
THE DYNAMICS OF FLNKS'S INSURGENCY: EVOLVING STRATEGIES AND ITS QUEST FOR INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

The quest for independence by the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) from French colonial rule has been a longstanding endeavour. Despite three consecutive referendums in 2018, 2020, and 2021, the desired outcome has not been achieved. This study employs the CIA's stages of insurgency and a qualitative research method with data collected through a literature review to analyse the FLNKS' struggle for independence. The analysis places the FLNKS in the third stage of insurgency, specifically guerrilla warfare, with a focus on activities predominantly carried out by left-wing factions. The study identifies three pivotal factors contributing to the group's stagnation: internal support, external support, and information dominance. The results emphasise a decline in local support for the FLNKS, evident in the decreasing percentage of the Kanak population, as in 2014. Additionally, the FLNKS's communication strategy primarily targets grassroots communities, while opposing groups, such as the Caledonie Ensemble, make effective use of modern media and technology. Furthermore, regional support from the Melanesian Spearhead Group and international assistance from the United Nations have been limited to technical and financial aid, falling short of realising the FLNKS's aspiration for independence.

Keywords: FLNKS, Insurgency, New Caledonia, Independence, Referendum

ABSTRAK

Selama bertahun-tahun, Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) berupaya mencapai kemerdekaan dari Prancis, meski tiga referendum berturut-turut (2018–2021) belum membuahkan hasil. Meski belum dapat dikategorikan sebagai insurjensi yang berhasil maupun gagal, FLNKS menunjukkan komitmen kuat. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dan kerangka tahapan insurjensi CIA, penelitian ini menempatkan FLNKS pada tahap ketiga (guerrilla warfare) yang didominasi faksi sayap kiri. Analisis terhadap faktor stagnasi menemukan bahwa dukungan internal melemah seiring penurunan populasi Kanak. Dalam keunggulan informasi, strategi FLNKS terbatas pada masyarakat grassroots, tertinggal dari kelompok kontra yang memanfaatkan teknologi modern. Terakhir, dukungan eksternal dari Melanesian Spearhead Group dan PBB hanya sebatas asistensi teknis dan finansial, belum cukup untuk mewujudkan kemerdekaan.

Katakunci: FLNKS, Insurjensi, Caledonia Baru, Kemerdekaan, Referendum

BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

French extraterritorial or overseas territories are located in various regions worldwide, including Oceania. Three territories in Oceania belonging to France are Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia, and New Caledonia (Székely 2007). An extraterritorial territory is a region that is officially part of a country but is situated far from the country's mainland (Cambridge Dictionary). These territories are part of the country but have different systems of government and laws compared to the mainland. New Caledonia is a large territory, covering 19,100 square kilometres. Its main island, Grande Terre, is 16,750 square kilometres in size and is the second largest island in the Pacific region after New Zealand. Additionally, New Caledonia has another island called Loyalty Island, which is 2,300 square kilometres in size. These main areas are fairly densely populated, and New Caledonia also includes around 200 smaller islands (Thompson & Adloff 1971).

1.1. Background

The French arrival in the Oceania region was motivated not only by the desire to maintain sovereignty but also by the primary goal of exploring and dominating new territories. Additionally, they aimed to connect these territories with others within a broader network (Aldrich 1990). This move was intended to expand France's influence and power across the world, as well as to establish economic, cultural, and political connections that could strengthen France's position on the international stage. France's expansion reflected its ambition to emerge as a major colonial power at the time and to compete with other major powers in the race for territories and global resources. According to the same source, France sought to expand its colonial territories because several other Western nations had already controlled significant areas around the Pacific Ocean. For example, the Netherlands had taken control of the East Indies, Spain had dominated the Philippines, and Portugal had established control over Macau.

The defeat of France in the Seven Years' War and the subsequent loss of Canada prompted France to seek out other territories for conquest. While initially only controlling Tahiti, French interest in expanding their colonies in the South Pacific was sparked by this victory. British missionaries arrived in New Caledonia in the 1840s, preceding the arrival of French missionaries in 1843. In 1853, French colonial leader Febvrier Despointes annexed New Caledonia's main island, Grande Terre, successfully taking control of the territory. This annexation occurred with little reaction from Britain or Australia, and it marked the beginning of a more established French dominance in New Caledonia, strengthening their position in

the South Pacific (Aldrich 1990). France also saw the local nickel mines as a valuable strategic resource (Chappell 2014).

After the annexation, France repurposed New Caledonia as a penal settlement for convicts. Throughout 1864 to 1897, the region held approximately 20,000 prisoners, including 4,500 political prisoners sentenced by France following the Paris Commune uprising in 1871. This influx of prisoners, along with an increasing number of Western settlers on the main island, Grande Terre, significantly altered New Caledonia's demographics (Henningham 1992). France sought to integrate the convicts and former convicts into the broader social structure, aiming at creating a stable and self-sufficient society. To accomplish this, the state intervened directly by fostering new families among the convicts and former convicts. An important initiative in this regard was the Caledonian Project, which focused on relocating female French convicts to the area. Under this project, female convicts were encouraged to marry and establish families with male convicts or former convicts who had already settled in New Caledonia. This was not only aimed at boosting the colony's population but also at fostering stronger social bonds and long-term community stability (Matsuda 2005). Consequently, this policy led to the creation of a more diverse and thriving society, with the integration of convicts into community life accelerating the development of essential infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, and other public facilities. The resulting demographic transformation was a key outcome of this policy, as mentioned previously.

