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## Ulama's Resistance to the Closing of Worship Places During The COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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### Abstract

PPKM Darurat (the implementation of community activity restrictions) is one of the policies implemented by the Indonesian government to control the spread of COVID-19. PPKM Darurat received opposition from *ulama* (Islamic religious leaders) because all places of worship had to be closed. Our qualitative study explores the forms, factors, and impacts of *ulama's* resistance to the closing of worship places during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research data were collected through interviews with participating *ulama*. This study indicates that *ulama's* resistance to the closure of places of worship during the PPKM Darurat period manifested in discourse and action. In the form of discourse, they considered the closure of places of worship contrary to the provisions of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). While in action, they demonstrated resistance by continuing to perform five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayers, and Eid al-Adha prayers in congregation in mosques and prayer rooms. This study suggests that there should be cooperation between the government and religious leaders in drafting, socializing, and implementing laws, including those on PPKM Darurat.

### Keywords

public resistance, closing of worship places, COVID-19, qualitative method, thematic analysis

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# Ulama's Resistance to the Closing of Worship Places During The COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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PPKM Darurat (the implementation of community activity restrictions) is one of the policies implemented by the Indonesian government to control the spread of COVID-19. PPKM Darurat received opposition from *ulama* (Islamic religious leaders) because all places of worship had to be closed. Our qualitative study explores the forms, factors, and impacts of *ulama*'s resistance to the closing of worship places during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research data were collected through interviews with participating *ulama*. This study indicates that *ulama*'s resistance to the closure of places of worship during the PPKM Darurat period manifested in discourse and action. In the form of discourse, they considered the closure of places of worship contrary to the provisions of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). While in action, they demonstrated resistance by continuing to perform five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayers, and Eid al-Adha prayers in congregation in mosques and prayer rooms. This study suggests that there should be cooperation between the government and religious leaders in drafting, socializing, and implementing laws, including those on PPKM Darurat.

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## Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Indonesia made a policy on the enforcement of emergency community activity restrictions called PPKM Darurat from July 3 to July 20, 2021. During this time, all places of worship, including mosques, prayer rooms, and other places were closed. *Ulama* did not accept the PPKM Darurat policy that was aimed to reduce the number of people exposed to COVID-19. Along with some community members, they continued to carry out five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayers, and the Eid al-Adha in congregation during the PPKM Darurat period (Viva, 2021). They argued that PPKM Darurat was implemented in a one-size-fits-all manner with little attention to local conditions. KH. Marzuki Mustamar (Chairman of the East Java Nahdaltul *Ulama* Regional Management) believed that the closure of mosques and prayer rooms during the PPKM Darurat period should only apply to red zone areas (Suara Surabaya, 2021). The preparation of PPKM Darurat itself did not involve the leadership of religious organizations (Siradj, 2021), resulting in a circular letter from social organizations that contradicted the provisions of PPKM Darurat (Jaridun, 2021) *Ulama* – custodians, transmitters, and interpreters of religious knowledge in Islam, including Islamic doctrines and laws, who study Islam from two primary sources, the Qur'an and Hadith, at religious and educational institutions – did not accept the closure of mosques and prayer rooms during the PPKM Darurat period for various reasons (Ali, 2020).

So far, studies on the role of *ulama* in responding to COVID-19 tend to look at three things. First, some studies that examines the role and contribution of *ulama* both in a personal capacity and through mass organizations in tackling COVID-19 (Agustina, 2020; Anam, 2020; Kowalczyk et al., 2020; Labib, 2020; Muchammadun et al., 2021a; Mushodiq & Imron, 2020; Wahidin et al., 2020). As Muchammadun (2021b) pointed out, *ulama* appeared to provide education to the public about the dangers of COVID-19 and the importance of maintaining distance, wearing masks, and washing hands both in social activities and in congregational prayers. Second, some studies focused on the religious behaviors of community members during COVID-19. Several studies show that people complied with health protocols (Fahrudin, 2020; Fathin & Suyadi, 2021; Zuhri, 2020), with the exception of some who ignored the health protocols (Burhani, 2020; Syamsurijal, 2020). Third, some studies raised the issue of resistance of *ulama* and the public to government policies in tackling COVID-19. (Al-Astewani, 2020; Pabbajah et al., 2020; Riexinger, 2021). Based on existing studies, *ulama* played a significant role in handling COVID-19. However, their rejection of the PPKM Darurat regulation, which prohibited the performance of worship activities in mosques/*musholla* has not been discussed in existing studies.

