

[Working Paper Series: Pandemic Crisis and Democratic Governance in Asia – Part I]

## Pandemic Crisis and Democratic Governance: Indonesia's Experience to Conquer COVID 19 Pandemic

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### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The first Indonesian citizen affected by the coronavirus was reported on March 2, 2020. During the early stage of the pandemic, people thought that the virus would fade away naturally with time. Therefore, Indonesia was already mid-pandemic when policies were applied to contain COVID-19. In the very beginning, Indonesia's policies consisted of evacuating the Indonesian citizens from Wuhan, China and designating specific hospitals in Galang Island (Riau Islands province) to only treat COVID-19 patients. Hospitals also offered services to act as a facility to observe quarantine and shelter patients to control the spread of COVID-19 on Galang Island. New facilities that could hold 1,000 beds were also constructed and ready to use by April 6, 2020.<sup>2</sup>

The policy above shows that the Indonesian government tried to counter the spread of the virus by treating the affected patients on a secluded island. Furthermore, the Indonesian government established a special team to accelerate the efforts to combat the spread of the coronavirus under the coordination of the BNPB (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana/ Indonesia National Board for Disaster Management). As creating a coordinated COVID-19 response between the government, ministerial departments, and other stakeholders was complicated and as new policy dilemmas emerged, maximizing efforts to control the pandemic was found to be challenging.<sup>3</sup>

Bloomberg, a private financial, software, data, and media company based in the US, launched a report called the "Covid Resilience Ranking." This report follows the development of the COVID-19 responses, fatality

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the year, ADRN members will publish a total of three versions of the Pandemic Crisis and Democratic Governance in Asia Research to include any changes and updates in order to present timely information. The first and second parts will be publicized as a working paper and the third will be publicized as a special report. This working paper is part I of the research project.

<sup>2</sup> Chandra Gian Asmara, "RS Galang untuk Covid-19 Beroperasi, Intip Fasilitasnya!" [Galang Hospital for Covid-19 Operates, Peek at the Facilities!], *CNBC Indonesia*, April 08 2020, (accessed in 21 December 2020).

<https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20200408122625-4-150577/rs-galang-untuk-covid-19-beroperasi-intip-fasilitasnya>

<sup>3</sup> Agus Wibowo, "Arahan dan Strategi Ketua Gugus Tugas Penanganan Covid-19 untuk Pemerintah Daerah" [Directions and Strategies of the Chair of the Covid-19 Handling Task Force for Regional Governments], *Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana*, March 17 2020, (accessed in 21 December 2020). <https://bnpb.go.id/berita/arahan-dan-strategi-ketua-gugus-tugas-penanganan-covid19-untuk-pemerintah-daerah#:~:text=JAKARTA%20%2D%20Kepala%20Badan%20Nasional%20Penanggulangan,daerah%20untuk%20menerapkan%20beberapa%20poin.> (

rate, number of infected cases and PCR tests completed for various countries. Reports are released every month, taking into account the social and economic disruptions. The report also gives an overview of the capacity of local health care systems, the impact of virus-related restrictions, and other COVID-19 related issues. From the Bloomberg Covid Resilience Ranking, the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries can be observed. This research utilized data that was published on December 2020.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1.** Bloomberg Covid Resilience Ranking

