

# From Land Tenure Uncertainty to Critical Citizenship: How Agrarian Reform Implementation Shapes Rural Political Behavior in Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine how land tenure uncertainty shapes the political behavior, institutional participation, and state society relations of the Nagori Purba Sipinggán community during the implementation of Indonesia's Agrarian Reform Program (*Tanah Objek Reforma Agraria*—TORA). Employing a qualitative case-study design, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis involving five purposively selected informants representing forestry authorities, village government, the village council, and affected farmers; the data were analyzed iteratively through open coding, categorization, thematic analysis, and cross-source comparison. The findings show that tenure insecurity transformed individual concerns into collective political articulation through *musyawarah nagori* and subsequent participation in TORA procedures. Administratively, 265 land parcels involving 289 community members were processed; of approximately 500 hectares examined, around 300 hectares were identified as potential objects for release and redistribution. However, policy delays, uneven access to information, and institutional inconsistency transformed initial optimism into conditional trust, repeated demands for clarification, and selective resistance rather than political withdrawal. These findings indicate that TORA operates not merely as an administrative mechanism but also as an arena of informal political learning in which citizens develop procedural knowledge, evaluate state responsiveness, and exercise participatory-critical citizenship. The study is limited by its single-village setting and five informants; future comparative and mixed-method research should examine whether similar relationships between tenure uncertainty, political trust, participation, and political learning emerge across different TORA implementation contexts.

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## Introduction

Land is not merely an economic asset or a productive resource; it is also a political institution through which authority, recognition, citizenship, and relationships between communities and the state are continuously constituted and renegotiated. In agrarian societies, access to land determines not only household income and livelihood continuity but also social legitimacy, territorial belonging, intergenerational security, and the capacity of communities to participate meaningfully in public affairs. Consequently, disputes over land are rarely reducible to disagreements concerning physical boundaries or legal ownership. They frequently embody broader struggles over who possesses legitimate authority to define rights, whose claims receive institutional recognition, and how state power is exercised in relation to local communities. The state therefore occupies a pivotal position in determining which land claims are recognized, what forms of evidence are considered legitimate, and which administrative procedures communities must navigate to obtain tenure security (German

& Braga, 2021; Higgins et al., 2018; Lund, 2023). Recent scholarship further demonstrates that tenure security is inherently relational and political because it depends on authority structures, state practices, social recognition, and locally embedded understandings of legitimate possession rather than on formal documentation alone (Larson et al., 2023; Obeng-Odoom & Haila, 2024; Valkonen, 2021).

This relational perspective challenges approaches that equate tenure security exclusively with formal land certification. Although legal documentation may reduce uncertainty in certain circumstances, the possession of formal or semi-formal documents does not automatically guarantee that communities perceive their rights as secure or that state agencies will recognize those rights consistently. Land tenure insecurity may arise from overlapping claims, ambiguity regarding jurisdiction, weak administrative coordination, competing sources of authority, unequal access to information, and the possibility that recognized rights will subsequently be modified or contested. Accordingly, recent literature conceptualizes tenure insecurity as a multidimensional condition produced through interactions among law, political authority, institutional practice, social relations, and community perceptions (Boone, 2019; Greene, 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). Valkonen (2021), for example, emphasizes that authority relations and state politics constitute fundamental sources of tenure insecurity, while Larson et al. (2023) show that formal rights constitute an inadequate proxy for perceived security when institutional and social conditions remain uncertain. Similarly, research in Indonesia demonstrates that uncertified or locally recognized forms of tenure may possess substantial social legitimacy even when they are positioned ambiguously within formal land administration systems (Afrizal et al., 2024; Obeng-Odoom & Haila, 2024; Putraditama et al., 2021). These findings suggest that land insecurity must be examined as both an administrative condition and a lived political experience.

The political consequences of such uncertainty are particularly significant. Conventional interpretations sometimes portray tenure-insecure communities primarily as vulnerable populations whose uncertain access to land diminishes their socioeconomic capacity. However, an expanding body of scholarship indicates that insecurity may simultaneously stimulate political awareness, collective organization, bargaining strategies, and engagement with government institutions. Communities confronted with uncertain or contested resource rights may organize collectively when institutional arrangements are perceived as inadequate, opaque, or unjust, transforming individual insecurity into a shared political concern (Beard, 2019; Berenschot et al., 2023; van der Muur, 2018). Comparative evidence reinforces this argument. Land certification and strengthened tenure rights can alter political relations by constraining discretionary authority and modifying citizens' relationships with local government (Hu et al., 2023; Jimenez-Ayora et al., 2024; Sha, 2023), whereas coercive or poorly governed land interventions can reduce political trust and intensify conflict with officials (Sha, 2023; Zhao & Xie, 2022). Hence, the political significance of tenure insecurity does not lie solely in whether rights ultimately become formalized, but also in how citizens interpret institutional procedures and respond collectively while uncertainty persists.

