

Media Framing of Environmental Pollution Caused by Nickel Mining in Southeast Sulawesi on Mongabay Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia holds the world's largest nickel reserves, mainly in Sulawesi and Maluku, positioning the mineral as a strategic resource for stainless-steel production and electric-vehicle battery development. Yet, the rapid expansion of nickel mining has intensified environmental problems, particularly in Southeast Sulawesi. This study examines how Mongabay Indonesia frames environmental pollution linked to nickel mining and analyzes the implications of such framing for public understanding. Through qualitative content analysis of seventeen articles published between 2023 and 2025, the study identifies dominant narratives, issue emphases, and representations of socio-ecological impacts. Guided by Entman's (1993) Framing Theory, the findings show that Mongabay Indonesia consistently portrays nickel mining as a multidimensional environmental threat, highlighting water contamination, sedimentation, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and increasing vulnerability among coastal and Indigenous communities. The coverage frequently features community testimonies, scientific evidence, and critiques of weak regulatory enforcement. Overall, the study underscores the role of alternative environmental media in shaping discourse, amplifying affected voices, and influencing public perspectives within Indonesia's ongoing green-energy transition.

Keywords: media framing, environmental narratives, Mongabay Indonesia, nickel mining

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia possesses exceptionally large nickel reserves (USGS, 2025), primarily located in the Sulawesi and Maluku regions (Figure 1), making the country one of the world's leading nickel producers. According to the 2025 data from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Indonesia's nickel production in 2024 increased by 8% to 2.2 million tons, solidifying its position as the largest nickel producer globally, with total national reserves reaching 55 million tons.

In Ministerial Decree of Energy and Mineral Resources (Kepmen ESDM) No. 69K/MB.01/MEM.B/2024, nickel is classified as a strategic mineral due to its critical role in supporting key industries such as electric-vehicle (EV) batteries and stainless steel, as well as its substantial potential to enhance economic competitiveness and increase state revenue. The surge in nickel exports is closely linked to rising global demand, driven by the urgent need to accelerate the development of electric vehicles as a more environmentally friendly

transportation solution for the future. This shift aims to significantly reduce carbon emissions while addressing global challenges related to the continuous decline of petroleum reserves, thereby reinforcing nickel's position as a key component in EV batteries and broader clean-energy technological innovation (Agnia et al., 2024).



Figure 1: Map of nickel potential distribution in Indonesia (Geological Agency, 2019, as cited in the Nickel Booklet of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources of the Republic of Indonesia)

The increasing global demand for nickel has driven large-scale expansion of the nickel mining industry in Indonesia, including in Southeast Sulawesi. Although Southeast Sulawesi possesses the largest nickel resources compared to other provinces, these resources have not yet generated significant economic benefits for the region. This is largely due to the limited exploration activities conducted, which prevents these resources from being converted into viable, mineable reserves (Suciyanti & Haryadi, 2018). According to Yakin A. (1997), as cited in Agussalim et al. (2023), mineral exploration is essentially an economic activity aimed at utilizing natural resources as a foundation for development, particularly technological advancement. However, the process of such activities requires careful attention to one critical aspect: their potential impact on the environment and nature itself.

Many media reports highlight the suffering of local communities directly affected by mining activities, such as the destruction of agricultural land, river water pollution, and the decline in fishermen's catch due to the degradation of coastal ecosystems. These reports primarily draw attention to environmentally harmful exploitation practices, weak monitoring of mining operations, and the lack of corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments from companies toward surrounding communities. Mining activities inevitably generate negative environmental impacts, and when carried out improperly, they can cause severe disturbances

to land-surface balance as the most significant consequence (Soleman et al., as cited in Bidul & Widowaty, 2023).

The media also frame mining companies as the primary actors responsible for environmental degradation. Several reports criticize the lack of response or the slow actions taken by the government in addressing environmental impacts and community grievances. This issue is often linked to weak law enforcement, conflicts of interest in mining permits, and the government's prioritization of economic investment over environmental sustainability. For example, Agussalim et al. (2023) note that several companies have conducted mining activities without possessing the required Mining Business Permits (IUP), and some issued IUPs were considered procedurally flawed. Ironically, some of these companies were owned by local governments or regional state-owned enterprises (BUMD) in Kolaka.

