

## Indonesia's West Papua: Settlers Dominate Coastal Regions, Highlands Still Overwhelmingly Papuan

West Papuan Demographics Revisited

By [Jim Elmslie](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Asia-Pacific Research, January 20, 2017

[The Asia-Pacific Journal](#) 15 January 2017

*This paper will reconsider previous work on the demographic transition under way in West Papua (the Indonesian provinces of Papua and Papua Barat) in the light of documents received from the Indonesian Statistics Office (Badan Pusat Statistik BPS) that give an ethnic breakdown across the 29 regencies that comprise Papua province and the eleven regencies in Papua Barat. They show that, while the proportion of Papuan people as a percentage of the entire population continues to decline, this process varies widely between different regencies. While some have a strong majority of non-Papuan people other regencies are still overwhelmingly Papuan.*

*This dichotomy is closely linked with topography - the mountainous interior outside of urban areas having a Papuan majority and the accessible lowlands a non-Papuan majority. The consequences of this dichotomy - a large chunk of West Papua about the size of Great Britain is peopled almost exclusively by Melanesian people, even as some of the coastal regions become non-Papuan majority- is profound. West Papuans of the interior have not only survived Indonesian occupation but have kept their lands and cultures largely intact, which continues to underpin calls for an independent West Papua and conflict with the Indonesian government and its security forces.*

*While coastal regions continue to receive large numbers of non-Papuan migrants resulting in the increasing minoritisation of the Papuan people and their concomitant militarization, marginalization and dispossession. This process is also occurring in the highlands from expansion of the oil/gas sector and mining sector; the proliferation of new regencies (with new bureaucracies) and the continuing development of new roads, all of which alienate traditional land and draw in migrants. Meanwhile the conflict over the political status of West Papua will continue, and indeed grow, as external actors, such as the Pacific countries of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, shine a spotlight on the conflict and advocate for the right to self-determination for the West Papuan people.*

### **The Importance of West Papua to Indonesia**

The territory of West Papua (the Indonesian provinces of Papua and Papua Barat) makes up about 24% of Indonesia's total landmass but contains only 1.7% of the nation's population. It is also Indonesia's richest region in terms of natural resources with the largest extant tracts of rainforest in south-east Asia; vast oil and gas reserves, and possibly the world's largest deposits of copper and gold. Indeed the Papua's giant Freeport Mine is the largest

economic entity in Indonesia and the country's largest taxpayer.

The economic exploitation of these resources, especially in the establishment of massive oil palm plantations (millions of hectares are underway or planned), and the economic opportunities that arise from a fast growing local economy has drawn in hundreds of thousands of migrants from other regions of Indonesia motivated by self-interest and previously by government sponsored transmigration programs. The migrants differ starkly from the indigenous (mainly Christian) Melanesian inhabitants of West Papua, being light skinned Asians predominantly of the Muslim faith.

West Papua is also symbolically central to the self-conceptualization of the Indonesian state as an archipelago nation whose motto is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) and it represents the final victory of the Indonesian nationalists over the Dutch after 350 years of brutal colonial rule. This means that the future of West Papua, and the movement by Papuan nationalists to break away from Indonesia, is a first order concern for the Indonesian government and military. The demographic transition now underway wherein new migrants have become the majority in many regencies is one of the underlying drivers of conflict in West Papua and is fueling the widespread desire for independence amongst the Papuan people. This is resulting in a direct challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the Indonesian state and its sovereignty over West Papua.



Map One showing the territory of West Papua (the Indonesian provinces of Papua and Papua Barat), previously known as Irian Jaya. Note the large chain of mountain ranges that run through the island of New Guinea all the way to the Bird's Head region and the flat coastal plains to the north and south of this highlands region.

