

World
Watch
Research

Indonesia: Country Dossier

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OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2021 Short country profile / Indonesia

Brief country details

Indonesia: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
272,223,000	33,192,000	12.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Indonesia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	63	47
WWL 2020	60	50
WWL 2019	65	30
WWL 2018	59	38
WWL 2017	55	46

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Indonesia: Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders, Government officials, Political parties, Ideological pressure groups

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

Many converts from Islam experience pressure from their families. However, the intensity of the pressure varies given the individual family and place and is mostly in the form of isolation, verbal abuse and similar treatment. Only a small percentage of converts have to face physical violence for their Christian faith. The level of persecution also depends on the region of Indonesia concerned. There are certain hot spots like West Java or Aceh, where radical Islamic groups are strong and exert a heavy influence on society and politics.

Once a church is seen to be proselytizing (as carried out by many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches), they soon run into problems with radical Islamic groups. Depending again on the region, non-traditional church groups also face difficulties getting permission for building churches. Even if they manage to fulfill all legal requirements (including winning court cases), the local authorities still often ignore them. There have been reports of Catholic churches having difficulties obtaining building permission as well. Although both the WWL 2021 and 2020 scores were lower than in WWL 2019, the overall trend is increasing. The situation for Christians has been deteriorating in the course of recent years, with Indonesian society taking on a more conservative Islamic character and during the COVID-19 crisis, there have been several incidents which showed up an increasingly intolerant attitude towards freedom of religion and belief for minorities, especially Christians.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- [19 September 2020](#): A Papua pastor was found dead after possible torture near Bomba, in the district on Intan Jaya, in the province of Papua. Initial investigations found that Indonesian soldiers may have been responsible for the killing (Benar News, 4 November 2020).
- [August 2020](#): At least 50 Catholic Christians belonging to an indigenous people group were evicted from a plot of land in East Nusa Tenggara. Ownership of the land has been disputed since 1982 when it was turned into a cattle ranch run by the provincial authorities and the Australian government (UCA News, 20 August 2020).
- [April 2020](#): Worship at the home of a Christian during the COVID-19 crisis was stopped by the neighborhood head (a Muslim cleric) and a mob from the surrounding community, even though the Christians had followed the regulations imposed for worshipping indoors in Cikarang, West Java. The police did not take steps against the perpetrators, but enforced a reconciliation in order to keep the peace in the area (Jakarta Post, 21 April 2020).

Specific examples of positive developments

- The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) took steps to set [standards for televised sermons](#), trying to rein in religious intolerance and hate speech, complementing government efforts (Jakarta Post, 8 March 2020).
- For the first time since taking office in 2014, President Jokowi has cautiously [spoken out against](#) the difficulties believers of minority religions are facing when they want to set up a place of worship (Jakarta Post, 14 February 2020).
- The largest Muslim organization in the world, Nahdlatul Ulama, won international support for a campaign to promote a [more tolerant form](#) of Islam (UCA News, 27 December 2019).

External Links - Short country profile

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 19 September 2020 - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/id-papua-pastor-killed-11042020171211.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: August 2020: - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/evicted-indonesian-families-vow-to-stay-put/89220>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: April 2020: - <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/04/21/local-figures-in-bekasi-disperse-family-conducting-sunday-service-at-home.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: standards for televised sermons - <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/08/ulema-council-government-to-rein-in-intolerant-television-sermons.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: spoken out against - <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2020/02/14/better-late-than-never.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: more tolerant form - <https://www.ucanews.org/news/indonesian-muslims-challenge-violent-islamic-traditions/85346>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Indonesia

Link for general background information

- [Indonesia country profile - BBC News](#)

Recent history

Indonesia, which is spread across more than seventeen thousand islands and more than 5000 kilometers east-west and 1700 km north-south, fought for its independence from the Netherlands in a four year war ending in 1949, having been occupied by Japan in WW II. After years of violence and corruption, the country made a transition to democracy, starting in 1998. The first direct presidential elections were held in 2004.

In the run up to the elections in early 2017 for the office of governor of Jakarta (the capital and largest city of Indonesia) mass protests erupted, bringing upwards of 200,000 people to the streets. These demonstrations were against the ethnic Chinese and Christian Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (then known as “Ahok”) on grounds of alleged blasphemy. Having won the first round of elections in February 2017, Purnama lost the second round and was sentenced to two years in prison. He decided not to appeal against the verdict and thus keep the political situation in Indonesia calm. It is a very worrying sign that the election winners played the religious card, relying almost solely on Islamic rhetoric.

The simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections on 17 April 2019, touted as the largest one-day-elections worldwide, were largely peaceful and - despite being contested by the challenger before the Constitutional Court - had a clear outcome, seeing incumbent Joko Widodo winning with a margin of 11%. Whereas religion did play a role in campaigning, it was not as central as many observers had feared. The president is striving to leave a legacy (as this is his last term in office) and pushed through with the [relocation of the capital](#) to a geographically more central (but in almost every other aspect more remote) place in the province of East Kalimantan (The Guardian, 26 August 2019). The arrival of the COVID-19 outbreak derailed these efforts and protests against a so-called "Omnibus Law" deregulating labor and many other laws have been a major challenge for the government, especially as Islamist groups tried to capitalize on them as well.

Christians have been affected by the recent events in Indonesia just like all other citizens. However, the triple suicide attack against three Christian churches on 13 May 2018 (see analysis below) highlighted once more how vulnerable Christians are to violent attack and how wide-

spread radical Islamic groups are. The attacks' shockwaves are still felt by Christians and other religious minorities.

Political and legal landscape

While Islamic political parties never gained many votes in elections, a conventional wisdom was once again confirmed in the 2019 elections: Moderate Islam is increasingly being challenged by radical influences and society continues to become more conservative in religious aspects. Even incumbent President Joko Widodo felt himself urged to choose conservative Islamic cleric Maa'ruf Amin as his vice-president in order to counter allegations slandering his religious credentials. Islam is thus being used as an effective political tool and has a [prominent place](#) in the political agenda (Reuters, 18 April 2019). Islamists are increasingly [shaping politics](#) in Indonesia (IPAC, 15 March 2019). The fact that Jokowi's opponent in the presidential candidacy, Prabowo Subianto, has been made [Minister of Defence](#), disappointed radical Islamic groups, but illustrates the style of Indonesian and Javanese politics very well (Benar News, 23 October 2019). [New Islamic parties and movements](#) emerged in 2020, but it remains to be seen how much they will be able to influence the political process as many currently seem more interested in fighting one another (RSIS, 19 November 2020).