One of the online media outlets that pays significant attention to the nickel mining industry and its environmental impacts on surrounding communities is Mongabay Indonesia. As an environmental media platform with an advocacy-oriented journalistic approach, Mongabay Indonesia not only disseminates information but also seeks to cultivate critical discourse on the relationship between extractive industries and ecological crises. Through its coverage of environmental data, the outlet highlights various social and ecological impacts of nickel mining, such as damage to water sources and the loss of community livelihoods. The narratives presented in Mongabay Indonesia's reports are often accompanied by criticism of weak governmental regulatory enforcement. Overall, Mongabay Indonesia actively constructs public narratives on the socio-ecological consequences of nickel mining through its reporting.

A number of previous studies have examined the relationship between media, environmental issues, and news framing, including research that involves Mongabay Indonesia as an alternative environmental media outlet. Sigit et al. (2023) investigated the role of Mongabay Indonesia in shaping the direction of control over the selection, addition, and presentation of information related to Indigenous communities. The intrinsic narratives presented are based on the individual knowledge of key actors (founders, editors, journalists), their beliefs in the values of diversity, their relationships with Indigenous activists and human rights movements, access to primary information sources, and empirical field-reporting experiences. Another study by Putri and Khotimah (2022) analyzed the framing of Komodo's premium tourism development in Mongabay.co.id and Greeners.co using Entman's framing

model, finding that Mongabay Indonesia tends to emphasize ecological impacts and environmental activists' opposition. Wardani (2023) compared the framing of imported waste issues across several media outlets—including Mongabay Indonesia, Kompas, VOA, and Greeners—and demonstrated significant differences in reality construction between mainstream media and environmental media. Furthermore, Sulistiani and Rumangkit (2023) examined the framing of environmental issues in online media in Papua and found that environmental topics are still frequently overshadowed by economic and development narratives.

Nevertheless, these studies have not specifically focused on how Mongabay Indonesia frames environmental pollution caused by nickel mining, particularly in Southeast Sulawesi and within the broader discourse of the green energy transition. Existing research generally centers on issues such as forest fires, imported waste, climate change, or conservation tourism, leaving the specific dimension of nickel as a “green mineral” for electric-vehicle batteries underexplored in alternative environmental media such as Mongabay Indonesia. Meanwhile, studies on the framing of nickel mining in Indonesia tend to focus on mainstream media. Saputra (2024) examined the framing of nickel downstreaming cases in Fajar.co.id and Kompas.com, finding that both acknowledge environmental risks, although Kompas.com presents a more optimistic frame, while Fajar.co.id is more critical of the policy background. Siregar (2025) analyzed media tendencies in the nickel mining controversy in Raja Ampat through Kompas.com's framing, showing that the conflict is constructed around tensions between conservation interests and investment. While these studies are valuable, they focus on general news outlets (Kompas.com, Fajar.co.id) and on cases outside Southeast Sulawesi, with greater emphasis on downstreaming or licensing disputes rather than on environmental pollution and socio-ecological crises in production zones like Southeast Sulawesi.

Accordingly, this study identifies at least three research gaps. First, there is a lack of research specifically analyzing Mongabay Indonesia's framing of environmental pollution from nickel mining, despite its role as an alternative environmental media outlet with a strong ecological justice orientation. Second, framing studies on nickel mining in Indonesia remain dominated by analyses of mainstream media, leaving the contributions of alternative environmental media—particularly regarding impacts in Southeast Sulawesi—underexplored. Third, few studies connect media narratives on nickel to the paradox of the green energy transition and its consequences for local communities in mining regions.

The expansion of the nickel mining industry in Southeast Sulawesi, as part of the green energy transition agenda, has generated an ecological paradox marked by water pollution, deforestation, and heightened social vulnerability among coastal communities. In this context, Mongabay Indonesia, as a non-profit environmental media outlet, plays a significant role in shaping critical narratives regarding the socio-ecological impacts of mining activities.

