

Article

Adaptive leadership of the Indonesian government in handling the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: As a global case, COVID-19 has raised concerns from various circles. To overcome these problems, serious steps are needed, especially from the strategic level that plays an important role in formulating policies. This paper tries to describe the steps taken by the Indonesian government, especially the president as the top leader in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. The method used is qualitative description through references that cover various topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in terms of strategic decision making by government leaders. Adaptive leadership as a leader's ability to deal with various challenges in the midst of conditions filled with uncertainty is very important. Decisions taken by the Indonesian government are based on various considerations, such as economic, geographical, cultural and sociological. The research findings show that in the implementation, the President of Indonesia has taken various concrete steps that have major implications on different sectors. This ultimately led the country to achieve success in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: adaptive leadership; pandemic; COVID-19; government; Indonesia

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 case that emerged in 2019 has brought major changes to various sectors of human life. Although the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared that the COVID-19 pandemic ended on 5 May 2023, the issue that had shaken the world for almost three years had caused great concern from various circles. In Indonesia alone, these concerns are increasing along with the rapid spike in cases in a short period of time, both domestically and abroad. This is exacerbated by the lack of readiness of several important elements to fight the coronavirus.

Seeing the high rate at which the virus was spreading enough to require the government to immediately take strategic steps by establishing anticipatory policies to overcome the impact of COVID-19 (Sukatri et al., 2021). On 31 March 2020, President Jokowi held a press conference to announce to the public the policy he has chosen to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic being faced by the global community. At the press conference, it was said that the Indonesian government chose the "LargeScale Social Restrictions" or "Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar" (PSBB) policy in response to this health emergency (Liu and Sukmariningsih 2021; Ristyawati 2020).

The government implemented the PSBB in an effort to stop the chain of the coronavirus. While most public facilities were closed, important sectors such as healthcare facilities, markets, and minimarkets continued to operate during PSBB.

The public supports this measure as it is considered to reduce disease transmission while maintaining their purchasing power. PSBB is an effective strategy to break the chain of coronavirus spread, but its success depends on people's awareness to avoid crowds and adhere to health protocols when outdoors. PSBB is considered more preferential than lockdown, which prohibits people from leaving their homes and halts all transport and office activities. Therefore, the implementation of PSBB is considered a better solution in dealing with this pandemic (Nasruddin and Haq, 2020).

Although the Indonesian government has determined the end of the pandemic status through Presidential Decree No. 17/2023 concerning the Determination of the End of the 2019 Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic Status in Indonesia, the dynamics that the Indonesian government had faced during the handling of the pandemic are still an interesting topic to research. Before choosing a big step by implementing PSBB, the Indonesian government was faced with a number of alternative choices to be able to overcome this complex problem. In addition, the presence of various factors, such as economic, geographical, cultural and sociological factors, also added to the government's considerations to be more careful in making decisions. In this context, the role of leadership at various levels of government is needed to effectively manage the crisis. The expected leaders are those who are able to understand and respond positively to situations that are full of uncertainty.

In line with this phenomenon, this paper attempts to describe how the steps taken by the government of Indonesia in handling the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the role of leadership (president) as head of state and head of government. A number of previous studies have tended to discuss the process as well as the results of decision-making, as well as its impact on the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The uniqueness of this research lies in the in-depth analysis of local dynamics and how the Indonesian president uses adaptive leadership principles to overcome new and unprecedented challenges.

2. Materials and methods

This paper is a descriptive qualitative research, which aims to describe the reality of a phenomenon through a systematic process of data interpretation. This is in line with the purpose of qualitative research which is intended to give meaning to a phenomenon that occurs and becomes the object of research (Moleong, 2007). While descriptive research is intended to provide an overview of the real conditions of the object of research, through data in the form of writing.

The data used in this research is secondary data obtained from literature studies by relying on information from various references or literature (Rosady, 2020). The data collection technique in this study is to use internet research methods and other literature studies. Various secondary data used include reputable international journals, accredited national journals and mass media articles, print and online media related to the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on examining pandemic handling efforts made by the Indonesian Government under the leadership of President Joko Widodo as listed in **Table 1**. I processed the existing data using a critical reading

approach. Critical reading is one of the important reading methods (Sunani et al., 2021).

