

## Labor Activists and the Coordinator of Online Motorcycle Taxi Drivers (Ojol) in the Solo Raya Region Highlight Regulatory Inequality and Worker Welfare Issues

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze regulatory disparities in labor governance and the welfare conditions of online motorcycle taxi drivers within the gig economy ecosystem, with a specific focus on the local context of the Solo Raya region. The transformation of the digital economy, accelerated by the advancement of platform technologies, has created a new partnership-based employment model that generates legal and social implications for workers. This research employs a descriptive-analytical method with a doctrinal (normative) approach through a literature review of statutory regulations, academic works, and relevant secondary data. The findings indicate that Indonesia's labor law framework has not yet been able to accommodate the characteristics of employment relations in the digital platform sector, thereby placing drivers in a legal grey area that limits their access to social protection and occupational safety guarantees. From an economic perspective, drivers face income uncertainty due to tariff structures and non-transparent platform algorithm mechanisms. In the local context, labor activists function as advocacy agents who not only articulate workers' interests but also facilitate collective mobilization, provide assistance on labor issues, and encourage policy dialogue with stakeholders. Their presence, together with community coordinators of ride-hailing drivers, strengthens drivers' capacity to advocate for normative rights and work welfare. This study underscores the need for regulatory reform that is adaptive to digital work models in order to create a more equitable and sustainable gig economy ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Gig economy, platform workers, online motorcycle taxi drivers, legal protection, worker welfare, labor activism

## INTRODUCTION

The transformation of knowledge in the post-20th century era has triggered a paradigm shift toward production systems managed through information technology and automation. The Industry 4.0 paradigm marks the peak of convergence between information technology and automated production systems, which has significantly reshaped social and economic behavior. The integration of disruptive technologies within the Industry 4.0 ecosystem has created a new economic landscape that demands high adaptability; however, it simultaneously introduces new vulnerabilities to economic stability and the protection of workers' normative rights [1].

This phenomenon has influenced the dynamics of the contemporary global labor market, which has transitioned toward a gig economy system, where digital technology facilitates highly flexible work arrangements but with strict and temporary contractual limitations [2]. The global expansion of the gig economy has occurred with remarkable intensity, affecting labor market structures in both advanced industrial countries and developing economies. According to data cited from Kompas.id and the International Labour Organization (ILO), digital platform workers have reached hundreds of millions globally, with continuous growth driven by the consolidation of large technology companies.

Referring to Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data for August 2024, Indonesia's employment structure is dominated by the informal sector, accounting for 57.95% or approximately 83.8 million individuals. This growth is directly proportional to the expansion of technology platforms based on the gig economy. The penetration of digital ride-hailing platforms such as Gojek and Grab has triggered a systemic restructuring of accessibility mechanisms in transportation and logistics services. Sectoral data and scientific research

indicate that the number of online motorcycle taxi drivers in Indonesia has reached millions, making it one of the fastest-growing segments of informal employment in recent years (Hadiwinata, 2020).

Despite the flexibility and convenience offered, a fundamental issue arises regarding the legal status of drivers, who are officially classified as “partners” or “independent contractors” by platform companies. Consequently, the relationship between ride-hailing drivers and platform companies is not legally recognized as a formal employment relationship, but rather as a partnership, which effectively eliminates workers’ normative labor protections [1]. Furthermore, studies conducted by leading research institutions in Indonesia reveal that ride-hailing drivers face significant income uncertainty due to non-transparent platform algorithms, increasing competition, and tariff structures that tend to favor the platform. Research from various universities indicates that many drivers work more than 12 hours per day to earn a decent income. Reports from DetikJateng highlight similar complaints among drivers in Solo, who must now work beyond 8 hours daily to meet basic needs. Under these conditions, all operational costs and occupational risks are borne by the drivers themselves.

Labor activists have criticized regulatory inequality, pointing out that platform algorithms create structural injustice, including non-transparent dynamic pricing systems, arbitrary penalty mechanisms, and unequal order distribution. Prasetyo and Hartono (2023) identified that ride-hailing drivers experience “algorithmic precarity,” a condition where algorithmic systems inaccessible to workers determine their income, leaving them with little control over key economic factors.

