

TOTALIZING SOVEREIGNTY: SECURITIZATION AND THE PARADOX OF STRONG STATE POWER IN PAPUA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the paradox of Indonesia's approach to Papua. Decades of securitization and large-scale, state-led development—intended to ensure stability and integration—have instead deepened the conflict and created conditions of fragility they sought to eliminate. This argument is rooted in Indonesia's use of political securitization to defend its territorial integrity, which has further heightened internal conflict and created new societal uncertainty. By synthesizing the logics of sovereignty, securitization theory, and strong-state theory, this paper introduces “totalization logic” to describe Jakarta’s approach, which limits space and imposes a top-down approach, despite the formal existence of autonomy mechanisms. Instead of being utilized as intended, this special autonomy law has been instrumentalized to centralize Indonesian policy and marginalize grassroots voices. Using qualitative methods, this study shows that the failed decentralization and Jakarta's central intervention have led to counterproductive outcomes and even produced international spillover effects, scrutinized by Melanesian regional bodies and United Nations human rights mechanisms and thus elevating what Jakarta treats as a domestic threat into international concern. The paper’s findings contribute to IR scholarship by showcasing securitization theory beyond the interstate realm, demonstrating how domestic political securitization logic generates insecurity rather than resolving it. The author also aims to show scholars and policymakers the limits of strong-state approaches to secessionist conflicts across Indonesia’s easternmost province and its relations to the transnational bond within the Melanesian region.

Keywords: Indonesia, Papua, sovereignty, conflict, violence, securitization

1. Introduction

Papua has long stood in the Indonesian embrace. The most eastern provinces have a strong internal dynamics and volatility due to the course of history. After going through decades of conflict for integration efforts, Papua remains unstable. To overcome this, Jakarta has invoked the Special Autonomy

Law (*Undang-Undang Otonomi Khusus*) as a pretext for decentralization.

In 2021, the revision of the Special Autonomy Law (Article 76) undermined the empowerment of the local institutions, especially the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Papua (DPRP) and Majelis Rakyat Papua (MRP), which are key special autonomy

institutions in Papua. The former represents the handling of budgeting and drafting laws, while the latter acts as a cultural representative to protect and uphold the rights of Indigenous Papuans (OAP). Even more, multiple state-funded infrastructure projects, such as the 4,330 km long trans-Papua roads, revitalizations of harbours and airports, and electrical infrastructure, such as power plants, substations, and high-voltage transmission lines, are part of the development agenda that is sought to accelerate growth and foster the well-being of the locals. This is also included in Indonesia's foreign policy priority, to ensure "The Integrity of the Sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia and Indonesia's Positive Image in the International Community" (Marsudi, 2020).

The Indonesian government also aims to supersede the internationalization of the Papua issue and halt the secessionist movement of the Free Papua Organization (OPM). Situated in the South Pacific, the West Papuan conflict drew significant attention from neighbouring countries, as well as multilateral organizations representing Melanesian countries and Pacific Islands States. In an international forum such as the United Nations General Assembly, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga, etc., often portray Indonesia as a colonizer.

During one session at the 2016 UNGA, Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Charlot Salwai, claimed that Papua is in the "yoke of colonialism", calling for the right to self-determination. Similarly, Solomon Islands' Prime Minister Manaseh Sogavare said, "we as a family of nations will become complicit in perpetuating the sufferings and

becoming blind to the injustices." Fiji, alongside these two nations, granted the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) observer status in the Melanesian Spearhead Group in 2015. In November 2022, during Indonesia's 4th UPR Cycle (41st Session), Vanuatu, Australia, the United States of America, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Canada, the Marshall Islands and Slovenia called out Indonesia for the ongoing human rights situation in West Papua. These countries also made recommendations on the situation in the region. Vanuatu and the Marshall Islands strongly pushed Indonesia to grant the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights access to investigate abuses. The rest requested transparent legal accountability and conduct investigations into the extrajudicial killing of West Papuans and called on Indonesia to uphold civil liberties (The Guardian, 2017; Lowy Institute, 2020; Tapol, 2022)

Specifically, the intense use of military apparatchiks and the presence of marginalization threaten the existence of indigenous communities' rights over their livelihood and land. Although the Special Autonomy Law and the Strategic National Projects (PSN) are formally seen as instruments recognising the rights of indigenous Papuans, in practice, they have been instrumentalized to centralize Jakarta's power. These approaches are taken to project stability to the international community. By treating Papua as a domestic security issue, Jakarta is evading international intervention, transnational human rights advocacy, and solidarity movements from other neighbouring countries.

