

Jombang Muslim thoughts on Mosque Closure During Covid-19 Pandemic To Prevent the Spread of Coronavirus Disease from the Perspective of Islamic Theology

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ABSTRACT: During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Indonesian government suggests closing worship places, including mosques, to prevent Coronavirus infection. This article discusses the thought of Muslim society in Jombang, East Java, an area with fervently-religious citizens, about the government's regulation of mosque closure during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study is qualitative. The data was collected in Jombang through observation, interview, and documentation. This study shows that Muslim society in Jombang, East Java, has various opinions about the government's regulation of mosque closure during the Covid-19 pandemic. All mosques in this study remain open during the Covid-19 pandemic; only the Baitul Mukminin mosque has ever cancelled Eid al-Fitr prayers. The reason presented is that the mosque implements health protocols, so it is safe for worship. In addition, they believe that diseases come from God, so they must get closer to Allah by worshipping in mosques and mosques as places of da'wa. During the Covid-19 pandemic, mosque income decreased. From the worshipper's perspective, they worship at mosques because mosques implement health protocols or because residents do not believe in Covid-19, so they continue to worship as usual. Worshipers who worship at home assume to maintain health and feel uncomfortable worshipping in the mosque because it is complicated to comply with health protocols. From the perspective of Islamic theology, the policy of mosque *ta'mirs* in Jombang not to close mosques during the Covid-19 pandemic, and residents who are still active in going to mosques is according to QS. At-Tawbah 9: Verse 18 is about prospering mosques. To prevent the spread of Covid-19, they implement health protocols. Meanwhile, those who do not go to the mosque obey the government's recommendation to worship at home because they are in emergency conditions and because of the benefit of maintaining the soul so as not to transmit/contract Covid-19.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, mosque closure, *ta'mir*, worshipper, Islamic theology.

I. INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, Covid-19 break-out hit almost all countries (Zhan et al. 2020) and became the world's concern when World Health Organization officially declared it a global pandemic (Cucinotta and Vanelli 2020). The pandemic severely affects health and the economy globally, prompting countries to take drastic measures to combat the virus (Imtyaz, Abid Haleem, and Javaid 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the governments of various countries make strict policies to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (Hale et al. 2020). They suggest the closure of mass-gathering venues, including local quarantine (Ren 2020), the closure of entertainment venues (Detsky and Bogoch 2020), and even the closure of worship places (Yezli and Khan 2020a). The Indonesian government is one of the countries whose government suggests closing worship places, including mosques (Kuipers, Mujani, and Pepinsky 2020a). In April 2020, the Indonesian government declared the pandemic a national disaster (Presiden Republik Indonesia 2020a) and issued certain limitations to prevent the pandemic from outbreaks. These limitations are (1) working from home, (2) the closure of schools, and (3) the closure of worship places, such as mosques (Menteri Agama RI 2020; Menteri Kesehatan RI 2020; Presiden Republik Indonesia 2020b). However, these limitations, particularly the mosque's closure, have not been effectively obeyed. Some mosques insist on remaining open and disregarding the risk of being contacted with the virus (Nurani 2020).

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Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country; 87, 21% of its population are Muslims (Anon 2020b; Khasandy and Badrudin 2019). Therefore, the policy of closing mosques during the Covid-19 pandemic received various responses from the Muslim community. On the one hand, Islam requires its people to obey Allah, Rasul (Prophet), and *ulil amri* (government); However, many Muslims are reluctant to follow government regulations to close mosques. To support the Indonesian government's policy, several Islamic organizations in Indonesia issued various *fatwas* on worship during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Nahdhatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah.

