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Discourse of Criticism on the Mining Permit Controversy by Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

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Abstract: The decision of Indonesia's largest religious mass organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, to accept coal mining business permits has sparked extensive critical discourse. Such criticism comes from environmental activists, academics, and the general public, highlighting ecological risks due to mining activities and potential conflicts of interest that may undermine the moral authority of these religious organizations. This study aims to analyze various criticisms directed at NU and Muhammadiyah in relation to their acceptance of mining business permits, as well as to evaluate the ecological risks and implications for the interests and integrity of these religious organizations. This study employs a qualitative approach through a literature review and discourse analysis of primary and secondary sources, including government regulations, statements from organizational leaders, academic perspectives, environmental reports, and public responses in the form of petitions and protests. Findings reveal that although the religious organizations strive to optimize economic roles through environmentally friendly mining management models, empirical evidence and field experiences indicate significant risks of environmental damage, water source pollution, and adverse social impacts on local communities. Strong criticism arose concerning potential conflicts of interest, weak technical and financial capacity, and contradictions with the core values of the religious organizations, which should uphold sustainability and morality. The strongest opposition came from young members and environmental activists within the organizations who want them to remain focused on advocacy and social empowerment.

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I. Introduction

Indonesia, as one of the countries that are richest in natural resources in the world, has abundant mineral and coal mining potential. The management of these natural resources, particularly in the mining sector, plays a crucial role in national economic development. A majority of state revenue, employment, and foreign exchange earnings comes from this activity (Amarullah et al., 2022; Universitas Gunung Kidul et al., 2021).

In 2024, the Indonesian government issued Government Regulation Number 25 of 2024, amending Government Regulation Number 96 of 2021 concerning the Implementation of Mineral and Coal Mining Business Activities. This regulation contains new provisions that open the opportunity for religious mass organizations (ormas), including Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), to obtain Wilayah Izin Usaha Pertambangan Khusus (WIUPK). The issuance of this permit allows religious organizations, as business entities, to manage mining areas, especially those derived from former coal mining work agreements (PKP2B) (Apriyanto & Maruf, 2024, p. 32; Bernike et al., 2024, p. 25).

This decision creates new dynamics in the management of natural resources in Indonesia. The government argues that the involvement of religious organizations in mining management will improve economic equity and empower organizations that have strong social and moral networks in society. Even President Joko Widodo expressed that these organizations have played an important role in the nation's history and struggles, and therefore they should be given space to participate in managing natural resources for the welfare of the people. However, this policy immediately sparked sharp criticism and controversy in the broader community (Yunus, 2025).

The main criticism comes from environmental activists, academics, civil society, and even some internal figures within the organizations themselves. One key reason for this criticism is that coal mining is highly destructive to the environment, causing air pollution, land degradation, and significant carbon emissions that contribute to global warming.

The involvement of religious organizations, which are historically known as guardians of moral values and environmental preservation, is seen as contradictory if they participate in the destructive mining business. Additionally, questions arise regarding the technical capacity and professionalism of these organizations to manage a complex mining business with high ecological risks (CNA Indonesia, 2024).

From the legal and governance perspective, granting mining permits on a priority basis to religious organizations without an open auction raises concerns about moral hazard and potential conflicts of interest. The permit granting mechanism, considered non-transparent, may open opportunities for oligarchic practices and corruption in natural resource management, potentially neglecting the principles of good governance. Various community elements demand that licensing procedures be conducted openly and fairly according to existing mining regulations (Cahyani, 2024).

Furthermore, the involvement of religious organizations in the mining business raises internal dilemmas regarding shifts in the organization's role. Organizations, which have traditionally focused on social, religious, and environmental advocacy, are feared to lose credibility and moral orientation as they transform into extractive business actors. This could weaken their ability to criticize the government's extractive policies, potentially diminishing the important role of these organizations as vital social control elements (Karubaba et al., 2025, p. 25; Mubin, 2025, p. 3).

Equally important, the socio-ecological aspect is also a focus of criticism. Conflicts with indigenous peoples and local communities around mining areas have often occurred throughout Indonesia's mining industry history (Ansari, 2017, p. 29; Kornelius, 2024, pp. 81–96). Threats to land rights, negative social impacts, and unequal distribution of benefits are issues that must be carefully guarded against if religious organizations manage mines without strict supervision and adequate public participation. This reflects the complex challenges of implementing the mining permit policy granted to organizations at the field level (Rumansara, 2015, p. 47; Soleh & Qurrotul'ain, 2024, p. 250).

