

Research Paper

# Electoral Finance and Ecological Governance: A Theoretical Framework for Institutional Constraint in Resource-Dependent Democracies

Imam Hanafi<sup>1\*</sup>, Vidian Ade Mauludi<sup>2</sup>, Eva Hany Fanida<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember, Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

\*Correspondence author: [imamhanafi@ub.ac.id](mailto:imamhanafi@ub.ac.id)

## Abstract

Contemporary electoral systems in resource-dependent countries face a key problem: elections can produce policies that harm the environment. This creates a tension between democratic legitimacy and ecological sustainability. This study explains how electoral finance influences ecological outcomes by developing the Ecological Constraint–Democratic Subordination (ECDS) framework. It addresses a gap in existing research, which often separates campaign finance from environmental governance. The study uses a qualitative comparative case study of Indonesia, Brazil, and the Philippines. The findings show that electoral finance shapes political incentives, which influence policy decisions through three mechanisms: regulatory forbearance, policy favoritism, and institutional capacity reduction. These processes contribute to environmental degradation across contexts. This study provides a framework that links political finance to environmental governance and shows the need to consider political and institutional factors in addressing environmental problems.

**Keywords:** Electoral Finance; Ecological Governance; Campaign Finance; Resource Extraction; Democratic Theory.

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Address: Jalan Proklamasi 70, Central Jakarta, Indonesia 10320

Phone: +62 21 31928280/31928285

Fax: +62 21 31928281

E-mail:

[journal.pusbindiklatren@bappenas.go.id](mailto:journal.pusbindiklatren@bappenas.go.id)

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## 1. Introduction

Democratic systems are often seen as legitimate when they follow fair procedures, such as free elections and open political competition. Electoral finance refers to the funding used to support political competition, including campaign contributions from various actors (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2024; Falguera et al., 2014). Ecological outcomes refer to the environmental effects of policy decisions, such as deforestation, resource extraction, and environmental damage (Baird et al., 2021). In many resource-dependent countries, however, these procedures often produce policies that harm the environment.

This condition creates a tension between democratic legitimacy and ecological sustainability. Even when electoral processes function as intended, the policies that result from them can lead to deforestation, pollution, and long-term environmental damage. Over time, this weakens the ecological conditions that future generations depend on. This raises questions about whether democratic systems can remain legitimate when their outcomes weaken the environmental conditions needed by future generations.

Several countries show a similar pattern that becomes evidence for these conditions. In Indonesia, deforestation increases around local elections. At the same time, the palm oil prices are high during local elections (Cisneros et al., 2021). In Brazil, deforestation in the Amazon also rises during election years. These conditions also appear when leaders seek reelection (Abman, 2017). In the Philippines, mining permits are often granted to companies that have a link with political actors. Even when environmental risks are high, the condition is still running (Holden & Jacobson, 2012). These cases show a clear link between electoral processes and environmental outcomes.

Existing studies have examined campaign finance and its influence on political decision-making (Lessig, 2011; Hasen, 2016). Research on environmental governance has focused on regulation, institutional capacity, and resource management (Ostrom, 1990; Ross, 2012). In addition, Political ecology research also shows how the elites can shape environmental outcomes (Robbins, 2004; Bryant & Bailey, 1997). However, these areas of research are often separated. First, Studies on campaign finance focus on representation and accountability but do not address environmental impact. Second, studies on environmental governance also do not explain how electoral systems and funding shape policy outcomes. This separation limits the explanation of how campaign finance affects environmental policy.

This gap is important, especially in countries that depend on natural resources. There are 'win-win solutions' between political actors and industries that focus on natural resources. Political actors often rely on funding from industries such as mining, agriculture, and forestry to support their position. These industries are affected by environmental regulation and have an interest in policy decisions. Previous studies show that environmental damage increases during election periods. However, they do not explain the process that links campaign finance to these outcomes.

Although previous research shows that environmental damage increases during election periods, it does not explain how campaign finance shapes ecological governance. This funding affects policy decisions and influences ecological conditions. This study fills this gap by proposing the Ecological Constraint Democratic Subordination (ECDS) framework, which links electoral finance, policy choices, and environmental outcomes, and demonstrates this process through cases in Indonesia, Brazil, and the Philippines.

## 2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative comparative case study method to examine how election financing can affect environmental conditions in several natural resource-dependent democracies. A qualitative approach is used because it can help us understand causal processes more deeply, particularly those related to political funding, institutional behavior, and policy outcomes. The primary focus of this research is to identify the causal mechanisms that explain these relationships.

