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# Growing public distrust towards the Indonesian Government for lack of response to COVID-19 outbreak

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**Abstract.** This research analyzes the growing public distrust towards the Indonesian Government expressed on social media platforms during the COVID-19 outbreak. It aims to answer (1) why has there been a growth of disappointment among citizens towards both the central Government and the local Government during the COVID-19 outbreak; (2) what facts and factors are objectively considered sufficient to underlie the expression of "disappointment" that arises in the public domain; and (3) how can the Indonesian Government regain public trust during this Pandemic. This study uses the transformative concurrent mixed methods design and utilizes the Disappointment Theory and the Belief Theory. The results show that the Indonesian Government tried to overcome public distrust by increasing essential indicators: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. These five indicators were maximized in several government policies through the Covid-19 Task Force formation in Indonesia. It is then concluded that the Indonesian Government's policies and protocols during the COVID-19 had been deemed ineffective in meeting society's needs, resulting in significant economic loss and a rapid increase in the death rate. To regain public trust, the Government must increase the quality of its public relations and publish data that can be held accountable.

## 1. Introduction

The global political and economic constellation in 2020 has changed drastically after introducing a new type of Coronavirus (Coronavirus Disease 2019 / COVID-19). This change has certainly not been taken into account by world economic and political analysts; hence, causing a drastic impact on the global political and economic policies. This situation was confirmed by the minister of finance of Indonesia, Sri Mulyani, that no country is ready to face the coronavirus pandemic or COVID-19.

When examined from the start, it can be said that COVID-19 is a local epidemic that has spread rapidly throughout the world. Based on the medical journal *The Lancet* entitled "Clinical features of patients infected with the 2019 novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China," it was stated that the first case of COVID-19 was detected on December 1, 2019, in Wuhan. On December 31, 2019, the Chinese Government officially reported it to the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO report results also stated that COVID-19 had a high-speed transmission rate followed by a high mortality rate. Following up on the report, on January 30, 2020, WHO declared a global public health emergency over the COVID-19 outbreak. The first COVID-19 cases outside China were reported on January 13, 2020,



in Thailand and January 25, 2020, detected in France and Australia, and January 29, 2020, was confirmed in the United Arab Emirates. On February 14, 2020, Egypt confirmed its first COVID-19 case. This data has confirmed the research results on the speedy spread of COVID-19 and is supported by the global community.

Several countries have adopted lockdown policies or limited their people's movement in general to overcome the fast rate of virus transmission. This lockdown and social restriction policy have certainly had a significant impact on the country's economy's decline, causing a halt on countless goods and service sectors. Based on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) analysis through the *World Economic Outlook, April 2020: The Great Lockdown* states that the global economy will experience a vast depression of up to minus 3.4%, even worse than the Great Depression 1920. Under this condition, not a single country can avoid the global recession, including Indonesia.

In Indonesia, the Indonesian Ministry of Health confirmed the first case of COVID-19 transmission on March 2, 2020. The Indonesian Government has carried out several medical treatments by appointing a particular COVID-19 referral hospital. Furthermore, on March 13, 2020, the Indonesian Government formed a Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19 to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak quickly, structured, and non-sectoral. Then, on March 31, 2020, President Joko Widodo announced Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB), followed by various policies and economic stimuli to the community.

However, some parties consider the Indonesian Government's efforts to be too slow in dealing with this Pandemic. This was voiced by the Head of Disaster and Crisis Journalist (JBK) Ahmad Arief, who stated that the Government was late in responding to the entry of COVID-19 into Indonesia, especially in taking the policy of closing Indonesia's borders, especially closing flights from China. For example, based on data from John Hopkins University on March 31, 2020, when the government-imposed isolation (PSBB, *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*) was implemented nationally, the spread had reached 1,528 cases with a death rate of 136 people. In comparison, Malaysia confirmed the first spread of COVID-19 on February 15, 2020, then adopted a lockdown policy on March 16, 2020, when the number of cases reached 566.