In this context, research on the discourse of criticism regarding the acceptance of mining business permits (IUPK) by Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organizations is important and relevant. This study not only analyzes the discourse circulating in online media as a reflection of public opinion and socio-religious dynamics but also addresses the following theoretical and practical problems: theoretically, the lack of deep understanding of how discourse framing shapes the legitimization of controversial policies in modern religious organizations, which has previously been described only descriptively without structural analysis; practically, the unclear implications of mining concession policies for environmental governance and internal organizational conflicts, which could exacerbate ecological risks and socio-political polarization in Indonesia. Through a critical discourse analysis approach based on framing theory, this study explores reporting patterns, involved actors, central issues (such as ecological risks versus organizational interests), and the dynamics of legitimizing such criticism.

Previous studies on critical discourse surrounding mining concessions managed by NU and Muhammadiyah remain limited. The author has not found research specifically analyzing criticism following the 2024 policy. However, several related studies on mining concessions granted to religious organizations include the following: *First*, research conducted by Tammam Sholahudin discusses the government's granting of mining concessions to religious mass organizations, especially Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), effective from May 30, 2024, which has raised various social and economic implications. This study analyzes the impact of the mining concession policy on the social and economic structures of society, as well as evaluates the consistency of the policy with religious values and environmental sustainability (Sholahudin, 2025).

Second, Said Romadlan et al., in their research, discuss discourse analysis in online media, while other media outlets, especially social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X, also feature discourses on the acceptance of IUPK by Muhammadiyah and NU. This acceptance has sparked pros and cons from various groups, including internal circles of both Islamic organizations. The controversy over the acceptance of mining business permits by

Muhammadiyah and NU has become a discourse in online media, where pro and contra discussions emerge regarding the acceptance of those mining permits (Romadlan et al., 2025).

Third, Amelia et al. (2025) describe the irony of religious community organizations' involvement in Indonesia's energy mining sector. The analysis shows that while mining permits granted to such organizations can significantly impact mining governance, this policy sparks controversy due to potential violations of the Mining Law. The main focus of this discussion is the legal, economic, and environmental consequences of the policy. The research finds that religious organizations' involvement in the mining industry could increase the risk of significant environmental damage.

While previous studies highlighted pros and cons or regulatory gaps without analyzing public perception, this research integrates framing theory with mining impact literature to reveal how criticisms are constructed, challenged, and legitimized.

The main novelty of this study lies in addressing the latest 2024 policy that grants religious social organizations the authority to manage mining operations, a new phenomenon that has drawn widespread attention from various parties. By examining discourse in online media, this research presents how public opinion and stakeholders construct diverse critical narratives on this issue, which is crucial for understanding the evolving socio-political dynamics of mining in modern society.

II. Methods

This research uses a qualitative descriptive design with critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the main approach. It enables an objective, systematic, and in-depth examination of the socio-political discourse surrounding mining permits issued to Muhammadiyah and NU, including related criticisms. The focus is on revealing power relations, ideological constructs, and social implications in the discourse (Romadlan et al., 2025).

Data collection employs purposive sampling of texts from online media reports, official statements by NU and Muhammadiyah leaders, academic publications, activist communications,

and public petitions related to the mining permits. Inclusion criteria include: (1) texts from national online media (e.g., Kompas.com, Tempo.co, Detik.com) and social media platforms (X, Facebook, Instagram); (2) containing keywords such as “IUPK NU,” “tambang Muhammadiyah,” “kritik konsesi tambang ormas,” or “PP 25/2024 lingkungan”; (3) published post-Government Regulation No. 25/2024 (May 2024 onward); and (4) a minimum of 50 articles/statements per source category for saturation. Exclusion criteria omit non-Indonesian language texts, opinion pieces without data, or pre-2024 publications (Ella et al., 2024, p. 239).

The analysis adapts Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA model: (1) textual analysis dissects linguistic elements (vocabulary, semantics, modality, syntax) to identify framing and persuasive strategies; (2) discursive practice analysis examines text production, dissemination, and consumption by actors such as organizational elites, media, activists, and the public; (3) social practice analysis explores broader socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts that shape and are shaped by the discourse.

Complementing this, W.A. Gamson’s framing theory uncovers interpretive frames shaping public perception and legitimizing narratives on ecological risks versus organizational interests. Frame analysis categorizes themes such as economic benefits versus environmental harm, moral authority, and power dynamics. A literature review on mining impacts and organizational behavior provides context. Ethical measures include respecting media copyrights and anonymizing non-public data (Fahrozi et al., 2025, pp. 1–14; Sugiono, 2020, p. 41).

III. Results and Discussions

A. Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Organizations Granted Mining Management Permits in Indonesia

In 2024, President Joko Widodo issued a presidential regulation allowing religious mass organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) to obtain Special Mining Business Licenses (IUPK). PBNU General Chairman KH Yahya Cholil Staquf (Gus Yahya) welcomed this positively, stating that NU needs revenue for operations, provided management does not harm local communities

or the environment and avoids problematic areas such as settlements or customary lands (Zuhriyah, 2025).

