

Received: 27-Sep-2021  
Accepted: 05 -Oct-2021  
Published: 27-Dec-2021

## **Global Political Landscape In The Time Of The Covid-19 Pandemic: Realist, Liberal, And Constructivist Perspectives**

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### *Abstract*

*The vast majority of international relations scholars interpret world politics in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic through realism by emphasising conflicts and the tendency of states to pursue their national interests. However, contemporary global politics shows the complexity that cannot be understood from a single perspective. This article seeks to interpret world politics in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic using three dominant approaches in International Relations, namely, realism, liberalism, and constructivism. This article argues that three different features characterise the landscape of global politics in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic; conflicts and the pursuit of national interests, international cooperations based on mutual benefit, and solidarity to help others deal with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This finding implies that understanding international relations requires inter perspective collaboration instead of debates and maintaining theoretical exclusivism.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19 pandemic; realism; liberalism; constructivism

### **Abstrak**

Kebanyakan pengamat hubungan internasional menafsirkan politik dunia di era pandemi Covid-19 menurut perspektif realisme yang menekankan pada konflik dan kecenderungan negara memperjuangkan kepentingan nasionalnya. Akan tetapi, realitas politik dunia kontemporer menunjukkan kompleksitas yang tidak dapat dipahami hanya dari satu perspektif. Artikel ini mencoba menafsirkan realitas politik dunia di era pandemi Covid-19 dengan tiga pendekatan dominan dalam Hubungan Internasional yaitu realisme, liberalisme dan konstruktivisme. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa lanskap politik dunia di era pandemi Covid-19 ditandai oleh tiga fitur utama yang berbeda; konflik dan pengejaran kepentingan nasional, kerjasama internasional dengan prinsip saling menguntungkan, dan solidaritas membantu negara lain untuk mengatasi dampak pandemi. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan bahwa pemahaman yang baik tentang hubungan internasional mensyaratkan kerjasama antarperspektif alih-alih perdebatan dan mempertahankan eksklusivisme teoretis.

**Kata kunci:** pandemi Covid-19; realisme; liberalisme; konstruktivisme

## **Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic is so destructive that many international relations experts project the 21st-century global political landscape. Most experts expressed pessimism regarding the future of world politics after the pandemic. Fareed Zakaria, for example, said that “Covid-19 is a global phenomenon that, ironically, countries everywhere look inward. Pain and suffering, economic hardship, and dislocation have led leaders to abandon the idea of international cooperation and instead, huddle, close their borders and devise their plans for resilience and recovery” (Zakaria, 2021, p. 201). According to the World Economic Forum, world peace has also experienced setbacks. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic period between January 2020 to April 2021, there have been many violent incidents related to the pandemic recorded in 158 countries (Fleming, 2021). Although UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres declared a global ceasefire amid a pandemic, the fact is that political violence is increasingly widespread in several countries (Mustasilta, 2020a; 2020b). In some countries with high levels of conflict vulnerability, governments are taking advantage of pandemic conditions to impose their agendas so that groups of politically

motivated violence increase (Brown and Blanc, 2020).

Pessimism also dominates the opinion of leading experts in Western countries. The July-August 2020 edition of Foreign Affairs magazine contains several writings with a gloomy tone about the future of world politics because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Francis Fukuyama, in his article, said, “Nationalism, isolationism. Xenophobia and attacks on the liberal world order have increased over the years, and a pandemic can only exacerbate these trends.... The rise of nationalism will increase the chances of international conflict” (Fukuyama, 2020, p. 28). In addition, the pandemic also shows the weakness of the multilateral system, thus worsening the existing conditions. On the one hand, the United Nations, especially the WHO and the UN Security Council, have failed to become a global collective instrument to overcome the impact of the pandemic. Under such conditions, people do not want to depend on multilateralism but their government. Major powers, especially the US and China, failed to play a leadership role during the Covid-19 crisis (Patrick, 2020, p. 40 & 45).

In contrast to the pessimistic view above, several experts think the international order is less gloomy than most experts imagine.