On March 12, 2020, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) issued a *fatwa* Number 14 of 2020 related to the implementation of worship during a Coronavirus outbreak (Komisi Fatwa Majelis Ulama 2020). According to *Fatwa* of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Number 28 of 2020 regarding *Kaifiyat* (the Methods) *Takbir* Guidelines and *Eid al-Fitr* Prayer During Covid-19 (Majelis Ulama Indonesia 2020). The Bahtsul Masail Institute (LBM) of Syuriyah Regional Management Nahdlatul Ulama (PWNU) of East Java issued a decision on Covid-19 or Coronavirus. The *fatwa* restricts Friday prayers and religious activities in the mosque. LBM allow NU citizens to continue praying in the congregation or Friday in safe areas from Covid-19, but banned it in areas affected by Covid-19. Furthermore, PBNU issued a Circular Letter numbered 6 of 2020 on the guidelines for Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr to perform *tarawih* in the respective homes (PBNU 2020). Muhammadiyah issued a *maklumat* (announcement) regarding the individual performance of *salat jumat* (Friday prayer) and *fardh* during the Covid-19 pandemic (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2020).

Jombang is a city dominated by *pesantren*. It is the centre of *pesantren*, a boarding school in Java land. Almost all *pesantren* in Java land are oriented and centred in Jombang, namely Tebuireng, Tambak Beras, Denanyar, and Rejoso (Darul Ulum). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Jombang government focuses not only on the native citizens of Jombang but also on thousands of visitors learning and living as *santri* (students) in Jombang, making it a challenge for the Jombang government (Yaqin 2020). The initial data of Covid-19 spread in Jombang first occurred on March 29, 2020. One of Jombang's citizens was confirmed Covid-19 positive after taking the result of the laboratory test, with the number of Monitoring Insider (*Orang Dalam Pemantauan* - ODP) 138 persons and Patient Under Surveillance (*Pasien Dalam Pengawasan* - PDP) 6 persons (Syafi'i 2020). As time passes, the virus of Covid-19 has kept spreading and causing the incline of positive Covid-19 confirmed patients, Monitoring Insider, and Patient Under Surveillance (ODP and PDP) in Jombang. There were several *kiai* (Javanese Islamic clerics or experts on Islam) in Jombang reported died from Covid-19; they were KH Chimayatulloh Alfatih, an adviser of Ribath Al-Ghozali PP Bahrul Ulum (Triraharjo 2020), and KH Ahmad Zaki Hadziq from *Pondok Pesantren* of Tebuireng.

In treating Covid-19, the Regent of Jombang and the Head of the Regional Assembly (DPRD) of Jombang involved the role of Islamic organizations in the hearings held in the Regional Assembly (DPRD) office in Jombang, among others, were NU, Muhammadiyah, and LDII to prevent the virus of Corona outbreak in Jombang. Among the hearing results was that the Regent of Jombang, Mundjidah Wahab, urged her citizens to worship in their respective homes during the holy month of Ramadhan (Anon 2020a). The urge to worship at home is written in the Regent's Circular Letter Number 251/2804/415.10.1.2/2020 concerning the Guidelines of Ramadan And Eid Al-Fitr 1 Syawal 1441 H in the Middle of the Corona Pandemic (Covid-19) (Bupati Jombang 2020b). On September 8, 2020, the Regent of Jombang issued Regulation of the Minister of Trade Number 57 the Year 2020 concerning Disciplinary Practice and Law Enforcement of Health Protocols as Corona Virus Disease 2019 Prevention and Control Efforts. This regulation states that worship places are allowed to conduct prayers under the safety of Covid-19 by indicating the letter from the Head of the Task Force of the district/regency (Bupati Jombang 2020a).

According to the data above, it is acknowledged that the governments of Jombang involve community organizations in making joint decisions on mosque closure policy. This Research is essential to find out the opinions of Jombang residents about the government's policy to carry out worship at home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

II. METHOD

This study was conducted in Jombang, East Java, Indonesia, from September to December 2020. Jombang was selected as the location for this study because this area has been known as a religious city with a solid Islamic religious basis. Jombang is a *santri* (Islamic students) city (Exercise et al. 2020; Nuryanto 2018), famous for having a strong Islamic religion basis.

