



Tracing the Dynamics of Land Corruption Investigations in Indonesia: A Case Study from Kuantan Singingi

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ABSTRACT:

Background; Corruption in Indonesia's land sector undermines public confidence, with overlapping rules creating obstacles for fair investigation and prosecution.

Aims; This research examines how land-related corruption is investigated by the District Prosecutor's Office in Kuantan Singingi. It aims to evaluate the adequacy of the legal framework while also identifying the main difficulties encountered in practice.

Methods; The study applies a normative juridical method combined with a case study approach. Sources include statutory regulations, court rulings, and interviews with prosecutors and legal professionals. A qualitative analysis was carried out to assess how far the written laws align with the realities of enforcement on the ground.

Result; The findings indicate that although Indonesia has comprehensive legal instruments to address corruption in land affairs, their application remains inconsistent. Investigators face problems such as limited institutional resources, challenges in proving manipulation of land certificates, and external pressures from political or economic actors. These issues tend to reduce prosecutorial effectiveness and slow the resolution of cases.

Conclusion; The Kuantan Singingi experience illustrates wider systemic weaknesses in Indonesia's anti-corruption framework. Building stronger institutional capacity, harmonizing land regulations, and ensuring transparency in prosecutorial practices are necessary steps to improve the integrity and effectiveness of land corruption investigations.

Keyword: Corruption Investigation; Kuantan Singingi; Land Sector; Legal Framework

INTRODUCTION

The issue of corruption in the land sector has become increasingly urgent to study because it directly impacts justice, welfare, and trust in public institutions. Unlike other types of corruption, land-related corruption is tied to ownership rights, resource access, and the state's ability to regulate fairly. When land administration is tainted by corrupt practices, communities face the risk of losing legal certainty over their property. This creates social unrest and weakens the legitimacy of government institutions tasked with protecting citizens' rights. Scholars and policymakers frequently warn that land disputes often escalate into broader conflicts if corruption is not addressed. Such conditions make the investigation of land corruption not only a legal necessity but also a social imperative. Without thorough analysis, the cycle of impunity and injustice will continue to persist.

Therefore, this study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of how investigations in this sector are carried out. The urgency of this research stems from the fact that land corruption cases are complex, technical, and politically sensitive. Unlike financial crimes that are easier to trace, land corruption often involves overlapping regulations and manipulation of legal documents (Levien, n.d.; Olujobi, 2021; Peng et al., 2021). Investigators face challenges in proving the falsification of certificates and in uncovering illicit practices hidden within administrative loopholes (Lawan & Henttonen, 2024; Potter & Potter, 2020). Moreover, local elites and economic actors sometimes intervene to obstruct legal proceedings. This creates a power imbalance that undermines the independence of prosecutors at the district level. When such corruption remains unchecked, it fosters a culture of impunity and inequality. Communities then lose confidence in the justice system and become vulnerable to repeated exploitation. These realities make the study of land corruption investigations a matter of urgent concern for both law and governance.

Indonesia's land sector is widely recognized as one of the areas most prone to corrupt practices (Alting et al., 2025; Bachriadi & Aspinall, 2023; Noor, n.d.). Growing population demands, urban expansion, and weak regulatory enforcement combine to create fertile ground for misuse of authority (Alexander et al., 2022; Baye et al., 2021). Reports from anti-corruption watchdogs consistently highlight that land disputes often involve collusion between officials and private actors. Such findings indicate systemic vulnerabilities that hinder effective law enforcement. Even though the state has established legal frameworks, their implementation remains fragmented and inconsistent. The contradictions between different regulations often provide room for manipulation. As a result, prosecutors struggle to construct solid cases that can stand in court. The Kuantan Singingi District illustrates these dynamics in a concrete and localized context.

The broader consequences of land corruption extend far beyond individual cases. Weak investigations reduce public confidence in state institutions and perpetuate perceptions of inequality. Communities often view unresolved corruption as proof that wealth and influence can override justice (Aïssaoui & Fabian, 2022; Locatelli et al., 2022). This perception is dangerous because it erodes respect for the rule of law and weakens democratic governance (Koeswayo et al., 2024; Tambunan, 2023; Tusalem, n.d.). Internationally, ineffective anti-corruption efforts in the land sector tarnish Indonesia's reputation and discourage foreign investment. Economic growth is threatened when legal uncertainty dominates land administration. These conditions underline why stronger investigation mechanisms are urgently required. Without reform, the social, political, and economic costs of corruption will continue to rise.