### **West Papuan Demographic Transition**

In a series of papers since 2006 I have examined the demographic transition that has taken place in West Papua following Indonesian takeover in 1962-63, and especially since the census of 1971, which found the total population of 923,000 as being 96% Papuan and only 4%, or 36,000 people, as non-Papuan<sup>1</sup>. The basis of this argument is that the non-Papuan sector of the population is growing faster than the Papuan sector due to large scale inward migration of non-Papuan from other parts of Indonesia and the vastly substandard living conditions of ethnic Papuans, including high infant and maternal mortality rates, that cause a lower overall fertility rate. Due to patchy statistical information the rate of growth of the two population sectors had to be estimated from different censuses data and then extrapolated as a projection of a possible future demographic break down.

While the trends are clear and unambiguous the actual population growth rates vary depending on assumptions about future inward migration and respective fertility rates. It also must be presumed that in a region as vast and as rugged as West Papua, census data will always be incomplete, as well as containing certain inaccuracies. Therefore while the data allows one to establish trends with great confidence, the precise number of future population segments should be taken as indicative (with the caveat that projections are based on past growth rates remaining consistent, which may not always be the case). Nonetheless the population of West Papua continues to grow and the percentage of the population which is non-Papuan also continues to rise. This is a driver of conflict: newcomers take resources such as land, forests and minerals from traditional land owners; the

Indonesian security apparatus continues to grow to maintain control over the territory and resource extraction in particular; Papuan people are further marginalized and lose even their basic freedoms of speech and association, and so Papuan discontent at the Indonesian occupation also grows and with it the desire for independence. Therefore understanding the demographic transition that is underway is central to comprehending the nature of the conflict in West Papua.

Where this paper extends the argument made in previous works is in the examination of the Papuan population on a regency by regency basis. Whereas in previous analyses the figures were largely conflated to look at the territory of West Papua (both Papua and Papua Barat provinces) as a whole, we are now able to rather forensically examine each particular region in isolation. This allows a deeper more finely grained insight into the process.



**Map Two showing the territory of West Papua including the Indonesian provinces of Papua and Papua Barat (West Papua) and the administrative regions called kabupaten (regencies).**

My previous analysis determined that the long term annual growth rate for the Papuan population was 1.84% and that of the non-Papuan population 10.82%<sup>2</sup> for the period from 1971 up to 2000. From my calculations this meant that indigenous Papuans comprised about 48%<sup>3</sup> of the entire population of West Papua (Papua and Papua Barat provinces) in 2010. The figures received from the BPS are from the 2010 census and identify the inhabitants of Papua province as either Suku Papua (Papuan tribe) or Suku Bukan Papua<sup>4</sup> (non-Papuan tribe). According to these figures out of a total population of 2,883,381 in Papua Province, some 2,121,436 were Papuan (73.57%) and 658,708 Non-Papuan (22.84%), the remainder being unknown. The BPS figures for Papua Barat show that the total population is 753,399 of which 51.49% is Papuan<sup>5</sup>.

Thus these BPS figures differ somewhat from my previous figures where I estimated that in 2010 for a combined population of Papua Province and Papua Barat Province of 3,612,854 some 1,730,336 (47.89%) were Papuan and 1,882,517 (52.10%) were non-Papuan. The new BPS figures now indicate that the Papuan proportion of the total population of Papua and Papua Barat provinces is 66.26%, or 2,409,670 Papuans out of a total population of 3,612,854<sup>6</sup>. This means (according to the BPS figures) that the historical growth rate of the Papuans for the period 1971-2000 (1.84%) and the non-Papuans (10.82%) have changed. However the total number of Papuans in the 2000 Indonesian census, where there was a breakdown of tribal populations, was 1,505,405 while the number of Papuans in the 2010 Indonesian census (Papua and Papua Barat provinces) was 2,409,670. This seems hard to believe as it implies a Papuan population growth rate of nearly 5%. The historical Papuan growth rate was 1.84% (1971 to 2000). The current estimated growth rate for the whole of Indonesia is 1.40%<sup>7</sup>. The 2013 estimate for the growth rate of PNG is 2.1%. How can a growth rate of 5% for the Papuan population be explained? The answer to this question explains why there is a divergence of my previous predictions and the figures released by BPS.

