

## **RELIGION OF PANDEMIC: DELEGITIMIZATION OF AUTHORITY DURING THE COVID-19 ERA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study delves into the delegitimization of religion during the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing not only the social aspects of religious life but also the social significance of religion itself. It explores how this delegitimization, particularly in Islam, has altered the sacredness of religious life. This qualitative research, utilizing literature review and media analysis, aims to uncover the forms of religious delegitimization that have transformed the face and substance of religion during the pandemic. It investigates 1) how this process has changed the legitimacy of religion, 2) the patterns of belief and worship, and 3) the context and factors underlying this delegitimization. The findings reveal that religious delegitimization during the pandemic is a part of the process of objectifying religion in a health disruption, highlighting changes due to COVID-19 regulations, understanding of religious sacredness, and the authority of religious figures in the context of religion and COVID-19 controversies.*

**Keywords:** Religion of Pandemic; Delegitimization of Authority, COVID-19 Era

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally impacted social life, leading to the delegitimization of religion. This process stemmed from health-based regulations by governmental bodies conflicting with established religious beliefs and practices. Religion, once an absolute influence, has been reinterpreted through diverse social forces, particularly within health and security paradigms. This trend decreases religion's credibility as a social guide, coinciding with health protocols in worship matters. At the height of the pandemic, the lessened influence of religious leaders and the dislocation of worship places and practices were evident. First, the validity of religious doctrines was questioned, and their truth was doubted by various groups. For example, congregational Friday prayers in mosques were replaced with Dhuhr (midday) prayers at home (Syamsuddin, 2020). Secondly, the gradual abandonment of valued practices, such as direct religious learning with religious figures, shifted towards social media (Regus, 2022). This overview reveals a fundamental shift post-pandemic, transforming the sacred into the mundane.

The issue of religious delegitimization has been underanalyzed from a macro perspective concerning the context of disruptions like the pandemic. Existing studies tend to focus on micro aspects, overlooking major forces structuring religious life, such as great disruptions (Ikenberry & Fukuyama, 1999) or technological disruptions affecting religious life (Rashid, 2019). Consequently, three trends emerge in the discussion of religious delegitimization during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, delegitimization is linked with changing religious commitments within religious communities (Miski & Hamdan, 2019). Second, it relates to religious authority where the sanctity of religion is questioned (Abraham & Stewart, 2019; Hayati, 2020). Third, it examines health policy impacts eroding sacred or absolute religious values (Khairunnisa, 2020). The macro context underpinning changes in religious life remains underexplored. The pandemic actually justifies the ongoing changes in religious life.

This paper positions religious analysis within a macro context, foundational for changes in religious life. The delegitimization of religion during the COVID-19 pandemic is inseparable from social and historical changes, presenting religious social facts as objective realities. Specifically, this paper addresses how religious delegitimization unfolds in social life and its effects on religiosity during and post-pandemic. The analysis provides a deep understanding of the factors causing delegitimization and comprehensive knowledge to formulate more targeted religious policies.

Religious delegitimization may occur due to shifts in religious ideology

and authority during the COVID-19 pandemic. Religion, once considered foundational, is now questioned or debated for its truthfulness. In other words, the loss of truth occurs as religion no longer possesses a single truth, due to open truth production. Three arguments are presented. First, the weakening of religious doctrines and the deauthorizing of religious figures coincide with the strengthening of governmental or power center authority for health and security reasons. Second, delegitimization is found in the loss of religious purity and practices due to increasingly dominant and coercive government policies. Third, delegitimization is a manifestation of the dysfunction of worship places due to the privatization of religious practices. Thus, the process of delegitimization occurs with the power shift of religion in relation to government policies.

The data for this paper is based on qualitative research from online sources discussing cases like replacing Friday prayers with Dhuhr prayers at home, mosque closures, home congregational prayers, defiance against religious figures, and insults towards scholars. This research involved systematic documentation and analysis of online news with the main keyword "COVID-19 pandemic," focusing on news discussing religious delegitimization in social life during the pandemic leading to religious shifts. The data was interpreted to understand the format, process, and reasoning behind religious delegitimization in social life.

