

Regional Boundary Conflict of Malaka Regency Versus South Central Timor Regency in Lotas Segment

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 6 June 2024;

Revised: 21 June 2024;

Revised: 9 July 2024;

Accepted: 14 August 2024;

Volume 1, Number 2

2024, pp 155-173

<https://doi.org/10.61401/rmaps.v1i2.135>

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study discusses the territorial boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency.

Methodology: This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. The dominant forms of analysis carried out in case study research are pattern matching, explanation building, and time-series analysis.

Results: The boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency in the Lotas Segment was driven by three main factors: communication, institutional structure, and personal interests. This conflict has resulted in delays in public service delivery, weakened community cohesion, and damaged relationships and communication among the parties involved.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the boundary conflict is influenced by communication, institutional, and personal factors, requiring stronger coordination, effective communication, and mediation between stakeholders to achieve a sustainable resolution.

Limitations: The limitation of this study is the lack of historical investigation of boundary conflicts between the two conflicting areas.

Contribution: This study provides recommendations for local governments to strengthen negotiation and mediation in resolving territorial boundary disputes.

Keywords: *Boundary Conflict, Case Study, Local Government, Territorial Dispute*

How to Cite: Asa, F. U., Djaha, A. S. A., & Sayrani, L. P. (2024). Regional Boundary Conflict of Malaka Regency Versus South Central Timor Regency in Lotas Segment. *Review of Multidisciplinary Academic and Practice Studies*, 1(2), 155-173.

1. Introduction

Territory is one of the fundamental elements in the formation and existence of a state because it determines the scope of governmental authority, administrative jurisdiction, and the implementation of public policies. In the context of regional governance, territorial boundaries play an essential role in ensuring legal certainty, effective administration, and equitable development. However, boundary disputes between autonomous regions remain a common phenomenon, particularly in countries

implementing decentralization systems. These disputes generally emerge due to unclear administrative boundaries, differences between juridical and physical boundaries, overlapping territorial claims, and competing interests among local governments and communities ([Mahmuzar, 2018](#); [Maiwan, 2019](#)). In Indonesia, regional boundary conflicts have become one of the consequences of regional autonomy implementation, where the expansion of autonomous regions often creates new administrative challenges that require definitive boundary arrangements ([Arifin, 2017](#); [Anyab, 2021](#)).

The implementation of regional autonomy as regulated in Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government emphasizes the importance of clear territorial authority between regions. Nevertheless, the determination of physical and definitive boundaries in the field remains a complex process because it involves legal, administrative, social, political, and geographical dimensions. Previous studies indicate that boundary disputes are frequently triggered by weak coordination between levels of government, unclear boundary markers, overlapping maps, and differences in historical interpretations of territorial ownership ([Hidayat, Munawaroh, & Rachma, 2021](#); [Nugraha, Manan, Astuti, & Apriadi, 2022](#)). Therefore, boundary determination is not merely a technical mapping process but also a governance mechanism requiring collaboration among governments and community participation.

The issue of territorial boundaries also occurs in Malaka Regency and South Central Timor or locally *Timur Tengah Selatan* (TTS) Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. This conflict represents a historical boundary issue inherited from the period when Malaka Regency was still part of Belu Regency. Malaka Regency was established as an autonomous region based on Law Number 3 of 2013 concerning the Establishment of Malaka Regency in East Nusa Tenggara Province. The establishment of this new autonomous region transformed the previous boundary issue between Belu Regency and South Central Timor Regency into a dispute between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency because the disputed area is located directly along the administrative boundary of both regions ([Pemerintah, 2013](#)).

The boundary dispute between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency occurs in the Lotas segment, located in the western part of Malaka Regency. The disputed area involves Muke Village, Lotas Malaka Village, and Naiusu Village in Rinhat District, Malaka Regency, which directly border Lotas Village, Obaki Village, and Benahe Village in Kokbaun District, South Central Timor Regency. Similar cases in Indonesia demonstrate that unresolved boundary disputes can continue for years because administrative expansion is often conducted before definitive territorial agreements are fully established ([Mahmuzar, 2018](#)). Furthermore, unclear boundaries may influence public administration, land ownership claims, resource management, and social relations among communities living in border areas ([Anyab, 2021](#); [Kolin, Stefanus, & Meyners, 2024](#)).

Based on Law Number 3 of 2013 concerning the Establishment of Malaka Regency, particularly Article 5 paragraph (1) regarding regional boundaries, Malaka Regency has legally established territorial boundaries. The northern boundary borders several villages in Raimanuk District, Belu Regency; the eastern boundary directly borders the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (RDTL); and the southern boundary borders the Timor Sea. These three boundary areas are currently not experiencing significant disputes. Meanwhile, the western boundary borders North Central Timor or locally *Timur Tengah Utara* (TTU) Regency and South Central Timor (TTS) Regency. The boundary dispute with TTU Regency, which previously occurred due to differences in coordinate placement, was resolved in 2018 through intervention from the East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Government and the Central Government. However, the boundary issue with TTS Regency remains unresolved, particularly in the Lotas segment involving overlapping administrative claims between Rinhat District, Malaka Regency, and Kokbaun District, South Central Timor Regency.

The geographical location of the disputed area is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the position of Rinhat District, Malaka Regency, and its direct administrative connection with Kokbaun District, South Central Timor Regency.

