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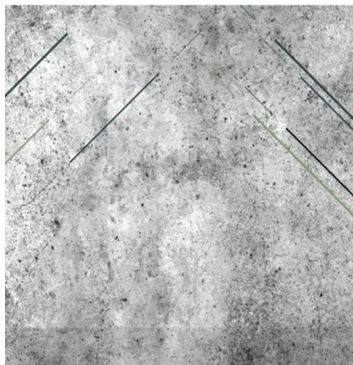
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Rethinking the Social Foundations of Environmental Politics: Evidence from Bali, Indonesia

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Rethinking the Social Foundations of Environmental Politics: Evidence from Bali, Indonesia

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Abstract

What constitutes the social foundation of environmental politics in the Global South? Existing scholarship advances two influential accounts. One, derived largely from research in advanced industrial democracies, characterizes environmental concern as a post-materialist phenomenon concentrated among affluent and highly educated middle classes. The other, grounded in case studies from developing contexts, emphasizes precarious movements among economically vulnerable communities. Whether these frameworks adequately capture environmental dynamics in middle-income societies, however, remains an open question. This article examines the case of Bali, Indonesia, a province that has experienced intensifying environmental pressures alongside growing public engagement with ecological issues. Drawing on an original representative survey of 1,893 respondents across nine districts (multistage random sampling; margin of error 2.8 per cent at 95 per cent confidence), the study analyses the distribution of pro-environmental behavior across socio-economic and educational strata. The findings indicate that pro-environmental behavior in Bali is not confined to either affluent, highly educated constituencies or economically marginal groups. Rather, environmentally aligned practices are observable across social strata. While differences in degree remain, the overall pattern suggests a more socially dispersed foundation than either the post-materialist or the environmentalism of the poor framework would predict. The article contributes to comparative debates by inviting a reconsideration of the North-South binary as an organizing framework for the study of environmental politics.

Keywords: Environmental Movements; Global South, Middle-Income Countries

Introduction

Debates concerning the social foundations of environmentalism have often been structured in relation to theoretical formulations originating in the global North. Research on environmental movements in advanced industrial democracies has frequently characterized such movements as predominantly middle-class, post-materialist, and common among the highly educated. Environmental awareness and activism in these contexts are commonly associated with liberal constituencies, higher educational attainment, and younger cohorts. The motivations attributed to these actors are understood to extend beyond immediate material subsistence, reflecting normative commitments to ecological stewardship and moral visions of social responsibility. This constellation has been succinctly described as an “environmentalism of affluence” (Liere & Dunlap, 1980; Olofsson & Öhman, 2006).

Scholars working from and on the global South have, however, challenged the universality of this account. Drawing on case studies from countries such as India and elsewhere, they have fore-

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ground the material and livelihood-based dimensions of environmental contention. In these accounts, environmental mobilization emerges not from post-materialist value shifts but from the defense of subsistence, land, and community against encroachment by state and private capital (Dwivedi, 2001; Gadgil & Guha, 1995; Guha, 2002; Satheesh, 2020, 2021). The resulting formulation, often termed the “environmentalism of the poor”, places working-class and rural actors at the center of environmental politics in developing contexts.

Taken together, these strands of scholarship have contributed to a stylized North–South distinction. Post-materialist environmentalism in affluent societies is increasingly contrasted with existentially driven environmentalism in the global South. While analytically useful, this dichotomy has arguably hardened into a foundational organizing framework within comparative environmental politics. It structures expectations about who mobilizes, why, and under what socio-economic conditions.

Current literature is still largely structured and influenced by these strands of scholarship. Reviews of studies on environmental movements and labor-environmental conflicts in the Global South, for instance, clearly indicate this engagement with the class-dimension of the movement (Satheesh, 2020, 2021). This preoccupation with the class dimension underscores the strength of the livelihood-defense argument in structuring the conversation on how movement emerge and unfold in the context of developing countries. Similarly, the latest developments in research on environmental movements in developed countries demonstrate the centrality of certain demographics especially the young and educated. Research on climate change movement in the Global North yields the following observation:

“[...] More recently, there has been an upsurge in climate protests led *by young, school-aged children* and civil disobedience-oriented protesters, whose framings on the issue focuses on reshaping the future and avoiding extinction” (Nulman, 2022).