Research on corruption in Indonesia has tended to focus on procurement fraud, bribery scandals, and political corruption (Paranata, 2025). While these studies provide valuable insights, they rarely address corruption in the land sector in depth (Eryanto et al., 2022; Paranata, 2025). Academic contributions often generalize anti-corruption efforts without analyzing the unique obstacles faced by district prosecutors. Local offices, particularly in semi-urban or rural areas, often lack the resources and technical capacity of larger institutions. As a result, their struggles are underrepresented in academic discourse. This lack of attention creates a gap in both knowledge and policy-making. Kuantan Singingi, as a district-level case, provides a valuable lens to explore these underexamined challenges. By focusing on this setting, the study contributes both theoretically and practically to understanding corruption dynamics.

Another urgent reason for examining this case lies in the gap between law and practice. Although Indonesia has ratified international anti-corruption conventions and passed detailed legislation (Ali et al., 2023; Thamrin, 2022), implementation remains problematic (Juvet et al., 2021; Nyame et al., 2022). Many legal reforms are designed at the national level but fail to address the local realities faced by prosecutors. A careful study of how investigations unfold in districts like Kuantan Singingi sheds light on these inconsistencies. It helps identify the disconnect between written regulations and their application in practice. This knowledge is crucial for policymakers seeking evidence-based reform. Without such localized insights, national reforms risk being incomplete or ineffective. Thus, this research not only documents problems but also informs solutions.

The challenges prosecutors face highlight why this study is necessary. Investigators in Kuantan Singingi frequently deal with inadequate staffing, limited budgets, and lack of technical expertise in handling land documents (Nugroho et al., 2022; Pramudya et al., 2022). They are also vulnerable to external pressure from local elites who benefit from corrupt practices (Meza & Pérez-Chiqués, 2021; Ruan & Wang, 2023). Communities, on the other hand, often lack access to legal remedies or awareness of their rights. These conditions create an imbalance that sustains corruption and prevents justice from being served. By analyzing such limitations, the research exposes the structural weaknesses in the legal system. It also opens opportunities to design reforms tailored to the realities of district-level prosecution. Highlighting these weaknesses is essential for creating fairer and more effective institutions.

In conclusion, the urgency of this study lies in its potential to restore public trust and reinforce the integrity of Indonesia's justice system. Corruption in the land sector is not merely a legal issue but a threat to social stability, economic development, and democratic legitimacy (Bakker et al., 2021; Gani, 2021). By focusing on the Kuantan Singingi District, this research provides localized insights into a national problem (Saiyed, 2023). It underscores the importance of harmonizing regulations, strengthening institutional resources, and ensuring transparent legal practices. The findings are expected to contribute to both academic discussions and policy reforms. More importantly, the study emphasizes that tackling land corruption is an urgent necessity rather than a long-term option. Without such efforts, the cycle of injustice will persist. This urgency justifies why the research deserves immediate scholarly and practical attention.

Corruption in the land sector is complex because it links legal certainty, ownership rights, and public trust. Lysova (2025) shows that effective surveillance and investigation tools are vital to uncover abuses of power, a lesson relevant to land disputes. Similarly, Davidescu et al. (2025) argue that institutional efficiency is central to improving public sector performance, which reflects the challenges faced by district prosecutors. Saba et al. (2025) demonstrate that weak institutions accelerate environmental degradation, a pattern similar to corruption in land administration. Yadav and Yadav (2023) also emphasize that governance failures reduce economic efficiency, highlighting corruption's wider economic impact. Gottschalk (2025), studying sports governance, underscores that compliance systems are essential, suggesting parallels for land management in Indonesia. Maletova & Utkina (2025) note that moral expectations often outpace legal enforcement, a tension seen in land corruption cases where communities demand fairness. In the same vein, Wedha et al. (2025) underline the importance of coherent policies, echoing Indonesia's fragmented land regulations. Li et al. (2025) contend that rule of law and corruption control are crucial for sustainable development, reinforcing the urgency of reform. Simatele & Bolarinwa (2025) explain how weak

governance sustains informality, which mirrors informal practices in land administration at the district level. Finally, Chowdhury (2025) highlights that political environments strongly influence government effectiveness, consistent with local interference in Kuantan Singingi. Collectively, these studies suggest that corruption is both a legal and institutional challenge, and this research addresses the gap by offering evidence from corruption investigations in Kuantan Singingi.