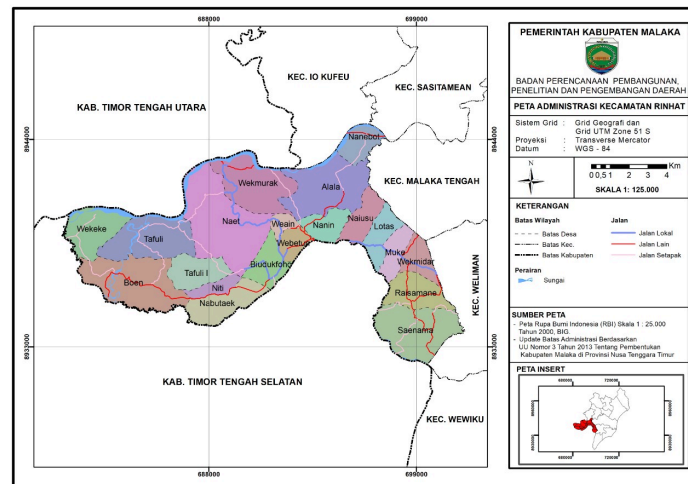


Figure 1. Map of Rinhat District, Malaka Regency

Based on Figure 1, Muke Village, Lotas Malaka Village, and Naisusu Village in Rinhat District, Malaka Regency, are directly adjacent to Lotas Village, Obaki Village, and Benahe Village in Kokbaun District, South Central Timor Regency. The unclear determination of administrative boundaries has created overlapping claims and generated friction among communities in the border area. Previous research highlights that boundary uncertainty may reduce administrative effectiveness and create difficulties in public service delivery because governmental authority becomes unclear between neighboring regions (Fowler, 2020; Villanueva, Kidokoro, & Seta, 2021).

In addition, limited public understanding regarding the relationship between administrative boundaries and individual land ownership has intensified the dispute. Some residents assume that ownership of land automatically determines the administrative affiliation of an area, even though administrative boundaries are determined through government regulations and official spatial maps. Similar conditions have been observed in various boundary conflicts where differences between customary perceptions and formal administrative arrangements create prolonged disputes.

The unresolved boundary issue in Malaka Regency has continued since the inauguration of the regency on April 22, 2013. Until 2021, the Minister of Home Affairs Regulation concerning the definitive determination of Malaka Regency boundaries had not yet been established. This situation demonstrates that legal recognition of a new autonomous region does not always immediately guarantee certainty regarding territorial implementation in the field. Therefore, strengthening multi-level governance, coordination mechanisms, and participatory boundary determination processes are essential to resolve territorial disputes sustainably (Charbit, 2020; Villanueva et al., 2021).

Previous studies have primarily examined regional boundary disputes from legal, administrative, and cartographic perspectives (Mahmuzar, 2018; Hidayat et al., 2021; Nugraha et al., 2022). However, limited attention has been given to understanding how governance factors, particularly communication, institutional structures, and personal interests, contribute to the persistence of territorial conflicts at the local level. Addressing this gap, this study employs a qualitative case study approach to analyze the territorial boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency in the Lotas segment. This study provides a governance perspective on the management of unresolved territorial disputes.

The ambiguity of regional boundaries may generate broader impacts beyond administrative disputes, including social tensions, uncertainty in land management, obstacles in government service delivery, and potential political conflicts in border communities. Therefore, establishing definitive regional boundaries is essential for effective governance and sustainable regional development. Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the territorial boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency in the Lotas segment by examining the roles of communication, institutional structures, and personal interests in sustaining the dispute.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conflict

Etymologically, the term conflict originates from the Latin word *configere*, which means “to strike together” or “to clash.” In social studies, conflict is understood as a social process that arises when individuals, groups, or institutions experience incompatibility in interests, values, objectives, or perceptions. [Antonius \(2002\)](#) defines conflict as an action by one party that has the potential to obstruct, limit, or interfere with the interests of another party. This concept indicates that conflict does not merely represent disagreement but reflects a relationship between parties where one party perceives the actions or existence of another party as an obstacle to achieving its objectives. Similarly, Deutsch explains that conflict emerges when social interactions are more influenced by differences than similarities, resulting in tensions caused by incompatible interests or goals ([Maftuh, 2005](#)).

Conflict is an unavoidable phenomenon in social life because differences in perceptions, interests, and values are inherent characteristics of human interaction. [Scannell \(2010\)](#) argues that conflict is a natural and normal occurrence resulting from differences in individual or group interpretations regarding goals and values. In line with this perspective, [Pruitt and Rubin \(2009\)](#) explain that conflict occurs when parties perceive a divergence of interests and believe that their aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. Therefore, conflict is strongly influenced by the perception of each actor regarding their interests and their interpretation of other parties as barriers to achieving desired outcomes.

From the perspective of conflict theory, social conflict is closely related to differences in power, authority, and control over resources. [Ritzer \(2005\)](#) explains that conflict theory emphasizes social inequality and competition between groups as fundamental factors influencing social relations. Unlike structural functional theory, which views social order and stability as central elements of society, conflict theory highlights the role of power struggles and differences in interests as sources of social tension. In the context of regional boundary disputes, conflict may arise because territorial boundaries determine administrative authority, access to resources, political legitimacy, and control over development processes. Thus, boundary conflicts are not merely geographical problems but also involve political, social, economic, and institutional dimensions.

Watkins, as cited by [Chandra \(1992\)](#), states that conflict occurs when two or more parties have the potential and practical ability to obstruct each other's interests. Potential conflict refers to the existence of capacity or opportunity to create obstacles, while practical conflict occurs when such capacity is manifested through actual actions. This concept is relevant to territorial disputes because conflicts between regional governments may remain latent until differences in boundary interpretation, resource utilization, or administrative authority create direct competition between parties.

In general, conflict may occur due to several interconnected factors. [Francis \(2006\)](#) identifies three main causes of conflict, namely communication, structural, and personal factors. Communication factors arise when information delivered by one party is interpreted differently by another party, resulting in misunderstanding and conflicting perceptions. In territorial boundary disputes, differences in understanding regarding legal documents, administrative maps, and boundary coordinates often become sources of disagreement. Structural factors are related to competition over authority, limited resources, and institutional interests. Regional boundary conflicts commonly involve structural issues because administrative boundaries determine governmental jurisdiction and control over strategic areas. Meanwhile, personal factors relate to differences in perceptions, experiences, values, and interests among individuals or community groups involved in the conflict.

