Transforming da'wah strategies during the Pandemic: Addressing religious community resistance to health protocols

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to describe the forms and factors of resistance of religious communities to the application of health protocols during religious activities.

Method – Data were collected by observing and interviewing Muslim community leaders who live in the village of Brumbung, Mranggen, Demak, Central Java, Indonesia. The concept of resistance approach is used to analyze the data descriptively and qualitatively.

Results – This study shows that the form of resistance is carried out openly by implementing worship activities and activities of local religious traditions without complying with the COVID-19 pandemic protocol. In addition, the form of resistance is carried out in a closed manner through statements that describe a theocentric mindset, attitude, and belief. At the same time, the factors that influence resistance are traditional local religious leaders (*kyai deso*) and fatalistic religious understanding (*jabbariyyah*). Statements and social behavior of the *kyai deso* are counterproductive to efforts to prevent COVID-19.

Implications – The consequences of this research have significant implications for public health and religious outreach in times of pandemics. The study points out a notable disparity between national religious guidelines and local religious customs, especially among Muslims in Java, Indonesia. Challenges in managing the pandemic arise from the reluctance to follow COVID-19 health measures influenced by traditional local religious leaders (kyai deso) and a fatalistic religious belief (jabbariyyah). This resistance is evident in both overt forms, such as ongoing communal religious practices, and covert means, like the maintenance of theocentric beliefs which contradict health guidelines.

Originality/Value – Da'wah's strategy for the prevention of COVID-19 must begin by contextualizing and re-actualizing religious messages that are more progressive and relevant to the findings of modern science about COVID-19, as well as involving local religious leaders in the process of socialization and internalization of religious understanding.

Abstrak

Tujuan – Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan bentuk dan faktor resistensi umat beragama terhadap penerapan protokol kesehatan dalam kegiatan keagamaan.

Metode – Data dikumpulkan dengan cara observasi dan wawancara tokoh masyarakat Islam yang tinggal di Desa Brumbung, Mranggen, Demak, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Pendekatan konsep resistensi digunakan untuk menganalisis data secara deskriptif dan kualitatif.

Hasil – Penelitian ini menunjukkan bentuk perlawanan dilakukan secara terbuka dengan melaksanakan kegiatan peribadatan dan kegiatan tradisi keagamaan setempat tanpa mematuhi protokol pandemi COVID-19. Selain itu, bentuk perlawanannya dilakukan secara tertutup melalui pernyataan-pernyataan yang menggambarkan pola pikir, sikap, dan keyakinan yang teosentris. Sedangkan faktor yang mempengaruhi resistensi adalah tokoh agama tradisional lokal (kyai deso) dan pemahaman agama yang fatalistik (jabbariyyah). Pernyataan dan perilaku sosial para kyai deso kontraproduktif terhadap upaya pencegahan COVID-19.

Implikasi – Konsekuensi dari penelitian ini mempunyai implikasi yang signifikan terhadap kesehatan masyarakat dan jangkauan agama di masa pandemi. Studi ini menunjukkan kesenjangan yang mencolok antara pedoman agama nasional dan adat istiadat setempat, khususnya di kalangan umat Islam di Jawa, Indonesia. Tantangan dalam penanganan pandemi ini muncul dari keengganan untuk mengikuti langkah-langkah kesehatan COVID-19 yang dipengaruhi oleh tokoh agama tradisional setempat (kyai deso) dan keyakinan agama yang fatalistik (jabbariyyah). Perlawanan ini terlihat jelas dalam bentuk yang terang-terangan, seperti praktik keagamaan komunal yang masih berlangsung, dan cara-cara terselubung, seperti mempertahankan keyakinan teosentris yang bertentangan dengan pedoman kesehatan.

Orisinalitas/Nilai – Strategi dakwah pencegahan COVID-19 harus dimulai dengan mengontekstualisasikan dan mengaktualisasikan kembali pesan-pesan keagamaan yang lebih progresif dan relevan dengan temuan ilmu pengetahuan modern tentang COVID-19, serta melibatkan tokoh agama setempat dalam proses sosialisasi dan internalisasi pemahaman agama.

Introduction

The Islamic religious community in Indonesia has hampered COVID-19 countermeasures. A religious approach has not been able to provide a solution to the COVID-19 outbreak, and even religious institutions tend to be resistant to COVID-19 pandemic protocols by continuing to carry out religious activities despite the prohibition by the government (Darmawan et al., 2020). Several protocol violations committed by religious communities have shown resistance to the policies issued to prevent pandemics (Pabbajah et al., 2020). Although the Ministry of Religion has issued circular Number: SE. 15 of 2020 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Religious Activities in Houses of Worship, there are still violations committed by some religious communities. This is evidenced by the emergence of several religious communities that continue to carry out their activities amid the ongoing pandemic. Likewise, the level of COVID-19 transmission occurring in religious institutions is still high. Some health protocols are not yet available, such as temperature detectors and hand soap, and some congregations still do not practice social distancing or wear masks. Under these conditions, the religious approach to enforcing health protocols through the involvement of religious leaders at the local level still needs to be intensified.

