

The Dilemma of Handling the Covid-19 Pandemic in Islamic Sharia Province: The Challenge of Building Trust in Government

Adri Patria^{1*}

¹Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Almuslim University, Aceh, Indonesia

Abstract

The specialty of Aceh, which is closely related to the strength of Islamic values and norms, emphasizes the vital role of Teungku (Ulama) Aceh in maintaining the practice of these values and norms. This local wisdom has also become a dilemma for local government officials in Aceh in the context of preventing the Covid-19 pandemic in Aceh, even though various policy products have been created. This dilemma can be seen from the difficulty in realizing the responsibility of local government officials who are members of the Covid-19 Pandemic Handling Task Force, given the people's trust, which is no more dominant than Teungku's in their village in understanding and believing in the Covid-19 pandemic phenomenon itself—which of course has a dominant emphasis on conformity with Islamic values (one of which is seen in the difficulty of implementing congregational 'shaf shalat (prayer)' protocols in the pandemic era). Using Max Weber and John Locke's framework of thinking about legitimacy, this study seeks to answer why the implementation of the Covid-19 pandemic prevention health protocol is not working well in Aceh? The results of this study, which are guided by qualitative methods, indicate that the low legitimacy of local government officials is none other than due to the Acehnese public's low trust in the government in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic itself, as well as showing the central role of Teungku in framing the understanding of the pandemic. The dominance of Teungku's understanding, which is contradictory to the understanding built by the government, has increasingly created momentum for people who did not comply with health protocols in the pandemic era, so it is not surprising then when mosques and stalls (cafes/restaurants) in the scope of the Aceh region are hardly implementing these health protocols, and where they exist, tends to be only part of maintaining the necessary formality.

Keywords: Teungku (Ulama), Government Apparatus, Policy, Trust, Covid-19 Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION*

Aceh, as one of the important provinces in the republic with various privileges in regulating itself has never been the focus of a very interesting study. Islamic values, which form the foundation in organizing the social, political, economic, and cultural life of the people, have become the main yardstick in understanding the dynamics that exist in Aceh so that it is nicknamed '*Negeri Serambi Mekkah*.' The armed conflict between Aceh and the national government since the post-independence era of Indonesia was partly caused by the issue of the privileged practice of the traditional Islamic order (Islamic Sharia) in Aceh. The strong Islamic values that form the basis of norms for every aspect of the state live in this area have placed *Teungku* (Ulama/Cleric) in a central position in Aceh, which further strengthens the informal patronage structure that makes *Teungku* a

source of reference for these social, political, economic and cultural problems [1]. But the anxiety then is, where the problem sits precisely from the significance of *Teungku's* role, where the centrality of *Teungku's* role, which is spreading in the process of governance in the regions, has unintentionally determined the level of effectiveness of the government in handling and preventing the current Covid-19 pandemic in Aceh. Thus, *Teungku*, as an informal actor in the government structure, has a decisive role in the response and prevention of a pandemic. The centrality of this *Teungku* also became the starting point that confronted the local government in Aceh and its apparatus in a dilemma, where there was a tendency for a gap in understanding between the government and *Teungku* in handling the pandemic.

The case of failure to implement health protocols in the practice of congregational '*shaf shalat* (prayer)' [2] arrangements and the use of masks in mosques in various regions in Aceh [3], is an explicit example of the struggle for understanding patterns between *Teungku* and the government in handling the pandemic, which is nothing but an explicit form of dynamics trusts

Correspondence address:

Adri Patria

Email : adri.fisipol@gmail.com

Address : Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Almuslim
University

and the level of this' trust.' How to position belief in Allah and belief in the government has become an irrelevant choice but has risen to the surface in the process of handling a pandemic without realizing it. This unequal choice inevitably has become a dilemma that haunts government officials who are members of the Covid-19 Task Force in proving their commitment to carry out their duties completely. Ulama versus the government has succeeded in being framed in such a way in the minds of the Aceh people so that efforts to create public trust in the government have become a difficult step but must be taken by the Aceh government.

