

**MOBILISING MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS AMID
THE PANDEMIC IN INDONESIA:
A Case Study of NU, Muhammadiyah, and
GUSDURian Network**

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Abstract

Collective action to protect individuals from all forms of threatening causes, including the Covid-19 pandemic, is urgently needed. The Covid-19 pandemic urged religious practices and traditions to adapt to a situation where a series of health protocols must be observed. In order to prevent the spread, World Health Organization (WHO) issued strict health protocol rules. Some of these rules seem to be contradicted to traditions and religious practices. This article tries to investigate the ways religious societies react and respond to the health crisis caused by Covid-19. In this respect, this paper strives to answer the questions of how Indonesian Muslims respond to the pandemic of Covid-19, how religion contributes to the prevention of transmission and infection, and overcomes the social problems impacted by the pandemic, and to analyze obstacles faced by Indonesian Muslims to enhance collective awareness to the danger of the Covid-19 pandemic. This article argues that civil or non-governmental religious leaders and groups in general play an important role to prevent and overcome the pandemic and after because of their independency

¹ This paper is adapted from my online presentation at Conference on “Asian Religious Communities in Action: Moving towards an Inclusive, Healthy, Prosperous, Peaceful Asia” by the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) also known as *Religions for Peace (R/P) Asia*, October 18th-20th, 2021 in Tokyo.

to make decisions and awareness to the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic. The involvement of religious leaders who have authority at the grassroots level strengthens the legitimacy of the obligation to comply with health protocols and has succeeded in reducing the rate of transmission and death and increased healing. Religious authority owned by clergy at lower levels has also encouraged increased participation in social solidarity which is demanded instead to depart from diversity and not similarities, among others due to Covid-19.

[Tindakan kolektif untuk melindungi individu dari segala bentuk ancaman, termasuk pandemi Covid-19, sangat dibutuhkan. Pandemi Covid-19 mendesak praktik dan tradisi keagamaan untuk beradaptasi dengan situasi di mana serangkaian protokol kesehatan harus dipatuhi. Untuk mencegah penyebarannya, Organisasi Kesehatan Dunia (WHO) mengeluarkan aturan protokol kesehatan yang ketat. Beberapa aturan ini tampaknya bertentangan dengan tradisi dan praktik keagamaan. Artikel ini coba memotret cara-cara umat beragama dalam merespon dan menyikapi krisis kesehatan akibat Covid-19. Sehubungan dengan itu, artikel ini berangkat dari pertanyaan mendasar tentang bagaimana umat Islam Indonesia menyikapi pandemi Covid-19? Bagaimana agama berkontribusi dalam pencegahan penularan, infeksi, dan mengatasi konsekuensi sosial dari pandemi Covid-19? Apa saja kendala yang dihadapi umat Islam Indonesia dalam meningkatkan kewaspadaan dan mengantisipasi pasca pandemi Covid -19 di masa depan? Artikel ini berargumen bahwa para tokoh dan kelompok agama non-pemerintah pada umumnya berperan penting untuk mencegah dan mengatasi pandemi dan setelahnya karena independensi mereka dalam mengambil keputusan dan kesadaran terhadap parahnya pandemi Covid-19. Keterlibatan tokoh agama yang memiliki otoritas di akar rumput memperkuat legitimasi kewajiban mematuhi protokol kesehatan dan berhasil menurunkan angka penularan dan kematian serta meningkatkan kesembuhan. Otoritas keagamaan yang dimiliki oleh para ulama di tingkat bawah ini juga telah mendorong peningkatan partisipasi dalam solidaritas sosial yang dituntut justru berangkat dari keragaman dan bukan kesamaan, antara lain akibat Covid-19.]

Keywords: *Covid-19, Islam, Authority, Solidarity, Grassroots*

Introduction

It has never happened before that the behavior of the people demanded and the solidarity needed to protect humans and society from a type of disaster² are against traditions and religious appeals in daily practice other than Covid-19. To avoid contracting Covid-19 and recovering from being infected with Covid-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued health protocol rules³, including bans on social gatherings and impose social-distancing policy through the prohibition of shaking hands, the obligation to wear a mask, washing hands, and self-isolation. Of course, the WHO's health procedures are based on very valid scientific findings. In fact, almost all these regulations are contrary to the practice of traditions and daily religious appeals in most Muslim societies, as well as other religions throughout the world,⁴ especially Indonesia.

