

Indonesian Democracy and Islamic Religious Activities in the Age of "New Normal"

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Abstract

This paper discusses relations of democracy enforcement and religious freedom in the pandemic era of Covid-19 in Indonesia, especially Muslim. In the "new normal" climate, some believe that perhaps one of the best ways to stop the spread is to impose lockdowns. The centralized style of government typically adopts this policy. However, Indonesia does not implement this policy with various considerations. However, on the other hand, when democratic countries such as Indonesia want to impose restrictions on religious activities, this regulation seems a religious freedom limitation. In several cases at the beginning of Covid-19 that hit Indonesia in March, it was often connected to clusters of religious events involving many people. While the policy of restricting worship often drew protests from religious adherents. Against the backdrops of religious politics as the impact of the 2019 democratic party in the Presidential Election, this paper looks at how this phenomenon has become tremendously politicized and has a common thread between those who refused, ignored, and accepted, and even got involved to support government policy. Herein lies the government's importance in managing its citizens' awareness to fight Covid-19 without intending to restrict religious freedom and stopping the politicization of religion.

Keywords:

Religious issues; Government policy; Social conflict; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Since Covid-19 spread worldwide and became a global pandemic after hitting China in late December 2019, today, all states have faced the same invisible enemy, and some states forced to implement a policy that it never imagined applying in some democratic state "lockdown." This decision is the most effective way to stop the chain of Covid-19 transmission as China did in Wuhan for several months, where the virus began. Although there is the

second or third wave of the spread, it also emerged after China implemented the policy, but the figure was never higher than in the first case. Advanced democratic states have also pursued this policy, like Western European countries, but the spread has not yet stopped. Covid-19 is not only becoming a threat to the global health system, but many countries will also face a recession. Still, there is always hope for solving this situation.

Meanwhile, Indonesia is almost the same as the world's circumstance, but the challenges are different. As in other countries, the policies pursued by the Indonesian government prompt resistance from the opposition, ranging from the

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option of large-scale restrictions to regional quarantine as an alternative allowing the economy relatively stable. Despite, some part of society has still not responded to these efforts, so that the increase in Covid-19 cases continues (Harirah MS, 2020; Putri, 2020). Various policies are taken by the government, written and unwritten, such as laws (Undang-Undang (UU)), Government Regulations instead of law (Peraturan Pemerintah Pengganti Undang-Undang (PERPU)), Government Regulations (Peraturan Pemerintah (PP)), regional regulations to Decision Letters (Surat Keputusan (SK)) (Tuwu, 2020). While unwritten policies, such as appeals from government, religious leaders, community leaders, traditional leaders, contain bans related to preventing the transmission and treatment of Covid-19. For example, Muhammadiyah posted a Statement Letter from the Central leadership of Muhammadiyah (Pimpinan Pusat (PP) Muhammadiyah) number 02 / MLM / 1.0 / H / 2020 regarding the Covid-19 virus outbreak and Letter number 03 / 1.0 / B / 2020 concerning the holding of Friday prayers (shalat Jumat) and Fardhu prayers (shalat Berjamaah) during Covid-19 (Syafriada & Hartati, 2020). Muhammadiyah made the decision based on the Islamic values contained in the Quran and Hadiths.

This policy impacts limiting mass gatherings, which is common when religious followers in Indonesia conduct worship and other religious activities. Still, of course, it becomes a risk when the global pandemic is not over. On the one hand, the government's policy aims

to protect its citizens and prevent the increase of the covid-19 victim in society.

The dread that democratic states will execute similar restrictions as socialist nations to diminish the number of people who infected the virus drew the consideration of many parties, not only government officials but also the public, because it is the freedom of expression against the limitations policy. Although some academic works show that the democratic states have healthier populations, a longer life expectancy, and better adequate health facilities, especially in the rich country (Karabulut et al., 2021), none of the nations is resistant to the assault of the Covid-19.

An article written by (Abbas et al., 2020) said religious activities have contributed to the spread of Covid-19 in some regions. Because it is difficult to establish social distancing in worship activities or religious celebrations, for instance, during the pilgrimage, the annual celebration of Ashura in Iraq may involve 2 to 3 million Muslims from and outside Iran.

A very worrying situation arose in India after the delta variant was discovered in the country in October 2020 and then spread rapidly in April 2021 in India. The World Health Organization has even said that the Delta variant of Covid-19 may have become the most infectious and virulent Delta plus variant. After a few months, the Delta Variance Delta hit India, Indonesia is a new epicenter. The daily number of people infected with Covid-19 has overtaken India at 56,757 on July 15, 2021. Several parties say that the increase in the number of infected people is due to the mudik tradition (return home

activities) of the celebration of Eid al-Fitr on May 13 and 14.

Since the Covid-19 problem is still relatively new in Indonesia, there is not much relevant literature to use as a reference for this research even in the world. However, these articles can be an initial comparison and description for the author to understand this phenomenon, especially how the relationship between democracy, freedom of religious activity, and the spread of covid-19 in Indonesia.