Furthermore, conflict involving multiple stakeholders requires an appropriate governance mechanism because unilateral approaches are often insufficient to resolve complex disputes. [Ansell and Gash \(2008\)](#) emphasize that collaborative governance is important in resolving public conflicts because it encourages communication, trust-building, and joint decision-making among stakeholders. [Similarly, Emerson et al. \(2012\)](#) explain that collaborative processes can strengthen

conflict management by creating shared understanding and coordinated actions among government institutions, communities, and other relevant actors.

Conflict can produce both positive and negative consequences depending on how it is managed. Constructive conflict may encourage dialogue, improve decision-making, and generate alternative solutions. However, unmanaged conflict can create destructive impacts, including social fragmentation, weakened institutional relationships, and reduced public trust. [Setiadi \(2011\)](#) explains that prolonged conflict may influence individual behavior by increasing emotional responses, aggression, and social tension among conflicting groups. In addition, [Suyanto and Narwoko \(2004\)](#) state that conflict may weaken social values and norms when communities perceive existing institutions as unable to provide fair and effective solutions.

Another significant consequence of unresolved conflict is the deterioration of communication and relationships between conflicting parties. Destructive conflict often creates distrust, negative perceptions, and hostility, which further complicate the resolution process. In regional boundary disputes, unclear territorial status may also affect public administration, land management, government services, and development planning because the authority of each regional government becomes uncertain. Therefore, unresolved boundary conflicts may have broader implications beyond administrative disagreements, including social instability and political tensions in border communities.

To address conflicts, Mitchell in [Ginting \(2013\)](#) proposes several conflict resolution approaches, including public consultation, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration. Public consultation provides opportunities for conflicting parties to exchange information and express their perspectives to achieve a shared understanding. Negotiation involves direct communication between parties to identify problems and formulate mutually acceptable agreements. Mediation requires the involvement of a neutral third party who facilitates communication and assists parties in reaching a settlement. Meanwhile, arbitration involves a third party with authority to provide binding or non-binding decisions depending on the agreement of the conflicting parties. [Xu et al. \(2018\)](#) further explain that arbitration and negotiation mechanisms can provide effective solutions for complex conflicts when parties are unable to resolve disputes independently.

In relation to territorial boundary conflicts, conflict resolution requires more than legal determination because it must also consider social acceptance, institutional coordination, and community involvement. [Wallenstein \(2015\)](#) argues that sustainable conflict resolution requires transforming relationships between conflicting parties rather than merely eliminating disagreement. Therefore, resolving regional boundary conflicts requires a combination of legal certainty, collaborative governance, and participatory approaches.

In the case of the boundary conflict between Rinhat District, Malaka Regency, and Kokbaun District, South Central Timor Regency, the conflict reflects differences in administrative interpretation, territorial claims, and community perceptions regarding boundary ownership. The unresolved status of the Lotas segment demonstrates that the establishment of an autonomous region does not automatically guarantee the implementation of definitive boundaries in the field. Consequently, understanding conflict dynamics and applying appropriate resolution mechanisms are essential steps toward achieving administrative certainty, maintaining social harmony, and strengthening governance in border areas.

2.2 Local Government

The government is the most general member unit that has certain responsibilities to maintain the system that covers it and a practical monopoly concerning its coercive power while the Regional Government is the administration of government affairs by the Regional Government and the Regional People's Representative Council according to the principle of autonomy and co-administration with the principle of the widest possible autonomy in the system and principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia as referred to in the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia.

The establishment of Regional Government in accordance with the mandate of Article 18 of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia has given birth to various products of laws and other laws governing regional government, including Law Number 1 of 1945, Law Number 22 of 1948, Law Number 1 of 1957, Law Number 18 of 1965, Law Number 5 of 1974, Law Number 32 of 2004, and finally Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government. Substantially, the Law regulates the form of the organizational structure of Regional Government.

Based on Article 18 Paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is divided into provinces and provinces are divided into districts and cities. Provinces, districts and cities have local governments, which are regulated by Law no. 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government. Then in Article 1 Number 2 of Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, it is stated that regional government is the administration of government affairs by the Regional Government and the Regional People's Representative Council according to the principle of autonomy as wide as possible in the system and principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia as referred to in 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia ([Dahwir, 2022](#)).

2.3 Autonomous Region

An Autonomous Region is a legal community unit that has territorial boundaries, which is authorized to regulate and manage government affairs and the interests of the local community according to their own initiative, based on the aspirations of the people in the Unitary State System of the Republic of Indonesia.

In an autonomous region there are the following elements:

1. The element of territorial boundaries as a legal community unit, the boundaries of an area are very decisive for legal certainty for the government and its people in carrying out legal interactions. On the other hand, territorial boundaries are very important if there is a legal dispute concerning border areas between regions.
2. The government element of the existence of government in the region, is based on the legitimacy of the Act that gives the authority to the Regional Government to carry out government affairs which are authorized to regulate based on their own creativity
3. The community element, the community as an element of regional government is a legal community unit, both *gemeinschaft* and *gesselschaft* clearly have traditions, habits, and customs that also color the regional government system, ranging from forms, ways of thinking, acting and certain habits in people's lives.

2.4 Borderline

The definition of a border in general is a demarcation line between two sovereign regions. At first the border of a region was formed with the birth of the state ([Hadiwijoyo, 2011](#)). The National Mapping and Survey Coordinate Agency of the Ministry of Home Affairs has defined regional boundaries, namely: "the separation between one region and another, where within the scope of regional boundaries the implementation of the authority of each region is carried out". This means that the authority of a region basically should not be carried out beyond the regional boundaries stipulated in the legislation.

