

# Public Animo in the 2020 Gubernatorial Election in Central Kalimantan during the Covid-19 Pandemic Era: Religious and Cultural Approaches

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## Abstract

Many observers believe that holding general elections during a pandemic is ineffective in attracting the public interest, including in Central Kalimantan. This study aimed to examine how the public's animo in the gubernatorial election during the Covid-19 pandemic, through religious and cultural approaches, in which the Central Kalimantan people still respected traditional and religious leaders as role models. This study used descriptive qualitative data collected through interviews with traditional and religious leaders and related documents obtained from election administrators. The findings showed that socialization was a reasonably good tool and strategy carried out by traditional and religious leaders at specific events with cultural (local tradition, Dayak language) and religious approaches (through speech in churches and other religious places of worship). Socialization by traditional and religious leaders contributes to public animo in the gubernatorial election in Central Kalimantan.

**Keywords:** Covid-19; Cultural Approach; Gubernatorial Election; Pandemic Era; Public Animo; Religious Approach

## INTRODUCTION

Like other countries, Indonesia is also facing the Covid-19 outbreak. On March 2, 2020, the first COVID-19 case was announced



in Indonesia. Furthermore, on March 10, 2020, the government declared a national emergency (Samudro & Madjid, 2020; Andriansyah, 2021). This also has an impact on political aspects, such as the postponement of regional head elections in 270 provinces, cities, and districts in Indonesia (Utami, 2021), as well as being affected globally in 20 countries (Nurhayati & Aji, 2020). At that time, Central Kalimantan carried out regional head elections, which should be considered in line with a health protocol. The global election for regional heads in 2020 needs to be considered in the election mechanism and cycle by minimizing the impact of the increasing COVID-19 pandemic and considering the potential problems found during the election (Landman & Splendore, 2020).

So far, studies on elections or regional head elections can be seen in several respects. First, there is political tension (Picherit, 2020). Second, the election should be transparent, and both mechanisms and stages should be suitably performed with laws and rules that minimize conflict (Landman & Splendore, 2020). In general election studies, one can be seen in the process where several studies discuss democratic competence and democratic values (Müller-Rommel & Geißel, 2020) as well as political participation in this matter (young people) (Valkering et al., 2018; Begum, 2023) who participate in general elections. From several factors related to general elections in several countries, it has also been mentioned that ethnic, regional, and religious sentiments are the main factors for voters to choose leaders in general elections (Babalola, 2020; Agbo et al., 2021). There is a new paradigm in several European countries: the religious dimension becomes the public domain and affects the balance between power and politics (Helander, 2017). In addition to the influence of religion, self-identity and ethnicity have also been considered (Colclough, 2000).

Election organizers also have democratic volunteers with several segments, including youth, categorized as first-time voters. Beginning voters is critical during elections. They do not yet have a decision on political choices and are easily influenced by others regarding their political choices. In addition, first-time voters have high enthusiasm, so they are quickly mobilized (Berenschot et al., 2021). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a space limitation for first-time voters, so the environment becomes the most dominant factor in providing information (Firmansyah & Kariyani, 2021).

It is already known that election success can be observed when voter participation turnout increases. Current regional elections have differed since the COVID-19 pandemic. It has become a big question for everyone, considering that several regulations must be implemented in elections, such as social distancing and physical distancing, and must meet health protocols. It is still in the COVID-19 pandemic era. All processes and stages need to be considered in detail, starting from the governance rules, election organizers, and candidates that must prioritize the determined health protocols (Anggita, 2021).

Elections in Indonesia are still being carried out for several reasons. In this case, the KPU is carrying out the work according to the mandate of the applicable regulations, then coordinating with the task force for handling COVID-19. There is also a constitutional right to vote and elect. Finally, the budget is available and managed (Saleh, 2022). It is hoped that after the election ends, there will be new strategic policies, such as regulations in the party system, prioritizing minority rights, the economy, and federalism (Kar et al., 2020).

This study complements the shortcomings of several existing studies on public interest in the gubernatorial election, which took place on September 9, 2020, which was predicted not to run entirely optimally (Kennedy & Suhendarto, 2020), considering that the

problems are so complex, including updating regulations and several additional policies/regulations related to the Covid-19 pandemic era and several rules that must be applied, especially in health aspects, such as the availability of hand sanitizers, masks, disinfectants, keeping a safe distance both in the form of crowds and physical touch.