These relationships are highly pertinent to Indonesia, where agrarian governance has historically been characterized by legal pluralism, overlapping administrative authority, competing territorial claims, and persistent tensions between state-controlled land categories and community-based practices. Although successive governments have adopted agrarian reform programs intended to reduce inequality and provide greater legal certainty, implementation continues to encounter

fragmented bureaucratic arrangements, institutional competition, and divergence between formal regulatory frameworks and locally recognized claims (Bedner & Arizona, 2019; Sarker et al., 2020; Selwyn, 2018). Recent studies reinforce these concerns. Hardiyanto (2021) demonstrates that agrarian reform in Indonesia cannot be understood simply through formal policy declarations because political and institutional prerequisites strongly condition implementation. McCarthy et al. (2022) similarly show that competing land-reform rationalities may simultaneously expand state governance, stabilize particular property relations, and generate new land politics rather than straightforwardly eliminating uncertainty. Meckelburg and Wardana (2024) further illustrate that contemporary land governance is embedded within broader political-economic structures in which definitions of public interest, development, and state authority profoundly affect land relations. Thus, Indonesian agrarian reform should be evaluated not only according to the quantity of land redistributed or certified but also according to how communities experience recognition, participation, procedural clarity, and institutional responsiveness.

The complexity becomes particularly evident where community claims intersect with land classified as state forest or other forms of state-controlled territory. Indonesian research on social and community forestry demonstrates that formal policy recognition does not necessarily eliminate institutional uncertainty. Sahide et al. (2020) show that policies intended to expand community access may continue to produce exclusion through asymmetrical information, contested rule-making, and unequal control over implementation. Maryudi et al. (2022) identify bureaucratic fragmentation and competing institutional mandates as significant impediments to the realization of community-oriented forest policies, while Myers et al. (2022) demonstrate comparatively that the effectiveness of tenure reform depends substantially on coordination among implementing institutions, policy objectives, and available resources. At the community level, Putraditama et al. (2021) found in Indonesia that securing tenure constituted a major motivation for participation in community-based forestry. These studies collectively indicate that institutional recognition is not a single administrative event; rather, it is a prolonged process in which communities encounter multiple authorities, information channels, requirements, and interpretations of legitimate land possession.

Within this broader policy architecture, Indonesia's Agrarian Reform Program, particularly the redistribution of *Tanah Objek Reforma Agraria* (TORA), constitutes an important instrument for addressing inequality in land control and resolving the uncertain status of communities occupying or cultivating land under state authority. TORA reflects an effort to transform particular land areas into legally recognized objects of agrarian reform and thereby strengthen citizens' access to land. However, existing scholarship suggests that the political effects of such reform cannot be inferred merely from the completion of formal redistribution. Research on Indonesian land and forest governance demonstrates that implementation is mediated by bureaucratic coordination, struggles over authority, access to policy information, and the capacity of communities to secure meaningful recognition (McCarthy et al., 2022; Maryudi et al., 2022; Myers et al., 2022). Moreover, the Indonesian case of insecure *Surat Keterangan Tanah* (SKT) rights examined by Afrizal et al. (2024) illustrates that locally held documentation may remain vulnerable when confronted with stronger political-economic interests. Consequently, investigating TORA solely through administrative performance indicators risks overlooking the political processes through which affected communities interpret, negotiate, and respond to uncertainty.

A useful theoretical perspective for addressing this limitation is provided by policy feedback theory. Rather than conceptualizing citizens merely as recipients of government programs, policy feedback scholarship argues that experiences with public policies can subsequently reshape citizens' political attitudes, perceived efficacy, institutional trust, expectations, and participation. Policies therefore generate not only material outcomes but also interpretive effects through which citizens learn about the competence, responsiveness, and fairness of state institutions (Goldfinch et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023; Porumbescu et al., 2019). Contemporary research provides substantial support for this proposition. Jacobs et al. (2022) demonstrate that policy experiences can generate durable changes in political efficacy and participation, while Bussi et al. (2022) show that the design and delivery of social policies influence political participation, political trust, interest, and attribution of government responsibility. Ardanaz et al. (2023) further demonstrate that information regarding participatory initiatives can influence citizens' evaluations of government performance and trust. Applied to agrarian policy, this theoretical logic implies that repeated interaction with land administration—through applications, verification, consultation, waiting periods, communication with officials, and decisions concerning recognition—may itself become a process of political learning.

This perspective is particularly useful because tenure-related policies entail sustained and often consequential encounters between citizens and state authority. The quality of these encounters can shape whether communities interpret the government as responsive, legitimate, opaque, or indifferent. Political trust is therefore not merely an abstract disposition independent of policy implementation; it may emerge from citizens' accumulated experiences of institutional performance. Empirical studies outside Indonesia provide compelling evidence of this relationship in the land sector. Hu et al. (2023) found that land titling strengthened political trust partly through increased stability of property rights and that standardized implementation procedures reinforced these effects. Conversely, Zhao and Xie (2022) demonstrate that land expropriation reduced trust in local officials through deterioration in subjective well-being and negative interactions between citizens and cadres, while Sha (2023) found that land expropriation increased conflicts with government officials and weakened trust in local government. More broadly, Mansoor (2021), Ardanaz et al. (2023), and Jacobs et al. (2022) demonstrate that government responsiveness, information quality, and policy experience constitute important mechanisms through which trust and political engagement are formed.