This research uses data from Indonesia, Brazil, and the Philippines. These three countries were chosen because they share similarities as democratic countries that depend on natural resources. However, they also have different characteristics in institutional strength and governance capacity.

These differences need clear comparisons to understand why environmental outcomes in each country are not always consistent, despite their similar characteristics.

This research is different from many previous studies because it combines three issues into one discussion, including election financing, environmental policy, and natural resource politics. Most research only addresses one aspect, so the relationships between these issues are not always clear. In this study, the focus is on theory development. The analytical framework is built from the patterns that have been found in the cases, rather than existing theories. The research used the data from secondary sources, such as academic articles, policy reports, and institutional publications. These sources discuss election financing, environmental governance, and the extractive sector. The research process involves selecting relevant information, comparing cases, and drawing conclusions to identify key mechanisms.

From this analysis, this study develops the Ecological Constraint Democratic Subordination (ECDS) framework. This framework explains the sequence of relationships in which Electoral Finance shapes Ecological Governance. Then, it influences policy decisions, especially in the natural resource sector. These policy decisions impact environmental conditions, such as deforestation and other forms of damage.

At the same time, this framework also reveals several mechanisms that enable this process. In some cases, during an election event, the enforcement becomes weak, or there are policy adjustments in specific cases. This results in the institution's ineffectiveness in protecting the environment. Political actors also tend to adjust policy with parties' interests. It is because the political actors are given financial support to maintain their position. These patterns can lose the ability of institutions to enforce rules, which also makes the overall system less effective.

The primary contribution of this research is to offer a framework that emphasizes the mechanisms of these relationships. It demonstrates that political financing, policy decisions, and environmental change are interconnected. This approach differs from studies that simply demonstrate statistical relationships without explaining how these processes occur. Therefore, this research provides another way to understand how election financing can influence natural resource management.

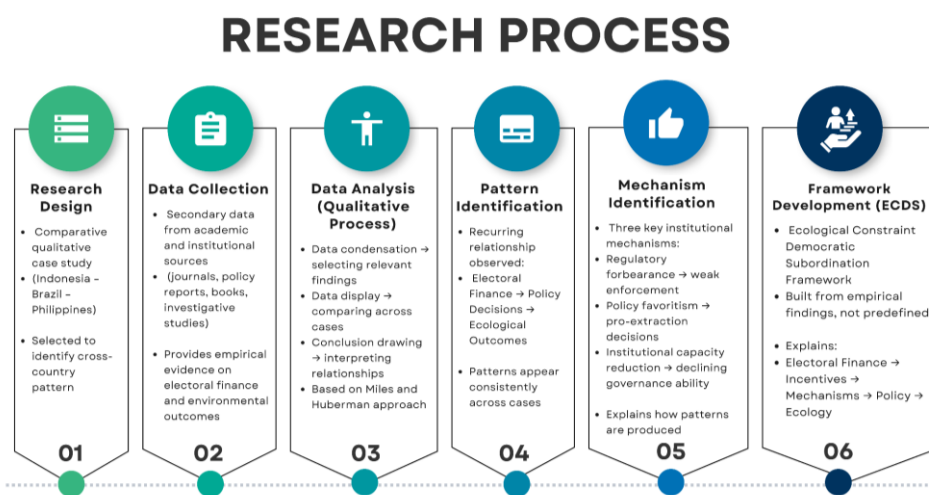


Figure 1. Research Process and Analytical Framework Development  
Sources: Author analysis, processed (2026)

### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1 Patterns of Electoral Finance and Ecological Outcomes

Indonesia, Brazil, and the Philippines show a clear example of the correlation between electoral processes and environmental outcomes. Even though these countries have different political systems and levels of governance, a similar pattern can still be seen during the political events. During election periods, the use of natural resources tends to increase, and the environmental damage becomes more visible. This suggests that the relationship is not random or limited to a small number of cases, but the

pattern often appears in democratic countries that have a dependence on natural resources. It also shows that political pressures during elections and the need for financial support to strengthen actor positions often shape policy decisions and can affect environmental conditions (Morpurgo et al., 2023; Kalk and Sorger, 2023).

