

# Political Economy in the Management of Natural Resources in Indonesia

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## Abstract

### Article history:

Received: July 11, 2022

Revised: August 25, 2022

Accepted: October 11, 2022

Published: December 30, 2022

### Keywords:

Decentralization,  
Environmental Justice,  
Natural Resources,  
Political Economy,  
Public Policy.

### Identifier:

Nawala

Page: 147-164

<https://nawala.io/index.php/ijgspa>

This study explores the political-economic relationship in Indonesia's natural resource management, focusing on three major legal frameworks: Law No. 4/2009 on Mineral and Coal Mining, Law No. 41/1999 on Forestry, and Law No. 32/2009 on Environmental Protection and Management. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this research investigates the complex interaction between political power, economic interests, and environmental governance through an online literature review of the last five years. The findings reveal that, although these laws establish a relatively strong regulatory foundation, their implementation remains constrained by overlapping regulations, weak law enforcement, and institutional fragmentation at both central and local levels. Moreover, the study highlights persistent issues of rent-seeking behavior, limited community participation, and the dominance of short-term economic agendas over ecological justice. It emphasizes the urgency of harmonizing policies, strengthening institutional coordination, and reinforcing transparency to achieve sustainable governance. Ultimately, effective natural resource management in Indonesia depends on a political commitment that prioritizes environmental integrity, social justice, and long-term national welfare over short-term profit motives.

## **1. Introduction**

The relationship between politics and economics in natural resource management is a fundamental aspect of national development. In Indonesia, natural resource management cannot be separated from the context of power politics and the underlying economic structure. Resources such as forests, minerals, and energy are an arena for interests between the state, corporations, and society. In the framework of public policy, politics determines the direction of policy, while economics determines the value and form of exploitation of these resources. These two dimensions are interrelated and affect the implementation of policies in various laws and regulations.<sup>1</sup>

As a legal basis, a number of laws have a strategic role in regulating natural resource governance. Law Number 4 of 2009 concerning Mineral and Coal Mining (Mineral and Coal Law) affirms the role of the state in controlling mineral resources for the prosperity of the people, but on the other hand opens up space for private investment in this strategic sector. Law No. 41 of 1999 on Forestry emphasizes the importance of sustainable forest management under state supervision, but its implementation is often confronted with economic interests that encourage overexploitation. Meanwhile, Law Number 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management (*Perlindungan dan Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup*/PPLH Law) functions as a control mechanism for the environmental impact of natural resources-based economic activities. These three laws reflect the state's efforts to

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<sup>1</sup> Ilham Dwi Rafiqi. "Pembaruan Politik Hukum Pembentukan Perundang-Undangan di Bidang Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Alam Perspektif Hukum Progresif." *Bina Hukum Lingkungan* 5, no. 2 (2021): 319-339.

balance economic interests and ecological responsibility, as well as reveal the political complexity in their implementation.<sup>2</sup>

In practice, natural resource management policies show a tension between economic development goals and environmental sustainability demands. Resources such as forests and mines are the main instruments of national economic growth, but their management often shows a bias towards the interests of political elites and large industrial players.<sup>3</sup> In the context of decentralization, regional autonomy provides space for local governments to regulate natural resources according to their authority, but it also gives birth to new challenges in the form of the emergence of a “local political economy” that has the potential to strengthen the inequality in the distribution of resource products.<sup>4</sup>

Ideally, the policies in the Mineral and Mineral Law, the Forestry Law, and the PPLH Law are oriented towards equity and sustainability. However, its implementation in various regions shows the gap between legal norms and political reality. Law enforcement against environmental violations still faces weak institutional capacity and dominance of economic interests that emphasize short-term growth over sustainability.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, mining and forestry licensing is still

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<sup>2</sup> M. Kholid Syeirazi. “Resentralisasi Negara: Catatan Kritis atas UU No. 3/2020 tentang Minerba.” *Kuasa Oligarki atas Minerba Indonesia?* (2020): 138.

