

## The role of Pancasila ideology in legitimizing public policies during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia

### Peran ideologi Pancasila dalam melegitimasi kebijakan publik di masa pandemi COVID-19 di Indonesia

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#### Abstract

The national ideology is often utilized as a tool to legitimize governmental actions. This study seeks to examine how government elites use the Pancasila ideology to legitimize public policies in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Employing a grounded reflective-interpretive methodological approach within the framework of post-foundational discourse, this study shows that several controversial policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic tended to be bolstered and justified by their alignment with the Pancasila ideology. These endeavors are chiefly undertaken by governmental actors who espouse these policies. Representing the ruling regime, these government actors consistently assert adherence to the fundamental tenets of Pancasila or self-identify as the most “Pancasilaist”. This strategy is the main characteristic of the utilization of Pancasila in legitimizing public policies during the pandemic era. Nonetheless, it is imperative to note that the prevailing political regime tends to interpret the tenets of Pancasila in accordance with their own interests. The results of this study confirm that within the context of policies aimed at managing the COVID-19 pandemic, the resultant measures have tended towards being pro-capitalist, anti-democratic, and even anti-intellectual. Nevertheless, for the ruling regime, these policies are perceived to be congruent with the Pancasila ideology. This study concluded that Pancasila is predominantly employed as a means of legitimizing actions that uphold these values.

**Keywords:** Pancasila ideology; political instruments; public policy

#### Abstrak

*Ideologi nasional seringkali dijadikan alat untuk melegitimasi tindakan pemerintah. Kajian ini berupaya mengkaji bagaimana elit pemerintah menggunakan ideologi Pancasila untuk melegitimasi kebijakan publik di era pandemi COVID-19. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan metodologis reflektif-interpretatif yang berbasis dalam kerangka wacana post-foundational, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa beberapa kebijakan kontroversial yang diterapkan selama pandemi COVID-19 cenderung didukung dan dibenarkan karena keselarasan dengan ideologi Pancasila. Upaya-upaya ini terutama dilakukan oleh aktor-aktor pemerintah yang mendukung kebijakan-kebijakan ini. Mewakili rezim yang berkuasa, para aktor pemerintah ini secara konsisten menegaskan ketaatan pada sila-sila Pancasila atau menyebut diri sebagai yang paling “Pancasilais”. Strategi inilah yang menjadi ciri utama pemanfaatan Pancasila dalam melegitimasi kebijakan publik di masa pandemi. Meskipun demikian, penting untuk dicatat bahwa rezim politik yang ada cenderung menafsirkan ajaran Pancasila sesuai dengan kepentingan mereka sendiri. Hasil studi ini membenarkan bahwa dalam konteks kebijakan yang ditujukan untuk menangani pandemi COVID-19, kebijakan yang diambil cenderung pro-kapitalis, anti-demokrasi, dan bahkan anti-intelektual. Meski demikian, bagi rezim yang berkuasa, kebijakan tersebut dinilai sejalan dengan ideologi Pancasila. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa Pancasila sebagian besar digunakan sebagai alat untuk melegitimasi tindakan yang menjunjung tinggi nilai-nilai tersebut.*

**Keywords:** ideology Pancasila; instrumen politik; kebijakan publik

## Introduction

Throughout the history of the modern state, the function of ideology has not only served as a basic guide for the actions of government and citizens but has also always been distorted to become a political instrument for narrower purposes of power, whether by the ruling class or their opposition (Apter 1964,

Alatas 1977, Therborn 1999). The ruling class uses ideology to maintain their power, while opposition groups use it to criticize, overthrow, or replace the ruling class (Althusser 1970). All of this is possible because the content of an ideology tends to have broad, vague, and unfixed meanings, being dynamic and open to challenge (Thompson 2023). Even when attempts are made to fix its meaning, there are always groups that oppose it and offer different interpretations. Ideology can thus be categorized as an 'empty signifier' whose meaning is always open to be filled and contested. This condition becomes clearer when looking at the context of a country's national ideology. In this context, the ruling political regime in a country tends to monopolize the interpretation of its national ideology as the most valid compared to interpretations by other groups in the country (Ramage 1995, Mulder 1999).

