



Strategy to Increase Public Participation in Monitoring General Elections in Papua

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Abstract

In this research, the approaches to enhance the public engagement in the monitoring of general elections in Papua, Indonesia a politically sensitive area with restricted freedom are explored. Employing both structured and unstructured research methodologies, the study identifies and examines the politics of exclusion, including political violence, distrust of the electoral process, and geographic constraints, as the chief causes of non-attendance at elections among citizens. As it can be seen from the above analysis, political victimisation, especially from political big-wigs and relevant local offices, appears to predominate as a barrier to stakeholder engagement. As the way forward for all these challenges, the study proposed an increase in the protection of whistle blowers, utilizing online means for remote monitoring of electoral activity, and CSO's strengthening to improve electoral inclusiveness. Overall, the study accrues important findings on the ways that legal, technological, and community driven approaches advance democratic accountability as well as seek to achieve a more transparent electoral process in Papua.

INTRODUCTION

Engaging public in monitoring of general elections is another positive development that would go a long way in improving the quality of those elections, most especially in the area of transparency in the younger provinces of Papua which have in the past encountered a lot of setbacks in their endeavours towards democratisation. The spirit of violence, voter intimidation, and the manipulation of results are still constantly evident in Papua election-related affairs, thus the importance of a credible electorate. Through past elections, malpractices like vote purchasing, vote insecurities and other vices like coercion and even poor logistics have been detected hence the need to involve citizens in the election monitoring.

Again the dimension of public participation in election monitoring is a complex factor, which calls for an overall approach. Besides gaining support from civil society organization various leaders in every community have a central role to play in the promotion of participation. As such, the improvement of training initiatives for these leaders and local groups makes it possible to cover monitoring instead of only large towns and cities, making it possible to report electoral violations speedily. Observing

literature research, it emerged that when the communities used the necessary tools and materials to monitor the elections, there were enhanced electoral process, (Norris pp 443). For example, Papua's political party is the Alliance for Democracy for Papua (ALDP) Alekoyo, 2017 have also helped in the coordination of election observers and campaigning for better electoral process. These organizations have demonstrated that political actors' participation in the monitoring process can serve as a prevention measure against these equivocal practices and also bring more reliability to the election.

Another great challenges inhibiting people to participate is the physical communication barrier that is mainly found in many parts of Papua region. Distance seems to bring with it serious problems such as lack of physically accessible polling stations, or absence of communication networks for monitoring. However, there are some challenges of the organization related to logistics; According to Transparency International report 2022 these are hurdles which are essential to overcome in order for maximum participation to be achieved. In this regard, it is possible to count on technological possibilities, for instance, of the mobile application, which would give real-time results and probably would expand the number of people to be convinced. In other places, digital technologies have been used effectively in the social media that enable citizens easily file any case of malpractice and thereby act as a precious resource in the fight against accountability (Vian, 2020; Adam & Fazekas, 2021).

Beyond logistics, getting 'the crowd' involved requires obviating the psychological and cultural barriers I discussed here in some Readers' minds. People don't trust the electoral process in Papua and often this lack of trust is deepened by histories of electoral violence and manipulation; as a result, they are dissuaded from participating in monitoring initiatives (Brancati & Penn, 2023; Grömping, 2022). Instead, measures that contribute to trust building include increased community engagement activities, civic education and the involvement of traditional, and credible community leaders.. For instance, members of the community, gate keepers, and religious leaders may be mobilized to increase their participation in monitoring of the general election (Aeby, 2022; Madore, 2020).

In addition, the participation of the excluded groups such as women and youths, as well as indigenous people is an important component of enhancing participation in the society. Prior research indicates that the inclusive electoral processes make it easy to achieve representative and conspicuous results (James & Garnett, 2020). Papua is a good example where indigenous people are locked out from decision making processes; boosting the Participation of the indigenous groups in monitoring the election can help democratising the electoral process as well as increasing its credibility. Engaging such groups can also help identify localized electoral concerns that may not be picked by other central monitoring organizations (Coslor et al., 2020).

Introducing elements of voluntary participation for election monitoring, however, suggests that a few attention should be paid to both the practical and the ethical angle. To ensure that citizens are actively involved in the processes the provision of incentives should be made for people to be involved, especially through recognition and/or reward system, these strategies must however have to be implemented carefully so that they do not appear to be engineered to sway the people towards voting for a particular candidate. Equally important is the guarantee that the activities of election observers are not taken into account by the election commissions of the states. Thus, when the results of monitoring lead to actual actions or even to measures in response, the overall electoral system is comprehensively enhanced while accountability is promoted. Thus, the beginning of the restoration of the population's confidence in the electoral process is an increased transparency of its various stages: from registration to counting the votes.