The fact that Covid-19 protocols are in contrast to Islamic tradition, it does necessarily implicate the efforts to prevent the spread and health threats. Because of the magnitude of contagion and death, challenges to build community, solidarity, and cooperation are clear. This also includes the need to overcome the domino effects of the pandemic such as hardship, job loss and poverty. In fact, in many cases, the earliest WHO's regulation ignited resistance for the perception in the wider community that Covid-19 was a form of conspiracy from opponents of Islam.⁵ In contrast, the resistance is not only based on religious arguments but also for social reasons and freedom and not only in developing countries but

² Chinmayee Mishra & Navaneeta Rath, "Social Solidarity during a Pandemic: Through and Beyond Durkheimian Lens," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, Vol. 2, 2020, pp. 1-7.

³ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/>, accessed on December 19, 2021.

⁴ Aldona Maria Piwko, "Islam and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Between Religious Practice and Health Protection," *Journal of Religion and Health*, Springer, 2021.

⁵ Benjamin Tyavkase Gudaku & Vincent Bulus, "Coronavirus: The Role of Religio-Cultural Conspiracy Theories Toward Containment Efforts in Nigeria," *SIJSCA*, Vol. 01, No. 02, 2021, pp. 26-31.

also in developed countries such as the United States and Europe.⁶

This article focused on three Islamic movements which affiliated to the mass organizations; Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) through the Covid-19 Task Force under NU Care⁷; Muhammadiyah through Muhammadiyah Covid-19 Command Center (MCCC)⁸; and the GUSDURian Network through GUSDURian Care.⁹

Based on the data above, this article seeks to answers some main questions; how did Indonesian Muslims respond to the pandemic that came with a shock, accelerated, rapid, and widespread transmission, large number of deaths, as well as unemployment and deep poverty when preventing and recovering was contrary to tradition and daily religious appeals? How religion contributes to the prevention of transmission, infection, and overcomes the social consequences that follow? And what are the obstacles faced by the clergy in maintaining awareness of anticipating the pandemic and maintaining public health as well as anticipating the solidarity movement of the post-pandemic situation in the future.

The Covid-19 Pandemic and Its Consequences: The Indonesian Context

Since Covid-19 has attacked the whole world and was later declared a global pandemic by the WHO on March 11, 2020, it cannot be isolated solely as a health problem but as a socio-economic disaster¹⁰ and humanitarian problem in general.¹¹ It concerns the culture and life

⁶ Drajat Tri Kartono (et.al), "Civil Disobedience for the Covid-19 Policy," *Easy Chair Preprint*, No 41, 2020, pp. 1-17.

⁷ <https://nucare.id/>

⁸ <https://Covid19.muhammadiyah.id/>

⁹ <https://gusdurianepduli/>

¹⁰ Chinmayee Mishra & Navaneeta Rath, "Social Solidarity..."; Lukmanul Hakim & Frans A. Djalong (eds.), *Pandemi, Konflik, Transformasi* (Yogyakarta: Gadjahmada University Press, 2021).

¹¹ Chinmayee Mishra & Navaneeta Rath, "Social Solidarity..."; Aldona Maria Piwko, "Islam and the Covid-19 Pandemic..."

of the wider community or at least demands changes in people's daily behavior and models of solidarity in the long term,¹² drastic changes in traditions and religious practices,¹³ and demands more intensive dialogue and sharing between religions.¹⁴ Islam, especially in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, is not quick to respond to the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the sudden arrival, the well-established traditions in society, and the limitations of health facilities. The character of Covid-19 demanded a completely new way of prevention.

That's why in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, data in almost all parts of the world showed that religion played a large role in the expansion of Covid-19 transmission due to gatherings and religious practices on a massive scale, both in places of worship and in other public places, such as buildings and the field that has become a tradition.¹⁵ The surprise of this new disease and its acceleration made the changing of habits, traditions, and lifestyle difficult. The government also initially tended not to want to lose economic opportunities so that it was inconsistent in setting restrictions and strict enforcement.¹⁶ Even in developed countries, for reasons of freedom, many people felt constrained when the Covid-19 protocol from the WHO was considered to limit their freedom. Even the president of the United States himself, Donald Trump, was acting in defiance and opposition to health protocols, which has led to soaring positive numbers and deaths from Covid-19 in the superpower country.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Mustaqim Pabbajah (et.al) "Deauthorization of the Religious Leader Role in Countering Covid-19: Perceptions and Responses of Muslim Societies on the Ulama's Policies in Indonesia," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, Vol. 9, 2020, pp. 262-273.

¹⁴ Je Clyde G. Corpuz, "Religions in Action: The Role of Interreligious Dialogue in the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2020, pp. 236-237.

¹⁵ Mikyung Lee (et.al), "A Divine Infection: A Systematic Review on the Roles of Religious Communities During the Early Stage of Covid-19," *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 17, 2021.