This study employs an integration of Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1968, as cited in Griffin, 2015) to understand how media narratives are constructed and how they influence public perceptions. Framing is used to examine how Mongabay Indonesia structures its reporting on environmental pollution caused by nickel mining through the selection, emphasis, and organization of information that highlight the ecological, social, and political dimensions of mining operations. Meanwhile, Agenda-Setting complements this approach by explaining how the intensity and consistency of Mongabay Indonesia's coverage directs public attention toward specific issues, thereby shaping collective perceptions of the urgency and consequences of the environmental crisis. Based on this framework, the study aims to analyze how Mongabay Indonesia selects and foregrounds particular issues in its reporting, and how these narrative constructions contribute to shaping public discourse on environmental pollution caused by nickel mining during the 2023–2025 period.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine narrative construction and framing in Mongabay Indonesia's coverage of environmental pollution caused by nickel mining in Southeast Sulawesi during the 2023–2025 period. The units of analysis consist of news articles and environmental reports published on the Mongabay Indonesia platform that address nickel mining and its impacts on the environment and local communities. Articles were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) they contain issues related to environmental pollution or degradation caused by nickel mining activities; (2) they reference locations within Southeast Sulawesi; and (3) they were published between 2023 and 2025 (Table 1).

The analysis was conducted by identifying framing elements using Entman's (1993) model, including problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and suggested remedies, as well as tracing agenda-setting patterns through issue intensity and thematic

focus. The data were then reduced, categorized, and interpreted descriptively to identify dominant narrative patterns and representations of socio-ecological impacts. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and peer debriefing to maintain the consistency and credibility of interpretations.

Table 1: Mongabay Indonesia's Articles (Period 2023-2025)

No.	Headline News	Writer	Publications Date
1	<i>Kala Pemerintah Gencar Kembangkan Industri Nikel, Lingkungan dan Masyarakat Jadi Perhatian?</i>	Rabul Sawal dan Della Syahni	27 Februari 2023
2	<i>Kala Tambang Nikel Datang, Biodiversitas Pulau Wawonii Mulai Terdampak</i>	Riza Salman	7 September 2023
3	<i>Gakkum KLHK Tangkap Pelaku Tambang Nikel Ilegal di Kolaka Sulawesi Tenggara</i>	Wahyu Chandra	20 November 2023
4	<i>Aliansi Sulawesi Tampik Klaim Dampak Positif Hilirisasi Nikel</i>	Wahyu Chandra	1 Februari 2024
5	<i>Perusahaan Tambang Nikel di Sulawesi Tenggara Kriminalisasi Warga Penolak Tambang</i>	Riza Salman	15 Februari 2024
6	<i>Jejak Logam Berat Tambang Nikel di Perairan Sulawesi Tenggara</i>	Riza Salman	13 Mei 2024
7	<i>Ketika Hutan di Konawe Utara Tergerus Tambang Nikel</i>	Riza Salman	2 Juli 2024
8	<i>Pencemaran Nikel Ancam Kepunahan Kima Raksasa, Spesies Kunci Biodiversitas Laut Banda</i>	Riza Salman	8 Juli 2024
9	<i>Perusahaan Nikel Terus Nambang di Wawonii, Putusan Hukum Tumpul</i>	Riza Salman	22 Desember 2024
10	<i>Aquaman Indonesia Terancam Nikel, 4 Fakta di Pulau Kabaena</i>	Bernardino Realino Arya Bagaskara	13 Maret 2025
11	<i>Pemerintah Abai Kerusakan Kabaena Demi Nikel?</i>	Irfan Maulana	12 Mei 2025
12	<i>Derita Petani Perempuan Lamonee Terdampak Tambang Nikel</i>	Riza Salman	14 Mei 2025
13	<i>Nikel: Mimpi Orang Kota, Mimpi Buruk Bagi Pulau</i>	Lusia Arumingtyas	17 Juni 2025
14	<i>Pulau Wawonii dan Luka Nikel yang Masih Terbuka</i>	Januar Wijaya	11 Agustus 2025
15	<i>Opini: Potret Neo Ekstraktivisme Industri Nikel di Pomalaa</i>	Baphtista Mario Yosy Randy Sara	13 Agustus 2025
16	<i>Adakah yang Peduli Penderitaan Warga di Sekitar Industri Nikel?</i>	Irfan Maulana, Riza Salman	30 Oktober 2025
17	<i>Setahun Kementerian Lingkungan, Penegakan Hukum Industri Nikel jadi Sorotan</i>	Achmad Rizki Muazam	31 Oktober 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several Mongabay Indonesia articles published between 2023 and 2025 that address the impacts of nickel mining activities in Southeast Sulawesi were analyzed using Entman's (1993) Framing Theory, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Framing Analysis (Entman, 1993) of Mongabay Indonesia Articles

