



Research Article

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The Controversy of Muslim Community Interpretation of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Naqiyah Naqiyah^{1*}

Irwan Abdullah²

Zulfi Mubaraq³

Farah Nuril Izzah⁴

Hasse Jubba⁵

Muhammad Khairi Mahyudin⁶

Farah Amani⁷

Inas Haidar⁷

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. KH. Saifuddin Zuhri (UIN Saizu),
Jl. Ahmad Yani 40A Purwokerto, Jawa Tengah 53126, Indonesia.

²Universitas Gadjah Mada Yogyakarta, Bulaksumur,
Caturtunggal, Sleman, Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia.

³Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Jl. Gajayana No.50,
Dinoyo, Lowokwaru, Malang, Jawa Timur 65144 Indonesia.

⁴Tilburg University, Netherland, Warandelaan 2, 5037 AB Tilburg, Netherlands.

⁵Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Jl. Brawijaya, Geblagan,
Tamantirto, Kasihan, Bantul, Yogyakarta 55183 Indonesia.

⁶Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Bandar Baru Nilai,
71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

⁷Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Jl. Profesor Dr. HR Boenjamin No.708,
Omit Dukuhbandong, Grendeng, Purwokerto 53122, Indonesia.

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract

The Muslim community in Indonesia interprets Covid-19 controversially, which may have various consequences. This paper aims to map the pattern of interpretation of Covid-19 among Muslims in Indonesia and analyze how different understandings hindered pandemic crisis countermeasures. The data were obtained from online news and social media, which were then confirmed by open interviews, specifically covering two areas: the respondents' views related to the interpretation of Covid-19 and the bases for their opinion. This study found three types of understanding: First, textual interpretation, in which Covid-19 was interpreted as a 'punishment and a creature of God, so there is no need to be afraid of; instead, we need to get closer to God. Second, contextual interpretation, where Covid-19 was interpreted as a disaster/trial, needs to be addressed by complying with health protocols in Indonesia and improving our spirituality. Third, spiritual interpretation, where Covid-19 was interpreted as a test, so those who passed this test will increase their piety. Thus, the controversy in understanding the substance of the Covid-19 pandemic needs to be overcome. This paper suggests that more intensive education is required to improve public knowledge about the Covid-19 pandemic to prevent further adversity in its countermeasures.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, text interpretation, controversy; Muslim community

1. Introduction

Covid-19 has been interpreted by Indonesian Muslim communities not only as a viral disease but has also been interpreted in many different ways. Some people believed that the death of any cause, including Covid-19, was a divine provision that could not be controlled by humans (Subarkah, 2020). Some thought that Covid was a test from God (Supriatna 2020). In contrast, some believed the enormous death toll during Covid-19 was a severe threat (Widiyanto, 2020). These differences in interpreting the pandemic and its countermeasures can become a significant obstacle to the efforts to fight the pandemic in Indonesia, as pointed out by Wiku Adisasmito, spokesman for the Covid-19 Handling Task Force (CnnIndonesia, 2020). Many factors could affect the pandemic countermeasures, including the need for a super-fast advancement in biomedical sciences and medical technology. Furthermore, improving our knowledge, mental attitudes, religion, and spirituality on this brand-new disease is also urgently required to catch up with this fast-spreading pandemic. Consequently, we need to have a better understanding of the truth of the Covid-19 pandemic and synchronous actions to overcome this pandemic. However, this pandemic has been interpreted based on various theories, including religious backgrounds (Pirutinsky et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, the existing studies mostly tended to overlook the importance of the relationship between religion/spirituality and the pandemic. Only a few studies have addressed these issues, including the relationship between religion and pandemics, which was discussed historically to show that pandemics have been known in the history of Muslims (Ridho, 2020). Religion has a trauma healing function for Muslims (Ulfiah et al., 2020). Darmawan et al. (2020) studied the religious responses of the Indonesian Muslim community in dealing with Covid-19, primarily related to the implementation of prayer services. This situation was also experienced by Muslim communities in other parts of the world, such as the U.K., where fatwas related to religious practices during the pandemic by Muslim scholars (muftis) were ambiguous and even contradictory (Maravia et al., 2021). Furthermore, reflections on the possible implications of Covid-19 for religion and mental health, including religious doctrine, religious behavior, prejudice against religious groups, and tensions and conflicts over religious issues, were studied by Dein et al. (2020). Vermeer (2020) studied religion and the spread of Covid-19 in the Netherlands and concluded that faith may be able to spread the virus, either directly (through worship) or indirectly (by non-religious social ties). However, studies about various interpretations of Islamic teachings related to the Covid-19 pandemic were still lacking, which can become a severe obstacle in its countermeasures, especially in Muslim majority countries.

