



Implications of Religious Fatwa on the Implementation of the COVID-19 Policy in Indonesia

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Abstract

This academic study has been conducted on the intricate interaction between religion and the state in Indonesia. Religion plays a significant role in how the state communicates its policy messages, which includes the COVID-19 policy in Indonesia. This study examines how state power dynamics and religious fatwas in the digital age affect Indonesia's adoption of the COVID-19 policy. A fatwa is a legal opinion or a decree which is passed down by an Islamic religious leader. The research methodology was carried out by looking at a wide range of relevant literature sources such as including books, academic journals, and already published research. The study results demonstrate that implementing government policies relating to the COVID-19 vaccine and the policy followed has produced a lobbying environment for developing power relationships between various role players. The interaction between the state's laws for addressing COVID-19 and the interests of religious organizations is often complicated and changes based on the nation involved and the specific situation that may be faced. The government has used the fatwa issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council to remedy several issues, including that faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is argued that in the current digital age, it is vital to allay any fears about the inconsistency of government policies toward religion and then there is also the possibility of fatwas to incite exclusivist views among some religious groups.

Keywords: Fatwas, Implementation Policy, COVID-19, politics, religion.



Introduction

Indonesia is a Muslim-majority country, accounting for 86.7% of the population. The relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia is complex and has become the subject of academic analysis (Ropi, 2017; Kusnandar, 2021). The Indonesian government, in its constitution, recognizes Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as official religions. Indonesia's relationship between the state and religion is inseparable because one needs the other. The state needs religion to develop, as well as religion which needs the state as the legality of moral guidance and ethical development in society (Shaleh & Wisnaeni, 2019). Assyaukanie argued Indonesia has moved towards a more pluralist and democratic political system, which makes Indonesian Muslims more pragmatic and rational (ALFITRI, 2019). Therefore, through the role of religion, the delivery of policy messages from the state can be conveyed to the public, including the COVID-19 policy in Indonesia.

The Indonesian government has implemented various policies to control the spread of COVID-19. During the initial phase of the outbreak, strict measures were taken to combat the spread of the disease while ameliorating its adverse impact on economic life (Ilo.org, 2020). The President of Indonesia declared COVID-19 a national emergency in February 2020 and formed a task force to support a high-level coordinated national response (Who.int, 2021). It was later learned that in December 2022, Indonesia had lifted all COVID-19 restrictions and switched to an endemic approach because the COVID-19 situation was under control after seeing improvements over the last ten months (Kemkes.go.id, 2022).

The involvement of religion in the policy of solving the COVID-19 pandemic is played through religious organizations that issue guidelines on how to carry out religious activities safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. This guideline is through the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) number 14 of 2020 (Mui.or.id., 2020). These guidelines have also provided flexibility to provide virtual services or implement social distancing measures through digitization. The government, as state administrator through the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, also recognizes the role of religious leaders in disseminating health protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Nasional.kompas.com, 2020). An interfaith alliance has also been formed to help people affected by the pandemic. However, there are also cases where religious beliefs conflict with public health measures, such as when some individuals refuse to follow guidelines or restrictions due to religious factors (BBC.com, 2020).

There are various perspectives on the COVID-19 Policy from the country's Muslim community and religious groups. For example, Islamic Fiqh places great importance on the sanctity and safety of human life and encourages efforts to protect humans, such as vaccine policies, from ending the spread of COVID-19. Since Fatwas are based on Fiqh and Ulamas' ijtihad, varying scientific backgrounds and religious experiences of Ulamas or authorized institutions may engender multiple different rulings on an issue, including vaccines. Fortunately, the leading religious authorities, usually under state control, supported the lockdown policies and advised people to keep away from religious institutions and observe strict rules against spreading the virus (Mardian et al., 2021; Sachedina, 2021). However, some religious groups have concerns about the relationship between policies such as administering certain COVID-19 vaccines, which have given rise to debates about whether people should be allowed to choose which COVID-19 vaccine to receive on the basis of personal ethical views. The problem arises primarily with regard to some religious groups' concerns about the connection between certain COVID-19 vaccines (Giubilini et al., 2021). In addition, there are results of analytical studies regarding religious identity specifically related to COVID-19 vaccination efforts and the skeptical views of some religious groups toward vaccines. A likely contributor to the link between religious identity and vaccine scepticism is the tendency for more-



religious people to put less trust in scientific and medical experts (Chu et al., 2021). Precisely religion and religious leaders as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution (Levin, 2020). This is a tragedy with its rejection of the centrality of science in understanding and responding to a viral pandemic and its misleading of the faith community by promulgating misinformation, theological ineptitude, and mistrust of all in authority (Jones, 2022).

