

# **POTENTIAL FRAUD AND VIOLENCE IN PAPUA'S APPROACHING ELECTIONS**

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# CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
II.	BACKGROUND: ADMINISTRATIVE FRAGMENTATION AND CONFLICT IN PAPUA .....	2
	A. The first division, 2003.....	2
	B. The Special Autonomy Law II and New Provinces in Papua .....	3
	C. The West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) in elections .....	4
III.	ELECTORAL FRAUD AND VIOLENCE DURING THE FEBRUARY 2024 ELECTION .....	5
	A. The “noken system” and violence .....	5
	B. Biased election boards and fraudulent tabulation.....	7
	C. The threat of rebel violence.....	8
IV.	PREPARING FOR THE 27 NOVEMBER ELECTIONS .....	9
	A. Electoral regulatory changes.....	10
	B. The “package system” .....	11
V.	PAPUA PROVINCE: A LOPSIDED CONTEST .....	12
VI.	HIGHLAND PAPUA: EPICENTER OF THE INSURGENCY .....	14
VII.	CENTRAL PAPUA: FOUR-WAY STAND-OFF .....	16
VIII.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	19
	APPENDIX I .....	20
	APPENDIX II.....	21

## I. INTRODUCTION

The division of Papua into six provinces in 2022 has exacerbated the potential for violence along multiple fault lines as elections for provincial and sub-provincial executives approach on 27 November 2024. Contrary to a widespread assumption, the main cause of violence is likely not to be clashes between government and pro-independence forces but rather the provocative use of ethnicity in mobilisation of voters, and poor administration of the elections themselves. Rebel group disruptions could be a factor in a few areas, but they are not likely to be the main problem.

The issues encountered in the February 2024 legislative elections, when thousands of local candidates competed for seats in the six provincial legislative bodies and 42 local councils, were a stark illustration of the chronic problems that have plagued elections in Papua, particularly in the central highlands. They included biased recruiting of local election staff, logistical problems, inaccurate and/or fraudulent vote tabulation; and weak, biased or corrupt judicial mechanisms responsible for certifying the result. Many areas had to do recounts or partial revoting as a result.

The use of the so-called “noken system” of proxy voting in Central Papua and Highland Papua has also made it both easier to transfer votes illegally and harder to prove these transfers in court. The absence of effective legal and administrative remedies means that losing candidates increasingly see violence and vandalism as the only viable options for protest. The National Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum) has tried to address some of the problems but, in the process, may have created new ones.

This report focuses on Papua's three largest provinces: Papua, Highland Papua and Central Papua. These provinces were the focus of reported fraud and violent clashes during the February elections and are also strongholds of the independence movement. Highland Papua and Central Papua are the only provinces where the *noken* system is allowed. All three are critical areas of concern in the November elections.

The stakes for the November elections are much higher than for the February legislative races. Most candidates are either incumbents or previous office-holders who have influence, access to substantial resources and the capacity to mobilise mass support. All candidates for governor are required by Papua's special autonomy law to be indigenous Papuans, but not all are running in their places of origin and are accused of being outsiders as a result. All are nominally members of national parties, but the parties represent sources of money or Jakarta connections more than definable policies or lasting alliances.

The report looks at the pattern of violence in February and then at the races for governor in the three provinces, looking at the backgrounds of the candidates, their party affiliations, and the challenges they face. It notes that many candidates are using a “package system” where would-be governors will build alliances with several *bupatis* as a way of merging resources but also reaching out to ethnicities not represented in the governor-vice governor ticket. It

concludes that at least in the short term, the division of Papua has only compounded its electoral difficulties.

This report is based on field research in Wamena and Jayapura city in October 2024, which involved interviews with candidates, campaign team and political party members, election officials, and community figures.

## **II. BACKGROUND: ADMINISTRATIVE FRAGMENTATION AND CONFLICT IN PAPUA**

In 2022, the Indonesian government created four new provinces in Papua out of the existing two (Papua and Papua Barat), making six altogether. Ostensibly intended to improve governance and “bring government closer to the people”, the division, in fact, continued a longstanding approach of security and intelligence to divide Papua in the interests of diluting pro-independence sentiment, keeping Papuan elites on the side through new opportunities for spoils, and justifying the expansion of the security forces. The divisions roughly corresponded to seven cultural areas first identified by the Dutch, and while many customary leaders have acknowledged the validity of the areas, the way in which the division was done – without consultation – meant that it had little legitimacy.<sup>1</sup> So far, the division has delivered few tangible benefits. Instead, it has created significant challenges for governance and electoral integrity, even as the rebels expand their operations into new areas.

### ***A. The first division, 2003***

In carving up Papua, the Jokowi government appeared to have learned no lessons from the outrage that accompanied the first division of the territory in 2003 under then-President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Her predecessor, Abdurrahman Wahid, had supported special autonomy for Papua with a 2001 law that had been based on extensive consultations with Papuans. It required among other things that any division of Papua have the approval of a new body called the Papuan People's Council (Majelis Rakyat Papua, MRP). In 2003, Megawati, urged on by the powerful head of the State Intelligence Agency (Badan Intelijen Negara, BIN), issued a decree dividing Papua into three: Papua, West Papua and Central Papua. The aim was to weaken the independence movement which had taken full advantage of political space allowed during post-Soeharto “Papuan Spring” that flourished in 2000. There was no consultation with the MRP or with Papuans more broadly. In the end, only Papua and West Papua were established, but the damage, in terms of destroying whatever trust Papuans had in Jakarta, was done.

Until 2022, the central government made no further move to create new provinces in Papua, but after Indonesia's adoption of a new local government law in 2004, a proliferation of

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<sup>1</sup> The areas are Tabi and Saireri (Papua), La Pago (Highland Papua), Mee Pago (Central Papua), Anim Ha (South Papua), Domberai (Southwest Papua), and Bomberai (West Papua). Originally Tabi and Saireri were considered separate areas, but Saereri's request for its own province was rejected.

districts (*kabupaten*) and subdistricts (*distrik* in Papua, *kecamatan* elsewhere in Indonesia) took place. The 2004 law allowed for the division or merger of existing provinces or sub-provincial units if certain conditions were met, several of which were routinely ignored. This set off a “big bang” of administrative fragmentation, in a process known as *pemekaran*, or “blossoming”. The impact was particularly acute in Papua, where in a very short time, 32 new *kabupaten*, hundreds of *distrik*, and thousands of villages sprang up, most of them carved along clan or ethnic lines. The fragmentation was finally halted in 2014 with a national government moratorium when authorities realised that the creation of new units had neither improved services nor reduced corruption and, in any case, constituted a major drain on national resources. By that time, however, a major political shift had taken place in Papua.

*Pemekaran* at the *kabupaten* level shifted the balance of political power among indigenous Papuans from the coastal elites, whom the Dutch had favoured, to the highlands. This was exemplified by the 2013 election of the late Lukas Enembe, from Puncak, as the first-ever highland governor of Papua province. Enembe's electoral success was facilitated by the dramatic increase in new administrative units and resultant – and highly questionable – rise in population data for the central highlands (See Appendix II).<sup>2</sup> The apparent increase in population also resulted in the expansion of the provincial parliament from 44 to 69 seats, further increasing Enembe's power and fuelling resentment among other regional elites.<sup>3</sup> By his second term, Enembe had Papua province in a chokehold until he was arrested in June 2023 on corruption charges.

The impact of *kabupaten*-level *pemekaran* in Papua was largely negative. Fiscal accountability for the massive funds transferred annually to Papua since 2002 was almost non-existent from the province down to the village level.<sup>4</sup> Most *kabupaten* remained impoverished, with the Human Development Index and other statistical indices consistently ranking Papua at the bottom nationally. And because so many new units were created along clan and ethnic lines, local elections turned into exercises in fraud, feuds and violence.

## ***B. The Special Autonomy Law II and New Provinces in Papua***

The 2001 special autonomy law for Papua only allowed special funding for 20 years, meaning that in 2021, either the funding would stop, or the law would have to be amended. Successive governments in Jakarta had premised their policies toward Papua in part on the belief that additional funds would speed the region's development, and development, in turn, would weaken independence aspirations. The Jokowi government therefore decided to renew the funding but amend the law to tighten control on how it was spent and recentralise some of the powers that had been devolved to the province or *kabupaten* in the original law.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> For examples of inflated data, see IPAC, “Numbers Matter: The 2020 Census and Conflict in Papua,” Report No. 60, 28 October 2019.