Studies on resistance have been carried out from various perspectives (Miller et al., 2005; Scott, 1985; Vanden, 2007). However, studies that focus on community resistance in handling COVID-19 have not received much attention. So far, existing studies tend to show four aspects of managing COVID-19. First, the presence of COVID-19 has opened opportunities for research in the medical world (Nikolai et al., 2020), as well as medical approaches through various forms of treatment and management (Şimşek Yavuz & Ünal, 2020; Varghese et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020). Second, the economic approach regarding COVID-19 with various impacts has developed (Fernandes, 2020; Gupta et al., 2020; Susilawati et al., 2020). Even COVID-19 can cause an economic crisis in various global sectors (Fernandes, 2020). Third, there are some social transformations in society due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmad et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2020; Saud et al., 2021), even though COVID-19 has an impact on the psychology of society (Dubey et al., 2020; Lades et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020), In Abdullah's view, COVID-19 can trigger fear and trauma (Abdullah, 2020; Rigoli, 2021). The fourth type of response to the COVID-19 pandemic is religious (Hart & Koenig, 2020; Wildman et al., 2020). However, few studies have discussed the resistance of religious believers to COVID-19 pandemic protocols. One such study by Pabbajah et al. (2020), shows a tendency of deauthorization by Islamic scholars regarding COVID-19 countermeasures, and Jubba (2021) studied the strategies of Muslims and Christians in carrying out their worship routines during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Nurhayati and Purnama (2021) about the resistance of Indonesian Muslims to the implementation of the COVID-19 Pandemic protocol for the funeral process. This study responds to the limitations of the literature by trying to complement the study of the resistance of religious leaders and religious devotees in handling COVID-19.

In particular, the focus of this research examines the resistance of the Indonesian Islamic religious community to the COVID-19 pandemic health protocol policies, such as social distancing and using masks and hand sanitizer. The resistance of the Islamic religious community arose because this pandemic health protocol policy was seen as threatening, disturbing, and eliminating the tradition of religious rituals and socio-religious traditions passed down from generation to generation in society.

The religious ritual tradition is the normative dimension of religion related to the vertical worship of Allah, such as performing congregational prayers at the mosque. Meanwhile, socio-religious tradition is the social dimension of Islamic teachings in which Islamic teachings dialogue with local culture. In other words, a socio-religious tradition is a form of normative religious teaching that adapts to the local community's culture, such as the tradition of going home (*mudik*) after Eid al-Fitr. With this pandemic protocol policy, the spirit and substance of religious rituals and religious traditions will increasingly be eroded and eliminated in people's lives. Therefore, this study aims to reveal and describe the forms and factors of religious community resistance to implementing the pandemic health protocol and the implications for socio-religious life.

This research is important for uncovering the ideas surrounding the Islamic religious community resisting the pandemic health protocol policy. These ideas relate to differences between religious leaders in interpreting and understanding the religious text as a basis for responding to pandemic protocol policies. In addition, this research is also important to reveal the role of Da'i (or religious leaders) in the socio-religious organizational structure with non-structural religious leaders (*kyai deso*). These religious leaders (structural and non-structural) often compete for religious authority, especially concerning pandemic health protocol fatwas which will become the community's reference.

Pandemics are defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as epidemics that spread throughout the world. They affect large numbers of people (Udgata & Suryadevara, 2021). The effectiveness of wastewater is considered a potential medium for developing the SARS-CoV pandemic virus in vitro (Westhaus et al., 2021). Transmission susceptibility factors are related to age, language, race, occupation, urban status, and disability (Andersen et al., 2021). In line with that, Mohan (2021) posits that the possibility of transmission through aerosol air and environmental factors can affect virus transmission. The Wuhan virus (2019-nCoV), called COVID-19, made the world alert and reminded us of the SARS-CoV outbreak from 2002 to 2003 (Jiang et al., 2021; Wan et al., 2020). The World Health Organization established the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). Countermeasures of virus transmission during a pandemic can be implemented by meeting the need for vitamins C, D, E, Zn, selenium, fatty acids, and omega 3, which have immunomodulatory effects (Shakoor et al., 2021).

Chinazzi et al. (2020) observed that at the end of 2019 in Wuhan, China, there was an outbreak of the coronavirus pathogen that became known as COVID-19. The COVID-19 infection causes a respiratory disease similar to acute respiratory syndrome and is associated with ICU admission and high mortality rates. Crooke et al. (2020) shows that COVID-19 is rapidly spreading and causing social disruption that has not occurred since the 1918 pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak caused a global crisis that had never before occurred, causing death, economic disruption, and turmoil in daily life (Cartenì et al., 2021). Asymptomatic people carrying COVID-19 are hidden drivers, and studies of infectiousness confirm the presence of asymptomatic individual transmission (Nikolai et al., 2020). In line with this finding, the Ataguba study shows that the COVID-19 pandemic affects morbidity and mortality (Ataguba, 2020). Chandra et al. (2021) revealed that infected patients showed different radiological visual characteristics with fever, fatigue, dyspnea, dry cough, etc.

G. Barbour (2000), classifies the relationship between religion and science in four dimensions, namely, conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration, including the integration of modern science and religion in responding to all humanitarian problems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Toresano, 2020). Dursun (2020), shows that elites in Tunisia use religious symbols to achieve their goals. The approach used is more comprehensive than other approaches in the national field. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people sought religion as protection without taking the basic precautions, which was the barrier faced by the COVID-19 frontline workers (Iqbal et al., 2020). Taylor (2020) said that as many as 85% of people in America pray, 60% pray every day, 47% of people pray for healing of their illness and health during the pandemic, and 49% of people pray for help during the pandemic. In line with that, the study of O'Regan (2020) states, in Newman's analysis, that God is the judge and mankind is under His judgment hoping for reconciliation through a mediator.

The pandemic in Islamic teachings is believed to be a disaster that "must be right", according to the *sunnatullah* that happened with Allah's permission. In religious teachings, there is a worldview on the interpretation of an event. From the perspective of Islam, the worldview is a vision of reality that appears before the eyes of the world as a projected totality in Islam. There are at least two Islamic perspectives—*Jabariyyah* and *Qadariyyah*—that show how they perceive COVID-19 (Maliki, 2020). From the *Jabariyyah* perspective, viruses are under Allah's power, and from the *Qadariyyah* perspective, humans have their own will to deal with COVID-19 (Maliki, 2020). In Islam, scholars' role in pandemic mitigation is through da'wah by combining religious knowledge with scientific knowledge. Islam can guide the people in handling pandemics by looking at al Quran and al Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. Based on authentic hadiths, there is a hierarchical procedure that individuals can carry out as protection from COVID-19 and similar diseases, which have almost the same transmission rate. Islam has already equipped the *ummah* (people) to deal with a dangerous plague through the actions of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, which contributes not only to Muslims but also to the universal world (Samsuduhah, 2020). The prophet had already mentioned the prohibition of entering a city that is facing a large epidemic in what is currently known as large-scale restrictions; likewise, the prohibition of leaving home during an outbreak in the modern world is called self-isolation.