RANK	CHANGE	ECONOMY	BLOOMBERG RESILIENCE SCORE	1-MONTH CASES PER 100,000	1-MONTH CASE FATALITY RATE	TOTAL DEATHS PER 1 MILLION	POSITIVE TEST RATE	ACCESS TO COVID VACCINES
20	▲4	Bangladesh	59.2	34	1.6%	44	10.2%	5%
21	▼7	Germany	59.2	692	2.1%	309	11.5%	172.4%
22	▲7	Malaysia	58.4	122	0.3%	13	6.5%	24.6%
23	▲3	Switzerland	57.5	1,310	2.3%	763	16%	97.5%
24	▲1	Egypt	57.1	12	4.4%	69	–	61%
25	▲7	Saudi Arabia	56.8	17	6.1%	176	0.4%	5%
26	▲13	Iraq	56.5	128	1.6%	315	3.8%	5%
27	▼11	Sweden	55.5	1,573	1%	791	14.8%	172.4%
28	▲10	Chile	54.8	239	2.4%	842	4.8%	139.3%
29	▼2	Pakistan	54.8	38	2%	42	7.1%	26.5%
30	▼2	U.K.	54.6	785	2.4%	990	6.4%	294.7%
31	▲11	Nigeria	53.6	6	0.4%	6	14.2%	5%
32	▼13	Indonesia	52.9	62	2.3%	72	21.1%	50%
33	▲8	Spain	52.6	514	2.6%	1,046	6%	172.4%
34	▲11	France	52.4	546	3.4%	927	6.1%	172.4%
35	▲11	Philippines	51.7	39	2.1%	81	4.2%	6.2%
36	▲1	Brazil	51.4	561	1.5%	877	–	63.5%
37	▼19	U.S.	51.2	1,734	1.1%	955	13.3%	153.7%
38	▼3	South Africa	50.9	252	2.5%	414	20.3%	5%
39	▼5	India	50.6	69	1.4%	105	2.6%	85.4%
40	▼7	Portugal	50.3	1,189	1.9%	595	11.9%	172.4%
41	▼5	Austria	50.2	1,131	2.9%	578	11.2%	172.4%
42	▲7	Czech Republic	49.2	1,226	2.5%	959	23.1%	172.4%
43	▲5	Colombia	48.5	516	2%	791	–	32.7%
44	▲6	Belgium	48.4	605	4.6%	1,600	6.9%	172.4%
45	▼15	Turkey	47.6	1,860	0.4%	212	14.8%	30.1%
46	▲1	Iran	47.1	385	3%	636	21.3%	5%
47	▼3	Poland	47.1	990	3.3%	667	32.6%	172.4%
48	▼5	Romania	46.3	961	2.5%	743	21.6%	172.4%
49	▼9	Italy	45.8	980	3.4%	1,132	10%	172.4%
50	▼19	Greece	44.7	409	6.3%	394	8.1%	172.4%
51	–	Peru	40.6	138	3.1%	1,118	–	37.7%
52	–	Argentina	37.8	394	2.8%	924	32.5%	47.7%
53	–	Mexico	35.3	223	5.9%	914	40%	119.2%

Source: Bloomberg Covid Resilience Ranking (December 20, 2020)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Jinshan Hong, Rachel Chang and Kevin Varley, “Best and Worst Places to Be in Covid: Vaccine Not Slowing Deaths,” *Bloomberg Covid Resilience Ranking*, December 20, 2020, (accessed on January 11th, 2021 at [10.35\)https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/covid-resilience-ranking/](https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/covid-resilience-ranking/) .

<sup>5</sup> Jinshan Hong, Rachel Chang and Kevin Varley, “Best and Worst Places to Be in Covid: Vaccine Not Slowing Deaths,” *Bloomberg Covid Resilience Ranking*, December 20, 2020, (accessed on January 11th, 2021 at

The Bloomberg resilience score indicates the resilience of the country, the higher the score, the higher the resilience. The Bloomberg Covid Resilience Ranking is a compilation of many datasets, indicators, and indexes that is based on three fundamental criteria: the comprehensiveness of the data, the recentness of the data, and the reputation of the data collectors. Therefore, the Bloomberg Covid Resilience Ranking is very useful in comparing the situation of the country amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the data above, it is evident that democratic countries tend to have poorer performances compared with authoritarian countries. The US and India recorded low performances compared to authoritarian countries such as China and Vietnam which successfully combated the spread of the coronavirus. Hence, the question of whether democratic values are suitable for coping with the pandemic has been raised. Substantial evidence states that succeeding in containing COVID-19 with the least amount of disruption could lead to the development of high levels of trust and societal compliance. However, it is also important to note that the impact of the pandemic and the response of countries have been found to have a significant impact on the national economy. Indonesia, like other countries, is also facing common challenges. Therefore this study aims to form an explanation for the following research questions: 1) What are the challenges faced by Indonesia?; 2) What are the responses of the Public and Private Sector?; 3) How did COVID-19 change the behavior of the people?; 4) How did the COVID-19 Pandemic impact domestic and foreign policy?

