



Religious Interpretation and the Pandemics in Indonesia: Whither the Pesantren Kiai Develop Meaning of Tawakkal

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji dampak Covid-19 pada masyarakat global dan penerapan protokol kesehatan seperti jarak sosial, penggunaan masker, dan mencuci tangan untuk mengurangi risiko kesehatan, terutama kematian akibat virus. Meskipun langkah-langkah tersebut diambil, beberapa komunitas menunjukkan keengganan dalam mematuhi protokol kesehatan, yang menyebabkan peningkatan kasus Covid-19. Secara khusus, di Indonesia, peran pendidikan Islam dalam mendorong penolakan terhadap protokol kesehatan Covid-19 melalui interpretasi ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an tentang tawakkal (mengandalkan kehendak Tuhan) masih jarang diteliti. Dengan berfokus pada beberapa kiai dari Kabupaten Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur, penelitian ini menggali berbagai interpretasi Al-Qur'an tentang pandemi dan evolusinya. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi dua kelompok kiai yang berbeda: satu kelompok menganjurkan ketergantungan penuh pada tawakkal, mengabaikan upaya manusia dalam melawan virus, dan kelompok lainnya menekankan langkah-langkah proaktif sebelum mengandalkan tawakkal. Makalah ini berargumen bahwa perbedaan interpretasi ini berasal dari kemampuan kiai dalam menggunakan prinsip-prinsip penafsiran Al-Qur'an. Memahami perspektif ini menggarisbawahi interaksi antara keyakinan agama dan praktik kesehatan masyarakat selama pandemi, menekankan pentingnya melibatkan pemimpin Islam dalam mempromosikan protokol kesehatan yang efektif demi kesejahteraan masyarakat.

ABSTRACT

This research examines the impact of Covid-19 on global communities and the subsequent implementation of health protocols such as social distancing, mask-wearing, and handwashing to mitigate health risks, particularly virus-related fatalities. Despite these measures, certain communities display reluctance in adhering to health protocols, leading to a surge in Covid-19 cases. Notably, in Indonesia, Islamic education's role in promoting resistance to Covid-19 health protocols through interpretations of Quranic verses on tawakkal (reliance on God's will) remains understudied. Focusing on selected kiai from Sidoarjo district, East Java, this study delves into the various Quranic interpretations regarding pandemics and their evolution. The research identifies two distinct groups of kiai: one advocating complete reliance on tawakkal, relegating human efforts in combating the virus, and another emphasizing proactive measures before turning to tawakkal. The paper argues that these interpretative differences stem from the kiai's ability to use principles of interpreting al-Qur'ān. Understanding these perspectives highlights the interplay between religious beliefs and public health practices during the pandemic, emphasizing the need for engaging Islamic leaders in promoting effective health protocols for societal well-being.

KATA KUNCI

Covid-19; Interpretasi Keagamaan; Kiai; Pesantren.

KEYWORDS

Covid-19; Religious Interpretation; Kiai; Pesantren.

A. Introduction

Since the coming of the Covid-19 to Indonesia in March 11th, 2020, the Government of Indonesia had to accept the fact that the country was not resistant to the virus. In early March 2020, President Joko Widodo announced for the first time several Covid-19 infection cases in the country.¹ Dealing with the virus spread, the Government has issued health protocols such as wearing masks, managing social distancing, avoiding crowds, and travel restrictions.

The health protocols so far have quantitatively reduced activities in public spaces, including schools, workplaces, religious facilities, tourism, and public transportation. Community members are no longer as free as before to carry out their activities. Although there are community members who comply with the government health protocols, many others were not yet ready to face the Covid-19 spread as indicated by their negligence towards the health protocols.² Refusal towards the protocols even appears quite direct in some cases. For instance, a young man in Banda Aceh attacked police officers simply because the officers asked the man to leave a café due to the restriction.³ Approval and refusal towards the health protocols in Indonesia are the sign of two opposite beliefs in community whether the virus is risking or not.

Dealing with those who do not care about the existing appeal from the government, the authorities invite the participation of religious leaders to take part in breaking the chain of Covid-19 spread in the community through religious approaches.⁴ Previous research on the Covid-19 and Islamic life in Indonesia indicate the involvement of different authorities, including the religious ones, to control mass in purpose of reducing the potential of the virus spread, e.g., to pray at home instead of in the mosque.⁵ Unfortunately, this effort must face religious view that are not always aligned with the government policy on the pandemic mitigation program.⁶ In some mosque communities, it was hard to spread the idea of health protocols issued by the government, because the religious views that were not

¹ Ega Ramadanti, "Covid-19 Dalam Perspektif One Health Approach Dan Law Enforcement," Fakultas Hukum Universitas Padjadjaran, accessed 28 April 2020, 2020. <http://fh.unpad.ac.id/Covid-19-dalam-perspektif-one-health-approach-dan-law-enforcement/>.

