

COAL AND RENEWABLE ENERGY REPORTING IN INDONESIA

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Executive Summary

Southeast Asia is a fast-developing region, and its energy decisions are critical to the next decade's global effort to reduce carbon-emitting fossil fuels. Yet little is known about the specific media narratives that shape the national debates on an energy transition in each country. For stakeholders wishing to influence such narratives and increase the quality of energy reporting, lessons from the past are crucial for future success. This knowledge gap is what Climate Tracker and the Stanley Center for Peace and Security wished to fill with an analysis of energy-related media coverage in five countries across Southeast Asia. This report on Indonesia is the fourth in a series of reports commissioned by the Stanley Center and produced by Climate Tracker that will be copublished as part of *Fueling the Tiger Cubs: How Southeast Asia's Media Is Covering Coal's Last Frontier*, a multicountry media analysis led by young journalists from the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Each of the Southeast Asian countries in our study has a unique media landscape with different challenges and opportunities for energy reporting.

Indonesia is a country with the fifth-largest population in the world and the largest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). With relatively few restrictions **on establishing media outlets**, it has both the largest market and media industry in the region. There are more than **47,000 different outlets across the country as of 2017**. Indonesia is experiencing rapid **media convergence**, however; 12 major media conglomerates dominate the media landscape and **mold reporting to serve the owners' interests**—most of which include significant stakes in the energy industry, specifically, coal.

Indonesia is **the leading global exporter of thermal coal**, with some of the largest **proven coal reserves in the world**. The second-ranked country in the region, **Vietnam, has less than 10 percent the amount of coal Indonesia has**. On a domestic level, **coal power makes up more than 62 percent of Indonesia's energy**

mix. In contrast, renewable energy, which is dominated by hydro-power, makes up only **12.24 percent of the nation's energy**. While there is a goal for renewable energy to reach **23 percent of the nation's energy mix by 2025**, Indonesia is well **behind this target**.

In our regional media analysis, Indonesia was the only country where coal was framed more positively in the media as quintessential for the nation's economy. Articles emphasized that coal mining plays an indispensable role in Indonesia's economy, despite its potential environmental harms. Even when the controversial coal mining **omnibus law** was discussed, most criticisms were directed at the undemocratic process by which the law was passed, rather than the environmental impacts of coal mining itself. Renewable energy, for the most part, is still in its nascent stages of development in the country; **solar and wind installation remains largely nonexistent**. Articles thus discussed renewables as a general concept rather than provide specific insight into the technologies and applications.

Overall, our two Indonesian researchers, Ari Ulandari and Cherika Hardjakusumah, examined 390 articles across 10 news outlets from January 2019 to July 2020 to find that despite some positive renewable developments, “king coal” was still framed as the future of energy in Indonesia. The researchers also came to the conclusions below:

Key Takeaways

- News articles in Indonesia framed coal extremely positively far more often than negatively. Around 67 percent of coal articles portrayed it as indispensable for the country's development. This is far more than any other Southeast Asian country included in this regional study. When environmental concerns were covered, they were regularly invalidated in that coverage by the economic contribution of the country's mining sector.
- Even when the negative impacts of coal plants or mines were discussed, we did not find any articles in the 18 months

that discussed a coal phaseout in the near future. Solutions proposed were often framed around improved coal plant technology or higher-carbon coal.

- Coal mining was generally presented as safe for the surrounding community when properly regulated. When specific mining activities in certain areas were presented as harmful or risky, their legality was questioned rather than the impacts of mining itself.
- Financial ties may have influenced the choice of coal frame, according to two journalists interviewed. “When a media organization grows into a for-profit media conglomerate, it expects revenue,” stated a Mongabay journalist, Meidella Syahni, who used to work in mainstream media. “Advertorial collaborations and other [financial ties] affect any issue reported, including energy issues.” Deasy Indriwati from online outlet Inidata also shared the same opinion—“LOTS of business interests [in Indonesian media]; this has been a problem from the stone age to the present.” In order to present a good energy story, she said, a journalist must have “guts” to be able to challenge the influence and power of the energy sector.
- In our sample of seven news outlets, three—Okezone, *Sindonews*, and *Detik*—are owned by corporations with significant coal mining interests. Okezone and *Sindonews* together published 62.5 percent of articles highlighting the positive economic contribution of the coal industry.
- The Indonesian government is trying to pass an omnibus law and a coal mining law, which would essentially streamline businesses’ process for obtaining mining permits. Though the laws were described as controversial in Indonesian media, most criticisms were directed at the lack of legislative transparency and civil society involvement in decision making rather than the environmental and human impacts of coal mining itself.
- Forty-five percent of renewable energy stories discussed the concept in general terms without mentioning specific alternative technologies. An editor from *kompas.com*, Erlangga Djumena, said renewable energy “has limited sources [for journalists to cite/interview], because it is still rare...plus

the sources are too technical. Not only the readers, the journalists are sometimes confused.” Because of this lack of understanding, it was difficult for journalists to dive deeper into a specific renewable energy source.

- More than 98 percent of renewable energy articles, however, framed it in a positive light, arguing that renewable development would ensure energy security for Indonesia while reducing its carbon emissions. In a contrast to Thai media, articles omitted mentions of coal phaseout as necessary for reducing emissions, arguing instead that replacing oil and gas—which the country currently imports—is enough.
- Indonesia’s recent rapid development of biofuel, boosted by a **20 percent biodiesel** mandate, was universally praised by the mainstream outlets. However, the biofuel primarily comes from palm oil—a **highly controversial industry tied to widespread fires and deforestation in the country**, with powerful backers.
- Kumparan, an online-only outlet published by a new media company, stands out for publishing 35 articles on renewable energy’s merits—the most of any outlet. In contrast, it published only six articles praising coal. This might stem from the outlet’s unique editorial approach, which allows for user-generated content. Half of the energy articles from Kumparan were written by external contributors and were overwhelmingly hopeful about the future of renewable energy.
- There is a severe lack of source diversity across the media industry. More than half of coal and renewable energy articles in our analysis included quotes from only one source—almost always government or business representatives.
- Hard news stories dominated the energy reporting, making up more than 80 percent of energy stories.
- While mainstream media publish far more positive stories about coal, there were more wire stories produced in the 18 months focusing on the opportunities of renewable energy than coal.

While this report does not offer specific recommendations for improving clean energy media narratives in Indonesia, the research can be used to inform the development of effective interventions and actions.

Research for this report was carried out under the guidance of Climate Tracker, a network of 12,000+ young climate journalists around the globe. Research methods included sampling, content analysis, framing analysis, and interviews with reporters and editors, and the time frame examined was January 2019 to August 2020.

This report is part of a regional media analysis commissioned by the Stanley Center for Peace and Security and produced by Climate Tracker.



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