The Government's steps' slow pace was also confirmed by the Task Force Chairman for the Acceleration and Handling of COVID-19, Wiku Adisasmito. The Government has been slow in detecting and anticipating the virus's spread due to limited rapid test and swab test tools. However, Mr. President Joko Widodo responded to the Government's slow pace in handling COVID-19 because the Government did not want to rush in making policies and wanted to avoid mass-hysteria. This situation advanced with the increasing number of disappointments conveyed by several national figures and the community, even within the Government, regarding the policies taken by President Joko Widodo. This disappointment narrative alludes to several aspects, such as the technical implementation of the PSBB, tug-of-war policies, and social assistance issues to the community and other political and economic policies.

During this situation, the Indonesian Government considers public trust to support the various policies to be issued. This aims to avoid social unrest in society related to government policies to mitigate the COVID-19 Pandemic. Therefore, this study examines in depth the decline in public trust in the Government in handling COVID-19 to support government policy in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia. This research shall discuss the following questions. Why has there been an increase of disappointment among citizens towards central and local Governments during the COVID-19 outbreak? *Second*, what facts and factors are objectively considered sufficient to underlie the

expression of "disappointment" that arises. *Third*, how can the Indonesian Government regain public trust during this Pandemic?

## 2. Method

The research methodology used in this study is a mixed-methods research method. Mixed methods were used to complete qualitative aspects based on available statistical and survey data and juxtaposed with quantitative aspects based on literature and information from various sources studied. Research and data collection of respondents took a sample of some opinions formed in the community that appeared in trusted online media in Indonesia and some government policies to deal with this pandemic situation. Then, combined with secondary data available in open sources.

The theories used in this study were the Disappointment theory and Belief theory. These theories were used as instruments of analysis in this study. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, disappointment is unhappiness from the failure of something hoped for or expected to happen. Disappointed emotions are negative emotions one feels from the failure to obtain the thing one truly wants. It is a feeling of dissatisfaction that follows the failure of expectations to materialize. The higher one's expectation is, the greater will be your disappointment. People who are particularly averse to disappointment may learn to adopt a pessimistic view about the future. Disappointment is a psychological reaction to an outcome that does not match up to expectation [1].

From these definitions, it can be concluded that disappointment is the existence of a distance or gap between hope and reality, where the greater the distance between hope and reality, the greater the disappointment. Besides, Bell also explained that repeated disappointments would form a pessimistic person about plans until the loss of hope for the desired reality.

The second theory was the Belief theory. According to Merriam-Webster, a translation dictionary defines trust as a firm belief in someone's character, strength, or truth. Trust is a person's tendency to believe in others and willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence [2]. It is the belief in others' good intentions that they will not harm them, care about their rights, and carry out their obligations [3].

One's level of trust can be measured through these indicators [4]. First, benevolence (good intention) is the belief in one's welfare or ownership of another person's protection and attention or group that he trusts. Good intention and desire will foster this trusting relationship. Second, reliability (reliable), which one gives trust to another party because that person is reliable. Third, competence (competence) believes in other parties' ability to do or do something under their field. Fourth, honesty (honest) which is the integrity and trustworthy traits of the person being trusted. And the last, openness (openness), the existence of transparency of the things entrusted to avoid prejudice.

## 3. Results and discussion

In every country, some people are pro and contra with government policies. A narrative of disappointment has begun to emerge and strengthen among public figures, business actors, heads of regional and local governments, and security forces regarding the Indonesian Government's policies and steps. Starting by opposing anything suggested by the Government, there were COVID-19 virus patients on March 2, 2020. A narrative emerged, saying that it was too late; it should have been since January 2020. Then there is also an argument that the patient's identity should not be disclosed because it becomes a neighbor's concern.

