The Challenge of Predicting the Security Situation in Indonesia: Implementation of the Noken System in Papua

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Article Info

Abstract: Elections in Papua have unique dynamics influenced by the Noken system, a traditional voting mechanism acknowledged by the Constitutional Court. While it represents local wisdom and indigenous political rights, its implementation often faces complex security challenges. This study analyzes the difficulties in predicting security situations in election areas using the Noken system, specifically in Central Papua and Highland Papua provinces. We used a qualitative, descriptive analysis method, drawing on academic literature, official documents, and media reports. Our findings reveal that the primary challenges include the potential for communal conflict, low transparency, limited access to information, and high monitoring costs due to difficult geography. These conditions result in low political efficacy among the public, both internally and externally, making security predictions difficult. We recommend strengthening supervision, increasing public involvement, improving coordination among stakeholders, and reforming Noken-related policies. These measures are crucial for creating safe, peaceful, and democratic elections in Papua.

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INTRODUCTION

Elections in Papua exhibit unique characteristics that distinguish them from other regions in Indonesia, one of which is the implementation of the Noken system. This system is a tangible manifestation of the political and legal rights of indigenous Papuans, as guaranteed by the Constitution. It has received legal legitimacy through Constitutional Court (MK) Decisions Nos. 47-81/PHPU.A-VII/2009 and 06-32/PHPU-DPD/XII/2014. Arizona, 2009)

The use of the Noken system has fluctuated over time. In the 2014 and 2019 simultaneous regional elections, 12 districts in Papua still used this system. However, by the 2020 regional elections, only Yahukimo Regency remained, as permitted by the Papua Provincial Election Commission's Decision No. 98/PL.02.6-Kpt/91/Prov/XI/2020. Nevertheless, Noken practices were found in districts outside of Yahukimo, such as Nabire and Yalimo. These practices were subsequently annulled by the Papua Provincial Election Commission and upheld by the Constitutional Court. (Nashrullah, 2024) (Faiz, 2021)

The latest developments in the implementation of the Noken system demonstrate a notable decline since the addition of four new provinces in the 2022 Papua DOB. Of the 12 districts that held the 2019 Simultaneous Elections, all are now part of the Papua Pegunungan and Papua Tengah provinces. For the 2024 elections, the Noken system will be fully implemented in seven districts spread across two provinces: Central Papua and Papua Mountains. The remaining five districts will use a mixed system combining Noken and direct voting. These changes are outlined in Election Commission Regulation No. 25 of 2023, Article 118(1), and Election Commission Decision No. 66 of 2024. (PKPU No 25, 2023).

The following districts in the Central Papua Province can conduct voting using the Noken system at all polling stations: Puncak Jaya, Puncak, Paniai, Intan Jaya, Deiyai, and Dogiyai. In the Pegunungan Papua Province, Nduga Regency is the only one that uses the Noken system at all polling stations. The other five regencies Jayawijaya, Yahukimo, Mamberamo Raya, Lanny Jaya, and Tolikara use a combination of the Noken system and ballot boxes in some districts and villages. (Keputusan KPU Nomor 66, 2024) (Nasrun, 2024).

The main challenge in predicting the security situation in Noken areas lies in their socio-cultural complexity, the influential role of customary authorities, limited infrastructure, and the potential for both horizontal and vertical conflict. As this system blends traditional values with modern democratic processes, it can create uncertainty in political behavior and security, especially when discrepancies arise between national regulations and customary practices.

Research Questions

1. What factors influence the complexity of security during elections conducted under the Noken system in Papua?
2. Why is predicting the security situation in Noken-based voting areas more difficult than in regions using direct voting?

Conflict Resolution Theory

According to the Webster Dictionary, Levine defines three meanings of "resolution": First, it is the act of unraveling a problem. Second, it is the solution to a problem. Third, resolution as the elimination or removal of a problem. Meanwhile, Weitzman and Weitzman define conflict resolution as solving a problem together. Fisher et al. explain that conflict resolution involves addressing the causes of conflict and building new, lasting relationships between conflicting groups. Mindes defines conflict resolution as the ability to resolve differences with others. It is an important aspect of social and moral development requiring the skills and judgment to negotiate, compromise, and develop a sense of justice.(Jannah et al., 2023)

Based on the theoretical explanations provided by these experts, it can be concluded that conflict resolution is a method by which individuals can voluntarily solve problems with one another. It also suggests using more democratic and constructive methods to resolve conflicts, such as giving the conflicting parties the opportunity to solve their problems themselves or involving a wise, neutral, and fair third party to help them.

