

## MEASURING THE JOB PRECARIOUSNESS EXPERIENCED BY GOJEK DRIVERS IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

The introduction provides an overview of the rapid growth of digital technology and its impact on various aspects of human life. The rise of the information society and the development of the digital economy, particularly in Indonesia, has led to the emergence of start-ups like Gojek. Gojek, a digital business offering various services, has become a significant player in the Indonesian market, impacting millions of lives and employing many driver-partners. However, the welfare of Gojek drivers has come under scrutiny as studies have highlighted their vulnerabilities. The concept of "precariat," introduced by Guy Standing, is used to describe the vulnerabilities experienced by these digital workers. Precariat workers, such as Gojek drivers, face multiple challenges, including ambiguous work relations, lack of worker rights, and inadequate state support. The methods section explains the research approach used, which is a qualitative descriptive method with a literature review approach. The research framework is based on data collected from various sources to analyze Gojek drivers' vulnerabilities. The results section provides insights into Gojek's profile, industry development in Indonesia, and the vulnerabilities Gojek drivers face. The partnership status of Gojek drivers leads to unequal relationships, extended working hours, and a lack of worker rights, particularly regarding social security benefits. Additionally, conflicts have emerged between Gojek and conventional motorcycle taxis, further highlighting the job insecurity experienced by Gojek drivers.

**Keywords:** *Digital economy, Start-ups, Gojek, Precariat, Vulnerabilities, Worker Rights, Indonesia.*

### A. INTRODUCTION

Currently, the development of digital technology growth fast. This growth also affects almost all areas of human life. Even the prediction made by Toffler (1980) states that human life will get into the information society. This information society is characterized by exchanging information between individuals quickly, which is not limited by differences in space and time (Straubhar, 2002). This information society changes society's condition, believing that information is a basic need. Moreover, this information society encourages economic development, especially machine-based industrialization or mechanization into a computer and network technology as its main basis (Tapscott, 1996). This condition enables the growth of the industrial revolution 4.0.

Furthermore, the development of start-ups is a trend that continues to grow, not least in Indonesia. The internet users in Indonesia in 2021 reached 202.6 million people, or 73 percent of the total population (Jatmiko, 2021). That makes Indonesia the 6th country with the highest internet users in the world (APJI, 2020). This condition certainly encourages the development of the digital economy, which continues to increase. According to research from Ernst & Young quoted by the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (2015), the growth in the selling value of online businesses increases by 40 percent every year. Surely, this condition inevitably changes the existing working and working conditions. One of the representations is the Gojek application, which is growing into a giant digital company in Indonesia.

Gojek is a digital business called start-up, which is engaged in services, one of which is online taxis. Gojek can be a start-up of this type in Indonesia, which began to be known in 2015. According to its official website, Gojek has been downloaded by 190 million internet users. With one of its goals as a business that impacts people's lives, Gojek has absorbed more than 2 million workers as driver-partners.

The development of Gojek, which is often narrated as one of the proofs of a successful digital business in absorbing labor and reducing unemployment, needs to be studied further concerning the welfare of the drivers as partners. Various studies have been conducted that link gojek drivers as a new form of work in the digital era with conditions of working welfare. Heychael (in Kamim & Khandiq, 2018), who focuses on the youth as Gojek drivers, found that the welfare narrative echoed by companies and the government did not match the facts. The absence of regulations governing this new form of work which is often not found in Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower has led to various conflicts, such as the prohibition on establishing labor unions (Randy, 2018), many workers' rights are not obtained (Indyaswari & Putra, 2017), unclear hire and fire, and undeveloped youth as potential residents (Fatmawati et al., 2019).

The vulnerability experienced by digital workers has at least long been mentioned by Guy Standing (2014) as a new group of workers who are full of various vulnerabilities due to the lack of clarity in their production relations. They are called the precariat, a combination of the precarious (vulnerable) and proletariat (working class) terminology, or workers who are in a weak condition (Polimpung, 2018). According to Standing (2014), there are at least three vulnerabilities that workers must experience, such as the double vulnerability faced by workers, the absence of rights as workers must be obtained, and the lack of the state in guaranteeing the rights of precariat workers as citizens.

