

# Portrait of Indonesian Religious Communities Attitudes toward the Government Policies Restriction on Congregational Worshipping

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## Abstract

Many offenses have been perpetrated by Indonesian religious communities toward the government's policies on the restriction of congregational worshipping during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, scant studies investigating those negative attitudes using a qualitative approach. In order to fill the gap, this paper reports on the religious attitudes of Muslims who are considered to violate the restriction policy on religious activities ordered by the Indonesian government. The involved participants were policymakers, mosque caretakers, and the three largest Muslim social groups, including Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulema (NU), and traditionalists. The results of this study revealed discrepancies in how Muslims' polarized religious attitudes are constructed. These communities have different patterns of thought and diversity in terms of perceiving the government's policies. This study suggests that there is a critical role for Islamic scholars in educating Muslims about the dangers and possible consequences of COVID-19. In other words, following government policies while partaking in

congregational worship can be interpreted as a manifestation of social piety, spiritual activity, and religious faith.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Congregational Worship, Religious Communities, Government Policy

## A. INTRODUCTION

Recently, Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) has had tremendous effects on people's social life, such as on the aspects of health (Saha *et al.*, 2020), education (Kapasia *et al.*, 2020), tourism vulnerability (Duro *et al.*, 2021), mental health (Moreno *et al.*, 2021), and religious activities (Kowalczyk *et al.*, 2020). In terms of mental health effects, societies in China were found to experience anxiety symptoms and other psychological problems (Taylor, 2022). In the education sector, many schools and higher education were forced to hold online learning modes (Sun *et al.*, 2020). In the tourism sector, COVID-19 has created huge downfalls in the capital among tourism agencies (Hogue *et al.*, 2020). Although many aspects of society's live have been researched concerning the COVID-19 impacts, religious sectors have received little attention from researchers. Precisely, the problem of religious worship during the COVID-19 pandemic is becoming increasingly complex (Perry, 2010; Regus, 2021).

Religious communities in Indonesia are considered to have violated government policies regarding congregational-based worship arrangements (Hilmy, 2021; Sukamto, 2021). The policy, which is entitled to restrict religious freedom, is intended to limit congregational worship in mosques (Kuipers *et al.*, 2021). The aims and objectives are to break the chain

of transmission of COVID-19. It is done since positive cases of COVID-19 in Indonesia mostly come from religious communities (Welle, 2020). A mass religious congregation (*tabligh akbar*) in the Palopo region, participated by some of its congregation from Malaysia, allegedly triggered the infection of COVID-19 in the region (Tsani, 2020). The *jamaah tabligh*, a transnational Deobandi Islamic missionary movement, followers in Indonesia who participated in a mass religious congregation in India are also affected by COVID-19. Moreover, a total of 183 Kebun Jeruk Jakarta Mosque members were declared as people under observation (ODP) for COVID-19 suspects (Wahanaputra, 2020). *Fatwa* from the Indonesian Ulema Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or MUI) has not been properly understood by most Indonesian Muslims (Mudassir, 2020).

Several studies also confirm that polarization among Muslim's understanding of the government restriction policies exists in the Indonesian context (Sarnoto & Hayatina, 2021; Sukamto & Parulian, 2020). These have created different perspectives and actions on whether societies should obey government restriction policies (Hilmy, 2021; Regus, 2021). Proponents of such a regulation believe that obeying is part of being a good Muslim in a nation-based country like Indonesia (Nuryana & Fauzi, 2020), while the opponents conder the regulation as a prohibition for congregational worship (Rahvy & Ridho, 2021). This evidence, thus, leads to the importance of further investigation into why Muslim societies in Indonesia rejected the government regulation on the COVID-19 restriction.

The commandment of the Indonesian government concerning guidelines for the implementation of religious

activities in worship places, realizing a productive and safe society during the COVID-19 pandemic has not been maximally socialized (Kim, 2022). In fact, only a few Muslims understand that there is a *fatwa* from the great Ulema of Al Azhar University to Muslims worldwide to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic by avoiding *jamaah* or congregational-based prayers in mosques for a while during the pandemic (Syakur, 2020). In the theological explanation, Muslims fail to understand the difference between fear of Allah and fear of a virus disease (Ishom, 2020). Similarly, the transmission of COVID-19 also occurred among Christians in Surabaya, East Java. In Kediri, the congregation prayer meeting confirmed 19 infected people for COVID-19 (Safi'i *et al.*, 2020). The attitude of rejection among the Indonesian people who are affiliated with religious identity has sparked an idea of why they behave so. In order to construe such an issue, listening to their voices is a worth-doing process to be done.