On January 13, 2025, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM) granted Wilayah Izin Usaha Pertambangan Khusus (WIUPK) to NU and Muhammadiyah. NU received the largest concession (25,000–26,000 hectares) from the former PT Kaltim Prima Coal mine in East Kalimantan, managed by PT Berkah Usaha Muamalah Nusantara (BUMN), owned by the NU Cooperative, with Gusfan Arif Ghofur as the responsible person. This policy is part of Jokowi’s affirmative action for public welfare through empowering mass organizations, emphasizing transparency, social, and environmental aspects (Muhlas & Amirullah, 2025, p. 72; Yunus, 2025).

Gus Yahya stressed that natural resource management must be optimal for public benefit and sustainability, requiring national consensus for oversight since regulations are often circumvented. Ulil Abshar Abdalla (PBNU) refuted claims of bribery, stating that the policy is legitimate and beneficial; in Islamic fiqh, a “good bribe” (sogokan hasanah) is permissible for positive matters (Suheri, 2025).

Abdul Qoyum (LP PWNU DIY) supported it with three reasons: (1) NU needs economic independence for grassroots activities such as schools and pesantren; (2) mining continues regardless, and NU involvement enhances environmental and social attention amid the slow energy transition; (3) mining potential is Rp65,000 trillion (20 times the 2024 state budget), with long reserves (gold 30 years, etc.), making it better to involve NU than private or foreign entities alone. He believes NU can manage operations in an environmentally friendly manner (proven by ESG practices in large firms), aligned with NU’s social DNA, using professionals; criticisms are excessive if proportional (Qoyum, 2025).

Meanwhile, on July 28, 2024, PP Muhammadiyah officially accepted the IUP after a consolidation meeting in Yogyakarta, as part of economic da’wah per the 2015 Muktamar mandate. The decision was read by Secretary General Abdul Mu’ti, committing to involve cadre professionals, minimize environmental damage, and return the permit if harms outweigh benefits,

as affirmed by General Chairman Haedar Nashir (Muliawati, 2025).

The minutes of the meeting were read by Abdul Mu'ti, the General Secretary of PP Muhammadiyah. He explained that this decision aligns with the mandate of the 47th Muhammadiyah Congress held in Makassar in 2015, which emphasized the importance of strengthening da'wah in the economic sector alongside education, health, social welfare, tabligh, and other fields. PP Muhammadiyah committed to involving professionals from the cadres and members of the organization in mine management, as well as applying technology that minimizes environmental damage. Haedar Nashir, the Chairman of PP Muhammadiyah, guaranteed that the mining permit would be returned if, in the future, the business proved to cause more harm than good. This commitment demonstrates the organization's seriousness in managing the mining permit responsibly and sustainably (Zuhriyah, 2025).

Previously, there were rejections from autonomous bodies like the Legal and Human Rights Council, with key issues concerning funding (Putra Adhiguna, Wahyu Perdana) due to separate AUM and infrastructure needs. Haedar Nashir stated that the decision was mature after two months of study, hearing pro and contra aspirations, and was based on the Tarjih fatwa (mining as permissible muamalah) and Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution (Ahmad, 2015; CNN Indonesia, 2025).

Abdul Mu'ti outlined seven principles: (1) nature as Allah's gift for welfare; (2) state control for people's prosperity; (3) 2015 economic da'wah mandate and 2017 BUMM Guidelines; (4) involvement of Muhammadiyah professionals, locals, universities, and green technology; (5) integrity partners; (6) time-limited operations, support for renewables, and monitoring of harms; (7) a "not-for-profit" model for da'wah, social empowerment, and a green ecosystem (Zuhriyah, 2025).

Muhammadiyah established PT Syarikat Surya Ecomining (parent) and PT Mentari Swadaya Ecomining, staffed with experts and with operations aided by contractors; the management team is led by Muhadjir Effendy.

B. Discourse of Criticism on the Acceptance of Mining Business Permits by Mass Organizations

The discourse of criticism surrounding the acceptance of mining business permits by the mass organizations Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) represents a complex and multidimensional socio-political phenomenon that emerged following the issuance of Government Regulation Number 25 of 2024. This regulation allows religious mass organizations, including Indonesia's two largest Islamic organizations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), to obtain Special Mining Business Area - *Wilayah Izin Usaha Pertambangan Khusus* (WIUPK) and manage mining areas.

