



Communicating Contested Risks: Mining Concessions to Religious Organizations in Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia's policy on mining concessions for religious organizations has generated controversy over its environmental, social, and institutional implications. While previous studies have examined the policy from legal, socio-economic, and religious perspectives, less attention has been given to how religious communities encounter information about the controversy and evaluate its communicators. This study examines risk communication among university students who currently study or have previously studied in *pesantren* or *mahad*. A quantitative survey was conducted using purposive and network-based recruitment. Of 122 individuals who completed the initial screening, 119 met the eligibility criterion, and 74 (62.2%) reported prior exposure to information about mining concessions to *pesantren* or Islamic organizations. The subsequent analysis focused on these 74 respondents. Seven study-specific items assessed evaluations of religious leaders, government institutions, media, and the overall credibility of information received using a five-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Evaluations of religious leaders' honesty ($M = 3.14$) and understanding of mining issues ($M = 3.07$) were close to the scale midpoint. Government-related items received lower mean evaluations, particularly regarding consideration of social ($M = 2.49$) and environmental consequences ($M = 2.38$), while overall information credibility had the highest mean ($M = 3.30$). These descriptive patterns highlight the value of examining trustworthiness and credibility across specific communicators and aspects rather than as a single generalized judgment.

Keywords: *Risk Communication, Religious Organizations, Mining Concessions, Santri, Trust*

INTRODUCTION

In May 2024, the Indonesian government issued Government Regulation No. 25/2024, allowing priority offers of mining permit areas to business entities owned by religious organizations. Although framed as a measure of empowerment and public welfare, the policy has created a new dilemma and continues to generate controversy over the involvement of religious organizations in the extractive sector (Azzahra, 2026; Masitoh, 2025). Existing studies on mining concessions for religious organizations in Indonesia have examined legal, socio-economic, and religious-normative perspectives, addressing regulatory compatibility, class and benefit distribution, environmental consequences, and religious principles of resource governance (Astinda et al., 2024; Khairuddin, 2024; Sholahudin & Maksum, 2024). Far less attention has been given to how information about the controversy reaches religious communities and how they evaluate the credibility of those communicating it.

This study examines how university students with *pesantren* or *mahad* educational experience encounter information about mining concessions to religious organizations and how they evaluate the trustworthiness of different communicators and the credibility of the information they receive, using a risk communication perspective. Risk communication refers to communicating information about potential hazards and is particularly relevant in situations characterized by high concern or controversy (Forney & Sadar, 2021). It can become difficult when audiences are

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unaware of a risk, indifferent to it, or question the credibility of the organizations communicating or managing that risk (Lundgren & McMakin, 2018). These characteristics make audience awareness and communicator credibility especially relevant to understanding communication surrounding contested mining risks.

The involvement of religious organizations adds a distinctive dimension to this risk communication context. Religious institutions and leaders can shape environmental worldviews and moral understandings that influence how communities interpret responsibilities toward sustainability and the natural environment (Gardner, 2003). In the context of mining, however, religious leaders are communicating about an issue that also involves environmental, economic, and regulatory considerations.

Government institutions, meanwhile, occupy a central position as policymakers, regulators, and sources of information about the rationale and implementation of the mining concession policy (Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, 2024). Online media constitute another important arena of communication, carrying competing discourses supporting and opposing the acceptance of mining permits by Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (Romadlan et al., 2025). The mining concession controversy therefore brings religious authority, government authority, and competing media discourses into the same risk communication environment, raising questions about how audiences evaluate their credibility.

Following the allocation of mining opportunities to religious organizations, public discussion has also extended to the possible involvement of *pesantren* in mineral resource management (Yunus, 2025; Zuhdi, 2025). Although this has not yet become established policy, the possibility places *pesantren* not only as sites where the controversy is discussed, but also as potential institutional actors within it. This makes people with *pesantren* educational experience a particularly relevant audience for examining how such developments are encountered and evaluated.

Pesantren also provide a distinctive interpretive environment for environmental issues. Religious education can shape how *santri* connect religious values with social and environmental concerns (Zulfikar, 2025), while communal life, collective discipline, and the central role of *kiai* can support the internalization of ecological values and practices (Arifin, 2025). *Santri* are therefore situated within communities where religious authority and environmental understandings intersect, making their evaluations especially relevant to the communication of contested mining risks.

