

## RELIGION, THE COVID-19, AND HEALTH PROTOCOLS: A CASE STUDY OF MUSLIMS GROUP VIEWS

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**Abstract:** *The article aims to describe the religious views of Indonesian Muslim groups concerning Covid-19 and health protocols. It also explores the factors that lead some Muslims to reject health protocols in their religious practices. The qualitative method was employed in this study, with research subjects selected through purposive sampling, and data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The informants included leaders of Indonesian Muslim groups, such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, and other Muslim group leaders. The research findings indicate that most Muslim group leaders interpret Islamic teachings with academic perspectives, although many tend to adopt conservative interpretations. This conservative religious understanding is influenced by several factors: first, the psychological factor of panic or cultural shock among some Muslims; second, the influx of information on social media whose accuracy is challenging to verify; third, economic pressure on the people; and fourth, the government's indecisiveness and the ineffectiveness of public communication.*

**Keywords:** *Pandemic; Covid-19; Health Protocols; Religious Conservatism.*

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pandangan keagamaan umat Islam di Indonesia mengenai Covid-19 dan protokol kesehatan. Laporan ini juga mengeksplorasi faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan sebagian umat Islam menolak protokol kesehatan dalam praktik keagamaan mereka. Metode kualitatif yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini, dengan subjek penelitian dipilih melalui purposive sampling, dan analisis data menggunakan analisis deskriptif. Informannya antara lain para pemimpin kelompok Islam di Indonesia, seperti Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, dan para pemimpin kelompok Islam lainnya. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar pemimpin kelompok Muslim menafsirkan ajaran Islam dengan perspektif akademis, meskipun banyak yang cenderung mengadopsi interpretasi konservatif. Pemahaman keagamaan yang konservatif ini dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor: pertama, faktor psikologis berupa kepanikan atau gegar budaya di kalangan sebagian umat Islam; kedua, masuknya informasi di media sosial yang keakuratannya sulit diverifikasi; ketiga, tekanan ekonomi terhadap rakyat; dan keempat, ketidaktegasan pemerintah dan tidak efektifnya komunikasi publik.

**Kata Kunci:** Pandemi, Covid-19; Protokol Kesehatan; Konservatisme Agama.

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of human life patterns, and the same is true for human religious life.<sup>1</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic has given rise to religious discourse within Muslim circles,<sup>2</sup> including in Indonesia. The discourse regarding adjustments to several worship services due to the primary health concerns of Covid-19 has sparked polemics among Muslims in Indonesia.<sup>3</sup> One polemic involves holding Friday prayers, wearing masks during congregational mosque prayers, using hand sanitizers, maintaining social distancing in rows, banning handshakes, and other related measures. Indonesian Muslims vary in their responses, with some complying with the government to implement health protocols in worship. Conversely, some Muslims reject the appeal and continue regular worship in mosques and prayer rooms, either by maintaining proper spacing or refusing to wear masks.

Akmal Salim Ruhan and Harris Burhani, in the results of the survey conducted in 2020, explain that the majority of respondents are aware of Covid-19 and its dangers. They possess knowledge about their geographical location, preventive measures to curb the virus spread, government policies, and health protocols. The respondents acknowledge the potential lethality of Covid-19. Most of them express readiness to adhere to government appeals and policies, including those outlined in the MUI fatwa No. 14/2020 and Circular Letter of the Minister of Religion Number 6/2020, particularly among Muslim respondents.

In line with their knowledge and attitude, a significant number of

respondents have acted in accordance with the prescribed policies and appeals. However, 20.89% of respondents consistently attend religious gatherings at worship houses, and an additional 12% do so frequently. Despite 48.86% of the respondents residing in red zones, the majority still agree to continue worshipping at the mosque during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Among the respondents who agree with this statement, 17.98% are in the red zone, and 43.04% of them support continuing worship at the mosque. Additionally, 7% of respondents strongly agree, with 52.45% of them located in red zones.”<sup>4</sup>

When compared with the results of the Saiful Mujani Research Consultant (SMRC) survey conducted in 2020, the findings are similar. A national survey conducted from April 9-11, utilizing random sampling and involving 1,200 respondents, reveals that 21% of inhabitants do not agree with the policy of conducting religious activities at home. They still prefer engaging in religious activities outside the house. This percentage, which is approximately 21% of the inhabitants or 17.98% of the respondents, is more intriguing than merely observing the actions or experiences.<sup>5</sup>

The relaxation of social restrictions in various sectors, particularly in transportation, as stipulated in the Circular Letter of the Chief Executive Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling Covid-19 No. 4 of 2020 regarding Person Travel Restriction Criteria in the Context of Expediting Handling Covid-19, has led to calls for similar relaxation in religious activities and places of worship. Unfortunately, this situation arose at a time when the number of new Covid-19 cases was still reaching hundreds per day at the beginning of May 2020.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, various forms of denial of restrictions on worship activities persist despite the area being in the PSBB zone. According to CSRC research (2020), this denial manifests in different ways. Firstly, there is mass worship, exemplified by the Ridha Muhammadiyah Mosque, which continues to conduct *tarāwīh* prayers even within a PSBB zone. Consequently, based on tests, three individuals tested positive for Covid-19. Similar instances occurred at the al-Ikhlās Mosque in the Bluru Permai Housing Complex, where 6 out of 123 worshippers participating in Tarawih prayers tested positive for Covid-19. Likewise, the Bhonawe church in Ende continued to hold Mass, and Vesak commemorations took place at the Mojopahit Temple in East Java.