Efforts to reform labor law through Law No. 11 of 2020 on Job Creation and its derivative regulations, including Government Regulation No. 35 of 2021 concerning Fixed-Term Employment Agreements, Outsourcing, Working Time, and Termination of Employment, are primarily aimed at simplifying formal employment arrangements, particularly in terms of flexibility and termination mechanisms [5]. However, these regulations do not specifically address employment relations within digital platform sectors, leading to criticism from labor activists.

Theoretically, gig workers are trapped in a legal gray area because platform-mediated interactions do not fulfill classical criteria of employment relationships, thereby limiting their access to social protection [7]. The Job Creation Law and its implementing regulations have not optimally accommodated the realities of emerging forms of work in the digital sector (Sulistyo & Febrianto, 2024). Activists argue that the classification of workers as “partners” is a strategic move by platforms to avoid labor obligations, while drivers remain economically dependent with limited substantive autonomy.

The welfare disparity experienced by drivers reflects a systemic failure to ensure that digital economic growth benefits all stakeholders fairly. Empirical data indicate that while platform productivity continues to increase, drivers’ welfare stagnates due to intense competition and declining tariffs [7]. The distribution of economic value within the gig economy ecosystem tends to be unequal, with the largest share captured by platforms while workers receive diminishing portions [8].

Based on the above discussion, the urgency of this research lies in the need to develop a more comprehensive understanding of gig economy dynamics, not only from a structural perspective but also from the empirical experiences of workers in a local context. Previous studies have examined the legal status of platform workers, welfare conditions, and the implications of algorithmic systems on income distribution. However, most of these studies focus on national-level analyses or major urban areas, leaving localized dynamics relatively underexplored. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its focus on the conditions, experiences, and advocacy practices of online motorcycle taxi drivers in the Solo Raya region, which has not been extensively examined in previous research.

## RESEARCHMETHOD

This study is a descriptive-analytical research aimed at describing and analyzing the phenomenon of regulatory inequality and worker welfare among online motorcycle taxi drivers in the Solo Raya region. The descriptive-analytical approach was selected because it is appropriate for comprehensively mapping various aspects related to labor activism among ride-hailing drivers, including legal aspects in the form of labor regulations and social security, economic aspects in the form of digital platform practices and drivers’ welfare structures, as well as social aspects in the form of organizational dynamics and activists’ advocacy strategies. Descriptive-analytical research seeks to describe the characteristics of the variables

under study without testing a particular hypothesis, while still incorporating in-depth analysis of the phenomenon being examined [6].

This study employs a doctrinal (normative) approach, which focuses on the analysis of legal materials and doctrines relevant to the research topic. In legal research, the doctrinal approach emphasizes the examination of legal principles, statutory regulations, and doctrines developed within legal scholarship in order to analyze and resolve the legal issues under investigation [4]. The specific approach used is the statutory approach, which aims to examine and compare the content of various relevant laws and regulations, including Law No. 13 of 2003 on Manpower, as amended by Law No. 6 of 2023 on Job Creation, Law No. 40 of 2004 on the National Social Security System, and Minister of Transportation Regulation No. 12 of 2019 concerning the Protection of Safety for Motorcycle Users Used for the Public Interest.

The data sources in this study consist of secondary data, including primary legal materials in the form of statutory regulations, secondary legal materials in the form of doctrines and academic literature, and tertiary legal materials in the form of legal dictionaries and journal indexes. Data were collected through a systematic library research process by accessing official databases such as the Legal Documentation and Information Network (JDIH) of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative analysis method with a deductive-inductive approach that integrates both deductive and inductive reasoning, as well as comparative analysis to evaluate practices in Indonesia against those in other countries that have developed more comprehensive regulations for digital platform workers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Regulatory Inequality in Labor Law Toward Digital Platform Workers

The paradigm of Indonesian labor law, which was constructed on the basis of a standard employment relationship between employer and employee, has become inadequate when applied to new forms of work mediated by digital technology. The framework of Law No. 13 of 2003 on Manpower, which serves as the backbone of national labor regulation, was designed based on the classical assumption of a hierarchical and structured employment relationship, in which the employer exercises clear control over the worker [18]. However, the actual relationship between digital platforms and online motorcycle taxi drivers exists in a legal gray area that cannot easily be subsumed under existing legal categories [5]. Viewed through Radbruch's theory of legal values, this situation reflects a legal dysfunction in which the law fails to reconcile the need for certainty with the fulfillment of fair rights for workers in the digital era [9]. This condition is further complicated by the fact that digital platforms employ a classification strategy that defines drivers as "business partners" or "independent contractors," thereby avoiding obligations that would normally be attached to employer status [1].

