



# Between Obedience to God or Submission to Government Policy: The Theological Resistance of the Sasak People Against the Corona Virus

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**Abstract.** This study sheds light on the public's disobedience to the policies of Indonesian government institutions in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in the new normal era in the Sasak community on Lombok Island, Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach, this study discovered that the low trust of public in adhering to the health protocol in the New Normal era pertained to the disparity of religious beliefs between the people and government. This was also attributed to the government's excessive intervention, inadequacy of public welfare and services, and forces public to adapt to the new normal activities. All the issues caused the public disobedience to government policies regarding COVID-19 health protocol. Contribution: The study has significant contributions to augment the government policies that correspond to the religious development in certain cases and circumstances. Because religion is central to the community, the government should guarantee that everyone has a right to express his or her religious beliefs.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, New Normal, Policy, Religion, Sasak Community.

## 1 Introduction

In September 2022, the global death toll from COVID-19 cases was 6,512,344 out of a total of 607,886,416 cases, with 157,757 deaths out of a total of 6,390,553 cases in Indonesia [1]. Many COVID-19 victims died in Indonesia because of widespread public opposition to health protocols during the pandemic. Sari discovered that people's disobedience was motivated by economic motives, ignorant attitudes, their belief in virus resistance, and distrust of the government, which issued contradictory policies and statements [2]. According to Buana, community disobedience is caused by negative perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes toward dealing with the Covid-19 outbreak. People's actions that defy government appeals because of cognitive bias [3]. When the policies involve the prohibition of religious rituals, public opposition becomes even more powerful [4]. In this case, government policy has intervened in theology, which is the 'heart of life' for most Indonesians.

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In general, Indonesians are religious, and they primarily practice their inherited religions critically or apically. In religion, inability to distinguish between sacred and profane, primary, secondary, and tertiary [5], [6], [7], [8]. Many experts concluded that religion is an element of cultural construction [9], [10], [11], [6], [12]. COVID-19 is a variable that predicts religious changes because of societal changes [13], [14], [15], [16]. The government is a stakeholder in the changes through its various COVID-19 policies. To prevent the spread of the virus, policies such as social distancing, mask use, and hand washing are implemented. However, the policies mentioned above are restrictive, and many people disregard or oppose government policies. The policy that most Indonesians criticize is the prohibition of social gathering (social distancing), which includes a ban on performing religious rituals in places of worship, funerals, weekly sermons, and several other religious traditions.

The Sasak people are known as people who are obedient, consistent, and fanatical with religious teachings, and they are one of the communities in Indonesia that has a variety of religious traditions/rituals. The Sasak people are also defying government policies concerning COVID-19. The variable of disobedience is the factor described at the beginning of this paper, but the main driver is the theological problem. According to the logic of hegemony theory, this opposition may result in the formation of new structures that are detrimental to policy and development goals. This article examined the Sasak people's disobedience to government policies and the implications for shifting social relations in the Sasak community.

## 2 Theory

The Corona virus is believed to have originated in Wuhan, China and is rapidly spreading worldwide [17]. The media also accelerates the publicizing process and facilitates fear [18]. Many people believe COVID-19 is an economic capitalist conspiracy [19], [20]. Capital owners, governments, and the media are the 'rulers' of the COVID-19 stage. It exemplifies asymmetrical interdependence, which is characterized by power dynamics between and among countries, nations, and social classes [21], [22]. COVID-19 is dominance or subordination resulting from power structures in relationships [23]. Domination and subordination in politics, culture, and the economy.

COVID-19 is a virus that is similar to MERS and SARS [24]. The virus was named Corona Virus by The International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses after it was discovered in Wuhan [19],[24]. Cough, runny nose, fever, respiratory problems, and digestive disorders are common symptoms of COVID. This virus is thought to be spread by bats, snakes, pangolins, and other reptiles [24]. The rapid and massive spread of the virus is the beginning of a social change in a global society.

The above-mentioned social changes affect the economy, education, culture, social relations, politics, and even religion [25], [26]. COVID-19 causes social change by enforcing new social relations through government policies. Government policies are enforced through force, including military force in some countries, and public rejection of political dominance is expressed in the COVID-19 discourse. COVID-19 is not just talking about the virus in society. However, it has infiltrated social, cultural, political,

and theological discourses, accompanied by a rejection of COVID-19 and the government's hegemony behind it [21]. Miller asserted that COVID-19 is a government plot to alter the course of history [19]. The rejection of conspiracy theories is natural and it is usually accompanied by public apathy [27]. COVID-19 is associated with the policies of the authorities, has resulted in public apathy. COVID-19 is a conspiracy and hegemony, specifically how the elite's domination is created, defended, and opposed [21], [28].

Traditions, emotional bonds between community members, political relations, kinship, and religious groups are all tools used by society to oppose hegemony. In the case of COVID-19, society naturally forms new forces to oppose the authorities' policy (hegemony) over COVID-19. In Indonesia, for example, students continue to learn face-to-face offline methods at home, even though government policies in schools must be implemented online, and parents are willing to accommodate the teaching and learning process. The moral resistance of the community to the rulers' hegemony is quite strong, including the prohibition on public gatherings for religious rituals.