## Literature Review

When faced with such emergency, democratic countries which usually welcome civic participation in the policy-making process are faced with a dilemma as the country needs to formulate the best and quickest decision or policy-making process to overcome problems that enacted emergency.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2003, p.2) state that democratic regimes generally choose policies that are more favorable to the poverty-stricken compared to the non-democratic regime.<sup>6</sup> On a similar note, after the first COVID-19 case was found, the Indonesian government announced that policies would be executed in order to control the rapid spread of the coronavirus. Therefore, the government of the Republic of Indonesia urged people to implement social and physical distancing such as, wearing a mask when outside and preventing unnecessary meetings. The government also distributed various assistance like providing food for daily consumption and financial assistance for the unemployed.

From a foreign policy point of view, the government of Indonesia cooperated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to deal with foreign policy to contain and suppress the spread of COVID-19 cases resulting from international travel and other cross-border activities. This is in line with the theory by Miroslav Nincic which states that foreign affairs should be left solely to the experts with as little interference as possible from citizens and non-experts within the government.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs banned the entry of passengers from foreign countries unless they held specific permits such as diplomatic and humanitarian missions.

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10.35)<https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/covid-resilience-ranking/>.

<sup>6</sup> Casey B Mulligan, Richard Gil, and Xavier Sala-i Martin "Do Democracies Have Different Public Policies than Nondemocracies?" *Journal of Economic Perspective* 18, No.1, 2004: 52

<sup>7</sup> Howard H. Harriot, "The Dilemma of Democracy and Foreign Policy", *Journal of Peace Research* 30, Issue 2, 1993: 219-22

Regarding the policy dilemma, Campbell and Conolly as quoted by Mark McGovern claim that the end goal of preserving democracy provides the un-problematized and ultimate justification for pursuing policies.<sup>8</sup> Although in this case, McGovern uses this framework to portray the dilemma faced by the government amid the terrorism case in the UK, the COVID-19 situation fits the notion of ‘emergency powers’ as the government has to deal with such an emergency.

Another interesting theory offered by Giorgio Agamben is on “State Exception” in which he argues that when a state is in an emergency, the state tends to neglect the existing law,<sup>9</sup> and searches for the field logic to create a policy.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, in pandemic situations, the government may employ specific considerations for policies to be applied.

Based on the theoretical perspectives mentioned above, this study aims to find the answer to the policy dilemma of the government; whether the state should control the spread of the coronavirus or focus more on the economic access of the public. These factors are creating such policy dilemmas so that the implementations of the policies are less effective rather than the strict government response shown by the authoritarian type of government.

### **Challenges: Intersections between health, economy, democracy**

How did Indonesia face the challenge of preventing the spread of the coronavirus, while at the same time hosting local elections on December 9, 2020? This section focuses on the challenges of Indonesia in maintaining democracy and dealing with economic challenges while protecting the safety, health, and political right of its citizens. The main challenge lies in implementing health protocols while keeping the balance between safety, economic stability, and democracy.

#### *1. Challenges on Economy*

Studies estimate that COVID-19 could push 100 million people globally to become subject to extreme poverty.<sup>11</sup> More research suggests that global trade may fall by an annual rate of 9.2%, depending on the depth and extent of the global economic crisis brought on by COVID-19.<sup>12</sup> The economic fallout from the pandemic could continue labor dislocation due to high unemployment rates. Many policies are applied by the Indonesian government to tackle this issue. Currently, the biggest economic challenge is on the use of the State budget in the allocation of financial aid.

<sup>8</sup> Mark McGovern, “The Dilemma of Democracy: Collusion and the State of Exception”, *Studies of Social Justice* 5, Issue 2, 2011: 213-230.