### **DELEGITIMIZATION OF RELIGION**

Delegitimization refers to the loss of belief or power from something established as a result of challenges due to an organization's failure to reproduce previously legitimized actions. This occurs due to social, political, cultural, or intellectual factors (Regany et al., 2021). Shevsky describes delegitimization as a change in self-description within the system and territorial disintegration (Shevsky, 2020). In line with this, delegitimization is also connected to the process where a structure experiences a loss of collective coercive power (Berger et al., 1998; Ridgeway et al., 1998). Delegitimization is divided into two levels, ideological and systemic. Ideologically, religion is understood as a driving idea capable of creating consensus to mobilize mass and public opinion in competition with other ideological forces (Acanfora, 2010). Systemically, delegitimization strategy relates to antifascism in public life, on one hand, a parliamentary system that has a great framework in establishing the limits of democratic legitimacy (Chiarini, 2017, 2019). With this strategy, delegitimization has two levels that can influence the existing democratic systems in the world.

Knowledge derived from social interactions and processes provides individuals

with a nuanced understanding of societal dynamics, integrating both personal and collective aspects (Siti Rahma Harahap, 2020). Within this social fabric, religion plays a pivotal role, profoundly influenced by its dual nature as both an ideological belief system and a practical framework (Dani & Mediantara, 2020). It significantly shapes personality development and social interactions, particularly through the medium of religious institutions (Shofaussamawati, 2018; Kardis & Kardis, 2019). Religion, as a universal aspect of human societies, establishes cognitive and behavioral patterns that are inherently religious in nature (Ridla, 2014).

Religion commonly sets forth ethical and moral guidelines, establishing norms and criteria for discerning ethical behavior (Zainur, 2020). It also emerges as a fundamental aspect of life, addressing strong social needs in humans (Nizar, 2018). As a universal need, religion critically organizes and governs social life (Rakodi, 2021; Roh et al., 2015; Salamah Eka Susanti, 2019). Its primary social function is to foster a sense of community through socialization, serving as a form of social control over individuals and groups (Barker, 2021). In this context, religion serves as a moral compass, promoting virtuous conduct and discouraging malfeasance (Baker et al., 2020; Berggren & Bjørnskov, 2011), thus underscoring its indispensable role in societal well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted not only public health but also the economic sphere (Haryaningsih & Elyta, 2022). It reconfigured everyday activities, ranging from work and social engagements to religious practices (Febriyani et al., 2021; Diez-Sampedro et al., 2020). The pandemic's influence extended to altering human behavior and religious observances (Ivan Muhammad Agung, 2020). During the crisis, religion evolved into a crucial source of social and spiritual capital, providing moral support and fostering solidarity in facing collective challenges (Luqman & Ilhamdi, 2023). Concurrently, religious practices adapted, aligning with the shift toward virtual platforms necessitated by pandemic containment measures.

This pandemic-induced transition converted traditional face-to-face social and religious interactions into online experiences. Restrictions limited the number of participants in physical worship gatherings, leading to the cancellation of many in-person religious activities (Yanuarita & Haryati, 2021). Consequently, numerous religious institutions embraced technology to facilitate virtual worship (Febriyani et al., 2021; Diez-Sampedro et al., 2020). Services became accessible via online platforms, live streaming, or video conferencing. These changes particularly impacted Muslim communities, where customary congregational worships shifted to individual practice at home, with Friday prayers being replaced by Dhuhr prayers and Eid prayers

conducted domestically. This transformation signifies a profound alteration in religious traditions and practices, reflecting the pandemic's pervasive impact on religious life.

### DELEGITIMIZATION OF RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES AND WORSHIP PRACTICES

Religion traditionally calls its followers to live according to taught values, influencing both personal and social lives. Religion encompasses more than just doctrinal teachings; it also shapes individuals and communities. The pandemic era, and the period following it, has been marked by a growing suspicion that religious teachings could hinder efforts to combat COVID-19. This has led to a loss of the absolute nature of religion, where its truths were once accepted without question. Now, there are increasing inquiries regarding the validity of religion. Evidence shows instances of delegitimization of religious teachings as reported in the media (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Cases of Delegitimization of Religious Doctrines during COVID-19 Pandemic**