Henningham (1992) discussed the parallels between the impact of foreign settlers in New Caledonia and the effects of British colonisation in Australia and New Zealand. The increasing number of these settlers led to their domination of the region and control over its resources, often resulting in discrimination against the local population, seizure of their traditional lands, and a threat to native traditions and cultures. These changes not only affected the social and economic structure of New Caledonia but also led to complex social dynamics and tensions between the settlers and the indigenous people. The sovereignty of the local population was undermined by the colonists' expansion in New Caledonia, highlighting the importance of sovereignty in shaping the future and guaranteeing autonomy in economic, political, and social decisions (Bonilla 2017). Sovereignty is the cornerstone of a community's independence and identity, providing the power to determine the desired direction and goals for a better future. Additionally, Karman (2016) emphasised the significance of territory in explaining the existence of states and political entities in political science.

1.2. Research Question

How does the FLNKS's pro-independence movement reflect the broader challenges and complexities of decolonisation in New Caledonia?

1.3. Purpose and objective

The defeat of France in Europe during the 1940s significantly contributed to the acceleration and intensification of liberation movements against French colonial rule in various territories (Aldrich 1993). Following their defeat in World War II and the German occupation, French authority in Europe was shaken and weakened, creating an opening for independence movements in French colonies. In regions such as Africa and Asia, resistance to French colonial power gained momentum, driven by aspirations for national independence and a rejection of the oppression and exploitation endured over many years. The study also highlights the significant impact of the failures of the three referendums held in New Caledonia in 2018, 2020, and 2022 (Le Monde 2024). Furthermore, the role of the FLNKS as a pro-independence group in New Caledonia is a key focus of the research. The study aims to delve into the dynamics of the group's struggle for independence, particularly through periodic referendums, shedding light on the complexities and challenges of the decolonisation process in the Pacific region. This research seeks to comprehend the FLNKS's struggle and the complexities of their insurgency as they strive toward independence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Insurgency is a concept that refers to a movement with a political objective that arises due to social divisions accompanied by economic and political disparities (O'Neill 2005). It is aimed at undermining the control and legitimacy of the government and increasing the dominance of the insurgent group over a country. Each insurgency has specific goals (political objectives), approaches (political or military strategies), locations (operational areas), timing (execution periods), and ideologies (motivations driving the insurgent group). According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2011), there are four stages of insurgency.

The first stage is Pre-insurgency, which involves the initial development of insurgency, characterised by dissatisfaction among the population due to economic, social, or political factors. At this stage, there is an increasing sense of discontent and a desire for change, but it has not yet evolved into widespread rebellion. This stage triggers a minimal response from the government. The second stage is Organisational, during which dissatisfied individuals begin to organise and form groups aimed at

opposing the existing power structures, such as political parties, militias, or other organisations representing the interests of the population. Insurgent groups start building infrastructure, recruiting guerrillas, and seeking support both domestically and internationally during this stage. This prompts a response from the government through the formation of counter-insurgency organisations to face the insurgent groups.

The third stage of insurgency involves Guerrilla Warfare, where organised groups employ guerrilla tactics such as hit-and-run attacks, ambushes, and sabotage. Guerrilla warfare is aimed at weakening government power structures by targeting infrastructure, resource supplies, and morale. This stage may also involve large-scale political activities at both domestic and international levels. As a result, the government typically responds with military action or implements economic, political, or social reforms, civil action programs, psychological operations, or amnesty programs. The final stage is Mobile Conventional Warfare, where the insurgency evolves into a more conventional war using larger units and traditional military tactics. It's worth noting that most insurgencies do not reach this stage. In response, the government usually conducts conventional military operations to confront the insurgent groups.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilises a qualitative research method. Qualitative research, as defined by Suryono (2010), is employed to explore, discover, investigate, describe, and examine the impacts of social phenomena that cannot be explained or measured using a quantitative approach. Additionally, this study utilises the case study research type to delve into the specific case under examination. According to Gerring (2004), a case study involves a comprehensive and intensive examination of a single unit to generalise to a larger set of units or understand a larger class of similar units. It can also be described as research that entails tracing or tracking (George and Bennett 2004). Moreover, this study relies on secondary data, which are data obtained from sources other than the researcher conducting the study. These secondary data are collected through documentation techniques that involve gathering relevant data from various sources such as books, journals, news articles, websites, and other documents.

This study employs a qualitative research approach, by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves three key phases: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data collection is conducted using both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are gathered from official institutional documents and relevant policy materials, while secondary data are obtained through literature reviews and scholarly articles that provide supporting context for the study. During the data reduction phase, information related to FLNKS insurgency, such as past incidents, the

referendum process, interventions, and the roles of many actors, is extracted and filtered from both primary and secondary sources. In the data display phase, this information is organised and mapped systematically, adapted to the chosen analytical framework, The Insurgency Stage by the CIA. The study then presents a descriptive analysis that links several events within the FLNKS independence process. Finally, in the conclusion drawing phase, the study synthesises the findings to emphasise the insurgency stage right now and highlights several factors that contributed to the FLNKS' failure to achieve independence.