Framing Devices (Entman, 1993)	Findings in Mongabay Indonesia Articles (2023–2025)
Define Problems	Nickel mining in Southeast Sulawesi is framed as a multidimensional threat to the environment (land, water, and air), including marine and river pollution caused by red-mud sedimentation, air pollution from smelter operations, forest degradation, loss of biodiversity, and disturbances to coastal ecosystems. The issue is also presented as a paradox of the green energy transition, which simultaneously generates environmental degradation around mining areas.
Diagnose Causes	The primary causes are attributed to large-scale nickel mining operations, weak governmental regulatory enforcement, and corporate practices driven more by economic interests than environmental sustainability. Global political-economic factors—particularly rising demand for nickel for EV batteries and stainless steel—are also highlighted as key driving forces.
Make Moral Judgement	Mongabay Indonesia emphasizes moral criticism toward both the government and mining companies, portraying them as failing to protect local communities and ecosystems. Moral narratives also highlight the voices of Indigenous and coastal communities, who are depicted as victims of ecological injustice.
Treatment Recommendation	The articles advocate for stricter environmental law enforcement, greater transparency in mining permits, protection of forest and coastal areas, and the strengthening of affected communities' voices in decision-making processes.

1. Framing of Mongabay Indonesia on Nickel Issues in Southeast Sulawesi

Analysis of Mongabay Indonesia articles published between 2023 and 2025 that discuss nickel mining in Southeast Sulawesi reveals a consistent pattern: nickel extraction is framed as a multidimensional threat to both the environment and local communities. Articles such as *“Jejak Logam Berat Tambang Nikel di Perairan Sulawesi Tenggara”*, *“Ketika Hutan di Konawe Utara Tergerus Tambang Nikel”*, *“Derita Petani Perempuan Lamonae Terdampak Tambang Nikel”*, *“Adakah yang Peduli Penderitaan Warga di Sekitar Industri Nikel”*, and *“Pemerintah Abai Kerusakan Kabaena Demi Nikel?”* highlight three layers of impact—ecological, socio-economic, and health-related.

Ecologically, Mongabay Indonesia emphasizes heavy-metal contamination (cadmium, mercury, nickel) in coastal waters and bays, red-mud sedimentation that smothers coral reefs and seabeds, and deforestation in forest areas that function as major watershed zones. Narratives of forests in North Konawe turning into barren hillsides and marine species such as giant clams and keong lola becoming contaminated reinforce the portrayal of mining expansion as eroding the region's environmental carrying capacity. In the article *"Nikel: Mimpi Orang Kota, Mimpi Buruk Bagi Pulau"*, the inaugural episode of Mongabay Indonesia's BTS (Berita Tanpa Sensor), journalists Lusia Arumingtyas and Riza Salman expose the harsh realities of nickel downstreaming on small island communities. Riza also refers to the ecological genocide experienced by the Bajo people—sea-dependent communities whose livelihoods are increasingly threatened. According to his observations, they are losing their living space, unable to farm, and now dependent on increasingly depleted marine resources.

Deforestation is also shown to exacerbate ecosystem degradation. The article *Ketika Hutan di Konawe Utara Tergerus Tambang Nikel* reports that nickel mining has transformed forest landscapes into barren terrain surrounding the Teluk Lasolo Nature Tourism Park in North Konawe, Southeast Sulawesi. This land conversion disrupts coastal and marine ecosystems (Figure 2). Deforestation also removes tree species traditionally used to build *soppe*, the Bajo community's wooden boats. Another article, *"Aquaman Indonesia Terancam Nikel, 4 Fakta di Pulau Kabaena"*, presents findings from Satya Bumi and Walhi Sultra showing that 3,374 hectares of forest in Kabaena have been lost between 2001 and 2022, leading to declining river and seawater quality. These impacts extend beyond the environment, disrupting the social and economic fabric of local communities.



Figure 2: Aerial view of forest clearing for nickel mining activities, showing resulting ecological damage to the Morombo coastal ecosystem in North Konawe, Southeast Sulawesi. Photo: Riza Salman/Mongabay Indonesia.

Socio-economically, the articles *Derita Petani Perempuan Lamone* and *Aquaman Indonesia Terancam Nikel* illustrate declining crop yields, damaged farmland, reduced fish catches, and the pressures forcing residents to become mining laborers or waste-sediment collectors as the sea and agricultural land can no longer sustain their livelihoods. Health-related impacts also emerge strongly, with narratives describing rising cases of respiratory infections, skin irritation, and the risks of heavy-metal poisoning among coastal communities, particularly children. The article *“Aquaman Indonesia Terancam Nikel, 4 Fakta di Pulau Kabaena”* reports that fishers’ incomes continue to decline due to polluted seas, as documented by Satya Bumi and WALHI Sultra. Residents of Kabaena have experienced household-level economic losses caused by nickel mining. Whereas fishers previously did not need to travel far to secure their catch, polluted waters now force them to sail long distances from the island to find viable fishing grounds.

