



A POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS OF THE PAPUA CONFLICT: NATURAL RESOURCE CONTROL, CUSTOMARY LAND RIGHTS, AND THE DYNAMICS OF RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS IN PAPUA

Ahmad Taufan Damanik

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

Corresponding author: taufandamanik@usu.ac.id*

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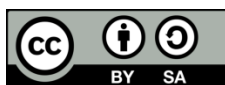
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ABSTRACT

This study examines how conflicts over natural resources and customary land shape political resistance in Papua. Using qualitative document analysis, it reviews academic publications, government documents, statistical reports, church statements, and civil society sources. The findings show that unequal resource control, land dispossession, weak implementation of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, ecological degradation, and limited Indigenous participation undermine state legitimacy and intensify resistance. However, shared grievances among the OPM, Indigenous communities, churches, and civil society do not necessarily indicate formal organizational consolidation. Sustainable conflict resolution requires recognition of customary rights, meaningful participation, distributive justice, accessible grievance mechanisms, and differentiated dialogue.

Keywords: Natural resource conflict, Customary land rights, Political resistance, Papua.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Papua's integration into Indonesia remains accompanied by unresolved historical, political, social, and economic problems. The 1962 New York Agreement transferred the administration of West New Guinea from the Netherlands to the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority before authority was handed over to Indonesia on 1

May 1963. The territory's political status was subsequently addressed through the 1969 Act of Free Choice, whose implementation remains contested among sections of the Indigenous Papuan population and pro-independence movements (Dalimunthe et al., 2025; Sarjito, 2023). These historical controversies have contributed to the formation of Papuan nationalism and the continuing political resistance represented most visibly by the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka-OPM) (Kusumo, 2025; Woodman, 2023).

The OPM, however, should not be understood as a single and homogeneous organization. It comprises diverse political and armed factions with different territorial bases, leadership structures, strategies, and relationships with local communities. Moreover, political resistance in Papua is not limited to groups explicitly demanding independence. Indigenous communities, customary institutions, churches, student organizations, human rights groups, and environmental organizations have also challenged state policies without necessarily identifying themselves with the OPM or supporting separatism (Kholil et al., 2024; Sarjito, 2023). Consequently, resistance in Papua must be examined as a spectrum ranging from customary protests and civil society advocacy to separatist mobilization and armed confrontation.

During the New Order period, the Indonesian government predominantly responded to political and armed resistance through security-oriented approaches. The treatment of political grievances as security threats expanded the role of military and police institutions while limiting Indigenous Papuan participation in defining the causes and possible resolution of the conflict. Studies show that the securitization of the Papua conflict has not eliminated resistance. Instead, it has contributed to political exclusion, distrust of state institutions, civilian insecurity, and the reproduction of armed violence in several regions (Humaizi et al., 2024; Koren & Bukari, 2026). The persistence of resistance therefore indicates that the conflict cannot be explained solely as a security problem or as an ideological struggle for independence.

One of the structural issues underlying political resistance is the unequal management of natural resources and agrarian territories. Papua possesses extensive mineral deposits, forests, biodiversity, and agricultural land, but natural resource extraction has not consistently produced proportional improvements in the welfare of Indigenous Papuans. Economic transformation and large-scale investment have

instead generated unequal access to employment, markets, land, political influence, and public services between Indigenous Papuans and migrant communities (Nerenberg, 2022; Suhendar et al., 2023). These inequalities have reinforced perceptions that Papua's natural resources are primarily managed to serve corporations, political elites, and national development interests rather than the long-term welfare of customary landowners.

Customary land is particularly important because it cannot be reduced to an economic commodity. For Indigenous Papuan communities, land is closely connected to ancestral history, collective identity, customary authority, spirituality, food systems, and intergenerational survival. The loss of customary territory may therefore be interpreted not only as economic deprivation but also as a threat to cultural continuity and collective existence. This relationship explains why land acquisition without meaningful community participation can generate resistance extending beyond demands for compensation or administrative recognition (De Maria et al., 2023; Suhendar et al., 2024).