Secondly, there is a denial within religious institutions below those at higher levels. Despite most central-level religious institutions supporting the continuation of the social restriction policy, denials or anomalies exist

in certain religious institutions. Following the second phase of the PSBB period or the extension of the PSBB in Padang City, the Padang City MUI issued Padang City MUI Notice and Tausyiah No. 002/MUIPDG/V/2020. Although the announcement appears cautious, allowing Friday prayers and congregational Tarawih prayers at the mosque only with written permission from the City Government, the Task Force, and the City Health Service, and subject to several other provisions that consider the community's culture, mosques failing to meet these requirements may still be motivated to conduct Friday prayers and congregational Tarawih prayers. Consequently, in that area, numerous mosques or prayer rooms may be used for congregational prayers while the epidemic persists and the city remains under PSBB status.

Thirdly, there is denial among the people towards religious leaders. Denials sometimes originate from the congregation or laypeople, whereas religious leaders aim to enforce compliance with social restrictions during an epidemic. An amateur video, later reposted by the TVOne News site on April 18, 2020, illustrating congregational protests, serves as a notable example of the Ummah's denial towards their religious leaders. In the video, an irate congregation verbally abuses the Ustaz or mosque imam who refuses to lead prayers at the mosque in adherence to Covid-19 social restrictions, while a significant number of congregants are present.<sup>7</sup>

The findings above lead to assumptions and questions: Could they be from circles that perceive the Covid-19 outbreak as not too dangerous? Or is there a fatalistic understanding regarding the current condition of the Covid-19 epidemic? It appears that the survey mentioned earlier cannot address these questions, thus necessitating a qualitative approach for a more in-depth description.

The conservative attitude exhibited by certain groups, including Muslims in Indonesia as mentioned above, is viewed by Najib Burhani as a manifestation of religious conservatism that often poses challenges in managing Covid-19. The religious conservatism often clashes with the scientific approach required for handling the pandemic. According to him, multiperspective studies are needed to thoroughly analyze this matter.<sup>8</sup>

Building on the facts, in order to answer and delve into why some Indonesian Muslims disregard health protocol calls for the prevention of Covid-19, this article aims to explore whether these attitudes and actions are caused or influenced by fatalistic and conservative religious beliefs. If so, what factors contribute to the influence of religious understanding during the pandemic?

The research method employed is qualitative-empirical, given that

the research object is a qualitative-empirical phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> The chosen approach is sociological. The sociological approach will be utilized to elucidate interaction patterns that give rise to and shape the understanding of Islam in Indonesia during a period that has an impact on social politics.<sup>10</sup>

This research was conducted from April to the end of July 2022, with research locations in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Madiun, East Java. In Jakarta, data collection took place at the PBNU Office on Jl. Kramat Raya, Central Jakarta. In Yogyakarta, data collection occurred at the PP Muhammadiyah Office on Jl. Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, and the residence of the Chairman of the Tarjih and Tajdid Council in Sleman, Yogyakarta. Meanwhile, in Madiun, East Java, the research was carried out at the residence of the Head of the Syuriah NU Madiun Branch in Dimong Village, Madiun. Salafi-Wahhabi sources were obtained from their lectures on the YouTube channel. The sample was purposively selected based on three typologies of Indonesian Muslims developed by Ricklef in his book 'Islamizing Java,' namely traditionalists, modernists, and revivalists.<sup>11</sup>

Three data collection techniques are as follows: First, document analysis is intended to analyze books, records, writings, lectures, and other relevant materials.<sup>12</sup> Second, a study of related literature is conducted by examining writings on social history, politics, and law, in the form of books, articles, papers, etc. Third, interviews are conducted with individuals representing the three typologies of Indonesian Muslims as described above.

The data analysis in this study is conducted using two methods: First, mapping and data categorization. The collected data or information is initially mapped, resulting in a grouping that corresponds with the designed data logging. Second, the contextualization of data or information is carried out based on the previously done categorization. We will analyze and understand the data in context using various methods to identify connections among elements of different data.<sup>13</sup>

### **Muhammadiyah: A Few of Fatalistic Group**

Based on interviews conducted by researchers and observations of lectures by Islamic religious leaders, the phenomenon of certain Muslim communities rejecting and denying the application of health protocols in worship rituals is influenced by various factors. These factors subsequently shape religious understandings that impact the attitudes and actions of some Muslims.

