

# Examining The Policy Narrative And The Role Of The Media In The Policy Response To The Covid-19 Crisis In Indonesia

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## Abstract.

*This paper aims to investigate the relationship narratives presented in the media and their role in influencing the policymaking process regarding the COVID-19 response in Indonesia. The study is based on an analysis of online news content and in-depth interviews with political advisers to the president and ministers as well as public health experts who were invited to the core group of policymakers. Analysis of the narrative policy framework reveals the relationship between the government's response and the changing tone of media coverage. The study also finds that the media have become an influential platform influencing policy agenda setting.*

**Keywords:** Media, Policy Response, Covid-19.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been characterized by a lack of transparency and leadership, making Indonesia the worst-affected country in Southeast Asia (Jakarta Post, 2020a). In particular, many advocacy groups in Indonesia, such as associations of Indonesian doctors, public health experts, and research centers, have publicly voiced their concerns during the crisis. They called for governments to be more transparent and respond more effectively to the pandemic. The news media has long been recognized as a powerful means of influencing public discourse, with a discernible impact on public policy (Chapman et al., 2014). Using this method, advocates can raise agenda-setting issues during the early stages of the policy process and even play an important role during this process (De Bruycker, 2019; Wolfe et al., 2013). This research focuses on advocates for formulating and communicating narratives through the news media to influence the policy process. To achieve this goal, the narrative policy framework (NPF) is used as a tool for analyzing narratives. This study answers a call from Shanahan et al. (2018) about the importance of researchers using the NPF to study the role of narrative in the policy process.

Blair and McCormack (2016) also assert that the use of NPF in investigating news media is a relatively understudied area of research. COVID-19 has raised critical questions about the interaction between policy narratives and policy processes. Therefore, this study aims to explore how the NPF, which plays a role as a strategy in media advocacy, can and does influence policy decisions. In particular, how does media advocacy shape agenda setting? And, to what extent can scientists, whose roles have been heavily emphasized and promoted by the media during the pandemic, can influence policy outcomes? This research has two main research objectives. First, this study contributes to the NPF literature because the NPF has not been used systematically to analyze narratives on critical issues, such as hazards or disasters, that emphasize crises (Crow et al., 2017). , this study contributes to the study of media and policy by exploring the role of the media in the policy process. The rest of this article is organized as follows. In Part 2, we present the theoretical underpinnings of the news media and the NPF and the role of the NPF in the policy process. Section 3 discusses the research methods, including the study design, interview, content analysis protocol, and data analysis. Section 4 presents the findings from the content analysis and interviews. Sections 5 and 6 present and discuss the findings, respectively, and Section 7 presents the conclusions and limitations of this study.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### News Media, Narrative Policy Framework, And Policy Making

The news media is always dominated and often used by advocates as an arena to frame problems and issues and provide solutions according to their respective values and interests (Malin et al., 2020). While

social media has limitations in that it can only serve a rather narrow audience (Himmelboim et al., 2013), news media are designed to reach a large audience. It also has a degree of prestige due to its longevity and standards of professional journalism (Schudson, 2002). Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) state that the news media are part of an advocacy coalition group, arguing that the news they present usually integrates policy beliefs. Advocates use the news media as an advocacy tool to mobilize the public with the same opinion (Wallack et al., 1999). Although the policy actions proposed by advocates affect the entire population, the narrow target of media advocacy is the main policymakers (Wolfe et al., 2013). Beyers (2004) and Hanegraaff et al. (2016) argue that the news media is an in-depth and relevant setting, which can be used to influence the attention of policymakers and other key stakeholders and provide information about public aspirations towards preferred policies. Framing is a fundamental element of media advocacy and is widely regarded as part of the policy narrative. Terkildsen et al. (1998, p. 47) assert that framing is 'an intimate thematic approach, policy structuring, and political solution'.