Resistance is an attitude of behaving defensively, fighting, opposing, or attempting to oppose. Resistance to change is not found in individuals, but in reality, constructed by individuals; resistance is understood as a response to an initiative for change. Resistance in the emancipation movement of women is a form of economic resilience during a pandemic. The increase in the online shopping business is another form of resistance carried out by the community during the pandemic in line with large-scale restriction policies (Fadly & Sutama, 2020; Sari et al., 2020). Resistance is also shown in the presence of panic buying by the community. Resistance is experienced by urban and rural communities who are forced to comply with policies that are considered to impact society's psychological and physiological conditions (Song et al., 2020). This form of resistance is also carried out in violation of health protocols as a strategy for survival, in line with the study (Lahmiri & Bekiros, 2020) that shows a pandemic may lead to the presence of an economic and food crisis.

The resistance theory used in this study is the resistance theory of James C. Scott. Scott (1990) defines resistance as all actions taken by subordinant groups aimed at opposing the domination of the superdominant group over them. Scott then divides resistance into two forms. The *first* is public or open resistance (public transcript). Open resistance (public transcript) is a form of resistance that gives rise to actions that originate from direct communication between the upper class (the ruling class) and the lower class (the weak). This resistance is also called radical resistance, hard and formally organized and systematic, and requires a comprehensive and fundamental change. The *second* is closed resistance (hidden transcript). The hidden transcript, according to James C. Scott, represents discourse, gestures, speeches, and practices carried out by subordinates behind the scenes that are unobserved by the authorities. This closed resistance is usually characterized by indirect and less systematic interactions between the subordinate and the superdominant classes. Scott explains that there are four characteristics of closed resistance, i.e., it occurs irregularly, is disorganized, is conducted individually, and does not imply the impact of change (Scott, 1990).

Several studies have shown that religion has an important role in social change (Syihab, 2009). In line with that, studies (Arrobi & Nadzifah, 2020; Darmawan et al., 2020) show that the role of religion is very important to solve the problem of the COVID-19 pandemic. Religion has a position as a motivator for community activities. Weber succeeded in showing how religion inspires economic action to improve welfare worldwide and gives birth to the spirit of entrepreneurship among Christians (Cook, 2020). Religion will be an effective tool to encourage change when religious impulses underlie human activity. Thus, religious communities are social groups that can be mobilized to become actors in solving the problem of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The community itself is a collection of people or members who have a sense of belonging, bonding, and trust among each other so that their needs will be met as long as they commit to continue living together (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The bond of this community can be in the form of geographic ties or common interests, religion, occupation, ethnicity, race, or based on gender. Thus, a religious community is a collection of people who have a common interest in religion to meet their spiritual needs, such as *tahlilan* communities, mosques, *majlis taklim* communities, and communities that maintain social religious traditions.

Factors related to religious communities are religious leaders and religious understanding factors. Sociologically, religious adherents in Indonesia tend to be more obedient to religious leaders than to the rules issued by the government. In the context of implementing government policies related to COVID-19, if religious leaders are not managed properly, the religious community will show resistance to COVID-19 prevention policies. In addition, religious understanding is also influential in overcoming COVID-19. There are at least two main typologies of religious understanding in Islam, namely, rational Islam and traditional Islam. Traditional Islam is a model of textual understanding of the sources of knowledge in Islam, namely, the Quran and hadith, while rational Islam is a model of contextual understanding of the Koran and sunnah by adhering to moral values (*maqashid al-syari'ah*). Traditional Islam is influenced by the views of Sunni theology, while rational Islam is inspired by the views of Mutazilah theology (Grabus, 2012).

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative case study to determine the perceptions and responses of the religious community to the implementation of the COVID-19 protocol in the spaces of worship and local religious tradition. This case study was conducted in Brumbung village, Mranggen sub-district, Demak district, Central Java, Indonesia, between November 2020-February 2021. This location is selected because Brumbung Village is a *desa santri* (village of Islamic clerics). There are two large Islamic boarding schools (Pondok pesantren) in this village, namely *Asy-Syarifah Islamic Boarding School* and *Ibrohimiyah Islamic Boarding School*. In addition to Islamic boarding schools in Brumbung village, there are also several *madrasas* from *Raudhatul Atfal* (kindergarten equivalent), *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah* (equivalent to Primary school), *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (junior high school equivalent), and *Madrasah Aliyah* (high school equivalent) which are each managed by the two Islamic Boarding Schools. The local community religious activities are also very dense outside the pesantren. Some of the religious activities usually carried out are attending the Yasin-Tahlil (religious study forum conducted after reading the Al - Quran Yasin and reading Tahlil) weekly and monthly. These activities are held in every Rukun Tetangga (*neighborhood Association*) and at the village level.

Participants

This research is qualitative research in which the data sources are obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants. These key informants consist of kyai (Islamic boarding school leader), kyai musholla/ masjid (mosque leader), imam/leader and members of the Yasin -Tahlil congregation for man, imam/leader and members of the Yasin - Tahlil congregation for women, and the head of Madrasah Aliyah. All key informants are men or women aged 40 to 60 years, live and have ID Card Brumbung, Mranggen, and are active in religious activities in Brumbung village. According to research needs and snowball sampling, informants were selected using a purposive sampling system (Table 1). The total number of respondents: twelve people, consisting of two kyai pesantren (kyai who become the caretaker of the pesantren), two kyai musholla (leader of the prayer room), two leaders of the Yasin-tahlil congregation (male), two leaders of the Yasin-tahlil congregation (female), one member of the Yasin-tahlil congregation (male), one member Yasin-tahlil congregation (female), one head of the village and one head of Madrasah.

