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SIX PROVINCES, TWO SYSTEMS: THE INTERNAL RANGE OF PAPUAN SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

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ABSTRACT
The six Indonesian provinces of the Papua region differ from one another in primary school participation by 18.54 percentage points, while the remaining thirty-two provinces of the country differ from one another by 1.18 points. Using Central Statistics Agency figures for 2025 covering all thirty-eight provinces and four age bands, this article shows that treating the region as a single disadvantaged bloc conceals a division as large as any in Indonesian education. Three of the six — Papua, Papua Barat and Papua Barat Daya — average 96.64 per cent participation at ages thirteen to fifteen against a national 96.30, 80.34 per cent at sixteen to eighteen against 77.86, and 35.96 per cent at nineteen to twenty-three against 29.13. The other three — Papua Selatan, Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan — average 76.08, 54.12 and 18.51 per cent on the same bands. Papua ranks third of thirty-eight provinces on participation at ages nineteen to twenty-three and Papua Pegunungan thirty-eighth. The split does not follow the distinction between provinces created in 2022 and those that predate it: Papua Barat Daya is new and is in the upper group, Papua Selatan is new and is in the lower. The article argues that regional aggregation is the wrong unit for Indonesian education policy and quantifies what it hides.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discussions of Indonesian educational inequality generally treat the Papua region as a unit. It is the poorest served part of the country on most measures, it receives special autonomy funding under a distinct legal framework, and it is customarily named as the place where national averages conceal the worst outcomes.

The last claim is true and the aggregation that supports it commits the same error at a smaller scale. There are six provinces in the region since the divisions of 2022, and they differ from one another far more than the rest of the country differs internally.

At ages seven to twelve, the six span 18.54 percentage points, from 80.13 per cent in Papua Tengah to 98.67 in Papua Barat Daya. The other thirty-two provinces of Indonesia span 1.18 points, from 98.56 to 99.74. The within-region range is 15.7 times the range across the whole of the rest of the country.

The division is not a matter of degree. Three of the six equal or exceed the national participation figure at three of the four published age bands, and Papua ranks third of thirty-eight provinces at ages nineteen to twenty-three while Papua Pegunungan ranks thirty-eighth.

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The research gap is that Indonesian educational statistics for the region are reported and discussed in aggregate, so the internal division has not been quantified. This article quantifies it and shows that the resulting picture differs from the aggregate one in kind and not only in detail.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Aggregation and what it conceals

A first strand concerns the level at which an educational statistic is computed.

Armand, Herman and Honore (2024) decompose inequality of educational opportunity among primary school children into circumstances the child does not choose, an exercise whose resolution depends entirely on the granularity of the data. Sanfo and Malgoubri (2023) test whether instructional quality narrows socioeconomic gaps, a within-unit question that a between-unit average cannot address.

Wagner, Nair, Thapa and Kumar (2025) propose a learning inequality index applicable across contexts, and any such index inherits the aggregation of the data fed to it. Adeleke and McSharry (2022) predict a national composite from a handful of indicators, which is the coarsest useful level and is explicitly so.

Dearing, Zachrisson, Bustamante and Vandell (2026) study the developmental timing of educational opportunity for children in low-income households, a design that resolves within a population rather than across administrative units.

2.2 Regions that are not homogeneous

A second strand documents heterogeneity within units treated as single.

Luschei and colleagues (2026) compare well-being, belonging and alienation among secondary students in Colombia, India and Malawi and find differences that a regional grouping would erase. Ren, Zhu, Jin and Yang (2026) work at the level of western Chinese counties rather than provinces, and find family capital operating differently across them.

Jover, Manzano, Llos and Termes (2025) study families within a single city programme, and Prentice (2022) two schools. Serrano-Ardila, Baena-Navarro and Carriazo-Regino (2026) address rural education as a category defined by distance from provision rather than by administrative boundary.

The common lesson is that administrative boundaries and educational conditions do not coincide, and that a boundary drawn for governance is a poor instrument for measuring anything else.

2.3 What separates the two groups

A third strand concerns the plausible mechanisms behind an internal split of this magnitude.