The expansion of mining, logging, plantation, infrastructure, and large-scale agricultural projects has frequently affected customary territories. In several cases, business permits and land concessions have been issued before Indigenous communities received sufficient information or provided meaningful consent. Such practices conflict with the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), which recognizes Indigenous peoples' right to participate in and provide or withhold consent for activities affecting their lands, territories, and resources (Sawathvong & Hyakumura, 2024). In the Indonesian context, the principle is also known as Persetujuan Atas Dasar Informasi di Awal Tanpa Paksaan (PADIATAPA). The weak implementation of FPIC has contributed to land disputes, internal community fragmentation, the weakening of customary authority, and conflict between Indigenous communities, corporations, and the state.

The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) illustrates how a development project may transform customary land into an investment frontier. The project was promoted as a means of strengthening national food and energy security, but it involved the allocation of extensive customary territories for corporate agricultural development. Research on MIFEE has shown that government and corporate actors used development, food security, and underutilized-land narratives to

make large-scale land acquisition politically acceptable, even though the project generated dispossession and ecological risks for the Marind Anim people. Moreover, participatory mapping and formal recognition of customary land did not always provide effective protection. In certain cases, mapping clarified land ownership in ways that facilitated corporate negotiations, land transfers, and new conflicts within Indigenous communities (Dalimunthe et al., 2024; Kurniawati et al., 2025).

The continuation and reformulation of food-estate policies in Merauke demonstrate that these conflicts have not been resolved. Environmental assessments have warned that large-scale forest conversion may generate significant carbon emissions, biodiversity loss, and disruption of Indigenous livelihoods. The Center of Economic and Law Studies estimated that forest clearing associated with the Merauke Food Estate could release hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide while producing substantial ecological and economic losses (Saragih et al., 2025). These risks have generated objections from Indigenous communities, customary leaders, churches, and environmental organizations. When such objections are disregarded, development projects may reinforce the perception that customary rights and Indigenous participation remain subordinate to national investment and food-security agendas.

Demographic change has further intensified perceptions of marginalization. Migration to Papua increased through state-sponsored transmigration and spontaneous economic migration, particularly following the expansion of government administration, urban economies, plantations, mining, and infrastructure. Previous research has shown that migration and economic transformation have contributed to competition over land, employment, trade, political representation, and access to public resources (Bhanye, 2024; Rambe et al., 2023). Nevertheless, demographic change is geographically uneven. Migrant populations are more concentrated in urban and coastal areas, whereas Indigenous Papuans remain dominant in many highland areas (Kadir, 2023). Thus, the political effects of migration should not be explained merely through aggregate population ratios but through the unequal distribution of economic and institutional power.

These developments demonstrate that conflicts over natural resources and customary land have political consequences. Repeated experiences of dispossession, environmental degradation, exclusion from decision-making, demographic anxiety,

and coercive state responses may transform localized agrarian grievances into broader questions about state legitimacy. However, opposition to land appropriation does not automatically constitute support for Papuan independence. Churches, customary communities, human rights organizations, and environmental groups may oppose the same policies criticized by the OPM while maintaining different political objectives and methods. Analytical caution is therefore required to distinguish separatist resistance, customary resistance, environmental advocacy, human rights activism, and community-based protest.

Previous studies have made important contributions to understanding Papua's historical integration, Papuan nationalism, migration, security policies, human rights violations, and agrarian transformation. Examined the historical and cultural foundations of Papuan nationalism, while analyzed the relationship between migration, economic change, and ethnic conflict. Identified history, political status, state violence, development failure, and Indigenous marginalization as central dimensions of the Papua conflict. More recent studies have focused on the securitization of political resistance, the policy discourse legitimizing and the limitations of customary land mapping in protecting Indigenous communities.