Political efficacy provides another conceptual bridge between policy experience and political behavior. Citizens are more likely to participate when they believe that they possess the capacity to understand political processes and that public institutions may respond to their claims. Conversely, prolonged uncertainty, inaccessible information, or perceived institutional indifference can weaken efficacy while potentially redirecting participation toward more critical, collective, or contentious forms (Jensen et al., 2019; Louis et al., 2020; van Deth, 2016). This relationship is especially relevant in land governance because affected communities often need to learn administrative rules, identify responsible authorities, communicate claims, mobilize documentary evidence, and coordinate collective action. The policy process may therefore function as an arena of political socialization. Evidence from policy feedback research indicates that interaction with public programs can modify citizens' political capacities and willingness to participate (Bussi et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2022), while studies specifically addressing land governance demonstrate that tenure reform can transform

citizen–state relations and patterns of collective action (Hu et al., 2023; Jimenez-Ayora et al., 2024). Accordingly, the absence of immediate policy resolution does not necessarily imply political passivity.

The importance of participation also directs attention to the procedural dimensions of land administration. Contemporary governance scholarship emphasizes that meaningful participation requires more than inviting citizens into formally established administrative processes. Participation depends on the distribution of information, decision-making authority, institutional openness, and whether affected groups possess genuine opportunities to influence outcomes (Adams, 2019; Ansell & Gash, 2018; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Research on land administration similarly demonstrates that nominally participatory programs may reproduce power asymmetries if citizen involvement is reduced to information provision or procedural compliance. Ho et al. (2023), for example, show that participation in land formalization is conditioned by power, institutional arrangements, decentralized implementation, and the extent to which communities are recognized as genuine co-producers rather than passive beneficiaries. In parallel, Ardanaz et al. (2023) demonstrate that information concerning participatory mechanisms influences citizens' assessments of governmental honesty and benevolence, whereas Mansoor (2021) highlights the importance of responsive government communication for institutional trust. These findings are directly relevant to agrarian reform because uncertainty concerning timelines, requirements, jurisdiction, and policy decisions may itself affect how communities interpret the state.

Taken together, the international and Indonesian literature suggests that land reform simultaneously operates in at least three interconnected domains: redistribution or recognition of rights, institutional governance, and political feedback. Nevertheless, these domains have rarely been integrated analytically. Indonesian agrarian reform studies have predominantly concentrated on land redistribution, legalization, conflicts over territorial authority, bureaucratic coordination, political-economic interests, and institutional effectiveness (Hardiyanto, 2021; McCarthy et al., 2022; Meckelburg & Wardana, 2024). Likewise, research on community access to state-controlled forests has illuminated problems of exclusion, bureaucratic fragmentation, and incomplete implementation (Maryudi et al., 2022; Myers et al., 2022; Sahide et al., 2020). These contributions are indispensable for understanding the structural constraints surrounding agrarian policy. However, considerably less attention has been paid to what prolonged encounters with such constraints do politically to the communities involved—that is, how waiting, uncertain legal status, administrative engagement, incomplete information, and repeated interaction with state officials shape political learning, participation, trust, and assessments of governmental responsiveness.

A second gap arises from the dominant treatment of agrarian political behavior through highly visible conflict and contentious mobilization. Existing scholarship has substantially advanced understanding of resistance, land disputes, and collective mobilization (Beard, 2019; Berenschot et al., 2023; van der Muur, 2018), yet routine and institutionalized forms of political behavior remain comparatively underexamined. Communities do not interact with the state exclusively through protest. They may attend village discussions, collectively seek information, communicate with administrative officials, submit documents, coordinate claims, evaluate governmental promises, or strategically continue engagement despite disappointment. Such practices constitute politically significant behavior even when they do not take the form of open contention. Comparative evidence showing that land interventions can influence trust, collective action, and citizen–official relations

suggests that these less visible political consequences warrant systematic examination (Hu et al., 2023; Jimenez-Ayora et al., 2024; Zhao & Xie, 2022).

A third and more specific gap concerns policy uncertainty itself. Existing research has generally treated uncertainty as a problem that effective land policy should reduce. Far less attention has been given to uncertainty as a temporally extended political experience capable of producing political learning. Policy feedback research suggests that citizens interpret the state through repeated exposure to implementation processes (Bussi et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2022; Porumbescu et al., 2019), while tenure scholarship demonstrates that perceptions of security are affected by authority, institutional relationships, and recognition beyond the possession of documents (Larson et al., 2023; Obeng-Odoom & Haila, 2024; Valkonen, 2021). Connecting these literatures provides a basis for examining an underexplored proposition: prolonged land-tenure uncertainty may not merely constrain communities but may also transform their political orientations by encouraging collective interpretation of policy, institutional participation, evaluation of government performance, and more critical forms of engagement.