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “State of Exception”, (Translated by Kevin Atell), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005, p.1

<sup>10</sup> Davide Giordanengo, “The State of Exception”, (accessed on March 10th, 2021 at 23.40). <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/63909>.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank Group, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020, Overview Reversals of Fortune*, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, Washington DC, 2020, p.1

<sup>12</sup> WTO/2020 Press Releases-Trade Shows sign of rebound from COVID-19, recovery still uncertain-Press/862, 6 October 2020 (accessed on 22 December 2020, at 19.36), [https://www.wto.org/english/news\\_e/pres20\\_e/pr862\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pres20_e/pr862_e.htm)

## 2. *Challenges to Democracy*

Data from International IDEA<sup>13</sup>, recorded from February 20 to December 13, 2020, shows that at least 75 countries and territories around the world decided to postpone national and subnational elections due to COVID-19. At least 40 countries and territories decided to postpone national elections and legislative referendums. 76 countries and territories decided to hold national or sub-national elections as planned. Despite concerns on the spread of COVID-19, nine countries have already held national elections or legislative referendums. The parliamentary election of Iran (February 21, 2020) and the by-election in Taiwan (February 22, 2020) are just some examples of countries that have also continued to implement general elections.

In order to ensure the maintenance of democracy, the Indonesian General Election Commission proposed three alternatives for implementing the Simultaneous Regional Elections. The first option was to hold elections on December 9, 2020, if the situation ameliorated by the end of May 2020. However, if the situation did not get better, the General Election Commission was proposed to be held on March 17, 2021. The third alternative was to postpone the Simultaneous Regional Elections until September 29, 2021, the latest.

On May 4, 2020, President Joko Widodo finally issued a Government Regulation in lieu of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 2 of 2020. This government regulation, in lieu of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 2 of 2020, ordered that the Simultaneous Regional Elections of 2020 be held on December 9, 2020

## **Responses**

### 1. *Government Responses*

The Indonesian government established an institution focusing on COVID-19 response such as the COVID-19 Task Force. The COVID-19 Task Force is chaired by the Head of the National Disaster Management Agency, General Doni Monardo, and its main role is to create necessary arrangements to control the spread of the coronavirus. The COVID-19 Task Force coordinates with provincial and municipal level local government. Policies including tracing, tracking, and treatment of the people affected by COVID-19 were implemented by this institution. As the Special Task Force successfully curbed the rapid spread of the virus, it can be said that the Indonesian government responded quickly to avoid the wider spread of COVID-19.

Within a couple of months, the government appointed the National Economic Recovery Task Force, chaired by Deputy Minister for State-Owned Enterprises Budi Gunadi Sadikin. The regulation further appointed State-Owned Enterprises Minister Erick Thohir as the Chief Executive of the new Task Force. The main task was to coordinate the efforts of the two task forces (the COVID-19 Task Force and the National Economic Recovery Task Force) to ensure the effective implementation of government policies in tackling COVID-19 while maintaining economic recovery

Through coordination between the government, Member of Parliaments, the General Election

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<sup>13</sup> Global Overview of COVID 19: Impacts on Elections, <https://www.idea.int/es/news-media/multimedia-reports/ikhtisar-global-covid-19-dampak-terhadap-pemilu-bahasa-indonesia> (accessed on April 2, 2021 at 11.10)

Commission, the Oversight Body of Election, and the Special Task Force a decision was made to host the Simultaneous Regional Election on December 9, 2020. The General Election Commission then applied a strict health protocol during the Simultaneous Regional Election. The strict measures included wearing face masks, washing hands prior to casting the ballot, and body temperature check

## *2. Responses in using public space*

During the pandemic, a “work from home” regulation was applied throughout Indonesia and all business processes were completed online. This led to the increase of interest in online shopping and self-household sufficient activities such as gardening, cooking, and other ‘at home’ activities.

“Large Scale Social Distancing” was applied in many provinces especially in places that experienced a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 patients. Many spaces for public meetings such as markets, malls, schools, and train stations, were closed. The operation of long-distance trains, flights, and intercity buses was also terminated under this regulation.

Shops were allowed to operate only for a limited amount of time as it was mandatory to close at 18:00. Therefore, many grocery stores started to offer direct delivery to the customer’s door. Restaurants were allowed to sell take away but were required to follow restrictions for dine-in customers. A clear glass border between diners or an application of social distancing seating arrangement was necessary for restaurants that allowed ‘dine-in customers.