Against this background, this article provides an exploratory examination of risk communication among university students with *pesantren* or *mahad* educational experience. Using a quantitative survey, it examines two aspects of risk communication: respondents' exposure to the mining concession controversy and their trust- and credibility-related evaluations of communication surrounding the issue. Specifically, it assesses whether respondents have encountered information about the controversy and how they evaluate religious leaders, government institutions, media, and the information they receive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Risk Communication, Trust, and Credibility

Environmental risk communication involves not only the information communicated but also its sources, communication channels, and audiences (Forney & Sadar, 2021). Recent research continues to emphasize this contextual character of risk communication. A scoping review of natural and environmental risk communication shows considerable variation in communication practices across risks and audiences, highlighting the need to consider how particular publics receive and evaluate risk information (Massa & Comunello, 2024). Risk communication therefore

cannot be understood solely in terms of message transmission, particularly when an issue involves uncertainty, controversy, and multiple information sources.

Lundgren & McMakin (2018) similarly emphasize that risk communication depends on the audience, situation, and purpose of communication. They note that credibility, perceived fairness, and trust can influence how communication is received, while these evaluations may also be shaped by previous communication experiences and institutional actions. Trust and credibility are therefore particularly relevant when audiences encounter information from multiple communicators within a contested issue.

More recent research conceptualizes trustworthiness as a multidimensional judgment rather than a single, uniform evaluation. Contemporary studies commonly distinguish dimensions such as expertise or competence, integrity or honesty, and benevolence or goodwill and caring (Besley et al., 2026; Hendriks et al., 2022). These evaluations may also differ according to the source being assessed. For example, Yang (2023) examines trust in government and media separately in relation to environmental risk perception. Recent reviews likewise show continuing variation in how trust and credibility are conceptualized and measured across risk and science communication contexts (Weber et al., 2026).

These dimensions provide the conceptual basis for several of the seven items examined in this study. The items were not adopted from a single established measurement scale but were developed deductively from contemporary dimensions of trustworthiness and adapted to the communication actors involved in the mining concession controversy. Religious leaders' honesty reflects integrity or honesty, while their understanding of the issue reflects expertise or competence.

Government good intentions reflect benevolence or goodwill, whereas consideration of social and environmental consequences represents perceived care and concern (Besley et al., 2026; Hendriks et al., 2022). The remaining items capture evaluations specific to the communication environment examined in this study. Media objectivity represents respondents' evaluation of the impartiality of media information, while overall information credibility captures a broader evaluation of the information received. The seven items are therefore treated as related but distinct evaluations rather than combined into a single composite measure.

Religious authority and the communication environment

Religious actors can play an important role in how environmental issues are communicated and interpreted. In Indonesia, religious teachings and institutions have been used to connect environmental protection with religious values and responsibilities. Akhda et al. (2019), for example, show how religious leaders communicate environmental messages through religious gatherings and faith-based organizations, while religious perspectives may shape community attitudes toward environmental issues.

Religious leaders are particularly relevant within this communication environment because their authority is embedded not only in religious knowledge but also in social relationships and institutional networks. Koehrsen (2021) notes that religious leaders and organizations can influence public debate through their credibility and networks. In pesantren settings, this role may be especially salient because *kyai* communicate environmental responsibilities through sermons, religious study, fatwas, and pesantren networks (Yulianto et al., 2026). Their role therefore extends beyond message transmission to the interpretation and legitimization of environmental issues within a religious community.

The mining concession controversy creates a more complex communication environment because religious actors are not the only sources through which the issue is understood. Government institutions communicate and justify the policy, while media circulate competing

interpretations of its potential benefits and social and environmental consequences. Religious authority therefore operates alongside other institutional sources that may differ in perceived competence, intentions, objectivity, and credibility.

For *santri*, information about mining concessions is thus encountered within a multi-source communication environment in which religious leaders, government institutions, and media coexist. Examining how *santri* evaluate these different communicators makes it possible to explore source-specific evaluations of trustworthiness and credibility within a contested environmental risk rather than treating these evaluations as a single generalized judgment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedure

This study employed a quantitative survey design to examine risk communication surrounding mining concessions to religious organizations in Indonesia. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling because the study specifically targeted university students who were currently studying or had previously studied in a *pesantren* or *mahad*. The questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms and distributed through student and *pesantren* networks.

Eligibility was determined through an initial screening question concerning respondents' experience studying or residing in a *pesantren* or *mahad*. A total of 122 individuals completed the screening section. Three respondents indicated that they had no such experience and were automatically directed to the end of the questionnaire; they did not proceed to the substantive survey sections.

The final eligible sample consisted of 119 respondents. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 33 years ($M = 21.31, SD = 2.52$); 69 respondents (58.0%) were women and 50 (42.0%) were men. Regarding *pesantren* experience, 62 respondents (52.1%) were currently studying or residing in a *pesantren* or *mahad*, while 50 (42.0%) had previous experience. An additional seven respondents (5.9%) reported *pesantren/mahad* experience through an earlier response format that did not distinguish between current and previous experience. Respondents came from a range of universities, academic disciplines, and locations, including Yogyakarta, Malang, Bogor, Kudus, Solo, and Semarang.