However, the existence and expansion of state projects across the

easternmost islands correspond to the top-down approach. This very condition is what the author marks as a ‘paradox of strong state power’. By paradox, the author means that intense projection and top-down development have inevitably produced fragility, such as failure to ensure livelihood and public service. Multiple customary forests and lands were cleared. One study by Global Forest Watch concluded that tree cover in natural forests loss in Papua accounted for 89%. Moreover, extrajudicial killings and various other tragedies involving the killing of civilians by security forces. Of the 12 past gross human rights violations, two occurred in Papua.

In 2024 alone, the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) released a report stating that 113 human rights incidents occurred in Papua throughout 2024. Of these, 85 involved armed conflict. That in mind, the author claims that Jakarta’s approach precludes any substantial legal mechanism. However, the law itself has undergone significant changes that undermine the element of self-governance, which overlooks accommodative and dialogic measures. The author argues that behind this approach lies the totalizing logic because sovereignty is viewed as final.

This article primarily aims to showcase a profound paradox: the more Indonesia tightens its grip on Papua in the name of sovereignty and to prevent internationalization, the more fragile its control becomes. Drawing from the strong-state theory that predicts the state's ability to intervene in some issues and the securitization theory, which treats sovereignty as an end. Yet in Papua, the application of both simultaneously produces new uncertainty and even human

rights violations—the opposite of what either framework would anticipate.

I also examine Indonesia’s failure to address the existing problems due to the usage of political securitization. As a result, Jakarta fails to address the structural problems due to the securitization through state apparatuses and development pushed by hawkish narratives that only strengthen the one-sidedness of Jakarta’s policy. This article explains why Indonesia, despite being a strong state, has failed to address the ongoing issues in Papua effectively and instead contributed to greater fragility.

To build this argument, the article is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the historical trajectory that fueled Papua’s conflicts over time. The second section provides a clear definition of securitization—stemming from a notion of sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI)—even to the extent of *harga mati*, in the context of Papua separatism and its relations to Jakarta’s interest. Finally, the third section offers an extensive explanation of why these two approaches lead to an escalation of large-scale violence, which contradicts the stated objectives of Jakarta’s separatist policy.

2. Literature Review

The West Papua problem has generated a vast number of scholarships. Multiple issues have also been discussed to explain the occurrences. Much of the scholarship centers on three substantive topics: (1) historicity of West Papua nationalism, (2) the battle of images and narratives and (3) the problem of autonomy. The first, and most established theme, argues that the conflict between the Free Papua Movement (OPM) and Indonesia was rooted in the

ethno-nationalism element, which clashes with Jakarta's actions. Scholars drew their analysis from the unilateral processes that surrounded Papua before and after Indonesia decided to acquire the island from the Netherlands, such as the New York Agreement of 1962 and *Penentuan Pendapat Rakyat* (Act of Free Choice). Aside from the odd element, the leadership precedents mostly failed to address the grievances of West Papuans. This led to a growing dissatisfaction among West Papuans and created armed resistance against Jakarta, united by awareness and giving rise to ethno-nationalism. Alongside political dissatisfaction, racism is also highlighted as the main factor triggering tension between Jakarta and West Papua. For the Papuans, Jakarta only continues to play demographic politics that increasingly sharpens the narrative of 'settler colonialism' and the distinction between *us* and *them* (Druce, 2020; Chauval, 2021; Trajano, 2010).

The second body of literature argues that the conflict's evolution stems from Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs), presenting different narratives that are related to the delivery of images and undermining each other's credibility. Scholars who discuss this perspective argue that the role of the media is important for digital activists to transmit facts and counter-narratives. Thus, they argue that the 'visibility' of the conflict is a prerequisite to an independence struggle. It is due to the political discourses being utilized on social media by pro-independence movements and sympathizers from Melanesian countries. The posts contain pictures, videos, attached news articles and even hashtags tools to voice struggle and even trigger Free West Papua movements in the Melanesian

countries, depicting Jakarta's violent actions and further be transmitted (Titifanue et al, 2016; Philpott, 2018). From this perspective, this action is often seen as containing substantive differences from Jakarta's view, because it espouses challenges to the dominant *status quo* of the NKRI. To overcome this, Indonesia is urged to portray domestic sovereignty to prevent global visibility.

The third body of literature focuses on the false promise of decentralization. Jakarta's decision to give Papua provinces a special autonomy converges with the idea of decentralization as a delegation of authority within a country's territory (Holtmann and Rademacher, 2013). Furthermore, decentralization is less risky compared to forced unitarianism. However, efforts to establish the ideal condition of governance may lead the central government to undermine local governments' ability to exert their control over the territory (Orlov et al, 2020). Some developing nations have been implementing decentralization through economic policies rooted in national planning institutions, with the use of force (Rondinelli, 1990). Scholars also highlighted that little progress had been made to fully implement the Special Autonomy Law, including corruption and the inability to fulfill locals' demands.