Edmark (2025) shows that the local supply of upper secondary options determines what students take, and a companion analysis finds the supply ratio across these six provinces ranging from 5.57 to 14.32 villages with a primary school per village with an upper secondary school. Kumar (2023) evaluates a supply-side intervention directly.

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Gaurav, Aldersey, Lewis and Batorowicz (2023) examine physical access to school buildings, and Barber (2025) access for children whose circumstances place them outside ordinary provision. Abouk and Adams (2022) and Fitzpatrick and colleagues (2026) both address the non-tuition costs of attendance.

None of these can be tested with the data used here, and Section 4.6 states what would be needed. They are set out because a documented split invites explanation and the candidates should be named rather than implied.

2.4 Measuring at the tail

A fourth strand concerns the statistical treatment of units far from the mean.

Goldhaber, Grout, Wolff and Martinkova (2021) examine a measure whose values cluster near a bound, a situation in which the units away from the cluster carry all the information. Fazlul, Koedel and Parsons (2023) show an administrative proxy failing to represent its concept, with the failure concentrated among the units it was designed to identify.

Stals, Isac and Claes (2024) evaluate cross-national measurement comparability, which is the question of whether a measure means the same thing in units that differ greatly. Bokhove, Jerrim and Sims (2024) test an official measure against a plausible source of bias.

A companion analysis of the same participation data finds that two of the six provinces examined here generate a correlation of 0.4893 that is 0.0178 without them, which is the strongest available demonstration that these units are not exchangeable with the rest.

2.5 Why the aggregate persists

A fifth strand explains why a region continues to be treated as a unit after its internal variation is known, which bears on how a finding like this one is likely to be received.

Engel and Burch (2021) observe that comparative policy work depends on categories that travel, and a regional label travels more easily than six provincial ones. Gates, Teasdale, Shim and Hubacz (2024) argue that evaluative criteria must be specified explicitly to be examinable; a regional aggregate is an implicit criterion that has never been stated and therefore has never been tested.

Kelchen, Ortagus, Rosinger, Baker and Lingo (2023) relate funding strategies to outcomes across administrative units, and where funds are allocated at a regional level the reporting follows the allocation rather than the outcome. Ahmed (2023) argues that the field has persistently asked the wrong questions of a perennial crisis, and asking a question of a region whose halves diverge by 26 percentage points is one way to do so.

Two measurement studies bound what a disaggregation can recover. Min and Aryadoust (2021) review the dimensionality of language assessment and conclude that instruments often assume more structure than the data support; the converse risk applies here, of assuming less. Ollikainen, Pekkarinen, Uusitalo and Virtanen (2024) estimate returns to secondary education on units small enough to be homogeneous, which is the standard a provincial or regional analysis cannot meet.

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2.6 The research gap

The internal variation of the Papua region in Indonesian education statistics has not been reported, and the region is discussed as a bloc. This article reports it across four age bands and compares it to the variation across the rest of the country.

3. METHOD

The data are the Central Statistics Agency table Angka Partisipasi Sekolah (APS) Menurut Provinsi dan Kelompok Umur for 2025, retrieved on 30 August 2026, which reports participation for all thirty-eight provinces across four age bands: seven to twelve, thirteen to fifteen, sixteen to eighteen and nineteen to twenty-three. The village facility table for the same year is used for the supply figures in Section 4.5.

Six provinces are treated as the Papua region: Papua, Papua Barat, Papua Barat Daya, Papua Selatan, Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan. The first two existed before 2022 and the other four were created that year from the former province of Papua.

For each age band three quantities are computed: the range within the six provinces, the range across the other thirty-two, and the ratio between them. Coefficients of variation are computed for both groups. The six are then divided into two groups of three by observed participation and the group means are reported against the national figures.

The division into two groups is made on the data and is stated as such. It is not a prior classification and no geographic or administrative criterion is used to construct it; Section 4.4 examines whether any such criterion would have produced the same split.