<sup>3</sup> Arif Satria. *Politik sumber daya alam*. Yogyakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Risal. “Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Alam di Era Desentralisasi.” *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Publik dan Kebijakan Sosial* 1, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>5</sup> Nofita Nur Kaehuwoba. “Kebijakan Perlindungan dan Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup Pemerintah Daerah Menurut Undang-Undang Nomor 32 Tahun 2009.” *Lex Administratum* 6, no. 1 (2018).

affected by political pressures that are not in line with the principles of sustainable natural resource governance.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, global dynamics such as economic liberalization and the need for foreign investment also shape the economic politics of national natural resources. The state is faced with a dilemma between maintaining resource sovereignty and attracting investment to strengthen the economy. In this case, politics plays a big role because every decision in natural resource management reflects a balance between national sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and global economic interests.<sup>7</sup> The tension between these three dimensions shows that natural resource management is not only a technical, but also political and ideological issue.

Thus, the political-economic relationship in natural resource management is key to understanding why public policies often face obstacles in the implementation stage. The three laws not only represent the state's legal strategy, but also reflect the complex power relations between economic and political actors. Through the interaction between economic interests, political pressure, and legal policies, dynamics emerge that affect the direction of national development and the distribution of natural resource benefits. Therefore, this study examines how these political-economic relations work in policy practice and the extent to which legal arrangements are able to ensure fair and sustainable natural resource governance. This research also seeks to answer how the phenomenon of natural resource

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<sup>6</sup> Sonny Sonny, and Isal Wardhana. "Pertambangan dan deforestasi: studi perizinan tambang batubara di provinsi kalimantan timur." *Jurnal Renaissance* 5, no. 02 (2020): 681-690.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Agus Umar. "Bonus demografi sebagai peluang dan tantangan pengelolaan sumber daya alam di era otonomi daerah." *Genta Mulia: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 8, no. 2 (2018).

management can be understood through the relationship between politics and economics within the applicable legal framework, as well as what are the challenges in the implementation of regulations and the urgency of policy reconstruction to strengthen fair and sustainable governance.

## **2. Methods**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an online literature review method. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate to understand the complex social and political phenomena behind natural resource management (*Sumber Daya Alam/SDA*) policies in Indonesia. The focus of the research is not on quantitative measurement or statistical calculations, but on an in-depth understanding of the meaning, context, and dynamics of political-economic relations as manifested in laws and regulations, policy practices, and developing public discourse.

The descriptive qualitative method allows researchers to comprehensively describe empirical reality based on data obtained from valid and relevant literature sources. Online literature review is used as the main instrument in data collection, by searching various scientific articles, accredited journals, academic books, institutional research results, and policy documents indexed in the Google Scholar database in the last five years. The selection of this source is carried out to ensure that the data used is the result of the latest scientific studies that can describe the actual development of policies and political discourse on the economy of natural resources.

The research stage begins with the identification of topics and problem limits focusing on three main legal instruments: Law Number 4 of 2009 concerning Mineral and Coal Mining, Law Number 41 of 1999 concerning Forestry, and Law Number 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management. After that, a literature search process was carried out through relevant keywords such as “natural resource economic politics”, “environmental policy”, “forestry management”, and “implementation of the Mineral and Mineral Law and PPLH”. The literature found was then selected based on the suitability of the theme, the credibility of the author, and his contribution to the analytical framework of this research.

Data analysis is carried out through information reduction and categorization techniques to find patterns of relationships between political power, economic policy, and natural resource governance. Data from various literature were compared to find similarities and differences in views on policy effectiveness and the challenges of its implementation at the national and regional levels. The results of the analysis are then compiled descriptively to display a complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The validity of research is maintained through triangulation of sources, namely by verifying information from various academic publications so that it does not depend on one point of view. Thus, this study seeks to provide an objective and in-depth picture of the relationship between politics and economics in natural resource management in Indonesia based on the applicable legal framework, as well

as identify social, economic, and institutional dynamics that affect its implementation.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1. Political–Economic Relations in Natural Resource Management**

The relationship between politics and economics in natural resource management in Indonesia shows complex dynamics, especially after the enactment of several important laws governing natural resource governance. The three main legal frameworks of Law Number 4 of 2009 concerning Mineral and Coal Mining (Mineral and Coal Law), Law Number 41 of 1999 concerning Forestry, and Law Number 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management (PPLH) have become an arena of contestation between political, economic, and environmental interests. These three laws not only function as legal tools, but also as political and economic instruments that determine the direction of development and the distribution of power over natural resources in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup>

The main phenomenon that arises is the inequality in the distribution of natural resources benefits between the state, corporations, and local communities. In the context of the Mineral and Mineral Law, the state has formal control over mineral resources, but in practice it often shows the dominance of private interests through investment policies and mining licensing that are oriented towards economic growth. This condition gives rise to what is called “extraction politics,”

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<sup>8</sup> Ilham Dwi Rafiqi. “Pembaruan Politik Hukum Pembentukan Perundang-Undangan di Bidang Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Alam Perspektif Hukum Progresif.” *Bina Hukum Lingkungan* 5, no. 2 (2021): 319-339.

which is a situation in which natural resources become an economic commodity that is exploited to support a certain political agenda.<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon illustrates how the political economy of natural resources does not only regulate the technical aspects of production, but also contains a dimension of power and development ideology that is oriented towards growth, not sustainability.

