

PROBLEMS OF POLICY GAP IN LESS MITIGATION OF FACING COVID-19: LESSON FROM BANGKALAN REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to identify the weak mitigation policy in response to the increasing case number of Covid-19 and elaborate on why the lack of crisis among community members in Bangkalan Regency occurred. The local government is trying to suppress the growing number of Covid-19 in Bangkalan Regency by restricting mobility during Eid al-Fitr and cooperating with the Surabaya City government and East Java province authority to provide a proper healthcare system. As the Bangkalan regency failed to deal with the crisis, the Surabaya city government responded to the emergency with a social restriction policy on the Suramadu bridge, which ended with rejection from the Madurese community. This study uses the interpretive approach and narrative analysis techniques. The article fully uses secondary data from credible mass media and official documents related to handling Covid-19 in Bangkalan Regency from April-June 2021. The concept of policy gap is used as an instrument to analyze the factors that caused the policy failure in the community in the Bangkalan Regency Government regarding Covid-19 mitigation. The result shows the political policy gap, which makes both policies ineffective, and the cultural policy gap.

Keywords: local government, policy gap, Covid-19, mitigation, pandemic

INTRODUCTION

This article elaborates on the weakness of the policies carried out by the Bangkalan Regency and Surabaya City Governments in handling the increasing number of Covid-19 cases in Madura. Based on data from the East Java Provincial Government, Wednesday (22/6), positive cases of Covid-19 in Bangkalan Regency reached 3,024 cases. While the active cases reached 969, the cases died 297 and recovered 1,758 cases. The death rate in Bangkalan is also relatively high, recorded at around 9.82%. Pusparsa (2021) explained that the increase in Covid-19 cases in Bangkalan was triggered by the movement of people who continued to travel back and forth and the return of migrant workers from abroad to celebrate the Eid holiday at home. In addition, many people still think they are immune from exposure to Covid-19 and ignore health protocols when they leave the house, which is the main trigger for the soaring Covid-19 case in Bangkalan (Salman & Muchlis, 2021).

Similar problems also occurred in Kudus Regency, which experienced the most significant addition of issues in Indonesia within three weeks after the Eid holiday, with an increase of 7.594% because people kept carrying *anjangsana* and the *kupatan*¹ tradition without health protocols (Pinandhita, 2021; Nafian, 2021). Similar to what happened in Sleman Regency, where the people of Degolan and Nglempong hamlets continue to carry out the tradition of *anjangsana*, thus contributing 52 positive cases in the DI Yogyakarta province (CNN Indonesia, 2021a).

In response to the crisis, the Bangkalan Regency Government is trying to reduce the number of Covid-19 cases by collaborating with the East Java Provincial Government and the Surabaya City Government. After placing the background, this article seeks to identify a policy gap for handling the Covid-19 crisis in Bangkalan involving the local government (Bangkalan District Government, Surabaya City Government, and East Java Provincial Government) in April-June 2021. The data we collected ranged from April 2021-June 2021. Using the narrative analysis method, this paper uses secondary data from online media, official government publications, and reports from research institutions regarding the Covid-19 handling policy in Bangkalan and its impact on the Surabaya city government as the basis for the findings.

GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSES TO COVID-19: LITERATURE REVIEW

The socio-political changes caused by the pandemic prompted the emergence of contemporary studies in the disciplines of political science and public policy to analyze the efforts and obstacles experienced by the government and other stakeholders in controlling the rate of spread of Covid-19. Capano et al. (2020) compare the response of the central government in 10 countries and what factors characterize each country's policies in tackling the pandemic's impact. China, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Israel, Turkey, and Canada successfully minimize the pandemic risk because they have experience dealing with political and endemic crises.

Meanwhile, America, Sweden, and Italy suffered from poor policy outcomes. Efforts to control the pandemic in America are hampered by the form of a federal state that makes health policies between the central government and federal states become out of sync. Meanwhile, Sweden, which has an excellent public health system, is powerless to face the increase in the positive number of Covid-19 because the central government tends to let the local government and healthcare centers at the local level take the initiative in fighting the pandemic. Italy's inexperience in dealing with crises caused by disease epidemics, with weak health emergency policies and an inadequate public health system, resulted in the most deaths in Europe and economic losses.

¹ Tradition which held on the seventh day after Eid al-Fitr by opening houses in order to be visited by the neighbors, relatives, or guests.