Recently, studies on Muslims' attitudes have tended to look at two aspects, including the attitude of the group that lacks religious knowledge (Mustain, 2020) and the attitude of the exclusive ideological groups (Ahmad, 2020; Ishom, 2020; Qotadah, 2020; Tsani, 2020). Many exclusive Islamic groups failed to understand the ban on Friday prayers as fear of COVID-19. This contra group often conflicts with the policymakers in the field. To the best of our understanding, a paucity of research explains the rejection of policies among Muslims in Indonesia. Thus, it is necessary to reveal why Muslims rejected the government's restriction policy on their worship practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Every policy is formulated by the community on the basis

of its understanding and becomes a practical factor for its operations (Ataguba, 2020). Moreover, cooperation between Ulema and policymakers is significant to control societies so that transmission of COVID-19 through mosque communities can be minimized. The role of Ulema is vital to empower people to raise awareness and adherence to policies to prevent COVID-19 transmission in the mosque environment. Therefore, the present study aims to explore 1) the forms of violation and construction of the restriction policy on congregational-based worshipping and 2) how Ulema and policymakers manage and empower societies to comply with the government's prevention policies.

This article reports on a case study of why Muslim societies rejected the policy of restricting congregational worship in mosques during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first section of the article elaborates on empirical problems in societies and recent studies supporting such problems. It then continues with the discussion of religious activities in several cities in Indonesia. The first section ends with two proposed research questions. The next part of the article is a literature review that discusses the government restriction policies, the role of Islamic scholars in responding to the policy, and the role of Ulema in empowering the societies regarding the restriction policies. Furthermore, research methodology using a qualitative approach is also discussed in order to elicit and analyze the data for addressing research problems. Following the research methodology, findings and analysis are presented and the article ends with a conclusion and recommendations for policymakers.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Government Restriction Policies on Worshipping Practices during COVID-19 Pandemic**

The government policy on limiting religious freedom in the context of tackling the spread of the epidemic and transmission of COVID-19 explicitly regulates the management of congregational worship in mosques, which involves large congregations (Pabbajah *et al.*, 2020). This policy is a follow-up to social distancing, physical distancing, and stay-at-home policies to break the chain of transmission of the COVID-19 virus (Ahmed, 2020; Begum, 2022). After the issuance of Presidential Decree No.12 of 2020, which stated that COVID-19 was a non-natural global disaster, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs and MUI responded to the Presidential Decree by issuing decrees and *fatwas* to provide instructions for Muslims to carry out congregational prayers at mosques.

Regarding the five policies regarding the regulation and restriction of worship in mosques, there are three decrees: Ministry of Religious Affairs Decree No.2055 of 2020, MUI *Fatwa* No. 14 of 2020, and Governor Circular No. 551/7809/012/2020. The substance of the policy regulates the procedure for using mosques and calls on Muslims to be aware of the transmission of COVID-19 in worship. There is no explicit ban on worshipping in mosques during the pandemic; the focus is on observing health protocols and the principle of legal decision-making, with avoiding *mafsadat* (damages) having precedence over choosing *maslahat* (benefits). The Presidential Decree was issued

based on information and provisions from the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, that the COVID-19 pandemic is a global pandemic (Schnabel & Scheiman, 2021). By publishing recommendations for the prevention of COVID-19 transmission, the Indonesian Ministry of Health would contribute to the prevention of COVID-19 transmission in Indonesia (Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2020). In addition, the Director General for the Prevention of Infectious Diseases has issued instructions for COVID-19 preventive readiness (Hilmy, 2021; Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2020).

Technically, the response to the spread of COVID-19 was handled by the Task Force Division to accelerate the handling of COVID-19 (Task Force for the Acceleration of Controlling COVID-19). With their power and authority, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Indonesian Ulema Council regulate religious worship and Muslims to actively participate in preventing the transmission of COVID-19 (Mushodiq & Imron, 2020). The transmission of COVID-19 in East Java is the highest spread in Indonesia; the latest data on July 12, 2020, confirmed 16,658 people, 31,009 people under observation (ODP), 12,500 patients under surveillance (PDP), and 1242 dead people (Turista *et al.*, 2020). The increment of virus transmission in Kediri has risen significantly. Data dated on July 11, 2020, showed 81 infected people, 25 PDP, 5 people without symptoms (OTG), and 1 person died.