The data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Both direct and indirect interviews were conducted randomly with the informants, consisting of six mosque organizers (*ta'mir*), and four worshipers (*jama'ah*) in Jombang. Interviews were conducted with mosque organizers to acknowledge their policies toward the government's suggestion to close down the mosques and to perceive their compliance with mosque closure during the Covid-19 pandemic. Observations were conducted randomly in mosques by supervising the mosque and the *salat* practice in *jama'ah* in various mosques. Documentations were conducted by analyzing the data taken from the documents, photos, and related news regarding worship activities in the mosque during the pandemic. In addition, we also collected data through Google Forms from 32 respondents.

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III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Literature Review

There are several studies of worship places closure during the pandemic. About worship place closure, Bendebka mentions that closing worship places is an essential move in saving and keeping the five vital points in *Maqasid Shariah* (Bendebka, Fettane, and Shogar 2020). Kwok studied 12 countries, such as the United States of America, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, India, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia, which had implemented the first lockdown for 14 days. According to the study, the cooperation of numerous parties in those countries was quite favourable; thus, it made virus management easy to handle (Kwok et al. 2020).

Yezli states that Saudi Arabia, which is highly concerned the religion, has made a bold decision by closing down 80.000 mosques since March 17, 2020, including *Masjid al-Haram* and *Masjid an-Nabawi* (Yezli and Khan 2020b). Furthermore, the study mentions that the restriction of religious events and the closure of worship places such as mosques, temples, and churches should be taken to prevent Coronavirus wide infection (Yezli and Khan 2020a). A study by Quadri strongly supports this, explaining that religious events of *Jamaah Tabligh* in Malaysia from February 27 through March 3, 2020, caused a new cluster of Coronavirus widespread infection, as well as religious events of *Jamaah Tabligh* in Pakistan and India (Quadri 2020). A study by Alyanak claims that Turkey's government urges the citizens not to go to Friday prayers in the mosque for health priority (Alyanak 2020).

Unlike other countries, the Pakistani government permitted the citizens to pray five times in mosques during the holy month of Ramadhan by complying with the preventive health measures (health protocols). Such policy conflicted with the medical practitioners because the limited health facilities in Pakistan led to high awareness that the Coronavirus was spreading from the mosques (Shah 2020).

The different study result found by Hailu indicates that social distancing implementation by not attending church sacraments and religious events in Ethiopia, 89% of the citizens had bad compliance with keeping the social distancing (Hailu 2021). Kuipers mentions that the Indonesian government, which suggests its citizens worship in their respective homes through SMS, is considered ineffective; therefore, many citizens are compliant with the suggestion (Kuipers et al. 2020a). In addition, Damayanti concludes that religiosity cannot drive the citizens' compliance with paying taxes, even though the government urges religious figures to give the taxpayers an understanding of the religious-life importance (Damayanti 2018).

From several studies above, it is known that there are various studies of people's compliance with the regent's policies. Despite the similarities of such studies, this study focuses on the opinions of Jombang Muslims, who have a strong Islamic basis for the regent's suggestion of mosque closure, and on knowing their compliance. Jombang was selected for this study because these areas have been known for their reputation as strongly-affluent Islamic areas. This article seeks to assess the extent to which the local communities comply with the regent's regulation to close the mosques and pray at home and what factors affect their compliance with mosque closure regulation.

B. Ta'mir of Mosque Policy in Jombang towards Regulations on Mosque Closure during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Ta'mir of mosques in Jombang, respondents in this study said that they knew about the regulations and fatwas on closing mosques during the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of them continued to open the mosques they managed by observing health protocols; Worshippers are required to wear masks, who have diseases and flu symptoms are prohibited from going to mosques, must wash their hands with soap or with hand sanitizer, there are disinfectant booths, especially on Fridays. In addition, they restricted activities in the mosque. Masduqi Subhan, *Ta'mir* of al-Ridho mosque, said that ar-Ridlo mosque has never been closed. From the beginning of the pandemic until now. The recitation also runs as usual. Only speakers outside the Jombang have closed the recitation schedule (Subhan 2020).