In Indonesia, several studies show that deforestation tends to increase around local election periods. Cisneros et al., (2021) show that deforestation tends to increase around local election periods. The effect becomes stronger when commodity prices, such as palm oil, become higher. These issues appear because some actors need more economic incentives to expand plantations (Warburton, 2024). At the same time, Burgess et al., (2012) find that the increase in deforestation commonly happens when elections are held. These findings suggest that the pressure is not only during elections, but also before and after elections. This issue shows that political competition can push local leaders to use their power to control natural resources, either to secure financial resources or to maintain political support.

A similar pattern can also be seen in Brazil. Research by Abman (2017) shows that deforestation in the Amazon tends to increase during election years, especially when the current or previous leaders want to join the election again (reelection). In this situation, leaders often have the power to boost economic activity or secure political support. In this context, the leader can maintain regulation to control natural resources. Pailler (2018) also shows a related pattern. The areas that are led by actors who have the will to win the election but face political pressure tend to use many strategies to stabilize their position. It usually uses the capacity to control national resources. As a result of this event, some areas in Brazil experience higher rates of forest loss. These findings suggest that electoral pressure not only shapes policy decisions but also affects the environment. In many cases, some leaders often prioritize short-term political interests rather than long-term environmental concerns.

A similar situation can be found in the Philippines, especially the issue of mining permits. Holden and Jacobson (2012) show that mining approvals are often given to companies that have financial connections with political actors. This indicates that business actors provide support for political actors. In return, they gain access or permission to operate their business (Warburton, 2024). This can still happen even when environmental assessments already show potential risks. The political actors often give businesses permits to show their respect for businesses that support the funding for political actors (Falguera et al., 2014). In this context, financial and political support can influence regulation decisions. It also shows how certain actors are able to gain access to natural resources through state authority, even when the state has strict regulations.

Although the forms of resource extraction may differ across countries, the correlation between electoral finance and ecological policies remains similar in many democratic countries. Environmental damage tends to increase during important political periods, especially around elections. This is related to the policy discussion process with the decisions on permits, land use, and enforcement. These decisions are often influenced by political considerations (Mehic, 2023). In some cases, political decisions are influenced by companies that provide support to political actors (Falguera et al., 2014). These businesses often have an interest in securing easier access to natural resources. This pattern shows how electoral finance can shift policy priorities.

**Table 1:** Comparative Patterns of Electoral Finance–Ecological Policy Linkages

Dimension	Indonesia	Brazil	Philippines
Primary Extractive Sector	Palm oil, logging	Agribusiness (soy, cattle), land appropriation	Large-scale metallic mining
Electoral– Ecological Pattern	Increased deforestation in pre- and post-election periods	Deforestation spikes during election years, especially under corrupt incumbents	Mining permits disproportionately approved for campaign financiers
Form of Campaign Finance Dependency	Direct monetization of permits and licenses to finance local elections	Coordinated sectoral finance via Bancada Ruralista	Localized campaign funding by mining firms in permit-granting jurisdictions
Key Institutional Mechanisms	License issuance to financiers; enforcement forbearance; regulatory interpretation shifts	Enforcement budget cuts; institutional capacity weakening; legislative favoritism	Override of negative environmental assessments; selective permit approval
Role of Environmental Assessment	Often bypassed or weakened through administrative	Undermined through agency defunding and political	Formally conducted but rendered non-binding

Dimension	Indonesia	Brazil	Philippines
Nature of Capture	discretion Decentralized and transactional	pressure Professionalized, coordinated, and institutionalized	Procedural and regulatory
Systemic Character	Recurrent across electoral cycles	Persistent across administrations	Embedded in permitting institutions

Source: [The Gecko Project and Mongabay \(2018-2019\)](#); [Kristiyanto et al., \(2023\)](#); [Cisneros et al. \(2021\)](#); [Burgess et al. \(2012\)](#); [Abman \(2017\)](#); [Pailler, 2018](#); [Rodrigues-Filho et al. \(2015\)](#); [Jacobin, 2023](#); [Killeen, 2025](#); [Holden & Jacobson \(2012\)](#); [Doyle et al., \(2006\)](#); [Williams and Dupuy \(2017\)](#); [Djogo and Syaf \(2004\)](#); [Chandra \(2024\)](#); [Chaloping-March \(2014\)](#); Author analysis, processed

The comparison presented in Table 1 highlights several patterns. First, electoral competition is often linked to financial relationships between political actors and industries. Some leaders need to gain financial support from countries, which is commonly gathered from the economic actors (industries, companies, etc.). These industries provide financial resources for political campaigns, which can create a form of dependency ([Falguera et al., 2014](#); [Mehic, 2023](#)). Over time, this can influence how decisions are made to support the industry's operation because of political actor dependency. This is also in line with broader research on campaign finance, which explains that political funding shapes policy priorities.