Corruption has been a central theme in many academic discussions, yet studies that look specifically at corruption in the land sector are still rare. Much of the existing literature tends to emphasize financial scandals, procurement fraud, or political bribery, while the administrative complexity of land management often remains overlooked. At the local level, the discussion becomes even thinner, with little attention given to how district prosecutors handle corruption cases that involve land ownership and certification. What is usually found in the literature is a strong focus on normative frameworks, but much less on the day-to-day realities of enforcement. This imbalance leaves a knowledge gap that makes it difficult to fully understand the challenges in prosecuting land corruption. To address this shortcoming, there is a clear need for research that documents how such investigations actually unfold in district-level offices.

This research is designed to fill that gap by examining the case of the Kuantan Singingi District Prosecutor's Office. The study provides an opportunity to look closely at how investigators work within limited resources and institutional constraints, while also navigating political pressures that often surround land disputes. By analyzing both the legal framework and the practical barriers, the research aims to present a more complete picture of how corruption cases in the land sector are pursued. The results are expected to be useful in two ways. On one hand, they will add to the academic conversation on corruption and governance. On the other, they will generate insights that may guide reforms in law enforcement practices. In this sense, the study carries both theoretical importance and practical value.

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the investigation process of land corruption cases in Kuantan Singingi. The study seeks to evaluate how far the current legal framework supports effective prosecution and to reveal the practical challenges that investigators encounter in the field. Beyond describing these issues, the study also aims to offer recommendations that can help strengthen future anti-corruption strategies in the land sector. The central assumption is that, although formal legal provisions are already in place, they are not enough to guarantee success in practice. Limited resources, technical difficulties in handling land documentation, and interference from political actors continue to weaken the effectiveness of investigations at the district level.

METHOD

Research Design

The study was carried out using a normative juridical design complemented by a case study approach. The juridical aspect was used to examine the legal framework, including laws, regulations, and court rulings relevant to corruption in the land sector. The case study focused on the Kuantan Singingi District Prosecutor's Office to capture how those legal provisions are applied in practice. This combination made it possible to bridge theoretical perspectives with real-world conditions in the field.

Participant

The research involved prosecutors and legal staff at the Kuantan Singingi District Prosecutor's Office who were directly engaged in investigating land corruption cases. Their perspectives were considered crucial because they provided firsthand accounts of the obstacles encountered and the strategies used to overcome them. Involving practitioners ensured that the analysis was not only based on documents but also reflected practical realities.

Instrument

Two main instruments were employed. First, legal documents such as statutory laws, prosecutorial guidelines, and court decisions were reviewed to build the normative foundation. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with prosecutors and staff members. These interviews allowed participants to share their experiences while giving the researcher the flexibility to explore specific issues in more depth. The combination of these instruments provided a balance between doctrinal analysis and empirical insights.

Data Analysis

The collected data were examined using a qualitative descriptive approach. Documents and interview transcripts were read carefully, coded thematically, and compared to identify consistencies and contradictions between the legal framework and its implementation. This process highlighted patterns related to institutional capacity, technical difficulties, and external pressures. The findings were then synthesized to draw conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of the current system.