Table 1 Participant demographic

Id	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Religious Community	Education
P1	Male	60	Married	Pesantren	S1 (Bachelor)
P2	Male	50	Married	Pesantren	S2 (Magister)
M1	Male	45	Unmarried	Masjid	S1 (Bachelor)
M2	Male	60	Married	Musholla	Pesantren
T1	Female	55	Married	Majelis Taklim	S1 (Bachelor)
T2	Male	50	Married	Majlis Taklim	S1 (Bachelor)
T3	Male	45	Married	Yasin-Tahlil	Pesantren
T4	Male	40	Married	Yasin Tahlil	Pesantren
T5	Female	40	Married	Yasin Tahlil	S1 (Bachelor)
T6	Female	45	Married	Yasin Tahlil	Pesantren
V1	Male	50	Married	Lailatul Ijtima	S1 (Bachelor)
M1	Male	55	Married	Madrasah	S2 (Magister)

Data Collection

Permission to conduct this research was obtained from religious and community organizations (PCNU) Brumbung Mranggen Demak Central Java, and approvals were obtained from local religious leaders and interviewees. Data collection was carried out by in-depth interviews conducted in person for approximately 30-60 minutes and digitally recorded using a mobile phone. Furthermore, trustworthiness is achieved by triangulating data between kyai pesantren, kyai Musholla/masjid, Yasin tahlil congregation, head of the village, and Head of Madrasah through FGD (*focus group discussions*).

 Research Instruments

 In-depth interviews were conducted so that participants could openly disclose the reasons and factors that influenced their resistance to implementing the pandemic health protocol in the spaces of worship and local religious tradition. Researchers also explored participant demographic data, including age, gender, level of education, and religious community followed. In addition to interviews, the researcher also conducted participatory observations to observe forms of resistance by the religious community to the COVID-19 protocol in the spaces of worship and local religious tradition.

Data Analysis

The results of interviews and observations were then recorded and transcribed and then grouped based on the manual coding process. There are two stages in the coding process: the first is initial coding word-by-word coding, and the second is a thematically focused coding process. In focused coding, researchers assign categories relevant to the initial code so that they can make the most analytical, clear, and complete meaning. Researchers then grouped them into three categories: Forms of Religious Resistance during a Pandemic, Religious Leaders as Actors of Resistance, and Dominance of Religious Understanding of Resistance. The analysis that researchers did using focus coding is considered sufficient for researchers to see the theory that emerges from the data by continuously comparing each code contained in the data. Researchers can see the interrelationships between different codes.

Ethical Approval

This research received ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Tugurejo Hospital, Central Java Province, number: 07/KEPK.EC/IX/2020. Furthermore, all participants agreed to participate in this study prior to the interview.

Results and Discussions

Forms of Religious Community Resistance in the Middle of a Pandemic

Religious resistance to COVID-19 protocol policies can be classified into the form of open resistance (visible) and private resistance (invisible). Forms of open resistance (visible) are shown, among others, by the behavior of religious leaders (*ulama, kyai*) who do not wear masks either during ritual worship or social worship. Other forms of open resistance include holding the grand recitation, mass *tahlilan* (a ritual or ceremony for the death), and the performance of Friday prayers without following health protocols.

Meanwhile, the private (invisible) form of resistance is shown in theocentric, textual, and philosophical religious interpretations. This religious interpretation is oriented toward submitting all mundane matters to Allah without making any serious efforts to deal with the spread of COVID-19. In addition, invisible forms of resistance are also indicated by the orientation of materialistic-spiritualistic values and religious leaders' statements that indicate indifference toward health protocols' application. The forms of resistance that are practiced are as shown in the following Table 2.

Table 2. Religious community resistance in public space

No.	Place of Worship	Religious Leader Statement	Social Activity	Tradition
1.	Not Keeping Distance	Invitation to the congregation to continue to pray	Wedding party	*tahlillan*
2.	Not Wearing Mask	COVID-19 is not dangerous	Mass gathering	*Syuronan* (a ritual or ceremony performed by some Muslims on the first day of Muharram to celebrate Islamic New Year),
3.	Lack of sterilization	Life and death in the hands of Allah	Folk Festival	*sedekah bumi* (a traditional Javanese ceremony that symbolizes human gratitude for God Almighty who has provided sustenance through the earth in the form of all forms of agricultural products)
4	Unavailability of hand sanitizers	COVID-19 is a hoax	Neighborhood activities or Family Welfare Program activities (*PKK/ Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*)	Haul *sesepuh* desa/*punden* (a day of tribute of the respected elderly in one's village or the founder of the village)

Source: Compilation from the Researcher, 2020.

The Table 2 shows four forms of resistance by Islamic groups that were practiced during the pandemic. First, forms of violation of COVID-19 countermeasure protocols committed in places of worship include not social distancing when performing prayers in congregation, not wearing masks, the lack of cleanliness, such as regular cleaning with disinfectants, and the lack of hand sanitizer in the places of worship. Second, resistance occurs due to religious leaders' influence, by consistently inviting the congregation to continue to pray at the Mosque. These people believe that COVID-19 is life and death is a religious matter and that they are in Allah's hands, not because of COVID-19 per se. Additionally, some argue that COVID-19 is a hoax.

Third, the resistance is also shown by the fact that there are still some social activities carried out by the Muslim community, such as wedding parties and folk festivals with many people gathered on a massive scale, including the implementation of religious activities managed by the

neighborhood and Family Welfare Program without adequate health protocols. Fourth, routine traditions are still consistently carried out in the congregation during the pandemic, including *tahlilan*, *syuronan*, *sedekah bumi*, and *punden*.