No.	Cases of religious delegitimization	Narrative	Source
1	Use of vaccines containing elements forbidden by Islamic doctrine	The government allows the use of such vaccines in emergency situations.	<a href="https://metro.tempo.co/read/1478882/fat-wa-mui-pedoman-pengurusan-jenazah-covid-19-memandikan-hingga-menguburkan">https://metro.tempo.co/read/1478882/fat-wa-mui-pedoman-pengurusan-jenazah-covid-19-memandikan-hingga-menguburkan</a>
2	Burial process in accordance with COVID-19 health protocols	The deceased who succumbed to COVID-19 are no longer washed, prayed for, and buried as customary for deceased Muslims.	<a href="https://metro.tempo.co/read/1478882/fat-wa-mui-pedoman-pengurusan-jenazah-covid-19-memandikan-hingga-menguburkan">https://metro.tempo.co/read/1478882/fat-wa-mui-pedoman-pengurusan-jenazah-covid-19-memandikan-hingga-menguburkan</a>
3	Postponement of departure for Hajj pilgrimage	The Hajj pilgrimage was postponed to reduce the spread of COVID-19 for the safety of pilgrims.	<a href="https://m.kominfo.go.id/content/detail/27142/dis-informasi-pembatalan-keberangkatan-haji-karena-dananya-sudah-habis/0/laporan_isu_hoaks">https://m.kominfo.go.id/content/detail/27142/dis-informasi-pembatalan-keberangkatan-haji-karena-dananya-sudah-habis/0/laporan_isu_hoaks</a>

No.	Cases of religious delegitimization	Narrative	Source
4	Restrictions on social gatherings or visits	Prohibition of face-to-face social visits during social distancing, even though in Islam, maintaining ties of kinship ( <i>silaturahmi</i> ) is considered obligatory.	<a href="https://islam.nu.or.id/ta-sawuf-akhlak/cara-silaturahmi-jarak-jauh-di-masa-pandemi-ypqth">https://islam.nu.or.id/ta-sawuf-akhlak/cara-silaturahmi-jarak-jauh-di-masa-pandemi-ypqth</a>
5	Changing Friday congregational prayers to Dhuhr prayers for Muslim men	During the pandemic, there was a recommendation to replace Friday congregational prayers with Dhuhr prayers, which is actually contrary to Islamic law.	<a href="https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4944622/sholat-jumat-diganti-dzuhur-karena-virus-corona-bagaimana-hukumnya">https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4944622/sholat-jumat-diganti-dzuhur-karena-virus-corona-bagaimana-hukumnya</a>
6	Distancing between individuals in rows during prayers	Spacing between individuals in rows during prayers due to the pandemic conflict with Islamic teachings that recommend forming tight rows.	<a href="https://www.republika.co.id/berita/q7f6rm366/shaf-sholat-berjarak-antisipasi-corona-bagaimana-hukumnya">https://www.republika.co.id/berita/q7f6rm366/shaf-sholat-berjarak-antisipasi-corona-bagaimana-hukumnya</a>
7	Replacing congregational prayers in mosque with praying at home	The replacement of congregational prayers in mosques with praying at home during the pandemic is examined from a Sharia perspective, highlighting the virtues of organizing congregational prayers in mosques.	<a href="https://kalam.sindonews.com/read/162598/69/salat-berjamaah-di-rumah-saat-pandemi-samakah-fadhilahnya-dengan-di-masjid-1599919785">https://kalam.sindonews.com/read/162598/69/salat-berjamaah-di-rumah-saat-pandemi-samakah-fadhilahnya-dengan-di-masjid-1599919785</a>
8	Wearing masks during prayers	Wearing masks during prayers during the pandemic contradicts Islamic teachings that prohibit men from covering their mouths during prayer.	<a href="https://dalamislam.com/shalat/hukum-shalat-pakai-masker">https://dalamislam.com/shalat/hukum-shalat-pakai-masker</a>

Table 1 demonstrates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the perception of certain Islamic doctrines. Initially, some factions considered the use of vaccines to be forbidden (*haram*) in Islam, citing their supposed inclusion of prohibited substances. However, as COVID-19 cases surged, the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia or MUI) sanctioned the use of vaccines, citing the urgency of the situation. The Islamic funeral process, which typically adheres to specific rites, had to conform to health protocols mandated by the government for pandemic management. In response, MUI issued a fatwa, declaring that the burial of COVID-19 victims should comply with both Islamic Sharia and health guidelines. The suspension of the Hajj pilgrimage serves as a further indication of how traditional religious doctrines


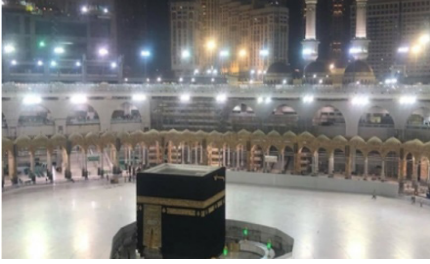



have been reevaluated in light of the pandemic.

