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Female brokers: Mobilising voters within Indonesia's *Majelis Taklim Network*

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Abstract

Many recent studies on Indonesian politics are characterised by analysis of patronage and electoral brokers. This paper explores how female electoral brokers mobilise voters through female Majelis Taklim (MT), an Islamic prayer group in Indonesia. The paper draws on in-depth interviews with female electoral brokers sitting in different positions in the community. One in the position of MT leaders and the other as an RT (the lowest administrative division in Indonesian) head. MT members, politicians and online documents were also included to support the primary data. It reports on how female electoral brokers interact with politicians and appeal to MT members by using religious identities, rituals and their positional power to garner political support. A lack of tangible government support and poor public services were identified as the underlying motives for female leaders to become brokers and to mobilise voters in female MT groups. The paper also reveals how politicians may reward and/or punish the female brokers depending on their success or failure in fulfilling their promises/commitments.

Introduction

The Islamic prayer group of Majelis Taklim (MT) is widely known in Indonesia as a Muslim group whose members seek to enhance their Islamic knowledge and their ability to read the Quranic text. MT is literally taken from Arabic meaning a 'place of study' and the Indonesian term *pengajian* is commonly used by Muslims to refer to the activity of reading the Quran within a group. The Contact Body of Majelis Taklim, or BKMT, is the formal national structure that under which most MT organisations sit. The term *pengajian* places greater stress on the activity, while MT refers to the group that conducts the *pengajian*. This study analyses both the institution of MT under BKMT and the *pengajian*, as the main activities of MT. In general, MT is not confined to women

(Kemdikbud, n.d). The *pengajian* in general, particularly in the Contact Body of Majelis Taklim or BKMT, is open to female and male participants as is the membership of MT. However, female participants are predominant, and MT is identifiable as a female group. This article uses MT and *pengajian* interchangeably to describe religious gatherings involving MT and BKMT members and participants reading the Quran, reciting *dzikir* and *shalawat* (prayers) and/or listening to a sermon.

This paper first explains the phenomena of MT in Indonesia. It then outlines the research aim and questions. The literature review and the research method follow. The paper then presents the findings and discussion, detailing the dynamics of patronage and political affiliation of female brokers with MT. These dynamics include various motives that drive female leaders to become vote brokers, the strategies they employ and the potential rewards and punishments they may receive from politicians for mobilising support within the MT network. The paper concludes by positing possible avenues for MT leadership going forward

Background to Majelis Taklim (MT)

Anecdotally, MT has many members. In 2009, Tutty Alawiyah, leader of BKMT at that time, claimed 14 million women were affiliated with MT groups across Indonesia's 31 provinces (Winn, 2012). According to earlier figures from the Ministry of Religion, about 153.357 MT groups existed throughout the region in 2006 with approximately 10 million participants in 2006 (Winn, 2012). It is expected that all MT leaders are selected through democratic mechanisms. However, many MT groups fail to execute the internal election processes as most members do not wish to have the responsibility of leadership. As a result, a typical mechanism is to extend existing leadership roles. To be an MT leader or board member is to be an elite in MT. Similar to the national chairwoman, local leaders have prominent responsibilities. These include speaking on behalf of members and regulating and motivating members to be involved in *pengajian*.

The characteristics of MT vary considerably from region to region. An MT group may operate with or without any public reporting requirement: it may be affiliated with the BKMT or with a political party or certain religious streams or may be unaffiliated and neutral. More recently, several MT groups have actively expanded their role into the broader community, for example, by offering initiatives to improve female leadership skills (Anitasari, Hasan, Nurrohmah, Wiyanti, & Eddyono, 2010) and by taking part in environmental care (Asnaini, Arisandy, & Eenfryanti, 2019; Chakim, 2016).

Some MT groups have also become politically active. This activism reflects the wider phenomenon of Muslim women becoming more active in public and/or religious organisations, more frequently filling leadership roles in the wider community (Khodafi, 2015; Nisa, 2012) and serving the community's religious needs (Hasanah, 2017). The increase in activism of MT groups may also be because the political involvement of MT groups is often randomly reported by the media, both at the national and local level in Indonesia (see for example, Metro Jambi, 12 October 2016; Pos Kota, 5 Feb 2019; Tribun, 1 June 2014).