The more dominant public trust in the Teungku in their village in understanding and believing in the Covid-19 pandemic phenomenon has become a dilemma in itself given the difference in understanding that has occurred between Teungku and the government. The level of confidence has made the government's version of the 'mask' and 'keep prayer distance' regulations an anomaly that doesn't need to be followed. So, it is not surprising then when mosques, stalls (cafes/restaurants), and other traditional community centers do not really care about the health protocol established by the government. The low level of public trust in the government is not without reason - as indicated by existing preliminary data, which shows so many inconsistencies in the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic [4]. The statement by the Presidential Chief of Staff regarding the emphasis on hospitals not to play with the death status of patients [5] has raised suspicion as well as public distrust of the pandemic itself.

Thus, by borrowing the legitimacy theory initiated by Max Weber and John Locke, this study is trying to answer the main question posed in this study, namely, why is the implementation of the COVID-19 pandemic prevention health protocol not working well in Aceh? This question looks simply, but it is very important to ask given the very limited adequate scientific explanation. Thus, by borrowing the legitimacy theory proposed by Max Weber and John Locke, this research seeks to show the practice and level of legitimacy of Teungku as an informal actor and the government as a formal actor in contesting the handling and prevention of this pandemic. This practice and level of legitimacy will later explain the dilemma assumption in preventing pandemics in this Islamic Sharia country, where the low level of public trust in the government automatically

increases the significance of Teungku's role, which at the same time decreases the level of effectiveness in the implementation of the duties and functions of the government apparatus in charge in the field. This is also what makes this research interesting, which will be systematically explained in the findings elaborated in the discussion section.

In accordance with the research focus related to legitimacy, it is necessary to be explicit in a frame of mind to guide coherent understanding in the analysis presented. Basically, there are two main focuses on assessing the legitimacy of power. The first legitimacy theory related to the "people's consent to the government" surfaced in the theory of John Locke [6], which was later developed by Peter Stillman and David Beetham, who then emphasized the context of fulfilling criteria or the basis of agreement for this legitimacy [7]. While the second, related to how to obtain legitimacy, rests on the theory put forward by Max Weber [8]. However, since both Locke and Weber's theory stand on certain theoretical foundations or different conceptions, it is necessary to explain in advance the methodological differences that underlie the perspective of the legitimacy of power they build.

Weber's theory, which also relies more or less on domination without coercion, is showing that legitimacy is a moral feature of the government (regime) because it is closely related to the element of popular consent required by Locke. Thus, compliance and approval from the community are important criteria that need to be put forward, although it must be remembered that the composition of these criteria is not balanced, because as explained above, Weber himself emphasizes more on legitimacy, which emphasizes compliance through domination, which tends to force. Therefore, the composition of the compliance and consent criteria has formed the assumption that legitimacy can be obtained through confidence (awareness building) or through the use of force, in the sense that it can go hand in hand with both of these criteria, or simply one of them.

From this, it can be seen that Weber's theory of legitimacy is still influenced by the aspects adopted by Lockean, so that the legitimacy theory developed by both Weber and Locke can be understood as complementary or complementary, not mutually negating. Thus, due to the tendency of this study, of course, this research will have a more inclined towards one of these legitimacy theories, in this case, of

course, it becomes Lockean, considering that the analysis of the legitimacy of the government and ulama (Teungku) tends to be flexible.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The method used in this research is descriptive-qualitative case study-based, in this case, the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, where the researcher will carry out an empirical and logical reconstruction of the chain of cases of pandemic handling practice in Aceh based on the theoretical framework that has been made. The case study was chosen as the method in this study based on its attention to finding trends, patterns, and the direction of change studied, as emphasized by Yin [9]. The advantages of case studies as a method chosen are based on the main objective of this method, namely how a case or multiple cases is comprehensively understood; and the possibility of generalization so that it is possible to predict the progress of the case [10]. Therefore, data priority is emphasized on data related to successive historical timescales in the same case frame in order to ensure the quality of research data even in such a short span of research time.

In particular, case studies are very helpful in this study, where this method has a focus on detailed and holistic sequence analysis in historical cases, suitable for studying rare events, facilitating the tracing of forgotten rationale that may be behind a historical event, and studies it is possible to examine the interaction effect in one or more cases [11]. This is certainly very helpful in framing the case for handling this pandemic.

For a study that uses a qualitative descriptive method, relevance is usually strengthened by a complete description procedure, communicative validation, and main constructs [12]. Complete descriptions, communicative validation, and main constructions are techniques applied in this research wherever possible. To increase confidence, triangulation techniques are used, namely by comparing the literature and different research results in the analysis process.

