It's a 'plandemic', not a pandemic: unraveling the discourse of a global conspiracy to destroy Islamic faith through COVID-19 health protocols

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the discursive arguments surrounding COVID-19 health protocols, particularly those related to prayer restrictions for Indonesian Muslims during the pandemic. The study highlights the importance of examining the development of contemporary Indonesian Islam and how particular Muslims address social and health issues that touch on sensitive religious matters through various religious interpretations. It explores how different religious sermons are discursively constructed by Muslim scholars to oppose the implementation of protocols restricting prayer, such as prayer distancing, mosque closures, and praying from home. The study employs topoi analysis as one approach in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how arguments are utilized in texts and talks to justify specific claims. The study finds that several topoi are used to justify the claim that COVID-19 is a 'plandemic' or a global conspiracy orchestrated by Judaism to destroy the Islamic faith. These arguments are specifically framed using the topos of enemy, faith, threat, or danger, definition or name-interpretation, and the topos of law.

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis wacana terkait penerapan protokol kesehatan COVID-19, khususnya yang berkaitan dengan pembatasan ibadah sholat bagi umat Muslim di Indonesia. Penelitian ini mengangkat wacana tentang pentingnya melihat perkembangan Islam kontemporer di Indonesia dan memahami bagaimana kalangan Islam tertentu menanggapi masalah sosial dan kesehatan yang menyentuh persoalan sensitif dalam Islam melalui berbagai interpretasi. Dalam artikel ini, penulis mengelaborasi konstruksi wacana yang dipresentasikan dalam bentuk ceramah agama untuk menentang penerapan protokol kesehatan yang membatasi kegiatan peribadatan berupa penjarakan sholat, penutupan masjid, dan sholat di rumah. Studi ini menggunakan analisis topoi sebagai salah satu pendekatan dalam Analisis Wacana Kritis (AWK) untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana argumen digunakan dalam teks untuk membenarkan dan menjustifikasi klaim tertentu. Dalam analisis ini, beberapa topoi digunakan untuk membenarkan klaim atau kesimpulan yaitu COVID-19 adalah 'plandemic' atau konspirasi global yang disebarluaskan oleh kaum Yahudi untuk menghancurkan keyakinan umat Islam. Klaim ini dijustifikasi melalui penggunaan *topos of enemy*, *faith*, *threat or danger*, *definition or name-interpretation*, dan *topos of law*.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis, COVID-19 pandemic, prayers-related health protocol, global conspiracy, Indonesian Islam*

Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 in December 2019 and its subsequent declaration as a pandemic in March 2020, along with the associated health protocols, sparked controversy within Indonesian society. Not only a health issue, the debate surrounding this matter also touched upon the sensitive topic of religion. In addition to enforcing new habits such as wearing face masks, washing hands, working and learning from home, and practicing social distancing, the protocols also regulate how Muslims perform their prayers. This can be seen in terms such as 'prayers from home' (henceforth PfH), mosque closures (MC), and prayer distancing (PD).

The issue of the COVID-19 pandemic has been investigated in several previous studies [1]. These studies have focused on identifying how information

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[1] Agnes Kövér, Attila Antal, and Izabella Deak, "Civil Society and COVID-19 in Hungary: The Complete Annexation of Civil Space", *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, Volume 12, Number 1 (2021), 93-126; Censolo Roberto, Massimo Morelli, "COVID-19 and the Potential Consequences for Social Stability", *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, Volume 26, Number 3 (2020), 1-5; *Peter Lor, Bradley Wiles, and Johannes Britz, "Re-thinking Information Ethics: Truth, Conspiracy Theories, and Librarians in the COVID-19 Era", Libri: International Journal of Libraries & Information Services, Volume 71, Number 1 (2021), 1-14*; Antonio Lillo, "COVID-19, the beer flu; or, the disease of many names", *Lebende Sprachen*, Volume 65, Number 2 (2020), 411-438; William Westermeyer, "Freedom over Fear: Fundamentalist Populism and the Challenge of COVID-19", *Open Anthropological Research*, Volume 1, Number 1 (2021), 116-128; Martha Lincoln, "Necrosecurity, Immunosupremacy, and Survivorship in the Political Imagination of COVID-19", *Open Anthropological Research*, Volume 1, Number 1 (2021), 46-59; Uran Botobekov, "How Central Asian Salafi-Jihadi Groups are Exploiting the COVID-19 Pandemic: New Opportunities and Challenges", in Nina Kasehage (ed.), *Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021: 107-148; Rahi Abouk, Babak Heydari, "The Immediate Effect of COVID-19 Policies on Social-Distancing Behavior in the United States", *Public Health Reports*, Volume 136, Number 2 (2021), 245–252; Yifan Yang, Xuechen Chen, "Globalism or Nationalism? The Paradox of Chinese Official Discourse in the Context of the COVID-19 Outbreak", *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Volume 26 (2021), 89–113; Naimah Ahmad Al-Ghamdi, Areej Hammad Albawardi, "Multivocality of Saudi COVID-19 discourse in social media posts: A socio-semiotic multimodal perspective", *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies, Volume 20, Number 4 (2020), 228-250*; Ajnesh Prasad, "The organization of ideological discourse in times of unexpected crisis: Explaining how COVID-19 is exploited by populist leaders",

about the virus is presented to the public, its potential consequences for social stability, power dynamics, policies, political contestation, social welfare, and public order. Other studies have attempted to examine the COVID-19 issue from the perspective of religion[2]. However, studies that explore how the health protocol is seen as a contradictory rule to the implementation of Islamic prayers from a discourse perspective are underdeveloped.

