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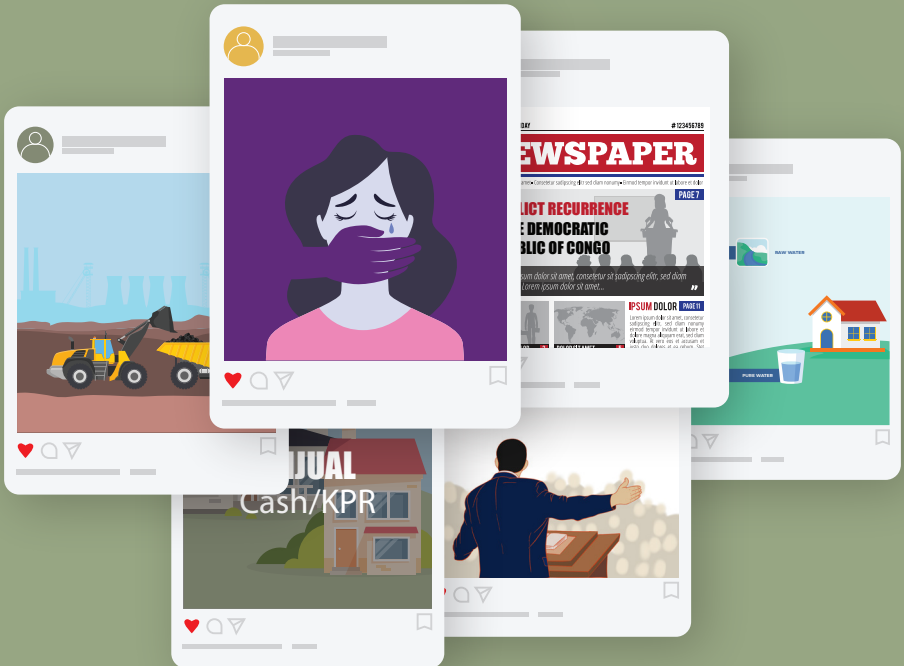
# Power, Conflict and Democracy In South and Southeast Asia

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PCD Journal of South and Southeast Asia's Power, Conflict, and Democracy Studies is an international refereed journal initiated by the Power, Conflict, and Democracy (PCD) consortium, a collaborative work by the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka, Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia, and the University of Oslo in Norway. It is a journal that comprehensively examines the dynamics of power and democracy, including practices of human rights, popular representation, and public policy, particularly, in Indonesia but still giving a space for comparative studies. Invitation is extended to authors with interest in making comparison experiences in Indonesia with those of the rest of the globe. PCD Journal publishes articles, literature review, field notes, and book reviews in major sub fields of political science, human geography, and political anthropology. PCD Journal aims to address some of the most current issues of power, conflict, and democracy in Indonesia with comparative perspective. While the journal is open to all methodological approaches, all submissions are expected to be theoretically grounded. The journal can be of great value to teachers, students, researchers, experts, journalists, and social movement activist dealing with these issues and regions.



## Submission

Submitted papers should be no longer than 8,000 words excluding tables and figures. Submit the manuscript via e-mail to the editor-in-chief at [pcd@ugm.ac.id](mailto:pcd@ugm.ac.id).

## Manuscript preparation

For detailed instruction check our website: <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/v3/PCD> or <http://www.jurnal.ugm.ac.id/pcd>.

## Peer Review

Every submitted article will be subject to peer review. The normal review period is three months. Most research articles in this journal have undergone rigorous peer review based on initial editorial screening and refereeing by anonymous referees. Authors should take care that the manuscript contains no clues as to identity. Nevertheless, articles published under 'Research Notes' section, aimed at setting up future research agenda, are non-peer-reviewed.

## PCD Programme

The state of democracy in the Global South is marked by a striking paradox: while liberal democracy has attained an ideologically hegemonic position through two so-called waves of democracy, the qualities of such democracies is increasingly called into question. The "old" democracies in the global South like Sri Lanka are weakened. Democracy deficits have emerged within constitutional and institutional arrangements as well as in political practices. Further, the "third wave of democracy" is over. "New" democracies like in Indonesia have fostered freedoms, privatisation and decentralisation but continue to suffer from poor governance, representation and participation. Hence there are general signs of decline. Vulnerable people are frustrated with lack of actual influence and sustained elitism. Politicians winning elections often need to foster ethnic and religious loyalties, clientelism and the abuse of public resources. Powerful groups and middle classes with poor ability to win elections tend to opt for privatisation and return partially to authoritarian governance. Critical questions are therefore asked about the feasibility of democracy in developing country contexts. Some observers say it is only a problem of better crafting of institutions. Others contend that "full" democratisation was premature in the first place and that necessary preconditions need to be created beforehand. Both positions are based on a narrow and static understanding of democracy. While the core elements of democracy are universal, real world democracies develop (or decline) over time and through contextual dynamics; in processes and contexts of actors, institutions



and relations of power. Therefore, the crucial task is to analyse the problems and options of expanding the historically “early” freedoms and deficient elements of democracy that fortunately exist in spite of poor socio- economic and political conditions in countries such as Sri Lanka and Indonesia rather than giving up on these freedoms until the other have somehow improved. This is to advance towards the universally accepted aim of democracy in terms of popular control of public affairs on the basis of political equality, and to be able to use democracy to handle conflicts and alter unequal and unsustainable development.

With this in mind, researchers at the University of Oslo (Norway), Gadjah Mada (Indonesia) and Colombo (Sri Lanka) have come together in a collective research— and post- graduate programme. The idea is to pool their research projects and results, and to promote doctoral as well as master studies by way of, first, a joint framework for analysing power, conflict and democracy and, second, a basic electronic peer reviewed journal and report series (published by PCD-Press) to the benefit of students, scholars and priorities in the region. Basic resources—in addition to the participants own voluntary work and projects— are provided by their respective universities and the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU).



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# The Practice of Local Bossism: Implementation of Local Boss Strategies in Mobilising Political Support

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## Abstract

*This study examines the relationship between politics and business through the case of Agus,<sup>2</sup> a tobacco middleman in Bukit Hijau regency.<sup>3</sup> Agus plays a pivotal role as a local boss, maintaining his position as a member of the District Regional House of Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah) in the regency. Employing a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews. The study finds that Agus's crucial position in the local tobacco trade system enabled his transformation into a local boss, or a local political figure, through two mobilisation channels: (1) the tobacco trade network, which he successfully converted into an electoral political network, and (2) religious networks, evidenced by his affiliation with the Nusantara Social Party (Partai Sosial Nusantara/PSN).<sup>4</sup> These forms of mobilisation are analysed through six strategic frameworks for local bossism. The limitation of local bosses arises from the fact that the influence of local bosses is constrained by political party structures. The institutional system of political parties limit the full consolidation of power within the party. In conclusion, while local bosses such as Agus successfully mobilised political support through local boss strategies, their power remains incomplete and subject to institutional limitations.*

**Keywords:** Local bosses; political mobilisation; religious networks; business and politics

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- 2 Not a real name
- 3 Not the actual name of the regency
- 4 Not the actual name of the political party



## Introduction

Discussions of local bossism are closely tied to the use of resources and coercive mechanisms that enable such actors to exert influence over local politics (Sidel, 1997). Sidel (1997) notes that the economic base of local bosses is typically came from direct state intervention, encompassing assets such as land ownership, industrial plants, transport infrastructure, illegal logging, and agricultural processing. In the Indonesian context, tobacco emerges as a key economic resource for local bosses to control the local political configuration. Based on the pre-research of this study, tobacco middlemen earn billions of rupiah per harvest season, while farmers receive as little as IDR 50 million (Putri et al., 2018). This disparity is unsurprising given the prevalence of fraudulent

practices in the tobacco trading system, particularly in price negotiations and weighing mechanisms (Wicaksono, 2020).

For local bosses, tobacco functions as more than just a source of wealth. It serves as a vehicle for consolidating power across economic, socio-religious, and formal political aspects. Economically, local bosses establish more than patron-client relationships with both farmers and cigarette factories, resulting in the dependence of farmers on local bosses. Socio-religiously, they capitalise on affiliations with religious leaders and institutions, often channeling government aspiration funds as political incentives. In formal politics, they engage in vote-buying strategies financed by profits from the tobacco trade. These methods solidify political power and demonstrate dominance within the community.



Nevertheless, despite their entrenched positions in the economic, socio-religious, and political arenas, local bosses face significant limitations. Drawing a comparison with the Philippines, Sidel (1997) notes that local bosses in that context rely heavily on state patronage to sustain their influence. When these ties to national political power weaken, so too does their dominance. This was a harbinger of the local bosses' collapse due to their detachment from state patronage. The weakening of the state's support base opens the door for rival elites with stronger patronage to overthrow entrenched local power (Sidel, 1997).

However, the constraints faced by local bosses in this study diverge from the patterns typically observed in the literature. Limitations do not come from the state mechanisms such as regulations

or loss of national patronage. Instead, they are internal to the 'structural' in nature, arising from the institutional logic of political parties. Material wealth, control of networks, and political positions (e.g., as a local parliament member) are insufficient to guarantee authority within the party system. In the case of Agus, the power of political parties makes local bosses lose their positions within the party. While he enjoyed electoral popularity at the regency level, he lacked decision-making authority within the provincial-level party hierarchy.

Therefore, this study aims to describe how Agus, a local boss who is both a tobacco middleman and a local parliament member, mobilises political support through two channels: trade and religion. The subsequent analysis breaks down his strategy into key components that define the modus operandi of local



bosses. Equally important is how institutional limitations have managed to destabilise the power of local bosses within political parties. This represents an important contribution to the broader theory of local bossism in Southeast Asia. Although this study is limited by its lack of data from provincial-level party elites, it nonetheless offers valuable insights not previously explored in existing literature. Employing a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach, this study gathers empirical evidence through in-depth interviews. All names of informants and locations in this article have been anonymised to protect the privacy and confidentiality of research participants. The interviewees were either directly or indirectly involved in the political practices discussed.

Anonymisation

has been applied consistently throughout the article, including in interview quotes, place names, and local institutions.

## Conceptual Framework

The concept of local bossism, according to Sidel (2005), refers to the phenomenon of local strongmen who sustain long-established political networks to monopolise economic resources and coercive power within their territories (Sidel, 2005). Bossism in this study emphasises the conditions that give rise to local bosses and their practices, while not excluding the coercive dimensions of their authority. Furthermore, local bossism is analysed through three aspects: control of economic resources, socio-religious networks, and formal political institutions.

Economic control plays a vital role in sustaining the existence of local bosses, serving both as a political power and a mechanism



for generating political loyalty. In the case of the tobacco trade, the capacity to control market flows allows local bosses to accumulate wealth, which is subsequently utilised to fund costly democratic activities—such as campaigning and vote buying (Sidel, 1997). Additionally, these economic resources create patronage ties, where the boss serves as a key intermediary between tobacco farmers and cigarette manufacturers. As a middleman, the local boss is present as a market provider for tobacco farmers who connect farmers and the industry. These patronage-based relationships foster not only material dependence but also emotional loyalty, which often translates into political support, electoral votes, and social stability.

Control over socio-religious aspects enables local bosses to expand their political support mobilisation and political career.

In this study, local bosses initially build a support base through their economic network, primarily trade, while seeking to expand their influence into non-aligned social groups, including religious and art groups which have helped local bosses' in their earlier political careers. Strategic alliances with religious leaders enhance the legitimacy and social reach of local bosses, increasing their capacity to mobilise voters (Suaib & Zuada, 2015).

Control of the formal political aspects provides institutional legitimacy. Through legitimate mechanisms of democracy, local bosses could occupy formal positions such as members of local parliament and direct access to state resources. These include aspiration funds and development programmes. Holding such positions also boosts social prestige and enhances credibility among constituents, particularly among

tobacco farmers who perceive these positions as indicators of power and reliability. Meanwhile, participation in electoral politics in Indonesia necessitates affiliation with a political party, making parties essential vehicles for political advancement and delivering local bosses to strategic positions.

The next concept elaborates three aspects of local bosses in political mobilisation, especially on the conversion of trade and socio-religious networks into political networks. This study draws on Nedelmann's (1987) definition of mobilisation as the key process of integrating individuals into the political system, particularly through their engagement in institutionalised political channels, such as voting. In the case of local bosses, this political mobilisation tends to follow a vertical orientation,

namely vertical mobilisation—a hierarchical process in which influence is exerted top-down (Nedelmann, 1987).

In terms of voter behaviour, the concept of mobilisation is divided into two strategies: pure political mobilisation and conversion political mobilisation. Pure mobilisation targets passive or low-turnout voters, focusing on re-engaging party loyalists and those with prior exposure to political networks. In contrast, conversion mobilisation targets non-partisan or opposition-aligned individual, with the goal of shifting their allegiance to the mobilising party or candidate (Karp et al., 2008).

Meanwhile, the types of political mobilisation can be divided into three: traditional ties, patron-client relations, and political machines. Firstly, traditional ties tend to be legitimised by cultural, social or religious traditions that have long



been present in society. Second, the patron-client relationship is defined by Huntington & Nelson (1994) as a relationship based on a reciprocal but unequal exchange of benefits. Third, a political machine is a group of people or political party frontmen that distribute material rewards in exchange for electoral support. Such relationships are pragmatic, transactional, direct, and brief (Huntington & Nelson, 1994).

According to Sidel (1999), local bosses may deploy up to ten strategies to consolidate and sustain their political-economic power: (1) placing relatives and cronies in formal positions; (2) establishing political machines that serve as vote brokers; (3) arranging for the placement of local officials; (4) arranging for government projects and aspiration funds; (5) arranging for local regulations; (6) arranging for tax breaks; (7) arranging for loans from the Regional

Development Bank; (8) granting contracts or concessions related to economic or development activities; (9) intimidation and political violence; and (10) implementing iron fist policies to resolve land conflicts and weaken labour unions. While this study does not capture all ten strategies in practice, it identifies six that are actively employed by the subject. Nevertheless, these findings are able to contribute to studies that explore the theory of local bossism.

Despite the power wielded by local bosses, they are not immune to institutional constraints, particularly those imposed by political party systems. In Indonesia, political parties are governed by statutes (Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga/AD/ART), which mandate democratic, transparent, and accountable internal decision-making processes (Sajian et al., 2023). However, the



strong institutionalisation of political parties tends to create formal barriers that hinder the consolidation of local bosses' power. Internal political party procedures, such as central control of party leadership in the regions, control over legislative and executive nominations, evaluation mechanisms for public officials, and regeneration in the bylaws are instruments to control party sustainability.

In this case, every party member is forced to comply with party rules. Every party policy must be adhered to, limiting local bosses' room for manoeuvre. The limitations are exacerbated when local bosses occupy lower levels, especially at the regency level. They can only accept centralised policies/decisions that sometimes threaten the survival of the local bosses themselves. This is possible because the provisions in the bylaws give party leaders the

authority to determine policy, including influencing the position of local bosses. Therefore, local bosses also experience unequal power relations within political parties and must submit to superordinate power even though they are dominant at the local level.

## Findings

### Transformation to Local Boss

Clan regeneration in the Philippines has similarities with the regeneration of tobacco middlemen in Indonesia, particularly in the intergenerational transfer of economic control. Sidel (1997) notes that the Osmeña clan's reproduction of power takes place through regeneration thus forming a classic "dynasty". Osmeña represented Cebu city for five terms in the national legislature and held many more



prestigious positions. Osmeña's legacy of positions, including control of monopoly franchises, public works contracts, and more enabled the clan to exercise considerable regulatory power over the city's economy (Sidel, 1997).

In the case of Agus, the process began in 1994, with support from his father, a traditional tobacco trader during the New Order era. This exemplifies a broader pattern in Bukit Hijau, where many tobacco middlemen emerge from inherited businesses and maintain dominance in specific localities. This pattern underscores the familial transfer of economic power.

Agus adopted a trading model aligned with PT Intikarya a major cigarette manufacturer, following the partnership framework established by the 2004 Ministerial Decree on Industry and Trade (Surat Keputusan/SK

Kemitraan) (Brata, 2012). His entry into the tobacco business was facilitated by a former grader and friend, who introduced him to PT Karyatama a distributor linked to PT Intikarya. As Agus said:

*"I have a friend, a grader, a Chinese person from Besole [Not the real name of a sub-regency], who works at PT Karyatama. He inherited the role from his father, who also had a good partnership with PT Karyatama. From the past until now, I have remained loyal to PT Karyatama." (Interview with Agus, tobacco middleman, 14 April 2023).*



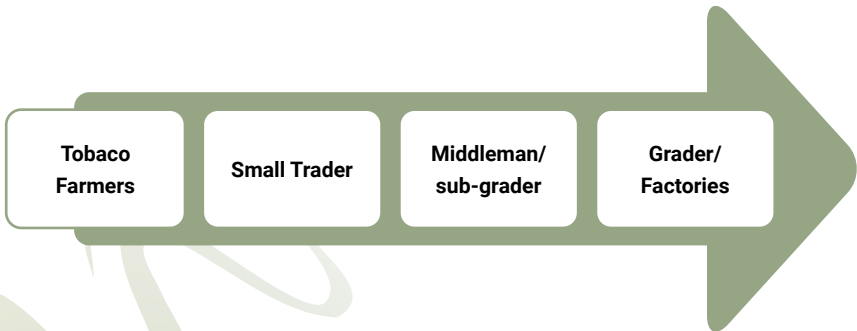


In this system, Agus holds the position of sub-grader, a level below the grader,<sup>5</sup> a role with significant influence over both farmers' incomes and manufacturers' procurement

5 Graders are representatives of cigarette factories who are tasked with determining the grade/quality of tobacco based on the colour of the dried tobacco, handle/body, aroma, and dryness. The fate of farmers and the cigarette industry depends on them because graders have the right to determine the price of tobacco based on subjective judgement. See <https://distanbun.jatengprov.go.id/v/index.php/blog/detail/210/Pelatihan%20tembakau> (accessed on 27 September 2024).

decisions. Sub-graders are tasked with buying tobacco from farmers and storing it in warehouses, then periodically distributing or selling tobacco from farmers to manufacturers in large quantities. The tobacco supply chain is quite complex and involving multiple intermediaries (small traders, middlemen, collectors), making Agus's role central in ensuring the flow of goods from farmers to manufacturers.

**Figure 1: Tobacco Trade Flow**



Source: Sari & Rusdijati, 2015



Agus supervises several field coordinators, who are responsible for procuring tobacco from local farmers, managing partnerships, and acting as marketing agents. Partner farmers must register through these coordinators to gain access to PT Intikarya's support, which is routed through Agus. These include fertiliser distribution, extension services, and seed provision. This structure positions Agus as a critical intermediary and reinforces his local dominance through personalised patronage and logistical control.

Agus's operation aligns with Sidel's (2005) local boss's criteria, particularly through monopoly control over economic resources. The buying system grants Agus near-total discretion in determining prices, often to the disadvantage of farmers. Middlemen often sell good-quality tobacco at a lower price. For example, A-grade tobacco

valued at IDR 75,000/kg may be purchased for only IDR 70,000/kg (Wibisono, 2022). In addition, there are also deductions for basket weight, sampling, and porter fees—further reduce farmers' profits, amounting to 8–13 kg per basket in lost weight alone (Kompasiana.com, 2020).

Farmer are further marginalised by their dependence on the partnership scheme. Without Agus, they would lack access to fertiliser credit and guaranteed sales channels. This relationship is instrumentalised by Agus during elections, translating economic subordination into political mobilisation.

The conditions enabling the emergence of local bosses in this context include: firstly, the concrete and immediate economic necessity. Agus strives for timely payment (different from the non-partner scheme), between 3-5 days at

most. Payments that tend to be quick can be used by farmers for operational costs of tobacco processing. Secondly, the scarcity of access to basic needs. Farmers lack direct access to cigarette manufacturers and rely on intermediaries like Agus for sales.

Thirdly, the governmental failure in welfare provision. For example, an article shows that partnered farmers in PT Intikarya earn above the regency minimum wage of around IDR 8,966,784, largely due to the partnership model's stability, thereby filling a state service gap (Putri et al., 2018). Fourth, the high socio-economic inequality between tobacco farmers and middlemen makes tobacco farmers often face operational capital difficulties. Agus helps bridge this gap through partnership system-linked input provision and credit.

Finally, the state facilitation through legal and democratic mechanisms. Agus has served three consecutive terms as a member of local parliament, even rising to the position of vice chairman and contesting the vice-regency. His campaigns were marked by money politics, as commonly acknowledged in local contests, and supported by both his trade cronies and religious affiliations.

Now Agus has transformed into a local boss, combining networks to accumulate wealth and power, just like local bosses in the Philippines. The birth of Agus's version of a local boss occurs through two mechanisms, namely regeneration from an entrepreneurial background and through the legal mechanism of elections involving the practice of money politics. The characteristics of a local boss become clearer when he becomes a member of



local parliament, which is called the result of the terms “marriage of market and state” (Wicaksono, 2020).

## **Local Boss First Line Mobilisation: The Trade Track**

The main support for Agus's political mobilisation derives from the tobacco trade route. This pathway describes Agus's process of converting an economic network into a political one. This network accounted for 75% of votes in the election; the religious network contributed 15-20% only, with the remainder stemming from party sympathisers. Indirectly, this shows the scope of Agus's control over the local economy, primarily through his dominance of the tobacco trade. Agus not only controls

the trade's economic dynamics but also exerts authority over the subordinate actors who operate within it.

Agus uses trade politics—in this context, referring to the politicisation of the PT Intikarya partnership system—as an effort to maintain his position as a local boss. He utilises at least two mechanisms within the partnership system to initiate political mobilisation. Firstly, Agus leverages the provision of fertiliser credit to partner farmers. PT Intikarya offers fertiliser on credit, but access is exclusively available through Agus, who acts as the distributor. This credit scheme is quite attractive, as most farmers cannot afford to buy large quantities of fertiliser outright. When working with Agus, Rohmat Pitoyo stated that he was granted leniency under the credit arrangement (Interview with Rohmat Pitoyo, tobacco partner farmer,



26 May 2023). Repayment is due after the tobacco harvest, when the farmers are obliged to sell their produce to PT Intikarya through Agus. Since Agus keeps credit records, payments are automatically deducted from the proceeds of the tobacco sales, based on the quantity of fertiliser taken beforehand. This system of access—mediated through Agus—can influence the political outlook of the contracted farmers. Partner farmers and their families often express their gratitude and sense of obligation by supporting Agus during legislative elections.

Secondly, farmers benefit from receiving payment for their tobacco more quickly. This prompt payment is crucial, as tobacco farming requires substantial capital. Rohmat reported that payment is typically made within a week after delivering tobacco samples—an arrangement that made him feel secure in the

partnership (Interview with Rohmat Pitoyo, tobacco partner farmer, 26 May 2023). In the end, this efficiency endangers a sense of indebtedness, and many farmers feel compelled to express their appreciation through electoral support.

Agus himself claims that the emotional bond formed through this economic interdependence, stating:

*"The factory provides fertiliser; I help with cultivation, even give cash support for labour. Naturally, they understand the help they've received. You have to observe them closely... Since tobacco trading relates to income, it resonates more deeply." (Interview with Agus, tobacco middleman, 15 April 2023).*

In additions, Agus deploys village coordinators as informal agents in his political machinery. These coordinators are tasked



with canvassing voters, referred to as *biting* in local parlance, as though operating a grassroots political machine during legislative elections.

Further analysis of Agus's mobilisation practices can be situated within mobilisation theory. Following the framework of Nedelmann's (1987) concept of vertical mobilisation, Agus's partnership system allows him to assert political and economic influence over those below him in the network, namely the village coordinators and partner farmers. His effort to convert an economic network into a political one have proven successful, as evidenced by the evolution of partner farmer coordinators into functional components of his political machinery.

Karp et al.'s (2008) mobilisation theory further supports this analysis. Agus has consistently maintained this trade network for a dozen years,

building the loyalty of partner farmers. This loyalty has been successfully converted into political support, aligning with the theory of pure mobilisation. This form of mobilisation relies on sustained engagement with loyal farmers, who in turn extend the influence by encouraging family members to back Agus. Such diffusion of support reflects the grassroots expansion that characterises pure mobilisation.

Some aspects of Agus's strategies reflect a patron-client relationship as described by Huntington and Nelson (1994). Here, Agus assumes the role of patron—providing credit and expedited payment—while farmers reciprocate with political backing. Yet, Agus's domination over pricing and lack of transparency reveal a deeper asymmetry. His control surpasses traditional patronage, marking him as a local boss rather than a mere patron.

Finally, Agus's coordinators play a critical role in vote buying, a key function of political machines. Political machines work by offering people what a candidate can give, then the recipient of the offer is expected to vote for the candidate as instructed. As Jono did, he offered a sum of money to target voters alongside instructions to support Agus (Interview with Jono or Sujono, partner farmer coordinator for one of the villages, 23 May 2023).

Two conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of Agus's political mobilisation through trade channels. First, Agus's use of the tobacco trading system aligns with a vertical mobilisation model, employing a pure mobilisation strategy based on a patron-client basis. Second, his reliance on partner farmer coordinators to mobilise votes reflects a conversion

mobilisation strategy, also within the vertical mobilisation model, but grounded in the workings of a political machine.

## **Local Boss Second-Line Mobilisation: The Religious Track**

Agus's political trajectory remains deeply intertwined with the religious organisation. The religious organisation and its affiliated bodies have served as stepping stones in Agus's political career. He strategically nurtures his relationships within the religious organisation by providing incentives to maintain his position both as a local boss and as a long-standing local parliament member.

Since first being elected in 2009, Agus has served three consecutive terms. His status as an incumbent affords him to aspiration funds, enabling the use of pork barrel politics as a



means of mobilising political support. He carefully organised the the distribution of these funds to respond to the aspirations of specific constituents. For example, when a *rebana* (Islamic tambourine) group in a hamlet, the majority of which are The religious organisation members, submitted a funding proposal through the formal recess procedure. The *rebana* group held a meeting with Agus to discuss the transaction process: recess funds in exchange for support and loyalty.

The next layer of mobilisation involves vote buying, targeting individuals as part of the community who are not affiliated with existing organisations in the community (e.g. farmer groups, arts groups, religious groups, etc.) and community groups that do not have a forum to receive aspiration funds. These vote buying was carried out by Agus's own family members,

as well as families of the religious organisation branch administrators, particularly in villages with dense familial networks members/extended families (Interview with Jono, partner farmer coordinator for one of the villages, 23 May 2023).

Meanwhile, Agus leveraged his personal relationship with influential religious organisation clerics (*kiai*). Together with his confidant Imam Sulaiman, Agus frequently visited the these clerics to maintain goodwill, seek spiritual blessings, and request explicit endorsements in the political sphere (Interview with Jono, partner farmer coordinator for one of the villages, 23 May 2023). The deference shown by followers of the *kiai* to their religious leaders makes them highly susceptible to mobilisation via clerical endorsement.

The mobilisation above are successful due to the effectiveness of the work



of both formal and informal political machines formed by Agus. Imam plays a pivotal role in this operation, acting as the sub-regency team coordinator, responsible for coordinating teams in the village-level. He describes his role as follows:

*"I act as a bridge between the team in the village, the residents, and Mr Agus. Mr Agus instructed me, 'Go to Mr Imam now.' Everything is scheduled by Mr Agus. The areas that haven't been worked on yet are Banyubiru and Soranan. Once Mr Agus gives the order, I take action." (Interview with Imam, Agus's trusted aides, 17 May 2023).*

The quote above illustrates Imam's duties as a sub-regency level coordinator within a political party. He initiated meeting

that paved the way for Agus's mobilisation of political support through pork barrel political practices.

Agus's mobilisation can be classified as vertical mobilisation based on the direction of movement. According to Nedelmann's (1987) theory of mobilisation, the flow of aspiration—from grassroots groups (such as *rebana* members) to political elites (Agus or his party)—exemplifies vertical mobilisation. This is evident in the involvement of family members of PSN branch administrators at the village level. Agus himself remains at the top of this structure, issuing instructions either directly or through trusted intermediaries such as Imam. Likewise, the mobilisation strategy of seeking *kiai* endorsements reflects a vertical mobilisation,



as the *kiai* are highly respected religious figures positioned higher than his followers in the social hierarchy.

The analysis can be further refined using the strategic perspective of mobilisation theory by Karp et al. (2008). The mobilisation of the religious organisation-affiliated constituents represents a case of conversion mobilisation, which is applied when a party or candidate already has a fixed voter base. In Agus's case, 75% of political support comes from the tobacco trade network, while 15-20% is derived from the expansion of religious networks, including *rebana* groups, local PSN branch administrators, and followers of influential *kiai*.

Agus's mobilisation through religious lines also aligns with Huntington and Nelson's (1994) mobilisation platform. The involvement of *rebana* groups, for instance, closely resembles a

patron-client relationship. These groups are financially dependent on Agus's assistance (albeit sourced from aspiration funds) to operations and equipment purchases. The inequality in this reciprocal relationship is evident: in exchange for aid, the *rebana* group offer electoral support.

Secondly, Agus employs the party's political machine at the village level. Some parts of Agus's political machine lie in the involvement of Agus's extended family, family members of PSN branch administrators, and trusted allies such as Imam. These actors also act as vote-buying agents, distributing material incentives in return for electoral loyalty. This reflects a pragmatic form of voter engagement, where the electorate prioritises tangible benefits over political programmes.

Thirdly, Agus relies on traditional ties by involving the religious organisation clerics

and activist figures in PSN. These traditional actors have the authority to control their small groups, where respect and deference are often granted by default, regardless of any personal or material benefit received from the leaders themselves.

The analysis above shows the mobilisation of political support by Agus correspond to the vertical direction mobilisation model, implemented through conversion mobilisation strategy grounded in three foundational mechanisms: traditional ties, patron-client relations, and political machine operations.

## **Strategies and Practices to Become a Local Boss**

### **1. Placing Family Members in Legislative Positions**

The political involvement of Siti Yumiyati, Agus's wife, stems from the implementation of the

30% female representation policy. General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum/KPU) Regulation No. 7/2013 reinforced Law No. 8/2012, which mandated that at least 30% of legislative candidates for the parliament be women, equivalent to one female candidate for every three nominees.

During this period, Agus had begun to wield considerable influence within the Bukit Hijau regency branch of the PSN. He proposed his wife to fulfil the gender quota requirement. Siti was positioned as a legislative candidate in a different electoral regency from Agus. Her candidacy proved successful: she was elected as a member of the Bukit Hijau local parliament for two consecutive periods, 2014-2018 and 2019-2024.

