but widely followed selection, with Karki securing more than 62% of the support. This phenomenon emerged after massive youth-led protests successfully toppled the government and selected Sushila Karki as interim Prime Minister through Discord voting, marking her as both Nepal's first female Prime Minister and the first world leader elected via a gaming platform.(Aryal, 2025)

Fiqh siyasah encompasses fundamental principles including syura (consultation), bai'ah (oath of allegiance), ijma' (consensus), and maslaha (public interest) that remain relevant for analyzing contemporary political leadership legitimacy. Research on implementing Islamic principles in

digital democracy remains limited, yet the Nepal phenomenon provides valuable empirical evidence for scholarly examination. The intersection between traditional Islamic political theory and modern digital participation mechanisms creates an important analytical space that this study seeks to explore. (Katrino & Afrida, 2021)

Various methods are used to foster political participation among young people, ensuring an active role in democratic life. Social media is a potential medium for distributing messages to Generation Z, effectively reaching and engaging young people. The role of digital platforms in facilitating youth political engagement has become increasingly significant, with implications for how we understand democratic legitimacy in contemporary contexts. (Hngokchai, 2025)

This research aims to analyze the legitimacy of Nepal's Prime Minister selection via Discord from fiqh siyasah perspectives and evaluate the compatibility of digital political participation mechanisms with Islamic principles. The theoretical contribution expected is developing frameworks for Islamic political legitimacy in the digital age, particularly addressing how classical Islamic political concepts can be applied to contemporary digital political phenomena.

Manuscript of original research should be written in no more than 8,000 words (including tables and picture), or proportional with articles in this publication number. Review articles will be accommodated, while, short communication should be written in about 2,000 words, except for pre-study.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

This research employs qualitative methodology with instrumental case study approach. (Hadi, 2021) The Nepal Prime Minister selection via Discord case serves as an instrument for understanding digital political legitimacy phenomena from fiqh siyasah perspectives. Case study methodology allows for in-depth examination of contemporary phenomena within real-world contexts, particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena where

boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Data Collection

Primary data were obtained from international media documentation, news reports, and social media analyses related to Nepal's Gen-Z movement. Sources include Real Instituto Elcano, Foreign Policy, Al Jazeera, The Logical Indian, and other credible international media outlets reporting on the September 2025 events. Secondary data comprise classical fiqh siyasah literature from scholars including Al-Mawardi and Ibn Taymiyyah, contemporary Islamic political theory, and digital democracy studies.

In September 2025 Nepal experienced a wave of protests that shook the country and led to the resignation of Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli, the burning of the National Assembly and the imposition of a military curfew in the capital. More than 70 people died in clashes with the police during a social uprising. Documentation of these events provides crucial empirical foundation for this analysis.

Data Analysis

Analysis utilizes qualitative content analysis with hermeneutic approach for understanding fiqh siyasah texts and interpreting them within contemporary phenomena contexts. The hermeneutic approach enables bridging classical Islamic textual traditions with modern digital political realities. Triangulation was conducted through comparing news sources, academic literature, and official documentation to ensure data validity and reliability.

The analytical framework integrates three levels: (1) descriptive analysis of Nepal's political transition chronology, (2) interpretive analysis applying fiqh siyasah principles to digital phenomena, and (3) critical evaluation of legitimacy implications for Islamic political theory development.

Results and Discussion

The Nepal Discord Election Phenomenon

Political Crisis Background

Nepal's political crisis commenced when Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli resigned amid massive anti-corruption protests led by Generation-Z activists.(Gautam dkk., 2025) The September 2025 protests in Nepal and the use of Discord to elect an interim prime minister show how, in the absence of institutional channels, digital platforms can assume functions of political legitimacy. The government's controversial decision to ban 26 social media platforms on September 4, 2025, ostensibly for registration compliance issues, catalyzed widespread youth mobilization against perceived censorship and corruption.(Timalsina & Pokharel, t.t.)