Table 1. Secondary data sources.

No.	Secondary Data Sources	Total Data	Description
1	Journal	19	National and international journals related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• COVID-19 Pandemic• Adaptive Leadership• Research Methods
2	Books	6	Books and bookplates are related: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• COVID-19 Pandemic• Adaptive Leadership• Research method
3	Legislation	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government Regulation No. 21/2020• Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1/2020• Minister of Health Regulation No. 9/2020
4	Online News Media	6	National news related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Decision making for COVID-19 countermeasures in Indonesia

“The Large-Scale Social Restrictions” or “Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar” (PSBB) policy was implemented after the issuance of Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 21/2020, dated 31 March 2020, three weeks after the first case was announced in Indonesia. The regulation allowed for the implementation of PSBB and local governments can implement it with the approval of the Minister of Health. President Joko Widodo has the belief that the spread of COVID-19 can be done with Physical Distancing. Although the Indonesian Medical Association considers regional quarantine to be more effective in breaking the chain of the spread of COVID-19 than the implementation of PSBB, the implementation of regional quarantine was not enforced by Joko Widodo with economic, geographical, cultural, and sociological considerations of Indonesian society that are different from other countries that implement regional quarantine (Siagian, 2020). According to Joko Widodo, regional quarantine was not chosen after comparing the policies from other countries, which were considered not to guarantee the successful implementation of regional quarantine without causing problems. According to him, there is no one definite formula for overcoming the COVID-19 problem (Herdiana, 2020).

3.2. Conditions in Indonesia during the implementation of PSBB

Several regions in Indonesia implemented PSBB, including areas in DKI Jakarta, Banten Province (Tangerang Regency, Tangerang City, South Tangerang City also called the Greater Tangerang area) and all areas in West Java Province, East Java Province (Surabaya City, Sidoarjo Regency, Gresik Regency which is the Greater area) and South Sulawesi Province precisely in Makassar City (Herdiana, 2020; Wibowo, 2021).

The PSBB policy is regulated nationally through the Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 21/2020 on Large-Scale Social Restrictions in the

Context of Accelerating the Handling of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The regulation is operationally explained through the Minister of Health Regulation No. 9/2020 on Guidelines for Large-Scale Social Restrictions in the Context of Accelerating the Handling of Corona Virus Disease 2019:

- a) The definition used as the basis for understanding which Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) in the Article 1 Paragraph (1) is defined as “Restriction of certain activities of residents in an area suspected of being infected with Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in such a way as to prevent the possibility of spreading Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)”.
- b) The PSBB process and procedure in which to be able to implement PSBB, an area must fulfil 2 (two) criteria as described in Article 2, namely: a). The number of cases and/or the number of deaths due to disease increases and spreads significantly and quickly to several areas. b). There is an epidemiological link with similar events in other regions or countries (Green, 2020).
- c) Regulates what activities are restricted according to Article 13 there are 6 activities consisting of: a) School and workplace holidays. b). Restrictions on religious activities. d) Restrictions on activities in public places or facilities. d). Restrictions on social and cultural activities. e) Restrictions on modes of transport. f). Restrictions on other activities specifically related to defence and security aspects (Green, 2020).

The implementation of the PSBB policy sparked in various responses from the community. The majority of the population felt the negative impacts, such as economic difficulties due to not being able to work as usual, which resulted in difficulties in fulfilling life needs, especially for the lower class (Masa et al., 2022; Nasruddin and Haq 2020). Restriction of movement also has an impact on physical decline and psychological impact due to excessive concern about this virus. The government’s efforts to anticipate the spread of the coronavirus have raised concerns among the community, not only regarding the risk of being infected, but also the PSBB policies imposed in some areas (Agustino, 2020; Nasruddin and Haq, 2020), which limit their activities and mobility.