This study aims to complement previous studies regarding misperceptions between *ulama* and the government in making regulations for closing places of worship during the COVID-19 period. In particular, this study shows the forms of and reasons, and *ulama's* resistance to the closure of places of worship in the implementation of PPKM Darurat. Correspondingly, three questions are explored in this study. First, what forms did *ulama's* resistance to the prohibition of performing worship in mosques and prayer rooms take? Second, why did *ulama* reject the closing of places of worship? Third, what impacts did the rejection leave? The answers to these three questions provide evidence surrounding *ulama's* rejection to the closure of places of worship during the PPKM Darurat period.

This paper shows that the *ulama's* refusal was due to a lack of coordination during the formulation of PPKM rules and a lack of socialization of when these rules were to be enacted. The implementation of PPKM Darurat required coordination with figures relevant to the scope of the regulation. Considering that the COVID-19 problem was not only the responsibility of the government but also the responsibility of all elements of the nation, especially religious leaders/mass organizations, it was considered essential to always consults and coordinate with them. Regarding religious issues, coordination and consultation with religious organizations or authoritative figures are required (Machmud et al., 2021; Wahyudi et al., 2021). Therefore, when there was a rejection, these authority figures would have been able to explain and even defend the direction and substance of the PPKM Darurat implementation from a religious perspective.

## Literature Review

Existing studies have shown that *ulama* played a significant role in educating the public about the dangers of COVID-19 and providing directions for performing worship according to health protocols according to health protocols. (Fahrudin, 2020; Fathin & Suyadi, 2021; Zuhri, 2020) *Ulama's* perception also determined people's behaviors in obeying government regulations regarding worship during the pandemic. There have been at least three focuses of previous studies: the role of *ulama* in tackling COVID-19, religious behaviors during the COVID-19 period, and *ulama's* and the public's resistance to government regulations in tackling COVID-19.

## Public Resistance

“Public resistance” refers to all actions that community members take to refuse or protest against a policy made by the authorities that is considered detrimental to them (Cardeñoso, 2018; Gaventa, 1992). According to Landsberger and Alexandrov (1981), resistance is a collective response to an inferior position vulnerable to injustice concerning socioeconomic and political status. Meanwhile, Sidney Tarrow (1994) defines resistance as a protest movement of many people with the same goal in unity against the elite and ruling groups. The protest movement is carried out to establish a sense of solidarity or collective identity based on mutual claims. Resistance may take the form of demonstrations or written requests to the parties concerned to whom a complaint is addressed. Whatever the form, resistance is a statement of intention to fight all forms of injustice.

Scott classified resistance into two parts: open resistance and closed resistance. Open resistance is a movement carried out systematically with coordination between the leadership and resistance members. Closed resistance is a form of resistance that is carried out through a less systematic process. The two forms are distinguished based on articulation, form, character, and the social and cultural environment (Gaventa, 1992). Open resistance has four characteristics: (1) the resistance is organized between one party and another who engage in cooperation; (2) the movement generates a change (revolutionary consequences) that can affect survival; (3) the resistance is based on rational considerations with the prioritization of the interests of many people; and (4) the resistance is aimed to abolish the domination and oppression of the rulers (Field, 1994). Meanwhile, closed resistance tends to designate a gradual resistance movement with the consideration of the type of resistance, its achievements, and the determination of individual attitudes in organizing and the ability to resist. Scott explained that there are four characteristics of closed resistance: it is (1) done sporadically; (2) disorganized; (3) individualistic in nature (aimed at seeking profit by focusing on personal interests); and (4) non-generative of a change (Cardeñoso, 2018).

