

Papua conflict: A religious approach and character education

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Article Info	Abstract
Short Article Main Object: International Relations, National Security; Peace and Conflict Resolution Scope: Indonesia Received: 25 August 2025 Revised: 06 October 2025 Accepted: 08 October 2025 Published online: 1 November 2025 Keywords: character education, national building, Papua, peaceful resolution, social conflict.	This study aims to elaborate on the effort in resolving the Papua conflict by implementing a religious approach and character education. This paper seeks to analyze the resolution of social conflict in Papua, which has not ended, and proposes a solution to resolve the conflict using the Religion and Character Education approach. The research method used in this study is qualitative with a case study approach. Data collection techniques used are observation, interviews, documentation, and data validation using triangulation. The results of the study indicate that the collaboration of stakeholders in carrying out their respective roles and functions in accordance with established operational procedures and standards by implementing a religious approach and character building in resolving the Papua conflict can provide new hope for improving security conditions and a sense of security for the Papuan people and reducing acts of terror by armed separatist groups that still disrupt. It revealed that building and developing a transformation of societal mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors of the future Papuan generation still needs to improve through a religious approach and aspects of educational character.

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1. Introduction

Armed violence using firearms and sharp bullets is one of the security problems that is often found in Papua, both carried out by civilians and separatist movements. Armed attacks dominate violent incidents in Papua and are driven by various motives from non-state actors. After 2011-2013, armed attacks have increased again since 2019. The Armed Criminal Group, which later changed its nomenclature to become the Armed Separatist Group and then changed to the Terrorism Separatist Group, became the most dominant perpetrator of violent acts. This group is an armed militant network in the Papua region that continues to spread terror against both civilians and the Indonesian National Armed Forces and the Indonesian National Police (Putri & Nugroho, 2023).



Source: <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/czj97xgl470o>

Figure 1. Papuan activists paint faces with the colors of the Morning Star flag

Conflict is emergence of never-ending perspectives about differences in interests where the aspirations of conflicting parties cannot be achieved simultaneously through peaceful harmonious consensus (Manurung & Bainus, 2019). The Papua problem requires a comprehensive and integrated solution by stakeholders who concerned with the future of economic empowerment and political awareness of local communities for boosting equitable prosperity for the people.

Discrimination and arrests against indigenous Papuans during President Joko Widodo's administration were visible and more numerous than during the previous presidential era. Intense discussion of the resolution of the Papua conflict by highlighting the aspects of deradicalization, anti-radicalization, anti-terrorism, anti-violence carried out by the National Counterterrorism Agency in collaboration with the national police has not yet produced encouraging results.

The research question in this paper relates to how Papua conflict resolve by applying the religious approach and character education. The proposing idea expressed in this article is the resolution of the Papua

conflict with the perspective of religious approach and strengthening character education.

2. Method

The method used in this study is a qualitative method with a case study approach. The unit of analysis in this study is conflict resolution along with a religious approach and character education in resolving the Papua conflict. The research problem raised in this study is how to resolve the "Papua Conflict" both from resolution through a religious approach and character education.

The data sources in this research are primary data originating from the results of in-depth interviews with informants and the results of focus group discussions. The data collection techniques used in this research were in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and documentation. Data analysis uses qualitative data analysis techniques.

3. Result and Discussion

The conflict in Papua is a complex issue, encompassing not only economic disparity but also identity, history, human rights violations, and a sense of injustice. A security-only approach has proven insufficient and often counterproductive. Religious approaches and character education offer softer, more long-term solutions in addressing the socio-cultural roots of the problem.