Furthermore, the area aspect becomes very important because the territory of an area reflects the extent to which the regional authority can be implemented. According to the aspect that can show the ability to implement regional autonomy because from the region it can generate regional taxes and levies, and also share the results of national resources. Even the area is a variable in determining the weights that affect the amount of general allocation funds received by the regions ([Tarasari, 2021](#)). Thus the determination and control of regional boundaries is useful to support the implementation of Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, in the context of improving the order and responsibility for the implementation of government functions that require

regional border capacity in the implementation of the real implementation of regional authority in the field ([Direktorat Pembatasan PUM, 2002](#)).

Therefore, regional boundaries have an important and strategic meaning when compared to the previous era. However, in reality, the strategic and importance of regional boundaries has not been balanced with the clarity of boundaries between regions so that in the end, it creates problems that can lead to conflicts between regions such as conflicts in the affirmation of regional boundaries between Rinhat District, Malaka Regency and Kokbaun District, South Central Timor Regency.

Regional boundaries are also regulated in the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 76 of 2012 concerning Guidelines for Affirmation of Regional Boundaries and Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 27 of 2006 concerning the Determination and Affirmation of Village Boundaries which explains that the Village is a legal community unit that has boundaries area that is authorized to regulate and manage the interests of the local community, based on origins and customs that are recognized and respected in the system of government of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method using a case study approach to examine the territorial boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor (TTS) Regency in the Lotas segment, East Nusa Tenggara Province. A qualitative approach was selected because this study aims to understand social phenomena through the exploration of experiences, perceptions, interactions, and meanings constructed by individuals or groups involved in the conflict. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena because it allows researchers to analyze contextual realities and understand how actors interpret specific events within their social environment ([Korstjens & Moser, 2017](#)).

The case study approach was applied because this research focuses on a specific territorial conflict occurring within its real-life context. The boundary dispute between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency involves various dimensions, including administrative authority, historical background, community perceptions, institutional interests, and conflict resolution processes. Case study research is suitable when a researcher seeks to examine contemporary phenomena where the relationship between the phenomenon and its context cannot be clearly separated ([Korstjens & Moser, 2017](#)). Therefore, this approach enables an in-depth analysis of the factors causing the persistence of the boundary conflict and the mechanisms used by stakeholders to address the dispute.

The research was conducted in the Lotas boundary segment, located in the western part of Malaka Regency. The research area includes Muke Village, Lotas Malaka Village, and Naiusu Village in Rinhat District, Malaka Regency, which directly border Obaki Village, Benahe Village, and Lotas Village in Kokbaun District, South Central Timor Regency. This location was selected purposively because it represents an unresolved administrative boundary conflict characterized by overlapping territorial claims, differences in community understanding, and uncertainty regarding the implementation of official boundaries.

The informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was chosen because qualitative research requires participants who possess specific knowledge, experience, and direct involvement with the phenomenon under investigation rather than statistical representativeness. The selection of appropriate informants is essential to ensure that the data obtained can provide meaningful explanations regarding the research phenomenon ([Moser & Korstjens, 2018](#)). The informants consisted of relevant stakeholders, including local government representatives, village officials, community leaders, and residents living in the disputed border area. The involvement of various groups aimed to obtain diverse perspectives regarding the causes, impacts, and possible solutions to the territorial boundary conflict.

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and field observations. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide a systematic framework while allowing researchers to explore additional information emerging from participants' experiences and perspectives. The development of an appropriate interview guide is important in qualitative research to ensure that data collection remains focused while maintaining flexibility during interaction with informants ([Kallio et al., 2016](#)). Field observations were conducted to identify geographical conditions, social interactions, and the characteristics of communities living in the disputed border area.

Secondary data were obtained through document analysis, including laws and regulations related to regional formation, government documents, administrative maps, boundary determination documents, and previous studies related to territorial conflicts. The combination of interview data, observation results, and documentary evidence was conducted to strengthen the understanding of the case and improve research credibility through data triangulation. Triangulation is an important strategy in qualitative research because it enables researchers to compare information from different sources and reduce potential interpretation bias ([Carter et al., 2014](#)).

Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and relationships emerging from the collected data. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research because it provides a systematic procedure for organizing and interpreting complex qualitative information ([Nowell et al., 2017](#)). The analysis process involved several stages, including data familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, and interpretation. The identified themes were categorized based on the research focus, including the causes of territorial conflict, stakeholder roles, impacts of boundary uncertainty, and conflict resolution efforts.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied qualitative validation criteria consisting of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The credibility of the research findings was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing information obtained from different categories of informants and supporting documents. In addition, confirmation of key information with selected participants was conducted to ensure that the researchers' interpretations accurately reflected the perspectives of the informants. Ensuring trustworthiness is essential in qualitative research because it determines the reliability and integrity of the research findings ([Korstjens & Moser, 2018](#)).

Through this methodological approach, the study provides an in-depth examination of the territorial boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency in the Lotas segment. The qualitative case study design allows the research to capture the complexity of the conflict by considering not only administrative and legal aspects but also social relations, institutional interactions, and community experiences in the border area.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Factors Causing The Boundary Conflict of Malaka and South Central Timor (TTS) Districts in the Lotas segment Segmen

The unresolved area in the Lotas Segment, which represents the boundary dispute between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor (TTS) Regency, covers approximately ± 24.3 km². The disputed area consists of agricultural land, plantation areas, residential settlements, and government facilities. The strategic function of this area has contributed to the complexity of the boundary dispute because it involves not only administrative issues but also social, economic, and community interests.



Based on Figure 2, the shaded area in the upper part of the map represents the administrative areas of Lotas Malaka Village, Muke Village, and Naiusu Village in Rinhat District, Malaka Regency. Meanwhile, the shaded area in the lower part represents Lotas Village, Obaki Village, and Benahe Village in Kokbaun District, South Central Timor Regency. These areas are directly adjacent and constitute the main location of the unresolved boundary conflict between the two regencies.