Despite these contributions, previous research has several limitations. First, studies of separatism and security generally emphasize the OPM, armed violence, and state responses without systematically examining how natural resource and customary land conflicts become sources of political resistance. Second, agrarian and environmental studies tend to analyze land grabbing, ecological damage, corporate practices, or FPIC implementation without adequately connecting these issues to perceptions of state legitimacy and separatist political narratives. Third, previous studies have not sufficiently differentiated between formal political consolidation and the mere convergence of grievances among the OPM, Indigenous communities, churches, and other civil society organizations. Similar criticism of development policies does not necessarily demonstrate organizational cooperation, ideological unity, or support for independence.

This study addresses these limitations by examining the mechanisms through which natural resource and customary land conflicts are transformed into political resistance toward the Indonesian state. Rather than assuming that agrarian protests automatically become separatist movements, the study distinguishes among localized

customary resistance, civil society mobilization, political convergence, and formal organizational consolidation. This distinction enables the analysis to determine whether the OPM and non-OPM actors possess shared organizational structures and political strategies or whether they merely express overlapping grievances concerning land dispossession, ecological destruction, Indigenous marginalization, and state coercion.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on political resistance by connecting resistance with agrarian conflict, Indigenous rights, FPIC, and state legitimacy. It argues that political resistance in Papua cannot be explained exclusively by separatist ideology or historical disputes over integration. Resistance may also be produced through everyday experiences of unequal development, land dispossession, environmental degradation, cultural insecurity, and exclusion from resource governance. Empirically, the study provides a differentiated analysis of the actors, narratives, and forms of resistance emerging from natural resource conflicts. It also identifies the political and cultural conditions that either intensify resistance or create opportunities for dialogue and conflict resolution.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do conflicts over natural resources and customary lands transform localized agrarian grievances into political resistance toward the Indonesian state in Papua?
- 2) What forms of convergence can be identified between the grievances and political narratives of the OPM and those of Indigenous communities, churches, customary institutions, and other civil society organizations opposing natural resource exploitation?
- 3) What political and cultural factors intensify resistance arising from natural resource conflicts, and what conditions may support the peaceful resolution of such conflicts in Papua?

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employed a qualitative approach using document analysis to examine the relationship between natural resource conflicts, customary land disputes, and

political resistance in Papua. The study was designed as desk-based research; therefore, it did not involve direct fieldwork, interviews, or participant observation. Papua was treated as the geographical context of the study, with particular attention to conflict-affected areas associated with mining, forestry, large-scale plantations, and food-estate development.

The research examined documents relating to the Papua conflict from the period following Papua's integration into Indonesia to recent developments in natural resource and agrarian governance. The data consisted of academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government regulations, United Nations documents, population statistics, environmental reports, church statements, civil society reports, and publications issued by human rights and environmental organizations. Documents concerning the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, the Food Estate program, customary land disputes, demographic change, security policies, and Indigenous Papuan resistance were given particular attention.

Documents were selected purposively based on four criteria: direct relevance to the research questions, institutional or academic credibility, discussion of natural resources or customary land in Papua, and provision of information about political resistance or conflict resolution. Materials that did not clearly identify their sources, contained unverifiable claims, or were unrelated to the relationship between agrarian conflict and political resistance were excluded. Data collection was stopped when additional documents no longer generated substantially new categories or explanations relevant to the research questions.

Data analysis was conducted through qualitative coding and thematic analysis. First, the researchers read the selected documents repeatedly to identify statements concerning customary land dispossession, unequal resource distribution, environmental degradation, Indigenous marginalization, demographic change, state security responses, political resistance, and conflict resolution. Second, similar codes were grouped into broader categories. Third, the categories were organized into four principal themes: the transformation of agrarian grievances into political resistance, the convergence and divergence of resistance narratives, political-cultural factors strengthening resistance, and conditions supporting peaceful conflict resolution.