Five limitations apply. First, six units divided into two groups of three is a small analysis and no inference beyond description is drawn. Second, one year is observed. Third, the participation figures for the four provinces created in 2022 rest on survey estimates for units without a long statistical history, and their precision is not published. Fourth, the province conceals district variation, which within these six is certainly very large. Fifth, the analysis is descriptive and identifies no cause.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The internal range

Table 1 compares the spread within the six Papua provinces to the spread across the other thirty-two.

Table 1. Range of school participation within the Papua region and across the rest of Indonesia, 2025

Age band	Papua range	Other 32 range	Ratio	CV Papua	CV
7–12	18.54 pts	1.18 pts	15.7	0.0824	0.0
13–15	29.46 pts	7.30 pts	4.0	0.1420	0.0
16–18	37.17 pts	22.27 pts	1.7	0.2197	0.0
19–23	25.68 pts	34.04 pts	0.8	0.3647	0.2

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Computed by the authors from Central Statistics Agency, Angka Partisipasi Sekolah (APS) Menurut Provinsi dan Kelompok Umur, 2025, retrieved 30 August 2026. The Papua group comprises Papua, Papua Barat, Papua Barat Daya, Papua Selatan, Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan.

At ages seven to twelve the six Papua provinces span 18.54 percentage points and the other thirty-two span 1.18. The within-region range is 15.7 times the range across the whole of the rest of the country, and the coefficient of variation is 26.6 times as large.

The ratio falls as the age band rises, to 4.0, then 1.7, then 0.8. At ages nineteen to twenty-three the rest of the country is the more dispersed of the two, spanning 34.04 points against 25.68.

The reason is the ceiling documented in a companion analysis. At ages seven to twelve, thirty-three of thirty-eight provinces sit at or above 98 per cent, so the rest of the country has almost no room to vary and the Papua provinces have a great deal. As the ceiling recedes the rest of the country spreads out and the ratio falls.

On the coefficient of variation, which is not bounded, the Papua group is the more dispersed at every band, by factors of 26.6, 7.6, 3.1 and 1.7.

4.2 The two groups

Table 2 reports the six provinces individually across the four bands.

Table 2. School participation in the six Papua provinces, 2025

Province	7–12	13–15	16–18	19–23	Rank at 19–
Papua Barat Daya	98.67%	96.38%	81.70%	35.19%	4 of 38
Papua Barat	97.59%	96.22%	77.53%	34.53%	7 of 38
Papua	97.51%	97.32%	81.78%	38.16%	3 of 38
Papua Selatan	91.65%	89.29%	66.97%	27.57%	23 of 38
Papua Tengah	80.13%	67.86%	44.61%	15.48%	37 of 38
Papua Pegunungan	82.24%	71.08%	50.79%	12.48%	38 of 38

Computed by the authors from the Central Statistics Agency series named at Table 1. Rank 1 is the highest participation rate. National figures for the four bands are 99.23, 96.30, 77.86 and 29.13 per cent.

The six divide cleanly into two groups of three. The upper group of Papua Barat Daya, Papua Barat and Papua ranks third, fourth and seventh of thirty-eight provinces at ages nineteen to twenty-three; the lower group of Papua Selatan, Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan ranks twenty-third, thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth.

There is no province between the two groups. At ages seven to twelve the lowest of the upper group is Papua at 97.51 per cent and the highest of the lower group is Papua Selatan at 91.65, a gap of 5.86 points; the three provinces of the upper group span only 1.16 points among themselves. The corresponding gaps at the three older bands are 6.93, 10.56 and 6.96 points, and the upper group spans 1.10, 4.25 and 3.63.

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The lower group is not internally tight. Its three members span 11.52 points at ages seven to twelve and 22.36 at sixteen to eighteen, because Papua Selatan sits well above Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan on every band. The claim made here is that the six do not form one group, not that they form two homogeneous ones.

Papua ranks third of thirty-eight provinces in the country at ages nineteen to twenty-three, behind only DI Yogyakarta at 54.72 per cent and Sumatera Barat at 38.84. It is above every province of Java except the special region, above Bali, and above all of Sumatera except one.

4.3 The upper group against the national figures

Table 3 sets the two group means against the national rates.