One explanation is that previous and current Indonesian governments have deliberately pursued a policy that researcher and analyst, Emil Ola Kleden describes as the 'unclarity of

ethnic composition in Papua [that] reflected Indonesia's lasting political stand on this issue. Both Old and New Order regimes held the view that knowing the 'truth' about ethnic composition could result in social and political instability<sup>8</sup>. One example of this policy of 'unclarity' is that the BPS documents from the 2010 census relating to ethnicity quoted in this paper were only briefly displayed on the provincial BPS website before being taken down<sup>9</sup>.

Besides any deliberate Indonesian government policy there are several other possible explanations for the confusion over the Papuan population growth rate and the subsequent total Papuan population and they lie in the uncertainty of the data collected by BPS over various census periods. I have derived my figures from the 1971; 2000 and 2010 censuses and extrapolated growth rates from the changes in population numbers between censuses. It is very possible that:

- The 1971 census was inaccurate due to the recent takeover of Irian Barat (as the territory of West Papua was then officially designated) by the Indonesian military; the relatively loose state control over a vast and wild country and the limited resources of the Indonesian state apparatus to conduct such a census.
- The 2000 census was inaccurate due to the widespread turmoil that was unfolding across much of Eastern Indonesia in the wake of the fall of President Suharto and the subsequent independence of East Timor. In West Papua militia and other groups were active and the Indonesian state apparatus was again poorly equipped to undertake such a huge process as a census across the vast and restless stretches of West Papua.
- The 2010 census may well be accurate, although given that West Papua remains a very large and relatively undeveloped region with low population densities spread throughout very rugged terrain where a low level insurgency still continues it is highly likely some groups were not included. It is also possible that groups of Papuans were included who had not been included in previous census (which could go some way to explaining the rapid increase in the number of Papuans).
- Anecdotaly there has been an incentive for the local regent (bupati) and other local leaders and politicians to inflate the number of people in villages and tribes to leverage more resources from the provincial government - funds allocated for health and education services for instance. This may or may not have had an effect on census data.

Besides actual difficulties in data collection there are also assumptions embodied in the data that may impact the outcome - either intentionally or unintentionally. For instance Table One shows the average annual population growth rates for Indonesian provinces going back to 1971 by decade. For Papua (and previously Irian Jaya Province) the growth rates have been 2.31% (1971-1980); 3.46% (1980-1990); 3.22% (1990-2000); 5.39% (200-2010) but just 1.99% for 2010-2014. This last figure is an estimation as censuses are conducted every ten years. This is counter intuitive as the population growth rate has been growing for four decades in a solid trend, inward migration of non-Papuans into Papua has been strong in recent years (not least due to massive development in the oil palm sector that has brought in many workers), and there has been rapid growth in (non-Papuan dominated) urban areas.

Together the above points mean that the data provided by BPS must be used with a degree of caution. It is highly possible that Papuans who missed out on earlier censuses due to their

isolation were included in subsequent censuses as the strengthening Indonesian state apparatus and modern communications and transportation improved the efficiency of BPS field operatives. It is also quite possible that the numbers of Papuan people living in remote regions have been inflated to secure more government funding (and electoral advantage).

Does this mean that it is impossible to draw conclusions on the demographic transition that is underway in West Papua? No. Even if precise numbers might be elusive trends can clearly be established from the BPS data which hold even when the exact numbers of respective population groups are unclear. By examining the data from the 2010 census it is apparent that:

- The percentage of Papuans as a proportion of the total population of the Papua and Papua Barat is falling over time, primarily due to inward migration. This process is ongoing.
- In some regions the percentage of Papuans as a proportion of the population has fallen catastrophically. This is particularly true in most urban centres such as Jayapura and Sorong, and in the flat coastal areas such as Merauke and Keerom. This process is ongoing (see below).
- That in large areas of the highlands and remote regions of both Papua and Papua Barat provinces Papuan people still make up in excess of 90% of the total population.

Figures from the BPS publication, *Profil Penduduk Menurut Suku Hasil SP 2010 di Papua*, (Population Profile Result According to Tribe in Papua 2010), show that the most of the Non-Papuan population reside in only a few of Papua's 28 kabupatens (regencies). According to the Suku document 556,422 Non-Papuans (84.47%) out of the total 658,708 are found in just seven of Papua's 28 regencies, leaving just 102,286 non-Papuans spread out in the remaining 21 regencies.