In the Indonesian context, the role of the national ideology as a political instrument for the narrow goals of the ruling political regime is very real and has been repeatedly practiced by several ruling political regimes. The Old Order under Sukarno's charismatic leadership is recorded as having used Pancasila, especially after the presidential decree of July 5, 1959, to maintain the status quo of his personal political power (Feith 1995, Mackie 1961, Robet 2014). The same strategy was found in the New Order era under Suharto's leadership. In the second half of the New Order government, Pancasila officially became Suharto's political instrument to maintain the stability of his personal power (Ramage 1995, Mulder 1999, McGregor 2007, Bouchier 2015). As an instrument of political legitimacy, Pancasila is generally used to oppose, curb, and silence all political views that differ from the ruling political regime. Thoughts or views from groups or individuals that contradict the thoughts of the ruling regimes are basically considered inconsistent or even contradictory to the basic values of Pancasila and are usually categorized as "anti-Pancasila" or "un-Indonesian". Meanwhile, the most appropriate interpretation of the basic values of Pancasila that is considered valid by the state is strictly determined by the regime itself. In other words, only officials have the right to determine what kind of political behavior is in line with Pancasila values.

Departing from that thought, one of the most important problems of a country's national ideology, including Pancasila as Indonesia's national ideology, is a political problem. This is closely related to distorting and making Pancasila a political instrument to perpetuate or legitimize the actions and narrow interests of individuals or groups within the ruling regime. Unfortunately, until now, the political problem of Pancasila has rarely been widely discussed and has never been resolved (Bouchier 2015, Robet 2018). Although some observers and government oppositionists in the New Order era attempted to point out and expand the discourse on the political aspects of Pancasila (Langenberg 1990, Ramage 1995), the 1998 Reformation, which was considered to have brought enormous changes in Indonesian politics, did not bring the political problems of Pancasila to be discussed seriously, unlike other issues such as human rights, democracy, and institutional reform issues (Crouch 2010). Even in the process of amending the Constitution between 1999-2002, the political problems of Pancasila were not discussed seriously (Idrayana 2008). At the beginning of the Reformation, the Pancasila discourse had disappeared along with the fall of the New Order regime. The political organs assigned to institutionalize Pancasila, namely the 'Educational Board for Guidelines for Living and Practicing Pancasila' (B7), were also officially abolished. This was followed by the end of the 'guidelines for understanding and practicing Pancasila' (P4), which previously had to be followed by every citizen (Robet 2018:149).

However, after 20 years of Reformation, the political issue of Pancasila has returned to the fore. One example is the case of banning the activities of social and religious organizations, especially Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, in 2017, whose views contradict those of the ruling regime (Burhani 2017). Like the New Order, these organizations were deemed not in accordance with the basic values of Pancasila. Even in some cases, those who are not in line with the values of the ruling regime will be labeled as radical. Another case that is very similar to the New Order is the issue of "I am Pancasila" and the labeling of other groups that are not Pancasila or even radical (Muhammadun 2017). There are indications that Pancasila, as conceptualized and used by the New Order, seemed to reappear in Indonesian politics without serious debate over the political problems of Pancasila.

This is not surprising because the Pancasila discourse, as conceptualized by the New Order, never disappears in Indonesian political discourse. 'Asas Tunggal' (the only ideological foundation), an integralistic state, and Pancasila democracy, for example, were three discourses of the New Order which are still the main discourse for most of Indonesia's main political actors after the Reformation (McGregor 2002, Bouchier 2015). Therefore, it is very reasonable that after around 10 or even 20 years of the Reformation, the New Order's way of viewing and treating Pancasila reappeared without significant obstacles. In 2009, the Chairman of the MPR officially formed a unit tasked with socializing the Four Pillars of the Indonesian State, one of which is Pancasila, a practice that resembles the New Order. In 2017, President Jokowi formed the Pancasila Ideology Development Presidential Working Unit (UKP-PIP) and in 2018, it was officially changed to the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency (BPIP). Functionally, this institution is basically not much different from the institution formed by the New Order (B7). All of these practices are not much different from the way the New Order used Pancasila. Pancasila as an ideology and stump principle is again the main discourse in Indonesian politics like the New Order (Ramage 1995). Even though it does not monopolize the interpretation of Pancasila, it determines which actors or groups can be branded as anti-Pancasila. This condition also underlies the views of some observers to label the Jokowi government regime as an "authoritarian turn" (Power 2018), new despotism (Kusman & Istiqomah 2021) or illiberal (Diprose et al. 2019).