According to the Chairman of the Majelis Tarjih and Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah, there are some Muslims, including a small number of Muhammadiyah members, who perceive that the 'fear' of the dangers of

Covid-19 is excessive, as if it surpasses the fear of God. In their perspective, humans are destined to die, and some of their statements reflect this belief, such as ‘If someone is going to die, then let them die...’. These views exist, although the research did not delve into the quantification of people holding such opinions. Anwar then said,

“But it does exist and is found. On the other hand, it’s not because of religion; yes, I have only seen this on YouTube. You often see reactions, for instance, during certain lectures where some consider it a fabrication or conspiracy. There are individuals with such views, and this is reflected in our lectures that explain worship during Covid. Some question marks arise as we don’t know where they originate. From this perspective, conspiracies in our time are prone to various speculations, so such things exist. Even my close friend, who is also a lecturer, never wears a mask to the mosque. I didn’t have time to ask him whether it was due to his religious understanding or something else, but I believe it was influenced by his perception of Covid-19.”<sup>14</sup>

After Muhammadiyah issued Circular Letter No. 02/EDR/I.0/E/2020 concerning Guidelines for Internal Worship during the Covid-19 Emergency Conditions, the Tarjih and Tajdid Council provided guidance for worship in the month of Ramadan during the Covid-19 emergency period. This guidance includes an appeal not to perform Tarawih in congregation in mosques, as well as the cancellation of Eid prayers if the Covid-19 emergency persists in 1441 H.<sup>15</sup> Based on the confirmation, Syamsul stated that in urban areas, it seems that few are not adhering to health protocols because pandemics are more common in such areas. However, in rural areas, people can still worship as usual. Someone once called me from a sub-district asking how to respond to a pandemic in their village. Then he sent our circular letter. Yes, it’s not considered dangerous, but there have been cases of one or two people being affected by it. However, for the community, it’s viewed as similar to any other fever, but many people also succumb, like in Kudus and Tegal. That’s half of Muhammadiyah administrators who died.<sup>16</sup>

Modernists generally emphasize scientific approaches as a characteristic. One notable feature that distinguishes Muslim modernists is their reliance on reason and logic to understand true Islam.<sup>17</sup> Despite prioritizing a scientific approach in responding to the spread of Covid-19, however, there are one or two Muhammadiyah regions that have shown some ignorance of health protocol calls, resulting in several regional administrators falling victim.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the researchers found a link between the lack of discipline in implementing health protocols and their religious understanding. Among

modernists, even though they acknowledge the dangers of Covid-19, there is also a small number who believe that human death is predetermined. The possibility of contracting Covid-19 or not is considered a matter of destiny. So, in certain cases or areas where they feel safe, they are guided by the hadith, “*da’ mā yarībuk ilā mā lā yarībuk*”. Unfortunately, this perspective has had consequences for the organization’s administrators. It is then explained that their religious views influence their attitudes and actions toward the Covid-19 health protocol. After a case like this, it seems to deter them, and they prefer to comply with health protocols.<sup>19</sup>

Then is this related to the emergence or strengthening of religious conservatism among Muslims? According to Syamsul, if the reluctance of some Muslims to comply with the health protocol is motivated by religious views, this could be called religious conservatism. But how significant this is as a rise of “religious conservatism” (conservatism turn) is yet to be ascertained because it is sometimes influenced by other factors, such as economics. For example, Ustadz who usually preaches or recites is very affected by these strict health protocols.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Syamsul is not too sure whether the violation of health protocols by a small number of Muhammadiyah members is caused by the emergence of a conservative understanding among them. He is more likely to agree that it is caused by other factors, such as the economy, and others.

Anwar stated that Muhammadiyah always provides guidance on worship, including Qurbani on ‘Eid al-Adha:

“It’s also interesting that the fatwas we issued for the 2020-2021 sacrifice. We issued a fatwa acknowledging that many of our financial capabilities are limited. If you can only afford to sacrifice 3 million for 1 goat, you can spend both amounts to help anyone whose economy has been affected by the pandemic. The three million is already quite a burden because there are also many other social expenses, and the income is also limited. So, we give a fatwa to those who have only one ability to sacrifice or spend only to prioritize giving to help people who are directly affected by Covid. So the only thing is from this infaq, if all the sacrifices are distributed by the mosque, the rich and poor are not squeezed. It can last for two days. Well, this is not effective in social funds for the community, so if directly, for example, 20 cows times 30 million, it’s already 600 million, right? 600 million, how long can certain people be helped? You can change the *infāq* at any time. He said this worship is only once a year.”

Then, what are the factors behind the emergence of the religious views mentioned above? Syamsul Anwar stated:

“Among other things that I am often asked about and debated is like



this. The name of the disaster is not certain to happen. Will it hit or not? Meanwhile, when we practice religion in the mosque, prayer is obligatory, it can't be done. A certain time is defeated by something that is not certain. So using this rule, so ... what's it called ... the considerations of the *fiqhiyah* rule. If we are attacked by the plague, it is possible, yes, it is possible, it is not certain, but if we are obliged to pray at the mosque for Friday prayers, for example, that is certain. So even using the hadith as well, "*da' mā yaribuk ilā mā lā yaribuk*". "Leave those who still doubt, take those who don't doubt, yes, prayer is certain, so there are also those who use texts like that."<sup>21</sup> "So, what if confronted with scientific findings regarding the dangers of the Covid-19 virus? Anwar continued: "Yes, for them, science is good. The issue lies in their perception that whether or not we are exposed to something new is uncertain. It can happen or not. So the level of certainty is uncertain. They focus more on individual cases rather than looking at the overall picture. I have heard that Mr. Haedar (General Chairman of PP Muhammadiyah-ed) was asked about this by someone. Mr. Haedar answered that whether it was a conspiracy or not, what was clear was that it was real, and many people died. That's the fact. As for the conspiracy, you know it's not real. However, for some people, even though it's real in general, individually, we're not necessarily affected. So there are views like that, and the level of certainty per case may not be according to him."<sup>22</sup>