Provinsi	Laju Pertumbuhan Penduduk per Tahun				
	1971-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2014 <sup>2</sup>
Aceh	2,93	2,72	1,46	2,36 <sup>1</sup>	2,06
Sumatera Utara	2,60	2,06	1,32	1,10	1,39
Sumatera Barat	2,21	1,62	0,63	1,34	1,34
Riau	3,11	4,30	4,35	3,58	2,64
Jambi	4,07	3,40	1,84	2,56	1,85
Sumatera Selatan	3,32	3,15	2,39	1,85	1,50
Bengkulu	4,39	4,38	2,97	1,67	1,74
Lampung	5,77	2,67	1,17	1,24	1,26
Kepulauan Bangka Belitung	-	-	0,97	3,14	2,23
Kepulauan Riau	-	-	-	4,95	3,16
DKI Jakarta	3,93	2,42	0,17	1,41	1,11
Jawa Barat	2,66	2,57	2,03	1,90	1,58
Jawa Tengah	1,64	1,18	0,94	0,37	0,82
DI Yogyakarta	1,10	0,57	0,72	1,04	1,20
Jawa Timur	1,49	1,08	0,70	0,76	0,69
Banten	-	-	3,21	2,78	2,30
Bali	1,69	1,18	1,31	2,15	1,24
Nusa Tenggara Barat	2,36	2,15	1,82	1,17	1,40
Nusa Tenggara Timur	1,95	1,79	1,64	2,07	1,71
Kalimantan Barat	2,31	2,65	2,29	0,91	1,68
Kalimantan Tengah	3,43	3,88	2,99	1,79	2,38
Kalimantan Selatan	2,16	2,32	1,45	1,99	1,87
Kalimantan Timur	5,73	4,42	2,81	3,81	2,64 <sup>3</sup>
Sulawesi Utara	2,31	1,60	1,33	1,28	1,17
Sulawesi Tengah	3,86	2,87	2,57	1,95	1,71
Sulawesi Selatan	1,74	1,42	1,49	1,17	1,13
Sulawesi Tenggara	3,09	3,66	3,15	2,08	2,20
Gorontalo	-	-	1,59	2,26	1,65
Sulawesi Barat	-	-	-	2,68	1,95
Maluku	2,88	2,79	0,08	2,80	1,82
Maluku Utara	-	-	0,48	2,47	2,21
Papua Barat	-	-	-	3,71	2,65
Papua	2,67	3,46	3,22	5,39	1,99
INDONESIA	2,31	1,98	1,49	1,49	1,40

Catatan:

Tidak Termasuk Timor Timur

<sup>1</sup> Rata-rata Laju Pertumbuhan Penduduk per tahun 2000–2010 untuk Aceh dihitung dengan menggunakan data Sensus Penduduk Aceh Nias (SPAN) 2005 dan SP2010

<sup>2</sup> Hasil Proyeksi Penduduk Indonesia 2010-2035 (Pertengahan tahun/Juni)

<sup>3</sup> Rata-rata Laju Pertumbuhan Penduduk per tahun 2010–2014 untuk Kalimantan Timur merupakan gabungan antara Kalimantan Timur dan Kalimantan Utara

Sumber :

- Sensus Penduduk 1971, 1980 , 1990 , 2000 , 2010 dan Sensus Penduduk Antar Sensus (SUPAS) 1995