Various groups have responded to this policy with diverse attitudes. Environmental activists and civil society organizations have strongly criticized the mining permits granted to religious mass organizations, considering them contradictory to the environmental preservation values and sustainability principles traditionally upheld by Muhammadiyah and NU. They argue that the involvement of mass organizations in the mining business, especially in coal mining, which is known to be highly environmentally destructive, will dilute the organizations' roles as moral guardians and consistent environmental protectors. For example, the Gusdurian network vehemently rejects this policy because it contradicts mining laws, which specify that permits can only be granted through auction processes, and it is also ethically and socially problematic due to the potential for conflicts and exploitation harming local communities (Salsabila, 2025; Sapii et al., 2024, p. 88).

However, criticism has emerged not only from external parties but also from within Muhammadiyah and NU. Notably, differences in their business orientations amplify these concerns: NU, with its established economic arms such as cooperatives and enterprises, faces less internal resistance to diversification. In contrast, Muhammadiyah, traditionally cautious toward profit-driven ventures and prioritizing *amal usaha* (social services), experiences stronger pushback from leaders and members. They worry that mining management, with its profound environmental and social impacts, could spark

internal conflicts and shift both organizations from purely socio-religious roles toward economic entrepreneurship focused solely on safeguarding financial interests. This shift has the potential to weaken the organizations' functions as agents of social change and protectors of religious and environmental values (Cahyani, 2024, p. 11; Suheri, 2025, p. 1822). Among the various critical discourses from different groups are:

a. Criticism from Within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Itself

On the night of June 9, 2024, a number of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) members who are alumni of Gadjah Mada University (UGM) held a virtual press conference to express their rejection of coal mining management by the mass organization. They opposed the decision of the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board (PBNU) to manage the coal mine, citing concerns about environmental and social impacts as well as the need to preserve the focus of the religious organization. Researcher Ahmad Wardhana from UGM's Center for Energy Studies stated that, from an environmental perspective, coal mining activities clearly cause undeniable damage, both through open-pit mining methods that destroy forests and through coal's use as a power source (Andriyani, 2025).

Ahmad also acknowledged that although coal remains a primary energy source, the government is gradually pursuing a transition to renewable energy, including plans to shut down some coal-fired power plants. NU, as an institution with significant social and political roles, is known as the authority determining the halal, haram, or makruf status of actions. Furthermore, Ahmad noted that coal industry players and coal-dependent power plants are beginning to doubt the sustainability of their businesses, especially since the effects of climate change are not directly felt by urban electricity consumers. The clearest impacts are experienced by vulnerable groups, such as coastal fishermen affected by rising sea levels due to climate change. He likened urban residents enjoying 24-hour electricity to passengers on a ship adrift on seas that threaten to drown those vulnerable communities.

Heru Prasetya, an activist and coordinator of NU Alumni UGM, also expressed concern that the organization's involvement in mining management

could harm the community, especially fishermen, farmers, rural workers, and laborers, who mostly belong to the Nahdliyin community. He assessed that PBNU's involvement in the predominantly exploitative mining industry could create internal conflicts among its members. According to Heru, this rejection reflects love and care for NU (Wawan, 2025).

In an official statement titled "NU Alumni UGM Reject Mining for Mass Organizations," signed by 68 alumni, eight points were outlined, including rejection of the government policy granting mining permits to religious organizations due to concerns that it would damage the moral integrity of religious institutions that should remain ethical. They also argued that the permit could benefit a small elite within the organization, erode traditions of critical thinking, and ultimately weaken the role of mass organizations as civil society forces capable of monitoring the government (Wicaksono, 2025).

Roy Murtadho, a young Nahdlatul Ulama figure and founder and teacher at the Misykatul Anwar Ecology Islamic Boarding School, stated that PBNU's decision to manage coal mining harms Nahdliyin members. Historically, NU has been strongly committed to environmental preservation and forbids natural resource exploitation, as enshrined in various NU congress resolutions. Roy argued that PBNU's decision contradicts these rulings, particularly those banning the conversion of productive agricultural land for large-scale business activities and opposing environmental damage with socio-ecological impacts.

NU's decision to prohibit natural resource exploration stemmed from the PBNU *bahtsul masail* session on May 10, 2015, chaired by KH A. Ishomuddin, then Rais Syuriah of PBNU. The primary consequence of this fatwa is a binding prohibition for NU members against engaging in environmentally destructive mining activities, even if legally permitted by the government or private entities, practices that often neglect ecological aspects. The ruling highlights the potential for severe environmental damage, as evidenced in Kalimantan, Aceh, Papua, and Sidoarjo due to overexploitation (Belseran et al., 2025).

