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LAND CONFLICT RESEARCH IN INDONESIA WITHIN THE GLOBAL LITERATURE: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESOLUTION

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Abstract

Background: Land conflict is a persistent governance and development challenge because land simultaneously functions as an economic asset, a source of livelihood, a basis of socio-cultural identity, and a domain of political authority. In Indonesia, these tensions are intensified by legal pluralism, agrarian inequality, land-use change, extractive and plantation expansion, and institutional fragmentation.
Purpose: This study aims to map the development of scholarly research on land conflict from 2015 to 2024, with Indonesia as the primary interpretative focus, to identify publication trends, thematic clusters, Indonesia's contribution to the field, and research gaps related to conflict resolution.
Design/methodology/approach: A bibliometric analysis was conducted using the Scopus database. A total of 446 journal articles published between 2015 and 2024 were retrieved and analyzed using VOSviewer to examine publication trends, keyword co-occurrence, thematic clusters, and the geographical distribution of publications.
Findings/Result: The findings indicate a generally increasing trend in scholarly publications on land conflict. Dominant research themes include land governance, agrarian reform, Indigenous rights, land grabbing, agribusiness, land registration, and sustainable development. However, operational dimensions of conflict resolution, particularly mediation and conflict management, remain peripheral in the overall keyword network. In the Indonesian context, prominent themes include investment, political dynamics, land registration, palm oil expansion, land use, and conflict resolution. Nevertheless, the direct association between land conflict and mediation remains relatively weak.
Conclusion: The findings suggest that future research should move beyond predominantly examining the causes and impacts of land conflict toward greater attention to the evaluation of dispute-resolution institutions, the development of effective mediation frameworks, and data-driven, legally grounded, and rights-based approaches to conflict prevention, particularly in relation to the recognition of Indigenous land rights.
Originality/value (State of the art): This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric overview of land conflict research and identifies a significant gap in resolution-oriented scholarship. By positioning Indonesia within the global research landscape, the study provides a foundation for future research and policy development on participatory, institutionally grounded, and rights-based approaches to land conflict management.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis, conflict resolution, land conflict, VOSviewer, research gaps

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INTRODUCTION

Land conflict represents one of the most prominent challenges in contemporary development dynamics because land functions not only as an economic asset but also as a living space, a socio-cultural identity, a source of livelihood, and a symbol of political power (Hillo 2018). In practice, land conflicts emerge when competing claims arise among actors with different interests, such as the state, private corporations, local communities, and indigenous peoples. These actors seek control over land and the resources embedded within it. These disputes often become increasingly complex because they involve legal uncertainty, social legitimacy, unequal access, and divergent interpretations of land ownership and land-use rights (Bekker 2023).

Globally, the World Bank reported that approximately 56% of conflicts are land-related, highlighting the central role of land in socio-economic dynamics across nations (World Bank, 2021). Land conflicts have manifested in diverse socio-political contexts, illustrating their systemic nature. In Sub-Saharan Africa, disputes over customary versus statutory land rights have triggered recurring conflicts, particularly in countries such as Uganda and Kenya, where land tenure insecurity contributes to violence and displacement (Deininger & Castagnini, 2006; Boone, 2014). In Latin America, large-scale land acquisitions and agribusiness expansion in Brazil have intensified conflicts with indigenous and rural communities (Borras Jr. et al 2011). Similarly, in Southeast Asia, land concessions for plantations and extractive industries in Cambodia and Indonesia have resulted in widespread disputes involving local populations and corporations (Tania Murray Li, 2014; Nancy Lee Peluso & Lund, 2011). These global cases demonstrate that land conflict is not an isolated phenomenon but a structural issue linked to development trajectories and resource governance.

Land conflict research has expanded rapidly and become increasingly fragmented across disciplines such as land-use science, environmental studies, governance, and development studies, making it difficult to capture the full state of the art through conventional narrative reviews alone. As a result, a bibliometric approach is important because it provides a systematic and evidence-based map of how land conflict research has developed, including dominant themes, emerging topics, and the intellectual structure of the field through keyword networks and publication trends. A bibliometric approach is particularly useful for examining land conflict research because it enables systematic identification of publication trends, thematic structures, and emerging research directions. For example, Sheng et al. (2022) used bibliometric analysis to map urban land management research from 1979–2021 and showed that bibliometrics is more comprehensive and objective than conventional literature review for identifying research trends and thematic evolution. Similarly, Xu and Xio. (2022) analyzed 1,860 publications on land-use change and ecosystem services and identified major thematic clusters, influential journals, and future research gaps. Rasva and Jürgenson (2022) used Scopus-based bibliometric analysis to identify knowledge patterns in large-scale land acquisition research. However, these studies remain sectoral or thematic and do not comprehensively map the intellectual structure, dominant themes, and emerging directions of land conflict resolution as a distinct research field. Therefore, the expected contribution of this study is to fill this gap by systematically identifying publication trends, key authors, influential countries, keyword networks, and research clusters related specifically to land conflict resolution.