- Data Dikutip dari Publikasi Statistik Indonesia

### **Table One showing average annual population growth rates by decade. Source: BPS.**

It is clear that the trend of an increasing proportion of non-Papuans in the overall population of Papua and Papua Barat province is continuing. What the Suku document shows is that the non-Papuans are concentrated in a few regencies, most of which are located in the border region close to neighbouring PNG; in Mimika near the Freeport Mine; on Biak Island and in the urban centre of Nabire. Table Two shows the actual breakdown for each regency in Papua Province by ethnic group. This table shows that there are five regencies with a majority of non-Papuans: Merauke (62.73%); Nabire (52.46%); Mimika (57.49%); Keerom (58.68%), and Jayapura City (65.09%). This means that there are still 23 regencies where Papuans are in the majority although there are another six with substantial non-Papuan

populations: Jayapura (rural) (38.52%); Yapen Waropen (21.91%); Biak Numfor (26.18%); Boven Digoel (33.04%); Sarmi (29.75%), and Waropen (20.41%). The remaining 17 regencies are all overwhelmingly Papuan in their ethnic composition, although with a non-Papuan presence concentrated heavily in the towns. For instance Lanny Jaya is 99.89% Papuan; Tolikara 99.04%; Yahukimo 98.57%; Paniai 97.58%, and Jayawijaya 90.79% Papuan. This dramatic population disparity is graphic shown in Table Three.

Table Three, Jumlah Penduduk Suku Papua dan Bukan Papua Menurut Topografi Wilayah di Papua, Tahun 2010 (Total Population of Tribe Papua and not Tribe Papua According to Topography in Papua Year 2010), is quite staggering in revealing the incredible inconsistency in the ethnic makeup of the various regencies in Papua Province. Table Three divides the regencies of Papua Province into three geographical zones: Dataran Mudah (easy plains); Dataran Sulit (difficult plains) and Pegunungan (mountain range). It is immediately apparent that the non-Papuan population is predominant in the hospitable 'easy plains', significant in the 'difficult plains', but very sparse in the 'mountain ranges'. The non-Papuan population has moved to and settled regions most conducive to types of agriculture of industrial development in line with the economic models seen elsewhere in Indonesia. They have not moved in large numbers to the mountainous regions - with some exceptions such as the fertile agricultural lands of the Baliem Valley where much land has been 'bought' from traditional Dani subsistence farmers.

In Papua Barat province the population divide similarly runs between urban and remote areas. In Sorong regency Papuans make up only 36.07% of the population and non-Papuans 73.93% with Javanese being the single biggest ethnic group at 41.46%. Meanwhile the mountainous regencies of Trambraun and Maybrat both have Papuan populations in excess of 95% of the total populations<sup>10</sup>.



**Table Two showing the ethnic breakdown of regencies into Papuan and Bukan Papuan (non-Papuan) charts in 2010. Source: Indonesian Statistics Office, BPS.**



Table Three showing the regencies of Papua Province broken into Papuan and Bukan Papuan (non-Papuan) population cohorts and by geographic region into Dataran Mudah (easy plains); Dataran Sulit (difficult plains) and Pegunungan (mountain range). Source: Indonesian Statistics Office, BPS.

Note that the non-Papuan population cohort is indicated by the darker shaded portion of the bar graphs and is predominantly in the Dataran Mudah (easy plains) region of Papuan province. Relatively few non-Papuan people live in the Pegunungan (mountain range) regions of the highlands.

This situation has echoes of the occupation of Australia by European settlers. The fertile 'easy' country of the coastal regions, particularly along the Eastern seaboard, was quickly taken over by farmer settlers, but the harsh interior and northern reaches of Australia were left alone for nearly a century from initial European invasion in 1788. It was really only with the expansion of the cattle industry in the late nineteenth century that large areas of the centre and north were occupied by the colonialists, driven by commercial imperatives. Similar settlement patterns unfolded in New Zealand, Canada and the United States where the economics of settler colonization (where the colonisers never left) resulted in widespread land alienation from traditional owners and the death of indigenous peoples on a massive scale. Will this same process unfold in Papua Province driven by mining projects, new regencies and roads as well as new military bases, rather than cattle?

Whereas in previous analysis's I conflated the population segments and treated the population of West Papua (Papua Province and West Papua Province) as a single entity and extrapolated future population projections based on previous growth rates, the Suku, and other, documents allow for focused analysis. The basic finding that the non-Papuan sector of the population is growing faster than the Papuan is sound, but with great regional variance. The projection that the non-Papuan sector of the population would come to dominate the Papuan sector and comprise a majority is correct in certain regencies, but clearly not yet happening in other regencies, especially in the highlands. The non-Papuan sector of the population now clearly dominates the richest areas and the urban centres of power, with all the benefits that brings such as education and health services.

