

INDONESIA'S DIPLOMACY MANAGEMENT IN DEFENDING PAPUA AS PART OF NKRI

Muhammad Zulham

Universitas Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia

Corresponding Author Email: m.zulham@civitas.unas.ac.id

Abstract: The Papua conflict, marked by separatist claims and allegations of human rights violations, has positioned Indonesia under sustained international scrutiny. This study examines the diplomatic strategies employed by the Indonesian government to defend its sovereignty over Papua from 2020 to 2024, focusing on responses to global pressures and domestic legitimacy challenges. Grounded in *neorealism* and *state sovereignty* frameworks, the research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze Indonesia's multi-level diplomacy involving state and non-state actors. Findings reveal a dual-track strategy: Government-to-Government (G2G) efforts prioritize bilateral engagements with influential states to counter separatist narratives, while People-to-People (P2P) initiatives focus on fostering Papuan trust in Indonesian nationalism through dialogue and grassroots empowerment. Key tactics include leveraging ASEAN partnerships to mitigate external criticism and deploying cultural diplomacy to reinforce national unity. However, challenges persist, such as balancing human rights accountability with sovereignty defense and addressing digital misinformation campaigns. This study underscores the necessity of integrating soft power and institutional legitimacy to fortify Indonesia's diplomatic posture. Recommendations include enhancing multilateral collaboration, institutionalizing P2P programs, and adopting data-driven communication strategies to preempt disinformation. The findings offer actionable insights for policymakers to harmonize sovereignty preservation with inclusive governance in conflict-sensitive regions.

Keywords: Papua, NKRI, Diplomacy Management

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INTRODUCTION

Papua, Indonesia's easternmost region, remains a focal point of complex socio-political challenges, including separatist movements, racial discrimination, and allegations of human rights violations. The Free Papua Movement (OPM), rooted in unresolved post-colonial disputes following the 1962 New York Agreement, has evolved into a multifaceted entity combining armed insurgency (e.g., TPN/OPM) and political activism (e.g., KNPB) (Hartono, 2023). Internationally, the OPM leverages networks such as the

Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), with Vanuatu and other Pacific nations amplifying calls for self-determination (Chauvel, 2021). Domestically, systemic inequities persist: despite contributing significantly to Indonesia's natural resource economy, Papua lags in human development indices, with poverty rates triple the national average (World Bank, 2023). Infrastructure projects like the Trans-Papua Highway have improved connectivity but failed to address core grievances such as educational disparities and healthcare access (Suryawan, 2022).

The Indonesian government's dual-track strategy—combining *government-to-government (G2G)* diplomacy to counter international pressure and *people-to-people (P2P)* initiatives to foster local trust—reflects a neorealist emphasis on sovereignty and power balancing (Waltz, 1979). However, accusations of genocide and human rights abuses, often amplified by digital activism, complicate Indonesia's diplomatic narrative (IPAC, 2021). This study examines how Indonesia navigates these challenges from 2020 to 2024, balancing domestic legitimacy and international credibility.

Existing scholarship on Papua's conflict emphasizes historical grievances (Saltford, 2003) and the interplay of local identity politics with global advocacy networks (Braithwaite et al., 2020). Neorealist frameworks highlight Indonesia's prioritization of territorial integrity over human rights discourse (Sukma, 2020), while constructivist approaches stress the role of nationalism and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (national unity in diversity) in domestic diplomacy (Aspinall, 2023). Recent studies by LIPI (2021) underscore the effectiveness of P2P strategies, such as cultural exchanges and educational scholarships, in mitigating separatist sentiments. Conversely, critics argue that Indonesia's G2G engagements, particularly within ASEAN and the MSG, often prioritize economic incentives over human rights accountability (Guterres, 2022).

The rise of digital diplomacy has further transformed the conflict's dynamics. Social media campaigns by pro-independence groups, such as #PapuanLivesMatter, exploit global networks to challenge Indonesia's sovereignty claims (Tapsell, 2023). Meanwhile, Indonesia counters with narratives emphasizing developmental progress and cultural integration (Kemlu, 2023). This duality underscores the tension between neorealist statecraft and liberal institutionalism in contemporary diplomacy.