DISCUSSION

FLNKS Insurgency Stages: A Historical Analysis

In the initial phase of insurgency, known as Preinsurgency, underlying grievances and discontent within the population, stemming from economic, social, or political issues, play a crucial role. In the context of New Caledonia, the Code d'indigénat regime, which was in effect from around 1887 to 1946, played a pivotal role in fueling the FLNKS independence movement. This system, encompassing various legal regulations and rules governing the local population, was employed by France to administer colonial territories and their inhabitants, often in a discriminatory and oppressive manner (Merle 1998). This regime was fundamentally repressive, establishing a distinct legal status for indigenous people which deprived them of the same rights and protections as French citizens. Initially, the Code d'indigénat focused primarily on land and property issues. However, from 1887 onwards, France expanded its control and supervision of indigenous institutions (Merle 2004). Colonial administrators, known as 'district agents,' were given judicial authority over the tribes, enabling the colonial government to monitor and control indigenous activities, frequently curtailing their movements and rights (Small 1996).

Beyond restrictions and surveillance, the system facilitated policies that showcased French superiority and authoritarianism, implemented through colonial powers that resulted in the confiscation of indigenous lands for colonial purposes (Bensa 1990). Overall, the Code d'indigénat served as a tool of French colonialism, utilised to control, dominate, and institutionalise colonial power over indigenous people in French territories such as New Caledonia (Merle and Muckle 2019). The Code de l'Indigénat had a significant impact on the Kanak people, fueling their aspirations for independence and self-determination (Demmer 2024). The oppressive nature of the Code de l'Indigénat led to social resistance and injustice among the Kanak community, prompting a movement to challenge colonial authority and reclaim Kanak rights and autonomy. Tribal leaders played a crucial role in organising and leading the revolt against French and European colonisers, sparking an uprising marked by resistance and violence (Wadrawane and Gravelat 2021). Despite some political rights

being granted to the Kanak people after the era of the Code de l'Indigénat, the introduction of universal suffrage in 1956 intensified the desire for independence due to growing political instability and power struggles (LeFevre 2013).

Colonial French policies during the Code de l'Indigénat also included the prohibition of indigenous languages in schools, reflecting a more oppressive approach that denied local linguistic rights starting in 1853. This was followed by increasingly restrictive policies limiting the use of Kanak languages, culminating in a complete ban in 1921 (Rivierre 1985). The suppression of Kanak languages contributed to the erosion of Kanak's cultural identity and autonomy, reinforcing the imposition of the French language and culture. These restrictions fueled the demand for recognition of cultural legitimacy and the right to independence among the Kanak people.

Kanak language remained central to pro-independence activism, becoming a primary demand to assert Kanak identity and preserve their cultural heritage. This was a contributing factor during the revolutionary period known as the "Événements," which began with a boycott of local elections and the Lemoine status, marking the inception of the FLNKS movement (Leblic 2024). This notably led to a boycott of colonial schools and supported movements advocating for Local Schools. The establishment of FLNKS (Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste) was driven not only by the inequalities, restrictions, surveillance, and exploitation under the Code de l'Indigénat regime but also by the emergence of new political parties and divisions within the pro-independence movement, which necessitated FLNKS to adapt to changing political dynamics and maintain unity (Fisher 2024). This prompted internal reforms and strategic adjustments within FLNKS to ensure the movement remained cohesive and effective in its pursuit of independence.

Immigration was also a significant concern, with settlers from metropolitan France posing a threat to Kanak's identity, culture, and political representation, thus making the Kanak independence movement more challenging to achieve. The potential demographic shift towards a non-Kanak population could weaken the influence of the Indigenous community in decision-making processes, necessitating urgent action, for example, through the formation of coalitions like FLNKS. These factors collectively drove FLNKS to form, implement reforms, address Kanak community issues, and advocate for a fairer system that respects the culture of the indigenous Kanak people in New Caledonia.

The next phase involves organisational efforts, with discontented individuals coming together to resist existing power structures (CIA 2011). When discussing this phase, we'll take a closer look at the genesis of the FLNKS as a group advocating for independence in New Caledonia. Historically, various pro-independence groups existed in New Caledonia. One such group was the UC (Union Calédonienne),

established in the 1950s with a communist ideology and garnering substantial support from Protestant residents and Catholic churches. The UC gained official status as a political party in 1956 (Chanter et al. 2008). Furthermore, the UMNC (Union Multiraciale de Nouvelle-Calédonie) was led by liberal political students and emphasised the recognition of traditional groups. The UMNC formally broke away from the UC in 1970. Subsequently, in 1974, the Union Progressiste Multiraciale (UPM) emerged, officially established in 1977 and later rebranded as the Front Uni de Liberation Kanak (FULK), primarily focusing on land reform and economic development. In 1976, the Parti Socialiste Calédonien (PSC) was founded to promote socialist values through regional resource nationalisation. Then, in 1977, the Parti de Liberation Kanak (PALIKA) arose with the key objective of ending colonialism in New Caledonia. Despite the distinct goals and priorities of these various groups, they all shared a unified aspiration for New Caledonia's independence from France. This common ground eventually led them to unite as part of a broader political movement advocating for independence, acknowledging indigenous rights, economic reform, and the advancement of socialist values. The amalgamation of these diverse aims underscores the intricate and varied nature of the political struggle in New Caledonia.