In the two decades since reform 1998, according to Larry Diamond (Warburton & Aspinall, 2019), Indonesia was the most stable democracy in Asia, free from undemocratic threats or significant challenges from its people. He also described that democracy in Indonesia tends to be liberal. Nevertheless, since 2014, there has been a shift in democracy in Indonesia, becoming more populist and increasing some strict regulations that bind public freedom. At the same time, there is also a religious conservatism from the middle class to the political elite. Based on the graph of the survey results of Democratic values versus non-democratic values (Warburton, 2020), most respondents want religious authorities to intervene in the regulation or interpretation of the law. However, Indonesia is not an Islamic state, but Indonesia is only three places lower than Malaysia at 69%. In another study, she found that during this period, since 2014, Indonesia has been politically polarized. This polarization can be seen in the party system, divided into two primary ideologies: Islamic parties seeking a more prominent role from Muslim

sympathizers. In contrast, pluralist nationalist parties draw attention from the multi-religious view of Indonesia.

Thomas Pepinsky (2013) also describes the Indonesian democracy in his writings on "Pluralism and Political Conflict in Indonesia." He analyzed the difference between the formal rules and procedures that constitute democracy and the democratic exercise of power. He sees power distribution; pluralism has changed its essence as a political conception of pressure groups representing their respective interests. In other words, critical pluralism challenges the oligarchic practices maintained in the Suharto era. Still, Indonesian democracy is moving towards an interest group in the name of nationalism and religion.

Meanwhile, in democracy, it is uneasy about implementing rigorous policies to stem the spread of Covid-19 (Bol et al., 2021). It is closely linked to individual freedom and often being a part of human rights violations. In-state advanced democracies like in the West, protests are occurring because some people regard wearing masks and other restrictive policies as a form of human rights violation. In the Indonesian case, some people consider the limitation policy to do a religious activity as still controversial until the second year of a pandemic of Covid-19

In the article titled "Reconstructing Nature in the Study of Science and Religion Case Studies during the Impact of the Covid-19 Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB)" (Siregar et al., 2020), preventing the disease transmission of Covid-19, humans need the synergy among science and religions. If this requires physical and social

distancing in terms of science, then in terms of Islam, humans should always try to pray, come closer to Allah SWT's dhikr, and believe that God always helps humans out from disaster. However, he did not study or observe how it is applied in the field, considering that each region in Indonesia has different conditions and situations.

While Faiq Tobroni (2020) research, "Restrictions on Religious Activities in Handling Covid-19," also examines religious restrictions in handling Covid-19 in Indonesia related to human rights legal instruments. He said that, in general, government policies were legitimate regarding restrictions on religious activities in the management of Covid-19. Indonesia has a solid foundation under human rights legal instruments. Tobroni clearly explained the regulations as the legal basis for the implementation of the PSBB, in particular the restrictions on religious activities: Law 6/2018, Presidential Regulation 11/2020, PP 21/2020, Minister of Health Regulation 9 / 2020, circular letter of the minister of religion number 1 of 2020, the circular letter of the minister of religion number 6 of 2020 and the decree of the minister of health concerning the approval of several provinces or regencies/cities to experiment with the implementation of the PSBB (Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar, The Large-Scale Sosial Restriction). He added that although the Constitution and Law 39/1999 do not consider public health and safety to limit (religious) rights, Indonesia has ratified the KIHSP (Kovenan Internasional Hak Sipil dan Politik, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) as Law

12/2005. With this reference, he concluded that in the management of Covid-19, the government's restrictions were valid as they aimed to protect public health and safety.

Further, Aula and Khadijah (2020) said the ulama had an essential role in shaping social action. They have charisma and religious knowledge, so religious leaders also act as centers of religious authority in society. When Covid-19 hit Indonesia, the ulama played an important role and influence with the public to educate and disseminate government policies, especially concerning restrictions on religious activities, both conventional and traditional, productive and counterproductive. According to him, there are two categorizations to assess the role of these ulemas, apathetic and accommodating. Those who are apathetic think that people's fear of Covid-19 is excessive; a man should fear only Allah. This categorization of ulemas allows Muslims who idolize him will ignore health protocols that tend to be scientific. Meanwhile, the accommodative side has responded to the policy by educating the public, which comprises three categories: motivators, pandemic informants (communicators), and role models (idol figures).

The publications above do not specifically address the relationship between the rejection of government policy to overcome the spread of Covid-19 with the identity politic rising in some political events since 2014, mainly to Muslims. Still, those research will help analyze why some part of a religious figure ignores it, even not believe in Covid-19. Then, the author tries to see

this as an inseparable part of the narrative built on social networks by various parties with political motivations and interests because there are religious figures who contradict Joko Widodo's rules. Meanwhile, some opposition politicians, former officials, and academicians also support them in social media and vice versa.