The holding of general elections was not optimal for all members of society. This can be seen in elderly voters who worry that they will be vulnerable to Covid-19 exposure. As expected, this needs to be thoroughly identified regarding how the government's readiness to carry out the gubernatorial election runs. The implementation of the general election is not only from the organizers, but also from the role of various domains, such as the influence of religious leaders and customary/cultural leaders. This needs to be studied, and how the community's participation in the gubernatorial election was seen through a religious and cultural approach during the pandemic several years ago needs to be reexamined.

### **Religious and cultural approach**

Religious and cultural approaches are vital, as seen from various aspects. For example, in education, it is necessary to incorporate religious and cultural values, especially the local culture of Central Kalimantan, namely, Huma Betang (Raihani, 2014). When religious and cultural motives intersect with strategic matters, a spiritual and artistic approach becomes strategic (Babalola, 2020). The role of religion as a counterweight in the political arena, where politicians have various strategies to achieve their goals. It is necessary to have the role of religion as a counterweight when applying policies (Helander, 2017). Identity politics at the time of regional elections became common, since family/kinship, ethnicity, and religion were used to gain sympathy from the people (Colclough, 2000; Dhani, 2019).

A digital religion approach can also be implemented in the COVID-19 pandemic era, which integrates a spatial material approach to studying digital religion and adds information from public spaces. Digital religion describes the process of religious mediation between online and offline environments by considering materiality and space (Evolvi, 2022). Many people use digital spaces in the current era, so there is a need for cultural revitalization in the surrounding environment. People have strong beliefs and preserve customs and culture in their daily lives amid the social and political changes brought about by modernization (Ku et al., 2022). The existence of dialogue between young people and cultural figures in a traditional event with discussion can be one of the steps for cultural preservation.

### **Public Animo**

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and people participating in politics, and how the consumption of political information and detected participation remains irrelevant. In addition, the public's interest in general elections depends on the consumption of the political information received (local or national news, online or offline). The pandemic seems to have slightly affected the relationship between the consumption of political information and the selection of participants (Neihouser et al., 2022). Attracting the public to the election, rather than through online media, can be done using the method suggested by the KPU.

Conventional campaign methods offer an excellent opportunity to increase the spread of COVID-19. Other methods that can be used are limited indoor meetings attended by a maximum of 20 people one meter apart, online meetings, or dialogues. Additionally, it is expected that the distribution of general materials will not cause crowding (Bahriyah & Afif, 2021). It is crucial to ensure that people are not infected with COVID-19 and to add positive cases of COVID-19. Each

electoral district may have different precautions depending on cultural awareness and local people (Kim et al., 2020).

### **Gubernatorial Election in the Pandemic Era**

Gubernatorial elections continue to be held during the massive Covid-19 pandemic. The government can apply new and locally relevant strategic management strategies to overcome this growing disaster (Kassa & Grace, 2020). Efforts were made for the governor's election during Covid-19 so that it could run smoothly. There was supervision of health protocols and upholding integrity in organizing the election. Both participants and executors are committed to the importance of people's discipline (Ristyawati, 2020).

Sometimes, political factors do not correlate with pandemic wave policies. The existence of political conflicts during elections during the 2020 pandemic can create divisions amidst the spread of the epidemic. The lockdown system implemented in European countries coincides with political contestation, and it can be concluded that the pandemic is not one of the reasons for the failure to harmonize systematic politics, political institutions, and political culture, which regularly shape policy decisions (Plümper & Neumayer, 2022). One general election held in the Czech Republic showed that voting did not affect the increase in COVID-19 cases. This can be a reference in general elections, which still carry out elections with a lower population than in other democratic countries, so that it is a democratic country with many citizens who do other alternatives, namely, voting through postal and online methods. Election delays caused by COVID-19 can disrupt elected politicians' electoral accountability (Palguta et al., 2022).

Indonesia has a policy that is different from that of European countries in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic. During the massive Covid-19 pandemic, elections can undoubtedly raise questions among the public. General election contestation during the pandemic gave

rise to perceptions of a power struggle between economic and systemic political programmatic crises. The selection of governors during a pandemic differs from previous elections. Provisions regarding regional head election regulations, election supervision in regions during the COVID-19 pandemic, codes of ethics, and the election monitoring system (SIWASLU) must be clearly understood by supervisory officers (Muharam, 2021). During the election process, a system design can be implemented to measure election waiting time, voter residence time, queue length at polling locations, time spent voting in the voting booth, and the number of voters in the voting booth. This is done to keep the election atmosphere conducive and ensure that there are no crowds when the election occurs (Schmidt & Albert, 2022).