¹⁶ Imam Tobroni (et.al), "Covid 19: Political Cooperation and Ritual Modification of Religious Worship Through Large-Scale Social Restrictions," *Sys Rev Pharm*, Vol. 11, No. 12, 2020, pp. 644-648.

However, the temporary suspension of the use of places of worship and other public places in various countries as ritual places and gatherings of many people on the grounds of the spread of Covid-19 can largely be enforced by the government together with religious leaders.¹⁷ In so much, that religion has a considerable influence both on the spread and vice versa on the prevention and mitigation and adaptation of Covid-19, depending on the situation and the action. According to government sources, throughout July 2021, after the long *Eid al-Fitr* 2021 holiday which fell on May 13 previously, the rate of transmission of Covid-19 increased sharply. And this has implications for rising unemployment and poverty trends.

However, the government's steps, which initially did not provide certainty and were inconsistent in responding to Covid-19 in a firm manner, also delayed the prevention of transmission and the handling of its effects. So that Indonesia had occupied a dangerous country in Covid-19 and made several other state authorities warn their citizens to be careful with the security risks of Covid-19 in Indonesia. Many worship houses are still carrying out normal religious activities during this pandemic, as happened in several cities. This condition causes the increase of the pandemic. Without clear rules and optimal education, the spread of the virus through places of worship is the fastest way to occur.¹⁸

The steps taken by both the WHO as the world body that manages health under the United Nations and the Indonesian government in the end cannot be carried out alone by government officials and health workers. While the participation of religious organizations and religious leaders determines understanding and awareness, enforcement of regulations ensures public compliance with these rules. The second tidal wave of Covid-19 in July and August 2021 has made the government aware of these two steps, participation from religious leaders and

¹⁷ Mikyung Lee (et.al), "A Divine Infection: A Systematic Review..."

¹⁸ Imam Tobroni (et.al), "Covid 19: Political Cooperation..."

consistent enforcement of rules.

Overall, until the third week of September, the total number of workers affected from the demand side was 18.45 million people or 96.6 percent of the total working age population affected by the pandemic. From January to August 2021, according to the records of the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower, there have been layoffs of 538,305 workers affected by layoffs from the final projection of 895 this year. So, it exceeds the projected figure in the middle of the year.¹⁹ With that, the government took firm steps by imposing the so-called PPKM (Enforcement of Restrictions on Community Activities) Emergency starting July 3—for the umpteenth time after the government previously issued regulations such as PSBB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions) inconsistently. Data from government information via Covid19.go.id, daily Covid-19 cases on July 1 was recorded at 24,836 with several records broken daily. The figure continued to increase until its peak with 56,757 cases or more than twice as large on July 15.²⁰

The average death rate that occurred at the peak of the second Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia was very high, rising to more than 400%. There are five provinces that contributed the highest, namely West Java, up 463% with 43,436 cases; followed by DKI Jakarta with 236% or 57,295 cases; Special Region of Yogyakarta, up 148% with 8,917 cases; East Java with 145% increase with 7,488 cases; and Central Java with 75% increase with 33,805 cases. The five provinces are all on the island of Java. According to the government, the rising death toll should be reduced immediately by intensifying prevention and treatment based on the current active cases. Handling is focused on reducing the mortality rate by ensuring the best possible handling of Covid-19 patients, especially in

¹⁹ “Overall Unemployment Figures until the third week of September 2021.” <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1504141/sekjen-kemnaker-stimulus-pemerintah-tekan-angka-pengangguran/full&view=ok>, accessed on September 22, 2021.

²⁰ “Number of layoffs until August.” <https://kumparan.com/kumparanbisnis/data-kemnaker-hingga-7-agustus-2021-sebanyak-538-305-pekerja-terkena-phk-1wJIT9BMPiJ/2>, accessed on August 12, 2021.

patients with moderate to severe symptoms. However, this was not easy because at that time the five provinces had more than 70% occupancy of Isolation and ICU beds, even DKI Jakarta reached more than 90% occupancy.²¹ Private hospitals and colleges were also full, and some were even treated in parking lots, and some died before being treated there.

Several regulations regarding Emergency PPKM, in addition to tightening people's mobility and closing places of worship in red areas level 3 and 4, also prohibiting activities in public areas, shopping centers such as malls and markets, places of worship, arts and culture activities, sports and social activities temporarily closed. The wedding reception can still be held with a maximum of 30% guests. Public transportation can also still be implemented with a maximum capacity setting of 70% with the implementation of strict health protocols. Prospective passengers for city electric trains must obtain a letter from the workplace that the occupation is substantive to the needs of the community, such as medicine and food.