In Indonesia, MT groups have developed within a national atmosphere of Islamic piety and the phenomenon of 'public Islam' which refers to symbols and activities of Islam in public areas such as attending MT and other similar groups like *majelis dzikir* and *majelis shalawat*. These prayer groups are popular and often run by particular *ulama* or Muslim figures who have great influence and many followers from all social classes (Zamhari, 2013). Today, MT groups, reflecting the wider atmosphere of Islamic piety, frequently invite speakers to discuss social issues. This atmosphere of Islamic piety also encourages politicians to engage with MT leaders and members in national and local contexts (Jambi Ekspres, 04 April 2013 ; Metro Jambi, 12 October 2016) or

establish their own MT. *Majelis Al Fauz*, for instance, was established when Fauzi Bowo ran for the last Jakarta gubernatorial election. *Majelis Dzikir SBY Nurussalam* was established when Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono ran for his second presidential election (Miichi, 2014).

The government of Indonesia historically acknowledged MT groups as avenues of informal education (Government of Indonesia, 2003). Despite this acknowledgement, furthering the scope of MT and enlarging membership has met with some resistance. For instance, in late 2019, all MT groups in Indonesia were asked to register with the Ministry of Religion and follow set teaching modules from the ministry. Many members did not comply as they considered this a politically motivated call aimed at diminishing the spirit of Islam in public: the government argued the call was to support MT groups, both financially and non-financially. Despite this attempted regulation by the government, MT groups continue their public activities and membership continues to grow.

The considerable size of MT has attracted many politicians and political parties to lobby different MT groups, even though MT's constitution affirms it is an independent organisation. Despite this, in the presidential elections of 2014 and 2019, BKMT declared MT's support for Prabowo (Aktualitas, 5 Feb 2019; Detik News, 16 Jun 2014). The 2019 presidential election in Indonesia was identified as the most polarised election to date (Aspinall, 22 April 2019). In this highly charged atmosphere, female electors were similarly polarised (Suryakusuma, 19 Sept 2018). Like other female voters, MT members in many provinces became involved in political movements, supporting presidential candidates and their policies.

This study on MT's involvement in local elections was conducted in Jambi Province, with Jambi as its capital city. Jambi Province is located on the east coast of central Sumatra, Indonesia. In 2018, it had a population of 3,570,272 comprising 1,821,381 males and 1,748,891 females living across 9 rural districts and 2 city administrative areas. There are approximately 2,876 MT groups in Jambi province with 21,032 members (Kantor Wilayah Kementerian Agama Provinsi Jambi, n.d.). It is noteworthy that the number of local MT members and participants who usually attend the *pengajian* is much bigger, as the record has not been updated and the participation has been voluntary.

Electoral support for MT

The public role of MT was first recognised during the New Order era with the establishment of the BKMT in 1981. Some Islamic institutions such as MT were permitted as their tightly monitored activities supported the political interest of the New Order regime. The chairwoman of national BKMT, Tutty Alawiyah, a prominent Jakarta preacher, was appointed to sit in the cabinet of President Soeharto. During her time as a leader in the New Order, many prestigious national events were held by BKMT (Winn, 2012). President Soeharto and official state guests, the majority from Islamic countries, often attended the events, which were sometimes broadcast live by the regime's co-opted state television and state radio (the TVRI and the RRI).

Tutty Alawiyah, as a woman representing millions of Muslim women and the chairwoman of BKMT, was listened to by the regime. Her ministerial career continued until the first term of President B.J. Habibie, who took office after Soeharto (BKMT, n.d.). Tutty Alawiyah was not in the cabinet of Habibie and subsequently, BKMT activities at the national level slowly declined. Financial and political support from the central government, which had been significant in raising the profile of BKMT, was less

forthcoming. The national leadership position and BKMT thus became less political. Nonetheless, on the surface, new political actors started approaching the national BKMT.

Indonesia's elections, especially after the reform era (1998 onward), are characterised by patronage and clientelism (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Berenschot, 2018; Van Klinken, 2009). Patronage refers to politicians' use of material resources such as cash and goods in exchange for votes. Clientelism is the nature of such 'a personalistic relationship of power' (Hutchcroft, 2014), with politicians as patrons, and powerful people, giving support and protection to access resources for receivers as clients); this so-called patronage network is promoted and maintained in Indonesia with the help of electoral brokers. In Indonesia electoral brokers may be political party representatives (Holland & Palmer-Rubin, 2015) or non-party members who promote a particular party or politician through social networks (Aspinall, 2014). Religious leaders may also act as vote brokers (Burhanudin & van Dijk, 2013; van Bruinessen, 1990).