Another article emphasizing socio-economic impacts, *“Derita Petani Perempuan Lamone Terdampak Tambang Nikel”*, explains that before 2019 the Lalindu River in North Konawe was clear, and flood-borne sediment enriched agricultural soil. Today, however, floods carry contaminated mud that damages crops. This condition is linked to river contamination caused by land clearing for nickel mining. Previously, farmers could harvest up to 7 kilograms of chili peppers per day, but current yields have dropped drastically to an average of only 1 kilogram per day. Mongabay Indonesia does not frame nickel as a “development commodity,” but rather as a source of socio-ecological crisis inherent to extractivist and downstream practices.

2. Environmental Journalism and Mongabay Indonesia

Reynaldi and Humeira (2021) show that in mainstream media, environmental issues are often overshadowed by political and economic agendas. Even when environmental topics are covered, they are frequently framed as political commodities rather than as tools for ecological literacy. Their study of Kompas.com’s reporting on the Jakarta Bay reclamation issue found that coverage largely fell within the categories of law and politics, with an emphasis on information delivery but lacking the depth required in environmental journalism.

In contrast, Agustina (2019) describes Mongabay.co.id as a pioneering environmental journalism outlet in Indonesia, run by journalists who are also environmental activists. She

argues that environmental journalism demands a commitment to ecological preservation and to the protection of human livelihoods that depend on it, requiring strong integrity to highlight environmental problems that are often marginalized by mainstream media. In her findings, Mongabay Indonesia acts as a “voice” when the environment is damaged by vested interests; this aligns closely with Mongabay Indonesia’s reporting on the suffering experienced by communities in Lamona, Kabaena, Wawonii, and the coastal areas of North Konawe in relation to nickel mining (Figure 4). Genisa and Angraini (2023) also note that Mongabay Indonesia’s reports have strong potential to serve as environmental socioscientific issues (ESSI) in science education because they provide rich factual knowledge about environmental damage and associated conflicts. However, they observe that conceptual and procedural dimensions (e.g., how solutions should be designed) still require supplementary sources. This pattern is also evident in Mongabay’s nickel coverage: the outlet effectively illustrates “what is happening” and “who is affected,” yet policy solutions are often presented only as general demands (law enforcement, permit evaluation, moratorium) rather than detailed technical recommendations.

Overall, existing studies reaffirm that Mongabay Indonesia’s framing of nickel issues, rooted in ecological justice and the concerns of local communities, is not an anomaly but an extension of the outlet’s ideological and professional identity as an alternative environmental media platform.

3. Critique of Regulation and the Paradox of the Energy Transition

The narratives presented in Mongabay Indonesia’s articles also point to issues within government regulation. One key finding is the contradiction between the government’s aggressive promotion of the nickel industry and on-the-ground realities that reveal weak environmental law enforcement. The article *“Kala Pemerintah Gencar Kembangkan Industri Nikel, Lingkungan dan Masyarakat jadi Perhatian?”* highlights that Southeast Sulawesi contains Indonesia’s largest nickel mining areas, 198,624.66 hectares, most of which overlap with forest zones.

Environmental organization WALHI reports that in 2021, nickel concessions covered 999,587.66 hectares, with 653,759.16 hectares located within forest areas. By 2022, the total concession area increased further to 1,037,435.22 hectares, including 765,237.07 hectares in

forest zones. These figures reveal how economic interests frequently override ecological sustainability.

Another article *“Aliansi Sulawesi Tampik Klaim Dampak Positif Hilirisasi Nikel”* critiques statements made during the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debate, in which Vice-Presidential candidate Gibran Rakabuming argued that downstreaming is essential for Indonesia because converting raw materials into higher-value products increases economic opportunities. This claim stands in stark contrast to field conditions: over the past three years, the impacts of nickel downstreaming in Central Sulawesi have been severely harmful to both the environment and local communities, including those living near mining sites and smelter facilities. These impacts must be accounted for as part of the broader consequences of Indonesia’s nickel downstreaming policy. The government is criticized for failing to grasp the fundamental purpose of mining permits, which should serve not only administrative functions but also act as mechanisms for limiting and controlling environmental damage. Additionally, the article *“Adakah yang Peduli Penderitaan Warga di Sekitar Industri Nikel?”* notes that nickel will continue to be one of Indonesia’s flagship industries, with President Prabowo committed to expanding downstreaming—yet this expansion has not translated into improved welfare or economic prosperity for affected communities.