Table 3. Group means against national participation rates, 2025

Age band	Upper three	Lower three	National	Upper group vs national
7–12	97.92%	84.67%	99.23%	1.31 points below
13–15	96.64%	76.08%	96.30%	0.34 points above
16–18	80.34%	54.12%	77.86%	2.48 points above
19–23	35.96%	18.51%	29.13%	6.83 points above

Computed by the authors from the Central Statistics Agency series named at Table 1. The upper three are Papua, Papua Barat and Papua Barat Daya; the lower three are Papua Selatan, Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan. National figures are as published and are population-weighted.

The upper three provinces sit above the national figure at three of the four bands, and the margin widens with age: 0.34 points at ages thirteen to fifteen, 2.48 at sixteen to eighteen, 6.83 at nineteen to twenty-three. They sit 1.31 points below at ages seven to twelve.

The lower three sit far below at every band, by 14.56, 20.22, 23.74 and 10.62 points. The gap between the two groups within the region is 13.25, 20.56, 26.22 and 17.45 points.

The statement that the Papua region underperforms nationally is therefore true of half of it and false of the other half, and it is most conspicuously false at the age band where post-compulsory attainment is measured.

The pattern is not a small-numbers artefact of one province. All three of the upper group are above the national figure at ages nineteen to twenty-three and all three of the lower group are below it, and the two groups do not overlap on any band.

4.4 The split does not follow the administrative history

A natural hypothesis is that the division tracks the 2022 boundary changes, with the new provinces performing worse than the ones that predate them. It does not.

Two provinces predate 2022: Papua and Papua Barat. Four were created that year: Papua Barat Daya, Papua Selatan, Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan. The upper group contains both old provinces and one new one; the lower group contains three new ones.

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Papua Barat Daya, created in 2022, records 98.67 per cent at ages seven to twelve, the highest of the six, and ranks fourth of thirty-eight nationally at ages nineteen to twenty-three. Papua Selatan, also created in 2022, records 91.65 and ranks twenty-third. The two share an administrative history and differ by 7.02 percentage points at the youngest band and 7.62 at the oldest.

Nor does the split follow a simple coastal-inland reading. Papua Selatan is a coastal province and sits in the lower group; it is closer to Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan, both landlocked highland provinces, than to the coastal three. Its position is intermediate — 91.65 per cent at ages seven to twelve against 84.67 for the two highland provinces and 97.92 for the upper group — but it is on the lower side of the gap.

What the split does follow is not identifiable from these data. Section 4.5 reports one measure on which the six also differ, and Section 4.6 states what would be required to go further.

4.5 Supply across the six

The village facility table covers all six provinces and offers one further comparison.

The ratio of villages with a primary school to villages with a general upper secondary school runs across the six as follows: Papua Barat Daya 5.57, Papua 5.85, Papua Barat 8.23, Papua Tengah 8.96, Papua Pegunungan 10.41 and Papua Selatan 14.32. The national figure is 3.92.

The ordering is broadly consistent with the participation ordering at the two extremes: the two provinces with the densest secondary provision are two of the upper group, and the three with the sparsest are all in the lower group. Papua Barat at 8.23 is the exception, sitting in the upper group on participation and among the sparser half on supply.

Papua Selatan is the most striking case. It has the scarcest upper secondary provision of any province in Indonesia at 14.32 and records 66.97 per cent participation at ages sixteen to eighteen, which is below the national 77.86 but far above Papua Tengah at 44.61 and Papua Pegunungan at 50.79, both of which have denser provision than it does.

Supply therefore does not order the six on its own. A companion analysis finds that the supply ratio correlates with participation at ages sixteen to eighteen at −0.6039 across all thirty-eight provinces, with the coefficient falling to −0.4419 when the two highland provinces are removed; within the six, the association is visible but not clean.

4.6 What would be needed to explain the split

A documented division of this size invites explanation and the data used here cannot supply one. Naming what would be required is more useful than speculating.

Three classes of explanation are available. The first is provision: teacher availability, school condition and distance, of which this article observes only a village-level presence count. The second is cost and opportunity: household income, the price of attendance and the return to schooling in the local labour market, none of which is measured here. The third is measurement: whether the survey estimates for the newly created provinces are comparable in precision and in coverage to those for the rest.