Second, environmental policy becomes more visible during electoral periods. This includes the expansion of land use, the issuance of permits, and the weaker enforcement of regulations. These actions often appear around elections, which suggests that election events can influence certain decisions to support the ally ([Rodrigues-Filho et al., 2015](#); [Falguera et al., 2014](#); [Jimenez et al., 2026](#)). This pattern does not directly impact, but has several damages for the institutional and state.

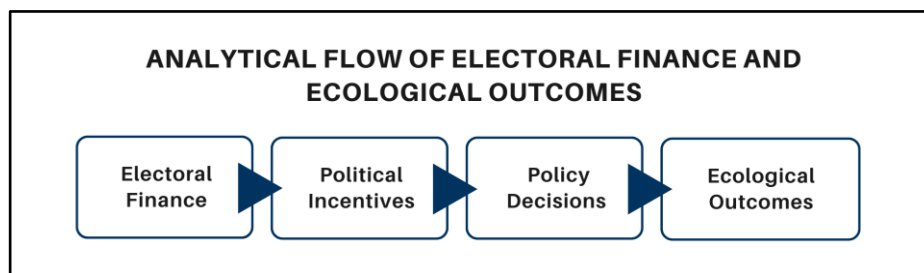
Third, institutions also play a significant role in creating these patterns in each country. In Indonesia, decentralization gives political actors more power to influence land allocation ([Djogo and Syaf, 2004](#); [Chandra, 2024](#)). In Brazil, organized industry groups tend to play a stronger role, especially at the national level ([Falguera et al., 2014](#)). In the Philippines, regulation and permit allocation in natural resource sectors have become a key channel to influence political processes ([Chaloping-March, 2014](#)). The form is different, but the direction is quite similar. It leads from electoral finance to ecological governance

Overall, the relationship between electoral finance and environmental outcomes remains consistent across cases. Financial support can influence regulation that later can affect the use of natural resources. These findings suggest that the connection between electoral processes and environmental degradation is strong

### 3.2. From Electoral Finance to Ecological Outcomes: Institutional Mechanisms

While the previous section has shown evidence that links the relationship between electoral processes to environmental outcomes, these patterns alone do not fully explain how such outcomes appear and have a significant impact. The repeated increase in environmental degradation during electoral periods suggests that there are institutional processes or formal regulations that connect electoral finance to policy decisions in the natural resources sector. Therefore, the research wants to observe these patterns to analyze the mechanisms that create these relationships.

To understand this connection, it is important to start with a basic analytical framework. Electoral competition requires significant financial resources, which are often provided by actors who have financial wealth. To gain support from those actors, the political actors need to provide benefits to those actors. The political actors usually targeted the companies or industries that have strict regulations in operation, such as natural resources companies. Then the political actors will support the economic actors, while the economic actors also support the financial actors to the political actors. These financial contributions are not neutral, they influence the priorities and behavior of political actors ([Lessig, 2011](#); [Hasen, 2016](#)). In this way, electoral finance creates a system of incentives that shapes how political actors make policy decisions, especially in areas related to the management of natural resources.



**Figure 2.** Analytical Flow of Electoral Finance and Ecological Outcomes  
Sources: Author analysis, processed (2026)

Figure 2 shows that electoral finance operates as an initial input that shapes Electoral Finance. These fundings influence policy decisions, including licensing, land allocation, and regulatory enforcement. The political support needs to give 'benefit' to economic actors. It can give easy permits to cooperation or adjust regulations to ease for companies or industries. The cumulative effect of these decisions is reflected in ecological outcomes such as the increase in deforestation, environmental degradation, and resource overexploitation. This analytical structure provides a foundation for identifying the specific mechanisms through which electoral finance is translated into environmental change.

Building on this structure, the analysis identifies three main institutional mechanisms that explain how electoral finance influences environmental outcomes. These mechanisms are derived from recurring patterns observed across the cases and are consistent with findings in the literature on environmental governance and political economy (Cisneros et al., 2021; Abman, 2017; Holden and Jacobson, 2012). These mechanisms do not operate in isolation, but often reinforce each other within the policy process.