The coding process was conducted manually using a data matrix that recorded the document source, year of publication, principal argument, type of conflict, actors involved, and relevance to the research questions. The interpretation of the data was guided by political economy perspectives, particularly the concepts of resource control, unequal distribution, relative deprivation, horizontal inequality, and state legitimacy. The researchers also compared competing interpretations and retained evidence that contradicted the dominant analytical patterns to prevent one-sided conclusions.

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through source and theoretical triangulation. Academic studies were compared with government documents, statistical data, church statements, and reports from civil society and environmental organizations. Claims presented by advocacy organizations were not accepted independently but were compared with other available sources. The analysis also used different theoretical perspectives to determine whether political resistance was more closely associated with resource competition, distributive inequality, cultural dispossession, political exclusion, or a combination of these factors.

Because this study relied exclusively on publicly accessible documents and did not involve human participants, informed consent and the protection of informant identities were not applicable. Nevertheless, research ethics were maintained by accurately representing the arguments of each source, distinguishing factual information from interpretation, avoiding unsupported allegations against individuals or organizations, and providing appropriate citations. The researchers also applied reflexivity by recognizing that the Papua conflict involves competing historical and political narratives. For this reason, the analysis avoided automatically categorizing Indigenous, church, environmental, and human rights advocacy as separatist resistance unless such a connection was explicitly supported by the analyzed evidence.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of academic publications, government documents, statistical reports, church statements, and reports from civil society and

environmental organizations produced six principal findings. These findings concern: (1) patterns of resource control and the appropriation of customary rights; (2) the limited implementation of consultation and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC); (3) ecological and socioeconomic inequalities; (4) the transformation of localized grievances into political resistance; (5) differences and convergences among resistance actors; and (6) the conditions required for dialogue and conflict resolution.

Integrated Analytical Framework

This study primarily uses Johan Galtung's concepts of direct, structural, and cultural violence to analyze the relationship between natural resource governance and political resistance in Papua (Yanuardi et al., 2022). Structural violence is treated as the principal analytical concept because conflicts over natural resources originate from institutional arrangements that determine who controls land, who receives economic benefits, whose political participation is recognized, and whose rights can be restricted. Direct and cultural violence are subsequently analyzed as mechanisms that reinforce these structural inequalities.

The indicators of structural violence include unequal access to natural resource benefits, the appropriation of customary land, limited Indigenous participation in policymaking, weak recognition of customary ownership, economic marginalization, and unequal access to political institutions. Direct violence includes physical attacks, armed confrontation, forced eviction, intimidation, security operations, and the criminalization of community members. Cultural violence includes narratives that describe customary territories as empty or unproductive land, portray large-scale investment as the only legitimate form of development, or automatically categorize opposition to development projects as separatism.

The analytical relationship among these concepts can be formulated as follows: unequal resource control and political exclusion create structural violence; structural violence produces horizontal inequality and relative deprivation; unresolved grievances weaken state legitimacy and encourage political resistance; and cultural and direct violence reinforce the cycle of conflict. Resource curse theory and political ecology are used to explain the political-economic origins of unequal resource

governance, while relative deprivation and horizontal inequality explain the transformation of inequality into collective grievances.

Patterns of Resource Control and the Appropriation of Customary Rights

The documentary analysis demonstrates that the central problem in Papua is not the scarcity of natural resources but the unequal institutional control over those resources. Large-scale mining, forestry, plantation, and food-estate projects have strengthened the role of government institutions and corporations in determining the allocation and utilization of land. Indigenous communities, by contrast, frequently possess limited authority in licensing, concession allocation, environmental assessment, and benefit-distribution processes.

The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate provides an important example. The project was promoted through the national discourse of food security, economic growth, and the utilization of supposedly underdeveloped land. However, the land allocated for the project was not empty space. It formed part of the customary territories, subsistence systems, cultural identity, and ecological environment of the Marind and other Indigenous communities in Merauke. The transformation of customary territory into a large-scale agricultural investment area consequently changed the political and economic control of land from customary communities to state-supported corporations (Teshome, 2026).

