

Dancing in the Shadow of Religious Politics: Jokowi's Political Communication Model Against the Pandemic

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Abstract

This article examines how President Joko Widodo's political communication model responded to and managed religious sentiment during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study analyzes selected posts from President Jokowi's official Instagram account using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, which emphasizes the dimensions of text, discursive practice, and social practice. The findings reveal that the intersection of politics and religion in the context of pandemic governance generated significant resistance from segments of religious communities, manifested in distrust of Covid-19 information, vaccine rejection, conspiracy narratives, and opposition to burial procedures following health protocols. In response, the Jokowi administration strategically incorporated religious language, symbols, and institutional religious authority, such as references to the Indonesian Ulama Council and the notion of halal vaccines, into its communication strategy. This approach sought to align public health policies with dominant religious values in Indonesian society. The study demonstrates that religious discourse functioned as an instrument of symbolic power to stabilize public opinion and increase compliance with state policies. Contributes to political communication scholarship by showing how religious instrumentalization can function as a pragmatic crisis communication strategy in a democratic yet highly faith-oriented society.

Keywords: *Communication Model; Covid 19, Jokowi; Pandemic; Religious Politics.*

INTRODUCTION

Many scientific articles reference that the best handling of covid 19 is China. China's authoritarian communist leadership model is considered the most effective in disciplining civil society (Zizek, 2020), (Xue, E., Li, J., Li, T., & Shang, W. 2020), (Zhang, L., Zhao, J., Liu, J., & Chen, K. 2021). In addition to being reliable in limiting the movement of citizens, it is also able to limit excessive information about covid 19 (Wu, Y., Zhang, Q., Li, L., Li, M., & Zuo, Y., 2021). Meanwhile, many democratic countries are considered to have failed to handle covid 19 because they do not use an iron fist of power in disciplining citizens and the circulation of information (Zizek, 2020).

For the context of Indonesia and many other countries whose citizens are devout religious adherents, the presence of Covid 19 is a very difficult challenge. Religion is said to be a determining factor in the spread of Covid 19 and hoax information about Covid 19 (Wildman, W. J., Bulbulia, J., Sosis, R., & Schjoedt, U., 2020), (Molteni, F., Ladini, R., Biolcati, F., Chiesi, A. M., Dotti Sani, G. M.,

Guglielmi, S., ... Vezzoni, C., 2020). Marshall, K., 2022). In Indonesia, separating religion from various things in public life in Indonesia is impossible. More people like the increased role of religion than those who oppose it. Indonesia has the highest figure (83%, with a median of 40%), in fact, the role of religion is very important today compared to 20 years ago (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Despite these extensive discussions on regime effectiveness and the role of religion during the Covid-19 pandemic, existing scholarship tends to remain polarized between two dominant explanations: authoritarian capacity as a determinant of successful crisis control, and religion as a source of resistance, misinformation, or policy obstruction. Such approaches leave a significant analytical gap in understanding how democratic leaders operating within highly religious societies strategically navigate this intersection of political authority and religious sentiment. In particular, limited attention has been devoted to examining how state actors incorporate religious discourse not merely as a reactive accommodation, but as a deliberate communicative strategy to construct legitimacy, manage distrust, and enhance public compliance during health emergencies. In the Indonesian context, where religion is deeply embedded in political and social life, studies rarely interrogate how presidential communication especially through digital platforms mobilizes religious authority, symbols, and language to stabilize governance amid crisis. Consequently, there remains insufficient theoretical and empirical exploration of how religious discourse functions as an instrument of symbolic power within democratic crisis management. This study addresses that gap by investigating how President Joko Widodo's communication during the pandemic strategically engaged religious narratives to negotiate resistance and consolidate policy legitimacy.