The first mechanism is regulatory forbearance, which refers to the selective non-enforcement of existing environmental regulations. Instead of changing policies, political actors reduce the intensity of monitoring, delay enforcement actions, or avoid imposing sanctions. This mechanism is often less visible because it operates through inaction rather than explicit decisions. However, its impact is significant. Empirical studies show that enforcement tends to weaken during electoral periods, particularly when political actors depend on financial support from regulated industries (Cisneros et al., 2021). As a result, in environmental areas, harmful activities can expand. It can also reduce the effectiveness of governance systems.

The second mechanism is policy favoritism. It involves policy decisions that benefit specific economic actors. The activities of this mechanism include the approval of permits, expansion of land use, and adjustment of regulatory requirements to facilitate resource extraction. Unlike regulatory forbearance, this mechanism is more visible because it involves a policy process. To benefit the companies, the political actor will give access or adjust policies to provide convenience for their ally. However, these decisions are often justified using 'development narratives', which can obscure the electoral finance behind them. Studies in Brazil and the Philippines show that natural resources companies tend to have easy access to gaining permits during electoral periods. These cases indicate that electoral needs influence policy outcomes (Abman, 2017).

The third mechanism is institutional capacity reduction. It refers to the weakening of regulatory institutions during election events. The evidence of these cases can be seen through budget reductions, organizational restructuring, or restrictions on authority. This mechanism not only links to a single policy decision, but also links the broader institutional environment in which policies are implemented. Research shows that environmental institutions are often ineffective in penalizing some actors who cause environmental problems (Dahlioni and Tuasikal, 2025). These conditions can reduce their ability to enforce regulations (Rodrigues-Filho et al., 2015). This creates structural conditions in which environmental governance becomes less able to prevent ecological degradation.

**Table 2:** Functional Roles and Outcomes of the ECDS Mechanism

Mechanism	Main Process	Type of Action	Policy Impact	Visibility	Time Effect
Regulatory Forbearance	Weakening enforcement	Inaction	Increased violations	Low	Short-term
Policy Favoritism	Supporting specific actors	Direct decision	Expansion of extraction	High	Immediate
Institutional Capacity Reduction	Weakening institutions	Structural change	Long-term governance decline	Medium	Long-term

Source: [Rodrigues-Filho et al. \(2015\)](#); [Killeen \(2025\)](#); [Abman \(2017\)](#); Author analysis, processed

Table 2 shows that each mechanism operates in a different way. First is regulatory forbearance. The citizens or other actors often do not see the process that is related to regulation forbearance. This is because implemented by institutions to weaken their enforcement against specific actors. Second, is Policy favoritism involves direct decisions that produce immediate outcomes to solve the economic actor problem. Third is Institutional capacity reduction. It operates at a structural level, affecting the long-term effectiveness of environmental governance.

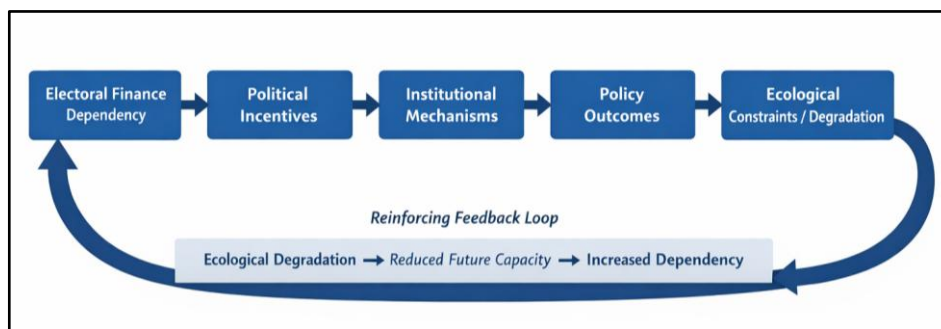
Although these mechanisms have different characteristics, they often occur at the same time. For example, the approval of extraction permits may occur when the government or local leader reduces enforcement and adjusts industry regulation. This interaction creates a reinforcing dynamic, where multiple mechanisms contribute to the same ecological outcome. As a result, environmental degradation is not caused by a single factor, but by a combination of institutional processes that operate across different levels of governance. The identification of these mechanisms provides a more comprehensive explanation of the relationship between electoral finance and Ecological Governance. This also explains why similar patterns appear across different countries, even though they have different systems or structures.

At the same time, this analysis highlights the limitations of approaches that treat campaign finance and environmental governance as separate issues. The mechanisms identified here demonstrate that these domains are interconnected. Therefore, addressing environmental degradation requires not only technical policy solutions but also an understanding of the political and financial structures that influence decision-making. This insight becomes the foundation for the development of the Ecological Constraint Democratic Subordination (ECDS) framework.