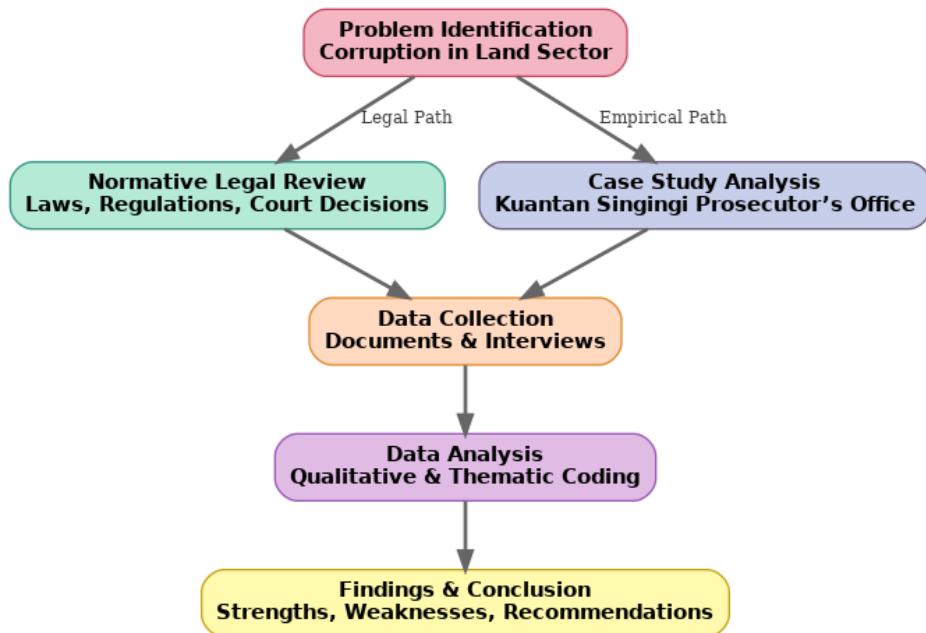


Figure 1. Research Method Flowchart of Land Corruption Investigation Study in Kuantan Singingi

To make the research process clearer, the main stages are presented in a flowchart. It shows that the study began with identifying the problem, which then branched into two main paths: a normative legal review and a case study analysis. Both streams converged at the stage of data collection, followed by data analysis, and finally led to conclusions and recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The study found that the handling of land corruption cases in Kuantan Singingi is marked by a clear divide between what the law prescribes and what actually occurs during investigations. Although the legal framework is relatively well-established, its enforcement at the district level continues to face structural and technical barriers. Investigators consistently pointed to four major obstacles: unreliable documentation, limited institutional capacity, political interference, and weak coordination across agencies.

Table 1. Legal Framework vs Practical Challenges in Land Corruption Investigation

Aspect	Legal Framework (Normative)	Practical Challenges (Case Study)
Basis of law	Anti-Corruption Law, Land Regulations	Limited application at district level
Documentation	Requirement for valid land certificates	High incidence of falsified or manipulated documents
Institutional capacity	Prosecutors authorized to investigate corruption	Lack of resources, understaffed offices
Political independence	Prosecutors expected to act impartially	Local elites interfering in investigations
Coordination	Formal cooperation across institutions	Weak implementation and fragmented communication

The table underscores the gap between the normative system and its application. While the law outlines comprehensive guidelines, prosecutors still struggle with falsified land documents, inadequate resources, and external pressures that hinder impartial enforcement.

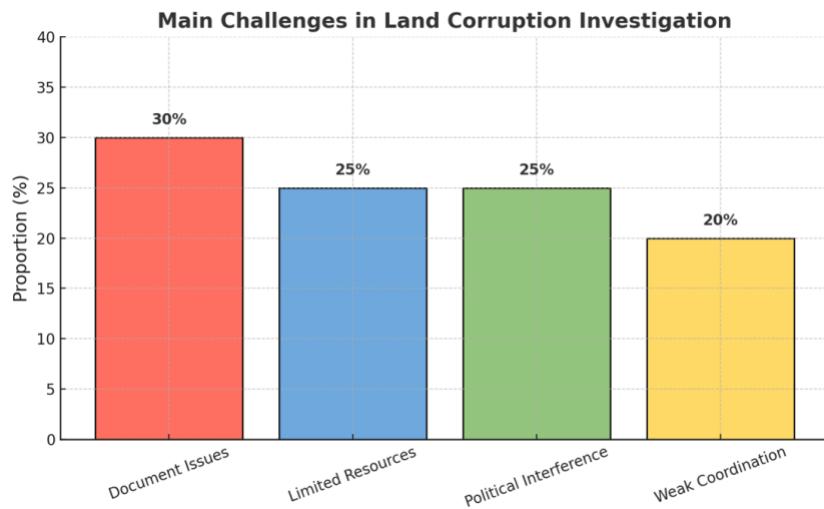


Figure 2. Main Challenges in Land Corruption Investigation

The bar chart illustrates the relative weight of each obstacle. Document-related issues stand out as the most pressing challenge (30%). Shortages in resources and political interference are nearly equal in scale, while weak coordination, although slightly lower at 20%, remains an important factor limiting investigative effectiveness.