Historically, the Lotas Segment has been a disputed area claimed by both Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency. The absence of a definitive and officially recognized boundary agreement between the two regional governments has resulted in continuing uncertainty regarding administrative authority over the area. Although various efforts have been undertaken by relevant stakeholders to resolve the dispute, the determination of the official boundary between Malaka Regency and TTS Regency in the Lotas Segment has not yet reached a final agreement that is fully accepted by both parties.

To analyze the factors contributing to the persistence of the boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency in the Lotas Segment, this study adopts the conflict framework proposed by [Francis \(2006\)](#), which identifies three main factors causing conflict: communication, structural, and personal factors. The communication factor relates to differences in interpretation, information gaps, and misunderstandings among stakeholders regarding boundary determination. The structural factor refers to differences in authority, institutional interests, and competition over territorial control. Meanwhile, the personal factor concerns differences in perceptions, values, experiences, and interests among individuals or community groups affected by the boundary dispute. These three factors provide an analytical framework for understanding the complexity of the Lotas Segment boundary conflict.

4.1.1 Communication

The historical development of the territorial boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor (TTS) Regency in the Lotas Segment demonstrates that communication problems have been one of the main factors sustaining the dispute. Based on the conflict framework proposed by [Francis \(2006\)](#), communication failures occur when information, agreements, or decisions are not effectively understood and accepted by all parties involved. In the Lotas boundary dispute, differences in understanding regarding historical boundary markers, administrative decisions, and community involvement have created different interpretations between government institutions and

border communities. The initial boundary references, including Pal Batu boundary markers established during the Dutch colonial period, were interpreted differently by traditional communities and administrative authorities, resulting in continuous disagreement regarding territorial ownership.

Communication problems continued through various historical periods, including the dispute between Swapraja Belu and Swapraja Amanatun in 1952, boundary negotiations in 1956 and 1959, and the Joint Decree of the Regent Heads of Belu and TTS Regional Level II Number 1/PERDJ/1971. Although several agreements were reached at the governmental level, these decisions were not fully accepted by communities in the disputed area because local communities and traditional leaders were not sufficiently involved in the decision-making process. Consequently, differences between government agreements and community perceptions created resistance, social tension, and uncertainty regarding the status of the Lotas boundary area.

The communication gap remained evident in subsequent boundary conflicts involving disagreements over boundary pillar positions, allegations of boundary marker changes, and disputes over specific areas between boundary points. Various resolution efforts involving customary leaders, local governments, and the East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Government were conducted, including the boundary confirmation process in 2020–2021. The process referred to the coordinate points contained in the Joint Decree of the Regent Heads of Belu and TTS Regional Level II Number 1/PERDJ/1971. However, despite agreement at the government level, implementation remained problematic because many communities continued to maintain their historical claims and existing territorial understanding.

This finding indicates that communication failure in the Lotas boundary conflict is not merely caused by limited information exchange but also by the absence of inclusive communication mechanisms involving government institutions, traditional authorities, and affected communities. This condition is consistent with collaborative governance theory, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful participation, mutual trust, and continuous communication among stakeholders in resolving public conflicts ([Ansell & Gash, 2008](#); [Emerson et al., 2012](#)). Furthermore, limited community involvement in decision-making processes may create resistance because communities perceive policies as externally imposed rather than collectively developed ([Fung, 2015](#)). Therefore, resolving the Lotas boundary conflict requires a participatory communication process that integrates administrative regulations, historical narratives, and community interests to achieve a sustainable and mutually accepted boundary agreement.

4.1.2 Structure

There was a power struggle between the stakeholders in each area where several traditional leaders of TTS Lotas stated that the 1971 agreement was absolute because Lotas was part of TTS while the Malaka side stated that Lotas was not part of TTS in accordance with the acknowledgment letter dated 16 September in 1952 which stated that Temukung Lotas, Temukung Muke, Temukung Obaki, Temukung Benahe and the Chairperson of the Village Chair and the women and men admitted that in front of the Malaka APPS they humbly liked to join the tax administration for the Umalor District, Malaka Belu. Tax Auditor Belu D. Fangidae and Police Patrol Commander A. Salan and Ahmad witnessed the incident.

From the data and information collected regarding the administrative boundaries of the government between TTS and Malaka Regencies, it is suspected that the issue of boundary issues was raised by certain groups of people with the intention of getting a position and position both in the executive and legislative institutions, so that the problem of territorial boundaries in Lotas is also can be said to be a problem engineered by a particular group. Efforts to define boundaries in the Lotas segment have been carried out since 1979, facilitated by the Provincial Government (Assistant Governor of the Southern Region with staff) based on the Letter of Concern dated December 20, 1929 concerning the Boundary between the Kingdom of Amanatun and the Kingdom of Belu with the result that nine boundary pillars have been installed. In 1989, the measurement and installation of pillars

was carried out again based on the Topographic Map of 1912 and 21 additional pillars were installed.

It should also be explained that the affirmation of regional boundaries is based on past documents in the form of agreements and maps, while for the problems that occurred in Lotas in 1979 at the beginning of the affirmation of boundaries facilitated by the East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Government, there was a basic dualism used by the TTS and the East Nusa Tenggara. Belu, the TTS party used the basis of the Letter of Concern dated December 20, 1929 concerning the Boundary between the Kingdom of Amanatun and the Kingdom of Belu, while the Belu used the basis of the Letter of Concern dated June 25, 1917 concerning the Boundary between Landschap-Landschap Amanatun and Malaka (Beslit Gouvernement dated December 3, 1918 Number 18). As a result, the boundary pillars that have been installed since 1979 have not received full acknowledgment from various parties, resulting in the problem being unresolved to date.