### **The Role of Scholars and Policymakers in Policy Oversight**

In the role of mitigation, the Indonesian Ulema Council was actively acting to produce *fatwas*, which are

the Islamic formal legal basis for the COVID-19 prevention policy. Communication between the government and Ulema is a strategic step to socializing and understanding society (Daniel, 2020; Regus, 2021). This COVID-19 pandemic has been considered in the treasures of Islamic literature called *thoun*. Such kind of outbreak disease has existed since the time of the Prophet. *Bahtsul Masail* (religious-based discussion) of Nadhlatul Ulama Regional Administrator (PWNU) of East Java issued a legal decision related to Friday prayers in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak (Baihaqi, 2020). The closure of several large mosques worldwide, including the Prophet's Mosque and the Grand Mosque, is a form of the Ulema's responsibility in handling COVID-19 (Fajriah, 2020). Government strategic policies can be socialized through mosques to avoid faith clashes with mosque communities (Ahmed, 2020). Ideally, controlling COVID-19 requires the involvement of all communities, both those who have been and those who have not been affected (Prawoto *et al.*, 2020). The MUI *fatwa* consists of nine points explaining openly to the public, especially the mosque community, so that they have the same understanding and do not cause friction among Muslims (Ansori, 2020; Pabbajah *et al.*, 2020).

Pros and cons in the Muslim community occur regarding government restriction policies. The pro group was alleged to have read it in full. The contra group presumably does not read the literature carefully or is not interested in the issue (Al-Astewani, 2021; Rusyana *et al.*, 2020). For example, the Muhammadiyah mass organization, the second-largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, agreed with the MUI *fatwa* (Hafil, 2020). In the *Maqoshidus* Sharia, it is explained that the rule of



law with the principle of avoiding *mudharat* (disadvantages) takes precedence over taking *maslahat* (benefits) (Sunarto, 2020). The role of civil society networks in breaking the chain of the spread of COVID-19, along with the socio-economic impacts of social restrictions, to complement the state's role as an organization, community, and individual is crucial (Schnabel & Scheiman, 2021). COVID-19 can generate collective awareness even though it is an emergency, at least to reduce the wider impact (Sari, 2020). Within the government, there has been a paradigm shift in disaster management by mainstreaming the role of the community, as mandated by Law No. 24/2007 on disaster management. In addition, there is a change in approach from disaster emergency response to disaster risk reduction (Bappenas, 2016).

### **The Role of Ulema in Empowering the Community during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The responsibility of the Ulema towards the people during this pandemic faced a formidable challenge, not only in religious attitudes but also regarding legal awareness and social solidarity. The religious attitude of the Muslim community in the midst of this pandemic shows solid inner pressure. Rituals of worship that were previously carried out freely have now been restricted. However, many Muslims still violate the provisions and restrictions on congregational worship in mosques; even for *tarawih* prayers, Friday prayers, and Eid Al-Fitr or Eid Al-Adha praying were still practiced. In reality, there are those who continue to carry out health protocols by using masks and keeping their praying distance, and some do not care about health protocols at

all (Darmawan *et al.*, 2020). Local Ulema understanding of pandemic mitigation is still lacking; COVID-19 perceives something completely new; hence it is not expected that Ulema knowledge will be open to discussion. This is because the role of the local Ulema in local community life is significant (Sahlan, 2019). In this case, the local Ulema's authority becomes the mosque caretaker, replacing the authoritative position of the great Ulema with a more limited function and role, which is considered more strategic because of his closeness to the congregation. The congregation has recognized his religious capacity and abilities because they believe in them. During the pandemic period, mosques and their caretakers determine the activities of mosques. There are differences in policies between one mosque and another in congregational worship activities. Mosques that are dominated by Muhamadiyah groups adhere more to the policy of restricting worship and eliminating all *jamaah* prayer (congregational worship) activities in mosques. Meanwhile, the mosque, which NU groups congregants dominate, continues to perform congregational prayer by observing the provisions of health protocols (Kurniawan, 2020).

The capacity of the Ulema in community leadership is determined by the extent to which they can influence the ummah or congregation in understanding and obeying the rule of law, as well as harmonizing relations between groups in the area of their leadership so that government policies do not conflict with people's understanding (Rasyid, 2019; Sarnoto & Hayatina, 2021). Empowerment of the community becomes essential in meaning so that the people have adequate abilities to adapt to new situations. The significance of spreading awareness is due to the fact that it

forces individuals to put the interests of their fellow citizens ahead of their own interests, which in turn makes a living on a pluralist level more conducive (Nuryatno, 2011). Religious moderation is important in reaffirming the importance of religion and nation so that the benefit of the public becomes a priority (Husna & Febriyanti, 2017; Ni'am & Nurhayati, 2018).