In this article, the author analyzes how religious activities contribute and get linked to the spread of Covid-19. On the one hand, government policies linked to religious activities during the Covid-19 pandemic are often political issues. This research focuses on how the narration about Covid-19 becomes a tool for politics, especially in regulating Muslim's religious activities.

RESEARCH METHOD

The data obtained from this study comes from literature and interviews, primarily primary and secondary data from previous research, various references to journals, books, web pages, and online media, which put the opinion from the religious leaders, the public figure, politicians, and the government about policy on religious activities since the Covid-19 pandemic hit Indonesia in March 2020. This explanative research data is based on discourse analysis related to these issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Challenges of Democracy During The Pandemic in Indonesia

Before further discussion in this section, the author needs to redefine the term democracy. In general, democracy refers to a government system administered from, for, and by the

people and is limited by applicable law. This term refers to the political method and mechanism to vote for political leaders. However, to be more specific, the author borrows the definition by Joseph A. Schmitter, Sidney Hook, Phillippe C. Schmitter, and Terry Lynn Karl, who refer more to a procedural definition. In essence, these democratic thinkers emphasize institutional planning, majority political decisions, the government's role or the state, and people's representation, which is power-oriented and realist (Przeworski et al., 1999; Ubaidillah et al., 2000: 162). Schmitter popularize this foundation of procedural democracy. He argued that democracy was "the method used to elect representatives of the people in competitive elections for their purposes."

Second, the definition of democracy by David Beetham and C. Kevin Boyle, which includes a broader definition of democracy, is as follows:

"...democracy belongs to collective decision-making than to individual decisions taken by people on behalf of themselves alone. It embodies the idea that all its members should take such decisions, affecting the association as a whole, and that each member should have an equal right to take part in such decisions. Democracy, in other words, entails the twin principles of popular over collective decision-making, and equality of rights in the exercise of that control..." (Beetham & Boyle, 2009: 13).

In their book, *Introducing Democracy: 80 Questions and Answers*, Beetham and Boyle, discuss the principles of democracy and why democratic values are so important. According to them, democracy embeds values such as equality of citizenship,

respects pluralism and compromise (deliberation), guarantees freedom and human rights; democracy is also committed to social reform. Beetham and Boyle see democracy as a mere political system and involves moral values. This concept is the ideal democracy; although it is not easy to realize, it is possible.

Meanwhile, as a political system, democracy has been accepted by many developing countries such as Indonesia. Democracy manages the social-political relationship, both involving interests between individuals in society; relations within society; the public and the state; and between countries in the world (Nugroho, 2015).

According to Heru Nugroho, democracy nowadays is related to the concept of liberalization, which interprets as a free and responsible society that has rules; therefore, the strong groups do not oppress the weak. He said this could embody law enforcement, which regulates all fields, such as economic, political, and cultural. In Indonesia, the term liberal, especially in religion, often refers to Darwinism; thereby, liberalism is synonymous with irresponsible freedom and ignores moral values. Nevertheless, referring to Nugroho and the concept of democracy mentioned above, if each individual has institutionalized and internalized the logic of democracy, liberalism will bring social welfare. In this case, people will respect 'free of enterprise,' 'free of a fight' (competition), 'free of speech,' and open to choose political affiliations. Otherwise, if all social sectors are unaware of this, it will turn from democratic politics to Darwinism.

Based on Nugroho's explanation, Darwinism interprets the concept of liberalism as unlimited freedom, and power is the only justification for actors' existence. In this situation, people can speak at will, and political forces can act whatever, so social equilibrium does not arise other than chaos. This concept should not raise in Indonesia, but more adopt and learned the notion of liberalism in terms of politeness and *kemaslahatan* that must be adopted and studied.

Nugroho was written the article in 2012 when social media had not developed rapidly as nowadays. One indication of democracy is the implementation of freedom of speech, and social media platforms are the most accessible places for expression by all levels of society. Unfortunately, not all these are positive expressions. According to Indonesian values, it even seems far from ethics, politeness, and inappropriate; in this case, it is political politeness. Darwinism's political practice has appeared in this decade and mainly in the 2019 Presidential Election last year because the two presidential candidates' two supporters attacked each other on social media. The mainstream media are addressing not neutral and seem like a political extension of certain elite groups. Even though Joko Widodo won the election and his competitor Prabowo Subianto entered the cabinet.

However, during the 2019 Presidential Election, political expression still impacted people's lives, especially Muslims. The 2019 Presidential Election was very thick with the nuances of religious politicization, where each candidate indirectly used Islamic

symbols in attracting voters, who indeed, the majority are Muslims.