In other words, after more than 20 years of 'Reformasi' in Indonesia, Pancasila still functions as a regulator, not as a guide. In fact, historically Pancasila itself was intended from the start as a political document to unite the diversity of groups in the archipelago. Pancasila is not intended to exclude other different groups, even less to become an instrument of political legitimacy for the narrow goals of certain groups, but to embrace different groups. Unfortunately, not only regulating, Pancasila also tends to become an instrument for the authorities to legitimize their actions and label different groups as "anti-Pancasila". Meanwhile, the ruling regime claims to be the most "*Pancasilaist*" and even they claim that their actions are always based on the basic values of Pancasila ideology.

This study aims to examine and dismantle the claims of the ruling regime as the most Pancasilaist group. In particular, this study looks at how the values of Pancasila are embodied in the response and actions of the government in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The assumption is that because the ruling regime has always claimed to be the most Pancasilaist, ideally, the direction of government policies and values in dealing with COVID-19 cannot be separated from and is an embodiment of the basic values of Pancasila. In particular, this study wants to examine the main characteristics of government actions in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this study does not intend to provide an assessment of the relationship between those actions and the basic values of Pancasila, which according to the author, are "the most valid".

## Research Method

Methodologically, this study departs from a grounded reflexive-interpretive approach within the framework of post-foundational/relational discourse (Bahar 2023). In simple terms, this approach is based on discourse ontology and relational epistemology with reflexive-interpretive grounded methodological principles (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000, Yanow 2006, Marttila 2015). This study does not aim to seek a reality judged as "true," but rather to explore possible conditions of reality at a certain time and situation. In this case, the relations between the discourse of Pancasila ideology and the controversial policies for handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data in this study are divided into two parts: data about policies for handling the COVID-19 pandemic, which are quite controversial, and the ideological arguments given by the government to support these policies. The data in this study were obtained from several sources, especially academic journal reports and media, both print and electronic. The data were then analyzed using reflexive-interpretive analysis within the critical framework of post-foundational discourse. There are two main methodological principles underlying this framework, namely careful interpretation and reflection. The first principle

emphasizes that interpretation is carried out at all stages of research. Meanwhile, the second principle, reflection, emphasizes that the research subject is not neutral where the research subject is filled with many pre-understandings related to social, political, community contexts, basic knowledge and so on. The aim was to examine the discursive relationship between these policies and the Pancasila ideology. The frame of thought that guides the analysis in this study is ideological theory and critical studies related to government policy in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Results and Discussion**

This study focuses on discussions related to the Pancasila ideology in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. The explanation is divided into several sub-chapters, including: Pancasila ideology and controversial policies in the COVID-19 pandemic era; Government policies that are considered pro-capitalist; Government policies that are considered anti-democracy; and Pancasila as political instrument of government to legitimize public policy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Pancasila ideology and controversial policies in the COVID-19 pandemic era**

The COVID-19 pandemic is an extraordinary and devastating event that humanity had not imagined in this century. This pandemic has profoundly impacted the establishment of modern human civilization. There is scarcely an aspect of life in the era of globalization that has not been affected by this pandemic, resulting in both negative and positive impacts (Baker et al. 2020, Olivia et al. 2020). However, it is certain that the impacts faced by each country are different. Countries such as England, America, and Italy experienced significant adverse effects at the onset of the pandemic's spread, unlike countries classified as much more underdeveloped, such as Egypt and India. Many factors influence this, but normatively, a government/country's response is based on the adopted ideology.

In Indonesia itself, there have been many controversial policies issued by the government amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these policies include providing incentives to airlines and travel agents to attract foreign tourists into the country; exempting hotel and restaurant taxes for six months to support tourist destinations in Indonesia; the second volume of the policy package comprising economic incentives, such as regulations facilitating business operations, including tax reductions or exemptions for industries, exemption from PPH 21 and final PPH for MSMEs, reduction of the corporate tax rate from 25 percent to 22 percent, expedited VAT refunds, and other incentives; the passing of the Omnibus Law on job creation amidst the 2020 pandemic; and maintaining direct regional head elections in 270 regions, including nine provinces, 224 districts, and 37 cities, at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interestingly, the justification given by the government for these various policies tends to utilize an ideological narrative, which is none other than the Pancasila ideology. The government tends to assert that the policies it implements are in line with or manifest the Pancasila ideology. Despite encountering significant resistance from various groups, these policies were ultimately ratified by the government. For example, in the case of the omnibus law on job creation policy, despite strong opposition voiced by many parties and even demonstrations carried out to reject this policy amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the government still strongly advocated for the rapid ratification of this policy. One argument from government circles, for instance, is a statement from the Principal Secretary of the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency (BPIP), Karjono, regarding the Omnibus Law on Job Creation policy. He stated that "I can say that the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, which is based on the Pancasila ideology, is very beneficial; if there are debates, they are generally technical in nature" (Jingga 2020).