One region where the demographic transition has been well researched is Keerom, where non-Papuans made up around 60% of the population in 2010 (this figure would be significantly higher in 2017). From being 100% Papuan in 1963 the authors' predict on current trends that the Papuan percentage of the population will fall to 15-20% within the next decade or so<sup>11</sup>. The Papuans are systematically discriminated against by having manifestly inferior health and education services, greatly reduced access to sealed roads, piped water and electricity and have lost large areas of land to migrant 'land grabbing' for both small scale agriculture and large scale oil palm projects<sup>12</sup>. Besides the racial divide the two populations are also divided by religion - Papuans being predominantly Christian and migrants predominantly Muslim. Fear and mistrust characterize relations between the two communities. As migrants continue to encroach on Papuan land tension continues to simmer. Such conditions are a breeding ground for inter-ethnic violence, up to and including genocide, which I have discussed at some length in previous publications<sup>13</sup>.

Another region where non-Papuan domination has already become entrenched is in Merauke Kabupaten, in the southern region of Papua province, where the Papuans comprised less than 40 percent of the population in 2010 (this figure would be lower in 2017). This is a region where huge oil palm development is proceeding as part of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE). Millions of hectares of plantations are underway or in the planning stages - all on land taken from traditional owners, often under coercion and with little or no compensation. Papuans are even deprived of employment as labourers on the plantations as workers are being brought in from Java, many of whom apparently do not speak the lingua franca and official national language, Bahasa Indonesia (and are therefore unable to communicate with local Papuans who can speak it)<sup>14</sup>. The Javanese are seen as more reliable and dedicated workers than the Papuans - which may be true as the Papuans are used to the more relaxed lifestyle of subsistence farming<sup>15</sup>. Apparently these Javanese settlers have themselves been forced off their land in Java due to large scale industrial developments, for example, the expansion of Java's network of freeways; there is therefore an economic imperative to resettle them elsewhere and Papua is still seen as largely 'empty'.

Ethnic tension in Merauke is high and minor incidents, such as traffic accidents, easily escalate into violent stand offs where the (predominantly non-Papuan) police side with the migrants. There are reports that police are also arming migrants, who are fearful of the Papuans' 'primitiveness'<sup>16</sup> and believe them to be uncivilized and violent. Further exacerbated by religious differences this situation is a powder keg contained only by a repressive military and police presence. It is a situation where everyday life is one of



oppression and misery for most of the Papuan population who suffer the indignity of being an occupied population: having their traditional lands stolen; discrimination in employment; very poor levels of health and education services and no basic freedoms of expression and association. Violence meted out to Papuans suspected of supporting 'separatism' is swift and ranges from beatings, incarceration and torture to extrajudicial killings. The police and military act with impunity and the legal system is effectively an arm of the security apparatus.

## **Concluding Comments**

Previously I have predicted that, if the trends of the past few decades remained constant, the Papuan sector of the total population of West Papua would continue to fall until it was a 'small and rapidly dwindling minority'<sup>17</sup>. This paper extends that argument and finds while such a conclusion is correct for some regencies, it is not for others. Indeed the situation predicted as a possible future for West Papua as a whole – the minoritisation of the Papuan people – is already a reality in rural areas such as Keerom and Merauke, and urban centres such as Jayapura and Sorong.

The fact that only relatively small numbers of migrants have moved into the highlands regions of Papua and Papua Barat means the highland Papuan groups, such as the Dani and the Mee, are not in imminent danger of becoming a 'small and rapidly dwindling minority', even as their lowland brothers and sisters suffer that fate. Migrants are increasingly drawn to the economic advantages, and relative safety, of the lowland regions where they can work on oil palm plantations or 'own' their own small agricultural blocks, as well as works as traders, public servants and participants in the rapid economic expansion that is underway. These opportunities are more limited in the highlands but growing as new regencies are created and new roads and settlements built, and as mining and oil/gas projects proliferate.