Framing appears in media stories when cause and effect are expressed in the reporting text (Graber, 1990). This framing attribute is believed to be what the narrative analysis literature calls 'casual stories' (Stone, 2002). Such stories typically feature heroes or actors in the policy arena who approve and promote policy preferences, criminals who are responsible for opposing favored policies, and victims who suffer when policy preferences are not made (Shahanan, McBeth, & Hathaway, 2011). The framing strategy echoes embedded policy ideas and strategies that aim to influence audience policy preferences. According to McBeth et al. (2014), a policy narrative 'consists of setting, characters (hero, villain, and victim), plot, and morals or policy solutions' (p. 228). Therefore, to categorize news as a policy narrative, news articles must at least consist of the following elements: policy issues, setting, character, and morals or policy solutions (McBeth & Lybecker, 2018). Policy narratives can also refer to public policy interests. This attribute can refer to anything policy-related, including policy solutions, possible policy impacts, or knowledge contested in policy settings (Shanahan et al., 2018). The NPF literature argues that policy actors tend to use narratives or stories to define processes. In policymaking, complex problems are simplified into stories with a central setting, characters, plot, and themes to help the public rationalize problems (Gupta et al., 2018). Thus, a policy actor can strategically communicate an issue, give policy preferences, and give credit or blame to certain parties (O'Donovan, 2018) to influence public opinion or policymakers toward support for the preferred policy (O'Donovan, 2018). (M. D. Jones & McBeth, 2010).

### **Media Advocacy And Agenda Setting**

In the discourse on the role of the media in the process of making public policies, media studies focus more on public opinion on an agenda or public agenda. In contrast, policy studies focus more on the agenda of the government or policymakers (Wolfe et al., 2013). There are three layers in the study of agenda setting: the media agenda, the public agenda, and the government agenda. We can immediately see the media and the public agenda by looking at stories or media coverage. What is more difficult is to link the role of the media directly in influencing the policy-making process. It is undeniable, that although difficult to measure directly on the government agenda, the media have a role in influencing discourse related to the policy-making process (Wolfe et al., 2013). In agenda-setting studies, this role means that the media act as 'trigger devices' (Kingdon, 1984). Excessive reporting of an issue can make the public pay more attention. When the media and the public pay attention to an issue and enter the discourse on the policy agenda, the government or policymakers will at some stage be involved in this discourse. Although the media and public media are not always on the government's agenda, the discourse space created by the media at least shows the role of the media in the public policy-making process. B. D. Jones and Wolfe (2010) further explain the role of the media. The media agenda reflected in the focus of its coverage will help determine which issues are worth discussing and prioritizing and which are not.

## **III. METHODS**

### **Research Design and Sample**

In this study, we apply a single case study to explore the policy narrative on COVID-19 in Indonesia. Focusing on the meso level, this study examines policy narratives in the national news media and how these

narratives from various advocacy groups can influence policy responses to COVID-19. A case study is a non-experimental approach that has been used in many Meso-level NPF studies (Shanahan et al., 2018). In this study, we used interviews and descriptive statistics as a result of content analysis. NPF comes from content analysis methods (McBeth et al., 2005), and meso-level NPF studies typically use content analysis (Shanahan et al., 2018). Given that our research focuses on the effect of policy narratives on the policy process, we selected selection criteria for the respondents we interviewed. In particular, they must be part of the core policy-making group regarding the handling of the COVID-19 crisis in Indonesia. This selection process resulted in five informants. Two of the informants came from government agencies involved in a limited cabinet meeting chaired by the president on handling the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. They are advisers to the president and ministers and are tasked with inviting experts to a preparatory meeting before each cabinet meeting is held. The other three informants are experts invited to the meeting, one of which is an epidemiologist who actively advocates for public health policies to the government through the media and is often quoted in various media features.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Content Analysis Protocol**