After hours of debate that included difficult questions for protest leaders and attempts at reaching out to potential prime minister candidates in real time, the participants chose former Supreme Court Chief Justice Sushila Karki to lead Nepal.(Giri, 2024) The selection process represented unprecedented digital democratic participation, with thousands of young Nepalis engaging in substantive political deliberation through online platforms.

Discord as Democratic Platform

When traditional social media platforms were blocked, youth activists migrated to Discord, creating servers like "Youth Against Corruption" organized by Sudan Gurung of civil society organization Hami Nepal. With the military working with representatives from the virtual convention to select an interim leader, the Discord channel swiftly exploded in size, gaining more than 140,000 members. The platform facilitated structured discussions with moderators, clear objectives, and transparent voting mechanisms.(Acharya, 2024)

Karki ultimately secured the most votes in a poll of more than 7,700 participants, reaching 50 percent before her name was forwarded to the president and army chief. Five candidates were shortlisted including social activist Harka Sampang, innovation center director Mahabir Pun,

independent politician Sagar Dhakal, advocate Rastra Bimochan Timalsina, and former Chief Justice Sushila Karki. The deliberative process involved town hall-style debates where candidates answered questions from participants in real-time.

Sushila Karki's Credentials

Karki, who emerged as the winner of the poll, had campaigned for an independent judiciary during her brief tenure as chief justice from 2016 to 2017. In 2012, she and another Supreme Court judge jailed a serving minister for corruption. Her reputation for integrity and commitment to anti-corruption made her compelling choice for interim leadership. Shushila Karki, aged 73, emerged as the overwhelming choice in this historic online poll conducted by Gen Z-led protest groups pushing for political reform.(Bliss, 2025)

On September 12, 2025, President Ram Chandra Paudel officially administered the oath, marking historic milestone for both digital democracy and gender equality as Karki became Nepal's first female Prime Minister. Her first official act was dissolving Parliament and scheduling elections for March 5, 2026, signaling commitment to restoring democratic processes.

Fiqh Siyasah Analysis

Syura (Consultation) Principle

The Islamic concept of syura emphasizes consultation importance in political decision-making. The Qur'anic principle "wa amruhum syura baynahum" (their affairs are determined through consultation among them) establishes consultation as fundamental Islamic governance mechanism. Classical scholars including Al-Mawardi in "Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah" elaborate syura as essential process for leadership selection and policy formulation.(Al-Raysuni, 2011)

Nepal's Discord voting process reflects modern syura implementation where thousands participated in collective decision-making discussions. The platform facilitated open, transparent, and inclusive discussion spaces enabling broad public participation. This aligns with syura spirit prioritizing community involvement in determining leadership. The town hall format where candidates debated before

logged-on participants embodies consultative principles central to Islamic political thought.

Contemporary scholars including Tariq Ramadan argue that syura principles remain adaptable to modern democratic mechanisms. Digital platforms can serve as contemporary manifestations of traditional consultation processes, extending participation beyond geographical and temporal limitations. The Discord deliberation demonstrates how technology can enhance rather than replace core Islamic political values.

Ijma' (Consensus) Principle

Ijma' as collective Muslim community consensus possesses similar characteristics to the consensus formed in Nepal's Discord voting. More than 7,700 participants voted, with Karki reaching 50 percent support, demonstrating substantial majority agreement. In fiqh siyasah theory, ijma' holds binding legal force when meeting specific requirements including broad participation and informed deliberation. (Hidayati & Hidayatullah, 2021)

While Discord voting does not constitute ijma' in technical shariah sense, it embodies similar essence: collective agreement based on deliberation. The process involved extensive discussion, candidate evaluation, and informed voting among participants representing diverse perspectives. Ibn Taymiyyah in "As-Siyasah as-Syar'iyah" emphasizes that collective decisions reflecting community interests hold legitimacy even without perfect unanimity. (Othman, 2024)

The challenge lies in determining whether digital consensus mechanisms meet classical ijma' criteria. Traditional ijma' concepts developed within specific historical contexts involving qualified scholars and community representatives. Extending these concepts to mass digital participation requires careful theoretical development balancing classical principles with contemporary realities. (Julia & Omar, 2017)