## The Role of *Ulama* During the COVID-19 Pandemic

“*Ulama*” is a term used to refer to Muslim scholars who have extensive knowledge of Islamic theology, laws, and jurisprudence (Muid, 2017). They are considered as the guardians and inheritors of the knowledge of Islam that has been passed down from generation to generation since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (Niam, 2010). The term “*ulama*” can refer to either individuals or groups, depending on the context. Typically, *ulama* are those who have completed formal education in Islamic studies and have obtained certifications recognized by the Muslim community as an acknowledgement of their knowledge and skills (Yahya & Sahidin, 2022). *Ulama* are also often known as “fuqaha” or experts in Islamic jurisprudence. They issue fatwas and advise the Muslim community on Islamic laws (Siagian et al., 2014; Winarni, 2014). In addition, *ulama* are often involved in teaching, research, and Islamic outreach activities. *Ulama* are charismatic figures who serve as references and role models in many ways. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, directives and fatwas from *ulama* are essential parts that the community members are waiting for, especially regarding how to carry out worship in mosques/*musholla* (Mushodiq & Imron, 2020; Sholeh, 2020; Siregar, 2022). In dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, *ulama* act as shock absorbers for others (motivators), pandemic information funnels (communicators), and role models (idols). In other words, the role of *ulama* in preventing COVID-19 further strengthens the social hierarchy that they have in patron-client relationships (Purnamasari et al., 2020).

At least during the pandemic, *ulama* played their roles as public figures, leaders of Islamic boarding schools, and administrators of social organizations. As public figures, they

advised about the importance of maintaining health care (Muchammadun et al., 2021a). They also provided tips for dealing with the pandemic; for instance, by assuring that there is no need to be afraid to be excessive by getting closer to God more intensely (Amelia et al., 2021; Osei-Tutu et al., 2021). As organizers of mass organizations, they formulated fatwas related to worship procedures during a pandemic (Wahidin et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian *Ulama* Council (MUI), Nahdlatul *Ulama* (NU), and Muhammadiyah issued guidelines for worship practices, especially in congregational prayers such as Eid prayers and Friday prayers (Agustina, 2020; Chaq, 2020; Fahrudin, 2020; Jauhari & Ghoni, 2020; Mahyudin, 2022; Sukamto & Panca Parulian, 2020). As leaders of Islamic boarding schools, they appeared to provide education to students and the surrounding community about concrete steps to COVID-19 prevention, ranging from food arrangements, placement of students in dormitories, maintaining student immunity, and educational and teaching activities to spiritual efforts to overcome the pandemic with *mujahadah* (prayer to God; Arifin & Zaini, 2020; Nurwidyaningrum et al., 2022; Prawoto et al., 2020).

### **Government Policies in Controlling COVID-19**

Since the outset of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in Indonesia on March 2, 2020, the government has taken various steps to prevent the pandemic through both in micro and macro policies. Micro handling was carried out in the form of restrictions on traveling, evacuation of 238 Indonesians from Wuhan (China), provision of a COVID-19 referral hospital, and establishing health protocols that included maintaining distance, wearing masks, and washing hands (Auladi, 2020; Chaniago & Suwarso, 2021; Zakso & Agung, 2021). Meanwhile, in the macro context, the government issued a policy on large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) (Endang & Sulasih, 2020; Herdiana, 2020), and the enforcement of restrictions on community activities (PPKM) (Permatasari, 2021).

PSBB refers to restrictions on the activities of people in an area suspected of being infected with the COVID-19 outbreak. These restrictions involved home, hospital, and regional quarantines to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Chaniago & Suwarso, 2021; Hartini & Setiawan, 2021). With the Minister of Health's approval, the PSBB policy was implemented by the provincial and district/city governments. The provinces and regencies/cities implementing PSBB must implement measures to limit community activities, including allowing some days off from schools and workplaces, restrictions on religious activities, and restrictions on activities in public places or facilities (Nasruddin & Haq, 2020; Saputra & Salma, 2020).

Following PSBB, PPKM was then implemented in four stages: PPKM, PPKM Mikro, PPKM Darurat, and PPKM levels 1-4 (Pratiwi, 2021; Yakhmid et al., 2021). PPKM was first applied on January 25, 2021, based on the Instruction of the Minister of Home Affairs (Mendagri) No. 1 of 2021 to Java and Bali regions (Bramasta, 2021; Dewi & Sunarta, 2021; KOMINFO, 2021). PPKM was then extended to phase two, from January 26, 2021, to February 8, 2021, with the Instruction of the Minister of Home Affairs No. 2 of 2021 (Miharja et al., 2021). During this PPKM period, several restrictions on community activities were set, including restrictions on activities in workplaces/offices with the arrangement of 75% of all employees working from home (WFH) and the remaining 25% working from the office (WFO), the requirement that teaching and learning activities be carried out online, and the requirement that places of worship be filled to 50% of their total capacities. PPKM was then extended again under the term Micro PPKM starting on February 9 to February 22, 2021, and even further until July 3, 2021. What distinguished it from the previous PPKM what that in PPKM Mikro, there was an additional policy for the formation of COVID-19 confectionary posts at the village level, the shopping/mall operational hours were longer until 9 pm and the