## *3. Responses from Society*

Many members of the civil society engaged in social solidarity activities by donating fresh produce such as rice and vegetables, and ready-made meals for the needy. To avoid the rapid transition of the virus, they also implemented ‘local lockdowns’ in their housing compound. This societal response controlled the spread of the virus by preventing non-residential people from wandering around their housing complex. Some people collected donations to help people in need like ‘ojek online (motor-taxi)’ drivers’ and others who were terminated from work or unemployed

## *4. Private sectors responses*

The private sector such as companies, trading industries, and hospitality industries, were also affected by the pandemic. Some private companies discontinued their services, and some of them were unable to continue to pay their workers. In this difficult situation, they understood the government policy to prioritize the health sector, rather than the economic sector.

## Changing behavior due to COVID-19 pandemic

Significant changes in behavior due to the Covid-19 pandemic were evident. Two significant changes should be noted: Firstly, there was disruption on many manual processes as many activities had to be done through Information of Technology. Therefore, all sectors were forced to adjust by employing IT, using mainly the online system and internet-based activities. Secondly, people were urged to implement health protocols everywhere. Thus, the government policies during the pandemic mostly stated the obligation to implement tight health protocols in all activities such as wearing a face mask and face shield, applying social distancing, avoiding crowds, etc.

## Government Policies

The government of the Republic of Indonesia responded to the pandemic by implementing domestic policies. President Joko Widodo announced that the government will allocate IDR 356.5 trillion (US\$ 24 billion) for the acceleration of the National Economic Recovery program in the 2021 State Budget. The budget was to be allocated to six sectors, namely health (Rp. 25.4 trillion), social protection (Rp. 110.2 trillion), ministries or institutions, and local government for sectoral improvements (Rp. 136.7 Trillion), micro, small and medium enterprises (IDR 48.8 Trillion), corporate funding (IDR 14.9 Trillion), and business incentives (IDR 20.4 Trillion).<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the funding mentioned above, the government had signed an MOU with UNICEF on receiving vaccines as part of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator - COVAX Facility of the World Health Organization (WHO)

The government also released the Presidential Instruction No. 6/2020 on the Disciplinary Intensification and Enforcement of the Health Protocol Law in the Prevention and Management of COVID-19. The document instructs all ministers, the COVID-19 task force, law enforcement officials, as well as governors, regents, and mayors, to take all necessary steps to intensify their efforts to prevent the spread of the coronavirus infection. President Joko Widodo had also issued the Presidential Regulation No. 82/2020 concerning the Establishment of the Committee for Handling COVID-19 and the National Economic Recovery.<sup>15</sup>

The Ministry of Finance issued the Regulation of the Minister of Finance Number 118 / PMK.06 / 2020 concerning government investment in the National Economic Recovery Program. The government also issued tax reductions and provided financial subsidies.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The government has prepare budget of 3565 trillion rupiah for economic recovery in the state budget for 2021, <https://nasional.kontan.co.id/news/pemerintah-siapkan-anggaran-rp-3565-triliun-untuk-pemulihan-ekonomi-di-rapbn-2021>, news of 4 August 2020, accessed on the December 22nd, 2020 at 20.44

<sup>15</sup> The announcement of the Presidential Regulation No. 82/2020 on Committee for Handling COVID-19 and the National Economic Recovery by the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto on Monday, July 20, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> The government issued Government Regulation Number 48 of 2020 concerning amendments to Government Regulation Number 81 of 2015 concerning Import and/or Delivery of Taxable Strategic Items which are exempted from Value Added Tax.

## Conclusion

From the findings above, it is evident that the Indonesian government tried its best to curb the pandemic that affected the life of Indonesian citizens. It is undeniable that at the beginning, the government has tried to overcome the COVID-19 related health issues by institutionally establishing the special task force as well as formulating and implementing policies to overcome the pandemic. Secondly, the government decided to host the national election in December 2020 with strict health protocols during the campaigning period and the actual election period. Third, the government implemented policies on economic recovery. This is also related to the import of COVID-19 vaccines from China and other vaccine-producing countries. The responses of the government, private sectors, and society are complementary to each other. The government was faced with the dilemma of choosing between combating the pandemic or maintaining economic stability. During the early stages of the pandemic, the government was seen as sacrificing economic stability and the public's access to economic resources in order to combat the spread of the coronavirus. However, the government was able to overcome this challenge by implementing policies that covered health issues, providing aid and other types of assistance, and by conjuring economic recovery plans. ■

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