The observation above strengthens our view that indeed the dominant understanding of environmental movements in the Global North is one that belongs to the educated and the affluent. This paper seeks to reconsider that sharp division. It suggests that the social base of environmentalism in parts of the global South may be more fluid and cross-cutting than the prevailing dichotomy implies. Focusing on Indonesia, and more specifically on Bali, where a national pilot project for net-zero transition is underway, the analysis explores whether both middle-class and working-class constituencies exhibit dispositions consistent with environmental awareness and action. The evidence presented here indicates that these sectors display comparable levels of pro-environmental behavior, suggesting the presence of a broader potential base for environmental mobilization than either framework alone would anticipate.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The next section outlines the Indonesian case and explains its analytical relevance for debates on environmental movement in the global South. This is followed by a discussion of data and methods, detailing the representative survey conducted among the Balinese population. The subsequent section presents the empirical findings, drawing on cross-tabulation analyses to examine the distribution of environmental awareness across socio-economic and educational strata. The final section concludes by reflecting on the study’s implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Indonesia offers a particularly instructive setting in which to reconsider prevailing assumptions regarding the social bases of environmental mobilization. As such, the country could be an illustrative case for the argument being developed here. The case selection of Indonesia is therefore deliberate and purposeful. It serves not as definitive theory testing of a causal argument, but instead serves as a smaller exploratory step in the broader theory-generating exercise. In other words, we are not yet concerned with validity both internally and externally as our argument here does not involve any form of causal inference.

Indonesia’s development trajectory has been deeply shaped by resource-intensive growth, with natural resource extraction occupying an important role in national revenue generation and

political economy (Warburton, 2017). Such a pathway has predictably produced sites of friction at the frontiers of extraction, where local communities confront both state authorities and private capital. Since the democratic transition of 1999, the widening of political space has rendered mobilization more feasible (Aspinall, 2005). Despite persistence of old oligarchic elites and network, civil society organizations generally have expanded and freedoms of association and expression have become institutionally protected especially in the early days of democratization (Robison & Hadiz, 2015). The structural conditions for environmental contention are therefore present in both material and political terms.

At the same time, Indonesia's level of development complicates a straightforward placement within the conventional North–South dichotomy. As a lower-middle income country marked by uneven urbanization and pronounced regional disparities, Indonesia occupies an intermediate position. Rapid urban growth and emergent middle classes coexist alongside regions still characterized by limited industrialization and persistent developmental constraints (Hadiz, 2010; Hill, 2014). This heterogeneity renders simplistic theoretical classifications less analytically satisfactory.

Environmental politics in Indonesia has thus far been interpreted predominantly through the lens of resistance at extractive frontiers. The literature has emphasized community opposition to plantation expansion, mining operations, and large-scale infrastructure projects. These are narratives that align closely with the “environmentalism of the poor” framework (Peluso, 1995; Peluso et al., 2008). In these accounts, environmental mobilization is principally rooted in livelihood defense against state–capital incursions. While such scholarship has yielded important insights, it does not exhaust the range of environmental dynamics observable in contemporary Indonesia.

This study shifts the analytical focus from extractive peripheries to Bali, whose political economy is structured less around resource extraction and more around tourism and service industries. In Bali, environmental and cultural preservation are not peripheral concerns but integral to economic sustainability. The island's tourism-dependent economy ties ecological integrity to livelihood across occupational categories (Cole, 2012). Environmental degradation thus carries cross-class implications. It affects not only working communities but also urban professionals, entrepreneurs, and the educated middle class whose economic and cultural identities are interwoven with Bali's environmental landscape. In other words, Bali offers an opportunity to witness theoretical complication beyond what the livelihood-defense type of argument could offer.

Moreover, Bali's civil society landscape is comparatively dense. It encompasses traditional institutions, local associations, and an active network of national and international non-governmental organizations concerned with environmental governance (Wardana, 2014). This institutional ecology creates opportunities for cross-class interaction and coalition-building around shared ecological concerns. Environmental vulnerability, in this context, is experienced less as a sectional grievance and more as a collective risk.

Bali therefore presents a case that sits uneasily within either the post-materialist narrative associated with affluent societies or the livelihood-defense model often attributed to the global South. Instead, it offers the possibility of a more hybrid social configuration in which environmental dispositions emerge across class lines in response to shared ecological exposure. On this basis, this study develops the argument that not only lower-income groups but also middle-class constituencies may exhibit dispositions conducive to environmental mobilization.