This study is important because it provides an in-depth examination of how religious interpretations may contradict official government policies. It tracks the development of contemporary Islamic discourse in Indonesia, particularly in examining how certain Islamic views are used and disseminated to address government policies on social and health issues that touch on sensitive religious matters. Additionally, this study sheds new light on the relationship between religion and state policies from the perspective of discourse studies, an area that remains underdeveloped in contemporary literature on religion, including in Indonesia. This aspect is explored through an analysis of how argumentation and argumentative strategies, conveyed through texts and talks, are used to interpret Islamic beliefs and strict rules in order to oppose government policies.

Leadership, Volume 16, Number 3 (2020), 294–302; Sultan, Muhammad Rapi, "*Positive Discourse Analysis of the Indonesian Government Spokesperson's Discursive Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic*", GEMA *Online Journal of Language Studies*, Volume 20, Number 4 (2020), 251-272.

[2]Amin Al-Astewani. "To Open or Close? COVID-19, Mosques and the Role of Religious Authority within the British Muslim Community: A Socio-Legal Analysis", *Religions*, Volume 12, Number 1 (2020): 1-26; Nicholas Kuipers, Saiful Mujani, and Thomas Pepinsky. "Encouraging Indonesians to Pray from Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic", *Journal of Experimental Political Science,* Volume 8, Number 3 (2021): 211-222; Max Regus. "Regulating religion in a time of COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia: context, dynamics, and implication". *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy,* Volume 42, Number 3/4 (2021): 313-331; Simon Simon, Alfons Renaldo Tampenawas, Joko Santoso, Astrid Maryam Yvonny Naipupu, Semuel Ruddy Angkouw, and Alvonce Poluan. "Participation of Religious Leaders in Helping the Success of Government's COVID-19 Vaccination Program". *Evangelikal: Journal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat*, Volume 5, Number 2 (2021): 234-245

Study published by Kuipers et al[3], for example, succinctly reveals that Joko Widodo's government tried to direct religious activities, particularly during the pandemic, to control the viral spread. However, it cannot be denied that the government has faced challenges from hardline Islamist groups expressing their disagreement with the policies of prayer distancing, mosque closures, and prayers from home. To some extent, this disagreement has become an obstacle to implementing the policy, as it persuades others to disobey the government's directives.

In line with this study, the current paper examines how religious interpretations are used to argue against the COVID-19 national policy, which is still underdeveloped and remains a gap. Specifically, it looks at the arguments (topoi) presented by preachers to show disagreement and argue against the Islamic prayer-related protocols. These texts and talks are deliberately disseminated to promote a negative discourse about the global conspiracy of Judaism to destroy the Islamic faith of Muslims around the world, which may discourage other Muslims from adhering to the health protocol.

This issue is important to identify, especially in terms of how certain individuals or Muslim groups in Indonesia use particular religious justifications and understandings to oppose the official pandemic policies in the country. It examines how religious interpretations are deliberately used to argue against the government's policies in order to maintain Islamic faith. This situation could potentially trigger social polarization among Indonesian Muslims and be counterproductive to official policies. Furthermore, it could contribute to a negative discourse that threatens the religious harmony and moderate values of Indonesian Islam.

Many Muslims are committed to obeying the health protocol and,

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[3]Nicholas Kuipers, Saiful Mujani, and Thomas Pepinsky. "Encouraging Indonesians to Pray……

during the PPKM (*Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat*), continue to stay and pray at home. On the other hand, some Muslims disobey the rule, considering it a threat to their Islamic faith. Therefore, the preachers' texts and talks, which view the pandemic as a global conspiracy, contradict the government's efforts to establish health protocols. This, in turn, contrasts with the goal of overcoming the virus's transmission and its other negative impacts. The religious interpretations on COVID-19 delivered by preachers on YouTube can impact the (un)successful handling of the pandemic, compliance with health protocols, and potentially create social instability.

Health Protocols Restricting Muslims' Prayers

The President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, announced the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia on March 15, 2020, declaring a public health emergency[4]. It was about four months after the first reported transmission of the virus in Wuhan, China. The President issued Presidential Decree No. 12/2020[5] and since the announcement of the pandemic status, the Indonesian government has issued several policies at the national level, followed by provincial and local governments, to prevent widespread virus transmission. One of these policies is the enforcement of health protocols.