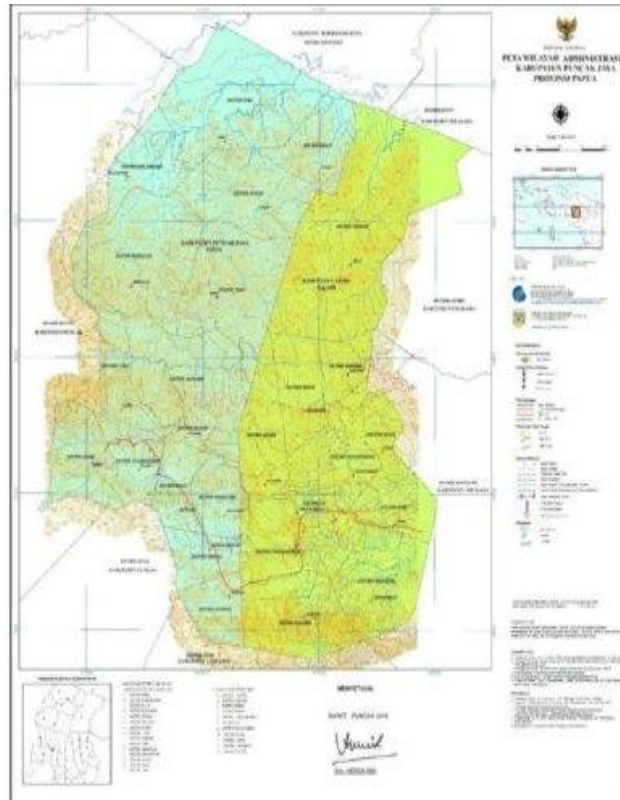
3.1. Result

Papua Province is located at the easternmost tip of Indonesia and has the largest area compared to other provinces in Indonesia. In 2020, the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/Regional Office of the National Land Agency for Papua Province released data on the area of Papua Province, namely 312,224.37 km². In general, the population of Papua Province in 2020 experienced a significant increase compared to the results of the 2010 population census. The results of the 2010 population census showed that the population of Papua Province was 2.83 million people. Meanwhile, the results of the 2020 Population Census show that the population of Papua Province is 4.30 million people (Central Statistics Agency, 2020).

Physiographically, the northern part of Papua is a lowland that extends from Lake Sentani towards Sarmi, and in the southern part it is a lowland from Asmat Timika, to Merauke. Puncak Jaya Regency is a hidden gem in the heart of Central Papua Province (Pemerintah Daerah Kabupaten Puncak Jaya, 2025).

The human rights situation in Papua has not shown significant improvement following the 1998 Reformation (Manurung, 2017). Currently, there are six provinces on the island of Papua: Papua, West Papua, South Papua, Central Papua, Highlands, and Southwest Papua. The four new provinces (South, Central, Highlands, and Southwest)

were formed through the division of two previous provinces (Papua and West Papua) (Salima Fathia, 2024).



Source: <https://puncakjayakab.go.id/>

Figure 2. Map of Puncak Jaya Regency 2024

The moral education crisis in Papua includes the increase in promiscuity, consumption of alcoholic drinks, and the use of illegal drugs which has become a social problem for the Papuan generation. The character education crisis is still ongoing with the development of the district and population development in Papua. The crisis in character education and the lack of overcoming the moral crisis in Papua has an impact on elementary, middle and high school students so that many experience pregnancies outside of marriage.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Conflict Management from a Local Wisdom Perspective: Opportunities and Challenges

Local wisdom in Indonesia has long been a foundation for various aspects of community life, including conflict resolution (Conflict Resolution Unit Indonesia, 2025). One such local wisdom, deliberation for consensus, is believed to be a uniquely Indonesian method for

resolving problems and conflicts. Therefore, as an approach to conflict resolution, deliberation for consensus has many advantages. Being a generally accepted cultural concept, this approach is participatory, involving all stakeholders, and encouraging cooperation to reach a solution.

The process is more flexible and cost-effective than formal litigation. In the context of local conflicts within egalitarian communities, or when the parties involved share similar egalitarian cultural values, this approach is particularly relevant. The resulting decisions tend to be more widely accepted because they arise from a mutual agreement involving all parties.

This approach is not working without challenges. The main weakness in practice is the lack of a systematic methodology. Deliberation processes are often informal, without clear rules or structures. The imbalance of power between the parties involved is problematic. In many situations, community leaders dominate and influence the deliberation process to their advantage, while other members of the community tend to adjust their opinions to those of the leaders. As a result of this bias, the resulting decisions often do not fully accommodate the interests of the silent majority. Another challenge is that efforts to reach consensus are often hampered by difficult-to-bridge differences in perspective. Even after discussions have taken place, the parties often fail to reach an agreement. In the absence of a clear agreement, conflict resolution is hampered.

Nevertheless, deliberation for consensus as a general approach has potential if applied within a more structured methodological framework to ensure a balanced and effective process. Deliberation can be conducted following the general principles and stages of Alternative Dispute Resolution, such as identifying the parties and ensuring their representation; initial review to agree on the deliberation agenda; establishing ground rules; expressing opinions; developing, evaluating, and agreeing on solutions; and planning the implementation of the agreement, which of course should be adapted to the context.

The excessive influence of the deliberation leader, traditionally a dominant figure with authority and influence, needs to be balanced with the role of a neutral and impartial mediator. This is crucial, especially in complex conflicts involving multiple parties with varying power and unequal interests. A mediator can support in maintaining a balance of power and ensure all parties have an equal opportunity to express their views.

3.2.2. Conflict resolution through a religious approach

Conflict resolution using a religious approach is carried out by involving moral values, ethics and peace teachings contained in religion. It involves dialogue between religious communities and the role of religious communities as mediators.

The religious approach to conflict resolution in Papua is implemented through dialogue between religious and community leaders to resolve existing problems. For example, on Raam Island, the steps taken include inviting religious and community leaders to dialogue to identify the root of the problem and jointly seek solutions. The agreement resulting from the dialogue is signed, followed by a peace pledge read together as a commitment to maintaining security and social harmony. This approach focuses on religious moderation and interfaith harmony, organized through forums such as the Interfaith Harmony Forum (Rasyid et al., 2021).