<sup>3</sup> See IPAC, “Carving up Papua: More Districts, More Trouble,” Report No. 3, 8 October 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Between 2002 and 2020, the central government transferred Rp105 trillion (\$7.2 billion) to Papua and West Papua provinces. This figure excludes the Village Fund, which provides between Rp500 million to 1 billion (US\$30,000-\$64,000) per village. There are 5,524 villages in Papua province and 1,742 in West Papua.

<sup>5</sup> IPAC, “Diminished Autonomy and the Risk of New Flashpoints in Papua,” Report No. 74, 22 December 2021.

Ministries of Finance and Home Affairs, together with BIN, had the most input into the revised version, known as Otsus II, which was crafted largely without input from Papuans.

Under the new law, Home Affairs and the national parliament (DPR) were given authority to create administrative units without the approval of the governor or provincial legislature concerned. As a result, on 30 June 2022, the DPR passed the law that carved Papua into six. Papua province was carved into four: the rump Papua, South Papua, Central Papua and Highland Papua, and West Papua was split into two, the rump West Papua and Southwest Papua. Again, the official rationale was improved governance; again, the real rationale was security, combined with economic interests of the Jakarta elite. Papuans – like the current candidates for governor of Central Papua and Highland Papua – who stood to gain from elective office, appointed office, or new business contracts supported the division, but elsewhere in Papua, widespread street protests ensued. The government waived the required preparation process and provided extra funding to accelerate the creation of the new provinces so they could take part in the 2024 elections.<sup>6</sup>

### ***C. The West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) in elections***

Local elites were not the only ones to benefit from *pemekaran* – the TPNPB guerrillas did as well. After 2005, elections became the primary avenue for the TPNPB to exercise its influence as local politicians sought support from rebel commanders to intimidate opponents, while new groups often made their first mark by disrupting the election process.<sup>7</sup> In *kabupaten* Nduga, then-teenage rebel commander Egianus Kogoya started his insurgent career in October 2018 by attacking an aircraft carrying electoral supplies and police personnel.<sup>8</sup> Similar disruptive activities were observed in 2020 in Yahukimo and Pegunungan Bintang where new TPNPB groups emerged, targeting election officials and medical workers.<sup>9</sup>

Many of these groups were able to attract more recruits and secure new arms, partly due to the trade in illicit firearms financed by misappropriated local government funds. This was evidenced by a notable increase in arrests of village and *distrik* officials found to have been diverting village funds to procure weapons and ammunition for the rebels through illicit deals with security personnel since 2018.<sup>10</sup> This trend, and the prevalence of money politics in elections more generally, meant that it came as no great surprise that some members of the

<sup>6</sup> “Pusat alokasikan Rp6,6 triliun bangun empat provinsi DOB di Papua,” *antaranews.com*, 18 June 2023, and “Pemerintah Anggarkan Dana Pilgub 2024 di 4 Provinsi Baru Papua Rp974 Miliar,” *kompas.com*, 18 July 2023.

<sup>7</sup> In 2009, TPNPB national commander Goliat Tabuni supported his cousin Deerd Tabuni, who ran for the provincial legislature for the Golkar Party. In 2014, he supported the incumbent bupati, Elieser Renaur, who ran against Lukas Enembe in the election Puncak Jaya bupati. In both cases, the candidates supported by Tabuni lost.

<sup>8</sup> Kogoya’s notoriety increased after he led the massacre of more than a dozen civilian construction workers in December 2018 and abducted New Zealand pilot Philip Mertens in February 2023.

<sup>9</sup> An investigation by the MRP found the rebels took sides in a political dispute in Kiwirok district after some locals were sacked from the local health department for supporting losing candidates in the 2020 *bupati* (regent) election. *Majelis Rakyat Papua*, “Kiwirok, Sudah Aman Kah?” Jayapura, November 2021.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of how Village Funds flow to TPNPB, see Aliansi Demokrasi Untuk Papua (ALDP) report, “Jejak Perdagangan Senjata Api dan Amunisi Ilegal di Tanah Papua,” 2022.

TPNPB tried to exploit the presidential and legislative elections in February 2024 and were looking to do the same in November 2024.

### III. ELECTORAL FRAUD AND VIOLENCE DURING THE FEBRUARY 2024 ELECTION

After the February 2024 election, more petitions contesting local legislative results were sent to the Constitutional Court from Central Papua than from any other province in the country.<sup>11</sup> Together with hundreds of other disputes handled by the local election supervising body (BAWASLU), substantial evidence emerged of electoral fraud perpetrated not only by candidates but also by biased election boards (KPUD) and local election officials. These fraudulent activities included deliberate failure to follow administrative procedures, vote buying, illegal vote transfer and fraudulent tabulation, as well as manipulation of the traditional proxy-voting methods known collectively as the “*noken* system”.

#### A. The “*noken* system” and violence

The “*noken* system”, often characterised as a “traditional” voting method, has long been criticised for its vulnerability to manipulation. A *noken* is a string bag, almost universally carried by Papuan highlanders, and in some areas, local leaders were traditionally chosen by villagers putting a shell or a stone in the bag of their preferred candidate. But the term now covers a wide range of proxy voting in which communities or community leaders come to an agreement before the poll on how everyone will vote, and ballots are left unmarked.<sup>12</sup> They are then wrapped up and used for the single candidate that the community unanimously supports. The principles of a secret ballot and “one person, one vote” are ignored, and in some cases any pretence of voting at all is dropped.<sup>13</sup> The government, however, has accepted its use in Central Papua and Highland Papua provinces, accommodating local elites' arguments that it is a necessary solution to logistical and transportation problems and a way of averting election violence. It is neither, and frequently results in a reported 100 per cent turnout rate in a polling station and a 100 per cent vote for a single candidate or a party.

The national election commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU) issued a regulation in January 2024 that outlined procedures for voting, spelling out in detail the roles of local officials at different levels of government, including procedures for implementing the *noken* system.<sup>14</sup> It vested significant authority in the election boards at the sub-provincial level

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<sup>11</sup> “Papua Tengah Catat Sengketa Pemilu Terbanyak, Perludem: KPU & Bawaslu Harus Evaluasi,” perludem.org, 28 March 2024.

<sup>12</sup> IPAC, “Carving up Papua: More Districts, More Trouble,” Report No. 3, 9 October 2013.

<sup>13</sup> IPAC, “Open to Manipulation: The 2014 Elections in Papua,” Report No. 14, 10 December 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, “Keputusan KPU No. 66 Tahun 2024 tentang Pedoman Teknis Pelaksanaan Pemungutan dan Penghitungan Suara Dalam Pemilihan Umum”, [https://jdih.kpu.go.id/data/data\\_kepkpu/2024kpt066.pdf](https://jdih.kpu.go.id/data/data_kepkpu/2024kpt066.pdf). Independent local KPUs would conduct elections at the provincial and sub-provincial levels. The KPUs at the kabupaten/kota

(kabupaten/kota) where the power of clans tended to be strong and corruption particularly rife. The KPU at this level, which was supposed to be independent but rarely was, appointed the teams to conduct the elections in subdistricts, villages and individual polling stations. A critical document was the C-1 form used to tally the votes in each polling station. It was supposed to be distributed by subdistrict teams down to villages and then to the stations, but in Papua, it sometimes did not arrive at its destination. The 2024 regulation also limited the use of the *noken* system to six *kabupaten* in Central Papua (excluding Mimika and Nabire) and six in Highland Papua (excluding Yalimo and Pegunungan Bintang).<sup>15</sup>

Despite the detailed guidelines spelt out in the regulations, many problems were reported.