The second and last term of President Widodo has so far been overshadowed by the arrival of COVID-19. One priority had been to strengthen the economy and bring more of the many young people in Indonesia into steady employment, besides improving their education. Given that his first term was rather a disappointment as far as human rights are concerned, it was not to be expected that he would make this a priority, but at least he finally [raised his voice](#) in support of freedom of religion and against denying building and renovation of places of worship for the first time in February 2020 (Jakarta Post, 14 February 2020). On the other hand, the parties supporting him now may soon switch to campaign-mode well ahead of the next elections, scheduled for 2024 for which the first candidates are already being considered; indeed, how well the different provinces are coping with the COVID-19 crisis may have an influence on the selection process. The government has tried to hold firmly to its banner of tolerance, but this came only after a spate of cases in which church building or renovation permits had been denied (see: "Persecution dynamics/Church sphere" below).

A good illustration of the practice surrounding the issuing of building permits can be seen in the case of Yasmin Church in Bogor, West Java – a church belonging to the Indonesian Christian Church denomination. Despite a judgment passed by the Supreme Court in December 2010, ruling that the church authorities had passed all requirements set up by law to get a building permit, the town's mayor refused to abide by this ruling and the government did not taken action against him, fearing social unrest. The church started to worship in front of the Indonesian president's palace in Jakarta instead, but this did not change the situation at all. In February 2017, almost seven years after the court ruling, a compromise was proposed that the church building may be opened if a mosque is allowed to be built next to it [on its land](#) (World Watch Monitor - WWM, 10 February 2017).

Another case was the Filadelfia HKBP church in Bekasi, West Java, where the Regency Administration decided not to re-open the church due to fears of possible conflict with local Muslims and the ombudsman proposed that the church should be [relocated](#) altogether (Jakarta

Post, 26 May 2019). How this and similar cases will be solved serve as a measuring rod for assessing Jokowi's second presidency and how far his words become deeds.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that democracy was only established in 1998; the 2019 presidential elections were only the fourth in the country's history. Despite all the problems of divisiveness and post-election violence, Indonesians managed to cast their votes and the country remains one of the largest democracies in the world - and one of the very few genuine democracies in a Muslim-majority country.

The scale of the challenges facing the government were aptly illustrated by the student [demonstrations](#) in Jakarta and other large cities in October 2019 (Foreign Policy, 30 September 2019). These were the largest demonstrations since the end of the Suharto regime. The students who have been taking to the streets come from [various segments](#) of society, both secular and religious (New Mandala, 3 October 2019). One point of contention has been the new restrictions placed on the country's Corruption Eradication Commission. This commission has enjoyed high levels of trust in Indonesian society and has been in action against politicians, parliamentarians and businessmen of all stripes. Another point of contention has been the revision of the country's criminal law. This now includes criminal charges for certain forms of criticism targeting the president and for such matters as extra-marital sex. This latter point makes it unlikely that the many different student groups will forge any long-term alliance. [More protests](#), joined by workers, students and Islamic groups, some of them radical, took place against the "Omnibus Law" in October 2020 (Reuters, 13 October 2020).

In August 2020, another civil society group was formed, using the acronym 'KAMI' (Indonesian for 'us' -a short form of "Save Indonesia Action Coalition"). Its goal is to prevent any erosion of the country's founding principle of 'Pancasila'. Together with some former (and disgruntled) political figures and a former chairman of the Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, the current chairman of the Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) is also a member. This means that the promotion of a more Islamist agenda (thus increasing Indonesia's [religious polarization](#)) may be on the agenda as well (New Mandala, 28 September 2020). The fact that hardline Islamic leader Muhammad Rizieq Shihab, leader of the FPI, decided to [return to Indonesia](#) after three years of self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia also spells trouble for an already challenged government (Benar News, 11 November 2020). He and his supporters had been instrumental in campaigning against the Christian governor of Jakarta in his sentencing for blasphemy.

The COVID-19 crisis may prove to be contagious on more than one level: It is not only challenging Indonesia's public health system and its economy, but also its politicians. The federal government's [response](#) has been widely seen as being too slow, too indecisive and lacking coherence, well illustrated by the unclarity surrounding the Muslim "mudik" (going to one's hometown after Ramadan) and for the nation having one of the lowest COVID-19-test rates in the world (RSIS, 29 June 2020). The growing dependence on the [army](#) (in helping contain the spread of the virus and in organizing relief aid) has been another point of criticism (RSIS, 11 May 2020). On the other hand, the parties supporting Jokowi seem to be in a constant campaign-mode well ahead of the next elections, scheduled for 2024. Candidates are already being considered and a decisive pandemic response could serve to boost the election chances of provincial governors and others.

Religious landscape

Indonesia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	33,192,000	12.2
Muslim	216,526,000	79.5
Hindu	4,350,000	1.6
Buddhist	2,120,000	0.8
Ethno-religionist	5,800,000	2.1
Jewish	200	0.0
Bahai	27,500	0.0
Atheist	310,000	0.1
Agnostic	3,600,000	1.3
Other	6,297,000	2.3
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

According to WCD 2020 estimates, 79.5% of the population is Muslim. There are also millions of atheists/agnostics and followers of ethnic religions, Hinduism (mainly on Bali), Chinese folk religion and Buddhism.

While Christianity became a major religion in eastern Indonesia, Islam became strong in the western and central parts, especially on the most populous island, Java. The very special brand of Islam in Indonesia, named “Islam Nusantara” by its largest organisation *Nahdlatul Ulama*, has been relatively moderate and tolerant towards other religions. However, it received a strong blow with the successful blasphemy campaign during the election of Jakarta’s governor early in 2017. Governor “Ahok” had been the first Christian governor in Jakarta for more than five decades, so his prison sentence for blasphemy and the emotionally charged (and religiously motivated) election campaign, might prove a game-changer for Christians in the country. Another shock were the bomb attacks against three churches in Surabaya in May 2018. Polls reveal that an increasing number of Muslims hold negative views concerning religious minorities such as Christians.