This paper aims to complement the existing studies by focusing on three things: First, to elucidate how the differences in interpreting religious teachings in response to the pandemic exist. Second, to map the pattern of interpretation of Covid-19 in the Indonesian Islamic society. Third, to analyze how different interpretations negatively impact the countermeasures of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The basis of the argument used in this paper was the interpretation given by a group of people that reflects their knowledge and beliefs. In other words, the understanding can reflect the background of religious beliefs. Furthermore, an interpretation influences the actions manifested in society. When interpretation controversially occurs, conflict of views and actions will inevitably arise. The interpreted text cannot be separated from the context prevailing in a society whose relationship needs to be explained in the context of the pandemic.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Covid-19 Pandemic

Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a coronavirus that can cause acute respiratory syndrome and attacks the immune system with symptoms such as shortness of breath, flu, and dizziness

(Ramirez et al., 2020; Zulva, 2019). Covid-19 has been rapidly spreading worldwide and has proven difficult to overcome. In general, the transmission of the Covid-19 virus occurs through droplets or body fluids splashed on a person, through coughing and sneezing, so maintaining social distance is vital in addition to cleanliness to prevent the spread of the virus (Karo, 2012; K. et al., 2020) However, in carrying out social distancing, it has had a significant impact, especially on people's mental health (Amran, 2020). This impact correlates with the high mortality rate during the Covid-19 pandemic in various countries and impacted psychological trauma (Abdullah, 2020; Kirlin, 2020). This is following the findings of Martins et al. (2021) that there was a complex and multidimensional relationship between mental illness, life difficulties, and Covid-19. This situation has worsened physical stress, reduced immunity, and increased vulnerability to diseases. Therefore, Covid-19 has caused various physical and psychological health, social, economic crises, which have further exacerbated the world situation, where children and the elderly are the most vulnerable people to be exposed to the virus (Sokol & Pataccini, 2020; Roy et al., 2020; Fronek & Rotabi, 2020).

The massive spread of Covid-19, according to (Gautam et al., 2021; Wheaton et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2020), needed to be addressed immediately, at least by trying to limit its transmission. Such as improving health literacy, primarily to protect those at risk of exposure to Covid-19, such as the elderly, children, and certain ethnicities. Therefore, policies taken by countries affected by Covid-19 should be rational and able to generate and resolve social, economic, cultural, and health problems that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic (Zulfa, 2020). In line with such efforts, a collaboration between the Government and authorities has been considered very important in preventing the spread of Covid-19 following societal socio-cultural values. Wahyudi also found that mutual trust between the community and the Government was a social capital to get out of the Covid-19 crisis (Wahyudi et al., 2021), such collaboration between the government and religious authorities through educational institutions, the economic system, community empowerment, and the alignment of the mass media (Suherman, 2020).

2.2 Text Interpretation of Covid-19 Pandemic

Different interpretations of the Covid-19 pandemic have become a social phenomenon that has sparked controversy among Indonesian Muslim communities, particularly regarding the risks, recovery, and death caused by Covid-19 (Yates et al., 2020). Muslims often view everything, including Covid-19, based on their interpretations of religious doctrines (the Qur'an and Hadith) in a textual manner related to problems, situations, and conditions happening in society. For example, the Tablighi Jamaat, which relies more on textual interpretation than the Covid-19 protocol, was counterproductive (Mustautina, 2020). It may be since many religious texts encourage congregational worship, such as attending mosques and prioritizing the spirituality and solidarity of the congregation (Dahlan et al., 2020). However, some groups of Muslims interpreted the Qur'an and Hadith contextually to produce a synergy between religion and science. Religion is tasked with finding meaning and science that finds facts so that in dealing with Covid-19, it is not only carrying out health protocols but at the same time activating the God Spot point by getting closer to God and accompanied by *tawakkal* (Fitriyana, 2020, Siregar et al., 2020). By using the texts of the Qur'an and Hadith in interpreting the Covid-19 phenomenon, some groups have moderated the attitudes and behavior of religious people in the way they worship God and in interacting with the Covid-19 pandemic by compromising the values they adopted (Islamy & Istiani, 2020) and syatan (2018). Different interpretations of the text gave rise to differences in Muslim attitudes towards Covid, which can be distinguished into three groups: Jabariyah with *tawakkal* (submission) to Allah without making *ikhtiyar* (an effort), Qadariyah making efforts without *tawakkal*, Ahlussunnah wal-jama'ah which combines *ikhtiyar* and *tawakkal* (Ronny Mahmuddin & Syandri, 2020).

