

Wildcat Strike Season: The Origin and Limits of Platform Driver Protests during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the widespread protest actions carried out by gig workers, especially actions using the wildcat strike, with case studies from Indonesia. During the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 to March 2022), a total of 47 wildcat strikes were carried out by platform drivers in Indonesia. Why were most of the protests by gig workers in Indonesia carried out through wildcat strikes? Can these wildcat strike actions win workers' demands? Unlike the claims of several scholars that wildcat strikes tend to appear in authoritarian state labour control regimes, becoming, in these cases, an effective form of movement in winning demands, in Indonesia a despotic labour market, repressive employers' actions, platform drivers' distrust of existing driver organisations and the obstacles to organising can explain the emergence of wildcat strikes. Though these tend to be effective in responding quickly to specific problems at the local level, they have limitations, being unable to win their demands in national or wider contexts.

KEYWORDS

Wildcat strike; precarious work; platform drivers' resistance, labour control; Indonesian gig workers

Introduction

The emergence of platform-based transport has received much attention, including interest in conflicts between drivers and platform companies, driver classification, precarious driver conditions and driver resistance. The problem of exploitation of platform drivers is predicted by some scholars to obstruct strong and wide-scale resistance from drivers (Collier et al., 2017; Vandaele, 2018). The digital gig economy, which has made labour processes that separate and individualise drivers, are considered to have segmented platform workers and made it difficult to raise collective consciousness to fight for their rights together (Collier et al., 2017; Vandaele, 2018; Webster, 2016). For others, the myth of the sharing economy and flexibility (Wu et al., 2019), has created a hegemony that discourages potential resistance from platform drivers. In addition, the abundant reserve army of labour, strict forms of labour control through digital technology or algorithms and work designed on gamification contribute to undermining the political awareness of drivers for protesting and demanding better working conditions (Deterding, 2019; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

Instead of making platform drivers docile, the digital gig economy in the transport sector has sparked widespread protests from gig workers globally (Bessa et al., 2022). In China, from 2017 to 2018 there were 87 protests (Lei, 2021), while in Indonesia there was a surge in protests during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely 71 protests from March 2020 to March 2022 (Novianto, 2022a). Instead of having silenced workers, labour control through digital technology and classification of drivers as independent contractors creates a contradiction which limits platform company

management in controlling driver complaints (Gandini, 2019; Lei, 2021; Veen et al., 2020). As a result, driver complaints are widespread and uncontrollable, pouring out in social media forums. Under certain conditions, when there is a feeling of sharing the same fate and solidarity emerges, the unresolved complaints of platform drivers flow into various protests, as a way to fight around complaints and demands.

Research on protest actions by platform drivers, so far, tends to be limited when compared to research on labour processes, work control and working conditions of drivers. Several studies have shown the occurrence of driver protests on certain platforms and in certain regions (Gutierrez Crocco & Atzeni, 2022; Lei, 2021; Panimbang, 2021; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Wood et al., 2019). Meanwhile, some researchers have gone further into investigating the dynamics of driver protest, either with the workers' power approach (Rizzo & Atzeni, 2020) or considering forms of organising action (Woodcock & Cant, 2022), such as wildcat strikes or movements within the labour union.

In relation to the form of organising action, wildcat strikes have recently returned to attract the interest of researchers. Anner (2015), for instance, considers that wildcat strikes tend to emerge in countries that implement authoritarian state labour control. Buckley (2021), on the other hand, argues that wildcat strikes tend to be more effective in winning demands, compared to movements through labour unions. However in the specific context of the UK, wildcat strikes most commonly emerged early in platform-based transport businesses as a form of spontaneous resistance that is not well organised, and as it developed, wildcat strikes began to be abandoned and platform drivers tended to prefer more organised actions via unions (Cant & Woodcock, 2020). To engage the academic debate, this article attempts to answer why most of the protests by gig workers in Indonesia are carried out through wildcat strikes. Can these wildcat strikes win their demands?

This article has at least three main contributions. First, in contrast to the prediction that platform workers tend to be apathetic, this article shows the rise of wildcat strikes in the context of platform-based transportation in Indonesia. The wildcat strike originates because of a contradiction in platform capitalism, where exploitation is deep and control using digital technology actually increases dehumanisation, thus triggering various complaints which at times turn into various protests. Second, instead of being born in an authoritarian state labour control situation, the emergence of many wildcat strikes in the platform economy in Indonesia is precisely amidst despotic labour market control, employers' repressive labour control, and drivers' distrust of existing driver organisations. Third, wildcat strikes tend to be effective in responding quickly to specific problems at the local level, but are limited in that they are unable to win their demands in national or wider contexts.

Literature Review

The spread of platform capitalism in the 21st century has caused digital labour and the platform-based gig economy to increasingly attract the interest of many researchers. Topics on precarious work (Cant, 2019; Prassl, 2018; Wood et al., 2019), misclassification issues (Cherry, 2016; Dubal, 2017), work control through algorithms (Möhlmann & Henfridsson, 2019; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020) or by gamification (Gandini, 2018; Van Doorn & Chen, 2021), and data asymmetry (Van Doorn & Badger, 2020) have become much researched. Over time, in the midst of a wave of protests from platform drivers, the topic of gig worker protests also began to get attention, amongst which was the wildcat strike. In general, wildcat strikes are defined as working class protests that are spontaneous, disorganised in the long term, not connected to the larger or traditional unions, and having no main leader in the movement. Van der Linden (2008) gives a

specific feature of the wildcat strike: namely the formation of a union at the time of the strike which is quickly disbanded after the strike, regardless of the outcome of the strike. In Buckley's (2021) study of garment workers in Vietnam, the wildcat strike takes place in a decentralised manner, it is difficult to know who initiated it, and leadership is temporary and constantly rotates. This is different from other studies which argue that wildcat strikes do not have a formal leader but there is almost always an influential informal leader in the course of the strike action (Clarke, 2006; Cox, 2015).