Requirements to board airplanes, trains and ships for long distances require showing a vaccine card (at least the first dose of vaccine) and evidence of H-2 PCR for aircraft, as well as H-1 Antigen for other long-distance modes of transportation. To enforce this rule, the government involves the Regional Government Guard (*Satpol PP*), the National Military, and the National Police to carry out strict supervision of the enforcement of the tightening of community activities. At the same time, the government increased the number of vaccinations, but until early September it was still far from the new vaccination target of around 40% of the first dose and 22.73% of the second dose of the total population in county or town. Meanwhile, to maintain the stability of immunity from who requires a minimum of 70%. During Emergency PPKM, the government increased social assistance to affected communities and tried to reduce poverty.²²

²¹ Covid19.go.id, July 1, 2021.

²² CNN Indonesia, 01/08/2021.

Furthermore, data up to the second week of September 2021 on *Covid19.go.id* in Indonesia has shown a steady decline in the last two weeks but according to epidemiologists and practitioners of Covid-19 prevention²³ cannot be said to be safe in a certain period because Indonesia has only experienced a decline in the second wave while some countries in the world are already in the third wave. The recovery data also shows that it continues to increase, and deaths decline but, according to them, the confirmed data continues to show an increase, while several days in the third week of September also show a very slight increase.²⁴ After all, according to WHO itself, even the completion of 100 percent vaccination does not guarantee a complete disappearance of the risk of Covid-19 but has the potential to evolve into an endemic that may require new traditions and attitudes rather than the pandemic era itself. In short, the response and attitude towards Covid-19 is long-term even though the pandemic itself will end later.

Theoretical Considerations: Religious Traditions and the Threat of a Pandemic

Piwko,²⁵ Pabbajah,²⁶ and Tobroni²⁷ strive to seek relation Islam and the Covid-19 pandemic and government programs in this regard. While Pabbajah highlighted the decline in the role of religious leaders, in this case, *ulama* in Indonesia, which was shown in cases of prevention and solidarity with Covid-19 running ineffectively. According to him, the government and MUI cooperation programs, for example, are not able to generate participation and other religious leaders for such effectiveness.²⁸

According to Piwko, there are three main factors in the Islamic world that affect whether the handling of Covid-19 is effective from a

²³ Interviewe with Syahrizal Syarief; Makky Zamzami; Agus Samsudin.

²⁴ Interviewe Syahrizal; Makky Zamzami; Agus Samsudin; covid19.go.id, 8/9/21.

²⁵ Aldona Maria Piwko, "Islam and the Covid-19 Pandemic..."

²⁶ Mustaqim Pabbajah (et.al) "Deauthorization of the Religious Leader..."

²⁷ Imam Tobroni (et.al), "Covid 19: Political Cooperation..."

²⁸ Mustaqim Pabbajah (et.al) "Deauthorization of the Religious..."

global perspective. The first is the religious commitment to its people to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. The lower community or religious followers always consider everything from a religious point of view. The second is a situation of public trust and distrust of political leaders or the government. According to Piwko, some *ulamas* are too involved in the games of politicians, causing public distrust of the rules, including the obligation to comply with health protocols. The third is a subjective assessment of global events. In the case of Covid-19, it is surprising both in terms of presence, the character of the virus itself, as well as the speed of transmission and its consequences on death, so that many people, governments, and religious leaders are not ready to accept the situation.²⁹

Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country in the world with a population of about 270 million with more than 80% Muslim. They are scattered in 34 provinces and more than 10,000 islands of the 17,000 total islands owned by Indonesia. Although there are parts of Indonesia where Muslims are minorities such as in Province of East-Southeast Nusa (NTT), North Sulawesi, Papua, West Papua, and Bali, overall, they have the same history and traditions. Most of them are adherents of Sunni Islam which is also the majority of Islam in the world.

Sunni Islam has a characteristic leadership that is loyal to the state and its adherents are loyal to the Islamic leadership in the region or country where they live. Culturally, leaders at the lowest, genuine local level have the highest authority over their people³⁰ compared to *ulama* or leaders at the national and regional levels and even the government. So, in Indonesia, there are many social and religious civil society

²⁹ Aldona Maria Piwko, "Islam and the Covid-19 Pandemic..."