In other instances, such as the policy of continuing to hold direct regional elections amidst a pandemic, despite facing numerous rejections from various parties, this policy was still endorsed by the government. The two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, namely NU and Muhammadiyah, strongly urged the government to postpone the regional elections and prioritize the safety of Indonesian lives from the COVID-19 pandemic, at least until the health emergency subsided. The Indonesian Ulema Council

and former Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla also urged the government to postpone the regional elections until a COVID-19 vaccine is found and positive cases decline. However, the government elite remained committed to holding regional elections even amid a pandemic. One argument from the government elite, for instance, is that regional head elections can inject funds faster and boost people’s purchasing power and economic stimulus. The government insisted on proceeding with regional elections in December, citing the careful preparation of health protocols. The Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, Mahfud MD, further explained that postponing the regional elections was no longer feasible as it necessitated laws and regulations that could not be swiftly implemented. Mahfud also noted that such a delay would impact the number of acting officials in several regional governments, hindering them from making strategic decisions.

Nevertheless, a narrative is emerging among academics that these policies represent conditions for bargaining over political-economic interests, which tend to favor a particular group. The following section will focus on discussing academics’ responses to various controversial policies implemented by the Indonesian government at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Indonesia, spanning from 2020 to 2021. This section will demonstrate how these policies tend to legitimize the narrow interests of the ruling elite.

### **Government policies that are considered pro-capitalist**

The government’s response to dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has essentially demonstrated alignment with capitalists from the outset (Bahar et al. 2021, 2022). Prior to the virus’s entry into Indonesia in February 2020, the Indonesian government took several measures to address the impact of the virus’s spread. However, these anticipatory measures were fundamentally minimal. The predominant discourse in Indonesia, widely disseminated by public officials, lacked anticipatory efforts. Some of these included beliefs such as: COVID-19 would not enter because Indonesia has a tropical climate; advocating for extensive prayer to prevent the entry of COVID-19 into Indonesia; discouraging the use of masks for those who were not sick; promoting the adoption of healthy lifestyle behaviors; and even advocating for the consumption of herbal or traditional medicine to enhance bodily endurance (Lindsey & Mann 2020).

Instead, the government focused more on addressing the economic impact. One response taken by the government was an economic stimulus policy amounting to IDR 10.3 trillion. If dissected, within the investment sector, for instance, the government allocated stimulus funds of IDR 1.5 trillion for housing incentives. Of this, IDR 800 billion was earmarked to subsidize the interest difference for a period of 10 years, where consumers would only pay five percent interest. Meanwhile, IDR 700 billion was designated for housing down payment assistance. In the tourism sector, the government allocated an additional budget of IDR 298.5 billion for incentives targeting airlines and travel agents to attract foreign tourists to the country. Additionally, domestic tourists were provided with IDR 443.39 billion in incentives, in the form of a 30 percent discount on plane ticket prices for 25 percent of seats per plane, destined for 10 tourist destinations. To further support these 10 tourist destinations in Indonesia, the government opted to exempt hotel and restaurant taxes for six months. As a compensatory measure for regional revenues, these 10 tourist destinations would receive grant compensation totaling IDR 3.3 trillion. The 30 percent discount applies to a quota of 25 percent of seats per flight, valid for three months from March to May 2020. Another incentive extended to airlines was a discount on aviation fuel, also valid for three months. The government’s rationale behind these measures was to stabilize the national economy.

Besides that, but in the second volume of the policy package, the economic incentives provided also tend to benefit the capitalist class more than the general public. For instance, various regulations make it easier for industries to conduct business, including reducing or even exempting taxes for industry, granting exemptions from PPH21 and final PPH for MSMEs, lowering the tax rate for corporate taxpayers from 25 percent to 22 percent, and expediting the rollout of VAT refunds, among other incentives.