There are three patterns of religious groups' reactions to Covid-19 in Indonesia. First, prayer can prevent the pandemic, or the Qur'an is believed to be a cure for all kinds of diseases, which when recited can boost a person's immune system. This group relies on religious arguments that we do not need to fear Covid-19, we only need to fear God, that God is greater than Covid-19, and Indonesia has a good will by lowering the outbreak. This attitude was pioneered by Jamaah Tabliq when holding the 2020 World Ulama Ijtima (LagaligoTv, 2019). Second, anti-Chinese racism and the government is considered unfair in imposing social restrictions on religious groups. "Malls are open, but mosques are closed" (KompasTV, 2020), is the issue from religious groups against government policies, and this condition continues like a serial drama. The pandemic has triggered a massive anti-China attitude on social media. In the early days of the pandemic spreading in China, there have been many memes circulating on social media that illustrate that Covid-19 is a punishment sent down by Indonesia to the Chinese nation because they oppress the Uyghur Muslim Muslim group in Xin Jiang Autonomous Province. The racist paranoia is clearly at play here, remember all those fantasies about a filthy old Chinese woman in Wuhan skinning live snakes and sipping a bat soup. Although the Ministry of

Communication and Information has straightened out many covid-19 hoax stories that have anti-China racism, the issue is unstoppable.

Third, the rejection of scientific advice on Covid-19 goes hand in hand with the rise of conspiracy theories and hoaxes. The ongoing pandemic, Zizek said, has also triggered a huge epidemic of ideological viruses lying dormant in society, which are, fake news, racism, and conspiracy theories. For example, the issue of the Sinovac vaccine purchased by the Indonesian government from China contains pork elements, which in the understanding of most Indonesians is haram. On the other hand, many Indonesians do not even have access to the knowledge of basic health matters, let alone the Covid-19 Swab test. This is compounded by stories of people who have had bad experiences with health services, reinforcing distrust of scientific medical information.

It is not easy to overcome the problem of the compound of religion and politics in contemporary Indonesian democracy, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Indonesia, religion, especially Islam, has been an important symbol, and even a "challenger" to Pancasila from the beginning of the country until now. Islam has been used as an effective tool in politics (Lew Suryadinata). Lately, the high level of public dissatisfaction with the performance of handling Covid-19 goes hand in hand with the rise of religious issues on social media. In an emergency like this, the state also cannot ignore public preferences from religious sources, as the majority of Indonesian citizens are motivated to obey the law only if the rules are also based on religious values (Budi Hardiman, 2018). Besides, religious believers tend to prioritize the moral problem of justice rather than the ethical problem of gook life.

Accordingly, the central research question of this study is: How did President Jokowi's political communication model utilize religious discourse to manage pandemic-related resistance and shape public compliance? The objective of this research is to analyze the discursive construction of religious legitimacy in Jokowi's official Instagram communication using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. By examining the textual features, discursive practices, and broader social power relations embedded in selected posts, this study seeks to explain how religious language functioned as symbolic power within crisis governance. Through this approach, the article contributes to the understanding of political communication in religious democracies by demonstrating how religious instrumentalization operates not merely as ideological expression but as a pragmatic strategy within digital era crisis management.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design within a critical interpretive paradigm, which assumes that discourse is not neutral but embedded in power relations, ideology, and social structures. The research adopts Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, which integrates analysis at the levels of text, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 2003).

This model is selected because it enables the examination of how language operates simultaneously as representation, action, and social power within political communication.

The primary unit of analysis consists of two official Instagram posts published on President Joko Widodo's verified account between 2020 and 2021, specifically those directly related to the Covid-19 vaccination program and containing explicit references to religious legitimacy (e.g., "safe" and "halal"). These posts were purposively selected because they represent key moments in the government's effort to respond to religious skepticism and vaccine hesitancy. The analytical focus includes: Lexical choices (e.g., "safe," "halal," "our biggest enemy"), Argumentative structures, Intertextual references to institutional authorities (BPOM and MUI), Visual-symbolic elements accompanying the posts. Data were collected using document analysis and digital archival techniques. The selected Instagram posts were captured, transcribed, and documented, including captions, images, publication dates, and public engagement indicators (likes and comments). Secondary data were obtained from relevant literature, academic publications, policy documents, and official statements to contextualize the discourse within broader socio-political dynamics.