Because recruitment relied on purposive sampling and online distribution through student and *pesantren* networks, the sample is not intended to be statistically representative of all university students with *pesantren* backgrounds in Indonesia. Rather, it represents an exploratory sample of respondents who met the study's substantive inclusion criterion.

Measures

The seven trust- and credibility-related items were developed for the broader survey rather than adopted from a single established measurement scale. Their development was informed by contemporary literature that conceptualizes trustworthiness as a multidimensional evaluation involving dimensions such as expertise or competence, integrity or honesty, and benevolence or goodwill and caring (Besley et al., 2026; Hendriks et al., 2022). The items were then adapted to the communication actors relevant to the mining concession controversy.

Two items assessed respondents' evaluations of religious leaders: perceived honesty and understanding of the issue. Three items assessed government institutions: perceived good intentions and consideration of the social and environmental consequences of mining concessions. One item assessed perceived media objectivity, while one item assessed the overall credibility of the information received. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

The seven items were analyzed individually because they represented different communicators and aspects of trustworthiness and credibility rather than indicators of a single latent construct. Accordingly, no composite trust score or internal-consistency estimate was calculated.

Statistical Analysis

The analysis was descriptive and exploratory. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe respondents' prior exposure to the mining concession controversy and the distribution of responses to each trust- and credibility-related item. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each item to summarize patterns of evaluation across communicators and aspects of trustworthiness and credibility.

No inferential statistical tests were conducted because the analysis was intended to describe patterns within the study sample rather than test associations or causal relationships. Differences in item scores are therefore interpreted as descriptive patterns and not as statistically significant differences between communicators or respondent groups.

Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the purposive and network-based recruitment strategy limits the representativeness of the sample and may have introduced selection effects. Second, the trust- and credibility-related items were developed specifically for this survey rather than adopted from a single validated scale. Although their development was conceptually informed by contemporary trustworthiness literature, the items were not formally pretested, and their measurement properties have not yet been established. Future research should further examine their clarity and validity across different samples. Third, the analysis was descriptive and did not test statistical associations among exposure, respondent characteristics, and trust- and credibility-related evaluations. The findings should therefore be interpreted as descriptive patterns within the sample rather than as population-level relationships.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Exposure to the Mining Concession Controversy

Among the 119 eligible respondents, 74 (62.2%) reported having previously heard or read information about mining concessions to *pesantren* or Islamic organizations, while 45 (37.8%) reported no prior exposure. The subsequent analysis of trust- and credibility-related evaluations was therefore limited to the 74 respondents who had previously encountered information about the issue.

These results indicate that prior exposure to the mining concession controversy was not universal even within a purposively selected sample of university students with *pesantren* or *mahad* backgrounds. This pattern is relevant to risk communication because the presence of information in the communication environment does not imply that all relevant audiences will have encountered it (Forney & Sadar, 2021). Recent environmental risk communication research similarly emphasizes variation in communication practices and audience engagement across different risk contexts (Massa & Comunello, 2024). Within the sample, therefore, familiarity with the mining concession controversy cannot be assumed solely based on respondents' connection to *pesantren* environments.

Evaluations of Communicators and Information

Among the 74 respondents who had encountered the issue, the seven items showed different descriptive patterns across communicators and aspects of trustworthiness and credibility. Evaluations of religious leaders were close to the midpoint of the five-point scale. Perceived honesty had a mean score of 3.14, while perceived understanding of mining issues had a mean of 3.07. These scores indicate relatively cautious rather than strongly positive or negative evaluations of religious leaders on the two items examined.

This pattern provides a useful comparison with previous research emphasizing the communicative importance of religious actors in environmental issues. Koehrsen (2021) describes the capacity of religious leaders and organizations to influence environmental debates through their authority and social networks, while Yulianto et al. (2026) identify *kyai* and *pesantren* networks as channels through which environmental responsibilities are communicated. The findings do not contradict these broader communicative roles. Rather, they show that the two religious-leader items were not rated uniformly highly within this sample: mean evaluations of both honesty and understanding remained close to the scale midpoint. This distinction is important because the broader social authority of religious leaders and respondents' evaluations of particular dimensions of trustworthiness are analytically distinct.

Government-related items received lower descriptive evaluations. Perceived good intentions regarding mining concessions had a mean score of 2.80. Evaluations were lower for whether the government considered the social consequences ($M = 2.49$) and environmental consequences ($M = 2.38$) of mining. More than half of respondents (56.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the government considered social consequences, while 60.8% gave the same responses regarding environmental consequences.