Furthermore, the paradox of the energy transition is prominently discussed. Globally, nickel is positioned as a strategic mineral for clean energy technologies, particularly electric vehicles. However, Mongabay Indonesia demonstrates that extraction practices at the local level have intensified environmental degradation and deepened social inequities for impacted communities. The article cites a statement from WALHI’s Head of the Anti-Extractive Industry Campaign Division, who warns that granting mining permits across the entire region could alter land functions so drastically that it would release an estimated 83 million tons of CO₂-equivalent greenhouse gases. By constructing this paradox, Mongabay Indonesia underscores that the green energy transition and the growth of the electric-vehicle industry do not inherently align with sustainable mining practices.

4. Linkages Between Mongabay Indonesia’s Findings and Research on the Impacts of Nickel Mining

From an empirical standpoint, Mongabay Indonesia’s reporting on the impacts of nickel mining in Southeast Sulawesi aligns closely with scientific research on nickel extraction.

Hasriati et al. (2019) found that the income of wet-rice farmers working on land affected by nickel mining in South Konawe Regency was significantly lower than that of farmers on unaffected land. The R/C ratio for farmers on affected land was only 0.9 (indicating financial loss), whereas on unaffected land it reached 1.9 with positive income. These findings reinforce Mongabay's narratives about farmers losing productivity due to mud floods, sedimentation, and water pollution.

Suciyanti and Haryadi (2018), through a SWOT analysis of the development of a Special Economic Zone (KEK) for the nickel industry in Southeast Sulawesi, show that although the province has substantial nickel resources and significant economic opportunities, it faces serious threats related to environmental degradation, limited energy access, and inadequate infrastructure. Mongabay Indonesia frequently documents this irony: while concession areas expand and smelters are built, surrounding villages experience mud floods, polluted coastlines, and shrinking living space.

Meanwhile, Agnia et al. (2024) emphasize Indonesia's comparative advantage in the global nickel market—particularly for EV batteries—supported by approximately 20% of global reserves, downstreaming policies, and the ore-export ban since 2020, which has stimulated domestic processing and attracted foreign investment. Their study illustrates the “bright side” of nickel from a macroeconomic and ASEAN-market perspective. This context is precisely what Mongabay Indonesia critiques, arguing that the national narrative of the green energy transition and nickel downstreaming does not automatically translate into socio-ecological sustainability in producing regions. Agussalim et al. (2023) further show land conflicts, ecosystem damage, and the absence of the state in ensuring ethical resource governance.

These findings parallel Mongabay Indonesia's reporting on the criminalization of anti-mining residents, unclear AMDAL (environmental impact assessment) processes in Wawonii, and the grievances of Kabaena communities who feel “sacrificed” for the ambition of electric-vehicle development. In sum, Mongabay Indonesia's coverage and prior scholarly research converge in demonstrating that nickel mining produces significant socio-ecological harms that are not always reflected in national-level narratives of development and downstream industrialization.

5. Media as an Agent of Public Awareness

Across the overall analysis of the articles, it is evident that Mongabay Indonesia not only reports the impacts of nickel mining activities but also functions as an agent of public awareness. Its narrative strategies include:

- a. Presenting scientific data (laboratory test results, deforestation statistics);
- b. Amplifying the voices of affected communities (fishers, farmers, Indigenous peoples, women);
- c. Critiquing environmental regulations and governance.

Through these strategies, Mongabay Indonesia practices critical environmental journalism, not merely distributing information but also fostering ecological awareness and demanding accountability from the government and mining companies.