The influence of radical Islamic organizations is growing. Neither federal nor local governments dare to ignore their demands, fearing public unrest. Such organizations, one of the most radical and vocal being the "Front Pembela Islam" (FPI - which translates as "Islamic Defence Front"), played a prominent role in the presidential elections and supported Jokowi's rival, Prabowo Subianto, a former army general. However, the FPI did not renew its status as an official mass organization ("Ormas"), leaving it without legal recognition, although that does not mean the movement will be [illegal](#) or simply disappears (Jakarta Globe, 31 December 2019). In November 2019, the Minister of Religious Affairs stated publicly that he [supported a renewal](#) of the status and even said the FPI is participating in "advancing the country" (Jakarta Post, 28 November 2019). The FPI does not need the Ormas status to mobilize supporters, especially now that their leader has returned to Indonesia in November 2020, as was proven by large crowds greeting him on the streets before the airport. The Indonesian government has taken action to close a radical Islamic group called "*Hizb-ut-Tahrir Indonesia*" in 2017, but this is just one of the smaller groups active in Indonesia.

Indonesia has been and remains - together with the Philippines - the most religious country in the world, that is, according to a survey published in July 2020: 98% of the respondents said that religion is [very important](#) in their lives (Pew Forum, 20 July 2020). By far the bigger challenge is that society as a whole holds increasingly religious conservative views. A study, published in May 2018, found that a growing number of students hold [Islamist views](#) and 39% of those surveyed had been exposed to radical Islamic ideology (Benar News, 3 May 2018). The local NGO Setara Institute published a study on ten public universities in Indonesia in June 2019, showing how Islamic radicals are [using university structures](#) to win followers (UCA News, 3 June 2019). Thus, the next generation is being educated to hold very conservative or even radical Islamic views. This is likely to lead to an increase in societal discrimination and even to violence towards Christians in the future – and not just in Aceh and other hot-spots.

One of the great unknowns at the moment is how the largest Muslim organizations in the country – the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and the *Muhammadiyah* – will counter the growing radicalization in the country. Traditionally, they were seen as moderate and tolerant towards other religious groups, but especially the youth organization of NU has been vocal in calling for a more conservative understanding of Islam. Whereas Vice-president Amin is a senior figure in NU, Yahya Staquf, General-secretary of NU continues to take a strong stand against [radicalism in Islam](#), a battle he admits he is not optimistic about winning (International-LaCroix, 18 February 2019).

Religious minorities such as the Ahmadis (a Muslim minority) and Christians are frequent targets for discrimination and acts of violence, but Indonesia is still a very diverse nation: One province, Aceh, at the western tip of Sumatra, is ruled by Sharia law and is even tightening its rules; several other provinces have also introduced Sharia by-laws, leaving Christians in particular in a difficult situation; but at the same time, there are Christian-majority and Hindu-majority provinces as well. Nevertheless, the massive demonstrations against Jakarta's ex-Governor Purnama and the May 2018 attacks against three churches have made Christians and other religious minorities in Indonesia nervous, since radical Islamic groups are becoming more outspoken and are obviously gaining more and more influence in the public sphere.

Economic landscape

According to [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300 onwards):

- **Gross National Income per capita (PPP 2011 USD):** 11,256
- **Poverty:** 1.2% of the population are living in multidimensional poverty, a further 9.1% are vulnerable to it. 10.6% of the population are living below the national poverty line.
- **Remittances:** These make up 1.08% of the national GDP

According to [World Bank's April 2020 update](#) (accessed July 2020):

- Indonesia has become an upper middle income country, according to the World Bank's most recent classification.
- **GDP per capita (PPP, constant 2017 international USD):** 11,812
- **GDP per capita growth rate:** 3.9%
- **Poverty gap at 5.50 USD a day (2011 PPP):** 20.9%

Indonesia is the largest economy in Southeast Asia (SEA) and is developing fast considering its unique geographical challenge of being made up of seventeen thousand islands. The government puts a strong emphasis on the development of infrastructure such as airports, ports, railroad connections and (toll) roads. For this, Indonesia relies on Chinese help and loans (for example for the highspeed rail between Jakarta and Bandung), but China is just one of a whole group of co-partners and Indonesia has taken care not to make itself as dependent on China as other SEA countries have done. Japan has been another important partner in infrastructure. In 2019, the first section of a mass transport train network system ([MRT and LRT](#)) was opened in Jakarta and plans for its rapid extension exist, a Japanese official called the project of bringing the lines to Jakarta "the project of the century" (Straits Times, 24 March 2019). Another project is the giant [embankment/polder system](#) planned in cooperation with the Netherlands and South Korea protecting Jakarta from floods (Antara News, 22 February 2020).

The growth of the middle class, predominantly in urban areas, has led to increasing prosperity and consumption which strengthens society as a whole. However, at the same time, Indonesia is one of the most unequal societies in Southeast Asia, the GINI ratio (measuring inequality in a society by income) [hovering around 0.4](#), although the poverty rate declined strongly in recent years, standing at 10.6%, according to the national definition (Indonesia at Melbourne, 27 November 2018). But numbers can be misleading: While the unemployment rate was below the 5% mark, a stunning three quarters of all employees (in the non-agricultural sectors) work in [the informal sector](#) and thus face socially insecure conditions (UCA News, 14 June 2019), especially in a pandemic situation.

Indonesia is the tenth largest economy worldwide in PPP terms (16th in absolute terms) and grew annually at a rate of more than 5%. Covid-19 [slowed](#) this growth to 3% in the first quarter of 2020, the slowest growth since 2001 (World Bank, 16 July 2020) and in the later quarters of 2020, the country entered its first recession since 1998. Indonesia is one of the countries expected to benefit from the US-China trade war and has the potential to become the [seventh](#) (some say even [fifth](#)) largest economy in the world within 20 years (McKinsey, 1 September 2012 and The Independent, 2 September 2017). It is seen as one of the countries benefitting from a

[dislocation](#) of businesses away from China, but needs to cut red tape for maximizing this effort (ASEAN Today, 30 July 2020). Indonesia depends strongly on its export of commodities, including oil and gas. It is also a large exporter of palm oil and thus tries to diversify its export markets due to expected import restrictions on palm oil to Europe. President Jokowi has announced his intention to put a strong emphasis on the "Islamic economy" (i.e. the export of Halal products and the expansion of Sharia-conform financial products and tourism etc.). But for now, all efforts need to be focused on getting the economy back on track after the COVID-19 disruption. The "Omnibus bill", fast-tracked before COVID-19 arrived, was planned to help in speeding up economic development, but has also created [far-reaching fears and protests](#) on the streets (The Diplomat, 6 October 2020). That it was published in several versions, differing by several dozen pages did not add assurance.