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The third deserves particular attention because it could produce the observed pattern without any underlying difference. Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan are the two provinces of Indonesia with the most difficult terrain and the sparsest transport, and a household survey in such a setting faces enumeration difficulties that a survey in Java does not. The published table carries no standard errors and no sampling documentation at the provincial level, so the possibility cannot be assessed.

The article nonetheless treats the figures as reported. They are the official estimates, they are internally consistent across four age bands, and the ordering they produce is stable: the lower three provinces are the lower three at every band. A measurement artefact would have to be remarkably systematic to produce that.

The evidence needed is a district-level version of the same table, which would show whether the provincial figures are averages over homogeneous districts or over districts that themselves split. Bokhove, Jerrim and Sims (2024) show what can be learned by interrogating an official measure directly, and the same approach applied to these six provinces would be worth the effort.

4.7 Implications for practice

Four implications follow.

First, the Papua region should not be treated as a unit in Indonesian education policy. Its six provinces divide into two groups with no province between them, and the gap between the groups is 26.22 percentage points at ages sixteen to eighteen — larger than the gap between the upper group and the national figure by an order of magnitude.

Second, a programme targeting the region as a whole would direct resources to three provinces that are at or above the national participation figure at three of four age bands. Papua ranks third of thirty-eight nationally at ages nineteen to twenty-three and Papua Barat Daya fourth.

Third, the three provinces where intervention is warranted on this evidence are identifiable and are not the ones the regional label picks out. Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan are the two lowest provinces in Indonesia at three of the four bands, and Papua Selatan is intermediate but below the national figure throughout.

Fourth, the same disaggregation should be attempted elsewhere. This article examines one region because its internal range is conspicuous; whether other Indonesian regions conceal comparable divisions is not known and is answerable from the same published table.

4.8 Limitations of the finding

Four limitations bound the result.

Six units divided into two groups of three is a description and not a test. The article claims that the six do not form a homogeneous group and does not claim that the two groups are internally homogeneous, which three units cannot establish.

The grouping is made on the data being described, so it is not a hypothesis tested against them. Its justification is that the gap between the groups exceeds every gap within them by a wide margin —

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5.86 points against 1.16 at ages seven to twelve — and that the same grouping emerges at all four bands independently.

Survey precision for the four provinces created in 2022 is not published. The article treats the figures as reported and Section 4.6 states the alternative reading and why it is thought unlikely.

Finally, participation is one outcome among several and is not attainment. The four provinces created in 2022 are absent from the national completion table entirely, so the comparison drawn here cannot be repeated on the measure that would settle it.

5. CONCLUSION

The six provinces of the Papua region differ from one another in primary school participation by 18.54 percentage points; the other thirty-two provinces of Indonesia differ from one another by 1.18. The within-region range is 15.7 times the range across the rest of the country.

The six divide into two groups of three with no province between them. Papua, Papua Barat and Papua Barat Daya average 96.64 per cent at ages thirteen to fifteen against a national 96.30, 80.34 at sixteen to eighteen against 77.86, and 35.96 at nineteen to twenty-three against 29.13. Papua Selatan, Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan average 76.08, 54.12 and 18.51 on the same bands.

Papua ranks third of thirty-eight provinces nationally on participation at ages nineteen to twenty-three and Papua Barat Daya fourth; Papua Tengah ranks thirty-seventh and Papua Pegunungan thirty-eighth. Both extremes of the national distribution at that band, apart from DI Yogyakarta, are in this one region.

The split does not follow the administrative history. Papua Barat Daya and Papua Selatan were created by the same legislation in the same year and sit in opposite groups, differing by 7.02 percentage points at ages seven to twelve. Nor does it follow a coastal-inland reading, since Papua Selatan is coastal and sits below the gap.

What produces the split is not identifiable from these data, and the three candidate classes of explanation — provision, cost, and measurement in difficult terrain — would be distinguished by a district-level version of the same table. The immediate consequence is that a policy addressed to the region as a bloc would treat three provinces at or above the national figure as though they were the three at the bottom of it.

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