Siti Yumiyati's success is inseparable from Agus's intervention. Agus consistently accompanied his wife in



engaging with grassroots constituents (Interview with Agus, tobacco middleman, 8 August 2023). The mobilisation strategies employed were similar to those previously used by Agus himself. Siti Yumiyati also had trusted aides assigned to engage and organise community groups. The political transactions are also similar, ranging from group assistance to vote buying.

Agus gained multiple advantages from his wife's legislative placement. Firstly, she provided a mobilisation base during his bid for the 2018 regional elections as a candidate for deputy regent. Her electoral success in Bukit Hijau created a dependable mass support base. Secondly, it facilitated the expansion of the tobacco business. A significant portion of residents in this electoral regency are tobacco farmers. The joint status of Agus and his wife as local parliament

members increased their political credibility and enhanced the perception of security and reliability, persuading farmers to sell their tobacco through Agus's network. Theoretically, Agus's actions align with Sidel's findings where the placement of local boss families in formal political positions aims to secure control over economic resources.

## **2. Establishment of a Political Machine as a Vote Broker**

The existence of political machines not only in theoretical framework on the mobilisation of political support but also in the literature on local bossism. This overlap between the two frameworks is a key analytical point in this research. Therefore, this section focuses specifically on Agus's use of political machines and presents concrete examples, particularly

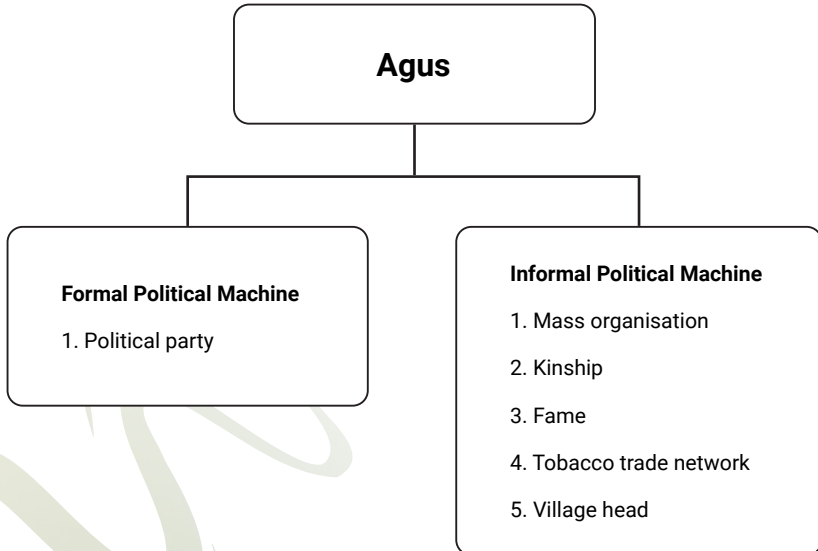


involving village heads. The broader mechanisms of two-way mobilisation are elaborated elsewhere.

Agus mobilised numerous actors in his vote-gathering efforts through an expansive political machine network. These machines operated at both

formal and informal levels. The formal political machine involves the political party structure itself. Meanwhile, the informal political machine was made up of mass organisations, familial ties, public reputation, and tobacco trade network.

**Figure 2. Agus's Political Machine Chart**





One central actor in this informal machinery is the village head, often regarded as a senior and respected figure (some of them are formed due to the tobacco trade network). Instructions from these figures are generally obeyed by the entire village community, including electoral directives. This influence is exercised through a transactional agreement. Agus provides aspiration funds to village heads, who in turn formally allocate these funds to the villages through programmes resembling official government initiatives. These allocations, however, come with consequences: the village community is converted into a vote bank for Agus. In return, village heads not only receive political and financial banking but also benefit materially from these arrangements.

Reflecting on Sidel's (2005) theoretical framework, the establishment of a political machine to broker votes for local bosses is similar to what happened in Thailand. There, *chao pho*—local political mafias and businessmen—play a crucial role in vote mobilisation. They act as brokers for members of parliament, leveraging their influence in exchange for protection and access to illegal businesses such as mining and gambling (Sidel, 2005). While Agus's case does not explicitly involve illegal enterprises, a similar mechanism is evident: partner farmer coordinators who assist in political mobilisation are rewarded with easy access to sales of partner farmers' tobacco commodities.



### 3. Government Project Arrangements and Aspiration Funds

Like many local bosses, Agus has discretion over government project arrangements and aspiration funds allocations. As a member of the local council, Agus is formally tasked with accommodating community aspirations and channeling them into tangible outcomes through these funds. The management of these funds is typically based on the number and prioritisation of proposal received. In principle, Agus accepts almost all aspirations from his constituents. Given the geographical dispersion of his supporters, he prioritises those who have not previously received support. Constituents who have already benefited are promised future allocations, typically in the following financial year after submitting new proposals.

An unrevealed variation of this practice is the distribution of aid to arts groups and village heads in two specific sub-regencies. In Kebonagung village, Agus reached out to the *kuda lumping* traditional dance group, facilitated by Jono, a coordinator of partner farmers and a member of the arts group. In this case, the aspiration fund was directed towards purchasing performance equipment according to the group's needs (Interview with Jono, partner farmer coordinator for one of the villages, 23 May 2023).

The ability to leverage aspiration funds in this way is a privilege afforded predominantly to incumbents. The existence of aspiration funds reduce the political costs associated with securing office. In general, a candidate must invest between IDR 750-900 million to secure a local parliament seat. Meanwhile, for incumbents like Agus,



the costs significantly lower (Interview with Imam, Agus's trusted aides, 17 May 2023). The state also facilitates incumbents for image-building and mobilising political support. Although aspiration funds are technically meant for public benefit, those acting as intermediaries often derive political capital from their distribution.

The statement above shows that Agus exerts a subtle monopoly over his constituents. He organises the allocation based on strategic political considerations; it can be priorities for the interests of constituents or priorities for personal interests, even he is able to distribute aspiration funds based on momentum, for example approaching the elections. Nevertheless, this monopoly operates within the

bounds of legality, as Agus consistently coordinates with local government authorities during the disbursement process.

#### **4. Local Regulation Setting**

This section draws upon the case of a demonstration by tobacco farmers protesting the proposed classification of tobacco as a narcotic substance. It highlights Agus's role as a legislator and his actions—whether implemented or not—in response to this policy threat.

Tobacco farmers, organised under the Indonesian Tobacco Farmers Association (Asosiasi Petani Tembakau Indonesia/ APTI) in Bukit Hijau regency, held a peaceful action to oppose Article 154, Paragraph 3 of the draft Health Bill. The article proposed by the central government equates tobacco with narcotics, psychotropic substances, alcoholic beverages, and other addictive substances.



According to tobacco farmers, such a regulation would torment their livelihoods by negatively affecting the economy (Suyitno, 2023).

As a representative of the people and chairman of Commission B, which deals with agricultural and economic affairs, Agus was compelled to respond to this issue. Although legislative authority over the bill rests with the national parliament, Agus and his colleagues at the regency level pledged to review the article and communicate their concerns.

Beyond the Health Bill, the increase in tobacco excise tax has also generated unrest. Farmers rallied outside the Ministry of Finance to urge a reassessment of the policy (Siregar, 2022). In this case, Agus sought to influence the Ministry's decision by advocating for a rational approach to the tax increase. He also coordinated with major cigarette factories

who purchase tobacco from Bukit Hijau, urging them to maintain procurement and ensure fair prices from farmers. Essentially, the tax increase on tobacco products affects the absorption of tobacco by factories, hence that it potentially reduce the level of cigarette consumption.

The above case signals a very real threat to Agus's political-economic base, which is rooted in the tobacco trade. Unwilling to remain passive, he actively leveraged his legislative position to shape policy outcomes and issue recommendations. Agus's actions are considered as efforts to defend the interests of tobacco farmers and maintain access to economic resources, although operating at the regency-level. In effect, these actions are consistent with the behaviour of local bosses who utilise formal political authority to protect strategic sectors.



## **5. Awarding Contracts or Concessions Related to Economic or Development Activities**

Back in 2004, the government issued a Decree of the Minister of Industry and Trade (SK Menperindag) (Brata, 2012), as a solution to falling tobacco prices. The regulation introduced a partnership system between cigarette manufacturers and farmers. Companies such as PT Intikarya, along with intermediaries like Agus, implemented this system to stabilise tobacco production and prices.

In this arrangement, as a sub-grader, Agus directly or indirectly plays a role in providing concessions related to tobacco trading activities to partner farmers. Farmers seeking to join the partnership must go through Agus. In other words, Agus directly provides forms of

partnership from PT Intikarya to farmers. Meanwhile, Agus also plays a role in providing concessions indirectly through PT Intikarya compliance's to the Partnership Decree. However, Agus as middleman is not a formal part of PT Intikarya's structure. This logic leads to the conclusion that Agus also plays an indirect role in giving concessions.

Concessions related to economic activities have similarities to the form of local bossism that occurred in Indonesia during the New Order era. At that time, military officials in local government naturally adhered to centralised programmes such as school funding or healthcare development, while using them to issue contracts to facilitate the business operations of entrepreneurs or even for personal enrichment

(Sidel, 2005). In similar fashion, Agus has leveraged the Partnership Decree to facilitate his tobacco trading business.

## 6. Intimidation and Political Violence

Agus has employed both direct and indirect methods of intimidation and political violence. The attributes of power attached to him allow Agus to control local bureaucracies and coercive forces. One such example occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Kebonagung village (home to many of Agus's constituents), a thanksgiving event was planned, but the local police initially denied the permit in accordance with health regulations. This is where Agus's role emerges, which is described by Jono as follows:

*"At that time, Mr Agus directly called the police station, saying 'That's my event—don't interfere.'"*

*The point is, Mr Agus told the police not to disband the event." (Interview with Jono, partner farmer coordinator for one of the villages, 23 May 2023).*

By involving Agus's control of coercive power, the event was successfully held without the intervention of the authorities.

The effort to control the local apparatus framed as care for his constituents. This ultimately builds political loyalty. His ability to guarantee such events not only protects the social fabric of rural communities but also secures his political base—particularly among partner farmers.

Agus has also resorted to more covert methods of intimidation. During the 2014 legislative elections, some of his political opponents removed and discarded his campaign posters. The perpetrator was linked to a subordinate organisation of one of the parties. To address



this situation, Agus contacted his subordinate, a known village thug, to intimidate and terrorise the individual responsible. The thug reportedly issued threats, including the possibility of kidnapping, as a deterrent to future sabotage.

This form of control over the coercive apparatus of the state and the profitable illegal economy has become an important instrument for the accumulation of capital and political power (Sidel, 1997). In this case, control over the coercive apparatus has an impact as Agus's efforts to protect the partner farmers are the same as Agus keeping economic control on track.

This phenomenon also echoes the longstanding practice of thuggery in Indonesian politics, most notably institutionalised during the New Order through organisations like Pemuda Pancasila (Sidel, 2005). The bottom line remains the

same; thuggery transforms into electoral services that at least provide a way for local bosses to grasp power.

## **Local Boss Limitation**

The dynamics of the implementation of party bylaws and regulations have become a significant barrier for Agus in maintaining and reproducing his power through party leadership at the regency level. Previously, Agus had served as a chair of the PSN branch management for two periods, both times elected by acclamation. As his final term approached its end, most of the sub-regency-level party administrators supported his re-election. However, despite the outcome of the local deliberation naming Agus as chair, the regional management board (at provincial level) substituted his name with another candidate and forwarded the replacement to the party's central board. Finally,



the leadership of the branch was in the hands of another person while Agus served as secretary (Interview with Imam, Agus's trusted aides, 17 May 2023).

The leadership change, although politically significant, was procedurally valid. Party regulations state that district level leaders are elected through sub-district party leadership deliberations, a process that was following in Agus's case. Similarly, the provincial level's alteration of the proposed name did not violate party regulations. Of course, this decision considers the interests of party consolidation.

The abundance of economic resources was unable to maintain dominance, which resulted in the decline of Agus's influence within the party hierarchy. While he continues to serve as branch secretary, Agus no longer has access to key levers of power necessary to control party

direction at the local level in line with his interests. His ability to influence decisions has been curtailed by the institutional power of the party. In this regard, political parties play an important role because basically local bosses are born from democratic mechanisms and need political parties as vehicles.

Elements of democracy such as political parties, which should ideally be the cornerstone of local bosses' power, are actually weakening local bosses. The strong institutionalisation of political parties, enshrined in bylaws and other regulations, is an 'iron cage' for local bosses. It is impossible for them to break these rules to advance their political careers. They will only be kicked out of the political party. Switching party affiliation is also futile because other parties apply similar rules. In addition, the party's institutional 'iron cage' have the potential



to 'kill' the existence of local bosses. Stagnant conditions within the party are vulnerable to being shaken by the power of party superordinates—regency to central level leaders—unless they have a patronage network with party officials at the centre.

## Conclusion

This paper concludes that the transformation of local bosses involves three key factors: the monopolisation of economic resources, the mobilisation of socio-religious networks, and control over the formal political sphere. This is evidenced by the experience of Agus, a tobacco middleman who transformed into a local boss by consolidating trade networks, engaging with socio-religious communities, and securing electoral legitimacy through democratic mechanism as a member of the Bukit Hijau parliament. This trajectory

confirms the notion that the state, as an institutional framework, can produce and sustain figures like Agus.

Agus successfully maintained his position in the Bukit Hijau parliament by employing classic local boss strategies for mobilising political support. Central to this was his monopolistic control over the the tobacco trade system. Agus, as a middleman, carefully converted tobacco farmers into a dependable electoral base. These trade networks were then reinforced by support from socio-religious networks. Mobilisation was further bolstered by practices such as vote buying and pork-barrel politics, targeting religious organisation members.

In reproducing his power, Agus successfully employed six out of ten strategies commonly associated with local bosses. First, he placed his wife as a member of local parliament,



securing both political and economic benefits. Second, he established a political machine composed of loyalists to act as vote brokers. Third, he organised aspiration funds using pork barrel political tactics. Fourth, he engaged in local regulation-setting by advocating for policies favourable to his economic interests. Fifth, he awarded economic concessions through tobacco farming partnership system. Sixth, he employed both intimidation and violence by controlling the local police and using threats against political opponents.

However, the limitation comes from the political party institutional system, which plays a vital role in consolidating the power of local bosses. The party's institutional system, as enshrined in party regulations, is an iron cage that limits the space for local bosses to maintain dominance within the

party. Local bosses' control of economic resources appears futile in the face of superordinate power from party leaders at the provincial and central levels. This proves that local bosses also do not have perfect political control. Thus, this paper is expected to add to the repertoire of knowledge and offering new perspectives both in interpreting strategies employed by local bosses and the institutional constraints that limit their power.



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# Policy Implementation Scheme and Policy Pathology: Lessons from KPR Sejahtera in the Special Region of Yogyakarta

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## Abstract

*This paper analyses the KPR Sejahtera policy, a mortgage loan programme for low-income communities (masyarakat berpenghasilan rendah/MBR) initiated by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (Kementerian Pekerjaan Umum dan Perumahan Rakyat/PUPR). Although the policy has good intentions, its implementation, particularly the funding scheme has hindered the effectiveness of housing provision in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Using the pathology of public policy framework by Hogwood & Peters (1985) and the NATO scheme from Hood & Margetts (2007), this study explores why the KPR Sejahtera funding mechanism has proven ineffective and has instead created new issues. The Directorate of Infrastructure Financing (Direktorat Jenderal Pembiayaan Infrastruktur) delegates this programme to state-owned banks, but the implementation details are left to each bank. The core problem arises from the mismatch between the banks' profit-oriented nature and the social mission of the program. This leads to internal conflicts within the banks and results in the failure to reach the targeted MBR beneficiaries. This situation reflects the 'earmarking' pathology, in which a budget designed for a specific programme is allocated outside of its original purpose, leading to sub-optimal policy outcomes.*

**Keywords:** FLPP fund; KPR Sejahtera programme; policy pathology; budgeting pathology; earmarking

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## Introduction

Providing affordable housing for the entire community is an important agenda of the government. Statistics Indonesia data in 2020 showed a housing backlog of 12.7 million from the target of 13.5 million that has been launched since 2010, covering all socio-economic classes (Brilian, 2023). In order to overcome this problem, the government initiated a housing funding policy through home ownership credit (Kredit Pemilikan Rumah/ KPR) Sejahtera with the Housing Provision Liquidity Facility (Fasilitas Likuiditas Pembiayaan Perumahan/FLPP) scheme, specifically for low-income communities (MBR), with the distribution of funds through state-owned banks (Badan Usaha Milik Negara/BUMN) and regional development banks (Bank Pembangunan Daerah/ BPD).

The mortgage policy was initiated in 2015 by President Joko Widodo through the One Million Houses programme which targets the construction of one million housing units each year, with a ratio of 70% housing units for MBR, and 30% housing units for non-MBR. This was conveyed in the president's speech on 29 April 2015 in Semarang (Kementerian Pekerjaan Umum dan Perumahan Rakyat, 2018). The KPR Sejahtera programme continues until 2022 with total funds disbursed by banks amounting to more than IDR102.2 trillion from 2020-2022.

Specifically in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, data on the realisation of the total distribution of FLPP funds in 2022-2022 by BP Tapera can be seen in table 1.



**Table 1. Realisation of Total Distribution of FLPP Funds in the Special Region of Yogyakarta 2020-2022**

No	Regency/ City	2020		2021		2022		Total	
		Unit	FLPP Value (IDR)	Unit	FLPP Value (IDR)	Unit	FLPP Value (IDR)	Unit	FLPP Value (IDR)
1	Bantul regency	47	4.521.817.500	41	3.850.770.000	106	10.764.356.250	194	19.136.943.750
2	Gunung Kidul regency	143	14.675.730.750	197	21.013.597.461	208	21.938.206.500	548	57.627.534.711
3	Kulon Progo regency	6	555.375.000	8	774.900.000	3	274.856.250	17	1.605.131.250
4	Sleman regency	78	6.531.562.500	75	7.083.150.000	103	10.273.746.825	256	23.888.459.325

*Source: Processed by the author based on data from BP Tapera (unpublished), 2022. Some data is available on BP Tapera's official website:*

<https://www.tapera.go.id/flpp-2022/>

The data above shows the trend of FLPP amounts in Special Region of Yogyakarta and shows an increase in the span of two years. The FLPP allocation for Gunung Kidul is the highest, and the lowest is Kulon Progo.

The data in Table 2 shows that of the total FLPP fund distribution of IDR 43.2 trillion

(420 housing units), it was only able to reach the lowest segment of the MBR of IDR 1,357 trillion (7 housing units). This shows that the KPR Sejahtera programme has not been optimal in reducing the housing backlog, especially for the MBR group that needs it most.



**Table 2. Realisation of FLPP Fund Disbursement 2022  
(Comparison between Total Fund Disbursement and  
Disbursement Based on Lowest Income)**

No	Total Units	Total FLPP Value (IDR)	Total Housing	Total Developers	Total Lending Banks	Total Province	Total Regency/ City
1	420	43.251.165.825	34	21	6	1	4
2	14	1.357.125.000	7	6	3	1	3

*Source: Processed by the author based on data from BP Tapera (unpublished), 2022. Some data is available on BP Tapera's official website:*

<https://www.tapera.go.id/flpp-2022/>

## Research Methods

This study employs a case study approach with a descriptive-quantitative method. Data were collected through document analysis, interviews, and literature review (Jaya, 2021). The literature review included data on the realisation of FLPP fund distribution from 2020 to 2022 in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, related regulations, and cooperation agreements related to the distribution of FLPP program. Interviews were conducted with Ms. Nenda

Nurjanah Niode from BP Tapera's Cooperation Analysis Division and were supported by literature on banking profiles and business models. The Special Region of Yogyakarta was selected as the research site due to its significant housing backlog, which reached approximately 250,000 units in 2022. In addition, data from 2021 stated that 23.47 percent of households in the region were living in houses that they did not own (Pradana, 2022). Data analysis followed an inductive approach, beginning with the



hypothesis of a policy pathology. The data were analysed through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Jaya, 2021). The results of the analysis indicate a policy pathology, characterised by a gap in the available funding scheme instruments.

## Literature Review

The topic of this paper has been conducted in previous study, particularly regarding the low effectiveness of the KPR Sejahtera programme. Wijayanti et al. (2011) in their study at Bumi Rejo Damai Residence in Pekalongan, found that the implementation of subsidised KPR was ineffective due to poor targeting, where 47% of beneficiaries were not first-time home buyers, and 2% did not meet the income eligibility criteria. Similarly, Rahayu (2020), in her study at the BTN Sharia Bekasi Branch, concluded that the BTN

Sejahtera IB KPR product was also misused—primarily serving as an investment vehicle rather than being used for residential purposes.

The contradiction between the policy vision of KPR Sejahtera policy and the operational mission of the banking sector—both of which are difficult to integrate—has led each bank to revise its financing systems and implementation strategies. Sari (2017) found that Indonesia’s dual-banking system (conventional and Islamic banks) results in differing calculations of subsidised KPR. Fatmawati (2017) highlighted that banks have minimised the risk of non-performing loans through creditworthiness analysis and customer classification, applying prudent banking principles. This finding is further supported by Wijaya (2021), who observed that the vision of improving access to subsidised mortgages is not

matched by the capacities of implementing agents, which are often hindered by conflicts of interest. These studies point to a broader issue: policy makers often fail to account for the institutional and operational diversity of banks, which affects their performance in distributing FLPP funds. As a result, distributing banks are forced to adapt their business models to accommodate FLPP funding while protecting themselves from potential losses. This situation reflects a lack of consistency on the part of the government in aligning policy design with implementation realities—demonstrating what Hoppe (2018) calls an insensitivity to real-world challenges during the policy-making process.

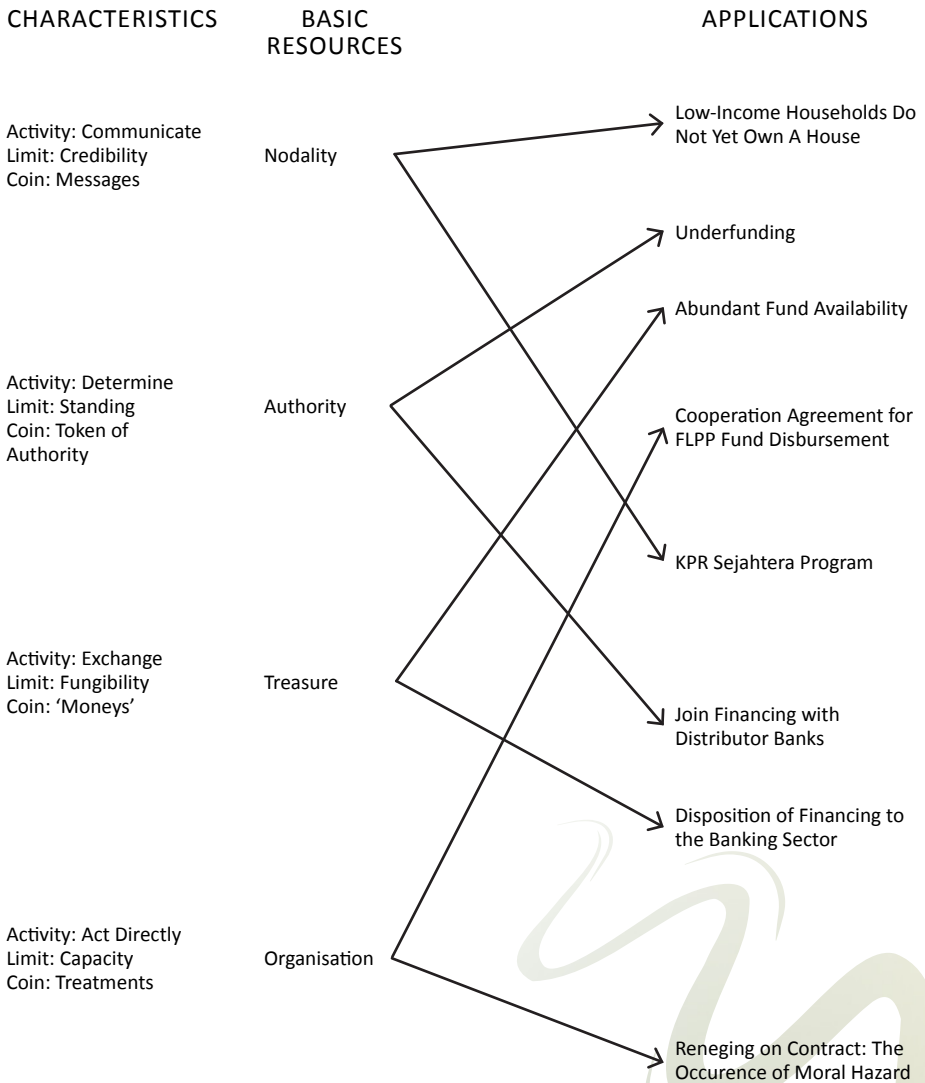
## Theoretical Framework

This paper analyses policy pathology through the lens of earmarking pathology, as defined

by Hogwood & Peters (1985) in *The Pathology of Public Policy*. It further explores the traits of such pathologies using the NATO scheme in *The Tools of Government in the Digital Age* (Hood & Margetts, 2007). The analysis highlights the crucial role of discretion in policy design, arguing that excessive discretion is often a symptom of poor design rather than intentional flexibility. This interpretation aligns with new policy theory, which views such failures not as the result of deliberate sabotage (as posited by old policy theory) (Cairney, 2021). The following scheme illustrates this conceptual framework:



**Chart 1. Application of NATO Scheme Theory**



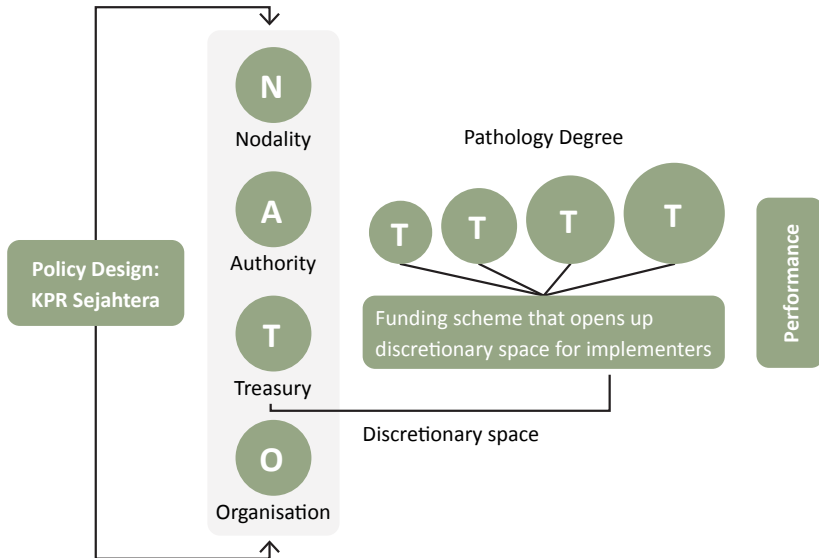
Source: adapted and processed by the author based on Hood & Margetts, 2007



The government introduced the KPR Sejahtera subsidy to provide affordable housing through an instalment scheme specifically targeted at MBR who do not yet own a house (Brilian, 2023). Funding is executed through a joint financing, combining allocations from the state budget with capital from partnering banks. Once the funding becomes available (treasure), the Ministry of PUPR delegates the responsibility for distribution to state-owned and regional development banks (BUMN and BPD, respectively). The transfer of housing finance authority to these financial institutions (banking sector) is

formalised through cooperation agreements for the distribution of FLPP funds, typically initiated by the disbursement of subsidised down payment assistance (SBUM) (Hood & Margetts, 2007). Unfortunately, moral hazard emerged in the banking sector, as some banks failed to fully adhere to the terms of these agreements. This breach undermined the achievement of the policy's intended vision. The root of the issue lies in pathological traits within the decision-making process when designing the policy, as explained in the chart below:

**Chart 2. Application of NATO Scheme Theory and Policy Pathology Theory**



*Source: Processed by the author based on Hogwood & Peters, 1985; Hood & Margetts, 2007*

In policy design, it is often assumed by policy makers that the availability of funding is the primary determinant of success. However, the experience of KPR Sejahtera demonstrates that this assumption does not always hold. This is because policy makers eventually chose to eliminate

the funding scheme instrument, creating discretionary space under the rationale of mitigating the risk of funding shortages. This discretionary space was subsequently leveraged by distributing banks to maximise profit, rather than to achieve the intended policy outcomes.



As more banks became involved in the distribution of FLPP funds, the volume of distributed funds increased. Yet, the problem lies in the fact that each participating bank operated under different orientations and business models. This diversity in discretionary execution determines the degree of policy pathology. In other words, the greater the degree of divergence, the more pronounced the pathology and, consequently, the higher the potential loss. The inequality in designing funding instruments to align with individual banks' business model has resulted in misallocation, where budgetary benefits are disproportionately accessed by the middle and upper segment of the MBR, rather than the bottom segment. This condition exemplifies the budgeting pathology known as earmarking, where the earmarked budget

fails to reach its intended target group, leading to sub-optimal policy outcomes (Hogwood & Peters, 1985).

From a design thinking perspective, this situation reflects discretion as a design omission (Peters, 2018) that does not place discretion as an explicit element within the policy design process (Cairney, 2021). Rather than being evidence of deliberate flexibility, such omission represents carelessness in acknowledging the diverse banking business models during policy formulation. This insensitivity toward each bank's business model is a pathological symptom. Basically, funding scheme instruments should be explicitly crafted to allow for discretion where appropriate, but only in a manner that is deliberate and aligned with the policy's core vision. Unfortunately, the presence of pathological traits blur the line between discretion



as a necessary design element or discretion as an afterthought. Strictly speaking, discretion is a design oversight, but the presence of pathological traits makes it appear as if it were deliberately planned.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Discretion and Negligence of Policy Design**

This paper argues that discretion within the context of the KPR Sejahtera policy constitutes a form of negligence in policy design. Discretion does not emerge from deliberate intent, but rather from the absence of detailed planning within the policy design process. In other words, it arises as an improvisational response to gaps left by inadequate design. This flaw leads to pathological

symptoms in public policy (Hogwood & Peters, 1985), particularly with respect to the funding scheme.

Negligence occurred when the Ministry of PUPR failed to establish a clear mechanism for the distribution of funds. As a result, distributing banks developed their own business models, which tend to be profit-oriented and insufficiently responsive to the needs of low-income communities. Meanwhile, the KPR Sejahtera programme was initially introduced as a government subsidy initiative aimed at providing affordable housing for MBR, as mandated under Law No. 1 of 2011 on Housing and Settlements. Eligibility criteria, including income ceilings and house size limits, are regulated in Ministerial Decree No. 411/KPTS/M/2021.