Many MT groups experience patronage politics, often via the involvement of the local MT leader and/or an electoral broker. In local MT groups, leaders, as elites, have prominent roles and possess considerable authority within their network. Their leadership proves their capability and influence with both recognised in public. This paper highlights the roles of MT leaders and female brokers in mobilising MT members to vote in local elections in Jambi Province.

Research questions

To examine these issues, the following research questions were asked:

1. What are the underlying motives which compel the female leaders to become brokers?
2. How do the female brokers mobilise voters in female MT groups?
3. Are there consequences for the female brokers in this study depending on their success or failure in supporting a candidate?

Literature review

Generally, research on MT in Indonesia is limited. A few studies discuss MT's interactions with external issues, such as political interests during an election, especially after Soeharto (Ismanto & Thaha, 2016; Miichi, 2014). In a classical study, Weix (1998) focuses on the organisation, its characteristics and MT's traditional role in Central Java. More recently, Winn (2012) investigates the activities of MT in the Northern Ambon region which were less homogeneous than MT groups in Java.

The characteristics of MT vary considerably from region to region. A *pengajian* in Central Java may interpret Quranic texts and elaborate on life's experiences with the help of preachers (Weix, 1998). In Northern Ambon, unlike Central Java, where the *pesantren*, a traditional Islamic boarding school, possesses great influence, MT gatherings mostly choose an informal local tutor rather than a preacher to help the members properly recite Quran and *barzanji*, a particular genre of religious text (Winn, 2012).

Preachers, as well as MT leaders, are elites of MT groups who regularly engage with MT members. Their activities and power enable them to act for electoral brokers. In Senegal, brokers use distinct strategies to optimise their results, such as persuasion, reciprocation and punishment (Gottlieb, 2017). In Indonesia, religious leaders, including preachers and MT leaders, commonly act as vote brokers (Aspinall & As'ad, 2015; Ismanto & Thaha, 2016). Their roles are significant in justifying politicians use money in

return for votes (Muhtadi, 2018). However, these previous studies did not examine the various strategies the brokers use, especially female brokers, in harvesting votes in a specific group.

A broker is often positioned in a dubious, often amoral role (Bierschenk, Chauveau, De Sardan, & Kossi, 2002) as their position often involves exploitation (Lücking, 2017). In Indonesia, it is common for people to employ a broker (known also as calo or makelar) to help access public votes (Van Klinken, 2013) and to avoid complex and corrupt bureaucracy (Nordholt, 2005). The use of brokers in democratic electoral processes, however, is widely debated. Most scholars argue that brokerage undermines the quality of democracy as it directly limits voters' access to public resources (Brun & Diamond, 2014), exploiting their needs or desires for the sake of their voting choice. Voters may also initiate a 'kontrak politik' that delivers the benefits even if the campaign fails (Savirani & Aspinall, 2017). Other scholars argue that brokers are prominent because they empower community populations to fight for their rights (Auerbach, 2016; Edelman & Mitra, 2006). In Indonesia, many social public services are typically corrupt and less accessible to people in the lower classes. Brokers, in these contexts, often help these people gain access to state services.

It is rare to find a female electoral broker in Indonesia. Female brokers have limited opportunities to meet clients in Indonesia's patriarchal society and their role in elections is often overshadowed by the politician (Berenschot, Hanani, & Sambodho, 2018). The percentage of female brokers employed by parties mediating for vote-buying is only 15% (Muhtadi, 2018). For these reasons mainstream scholars suggest brokers are more successful when they join a coordinated team called the 'succeed team' (tim sukses). These factors also arguably contribute to the lack of research on the role of female electoral brokers. Darwin's (2017) research in North Aceh on the prominent and agentic roles of female brokers in the local election is an exception. Her investigation of female brokers targeting personal networking is significant. This study, like Darwin's, contributes to the literature on female leaders brokering votes for women in a group and community.