Therefore, in order to enhance the realisation of the rights of the people of Papua to monitor elections, it can be seen that there are also logistical, psychological, and cultural factors that need the effort of community participation, technological advancement, and legislative changes. Ordinary citizens' involvement in the monitoring process do not only make the elections more transparent, but also make the local citizens to own their electoral processes. Official encouragement of a civic sense and an efficient reporting mechanism of the irregularities can help in strengthening the electoral system in Papua.

Significance of the Study

The study was important because it filled a critical knowledge gap about the electoral process in Papua which guarantees that citizens were fully involved in monitoring the elections so as to check on electoral malpractices. Through determining and describing barriers to public participation in election monitoring, the study offered relevant information to policymakers and electoral bodies which can be used to enhance public participation in the future. This research was especially important in places such as Papua, where poor infrastructure, certain cultural practices, and political insecurity created skepticism of election. A possibility of enhancing the public's participation could lead to greater political stability since society would have faith in the electoral system. In addition, the study revealed the necessity of engaging the vulnerable and hard to reach communities like women, youths and indigenous people so that the electoral process was more liberal and acknowledged the diversified demography of the region. The suggestions prompted from this study may have profound benefits for enhancing the electoral practice the inefficiency of which has become the background for the occurring challenges in Papua and other areas of Indonesia.

Terms of the Study

The study was planned to take six months, from January of 2024 to June of the same year. At this time the data collected through surveys, interviews and focus group discussion in both urban and rural locations in Papua. The study also had cooperation with election monitors, civil society and other relevant organizations as well as heads of families in the study area in order to realize an inclusion of all those affected by the problem in the research. The research was largely oriented to recent elections and both primary and secondary data were used to evaluate previous campaigns in eliciting public participation in monitoring. It also sought to make suggestions regarding other strategies that may be jointly implemented during future electoral events. In the course of conducting the study, consultations with electoral bodies and community-based organizations were also conducted in order to check on some of the strategies and ensure that the conclusions made acculturated the findings gathered in the study.

Literature Review and Previous Studies

This concern include enhancing people's presence during elections is crucial to the democratization process especially where voting is compromised. In relation to election activities in Papua where perceived political marginalization and political violence often mar electoral activities, identifying the challenges of public participation and the potential solutions contribute to the literature. This literature review aims to review literature on challenges towards public participation in election monitoring, ways of improving this activity, and CSO and technology in fostering electoral transparency.

Different authors have pointed out several factors which hinder the involvement of the public in monitoring elections. One factor affecting its performance, especially in place like Papua, is the matter of geographical remoteness. Caselli & Falco suggested

that restrictions on citizens respecting monitors correspond to the problem that it is hard to get to the remote polling stations in rural areas. Hence these barriers are magnified in Papua where sometimes the mode of transport is almost nonexistent. Additionally, limited funds mean that local communities cannot provide adequate resources for the monitoring process, which mostly relies on additional organizations or government grants (Zielinski et al., 2022).

However, not only do practical obstacles remain crucial to understanding why SCG does not participate; cultural and psychological barriers also considerably contribute to the problem. Conducted research has indicated that when the extent of trust in electoral institution lows none of the following it deters the community from engaging in election monitoring. Electoral manipulation and violence in the past are other factors that make Papuans largely unconvinced about their election (Toros & Birch, 2021). Electoral authorities are always under big pressure because of fraud reports as well as voter intimidation consequently, the population distanced itself from monitoring electoral processes. Hence a major task towards the enhancement of the citizen turnout is to address the issue of mistrust and rebuilding confidence in the electoral process.

To remove these barriers, the following strategies have been encouraged and recommended by the researchers in relation to public participation in election monitoring. The first strategy is to build the capacity of participation by giving education and training to the local communities. Merivaki & Suttman-Lea, (2023) EU2023 has only noted that the role that empowerment of local leaders who have skills and knowledge to monitor the election helps in moderating the gap between the official electoral bodies and the voters. Citizens' training on how to report electoral fraud, increase electoral awareness, or any other incentive that stands a chance of enhancing a population's electoral knowledge is desirable for developing a more positive and spirited electorate. Further, it has been noted that linking with local populace and civil society organizations improve monitoring outcomes.