The state can use conveying messages of power through religion to implement policies in various ways. The relationship between religion and the state is an interesting topic in various academic fields, as there is an interaction between religions in political and social theory and practice. It is important to note at the outset that the causal nature of these relationships is likely reciprocal, and this initial round of hypothesis testing is not primarily designed to resolve questions about the precise direction of any causal relationship (Buckley, 2018). A side effect of the power relations between the state and religion is that the dominant form of certain religions creates alliances that increase pressure to limit the activities of minority religions. The state often forms an alliance with religion in an effort to enhance political stability through increased political support, more effective control of the dominant religion, and increased political and ideological compliance (Finke, 2013; Fox, 2019). The use of the state through the role of religion in culture and society from various perspectives has shown that the relationship between the state and religion is complex and multidimensional.

The use of religion by the state to establish social legitimacy and control is not unheard of cause religion remains an important factor in the social, cultural, and political domains (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). However, the state sometimes has the final say in how religion is viewed in culture and society. Religion and culture are fundamental human components, and communication mediates these human components, these terms and relationships can be further enhanced by analyzing how forms of mass communication mediate each other (Croucher et al., 2017). This is because religion has historically played a more important role such as the tools religion has, in the form of collective spaces and voices of authority, to challenge cultural practice, meaning it will currently impact democracy and the rule of law (Abdulla, 2018). The transition to the digital era offers many advantages, and along with the substantial opportunities the digital age brings, comes a diverse range of risks and harms. from enhancing daily living to altering how we work and communicate (Child, 2018). People worldwide depend heavily on digital technologies to obtain information, education, religion, and government. Digital media is becoming essential to how each citizen interacts with their government in politics, allowing society to organize and mobilize like-minded people (Gil de Zúñiga & Chen, 2019; Nasution et al., 2023). Additionally, digital governance units have been developed, which makes it simpler to link various policies and programs, diffuse digital governance infrastructure, total spending and staff allocations for digital are also necessarily more spread out across departments and units (Clarke, 2020).

It is intriguing to consider if Indonesia's power dynamics have been shaped by the COVID-19 policy's implementation, from its early management through societal restraints and public immunization campaigns. For the people to follow these laws, religious organizations use the authority of religious fatwas to transmit their teachings. This relationship calls into question the ability of the state (ruler), institutional interest groups (religious), and public (community) obedience and resistance in the age of digitalization.

Therefore, this study aims to clarify how state power dynamics and religious fatwas relate in the digital age and what that means for Indonesia's implementation of the COVID-19 policy. This query will be provided in thorough analyses and developed using pertinent theory.



Method

The research method was carried out through literature studies by examining various relevant sources. This method can be used as a first step in research (Nurjanah & Mukarromah, 2021). Literature studies can be carried out by seeking sources from various media such as books, journals, and existing research. The purpose of the literature study was to obtain data and information needed for the research (Adlini et al., 2022). Literature study can also be carried out in several stages, such as collecting, reducing, displaying, and organizing materials. The library method refers to conducting a literature review, namely a critical analysis, and synthesis of existing research on a particular topic (Hempel, 2019). The literature review aims to identify gaps in current knowledge and provide a basis for further research. There are various approaches to conducting a literature review, including systematic, semi-systematic, and narrative reviews (Synder, 2019). To conduct a literature review, it is necessary to, first of all, define the research questions, search relevant literature, evaluate the quality of sources, and synthesize information to conclude. A literature review can be written as a standalone piece or included in a larger body of work. In short, the literature method refers to conducting a literature review, which involves critically analyzing and synthesizing existing research on a particular topic to identify gaps in current knowledge and provide a foundation for further research.

Result and Discussion

State Capacity in COVID-19 Policy

Foucault's theory of power states it is something owned by individuals or groups to control others, ignoring the real function of power in modern society (Kamahi, 2017). Power, in this case, is seen in a juridical context, namely that which relates power to sovereignty and law. The concept of power in modern society is not sovereign but disciplinary power (Mudhoffir, 2013). The concept of disciplinary power is a key aspect of state power in controlling the spread of the COVID-19 virus in society. Disciplinary power refers to how institutions such as the state provide firmness through the COVID-19 policy by imposing sanctions on violators in the initial implementation of policies such as social restrictions in various regions, even though this has experienced much resistance from the public itself. The state uses surveillance and control to regulate individual behavior while implementing the COVID-19 policy. Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power is part of a broader range of historically specific power modes and how they evolve, as with the COVID-19 outbreak.