Research method

This study used a qualitative case study approach to investigate the motives, strategies, and consequences of being female vote brokers in MT groups. A case study focuses on particular issues, such as place or event, with the product of an investigation providing descriptive and heuristic insights (Merriam, 2002). This is a popular research approach among social science researchers (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research uses the lens of naturalistic inquiry, which means 'studying people in everyday circumstances by ordinary means' (Beuving, 2015, p. 15)

This research was undertaken in four districts of Jambi Province, namely Kerinci, Muaro Jambi, Jambi Municipality and West Tanjung Jabung and Jambi Province. The districts were chosen based on demography, socio-economic status and electoral records. All four districts have different characteristics (e.g. rural or urban) as well as different histories in terms of electoral vulnerability (Bawaslu, 2018).

Participants were recruited using 'snowballing' which allows a researcher to approach the next informant based on the information obtained from the first interviewee (Leavy, 2014). The researcher also joined several *pengajian*, introduced herself to the participants and discussed her research. Through snowballing one provincial MT leader, three local MT leaders, 60 MT members, three vote brokers, four politicians, and four preachers were recruited. In total, 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were

conducted, and 60 MT members participated in 12 focus group discussions. All four MT leaders were active in mediating between MT members and a politician in the 2019 election. As such, the MT leaders acted as vote brokers.

Each face-to-face interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours and each focus group approximately two hours. All sessions were recorded with permission and pseudonyms applied when reporting the study. Data was analysed using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and ‘commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set’ were identified and grouped (William J Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 2).

Findings and discussion

This section first profiles each female broker. It then presents the findings related to the research questions:

1. What are the underlying motives which compel female leaders to become brokers?
2. What are the strategies female brokers use to mobilise voters in female MT groups?
3. What are the consequences for female brokers if their support for candidates is a success or failure?

Table 1 details each female broker’s profile, their position and affiliation. A pen portrait of each broker follows to help identify their characteristics and better explain their role and influence during elections. The findings are then discussed.

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Position	Affiliations
Wahda	83	Batak	MT Leader at province level	Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)
Fatmah	43	Javanese	MT leader at village level	NU
Murniati	62	Minangkabau	MT Leader at the neighbourhood level	Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS)
Eni	60	Minangkabau	RT head	No affiliation

Table 1. Profiles of Female Brokers

Wahda, Jambi Province

Wahda is a Muslim Batak woman, aged 83 years. She has served provincial MT groups since MT’s establishment in Jambi Province in 1993. She is a former leader of provincial branch of Muslimat NU, the largest traditionalist Muslim organisation in Indonesia. Wahda had served in the position for two periods. Her late husband was a prominent NU activist in the region and had a long career in the local parliament. Wahda established an Islamic school in the province. Her husband and sons were politicians at the local and national level. About ten years ago, she ran as a regional representative (*Dewan Perwakilan Daerah*, DPD) but failed to meet the initial

requirements. After that, she limited herself to running MT and NU's social activities. In the 2014 election, she mobilised her MT friends, prompting them to vote for prominent women candidates, eventually being elected to represent Jambi as a DPD member. In 2019, she also actively mobilised support for the politician running for the DPD; her efforts were unsuccessful.

Fatmah, West Tanjung Jabung

Fatmah is an ethnic Javanese woman, born in West Tanjung Jabung aged 43 years. She is a long-time resident in her village and the leader of sub-district MT and she had previously led the village MT for many years. Like most Javanese, her Islamic stream (*aliran*) is deeply aligned with NU. As a graduate of Islamic State University, her Islamic knowledge is based on her studies undertaken there. Due to her competence, Fatmah has been teaching the Quran at the MT gatherings in the village. In the 2014 elections, she nominated to run for local legislative from PKB, a party associated with NU. She obtained wide support from the villagers as the village head had the same Javanese background and backed her fully. However, she was defeated, as her popularity did not extend to other villages.

In 2019, Fatmah was working as the village preacher, an honorary worker from the Ministry of Religion. As a state preacher, she must be free from political activities, including being an electoral candidate. In the 2019 elections, she chose to mediate a female friend and advance her political career as a PKB politician. Although her efforts were unsuccessful, she was successful in mobilising the MT members as well as the villagers by appealing to them with merchandise and food, specifically club goods and pork barrels.

Murniati, Jambi Municipality

Murniati is a woman of Minangkabau ethnicity. She is 62 years old and grew up in Jambi. She is a principal at a private Islamic school and an MT leader. Her political views are greatly influenced by PKS, *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperous Justice Party) and she mediates MT members to attach to her candidates. Her role in mediating between MT and the politicians is limited to MT members. Many MT members count on her, from selecting preachers (mostly affiliated with PKS) to motivating the members. At the previous local election, she succeeded in mobilising MT members to help the candidate obtain his office.