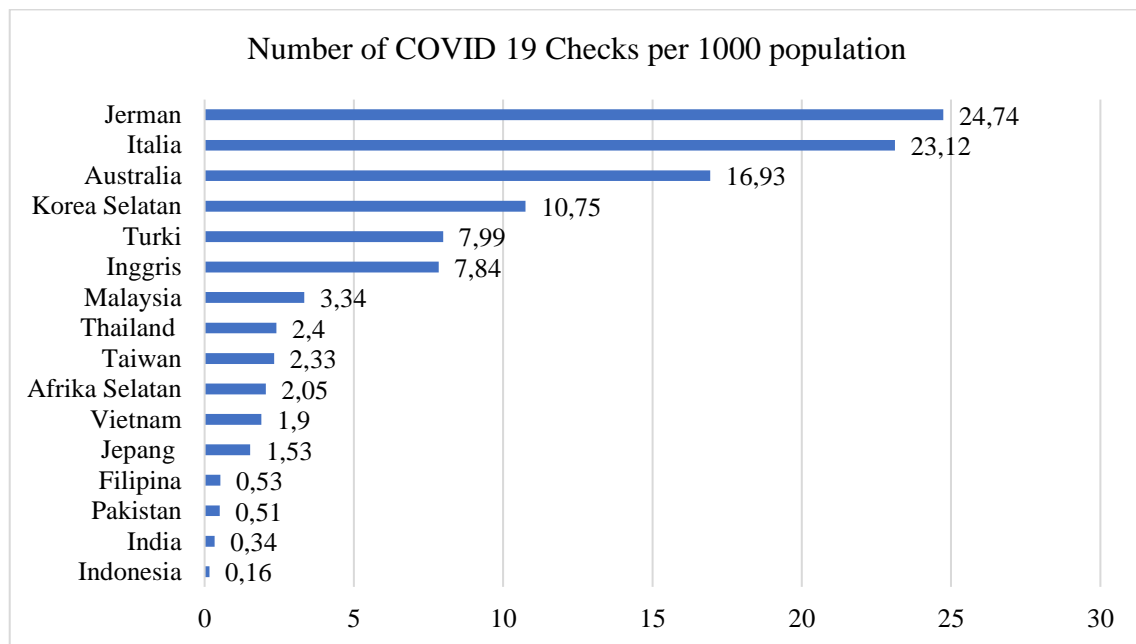
Likewise, as the implementation of the PSBB by President Joko Widodo, the narrative emerged with the statement, why not immediately apply "lockdown" but only PSBB and so on. When the second

PSBB extension was announced, from May 20, 2020, to June 4, 2020, there were also many narratives of disappointment saying that people were bored at home. The Government's assistance was uneven and many more continued to narrate disappointment with both central and local government policies. The Government's profound indifference to data creates the wrong choice; instead of preparing for the inevitable, officials are looking for ways to avoid a response to the outbreak. While senior officials pitched baseless theories about the favorable impact of the virus in tropical weather, doctors pleaded with Jokowi to ignore bad advice, and scientists complained about being excluded from the Government's pandemic response process. President Jokowi has defended his administration's response by noting scientists' inability to make definite predictions about COVID-19. However, government efforts to withhold data on infection rates only add to this uncertainty, with deadly consequences.

This narrative continued during the PSBB relaxation since June 5, 2020, where transportation began to operate with passenger restrictions (50%), offices were allowed to enter a maximum of 50% of the total employees and continued to apply the COVID-19 pandemic health protocol rules, namely: keep your distance, wear a mask and maintain cleanliness recommended by the Task Force for the Acceleration of COVID-19 Handling on June 9, 2020, there is still a narrative of disappointment that says that relaxation should be stopped because there is a buildup of potential passengers at Soekarno Hatta Airport and other public transportation. The highlight is disappointed in handling COVID-19, "Indonesia is whatever" became a topic of conversation on Google Trend, and #indonesiaterserah appeared on Twitter. The hashtag #indonesiaterserah voices netizen dissatisfaction with implementing regulations to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. With this disappointment, netizens regretted the medical personnel's sacrifice who came face to face with them everyday coronavirus. According to netizens, these sacrifices are meaningless if the public and Government seem not serious about dealing with COVID-19.