Among these optimistic views is Barry Posen, who, in his article in the April 2020 issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, argues that the Covid-19 pandemic will promote peace instead of conflict. It based his argument on the war theory that states will go to war when the confidence to win is high enough. According to Posen, many countries, including big countries, have ravaged their resources to feel powerless to think about war because of being hit by the pandemic. Even years after a pandemic, the conflict between powerful nations is improbable (Posen, 2020). Daniel Drezner also stated that even though the Covid-19 pandemic has destroyed the lives of countries worldwide, its impact on the international system is not significant. The pandemic cannot change the global distribution of power. Therefore, the pandemic will maintain the existing order or status quo (Drezner, 2020, p. 31).

Which of the two opinions accurately describes the world's political landscape during a pandemic? This paper attempts to explain the pattern of international relations during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2021. In contrast to the two camps, this paper proposes an argument that the world order during the pandemic does not represent the views of the pessimistic or optimistic camp. During the pandemic, the

pattern of international relations did not change the critical features of relations between countries, namely conflict and collaboration (discord and cooperation). These two features do not exclude each other but complement each other. This paper will show that conflict and cooperation are two features that come together, even though the pandemic has had a destructive impact on many countries. Therefore, one perspective alone does not describe reality as it is. This paper applies three dominant approaches to studying International Relations (IR): realism, liberalism, and constructivism. This article offers a more comprehensive explanation of world politics during a pandemic than just focusing on one answer from a particular perspective.

This paper will be divided into three main parts. The first section will discuss the three dominant theoretical perspectives: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Each view represents a feature of international relations. Whereas realism represents the conflict between countries, liberalism represents cooperation between countries emphasising the role of multilateral institutions, and constructivism represents cooperation between countries motivated by ethical or moral dimensions. The second part describes the realism version of the

political reality of the conflictual world. This section will highlight several cases of international conflict related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The third part describes the reality of international cooperation from liberalism and constructivism. The author will describe examples of mutually beneficial collaboration cases and the role of multilateral institutions according to the assumptions of liberal theory. Meanwhile, cooperation between countries based on ethical motives will show the relevance of constructivism. The fourth or final section is the closing, which contains the conclusions and policy recommendations.

Realism, liberalism, and constructivism: A theoretical framework

This paper applies three dominant approaches in the study of IR, namely realism, liberalism, and constructivism, to provide a complete picture of the world's political landscape in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic. Each approach offers a different point of view but is complementary. Therefore, preferring one approach will only produce a partial picture of the world so that it will have implications for the formulation of less specific policies. This paper believes that decision-making at the government level, particularly in combating the Covid-19 pandemic, demands a comprehensive understanding of

the reality of international relations. Therefore, it is essential to look at how these three approaches provide pieces of the narrative about the world.

The first perspective is realism. We can say realism to be the most dominant paradigm in the study of IR. IR studies are often associated with realism, where international politics is synonymous with conflict, war, and competition between major powers in the military field. In general, realism views international actors as unitary states (state-centric). The state is a single entity, regardless of the dynamics in its domestic sphere. Besides, the state is unimportant because international dynamics are determined through state actions. Then the state behaves rationally in the sense of self-help. The highest goal of the state is power. However, power can be a tool to pursue security (survival). All countries, whether small or large, regardless of their ideology, want security. According to realists, conditions of anarchy characterise international politics where there is no authority above the state that can impose policies on the state. In such situations, the state is forced to survive to secure its existence. Realists also believe that in pursuing the national interest, the state does not need to consider the principles of morality (Dunne and Schmidt in Baylis,

Smith and Owens, 2014, pp. 100-101).

There are three basic assumptions of realism. First, the state is the main actor in international relations. They defined international relations as relations between countries (interstate relations). Realists do not deny the existence of non-state actors such as multinational corporations, international organisations, transnational NGOs, terrorist groups, influential individuals, etc. However, realists underestimate the influence of these actors on international politics. Second, the goal of the state is power. Realists defined power accordingly with military terminology. Suppose the country possessed a robust military capacity, the safer the country amid international anarchy. Economic factors are also important, but only if they contribute to military capabilities. Third, the nature of international relations is conflictual. Realism describes international politics like a billiard ball, where one country and another clash with each other, with no one able to prevent it. According to realists, such conditions are natural, so they require the state permanently to prepare themselves (Rosyidin, 2020, pp. 30-31).