² La Ode Harjudin, "Dilema Penanganan Covid-19: Antara Legitimasi Pemerintah Dan Kepatuhan Masyarakat," *Jurnal Kesejahteraan dan Pelayanan Sosial* 1 (05/29 2020), <http://dx.doi.org/10.52423/jkps.v1i1.13249>; A. A. Rahman et al., *Faktor-Faktor Psikososial Dari Ketidakpatuhan Masyarakat Pada Masa Pandemi*, 2020, Karya Tulis Ilmiah Psikologi, Bandung.

³ Tagar.id, "Gara-Gara Dilarang Ngopi Pemuda Aceh Pukul Polisi," Tagar.id, accessed 27 March 2020, 2020. <https://today.line.me/id/v2/article/JMjqjX>.

⁴ Yono Yono, "Sikap Manusia Beriman Menghadapi Covid-19," *Mizan: Journal of Islamic Law* 4, no. 1 (2020), <https://www.jurnal-fai-uikabogor.org/index.php/mizan/article/view/616>.

⁵ Nicholas Kuipers, Saiful Mujani, and Thomas Pepinsky, "Encouraging Indonesians to Pray from Home During the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Journal of experimental political science* (2020), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2020.26> 10.7910/DVN/CQMMTS. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

⁶ Asfa Widiyanto, "Religion and Covid-19 in the Era of Post-Truth: The Case of Indonesia," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 18 (2020), <http://dx.doi.org/10.24035/ijit.18.2020.176>.

supporting preparedness against the pandemics.⁷ Furthermore, there are several Islamic spiritual events that were conducted to reduce depression due to the pandemics.⁸ These previous studies suggest that religious (Islamic) authorities and their approach are very influential in the making of people's attitudes during the pandemic period. This research aims to fill in the gap in previous studies by dealing with how the religious interpretation related to the Covid-19 is developed or produced by Muslim authorities.

In Indonesian context, a *kiai* (orthodox Islamic teacher) is usually a leader of a *pesantren*, a type of indigenous Islamic educational institution. Besides leading the *pesantren*, *kiai* are usually informal community leaders who have access to local authorities or policy makers. As a result, *kiai* usually have ability and power to negotiate with them regarding decision making in public affairs.⁹ A historical research on *kiai* and *pesantren* demonstrates that many *kiai* have active roles in promoting social change through their *pesantren*, responding to social issues in community outside *pesantren*, as well as taking active stance whether to support government policy.¹⁰ For the reason of *kiai's* influence in community, several local governments in Indonesia embraced particular *kiai* who have religious views that align with the government programs against the Covid. The *kiai* then take part as local social influencers to support the government programs.

The involvement of *kiai* as local influencers is quite reasonable because, in the field, there are two opposite religious interpretation regarding how Muslim should deal with the pandemics rooted in some *kiai's* teachings and these teachings could directly or indirectly influence people's attitudes towards during the pandemic period. Interviews with *kiai* in East Java indicates that several *kiai* relate their teachings regarding *tawakkal*, self-abandonment to God in order to follow His will, with the Covid-19 exposure. The first group of *kiai* believe that *tawakkal* is an attitude of surrendering all worldly matters to God without conditions. Hence, it should be enough for Muslims to pray to God, asking for salvation, then God will save someone from the risk of the Covid exposure.¹¹ As a result of this view, any health protocols could be considered unnecessary. On the other hand, the second group of *kiai* believe that *tawakkal* is human attitudes of surrendering all worldly affairs after the humans themselves put

⁷ Febri Nurrahmi et al., "Paradox of Protective Behaviors among Muslim Men During the Early Stage of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Aceh, Indonesia," *Disaster medicine and public health preparedness* (2021), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2021.110>.

⁸ Meidiana Dwiyananti et al., "Dahaga: An Islamic Spiritual Mindfulness-Based Application to Reduce Depression among Nursing Students During the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Belitung Nursing Journal* 7, no. 3 (2021), <http://dx.doi.org/10.33546/bnj.1494>.

⁹ Hans Antlöv and Sven Cederroth, *Leadership on Java : Gentle Hints, Authoritarian Rule, Studies in Asian Topics* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994), 40-41; Endang Turmudi, "Religion and Politics: A Study on Political Attitudes of Devout Muslims and the Role of the "Kyai" in Contemporary Java," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 23, no. 2 (1995), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24492486>.

¹⁰ Auliya Ridwan, "The Dynamics of Pesantren Leadership from the Dutch Ethical Policy to the Reformation Periods," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 15, no. 02 (2020), <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2020.15.02.365-400>.

¹¹ M. Solikhin Saleh, interview by Ahmad Yusam Thobroni, 28 June 2020, 2020.

effort into dealing with their matters.¹² Therefore, this group of *kiai* highly supports the government health protocols before fully surrender to God about what happen next.

Due to the difference in interpreting and contextualizing the notion of *tawakkal* during the pandemic periods, this research attempts to investigate how the *kiai* develop their interpretation and how the interpretation construct awareness regarding the health risk amongst the *kiai's* followers. To answer these research questions, we attempted to explore the *kiai's* interpretative paradigm though exploring the roots of their thoughts.