³⁰ Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); Kathryn M. Robinson, (ed.), *Mosques and Imams: Everyday Islam in Eastern Indonesia* (Singapore: NU Press, 2021); Mitsuo Nakamura, "The Radical Traditionalism of the Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia: A Personal Account of the 26th National Congress, June 1979, Semarang," *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1981.

organizations that are genuine in leadership and traditions, but structurally do not have religious observance to other regions or countries. NU and Muhammadiyah as well as GUSDURian Networks—the latter is still in the Sunni sect of NU—are three of the largest Islamic movement and network of hundreds of organizations in Indonesia that follow this leadership structure.

That is why, it seems, why some clergy and religious groups initially question the health protocols issued by the WHO and enforced by the government because they go against the traditions and calls of regular religion in society. The word “positive” in Covid-19 itself is already a reversal of the connotations in the heads of many people who generally consider something good for the perspective of the Indonesian people, possibly around the world. This reversal, therefore, not only requires clergy to draw up new and reversed arguments in religious activities both in tradition and theology³¹ but it is also a challenge in social science in general.³² In Indonesia, organic Islamic religious leaders who are close to the grassroots people have high authority or even the owner of the religious authority itself over religious missions and aspirations³³ and not in the hands of national leaders who are close to power, such as the MUI. What religious leaders say can be considered law itself within the scope of their authority.³⁴ Interfaith leaders also learn from one another in these ways.

Islam—perhaps other religions—in Indonesia is not only a set of rules regarding rituals and socio-political structures but moreover, it is a matter of life itself which can include culture, traditions, customs, daily lifestyles, human relations, relationships with the ummah, as well as the

³¹ Imam Tobroni (et.al), “Covid 19: Political Cooperation...”

³² Mauro Basaure, Alfredo Joignant & Aldo Mascareño, “Between Distancing and Interdependence: The Conflict of Solidarities in the Covid-19 Pandemic, *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 64, No. 5, 2021, pp. 706-725.

³³ Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?...*

³⁴ *Ibid*; Kathryn M. Robinson, (ed.), *Mosques and Imams*; Mitsuo Nakamura, “The Radical Traditionalism...”

relationship of government with Muslim communities and their leaders. Therefore, it is difficult to measure the life of Indonesian Islam only from the scientific literature of jurisprudence, Sufism and so on or theories about Islam on paper and with Islam in other regions or countries. Various forms of Islamic rituals exist in Indonesia except those that are essential in Islamic teachings such as the Pillars of Faith (*Rukun Iman*) and Pillars of Islam (*Rukun Islam*). The forms of expression can be very different from people in other regions and countries. Islam in Indonesia cannot be separated from and even identical with the formation of traditions in the history of Indonesian society itself.

Many traditions originating from the Islamic community in Indonesia are absorbed into the habits of society and the state, but on the contrary, many traditions from local communities and outsiders are absorbed into the traditions of the Muslim community in Indonesia. This often leads to complications when a social imperative with scientific and theological arguments, such as about health, if in practice is contrary to the traditions that have been formed in society even though the tradition itself is not part of the substance of the core Islamic beliefs or the Pillars of Faith and the Pillars of Islam. The main problem is often not for theological reasons but because of changes in habits that require guidance and education from their closest leaders.

It is not surprising that the formation of tradition in the way of worship is seen as more important than the substance of worship itself in daily practice. For example, praying in a mosque for *Jumat* has a lower legal status or is only *sunnah* (recommended) whereas the obligation to perform the prayer itself, which is *fardlu'ain* (obligation for every Muslim). However, due to the establishment of tradition, it is often evident in this Covid-19 pandemic that there is an assumption that the closing of mosques for congregation and Hajj and Umrah is considered by some Muslims as contrary to religion, more so by some people it is considered an attack on Islam or a conspiracy strategy. Likewise, it is forbidden to

meet in other Islamic traditions and rituals.

Friday prayers are obligatory for everyone, but the Prophet Muhammad SAW gave an exception. For example, in inclement weather he can cancel the obligation to pray Friday at the mosque and can replace it with “the four *rakaat* of *dhuhur*” prayer at home or other places. In fact, weather causes less danger for traveling to the mosque than the transmission of dangerous diseases, such as the Covid-19 pandemic which has a contagion characteristic. Hajj is only obligatory once in a lifetime and only for those who are financially capable and guaranteed security, including the absence of obstacles and health for traveling very long distances.