Participatory mapping and the formal documentation of customary boundaries have not always prevented dispossession. Documentary evidence from Merauke indicates that mapping may strengthen customary recognition, but it can also clarify land boundaries in ways that facilitate negotiations between corporations and selected customary representatives. When negotiations do not include all rights holders or when customary authorities possess unequal bargaining power, mapping may contribute to internal community conflict and the transfer of land rather than its protection (Ritonga et al., 2023).

Similar patterns are evident in mining and plantation areas. Natural resource projects produce considerable economic value, but customary landowners do not always possess an equal position in determining land use, compensation,

employment, revenue distribution, or ecological restoration. This finding supports political ecology theory, which explains that natural resource conflicts concern not merely access to commodities but also the power to determine the meaning, ownership, and future use of particular territories.

The findings also partially support resource curse theory. Papua's resource wealth has not automatically improved the socioeconomic position of Indigenous Papuans. The principal problem is not resource abundance itself but the interaction between resource dependence, unequal revenue distribution, weak accountability, and limited community participation (INDEF & Greenpeace Indonesia, 2022; Ross, 1999, 2012). In Papua, the resource curse therefore operates primarily through institutional and distributive mechanisms rather than through resource abundance alone.

Indigenous Experiences of Consultation and FPIC

The analysis identifies weak community participation as a recurring problem in natural resource governance. In several development projects, consultation has been conducted after important policy, licensing, or investment decisions have already been made. Under such conditions, consultation functions primarily as the communication of decisions rather than as a process through which Indigenous communities can influence, modify, approve, or reject a proposed project.

This practice does not meet the substantive requirements of FPIC. The principle requires consent to be obtained before a project is approved, without intimidation or manipulation, and based on complete information concerning its social, cultural, economic, and ecological consequences (Malik, 2026). Consent cannot be reduced to the signatures of a small number of customary representatives when the project affects a wider community or several customary groups.

The documentary findings indicate three principal weaknesses in the implementation of FPIC. First, communities do not always receive complete information regarding concession size, project duration, environmental risks, compensation, or long-term changes in landownership. Second, negotiations may involve only individuals regarded by the government or company as community

representatives, although their authority may be disputed by other customary rights holders. Third, communities possess limited opportunities to withhold consent when a project has already been designated as a government priority.

The absence of meaningful consent creates both material and political consequences. Materially, communities may lose forests, hunting areas, agricultural land, water sources, and other livelihood resources. Politically, the absence of consent communicates that customary authority is subordinate to state licensing and corporate investment. Consequently, the conflict is no longer perceived solely as a disagreement concerning compensation. It becomes a conflict over recognition, authority, and the legitimacy of the state's development policies.

Ecological and Socioeconomic Impacts

The documents analyzed consistently associate large-scale resource projects with deforestation, ecosystem transformation, reduced access to customary forests, and changes in Indigenous livelihood systems. These effects are particularly significant because many Indigenous communities depend directly on forests, rivers, sago areas, hunting grounds, and customary agricultural land. Environmental degradation therefore creates simultaneous ecological, economic, cultural, and social losses.

The socioeconomic effects are also distributed unequally. Investment may create infrastructure, employment, and regional revenue, but the principal benefits are not necessarily received by the communities bearing the environmental and social costs. Indigenous Papuans may encounter barriers related to education, professional qualifications, market access, capital ownership, administrative requirements, and discrimination. Consequently, migrants and external economic actors may benefit more rapidly from the economic opportunities created by development projects.

Demographic change strengthens these perceptions of inequality. Migrants have become increasingly influential in trade, services, formal employment, and political-economic networks, particularly in coastal and urban regions. However, this pattern is not uniform throughout Papua because Indigenous Papuans remain demographically dominant in many highland areas (Tekege & Rahanra, 2022). The political consequences of migration must therefore be understood through the

distribution of economic and institutional power rather than solely through aggregate population percentages.