The results of this study show that the resistance of religious adherents to COVID-19 protocol policies is carried out in open (visible) social spaces as well as closed (invisible) social spaces. However, using James Scott's theory of resistance, the resistance of religious adherents is included in the hidden transcript category or can also be referred to as symbolic resistance (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018). What they did was limited to discourses, statements, and religious practices that did not give rise to radical, hard, and formally organized, systematic forms of resistance and required a comprehensive and fundamental change. This symbolic resistance is indeed quite dominant in traditional societies.(Sulaeman et al., 2021).

This symbolic resistance has an impact on the value of religious resistance, which is silent, hidden in social practices, and spreads massively in the beliefs of religious communities. At the same time, this symbolic resistance is supported by the presence of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp groups. As a result, this symbolic resistance develops massively in cyberspace mixed with hoaxes. This symbolic resistance ultimately has hampered efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Factors Affecting Resistance

Religious leader as a resistance actor

Religious leaders play a substantial role in mobilizing religious devotees; this has also been happening during this pandemic, where religious leaders have become actors in the practice of religious devotee resistance through violations of COVID-19 prevention protocols. This is a challenge in tackling COVID-19. Islamic religious leaders (*kyai, ulama, ustadz*, etc.) have a substantial role in overcoming COVID-19 because they are role models for their followers (*uswah hasanah*). The influence of religious leaders can be seen in three ways (Table 3): through their worship practices, their expressions and statements, and their value orientation.

Table 3. Resistance factor of religious leader

Religious Leader	Conceptual	Religious Practices
Worship Practices	*Hablun min allah Hablun minannas* (Relationship between human beings and their Creator/Allah (ritual worship) and relationship among human beings (social worship)	• Obligatory prayers at the Mosque • Islamic lectures • Wedding party
Expressions and Statements	Religious expression	• "*Dadi wong Islam kok wedi karo COVID-19*" (Muslims must not be afraid of Corona) • They do not wear a mask when doing daily activities

Religious Leader	Conceptual	Religious Practices
Value Orientation	The world and the hereafter	• Respecting guests who visit *kyai*'s house • Praying for the death, • Holding a *haul* (a commemoration of someone's death which is usually held once a year with the main purpose of praying for the deceased so that all the deeds are accepted by Allah)

Source: Compilation from the Researcher, 2020

Religious leaders' resistance to COVID-19 health protocols is shown in religious practices, ritual worship (*hablun min Allah*), and social worship (*hablun min al-nnas*). The resistance of religious leaders in ritual worship practice is shown by implementing obligatory prayers at the Mosque and Friday prayers without complying with COVID-19 health protocols. Meanwhile, religious leaders' resistance to social worship practice is shown by still holding Islamic lectures on small or large scales and through wedding parties that do not comply with health protocols.

In local religious leadership (*kyai deso*), the *fatwa* (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority) or orders of the kyai are not always conveyed in mass gatherings, such as during lectures at the Mosque or other *majlis taklim* (places for teaching and learning Islamic teachings) but are more often given in limited gatherings, such as when congregants or guests visit the house of the *kyai deso*. The commands that are conveyed do not have to always be in a serious atmosphere; rather, they are often jokingly conveyed in a relaxed atmosphere "*dadi wong islam kok wedi karo corona*" (Muslims must not be afraid of the coronavirus). These words are often also mentioned in religious activities, such as *yasinan* (recitation of theYasin Chapter of the Quran by some Muslims) or *tahlilan* (recitation of the holy verses of the Koran to ask mercy and forgiveness for the spirits of those who passed away). These types of words, orders, or fatwas of the clerics are readily followed by the public.

> *... I'm just a commoner, I don't understand many things. I just follow what Pak Kyai is doing. Even Pak Kyai did not wear a mask, so why should I? I actually wanted to wear a mask, but I felt alienated because no one here wears a mask. People who wear masks are even bullied and laughed at* (Member of Yasin-Tahlil congregation, Male, 55 Years).

Religious local leaders (*kyai deso*), are generally the motor of social movements and social changes. They are the role models (*uswah hasanah*) for their people. Their every word and action will be readily followed by the public. In relation to COVID-19, social movements carried out by local religious leaders (*kyai deso*) are not carried out in a structured manner but rather are carried out in disguise. As a simple example, if a *kyai deso* does not wear a mask, then this will be interpreted by the community that wearing masks is unimportant and unnecessary, as exemplified by the *kyai*. Most of the *imams* (in general, it means a title for Muslim leaders, more specifically, an *imam* can also mean a leader of congregation prayers) in Mosques around Mranggen, Demak do not wear masks and do not apply social distancing during Friday prayers, even in their daily activities. This phenomenon is readily imitated by the community; moreover, local people believe in the saying

"*madep mantep melu pak Kyai*" (following *kyai* wholeheartedly) as a symbol of loyalty to their *kyai.*

The leader's value orientation is the value that a leader chooses to set people in motion. This value orientation can be classified into two categories: the value of materialism and the value of spiritualism. Materialism directs one's leadership to material interests or benefits, both personal and group interests, while spiritualism directs one's leadership to immaterial interests such as peace of mind, satisfaction, happiness, and the benefit of the people.

This materialistic and spiritualistic value orientation affects the attitudes and behavior of religious leaders (*ulama, kyai, ustadz,* etc.). Materialistic-oriented religious leaders will perceive their followers as an economic asset who can be used to empower the people, while spiritualistic-oriented religious leaders will think of their followers as friends and partners in reaching the blessing of Allah. However, this religious leadership value orientation is sometimes difficult to separate and differentiate because materialistic and spiritualistic value orientations most likely become obscure.

This obscurity creates a dilemma for a religious leader between the choice of spiritualism and the temptation of materialism. In the case of *kyai deso*, a vague boundary between two values often develops. *Kyai deso* is a religious leader who is in direct contact with the community. They are often used as role models for the local community (Riyadi & Karim, 2023). They also are considered solvers of all social problems among the local people. This dilemma of materialism and spiritualism is evident when *Kyai* does not have the heart to refuse incoming guests during the COVID-19 pandemic, because they believe that welcoming guests and treating them warmly is one of the religious obligations.