Roy further criticizes mining management for its negative environmental and human rights impacts, such as conflicts with indigenous

communities displaced by deforestation. He argues that NU's involvement would position the organization as an environmental perpetrator, violating the 2015 fatwa, and trigger further consequences: internal organizational conflicts and community divisions, where opponents are labeled anti-religious, while 2024 concession recipients (PP 25/2024) face challenges to their religious legitimacy.

Asman Aziz, Deputy Secretary of PWNU East Kalimantan, regretted PBNU's acceptance of mining concessions without thorough discussion or deliberation, especially given the serious impacts of mining activities in East Kalimantan. He highlighted the many unclaimed mining pits and noted that 49 children had died from these pits in the region (Fiqih, 2025).

Raden Rafiq, Executive Director of WALHI South Kalimantan, added that the former Adaro mining area in Tabalong and Balangan districts has long experienced social conflicts and loss of communal lands, exemplified by the disappearance of the Wonerjo transmigrant village due to mining activities. South Kalimantan is currently under significant pressure from natural resource exploitation, such as mining and plantations, with about 51% of its territory already licensed for exploitation. Raden stressed the importance of avoiding social conflict between communities and religious organizations managing mining.

Asman viewed the concession granting to mass organizations as a political bribe by the government to avoid criticism and resistance from religious groups. He emphasized that NU should be at the forefront of safeguarding policies protecting ecology and communities, rather than becoming part of the entities causing damage. Additionally, Izzuddin Zaky, Chairman of PC Ansor Trenggalek District, firmly rejected the planned gold mining in his area due to concerns that it would cause more harm than benefits.

b. Criticism from Within Muhammadiyah

Within Muhammadiyah, significant opposition from the youth against some organizational elites supporting coal mining management has emerged. This rejection was triggered by statements from several Muhammadiyah elites indicating a willingness to accept the government's offer to manage coal mines. Unlike NU, Muhammadiyah's

youth opposition has manifested through a petition posted on Change.org titled "Muhammadiyah Youth Reject the Organization's Involvement in Mining! - Anak Muda Muhammadiyah Menolak Persyarikatan Terlibat Tambang!", which has so far garnered support from over 400 signatories. The youth resistance in Indonesia's two largest Islamic organizations represents an intriguing phenomenon amid efforts to shift the discourse on religious organizations' mining concessions from ecological to religious or *fiqh* issues.

Wahyu Perdana, Chair of the Natural Resources Political Studies Division at Muhammadiyah's Wisdom and Public Policy Institute (LHKP), expressed disappointment at the organization's inclination to follow PBNU's steps in accepting mining concessions. From the beginning, LHKP had submitted a formal report titled "LHKP PP Muhammadiyah Policy Paper", outlining potential legal and environmental impacts that could befall the organization and its leaders if they accepted mining permits. The greatest concern revolves around environmental degradation frequently caused by the extractive mining industry, as well as the potential emergence of social conflicts and human rights violations (Reza, 2025).

Based on these studies, Wahyu stated that Muhammadiyah should reject the mining concession offer and demonstrate integrity by pursuing business ventures through official procedures without succumbing to political permit grants. Considering Muhammadiyah's asset base, establishing an independent mining company following administrative and environmental requirements, such as an Environmental Impact Assessment (AMDAL), is very feasible. He criticized the decision as "political bribery," which could result in the loss of institutional critical voices within five years, given the limited permit duration.

Wahyu referred to Muhammadiyah's firm stance in criticizing various violations in the mining sector, ranging from andesite mining cases in Wadas Village, Central Java, involving legal and human rights breaches, to demands for the cancellation of National Strategic Projects in Rembang and the rejection of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation. He doubted claims that Muhammadiyah managing mines could avoid

social conflicts and preserve the environment, calling such ideas of “green mining” utopian. According to Wahyu’s knowledge, even reclaimed post-mining lands can restore only about 20 percent of water absorption capacity, far from optimal ([Hafiez, 2025](#)).

Additionally, the Muhammadiyah Green Cadre, or “*Kader Hijau Muhammadiyah*” (KHM), has consistently published posts on its official website demanding that the central leadership reject mining management. They assert that the organization’s involvement in mining contradicts the 44th Muhammadiyah Congress in 2000 and the 48th Congress in 2022, which rejected all forms of environmental destruction. In their position document, KHM outlined several reasons why granting mining permits to Muhammadiyah must be refused. KHM also issued a Position Paper urging the Central Leadership to reject mining, including the following point: *first*, rejecting government policy granting permits to religious mass organizations for mining, such as coal extraction, because it will damage nature and undermine the moral prestige of religious organizations ([BBC News Indonesia, 2025](#)).