These findings demonstrate a specific form of horizontal inequality. The relevant inequality is not simply the income gap between individuals. It concerns systematic differences between Indigenous Papuans and migrant or external groups in access to land, employment, education, markets, political representation, public services, and social status (Stewart, 2008). The collective nature of this inequality allows economic dissatisfaction to be interpreted through Indigenous identity and shared historical experiences. The findings also expand Gurr's concept of relative deprivation. In Papua, deprivation is not limited to the difference between expected and actual economic benefits. It also includes the perceived loss of customary authority, cultural recognition, territorial control, political dignity, and the ability to determine the future of ancestral lands. Relative deprivation consequently possesses both material and recognition-based dimensions.

From Local Grievances to Political Resistance

The documentary analysis identifies a gradual process through which localized resource conflicts may develop into broader political resistance. This process generally begins with disputes over land acquisition, compensation, environmental damage, employment, or the distribution of project benefits. Communities initially respond through customary deliberation, petitions, negotiations, public statements, legal claims, church mediation, or peaceful protest.

Political escalation occurs when these mechanisms fail to produce recognition or meaningful policy change. When community claims are repeatedly ignored, the conflict may be interpreted as evidence that state institutions do not protect Indigenous rights. The object of opposition then shifts from a particular corporation or development project toward the wider structure of government policy and state authority. Security-based responses may accelerate this transformation. When peaceful protests, customary claims, or environmental advocacy are categorized as security threats, community grievances can become connected to broader experiences of political exclusion and historical injustice. The repeated use of coercive measures may strengthen the perception that the state protects investment and

territorial control more strongly than Indigenous citizens. This process is consistent with previous findings that marginalization, development failure, state violence, and historical disputes mutually reinforce one another in Papua (Tekege & Rahanra, 2022).

However, the analysis does not indicate that every natural resource conflict inevitably develops into separatism or armed resistance. Three levels of resistance can be differentiated. The first is issue-specific resistance, which focuses on compensation, environmental protection, customary recognition, or the cancellation of a particular permit. The second is broader non-armed political resistance, which connects local conflicts with demands for Indigenous rights, policy reform, political participation, or self-determination. The third is armed resistance, which seeks political objectives through organized violence. Movement from one level to another is not automatic. It is influenced by the duration of the conflict, the availability of peaceful grievance mechanisms, the behavior of government and security institutions, the involvement of political actors, and local interpretations of historical injustice. Agrarian conflict therefore creates political opportunities for resistance, but it does not by itself determine the organizational form or ultimate political objective of that resistance.

Differentiating Resistance Actors and Forms of Convergence

The findings demonstrate that actors opposing natural resource projects possess different identities, objectives, methods, and relationships with the Indonesian state. Indigenous communities generally focus on customary landownership, livelihood protection, compensation, cultural survival, and meaningful participation. Environmental organizations emphasize deforestation, biodiversity loss, pollution, carbon emissions, and the sustainability of ecosystems. Human rights organizations focus on violence, criminalization, freedom of expression, and civilian protection.

Church institutions occupy a distinct position. Their activities generally involve moral advocacy, humanitarian protection, documentation of community grievances, mediation, and the promotion of peaceful dialogue. Churches may criticize government policies and security practices without adopting the organizational

objectives or strategies of pro-independence movements. Their political relevance originates from social legitimacy and proximity to Indigenous communities rather than from formal participation in armed or separatist organizations.

Civil society protests similarly cannot be automatically categorized as separatist activities. Civil society organizations may demand the enforcement of national law, constitutional rights, environmental standards, or international Indigenous rights principles while continuing to operate within non-violent advocacy frameworks. Non-armed pro-independence movements differ because they explicitly connect human rights, natural resources, and historical grievances with demands for self-determination or independence.