While it is true that the volatile history remains essential, its focus mostly rests on the opposition of interests. A significant vacuum remains in my understanding, particularly on Jakarta's political securitization. Seemingly enough, this paper concurs with Rondinelli in the sense that the decentralization in his understanding requires a large portion of centralization. This paper calls this "half-

hearted decentralization”—— decentralization with prerequisites. Building on Rondonelli, the author extends my argument, stemming from his, to showcase that the employment of sovereignty infers a totalization logic that only perpetuates the exercise of securitization. This leads to a paradoxical reality of a strong state, which only denotes its fragility, in the context of West Papua. While the existing literature notes the failures, there is a fundamental lack of emphasis on the basis that drives this centralization. For that reason, the author posits the connection of the idea of ‘half-hearted decentralization’ with Rondonelli’s argument that decentralization often requires high centralization. Aside from it, the existing literature on Papua has missed the nature of how the logic of totality creates conditions of fragility. The author uses several examples, where development, such as National Strategic Projects (PSN) and built infrastructures, which are often portrayed as a program that aims to improve the welfare of the Papuan people, but actually reflect the state's self-interest.

In *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Buzan, Weaver, and Jaap de Wilde suggest that there is an increasing need to broaden the security agenda to include threats beyond traditional security concerns. They aim to create a new security paradigm that covers five sectors: economy, politics, environment, society, and military, each with its own threats and measures to address rising insecurity. To identify Jakarta’s approach to addressing threats, the author uses the concept of political securitization. This process involves three components: the securitizing actor, who initiates and frames an issue as a security threat; the referent object, which is what

needs to be protected; and functional actors, who assist and influence the securitization process but are not the ones who start or advocate it. In addition, the author also utilizes the concept of state sovereignty from Schmitt and Agamben as the basis of securitization.

Securitization theory has several elements: the securitizing actor (Jakarta), the referent object (Sovereignty/NKRI), and functional actors here. This part is integral to the logic of the totalizing sovereignty concept of Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben. Schmitt, for example, exclaimed that the sovereign is he who decides exceptions (Schmitt, 1985). This argument is used by Giorgio Agamben in the context of *homo sacer*. In his view, the sovereign not only allows exceptions but also legalizes killing (Agamben, 1995).

This violent nature also relates to Foucault’s triangulation of sovereignty—discipline—government, which primarily targets ‘the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security’ (Foucault, 1977). The only blatant difference is, by far, that for Foucault, power may be productive. While for Agamben, power is legally violent, exercised by the sovereign (Agamben, 1998). In the modern IR scholarship, domestic sovereignty is connected with the de facto autonomy of states that can regulate their behaviour. Thus, to exert the full degree of sovereignty, states may disregard themselves from specific—or even universal—moral principles. This is a state of exemption, where codification of laws and morality is stepped over (Bauder, 2020). Drawing on Schmitt and Agamben, these approaches prompt “totalizing logic”, in which the sovereign treats challenges to territorial integrity as an existential issue,

requiring an undifferentiated and total approach. Consequently, the methods foreclose a negotiated or dialogic solution and allow the use of exceptional violence to defy the threats.

State power is measured by the breadth, width, and the state's permeability by society. The breadth and width of permeability refer to the state's ability to transform society, in both the functional and physical realms. Additionally, the third element refers to society's ability to oversee the state's performance, including questioning its policies (Desch, 1996; Davidheiser, 2023). The state of exemption allows the sovereign to surpass moral principles and legal measures to regulate behaviour.

Consequently, the strong state, which requires significant intervention through the means of top-down logic, including violence, results in the failure of authority, service, or legitimacy. The reason is that the state is present as an unparalleled force. In the eyes of Papuans, this is seen as an attempt to maintain the nation's integrity by marginalizing the rights of local communities. By characterizing a strong state without transparency for the sake of political security, Indonesia's action has prompted a crisis of legitimacy and service. Jakarta's totalizing logic intended to project strength and a handful of developmentalist agendas. However, it actually produces fragility, which the author intends to showcase.

3. Research Method

For this research, the author uses a qualitative single-case study, which is a subset of social research that emphasizes investigative aspects based on a conceptual framework. Papua is chosen due to its

complexity and breadth of military operations, national strategic projects, and the existence of special autonomy laws.

Examining a social phenomenon and prioritizing the collection of various data through thematic analysis, it facilitates the author's interpretation of the extracted data to understand social reality. The primary focus of qualitative methods is an in-depth study of specific events, phenomena, countries, organizations, and individuals (Lamont, 2021). This research describes the factors that contribute to the contradictions in centralization, where Jakarta acts as a securitizing actor, the Unitary State (NKRI) is the referent object, and the military/police are functional actors.

The author uses a thematic analysis method by examining a form of Indonesian actions while analyzing the data to code the failure of state control. This method emphasizes the explanatory aspects provided by various actors regarding the research variables, using analytical tools such as securitization theory. To complement this section, the author utilizes the concepts of sovereignty and a strong state. For data collection, the author used document study techniques, drawing on primary sources such as national regulations, UN reports, and ministry RPJMN sources, as well as secondary sources such as journal articles, news, government reports, and books. The data and information contained in these various sources were extracted to provide a holistic picture and information for this research topic.