Despite the expanding body of literature, existing studies remain fragmented and predominantly focus on the drivers and socio-environmental impacts of land conflict, with limited attention to systematically examining the evolution of the scholarly field and identifying critical knowledge gaps, particularly in relation to conflict resolution and management-oriented approaches. Elomina *et al* (2024) reviewed land-use conflicts and highlights conflicts intensifying due to resource demand and transition pressures, showing that many studies focus on conflict escalation, competition, and impacts rather than systematic research evolution mapping. Kennedy et al (2023) identified global hotspots where industrial development pressures overlap with Indigenous Peoples' lands and examined how surrounding socio-economic and political conditions may shape the resulting outcomes. This study fills a critical gap by providing the first comprehensive bibliometric mapping of global land conflict research, specifically focusing on conflict resolution and management, which remains underexplored compared to the dominant emphasis on conflict causes and impacts.

The adoption of bibliometric methods in this study is motivated by a fundamental weakness in the existing land conflict literature, namely its persistent fragmentation and lack of cumulative knowledge integration. Although research on land conflict has expanded considerably, it remains dominated by case-specific and discipline-bound analyses that prioritize conflict drivers and socio-environmental impacts, while offering limited insight into how the field has evolved or where its most critical knowledge gaps lie. In particular, research on conflict resolution and management remains conceptually underdeveloped and insufficiently synthesized, constraining both theoretical advancement and the translation of scholarship into effective policy interventions. This study addresses these limitations by applying bibliometric analysis as a systematic and data-driven approach to reconstruct the intellectual structure of land conflict research through citation networks, co-authorship patterns, and keyword co-occurrence. By doing so, it provides the first comprehensive, global mapping of the field with an explicit focus on resolution-oriented knowledge, enabling the identification of dominant paradigms, marginal research areas, and emerging directions. This approach moves beyond descriptive reviews and offers a critical foundation for reorienting future research toward more integrative and solution-oriented land conflict management strategies. In addition, bibliometric visualization tools such as VOSviewer facilitate science mapping by constructing and displaying bibliometric networks, including co-citation, co-authorship, and co-occurrence maps, which support the detection of research hotspots and the intellectual structure of a field (van Eck & Waltman 2010).

This study focuses on the international literature on land conflict published between 2015 and 2024. The analysis is directed at identifying prevailing research directions, dominant thematic clusters, and gaps in the field of land conflict management. The position and contribution of Indonesian research will also be examined in the context of this global framework. This comprehensive overview is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the state of the art in land conflict management and serve as a foundation for future research and policy development.

METHODS

This study employed a bibliometric analysis approach to systematically explore the scientific landscape of land conflict research at the global level. Bibliometric analysis enables the quantitative examination of publication patterns, keyword relationships, citation structures, and thematic developments within a specific research domain.

The data selection followed a systematic filtering procedure within Scopus to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Initially, all records matching the predefined Boolean query were retrieved. Subsequently, Scopus filters were applied to limit the dataset to publications from 2015–2024, document type "article," source type "journal," and English language. Finally, a manual screening of titles and abstracts was conducted to ensure relevance, retaining only studies that explicitly focused on land conflict as the primary research topic while excluding those with only incidental references. Total of 446 journal articles published between 2015–2024 were retrieved.

A keyword was developed using the search term TS: Land conflict applied to the title, abstract, and keywords fields to capture relevant publications. To ensure the relevance and scientific rigor of the dataset, a series of exclusion criteria were applied, including: (1) publication years restricted to 2015–2024 to capture the most recent developments; (2) source type limited to journal articles; and (3) English language publications to maintain consistency in interpretation.

Following data collection, a data cleaning process was performed to remove duplicate records, non-research sources, and articles unrelated to land conflict as the main analytical subject. Cleaned data were then exported in formats compatible with bibliometric software. This step ensured data accuracy and validity, which are critical for generating reliable bibliometric visualization outputs.

The final dataset was processed using VOSviewer, a widely adopted tool for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks (van Eck & Waltman 2014). The software facilitated the mapping of co-occurrence relationships among keywords, allowing the identification of major research clusters and conceptual linkages across the literature. Additionally, visualization of geographical publication distribution

was conducted to determine international research contributions, including Indonesia's position within global scholarship trends.

Lastly, interpretation of the visualized networks was carried out to derive insights into dominant research themes, emergent topics, and gaps requiring further academic exploration. The results of this phase served as the foundation for the development of recommendations regarding future directions in land conflict management research, particularly in enhancing governance-oriented and data-supported conflict resolution strategies. Figure 1 visualized the framework of research.

RESULTS

The results of the Scopus database search, using the predefined criteria, we identified 446 journal articles that explicitly address the topic of land conflict within the period 2015–2024. Figure 2 presents the distribution of publications per year, showing a steadily increasing trend in scholarly attention toward land conflict issues. The number of publications increased from 33 in 2015 to 57 in 2019, indicating a substantial increase in scholarly attention. This growth pattern reflects the rising significance of land conflict as a global academic concern, particularly in relation to governance, resource allocation, and socio-economic development.