Data Collection

As outlined above, regarding the priority of research data, case data in an effort to explain the logic of this pandemic handling case can be categorized into two, namely primary data and secondary data [13]. Primary data sources can be traced from the statements of power participants or witnesses involved, or people who were at the

scene of the incident, such as provincial and district/city government actors in Aceh, Teungku (Ulama), target communities, Acehese scholars, community leaders, and others. Interviews with these informants are the most basic method for finding primary data. In this study, interviews were conducted with power participants who mostly reside in district/city areas.

Given the various obstacles above in obtaining data from primary sources, secondary sources are very important because many political actors or power participants are not willing to answer openly in interviews. However, their expressed opinions can be found in various secondary sources, such as in journals, books, and newspapers. The expressions in these secondary sources can guarantee the validity of the data from one another, or it can also cross-check the interview data.

The next flow is how the data is verified, and its validity is guaranteed. The quality of a study is determined by relevance and confidence. There is a general consensus that qualitative research should make use of as complete a source of reporting as possible and that the practice of selecting and altering the facts, however small, should be avoided to satisfy the wishes of the researcher simply. Communicative validation is carried out by confronting the sources of the text and interviews to ensure they match what is really meant. Meanwhile, the main construction is adding information to a saturated level so that adding data is no longer enriching it with new things [14].

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Covid-19 Pandemic Crisis in Aceh

The Covid-19 pandemic, which became popular in Indonesia in early March 2020, has quickly spread to all corners of the republic, including in Aceh Province. Aceh, which was used as a pilot of the Covid-19 free area [15], immediately shifted to a concerning status with the spread of various cases of transmission starting in June 2020. In the early days of the pandemic, the Acehese people were very confident that this pandemic would not break out in Aceh [16]. This is based on the people's belief that the country of Aceh is an Islamic sharia country that is difficult to penetrate by the Covid-19 pandemic. Non-compliance with health protocols established by the government has become a daily routine for people in the pandemic era. Markets, stalls, cafes, and other

busy centers are still full of visitors who do not apply the said health protocols [17]. However, this situation did not last long.

In mid-June 2020, positive cases of Covid-19 found momentum in Aceh. Of course, this was accompanied by worries and fears that began to hit various regions in Aceh [18]. These people's neglectful attitude immediately gave rise to concern with the outbreak of the pandemic in Aceh. The Aceh government immediately imposed stricter regulations and supervision, although, from the start, it was indicated by the issuance of an announcement issued by the Aceh Regional Leadership Communication Forum (Forkopimda), which took effect from March 30, 2020, regarding the application of the 'curfew' rule [19]. The outbreak of positive cases of Covid-19 in Aceh is also inseparable from a large number of patients and their families who are not honest with the medical team in existing health facilities when they need medical care [20].

Table 1. Data of Covid-19 in Aceh

TERKONFIRMASI +21		DALAM PERAWATAN +21		SEMBUH 0		MENINGGAL 0	
8064		1104		6659		301	
SEKELAS SIKLAS		SUSPEK		PROBABLE		TOTAL	
4015		160		447		534	
SEKELAS SIKLAS		DALAM PERAWATAN		SEMBUH		MENINGGAL	
4015		160		447		534	
SEKELAS SIKLAS		DALAM PERAWATAN		SEMBUH		MENINGGAL	
4015		160		447		534	

Sources: Dinas Kesehatan Aceh, November 20, 2020.

The High Level of People's Trust in Teungku (Ulama/Cleric)

The strong belief of the Acehnese people in Teungku is an institutionalized historical product, as explained in the previous introduction. Adherence to Teungku is nothing but a manifestation of fundamental obedience to Islamic values and norms as an inherent tradition in Aceh. In the case of the early outbreak of this pandemic in Indonesia, the people of Aceh tended to ask advice from the Teungku. This is because the Covid-19 pandemic is considered a test from Allah SWT. However, in this context, an understanding block was also created among the Teungku themselves. On the one hand, there is Teungku who supports the Covid-19 prevention

measures carried out by the government, but on the other hand, there is also Teungku who is against the government's steps, as seen in Friday Prayers lectures in the era of the pandemic [21], in fact, it shows the dominance of the counter understanding. The contra context referred to refers to the speeches of the Teungku, who did not believe in the existence of the Covid-19 virus. In fact, there is a tendency to think that this pandemic is nothing but a manifestation of fabrication or conspiracy between doctors and journalists in order to achieve certain benefits [22]. In addition, there was also Teungku's oration on the counter block, which emphasized that there was no need to worry about a pandemic, considering that destiny had been determined [23].