work arrangement consisted of 50% WFH and 50% WFO (Permatasari, 2021). From July 3 to July 20, 2021, PPKM Darurat was enforced in place of PPKM Mikro. PPKM Darurat was intended to suppress increasingly rampant spread and transmission of COVID-19 (Hilmi Ridho, 2021; Miharja et al., 2021; Nuraeny et al., 2021). Therefore, the health protocol during this time were increasingly tightened. During this period, all employees worked from home (WFH), places of worship were closed to congregational activities, shopping/mall areas were also closed, and all activities that caused crowds were prohibited.

Some of the literature above shows that scholars in Indonesia have supported government policies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by implementing health protocols (Muchammadun, 2021b). Even scholars have issued fatwas or guidelines on how to deal with this pandemic properly (Amelia et al., 2021; Osei-Tutu et al., 2021), fatwas on the importance of maintaining social distance, avoiding crowds, and wearing masks to protect yourself and others from the spread of the COVID-19 (Agustina, 2020; Chaq, 2020), and fatwas on worship arrangements during COVID-19 (Sukanto & Panca Parulian, 2020). Unfortunately, the literature above has not discussed that some scholars rejected government policies during the Emergency PPKM, which closed all places of worship. It is this theme that is discussed in this article.

### **The Role of Researchers**

The research team involved and contributing to this study was composed of individuals of the same background and expertise in Islamic law teaching. Therefore, all the authors shared the same interest in investigating various issues related to Islamic law, including Indonesian government policies during the COVID-19 pandemic that required the closing of places of worship for worship activities. We interviewed participants and discussed the results to the point at which we reached an agreement not to collect more information.

### **Methods**

This study used a basic qualitative design to examine informants' experiences in their respective social environments. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a basic qualitative research study stems from the concept that people gain knowledge by engaging in and shaping the meaning of an action or experience. Using these methods, the researchers investigated a comprehensive perspective on *ulama*'s (Islamic religious leaders) rejection of the closure of places of worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research was conducted during the implementation of emergency community activity restrictions (PPKM) from July 3 to July 20, 2021. During this time, the government appealed to all people to perform five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer at home.

The informants of this study were thirteen Islamic religious leaders in Ponorogo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The informants were identified and recruited through purposive sampling based on three criteria. First, the *ulama* must master the teachings of Islam either through *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) or higher education institutions and specifically study Islamic law. Second, the *ulama* had a degree of influence on society. Their opinions had served as a reference for the community across various contexts, including the closing of places of worship during the PPKM Darurat period. Third, the *ulama* who had a deep knowledge of this research topic and answered questions objectively and honestly. Thirteen *ulama* as units of sample in this study were considered sufficient. Starks and Trinidad (2007) say there is no requirement for the sample in a qualitative research study to consist of many participants, but the sample must meet relevant and appropriate criteria for the study. Based on age, nine informants were aged 40–60 years, and four were aged 61–80. Based on education, two

informants only had Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) education, four had Islamic boarding school education and undergraduate education, four had Islamic boarding school education and master's education, and three had Islamic boarding school education and doctoral education.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews to capture the descriptions and understandings of the research informants (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Because data collection was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were two options which could be taken by the participants for the interview: directly or via WhatsApp chats. The researchers interviewed three informants directly. These informants were interviewed openly in an atmosphere of intimacy inside and outside the home. Six informants were interviewed via WhatsApp chats because they did not wish to be interviewed directly.

The research analysis was carried out using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of data analysis used to identify, analyze, and report on thematic patterns or topics that appear in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Uwe, 2009). In conducting this analysis, the following steps were taken:

- 1) Developing familiarity with data by carefully transcribing the interviews with nine informants verbatim (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We reviewed interviews with thirteen informants at this stage. Together, we examined the transcript results to ensure their accuracy.
- 2) Generating initial codes by reading the entire transcripts repeatedly to get a holistic understanding and then creating the initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this stage, we discussed providing the initial code for the entire transcript. Based on resistance theory, we coded the entire transcript. In the end, we agreed to give out twenty codes.
- 3) Searching for themes from some codes generated in the second stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, we've assigned a category to some of the code that was generated in the second phase. Seven categories of rejection were identified at this point: open rejection, closed rejection, rejection of discourse, rejection of action, rejection for reasons of fiqh, rejection for reasons of zone, and the outcome of rejection.
- 4) Reviewing and refining themes so that the resulting themes become relevant (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this point, we revisited the seven themes and agreed to divide them into three categories: resistance, reasons for resistance, and repercussions of resistance.
- 5) Defining and naming the resulting themes, in which case "defining" referred to identifying the essence of each theme as a whole and determining the data aspects of each theme, where each theme consisted of diverse and complex data, making this step necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We re-discussed creating a proper theme name at this point. Finally, we agreed to give our study subject a relevant theme. The three topics are: (a) forms of resistance, (b) resistance factors, and (c) resistance impacts.
- 6) Producing the report, which is presented concisely, coherently, logically, non-repetitively, and in an engaging manner, with an explanation of the researchers' data and an argument about the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on these three themes, our findings are reported.

## Findings

Based on thematic analysis, we present three themes that represent the anxiety of *ulama* regarding the closure of places of worship during the PPKM Darurat period. The three themes



are: (a) forms of resistance, (b) factors of resistance, and (c) impacts of resistance. Interview excerpts relevant to each theme are included as supporting instruments in presenting data. The informants' names are coded R1–R13 to maintain confidentiality.

### Forms of Resistance

All participants agreed to fight against the closure of places of worship, mosques, and prayer rooms by performing five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation. One of the participants, through an interview, said:

I refused to sign when the local government was about to make a decree. During the coordination meeting with Kesra (the division of people's welfare), I proposed that for Ponorogo a circular letter should be made in correspondence with the actual conditions in the community. For green zones, I suggested that people be free to perform the Eid al-Adha prayer (R1).

According to R1, the closure of places of worship should be done in dangerous places (red zones) and activities should be allowed in safe places (green zones). Another participant said:

If worshipers asked about the closure of places of worship, I answered: If your environment is safe, carry out activities (like you normally do). If there is a Covid-19 task force around, then stop for a moment. If the officers have left, then continue (the activities). Congregational prayers such as the Friday prayer can be held even without loudspeakers with the health protocols being obeyed (R2).

Similarly, R7 said:

In writing, we did not issue any instructions on recommendations for or against the performance of obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer. All we did was to forward the circular letter from the East Java Nahdlatul Ulama management, which was essential for safe areas. It was allowed to carry on with worshipping in mosques or prayer rooms, but people must stick with the health protocols (R7).

Interviews with R8, R10, R11, and R4 show that they continued to carry out five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation irrespective of the PPKM Darurat rules. R8 said: "In our mosque, we continued to perform five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation even though village officials warned against performing worship activities (in mosques) during the PPKM period" (R8). "Almost all mosques and prayer rooms in my neighborhood continued to call for prayers (*adhan*), chant praises, and use loudspeakers. The Friday prayer was still performed (in congregation in mosques), and so was the Eid al-Adha prayer" (R10).

Meanwhile, R11 explained that on the eve of Eid al-Adha, he openly urged the public to continue to perform the Eid al-Adha prayer and even announced the imam and khatib for the prayer. One of the participants even explained the strategy to get around the PPKM Darurat rules. He said: "The mosque administrators announced that worshippers were temporarily prohibited from coming to the mosque. Still, in practice, we performed five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer, albeit in a limited congregation" (R4).

The excerpts of interviews from several participants show that participants' resistance to the closing of places of worship during the COVID-19 pandemic was demonstrated openly and privately. Some participants publicly expressed disagreement with the local government's plan to make a decree banning the performance of five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation in mosques during the PPKM Darurat period. Some other participants fought behind closed doors. They and the community performed worship activities in mosques and prayer rooms while still observing the health protocols.

### Factors of Resistance

The second theme emerged from the data from some participants (n = 6), who actively expressed their reasons for rejecting the closure of mosques and *musholla* to the performance of five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation. According to two participants, the government did not coordinate with clerics in making the PPKM Darurat rules. In an interview, one of the participants stated: "To avoid turmoil in the community, the government should have consulted scholars to find the best policy for implementing PPKM Darurat at the district, sub-district, and even village levels and, if necessary, to the neighborhood level" (R5).

