



The Lack of Government Capacity and Rising Community Networks in Building Resilience During the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Insight from Pekalongan City, Indonesia

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted various sectors of people's lives, including socioeconomic disruption. In Indonesia, at both local and national government levels, social protection programs have become a vital tool for policymakers to overcome the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. This study aims to examine how the local authorities and community networks called P2SE (Pekalongan Peduli Sosial Ekonomi or Pekalongan Cares Socio-Economy) in Pekalongan City respond to the socioeconomic crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic in order to increase the resilience of urban poor and vulnerable group as well as reducing social inequalities. One way of doing this is through integrated social protection provision involving various communities from the local authority, academicians, civil society, businessmen, and small and medium enterprises. This article argues that the community networks-based integrated social protection provision model is an alternative strategy to help state authorities address poverty and socioeconomic inequality in inclusive and participatory ways. In this way, some issues of inequality and political interests in the resource distribution process related to the provision of social protection can be minimized. Therefore, this model of providing social protection based on integrated community networks can be used as an alternative strategy to reduce inequality and build the resilience of urban poor and other vulnerable groups when facing crises due to unpredictable disasters such as Covid-19.

Keywords

Covid-19; Social Protection; Community Networks; Social Resilience; Social Justice; Pekalongan City

Abstrak

Pandemi Covid-19 berdampak besar terhadap beragam segi kehidupan manusia, termasuk dirupsi di bidang sosial-ekonomi. Program perlindungan sosial di Indonesia, baik di tingkat nasional maupun lokal, menjadi instrumen kunci bagi para pembuat kebijakan untuk mengatasi dampak negatif dari krisis akibat Covid-19. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana otoritas pemerintah daerah dan jaringan komunitas P2SE (Pekalongan Peduli Sosial Ekonomi) di Kota Pekalongan merespon krisis sosial-ekonomi selama pandemi Covid-19 untuk meningkatkan ketahanan hidup warga miskin dan kelompok rentan serta mengurangi ketidakadilan sosial di kota. Salah satu cara yang dilakukan adalah membuat program perlindungan sosial terintegrasi yang melibatkan beragam stakeholder, mulai dari pemerintah lokal,

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akademisi kampus, masyarakat sipil, pengusaha, dan kelompok UMKM. Studi ini berargumen bahwa program perlindungan sosial berbasis jaringan komunitas terintegrasi adalah strategi alternatif yang dapat membantu negara, khususnya otoritas lokal yang mengalami kelemahan kapasitas ekonomi, untuk mengatasi kemiskinan dan ketidakstaraan sosial-ekonomi melalui mekanisme yang inklusif dan partisipatif. Dengan begitu, mekanisme ini dapat meminimalisir kemungkinan-kemungkinan hadirnya ketidaksetaraan dan kepentingan politik dalam proses distribusi sumberdaya ekonomi berkaitan dengan penyediaan perlindungan sosial untuk warga kota. Untuk itu, model program perlindungan sosial berbasis jaringan komunitas terintegrasi ini dapat digunakan sebagai strategi alternatif untuk mengurangi ketidakadilan dan membangun ketahanan masyarakat miskin dan kelompok rentan kota ketika menghadapi krisis ekonomi dan sosial akibat bencana yang tidak dapat diprediksi seperti Covid-19.

Kata Kunci

Covid-19; Perlindungan Sosial; Jaringan Komunitas; Ketahanan Sosial; Keadilan Sosial; Kota Pekalongan

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Introduction

The Covid-19 outbreak has had a wide impact on various people's lives. It is a problem in health systems and social and economic realms. In short, Covid-19 has wreaked havoc around the world, infecting millions of people, killing hundreds of thousands of people, weakening health systems (Pawar, 2020; Ratuva et al., 2021), and making socioeconomic disruption in many countries (Nocola et al., 2020; Supriatna, 2020; Kumar et al., 2020; Bashir et al., 2020; Buheji et al., 2020). In the case of Indonesia, the implementation of physical and social distancing in the form of PSBB (large-scale social restrictions) and PPKM (community activities restrictions enforcement) policies to overcome the spread of Covid-19 have negatively impacted social and economic systems. The restrictions policies have drastically limited the activities and movements of people and business sectors, especially small and medium enterprises in many cities (Lutfi et al., 2020; Olivia et al., 2020; WHO, 2020).