Four Indonesian national online newspapers were selected for this study: Tirto, Tempo, Kompas, and CNN Indonesia, for several reasons. First, Kompas and Tempo are two newspapers that have an important influence on various political processes in Indonesia (Dhakidae, 1991; Steele, 2005). Both are excellent examples of high-quality journalism and can be considered trendsetters in the Indonesian media industry in terms of style of coverage (Tapsell, 2017). Meanwhile, Tirto and CNN Indonesia are relatively younger media in the media landscape in Indonesia, with only five years of operation. Both are online newspapers that have attracted great attention because of their long and comprehensive coverage of headlines – something that is rarely done by online media in Indonesia (Sugito, 2017; Utama, 2016). By reviewing these four online newspapers, we want to show the importance of the role of media coverage in the dynamics of the government's public policy-making process regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The selection of online news is based on the speed with which the news is published, usually published around the clock rather than every day, and can be easily accessed by the public. News articles were collected using the search terms 'coronavirus' and 'COVID-19' for the period January 21, 2020, to, March 30, 2020. The selected period marks the resurgence of COVID-19 cases in China and when the Indonesian government finally takes a series of serious actions to respond to the pandemic. When duplicate news articles are identified in different publications, we analyze only one article. A total of 2,187 stories were collected in several categories.

#### **Semi-Structured Interview**

The selection of policymakers is based on a priori information in the news media about who might be considered most 'attractive'. Therefore, we include informants who play an active role in the policy-making process and those who show a willingness to share information. By interviewing more policymakers, we aim to gain diverse perspectives to minimize bias and increase our understanding of the policy-making process. Each interview lasted from 40 to 90 minutes and was audio recorded with informed consent. We started the interview by asking about the personal and professional backgrounds of the informants. After that, they were asked their opinion on the policy narratives from advocacy groups circulating in the mass media. We also asked them about how the narrative affected the policy-making process and at what stage it had the most impact on this process. To obtain clearer information about the process, we asked informants about the formulation of certain policy outcomes. Strict confidentiality and anonymity of informants were ensured throughout the study.

#### **Data Analysis**

As noted by Creswell (2003), we use quantitative content analysis and descriptive analysis as methods for finding data and as our main analytical techniques. In this study, there were three coding stages in the data collection stage (Creswell, 2003). Coding level 1 is an explanation of descriptive variables of an article, such as headline, length of the article, day of publication, and so on. Level 2 coding collects different variables about the news argument and the tone of the news it contains, and level 3 coding identifies the main framework in more detail. This is done using the NPF, which includes identifying settings and actors

related to COVID-19 policies as they appear in media coverage. To frame the three coding stages, we used a thematic type content analysis technique. Specifically, we use the technique proposed by Neuendorf (2002) in which the themes in each news article are viewed based on the subject matter of the article. To analyze the data from the interviews, we used an iterative process, which consisted of data coding, clustering, and interpretation. We repeatedly reviewed all aspects of the data and coded it. Next, to interpret the data, we grouped the data with the same code and linked the data in each cluster to the relevant literature.

### **Media Context in Indonesia**

Political personalization has emerged in post-reform Indonesian politics. As Asp and Esaiasson (1996) point out, the mass media has now become the dominant channel connecting government, political parties, and citizens. The process of political communication does not occur directly through interpersonal communication. Instead, physical encounters have been replaced by artificial images reproduced by the media. The consequence is a dramatic change in the political communication process of a candidate or politician. For the public, political figures are seen as representations of ideas; therefore, political parties are no longer important institutions for channeling political choices. In other words, the public's attention is focused on the 'who' discussion and not on the 'what' and 'how' questions regarding the political platforms promoted by political candidates and political parties. Political figures are vying to become media darlings. Media opinion has become important lately because it can be used to determine how a character is projected to the public. President Joko Widodo was originally a media lover; His initial appearance on the national political stage began when he received media attention after becoming the Mayor of Solo and the Governor of Jakarta (Tapsell, 2015). Context is important for understanding how the tone of media coverage can influence the political behavior of politicians.