Disciplinary power in government policy refers to the ability of government officials to enforce rules and regulations through various means of punishment or corrective action (Ridho et al., 2023). This can include fines, imprisonment, or other forms of legal action when individuals have violated the rules of the COVID-19 policy. Disciplinary power is intended to prevent individuals or organizations from violating COVID-19 policies and regulations and ensure compliance with the laws set by the authorities. The extent to which disciplinary power is used can vary depending on the specific policies and regulations and the political and social context in which those rules are enforced (Anggara, 2018). Disciplinary power is an important aspect of Government as a state because it helps maintain order and promotes the rule of law. Although it is known that the Disciplinary power of the COVID-19 Policy is a complex issue that involves balancing the need to protect public health with limiting public rights, policymakers must take action to protect people from deadly diseases. The public needs reliable Information about the COVID-19 virus, the mechanism of its transmission, the effectiveness of possible actions, and the health and socio-economic consequences (Haug et al., 2020). Using coercive power from policymakers to enforce COVID-19 policies can have a dysfunctional effect on the public. In other words, through its coercive power, the Government has been using threats, rules, and orders to control others to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Silkose, 2020). However, at the same time, there is a dysfunctional public interest that describes



activities that need to be more effective and efficient due to obstructions in the chain of affairs and public needs, especially the people's economy (Silkose, (2020).

Institutional Interest Group (Religious) in COVID-19 Policy

Institutional Interest Group Theory is a theory of political science that seeks to explain the behaviour of interest groups in the political process. This theory argues that interest groups are shaped by the institutional context in which they operate, including the political system's rules, norms, and procedures (Maisel et al., 2010). According to this theory, interest groups will adapt their strategies and tactics to suit the institutional context to maximize their influence and achieve their policy objectives. This theory has been influential in the study of interest group politics. It has been used to explain various phenomena, including the emergence of interest group litigation, grassroots mobilization, and the role of interest groups in the policy-making process. MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council) has a category as an Institutional Interest Group (Mui.or.id, 2023).

This group has an institution that claims to be a Deliberation Forum group for Muslim Scholars, Zu'ama, and Scholars in Indonesia to guide, foster and protect Muslims throughout Indonesia. With efforts for the following (Mui.or.id, 2023): (1). Provide guidance and guidance to Indonesian Muslims in realizing religious and social life that Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala blesses; (2). Providing advice and fatwas regarding religious and social issues to the Government and society, increasing activities for the realization of Islamic brotherhood and inter-religious harmony in strengthening national unity and integrity (3). Become a liaison between the ulama and macro (Government) and reciprocal translators between the people and the Government to succeed in national development; (4). Improving relations and cooperation between organizations, Islamic institutions, and Muslim scholars in providing guidance and guidance to the community, especially Muslims, by holding consultations and information on a reciprocal basis (Mui.or.id, 2023).

With this statement, the Religious Institutional Interest Group declares itself as an intermediary between the authorities and the community. Therefore, power relations with the Government are established through the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulama Council number 14 of 2020 regarding the COVID-19 policy. Regarding the perspective of power relations, several concepts can be explained. Religious institutional interest groups can use two ways to convey their interests to the Government: by selling issues to political attitudes or by influencing regulations set by the Government. Religion and the state are two entities that both function for human life and influence each other (Sadzali, 2018). The phenomenon of clergy leadership, such as the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) in issuing fatwas (Setiyanto, 2018), is still considered a determining factor in the policy, especially with the condition of society during the COVID-19 pandemic. Power relations occur between elite power as leaders of religious groups who occupy strategic positions, thereby creating the moral submission of their clients (Pradana, 2020). Regulations set by the Government, as the ruling institution, has the authority to internalize values or a set of knowledge through power intermediaries to the public as policy recipients (Holt et al., 2021).

Public Society Acceptance and Resistance to the COVID-19 Policy

Public attitudes toward government policies regarding COVID-19 are complex and vary depending on individual policies and political affiliations. The pandemic has contributed to increasing political divisions, and partisan affiliation is often the strongest predictor of behaviour and attitudes toward COVID-19 (Miller et al., 2022). Policies such as stay-at-home orders and wearing masks have effectively slowed the spread of the virus (Fowler, 2021; Brooks, 2021). However, what has become a lot of problems and debates is the administration of vaccines (Octafia, 2021). Public trust in



government policies and the perceived dangers of COVID-19 has fluctuated as rumours and misinformation spread through social media (Jacob et al., 2023)

This incident will be exacerbated by the lack of public knowledge and awareness of COVID-19 prevention measures and social distancing practices that are sometimes ignored. According to a survey conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) in 2021, most Indonesian people (around 84,9%) agree with the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sugiarto, 2021). On the other hand, there have been criticisms and protests against several government policies, such as implementing lockdowns and vaccination programs (Martin & Vanderslott, 2022). Overall, public acceptance of the government's policy on handling COVID-19 is an issue with political nuances. Resistance to changes in government policy is a common phenomenon (Shearer et al., 2016)

People may resist change for various reasons, such as fear of the unknown, especially the handling of COVID-19, which causes a lack of trust in the government, and its negative impact on their lives (McNeil, & Purdon, 2022). Resistance to change can manifest in various ways, including protests, strikes, and non-compliance. To overcome resistance to change, governments can engage in dialogue with stakeholders, provide education and information about proposed changes, and involve citizens in decision-making processes (Liu et al., 2020). The government must understand the reasons behind resistance to change and deal with it transparently and inclusively to ensure successful policy implementation.