## **C. METHOD**

### **Design**

This study employed a case study design within the qualitative descriptive framework. The focus was on the rejection of Muslim groups in the policy of restricting congregational worshipping in mosques during the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes types of offense and construction of policies to restrict congregational worship practices in mosques, cooperation and communication between Ulema and policymakers in monitoring congregational worship practices in mosques, and the role of Ulema in empowering individuals to restrict the congregational worship activities that take place at mosques.

### **Participant Profiles**

Five social groups of Indonesians, which consisted of policymakers, mosque caretakers, and three Muslim social groups, Muhammadiyah, NU, and traditionalist, were involved in this study. Participants' names were coded for anonymity using P1, P2, P3, and so forth.

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected through individual interviews with the participants. They were interviewed for around 45 minutes to 1 hour each. The interviews were done using the participants' national language to ensure they shared their voices well. The interviews were also audio-recorded. Observations were also done to verify the participants' answers.

## **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data was carried out using six steps of a thematic approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, researchers familiarized themselves with the data by listening to it multiple times. Second, the data were then transcribed verbatim, and researchers read them to understand the global meaning. Afterward, the researchers continued reviewing the transcripts to discover possible emerging patterns. Furthermore, initial codes were generated based on the data. Subsequently, researchers gave complete coding from the early coding processes. Finally, themes were obtained from the coded data.

## **D. FINDINGS**

### **The Construction of Violations of Restriction Policy**

The government policies to tackle COVID-19 through the decree from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the *fatwa* from MUI, and the circular letter from the Governor of East Java have generated various responses. Government policies that are

intended to regulate the obligatory *jamaah* prayer activities, *tarawih*, Friday prayer, Eid prayer, and other activities that bring together congregations in mosques, responded to the pros and cons. They decided the mosque to be completely closed, keep it open with health protocols, and keep it open without health protocol for their own reasons. Mosque caretakers closed mosques because the COVID-19 pandemic was dangerous, as shared by P1. The congregation should pray in their respective homes, as expressed by P2. Mosque caretakers opened a mosque with a health protocol because the community needed more intensive worship, provided the *jamaah* obeyed the health protocol (P3 & P4). They continued to open the mosque for all congregational activities without health protocols, arguing that government regulations, social distancing, and physical distancing are against religious teachings because COVID-19 is an irresistible destiny of Allah the Almighty (P5). Mosque caretakers must be able to place the interests of many people above individual interests (P6).

A subsection of the Muslim community does not have an accurate understanding of the virus and the method by which it transmits. They still open mosques to worship, without following health protocol. They leave of house to work without caring about health protocols. This is because they lack access to the right information in accordance with their understanding. The rapid and massive virus transmission does not make them afraid and worried. They are more afraid of being unable to eat, so they keep working while not following health protocols (masks). They believe that it merely makes the infected people difficult to breathe due to the fact that they consider COVID-19 to be a common disease. Because there is

covidence available, it is reasonable to assume that the death of a person was inevitable. Throughout the interview, the participants share the information with one another that:

*During this pandemic, people should pray a lot to get closer to Allah. On the contrary, why should the mosque be closed if they could pray by wearing a mask. The congregation must keep their distance. This is not allowed in religion. I still pray at the mosque, and the congregation also does the same thing. Illness is everywhere. I am more afraid that my family will not be able to eat. If told to stay at home, what do the children eat? We can die from hunger, not from Covid. Rich people can stay at home because they have something to eat every day. We are small people, who work today to eat today too. If I can't leave the house, my family and I will starve. The use of masks interferes with activities, because it is difficult to breathe. If we are hard workers, then we wear masks, we get sick instead of getting healthy. All viruses are contagious, the important thing is that the Bible takes care of oneself. Don't be near people who are sick. (P1, interview, June 20, 2020)*

The difference in the decision of *takmir* mosque is caused by factors of reading, knowledge, and understanding. There are those who read comprehensively, so they understand the purposes and goals. Some read partially, some do not read at all, and the information is merely obtained through social media. Knowledge and understanding of the principles of Islamic law in Qowaidul Fiqiyyah in making Islamic law, prioritizing away from complexities rather than taking advantage of the worship (P7). This policy is to protect the community (P2). Reading some of the contents and assessing that the use of

mosques is permissible as long as it meets the provisions of health protocols, the principles of Fiqh can be understood by avoiding infection with health protocols and still being able to benefit from the congregation (P8). The *jamaah* did not read or understand the principles of *qowaid fiqiyah*. Knowledge of media information as a conflict between mosque caretakers and congregation becomes the basis for the decision.