The initial collaboration among different pro-independence factions in New Caledonia was spurred by their concerns regarding participation in parliament. In the late 1970s, conservative factions from France passed a law stipulating that political parties needed to secure at least 7.5% of the vote to gain a seat in the territorial parliament. This law was intended to impede the involvement of pro-independence factions in the legislative process. In response, these factions united and established the Front Indépendantiste (FI) before the 1979 elections. Their success in that election was evident as they secured 14 parliamentary seats, while anti-independence factions won 15 seats, and neutral factions obtained 7 seats. This represented a significant advancement in their political struggle. In 1984, during the territorial elections, the FI chose to disrupt and boycott the system as a form of protest against what they deemed an unjust system. Concurrently, they officially rebranded themselves as the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) and held their inaugural congress. The formation of FLNKS was a strategic response to the obstacles encountered by the independence movement in New Caledonia. They aimed to consolidate political influence and garner broader support from the public. Their success in the 1979 elections and their evolution into FLNKS in 1984 illustrated their resolve to achieve independence from France, despite facing various political and legislative challenges.

After the establishment of FLNKS, the group also welcomed several other organisations, such as GFKEL (Groupe des Femmes Kanak et Exploitées) and USTKE (Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Kanaks et des Exploités), both are federations of trade unions. However, their journey was not without challenges. FLNKS faced

various internal dynamics, leading to the departure of some groups like GFKEL in 1986 and USTKE in 1989 (Fisher 2013). These internal dynamics reflected the difficulties in maintaining unity amidst diverse aspirations and interests. Throughout their struggle, FLNKS had to navigate differing views, adding complexity to New Caledonia's political landscape. Additionally, FLNKS selected a flag with green, red, and blue colours, and a flèche faïtière symbol, to represent their cultural identity and political fight for independence. In addition to pursuing their goals through domestic political strategies by unifying groups with similar objectives into the party, FLNKS also championed New Caledonia's independence on the international stage by joining the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).

The MSG was established during an informal meeting in Goroka, Papua New Guinea, on 17 July 1986, attended by the Prime Ministers of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and a representative from the FLNKS from New Caledonia. This meeting was driven by a shared vision for decolonisation and freedom for Melanesian countries and territories still under colonial rule in the South Pacific, aiming to strengthen cultural, political, social, and economic ties among Melanesian communities. Two years later, on 14 March 1988, the Principles of Cooperation Among Independent States of Melanesia were signed in Port Vila, Vanuatu, by the founding members of MSG: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. FLNKS formally joined the organisation in 1989 (Melanesian Spearhead Group 2021).

The establishment of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) reflects the strong commitment of Melanesian nations to support the decolonisation efforts in their region. The inclusion of the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) in the MSG signifies regional support for the independence aspirations of the Kanak people in New Caledonia, while also strengthening alliances among Melanesian countries in addressing colonial challenges. Unlike other regional groupings, the MSG exhibits unique characteristics, such as a strong sense of identity and competition among Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia, as well as informal and egalitarian diplomacy. Notably, membership is not dependent on independent status, as demonstrated by the inclusion of FLNKS as a pro-independence faction (Wardhani 2017).

After the 1988 French presidential election, President François Mitterrand, who had been re-elected, sent a special team to New Caledonia to address the ongoing conflict. This intervention resulted in the signing of the Matignon Agreements in June 1988, which were endorsed by FLNKS leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou and RPCR leader Jacques Lafleur. These agreements reorganised the distribution of economic resources in New Caledonia and established three new provinces: the Southern Province, the Northern Province, and the Loyalty Islands Province, each with its own assembly.

Additionally, the agreements ensured a referendum on independence within the next decade. However, the agreements met opposition, as evidenced by the assassination of Tjibaou one year after their enactment (Kowasch and Batterbury 2024). In May 1998, French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin signed the Noumea Accord with New Caledonian politicians, initiating a gradual transfer of authority over 15-20 years to the resource-rich territory without committing to independence. This accord expanded citizenship rights for New Caledonians in 1999 within a framework of increased autonomy. Despite opposition from various political factions, many viewed it as a promising step toward stability amid a long history of demonstrations and unrest (Chappell 1999). The Noumea Accord also outlined the process for a self-determination referendum to take place in the later stages of the Noumea Accord or before November 2018 (Kowasch and Batterbury 2024). This agreement represents a significant achievement in New Caledonia's journey toward greater autonomy and self-determination, demonstrating political progress and a commitment to reaching consensus in the face of existing political and social differences.

As an insurgent group affiliated with national politics, FLNKS predominantly pursued political and negotiation strategies to achieve its goal of independence for New Caledonia. However, between 1987 and early 1988, FLNKS shifted its strategy from conciliation to confrontation (Islam 1998). This shift involved military actions and violence, exemplified by the Ouvéa Crisis of 1988-1989, which marked the only physical conflict between FLNKS and the French Government. The crisis arose from FLNKS's frustrations with the limitations imposed by the 1987 Pons Law, which restricted pro-independence groups in their activities. In 1988, FLNKS began to develop a broader national mobilisation plan to support its opposition against French policies deemed detrimental (Maclellan 2005). According to Islam (1998), during the Seventh Annual Party Congress held in February 1988, FLNKS leaders urged Kanak tribes to defend themselves against France with weapons. The speech even threatened France with a war of independence akin to the Algerian struggle against French colonialism.