## **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

#### **Media Narrative**

##### **Settings**

There are two moments related to the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia that determine the government's response. The first is the previous period when COVID-19 emerged in Wuhan in January 2020. Before the discovery of the first positive patient, statements by several government officials in the media were a catalog of blunders, showing how much they underestimated the scale of a disease. pandemic cases that may soon arrive in Indonesia (Wijayanto, 2020). The second period after the discovery of the first COVID-19 case in Indonesia in early March 2020. The focus of media coverage after the discovery of a positive case in Indonesia was the government's unpreparedness in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the main focus is on the minister of health, who has failed to calm the public and properly address health management issues. The Indonesian Doctors Association (IDI) criticized the central government for not involving private hospitals and laboratories to help speed up the testing of COVID-19 patients in various regions.

During this period, some media outlets became more hostile to the government. For example, Tirta (12 March 2020) wrote that the 'Ministry of Health Terawan downplayed the COVID-19 outbreak by allowing flights to Indonesia from affected countries. Another example of hostility can be seen in the stories that appeared in Tempo. On March 17, 2020, Tempo wrote about the strong pressure from civil society groups to demand the minister of health resign for not managing the crisis properly. Another important aspect of this incident relates to the government's focus on the economy rather than public health. Reports compiled from Tempo's coverage mostly highlight the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, particularly the tourism industry. The central and local governments have chosen to intensify tourism promotion when COVID-19 is already endemic in various countries. The focus on economic issues (eg, tourism) rather than health has received criticism, which is manifested in the discussion of actor mapping in the next section.

#### **Mapping Of Actors: Heroes, Villains, And Victims**

The Indonesian government's policy narrative map can be formulated in Table 1: The Indonesian government's policy narrative in handling COVID-19. In the NPF there are narratives about the character of

actors related to policy: villains, heroes, and victims. In this context, the villain is any party who intentionally or unintentionally causes problems in a policy, the victim is the party who is harmed by the existing policy, and the hero provides an alternative to the problematic policy (Gray & Jones, 2016). In this case, the victims are Indonesian citizens who are affected by the policies implemented by the government. At the beginning of the discovery of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia, the victim narrative was embodied in patients number 1 and 2. The announcement of President Widodo and Minister of Health Terawan on March 2, 2020, regarding the first few cases of COVID-19 in Indonesia. Indonesia led to the widespread dissemination of patient personal information. Unfortunately, Kompas reported that the victims were not informed of their positive status before the news was announced. It's natural for patients to be surprised to learn that they tested positive for COVID-19 while watching the president's announcement.

**Table 1.** Indonesian Government Policy Narrative On COVID-19

Arrangement	Victim	Villain and Plot	The main role	Moral of the story/policy solution
The stuttering of the Indonesian government in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic	Public health	Central government	Expert, Civil Society	The government ensures increased public communication about policies and heeds the advice of health experts

From this example, we can see that the criminals in terms of policies for handling this pandemic are government officials, especially President Widodo, the minister of health, and several ministers in other government agencies. An initial study conducted by Wijayanto (2020) noted, that in less than 100 days since the COVID-19 outbreak occurred at the end of last January, there were 37 blunder statements issued by Jokowi and his government regarding COVID-19: 13 blunder statements in the pre-crisis period, 4 blunder statements at the beginning of the crisis, and 20 blunder statements during the crisis. As a result, the public failed to prepare for what was to come, causing widespread panic, social stigma against COVID-19 patients, and the exposure of the first COVID-19 patient's data (Wijayanto, 2020). Meanwhile, the heroes who appeared later in media coverage were those who raised various problems in handling the outbreak by the government and who provided policy recommendations. These heroes in the analyzed data consist of civil society groups and academics. The main argument given by civil society groups and academia is that the government should prioritize public health. One of the heroes highlighting the policy issues of the Indonesian government is Pandu Riono, a leading epidemiologist at the University of Indonesia. In an interview with Kompas on April 13, 2020, Pandu said that since January and February, local transmissions have been taking place in Indonesia, which means ' . . . The virus has been circulating in Indonesia for a long time, but we are not satisfied that Indonesia is virus-free. This is what puts us in a bad situation'. Pandu implicitly said that the government's policy to hold Wuhan–Indonesia flights were one of the causes of the rapid spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia.