This study seeks to analyze Indonesia's diplomatic strategies in defending Papua's integration into the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) amid escalating international pressure from 2020 to 2024. Innovatively merging *neorealism* with *media ecology theory*, it examines how digital platforms—such as social media campaigns and disinformation networks—reshape sovereignty disputes in the 21st century. By evaluating Indonesia's dual-track approach of *government-to-government (G2G)* engagements, which prioritize bilateral partnerships with Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) nations, and *people-to-people (P2P)* initiatives, such as cultural exchanges and youth empowerment programs, the research identifies gaps in current policy

frameworks. Temporally, it focuses on post-2019 developments, including the COVID-19 pandemic's role in amplifying Papua's visibility in global human rights discourse (Human Rights Watch, 2023) and Indonesia's counter-narratives through digital public diplomacy (Kemlu, 2023). This approach not only updates neorealist theories to account for digital-era statecraft but also provides actionable insights for balancing sovereignty preservation with inclusive governance in conflict-sensitive regions.

The findings aim to inform Indonesian policymakers in refining diplomatic strategies that harmonize sovereignty defense with inclusive governance. For instance, replicating successful P2P models, like the *Papua Youth Creative Hub* (launched in 2021 to empower local entrepreneurs), could strengthen grassroots loyalty (Bappenas, 2023). Internationally, the study offers insights into countering disinformation campaigns, particularly as Indonesia prepares for potential UNHRC scrutiny in 2024.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations of Defense Management

The discourse on national defense and sovereignty is deeply rooted in the interplay of theoretical frameworks and pragmatic statecraft. Defense Management (DM), as conceptualized by Bucur-Marcu et al. (2009), provides a structured approach to optimizing military capabilities through strategic resource allocation and operational planning. In Indonesia, this framework has been localized by scholars like Supriyatno (2018), who positions DM as a holistic system integrating military and non-military elements to address hybrid threats. Indonesia's *universal defense* doctrine (*Sishankamrata*), enshrined in Law No. 3/2002, exemplifies this approach, mobilizing societal and economic resilience to safeguard territorial integrity. Neorealist underpinnings further contextualize Indonesia's defense strategy. Waltz's (1979) assertion that states prioritize survival in an anarchic international system resonates in Indonesia's dual focus on internal capacity-building—such as modernizing its *Minimum Essential Force*—and external alliances, including ASEAN security partnerships. This aligns with Buzan's (1983) expanded security paradigm, which links military preparedness to political, economic, and environmental stability, reflecting Indonesia's investments in Papua's infrastructure to mitigate separatist grievances (World Bank, 2023).

Sovereignty in a Globalized World

Sovereignty, as the bedrock of state legitimacy, faces unprecedented challenges in the digital age. Traditional definitions emphasize territorial control and non-intervention (Mauna, 2005; Hingorani, 1982), yet globalization and transnational activism have eroded the absoluteness of these principles. Indonesia's sovereignty claims over Papua, rooted in the 1962 New York Agreement, clash with global human rights narratives

amplified by digital campaigns like #PapuanLivesMatter (IPAC, 2021). The tension between legal sovereignty and evolving international norms is evident in Indonesia's diplomatic balancing act: while invoking the Act of State Doctrine to deflect external scrutiny (Bledsoe & Boczek, 1987), it engages in soft power initiatives, such as cultural exchanges with Pacific nations, to legitimize its governance in Papua (Kemlu, 2023). This duality underscores Keohane's (2020) argument that modern sovereignty necessitates adaptive strategies to reconcile domestic authority with global accountability.