- In Yahukimo, Highland Papua, KPU officials allegedly directed the village election teams to inflate the vote of the Nasdem party by filling in blank C-1 forms across all 51 *distrik*. This was made possible by not registering the vote at polling stations, which in turn enabled *distrik* teams to fake the result during the next stage of counting called “recapitulation.” The systematic fraud was discovered, which led to public outrage and attacks on the KPU office. The protesters also demanded a revote.<sup>16</sup> Despite the controversy, Nasdem won the legislative elections in Highland Papua with 21.6 per cent of the votes in the province and 40 per cent in Yahukimo.<sup>17</sup>
- In Jayawijaya, Highland Papua, officials at polling places in three *distrik* failed to provide copies of C-1 forms to party witnesses, enabling *distrik*-level election officials to falsify tallies by reducing some candidates' votes to zero and transferring them to others. This sparked a riot in Wamena, where election officials were attacked. Although the provincial KPU in Highland Papua dismissed the allegations as a typical result of the *noken* system, the Constitutional Court found sufficient evidence of fraud to annul the results and order re-elections.
- The *noken* system was also used illegally in areas where it was banned. In Jayapura, three polling stations illegally administered *noken* voting, which prompted revoting.<sup>18</sup> In Yalimo and Pegunungan Bintang, both in Highland Papua, the turnout rate exceeded the number of registered voters, with all ballots used in Yalimo and only fifteen unused ballots left in Pegunungan Bintang.<sup>19</sup>

Rather than preventing electoral conflict, the *noken* system contributed to violence in some areas. Failure to reach a consensus among neighbouring communities to vote for certain candidates led to widespread clashes in nine *distrik* in Puncak Jaya, Central Papua.<sup>20</sup> In Nduga, Highland Papua, disagreement between the incumbent provincial legislator from the

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level would then appoint committees, known as PPK and PPS, to conduct elections at the subdistrict and village levels, respectively. Each village-level PPS would then select a team, known as KPPS, to implement elections at individual polling places. Election oversight bodies known by the acronym BAWASLU, to ensure the fairness of the process, were to operate at the national, provincial, and *kabupaten/kota* levels.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Chapter IV (2).

<sup>16</sup> The Constitutional Court partially accepted the petition by ordering KPU Highland Papua to annul the legislative election and ordered KPU Highland Papua to conduct another recapitulation in *distrik* Geya.

<sup>17</sup> Yahukimo is the most populated *kabupaten* in Highland Papua, with 282,535 registered voters or 21.6 per cent of the 1,306,112 total voters in the province.

<sup>18</sup> “Bawaslu Temukan Ada TPS di Kota Jayapura Gunakan Sistem Noken, Frans: Sistem Noken Dampak Buruk Bagi Pemilih,” *ceposonline.com*. 16 February 2024.

<sup>19</sup> In Yalimo, 92,221 voters participated in the February election, surpassing 92,184 registered voters in five subdistricts. In Pegunungan Bintang, 100,566 voters registered in a total of 30 subdistricts, and 100,641 used their voting rights.

<sup>20</sup> “Bentrok Antar-pendukung Caleg di Papua Tengah, 1 Warga Tewas,” *Kompas.com*, 29 February 2024.



Golkar party and a candidate from the PSI party on how to divide the votes collected using the *noken* system sparked a deadly clan feud that lasted from February to July 2024, leaving five dead and countless injured. The violence seemed to be driven by revenge, with neither candidate seeking legal intervention to resolve their electoral dispute.<sup>21</sup>

### ***B. Biased election boards and fraudulent tabulation***

The manipulation of the *noken* system was a symptom of wider abuse. Allegations were widespread that local election officials fraudulently tallied votes to favour specific candidates or parties, including in areas where the standard voting system, not *noken*, applied. The election boards tried to address these concerns by permitting candidates to send witnesses who would oversee the entire election process and receive copies of the forms with the results.

Most of these reports involved *distrik* election officials who aggregated the tallies during the *distrik* recapitulation process and produced the D-result forms that were then delivered to KPU officials higher up the chain, at *kabupaten* or provincial levels. The methods of fraud varied, including bypassing the *distrik* recapitulation process entirely, refusing to announce the result to the public, and withholding copies of D-result forms from witnesses. Discrepancies typically came to light during *kabupaten* recapitulations, where candidates discovered that the result did not match the tallies recorded on their copies of C-1 forms.

- In Papua province, systematic fraud was found in three *kabupaten*.<sup>22</sup> In Jayapura City, candidates from the PKS party discovered that *distrik* officials in *distrik* Sentani had reduced their votes from 225 polling stations and refused to provide copies of D-results to their witnesses. In Sarmi, a PDIP candidate found his votes had turned zero during recapitulation at the *kabupaten* level, and different versions of D-result forms were issued, with one of them showing that his votes were transferred to a candidate from Nasdem.<sup>23</sup> In Yapen, KPU officials delayed the recapitulation process by over ten days and inflated the votes for Golkar, PKN and Perindo at the expense of other parties.<sup>24</sup> The Constitutional Court subsequently ordered KPU Papua province to officiate a re-recapitulation in these *kabupaten*.
- In Highland Papua, KPU officials from Tolikara were found guilty of fraudulent tabulation.<sup>25</sup> Irregularities had already occurred during the recapitulation process at the *distrik* level, where many candidates found their votes had turned zero. Mobilisation of enraged voters armed with traditional weapons prompted the officials to move the recapitulation to Wamena. Hundreds of protesters from Tolikara then

<sup>21</sup> The police had already mediated the conflict between the two opposing factions several times. However, each time a peace agreement was signed, another round of fighting erupted again. See "Pemilu Sistem Noken Penyebab Konflik Pecah di Nduga Papua Pegunungan, Tiga Tewas," *tribunpapua.com*, 4 July 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Mahkamah Konstitusi, Putusan Nomor 17-01-05-33/PHPU.DPR-DPRD-XXII/2024, 10 June 2024.

<sup>23</sup> "MK: Suara PDIP di dua TPS Distrik Apawer Hulu harus ditetapkan ulang," *Antara*, 10 June 2024.

<sup>24</sup> "MK Perintahkan KPU Rekapitulasi Suara Ulang DPRD Kepulauan Yapen Dapil 1," *mkri.id*, 10 June 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Mahkamah Konstitusi, Putusan Nomor 221-01-12-37/PHPU.DPR-DPRD-XXII/2024, 10 June 2024.

showed up in Wamena, forcing the officials to relocate to Jayapura City. The court annulled the election results and ordered the votes to be recounted in Tolikara.

Reports of money politics and vote buying were widespread during elections but rarely proven in court due to the discreet nature of these transactions. Candidates often avoided direct financial exchanges by hosting expensive traditional ceremonies like the *bakar batu* (a pig roast), spending millions on pigs to win support from local clans. At the *distrik* recapitulation, unused ballots were reportedly sold to the highest bidder.<sup>26</sup> The only proven case occurred in Central Papua, where an election supervisor was convicted of accepting a kickback from a Golkar candidate, which he used to pay each local supervisor (Panwaslu) from *kabupaten* Dogiyai Rp5 million (US\$317).<sup>27</sup> He was caught on video distributing money to local supervisors at a police station, which led to his conviction.

### ***C. The threat of rebel violence***

The February election was relatively peaceful amid escalating insurgent violence across Papua. This raised a question about the implication of TPNPB's growing strength and influence and its role in local politics. Despite a threat from TPNPB spokesperson Sebby Sambom in January 2024 to ban the elections, insurgent violence during the election was only reported in Intan Jaya, Highland Papua, where rebels seized an aircraft carrying election logistics shortly after it landed in *distrik* Homeyo. The TPNPB also held several election officials as hostages for a few days. The rebels finally agreed to release them after negotiations with local officials in exchange for a ransom payment of Rp150 million (US\$9,500).