Based on the subject area (Figure 3) the discussion of land conflicts is 39% in the area of social sciences, 19% in environmental sciences, 10% in arts and humanities, 9% in agricultural and biological sciences, 5% in the area of earth and planetary sciences, 4% in the area of economics, econometrics and finance, 3% in the area of energy, 2% in the area of engineering, 2% in the area of business, management and accounting, 1% in the computer science area, 1% in the decision sciences area, 1% in the multidisciplinary area and 4% in other areas. This shows that there is still very little research on land conflicts conducted using a management approach.

The number of research based on country affiliation as presented in Figure 4, the country affiliated with the highest land conflict research is China with a total of 68 publications, followed by Brazil with a total of 55 publications, and the United States with 51 publications. Indonesia is in fourth position as a country affiliated with land conflict research with a total of 37 publications. The 5th to 10th place in a row are: Brazil, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, France and finally in the third place of Australia with 11 total publications.

Indonesia as the country with the fourth number of publications based on country affiliation with 37 publications from 2015 to 2024. The number of publications is based on the year of publication as presented in Figure 5. The highest number of research publications based on the Scopus database using the keyword land conflict is 9 publications in 2023. The second place in 2019 and 2020 was 7 publications.

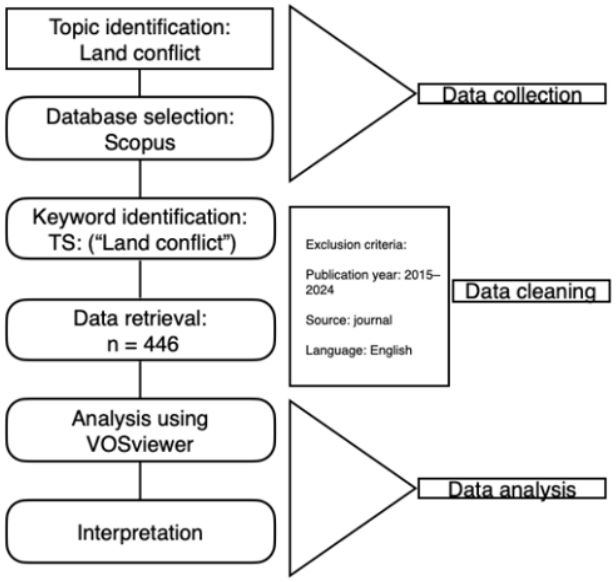


Figure 1. Framework of research

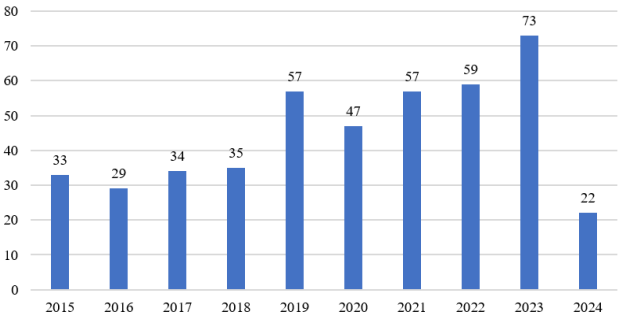


Figure 2. Number of Publications by Year

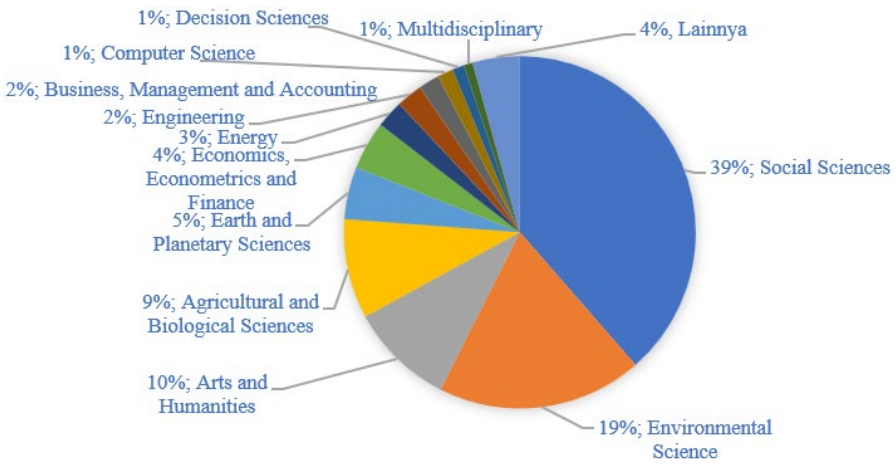


Figure 3. Discussion of the theme of land conflict based on subject area

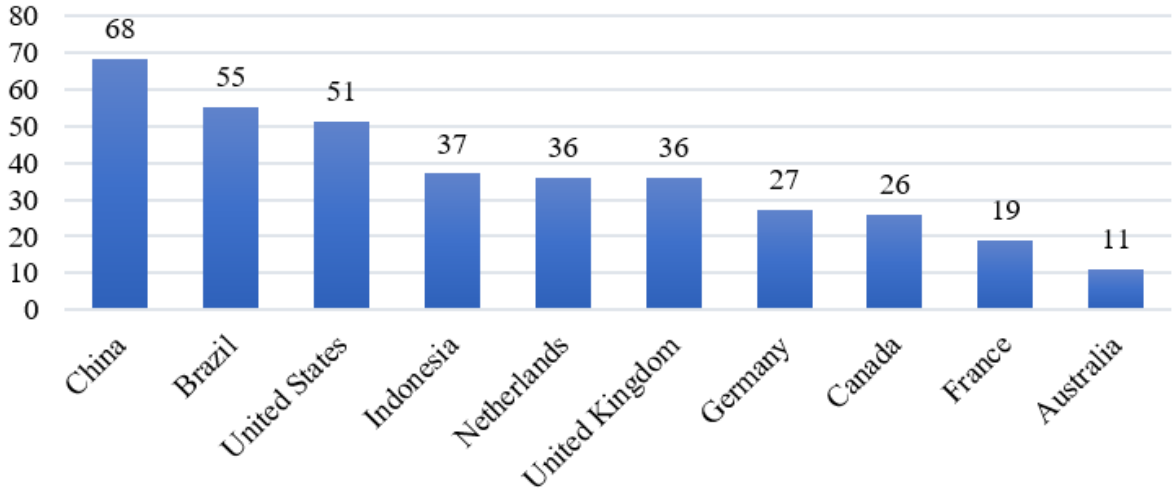


Figure 4. Number of research affiliates by country

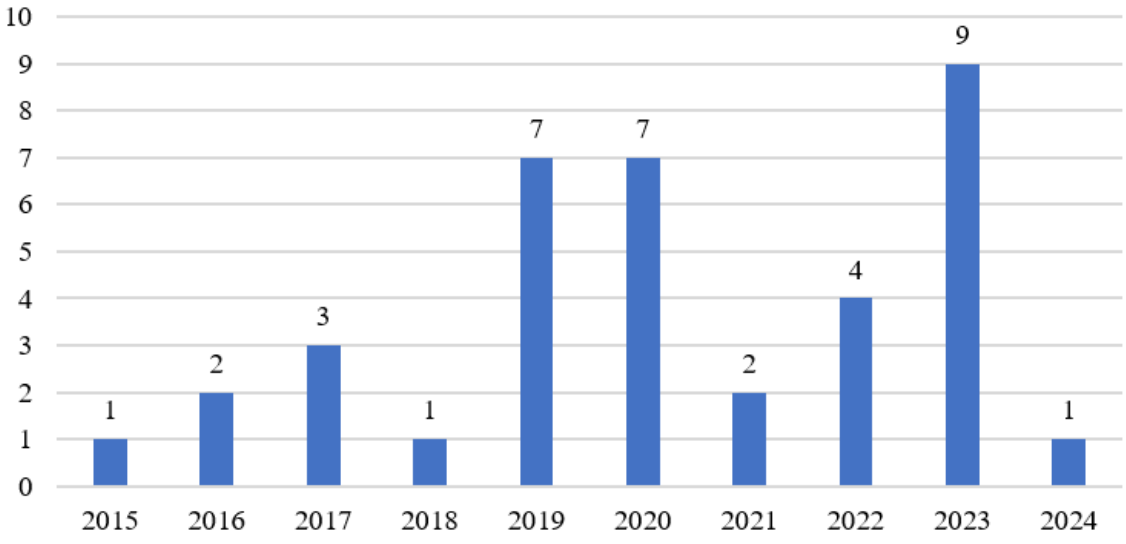


Figure 5. Number of research publications with the theme of land conflict in Indonesia