Djalante et al. (2020) found that the Indonesia Ministry of Health has received harsh criticism for ignoring the recommendations of experts from within and outside the country to increase testing capacity and provide the availability of healthcare facilities. In addition to the lack of leadership in taking preventive steps, the article also reveals that this crisis has exposed the imbalance in health infrastructure between the national and regional levels. Notably, there are only 48 laboratories throughout Indonesia that can diagnose Covid-19. Roziqin et al. (2021) examine that due to miscommunication at the level of government agencies, partial lockdown policy through PSBB (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*, large-scale social restriction) had not been effective in reducing the number of positive patients or reducing the socio-economic impact of Covid-19. Contradictory statements between one institution and another often make it difficult for the public to determine which information is credible to follow.

The problem of policy communication between the central government and local governments was also discussed by Putranto and Emilia (2020). Both stated that when a crisis occurs, policy reasoning tends to be polarized into one of the following two models: centralization of state power that assumes the need for a hegemonic leadership that prioritizes common interest *vis a vis* the arguments of democracy and decentralization, which claim that the deliberative process will better accommodate different regional problems (Zizek in Putranto and Emilia, 2020). All the previous literature inspired this article to contribute to enriching research on policy gaps in dealing with the crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic involving three local government entities, namely the Bangkalan district government, the Surabaya City government, and East Java Provincial government.

POLICY GAP AS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This article uses the concept of policy gap as a framework for understanding the lack of policies to deal with the pandemic in Bangkalan Regency and the chaos synchronization coordination with the city government of Surabaya. Foxell and Cooper (2015) moved from an understanding that political intervention led to the policy gap between public policy planning purposes with the outcome of public policy in the field. At least there are eight forms of political intervention that contribute to policy failure, namely:

1. Overcalling: Ignoring the limit of resources.
2. Impatience: Governments tend to rush in implementing policies.
3. Rotation of the regime.
4. Distraction and noise: Political officials often use policy for short-term goals, namely gaining constituents.
5. Temporal misalignment: Short-term oriented policy.
6. Neglect and decay: Policymakers often fail to see the impact and connectivity of a policy with other issues.

7. Multiple jurisdictions: The overlapping authority between institutions or levels causes policies.
8. Events: Budget constraints or the lack of experts.

Despite agreeing to use the policy gap conceptualization initiated by Foxell and Cooper (2015) as a framework, we argue that the cultural dimension at the community level also plays a vital role in widening the policy gap. It is necessary to deeply understand a specific community's cultural and social context to achieve policy goals (Demaio, 2011). Based on this explanation, this article typifies two policy gaps: political and cultural policy gaps. The following discussion will describe the policy gap that occurred in the weakness of the two policies for handling the pandemic in Bangkalan.

POLITICAL POLICY GAP: LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISPUTE IN THE BAN ON *MUDIK* (HOMECOMING) POLICY

This article elaborates on the weakness of the policies carried out by the Bangkalan. This section finds two policy gaps in the Bangkalan case: the inability to maintain the impact of specific policy implementation (neglect and decay) and overlapping authorities (multiple jurisdictions). Before the celebration of Eid which falls on May 15, 2021, both the provincial and Bangkalan government issued a state of alert following the decree of the Minister of Transport No. 13 of 2021, which restricts mobility from 6-17 May 2021 to prevent Covid-19 transmission (Bangkalan District Government, 2021a). However, there was misinformation spread among the Bangkalan locals that the government allowed them to come homecoming.

Through an official statement to the media on April 16, 2021, the Department of Transportation of East Java clarified that such information is untrue. Mobility during the Eid holiday only allowed for 'essential sectors,' such as business trips, medical treatment, and logistical transport (CNN Indonesia, 2021b). Furthermore, the head of the East Java Provincial Transport Department stated that in addition to referring to the Minister of Transportation decree, the public should pay attention to the health ministry circulars and Covid Task Force-19, which became the basis for the provincial government to ban back and forth on May 6-17, 2021 (Ginanjar, 2021). Following up on the provisions of the central and provincial governments, the district government, through the Bangkalan Regency Transportation Service, stated that it would implement a policy of prohibiting going home on the specified date in order to suppress the spread of Covid-19 in the area (Bangkalan Regency Government, 2021a).