Nagori Purba Sipinggan offers an analytically important setting in which to investigate this proposition. Community members have occupied and cultivated land across generations, while administratively parts of the territory remain situated within areas classified as state forest. Residents possess local land documents in the form of *Surat Keterangan Tanah* (SKT), yet these documents do not provide the same level of legal certainty as formally registered land certificates. The distinction is consequential because Indonesian evidence demonstrates that SKT-based claims can become particularly vulnerable when local recognition encounters competing state classifications or stronger political-economic interests (Afrizal et al., 2024; McCarthy et al., 2022; Obeng-Odoom & Haila, 2024). For residents, therefore, tenure uncertainty concerns more than legal status; it also affects expectations regarding continuity of occupation, inheritance, long-term access, and the capacity to secure authoritative recognition from the state.

The implementation of TORA in Nagori Purba Sipinggan consequently provides an opportunity to examine agrarian reform not simply as a program of land administration but as a political process unfolding through interactions between citizens and government institutions. Community concerns regarding land status have encouraged collective discussion, engagement with local authorities, information seeking, and participation in administrative procedures. At the same time, prolonged uncertainty and delayed policy decisions potentially generate changing expectations regarding institutional responsiveness, policy credibility, and citizens' capacity to influence outcomes. Building on tenure-security scholarship, policy feedback theory, and research on political efficacy and institutional trust, this study therefore moves beyond an output-centered assessment of TORA and focuses on the political consequences generated during the implementation process itself (Jacobs et al., 2022; Larson et al., 2023; McCarthy et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this study asks: How does land tenure uncertainty shape the political behavior of communities in Nagori Purba Sipinggan as they interact with government institutions through the TORA program? The study aims to analyze how prolonged tenure uncertainty and direct experiences with TORA implementation influence community political awareness, institutional participation, collective action, political efficacy, perceptions of government responsiveness, and trust in public institutions. It advances the argument that tenure uncertainty does not necessarily result in political withdrawal; under particular institutional conditions, uncertainty may operate as a mechanism of

political learning through which communities acquire knowledge of governmental procedures, mobilize collectively, participate through institutional channels, evaluate state performance, and develop more critical forms of engagement when anticipated policy certainty is delayed.

The novelty of this study therefore lies in repositioning agrarian reform from a predominantly administrative and distributive issue toward a policy-feedback process that produces political consequences during conditions of unresolved tenure uncertainty. First, it extends the agrarian reform literature by examining not only whether land rights are eventually formalized but also how the process of seeking recognition transforms citizens' political orientations. Second, it integrates land-tenure scholarship with policy feedback, political efficacy, institutional trust, and citizen-participation perspectives, fields that have rarely been brought together in empirical analyses of Indonesian TORA implementation. Third, it conceptualizes communities affected by uncertain land rights not merely as beneficiaries, victims, or protesters but as active political actors who learn, interpret, negotiate, evaluate, and respond to the state through everyday policy encounters. By doing so, the study offers a more comprehensive explanation of how agrarian policy implementation can reshape state–society relations even before formal land-tenure outcomes are conclusively determined.

## Method

### *Research Design and Context*

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design focusing on Nagori Purba Sipingga, Purba District, Simalungun Regency, Indonesia. A qualitative case study was selected because this approach enables an in-depth understanding of how communities interpret, experience, and respond to policy processes within their specific social and institutional contexts. The case study design was considered appropriate for examining the relationship between land tenure uncertainty, policy implementation, and citizens' political behavior within the Agrarian Reform Program (*Tanah Objek Reforma Agraria*—TORA) (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Jain et al., 2021; Ridder, 2017).

This article represents an analytical development of previous undergraduate research concerning the implementation of land redistribution through the TORA program. The original study primarily examined the implementation process, institutional coordination, and obstacles encountered during TORA implementation. However, this article reanalyzes the same empirical materials with a different analytical orientation, namely examining how uncertainty regarding land rights shapes community political behavior, participation patterns, and relationships with government institutions.

The empirical data were obtained through field research involving in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis related to the stages of TORA implementation. The research context was selected because Nagori Purba Sipingga represents a relevant case where communities have historically cultivated land but continue to experience uncertainty due to overlapping claims between community land use and state forest designation.

### *Participants and Data Sources*

The selection of informants was conducted purposively based on their direct involvement, institutional position, and experiential knowledge regarding the implementation of the TORA program. The study involved five informants representing different social and institutional positions within the policy process. The key informant was Tigor Siahaan from the Forest Management Unit

(KPH) Region II Pematangsiantar, specifically from the Forest Protection and Community Empowerment Division. The main informant was John Verdy Sipayung, the Pangulu (village head) of Nagori Purba Sipinggán. Supporting informants consisted of Harapan Damanik, the Chairperson of Maujana Nagori, and two farmers, Ramli Purba and Rasden Sinaga, who directly experienced uncertainty regarding land ownership and access (Campbell et al., 2020; Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Palinkas et al., 2015).