Align with the research questions, to investigate how the *kiai* proceeds with interpretation of *tawakkal* and how the interpretation influences the *kiai's* followers, this research categorizes the source of information into two groups. The first group consists of *kiai* and his students or followers who concern about taking efforts before proceeding *tawakkal*. On the other hand, the second group consists of *kiai* and their students or followers who proceeds with fatalism in dealing with the pandemics.

To explore several *kiai's* view regarding the pandemics, the researchers selected District of Sidoarjo as the research location. Sidoarjo is a district in East Java Province in which abundant number of Pesantren are located. It is impossible for the researcher to interview all *kiai* and their students. Hence, we selected four *kiai* and four students from different pesantren that represent the two opposite sides of perspective on pandemics. In this paper, *Kiai Saleh* and *Kiai Arifin* represent those who have fatalistic view, seeing human efforts as unnecessary of proceeding *tawakkal*. On the other hand, *Kiai Kholis* and *Kiai Syamsuddin* represent those who prioritize putting efforts before proceeding *tawakkal*. From the four *kiai*, we collected information of the same issue and compare it.

The main data collection method in this research is interview. Through the interview, we tried to investigate how both groups of *kiai* develop their interpretation of *tawakkal* and how they respond to the health protocols issued by the government. In addition, we interviewed the students of the four *kiai* to explore how the *kiai's* view influence the students' view on dealing with the pandemics. On analyzing the collected data, the researchers transcribed the recorded interview, applied coding, and sought for emerged themes.

B. The Roots of *Kiai's* Theological Views on the Pandemics

In the introductory part, it is mentioned that there are two groups of *kiai*, those who are refusing and those who are supporting the government regulation regarding the Covid-19 mitigation steps. The *kiai's* attitudes are highly influenced by their theological view rooted in how they interpret Quranic verses and other Islamic resources. The following description is the result of exploration in the field regarding the root of the *kiai's* views.

¹² Nur Kholis, interview by Ahmad Yusam Thobroni, 16 September, 2020; Syamsuddin, interview by Ahmad Yusam Thobroni, 21 May 2020, 2020.

The First Group: The Deterministic

According to the information from the field, the first group of *kiai* and their followers who are refusing the government health protocols do not really worry of getting infected by the virus. They do not wear mask, do not maintain social distancing, do not wash hand, keep socializing as usual and shake hand. These attitudes develop because the *kiai* interpret the idea of *tawakkal* as surrendering all worldly matters to God without putting efforts. They just need to ask for safety to God, and nothing else. *Kiai Saleh* stated,

"If God has predestined someone to be exposed to Covid 19, then he will be infected, whether he wears a mask or not. On the other hand, if God does not predestinate someone to be infected, whether he wears a mask or not, then he definitely will not be infected. So the use of masks does not guarantee someone to be safe from being infected from the Covid-19".¹³

The view above has developed because the *kiai* refers to Qur'an, 65: 3.¹⁴ In that verse, the word *tawakkal* is interpreted as totally handing over matters in God. Therefore, the *kiai* believe that there are no preconditions nor endeavor to be done by human beings because God will fulfill all humans' needs. That interpretation is taken from the clause "*wa-man yatawakkal 'alā llāhi fa-huwa ḥasbuhū*", which means "and whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him". This part is interpreted by cutting off the meaning of the verse, without relating it to the previous series of clauses in a single verse. Consequently, in the pandemic context, when a person has trusted (surrendered) his life to God to be safe from the virus, then God will suffice him (keep him away from the virus). Someone does not need to wear a mask to avoid the virus outbreak because it is the work of God to take one away from the outbreak.¹⁵

Similar way of interpreting Qur'an, 65: 3, was also performed by *Kiai Arifin*. The *kiai* believes that the *tawakkal* has nothing to do with human efforts, meaning that *tawakkal* is an absolute and pure submission to God. *Kiai Arifin* stated, "with the command of *tawakkal*, God tests human beings about how deep their faith in the power of Almighty God".¹⁶ Shared interpretation was even conveyed by *Kiai Agoes Ali Masyhuri*, a famous *kiai* in East Java, in one of his preaches in a Youtube channel. The *kiai* stated, "if God does not predestine someone to get infected by the Corona virus, then God will give that one health, even if he does not wear a mask".¹⁷ Another verse that is commonly used to support the deterministic understanding of *tawakkal* is Quran, 14: 12.¹⁸

¹³ Saleh, interview.

¹⁴ Q. 65:3, "*wa-yarzuqhu min ḥaythu lā yaḥtasibu wa-man yatawakkal 'alā llāhi fa-huwa ḥasbuhū 'inna llāha bālighu 'amrihī qad ja'ala llāhu li-kulli shay'in qadra*" ("and provide for him from whence he does not reckon. And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him. Indeed Allah carries through His command. Certainly Allah has set a measure for everything").

¹⁵ Saleh, interview.

¹⁶ Zainul Arifin, interview by Qoni'ah, 25 September 2020, 2020.