## **METHOD**

A qualitative method was used to conduct the investigation. Creswell & Creswell (2014) asserted that qualitative techniques can be used to investigate and comprehend the significance of certain people or groups assigned to social human problems. One strategy used in qualitative research is to examine things in their natural settings. It aims to pinpoint the causes and explanations rather than simply summarize the research technique and overall conclusions. To make meaning of unstructured data, this research depends on people's behaviors, attitudes, value systems, concerns, objectives, goals, culture, and ways of life. The research process entails developing study questions and methods, gathering data from participants in their environment, inductively analyzing the data, building from specific to general themes, and interpreting the significance of the findings. According to Creswell & Creswell (2014), qualitative approaches are divided into five types: phenomenological, grounded

theory, ethnography, case studies, and narrative research. This study applied descriptive analysis.

The objects of this study were religious leaders and humanists, mediated by representatives of democracy volunteers in the religious segment as partners of the General Election Commission (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, abbreviated KPU in Bahasa Indonesia), both in cities/districts in Central Kalimantan province. Qualitative descriptive research to see or conduct dialogue directly with a team of democratic volunteers in the religious segment or several interfaith communities to determine how the arguments and attitudes towards socialization activities are carried out and how they participate in democratic parties. This research was conducted using several data sources, namely several members of the democratic volunteer team in the religious segment who are in the city area and several districts as representatives of democratic volunteers.

As for the religious volunteers, there are five people consisting of several religious people from Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Hindu Kaharingan; as supporting data, it is also necessary to have four informants from election organizers (KPU). In addition to several informants from democratic volunteers in the religious segment, several interfaith religious leaders and society leaders with congregations/adherents in their area participated in socializing the 2020 gubernatorial election in Central Kalimantan Province. Several techniques are required to collect field data. First, conducting interviews was the main factor in the process of extracting data in the field because the investigation wanted to see how the responses or arguments from democratic volunteers in the religious segment carried out Gubernatorial election socialization to interfaith communities through the interfaith leaders or traditional leaders in the local society. Second, by observing field data.

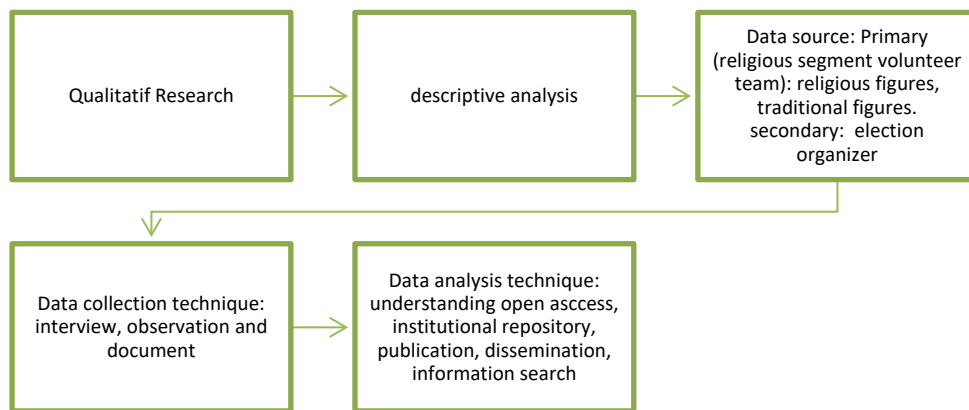


The observation was essential in observing, feeling, and acting or responding well to the democratic volunteer team in the religious segment, the interfaith people as voters, and interfaith leaders as socialization agents with charisma for their adherents. Third, documentation needed to be used as essential material to directly see the data in the form of documents and photos of the activities of interfaith leaders in socializing the procedures and processes in the election of governors.