The reasons mosque *ta'mirs* do not close mosques include the belief that disease comes from Allah, so we must get closer to Allah by worshipping in mosques. Jeje, *ta'mir* of al-Karomah mosque, Jombang, stated: "The mosque is not closed because of this disease from the wrestling of Allah; therefore, among the ways out of it is to draw closer to Allah. However, we must not underestimate this pandemic period before a cure is found. We still have to be vigilant. The benefit that is built is *mu'awanah* (mutual help), not *musabaqah* (competition)." (Jeje 2020).

Another reason not to close the mosque is that the mosque is a place to *da'wa*, especially for those who want to learn Islam. According to Hamam, *ta'mir* of al-Abror mosque, Cangkring Perak, Jombang: "The mosque enforces congregational prayers by implementing health protocols. Many ordinary people are still not fluent in reading prayers and salaries, so if they pray at home, they will find it difficult to pray properly. So we keep activating the mosque for *da'wa*." (Hamam 2020).

In addition, the policy of not closing the mosque is based on deliberation results. Kemal Riza, *ta'mir* of Ta'miriyyah Mosque, Jombang, said that since the early days of the pandemic, the Ta'miriyyah mosque has never closed and continues to carry out congregational prayers as usual but eliminates recitation and TPQ. The mosque implements health protocols but cannot be maximized because it often causes riots, such as restrictions on Friday prayers. *Ta'mir* of the mosque always coordinates with

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various parties by conducting intensive communication and asking for advice from the caretaker of the lodge and the chairman of MUI Jombang (Kemal Riza, Masjid Ta'miriyyah 2020).

Anam, *ta'mir* of Roudhotul Jannah mosque, Peterongang Jombang, stated that mosques are always open, never closed because they consider that "people praying how come it is forbidden." However, the mosque's treasury has decreased due to the decrease in worshippers going to the mosque. Usually, it can be 5 million rupiahs per month since the pandemic cash that comes in is only around 3 million rupiahs per month and is often low (Anam 2020).

Ima, Treasurer of the Baitul Mukminin Mosque or the Great Jombang mosque, said that the Baitul Mukminin mosque once cancelled *Eid al-Fitr* prayers because of a Regent prohibition letter. In addition, the mosque continues to hold congregational prayers in the mosque, both obligatory prayers, *taraweeh* prayers, and *Eid al-Adha* prayers. The mosque is only opened when it is close to entering prayers, but now it is running as usual, only implementing health protocols. Due to this pandemic, mosque income has decreased, and there is no financial assistance from the government (Ima 2020).

Based on the narration of the mosque *ta'mir* above, it is known that all mosques remain open during the Covid-19 pandemic. Only the Baitul Mukminin mosque has ever cancelled *Eid al-Fitr* prayers. The reason presented is that the mosque implements health protocols. They believe that diseases come from God, so they must get closer to Allah by worshipping in mosques and mosques as places of *da'wa*. During the Covid-19 pandemic, mosque income has decreased.

C. Jombang People's Opinion on Regulations on Mosque Closure during the Covid-19 Pandemic

In response to the mosque closure regulations, some worshippers have their attitudes. Nailatin, *Jama'ah* of Jombang Permai mosque, is still diligent in going to the mosque with time to adjust to circumstances. She feels comfortable and safe in the mosque because the mosque implements health protocols. Because she lives in housing, the health protocol is quite strict. At the beginning of the pandemic, the mosque where he lived was closed and did not hold congregational and Friday prayers. Still, during Ramadan and the new normal period, the mosque was reopened by implementing strict health protocols (Nailatin 2020).