The three groups responded and acted differentially in dealing with Covid-19. Jabariyah people believe that everything happens because of God's destiny (the will and power of Allah), so they became ignorant of government rules such as the prohibition of gathering, including in the mosques.

The Qadariyah group relies on *ikhtiyar* or their ability to prevent the spread of Covid by complying with health protocols without considering God's destiny. On the other hand, the Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah responded positively to the Government's rules while still believing in the future. Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah is the majority in Indonesian Muslim community (Ronny Mahmuddin & Syandri, 2020). This group continuously optimizes *ikhtiyar* by following the Covid-19 health protocol, improving their compulsory prayers, and increasing night prayers, as Yono (2020) and Bustomi (2020) stated. This controversy sparked debate in society, especially between religious people and scientists. Therefore, communication between the Government, scientists, and religious leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic is crucial in the context of prevention. In fact, according to the results of Aula (2020), the role of religious leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic was as peacemakers and enlighteners of confused and motivators of depressed people. In addition, they also function as a funnel of pandemic information (communicators) and role models whose fatwas are very helpful to the Government (Ismail, 2020).

2.3 The controversy of Interpretation of COVID-19

The controversy during the Covid-19 pandemic also occurred not only as a disaster to human health but also as a threat to the socio-religious activities of the community (Alandijany et al., 2020). Therefore, to moderate controversial public opinions, disaster *fiqh* has often been used in dealing with Covid-19 (Suyadi et al., 2020). For some people, the Covid-19 outbreak is understood as a test from God to resurrect people to be closer to God. In addition, Covid-19 is called *tho'un*, or an attack that causes the population to risk infection, so social distancing is needed (Supriatna, 2020). Some Muslim scholars interpreted Covid-19 through the text of the Qur'an as God's verses in the form of *fauqa ba'udhah* (lower than mosquitoes), then they responded controversially by underestimating Covid-19, so they did not use this pandemic as a lesson. However, some also believed it was a *mushibah*, which led them to introspect and become closer to Allah (Nurul Wathoni & Nursyamsu, 2020). Hadiths about pandemics teach to improve obedience to God and any relevant efforts to fight Covid-19, including prohibitions on entering places where disease outbreaks occur and prohibiting residents from leaving the areas (Dede Mardiana, 2020). The interpretation of Indonesian Muslims on COVID-19 using the terms above can be used for moderating public opinion, which tends to be controversial.

Contrary to mentioned above, some people responded to Covid-19 with a positive attitude, but some reacted negatively. A negative response was evident that 27 Tabligh Jamaat Bantarkawung Central Java members during a pandemic were positively infected with Covid-19 after attending the Ijma' Ulama Tablighi Jamaat in Gowa Sulawesi, thus turning those areas into red zones or highest level of pandemic (Mustautina, 2020). Furthermore, some people who believed that Covid-19 was a threat rejected the corpse that died of such a disease for fear of disease transmission (Sari & Wahid, 2020) and Sirajuddin et al. (2020). In contrast, those who believed that Coronavirus is just a *fauqa ba'udhah* often took corpses that died of Covid-19 forcibly by mass mobilization to be buried by their families and rejected the authority to perform burial with Covid-19 protocol (Amindoni, 2020). Misinterpretations and public attitudes against Covid-19 have become a part of obstacles to the plan for handling Covid-19 in Indonesia because the policies made by the Government were by some groups of people considered not in line with their religious beliefs. Hence, people often acted in the opposite direction of the Government (Hannan, et al., 2020).

3. Method

The written data were obtained from online news and then confirmed by several people as informants in the study. Online information was purposively selected based on news themes that meet the criteria for the focus of the research, which concerns the public's interpretation of the Covid-19 pandemic. The community's interpretation includes the community's understanding of the

Covid-19 pandemic, the basis for their knowledge, and the implications of the community's performance.

Informants were limited to a few people who had minimal influence on their environment. They were selected based on their visible behavior or audible speech and matched those found in news stories or online statements. In collecting data, interview guideline instruments were used to formulate questions. Open-ended questions cover two data fields. First, the data is related to the informants' views regarding the interpretation of Covid-19. Second, on what basis or factors do they argue so.

The study took place in January 2021, when the Covid-19 pandemic reached the peak of transmission in the second period. In some areas in Indonesia, PSBB (large-scale social restrictions) is treated back. At that time, the general public did not look at Covid-19 as before, namely with vigilance. It may be because Covid-19 has been going on for ten months. Questions are made by chatting via W.A. At the same time probing was done to confirm the answers sincerely.