What we are implying here is that from the two government policy packages, it is evident that the government's policy direction leans more towards being pro-capitalist. This inclination has been identified from the outset by many observers (Fealy 2020:303-306). Even if we extend the list, we can observe this in the government's efforts to enact the omnibus law policy, known as the job creation law, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This policy direction is also evident in the government's continuation of other development projects, particularly plans to construct a new capital amidst the economic challenges facing the Indonesian people and the mounting state debt due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Putri 2021).

A common question arises: Is this alignment with and embodiment of the values of Pancasila as formulated and agreed upon by the founding fathers of the nation as the basis for the establishment of the Indonesian nation? If not, are the ruling regime's claims of adhering to Pancasila still acceptable?

### **Government policies that are considered anti-democracy**

History records that pandemics have brought about significant changes to the global order (Ryan 2019). The industrial revolution, originating in England, stands as one of the positive impacts we currently benefit from due to the pandemic that swept the world at that time. The labor shortages caused by the bubonic plague in Western Europe, particularly in England, managed to destabilize the dominant feudal system of the era. However, pandemics also yield negative impacts. In the same historical period, for instance, in Eastern Europe, the outbreak of the bubonic plague reinforced the oppression of workers due to dwindling labor forces and bolstered authoritarian regimes (Acemoglu & Robinson 2013).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, one observable negative impact is the trend towards anti-democratic tendencies (Mietzner 2020, Robet et al. 2020). Mietzner observed that the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia served as a pivotal moment for anti-democratic conservative elites to advance their anti-democratic agenda (Mietzner 2020:241). Various measures implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19, particularly social distancing policies restricting civil society movements, present significant opportunities for conservative elites to pursue their objectives. It is not uncommon to find various political theories asserting that democracy serves as a formidable adversary to corruption and its associated elements such as collusion, nepotism, and even authoritarianism (Bull & Newell 2003). This implies that during the COVID-19 crisis, conservative elites, including oligarchs, are able to advance their diverse interests, particularly through state policies, with minimal resistance from civil society. Any forms of gatherings, let alone demonstrations, are liable to legal repercussions.

The concept of limiting crowds to address the spread of COVID-19 adopted by the Indonesian government is inherently intriguing. Various forms of demonstrations, particularly those criticizing government policies, were rigorously restricted and sometimes forcibly dispersed. A significant incident amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, was the demonstration against the omnibus law in late 2020 (Mietzner 2020, Robet et al. 2020). Opponents view this policy as primarily serving the interests of capitalists and foreseeing significant societal losses, particularly for workers, with potential adverse environmental impacts. It is noteworthy that the bill aims to amend hundreds of articles within eighty-one existing laws related to investment, labor, taxes, and environmental matters. According to Mietzner, while designed to streamline investment by reducing bureaucratic hurdles, it effectively curtails many labor rights established post-1998 and largely eliminates environmental protection requirements for large-scale businesses and infrastructure projects (Mietzner 2020:242).

In this context, the government strictly prohibits workers and students from conducting demonstrations or other crowd-gathering activities under the pretext of potentially increasing COVID-19 transmission. Several activists who persisted in demonstrating faced persecution, and a significant number had to contend with legal ramifications. Interestingly, the discourse presented by policy critics appears to be overshadowed by concerns regarding potential COVID-19 transmission through crowd gatherings. Nevertheless, the democratic space remains partially open, as individuals can still engage in discussions and express criticism through online media platforms. However, the question arises as to whether such

expressions will be acknowledged by the government, which has consistently advocated a different discourse and even initiated certain proposals. This becomes increasingly challenging with government oversight over various media outlets in Indonesia, coupled with legal provisions pertaining to defamation and dissemination of fake news.

This narrative is not the culmination of the government’s encounter with anti-democratic tendencies. Concurrently, the government endorses the holding of direct regional head elections in 270 regions, encompassing nine provinces, 224 districts, and 37 cities. Despite the regional head elections being scheduled for December, the process commenced in September, including the initiation of open campaign activities. Despite assurances from public officials that there would be no open campaigning, various forms of crowd gatherings were depicted in Indonesian public media in the context of the regional elections (Makki 2020). Such ambiguous behavior raises significant concerns among the majority of the Indonesian populace.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, another crucial problem further undermining Indonesian democracy is the apparent participation of the ruling president’s offspring and sons-in-law in the regional elections (Harimurti & Supriatma 2021). Supporters of this move argue, from a democratic standpoint, that the children of the current president are entitled to engage in political competition. However, can this logic also be extended to the selection of children or relatives of governors, mayors, or regents in appointing heads of services or awarding project tenders in various regions within the current Indonesian political framework? This raises questions regarding alignment with Pancasila values.