While some regions are Papuan dominated and others migrant dominated, regions such as Sarmi, Biak Numfor and Jayapura (rural) still have a Papuan majority but are receiving large numbers of migrants. If these trends continue they will end up in the same pernicious situation as the migrant dominated areas discussed above where the Papuans become marginalised and their future existence is put in peril.

The consequences of these new findings are profound:

- The Papuan people living in regencies such as Sorong, Merauke, Jayapura City, Keerom and Mimika are already a minority and are set to become further marginalized as non-Papuan migrants continue to arrive to work in the agricultural sector and pursue other economic opportunities. Non-Papuan migrants clash with the Papuan population due to loss of traditional lands; discrimination in employment, health and education services; religious tensions, and by the increasing suppression and human rights abuses inflicted by Indonesian security forces, especially in response to perceived 'separatist' activity. This is set to continue and grow as more non-Papuan migrants arrive, fueling ethnic tensions and laying the ground for violent, even genocidal, conflict.
- The Papuan people living in regencies in the mountainous interior of the country are still the overwhelming majority. The relatively small number of non-Papuan migrants in these areas are involved in trade, civil service, the construction industry and the security forces. While new roads, airports and industrial

developments are underway, large numbers of migrants will only arrive when economic opportunities are present, such as oil palm or other plantations (where possible); mines; gas and oil fields are expanded or other projects are established. It seems likely that this will occur, at least in some areas, as the economic imperative driving development reaches ever further into remote areas. Conflict over such resource development and the ongoing security response with 'sweeping' operations and military reprisals seems likely to continue under current Indonesian government policies. The situation can be described as ongoing insurgency which is now characterized by non-violent resistance on the part of the Papuans demanding not just their basic human rights but also that of self-determination, bolstered by rapidly growing international support, particularly from the small Pacific island nations such as Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

- Given the above the conflict in Papua Province (and West Papua Province) will only grow short of a fundamental shift in Indonesian policy including: the recognition of traditional land ownership rights; ceasing militarization and military impunity; respect for the fundamental human rights of free speech and association; progressive education, health and employment opportunities, and the emergence of political organisations that adequately reflect the interests of the Papuan people. At this stage such policy shifts by the Indonesian government appear unlikely.
- International support for the basic rights of the Papuan people is growing rapidly with a goal of taking the issue to the United Nations, having (West) Papua put back on the Schedule of Non-Self Governing Territories and, ultimately, having the flawed 1969 Act of Free Choice, whereby Indonesia gained sovereignty over the region, revisited. These figures mean that the 'problem' of West Papua will not be resolved any time soon by the effective minoritisation of the Papuan people, at least not in the highlands. On the contrary large portions of the Papuan people retain their lands and cultures intact and are quite capable of both having an open and honest vote on their integration into Indonesia, and, given the chance, functioning as an independent nation.

This paper shows how that the process of settlement by recent non-Papuan migrants in the territory of West Papua is far from uniform. On the contrary most of the migrants have settled in the coastal plains and urban centres while the vast highlands regions remain populated predominantly by Papuan people. However the highlands regions will be increasingly attractive to migrants as the Indonesia government pursues aggressive economic development policies including creating new regencies (and their concomitant bureaucracies); building roads and developing mineral; oil/gas and forestry resources. While the Indonesian government claims that accelerated development will help resolve Papuan grievances against Indonesian rule the opposite is likely as the Papuans get left behind in the development process in favour of non-Papuan migrants; they become further marginalized within an Asian Muslim society, and their traditional lands are forcibly taken over by government or commercial interests. Therefore it looks likely that the changing demographic make of West Papua will continue to fuel conflict into the future.

The author would like to thank Septer Manufandu for his insightful comments and assistance with this essay.