Network visualization shows the collective interconnection of key texts based on the presence of their partners (co-occurrence). In this case, the network visualization map is developed based on the author's keywords. Then the weight is calculated based on the total strength of the link. As shown in Figure 6, network visualization includes six clusters. The clusters are developed based on the collective interconnections identified by the VOSviewer software. The total weight of keywords is measured based on total strength. In VOSviewer, total link strength represents the cumulative strength of the links between a keyword and other keywords in the network. Higher values indicate stronger overall connectivity within the keyword co-occurrence network. Network visualization. Each cluster has a different color and thickness of scale, which can illustrate the extent to which the concept or term is studied in the study of land conflicts. The thicker the scale of the terms produced, the more likely it is that the term or concept has become the main focus in research related to land conflicts, so that future researchers can quickly identify related themes that are still lacking in research. Based on network visualization, there are 6 clusters, namely: cluster 1 (red), cluster 2 (green), cluster 3 (blue), cluster 4 (yellow), cluster 5 (purple), cluster 6 (orange).

The research that discusses land conflict as a keyword (Figure 7), is related to topics that have keywords such as land management, conflict management, governance approach, violence, indigenous populations, local governance, conflict resolution, land grabbing, dispute resolution, agribusiness, institutional framework, politics, land reform, sustainable development, deforestation, sustainability, food security, land registration, agriculture, peri-urban areas, policy approach, and agrarian reform.

The theme of land conflicts that are directly related to conflict resolution with a mediation approach is still rarely the main topic in research, this can be seen as Figure 7 which shows that there is no direct link between the keyword land conflict and mediation as one of the resolutions of land conflicts.