Technically, Critical Discourse Analysis is operated in three stages. First, selecting the text that is the object of analysis. In this case, President Jokowi's official statement regarding the handling of Covid-19 on his Instagram account, a statement that responds to the political and religious sentiment circulating in the public. Second, analyzing the form and production of texts in discourse practices, such as how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. Third, analyzing power relations in social practices, such as power relations, ideology, hegemony of discourse, challenging or restructuring, and examining the ways in which texts express traditions in a culture (Fairclough, 2003).

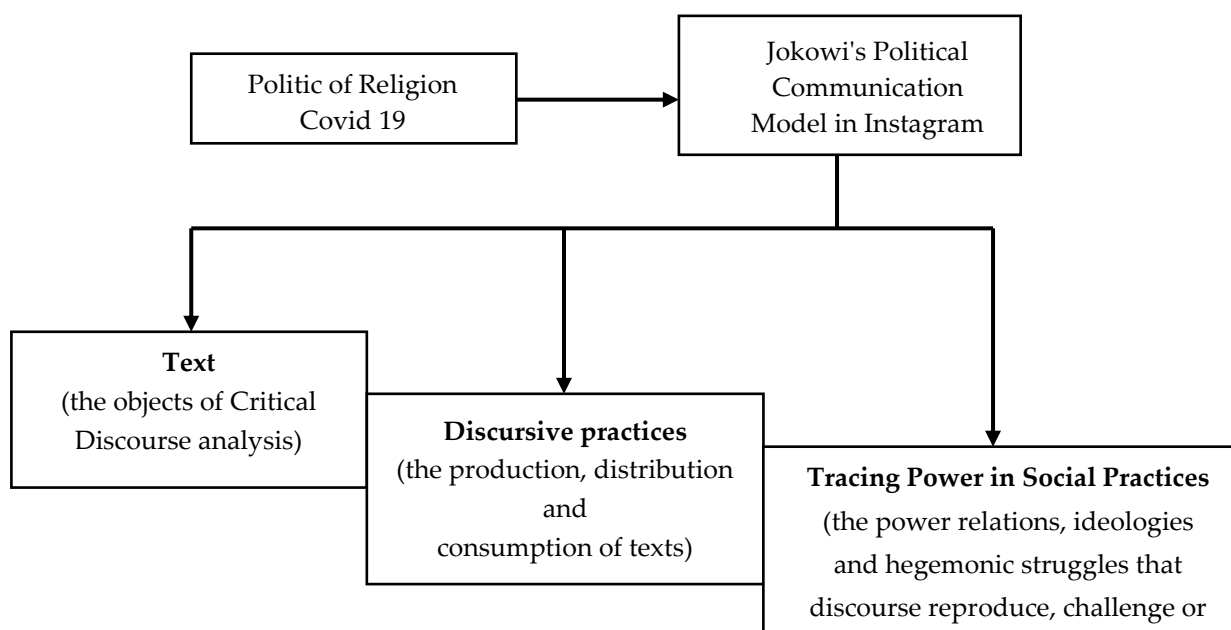


Figure 1: Critical Discourse Analysis Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

“Safe and Halal” are two words chosen as the background of Indonesian President Widodo when conducting the first vaccine socialization in Indonesia. These two words are the main narrative in all Covid 19 response programs carried out by the government, as well as describing the use of religious politics in handling Covid-19 in Indonesia so strongly. This is a direct response to the very high religious sentiment from religious groups when Covid 19 occurred.



Figure 2: President Jokowi's official statement, after making the first vaccination before the vaccination program is carried out nationally, January 13, 2021 (source, Official Instagram)

In figure 3 above, President Jokowi “sacrificed” himself as the first person to be vaccinated before the mass vaccination program was implemented in the community. It was as if the president wanted to say that this vaccine was not dangerous and safe to use. Previously, issues about the dangers of mass vaccination circulated on social media. The issue was of course hoax information that made the situation worse. Moreover, many Indonesians do not even have access to basic health knowledge, let alone about Covid-19. This is exacerbated by stories from people who have had bad experiences with health services, further strengthening distrust of scientific medical information.

