

## Research Article

### Comparative Analysis of the Covid-19 Policy of Indonesia and Vietnam in 2020

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#### Abstract

*A virus started to spread in China by the end of 2019. Soon after, the world faces a global pandemic known as the Covid-19. The deadly and highly contagious virus threatens not only health security but also various social-economic aspects. In the chaotic world, the advancement of transportation technology contributes to the accelerated spread of the Covid-19 virus. The global movement of people becomes the biggest challenge for the national government to tackle during the global pandemic. Countries take different policies and measures to mitigate the spread of the virus. This paper conducts comparative policy analysis on two cases: Vietnam and Indonesia. The paper argues that the Vietnamese government tackles the virus mitigation more efficiently than the Indonesian government despite Vietnam's close geographical location to China. The Indonesian government is also relatively slower than the Vietnamese government concerning the policy responses.*

**Keywords:** Indonesia, Vietnam, Covid-19, mitigation policy, preventive measures

## I. Introduction

On December 31, 2019, WHO (World Health Organization) received a report from the Wuhan City Health Commission regarding an outbreak of *pneumonia* - an inflammatory lung disease - that is currently happening there (WHO, 2020). Several media such as the BBC and CNN are also responsive in conveying information to the world about the virus. At an alarming rate, the disease spread across the globe and developed into a global pandemic. This phenomenon is, of course, a threat to human health security on a global scale. Now, almost all countries are affected by the pandemic, including Indonesia and Vietnam. Therefore, the governments in both countries are trying to handle the Covid-19 not to spread widely and cause more harmful effects.

To prevent further outbreaks, countries around the world implement mitigation and preventive measures. Etymologically, mitigation efforts can be interpreted as actions taken to suppress the spread of infectious diseases (CDC, 2020). Furthermore, mitigation strategies are carried out to reduce the risk of the Covid-19 transmission to vulnerable individuals (elderly and infants), vulnerable populations (refugees, IDPs, and prisoners), and the frontline (first responders or medical personnel). In this case, mitigation efforts involve the roles of the government, individuals, communities, business groups, and health service providers to suppress the death toll and the socio-economic effects caused by the Covid-19 (CDC, 2020). The government needs to stop the rate of the Covid-19 transmission to prevent new victims so that the country can quickly recover from its effects. In this effort, the government carries out various preventive measures to

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support the mitigation efforts implemented by the government so that they can be carried out optimally.

In Vietnam, until July 23, 2020, there were 408 positive patients with the Covid-19, and the pandemic still causes no deaths to date (The Vietnam Ministry of Health, 2020). Since early January 2020, the Government of Vietnam has prepared various mitigation efforts long before positive cases. So, when there is confirmation that a Vietnamese citizen is infected, the program can be implemented as soon as possible (Jones, 2020).

Unlike the Vietnamese Government, in Indonesia, Joko Widodo announced the first positive case on Monday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, (Covid-19, 2020). In this case, many people have criticized the actions taken by the Indonesian government, which is considered slow in responding to the pandemic. Even in the early stages of the spread, the government had rejected the fact that a pandemic could spread to Indonesian territory. Thus, there are no mitigation or prevention steps taken by the Government of Indonesia. The disease has spread very widely during its development, reaching 34 provinces in Indonesia through human transmission. The epicenter of the spread is on the island of Java, especially the two big cities, namely Jakarta and Surabaya. As of July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, there were 93,657 positive cases and 4,576 deaths (Martinus, 2020).

The policy for handling pandemic in the two countries have different impacts. Although geographically Vietnam is closer to China, its government can be more successful than the Indonesian government in mitigating the pandemic. The negative effects of the pandemic in Indonesia are far greater than the impact experienced by Vietnam.

## II. Vietnam Policy

UNDP argues that there are seven elements of basic human security needs, which include: economic security (related to poverty, unemployment, financial crisis), food security (related to hunger and food shortages), health security (related to infectious diseases, toxic food, malnutrition and access to health services), environmental security (related to environmental degradation, scarcity of natural resources, natural disasters, and pollution), personal security (related to physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, and the phenomenon of child labor), community security (related to tension and conflict between identity and religion), and political security (related to political repression and human rights crimes) (Jolly, 2006). In this case, issues related to human security are intertwined issues. If a problem occurs in one aspect/ element, it can cause problems in other aspects. This problem is what happened in accordance with the Covid-19 pandemic. The World Bank stated that if not handled properly, the Covid-19 pandemic could lead to a global recession, with an effect more significant than the effects of World War II (The World Bank, 2020).