This research also obtained document data from district/city and provincial KPUs to examine data on public participation in the 2020 gubernatorial election. Thematic analysis involves several steps for the data analysis (Heriyanto, 2018). The first is to understand open access from journals, articles, online news, e-books, or the like, related to regional head election themes and others. Then, an institutional repository was created to select the results of writing from several universities related to the theme. The third step is publication and dissemination, where this study attempts to publish the results of writing in several scientific activities, such as online/offline seminars and lectures with students. The last step is information retrieval, which is the final step in researching, finding, and evaluating open access sources related to regional head elections. The data processing process carried out can be seen in Figure 1, which shows the steps taken.

**Figure 1**

*Steps in the Field Data Mining Process*



Source: Heriyanto (2018)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Public Animo in the Gubernatorial Election in the Covid-19 Pandemic Era Through Socialization in Religious Approach**

Socialization carried out by democracy volunteers in the religious segment can also be seen in the content of lectures delivered by various religions, including Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Hindu Kaharingan. The next step was to choose a candidate leader. It was also not attractive to talk about maintaining health protocols, considering that the 2020 gubernatorial election was still during the COVID-19 pandemic era. The clergy also reminded them not to commit crimes during the democratic party. Dissent usually occurs during elections, but it does not spread hatred, bullying, or insult to one another. The assistance provided by religious leaders resulted from the increasing number of public animo to actively participate in the general election as a stage of the party. This is in accordance with the results of an interview from one of the voters (FL) stating that "with

the role of religious leaders to provide motivation for their citizens to participate in voting at a predetermined time (interview, FL, 2020).

The same thing was conveyed by another voter "NH" explaining that the role of religious and customary leaders makes an important contribution in terms of providing the importance of participating in the democratic party, especially the people of Central Kalimantan are very obedient to both religious leaders and their figures (Interview, RS, 2020). People's involvement in the election was seen from the continuation of the religious content of speech and sociopolitical content, which included religious texts or sources from each religion. The statement is in accordance with the results of interviews with several religious leaders "My, Prd, FM, DD," stating that every delivery of religious messages is always associated with the necessity of participating in one of the government programs such as the simultaneous election of regional heads (Interview, My, Prd, FM, DD, 2020).

### **Cultural Approach as a Form of Successful Society's Involvement**

Public animo in the election for governors in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic was supported by massive movements carried out by both PPK, PPS, and democracy volunteers, which was first proven by a decision letter (SK) from the district/city KPU in Central Kalimantan province by making an effort to share information online and face-to-face with religious leaders, youth, organizations, and public figures in society so that they urge, invite, and assist all elements of culture ([Muntiana, 2021](#)).

The role of traditional leaders has been proven to be proactive using a cultural approach to determine future leaders. The cultural approach was carried out strategically, as the results of an interview with one of the traditional leaders stated that: "the society members (our people) are very enthusiastic in flocking to the TPS to choose a candidate leader according to their hopes and wishes, which is

influenced by exposure or invitation from traditional leaders because they are considered role models (public figures), especially among their citizens (*Uluh Itah*) (Suryani, 2019; Fatchurahman et al., 2021).

### **Public Animo as One of the Strategies to Increase Voter Participation in the Central Kalimantan Gubernatorial Election**

Based on data from 2020, it was found that 61.95% of people were involved, with 48.65% women and 51.35% men, while in 2016, it was around 52.30%, which showed that the level of success of public participation in 2020 was better than in 2016 (Andika, 2020). The high level of participation in the gubernatorial election showed that people followed and understood political issues and wanted to be involved with democratic parties. Of course, this cannot be separated from KPU's efforts to increase social participation by conducting outreach through direct and indirect media, print, and electronic media (Herlinda, 2021).

The result of the political contestation in the governor election in Central Kalimantan in 2020 was won by the governor candidate paired with serial number two (2), obtaining 51.60% of the votes, and the governor and deputy governor candidate pair number one (1) with 48, 40% votes. The results showed that the use of socialization from a religious and cultural perspective can convey information and can be easily understood by the public to participate politically in elections. The success of this election was seen from the large number of people involved because political information influenced people's interest in participating in democratic parties (Neihouser et al., 2022).

### **People Animo through a Religious approach**

The spread of fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic has increased, coupled with the existence of political democratic parties. Choosing information circulating in the media is difficult. False news targeted people with low education, young men, and women, so in

political contestation, socialization was needed not only from electronic media (Balakrishnan et al., 2022). Related to this, to reduce misinformation, one way to disseminate information to the public is through socialization from the religious segment. In Indonesia, religion and politics are difficult to separate. Religion is used as a political lens to determine candidates' choices and governance. Religion is used in the democratic public sphere to gain votes for voters. The sense of brotherhood among Muslims or Ukhuwah Islamiyah is the next part that shows the relationship between religion and politics in Indonesia (Manese & Nurhamidin, 2021).