These documents were then analysed using the interpretive lens of securitisation theory of Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998). The author dissects statements of presidents, military

commanders and ministers to identify the speech acts activity. Subsequently, the paper traced the spread of national development projects as an execution of pretexts and speech acts—through military deployment, existence of PSNs and legislative revisions. At last, the paper uses the concept of state fragility—authority failure, service failure, and legitimacy failure—as defined by Stewart and Brown (2009) and Zoellick (2008), to identify the paradox.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. A History of Contested Integration

Papua is a lengthy story to tell. The Dutch-Indies rule resulted in a conflict with the Indonesian government. On December 1, 1961, under the Dutch-Indies occupation, the people's congress had established a manifesto for West Papua independence and even composed *Hai Tanahku Papua*, their anthem (King, 2002). However, conflict between the Dutch and Indonesia erupted over who was to acquiesce to Papua. To resolve this, both were mediated by the United Nations and led to the ratification of the New York Agreement. Following this ratification, the UN composed the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) to look after the disputed territory. Against all odds, around 1.500 Indonesian paratroopers managed to enter the territory and took over control (Elmslie & Webb-Gannon, 2013). Soekarno, rejecting the agreement, proposed the Three People's Commands (Trikor) and formalized Komando Mandala Pembebasan Irian Barat led by Soeharto, the future second president of the republic. In the Old Order, Jakarta had exhibited a hard approach to tackling separatism. At that time, Jakarta adopted a non-conventional

way in handling Papua: composing guerrilla bases and preparing for the formation of outposts for Indonesia's attack on Papua. These infiltrating officers were then melted down to Kontingen Indonesia (Kotindo) and some others were assigned to help the United Nations Security Force (UNSF). Administratively, these actions were part of Jakarta's strategy to stem the pro-independence movement. January 12th, 1963, became a turning point because UNTEA handed over full control of Papua (al Rahab, 2016).

As a result, there was growing dissatisfaction among indigenous people, which gave birth to OPM. OPM was established on July 26, 1965, in Manokwari by Johan Ariks along with ex-Papoea Vrijwilligers Korps fighters. Ariks was well known for his leadership in the Papua New Guinea People's Union (PONG) and as an aspiring voice of West Papuan independence. Following this formation, the Papuans induced aggressions against the government, such as the Ayamaru and Arfak uprising in 1967. In 1968, the Provincial Assembly had a substantial disagreement with the Act of Free Choice. Subsequently, independence efforts in Paniai and Ubrupwaris intensified (Aditjondro, 2000; Gault-Williams, 1987; Chauvel, 2021). However, this movement was crushed by the Army Para Commando Regiment (RPKAD), later known as Kopassus, Indonesian army special forces, following the rebellion in the Bird's Head Peninsula. Around six years later, on July 7th, 1971, an extension movement of July 26th was made by Seth Jafet Rumkorem and widely known as Victoria Headquarter (IPAC, 2015; Aditjondro, 2000).

This led to the OPM proclamation, which stated *the land and people of Papua*

have been proclaimed free and independent (de facto and de jure). The proclamation marked a significant beginning for the West Papuans, particularly because it refers to a clear geographical description. Areas that are included are: Jayapura and Merauke as the region's north-south axis, while Sorong and the Bintang Mountains form the west-east axis.

In addition to the "mainland," the region also encompasses offshore islands, from Biak to Adi Island. Biak Island acts as a 'gate' to Cenderawasih Bay in the north, while Adi Island is in Kaimana Bay, off the coast of Fak-Fak in the south—representing the northern and southern island groups of West Papua, respectively (Aditjondro, 2000). Jakarta imposed several measures, from legal instruments to violence, to crush this movement. One of the sole sympathizers of OPM, Arnold Clemens Ap, who is known for his activism through cultural mediums, was killed in April 1984 by Kopassus. His death raised awareness and sympathy for the West Papuan independence movement.

Indonesia's approach to security in the New Order era only solidified the separatist movement. Soeharto's administration adopted a militarization approach to counter the pro-Independence movement, notwithstanding their peace move. This regime also labeled OPM as the Security Disturbance Movement (*Gerakan Pengacau Keamanan-GPK*). Ultimately, this movement's label could justify arrests, or worse, extrajudicial killings. The expansion of Regional Military Commands (Kodam) was also a hallmark of the New Order's handling of conflict, especially when the actor was the Army. Between 1963 and 1998, the New Order launched 15 military operations.