Social activities traditionally involving direct interactions, such as returning to one's hometown during Eid, faced restrictions to uphold social distancing measures during the pandemic. As a result, these interactions transitioned to remote forms of communication, including exchanging news via text messages, phone calls, or through various digital platforms. The pandemic also led to the suspension of the obligatory Friday prayers for adult Muslim men, a preventive measure to curtail the spread of the coronavirus. This necessitated a reevaluation of the teachings related to congregational religious practices and their execution in public spaces, especially for worship purposes. Consequently, many mosques and prayer halls were closed for congregational prayers.

In response, Muslims adapted by conducting prayers at home. However, numerous scholars pointed out that, as per authentic hadiths from Bukhari and Muslim, congregational prayers in mosques hold greater virtue than prayers performed individually at home. The mandated use of face masks presented a conflict with Islamic practices, as Prophet Muhammad discouraged men from covering their mouths during prayers. This restriction was believed to interfere with the clarity of prayer recitations and the direct contact of the nose with the ground during prostrations, potentially diminishing the prayer's completeness. Figure 1 depicts a range of responses to the implementation of these health protocols, highlighting the ensuing controversies.

**Figure 1. Discourse on Implementation of Health Protocols in Religious Practices during COVID-19 Pandemic**

No.	Discourse	Visual Description	Source
1	Vaccines containing forbidden animal ingredients		<a href="https://nasional.sindonews.com/read/369790/15/mui-astrazene-ca-haram-tapi-boleh-digunakan-selengkapnya-di-inews-sore-ju-mat-pukul-1600-wib-1616141032">https://nasional.sindonews.com/read/369790/15/mui-astrazene-ca-haram-tapi-boleh-digunakan-selengkapnya-di-inews-sore-ju-mat-pukul-1600-wib-1616141032</a>

No.	Discourse	Visual Description	Source
2	Burial of COVID-19 victims under health protocol provisions		<a href="https://www.liputan6.com/cek-fakta/read/4394568/pelibatan-tokoh-agama-penting-hindari-konflik-cara-pemakaman-jenazah-covid-19">https://www.liputan6.com/cek-fakta/read/4394568/pelibatan-tokoh-agama-penting-hindari-konflik-cara-pemakaman-jenazah-covid-19</a>
3	Deserted atmosphere of the Kaaba due to travel restrictions amid pandemic		<a href="https://bkpp.demakkab.go.id/2020/06/penundaan-keberangkatan-ibadah-haji.html">https://bkpp.demakkab.go.id/2020/06/penundaan-keberangkatan-ibadah-haji.html</a>
4	Practice of the distancing of individuals in prayer rows ( <i>shaf</i> ) during the pandemic stirred controversy		<a href="https://republika.co.id/berita/r8ix-ht399/masjid-al-akbar-surabaya-belum-akan-rapatkan-shaf-shalat-jumat">https://republika.co.id/berita/r8ix-ht399/masjid-al-akbar-surabaya-belum-akan-rapatkan-shaf-shalat-jumat</a>
5	Congregational prayer with the use of masks due to COVID-19 pandemic		<a href="https://syariah.iainkediri.ac.id/shalat-menggunakan-masker/">https://syariah.iainkediri.ac.id/shalat-menggunakan-masker/</a>
6	Eid prayers conducted virtually due to COVID-19 pandemic		<a href="https://poskota.co.id/2021/07/20/timbulkan-pro-kontra-bagaimana-hukum-salat-idul-adha-berjemaah-secara-virtual-berikut-penjelasan">https://poskota.co.id/2021/07/20/timbulkan-pro-kontra-bagaimana-hukum-salat-idul-adha-berjemaah-secara-virtual-berikut-penjelasan</a>



The visuals depicted above highlight that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in profound alterations to the beliefs and worship practices within religious communities, especially among Muslims. Practices that were conventionally performed in congregational settings, characterized by collective participation, had to be reconfigured into individual practices, distancing worshippers from communal gatherings. This emergent pattern of worship, necessitated by the pandemic, established a new norm in religious observance. Consequently, Muslims have progressively adapted to these modified patterns of worship, embracing new routines in their religious practices without the resistance or dissent that was more prevalent before the pandemic.