According to Anwar, science is good for them. The issue lies in their perception that whether we are affected or not is uncertain. So, the degree of certainty is unclear. They focus more on individual cases, which can be termed as a partial view. They look at cases of individuals rather than the whole picture. However, the matter of conspiracy, whether it was a conspiracy or not, is debatable. For some people, even though it's real in general, individually, they may not necessarily be affected. So, there are views like that, and the level of certainty per case may not be according to him.

### **Nahdlatul Ulama: It's Hard to Abandon Religious Traditions**

The Chairman of the Bahtsul Masail PB Nahdlatul Ulama stated the same thing, mentioning that the rejection and denial of some Muslims are related to their religious views. Among Nahdliyin, there are kiai or ustadz who often protest against fatwas or calls from PBNU to comply with health protocols, such as social distancing, wearing masks, etc., because it is challenging to abandon religious practices that have become a habit. For instance, even though congregational prayers with sparse rows were permissible during the pandemic, with the recommendation to close the congregation in congregational prayers, they still do it. Similarly, in



the case of Qurbani, where helping those affected by the pandemic is more obligatory than carrying out Qurbani, which can cause crowds, it is difficult for people to break this habit.<sup>23</sup>

This was then reinforced by the concept of resignation that they developed. Fear of Covid-19 can be interpreted as demonstrating low trust in Allah, even though following the health protocol is an effort. Even if we refer to the views of classical scholars, there is a strong basis that fear of something other than Allah due to danger is not related to the level of trust. It is permissible, and sometimes even obligatory. Al-Qarāfi (d. 684 H) states in the book *al-Furuq* as follows:

قَدْ يَكُونُ الْخَوْفُ مِنْ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى لَيْسَ مُحَرَّمًا كَالْخَوْفِ مِنَ الْأَسُودِ وَالْحَيَّاتِ  
وَالْعَقَّارِبِ وَالظُّلْمَةِ، وَقَدْ يَجِبُ الْخَوْفُ مِنْ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى كَمَا أَمَرْنَا بِالْفِرَارِ مِنْ أَرْضِ  
الْوَبَاءِ وَالْخَوْفِ مِنْهَا عَلَى أَجْسَامِنَا مِنَ الْأَمْرَاضِ وَالْأَسْقَامِ<sup>24</sup>

“Sometimes, the fear of entities other than Allah is not prohibited, such as fear of lions, snakes, scorpions, and unjust people. Occasionally, fearing entities other than Allah is obligatory, as we are directed to avoid areas affected by a pandemic/plague and are instructed to be cautious about the transmission of disease to our bodies.”

The basis for this perspective is very clear and has no relation to the level of trustworthiness when a Muslim avoids dangers like viruses. A kiai or ustadz cannot issue a fatwa regarding whether a virus is dangerous or not without hearing and paying attention to the research results of virus experts.

In Islamic history, ‘Umar binn al-Khaṭṭāb once ordered his troops in Syria at that time to return to Medina due to an epidemic that caused many Muslim troops to die from the plague. However, this view of ‘Umar was opposed by Abū ‘Ubaydah bin al-Jarrah, the warlord, because, according to him, matters of sickness and death were God’s destiny and business. Even Abū ‘Ubaydah himself died from the plague. So a viewpoint like that of Abū ‘Ubaydah is followed by some Muslims who refuse to comply with health protocols due to religious beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

This problem was exacerbated by massive social media news claiming that Covid-19 was a conspiracy. Whether it is a conspiracy or not, the danger of Covid-19 is a real fact that has resulted in victims. Lack of literacy has caused around 20% to 30% of people to be affected, according to the survey. The campaign was quite successful in influencing the views, attitudes, and actions of some Muslims. On the other hand, the government has not been successful enough in convincing the public about the importance of adhering to health protocols in tackling the spread of

the Covid-19 virus and the dangers that can cause death, leaving a large percentage of those who reject the Covid-19 health protocol.