The OPM and its armed factions differ further because their principal political objective concerns Papua's separation from Indonesia, and some factions employ armed violence. Although these groups may use natural resource exploitation and customary land dispossession as evidence supporting their political narratives, this does not demonstrate that Indigenous communities, churches, or environmental organizations are organizationally affiliated with them. The analysis identifies convergence at the level of grievances and discourse rather than clear evidence of formal political consolidation. Different actors may share concerns about customary land loss, environmental degradation, Indigenous marginalization, human rights violations, and the limited effectiveness of Special Autonomy. These shared issues create discursive convergence and may result in parallel statements, overlapping advocacy agendas, or participation in the same public forums.

However, the analyzed documents do not provide sufficient evidence of a unified organizational structure, joint leadership, coordinated mobilization, or common strategy connecting the OPM, churches, customary institutions, environmental organizations, and civil society groups. Shared criticism should therefore not be interpreted as proof of organizational consolidation. The principal finding is the existence of overlapping grievances combined with substantial differences in political objectives and methods.

Mapping the Findings through Galtung's Violence Triangle

The findings can be systematically mapped into Galtung's three forms of violence. Direct violence is reflected in armed attacks, security operations, physical intimidation, forced eviction, attacks on civilians, and confrontations involving armed groups and state security forces. These acts constitute the most visible dimension of the Papua conflict because their consequences can be observed immediately. Structural violence is reflected in unequal control over land and natural resources, weak Indigenous participation, inequitable distribution of resource benefits, limited access to public services, employment inequality, and institutional arrangements that prioritize state or corporate claims over customary rights. This form of violence may not involve an identifiable individual perpetrator, but it systematically reduces the ability of Indigenous communities to maintain their livelihoods, exercise political authority, and determine the use of their territories.

Cultural violence is reflected in narratives and classifications that legitimize structural and direct violence. The representation of customary land as empty, idle, or economically unproductive can justify its transfer to corporations. The assumption that large-scale investment necessarily represents progress may delegitimize Indigenous livelihood systems. Similarly, the indiscriminate use of the term "separatist" may justify restrictions on peaceful protest, environmental advocacy, or customary claims. The relationship among the three forms of violence is cumulative. Cultural narratives legitimize unequal policies; unequal policies create structural violence; structural grievances produce resistance; and resistance may be answered through direct violence. Direct violence then reinforces collective memories of repression and distrust, allowing the conflict cycle to continue. The Papua case therefore supports Galtung's argument that visible violence cannot be resolved sustainably without transforming the structural and cultural conditions that reproduce it (Hutapea & Evan, 2025).

Opportunities for Dialogue and Conflict Resolution

Several political and cultural factors intensify resistance. These include the strong relationship between Indigenous identity and ancestral land, collective memories of state violence, contested interpretations of Papua's political history, demographic anxiety, distrust of government institutions, and the securitization of community protest. Resistance becomes stronger when economic exclusion is interpreted as part of a wider threat to Indigenous cultural and political existence.

Conversely, the findings identify several conditions that may support conflict resolution. The first is the effective recognition of customary land rights through procedures that are accepted by the affected communities. The second is the implementation of substantive FPIC before licenses or project decisions are finalized. The third is transparent benefit distribution, including community participation in determining compensation, employment, revenue sharing, and ecological restoration.

The fourth condition is the establishment of independent and accessible grievance mechanisms. Communities must be able to challenge permits, environmental assessments, compensation decisions, and security abuses without fear of criminalization. The fifth is the protection of civic space so that churches, customary institutions, human rights organizations, environmental groups, and Indigenous communities can communicate their concerns without automatically being associated with armed movements.

Dialogue must also differentiate among actors. Customary land disputes require negotiations with recognized customary rights holders. Environmental conflicts require scientific assessment and ecological restoration. Human rights violations require investigation and accountability. Political disputes concerning autonomy, historical status, or self-determination require a broader political dialogue. Combining all these issues under a single security category obscures their different causes and prevents appropriate resolution mechanisms.