The question is: did the OPM movement then decline or even surrender? Not at all. Instead, it escalated, and demands for independence spread (al Rahab, 2016). Thus, it is counterproductive (Chauvel & Bhakti, 2004). The presence of the security forces in the New Order proves that Jakarta did not aim to resolve the conflict; it is otherwise: escalating violence and making Papua a zone of conflict.

The first democratically elected president, Abdurrahman Wahid, adopted an accommodative and persuasive approach. Wahid even permitted the waving of Bintang Kejora, the OPM flag in the island. Wahid also supported the Papuan Mass Consultation and the Papuan Presidium Council and even donated to these conventions. However, the successor of Wahid, Megawati Soekarnoputri, shared a disjunction of vision with his father, Soekarno. Megawati recalled that her father once said, "Without Irian Jaya, Indonesia is not complete to become the national territory of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia." (Chauvel & Bhakti, 2004). In her era, Megawati also proposed that Papua's province be expanded to Papua and West Papua provinces in order to be easily tamed. In her presidency, the killing of the former chairman of Presidium Dewan Papua (PDP) by Kopassus, allegedly, signified an end to a peaceful resolution initiated by Wahid (Chauvel, 2021).

Yudhoyono's presidential rhetoric was different to his predecessor. In 2011, he even established the Development Acceleration Unit of Papua Province and West Papua Province, or *Unit Percepatan Pembangunan Provinsi Papua dan Provinsi Papua Barat* (UP4B). However, there were still violations. One notable incident was when the security apparatus opened fire,

which was directed towards 1,000 attendees at the Third Papuan People's Congress and led to the deaths of three people on 19 October 2011 (Amnesty, 2018).

A decade later, Jakarta had a multitude of policies in order to address the challenges and to counter the separatists under Joko Widodo's administration. The most significant approach is through the ratification of UU Otonomi Khusus (Special Autonomy Law for Papua). Accordingly, the Indonesian government designated the Free Papua Movement (OPM) as a terrorist group on April 30, 2021. This designation was announced by the then Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (Menko Polhukam), Mahfud MD. The definition of a terrorist group in itself is able to provide the authorities with broad access and power to punish and counter these groups. In 2022, Jokowi's administration formed four new provinces on the island. Previously, Papua was only one of the Papua and West Papua provinces. With the ratification of the new autonomous region (DOB), Central Papua, Highland Papua, South Papua, and Southwest Papua exist.

Jakarta had also formalized the Proyek Strategis Nasional or National Strategic Projects (PSN) that aim to boost the even distribution of the economy. In the National Medium-Term Development Plan (2025–2029), it is stated that PSNs are established as an integral part of the national development planning. Jokowi's administration claimed that they had built the Trans-Papua toll road that covers 3.462 kilometers and 1.098 kilometers of roads on the borderline (Widodo, 2023). Along with it, the government had built the 1,3 kilometers Youtefa bridge in Jayapura and

rehabilitated Domine Eduard Osok airport in Sorong.

Table 1.1 PSN in Papua Island

No.	Projects	Area(s)
1.	Food Estate Development	South Papua
2.	Bioethanol (Sugarcane Based)	South Papua
3.	Sago, Cassava, and Sweet Potato Downstreaming Program	Papua
4.	Palm Oil, Coconut, and Seaweed Downstreaming Program	Papua, West Papua
5.	Nickel, Tin, Bauxite, and Copper Downstreaming Program	Central Papua
6.	Bintuni Bay Industrial Area and Development of Methanol, Ammonia, and Carbon Utilization	West Papua

	Industries from CCUS/CCS Results	
7.	Fakfak Industrial Area	West Papua
8.	Arrangement of the Central Government Area of the New Autonomous Region (DOB) of Papua	Central Papua, South Papua, Highland Papua and West Papua

Source: RPJMN, 2025

4.2.The 'Totalizing Logic' of the Securitizing State

In the case of West Papua, the Indonesian government adopted political securitization. It is clear that in the *Defense White Paper* (Kementerian Pertahanan, 2015), separatism is considered a national threat. The rhetoric of unity has always been present in Jakarta's narratives, particularly directed to the essence of sovereignty. In the *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, "The Political Security Agenda" takes the form either of the subversion of legitimacy or of the denial of recognition (either total denial or denial of sovereign equality)' (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1991). As it is noted in the white paper, as well as the constitution, clearly states that unitarianism is taken for granted. The white paper content converges with Buzan, Weaver and Jaap de Wilde, who categorized three threats to sovereignty: "emerging quasi-superstates, such as the EU; some of the

self-organized, stateless societal groups dealt with in the societal chapter—tribes, minorities, and clans—which have strong political institutions although not of the formal type international society recognizes (only those that take on very strong coercion wielding and institutionalized forms enter this chapter; otherwise they are dealt with as societal); and the transnational movements that can mobilize supreme allegiance from adherents."