Meanwhile, Mahbub Maafi is very certain that this phenomenon is related to religious conservatism because there are often groups that have been labeled as conservative. This is dangerous if allowed to grow because it will hinder the diversity of Muslims, causing setbacks as they become irrational, even though in certain matters, religion is not always rational. In issues that may be studied rationally and scientifically, Muslims should use rational reasoning and scientific findings as a reference. However, it is difficult to avoid historical preferences by relying on the opinions of certain friends or scholars when considering Dian, coupled with the lack of literacy about Covid-19. There will always be groups of Muslims who are conservative toward scientific products. This phenomenon is also found in other religions, such as the situation with some Hindus in India, and others.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, quite several kyai among Nahdliyin being exposed of Covid-19. Based on the confession of the Chairman of the RMI (*Rabi'ah Ma'āhid Islāmiyah*) PBNU, 333 NU clerics died during the Covid-19 Pandemic.<sup>27</sup> According to the Chairman of LBM PBNU, this is due to the difficulty for traditional Muslims to abandon religious traditions that involve large masses of people such as *tablilan*, *istighāsah*, and others. Moreover, most Islamic boarding schools continue to operate as usual. Maybe the movements of the santri can be controlled, but the clerics who are so mobile can become a source of the spread of Covid-19 and even victims at the same time.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, among the Salafi-Wahhabis, there are also Ustadz who have died of Covid-19. Ustadz Ainul Haris in Surabaya interviewed researchers in 2020 who died on July 21, 2021, due to Covid-19. However, the authors did not obtain exact data on the number of ustadz among Salafi-Wahhabis who died because each institution was not affiliated with one organization.

The common thread can also be drawn among traditional Muslims who find it very difficult to leave the religious traditions rooted among those who attract the masses. This characteristic refers to Muslim groups who have an established religion that holds characteristics of ceremony and understanding local which stand up in a manner traditional.<sup>29</sup> This perspective is strengthened by the concept of trust that they adhere to. Obeying health protocols too strictly causes a loss of dependence on God. Historically, this perspective has even been justified from the perspective of Abū 'Ubaydah bin al-Jarrāh, who was fatalistic when addressing the epidemic that occurred in Syria at that time. Even though 'Umar bin

al-Khaṭṭāb's rational perspective can also be imitated in responding to a pandemic. Likewise, references to the yellow book from scholars of the al-Qarāfi class also put forward a rational attitude in responding to the epidemic.<sup>30</sup> However, according to researchers, this discourse is less popular among those who ignore the health program, because it is not popular, whereas al-Qarāfi is a follower of the Mālikī school of thought and his books are rarely studied in traditional Islamic boarding schools. Added to this is the influence of social media news which often underestimates the dangers of Covid-19. Apart from the uncertainty of public communication since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, it also contributed to their attitudes and actions.

Meanwhile, among traditional Muslims, according to KH. Mahbub Maafi, the religious perspective as above is because historically it has roots since the time of the Companions as described above, where there were differences in the construction of thinking that is ta'abuddi (doctrinaire) represented by Abū 'Ubaydah bin al-Jarrāh, and some are following the *ta'aqquli* (rational) thinking construction represented by 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb. So here there is a struggle for discourse hegemony from these two tendencies until now. So the mindset represented by Abū 'Ubaydah bin al-Jarrāh will always be there.<sup>31</sup> However, Mahbub claims that the majority of *Nahdliyin* adhere to the call for health protocols.

This was confirmed by the Chairperson of the Syuriah PCNU for Madiun Regency, KH Musthofa, that the majority of Nahdliyin members in his area obeyed the advice of the clergy and the government. He stated:

“That's so-and-so, the rules are *dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddamun 'alā jalb al-maṣālib*.<sup>32</sup> So if there is an effort to tackle the spread of Covid-19, even though there are those who continue to pray in congregation, but because they are faced with a reality like this, in the end, those people are the ones who adjust (stretching their seats and wearing masks-ed). It seems they are aware of that. So, they also at certain times leave the practice of the sunnah, to pursue that which is obligatory (avoiding danger -ed). That's mandatory, right? *Lā ḍarara wa lā ḍirāra*.<sup>33</sup> Means “to avoid harm.” “It is obligatory to leave what is sunnah to do what is obligatory. That's mandatory (avoiding red virus), why? It's a health threat.<sup>34</sup>

So the mindset that contrasts scientific findings with religious understanding should not be carried out, because the empirical facts are clear, namely the danger of the Covid-19 virus. The same thing was said by Muslim leaders from traditional organizations such as PCNU in Madiun Regency. “Look, after the circular was issued, the community, especially Muslims in Madiun, generally obeyed. It means like this, recitation is not

allowed, crowds are not allowed, usually, we are the ones who are *tablilan*, Friday prayer is *yasinan*, it is abolished, *maratiban* is abolished, then prayer is abolished, then prayer must be so and so, use that distance, prokes is a health protocol. Then, this school was closed right, it's usually closed for up to one year, one year using a distance learning model, online. But yes, some can use technology, so use it online. There are those who, if they can't afford it, use the children in rotation. So, using the package model, right? Take the book, take it home, then the results are done, well, the results are deposited. So there are no crowds in the school environment, that's not there, and even then in so-and-so means it's arranged. So take the lesson packages one by one and then take them home and then return the assignments, arrange them."<sup>35</sup>

### Salaf-Wahabi: Seeking a Sunnah Models

Meanwhile among the Salafi scholars, the majority of whom call for compliance with health protocols, such as eliminating Friday or congregational prayers or stretching the rows, some views refuse to stretch the rows according to the Ulama's fatwa, on the contrary, confronting the fatwa with a hadith order to tighten the rows because it is tightening shaf is mandatory. Yazid Jawas in a lecture uploaded on June 18 2020 stated that,