This presidential decree was followed by the implementation of *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*, which is commonly referred to as PSBB. To prevent transmission, PSBB enforces restrictions on outdoor activities, crowd avoidance, learning from home (LFH), working from home (WFH), wearing face masks, washing hands, and certain restrictions on prayer-related

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[4]Ihsanuddin. *Presiden Jokowi Teken Keppres Tetapkan Wabah COVID-19 Bencana Nasional*. Kompas.com (2020). downloaded from https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/04/13/18101841/presiden-jokowi-teken-keppres-tetapkan-wabah-COVID-19-bencana-nasional on 12 July 2021

[5]This decree is about about non-natural disaster of COVID-19 transmission as a national disaster.

activities. Both PSBB and PPKM are implemented to enforce restrictions on community activities. In fact, these two policies share similarities in their application and have sparked controversy among the public.

The first PPKM was implemented in Java and Bali to respond to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases from January 11 to 25, 2021[6]. The second enforcement, which was stricter, took place from July 3 to 20, 2021, in response to the rapidly increasing number of transmissions due to the new Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2. This second PPKM was labeled with a new term, *darurat* (emergency), becoming PPKM Darurat (CNN Indonesia, 2021). Community activities were more heavily restricted during this PPKM Darurat because the Delta variant was claimed to be more dangerous, contagious, and deadly compared to the previous variant.

Both PSBB and PPKM have sparked controversy, especially regarding the restriction of Muslim prayer-related activities. This protocol is claimed to be contradictory to the core teachings of Islam regarding worship, particularly congregational prayer (*Sholat Berjamaah*). Some members of the public claim that such a health protocol has treated Muslims unfairly, as it changes the rules and their habits of praying in the mosque and prevents them from gathering (*silaturrahim*), as Muslims commonly do on normal days. Muslims, especially men, are encouraged to pray in the mosque five times a day. The mosque is also an important place for teaching the Qur'an, spreading knowledge of Islamic values, and conducting other related Islamic learning activities.

The prayer-related health protocol can at least be translated into the following terms: prayer distancing, mosque closures, and prayer from home. These three terms are used interchangeably when discussing the

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[6]Nurdiana, Titis. *Bukan PSBB, Pemerintah Pakai Istilah Baru PPKM dalam Pembatasan kegiatan, Ini Bedanya.* Kontan.co.id (07 January 2021). Downloaded from https://nasional. kontan.co.id/news/bukan-psbb-pemerintah-pakai-istilah-baru-ppkm-dalam-pembatasan-kegiatan-ini-bedanya on 12 July 2021

government's COVID-19 policy regarding prayer. The government argues that congregational prayer at the mosque can lead to crowds (*kerumunan*), which could exacerbate virus transmission and infection. Since this issue is not only related to medical topics but also religious faith, the policy has sparked both support and opposition among Muslims, ulama, preachers, and scholars.

Both groups justify their personal interpretations and arguments based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. They cite verses from the Qur'an to support their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the government's COVID-19 policy. The proponents believe that Islam encourages Muslims to find the best way to overcome such dangerous diseases, with an emphasis on health and the salvation of humankind. They interpret this policy moderately, understanding it as a measure to minimize virus transmission. To some extent, therefore, Muslims may not pray in mosques or may pray from home, or if they do pray in the mosque, they should maintain distancing. Mosques could be closed temporarily, especially when virus transmission worsens, as this could have negative impacts on other sectors of life, such as health and the economy.

The opposite group argues that COVID-19 is not a pandemic, but it is 'plandemic.'[7] They argue that the matter of prayer has strict rules and regulations, and this is uncompromising. This means that the way Muslims organize prayer in the mosques cannot be changed. Maintaining distancing during prayer is not permissible, as there is no example from Prophet Muhammad. The rows of prayer must be straightened and tightened (*luruskan dan rapatkan shaf*).

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[7]Plandemic is a popular term used by certain individuals or social groups arguing that a pandemic, particularly COVID-19 does not happen naturally. However, it is planned and by design by global authorities to change the world order and become an economic enterprise of virus and vaccine trade around the world. Within this mind frame, one of the main goals of plandemic is to destroy the *aqidah* (Islamic faith) of Muslims.

Muslims should be encouraged to go to the mosque to perform congregational prayer. The mosque is the house of God, and Muslims must frequently visit it and pray there. Muslims should not be kept away from the mosque, and based on this argument, they conclude that the government has wrongly and mistakenly issued COVID-19 policies, especially those restricting Muslims from performing congregational prayers. To some extent, such a policy is considered a deliberate attempt to weaken Muslims' strong commitment to implementing their Islamic teachings in daily life, with the best strategy being to take Muslims away from the mosque.

'Plandemic' and the Global Conspiracy

The term 'plandemic' is found in some social media posts and is understood as a mockery and spoonerism. It sounds akin to a 'pandemic,' but the former is deliberately created by those who believe that COVID-19 did not emerge naturally. Instead, they claim it was deliberately planned or orchestrated. 'Plandemic' can be simply defined as a pandemic (referring to COVID-19) that was deliberately planned by certain global actors to change the world order, control the excessive world population, and serve as an economic enterprise for the global vaccination trade[8].