A pivotal moment for FLNKS to pursue confrontational efforts was the French presidential election in May 1988. Just two days before the event, FLNKS militants launched a rebellion involving attacks and hostage-taking (Grams 2024). The first attack was carried out by about sixty activists on a police station in Fayaoué, Ouvéa, which resulted in a battle between the activists and police. During this battle, around four police officers were killed, and approximately 26 unarmed police officers were taken hostage (Gabel 2024). The attacks continued for about thirteen days, during which the militants kidnapped and held at least 23 individuals, including French officials and gendarmes, in a cave near the village of Gossanah (Islam 1998). The

hostage-taking and attacks by FLNKS militants were attempts to force the French government to recognise their right to self-determination.

After the attacks, France declared Ouvéa a military zone and prohibited journalists from reporting on the events. Subsequently, French military units were deployed to assault a cave in Ouvéa where FLNKS militants held hostages. The large-scale military operation involved torture and abuse of the civilian population in Gossanah. The French occupation of Ouvéa resulted in the suffering of innocent civilians, the deaths of nineteen Kanak activists, and trauma for the Ouvéa residents (Small 1998). The conflict between FLNKS and France ultimately led to both parties recognising the need for de-escalation and seeking a resolution.

In response, French Prime Minister Michel Rocard proposed negotiations to find a middle ground for resolving the issues between pro-independence and anti-independence groups, represented by Jacques Lafleur and Marie Tjibaou. These negotiations resulted in the Matignon and Oudinot Agreements, which were signed by all three parties in June 1988. The Matignon Accord of 1988 included provisions for amnesty for crimes committed before August 1988 (MacLellan 2019). The agreement also granted New Caledonia the opportunity to hold a self-determination referendum in ten years. Under this agreement, France committed to actively monitoring and overseeing New Caledonia's political and economic reforms over the next decade. Additionally, France pledged to focus on providing economic support to the underdeveloped Kanaky regions in preparation for the 1998 referendum (Islam 1998).

The FLNKS insurgency had not advanced to the point of employing large-scale military units in opposition to the French government. The tragic events of the Ouvéa crisis, culminating in the deaths of 19 Kanak activists, deeply impacted FLNKS and led to a reevaluation of their guerrilla tactics. This shift became apparent as FLNKS entered negotiations with Michel Rocard following the Ouvéa massacre. These negotiations resulted in two landmark agreements signalling a move toward reformist efforts for FLNKS: the Matignon Accord (1988) and the Nouméa Accord (1998). The Nouméa Accord brought about significant changes in the New Caledonian independence movement by introducing the concept of decolonisation as a means to strengthen social bonds between the Kanak people and the French government. This agreement pledged to uphold the rights of the Kanak people, including those of their land and cultural heritage (Small 2017). Additionally, the Nouméa Accord granted FLNKS the opportunity to pursue independence through referenda held twenty years after the accord, specifically in 2018, 2020, and 2021.

The shift towards a more reformist approach by FLNKS was partly a response to the events of the 1988 tragedy and the uneven power dynamics between the group and the French government. France's formidable military force gave it a significant

advantage, while FLNKS, as a political party, lacked formal armed forces and faced limitations in terms of weaponry, military training, and resources. Recognising their constrained position, FLNKS sought to pursue its objectives through economic participation and political empowerment (Kowasch & Batterbury, 2024). The group concentrated on expanding its influence in provinces with a predominantly Kanak population, aiming to build support for independence from a broad spectrum of the community. FLNKS sought to establish local sovereignty in these regions by asserting control over nickel resources. This economic nationalism within the mining sector was designed to foster a more self-reliant Kanak society, reducing reliance on France and enhancing their role in local governance (Kowasch & Batterbury 2024).

Post-Noumea Accord and The Referendums Process

The Nouméa Accord, which was signed on 5 May 1998, was initiated in response to the conflicts of the mid-1980s and the preceding Matignon Accords (MacLellan 1999). The objective of the accord was to establish a framework for a peaceful transition towards independence for New Caledonia while accommodating the aspirations of both the FLNKS movement and the French government. It brought about political changes, including the creation of new political institutions and a shift in New Caledonia's status from an overseas territory to a more autonomous region within the French Republic. This shift towards shared sovereignty and new citizenship for New Caledonians was meant to pave the way for a future referendum on self-determination (MacLellan 1999). The accord stipulated a transition period of 15 to 20 years before an independence referendum could be held. However, this transition period experienced delays and debates, such as the postponement of the first planned referendum from 1998 to 2018. This delay underscored some of the challenges and controversies in the implementation of the Nouméa Accord, shedding light on the complexities of negotiating and executing such significant political agreements.

The first referendum on the independence of New Caledonia, initially slated for 1998 but postponed to 4 November 2018, was characterised by continuous negotiations and political tensions between pro-independence factions and loyalist groups. The requirement that only individuals who had resided in New Caledonia for at least ten years before 1998 could participate in the vote sparked fervent debate among opposing parties. Nonetheless, this stipulation was perceived as advantageous for the FLNKS and Kanak people, as it curtailed the influence of settlers and immigrants, who were predominantly aligned with loyalist factions (Fisher 2024). The substantial voter turnout, notably among young Kanak individuals who were spurred to engage through gatherings and advocacy initiatives organised by the FLNKS, was a significant accomplishment. Despite internal rifts within the coalition, FLNKS endeavoured to present a unified front, articulating a coherent vision for an

independent New Caledonia, with a focus on self-determination and the historical injustices experienced by the Kanak people. Furthermore, they sought broader backing from other pro-independence groups in the region, such as those in French Polynesia and Vanuatu.