Likewise, in burial for the bodies of the dead, the law for Muslims is to both perform *takziyah* to the deceased and to come to the family’s house of the deceased in the context of empathy and solidarity. Both practices are facultative obligation (*fardhu kifayah*), or sufficient representation by one or more people. For those who are considered a martyr—in the classical Islamic tradition, martyrdom is identical to those who died in war battles—they do not have to or may not follow the procedures and processions as ones that died naturally or sick but must be buried immediately as is according to the latest situation. Some scholars in Indonesia have identified that death caused by Covid-19 is equated (*qiyas*) with death for martyrs due to fighting against Covid-19 or being unable to escape the attack of the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, due to tradition, the death procession includes wrapping the body with a special cloth. *Takziyah* is an obligation for everyone. Because of this obligation, the special procedures for Covid-19 regarding the procession of treating and burying the bodies of those who died of Covid-19 have been questioned and even opposed. Likewise, the prohibition of gathering for *takziyah* and solidarity for the dead have been a matter of opposition.

Discuss from Field Findings

This article found that independent civil or non-governmental religious leaders were sensitive from the start to the viciousness of the Covid-19 pandemic. From the time Covid-19 was discovered in Wuhan, China to the moment it was determined a global pandemic by the WHO, the reports in the media indicated the urgency of the virus. The clergy were assisted by health experts and epidemiologists within the organization to understand the type and character of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, its sudden arrival and distinctive character contradicts daily religious traditions and practices, making it difficult to provide understanding to the public. Initially government leaders also seemed hesitant, indecisive, and slow in building synergies with religious leaders. This caused a big spike due to the lack of strict enforcement of the prokes rules and the weak understanding and awareness of the community.

Muhamad Makky,³⁵ the chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama's Central Board (PBNU) of Covid-19 Task Force and Agus Samsudin,³⁶ the chairman of the MCCC PP Muhammadiyah and Coordinator GUSDURian Networks, Alissa Wahid,³⁷ are of the view that the government was too late in forming partnership with civil religious leaders. First, government partners should not be Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) which is centralized and formalistic and too close to the government, but community or mass organizations and religious leaders at the grassroots level. These religious organizations with the help of the epidemiologists have provided understanding and awareness about the dangers of Covid-19 and its prevention since the case went viral and was followed by the issuance of health protocols from the WHO and the Indonesian government.

According to the three, at first the government thought that the Covid-19 pandemic was solely a health problem, so it was reluctant to

³⁵ Interview, (20/9/21).

³⁶ Interview (21/9/21).

³⁷ Interview (21/9/21).

involve religious leaders on the ground in these works. The three said that it was only after the increase took place one year later that synergy occurred, and the government gave a greater role to religious leaders and religious organizations that reached down to the grassroot communities.

However, it is precisely the civil Muslim movement under the leadership as shown by religious organizations, such as the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia NU and Muhammadiyah and the youth movement which was inspired by one of Indonesia's great Muslim figures, KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), namely GUSDURian Networks through GUSDURian Care immediately grasped the urgency of a quick response to the disaster. NU, Muhammadiyah and GUSDURian Network have responded early and formally in responding to this pandemic since the first week of March 2020, the week when the first Covid-19 case in Indonesia was announced by the government. So, the real sensitivity and clear attitude of the leaders of the majority religion against the dangers of Covid-19 had been developed from the start, but the government was too late to engage them in a more intensive and effective way.

As mentioned above, the most important thing about preventing Covid-19 is the legitimacy of the regulatory status or tradition to be developed, despite its contradictions of the traditions and beliefs of the wider community. So, the most important legitimacy is not only a rational explanation of science and religious theological messages but is the authority of who explains it. Civil Islamic organizations and associations hold the most important legitimacy of these authorities.³⁸ However, the leaders of mass organizations and Islamic associations still need the backing of scientific and religious arguments as well as to explain them to the public. There is no conflict between the highest legitimacy of authority in the hands of civil religious leaders and the rational arguments of science or medicine and religion or theology,³⁹ including the legal

³⁸ Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*; Kathryn M. Robinson, (ed.), *Mosques and Imams...*

³⁹ *KompasTV*, (10/4, 2020); *KompasTV*, (17/3 2020).

status of vaccines and vaccine emergencies that are still pending in haram status.⁴⁰ NU, Muhammadiyah and GusDurian Network provided a place to doctors and epidemiologists to explain the importance of the rationality status of science within a religious framework when giving a message to the public about Covid-19.

Thus, the controversy or partial opposition from the Muslim majority in Indonesia to the Covid-19 health protocol, including vaccines, is not based on a belief in distrust of science and the dangers of the Covid-19 pandemic, but rather the need for legitimacy from the government, science, and their closest leadership. The necessity of changing culture and habits in society and even structure is difficult. For example, economically, a ban on going out of the house without guaranteeing the cost of living makes daily life impossible. It can even lead to situations of hunger and death. Another example, the maintenance and operational costs of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) and *madrasa*. Those often accommodate thousands of *santri* and live from their contributions. Without these contributions the livelihood of the *pesantren* administrators and their faculty because they live from the costs of managing education and maintaining the *pesantren's* facilities and infrastructure. While the government is often late in delivering aid and providing not enough to cover even basic needs.⁴¹

Solidarity in Handling Covid-19

The other side of the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to Islam is about mobilizing solidarity for the victims of Covid-19 and its effects. This is because Covid-19 as a pandemic is not only a health problem but also a social, economic, and religious problem. The 2021 world philanthropy ranking report places Indonesia as the most generous

⁴⁰ *Berita SatuTV*, (27/11, 2020).