There are still very few precarious jobs discussions in Indonesia, which encourage writing this essay. Gojek, as a new form of work responding to digital developments, gives rise to various risks experienced by drivers as partners. The absence of regulations, the glorification of flexible work, and the jargon of digitizing work are still more visible than the hidden vulnerabilities experienced by the community as Gojek's partners. Therefore, this essay aims to measure the vulnerable conditions of Gojek drivers using the precarious theory approach by Guy Standing and describe the various vulnerabilities based on data from multiple existing works of literature.

### **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The precariat is a new concept introduced by Guy Standing (2011), emphasizing the difference in fate with another proletariat. According to him, the main factor of the emergence of this precariat worker was the development and innovation of technology which automatically created new job opportunities. In simple terms, Standing (2011) defines precariat as workers with various risks that haunt and cause problems for the workers. The first characteristics of this precariat can be seen from the context of production relations, where precariat workers do not have a clear working relationship with the corporation. Second, in contrast to workers in general, these precariat workers only rely on the salary they get without any additional incentives or rights outside of wages such as health insurance and pensions. Furthermore, this precariat also eliminates the relationship between workers and the state where precariat workers are not the same as other workers in accessing citizens' rights, including political, social, and economic rights.

The basic rights of workers who are not fully fulfilled are the beginning of this precariat worker disaster. According to Standing (2011), workers have at least some needs other than wages, such as self-development, job security, and associations. In line with this opinion, in Indonesia, it has been regulated in Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower that workers

must also get other rights and salaries. Therefore, the company's obligation to provide guarantees for self-development, occupational health and safety, association, and severance pay in the event of termination of employment becomes mandatory.

Precariat workers do not only happen to workers with contract or partner status, as experienced by Gojek. Standing (2011) examines in depth that many new models of types of work are vulnerable to labor exploitation. Even those who do not have the status of workers are being exploited for their energy and thoughts for the benefit of corporate profits. Call it part-time workers, freelancers and apprentices is a common phenomenon encountered today. This condition of invisible vulnerability escapes the eyes of the state in ensuring the welfare and job security. The position of precarious workers is also increased, leading to an unclear status that harms the workers.

There is a lack of research on the vulnerability experienced by precariat workers in Indonesia. However, Gojek-drivers as precariat workers certainly tend to experience vulnerabilities, as stated by Standing. Furthermore, labor rights were generally not obtained from the unclear industrial relations, and ambiguous relations with the state caused conflicts to arise. Therefore, the next discussion of this paper will analyze the precariousness experienced by Gojek drivers.

### **C. METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a literature review approach based on previously conducted research documents. The literature review is highly appropriate for investigating topics related to online motorcycle taxi drivers, particularly those associated with Gojek, as numerous studies have been conducted in this area. Hence, the literature review selection aims to identify patterns from research documents and existing data to form a new research framework (Fink, 2010).

The descriptive literature review approach is adopted for this research method. According to King & He (2005), a descriptive literature review involves seeking patterns from empirical studies with similar research focus and scope. Thus, this approach involves gathering, categorizing, and analyzing research findings to create a comprehensive overview of the chosen topic based on existing literature (Pare' et al., 2015).

As mentioned earlier, data collection is performed gradually by collecting and studying documents from various sources. Firstly, the author searches for relevant documents using specific keywords through search engines such as "Google Scholar & Scopus." Subsequently, a reduction process is carried out to identify essential and relevant information related to the research topic, then grouping the data into sub-topics for further discussion. The data analysis comprises several stages, including reduction, data grouping, synthesis, and concluding.

### **D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Gojek's Profile and Industry Development in Indonesia**

Digitization as the process of using digital technology for business models in Indonesia is no longer considered a change but a massive transformation. The impact of the industrial revolution 4.0 is the main cause for digital business to go beyond conventional business. For example, in Indonesia, the largest airline company, Garuda, has a much lower valuation than Gojek, which is 142 trillion compared to 11.07 trillion rupiahs (Bahtiar et al., 2019). This digital transformation has become a separate impetus for the development of Gojek as a digital business in Indonesia, and it can even encourage a digitalization climate for all economic activities that have not been touched by technology (Saint-Amans, 2017).

Reporting from its official website, Gojek was founded in 2010. This company is claimed as the first online taxi service provider in Indonesia. Gojek's growth is very rapid as a company considered a new model. This digital company has developed its business with a

service model that is not only an online transportation provider five years later. Gojek is starting to expand with food delivery service providers, ticket reservations, etc.