Implications of Religious Fatwa on COVID-19 Policy as State Power Relations in the Digitalization Era

Regarding implementing the COVID-19 policy, MUI has issued several fatwas, including guidelines for religious activities during a pandemic. During a pandemic, the fatwa is thought to give a remedy for both the government and Muslims. The importance of religion in combating COVID-19 is a crucial aspect of combating the epidemic, and the government is using it through the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which issued several fatwas related to the COVID-19 policy. Fatwa No. 14 of 2020 on Organizing Worship in the Event of a COVID-19 Outbreak sets rules for religious activities during a pandemic. Another fatwa is Fatwa Number 2 of 2021 concerning COVID-19 Vaccine Products from Sinovac Life Science Co. Ltd. China and PT Bio Farma Persero, which offered directions for using the Sinovac and Bio Farma COVID-19 vaccines. MUI has also studied the dynamics and existence of its fatwa in combating the spread of COVID-19 (Mui.or.id, 2023).

The fatwa given by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) on the COVID-19 policy is significant in Indonesia. During the pandemic, the fatwa provides guidance and solutions to the government and Muslims. The fatwa also reduces the negative stigma associated with religious actors' political roles and demonstrates the growing significance of religious leaders in developing connections with policymakers. In line with this, the government requires legality, and with the support of the MUI fatwa regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, it has been able to overcome public concerns about the halal status of vaccines. This fatwa elicited a positive response from all groups since it offers crucial options and strategies to combat the spread of COVID-19. Overall, MUI fatwas influenced Indonesia's approach to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Throughout history, the power connections between religion and the state vary per country. Religion is essential in moulding government policies and regulations in some nations, such as Indonesia. Factors such as the prevalent religion in Indonesia, the government's political ideology, and the population's level of religiosity can all impact the interaction between religion and the state. The rise of social media and online platforms can be exploited to gain access to government policies backed



by religious fatwas. Social media has grown in popularity as a means of spreading religious messages.

Indonesia, for example, can readily distribute religious verses on social media so receivers can find them for themselves through social media, the belief system and behaviour of users who encounter these messages, including relationships of the interests of those in power through religious organizations to support political messages or policies aimed at the public. Religious organizations have recognized the value of using social media to deliver messages, such as information about religious holidays and political opinions and policies. Religiously polarized social media communications, on the other hand, can be emotive and linked to social and political issues.

Conclusion

The relationship of interests between religious groups and the government in Indonesia is dynamic, complex, and multifaceted. Some religious groups may seek to influence government policies and promote the values and beliefs of the dominant religious group; others may prioritize the separation of religion and state because of limited powers. Religious nationalism, or the blending of religious and national identities, is an increasingly prominent aspect of nationalism, like in Indonesia. The constitutional relationship between the state and religious interest groups in a democratic country is marked by an agreement of interests between the government and religious groups embodied in policies. Religious interest groups can also engage in lobbying activities to promote their interests, which are political offerings from the authorities.

Religious interest groups lobby for their interests in government by an intermediary between elected officials and the general public. They focus on a wide range of issues, ranging from issues inherent in religion, such as freedom of religion and support for religious schools to social, political, and policy issues where religious groups seek to advance a religious perspective. These religious groups have become the main mechanism for religious involvement in politics and policy in Indonesia. For example, implementing government policies regarding the COVID-19 policy COVID-19 Vaccination has created a lobby space for establishing power relations between them. The relationship between the interests of religious groups and the state in policies for handling COVID-19 is a complex issue that varies depending on the country and the particular context.

Religious groups have sometimes been vocal against COVID-19 policies, such as lockdowns and vaccine mandates, citing concerns about religious freedom and personal autonomy. Religious groups have supported such policies in other cases, seeing them as a way to protect public health and promote the common good through MUI Fatwa No.14/2020. State responses to this interest have also varied, with some governments accommodating religious objections to the COVID-19 policy, while others take a more restrictive approach. Overall, the relationship between religious groups and the state in COVID-19 policy is a multifaceted issue that requires careful consideration of competing interests and values. The MUI fatwa referred to above regarding COVID-19 can be conveyed through digital technology that all parties can accept.

Suggestions for research future regarding using fatwas as a relationship between government policy and religious groups. Fatwas are religious regulations issued by Islamic scholars which can be used as a reference for government policies related to religious affairs. The government has used the fatwa issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) to solve various problems, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is necessary to allay concerns over the inconsistency of government policies regarding religion and the potential for fatwas to provoke closed attitudes among certain religious groups. Despite these concerns, fatwas can still be useful tools to promote Islamic values and strengthen national unity in Indonesia.





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