However, the determination of physical and definite regional boundaries in the Lotas segment is not an easy matter, even though the structure of regional government administration has been running and developing since the birth of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) and juridical boundaries have been established by the Law on the establishment the area itself often causes problems between the regions concerned because each party does not easily agree on the location of the boundary points, especially in this problem between Lotas TTS and Malaka involving a cultural structure that the government should not step over.

Structural problems in determining the boundaries of the Lotas area are also in line with the opinion [Kartiko \(2014\)](#) which states that empirically the emergence of Bapas disputes is caused by juridical factors due to the unclear boundaries of an area (the determination of regional boundaries is attached to the law on the formation of an area). The rapid expansion of regions is due to the desire to become an autonomous region. [Ritzer \(2005\)](#), states that conflict theory is actually still in the same paradigm as structural functional theory, but both have different points of view. Structural functional theory assesses conflict as a functional thing. Meanwhile, conflict theory highlights social facts in the form of authority and position, which are the sources of conflict in social life. These differences in turn can trigger conflicts in society.

The blurring of regional boundaries due to these structural factors can cause a wider negative impact than just the potential for conflict between regions because of the strategic and economic potential of a part of the region, such as the impact on social life and the administration of government administration, and can even cause political impacts, especially in border areas. Therefore, in carrying out government administration structurally, it is important to define regional boundaries in the Lotas segment. The existing mechanism is actually sufficient as long as it is actually implemented ([Raharjo, 2016](#)).

4.1.3 Personal

Personal interests have contributed to the persistence of the territorial boundary conflict between Lotas TTS and Lotas Malaka. Differences in perceptions, values, and interests among individuals and community groups have influenced how they understand and defend territorial ownership. In practice, some households in the Lotas area possess two family cards from different regencies, allowing them to access government assistance from both Malaka Regency and TTS Regency. In addition, communities in Lotas TTS seek recognition from the TTS Regency Government, including opportunities to receive assistance and participate in village administration. These conditions demonstrate that administrative ambiguity creates opportunities for communities to maintain different interests based on their respective needs.

These personal interests have accumulated into collective claims between Lotas TTS and Lotas Malaka communities, where each group seeks to defend customary rights based on historical narratives. This situation was reflected in the protest submitted by Lotas Malaka representatives on January 8, 2020, regarding the installation of boundary pillars and the construction of the Kokbaun sub-district office, which was considered to occupy Malaka Regency territory. Meanwhile, the TTS community maintained that their ownership claims were based on the 1971 agreement. The

accumulation of these interests has strengthened the boundary conflict and created negative impacts on relations between communities in the border area. Therefore, effective control and neutral assessment mechanisms are needed in regional expansion processes to prevent conflicts arising from competing interests among groups or regions ([Suaib, 2020](#)). The issue of boundary disputes has become increasingly relevant since the implementation of regional autonomy, where the expansion of villages, regencies, cities, and provinces has often resulted in disputes over territorial ownership and land claims ([Budisusanto & Firdaus, 2019](#)).

4.2 The Impact of the Boundary Conflict of Malaka and South Central Timor (TTS) in the Lotas Segment

4.2.1 Public Service Barriers

Based on the results of the author's observations and interviews, it is known that one of the impacts that occur on the boundary between Lotas Malaka Village and Lotas TTS is the obstruction of public services where there are people who have 2 KK namely Malaka and TTS in one house as a result of which administrative services are hampered while the main goal of establishing The new autonomous regions are directed at accelerating the realization of public welfare through public services so that the implementation of regional autonomy through decentralization of public services can be considered a failure in realizing slick public services for the community so that it requires a new format for governance but the pressure to form new autonomous regions (regional expansion) continues and the next is the inhibition of public services in land administration services. This is manifested in the problem of juridical data on land in the process of obtaining proof of ownership of land rights (certificates), especially in Lotas Malaka Village, Muke Village and Naisu Village, Rinhat District, Malaka Regency with Lotas Village TTS, Benahe Village and O'baki Village, Kokbaun District, TTS Regency, Whose territorial boundaries are not clear due to the unfinished confirmation of regional boundaries between districts.

While the main objective of the establishment of new autonomous regions is directed at accelerating the realization of public welfare through public services so that the implementation of regional autonomy through decentralization of public services can be considered a failure in realizing slick public services for the community so that it requires a new format for governance, but the pressure to form new autonomous regions (regional expansion) continues and even increases from year to year ([Suaib, 2020](#)).

4.2.2 The Disbandment of the Unity of the Group

In Lotas, the settlement of boundary problems often experienced deadlocks because the plan to install boundary pillars was stopped by the angry Lotas Malaka residents. As a result, the installation of boundary pillars between districts always fails and if the conflict is not successfully resolved in a good way and eventually leads to violence, it is certain that the unity of the groups experiencing conflict will experience setbacks and even destruction.

[Azar \(1990\)](#), notes that in countries experiencing prolonged social conflict, political power tends to be dominated by one identity group that uses resources to maintain its power over others. To establish this power, the ruling group will try to reduce the participation of minority groups to a minimum. Based on his notes, Azar then concluded that, such a crisis would exacerbate pre-existing competitive or conflict situations by dissolving group unity and reducing the ability of the State to meet basic needs and lead to further development of the crisis. In other words, the typology of the regime and the level of legitimacy are very important connecting variables between needs and prolonged social conflict.

Therefore, regional boundaries have strategic and important meaning. However, in reality, the strategic importance of regional boundaries has not been balanced with the clarity of boundaries between the Lotas Malaka and Lotas TTS areas, so that eventually it causes problems that result in conflicts between regions and has an impact on the dissolution of unity between groups within one tribe, such as conflicts in boundary assertion The area is between Rinhat District, Malaka District and Kokbaun District, South Central Timor Regency.