Online news and interview data were classified and mapped thematically to clarify the community's interpretation of Covid-19. In addition, the data were also organized by considering the aspects covered. The differences in interpretation were analyzed for their significance based on the applicable textual and contextual parameters.

The data were analyzed through three stages: data restatement, description, and interpretation. The rendition was carried out by referring to online data and from "informants" based on their point of view. Data sourced from "informants" became a mutual comparison of data sourced from online news for confirmation. The data descriptions were done to show the pattern or trend of the data regarding the typology of the interpretation. The interpretation process was carried out by considering the context, both online news, and the interviewees. The three stages of analysis became the basis for concluding.

4. Results

4.1 Muslim Interpretations of the Covid-19 Pandemic

This study revealed that Covid-19 had been interpreted in various ways by Indonesian Muslim people from multiple backgrounds. There were three types of interpretations of Covid-19 comprising an 'adzb (punishment), a *mushibah* (disaster), and a *bala'* (test) found in this study. These interpretations are summarized and mapped as presented in the following Table 1

Table 1: Differences in Muslim interpretation of Covid-19

Category of understanding	People's interpretation of Covid-19	Source
Covid-19 as 'adzb (punishment)	Covid-19 as God's army to protect Uighur Muslims (Ustad Abdul Shomad).	Reported by Herlambang (2020), https://ayosemarang.com/read/2020/02/29/52975/ustaz-abdul-somad-virus-korona-merupakan-tentara-allah-melindungi-muslim-uighur
Covid-19 as 'adzb (punishment)	Covid-19 is a small army sent by God as a 'punishment to sinful humans' (Umi Pipik)	https://www.insertlive.com/hot-gossip/20200329123909-7-87698/usai-uas-kini-giliran-umi-pipik-sebut-virus-corona-tentara-allah

Category of understanding	People's interpretation of Covid-19	Source
Covid-19 as 'adzb (punishment)	The only thing to fear is Allah, not Covid-19 (Mustari Bahranuddin)	Reported by Tejomukti (2020), https://republika.co.id/berita/q7e4lx327/tanpa-ijin-jamaah-tabligh-tetap-gelar-ijtima-dunia-di-gowa
Covid-19 as 'adzb (punishment)	All disasters, including Covid-19, are God's punishment (Informan 1)	I-1, (Interview on 20/1/2021)
Covid-19 as <i>mushibah</i> (disaster)	Covid 19 is not a punishment but a disaster (Nasaruddin Umar)	https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4937255/imam-besar-istiqlal-tegaskan-corona-bukan-azab-allah-ini-penjelarasnya
Covid-19 as <i>mushibah</i> (disaster)	Covid-19 is seen from its impact as a disaster Samsul Nizar	https://www.kampusmelayu.ac.id/2020/kolom-ketua/covid-19-musibah-atau-ujian
Covid-19 as <i>mushibah</i> (disaster)	Covid-19 is a disaster, not a punishment (Alisa Wahid)	Reported by Sulistiyono (2020), https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2020/09/19/alissa-wahid-pandemi-covid-19-itu-musibah-bukan-azab
Covid-19 as <i>mushibah</i> (disaster)	Covid-19 is neither a punishment nor a test but a disaster.	1-2 (Interview on 20/1/2021)
Covid-19 as a <i>bala'</i> (test)	Covid-19 to remember Allah (Quraish shihab)	Reported by Sahal (2020), https://www.narasi.tv/shihab-shihab/benarkah-corona-tentara-allah
Covid-19 as a <i>bala'</i> (test)	Covid-19 as a test of faith (Mukomuko Ajamalus)	Written by Wahyono (2020) https://bengkulu.kemenag.go.id/berita/512277-kakemenag-mm-sebagai-ujian-keimanan-ambil-hikmahnya-dibalik-wabah-virus-corona
Covid-19 as a <i>bala'</i> (test)	Covid-19 is a test for believers (Ustadz Rosihan Anwar)	Reported by Retnowati (2020) https://www.djkn.kemenkeu.go.id/kilas_peristiwa/baca/13569/Pandemi-Covid-19-Ujian-Bagi-Orang-Beriman.html
Covid-19 as a <i>bala'</i> (test)	Covid-19 is a test, so it must be returned to Allah.	1-3, Lecturer of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta (Interview on 22/1/2021)

4.2 Arguments of Muslim interpretations of Covid-19

The results of this study on the Muslim community's interpretation of Covid-19 based on dalil (Islamic arguments) revealed that they used various views and different approaches in interpreting religious texts (such as the Qur'an). These resulted in textual and contextual mindsets and interests, as presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Factors Leading to the differences in community interpretation of Covid-19