"We want to follow the fatwa of the Sheikh, Ustadz, or Ulama or follow the orders of the Prophet. Of course, must follow the orders of the Prophet. Concerning the concern of contracting the virus, according to him, it is impossible because when someone is going to pray the congregation is already clean and his ablution. Congregational prayers themselves are carried out at most 5-10 minutes. While people in the market or on public transportation take longer than 5 minutes. So why should tightening the rows in congregational prayers be an issue while people in the market are not an issue? The fatwa or the opinion of the clergy contradicts the argument, so what must be followed is the argument. This is a principle in religion. For example, Ibn 'Abbās cited the opinion of Abū Bakr and 'Umar who stated that there is no *tamattu'* in Hajj, even though the Prophet clearly stated that Hajj has *tamattu'*. So when the opinion of the scholars contradicts the text, it is not obligatory to follow it".<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, Khalid Basalamah in an interview argued that when there is fear of being affected by the virus, there is no need to pray in congregation at the mosque. This is based on the hadith of the Prophet "*lā ḍarara wa lā ḍirāra*". The ulama's fatwa also makes it clear that congregational prayers will not be held at the mosque for the time being. As for the congregational prayer stretching the rows, it is invalid for the congregational prayer because

it contradicts the Prophet's guidance regarding congregational prayer.<sup>37</sup> In other words, they consider that modifying congregational prayers with a wide gap contradicts the Sunnah.

Meanwhile, according to Firanda Andirja, there is nothing wrong with stretching the *şaf* in congregational prayers during a pandemic, because tightening the *şaf* is sunnah. If there is a pandemic, then tightening the *şaf* can be done. Meanwhile, when the danger of the virus is over, then return to the law of origin, namely tightening the shaf. Meeting the *şaf* itself is not a pillar of prayer that cancels the prayer. Even if the closing is mandatory, it can be abandoned due to an emergency.<sup>38</sup>

The same thing is also found in the perspective of Ustadz Ainul Haris who views those who die from Covid-19 as martyrs. Ustadz Ainul Haris in a lecture on the YouTube channel stated:

“Many do not want to accept the death of relatives and those closest to them, then blame the doctor or nurse. No matter how good the quality of a doctor or health facility is, it will not be able to delay someone's death, even for a minute. No matter how ferocious the corona is, don't let it make us fear too much, and act outside of reasonableness, which violates the signs of faith. This virus is just one cause among many ways of human death. Where is our death, absolutely in the hands of Allah? Even though we are ultimately destined to die because of this plague, Allah promises to grant us martyrdom. We achieve great rewards, sins are forgiven, and we will get to heaven. Be patient, and leave everything to Allah. Let go of those who have gone before us, even ‘be happy’, because the truth is they are enjoying great rewards from their Lord.”<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, revivalist groups such as Salafi-Wahabi emphasize the importance of the purification of religion which is necessary, which was exemplified by the Prophet and his companions, although on the one hand, they emphasize obedience to the government and avoiding the danger of spreading the virus. For example, the matter of loosening the *saf* is something that the Prophet and his companions never exemplified, even contradicting the Prophet's orders as a clear argument. The emphasis on the *naqli* proposition as emphasized by Yazid Jawas shows the small role of rational reasoning or scientific findings in religion. When textual understanding contradicts the results of scientific reasoning and findings, then religious texts must take precedence.<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, the attitude of Yazid Jawas and Khalid Basalamah was against stretching the shaf in congregational prayers because it was not by the guidance of the sunnah of the Prophet, even though Khalid preferred a fatwa that abolished congregational or Friday prayers at the mosque as fatwa by Saudi scholars.

## **Religious Conservatism or Other Factors?**

The rejection of health protocols during the Covid pandemic among Muslims is partly influenced by conservative religious views that tend to distrust scientific findings, but also by other factors. The interpretation of death that a person's death has been determined since in the womb causes attitudes and actions that are not careful about health protocols and have a fatalist attitude in responding to a pandemic. In the case of revivalists, puritan and literal interpretations tend to reject the process of reinterpreting religious texts during a pandemic. This is indeed a characteristic of revivalist groups who tend to interpret religious texts literally. Religious practices such as loosening the shaf during congregational prayers are practices that have never been emulated by generations of the pious salaf.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, traditional Muslims in rural areas find it very difficult to abandon religious traditions that involve large groups of people.

The religious understanding factor is influenced by other factors. For example, news on social media tends to downplay the dangers of Covid-19 with conspiracy theories. In social media literacy, in the post-truth era, fake news seems to be seen as the truth. This theory was developed by Steve Tesich (1992) and Ralph Keyes (2004). Social media makes information much louder and louder. Every minute there is a new photo or status that is updated, circulating the latest or renewed news or tips, even news that is multiplying. Through unlimited cross-border social media, any video can "float" on our platform account. One hour after our account was signed out, and when signed in it was immediately filled with the latest videos. So, the current information cycle moves very fast. It is these waves and waves that are then exploited by artificial lies that lead the public to assume that the lies were the truth. As Joseph Goebbels, one of Hitler's loyalists said that "a lie told once is a lie, but a lie told a thousand times will become the truth".<sup>42</sup>