The ambition of the paper, however, remains deliberately modest. Drawing upon original, representative survey data from the Balinese population, the analysis is primarily descriptive. It does not seek to establish causal mechanisms, nor to identify causal effects. Rather, it aims to document patterns of association that may invite further inquiry into the evolving sociological foundations of environmental politics in middle-income democracies.

Building on the comparative literature on environmental politics, we begin by identifying two stylized pathways that have structured scholarly debates on the social bases of environmental movements. The first pathway mirrors the experience of the Global North. In this account, environmental mobilization is primarily post-materialist in orientation. It emerges once basic material needs are satisfied and is driven by concerns over quality of life, ecological sustainability, and in-

tergenerational justice. The social base of such movements is typically urban, educated, and middle class. Environmental activism, in this framework, is less about immediate livelihood defense and more about normative commitments to sustainability and cosmopolitan ecological values.

Several hypotheses animating this study can thus be derived. The first hypothesis is the *post-materialist pathway*. If our case of Bali, Indonesia, follows the trajectory observed in advanced industrial democracies, then environmental concern and participation should be positively associated with higher education and higher income. A second pathway reflects the experience of many developing countries in the Global South. Here, environmental mobilization is not post-materialist but existential. It is rooted in distributive conflict over land, water, forests, and extractive resources. Environmental activism in this context is frequently a defense of livelihood against encroachment by the state or private capital. The social base is often rural communities, smallholders, fishers, informal workers, and other economically vulnerable groups whose survival depends directly on natural resources.

This second hypothesis can be termed *the livelihood-defense pathway*. If our case follows the Global South trajectory, environmental concern and mobilization should be more pronounced among lower-income groups and those directly dependent on natural resources for subsistence. However, given Indonesia's status as a lower-middle to upper-middle income country with pronounced regional inequalities and uneven structural transformation, a third possibility warrants consideration. Indonesia combines advanced urban middle-class enclaves with agrarian and extractive peripheries. Its political economy is marked by both post-industrial service growth and persistent resource dependence. Under such conditions, environmental mobilization may not neatly conform to either the post-materialist or the livelihood-defense model.

This third middle hypothesis could be aptly termed *the hybrid or middle-income pathway*. In a middle-income, structurally diverse context like Indonesia, environmental concern likely has a broad social foundation. Both the educated middle-class economy vulnerable groups may show high awareness for environmental concerns, though for different reasons. Instead of a rigid North-South divide, we expect to find fluid, overlapping patterns of environmental concerns across socio-economic groups. This third hypothesis speaks directly to the broader North-South debate by suggesting that middle-income countries, particularly those undergoing uneven capitalist development, may generate hybrid environmental profile. The empirical task, therefore, is not merely to test which pathway Indonesia fits, but to assess whether the Indonesian case compels a refinement of the prevailing binary typology.

Method

This study is a descriptive research project designed to identify the demographic groups with the highest potential for environmental concern, using a case study in Bali, Indonesia. Primary data were collected through representative survey. Survey was utilized to provide a numerical description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of the population through structured interviews and questionnaires (Creswell & Creswell, 2013).

The researchers relied on primary data derived directly from surveying respondents at research site (Bungin, 2008). The survey employed a total sample of 1,893 respondents distributed proportionally across all nine regencies and municipalities in Bali (Badung, Bangli, Buleleng, Gianyar, Jembrana, Karangasem, Klungkung, Tabanan, and Denpasar). The sample size allows for robust province-wide inference and subgroup comparison. With 1,893 respondents, the survey achieves a margin of error (MoE) of ± 2.8 percent at a 95 percent confidence level, assuming its robust simple random sampling conditions (De Vaus, 2006). This level of precision enables reliable estimation of aggregate patterns of environmental concern within the population.

A multistage random sampling strategy was employed to ensure representativeness. A multistage random sampling is appropriate due to the constraint that the population is not homogeneous. As the sampling frame is very heterogeneous, differences in the characteristics of the population become important to consider. The number of samples is proportional to the population in

each regency/city in Bali. Respondents in this study are Balinese residents who are 17 years of age or older and hold a state identity card (KTP) as they are deemed capable of conveying perceptions about an issue. The gender proportion in this study was maintained to remain balanced.