Ironically, an ambiguous official statement from Bangkalan head of the district transportation office's traffic division on April 21, 2021, opened up opportunities for travelers to circumvent the provisions for the homecoming ban, *"For example, returning before that date [May 6-17], it is permissible because the ban is only on May 6 to 17, 2021"* (Arfa, 2021). By April 26, 2021, Bangkalan had obtained a yellow zone status with details of four positive patients being treated at the Syamrabu

Hospital and nine other patients self-isolating at their respective homes (Faisol, 2021a). Responding to the status, Bangkalan police stated that they would impose insulation at the entrance of the Suramadu Bridge and Kamal Port in Bangkalan. Although the partition was initially set to take effect on May 22, 2021, with a force of 207 security personnel, until May 26, 2021, the Bangkalan police have not been able to carry out the isolation because they still have to wait for instructions from the East Java Regional Police (Faikli, 2021; Zamachsari, 2021a).

The gap for the entry of homecomers re-emerged when the Bangkalan police chief stated that, referring to the categorization of the National Disaster Management Agency, on Eid al-Fitr, only residents from Surabaya, Sidoarjo, and Gresik were allowed to enter Bangkalan (Faisol, 2021a). Data shows that on May 2, 2021, a wave of homecomers will return, dominated by two-wheeled vehicle drivers from Surabaya to various districts on Madura Island, including Bangkalan, via the Suramadu Bridge. Since Friday, April 30, 2021, 65 registered Indonesian migrant workers have arrived in Bangkalan for Eid in his hometown. As many as 75 others will follow to arrive on Monday, May 3, 2021 (Zamachsari, 2021b). The partition policy was entirely held on May 6-17, 2021. The joint apparatus deployed 552 security personnel who were divided into four security posts at the entrance to the Suramadu Bridge, Kamal Port, Blega District, and Tanjung Bumi District, plus two monitoring posts at the Tanah Merah market and the Sinjay Restaurant in Burneh (Bangkalan District Government, 2021b).

However, the imposition of the ban on going home on May 6-17 did not dampen the interest of the people of Bangkalan to return to their hometowns. This is coupled with the fact that inspections that target four-wheeled vehicle users make it easier for two-wheeled travelers to Bangkalan to cross the Suramadu Bridge (Faizal, 2021; Faisol, 2021b). In fact, on the first day of the lockdown, some travelers to Bangkalan were determined to use motorboats to cross the Madura Strait at a rate of Rp. 200,000 to Rp. Four hundred thousand to avoid scrutiny (Prabowo, 2021). This article identified two policy gaps at the provincial and district government levels through narrative analysis.

First, neglect and decay. Inconsistency is increasingly visible at the district level when the attitude of public officials seems not to be committed to the aim of preventing the pandemic, such as the head of the Bangkalan transportation service who does not take seriously with travelers from Gresik, Surabaya, and Sidoarjo going to Bangkalan before May 6, 2021, as well as loose supervision for two-wheeled drivers. In the case of the ban on going home in Bangkalan, both the provincial and district governments, instead of exercising discretion by taking preventive action, both chose to let travelers who come to Bangkalan before May 6, 2021. Consequently, neglect and decay then occur. Two weeks after Eid al-Fitr, Bangkalan Regency, which was initially a yellow zone, became a red zone as of 8 June 2021, with details of the spike in active cases increasing by 1.362% (190 cases),

the death rate increasing by 12% (188 cases), and approximately 24 new cases per day per week (Jayani, 2021).

Another severe impact as a result of the omission is the burden of the collapse of the availability of health facilities in Bangkalan as of June 8, 2021, with details of 3 health workers have died and 76 others tested positive, so the emergency room at the Rato Ebu Hospital and two puskesmas in Arosbaya and Tongguh have to be temporarily closed so that patients have to be hospitalized referred to outside the region, one of which is Surabaya (Jayani, 2021). Through executive order, the East Java Provincial Health Office requested six hospitals in Surabaya to receive referrals for Covid-19 patients from Bangkalan (Liputan6.com, 2021). The decision then has consequences for the Surabaya local government, namely an increase in the bed occupancy rate in Surabaya from the previous 21% spike to 53% as of June 13, 2021, due to receiving referrals from Bangkalan (Widiyana, 2021).