Additionally, Ministerial Regulations No. 20/PRT/M/2019 and No. 35/2021 outline a joint financing scheme between the government and participating banks. The government also established PT. Sarana Multigriya Finansial (SMF), funded by the national budget, to provide long-term secondary financing to banks, as mandated in Government Regulation No. 57 of 2020 and Presidential Regulation No. 100 of 2020.

FLPP funds are distributed by selected state-owned banks under cooperation agreements for the provision of down payment assistance subsidies (Subsidi Bantuan Uang Muka/SBUM). These banks include Bank Tabungan Negara (BTN), Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI), Bank Mandiri, BPD DIY, and others. However, Ministerial Regulation No. 35/2021 does not detail the technical procedures for fund disbursement by each bank. As

a result, each bank has employed its own business approach, leading to the emergence of six different fund distribution methods in the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

Originally, KPR Sejahtera aimed to facilitate home ownership for MBR through credit-based schemes. However, because banks were granted autonomy in implementing their programme without specific technical guidelines from the ministry, the policy became subject to each bank's internal framework. This opened a wide discretionary space, effectively transforming the programme from a social initiative into a transactional arrangement between banks and the government.

While discretion may have expanded access to funding, it also introduces inconsistencies and potential risks, as implementation varied across



institutions. The government ought to have introduced a clear and standardised funding scheme instrument to ensure the policy remained aligned with its original social objectives. The failure to do so enabled banks to fill this institutional void with ad hoc solutions. This, in effect, exemplifies discretion as a consequence of design omission in policymaking.

## **Funding Schemes for Positive Discrimination: Programme Discretion and Accuracy**

### **1. Bank Patterns Colouring Funding Schemes**

The government's lack of sensitivity to the operational competencies of distributing banks has resulted in the failure to formulate a standardised funding scheme that accommodates the distinct stages and processes undertaken by each institutions.

This oversight has created a space for discretion, effectively granting each distributing bank the authority to implement its own interpretation of the policy. Basically, each banking entity operates under a specific business orientation, embedded from its inception as regulated in government regulations. These institutional profiles and orientation serve as the foundation for each bank's business practices. The following table presents a summary of the business models adopted by the distributing banks, compiled from official sources published on the respective institutions' websites:





**Table 3. Business Model of FLPP Fund Distributing Banks  
in the Special Region of Yogyakarta**

No	Bank Names	Bank Orientations	Focus Sector	Service Sector	Operation Area Sector
1	BTN	Mortgage Bank	Real estate	The general public, developers and property entrepreneurs	National
2	BTN Sharia	Sharia Mortgage Bank	Real estate	The general public, developers and sharia-based property entrepreneurs	National
3	BRI	MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise) Bank	MSMEs	Lower middle class society	National
4	BPD DIY	Regional Development Bank	MSMEs	Lower middle class society in the DIY region	Regional-Special Region of Yogyakarta



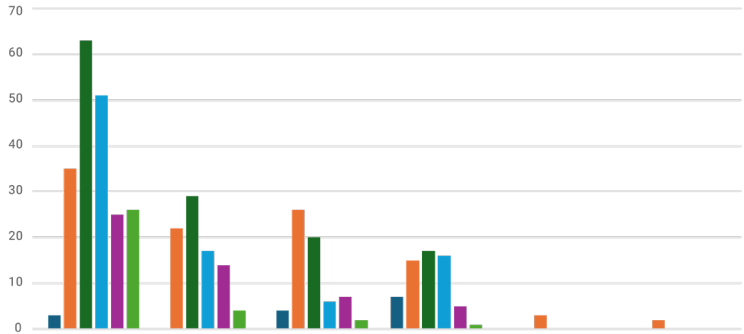
No	Bank Names	Bank Orientations	Focus Sector	Service Sector	Operation Area Sector
5	Bank Jateng	Regional Development Bank	Retail Banking	Central Java Society	Regional-Central Java
6	Bank Mandiri	Business Bank	Business Development	Entrepreneur	National

*Source: research data processing results, 2023*

Insensitivity results in varying degrees of policy pathology. The more FLPP funds are allocated to the upper-middle segment of the MBR, the higher the degree of pathology. Conversely, the smaller the proportion of funds reaching this segment, the lower the pathology. In other words, a higher degree of pathology illustrates a greater misallocation of funds—resources intended for the lower-income segment of the

MBR, who are in greater need. The following graph illustrates the order of distributional inaccuracy among the implementing banks, based on the extent to which their funding failed to reach the intended beneficiaries. Ranked from the most to the least inaccurate, the distribution is as follows: BTN, BRI, BTN Sharia, BPD DIY, Bank Jateng, and Bank Mandiri.

**Graph 1. Degree of Pathology of Banks Distributing FLPP Funds in the Special Region of Yogyakarta in 2022**



Description	Bank BTN	Bank BRI	Bank BTN SHARIA	Bank BPD DIY	Bank Jateng	Bank Mandiri
Income ≤ 2 Million	3	0	4	7	0	0
2 Million < income ≤ 3 Million	35	22	26	15	3	2
3 Million < income ≤ 4 Million	63	29	20	17	0	0
4 Million < income ≤ 5 Million	51	17	6	16	0	0
5 Million < income ≤ 6 Million	25	14	7	5	0	0
Income > 6 Million	26	4	2	1	0	0



Source: Processed by the author based on the 2022 BP Tapera FLPP Fund Distribution Realisation Data. Available at: BP Tapera <https://www.tapera.go.id/flpp-2022/>

The discretion inscribed by BTN can be understood in the context of its business model as a specialised mortgage bank that has supported housing finance since 1897. BTN has proven

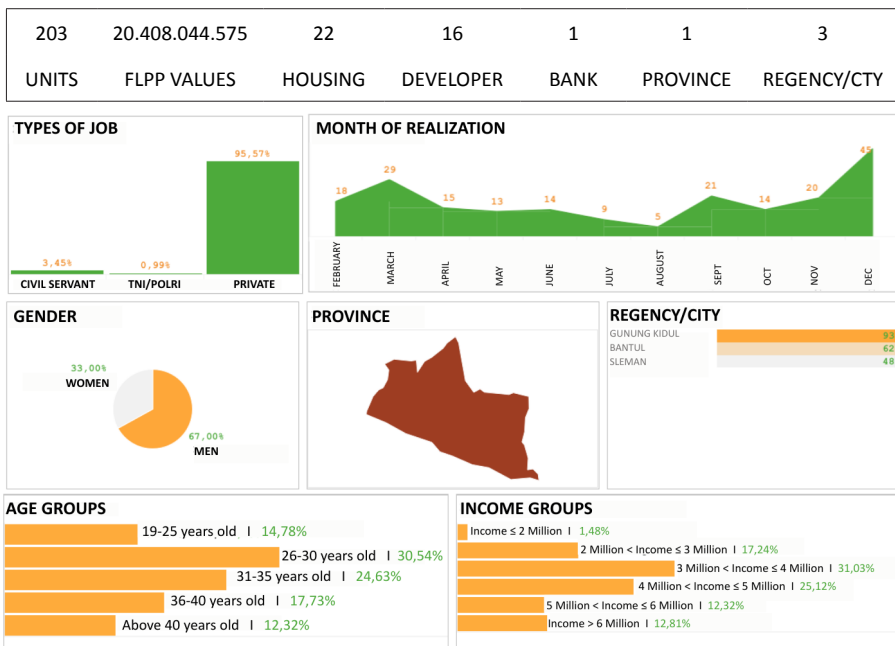
successful in this sector through various achievements, including the issuance of EBA Danareksa Sarana Multigriya Finansial I-Home Ownership Credit BTN (SMF I-KPR BTN) in 2009.



The bank has also focused on transforming itself into a Leading House Bank with World-Class Banking Service (BTN, 2019).

This orientation is reflected in BTN's approach to distributing FLPP funds, as illustrated in the chart below:

**Chart 2. Realisation of FLPP Fund Distribution by BTN in the Special Region of Yogyakarta 2022**



Source: BP Tapera, 2022

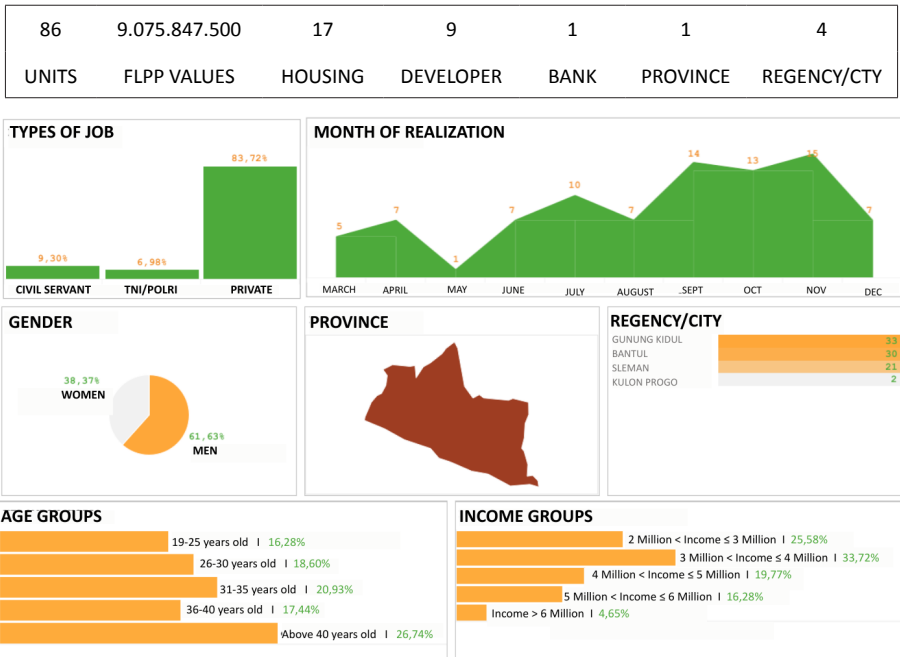
A total of 203 housing units (48.33%) valued at IDR 20.408 trillion (47.18%) were

successfully distributed to MBR. BTN leads in the distribution of FLPP funds but tends to

prioritise the upper-middle segment, particularly household earning between IDR 2–5 million, followed by those earning above IDR 5 million, and lastly those earning below IDR 2 million. Although BTN has the potential to reach all income levels, its profit-oriented approach results in less stringent targeting.

As a result, BTN also ranks highest in terms of targeting inaccuracies in the FLPP programme. A similar pathological pattern is shown by BRI, the second largest FLPP distributor, whose discretion primarily benefits MBR with incomes ranging from IDR 2 million to IDR 4 million.

**Chart 3. Realisation of FLPP Fund Distribution by BRI in the Special Region of Yogyakarta 2022**



Source: BP Tapera, 2022



Founded on 16 December 1895 (BRI, 2023), BRI was formally established as a single bank under Government Regulation No. 21 of 1992. Historically, BRI has focused on serving the lower-middle segment and MSMEs. However, to avoid stagnation and to realise its 2025 vision of becoming the most valuable banking group in Southeast Asia and champion of financial inclusion, BRI has had to adapt its business model (BRI, 2023). BRI views financial inclusiveness as the diversity of service users engaging with its products, a strategy rooted in rational efforts to balance

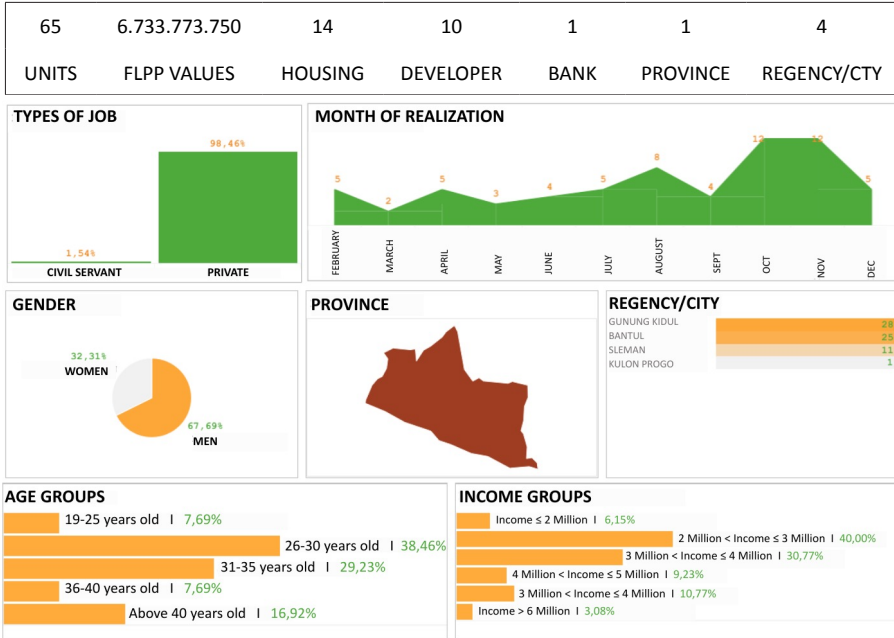
inclusivity with profitability while remaining aligned with the company's long-term goals (BRI, 2023).

The third highest degree of pathological funding in the FLPP distribution is attributed to BTN Sharia, which predominantly serves middle to upper-income classes, particularly those earning between IDR 2 million and IDR 4 million, followed by those with incomes ranging from IDR 4 million to IDR 6 million, as depicted in the graph below:





**Chart 4. Realisation of FLPP Fund Distribution by BTN Sharia in the Special Region of Yogyakarta 2022**



Source: BP Tapera, 2022

BTN Sharia, a subsidiary of BTN, faces similar issues to its parent company. Although it successfully reaches the lowest-income segment of the MBR, it still contributes significantly to the FLPP budget allocation. BTN Sharia's focus on Islamic financial principles limits its

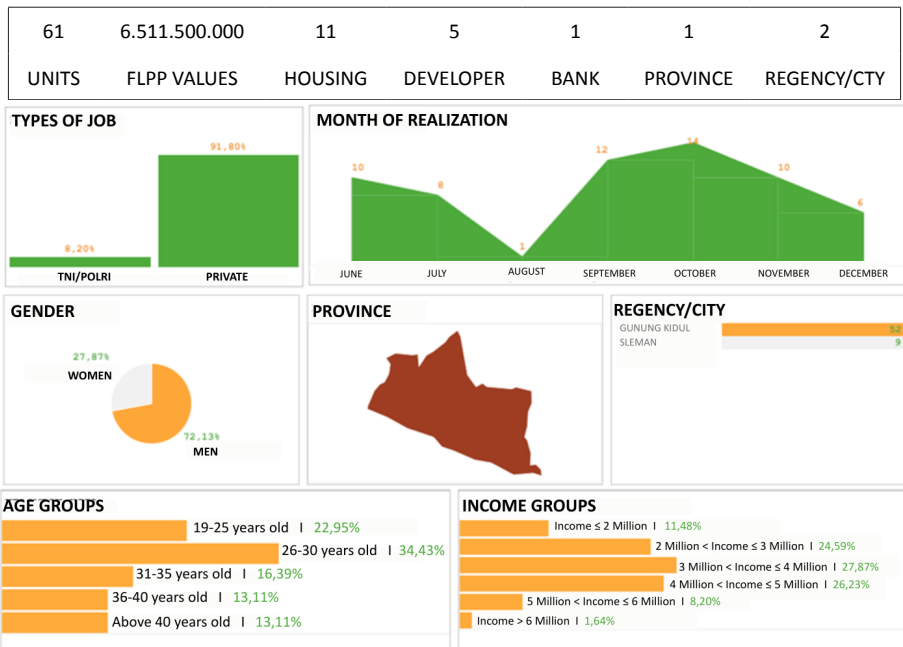
customer base, reducing its growth potential. However, it excels in providing house finance across all income levels, with a specific focus on serving Muslim communities. To overcome these limitations, BTN Sharia is encouraged to expand its outreach and provide



equal opportunities to financial services for all segments of the Muslim population (BTN Sharia, 2019).

BPD DIY ranks fourth in terms of pathological level, primarily serving the upper-middle class segment with average monthly incomes between IDR 2 million and IDR 5 million, as illustrated in the data below:

**Chart 5. Realisation of FLPP Fund Distribution by BPD DIY in the Special Region of Yogyakarta 2022**



Source: BP Tapera, 2022

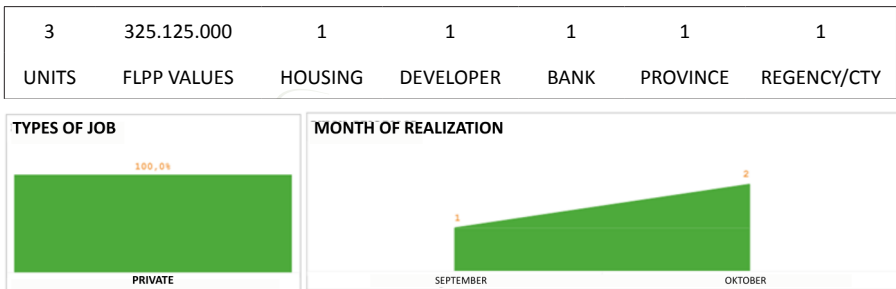


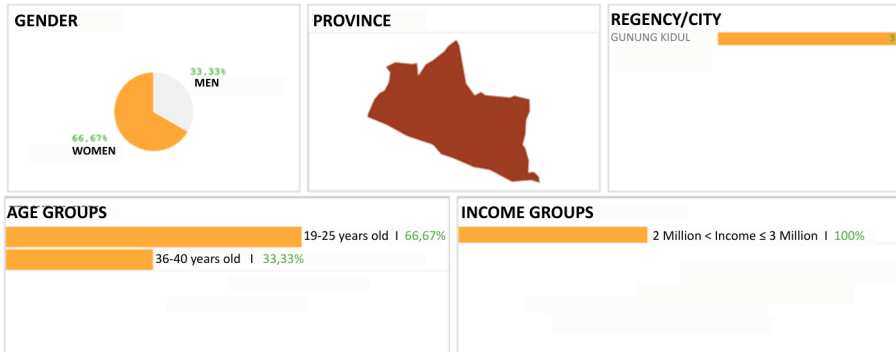
BPD DIY has shown remarkable success in reaching the lower-income class of the MBR segment, achieving the highest distribution among all participating banks. This bank has previously been entrusted by the state with a mandate to mobilise state capital in order to build and develop regional potential by leveraging local resources, especially through the empowerment of MSMEs (BPD DIY, 2022). This strong alignment with local socio-economic

characteristics explains why BPD DIY occupies the first position in terms of accuracy in targeting FLPP fund recipients. Its deep understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of lower-middle-class communities has made it highly effective in fulfilling its mandate.

The low degree of pathology is occupied by Bank Jateng which distributes FLPP funds to middle-income class earning between IDR 2 million and IDR 3 million, as shown in the data below:

**Chart 6. Realisation of FLPP Fund Distribution by Bank Jateng in the Special Region of Yogyakarta 2022**





Source: BP Tapera, 2022

The distribution of FLPP funds by Bank Jateng shows its contribution to supporting regional development in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Bank Jateng, which carries the cultural and operational identity of Central Java, faces a distinct challenge when operating beyond its core region. Its business culture is inherently shaped by the socio-economic characteristics of Central Java (Bank Jateng, 2022), which may not align seamlessly with the local context of Yogyakarta. So, it is natural that Bank Jateng's performance in this area is less

than optimal, as many of its systems need further adaption to the differing cultural and operation of the area. Under-performance in this context indicates a mismatch between internal banking processes and the external demands of the FLPP fund distribution mandate. Finally, Bank Mandiri occupies the lowest pathological degree, distributing FLPP funds to middle-income MBR households earning between IDR 2 million and IDR 3 million, as follows:





undermining the policy's vision. In this context, banks that successfully navigate discretion are not only adapting—they are compensating for policy design negligence.

To align the government's housing programme with their own business operations, banks integrate their respective models into the programme's implementation. However, this adaptation can give rise to pathological tendencies, wherein banks prioritise business continuity over inclusive housing distribution. The discretionary space, initially a gap-filler, transforms into a domain of competitive business arena. Banks begin to search for the most profitable models under the justification of mitigating funding risks.

This phenomenon leads to an irony: while some banks report massive FLPP fund distribution, it masks the deviation from the

policy's core vision. The banks with the largest disbursements are often those showing the greatest deviation from the core policy objectives. The degree of policy pathology is reflected in the significant proportion of funds flowing to the middle-upper MBR segment, rather than to the most economically vulnerable.

Thus, discretion is not merely incidental; it is a consequence of design omission. The variation in discretionary practices reflects different design patterns, shaped by each bank's business model. Ideally, these differences should have been formally integrated into the policy formulation. Had the six distributing banks been involved from the outset, the KPR Sejahtera programme could have been implemented with a framework of six differentiated and tailored funding instruments,



each aligned to the business strategy and institutional constraints of the respective bank.

## **2. Sub-Optimal Policy Outcomes Due to Low Targeting Accuracy**

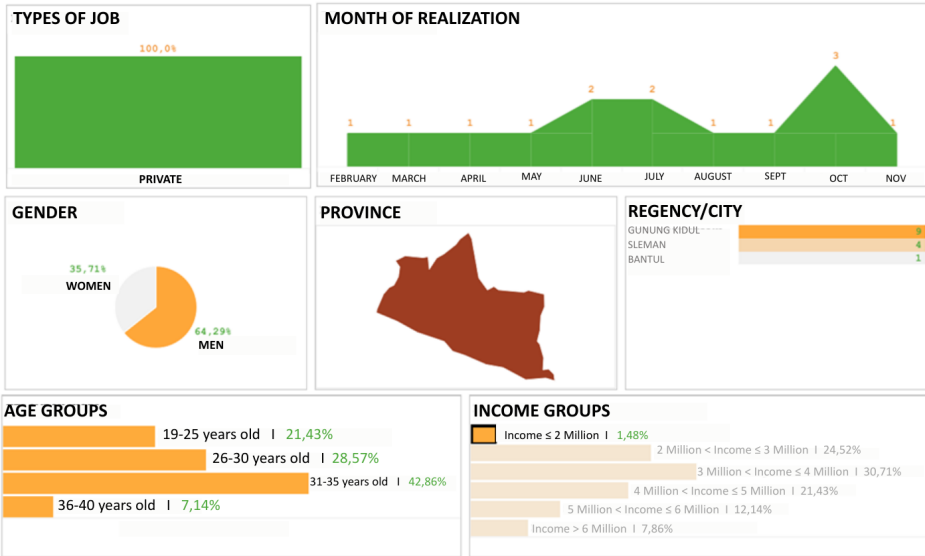
The absence of well-defined funding scheme instruments causes the policy sub-optimal, as it fails to effectively reach the lowest-income groups within the MBR segment. On the contrary, disproportionate distribution of the benefits is enjoyed by those in the upper class of the segment. This misalignment in targeting

stems from the insensitivity of policymakers, who neglected to develop appropriate scheme instruments or to leverage the unique business models of the distributing banks. In fact, this is very crucial to enhance targeting accuracy and ensure that the programme reached its intended beneficiaries. This insensitivity during policy design has contributed directly to the emergence of policy pathology, which ironically harms the government's own goals to achieve equitable distribution. The effects of this policy failure are illustrated in the following data:



**Chart 8. Data on the Realisation of FLPP Fund Distribution Based on the Lowest Income in the Special Region of Yogyakarta 2022**

14	1.357.125.000	7	6	3	1	3
UNITS	FLPP VALUES	HOUSING	DEVELOPER	BANK	PROVINCE	REGENCY/CTY



Source: BP Tapera, 2022

MBR households with incomes ≤ IDR 2 million that were successfully distributed amounted to 14 units with an FLPP value of IDR 1,357 trillion. These units were developed across seven housing complexes by six developers in three regions:

Gunung Kidul regency, Sleman regency, and Bantul regency. All recipients were employed in the private sector and ranged in age from 19 to 40 years. This group represented a mere 3.33% of



the total 420 KPR housing units distributed in the Special Region of Yogyakarta during the 2022 period.

The MBR group with the lowest income ( $\leq$  IDR 2 million) should have been the primary target of the KPR Sejahtera financing assistance. Greater inclusion of this lowest-income segment would have provided stronger evidence that the programme was reaching those most in need. However, the opposite occurred in practice. A dislocation of discrimination emerged, in which programme implementation diverged from the government's initial vision. This dislocation ultimately became evidence of policy pathology, contributing to the sub-optimal achievement of the programme's objectives.

The distribution of these 14 housing units was carried out by three distributing banks, namely BPD DIY, BTN Sharia, and BTN.

These results indicate that these banks should be given a greater opportunity in distributing FLPP funds. However, this assignment needs to be supported by a properly designed funding scheme instrument, one free from pathological traits. Despite their potential, their effectiveness remains limited by an inadequate policy design, thus opening up space for arbitrary implementation. Meanwhile, other distributing banks have failed to reach the lowest-income MBR segment, largely because the government has overlooked their potential and has not provided targeted support to enhance their performance.

The low accuracy of discrimination can be attributed to differences in discretionary practices. Different patterns of discretion certainly bring different processes according to the operational system of the business model in distributing



FLPP funds. These differences significantly determine the degree of pathology produced. Some banks have harmonised their business processes with the policy assignment, but ironically, this synergy has also enabled greater deviation from the original policy intent, thereby producing a high degree of pathology. Conversely, banks with less effective integration often exhibit lower degrees of pathology, not due to greater alignment, but due to inefficiency and implementation difficulties. Thus, the processes underpinning these discretionary patterns must inform the future design of funding scheme instruments. By understanding how these internal banking processes interact with policy execution, policymakers can create more precise and responsive designs.

### 3. Discrimination Accuracy Treatment

As the adage goes, “prevention is better than cure”, so it is important to design policies carefully (Hogwood & Peters, 1985). One strategic step is to carry out budget efficiency, ensuring that government expenditure is precisely targeted. It is better to distribute a small budget accurately than to manage a larger budget ineffectively. For example, allocating IDR 1,357 trillion to fund 14 well-targeted housing units is more rational than spending IDR 43,251 trillion on 420 housing units, the majority of which are misdirected.

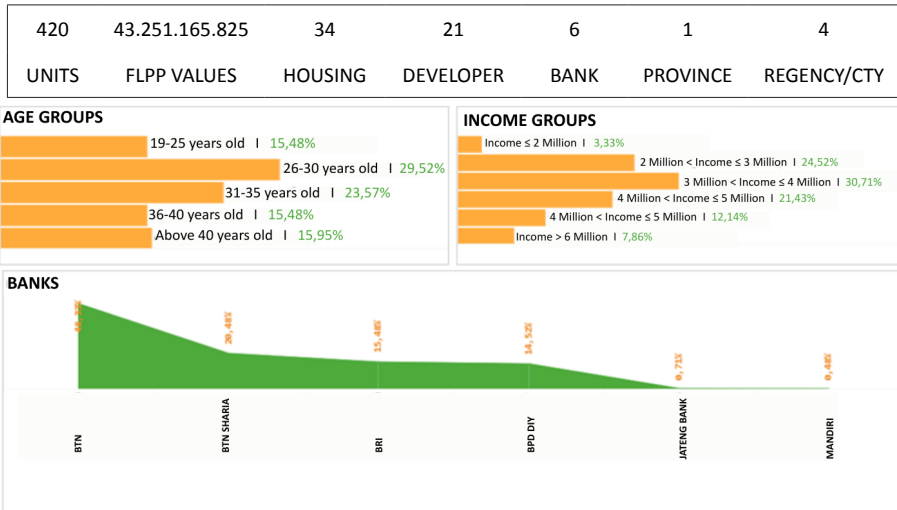
Therefore, the most efficient approach would be to narrow the beneficiary target group, focusing on MBR households earning  $\leq$  IDR 2 million, while eliminating higher-income MBR segments from eligibility.

From a cost-benefit analysis perspective, this represents the most rational solution—one that allows for budgetary contraction without compromising the effectiveness of the programme.

Banks that have succeeded in integrating their business models with government funding assignments tend to have a

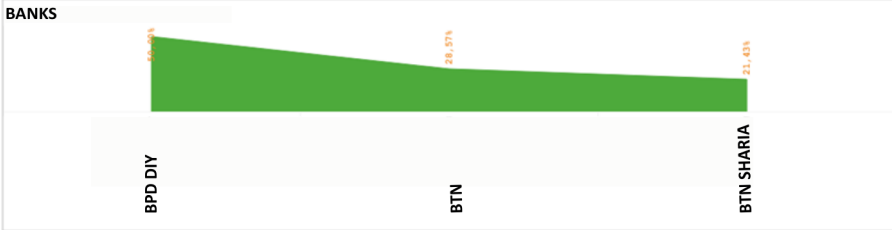
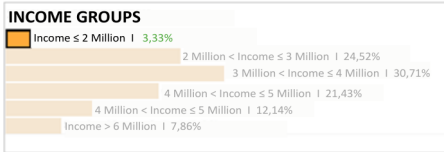
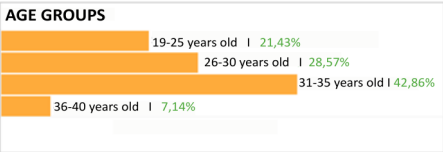
track record in similar initiatives. Their experience in similar fields has enabled them to effectively integrate policy demands into their existing business models. Conversely, integration failures indicate that there are processes that are inflexible to accommodate assignments, thus hampering operational alignment.

**Chart 9. Total FLPP Fund Distribution Realisation Data for 2022 and Based on Lowest Income by Distributing Banks**





14	1.357.125.000	7	6	3	1	3
UNITS	FLPP VALUES	HOUSING	DEVELOPER	BANK	PROVINCE	REGENCY/CTY



Source: BP Tapera, 2022

Three distributing banks have been unable to reach the lowest income level within the MBR segment: BRI, Bank Jateng, and Bank Mandiri. Although BRI is known to serve the lower-middle segment of society, its business orientation is largely focused on providing business credit for MSMEs, not on housing finance. In fact, housing sector financing requires large capital and a long-term commitment, in contrast to the short- to medium-

term, smaller-scale nature of MSME credit. Consequently, BRI lacks familiarity with handling financing schemes such as FLPP, which differ significantly from its core operations.

Although Bank Jateng’s experience in regional development through retail banking, its strong identity as a “Central Javanese Bank” makes it difficult to adapt to different socio-economic and administrative environments,



such as the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Systemic mismatches and unadjusted internal processes have caused this bank to experience system dysfunction, limiting its ability to reach the lower MBR segment. For Bank Jateng, providing funding outside its main area and institutional comfort zone is something new that requires significant adaptation time.