Viewed through Entman's Framing Theory, Mongabay Indonesia's reporting on nickel mining in Southeast Sulawesi can be explained through four framing devices:

a. Define Problems

Mongabay Indonesia defines nickel mining as a structural problem rather than a localized incident. The issue is framed as environmental degradation (deforestation, sedimentation, heavy-metal pollution), the destruction of local livelihoods and living spaces, and the paradox of the green energy transition that creates new "victims" in mining regions. This contrasts with many mainstream media outlets which, as noted by Reynaldi and Humeira (2021), tend to define environmental issues within narrow legal-political frames (such as permit disputes or elite conflicts) rather than as ongoing ecological crises.

b. Diagnose Causes

The causes of the problem are attributed to large-scale mining and smelter operations, downstreaming policies and concession expansion, and weak environmental regulation and oversight at both regional and national levels. This aligns with the findings of Agussalim et al. (2023) and Suciyanti & Haryadi (2018), who show that environmental damage linked to nickel extraction cannot be separated from regulatory structures and extractive policy orientations.

c. Make Moral Judgement

Mongabay Indonesia clearly sides with Indigenous communities, fishers, women farmers, and local residents as the harmed parties, while viewing mining companies and the government as actors failing to uphold ecological responsibility. This moral stance is

consistent with Agustina's (2019) conception of environmental journalism, which argues that journalistic alignment should favor environmental sustainability and vulnerable communities.

d. Treatment Recommendation

The recommendations emerging in Mongabay Indonesia's narratives include consistent enforcement of environmental laws, evaluation and moratorium of problematic permits, protection of Indigenous and coastal living spaces, and reassessment of downstream policies that prioritize economic value while neglecting ecological burdens. Although technical policy solutions may not always be detailed, the framing of these recommendations effectively guides readers to perceive the need for a shift in nickel governance.

Through Entman's lens, it can be concluded that Mongabay Indonesia's framing directs public understanding of: what the core problems are, who causes them, who is harmed, and where policy solutions should be oriented.

Beyond framing, Mongabay Indonesia's coverage of nickel mining can also be examined through the lens of Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw). In this context, Mongabay Indonesia plays several key roles:

a. First-Level Agenda Setting (what to think about)

Mongabay Indonesia consistently reported on nickel issues in Southeast Sulawesi throughout 2023–2025, elevating environmental pollution and ecological degradation caused by nickel extraction as central issues within public environmental discourse. While mainstream media often highlight downstream narratives as an "economic success story," Mongabay Indonesia directs public attention toward the other side of the equation: victims, land conflicts, and ecosystem destruction.

b. Second-Level Agenda Setting (how to think about it)

Beyond selecting issues, Mongabay Indonesia also shapes how the public thinks about them. By highlighting imagery of reddish-brown polluted seas, barren hills, struggling farmers, and testimonies from fishers, the outlet constructs cognitive and affective attributes associating nickel mining with destruction, loss, and threat—rather than with export figures or investment achievements. When agenda-setting interacts with framing, the emphasized attributes of ecological damage and community suffering make the public more attuned to environmental justice concerns than to national pride in being the "world's largest nickel producer."

c. Agenda Building (interaction with other actors)

Through its extensive reporting, Mongabay Indonesia amplifies the voices of environmental organizations such as WALHI and Satya Bumi, as well as academics and local activists. This supports the findings of Genisa and Angraini (2023), who note that Mongabay Indonesia often serves as a primary reference for researchers and environmental advocates. Thus, Mongabay Indonesia's agenda does not stand alone but becomes part of a broader network of actors constructing a critical discourse on the nickel industry.

Through the agenda-setting perspective, this study demonstrates that Mongabay Indonesia functions as an alternative environmental media outlet that constructs a counter-agenda to the dominant state–corporate narrative framing nickel as an “economic blessing.”

CONCLUSION

Online media such as Mongabay Indonesia play a significant role in shaping critical narratives about the nickel mining industry in Southeast Sulawesi through their digital reporting during the 2023–2025 period. Based on Entman's framing model, Mongabay Indonesia consistently defines nickel mining not merely as an economic activity but as a structural problem that poses multidimensional threats to local ecology, society, health, and the economy. This framing functions not only as a vehicle for information delivery but also as an agent influencing public opinion, strengthening critical awareness, and encouraging accountability from the state and corporations in natural resource governance.

Through agenda-setting strategies, Mongabay Indonesia actively shapes public perceptions regarding the urgency and socio-ecological impacts of the nickel industry. The outlet structures the public agenda on nickel issues by emphasizing attributes such as environmental degradation, injustice, and the paradoxes of the green energy transition.

These findings demonstrate that critical environmental media serve a strategic function in safeguarding the green energy transition from becoming an instrument of destructive resource exploitation. Furthermore, the narrative framing constructed by Mongabay Indonesia provides an important lens through which the public can understand the realities of nickel mining activities in Southeast Sulawesi.

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