Foreign Policy Dynamics and Strategic Diplomacy

Foreign policy emerges as the linchpin connecting defense and sovereignty strategies. Indonesia's approach to Papua exemplifies Rosenau and Holsti's conceptualization of foreign policy as a blend of ideological orientation and actionable plans (Perwita & Yani, 2011). The *government-to-government (G2G)* strategy targets diplomatic adversaries like Vanuatu through economic incentives and ASEAN solidarity, neutralizing separatist advocacy in forums such as the Melanesian Spearhead Group (Chauvel, 2021). Concurrently, *people-to-people (P2P)* initiatives—ranging from the *Papua Youth Creative Hub* to educational scholarships—aim to cultivate grassroots loyalty, addressing historical grievances tied to racial discrimination and underdevelopment (LIPI, 2021). These efforts reflect Buzan's (1983) interdisciplinary security model, where economic inclusivity and social cohesion are as critical as military deterrence.

Despite these theoretical and policy advancements, critical gaps persist. First, digital diplomacy's role in sovereignty disputes remains underexplored. While Indonesia counters disinformation through platforms like *Papua Bangkit*, the efficacy of such narratives in swaying global opinion is under-researched (Tapsell, 2023). Second, civil society's agency in shaping Papuan nationalism is often overlooked. Grassroots organizations, such as the Papuan Women's Working Group, play pivotal roles in mediating state-society relations, yet their contributions are rarely integrated into defense or foreign policy analyses (Aspinall, 2023). Third, post-2019 shifts—such as the COVID-19 pandemic's diversion of international attention from human rights issues—demand fresh scrutiny of how states exploit geopolitical crises to consolidate sovereignty (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

By synthesizing Defense Management, Sovereignty Theory, and Foreign Policy Dynamics, this study advances a novel framework termed *Integrated Sovereignty Governance*. This approach merges neorealist pragmatism with media ecology insights to analyze how digital platforms and grassroots engagement reshape state power in contested regions. For Indonesia, this framework offers a roadmap to harmonize military preparedness, diplomatic agility, and socio-cultural inclusion, ensuring Papua's integration into NKRI remains resilient against evolving global pressures.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a *qualitative descriptive design* to analyze Indonesia's diplomatic strategies in defending Papua's integration into the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Aligning with Moleong's (2017) framework, the approach prioritizes holistic understanding through non-numerical data, focusing on textual and contextual analysis of social phenomena. The design enables the exploration of complex interactions between state sovereignty, foreign policy, and digital diplomacy, particularly in addressing international pressure over Papua from 2020 to 2024. By emphasizing factual descriptions of Indonesia's G2G (government-to-government) and P2P (people-to-people) strategies, the research captures nuanced dynamics often overlooked in quantitative studies.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through triangulation to ensure depth and validity:

1. Primary Sources:
 - a. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with 12 key stakeholders, including Indonesian diplomats, Papuan civil society leaders, and academics. Interviews were conducted virtually (Zoom/WhatsApp) due to pandemic constraints, with consent obtained for recording and transcription.
 - b. Document Analysis: Government publications (e.g., *Defense White Paper 2023*), diplomatic correspondence, and policy briefs from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kemlu).
2. Secondary Sources:
 - a. Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed journals, books on neorealism, and sovereignty theory (e.g., Waltz, 1979; Buzan, 1983).
 - b. Media and Digital Content: Analysis of social media campaigns (e.g., #PapuanLivesMatter) and Indonesia's counter-narratives (e.g., *Papua Bangkit* YouTube channels).
3. Archival Records: Historical documents related to the 1962 New York Agreement and Papua's integration into Indonesia.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants and sources with direct relevance to Papua's sovereignty discourse. Key criteria included:

1. Expertise in Indonesian foreign policy or Papuan socio-political dynamics.

2. Involvement in G2G/P2P initiatives (e.g., ASEAN diplomats, Papua Youth Creative Hub coordinators).

Analytical Framework

The study applies thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model:

1. Data Familiarization: Immersion in transcripts, documents, and media content.
2. Code Generation: Identifying patterns (e.g., "economic diplomacy," "digital disinformation").
3. Theme Development: Grouping codes into themes like *neorealist statecraft* and *soft power mobilization*.
4. Theme Review: Validating themes against theoretical frameworks (Defense Management, Sovereignty Theory).
5. Defining Themes: Articulating how themes address research objectives.
6. Report Production: Synthesizing findings into a cohesive narrative.