Argument	Description	Source
The difference in the dalil/argument (<i>Adzb</i>)	Q.S. 30:41 (damage on land and sea due to human actions (Mukomuko Ajam-alus). Q.S. 11: 64-65: The punishment for the Thamud is in the form of a disease, for violating Allah's commandments (Puti Yasmin)	Written by Wahyono (2020) https://bengkulu.kemenag.go.id/berita/512277-kakemenag-mm-sebagai-ujian-keimanan-ambil-hikmahnya-dibalik-wabah-virus-corona . Puti Yasmin (2021) https://health.detik.com/berita-detikhealth/d-5333036/ayat-alquran-tentang-wabah-penyakit-dan-cara-menghadapinya

Argument	Description	Source
Differences in the dalil/argument (<i>mushibah</i>)	Q.S. 64: 11 (All calamities that occur are by Allah's permission). Q.S. 64: 51 (Everything that befalls the believer is a decree of Allah)	https://iqt.uinsgd.ac.id/dialog-al-quran-dan-pandemi-global-musibah-sebagai-ladang-muhasabah/ Written by Sri Patmawati, (n.d.) https://fk.uui.ac.id/en/sikap-seorang-muslim-dalam-menyikapi-wabah-covid-19/
Differences in the dalil/argument (<i>bala'</i>)	Q.S. 2: 269 ("Allah bestows al wisdom (behind Covid-19) to whom He wills." Q.S. 31: 34 (Allah knows all things) (Dindin Jamaluddin)	Siregar, Sugilar, and Hambali (2020) https://bkpp.demakkab.go.id/2020/10/hikmah-di-balik-pandemi-covid-19.html . https://uinsgd.ac.id/covid-19-sebagai-ujian-keyakinan/ .
The religious school of thought and mindset (textual)	Allah SWT has arranged Covid-19. capital of high spirit in religion, based on the belief there is no need to be afraid of creatures, including Covid-19 (Ustaz Miftah el-Banjary)	Iswandi Syahputra (2020) https://republika.co.id/berita/q7f800385/ada-qadariyah-dan-jabariyah-dalam-virus-corona . Ustaz Miftah el-Banjary (2020) https://kalam.sindonews.com/berita/1568434/69/kesalahan-personal-dan-sifat-egois-di-tengah-wabah-corona
The religious school of thought and mindset (contextual)	Allah SWT has arranged Covid-19. capital of high spirit in religion, based on the belief there is no need to be afraid of creatures, including Covid-19 (Nasaruddin)	Reported by Rayful Mudassir (2020) https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20200320/15/1215919/ikhtiar-takdir-dan-corona-ini-penjelasan-imam-besar-masjid-istiqlal
Differences in interests (Religious school of thought)	The protester wanted to demolish the mosque because it was forbidden to use it for religious activities. Performing congregational prayers at the mosque (Takmir Masjid Al-Mubarak Banyumas)	Reported by Akbar Tado (2020) https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200501193550-20-499319/dampak-corona-masjid-di-banyumas-sempat-ingin-dirobohkan . Reported by Heyder Affan (2020) https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-52408357
Differences in interests (Religious, social life)	Covid-19 cases increase starting from religious activities Wedding party cluster	https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/klaster-baru-covid-19-dari-kegiatan-sosial-dan-keagamaan-terus-meningkat.html . https://health.detik.com/berita-all/d-5162425/ratusan-orang-terinfeksi-corona-dari-klaster-resepsi-pernikahan .

4.3 The implications of different interpretations and understandings of Covid-19

As mentioned in the material and method section, the basis of the argument used in this paper was the interpretation by a group of people that reflects their knowledge, background, and religious beliefs. Furthermore, an interpretation by a group of people influences their actions manifested in society, as summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: The implication of differences in understanding of Covid-19 related to the way Muslim people responded

Response	Implication of interpretation	Source
Refusing health protocol	Crowds of citizens following the Islamic tabligh by well-known preachers such as Ustadz Abdus Somad at the Amal Silaturahmi Mosque,	Tim Detikcom (2021) https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5321161/kerumunan-warga-ke-pengajian-uas-bikin-satpol-pp-turun-tangan
Refusing health protocol	Increased violations of health protocols during holidays, such as in Malioboro Yogyakarta.	Haris Firdaus (2021) https://www.kompas.id/baca/nusantara/2021/01/02/libur-awal-tahun-pelanggaran-protokol-kesehatan-marak-di-kawasan-malioboro/