Eni, Jambi Municipality

Eni is also a Minangkabau woman who is about 60 years of age. She has been an RT (neighbourhood) leader in Jambi municipality for about 15 years. Her initial career was as a pre-school teacher in her community which she resigned from after being elected as the RT head. She lived with her husband and teenage son in a dense community with the majority of people from the same ethnic and social status as her. Her husband is a truck driver. She was elected as an RT head for being humble and having a positive relationship with people in her community.

The majority of the households in her neighbourhood are comprised of migrants who have lived in Jambi for many years. Most of the people in the households are employed as food street sellers, or they work in informal sectors under the poverty line. Eni proudly told of her success in connecting many politicians with people in the community. In a local election, she contributed to the victory of the candidate running for the city mayor. In 2014, she was successful in mobilising all of the active females in

the neighbourhood and the MT groups to vote. In 2019, she again mobilised people in her neighbourhood, the majority being MT members, for local legislative representatives. The candidate won the seat.

Motivations to become a broker

The female brokers in this study are motivated to deliver women's rights, group rights and community rights, not by personal gain. The state does not widely support the development of religious groups, despite increasing community demands. While the quality of public services during decentralisation in Indonesia are expected to improve with the autonomy of local governments, corruption in the bureaucracy and poor public services are still widely evident (Kristiansen, Dwiyanto, Pramusinto, & Putranto, 2009; Kristiansen & Santoso, 2006). The roles of the brokers in this study cannot be separated from their positions as elites in MT and as women in their community.

Wahda had spent almost half of her life serving the MT; being active as a leader and as a member of MT was part of her faith and worship. Wahda said that MT province needs to have regular coordination and official visits to the lower level organisations. However, as she said, there is not enough support to reach such wide areas. To obtain support from the organisation, Wahda was vocal in lobbying the ruling government to provide greater support to MT groups. For instance, she lobbied to borrow official cars from the department of religion services for official travel engagements within the MT groups.

Unlike Wahda, Eni was motivated to be a vote broker due to a need to improve access to public and community services. As she expressed, 'sometimes we have no choice, we have to send our children to private schools. It is expensive. If there is no money, we do not send our children to school.' People in her community agreed for Eni to approach candidates and incumbents to advocate for better services for her community; provision of affordable education and improved support for small-scale home industries for women in her community were two key areas.

In Indonesia access to public high schools, in particular, is competitive. Families who cannot meet the qualifications have to send their children to private schools which are more expensive. The candidate listened to Eni and the concerns of the community. The politician contacted school authorities to help families in the district receive a public education.

In Kerinci district, public and many other administrative services are less accessible because of the poor services. One of the members reported about health services under BPJS (Indonesia social security program):

The procedure is complicated, and the quality of services is very low. It seems here, the BPJS is not applicable. It is useless that we pay, but we do not get the services. We should pay without BPJS, which is much more expensive if we want to get the health treatment. (Interview with the MT members)

Poor public services, lack of government support for the groups and community are key motives that drive female leaders to broker. In these instances, the female brokers' efforts help poorer and marginalised citizens in their communities to access the services.

Mobilising MT members

The brokers used different strategies to mobilise their members. They included arranging political patronage in the MT network, adopting Islamic identities, donating hijab and female Muslim clothes, participating in Islamic rituals, and espousing shared values. These strategies are typically used by brokers, as well as politicians, to consolidate the support of MT groups. The female brokers often employ these tools to convince members to vote for their candidates. In presenting themselves to the MT network, politicians also use religion as a way to build connections via their shared faith and convey their concern to support the values and desires of the MT groups.

In the MT network, symbols and ceremonies are commonly used. As an institution, MT has traditions and behaviours at broad and local levels. Istigoshah is a traditional ritual in which an Islamic leader guides a group through the recitation of supplications. However, this holy ritual is frequently appropriated to mobilise the congregations. Muslim Indonesia is more pious and expects society to incorporate Islamic morality. As such, public Islam has made the electoral competition more religious. Religious-themed issues are used by party politicians and non-party politicians from both Islamic-based parties and Islamic-friendly parties. Other examples include attending *pengajian* in non-traditional places such as the official house of the district head or in an open space to accommodate large groups, and introducing MT uniforms, usually supplied by a candidate or broker. These new behaviours potentially represent patronage and clientelism practices that position MT as a political body.