From the perspective of Conflict Resolution Theory, the challenge of predicting security in Noken system areas is not solely caused by geographical and infrastructural factors, but also by their distinctive social and political structures. In Central Papua and Highland Papua, the electoral process still combines customary mechanisms (the Noken system) with modern democratic procedures. This combination creates an asymmetric understanding between formal regulations and local practices, making it more difficult to predict potential escalation. Effective resolution requires a hybrid approach preserving cultural legitimacy while ensuring transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation. Without both technical and social reforms, the risk of recurring conflicts in subsequent elections will remain high, and security predictions will continue to face inherent uncertainty. (Jannah et al., 2023)

Political Efficacy Theory

Campbell, Gurin, and Miller define political efficacy as the belief that one's political actions impact the political process and that performing civic duties is useful. Thus, political efficacy is the belief that one's political actions impact the political process and that performing one's civic duties is useful. (Fauzie, 2014) Political efficacy is part of the concept of self-

efficacy, but in this case, the specific context of behavior is the political sphere. Believing that one can influence local politics requires the ability to participate in the existing political system (internal efficacy) and the political system's response to one's input or contribution (external efficacy). The more specific the political issues individuals feel are within their competence, the more predictable their political behavior becomes.

Traditionally, political efficacy has been used to assess an individual's relative tendency to participate in political life. Political efficacy is divided into two categories: internal and external. Internal efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to impact the political process through their skills and self-confidence. External efficacy is the belief that political institutions will respond to citizens' actions in the political process or that one is effective when participating in political life. (Elis, 2016) (Morrell, 2003) Furthermore, (Morrell, 2003) explains that political efficacy is the perception, by citizens, of their ability to act in the political sphere. Thus, political efficacy is defined as citizens' perception of their ability to act in the political sphere. This differs from Ramdhani's definition, which refers to an individual's perception of their ability to influence politics in a given situation. (Arini, 2021)

From the perspective of Political Efficacy Theory, recurring electoral conflicts in Papua are caused by low levels of both internal and external political efficacy. First, internal efficacy has declined because communities feel they lack the capacity and adequate understanding to participate effectively, especially under the opaque Noken system. Second, external efficacy has sharply decreased because people perceive electoral bodies and the political system as unresponsive, biased, and often unable to ensure stability and security. To address these challenges, efforts must be made to strengthen both forms of political efficacy; First, Enhancing Transparency: Making the electoral process more open and accessible to the public, not just to traditional leaders. Second, Strengthening Oversight: Empowering election monitors and improving public access to electoral information so citizens can track the process. and third, Reforming the System: Conducting an in-depth review of the Noken system and considering reforms toward a more democratic and equitable model to ensure that every citizen's vote is valued and counted transparently. In this way, conflict resolution in Papua must focus on rebuilding citizens' trust in themselves as political participants (internal efficacy) and in the political system as a fair and responsive entity (external efficacy). (Elis, 2016), (Morrell, 2003)

Security Prediction Challenges

The existence of the Noken system in seven regions of Central Papua and Pegunungan Papua is legally recognized. However, it adds dynamics and serious challenges to predicting the security situation in the 2024 simultaneous regional elections. Elections in Central Papua and Papua Pegunungan have always been difficult and challenging to implement. This is due to the vast and rugged geographical terrain, limited accessibility, and unpredictable weather conditions. (Hidayat, 2023), The diverse society often leads to problems, even conflicts that result in the burning of residents' homes, causing injuries and deaths, as happened in Nduga Regency, Papua Pegunungan Province, during the 2024 elections. Two groups of supporters of legislative candidates clashed in Kenyam, the capital of Nduga, resulting in one death and several injuries. (Tempo.co, 2024)