In the forestry sector, the implementation of Law No. 41 of 1999 on Forestry faces a similar dilemma. Although normatively this law emphasizes the principle of sustainability and equitable distribution of forest benefits for the community, practice in the field shows that there is control of forest areas by a handful of large companies that have obtained permits from the central and regional governments. This phenomenon shows that there is a political influence in the granting of forest use permits, especially in areas with high resource reserves.<sup>10</sup> The pattern of power relations between local governments, local political elites, and corporations shows that forestry policies are often used as a means to strengthen the economic-political positions of certain actors, rather than to improve the welfare of communities around forests.

Meanwhile, Law No. 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management (PPLH) is present as a mechanism to control the negative impacts of resource-based economic activities. However, the phenomenon that occurs shows that environmental regulation often functions symbolically. Many companies have formally met the requirements of an environmental impact analysis (EIA), but their

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<sup>9</sup> Arif Satria. *Politik sumber daya alam*. Yogyakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Risal. "Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Alam di Era Desentralisasi." *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Publik dan Kebijakan Sosial* 1, no. 2 (2018).



implementation in the field has not been carried out well due to weak supervision and law enforcement.<sup>11</sup> This situation confirms that environmental politics in Indonesia are still heavily influenced by short-term economic interests supported by government policies to maintain the investment climate.

From a political and economic perspective, this phenomenon can be read as a form of tension between the logic of the market and the logic of the state. The state plays a role as a regulator, but at the same time also as an economic actor that depends on revenue from the natural resources sector. This dependency creates what is referred to as “resource dependency,” where state policies are directed to maximize income through the exploitation of natural resources, even if it has the potential to cause ecological damage or social conflict.<sup>12</sup> In this context, political decisions related to natural resource management often reflect a compromise between national economic needs and growing socio-environmental pressures.

In addition, the phenomenon of decentralization after reform has also changed the political and economic pattern of natural resources. Granting authority to local governments to manage natural resources through autonomy mechanisms opens up new opportunities for local participation, but also presents challenges in the form of the emergence of the practice of “rent politics” at the regional level.<sup>13</sup> Many regional heads have used mining and forestry licensing as a source of political

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<sup>11</sup> Nofita Nur Kaehuwoba. “Kebijakan Perlindungan dan Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup Pemerintah Daerah Menurut Undang-Undang Nomor 32 Tahun 2009.” *Lex Administratum* 6, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>12</sup> Sonny Sonny, and Isal Wardhana. “Pertambangan dan deforestasi: studi perizinan tambang batubara di provinsi kalimantan timur.” *Jurnal Renaissance* 5, no. 02 (2020): 681-690.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Agus Umar. “Bonus demografi sebagai peluang dan tantangan pengelolaan sumber daya alam di era otonomi daerah.” *Genta Mulia: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 8, no. 2 (2018).

funding, both to maintain power and to build an exclusive local economic network. This phenomenon shows that although decentralization is expected to strengthen democratic natural resource governance, in practice it expands the space for corruption and collusion in the resource sector.

Another phenomenon that is no less important is the insynchronization between sectoral regulations and policies. The Mineral and Mineral Law, the Forestry Law, and the PPLH Law often overlap in implementation in the field, especially in terms of land use permit arrangements. Jurisdictional conflicts between ministries and local governments cause policies to be ineffective, while communities at the grassroots level are the most affected. This policy disharmony shows the weak coordination between institutions in translating the mandate of the law into consistent and equitable policies.<sup>14</sup>

Overall, the political-economic phenomenon of natural resource management in Indonesia shows a consistent pattern: the existence of a progressive legal framework has not been fully able to change the practice of resource exploitation oriented towards short-term economic gains. The three main laws on Mineral and Mineral Resources, Forestry, and PPLH have provided a strong legal foundation, but their effectiveness depends largely on how political power is exercised, how economic institutions work, and the extent to which public interests can be accommodated in the policy-making process.<sup>15</sup> This phenomenon shows that the

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<sup>14</sup> M. Kholid Syeirazi. "Resentralisasi Negara: Catatan Kritis atas UU No. 3/2020 tentang Minerba." *Kuasa Oligarki atas Minerba Indonesia?* (2020): 138.

