

# Elections in Indonesia: Implications for West Papua

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## Bringing clarity to crisis

ACLED Asia Research Manager Elliott Bynum analyzes rising disorder in Indonesia's West Papua region ahead of the country's 17 April election.

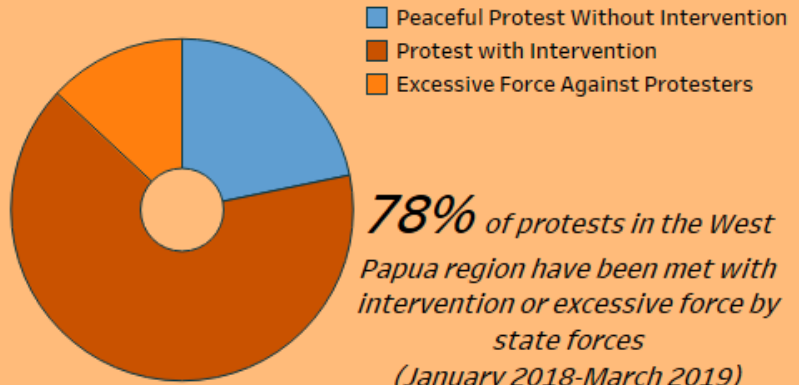
## Elections in Indonesia

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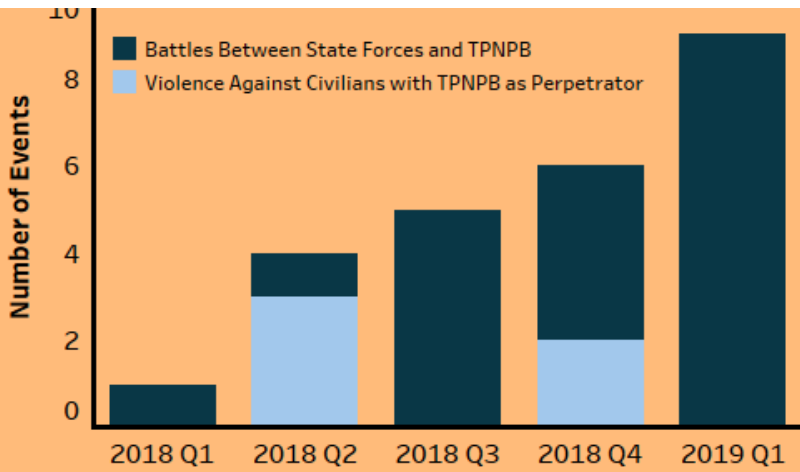
When current Indonesian president Joko Widodo was elected in 2014, many expected the situation in West Papua (consisting of West Papua and Papua provinces) -- where Papuans have been calling for self-determination since the provinces came under Indonesian rule in the 1960s -- to improve. Yet, by favoring development projects over addressing historical grievances, continuing the practice of suppressing peaceful dissent by Papuan activists, and not reining in attacks on Papuan civilians by state forces, Widodo has failed to ease tensions in the region. As disorder has increased in the region in the past four months, Papuan activists have called for a boycott of the upcoming 17 April general election. Disorder in the region is likely to continue after the election unless policy changes are made to address long-standing grievances and curb violence against peaceful protesters and civilians alike.

### Calls for Independence in West Papua Met with State Intervention

In December 2018, many demonstrations were held in the West Papua region and across the country calling for Papuan independence. State forces cracked down on these protests, arresting and injuring many. There has been a long history of such protests being met with intervention or excessive force, particularly when the Morning Star flag, the symbol of the movement to free Papua, is raised. The continuation of this trend under Widodo has led to increased tension in the region. In the past year, the majority of such protests have been met with state intervention or excessive force.



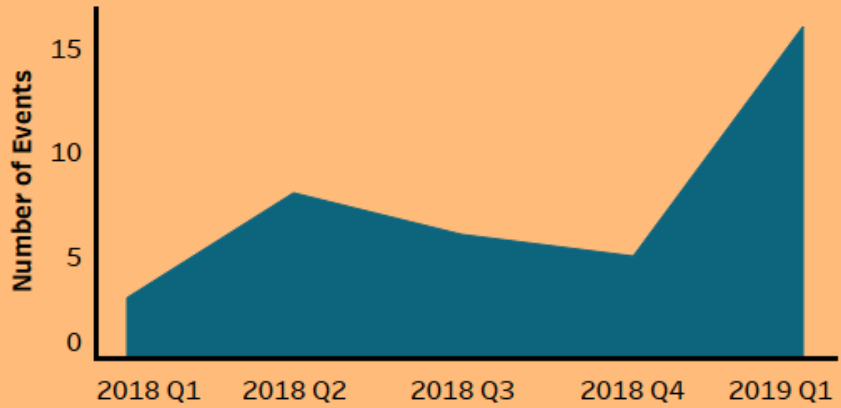
### West Papua National Liberation Army Activity Increases as State Forces Deployed



On 2 December 2018, the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) attacked and killed several construction workers of a state-owned construction company working on the trans-Papua highway in Nduga regency. As part of Widodo's promised push to develop the region, the trans-Papua highway has instead become a flash point for violence. Many Papuans see it as inviting further migration of non-Papuans to the region and opening the area to further exploitation of its natural resources. After the attack, state forces began operations in the area to guard construction on the highway. This has resulted in increased clashes between state forces and the TPNPB.

### Violence Against Civilians by State Forces on the Rise in West Papua

In addition to increased battles, there has been a noticeable increase in reports of violence against civilians by Indonesian state forces in the West Papua region. State forces have long attacked and abused Papuan civilians in the region over perceived links with the TPNPB. Ongoing violence against civilians in the region by state forces ensures further distrust of the Indonesian government and hinders any attempts to end the conflict.



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