During the pandemic, people's anxiety can be overcome through enlightenment from religious or society leaders through online and offline media (Siuda-Ambroziak & Bahia, 2020; Andriansyah, 2022). Thus, in socializing with this religious approach, it is easier to convey information that is supported by religious leaders. People with religious beliefs have a strong sense of brotherhood towards others, so it is not uncommon for people to choose a candidate for a leader from their religious background. During the gubernatorial election during the COVID-19 pandemic, to attract people to vote without experiencing excessive worries, it is necessary to socialize with a religious approach that is easy to understand. One general election held in Brazil during the election for the mayor of Rio de Janeiro used a Christian religious approach. The religious approach is most demanded in Brazilian politics. Popular rules are like "brothers choose brothers," which means the discipline of supporting representatives and allies in election campaigns (Chilanga et al., 2022).

The use of religion in a political approach certainly has advantages and disadvantages. There are moral reasons why religion is used as the basis for communicating information to certain religious groups. The religion can be an approach that can be taken amidst

people's fears and concerns regarding the pandemic (Coetsee, 2022). The pandemic has made people more concerned and obedient about following government regulations. With relevant government policies to prioritize health protocols, voters can still exercise their voting rights (Perdana, 2021). The pros and cons of the religious approach during political contestation are inseparable from the image of religion itself, in the eyes of a wider society. One of the approaches in Islamic religion highlights two different trends in the Muslim approach: exclusivity and inclusivity. Both trends have focused on outward obedience (exclusive) and prioritizing good morals (inclusivism) (Shah, 2022).

### **A Cultural Approach as One of the Forms of Success in the Gubernatorial election during the Covid-19 Pandemic Era**

In addition, with a cultural approach, delivery is not in a formal language, and there are no restrictions on movement, so messages from election information can be conveyed (Morgan, 2022). Socialization through the media could not raise public awareness of the importance of using their right to vote during elections. Therefore, using culture as a communication medium for discussions during the gubernatorial election can help the public understand each pair of prospective leaders and determine which votes apply to health protocols during a pandemic (Habibi, 2020). Socialization using a cultural approach can also be one of the identities of a region or country.

This approach can enhance political specificity. The amount of socialization with online media allows for a combination of political values from other regions. The existence of a cultural approach to society makes it easier for prospective leaders to explain based on local cultural values (Lu & Yan, 2022). In addition, culture regulates political spirit, political values, political thoughts, certain periods, specific social communities, and the arrangement and operation of

public power to help people understand politics (Dittmer, 1977; Rose & Miller, 2010). One of them, in the gubernatorial election in Central Kalimantan, the Dayak people strongly believe in culture and adhere to "*Huma Betang*" philosophy, making it a reference or order in people's daily lives (Apandie & Ar, 2019). The "*Huma Betang*" philosophy indicates that there is acceptance of the local community to the immigrant community while always maintaining local rules and norms (Pelu & Tarantang, 2018). When they are part of them, it is often called "*Uluh Itah*," then the attitude of tolerance, respect for differences and cooperation becomes the main capital in community life.

A cultural approach can also be carried out in artistic activities, such as festivals, traditional events, or traditional ceremonies (Coetsee, 2022). The indigenous Dayak People have cultural activities, such as *Batiwah and Memapas Lewu*, which can be used to reach prospective leaders in the 2020 gubernatorial election. At this traditional ceremony, people gather both conventional leaders, the local society, and young people, so they have space to discuss and dialogue about elections and invite a wider society to participate in the election of governors. Another local wisdom possessed by the Central Kalimantan Dayak People is "*Karungut Sansana Dayak*," which plays a role in society, especially in communication that uses symbolic language, which is quite effective.

This culture can convey messages in terms of language that people can understand (Syaputra & Sihombing, 2020). Based on these observations, through traditional ceremonies, it is very effective to carry out socialization and direct interaction starting from traditional leaders, community leaders, village elders, government, religion, and community. Local language is also one of the right strategies for providing suggestions to the community (Observation, MN, 2020).