The traditionalist group has a conservative–textualist pattern of religious understanding. Government policies are always sought for reference in the text of the Qur’an and Hadith. Traditionalists do not seem to be facing any psychological burden due to the covid pandemic, which has generated anxiety among the public. Everything is believed to be God’s will and they believe that God says this outbreak has a specific purpose, which humans might not understand. As a result, it is necessary for them to embrace it with sincerity, patience, and devotion by dedicating a great deal of worship, remembrance, and prayer to Allah in order to fortify their thoughts. The health protocol is considered to be contrary to Islamic law and the pillars of prayer. For example, praying to wear a mask, keeping the prayer time apart between congregations, and not shaking hands are considered contrary to religious provisions. They have such faith that they continue to worship in congregation at the mosque, despite the mosque not following the health protocol. Moreover, they continue studying as usual because they are more convinced that this Covid outbreak requires everyone to pray more in order to become closer to Allah. They also engage in other activities without concern about health protocols since their faith in God’s predestination

empowers them to confront the ferocity of the pandemic. The participant shared in the interview as follows:

*I perform the obligatory prayers in congregation every day at the mosque. Not reducing any form of worship in the Covid season. The atmosphere of the mosque remains crowded every day. The congregation of our mosque is increasing, from people from congregations of other mosques, who use the health protocol. Everyone will die, don't know when will die. Because this is the most important moment to increase piety to Allah. The facilities provided by village officials for worshipers such as masks, we distributed sanitizers, but not for use in mosques. Because praying is not allowed to wear a mask. To face Allah, the face must be open. Prayer is praying, if the face is covered, our prayer will be blocked by a mask. Likewise keeping the distance between prayer times, that will be fulfilled by the devil among the congregation. This is against the Shari'a. Because the essence of prayer is to stay away from evil by expelling the devil within us. Keeping that distance is the same as inviting satan. Al-Qur'an recitation and education activities are still running. Pilgrims prefer to be in the mosque, rather than at home. Because his neighbor's house was closed. Relations with neighbors became tenuous. If you are in the mosque there is entertainment, hearing the voices of people reading the Koran, praying, reading, and so on. We cannot get this situation when we are at home, which is completely limited. (P8, interview, June 23, 2020)*

## **The Pattern of Cooperation Between Ulema and Policymakers**

The relationship between Ulema and the policymakers went well, with coordination, consolidation, and evaluation



within community control. All activities during the COVID-19 pandemic were done virtually (P7). The communication strategy should take into account the diversity of the group. There are patterns of equality, mutual respect, and education due to the numerous methods in which communities perceive. The pattern of equality means that Ulema and policymakers have equal roles and responsibilities. The pattern of mutual respect is that the Ulema and the policymakers have different roles but have the same responsibility. Since this group is resistant to complying with health protocols, the instruction pattern remains as it is (P8). Attempts were made against the Ulema, who closed the mosque by appreciating his decision. Collaborate with Ulema, who establish mosques with health procedures, and maintain close interaction to monitor the situation's progression of COVID-19 transmission in the city area. Efforts were made to groups that opened mosques without health protocols by continuously educating Ulema and congregation individually about the potential dangers of COVID-19 (P9). Ulema can respect the duties and responsibilities of the policymakers in controlling COVID-19 transmission (P10). Ulema can empathize with the implementation of the officers' duties during this hefty pandemic season (P11). The Ulema put the apparatus as part of the government that orders society (P12).

The obstacles the authorities face in cooperating with religious scholars depend on the community's attitude during the COVID-19 pandemic (P7). The high level of public concern facilitates the apparatus's task, which is the result of the work of the Ulema (P10). Authorities face a significant issue because of the large number of people who

do not care about the spread of COVID-19. They did not want to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in activities both at home and at the mosque. This is the responsibility of the Ulema and policymakers to educate (P8). Other obstacles are more individual in nature, both in communication, coordination, and consolidation (P11). Societies that often experience anxiety are frequently unable to regulate their emotional distress. Apart from carrying out their duties, the apparatus also has responsibility for themselves and their families (P9). The policymakers also obey social distancing and physical distancing; if they carry out field supervision, they also experience concerns about their health.