One of the challenges haunting Indonesian development is the deeply-rooted corruption. The country sits at [rank 85](#) in Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Perception Index and on an almost weekly basis, new cases of corruption are uncovered, affecting local and national politicians from all parties and state-owned and private companies. The office investigating these cases, the KPK, is known to have had teeth and courts tend to issue harsh sentences, which has been one of the reasons to limit its impact by new laws referred to above. Many citizens are weary of the continued corruption of the politicians and are uninterested in politics, but this did not help a clean-sheet politician like "Ahok" at all, as religion (i.e. Islam) still trumps all other considerations in Indonesia.

According to a report published by the [World Bank in July 2020](#), COVID-19 disrupted economic growth and sent millions of people into unemployment, particularly affecting residents in Metro Jakarta. A quick recovery is hampered by the fact that according to the same study, only an estimated 21% of all jobs can be carried out from home (World Bank, p.21). Even before the pandemic struck, the government was on its way to adopt an Omnibus Bill for job creation, amending 79 different laws; such a law may be needed even more now (p.43). At the same time, the Bill was hotly debated as it limits workers' rights, among other things. Depending on the region, due to discrimination, Christians may face more problems in finding jobs in a struggling economy. Apart from that, they are facing the same difficulties as everyone else.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300) and the [World Factbook](#) (updated February 2020):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Javanese 40.1%, Sundanese 15.5%, Malay 3.7%, Batak 3.6%, Madurese 3%, Betawi 2.9%, Minangkabau 2.7%, Buginese 2.7%, Bantenese 2%, other 23.8% (2010 est.)
- **Main languages:** Bahasa Indonesia (official, modified form of Malay), English, local dialects (of which the most widely spoken is Javanese).
- **Urbanization rate:** 55.3%
- **Literacy rate:** 95.4%
- **Mean years of schooling:** 8.0 years
- **Health and education indicators:** Per 10,000 people, Indonesia has 3.8 physicians and 12 hospital beds, the pupil teacher ratio in primary school is 16:1.

According to [World Bank's April 2020 update](#) (accessed July 2020):

- **Population/Age:** 26.2% of the population is below the age of 14, 6% is above the age of 65
- **Education:** The primary school completion rate is 102.3%.
- **Unemployment:** 4.7%, 47.9% are in vulnerable employment and the rate of people in the non-agricultural sector in informal employment is 74.7%.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** Indonesia is neither a specific target nor source country, refugees - e.g. from the Middle East, Africa or Afghanistan - are present, especially in the cities, but their numbers are small.
- **Malnourishment:** Approximately one of three children under the age of five suffer from stunting.

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (2019):

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.707, Indonesia ranks 111th out of 189 countries. Its development has been slow and steady.
- **Life expectancy:** 71.5 years
- **Median age:** 29.7 years
- **Gender inequality:** With a score of 0.451, Indonesia ranks 103rd of 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index.
- **Youth unemployment:** Youth (between 15 and 24 years of age) not in school or employment is 21.4%.

Indonesia is the fourth most populated country in the world, with more than 40% under the age of 25. It has therefore a surplus in workforce and an estimated 4.5 million people working abroad, 70% of whom are women, who mainly work as domestic maids and nannies, while male workers are often construction or plantation workers, many of them working in neighboring Malaysia. Most of these migrant workers are without their families which leads to emotional distress and many other challenges shared by migrant workers all over the world (weak legal position, abuse etc). The government strives to increase the production and service sector and education is widely seen as a key to progress.

In order to improve the livelihood of young people in particular, better education and skills are required. This has been a main focus in the second term of the Jokowi government. Indonesia opened the tertiary education sector for international partners and in February 2020, Australian [Monash University](#) became the first foreign university to open a campus in the country (Jakarta Globe, 10 February 2020). From 2014 onwards, the government implemented a public health insurance system with the goal of covering all citizens. [Challenges](#) remain, however, as the fees are necessarily low and infrastructure is difficult (WHO, 2017). According to the already mentioned July 2020 [World Bank study](#), between 2001 and 2018 expenditure for public health increased by 22% annually and the health insurance covers 83% of the population now (page 48). Compared to other similar countries, however, Indonesia lags behind.

Indonesia enjoys a democracy, despite challenges, and strong media. Debates in parliament are lively and open, with room for discussion and questioning government action. However, the most recent government has co-opted almost all parties into the government, so there is no

strong opposition. The media have grown in influence too, becoming a fourth source of power alongside the legislative, executive and judiciary powers. Whether the issue is attacks on religious minorities (mostly labelled as “sectarian strife”) or rampant corruption, the media (newspapers, TV, radio and social media) do not shy away from reporting. A growing number of non-governmental organizations complete this picture. However, in reality such reporting does not change much. The radical Islamic groups taking to the streets are far more effective at influencing both society’s point of view and government action - as was shown in the blasphemy case against Jakarta’s Christian ex-governor. Another factor is the strong influence that social media has, especially among young people (see “Technological landscape” below).

One particularly strong social factor is the country's continued trend towards urbanization. Citizens from across the islands come to the bigger cities in search of work and a better life. This trend can be felt in many cities, but has become so evident in Metro Jakarta (with an estimated 30 million inhabitants) that the government decided to relocate the capital. More than 55% of the population live in an urbanized environment; however, this still means that around 120 million people are living in rural areas - and the difference is extreme: The growing openness in criticizing the powerful does not reach all citizens, since local strongmen in rural areas have more means for staying in power.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that an estimated 60% of the whole population live on the Island of Java, which comprises just 6.7% of Indonesia's territory. This means that people from the other islands sometimes feel overlooked as a lot of development focuses on Java. This is also a reminder that Indonesia is a patchwork of hundreds of different ethnicities, languages and cultures.

No matter which island is considered, the COVID-19 crisis had devastating consequences for all of them. According to a [government](#) projection from April 2020, more than five million Indonesians lost their jobs and more than three million were added to the poverty statistics (Jakarta Post, 15 April 2020). Indonesia is the country with the most confirmed cases of infection in East Asia and had expected the peak for its [first wave](#) in September 2020 (CNBC, 23 July 2020), although at the end of November 2020, the numbers were still climbing. The [testing ratio](#) is the second-lowest (after Egypt) of the strongest affected countries in the world (Statista, last accessed 24 August 2020). Another challenge is that workers from the younger generation, who had flocked to the cities and may have even been able to send remittances home, now may be [forced to return](#), making life in the rural areas even more difficult (New Mandala, 23 September 2020).

Christians participate in social and cultural life like everyone else, but while in urban areas they rather tend to belong to the middle class, in rural areas they are often facing poverty and related challenges. It is noteworthy that, according to the official [government statistics](#), the provinces with the highest levels of poverty in Indonesia (Papua, West Papua, NTT and Maluku) have a Christian majority population or a large Christian minority (Maluku with 46%). There are geographical and infrastructural reasons for this as well; other majority Christian provinces do better in these terms.

Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed July 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 64.1% penetration - survey date: December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 50.1% penetration – survey date: January 2020

According to [World Bank's Country profile \(2018\)](#):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 119.3 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2020](#):

- "Internet freedom in Indonesia declined due to an increase in disinformation and pro-government propaganda, as well as technical attacks targeting activists, journalists, and civil society. The government again restricted internet access during the coverage period; in August and September 2019, connectivity was limited amid protests in Papua and West Papua provinces. However, a court later ruled in support of civil society groups, declaring the restrictions unlawful. Meanwhile, critics of the government, journalists, and ordinary users continued to face criminal charges and harassment in retaliation for their online activity."
- Due to Indonesia censoring the Internet and social media, it was only labelled "partly free" and noted a deterioration in scores. On the other hand, blocking channels due to terrorism-related content has to be seen in relation to the fact that terror and insurgents' attacks are a reality in the country. The government tries to respect rights and freedom, as was illustrated in the post-election violence in Jakarta in May 2019, when all kinds of fake news (including doctored photos) were shared on social media. Instead of shutting everything down completely, the government reacted by slowing down Internet speed for several days and blocked the possibility of uploading and sharing photos and videos. Despite the existing censorship and all other inherent dangers, social media remains for millions of people (especially the younger generation) the source of choice for staying informed.
- Freedom House quotes sources giving the range of people using the Internet at around 175 million people. Internet coverage is strongest on Java, which is the most populated island. According to Freedom House, there are 338 million mobile phone subscriptions, each Indonesian uses 1.24 mobile phones, making it one of the highest rates in the world and consequently social media is greatly in use.

The Internet penetration rate is much higher in urban areas. It should be kept in mind that the comparably small island of Java alone hosts close to 60% of the whole Indonesian population. In a country with 17,000 islands, there are infrastructural challenges for making Internet access possible. In October 2019, the government announced the finalization of the "Palapa Ring", a massive broadband [infrastructure project](#) spanning more than 12,000 kilometers (Submarine Telecoms Forum, 16 October 2019).

Security situation

Indonesia decided to [ban the return](#) of battle-hardened Islamic State group militants and their family members from Syria and Iraq. Although this may initially help the authorities in coping with the danger of Islamic extremism, it will not stop the militants from quietly seeping in via the thousands of islands (Reuters, 11 February 2020). How dangerous such an unmonitored return can be was clearly illustrated in the capture of the town of Marawi in neighboring Mindanao/Philippines, which was supported by Indonesian Islamic fighters. The triple suicide-bomb attack against churches in May 2018 sent shockwaves through the country and region, and attacks on religious minorities not only occur frequently, they are also regularly left unpunished, especially when they are considered insignificant by the authorities. This leads to a climate of growing fear and desperation. Another example is the suicide bombing of the Roman Catholic Cathedral in neighboring Jolo/Philippines on 27 January 2019, claiming 20 lives, which was carried out by an [Indonesian couple](#) (Benar News, 25 July 2019).

[Radical Islamic groups](#) in Indonesia are using the COVID-19 crisis as a time for [regrouping](#) and strengthening their ranks (The Diplomat, 23 June 2020 and UCA News, 26 May 2020). While there have been suicide and bomb attacks against [security forces](#), they have remained [small scale](#) so far (RSIS; 23 January 2020 and Benar News, 1 June 2020). The police warned that the *Jemaah Islamiyah* is regrouping, and in December 2019, *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah* challenged the authorities with an [attack](#) against then-Security Minister Wiranto (Jamestown, 17 December 2019). The *Mujahideen Indonesia Timur* (MIT) continue to be [active](#) despite their small size and enjoy [community support](#) (Benar News, 15 April 2020 and IPAC, 28 April 2020). Thus, the country is starting to lose its model character of being a successfully democratic country housing a tolerant form of Islam, although it is fighting with some success against violent forms of radical Islam. Nevertheless, these attacks highlight the difficulties caused by the porous borders between the Island states of Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia.

The May 2018 bombings in Surabaya represent the largest radical Islamic attack since the Bali attacks in October 2005 and the largest attacks against Christians since the year 2000. The May 2018 suicide family killed 18 Christians and left many others severely injured. The attackers were motivated by Islamic State ideology, illustrating the worrying trend of radicalization, this time affecting members of a whole family. There have also been further bomb attacks targeting government security forces. This all adds to a picture of growing volatility and insecurity, affecting in particular religious minorities like Christians. The fact that it was easier for an Indonesian couple to carry out a bomb attack against a church in the Philippines (see WWL 2021 Country Dossier Philippines) than in their home country, points to the effectiveness of Indonesia's security agencies. At the same time, it illustrates the challenges that radical ideology and porous borders pose.

The police are not generally biased against religious minorities, but appear to be more concerned with keeping the peace in a given community rather than with enforcing the law or constitutional rights. Indonesia's intelligence and counter-terrorism forces are renowned and much more effective than most of its ASEAN peers. Militant Islamic cells are frequently unearthed, so that the largest danger does not seem to come from radical Islamic networks or organizations, but from so-called "lone wolves". However, Islamist ideology has clearly made

inroads into the country - the preferred avenue for young people being the Internet and social media, which radicals know how to use for their purposes very well. And there are groups like *Jamaah Ansharul Khilafah*, which focus on [Islamic mission](#) ("dawah") and act according to the motto "continue to teach and bide your time" (The Diplomat, 13 August 2020). Correspondingly, there are reports that IS stepped up their [recruiting efforts](#) in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, taking advantage of governments being distracted by the COVID-19 crisis situation (Benar News, 23 September 2020).

Another challenge which needs to be mentioned here and which concerns the Christian minority (and Indonesia as a whole) is the situation in Papua. There is a violent insurgency seeking independence or autonomy and while atrocities are committed from both sides, security forces hide behind a continuing communication blackout, as could be seen in the aftermath of the events in [Wamena](#), where in September 2019, at least 33 people died (Jakarta Post, 28 October 2019). COVID-19 has been a catalyst for conflict and increasing [tensions with migrants](#) from other provinces in Papua (IPAC, 13 April 2020). The status of "special autonomy (otsus)" for Papua is going to [expire](#) after twenty years in 2021 and negotiations about a renewal or replacement pose the opportunity for discussing security as well as minority and human rights issues (IPAC, 30 July 2020). In September 2020, a Protestant pastor was killed, according to independent investigations by a member of the Indonesian military (see above).