Although it was a bog risks, this policy is needed to be done to break the chain of spreading the coronavirus (Nasruddin and Haq, 2020). Policies that restrict people’s activities are especially difficult for those who earn a living in the informal sector. For example, online motorcycle and taxi drivers face the challenge of making ends meet and paying their motorbike instalments (Iskar et al., 2021; Nasruddin and Haq, 2020). PSBB also results in a decline in people’s income and weakened purchasing power, which hinders their ability to buy basic necessities (Nasruddin and Haq, 2020). A strict enforcement of the PSBB to successfully prevent the coronavirus from spreading, meant that the mobility of the community became increasingly limited, which further complicated their economic conditions. The short-term economic problem that the local government needed to prepare a mitigation strategy for was the community’s ability to access food, especially basic foodstuffs, which was very weak or almost nonexistent (Nasruddin and Haq, 2020).

3.3. The Indonesian president's successful efforts to combat the COVID-19 Pandemic

President Joko Widodo explained a number of steps taken by the Indonesian government in facing the COVID-19 pandemic that hit Indonesia and countries around the world since 2020 (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika, 2020). According to the president, some of the successful steps need taken include:

- a) The first step taken by the government was to carry out macro and micro management effectively so that all parties could participate in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. The President said that Indonesia and all countries have no experience in dealing with this pandemic. When most of his ministers suggested that the government lockdown, President Joko Widodo had other considerations.
- b) The second step taken by the government was to synergise and collaborate well between the central government, local governments, and the Indonesian National Army and Indonesian National Police. This could be seen from the number of COVID-19 vaccines that have been administered to the public, which has reached 448 million doses.
- c) The third step taken by the government is to carry out “gas and brake” management in order to balance health and the national economy. The President said that this step is not an easy thing to do.
- d) Step four, the government also made decisions and took speedy action in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the speed of action is adjusted to the data in the field.
- e) Fifth, the large participation of the community in handling the pandemic and the national economy is considered by the President as the most supportive step for the government's success in handling the pandemic. This participation makes all parties involved in handling the COVID-19 pandemic in the country (Srii003, 2023).

Some of the measures adopted from countries that have successfully reduced the spread of the coronavirus include the implementation of physical distancing, closing schools and campuses by replacing home learning methods, stopping the operation of factories, tourist attractions, malls, private offices, cinemas, and other crowded places, as well as implementing COVID-19 tests such as rapid tests and swabs. In addition, regional isolation is also carried out in the form of PSBB, conversion of hotels and conference halls into health facilities for handling the coronavirus, among others (Agustino, 2020; Wardhana and Timur, 2021).

However, there are still some important steps to take that have not been implemented. Firstly, data collection on infected individuals and data transparency to the public so that they can avoid direct contact with exposed people. Second, increasing the number of tests to detect COVID-19 infection. Third, strengthening health workers and personal protective equipment from areas with low infection rates to areas with high cases, including the provision of PPE, medicines, and medical equipment. Fourth, as a final step, strict implementation of microlockdown to control the spread of the coronavirus in Indonesia (Agustino, 2020).

During the transition from pandemic to endemic phase, vigilance must be

maintained. For this reason, monitoring of all cases must continue. Vaccination of booster doses, administration of medicines, and vitamins must continue. The role of the community in maintaining the implementation of health protocols also needs to be encouraged. As of mid-March, more than 450 million doses of vaccine have been administered. This brings Indonesia into the top five countries in the world with the most vaccinations. The number consists of 203.8 million first dose vaccinations, 174.8 million second dose vaccinations, plus 68.5 million first booster dose vaccinations, and 3 million second booster dose vaccinations (Cyprianus Anto Saptawalyono, 2023).