The field data collection process was conducted in June 2023. The enumerators were given prior training on the questions in the questionnaire and randomization techniques with the aim of minimizing non-sampling error, non-response, and ensuring data quality. Face to face surveys were conducted simultaneously for one week with questionnaire as a guide for the structured interviews. The use of in-person interviews was intended to maximize response rates, reduce item non-response, and ensure clarity in question comprehension (Groves et al., 2009). The questionnaire included items measuring environmental knowledge, behavioral attitudes, and demographic characteristics, enabling disaggregated analysis by age, education, occupation, as well as income.

In each village referred to as a primary sampling unit (PSU) in this survey, there were 10 target respondents. Target respondents in each PSU were selected using a simple random sampling techniques at the village level and continued with the application of Kish grid techniques at the household level (Kish, 1965). Multi-layered supervision was applied to the randomization process. Quality control of the field survey results was also conducted by spot checks on 20% of the collected questionnaires.

Data that have been collected and passed through quality control process are subsequently processed and analyzed using statistical software. The result of this analysis consists of frequency data and cross-tabulations. The interpretation of these numerical data is then conducted qualitatively. The empirical strategy of this research is thus primarily descriptive. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns of environmental behavior across demographic groups and socioeconomic levels. By grounding the analysis in representative survey data, the study provides a systematic empirical basis for assessing the social foundations of environmental awareness and environmental movement in Bali.

In addition to these primary data sources, a literature study was also conducted by searching for secondary sources such as books, journals, research reports, documents, and other written resources related to the problem being studied. This desk study is necessary to strengthen the concepts and theories that support this research. The literature study was conducted before the field research was carried out.

Results

Our first step is to measure environmentalism by looking at what people know (their knowledge) and what they actually do (their behavior). We used several specific survey questions to see how our respondents view environmental issues. The questions indeed are limited to only two questions. However, for probing mere potential of support toward environmental causes, these questions are arguably sufficient. Key to these questions is the focus on the problem of waste management and specifically plastic waste in Bali. These two twin problems are at the heart of environmental crisis that Bali currently is suffering from. Individual position on this issue is consequential and arguably is emblematic to their attitude toward environmental issues.

The emphasis on waste is not incidental. In Bali, waste management constitutes one of the most visible and politically salient environmental concerns. Provincial and district governments continue to grapple with infrastructural and administrative constraints in managing the growing volume of daily waste (Hasjanah & Simanjuntak, 2025). In 2019 alone, approximately 4,821 tons of waste were produced per day, of which an estimated 52 per cent could not be processed within the existing governmental system (Herin, 2025). The magnitude of this figure underscores the structural nature of the problem and situates plastic reduction not merely as a matter of lifestyle preference, but as a pressing public policy concern.

Table 1 below shows these questions, focusing heavily on how people perceive waste management and the plastic crisis in Bali.

Table 1 Measuring Environmental Awareness and Action

No	Prompt	Level	Value
1	When shopping at a market or local shop (warung), do you still use plastic bags to carry your purchases?	Ordinal Likert	1-4
2	The following are PRIORITY PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATIONS currently being or soon to be carried out by the Province of Bali. Are you aware or unaware of these programs? H. Awareness of the Program to Limit Single-Use Plastic Waste	Categorical	0-2

Against this backdrop, the behavioral indicator concerning plastic bag usage offers an instructive entry point. Responses regarding the plastic bag reduction program indicate that environmental awareness is widespread among the Balinese respondents. Of the 1893 surveyed, over 1400 (approximately 77,4%) reported being fully aware of the initiative. This suggests that only 22,6% of the sampled population remains unaware of the government's environmental program.