Around the world, the Covid-19 pandemic harmed various sectors. Apart from the health aspect, the impact of the pandemic has caused economic, social and political problems in multiple countries. In this case, Vietnam also felt the negative effects of Covid-19, not only in the health aspect but also in other sectors. If not handled properly, the Covid-19 pandemic can have a terrible impact on individuals and the country. Like a "vicious cycle," health threats can spread to other aspects. When the government implements the wrong policy, it will have a major impact on national security, which directly threatens the existence and survival of human beings in it.

In contrast to the Indonesian Government, the Vietnamese Government has taken mitigation, and preventive measures before the pandemic enter and spreads in its territory. This action is inseparable from the geographical location of Vietnam, which is adjacent to China. Compared to other countries in the Southeast Asian region, Vietnam is the closest country and has a direct border area with China. Vietnam shares a 1,100-kilometer border with China (DW Indonesia, 2020). Wuhan, known as the initial epicenter of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, is only about 1,938 km from Vietnam. Supposedly, geographical proximity is one factor that increases the risk of the threat of disease spread.



**Fig. 1.** Map of Vietnam

**Source:** Nusa Daily (2020)

In order to deal with a pandemic in his country, the government has taken mitigation efforts and taken preventive measures so that the pandemic does not spread more widely. The Vietnamese government also implements very strict regulations or protocols. In an effort to mitigate the pandemic, the Vietnamese Government has declared war on the Covid-19 since January 2020, even though at that time, the number of the Covid-19 cases in China was still very limited (DW Indonesia, 2020). The Prime Minister of Vietnam, Nguyen Xuan Phuc has also conveyed and emphasized in his speech aimed at the public that "it will not be long before the virus reaches Vietnam."

Realizing that the capacity and capability of the country are weak compared to other countries, the government must take preventive action. The Vietnamese government chose to implement a lockdown policy by closing access to and from Vietnam, and closing schools and business activities deemed not crucial from January to mid-May.

On January 23<sup>rd</sup>, when the first two of the COVID-19 patients in Vietnam were announced, all flights to Wuhan were canceled on the same day. This policy is applied considering that planes and other means of transportation are catalysts for the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic across national borders. In addition, based on World Economic Forum records, on February 1<sup>st</sup>, the Government of Vietnam has initiated various initiatives to tackle the spread of the COVID-19 (Saputra, 2020). The Vietnamese government has also suspended all flights to and from China, closed schools, and implemented a 21-day quarantine imposed in Vinh Phuc province, north of Hanoi (Saputra, 2020). The policy was implemented because it was triggered by concerns over the health status of migrant workers returning from Wuhan, which is where the virus originated.

The Vietnamese government also formed the National Steering Committee on the COVID-19 Prevention and Control to coordinate with the public. Various messages and news from the government are conveyed via text messages, state-owned media, banners, and an official website made by the Vietnamese Minister of Health (Tatarski, 2020). Government transparency and good public communication increase public trust in the government and adherence to planned health protocols (Dabla-Norris, 2020). In addition, the Vietnamese government also does not hesitate to take firm action against perpetrators who spread false news and information related to the Covid-19. The police immediately approach people who are proven

to spread false or false news and information. At least around 800 people have been fined so far (Saputra, 2020).

The Vietnamese government is also conducting intensive tracing to prevent new clusters (BBC News, 2020). If Western countries like Germany only carry out tracing on infected people and who have direct contact with that person, the Vietnamese Government does not stop there. The Vietnamese government also traced to the second, third, and fourth levels with infected people (DW Indonesia, 2020).

In addition, the Vietnamese Government also implements a rigorous supervision system. The government deployed the security apparatus to intelligence or Communist Party spies to guard and supervise street corners up to the villages. It is said that the rigorous supervision succeeded in reducing the number of people who broke the rules. The policy measures implemented by the Vietnamese Government have received appreciation from various countries. Apart from the minimal number of cases, there were no (zero) death cases in Vietnam due to the Covid-19.