Second, granting mining permits to religious organizations risks creating conflicts of interest, benefiting a few elites, eroding the critical tradition of these organizations, and ultimately weakening their role as part of civil society capable of monitoring the government. *Third*, KHM urged PP Muhammadiyah to take a firm stance in rejecting mining management for religious organizations and to cancel mining permits already offered by the Jokowi administration, as they could plunge Muhammadiyah into social and ecological sin. *Fourth*, KHM urged PP Muhammadiyah to return to its foundational values and refuse mining concession offers, which could co-opt the organization into government tools for controlling society and to encourage the use of renewable energy.

Fifth, requesting Muhammadiyah to better organize itself professionally by harnessing existing potential for economic independence without entering the environmentally harmful mining business, which could become a historical legacy of error. *Sixth*, emphasizing that Muhammadiyah belongs to many, from regional to local branches and individual members, not just

the Central Leadership and elites. Everyone has their own way of supporting Muhammadiyah as a platform for environmental preservation. *Seventh*, calling on all levels of Muhammadiyah leadership and society to consolidate and strive to repeal regulations that risk social and ecological bankruptcy.

KHM contends that the organization’s grassroots aspirations are insufficiently considered by central elites. In an article titled “The Influence of Leftist NGO Ideology” published on Muhammadiyah’s official site, Haedar Nashir labeled critical groups, including those opposing natural resource and mining management, as radical-left NGOs adopting Marxist and Neo-Marxist ideologies. In response, KHM reported that about 1,340 youths from various Muhammadiyah autonomous bodies have united under movements such as *#alleyesonmuhammadiyah* to pressure the Central Leadership to reject involvement in coal mining management. Moreover, KHM issued an open letter from Berau cadres as a form of critique against the mining concessions granted to Muhammadiyah ([Fiqih, 2025](#)).

In the South Kalimantan region, the local Muhammadiyah chairperson, Ridhani Fidzi, stated that community complaints regarding mining practices have so far been related to the weak implementation of reclamation obligations by mining companies. He stressed the need for Muhammadiyah-managed companies to avoid such problems by reclaiming 60–80% of post-mining land and preventing complaints from the community. Putra Adhiguna highlighted that the mining operational standards upheld by Muhammadiyah would attract public attention, given its status as a religious organization that should harmonize with the community. He emphasized that mining management by this organization must meet higher standards than those of typical mining companies because failure to do so would raise substantial doubts.

Trisno Raharjo, Chair of the Law and Human Rights Council (MHH) at PP Muhammadiyah, reminded that mining carries significant environmental risks and can trigger social conflicts. Therefore, PP Muhammadiyah leaders are urged to exercise caution regarding offers to manage mines. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah’s Wisdom and Public Policy Institute (LHKP) has

consistently voiced rejection, with the Chair of the LHKP Education Division, Usman Hamid, asserting that the Muhammadiyah Congress 2022 decision should encourage refusal of mining permits because they contradict principles of humanity and ecological justice. Similarly, the Aisyiyah Research and Development Institute (LPPA) rejects mining permits, arguing that they would worsen conditions for women in mining areas.

Hening Parlan, Head of the Environment and Disaster Management Division of PP Aisyiyah, stated that PP Muhammadiyah should shift its focus to energy transition issues rather than entering the uncertain mining business, especially given the government's commitments to reduce fossil fuel dependence by 2040 (Rhamadanty, 2025).

c. Criticism from Academics and Intellectuals

Criticism of the decisions by Indonesia's two largest religious organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, to engage in mining management has come not only from environmental activists but also from academics and the broader public. Many argue that the organizations' original social and religious missions are at risk of being overshadowed by potential conflicts of interest, environmental degradation, and socio-economic consequences associated with extractive industries. Consequently, various parties urge NU and Muhammadiyah to reconsider their decisions and prioritize their roles as advocates for environmental sustainability rather than directly engaging in the controversial mining industry.

In the era of energy transition and global ecological challenges, the involvement of Indonesia's largest Islamic mass organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, in coal mine management has sparked profound critical discourse. This study introduces the innovative concept of "moral capture", an adaptation of regulatory capture, to analyze how religious mass organizations (*ormas*), which should serve as independent moral agents, are instead co-opted by state regulations, sacrificing their ethical mandate for economic incentives. The concept of "moral capture" is a critical adaptation of the classic regulatory capture theory in political science and economics, first

developed by George Stigler in 1971 to describe how state regulatory bodies are "captured" by the industries they are meant to regulate, thereby prioritizing corporate interests over public welfare (Astinda, Pratama & Haidar, 2024).