Trends analysis

1) The government is struggling to keep the country together as radicalization rises

Indonesia faces difficult times ahead. The fact that ethnic and religious affiliation have been used for political gain without concern for the consequences, has shocked many Indonesians and significantly harmed the country's international image of sponsoring a tolerant brand of Islam. Radicalization continues and is increasingly carried out online; schools, universities and the authorities are struggling to find an antidote against this. Concerning Islamism in Indonesia, there are a number of developments which need to be watched in the coming months and years:

a) Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), is [mired in a struggle](#) over its theological direction (RSIS, 23 January 2017). Many younger clerics view the relatively liberal brand of Islam Nusantara (a.k.a. "Islam of the Islands") as not being compatible with classic Islamic theology and values. Several young clerics have formed a group within NU, calling itself [the 'True Path'](#) (New Mandala, 8 August 2018). For decades, the Nahdlatul Ulama, used to follow a moderate course combined with politically neutrality, but in recent years, it has become [increasingly Islamist and politically active](#). (New Mandala, 11 July 2018). It remains to be seen if the fact that the Vice-president is a high dignitary of NU will translate into more conservative politics. Similarly, many members of the Muhammadiyah organization [do not agree](#) with their leader and have chosen to join more radical groups as well (RSIS, 4 May 2018). The fact that young members of Muhammadiyah are more interested in a radical understanding of Islam will have consequences for all future [elections](#) (UCA News, 25 April 2018). Both organizations are struggling to keep their vision of moderate [Islam in a pluralist society](#) central and young people engaged (New Mandala, 24 August 2020).

b) Given the increasing threat from radical and violent Islamic group resurgence, it remains to be seen how successful the authorities are in curbing this threat and whether attacks will be limited to the security organs or will target religious minorities again. At the same time, the government needs to find ways to reduce the community support for such groups in certain regions of the country. The fact that more and more radicalization happens online does not make this task easier. One other challenge is that until the end of 2021, there are [around 270 prison inmates](#) sentenced for terrorism-related charges poised for release, excluding those under police arrest. Even though the reoffending rate may only be around 10%, this poses a significant challenge for the authorities and for society at large (IPAC Report No. 66, 4 September 2020). A growing number of Indonesian supporters of Islamic State group (IS) ideology are resorting to home-schooling to raise a generation of [IS militant “cubs”](#) (RSIS, 28 August 2020).

c) Another question to watch is whether Indonesia will expand its blasphemy laws and what the potential implementation could look like. Human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) have [strongly warned against](#) such a move, but it may be seen by the president as an excellent way to accommodate the growing conservatism in society (HRW, 31 October 2019). [Recent research](#) has shown that voting for radical parties at the local level does not necessarily increase the level of violence, but encourages the majority population to take on board more radical and intolerant views (British Journal of Political Science, 2019, pp 1-8).

2) Growing authoritarianism and polarization

The fact that Indonesia is in danger of losing its reputation for following a tolerant brand of Islam, also means that the government feels obliged to defend the country's motto "Unity in Diversity" (and remain loyal to the nation's foundational ideology, Pancasila) more overtly. However, it will be an enormous challenge to take all citizens into consideration, including all ethnic and religious minorities. Efforts were made to draft a [Pancasila guidance law](#) but this would risk monopolizing its interpretation and could be misused as a political weapon, damaging both Pancasila's inclusive approach and the standing of religious minorities (RSIS, 8 July 2020). This topic has even been seen as having the potential to bring diverse Islamist groups [back together](#), campaigning for a common issue (IPAC Report No. 65, 13 August 2020). The return of FPI leader Rizieq to Indonesia may turn out to be a catalyst for the radical Islamic groups and one of his first sermons after his arrival set the tone to expect in the future: In that sermon he called for the [execution of those who blaspheme](#) against Islam (Jakarta Post, 18 November 2020). It has been re-assuring, that the State Administrative Court ruled that the blanket internet blackout in Papua was [unlawful](#) (Benar News, 3 June 2020), so there are still correctives in place, but more challenges have to be expected.

President Jokowi's second cabinet [includes](#) six ministers with a military background (including the minister for religion) and one with a police background, reflecting how much Indonesia still counts on the armed forces and how important security issues are (RSIS, 25 October 2019). However, it would be an over-statement to speak of a "re-militarization" of Indonesian politics (The Diplomat, 1 August 2020). [Authoritarianism](#) and majoritarianism are also being used in an effort to keep the country together and in balancing out difficulties and tensions (Brookings,

August 2020). Another facet of the growing authoritarianism is the continuation and actual increase of dynastic politics. Indonesia has always been prone to it, but the regional elections in December 2020 showed a new height: President Jokowi's oldest son was running for the mayoral position in Surakarta and in [Tangerang Selatan](#), Prabowo Subianto's niece will run against Ma'aruf Amin's daughter (Jakarta Post, 21 July 2020). This illustrates how difficult it is for minorities to get a voice against vested interests.

Finally, Indonesia's widely recognized democratic decline played out in its response towards the COVID-19 crisis. While growing religious conservatism and populism played a strong role, the increasing political polarization of the country between Islamists and so-called pluralists was seen as decisive (Mietzner, Populist Anti-Scientism, Religious Polarisation, and Institutionalised Corruption: How Indonesia's Democratic Decline Shaped Its COVID-19 Response, [Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs](#), 2020, Vol. 39 (2), pp. 227-249). This polarization will continue to define Indonesian politics.

3) COVID, China and other challenges

The challenges posed by weathering the COVID-19 storm and its economic and social fallout have already been mentioned above and will not be repeated here. The inconsistent and weak [response](#) will have longer lasting consequences far beyond the social and economic landscapes (Reuters, 20 August 2020). One additional challenge is how Indonesia positions itself as an emerging political and economic force as the fourth largest and largest Muslim country in the world.

Naturally, one of the biggest challenges is to find a working relationship with China. Although Indonesia has claimed not to have any territorial disputes with China and Chinese claims in the South China Sea, this is only half true as a [stand-off](#) between a Chinese flotilla and Indonesian forces in December 2019/January 2020 in the Indonesian Natuna Sea showed (RSIS, 20 January 2020). The installation of a military command center already sent a clear signal, but sending a [diplomatic note](#) to the UN Secretary General opposing China's claims was a rare public positioning of Indonesia's politics, backing ASEAN's position on this issue (Radio Free Asia, 28 May 2020).

