

Indonesia Country-wide Risk: Low / West Papua: High

Indonesia as a whole is at low risk of violence and atrocity crimes.

As Indonesia prepares for a federal election, the risk of a rise in violence remains low across the country. In a study by University of Gadjah Mada students in the lead-up to the elections, they found that potential conflict triggers in the region were mostly not ideological nor religious, but political, and this violence often incited by organisations that have political affiliation.¹ Yet much work has already been done to prevent a rise in violence given the risks associated with federal elections, including incentives by organisations such as UNESCO that conducted a series of high-level meetings titled “Combatting Hate Speech and Disinformation ahead of 2024 Indonesian elections.” This and other workshops and seminars have been aimed at reducing the risk of inciting violence in the early-2024 period.

As noted by the *Jakarta Post*, elections have, for the most, been peaceful across the last twenty years in Indonesia, except for the post-election violence that erupted in 2019.² One reason for there being little risk of violence either before or after elections in 2024 is due to a lack of polarisation amongst voters,³ with Prabowo Subianto seen as a clear favourite to win.⁴

While not contributing to incitement to violence, what has become apparent in the 2024 election is social media’s role in promoting politics through the employment of individuals and companies who are paid to “push political agendas”. In Indonesia, “buzzers” have been utilised to promote candidates and to fuel disinformation about others via social media. In some cases, buzzers have falsely promoted the claim that people supporting a particular candidate stand the chance of being given money.⁵

Alongside this proliferation of online hoax news or disinformation there has also been reported a rise in online bullying targeting Indonesian women. While this was a phenomenon that became apparent in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic, this bullying is being noted across the country in the lead-up to the federal elections, with those bullying suggesting that “politics is no place for women.” As noted by Civic Media Observatory, “Cyberbullying makes women more reluctant to participate online which exacerbates the gender digital divide.”⁶

Overall, there is low risk of violence in the lead-up to the Indonesian federal elections, which include sub-regional elections across the Indonesian archipelago. While these elections are being signalled as non-democratic given the mixture of staid politics and social media propaganda, there is no hint that this will lead to outbursts of violence, even in regions such as Aceh where there are historical risks given the past injustices suffered by people of Aceh by the most likely candidate to win the election, Prabowo.⁷

Recommendations

The Indonesian government should:

- Appoint a senior official as National R2P Focal Point to coordinate national and international efforts to implement R2P.
- Ensure the monitoring and removal of inciteful social media posts in the lead-up to the elections.
- Ensure legislative decisions do not compromise Indonesia’s democracy and will not lead to human rights abuse across all regions.

- Ensure legislation that is stalled at Bills that does criminalise human rights abuse, is advocated for and adopted into legislation.
- Work to further implement legislation to online bullying against Indonesian women.

Neighbouring governments should:

- Encourage Indonesia to take active steps to fulfil its responsibility to protect.
- Explore avenues for cooperation with the Indonesian government and society in the areas of combatting disinformation and misinformation related to the upcoming elections.
- Provide humanitarian assistance when requested to help the government and civil society tackle challenges that stem from a lack of access to basic infrastructure.
- Explore dialogue with Indonesian officials to help discourage the use of hoax news and disinformation as political propaganda.

West Papua – High Risk

The region of West Papua is at high risk of violence and atrocity crimes.

It has been over a year since New Zealand pilot Philip Mehrtens was taken hostage in West Papua by the West Papua National Liberation Army. Any attempt at freeing Mehrtens has been thwarted due to concerns of his killing by the group should a rescue occur. Making rescue also difficult is the fact that Indonesian forces are losing ground and control of the highland region where the pilot is being kept. This situation has been met with the appointment of a new Indonesian Commander of the Indonesian Defences Forces who has “promised to crush the armed groups and build more territorial commands, as well as create four more provinces in Papua,” which will only heighten tensions in the region.⁸

There has been ongoing conflict and ongoing deaths in the region across late-2023, both in the highlands but also on rare occasions along the coast. As a reaction to these battles there has also been military escalation by the Indonesians, which has added to the “mass killings.”⁹ This tension is also exacerbated by Indonesian efforts to deforest and develop the region, where the Indonesian government is describing West Papua the new “food bowl” of Indonesia’s future, in so being killing off native plants and wildlife and displacing local peoples. The county’s rainforest has been reduced by 13 per cent in only a short while, with more of this to be logged and “developed” over the coming years as Indonesia’s central government looks to West Papua as a region that will help sustain the rest of Indonesia’s population’s rice and food needs.¹⁰

Recommendations

The Indonesian Government should:

1. Address entrenched racial discrimination, hate speech, fake news, and incitement against West Papuans, and provide clear advice to security forces to abide by international law and refrain from the use of violence and torture.
2. As a member of the UN Human Rights Council, ensure human rights are protected in all Indonesian territories, including freedom to protest and gather and freedom of speech.
3. Refrain from manipulating news to serve the interests of the Indonesian forces in the region.

4. Consider the aspirations of West Papuans and the underlying issues fuelling the need for independence, and endeavour to consider these aspirations in future dealings with the province.
5. Place consideration on the region's natural environment and the impact development is having on this ecosystem, including its impact of local peoples.

¹ Salma, "New Study Sheds Light on Potential Conflict Triggers in Upcoming General Election in Indonesia," Faculty Corner News Report, University of Gadjah Mada, October 16, 2024, <https://ugm.ac.id/en/news/new-study-sheds-light-on-potential-conflict-triggers-in-upcoming-general-election-in-indonesia/>

² Editorial Board, "Safeguarding the Elections," *Jakarta Post*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2023/11/29/safeguarding-the-elections.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bill Birtles, "Indonesia's Election Combines Dark History and Future Dynasty," *The World: ABC News*, February 7, 2023, <https://iview.abc.net.au/video/WORM2022103439752>

⁵ Annika Burgess and Hellena Souisa, "Inside the World of Indonesia's Social Media 'Buzzers' Cashing in From Pushing 2024 election Propaganda," *ABC News*, January 20, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-01-20/political-buzzers-indonesia-election-misinformation-social-media/103298530>

⁶ Juliana Harsianti, "Cyberbullying Hinders Women's Participation in Indonesia's 2024 Elections," *Global Voices*, December 30, 2023, <https://globalvoices.org/2023/12/30/cyberbullying-hinders-womens-participation-in-indonesias-2024-elections/>

⁷ Shane Barter, "Aceh in the 2024 Indonesian Elections: Self-Rule but Shared Spoils," Blogpost, University of Melbourne, January 11, 2024, <https://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/aceh-in-the-2024-indonesian-elections-self-rule-but-shared-spoils/>

⁸ Hipolitus Wangge and Alexandro Rangga, "Hostage Situation Reinforces Tensions in Papua," *East Asia Forum*, December 2, 2023, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/12/02/hostage-situation-reinforces-tensions-in-papua/>

⁹ Douglas Gerrard, "Indonesia Is Stepping Up Its Repression of West Papua's Freedom Movement," *Jacobin*, November 3, 2023, <https://jacobin.com/2023/11/indonesia-west-papua-colonialism-development-repression-resistance>

¹⁰ Ibid.