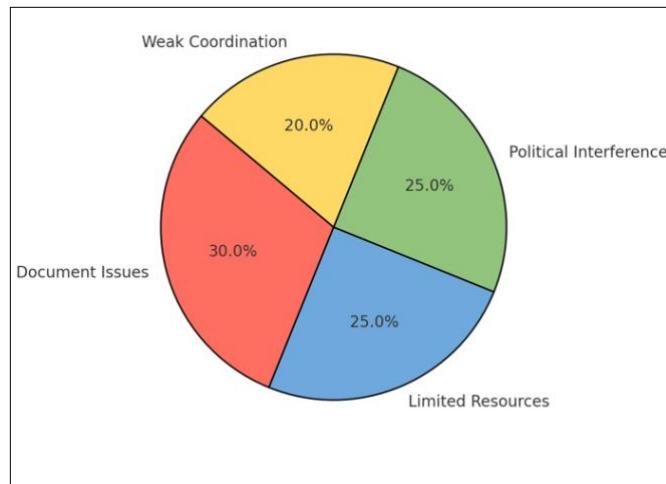


Figure 3. Proportional Distribution of Challenges

The pie chart gives a clearer picture of how challenges are distributed. Rather than being dominated by a single factor, the results reveal a mix of problems that combine to weaken investigations. This balance highlights the complexity of land corruption cases, where legal, institutional, and political aspects intersect.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that investigations into land corruption cannot be viewed merely as legal exercises; rather, they are deeply influenced by institutional and political realities. The frequent manipulation of land documents, combined with limited human and technical resources, has made investigations fragile. Lysova (2025) has argued that surveillance systems are crucial in uncovering abuses of power, which is very relevant to the difficulty prosecutors face when relying on unreliable land certificates. In Kuantan Singingi, the absence of modern verification tools made investigators heavily dependent on paper-based records. This dependence created opportunities for corrupt actors to exploit administrative loopholes with ease. Such conditions perpetuate a cycle in which misconduct goes undetected, weakening the authority of the prosecutor's office. Without adequate capacity to bridge these gaps, legal frameworks remain theoretical rather than practical. The overall picture reflects how fragile the balance between law and enforcement is at the local level.

Institutional capacity emerged as one of the most important aspects in ensuring successful prosecution of corruption cases. Davidescu, Lobonț, Manta, Mihiț, and Țăran (2025) highlighted that performance in the public sector is strongly tied to how well institutions manage their resources and processes. In Kuantan Singingi, prosecutors often worked with insufficient staff and limited budgets, making it difficult to handle complex land-related corruption cases. While the law formally empowers them to investigate, their operational capability did not match the expectations set by national regulations. This mismatch created an imbalance between responsibility and capacity. The result was that many investigations progressed slowly and often failed to yield strong evidence in court. Such inefficiencies also eroded public confidence in the justice system. Strengthening institutional resources is therefore not optional but essential for improving enforcement.

Weak governance is another factor that has repeatedly surfaced in this study. Saba, Alola, and Ngepah (2025) noted that poor governance systems produce vulnerabilities that allow corruption to

flourish, a pattern that resonates in Kuantan Singingi. Coordination between prosecutors and land administration agencies was often fragmented, leading to duplication of efforts and delays. This lack of synergy reduced accountability and created additional room for manipulation. Local elites frequently took advantage of these weak structures to obstruct or delay investigations. Communities, observing these dynamics, grew increasingly skeptical of formal institutions. The perception that justice could be bought or influenced by powerholders spread widely. Such conditions reinforced the normalization of corruption, making reform more difficult. The findings thus highlight governance reform as a precondition for effective anti-corruption work.