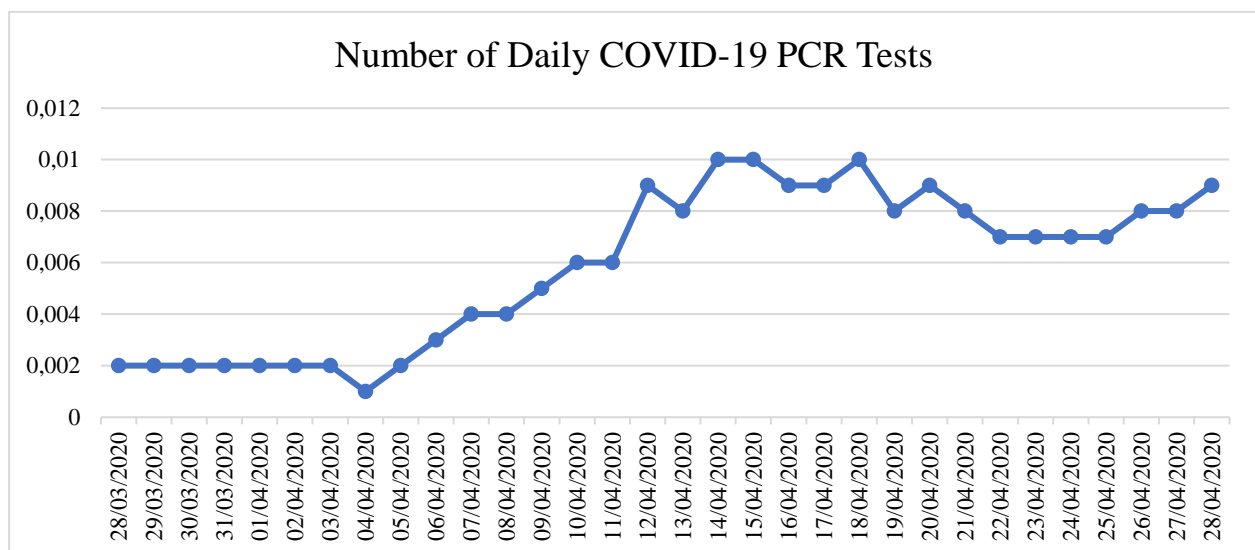
### *3.1. Growing public distrust*

The series of denials, reluctance, and caution that has been delayed in Indonesia's response to the COVID-19 crisis is in line with many other countries, including developed countries. The emergence of public disappointment with the Government in handling COVID-19 was caused by several factors such as a lack of PCR testing kits. The Government's unpreparedness in the health sector can be seen from the COVID-19 Test data obtained from [ourworldindata.org](https://ourworldindata.org).