In the context of research affiliated with the Indonesian state, the discussion of land conflicts is related to the topics of investment, politics, land registration, conflict relations with the palm oil industry, land use, and conflict resolution as presented in Figure 8.

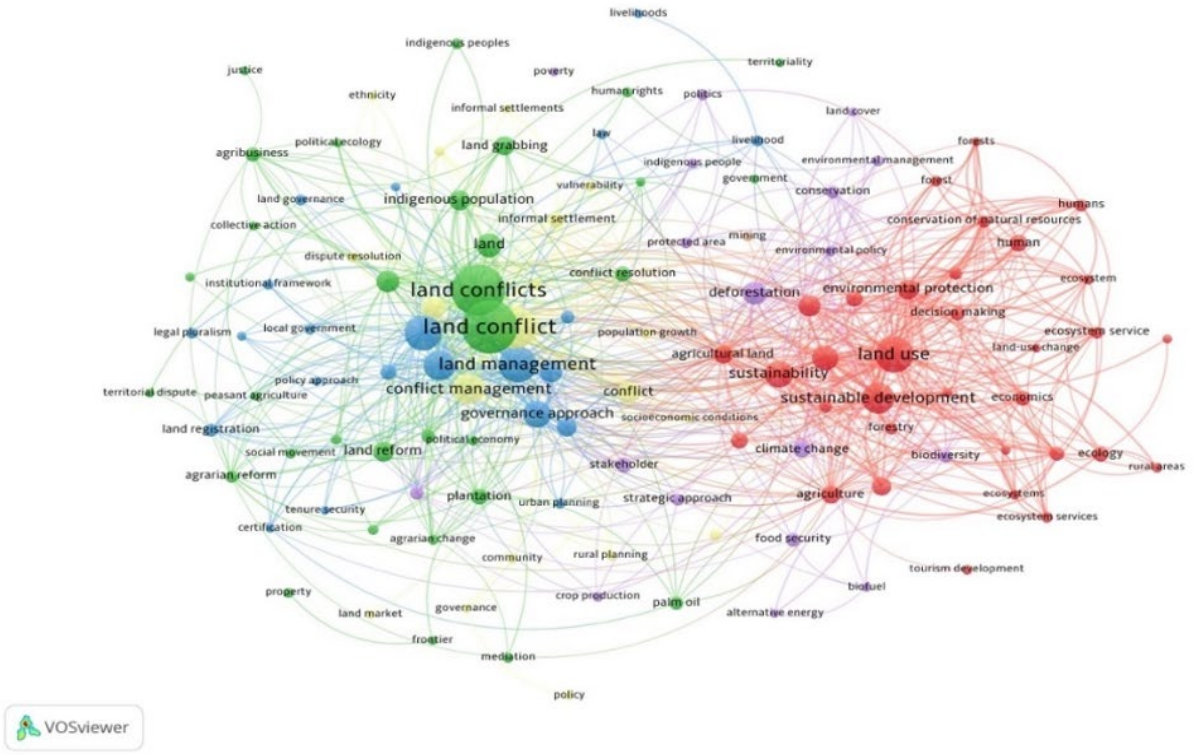


Figure 6. Network visualization Land Conflicts

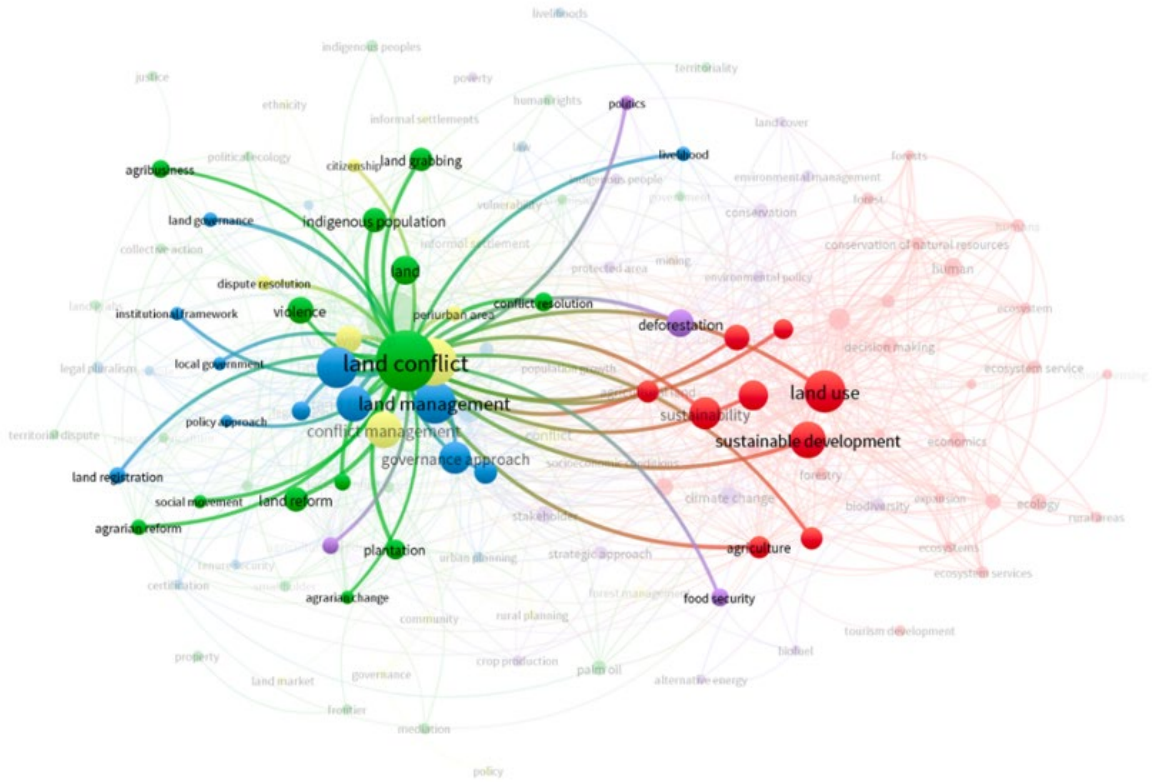


Figure 7. Network visualization Keywords land conflict

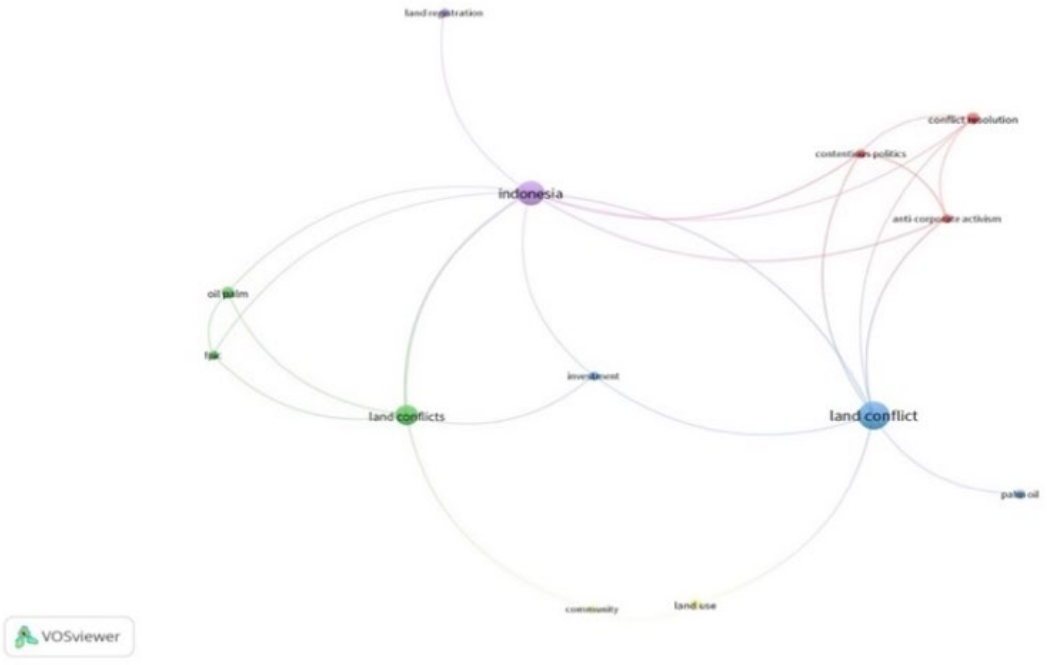


Figure 8. Network visualization theme land conflict di Indonesia

Land conflict in the context of Indonesia

The Indonesian archipelago, characterized by diverse ecosystems and cultural traditions, has long been a site of complex and protracted land conflicts that challenge both sustainable development and the protection of indigenous rights (Syaban & Opoku, 2024). Historically, these conflicts can be traced back to the colonial period, when plantation systems introduced by the Dutch displaced indigenous populations. This pattern continued after independence in 1945, as state-led development and industrialization often prioritized economic growth over environmental sustainability and customary land rights (Berenschot et al., 2022). Subsequent land-use policies, including the classification of large areas as state-owned forests, further intensified disputes between local communities and the government, frequently resulting in protests, legal battles, and episodes of violence (Afrizal & Berenschot, 2020).

The causes of land conflict in Indonesia are multidimensional, reflecting intertwined socio-economic, political, and institutional factors. A key driver is the expansion of resource-based industries such as mining, logging, and oil palm plantations, which often displace indigenous and local communities and disrupt traditional livelihoods (Elfitra et al., 2019). These dynamics are compounded by unequal distribution of economic benefits, where affected communities bear environmental and social costs without receiving proportional gains, leading to marginalization and resistance (Afriza & Berenschot, 2022). Additionally, weak recognition and protection of customary land rights exacerbate these conflicts, as formal state legal systems frequently fail to accommodate traditional tenure arrangements. This legal gap enables the appropriation of indigenous lands by state and corporate actors, increasing vulnerability to dispossession and highlighting the urgent need for stronger institutional frameworks to safeguard indigenous rights and support sustainable land governance (Hanifah et al., 2019; Berenschot et al., 2022).