It was different from Ismi, the congregation of al-Rohman mosque, Jombang. Ismi is more comfortable worshipping at home even though the mosque is close to home, except *taraweeh*, *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. For prayer five times more comfortable at home because it feels complicated if you worship at the mosque because you have to comply with health protocols. He prays at home not to contract the Coronavirus because many worshippers violate health protocols (Ismi 2020).

Likewise, with Alan, the congregation of the Sabilil Muttaqin mosque, Peterongan, Jombang, prefers to pray at home to maintain health. However, he still goes to the mosque for Friday prayers because he is still confused about how to pray Friday if not in the mosque (Alan 2020).

Inagatha, a congregation of al-Hidayah mosque in Kabuh, Jombang, said that the mosque in Kabuh had the same condition during the Coronavirus pandemic or was non-pandemic. Most villagers who work as farmers consider that the Coronavirus does not exist, so congregational activities in mosques are carried out without paying attention to health protocols. Ramadan worship is also carried out as usual. In the village, most of the population are farmers, and no one leaves the city. There is socialization in the village, to maintain distance and wear masks, but sometimes many protests (Inagatha 2020).

Based on interviews with mosque worshippers in Jombang above, the worshippers (*jama'ah*) worship at mosques because mosques implement health protocols or because residents do not believe in Covid-19, so they continue to worship as usual. Worshippers who worship at home assume to maintain health and feel uncomfortable worshipping in the mosque because it is complicated to comply with health protocols.

Based on questionnaire data distributed to 32 Muslim residents in Jombang, most (80%) residents are aware of regulations regarding mosque closures during the Covid-19 pandemic. They find out about it through social media and television. 52% stated that the mosque where they live was closed during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. Concerning their approval of the mosque closure ordinance, the majority (68%) disagreed with the closure of mosques, and 32% agreed. The reason that they disagree with the closure of the mosque is; that there is no connection between worship and disease; if the mosque is closed for Pandemic reasons, then the more distance from prostration, *munajat*; if the mosque is closed, it can reduce solemnity in worship; we do not prevent people from worshipping in the mosque; if the mosque is closed then no one will take care the mosque; and closure the mosque will eliminate the function of the mosque as a place of worship. During the pandemic, Muslims can continue to worship in the mosque by implementing health protocols. The people who agree with the mosque's closure said it is to avoid large gatherings of people who make Covid-19 transmission occur and for the benefit of the people, namely *hifdz al-nafs* (guarding the soul).

Regarding their activity in worshipping in mosques during the Covid-19 pandemic, 64% stated that during the Covid-19 pandemic, they remained active in worship at mosques. The reasons they conveyed to continue to worship at the mosque were because the mosque was close to home, congregational prayer was more important, to get closer to Allah SWT, the belief that worshipping in the mosque would not result in contracting the virus, praying for immediate restoration as before, the mosque implemented strict health protocols so that it was safe to worship in the mosque during the Covid-19 pandemic. They conveyed

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not going to the mosque during the Covid-19 pandemic because they were praying at home in congregation with family, following the government's advice to worship at home for the common good so as not to contract Covid-19.

D. Islamic Theological Analysis of Jombang Muslim Residents' Opinions on Mosque Closure Regulations during the Covid-19 Pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the average mosque stated that it had implemented health protocols, but if mosques check it, many still violate these rules, especially in villages. Residents who apply health protocols usually do because they already know the dangers of this virus. People's beliefs in responding to the Coronavirus are divided into 2: some people put forward the power of Allah using the hadith of the apostle in the hadith:

عن أنس رضي الله عنه قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: "لا عدوى ولا طيرة ويعجبني الفأل" قالوا: وما الفأل؟ قال: "كلمة طيبة" (متفق عليه).

Anas (May Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Not the transmission of disease of one person to another and no evil omen, but I am pleased with good omens." He was asked: "What is a good omen?" He replied, "A good word." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim](An-Nawawi n.d.)