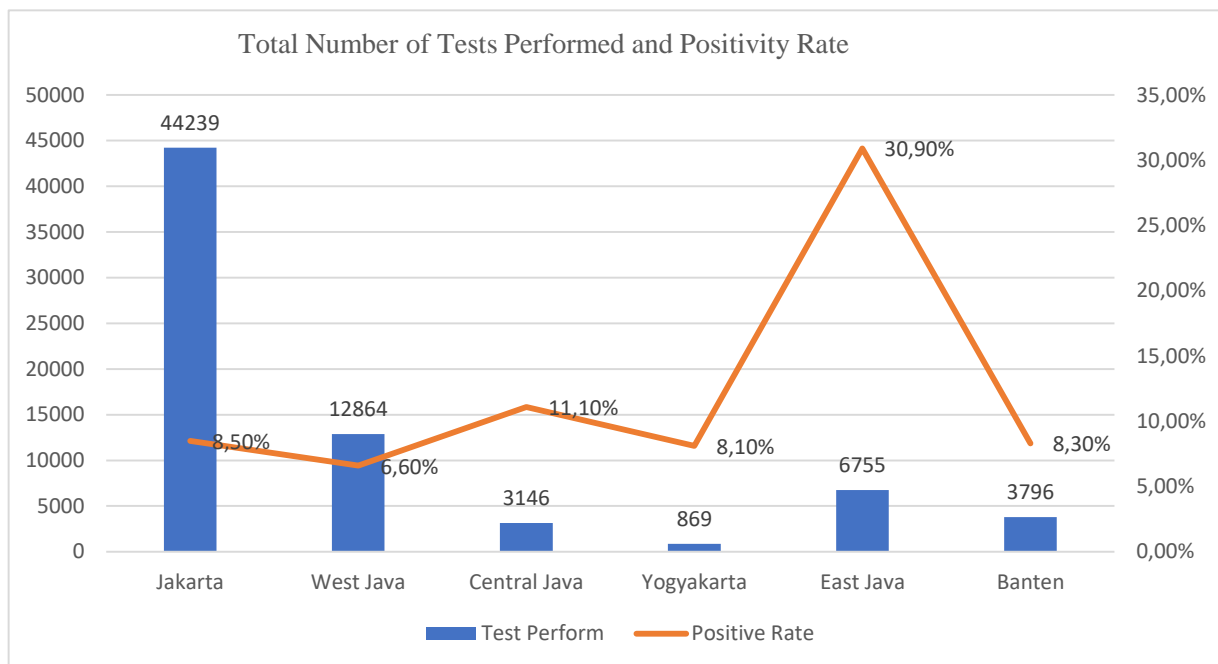


**Figure 1.** Number of COVID 19 Checks per 1000 population as of April 20, 2020, in 17 countries [5].

These data show the number of COVID-19 tests per 1,000 population as of April 15, 2020. Indonesia is classified as the country with the lowest number of tests per 1,000 population, still below Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines. 1 Until April 15, there were only 32 laboratories in Indonesia who carried out the COVID-19 test by PCR.



**Figure 2.** Number of daily COVID-19 PCR tests for the period 28 March-15 April [6].



**Figure 3.** Total number of tests performed and positivity rate over two weeks of 25<sup>th</sup> May to June 7, 2020, for provinces in Java [7].

According to WHO data, only Jakarta has the number of PCR tests that have met the WHO minimum requirements: 1/1000 / week. Other provinces still have not met the standards. East Java Province is the province with the most positivity rate of 30.9 percent. This shows that many COVID-19 positive citizens have not been found due to the lack of tests.

Since the end of March, medical personnel has been short on Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), and the Central Board of the Indonesian General Practitioners Association has strongly protested to the Government about the scarcity of PPE (Irwandy, 2020). In the March 30 meeting, the President asked the Task Force for Handling COVID-19 to add 3 million PPE by May. However, amidst limited raw materials and high demand for local and global markets, this is a formidable challenge. Thus, the Government needs to encourage the development of PPE innovations and products in the country (for example, face shields and hazmat suits) and innovations that can reduce PPE's need (for example, swab collection booths) that meet standards.

Among the 26 medical personnel reported to have died as of April 12, 2020, five dentists and 3 ENT specialists (Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19, 2020). Medical personnel who do not directly handle COVID-19 patients also have a high level of exposure because among the patients who come there are OTG (People Without Symptoms). Thus, doctors who practice related to mouth, nose, eyes, etc. should use PPE at the time of practice. The cleanliness and sterilization of the doctor's practice tools must also be appropriately considered. Responding to this need, on April 10, 2020, the COVID-19 Task Force distributed: 5,000 sets of PPEs to the Indonesian Dentists Association (PDGI); 2,000 sets of PPEs to the Ear Doctors Association.

Information disclosure is also a factor in the emergence of public disappointment with the Government regarding COVID-19. Information disclosure from the regional or central level must be appropriate to determine the policy to be decided later. Such as data on deaths obtained by WHO based on government data. The data released by the Government regarding positive patients with COVID-19

is data 7 days ago, not the most updated daily data. Data related to patients who died positive for COVID-19 issued by the Government did not comply with WHO recommendations. WHO recommends that data on patients who die is suspected of being COVID-19, and positive patients who die are counted. Besides, OPD, PDP, and MD data for North Sulawesi province were not presented from the provincial and city and district websites as of May 19, 2020.