Additionally, *Kyai* would obtain some economic assets, such as *shodaqah* (a gift, usually in a form of money, from a Muslim to another voluntarily), *zakat* (money that must be given by Muslims to those entitled to receive it), and *hadiyah* (general gift) as a substitute for blessed water given by *kyai* to their guests. These people drink the water to seek blessings. This happens throughout the annual religious events, such as *ruwahan* (Islamic annual activity done by some Muslims when they visit each other before the fasting month (*Ramadhan*)) on the 15th of Syab'ban, *sedekah bumi, syuronan, rajaban* (the celebration of *Isra 'Mi'raj* which falls in the month of *Rajab*, one of the Islamic months). *Isra' Mi'raj* marks the night that Allah (God) took Mohammad (also known as Mohamed or Muhammed) on a journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to heaven and *muludan* (the commemoration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which in Indonesia falls on every 12th of Rabiul Awal in the Hijri calendar). This was stated by one of the following informants:

> *... Regarding COVID-19, I leave it to Allah. I only serve my jamma'ah (religious followers). They would feel honored if they were welcomed to my house. They asked me to pray for their lives to be successful in the world and the hereafter, for their business, their children's study. After I pray for them, they were happy, their hearts felt reassured. Other than that, they would give me some gifts as gratitude. If I refuse, they will feel unhappy* (Kyai Pesantren, Male, 60 Years).

The domination of religious understanding over resistance

One of the biggest challenges in handling COVID-19 is the religious understanding factor. The choice of certain religious beliefs will encourage religious communities to resist COVID-19 protocols. There are at least three main fields of religious understanding, namely, the theological view, the juridical view (*fiqh*), and the Sufism view (Table 4).

Table 4. Religious understanding factor

Religious Understanding	Concept	Religious Behavior
Theological concept	*Jabariyyah*	People who are afraid of COVID-19 are *musyrik* (idolators who do not believe in the Oneness of Allah)
Sufism	*tazkiyah al-nnafs* (soul purification)	• *sabr* (the Islamic concept of patience), • *qana'ah* (: the Islamic concept of being grateful for what Allah has ordained), • *tawakkal* (the Islamic concept of the reliance on Allah or "trusting in Allah's plan")
Fiqh	textual understanding	For Muslims, performing Friday prayer must be in a Mosque

From a theological perspective, the viewpoint of fatalistic theology (*Jabariyyah*) still dominates Muslim society in Indonesia. In view of *Jabariyyah* theology, the main actor in this life is only Allah SWT as the essential actor, while humans are only metaphorical actors. Allah has the absolute power to rule all human life. As a result, humans do not have freedom before Allah's dominion. In other words, humans are like puppets controlled by the mastermind. Humans submit to the scenario created by the puppeteer. *Jabariyyah* doctrine, among others, is based on the QS. Ash-Shafaat verse 96: ".... when it is Allah Who created you and whatever you do? ", and QS. Al-Anfal verse 17: "It was not you ˹believers˺ who killed them, but it was Allah Who did so." This view becomes the rationale of *Jabbariyyah* followers to believe in complete submission upon Allah's *taqdir* (predestination). As stated in the following interview excerpt:

> ... *Life is just temporary. It will definitely end. End point of life. Everything from the start until the end, everything has been arranged by Allah. We don't need to be afraid of anything, except Allah* (kyai/imam musholla, Male, 55 Years).

Concerning the implementation of the COVID-19 health protocol, the followers of *Jabariyyah* believe that the existence of COVID-19 is part of Allah's plan, which is full of life lessons. At the same time, they believe that life and death are not caused by COVID-19 but rather by Allah's *taqdir*. They even believe that people who are afraid of COVID-19 are idolaters (associating partners with Allah). Such an understanding is still found by some Muslim communities in the regions. Meanwhile, from the perspective of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), textual religious interpretation in understanding religious texts is quite dominant in Indonesian Muslim society. This model places religious texts (al-Quran and al-Hadith) as the only sources of knowledge without relating them to the revelation

background of a verse (*asbab al-nuzul*) or hadith (*asbab al-wurud*). In the end, they are unable to grasp the ethical principles or objectives of the implementation of Shari'a (*maqashid al-syari'ah*). The purpose of implementing Shari'a itself is to create benefits for mankind. This benefit is marked by the maintenance of five main things: religion, soul, children, reason, and wealth. This lack of understanding of ethical principles causes al-Quran and al-Hadith to be understood only textually and not contextually. Because of this fact, *Jabariyyah* followers tend to engage in rigid religious behavior. This is in line with the following informant's statement:

> *Since I was a kid, I have been doing Friday prayer at Mosque. Therefore, if I am asked to pray at home and replace it with Dhuhur prayer, my heart cannot accept it* (leader of majlis taklim, Male, 50 Years)

Textual religious understandings (*fiqh*) have led some Muslims to reject government policies (Ministry of Religious Affairs, COVID-19 task force) and *fatwa*s from various socio-religious organizations regarding health protocols when carrying out *maktubah* (everyday prayer) or Friday prayers. This rejection was particularly evident when a government policy prohibited Friday prayers, *tarawih* prayers (additional ritual *prayers* performed by Muslims at night after the *Isha prayer* during the holy month of Ramadan), and *Eid* prayers (special prayers offered to celebrate the two Islamic festivals traditionally in an open space allocated or field available for prayer) or in Mosques. These people base their argument on Q.S. al-Jumuah verse 9: "O believers! When the call to prayer is made on Friday, then proceed ˹diligently˺ to the remembrance of Allah and leave off ˹your˺ business. That is best for you if only you knew." Apart from the verses of Al Qur'an, there are several hadiths, including those narrated by Abu Hurairah RA in the Hadith of Imam Muslim: "For the sake of Allah, stop those men who often leave Friday prayers or Allah will lock their hearts and make them negligent people."