From the explanation above, it is known that Vietnam is taking significant steps in overcoming the pandemic. This drastic decision was based on Vietnam's experience in dealing with the SARS outbreak in 2003 (Samuel, 2020). Apart from mitigation efforts, the transparency of the Vietnamese government is also based on experience. In 2016, the Formosan steel plant in Ha Tinh province caused pollution to the maritime environment of Vietnam. Therefore, the public criticizes the Vietnamese government, judging that the government is relatively slow in handling the problem and lacks transparency. The incident led to street protests in various cities. Not wanting this to happen again, the Vietnamese government this time has succeeded in bridging communication

between the state and the public (Nguyen, 2020).

The success of the Vietnamese Government in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic has put the country in the spotlight of various countries internationally. It can be said that Vietnam is a country that has limited resources and capacity but has succeeded in exceeding the capabilities of other countries, not only in the Southeast Asia region but also in Western countries, including the United States.

Still, it cannot be denied that Vietnam was also affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, both from an economic and political perspective. From an economic perspective, Vietnam is suffering the impact of the pandemic. In early 2020, Vietnam's gross domestic product (GDP) had decreased by 3.8%, and in the first three months, nearly 35,000 businesses went bankrupt. To support the people's economy, the Government of Vietnam is preparing a \$10.8 billion support fund, lowering interest rates, delaying the payment of taxes and land use fees for several types of businesses. It said that Vietnam's economic growth in the second quarter of 2020 experienced a decline due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic that hit many countries in the world, thus disrupting trade activities between countries (Dewi, 2020)

The General Statistics Office (GSO) in a statement revealed that Vietnam's GDP in the second quarter of 2020 grew 0.36% from the same period the previous year (Dewi, 2020). Furthermore, the GSO also stated that the complicated development of the Covid-19 pandemic had negative impacts on all socio-economic aspects. GSO data also shows that the service sector in the second quarter contracted 1.76% from the previous year, while the industrial sector rose 1.38% and the agricultural sector rose 1.72% (Dewi, 2020). Vietnam is trying to resume economic

activities after records 355 positive cases of the Covid-19 and no fatalities due to the virus.

Additionally, the IMF predicted Vietnam's economic growth would slow to 2.7% by 2020, but still, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc said his government would keep economic growth above 5% (Dewi, 2020). According to the GSO, Vietnam's exports in the first half of this year fell 1.1% from a year earlier to the US \$121.21 billion, while imports fell 3.0% to the US \$117.17 billion, resulting in a trade surplus of US \$4.04 billion (Dewi, 2020). Vietnam's inflation in June rise 3.17% from a year earlier, with an average consumer prices in the January-June period rose 4.19% (Dewi, 2020). GSO added that Vietnam's industrial output in June rose 7.0% from the previous year.

As we know, health is the key to carrying out various daily activities. In the case of the Covid-19, security for health has become threatened. Being infected by the virus can be bad news for anyone because of the threat of medical complications. Therefore, to prevent further spread, various policies and programs have been implemented in response to ongoing health issues.

In contrast to the impact of the economic aspect, the Covid-19 case in Vietnam has quite a positive effect on politics. The Vietnamese government realizes that public trust is important. Learning from similar problems in the past, the Vietnamese Government is now trying to build good communication with the community and be transparent. Thanks to the responsive and proactive handling, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc received good support from the public. This support will be significant at the Communist Party's 13th congress in early 2021, when Phuc competed for the top position (Nguyen, 2020).

### III. Indonesian Policy

Unlike Vietnam, Indonesia's geographic location is much further from China. Geographically, the distance between Indonesia and China is about 3,565 km, almost twice the distance between China and Vietnam. This should minimize the potential for the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic as happened in Vietnam. However, this is not the case. The Indonesian government is considered late in mitigating the spread of the Covid-19. The number of the Covid-19 sufferers in Indonesia on the same day (July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020) reached more than 200 times the number of sufferers in Vietnam, a death rate of 4.89%.