4.2.3 Damaging Relationships and Communications Between the Parties to the Conflict

Conflict, especially destructive conflict, reduces the quality and intensity of the relationship between the parties involved in the conflict. Based on the results of interviews and the author's observations, it is known that the boundary conflict between Malaka and South Central Timor (TTS) in the Lotas Segment has damaged the relationship and communication between the parties involved in the conflict. This territorial boundary conflict creates feelings of displeasure, anger and hatred towards each region in these two regencies and often leads to acts of violence. This situation damaged the relationship between the parties to the conflict and communication between the Malaka District Lotas and the South Central Timor District Lotas (TTS).

In this case, the conflict is a perception or point of view regarding the perceived divergence of interest or a belief and belief that the aspirations of the conflicting parties cannot be achieved simultaneously because of differences. According to Watkins cited by [Chandra \(1992\)](#), conflict occurs when there is two parties whom potentially and practically / operationally hinder each other's interests. Potentially, it means that one party or both parties have the ability to hinder. Practically / operationally, it means that the inhibiting ability can be realized and is in a state that allows its realization to be easily carried out.

The potential for conflict in society occurs when contact is made between the government and citizens or between citizens. As individuals who are organized in groups, every citizen wants to find a way according to their respective views to fulfill their respective life goals. The opportunity to fulfill that goal is only through the choice of getting what is needed or being forced to engage in conflict with other parties if interests become conflicting and this is what happened to Lotas Malaka Village and Lotas Village TTS.

4.3 Boundary Conflict Resolution Efforts between Malaka and South Central Timor Regencies in the Lotas Segment

4.3.1 Negotiation

The government as a mediator in the negotiations did not involve traditional leaders from both sides because they took their customary lands, which in their belief, if the boundaries of the land were wrongly determined, they would die, while for the governments of the two districts and provinces, they wanted to immediately resolve the issue of this territorial boundary so that There are no more conflicts between the two camps, so it can be stated that the steps that have been taken by the Malaka Regency Government and the South Central Timor Regency Government to overcome the problem of the boundaries of the Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency (TTS) in the Lotas Segment through negotiations have not met an agreed middle way. and mutually beneficial for both parties because negotiations are only agreed upon at the macro level, namely the Government of the two regions and the Provincial Government as mediators, while at the micro level these negotiations are hampered by historical beliefs passed down from generation to generation by both parties. ng declares Lotas is his territory. The rapid rate of regional expansion has created a new dispute between the regional government and other regional governments, in this case the TTS Regional Government and the Malaka Regional Government. Disputes that occur in the expansion of regions do not only occur during the expansion process, even after the division raises problems. Regional expansion will not be separated from the problem of drawing a line between the two autonomous regions so that it requires negotiations with consideration of various aspects so that the goals of decentralization and regional autonomy can be achieved.

However, negotiations in the Lotas segment have always been deadlocked even though the government claims that an agreement has been reached. This happened because the people of Lotas Malaka (Belu at that time) wanted to bring traditional leaders from these 2 districts, namely leaders from the Tiumlafa Tribe and Naiusu Tribe, to negotiate sitting together and just show the boundary point between Belu and TTS at that time but at that time the traditional leaders have not sat down together so that in 2013 yesterday there was a meeting between the Naiusu Tribe and the Tiumlafa Tribe witnessed by Kabaran Rai Namako and the boundaries of the area were agreed based on custom that the boundary point started from Noteluan leading to the Motabele river but the result of this tough negotiation collapsed due to the decision of the parties. the government set the

coordinates based on their own agreement without involving the results of negotiations from the community, especially through severe negotiations with traditional leaders who better understand the condition of their territorial boundaries.

4.3.2 Mediation

As a response to the potential for border disputes between the Malaka Lotas and the TTS Lotas, Law Number 23 of 2014 regulates the settlement mechanism through the Governor and the Minister of Home Affairs. Based on article 370 paragraph (1), if there is a border dispute between autonomous regions in one province, the settlement will be facilitated by the governor. Meanwhile, if there is a dispute between the provincial government and the province, and the province and the region, the Minister of Home Affairs carries out the resolution and the decision is final.

However, all negotiations until the mediation stage was carried out, there were still obstacles at the micro level where until 2021 the community and traditional leaders of the two villages had the same motive, namely that when they delegated this Lotas boundary problem to the Provincial Government, the determination of regional boundaries would be determined based on their respective beliefs and historical history where the motive of the TTS Lotas delegate this problem to the mediator so that the boundaries of the territory remain in their beliefs while the TTS Lotas also wants that and if the boundary is changed it will cause conflict between the two disputed areas so that the resolution of the conflict by means of mediation, namely the involvement of a neutral third party, in this case the Governor of NTT, has not yet met a middle way of the boundary conflict between the two regions ([Riza, 2022](#)).

If the people of both parties want their customary land not to be contested, then this has actually been stated in Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 141/2017 concerning the Determination of Regional Boundaries Article 2 paragraph 1 it is stated that the Affirmation of Regional Boundaries aims to create an orderly government administration, provide clarity and legal certainty to the territorial boundaries of an area that fulfills technical and juridical aspects while Article 2 paragraph (2) states that the Affirmation of Regional Boundaries does not abolish land rights, asset ownership, *ulayat* rights, and customary rights to the community point of agreement between the two parties ([Kementerian Dalam Negeri, 2017](#)).

This is further exacerbated by the role of the Governor of TT in the settlement of boundary disputes between the TTS Lotas and the Malaka Lotas as only a mediator. The authority to settle border disputes granted by Law 23 of 2014 (Article 1 paragraph 6) does not give the Governor of NTT full authority in deciding the settlement of border disputes. This becomes ineffective, considering that the governor as the representative of the central government in the region should be given the authority to decide border disputes in his territory. Because the spirit of regional autonomy is the right, authority, and obligation of the autonomous region to regulate and manage its own government affairs and public interests in the system of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. This is also in line with the opinion of that one of the criteria for an Autonomous Region is a legal entity, so that it has the power to take actions regarding wealth, legal power, and can act.