Meanwhile, on election day, November 27, 2025, riots broke out in Puncak Jaya Regency, Central Papua, resulting in 40 burned-down houses and 94 people injured by arrows. Tensions had been running high since the previous day, when supporters of regency candidate Miren Kogoya allegedly seized ballots in four districts. (BBC.com, 2024a)

For the past three months, clashes have been ongoing between two camps supporting regional head candidates, resulting in 12 deaths and 658 injuries. The local elections feature two pairs of candidates: Yuni Wonda and Mus Kagoya (candidates 1) and Miren Kogoya and Mendi Wonorengga (candidates 2). The latest clash, which occurred on April 4, 2025, in Pagaleme District, resulted in 59 injuries.

The conflict escalated after the Constitutional Court (MK) ruled in favor of Yuni Wonda-Mus Kagoya's petition, which alleged systematic, organized, and massive violations, including

suspected logistical sabotage by the second pair of candidates. The MK ordered the Election Commission (KPU) to conduct a recount in 22 districts. (Tempo.co, 2025)

After months of conflict following the regional head elections, the two opposing factions finally reached a peace agreement on April 12, 2025. The local government and security authorities facilitated this peace process through a dialogue-based approach involving various parties, including the 173/PVB military commander, the Papua People's Council (MRP), the Puncak Jaya Regency Regional Leadership Forum (Forkopimda), and religious and traditional leaders. As a symbol of peace, they performed the traditional ritual of "bela doli," or "breaking the arrow." (InfoPublik.Id, 2025)

Some experts argue that direct regional election conflicts are often caused by:
• Misuse of the Noken system (Deliarnoor, 2015) (Katharina, 2017).
• Inter-clan and inter-ethnic sentiments that are difficult to avoid (Suryawan, 2011).
• A lack of outward-looking perspectives in the election process.
• Lack of trust-building among fellow citizens and lack of political education among the public (Sugandi, 2008).

Additionally, the Noken system opens up greater opportunities for money politics. Traditional leaders have complete control over their communities' votes, so the potential for transactions between candidates and leaders is enormous. (Sri Wahyu Ananingsih, 2025)

The head of the Papua Pegunungan Provincial Election Commission, Theodorus Kossay, acknowledged that the Noken system can trigger conflict. Disagreements about candidate selection at a single polling station can lead to anger and hatred, as occurred in Nduga Regency. However, the system cannot be abolished instantly because many communities in Papua Pegunungan Province and Central Papua are homogeneous and firmly uphold the role of traditional leaders. Other factors include high illiteracy rates, long distances between villages, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for improved human resources. Fredy Wamo, chairman of the Papua Mountains Province Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu), said that the noken system has caused Papua to regress in its democratic development because it fuels intercommunal hostility due to the open election process that allows for the identification of individual choices. (Lumbanrau, 2025)

Other Security Issues
Beyond the issues inherent in the Noken system, the distribution of Pilkada logistics is often constrained by geographical difficulty, low connectivity between regions (especially in the Papua Mountains), and extreme weather. Some areas can only be accessed by air. For example, during the 2018 Papua gubernatorial election, an Armed Criminal Group (KKB) shot at a Trigana Air plane carrying election supplies at Kenyam Airport in the Nduga Regency. The pilot was injured, and there were indiscriminate attacks on residents that killed three people. (Liputan6, 2018) (Kompas.com, 2018)

There were also logistics distribution problems in the simultaneous regional elections in Yalimo and Yahukimo Regencies in 2020. (Tirto.id, 2020). In Yalimo, a mob siege forced the use of the noken system, despite the fact that ballots were supposed to be used.

Conflicts often occur at other stages of the election as well.
Quiet Period: Two people died from gunshot and stab wounds during the 2017 Puncak Jaya Regency elections. The governor of Papua was also reportedly campaigning during the quiet period of the 2017 Tolikara regency elections. (Kompas.com, 2017)

Voting: A complex conflict occurred in the 2012 Tolikara District Election between supporters of the John Tabo - Edi Suyanto and Usman Wanimbo - Amos candidate pairs, causing 201 serious injuries, 11 deaths, and 122 houses and offices burned down. (Tempo.co, 2012) (Detik.com, 2012). In Puncak Jaya Regency on May 28, 2012, the voting process was marked by shootings between security forces and armed groups. (Viva.co.id, 2012). A similar conflict occurred during the re-voting of the 2017 Puncak Jaya Regency election, which left one resident dead and three security forces injured. (Liputan6.com, 2017).