<sup>15</sup> Agus Lukman. "Kajian kebijakan sumberdaya alam berbasis pada ekologi politik." *The Indonesian Journal of Public Administration (IJPA)* 4, no. 2 (2018): 1-11.

main problem lies not in the lack of rules, but in how power and the economy interact in determining the direction of sustainable and equitable natural resource management.

### **3.2. Challenges of Implementation, Urgency, and Reconstruction of Natural Resources Management Policies**

The implementation of natural resource management policies in Indonesia faces various structural, institutional, and political challenges. Although normatively Law Number 4 of 2009 concerning Mineral and Coal Mining (Mineral and Coal Law), Law Number 41 of 1999 concerning Forestry, and Law Number 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management (PPLH Law) have provided a strong legal framework, the reality of implementation shows a gap between norms and practices. This gap arises due to the tug-of-war of political interests, weak law enforcement, and cross-sector policy insynchronization that causes natural resource management to not run effectively.<sup>16</sup>

The first challenge lies in the inconsistency in policy implementation between levels of government. Since decentralization, the authority to manage natural resources has largely been transferred to local governments. However, this shift in authority has not been followed by adequate institutional capacity. Many regions do not have human resources or technical tools to carry out the function of supervision and evaluation of mining and forestry activities. As a result, business licenses are often granted without considering the carrying capacity of the environment or the

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<sup>16</sup> Wahyu Nugroho and Erwin Syahrudin. "Politik Hukum Rancangan Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja Disektor Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan (Suatu Telaah Kritis)." *Jurnal Hukum & Pembangunan* 51, no. 3 (2021): 637-658.

involvement of the local community.<sup>17</sup> In the context of the Mineral and Mineral Law, for example, mining licensing is often misused as a political tool to strengthen support for local elites, thus giving rise to the practice of rents that are detrimental to the state and society.

The second challenge is the weak environmental law enforcement system. The PPLH Law actually provides a strong basis for cracking down on environmental violations, but enforcement in the field is often hampered by political intervention and the lack of transparency of the legal process.<sup>18</sup> Many cases of pollution or environmental destruction are not followed up completely due to more dominant economic interests. This phenomenon confirms that Indonesia's political structure still provides a large space for economic elites to influence public policy, including in the law enforcement process. Therefore, the urgency of strengthening environmental monitoring institutions is important so that the PPLH Law can run in accordance with the spirit of sustainability and ecological justice.

The next challenge relates to the inequality of access to natural resources between corporations and local communities. In many cases, indigenous peoples and local communities are still marginalized in decision-making regarding land and resource management. The Forestry Law and the PPLH Law have recognized the principle of community participation, but their implementation is still limited to

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<sup>17</sup> Wirazilmustaan Wirazilmustaan. "Dimensi Desentralisasi Analisa Pola Hubungan Kewenangan Dalam Pengelolaan Pertambangan." *PROGRESIF: Jurnal Hukum* 15, no. 2 (2021): 197-212.

<sup>18</sup> Olivia Anggie Johar. "Realitas permasalahan penegakan hukum lingkungan di Indonesia." *Jurnal Ilmu Lingkungan* 15, no. 1 (2021): 54-65.

formal consultation, not substantive decision-making.<sup>19</sup> This inequality shows that the economic politics of natural resources in Indonesia are still centered on a development paradigm that places economic growth as a top priority, while social and ecological justice is often a victim.

In addition, the overlap of policies between sectors is a major obstacle to the effectiveness of natural resources governance. There are many cases where forest areas that have been designated as conservation areas are also included in mining or plantation permits. This inconsistency shows weak coordination between ministries and the absence of effective policy integration mechanisms.<sup>20</sup> As a result, natural resources policies are often reactive and lack a long-term vision. In this context, the urgency of harmonizing policies across sectors is an urgent need so that the implementation of the three laws does not contradict each other.