After being considered successful in handling the COVID-19 pandemic, the COVID-19 handling award was conceived as an appreciation to all components of the nation, both at the central and regional levels, who worked hard to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic following their respective roles and duties. Some of the awards include:

- a) Best Vaccination Centres
- b) Best Telemedicine Service
- c) Best Laboratory
- d) Best Media and Influencers
- e) Best Religious Organisations Supporting the Government in Handling the Pandemic
- f) Best Academics Supporting the Government in Handling the Pandemics
- g) Best Friendly Countries Supporting the Indonesian Government in Handling the Pandemic
- h) Best State-Owned Enterprises Supporting the Pandemic Handling Services
- i) Best International Organisations Supporting the Indonesian Government in Handling the Pandemics
- j) Best Foreign Private Sector Supporting the Indonesian Government in Handling the Pandemics
- k) Best Domestic Private Sector Supporting the Government in Handling the Pandemic
- l) Non-Governmental Organisations Supporting the Indonesian Government in Handling the Best Pandemic
- m) Best District
- n) Best Police Unit
- o) Best Province

3.4. The role of leadership in encouraging the success of the president of Indonesia in overcoming COVID-19 through the PSBB policy

The President as the Head of State and Head of Government is a combination of the role of an authority who tends to be political and a leader who is needed to drive change that cannot fulfil the interests of all stakeholders (Heifetz, 1994; Syauket, 2021). However, when a leader has authority, the scope of his leadership will be wider because he has political power. Heifetz in the book “Leadership Without Easy Answers” formulates that Leadership is a simultaneous activity to mobilise people to adapt to challenging realities or problems.

Along the way, a leader will face a variety of problems that can be categorised into two typologies: technical and adaptive problems (Heifetz, 1994). In further development, (Heifetz et al., 2009) also suggested the concept of adaptive leadership as the ability to adjust to the problems faced (external) and the circumstances within the leader (internal). This opinion is also in line with the theory of adaptive leadership proposed by Anderson et al. (2015). Adaptive leadership in this context is understood as the ability of a leader to adapt and direct change in the face of complex challenges. As can be seen in **Figure 1**, the challenges referred to by Anderson et al. (2015) show a spectrum consisting of technical challenges to adaptive challenges.

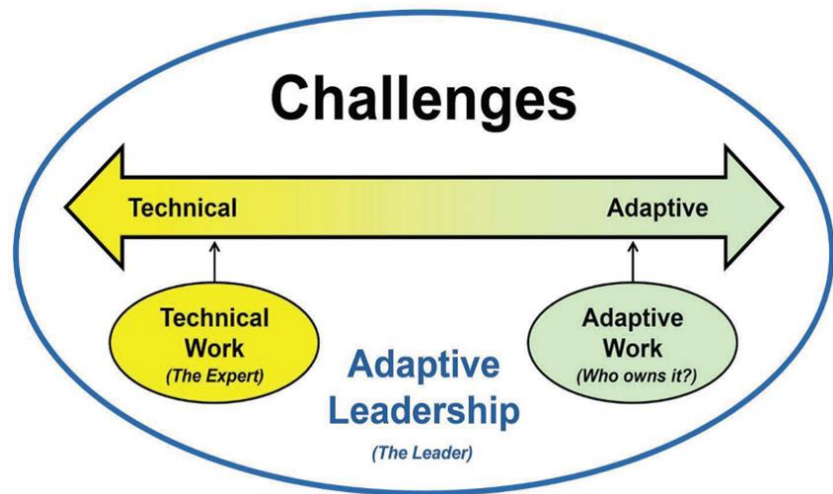


Figure 1. Adaptive leadership typology.

Source: Anderson et al., 2015.

We see from the typology above that technical problems are real problems that can be seen, and strategies can be formulated to determine the desired output. This work can usually be completed by someone who has expertise in a particular field or a technocrat. Meanwhile, adaptive problems have no certainty and cannot be predicted. The obstacle is that there is a disparity between the ideas brought by the leader and the situation that occurs, the biggest challenge is when bringing the distance closer through combining political power, resources and intelligence to turn things around (Syauket, 2021).

The reason Heifetz et al. (2009) adaptive leadership theory fits President Jokowi's leadership style is that if seen in the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the responsibility of a president and as head of state or head of government, meaning that the President is a leader who has authority, so the scope of his leadership will be wider because he has political power (Puspita et al., 2022). Handling the COVID-19 Pandemic is the responsibility of the President as a Leader who has authority, so the scope of his leadership will be wider because he has political power.