This issue serves as a warning that the COVID-19 pandemic could potentially mark the demise of democracy, a subject not addressed in Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt’s book “How Democracies Die” (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018). However, signs of democracy’s erosion in Indonesia have been evident for several years (Power 2018). One critical factor highlighted by Levitsky and Ziblatt is when ruling regimes brand various political opponents or groups opposing government policies as anti-Pancasila, a tactic with significant potential to undermine democracy in Indonesia (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018:91).

In addition to the aforementioned major issues, several observers also perceive Indonesia’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic as anti-intellectual. This sentiment was particularly evident in the initial reaction to the global spread of the pandemic. Several key discourses reflecting this include assertions such as: COVID-19 will not infiltrate Indonesia due to its tropical climate; extensive prayer is effective in preventing COVID-19 from entering Indonesia; healthy individuals should refrain from wearing masks; and reliance on herbal or traditional remedies to enhance bodily resilience (Lindsey & Mann 2020). Mietzner characterizes this phenomenon as a regime of anti-intellectual populism (Mietzner 2020).

### **Pancasila as political instrumen of government to legitimize public policy during the COVID-19 pandemic**

From the previous description, it is evident that the Pancasila ideology tends to be utilized by government elites to legitimize controversial policies that primarily benefit certain groups. Despite widespread rejection of these policies, numerous experts engaged in discussions regarding the Indonesian government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic era assert that these measures are highly pro-capitalist, anti-democratic, and anti-intellectual, and anti-scientific. Despite claims of adherence to Pancasila ideology, these policies appear to prioritize economic interests over public health and democratic values, raising questions about the government’s commitment to the principles of justice and welfare enshrined in Pancasila. The divergence between official rhetoric and observed outcomes underscores the importance of critically analyzing the ways in which ideology is invoked and manipulated in political discourse. However, the government insists that these policies are aligned with the Pancasila ideology.

The strategy employed by the government is essentially akin to that of the New Order authoritarian regime (Bourchier 2015). The distinction lies in the fact that while the New Order era was characterized by authoritarian politics, the COVID-19 pandemic era in Indonesia tends to be categorized as democratic.

While the COVID-19 pandemic era in Indonesia may be nominally democratic, the underlying mechanisms of power and control bear resemblance to those of the authoritarian past. This continuity highlights the adaptability of ideological tools in different political contexts and the enduring influence of power dynamics on governance practices.

As debates surrounding the government's handling of the pandemic continue, the role of ideology in shaping public opinion and justifying state actions remains a central point of contention. Whether in authoritarian or democratic settings, ideology serves as a powerful instrument for the ruling elite to assert control over the populace and maintain their grip on power. Understanding the ways in which ideology intersects with political practice is essential for navigating the complexities of governance and safeguarding democratic principles in Indonesia and beyond.

## Conclusion

In this study, it has once again been proven that the narratives portraying the government as the most Pancasilaist group of actors are not entirely true. In fact, many government policies in the COVID-19 pandemic era are highly pragmatic, serving the interests of certain elite groups. These policies are not solely in the interests of the ruling elite; rather, they are categorized by many observers as tending towards being anti-democratic and pro-capitalist.

Therefore, an attempt to understand this trend involves deconstructing and broadening the discourse on the political realities of Pancasila and its potential for instrumentalization. This study contributes to this objective. Through an analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic response, it reveals that government actions tend to align with pro-capitalist, anti-democratic, and even anti-scientific tendencies. Despite this, the government often asserts itself as the ultimate champion of Pancasila, while stigmatizing opposing factions as anti-Pancasila. Consequently, it is evident that the potential for Pancasila to be manipulated as a tool for political legitimacy by current and future ruling regimes remains extensive. This, in turn, widens the potential for authoritarianism (re)emergence in Indonesia

This study underscores the importance of critically evaluating governmental assertions of Pancasila adherence and highlights the need for diverse voices to challenge monopolistic interpretations of its values. As political freedoms face greater restrictions, it becomes imperative for individuals and groups within society to uphold the principles of Pancasila and advocate for a more inclusive and democratic governance framework.

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