The second perspective is liberalism. Liberalism is the antithesis of realism in viewing the reality of

international relations. There are three basic assumptions of liberalism. First, the main actors in international relations are individuals and groups. In contrast to realists, liberals view the state as only a 'dead' entity that lives because domestic actors solely control it. These domestic actors behave with a profit-and-loss rational logic to pursue their interests. Second, they define the concept of national interest as the goals that domestic actors want to follow. So the national interest is not the interest of the state or on behalf of all the people in the country but merely reflects the interests of the domestic actors. In this case, the state, or the government as a decision-maker, only functions as a reservoir for aspirations and implementing those aspirations. Third, interdependence characterises international relations between various actors. This interdependence is created because international actors, especially the state, see that advantages can be achieved rather than acting alone. In liberal terms, this mutually beneficial cooperation is called absolute gain (Moravscik, 1997, pp. 516-521).

This regard for cooperation as a feature of international relations is the most prominent premise of liberalism. One among many strands in liberal thinker, neoliberal-institutionalism, which states that collaboration in conditions of anarchy

is possible. This assumption contrasts with realism, which says that anarchy conditions incentivise states to conflict with other countries. The shape of anarchy creates a brief opportunity for cooperation because the state is always suspicious of other countries. For institutionalists, intermediary institutions or international regimes can expect this. International authorities can be official institutions, such as the United Nations, multilateral forums such as the G20, APEC, etc. However, the most common form of an international regime is an agreement between countries, whether it is simply a memorandum of understanding (MoU) or a contract. The international regime acts as a “bridge” that allows nations to know each other’s intentions and interests, reducing suspicion. In addition, international regimes can also reduce the cost of pursuing national interests because they are collective (a shared obligation). Therefore, institutionalists believe that by working together through institutions that states create themselves, they will positively impact the achievement of their respective national interests (see Keohane, 1984; Keohane and Martin, 1995).

The third perspective is constructivism, an alternative perspective to realism and liberalism. Constructivism departs from

social theories, especially interpretive sociology and social psychology, to explain state behaviour at the international level. At the beginning of its emergence, constructivism should criticise neorealism, which was considered being overemphasised by material elements. According to Alexander Wendt (1999, p.1), constructivism has two basic assumptions: non-material (ideational) factors are more important than material elements, and these non-material elements determine identity and interests. According to constructivists, international relations are more determined by ideational elements, such as identity, norms, culture, and other invisible factors. This is because the state is analogous to a human individual who has a mind to interpret objects. Objects can be the same, but the interpretation can vary from one person to another. Wendt (1995, p. 73) gives an example of how North Korea’s five nuclear weapons are far more frightening to the US than Britain’s 500 nuclear weapons. According to him, the difference in perception of this threat occurs because the US has different interpretations of North Korea and Britain. In contrast to the UK being interpreted as “friend,” the US interpreted North Korea as “enemy.” The interpretation is more important than nuclear weapons.

Constructivism sees state behaviour not driven by a profit-and-loss logic like a realist and liberal thinking. The state acts based on considerations known as “logic of appropriateness”. This thought was adopted from organisational theorists James March and Johan Olsen in their writing entitled “The Logic of Appropriateness.” According to them, actors’ actions can be divided into two forms based on their motives, namely “logic of consequences” and “logic of appropriateness.” The logic of consequences explains the behaviour of actors who are driven by a profit-and-loss motivation, as in the rational choice theory model. This logic refers to the actions of actors who are selfish (selfish). The logic of propriety explains the behaviour of actors influenced by norms. In other words, the actor’s actions are more a reflection of compliance with norms that are legitimate. Actors act by putting aside their interests because they believe that doing is the right thing, reasonable, and proper. We can understand the difference between these two ways of thinking by illustrating a person driving in the early hours of the morning on a deserted highway and seeing a red-light flashing. The logic of consequence would suggest that the person should just run a red light because he is better off taking care of himself. Meanwhile, the logic of appropriateness

would indicate that the person should stop because they must obey traffic norms (see Finnemore, 1996; March and Olsen, 2004; Rosyidin, 2015, p. 27).

### **Fighting for the National Interest: Pandemic from the Perspective of Realism**

Realism assumes that world politics is full of conflicts, suspicions, and wars. This has become a natural feature of international relations. When the world was under the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic, competition and conflict between countries did not subside. Politics remains politics, unaffected by other issues. Realists turn a blind eye and ear to the world's public calls to end the conflict and prioritise collective efforts to overcome the impact of the pandemic that has shattered every aspect of human life. Realists would say that political submission to a global ethic is naive. For realists, international morality and ethics cannot be used to guide state policy. Countless empirical examples support this realist thesis in times of pandemics. We will explore them one by one in this section.