The continued [funding](#) from Saudi Arabia has transformed Indonesia over the last three decades (The Guardian, 16 April 2020). Over the last years, the tolerant and inclusive brand of Islam in Indonesia has become a much more conservative one, as the country became a prime recipient of the full spectrum of Saudi proselytization. It remains to be seen how Indonesia positions itself in this respect as well and in how far society and Muslim organizations defending Pancasila (like NU and Muhammadiyah) prove resilient or even counter-effective to these efforts. The level of freedom which religious minorities like Christians enjoy depends in part on these factors.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Indonesia country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14921238>
- Recent history: relocation of the capital - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/26/indonesia-new-capital-city-borneo-forests-jakarta>
- Political and legal landscape: prominent place - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-election-islam-analysis/in-indonesias-election-the-winner-is-widodo-and-islam-idUSKCN1RU1PT>

- Political and legal landscape: shaping politics - <http://understandingconflict.org/en/conflict/read/80/Anti-Ahok-To-Anti-Jokowi-Islamist-Influence-on-Indonesias-2019-Election-Campaign>
- Political and legal landscape: Minister of Defence - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/new-cabinet-10232019161610.html>
- Political and legal landscape: New Islamic parties and movements - <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/indonesias-new-parties-evolving-conservative-landscape/>
- Political and legal landscape: raised his voice - <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2020/02/14/better-late-than-never.html>
- Political and legal landscape: on its land - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/02/indonesian-church-closed-for-years-told-you-can-reopen-if-mosque-allowed-on-your-land/>
- Political and legal landscape: relocated - <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/05/26/indonesian-ombudsman-asks-hkbp-filadelfia-to-accept-church-relocation-plan.html>
- Political and legal landscape: demonstrations - <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/30/protests-against-joko-widodo-rock-indonesia/>
- Political and legal landscape: various segments - <https://www.newmandala.org/indonesias-pro-democracy-protests/>
- Political and legal landscape: More protests - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-economy-protests/indonesia-islamic-groups-students-join-movement-to-scrap-jobs-law-idUSKBN26Y18Q>
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WWL 2021: Church information / Indonesia

Christian origins

Searching for the New World and exotic spices, Portuguese merchants came to Indonesia in 1511, firstly to Maluku, in the eastern part of the country. The Portuguese brought with them Roman Catholicism as the first seeds of Christianity in Indonesia.

According to a report compiled by Frederick W H and Worden R L (editors, Washington, 1993) entitled "[Indonesia – A Country Study](#)":

- “Christianity had a long history in the islands, with Portuguese Jesuits and Dominicans operating in the Malukus, southern Sulawesi, and Timor in the sixteenth century. When the Dutch defeated Portugal in 1605, however, Catholic missionaries were expelled and the Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church was virtually the only Christian influence in the region for 300 years. Whereas the United East Indies Company (VOC) was primarily a secular and not a religious enterprise, and because Calvinism was a strict, austere, and intellectually uncompromising variety of Christianity that demanded a thorough understanding of what, for Indonesians, were foreign scriptures, Christianity advanced little in Indonesia until the nineteenth century. Only a few small communities endured in Java, Maluku, northern Sulawesi, and Nusa Tenggara (primarily Roti and Timor). After the dissolution of the VOC in 1799, and the adoption of a more comprehensive view of their mission in the archipelago, the Dutch permitted proselytizing in the territory. This evangelical freedom was put to use by the more tolerant German Lutherans, who began work among the Batak of Sumatra in 1861.”
- “The twentieth century witnessed the influx of many new Protestant missionary groups, as well as the continued growth of Catholicism and of large regional and reformed Lutheran churches. Following the 1965 coup attempt, all nonreligious persons were labelled atheists and hence were vulnerable to accusations of harboring communist sympathies. At that time, Christian churches of all varieties experienced explosive growth in membership, particularly among those people who felt uncomfortable with the political aspirations of Islamic parties.”
- “In the 1990s, the majority of Christians in Indonesia were Protestants of one affiliation or another, with particularly large concentrations found in North Sumatra, Irian Jaya, Maluku, Central Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, and North Sulawesi. Catholic congregations grew less rapidly in the 1980s, in part because of the church's heavy reliance on European personnel. These Europeans experienced increasing restrictions on their missionary activities imposed by the Muslim-dominated Department of Religious Affairs.”

Church spectrum today

Indonesia: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	3,000	0.0
Catholic	8,100,000	24.4
Protestant	20,204,000	60.9
Independent	6,384,000	19.2
Unaffiliated	400,000	1.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-1,899,000	-5.7
Total	33,192,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	9,414,000	28.4
Renewalist movement	11,000,000	33.1

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Around a quarter of all Indonesian Christians are Catholic and they are recognized by the country's Constitution as a separate religion (while Protestants are recognized as "Christian"). Geographically, Catholics can be found throughout the archipelago, but they are a majority in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) with its island Flores and the famous Komodo islands. Protestants come in a great variety of denominations, some along ethnic lines (like Batak, Manadonese etc), others crossing ethnic and other boundaries to form Evangelical and - in particular - Pentecostal churches. These are found throughout the country but are more concentrated in eastern areas (such as in Papua and North Sulawesi). At the same time, there are pockets of Christianity in the western part of Indonesia, too, e.g. in North Sumatra. Due to missionary work by Dutch, Scandinavian and German missionaries in the 19th century, many

ethnic church denominations are Reformed or Lutheran (like the Batak, Toraja and others). The ethnic church denominations traditionally used to be limited to their region of origin but nowadays, due to work migration, their churches can be found in the larger cities throughout Indonesia, especially in Metro Jakarta.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Indonesia – A Country Study - <http://countrystudies.us/indonesia/>

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Indonesia

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Indonesia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	63	47
WWL 2020	60	50
WWL 2019	65	30
WWL 2018	59	38
WWL 2017	55	46

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

The increase in score of 3.3 points in WWL 2021 in comparison to WWL 2020 was due to the fact that more pressure against Christians was reported, resulting in an increase of score in all *spheres of life* (except in the *Church sphere* where the level of pressure dropped very slightly). There have been no bomb attacks against churches for a second WWL reporting period in a row, but some churches have been hindered in meeting. One pastor in Papua was killed, allegedly by a government soldier, and more than 50 Christians were evicted from their land in East Nusa Tenggara (see section below on "Violence"). Dozens of radical Muslims have been arrested by the authorities and attacks foiled.