The emergence of wildcat strikes is generally seen as a result of the ongoing authoritarian state labour control in the region or country where the strike took place (Anner, 2015; Buckley, 2021). In his study of Vietnam, Anner (2015) explains that there were two reasons that wildcat strikes were the most common form of resistance to authoritarian state labour control: first, official unions (in Vietnam only one union is allowed), because they are controlled by the state so that official unions in general do not respond to the needs of workers; second, the state blocks access to formal national institutional mechanisms that might address workers' concerns and blocks direct ties with international advocacy groups. In the midst of coercive control, where strike leaders can be imprisoned, and in the midst of low wages and poor working conditions, wildcat strikes become a possible option for workers to speak out (Anner, 2015; Buckley, 2021).

Wildcat strikes have become a very effective strategy for the working class in Vietnam, especially in the garment and textile industry, to win their demands amidst state labour control. Throughout 2006, there were 387 strikes, and this increased in 2011 to 978 strikes. Clarke (2006) showed that of the 71 wildcat strikes analysed, 68 cases won their demands. Meanwhile, Anner (2015) shows that at least one demand was met in 95% of the 97 wildcat strikes studied. The short time given to suppliers by buyers to complete orders for certain commodities has increased the bargaining position of workers to confront capital when carrying out wildcat strikes. This is another reason why the resistance in the form of wildcat strikes had a high success rate in Vietnam (Anner, 2015).

If wildcat strikes tend to emerge in the context of authoritarian state labour control, other forms of labour control also produce other patterns of resistance. In countries with labour regulation based on labour market flexibility (short-term contracts, outsourced labour and part-time work) and an abundant reserve army of labour, market despotism results. In market despotism, workers are disciplined through coercive market power (Webster et al., 2011); where the bargaining position of workers against employers is low and the reserve army of labour is large, workers can be replaced at any time by other workers (Foster et al., 2011; Silver, 2003). These conditions shape what is known as despotic labour market control, which allows workers' wages to be kept as low as possible and workers' involvement in labour unions to be reduced. In general, according to Anner (2015), a pattern of resistance that appears in despotic market labour control is to encourage international accords.

Another form of labour control is repressive labour control by employers. This form is different from labour control through persuasion, for example by "manufacturing consent" (Burawoy, 1982). Persuasive labour control by employers is carried out, in general, through gamification and hegemony in the workplace (Deterding, 2019; Gandini, 2019). The purpose of these two things is to obtain consent to maximise the outpouring of labour power from workers and to follow the rules of the game set by the employer (Burawoy, 1982; Mollick & Rothbard, 2014; Woodcock & Johnson, 2018). Labour control that is carried out by the employer in a repressive manner emphasises coercion. This repressive form of labour control is possible, especially, when the state is weak in terms of regulations on worker protection and weak in enforcement capability, and workers' power is weak (Novianto et al., 2023). In responding to employer workplace

repression, in general, the pattern of resistance is through transnational corporate campaigns (Anner, 2015).

In the context of the platform-mediated gig economy, studies of worker protest actions are starting to be conducted, but there are still very few that focus on wildcat strikes. Several studies in the UK show that gig workers respond to insecurity and low pay by protesting, one of which is through wildcat strikes (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Woodcock & Cant, 2022). Another study of wildcat strikes by gig workers in Italy shows the success of wildcat strikes in resisting firms' managerial control and winning several demands (Cini & Goldmann, 2021). In the context of a Global South country such as Indonesia, several studies show platform-driver resistance against algorithmic control and exploitative conditions (Mustika & Savirani, 2021; Nastiti, 2017; Panimbang, 2021) but do not specifically explain patterns of resistance – for example, wildcat strikes. That is where this research contributes to the debate about the relationship between forms of labour control and patterns of worker resistance.

The conditions of gig workers in Indonesia, where since 2020 there has been a significant increase in the protests, is a relevant place to discuss the pattern of resistance. This offers scholars the opportunity to discuss the protests that took place in Indonesia along with various other research globally, both theoretically and empirically. In the context of wildcat strike patterns, the different forms of labour control and platform-driver responses to their working conditions have made it possible for me to argue about the origins and limits of wildcat strikes as a form of protest.

Research Method

In the process of collecting data in this study, I used two methods, namely semi-structured interviews and online ethnography. The semi-structured interview method was used to obtain more in-depth information about work issues and protests of platform drivers. This semi-structured interview was conducted with forty-two platform drivers, including thirteen Gojek drivers (anonymously coded respondent GJ01-13), twelve Grab drivers (GR01-12), five GoKilat drivers (GK01-05), three ID Express drivers (IE01-03), two Sicepat drivers (SC01-02), two Lalamove drivers [LM01-02], three Maxim drivers (MX01-03), and two Shopee Food drivers (SF01-02). The semi-structured interview process was conducted by telephone from July 2020 to March 2022.