In the context of religious mass organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, moral capture refers to the process whereby Islamic mass organizations, traditionally functioning as independent moral agents, guardians of ethical values, and overseers of state power, become ensnared as state instruments through legal regulations designed to co-opt civil society. This phenomenon is evident in the controversy surrounding the acceptance of coal mining business permits (IUP) by PBNU and PP Muhammadiyah under Presidential Regulation 70/2023 and Government Regulation 25/2024, where the state employs legal instruments to drag mass organization (*ormas*) into the extractive business realm, blurring the boundaries between spiritual-social roles and economic-political interests (Setiawan, 2025).

The critical discourse against this policy highlights how moral capture undermines the moral legitimacy of *ormas*. Historically, NU and Muhammadiyah emerged from the spirit of resistance against colonialism and authoritarianism, with primary mandates to disseminate religious knowledge, provide education, and advocate for social justice based on the principles of *maslahah umat* (public welfare) and *maqasid syariah* (objectives of Sharia). However, the government's policy of "distributing" mining concessions, such as 26,000 hectares in East Kalimantan for PBNU, has altered this dynamic (Astinda, Pratama & Haidar, 2024).

Central elite leaders of the *ormas*, such as PBNU under Gus Yahya Cholil Staquf, justify the move as a "policy breakthrough" (drive-thru policy) for the economic welfare of the masses (*umat*), claiming they will implement environmentally friendly mining practices using mitigation technologies like post-mining land reclamation. Critics view this as co-optation: state regulations create economic incentives (potential billions of rupiah in revenue for *ormas* social programs) that tempt elites to sacrifice moral independence, akin to how mining companies "capture" regulators through lobbying (Setiawan, 2025).

Internal fractures provide concrete evidence of moral capture. At the grassroots level, vocal resistance has emerged: NU UGM alumni held a virtual press conference on June 9, 2024, rejecting PBNU's mine management due to environmental impacts such as deforestation, water pollution, and contributions to climate change that burden vulnerable coastal fishermen. UGM researcher Ahmad Wardhana highlighted that NU's involvement hinders the national energy transition toward net zero emissions by 2060, as influential *ormas* in issuing halal-haram fatwas end up legitimizing coal, which contradicts NU's own 2021 *Muktamar* commitment to halt new coal-fired power plants.

Meanwhile, in Muhammadiyah, the *Majelis Hukum Hak Asasi Manusia* (Law and Human Rights Council) issued a fatwa on May 11, 2024, stating that mining tenders are mandatory under the Mineral and Coal Mining Law (UU Minerba), making direct grants via Presidential Regulation prone to corruption and violations of transparency principles. MDMC (Muhammadiyah Branch Council for Education and Training - *Majelis Diklat Muhammadiyah Cabang*) and youth cadres, such as those in Trenggalek, strongly rejected it, arguing that environmental harm (ecosystem damage) outweighs benefits, ignoring pro-mining internal fatwas from PP elites. Din Syamsuddin, former PP Muhammadiyah Chairman, even urged *ormas* to reject the offer due to its "abundant harms," revealing polarization between elite pragmatism and grassroots idealism.

Theoretically, this moral capture is rooted in the Political Economy of Law (PEL) framework, which posits that law is not neutral but a state instrument for distributing power and resources. The Jokowi-Prabowo government leverages *ormas* as "implementation agents" for mineral down-streaming policies aimed at achieving 8% economic growth, but at the expense of Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution, which mandates natural resources be managed for maximum public prosperity, not for *ormas* elites. *Ormas* are caught in a patrimonial patron-client relationship: the state grants concessions, and *ormas* provide moral legitimacy, creating dependency that erodes their symbolic capital (legitimacy as guardians of *wasathiyyah* Islam). Wardhana's ship analogy is illustrative: urban NU and Muhammadiyah elites enjoy 24-hour electricity from coal, while

poor farmers and fishermen suffer tidal flooding caused by GHG emissions. This discursive critique, framed through a Foucault-inspired lens, reveals how elite official discourse, such as claims of "sustainable mining", dominates narratives to silence dissenting voices, while regulations like the *Ormas* Law effectively "nurture" *ormas* into compliance (Widiati, 2025).

The broader implications of moral capture involve the delegitimization of *ormas* in the eyes of the *umat* and civil society. NU and Muhammadiyah, which once declared the Silo Jember gold mine *haram* (NU fatwa, 2018), are now perceived as compromising with extractivism, inviting accusations of hypocrisy. Internal conflicts persist into 2025–2026: PBNU polemics are cited as the source of elite splits, while Muhammadiyah faces pressure from AMM (Muhammadiyah Young Ansor -*Ansor Muda Muhammadiyah*) to reject IUPs. From a normative perspective, this policy is legally problematic: PP 25/2024 contradicts UU Minerba, as non-profit *ormas* lack the technical and financial capacity to manage mining waste, heightening risks of social conflicts akin to those experienced at Freeport or in Kalimantan (Tempo, 2026).