The post-truth phenomenon was originally used for political purposes. But increasingly, post-truth is used in all lines of issues and agendas. There are similarities between post-truth and hoax news. Both post-truth and hoaxes will usually be wrapped in bombastic headlines, ignoring data and facts, maybe even using fake data whose truth is unclear. Not to mention if there are paid accounts, which are popularly known as buzzers, who deliberately raise the topic continuously (headlining), or comment on the news which causes social media users to become confused and even believe in the "truth" of the hoax news.<sup>43</sup>

In addition, the failure of the government's public communication since the beginning of the 19-pandemic in early 2020 has caused those who

are ignorant to not believe in the dangers of Covid-19 and to have many misunderstandings, resulting in ineffectiveness. Ineffective government communication has resulted in a great deal of public confusion and misunderstanding, as well as a serious misrepresentation of the growing health threat, and led to catastrophic health and social impacts on society and prolonging the pandemic.<sup>44</sup> The confusion itself has become a “cultural shock” for Indonesian Muslims to face a new reality. The community’s response to religious activities is illustrated by the concept of culture shock, namely anxiety when faced with conditions, environments, and cultures that are different from usual and require them to adapt religious activities from public spaces to their respective homes.

Then, a conservative attitude toward religion becomes an option. Supported by doubts about the scientific findings of Covid-19 and its dangers, health protocols, and vaccines. The conservatism of Indonesian Muslims, whether from modernists, traditionalists, or revivalists, is intertwined with partial and literal interpretations of religious texts, the level of literacy on social media, and the government’s public communication uncertainty about Covid-19 and health protocols that makes them doubtful. During the panic, the choice of conservatism seems to be a guide and provides a sense of security in uncertainty.

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the understanding of Muslim groups who reject the Covid-19 health protocol tends to be fatalistic because they think that the danger of Covid-19 will not affect the terms of death that have been ordained by God since in the womb. They are aware that the Covid-19 virus is dangerous, but excessive fear of the virus will show low trust in Allah. This attitude shows a conservative attitude in religion because it tends to be the result of scientific findings. Both traditionalist and modernist groups deny health protocols, by taking a partial-simplistic approach to religious texts. Meanwhile, a rigid textual approach to the text of religious propositions among Salafi-Wahhabi revivalists has led to an attitude of rejecting the rules of spacing in the rows of prayers. Even though the religious texts, both the verses of the Quran and the Hadith, are clear enough to avoid danger.

From a sociological perspective, religion is seen as a belief system that is revealed in certain social behaviors in society, every behavior that is carried out is always related to the belief system of the religious teachings that one adheres to. Individual behavior and social values are driven by internal forces which are based on the values of religious teachings that were internalized beforehand and when beliefs like this bring subjectiveness to religion. Dadang Khamad writes that because of this Wach further believes



that subjective religion can be objectified in various kinds of expressions, and these expressions have a certain structure that can be understood.<sup>45</sup>

Kahmad further explained that when uncovering the interdependent relationship between religion and society, Wach showed a reciprocal influence between the two factors. First, the influence of religion on society, as seen in the formation, development, and determination of new specific religious groups. Second, the influence of society on religion. In this case, Wach focuses his attention on social factors that give the nuances and diversity of religious feelings and attitudes that exist in a particular environment or social group.<sup>46</sup>

So strong is the influence of religion in the context of handling Covid-19, then the 20% to 30% of people who ignore health protocols will become a stumbling block in handling Covid-19, moreover, this number continues to increase. The implication is given the central role of religion in Indonesian society in influencing people's views, attitudes and actions. Religion has a strong influence on people's behavior which is rooted in religious emotions. Then arise various forms of public perception of different religious patterns and behavior.

Religion as a social structure has several important aspects in the training and development of adherents, including Aspects of religious beliefs, religious rites, religious symbols, religious experiences, and religious communities.<sup>47</sup> The fatalistic attitude that emphasizes that death is predetermined and the concept of "*tawakal*" which is more synonymous with resignation and apathy towards efforts to deal with Covid-19 has led to a lack of caution among Muslims, which has resulted in many victims falling among Muslim leaders. and society in general. Such is the narrative that those who died from Covid-19 were martyred, further adding to the neglect and recklessness of some people.

The key here is the example of religious leaders in responding to Covid-19 because Indonesian people generally follow the patrimonial culture. The term "patrimonialism" itself comes from Weber to term a form of social organization that has not yet reached the impersonal and rational character of modern bureaucracy. While the term "neo" refers to the new development of a social organization that has used various modern means but still has the character of patrimonialism. This means that things that are still classic or still traditional are maintained, preserved, and used in everyday life, patrimonialism says so. In neo-patrimonialism, the stability of the system is maintained not because the system is rational, efficient, and even fair, but because of the ability of the leader to unite various interest groups around him. That's how a leader should be, stay optimistic and be

good at leading. Loyalty to various political forces is quite strong because the distribution of fulfillment of the interests of various interest groups is well organized. Various neo-patrimonial countries in the Third World are always characterized by personalism, which means the magnitude of the role and authority of leaders to distribute benefits to gain political loyalty.<sup>48</sup>

Religious figures are patrons for their followers, so they need to be wise and prudent in issuing fatwas or opinions to the public. A patron will always be a model and role model for the people. Therefore, a conservative attitude and lack of open dialogue in this matter will make it difficult to resolve and mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Religious conservatism will even become a threat if the numbers become large. religious conservatism can be identified in self-group Islam which always shows a response negative to the agenda tackling Covid-19. The negative response meant is attitude resistance they choose not to follow health protocol recommendations. The most obvious feature is clear from the group this is often contrast agenda mitigation Covid-19 with texts religious. Covid-19 is part of an effort group's certain operating mission of weakening the existence of religion or belief so that following the rule tackling Covid-19 same case with make religion weaker and threatened. Because of that way of thinking, groups prefer fixed to carry out normal religious activities or activities, organize rituals and religion in the place of worship general without implementing health protocols like those recommended government.