The incident had severe consequences for the local electoral process. According to KPU Intan Jaya, the rebels had stolen 119 ballot boxes, and all C-1 forms designated for eight *distrik* were missing. The threat of another rebel attack prompted the KPU to postpone the election in four *distrik* and relocate all polling stations there to Sugapa, the capital.<sup>28</sup>

A different version of the story was revealed after several candidates filed petitions to the Constitutional Court, accusing local officials of using security and logistical issues to mask widespread electoral fraud. They argued that new logistics had already been delivered by the time a new election date was set for 22 February.<sup>29</sup> In all polling stations, however, the vote count was conducted without using C-1 forms, as the tallies were written on paper or cardboard. Moreover, despite relocating to safer areas, dozens of *distrik* officials failed to turn up, and there was no one to oversee the *distrik* recapitulation. Instead, KPU officials aggregated the tallies and finalised the result at the *kabupaten* level. This problematic

<sup>26</sup> Interview with a member of Bawaslu from Papua province by phone, 18 September 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Dewan Kehormatan Penyelenggara Pemilu Republik Indonesia, Putusan 47-48-51-54-PKE-DKPP/III/2024, 28 June 2024.

<sup>28</sup> TPNPB activities were reported in *distrik* Homeyo, Tomosiga, Biandoga, and Wandai.

<sup>29</sup> Mahkamah Konstitusi, Putusan Nomor 159-02-08-36/PHPU.DPR-DPRD-XXII/2024, 21 May 2024.

procedure prevented candidates from verifying their votes at each polling station and allowed for discrepancies at different stages of recapitulation.<sup>30</sup>

The Intan Jaya case exemplified systemic electoral fraud beyond rebel threats, particularly when contrasted with the simultaneous presidential election. KPU's official result for the presidential election showed that all 123,508 ballots allocated to Intan Jaya were used in their entirety, with Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming receiving 100 per cent votes in six out of eight *distrik*.<sup>31</sup> The lack of complaints regarding the presidential elections, juxtaposed with the controversy in legislative elections, raised serious concerns about the integrity of the electoral process in Intan Jaya. If logistical and security challenges were the primary obstacles, both elections should have encountered similar difficulties.

The absence of insurgent violence during the election in other *kabupaten* warrants further investigation. An independent election witness tasked to observe elections in Nduga noted an informal arrangement between officials and the local rebels, including an agreement to prohibit the deployment of security personnel at polling stations, especially in remote areas.<sup>32</sup> It remains unclear whether money changed hands to reach this agreement, but it suggests that in their strongholds, the TPNPB had more to gain from working out deals with officials than engaging in gratuitous violence.

#### IV. PREPARING FOR THE 27 NOVEMBER ELECTIONS

The elections for local executives in Papua on 27 November 2024 are expected to be raucous, corrupt and marked by identity politics, especially in Jayapura and the central highlands. In an effort to prevent some of the problems that marred previous elections, both the national KPU and several provincial KPUs introduced regulatory changes that aimed to alleviate logistical and transportation challenges, enhance the accuracy and reliability of vote tallying, and ensure local officials' safety while serving in conflict areas. In the following section, IPAC looks at the changes made and then at the challenges posed by the election for governor in three provinces: Papua, Central Papua and Highland Papua. There are also direct elections for *bupatis* in all *kabupatens* in Papua, but the focus is on the governors' races.

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<sup>30</sup> The court rejected all the petitions because the plaintiffs could not provide evidence that traced the location of polling stations where the votes went missing and to whom they were being transferred.

<sup>31</sup> Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming received 100 per cent of the vote in six subdistricts except in Sugapa where 2,894 people voted for Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar, and in Biandoga where approximately 10,000 people voted for Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD.

<sup>32</sup> IPAC interview with an independent witness serving in Nduga, Jayapura city, 24 October 2024.

## A. Electoral regulatory changes

One of the main changes made at the national level was the introduction of a two-step verification process for online reporting of vote tallies. Election officials must now scan the C-1 form via a KPU mobile phone app called Sistem Informasi Rekapitulasi (Sirekap), which uses Optical Mark Recognition and Optical Character Recognition. The app reads and registers the handwritten tally. The tally cannot be uploaded if the system detects a discrepancy between the scanned form and the manually entered figures. The Sirekap app was first used in 2020 and more widely in the February 2024 presidential and legislative elections, but with many glitches. The KPU says that these have been fixed and it will be ready for use for the November polls, with a 24-hour hotline to help with any problems. One innovation is that in areas where Internet signals are weak or absent, data can be transmitted by Bluetooth.<sup>33</sup>

Other changes include:

- Reduction of polling stations: The number of polling stations will be reduced, but each station now will accommodate up to 600 ballots, an increase from the previous cap of 300.
- Provision of official C-1 form copies: local election organisers are now required to issue official copies of the tally to the local supervisors at village and *distrik* levels and witnesses, rather than relying on photocopies.
- Reduction of maximum number of days to hold the recapitulation process at the *distrik* level from seven to four.
- Reduced interaction with armed actors: to lessen the risk of attacks by rebel groups, officials are advised to avoid extensive interaction with police or military personnel and to refrain from renting vehicles previously used by security forces. In Nduga, Intan Jaya, and Puncak, the voting process will be entirely held in the kabupaten capital to minimise disruption by the rebels.

These changes have met with mixed reactions from KPU and Bawaslu members. Reducing the number of polling stations, for example, has raised concerns about potential conflict, particularly in areas where the *noken* system is applied. In such areas, merging polling stations could heighten tensions between neighbouring communities with different preferences. The head of the provincial Bawaslu in Highland Papua, for example, said:

Each *distrik* in Jayawijaya has multiple communities from different tribes or clans, often with different political preferences. By reducing the number of poll stations, we risk merging these groups and forcing them to reach a consensus under the *noken* system, which could escalate tension.<sup>34</sup>

Steve Dumbon, head of the KPU for Papua province, said the changes address some of the issues that came up in previous elections. He said one example is the logistical burden placed on election officials when the polling stations serving residents from a single village are

<sup>33</sup> "KPU Lakukan Peningkatan Kemampuan Sistem Sirekap untuk Pilkada," rri.com, 8 November 2024. See also "Sirekap Pilkada 2024: Penyempurnaan Masih Goyah di Transparansi," tirta.id, 12 November 2024.

<sup>34</sup> IPAC interview with the head of Bawaslu Highland Papua, Freddy Wamo, Wamena, 28 October 2024.

located far apart from one another. This burden will be reduced by increasing the number of ballots that each polling station can handle and reducing the number of polling stations.<sup>35</sup> While this arrangement may be easier for the officials, it would seem to make it harder on the voters. It also might increase vote-buying, since more unused ballots will be concentrated in the larger polling place.

### **B. The “package system”**

Despite these changes, the November elections in Jayapura and the highlands are likely to be marked by a high level of tension, fraud and identity politics – and possibly violence. Two primary approaches have emerged as crucial for electoral success: controlling the electoral system through ensuring that friends and relatives get key election monitoring positions and implementing the “package system” (*sistem paket*), where candidates for governor and *bupati* build alliances and merge resources.

The package system emerged as a new trend after the creation of the new provinces in 2022. The term refers to a strategy to enhance a gubernatorial candidate's success based on the number of “packages” he or she can secure with *bupati* candidates from other kabupaten. An alliance is particularly effective when the would-be governor can ally with an incumbent *bupati* running for a second term. Incumbents have the power and resources to use the local apparatus to mobilise supporters for the governor's campaign. These packages lessen the travel expenses of gubernatorial candidates to far-flung areas and facilitate extensive vote-buying networks through cost-sharing arrangements. In Southwest Papua province, the candidates for governor and *bupati* had a plan to make payments of Rp1 million [US\$63] to each voter on election day, with the former covering a larger portion of the money.<sup>36</sup> In exchange, the gubernatorial candidate can rely on the *bupati* to campaign for him on his home territory. The use of the package system is most prominent in Papua and Highland Papua.

Identity politics has also become a critical factor in the gubernatorial election. One of the implications of dividing Papua into six is the perception that the new provinces should only be led by someone indigenous to that area. Some candidates in the gubernatorial race have made up for the lack of resources by promoting themselves as native sons as opposed to their rivals, who may be indigenous Papuans but from outside the province where they are running. Campaigns using tribal affiliations to promote or demean candidates are common in the highlands. Most of the candidates for governor are previous officeholders with supporters willing to mobilise their clans, even to the point of tribal warfare. Nabire and Wamena, the capital districts of Central and Highland Papua, respectively, are particularly vulnerable, given a history of in-migration from other areas. Tensions are also likely to be higher here because this is where the vote count will be finalised.