Meanwhile, to get data about problems, complaints and the process of organising platform drivers on social media, I did an online ethnography. I joined forty-four social media groups for platform drivers (both Facebook and WhatsApp groups) during August 2020 until March 2022 to find out the daily dynamics of drivers, recording every protest action they take (which is often not covered by the mass media, because the actions are spontaneous and not well organised), and the dynamics in every protest action, one of which is protesting through wildcat strikes. The social media groups, which became the subject of online ethnography, were selected based on group activity (there are posts every day), having more than one hundred members, and representing certain platforms and regions.

The method in this study certainly has some limitations. First, data collection on protests and wildcat strikes made it possible to miss other actions that were beyond the reach of researchers. This happens because the number of social media groups for platform drivers in Indonesia can reach hundreds (counting groups with more than 1 000 members) and even thousands (if you count groups with fewer than 1 000 members), while this study is limited to forty-four driver social media groups. Therefore, it is very possible that there are protests or wildcat strikes that are not recorded.

Second is the limitation on the number of active participants involved in each wildcat strike. This happened because they were spontaneous and not well organised, making information about the number of platform drivers involved in the action only an estimate, which information was obtained from the participants of the action.

With these two methods for collecting data, despite the limitations, it is possible for me to analyse the origin and limits of platform drivers mobilisation during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The findings of the field data fill in some of the blank puzzle pieces in previous studies discussed in the literature review section.

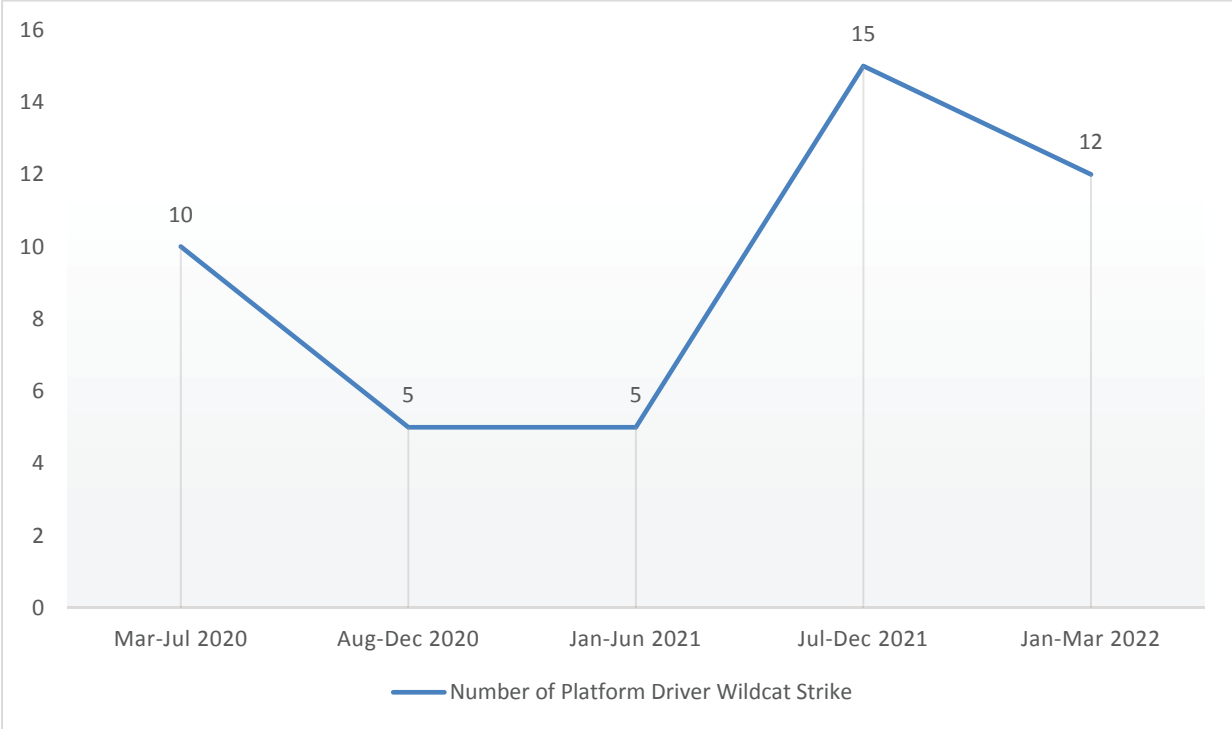
Results

Increased protests in Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has opened the curtain on various vulnerabilities experienced by platform drivers in Indonesia. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the various vulnerabilities experienced were not much discussed, because drivers' income tended to be higher than others', even reaching twice the minimum wage (Novianto, 2022a). However, when the COVID-19 pandemic began in Indonesia in March 2020, the income of platform drivers experienced a drastic decline of 67 per cent (Keban et al., 2021). This decline in income led them to start to question low pay, harsh working conditions, lack of social protection and classification issues.

If we look more deeply, the decline in platform driver income is not solely caused by the economic recession due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The downward trend in revenue actually started before the pandemic, when platform companies began to end the money-burning period by reducing incentives and fares for drivers as well as discount promos for consumers (Novianto, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has actually given momentum to platform companies to cut fares and incentives for drivers, which has resulted in a decrease in income and an increase in the vulnerability of platform drivers. The policy of reducing incentives and fares for drivers was triggered by the race among platform companies to cut labour costs, to lower service prices for consumers to win them away from their competitors. This competition has created a "race to the bottom" to the detriment of platform drivers.