The composition of informants was designed to capture multiple perspectives regarding TORA implementation, including government institutions responsible for forest governance, village-level authorities, community representatives, and affected residents. This multi-perspective approach allowed the study to examine how different actors interpreted land uncertainty and responded to government policy processes. The number of informants was determined based on the principles of information adequacy and data saturation. Data collection was considered sufficient when additional interviews no longer generated substantially different information or new analytical categories related to land tenure uncertainty, citizen participation, trust in institutions, and political responses. Therefore, although the number of informants was limited, the selected participants provided sufficient depth and representativeness for understanding the political dynamics surrounding TORA implementation in the research setting (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Malterud et al., 2016).

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

Data collection was conducted through three complementary techniques: in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected informants to explore their experiences, perceptions, and responses regarding land tenure uncertainty and the implementation of TORA. The interviews focused on several themes, including: (1) community experiences regarding land status uncertainty; (2) interactions between citizens and government institutions; (3) forms of community participation during TORA implementation; (4) perceptions regarding government responsiveness; and (5) changes in citizens' attitudes toward state institutions. Field observations were conducted to understand the social context of the community, particularly regarding land use practices, community meetings, and interactions related to the TORA process. In addition, documentary materials, including policy documents, administrative records, and reports related to TORA implementation, were analyzed to complement and verify interview findings (Busetto et al., 2020; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis was conducted through an iterative thematic analysis process consisting of data condensation, data organization, and conclusion verification. The analysis followed several stages to ensure systematic interpretation of qualitative evidence. First, interview transcripts and field notes were processed through open coding to identify meaningful statements, recurring concepts, and important experiences related to land tenure uncertainty and citizen responses. Second, the identified codes were grouped through categorization to develop broader analytical themes. Third, thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns and relationships among themes related to insecurity, participation, trust, and political learning.

Through this process, the data were organized into four main analytical categories: (1) forms of land tenure uncertainty experienced by communities; (2) political responses emerging from uncertainty; (3) changes in citizens' trust and perceptions toward government institutions; and (4)

informal political learning developed through interactions with the TORA implementation process. The analysis involved continuous comparison between information obtained from different informants to identify similarities, differences, and variations between institutional and community perspectives. Unlike the original research, which focused on evaluating TORA implementation, this article positions political behavior as the primary unit of analysis. Community deliberations, expression of aspirations, participation in administrative procedures, follow-up actions toward government institutions, and selective rejection of certain land management practices were analyzed as political actions because they represent efforts to protect interests and influence state decisions regarding land governance.

### ***Research Validity and Ethical Considerations***

The validity of the findings was strengthened through data triangulation by comparing information obtained from different categories of informants and cross-checking interview findings with relevant documentary evidence regarding the TORA implementation process. This strategy was applied to reduce individual bias and ensure consistency between participants' narratives and documented policy processes.

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the research process. Informants were informed about the purpose of the study, the use of interview data, and their voluntary participation. The information obtained from participants was used solely for academic purposes and interpreted within the broader context of agrarian governance and citizen-state relations.

## **Result And Discussion**

### ***Land Tenure Uncertainty as the Foundation of Political Concern***

The findings demonstrate that land tenure uncertainty in Nagori Purba Sipinggán originated from the discrepancy between community-based recognition of land control and formal state recognition. For local residents, land legitimacy was constructed through historical occupation, intergenerational inheritance, and continuous cultivation practices. However, from the administrative perspective of the state, parts of the occupied areas remained classified as state forest areas. This difference created a condition in which communities socially perceived themselves as legitimate land users but lacked formal legal protection.

The findings indicate that tenure insecurity was experienced not merely as the absence of formal certificates but as uncertainty regarding the continuity, recognition, and future security of land ownership. As explained by one farmer, Rasden Sinaga, the community questioned how land that had been cultivated for generations could later be categorized as state forest without clear information regarding when and through what process such classification occurred. This condition illustrates that uncertainty was produced through the gap between lived experiences of ownership and administrative recognition.

At the community level, the *Surat Keterangan Tanah* (SKT) maintained social value because it functioned as local evidence of recognition among residents. However, its authority became limited when communities interacted with external legal and administrative systems. The Pangulu explained that SKT could support recognition within the community but did not provide equivalent legal strength for transactions or formal protection outside the village context.

The findings further show that tenure uncertainty contained a temporal dimension. Communities were not only concerned about their current access to land but also about whether

future generations would inherit land without adequate legal protection. Thus, uncertainty became a collective concern that extended beyond individual property issues and influenced how communities evaluated their relationship with government institutions.

### ***From Individual Grievance to Collective Political Articulation***

A central finding of this study is that land tenure uncertainty did not generate political withdrawal. Instead, uncertainty became the initial condition that encouraged collective awareness and political articulation. Initially, land problems were experienced individually by farmers and land users. However, through interaction among residents, the issue gradually became understood as a shared problem requiring collective responses.

The transformation occurred through village deliberation (*musyawarah nagori*). Community members requested a collective meeting with village authorities, and the Pangulu facilitated discussions to identify land-related problems, map affected areas, and consolidate community aspirations before communicating them to higher government institutions.

This process indicates that the community did not immediately adopt confrontational strategies. Instead, citizens utilized existing institutional channels to articulate their interests. The village government functioned as a mediating institution connecting community concerns with broader governmental structures.