This term can be found in Wikipedia website referring to a 26-minute video entitled *Plandemic: the Hidden Agenda behind COVID-19*[9]. The video that features Judi Mikovits, an anti-vaccine activist, has launched and disseminated the 'plandemic' conspiracy theory[10] that went viral on

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[8]Shahin Nazar, Toine Pieters. "*Plandemic* Revisited: A Product of Planned Disinformation Amplifying the COVID-19 Infodemic". *Frontiers in Public Health*, Volume 9 (2021): 1-15

[9]This video promotes a conspiracist claim of vaccines as a money-making enterprise that causes medical harm (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plandemic)

[10]Martin Enserink, Jon Cohen. "Fact-checking Judy Mikovits, the controversial virologist attacking Anthony Fauci in a viral conspiracy video". *Science* (8 May 2020). Available at: https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/05/fact-checking-judy-mikovits-controversial-virologist-attacking-anthony-fauci-viral

major social media platform and facilitated the rapid spread of covind-19 misinformation[11]. Although the video has been criticized due to some false statements in its content, this term has been a famous 'word' used by those who oppose the COVID-19 program, including health protocol and vaccination, enforced by World Health Organization (WHO) and then followed by official governments around the world.

The term 'plandemic' is considered to be a form of misinformation which is deliberately posted and shared on social media. It aims at manipulating society's mind to decrease their belief about the spread of COVID-19. Besides, this conspiracy is also utilized to oppose political elites and official policies either in global and national levels[12]. Since COVID-19 became a global and national issue under the control of the government, the 'plandemic' conspiracy has found its place and importance among anti-vaccine and anti-government groups. To some extent, within the context of the COVID-19 health crisis, the conspiracy is used by certain groups to oppose the government, the established political order, elites, and scientific institutions.

Compared to other previous studies concerning 'plandemic' of COVID-19, this study offers a novelty. It is how the issue is contextualized within the religious discourse. Previous ones have clearly connected the 'plandemic' to the topics of world population, economic enterprise (vaccine trade), health on anti-vaccine movement and politics. The current study, meanwhile, discursively elaborates the issue from the religious point of view that the conspiracy of COVID-19 is deliberately planned and created

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[11]Yu Xu, Yao Sun, Loni Hagen, Maher Patel, and Mary Falling. "Evolution of the Plandemic Communication Network among Serial Participants on Twitter", *New Media & Society*, Volume 25, Number 12 (2023): 3676-3695

[12]Jacob Morits Eberl, Robert Huber, and Esther Greussing. "From Populism to the 'Plandemic': Why Populists Believe in COVID-19 Conspiracies", *Journal of Elections, Public Opinions and Parties*, Volume 31, Number 1 (2021): 272-284

by global elites and national government to destroy the faith of particular religion (i.e. Islam).

Discourse and Topoi Analysis

Discourse and its manifold analyses, including the critical approach, have gained significant attention in social and linguistic studies. It focuses on identifying, examining, and revealing how certain individuals or groups, through texts or discourses, attempt to deliver messages, create meaning, and represent their ideology to influence others' minds and manipulate them. In this study, discourse is viewed as texts and talks that contain certain ideologies, perspectives, and knowledge presented by speakers to others with specific purposes. Because discourse is closely related to or interferes with knowledge[13], The analysis of discourse should pay close attention to identifying how certain knowledge or sets of beliefs (ideologies) are constructed in texts and talks, along with the argumentative strategies utilized.

According to Van Dijk, knowledge, especially when ideologized, is relative; what is true for one community may be a mere or false belief for another community[14]. In line with this definition, Reisigl and Wodak[15] also argue that ideology is a one-sided perspective or worldview and does not tend to be absolutely true. Although there is no absolute truth, knowledge and ideology presented through texts and talks (including on social media) can have a social impact in shaping people's minds, particularly in establishing social identity, social relations, inequality,

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[13]Teun Andres Van Dijk. "The Discourse-Knowledge Interface", in Gilbert Weiss & Ruth Wodak (Eds.) *Critical Discourse Analysis. Theory and Interdisciplinarity.* Houndsmills: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2003: 85-109

[14]Teun Andres Van Dijk. "Discourse and Knowledge", in James Paul Gee & Michael Handford (Eds.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis.* London: Routledge, 2012: 587-603

[15]Martin Reisigl, Ruth Wodak. "The Discourse-Historical Approach", *in* Michael Meyer *(Ed.) Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2nd ed.). London: Sage, 2009: 87–121.

and supporting, or, in particular, opposing public policy. The way it is constructed is through the selection of certain words, clauses, sentences, and argumentative strategies to represent and transform particular social practices, norms, beliefs, past stories, and knowledge.

One of the strategies in discourse construction is presented through argumentation, also called topoi. Topoi consist of several topoi containing interrelated arguments in the text, which serve as strategies to justify a certain claim or conclusion. These arguments are utilized to build positive-self and negative-other presentations. Furthermore, such arguments are used to justify or legitimize the claims of the speakers or authors on a particular issue, whether in support of or opposition to it.

According to Wodak[16], 'topoi, within argumentation theory, can be described as parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable premises. They are the content-related warrants or `conclusion rules' which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion or claim.' These topoi are justification of transition from the argument or arguments to the conclusion[17] or it aims at securing 'the transition from an argument to a conclusion'[18]. Most of the studies agree that topoi are strategies of argument utilized to persuade the people with the best conclusions or promises they offer[19]. From the speaker's point of view, both persuasion and manipulation involve an attempt on the part of speaker to influence the judgments, decisions and actions of the audience[20].