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<sup>35</sup> IPAC interview with the head of KPU Papua, Steve Dumbon, Jayapura city, 30 October 2024.

<sup>36</sup> IPAC interview with a Bawaslu Papua official, Jayapura city, 25 October 2024.

## V. PAPUA PROVINCE: A LOSPISDED CONTEST

The landmark Constitutional Court decision of 21 August 2024, which lowered the threshold for nominating candidates in local elections, changed the trajectory of the gubernatorial race in Papua.<sup>37</sup> Before the decision, one candidate, former Papua police chief General (Retired) Mathius Fakhiri had no opposition and was backed by seventeen political parties. The court decision enabled a rival candidate, Benhur Tomi Mano (BTM), to emerge, although the race remains lopsided. The candidates are thus as follows:

- **Mathius Fakhiri** is backed by Golkar, Demokrat, Perindo, PKB, PAN, PSI, Buruh, Hanura, PBB, PKN, PKS, Gerindra, PPP, Gelora, Garuda, Golkar, and Nasdem. Born in Manokwari Selatan, West Papua in 1968, Fakhiri is a 1990 graduate of the Indonesian police academy. His mother was from South Sorong in what is now Southwest Papua and his father, was from Mappi, in South Papua. After a long career in Brimob, where he was involved in many high-profile operations against insurgents, Fakhiri was appointed deputy police chief for the combined West Papua and Papua commands in 2020 and police chief of Papua in 2021. He is a convert to Islam. Fakhiri's running mate, Aryoko Alberto Ferdinand Rumaropen, was born in Jayapura in 1970. He has a degree in urban and regional planning from Gajah Mada University and studied for a doctorate in social science from Cendrawasih University, Jayapura. He has worked most of his professional life as a bureaucrat in the provincial government, currently as head of human resources.
- **Benhur Tomi Mano (BTM)**, backed by PDIP. Born in 1965 in Jayapura, he graduated from the Home Affairs Academies in Jayapura and Jakarta and received an M.A. in human resource management from Cenderawasih University. He mostly served in caretaker positions, heading subdistricts across Papua province as needed, until he was elected mayor of Jayapura in 2011. A popular mayor, he was re-elected to a second term and also served as head of the provincial football club (Persipura Jayapura). His most recent job was in Jakarta as the expert staff of the Ministry of Social Affairs in the area of social rehabilitation. BTM chose the former *bupati* of Yapen, Yermias Bisai, as his running mate. A Wapoga, Papua native, Yermias has a law degree. As a candidate of the Democrat Party, he was elected *bupati* of Waropen in 2016 and was returned to a second term in 2021. He was also chosen unanimously in 2021 to head the Papua branch of the Indonesian Athletic Association.

The Fakhiri campaign benefits from extensive institutional backing in Jakarta, including from the police, and from the province's eight kabupaten and one city, Jayapura. The appointment of Christian Sohilait, a wily political operator and known Fakhiri loyalist, as Jayapura's caretaker mayor in May 2024 – reportedly engineered by Interior Minister and former

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<sup>37</sup> The previous regulation required a 20 per cent seat threshold for political parties to nominate a regional executive candidate. The new regulation lowered the threshold to 10 per cent (for a region with a population of less than two million), allowing a single party or small coalition to nominate a candidate.

national police chief Tito Karnavian – exemplifies this backing.<sup>38</sup> Upon taking office, Sohilait tried to systematically cut into BTM's remaining political influence in the city's bureaucracy by promoting pro-Fakhiri officials to head local administrative units and replacing those loyal to BTM.<sup>39</sup>

Sohilait and Fakhiri have greater appeal than BTM in “Nusantara” communities, a term now widely used to refer to non-Papuan residents or in-migrants. Sohilait, an Ambonese Christian and a long-time bureaucrat, is working to consolidate support from Torajan, Ambonese, and Manadonese communities. Fakhiri's religious status as a Muslim convert makes him the obvious choice for Muslim constituents.

The provincial police force has a strategic role in Fakhiri's campaign. However, unlike the overt pressure from police during Prabowo Subianto's presidential bid, police involvement in Papua is limited to distributing Fakhiri's campaign paraphernalia, mapping out opposition strongholds, and encouraging defection from BTM supporters who hold strategic positions. Because of Fakhiri's police connection, the BTM-Bisai team also requested that KPU use TNI instead of Polri as security escorts during campaign, as they feared the police might leak sensitive information to Fakhiri's team. KPU rejected the request but allowed BTM to hire his own relatives in the police force as his escorts.<sup>40</sup>

BTM's campaign has taken a markedly different path, leveraging identity politics and local sentiment. His provocative declaration that “Papua belongs to the Tabi and Saireri people” serves multiple purposes: it delegitimises Fakhiri as an outsider, stirring up indigenous sentiment, and frames the election as a protecting Papua's special autonomy from Jakarta's control. This stance has been controversial, particularly after BTM's confrontational speeches targeting non-indigenous residents and indigenous Papuans from other regions living in Jayapura, whom he accused of supporting Fakhiri. In one particularly charged moment, BTM declared to immigrant communities, “We are the owners of this land! I hold the key to this house. You eat and drink in my house. I won't ask you for money but remember! On November 27, give your vote to the owners of this land!” In another speech, BTM questioned the loyalty of Biak communities in Jayapura, which supported Fakhiri instead of him.<sup>41</sup>

Religious undertones have also emerged as a significant factor. The Protestant GKI Pneil Church in Kotaraja has become BTM's unofficial campaign post. (Pneil refers to a Biblical site.) Campaign chants of “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah” during gubernatorial debates resonate in a province where Protestantism is the predominant religion.<sup>42</sup> While BTM has never directly referenced Fakhiri's religion, social media buzzes with comments about Papua being “the land of the Gospel” and should never be led by a Muslim (an ironic twist on a campaign by

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<sup>38</sup> After being sidelined as the Papua province head of education following Lukas Enembe's imprisonment in 2022, Sohilait was hired by Fakhiri as a special staff for the Cartenz Peace taskforce. For Sohilait's detailed role in managing conflict with the TPNPB, see IPAC, “Managing Conflict in Papua: Suggestions for the New President,” Report No. 81, 6 February 2024. At the time, IPAC praised his successful efforts to reduce conflict, but he proved to be as corrupt as he was skilled.

<sup>39</sup> IPAC interview with a *distrik* official from Abepura, Jayapura city, 26 October 2024.

<sup>40</sup> IPAC interview with the head of KPU Papua, Steve Dumbon, Jayapura city, 31 October 2024.

<sup>41</sup> “Terkait Kampanye di Organda, Marga Sroyer Belum Menerima Permohonan Maaf BTM Secara Langsung,” *pembaruanpapua.com*, 22 October 2024.

<sup>42</sup> According to the 2020 census, 488,149 people identified themselves as Protestants, and only 67,665 identified as Muslims.

hardline Muslims in 2016-2017 against the then Christian governor of Jakarta that Muslims should never be led by a non-Muslim.)

The BTM-Bisai campaign, however polarising, remains limited by its meagre resources derived from a single party, PDIP. BTM's two consecutive terms as Jayapura mayor do not necessarily translate to wider electoral support and his campaign has not reached very far outside the capital.

The campaign's dynamics shifted dramatically on October 31, however, when an audio recording leaked, exposing Sohilait's alleged orchestration of electoral fraud. The recording revealed Sohilait providing detailed instructions to local officials on how to buy votes. This included specific directions on bribing election officials, mapping all subdistricts with sizeable voter lists and buying unused ballots from each polling station, issuing voter invitation cards (C-6 form) to people without national identification cards, and instructing each voter to pierce multiple ballots at the same time. While protests demanding Sohilait's dismissal erupted at the Jayapura mayor's office, he had yet to respond to Bawaslu's summons for clarification at the time of this writing.

Unsurprisingly, Fakhiri is favoured to win. The recording of Sohilait's efforts to rig the voting, however, may serve as legal grounds for BTM to challenge the election's integrity even before votes are cast.