Sufism also has a large influence on motivating resistance to the COVID-19 countermeasures. Some of the concepts that develop in Sufism are *sabr*, *qana'ah*, and *tawakkal*, which can hinder compliance with the countermeasures of COVID-19. *Sabr* is a condition of the soul that remains calm in the face of disaster. *Qana'ah* is the concept of being grateful for everything one has to avoid feeling dissatisfaction. Meanwhile, *tawakkal* is the reliance on Allah or "trusting in Allah's plan" after doing *ikhtiyar* (effort). Through these three concepts, the absolute reliance of a servant on God is shown. This value initially became a typical lifestyle for a Sufi. Now, however, this resignation can be seen from the general public who do not belong to a Sufi "group". This resignation value, then, has implications for the attitude of Muslims who do not have concrete and progressive steps in dealing with COVID-19. The value of absolute reliance is interpreted passively so that it leads to an escapist attitude in Muslims. Therefore, they seem to "run away" from reality and be indifferent to COVID-19 issues.

Kyai Deso and Religious Understanding as a Resistance Factor

This study's results indicate that Indonesian Muslims' resistance to the COVID-19 protocol policy is related to the implementation of worship, especially social activities distancing. This finding reinforces the research conducted by Oxholm (2021) and Ben-Lulu (2021), who explained that social Distancing is a major problem in worship. Indeed, there has been an attempt to shift a

religious community from an offline to an online religious community, but it still raises normative-theological problems that create resistance. Meanwhile, the resistance of Indonesian Muslims is carried out in open (visible) and closed (invisible) social spaces. However, these two resistance patterns are not two separate binary patterns. In this context, private space is closely related to the deep beliefs of Muslims based on their religious understanding (internal), and this religious understanding is then expressed in the social behavior (external) of local religious leaders (*kyai deso*) and the religious community they lead. In other words, this social behavior is an inseparable part of the internal religious understanding of Muslims.

This study also confirms that local religious leaders and religious understanding are the two main factors influencing resistance to implementing the COVID-19 protocol. *Kyai deso* is a religious leader in direct contact with the community and becomes their role model. Responding to COVID-19, *kyai deso* prioritize divine spiritual values and are less concerned with worldly material values. This orientation of spiritual values causes *kyai deso* to be less concerned with the social, political, economic, and health implications of violating the COVID-19 pandemic protocol. Because of this spiritual orientation, *kyai deso* does not need public recognition, which is seen as temporary and can reduce the quality of their sincerity in worshiping God. The conception of values that the kyai wants to achieve deso is to gain the pleasure of Allah in their every social activity.

Nevertheless, the Islamic religious community (*jamaah*) led by the kyai still views the kyai as the holder of traditional religious authority whose fatwas and advice will always be followed. The concept of traditional religious authority is different from the concept of public recognition. Traditional religious authority is given and cannot be cultivated. It is a spontaneous and natural gift of Islamic society. Meanwhile, public recognition can be done with structured and systematic efforts.

This study also further strengthens the research of Fauzi (2020) and Bosra (2020), who say that local religious leaders (*kyai deso*) have a strong influence on society and have a strategic role in bringing about change in social, political, and economic aspects. The resistance of Kyai deso and Islamic religious communities against implementing the pandemic protocol due to the failure of the COVID-19 Task Force (SATGAS) to involve the kyai village to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The relatively long coordination between the leaders of central and regional socio-religious organizations is a problem in itself (Rachmawati et al., 2022).

Fatalistic, textual, and theocentric religious understanding factors also greatly influence Indonesia's resistance to the COVID-19 protocol. This theocentric style of religious interpretation cannot be separated from the influence of the dominant Sunni school of thought in Indonesia. In the field of theology, Indonesian Muslims tend to adhere to the Sunni ideology (founded by Imam Abu Hasan al - Asy'ari and Imam Abu Mansur al - Maturidi). In the field of Sufism, they adhere to the basic teachings of Imam Abu Qasim al - Junaid al-Baghdadi, and in the field of fiqh, they adhere to one of the four schools of thought: Maliki, Hanafi, Shafii, and Hambali. However, in practice, they mostly adhere to the Shafi'i school of thought. Imam Shafi'i in ushul fiqh is the "middle way" between rationalist thought of Imam Hanafi and traditionalist thought of Imam Maliki (Mashar, 2015).

The most prominent thing in the Sunni school of thought is the theocentric and fatalistic view of theology. The most prominent fiqh field is the Shafi'i school, which tends to be traditional. In the traditional view of fiqh, the knowledge source refers to the Qur'an and al-Hadith texts and is less responsive to social dynamics. However, in the Sufism field, Sunni schools prioritize the morals of Sufism, which tend to pay attention to the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). This school of thought has profoundly influenced the successes and failures of COVID-19 pandemic management because their absolute dependence on Allah makes things other than Allah, including COVID-19, meaningless.

The Impact of Resistance on Religious Community Values

The resistance of the religious community to the implementation of this pandemic protocol policy has had an impact on the religious community's lives. One of the most important social impacts is the emergence of negative prejudice and mutual suspicion between religious groups who are pro (obedient) and contra (resistant) to the pandemic protocol policy. These groups maintained this prejudice, although it did not lead to physical violence.

This negative prejudice and mutual suspicion gave birth to segregation and sentiment between groups. Initially, the community's resistance to the pandemic policy carried out religious activities such as congregational prayers without wearing masks. Meanwhile, the religious group that is obedient toward the pandemic protocol will avoid and keep their distance from groups against it. As a result, there is polarization between pro and contra-groups in their religious activities.

This polarization eventually gave rise to value clashes in the community's lives. The resistance community to the pandemic policy viewed religion as an absolute, fixed, and eternal value. Therefore, the presence of COVID-19 should not change people's religious values and behavior. On the other hand, the obedient community to the pandemic policy viewed religion as a dynamic source of value to dialogue with the dynamics of society. Therefore, religious teachings must be constantly reinterpreted when dealing with new phenomena in society so that religion benefits its adherents. According to this group, this reinterpretation is also needed in responding to the implementation of the pandemic protocol.