The critical discourse also points toward possible remedies: reinforcing *wasathiyyah* principles within Islamic organizations to balance idealism and practical realities, ensuring concession audit transparency, and promoting grassroots participation in decision-making. By comparing discourses across multiple actors, this study demonstrates that moral capture is not merely theoretical but a structural reality in post-Reformation Indonesia, where the state undermines civil opposition through economic incentives. Ultimately, NU and Muhammadiyah's acceptance of IUPs extends beyond coal management; it constitutes an existential test on whether these *ormas* will remain moral guardians or become extensions of state and economic power. Grassroots criticism emphasizes the need to liberate *ormas* from this trap, safeguarding both ecological justice and substantive democracy.

Yani Purwanto, an environmental academic from the University of Indonesia, argued that NU and Muhammadiyah would be better positioned focusing on advocacy and oversight rather than directly engaging in high-risk mining ventures.

In response to such criticism, both organizations have reiterated their commitment to open dialogue with the public and relevant stakeholders. They further pledged ongoing evaluation of their involvement in the mining sector to ensure that their decisions remain consistent with their foundational principles and ethical mandates.

According to Fahmy Radhi, an economic and energy observer from Gadjah Mada University, under Government Regulation Number 25 of 2024 concerning the Implementation of Mineral and Coal Mining Business Activities, NU and Muhammadiyah were granted mining management permits with contracts lasting only five years from the regulation's issuance by President Joko Widodo on May 30, 2024. This relatively short contract period necessitates that both organizations collaborate with experienced contractors to accelerate production before the permits expire (Wawan, 2025).

Fahmy estimates that permit processing will take approximately one year, followed by the start of mining production. If NU and Muhammadiyah manage the operations independently, the timeline will be longer due to their limited practical experience in coal mining. Therefore, he stressed the importance of involving trained contractors so that coal production from former PKP2B permits can be realized promptly, aiming for operational capability within the last two years of the contract. However, this faces challenges because the five-year contract is relatively short, and Government Regulation 25/2024 Article 83A paragraph 5 prohibits business entities from collaborating with former PKP2B holders or their affiliates.

Fahmy proposed a solution involving PKP2B permit exchanges between organizations for example if Muhammadiyah receives the former Adaro concession Adaro could partner with NU and vice versa to overcome these limitations. He also highlighted the promise made by the then Minister of Investment BKPM Bahlil Lahadalia during a June 2024 press conference to assist in finding professional contractors for organizations managing mines. The statement affirmed the government's intent to ensure that the contractors involved had no conflicts of interest with former PKP2B permit holders (CNN Indonesia 2025b).

IV. Conclusion

This study analyzes the discourse of criticism surrounding the decisions by PBNU (June 6, 2024) and PP Muhammadiyah (July 28, 2024) to accept Mining Business Permits (IUP) based on Government Regulation No. 25/2024, which grants mining concessions to religious mass organizations. The main findings reveal differences in representation: PBNU frames mining as a financial necessity to support dependent communities, while Muhammadiyah positions it as social charity and *dakwah* (Islamic propagation), with an ethical commitment to return the IUP if it violates principles of justice, welfare, and the environment.

Overall, the study concludes that the critical discourse reflects tensions between legal legitimacy (PBNU relies more on regulations) and ethical legitimacy (Muhammadiyah emphasizes internal evaluation), but this decision risks damaging the moral credibility of the organizations as guardians of the environment. The government's policy is driven by distributive politics and state economics, conflicting with Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution and the Mass Organizations Law (which emphasize the non-profit and non-political nature of such groups). Digital activism is limited to "digital spectator activities" (clicktivism, meta-voicing), which only harms reputation without changing organizational stances.

Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) have created two main groups: supporters and opponents. NU was the first organization to accept the IUPK, citing the need for funds to develop organizational programs, while Muhammadiyah accepted it after consolidation with the intention of managing mining operations in a way that promotes welfare and environmental sustainability. However, this decision triggered rejection reactions from activists and internal cadres of both organizations, as it is seen as contrary to their long-standing struggle to preserve the environment.

This research offers novelty through a critical discursive approach (the key novelty is the "moral capture" framework, where mass organizations, instead of being independent moral agents, become trapped in regulatory capture—

the law as a state tool to co-opt civil society). This is enriched by primary data contrasting official PBNU/PP Muhammadiyah discourses with grassroots criticism (MDMC Muhammadiyah rejects it due to environmental threats), revealing internal fractures (central elites ignore the fatwa from Muhammadiyah's Human Rights Legal Council, May 11, 2024, which states that tenders are mandatory).

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