Platform companies argue that partnership status is based on the principle of operational freedom, whereby drivers are not bound by rigid limitations regarding working hours or place of work [8]. This argument is grounded in the absence of a conventional employment relationship and the operational discretion given to drivers to accept or reject incoming orders without direct coercion. However, researchers and labor activists emphasize that digital control mechanisms exercised by platforms have created a level of technical and financial dependency that goes beyond the boundaries of conventional partnership relations. Empirical studies reveal that online motorcycle taxi drivers occupy a subordinate position similar to that of conventional workers, with platforms exercising significant control through various mechanisms [3]. The determination of visibility through rating systems and algorithm-based order allocation constitutes a form of technical control that reduces the operational freedom long claimed by platform companies. The classification of drivers as "partners" systematically restricts their access to basic rights such as social security and occupational accident protection, which should be recognized as constitutional rights of every worker [4]. In fact, Article 15 paragraph (1) of Law No. 40 of 2004 on the National Social Security System explicitly requires employers to register all workers in social security programs, including work accident insurance, death benefits, old-age benefits, and pension benefits; however, implementation in practice remains deeply concerning [19]. BPJS data show that out of an estimated two million drivers, only around 250,000 are registered as active participants. This indicates that more than 1.7 million individuals exposed to high occupational risks on the road remain outside the protection of the state's social safety net [9].

A comparative analysis of gig economy regulations indicates that Indonesia still adopts a less progressive approach compared to the European Union, which has enacted Directive 2019/1152 to provide basic protections for gig workers, including social security, collective bargaining rights, and minimum wages. In addition, the implementation of California Assembly Bill 5 has played a crucial role in reconstructing a more balanced industrial relationship between platform workers and service providers [10]. Several studies confirm that implementing similar regulations in Indonesia requires deep local contextualization, particularly with regard to labor culture and the level of legal literacy within society. Meanwhile, through Case No: A2/2017/3467, the UK legal authority affirmed the status of Uber drivers as “workers,” which automatically grants them access to certain labor rights unavailable to independent partners [11]. Within Southeast Asia, several countries have undertaken varied efforts. In Singapore, the Platform Workers Act 2024 provides a formal definition of platform workers, demonstrating recognition and greater legal clarity regarding their status [12]. Meanwhile, Malaysia’s Gig Workers 2025 regulation represents a progressive legislative effort to acknowledge online drivers as legal subjects in need of specific protection [2]. Such comparisons confirm that Indonesia is still experiencing regulatory stagnation, as the development of an adequate legal framework has not kept pace with the massive growth of platform workers.

Activists emphasize that the classification of workers as “partners” is a systematic strategy designed to avoid the labor obligations that should be borne by platforms. Substantively, this criticism is driven by the finding that platforms possess discretionary power to regulate work rhythms, while drivers have no real alternative but to depend on the system for their livelihood [1]. Activists also point out that the algorithmic mechanisms of digital platforms have generated structural injustice, particularly through the implementation of opaque dynamic pricing systems that disadvantage drivers [3]. Moreover, regulatory inequality has resulted in road accident risks being borne entirely by drivers as a personal burden, without the institutional protection commonly available in formal employment relationships [5]. The failure to integrate platform workers into the national social security system constitutes a major challenge for sustainable and equitable economic development.

#### **The Welfare of Solo Raya Ride-Hailing Drivers and the Role of Labor Activism**

From an economic perspective, studies have identified income uncertainty as the primary problem faced by online motorcycle taxi drivers. Although gross earnings may appear nominally sufficient, the accumulation of routine expenses for fuel, periodic maintenance, and internet data substantially erodes drivers’ real income, causing their net earnings to frequently fall below government-established wage standards. This problem becomes increasingly complex due to tariff policies that are more favorable to corporations, as well as intensifying competitive pressure resulting from the growing number of drivers entering the platform ecosystem [3]. Empirical evidence shows that increased operational performance of digital platforms is not proportional to the prosperity of their partners. While corporations continue to grow rapidly, drivers’ living standards are instead subjected to pressures that contribute to declining welfare. This phenomenon confirms the existence of economic asymmetry in which application providers absorb most of the added value through high service deductions, while workers in the field face the reality that their share of income continues to shrink over time [13]. Activists in Solo Raya have voiced complaints similar to those heard in other regions of Indonesia, where drivers must work beyond normal working hours—often more than 12 hours per day—simply to meet the minimum living needs of their families.