## VI. HIGHLAND PAPUA: EPICENTER OF THE INSURGENCY

In Highland Papua, the gubernatorial race pits two longtime politicians with strong local support bases against each other. Both claim to have been endorsed by Prabowo. The province includes eight kabupaten, one of which, Nduga, is the most conflict-wracked area in all of Papua. It was from Nduga that the New Zealand pilot Philip Mehrstens was eventually rescued in September 2024, nineteen months after being taken hostage by a local TPNPB commander.<sup>43</sup> Whoever becomes governor will be drawn into the conflict between the TPNPB and Indonesian security forces and will have to manage a stepped-up presence of troops amid a resentful population. The new governor, however, may also be able to offer creative local solutions for particularly hard-hit areas. The outcome of this race could have major implications for the trajectory of the insurgency. The candidates involved are:

- **John Tabo**, backed by Golkar, Demokrat, PDIP. Tabo, born of a Torajan father and an indigenous Papuan mother in Tolikara in 1970, served as head of Jayawijaya legislature (1999-2004), *bupati* of Tolikara (2005-2010) where he developed a reputation for educational reform, and Mamberamo Raya (2021-2024).<sup>44</sup> He was a prominent campaigner for the creation of Highland Papua in 2022; he was also head

<sup>43</sup> In addition to Nduga, Highland Papua's kabupaten are Jayawijaya, Pegunungan Bintang, Yahukimo, Tolikara, Mamberamo Tengah, Yalimo and Lanny Jaya.

<sup>44</sup> He lost his bid for a second term in Tolikara in 2012 through fraud and violence, though initially he was declared the winner. See IPAC, "Rebuilding after Communal Violence: Lessons from Tolikara, Papua," Report No.29, 13 June 2016.



of the Prabowo-Gibran campaign team in the February 2024 election. Tabo's running mate, Dr Ones Pahabol, is an ethnic Yali from Yahukimo, where he served as *bupati* for two terms from 2005 to 2016. (Yahukimo has the largest number of registered voters in the province.) Pahabol received an M.A. in management from Hasanuddin University, Makassar and a medical degree from Brawijaya University in Malang, East Java in 2011.

- **Befa Yigibalom**, backed by Nasdem, Gerindra, PKS, PSI and Perindo. Yigibalom was born in Wamena in 1972. He served as *bupati* of Lanny Jaya from 2011 to 2024, and in 2018 succeeded Lukas Enembe as head of the Association of *Bupatis* from the Central Highlands. Enembe had used this association as a stepping stone to power. Yigibalom, like Tabo, campaigned hard for the creation of Highland Papua province. Yigibalom's running mate, Natan Pahabol, has served as a Gerindra legislator in the Papuan provincial parliament from 2014 to 2024. Like his rival for the vice-governor, he is an ethnic Yali from Yahukimo.

The candidates have taken different approaches to voter outreach. Yigibalom, leveraging his position as head of the *bupati* association, has sought and received support from regional executives, including incumbent *bupati* seeking re-election. His campaign "package" includes influential incumbent *bupati* running for a second term like John Banua of Jayawijaya and Didimus Yahuli of Yahukimo.<sup>45</sup> Three *bupati* candidates competing in Tolikara and Pegunungan Bintang have also publicly pledged their support. In Pegunungan Bintang, the candidates have promised Befa that he can get all 100,600 ballots to be cast there.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast, Tabo directly engages with grassroots, regularly hosting feasts with local communities to seek binding political endorsements through the *noken* system. He said:

Befa believes that he already won because he controls the electoral system. He may feel that meeting local communities and getting their commitment for *noken* is no longer necessary. That is why he never visits *distrik* and villages in other kabupaten.<sup>47</sup>

Anticipating widespread fraud during the recapitulation process, the Tabo-Pahabol team plans to deploy ten to twenty witnesses at each polling station to prevent intimidation and illegal vote transfers.

The rivalry between Tabo and Yigibalom has exacerbated existing tensions among indigenous communities, particularly between Lani and Nduga communities. A tribal conflict in Wamena from late September to early October 2024 left five dead and many injured. Instead of mediating the conflict, Befa Yigibalom sided with the Lani community and blamed Nduga people, accusing them of instigating the violence.<sup>48</sup> He allegedly spent Rp3.5 billion in compensation for the victims' families from the Lani side. Tabo, in turn, gained favour from the Nduga community by providing contributions of rice, food, and other commodities. This

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<sup>45</sup> "Kampanye Terbuka Befa Nathan dan John Marthin Dihadiri Ribuan Pendukung," RRI.com, 24 October 2024, "Tim Koalisi dan Pemenangan BENA-DYEM di Yahukimo Resmi Dilantik, jpnindonesia.com, 21 September 2024.

<sup>46</sup> "Tiga Calon Bupati Pegunungan Bintang Dukung Befa-Natan," accessed via Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w17AScOgTbg>

<sup>47</sup> IPAC Interview with John Tabo, Wamena, 27 October 2024.

<sup>48</sup> IPAC Interview with a Papuan activist from the Lani community in Wamena by phone, 24 November 2024.

was publicised in a video where a Nduga leader pledged his support for Tabo, warning Yigibalom not to set foot in Nduga territory.<sup>49</sup>

As the election date approaches, tensions in Highland Papua's capital have reached a boiling point. The head of the Highland Papua Bawaslu fears the mobilisation of fanatical supporters in Wamena if either candidate claims irregularities during the counting process as evidence of electoral fraud. John Tabo, who has direct experience of massive rigging that denied him a second term as Tolikara *bupati*, explicitly warned that any evidence of fraud during the 27 November election would trigger a 'People Power' movement across the region.<sup>50</sup>

## VII. CENTRAL PAPUA: FOUR-WAY STAND-OFF

The race for governor in Central Papua has become a four-way standoff among former *bupati*, each aiming to lead this resource-rich province that is home to the giant Freeport-McMoran gold and copper mine.<sup>51</sup> Largely because of Freeport, the province is the eighth wealthiest in all of Indonesia, but several of its eight kabupaten rank among the lowest on the region's human development index and are also strongholds of the OPM-TPNPB.<sup>52</sup> Elections in the area under TPNPB's sphere of influence will be held in the kabupaten capital.<sup>53</sup>

The four candidates are as follows:

- **Meki Fritz Nawipa**, is supported by PDIP, and PAN. Born in Enarotali, Paniai in 1978, Nawipa is a licensed pilot who worked for several of the airlines serving Papua's most remote areas. He served as *bupati* of Paniai from 2018 to 2023 and is widely popular among the indigenous communities in Paniai, Dogiyai, Nabire and Deiyai kabupaten, which together constitute 36 per cent of Central Papua's registered voters. Nawipa's running mate, Denias Geley, adds support from Puncak Jaya, where he is the incumbent deputy *bupati* and which is also an important voting bank, with 196,881 registered voters. Nawipa's outspoken opposition to some central government policies, particularly transmigration, makes him popular among indigenous voters, but it could lead security and intelligence stakeholders to see him as uncooperative.
- **John Wempi Wetipo**, backed by Gerindra and PKS. Born in Jayawijaya in 1972, Wetipo, served as deputy minister of Home Affairs under Tito Karnavian from June

<sup>49</sup> A video made available to IPAC, accessed on 21 October 2024.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with John Tabo, Wamena, 27 October 2024. It is also noteworthy that Tabo was involved in deadly electoral violence in 2012, where he faced a contender, Usman Wanimo. Repeated clashes between supporters of both candidates resulted in a dozen deaths and hundreds of injuries. Ultimately, John Tabo lost the election.

<sup>51</sup> Following Papua province's division, Central Papua secured a share of the revenue from PT Freeport Indonesia. The agreement is supposed to allocate 7 per cent of the revenue to local governments: 5 per cent for Mimika kabupaten and 2 per cent for Central Papua province. In 2023, PT Freeport reported net profits of Rp3.35 trillion (US\$212,503,565), with Mimika receiving US\$88.8 million, Central Papua getting US\$53 million, and the remainder distributed among other kabupaten in Central Papua. "Freeport Setor Rp3.35 Triliun Bagian Daerah atas Keuntungan Bersih 2023," ptfi.co.id, 18 April 2024.

<sup>52</sup> The eight kabupaten are Nabire, Puncak, Puncak Jaya, Paniai, Mimika (home to Freeport), Dogiyai, Intan Jaya and Deiyai.