Therefore they consider that there is no contagion. If there is a contagion, it is due to fate. While the community that is strict in implementing health protocols can be based on the hadith of the Prophet SAW, which said:

عن أبي هريرة، قال: سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول: "فر من المجذوم فرارك من الأسد"

Abu Hurayrah reported: I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: "Run away from the leper as you would run away from a lion." (Hanbal n.d.)

Regarding the contagious Coronavirus, this is because there is the power of God. Government policies to carry out social distancing include closing mosques and implementing health protocols. It is according to the hadith:

وعن أسامة بن زيد رضي الله عنه عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: "إذا سمعتم الطاعون بأرض، فلا تدخلوها، وإذا وقع بأرض، وأنتم فيها، فلا تخرجوا منها" (متفق عليه).

Usamah bin Zaid (May Allah be pleased with him) said: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "If you get wind of the outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; and if it breaks out in a land in which you are, do not leave it." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

The closure of mosques is one way to avoid the spread of Covid-19, but on the other hand the Muslim community is faced with the word of Allah which commands to enliven the mosque:

أَمَّا يَغْمُرُ مَسْجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ ۖ فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَن يَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ
"Only he should visit or tend God's houses of worship who believes in God and the Last Day, and is constant in prayer, and spends in charity, and stands in awe of none but God: for [only such as] these may hope to be among the right-guided" (QS. At-Taubah 9: Verse 18)

Because Covid-19 is an emergency that can cause fear of death, the original one may not be. Emergency permits should not be loosely and should be according to the level of emergency. Restrictions in mosques can be controlled and monitored without needing to close mosques. Mosque *ta'mirs* are essential in keeping their mosques from becoming a place for the spread of Covid-19. At the same time, worshippers must understand their conditions, especially health, so as not to transmit diseases or contract Covid-19 in mosques.

The recommendation to close mosques in Indonesia during this pandemic is not unusual because several countries also implement closures of houses of worship. Citizens' compliance in complying with the closure of places of worship in each country also varies. It was due to several factors, including the attitude of surrender to God, that illness and healing are God's rights and will, as well as life and death, so the closure of mosques must not be followed. This study supports the findings that socialization of mosque closure is not only enough through SMS messages but there must be more assertive socialization (DeFranza et al. 2020), and Research on high religiosity does not affect the obedience of citizens in implementing health protocols (Kuipers, Mujani, and Pepinsky 2020b). In addition, this study does not support Hanafi's Research which states that most citizens obey MUI fatwas in carrying out worship at home (Hanafi et al. 2020).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In April 2020, the Indonesian government declared the pandemic a national disaster and issued certain limitations to prevent the pandemic from outbreaks. These limitations are (1) working from home, (2) the closure of schools, and (3) the closure of religious places, such as mosques. However, these limitations, particularly the mosque's closure, have not been effectively obeyed. Some mosques insist on remaining open and disregarding the risk of being contacted with the virus. The initial data of Covid-19 spread in Jombang first occurred on March 29, 2020. In treating Covid-19, the Jombang Regent issued the Regent's Circular Letter Number 251/2804/415.10.1.2/2020 concerning the Guidelines of Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr 1 Syawal 1441 H in the Middle of the Corona Pandemic (Covid-19). On September 8, 2020, the Regent of Jombang issued Regulation of the Minister of Trade Number 57 the Year 2020 concerning Disciplinary Practice and Law Enforcement of Health Protocols as Corona Virus Disease 2019 Prevention and Control Efforts.

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From the perspective of Islamic theology, the policy of mosque *ta'mirs* in Jombang not to close mosques during the Covid-19 pandemic, and residents who are still active in going to mosques is according to QS. At-Tawbah 9: Verse 18 is about prospering mosques. To prevent the spread of Covid-19, they implement health protocols. Meanwhile, those who do not go to the mosque obey the government's recommendation to worship at home to maintain the soul so as not to transmit/contract Covid-19.

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