Since the Indonesian government, at both central and local levels, implemented social restriction policies to reduce the spread of Covid-19, many corporations have also reduced employee density by working two weeks and two weeks off at home. It has, of course, had a significant impact on decreasing production. Then it has made companies lose, especially the garment and manufacturing industries, disturbed by the supply chain, hindering production (Caraka et al., 2020). On the other hand, the restrictions policy also has significantly changed the pattern of population mobility to visit markets (modern and

traditional), supermarkets, educational institutions, and retail (Ouhbine et al., 2020). All of these have been paralyzing economies causing significant unemployment, poverty, and inequality and dramatically impacting social well-being across regions and communities.

In Indonesia, at both local and national government levels, social protection programs have become a vital tool for policymakers to overcome the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, as mentioned above. In response to the unfolding crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic, like many countries in the world, all types of social protection programs and policies in the form of groceries distributions, food distributions, cash transfers, pre-employment cards adopted by the Indonesian government (Sumarto & Ferdiansyah, 2021; also see Ratuva et al., 2021; Dwikara, 2020; Jovic, 2020). Some studies find that the Indonesian social policy responses to the social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic were mainly through reallocations within the government budgets at both central and local levels. However, these budget reallocations have been insufficient to cover all social programs distributed to the poor and vulnerable communities (Sumarto & Ferdiansyah, 2021). This condition, at the local level, stimulated public awareness and created social solidarity to help the state in overcoming the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic from non-government organizations (NGOs) and community organizations. In short, the Covid-19 pandemic has encouraged an important role for civil society and community organizations to fill the government gap in response to this local and national crisis. Pekalongan city is one of the cities in Indonesia that represents a good example of that case.

Studies on the socioeconomic impact of Covid-19 and the governance of social protection programs in Indonesia have been widely carried out. Based on analyzing many literatures, however, there have been no studies that focused on the impact of Covid-19 and the rise of community networks in providing social protection against poverty in Indonesia, especially in the local context (Pitoyo et al., 2020; Yuda et al., 2021; Supriatna, 2020; Lutfi et al., 2020; Suryahadi et al., 2020b; Suryahadi et al., 2020a). Therefore, this article aims to examine the emergence of community networks in providing social protection programs on poverty to urban poor and vulnerable communities during the Covid-19 period in Pekalongan City, the province of central Java, Indonesia. This community called P2SE (Pekalongan Peduli Sosial Ekonomi or Pekalongan Cares Socio-Economy) rose in response to the socioeconomic crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic in order to increase the resilience of urban poor and vulnerable groups as well as reducing social inequalities. One way of doing this is through integrated social protection provision involving various communities from academicians, civil society, businessmen, and small and medium enterprises. This article argues that the community networks-based integrated social protection provision model is an alternative strategy to address poverty and socioeconomic inequality in inclusive and participatory ways. In this way, some issues of inequality and political interests in the resource distribution process related to the provision of social protection can be minimized.

In terms of structure, the paper first explains Covid-19 and its effects on batik industries, poverty, and vulnerable communities in urban societies in Pekalongan City. The paper then examines how the limited capacity of the state to provide social protection to all urban poor and vulnerable communities responded by the emergence of P2SE as community networks that fill the government gap in response to the local crisis in Pekalongan City. Finally, this paper will be closed by conclusion and some of the shortcomings and challenges regarding the existence of integrated community networks such as P2SE as an alternative strategy to reduce inequality and build the resilience of urban poor and other vulnerable groups when facing crises due to unpredictable disasters in the future.

Method

This article was written from the results of qualitative research using a case study conducted in Pekalongan City. This research used multiple data sources, from face-to-face interviews with participants, focus group discussions, and documentation collected in August 2020 and July 2022. Then, the author examined all the data, gave meaning to it, and organized it into categories or themes that cut across all data sources. This research used inductive analysis to build patterns, categories, and themes regarding this study. It started from managing and preparing data to be analyzed; reading all data to build a general sense of information and make comprehensive reflection; making coding all data to describe a setting, participants, categories, and themes that are analyzed; providing narrative data; and the last step is making interpretation and giving the meaning.