### DELEGITIMIZATION OF RELIGIOUS FIGURES

During the pandemic, a notable process of delegitimization affected religious figures, characterized by their decreasing authorization. This led to a weakening of their traditional authority and a reduction in their influence on social organization. This shift occurred as the state and its agents assumed a more dominant role in the regulation of religious affairs, justified by concerns for public health and national security. Table 2 provides a detailed account of various instances where religious figures experienced delegitimization throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Tabel 2.**  
**Delegitimization of Religious Figures during COVID-19 Pandemic**

No.	Delegitimization of religious figures	Narrative	Source
1.	Defiance against religious figures (disregarding religious decrees).	People's resistance against fatwas issued by religious scholars regarding COVID-19 regulations	<a href="https://ibtimes.id/peran-ulama-kegelisahan-masyarakat-dan-mitigasi-covid-19/">https://ibtimes.id/peran-ulama-kegelisahan-masyarakat-dan-mitigasi-covid-19/</a>
2.	Refusal to study religion with religious figures	People preferred instant, non-personalized religious learning	<a href="https://jabar.nu.or.id/taushiyah/bahaya-belajar-agama-secara-instan-iKYwv">https://jabar.nu.or.id/taushiyah/bahaya-belajar-agama-secara-instan-iKYwv</a>
3.	Disparaging ulema or ignoring their existence	Disparagement of religious scholars who made decisions not in line with public opinion. Internet users assigned derogatory labels such as " <i>kiai sumbu pendek</i> " (short-fused clerics) or " <i>kiai kagetan</i> " (reactionary clerics)	<a href="https://sidogirimedia.com/delegitimasi-ulema-oleh-dunia-maya/">https://sidogirimedia.com/delegitimasi-ulema-oleh-dunia-maya/</a>

No.	Delegitimization of religious figures	Narrative	Source
4.	Controversy surrounding a sermon by a religious teacher who claimed that the coronavirus is an Illuminati weapon.	Statements by Ustad Zulkifli about the rampant coronavirus, claiming that COVID-19 is a creation of the Illuminati, sparked considerable controversy among internet users.	<a href="https://monitor.co.id/2020/03/17/kontroversi-ceramah-ustadz-zulkifli-sebut-virus-corona-senjata-illuminati/">https://monitor.co.id/2020/03/17/kontroversi-ceramah-ustadz-zulkifli-sebut-virus-corona-senjata-illuminati/</a>
5.	Controversy surrounding a video in which an Islamic scholar suggested that the coronavirus only affects hypocritical individuals	In a post, an internet user stated: "If he ever contracts COVID-19, we'll call him ... a hypocrite". Other internet users expressed wishes for the scholar to contract COVID-19.	<a href="https://www.suara.com/news/2020/04/17/073000/dikecam-ustaz-ya-hya-waloni-sebut-virus-corona-hanya-serang-orang-munafik">https://www.suara.com/news/2020/04/17/073000/dikecam-ustaz-ya-hya-waloni-sebut-virus-corona-hanya-serang-orang-munafik</a>

Table 2 suggests that the public frequently disregarded the fatwas issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), such as those concerning the suspension of congregational Friday prayers during the COVID-19 pandemic. These fatwas often sparked controversy, given the religious norms emphasizing the obligatory nature of Friday prayers. It is widely held that religion is best understood through the insights of knowledgeable religious scholars, who possess a deep comprehension of religious teachings and their practical application in the real world. Instantaneous learning methods, such as reading religious texts or accessing lectures via television or the internet, akin to a 'Google search' approach to religious education, carry the risk of misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and the propagation of incorrect beliefs, especially among younger audiences.

Disrespect towards religious scholars has become increasingly common, often manifesting in derogatory remarks about their viewpoints or actions. For example, when scholars confront various deviations, they are frequently met with cynical labels like "*kiai sumbu pendek*" or "*kiai kagetan*" (terms implying reactionary or short-fused clerics). Similarly, those who adopt a more persuasive approach to address deviations are quickly labeled as "*kiai liberal*" (liberal clerics). With public opinions spreading rapidly through social media, there is a noticeable shift in the power dynamics, with the public exerting influence through both traditional and digital media to create religious knowledge and contest the views of religious scholars. The pandemic period has notably opened up a space of contestation, reshaping the community's relationship with religious figures. The changes wrought by this pandemic are seen as enduring and an inevitable part of the evolution of the times.