Similarly, R6 stated: "Since the closure of places of worship is religious, the government should have consulted *ulama*. In addition, an explanation of the PPKM regulation should have been provided to the *ulama*" (R6). Excerpts of interviews from R5 and R6 show that the preparation and implementation of PPKM Darurat that did not involve *ulama* is one of the factors in their rejection of the closing of places of worship.

Meanwhile, other participants expressed their reasons for rejecting the closure of places of worship during the PPKM Darurat period from the *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) side. R3 and R13 argued that five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer should have still been carried out. The two participants stated as follows:

Five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer must still be carried out regardless of the zoning. However, they must be carried out with strict observance of procedures and restrictions on pilgrims. Closing mosques to worship is equivalent to shutting down Islamic teachings (R3).

While R13 said: "Instead of prohibiting, the government must have supervised and regulated the performance of the Friday prayer under the condition that the health protocols must be obeyed."

While R2, R8, and R9 argue that the prohibition of performing worship activities in mosques and prayer rooms should only be applied to vulnerable areas (red zones). It should have still been applicable to safe areas (green zones) as long as the health protocols were observed.

The interview excerpts from several participants show that *ulama*'s resistance to the elimination of worship activities in mosques and *musholla* during the PPKM Darurat period was influenced by two things – the non-involvement of scholars in the discussion of the rules and the scholar's considering the government regulations not following the provisions of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).

### The Impacts of Resistance

The third theme relates to the impacts of *ulama*'s resistance to implementing PPKM Darurat. Two participants stated that there had been disparities in the community in the

implementation of the provisions of PPKM Darurat. Some people obeyed the provisions, but some others opposed them by continuing to worship in mosques and prayer rooms. One participant stated:

The community continued to perform five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation, while others carried out prayers at home according to the PPKM Darurat rules (R12).

Even other participants described the tension between the *takmir* (administrator) of a mosque and the local COVID-19 task force. The *takmir* insisted that five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer be conducted in the mosque. In contrast, the local COVID-19 task force intended the opposite in accordance with the provisions of PPKM Darurat. R10 said:

In our mosque environment, there was tension and quarreling between takmirs who wanted to continue carrying out congregational prayers, Friday prayers, and Eid al-Adha prayers and village officials who prohibited the implementation of worship in mosques during the emergency PPKM period (R10).

Another impact was the decline in the level of trust in the government as stated by R3, R13, R2 and R5. Two participants considered that the provisions of PPKM Darurat reflected the government's panic in overcoming COVID-19. R3 and R13 stated the following:

The corona- (virus disease 2019) was going on for more than 2 years. They (community members) have not been affected by anything. If they were required to drop Friday and obligatory prayers (performance in the mosque), they would be confused (R3).

Our mosque is in a safe village. None of the residents was affected by COVID-19. However, from July 3 to July 20, we were forbidden to worship in the mosque. This policy was unacceptable to us. What did the policy mean (R13)?

Even two participants suspected that there was a disguised agenda in PPKM Darurat. R5 said “Was PPKM Darurat intended to break the chain of transmission of COVID-19 by preventing crowds, or was there a hidden agenda in closing places of worship” (R5)? and R2 stated: “If the ban on performing the Friday and other prayers was uniformly applied to all zones regardless of whether they were safe and vulnerable zones, people would have a negative opinion on government policies” (R2).

Some excerpts from the interviews show that implementing PPKM Darurat caused two things. First, it evoked mixed responses from the community. Community members were divided in the implementation of the rules. In a few cases, a tension was even created between the COVID-19 task force and mosque *takmir*. Second, people were uncertain about government policies in handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Discussion

This study shows that none of the participants agreed with the provisions of eliminating worship activities in mosques or mushollas during the PPKM Darurat period. This disapproval was shown by resistance in discourse and action, both closed and open. *Ulama* continued to

carry out obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation. This resistance was based on two arguments. First, there was a lack of coordination with *ulama* in preparing the PPKM Darurat regulation. Second, implementing PPKM Darurat uniformly in all zones was considered contrary to the provisions of *fiqh*. Based on the provisions of *fiqh*, the prohibition of performing worship activities in mosques or mushollas should have been applicable only to red zones. This resistance left three impacts: the community was divided in responding to the PPKM Darurat regulation, there was a decline in the level of public trust in the government, and there was a decrease in *ulama's* participation and support to the government in suppressing the spread of COVID-19.