As mentioned above, securitization requires a mechanism of speech acts. Speech acts need 'the grammar of security, and construct a plot that includes existential threat, point of no return, and a possible way out'. The external aspect of a speech act has two main conditions. One is the social capital of the enunciator, the securitizing actor, who must be in a position of authority, although this should not be defined as official authority. The other external condition has to do with threat. It is more likely that one can conjure a security threat if certain objects can be referred to that are generally held to be threatening—be they tanks, hostile sentiments, or polluted waters. In themselves, these objects never make for necessary securitization, but they are definitely facilitating conditions (Buzan, 1991). However, framing may result in a totalitarian way because some groups or individuals are 'self-serving, deceptive, or reactionary' when responding to the issue of securitization (Van Rythoven, 2019).

To respond, Jakarta's logic is predicated on the total defense of NKRI, from Sabang to Merauke. The seventh Indonesian president, Joko Widodo, once said, "I have also ordered the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) Commander and the National Police Chief to continue

pursuing and arresting all members of the armed criminal group (KKB)," he said on Monday (April 26, 2021). Agus Subiyanto, the Chief of Indonesia's TNI, said, "I will take firm action against the OPM's actions. There is no country within a country!" This implies the adjacency to the political securitization, because it treats sovereignty as the referent object, where Jakarta acts as a securitizing actor, reacting fiercely to a professed defender of unity, as the sole characteristic of the sovereign. In defense of sovereignty, the approach to tackle separatism puts the logic of exclusions. Speaking of sovereignty, the power conceded is above everything else.

In this matter, the author claims that total defense of sovereignty often aims to annihilate the presence of opposition. Also, the hawkish nature refers to the political insecurity, the fear of unsustainable enforcement of integralism. To manage that insecurity, states may enforce a securitization by mobilizing apparatuses and intervening, only to prevent such dissipation of identity from occurring (Browning and Joenniemi, 2016). The narratives that surround resolution in Papua leave no room for discussion, as they concern sovereignty. Sovereignty, viewed as both final and inherent, precludes dialogue, or even skepticism. Jakarta's employment of sovereignty logic is an incarnation of total power, crushing all movements that even try to question its validity.

4.3. A Paradoxical State

This suggests a strong state—highly cohesive and exerting the state's maximum capacity. A strong state thus implies its ability to respond to social forces leading to polycrises. In the case of Papua, the yoke of

a strong state only connects to the first and the second. Transparency and accountability are not considered. It is clear that Jakarta's exercise of power in Papua under the banner of 'state-building' only strengthens the exclusive authority of central power, diminishing the element of openness is lacking due to the top-down approaches.

This is exactly where a paradox emerges. While centralized policy-making and decision-making for Papua become features of a strong state, it simultaneously leads to the degeneration of Jakarta's power and produces fragility. Fragile states are thus defined as states that are failing, or at risk of failing, with respect to authority, comprehensive service entitlements, or legitimacy (CRISE, 2009). These conditions imply that Indonesia has, in certain aspects, taken on the characteristics of a fragile state. This is illustrated by the sharp *in-group* and *out-group* distinction (Agerbak, 1996), where certain populations are implicitly positioned as less deserving or less trustworthy in the eyes of the state. Papuans should be able to enjoy public access, but because of securitization, it actually hinders access to their basic rights. Transmigration has also been established by the Indonesians to control specific territories (Aditjondro & Prasetyo, 2009). Adriana Elisabeth, one of the key proponents of the JPD–LIPI dialogue initiative, succinctly summarized this problem: "The roots remain the same: distrust remains because Indonesia was born to Papua with a violent face and this is not yet resolved" (press comm, Oct 2015, as cited by Hernawan, 2019). Aside from co-optive development, which appeared on several mega-projects, Jakarta's approach also used intense violence. This is caused by

the top-down logic imposed by Jakarta to raze to the ground the dimension of separatism. Over the course of 27 years, violence has become a daily spectacle, even in a peaceful protest.

In 1998, the Bloody Biak Incident caused 8 people to die. The incident started when security forces carried out a raid on residents who had gathered and raised the Bintang Kejora flag at the Biak water tower. A similar incident occurred in 2011 when security forces dismissed the Third Papuan People's Congress (KRP III) with violence in Lapangan Zakheus, Padang Bulan, Jayapura. Around 1.000 participants were fired at and forced to flee. This resulted in the death of around three congress attendees.