<sup>53</sup> These kabupaten include Intan Jaya, Puncak Jaya and Puncak. Interview with a KPU member from Intan Jaya, Jakarta, 9 November 2024.

2022 until October 2024, and as deputy head of the Public Works and Housing Ministry from 2019 to 2022. Although he also served as *bupati* of Jayawijaya for ten years (2008-2018), he has been perceived by many locals as representing Jakarta's interests, including in Freeport, rather than those of local communities. His involvement in the controversial acquisition of customary land for the construction of the Highland Papua governor's office has hurt his appeal, and at least one of his rivals has accused him of supporting "silent genocide" against indigenous Papuans.<sup>54</sup> Wetipo is also seen as an outsider, particularly among the Mee people, because he was born in what is now Highland Papua, not Central Papua. His campaign has faced resistance; on 2 October 2024, Dogiyai residents blocked his campaign convoy en route to Deiyai and Paniai.<sup>55</sup> His prospects plummeted further after his original running mate, Ausilius Youw, died suddenly on 18 October 2024. Ausilius, a provincial official, had been key to securing votes from his native Mimika, Central Papua's most populous kabupaten, with 224,514 voters. Wetipo replaced Youw with Agustinus Anggaibak, a Mimika native and the head of the Central Papua MRP, leading to protests from Youw's supporters, who preferred Youw's brother.

- **Willem Wandik**, backed by Golkar and Demokrat.<sup>56</sup> Born in 1975 in Paniai, Papua, Wandik is the former *bupati* of Puncak for two consecutive terms from 2013 to 2023 and an ally of Lukas Enembe. He and his running mate, Aloysius Giay, are regarded as representing the highland tribes (Dani, Lani, Damal) inhabiting the eastern part of the province and constituting an important part of the Mee Pago cultural community. Wandik is popular for his engagement with indigenous Papuans beyond his own political base and direct involvement in managing armed conflict between security forces and the TPNPB rebels. Giay is a Mee intellectual who became the head of the Papua province Health Department in 2015 and pioneered free healthcare for Central Papua through the Otsus Health Card. The Wandik-Giay is the most popular slate as the election approaches, according to several surveys.<sup>57</sup>
- **Natalis Tabuni**, backed by Nasdem. Tabuni, born in 1977 in Intan Jaya, became first *bupati* of Intan Jaya after it was carved out of Paniai in 2008 and proceeded to serve for two terms. He was elected to the DPR in February 2024 as a Nasdem candidate. His running mate, Titus Natkime, is Freeport's Vice President Shareholder representing the Amungme tribe, but his popularity or electability among constituents is yet to be tested.<sup>58</sup> The Tabuni-Natkime slate is considered to be the weakest in the race. Since the onset of the TPNPB insurgency in Intan Jaya in 2019, Tabuni has faced criticism for being largely absent from the kabupaten.

<sup>54</sup> Meki's statement was made during the first Central Papua gubernatorial debate on 19 October 2024, which can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AupNXQPzWR8>

<sup>55</sup> "Kunjungan Cagub Papua Tengah John Wempi Wetipo di Dogiyai Dihadang Warga," suara.com, 2 October 2024.

<sup>56</sup> Confusingly, there are two prominent politicians named Willem Wandik; the other is from Tolikara and a former member of the Papuan provincial council. They are frequently confused in Indonesia media reporting.

<sup>57</sup> "Survei Indo Barometer: Willem Wandik unggul di Pilkada Papua Tengah," *Antara*, 20 June 2024; "Survei TBRC: Willem Wandik-Aloysius Giay Pemenang Pilkada Papua Tengah," *dki.pikiran-rakyat.com*, 11 November 2024.

<sup>58</sup> In 1974, Suwarek Natkime, the chief of the Amungme tribe and father of Titus Natkime, signed a land concession agreement with Freeport. Suwarek's sons, Titus and his late brother, Silas, respectively, were later appointed Vice President of Stakeholders and Vice President for the Papuan Affairs department at PT Freeport Indonesia.

Victory in Central Papua will likely depend more on identity politics and the popularity of each candidate among local indigenous communities than on party affiliation. Wetipo appears to have more resources, but his close ties to Jakarta's interests have harmed his reputation. Each candidate's choice of running mate reflects an effort to connect with ethnic groups and political bosses beyond his home area. None of the candidates has a significant advantage in terms of influence over electoral bodies beyond their respective kabupaten. At the provincial level, the three *bupati* or former *bupati* have allies in the KPU. Wandik and Tabuni are related to Jennifer Tabuni, the head of KPU Central Papua, while Nawipa has relatives on both provincial and kabupaten election boards.<sup>59</sup>

The security concerns for the upcoming election present greater challenges than those faced during the 2024 presidential and legislative elections. While previous problems centred on potential clashes between political supporters, the current primary threat stems from intensified rebel activities.<sup>60</sup> A notable increase in insurgency violence occurred in Puncak Jaya. On 17 July, the military killed three civilians suspected of being TPNPB members, triggering communal retaliation by indigenous Papuans. Migrant communities were targeted, resulting in one death, three injuries and the destruction of migrant-owned properties. The situation further deteriorated with the fatal shooting of a Brimob personnel in the Kalome distrik on 26 September and on 28 October. These attacks suggest that the threat of armed violence, while not the biggest problem the elections face, may still be a problem in parts of Central Papua.

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<sup>59</sup> Meki Nawipa is related to KPU Central Commissioner Sepo Nawipa and two Paniai commissioners, Sisilia and Petrus Nawipa. Petrus previously served as the head of KPU Paniai until he was demoted by the DKPP in 2020 for violating the recapitulation procedure. Sisilia replaced Petrus as the head of election board until 2023. Petrus and Sisilia were reported for failing to distribute election logistics in nine *distrik* during the February legislative election. See "Ketua KPU Papua Tengah Masih Saudara dengan 3 Kandidat di Pilkada, Siapa Saja?" suara.com, 8 October 2024.

<sup>60</sup> Rebel attacks between February to November 2024 were reported in Intan Jaya, Paniai, Puncak and Puncak Jaya.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

