

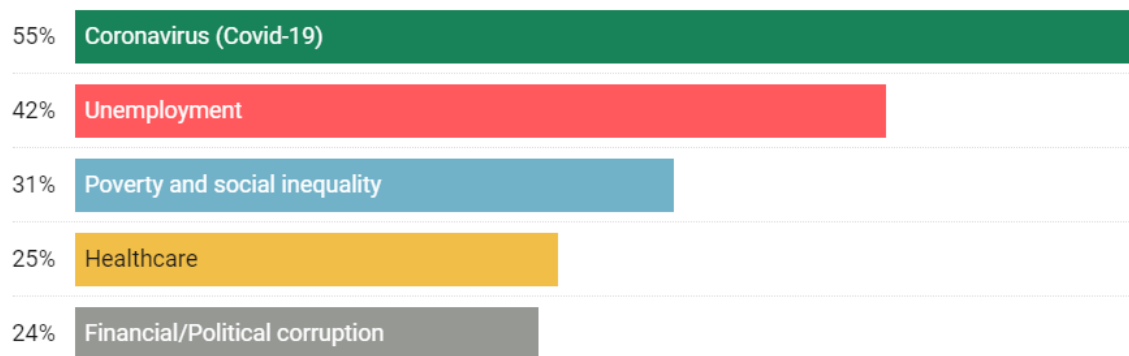
COVID-19, Leadership and Democracy

By: Noto Suoneto and Annisa Sekaringrat

The first Indonesian Scholars Forum (ISF) Politics and Law Monthly Forum was successfully held on Sunday, 21 February 2021. Noto Suoneto, a student of MA International Political Economy at the University of Birmingham, led the discussion on “Challenges of Global Leadership, Governance and Democracy in the COVID-19 Pandemic and What to Expect in 2021”. The discussion was substantially insightful and rich, with various opinions raised by the attendees.

To open the session, Noto asked the participants about the most threatening problem to our world today. Various answers were given to the floor: inequality, emerging infectious disease, climate change, social polarization and political greediness. Surprisingly, no one answered COVID-19 in which contradicting with the top global concerns regarded by adults aged 16-64 in 27 participating countries according to poll by Ipsos¹ and not matched with Noto’s guesstimate.

The top five global concerns



Research among adults aged 16-64 in 27 participating countries. c. 19,000 per month. (May 2020).

Source: Global Advisor • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Source: Atkinson and Gebrekal, 2020

However, Noto still conveyed his analysis by articulating what COVID-19 has brought to many spheres such as health, economy, politics, and security. The issue itself has been over-politicized and securitized as an existential threat by numerous actors. During the discussion, different opinions were raised in regards to how has COVID-19 become a political issue. One participant argued that COVID-19 critically affects the economy, which demands political intervention by the governments. The others believed that states do not have the adequate capacity to deal with such an unprecedented crisis, and governments worldwide have used the contagion to exercise more political power.

¹ <https://www.ipsos.com/en/what-worries-world-may-2020>

In regards to policymaking process of COVID, some participants believed that a significant number of COVID-19 related policies introduced by many governments were counterproductive as they were not based on scientific evidences. However, others suggested that the current global pandemic is an urgent issue, so then waiting for scientific evidences to act is unpreferable. There were (and still are) numerous disagreements among scientists pertaining the nature of the virus itself. The virus itself remains evolved and mutated. The World Health Organization (WHO) has even frequently changed their advices on the situation² and along with the required responses. Demands to act quickly with limited available scientific data led some countries to create policies which based on past practices, such as South Korea who learned from their past experience of the MERS outbreak in 2015³.

Lastly, Noto invited the participants to critically compare Indonesia's governance to some other countries in the Southeast Asian region, such as Vietnam and Singapore. Many argued that the Indonesian government's responses to COVID-19 were ineffective and full of unnecessary political issues. In addition, some participants raised citizens' characteristics and obedience as one of the determining factors in handling the epidemic. However, not everyone agrees with this argument. Other participants believed that having an effective and transparent government is the key. At the end of the session, Noto brought up some expectation of global governance, leadership, and democracy, such as the importance of incorporating science into politics, the rising self-help and self-reliance attitudes in many countries, and the significance of reform for existing global governance either on politics, security or economy.

² <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/interactive-timeline>

³ <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-exemplar-south-korea>