Figure 1: Number of platform driver wildcat strikes during COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia

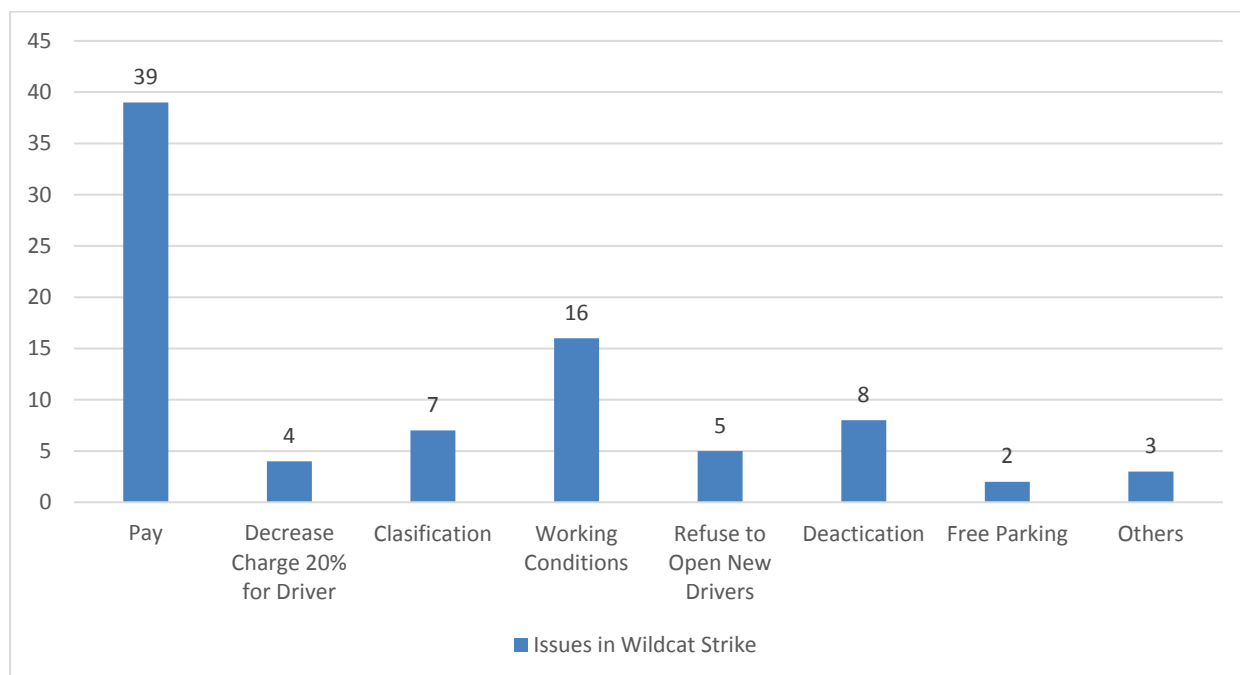


Source: field data

In response to the reduction in incentives and fares as well as precarious working conditions, various protests were carried out by platform drivers. From March 2020 to March 2022, there were seventy-one platform driver protests, and forty-seven of them used the wildcat strike strategy. In 2020 (from March to December), there were fifteen wildcat strikes from platform drivers, increasing to twenty wildcat strikes in 2021. Meanwhile, in early 2022 (January-March) there were twelve wildcat strikes from platform drivers. Unlike the protest actions before the COVID-19 pandemic, which were centred only in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, the protests spread during the pandemic: for example, on 24 March, 2022, a strike took place in the form of logging off from driver accounts in thirteen cities and mass actions in three cities in Indonesia.

The main issue in the wildcat strike that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia was about pay (either fares or incentives). Of the forty-seven wildcat strikes that platform drivers took over the course of two years, thirty-nine had primary demands around fair pay. Most of these wildcat strikes that demanded decent pay were spontaneous and reactive, where protests were initiated very quickly, and were not organised through a union, to respond to policies reducing fares or incentives carried out by platform companies such as Gojek, Grab, Maxim, and Shopee Food. Other issues that were the main demands in the wildcat strikes were working conditions, deactivation or unilateral sanctions, and the problem of driver classification.

Figure 2: Issues in platform driver wildcat strikes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia



Source: field data

A total of around 62 000 platform drivers were involved in these forty-seven wildcat strikes during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 there were approximately 14 600 platform drivers involved in wildcat strikes. That rose to 32 350 platform drivers by 2021, and there were 15 050 drivers involved in wildcat strikes by early 2022. Most of the drivers involved in wildcat strikes had never been union members. They tended to become members of small-scale grassroots communities, with a membership of twenty to one hundred platform drivers. These platform driver communities are generally formed as a place to share information and help each other, not as political vehicles to fight for better working conditions, a role often played by labour unions (Novianto et al., 2021).

Wildcat strikes and organising platform drivers

The emergence of many wildcat strikes by platform drivers in Indonesia was motivated by complaints and demands from drivers that were not accommodated by the platform company. In the beginning, the seeds of protests stemmed from the activity of sharing common problems and complaints between workers (Atzeni, 2010). When complaints about issues that were previously expressed by individual workers were to responded by other workers with the same complaints, then a sense of sharing the same experience arose and solidarity emerged to strive to achieve certain goals, which led to open protests. In the context of the wildcat strike carried out by platform drivers in Indonesia, the same process takes place; the difference is the conditions that bring together complaints and the building of solidarity, where social media played an important role.