Triangulation was employed to cross-verify data across sources (e.g., comparing Kemlu reports with NGO assessments).

Validity and Reliability

1. Credibility: Prolonged engagement with Papuan civil society representatives to capture grassroots perspectives.
2. Dependability: An audit trail documenting coding decisions and analytical processes.
3. Confirmability: Peer debriefing with Southeast Asian studies experts to minimize bias.
4. Transferability: Thick descriptions of context (e.g., Papua's socio-economic disparities) to enable applicability to similar conflicts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Papua conflict is deeply entrenched in historical and structural inequities, beginning with Indonesia's contested integration of the region through the 1969 *Pepera* referendum. While Indonesia's sovereignty claims are grounded in the 1962 New York Agreement, Papuan grievances—rooted in political marginalization, economic neglect, and alleged human rights violations—persist. Post-1998 democratization inadvertently amplified separatist activism, enabling groups like the Free Papua Movement (OPM) and the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) to reframe their struggle through narratives of decolonization and Melanesian solidarity. Internationally, Indonesia's engagement with the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) reflects a dual strategy: securing associate membership in 2015 to counter separatist advocacy while

fostering economic ties with Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Fiji to temper criticism. For instance, Indonesia-PNG trade reached \$322 million by 2021, underscoring how economic interdependence mitigates political friction. Yet, Vanuatu's annual UN resolutions condemning Indonesia's Papua policies highlight the limits of transactional diplomacy, as ideological kinship among Melanesian nations often supersedes material incentives.

Domestically, Indonesia employs a blend of *government-to-government (G2G)* and *people-to-people (P2P)* strategies. Along the PNG border, the Joint Border Committee (JBC) has enhanced security through joint patrols and infrastructure projects, reducing cross-border insurgent movements. In Fiji, collaboration on drug trafficking and COVID-19 aid (13 tons of supplies in 2021) bolstered Indonesia's regional influence. However, grassroots initiatives like the *Papua Youth Creative Hub*—designed to empower local entrepreneurs—face implementation gaps in remote highland areas, perpetuating spatial inequities. Meanwhile, Indonesia's *No Genocide in West Papua* campaign counters Vanuatu's allegations but struggles against viral hashtags like #PapuanLivesMatter, revealing vulnerabilities in digital diplomacy.

Discussion

Indonesia's Papua diplomacy exemplifies the tension between neorealist statecraft and constructivist legitimacy-building. Neorealism, as articulated by Waltz (1979), explains Indonesia's prioritization of alliances and economic ties with PNG and Fiji to neutralize security threats. These partnerships align with Buzan's (1983) expanded security paradigm, where economic interdependence and infrastructural development serve as non-military deterrence. However, Vanuatu's unwavering advocacy for Papuan self-determination—despite Indonesia's energy cooperation and scholarships—challenges neorealist assumptions, underscoring the potency of ideological solidarity in Melanesian geopolitics. This dissonance mirrors Chauvel's (2021) critique of MSG's cohesive identity politics, which complicates Indonesia's transactional approach.

The limited reach of Indonesia's P2P initiatives, such as the *Papua Youth Creative Hub*, reflects a broader critique of centralized policymaking. While LIPI (2021) champions grassroots engagement as a tool to reduce separatist sentiment, the program's urban bias neglects highland communities where distrust of Jakarta is most acute. Similarly, Indonesia's *No Genocide* campaign, though effective in diplomatic fora, fails to counter digital narratives like #PapuanLivesMatter, echoing Tapsell's (2023) warning about the state's lag in digital diplomacy. This gap leaves Indonesia reactive rather than proactive in shaping global perceptions.

Comparative analysis with prior studies reveals contradictions. Supriyatno's (2018) universal defense model, integrating military and socio-economic measures, validates Indonesia's border security successes with PNG. Yet, Braithwaite et al. (2020) argue that

economic incentives alone cannot resolve identity-based conflicts, a notion supported by Vanuatu's resistance to Indonesian outreach. Similarly, while Rosenau's foreign policy theory (Perwita & Yani, 2011) posits that transactional diplomacy secures short-term gains, Indonesia's inability to sway Vanuatu highlights the need for hybrid strategies blending material and ideological engagement.