Keeping distance between individuals is an obligation because the transmission of COVID-19 is so fast and massive. The Work From Home (WFH) policy is one of the reasons why people cannot meet. In addition, workplace colleagues may be separated for a duration of two years. Similarly, the communication between Ulema had problems in the face-to-face meeting for congregational worshipping. Therefore, what can be done optimally is to communicate and interact online. This communication system is accessible, yet there are substantial impediments. Therein exists the impossibility of establishing emotionally respectful relationships in order to review field conditions and find psychological barriers because there is a sense of worry, anxiety, and fear of the ferocity of COVID-19. In addition, Ulema, who formerly came regularly to the mosque to provide the religious talk, also cannot come freely because a local policy prohibits recitation of no more than half an hour.

*The takmir of the NU mosque and the congregation inform that the local apparatus regularly coordinates both online and offline. with takmir from several existing mosques. Information from the Regional Government is submitted. Especially about the current conditions. Data updates are continuously carried out by the apparatus. Monitoring information from social media also contributes to providing information. Because the mass media is the only source of information. Conditions that are very stressful demand that the apparatus, Ulema, and the takmir of the mosque continue to pay attention to the safety of the community. Everyone will prioritize their own safety, as well as the apparatus. Therefore, public awareness is expected to always be vigilant and avoid transmission of Covid. (P8, interview, June 23, 2020)*

The formalization of relations often colors social relations that have been well-established. Local officials who know each other closely often keep their distance from the *takmir*. This is primarily due to social distancing policies. According to some people who have been able to adjust to self-isolation, it turns out that they are more comfortable at home. This then influences the pattern of relations between the local officials and *takmir*.

### **The Role of Ulema in Empowering Societies during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The local Ulema authority, with the status of mosque caretakers, is responsible for empowering its congregation. The mosque caretaker's position has a double function, as the management of the mosque as well as the Ulema for

the congregation, because it serves as a reference for the diversity of the *jamaah*. Mosque caretakers disseminate to the congregation about government policies and what mosque caretakers are doing. The closure of the mosque is a solution to protect the congregation from virus infection. Protecting them means protecting the communities around them. The congregation must understand why mosque caretakers close the mosque so as not to misunderstand because avoiding complexities takes precedence over taking advantage of what is embraced.

There are attitudes and constraints against the decision (P1); for example, *jamaah* is advised to perform congregational prayers at their respective homes. The problem arises when the congregation continues to pray in the congregation at other mosques (P2). In other places, *takmir* conducted socialization about the transmission of COVID-19, and everyone was careful to protect themselves. In addition, *takmir* deliberated on the congregation's routine activities. The congregation asked the mosque to remain open so that it could continue to carry out worship. During the pandemic, the congregation needs a more particular and ideal prayer medium, the mosque, for congregational-based worshipping. The important thing is that the congregation must adhere to health protocols; therefore, the problems arose in the congregation who disagreed with the mosque's decision (P5). As a result, mosque caretakers cannot prohibit individuals from worshipping in congregation, since this is a fundamental Islamic follower need (P12). Consequently, *takmir* accompanied them to strengthen their mind to face the pandemic. The problem is that some congregants do

not attend the mosque to worship; therefore, the moment is diminishing (P12).

The position of Ulema in community empowerment is crucial while using religion-based understanding through *tausiyah*, the broadcast of *dawah* (proselytizing), at the mosque, and on social media. Many mosque activities were restricted, affecting their presence or roles in society. Even though local media, radio, and TV are often used to conduct *tausiyah*, Ulema's message is mainly conveyed through the *takmir* of the mosque, both written and verbal messages. It is because the Muslim community must get closer to Allah by carrying out many prayers that are circumcised to ask Allah for protection. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, moral support must persist so that people's spiritual power can overcome all sorts of fear and anxiety. Thus, Ulema emphasizes that people worship in their homes more because it is safer than in the mosque. Staying away from harm is a more noble practice than getting the benefit of congregational-based worship.

Providing food assistance to the community is only one way for the government to lighten the economic burden. To those who have been infected, the government and non-governmental organizations have really helped their families. Because they have to be isolated, automatically, those who provide food and other needs are the surrounding community along with the Ulema and the government. This strategy can lighten the burden on the family because the government provides health protocols assistance with sterilization, masks, sanitizers, and vitamins booster for the protection of people's bodies against infection. So far, the support of

Ulema and officials for the community has been quite good. This pandemic is the problem; everyone is not used to doing their best for others. The desire to help others is there, but the provisions of social distancing limit and restrict it.