In strikes carried out by Gojek drivers on same-day delivery services, such as GoKilat, the main organising was through the GoKilat drivers' Facebook and WhatsApp groups. The initial process of triggering the strike was motivated by Gojek's policy of lowering pay for GoKilat drivers, which has reduced around 30 per cent of drivers' net income (Novianto, 2021). Responding to the policies that harm drivers, various complaints and concerns were shared by various drivers in social media groups. These complaints were eventually gathered into a feeling of sharing the same experience, which gave rise to solidarity and a common will to reject the incentive reduction

policy implemented by Gojek, until finally, without knowing who started it, the idea arose to go on strike (GK01 & GK02).

The idea to fight Gojek's policy of reducing incentives by striking got a lot of support from GoKilat drivers. In one of the drivers' posts on the Facebook group containing GoKilat drivers, a discussion appeared, comprising up to 430 comments. After many drivers agreed on the idea of a strike, the discussion continued about how many days the strike would take in order for their demands to be won. Initially the idea that emerged was that they would strike for only one day; then the idea of a one-day strike tended to be rejected, because it was considered that it would be difficult to win demands and it would be ignored by Gojek. In the end, it was agreed that the strike would be for three days. After that, the discussion progressed to whether a three-day strike was enough to pressure Gojek to withdraw its incentive reduction policy or not. GK02 shared his experience that "If it's just a strike, my friends fear that the strike will not be effective, because there are still drivers who are still actively working or not joining the strike."

Various discussions on the platform drivers' social media continued to develop and flow before the wildcat strike. One of them was about an agreement to disseminate information about a strike to other GoKilat drivers who had not joined social media groups or did not open social media, for more drivers to join the strike. It did not stop there: the idea of picketing in a shop which lots of consumer order from also appeared in one of the posts on the Facebook group, to ensure that no driver kept working during the wildcat strike. The idea was finally agreed by most of the GoKilat drivers (GK03). Another idea was to put up banners on the roadside and send bouquets of flowers to Gojek's offices as a form of protest. After the various ideas were approved, two drivers were appointed to be in charge of fundraising to buy equipment to support the action.

In organising the GoKilat wildcat strike for 8 June to 10 June, 2021, not all ideas were approved. For example, the idea offered by one of the drivers about the need for mass action in large numbers and convoys with motorcycle was rejected by the forum, taking into account that, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic situation that was spreading in Indonesia, mass mobilisation in large numbers would be prone to being dispersed by the police and create a negative image in the eyes of the public. The wildcat strike carried out by the GoKilat driver showed its spontaneous nature: there was no single leader, the organisation was carried out quickly when the strike was approved, many drivers on social media used anonymous accounts to avoid sanctions from the platform company (because at the time protests were included by Gojek as a violation carrying the penalty of being fired), and the movement tended to be short term.

If examined further, the emergence of wildcat strikes from platform drivers in Indonesia was caused by despotic labour market control, repressive employer labour control, and drivers' distrust of existing driver organisations, or because most of them had not been organised (floating mass). These are outlined in the sections below.

Despotic labour market control

The abundant reserve army of labour in the Indonesia labour structure has weakened the bargaining position of platform drivers. Even though their working conditions are precarious, there are still many queues to become platform drivers. This is because there is shortage of vacancies for decent jobs and greater potential to earn more income in platform-based transport compared to jobs in the informal sector (Novianto et al., 2021). It is also due to the precarity of the formal sector in Indonesia (Hauf, 2016; Tjandraningsih, 2013), where the minimum wage tends to be below the decent living component (Wulansari, 2021).

The many queues to become platform drivers allow platform companies to control and discipline drivers more deeply, by classifying drivers as independent contractors – in the Indonesian

context, more commonly called “partner”. Platform companies in Indonesia then apply sanctions and dismissals unilaterally, even without valid evidence, without fear of a shortage of workers on their platforms. To respond to this precarity, platform drivers have driver accounts on more than one platform. For example, a recent survey shows that more than 80.8 per cent of Lalamove drivers are also registered as drivers on other platforms such as InDriver, Maxim, Gojek, or Grab (Novianto, 2022b). The purpose of registering on more than one platform is that if at any time they are suspended or fired, there is another platform that they can immediately use as a place to work (LM01, GJ07, GJ09, & GR10). In addition, amid income uncertainty, being a driver on more than one platform makes it possible for them to activate all platform accounts at the same time to increase their chances of getting a job or choose the platform that they think brings more income (SF01, SF02, MX02, LM01, & GJ03).

The labour market conditions described above, on the one hand, are used by platform companies to control drivers despotically. On the other hand, there is a contradiction that allows platform drivers to continue to strike through mass logging off from one platform without having to worry about losing income, because there are still other platforms to work as a drivers. GJ07, for example, stated that:

as a platform driver, there is no fixed salary, the payment is when completing customer orders. If we don't work for a day, for example, we don't have any income. So when we protest, because yesterday Gojek lowered fares, we can then [be] logging off the Gojek driver account and activate another platform account for work, so that there is still daily income.

The wildcat strike through logging off the driver's account, without involving mass mobilisation on the streets, is mostly carried out in response to the policy of reducing incentives or fares carried out by platform companies. These actions were all discussed in the platform-drivers' social media group; then a spontaneous idea emerged about a strike which was agreed upon by most of the participants in the discussion forum. In addition to striking on one platform but activating applications on another platform, several wildcat strike actions were agreed in advance; then there was an appeal for platform drivers to set aside their income into savings during the time before the action to keep having money during the strike (GK01 & GK03). One of these methods was applied in the second wildcat strike carried out by GoKilat drivers in Greater Jakarta from 29 to 30 June, 2021, after previously striking from 8 to 10 June 2021. In this action, the wildcat strike timing decision was two weeks before the action. Then came a mutual agreement that 29 to 30 June, 2021, was set as a public holiday. They tried to overcome financial problems during the two-day strike, by saving for two weeks before the action (GK01 & GK04).