In addition, there has also been an 'anomaly' discourse for people who wear masks in mosques when attending regular congregational prayers. Government officials and the public who are disciplined in wearing masks in Friday prayer activities in the congregation have succeeded in stealing the attention of other mosque publics who think that wearing masks are 'people who do not believe in God' and Teungku's advice [24]. In addition, the practice of obedience to Teungku can also be seen in the practice of the arrangement of 'shaf shalat (prayer)' in the congregation, which in principle is still directed at the usual 'shaf' density mechanism [25].

The difference in perceptions between the government and Teungku above shows that the centrality of the Teungku (Ulama) role remains strong and is always gaining momentum. The centrality of Teungku's role also breaks down the wall of understanding that so far, religiousness has often been equated and measured in terms of ritual in a cultural dimension, which is separate from political discourse. This separation caused Teungku's ulama as the holder of Islamic authority in Aceh [26] to be understood as a cultural identity that is only tasked with preserving Islam as an aspect of worship alone. Many people did not realize this, moving from the thinking of a Dutch orientalist, namely Snouck Christian Hurgronje, who did have extraordinary expertise in understanding Islam, wherefrom his experience researching Aceh, Hurgronje formulated what became known as 'Islamic politics' [27].

The Low Level of Public Trust in Government Officials

As previously explained, the low level of public trust in the government in handling the

pandemic was caused by the strong level of trust of the Acehese people in Teungku in understanding the pandemic phenomenon. However, this is not the only determining factor of the low legitimacy of government officials in handling the pandemic. At least from the findings, there are three other factors that cause the weak legitimacy of the government apparatus, apart from the centrality factor of Teungku (Ulama). These determinant factors are government inconsistency related to the Covid-19 case; monitoring practices by government officials that show low commitment to dealing with pandemics; and the contradiction of the pandemic issue that was wiped out by the government apparatus and national and global medical personnel.

1. Government Inconsistencies Related to the Covid-19 Case

Inconsistency in government information is also a crucial problem in efforts to deal with a pandemic. This is shown starting from the practice of 'ignoring' the central government when this epidemic began to hit massive Wuhan, which is one of the provinces in China. This negligent practice can be seen from the non-scientific arguments that have been made by many central government officials in assessing the existence of this pandemic from the start [28]. In addition, coordination between competent institutions in handling this pandemic from the start has also created problems of its own, where each competent institution is confidently competing to expose their own data, which often overlaps with each other [29]. This government's inconsistency has succeeded in encouraging the growth of public dissatisfaction with the government in dealing with the pandemic, including the Acehese people [30].

In principle, the community supports government policies related to handling pandemics, such as restricting movement and implementing health protocols. However, the practice has gradually begun to fail due to the emergence of different kinds of information presented by various government agencies. The public does not believe in the existence of the Covid-19 virus but rather distrust the government, which is considered insufficient and even so 'trivial' in terms of handling the impact of the pandemic. The implication of the lack of seriousness of the government - if you don't want to say 'mismanagement' - is truly significant, which causes Indonesia's economic

growth rate to be in the line of minus 5.32 percent in the second quarter of 2020. This recession gap also implied an increase in the number of unemployed suddenly and exploded in quantity, which touched the figure 8.1 to 9.2 percent or the equivalent of printing 10.7 to 12.7 million unemployed [31]. Thus, the problem of 'mismanagement' has significant implications for violations of health protocols that are based on the priority of people's economic activities in order to fulfill their basic needs. Public ignorance does not necessarily come from the dimensions of social egocentrism but is also triggered by the government's lack of seriousness in managing the pandemic itself.

The overlapping coordination process and frequent changes in government regulations regarding the handling of the pandemic are serious implications as a major contributor to increasing public distrust of the government. This accumulated distrust was manifested in the form of violations of health protocols and government regulations that were perpetrated by the people of Aceh in the pandemic era.