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[16]Ruth Wodak. "The Discourse Historical Approach", in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Sage, 2001: 64-94.

[17]Ruth Wodak. "The Discourse Historical Approach"......

[18]Igor Zagar. "Topoi in Critical Discourse Analysis", *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, Volume 6, Number 1 (2010): 3-27

[19]Kanaan Hasan. "Political Discourse Analysis: Topoi in Haider Al-Abadi's Discourse during Basra Crisis in 2008", *Journal of Language Studies*, Volume 3, Number 3 (2020): 131-144

[20]Martin Reisigl, Ruth Wodak. "The Discourse-Historical Approach".......; Teun Andres Van Dijk. "Critical Discourse Studies; A socio-cognitive Approach", in Ruth Wodak & Michael Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis.* London: Sage, 2009: 62-85

Drawing on Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach[21] and Van Dijk's Ideological Square, there are 15 types of *topos* that justify self and other presentations. These topoi are mainly used in texts by certain individuals to present him/herself in a positive way and present the opponents negatively[22] and to convince an audience of one's interests, visions or positions[23]. In this current study, such topoi are identified to find out how the preacher connects or justifies his claim/conclusion: "COVID-19 'plandemic' as a global conspiracy of Judaism to destroy the faith of Islam".

Table 1: Types of *Topos*

No	Types of topos	Conclusion Rule
1.	Advantage or usefulness	if an action under a specific relevant point of view will be useful, then one should perform it
2.	Disadvantage or uselessness	If one can anticipate that the prognosticated consequences of a decision will not occur, or if other political actions are more likely to lead to the declared aim, the decision has to be rejected
3.	Definition or name-interpretation	if an action, a thing or a person (group of persons) is named/designated (as) X, the action, thing or person (group of persons) carries or should carry the qualities/traits/attributes contained in the (literal) meaning of X
4.	Danger or threat	if a political action or decision bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform or do it

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[21]Ruth Wodak. "The Discourse Historical Approach"......
[22]Kanaan Hasan. "Political Discourse Analysis......
[23]Ruth Wodak. *The Discourse of Politics in Action*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

5.	Humanitarianism	if a political action or decision does or does not conform with human rights or humanitarian convictions and values, one should or should not perform or take it
6.	Justice	If persons/actions/situations are equal in specific respects, they should be treated in the same way
7.	Responsibility	Because a state or a group of persons is responsible for the emergence of specific problems, it or they should act in order to find solutions to the problems
8.	Burdening or weighing down	If a person, an institution or a country is burdened by specific problems, one should act in order to diminish these burdens
9.	Finance	If a specific situation or action costs too much money or causes a loss of revenue, one should perform actions which diminish the costs or help to avoid the loss
10.	Reality	Because reality is as it is, a specific action/ decision should be performed/made
11.	Numbers	If the numbers prove a specific topos, a specific action should be performed or not be carried out
12.	Laws or Rights	If a law or an otherwise codified norm prescribes or forbids a specific politico-administrative action, the action has to be performed or omitted
13.	History	Because history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation (allegedly) comparable with the historical example referred to

14.	Culture	Because the culture of a specific group of people is as it is, specific problems arise in specific situations
15.	Abuse	if a right or an offer for help is abused, the right should be changed, or the help should be withdrawn, or measures against the abuse should be taken

The data for this study consist of several videos uploaded on YouTube. The videos feature religious speeches presented by an Islamic preacher, Ustad Ihsan Tanjung, in which he expresses his disagreement with COVID-19 and accuses it of being a global conspiracy to destroy Islam. The videos are as follows:

Table 2: Titles and Links of the Video

No	Titles and links of the Video	Uploaded by	Upload on
1.	*PPKM Darurat COVID-19 hingga Mesjid ditutup*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rf-CpynXy2kk (Video 1; V1)	Media Dakwah Hikmah TV	July 5, 2021
2.	*Sholat kita 2020 ternyata persis dengan ini* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jh3UawQ60qs_ (Video 2; V2)	Berislam Channel	October 16, 2020
3.	Ceramah Ustadz Ihsan Tanjung terbaru 2021-COVID-19 *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpqskS8H3d8* (Video 3; V3)	Iyaiyayaa Yt	July 8, 2021

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The three videos are transcribed and coded to identify various arguments or *topos* that are presented by the preacher to argue against COVID-19 health protocol, especially those related to Islamic prayers. These arguments are then categorized and elaborated into some types of topoi to answer the following question: *what topoi or argument strategies presented by the preacher to argue for his religious interpretation and to argue against government's policies on prayers-related health protocol?*

Topoi Analysis: Global Conspiracy and the Destruction of Islamic Faith

In this analysis, various topoi are presented to connect the COVID-19 issue with the claim of a global conspiracy by Judaism to destroy Muslims' faith. Most of the identified topoi are similar to those introduced in Wodak's list of topoi[24], while some others are new and typical of religious discourse. While Wodak investigated topoi analysis in the discourse of racism and immigration, this study focuses on how religious discourse is created to argue against the government's policy. As identified in three videos, the preacher presents the idea that the conspiracy to destroy the Islamic faith of Muslims is deliberately planned by certain individuals or groups. This can be identified in the following topoi.