The covid-19 pandemic should not stop at just advising to comply with health protocols as recommended by the state. Work on enlightening the people so that they are not trapped and plunged into conservatism and religious radicalism must continue to be carried out. Don't let radicalism return to becoming a stowaway in religious communities that are in trouble and make the nation's condition during a pandemic even more chaotic.

This conservative religious understanding is influenced by the psychological factor of panic or cultural shock among some Muslims to abandon deeply rooted habits such as praying in congregation at the mosque and others that gather masses. Among the traditionalist Muslim groups, this reluctance is even more difficult considering that many religious rituals gather masses, such as tahlilan and others. Among modernists, they see the danger of spreading the virus is casuistic. Those who feel safe will continue to carry out their worship as usual at the mosque or prayer room. Meanwhile, among the revivalists who reject the health protocol apart from psychological factors, they argue by questioning whether this method of worship was ordered by the Prophet or not. Stretching the

shaf is an act that was not exemplified and ordered by the Prophet, so it must be abandoned because it is contrary to strong evidence. In addition to psychological factors, the influx of information on social media whose truth is difficult to check has also influenced the attitudes and actions of some Muslims in responding to Covid-19 and health protocols. Conspiracy theories are often the backbone of this conservative group to fight against all forms of Covid-19 prevention, including implementing health protocols.

Another factor that influences the pattern of understanding above is the economic pressure of the people who force them to ignore health protocols because they have to make a living. The next factor is the government's indecisiveness and ineffectiveness of public communication at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Confusion about how dangerous Covid-19 is and procedures to prevent its spread, causing some people to not be too sure about the information obtained from the government. This is used by conservative groups who have been at odds with the government to oppose the government's health protocols.

The implication is that due to the neglect of a small number of people, prevention of the spread of Covid-19 is experiencing problems. In some cases, those who tend to be ignorant often become carriers and at the same time victims of the malignancy of the virus. Statistical data on the death decrease of Islamic religious leaders from any of the three typologies of Indonesian Muslims above shows that the religious views, attitudes, and actions of the people greatly influence the process of preventing the spread of Covid-19. The conservative attitude in religion which is unable to see such a radical change, and the inability to adapt causes loss of life from the death of not a few Islamic religious leaders, of course, it is very detrimental to the people and nation.

## **Conclusion**

Some Muslims who reject health protocols during the Covid-19 pandemic are indeed influenced by fatalistic religious understanding. They tend to make conservative interpretations. This conservative religious understanding is influenced by : First, the psychological factor of panic or cultural shock among some Muslims. Second, the influx of information on social media whose truth is difficult to check. Third, economic pressure on the people. Fourth, the government's indecisiveness and ineffectiveness of public communication. Those who tend to be ignorant often become carriers and at the same time victims of the malignancy of the virus. Statistical data on the death decrease of Islamic religious leaders from

any of the three typologies of Indonesian Muslims above shows that the religious views, attitudes, and actions of the people greatly influence the process of preventing the spread of Covid-19.

## Endnotes

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12. Burhan Bungin (ed.), *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Jakarta: PT King Grafindo Persada, 2011), 8th edition, 101.
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21. Interview, April 18, 2022.
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23. Interview, July 29, 2002.
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30. Interview with the Chairman of LBM PB NU, July 29, 2022.
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32. The editorial of Ibn Nujaim reads: "Rejecting the danger is more important than taking advantage". Ibn Nujaim, *al-Ashbah wa al-Nadhā'ir* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1999), 78.
33. A hadith narrated by Ibn Mājah and Aḥmad from Ibn ‘Abbās. See *Musnad Aḥmad*, Juz 5, p.55, no. 2868; and *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, juz 3, h. 432, No. 2341.
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36. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ab00OTYS8Ds>
37. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYEAQ0lwEIY>
38. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOLQJT06WMw>
39. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KC6GmQV9G5g>
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41. For the Salafi-Wahhabi it is necessary to imitate the practice religious generation *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* because Muslims have practiced a lot of different religious teachings has been mixed with various forms of bid'ah and superstition. One cause is mainly because Muslims no longer maintain religious practices such as *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*. Returning to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah is the only way to protect humans from all mistakes and sins in the practice of religion. Salim bi al-‘Id al-Hilali, *Manhaj Salaf Manhaj Alternative*, trans. Andi Arlin (Jakarta: References Azzam, 2001), 1st edition, 72-73.
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