Gojek's rapid growth has brought it into a new business trend in Indonesia. This growth is evidenced by Gojek's contribution to the country's economy, reported from a research report by the Faculty of Economics, the University of Indonesia in 2020 of 1.6 Trillion Rupiah. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, digital companies, including Gojek, did not experience problems like other business sectors. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (2021), Gojek and other digital businesses are the only industries contributing to Gross Domestic Product in deficits in other sectors.

The expansion of the Gojek market again showed its power when it merged with Tokopedia as another well-known digital company in Indonesia. This merger gave rise to a service called ToGo (Tokopedia-Gojek), officially launched in 2021. As a result, the two companies that were formerly unicorns—a term for startups with a valuation value of 1 billion US dollars or around Rp. 14.2 trillion have become giant digital companies in Indonesia (Ramadhan, 2022).

## **2. Vulnerabilities Behind Flexible Work and Partner Status**

Flexible work has become a business strategy widely applied in response to the developed global economy (Poelmans & Chenoy (2008)). The growth of various digital platforms makes it easier to monitor work anytime and anywhere in the main impetus for the growth and development of this flexible work. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred around the world two years ago affected various existing structures of life, including how activity restrictions directly prompted different business sectors to implement work from home with irregular working hours (Kramer & Kramer, 2020).

Working as a Gojek-driver can be said to be a flexible worker. However, the jargon of "boss for yourself" is not in line with the various problems experienced by Gojek drivers (Suryomenggolo, 2021). At least the problems and vulnerabilities encountered by Gojek drivers stem from the partnership status, which occurs inequality between Gojek and drivers who work under their responsibility. The partner's status of Gojek drivers has become unclear in terms of responsibility to industrial relations (Novianto et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to him, the status of this partnership is contrary to various existing regulations. On the one hand, they are not workers or employees of Gojek who do not have the power to speak out about the relationship between workers and employers. However, on the other hand, as a partner, drivers still experience various imbalances in relations, in which the relationship between Gojek and drivers should be equal. What happens in the field, the determination of various policies is very much centered on the internal Gojek without listening to the drivers' voices who have had a big role in the running of their business (Ayuwuragil, 2018).

The impact of this partnership, which requires unequal relationships, the working hours of Gojek-drivers are most highlighted by the problems that have been experienced so far. Based on the Manpower Law in force in Indonesia, each worker has 7 hours/day for six working days or 8 hours/day for five days with a maximum number of working hours of 40 hours per week. However, many Gojek-drivers have a conflict with these regulations. Mutahhari (2017) said that at least the drivers worked 12 hours per day for 6-7 working days in his research. Another research conducted by Prakarsa (2017) shows a condition where 39 percent of the respondents' drivers work a full week without rest. Meanwhile, 30 percent of other drivers work more than 8 hours/day. The government also have given up on this condition, evidenced by the absence of firm rules regarding working hours (Jannah, 2019).

Back to the definition of precariat by Standing (2014), the first vulnerability experienced by precariat workers is the ambiguity of oppressive work relations towards precariat workers. The status of partners intentionally or not many facts and data cause various

problems encountered by drivers. What is most highlighted by this partner status is that the driver's working hours are required to violate applicable regulations. The normalization of flexible work where workers can work from any hour is why the government detach. Many studies have shown that Gojek-drivers work more than the working hours that have been the rule.

### **3. Lack of Driver Rights as Workers**

Kamim & Khandiq (2019) conducts an interesting discussion in looking at the vulnerability of Gojek-drivers who are far from their rights as workers. Furthermore, according to him, Gojek-drivers seem to be confined in a gamification model. This approach encourages workers to be more active and diligent to add value than other workers. Therefore, bonuses as additional income for workers are no longer seen as the rights of drivers as workers from Gojek. However, it was formed as a form of driver service to consumers, which of course will be of great benefit to Gojek with the applicable digital algorithm

The only benefit other than the delivery fee that every driver can get is a bonus with a point system. Consumers will give stars starting from the lowest 1 to 5 as the highest point. The higher the accumulated stars obtained by the driver, the higher the bonus received (Hendrastomo et al., 2016). This condition means that Gojek-drivers will compete to take as many orders as possible. This condition certainly causes losses, such as working overtime and poor occupational health.