Topos of Enemy

The emergence of COVID-19 and the policies following it are described as a deliberate effort carried out by particular individuals or groups, or those affiliated with certain religions that hate Muslims. These individuals or groups are presented as enemies of God who use all strategies to destroy the Islamic faith: 'The enemies of God (Allah) are so systematic, and they make every effort to make us abandon our religion' (V3: 06.03-06.07).

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[24]Ruth Wodak. "The Discourse Historical Approach"......

One of these strategies is implemented through the COVID-19 health protocol, such as prayer from home and prayer distancing. The goal is to keep Muslims away from the true teachings of Islam. The topos of enemy or hate can be summarized in the following conditional: If a person, group, or institution hates others, they will do things that are harmful and destructive to their opponents.

In the videos, people or groups of people are presented as the enemies of Islam who deliberately planned the virus pandemic and its subsequent policies - namely, Jews (Judaism).

> *Allah SWT says: 'Muhammad, you will find people who are fiercely hostile to the believers (i.e., Muslims); they are the Jews and the polytheists.* (V2: 03.40-04.00)

> *The Prophet said about the Jews: 'They are tired of their religion, they are hateful, and they hate us, Muslims.* (V2: 04.02-04.13)

In order to justify this topos of enemy, the preacher presents an argumentation outlining three reasons why Jews hate Muslims. These reasons are then logically connected to the reality of COVID-19 and all its health protocols, such as wearing facemasks, physical distancing, and those related to prayers. The first reason is related to *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, which is translated as social gathering or Islamic brotherhood, along with actions such as shaking hands, greeting, smiling, and meeting frequently. This is arguably in contrast to the health protocol that encourages people to stay at home and restricts brotherhood-related activities.

> *Our habit of greeting each other when we meet, 'Assalamu alaikum,' replied with 'wa'alaikum salam,' is something the Jews don't like when Muslims practice ukhuwah.* (V2: 04.00-04.43)

This topos can also be translated as follows: because Jews hate Muslims for their manners in building brotherhood, they will prevent Muslims from gathering. Physical distancing, as enforced in the health protocol,

is a planned effort by Jews to keep Muslims away from this brotherhood. This argument is further clarified in the following excerpts, presenting various actions or manners that are restricted and prohibited during the implementation of the health protocol, such as prohibiting face-to-face meetings, not shaking hands, and wearing facemasks.

> *The nature of humans is to be social creatures, and Islam is in accordance with this nature. As social creatures, humans need to meet each other. They need to meet to build close relationships, to talk, shake hands, and hug in warm relationships* (V2: 08.27-08.49)

> *Prophet Muhammad said, 'There are no two Muslims who meet each other and shake hands, but their sins will be forgiven by Allah before they part....'* (V2: 09.35-09.47) [This is also known as hadith of manners: Muslims rewarded for shaking hands]

> *Now, we are prohibited from pursuing Allah's forgiveness...* (V2: 09.49-09.55)

> *Your smile to your brothers is charity... Now, it is very difficult to see the smiles of the believers... They are covered by facemasks* (V2: 10.13-10.39)

The second reason is related to prayer. This reason logically connects the virus and its protocol to prayer distancing, arguing that the virus was deliberately created to damage Muslims' belief in terms of prayer. 'They don't like our way of arranging congregational prayers. They are really angry and hate this [straightening and tightening the rows]' (V2: 04.45-04.55). The prayer distancing, as shown in the picture below, is considered the embodiment of the Jews' hatred against Muslims.

This picture was taken from: https://www.kompas.com/ramadhan/read/2020/04/25/035700972/shalat-berjamaah-dengan-physical-distancing-apakah-menghilangkan?page=all

The third reason is related to the enthusiasm of Muslims to come and pray at the mosque. In this topos, the virus and its protocol [i.e., prayer from home] are considered a deliberate effort by Jews to keep Muslims away from the mosque. This could also be seen as a structured way to weaken the spirit and enthusiasm of Muslims in performing prayers at the mosque.

What they really hate about Muslims is the word 'AMEN,' which is uttered in congregational prayers... That means, if there are more congregants, the word 'AMEN' is uttered louder and louder, isn't it? They really hate it. (V2: 06.10-06.44)

The three reasons in the topos of enemy or hate are the main arguments presented by the preacher to logically connect the virus with the global conspiracy attempted by Jews to destroy Muslims' faith — a 'plandemic'. Along with other topoi, this topos is arguably used to justify and support the transition from arguments to the claim or conclusion of the global conspiracy.

Topos of Danger or Threat

In this *topos*, the issuance of COVID-19 health protocol is considered to be the danger and threaten Muslims' faith. This *topos* is argued in the following conditional: if a political action or decision (policy on COVID-19 health protocol) bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform or do it. According to Wodak[25], 'if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them' (2001: 75). Through the protocol of *prayer from home* and *physical distancing*, Indonesian government is considered to be the extension of global elites that imposes or enforces its will by disobeying God's will and the strict rule of Islam. Muslims have to do something against this danger.

