



INTEGRATING THE RELIGIOUS AND SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This article analyzes the Indonesian people's scientific and religious understanding during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a crucial topic to discuss because some religious people in Indonesia resist the government policies restricting worship. Based on the analysis, the results obtained include an excessive understanding of religion that will make people increasingly distrustful of reality, so they avoid the scientific explanation. The article also explains that religion is the primary factor in building community perspectives in Indonesia. Nevertheless, science and religion have contributed and should be integrated to solve the problems during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *Science, Religion, Technology, the Covid-19 Pandemic.*

Introduction

Government policies toward the pandemic are perceived inappropriately by the majority Muslim population of Indonesia. This negative response arises because religion and science, in the perspective of the government and society

on the pandemic, have not yet found an alternative solution. The phenomenon of the clash of religion and science during the pandemic in Indonesia can also be seen in portraits of Hajj, Homecoming on Eid Day, worship at mosques, and halal-certified vaccines.



The cancellation of the Hajj departure announced by the Indonesian Minister of Religion Yaquut Cholil Qoumas because he had not received a quota from the Arab government during the pandemic made many people speculate. Hoaxes were circulated on social media about whether the government has used the funds or the Indonesian government has debts to the Saudi Arabian government. Another perception also emerged from the community. They felt disappointed because they had waited a long time for the departure of the hajj.¹

The ban on going home for Eid al-Fitr has also led to speculation that the government is not siding with Muslims to gather with their families on this sacred day. This negative speculation made people violate the homecoming rules, which increased the number of cases of the spread of Covid-19.²

The restriction of worshiping in the mosque has also become a lively discussion among the Muslim community. It has sparked speculation about the

notion that the government prohibits Muslims from worshiping in places of worship. However, they continue to pray in the mosque, and the mosque administrators (*ta'mir*) allow Muslims to worship in the congregation. This reason triggers the emergence of new clusters of the spread of Covid-19 in places of worship.

The issue of halal certification of vaccines to limit the spread of Covid-19 was also widely discussed. Many pro and con responses were shown on social media, arguing that the vaccine was too rushed, the absence of halal certification, and public doubts regarding the quality of the vaccine used.³ Some people doubt the halalness of vaccines because there is no halal certification label, even though there have been many scientific explanations about vaccines. Others believe that, even though it is haram and or unclean, vaccines can still be used under certain conditions, such as in particular conditions (*al-dlarurat* or *al-hajat*), or there is no halal and holy vaccine material, or there is already reliable medical information that there is no halal vaccine yet.⁴

¹ Mahel Armansyah et al., "Persepsi Publik Terhadap Pembatalan Haji Selama Dua Tahun Berturut-Turut," *SENKIM: Seminar Nasional Karya Ilmiah Multidisiplin* 1, no. 1 (2021): 272–275, <https://journal.unilak.ac.id/index.php/senkim/article/view/7916>.

² Pudjo Utomo, "Covid-19 Versus Mudik Telaah tentang Efektivitas Kebijakan Pelarangan Mudik Lebaran pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19," *QISTIE* 14, no. 1 (2021): 111–125, <https://www.publikasiilmiah.unwahas.ac.id/index.php/QISTIE/article/view/4496>.

³ Fajar Fathur Rachman & Setia Pramana, "Analisis Sentimen Pro dan Kontra Masyarakat Indonesia tentang Vaksin Covid-19 pada Media Sosial Twitter," *Health Information Management Journal* 8, no. 2 (2020): 2655–9129.

⁴ M. Asrorun Niam Sholeh & Muhammad Ishar Helmi, "The Covid-19 Vaccination: Realization on Halal Vaccines for Benefits," *Samarah*

Much literature has explained the handling of Covid-19 concerning religious provisions and laws. Alimardani explained that there was religious misinformation during the pandemic in the Middle East and Africa, such as fake hadiths and viral lectures conducted by religious leaders on social media, causing public fear and confusion.⁵

Abdullah,⁶ in his research, also explains how the science of religion loses its relevance to current life when the science remains in a monodisciplinary approach.⁷ While Quadri also reveals how Covid-19 spread due to the large gathering of local and traditional communities in religious activities. Quadri elucidates how Covid-19 can spread when religious activities and gatherings across countries.⁸

This article uses the previous literature as a reference for analyzing reli-

5, no. 1 (2021): 174–190.

⁵ Mahsa Alimardani & Mona Elswah, “Online Temptations: Covid-19 and Religious Misinformation in the MENA Region,” *Social Media and Society* 6, no. 3 (2020): 4–7.

⁶ M.A. Abdullah, “Mendialogkan Nalar Agama dan Sains Modern di tengah Pandemi Covid-19,” *Maarif* 15, no. 1 (2020): 11–39.