## DISLOCATION OF WORSHIP

The implementation of social and physical distancing policies has been identified as a significant issue in relation to the restrictions on conducting religious worship and mass religious activities. Religious practices were forced by regulations to shift to homes. Similarly, various religious preaching activities that previously involved large public gatherings were suspended during the pandemic. Table 3 presents various instances with diverse responses, demonstrating the disruption of places of worship throughout the pandemic.

**Table 3. Cases of Delegitimization of Places of Worship during COVID-19 Pandemic**





No	Cases	Narrative	Source
1.	Pros and cons of Mosque closures during the pandemic sparked debates within the community	The recommendation for the closure of mosques among the Muslim community triggered diverse opinions. Some argued that mosque closures constitute a form of discrimination and even oppression against the Muslim community.	<a href="https://www.republika.co.id/berita/qvrq98318/penutupan-masjid-masa-ppkm-darurat-dan-diksi-zalimi-umat">https://www.republika.co.id/berita/qvrq98318/penutupan-masjid-masa-ppkm-darurat-dan-diksi-zalimi-umat</a>
2.	Restriction of worship activities in mosques	The government recommended the implementation of various restrictions on places of worship during the pandemic.	<a href="https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210803111609-20-675675/aturan-salat-di-masjid-daerah-ppkm-level-4-3-dan-2">https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210803111609-20-675675/aturan-salat-di-masjid-daerah-ppkm-level-4-3-dan-2</a>
3.	Dissemination of religious teachings ( <i>da'wah</i> ) no longer takes place in mosques; instead, it has shifted to digital platforms.	In reality, <i>da'wah</i> is no longer confined to mosques, assemblies, or traditional face-to-face communities.	<a href="https://www.kompasiana.com/tiarade/5ee8974ad541df2e593ef0f2/kebangkitan-dakwah-digital-di-masa-pandemi">https://www.kompasiana.com/tiarade/5ee8974ad541df2e593ef0f2/kebangkitan-dakwah-digital-di-masa-pandemi</a>
4.	Cessation of study sessions in mosques	During the pandemic, conducting face-to-face study sessions was considered to pose health issues for the public.	<a href="https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/men-ag-harap-tokoh-agama-lebih-arif-menyikapi-pandemi-covid-19.html">https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/men-ag-harap-tokoh-agama-lebih-arif-menyikapi-pandemi-covid-19.html</a>
5.	Virtual Friday prayers	MUI stated that virtual Friday prayers are considered invalid.	<a href="https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/salat-jumat-virtual-berjamaah-tanpa-berkerumun/5925156.html">https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/salat-jumat-virtual-berjamaah-tanpa-berkerumun/5925156.html</a>



No	Cases	Narrative	Source
6.	Virtual Eid prayers	Eid prayers were conducted utilizing computers, such as via Zoom	<a href="https://www.kompas.id/baca/opini/2021/08/07/ibadah-virtual">https://www.kompas.id/baca/opini/2021/08/07/ibadah-virtual</a>
7.	Virtual <i>umrah</i> (lesser hajj)	The implementation of virtual <i>umrah</i> during the pandemic is considered by some scholars as a deception of the public	<a href="https://www.suara.com/news/2021/04/27/120207/fakta-umroh-virtual-harganya-murah-tapi-pembodohan?page=all">https://www.suara.com/news/2021/04/27/120207/fakta-umroh-virtual-harganya-murah-tapi-pembodohan?page=all</a>

Table 3 reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic not only modified worship practices but also evidences the reduced functionality of places of worship. Activities traditionally performed in these spaces, once considered normal and habitual, experienced a process of delegitimization throughout the pandemic. COVID-19 Task Force strongly stated: “The government emphasizes that places of worship are not permitted to conduct collective worship activities. Community members who wish to worship are advised to do so at home.” Diverse reactions elicited by this regulation, including a comment from the Minister of Religious Affairs: “Places of worship are open only in a restricted capacity for administrators. While mosque or musala administrators may still call the adhan to denote prayer times, actual worship activities should be conducted individually at home.” The pandemic has transformed the traditional pattern of preaching, which typically involved face-to-face and congregational interactions. Preaching has expanded beyond mosques, assemblies, or traditional community gatherings. COVID-19 has necessitated a rapid transition for preachers into the digital era, utilizing communication and information technologies to their full potential.