After the boisterous democratic party, the representative council inaugurated the Presidential Election winner on October 20, 2019, and soon they have to face the problem of bringing back the unity of Indonesian people because of the differences in presidential candidate choices and dealing with an unnormal circumstance. A couple of months after they took over the government, Indonesia, like almost all countries globally, has turned upside down to restrain the spread of coronavirus disease. Although many experts from abroad have predicted that Covid-19 may have entered Indonesia since January 2020, the government, through the Minister of Health Terawan Agus Putranto, has denied it and said that the virus had no infected until February citizen in Indonesia. Minister Terawan also made several controversial statements in response to speculation about the coronavirus in Indonesia. For example, on February 17, 2020, he said at the Presidential Staff Office, *"We are a country devoted to the One and only, whatever the religion as long as we adhere to Pancasila, prayer is a must. So the name is ora et labora (praying and trying)"* (Nur Hakim et al., 2020).

Terawan may aim to calm the public to avoid panic in facing corona. Though the information's interpretation shows that Indonesia is free from coronavirus, soon after the announcement, Covid-19 infect two Indonesian citizens. The number of infected people with Covid-19 increases over time until December 22, 2020, President Joko Widodo reshuffled the

cabinet and replaced Minister of Health Terawan with Budi Guna Sadikin, who has no medical background.

Based on official government data on the covid19.go.id, June 19, 2021, active cases of Covid-19 in Indonesia had reached 542,236 people, while cases accumulated were 2,877,476, the total number of deceased cases was 73,582, while the number of cases was 2,877,476, and daily cases was 44,721. As of mid-July, cases of Covid-19 in Indonesia increased very sharply. Besides the emergence of delta variants in the various regions, particularly in Java and Bali, many parties argue that mudik tradition (celebrate eid Fitri with family in hometown) is the leading cause of this high transmission. Even among experts, there are differences of opinion regarding the causes of the drastic transmission increasing of Covid-19 in Indonesia. This figure is the highest in Southeast Asia, and Indonesia's daily case is in the top rank worldwide.

In April 2020, the government took an unpopular decision in dealing with the coronavirus disease by imposing a PSBB (Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar (Large-Scale Social Restrictions), which refers to Law No.6 of 2018 concerning Health Quarantine. The government took this policy rather than the lockdown that several countries have implemented after seeing China's success stemming from the spread of the virus in Wuhan. Some figure also call for a lockdown, especially those who live in big cities like Jakarta. Otherwise, the government refused the lockdown option due to various considerations, especially concerning the state's economic condition, even though a

global recession might be inevitable in the future.

The government states that the implementation of PSBB is not enforced uniformly throughout Indonesia but will look at each region's conditions before the Minister of Health determines the status of PSBB in that area by applicable regulations and laws. As is known, Government Regulation Number 21 of 2020 explains that the PSBB covers closing to schools and workplaces, restrictions on religious activities, and restrictions on activities in public places or facilities.

The president explained that various considerations would be the basis to determine PSBB status in a region. The following is an official quote from President Joko Widodo in the official portal online of the Ministry of State Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia (*Keterangan Pers Presiden Republik Indonesia Mengenai Isu Penerapan Pelonggaran Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar (PSBB)*, 15 Mei 2020, Di Istana Merdeka, Provinsi DKI Jakarta, 2020):

"We know that the decision to implement PSBB or not, whether it is related to closing schools and offices, restrictions on religious activities, restrictions on activities in public (places), must consider several things. Including the number of cases, the number of deaths in every district, city, or province, and of course, based on epidemiological considerations, the significance of the threat, resource support, economic, social, cultural, and security considerations. This policy is critical. Once again, we do not want to decide that it is chaotic, fast, but imprecise. Let us decide this by calculation, with clarity, and with detailed and in-depth calculations."

The president's official statement above indicates that the government will limit everything related to mass gatherings, including religious activities. In a democratic country such as Indonesia, the government guarantees the activities of religions and beliefs.

After implementing the PSBB to prevent the spread of Covid-19 transmission, now more than a year later, from July 3 to 20, 2021 and be extended until July 25 2021, the government applied the PPKM (Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat, Enforcement of Community Activity Restrictions) when the delta variant caused a spike of cases in Indonesia. Indeed, this policy is very influential on the economic sector in Indonesia, just as it was during the implementation of the PSBB policy before (Arianto, 2021; Dilla et al., 2020; Hanoatubun, 2020; Susilawati et al., 2020). Even though the policy is still debatable to overcome the situation because the transmission of delta variant is still very high in society, at least the PPKM can be an alternative solution controlled as the spreads of Covid-19 in Indonesia.

As with the implementation of the PSBB, during PPKM, the government also issued a regulation to close all places of worship and ban religious activities since it caused the crowd. However, in society, this policy had been debatable among religious leaders and religious followers. Although the clusters of worship and religious events become the source of massive COVID-19 transmission also occur in religions other than Islam, like Catholic, Christian, and Buddha in some regions.