The most prominent illustration of the realist world view in the pandemic era is the conflict between the US and China's superpowers. The conflict between the two major world powers in the 21st century is

based on conspiracy theories rather than objective facts. It can be said that the US-China conflict related to the Covid-19 pandemic is a victim of a narrative that is not real and reflects negative prejudice against one another. This conflict started with US accusations that China and Russia were involved in an evil conspiracy to spread false narratives about the outbreak (Kompas, 2020a). The US even accused China of negligence, causing a global health catastrophe. According to the US, the outbreak occurred because of a leak in a laboratory in Wuhan, a province in China. US President Donald Trump claimed that solid evidence of the coronavirus came from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (Kompas, 2020b). In response to the accusations, China hit back, saying the US was infected with a "political virus", referring to those within US power circles who want the two countries to come to conflict. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, "The power is trying to push the two countries into a new cold war. Apart from the devastation caused by the coronavirus, there is a political virus that is spreading in America" (Republika, 2020). China has also accused the US of politicising investigations into the origins of the coronavirus. This allegation arises because track relies more on intelligence

personnel than scientists (VOA Indonesia, 2021).

Apart from China, the US is also in conflict with Iran. At first, Iran accused the coronavirus of being a US biological weapon. The Commander made this accusation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Major General Hossein Salami posted on the Iranian Student News Agency (ISNA) Twitter account: "We will win the war against the #coronavirus which may be the product of America's biological invasion" (CNBC Indonesia, 2020). The US did not reply to the statement. However, the US continues to impose economic sanctions on Iran. Iran admits that the sanctions are challenging for them to overcome the pandemic. When Joe Biden replaced Donald Trump as US president, the Iranian government begged the US to end sanctions so that the country could get out of the pandemic (Tempo, 2021). However, the Joe Biden administration seems unmoved by Iran's request. The US is actively trying to prevent Iran from buying a coronavirus vaccine through the WHO-initiated Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility (COVAX). Iran has difficulty purchasing Covid-19 vaccines due to US sanctions targeting Iran's central bank (Media Indonesia, 2021).

The pandemic has also sparked conflict between Saudi Arabia and Russia over the crude oil price war. The conflict was triggered by Saudi Arabia's policy to cut crude oil production to boost prices. This action is done because the pandemic has weakened the country's national economy. Saudi Arabia makes oil a weapon of its national interest. However, this policy was opposed by Russia, which did not want to reduce its oil production. Declining oil production will allow the US to become a world oil producer for Russia. Russia does not want the US to seize the global oil market, so it insists on maintaining its oil production (Kontan, 2020). According to Moscow, the proposed reduction in oil production from Saudi Arabia will benefit the US and Russia as a sacrifice. Because Russia refused, Saudi Arabia retaliated by providing huge discounts for its crude consumers. The country will give Chinese customers discounts of US\$ 6-US\$ 7 per barrel and increase production by up to 2 million barrels per day. This manoeuvre is done to seize the Russian market share, reducing its oil supply. The conflict between these two countries is like a game of chess. If Saudi Arabia is willing to negotiate, Russia will push the US to reduce its oil production. This development will undoubtedly make Russia the winner of global competition. However, Saudi Arabia

will not want to sacrifice its national interests and good relations with the US (Bakeer, 2020).

In addition to conflicts between countries, a realistic picture of the world in other pandemic eras can also be seen from how countries react when treating citizens of other countries. Realists always place national interest, especially national security, as the highest priority in their policies. In this context, once again, the realist dictum about the invalidity of global morality and ethics is very appropriate to describe the behaviour of countries amid a pandemic. During a very worrying situation due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus, governments choose to be selfish by closing their borders. During the wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, almost all countries in the world implemented border closures. This border control is done to prevent the potential for transmission that arises from the mobilisation of people to and from other countries. The European Union (EU), which is known as the "friendliest" region for immigrants, has closed its borders.