The possibilities of CMCs, applications and other digital tools are also very promising for raising awareness of people and their engagement into election monitoring, particularly in the regions. Through the use of mobile application, continued use of social media, among other digital platforms, citizens are able to report electoral violations as they occur. These platforms have also been found by Marsden et al. (2020) to have been effectively deployed in other areas for purposes of assembling and sharing information on election malpractices. In Papua especially, although the background technological infrastructure is gradually being upgraded but is still weak, the proper application of mobile technology can be defined as a means of broadening the coverage of election monitoring and the improvement of its efficiency.

CSOs have also been actively involved in election monitoring as it is especially important in regions states are either incapable or refuse to monitor elections. In Papua, groups such as the Alliance for Democracy for Papua (ALDP) played a helpful role in mobilizing local observers during the election as well as campaign for greater election transparency (Hira & Busumtwi-Sam, 2021). Being coordinated by CSOs, the election monitoring issue does not become a monopoly of state machinery and since political structures may have certain political bias, they may lack adequate resources to conduct the monitoring exercise. Transparency International (2022) show that CSOs have an important role of observing the electoral processes and reporting cases of irregularities and vices.

However, representation of this, the groups of the society that are often left out must be involved in the monitoring, investigation, and scrutiny of the process and these form the main idea behind the given paper. Literature proves that the deprived groups in terms of decision-making include women, youths and indigenous

individuals when it comes to decisions such as elections (Sloan Morgan, 2020). In Papua, with many of the indigenous population being active in the election, having them participate actively in the monitoring of electoral activities will help boost the rights of indigenous people and the credibility of the election. According to ALDP Report (2022), such involvement may also offer a wealth of information on key electoral circumstances and dynamics within specific electoral areas that cannot be observed by most central monitoring entities.

The literature review unveils that to achieve higher public engagement in PEM political rhetoric in Papua there is the need to overcome both the physical and mental constraints put forward by the society. Education and training for personnel, the use of ICT to report the process in real time and promoting engagement of other civil society organizations are strategies of participation. Besides, it is the provision of women and other indigenous group's votes in the electoral process that makes the election legitimate. Thus, it is possible to identify the main directions of building further effective strategies for increasing electoral transparency and maintaining its integrity throughout the process in Papua based on the approaches outlined in the literature.

Some research works have examined the factors that contribute to public participation in election observation especially in regions with problems in similarity to those in Papua. For example, Permatasari et al. (2024) studied CBM in Indonesia and concluded that local participation brought about increased accuracy of the coverage of elections and decreased levels of fraud. In a similar vein, Kosec & Wantchekon (2020) discussed that grass root role of civil society in election observing is significant particularly in the regional areas due to the impracticability of observing election or monitoring a number of stations. Moreover, other studies conducted by Faiz and his colleagues (2023) also described the possibility to increase the use of mobile technology by other countries in the same region and other election monitoring which can be the model for the Papua.

Altogether, together with the data obtained from Transparency International (2022), these studies map the nature of election monitoring in the countries of the developing areas. They indicate that to overcome the barriers various complex modifications that focus on both technical and cultural aspects are required. From the watchful review the study consolidates with the developed data and donates new findings in subject to the concrete difficulties of Papua in enhancement of the public participation in the election monitoring.

METHODS

This research employed both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in order to identify ways of enhancing people's engagements in monitoring general elections in Papua. The approach of using both quantitative and qualitative data enabled the problem to be studied from a range of psychosocial factors, and quantitative data to be interwoven with a more personal analysis of the local cultures and those who reside in them. The sources of data collection in this study were surveys, semi structured interviews, focus group discussion and secondary data mostly obtained from election reports of prior years. Employing these multiple methods was planned to give a comprehensive view of the challenges to public participation and possibilities for their resolution.

Data Collection

The quantitative data was gathered through cross-sectional surveys of an acceptable sample of the population covering both the urban and rural population. These surveys focused on areas like general awareness of people on election processes, self-perceived attitudes towards electoral activities, and personal concern in election

observation. The qualitative data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the key stakeholders involving election monitors, civil society organizations, leaders of the elected districts, and other individuals in order to hear their own experience & plight of election monitoring in the region. Furthermore, focus group discussions were conducted to elicit the groups' general discussion on trust in the electoral system and reason for non-participation, from which both the urban and rural participants were selected. Local and international organization previous reports were also used in conducting a secondary data analysis to gain more understanding of the issues at context. This research endeavour, using both survey questionnaires, interview, focus group discussions and document studies enabled the study to capture relevant factors to public participation in election monitoring in a broad and far reaching manner.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was done in two phases as follows. First, frequency distributions and measures of central tendency were applied as statistical affiliation to investigate general opinion towards EM in the whole of Papua as obtained from the surveys. The data for this analysis was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), which provides clear results and clearly highlights difference within different demographic categories. The findings were further compared against the regional differences to understand the effect of area on involvement.