Cultures in several countries have policies to determine the habitual patterns of people's daily lives. One of these is the existence

of a pandemic. In several countries, local culture is one of the means that has an essential role in determining the spike in cases of the COVID-19 pandemic in society. The magnitude of the role of cultural figures in influencing local communities can undoubtedly be one of the platforms that can be used to invite people to participate in general elections. Additionally, this cultural approach can undoubtedly reduce the occurrence of fake news or information (Curtis et al., 2022). A country's success in handling COVID-19 can increase public trust in the government. Increased public trust in government policies can be used to assess public interest in government politics (Lim & Prakash, 2021).

Based on the results of this analysis, it can be seen that the function of religion in society is very influential. As stated by one of the classical sociologists, Durkheim, religion, when viewed in terms of its function, can bridge the tensions that occur in the hope of creating a social order (Mahyudi, 2023). In this case, solidarity is the primary goal in the political realm. Religions play a crucial role in this process (Dingley, 2015).

The approach of religion and culture to creating a new culture (Burchardt & Yasemin Ural, 2024) can be seen in the role of religious and cultural leaders in the local community in Central Kalimantan. Even though it was colored by the pandemic, hitting globally did not affect the community's enthusiasm to attend and listen to the leader's socialization. This indicates that religious messages and local traditional events have more points, and it can be seen that the voter participation rate increased even during the pandemic, with an average of 61.59% compared to the voter participation rate of 52.30% in 2016. Many factors contributed to the success of the campaign, including the role of democratic volunteers in the religious segment. According to Berger, one of the socialization agents that can be given to the community is religion, mass media, and peers (Johnson, 2010).



The religious and cultural approach plays a very important role in providing assistance to the community and in the importance of being an active voter in the 2020 gubernatorial election. Even though it is still a pandemic, there is no fear of the community because of the trust and obedience to their leaders, and religious leaders and traditional leaders have full authority over the local community. The politicization of culture and economics is a combination that can affect a person's way of thinking and cause division or unity (Bornschieer et al., 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

Through a religious approach, one of the factors in the success of the gubernatorial election during the 2020 pandemic is that the people animo of Central Kalimantan can play an active role as voters in the gubernatorial election. One of the factors is the existence of socialization and the role of religious leaders, where society respects the profession highly. The general characteristic of Indonesian people is that trust in religious leaders or society leaders is still very strong. Other supporting factors include contents/religious messages that affect the perspective of society. The cultural approach also played a role in the success of the 2020 Gubernatorial election. Seeing the characteristics of the local people, the role of traditional leaders/cultural figures in socializing the gubernatorial election is perfect through the local language, traditional ceremonies, and so on. These customary activities can become a forum for discussions and interactions among communities regarding elections. Using a religious and cultural approach is an exceptionally strategic medium for distributing information and inviting people.

Considering the pandemic era, additional preparation from election organizers is needed. Furthermore, readiness to use media or digital access in the election era requires sufficient attention. Referring

to the results of the vote acquisition, the study reveals that there has been an increase in voter involvement. This shows that the ongoing pandemic did not hinder changes in regional leaders. The spiritual and cultural approach is a strategic step in introducing potential leaders into society, considering that the Central Kalimantan people still strongly believe in traditional leaders.

The charismatic power of religious leaders and traditional leaders plays a very important role and influences the mindset and actions of the people in Central Kalimantan, even though the outbreak of the pandemic has occurred in the past few years. Community members remain enthusiastic about participating in religious activities and traditional ceremonies. The pandemic has given birth to attitudes of caring, empathy, sharing, living together, and continuing to follow health protocols.

### **Author Contributions**

Conceptualization: D.E. & H.; Data curation: D.E. & H.; Formal analysis: D.E. & H.; Funding acquisition: D.E. & H.; Investigation: D.E. & H.; Methodology: D.E. & H.; Project administration: D.E. & H.; Resources: D.E. & H.; Software: D.E. & H.; Supervision: D.E. & H.; Validation: D.E. & H.; Visualization: D.E. & H.; Writing - original draft: D.E. & H.; Writing - review & editing: D.E. & H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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This study was approved by Program Studi Ekonomi Syariah (S2), IAIN Palangkaraya, Palangkaraya, Indonesia.

### **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was obtained before the interview.

## **Data Availability Statement**

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding authors.

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## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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