The role of Ulema, especially during the pandemic season, is to motivate and strengthen mental spirituality by increasing prayer activities. Worship does not depend on place; at home with family by strengthening the feeling of surrender to Allah (P1). In addition, other scholars promoted worship activities by inviting the *jamaah* to improve *qiyamul lail*, a supererogatory prayer at night, and other inner efforts such as sunnah fasting. Surrender is the finest way to boost the immune system because it is a pandemic that affects everyone, people should avoid stress and anxiety (P4). Empowerment of the congregation by inviting worship increment, spiritual efforts with surrender and *tawakkal* (the reliance on Allah), and Islamic speech as a reminder of the congregation to accept their destiny because Allah, has determined everything. The fate of illness and death is inevitable, and humans do not understand when it will come, either with COVID-19 or other causes. Thus, during this pandemic season, the congregation must remain in faith, and it must even be increased (P6).

## **E. DISCUSSION**

The government policy on the prevention of COVID-19 transmission has explicitly entitled restrictions on religious freedom during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hilmy (2020) strengthen the decree of the Ministry of Religion does not strictly prohibit the use of mosques, but only in the form of

arrangements for the management of worship in mosques during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mudassir (2020) said the Ulema *fatwa* and the Ministry of Religious Affairs Decree are guidelines for the management of worship in mosques during the COVID-19 pandemic. The community and Ulema are expected to be able to mitigate and detect their environment early against the transmission of COVID-19. Previous research by Pabbajah et al. (2020) revealed that this mitigation becomes a joint decision on whether congregational prayers in the mosque will continue to be carried out or not temporarily. Mushodiq and Imron (2020) explained the government policy deals with the implementation of fardhu prayers, Friday prayers, tarawih, and Eid al-Fitr, which allows for faster and more massive transmission of COVID-19. Apart from a small number of congregants at a particular mosque who do not adhere to health protocols, this phenomenon in the community, particularly the mosque's congregation, does not violate the provisions and is even appreciated, with the exception of a few congregants who do not adhere to health protocols (Schnabel, 2018).

The difference in the construction of government policies is due to the understanding of policies and patterns of group diversity (Mustain, 2020), which is polarized into modern, moderate, and traditional variants. Pro-contra friction occurs in the group (Ansori, 2020) as the responses of the Ulema and *takmir* of the mosque to this policy are different, according to the mindset of the group. As a result, it affects the attitude of the congregation of each group. It had contrary to the mosque caretakers' decision. Research results support this field data stated by Sarnoto and Hayatina (2021), "polarization of

Muslim community toward government policy in overcoming COVID-19 in Indonesia, differences between religious groups are a problem adds to the complexity of tackling COVID-19. The modernist group put forward rational, realistic, that the global COVID-19 pandemic is dangerous, with direct and massive transmission through physical proximity. The congregational prayers in mosques are considered to have more complexities (Fajriah, 2020). Moderate groups are more concerned with the community context by respecting the provisions of the health protocol (Baihaqi, 2020). This diversity pattern is known to take a middle ground in religious decision-making. As in the field findings, congregational rituals remain open in moderate-group mosques with the application of stricter health protocols. Traditional groups are more concerned with obedience to religious teachings than other interests. Textual and rigid religious thinking closes everything, especially those that are against religion (Schnabel & Scheiman, 2021). The government policy is considered to prohibit prayer in mosques. Social and physical distancing is considered contrary to the provisions of congregational prayer. This finding is consistent with the results of Schnabel and Scheiman (2021) research that textual patterns of religious understanding affect people's attitudes and understanding of the transmission of COVID-19. The belief in Allah's destiny closes his worries about the transmission of COVID-19.

The formalization of the relationship between Ulema and officials so far has been marked by a form of consolidation in community control. During the pandemic season, it is increased in practical form in the field. As Daniel (2020) found, formal relations between officials to build



communication is very important, even though it is done online. Consolidation through intensive communication through online can build appreciation, mutual respect, and recognition of each other's roles and responsibilities (Daniel, 2020). Going to the field to educate the public, both groups and individuals, is challenging for the apparatus. It was difficult for officers to conduct fieldwork when the Covid exchange was raging. Everyone was scared, worried, and worried about their safety because each individual must protect himself by keeping his distance from others.