The COVID-19 pandemic raises uncertainties both in terms of time and scope and impact, the spread of COVID-19 cannot be controlled even though various prevention efforts continue to be made. But it is precisely in pandemic conditions

like this that the resilience of a leader is tested (Rohaniah, 2022). In conditions like this, an adaptive leadership attitude is needed, namely leadership in the midst of uncertainty, both technical and adaptive, which can be done by the President and of course the chances of success are very high. Leadership is an important factor, especially in determining legal policies to save lives. In addition, good leadership also establishes legal policies that improve and simplify coordination between ministries and between the central and provincial governments. Adaptive leadership as described by Heifetz et al. (2009), has a high tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. In this case, President Jokowi demonstrated this attitude through bold decisions taken in uncertain situations.

Another form of adaptive leadership emphasises the importance of identifying problems that cannot be solved by technical solutions alone. In handling the COVID-19 pandemic, President Jokowi faces complex challenges, including coordination between various sectors. COVID-19 poses a threat to the Indonesian government if it cannot balance economic activity (political interests) and public health (urgency). This can be seen from the government's response to handling the coronavirus, which chose a technical approach as if it were involved in a physical war by forming an acceleration team for handling the virus handled by the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment (Syauket, 2021). In addition, President Joko Widodo used his constitutional right to issue Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1/2020 on State Financial Policy and Financial System Stability for Handling the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic and/or in the Context of Facing Threats that Endanger the National Economy and/or Financial System Stability (Carel et al., 2020; Syauket, 2021).

Indonesian President Joko Widodo's Adaptive Leadership attitude was appropriate in handling the COVID-19 Pandemic to save people's lives, which is a form of Adaptive Governance because the COVID-19 Pandemic needs to be responded effectively by involving all relevant authorities. The policy in the form of issuing Regulation in lieu of Law No. 1/2020, especially as stipulated in Article 27 paragraph (1), is very prone to corruption, given the large state budget used to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. The Constitutional Rights of the President of the Republic of Indonesia by issuing Presidential Decree No. 7/2020 concerning the Task Force for the Acceleration of COVID-19 Handling, Government Regulation No. 21/2020 concerning LargeScale Social Restrictions in the Context of Accelerating Covid-19 Handling is a form of Adaptive Leadership of the President as Head of State and Head of Government is appropriate and justified by law (Syarifudin, 2004).

During the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, President Jokowi did not only focus on formulating policies. Because according to Heifetz et al. (2009), leadership needs to be supported by public involvement in the adaptation process. In its realisation, President Jokowi as the highest leader actively communicates with the public. The President directs all levels of government to always explain the steps taken, and does not stop inviting the public to jointly participate in the prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strong leadership in crises is needed to provide a clear direction for crisis management and foster public trust in the system developed to get through the crisis. In a crisis situation, not all public leaders can show adequate leadership, which

results in the erosion of leadership legitimacy, and can even cause a crisis of confidence in the system. Indonesia's experience at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak shows that one of the heaviest burdens is the politicisation of the pandemic among key government actors. The failure of synergy and coordination between elements in responding to the pandemic threat will be paid dearly with a serious humanitarian crisis.

4. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world is a difficult test for everyone. However, this condition needs to be addressed immediately so as not to cause greater negative impacts. In this context, the government, which plays an important role as a policy maker, must be able to formulate the right strategy to solve this problem. The role of good leadership in times of crisis is very important to provide clear guidance in handling the crisis and building public trust in the agreed policies. At the leadership level, the issuance of various policies related to efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic is a form of Adaptive Leadership from the President of Indonesia as Head of State and Head of Government is considered appropriate and justified by law. The Indonesian government took the policy step of "Large-Scale Social Restrictions" or "Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar" (PSBB) in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic to be adjusted to regional conditions in Indonesia. However, a number of violations caused by the low awareness of citizens are still often found. Therefore, although it has succeeded in temporarily suppressing the spread of the virus, PSBB is still considered not effective enough to tackle COVID-19.

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