The economic implications of weak law enforcement should not be underestimated. Yadav and Yadav (2025) demonstrated that failures in governance reduce efficiency in the allocation of resources, a dynamic that mirrors what is happening in land corruption cases. When investigations falter, uncertainty over land ownership and rights grows. This uncertainty discourages both domestic and foreign investors from committing to long-term projects. In Kuantan Singingi, prosecutors were aware that weak enforcement not only harmed justice but also constrained regional development. Communities lost opportunities for growth because of persistent legal insecurity. The local economy, particularly in sectors dependent on land use, became vulnerable to disputes and instability. The findings suggest that corruption in the land sector creates ripple effects that extend far beyond the legal arena. Addressing it requires integrating economic considerations into anti-corruption strategies.

The role of compliance systems is critical in ensuring consistent enforcement. Gottschalk (2025), examining corruption in sports governance, emphasized that compliance frameworks prevent systemic abuses. While the sector is different, the principle is highly relevant to land corruption. In Kuantan Singingi, overlapping regulations and conflicting interpretations of land law undermined investigations. Prosecutors were often caught between contradictory legal provisions, which slowed the progress of cases. The absence of a clear compliance system left them without consistent guidance. This lack of coherence made enforcement vulnerable to manipulation. The study shows that legal reform must not only focus on creating new regulations but also on ensuring compliance and harmonization. Without such measures, prosecutors will continue to face uncertainty in their work.

The gap between community expectations and institutional performance is another pressing issue. Maletova and Utkina (2025) observed that moral norms in society often move faster than legal enforcement mechanisms, creating tension when justice is delayed. This observation is consistent with the reality in Kuantan Singingi, where communities expected swift resolution of corruption cases but instead experienced delays and inconclusive outcomes. Such a gap damaged public trust in the justice system. Citizens increasingly believed that the law favored elites rather than protecting their rights. This perception discouraged cooperation with investigators, as people doubted the usefulness of reporting irregularities. Over time, the legitimacy of the prosecutor's office eroded further. Bridging this moral-legal gap requires stronger institutions that can meet both legal standards and public expectations.

The challenge of fragmented regulations also deserves attention. Wedha, Wijaya, Mukti, and Turymshayeva (2025) pointed out that policy incoherence undermines anti-corruption frameworks by creating contradictions. In Kuantan Singingi, prosecutors frequently faced overlapping land regulations interpreted differently by various institutions. This created legal uncertainty and slowed

down investigations. Corrupt actors exploited these gaps by playing institutions against each other. The result was a prolonged legal process that reduced the effectiveness of enforcement. Prosecutors lacked the clarity they needed to pursue cases decisively. Such fragmentation shows that legal reform must focus not only on drafting laws but also on ensuring alignment across agencies. A coherent policy environment would reduce opportunities for corruption and empower investigators.

The connection between the rule of law and sustainable development is also evident. Li, Aghazadeh, Liaquat, Nassani, and Eweade (2025) stressed that strong legal institutions and effective corruption control are central to long-term sustainability. In Kuantan Singingi, weak investigations into land corruption undermined not only justice but also the prospects for sustainable land use and development. Land disputes reduced productivity in agriculture and limited opportunities for investment. Local communities faced instability that affected their economic and social well-being. Prosecutors, despite recognizing these challenges, lacked the means to resolve them effectively. The findings show that weak enforcement at the district level can derail broader national goals. Building strong local institutions is therefore essential for aligning anti-corruption efforts with sustainable development objectives.

The persistence of informal practices further complicates the situation. Simatele and Bolarinwa (2025) explained that weak governance sustains informality, particularly in regions where formal institutions are ineffective. In Kuantan Singingi, informal networks facilitated document manipulation and reduced the role of formal investigations. These networks were often tied to local politics and economics, making them resistant to reform. As a result, prosecutors struggled to establish authority over land disputes. Communities frequently turned to informal mechanisms for dispute resolution, bypassing legal institutions altogether. This weakened the influence of the prosecutor's office and reinforced parallel systems of accountability. Breaking this cycle requires strengthening formal governance and increasing public trust in official institutions. Without such changes, informal practices will continue to undermine anti-corruption efforts.