The encouragement of working conditions created is certainly causing health and safety conditions that are at risk for drivers. Not to mention that the driver will encounter congested road conditions that put the driver back as the aggrieved party. In addition, working conditions by encouraging drivers to take as many orders as possible in the midst of traffic jams cause a risk of stress and tension for drivers (Azizah & Adawia, 2018).

The vulnerability of workers in terms of occupational health and safety is guaranteed in Law Number 40 of 2004 concerning the National Social Security System, which states that every worker is entitled to five guarantees for himself, namely health insurance, pension insurance, old-age insurance, work accident insurance and death insurance. However, what is most highlighted in Prakarsa's research (2020) is the absence of work accident insurance. Therefore, the number of traffic accidents befitting Gojek drivers is very high, and it is 79 percent or 58,715 accident cases in 2017 (Simamora, 2018). Unfortunately, there are at least 2 accidents per day that result in the death of the Gojek driver (Fiandri, 2017).

The absence of social security as the right of every Gojek-driver further shows that precariat workers are happening in Indonesia, which is felt by Gojek-drivers. The lack of clarity about the work bonus scheme makes Gojek-drivers available anytime and anywhere. This condition is because the work system is set gamification. Not to mention the vulnerability of work accidents where many Gojek-drivers have not received guarantees as to their rights. Of course, the lack of driver's rights as a new work phenomenon in this digital era reinforces that precariousness leads to alienating workers from their rights due to the "partner" condition, which becomes a dilemma.

### **4. Social Conflict as the Final Form of Vulnerability**

The development of Gojek can be said as a form of disruption that has transformed the type of motorcycle taxi work in Indonesia. Gojek has succeeded in changing the constellation of motorcycle taxis that have been done conventionally by hanging out at certain points. This transformative disruption is not without consequences. Disruption leads to change, resulting in various forms of changes in the social order (Frizzo-Barker et al., 2020). The shift from conventional motorcycle taxis to online motorcycle taxis with different existing platforms, Gojek, has led to two groups that often intersect and even lead to horizontal conflicts.

Various studies have been conducted looking at the multiple conflicts between gojek drivers and conventional motorcycle taxis. Rahayu & Zuber (2018) researched in Surakarta City, Central Java, where the conflict between conventional motorcycle taxis and online motorcycle taxis—one of which was Gojek caused by economic factors. Conventional motorcycle taxis assess that online motorcycle taxis have won many consumers who have been using their services. Not only happened in Surakarta, this conflict between conventional motorcycle taxis and Gojek also occurred in Kediri Regency, East Java (Junior, 2017). The conflict that occurred in Kediri Regency has led to physical conflict.

The conflicts that arise in big cities have a higher potential for conflict due to the higher mobility of its citizens compared to other cities. For example, Anggraeni (2017) studied the motorcycle taxi and Gojek conflicts in Bandung, where conventional motorcycle taxi groups were not ready to accept the increasing presence of online motorcycle taxis. It is because online motorcycle taxis have a significant impact on economic conditions in the region. As a result, boundaries have been created between online and conventional motorcycles in various public places such as airports, stations, and terminals.

The conflicts that have occurred so far show the conditions of work insecurity experienced by Gojek drivers. The absence of firmness from the government as the main regulator in various regions is the reason for the maintenance of friction between online and conventional motorcycle taxis that have occurred until now. The job insecurity experienced by Go-Jek drivers increasingly shows the job precariousness felt by Go-Jek drivers. Conflicts between driver-partners and application companies in various regions occur because drivers want to form a labor union based on the Manpower Law. Still, the government and companies do not fulfill it (Randi 2018). The absence of this union is another problem for the lack of power of Gojek drivers to push for the creation of regulations that benefit them.

The discussion section delves into the findings presented in the results section and offers an in-depth analysis of the vulnerabilities faced by Gojek drivers as precariat workers. It also explores the implications of these vulnerabilities for the drivers, the digital economy, and society.

The study found that Gojek drivers can be classified as precariat workers, according to Guy Standing's concept. As precariat workers, they experience double vulnerability due to the ambiguity of their work relations with the company and the lack of rights and benefits typically associated with regular employment.