The availability of access to education influences the life of a nation in adapting to and benefiting from the impacts of globalization. Education today has become trapped in the current of capitalization or commercialization of education. A study in Tolikara highlighted the importance of a holistic approach that prioritizes dialogue between religious groups as an effort to resolve multidimensional conflicts, involving religious, social, cultural, political, and economic aspects (Isfahani et al., 2025). This approach emphasizes the importance of implementing the values of pluralism, social justice, and respect for diversity.

Some ways to resolve conflicts with a religious approach are: 1. Increase education quality and understanding of differences in beliefs; 2. Encourage open dialogue between and amongst religious groups; 3. Building trust and cooperation; 4. Building an attitude of mutual respect and respect; 5. Promote the values of tolerance; 6. Putting public interests above personal interests; 7. Eliminate attitudes of group supremacy; 8. Develop mitigation strategies to prevent conflicts from occurring again; 9. Apart from that, the constructive role of government, religious leaders and society is also very important in resolving religious conflicts.

Thereafter, by understanding how religion can play a role in resolving social conflict in multicultural and often conflictual societies, we can develop more effective approaches in promoting peace, tolerance and understanding between different groups in society (Godlif, 2023).

It is expected that the findings from this research can support practical guidance for religious leaders, social practitioners and policy makers in efforts to manage and reduce conflict and develop peace sustainably. The research findings are:

1. The role of religious mediation functions as an effective mediation tool in resolving conflicts. Religious figures and spiritual leaders play a key role in facilitating dialogue and creating understanding between parties involved in a conflict.
2. Moral and ethical values taught by religion often serve as guidelines for conflict resolution and peace creation. They can support form mutual understanding and promote fairness in the

settlement process.

3. The role of religious groups is also often involved in coordinating conflict resolution efforts. They organize various activities to facilitate dialogue, promote tolerance, and create a peaceful environment.

Mutual respect and respect for people of different religions is one of the steps in building a better world and is also a way for religions to find God's message about how world peace needs to be created (Fitriani, 2020). There are many types of dialogue between religious communities. There is life dialogue, dialogue about doing social work, dialogue about religious experiences, and theological dialogue. Religion should be used as a unifier, not a divider as taught by every religion.

3.2.3. Educational character approach

Character education is a solution for developing positive mental and behavioral skills in Papuan society. Character education for students in Papua can be implemented through local wisdom, for example, through the use of local cultural values, such as the traditional Papuan *noken* in certain subjects (e.g., Civics). This is implemented through habituation, extracurricular activities, and the active role of teachers in guiding students. Results show positive, though not yet comprehensive, character changes, supported by the active involvement of school principals and local education offices.

Sustainable of character education plays a role in increasing the learning motivation of indigenous Papuan students, who have been affected by local political instability and weak socioeconomic conditions.

Character education can literally be interpreted as changing or shaping a person's character, behavior, temperament, character and personality according to specified criteria (Muslich, 2011). However, Indonesian history does not only belong to the nation itself, but is continuously introduced, recognized, and appreciated by the world society (Manurung, 2025). It is an effort to help the development of children's souls both physically and mentally, from their natural nature towards a better human civilization.

Character as a way of thinking and behaving that is characteristic of everyone to live and work together, both within the family, community, nation, state and natural surroundings. It is a characteristic possessed by an object or individual. These characteristics are original and rooted in the personality of the object or individual, and are the engine that drives how a person acts, behaves, speaks and responds to things.

However, character education is not only aimed at improving the quality of educational processes and outcomes that lead to students'

complete noble character, but is aimed at developing moral intelligence or developing children's moral abilities, which is done by building moral intelligence, namely the ability to understand things (Zubaedi, 2013).

One of the brilliant ideas for finding the root of the problem as well as resolving the protracted conflict may be found in the application and cultivation of character education in the Papuan people, as is the application and cultivation of character that occurred in the small poor country "Mauritius" which is now a rich, safe and peaceful country, especially experiencing developments in the field of civilization (Quisumbing, 2000).

Nowadays, many parties are demanding an increase in the intensity and quality of the implementation of Character Education in formal education institutions (Koesoema, 2007). These demands are based on developing social phenomena, starting from brawls between university students and communities, free sexual behavior, muggings, rape, rampant drug use, the decline in manners, ethics and morals among students, to suicides which are phenomena that make society Indonesia deserves to be concerned.

4. Conclusion

The condition of Papua is still conditioned by violent conflict, and therefore, it is necessary to develop and empower a transformation of the individual mindset, attitude patterns and behavior of the Papuan generation in the aspect of strong and strong character education as an effort to break the character chain of the older generation of Papua in the past which was marked by violence and separatist efforts.

Strengthening moral education or character education in the current context is very relevant to overcome the violent behavior that is currently plaguing Papua. The character education crisis currently haunts the Papuan young people in everyday life, especially school-aged teenagers, and it need to be resolved by the related stake-holders. A wise approach and a deep understanding of the role of religion in the context of social conflict are needed. However, it is important to encourage interfaith dialogue, promote tolerance, and avoid the abuse of religion for political purposes or personal interests.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or

falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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