Jokowi realized that the spread of the Covid 19 virus is one thing, and the spread of false information is another. Both of these things must be addressed by the government. False information circulating in the community is worsening the situation, as seen in the image below:



Figure 3: President Jokowi's appeal to calm the situation and condition of the community when Covid-19 takes place, March 5, 2020 (source, Official Instagram)

Step 1: Social Wrong Covid 19 in Indonesia

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, various social irregularities emerged in society that prevent the handling of Covid-19. These social irregularities are: Covid-19 is a virus made in China, Covid-19 is a God's punishment handed down to China for massacring the Uyghur Muslim ethnic minority in Xin Jiang Autonomous Province, Covid-19 can be cured with prayer, refusal to bury Covid-19 bodies by following health protocols, Covid-19 vaccines contain pig elements, many people died after being vaccinated, and many more.

This condition is well realized by the government, that many Indonesians do not even have access to a basic health knowledge, let alone the new Covid-19 virus. The government also sees that many theological doctrines in religion can worsen the situation, such as the obligation to pray Friday prayers in congregation at the mosque, which means crowding and clearly violates the Health protocol. This is exacerbated by the stories of people who have had bad experiences with health services, further strengthening the distrust of medical scientific information.

In Jokowi's text in image 3 above, it is quite representative to respond to the tendency of social irregularities that are very massive circulating in the community.

"HOW TO PREVENT CORONA. Our biggest enemy right now is not the coronavirus itself, but anxiety, panic, and excessive fear," (Source, Jokowi's Instagram 2020).

The social irregularities apparent in the text are:

Table 1.

Social Wrong Covid-19 in Jokowi Text
Social Wrong Covid 19 in Jokowi Text
Our Greatest enemy
Anxiety
Panic
Excessive Fear

The metaphoric use of 'Our biggest enemy' semiotically is President Jokowi's explicit declaration of a social wrong that must be addressed, which is 'Anxiety', 'Panic', and excessive fear'. Covid-19 actually attacks the deepest existence of humans, which is the fear of death. So empire, money, and religion all falter in the face of the lowest little creature on the biological evolutionary ladder. But critical analysis is needed because metaphors are usually misleading and manipulative. For example, where did all these social wrongs come from? Didn't it all arise from the state's failure to calm its own citizens, which of course all countries in the world experienced the same thing at that time. This situation shows the level of civilization of a nation, which in fact is generally still at the lowest level of survival.

Step 2: Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong Covid-19

The identified obstacles for dealing with social irregularities during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic are expressed in Jokowi's text is, first, 'Anxiety', 'Panic', and excessive fear'.

Tabel 2.
Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong Covid-19

Text	Social practices	Events
Anxiety	They are anxious and tend to distrust the cleanliness of shopping items, places, other people, and doubt the veracity of information about covid-19 and vaccines.	Strictly selective behavior towards anything. For example (1) stop ordering gofood because you don't believe in the cleanliness of the seller and the food delivery person. (2) Distrust of the Covid-19 Vaccine), (3) Anxiety about financial conditions due to social distancing implemented by the government.
Panic	Confusion, nervous, and sudden fear of everything about covid-19 that drives actions without thinking calmly.	(1) Panic buying of basic needs resulting in a scarcity and crisis. (2) The rarity of certain types of medicine and vitamins.
Excessive Fear	An acute phobic feeling towards covid-19 that makes someone avoid the object or situation.	Taking physical distancing and social distancing positions that exceed the health protocol standards. For

example (1) taking a 20 km distance when it should be 2 meters. (2) Locking themselves up without doing anything. (3) Refusing to be vaccinated because they suspect that there are pork elements in it.

Actually, Jokowi's text above also implies anxiety and a little fear about the dangers of the Covid-19 pandemic. Jokowi starts his sentence with a capital letter 'HOW TO PREVENT CORONA' or a kind of emphasis that this appeal is very important for the public. That there are two layers of problems that he faces. The first layer is Covid-19, and the second layer is the situation and condition of Indonesian society which is actually not ready to face this emergency situation.