Result and Discussion

Covid-19, Batik Industries, and Poverty Amongst Urban Societies in Pekalongan City

The first case of Covid-19 in Pekalongan City was discovered on March 29, 2020. Six months later, the case of Covid-19 in this city was relatively under control. The data of Pekalongan government shows that on July 17, 2020, there were only 18 people who were confirmed positive for Covid-19 (interview, Slamet Budiyanto, August 12, 2020). Therefore, at that time, Pekalongan City was one of the regions in Central Java that had the second lowest Covid-19 cases after Tegal City. The initial spread of Covid-19 in Pekalongan City was a cluster of export and import batik businesses from residents who traveled to and from Jakarta (Dinkes Kota Pekalongan 2020). For the success of handling the increasing number of Covid-19 cases, Pekalongan City is considered one of Indonesia's regions with a low risk of Covid-19. Therefore, on July 22, 2020, this city received an award from the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia through an additional Regional Incentive Fund of Rp. 14.9 million for handling Covid-19 and regional economic recovery (Diskominfo Pekalongan City 2020).

However, since December 2020, the number of Covid-19 cases in Pekalongan City has increased to 1,024 (Hidayat, 2020). Covid-19 cases in this city increased significantly until the end of 2021. Based on data compiled by the government of Pekalongan City, within two years during the Covid-19 pandemic, residents infected with the virus reached 7,751 cases (Pekalongan, 2022). This data explains that Covid-19 is a deadly virus with a reasonably fast spread. Even according to some studies that Covid-19 is the most severe public health threat from the respiratory disease since the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918 (Olivia et al., 2020).

Many regions in Indonesia, including Pekalongan City, lack capacity in handling Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 outbreak has hit a health system that is already fragile, especially in terms of the unequal availability of health facilities between regions. Significant disparities in the accessibility and quality of health services between regions in Indonesia make handling Covid-19 even more complicated when cases spread widely between regions and rural areas (Olivia et al., 2020). Therefore, one of the ways the Indonesian government has taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and/or respond to the public health emergency is to introduce the policy of large-scale social restrictions (PSBB).

This restriction policy requires local governments in the red zone category to limit the movement of people and goods to and from their respective locations. The local government must have data on the distribution of cases, local transmission, and data on the increase in the number of cases from time to time, accompanied by an epidemiological curve, as well as regional readiness regarding aspects of the availability of basic living needs for the community. In addition, this policy also defines minimum restrictions, including the closure of schools and workplaces, restrictions on physical worship, public gatherings, socio-cultural activities, modes of transportation, and other activities that allow people to mobilize and cause transmission of Covid-19 (Andriani, 2020).

In Pekalongan City, the social restriction policy has been implemented since March 15, 2020, through the Circular Letter of the Mayor of Pekalongan Number 443/01 of 2020 concerning Increased Awareness of the Risk of Covid-19 Transmission. In the case of Pekalongan City, the social restriction policy has had a major impact on the economic system and socioeconomic conditions of the local community, particularly the batik industry, which is the main economic supporter in this city. Most of the batik and textile industries in the form of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), such as in Kampung Batik Pekalongan, have closed. This condition is caused by several factors, including difficulty in supplying batik raw materials from outside Java, supply chain disruptions and market disruptions, limited capital due to difficulty in seeking injections of funds from third parties (Rachmawati et al., 2020), and production processes that have stopped due to cancellation of goods orders or declining demand for goods from entrepreneurs outside Pekalongan City (interview, Candra, August 25, 2020).

In addition, many batik traders who are in batik trading centers in Pekalongan City, such as the Batik Wholesale Market of Setono, also reduce employees and

close their stores to cut operational costs and switch marketing techniques from conventional to online models. This is a strategy that most batik traders do in order to survive during the Covid-19 pandemic. The social restriction policy has had a major impact on reducing the turnover of batik traders by up to 50 percent. Batik traders have a sales turnover of between Rp. 100 million to Rp. 200 million, but during the Covid-19 pandemic, they have a sales turnover of between Rp. 80 million to Rp. 150 million (Purnama, 2021).