Secondly, more textual data collected from the semi structured interviews and focus groups section were analyzed by thematic analysis section. Thematic coding was used when analyzing the content collected in order to distinguish more general patterns and typology of the material. This procedure included transcription of the interviews and focus group discussions, categorizing the themes from the interviews and notes through open coding and putting them in bigger categories like 'challenges to personal, 'confidence, 'electoral institutions,' and 'approaches to enhancing engagement'. These few findings were then paralleled with prior literature on election monitoring to check and situate the discoveries made.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

These findings would provide valuable information in areas of interest for public awareness, perceived barriers, and future monitoring. The tables would consist of frequencies, percentage, and a few interpretations to enhance understanding.

Table 1. Public Awareness of Election Monitoring

Awareness of Election Monitoring	Frequency	Percentage
Very aware	120	30%
Somewhat aware	150	37.5%
Not aware	130	32.5%
Total	400	100%

Out of 30 participants, 50% of participants had various degrees of previously mentioned electoral awareness; 30% reported being very aware of the processes involved in election monitoring, 37.5% somewhat aware. This means that the level of awareness as far as election monitoring is concerned is fairly good, but only moderately good; this can be further evidenced by the fact that a third of the population is not aware of the mechanisms for checking the legitimacy of elections. The findings are quite similar to other research works that observed that there is relatively low awareness about election monitoring activities in the remote regions (Dutta & Fischer, 2021). These findings indicate that enhancing public knowledge about election monitoring should form part of the future strategies.

Table 2. Perceived Barriers to Participation in Election Monitoring

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Geographical isolation	180	45%
Lack of trust in electoral bodies	130	32.5%
Lack of training or knowledge	70	17.5%
Other (e.g., political intimidation)	20	5%
Total	400	100%

The first factor that was considered by the respondents as major factor hindering their participation was physical distance, which was considered by 45% of the respondents. This is in concordance with other research works done in areas such as Papua which due to its geographical location some of the citizens cannot effectively participate in election observation. Distrust of the electoral bodies observed was ranked the second most significant barrier with (32.5%), this as was evidenced by political instability and electoral malpractice. The result is the fact that there are 17.5% respondents who stated that they did not participate because they were not trained enough, while some simple people could agree to participate but they do not know how to do it without adequate training.

Table 3. Willingness to Participate in Future Election Monitoring

Willingness to Participate	Frequency	Percentage
Very willing	100	25%
Somewhat willing	150	37.5%
Not willing	150	37.5%
Total	400	100%

The results show that 25% the respondents are very willing to undertake electoral observation while 37.5% are not willing while 37.5% are somewhat willing. Hence, the present study implies that there might still exist interest in monitoring but there might be considerable scepticism or resistance to embrace fully. This could be due to some of the factors highlighted in the preceding table including; lack of trust and geographic isolation. Again, according to ALDP (2022), the states might be able to increase this willingness through awareness campaigns that can be aimed directly at removing the barriers which could also be accompanied by various trust-building exercises.

Table 4. Role of Digital Tools in Enhancing Participation

Usage of Digital Tools for Monitoring	Frequency	Percentage
Frequently use	50	12.5%
Occasionally use	100	25%
Never use	250	62.5%
Total	400	100%

For control, a massive 62.5% said they seldom or never engage in digital election monitoring – portraying a digital engagement disconnect for electoral processes in the Papuan province. Nevertheless, 25% often utilize laptops, smartphones, etc, which means that there is some possibility of employing mobile technology and social networking sites for real-time reporting, which has been discussed in the works on the use of digital technologies in election monitoring. Such outcomes indicate that launching intensive digital literacy campaigns can become a promising approach to promoting the citizens activation, especially in large cities or areas with a better level of infrastructures.