¹⁷ TV9 Official, "Kajian Hikmah Kh Agoes Ali Masyhuri 11 Maret 2020 Bersama Sarung Bhs", 2020.

¹⁸ Q. 14:12, "*wa-mā lanā 'allā natawakkala 'alā llāhi wa-qad ḥadānā subulanā wa-la-naṣbiranna 'alā mā 'ādhaytumūnā wa-'alā llāhi fa-l-yatawakkali l-mutawakkilūn*" ("And why should we not put our trust in Allah, seeing

From several *kiai* who support the deterministic approach in interpreting Quranic verses, there are several similarities in terms of methodologically. The *kiai* do not consider the cause of revelation of each verse and the relationship between the selected verses with other verses. As a result, the interpretation is lack of its historical roots. Apart from the methods, it is discovered that the interpretation has been handed down from previous generation of *kiai* and remains unquestioned by the next generation of *kiai*. This phenomenon suggests that *kiai*'s decision or opinion sometimes remains unquestioned over generation in the context of Indonesian Muslim community.

The second group: Endeavor before Self-Abandonment

In opposition to the deterministic group, the second group upholds the importance of endeavor before getting into self-abandonment. Two supporters of this view are *Kiai* Syamsuddin and *Kiai* Kholis. They clearly stated that *tawakkal* is a stage where human beings are fully surrender to God regarding any matters, but the highest possible endeavor must be taken in advance.¹⁹

From an interview with *Kiai* Syamsuddin, it is found that the *kiai* refers to Qur'an 8: 61.²⁰ In the selected verse, the *kiai* points the clause '*in jannahū* (if they incline) as the condition of the next clause *fa-jnah lahā wa-tawakkal 'alā llāhi* (then you [too] incline toward it, put your trust in Allah). This method of interpretation gives meaning that if someone demands peace situation, then he needs to put efforts into it then pursues *tawakkal* to God regarding any results he would obtain.²¹ With this interpretation, the *kiai* regards the importance of preventing the spread of Covid-19 virus if everyone wants to get the pandemics over.

Several influential *kiai* from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, support direct actions to fight the Covid-19. *Kiai* Said Agil Siraj, the head of NU, suggest that human beings have to accept the pandemics as the destiny from God, but they have to remember that God also creates natural law, principles that can be used to prevent and to avoid the virus.²² Similarly, *Kiai* Musthofa Bisri from the North Coast of Central Java states that wearing a mask and following other health protocols are mandatory for everyone who wish to keep safe from the Covid-19.²³ The two *kiai* from NU could be seen as the representing the worldview of Indonesian Muslim in general, that most of them supports the mitigation of the Covid-19 pandemics by complying with health protocols as the endeavor before self-abandonment to God.

that He has guided us in our ways? Surely, we will put up patiently with whatever torment you may inflict upon us, and in Allah let all the trusting put their trust").

¹⁹ Syamsuddin, interview; Kholis, interview.

²⁰ Q. 8:61, "*wa-'in jannahū li-s-salmi fa-jnah lahā wa-tawakkal 'alā llāhi 'innahū huwa s-samī' u l-'alīm*" ("And if they incline toward peace, then you [too] incline toward it, and put your trust in Allah. Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing").

²¹ Syamsuddin, interview.

²² Kompas TV, "Ketum Pbnu Imbau Terus Berikhtiar Di Tengah Pandemi Corona", 2020, accessed 20 August 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBZpdw_qpMI.

²³ Kemenag RI, "Kasus Covid-19 Terus Naik, Gus Mus: Saatnya Prioritaskan Rasa Kemanusiaan", 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4splzF9TDFs&t=302s>.

Different from the first group, the second group apply more rigid approach on interpreting verses on *tawakkal*. The *kiai* in the second group, such in the case of *Kiai Syamsuddin*, upholds the relation of one clause with another clause in one verse. Hence, their interpretation shows the sequence of action, i.e. pursuing endeavor before *tawakkal*.

As *kiai* are influential figures, particularly to their students and followers, whatever their interpretation regarding *tawakkal* is always influencing the way their followers give meaning to a thing. The next part discusses how students of the two groups of *kiai* regards their teachers' thought regarding the pandemics and where the students take position on the issue.

C. Perspectives of Students or Followers on Covid-19 Pandemic

To understand how the *kiai's* understanding about the pandemics influence community members under their influence, this part presents several information from students of the interviewed *kiai* in this paper. Information from the field indicates shared thought between *kiai* and their students, meaning that students always follow *kiai's* theological approach in interpreting *tawakkal*, whether it is deterministic or making endeavor before the self-abandonment to God.