⁷ Saber Yezli & Anas Khan, “COVID-19 Pandemic: It is Time to Temporarily Close Places of Worship and to Suspend Religious Gatherings,” *Journal of Travel Medicine* 28, no. 2 (2021): 1–2.

⁸ S.A. Quadri, “Covid-19 and Religious Congregations: Implications for Spread of Novel Pathogens,” *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* 96 (2020): 219–221.

gious and scientific phenomena during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. In addition, this article also complements previous research on science and religion on phenomena that occur in Indonesia. In short, this article tries to offer a new perspective for people who tend to overreact in their perception of religion by reviewing cases that intersect with science and differing perceptions of religious communities from government policies.

The discussion results suggest that science and religion must be consistently in line in dealing with socio-religious phenomena during the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher notes that this article is not the first to acknowledge that science and religion must be in accordance in solving a societal problem. Moreover, this article provides a new “picture” of the phenomenon in Indonesia, where religious understanding is essential in solving a problem for most Muslims.

This research focuses more on how science and religion can explain phenomena during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, which has a Muslim majority population. For this reason, researchers used three stages: planning, reviewing, and reporting.⁹ At the planning stage,

⁹ Wenda Li et al., “Motivations, Barriers and Risks of Smart Home Adoption: From Systematic Literature Review to Conceptual Framework,” *Energy Research and Social Science* 80, no. (July 2021). DOI: 10.1016/j.erss.

the researcher tried to review articles that discussed the focus of the research and compared them with cases in several countries.

Moreover, the researcher can get an overview of the research focus cases. At the review stage, the researcher reviews several relevant references related to the research focus. Finally, the researcher reports the result discussions.

Religious Issues in Indonesia during the Covid-19 Pandemic

It must be emphasized that Covid-19 is a collective problem that agonized many people and matters in many fields; in fact, many people have died, not only in Indonesia but worldwide. Therefore, the government is concerned about overcoming the increasingly high spread of Covid-19. However, the government's policy was not responded to well by the public. The number of hoaxes circulating and misunderstanding these policies adds to the complexity of efforts to solve the Covid-19 problems.

The public's misperception of the government policies is based on religious understanding among community groups. The religious groups resistant to Covid-19 have created a chaotic situation, reinforced by the worrying spread of information on social media.¹⁰ One

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¹⁰ Alimardani & Elswah, "Online Temptations: Covid-19 and Religious Misinformation

of them is the issue of the government's appeal to worship in their respective homes to prevent the spread of new clusters of Covid-19. One of them is the issue of the government's appeal to worship in their respective homes to prevent the spread of new clusters of Covid-19.

However, this appeal has triggered conservative anti-science groups to think that the policy is banning Muslim worship. They consider that religion does not provide a thought process for science and that the reflective integration of religion and science becomes a priority.¹¹

They assume that the government's policy is against religious teachings. Therefore, they tend to disobey government policies. According to them, life has been determined by God, so they are obliged to perform worship in a way that they believe is true.¹² Furthermore, these disobediences increase the rate of the spread of Covid-19 cases.¹³ The resistance is also parallel with crowds of worshipers and the lack of health pro-

in the MENA Region."

¹¹ M. Maliki, "Covid-19, Agama, dan Sains." *Maarif Journal* 15, no. 1 (2020): 60–92.

¹² Sudirman, Edi Gunawan & Muh Rusdi Rasyid, "Covid-19 dan Ibadah: Resistensi Perubahan Hukum Islam dalam Mempertahankan Rutinitas Ibadah," *Aqlam: Journal of Islam and Plurality* 6, no. 1 (2021).

¹³ Rika Wulandari et al., "Pelaksanaan Protokol Kesehatan Covid-19 pada Tempat Ibadah di Kota Pontianak," *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat* 14, no. 1 (2021).

ocols in places of worship, thus accelerating the transmission of Covid-19 through direct contact or the air.¹⁴

Opposition to government policies and ulama's fatwas during the pandemic harmed the safety of themselves and others. Therefore, this prohibition in mosques and Eid al-Fitr homecoming during the pandemic is a policy that is relevant to the perspective of *'adhdharia*. It means avoiding actions that cause harm (*mafsadat*). Thus, the public's perception of following government policies refers to theological values based on the principle of *maqashid shari'ah*. In this perspective, the perception contrasts dissidents against government policies which are also guided by God's provisions.¹⁵

In addition, it can be said that misperceptions of socio-religious phenomena or enthusiastic worship can affect human safety and health. Some religious people ignore the restriction on going home for Eid al-Fitr because on the day they will celebrate with their fami-

lies; besides being a tradition, they also obeyed religious teachings. In addition, the lack of knowledge about health and the dangers of Covid-19 transmission made them ignore and disobey the government's policies. It can be seen from the number of cases of violations of going home ahead of Eid al-Fitr.¹⁶