⁴¹ Interview with Makky Zamzami, (20/9/2021); Syahrizal Syarief, (18/9/2021); Agus Samsudin, (21/9/2021); A'ak Abdullah Al Kudus, (17/9/2021); Alissa Wahid, (25/9/2021).

country in terms of philanthropy. This finding is a continuation of the findings of the previous year.⁴² Bin-Nashwan,⁴³ and Paul Agu Igwe⁴⁴ argue that Covid-19 pandemic has increased the solidarity and solidarity movement of middle-class people with incomes above \$200 US globally via IT for prevention and safeguarding the lives of the lowest people by donating funds.

Furthermore,⁴⁵ have observed the concept of change in solidarity in the Covid-19 era, whose principles are contrary to “traditional” solidarity which is characterized by mechanical solidarity. Cases like Covid-19 require not only clear regulations but also life behavior so that individuals and communities are commanded to social distance, wear masks, and prohibit shaking hands. All these rules contradict previous requirements for solidarity in tradition in Indonesia. Based on Durkheimian theory, according to the three, Covid-19 demands an organic solidarity that reflects solidarity based on differences such as social, ethnic, and faith groups and does not suffice for mechanical solidarity, solidarity that is only based on similarities.

The new map of solidarity in the form of the necessity of growing organic solidarity is also reflected in the new rules in religion in the form of restrictions on worship practices, the use and total emptying of places of worship when the situation escalates as well as on the most important days for all religions, both regular, as well as special ones. For example, for Muslims, this would include the following: *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* holidays are worshiped in the field, *umrah* and hajj in the big mosques

⁴² Catherine Mahoney, “What is the World Giving Index?” <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2021-publications/caf-world-giving-index-2021>.

⁴³ Saeed Awadh Bin-Nashwan (et.al.), “Social Solidarity Amid the Covid- 19 Outbreak: Fundraising Campaigns and Donors’ Attitudes,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 42, No. 3/4, pp. 232-247.

⁴⁴ Paul Agu Igwe (et.al.), “Solidarity and Social Behavior: How did this Help Communities to Manage Covid-19 Pandemic?” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 40, No. 9/10, 2020, pp. 1183-1200.

⁴⁵ Mauro Basaure, Alfredo Joignant & Aldo Mascareño, “Between Distancing...” pp. 1-20.

of Mecca and Medina, Friday prayers in mosques in almost all villages in Indonesia, as well as *takziyah* of dead people. All require a change in perspective and behavior from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. Inter-religious collaborations are also formed when handling Covid-19 and its impacts.⁴⁶

In the normal tradition of life, the tradition of gathering and worshipping or performing religious ritual together is the most powerful and effective means of building solidarity. Religion builds ways of persuasion and direct communication to those who are being hit by a calamity. It is necessary to convey soft and wise words to melt and relieve suffering, to visit their families, to shake hands, and to kiss each other on the cheek. Likewise, on special days such as Saturday for Jews, Sunday for Christians, and Friday for Muslims people build community and call for solidarity by gathering. In addition to certain days which are religious celebrations, including funerals, it is a place to offer comfort and build relationship. In the Covid-19 pandemic, these traditions do not follow protocols and procedures. In fact, the opposite practice must be carried out.

The tradition of mobilizing solidarity through assistance, visits, and prayers is carried out in events, meeting places, physical relationships, and gatherings for worship in the Islamic religious tradition. These events include worship of a basic nature, such as congregations and Fridays at the mosque, *Eid al-Adha*, and *Eid al-Fitr* prayers in the field, as well as the tradition of meeting these two holidays in various places on the road and in places of worship. Islamic celebration traditions such as the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad and the month of fasting (*Ramadhan*) which is full of events in mosques and other celebrations can last for months with the gathering of many people. Likewise, the tradition of praying together with various religious readings are also considered to have the

⁴⁶ Didid Haryadi & Devira Nur Malitasari, "Solidarity During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study on the Social Action of Yogyakarta Food Solidarity and the Interfaith Network for Covid-19 Response," *Junal Partisipatoris*, Vol. 2 No. 2, 2020, pp. 58-74.

weight of religious rituals, *tablilan*, *istighosah*, recitation of various scales and so on. All these religious traditions and appeals are in line with the potential to awaken traditional solidarity including the tradition of gathering rituals between religions and faiths. On the contrary, all these traditions are contrary to the health protocol by the WHO.