Repressive employer labour control

The rules set by platform companies in Indonesia stipulate that driver protests are a violation. At Grab, for example, the code of ethics in Point 17 states that drivers can be fired if they “Participate in any illegal demonstrations against Grab, and engage or provoke other partners [platform drivers] to carry out activities that can damage public facilities or harm other parties, and or harm any party, including Grab”. At Maxim, Point 14 of the work rules for platform drivers similarly states that “participating directly or indirectly in protests/demonstrations” is included in the category of violations and is subject to partner termination sanctions or dismissal.

Gojek previously set a similar rule, in the Gojek Code of Conduct Point 9: a level V violation states that “inviting other drivers to conduct demonstration activities/sweeping/offbid/everything that harms the company or disturbs public order” will be subject to the penalty of dismissal. GJ12,

the coordinator of the protest movement in North Sumatra Province before the COVID-19 pandemic, was sanctioned by Gojek in the form of termination of partnership relations on the grounds of “involved in political action”. The dismissal experienced by GJ12 was considered an attempt by Gojek to silence the movement of platform drivers. In a protest action carried out by platform drivers in the city of Semarang, in the Central Java Province of Indonesia, a Gojek driver was also fired because he was considered to be involved in the protest. The restrictions on freedom of expression have prompted the Online Drivers Association (ADO) to create an online petition to demand that Gojek revoke the rules prohibiting protest action (GJ10). The online petition was signed by 6 325 people, and finally made Gojek revise the rules. Although the prohibition on drivers expressing aspirations was lifted by Gojek, there is still fear among drivers of protesting. GJ09 said that:

platform companies are like giants, they can do anything. It is possible that a protest is allowed, but the driver who protests can still be sanctioned, for other reasons, even without evidence. That’s what fellow drivers are still afraid of.

The existence of repressive employer labour control in platform-based transport in Indonesia has prompted various protests in the form of wildcat strikes. Despite fear of sanctions or dismissal, there is a will and desire to fight for decent working conditions and pay, the driver gets around this by doing a wildcat strike. The wildcat strike tends to be preferred as it is possible for the driver to carry out the action anonymously. In order to keep their identity from being revealed, in discussions on social media groups of platform drivers, many of them use pseudonyms. Even when the wildcat strike was carried out, the drivers intentionally logged out of their accounts or temporarily uninstalled the driver’s application on their cell phones when they wanted take part in mass action, an offline meeting or picketing at a certain place. The goal is that their positions and activities should not be tracked by the technology surveillance system used by platform companies, as it is feared that they will be sanctioned if they are tracked.

In some wildcat strikes, anonymity is also used to disrupt activity on the platform that is the target of the action, by spreading fictitious orders using anonymous consumer identities. The purpose of this action is to stop all work activity on the platform, in which drivers who are still actively working or not involved in strikes also log off from their driver accounts (GR09, GK02, GK03, & GJ08): if there are drivers who are still active during wildcat strikes, then their account will receive fictitious orders, which will damage their performance, cause them to execute fictitious orders without payment, and use up their time. A wildcat strike strategy such as this was able to paralyze the Gojek platform in Greater Jakarta on 8 to 10 June, 2021, when almost 80 per cent of the drivers on the GoKilat service went on strike, so that many consumer orders did not get drivers. To overcome this, Gojek chose to close the GoKilat service during the strike period.

Platform drivers’ distrust of existing driver organisations and the floating mass

The spread of wildcat strikes in platform-based transport in Indonesia is also caused by distrust of existing driver organisations. In the period before the COVID-19 pandemic, most platform drivers with motorcycles in Indonesia were members of the Two-Wheel Action Association (Garda), while many platform drivers with cars joined ADO. During its development, there was a disunity within the largest platform driver organisation.

Garda, the organisation that houses around 200 000 platform drivers, experienced disunity in 2019. The disunity was due to problems with the organisation’s leadership, who were accused of accepting bribes and instead establishing a driver’s cooperative under the auspices of a platform

company (GJ08). This created distrust at the grass roots, because it is considered that the direction of the organisation's movement has actually been co-opted by platform companies. Therefore most of the communities and organisations that previously joined Garda chose not to join. Several former members of the Garda chose to move independently, engaging in various wildcat strikes. GJ08, one of the people who participated in declaring the Garda, said that:

Since there was a problem with the Garda, we no longer trusted the organisation. Many of the comrades chose to build their own organisations or move independently, and officially declared that they were leaving the Garda. Even though we are no longer in the Garda, we are keep[ing] fighting, because the problems experienced by drivers are extremely complex. For example, if there is a problem that the driver experiences, due to unilateral deactivation or conflict with the restaurant because of long waiting times for food or parking problems, we immediately form solidarity if we get information on social media groups, take joint action. Because life as a platform driver is severe, so solidarity among drivers is our main weapon. The harsh working conditions and the problems we experience, almost every driver must have a sense of solidarity if other drivers have problems.