**Fig. 2.** Map of Indonesia's Territory from China  
**Source:** Pualam (2020)

Under these conditions, the impact of the Covid-19 in Indonesia should be lower than the impact experienced by Vietnam. In its development, the opposite happened. Indonesia is experiencing a much more significant effect than Vietnam. This is inseparable from the slow response to the Indonesian government's policies in handling the Covid-19 case.

In Indonesia, the announcement of the Covid-19 pandemic emergency was only announced to the public on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, approximately a month after the confirmation of the first positive case, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020,

which was relatively slow when compared to Vietnam. In contrast to what was implemented by the Vietnamese Government which carried out a lockdown in handling the Covid-19, the Indonesian Government implemented Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) in accordance with Government Regulation No. 21 of 2020, which included closing schools and workplaces, as well as limiting religious activities and social activities. Indonesia's PSBB was held about a month after the first positive confirmation, in contrast to Vietnam, which has implemented a lockdown since the first day of positive confirmation cases.

In this regard, it is clear that the consideration of socio-economic consequences causes the Indonesian Government's reluctance to implement a lockdown status. President Jokowi stated that the lockdown was not an option because it would disrupt the economy (Ihsanuddin, 2020). Furthermore, the government also noted that economic activity must remain, only that the public is asked to continue implementing health protocols such as maintaining safe distances and implementing social and physical distancing as a form of preventive action to prevent the Covid-19 transmission. Thus, the idea is that economic activity can still be carried out while preventing disease transmission. In addition, by implementing the PSBB policy rather than a lockdown, the Indonesian Government does not have to bear significant sustenance for the citizens during the PSBB because economic activities can still run.

PSBB in Indonesia is carried out through quarantine; three types of quarantine are implemented, including home quarantine, hospital quarantine, and regional quarantine. While its names quite clearly define the two previous forms of quarantine, regional quarantine (local lockdown) refers to the decision of small areas (cities/ regencies) to submit requests for quarantine if the number

of cases in their area is large. Meanwhile, more extensive area coverage (provincial level) may only apply restrictions (not quarantined) following the Central government's policy. Then, to maintain the orderliness of the health protocol, the Jokowi government formed a task force for the acceleration of the Covid-19 management on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020. With the same function as the Vietnam Steering Committee, the Indonesian task force is considered less informative and has carried out its duties to maintain order (Laksamana, 2020).

As some may already know, Indonesia has a homecoming culture where urban people return to their respective hometowns on Eid al-Fitr, a celebration day for Muslims. Even with the threat of virus transmission, President Jokowi did not prohibit homecoming, only appealed not to do it (Sutrisno, 2020). This is clearly different from Vietnam, which implements large-scale quarantine by guarding provincial borders to prevent further spread and strictly prohibiting citizens from gathering unless they have an urgent agenda and guarding social crowd hot spots with police personnel to prevent violations.

Similar with Vietnam, the Covid-19 case in Indonesia threatens human health and survival and national security and economy. In the economic aspect, 1.7 million workers in Indonesia have been laid off due to restrictions on business activities. In direct proportion, the poverty rate in Indonesia increased from 24.79 million in September 2019 to 26.42 million in March 2020, an increase for the first time since 2017 (Afrianto, 2020). As a response, the government provided a budget of Rp405.1 trillion as support for the citizens during the pandemic (BPMI Setpres, 2020).

As a result, many other security issues emerged. Regarding human security, it was reported that the crime rate had increased by up to 7% (Wijayaatmaja, 2020). This could be caused by the obstruction of economic

activities by the existence of new policies related to the pandemic, which then decreased income for several groups of society. This can be a motive for various crimes. Regarding food security, restrictions on mobilization between regions have disrupted the distribution of staples in many areas in Indonesia (Utami, 2020). In terms of education, social restrictions result in the obstruction of the learning process for underprivileged students due to inadequate access to online learning in the 2020/2021 academic year (Sulaiman, 2020). From the cases above, it cannot be denied that the Covid-19 outbreak has indeed affected various aspects of security besides health security.