## Related articles

- Cammellia Webb-Gannon, Here: [Salvaging Democracy for West Papuans in the Face of Australia-Indonesia Obstruction](#)
- Camellia Webb-Gannon and Jim Elmslie, Here: [MSG Headache, West Papuan Heartache? Indonesia's Melanesian Foray](#)
- David Adam Stott, Here: [Would An Independent West Papua Be A Failing State?](#)
- David Adam Stott, Here: [Indonesian Colonisation, Resource Plunder and West Papuan Grievances](#)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For instance, West Papua: Genocide, Demographic Change, the Issue of 'Intent' and the Australia-Indonesia Security Treaty, Australia Institute of International Affairs, Adelaide, 23/10/06; Not Just a Disaster, Papuan Claims of Genocide Deserve to be taken Seriously, Inside Indonesia Issue 97, July-Sept. 2009; West Papuan Demographic Transition and the 2010 Indonesian Census: "Slow Motion Genocide" or Not?, Papua Papers No. 1, CPACS, University of Sydney, September, 2010. More recently with Camellia Webb-Gannon, A Slow Motion Genocide: Indonesian Rule in West Papua, Griffith Journal of Law and Human Dignity, Vol. 1(2), 2013, pp. 142-165.

<sup>2</sup>See West Papuan Demographic Transition and the 2010 Indonesian Census: "Slow Motion genocide" or not? Op. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Suku meaning 'tribe' and Bukan meaning 'not' in Bahasa Indonesia

<sup>5</sup>Statistics on Ethnic Diversity in the Land of Papua, Indonesia, Aris Ananta; Dwi Retno Wilujeng Wahyu Utami; Nur Budi Handayani, Asia & Pacific Policy Studies, Vol. 3, Issue 3, September 2016, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>There is some variance in the figures from the Badan Pusat Staistik of total populations etc. although these are statistically insignificant.

<sup>7</sup>[www.bps.go.id/linkTabelStatis/print/id/1268](http://www.bps.go.id/linkTabelStatis/print/id/1268)

<sup>8</sup>This quote is from a paper presented by Emil Ola Kleden, 'Papua, Indonesia and Climate Change' for the conference, At The Intersection: Climate Change in the Pacific and Resource Exploitation in West Papua, organized by the West Papua Project at the University of Western Sydney on November 3-4, 2016. Kleden refers to Ananta, A., Evi Nurvidya Arifin, M. Sairi Hasbullah, Nur Budi Handayani, Agus Pramono, Demography of Indonesia's Ethnicity, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2015, p.10.

<sup>9</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Statistics on Ethnic Diversity, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup>Cypri J. P. Dale and John Djonga, *The Papuan Paradox: The Patterns of Social Injustice, the Violations of Right to Development, and the Failure of Affirmative Policies in Kabupaten Keerom, Papua*, Yayasan Teratai Hati Papua, Arso, Keerom, Papua, and Sunspirit for Justice and Peace, Flores, NTT, Indonesia, 2011, slide 45.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>See Jim Elmslie and Cammi Webb-Gannon, *A Slow-Motion Genocide: Indonesian Rule in West Papua*, *Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity*, Vol. 1[2] 2013, pp. 142-165.

<sup>14</sup>Confidential source with firsthand knowledge of conditions in Merauke.

<sup>15</sup>Personal comment from a Papuan source who related that many Papuan people are unused to the controlled and repetitive regime of industrial agriculture, and intensely bored from such occupations as security 'guards'.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>For instance see, Jim Elmslie, *West Papuan Demographic Transition and the 2010 Indonesian Census: "Slow Motion Genocide" or not?*, *Papua Papers No. 1*, West Papua Project, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney, 2010, p.4.

The original source of this article is [The Asia-Pacific Journal](#)  
Copyright © [Jim Elmslie](#), [The Asia-Pacific Journal](#), 2017

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Jim Elmslie](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). Asia-Pacific Research will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. Asia-Pacific Research grants permission to cross-post Asia-Pacific Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Asia-Pacific Research article. For publication of Asia-Pacific Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [editors@asia-pacificresearch.com](mailto:editors@asia-pacificresearch.com)

[www.asia-pacificresearch.com](http://www.asia-pacificresearch.com) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [editors@asia-pacificresearch.com](mailto:editors@asia-pacificresearch.com)