### 3.3 The ECDS Framework and Theoretical Contribution

The mechanisms identified in the previous section demonstrate how electoral finance influences environmental outcomes through specific institutional processes. However, these mechanisms alone are not sufficient to explain the relationship at a theoretical level. They describe how the process occurs, but do not fully explain why similar patterns appear across different countries and political systems. To address this limitation, this study develops the Ecological Constraint Democratic Subordination (ECDS) framework as a conceptual model that explains the structural relationship between electoral systems and ecological outcomes in resource-dependent democracies.

The ECDS framework is based on the argument that electoral processes are not related to shaping policy outcomes. Instead, they operate within institutional conditions that influence Electoral Finance and decision-making. In systems where political competition depends on financial support, candidates often rely on contributions from actors whose economic activities are directly affected by environmental regulation. These conditions made political actors prioritize policies that enable the wealthy actor to run the activities because of Regulatory Forbearance ([Lessig, 2011](#); [Hasen, 2016](#)). As a result, environmental degradation should not be understood as an unintended consequence, but as a predictable outcome of institutional arrangements that shape political behavior.



**Figure 3.** The ECDS Framework  
Sources: Author analysis, processed (2026)

Figure 3 presents the main structure of the ECDS framework. The process begins with electoral finance dependency, which refers to the reliance of political actors on financial resources to compete in elections. After gaining some funding support and creating dependency between the political actors and economic actors, the candidates become responsive to the contributors' needs or interests. These funding or interest are then translated into policy outcomes through institutional mechanisms, such as regulatory forbearance, policy favoritism, and the weakening of institutional capacity, as discussed in the previous section.

These policy outcomes lead to ecological constraints, including environmental degradation, resource depletion, and reduced ecosystem resilience. The framework also includes a feedback loop. Environmental degradation reduces future economic opportunities and governance capacity. The state may increase reliance on natural resource industries, which can also affect the environment. This pattern usually becomes a cycle. The government needs a natural resources industry that has strict regulation, the industries need actors to weaken the strict regulation, and after that, the regulation is still running, and the state continues gaining revenue from the industries (Ross, 2012; Ostrom, 1990; Auty, 1993). This feedback mechanism explains why the problem tends to persist over time rather than being resolved through standard policy adjustments.

Building on this structure, the ECDS framework advances five key propositions that explain the relationship between electoral finance and ecological outcomes in a more systematic way.

**Table 3:** Propositions of the ECDS Framework

Proposition	Explanation	Implication
Proposition One (Structural Dependency)	Electoral systems depend on financial resources linked to regulated industries	Policy bias toward extraction
Proposition Two (Institutional Mediation)	The relationship operates through identifiable institutional mechanisms	Mechanisms can be analyzed and reformed
Proposition Three (Ecological Constraint)	Environmental limits shape long term policy viability	Policy decisions cannot ignore ecological conditions
Proposition Four (Democratic Subordination)	Electoral outcomes must operate within ecological limits	Redefinition of democratic legitimacy
Proposition Five (Temporal Dimension)	Present decisions affect future generations	Need for intergenerational consideration

Source: Author analysis, processed

Table 3 summarizes the main theoretical propositions of the ECDS framework. The first proposition is structural dependency. It emphasizes that electoral systems require financial resources. These resources often come from industries that depend on environmental regulation and have strict regulations. This creates a requirement for political actors to adjust the policies that support resource uses (Ross, 2012). The second proposition is institutional mediation, explaining that the relationship between electoral finance and ecological governance does not occur directly. Instead, it operates through institutional mechanisms such as selective enforcement, policy bias, and institutional weakening. This aligns with institutional theory, which highlights how rules and structures shape policy outcomes (Ostrom, 1990).

The third proposition presents ecological constraints as a major factor. It emphasizes the fact that ecological constraints are not merely external to politics, but affect the long-term sustainability of policy choices (Kalt, 2024). This can decrease the capability of the future systems of governance. The fourth

proposition known as democratic subordination is the core of the theoretical framework. This means that electoral processes must be sustainable in terms of ecology if it were to continue in the future. However, this proposition neither negates the existence of democracy nor its value, but rather modifies its meaning by including ecological limits into politics (Dryzek, 2000). The fifth proposition brings an element of temporality into the process of making political decisions. Thus, today's decisions have an impact on future generations, something that can be attributed to the problem of intergenerational justice (Vanderheiden, 2008).