According to Durkheim's classification, religion is divided into the sacred and the profane, namely the sacred and sanctified region and the elastic region that can be met with change [29], [30], [31]. In many ways, government policies (particularly in Indonesia) are included in the sacred area, which disrupt the community's (Muslim groups') sense of and belief in God. Religion and its rituals are at the heart of life for Indonesians. Religion is essential for tying together and strengthening social, economic, political, cultural, and other social ties [32]. In the COVID-19 pandemic, power hegemony over (religious) society creates new relationships; there are dialogue and communication clashes in system theory known as emergent properties [41]. The system unit in society employs values and systems from tradition, religion, and culture to combat rulers' hegemony in discourse and action, including humor, gossip, rallies, sabotage, avoidance, and denial. Method

This study was a survey of the Sasak community's compliance with the government-mandated COVID-19 submission. The study aimed to describe and map the community's reaction to COVID-19 policies and how they reacted to them, particularly in a social, religious, and theological context. Data were gathered through questionnaires, interviews, documentation, and information searches. During the research, the data were categorized and analyzed.

## **3 Results and discussion**

### **3.1 Sasak Community**

The Sasak people live on the Indonesian island of Lombok, which has five districts: Mataram, West Lombok, Central Lombok, East Lombok, and North Lombok, with a total population of 2,433,391. (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The Sasak people are devoted to their religious teachings and traditions, which are based on Islam. Most Sasak people are emotionally attached to charismatic figures who are usually affiliated with certain religious organizations, each of which has its own religious traditions and teachings. Traditions, doctrines, and religious teachings are passed down through the

Sasak community within the family, formal education, social relations, politics, and other media. Religion is the heart of life for the Sasak people, and it is the main spirit that fills all other aspects of life.

Religious traditions in the Sasak community have been developed over hundreds of years, and religion has been incorporated into Sasak culture. The sacred and profane [8], [30], [31], [42], [43] can be distinguished but not separated in community activities [32]. The main religious activities in the Sasak community are five daily prayers at the mosque, funerals, weddings (in certain months), and recitations (weekly, monthly, and yearly). The activities involve a large number of people, and the work is collaborative.

As long as they do not interfere with their traditions and religions, the Sasak people are courteous, rule-abiding, obedient to the government, and cooperative.

### **3.2 Regional Policy On COVID-19 In NTB**

COVID-19 policies in the province of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) began to be issued in March 2020, following national policies. Among the provincial decisions made by the NTB government in 2020 are the following: COVID-19 Prevention Task Force, Emergency Response Status for Covid-19 Non-Natural Disasters in NTB Province, Use of Unexpected Expenditures for Covid-19 Non-Natural Disasters in NTB Province, Self-Isolation Obligations for Residents Arriving from Pandemic Areas and Abroad, Implementation of Education Policies in the Emergency Period for the Spread of Covid-19, Arrangements on the implementation of prayers in mosques, Adjustment of the Civil Servants Work System in Efforts to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 in the NTB Provincial Government Environment, Obligation to Wear Masks in NTB Province in the Context of Preventing the Spread of Covid-19 in the Workplace, Protocols for the Management of Covid-19 deaths.

All of the policies listed above are being implemented, assessed, and continuously monitored. There are no operational business locations, places of worship are closed, educational institutions at all levels are directed to online learning, social and religious activities are prohibited, and government operations are prohibited. Only fishermen on the coast of Lombok can continue to fish, farmers can continue to work in their fields, and farmers in rural areas can continue to crop. The others were at home, doing activities and communicating online. During the new normal time, the provincial administration devised a vaccine strategy for the community.

### **3.3 Resistance of Sasak Community on COVID-19 Policies**

As a community built over hundreds of years, the Sasak have the inherent expertise to recognize diseases and treat them in their way. Life, death, and wealth are all decisions made by God that must be embraced and cannot be avoided. The Sasak people believe that disease originates within humans, outside of humans (nature), and from God because of human mistake (God's wrath). Nobody can avoid pain and illness because they are the part of life. No virus or sickness can infect a person if Allah protects. According to the results of the survey, the Sasak people believe the following about the origins of disease, especially COVID-19:

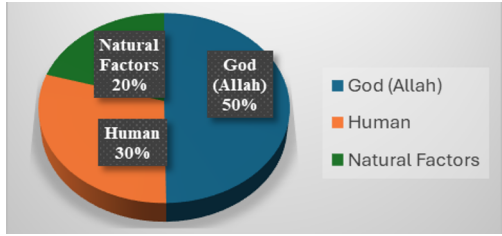


Fig. 1. Origins of disease COVID-19

According to the above-mentioned concept, the Sasak people oppose various government laws relating to the COVID-19 protocol, which governs worship and death ceremonies. The government has intervened in places considered sacred by the Sasak people in this context.