Bank Mandiri has also struggled with adaptation. So far, Bank Mandiri has focused more on corporate and upper-tier entrepreneurs. Although it does engage in business financing, its target market differs from BRI's, as it primarily serves the upper segment of entrepreneurs, not MSMEs. Meanwhile, housing financing requires large capital with a long term—different from business financing which is generally short- to medium-term. This sectoral misalignment makes the KPR Sejahtera

assignment a major challenge for Bank Mandiri, as it must operate outside its core experience and business orientation.

Given this mismatch, the second step should be to reallocate FLPP fund distribution mandates more selectively. Previous data shows that of the six distributing banks, three of them have succeeded in distributing FLPP funds to the lowest-income MBR segment ( $\leq$  IDR 2 million), namely: BPD DIY (50% or seven housing units), BTN Sharia (28.57% or four housing units), and BTN (21.43% or three housing units). This achievement shows the institutional readiness and track record of these three banks. As previously explained, BPD DIY has a consistent commitment to financing local development within its own operational area. Meanwhile, BTN Sharia and BTN have indeed been experienced in



housing finance sector, enabling them to more easily integrate policy tasks into their business models.

Logically, the funding assignment should be transferred exclusively to these three banks. The adaptation process required for other banks is time-consuming and effort to adjust their internal systems (Hogwood & Peters, 1985). These three banks, by contrast, already operate with a degree of alignment to the programme's demands, reducing the need for systemic overhauls. However, the ability of these three banks to reach the lowest level of MBR still needs to be improved. Therefore, the right approach is to train them to be accustomed to the process, with an orientation of contributing to national development—not just pursuing business profits.

As in medical treatment, effective policy implementation requires not only the right prescription but also the correct dosage and renewal cycle (Hogwood & Peters, 1985). A well-designed policy is insufficient unless accompanied by mechanisms that ensure compliance and adaptability to changing circumstances. Over time, policies may become obsolete or misaligned with current conditions. Thus, there must be a control mechanism embedded in the implementation process. This responsibility lies with BP Tapera and Ministry of PUPR for the relevance and performance of policies through evaluation results.

## **Funding Scheme Omission and the Problem of Earmarking**

The assumption that “money is everything” has proven to be a fundamental error, particularly

within the implementation of the KPR Sejahtera programme. The government appears to have been lulled into a false sense of security by the programme's fund rollover mechanism. Funding for this initiative comes from a combination of state budget funds through FLPP scheme and funds from implementing banks, each with a certain proportion. This funding scheme is clearly explained by Ms. Nenda Nurjanah Niode, a BP Tapera Cooperation Analyst, who stated:

*“So, the FLPP mortgage financing comes from a combination of government and bank funds. The government funds are those that have been budgeted in the APBN (anggaran pendapatan dan belanja negara) for the subsidised mortgage programme, and the second fund is from the bank. The portion is 75% from the government, the remaining 25% is from*

*the bank.” (Interview with Nenda Nurjanah Niode, BP Tapera Cooperation Analyst, 27 February 2023).*

This illustrates that the government has designed a fixed budget plan for the KPR Sejahtera programme, and these funds are earmarked exclusively for that purpose. They cannot legally or operationally be redirected to other sectors or initiatives.

In response to concerns over potential funding shortfalls, especially given the long-term nature of housing loans, the government established PT Sarana Multigriya Finansial (SMF) to support secondary financing to banks. As is known, purchasing a house through the KPR Sejahtera scheme requires installments over a fairly long period of time, thus requiring large capital. On the other hand, the limited capacity of banks to issue long-term credit, due to



capital and risk constraints, was a primary justification for SMF's creation (SMF, 2023). This role is summarised as follows:

*"...so what is the function of this SMF? Its function is to help with the 25% funds, in case the bank needs more funds." (Interview with Ms. Nenda Nurjanah Niode, BP Tapera Cooperation Analyst, 27 February 2023).*

Both of the evidences above show that although the government seems very serious in mitigating financial risks, it reflects the government's tendency to waste funds through two channels at once: primary financing and secondary financing. It inadvertently reflects a pathological tendency within policy implementation. This condition reduces the performance of banks that actually have the potential to carry out assignments optimally.

However, this pathological nature actually triggers a moral hazard that distances the implementation of the policy from the expected vision of policy discrimination: targeting the lowest-income segment of MBR.

It is through this business arena that dualism occurs, where pathological characters actually become the winners. There is a budget deviation that should be intended for priority MBR, but instead it is used to serve customers who are only classified as MBR administratively. Ironically, the interests of customers are prioritised over the interests of MBR who really need it. This situation is actually considered a solution by policymakers when faced with two interests that are considered uniform and are allowed to run side by side. On the one hand, policymakers do not consider this to be a mistake

because it remains within the framework of the policy target. However, that is precisely where the pathological character lies that is not realised because the target that actually needs it more is not the main priority.

Earmarking is a form of pathology in budgeting according to the pathology of budgeting theory proposed by Hogwood & Peters (1985). Earmarking is defined as a budgeting practice that from the start has determined the allocation of funds only for certain programs (Hogwood & Peters, 1985). In this context, FLPP funds come from two sources: banking and the APBN, where the APBN funds themselves come from community tax revenues that will be returned through government programs (Oswaldo, 2022). FLPP funds are part of the APBN budget that is specifically allocated to finance the KPR Sejahtera program, the benefits

of which are returned to the community. The provisions for the use of FLPP funds are rigid so that they cannot be diverted to finance activities outside those that have been determined.

However, budgeting pathology has created dualism in interpreting FLPP funds. On the one hand, FLPP is a public fund that is constitutionally sourced from taxes and specifically allocated to fund certain programs—in this case KPR Sejahtera—so it cannot be diverted for other purposes. On the other hand, the abundance of FLPP funds is interpreted as a gift that has pathological potential because technocrats are more focused on the existence of funds, not on their management strategy in order to achieve the policy vision. The results can be seen from the sub-optimal implementation of the program—especially its inability to reach the lowest level of



the MBR segment. The allocation of funds that actually falls to the non-priority MBR group is a real example of sunk cost, namely losses due to a shift in focus from the main objective of the policy. Thus, negligence in designing a funding scheme is an early symptom of pathology that leads to a diagnosis of the failure of the KPR Sejahtera policy.

## Conclusion

The omission of a detailed funding scheme instrument has led to widespread discretionary allocation of FLPP funds by distributing banks. As a result, the discretion has contributed to the low targeting accuracy in reaching the lowest-income MBR segment, who should have been the primary beneficiaries of the KPR Sejahtera program.

The omission of this funding scheme instrument resulted in the failure to realise the priority target of the One

Million Houses programme for MBR. This condition is called sub-optimal policy: one which disproportionately benefits non-MBR or less vulnerable MBR, while marginalising those in most need. This is a clear illustration of budgeting pathology, particularly the earmarking dysfunction where budget allocations, though fixed, are misaligned with the policy's core objective. The seeds of pathology are sown the moment policy makers treat funds as guaranteed inputs, rather than strategic tools.





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# Multiactor Dynamics in Domestic Wastewater Governance within the Framework of Water Governance: Case Study at Sewon WWTP

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## Abstract

*Wastewater management is important component in sanitation that has direct affect on the quality of clean water sources. This study analyses the implementation of domestic wastewater governance by focusing on two key aspects: government performance and community involvement. Adopting a case study approach, the study was conducted at the Sewon Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP), which is the only regional WWTP in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta/DIY) serving Sleman regency, Yogyakarta city, and Bantul regency. Data were collected through interviews, document analysis, and field observation. The analysis is grounded in a water governance framework, assessing three key dimensions: content, institutional arrangements, and relational dynamics. The results reveal significant gaps in policy implementation, limited coordination among government actors, and minimal public participation. These challenges have negatively impacted the effectiveness and sustainability of domestic wastewater management. Therefore, the study underlines the urgent need for more integrated coordination among governmental bodies and stronger efforts to empower communities. Greater public literacy, involvement in decision-making processes, and inclusive governance practices are essential to improve the performance of domestic wastewater management and ensure long-term environmental sustainability.*

**Keywords:** Water governance; wastewater management; Sewon WWTP

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## Domestic Wastewater Management Issues

The domestic wastewater management at the Sewon Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) involves multiple stakeholders, each with distinct roles, interests, and capacities. The local government, which includes collaborations among related districts, cities, agencies, and the community, participates in various stages of the management process. However, the collaboration in practice lacks full synergy. Field data shows ongoing challenges such as limited public awareness, power imbalances among actors, and insufficient budget allocations for the optimisation of the Sewon WWTP. This shows that the problems in domestic wastewater governance are not only technical in nature but also rooted in complex social and institutional challenges. Therefore, an analytical

framework is needed to describe the relationship between these actors. Using a water governance approach and the three-layer model, this article analyses the multi-actor dynamics of domestic wastewater governance at the Sewon WWTP, focusing on the legitimacy, capacity, and collaboration of each actor, and how these factors influence the effectiveness of wastewater management.

Domestic wastewater management and sanitation are fundamental human needs, serving to separate waste from human settlements to prevent the spread of disease (Flores et al., 2009). In Indonesia, wastewater management is a regional responsibility as stipulated in Law No. 23/2014. However, it cannot be managed in isolation, as wastewater often flows across administrative boundaries. For example, in this study, waste originating



from Sleman regency affects the downstream environment in Bantul regency if not managed properly. This situation illustrates that wastewater management at the Sewon WWTP is a manifestation of inter-regional cooperation.

Effective domestic wastewater management requires an integrated, effective, and efficient approach to planning, financing, and implementation (Yudo & Said, 2018). Despite this, on-the-ground implementation often faces significant obstacles, such as limited community participation—reflected in low levels of engagement and compliance—and inadequate treatment capacity. Faced with declining water quality due to untreated domestic waste, Indonesia must address the pressing challenge of improving wastewater treatment infrastructure, especially

in rapidly urbanising areas. Legislative frameworks such as Law No. 17/2019 on Water Resources and Presidential Regulation No. 1/2017 on water resources management underscore the importance of integrated and sustainability-based water governance.

The selection of the Sewon WWTP as a case study is well justified due to its pipeline network spanning across district and city boundaries, involving a wide range of stakeholders. This setting presents an unique opportunity to see the dynamics and interrelationships between actors. Additionally, Sewon WWTP serves as a reference point for other regions, such as Central Java province, which also planning the development of regional WWTPs. As such, the national relevance of this study may contribute to enhancing inter-regional collaboration, especially in sustainable

sanitation management (DPRD Provinsi Jawa Tengah, 2023). Moreover, Sewon WWTP exemplifies a cross-regional governance model, a critical issue in Indonesia’s water resources policy, as emphasised in both the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (Rencana Pembangunan Jangka

Menengah Nasional/RPJMN) and Indonesia’s National Action Plan for the SDGs. Therefore, research at Sewon WWTP holds both local significance and national value, contributing to Indonesia’s efforts to achieve Sustainable

**Figure 1. Main Pool Sewon WWTP**



*Source: Author’s documentation, 2024*



Development Goal 6 (clean water and proper sanitation) and Goal 11 (sustainable cities and settlements).

The selection of actors in this study was based on their direct involvement and roles in the management of domestic wastewater at the Sewon WWTP. The selected actors included the provincial government, the relevant district and city governments, Urban Wastewater and Drinking Infrastructure Management Agency (Balai Pengelola Infrastruktur Air Limbah dan Air Minum Perkotaan/Balai PIALAM) as the technical implementation unit (Unit Pelaksana Teknis/UPT) responsible for Sewon WWTP, and representatives from the community who utilise its service. The selection ensured a comprehensive perspective across different levels of management.

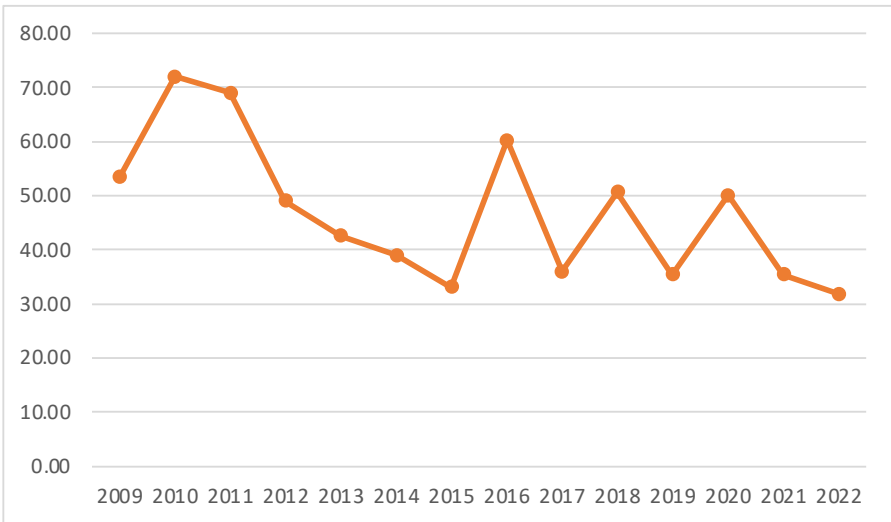
The coding process followed a thematic approach using a combination of inductive and deductive methods. Interview transcripts and documentary data were analysed through the stages of data familiarisation, initial coding, code grouping into themes, and thematic interpretation, guided by the three-layer model of water governance (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach enabled the systematic and holistic identification of patterns and key themes while maintaining alignment with theoretical framework (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2023). The coding began with an in-depth reading of interview data to extract meaning, followed by categorisation into representative codes that were used to construct an analytical narrative describing the dynamics of domestic wastewater governance.



The urgency of domestic wastewater management in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta/ DIY) is further underscored by population growth. According to BPS data from 2010 to 2019,

the population increased by 121.27 people per km<sup>2</sup>. This growth drives a corresponding rise in demand for clean water, housing, and adequate sanitation services.

**Figure 2. Water Quality Index DIY 2009-2022**



*Source: Environmental and Forestry Agency of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, 2023*

Based on the graph above, it can be observed that water pollution in DIY has shows fluctuating data but has tended

to decrease in recent years. Many factors contribute to water pollution, one of which is the improper disposal of household



waste. Domestic wastewater management is a key effort to help reduce water pollution in DIY.

In the Sewon WWTP system, the number of household connection (*sambungan rumah/SR*) surged up to the end of 2021, reaching 26,050 SR, with an average incoming water volume of 19,605 m<sup>2</sup> per day. The Regional Settlement Infrastructure Office optimised the Sewon WWTP in 2021, increasing its capacity from 25,000 SRs to 75,000 SRs due to overload. However, despite the optimisation, the number of household connections did not increase significantly. Data from 2024 shows that utilisation of household connections only reaches 36.27 percent or around 27,205 connections—comprising 19,831 in Yogyakarta city, 3,868 in Sleman regency, and 3,506 in Bantul regency (Ria, 2024).

This household connection network requires a large budget, with each network costing around IDR 10-12 million. Therefore, many residents remain reluctant to connect independently. Meanwhile, the district and city government, which hold the authority to build these networks, are also constrained by limited local government funding.

In addition, problems also arise in the community level. Public understanding and participation in managing wastewater pipeline infrastructure remain limited. According to Deni Purwana Nugaraha, Head of the Operational Division of Balai PIALAM,

*“There are still people who put garbage other than wastewater into the leading pipe network that passes through their house, which can clog the system and potentially*

*damage the infrastructure.”*  
(Deni Purwana Nugaraha,  
Head of the Operational  
Division of Balai PIALAM, 1  
February 2024).

The provincial government, Kartamantul<sup>2</sup> Joint Secretariat (Sekber Kartamantul), district/city governments, and the community are all involved in managing the Sewon WWTP. The water governance framework emphasises collaboration, cooperation, and participation. This research examines the dynamics among these actors in managing domestic wastewater at the Sewon WWTP.

The issue of domestic wastewater management is a government priority, as it directly impacts public sanitation. Based on the previous challenges, this research focuses on domestic

2 Kartamantul refers to the Greater Yogyakarta metropolitan area, encompassing the city of Yogyakarta and the surrounding districts of Sleman and Bantul. It's an informal term, essentially an acronym formed from the names of the three administrative areas.

wastewater governance within framework of water governance, with particular emphasis on the role government as a key actor in providing environmental sanitation services. Additionally, the dynamics between actors involved in governance will be an important focus of the study.

## **Complexity in Wastewater Governance**

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) defines water governance as the political, social, economic, and administrative systems that exist to manage and develop water resources and provide water services to society (Jiménez et al., 2020). This definition explains that water governance encompasses both formal institutional structures and the informal processes of day-to-day negotiation, contestation, and conciliation among involved actors, which collectively influence the management and



distribution of water. Therefore, water governance also involves the political power dynamics among stakeholders. In looking further into water governance, a framework is needed to map the actors involved.

Several models exist for examining water governance. One notable example is the socio-hydrological framework of Garimella & Prakash (Prakash et al., 2025), which discusses adaptive governance—emphasising the dynamic interaction between social and hydrological systems. This framework offers a new approach to designing more inclusive and climate-responsive water governance strategies. It focuses on the interplay between social decisions, water management policies, and the hydrological cycle, considering how changes in one system affect the other. This approach is particularly oriented towards resilience and

adaptation to climate change, incorporating social, economic and cultural factors into water management.

Another widely adopted approach is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Gap Analysis, which centres on evaluating water governance policies and identifying gaps in sustainable policy implementation. This model assesses whether existing policies meet the standards of good water governance and identify areas for improvement, whether regulatory, implementation, or policy. It is particularly useful for strengthening the effectiveness of existing policy framework (OECD, 2024).

A third model, the three-layer model by Maarten Hofra (Water Governance Centre), conceptualises water governance through three interrelated and



inseparable layers. The content layer focuses on knowledge of the water system and its problems. The experience and skills of the managing actors will be needed to solve various problems, both technical and non-technical. Adequate organisation coupled with the legal instruments needed to create a more integrated water resources management structure is included in the institutional layer. In addition, persistent problems must be resolved through what is called the relational layer. Key elements of the multiple stakeholders involved in water resources management must communicate and cooperate to build transparency and trust (Hofstra, 2013).

This study adopts the three-layer model due to its emphasis on structured, multi-level water resource management, involving actors from operational to policy levels. This framework helps to

see the extent of government-led wastewater governance and identifying the roles and interests of various actors involved. While typically applied to clean water provision, the model is here adapted to examine domestic wastewater management at Sewon WWTP.

This framework helps to see the extent of wastewater governance by the government, map the participating actors, and assess their respective roles and interests. The analysis categorises and codes actor behaviours and statements across the three indicators: content, institutional, and relational. In the content indicator, data is classified based on the knowledge, understanding, and policy formulation. The institutional indicator focuses on organisational structure, coordination mechanisms, budgetary constraints, and task distribution. Relational



indicators examine interactions, participation levels, and communication strategies. Qualitative data were validated using source and method triangulation, involving various actors including the provincial and district/city governments, as well as community members utilising the service. Data source included interviews, policy documents, and field observations, all cross-verified and interpreted through crisis reflection and alignment with the theoretical framework to ensure credibility and validity.

Beyond water governance, this study also supported by the theory of inter-regional cooperation to evaluate the inter-regional relations of the Sewon WWTP. Given Indonesia's decentralised governance structure, inter-governmental cooperation is often required to address issues that transcend territorial boundaries. Successful

collaboration relies on trust, common goals, and mutual dependence. Angranoff & McGuire (2003) emphasise the importance of both horizontal and vertical collaboration, supported by intensive communication in various policy domains. Effective regional cooperation can mitigate disparities between regions, preventing “winners and losers” scenarios often associated with decentralisation. As Utomo (2006) notes, better-managed regions tend to attract more resources, accelerating their development. In addition, Rhodes (1981) and Stoker (1995) observe that bureaucrats may prioritise expanding their own departmental budgets and programmes, potentially sidelining broader public interest. The losers in this case will be the majority who are not included in the system and just sit idly by on public funding to support service expansion (Stoker, 1995).



By integrating water governance and inter-regional cooperation, this research aims to unpack the complexities of domestic wastewater management at Sewon WWTP. The study explores actor involvement, the interplay of interests, and how these dynamics influence governance outcomes.

Given the diverse actors involved—each with differing interests, capacities, and roles—effective governance of domestic wastewater at Sewon WWTP requires collaborative approaches. Multi-actor models are shown to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of water management. This is because collaboration frameworks can balance stakeholder roles and improve communication (Di Vaio et al., 2021). Similarly, a multi-actor approach in water governance also improve the effectiveness

of decisions taken as outlined by Megens & Warner (2025) which emphasises the importance of collaborative and decentralised systems in water resources management.

A 2023 OECD report on water governance also found that applying principles of participation, accountability and transparency can improve water management efficiency and effectiveness at the local level. This aligns with findings from Saint-Bois et al. (2024), who argue that multi-sectoral cooperation in managing the food, energy, and water nexus leads to more responsive and locally tailored policies.

Finally, understanding the power dynamics between actors is essential. McIlwain et al., (2023) suggest that recognising and actively managing these dynamics enables more effective collaboration and responsive problem-solving. Therefore,



attention to power relations is critical for fostering meaningful actor collaboration in the governance of wastewater at Sewon WWTP.

## **Multi-actor-based Water Governance**

Multi-actor-based water governance and multi-level governance have received more attention in recent years, especially in the Asian region, which is currently facing challenges in sustainable water resources management. Research Jiangmin & Ghengzi (2024) conducted a study of transnational water governance in the Shenzhen river, which involved collaboration between local governments, the Hong Kong government, and the Chinese central government. The study highlighted the importance of cooperation between actors in managing flooding challenges and water resource management

in transboundary areas. Linh et al. (2025) applied the OECD framework to assess water governance in the Mekong delta, Vietnam, which highlighted the implementation of sound water governance principles and the importance of a multi-actor approach to water resources management. In addition, the Global Water Partnership (2025) states the importance of water diplomacy in maintaining and strengthening ASEAN regional water security, focusing on managing shared aquifers and trans-boundary cooperation mechanisms.

Another study conducted by Marks & Baird (2025) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, highlighted how the government's power structure and policies will affect its vulnerability to flood disasters. This shows that the need for a multi-actor approach in mitigating disaster risk. On the theoretical side, Prakash et al. (2025)

propose a socio-hydrological framework for adaptive governance that focuses on the dynamic interaction between social and hydrological systems. This framework offers a new approach to designing water governance strategies that are more inclusive and responsive to climate change.

These studies reinforce the importance of multi-actor and multi-level governance in addressing the complexity of water-related challenges in Asia. They also provide a more robust theoretical foundation for the implementation of adaptive and collaborative policies across the region. By adopting such an approach, water resource management can become more responsive to the pressures of urbanisation and climate change, while also being more inclusive of the diverse actors involved in the governance process.

## **Identification of Actors and Their Involvement in Sewon WWTP Management**

Analysis through the water governance framework requires mapping between actors involved to see the extent of their participation in domestic wastewater management at the Sewon WWTP. This actor mapping also reveals the various problems faced by each actor. The following outlines the roles, interests, and challenges encountered by different actors involved in managing domestic wastewater at the Sewon WWTP.

The provincial government, through the Public Works, Housing, and Energy and Mineral Resources Agency (Dinas Pekerjaan Umum, Perumahan dan Energi Sumber Daya Mineral/ DPUP ESDM), is responsible for overseeing wastewater management. The technical



operations are delegated to one of its implementation units, Balai PIALAM. Although operational and maintenance budgets are shared with the regency/city governments that utilise the Sewon WWTP, overall budget planning remains under the authority of the PUP ESDM DIY. Wastewater management remains a priority, with development targets focusing on increasing house connections to reach the current maximum capacity of 75,000 SRs. According to Gunawan Sri Subekti, Sub-Coordinator of the Programme Substance Group, achieving these targets remains a challenge for district/city governments. The provincial government's authority is largely limited to operational management of the WWTP itself and maintenance of the main pipeline network that crosses regency/city boundaries.

In addition to the DPUP ESDM DIY, the Regional Development Planning Agency (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah/Bappeda) of the DIY also involved in this management. Bappeda acts as a monitor and evaluator for the programmes developed by the provincial PUP ESDM. It coordinates with Bappeda at the regency/city level to improve house connection coverage. Furthermore, Bappeda DIY defines key indicators aligned with the five- and twenty-year development plans (RPJMD and RPJPD), which guide the allocation of annual development budgets.

To facilitate cooperation between the three districts/cities involved—Sleman regency, Yogyakarta city, and Bantul regency—a joint body known as the Sekber Kartamantul acts as a facilitator, mediator, and coordinator. Its primary function is to manage shared



infrastructure and services, including the Sewon WWTP. Sekber Kartamantul ensures that facilities and infrastructure issues are addressed collaboratively through discussion and coordination forums, where each region can voice concerns and propose solutions. As Agranoff & McGuire (2003) argue, successful inter-regional collaboration depends on intensive communication, trust, and common goals. The secretariat's function is important to minimise conflicts and manage competing interests across administrative boundaries.

The regency/city governments which covers the Sleman, Yogyakarta, and Bantul have direct authority over the service network and house connection infrastructure. Their involvement is especially crucial in the current phase, which prioritises the optimisation of the Sewon

WWTP's expanded capacity. However, there are technical and budgetary limitations. For instance, Sleman regency has the highest target, around 30,000 SRs—but progress is hindered by a lack of main pipeline coverage in certain areas, which falls under the authority of Balai PIALAM. Budget constraints also persist, as Sleman's focus remains on developing its own Depok WWTP, diverting resources from Sewon-related connection. Budget constraints also persist, as Sleman's focus remains on developing its own Depok WWTP, diverting resources from Sewon-related connections.

In contrast, Yogyakarta city has made more progress, having received central government funding to build around 600 SRs by 2024. Most areas in Yogyakarta city are already connected to the Sewon



WWTP, largely because the city lacks its own regional WWTP and thus relies entirely on the Sewon facility.

Bantul regency, where the Sewon WWTP is located, presents a unique case. Despite housing the plant, only the northern parts of Bantul can be served, due to technical constraints in extending service coverage throughout the regency.

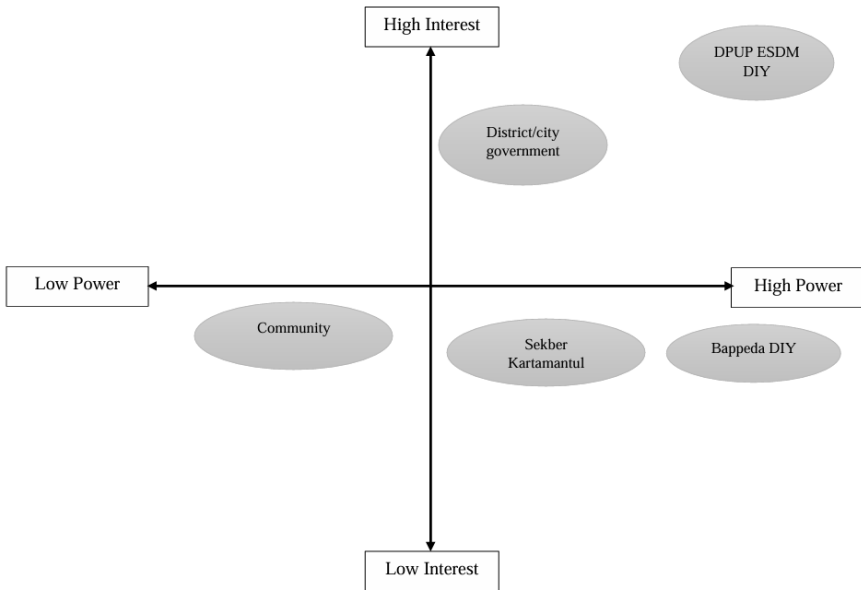
The community also constitutes an important stakeholder group, as outlined in Regional Regulation No. 2/2013 of DIY. However,

in practice, community involvement has been minimal. Public understanding of piped domestic wastewater systems remains slow, leading to resistance against the construction of new SRs in some areas. The multi-actor and collaborative approach proposed by Jiménez et al. (2020) emphasises the importance of community empowerment as a critical component for sustaining the Sewon WWTP management system.





**Figure 3. Actors Mapping**



*Source: Author's analysis*

Based on actor mapping designed by Freeman (1984), stakeholder mapping can be used to see more clearly the influence and impact of actors involved in domestic wastewater governance at the Sewon WWTP. The high interest-high power category is filled by DPUP ESDM DIY, Balai PIALAM, and

the regency/city government, which have a high level of importance and influence. Their collaboration is critical and their roles are pivotal in determining decision-making processes in Sewon WWTP management. The high power-low interest group comprises the Sekber Kartamantul and Bappeda DIY,



who hold considerable influence but have a more peripheral engagement in day-to-day governance. Conversely, the low power-high interest category is occupied by the community, whose stake in domestic wastewater governance is substantial, given that they are the primary beneficiaries of the service. However, their role remains marginalised due to limited engagement, low awareness, and weak inclusion in decision-making processes related to the Sewon WWTP.

The behaviour of these actors cumulatively reflects horizontal fragmentation, stemming from inter-regional interactions, and vertical fragmentation, stemming from interactions between levels of government. The absence of a shared vision and weak inter-agency communication lead to gaps in house connection development, weak coordination, and low community participation.

Wastewater management in Sewon WWTP is fairly complex, multi-layered system, in which actors across administrative boundaries and governance levels interact dynamically. Inter-regional collaboration and active community participation, as emphasised in Agranoff & McGuire (2003) theory of cooperation, are key to the success of this governance. By understanding the power dynamics and interests of each actor, Sewon WWTP's wastewater governance can be improved in terms of effectiveness and sustainability by the principles of good water governance.

## **Problems and Challenges in Sewon WWTP Management**

The actors involved in domestic wastewater management experience several problems, stemming from both

government through power imbalances between actors and community-level dynamics. From the data analysis, three problems have been identified: limited public awareness, power imbalance between actors, and budgetary constraints in optimising the Sewon WWTP.

One of the key challenges lies in the community's limited awareness and understanding of piped wastewater systems. Some communities object to the installation of pipelines because they do not really believe in pipeline treatment. This condition happens a lot in Bantul regency, as stated by Department of Public Works, Housing, and Settlement Areas (Dinas Pekerjaan Umum Perumahan dan Kawasan Permukiman/DPUPKP). These objections are mostly due to the idea that the pipe system may disrupt their existing water infrastructure. Whereas the piped network system is more efficient

and can help the community to maintain water quality as it minimises leakage. Others fear that pipeline installation will involve dismantling parts of their homes or incur costs they cannot afford without government subsidies.