There is also disunity in ADO, due to internal conflicts. The issue of integrity of the leaders of the organisation became the main trigger for the conflict. GJ13, who was previously the head of ADO in the East Java Province, chose to leave ADO because "there was a difference of notion with the central committee [of] ADO regarding funding issues and the direction of the organisation's future movement". This disunity led some drivers to finally choose to move outside of the organisation's auspices and run various wildcat strikes. In the case of East Java Province, after breaking up with ADO and running a wildcat strike, they slowly began to form their own independent organisation named Frontal, with platform driver members who were previously in ADO, small-scale communities, and platform drivers who are not yet organised within the organisation (GJ13). Meanwhile, after facing disunity, with its new leadership, ADO is trying to rebuild the trust of its members by actively carrying out protests to demand decent pay and better working conditions.

Meanwhile, for platform drivers who were not previously involved in unions or had not been organised, the wildcat strike form of action is part of the spontaneous awareness that is possible, especially in the midst of ongoing despotic labour control and the legacy of the "floating mass" politics that was run by the Soeharto regime, which cut people's awareness in working-class politics. GK04, for example, who was involved in the wildcat strike at GoKilat, said that all this time the resistance was carried out by grumbling (daily resistance), culminating in a wildcat strike, owing to limited knowledge of appropriate resistance to win the demands. Most of the unorganised platform drivers who joined small-scale communities are not connected to existing labour organisations who have structural power, and at the same time these unions are not able to organise the platform drivers, so that their consciousness is generally spontaneous.

The Limits of the Wildcat Strike in Platform Driver Movement in Indonesia

Of the forty-seven wildcat strikes that were carried out by platform drivers in Indonesia, seven wildcat strikes had their demands met (see Table 1). These seven wildcat strikes were a spontaneous response to certain policies from platform and restaurant companies. The protest strategy carried out, apart from a strike, also included blocking and sealing offices, sending letters of complaint to the government and sending representatives of demonstrators to negotiate with the targeted parties.

Meanwhile, the demands of forty other wildcat strikes that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia have not been fulfilled. All of the wildcat strike demands that have not been met involved refusing to reduce fares or incentives, to set fair pay, guarantee social protection and

better working conditions, or clarify the classification of platform drivers. Platform companies tend to reject demands that threaten their business existence and capital accumulation. If the drivers are classified as “employees” instead of “independent contractor or partner”, the platform company’s revenue will drop drastically. In its Prospectus before the IPO, Gojek openly wrote that the company’s economy would be shaken if the driver was classified as employee. Likewise, if the clarity of classification as a “partner” was really implemented according to regulations in Indonesia, the platform company would lose their control over the driver (Novianto, 2022b). For that reason, the demands to clarify driver classification were all rejected by the platform company.

Meanwhile, if we look deeper, there are three similarities among the seven wildcat strikes that fulfilled their demands. First, the demands that were met had a legal foundation that was violated; second, there was a wedge of interest from platform companies regarding the demands being met; third, the demands were not directed at platform companies or the impact was not felt by all platform companies. An explanation of the similarities across the seven wildcat strike actions whose demands were met are as follows Table 1.

Table 1: The Conditions that Make 7 Wildcat Strikes Fulfilled Their Demands

	Demands	Have a legal Foundation?	Any interest from platform companies?	Is the negative impact being felt by all platform companies?
1	Ride-hailing be allowed to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic	No	Yes, so that their platform for ride-hailing services can operate again	No, directed to local and central government, benefiting all platform companies
2	Incentive payments for platform drivers who are paid late by SiCepat Express	Yes, payment of driver’s rights is regulated in the Manpower Law or Minister of Transportation Regulation 12/2019	Yes, because late payments only take place on one platform, and demands have no effect on other platforms	No, only directed to SiCepat Express company
3	Fulfilment of demands for faster service at Gacoan restaurants	No	Yes, there is an interest so that the service at the restaurant can be fast	No, directed to restaurant and it benefits all platforms precisely
4	Cancellation of informalisation (from employee to independent contractor) carried out by the ID Express company for its couriers in Batam city	Yes, based on the Manpower Act because the status of some couriers are permanent workers	Yes, the informalisation process takes place on one platform and has no effect on its competitors	No, only directed to ID Express company
5	Cancellation of cooperation between Maxim and conventional taxis at Batam Port	No	Yes, there is an interest from other platform companies, because the cooperation will create a service monopoly by one of the platforms at the port	No, only directed to Maxim

6	Full payment of the driver's income that ID Express company wants to cut	Yes, payment of driver's rights is regulated in the Manpower Law or Minister of Transportation Regulation 12/2019	Yes, because late payments only take place on one platform, and demands have no effect on other platforms	No, only directed to ID Express
7	Free parking access for platform drivers at BSD Mall, which was withdrawn after previously being paid for	No	Yes, because with mall free parking, there is no need to charge parking fees to consumers, so the costs to consumers become cheaper	No, demands directed to mall management

Note. based on field data

The main similarity among the seven wildcat strikes carried out by platform drivers is that demands were met because they suited platform companies' interests and the impact was not felt by all platform companies. Meanwhile, demands that had a legal basis – for example regarding the implementation of a “true partnership” as regulated in Law 20/2008, which emphasises that the position of partners (companies and platform drivers) is equal and no one dominates the other party – in fact were not fulfilled. The reason is because these demands would affect all platform companies, thus threatening their business and capital accumulation.