The inconsistency between formal legal frameworks and the realities of land management in Indonesia has created persistent tensions, particularly for indigenous communities seeking recognition of their ancestral rights amid increasing commercial pressures and state-supported development (Sunarno, 2019). Decentralization further complicates governance by generating overlapping authority between different levels of government, often exacerbating conflicts and marginalizing vulnerable groups (Kartodiharjo & Cahyono, 2021). As a result, land conflict in Indonesia reflects not only competing claims over resources but also structural governance challenges rooted in legal pluralism and institutional fragmentation.

These overlapping factors have produced widespread land conflicts across the Indonesian archipelago, with significant environmental and social consequences. Conflicts contribute to deforestation, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation, while also disrupting social cohesion and eroding trust within communities (Hein et al., 2015; Shaban & Opoku, 2024). At the same time, complex legal and bureaucratic procedures for land recognition create substantial barriers for indigenous communities, making it difficult to secure land rights and increasing their vulnerability to dispossession (Iswantoro, 2021). These challenges are often compounded by regulatory systems that favor corporate and state interests over local communities (Kartodiharjo & Cahyono, 2021).

Despite these challenges, efforts toward land conflict resolution have progressed through increasing advocacy for agrarian reform, recognition of customary land rights, and the adoption of participatory approaches. Civil society organizations and international attention have encouraged policy responses, including the recognition of customary rights under the Village Act, which enhances local autonomy (Sembiring, 2017; Hanifah et al., 2019). Various studies emphasize the importance of integrating customary law, mediation, and local wisdom into conflict resolution processes, alongside institutional reforms and improved land governance systems (Tehupeiory et al., 2023; Rato, 2019; Tegnan, 2015; Nasution et al., 2023). Overall, addressing land conflict in Indonesia requires a collaborative and balanced approach that aligns economic development with environmental sustainability and the protection of indigenous rights (Syaban & Opoku, 2024).

Land conflict in Indonesia is shaped by overlapping legal, political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. The document shows that conflicts are closely linked to colonial land legacies, development-oriented state policies, weak recognition of customary land rights, and the expansion of extractive industries, plantations, mining, and logging. These dynamics create competing claims between the state, corporations, local

communities, and indigenous peoples, often producing inequality, displacement, environmental degradation, and social tension. From a governance perspective, these conflicts reflect institutional fragmentation, weak coordination, unclear land administration, and inconsistencies between formal law and customary land tenure systems.

The bibliometric findings support this analysis by showing that land conflict research is strongly connected to themes such as land governance, agrarian reform, indigenous rights, land grabbing, land registration, sustainable development, and political dynamics. However, the findings also show that conflict resolution, mediation, and conflict management remain weakly developed within the keyword network. This indicates that existing research, including studies on Indonesia, still tends to focus more on the causes, impacts, and legal complexity of land conflict than on evaluating practical mechanisms for settlement and prevention.

The position of this analysis is to bridge the gap between descriptive studies of land conflict and more solution-oriented research on land conflict management. By linking the bibliometric results with the Indonesian context, this study shows that land conflict should not only be understood as a problem of competing land claims, but also as a governance problem requiring institutional reform, participatory decision-making, recognition of customary rights, and stronger non-litigation mechanisms. Therefore, the analysis contributes to a clearer research direction by emphasizing the need to move from mapping conflict problems toward developing effective, inclusive, and legally grounded resolution frameworks.

Land Conflict Resolution

Figure 9 presents a structured, participatory, and non-litigation framework for resolving land conflicts, which directly responds to the legal and bureaucratic complexities of land rights in Indonesia. As discussed, formal litigation mechanisms, while available, are often lengthy, costly, and tend to favor more powerful actors, thereby limiting access to justice for marginalized communities (Hanifah et al., 2019; Iswantoro, 2021). In this context, the figure illustrates an alternative pathway that emphasizes dialogue, negotiation, and community-based approaches as more inclusive and effective mechanisms for conflict resolution.