### **Narrative Mapping And Policy Criticism**

Media coverage also shows the moral of the story or, in this context, policy recommendations drawn from the stories presented in the media. Based on the media coverage analyzed, the criticism of the policy is related to several things. The first type of criticism relates to the inability of the Indonesian government to properly communicate its policies related to COVID-19. When a positive case of COVID-19 was first reported, the media stated that the government's pattern of public communication caused public anxiety, especially for COVID-19 patients. The second criticism relates to the idea that the government should provide all public information related to COVID-19, which can be used as solid guidelines by local governments and the public, especially amid a troubling flood of false information. . The central government must improve coordination with local governments in handling the COVID-19 pandemic so that the efforts made by the central and regional governments can be synchronized. Media criticism through various media reports focused on suggestions to the government to improve public communication regarding preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic by emphasizing travel restrictions and providing public health insurance. Other critics – and policy recommendations – recommend that the government immediately take preventive

measures to reduce the economic impact of the pandemic. The priority of the economic sector needs to be clarified so that government assistance in the economic and industrial sectors is not misplaced. The government must involve all parties in dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic so that more lives are saved.

### **Media and Policy Advocacy**

One expert revealed that he has heavily used the media to counter the government's response to downplaying the severity of COVID-19. Experts also apply other strategies to complement their media advocacy and increase their visibility. An expert builds strategic alliances with government agencies and senior bureaucrats to convey his recommendations on COVID-19 to the agency's ministers. He also uses his network position to disseminate his recommendations to other ministers. The Vice President revealed that when the government saw a spike in COVID-19 cases, it faced increasing pressure from the media to respond immediately to the outbreak. Regarding the role of the media in providing public information, he said, 'The media has a dominant role in agenda setting. This not only helps the government understand the public discourse about the pandemic, but we also rely on the information provided by the media that describes the real situation. We often question the validity of the data provided by some local governments because we know they have poor data management systems. The minister's adviser also expressed a similar sentiment, 'Ministers often get news website links sent by his connections to What's App groups. This became one of his sources of information, helping him set the agenda in policy-making'. He further revealed that the proportion of sources of information in ministerial meetings was 65:35, of which 65 referred to news media and 35 referred to internal think tanks.

However, he emphasized that not all news media play an important role in shaping the agenda setting, stating that the government only considers reputable news media and opinions quoted from reputable experts who have authority knowledge on the matter. The Deputy for Disaster Management said the media's framing of an issue may directly influence the opinion of the president and ministers on an issue, revealing that, 'the media have a strong role in helping the President win the election; therefore, he is concerned about his image and reputation conveyed in the media. To some extent, it affects his approach to dealing with a problem'. He also shared how the crisis and the media played a role in accelerating the policy process. When the government realized that the COVID-19 crisis posed serious risks and that it lacked the knowledge to properly respond to such a pandemic, it decided to invite public health experts into the policy-making process. Both the president and the adviser to the minister of health said, 'There is a consolidation process to make policy-making more inclusive by inviting experts into such a process'. However, experts point out that the policy process is complex because it has to compete with other actors in the policy-making process, including political advisers, senior bureaucrats, and other actors with different interests and judgments that influence decisions. president or minister. The author summarizes the dynamics of various Indonesian government policies during the pandemic in Table 2: The Indonesian government's policy response to COVID-19.

### **Discussion**

The Narrative Policy Framework shows that narrative is one of the most powerful elements in the public policy-making process. Mintrom and O'Connor (2020) state that evidence and facts alone are not sufficient as a basis for policy-making. Therefore, there needs to be a narrative that convinces the government, parliamentarians, political party elites, and the public. When a policy is narrated both structurally and content (M. D. Jones & Mc Beth, 2010), it can have material consequences that will affect the extent to which a policy is accepted and implemented (Mintrom & O'Connor, 2020). To see how media advocacy works in the public policy-making process, some may look to policy narratives. In terms of agenda-setting, the role of the media in influencing public policy arises when the media can prioritize and 'regulate attention in situations where various interests and ideas compete with one another (B. Jones & Baumgartner, 2005).