The obedience of students to *kiai's* decision in this research appears in the acceptance to any advice and teachings of their *kiai*. This suggests that *kiai's* arguments are often accepted without question by their students or followers. The culture of obedience towards *kiai* is very strong in pesantren world because *kiai* usually have the most important role of managing, teaching, as well as supervising all aspects in their pesantren.²⁴ In addition, whatever a *kiai* says, students would obediently follow it.²⁵ Students highly regards their *kiai* as teachers, educators, and social leaders in community around their pesantren.²⁶ The strong cultural position of *kiai* makes their students believe that whatever the *kiai* said is always correct, especially when dealing with religious issues.²⁷

Aligned with *kiai's* theological view in previous section, there are students of pesantren who have deterministic view on the pandemics because of following their *kiai*. The students caught meaning of *tawakkal* from the teachings of their *kiai*, that *tawakkal* is a total surrender to God without any efforts. This view firmly rooted in the students's mind because their high trust to their *kiai*. The following interview script reflect the previous statement.

²⁴ Ali Maschan Moesa, *Nasionalisme Kiai : Konstruksi Sosial Berbasis Agama*, 1st ed. (Surabaya Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Ampel Press; LKiS: Distribusi, LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 2007).

²⁵ Siti Muhibah, "Keefektifan Kepemimpinan Kyai Pada Pondok Pesantren," *Al Qalam* 33, no. 2 (12/30 2016), <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32678/alqalam.v33i2.394>.

²⁶ Muslichan Noor, "Gaya Kepemimpinan Kyai," *Jurnal Kependidikan* 7, no. 1 (2019), <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24090/jk.v7i1.2958>.

²⁷ Zainab, interview by Ahmad Yusam Thobroni, 22 August 2020, 2020.

"My kyai is a pious person and he highly understand the meaning of *tawakkal* in the Qur'an. I believe that he cannot be wrong because he has studied at a boarding school for a long time. He gains knowledge from his teachers as well".²⁸

The statement implicitly emphasizes on the importance of chain of transmission between teachers and students. The interviewed student believes that her *kiai* gained the understanding of *tawakkal* from his teachers, meaning that the *kiai* does not make his own interpretation. This attitude suggests that chain of knowledge transmission, i.e., from teachers to students, is significantly important to legitimate the "validity" of any Islamic teachings.

Different from above, there are students who pursue *tawakkal* after making effort to solve their issues. Basically, there is a similar pattern as previous information of how the students' understanding has developed. The students put high trust of their *kiai*, that the *kiai* has valid information and right guidance. In addition, the students have access to resources other than that of belongs to the *kiai*. Hence, the students can make comparison between what is said by the *kiai* and what is stated in other resources. The following interview script demonstrates students' reasoning, not just following what the *kiai* said.

"My Kyai's understanding of *tawakkal*, in my opinion, is very makes sense. He emphasized on the the relationship (*munāsabah*) between words, between clauses in a verse. So, in giving an interpretation, we cannot just take a clause and cut it from the entire verse. In my understanding, God can make human beings sick of healthy, but He also commands humans to follow the laws of nature (*sunnatullāh*) that He has set. If someone wants to be healthy and stayed away from the Covid, that one must follow the *sunnatullāh* by wearing mask".²⁹

From the field observation, the patterns of students' understanding towards *tawakkal* and the pandemics are highly influenced by their *kiai*. *Kiai's* deterministic view of *tawakkal* tends to be imitated by the students. Similarly, when *kiai* supports endeavor before *tawakkal*, the students would follow that approach too. This section demonstrates that *kiai* figure is very influential in the making of students' way of thinking. In the discussion in the next part, authors of this article are tracing how the understanding of *tawakkal* amongst *kiai* could differ.

D. Discussion

To understand how the interpretation of Quranic verses on *tawakkal* differ amongst two groups of *kiai* as discussed previously, this section examines the root of interpretation from the perspective of etymology and methods of Quranic interpretation.

²⁸ Sari, interview by Ahmad Yusam Thobroni, 23 August 2020, 2020.

²⁹ L. Helmiati, interview by Ahmad Yusam Thobroni, 24 August 2020, 2020.

Tawakkal from Etymological Perspective

Etymological examination is important in interpreting Quranic verses to find which meaning should be considered for particular words in the Qur'ān. the word *tawakkal* is derived from Arabic *al-tawakkul*.³⁰ The word *al-tawakkul* and all its verb forms addresses the meaning of “submission of human affairs to his Lord”.³¹ The root of *al-tawakkul* etymologically comes from the word *wakala* (*fi'l māḍī mujarrad* / active past simple verb) following *fa'ala* form. It consists of the letters *waw-kāf-lām*, then this root word gets additional letter *tā* 'at the beginning and *syiddat* on its' *ayn fi'l*. Thus, the word *wakala* becomes *tawakkala* following verb form *tafa'ala* (*fi'l māḍī mazīd* /past active verb). From word *tawakkala* comes the word *al-tawakkul*, which is a form of *maṣḍar* (gerund).³²