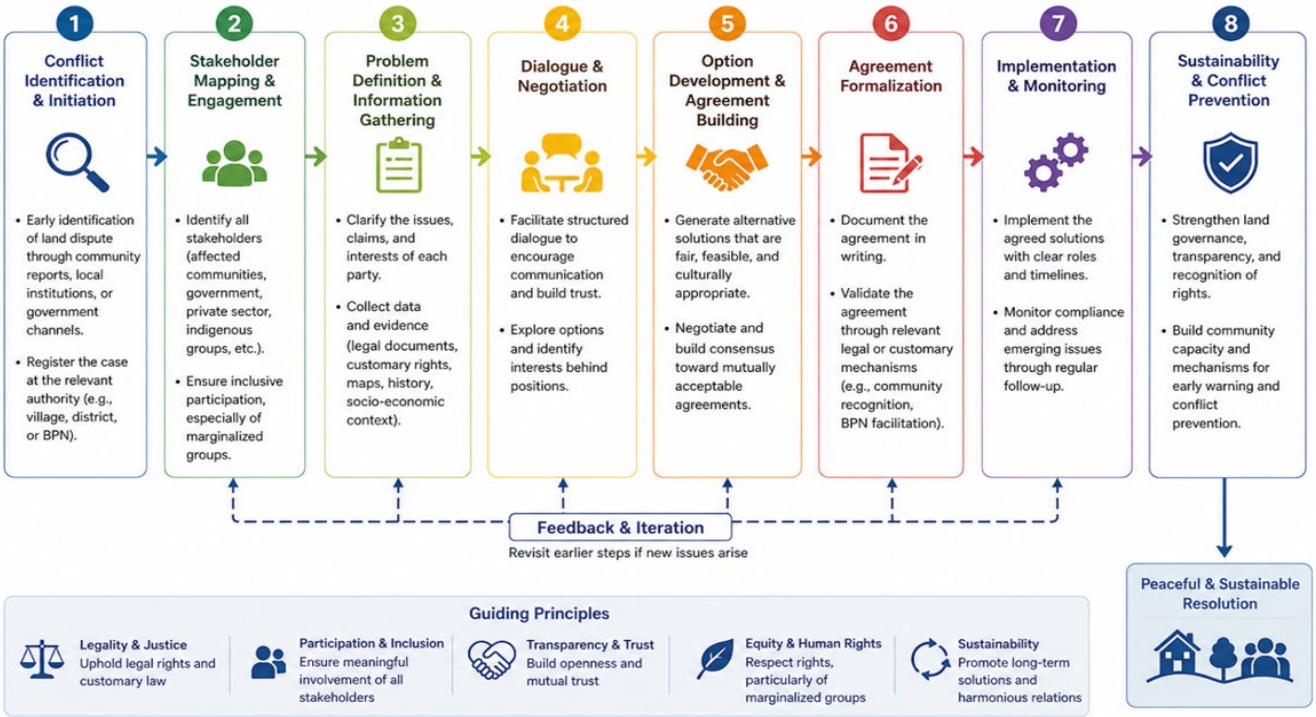


Figure 9. Steps for resolving land conflict

The process begins with conflict identification and initiation, followed by stakeholder mapping and engagement, ensuring that all relevant actors including local communities, government institutions, and private sector stakeholders are actively involved. This inclusivity is essential for addressing structural inequalities and ensuring that marginalized groups are not excluded from decision-making processes. The next stage, problem definition and information gathering, aims to clarify competing claims and collect both legal and customary evidence, reflecting the importance of integrating formal and informal land tenure systems.

Central to the framework is the stage of dialogue and negotiation, which promotes open and transparent communication among stakeholders. This approach seeks to address the root causes of conflict, including competing interests, resource allocation, and power imbalances, in a collaborative manner (Siregar et al., 2024). Building on this, option development and agreement building enables stakeholders to generate and negotiate solutions that are fair, feasible, and culturally appropriate. The agreed outcomes are then formalized through legal or customary mechanisms, including facilitation by institutions such as the National Land Agency (BPN), ensuring both legitimacy and enforceability.

Subsequent stages focus on implementation and monitoring, where agreed solutions are executed with clear responsibilities and continuous evaluation. The process concludes with sustainability and conflict prevention, emphasizing the strengthening of land governance, transparency, and recognition of indigenous rights, as well as the development of community capacity to prevent future disputes. Importantly, the framework is iterative, incorporating feedback mechanisms that allow stakeholders to revisit earlier stages when new issues arise. Overall, the figure demonstrates that effective land conflict resolution requires not only institutional support but also participatory, adaptive, and culturally grounded approaches that go beyond conventional litigation-based systems.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study demonstrates that land conflict research has expanded significantly between 2015 and 2024, reflecting its growing importance in global and Indonesian development discourse. The literature is largely dominated by themes such as land governance, agrarian reform, land grabbing, and indigenous rights, indicating a strong focus on the structural drivers and impacts of conflict. However, the bibliometric findings reveal a clear imbalance: while the causes and consequences of land conflict are extensively studied, the operational aspects of conflict resolution particularly mediation and conflict management remain marginal and weakly connected within the overall research landscape.

In the Indonesian context, land conflicts are shaped by complex interactions between legal pluralism, socio-economic inequality, political interests, and institutional fragmentation. Issues such as weak recognition of customary land rights, expansion of extractive industries, and inconsistencies between formal and informal legal systems further intensify disputes. Although Indonesia plays a notable role in global research output, existing studies still emphasize descriptive and problem-oriented analysis rather than evaluating the effectiveness of resolution strategies. This indicates a critical gap between academic research and practical, policy-relevant solutions for sustainable land conflict management.

Recommendations

Future research should shift toward a more solution-oriented approach by focusing on the development and evaluation of effective conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly mediation and participatory frameworks that integrate formal legal systems with customary practices. Emphasis should also be placed on data-driven methods, institutional performance analysis, and rights-based approaches that strengthen the recognition of indigenous land rights and community participation. Additionally, interdisciplinary and preventive research such as improving land governance systems, transparency in land registration, and early conflict detection will be essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to support more equitable and sustainable land conflict management.

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