**Table 2.** The Indonesian Government's Policy Response To COVID-19

No	Tanggal	Kebijakan
1	Maret 2020	The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Indonesia

2	Maret 2020	The Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy invited local and foreign influencers to promote Indonesian tourism amidst the pandemic.
3	Maret 2020	Government announces social/physical distancing policy
4	Maret 2020	The government imposed a Regional PSBB (partial lockdown) instead of a full lockdown.
5	April 2020	The government banned going home for several days and stopped public transportation services during the Eid holiday season. However, the government allowed people to return to their homes in the same month. This policy creates confusion because of the definition of its words.
6	April 2020	The government has created a pre-employment card program for residents affected by the pandemic.
7	Mei 2020	The government has issued guidelines regarding the new normal of people's lives amid the high number of COVID-19 infections and deaths.
8	Juli 2020	The government forms a Committee for Handling COVID-19 and National Economic Recovery
9	Juli 2020	The Ministry of Agriculture plans to release and mass produce an antiviral necklace made from eucalyptus, which is claimed to be effective in preventing the transmission of COVID-19.
10	Agustus 2020	Amid increasing cases of COVID-19, the government has allowed civil servants to travel on business to accelerate the absorption of the government's budget.
11	December 2020	President Joko Widodo reshuffled and replaced the health minister responsible for handling the pandemic in Indonesia
12	December 2020	The chairman of the Task Force for the Acceleration of the Prevention of Corona Virus Disease has appealed to regional heads to reduce the use of PCR tests to increase the efficiency of the pandemic budget.
13	December 2020	The government closed borders to foreign travelers amid concerns over the discovery of a more contagious variant of COVID-19 that was first detected in the UK.
14	January 2021	President Joko Widodo receives the first COVID-19 injection as the government starts mass vaccination
15	February 2021	The government allocates IDR 14.2 trillion for the recovery of the tourism sector in Indonesia
16	Maret 2021	The government banned the Eid homecoming (exodus) tradition for the second year in a row to suppress the spread of COVID-19 but reopened tourist destinations.
17	Maret 2021	The government reopened borders, including allowing Indian citizens to enter Indonesia in April 2021, and 9 of them tested positive for COVID-19.

When the media has given priority to a particular issue, the media invites the public to pay attention to that issue as suggested by previous studies on agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). In the next stage, when the public's attention is so great on a problem it will affect the policy-making process carried out by the government. Based on the Indonesian government's COVID-19 pandemic policy, it is important to see how the media publish the narrative. In addition, the Indonesian government's pandemic policy approach is important not only for its citizens but also in international efforts to deal with COVID-19 (Fealy, 2020). The narrative of media coverage during the pandemic shows how the media sided with academics and independent experts who could criticize various policies taken by the government. Various critical reports from the media also show that critical narrative policies influence the approach taken by the Jokowi administration. The statements of these experts not only appear in the media but are also reproduced in various discussion forums and are seen in the realm of social media and show the public's mood towards the government (Fahmi, 2020). As a result, aggressive coverage that also represents public anger regarding the government's response has led to a shift in government policy. There were significant changes in the early days of the pandemic, especially after the Indonesian government announced the first positive case. Along with the hardening of the attitude of the media, the government also took a firmer stance after previously denying it. For example, in the early days of the pandemic, the government prepared fiscal incentives to boost the tourism industry which was sluggish due to the COVID-19 outbreak, including providing a US\$5.2 million subsidy to pay influencers to promote the country. After much criticism emerged in the media that the government should focus on health issues, the government revoked the policy (Jakarta Post, 2020a, 2020b).