> *You have to know that we are now living in Phase 4, which is called mulqan jabriyatan. It is the era where the rulers impose their will. This is the darkest chapter in Muslim history. Whoever occupies the stage of power has negative behavior by imposing their will and disobeying God and His messengers' will.* (V1: 3.28-4.10)

> *Today, we are aware that our way of worship is being disrupted. We do not understand science, technology, medicine, and health. And then, we simply submit* (V1: 9.10-9.22)

The statements 'we are now living,' 'it is the era,' 'this' (time deictic), and 'today' (time adverbial) refer to the current situation of COVID-19. This situation is negatively portrayed as the worst era that Muslims have to face. The implementation of the health protocol is considered to have disrupted or ruined the way Muslims conduct their worship, and this is seen as a danger because it could destroy Muslims' faith and keep them away from God's blessings. Therefore, Muslims should not follow the protocol and should continue practicing the correct way of prayer.

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[25]Ruth Wodak. "The Discourse Historical Approach"......

In relation to prayer from home, every Muslim, especially men, is encouraged to go to the mosque and perform congregational prayer with other Muslims. Congregational prayers are considered to offer more social and spiritual benefits than individual prayer at home. There are several verses in the Qur'an and hadith (Prophet Muhammad's sayings) that justify the virtue of congregational prayer compared to individual prayer at home. One such verse can be found in the Qur'an (2:43): '...And bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship)'.

Another verse is found in the Qur'an (9:18): 'The mosques of Allah shall be visited and maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, practice regular charity, and fear none (at all) except Allah.' These verses are further strengthened in hadith, as reported by Imam Bukhari, who said, 'Performing prayer in congregation is 27 times better than prayer performed individually.' This comparison confirms the virtue of congregational prayer, which can only be performed in the mosque, not at home.

Topos of Faith

The topos of faith consists of various arguments to maintain Islamic faith and argue against all forms of religious deviation. In the case of prayer, it is argued that congregational prayer should strictly follow the example set by Prophet Muhammad. On the one hand, this topos is used to justify that the health protocol deviates from Islamic teachings, and on the other hand, it encourages Muslims to oppose all forms of deviation. This can be presented in the following conditional: if a political action, decision, or policy does not conform to the true faith and the correct teachings of Islam, one should or should not follow or accept it.

With regards to prayer distancing at the mosque, such a protocol is considered an imposition that changes the strict rules of Islamic law

(sharia) in conducting congregational prayer. The main argument is that the way Muslims pray at the mosque, or in congregational prayer, should be straightened and tightened. This is in opposition to prayer distancing, which imposes a gap, as Prophet Muhammad never demonstrated this practice.

In a hadith, as reported by Anas Ibn Malik, it is said, 'Straighten your rows, for indeed, straightening the rows is part of the perfection of the prayer.' The popular statement regularly stated by the imam before praying is to straighten and tighten the rows. They must close the gaps (not create distance) in the rows so as not to give the devil a way to tamper with their prayer.

> *If we are truly afraid of COVID-19, we don't need to go to the mosque. However, if we have the courage, let us go to the mosque and pray in the right way, as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad.* (V1: 17.46-17.54)

> *I just want to remind you of a few things. Our Prophet clearly says, 'Don't leave gaps amongst you, for the devil.' This is what our Prophet says. So, why would we invite the devil to be in our midst?* (V1: 17.55-18.24)

The two excerpts above seem to be a site of struggle or battlefield between *the good* and *the bad*. As stated by Van Dijk[26] in his 'ideological square' of positive *self* and negative *other* presentations, *topos* of faith constructs a dichotomy (US versus THEM); presenting US as the true believers of Islam and THEM as the coward. The good ones are those who implement the right way of praying and are not afraid of anything (including the virus) but God. The bad ones are those who follow the health protocol. They are afraid of the virus and are disbelievers who do not have true faith in Islam. The only people who truly prosper the mosques are those who believe in Allah. 'Hopefully, they are among those who receive guidance from Allah' (V1: 16.53-17.42).

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[26]Van Dijk, Teun Andres. "Discourse and Knowledge", in James Paul Gee & Michael Handford (Eds.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis.* London: Routledge, 2012: 587-603.

Topos of Definition or Name-Interpretation

This topos concerns the name of Muslims, which carries certain qualities or attributes. It is closely connected to the topos of faith. Those who are categorized as Muslims have certain characteristics and duties that distinguish them from others (such as the followers of other religions and non-believers). By identifying themselves as Muslims, they are obligated to carry out specific actions as commanded in the Qur'an and exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad. This *topos* can be explained in the following conditional: if an action, a thing or a person (group of persons) is named/designated (as) X, the action, thing or person (group of persons) carries or should carry the qualities/traits/attributes contained in the (literal) meaning of X[27] (Wodak, 2001).

> *Those who claim to be Muslims must consider themselves servants of Allah, followers of Muhammad, and uphold the teachings of the Prophet, especially in performing congregational prayers.* (V1: 15.50-16.04)

In the above excerpt, Muslims are those who uphold the Prophet's teachings or follow his example. To be recognized as Muslims, they must follow the Prophet's way in prayer, not merely the recommendations of health protocols. If they disobey this way—such as by not performing congregational prayers in the mosque or failing to straighten and tighten the rows—they cannot be considered true Muslims.