The referendum yielded an 81.01% voter participation rate, with 56.7% in favour of maintaining ties with France and 43.3% supporting independence (Government of New Caledonia 2018). This outcome posed a quandary for FLNKS, the pro-independence body advocating for the self-determination of the Kanak people and New Caledonia. The result prompted FLNKS to reconsider its tactics and approach in light of the referendum's outcome. Additionally, the referendum escalated political tensions in New Caledonia, prompting certain loyalist factions to call for a review of voter eligibility criteria for future referenda.

The first referendum not only solidified FLNKS's position as the primary advocate for Kanak independence but also underscored the difficulties in uniting various factions and addressing community concerns (Connell 2019). The coalition's ability to navigate the post-referendum landscape is crucial for maintaining the momentum of the independence movement and for future negotiations with the French government. Despite the tensions, the French government reaffirmed its commitment to the provisions of the Nouméa Accord, including the possibility of further referenda. The referendum highlighted the deep divisions within New Caledonian society, with ongoing concerns about political balance and the future governance of the territory (Fisher 2024). While the peaceful conduct of the vote was celebrated as a significant achievement, it was followed by unrest in some areas, reflecting underlying tensions. FLNKS has been working to maintain its position and continues to advocate for independence, emphasising progress and garnering increased support for its cause. The coalition is endeavouring to unify pro-independence parties and strengthen their political stance in preparation for the next referendum, emphasising the need for a third referendum and asserting their right as representatives of the colonised Kanak people to regain control over their homeland.

The timing of the second referendum sparked renewed debate between opposing groups. The party *Avenir En Confiance* (AEC), which initially proposed the referendum, clashed over the voting date, with loyalist groups favouring an earlier date and pro-independence parties pushing for a delay. Ultimately, the referendum was postponed to October 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the second referendum, FLNKS and other pro-independence parties capitalised on their strong performance in the first referendum through active campaigning. They gained additional support from the left-wing *Parti Travailleiste*, which had boycotted the first referendum. Crucial campaign issues included managing the COVID-19 pandemic

and control over nickel resources, which are vital for the local economy and the Kanak people (Connell 2021). Independence leaders, including UC leader Daniel Goa, criticised the French High Commissioner for mishandling the pandemic in New Caledonia and accused the French government of favouring loyalist interests. These criticisms became central to the campaign for the second referendum.

The results of the second referendum closely mirrored those of the first. 53.26% of the votes were in favour of remaining with France, while 46.74% favoured independence (Connell 2021). Voter turnout increased to 85.6%, with nearly 15% of the population abstaining from voting, which is a significant statistic. The voting process was peaceful, although there were allegations of intimidation tactics by pro-independence groups at polling stations in Nouméa, as claimed by some loyalists (Steinmetz 2020). This outcome intensified the division between loyalists and pro-independence groups, presenting challenges for FLNKS and other pro-independence factions, as it indicated a strong preference for remaining part of France. The second referendum set the stage for ongoing political negotiations regarding New Caledonia's future, potentially leading to a third referendum. During this period, the French government played a complex role, maintaining a neutral stance but being perceived by pro-independence groups as favouring the loyalists. The use of the French flag in official campaign materials by anti-independence groups was seen as political bias by FLNKS (Fisher 2024). Despite this, FLNKS reaffirmed their commitment to independence and the right to self-determination for the Kanak people, viewing the referendum as part of their ongoing struggle for sovereignty.

Key figures within the FLNKS, such as Roch Wamytan, have reaffirmed their dedication to pursuing independence regardless of the outcome of the recent referendum (LNC 2019). In the aftermath of the results, the FLNKS has stressed the necessity of a third referendum, asserting that the independence movement is still ongoing. They view the election as a step forward and have stated that the Kanak people are prepared to govern themselves. FLNKS leaders have announced plans to regroup and plan for future political endeavours. Conversely, loyalist parties, who campaigned against independence, have argued against a third referendum, fearing it would only worsen political tensions (Maclellan 2021). They aim to strengthen their position and maintain the current state of affairs, emphasising the importance of stability and continued ties with France. The outcome of the second referendum has left New Caledonia at a crossroads, sparking discussions about the potential for a third referendum, new agreements between loyalists and pro-independence parties, or the continuation of the existing power-sharing arrangements outlined in the Nouméa Accord of 1998. The political landscape remains deeply divided, and the future governance and identity of New Caledonia continue to be highly debated topics.