The recommendation to restrict activities in places of worship (including mosques, churches, Hindu and Buddhist temples, etc.) catalyzed the adoption of virtual and digital spaces for religious practices. For example, the virtual celebration of Eid prayer during Eid al-Adha 2021 saw a Zoom attendance of 1,000 people. The online worship was conducted live, with participants scattered across various locations in Indonesia. In addition to Eid prayers, other religious practices such as *tahlilan* (a form of remembrance) and *takziah*, dedicated to praying for deceased friends and family members during the pandemic, also transitioned to being performed online. Since the onset of the pandemic, various innovations in virtual religious activities have emerged, including virtual *umrah*, which has been a subject of controversy. Numerous reports have underscored the widespread challenges related to the disruption of traditional places of worship (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Virtual Worship Practices**

No.	Online religious practice	Visual	Source
1	Eid prayer conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic		<a href="https://poskota.co.id/2021/07/20/timbulkan-pro-kontra-bagaimana-hukum-salat-idul-adha-berjemaah-secara-virtual-berikut-penjelasan">https://poskota.co.id/2021/07/20/timbulkan-pro-kontra-bagaimana-hukum-salat-idul-adha-berjemaah-secara-virtual-berikut-penjelasan</a>
2	Procedure for online Friday prayers: the preacher, <i>muezzin</i> (caller to prayer), and congregation are separated		<a href="https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/tata-cara-jumatan-online-khatib-muaz-in-dan-jemaah-terpisah-1uwEPwAf5jQ">https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/tata-cara-jumatan-online-khatib-muaz-in-dan-jemaah-terpisah-1uwEPwAf5jQ</a>
3	Policy of mosque closures during the COVID-19 pandemic		<a href="https://www.republika.co.id/berita/qw1y79366/tito-tempat-ibadah-tak-ditutup-teta-pi-tak-boleh-berjemaah">https://www.republika.co.id/berita/qw1y79366/tito-tempat-ibadah-tak-ditutup-teta-pi-tak-boleh-berjemaah</a>
4	Invitation to spread religious teachings through social media		<a href="https://kampusdosenjualan.com/syiar-islam-lewat-sosial-media/">https://kampusdosenjualan.com/syiar-islam-lewat-sosial-media/</a>

No.	Online religious practice	Visual	Source
5	Poster design for virtual <i>umrah</i>		<a href="https://makassar.terkini.id/poster-umrah-virtual-kembali-viral-netizen-tawafnya-mengelilingi-tv-ka-lau-doa-gak-sampai-berarti-sinyal-bermasalah/">https://makassar.terkini.id/poster-umrah-virtual-kembali-viral-netizen-tawafnya-mengelilingi-tv-ka-lau-doa-gak-sampai-berarti-sinyal-bermasalah/</a>
6	Religious preaching through podcast		<a href="https://www.liputan6.com/lifestyle/read/4533528/kembangkan-dakwah-digital-umma-ri-lis-fitur-podcast-hingga-kompetisi-syiar">https://www.liputan6.com/lifestyle/read/4533528/kembangkan-dakwah-digital-umma-ri-lis-fitur-podcast-hingga-kompetisi-syiar</a>

The images presented above demonstrate how the delegitimization of traditional places of worship has redirected attention away from physical locales previously central to religious activities and practices. With the advent of online platforms, conventional places of worship have experienced a decline in perceived legitimacy. In contrast, virtual or digital media spaces have emerged as the new epicenters of religious life, progressively evolving into preferred spaces for religious engagement.

### RELIGION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The findings of this research have revealed that religious doctrines underwent delegitimization during the COVID-19 pandemic. Policies implemented to handle the pandemic, in fact, diminished the role of religious doctrines, leading to a reinterpretation of the initial understanding of values and norms in religious teachings. This reevaluation of religious teachings, adapted to the emergency situation of the pandemic, served not only as a coping strategy but also had the potential to generate misunderstandings within society. Religious doctrines were no longer considered absolute; their truth became subject to questioning and debate, rendering them relative. Simultaneously, these

doctrines could induce social changes in communities, creating situations where individuals altered their ingrained behavioral patterns (Berezovska-Chmil, 2020). Doctrines in general consistently dominate and influence the ability to attract followers (Hanson & Xiang, 2013). During the pandemic, religious doctrines significantly transformed the lives of religious communities.