*“People who did not want to install the pipeline also argued that they did not want to dismantle the tiles in their houses and that they would have financial problems if they did not receive funding from the government program.”*  
*(Interview with Satria Agung Nugroho, Staff of Human Settlements Division DPUPKP Bantul, 5 February 2024).*

These objections highlight the lack of technical literacy regarding the environmental and health benefits of domestic wastewater treatment. The system is arguably still new to the community so they still do



not know about the impacts that may arise from using old system wastewater treatment. On the other hand, they also feel that the need for wastewater management is not a priority and do not see the urgency to carry out such treatment. The community often lacks access to education on domestic wastewater management. So far, socialisation from the government has only been limited to the disposal of waste or garbage that has the potential to pollute the environment.

*“Education to the community has never touched on domestic wastewater management in the piping system. In fact, this can be said to be new knowledge for the community.” (Interview with Kuncoro, Sewon WWTP user residents, 21 March 2024).*

*“The emergence of cons from the community is because they do not know the benefits of management with a pipeline system. One of them is because they have the idea that pipes under the ground will produce murky or polluted water. Whereas this system is actually beneficial for the community.” (Interview with Sarwiyono, Sewon WWTP user residents, 29 February 2024).*

Due to the lack of knowledge on domestic wastewater management, people assume that wastewater management is the responsibility of the government. Such thinking is strongly reflected in their behaviour towards involvement in domestic wastewater management. Wastewater is often perceived as a secondary issue, with residents prioritising more immediate needs such as

clean water access. However, when it comes to waste, the community has yet to see that it is an obligation for them as well.

*“The community is often unable to see the link between the water they use and the waste they discharge. In fact, as water users, we share responsibility to ensure that waste is treated in a manner that does not pollute the environment.” (Interview with Mifta, Assistant for Programme and Technical Sekber Kartamantul, 1 March 2024).*

One tangible form of the community’s lack of literacy regarding domestic wastewater management is the continued practice of disposing of solid waste into wastewater network pipes, which has the potential to block the passage of water. This habit of the community is also exacerbated by the fact

that many pipelines have been built since the Dutch colonial era and are therefore susceptible to damage. Therefore, incidents of wastewater overflow have occurred in the Keraton area.

Power asymmetries is also experienced by government actors in collaborative efforts. Bantul regency has expressed concerns regarding inequalities in the budget-sharing scheme for Sewon WWTP. Under current arrangements, operation costs are shared with a composition of 30% covered by the district/citie governments and 70% by provincial government. The former being distributed according to the number of SRs.

Bantul regency, however, has raised objections to this model, as most of its connections come from low-tariff households. In contrast, Sleman regency and Yogyakarta city benefit from a



higher number of connections to hotels and other commercial entities, which are charged significantly higher tariffs.

*“Therefore, there is an imbalance in budget contribution. In Yogyakarta city and Sleman regency, there are many hotels so that the amount of contribution will also be different. At this time, the payment from the district/city government budget sharing is only based on the number of SRs, not actual usage.” (Interview with Satria Agung Nugroho, Staff of Human Settlements Division DPUPKP Bantul, 5 February 2024).*

Adding to this inequality, the Bantul regency government has raised the issue of compensation due to the location of the Sewon WWTP within Bantul. The community’s complaints have yet

to be formally addressed through the Kartamantul coordination forum, as the matter is still under review.

Inequality is also experienced by Sleman regency, which has the most house connection target of 30,000 SRs. The reason for this target is also supported by the region’s favourable topography which is higher than Bantul regency and Yogyakarta city so that it is expected to expand the area served by the pipeline network.

*“This high target is not supported by an adequate main network, which only exist in a few sub-districts. Since the authority of the main network falls under provincial government, the expansion of the service network at the local level is constrained.” (Interview with Fitria, Substance Group Wastewater Treatment DLH Sleman, 6 February 2024).*

The problems experienced by the district/city government certainly hinder the goal of optimising the Sewon WWTP. Increasing house connections is indeed the authority of the district/city government but, on the other hand, they are also still constrained by public awareness and lack of mainline infrastructure in several areas. Therefore, the optimisation of the Sewon WWTP potentially lead to a shift in responsibility when the provincial government seems to be hands off on the construction of SRs.

*“During initial development, most of the budget came from central government grants and programmes. Today, such funding is limited, and the emergence of regional WWTPs in each district/city has further divided available resources. Public willingness to self-finance connections remains low.” (Interview*

*with Miftah, Assistant for Programme and Technical, Sekber Kartamantul, 1 March 2024).*

*“The budget for connecting the service network can reach an average of IDR 10 to 11 million per household without government assistance. This is a major obstacle in the optimisation programme, particularly as programme-based funding remains insufficient to meet community needs.” (Interview with Fitri, Substance Group Wastewater Treatment DLH Sleman, 6 February 2024).*

DIY is one of the few regions in Indonesia that receives a privilege fund (dana istimewa/danais) due to historical and cultural status. To date, this fund has primarily been allocated for cultural and heritage-related purposes. However, the Yogyakarta city government has proposed using danais for



infrastructure revitalisation—particularly in areas such as the Keraton, where pipelines fall within the Sultanate’s Land Space Unit (SRS).

*“The allocation of funds for infrastructure development is also important. The Yogyakarta city government has tried to propose the use of the danais to revitalise the existing pipeline network in the Keraton area, which lies within the Sultanate’s SRS. Since danais is not itemised in allocations from the central government, only areas within the SRS can currently be funded through this mechanism.” (Interview with Miftah, Assistant for Programme and Technical, Sekber Kartamantul, 1 March 2024).*

## **Analysis of Domestic Wastewater Governance**

In the water governance framework as previously described, three indicators serve as benchmark for evaluating domestic wastewater governance at the Sewon WWTP. These indicators are content, institutional, and relational. These indicators are interrelated with each other to see the role of stakeholders and the agenda they pursue.

### **a. Content**

Domestic wastewater in DIY is regulated under Regional Regulation No 2/2013, which aligns with the region’s needs for wastewater management. The regulation outlines responsibilities among government actors, and in practice, each institution largely adheres to its designated duties and authority. However, a significant challenge in policy



implementation stems from limited public awareness, particularly regarding the piped wastewater system. Nonetheless, local regulations have also regulated the planning of non-physical aspects, such as public education on domestic wastewater management. This effort to implement these have not been optimal by the government as the person in charge of educating the community.

This aligns with the three-layer model framework which emphasises the importance of knowledge and experience of managing actors in dealing with both technical and non-technical problems. Although in its implementation there are still some things that need to be addressed, especially regarding the lack of public knowledge regarding domestic wastewater management.

## **b. Institutionalisation**

The division of responsibilities among actors has been stated in the local regulation. However, interview findings reveals that there is still a one-way coordination. The district/city government only follows the direction of the provincial government, particularly concerning the expansion of household connections to the Sewon WWTP. This one-way coordination model has hindered the achievement of targets, largely due to budget constraints at the district level. In addition, there are some biases in the division of tasks and authority, so development is hampered.

Furthermore, fiscal inequality can occur as a result of differences in regional fiscal capacity. Regions with lower fiscal capacity are less able to finance infrastructure development projects without substantial support from the



central government (Sirait & Handra, 2020). Inequality in regional budgets will greatly affect the ability of local governments to provide adequate sanitation services through the Sewon WWTP. Until now, this construction has depended on central government assistance funds. However, since the expansion of Sewon WWTP capacity, such assistance has significantly declined, making it difficult for regency and city governments to meet the provincial targets for SR expansion. Thus, fair and targeted budget allocations from the central government are crucial to ensure more equitable access to sanitation infrastructure across regions.

Institutionalisation is closely related to intergovernmental relations, and the lack of clear, two-way communication among different government level has contributed to coordination

failures. The overlapping roles in pipeline maintenance and the lack of cooperative planning reflects a broader issue in governance. The top-down approach has the potential to create inequality in the distribution of resources, as seen in the unequal interactions between district/city governments, which feel that they are being disadvantaged by these interactions.

### **c. Relational**

In line with Scharpf (1997) theory, the top-down relationship results from decision-making processes at the central level that do not adequately consider the capacities or needs of local governments. Such an approach often ignores the local context, resulting in the implementation of policies that are not aligned with local conditions.

Most of the Sewon WWTP optimisation programmes are still top-down in nature. While proposals from district or city governments are not entirely excluded, the majority of programmes are still initiated and driven by the provincial government. From an interest-mapping perspective, the provincial government is primarily focused on increasing SRs in order to close the capacity-utilisation gap at the Sewon WWTP.

In this domestic wastewater management system, community involvement is an important consideration. Although communities are directly affected by the system, their participation is often limited to receiving assistance during the construction of SRs and paying service fees. The lack of involvement lead to low public awareness, so they tend to be less concerned about

the maintenance of domestic wastewater management infrastructure. The situation is compounded by limited public knowledge and literacy regarding domestic wastewater management. According to community interviews, socialisation efforts by the government are often reactive and insufficient, typically taking place only when construction is imminent in a neighbourhood.

To foster greater trust and participation, communities need visible success stories that demonstrate the effectiveness of the system. One example is Padukuhan Pogung Lor, Sinduadi sub-district, Sleman regency.

*“At the beginning of 2016, few people built house connections due to the pros and cons of the development. However, over time, as domestic wastewater management system was considered*



*better and would have a good impact on their groundwater quality, many of them finally began to be interested in making connections independently.” (Interview with Kuncoro, Sewon WWTP user residents, 21 March 2024).*

The relationship between these actors would contribute to more effective and sustainable governance. Community rejection of house connections and instances of infrastructure damage illustrate the consequences of weak engagement. In addition, efforts to reduce water pollution will remain hampered if communities fail to see domestic wastewater management as a shared responsibility.

Overall, the empirical findings show that although the prevailing policies and regulations align with the needs, their implementation

is still constrained by weak coordination, limited budget, and lack of community participation. The success of domestic wastewater management also depends on strong cooperation between the government and the community. Therefore, domestic wastewater management at the Sewon WWTP should focus on theoretical elements that prioritise collaboration among actors and community empowerment to achieve more effective and sustainable results.

The lack of understanding among the public has led to limited active participation in domestic wastewater management. This is also driven by a lack of coordination and transparency among government actors. In good water governance (OECD, 2021), public involvement is considered essential to ensure water management is carried



out efficiently and effectively. However, decision-making, from planning to implementation, remains solely in the hands of the government, without providing the public with a voice. As a result, it is not surprising that the public feels excluded and views themselves only as end-users.

Such conditions are prone to fostering distrust among the public, which is further reinforced by their lack of awareness regarding the importance of domestic wastewater management. If this situation continues, it may lead to increased water pollution caused by poorly managed domestic wastewater.

## Conclusion

The findings in this study reinforce the relevance of the water governance framework, which emphasises the importance of content,

institutional, and relational dimensions in domestic wastewater management. Barriers such as limited public knowledge and weak coordination between local governments indicate how these three dimensions are interdependent, as explained by Maarten Hofstra. Furthermore, this study identifies imbalances in authority and budget allocation across regions, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of power and resource dynamics through the lens of intergovernmental relations theory. Budgetary disparities should be a key consideration for the central government in order to ensure fairer and more targeted funding that supports infrastructure development related to sanitation services and helps reduce regional inequalities.



In addition, the lack of public participation challenges the assumption of inclusiveness within multi-actor governance theory, calling for stronger efforts in community education and trust-building. The inadequate response to management issues, such as pipeline damage involving various actors with different authorities, makes an essential contribution to the development of a more adaptive governance theory. This study confirms the need for a governance model that is responsive and flexible to the dynamics on the ground, in order to make domestic wastewater management more effective and sustainable.

Therefore, this study supports the framework of the three-layers model and inter-regional cooperation, offering valuable insights for the development of a more realistic and contextualised governance theory. This is particularly important

in addressing institutional challenges, empowering communities, and managing resource imbalance in domestic wastewater management.

However, this study has limitations in its ability to explain domestic wastewater governance more broadly, due to its focus on a single case study of the Sewon WWTP. Thus, further studies are needed to generalise these findings to other regions with differing social and institutional characteristics. It is recommended that future studies employ comparative approach across multiple areas using more comprehensive methodologies, including participatory and longitudinal methods. Such approach would allow for a deeper exploration of collaborative dynamics and the impacts of community involvement in domestic wastewater management. Future research could also



investigate innovative strategies for improving public literacy, enhancing public participation, and integrating information technology to support multi-actor coordination. These efforts are expected to strengthen both the theoretical framework and practical implementation of more inclusive, sustainable and effective domestic wastewater governance.



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# **No More Sexual Violence: @\_perEMPUan\_ and the Advocacy for Victim-Centred Approach to Gender-Based Violence on Instagram**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines how digital platforms are utilised as tools for anti-sexual violence campaigns, with a particular focus on perEMPUan, a woman-led advocacy initiative based on Instagram. By centring the campaign against sexual harassment and violence, this research explores how perEMPUan builds narratives, mobilises public discourse, and fosters collective awareness in digital spaces. Employing a qualitative netnographic approach, the study draws on three main sources: narrative content posted on the Instagram account @\_perEMPUan\_, audience responses observed in the comment sections, and an in-depth interview with the community's founder, Rika Rosvianti (also known as Neqy). The findings reveal five thematic categories that reflect the campaign's core strategies and recurring issues: (1) relationships between public figures and their followers, (2) domestic violence, (3) victim-blaming narratives, (4) the conceptual framing of sexual harassment and violence, and (5) depictions of sexual violence as tragedy. The analysis draws on George and Leidner's (2019) theoretical framework on the hierarchy of digital activism. The findings point to a distinct division of roles between the advocacy community and its digital audience, particularly in how public discourse around sexual violence is shaped and negotiated in online spaces.*

**Keywords:** Public education; social movement; sexual violence

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## Introduction

Sexual violence is a pervasive form of gender-based violence, encompassing physical, structural, and cultural dimensions (Susiana, 2019). According to the *World Report on Violence and Health* (2022) by the World Health Organisation, sexual violence includes a wide range of acts—both physical and verbal—directed towards a person's sexuality without their consent (Krug et al., 2022). While sexual violence can affect individuals across all gender identities, women remain disproportionately impacted. Alarmingly, the report notes that fewer than two per cent of women report their experiences to formal authorities. Supporting this, data from Indonesia's National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan/ Komnas Perempuan) reveals

that between 2001 and 2012, an estimated 35 women per day experienced sexual violence, yet only 4,336 cases were formally reported over the entire period.

This significant gap between incidents and reporting is deeply shaped by cultural and social barriers. A prevailing culture of victim-blaming continues to discourage survivors from coming forward—often attributing blame to a survivor's clothing, behaviour, or physical appearance. In parallel, sensationalist media coverage tends to trivialise or sensationalise sexual violence, rather than treating it as a systemic issue. Discourses such as the so-called "rape fantasy" have historically discredited women's testimonies, framing them as fabricated or exaggerated (Paradiáz et al., 2022).



These forms of structural silencing not only marginalise survivors but also reinforce narratives that normalise gender-based violence.

In response to these conditions, digital platforms have emerged as important tools for anti-sexual violence campaigns—enabling new forms of public engagement, survivor support, and educational outreach. One such initiative is perEMPuAn, an Indonesian feminist digital community that operates primarily through its Instagram account, @\_perEMPuAn\_. This platform advocates for the prevention of sexual violence through feminist-informed education, myth-busting, and survivor-centred narratives. As part of broader alliances like the Coalition for Safe Public Spaces (Koalisi Ruang Publik Aman/KRPA) and the Youth Coalition Against Sexual Violence (Koalisi Masyarakat Sipil Anti

Kekerasan Seksual/KOMPAKS), perEMPuAn situates itself within an ecosystem of grassroots digital advocacy that leverages social media to counter stigma and promote structural change.

This study focuses on the ways in which perEMPuAn uses Instagram as a platform for its anti-sexual violence campaign. It specifically examines the educational strategies and narrative practices deployed by the community to foster public awareness and promote justice for survivors. Special attention is given to the use of hashtags and visual-textual content as tools for visibility and engagement, and how these practices contribute to wider conversations about survivor agency, collective healing, and digital resistance.

By analysing perEMPuAn as a case study of online anti-violence activism, this research aims to: (1) identify the forms of educational content developed



by the community to inform the public about sexual violence prevention, and (2) explore how survivor-centred perspectives are promoted and sustained through social media. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to scholarly discussions on the transformative potential of feminist digital communities, while also offering practical insights into the role of social media in challenging rape culture and supporting survivor empowerment.

## Literature Review

The rise of social media as a space for activism has transformed how societies confront gender-based violence, especially sexual violence. While early studies emphasised its power to foster visibility and participation, recent scholarship highlights the complex tensions involved—where digital storytelling and feminist

ethics intersect with platform algorithms, emotional risks, and structural constraints. Numerous scholars have explored how online platforms enable survivors of sexual violence to reclaim narrative agency. Movements like #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos demonstrate how personal testimony, when collectivised, can disrupt dominant discourses of shame and silence (Alaggia & Wang, 2020; Dawson, 2020; Medina, 2023). The act of naming and sharing experiences online allows survivors not only to break isolation but also to connect with others across borders. Yet, many of these analyses are situated in Euro-American contexts, often assuming a universality that flattens cultural, political, and infrastructural differences. There remains limited exploration of how similar strategies are used—and reconfigured—within countries like Indonesia, where



survivors must navigate different sociolegal constraints, digital cultures, and public attitudes toward gender-based violence (McCarthy et al., 1973).

The case of #IAmNotAfraidToSayIt in Ukraine, as analysed by Martsenyuk & Phillips (2020), offers a valuable comparative perspective. The campaign, which emerged from a single Facebook post in 2016, evolved into a cross-border conversation around sexual violence, triggering both solidarity and backlash. The study highlights how survivor narratives can produce visibility but also provoke discomfort and denial within the broader public sphere. Despite its digital format, the campaign led to important institutional discussions, including reforms in sexual harassment regulations in educational settings. Yet, as the authors argue, these effects

were not automatic; they were shaped by the political will, media coverage, and activist pressure that accompanied the viral moment. The Ukrainian case demonstrates that storytelling, while necessary, must be accompanied by sustained engagement and structural pushback to yield transformative change.

This dual nature of digital advocacy—as both empowering and precarious—has been a central point of tension in the literature. Merlyna Lim (2013) cautions against the over-romanticisation of online activism, arguing that much of what circulates on social media remains symbolic and short-lived. Her phrase “many clicks but little sticks” points to the disconnect between viral engagement and long-term political outcomes, particularly in Indonesia where state responsiveness remains limited. At the same time,



dismissing digital participation as merely performative risks overlooking the material and affective labor invested by those sustaining these campaigns. Kidd & McIntosh (2016) offer a more balanced view, introducing the idea of techno-ambivalence—an approach that recognises social media’s contradictory capacity to both enable and dilute political action. This framing allows for an examination of how activists themselves negotiate hope and exhaustion, urgency and vulnerability.

Feminist digital communities that center survivor narratives must also contend with the affective burden of platform participation. While participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009) suggests that audiences can actively shape discourse, the emotional cost of being visible—especially for survivors—can be profound. Online disclosure may empower some, but it can

retraumatise others, especially when responses involve victim-blaming, harassment, or indifference. Communities like @\_perEMPUan\_ perform constant affective labor: moderating comments, curating sensitive content, responding to disclosures, and holding ethical space for pain that the broader public often dismisses. These acts of care are seldom recognised in traditional analyses of activism, yet they are critical to the endurance and credibility of feminist digital work.

In this context, online anti-sexual violence campaigns cannot be understood solely in terms of reach, virality, or hashtag visibility. Rather, they must be read as ongoing attempts to reconfigure public discourse, institutional accountability, and collective memory. Feminist digital activism involves not only confronting external structures—patriarchy, media sensationalism,



impunity—but also managing the internal economies of emotion, care, and fatigue. In Indonesia, @\_perEMPUan\_ exemplifies a model of sustained, survivor-centred campaigning that relies not on viral spikes but on consistent engagement, educational framing, and feminist ethics. Its approach pushes against the idea that visibility is an end in itself and instead reframes visibility as a relational practice—one that requires protection, context, and ongoing negotiation. While existing literature offers important insights, there remains a gap in studies that link survivor-centred activism with long-term, everyday practices of emotional sustainability and digital care work—especially in Southeast Asian contexts. This research contributes to closing that gap by analysing how @\_perEMPUan\_ builds a digitally networked and ethically

responsive campaign that resists both the spectacle of trauma and the disposability of digital attention.

## Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the theoretical framework of digital activism with a specific focus on how social media-based campaigns against sexual violence are initiated, mobilised, and sustained. While digital activism is often examined as a broad form of online political participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; George & Leidner, 2019), this research positions anti-sexual violence campaigns as a particular strand—one that not only carries political messages but also responds to social stigma, power asymmetry, and the need for public education. In this context, digital platforms serve not only

as tools for mobilisation but also as key sites for discourse production and public engagement.

George & Leidner (2019), building on Milbrath's (1965) model of political participation, offer a hierarchical view of digital activism comprising three levels: digital spectator activities (e.g., liking or sharing posts), transitional activities (e.g., signing online petitions or contributing to digital campaigns), and digital gladiatorial activities (e.g., initiating movements, leading discourse, and coordinating advocacy). These levels are not mutually exclusive; rather, they represent interconnected modes of participation. This framework is particularly useful for understanding the layered dynamics of digital advocacy work and the distribution of roles among different actors within a campaign.

The case of @\_perEMPuan\_ illustrates how a single digital community can occupy all three levels of participation. As a movement initiator, @\_perEMPuan\_ plays a gladiatorial role by consistently producing educational content and challenging dominant narratives surrounding sexual violence. In addition, it engages in transitional activities by collaborating with allied organisations, promoting joint campaigns, and amplifying petitions. At the spectator level, the campaign relies on its followers to extend its visibility through likes, shares, and comments. These interconnected roles form a relational ecosystem in which digital participation reinforces the campaign's broader objectives.

To deepen this framework, the study also draws on Martsenyuk & Phillips' (2020) analysis of



the #IAmNotAfraidToSayIt campaign in Ukraine. Their work demonstrates how survivor disclosures on social media can serve both as political resistance and as mobilising discourse. Importantly, their analysis shows that online engagement around sexual violence is not passive: it requires clear narrative framing, community support, and continuous discursive effort—all of which align with the gladiatorial and transitional roles outlined by George & Leidner (2019). Martsenyuk & Phillips (2020) also highlight the fragility of visibility, noting that public disclosures often entail emotional and reputational risks for survivors. This insight is especially relevant for understanding the calculated strategies used by @\_perEMPUan\_ to create safer narrative spaces, avoid sensationalism, and maintain ethical standards while still

engaging a wide audience. In this way, their study complements the hierarchical model of digital activism by showing how each level of participation—especially those involving voice and visibility—carries political and emotional consequences that shape a campaign’s trajectory.

In sum, this framework offers a structured lens to analyse how @\_perEMPUan\_ organises its advocacy strategy, distributes roles among digital actors, and sustains issue visibility over time. Rather than focusing solely on quantitative metrics such as engagement rates or follower counts, the study emphasises the interdependence of digital actions and the strategic use of technology in promoting anti-sexual violence campaigns—particularly in settings where institutional responses remain weak or inaccessible.



## Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach combined with netnography to analyse digital activism around sexual violence. Qualitative methodology, as described by Creswell (1998), enables an in-depth, descriptive, and inductive examination of social phenomena, capturing multiple perspectives through verbal, textual, and behavioural data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Netnography, an adaptation of ethnography to digital spaces, facilitates the study of online cultures and advocacy networks. It draws from participant observation while accounting for anonymity, digital interaction, and platform-specific dynamics. Like traditional ethnography, it may include interviews, discourse analysis, and thematic coding to understand the lived experiences of survivors in digital contexts. Netnographic research thus

involves understanding social environments within digital spaces, including language use, emoticons, and hashtags.

For data collection, this study primarily draws on narratives related to victims of sexual harassment and violence as presented on the @\_perEMPUan\_ social media account. The researcher also monitors debates and discussions in comment sections, as well as relevant hashtags linked to the advocacy account. Additionally, an interview was conducted with the account initiator, R. Rika Rosvianti, using a semi-structured interview guide and with prior consent from the interviewee. Supplementary data were gathered through literature and document reviews sourced from books, articles, and journals. The data collection period spanned from July 12, 2024 to August 21, 2024.



Bogdan & Biklen (1982), as cited in Moleong (2007), define data analysis as the process of organising, processing, and interpreting research data to extract meaningful findings before dissemination. Miles & Huberman (1992) describe two models of qualitative data analysis: the flow model of analysis and the interactive model of analysis. This study utilises the latter, wherein all research activities are interconnected and dynamically ongoing throughout the data collection process. According to Miles & Huberman (1992), this model involves four interrelated stages occurring iteratively: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) data display, and (4) conclusion drawing and verification.

## Result

### The History and Profile of perEMPUan Community

The founding of perEMPUan in 2011 should not be interpreted merely as a reactive response to a series of rape cases occurring in moving public transportation vehicles. Rather, it marked a critical intervention grounded in personal experiences and a broader critique of societal complacency toward sexual violence. Founders R. Rika Rosvianti and Astrid Malahayati Fathma initiated the movement after becoming aware of three such incidents. As survivors of sexual harassment themselves, they observed a recurring pattern wherein awareness and recognition of violence often emerged only retrospectively. This delay in comprehension underscores the pervasive normalisation of sexual violence in public and everyday settings.



Neqy (Rika Rosvianti), one of the founders, further emphasised the emotional burden carried by survivors who, despite resisting such violence, often struggle to articulate or process their experiences—particularly when they lack an initial understanding that what occurred constitutes a form of violence. The initial development of perEMPuAn stemmed from a written post by the founders, which sought to compile common tactics used by perpetrators and practical guidance for self-defense in the face of sexual harassment. This early endeavor marked the transition from personal testimony to a collective project of knowledge production and resistance. The establishment of perEMPuAn’s digital presence—initially on Twitter (now X) and Facebook, and later focusing on Instagram—demonstrates the strategic use of social media as a space for feminist

pedagogical intervention. The name perEMPuAn itself carries symbolic significance. The capitalised element “EMPU,” derived from the Sanskrit term for “ownership,” serves as a political statement asserting bodily autonomy and the right to self-defense. Through this naming, the movement situates itself within a broader discourse of gendered power and linguistic reclamation, where the act of naming becomes part of its resistance strategy.

From 2016 to 2020, perEMPuAn—particularly under Neqy’s leadership—engaged actively in public advocacy and digital campaigning, most notably in collaboration with Komnas Perempuan to push for the passage of the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill (RUU Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual), which has since been enacted as the Sexual Violence Crime Law (UU Tindak



Pidana Kekerasan Seksual). In her capacity as campaign coordinator, Neqy represented both individual and organisational perspectives, reflecting the increasingly hybrid nature of digital activism that merges grassroots mobilisation with formal institutional engagement.

Currently operating via the Instagram account @\_perEMPUan\_, the initiative functions as a digital platform focused on public education, advocacy, and community-based awareness. While it initially centred its efforts on women, perEMPUan has since adopted an inclusive approach that acknowledges the reality that sexual violence affects all gender identities. Its primary objective lies in fostering collective digital consciousness that empowers individuals to identify, respond to, and support those affected by sexual violence—whether themselves or others.

The scope of perEMPUan's activities has grown to include both online and offline strategies. Key achievements include the distribution of free digital booklets, the organisation of surveys and seminars across educational institutions, the documentation of violence on public transportation, and institutional partnerships with PT Kereta Commuter Indonesia. These partnerships facilitated offline campaigns such as the installation of informational banners across 93 KRL commuterline stations and the dissemination of infographics within train carriages. Such efforts illustrate perEMPUan's commitment to bridging digital discourse with physical space, thereby expanding the terrain of feminist intervention.

In addition, perEMPUan's engagement with broader civil society coalitions—such as the KRPA—and its execution of a

large-scale public survey involving over 62,000 respondents further demonstrate its role as a central actor in shaping both public perception and policy on sexual violence. Although the organisation does not provide direct services, it fulfills a critical intermediary function by mapping survivor needs, referring individuals to appropriate services, and responding to community requests for support and collaboration. Moreover, perEMPUan cultivates an interactive digital community wherein followers not only consume information but also participate in a collective process of witnessing, storytelling, and mutual support. Audiences frequently share personal narratives in comment sections and tag the account when encountering relevant content. This mode of engagement

illustrates a decentralised model of advocacy based on solidarity and shared agency rather than top-down direction.

In sum, perEMPUan represents a significant case of feminist digital activism in Indonesia. Its trajectory—from a personal response to a broader, inclusive movement—demonstrates how survivor-led initiatives can challenge dominant cultural narratives, influence institutional discourse, and build sustainable models of public engagement. By leveraging digital tools while maintaining a strong presence in offline spaces, perEMPUan exemplifies the potential of integrated advocacy strategies that center lived experience, collective action, and structural change (Interview with Rosvianti, one of the founders, 21 August 2024).



## **@\_perEMPUan\_ in the Perspective of Digital Social Movements**

### **1. Digital Gladiatorial Activities**

Gladiators are individuals who actively contribute to advancing the agenda of social movements. Drawing from George & Leidner (2019), gladiators do not rely on traditional pathways such as lobbying to influence policy; instead, they are the agents of change themselves. Some gladiators operate within organised mass groups, while others act independently. Traditionally, gladiatorial movements have often centred on political activities such as women's representation and other governmental political agendas. However, in recent years, gladiatorial activities—especially within the digital realm—have shifted focus away from electoral politics toward

broader societal benefit. George & Leidner (2019) identify several forms of digital activism including data activism, exposure, and hacktivism.

Firstly, data activism encompasses a range of digital actions within political and social domains, both active and passive. A key element of data activism is the capability of individuals to access, control, and utilise data from various entities to disseminate benefits for particular causes. In this context, perEMPUan, as a community prioritising the prevention and response to sexual violence, continuously amplifies public awareness of this issue. They often collaborate with other communities engaged in direct case handling, such as @perempuanberkisah and @advokatgender on Instagram. Moreover, perEMPUan remains receptive to requests for assistance, especially from



women. Through their advocacy efforts via posts and Instagram stories, perEMPUan consistently delivers value to its followers.

Secondly, exposure refers to the dissemination of information. Actors engage in activities to share information across Social Network Sites (SNS), the press, and various platforms. Exposure has a significant potential to influence governmental sectors and wider audiences. It also pertains to content release, which can provoke public debate and societal conflicts (Benkler, 2011). Such conflicts can either raise public consciousness or generate new issues. In digital activism, exposure is a crucial mechanism that yields both positive and negative outcomes. perEMPUan exemplifies this by sharing narratives drawn from societal phenomena such as domestic violence, sexual harassment between celebrities and fans, and lesser-known

sexual disorders. For instance, posts like “Is Unplanned Pregnancy Considered Sexual Violence?” address discourses around pregnancy within marriage and unsafe abortion cases, supported by related data and myths about contraception. Additionally, perEMPUan regularly reposts content concerning sexual harassment facts via Instagram stories.