Islam and Religious Freedom Activity: Before and After COVID-19

Indonesia has different characteristics from other Muslim countries. Although the number of Muslims shows that Muslims constitute the majority among other countries, Indonesia has not declared an Islamic state. However, as stipulated in Pancasila's first principle, as a religious state, the government guarantees freedom of religion in law and constitution. The problem that often arises in this regard is when a particular religion or sect is considered heretical and is not part of the official religion recognized by the state. However, apart from this, the government protects official religious activities, traditional religions, and recognized beliefs. In the Islamic context, a mosque functions as a place of worship and gathering with the community. Even religious holidays, Islamic and non-Islamic, have become national holidays. In this sense, Indonesia is considered a moderate Islamic country and has a culture of high tolerance.

In some studies, sometimes it shows contradictions. For example, Jeremy Menchick wrote about communal Islam in Indonesia in *Tolerance without Liberalism* (Menchik, 2017:124-158). In his research, he found that traditional Islamic groups such as Muhammadiyah and NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) are very democratic. They do not support "liberal democracy" but "community democracy and religion," including the emphasis on tolerance based on group rights, pluralism, the law, the separation of religious and social affairs, and the

primacy of faith over other values, he calls "communal tolerance." However, in general, Muhammadiyah and NU play an essential role as neutral and moderate Islamic organizations in reducing intolerance, conflict, and religious violence, especially those in the name of Islam. Although the two also have other factions, such as the liberals and also the more radical ones, they are generally known as moderate Islamic organizations in Indonesia (Ida, 2004).

The state constitution Chapter XI, Article 29 of the Indonesian Constitution of 1945 describe a detailed and brief description of religious freedom (Cohen, 2015):

1. The state-based on a belief in the One God.
2. The state guarantees all people the freedom to embrace a religion and worship following their religion and beliefs.

Although it does not explicitly mention the official religion in the article, it conveys a monotheistic undertone. However, the image of religious freedom in Indonesia does not recognize non-standard religions; In this case, the state only officially recognizes the six religions and various beliefs protected by law.

The Indonesian government guarantees freedom to carry out religious activities in worship places, but in the early days of COVID, the information about government policies regarding a ban on religious activities due to the risk of the massive spread of COVID was still hazy. On the one hand, the government denies that it has banned religious activities such as congregational prayer. Still, the first

other information shows that the government only limits these activities, and the ban only targets specific areas with a high risk of spread. This policy means prohibiting religious activities, especially in mosques, is not implemented simultaneously and uniformly, depending on each region's conditions. The pandemic impacts the role worldwide; most religious leaders and communities of faith have to cancel all religious activities, services, and gatherings which are then replaced with remote/virtually (Kumar & Indira, 2020). Because they should be the role model of communities to reinforce the government's policy, such as keep the social distancing that uneasy about applying in religious activities.

On March 16, 2020, MUI published Fatwa No. 14/Tahun 2020 of worship amid the Covid-19 outbreak. The content of the fatwa is to conduct congregational worship related to the five daily prayers, Sunnah prayers, and Jumat (Friday) prayers in mosques or other public places, including other religious activities such as recitation majelis taklim, and all, adapted to the conditions and situation of a particular area. If the condition of Covid-19 spreads in an area is hazardous and can be life-threatening, the Muslim community must not carry out worship activities that involve large numbers of people (Wijaya, 2020). But, the fatwa was still a matter of debate in the society (Darmawan et al., 2020), even among the ulama themselves (Rusyana, 2020; Zulkarnain et al., 2020). According to Zulkarnain et al. (2020), the MUI fatwa has reached the criteria of al-Dlarar, "Islam allows an action for the sake of

the salvation of life due to an emergency." So leaving the shalat Jumat (Friday prayer) and replacing it with the shalat Dzuhur (Midday prayer) is not a prohibited act and is instead recommended.

Furthermore, according to the study of the Fiqh and Usul Fiqh approaches, this policy can be justified in Islamic law, but it only applies during a pandemic and must prioritize safety first (Shubhan, 2020). Islam also teaches the terms of lockdown and social distancing to prevent disease transmission; some ulemas call this disease Tho'un, an epidemic that makes people sick, at risk of contracting it, and endanger people's life (Supriatna, 2020).

In its press conference, back to MUI Fatwa, they stated that regarding actions or policies related to the prohibition or closure of places of worship, especially mosques, this authority corresponds to the government. The Chairman of the MUI Fatwa Commission, Hasanuddin Abdul Fattah, said:

"I think the fatwa should serve as a guide for the government to take action and even determine which areas are already in the emergency phase, the level of the spread... The government authorized has determined the areas where the spread of the coronary virus has become uncontrollable or under control. So that people can see in which area of this mosque, it is at risk or not ..." (Katriana, 2020).