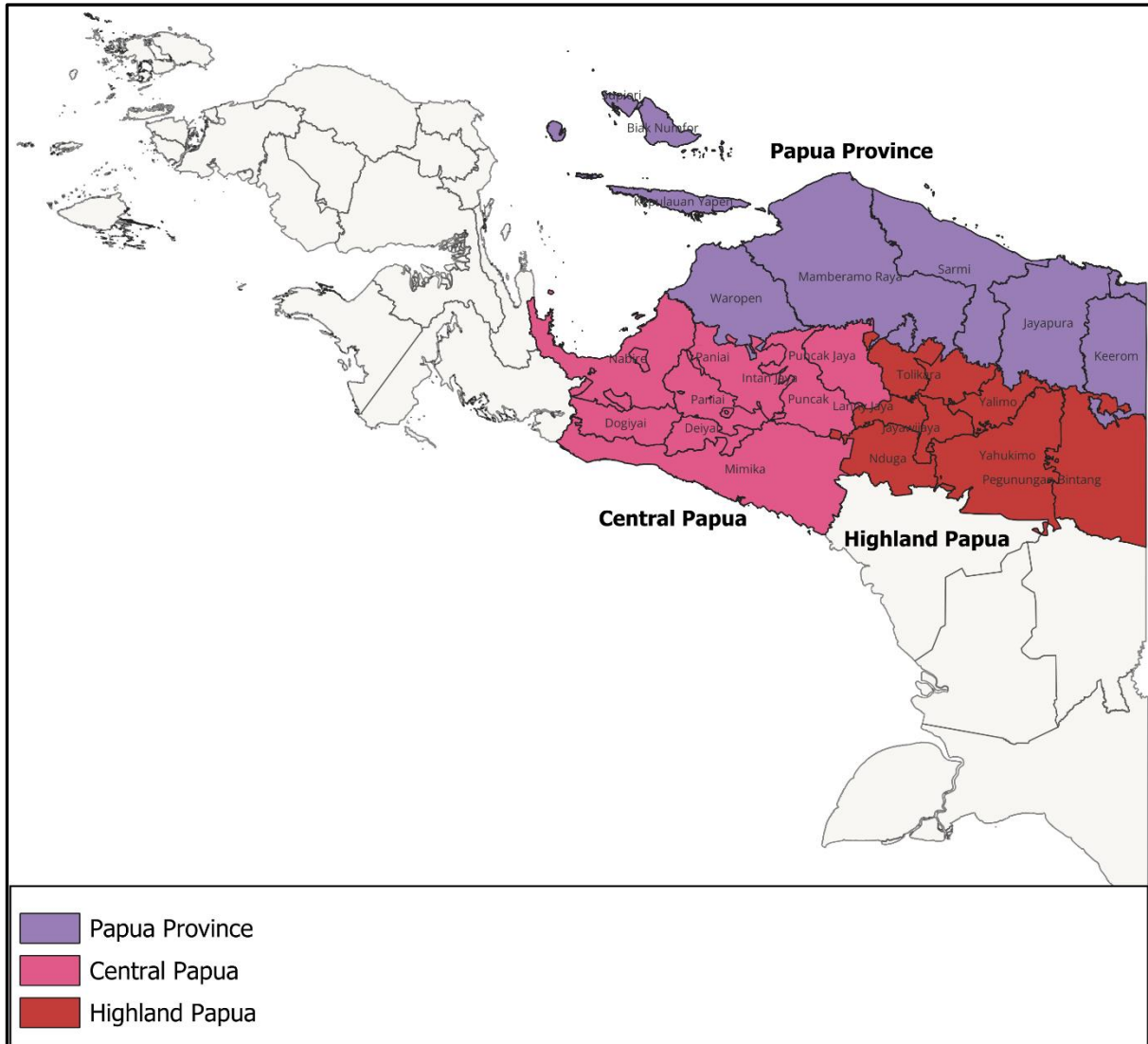
The need to improve election procedures in Papua is urgent. The November elections are likely to be more violent than the legislative polls in February, and the fraud is more pronounced because the stakes are so much higher. The answer is not, as some top officials have proposed, returning to indirect elections via local legislatures with candidates approved by the Ministry of Home Affairs. It is rather to step up the kind of incremental improvements already mandated by the KPU, increase voter education, eliminate the *noken* system, and crucially, put the resources necessary into doing an accurate census that will enable the correction of voter rolls. Comprehensive training for election witnesses and oversight officials (Baswaslu), particularly in gathering and analysing evidence of violations, is also needed, and it needs to start long before the elections are held. Training alone, however, does not guarantee improvements, as witnesses and supervisors themselves are often involved in electoral malpractice.

An alternative solution is to strengthen the role of independent observers in Papua's elections. Independent observers are typically recruited by civil society organisations and play a crucial role, particularly in reporting electoral issues to Bawaslu. In many cases, Bawaslu's recommendations for addressing electoral fraud are based on reports from independent observers rather than from official witnesses or local supervisors. By supporting the involvement of such observers, Bawaslu's oversight role could be significantly strengthened, especially in remote areas of Central Papua and Highland Papua.

The Indonesian government also needs to recognise that the division of Papua into new provinces has solved little. It has not weakened the OPM, it has not improved social services, it has created new land conflicts as elaborate new provincial offices are built, and it appears to have exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions among indigenous Papuans, at least at election time. It will be interesting to see whether any of the new governors elected in November can bring about the kind of peace at a local level that Papua so badly needs – and if so, whether the lessons of what works can be transferred elsewhere.

## APPENDIX I

### Regional Elections in Papua, Highland Papua, and Central Papua



@QGIS Geographic Information System, November 2024; amended by IPAC

## APPENDIX II

### Discrepancies among Different Government Agencies on Population and Registered Voters in Papua

Irregularities in the population data and voter registries are more prominent in kabupaten located in Highland Papua and Central Papua provinces than in other regions. In the 2024 election, there were 12 kabupaten, where more than 80 per cent of the population allegedly over 17 years old and eligible to vote. In Tolikara, Yahukimo, Yalimo, Lanny Jaya, Nduga, and Intan Jaya, the figure is roughly 90 per cent, meaning only ten per cent or less of the demographic is 17 years old or below. In Pegunungan Bintang and Puncak, the number of voters surpassed the population count by a significant margin.

The data below is from the Central Statistics Bureau (Biro Pusat Statistik, BPS); the Population and Civil Data Directorate of the Ministry of Home Affairs (Dukcapil) and the 2020 census.

	2019			2020		
	BPS	Dukcapil	KPU Voter list	Census 2020	KPU Voter List 2024	Voter/ Population ratio
<b>Highland Papua</b>						
Jayawijaya	212,811	268,137	263,729	277,923	227,556	82%
Tolikara	136,576	246,858	223,077	244,345	234,295	96%
Pegunungan Bintang	73,473	107,353	96,859	78,466	100,639	128%
Yahukimo	187,021	349,410	291,491	361,657	328,953	91%
Mamberamo Tengah	47,487	44,788	33,265	51,719	37,562	73%
Yalimo	60,822	118,829	84,048	105,139	99,221	94%
Lanny Jaya	176,687	197,313	186,197	201,461	187,272	93%
Nduga	97,012	106,354	94,216	109,630	97,916	89%
Total	991,889	1,439,042	1,272,882	1,430,340	1,313,414	92%
<b>Central Papua</b>						
Intan Jaya	48,318	137,050	82,110	139,236	124,994	90%
Paniai	170,193	117,047	101,043	227,254	115,424	51%
Deiyai	72,206	88,145	60,999	102,168	78,959	77%
Dogiyai	94,997	112,513	89,543	119,815	96,080	80%
Nabire	145,101	166,463	174,397	173,043	124,913	72%
Mimika	210,413	306,517	233,125	321,657	224,514	70%

Puncak	107,822	158,406	158,340	116,279	167,376	144%
Puncak Jaya	123,591	215,106	180,430	231,499	196,881	85%
Total	972,641	1,301,247	1,079,987	1,430,951	1,129,141	79%
<b>Papua</b>						
Jayapura	125,975	165,404	116,974	171,331	134,568	79%
Jayapura city	293,690	417,492	297,603	410,852	258,082	63%
Keerom	55,018	59,406	47,319	62,777	50,017	80%
Sarmi	38,210	36,726	10,513	42,233	30,329	72%
Mamberamo Raya	22,313	34,558	26,691	37,616	27,292	73%
Biak Numfor	144,697	140,631	93,372	135,796	101,536	75%
Supiori	19,104	21,014	14,545	23,247	17,128	74%
Kepulauan Yapen	95,007	109,531	97,701	116,107	81,879	71%
Waropen	29,480	32,541	33,978	34,997	27,004	77%
Total	823,494	1,017,303	738,696	1,034,956	727,835	70%
<b>South Papua</b>						
Merauke	223,389	221,886	130,924	232,357	162,942	70%
Boven Digul	66,209	58,093	31,224	65,193	43,765	67%
Mappi	94,671	102,113	69,919	111,141	80,440	72%
Asmat	92,909	103,074	69,110	113,524	80,112	71%
Total	477,178	485,166	301,177	522,215	367,259	70%
Papua Total	3,265,202	4,242,758	3,392,742	4,418,462	3,537,649	80%



## **INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT (IPAC)**

The Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) was founded in 2013 on the principle that accurate analysis is a critical first step toward preventing violent conflict. Our mission is to explain the dynamics of conflict why it started, how it changed, what drives it, who benefits and get that information quickly to people who can use it to bring about positive change.

In areas wracked by violence, accurate analysis of conflict is essential not only to peaceful settlement but also to formulating effective policies on everything from good governance to poverty alleviation. We look at six kinds of conflict: communal, land and resource, electoral, vigilante, extremist, and insurgent, understanding that one dispute can take several forms or progress from one form to another. We send experienced analysts with long-established contacts in the area to the site to meet with all parties, review primary written documentation where available, check secondary sources and produce in-depth reports, with policy recommendations or examples of best practices where appropriate.

We are registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs in Jakarta as the Foundation for Preventing International Crises (Yayasan Penanggulangan Krisis Internasional); our website is [www.understandingconflict.org](http://www.understandingconflict.org).

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