> *Today, I hope to once again witness the servants of Allah, whose hearts are strengthened, minds are moved, and courage is evident. They fear no one but Allah and show no sign of wahan—the love of this world and the hatred of death.* (V1: 16.23-16.40)

The statements above are used to create a contradiction between the fear of the virus and the fear of Allah. This contrast is deliberately introduced by the preacher to convey the message that many Muslims today follow

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[27]Ruth Wodak. "The Discourse Historical Approach"......

health protocols and pray from home because they are afraid of the virus. Fear of the virus, according to this view, is a sign of excessive attachment to this world. They do not perform congregational prayers at the mosque because of their fear of death. In this mindset, they are more afraid of the virus than of Allah. If they adopt this attitude and behavior, they cannot be considered true Muslims. True Muslims must have unwavering faith in Allah and honor His Mosque, and the way to do so is by performing congregational prayers at the mosque. The qualities of Muslims are then strengthened as follows:

> *The only people who truly honor Allah's Mosque are those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, persist in prayer, pay zakat, and fear nothing but Allah.* (V1:17.20-17.42)

In conclusion, those who claim to be Muslims must follow God's commands and the true teachings of Islam as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad, especially in the matter of prayer. To do so, they must prioritize these religious obligations, even if it means disregarding or disobeying health protocols.

Topos of Law

The topos of law is used by the preacher to express disagreement with policies, rules, or protocols imposed by official authorities at both the global and national levels. In the context of this study, the topos conveys the message that health protocols violate God's law. The government's action in issuing these protocols is seen as contradictory to God's commands regarding prayer and inconsistent with the example set by Prophet Muhammad

The conclusion rule for this *topos* is: If a law or an otherwise codified norm prescribes or forbids a specific politico-administrative action, the action has to be performed or omitted. The health protocol has directed

people to deviating from the human nature, normal daily life and God's rules, so Muslims do not have to perform or omit it. This can be identified in the following excerpt:

We are now being directed to become people whose nature is disturbed by anything imposed by these rules. This not only affects our congregational prayers but also has a negative impact on our daily lives. (V2: 16.38-16.45)

The implementation of health protocols has dramatically changed people's habits and the way they conduct their daily lives. What was once natural has now become unnatural. People used to shake hands and smile at each other, but the protocol has made these common behaviors problematic, with violators facing punishment. Therefore, the COVID-19 protocol has not only altered how religious activities are conducted but also transformed the way people live their daily lives.

Going outside is a normal activity, and shaking hands is also a common gesture. However, these actions are now considered violations of the law. Smiling at each other without wearing a facemask is also deemed a violation. (V2:16.38-16.57)

The final argument against the protocol as a law concerns the loss suffered by Muslims, both in this life and the hereafter. Changing the rules of prayer is seen as a serious violation of Islamic law. As Islamic law has strict guidelines, prayer must be performed with utmost adherence and should be based on the guidance from God and the examples set by the Prophet.

My brothers, I just want to remind you all of the messages delivered by our Prophet regarding prayer. The Prophet said: "Pray as you have seen me praying." Therefore, the scholars of Islamic law have determined that prayer cannot be performed carelessly. Prayer has specific rules, and we must not think that the health protocol is better for the safety of our worldly life while neglecting the safety of our afterlife. (V3: 01.05-01.38)

Conclusion

The issue of the COVID-19 health protocol is not only a matter of health, politics, trade, or economic and social instability, but it is also a matter of discourse. Discourse, in this context, refers to the means by which opinions, arguments, and justifications are produced and disseminated regarding the use of the virus issue for certain purposes. Discourse plays an important role in not only spreading information about the virus but also in justifying related policies or expressing disagreement with how the problem is managed. Since discourse uses language as a medium to represent particular ideologies in texts, the analysis should focus on revealing how, in the context of this study, the viewpoints of speakers or writers are presented argumentatively to maintain and defend certain religious beliefs and to argue against policies that contradict those beliefs.

Furthermore, this study convincingly demonstrates that topoi analysis is not limited to analyzing policy documents issued by elites or political actors, as commonly seen in mainstream studies of topoi analysis, particularly in CDA. On the contrary, such analysis can also reveal how specific policies are challenged by particular individuals or groups. Within the framework of positive-self and negative-other presentations, topoi analysis can be used to identify how non-elite or powerless individuals or groups create negative portrayals of elites, governments, or powerful groups.

Analyzing COVID-19 within the social and religious contexts of Indonesia has revealed various topoi or argumentation strategies, some of which have not been elaborated in previous studies. Wodak identifies 15 types of topoi, several of which are found in this study. In addition to danger or threat, definition or name interpretation, and laws, this study identifies other types of topoi, such as enemy and (religious) faith, used to justify the view that the COVID-19 issue is a 'plandemic' or a global conspiracy to destroy Islamic faith. This demonstrates that the types of

topoi can vary depending on the issue at hand. By uncovering new types of topos, this study offers fresh insights into the study of argumentation strategies, particularly within the framework of CDA.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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