This precariat status is further exacerbated by the partnership model employed by Gojek, which denies drivers the full protection and benefits they are entitled to as employees. The partnership status of Gojek drivers raises questions about their employment status and the company's responsibilities towards them. While they are not classified as traditional employees, Gojek exerts significant control over their work, including setting prices and determining working hours. This creates an unequal power dynamic where Gojek holds most of the decision-making power, leaving drivers with limited bargaining power.

Gojek drivers need more of the rights and benefits afforded to regular workers, such as health insurance, pensions, and work accident insurance. The company's gamification model, which incentivizes drivers to compete for bonuses based on customer ratings, undermines the idea of fair wages and benefits. As a result, many drivers are compelled to work long hours, leading to overwork and potential health issues.

The absence of social security protection for Gojek drivers is a significant concern. Despite the high risk of work-related accidents, many drivers do not have access to proper work accident insurance. This lack of protection leaves them vulnerable to financial hardships in accidents or emergencies, further exacerbating their precarity.

The study highlights the emergence of conflicts between Gojek drivers and conventional motorcycle taxi drivers. These conflicts are often fueled by economic factors, as

traditional drivers view the rise of online platforms like Gojek as a threat to their livelihoods. The job insecurity experienced by Gojek drivers is compounded by the lack of job stability and the potential for being replaced by other drivers, leading to further tensions and unrest in the industry.

The vulnerabilities Gojek drivers face have broader implications for the digital economy and society. The exploitation of drivers and the lack of worker rights could lead to a disillusioned and disengaged workforce. This could eventually impact the overall quality of service the platform provides, potentially leading to a decline in customer satisfaction. Additionally, drivers' lack of social security protection poses social and economic risks, as accidents and emergencies could result in financial burdens for drivers and society.

To address the vulnerabilities faced by Gojek drivers and other precariat workers in the digital economy, there is a need for comprehensive policies and regulations. The government should acknowledge the changing nature of work and ensure that workers' rights and benefits are adequately protected, regardless of their employment status. Clear guidelines on working hours, fair wages, and social security provisions are essential to safeguard the welfare of workers.

Digital platforms like Gojek should also take on greater corporate responsibility in ensuring the well-being of their drivers. Fair compensation, transparent policies, and open communication channels are crucial for establishing a positive and mutually beneficial relationship between the company and its drivers. Emphasizing worker welfare and social responsibility can enhance the reputation and sustainability of the platform.

Further research is needed to delve deeper into the working conditions, motivations, and perspectives of Gojek drivers. Exploring drivers' experiences in different regions and cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into the broader implications of precariat work in the digital era. Additionally, comparative studies with other digital platforms and industries can shed light on the universality of vulnerabilities faced by precariat workers.

### **E. CONCLUSION**

The ongoing development of digitalization has brought about unexpected work transformations, such as the emergence and growth of Gojek as one of the application-based service providers in Indonesia. Gojek has grown to become a digital business giant in Indonesia with a huge impact on the country's economy. However, a bit of the story behind it leaves welfare problems for Gojek drivers, which are the resources behind the development of Gojek until now. The emergence of a new working relationship pinned to Gojek drivers, who are referred to as "partners" instead of workers, is the root of the problem. The absence of benefits other than the delivery service fee is the first weakness experienced by this driver. The bonus system developed is also a requirement for exploitation, requiring drivers to be available anytime and anywhere. Gojek drivers, whose daily lives are very vulnerable to work accidents, sadly still lack social security protection for them. Not to mention that the development of Gojek and other similar applications is not supported by the government's readiness to respond with pro-driver regulations as a form of labor.

In conclusion, the discussion highlights the precarious status of Gojek drivers as precariat workers, facing multiple vulnerabilities and lacking adequate worker rights and benefits. Addressing these vulnerabilities is crucial for creating a fair and sustainable digital economy. Policymakers and businesses must work together to establish regulations that protect worker rights and ensure the well-being of drivers, contributing to a more equitable and prosperous digital society.

In closing, the phenomenon of gojek drivers is important to be seen as a new class, called precariat workers who are full of vulnerability. It is time for the government as a regulator to photograph this phenomenon as a new form of work and keep it away from

problems resulting from existing vulnerabilities. The business sector also needs to emphasize the aspect of business responsibility principled towards work fairness for its employees. So that in the future, precariat workers will get the same rights as other workers.

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