On 12 December 2021, New Caledonia held the third and final referendum as outlined in the Nouméa Accord. This referendum was of great significance for the future of the Kanak people under the self-determination process. Tensions between pro-independence and loyalist groups had been escalating in the lead-up to the vote, reflecting the contentious outcomes of previous referendums (Fisher 2024). Buoyed by their previous successes, pro-independence groups had been eagerly focused on this referendum, while loyalists had grown increasingly concerned about the strength of the independence movement. The third referendum was anticipated as a crucial moment, being the final vote under the restricted electoral system that had previously favoured pro-independence parties. However, due to significant demographic changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, FLNKS leaders called for non-participation, urging their members to either abstain from voting or actively not participate, citing mourning for COVID-19-related deaths and distrust in the electoral process as reasons (FLNKS 2021). This call for non-participation was supported by many Kanak communities due to their mourning customs, resulting in a notably low voter turnout.

The recent referendum had an unexpectedly low voter turnout of only 43.87%, marking the lowest participation of the three referendums. Results showed that a mere 3.5% supported independence, while 96.5% opted to remain with France (Fisher 2024). This outcome sharply contrasted with earlier trends, significantly undermining the political impact of the vote. The notably low turnout, particularly in Kanak areas, signified that the FLNKS's non-participation strategy resonated with their supporters (Connell 2021). Despite this, pro-independence parties rejected the results, arguing that the low participation, falling short of 50%, invalidated the vote's legitimacy. They maintained that the result did not truly represent the will of the Kanak people and announced their intent to engage in discussions about New Caledonia's future only after the French presidential election in April 2022 (Comité Stratégique Indépendantiste de Non-participation 2021).

The outcome of the third referendum deepened the political deadlock in New Caledonia. While independence leaders expressed a desire for further discussions on self-determination, loyalists claimed victory and readied themselves for future political negotiations. The political landscape became increasingly polarised, with both sides maintaining their positions. The third referendum has raised questions about the future governance of New Caledonia, especially as the Nouméa Accord approaches its end. Pro-independence leaders, particularly from the FLNKS, have called for a new vote under the oversight of the United Nations, while loyalists aimed to solidify their position and engage in discussions about the region's future (Kowasch et al. 2022).

The recent referendums have brought to light significant challenges, particularly in terms of the democratic process. The limited participation from independence supporters, particularly the Kanak people, has underscored issues regarding the respect for cultural traditions during the voting process. While loyalist groups have expressed contentment with the outcomes and believe that the Nouméa Accord has been effectively executed, there is a growing push towards charting a new path for New Caledonia within France. However, the breakdown in communication between pro-independence groups, the French government, and loyalists has led to heightened local conflicts between Kanak and non-Kanak communities. Consequently, the political impasse in New Caledonia has deepened, with the gap between pro-independence and loyalist factions widening. This has complicated the decolonisation process that has been in progress for 30 years. The ongoing tensions significantly impact the aspirations for independence of FLNKS and the Kanak people, ultimately shaping the future trajectory of New Caledonia.

The Dynamics of Insurgency Stagnation

Zimmerman, in his 2007 thesis entitled "Why Insurgents Fail: Examining Post-World War II Failed Insurgencies Utilising The Prerequisites of Successful Insurgencies as a Framework," argues that for an insurgency to succeed and avoid failure, it must consider at least three main factors: internal support, external support, and informational advantage. The first factor, internal support, examines how local community backing sustains an insurgency to achieve its objectives. Despite efforts by the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) to attain independence, internal support for the FLNKS has not significantly waned. Nonetheless, a crucial factor to consider is the declining percentage of the Kanak population. In recent years, there has been a significant decrease in the Kanak population. A 1974 report indicated that the Kanak made up approximately 48.8% of New Caledonia's total population, whereas by 2014, this figure had dropped to around 39.1% (Anderson and Anderson 2017). This demographic shift has resulted in the Kanak becoming a minority in their own land.

The tension between the Kanak people and French colonialism has given rise to a cultural identity with political implications (Horowitz 2009). The cultural identity of the Kanak people has translated into a political identity, with the indigenous population largely aligning with pro-independence ideologies. France's initial attempts to alter the demographics followed the discovery of nickel mines in Grand Terre in 1864, leading to an influx of foreign residents to New Caledonia and the utilisation of the territory as a penal colony, as previously mentioned (Batterbur et al. 2020). The success of France in altering the demographic composition is apparent in

the outcomes of the three independence referendums, none of which reached the 50% threshold in favour of independence.

The second factor, despite multiple unsuccessful attempts at achieving independence, the FLNKS (Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste) has garnered support from various external parties advocating for New Caledonia's decolonisation. The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), a regional organisation in Melanesia, is among the entities backing the pro-independence movement. In the 1980s, the MSG supported the inclusion of the French territory in the United Nations Decolonisation Committee's list (Duffield 2019). In 2013, an action plan was established through the 'Noumea Declaration 2013' as a commitment from the MSG to support the FLNKS. This declaration represented the MSG's initial vision to advocate for the decolonisation and independence of Melanesian countries still under colonial rule. Additionally, in forums, the MSG expressed its commitment to fully support the decolonisation efforts desired by the FLNKS and other Kanak people. The MSG provided various forms of assistance, including advocacy efforts with UN bodies and encouraging agreements and cooperation at both the governmental and grassroots levels (Naouna 2016).