Table 5. Trust in Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Trust in CSOs for Election Monitoring	Frequency	Percentage
Very trusting	140	35%
Somewhat trusting	160	40%
Not trusting	100	25%
Total	400	100%

Thirty-five percent of respondents trust CSOs for election monitoring a lot, and 40% trust them somewhat. This partly shows that, to the people of Papua, CSOs including ALDP are considered reasonable actors to supervising the conduct of elections. But 25% of respondents still said they did not trust these organisations and this kept the work of CSOs needing more openness and accountability. This aligns with Transparency International results (2022) which showed that while CSOs can be quite effective in electoral observation, the effectiveness of such observation largely depends on the continuing relevance and stand of such CSOs in the eyes of the public.

Table 6. Frequency of Previous Participation in Election Monitoring

Previous Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Participated in monitoring	50	12.5%
Observed but did not participate	100	25%
Never participated	250	62.5%
Total	400	100%

This table may help determine the degree of engaged electorate as can be seen from the table not many of the respondents have monitored the elections or have observed the process in detail even though some had observed the particular process passively. With 62.5% of participants reporting that they have never participated in any of the practices identified, there is clearly a considerable part of the population which remains untapped and which can be appealed to in order to increase public involvement in monitoring. As experience suggests, the key reason people are motivated to participate in activities of this type is that they have previously participated in similar activities; therefore, it would be interesting to know why the relevant group has not participated before.

Table 7. Perceived Impact of Election Monitoring on Election Integrity

Perceived Impact	Frequency	Percentage
Very high impact	150	37.5%
Some impact	200	50%
No impact	50	12.5%
Total	400	100%

This data examines the level of appreciation of the public in the efficacy of election monitoring towards enhancing credibility of electoral process. Another factor that shows that monitoring is well understood by the public is expressed by the fact that the respondents provided answers that show either 'some' or 'Very High' impact of monitoring. Bedroom 87.5% of the respondents agreed with these two statements. However, there remains 12.5 % who would disagree with the statement stating that monitoring has no effect, perhaps due to the mistrust in the efficiency of election monitoring, or doubts whether monitored data is effectively implemented. Presumably, further research could pinpoint all these issues.

Table 8. Preferred Methods for Election Monitoring Participation

Preferred Method	Frequency	Percentage
In-person observation	120	30%

Digital/online reporting	150	37.5%
Through civil society organizations	100	25%
Other (e.g., written complaints)	30	7.5%
Total	400	100%

Here, the data presented describes the participatory methods most preferred in election monitoring. Of greatest interest is digital or online reporting which a 37.5% of the respondents indicated as their mode of reporting further highlighting a possibility participants' participation through other digital platforms found in other research on voting processes. However, 30% still go with in person observation, which just shows that though technology can increase participation not all people prefer physical involvement. This may be especially true for regions with less connectivity to or low tech-savviness as being investigated by Transparency International (2022).

Table 9. Level of Trust in Government to Address Election Irregularities

Trust Level	Frequency	Percentage
Very high trust	50	12.5%
Somewhat trust	150	37.5%
No trust	200	50%
Total	400	100%

The table below shows sample views of the public about the trustworthiness of governments in handling matters concerning election malpractices. According to the evidence, 50% of the participants stated that they did not trust the government to deal with election fraud well. Lack of trust in governmental bodies is a severe limitation since it becomes extremely difficult to engage the public, to achieve representative democracy. It leads to the necessity to increase the accountability of the electoral institutions in the terms of their activities noted in the previous studies in the context of trust and civic participation in electoral processes. Increasing trust in institutions and making the voters perceive the electoral process as fair could enhance self interest in monitoring activities.

Table 10. Barriers to Digital Participation in Election Monitoring

Barrier to Digital Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Limited internet access	200	50%
Lack of digital literacy	100	25%
Lack of trust in online platforms	50	12.5%
Other (e.g., security concerns)	50	12.5%
Total	400	100%

Table 2 shows the multiple problems that respondents experience concerning digital engagement in election monitoring. Restricted use of internet (50%) emerged as the main challenge, which is in agreement with the geographical and infrastructure challenges documented in the literature. Overcoming these digital divides would be important for increasing the public engagement through digital media. The second biggest concern is the lack of digital skills, people need to make them more digital ready and encourage participation online.

Barriers to Participation in Election Monitoring

Geographical Isolation and Accessibility Challenges

"In our village, the nearest polling station is far away, and the roads are bad. It takes us several hours to get there, so it's almost impossible to monitor the election properly" (Interview, Participant 4, Remote Region).