Table 1: Several Verb Forms of Tawakkal in al-Qur'ān³³

No.	Type	Mentioned in
1	Fi'l māḍī (Past - verb) ma'lūm	Tawakkaltu (تَوَكَّلْتُ) is mentioned seven times respectively in Q. 9:129; 10:71; 11:56,88; 12:67; 13:30; 42:10. Tawakkalnā (تَوَكَّلْنَا) is mentioned four times respectively in Q.7:89; 10:85; 60:4; 67:29.
2	Fi'l mudāri' (Continuous - verb) ma'lūm	Tawakkala (تَوَكَّلَ) is mentioned once in Q. 14:12. Yatawakkalu (يَتَوَكَّلُونَ) is mentioned twelve times respectively in Q. 3:112, 160; 5:11; 8:49; 9:51; 12:67; 14:11, 12; 39:38; 58:10; 64:13; 65:3. Yatawakkalūna (يَتَوَكَّلُونَ) is mentioned five times respectively in Q. 8:2; 16:42, 99; 29:59; 42:36.
3	Fi'l amr (Imperative - verb)	Tawakkal (تَوَكَّلْ) is mentioned nine times respectively in Q. 3:159; 4:81; 8:61; 11:123; 25:58; 26:217; 27:79; 33:3,48. Tawakkalū (تَوَكَّلُوا) is mentioned twice respectively in Q. 5:23, 10:84.
4	Ism Fā'il (Subject)	Mutawakkilūna (مُتَوَكِّلُونَ) is mentioned three times respectively in Q. 12:67; 14:12; 39:38. Mutawakkilīna (مُتَوَكِّلِينَ) is mentioned once in Q. 3:159.

According to Ibn Fāris, the term *al-tawakkul* has etymological meaning of “leaning on or believing in others in settling affairs”.³⁴ From the lexical meaning, Ibn Fāris adds that *al-tawakkul* means “expressing helplessness (weakness) in a matter and leaving it to others”. This means that one who leaves a matter to others is substantially a weak one and the entrusted other is considered have responsibility and ability to resolve that matter.³⁵ From these definitions, thus, *al-tawakkul 'alallāh* (self-abandonment to God) is a state of entrusting all affairs to God and submitted only to Him as the entity who is able to deal with and to guarantee and to suffice the needs of all His creatures. *Tawakkal* should be taken as a conscious attitude regarding the powerlessness of human beings in dealing with their affairs.³⁶ In addition, *al-tawakkul* is believing on help of God and being frustrated from human helps.³⁷

³⁰ , s.v. "Al-Munjid Fī Al-Luḡat Wa Al-A'lām."

³¹ Abū al-Fadl Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol. 9, 12, 14, 15 (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah).

³² Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqiy, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Mufahras Li Alfāz Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1992).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad Ibn Fāris ibn Zakariyyā, *Mu'jam Maqāyis Al-Lughah*, vol. 2, 3, 4, 5 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1979).

³⁵ Ibn Manẓūr.

³⁶ al-Rāqib Al-Aṣḥānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz Al-Qur'ān* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1992).

³⁷ 'Alī bin Muḥammad Al-Jurjānī, *Al-Ta'rīfāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988).

The person who pursues *tawakkal*, *al-wakīl*, realizes his/her weakness in front of God as the entity who is able to deal with a matter.³⁸

The word *al-tawakkul* has two main essences, to surrender and to believe, and these are closely related to weakness. The state of weakness is always the main reason for someone to hand over a matter to someone else. Theologically, human being is created in a weak condition as stated in Q. 4: 28.³⁹ When this view is associated with *tawakkal*, then it can be said that human beings are, by nature, weak and dependent on others.⁴⁰

The order to pursue *tawakkal* came to the prophet Muhammad in Q. 3:159 when the prophet needed to discuss with his companions regarding the ummah (Muslim community).⁴¹ In this regard, al-Zuhayliy argues that the word *tawakkal* in the verse means submission of the affairs to God, which includes worldly affairs, e.g. peace and war, politics, economics, and community affairs.⁴² In the context of this verse, a leader needs to take effort to solve the affairs and put trust in God afterwards. Hence, in the context of pandemics in Indonesia and elsewhere in the world, Muslims must take direct actions first before pursuing *tawakkal*. In short, it is true that etymologically *tawakkal* means surrendering human affairs to God; however, as contextualized in other verses (e.g., Q. 3:159), this is an obligation for every Muslim to resolve their issues before coming to the state of *tawakkal*. To discuss how the interpretation of *tawakkal* may differ amongst *kiai* in this research, the next part discusses the interpretation methods and their implication to the production of meaning of *tawakkal* by *kiai*.

Quranic Interpretation Methods and Interpreting Tawakkal

Interpretation of al-Qur`ān, *al-tafsīr*, must be carried out through methods under the consensus of scholars in the area of *qawā'id al-tafsīr* (principles of Quranic interpretation). Besides that an interpreter must master Arabic language as the main tool to comprehend al-Qur`ān besides other tools in *ulūm al-Qur`ān wa al-tafsīr* (Quranic studies and interpretation). *Ulūm al-Qur`ān* consists of Quranic studies from several perspectives, i.e., *asbāb al-nuzūl* (causes of revelation of particular verses), sequences, collection, writing, chanting, interpretation, miracle, *Al-nasikh wa al-mansukh* (eliminating a law or principle due to other principles), countering arguments against *al-Qur`ān*, etc.⁴³ On the other hand, *al-tafsīr* is an activity of explaining interpretation of Quranic verses, issuing Islamic law according

³⁸ Depag RI, *Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahnya*. (Jakarta: Bumi Restu, 1976).