The nature of the wildcat strike, which is spontaneous, not well organised, and without any permanent organisation, has made the struggles tend to be short-term and only reactive. It can be seen in the wildcat strike actions of platform drivers that when their demands were not met, in general, the movements diminished until they disappeared. The wildcat strike carried out by Gojek drivers in DI Yogyakarta on 26 March, 2022, for example, was not followed up when their demands were not met. After the wildcat strike, they returned to work as usual. The same thing happened with the wildcat strike carried out by drivers at Grab in DI Yogyakarta on 21 March, 2022, in refusing the rates reduction policy implemented by Grab. When their demands were not met, the escalation of the movements carried out then decreased, and after that they returned to work on the platform as usual. The absence of an organisation or union, as a vehicle for action and struggle that has a long-term vision, is a limitation of wildcat strikes in winning demands that are structural and contrary to the interests of platform companies.

Discussion

Studies of worker resistance are generally divided between those seeing that wildcat strikes tend to be regressive and those viewing wildcat strikes as an alternative in the face of the failure of existing unions. With the perspective of dialectical materialism, the forms and methods of resistance that are appropriate for the working class are almost always related to the dynamics of the political economy and class relations in a place (Silver, 2003). In the UK, for example, wildcat strikes by platform drivers were not enough to win sustained victories as they began to organise themselves into unions, such as the IWGB (Woodcock & Cant, 2022). Meanwhile in Vietnam, before the existence of freedom of association and in the midst of co-optation of existing unions by the state and employers, wildcat strikes became an effective movement strategy in winning demands (Buckley, 2021).

In the context of platform-based transportation in Indonesia, the wildcat strike, on the one

hand, has been able to win various demands, and on the other hand has limitations. Wildcat strikes have the advantage of being consolidated quickly compared to unions, which often have certain bureaucratic procedures before deciding on actions; they are also difficult to co-opt due to the absence of a single leader in the movement, and are democratic because everyone has the same rights as others.

Wildcat strikes also have limitations, namely not being able to win broad and substantial demands for which there are no legal regulations and which are contrary to the interests of the platform company, such as demands for fair working conditions, decent pay, clarity of classification and social protection for platform drivers. This can be seen from the non-fulfilment of these demands in wildcat strike actions carried out by platform drivers during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The wildcat strike actions aimed to win demands on a small scale and only targeted one platform or did not target platform companies – for example, the demand for free parking at a mall, late payment of incentives and cancellation of informalisation in ID Express.

These limitations occur because the wildcat strike is a movement that tends to be spontaneous, not well organised, without a main leader, and not connected to larger unions. The spontaneity of the movement occurs because of the tendency of the movement to move only when certain new policies are felt to be detrimental to it. Responding to such policies, drivers shared their complaints, especially in the platform drivers' social media groups, while seeing whether many other drivers experienced the same anxiety or not. When many felt the same anxiety, then ideas about wildcat strikes and other action strategies were usually raised, to be discussed and agreed upon together. The process of organising the wildcat strike tended to be fluid, there was no main leader, and it was not organised under the auspices of a particular organisation that had been around for a long time. In general, new organisations or alliances are formed when a wildcat strike takes place, but then dissolve when the action is over, regardless of the outcome of the action (whether the demands are met or not).

The general tendency to wildcat strikes by drivers is one of this movement's weaknesses, as it makes it incapable of winning large and structural demands. In wildcat strikes carried out over a few days, when the platform company or the government do not comply with their demands, the wildcat strike movement tends to decrease and slowly disappear. Even if a movement is built to consolidate long-term plans to win demands, the tendency is for wildcat strikes not to be used as the main strategy. In general, platform drivers who previously used wildcat strikes then form a long-term union or alliance. The GoKilat drivers, after demands in the wildcat strike conducted from 8 to 10 June, 2021, were not met, were aware the limitations of the wildcat strike, and they then formed the Online Drivers' Union (Sejaring). Lalamove drivers did the same thing when their demands from the wildcat strikes were not met; they then organised themselves to form an organisation, namely Lalamove Drivers Motor Indonesia (LDMI).

Conclusion

This article has elaborated on the origins and limitations of wildcat strikes by platform drivers in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergence of forty-seven wildcat strikes in the platform economy in Indonesia is precisely in the midst of despotic labour market control, repressive employer labour control, and couriers' distrust of existing courier organisations or because most of them have not been organised (floating mass). This condition is certainly different from previous studies related to wildcat strikes in non-platform sectors, which tend to be born in authoritarian state labour control. Meanwhile, in terms of the achievement of demands, wildcat strikes have limitations. This is because they were only able to win demands in a small context and

when the platform companies had an interest in the demands or the demands do not target all platform companies, while all of them failed to win demands in the broad, substantial context and those which conflicted with the interests of capital accumulation for platform companies.

Amidst the limitations and advantages of wildcat strikes, this article contributes to providing an overview of the appropriate choice of resistance method for each different problem or demand. Wildcat strikes tend to be effective in responding quickly to certain problems at the local level, especially those that have been regulated by law. Meanwhile, for bigger demands, such as the creation of regulations that protect workers or the overthrow of platform capitalism, resistance through the labour unions or working-class parties tends to win them more. However, the action of the wildcat strike and action through the union are neither separate nor mutually exclusive. Both can still be used or combined simultaneously to win certain demands

This study has limitations regarding the data collection method, which was limited to forty-four social media groups and tracking protest information through online media, so there is room for wildcat strikes that were not recorded because the actions were spontaneous, not covered by the national mass media, and often carried out anonymously, due to repressive employer labour controls from platform companies. Meanwhile, there are still many future research topics that have not been covered in this study, including the context of the wildcat strikes of platform drivers in other regions, comparing union protests and wildcat strikes, the transformation from wildcat strikes to unions that have not been successful, and the response of platform companies to various actions taken by platforms drivers.

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