Response	Implication of interpretation	Source
Refusing health protocol	Health protocol violations rose by 75.48% in tourism spots.	Rahajeng Kusumo Hastuti (2021) https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20210106131114-4-213864/540-ribu-orang-langgar-protokol-kesehatan-saat-libur-nataru
Adherent to health protocols	Several figures and experts died from Covid-19, so it is necessary to comply with health protocols.	(Instagram ayahnya atiqahfatma, 10 Agustus 2020).
Adherent to health protocols	Please make a living but still pay attention to health protocols.	(Instagram Indah-Permata_ Sasmiadi Innalillahi, 15 Agustus 2020).
Adherent to health protocols	When it comes to life, don't counter it with personal prejudices and sentiments; what about the closest family.	(Instagram runaaviena 29 Juni 2020).
Ignoring the new standard rules	During the transition period (the implementation of PSBB) in Jakarta, it was recorded that until July 19, 2020, more than 28,000 residents violated the use of masks	Febby Curie Kurniawan (2020) https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/new-normal-dinilai-picu-penurunan-kesadaran-masyarakat-akan-protokol-kesehatan.html
Ignoring the new normal rules	In Tegal City square, residents exercise, and many don't wear masks properly and ignore physical distancing	Aleksandra Nugroho (2020) https://www.kompas.tv/article/84198/tegal-mulai-new-normal-masyarakat-masih-abaikan-protokol-kesehatan
Ignoring the new normal rules	Violation of health protocols in traditional markets, especially regarding wearing masks and maintaining social distance	Sutrisna (2020) https://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2020/05/29/18514471/banyak-pelanggaran-protokol-kesehatan-pengawasan-pasar-tradisional

5. Discussion

As mentioned in the Results section (summarized in Tables 1, 2, and 3), there were at least three crucial issues to discuss. First, the diversity of Covid-19 interpretations was caused by differences in Islamic texts about the pandemic. These differences existed because the religious texts were interpreted as textual or contextual. Indonesian Muslims interpreted Covid-19 as punishment, lousy luck, and reinforcements. In addition, differences in interests, such as ideology/religious beliefs that were not scientifically proven, have also influenced the thought of some groups of Indonesian Muslims. Although the Indonesian Government has made a scientifically proven policy (e.g., the prohibition of per-form worship in mosques and socio-religious interests such as attending recitations and wedding receptions), Indonesian Muslim people responded to Covid-19 differently; some groups of Muslims rejected the policy and the Covid-19 protocol. Consequently, the Indonesian Muslim community acted differently and even in contrast to the Government's policy and would potentially hinder the countermeasures of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As summarized in Table 1, there were three issues worth discussing. The controversy over the interpretation of Covid-19 is as 'adzab (Q.S. 30:41), *mushibah* (Q.S. 64:11), and bala' (test) (Q.S. /2: 269). These differences were related to the selection of the Quranic text as the arguments, which could not be separated from the tendency of the interpreters. Religious texts that make it possible to justify punishment were used as references by those who focused on why Covid-19 happened. They related it to the stories in the Qur'an regarding the discipline of the infidels with disease (Q.S. 11: 64-65). Yates et al.(2020) stated that Covid-19 had sparked controversy in religious communities. The increasing number of Covid-19 victims was interpreted as God's punishment, so they had to face it by

repenting and worshiping more. Covid-19 was interpreted with the Qur'anic verse *fawqa ba'udhah*, so we should not fear it because it was only a humble creature of God.

Some people associated Covid-19 with *mushibah* and *bala'* (test). Those who interpreted Covid-19 as *mushibah* (Q.S. 64: 51) responded to it with *Ikhtiyar* (efforts) in addition to *tawakkal* (relying upon God) (Fitriyana, 2020, Siregar et al., 2020). When facing the *tha'un* epidemic, the Prophet closed the affected area, prohibiting people's exit and denying people entry from outside the area (Qudsy, 2020) or required social distancing (Supriatna, 2020). In addition, some people associated Covid-19 with a test (Q.S. 31: 34) that deals with Covid-19. They focused on accepting what had been happening patiently to pass the exams they were facing. This group tended to look for wisdom in the pandemic, both towards families (with family gatherings at home), society (with empathy for those affected by Covid-19), and the environment (by reducing pollution). The diversity of interpretations of Covid-19 occurred not only due to various religious text references but also because of the interpreter's mindset.