³⁹ Q. 4:28, “*yurīdu llāhu ‘an yukhaffifa ‘ankum wa-khuliqa l-‘insānu ḍa ‘īfa*” (“Allah desires to lighten your burden, for man was created weak”).

⁴⁰ Wahbaṭ Al-Zuhayliy, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munīr*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1994).

⁴¹ Q. 3:159 “*fa-bi-mā raḥmatin mina llāhi linta lahum wa-law kunta faẓẓan ghalīẓa l-qalbi la-nfaḍḍū min ḥawlika fa-‘fu ‘anhum wa-staghfir lahum wa-shāwirhum fī l-‘amri fa-‘idhā ‘azamta fa-tawakkal ‘alā llāhi ‘inna llāha yuḥibbu l-mutawakkilīn*” (“It is by Allah’s mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you. So excuse them, and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in Allah. Indeed Allah loves those who trust in Him”).

⁴² Al-Zuhayliy.

⁴³ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīm. Al-Zarqāniy, *Manāhil Al-‘Irfān*, vol. 1 (Cairo: ‘Isā al-Bābiy al-Ḥalabiyy, 1972).

to them, and taking wisdom.⁴⁴ Based upon the two definitions of *ulūm al-Qur'ān* and *al-tafsīr*, the activity of interpreting the Qur'an should not be taken carelessly as an interpreter requires to master particular Islamic disciplines and follow consensus amongst Muslim scholars.

In this research, two groups of *kiai* in the beginning of the article have opposite view regarding the pandemics Covid-19 from Quranic perspective, which is influenced by their methods in interpreting. In this part, authors of this article demonstrate principles in *ulūm al-Qur'ān wa al-tafsīr* could results in different interpretation when an interpreter makes use of them or not. Regarding this, we take example from Q. 12:67 and Q. 3:159.^{45,46}

Interpretation of Q. 12:67 regarding *tawakkal* may result in deterministic or fatalistic view when an interpreter points directly to clause “*‘alayhi tawakkaltu wa-‘alayhi fa-l-yatawakkali l-mutawakkilūn*” (“In Him I have put my trust; and in Him let all the trusting put their trust”). Without connecting the clause with previous clause in one verse, ones may produce fatalistic view on dealing with their affairs.

Different from above, interpretation of *tawakkal* should result in humans' active efforts to deal with their affairs before fully surrendering to God if Q. 12:67 regards the context in the beginning of the verse, “*lā tadkhulū min bābin wāḥidin wa-dkhulū min ‘abwābin mutafarriqatin wa-mā ‘ughnī ‘ankum mina llāhi min shay’in*” (“do not enter by one gate, but enter by separate gates, though I cannot avail you anything against Allah”). This verse is actually about Prophet Ya'qūb commands to eleven of his sons to enter Egypt separately from different gates in purpose of arriving at the destination safely.

From Islamic historical perspective, Prophet Ya'qūb took that strategy because he has information regarding Egypt, which had strict guards in each gates that many non-Egyptian tried to avoid.⁴⁷ Related to Q. 12:67, this is clear that the knowledge of the Prophet regarding the condition in the border of Egypt is a cause of action, which then he made efforts into the safety of his sons through strategy of entering the country separately from different gates. Hence, all his sons was successfully arrived in Egypt safely.

Reflecting from the history of Prophet Ya'qūb, applying strategy as a product of human thinking process is compulsory before surrendering all the result to God. This gives meaning to the clause “*lā tadkhulū min bābin wāḥidin*” (“do not enter by one gate”) as the sign for human beings to observe causes

⁴⁴ Badr al-Dīn 'Abdullāh Al-Zarkasyiy, *Al-Burhān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1 (Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābiy al-Ḥalabiy, 1957).

⁴⁵ Q. 12:67, “*wa-qāla yā-baniyya lā tadkhulū min bābin wāḥidin wa-dkhulū min ‘abwābin mutafarriqatin wa-mā ‘ughnī ‘ankum mina llāhi min shay’in inī l-ḥukmu ‘illā li-llāhi ‘alayhi tawakkaltu wa-‘alayhi fa-l-yatawakkali l-mutawakkilūn*” (“And he said, ‘My sons, do not enter by one gate, but enter by separate gates, though I cannot avail you anything against Allah. Sovereignty belongs only to Allah. In Him I have put my trust; and in Him let all the trusting put their trust’”).

⁴⁶ Q. 3:159, “*fa-bi-mā raḥmatin mina llāhi linta lahum wa-law kunta faẓẓan ghalīẓa l-qalbi la-nfaḍḍū min ḥawlika fa-fu ‘anhum wa-staghfir lahum wa-shāwirhum fī l-‘amri fa-‘idhā ‘azamta fa-tawakkal ‘alā llāhi inna llāha yuḥibbu l-mutawakkilīn*” (“It is by Allah’s mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you. So excuse them, and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in Allah. Indeed Allah loves those who trust in Him”).