In the 2018 Papua Gubernatorial Election, a shooting in Torere District, Puncak Jaya, killed three people, including police officers and the district head. (BBC.com, 2018). The

Nduga Regency experienced a new misfortune during the 2024 elections. In Kenyam, the capital of Nduga, two groups of supporters attacked each other, leaving one person dead and several others injured. (BBC.com, 2024b). Recently, on November 27, 2025, the day of the elections, there was a riot in Puncak Jaya Regency, Central Papua, which caused 40 houses to burn and injured 94 people in arrow attacks. The situation had been escalating since the previous day, when supporters of regent candidate Miren Kogoya allegedly stole ballots from four districts. (BBC.com, 2024a)

The 2024 elections and local elections in the Papua region, especially in Central Papua, have caused destructive and recurrent conflicts and clashes. The Noken system is considered a trigger for disputes because the voice of the community, as represented by the customary leader, often provokes protests from parties who feel disadvantaged. Therefore, Commission II of the House of Representatives must continue encouraging election organizers, the government, and security forces to ensure post-election security and legitimate results. When discussing the revision of the political package law, Commission II of the House of Representatives (DPR RI) must conduct a comprehensive study to develop policies for this system. (Lumbanrau, 2025)

RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to identify and analyze the challenges in predicting the security situation in noken system electoral districts. The results of this research are expected to provide insights and recommendations for relevant stakeholders in managing a safe and peaceful election process.

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis method. Data sources came from scientific journals, books, and articles relevant to the research topic. The data analysis process is carried out through identification, clarification and synthesis of information from various sources to produce a comprehensive discussion.

The data collection process includes:
- Search and selection of literature relevant to the research topic.
- Data collection from journals, websites and media.
- Data analysis to identify key issues related to challenges in predicting the security situation in electoral districts using the noken system.

RESULT AND DICUSSION

The primary challenge in predicting the security situation in Central Papua and Papua Highlands under the Noken system lies in the socio-cultural complexity, the involvement of traditional authorities, limited infrastructure, and the potential for both horizontal and vertical conflicts. This system blends traditional values with modern democratic processes, creating uncertainty in political and security behavior especially when discrepancies arise between national regulations and customary practices. Events during the 2024 General Election and 2024 Regional Elections in Central Papua and the Papua Highlands demonstrated that the Noken system is a major factor adding to the complexity and unpredictability of the security situation. (Katharina, 2017) Although legally recognized, the Noken system has repeatedly triggered destructive conflicts, ranging from clashes between rival supporters and the burning of houses to casualties and injuries. Incidents in Nduga and Puncak Jaya illustrate how disputes over election results fueled by alleged misuse of the Noken system and sabotage of election logistics can quickly escalate into mass violence.

According to Webster Dictionary's theory of conflict resolution, we can predict the security situation in electoral districts with the Noken system, such as in Central Papua and the Papua Mountains regions. First, we must identify the problems that can cause conflict in Central Papua Province and the Papua Mountains, where the Noken system is still used. Once we identify the causes, we can find resolutions to solve the problems, which will prevent them from happening again in the upcoming 2029 elections and Pilkada.

According to the description above, the causes of conflict in Noken System elections in Central Papua and the Papua Mountains can be anticipated in four ways. (Katharina, 2017)

First, the technical implementation of the Noken system is problematic. This is based on Constitutional Court decisions No. 47/81/PHPU.A/VII/2009 and No. 06-32/PHPU-DPD/XII/2014, as well as on KPU regulations No. 25 of 2023, Article 118, paragraph 1, and No. 66 of 2024, which outline technical implementation. Following the division of the Papua region into six provinces, it is hoped that the Noken system will be eliminated in the 2029 elections and beyond to promote democracy in Central Papua and the Papua Mountains. The noble value referred to in the Noken system is exploited by power-hungry candidates for personal gain. The transparency of the system, which allows anyone to find out who the chosen candidate is, has resulted in the opposing party being able to ascertain which parties oppose theirs and take countermeasures in the event of a defeat.