The controversy over the interpretation of Covid-19 varied, as summarized in Table 2. In interpreting religious texts (such as the Qur'an), there were also differences in the impacts of textualist and contextualist schools of thought (Saeed, 2006). A textualist understands the verses of the Quran or hadith according to the meaning of the text by relying on a referential theory of sense, especially on the linguistic side, without social, historical, and scientific analysis. In the case of Covid-19, the textual school of thought understands positive people and those who died of Covid-19 are because of God's will, which no one can prevent. This logic is based on Jabariyah theology in Islam, which believes that God has planned everything, and humans only follow it, so there is no room for human efforts (Syahputra, 2020). Some groups of people with high Islamic *ghirah* encouraged people to pray in *jamaah* in the mosque/mushalla with firm belief and not be afraid of Coronavirus because it is only a creature of God (El-Banjary, 2020). This community emphasizes spirituality and group solidarity (Dahlan et al., 2020). Counterproductive attitudes with reluctance to take anticipatory measures against the spread of Covid-19. They can be categorized as those who responded to Covid-19 in the "fear zone" or with an attitude of fatalism (Hidayah, 2020). Fatalistic attitudes may be caused by a failure to comprehend the truth. This condition usually leads to a philosophy of resistance or ignorance by being submissive to God, the only determinant of all events (Mulkhan, 2020). Thus, it appears that this group of people understand the verses but ignore the context so that it can be categorized in the textualist group.

In contrast to the textualists, the contextualists interpret the text (Al-Qur'an) not only by relying on the linguistic aspect of the text but also by considering the socio-historical context of the revelation and the context in which the interpretation was carried out (Saeed, 2006). This group of people assumes that the meaning of a Quranic text (a verse) is not static but develops over time and depends on the text's socio-historical, cultural, scientific advancement, and linguistic context. The outcomes of the contextualist interpretations tend to be moderate. In response to Covid-19, this group has attempted to prevent transmission by following health protocols. Theologically, this attitude, as stated by Syahputra (2020), relies on the understanding of Qadariyah, which believes that humans have the freedom to determine their way of life.

Furthermore, Nur Hidayah (2020) stated that this thought leads to a "learning zone" attitude, accepting the outbreak as a disaster and doing the best things. This understanding is generally associated with a Sunni school of thought. Nasaruddin Umar (The Great Imam of the Istiqlal Mosque Indonesia), as written by Mudassir (2020), said that Islam encourages people always to endeavor to do something, including preventing the spread of the pandemic. Every time we talk about destiny, we must also speak about *ikhtiar*. Likewise, we can't just talk about endeavors without relying on the almighty God or fate. Al-Habib Quraish Baharun (caretaker of the Ash-Shidqu Kuningan Islamic Boarding School) stated in this context that "in the holy book there are vers-es whose contents are very diverse, but each of them does not deny each other but synergizes so that it becomes a trilogy, namely *ikhtiar* (effort), prayer, and *tawakkal* (trusting in God's plan) (R. Siregar, 2020; and AR, 2020). This mindset resulted in an adaptive attitude to the conditions, including ritual and socio-religious

practices, as shown by the Ahlussunnah wal-jamaah (Ronny Mahmuddin & Syandri, 2020).

These differences in interpretation (as summarized in Table 2) related to the interest groups can be differentiated into religious beliefs, group interests, and economic interests. The interest in religious beliefs can be exemplified by what was done by the Takmir of the al-Mubarak mosque in Banyumas, who planned to demolish the mosque because the Banyumas Regent limited people to pray at the mosque during the lockdown period to avoid the spread of Coronavirus (Tado, 2020). Even though there was a ban, jamaah (congregational) prayers were still held at the mosque (<https://www.bbc.com>). Furthermore, the increase of Covid-19 transmission in Indonesia may be related to socio-religious activities, resulting in new clusters such as the Ijtima Tablig Gowa cluster, the Temboro Islamic Boarding School cluster, and Magetan the Indonesian Bethel Church (GBI) cluster (Qudsy et al., 2020). A wedding party cluster initiated the Covid-19 case in Jakarta (<https://health.detik.com>). Positive Covid-19 cases also increased after a wedding party (<https://regional.kompas.com>). Therefore, COVID-19 should be understood from 3 points of view: religious, economic, and medical, as stated by a U.S. informant as one of the MUI administrators. If all parties could comprehensively understand Covid-19 from those aspects and integrate it, there would be no controversial attitudes and responses. Everyone would obey and comply with the government policies to prevent the uncontrollable spread of Covid-19.