These results indicate a more skeptical descriptive pattern toward the government-related items, particularly those concerning social and environmental consequences. However, the analysis does not establish why respondents held these evaluations or whether they were associated with particular information sources or demographic characteristics. The distinction among the three items is nevertheless conceptually consistent with contemporary approaches that treat trustworthiness as multidimensional. In particular, perceived good intentions can be distinguished conceptually from evaluations of care or concern for affected groups and consequences (Besley et al., 2026; Hendriks et al., 2022). The mean scores nevertheless differed across the three government-related items, with evaluations of social and environmental consideration lower than evaluations of general good intentions. These differences are interpreted descriptively and do not establish statistically significant distinctions among dimensions of government trustworthiness.

Evaluations of media objectivity were also close to the scale midpoint ($M = 3.08$), with 36.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing that media coverage was objective and 35.1% selecting a neutral response. The overall credibility of information received had the highest mean among the seven items ($M = 3.30$). This descriptive difference should not be interpreted as evidence that particular communicators produced higher or lower perceptions of information credibility, because relationships among the items were not statistically tested.

The distinction is consistent with research that treats evaluations of information sources separately rather than assuming a single generalized form of trust. Yang (2023), for example, examines trust in government and media as distinct evaluations in the context of environmental risk perception. This study likewise treats evaluations of different communicators and of the information received as distinct, although it does not test whether these evaluations are statistically associated with one another.

Communicating Contested Risks

Taken together, the descriptive results show variation across the seven trust- and credibility-related items. Religious leaders received evaluations close to the scale midpoint for honesty and understanding, government-related items were evaluated less positively, particularly regarding social and environmental consequences, and overall information credibility received the highest mean score. These differences describe patterns within the sample; they do not demonstrate statistically significant differences among communicators or relationships among the underlying evaluations.

Nevertheless, this approach is consistent with contemporary research that conceptualizes trustworthiness as multidimensional and source-specific rather than as a single undifferentiated judgment. [Hendriks et al. \(2022\)](#) distinguish evaluations of expertise, integrity, and benevolence, while [Besley et al. \(2026\)](#) similarly emphasize multiple beliefs underlying judgments of trustworthiness. [Yang \(2023\)](#) further illustrates the analytical value of distinguishing trust in different institutional sources, including government and media. This study applies this source-specific perspective to a communication environment in which respondents encounter religious leaders, government institutions, media, and information concerning the same contested environmental issue.

The Indonesian mining concession controversy also differs from many environmental communication settings because religious organizations are not only potential communicators but are institutionally connected to the contested policy itself. Previous research has documented the broader role of religious actors in environmental communication and environmental responsibility ([Akhda et al., 2019](#); [Koehrsen, 2021](#); [Yulianto et al., 2026](#)). This study contributes an audience-level perspective by documenting how university students with *pasantren* backgrounds evaluated religious leaders alongside government institutions, media, and the information they encountered.

These findings should not be interpreted as explaining why respondents evaluated particular actors more or less favorably. The analysis does not test whether trust- and credibility-related evaluations vary according to demographic characteristics or particular information sources, nor does it examine statistical relationships among these items. Its contribution is therefore descriptive and exploratory: it documents how evaluations were distributed across different communicators and aspects of trustworthiness and credibility within a sample of university students with *pasantren* backgrounds who had encountered the contested issue.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study shows that exposure to the mining concession controversy was uneven among university students with *pasantren* or *mahad* educational backgrounds. Among respondents who had encountered the issue, the seven trust- and credibility-related items showed different descriptive patterns. Evaluations of religious leaders and media remained close to the midpoint of the scale, while government-related items received lower evaluations, particularly those concerning the social and environmental consequences of mining.

The study adds an audience-level perspective to risk communication in a context where religious organizations are institutionally connected to the contested policy itself. The findings highlight the value of examining audience evaluations of specific communicators and aspects of trustworthiness and credibility separately rather than treating them as a single generalized judgment. From a practical perspective, communication surrounding contested policies may need to address not only the policy rationale but also public concerns about social and environmental consequences, while different communicators and the information they provide may be evaluated in different ways by particular audiences.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. The purposive and network-based sample was limited to university students with current or previous *pesantren* or *mahad* experience and should not be considered representative of broader religious communities or the Indonesian public. The trust- and credibility-related items were developed specifically for this survey rather than adopted from a single validated scale. Although their development was conceptually informed by contemporary trustworthiness literature, the items were not formally pretested, and their measurement properties require further examination. In addition, the analysis was descriptive and did not test statistical relationships among respondent characteristics, information sources, and trust- and credibility-related evaluations, or among the items themselves. The trust- and credibility-related analysis was also limited to respondents who reported prior exposure to the controversy.

Further research could examine how audiences encounter, compare, and interpret information from different sources and test whether evaluations of particular communicators and aspects of trustworthiness and credibility are statistically related. Future studies should also examine the clarity and validity of the study-specific measures and employ broader and more diverse samples to determine whether similar descriptive patterns are observed across other religious communities and publics.

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