During the pandemic, controversy over government policies has sparked reactions, primarily when policies related to worship during the Ramadhan

(month of fasting), which runs from late April to late May 2020. In Ramadhan, people usually worship more intensely than in the other months, which involve many people, such as shalat Tharawih, breaking fasting, tadarus Al-Quran in the mosque, recitation, and all. Nevertheless, during the pandemic, of course, this cannot be realized with a large crowd. Meanwhile, the ban policy has drawn reactions and criticism from the public, including the MUI itself, expressed by MUI Secretary-General Anwar Abbas. He questioned the government's attitude that still prohibits people from gathering in mosques, but why the government is not strict on crowds at airports. He said in a written statement, *"But the question is, why does the government only strictly prohibit people from gathering in mosques. However, they are not firm or strict when dealing with people who gather in markets, shopping malls, airports, offices, factories, and elsewhere"* (Azzahra, 2020).

Abbas said the government tends to be ambivalent in dealing with this problem because it seems firm with places of worship but not firm with others. He also acknowledged that the government had upheld the MUI fatwa that urged people to worship at home. Nevertheless, he was surprised because there were no officials forbidding people to gather in public spaces, and according to him, this was ironic.

Simultaneously, the government issued statements claiming that it prohibited worship in mosques is not correct. The government clarified the news that was already circulating in the community. President Joko Widodo stated that the government never banned

worship during the Covid-19 pandemic, but the government did regulate it. He asked his staff to socialize it with the public. President Joko Widodo said:

"In implementing the health protocols and regulations of the PSBB, I ask you to give an understanding to people and socialized it that the government does not prohibit worship" (Indonesia & CNN, 2020).

This statement was transmitted when Joko Widodo opened the final meeting to prepare Eid on May 19, 2020.

The opposition also conveyed the government policy related to banning worship in the pandemic situation. So even though the government has clarified this, the public has already received the information. Meanwhile, the opposition or parties that position themselves as opponents, such as Gatot Nurmayanto (formerly Commander General of Indonesian Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI)) (2015-2017), have expressed their criticism of the "prohibition" policy of worship in mosques or public spaces.

In this regard, Mahfud MD, Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, explained why the government allowed shopping malls and airports to remain open during the Covid-19 pandemic. Mahfud also responded to the disappointment of some MUI members who questioned the policy. He said,

"...for example, why are mosques closed, shopping centers opened? I do not think that what was against the law because 11 certain sectors still open" (Republika Online, 2020).

Mahfud also explained on *Republika* why the shopping centers were allowed to continue operating because they provided services included in the 11 service sectors; therefore, it is not part of the regulation implementation of PSBB to control the transmission of Covid-19. Also, he said,

"following the provisions relating to the PSBB and health quarantine, the restrictions on work activities during the PSBB include the exemption for service providers to meet the needs of food and fuel oil, health, communications, and logistics distribution. "Airport for the transport of people with tasks and certain conditions can operate. If any, those who violate them, they will go to make up with the law."

Restricting religious activities is also often linked to human rights issues, which are also controversial in Indonesia and several countries. Underlies this criticism, religious activities are accessible to satisfy basic needs; attending religious events is also less risky than visiting shopping malls or other public spaces. Religious restrictions constitute a violation of the right to religious practice (Saraswati, 2020).

Therefore, according to Saraswati (2020), under international law or national law that applies in many countries, the state may limit religious activities if conditions are not possible due to certain conditions and emergencies, such as public health reasons. One of the instruments on this matter is the international list of human rights that contains the International Covenant provisions on Civil and

Political Rights (ICCPR), which more than 170 countries have ratified. Article 18, paragraph 3, states that the freedom to practice religion or belief may only be limited by provisions based on the law necessary to protect *"public safety, public order, public health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others."*

However, apart from the social and legal aspects, more moderate religious organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) supported government policies for the common good (*kemaslahatan*). Nevertheless, in this case, the government should also collaborate with ulama to socialize the public about the coronavirus's dangers because not all of them have the same information about it, as Muhsin Hariyanto (2020) expressed an academic and former member of the Majelis Tarjih and Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah in the news portal of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. He said that the ulama's involvement in the community's socialization and education is significant because they take their respective attitudes and sometimes will only follow the ulama's advice who become their reference or idol.

In the *Republika* daily, Haedar Nashir, the chairman of this organization, said that Muhammadiyah was always present in humanitarian missions, including when the world, especially Indonesia, was experiencing a pandemic. Muhammadiyah expresses that dealing with Covid-19 requires the active participation of all parties because it is the real contribution as equal as worshiping and is part of humanitarian jihad (Falahuddin, 2020).

While, the chairman of Satuan Tugas NU Peduli Covid-19, Muhammad Makky Zamzani, said that the NU had discussed Covid-19 related issues at Bathsul Masail question rejecting a body, the stigma of those who suffer from Covid-19 to religious activities during Ramadan (Firmansyah, 2020). He said that NU's ulama had issued instructions to comply with government regulations and conduct outreach activities to the public, especially the Nahdliyin. Some Ulemas of NU have also contributed to preventing Covid-19 by educating the public through their social media, such as Gus Mus, Gus Baha, and Gus Miftah (Hakim & Aziz, 2020).