Second, the neutrality of election organizers is low. Some cases that show this can be seen in the case of the Intan Jaya and Puncak Jaya KPUs. KPU Intan Jaya and Puncak Jaya in determining the winner of the election did not count the votes in all districts. Even the recommendation from the Tolikara Election Supervisory Board (Panwaslu) to the Tolikara KPU to conduct re-voting was not carried out by the Tolikara KPU.

The cause of the non-neutrality of election organizers is usually due to economic factors and taking advantage of geographical conditions in mountainous areas that are difficult to monitor. The condition of long distances between districts and requires large costs is utilized by interested parties to influence members of the regional KPU in accordance with their interests. Supervision of the behavior of election organizers is difficult to monitor coupled with the geographical conditions in the Papua Mountains. One district with another district can only be reached by air.

Third, access to information is poor. Poor access to information is evidenced by the difficulty of getting cellular phone signals, which are expected to help communication in the area. In Intan Jaya District, for example, the signal is only available at the residence of the regent's official, and nowhere else. As a result, it is difficult for security forces to report on the situation in conflict-prone areas. For mountainous Papua, the implementation of the election supervisor's duties also relied heavily on the signal. This is because it is almost impossible to have witnesses at all polling stations in the Papua Mountains region. Signal support will help good communication in order to gain access to information from the local population.

Fourth, there is the issue of cost. The geography of Papua, which is difficult to reach by land, makes it expensive to deploy security personnel and supervisors to oversee the elections, especially in the Papua Mountains. Deploying officers in the Papua Mountains must be done by airplane, which can only carry 8-9 people and their equipment in one flight. This is not only a matter of money, but also concerns the effectiveness of the movement of security forces personnel to deal with security disturbances before, during and after the elections in the Papua Mountains.

According to (Amin et al., 2023), the Noken system lacks transparency in its decision-making process, which tends to be closed. Involving traditional leaders reduces transparency, causing people to doubt the results. This is included in the internal efficacy category defined by Campbell, Gurin, and Miller. When people do not believe in the results due to a lack of transparency, their internal efficacy, or the belief that their actions will produce trustworthy and relevant results, decreases. "Lack of information and open access to data can limit the ability to predict the security situation." While this also impacts internal efficacy, the system's lack of transparency directly affects citizens' beliefs that the system is accessible and understandable and will ultimately respond to them in an accountable manner. This lowers external efficacy.

Additionally, (Ali & Widjaja, 2020) state that the Noken system faces several challenges in predicting the security situation of electoral districts, such as limited supervision. The traditional and closed nature of the Noken system means that oversight of the electoral process is limited. This closed nature and limited oversight may cause the system to appear unresponsive to citizen input, thereby reducing external efficacy. If citizens feel that they cannot monitor or intervene in the process, they will believe that their participation will not be effectively addressed by the system.

Meanwhile, (Yunus, 2020) claims that the Noken system has the potential to trigger communal conflict. "Cultural differences and interests between communities in the Papua

region can trigger conflicts when implementing the Noken system. This can disrupt security, stability, and predictability in the electoral district. When the system has the potential to trigger conflict and cannot guarantee stability, citizens may lose confidence in its ability to effectively manage and respond to their needs and interests, further lowering external efficacy.

To overcome these challenges, efforts should be made to increase supervision and community involvement in the Noken system election process. The role of stakeholders, such as local governments, traditional leaders, and community organizations, must be strengthened and coordinated. The electoral process must be transparent, and the community must have access to information. The role and capacity of election observers must be strengthened to enable effective monitoring. Additionally, developing conflict handling mechanisms that involve traditional leaders and local governments is crucial. These efforts are expected to increase transparency, accountability, and stability in the implementation of the Noken system in electoral districts, especially in Central Papua and the Papua Mountains.