During the pandemic, scientists, including medical and public health professionals, have been featured extensively in the media. Their coverage promotes the important role scientists can play in

responding to the COVID-19 emergency. In the weeks following the emergence of the first confirmed cases, scientists have grown to become media figures. Because of their expertise in providing scientific knowledge to understand situations, the role of scientists in the public sphere is changing significantly. Both elected officials and senior bureaucrats have begun inviting scientists to policy-making groups, asking them to provide evidence and explanations on which to base their decisions. We also find that the network structure strengthens the reputation of scientists in policy networks (Weibble et al., 2020). The alliance of scientists with government agencies and senior-ranking bureaucrats enhances their status (Weibble et al., 2020). The network is also used by scientists to gain direct access to influential policymakers such as ministers. Scientists provide important attendance at press conferences and government meetings. They play a classic public role in explaining and predicting situations, as well as increasing awareness and emergency preparedness (Cairney, 2016). However, during the pandemic, scientists also play a further role in legitimizing government decisions (Weibble et al., 2020). Therefore, during this crisis, scientists can strengthen governance capacity and governance legitimacy (Christensen, Læg Reid, and Rykkja, 2016). During this period of crisis management, experts appear to be recognized policy actors (Bakir, 2020). The involvement of experts may signal that scientific knowledge and evidence are institutionalized in the policy-making process (Baekkeskov, 2016). The crisis has created a situation in which experts have the opportunity to play a central role in policy making (Capano et al., 2020). In addition, this action is also partly to reassure the public by showing that the government is responsive to people's demands to take the pandemic more seriously (Christensen & Lgrid, 2020). However, we find that evidence, scientific modeling, and scientific approaches do not easily influence policy in Indonesia. There are two reasons behind this problem.

First, the nature of science is at odds with the needs of policymakers (Stringer & Dougill, 2013). Science is slow to develop, and develops because of intellectual disagreement; it is complex and multifaceted, ambiguous, and uncertain (Bal et al., 2020). Scientists from various disciplines share various perspectives (Bijker et al., 2009). Each scientist can propose a different measure, and this can confuse the policy-making process. Epidemiologists, virologists, and public health professionals emphasize strict infection control measures; Meanwhile, social and economic experts warn of socioeconomic pressures caused by decisive action, such as rising unemployment and bankruptcies, as well as social disruption (Richardson, 2020) that distract public attention from public health. This multiplicity of arguments results in more nuanced and unclear recommendations, which further deepen the uncertainty and complexity of the situation (Leach et al., 2021). This situation affects the reputation of scientists, while policymakers are pressured to make clear and fast decisions (Angeli & Montefusco, 2020). The president and ministers have repeatedly argued that they follow science in policy making. However, some policies indicate that they deviate from the scientific path. The crisis puts increasing pressure on governments to consider prudent strategies in responding to the pandemic (Angeli & Montefusco, 2020). In particular, the President has expressed his frustration that the ministry has not shown significant progress in implementing the policy response to COVID-19. The president asked the ministry to increase budget absorption because government spending was very low (Tempo, 2020a) while threatening to reshuffle the cabinet if the minister's performance was poor. This pressure prompted ministers to create programs that lack scientific credibility as a confusing effort to respond to the pandemic. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture is planning to mass-produce anti-coronavirus necklaces containing eucalyptus oil, which is claimed to prevent the virus. The Minister of Finance said that the product was proven to be effective in eradicating the virus (Kompas, 2020b). Later, the Minister of Health admitted that he had not reviewed the policy regarding the necklace (Kompas, 2020c).

Second, economic factors during the Jokowi regime played a dominant role that greatly influenced the context of policymaking in Indonesia (Muhtadi, 2015), including when designing policy responses to COVID-19 (Mietzner, 2020). Jokowi's administration focuses on development goals whereas his work emphasizes pragmatically rapid economic growth. The main agenda is to strengthen local businesses and industries (State, 2019). In February 2020, Jokowi admitted that he was worried that the pandemic would endanger the Indonesian economy (Kompas, 2020a). The main economic loss due to the pandemic is what Jokowi fears because it could affect his legitimacy and will put his power at risk (Fealy, 2020). He opposes