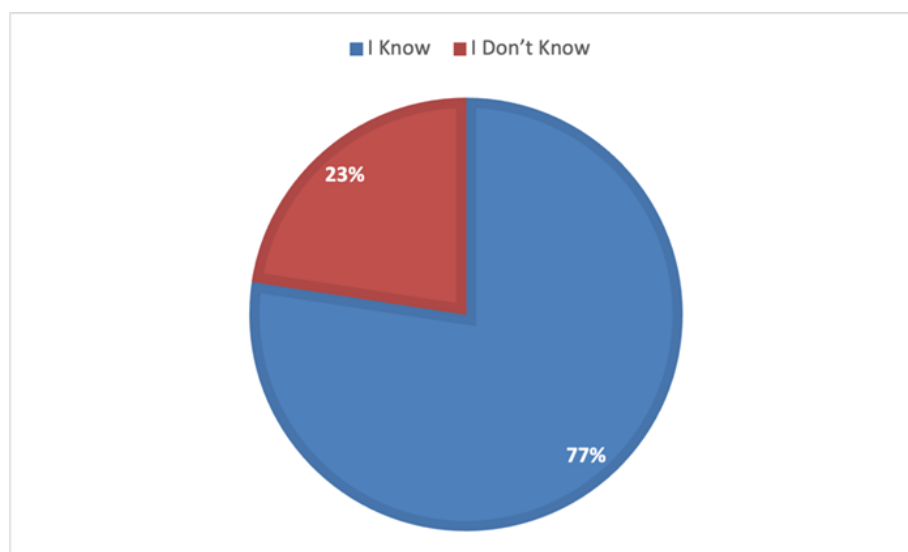


Figure 1 Awareness of the Program to Limit Single-Use Plastic Waste

Responses to the question on frequency of plastic bag use suggest a notable degree of pro-environmental behavior among respondents. Approximately 79.8 per cent report having reduced or modified their plastic bag usage in some form. Of these, 47 per cent indicate that they rarely use plastic bags, 13 per cent report having ceased their use altogether, and 20 per cent state that they routinely use reusable bags when shopping. These figures should be interpreted with caution, not least because self-reported behavior may be subject to social desirability bias. Nonetheless, even allowing for such considerations, the distribution indicates that pro-environmental practice has penetrated everyday consumption behavior to a considerable extent. What is striking is not merely the existence of environmentally aligned respondents, but their numerical weight within the sample. This provides an empirical basis for considering the breadth, rather than the narrowness, of Bali's potential environmental constituency.



Figure 2 The Frequency of Using Plastic Bag when Shopping

Further disaggregation of respondents across three socio-economic strata — low, middle, and high income — reinforces the impression of a socially mixed base for environmental alignment. When asked about their habits regarding plastic bag usage while shopping, a consistently high proportion across all income categories report rarely using plastic bags. Among respondents in the lower-income stratum, 49 per cent indicate that they rarely use plastic bags. The corresponding figures for the middle and higher-income groups are 46 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively. While modest variation is observable, the overall pattern suggests broad diffusion rather than concentration within a particular economic segment.

A similar pattern emerges when examining those who report having stopped using plastic bags altogether or having shifted to reusable alternatives. In the lower-income group, 28 per cent of respondents indicate that they have either ceased using plastic bags or replaced them with reusable bags. The figures for the middle-income and higher-income strata are 28 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively. The near parity across these categories is noteworthy. It indicates that behavioral adaptation is not confined to the more affluent segments of society, nor does it appear disproportionately driven by economic capacity alone.

Taken together, these findings point toward a relatively even distribution of pro-environmental behavior across income levels. Although the intensity and motivations underlying such behavior may differ, which is a matter beyond the scope of the present descriptive analysis, the observable practices themselves are not the exclusive preserve of any single socio-economic group. Table 5.2 provides a detailed breakdown of responses disaggregated by income category, illustrating the breadth of participation across strata.

In short, the evidence does not support the view that pro-environmental behavior in Bali is exclusive to the wealthy or driven by economic precariousness. Rather, it appears embedded across the social spectrum, suggesting a foundation for mobilization that cuts across conventional class distinctions.

Table 2. Income Level and Intensity of Using Plastic Bag

Income	Baseline	Often	Rarely	No More	Reusa- ble
Low	52%	23%	49%	11%	17%
Middle	37%	16%	46%	16%	22%
High	11%	20%	42%	11%	28%

A further layer of analysis disaggregates respondents according to educational attainment: low (primary education or less), medium (secondary/high school), and high (college degree or above). This categorization allows us to examine whether environmental behavioral alignment is disproportionately associated with formal educational exposure, as some strands of the literature might anticipate.

The data suggest that even at the lowest level of formal education, pro-environmental behavior is far from negligible. Among respondents with primary education or less, 39 per cent report that they rarely use plastic bags. As educational attainment increases, the proportion rises, though not in a strictly linear fashion. Fifty per cent of respondents with secondary education indicate that they rarely use plastic bags, while 45 per cent of those with higher education report the same behavior.