The second gap is multiple jurisdictions. The overlapping authority appears when the Bangkalan police, even though they are supported by sufficient personnel, cannot optimally take action in response to the large number of travelers who take the opportunity before the imposition of the homecoming ban because they have to wait for the police authorities at the provincial level to give instructions. In the case of the Bangkalan transportation agency, it is also unable to act to determine the blocking points because this is the authority of the police. The distribution of authority for implementing policies that are not adaptive to the local context also has an impact on not achieving the policy objectives in breaking the Covid-19 chain in Bangkalan, which was brought through the flow of homecomers and migrant workers so that it later transformed into a Covid-19 spike in the district. The following section will analyze the impact of the Suramadu Bridge blocking policy.

MASS PROTEST AGAINST BAN ON *MUDIK* POLICY

In response to the Covid-19 crisis in Bangkalan after the Eid al-Fitr commemoration, Surabaya City Government immediately constructed a checkpoint at the exit gate of Suramadu Bridge. Roosa (2021) reports that this blocking ensures that drivers entering the city of Surabaya are truly Covid-19 negative. The swab test was carried out at the Suramadu Bridge and the Ujung-Kamal Ferry Pier. The blockage is carried out for approximately 12 days, starting from June 6, 2021. The decision is a follow-up to the result of a joint agreement in the East Java Forkopimda coordination meeting between the Surabaya City Government and the Bangkalan Regency Government, which will take place on 6 June 2021. Eri Cahyadi, as Mayor of Surabaya, took this step to minimize residents' mobility, especially from Bangkalan, which has a red zone status, so that there is no spread of active cases of Covid-19 in the Surabaya area.

The public's rejection of the isolation post policy on the Surabaya side erupted on the morning of June 18, when dozens of drivers from the Madura side who were about to go to work in Surabaya damaged the administration desk containing stacks

of antigen test files because they thought the picket officers were lame so that the driver's ID cards were lost (Faizal, 2021b). Responding to the incident, Fathur Rozi Zubair, a charismatic Bangkalan cleric, regretted the action and tried to convince the public that the isolation post was not discrimination against Madurese residents but a joint effort to suppress the pandemic both in Bangkalan and Surabaya. (Yohanes, 2021). Furthermore, Zubair also asked the authorities to scrutinize the isolation post.

However, a mass organization such as GAS Jatim considered this policy discriminatory against Madurese because neighboring areas, such as Sidoarjo and Gresik, were not restricted (Salman, 2021a). Based on this narrative, GAS Jatim staged a demonstration against Eri Cahyadi and threatened to mobilize a more extensive crowd if the demonstration was prohibited (Kurnia, 2021). On June 17, Surabaya Covid-19 Task Force had a hearing session with GAS Jatim and MADAS (*Madura Asli*, Madurese Indigenous Organization) (Mubyarsah, 2021). As a result of the hearing session, GAS Jatim still demands that there be not only checkpoints from Bangkalan to Surabaya but also, at many points on the Surabaya border, should be abolished. At the same time, MADAS agreed with the government's clarification (Salman, 2021a; Mubyarsah, 2021).

The hearings still have not been able to reduce the discrimination against ethnic Madurese issue. On June 21, 2021, hundreds of Bangkalan residents calling themselves *Koalisi Masyarakat Madura Bersatu* (United Madura Community Coalition) mobilized mass protest at the Surabaya City Hall, demanding an apology from Eri Cahyadi because his policy was deemed to have been 'racist' (CNN Indonesia, 2021c). Even though Eri Cahyadi had met the protestors and the crowd voluntarily dispersed, there were still protests against the partition policy in the following days. The situation turmoiled at dawn on June 22, 2021, when a group of Madurese teenagers harassed healthcare workers and police officers stationed at the Suramadu checkpoint by throwing firecrackers (Muchlis et al., 2021; Salman, 2021c). Considering the escalation of the conflict, Forkopimda and the East Java Covid-19 Task Force agreed to close the blocking posts on the Suramadu Bridge both on the Surabaya and Bangkalan sides and only oblige the community, especially from Bangkalan, to show an exit permit papers that can be obtained in the sub-district office (Arfani & Irawan, 2021). The following section explains that the policy gap is political at the local government level and a cultural and developing policy gap at the community level.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL APPROACH AND ULAMA AS AN OPINION LEADER

Besides neglect and decay and multiple jurisdictions factors, the failure to handle Covid-19 cases in Bangkalan can also be explained from a cultural perspective. Riski's findings (2021) found that many Madurese do not wear masks and ignore health protocols when doing activities outside their homes. Many people do not believe in Covid-19 due to conspiracy theories. According to Taufiqurrahman

in Nasrullah (2019), Madura's cultural specificity is not similar to other communities' ethnography. It is the loyalty and obedience to four key figures in Madurese society: *buppa*, *babbu*, *guru*, and *ban rato* (father, mother, teacher, and government leader). Compliance Madurese to the figure of the teacher plays in the second hierarchy level after their parents (*buppa*, *babbu*).