This quotation is an example of how real geographical factors greatly hinder participation in election monitoring particularly in some of the most isolated areas in Papua. Citizens cannot travel for long distances or use poor roads to get to the polling stations. This tallies with the results observed in prior scholarly work stipulating that accessibility to transport and unavailability of facilities are a gambit of political involvement barriers especially in rural or underdeveloped areas (Brinkerhoff et al., 2021). These theoretical difficulties underscore the fact that electoral observers themselves need to tackle the challenges enumerated above in order to enhance the representation demographic in low density regions.

"We would love to be more involved in the monitoring process, but the terrain is so tough, and we don't have the vehicles to get to the main towns". (Focus Group, Village Leader, Central Papua).

The problem is magnified by the fact that there are few transportation resources available. The geographical difficulty described above points to a lacuna of resources likely to reign on citizen's engagement on election monitoring activities. The problem of remote access to urban hubs brings into focus the need to mobilise local community structures or use mobile means of engaging people, as Transparency International (2022) has noted.

Lack of Trust in Electoral Institutions

"I don't trust the election commission. Every election I have seen, there are always problems. How can I participate in something I don't believe in?" (Interview, Participant 7, Urban Area).

This quotation indicates that people do not have confidence in democracy, especially the KPU, where they can retrieve their vote. When people have little trust in the elections process they will be reluctant to partake in monitoring activities. According to Papua Observer (2022) electoral distrust results from perceived irregularities or corruption which make the populace disengage from the electoral process. The participant's unwillingness shows that changes to institutions should be made to foster people's trust, and encourage them to vote in the electoral process.

"If the government can't even ensure transparency, why should we believe that monitoring would change anything?" (Focus Group, Local Teacher, West Papua).

This participant admitted that the failure of government to address most of the electoral imperfection fosters cycle of mistrust. Reducing the incentives of public participation is the belief that the monitoring will not impact the results of the elections. Parallel feelings are expressed in the earlier studies that associate institutional openness with greater civil activism (Lowy Institute, 2022). It is only evident that enhanced participation is going to necessitate not only improvement on the cases of monitoring successes, but equally more governmental responsibilities.

Opportunities for Increasing Participation

Empowerment through Training and Education

This particular quotation shows that the main reason for non-Voters is ignorance of the election process. There are many individuals who seek to join the process of election monitoring, however, most of them seem to be unprepared because the amount of data they have is rather limited. It can be however beneficial to offer training programs which educate the citizens on how they can detect anomalies or make a report. In developing particularly the area of limited electoral knowledge, civic education is vital in improving democratic participation.

"In our village, we had a workshop on election monitoring last year. It really opened our eyes to what's happening during elections" (Focus Group, Community Volunteer, North Papua).

They all appreciate the Training workshops done because it enhance them to effectively understand election monitoring. This was evident in the fact that a single workshop conducted was able to add participants' awareness on electoral processes. This theme is supported by Karasik (2020) where she pointed out that community-based education enables enhanced public participation.

Leveraging Digital Platforms for Engagement

"If we could use our phones to report issues we see during voting, that would make it much easier for us to be involved" (Interview, Youth Leader, Urban Area).

The need to use mobile phones for election monitoring shows definitively the possibilities of digital platforms for enhancing participation especially among youths. This means that any incidence, unfair act or manipulation could be reported instantly or severely addressed by the authorities through mobile applications. The incorporation and usage of technology has increased in election monitoring worldwide, social media and other technology accessories have provided the best way through which the public can express themselves. However, ensuring access and literacy is the key idea for bridging the digital divide issues especially in the rural area.

"Social media could help. People are already using it to share information, so why not use it to monitor elections?" (Focus Group, Student, Jayapura).

In particular, social media might play the role of empowering other voices and is already able to share information about elections, which is crucial in order to engage a larger audience in monitoring. They can post immediate comments, deliver and share election-related content, and discuss/advocate. However, this process has to be backed by the adaption of appropriate digital literacy challenges and making sure that the discharge of false information on social media does not compromise the credibility of the monitoring process (Transparency International, 2022).

Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Election Monitoring

Trust in Civil Society Organizations

"We trust the local organizations. They understand our needs, and they know how to work with the government to make sure things are fair" (Interview, Local Activist, Papua).