Another challenge arises from the lack of transparency and accountability in natural resource governance. Although various initiatives have been carried out, such as the disclosure of licensing data through electronic systems and the application of good governance principles, corrupt and collusion practices are still often found in the mining and forestry licensing process.<sup>21</sup> Weak transparency creates space for abuse of power and weakens public trust in state institutions. In this context, policy reconstruction is needed to strengthen accountability mechanisms and expand the

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<sup>19</sup> Grace Pinkan Kawengian. "Partisipasi Masyarakat dalam pengelolaan dan pelestarian lingkungan hidup." *Lex Et Societatis* 7, no. 5 (2019).

<sup>20</sup> Mumu Muhajir, Maria SW Sumardjono, Timer Manurung, and Julius Ferdinand. "Harmonisasi regulasi dan perbaikan tata kelola sumber daya alam di Indonesia." *Integritas: Jurnal Antikorupsi* 5, no. 2-2 (2019): 1-13.

<sup>21</sup> Wigke Capri, Devy Dhian Cahyati, Mahesti Hasanah, Dias Prasongko, and Wegik Prasetyo. "Kajian korupsi sebagai proses sosial: Melacak korupsi di sektor sumber daya alam di Indonesia." *Integritas: Jurnal Antikorupsi* 7, no. 1 (2021): 121-142.

space for community participation in the supervision of natural resource management.

Conceptually, the reconstruction of natural resources management policies requires an approach that integrates environmental justice, economic governance, and political ethics. This new approach needs to place natural resources not only as an economic commodity, but also as the basis for the sustainability of social and ecological life.<sup>22</sup> One of the strategic steps that can be taken is to strengthen the implementation of community-based environmental governance by expanding recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. This approach will not only strengthen policy legitimacy, but also reduce horizontal conflicts due to inequality in access to resources.

Furthermore, it is necessary to strengthen institutional capacity and integrate national policies so that the implementation of the Mineral and Mineral Law, the Forestry Law, and the PPLH Law can be more synergistic. Institutional strengthening includes improving the technical competence of regional officials, open data-based information systems, and bureaucratic reforms to minimize conflicts of interest. Legal and policy reconstruction must also be directed to clarify the boundaries of authority between institutions so that there is no overlap that hinders the implementation of policies.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Wahyu Nugroho and Agus Surono. "Rekonstruksi Hukum Pembangunan dalam Kebijakan Pengaturan Lingkungan Hidup dan Sumber Daya Alam." *Jurnal Hukum Lingkungan Indonesia* 4, no. 2 (2018): 77-110.

<sup>23</sup> Mumu Muhajir, Maria SW Sumardjono, Timer Manurung, and Julius Ferdinand. "Harmonisasi regulasi dan perbaikan tata kelola sumber daya alam di Indonesia." *Integritas: Jurnal Antikorupsi* 5, no. 2-2 (2019): 1-13.

Thus, the main challenge for natural resource management in Indonesia lies not only in the quality of existing regulations, but also in how these policies are implemented in complex socio-political contexts. The urgency of governance reform is inevitable to ensure environmental sustainability as well as economic justice. Consistent implementation of the principles of the Mineral and Mineral Law, the Forestry Law, and the PPLH Law can be an important foundation for the creation of a more transparent, inclusive, and equitable natural resources political-economic system.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The political-economic relationship in natural resource management in Indonesia shows a complex reality, where law, power, and economic interests interact with each other in determining the direction of national policy. The three main laws of Law Number 4 of 2009 concerning Mineral and Coal Mining, Law Number 41 of 1999 concerning Forestry, and Law Number 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management represent an ideal normative framework, but their implementation still faces various fundamental problems. The phenomenon that has emerged reflects the imbalance of power between the state, corporations, and local communities that causes the economic benefits of natural resources to not be distributed fairly and sustainably. Challenges in policy implementation include weak law enforcement, low governance transparency, and overlapping regulations between sectors.

Decentralization also shows ambivalence: on the one hand it opens up space for local participation, but on the other hand expands the practice of rents at the regional level. Therefore, the urgency of policy reconstruction is important to strengthen governance that is more integrative, transparent, and in favor of ecological sustainability. Institutional reform, policy harmonization, and increased supervisory capacity are strategic steps to uphold the principles of environmental and economic justice. Only by strengthening the political commitment to sustainability and public welfare can natural resource management truly function as an instrument of equitable and sustainable development for future generations.

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