In the 2019 elections, many legislative and regional candidates campaigned at MT *pengajian* as they recognised an opportunity to garner MT's electoral support. Incentives were often offered: for example, an MT member who attended the event four times received a free MT uniform or a PKK's (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga or Family Welfare Movement). MT leaders acted as the personal contacts for the politicians to connect with the members for securing votes.

An MT leader in Kerinci advised the incumbent that she could not promise to secure the votes for him as it was the individual's choice. However, she regularly reminded her members that they had received the uniforms in anticipation of their votes. The members thus felt tied to the candidate in the name of God. They had promised to vote for the candidate, and the promise must be kept to avoid being a sinner. The leader stressed that many MT members, especially older members, were afraid of displeasing God. Similarly, in Kerinci, the *pengajian* could not afford to call a preacher often as it was expensive. Knowing the situation from his broker, the politician offered to call and pay for the preacher for the MT group.

In West Tanjung Jabung, Fatmah had a friend who was a politician running in the 2019 election. The MT group she lead wanted to buy a set of traditional musical instruments for the group but could not afford to. She asked the members if they were happy for her to approach her friend. All the MT members agreed. Fatmah then contacted the politician and informed her of the situation. The politician agreed to send out an amount of money. Fatmah said:

I reminded *ibuk-ibuk* [the MT members], during her term, whatever the activities in the village, she always help, although you did not choose her in the last election. *Pengajian*, *MTQ* (Quran recitation festive), *Maulid Nabi* [the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad] were the celebrations that she always helps. I once invited her. Although she could not come, the ATM [cash sent through the bank account] was sent. (Interview with the MT leader)

Shortly afterwards, the politician requested to meet the members at the following pengajian. Almost all pengajian across the village agreed to her visit. The members were also happy to bring home the calendars and cards with the politician's profile on them to be further circulated. In 2019, the politician won and her husband and son were also elected.

In appealing to voters, brokers sometimes use more than one strategy. Wahda sought the opportunity to reach out to the MT members. Besides a religious-ritual approach, she also appealed to her members by using her authority as a leader of the institution. She employed an individual approach as well as an organisational approach in promoting her candidate. In arranging the meeting with members of MT she illustrated the financial hardship faced by the MT province and advocated for help. She then introduced the candidates and let them speak to the floor.

Whenever MT groups have big events, MT leaders would invite candidates. On these occasions, the MT leaders would introduce the candidates to the members and invite them to give an opening speech before opening the session for questions. In letting the candidates know the problems members face, such as lack of money for materials or paying regular expenditures, the MT members felt the candidates cared about their problems.

The consequences of brokering

MT leaders and individuals may use the authority they possess to support their preferred political choice or candidate. In supporting political candidates, a broker and/or their MT group is likely to experience some consequences. If the candidate they supported wins, they may be rewarded. On the other hand, if they lose, they may have funding and support withdrawn. Leaders of MT groups acting as brokers thus take a risk, for themselves and the organisation.

Eni is a good example of a powerful broker who enjoyed mediating the MT in her community for a wealthy politician running for provincial parliament. She was successful in organising enough votes (75 required) for the candidate to win in the 2014 parliamentary elections. She proudly shared that 73 out of 75 MT members committed to 'her' candidate on the ballot day. For this, each voter was paid 50 thousand rupiahs and she herself received 200 thousand rupiahs. She again mediated votes, mostly women in MT, for the 2017 mayoral election. Not long after the elections, the politicians rewarded the voters. The community benefits included a cow for the Eid al-Adha (the Muslim festival of sacrifice), cooking equipment, street food carts, and sewing machines.

Similarly, Wahda also felt grateful when her politicians secured their seats. During the campaign in the 2014 election, Wahda actively facilitated a DPD candidate and a provincial parliament candidate meeting with MT members. Provincial events were created to welcome the candidates and allow them to speak directly to members. The MT leader then asked the candidates for financial support. An oral agreement was made to provide financial support for MT on a monthly basis. She was one of the permanent donors for the MT province. The money was just enough to cover the staff expenses. Another politician provided financial support for events within the MT.