Thirdly, hacktivism involves acts of hacking carried out to achieve social or political objectives (Jordan, 2002). Hacktivists target specific entities, often motivated by the desire to extract advantageous data. According to Coleman (2011), hacktivism entails security breaches conducted through programming and implies exertion of power over others’ data. Political-intentioned hacktivism can have broad impacts on governments, organisations, and industries.



However, this theoretical framework does not align with perEMPUan's practices, as the community does not engage in hacking activities to advance their educational agenda. Therefore, this aspect of the theory is incongruent with the observed phenomenon.

## **2. Digital Transitional Activities**

Transitional actors operate between gladiators and spectators; their engagement is more passive than gladiators but more active than spectators. This means that actors at this level engage in actions that are more passive than those of gladiators but more active or aggressive than those of spectators. The activities performed by transitional actors require greater resources and energy to amplify the causes they advocate. Consequently, their impact tends to be more substantial than

that of spectators. According to George & Leidner (2019), there are four categories of activities within this level: political consumerism, digital petitions, botivism, and e-funding.

Firstly, political consumerism refers to the capacity of individuals to support actors or principles they endorse, which encompasses both boycotting (purchasing products initiated by preferred actors) and boycotting (refusing to purchase products from opposing companies). Political consumerism relates to an actor's political attitudes and their relationship with commercial organisations. In the case of perEMPUan, political consumerism is not practiced, and therefore no linkage to consumerism is observed in their activities. Secondly, digital petitions are utilised when the public collectively opposes government decisions or seeks to submit appropriate legal appeals.



Once a minimum number of online signatures is achieved, the government is compelled to respond to the issue or interest at hand. perEMPUan actively promotes digital petitions to raise broader audience awareness and to support the realisation of improved policies. Thirdly, botivism—a fusion of “bot” and “activism”—refers to the use of automated bots to execute various digital activism agendas. For example, bots may assist in explaining phenomena to audiences. However, a key concern is that many users may be unaware that posts generated by bots are not authored by humans. In this study’s case, perEMPUan does not employ bots in the creation of their content. Fourthly, e-funding involves activities aimed at generating financial resources for specific objectives. This is facilitated through websites or applications that simplify

audience access. Fundraising efforts are typically triggered by events requiring monetary support. Similarly, perEMPUan conducts an e-funding initiative called *Dolanan (Donasi Bulanan)* or monthly donation to help advance the dissemination of educational content on their Instagram account.

### 3. Digital Spectator Activities

The role assumed by digital spectators significantly drives the volume of activity within digital activism who brings in the largest mass of participants and involves the majority of the digital audience. According to Rainie et al. (2012) and Vaast et al. (2017), digital spectator activities account for the participation of nearly two-thirds of social media users in the political dynamics of social media platforms.



In each agenda, digital spectators typically engage in three primary actions: clicktivism, metavoicing, and assertion.

The first is clicktivism, which refers to audience engagement through liking posts shared by certain activists—posts that they support, appreciate, or choose to follow. In a social context where digital platforms significantly influence everyday life, clicktivism represents the most common form of public support or appreciation for a particular opinion, movement, or issue without requiring direct involvement. It is a low-effort action facilitated by access to technology, social media, digital devices, and stable internet connectivity. While clicktivism may appear to be a form of participation that requires minimal commitment, it can substantially contribute to advocacy efforts when conducted en masse.

Consequently, movements or issues promoted through digital platforms benefit from increased content visibility.

The second activity is metavoicing, which involves actions such as retweeting, reposting, and commenting on social media posts. Majchrzak et al. (2013) describe this phenomenon as an “echo chamber”—a conceptual space in which the existence and reinforcement of information are amplified through users' interactions. Metavoicing is observable across multiple social media platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and others. This activity requires greater involvement than merely liking a post, as it reflects an audience's attempt to express their opinions. As with clicktivism, the dissemination power of



metavoicing is largely dependent on the number of users who participate in amplifying a particular piece of content.

The third activity undertaken by digital spectators is assertion. Assertion entails sending messages or information directly to others in the form of text, images, audio, or video. It may also involve creating posts and directly contacting representatives of a particular movement. Although digital access is widely available, assertion requires greater effort and engagement compared to simply liking or commenting. As such, fewer individuals tend to engage in this type of activity. Nevertheless, assertion can produce more substantial impacts for the cause or issue being championed. When assertion becomes a normalised

practice, it can open avenues for meaningful dialogue between members of a movement and opposing stakeholders.

From the above explanation, it can be observed that the digital audience of perEMPUan tends to fall into these three categories. The high number of likes, shares, and comments on posts from @\_perEMPUan\_ indicates that the concept of digital spectator activities is indeed at work among the digital observers of the perEMPUan community. For instance, in a post titled *“Stop Romanticizing Sexual Violence in Fictional Narratives”* from the #ThinkingThursday series, the account received 2,286 likes, 49 comments, and 4 shares—reflecting substantial support for the notion that sexual violence is often romanticised in fictional stories, including both literature and film. Similarly, another post titled *“Sexualizing Breastfeeding Mothers is Sexual Violence”*



from the #WhyWednesday series received 2,288 likes and 50 comments. In the comment section, digital audiences shared their concerns and voiced agreement that such sexualisation is unacceptable. These interactions align with the theoretical framework proposed by George & Leidner (2019), illustrating how the audience of the perEMPUan community actively engages in digital spectator activities on Instagram.

### **Netnographic Study of the Instagram Account @\_perEMPUan\_**

The perEMPUan community shares a variety of perspectives on the issue of sexual violence. This study employs a netnographic approach to examine the content shared by the account, with the author categorising posts based on the five topics that receive the highest levels of engagement on Instagram @\_perEMPUan\_.

These topics include: (1) the relationship between idols and fans, (2) domestic violence, (3) victim-blaming in cases of sexual violence, (4) conceptual understandings of sexual violence and harassment, and (5) sexual violence in the context of tragedy.

The first topic explored in this study is the relationship between idols and their fans, which has generated considerable engagement on Instagram @\_perEMPUan\_. A notable example is a post titled *“The Romanticisation of Sexual Violence in Fictional Narratives”*, which received 2,286 likes and 49 comments. In the comments section, users expressed their views on a range of fictional stories—both written and in a film—that address this issue. These discussions are grounded in the observation that possessive behaviour by fictional characters, as well as non-consensual

acts, are often normalised in storytelling platforms such as Wattpad and alternate universe (AU) fanfiction on X (formerly Twitter). This post attracted the highest number of viewers among all content published by @\_perEMPUan\_. Several comments criticised the normalisation of male characters perpetrating violence against their partners, highlighting the

problematic nature of such portrayals. Others noted that romantic narratives in fiction should not be interpreted as applicable to real-life relationships. Furthermore, audience disappointment was evident in comments referencing the presence of Stockholm Syndrome, in which sexual violence is portrayed as romantic.

**Picture 1. The first category of netnography**



Source: Post by @\_perEMPUan\_ on Instagram, available at [https://www.instagram.com/p/CelbQbSvI0r/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRI0DBINWFIZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/CelbQbSvI0r/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRI0DBINWFIZA==)



The second aspect of this netnographic study focuses on posts related to domestic violence. One such post by @\_perEMPUan\_, titled *“The Sexualisation of Breastfeeding Mothers Is Sexual Violence: Have You Learned Why Breastfeeding Shaming Constitutes Violence Against Mothers?”*, seeks to raise awareness about the existence of harassment experienced by breastfeeding mothers. This post generated a strong response, as evidenced by 2,288 likes and 49 comments from the audience.

This particular entry, part of the #WhyWednesday series, explores how society—especially men—tends to perceive breasts primarily as sexual objects. As a consequence, the act of breastfeeding in public is often regarded as inappropriate or taboo. The post also highlights various negative impacts resulting from the sexualisation of breastfeeding

mothers. This content sparked significant engagement among @\_perEMPUan\_'s digital audience.

The majority of commenters agreed that the sexualisation of breastfeeding mothers constitutes a form of harassment and sexual violence. Some spectators expressed surprise and concern that, in today's era, breastfeeding in public is still viewed as shameful. Furthermore, certain comments proposed alternatives, such as the increased provision of nursing rooms in public spaces to better protect mothers from sexual violence and harassment. In addition, one woman shared her personal experience, stating that she breastfeeds her child and chooses to ignore people's remarks when doing so, asserting her right to feed her baby without interference.

**Picture 2. The second category of netnography**



Source: Post by @\_perEMPuAn\_ on Instagram, available at [https://www.instagram.com/p/CSJy6EAl3ih/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/CSJy6EAl3ih/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==)

Third, this example highlights how the general public still tends to blame victims for the sexual violence they experience. This is reflected in one of @\_perEMPuAn\_'s posts, which responded to a content piece from an Indonesian hijab brand that was perceived as engaging in victim blaming. The post, which garnered 287 likes and 18 comments, sparked reactions from netizens in response to a statement made by the Director of the brand Rabbani at the

time. Members of the public expressed disappointment and anger toward the statement delivered by the figure. Followers also voiced their concern and spoke up, emphasising that clothing—regardless of whether it is modest or not—should never be used as a justification for committing acts of harassment or sexual violence.

**Picture 3. The third category of netnography**



Source: Post by @\_perEMPuAn\_ on Instagram, available at [https://www.instagram.com/reel/CnmQ9\\_op6Mp/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA=](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CnmQ9_op6Mp/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA=)

Fourth is a netnographic analysis of a post discussing concepts or phenomena that need to be understood in acts of sexual violence or harassment. The content titled "Apakah Ekshibisionisme adalah Kekerasan Seksual?" gathered 849 likes and 12 comments. In this post, perEMPuAn educates the audience about how exhibitionism—namely,

the act of exposing parts of the body with sexual motivation—carried out by exhibitionists, is a form of sexual violence. Exhibitionism often happens to women and can cause trauma for the victims. Furthermore, this content received comments from people expressing how disturbing this behavior is. Some people shared their experiences when they encountered

unpleasant incidents related to these exhibitionists. With a similar pattern in each of their stories in the comment section, the perpetrators showed their genitals to others, especially women.

Picture 4. The fourth category of netnography



Source: Post by @perEMPUan\_ on Instagram, available at [https://www.instagram.com/p/Ce3edPZPJRu/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRI0DBiNWFIZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/Ce3edPZPJRu/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRI0DBiNWFIZA==)

Fifth is a netnographic analysis of sexual violence and tragedy in Indonesia. The perEMPUan community once discussed sexual violence in relation to the 1965 tragedy through a post titled "#Menolak Lupa Kekerasan Seksual Massal 1965" ("*Refusing to Forget the Mass Sexual Violence of 1965*"). In this post, they explored how sexual violence occurred as a result of propaganda. This propaganda targeted Gerwani (Indonesian Women's Movement), a women's organisation affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party, which was accused by the New Order (Orba) regime of being



responsible for the torture and murder of generals during the G-30-S 1965 incident. Although there was no evidence of torture found on the generals, the Orba regime arrested, tortured, and committed acts of sexual violence against many Gerwani members. This content, which garnered 1,766 likes and 12 comments, also educated audiences on the types of sexual violence that took place following the G-30-S 1965

event. In response, audiences expressed their disappointment in the comment section, such as the user @ilmadarajat who wrote: “🥹🥹🥹 Hopefully justice for the victims can be realised soon...”—a comment that reflects audience sympathy towards the victims. The use of various emojis in the comment section of this post allows us to understand the severity and emotional weight of this tragic event.

**Picture 5. The fifth category of netnography**



Source: Post by @\_perEMPuAn\_ on Instagram, available at [https://www.instagram.com/p/CUcezNtvthl/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/CUcezNtvthl/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==)

During the netnographic analysis, the author of this article identified several limitations that affect user interactions on Instagram, including those experienced by the perEMPUan community. It is important to acknowledge that Instagram is one of the most widely used platforms, which encourages the rapid dissemination of information. However, there are drawbacks to using this platform. Instagram offers only basic features such as likes, comments, and shares. Although users can freely insert emojis in the comment section, unlike Facebook, Instagram does not offer a reaction feature that allows users to express a range of emotions such as agreement, happiness, anger, sadness, or admiration through different emojis. This restriction on expression—being limited to “likes”—makes it difficult to discern how many users are

actually angry, sad, or happy when engaging with perEMPUan’s posts. As a result, we can only assume approval from users who choose not to comment based on the number of likes a post receives. Furthermore, the absence of a “dislike” button alongside the “like” feature adds to the limitations in understanding public responses. We are unable to fully comprehend how those who are unwilling, hesitant, or too busy to comment actually feel about the content.

In addition, another limitation concerns the dissemination of perEMPUan’s content. The perEMPUan community often reposts content related to sexual violence and harassment cases through Instagram Stories. However, this feature is only available for 24 hours. This presents a challenge for audiences who do not access Instagram within that time frame,



as they may miss the stories shared by @\_perEMPUan\_. For individuals who are not active social media users, there is a risk of being left behind and losing the opportunity to learn, as the content has already expired. This is especially unfortunate given that education on sexual violence is urgently needed and should remain accessible over a longer period, particularly because incidents of sexual violence continue to be widespread in society.

### **perEMPUan and the Victim's Perspective**

In its ongoing discourse, the perEMPUan community consistently advocates for a victim-centred perspective in its digital communications. This commitment is evident in several of its posts that articulate the lived realities and psychological experiences of survivors of sexual violence. First, in a post

titled *"The Absence of Resistance Does Not Mean Consent"*, part of the #SharingSaturday and #MitosFaktaperEMPUan series, the community addresses the psychological condition commonly experienced by survivors, known as tonic immobility—a state of temporary paralysis often triggered by trauma or fear during instances of sexual assault. In this post, @\_perEMPUan\_ asserts that the presence or absence of resistance cannot serve as the sole criterion for identifying acts of violence. The community also underscores the pervasive issue of victim blaming, which further marginalises survivors by holding them accountable for incidents beyond their control. This misplaced emphasis on victim resistance as a condition for defining sexual violence ultimately imposes an additional emotional burden on survivors.



Second, in a random post from the #TalkingTuesday series, perEMPUan again demonstrates its support for a victim-centred framework through the use of meme-based communication. The first slide of the meme states unequivocally that sexual violence is never the victim's fault. The second slide emphasises the importance of not objectifying others. Subsequent slides highlight how societal narratives frequently blame victims based on their clothing, thus reinforcing harmful stereotypes and perpetuating a culture of victim-blaming.

Third, another post by @\_perEMPUan—featuring the logo of KOMPAKS—expresses solidarity with a campaign demanding that a well-known Muslim fashion brand issue a public apology and remove one of its advertisements. The ad in question implies that women should wear modest

clothing to prevent men from having “impure thoughts.” The community criticises this message as a form of victim-blaming, shifting responsibility from the perpetrator's behavior to the victim's attire and thus perpetuating the notion that it is women's responsibility to prevent sexual violence.

From these examples, it is evident that the perEMPUan community actively protects and promotes the victim's perspective in its content. However, a notable limitation emerges: the absence of first-hand survivor testimonies. This lack of direct narrative from survivors may limit the audience's ability to fully grasp the emotional and psychological impact of sexual violence from the perspective of those most affected.



## **Political Hashtag on @\_perEMPUan\_**

Political hashtag refers to a form of digital activism in which hashtags (#) on social media are employed to amplify and articulate various socio-political issues. According to Rho & Mazmanian (2020), political hashtags serve to organise and categorise the vast array of content circulating on social media into cohesive topics. A prominent example is the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, which encapsulates the public movement advocating for justice and equality for Black individuals. Hashtags, in this context, function as tools to increase both visibility and public discourse. They allow users to trace and engage with the ongoing development of particular issues in real time.

However, Rho & Mazmanian (2020) also highlight a critical limitation of hashtag politics: the potential for misdirected attention. Users may exploit trending hashtags to promote unrelated content or misinformation, such as hoaxes, thereby diverting attention from the core issue. Despite this, hashtags continue to serve as a means of expressing public pressure. In moments of crisis or controversy requiring mass attention, hashtags become an effective and accessible tool for individuals or groups to mobilise collective concern.

Small (2011) adds that political hashtag discourse does not necessarily constitute a primary forum for dialogic exchange. Instead, hashtags are primarily used to transmit short, declarative messages to a broader audience. Small (2011) further argues that while hashtags themselves may not



yield substantial transformative impact, they play a key role in amplifying content, including news and articles, which may later be picked up by mainstream media outlets.

The perEMPUan community strategically employs hashtags in nearly all of its content. A recurring example is the use of #perEMPUan in its Instagram posts. However, a significant limitation emerges when evaluating the effectiveness of this digital strategy. Due to Instagram's hashtag functionality, searching for #perEMPUan does not exclusively yield content from the @\_perEMPUan\_ account. Instead, it returns a broader array of posts tagged with variations such as #perempuan (Indonesian for "woman"), which dilutes the specificity and branding of the hashtag. As a result, the perEMPUan community is unable to fully

control or claim the hashtag for the exclusive dissemination of its ideas, messages, and campaigns. This undermines the potential effectiveness of their hashtag politics strategy, as the tag is not functioning as a unique or clearly identifiable marker for their movement's content.

## Conclusion

Sexual violence remains a pervasive issue that limits access to safe and supportive environments, particularly for women. In many cases, survivors are silenced by structural barriers, victim-blaming narratives, and a lack of institutional responsiveness. Within this context, online campaigns have emerged as a strategic avenue for raising awareness, challenging dominant discourses, and facilitating public engagement. This study examined



@\_perEMPUan\_ as a case of Instagram-based advocacy, highlighting how digital platforms can be used to build and sustain anti-sexual violence campaigns.

Using George & Leidner's (2019) framework on the hierarchy of digital activism, the study identified how @\_perEMPUan\_ functions across three interconnected levels: as a "gladiator" initiating digital campaigns and producing educational content; as a transitional actor collaborating with allies and supporting collective efforts; and as a spectator of broader audience participation through digital spectator activities. These layered roles reveal how an online campaign can organise its strategies to maintain visibility, build networks, and invite ongoing public involvement.

The study also shows that platform-based activism is shaped by both technological affordances and expressive limitations. While Instagram offers broad reach and visual immediacy, it constrains symbolic expression—such as the intended emphasis on the stylised capitalisation in "EMPU"—and restricts interactive depth through limited features for feedback or nuanced emotional responses. These constraints illustrate that digital activism is not only about content, but also about how platform design structures communication.

Findings further indicate that participation in digital campaigns does not always follow a linear trajectory from passive to active involvement. In the context of @\_perEMPUan\_, even seemingly simple actions—such as likes, shares, or empathetic comments—



contribute to the campaign's momentum and resonance. These actions suggest that audience involvement in online anti-sexual violence campaigns often operates through affective alignment and symbolic gestures, which should be recognised as meaningful within broader political participation models.

By categorising @\_perEMPUan\_'s content into five thematic areas—(1) relationships between public figures and fans, (2) domestic violence, (3) victim-blaming, (4) definitions of sexual harassment, and (5) the framing of sexual violence as tragedy—this study provides insight into how issue framing, narrative structure, and engagement patterns contribute to the sustainability of a digital campaign. The findings demonstrate that successful online advocacy is shaped by

both internal motivations (such as the founders' experiences) and external sociocultural factors that influence public responses.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the literature on online anti-sexual violence campaigns by showing how digital communities navigate strategy, participation, and message framing through platform-based advocacy. It emphasises the need to further explore how different levels of digital activism function in practice, especially in contexts where institutional support is limited. Future research could examine how platform-specific features shape participation styles, and how campaigns like @\_perEMPUan\_ adapt their messaging strategies to maintain relevance, credibility, and public trust in rapidly shifting digital environments.



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# The Implementation of the Social Licence to Operate (SLO) Concept in Nickel Mining Governance in Kolaka Regency

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## ABSTRACT

*This article examines the governance of nickel mining permits in Indonesia, with Kolaka regency as a case study, with a focus on the implementation of the social license to operate (SLO) and the principle of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) as an integral component of SLO. The growing global demand for nickel has led to environmental degradation and social challenges. Drawing on document analysis, field observations, and interviews, this study finds that the implementation of SLO in Kolaka has not fully achieved genuine social legitimacy. Companies largely depend on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and community development programmes to build social acceptance, with primary focus on compensatory measures such as infrastructure or employment. However, these strategies tend to be top-down and do not ensure inclusive participation. FPIC has not been properly implemented, as consultations often exclude indigenous communities and fail to meet the criteria of being free, prior, and informed. Moreover, SLO is typically secured after mining operations have already commenced. These findings show that SLO implementation in Kolaka remains superficial, shaped more by CSR than by active engagement and voluntary consent from affected communities. It recommends adopting a more transparent and participatory approach grounded in FPIC principles.*

**Keywords:** Nickel mining; permit governance; SLO; FPIC; Kolaka

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## Introduction

The global surge in demand for nickel, particularly driven by the development of renewable energy sector, has triggered the nickel rush phenomenon, leading to a significant increase in mining activities in Indonesia, including in Kolaka regency. While this phenomenon has boosted national nickel production, it has also resulted in adverse social and environmental impacts, such as pollution and rising tensions with local communities (Jatam, 2022; Wijaya, 2022). The governance of nickel mining permits, therefore, plays a crucial role in ensuring operational sustainability and mitigating the negative impacts (Aljauhar, 2018; Tegnan et al., 2021).

Indonesia possesses approximately 25% of the world's nickel reserves (Zuada et al., 2021), positioning it as a strategic player in the global renewable energy supply chain.

However, exploiting these vast resources has frequently involved significant governance issues, including environmental degradation, regulatory breaches, illegal mining, and corruption (Tegnan et al., 2021). In this context, the social licence to operate (SLO) is vital. As a form of social contract, the SLO builds relationships between mining firms and local communities (Prno & Slocombe, 2012; Sícoli Póslleman & Sallan, 2019).

This article aims to analyse how the SLO is implemented in the governance of nickel mining amid the ongoing nickel rush phenomenon. The SLO is conceptualised as a social contract reflecting the relationship between mining companies and local communities, wherein communities actively influence the sustainability of mining projects (Heffron et al., 2021; Komnitsas, 2020;



Prno & Slocombe, 2012; Sicoli Pósléman & Sallan, 2019). A core element of this framework is free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), which emphasises obtaining consent from affected communities before launching any project likely to affect their lives (Anderson, 2011; Rodhouse & Vanclay, 2016; Yakovleva et al., 2023). Both concepts are vital for sound mining governance, particularly in regions like Southeast Asia where extractive sector governance remains weak. This study assesses how these mechanisms are applied in Kolaka and explores the challenges and opportunities faced by mining firms in securing social legitimacy to sustain their operations.

This article is based on qualitative research that combines document analysis, field observations, and in-depth interviews with various informants directly or indirectly

involved in political practices and mining activities in Kolaka. All names of individuals, locations, and institutions have been anonymised consistently to protect privacy and to avoid potential negative consequences for local communities, government actors, companies, and the researcher. Only names derived from written sources or public figures that cannot reasonably be anonymised have been retained. This process of anonymisation reflects an ethical commitment and methodological caution in addressing the sensitive issues explored in this study.

The article is structured as follows: the first section reviews literature on the SLO and outlines the analytical framework; the second introduces the empirical context of Kolaka as the case study; the third examines strategies used by nickel mining firms to implement the

SLO, including successes and challenges; the fourth reviews the obstacles in implementing the SLO during the permitting process and the extent of community involvement. The conclusion underscores the need to strengthen the SLO to promote sustainable mining governance in Kolaka.

## **Challenges and Strategies in Implementing the Social Licence to Operate in Nickel Mining in Kolaka Regency**

The SLO has gained increasing relevance in the context of mining activities, particularly in response to the nickel rush phenomenon. SLO refers to the obligation of companies to secure acceptance from local communities for their operations, recognising that social consent is crucial when mining activities carry the

potential for environmental and social impacts on surrounding populations (Heffron et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2021).

In Indonesia, the concept is embedded in legal frameworks such as the Job Creation Law (Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja) and the Environmental Impact Assessment (Analisis Mengenai Dampak Lingkungan/AMDAL) regime. The principles underlying SLO are reflected in provisions requiring community involvement in environmental permitting. For example, Article 26 (3) of the Environmental Protection and Management Law (Law No. 32/2009), revised by Article 26 (2) of the Job Creation Law, mandates engagement with communities affected by planned business activities during AMDAL preparation. Likewise, Article 23 (3) of the Job Creation Law requires business risk assessments to consider health, safety, environmental



impact, and natural resource use. These provisions show that community involvement is not merely procedural but forms a core aspect of corporate social legitimacy, closely aligned with SLO principles in the mining sector (Komnitsas, 2020).

The SLO can be understood as a social contract between companies and local communities, wherein companies are expected to fulfil social, economic, and environmental expectations (Prno & Slocombe, 2012). Community trust is essential for securing this licence. Without it, local populations often resist or reject mining activities (Matebesi & Marais, 2018). Thomson & Boutilier's (2011) framework, comprising legitimacy, credibility, and trust, explains how SLO can be sustained and social conflict prevented (Gehman et al., 2017; Savira, 2023). These elements are particularly

relevant where distrust towards companies leads to tension. In this context, free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is a key tool for establishing legitimacy, ensuring that communities can meaningfully engage in decisions before mining begins. Effective FPIC strengthens a firm's social legitimacy, credibility, and community trust.

Leena et al., (2019) note that trust is shaped by community engagement, access to information, company reputation, and contributions to local development. Firms perceived as fair and transparent often receive greater public support, even when negative impacts occur. Case studies from Colombia and Peru highlight that securing SLO is critical to long term sustainability, as the absence of community support can lead to delays, disruptions, or project termination, threatening

both investment and operational continuity (Heffron et al., 2021; Prno & Scott Slocombe, 2012; Sícoli Póslleman & Sallan, 2019).

Cesar (2019) notes that community acceptance of a company increases when the company is perceived as fair, highlighting the importance of fairness in shaping relationship between companies and local communities. Similarly, Savira's (2023) found that community trust in developers who demonstrate fairness and credibility is a crucial factor in securing the SLO. The success of SLO highly dependent on stakeholders engagement, which not only fosters more responsible mining practices but also has the potential to mitigate the social impacts associated with extractive activities (Cesar, 2019, 2021; Komnitsas, 2020).

FPIC, which forms part of the SLO, is a fundamental internationally recognised

principle aimed at ensuring that indigenous and local communities provide voluntary consent before any project affecting them is initiated (Prno & Slocombe, 2012). FPIC is crucial for balancing the interests of mining companies with the rights of local communities in Kolaka. It underscores that the need for communities to give their consent freely, based on comprehensive information about the potential impacts of a proposed project (Huizenga, 2019; Ikbal, 2012; Yakovleva et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, the relevance of FPIC has emerged from growing concern over the marginalisation of indigenous communities who often lack the political leverage to safeguard their interests in decisions taken by the government authorities or private investors (Anderson, 2011). Although some efforts have been made to incorporate



FPIC into legislation, such as the Environmental Protection and Management Law, these remain incomplete. Current regulations do not explicitly require legal consent from communities before project implementation. Instead, they emphasise public consultation without granting affected communities veto power. Consequently, FPIC is often subject to the discretion of companies or local authorities. Yet, the “consent” aspect of FPIC remains critical to project sustainability, particularly where indigenous rights and livelihoods are involved (Wardhani, 2020).

In this context, FPIC seeks to ensure that communities, including indigenous peoples, receive adequate information and are given the genuine opportunity to provide or withhold consent for projects that may affect their lives and livelihoods. However, the implementation of FPIC in Indonesia continues to faces

significant challenges due to the lack of formal recognition of indigenous communities’ rights over their land and resources, which complicates the process of securing consent that is truly free, prior, and informed (Rodhouse & Vanclay, 2016; Yakovleva et al., 2023).

Overall, the implementation of SLO in mining governance, particularly within the nickel sector, should be understood as comprising two interrelated and complementary approaches. FPIC forms an integral part of SLO, wherein the community’s right to grant or withhold consent constitutes a fundamental element of inclusive and rights-based governance. While there is a growing body of literature on SLO and FPIC, there remains a lack of focused research on how FPIC is operationalised within the broader framework of SLO, especially in the context of mining permit governance in Indonesia.



Accordingly, this study aims to investigate more thoroughly how the governance of nickel mining permits in Indonesia, especially in Kolaka, integrates the principles of SLO and FPIC to achieve more inclusive, legitimate, and sustainable development outcomes.

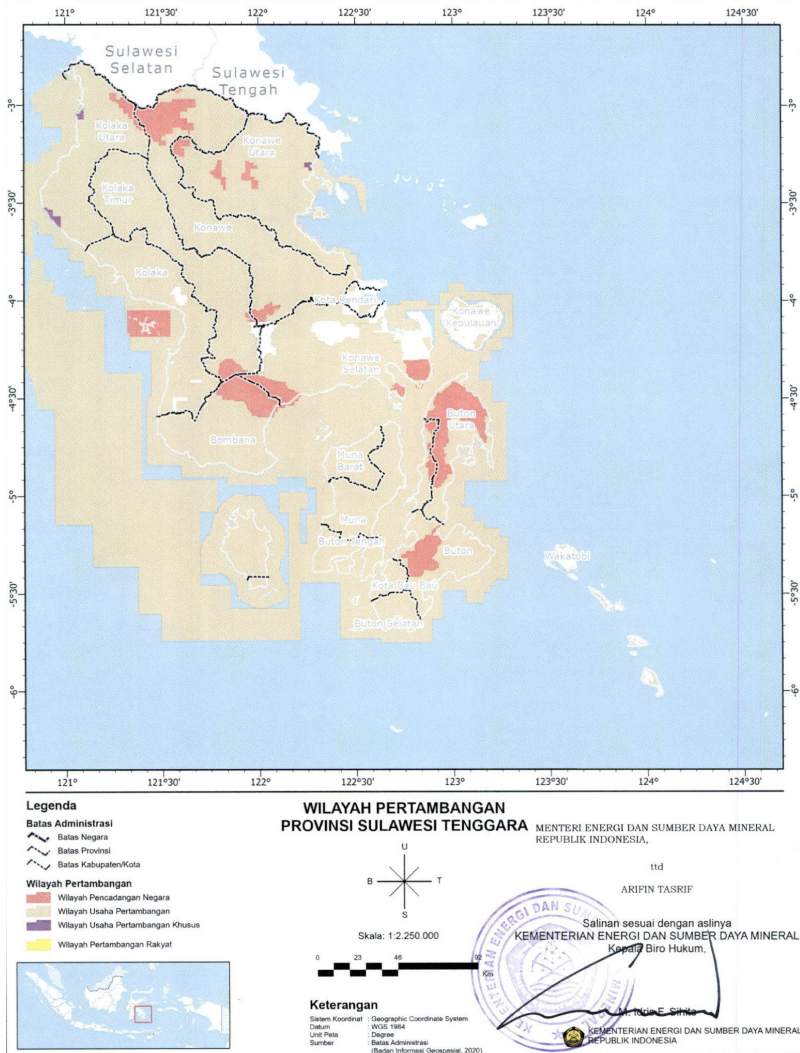
## The Nickel Mining Boom in Kolaka Regency

Kolaka regency, Southeast Sulawesi, was formally established on 29 September 1959. It spans 3,283.64 km<sup>2</sup> of land and around 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> of maritime area. Administratively, it comprises 12 sub-districts, 35 urban villages, and 100 rural villages, with a population of 228,970 (Kabupaten Kolaka, 2021). The local economy relies primarily on agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, supported by sufficient education and healthcare infrastructure (JP, 2023). Kolaka holds one of

the largest nickel reserves in Southeast Sulawesi, estimated at 12.81 billion tonnes (suarakendari.com, 2023). Mining activities began in 1901 (tribhakti.com, 2021), and expanded significantly post-2008, particularly after Indonesia's 2014 ban on raw nickel exports to promote domestic smelter development (PWYP Indonesia, 2017).