The public's anxiety about covid-19 must be great, but the anxiety from the government's side is no less. Anxious about the various negative consequences that loom ahead, such as social chaos, scarcity of goods, cessation of economic circulation, and others. For example, when the government issued a strict social distancing order, limiting the mobility of citizens, prohibiting Eid homecoming, prohibiting Friday prayers in congregation at the mosque, it was a very bold series of decisions for the context of Indonesian society. In the past for the other case contexts, prohibiting citizens from carrying out their mandatory worship must have caused widespread bloodshed and social riots. But in the Covid-19 case, the prohibition of worship activities did not cause significant social turmoil.

Step 3: Consider whether the social order 'need' the social wrong

At this stage, it is important to look at the text structure that contained President Jokowi's argument. "HOW TO PREVENT CORONA. Our biggest enemy today is not the coronavirus itself, but anxiety, panic, and excessive fear," (Jokowi 2020)

Major Premise: Our biggest enemy today is not the coronavirus

Minor Premise: But excessive anxiety, panic, and fear

Conclusion: So the way to prevent Covid-19 is to first overcome anxiety, panic, and excessive fear.

The argumentation structure contained in President Jokowi's sentence above looks like a moral appeal, rather than a systematic and measurable strategic solution. Because he knows very well that the religious public tends to like the moral problem of justice rather than the ethical problem of goog life. Or in other words, religious citizens are more interested in moral appeals such as patience, rather than technical orders, such as the prohibition of congregational Friday prayers. Thus, the existing social order actually requires 'social disorder' so that the inadequacies and unpreparedness of the government are covered.

Step 4: Identify possible ways past the obstacles

Many short-term emergency treatments will become life arrangements. That is the nature of emergencies (Yuval Noah Harari 2020). President Jokowi's approach to managing Covid-19, which is intertwined with religious politics, is faced by using religious politics as well. According to Habermas, religious aspirations like this in the public sphere should not be countered with rational arguments (F. Budi Hardiman 2018). This can be seen in Jokowi's statement below:

"My blood pressure was measured, 130/67 mmHg. Normal. Then I was asked: have you ever been confirmed positive for Covid-19, have you had a cough or cold in the last few days, have you ever had heart disease, or other diseases such as kidney disease? And others. All I answered no.

Then, my left sleeve was lifted. And the vaccine was injected.

My fellow countrymen and women. At 9.42 am this morning, I began a great endeavor as an Indonesian citizen to be free from this pandemic by receiving the Covid-19 vaccine.

This Covid-19 vaccine is what we have been waiting for and was only injected after BPOM issued an emergency use permit, and the Indonesian Ulama Council declared it safe and halal to use.

I hope that the Covid-19 vaccination, which has started today, will run smoothly." (Source, Jokowi's Instagram 2020).

'Safe and Halal' are two words that have become the big narrative for overcoming the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. For religious citizens who doubt the content of the Covid-19 Vaccine, Jokowi uses the Indonesian Ulama Council as a guarantor of legitimacy. While the word 'Safe' is more general, or to citizens who are worried about the impact of the vaccine, Jokowi uses the Food and Drug Supervisory Agency (BPOM) as a source of legitimacy, as shown in image 3. On top of that, to further strengthen legitimacy, Jokowi himself volunteered to be the first 'guinea pig' of the vaccination program.

Tabel 3.

Identify possible ways past the obstacles

Narasi	Social Wrong	Possible Ways
Safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The vaccine effect can cause a fever and even death - In the world of health, vaccines are made after long research and many trials, while the covid vaccine is made only in a short time and limited testing. This raises the public's assumption that the covid-19 vaccine is not suitable for use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measuring blood pressure and other information on congenital diseases are important before vaccines to prevent excessive side effects. - To calm public doubts about the reliability of the vaccine, Jokowi legitimized it by using the Food and Drug Supervisory Agency (BPOM). Not only that, but Jokowi also volunteered to be the first 'guinea pig' for the vaccination program.
Halal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Covid-19 vaccine containing porks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the text above Jokowi says that the Indonesian Ulama Council declares safe and halal to be used.

After all of that, what happens? Did the Social Wrong obstacles go away? Apparently not, the obstacles are still there. President Jokowi's 'self-assurance' and the appeal of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) do not necessarily drive away the theological dogmas such as 'prayer can cure Covid-19' or reading the Qur'an can increase the body's immune system (Quranic Immunity).