Both Muhammadiyah and the NU agreed to support government policies regarding the rules of activities in mosques for the community, but the emphasis was on providing education, not sanctions. However, the support of the two largest Islamic mass organizations is not without criticism. For example, when the government proposed a "new normal" in May 2020, Haedar Nashir, chairman of PP Muhammadiyah (2015-2025), said that the government should first carry out epidemiological tests and do the preparations as well as possible" (Wahidin, 2020).

Despite the numerous criticisms from various parties to the "new normal" policy, in the end, the government still applies it with all calculations and risks, considering that the number of infected and dead patients is the highest in Southeast Asia. However, later, the government changed the diction to "adaptasi kebiasaan baru" (a new adaptation of habits) closer to the culture

and facilitated understanding all social levels. This decision is because the facts show that some people interpret the "new normal" as no different from the situation before Covid-19 hit Indonesia. Even this "adaptation of new habits" protocol cannot be applied uniformly throughout Indonesia, depending on each region's risk level. In this case, not all mosques can open, and even if the Muslim ummah can carry out her prayers, the government enacts strict health protocols. However, this is also not entirely applicable because there are also people who ignore it. For example, people who do not live in the same areas also visit the mosque, so it is doubtful that the mosque is free from the virus.

Meanwhile, others insist that in a house of worship, God will protect him. If we have entered this realm, it seems that controlling Covid-19 is not an easy thing, but that does not mean that it is impossible. The role of ulama and religious figures is essential to educate and socialize the community, especially Muslims.

How Does This Relate to Politics?

Since the government officially announced that Covid-19 had entered Indonesia on March 3, 2020, until September 2020, the government has issued various policies to address the pandemic in the fields of social, economy, health, fiscal and fiscal incentives, exports and imports, and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, law, and PSBB. In detail, the PSBB policy includes several things: "1) School and work holidays; 2) Restriction of religious activities; 3) Limitation of activities in public places/facilities; 4) Limitation of

sociocultural activities; 5) Limitation of modes of transport, and 6) Restrictions on other activities related to defense and security aspects (Kemlu.go.id, 2020)

PSBB's policy is a difficult choice for the government, between protecting its citizens from Covid-19 or keeping to balance the economic condition. Since the government announced PSBB, this policy has never been free of criticism and pros-cons from academicians, community leaders, religious leaders, and the opposition. When the government announced the concept of "new normal" as an alternative to the sustainability of life in society and the state during a pandemic, the government changed it to "adaptation of new habits." At the beginning of Covid-19, the policy was no less controversial was Perppu No.1/2020 regarding state finances and financial system stability to handle the Coronavirus disease pandemic and the context of coping threats endanger the national economy and the stability of the financial system (Maharani, 2020). The DPR later promulgated Perppu 1/2020 on May 13, 2020. The Perppu was heavily criticized by various parties, even suing the Constitutional Court (MK).

Indeed, there is no single country with a policy that effectively reduces the number of transmissions of Covid-19. There is no single policy to overcome this that can satisfy all parties. Even though in the name of human rights or the freedom of civil rights, based on applicable international law, the state has the right to issue urgent policies and regulations. In a democracy, the problem is the impression that the freedom of speech and expression or criticism of the

government disturbs the state's security and then deals with the law. There are two perspectives to understand this context: first, the government has looked for the most feasible policies to deal with Covid-19, but those who oppose the government think it is considered undemocratic and detrimental to society. Second, as Nugroho said earlier, even democracy must prioritize ethics and political courtesy. The criticism that if it goes outside these norms is considered offensive to the country's dignity and is inappropriate. Third, what is related to the government's diction is considered inappropriate and then becomes for public consumption, as is the "banning religious activities" issue that has gone viral. Although the government did not want to say that it only "regulates the religious activities." This situation also happens when the government revealed the word "new normal," which the government rectified later to become "adaptation of new habits."

These narratives make information out of sync between the government, the opposition, and the people. Public perceptions may differ in Covid-19 policies, especially on issues of religious freedom. Which is a fundamental right of all human beings; another hand, the prejudice to the government under Joko Widodo, who supported mainly by the nationalist party since the phenomenon of the case of Basuki Tjahaya Purnama's blasphemy issue in 2017, has been constructed and maintained continuously as the issue of political Islam until Presidential Election in 2019. When Joko Widodo assumed the presidency after winning the election, the anti-Jokowi movement was still

circulating. Some Islamic organizations like FPI (Front Pembela Islam, Islamic Defender Front) before banned on December 30, 2020, some figure of ex-HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia), and all still develop the narratives that the government is not on Islam's side that does not support him in the 2019 Presidential election.

According to Wiranto, the former Minister of Coordinating for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (2016-2019) in Kompas said that the ex-HTI member still spread anti-Pancasila and NKRI (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia, The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia) (Ristianito & Galih, 2019). The government under Joko Widodo banned those organizations because they threaten national security and influence the intolerance in society. Unfortunately, the government can only disband the registered organization in a state agency or institution. But, some organizations, such as those related to local anti-mainstream pro-Islamic State (IS) groups {Formatting Citation}, which operate quietly, whose existence and actions are almost undetectable are uneasy for the government to ban them since their illegal.