Therefore, building social solidarity in the face of Covid-19 is theoretically much more difficult than just prevention and healing. The changes needed to build social solidarity can not only be done by referring to religious verses and regulations, but also involving religious authority at the lowest level, traditions, and cross-group relations as organic solidarity. Islamic law, through the decisions of the clergy, is needed in cases of voiding the four worships and the status of vaccine contents. The status of halal or haram in an emergency is permissible, and it is important to legitimize the use of it as required in Islam for religious reasons.

But what is more important is the legitimacy of the authority of the ulama's views or fatwas in each of the existing groups and organizations and for the grassroots community. Therefore, in the religious tradition in Indonesia, the government, health workers, and religious representatives from the government such as the MUI cannot work alone in the field without the involvement and legitimacy of the leaders of local religious communities and Islamic organizations. This would include religious leaders from the grassroots community, both structured and centered in Jakarta, to the smallest local communities below. Economically, whether an individual sells on the roadside (street vendors) or works from home (WFH) guarantees must be made to ensure their income. For example, they have no opportunity to change professions in such a short time. In many cases the opportunity to change occupation is not an option and assistance from government is not available. It is the actions of community and religious groups' initiatives that fill this void. Social solidarity is inevitable.

NU through the PBNU Covid-19 Task Force, Muhammadiyah through the MCCC, and the GUSDURian Network through GUSDURian Care carried out various solidarity activities since the beginning of the first week of March after WHO declared Covid-19 a global pandemic. However, China's Wuhan province officially reported a discovery of a new virus that threatened human life and had no cure to the WHO on December 31, 2019. This does not include those who put forward theological and faith arguments solely for the Covid-19 health protocol and other arguments that are minor.⁴⁷ However, the government still must approach them for the sake of mutual safety.⁴⁸

Epidemiologists, especially those who are members of these Islamic organizations and movements have given their thoughts and ideas on the steps needed to protect the people from the virus. Both PBNU Covid-19 Task Force, MCCC Muhammadiyah, which is specifically overseeing Covid-19, and GUSDURian Care, the special Covid-19 response program, were officially born a few days after the announcement of the global pandemic. However, response activities in the form of education and awareness regarding the demands of responding to Covid-19, reducing transmission and infection have started before the institutions themselves were officially established. The mobilization of human resources for handling Covid-19 and raising solidarity has been carried out since the beginning.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The main difficulty in responding to Covid-19 in the context of Islam in Indonesia is not primarily a matter of Islamic theology and

⁴⁷ Ibnu Nadzir, "Conspiracy Theories and Modern Disjuncture Amidst the Spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia," *Masyarakat Indonesia*, Vol 46, No. 2, December, 2020, pp. 150-167.

⁴⁸ Interviewed with Alissa Wahid, (25/9/2021).

⁴⁹ Interviewed with Muhammad Makky Zamzami, (20/9/2021); Syahrizal Syarief, (18/9/2021); Agus Samsudin, (21/9/2021); A'ak Abdullah Al Kudus, (17/9/2021); Alissa Wahid, (25/9/2021).

jurisprudence or *halal* and *haram* in terms of substantial *sharia*, but because of the character of the prevention of Covid-19 which is contrary to traditions and daily religious calls that have been formed for a long time. The reversal of this tradition, although it is not prohibited by religion, is not easy because of the depth of the culture. It requires the involvement of religious leaders at the lowest level. Traditionally, it is they who have the strongest religious authority in building the religious tradition, as well as to change it. However, this authority cannot run without guarantees for the needs of people's lives and the maintenance of social mechanisms in various fields such as education, economy, and the enforcement of other health protocol rules which are the responsibility of the government. The government's slowness and indecision have made the effects of Covid-19 worse for a period.

In social solidarity, there are two important tendencies: solidarity between religions and faiths and community participation. There is no selection based on any religion, organizational affiliation, ethnicity, or identity card, except for distribution based on region in a fair and balanced manner according to regional needs. Covid-19 produced a long-term solidarity between religions and faiths that seem to be greater than the short-term solidarity evident in other disasters. Community participation in the region regardless of religious background, ethnicity, and social group is higher than the national and global average. Three major Islamic organizations in Indonesia show these two tendencies. The three collaborate with local, national, and global institutions, government, and private representatives.

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