This difference in perception of religious values has brought about a difference in the psychological mood between the two groups. The resistance community to the pandemic policy tends to adhere to Jabariyah theology, so they perceive COVID-19 as a normal phenomenon and an examination of a Muslim's faith. Therefore, the right attitude in dealing with COVID-19 is to return to God, who created COVID-19. As a result, they have a relatively calmer psychological atmosphere without anxiety or fear of COVID-19. Consequently, this community tends to place COVID-19 patients as friends or social elements who must be helped, just like sufferers of other diseases, so their social ties are still fluid and full of kinship, friendship, and cooperation.

Meanwhile, the obedient community to the pandemic policy tends to adhere to rational theology (Qadariyah). Thus they viewed COVID-19 as a "disaster," and they tend to take a preventive and careful attitude. As a result, they have a psychological atmosphere that tends to be anxious and afraid of COVID-19. As a result, in responding to COVID-19 patients, they tend to keep their distance from COVID-19 patients, so their social bonds are very tenuous and rigid.

In addition to social conflicts and clashes of values, the emergence of the resistance community to the pandemic policy also has implications for the strengthening influence of local religious leaders. They rejected the fatwas of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah, which issued fatwas regarding implementing the health protocol pandemic in conducting worship. This phenomenon shows the distribution of religious authority from central (structural) religious authority to local (cultural) religious authority. In other words, there has been a decentralization of religious authority distributed to local religious leaders (kyai deso). Regarding the distribution and decentralization of religious authority, the resistance community tends to place local religious leaders as the holders of religious authority (Mudhofi & Karim, 2024).

This social conflict, clash of values, and the distribution of religious authority show that religion still has an important role in responding to COVID-19 (Iqbal et al., 2020; O'Regan, 2020; Samsuduhah, 2020; Wildman et al., 2020). However, this study shows that religion and its adherents, if not managed properly, will develop a resistance attitude toward COVID-19 response policies. In managing religion, at least it must be understood from three interrelated sides: religious messages (scriptural scriptures), subjects delivered (ustadz, ulama, khatib, organizations), and society (objects). Religious messages (texts) that still rely on conservative, traditional religious interpretation models are no longer relevant in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Progressive, critical, and transformative religious messages must be explored more deeply so that Muslims have a more relevant and contextual religious interpretation in responding to COVID-19 (Arrobi & Nadzifah, 2020). In terms of delivering messages, this study rejects the notion that religious leaders who are formally legal are considered to play a major role in overcoming COVID-19. This study shows that local religious leaders strongly influence the religious behavior of grassroots communities.

From this fact, the government and religious communities need to do the following two things. First, Muslims must deconstruct religious discourses that are less responsive to COVID-19. Outside of theocentric religious discourse (*Jabariyyah*), it is necessary to introduce a critical and transformative religious discourse (*Qodariyyah*), as well as discourse on religious relations and science in response to COVID-19 (Alexander, 2020). Second, the Government embraces and involves local religious leaders in handling COVID-19 as religious leaders who are in direct contact with the community.

Limitations and Future Research

Java is one of the majority ethnic groups in Indonesia. The Javanese have a unique culture and a patriarchal pattern that has implications for the relationship between religious leaders and religious communities. This pattern applies to all areas with Javanese culture, even though they do not live on the island of Java. However, this study has limitations that lie in the scope of the study, which only looks at the religious aspect in one village. The resistance of religious communities to the COVID-19 protocol policy is very likely to be influenced by other factors, such as economic, social, cultural, political, and psychological aspects. These factors are suspected of playing a strong role in creating religious resistance in efforts to prevent COVID-19. Therefore, this study suggests a comparative follow-up study in other areas with a more comprehensive conceptual approach. These aspects allow other researchers to explore this phenomenon further as a reference for future policies. Likewise, cooperation from all parties is needed to accommodate various elements in

society in an integrated manner through the involvement of religious and community leaders from the central and regional, regional, and national levels so that the COVID-19 response can be thoroughly disseminated.

Conclusions

Several violations of health protocols during the pandemic were committed not only by the public but also by religious people. There are still many protocol violations as a form of resistance to the COVID-19 response. *First*, this resistance can be seen from the understanding of religion. Religious understanding at the local level is still dominated by textual-normative religious messages. The understanding of fatalistic theology, textual fiqh, and escapist Sufism has given rise to a passive religious attitude in responding to the issue of preventing COVID-19. Religious communities have not shown proactive efforts in preventing COVID-19. This study shows that religious expression and religious behavior (external dimension) are strongly influenced by religious understanding (internal dimension). Therefore, the prevention of COVID-19 must begin by contextualizing religious messages that are more progressive, actual, and relevant to the findings of modern science about COVID-19.

Second, Da'i or local religious leaders also have an important influence in shaping the religious attitudes of Muslims during the pandemic. Statements and social behavior of religious leaders that are counterproductive to the Government's efforts have resulted in several violations of health protocols in preventing COVID-19 in religious communities. Meanwhile, mainstream religious organizations (MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah) at the national level have issued religious fatwas that are adaptive to the COVID-19 pandemic health protocol. However, they failed to build a network of understanding with the Muslim religious community and local religious leaders, most of whom were outside the formal structure of religious organizations. As a result, there is a gap between the policies of the central leadership of socio-religious organizations and local religious leaders. This result shows that the hierarchical structure of religious organizations does not fully apply in the Islamic religious community in Indonesia. Therefore, the success of preventing the COVID-19 pandemic depends on the Government's involvement in Da'i or local religious leaders in implementing the COVID-19 pandemic protocol. In other words, amid the development of science and information technology 4.0, Da'i or local religious leaders still have strong religious authority in the Islamic religious community.

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