The main theoretical contribution of the ECDS framework is based on the integration of three areas that are often studied in different areas. First, it connects electoral finance with ecological governance by showing how financial dependencies shape policy decisions beyond representation and accountability (Lessig, 2011). Second, it contributes to environmental governance by emphasizing that regulatory effectiveness is influenced by Electoral Finance, not only by institutional design (Ostrom, 199). Third, it engages with democratic theory by introducing ecological constraints as a factor in evaluating the legitimacy of political systems and affecting the regulation (Dryzek, 2000).

Another important contribution of this framework is that this framework focuses on structural dynamics (institutions) rather than individual behavior. Environmental degradation is often explained in terms of corruption or poor leadership decision-making (Zhou et al., 2024). However, the ECDS framework demonstrates that structures or operator institutions are influenced by ecological funding. It allows political actors to gain entry into institutions or adjust regulations. This perspective shifts the analysis from individual actors to the broader system, requiring more detailed explanations to analyze the interrelationships between these factors.

At the same time, the ECDS framework also has long-term impacts. This framework suggests that maintaining democratic legitimacy requires reconsideration of the relationship between Electoral Finance and Ecological Governance. If an electoral finance cycle always adjusts policy procedure and leads to environmental problems, it can affect long-term sustainability and damage the state in the future. This does not mean that electoral finance should be replaced, but rather that they should operate within transparency.

This perspective challenges the conventional assumption that election outcomes are legitimate as long as procedural rules are followed. Instead, it argues that legitimacy also depends on the political system's ability to maintain the environmental conditions necessary for future decision-making. This, in turn if the government is not fixing these issues, will impact the country's sustainability. In this sense, ecological finance becomes part of democratic governance that can drive the long-term sustainability of the state.

Overall, the ECDS framework provides an explanation of how election funding, institutional processes, and environmental outcomes are interrelated. This framework explains why similar patterns emerge across countries even if each country has a different national characteristic

### 3.4 Implications for Governance and Policy

The findings of this study have important implications for theory, governance, and policy. By demonstrating the structural link between election finance and ecological governance. This study demonstrates that environmental problems are not only caused by natural disasters, but also can be caused by regulation problems and leadership behaviour. Rather, these problems are linked to election funding and the institutional arrangements that shape decision-making. Consequently, effective responses to solve natural resources problems require a broader approach that integrates environmental governance with political and financial structures.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of democratic theory by introducing ecological governance as an important dimension of political legitimacy. Conventional approaches often evaluate democracy based on procedural criteria, such as free elections, representation, and political competition (Dahl, 1989). However, the findings of this study suggest that these criteria are insufficient when election outcomes can change the policies based on the will of the actor or other parties' benefit that cause environmental degradation. Under such conditions, democratic legitimacy should also be evaluated based on whether political decisions maintain the ecological conditions for the maintenance of governance over time. This argument is consistent with

discussions on deliberative and ecological democracy, which emphasize that the government needs to align political systems with long-term environmental sustainability (Dryzek, 2000; Blühdorn, 2019). By incorporating ecological governance into the concept of legitimacy, this study broadens the theoretical understanding of democracy to encompass intergenerational responsibility.

At the level of governance, the findings highlight that environmental degradation is not only caused by weak regulation but also shaped by electoral finance. The mechanisms identified in this study, including regulatory forbearance, policy favoritism, and institutional capacity reduction, demonstrate how governance can harm the environment by adjusting natural resources policy for several actors. This suggests that improving environmental governance requires reforms that strengthen regulations. Institutional design must also address how election financing affects the implementation of those regulations (Ostrom, 1990; Ross, 2012; Auty, 1993). In this context, governance reforms should focus on increasing transparency in campaign funding, strengthening the independence of environmental institutions, and reducing the influence of short-term political interests on natural resources policy.

**Table 4:** Governance Challenges and Policy Directions

Challenge	Description	Policy Direction
Electoral finance dependency	Political actors rely on funding from resource based industries	Strengthen transparency and accountability in campaign finance
Weak regulatory enforcement	Environmental rules are not consistently applied	Improve monitoring systems and institutional independence
Policy bias toward extraction	Decisions favor short-term economic gains	Introduce constraints in resource related policy approval
Institutional capacity limits	Agencies lack resources and authority	Increase funding and technical capacity of environmental institutions

Source: Forster et al. (2026); Handoyo (2024); Aulia and Andhini (2025); Hartono (2025); Author analysis, processed

Table 4 shows that governance challenges are related to political and institutional conditions. Dependence on election funding creates demands for 'benefit sharing' that influence policy decisions, particularly the businesses that operate in natural resource sectors. At the same time, weak law enforcement and limited institutional capacity can reduce the effectiveness of environmental protection. These conditions are interconnected with each other. As a result, environmental policies exist but do not have effective implementation. Therefore, addressing these challenges requires coordinated reforms that consider both Electoral Finance and Ecological Governance.