The middle educational category warrants particular attention, as it constitutes the largest segment of the sample — approximately 65 per cent of respondents fall within this group. The fact that half of this numerically dominant constituency report rarely using plastic bags suggests that environmentally aligned behavior is not confined to a small, highly educated minority. Rather, it is meaningfully present within the broad center of the educational distribution.

A comparable pattern appears when examining those who report having ceased plastic bag use altogether or having transitioned to reusable alternatives. Among respondents in the lowest educational category, 28 per cent indicate that they no longer use plastic bags. The corresponding figure for those with secondary education is 30 per cent, while 43 per cent of respondents with tertiary education report having fully moved away from plastic bag usage. While a gradient is visible, particularly at the highest level of education, the baseline levels across all categories remain substantial.

Table 3 presents the full distribution of responses disaggregated by educational attainment. Taken together, the evidence suggests that pro-environmental behavior is not the exclusive domain of the highly educated. Formal education appears to correlate with intensity of behavioral shift, yet the presence of considerable alignment even among the least educated respondents points once again to a dispersed, rather than stratified, social foundation for potential mobilization.

Table 3 Level of Education and Intensity of using Plastic Bag

Education	Baseline	Often	Rarely	No More	Reusable
Low	14%	34%	39%	10%	18%
Middle	65%	20%	50%	13%	17%
High	22%	12%	45%	14%	29%

Discussion

To interpret the findings above and relate them to questions of collective mobilization, the analysis rests on a modest but consequential assumption. This study assumes that individuals exhibiting comparatively high levels of environmental awareness and demonstrable pro-environmental behavior constitute a latent social base for mobilization. Granted, awareness does not mechanically translate into activism. Nevertheless, knowledge and disposition are widely recognized as preconditions for sustained collective action.

In the study of collective action, framing theory is one of the foundations for understanding how social movements take shape. Specifically, the ‘frame alignment’ theory emphasizes that alignment of how people interpret reality is a necessary precondition for mobilization (Snow et al., 1986). As an interpretive schema, a frame functions as a cognitive lens through which individuals perceive, identify, and label events within their lived experience. Drawing on Goffman’s seminal work, frames render otherwise ordinary occurrences meaningful, effectively organizing experience and suggesting the impulse toward

certain social actions (Goffman, 1974). It is crucial to recognize that while a singular social event may be objectively documented, its interpretation is inherently subjective and multifaceted. A single occurrence shared by a multitude of actors can generate as many distinct interpretations as there are participants. Therefore, the process of aligning these disparate interpretations is vital. It is the communicative labor necessary to transform a multitude of individual interpretation into a unified and shared meaning.

Bridging the gap between interpreting the world and adopting a specific disposition toward action requires another transformative process. As argued by McAdam, mobilization can only begin when the oppressed break away from the fatalistic acceptance of their conditions, an occurrence that was referred to as cognitive liberation (McAdam, 1982). Cognitive liberation takes place when individuals collectively redefine their predicament no longer as a matter of misfortune, but as a systematic result of injustice and oppression. This transition toward perceiving injustice necessitates the frame alignment process mentioned previously. Without a shared framework that identifies a clear antagonist or remediable grievance, the energy required for mobilization remains latent. Thus, understanding and interpretation becomes the cognitive scaffolding upon which the physical reality of mobilization is manifested and built.

Recent scholarship in environmental studies has mirrored this sociological understanding of the knowledge-action nexus. Within environmental psychology, the dominant knowledge-action paradigm posits a linear progression wherein a heightened environmental awareness is the essential precursor to pro-environmental behavior (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Shove, 2010; van de Wetering et al., 2022). This perspective thus assumes that by refining the frame through which citizens view ecological degradation, a corresponding shift in lifestyle or environmental engagement will follow. However, many scholars also note that this nexus is often fraught with complexity and the alignment of knowledge does not always guarantee the leap to sustained environmental action.

On this premise of knowledge as precondition for action, we disaggregate responses across educational attainment and socio-economic position in order to assess whether potential mobilization capacity is concentrated within particular strata or dispersed more broadly. The clustering of respondents into low, middle, and high categories along both dimensions allows for a clearer view of the sociological distribution of environmental predispositions.