If we look deeper, the solution offered by Jokowi actually has a loophole that still stands out. For example, it is unlikely that the Covid-19 Vaccine was given first to Jokowi, in the text above it is clear that the vaccine first went through the Food and Drug Supervisory Agency (BPOM). This means that a special person or team has first tried it and ensured that it is safe for the President. Another thing that still cannot clear the public's doubts is the word 'emergency use permit' which implies that the vaccine is not one hundred percent safe. 'Emergency use permit' is a phrase commonly used in the social context of war, riots, and unpreparedness. It is only because of the emergency that the vaccine is used, but in normal conditions it should not be used or look for another alternative.

Seeing that the national vaccination program was not going as expected, at this phase, President Jokowi used a structural power approach that forced people to get the vaccine. For example, the government issued a new regulation that anyone who does not vaccinate cannot travel by public transportation. Or cannot apply for other important documents. All this is to stop the pandemic, the entire population must comply with the guidelines that have been set. This authoritarian political mode brings positive impacts and public compliance, but also a lot of criticism comes from various communities.

The same applied to religious citizens. The two largest cultural religious groups in Indonesia, Nahdatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, have become an effective source of religious information

in shaping public preferences about pandemic countermeasures. Even President Jokowi directly expressed his appreciation for helping to overcome the spread of Covid-19, which at that time faced two major religious socio-cultural momentum, which are tarawih prayers in congregation and Eid homecoming. Interestingly, there were almost no significant obstacles and for the first time in the modern world, religion voluntarily made internal changes or adjustments due to the pandemic. Many religious procedures that had been established suddenly changed without significant violence. People did not go on rampage when they were asked to stop crowd religious activities. Loud preachers became more reserved. They comply with decisions made by the government.

Tracing Power in Social Practices

Genres (ways of acting)

Genre refers to the way that is used in framing the discourse. Genre is important because it provides a framework for the audience to understand the discourse, although it turns out that because of this quality, genre can be a locus of power and domination. In image 3, Jokowi begins his text by describing his physical condition and general health. This is standard procedure in the medical world.

"My blood pressure was measured, 130/67 mmHg. Normal. Then I was asked: have you ever been confirmed positive for Covid-19, have you had a cough or cold in the last few days, have you ever had heart disease, or other diseases such as kidney disease? And others. All I answered no.

This Covid-19 vaccine is what we have been waiting for and was only injected after BPOM issued an emergency use permit, and the Indonesian Ulama Council declared it safe and halal to use. (Source, Jokowi's Instagram 2020).

The medical standard in the text above is a formal language in the medical world that describes the relationship between a knowledge system and the owner of the authority, in this case the doctor and BPOM. The same with MUI which is an institution with authority in religious field. In social practice, a patient has no power to argue with the doctor, exactly the same with MUI, whose fatwa is highly obeyed by religious citizens. In the case above, Jokowi took the legal formal procedural genre as the basic framework to appeal to the public about the basic procedures that are required before vaccinating. The way Jokowi frames discourse like this is also implemented in all Covid-19 prevention programs in Indonesia. For example, the government issued a new regulation that requires every citizen to vaccinate, otherwise they cannot travel using public transportation. Or cannot apply for other important documents. And it is true that this formal procedural legal genre is effective in creating public compliance in the new normal era. This means that the decisive structure of meaning in a certain

historical period is determined by the dominant interpretation, which is the owner of scientific authority (doctors and scholars), and power (Jokowi Government).

Discourses (ways of representing)

Discourse/representation is essential in assessing how seemingly similar aspects of the world can be appreciated and understood from different perspectives or positions. How does Jokowi represent the Covid-19 mitigation program to the public? Jokowi argued that vaccines are the solution to be free from Covid-19.

My fellow countrymen and women. At 9.42 am this morning, I began a great endeavor as an Indonesian citizen to be free from this pandemic by receiving the Covid-19 vaccine.

This Covid-19 vaccine is what we have been waiting for and was only injected after BPOM issued an emergency use permit (Source, Jokowi's Instagram 2020).