Excessive working hours in this sector have negative consequences for both the physical health and psychological stability of drivers. In addition to vulnerability to traffic accidents caused by chronic fatigue, mental pressure also arises from income fluctuations and the constant pressure to achieve daily targets, further undermining their emotional well-being [14]. This condition is aggravated by the absence of an adequate health protection system, under which drivers must bear all medical costs themselves when they fall ill or experience work-related accidents. Sociologically, the identity of platform workers in Indonesia occupies a problematic liminal position within the national labor system. On the one hand, they do not receive normative protection as formal employees; on the other hand, their economic freedom is significantly constrained by platform systems. This uncertainty of status creates systemic barriers for workers in accessing social protection programs and government services, whose procedures are still based on rigid traditional job categories. The lack of legal clarity directly affects workers’ ability to plan for the future, including constraints on property ownership and limited access to formal financing [15].

Unlike conventional labor movements, which are organized within formal trade union structures with clearly defined membership, activism in the platform economy sector in Solo Raya often takes the form of informal networks built through friendship ties and geographic proximity. The local leadership structure within the ride-hailing driver community plays a multifunctional role that should not be underestimated. This role extends from dealing with technical administrative matters involving the platform to providing a space for drivers to build social bonds and engage in advocacy for shared interests. Coordinators play a significant role in fostering collective awareness among drivers regarding their rights and the inequalities they face. These coordinators consolidate drivers through discussion forums and digital groups in order to voice common demands before service providers and public authorities. The findings indicate that the effectiveness of this movement is highly dependent on leadership capacity in coordinating drivers, although the sustainability of such unity is often hindered by the highly individualistic character of the platform industry [16].

Although labor activists and ride-hailing coordinators in Solo Raya have demonstrated the capacity to organize and articulate workers' aspirations, they face various significant challenges in their advocacy efforts. The first challenge is that the individualistic working pattern in the platform industry creates complex collective fragmentation. This is markedly different from workplace cultures in offices or factories, which facilitate prolonged interaction among workers. For online motorcycle taxi drivers, physical separation and systemic competition make it difficult to unify visions and build solidarity. The asymmetry of power is another major obstacle in the advocacy efforts of digital workers against corporations with massive resources. Platforms are not only economically capable of lobbying public authorities, but are also able to carry out technical repression against drivers who voice complaints. The absence of definitive legal rules regarding the rights of workers in this sector means that their aspirations are often ignored by policymakers on the grounds that they lack a formal legal basis [9]. Activism in Solo Raya has developed an integrative pattern of struggle, ranging from mobilizing public opinion through social media to building strategic alliances with established trade unions and conducting diplomatic lobbying. The fact that this movement has succeeded in influencing policy demonstrates that collective strength can serve as a counterbalance amid platform dominance. This record of success offers valuable insight for strengthening the organization of gig workers on a national scale [16].

Strategic steps that can be developed include strengthening the legal framework to clarify the juridical position of platform workers in Indonesia. This must be accompanied by the provision of adequate social protection access and the formulation of social dialogue forums as a means of mediating the interests of drivers, platform companies, and regulators [17]. Another highly decisive aspect is the development of workers' organizational capacity to understand their normative rights. This combination of structural and educational efforts is aimed at building a more proportional platform economy ecosystem, in which the benefits of technological growth can be fairly enjoyed by all parties involved [18]

## CONCLUSION

Discussion shows that the legal relationship between online motorcycle taxi drivers and platform companies within the gig economy scheme remains constructed as a partnership model that does not fully guarantee equality between the parties. This condition has resulted in the suboptimal fulfillment of normative rights, particularly with regard to occupational safety and health protection. In this context, the role of labor activists and coordinators of driver communities becomes highly significant in bridging workers' aspirations, advocating welfare-related issues, and encouraging public discourse on the need for regulatory reform that is more responsive to the dynamics of platform-based work.

A more adaptive and inclusive policy formulation is therefore required, involving various stakeholders, including driver communities and labor activists, so that legal protection is not merely normative but also effectively implementable. On the other hand, platform companies need to strengthen sustainable labor protection mechanisms, while further research is recommended to explore more deeply the role of collective worker movements in promoting policy change within the gig economy sector.

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