According to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources Decree No. 104.K/MB.01/MEM.B/2022 concerning Mining Areas in Southeast Sulawesi Province, the following map illustrates the designated nickel mining business permit areas (*wilayah izin usaha pertambangan/WIUP*) within the region:

**Figure 1. Mining Areas in Southeast Sulawesi Province**



Source: Decree of the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM) No. 104.K/MB.01/MEM.B/2022 on Mining Areas in Southeast Sulawesi Province



The map above illustrates that the entire Kolaka is included within the designated WIUP. In contrast, only a small portion of the territory is classified as a state-reserved mining area.

Kolaka is endowed with abundant natural resources, particularly nickel, which serves as one of the primary sources of regional income. The extractive potential of these resources and reserves is outlined as follows:

**Table 1. Data on Mineral Resource Potential in Kolaka Regency**

No	District	Distribution of Mineral Resources	
		Area (Hectares)	Nickel
1	Iwoimenda	25.680	-
2	Wolo	35.033	4.108
3	Samaturu	66.260	-
4	Latambaga	22.480	-
5	Kolaka	12.700	-
6	Wundulako	16.483	4.498
7	Baula	10.750	4.481
8	Pomalaa	23.420	16.136
9	Tanggetada	24.540	4.911
10	Polinggona	12.460	-
11	Watubangga	31.880	737,5
12	Toari	10.620	-
Total		292.307	34.847
Specific Gravity			1,5
Estimated Thickness			5
Estimated Distribution			50%

*Source: RPJMD Kolaka 2019-2024*

Mining companies operating in Kolaka are primarily concentrated in three districts: Wolo, Pomalaa, and Tanggetada.



**Table 2. Registered Mining Companies Operating in Kolaka Regency**

Mining Companies Operating in Kolaka Regency			
Region		Company name	Types of Mining Materials
Regency/city	District(s)		
Kolaka	Pomalaa	Akar Mas International, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Pomalaa	Aneka Usaha Kolaka, PD	Nickel
Kolaka	Pomalaa	Antam, Tbk, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Pomalaa	Bola Dunia Mandiri, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Wolo	Ceria Nugraha Indotama, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Tanggetada and Lambandia	Dharma Bumi Kendari, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Tanggetada and Lambandia	Dharma Bumi Kolaka, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Tanggetada	Pernick Sultra, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Pomalaa	Putra Mekongga Sejahtera, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Tanggetada, Watubangga, and Lambandia	Toshida Indonesia, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Wolo	Wajah Inti Lestari, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Pomalaa	Wijaya Nikel Nusantara, PT	Nickel
Kolaka	Pomalaa	Mapan Asri Sejahtera, PT	Nickel

*Source: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022*

The mining operations and significantly enhancing undertaken by companies regional economic performance. in Kolaka have become a This is reflected in the increasing vital component of the local contribution to the gross regional economy, providing employment domestic product between 2021 opportunities for local residents and 2023.



**Table 3. Annual Contribution of Mining Companies**

Year	Contribution from Mining and Quarrying (in million IDR)
2021	13.244.394,76
2022	15.657.297,52
2023	19.324.787,52

*Source: BPS, 2024*

Kolaka's growing nickel industry has generated economic opportunities but also caused significant environmental harm, especially in villages within mining zones 1 and 2. In Hakatutobu village, coastal and marine pollution, including sedimentation from red mud waste linked to port construction, has led to shallower coastal waters. This has contaminated fish farming, seaweed cultivation, and sea cucumber harvesting. The damage has severely affected local fishermen, who now struggle to depend on nearby

waters. Whereas fish were once abundant near the shore, they must now travel further out to sustain their catch.

Mining activities have resulted in environmental pollution, including in Muara Lapao-pao village, located within the operational area of PT CNI, where a dam breach caused water overflow (Lestari, 2023). The adverse impacts have extended to other sectors, notably agriculture. In Pesouha village, for instance, mining waste has led to land degradation and subsequent flooding. The floodwaters, contaminated with red mud, inundated



approximately 650 hectares of rice fields and residential areas (Interview with Gusri, head of administration in Pesouha village, 3 October 2023). This environmental disaster caused widespread crop failure, resulting in reduced income for farmers and a further decline in the economic conditions of the local community (Salman, 2023).

Social challenges in Kolaka extend beyond environmental degradation, with local employment emerging as a major source of tension. During the early phase of nickel operations, conflicts arose over recruitment practices. In Hakatutobu village in 2003, protests erupted during the construction of a ferronickel plant after the developer was accused of prioritising workers from outside Kolaka, while offering only temporary or low-skilled roles to locals. The appointment of non-local workers to similar roles further

fuelled resentment among residents who felt marginalised. Land ownership also remains a major point of contention, driven by overlapping mining concessions and hereditary land claims that often lack formal legal recognition. These issues particularly affect Indigenous communities and compound frustrations over the limited inclusion of locals in mining employment.

Despite the significant economic potential brought about by the rapid development of the nickel industry, Kolaka faces serious challenges stemming from the environmental and social impacts of mining activities. In this regard, Kolaka presents a compelling case study through which to examine the complex dynamics of nickel mining governance. Analysing Kolaka as a focal point provides a solid foundation for understanding the broader implications of mining

activities and offers valuable insights into both identify both the challenges and opportunities for achieving sustainable natural resource management.

## **The Dynamics of SLO Implementation in the Governance of Nickel Mining Permits in Kolaka Regency**

SLO seeks to ensure that mining companies contribute to local development by creating employment and delivering social programmes, such as education and healthcare, not only for employees but also for those in related sectors like logistics, hospitality, and public services (Nguyen, 2021). In Kolaka, the implementation of the SLO within permit governance reflects a complex dynamic, where success relies less on regulatory compliance and more on companies' ability to foster genuine relationships with local

communities. This includes inclusive project planning, transparent information-sharing, and responsiveness to local needs and concerns.

A key mechanism in securing an SLO is the application of FPIC, which ensures that affected communities receive timely information, can freely express consent or dissent, and participate throughout the decision-making process. In Kolaka's nickel sector, implementing FPIC remains challenging, especially in ensuring that consultations genuinely reflect community aspirations. To build trust, companies have employed strategies such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and mandatory community development programmes (*program pemberdayaan masyarakat/PPM*).

While CSR reflects voluntary initiatives in economic, health, education, and infrastructure



development, PPM, requiring local government approval, aims to improve the socio-economic conditions of communities near mining sites. Notably, PT Vale initiated a PPM even before commencing operations as an early engagement effort (Heffron et al., 2021). Broader SLO strategies also include transparency around social and environmental impacts, participatory consultations, and targeted development programmes. These efforts are shaped by regulatory frameworks, local socio cultural dynamics, and the communication strategies used by companies to engage stakeholders (Mononen & Sairinen, 2021).

To foster the three core elements of SLO legitimacy, credibility, and trust, companies have adopted multifaceted strategies. These include prioritising the recruitment of local labour, undertaking CSR

and PPM, and establishing collaborative partnerships with local communities. Specific initiatives have involved vocational training for residents, support for micro-enterprise development, and the construction of public infrastructure through participatory approaches. Such strategies aim to strengthen company-community relations and enhance local participation in shaping corporate social policy.

These strategic measures reflect the notion that a company's legitimacy in the eyes of the community is contingent not only on its economic contributions but also on the social impacts it engenders. By implementing transparent CSR programmes and actively involving local communities in decision-making

processes, companies can foster the credibility and trust essentials for securing and maintaining long-term social support.

#### **a. Employing the Local Workforce**

Nickel companies in Kolaka regency aim to foster positive relations with local communities by prioritising the recruitment of local residents. Through open hiring processes, they promote equal opportunities and local participation. Where skills are lacking, firms provide targeted training to enhance competencies. This strategy helps build both economic support and social legitimacy (Muchtazar et al., 2023). Leena et al. (2019) note that creating local employment is among the most effective ways to secure an SLO, as it reduces unemployment and boosts income, creating mutual benefits. Companies such as PT Ceria Nugraha Indotama (CNI)

and PT WIL have successfully recruited workers from nearby villages. PT CNI, for instance, prioritises local hires, with most of its workforce drawn from surrounding communities (Arsyad, 2023).

*“We prioritise local labour up to 70%. In addition, we also enhance their capacity through training, for example, by providing them with education or training such as operating heavy equipment.” (Interview with Saldi, external CSR representative of PT CNI, 4 October 2023).*

Meanwhile, PT WIL also engages residents as workers, whether in skilled or unskilled roles, particularly in non-technical positions, as part of its economic empowerment strategy.

Nickel companies in Kolaka have sought to empower local communities by collaborating with local youth organisations,



such as *karang taruna*, to provide training that enhances workforce skills and institutional capacity. These efforts aim to deliver tangible economic benefits and foster community empowerment. By offering broader employment opportunities, both in unskilled and administrative roles, and prioritising local recruitment, companies have strengthened social trust and legitimacy. This approach ensures that mining's economic gains are directly felt by local populations, supporting smoother operations and reinforcing positive company–community relations (Matebesi & Marais, 2018; Mononen & Sairinen, 2021).

**b. Corporate Social Responsibility and Community Empowerment Programmes**

Mining companies in Kolaka implement CSR and PPM initiatives as strategies to gain

legitimacy and SLO from local communities. These programmes aim to deliver direct benefits through economic assistance, infrastructure development, and capacity building (Cesar, 2019; Komnitsas, 2020). For instance, PT CNI allocates CSR and PPM funds annually, distributing IDR 200 million to first-ring villages and IDR 100 million to second-ring villages within Wolo district. These funds are typically used for priority community needs identified through local consultations.

*“The amount of CSR funds for each village in ring 1 is 200 million, but for villages in ring 2, they receive 100 million, this is provided by CNI.” (Interview with Rahman, head of Wolo district, 11 October 2023).*

The allocation of funds is determined through village-level deliberations involving various local stakeholders before being



submitted to the company. PT Antam also provides varying levels of funding, the use of which is jointly discussed with the community during the Pomalaa Development Planning Meeting (Musyawarah Rencana Pembangunan Pomalaa/ MUSREMPOM). According to the Tambea village government, programme proposals in Pomalaa district are typically developed through community consensus during these planning meetings.

*“The proposals are made during a meeting called MUSREMPOM. So, all the villages discuss Pomalaa’s development. The collected amount of 200 million already includes partners and VAT, so the amount that reaches the village is only 150 million.” (Interview with Kusupang, Tambea village government, 3 October 2023).*

**Table 4. CSR and PPM Funds Received by Villages in Kolaka Regency**

District	Company	Annual CSR/PPM Fund Allocation for Villages in Ring 1	Annual CSR/PPM Fund Allocation for Villages in Ring 2
Wolo	PT. CNI	IDR 200.000.000	IDR 100.000.000
Wolo	PT. WIL	Irregular	Irregular
Pomalaa	PT. Antam	IDR 200.000.000	IDR 100.000.000

*Source: Processed by the author, 2024*



CSR and PPM funding helps villages near mining sites become more financially self-reliant, reducing dependence on state funds such as *dana desa* and *alokasi dana desa*. These programmes typically focus on education, healthcare, and infrastructure, sectors crucial for fostering strong community relations and securing the SLO (Heffron et al., 2021; Sícoli Póslleman & Sallan, 2019). CSR reflects SLO principles, where active community participation is key to gaining social approval (Matebesi & Marais, 2018). In practice, companies adapt CSR to meet pressing needs; during the COVID-19 pandemic, priorities shifted to health. PT Ceria, for instance, conducted a needs-mapping process to align its initiatives with community input (Interview with Saldi, external CSR representative of PT CNI, 4 October 2023).

Companies also accept village proposals, expanding CSR and PPM's impact on local welfare (Nguyen, 2021). This flexibility shows purely profit-driven but seek long-term relationships through sustained social responsibility (Komnitsas, 2020; Prno & Slocombe, 2012). CSR initiatives span infrastructure, education, healthcare, and social support, including roads, health posts, scholarships, and medical aid. Infrastructure is often prioritised to improve living standards and access to services, with programmes coordinated with local authorities to meet real needs (Interview with Saldi, external CSR representative of PT CNI, 4 October 2023).

A key CSR priority has been building agricultural access roads to help farmers transport produce efficiently, thereby strengthening ties with local communities. Companies have also supported large-scale

infrastructure, such as regional hospitals and public facilities. According to the Chairman of the Kolaka branch of the Indonesian Muslim Students' Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam/HMI), PT Antam has made a substantial contribution to infrastructure, funding approximately 80–90% of the regional hospital's development through CSR (Sandi, external CSR representative of PT CNI, 2 October 2023).

These initiatives deliver tangible benefits and demonstrate corporate commitment to sustainable development. Firms also invest in education through scholarships and school facility upgrades, supporting students from primary to university level (Saldi, external CSR representative of PT CNI, 4 October 2023). These efforts not only widen access

to education but also enhance its quality, building local skills and creating future employment prospects.

In the health sector, companies provide basic services including health centres, immunisation programmes, and awareness campaigns, particularly for vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and children. These efforts reflect a commitment to public health and alignment with government initiatives.

For instance, in Wolo district, PT CNI donated an ambulance to the local community health centre (Pusat kesehatan masyarakat/Puskesmas) as part of its health support (Interview with Saldi, external CSR representative of PT CNI, 4 October 2023). In Pomalaa district, PT Antam, allocated most of its 2022 CSR budget to the construction and renovation of integrated health posts (*pos pelayanan terpadu/*



*posyandu*) (Fatmawati, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, mining companies across Kolaka also provided essential assistance, including food aid, medical supplies, and other forms of support.

In addition, companies offer social and economic support through skills training, small business development, and targeted assistance for vulnerable families. These efforts help strengthen social networks and enhancing the economic resilience.

*“In the social and economic sector, we provided fishing boats along with fishing equipment to fishermen’s groups. We also delivered tractors for rice farmers and offered various training programmes tailored to the community’s needs.” (Interview with Saldi, external CSR representative of PT CNI, 4 October 2023).*

The support includes training for farmers, provision of fishing equipment for fishermen, and assistance for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). These programmes help improve the economic conditions of local communities and reflect the companies’ commitment to the welfare of those directly affected by mining activities.

### **c. Impact of Corporate Strategies**

Mining companies in Kolaka have strengthened community relations by prioritising local recruitment and providing skills training. In Wolo district, most residents are now employed in mining-related sectors, ranging from unskilled to managerial roles, with skilled labour forming the majority (Saldi, external CSR representative of PT CNI, 4 October 2023). his employment growth has led to greater community acceptance

of mining operations. Youth representatives from Wolo noted that initial resistance has largely subsided, with complaints significantly decreasing as more locals have secured jobs with the company (Ahmad, Cikal, Wahyu, Adi, Iccang, & Akka, youth representatives from Wolo district, 7 December 2023).

Local involvement in the mining sector has enhanced community welfare and social stability. Companies like PT Ceria prioritise local recruitment, with around 70% of employees ranging from operators to management positions (Interview with Saldi, external CSR representative of PT CNI, 4 October 2023). Most are skilled workers, indicating improved employment prospects and household incomes. Although some are employed on contractual or daily terms, many refrain from voicing concerns due to job insecurity. This reflects a tacit compromise, where

community acceptance is tied to corporate compliance with regulations and transparency. Such openness builds trust and reduces resistance. In Hakatutobu village, Pomalaa district, for example, residents initially opposed PT Antam's operations over environmental damage and exclusion from employment.

*"At first, when the mining started here, the community left the village empty for three days and three nights, spending the nights at the parliament building to protest against the mine." (Asep, resident from Hakatutobu village, 5 October 2023).*

He also highlighted the injustice in labour recruitment, stating:

*"The company only employed workers from outside Kolaka without utilising the*



*local community. The company should facilitate empowerment so that locals can become skilled professionals and placed in appropriate positions, rather than being relegated to unskilled labour.” (Asep, resident from Hakatutobu village, 5 October 2023).*

However, overtime, interaction between mining companies and local communities have evolved through CSR programmes. Training and empowerment initiatives have become accepted forms of collaboration. As noted by Asep, such efforts aim to reduce dependence of mining, promoting long-term community resilience:

*“I conduct training programmes... because if the Pomalaa community depends solely on the companies, it will have negative consequences when these resources are*

*depleted, what will they do then?” (Asep, resident from Hakatutobu village, 5 October 2023).*

These efforts have shown positive outcomes. PT Antam, for example, received ISO 26000 certification for CSR, with programmes in Pomalaa including youth training, mangrove reforestation, and infrastructure development to build community trust. In Tambea village, empowerment efforts are reflected in the development of layer chicken farming and bread-making businesses, both supported by the mining company. An interview with the Tambea village government stated:

*“There is empowerment here in the form of layer chicken farming, which is still in the development. I have requested it continue. There is also a bread-making business, which, thankfully, has*



*received support this year.” (Kusupang, Tambea village government, 3 October 2023).*

A similar collaboration occurred in Wolo district, where the company and community jointly formulated empowerment programmes through village meetings to address local needs. For example, a plan to build toilets at a kindergarten was redirected towards constructing a fence, due to the road-widening project. As stated by the Head of Wolo district:

*“Recently, from PT CNI, we initially programmed to build toilets for kindergarten, but because of the road-widening, so that they would be removed, we then redirected the plan from building toilets to support the construction of a fence.” (Rahman, head of Wolo district, 11 October 2023).*

This demonstrates the flexibility and responsiveness of company-community collaboration.

Overall, the collaboration between mining companies and communities in Kolaka has contributed to stronger cooperative relationships. Empowerment programmes have provided tangible economic and social benefits, including employment opportunities and skills development. Interviews with community leaders and youth indicate a growing community involvement in economic activities linked to the mining sector, such as local supply chains, labour, and support services. This suggests a transformation in the community’s socio-economic dynamics in response to mining operations.



#### **d. Challenges in the Implementation of SLO**

Despite Kolaka's substantial nickel reserves, mining companies often struggle to secure community support. A key barrier is limited public understanding of mining operations and their impacts, leading to distrust and unmet expectations around welfare and compensation (Nguyen, 2021; Savira, 2023). Poor transparency and weak communication further erode corporate credibility. Misalignment between CSR programmes and actual community needs often stems from a lack of consultation. The absence of local involvement in planning reduces effectiveness (Prno & Slocombe, 2012).

The Tambea village government, for instance, criticised the lack of preliminary research in CSR planning.

*"PT Antam helped without prior research. For example, regarding the fishermen in Tambea village, what do they need? Ideally, a needs assessment should have been conducted. But in this case, the company simply heard that fishermen needed engines and immediately distributed them. In fact, many of the fishermen already had engines. Eventually, the equipment was sold because there had been no field communication or research to ensure that the assistance matched real needs." (Kusupang, Tambea village government, 3 October 2023).*

Without proper assessment, assistance risks being misdirected and ineffective. In Pesouha village, repeated complaints about waste runoff into the Air Merah stream were unresolved. A local official explained:

*“So, we invited them, whenever it rains, waste flows down again into the Air Merah stream, we called them in, we told them our complaints and all sorts of things, but that’s how it goes. The only compensation they gave was fertiliser.” (Gusri, Pesouha village government, 3 October 2023)*

These cases illustrate how poor communication and lack of responsiveness undermine trust and the social licence to operate. These communication failures reveal deeper structural problems in company–community engagement, where the lack of responsive and transparent channels weakens the implementation of the SLO. As noted by Sícoli Pósleman & Sallan (2019), CSR programmes developed without meaningful community participation often misalign with local needs and may provoke resistance,

particularly when environmental or economic concerns emerge. Many communities view CSR as limited to physical assistance, with insufficient focus on sustainable empowerment or post-mining planning. Programmes frequently prioritise infrastructure, such as bridges and offices, over long-term investment in human capital. As a Tambea village official expressed:

*“Most CSR programmes are focused on physical infrastructure, while community empowerment is lacking. What I understand about CSR is that the government has issued a policy that should compel PT Antam, or any company, to consider not only today’s needs but also what happens after mining operations cease. How will Tambea village look once PT Antam leaves Pomalaa? What about the community’s health,*



*education, and economy, especially since most of us here are fishermen?" (Kusupang, Tambea village government, 3 October 2023).*

On the other hand, the involvement of the regional-owned enterprise (*badan usaha milik daerah*/BUMD) funds has also drawn public scrutiny. According to Kolaka Regional Regulation (*Peraturan Daerah/Perda*) No. 4 of 2016, the regional enterprise (Perusda) is required to allocate a portion of its profits to CSR initiatives. However, the realisation of this mandate has often failed to meet public expectations. As expressed by a member of HMI:

*"I have never even heard of Perusda allocating any CSR or PPM funds. Never. We've never heard of it. Yet Perusda has been in operation since 2016, if I'm*

*not mistaken. It's only been active for a few years." (Sandi, member of HMI, 2 October 2023).*

This perceived inaction has fueled public scepticism regarding Perusda's commitment to social responsibility.

Another persistent issue relates to the employment of residents. Despite being located within the primary operational zone (ring 1), many community members feel excluded from job opportunities. Recruitment processes that prioritise technical qualifications and favour non-local applicants often marginalise local job seekers. This has generated frustration and a sense of injustice among residents. As a resident of Hakatutobu village noted:

*"Even employment at PT Antam is still dominated by outsiders, it's an open secret. So even if you're from the local area, if you*



*don't have access, you won't be able to get in, even though your village is within ring 1, you still need connections to get into PT Antam." (Asep, resident of Hakatutobu village, 5 October 2023).*

Widespread dissatisfaction reflects the absence of inclusive recruitment and limited community involvement in decision-making, both of which undermine corporate legitimacy. Community participation is crucial for the legitimacy and sustainability of mining operations, with FPIC serving as a key safeguard. FPIC ensures that affected communities, particularly indigenous groups, can accept or reject projects before they begin. It requires companies to provide clear, comprehensive information and obtain consent without coercion (Anderson, 2011; Heffron et al., 2021). In Kolaka, FPIC implementation has faced

major challenges, especially during the initial entry of mining firms. Early stages were marked by demonstrations over environmental damage, land rights, and exclusion of local labour. While resistance has lessened, often due to rising nickel output and strategic engagement with local elites, underlying discontent remains. In Hakatutobu village, for example, opposition declined only after firms secured support from key individuals formerly involved in anti-mining protests.

Despite company efforts, many residents remain sceptical about mining's long-term benefits. When properly implemented, FPIC not only secures voluntary and informed consent but also fosters legitimacy and trust. It requires that consent be given freely, with clear and transparent information, and before project initiation. The core elements



of FPIC, freedom, access to information, and genuine consent, are vital for transparent company–community relations and for building a lasting SLO (Mahanty & McDermott, 2013; Prno & Slocombe, 2012; Rodhouse & Vanclay, 2016).

#### **e. Involvement of Indigenous Communities**

Indigenous communities in Kolaka face persistent challenges, particularly regarding ancestral land and forest claims. The expansion of nickel mining has heightened tensions over hereditary rights, exacerbated by the lack of clear legal frameworks for indigenous territories. Although Indonesia's Constitutional Court ruled that customary forests are not state property, local regulations such as Regional Regulation No. 11 of 2016 on the Empowerment of

the Mekongga Indigenous Assembly lack clear territorial definitions, weakening indigenous bargaining power.

The Tolaki Mekongga, for instance, maintain customary inheritance systems that frequently clash with mining concessions, resulting in disputes companies cannot resolve alone. Firms often work with village governments to mediate, usually resulting in “loss compensation” payments for land use. While this may ease short term tensions, it also inflates land values and fuels further disputes, with some viewing land sales as a path to quick profit. In some cases, village heads have encouraged sales, often ignoring long term socio economic or cultural consequences.

The continued lack of legal recognition for customary land rights disadvantages indigenous communities. Although some have received compensation,

such transactions often prompt speculation and further conflict. Efforts by indigenous advocates to address these issues through formal channels such as the Regional House of Representatives have been largely ineffective due to weak legal protections. Meanwhile, some companies have reduced resistance by co-opting influential former anti mining figures (Interview with Zul, indigenous peoples' lawyer of Kolaka, 13 October 2023).

#### **f. Consultation and Community Approval Process**

Consultation in Kolaka's mining sector are typically carried out through formal forums such as village development planning meetings (*musrembangdes*), where village heads often act as intermediaries. Although meant to inform residents about upcoming projects, these forums

rarely involve direct participation from indigenous communities. Instead, village heads represent all residents, creating ambiguity and fuelling tensions over land rights. Companies have sought to resolve disputes through mediation and compensation, but these efforts have triggered unintended effects, including rising land prices and more conflicts, driven by the belief that land transactions bring financial gain.

Outreach strategies vary among mining companies in Kolaka. Some engage in direct consultations, while others rely on digital platforms. Although efficient, digital methods often exclude those without reliable access. Dependence on village heads as sole representatives undermines inclusive participation, especially for indigenous groups, contributing to dissatisfaction and protests, particularly around employment.



These practices fall short of FPIC standards. Continued resistance after operations begin suggests that consent was not obtained through transparent, inclusive processes or failed to reflect collective agreement. Often, it comes from individuals expecting direct benefits rather than genuine, community-wide decisions.

Company engagement is often confined to formal events like *musrembangdes* meetings, attended by government officials but excluding traditional leaders, customary institutions, and marginalised groups. Reliance on digital communication further reinforces inequality by sidelining those lacking access or literacy. Meaningful implementation of FPIC requires companies to move beyond formalities and establish inclusive, transparent communication channels, ensure fair representation, and address concerns through participatory

dialogue. Early and continuous involvement of all stakeholders, especially Indigenous communities, is vital for building trust, social legitimacy, and sustainable development.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the implementation of the SLO in Kolaka has not fully adhered to its foundational principles. Central to this shortfall is the incomplete application of FPIC, a core component of the SLO framework. In practice, the involvement of indigenous communities in decision-making processes has fallen short of the FPIC principles, leading to the perception among many communities that the presence of mining companies has not translated into equitable welfare.

Although several mining companies have successfully reduced resistance in certain villages through CSR and

PPM, these efforts have not necessarily reflected genuine social acceptance. CSR, while often deployed as a key tool for fostering community support, remains a statutory obligation rather than a voluntary mechanism for negotiating social consent. In this context, CSR is frequently utilised as a means to cultivate social legitimacy, yet it does not inherently satisfy the FCIP criteria, which demand consent that is freely given, obtained prior to activities, and informed by transparent and inclusive dialogue.

From a regulatory perspective, the principles underpinning SLO are implicitly recognised in several national policies such as the Job Creation Law and AMDAL framework. However, the implementation of SLO in Kolaka, there is a clear gap between the conceptual framework of the SLO and its practical implementation. Ideally, SLO should be secured

before operations begin, as a form of social legitimacy granted by affected communities. In practice, however, companies in Kolaka often seek acceptance retrospectively through what can be described as designed acceptance strategies based on corporate social responsibility programmes. This raises critical questions about whether community support stems from free consent or from corporate adaptation after operations commence. The case also demonstrates that FPIC has not been meaningfully integrated into the SLO process. Consultations are often procedural and fail to engage all stakeholders, especially indigenous groups. As a result, SLO in Kolaka appears more strategic than genuine, marked by managed compliance rather than authentic community partnership. The acceptance achieved frequently falls short



of the voluntary, inclusive, and informed consent envisioned in the original SLO and FPIC principles.

Based on these findings, this study concludes that the current implementation of the SLO in Kolaka has yet to fully uphold its core principles. Social acceptance has largely been constructed through compensatory measures such as CSR, rather than through participatory mechanisms that enable communities to exercise agency in determining the terms of their engagement with mining companies. Therefore, this study recommends the adoption of a more inclusive, transparent approach grounded in FPIC principles in the implementation of SLO within the mining sector, to ensure that the social legitimacy obtained genuinely reflects legitimate and sustainable community acceptance.





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# Taming the Beast: Conflict Recurrence in the Democratic Republic of Congo Towards Containment and Peacebuilding

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## Abstract

*The study challenges the prevailing belief that conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is mainly driven by ethnicity, weak governance, or resource mismanagement. It argues instead that recurring violence stems from deeper structural problems, such as economic deprivation, systemic institutional failure, and the influence of multifaceted geopolitical interests. Despite repeated peace agreements and interventions, the root causes remain unaddressed, allowing tensions to resurface quickly. Using qualitative research based on secondary data from government reports, international organisations, and expert academic studies, the findings show that conflict in the DRC is phenomenally complex in nature and raises persistent questions about why the DRC has not benefited from its sizable economic potential. This study calls for developing strategies related to inclusive economic development policies to provide an institutional framework, restoring operationalisation of these institutional challenges. It refrains from straightforward explanations relating to ethnicity or mismanagement of resources. It aims to inform policy recommendations about future interventions by underpinning the path to sustained peace and national development in similarly complex contexts.*

**Keywords:** Conflict; DRC; recurrence; containment; policy consideration

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## Introduction

In the past three decades, the African continent witnessed notable economic growth and political stability following the ending of conflicts in several countries and the firming of democratic practice (UNGA, 1998; Kelly, 2023). However, volatility continues to be a severe challenge in some regions, such as the Great Lakes. Notably, the Democratic Republic of Congo's insecurity significantly limits social and economic development (Chestnut, 2020). This observation was corroborated by the Secretary General of the United Nations, who noted that Africa had started making significant progress economically and politically in recent years. However, in some areas, conflict impeded or threatened progress (UNGA, 1998). It was further reported that in 1996, there were 14/53 armed conflicts afflicted countries

on the African continent. This included the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) under the Kabila administration, which experienced an upheaval that ended Mobutu's 32-year administration in 1997 (UNECA, 2015). The gloomy situation reported in 1998 was positively and dramatically changed. Only six countries (including the DRC) were deeply affected by conflict, while the rest enjoyed relative political stability by then (UNGA, 2004). The DRC remained in crisis the same year, regardless of the peace pact formally ending the war.