These groups have the potential to take advantage and opportunities of the pandemic situation with the government is in a weak position facing a domestic health crisis. While on the one hand, these groups play an important role in social media by boosting public opinion, including racial issues, such as anti-Chinese, sentiment towards police officials who arrest anyone that spreads hoaxes, hatred, and disinformation during the pandemic, and also the

continued efforts to overthrow the legitimate government of Joko Widodo.

The increase in sentiment also came from the political elite, public figures, academics who since the beginning was contrary against the government. Some of them are works on social media, raising racial issues, and even discrediting government efforts and supporting hoaxes. For example, when a doctor is not a virologist, dr . Louis Owien declares that COVID-19 does not exist and became viral in mid-July 2021, she is gaining support from these groups. The narrative remains the same, that the government has mistreated (zalim) its people, its main objective is to overthrow the legitimate government. Meanwhile, these groups have never been directly involved in dealing with COVID-19 and can only criticize without a solution. It is unfortunate that too many deceptive public opinions have been constructed by opposition groups, whether affiliated with academics, politicians, former government officials, social media activists, or pro-IS religious groups. Many of them are active on social media.

Like the algorithms in social networks, this how the information is constructed, just looking to the one side automatically.

In a pandemic situation, these political narratives are still unfolding. For example, when the BEM (Student Executive Council) of Universitas Indonesia statement "Joko Widodo is the king of lip service" gone viral and was followed by several other BEMs, it became an opportunity for former FPI members who said they supported BEM across Indonesia to bringing down the

president (WE & Vicky, 2021). Even though the FPI has disbanded, its cells are still active while their leader, Habib Rizieq Shihab, is in prison. The government's relations with the group accused of intolerance have heated up after the shooting of 6 ex-FPI by the police officers at KM 50 of the Jakarta-Cikampek toll highway on December 7, 2020 (Pebrianto & Budiman, 2021). Even FPI proclaims to bringing down Joko Widodo through a revolution on social media. Although FPI has clarified the term revolution to turn it into a moral revolution, the news has already gone viral in the media.

Furthermore, the progressive faction in Muhammadiyah, Masyarakat Hukum Tata Negara (Mahutama), had the opportunity to discuss the possibility of president impeachment constitutionally because they considered that the president had not addressed the pandemic in Indonesia. Even their meeting is "Questioning the freedom of speech and Constitutional President Impeachment in The Era of the Covid-19 (Wahidin, 2020). At the discussion, Din Syamsudin said: "I see that our state life has recently built a constitutional dictatorship that resides in the constitution, as a product of Perppu (Perppu No. 1/2020) that becomes law and a series of other policies" (Wahidin, 2020). He is former Chairman of PP Muhammadiyah, who was also known for being critical and vocal about government policies that were considered unfavorable to the Muslim community.

In a democracy characterized by openness, the State guarantees freedom of speech and expression and even

criticism. All of them are part of human rights, and the law protects them. However, when those human rights violations interfere with other human rights, the State also has the right to take strict action. According to whose perception, depending on which reference or source of information, then the truth is not absolute because each one has its interpretation of the existing discourse; in this case, it is government policy.

CONCLUSION

Political communication in the digital era unconsciously forms a polarization of thought because it is considered a reference to what they previously believed. People tend to convince only things that are believed to be accurate and then put aside those who disagree with their thinking. Social networks and their platforms have led the public to choose the diction or style of language that can contradict each other. The essence of the information is then blurred and interpreted differently by the public; in this case, information is directed explicitly to the Muslim community's audience. Thus, diction is crucial in political communication because it plays a role in constructing the actors' speech acts.

During the pandemic, many issues that had gone viral on social media seemed to suggest that the government was not on the Muslim community's side. However, more moderate Islamic groups such as Muhammadiyah and NU (especially the moderate faction) remained on both sides, supporting the government and criticizing their policy if it would not

bring *masalahat*. While, in the case of middle democracies, making cultural factors as guidelines of oriental ethics whose historical traces are distant from the birth of the country itself, as in Indonesia, which was historically is adhere to monarchy system, then the rules of courtesy refer to the ruler's standard, the ethics of speech, even on social media.

On the contrary, other parties interpret this as dictatorship, so there is a distinction in public thought; the direction is polarization. When a nation chooses democracy, there will always be two opposite poles, the coalition or alliance, and the opposition. Each has different thoughts on policies, although the goal remains the same for the country's good. In a pandemic situation, which seemed very surprising, no country is prepared to deal with this. Political decisions are not easy to implement, especially in a multicultural country with a complex and unequal education gap. Therefore, community leaders' movements, especially ulama, are needed to socialize and educate the public. The religious approach is considered more straightforward for people in Indonesia to accept than the other approach, in particular for Muslims.

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