MSG leaders have committed to monitoring and evaluating the decolonisation process as outlined in the 1998 Noumea Accord. This commitment was realised through various forms of support during the referendums in 2018, 2020, and 2021. The assistance included financial aid and technical support, such as providing observers to strictly monitor and supervise the elections (Kowasch and Batterbury 2024). Additionally, members provided capacity-building training to the FLNKS to help them better compete, articulate their vision, and programmes to voters, and enhance political participation in New Caledonia (Naouna 2016). These efforts aimed to help the FLNKS, as New Caledonia's pro-independence group, to directly benefit from the MSG's support. However, despite the various forms of assistance and support from the MSG, it has not been adequate to achieve the FLNKS's aspiration for independence. The MSG still has limitations, such as being perceived as less effective in advocating for the FLNKS in international forums like the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) (Wamytan 2013). The MSG has not yet maximised its influence in the PIF and similar forums to more strongly advocate for New Caledonia's independence issue.

In addition to regional organisations, the United Nations (UN), as an international organisation, also supports the FLNKS and the decolonisation efforts in New Caledonia. This support has been provided since 1986, when the UN offered a platform for the pro-independence group to voice their concerns and urged France to coordinate the decolonisation process (Gravelat 2020). The UN, through the Committee on Decolonisation (C-24), has played a crucial role in ensuring the effective

implementation of the Noumea Accord (Kowasch & Batterbury 2024). During the referendum period, the committee provided technical assistance to ensure fair outcomes by helping to prepare voter lists, sending observers during the elections, and involving the Secretary-General in the referendum process (Gravelat 2020). This aimed to ensure that the voting process was conducted fairly and transparently. The committee also conducted a series of visits to bring stakeholders together to create a calm environment for building decolonisation efforts and provided reports to the UN General Assembly. Despite significant external support, various factors still contributed to the failure of New Caledonia's pro-independence movement.

In the context of insurgency, the third factor of information superiority, as emphasised by Zimmerman, plays a pivotal role in determining the success of such movements. Information superiority encompasses intelligence, attack tactics, and propaganda. There is no evidence to suggest that the FLNKS engaged in intelligence or attack tactics. This aligns with the group's classification as a politically organised insurgency, as per the CIA's categorisation. According to the CIA (2011), a politically organised insurgency establishes a political ideology as a foundation with the aim of weakening or overthrowing the existing political regime. Therefore, the FLNKS did not partake in military insurgency activities, which is consistent with previous classifications of the insurgency stage. A significant propaganda effort by the Kanak people against French colonialism was the establishment of Radio Djido in 1985. This platform provided the Kanak people with the opportunity to voice their perspectives and challenge the prevailing colonial narratives (Seneriratne 1991). Two opposing media outlets, the pro-independence Radio Djido and the anti-independence Les Nouvelles, targeted their respective audiences (M'Balla-Ndi 2017).

In the realm of media propaganda, the competition within the insurgency was not directly against France but rather against anti-independence groups. For instance, in 2014, the slogan "Réussissons notre citoyenneté" (Let us succeed with our citizenship) was introduced to counter the anti-independence group CE (Calédonie Ensemble), which distributed leaflets and manifestos in the Loyalty Islands and even distributed small French flags to their supporters (Maclellan 2015). The CE also utilised social media for their propaganda. This competitive dynamic continued into 2018, when the FLNKS introduced the slogan "Yes to accession of Kanaky-New Caledonia to full sovereignty, in a multicultural, united, and peaceful nation," aimed at supporting full Kanak sovereignty within a multicultural and peaceful New Caledonia. Meanwhile, the CE distributed leaflets with the message "Calédonie ensemble considers that the result will be close to 70 per cent No to independence," expressing confidence in a significant No vote in the referendum. Additionally, the French government only allowed five registered parties to campaign through national media, with three of these parties or coalitions being anti-independence groups

(Maclellan 2019). The competition between these two factions has characterised New Caledonian politics for decades, with intensified propaganda and campaigns leading up to the independence referendums.

CONCLUSIONS

The FLNKS insurgency, as a pro-independence group, has not yet advanced to the highest stage in the CIA model of insurgency development. It is categorised as a political insurgency, utilising political means to pursue its goals. The final stage of mobile conventional warfare may prove difficult for FLNKS to attain due to the unequal power dynamics with the French government. Given FLNKS's limited military resources, attempting this stage could lead to unnecessary violence. As a result, FLNKS focuses on political tactics at both the local and global levels to achieve independence. Historical instances of insurgencies, like those in Algeria and Cuba, underscore the crucial role of effective military support in the success of an insurgency. Although non-military strategies such as diplomacy and propaganda are important, an effective military component is often vital for overcoming substantial challenges and realising the ultimate objectives. The military plays a pivotal role in insurgencies by controlling territory and providing leverage in negotiations. It is worth noting that the absence of military efforts does not guarantee the failure of an insurgency; rather, it makes achieving independence significantly more difficult and complex.

The lack of progress in the movement is evident from the repeated failures to achieve full sovereignty, particularly through the three failed referendums. The stagnation in the FLNKS movement's quest for independence in New Caledonia can be attributed to factors such as dwindling local support, limited external support, and shortcomings in leveraging information and technology. To overcome these challenges, FLNKS needs to develop more effective strategies to regain local support by enhancing its presence in modern media for propaganda. This approach should involve the entire Caledonian society, not just the grassroots community. Moreover, seeking stronger international support is crucial. FLNKS should build closer ties with key countries in the international community to bolster their independence aspirations. While the road to independence remains lengthy and arduous, persistent efforts and strategic adaptation offer hope for achieving their ultimate objective.

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