In March 2020, or when the first pandemic wave emerged, the EU decided "all travel between non-European countries and EU countries will be suspended" (Liputan6, 2020). Australia was a country that was quite strict about travel restrictions in

Australia. Since the first pandemic wave, Australia has closed its borders until the end of 2022 (Media Indonesia, 2021). Its neighbour, New Zealand, is doing the same. However, unlike Australia, New Zealand will open its borders in early 2022 (Tribun News, 2021). The US and Canada also agreed to isolate their countries from foreign arrivals. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said borders are a source of vulnerability, so separating the country is a "sustainable measure [that] will keep people in both of our countries safe" (Okayzone, 2020). When the second pandemic wave hit, some countries even put other countries on a blacklist prohibited from visiting. Indonesia is one of them. When the Delta variant of the Covid-19 virus mutation spread, six countries refused the arrival of Indonesian citizens, namely Singapore, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, EU, and Hong Kong (CNN Indonesia, 2021a).

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"Vaccine nationalism" is another phenomenon that reflects the realism version of the world where countries tend to be selfish and ignore global ethics. In the pandemic era, the availability of vaccines is precious for the country. If war requires the state to strengthen its military capabilities, the pandemic requires securing its vaccine stock. As a result, nations compete to secure vaccine stocks to benefit their citizens. In March 2021, for example, the EU officially announced it would stop exporting the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine to the UK and Ireland (Fenton-Harvey, 2021a). Wealthy countries such as Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand managed to secure vaccine stocks for their citizens while many

poor South Asia, Africa and South America were in short supply. Economic Intelligence Unit research suggests that 84 developing countries may not have sufficient vaccine stocks until 2024 (Fenton-Harvey, 2021b). The CNBC report also concluded that of the 700 million vaccines that have been distributed worldwide, rich countries top the list of vaccine recipients. This situation means that one in four rich countries will receive the vaccine.

Meanwhile, for people in developing countries, the ratio is only one in 500 people who get the vaccine (CNN Indonesia, 2021b). Vaccine nationalism is still exacerbated by the policy of "vaccine embargo", in which the state prohibits the export of vaccines to other countries. Indonesia is one of the countries affected by this policy from India. As the country's Covid-19 surged in March 2021, India, which has the world's second-largest vaccine manufacturer after China, withheld the AstraZeneca vaccine out of the country. As a result, Indonesia lost 11.7 million vaccine doses (Kompas, 2021a).

### **Interdependence in The Pandemic Era: Liberalism Perspective**

Suppose realism focuses on conflicts between countries and the struggle to

pursue their respective interests. In that case, liberalism sees how mutually beneficial cooperation characterises the realities of world politics in the pandemic era. There are countless examples of this. However, this section will highlight only a few as illustrations and show that experts' pessimism about the prospects for international relations is not the only narrative to be believed. The examples of cases presented in this section provide a glimmer of hope for the world that no matter how gloomy the realities of international politics are, there are still opportunities for cooperation.

The first example that proves the view of liberalism is a cooperation between regions, namely the EU and ASEAN. By the end of 2020, the two regional institutions are committed to strengthening WHO to ensure access to appropriate and affordable vaccines. EU Ambassador to ASEAN Igor Driesmans said that vaccines must become public goods, so ensuring their availability for the entire world community is an obligation for all parties, especially WHO. The EU also contributed 500 million Euros or Rp. 8.55 trillion to support the Covid-19 vaccine alliance. In addition, the EU also supports the Southeast Asia Health Pandemic Response and Preparedness

program worth 20 million Euros or Rp. 341.6 billion (Republika, 2020).

In addition to interregional cooperation, cooperation between countries is also widely carried out as a form of international awareness regarding the importance of collective efforts to overcome the pandemic. One of them is the cooperation between Israel and South Korea (South Korea). Both agreed to cooperate in reciprocal vaccines. It began with Israel's commitment to providing South Korea with 700,000 doses of Pfizer vaccine, noting that South Korea would help Israel in the future (BBC, 2021). South Korea also cooperates with Indonesia, such as personal protective equipment (PPE), diagnostic equipment, and medicines. The two parties are also cooperating in the development of vaccines between PT. Kalbe Farma and Genexine and therapeutic effect between the National Institute of Health Research and Development and Daewoong Infineon. At the government level, the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) have signed the Minutes of Understanding on Inclusive Program for Covid-19 Response worth US\$ 4 million or Rp. 57.7 billion (Second, 2021).