The evidence suggests that the potential social base for environmental mobilization is neither confined to the lower strata nor monopolized by the more affluent and educated segments of society. In our sample, there is little indication of a sharp sociological cleavage corresponding to an "environmentalism of the affluent" as distinct from an "environmentalism of the poor." Rather, the proportion of respondents demonstrating high levels of environmental awareness and behavior is distributed across educational and income divides. The implication is not that class and education are irrelevant, but that their effects are not polarizing in the manner some theoretical accounts might anticipate.

The behavioral indicator concerning plastic bag usage offers a particularly illustrative example. Across educational strata, a substantial proportion of respondents report rarely or no longer using plastic bags. Among respondents with primary education only, 67 per cent report pro-environmental behavior on this measure. The corresponding figures for those with middle and higher levels of education are 80 per cent and 88 per cent, respectively. While there is a gradient consistent with educational attainment, the baseline level of pro-environmental practice among the least educated group remains strikingly high. This suggests that environmental alignment is not confined to formally educated constituencies alone.

A similar pattern emerges across income categories. In the lowest income group, 77 per cent report behavior consistent with reduced plastic bag use. The figures for middle and higher-income groups are 84 per cent and 81 per cent, respectively. The differences are present but modest. What is notable is the absence of exclusion: pro-environmental behavior appears in substantial proportions across all income levels.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that the sociological ingredients for environmental mobilization are not restricted to a single class or educational constituency. If mobilization depends, in part, on the presence of receptive publics, then such receptivity appears widely distributed. The question that follows is therefore not whether a social base exists, but under what political and organizational conditions such a dispersed base might be translated into sustained collective action.

This analysis carries significant normative and policy implications. Normatively, these findings challenge the tendency to attribute environmental degradation to the 'illiteracy' of the poor. Our data reveal that even within the most economically disadvantaged segments of the society, a substantial number of individuals already demonstrate pro-environmental potential. This is particularly noteworthy given that these households align their behavior with ecological expectations despite precarious circumstances.

From policy perspective, while extending environmental education remains imperative, such initiatives must be delivered with empathy, avoiding the judgmental frameworks that often alienate marginalized communities.

Conclusion

This study has argued that the social foundations of environmental movements in the global South are not as sharply bifurcated as the conventional North–South framework suggests. Rather than reproducing a clean distinction between a post-materialist, middle-class environmentalism of affluence and a livelihood-driven environmentalism of the poor, the case of Bali, Indonesia, reveals a far more fluid and cross-cutting social base. Drawing on original survey data from a representative sample of 1,893 respondents across nine regencies, this paper demonstrates that pro-environmental behaviors are distributed across socio-economic and educational strata in ways that defy theoretical expectation.

Pro-environmental behavior is observable among lower-income groups as well as high-income respondents. Similarly, it is present among individuals with limited formal education alongside those with higher educational attainment. This pattern suggests that environmental concern in a middle-income, culturally cohesive society such as Bali cannot be reduced either to post-materialist affluence or to purely livelihood defense. Instead, environmentalism appears embedded within a broader social fabric that might be shaped by local institutional contexts and the lived experience of ecological change.

What emerges from this study, however, is not the collapse of the North–South distinction, but its complication. The evidence from Bali suggests that the social bases of environmental concern in middle-income societies cannot be neatly assimilated to either the post-materialist thesis or the livelihood-defense model. Instead, environmental dispositions appear distributed across socio-economic and educational strata in ways that invite a reconsideration of how we conceptualize collective action in transitional political economies.

The presence of pro-environmental attitudes among both lower-income and higher-income groups, and across varying levels of educational attainment, indicates that the potential constituency for environmental mobilization is broader than prevailing theoretical frameworks would anticipate. This does not imply that mobilization is inevitable. Political opportunity structures, organizational capacity, and leadership remain decisive (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tarrow, 2022). Yet the sociological preconditions for cross-class coalition may be more extensive than the literature has assumed.

At the same time, caution is warranted. The analysis rests on subnational evidence from Bali and cannot straightforwardly be generalized to Indonesia as a whole, let alone to the global South in its diversity. Indonesia's particular political economy, its middle-income status, and Bali's distinctive socio-cultural configuration may shape the observed patterns in ways that are not universally replicable. The task ahead, therefore, is comparative. Replication across cases with divergent growth regimes and institutional arrangements would allow us to determine whether the fluid

social base identified here signals a broader transformation in environmental politics across emerging economies, or remains a contextually bounded phenomenon.

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