The findings also reveal the importance of intermediary actors. The Pangulu played a role beyond administrative leadership by becoming a bridge between citizens and state institutions. Through this mechanism, individual grievances were transformed into collective claims that could be formally communicated within the policy process.

### ***Institutional Participation through the TORA Mechanism***

Following the articulation of community concerns, residents participated in the institutional mechanisms provided through the TORA program. Participation occurred through several stages, including socialization, documentation collection, land identification, measurement, and administrative verification.

The research data show that 265 land parcels involving 289 community members were included in the administrative process. From approximately 500 hectares examined, around 300 hectares were identified as potential objects for release and redistribution.

Community involvement at this stage was characterized by cooperation with government procedures. Residents submitted available documents, participated in data collection, and followed measurement processes because they perceived TORA as a possible pathway toward legal recognition.

However, the findings also reveal uneven access to information among community members. While some residents actively participated in the process, others reported limited understanding of TORA procedures. This indicates that administrative participation did not automatically represent equal political inclusion.

### ***Policy Delay and Transformation of Citizen Trust***

The study found that the completion of administrative procedures under the TORA process did not immediately generate the legal certainty expected by the community. Although residents had participated in the required stages of policy implementation, the anticipated government decision had not yet been issued by the end of the research period in 2025. This condition produced a

significant transformation in the nature of uncertainty experienced by the community. Initially, uncertainty was primarily associated with the legal status of the land and the absence of formal recognition. After participation in the TORA process, however, uncertainty shifted toward the completion, timing, and final outcome of government policy. Thus, the policy process did not eliminate insecurity but instead transformed it from land-status uncertainty into implementation uncertainty.

This transformation is important because it demonstrates that participation in a government program does not automatically result in greater institutional certainty. Community members had already complied with administrative requirements and engaged with the procedures established by government institutions. Consequently, expectations of resolution became stronger after participation. When the process remained incomplete, uncertainty was no longer interpreted solely as a historical problem of insecure land tenure but increasingly as a consequence of delayed governmental decision-making. In this sense, the policy process generated new expectations while simultaneously exposing the limitations of institutional responsiveness. The gap between procedural participation and substantive policy resolution therefore became an important element shaping community perceptions of government performance.

The prolonged implementation process also affected citizens' assessments of governmental responsiveness. The Pangulu repeatedly contacted relevant government institutions to obtain information regarding the progress of the TORA process and to clarify the status of the pending decision. Nevertheless, the responses received remained largely general and did not provide clear implementation schedules, definitive procedural milestones, or certainty regarding when the process would be completed. Such communication maintained a formal connection between the community and government institutions, but it did not fully satisfy the community's demand for substantive information. This distinction between institutional accessibility and institutional responsiveness is analytically important: government agencies remained reachable, yet their ability to provide clear and authoritative answers was perceived as limited.

As a result, citizen trust did not simply collapse but underwent a gradual transformation. The findings indicate that community members continued to recognize the government as the institution possessing the authority to resolve their land status, while simultaneously becoming more critical of the effectiveness and responsiveness of the policy process. Trust therefore became conditional rather than absolute. Citizens continued to expect the state to provide a legal solution, but repeated delays encouraged them to evaluate more critically whether government institutions were capable of translating administrative procedures into concrete outcomes. This pattern suggests that trust should not be treated as a binary condition of either confidence or distrust. Rather, it may evolve through repeated policy experiences in which citizens simultaneously retain institutional expectations and develop skepticism toward bureaucratic performance.

Importantly, the emerging decline in confidence did not immediately result in political withdrawal or rejection of state institutions. Instead, the community's initial response was to strengthen its engagement through formal institutional channels. Follow-up communication, requests for clarification, coordination with local authorities, and repeated inquiries regarding policy progress became mechanisms through which citizens attempted to obtain certainty. These practices demonstrate that dissatisfaction may coexist with continued institutional participation. Rather than abandoning the policy process, community members used formal procedures more actively to

express expectations and demand greater responsiveness. Such behavior indicates that policy delay can generate a form of critical participation in which citizens remain engaged while becoming increasingly attentive to institutional performance.

These findings therefore suggest that policy delay should not be interpreted solely as an administrative inefficiency. It also constitutes a politically meaningful experience capable of reshaping the relationship between citizens and the state. In the case of Nagori Purba Sipingga, prolonged uncertainty transformed community expectations, encouraged closer evaluation of governmental responsiveness, and produced a more conditional form of institutional trust. At the same time, the persistence of follow-up communication demonstrates that declining trust did not necessarily lead to disengagement. Instead, uncertainty encouraged citizens to maintain formal interaction while adopting a more critical orientation toward government institutions. The TORA process thus became not only a mechanism for pursuing land legalization but also an arena of political learning in which citizens reassessed state capacity, interpreted bureaucratic delay, and strengthened their demands for accountable and timely policy implementation.

**Selective Resistance and the Emergence of Critical Citizenship**

The final finding concerns the emergence of selective resistance when communities encountered government interventions perceived as inconsistent with their interests. The establishment of forestry management activities, including pine resin management through forestry groups, generated rejection among some residents because they perceived these activities as threatening their existing livelihood practices.