CONCLUSION

Although the noken system is considered a form of local democracy in Papua, it faces significant challenges in predicting the security situation in electoral districts. These challenges include limited oversight, the potential for communal conflict, and a lack of transparency. Increasing the transparency of the electoral process, the active role of the community, and close cooperation between stakeholders is necessary to maintain security and stability in electoral districts with the Noken system. The implementation of the Noken system has not fulfilled political efficacy, either internally or externally. The lack of transparency and the closed nature of the Noken system cause citizens to lose confidence in the results of the political process, resulting in low internal efficacy. At the same time, external efficacy decreased dramatically. This was due to limited oversight and a lack of open access to information, which made the system less responsive to citizen participation.Due to low political efficacy, people feel powerless and lose trust in the political process. This condition becomes a major obstacle to effective conflict resolution. When citizen participation is not valued or the system is unresponsive, conflict resolution becomes difficult to accept and implement, ultimately making it much harder to predict security stability.

The complexity of security in the implementation of elections using the Noken system in Papua is the result of the interaction between three main factors: the incompatibility between the Noken system and modern democratic principles, geographical and infrastructure challenges, and the institutional weaknesses of the election organisers. The Noken system, although legally recognised, creates uncertainty in political behaviour as it has the potential to be abused and trigger communal conflicts. Geographical and infrastructure challenges exacerbate the situation by hindering effective security monitoring and response. Meanwhile, the lack of neutrality of election administrators undermines public trust in the political system. Therefore, security predictions in the Noken region are very difficult to make. To address these challenges, a holistic approach is needed, namely by reforming the Noken system, strengthening the neutrality and transparency of electoral institutions, and using dialogue-based conflict resolution mechanisms involving traditional leaders and the government, as exemplified in the peace agreement in Puncak Jaya. These efforts are important to rebuild public trust (political efficacy) and create long-term stability.

Predicting the security situation in areas that use the Noken system is more difficult than in direct voting because of a fundamental mismatch (asymmetric understanding) between formal democratic rules and local customary practices. In direct voting, each citizen has full control over their vote, and the results are counted individually. This creates a clear and predictable path: if there is dissatisfaction, protests will focus on technical fraud in vote counting or logistical processes. Conversely, in the Noken system, predictions become complicated due to several factors: First, Unpredictable Political Sentiment: The voices of the people are represented by traditional leaders. This creates unpredictable dynamics, as dissatisfaction stems not only from the final results but also from the decision-making process by the traditional leaders themselves. If there is a dispute, the conflict will involve tribal sentiments and inter-group rivalries that are very difficult to anticipate. Second, Lack of Transparency and Oversight: The closed nature of the Noken system and limited oversight

(due to geographical conditions and inadequate infrastructure) making election data and processes impossible to verify transparently. This triggers suspicion, distrust, and dissatisfaction that can quickly turn into violence, as happened in Puncak Jaya and Nduga districts. In addition, there is a low level of political efficacy both internally and externally. For example, in terms of internal efficacy, the community feels that it does not have the ability to influence its own political process because their voices are represented by others. Similarly, in terms of external efficacy, the community also does not believe that political institutions (KPU and Bawaslu) will be responsive and neutral, especially due to frequent instances of bias and failure to ensure security.

Research Recommendations and Limitations

The challenge of predicting the security situation in Papua, especially in areas that implement the Noken system, does not only stem from geographical obstacles, but is a multidimensional issue rooted in the incompatibility between the formal political system and socio-cultural practices. Repeated destructive conflicts are a manifestation of the low political efficacy of the community and the failure of the system to provide transparent and accountable conflict resolution mechanisms. Therefore, strategic steps are needed to address these challenges. Efforts must not only be reactive (security measures after conflict), but also proactive through:

1. Reform of the Noken System: Conducting a comprehensive review of the Noken system to improve transparency, accountability, and reduce the potential for abuse.

2. Institutional Capacity Building: Strengthening the neutrality and effectiveness of election administrators and supervisors.

3. Dialogic Approach: Implementing a dialogue-based approach that involves all stakeholders, including traditional leaders, to resolve disputes and rebuild trust between communities.

By increasing the political efficacy of the community and building stronger conflict resolution mechanisms, security predictability in Papua can be improved, and a more inclusive democracy can be realised.

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