Apart from South Korea, Indonesia is also collaborating with Australia specifically for

research that targets preparedness to face a pandemic. The Australian National Institute of Science (CSIRO), in collaboration with the Indonesian Ministry of Research and Technology, has allocated nearly AU\$ 45 million or Rp. 462.6 billion of the total program funds in Indonesia of AU\$ 298.5 million or Rp. Three trillion specifically for research on Covid-19. Australia also provided additional funding of AU\$ 1 million or Rp. 9.7 billion of the total AU\$ 21 million or Rp. 215.8 billion. CSIRO Chief Executive Larry Marshall said, "So partnering with Indonesia and other countries means we can learn from each other, better protect the health of our people, and tackle this global crisis together" (Kompas, 2020c). The main objective of the collaboration between the research institutions of the two countries is to strengthen pandemic preparedness and response in Indonesia. In addition, another goal is to accelerate the results of joint research related to Covid-19. The collaborative program includes building vaccine testing models and analysing data on new disease emergence points (Sindo News, 2020).

For a country with one of the largest populations in the world, Indonesia needs to ensure the availability of vaccines. Therefore, the government continues to

encourage vaccine diplomacy by exploring bilateral cooperation. Indonesia is not picky in choosing cooperation partners. Indonesia is also collaborating on vaccines with Russia, not only Western countries. In July 2021, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov agreed to produce a Covid-19 vaccine. Previously, the Food and Drug Administration (BPOM) visited Russia to review the Sputnik vaccine facility. The cooperation is based on the principle that vaccines are public goods available to everyone. Lavrov said, "We agree that vaccines should be available to everyone, and we have also agreed to cooperate in the bilateral context of providing or assisting local production of such vaccines" (Kompas, 2021b).

At the multilateral level, international cooperation in overcoming the pandemic is carried out by the G20 forum. At a high-level meeting in Rome, May 21, 2021, the G20 leaders agreed on the Rome Declaration. All parties committed to working collaboratively in dealing with the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The spirit behind the agreement is a shared commitment to "global solidarity, equity, and multilateral cooperation; to effective governance; to put people at the centre of preparedness and equip them to respond

effectively; to build on science and evidence-based policies and create trust; and to promote sustained financing for global health" (European Union, 2021a). This condition means the G20 countries are united by a common view on the threat of a pandemic to human survival. This agreement also reflects the collective awareness of the G20 countries that they "live in the same boat" and thus bear the same responsibility for dealing with the pandemic. The EU, in particular, welcomed the deal, calling it a "victory for multilateralism:

It is the first time that the G20 leaders have come together specifically on health. World leaders gave a strong message: Never again. We have learnt the lessons from the current crisis. And we are determined to make COVID-19 the last pandemic. So, for the first time, all G20 countries agreed on common principles to overcome COVID-19 and prevent and prepare for future pandemics. The U.S. and China. The EU and Russia. India, South Africa and Latin America. The Rome Declaration celebrates multilateralism (European Union, 2021b).

### **Morality Amid A Pandemic: A Constructivism Perspective**

One of the basic assumptions of constructivism is that state action is based

on the logic of propriety rather than the logic of profit and loss. This assumption is because countries are aware that there is a normative structure that makes them aware that foreign policy is not only about the pursuit of profit. The state is not always selfish; sometimes, countries need to do good not because they want to please other countries. The logic of appropriateness presupposes that the state is an actor who believes in values and norms whereby the state feels that it has done the right and proper thing.

In the pandemic era, some empirical phenomena describe the world according to this constructivist version. Because the effects of the pandemic are so damaging, especially for economically vulnerable countries, a sense of solidarity and responsibility emerges from rich countries to share. In contrast to cooperation from a liberal perspective, which emphasises the logic of mutual benefit or a non-zero-sum game, constructivist cooperation is more altruistic in the sense that rich countries assist solely so that other countries can rise and overcome the impact of the pandemic. The constructivist analysis ignores whether the aid is motivated by vested interests, as realists assume. The real motive is a matter of global ethics; helping other countries in need is good behaviour in the ethics of

international relations. Perhaps this assumption sounds naive to those who follow rationalists. But again, it should be noted that the pursuit of all-time interests has not always characterised world politics.