⁴⁷ Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn Al-Qāsimiy, *Tafsīr Al-Qāsimiy Al-Musammā Maḥāsin Al-Ta’wīl*, vol. 9 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1978), 250-51.

of actions in the universe, which would contribute to the success of our endeavor.⁴⁸ Afterwards, by the knowledge of identifying the causes, one could pursue endeavor to achieve something optimally. This suggest that *tawakkal* must go after putting effort into something. I would called this as an active way of pursuing *tawakkal*.

To contextualize the history of Prophet Ya'qūb in the pandemic of Covid-19 period, the clause "*wa-dkhulū min 'abwābin mutafarriqatin*" ("but enter by separate gates") implicitly suggests that people should go through several ways against the pandemics, e.g., wearing masks, managing social distancing, washing hand, avoiding touching face, applying disinfectant, etc. On the other hand, the clause "*lā tadkhulū min bābin wāḥidin*" ("do not enter by one gate") suggests that taking only one way to solve the pandemics, e.g. only managing social distancing") should be still considered as minimum efforts and would have small success chance to fight the pandemics. Q. 12:67 is closed with clause '*alayhi tawakkaltu wa-'alayhi fa-l-yatawakkali l-mutawakkilūn*' ("In Him I have put my trust; and in Him let all the trusting put their trust"). This clause indicates that after human beings have optimally put effort into solving their problems, they should ask for God help (e.g. by praying) for best result.⁴⁹

For the second example of making use principles in Quranic interpretation, authors of this article select Q. 3:159. Like previous example on Q. 12:67, cutting off a clause from the whole verse might result in deterministic or fatalistic interpretation of *tawakkal*, i.e., cutting the clause "*fa-tawakkal 'alā llāhi*" ("put your trust in Allah") from the entire verse. The interpretation of the verse must include the key clause "*wa-shāwirhum fī l-'amri*" ("and consult them in the affairs") as the obligation before coming into *tawakkal*.

According to Ibn 'Aṭīyyaṭ as cited by Wahbaṭ al-Zuhayliy, consultation is one of problem solving methods according Islamic teachings; hence, Muslims must avoid those who claim as scholars but stepping aside consultation.⁵⁰ The statement of Ibn 'Aṭīyyaṭ is quite reasonable, because making use only one's thought has smaller chance of formulating problem-solving strategy than taking consultation involving many different parties. This view highly supports the notion of better strategy, which may come from others.⁵¹ This interpretation of *tawakkal* suggests three steps of *tawakkal*. First, Muslims should take consultation, planning ahead about what to do to solve their issues. Second, Muslims should take high endeavor to solve their issues based upon what they have planned. Third, after the planning and putting effort, Muslims are allowed to come to *tawakkal*, trusting God for what the result be.

From the discussion on Q. 12:67 and Q. 3:159, it can be concluded that making use principles of interpreting al-Qur`ān is highly important to build up comprehensive understanding about *tawakkal*.

⁴⁸ Muḥammad Fakh al-Dīn Al-Rāziy, *Tafsīr Al-Fakh Al-Rāziy Al-Musytahir Bi Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr Wa Mafātiḥ Al-Gayb*, vol. 14 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1994), 178.

⁴⁹ Aḥmad Muṣṭafā Al-Marāghiy, *Tafsīr Al-Marāghiy*, vol. 4,13 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr), 17.

⁵⁰ Al-Zuhayliy, 143.

⁵¹ Al-Marāghiy, 113-14.

Fatalistic view in facing the pandemics Covid-19 should not happen amongst Muslim scholars if they could examine Quranic messages more closely using the principles of quranic interpretation.

E. Conclusion

In their capacity as influential figures, the statements of *kiai* wield considerable sway over their students and followers. This investigation has illuminated compelling evidence showcasing the profound trust reposed by students and followers in their respective *kiai*, leading to unwavering adherence to their pronouncements. Regrettably, a subset of *kiai* has espoused a fatalistic stance when confronting the challenges of pandemics. This perspective has indirectly permeated the mindset of their students and followers, engendering an unsettling impact.

This paper contends that the emergence of this fatalistic outlook is rooted in the oversimplification of Quranic messages during the interpretive process. Factors such as the disregard for the contextual background, causes of revelation, and the interconnections among clauses within a verse have contributed to this viewpoint.

The exigencies posed by the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia necessitate the concerted efforts of multiple stakeholders for its resolution. As the most populous Muslim country globally, *kiai* wield significant influence in shaping public decisions. Therefore, it is imperative that *kiai* promote the notion of proactive engagement to combat the pandemic, in lieu of endorsing a fatalistic standpoint. The statements of *kiai* should harmonize with governmental policies, uniting the populace towards a gradual return to normalcy.

Note

All Quranic translation and transliteration / romanization in this paper is derived from <https://al-quran.info/>.

Terms in Bahasa Indonesia, such as *kiai*, is written as it is regardless plural or singular in order to keep the term linguistically pure.

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