total lockdowns, pointing to Italy and India as precedents for how lockdowns can lead to social unrest (CNBC Indonesia, 2020b). His ministers also expressed similar arguments that the lockdown would hurt the economy and cause public panic, rebuking local leaders who were willing to take tough action by warning them to grow up and not politicize the pandemic (CNBC Indonesia, 2020a). The government has ignored many recommendations from experts to implement more stringent measures to safeguard the economy (Koran Tempo, 2020a). One of our respondents, an epidemiologist, stated that economic considerations, which play a central role in guiding policy responses in the first months of the pandemic, indicate their continuance to do so. In the first months after the first confirmed cases were reported, the Jokowi administration was widely criticized for ignoring and underestimating the issue. But months later, it has been criticized for offering half-hearted and ineffective policies to contain the spread of the virus (Fealy, 2020), while continuing to under-report the number of infections.

Scientists face a complicated situation and have difficulty in carrying out their duties when entering the policy-making environment. This is because there are many different actors in government, and there are many different approaches to the same problem (Bryson et al., 2017). The thinking approach of each actor is driven by their agenda, goals, and belief system (Schneider et al., 2014). Scientists enter the black box of the policy process which contains policymakers with irrational views and often political agendas leading to unexpected results (Weibble et al., 2020). Scientists not only deal with competing views of different actors, but they also need to compete for political attention from political leaders (B. Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). For example, one of Indonesia's leading epidemiologists, Pandu Riono, has repeatedly criticized the government's approach to dealing with the pandemic (Kompas, 2020e). Since his criticisms did not directly channel the government, Pandu used social media and made statements in the mainstream media to convey his opinion. Pandu said in various policies related to the pandemic, the government listened more to economists and other government sectors such as the army and did not involve health experts. 'The government doesn't want to hear my opinion', said Pandu (Tempo, 2020c). Ironically, he is often attacked by government supporters for being very vocal and repeatedly criticizing the Jokowi administration's pandemic policies. As our respondents noted, there are correcting priorities in the policy-making process and the government lacks the political will to prioritize public health over the economy. Scientists soon realized that they were in a fragile position in the policy-making environment. While a pandemic can change the policy process in a country, this may or may not happen, as normal political and administrative behavior, rules within the bureaucracy, and institutional arrangements greatly drive the content and processes of government responses to pandemics. A recent study conducted by the Lowy Institute places Indonesia as one of the poorest performing countries (85 out of 98 countries) in managing a pandemic (Jakarta Post, 2021).

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

A suggestive conclusion from this study is that there is little evidence to suggest media advocacy on matters of policy influence, as scientists' recommendations are not sufficiently reflected in actual policy outcomes. NPF in the media advocacy process seeks to create an Overton Window for leaders, politicians, and the public to pay attention to a particular issue. In other words, this is a form of attention politics in a political system (Wolfe et al., 2013). The media do not always succeed in influencing and changing public policy. However, in the NPF, the media help index an issue and play an important role in allocating the attention of the public and policymakers. This process becomes important in policy discussions at a later stage because the Overton Window has already been formed. This means that political leaders can signal response to media advocacy by bringing the issue onto the political agenda. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance of evidence and science in the policy-making process and their role in uncertain and ambiguous situations. We find that the media may help set the tone of the policy agenda and some public health experts have been media figures over the years.

Their increased visibility to political leaders then allows them to be invited to advisory committees in various government agencies or ministries. Therefore, media advocacy, to some extent, promotes the interaction between science and policy by promoting alliances among experts, political leaders, and policymakers. The government's decision to invite several experts to join the core group of policymakers

could indicate that policies aimed at serving the public interest are being formulated based on public health priorities. However, the changes were more symbolic than substantial. Our aggregate analysis shows that these measures do not extend to substantial responses. We find that the existing economic considerations continue to strongly drive the content of government policy formulation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in contrast to the protection of public health that is strongly promoted by experts. The worst impact of this response is the decline in public confidence in the government, which can be counterproductive to the government's long-term policy to deal with the pandemic.

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