Today, the country is still facing persistent insecurity challenges and smarting from the effects of the continental wars and World War II (Roberts & Muganda, 2008; Coghlan et al., 2004; Prunier, 2009). In 2013, the DRC was reported to be among three African countries experiencing setbacks related



to conflict, resolution, and stability, which have remained a prominent feature in the history of the Congolese people (UNGA, 2013). There are key peace agreements that were signed, subsuming the peace deal made in July 2002 between Rwanda and the DRC exhorting the Rwandan troops to pull out of the DRC and demilitarisation of the Hutu paramilitaries operating in the eastern DRC; the July 1999 six-country armistice signed in Lusaka; the 2008 agreement between the rebel groups and the DRC government; and the more recent seven nation November 2022 arrangement for a cessation of hostilities (Kelly, 2023). Some of these truces restored peace and paved the way for post-conflict transition, including elections in 2006 and 2011 (Kelly, 2023). Figure 1 below shows people fleeing the ravaging war in the DRC. The failure to strengthen peace in light of several ceasefire

agreements is indicative of deep-seated, unresolved problems that fuel ongoing antagonism amongst the disputants, mistrust by communities and the people regarding the state, and bad relationships between the DRC and its neighbouring countries (Abunemeh, 2019). In any case, most of these issues date back to the colonial epoch, which created a state-tolerated national resources exploitation for rulers' benefit and was inherited by the post-independence systems (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; UNECA, 2015; Kisangani, 2012). Hence, the DRC wars have been linked to poorly planned natural resource distribution. This has become a competitive arena for locals, non-state actors, and foreign states seeking to exploit the insecurity and lack of regulation (Collier & Hoeffler, 2012). Given this setting, it is essential to deepen understanding through investigative study and



debate the DRC conflicts and implications on development for the region and the country. This analytical study will perhaps help to have a more informed formulation of policies at various levels. Hopefully, this study will contribute to this agenda of generating knowledge for input into the discourse on DRC strategies for a workable solution to the conflicts and accelerate socio-economic development in the region.

Indeed, a considerable body of research exists on the recurrence and persistence of conflict in the DRC. Most of the studies contend that there are many dimensions to the causes of the conflict, emphasising that we need to look at it as a complex phenomenon arising from historical, political, economic, and social factors. Some of the key arguments focus on ethnic tension, the influence of neighbouring states (especially Rwanda

and Uganda), competition for natural resources, a lack of state capacity and legitimacy, and the proliferation of armed groups. For instance, Ojewale (2025) and Geenen (2025) point out that while minerals and other forms of resource extraction are important, the simplification of the conflict to only the "resource curse" can diminish our understanding of the conflict. Ethnic tensions, land disputes, and exclusion from politics are arguably just as important, and the framing around "conflict minerals" shifted attention more profound structural and political questions around the unfolding conflict. Other research emphasises the cyclical nature of violence in the eastern DRC, which has persisted, despite peace accords and international interventions. These measures



have failed largely due to previously persistent structural grievances and the weakness of former state institutions.

Some research focused on the recurring insurgencies and the illegal trade of minerals (Mafura, 2021) acknowledges contributing factors like social exclusion and conflict entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, others (Maeresera et al., 2018) have highlighted the lack of coordination of actors and the failures of national and international peace attempts to address the root causes, specifically, governance and the weakness of institutions.

The paper is very much in agreement with the general agreement in the literature that the DRC's contemporary conflict is rooted in factors such as competition over resource control, issues of ethnicity/region, and the general weakness of governance. However, I am equally in agreement with newer

scholarship, and indeed, the argument of the paper attached cautions against simplifying the conflict by identifying one factor of the many. The evidence reviewed supports a more complex-structural analysis and consideration of issues of historical legacies, failure of institutions, and the need to consider inclusive and locally based solutions.

All the above relate to many of the following issues: first, the colonial legacy is viewed as a primary reason, with historical tensions exacerbated by the artificial borders established by European powers, which grouped numerous ethnic groups. Second, as armed groups vie for dominance, conflicts are exacerbated by exploiting natural resources, especially the DRC's enormous mineral richness, including diamonds, gold, and coltan. Thirdly, conflict is still fueled by ethnic conflicts, which



are partially the result of colonial "divide and rule" strategies. It is also said that weak institutions and poor governance make it more difficult for the government to deliver security and other necessities. The conflicts have been drawn out and made more complex by regional issues, such as the participation of

cross-border armed organisations and neighbouring nations. Finally, economic issues, including unemployment, poverty, and unfair resource distribution, have made the environment conducive to violence.

**Figure 1. Event of 2023 (people fleeing the March 23 (M23) movement rebel group in Bambu North Kivu, eastern DRC)**



*Source: World-Report, 2024*



## Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that describes conflict in the DRC builds upon conflict theory and its structuralist extension. Conflict theory assumes that there is a perpetual struggle and conflict in society over limited resources, with class conflict, economic forces, and power relations being central concepts, such as fighting for the mineral wealth of the DRC and power over the DRC. The social and economic contradictions often overlap with ethnic and identity grievances. Access and control over resources typically have an ethnic basis, making access and control issues more salient in this multi-dimensional contest over land and power. Going further, human needs and identity theories lend greater insight into the psychological and social basis for the violence.

In this study, structural conflict theory focuses on systemic variables, like deprivation, inequality, and institutional failure, that act as root causes of conflict. In previous studies of the DRC, most of the research has concentrated on external interference, oversights/mismanagement of resources, ethnic conflict, or all of those. This structuralist framework also makes it easier to understand how problematic institutions and social structures create an environment for deep-seated conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2012). Ethnic divisions, which have historically been used in colonial “divide and conquer” strategies, are better understood as aspects of political mobilisation, but not necessarily the cause (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Lemarchand, 2009a). Weak states, weak state institutions, and exclusionary governance create social and political

power vacuums filled by armed actors, external interventions, and ongoing regional and international involvement.

The structuralist approach is the best way to analyse the DRC's conflict because it creates a more holistic structural analysis that considers historical, economic, political, and social forces and their interaction in producing, reproducing, and perpetuating cycles of violence and mistrust. In contrast, narrative approaches focusing on ethnicity, resource greed, or exploitation do not solve the problems underpinning the conflict and do not consider the broad scope of incompetence causing the conflict. Structuralism identifies structural issues—namely economic deprivation, exclusionary politics, poor and weak institutions, etc.—that ultimately causes the conflict.

The ability to recommend and implement long-term profound structural change, involving restructuring institutions and inclusive policies, will remove the short-term responses to conflict. Existing and historical evidence shows a variety of peace agreements to stop fighting, or the variety of resource-based agreements between the DRC and foreign countries, is based on the belief that bringing in short-term agenda-based solutions without fixing the problems the other side causes is a poor response to attempting to reach a sustainable long-term solution. Building on an understanding of structural conflict theory helps identify how societies are organised. The issues of exclusion, injustice, inequality, inequity, deprivation, marginalisation, and exploitation arise for young and white leaders like Kabila and Mobutu against their respective moral and evidence-based public opinion



(Jones, 2003; Oakland, 2005; UKEssays, 2017; Braeckman, 1999). The DRC has considerable social inequality and gender discrepancies with a robust sexual violence backdrop of female denial of rights to exploit warfare as a strategy for social instability (Kelly, 2023).

## Literature review

Current analyses of the crisis in the DRC present a nuanced, multi-faceted understanding of the interlocking historical, political, economic, and social drivers of ongoing conflicts. This comprehensive approach embeds contemporary violence in a broader regional and historical context. However, some of the literature tends to emphasise external actors and underplay the role of internal actors. At the same time, an overemphasis on natural resources can obscure other critical issues such as political representation and land

rights. The literature review draws on themes of the geography of the DRC, the DRC economy, the root causes of conflict, ideology, post-independence state building, contestation over resources, ethnicity, the management of the public sector, and institutional design.

## The country's geography and economy

The DRC is the second-largest country in Africa by area (UNECA, 2015). Nevertheless, for its size, the DRC has a low population density, with the population being approximately 28 persons per square kilometre. Extensive, fertile forest cover due to its equatorial position (Loffman, 2017) given these geographical features, and coupled with a very harsh, humid climate,

transportation internal to the DRC is integral to its functionality, yet another hindrance (Al-Makura, 2021).

## **More recent developments in the DRC**

Félix Tshisekedi, the opposition leader, won the controversial December 2018 elections and took office officially in January 2019. It was a momentous occasion, representing the first peaceful power transition after Joseph Kabila completed his lengthy stay as president in DRC (Bark, 2019; CPA, 2023). However, the election's legitimacy was questioned amid claims of electoral irregularities and evidence that Martin Fayulu could have won the election in reality (Pilling, 2019). Tshisekedi's presidency commenced amid continuing crises—a long-lasting

violent conflict in eastern parts of the DRC and an Ebola virus disease outbreak (Ismail, 2019; CPA, 2023).

Tensions with Rwanda surfaced again in 2022, when both governments claimed that one supported rebel groups, including M23 and Hutu militias, and both governments admitted to illicit mining interests (ACSS, 2022; CPA, 2023; PS, 2023). Efforts for diplomatic peace remained largely unsuccessful (AFP, 2022), as M23 and the ADF (an affiliate of ISIS) continued to carry out attacks (AFP, 2023; Kabumba, 2023). The DRC remains wary of relations with its neighbours, notably Uganda and Burundi (Hoinathy, 2023). By 2023, an estimated 5.7 million registered internally displaced people had unmet humanitarian needs (Lorgerie, 2023; UNHCR, 2024). President Tshisekedi has decried missed opportunities by calling on the EU for



assistance and has threatened to postpone elections. At the same time, SADC agreed to send peacekeepers to eastern DRC (Kavanagh, 2023a, 2023b).

## **The leading causes of conflict**

Since the 1960s, conflicts in the DRC have continued in contexts rooted in challenges transitioning from colonialism to independence (Kisangani, 2012; UNECA, 2015). The initial post-colonial discontent resulted from political disagreements, ethnic and regional competition, and debates on establishing a centralised or federal system for governance (Young & Turner, 1985; Lemarchand, 2009b) Ndikumana & Kisangani, 2005). The instability was further complicated by the fact that former colonial powers were reluctant to relinquish control, and by the Western interests in the DRC, as Western powers

used the DRC to undercut the expansion of communism on the African continent. Today, conflicts manifest unresolved historical issues (WB, 2019) as the structural underpinnings for instability were never fully resolved. Even during some periods of relative peace in the 1970s and 1980s under Mobutu, the government sought to establish stability through suppression rather than reconciliation and institutional reform (Malu, 2019).

## **Ideological hostility**

Ideological disagreements were the primary sources of conflict among elites after independence (Weiss, 2000). Patrice Lumumba wanted complete ideological independence from the West, especially the former colonisers (Ndikumana & Kisangani, 2005). Others, like Moïse Tshombe, wanted to maintain the strong

patrimonial ties with the Belgian community and the West (Kisangani, 2012). The second ideological disagreement concerned those opposed to Lumumba's support for socialism and those like Tshombe who were pro-capitalism (Weiss, 2000). This ideological hatred is argued to have influenced the 1964–1966 Eastern rebellion, where Laurent Kabila was a leading player and then again later, as the leader of the anti-Mobutu rebellion of 1996 (Weiss, 2000; Kisangani, 2012; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). This ideological struggle was significant for Lumumba's assassination and Mobutu's eventual assumption of power. These events fundamentally changed the DRC by fostering ethnic and regional hatred and legitimised prolonged kleptocratic, autocratic, and despotic rule (UNECA, 2015).

## **Control of natural resources disputes**

The natural resources in the DRC have reportedly not been distributed evenly to benefit the whole nation. Katanga produces 70 per cent of cobalt and copper in the country, while just after independence, 75 per cent was produced and 20 per cent of public expenses (UNECA, 2015). Likewise, the region of Kasai, dubbed the 'diamond state,' has massive industrial diamonds and gem reserves. The Kivu, which lies in the eastern DRC, has large deposits of coltan, tin, and gold (Kisangani, 2014). Soon after independence, the political leaders from these mineral-rich regions sought secession, citing disgruntlement over how the central government managed resources (Kisangani, 2014; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). The Katanga region became the first to engage in a war of secession in the period 1960–1963; in 1977,

it was Shaba 1, and in Shaba II, the secession war broke out in 1978; the Kasai war of secession was waged in the period 1960–1962, and the rebellion by the eastern DRC witnessed from 1964–1966 (Kisangani, 2014). Figure 2 below shows soldiers and rebels in eastern DRC.

## Conflict due to ethnic dimensions

According to the World-Bank (2024), the DRC has more than 250 ethnic groups and with over 240 languages spoken. Just after independence, ethnicity triggered conflicts as much as it remains vital to present-day conflicts, as each ethnic group

**Figure 2. Conflict in eastern DRC-East African regional force soldier and M23 rebels (December, 2022)**



Source: Mukoni (2022) on Getty Images. Available at <https://www.dw.com/en/conflict-in-eastern-dr-congo-flares-again/a-67203737>

sought to dominate over others (UNECA, 2015; Young & Turner, 1985). Only the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC), led by Lumumba, advocated for national unity transcending ethnic ties (Young & Turner, 1985; Kisangani, 2012; Lemarchand, 2009a). The rest of the other parties were attached to ethnicity and openly defended their preferred interests against what they believed was a threat from foreigners.

## **Conflicts and public sector management**

The danger of conflict has increased in many ways due to weak public sector management systems (Roberts & Muganda, 2008). This undermined the government's potential to create a coherent and robust system of security that would defend the state's interests locally and internationally (Young & Turner, 1985; Kisangani, 2012). Because the military was

demoralised, under-equipped and underfunded, Mobutu could not mount any intense fight against the 1996 rebellion led by Kabila. Nevertheless, Mobutu deliberately weakened the army as a ploy to avert internal challenges to his reign, which had a boomerang effect (Roberts & Muganda, 2008; UNECA, 2015). The government's ineptitude to effectively implement public sector policies and provide social services and infrastructure weakened the central government's legitimacy, prompting the emergence of opposition activism (Roberts & Muganda, 2008). The opposition leaders were infuriated by the unidirectional resource transfer from provinces to the central government for the benefit of a few, coupled with fiscal disintegration.



## Discussion of main findings

The paper offers substantial evidence of the complex and persistent nature of conflict in the DRC, shaped by historical, political, economic, and social factors (CPA, 2023; World-Bank, 2024). The DRC has over 7.3 million internally displaced persons, with about 120 militias and armed groups operating in the eastern provinces. Between January 2023 and March 2024, at least 1,533 civilians were

killed, 469 were injured, and 712 were abducted in Ituri province alone. Cumulatively, the conflict has claimed nearly 6 million lives since 1998. Displacement reached a record high in early 2024, with 2,741,000 people uprooted in six months; over 2 million were displaced by the M23 movement, accounting for 73% of all cases. Additional displacements in 2024 were caused by M23 movement, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and CODECO. This is summarised in Figure 3 below.





**Figure 3. Illustration of key conflict-related statistics in the DRC from 1998 to 2024**



*Source: processed by the author*

Since the 1990s, the DRC has faced ongoing instability, despite its resource wealth and population rank as the fourth

largest in Africa and the highest among francophone countries (CPA, 2023; World-Bank, 2024). Eastern DRC continues to be



an epicentre of ethnic conflict and violent competition for resources, involving state, UN, and non-state actors. The First Congo War (1996–1997) was triggered by spillover from the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, which sent close to two million Hutu refugees into South and North Kivu; some of these, fearing retribution, formed militias in the DRC. Tutsi militias, with foreign involvement, mobilised against the Hutus, escalating regional violence and deepening the conflict.

Rwanda justified its invasion of Zaire by claiming that Hutu groups in eastern DRC threatened Tutsis' security, alleging that Mobutu's government sheltered these extremists. Rwanda, supported by Uganda, Burundi, and Angola due to their security concerns, allied with opposition leader Laurent Kabila against Mobutu's regime. The conflict saw brutal tactics resulting in

thousands of deaths among Hutu militants, government forces, refugees, and civilians in Kivu (Parens, 2022). The Kabila-Kagame alliance succeeded in the 1997 First Congo War, forcing Mobutu to flee; Kabila became president and renamed Zaire the DRC.

However, tensions quickly rose, leading to the Second Congo War in 1998 after Kabila distanced himself from Rwanda, removed Tutsis from his administration, and sought to reduce Rwandan influence in eastern DRC (TRC, 2003). Revelations of war crimes committed by Kagame's forces against the Hutus further damaged Kabila's regime. Kabila demanded that all foreign forces leave, prompting Rwanda to attack again (Zapata, 2011). Angola switched support to Kabila, while Zimbabwe and Namibia joined Kabila's side against other regional forces backed by Rwanda and Uganda.



The conflict persisted until 2001, and, after Laurent Kabila's death, his son ended the war in 2002. Estimates place the Second Congo War's death toll and related humanitarian crisis at over 3 million by 2004 (UNHR, 2002; CPA, 2023).

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the 1997 First Congo War, forcing Mobutu to flee; Kabila became president and renamed Zaire the DRC.

Tensions escalated into the Second Congo War in 1998 after Kabila broke ties with Rwanda, removed Tutsis from his administration, and reduced Rwandan influence in eastern DRC (TRC, 2003). Reports of war crimes by Kagame's forces against the Hutus further weakened Kabila's regime. Kabila ordered all foreign military groups to leave, leading Rwanda to attack again (Zapata, 2011). Angola switched to support Kabila, and Zimbabwe and Namibia allied with him against regional forces backed by Rwanda and Uganda. The conflict lasted until 2001, concluding after Laurent Kabila's death when his son ended the war in 2002. The Second Congo



War and its humanitarian fallout resulted in more than 3 million deaths by 2004 (UNHR, 2002; CPA, 2023).

From 2002 to 2003, DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda had to implement peace agreements for a transitional government led by Joseph Kabila in Kinshasa (USIP, 2002). Despite these agreements, the presence of the UN transformed peacekeeping forces and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but clashes and unrest continued in eastern DRC. Kabila was elected president after a general election in 2006 (DFID, 2006). In the 2000s, the M23 was a conspicuous rebel group that emerged, composed mainly of Tutsi ethnic people (CPA, 2023). From 2012 to 2013, the M23 movement had become a powerful force operating in eastern DRC, and Kinshasa accused Kigali of supporting it. As a countermeasure, in 2013, the UN Security Council created

a task force called the UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO, 2022) to reinforce the Congolese troops in fighting against the M23 movement, which was forced to withdraw its original campaign in the same year. However, the evidence that Kigali supported M23 movement had long-lasting effects on the Kinshasa-Kigali political ties (Katombe, 2013). The frosty diplomatic relationships only ended in 2022 (Veira, 2022).

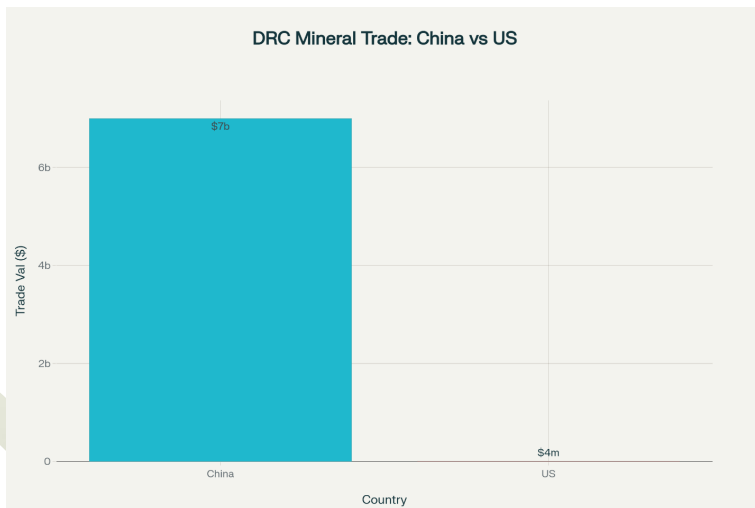
The DRC has extensive reserves of rare minerals and metals comparable to those used to produce high-quality electronic works (ITA, 2022). With the world increasingly becoming more dependent on zinc, copper, cobalt, and other minerals, multinational companies, local armed groups, and foreign actors have been further motivated to engage in the DRC conflict (ITA, 2022). This conflict has been



globalised, especially in eastern DRC (CPA, 2023). Although some companies from the U.S. previously owned big cobalt mines in Congo, several of them were sold to companies in China during the reigns of Donald Trump and Barack Obama (CPA, 2023). Chinese companies linked to Beijing constitute the majority of foreign-owned mines. These mines are primarily for uranium, copper, and cobalt. They are

located in eastern DRC and are guarded by Congolese forces that protect Chinese interests and assets (Bociaga, 2022). This is why Joe Biden’s administration recognised the virtual Chinese monopoly in the mining sector as advancing its competitive advantage in the technology and energy industry and an obstacle to the aspirations of the U.S. for clean energy (TWH, 2021). The above is illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Annual mineral trade values between major powers and the DRC**



*Source: processed by the author*



China is implicated in the internal conflict and economy of Congo: the Congolese fight against the M23 insurgents is being assisted by drones from China (AI, 2023), including weaponry, and the government of Uganda procured arms from China to conduct military operations along the borders of the DRC (Katusiime, 2022). The Chinese deals sealed with the Congolese government, mainly when Joseph Kabila was in power, have allowed Chinese companies unparalleled access to metals (Chang, 2022). The relationship between Beijing and Kinshasa was internationally spotlighted until Kabila resigned in 2019. This was when it emerged that Chinese funds meant for infrastructural investment and mining rights settlement were paid directly to Joseph Kabila and his cabal (Hussain, 2022). DRC and China's multi-layered, complex military and economic

relations have occasioned limited access to resources in Congo for other nations and even the Congolese themselves (HRC, 2022). Moreover, in July 2022, a U.S. Congressional Human Rights Commission reported having evidence concerning child labour and unlawful practices in the Congolese mines allegedly owned and run by the Chinese (HRC, 2022). Meanwhile, Russia maintains its relationship with the DRC government. From February 2022, when it attacked Ukraine, Moscow is believed to have courted different African countries for support, and this includes the DRC (NA, 2022). This is even though in February 2023, the DRC voted to support a resolution that condemned the war and demanded Russia withdraw from Ukraine (Tsongo, 2023; NA, 2023). The United States also maintains its trading ties with the DRC. However, strict requirements for reportage on



imports from states affected by conflict are required, and the importation of conflict minerals is banned. These minerals, like gold and tin, are extracted to benefit armed groups from the DRC and its neighbouring states (US-SEC, 2017). Apart from these limitations and the Chinese recent dominance in the mining sector of the DRC, the US interests here are comparatively marginal. For example, the US trades in (IMF, 2023) about four million dollars worth of precious minerals from the DRC annually, compared to over seven billion worth of Congolese minerals imported by China alone (IMF, 2023).

The DRC conflicts reveal a high degree of complexity. The evidence shown in this study indicates three main groups of factors playing a pivotal role, either as primary causes or as secondary causes of conflict. The first group comprises factors

that have to do with bad policies for the economy that hamper economic development. Instead of fully benefiting the Congolese people, the natural resources in the country have been diverted to bankroll the wars, with severe effects on the people and the whole region. Despite having abundant resources, poor economic performance has undermined the capacity of the government to provide essential social services. The government has failed to adequately institute a security system that effectively maintains law and order and guards the porous borders. This has caused economic deprivation and created a fertile ground for rebellions.

The second group of issues consists of systemic institutional ineptitude and bad governance. The government has failed to deliver fundamental services, defend the country's interests at the regional level and



beyond, and create and support vibrant institutions that can contain conflicts. Instead, the state enacted laws and rules undermining the peaceful living together of ethnic groups and, for example, using immigration and national laws to deal with targeted people of Rwandan origin and turning them into stateless people. The state has also been unable to foster an environment for suitable economic regulatory activities. Instead, it promoted a system mired by rent-seeking, kleptocracy, and corruption, thereby alienating people from the state and opening gaps for the uncontrolled resource extraction by foreign and domestic actors.

The third group is composed of geopolitical interests from regional to global echelons (see Figure 5). The recent conflicts arose in a situation characterised by the complicity of private and public mercantilist concerns in a prosperous state with weak

institutions. An environment marked by the reappearance of determinism in global security in the wake of increasing terrorism, while the DRC's relations regionally were compromised by critical cross-border and national security threats. As in the past, the DRC remains precarious because global forces fundamentally compromise its economic and political fate.

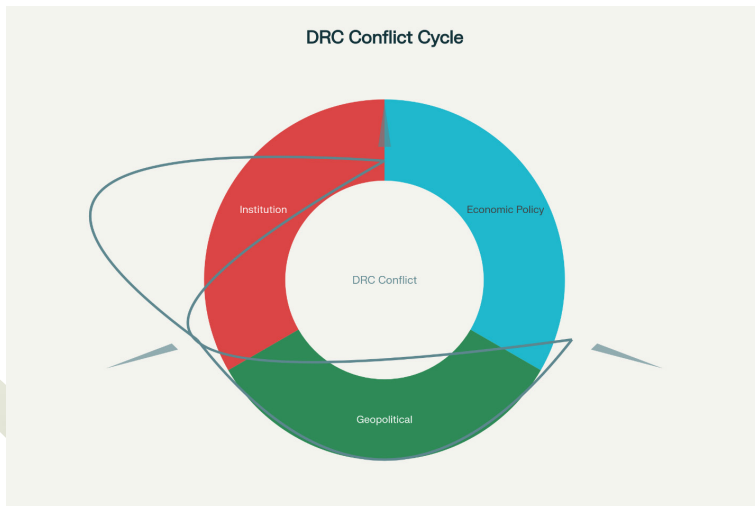
To have lasting peace in the DRC, attention should be paid to constructing strategies meant to address issues at the national level, not just to address conflicts. These strategies should include developing a new economic policy framework to address unequal resource distribution. The framework should seek to reduce the separation of the people from the state by improving service delivery and effective management of natural resources to improve employment opportunities and



revenue generation. The DRC must redesign institutional systems that deal with problems concerning state configuration, especially by designing mechanisms for creating a sustainable federal system. This will help resolve nationality and citizenship issues, human security, political and economic rights, and the protection of minority groups. These are

taxing tasks, but appropriate and necessary. Conflict containment and consolidation of political stability call for effective governance institutions that reconcile the relationships between the local communities and the central state, including a perfect arrangement for traditional and local authorities to manage resources such as land.

**Figure 5. Cyclical relationship between the three main factors driving conflict in the DRC**



*Source: processed by the author*



In line with previous research, the study acknowledges the significant contribution that ethnic conflicts and regional dynamics make to violence. It highlights how colonial "divide and rule" tactics have a lasting impact on interethnic relations. The study also emphasises the spillover effects from neighbouring countries, particularly in the wake of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, which is consistent with traditional regional studies of the conflict. The paper firmly backs the claims that institutional failure and poor governance contribute to instability. It

underscores how armed groups and other actors have taken advantage of power voids caused by the Congolese state's incapacity to deliver essential services, security, and efficient government. This supports earlier research on the connection between conflict and state fragility. The study provides new perspectives for examining current advancements and geopolitical aspects (see Figure 6). It draws attention to how the dynamics of conflict are shaped by the changing roles of superpowers, especially China and Russia.





Figure 6. The interconnected leading causes of conflict in the DRC



Source: processed by the author

This updates previous studies to reflect current geopolitical circumstances and adds a layer of complexity to the regional focus frequently found in the literature.

### Containment, peacebuilding, and policy analysis

In the DRC, key containment and policy analysis areas include state and institutional building, national dialogue and peacebuilding, economic recovery, and the avoidance



of policy biases. Despite the existence of multiparty politics and regular elections at all levels of government, the state's legitimacy remains fragile, as many local communities feel little connection to the central government. For lasting political stability, federalism and regional autonomy issues must be resolved. The constitution endorses devolution, but the state retains all control over resources. Effective fiscal devolution—paired with safeguards against the misuse of funds—is essential, alongside a careful balance between deconcentration, decentralisation, and the prevention of regional and social imbalances. The state must also construct representative institutions and design inclusionary policies to enable participation for historically

marginalised groups to forge a unified Congolese identity and strengthen the state's territorial cohesion.

Peacebuilding, likewise, demands more than the mere prevention of violence. The DRC must engage in sustained and inclusive dialogue to capture the root causes of conflict, including land rights, ethnicity, political representation, and minority rights. While peacebuilding requires competent internal leadership and strong support from local governments and regional and international partners, its long-term success depends on nationally led initiatives.

Economic recovery is equally vital to stabilisation and post-conflict recovery, particularly by boosting production in conflict-affected zones, allowing us to drive growth and economic development. At the same time, policymakers must avoid

geographic or sectoral bias—neither prioritising urban areas over rural areas nor restricting their focus to eastern DRC; recognising that all parts of the DRC are affected by common structural challenges.

## Conclusion

The ongoing conflict in the DRC is a consequence of a unique and complex interaction between historical, political, economic and social developments. This investigation shows that, after several decades of peace agreements alongside international mediation efforts, the causes of instability were primarily untouched. The findings of the investigation indicate that the legacy of colonialism, the violent and unfair distribution and management of large amounts of natural resources, and a failure of state institutions to govern effectively have all generated a context where violence is

cyclical, endemic and fed by competition over resources. While natural resources have been a catalyst for competition and prolonged conflict, they are not the original cause; the combination of deprivation, exclusionary politics, and broken state institutions has generated unstable situations. Additionally, regional and international actors with vested geopolitical and economic interests have obfuscated and complicated peacebuilding and further eroded political autonomy.

These findings highlight that sustainable peace in the DRC cannot be addressed only by temporary settlements or externally imposed solutions. A broad, inclusive approach is needed, prioritising structural inequalities, meaningful institutional reform, and respect for communities' local autonomy. Subsequently, the study calls for the establishment of a new



economic policy framework that draws from a fair distribution of wealth, a restructuring of systems of governance to ensure the genuine representation of federalism and local community autonomy, and the need for some form of national dialogue and reconciliation on the historic failures of the DRC. Without confronting these fundamental issues, the DRC cannot break its cycle of violence and realise its potential for stability and development.





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