2. Low Commitment of Government Officials in Pandemic Handling Practices

The complexity of the Acehese people's distrust of the government is exacerbated by the lack of seriousness in the practice of monitoring by government officials regarding pandemic prevention. This was shown by observing the activities of the monitoring and surveillance posts established by the Covid-19 Handling Task Force at two crossing points of people in Aceh. The first point is located in the border area between Aceh Tamiang Regency and North Sumatra Province. With the capital of an "ordinary health certificate" (without blood test) issued by express by medical facilities in the border area—with a cost of Rp. 30,000 - Rp. 60,000 (whereas at that time, the cheapest rapid test costs ranged from Rp. 350,000-Rp. 500,000) plus body temperature checks using a thermometer (thermo gun), everyone is free to enter Aceh Province via Aceh Tamiang District [32]. Not to mention the issue regarding the receipt of a certain amount of money by the officer for handling Covid-19 at the border in order to smooth the process of crossing people into Aceh Province [33], further increasing the level of public distrust of the government. The lack of seriousness in monitoring practices by government officials was also seen at the second point in the area of the entrance gate of Bener Meriah District-Central

Aceh District (Pos Paya Tumpi), where starting at 18.00-19.00 WIB, the pandemic handling inspection activities stopped altogether so that used by various communities with the need to pass, to enter freely into the Central Aceh District [34].

The practices shown above show the lack of seriousness in efforts to deal with the pandemic's progress. The practice of supervision seems to be only part of the formalization of tasks accompanied by certain rights for the government apparatus itself. This practice also reinforces the public's ignorance of the commitment to handling the pandemic. Even though the supervision aspect is a very important aspect in the government and state management mechanism, and of course, this is also a significant factor in efforts to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic itself. The tradition of the discourse of "fulfill rights and drop obligations" as another term for "formality" seems to find its context in the practice of such supervision.

3. Contradictory of Pandemic Issue

Apart from the inconsistency of the government and the weak practice of supervision carried out by government officials, the contradiction in understanding the pandemic issue that is being blown by the government apparatus itself also significantly affects the level of public trust in the government in Aceh. The government officials' own hesitation in understanding and believing in the pandemic issue itself has further increased the complexity of this public distrust. The emergence of the issue that the case of the Covid-19 virus transmission is nothing but part of a "central government project" when structured in such a way as to refer to a conspiracy theory [35], further reinforces the low level of public trust in the government. The irony is precise because contradictory beliefs on this issue are not only circulating in society but also within the government apparatus itself [36]. Of course, this actually increases the ignorance of the community in implementing health protocols as a form of handling against a pandemic.

Apart from contradictions that originate in government circles, contradictions also originate in the national and global medical community [37]. The belief of a number of national and international medical parties that the Covid-19 virus is nothing but an annual flu virus, in addition to the growing issue that the pandemic is nothing but part of the practice of global

conspiracy theories - where the spread of this issue is much-helped thanks to the support of information technology closely related to the openness of access to social media, it has further eroded the level of public trust in the government. The emergence of the conspiracy theory is not without basis, which is nothing but a form of disappointment by medical personnel in seeing the practice of handling the pandemic carried out by the Indonesian government regime and the international regime that looks mismanaged or not serious.

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CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the level of public trust in the government is constantly being eroded to the minimum level, which is shown by the massive and prevalent violations of health protocols by the community in the Aceh region. The significance of the role of Teungku (Ulama) and the lack of public trust in the government further strengthens the thesis that the low legitimacy of government officials in the field is due to the low level of public trust in Aceh in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic itself, as well as showing the central role of Teungku in a frame the understanding of the pandemic. Public non-compliance in implementing health protocols in the context of pandemic prevention has increasingly found a foothold when statements that are contradictory to the government's edition of pandemic handling come from Teungku as a public actor who is more dominantly trusted by the community.

Thus, the strategy of involving Teungku's role in Aceh is the main recommendation of researchers in order to break the chain of the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak, which is a necessity that the local government in Aceh must think about, to overcome the increasingly concerning crisis of trust. Apart from expecting Teungku's pro-active participation in supporting government policies - which of course must begin with an understanding of the perception of the pandemic itself, commitment and consistency of government officials are also a significant inseparable part of the grand framework for handling the pandemic itself.

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