To combat the Covid-19, the Vietnamese government applied strict rules. Everyone must maintain a distance of 2 meters from each other, and gathering activities can only be done in offices, schools, and hospitals (Linh, 2020). In contrast, in its development, the Indonesian government has changed the status of the PSBB with the existence of the *New Normal* to support the economy of people who were previously hit by the pandemic (Wijayaatmaja, 2020). The New Normal policy has been implemented in various regions, removing the strict traits of PSBB while maintaining a relatively low spread transmission rate. The policy was implemented in early June or only about one and a half months after implementing the PSBB.

Responding to the new policy, society is divided into two groups - pros and contra. Some people are glad because they can rerun economic activities. However, on the other hand, some people argue that the policy is dangerous, judging from the increase in positive cases of the Covid-19 in their region. They consider the government to be too hasty and cause concern in people regarding the Covid-19 transmission when they carry out social or economic activities. Especially when there seems to be no firm action taken by the

government, when there are people who violate established health protocols, which would not provide a deterrent effect and is different from what the Vietnamese government has applied to its health protocol perpetrators.

The political aspect in Indonesia is very contrast from Vietnam, in which the level of public trust in the government has decreased due to the lack of communicative capability between the government and the people. This is associated with inconsistent information and a lack of transparency, which leads to reduced public trust (Jyestha, 2020). The lack of quality of communication to the public and the lack of transparency has made public trust in the government shrink (Bayuni, 2020). The decline in public trust in the government also occurs due to unclear communication between government agencies, such as differences in data comparison between local governments and the Ministry of Health and differences in attitudes and policies between provincial and city governments. This also represents a lack of synergy between government agencies, in which the society suffers as a result.

The slow response and handling efforts have made people pessimistic about the government's performance. The change in the status of PSBB to New Normal also creates the impression that the government does not care about public health security. Then, the poor communication between the government and the community is very unfortunate because the planned health protocols require compliance and support from the public. In this regard, Indonesia may need to emulate Vietnam to build public trust and effectively tackle the pandemic.

It can be understood that the government's position is very dilemmatic in efforts to deal with the Covid-19. On the one hand, the government is expected to continue to ensure health security for citizens. On the other hand, the government is also required to

ensure that the economy can continue to run to fulfill its primary needs to survive. As previously explained, health safety issues are related to other issues or aspects. The government's steps or policy responses largely determine the condition of human security and the country's national security.

#### IV. Conclusion

Based on the previous explanation regarding the comparison of policies implemented by the Vietnamese and Indonesian Governments, it can be seen that the Indonesian government is slower and less responsive in handling the Covid-19 pandemic. The Indonesian government also chose to implement the PSBB policy rather than implementing lockdown done by the Government of Vietnam and other countries. In addition, the relatively slow response from the Indonesian Government in its efforts to deal with the Covid-19 caused the pandemic to spread widely and had a more significant negative impact on the social, economic, and political sectors compared to that experienced by the Vietnamese Government. Despite its geographic location, Vietnam is closer to the epicenter of the pandemic outbreak than Indonesia, yet they managed to handle the pandemic better.

Poor communication, transparency, and synergy between government agencies also led to the decline of public trust for the government. Meanwhile, some people in Indonesia also do not implement health protocols according to policies implemented by the government. This, of course, makes handling the Covid-19 pandemic even more complicated, putting the mitigation and preventive efforts at risk of failing. Vietnam's strict and responsive policies may serve as an example for other countries, especially Indonesia.

In this case, it does not rule out that the type of governance also affects the effectiveness of the policies implemented by the government. As some may have already known, Vietnam is a socialist country with enormous control by the central government. In addition, Vietnam also has the state apparatus as a tool for the government to control and closely monitor its people. It is different from the Indonesian governance, which has provided great flexibility for each region (decentralization) to carry out their respective policies, which may complicate synergy between government agencies. Additionally, government officials are also considered to be very lax in taking action against violations committed by the community, thus making policies ineffective when implemented.

Good internal cooperation and synergy between the government, individuals, communities, and business or business groups are needed to implement pandemic management policies more effectively and optimally. In addition, the government must also intensify cooperation to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic through health diplomacy efforts both in the region and globally. Thus, handling the pandemic can be done more effectively and efficiently.

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