A concrete example is Indonesia's assistance in 200 oxygen concentrator units to India. Even though the two countries are involved in mutually beneficial, intense cooperation, including when facing a pandemic, this assistance is based on ethical motives rather than mutual benefits. Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said the aid reflected Indonesia's solidarity with India. He said, "Only with the spirit of solidarity can we come out of the pandemic as winners. No country should be left behind" (Media Indonesia, 2021). This statement clearly shows the absence of rationalistic motives. By helping India, Indonesia did not expect to benefit from India. Apart from the bilateral cooperation between the two countries, the assistance reflects Indonesia's foreign policy ethics.

If the example above is less convincing, we can look at Canada's policies to help poor countries. Canada has donated at least 17.7 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine to Third World countries through Covax and WHO. Canada also contributed US\$ 10 million to UNICEF for vaccine procurement needs (Republika, 2021). The Canadian

government claims to have poured more than \$2.5 billion into the global pandemic. Of that amount, US\$ 1.3 million was given to WHO to test vaccines, treat patients, and provide vaccines. Meanwhile, US\$ 740 million is budgeted for humanitarian and development assistance, especially for sectors affected by the pandemic. The remaining US\$ 541 million was donated to developing countries to deal with the pandemic (Government of Canada, 2021).

Apart from Canada, the EU and Indonesia are also noted to assist poor countries. The EU is committed to helping provide 200 million doses of vaccines destined for low-income countries. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the aid was an "investment in solidarity", which meant that the EU took part in creating global health (Republika, 2021). Meanwhile, even though Indonesia is categorised as an upper-middle-income country, it is also committed to assisting poor and vulnerable countries in the Asia Pacific region. This assistance is provided in the context of Indonesia's membership in the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which holds the sixth-largest share. Indonesia contributed US\$ 12 million or Rp. 176.4 billion for grants in the health sector, disaster risk, climate change

adaptation, gender, infrastructure, and good governance (CNN Indonesia, 2020).

Apart from providing aid, Indonesia is also a recipient country for assistance for other countries. One that stands out is New Zealand's aid of Rp. 52 billion through UNICEF. The funds are intended for planning, implementing, monitoring the introduction and launch of the Covid-19 vaccine. These funds are additional funds because previously, New Zealand has disbursed Rp. Fifty-two billion for preparedness, response, and efforts to recover Covid-19 in Indonesia (Tempo, 2021). It didn't stop there; New Zealand in July 2021 again flooded Indonesia with assistance worth Rp. 15 billion to help overcome the surge in Covid-19 cases (Antara News, 2021). Besides New Zealand, Canada is also quite generous by helping Rp. 12.5 billion through Red Cross and UNICEF (Medcom, 2020). Canada's commitment to assisting many countries in escaping the Covid-19 pandemic places it as one of the most generous countries in the world in terms of support to developing countries struggling to get vaccines (Republika Online, 2021).

## **Conclusion**

The theory is like the lens of glasses to clarify our view of the reality around us. Lens colours vary. If the lens we use is black, reality will be black according to our eyes. If it is green, then reality is green. So, what the picture of the world looks like depends on the point of view or lens we use. As Steve Smith put it, "all observations about international relations must be based on the theory" (Smith in Dunne, Kurki and Smith, 2013: 8). Of course, no single lens can capture the entire object. One point of view is not able to represent the whole reality. Because of this, various theories have emerged, each of which offers a unique perspective. Although contradictory, these multiple theories complement each other to understand us completely. As Stephen Walt puts it, "each conflicting perspective provides an important picture of world politics. Our understanding will be shallow if our thoughts are based on only one of them" (Walt, 1998:44).

This article presents a picture of world politics during the Covid-19 pandemic through three lenses, namely realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Realism offers a blurry and pessimistic vision of the world by emphasising the tireless efforts of countries to pursue their

national interests. Liberalism offers a more optimistic view by highlighting cooperation between nations and the role of multilateralism as an instrument of collaboration. Constructivism provides a less common perspective according to the rationalist perspective, namely that global ethical factors have a role in influencing state actions because the state is an actor who views the logic of appropriateness as necessary. None of these three perspectives accurately interprets world politics in the pandemic era. Although most observers tend to depart from the premise of realism, this is not the case. This article shows that a better understanding of the global political landscape in the pandemic era and beyond requires us not to exclude anyone theory. This article has demonstrated that the world's current portrait is characterised by conflict and self-serving state attitudes, mutually beneficial cooperation, and a sense of empathy and responsibility to help other countries in difficulty. These three features each represent the perspectives of realism, liberalism, and constructivism.

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