The loss of perceived absolute truth in religious teachings became increasingly palpable among nearly all Muslims due to health protocol regulations. This phenomenon arose from a series of changes that transformed the original meanings into a new system, facilitated by the opening of media space, causing a redefinition of religious doctrines. The forms of delegitimization of religious doctrines illustrate that government regulations tended to contradict earlier religious decrees, such as on the use of vaccines, which were considered to contain forbidden elements. On the other hand, vaccination represented almost the sole opportunity to address the emergency situation of the spread of COVID-19. Religion, in this shift, experienced desacralization, transforming the law from forbidden (*haram*) to an allowed solution in emergency situations. The pandemic turned the absolute laws of Islam into a contested space with open meanings.

The delegitimization of religious figures during the pandemic brought about a significant shift in meaning for the religious community. On one hand, society lost its guidance or role models in the form of religious leaders, aligned with the weakening authority of religious figures caused by the growth of individualism or a shift in communal values (Sajjadi, 2008). Religious figures underwent a transformation in their role in conveying religious teachings, in line with the open space for truth that allows anyone who subscribe to a particular religion to make their own interpretations. Resistance to religious leaders' fatwas often gave rise to both support and opposition. The diminishing authority of religion resulting from controversies surrounding religious figures eroded religious influence, potentially sparking disputes between those who believe in COVID-19 and those who see it merely as a global conspiracy. Controversies in expressing views and values on religion in addressing the pandemic led to a shift in public trust in religion and religious figures.

The implementation of regulations mandating the closure of mosques, limiting worship activities within them, and promoting the virtualization of preaching and prayers, has contributed to the delegitimization of traditional religious practices, leading to profound shifts in the dynamics among religious communities. These regulations ignited considerable debate within the Islamic community, particularly in 2020, when religious practices experienced a loss of empowerment and disruption in rituals and preaching (Hamdi, 2022). The

necessity for physical distancing due to COVID-19 markedly encouraged the adoption of virtual methods for disseminating religious teachings, significantly influencing the landscape of religious practice (Jogezai et al., 2021). Religious activities have increasingly adapted to the confines imposed by worship rules in sacred spaces. Within the Islamic framework of needs, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, applying the principle of *if al-nafs* (preserving life) in mosques has been prioritized as a primary need (*darūriyyāt*). This principle underscores the importance of protecting life while maintaining the spiritual continuity of collective worship. This adaptation unites the community within a paradigm that values health and sanctifies life during these challenging times (Dahlan et al., 2021). Therefore, the process of delegitimizing religion in social life, particularly in places of worship, signifies an evolution in the patterns and structures of the religious social experiences within the Muslim community.

## CONCLUSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the phenomenon of religious delegitimization in social life transcended mere alterations in Islamic religious regulations; it also entailed significant changes in religious doctrines, thereby affecting the established legitimacy of long-standing beliefs. This widespread perception of delegitimization within Indonesia's Muslim population was, in part, attributed to a lack of comprehensive understanding. The process led to various instances of delegitimization of religious doctrines and the diminished authority of religious figures, culminating in prevalent misunderstandings. This occurrence of religious delegitimization has projected implications for the future of social religious life, suggesting a transition away from conventional Islamic practices and spirituality. In this context, religious doctrines have broadened their reach, disseminating through various social media platforms, with religious figures frequently igniting social controversies in their portrayal of religion during the pandemic. Consequently, the delegitimization of religion in social life throughout the COVID-19 pandemic poses emerging challenges for future religious practice and interpretation.

This study offers insights into the delegitimization of religion in social life, examining not only the social impact but also the ramifications of regulatory changes and alterations in religious practices as a significant social issue within Indonesian Islam. The different manifestations of religious delegitimization observed during the pandemic have indicated that this period has reshaped patterns and the authority of religious practices. It is posited that religion has experienced a shift in its social significance during the COVID-19 pandemic.



This observation underscores that the delegitimization of religion in social life can be discerned through various expressions of doctrinal teachings, the implementation of values, and the behavioral patterns of believers during the pandemic.

The manuscript, however, acknowledges limitations in its data sources, primarily derived from social media research. Such a foundation is not sufficiently robust to support broad claims of extensive religious delegitimization in social life. To develop a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, extensive surveys on religious delegitimization in social life are necessary, taking into account spirituality and religious concerns. These surveys, encompassing a broader scope and including experiences from various religious backgrounds, are vital for informed understanding and effective policymaking in managing community life in the aftermath of the pandemic.

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