However, this resistance was not directed against the state as a whole. Communities continued to support TORA because the program represented a pathway toward legal recognition. At the same time, they rejected specific interventions considered incompatible with their land claims.

Therefore, the findings reveal a pattern of participatory-critical citizenship. Citizens simultaneously engaged with formal institutions while maintaining critical evaluations of state policies. They participated in deliberations, submitted documents, followed administrative procedures, and requested policy progress, but they also questioned unclear decisions and resisted interventions perceived as threatening their interests.

**Tabel 1.** Transformation of Land Tenure Uncertainty into Political Behavior

| Stage                       | Experienced Condition                                                                         | Political Response                                              |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Initial uncertainty         | Historically cultivated land remained classified as state forest; SKT had limited legal power | Individual concern and questioning of land legitimacy           |
| Collective awareness        | Residents recognized shared experiences of uncertainty                                        | Village deliberation and articulation of collective interests   |
| Policy opportunity          | TORA provided a formal pathway for recognition                                                | Participation in documentation, identification, and measurement |
| Implementation uncertainty  | Government decisions remained delayed and information was unclear                             | Follow-up actions and demands for policy certainty              |
| Institutional inconsistency | Different government interventions produced conflicting expectations                          | Declining trust and selective resistance                        |

Source: Processed from research data

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that land tenure uncertainty in Nagori Purba Sipinggaan should not be understood merely as an administrative problem concerning incomplete legalization processes. Instead, uncertainty functions as a political condition that shapes how citizens interpret state authority, organize collective responses, and develop strategies of engagement with government institutions. This finding extends previous studies on land tenure insecurity, which emphasize that insecurity is produced not only by the absence of formal land certificates but also by unequal recognition, institutional ambiguity, and contested relationships between communities and governing authorities (Arizona & Cohen, 2024). In the case of Purba Sipinggaan, the central issue was not simply whether communities possessed documentary evidence of land use, but whether the state recognized their historically established relationship with the land. Thus, tenure insecurity became a question of political recognition and citizenship rather than merely a matter of legal status.

The findings also contribute to broader discussions on agrarian governance in Indonesia. Previous studies have largely examined agrarian reform through the perspectives of redistribution, legalization, and institutional implementation. Research on agrarian governance has shown that the effectiveness of reform programs depends heavily on institutional coordination, regulatory clarity, and recognition of community interests (Darmawan et al., 2023). However, the case of Purba Sipinggaan reveals that even when communities participate in formal policy procedures, uncertainty may persist when implementation processes lack clear timelines and effective communication mechanisms. This suggests that the success of agrarian reform cannot be evaluated only through administrative indicators, such as the number of registered parcels or completed measurements, but also through the extent to which policy implementation produces trust and legitimacy among affected communities.

The transformation from individual concerns into collective political action observed in Purba Sipinggaan supports previous research on grievances and political mobilization. Kurer et al. (2018) argue that social and economic grievances do not automatically generate political participation; rather, grievances become politically meaningful when communities possess organizational mechanisms and opportunities for collective action. The present study confirms this argument by showing that land uncertainty initially existed as individual anxiety among farmers but gradually became a collective issue through village deliberation (*musyawarah nagori*). However, this study extends previous findings by demonstrating that collective mobilization does not always take the form of protest or confrontation. In Purba Sipinggaan, citizens initially chose institutional participation by utilizing village structures, submitting administrative documents, and engaging with government procedures. This indicates that rural political behavior may develop through gradual institutional engagement before transforming into more critical forms of action (Damayanti & Syarifuddin, 2020; Kusmiarto et al., 2020; Zang et al., 2021).

The findings further support and extend the perspective of policy feedback theory. Previous studies have demonstrated that public policies influence citizens beyond their immediate material outcomes because policy experiences shape perceptions of government capacity, trust, and willingness to participate (Campbell et al., 2020; de Blok et al., 2022). The TORA process in Purba Sipinggaan illustrates this mechanism clearly. At the initial stage, policy implementation generated positive expectations because citizens perceived TORA as an opportunity to obtain legal recognition. Participation in documentation, land identification, and measurement processes strengthened

citizens' belief that institutional mechanisms could resolve their problems. However, prolonged delays and unclear information gradually transformed policy experience into disappointment and uncertainty. Therefore, this study shows that policy feedback operates not only through policy success or failure but also through citizens' experiences during the implementation process.

The findings regarding changing trust toward government institutions are also consistent with contemporary studies on citizen participation and institutional responsiveness. Research on governance demonstrates that participation is strongly influenced by citizens' perceptions of whether institutions provide meaningful responses and whether public involvement produces tangible outcomes (Hutahaeen et al., 2023; Sadat, 2025). In Purba Sipingingan, citizens did not abandon government institutions despite experiencing delays. Instead, they continued to communicate with authorities and request clarification. This pattern indicates that declining trust did not immediately lead to political disengagement. Rather, citizens developed a more critical relationship with the state, where they continued to recognize government authority while simultaneously evaluating institutional performance. This finding challenges a simplistic assumption that disappointment with government automatically produces withdrawal from political processes.