A similar incident occurred in 2014, known as the Paniai tragedy, which killed five civilians and injured 17. This resulted from the authorities' refusal to accept reprimands from residents. As a result, emotional officers beat several young men in Ipakiye Village, severely injuring them and leading one to a coma. Residents, dissatisfied with the abuse, staged a demonstration to express their dissatisfaction. Confronted by this situation, officers from the 753rd Special Raider Infantry Battalion, under the orders of Major Isak Sattu, opened fire. Ultimately, the crowd of approximately 800 people was showered with TNI bullets, resulting in five deaths. (BBC, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2014). Sattu was then freed from charges. Security forces also often react excessively, rather than in a measured and professional manner. This was manifested in the 2000 Abepura raids, a raid on a student dormitory following an attack on a police post; victims were tortured and killed. Furthermore, the incidents in Wasior and Wamena began

when alleged OPM members killed police officers. Afterward, security forces conducted a sweeping operation, detaining civilians, burning villages, and even killing them extrajudicially. In Wamena, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) also retaliated after a weapons theft. TNI was also involved in the extrajudicial killing of activists who are vocal about Jakarta's policy. One of the most notable examples was that of Pastor Yeremia Zanambani, who was shot dead after questioning TNI violence. Moreover, the extrajudicial killing of Theys Hiyo Eluay proves that peaceful grassroots voices are often perceived as disruptive. As recorded by Amnesty International, Papua witnessed 69 cases of extrajudicial killings and 34 involving military officers (Amnesty International Indonesia, 2020).

In July 2025, 9.000 additional troops were augmented and spread all over Papua (Sianturi, 2025). Within 11 months from October 2024 to September 2025, there were 5,859 TNI soldiers sent to Papua (KontraS, 2025). In total, there are 83,177 security forces in Papua (Supriatma & Salam, 2025). However, the escalation of conflict between Indonesian forces (TNI) and the West Papua National Liberation Army of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (TPNPB-OPM) had not stopped. In 2024, the National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM) recorded 113 human rights violations. Up until July 2025, it is recorded that the number of displaced people across the island had reached a number between 86.886 and 97.650 (ACAPS, 2025). Moreover, the Human Rights Watch report in March 2025 stated that bombing had occurred in Intan Jaya, Yahukimo, Nduga, and Pegunungan Bintang regencies.

Operation Habema, which was executed mainly in the mountainous region, allegedly targeted communities of forest dwellers and Indigenous Papuans. Aside from it, the bombs and drone operations were indiscriminately dropped in public facilities such as churches and villages (HRW, 2025).

Although the Special Autonomy Law 2001 intended to accelerate the development of welfare and enhance the quality of public services, and ensure sustainable progress in the Papua region, it has largely failed to prove its effectiveness. Ideally, the law formally aimed to ‘protect and uphold the dignity, affirming, and protecting the basic rights of Indigenous Papuans, both in the economic, political, and socio-cultural fields, requires legal certainty’, in practice, these objectives have often been violated. Subsequent revisions to the Special Autonomy Law have further revealed the ambiguity of Jakarta’s commitment to genuinely solving Papua’s conflict. Prior to the revision, "The expansion of Papua Province into provinces was carried out *with the approval* of the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP) and Papuan People's Representative Council (DPRP) after taking into serious consideration socio-cultural unity, human resource readiness, economic capacity, and future development." The modification of the phrase was attenuating. The New Special Autonomy Law 2021, in the revised Article 76, said,

1. "The expansion of provincial and district/city areas into provinces and districts/cities *can be* carried out with the approval of the MRP and DPRP after taking into serious consideration socio-cultural unity, human resource readiness,

economic capacity, and future developments."

2. "The Government and the People's Representative Council (DPR) can expand provincial and district/city areas into autonomous regions to accelerate equitable development, improve public services and community welfare, and raise the dignity of Indigenous Papuans by taking into account political, administrative, legal, socio-cultural unity, human resource readiness, basic infrastructure, economic capacity, future developments, and/or the aspirations of the Papuan people."

The strange unwillingness of Indonesians to achieve the main objective of creating the Special Autonomy Law becomes particularly visible in its approach towards Papua. Fragility refers to the failure of an authority to protect its citizens from any kind of violence. Also, there are some periodic incidents that happen that lead to casualties and the destruction of livelihood. Moreover, the state, especially security forces, gains impunity, even when strong proof exists. This marks the dawn of a judicial system that not only protects but also guarantees law enforcement. Aside from authority failures, the dimension of service failures is also being regarded as a characteristic of fragile states. This refers to the state's failure to ensure that all citizens can gain access to fundamental services such as education, healthcare facilities, infrastructure, water and sanitation, as well as the welfare systems to tackle poverty.

Legitimacy failure that are characterized by distrust because the state has only a sole supporter, limited to a

certain group of people that dominates the government and decision-making process. Some characteristics that signify legitimacy failure are: no presence of democracy and often concentrated on centralized authority, strong presence of the military in the government; forceful enforcement of power, crushing of oppositions, limitation of freedom of speech; restriction of significant groups from power; suppression of liberties, marked with the arbitrary arrest, as well as absence of free speech. When combined, this forms a fragility that does not refer only to low growth, but 'a failure in the normal growth process, such poverty becomes a persistent condition due to weak governance, corruption and insecurity that may lead to the banality violence which means the gap between ideal and actual potential (Zoellick, 2008; Stewart & Brown, 2009; Galtung, 1969).