The deterioration of the batik industry has left many new unemployed in Pekalongan City. There are many small traders who close and workers who experience work termination. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has also had a major impact on vulnerable groups in the city of Pekalongan. They are small traders or street vendors who sell snacks, bakso, and siomay around traditional markets and schools (interview, Imtihanah, July 28, 2022). This condition then has an impact on increasing poverty rates in urban communities in Pekalongan. According to an informant that Covid-19 has had an impact on increasing poverty rates in Pekalongan City, where before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019 the poverty rate at 6.6 percent rose to 7.17 percent in 2021 (interview, Anita, July 28, 2022).

By analyzing the factors that affect the decline of the batik industry and vulnerable groups in Pekalongan City, theoretically, the impact of Covid-19 on poverty in the city can be explained by referring to the explanation of Suryahadi et al. (2020) that there is a combination of supply and demand shocks, Covid-19 pandemic causing a decline in economic activity which leads to a decrease in economic growth. This macroeconomic shock caused a decrease in the average per capita expenditure at the household level. Then depending on the distributional impact, a decrease in per capita household expenditure can lead to increased poverty.

Interface Between State Social Protection and the Rise of P2SE as Community Networks

In handling the Covid-19 pandemic and regional economic recovery, the local government in Pekalongan City refocused the local budget around seven times in 2020. The city budget of around Rp. 1 trillion, and there was Rp. 23.5 billion which was allocated for handling the socioeconomic impacts of Covid-19, especially the provision of social safety nets. Of these budgets, there are many programs adopted by the government to restore the regional economy and overcome poverty due to the Covid-19 pandemic, ranging from digital marketing training for MSMEs, cash transfers, assistance for business raw materials for 178 small and medium industries, providing pocket money assistance for students of IDR 250,000 for a total of 2,850 students, and fuel subsidies for 73 drivers of public transportation (interview, Doyo Budi, August 13, 2020).

The state social safety program is intended for 178 small and medium industries with a budget allocation of Rp 80 million, where the two activities are financed through refocusing the city budget in 2020 (Pekalongan City 2020

Budget). In addition, the Pekalongan City government is also the executor of the food raw material assistance program provided by the government of Central Java Province to 148 MSMEs in Pekalongan City in two stages, 48 MSMEs in the first stage and 100 MSMEs in the second stage. The raw materials received by each MSME consist of 75 kg of flour, 50 kg of eggs, 50 kg of sugar, and 40 liters of cooking oil. Most of the MSME actors who received the assistance were women (interview, Candra, August 25, 2020).

In addition, through the Department of Social Service, the Pekalongan City Government adopted the Social Safety Net program in the form of providing cash to people affected by Covid-19 as many as 38,457 heads of families with the amount of Rp 3 months with a budget of IDR 19,851,600,000. This policy was issued in two stages, namely: the first stage was carried out on May 5, 2020, through the Decree of the Mayor of Pekalongan Number 746/628 concerning Social Safety Net Recipients for Communities Affected by Covid-19 in 2020, and the second stage was carried out on June 22, 2020, through Pekalongan Mayor's Decree Number 746/665 concerning Social Safety Net Recipients for Communities Affected by Covid-19 in 2020 (City Budget of Pekalongan 2020).

The Pekalongan City government's social safety policy in overcoming socioeconomic problems due to the Covid-19 pandemic is still far from sufficient. For example, the economic resilience program for business actors can only help a small part of the total number of MSMEs in Pekalongan City, which is 22,983 business entrepreneurs (Admid RBK 2020). Likewise, the social assistance program in the form of cash transfers and basic food items (sembako) provided by the government also does not cover all the poor and vulnerable communities in Pekalongan City. This study found that many street vendors who used to sell food around schools, markets, and other public spaces during the pandemic were experiencing economic hardship. This is due to the social restriction policy that has closed schools and limited community activities in public spaces of the city, so that few residents buy their wares, and not a few of them close the business selling these snacks. They are the ones who contributed to the increase in new poverty data during the Covid-19 pandemic in Pekalongan City. The problem is that many of these small traders do not receive social assistance from the government for various reasons, such as not having ID cards, not having the identity of Pekalongan City, and not being registered as recipients of social assistance (interview, Imtihanah, July 28, 2022).