An important contribution of this study is the identification of a pattern of participatory-critical citizenship within agrarian policy implementation. Existing studies often categorize citizen responses into two contrasting forms: compliance with institutional procedures or resistance against state authority. The case of Purba Sipingingan demonstrates a more complex pattern in which communities simultaneously participate in formal policy mechanisms and maintain critical evaluations of state actions. Citizens accepted TORA because it represented a legitimate pathway toward land recognition, but they resisted other interventions when these were perceived as inconsistent with their expectations and livelihood interests. This finding contributes to agrarian politics literature by showing that citizen engagement in land governance is not simply cooperative or oppositional but may involve continuous negotiation between participation and critique.

The study also provides a new understanding of TORA as a space of informal political learning. Previous research on political learning emphasizes that citizens develop political knowledge not only through formal civic education but also through everyday experiences with government institutions. The experiences of Purba Sipingingan residents demonstrate that policy implementation itself becomes an educational process through which citizens learn how bureaucracy operates, how decisions are negotiated, and how they can articulate demands toward the state. Through participation in TORA, residents acquired procedural knowledge regarding administrative requirements, institutional pathways, and strategies for communicating their interests. At the same time, prolonged uncertainty taught citizens to critically evaluate government capacity and consistency. Therefore, TORA functions not only as an agrarian policy instrument but also as an arena where political awareness and citizenship capacities are produced.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes by connecting agrarian governance with policy implementation studies, political participation, and state-society relations. While previous studies have examined land reform primarily through material redistribution and institutional effectiveness, this research highlights the political consequences of implementation experiences. The study demonstrates that uncertainty within policy processes can become a mechanism through which citizens develop new forms of political awareness, trust evaluation, and strategic participation. In this regard, the findings expand understanding of how state policies shape

citizens not only as beneficiaries but also as political actors who interpret, negotiate, and respond to government interventions.

The findings also have important implications for agrarian governance practices. First, government institutions need to recognize that delays and uncertainty in policy implementation have political consequences beyond administrative inefficiency. Prolonged uncertainty may weaken institutional trust among communities that have already invested time and effort in participating in government programs. Second, transparency and communication mechanisms should become central components of agrarian reform implementation. Communities require accessible information regarding policy stages, institutional responsibilities, and expected timelines. Third, coordination among government agencies managing overlapping land authorities must be strengthened because fragmented governance arrangements may be interpreted by communities as inconsistency or lack of commitment from the state. Improving administrative coordination is therefore essential not only for policy effectiveness but also for maintaining legitimacy in state–society relations.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single village context, meaning that the findings reflect the specific social, institutional, and historical characteristics of Nagori Purba Sipinggan and cannot be generalized statistically to all TORA implementation sites in Indonesia. Second, the number of informants was limited because the study prioritized depth of understanding rather than broad representation. Although data saturation was achieved within the selected context, different patterns may emerge in areas with different institutional arrangements or agrarian histories. Third, this study relied primarily on qualitative interpretation of community experiences and did not quantitatively measure changes in political trust, participation levels, or political efficacy. Future research may employ comparative case studies or mixed-method approaches to examine how different models of agrarian reform implementation influence citizen participation and state–society relations across diverse Indonesian regions.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that land tenure uncertainty in Nagori Purba Sipinggan does not produce political disengagement but instead becomes a mechanism through which citizens develop collective awareness, institutional participation, and critical responses toward state interventions. The findings reveal that uncertainty regarding land status initially emerged as an individual concern but was transformed into a collective political issue through village deliberation (*musyawarah nagori*) and community articulation of interests. Through the TORA program, citizens actively engaged with formal policy mechanisms by participating in land documentation, identification, verification, and measurement processes as strategies to obtain state recognition. However, prolonged policy implementation, delayed decision-making, and limited information transparency generated a new form of uncertainty, namely implementation uncertainty, which influenced citizens' perceptions of government responsiveness and institutional consistency. This study further shows that community responses toward the state cannot be categorized simply as compliance or resistance; instead, citizens demonstrated a pattern of participatory-critical citizenship by simultaneously utilizing formal institutional channels while critically evaluating government actions perceived as inconsistent with their interests. Theoretically, this research contributes to agrarian governance studies by demonstrating that policy implementation functions not only as an administrative process but also as a political learning arena through which citizens develop procedural knowledge, evaluate state capacity, and construct new forms of political engagement. The findings imply that successful

implementation of agrarian reform requires more than land redistribution or administrative completion; it also depends on clear implementation timelines, transparent information mechanisms, effective coordination among government institutions, and consistency between agrarian reform objectives and forest governance practices. Without these elements, policies designed to provide tenure security may unintentionally reproduce uncertainty and weaken trust between communities and the state. This study is limited by its focus on a single village context and a relatively small number of informants, meaning that the findings are intended for analytical understanding rather than statistical generalization. Future research should employ comparative and mixed-method approaches across multiple TORA implementation sites to examine how different institutional contexts shape the relationship between land uncertainty, citizen participation, political trust, and informal political learning in broader agrarian governance settings.

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