The differences in the interpretation of Covid-19 among the public had implications for their views and behavior related to health protocols as summarized in Table 3. A mass gathering of Muslims participated in Ustadz Abdul Somad recitation at the Amal Silaturahmi Mosque, Asia Mega Mas Complex, Medan Among was an event in Indonesia that was difficult to control in the transmission of Coronavirus prevention (DetikNews, 2021). Furthermore, there was an increase in violations of health protocols during the Christmas and early year holidays, as seen in Malioboro Yogyakarta (Firdaus, 2021). The Covid-19 task force noted that during the Christmas and New Year holidays at tourist destinations, 542,000 people received warnings at tourist places for violating health protocols, up from 309 thousand people to 542 thousand people, which was up by 75.48% (Hastuti, 2021). Nabila (2021) reported an increase in health protocol violations by 176.3% from the end of the year, which amounted to 91,659 people to 253,216 people. Thus, the public's interpretation of Covid-19 had implications for their behavior and statements in online news and on social media regarding health protocols.

On the other hand, some Muslim people who were adherent and complying with health protocols to prevent the transmission of Covid-19 thought it was necessary. They stated that "Covid-19 does exist and is real. During this one week, we have lost many public figures and experts who died of Covid-19, including an Ustadz, an Islamic economics expert, a doctor, a deputy regent, and many more. Let's keep obeying the health protocols. Please do outdoor activities only to fulfill the family's basic needs" (Instagram of atiqahfatma father, August 10, 2020). I hope Indonesia is doing well. Amen (Beautiful-Permata_Sasmiadi *innalillahi* Instagram, 15 August 2020). I'm worried. "Health issues are related to people's lives; if they are countered only because of personal prejudices and sentiments, releasing health protocols is annoying. What if our next of kin are affected?" (Instagram runaaviena June 29, 2020). The statements above reflected their comprehension of Covid-19, which gave rise to their awareness to comply with health protocols.

Unfortunately, so many Indonesian people were ignorant of the health protocols that the Government had imposed. Violations occurred, for example, during the implementation of the transitional Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) by the DKI Jakarta Provincial Government. It was recorded that until July 19, 2020, more than 28,000 residents violated health protocols related to the use of masks (Kurniawan, 2020). Likewise, when the new phase began, on Sunday morning, in the Tegal City square, a crowd of residents was doing exercise. Many residents did not wear masks properly and ignored physical distancing; even during the nighttime, when there were no officers, more and more people ignored the health protocols (Aleksandra Nugroho, 2020). In addition, violations of health protocols occurred in traditional markets, as stated by the Kapolda Metro Jaya Nana Sudjana, especially regarding wearing masks and maintaining distance (Sutrisna, 2020). Thus,

the implementation of the new normal by the Indonesian Government was misleadingly perceived by people as a relaxation of the rules to comply with health protocols.

This study indicated that the level of understanding of the Government and the public about Covid-19 was minimal to the truth in question. The little involvement of representative institutions, especially religious institutions, in responding to the pandemic and communicating with the community has led to common public knowledge. Various sources of information from multiple media and parties with different interests have misled the public, which appeared in numerous forms of misguided actions during the pandemic. In line with that, a public education process about what and why Covid-19 and appropriate strategies to overcome it is urgently needed. This public education requires the involvement of stakeholders, especially religious institutions, to ensure its effectiveness of public education.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study (in contrast to previous results) indicated that one of the problems that hamper the handling of the spread of Covid-19 stems from the difference in the public interpretation of Covid-19. Those who interpreted the Coronavirus as punishment were more concerned with the community behavior that was considered contrary to religious norms and tended to be less strict in implementing health protocols. In contrast, for some people, Covid-19 was considered a disaster, so it should be faced by complying with health protocols and strengthening spirituality. Furthermore, those who thought Covid-19 was a test tried to comply with health protocols, enhance spirituality, and believe there was wisdom behind all events, including this Covid-19 test. Thus, one of the obstacles to Covid-19 countermeasures was the community's interpretation which implied negligence and refusal to implement health protocols and subsequently refused to be vaccinated. With this diversity of interpretations, it is vital to take a religious approach by involving people from various religious schools of thought in handling Covid-19.

The controversial analysis in interpreting the pandemic has made two crucial findings possible. First, the interpretation of the pandemic was dynamic and competitor, which showed different knowledge mastery and different interests. Second, this research also provided a new perspective on understanding the Covid-19 pandemic concerning human life, which so far has only been viewed from an objective perspective. The dynamic meaning of the Covid-19 pandemic and the use of a new, more subjective point of view in understanding the effects of the pandemic have allowed the discovery of space for explanations of how the interpretation of Covid-19 become the reasons for people to comply with or to ignore or to reject the Covid-19 protocol.

This study was limited to online news and social media, accessed in January 2021, and confirmed only by some experts. For a more comprehensive or more profound understanding, further studies are required that focus more on community groups based on specific social classes, likely to have different interpretations regarding the dangers of Covid-19.

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