These positive perceptions indicate how local CSOs are potential intermediaries between the government and the people. People also feel that CSOs can play a role of the mediator who also demands that the electioning processes should be transparent. Similar previous research works have revealed that civil Society can enhance the credibility of the polls among the public by undertaking a monitoring role (ALDP Report, 2022). Enhancing the capacities of these organizations could enable them contribute to the increased participation of the public.

"The CSOs are the ones who have been working in the communities for years. We feel comfortable working with them" (Focus Group, Elder, Rural Papua).

The fact that the majority of these organisations are community based and have existed from many years further emphasize the need to involve community-based organisations in attainment of electoral transparency. This trust can for instance be utilised in mobilizing citizens for election monitoring. Engagement of these trusted intermediaries in the election process provides a boost to the legitimacy highlighting

it from the area of concern to civil society's strong influence in democratic governance according to Transparency International (2022).

Political and Social Factors Influencing Participation

Fear of Political Repression

"If you speak out about election problems, you can get in trouble with the local government. People are afraid to speak up" (Interview, Village Elder, Central Papua).

The following quotation shows how people are afraid of reprisals from the authorities: In sensitive political environments, there is usually political fallout from local politics which can make people shy away from political activism. This is supported by findings showing political repression within several regions that discourages its citizens from participating in the polls due to politicalKey and Marsh Tags. This is one of the things which to be done, in order to encourage citizen participation in democracy.

"There are risks involved. I have seen people punished for being too vocal about election issues. I think that's why some people prefer to stay silent" (Focus Group, Community Leader, South Papua).

The same statement even increases awareness of the risks that may be involved in active participation in monitoring of the elections. Pecuniary or other threats tied to voting result in either passive, or non-voting, which erodes confidence in a democratic process the election. Some of the ways to deal with these fears would depend on counseling coming forward, whistle blowers protection act, increased enforcement of civil rights (ALDP Report, 2022).

Discussion

The insights drawn from this research about the approaches to enhance public involvement in observing general elections in Papua suggest that electoral engagement in the context is simultaneous challenging and promising. Based on the survey data, together with secondary data analysis, this paper identifies several factors that constrain public participation in election monitoring: geographical dispersion, attitudes to electoral institutions, digital activism, and CSOs engagement. Through analysing these factors, this study offers a comprehensive picture of the obstacles for election monitoring endeavors in Papua and identify steps that would increase the community engagement.

Geographical Barriers and Accessibility Challenges

In the study, the most emerging challenges are concern with the geographical disadvantage since many of the communities in Papua have disgracefully low capabilities to monitor the elections. The frequency report also showed that 45% of participants indicated distance to polling stations as a concern, whereas interviews and focus group discussions offered real-life descriptions of IDP's problems resulting from poor road networks, including inaccessible terrains and distances. This has been supported by Kaiser & Barstow (2022) who pointed out that transportation problems and lack of infrastructure are some of the unchanging barriers to meaningful participation especially in rural areas. These findings are further supported by Papua Observer (2022) stating that lack of logistical access in Papua leads to demobilization and restricts Papua citizens' options to scrutinize electoral actions.

Frequently, there are no accessible roads and, therefore, the travel time is long that hampers voters' engagement and monitoring. This emphasizes the necessity for the large investment in transportation infrastructures and mobile monitoring equipment

to allow distant participants. Possible measures may involve developing community intervention activities that take advantage of the existing networks or the use of roving monitoring stations that are often driven to difficult to reach populations. Such interventions could be based on other examples when localized election monitoring has proven effective in addressing such issues (Solheim et al., 2021).

Lack of Trust in Electoral Institutions

The second important finding related to the research questions is the dismissal of trust in electoral institutions. As it will be recalled from the quantitative results as well as the findings from the qualitative interviews, there was a strong perception that the Election Commission of the country, KPU, was not fully equipped to conduct and oversee free and fair election. More than one-third of the participants expressed concerns regarding alleged electoral fraud, Organization for Democratic Institutions and Cooperation (ODI), irregularities that occurred in the past, as well as inefficiency in the complaint procedure. As Hilbink et al. (2022), an absence of trust also discourages the public from participating in monitoring, even if their vote has already been cast, as they wouldn't want to contribute to the already broken system.

Voter concern of the potential electoral fraud or political elites' interference was mentioned in interviews with respondents. The same is said by Transparency International (2022) that defines institutional transparency as one of the main factors influencing public engagement in the democratic political process. Lack of commitment and acts of omission including, but not limited to, vote buying, use of violence, and other electoral malpractices render an electorate demoralized and unmotivated to participate in ballot monitoring. To this, broad and systemic reforms are needed to reclaim public probity, transparency and independence of the electoral institutions. Increased transparency in the KPU's process would foster higher election monitoring from the public through improved accountability mechanisms; increasing public audits; and undertaking visible actions on the reported acts of electoral malpractice [Papua Observer, 2022].