In this case, the teacher refers to *Kiai*, who owns a *pesantren* or, at least, a religious school teacher. The teacher's role is stressed in the context of morality shown in the life hereafter. The obedience of the Madurese to this teacher figure is a distinctive marker of their culture that cannot be doubted (Nasrullah, 2019). Based on the hierarchy of obedience figures of the Madurese community, the government leadership (*rato*) is at the last level. Someone achieves this figure not from ethnicity but because of the achievements in achieving that status. In reality, not all Madurese have the opportunity to achieve this position due to educational and economic constraints. Thus, the opportunity to occupy this figure is relatively tricky and rare for Madurese to achieve.

Abdussalam on Sari et al. (2019) stated that Madura's human development index (HDI) tends to be low. This is one factor that makes it challenging to overcome social problems, including the problem of fulfilling health in the community. In addition, poverty and low education also affect the understanding of the Madurese community on the importance of paying attention to health issues (Riski, 2021). Surokim also explained that poverty and education are the main problems that impact the health literacy abilities of residents in Madura. For people in Madura, if the problem is not directly related to their lives, they will take it for granted. According to Abdussalam, blocking the Suramadu Bridge is a severe warning to the Madurese community to make them aware of the Covid-19 virus. The local government's socialization has only effectively reached the Madurese urban community. Meanwhile, people living in rural areas, such as those currently infected with the Covid-19 virus, are at most not maximized (Riski, 2021). The increase in Covid-19 in Madura can be suppressed by involving community leaders in areas with legitimacy in the Madurese community. The approach cannot be top-down, as the government is direct to the people, but by the socio-cultural approach.

Demaio (2011) stated that local wisdom and indigenous knowledge are essential tools to support the promotion's success of promoting health in a community. Local wisdom needs to be used as a lesson to alleviate the Covid-19 problem in Madura. The sociocultural aspect is considered ignored by policymakers, while Madurese had nearly unconditional trust in *ulama* (religious leaders) more than state officials. Reflecting on the case of Covid-19 in Madura, it is time for the government to take a sociocultural approach to the lower level. The sense of citizens' trust in the government must be re-emerged, so that social influence on the community can be turned into social compliance and become an agreement to support government programs. In Madura, local religious leaders become people whom residents hear.

As an illustration, the Bangkalan regent, together with the head of the local police, the military district commander, as well as prominent *ulama* figures such as Kyai Aschal and Kyai Nasih Ashal, took part in promoting awareness of Covid-19 and encouraged health protocols to a local citizen. The involvement of *Kiai* in the circumference broadcast is intended to get attention from the public Bangkalan. Because, for the Madurese, religious figures play an essential role in their lives. In addition, the Bangkalan Regent hopes that inviting *ulama* to this mobile broadcasting activity can help residents better understand the recommendations of the Islamic religion in dealing with pandemics or disease outbreaks. The collaboration carried out by the Bangkalan Regency Government with security forces, religious leaders, and all elements of society in Madura is very important in preventing the spread of Covid-19 (Ramadan, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The Bangkalan case shows that the weakness of the Covid-19 control policy is a consequence of the inability to anticipate the political policy gap at the local government level and the cultural policy gap at the community level. This article identifies two main policy gaps. First, neglect and decay, alongside multiple jurisdictions, occurred in the homecoming ban policy. Second, cultural factors should not be ignored in the public policy-making process. The findings of this article show the lack of effort by the Surabaya City government to build participatory dialogue with informal elites in Bangkalan, such as *ulama* and ethnic-based organizations, before implementing the partition policy. Building on this research, it is possible to conduct further research to explore a similar theme with another focus, such as the best practice of policies on handling the pandemic or the role of the local institution in dealing with the pandemic.

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