Finally, the influence of political conditions cannot be overlooked. Chowdhury (2025) demonstrated that the effectiveness of government institutions in Southeast Asia is shaped by their political environment, and this finding resonates strongly in Kuantan Singingi. Prosecutors frequently reported political pressure that hindered their investigations. Such interference not only delayed cases but also created fear among investigators. The dominance of political interests over legal processes weakened the credibility of the justice system. Communities interpreted this as evidence that the law could be manipulated by those in power. The study underscores the urgent need for greater prosecutorial independence and safeguards against political influence. Without such measures, legal provisions will remain hollow, and investigations will continue to face obstacles. The broader conclusion is that the fight against land corruption requires not only strong laws but also political will to uphold them.

Implications

This research carries several implications that extend beyond the immediate case of Kuantan Singingi. On a practical level, the findings make it clear that district prosecutors cannot work effectively without adequate resources, training, and tools to verify land documents. Improving institutional capacity would not only enhance legal outcomes but also rebuild public confidence in the justice system. At the policy level, the study points to the importance of harmonizing land regulations, since overlapping and inconsistent rules have created unnecessary barriers to

prosecution. For academics, this work contributes by shedding light on the realities of local enforcement, which are often overlooked in studies that focus mainly on national institutions. The study also highlights the link between justice, economic stability, and governance, showing that weaknesses in legal enforcement can spill over into broader development challenges. Taken together, these insights suggest that addressing land corruption requires a holistic approach that integrates legal, institutional, and societal reforms.

Limitations

Like any research, this study has certain boundaries that need to be acknowledged. Because it focused exclusively on the Kuantan Singingi District Prosecutor's Office, the findings cannot be generalized to all regions of Indonesia. The use of qualitative methods, particularly interviews and document reviews, provided depth but limited the ability to measure issues quantitatively. The sensitive nature of corruption also meant that some participants may have been reluctant to speak openly, which could have shaped the data collected. Another limitation lies in the absence of longitudinal analysis, since the study captures conditions at one point in time while corruption patterns may evolve. In addition, the reliance on secondary legal documents carries the risk of interpreting laws without the full context of their application in different regions. These limitations suggest caution when applying the findings beyond the immediate study area, while also pointing to opportunities for future research.

Suggestions

Based on these findings, several directions for future work can be proposed. Expanding the research to include more districts would allow for comparisons and reveal whether the challenges observed in Kuantan Singingi are widespread or context-specific. Combining qualitative insights with quantitative data, such as case statistics, could strengthen the robustness of conclusions. Future studies might also explore the role of civil society and grassroots communities, as they often play an important role in exposing irregularities and supporting legal processes. For policymakers, building stronger collaboration between prosecutors, land offices, and anti-corruption agencies would be a practical step forward. Training programs that improve both the technical and ethical capacities of prosecutors should be prioritized to ensure greater independence and professionalism. It is equally important to introduce safeguards against political interference, so that investigators can work without fear of pressure or retaliation. Implementing these suggestions would contribute to a more consistent, transparent, and trusted system of justice in land corruption cases.

CONCLUSION

The investigation of land corruption cases in the Kuantan Singingi District Prosecutor's Office shows that the existence of a strong legal framework is not sufficient when enforcement on the ground is constrained by falsified land documents, limited institutional capacity, political influence, and weak coordination among agencies. These obstacles reveal a wide gap between legal provisions and their practical application, leading to declining public confidence, discouraging investment, and reinforcing patterns of inequality. The study emphasizes that efforts to combat corruption in the land sector must go beyond the creation of new laws and instead focus on building institutional strength, aligning policies, establishing clear compliance systems, and safeguarding prosecutors from external pressures. Although this research is situated in a single district, the lessons drawn highlight broader needs for reform across Indonesia, underlining that effective action against land corruption is vital

not only for achieving justice but also for protecting citizens' rights and supporting sustainable development.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Nasrizal designed the research, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the manuscript. Zul Akrial as the first supervisor provided academic guidance, contributed to the development of the research design, and offered critical feedback during the writing process. Riadi Asra Rahmad as the second supervisor assisted in refining the theoretical framework, reviewed the manuscript carefully, and ensured the overall academic quality of the work.

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