Maslaha (Public Interest) Principle

Maslaha in fiqh siyasah prioritizes public interest over individual or group interests. Sushila Karki's selection was motivated by anti-corruption reform interests and public welfare advancement. The maslaha concept provides fiqh siyasah flexibility for

adapting mechanisms yielding greater societal benefit. Classical scholar Al-Mawardi emphasizes that political arrangements must serve community welfare and justice promotion. (Alexander dkk., 2025)

Digital platforms can effectively realize maslaha through broader, more transparent political participation. The Discord process enabled inclusive participation transcending traditional barriers of geography, economic status, and social connections. This democratization of political participation aligns with Islamic egalitarian principles and maslaha objectives of maximizing public welfare. (Ayaz dkk., 2024)

Contemporary Islamic political theorist Muhammad Asad argues that maslaha principle allows for institutional innovation serving justice and community welfare. The Nepal case demonstrates how digital technology can be harnessed for maslaha advancement through enhanced transparency, accountability, and participatory governance mechanisms. (Amir & Rahman, 2024)

Digital Political Legitimacy in Islam Legitimacy Sources in Fiqh Siyasah

Legitimacy in fiqh siyasah derives not solely from formal procedures but also from substantive justice and public welfare. Contemporary scholars like John Esposito argue that Islamic political thought possesses inherent flexibility accommodating diverse institutional forms provided they serve justice and community welfare. Digital technology can strengthen Islamic political principles implementation through enhanced transparency, participation, and accountability. (Dzimar & Ghazlan, 2025)

The Nepal case reveals tension between moral-religious legitimacy and legal-formal legitimacy. Discord voting provided strong moral legitimacy through widespread popular support and substantive deliberation. (Tucker, 2024) However, formal constitutional recognition remained necessary for complete legitimacy. This gap between popular and constitutional legitimacy requires bridging through legal reform.

Constitutional Integration Requirements

The challenge for Shah, Karki and other emerging leaders is to convert their popularity into parliamentary capacity. They need a party that can field enough candidates to achieve a legislative majority. Full legitimacy requires integrating moral-religious legitimacy with legal-formal legitimacy through constitutional frameworks. Islamic political theory emphasizes that rulers must possess both popular support (expressed through *bai'ah*) and institutional recognition. (Tripathi, 2021)

The Nepal experience demonstrates that digital democratic innovations, while potentially aligned with Islamic principles, require formal legal frameworks for sustainable implementation. Constitutional amendments accommodating digital participation mechanisms could bridge legitimacy gaps while maintaining both Islamic values and modern governance standards. (Joshi, t.t.)

Implications for Contemporary Islamic Political Theory

Redefining Islamic Public Sphere

The Nepal phenomenon opens new discussions about implementing Islamic values in digital democracy. Digital platforms create new public spheres enabling *syura* implementation without geographical and temporal limitations. This resonates with Jürgen Habermas's public sphere concept adapted to Islamic contexts, where deliberative spaces facilitate collective political will formation.

The digital culture of the youth has been playing a decisive role in the promotion of networking democracy, civic engagement and political participation in online spheres. For Muslim-majority societies, digital spaces offer opportunities for revitalizing traditional consultative practices through modern technological means while maintaining core Islamic values. (Saad dkk., 2023)

Democratizing Participation

Digital technology enables more inclusive political participation consistent with Islamic egalitarian spirit. Traditional Islamic political thought emphasizes that all community members possess rights to participate in collective affairs. Digital platforms can operationalize this principle by

reducing participation barriers related to geography, economic status, and social capital. (Fuadi, 2024)

Research indicates that social media greatly promotes political involvement and participation for Gen Z, though the fact that information is not always verified causes difficulties for democracy and informed citizens. This highlights both opportunities and challenges in digital political participation requiring careful consideration in Islamic political theory development.