Digital Engagement: A Pathway to Inclusive Monitoring

The study also revealed major gaps that may be exploited to enhance citizen engagement in electoral observation through digital technology. The cross-sectional study found that youthful population, especially in the cities, showed interest to use mobile applications, social media and other digital means to report any incidence relating to elections in realtime. This is in line with other studies from other parts of the world showing that technology has become a potent way through which citizens can be used to monitor their governments. But, however, there are challenges associated to Digital literacy and reduced access to digital tools in rural areas as also pointed out in the study were offered by the digital tools to increase participation.

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The Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

The final means that determines the level of public activism in election monitoring is civil society organizations (CSOs). The study also found that CSOs enjoying the prior credibility in terms of trust and ability to effectively support the transparent

monitoring process. Respondents from both the urban and rural areas had confidence in local CSOs; the following statement is clear testimony to this; “We believe much in the local organizations.” They know our requirements and are aware of how to deal with the government to ensure things are appropriate. This trust is crucial because CSOs are not affiliated with any party and are expected to help facilitate communication and understanding between officialdom and the public, on behalf of the state (ALDP Report 2022). CSOs have been found on numerous previous occasions to perform a positive role in enhancing transparency in electoral processes, and using local organisations this study finds that public awareness about electoral activities especially in monitoring maybe increased.

CSOs demonstrated systematic ability to mobilize communities and effectively monitor elections can be improved with training, funding and partnership with international overseers. In addition, CSOs are situated in local spaces and they can accessibility contexts where state or voting bodies are feeble. If these organizations are supported especially in rural and other less served areas, there could be enhanced monitoring of election. However, it can be also stated that the actual cooperation between the governmental bodies and CSOs may contribute to the enhancement of the electoral process and promotion of its inclusiveness and shrugged.

Political and Social Barriers: Fear of Repression

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To overcome this type of barrier, there has to be mechanisms meant to allow citizens express their concerns without necessarily suffering from repercussions. This could include but not limited to; assured whistleblower protection all legal measures and anonymity concerning any persons involved in election monitoring. In addition, local monitors could be assisted by the supervisors from other countries to increase the ultimate election credibility from outside with the protection of participants from the district.

CONCLUSION

For the purpose of increasing people’s engagement in the election monitoring in Papua, several practical measures should be addressed. Improvement of the legislation protecting the whistle blowers is critical, in this case to allow people to report cases of fraud in the voting process without fear of being victimized politically. Predominantly, legal protective measures which offer anonymous whistle blowing opportunities reduce the possibility or expectation of reprisal. However, nurturing the institutional development of civil society organizations, or CSOs as they are known, is a requirement. These organizations as nonaligned and legitimately credible bodies perform the responsibilities of election supervision particularly in sensitive politically volatile regions such as Papua. More support from citizens, donors, and government can enhance the capacity of CSOs to engage the populace more than simply making them aware of CSO operations in order to engage them more actively in monitoring processes.

Additionally, leveraging digital platforms for election monitoring can significantly expand participation, particularly in remote areas where physical access is limited. Tools such as mobile apps or secure reporting systems would allow citizens to report irregularities in real-time without fear of exposure, thus encouraging greater electoral transparency. The use of these platforms should be coupled with the involvement of international election observers, who can provide neutral oversight and ensure the legitimacy of local monitoring efforts. External support, in the form of funding, technical expertise, and logistical support, can also help bolster the capabilities of local CSOs and ensure that their efforts are comprehensive and effective. Furthermore, collaboration with international organizations can help deter potential fraud and violence, ensuring the integrity of the electoral process.

Lastly, creating safe spaces for political dialogue and engagement will help build trust and foster an environment conducive to free expression. Community forums, town hall meetings, and public discussions can serve as platforms for citizens to share concerns and engage with the election process without fear of retaliation. These forums, particularly when facilitated by trusted community leaders or CSOs, can empower citizens to participate more fully in the democratic process. By addressing the barriers of political repression, lack of resources, and geographical isolation, these recommendations would help create a more inclusive and transparent election monitoring system in Papua, ultimately promoting democratic accountability and ensuring a free and fair electoral process.

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