Churches and trusted customary institutions may function as intermediaries because they possess social legitimacy and sustained relationships with affected communities. However, dialogue will not create positive peace when it is limited to ending direct violence. Following Galtung, positive peace requires the transformation

of the structural inequalities and legitimizing narratives that sustain conflict. Conflict resolution must therefore include institutional reform, recognition, distributive justice, cultural protection, and political participation.

Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

The findings support resource curse theory only conditionally. Resource abundance does not independently produce conflict. Conflict emerges when resource wealth is governed through weak accountability, unequal distribution, territorial exclusion, and limited political participation. The Papua case therefore demonstrates an institutional and territorial form of the resource curse rather than a simple causal relationship between resource abundance and violence.

The findings expand relative deprivation theory by showing that deprivation includes not only economic expectations but also customary recognition, cultural continuity, political dignity, and territorial authority. They also demonstrate a multidimensional form of horizontal inequality involving economic, political, social, cultural, and status differences between Indigenous Papuans and more powerful external actors.

The documentary evidence provides less support for an exclusively greed-based interpretation of conflict. Although natural resources may create economic opportunities for state, corporate, political, or armed actors, the available evidence more clearly demonstrates the importance of grievance arising from dispossession, exclusion, inequality, and coercion. The greed-and-grievance thesis should therefore be modified by recognizing that economic interests and political grievances may coexist but cannot be assumed to operate equally among all actors (Besenyő, 2024).

The Papua case also contributes to Galtung's theory by illustrating how structural violence mediates the relationship between resource governance and political resistance. Direct violence is not the initial cause of the conflict but one stage in a longer process involving land dispossession, unequal development, cultural delegitimization, failed grievance mechanisms, and political exclusion. Cultural violence plays a particularly important role because development and security narratives may normalize both structural inequality and coercive responses.

The distinctive contribution of the Papua context lies in the intersection of natural resource conflict with contested political integration, Indigenous territorial identity, demographic transformation, and security-based governance. In this setting, land is simultaneously an economic resource, a customary territory, a source of cultural identity, and a symbol of political sovereignty. Consequently, conflicts over natural resources can rapidly acquire wider political meanings even when the initial demands concern local rights, environmental protection, or compensation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that conflicts over natural resources and customary lands strengthen political resistance in Papua when land dispossession, ecological degradation, unequal benefit distribution, and limited Indigenous participation remain unresolved. Local agrarian grievances may develop into broader criticism of state legitimacy, although such conflicts do not automatically lead to separatism or armed resistance.

The findings also show that the OPM, Indigenous communities, churches, customary institutions, and civil society organizations share several concerns, particularly regarding customary land rights, environmental destruction, marginalization, and state violence. However, this convergence occurs mainly at the level of grievances and discourse. The available documents do not demonstrate formal political consolidation, unified leadership, or coordinated organizational strategies among these actors.

Political resistance is intensified by the close relationship between land and Indigenous identity, collective memories of violence, horizontal inequality, political exclusion, and distrust of state institutions. Conflict resolution is therefore more likely when customary rights are recognized, FPIC is meaningfully implemented, grievance mechanisms are accessible, and peaceful civil society advocacy is clearly distinguished from armed political activity.

Theoretically, the study shows that the Papua conflict reflects an institutional and territorial form of the resource curse, in which resource abundance becomes conflictual through unequal control, weak accountability, and Indigenous exclusion. It also extends the concepts of relative deprivation and horizontal inequality by including

the loss of customary authority, cultural recognition, and territorial control. Through Galtung's framework, the findings demonstrate that structural, cultural, and direct violence reinforce one another in producing political resistance.

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly available documents and secondary data without direct interviews or field observation. Future research should therefore include field-based evidence from different Papuan regions and actor groups. Based on the findings, the government should strengthen customary land protection, implement FPIC before project approval, establish independent grievance mechanisms, and adopt differentiated approaches toward Indigenous advocacy, civil society protest, non-armed political resistance, and armed groups.

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