With a persuasive communication method, Jokowi began his appeal with the word 'brothers', a word with a meaning that indicates 'close relationship', 'familiar', and 'kinship'. Furthermore, for vaccine safety guarantors, Jokowi uses the Food and Drug Supervisory Agency (BPOM) as a representation of institutions that have authority.

"The Indonesian Ulama Council declared it safe and halal to use." (Source, Jokowi's Instagram 2020).

As for Muslim citizens, Jokowi uses the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) as a representation of an authoritative institution. The often-non-negotiable spirit of religious absolutism has found its compromise point, not in the decline in the quality of citizen faith, but in the wider use of faith in the public sphere. The use of the word 'safe' in the sentence is a symbolic response to the anxious public who are haunted by concerns about the covid-19 vaccine containing pork, which is forbidden in Islam. Meanwhile, the word 'Halal' is a 'tranquilizer' that reaffirms that the vaccine is suitable for use.

Do the words 'Safe' and 'Halal' represent the Indonesian public? Of course not. The Jokowi administration's communication strategy is strategically adjusting to the dominant public behavior and all its moral intentions. Here we see how the state tries to satisfy humans as moral and religious beings, if their moral and religious values are taken into consideration in a public life then they will obey and follow the government's appeal without coercion. Based on this assumption, it is difficult to imagine that the prevention of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia can be separated from the religious context and cultural habits of the community. In fact, religion and unique cultural practices have helped the government succeed. This means that the use of 'religious language' that is packed in political messages

to overcome Covid-19 is an instrument of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1992). At this point, political actors empower 'religious language' to create stability, creating a model of religion instrumentalization to serve politics.

Styles (ways of being)

Style is the way discourse is used to shape a sense of presence and identity, how identification is placed through the implementation and method of certain discourses. Just like 'blusukan' or 'close to the people' as a style that attached to Jokowi, in this pandemic case Jokowi wants to show that he is a 'guarantor' for the problem of 'anxiety, panic, and excessive fear'. Jokowi's style is portrayed as a 'brave' figure who first 'sacrificed himself' for a vaccine that he called an 'emergency use'. In Islamic religious understanding, people who 'sacrifice themselves' to create good for many people are considered a very commendable act and receive the highest appreciation and the greatest good deeds. Jokowi is well aware that in an emergency like this, the state cannot ignore public preferences from religious sources, that the majority of Indonesian citizens are motivated to obey the law only if the rules are also based on religious values.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the management of Covid-19 in Indonesia cannot be understood solely through the lens of regime type or public health capacity, but must also be analyzed through the interplay between political communication and religious authority. By examining President Jokowi's Instagram communication using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, this research shows that the narrative of "safe" and "halal" functioned as a dual-legitimacy framework. The term "safe" invoked scientific authority through BPOM, while "halal" mobilized religious authority through the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI). Through this discursive construction, the state did not merely respond to religious resistance but strategically incorporated religious language to stabilize public trust and enhance compliance.

Theoretically, this study contributes to political communication scholarship by conceptualizing religious discourse as a form of symbolic power within democratic crisis governance. Rather than positioning religion exclusively as a source of obstruction, this research shows how religious instrumentalization can operate as a pragmatic communication strategy that negotiates legitimacy in a highly faith-oriented society. Methodologically, the study extends the application of Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA to digital presidential communication, highlighting how social media functions as a strategic arena for constructing state authority during emergencies.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a limited number of Instagram posts, which may not fully capture the broader communication ecosystem surrounding pandemic governance. Second, the research focuses primarily on discursive construction and does not

empirically measure audience reception or behavioral impact. Third, the study centers on presidential communication and does not comparatively examine other political actors or religious organizations in depth.

Future research may expand this inquiry by incorporating audience analysis to assess how religiously framed messages are interpreted across different social groups. Comparative studies between Indonesia and other religious democracies could also provide deeper insight into whether religious instrumentalization represents a broader pattern in crisis communication. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches combining discourse analysis with quantitative public opinion data would enrich understanding of the long-term implications of integrating religious politics into public policy communication.

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