The above conditions encourage the solidarity of some academics from campuses in Pekalongan City, civil society activists such as Nahdhatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, and local entrepreneurs to form a community network called Pekalongan Peduli Socioeconomic or abbreviated P2SE. This P2SE community network was inaugurated directly by the mayor of Pekalongan on April 16, 2020, to help the city government overcome social and economic problems during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is as conveyed by the treasurer of P2SE, who is the vice-rector of Universitas Muhammadiyah Pekajan Pekalongan, as follows:

"P2SE was originally initiated by lecturers who synergized with the local government. It is our concern for the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic that we are experiencing together. So, our concern was the initial idea from a simple story, namely when at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were many street vendors such as cilog traders, somai traders, and others who were in schools. Then there is the policy of closing schools and switching to an online learning system that has an impact on those who lose their income. Then we thought about what these academics could do. Because most groups of people who are affected by the economy, like them, do not have a poor card or PKH card, which is legally the basis for them to get social assistance from the government when they need it. Now, those who already have PKH cards and other poor cards have been touched by the government. Finally, together with the community forum, we discussed finding a way out. Then this P2SE was born which was supported by legality and initial funding by the mayor through donations of civil servants of Korpri." (Interview, Imtihanah, 28 July 2022).

The P2SE is led by the rector of Pekalongan University (UNIKAL), Suryani, and consists of lecturers, community leaders, and entrepreneurs. In this P2SE community, there are no elements of political parties, politicians, or public officials who are part of the management and members within. It is to maintain independence and keep away the influence of elements of political interest in the management of social protection programs, considering that 2020 is the time of simultaneous regional elections in December 2020. In addition, in order to maintain the influence of identity interests in citizen data collection and distribution of social protection programs, there are many faith-based civil society communities (NU, Muhammadiyah, al-Irsyad, and Christian/Catholic religious organizations) that are part of P2SE (interview, Suryani, July 27, 2022).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, P2SE succeeded in attracting solidarity from many groups to finance social protection programs and empower the MSMEs community in Pekalongan City. They start from local businessmen, Kadin (Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry), universities (Unikal, IAIN Pekalongan, UMPP), Islamic and non-Islamic religious organizations, civil society, and Korpri (Korps of civil servants of Republik Indonesia) Pekalongan City government. From the solidarity of the various components of the community, around Rp. 1 billion was collected, which has been managed to help the government overcome the socioeconomic impacts of Covid-19 in Pekalongan City (interview, Imtihanah, July 28, 2022).

The funds of around Rp.1 billion managed by P2SE, it was managed to finance social protection programs in the form of basic food packages with a value of Rp 150 thousand per package to 1,900 families, providing assistance for 70 portable hand washing tools and 700 face shields for kindergarten, elementary, junior high school, and Islamic junior high school in Pekalongan City, as well as providing public

kitchens or food preparations for people infected with Covid-19 who are in quarantine houses. In addition, P2SE also finances empowerment programs in the form of training activities to strengthen the capacity of MSMEs.

Regarding the management and distribution of basic food packages, which is the main social protection program of P2SE, it is carried out in a participatory way by involving many stakeholders from the civil society community, lecturers, heads of household (RT), and residents at the grass root level. They are involved in collecting data on residents who will receive the social assistance program and in the distribution process. The data on the recipients of the basic food packages were obtained from poverty data released by the Social Service of Pekalongan City. In order to ensure overlapping data on citizens receiving social assistance from the government, RT heads, and civil society communities at the output level were involved to verify the data on residents who would receive social assistance from P2SE. The participation of many elements of society was deliberately opened by the P2SE management in order to avoid the infiltration of various socio-political interests and clientelism practices in it, especially in 2020, when the Pilkada is approaching. This is as the findings of a number of studies (see Mahsun, 2020; Sumarto, 2014; Schaffer, 2007) that the distribution process of social security insurance is often misused for electoral political purposes, including as patronage goods exchanged in clientelism networks.