Not all female brokers were successful in their roles. One had supported a losing candidate, who was an incumbent. The elected regent, bupati, punished the MT leader by disallowing her to sit as an MT leader. Although she was legitimately elected by the members, the official refused to sign her decree paper. Wahda, as the top chairwoman, was not powerful enough to force the local head. She could not sign the MT decree paper without the necessary approval. She said:

I thought she could be an adviser because she has served MT for 5 years. She also still wanted to be an advisor, but she was not allowed by the *bupati's* wife. So, she [the *bupati's* wife] appointed a new chairperson...She said better not to have MT at all, rather than accommodating her in the structure of MT. (Interview with the MT leader)

Remaining neutral can also make MT groups vulnerable. In the Kerinci District, the elected leader at the village level was overthrown in a non-procedural way after several decades serving local groups. The village head intervened in the affairs of her MT group. The leader speculated that the village head had an interest with the MT members prior to the 2019 election to help in mediating politicians (interview with the MT leader). Similarly, at the National BKMT level, a local elite speculated that the lack of government attention (after Soeharto) was due to the movement supporting the incumbent president who ended up losing office. After Soeharto, several national BKMT events were not supported or attended by the president.

Normally, when an MT leader receives patronage from certain candidates, she will secure the votes for the preferred politician and block the other candidates from approaching. However, it can be tricky to secure the votes when more than one candidate has financially contributed to the institution. In the case of provincial MT, a senior woman candidate who ran for DPD expressed her disappointment:

I know them (the provincial MT leadership). Although I helped in the past until now, they did not support me. Yesterday (former election of 2014), they supported Ibu Jane, because she was more senior than me. (Interview with the female politician)

The MT leader confirmed her difficult position. Both female politicians ran for the same level of DPD. They had both financially contributed to the MT province as they were both advisor members. However, based on information, one of the candidates had supported MT more than the other in terms of continuity and quantity of contributions.

Even though other MT leaders facilitated candidates, other MT leaders can refuse to mediate their members for patronage practice. One of the MT groups in West Tanjung Jabung declined to re-mediate a politician with MT members. Along with her group members, she refused to promise the politician to secure MT votes with material benefits.

I am the leader but I am afraid to make a promise with the politician. I can't give a guarantee that they would get the votes from my group. They [other MT groups] dare to sign the paper to guarantee that the members will vote as many as they want. (Interview with MT leader)

This is an option for MT leaders and is more likely in the lower levels where MT leaders and groups do not have a close relationship with the government. This stand represents an exception to what appears to be a general pattern of the politicisation of MT women's prayer groups in Indonesia.

Brokerage on MT network can have consequences. Female leaders and the group or community may receive rewards following their successful support. Individual politicians tend to maintain the relationship by giving limited and regular financial support during the MT leaders' terms. This close relationship creates new clientelism.

MT leaders that regularly conduct the *pengajian* are more likely to support the incumbents. This is a risk for the group, especially for the MT leaders. If the incumbent politician running as a candidate fails, despite the MT leaders actively campaigning for them, the MT leaders may lose their positions and standing in the group and wider community: the MT group may lose any funding or other types of material support.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the underlying motives which compel female MT leaders to become brokers, as well as the strategies they employ and the consequence they may experience as successful or unsuccessful brokers. It has shed light on female brokers working within the MT network in Indonesia. The MT leaders and RT heads connected to MT groups are key figures in the institution and the community respectively with the power to influence mobilisation and consolidate electoral support, both individually and organisationally.

The involvement of the MT leader and community leader acting as female brokers to mobilise MT members indicates patronage practices are still powerful in Jambi Province. However, brokerage within the MT groups allowed them to fight for individual, group and community rights and to empower the members and people in the community. MT groups have undergone declining support from the government, especially after the New Order. MT groups are becoming in demand for conducting *pengajian*. Brokerage in MT groups has been common with the use of religious identities, religious ceremonies, and positional power of the brokers to garner political support. It is quite effective for brokers to mobilise the MT members and communicate it to politicians. In certain cases, the brokers' motives were more salient because of the poor performance of the state in providing the services and support for lower class people in particular. These findings suggest MT leaders and other community leaders acting as brokers is an alternative and accessible avenue to help citizens and communities better access state institutions (Hickey, 2012). Further research on the relationship between the voters and the candidates would provide further insights into the dynamics at play.

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