4.4 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the territorial boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor (TTS) Regency in the Lotas Segment is a multidimensional conflict involving administrative, historical, social, and cultural aspects. The conflict is not merely caused by differences in geographical interpretation but also by competing interests regarding territorial authority and community identity. This finding supports conflict theory, which explains that conflict emerges when groups have different interests, perceptions, and power relations in controlling certain resources or territories ([Ritzer, 2005](#); [Pruitt & Rubin, 2009](#)). In the context of the Lotas Segment, the unclear implementation of administrative boundaries has created overlapping claims between the two regions, where each party maintains its interpretation based on legal documents, historical agreements, and customary perspectives.

The study also reveals that communication factors play a significant role in maintaining the persistence of the conflict. Various boundary agreements have been conducted at the government

level; however, these agreements have not fully resolved the dispute because affected communities and customary leaders have not been sufficiently involved in the decision-making process. This condition reflects the argument of [Francis \(2006\)](#), that communication failures occur when information and decisions are interpreted differently by conflicting parties. The findings are also consistent with collaborative governance perspectives, which emphasize that conflict resolution requires inclusive communication, trust-building, and active participation from all stakeholders ([Ansell & Gash, 2008](#); [Emerson et al., 2012](#)). Therefore, the failure to integrate community perspectives into boundary determination has created a gap between formal government decisions and local acceptance.

Furthermore, structural and personal factors contribute to the continuation of the Lotas boundary conflict. Structural factors are reflected in differences in administrative authority, institutional interests, and competing interpretations of historical boundary documents between Malaka and TTS Regencies. Meanwhile, personal factors emerge from differences in community perceptions, customary values, and interests related to land ownership and administrative affiliation. These findings confirm that territorial disputes cannot be resolved solely through legal and administrative approaches because boundaries are also associated with social identity and historical relationships. The sustainable conflict transformation requires understanding the underlying social meanings and interests behind conflicts rather than focusing only on formal settlement mechanisms.

The findings further demonstrate that negotiation and mediation efforts conducted by the regional governments and the provincial government have not yet produced a comprehensive resolution because the process has mainly occurred at the institutional level. Although negotiation and mediation are recognized as important mechanisms for conflict resolution ([Ginting, 2013](#); [Xu et al., 2018](#)), their effectiveness depends on the involvement and acceptance of all affected parties. Therefore, resolving the Lotas Segment boundary conflict requires a more participatory approach that involves government institutions, customary leaders, and local communities. Strengthening collaborative communication and ensuring community participation are essential to achieving legitimate boundary determination and preventing the recurrence of similar conflicts in the future ([Fung, 2015](#)).

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that the boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency in the Lotas Segment is caused by three main factors: communication problems, structural factors, and personal interests. The conflict has resulted in several negative impacts, including delays in public services, weakening of social cohesion, and damaged relationships between the communities and institutions involved. Although the governments of both regions have attempted to resolve the dispute through negotiation and mediation involving the East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Government, a final agreement has not yet been achieved due to differences in historical interpretations and territorial claims among local communities. Therefore, resolving this boundary conflict requires continuous communication, stronger coordination among stakeholders, and an inclusive approach that considers legal, administrative, and social aspects to achieve a mutually accepted solution.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations, particularly regarding the difficulty of conducting a comprehensive historical tracing of the boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency in the Lotas Segment. Limited historical documentation and differences in community narratives regarding territorial ownership have resulted in incomplete information regarding the development of the conflict over time. In addition, this study relies mainly on available data and perspectives from relevant actors, which may not fully represent all historical aspects of the dispute. Future researchers are expected to conduct deeper historical investigations and involve broader sources of information to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors, dynamics, and resolution processes related to territorial boundary conflicts.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be proposed to support the resolution of the territorial boundary conflict between Malaka Regency and South Central Timor or locally *Timur Tengah Selatan* (TTS) Regency in the Lotas Segment. First, the regional governments of Malaka and TTS, together with the East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Government and the Ministry of Home Affairs, need to strengthen a participatory boundary determination mechanism by involving not only government representatives but also customary leaders and communities directly affected by the dispute. The involvement of local communities is essential because the conflict is not only related to administrative boundaries but also involves historical values, customary rights, and community perceptions regarding territorial ownership.

Second, the conflict resolution process should move beyond formal negotiations at the governmental level toward a collaborative approach that prioritizes continuous communication, transparency, and mutual understanding among stakeholders. The government needs to establish an effective communication forum that accommodates different perspectives between Malaka and TTS communities so that boundary decisions can gain broader social legitimacy. Furthermore, the determination of boundaries should consider both juridical aspects and empirical conditions in the field to ensure that administrative certainty does not create new social tensions.

For future research, further studies are encouraged to examine the boundary conflict from broader perspectives, including legal, anthropological, political, and spatial analysis approaches. Future researchers may explore the role of customary institutions, community identity, and historical narratives in shaping territorial claims among border communities. In addition, comparative studies involving other regional boundary conflicts in Indonesia may provide deeper insights into effective conflict resolution models and collaborative governance mechanisms for resolving administrative disputes. Future research may also utilize participatory mapping or geospatial approaches combined with qualitative analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between formal administrative boundaries and community-based territorial perceptions.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all parties who contributed to the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to the Government of Malaka Regency and South Central Timor Regency, local government officials, village authorities, customary leaders, and communities in the Lotas Segment who provided valuable information, experiences, and insights related to the territorial boundary conflict. The authors also acknowledge the support and guidance provided by Nusa Cendana University throughout the research process. The contribution and cooperation of all participants were essential in understanding the complexity of the boundary dispute and developing recommendations for sustainable conflict resolution.

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