The residents who are the target recipients of social assistance are starting from the urban poor, veteran communities, and vulnerable groups such as street vendors who have lost their income due to Covid-19, disabilities, and workers who got laid off. Where the determination of recipient residents is based on zoning spread across four sub-districts in Pekalongan City. This zoning is the area that has the largest distribution of people who fall into the category of recipients of the social assistance mentioned above. Interestingly, many residents who are recipients of the social protection program managed by P2SE are those who live in the northern coastal area who live in the Pekalongan Utara sub-district, an area where the poor and vulnerable groups live. This is done with the aim that the distribution of social protection carried out by P2SE is not only to help the Pekalongan City government deal with socioeconomic problems due to Covid-19 but also to reduce social inequality and build the resilience of vulnerable communities in times of crisis (interview, Suryani, July 27, 2022).

In addition, the process of distributing social assistance managed by P2SE has a dimension of empowerment for MSMEs engaged in the primary food trade sector. This empowerment practice is in the form of involving 48 small traders who are around the zoning where the residents who receive the basic food packages live. The MSMEs activists who are P2SE partners provide a number of basic food packages to distribute to residents who receive social assistance. In addition, P2SE also provides training to increase the capacity of MSMEs partners related to managing permits, sales in the online system, financial management, and store design. According to several sources, the empowerment of MSMEs in the process

of managing the social safety program by P2SE is to build the resilience of small business activists to survive in times of crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has stimulated the transformation of social protection models in various forms managed by community networks. The case of the emergence of P2SE in Pekalongan City is a good example that represents it due to the paralysis of the economic system caused by increasing poverty, vulnerable groups, and the unemployment rate during the Covid-19 pandemic. The presence of a social protection program managed by the community networks called P2SE, which is an association of academics, civil society, and entrepreneurs in Pekalongan City, not only helps the local government to overcome the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic but also helps maintain the resilience of urban poor, vulnerable groups, and micro-small dan medium enterprises (SMEs) in times of crisis.

While social protection programs adopted by the government can not cover all levels of societies affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially the urban poor and vulnerable groups due to budget constraints, the presence of the P2SE can provide social protection programs to fill the gap that the government can not fill. It is like the case of urban poor and vulnerable groups living in the northern coastal areas and street vendors who are not touched by the government social protection in Pekalongan City. Thus, the combination between state social protection and community solidarity of P2SE can target many layers of societies affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This strategy not only has greater scope to improve the resilience of the urban poor and vulnerable groups but can also reduce social inequality. In addition, the social protection program governed by P2SE also opens a more expansive participatory space for the community to be involved. It can minimize the influence of political interests and clientelism political.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic has provided the opportunity to seek out creativities and alternative social protection models with a multi-stakeholder partnership system to overcome the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the future, this social protection model can be used as a strategy to reduce inequality and build the resilience of urban poor, vulnerable groups, and SMEs when facing crises due to unpredictable disasters such as Covid-19.

Authenticity Statement

I declare that this article is the author's original work, free from plagiarism, and all references are listed in the article. The article has not been published and is not being submitted to another journal.

Biography

Muhammad Mahsun is a lecturer in and Secretary of Department of Political Science, Faculty of Sosial and Political Science, State Islamic University Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia. He researches politics with interest in democratisation, election, clientelism, and Islam politics. His current publications are “Women Candidates, social media, and The Politicization of Religious Identity and Women Islamic Organizations in Indonesia’s 2019 Election” published in Proceedings of the First International Conference on Democracy and Social Transformation, 2022; “Resistensi Masyarakat terhadap Kebijakan Penanganan COVID-19: Studi di Desa Jawisari Kabupaten Kendal” published in Jurnal Politik Walisongo, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2022; “Female Candidates, Islamic Women’s Organisations, and Clientelism in the 2019 Indonesian Elections” published in Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2021.

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