Most notably, the state fails to exert its authority to mitigate violence, leading to the death of citizens. In the context of securitizing political interests in Papua, TNI and also Polri have repeatedly been reported to engage in acts of torture against civilians. It is noted that 39% percent of torture cases occurred in public spaces, 3% and 8% outside military and police stations, while 12% occurred in military stations and 24% in police stations (Hernawan, 2024). In 2024, the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) recorded 113 human rights violations in Papua, with more than half of these cases involving security forces. From October 2024 to September 2025, KontraS recorded at least 85 incidents of violence perpetrated by Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) soldiers. Of these 85 cases, 53 occurred after the ratification of the TNI bill in March 2025. (KontraS, 2025). In October, security forces

were strongly suspected of committing violence and intimidation against LP3BH volunteers who were providing humanitarian aid to refugees in the North Moskona District of Bintuni Bay (Komnas HAM, 2025).

While it is clear that OPM challenges Jakarta's monopoly of power, Jakarta's logic of totality has only sharpened the conflict. Autonomy, as it is idealized, contains a recognition of respecting people's sovereignty (Enoch, 2021). However, Jakarta's treatment of Papua only contributes to a prolonged phase rather than a never-ending cycle of violence. State institutions are also suboptimal due to a lack of legal certainty, as evidenced by the impunity surrounding the tragedies in Paniai, Wasior, Abepura, and Biak, demonstrating their intransparency. This also reflects Jakarta's exclusive authority, despite its Special Autonomy Law (Osaghae, 2007). The securitization approach has proven unable to address a fundamental issue: the suffering that fuels aspirations. Papua is a battleground. But, more specifically, what kind of battle? Is it merely a superficial one between Indonesia and the separatists? Or is it something far more abstract, like a battle fueled by the logic of exceptionalism? The proponents of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) have always been aware that, from the beginning, Papua was a separate part that was intended to be grafted onto the whole territory of this unified country.

Returning to the strong state assumption, this weakening is an attempt to strengthen Jakarta's grip on Papua. In fact, the Special Autonomy Law is an elementary and fundamental measure to strengthen the role of representative actors within Papuan

communities. However, this revision reverses this ideal order and also slows peace efforts. The revision indicates that Jakarta remains preoccupied with a logic of sovereignty and centralism.

Developmentalism elements also reinforce Jakarta's role and marginalize local values. Furthermore, food estates for sugarcane and bioethanol plantations, rice paddy development, and land clearing that have cleared more than 1.5 million hectares of rice fields have again stripped Papuans of their customary rights. The basic assumption is that the intentions of the state as 'developmental philanthropists' through development are invalid. One reason is the context of vested interests. Therefore, moral support for power ambitions is conveyed explicitly and implicitly through communication activities such as public communication, which includes media propaganda, cultural diplomacy, education and knowledge exchange, support from other governments, visits, positive narratives and images, and aid or development tools, are proven to be vain. This depicts a quasi-real situation, because the "benefits" are portrayed as helping the recipient, but in reality, the self-interest of the provider is the primary objective (Alexander, 2020). This creates a paradox: on the one hand, these policies signal a strong state, but on the other, they actually strengthen resistance, or worse, fuel resentment against Jakarta.

5. Conclusion

This article shows that Indonesia's approach in Papua, driven by the logic of totalization, has paradoxically augmented insecurity among Papuans. Securitization is merely a pretext for power because of its connection

to sovereignty. The totalizing nuance is always present and constant. Therefore, anything that contradicts or is perceived as contradictory will always be crushed. To borrow Agamben's words: *'Ultimately, security and terrorism may form a single, deadly system, in which they justify and legitimate each other's actions.'* The centralization of the power mindset of the New Order has not yet been changed by the current administration. From various data and statistics, this article concludes that Indonesia still uses a top-down approach for the sake of sovereignty. In the form of integralism, this tendency risks undermining the very notion of real security. At the same time, this situation is caused directly by the absence of a democratic mechanism that is controlled through legal mechanisms, when people can voice their own aspirations, and what is most important is ensuring public interest is elevated to the national agenda.

Securitization approach questions the authorization to security by asking: whose security? What kind of security? Thus, the new dimensions of security began to emerge. The basic notion of this new security paradigm centers on the widening towards referent objects that are related to human survival. However, by adhering to a single logic of unitarianism, deepening and widening aspects of human security are neglected. Indonesia's unilateral actions in Papua embody a logic of exclusion and totalization. For the sake of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, all potential opponents are eliminated, at times through lethal violence. Ultimately, securitization is an outdated approach, as it only increases human suffering on a massive scale. Jakarta's action is not uniting

the country, but actively deepening the
fragility it seeks to eliminate.

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