Religious-traditional strength underpins the Sasak community's rejection of numerous COVID-19 Health protocol policies. The authority and public trust in the government are at controversy in this case. The following figure depicts the Sasak community's power relations opposition behaviours:

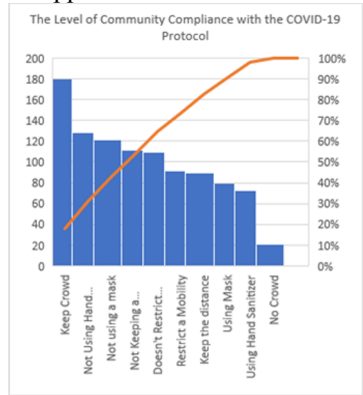


Fig. 2. Figure depicts the Sasak community's power relations opposition behaviours

In the COVID-19 narrative, the government's hegemony has reached the point of limiting individual freedom of action. With the government's authority, the public is compelled to obey information that is not always reliable. The Sasak people use their moral structure to oppose the government's discourses and policies. In the Sasak community, structural authority and moral authority clash when it comes to responding to COVID-19.

The figure below depicts the Sasak community's rejection of the COVID-19 policy:

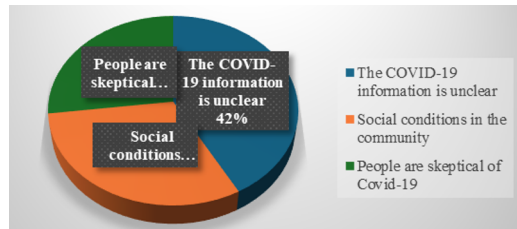


Fig. 3. The Sasak community's rejection of the COVID-19 policy

### 3.4 Between Obedience To God or Submission To Government Policy

As a Muslim-majority population, the Sasaks realize that religion is everything. The systematic logic of Muslim thought is linked to the maqashid al-syariah doctrine, which emphasizes the preservation of religion, soul, mind, wealth, and offspring as the foundation for attaining the benefit of self, family, and community [33], [34]. Maqashid al-Sharia is a philosophy that has been passed down from generation to generation through the existing moral framework in society, as well as a force to combat authoritarianism and power hegemony [35]. In Durkheim's perspective, the division of the sacred and profane is founded only on secularism. Nevertheless, the sacred and the profane are different in Muslim society but cannot be separated. That is why in every Islamic country (government), or where the population is Muslim, religion is always involved in the policies issued [35], [36], [37]. Despite the involvement of ulama, the COVID-19 policy intervenes too deeply and seeks a fundamental shift in religious practice in society.

Religion is associated with the supernatural. COVID-19, according to the Sasak, is something that comes from God through the process of human action. COVID, like all living things, is subject to God. If a person is close to God, he will be protected from all misfortunes (interviews with several religious leaders of the Sasak community). It is where the Sasak people's ideological stakes are tested by policies that are fundamentally opposed to their values, idealism and realism.

Dialogue of idealism and realism in Islam is carried out with *ijtihad*, namely understanding and reinterpreting religious norms according to the context of community development. Religious normative adaptation to the reality of COVID-19 has been carried out at the elite religious level, but there are still many rejections at the practical level. *Ijtihad*, in principle, is a quick response to reality. More *ijtihad*-related adjustments must be detailed, both in substance and methodology, as the foundation for future policy development. *Ijtihad*, with its methodological tools, must be used as a foundation for dealing with the similar challenge in the future: religion and power relations during a pandemic. It was referred to as objective facticity by Berger. Facticity implies that human life choices exist and are limited, such as place of birth, actions, ethics, and beliefs [38]. In the social domain problem, what is done is not considered. Any opposition to what was ordered or devised by the government was futile. As a result, it is not surprising that social realities and moral values generated by government policies can generate systemic legitimacy to impose sanctions, with most of these

morals being used against society for disobeying. When people cross the line, the government has and uses unlimited control and coercive powers.

The most understandable reason for COVID-19 rejection among Sasak people who use traditional religious and social institutions is how people can reduce pressure from state institutions under authoritarian social structures.

Fundamental rights should be protected by government institutions. However, the community, as a moral agent constantly dealing with state institutions (government) as moral institutions, loses its authority to create a common good between the community and the government.

This explanation implies that there is a conflict between moral agents (religious values) and institutional morals (government policies), with the moral institution winning. Its dominance and victory are the result of government colonization, not because this moral is superior to the substance of human values. Government colonization has rationalized community values by carrying out moral enlightenment under the guise of religious legitimacy (ijtihad). A social constraint devalues other humans [39], [40].

There is a mythical norm at this level of society, which is mystifying norms and obscuring what is happening [38], with the expectation that social expectations will occur, which is referred to as social expectations, so that all members of society behave according to government-created norms.

## 4 Conclusion

Religion and belief cause rejection and non-compliance with health protocols due to differences in interpretation of religious values and beliefs between the community and the government. This difference in interpretation exacerbates the public's distrust of the government. This ideological resistance is merely a tool for public dissatisfaction with the COVID-19 period's political, economic, and development problems. People's resistance and disobedience to the COVID protocol is also strengthened by issues of conspiracy, hegemony, and injustice. The government's coercion in regulating and determining the community behavior system also drives public disobedience to the COVID-19 protocol. The government tolerates only certain behaviors under policies and regulations while ignoring the sources of tradition and religion that exist in society.

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