From a policy perspective, the findings provide mechanisms that can limit the influence of electoral finance on environmental outcomes. The ECDS framework developed in this study provides a conceptual basis for such mechanisms. First, transparency measures can improve the visibility of the relationship between political funding and environmental impact. It also allows voters and civil society to make more informed evaluations. Second, procedural constraints (such as stronger environmental assessment requirements) can ensure that policy-makers consider the ecological sector before implementation (Estlund, 2008). Third, participation from other actors can become an alternative to support this framework (Ostrom, 1990).

These policy approaches are not intended to replace democratic institutions, but to strengthen the institutions' system and structure. By introducing ecological governance mechanisms and ecological governance, political systems can maintain electoral competition while ensuring policy outcomes related to environmental sustainability. This reflects the main argument of the ECDS framework, which emphasizes that democratic processes should relate to sustainability rather than focus on short-term projects.

On a practical level, this study has implications for various stakeholders. For policymakers, the findings highlight the importance of institutions that can balance political competition with environmental protection. For civil society organizations, the results emphasize the role of monitoring, advocacy, and public communication in enhancing transparency and accountability. For researchers, this study opens up opportunities to further examine how political funding interacts with environmental governance in different institutional contexts.

Overall, the implications of this study suggest that environmental governance cannot be separated from political and institutional dynamics. Addressing ecological challenges requires not only better policies but also better institutions and structures. By linking electoral funding to ecological outcomes,

this study provides a foundation for developing a more integrated and effective approach to governance and policy.

### **Conclusion**

Electoral competition often leads to policy decisions that support resource extraction and can affect environmental problems. This issue appears because political actor which have power in natural resources need financial support to strengthen their position. In gaining electoral finance, they tend to cooperate with industries, especially companies related to natural resources. As a result, political actors tend to make decisions that align with the industries' interests. This shows that environmental outcomes are connected with electoral competition.

These outcomes are not directly affected by electoral finance. It appears from the policy adjustment that provides convenience to businesses, the easy process of gaining permits, and the weak monitoring system for industries or companies. For example, rules may still exist, but their enforcement becomes weaker over time. Some leaders also approved permits or policies that benefit certain groups more than others. At the same time, institutions may lose their ability to monitor and control companies or industries when operating their business in environmental sectors. When these processes happen together, environmental protection becomes less effective. This means environmental problems cannot be solved only through technical solutions or policies. It is also necessary to understand how political systems and institutions shape decision-making.

These patterns show that electoral finance is related to ecological governance. To prevent the impact in the future, the government needs to evaluate the election system. If this issue is not addressed, the cycle can damage the environmental sector. These damages can affect long-term stability. Because of this, a more connected approach is needed. Electoral processes, policy decisions, and environmental limits should be studied together to gather an understanding of this sector

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings and discussions, several recommendations can be considered to improve the relationship between the electoral process and environmental governance.

First, the government should strengthen transparency and accountability in political funding. The public must be informed about the actor, contributions, and other detailed information that support the funding. This allows citizens to understand how financial contributions influence policy decisions. Furthermore, campaign funding disclosures should include information on environmental impacts, allowing for more effective public oversight.

Second, the environmental institutions need to strengthen their capacity and independence. These institutions need to strengthen their monitoring system, evaluate the policy, and increase sufficient resources. These efforts can ensure that electoral competition does not cause significant damage to environmental problems. Third, policy-making needs to include ecological governance in the policy. The policy makers must discuss the resources used and land management should include environmental impact assessments. Policies should be evaluated based on their ecological consequences, rather than focusing on short-term economic gains.

Fourth, governments need to involve the experts, citizens, institutions, and organizations to participate in the decision-making process. Broader participation enhances policy legitimacy, balances competing interests, and reduces the influence of narrow political or economic agendas. Fifth, further research needs to explore the relationship between political funding and environmental outcomes. Additional studies using qualitative and quantitative data across multiple cases would provide a deeper understanding of this relationship. These insights could guide the development of more effective governance strategies.

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