Fiqh Siyasah Flexibility

The Nepal case demonstrates *fiqh siyasah* flexibility in accommodating technological developments within politics. Classical Islamic political thought developed within specific historical contexts but contained principles flexible enough for contemporary application. Scholars like Abdulaziz Sachedina argue that Islamic political theory possesses adaptive capacity enabling engagement with modern democratic institutions while maintaining core values. (Prayogi & Nasrullah, 2025)

This flexibility manifests in recognizing that specific institutional forms matter less than substantive justice, consultation, and public welfare principles. Digital platforms represent new institutional forms potentially serving timeless Islamic political values if properly structured and regulated.

Challenges and Limitations

Digital Divide Concerns

While authorities probably wouldn't allow a fraction of the populace to choose the next prime minister under normal circumstances, Karki is a popular choice, and with 99.6 percent of the population having access to the internet via mobile broadband, this is less of a niche, upper-class move than it might first appear. However, digital divide remains significant concern for democratic legitimacy in many contexts. Not all citizens possess equal access to digital platforms or technological literacy required for meaningful participation.

From *fiqh siyasah* perspective, ensuring inclusive participation constitutes essential legitimacy requirement. Digital mechanisms must

be complemented by alternative participation channels ensuring all community members can engage in political processes. This aligns with Islamic justice principles requiring equitable treatment and opportunity access for all citizens. (Kurniawati dkk., 2025)

Authenticity and Verification Issues

Khare, like many, has doubts about the reliability of the polls conducted on Discord, pointing out that their anonymous nature might have allowed individuals to vote multiple times. Ensuring vote authenticity and preventing manipulation pose technical challenges requiring robust verification mechanisms. Islamic political principles emphasize transparency and integrity in leadership selection processes.

Future digital democratic implementations require developing secure authentication systems protecting vote integrity while maintaining privacy. Blockchain technology and other innovations might address these concerns, enabling trustworthy digital political participation aligned with Islamic governance principles. (Peelam dkk., 2025)

Information Quality and Misinformation

Digital platforms facilitate rapid information dissemination but also enable misinformation spread. Only 25% always check their information from other places, indicating a great chance they might be tricked by incorrect news. This poses risks for informed deliberation essential to both democratic legitimacy and Islamic consultative principles.

Islamic political thought emphasizes informed decision-making based on accurate knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad's saying "seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim" underscores information quality importance. Digital political participation must incorporate mechanisms ensuring information accuracy and promoting critical literacy among participants. (Peelam dkk., 2025)

alignment with fiqh siyasah principles, particularly *syura*, *ijma'*, and *maslaha*. Digital platforms can serve as effective instruments for implementing Islamic values in contemporary political participation when properly structured. The case reveals that 7,713 Discord participants engaged in deliberative processes reflecting consultative principles central to Islamic political thought, with Sushila Karki receiving 50% support marking unprecedented digital democratic achievement.

However, complete legitimacy requires integrating moral-religious legitimacy with legal-formal legitimacy through constitutional reform. Nepal's case provides new digital democracy models adaptable by Muslim-majority countries considering both shariah and constitutional aspects. The phenomenon demonstrates that classical Islamic political principles possess flexibility for application in digital age contexts while maintaining core values of justice, consultation, and public welfare.

Theoretical contributions include developing Islamic political legitimacy frameworks for the digital era integrating classical fiqh siyasah principles with contemporary technological realities. The research reveals that Generation-Z's digital activism can align with Islamic democratic values when grounded in substantive deliberation, broad participation, and commitment to public welfare. Further research is needed exploring practical implementations of shariah-based digital democracy models addressing challenges including digital divide, authenticity verification, and information quality assurance.

The Nepal experience suggests that future Islamic political theory development must engage seriously with digital transformation implications for governance and participation. This engagement should preserve timeless Islamic values while creatively adapting institutional forms to contemporary technological contexts, ensuring that political systems serve justice, consultation, and community welfare in twenty-first century contexts.

Conclusions

This research concludes that Nepal's Prime Minister selection via Discord demonstrates substantial

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