The *ulama's* resistance reflects the inequality in implementation of PPKM Darurat, especially in relation to the prohibition of performing five obligatory prayers, Friday prayers, and Eid al-Adha prayers in congregation in mosques/*musholla*. Inequality occurred in two stages: the regulation drafting stage and the implementation stage. At the drafting stage, *ulama* were not involved in the preparation and drafting of The PPKM Darurat regulation (Siradj, 2021) despite the importance of their involvement because one of the aspects regulated in PPKM Darurat was the issue of worship. This non-participation directly impacted the preparation of rules that did not pay attention to the *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) aspect, which is the field of study of *ulama*. At the implementation stage, due to the non-participation of *ulama*, the socialization of the prohibition of worship activities in mosques and prayer rooms did not run optimally. *Ulama* had a "smaller role" in socializing the provisions because they disagreed with the regulation. In fact, in the context of COVID-19 prevention, the position of *ulama* as public figures, organizers of mass organizations (Agustina, 2020; Aula, 2020; Fahrudin, 2020), and leaders of Islamic boarding schools (Arifin & Zaini, 2020; Prawoto et al., 2020), was very strategic in providing education and managing congregations (Muchammadun et al., 2021a). This fact directly resulted in the lack of public literacy about PPKM Darurat and resistance.

The resistance of *ulama* reminds us of the importance of drafting rules with attention to all aspects related to them. Rules relating to worship matters must involve *ulama* in the drafting, socialization, and implementation. It will repeat in other forms of community resistance in in similar cases if the abovementioned things are not considered.

Existing research on religious behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown three things. First, it reflects the role and contribution of *ulama* both in a personal capacity and through mass organizations in tackling COVID-19. As shown by Muchammadun (2021b), *ulama* appeared to educate the public about the dangers of COVID-19 and the importance of maintaining distance, wearing masks, and washing hands in social activities, as in activities before, during, and after congregational prayers. Second, it discusses community religious behaviors towards COVID-19. Several studies show that there were people who adhered to the health programs, and there were others who ignored them. Third, it concerns public resistance to government policies in tackling COVID-19. Looking at existing studies, *ulama* has a significant role in handling COVID-19. Existing studies show that *ulama* have a significant role in handling COVID-19, but none of them analyzed why policies regarding government regulations received opposition from *ulama*. The findings of this study indicate two different things. First, government regulations in dealing with the surge in the COVID-19 cases through PPKM Darurat did not work effectively due to the non-participation of *ulama*. This finding is different from the works of Agustina (2020), Anam (2020), Kowalczyk (2020), Labib (2020), Muchammadun (2021a), and Mushodiq and Imron (2020). Second, the *ulama's* resistance to PPKM Darurat was not due to a textual understanding of *fiqh* texts, as indicated by Widiyanto (2020), and Dahlan (2020) but due to the *ulama's* assessment that the omission of obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation during the PPKM Darurat

period did not pay attention to zoning and tended to identify the problem of the danger of COVID-19 (Greene, 2021; Mochamad Baqir, 2020)

### Conclusion

This study indicates that the resistance of *ulama* to the closure of places of worship during the PPKM Darurat period manifested in discourse and action. In the form of discourse, they considered the closure of places of worship contrary to the provisions of *fiqh*. The existence of *rukhsah* (dispensation) to eliminate five obligatory prayers, the Friday prayer, and Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation cannot be generalized in all spaces and times; it is only applicable in conditions that are indeed of an emergency nature. While in action, they demonstrated resistance by continuing performing five obligatory prayer, the Friday prayer, and Eid al-Adha prayer in congregation in mosques and prayer rooms. This shows *ulama*'s weak participation in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper suggests the importance of involving religious leaders in preparing, socializing, and implementing PPKM Darurat. If there was a refusal, these figures would have been able to explain the PPKM rules from a religious perspective.

The research has limitations in three aspects. First, the participants in this study were some *ulama* from Ponorogo. Thus, other characteristics in different locations may produce different findings. Second, this research does not discuss the response or resistance of the community to the provisions for eliminating worship in mosques/musholla during the PPKM Darurat period. Third, this research does not discuss the views of state civil apparatus (ASN) of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, who, specifically during the PPKM Darurat period, were strictly prohibited from being involved in Eid al-Adha prayer activities, either as committee members, *imams*, preachers, or members of congregation. This gap is to be filled with similar studies with findings regarding the religious behaviors of the community or *ulama* during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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