Delaying the departure of Hajj is also an exciting issue to be discussed. Most people have been affected by hoax information circulating on social media. As a result, they ignore *tabbayun* and speculate brutally in response to government policies and other issues, such as the issue of misuse of hajj funds by the government. So far, however, these allegations have not been proven to be true. They negate that the Hajj Financial Management Agency (BPKH) is audited by the Financial Supervisory Agency (BPK), and the actual cost of Hajj is subsidized by the government every year. The accusations and lies spread on social media eventually became terrible slander, adding to the chaotic situation during Covid-19.

Of the various issues that have been described, significant patterns need to be considered. Extremist Muslims perceive that government regulations based on science are unacceptable because it is

¹⁴ World Health Organization (WHO), "Modes of Transmission of Virus Causing COVID-19: Implications for IPC Precaution Recommendations," *Geneva: World Health Organization* (2020), 1–10, <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/modes-of-transmission-of-virus-causing-covid-19-implications-for-ipc-precaution-recommendations>.

¹⁵ Imaduddin, "Studi Persepsi Masyarakat terhadap Fatwa MUI Nomor 14 Tahun 2020 tentang Penyelenggaraan Ibadah dalam Situasi Wabah Covid-19," *Jurnal Ilmiah Sosiologi Agama* 3, no. 2 (2001): 92-133.

¹⁶ Ratna Kartika Sari, "Identifikasi Penyebab Ketidakpatuhan Warga terhadap Penerapan Protokol Kesehatan 3M di Masa Pandemi Covid-19," *Jurnal AKRAB JUARA* 6, no. 1 (2021): 84–94.

based on their religious understanding that God will save believers. Therefore, they neglect health and safety, do not think well, and act wisely towards the situation.

For them, the anxiety of epidemiologists and scientists about the dangers of the spread of Covid-19 is considered entirely unnecessary. Even though the facts of science have also been explained, they constantly and straightly view religion conservatively as the primary way of determining life. For them, religion and science are distinguished; Science is considered only for worldly matters and religion for the hereafter. As adherents of extreme religious sects, they tend to think that vertical connection to God is the way to determine their safety during a pandemic. Finally, they reject epidemiologists' and scientists' science-based explanations of pandemics.

Indeed, science and religion differ in epistemological aspects. Science emphasizes rationality and empiricism, while religion is more on intuitive and spiritual aspects.¹⁷ These differences have the potential to negate each other or otherwise complement each other. According to physicist Ian G. Barbour, this problem has four relationships: conflict, independence, dialogue, inte-

gration, and in extreme cases, even hostility.¹⁸ Another form of the relationship between science and religion is dialogue and confirmation.¹⁹

Furthermore, Barbour explains four issues of religion and science; *first*, conflict occurs because science and religion have contradictory statements. Both of them acknowledge each other's existence. *Second*, science and religion are two independents that can coexist as long as they maintain distance from each other. *Third*, dialogue by emphasizing the relationship between science and religion with interactions about similarities that can be dialogued. *Fourth*, efforts to integrate science and religion.²⁰

In Indonesia, the existence of religion and science should have a dialogue to integrate. One way to do this is by connecting scientists' understanding with religious leaders. Scientists provide rational boundaries to facilitate rational resolution of the pandemic. At the same time, the religious leaders conveyed their fatwa to the public about the importance of integrating science and religion for the same purpose, to solve the problems during the pandemic.

Religious leaders are necessary to solve the problems during the pandemic

¹⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena: To the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001).

¹⁸ Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2020).

¹⁹ John F. Haught, *Perjumpaan Sains dan Agama: Dari Konflik ke Dialog*, trans. Fransiskus Borgias (Bandung: Mizan, 2004).

²⁰ Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*.

because, in Indonesia, they are the central figure in guiding morals and human life. People will undoubtedly consider religious leaders as representatives of God who can guide them to the path of truth and get closer to their God. Religious leaders will undoubtedly try to prevent a rampant epidemic by guiding in performing worship and praying to avoid the rate of the Covid-19 spread.

In this case, science is also very significant because it has changed how humans view themselves and their lives according to scientific understanding—likewise, the role of religion, which is not limited to empirical and rational knowledge. Religion can explain something that science cannot explain in life.

Conclusion

Some religious people in Indonesia resist government policies to restrict the spread of Covid-19 cases scientifically. They argue that the government policies in restriction of worship deviate from their religious understanding. For them, religion is a vertical way to reach God to be safe during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, their understanding of religion and science has clashed though science and religion should be synergized and integrated to solve problems during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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