Many groups still do not care about the transmission of COVID-19, which are vulnerable to infection. They are people who have problems with economic, social, and religious understanding, as explained by Darmawan et al. (2020) findings above. The phenomenon in the policymakers' field is active in creating a cooperative situation because there is a perception that overcoming and preventing the transmission of COVID-19 is the domain of the government. In order to avoid negatively affecting public trust, policymakers' persuasion in carrying out their duties must be fair (Rasyid, 2019). All parties in society are also responsible for reducing the transmission of COVID-19. It was discovered in the research that certain individuals comprehend the function of the apparatus so that they may respect their responsibilities.

Each group has a different religious mindset. This became the focus of the field authorities so that there would be no mosque-based conflict between the apparatus and congregation or the apparatus and the *takmir* (Kurniawan, 2020). Ansori (2020) explained that different religious groups' attitudes determine the pattern of relations with

Ulema and officials. The rational modernist group makes it easier to carry out the task of the apparatus because, in general, this group supports more government policies (Hafil, 2020) in dealing with COVID-19 issues. Muhamadiyah Mosque supports government policies more. This attitude is evidenced by closing mosque activities from congregational worship, and other religious activities. With the moderate group, the apparatus can respect because this group's thinking of diversity accommodates the interests of all parties, in this case, the interests of the congregation and the government. This finding was confirmed by Baihaqi (2020) and Hilmy (2020). They stated that traditional groups become challenges for the authorities because their religious understanding constrains the process of adjusting to the COVID-19 pandemic. Darmawan (2020) and Baihaqi (2020) explain how the religious attitudes of traditional groups, which are difficult to accept a new reality, are contrary to the texts of the scriptures (Ishom, 2020). His devotion to religion understands that fear of Allah precedes the fear of COVID-19 infection. Therefore, the risk of COVID-19 transmission is higher due to ignorance of the provisions of health protocols in congregational places.

The most urgent issues that the congregation must understand are the handling and prevention of the transmission of COVID-19 and the chronology of the issuance of government policies regarding restrictions on religious freedom. The finding of Hilmy's (2021) work revealed that a complete understanding of government policies is essential so that the congregation can understand the aims and objectives of these policies. Freedom of worship in the pandemic season must take into account the general benefit. Health protocols

are used to break the chain of transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Muslims must understand the principles of *qowaidul fiqiyah* in the practice of worship; avoiding complexities that take precedence over taking advantage (Al-Astewani, 2021; Sunarto, 2020) in his article "To open or Close? Covid 19. Mosque of the role of religious authority. The role of the Ulema is significant to provide understanding and insight to the congregation so that misunderstandings do not occur. Sukamto (2021) stated that group friction proves that the pros and cons always color policies and decisions. With intensive communication between Ulema and the congregation, misunderstandings can be avoided. This explanation is reinforced in the previous research (Qotadah, 2020).

The religious knowledge resources of the Ulema, which have been the basis for increasing the religious insight of the congregation, have the right momentum to increase the moral-ethical resources of the *jamaah* to adapt to facing COVID-19 as a new phenomenon. Pabbajah et al. (2020) explained that following health protocols is the primary key to breaking the chain of COVID-19 rule and has a broad religious meaning as a manifestation of faith, worship, and piety. Moreover, Daniel (2020) and Baihaqi (2020) explained the importance of education to raise awareness and put the public interest first, part of good deeds. That is to believe that Allah the Almighty created various kinds of creatures, both good and dangerous to humans, which means worship with submission, obedience, and efforts through provisions that protect the lives of many people. The meaning of piety maintaining the safety of themselves and others from COVID-19 transmission is a form of love and concern. Therefore, according to Darmawan et

al. (2020), the task of the Ulema is to instill awareness that COVID-19 is a global problem that targets all people massively and dangerously, and everyone has an obligation to overcome it by complying with health protocols.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the violation of government policy restrictions by mosque congregations is a minor component of the Islamic social system. Also, they continue to open the mosque for congregational prayers and leave their homes for work. Religious thought patterns and the economic demands of the family influence this attitude of violation. They are more obedient to religious teachings than obeying human regulations. Societies' lack of understanding of COVID-19 ignores the dangers that threaten the lives of individuals and communities. Besides that, the differences in the construction of these government policies gave rise to friction in their respective groups. This is because understanding government policies do not mean they get a comprehensive explanation of the government restriction policies. After all, it is not well-socialized. Findings from this study inform two contributions. First, the study shows evidence that traditionally threatening groups of Muslims have strong faith, which violates "common sense" about the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the study advises the government, Ulema, or other Islamic community elites on the importance of intensive communication on policies enacted. Thus, society must understand why these rules are constructed, how they are enacted, their purpose, and what rewards or punishments will be imposed on society who commits an offense to the rules.

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