Theoretical and Policy Implications

1. Integrated Sovereignty Governance: Merging neorealist alliances with constructivist soft power, as seen in Fiji's security partnerships and cultural exchanges, could isolate critics like Vanuatu while addressing Papuan grievances.
2. Decentralized Development: Redirecting resources to underserved highland regions, as advocated by the World Bank (2023), would mitigate spatial inequities fueling separatism.
3. Digital Counter-Narratives: Institutionalizing platforms like *Papua Bangkit* to preempt disinformation, drawing on Southeast Asian models of digital statecraft (e.g., Singapore's POFMA framework).

Indonesia's Papua strategy navigates a complex interplay of structural realism and identity politics. While G2G engagements stabilize immediate threats, sustainable resolution demands P2P inclusivity and digital agility. By addressing these gaps, Indonesia can transform Papua from a sovereignty liability into a model of pluralist governance, balancing national unity with regional autonomy.

CONCLUSION

The Papua conflict represents a multifaceted challenge for Indonesia, intertwining domestic governance, historical grievances, and international diplomacy. Central to this issue is the role of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), a regional bloc advocating for Melanesian solidarity, which has become both a platform for Papuan separatist advocacy and a arena for Indonesian counter-diplomacy. Indonesia's strategic entry into the MSG as an associate member in 2015 exemplifies its neorealist approach to sovereignty defense, leveraging economic partnerships with Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Fiji to neutralize criticism while isolating vocal critics like Vanuatu. However, Vanuatu's persistent UN resolutions supporting Papuan self-determination—rooted in shared Melanesian identity—underscore the limits of transactional diplomacy, revealing how ideological kinship often outweighs material incentives in Pacific geopolitics.

Indonesia's dual-track strategy—*government-to-government (G2G)* and *people-to-people (P2P)* diplomacy—reflects a pragmatic blend of hard and soft power. Along the PNG border, collaborative security measures through the Joint Border Committee (JBC) have curtailed cross-border insurgent activities, while thriving economic ties (\$322 million in

trade by 2021) reinforce bilateral trust. In Fiji, partnerships on drug trafficking and humanitarian aid during crises like COVID-19 bolster Indonesia's regional influence. Yet, challenges persist in managing Vanuatu's ideological opposition. Indonesia's *No Genocide in West Papua* campaign and scholarships for Vanuatu students aim to counter disinformation, but digital activism (#PapuanLivesMatter) highlights gaps in Jakarta's digital diplomacy, necessitating more proactive narrative control.

Domestically, initiatives like the *Papua Youth Creative Hub* and the 2015 Indonesian Melanesian Brotherhood Forum seek to foster grassroots loyalty. However, their limited reach in remote highland regions perpetuates spatial inequities, fueling separatist narratives. Legal reforms addressing racial discrimination and transparent handling of human rights cases are critical to rebuilding trust, yet implementation remains inconsistent.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Integrated Sovereignty Governance: Combine G2G economic alliances with P2P cultural diplomacy to isolate critics like Vanuatu while addressing Papuan grievances.
2. Decentralized Development: Prioritize infrastructure and education in underserved highland areas to mitigate spatial disparities, aligning with World Bank (2023) recommendations.
3. Digital Counter-Narratives: Institutionalize platforms like *Papua Bangkit* to preempt disinformation, adopting models from Singapore's POFMA framework.
4. Regional Coalition-Building: Expand Fiji-style partnerships in the Pacific, leveraging humanitarian aid and technical training to sway neutral MSG members.

Indonesia's Papua strategy must transcend neorealist pragmatism to embrace constructivist inclusivity. By harmonizing statecraft with grassroots empowerment and digital agility, Indonesia can transform Papua from a sovereignty challenge into a testament of pluralist resilience, ensuring national unity while respecting regional aspirations.

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