### 3.2. Indonesian government efforts to regain public trust

The Government can increase the "trust" or trust of the five components in handling the COVID-19 Pandemic. The five components mentioned below were benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness.

3.2.1. *Benevolence (good intention)*. A right attitude and desire will foster this trusting relationship. The following are efforts to increase public trust through good intentions. *First*, Forming The Task Force for the Acceleration of COVID-19 Handling and specifically, the Spokesperson reported the steps are taken. The data of affected patients in the classification, namely OTG, (People Without Symptoms), ODP (People Under Supervision), PDP (Patients Under Supervision), Positive COVID-19, Healed COVID-19, and died of COVID-19. *Second*, procurement of test kits, both Rapid and PCR, and more testing for ODP (i.e., people who have direct contact with patients but have not tested positive for COVID-19). *Third*, the Government has allocated Rp405.1 Trillion for handling COVID-19 at the national level (PP. 21/2020).

Meanwhile, at the regional level, each region allocates a different budget depending on regional capacity and COVID-19 exposure in that area. The most important thing about this budget accountability is how fraud and corruption in the use of the COVID-19 budget can be avoided and prevented. So it takes tight and well-structured supervision.

3.2.2. *Reliability*. The Government continues to apply the rules during the PSBB and the PSBB Relaxation and distribute aid. They have also instructed all regional heads to follow instructions from the central Government so that the handling is uniform throughout Indonesia, such as the COVID-19 law enforcement related to the efforts of the Government and society in carrying out the rules contained in Law no. 6/2018, PP No. 21/2020, Permenkes No. 9/2020, and Permenhub No. 18/2020. Likewise, local government regulations, namely; Pergub DKI Jakarta No. 33/2020 and the West Java Pergub No. 27/2020. In this case, the competent authorities' involvement in law enforcement against all the policy rules is crucial.

3.2.3. *Competence*. Competence is expressed by appointing Doni Monardo, General 3 Star of the Army as Chairman Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19, who has been the Chair of the BNPB during this time, indicates that the Government has appointed the right people and institutions who have equal competence to handle COVID-19. The involvement of the TNI and Polri during the PSBB period made the community calm and felt protected.

3.2.4. *Honesty*. Regarding the distribution of aid funds, the President has stated that there should be strict supervision. All should carry out this task honestly and take firm action against any violations that occur. This emphasizes the importance of a sense of security from the community that the Government is doing its best and with integrity.



3.2.5. *Openness*. A website for COVID-19 is provided so that the public can monitor and report on all steps taken by the Government for the successful handling of COVID-19 in Indonesia. This is done to give public information on reported cases and death rates. Openness is an important aspect to increase public trust. Through transparency, the public can project efforts that must be done to protect them and their family.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Government and all parties pay attention to accountability in handling COVID-19. Although handling COVID-19 is part of emergency handling, it is necessary to pay attention to governance aspects. It must remain a priority to increase the effectiveness of its successful implementation on the one hand and reduce negative impacts on the other. The more accountable the process of handling COVID-19, the better the results are expected for the Government and all parties. The COVID-19 policy's accountability is seen at the national level and how policies are implemented at the regional level. Implementing the COVID-19 policy at the regional level will be more visible to the community at the field level. It is significant for the Government to release data as accurately as possible so that the data is accountable and held accountable to the public. If this data's accountability is low, then public trust in the Government will also decrease in handling COVID-19.

To regain public trust, this study suggests that the Government does the following. *First*, the Government must issue data as accurately as possible to be accountable and accountable to the public. If this data's accountability is low, then public trust in the Government will also decrease in handling COVID-19. *Second*, the Government needs to ensure that all regulations in implementing policies for COVID-19 must be appropriately implemented and correctly. Likewise, if there are violations, this should not be allowed because it will harm the spread and transmission of COVID-19 to a broader area. If COVID-19 law enforcement does not go well, then the accountability of COVID-19 law enforcement will tend to be low, and the public can file a class-action lawsuit. *Third*, society, especially the scientific community, is expected not to be silent and to be active in providing input to the Government to avoid government failure, namely the Government's failure to implement a policy.

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