Persecution engines

Indonesia: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Weak
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Weak
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
Christian Denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very weak

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

Indonesia is a country both blessed and challenged by its diversity. It hosts the largest Muslim population in the world, whose predominant brand of Islam is traditionally fairly tolerant, granting minorities some space. This brand of Islam is often called *Islam Nusantara* or Island Islam, referring to the archipelago's unique topography of more than 17,000 islands and to its diversity. It is a term which was coined by the country's largest Muslim organization, *Nahdlatul Ulama*.

In regard to geography as well as religion, Indonesia is one of the most de-centralized and diverse countries in the world. Although the Constitution of Indonesia guarantees religious freedom, various regions and territories of Indonesia are governed by a host of Islamic by-laws, including Sharia law in the Province of Aceh. Despite some radical and even violent Islamic groups being officially banned, they continue to wield a significant influence. The authorities are learning a lesson that governments are learning all round the world: Simply banning radical Islamic groups does not make them go away. They will often simply re-emerge under a different name. The return of firebrand preacher Rizieq, leader of the Islam Defenders' Front (FPI) on 10 November 2020 will add not just radical rhetoric (including against minorities), but also a sharply increased potential to mobilize supporters to take to the streets, thus putting pressure on the government to give in to its demands.

Indonesia's universities are known to be hotbeds of Islamic radicalization and so it is not surprising that a study published by the Indonesian government in May 2018 revealed that a growing number of students hold [Islamist views](#) (Benar News, 3 May 2018). Money from Saudi Arabia is pouring into Indonesia for educational purposes and has the effect of bringing Wahhabi ideology into the country. The uphill task of countering intolerant and [at times totally anti-Christian attitudes](#) was highlighted in a research paper presented in New Mandala on 1 June 2018, where differences in Indonesia's 34 provinces were discussed (New Mandala, 1 June 2018). In the survey, responses to the following five statements were requested:

1. Christians are often dishonest and self-interested.
2. Indonesia would be a better place if there were no Christians in this country.
3. Christians have the right to be elected as regent, mayor, or governor, even in regions where Muslims are the majority.
4. I would be opposed to any church being built in my neighborhood.
5. Christians must be allowed to stage demonstrations to protest discrimination against their religion.

Despite some concerns about the methodology employed, the results are clear enough: Broadly speaking, Aceh is the least tolerant and Kalimantan Utara the most tolerant. Among the provinces in Java, Banten is the least tolerant, followed by Jakarta, Jawa Barat, Jawa Timur, and Yogyakarta. Radical ideology is spreading its roots and not only Christians are affected by this; Muslim minority groups such as Ahmadis suffer as well.

The large rallies protesting against Ahok have led to a [more intolerant attitude in society](#) in general, as one research paper showed (Coconuts, 25 September 2018). While in 2016, 48% of respondents to a survey by the Indonesian Survey Institute said that they would oppose a non-Muslim president, this figure rose to 59% in 2018. A similar rise is noticeable when this question is asked in reference to the vice-president, governors and mayors. On the other hand, the survey shows that the number of people opposing non-Muslims building houses of worship in their neighborhood dropped from 64% to 52% - although it should be noted that this figure is still more than half.

A study published in October 2018 found that 57% of all teachers are [intolerant of other religions](#) (Coconuts, 17 October 2018). The Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) at State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah discovered in its survey that more than 37% of all teachers said that they had or wanted to 'undertake intolerant actions'. 56% of respondents disagreed with non-Muslims establishing places of worship in their neighborhood, and 21% disagreed with neighbors of other religions holding religious events. Keeping in mind that this group has the task of teaching and educating Indonesia's next generation, this does not look promising for the country's future and the Persecution engine *Islamic oppression* will almost certainly gain more strength as a result. These attitudes are unlikely to have changed much in the last two years.

Religious nationalism - Hindu (Weak):

Although the level of strength of this persecution engine is rated as 'weak', it is mentioned here, not least as a reminder for the diversity of Indonesia. As already stated above, Indonesia is one

of the most diverse countries in the world as far as language, ethnicity or religion is concerned. One example of this is the predominantly Hindu island of Bali. If a Hindu becomes a Christian, he/she experiences strong pressure from family, friends and neighbors to return to the belief of the fathers.

Drivers of persecution

Indonesia:									
Drivers of persecution per engine	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	WEAK	WEAK	-	WEAK	-	-	-	VERY WEAK
Government officials	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very strong	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- Violent religious groups (Very strong) and Ideological pressure groups (Medium):** There is a plethora of violent and partly terrorist-related groups, two of which have been banned by the government: *Hizb-ut Tahrir Indonesia* in May 2017 and *Jemaah Anshorut Daulah* in July 2018. In everyday life, groups like *Islamic Defender Front (FPI)*, the *Islamic Community Forum (FUI)*, *Islamic Jihad Front (FJI)* and the *Indonesian Mujahideen Council (MMI)* affect Christian communities much more and have been behind opposition to churches, for instance. These organizations wield an increasing influence on society and politics alike.

They publicly use strict religious interpretations to justify the implementation of Sharia law and the infringement of the rights of religious minorities. They are able to mobilize hundreds of thousands for street demonstrations and are also used by some politicians and parties to gain electoral leverage. Recently, some of them have started to build Islamic political parties themselves. The line towards ideological pressure groups is very fine and hard to draw. But not all Islamic radical groups resort to violence.

- **Normal citizens (Very strong):** Local communities are becoming increasingly active in hindering church congregations from meeting and in complaining about their presence, sometimes by arguing that they need to [keep their Islamic faith pure](#) and the presence of a Christian church makes this difficult (Jakarta Post, 10 July 2019, other examples see below). The rising popularity of very conservative Islamic preachers online contributes towards this attitude as well. At times, this can lead to mob violence and the forced closure of places of worship, often facilitated by the violent religious groups mentioned.
- **Government officials (Strong):** The government per se is less of a driver of persecution at the national level, even though it shows little concern for the situation of religious minorities. All government officials are sworn to follow and defend the country's national ideology, Pancasila. However, in practice, government officials (especially at the local level) make it hard for Christians to obtain church permits and deliberately fail to bring perpetrators of crime against Christians to justice. In many cases, officials are more concerned about keeping the harmony in a community in balance rather than protecting the rights of the minority. This varies from region to region, but in general, the list of provinces named in the Persecution engines section above applies here as well.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Persecution comes from radical Islamic religious leaders, who instigate hatred against Christians and other religious minorities via their teaching in mosques and in the mass media, especially the Internet and social media, one example being Abdul Somad. They have also at times masterminded attacks. When normal citizens are stirred up to act against a minority, they are often led by (their) religious leaders. These may be leaders from the local mosque, but they can also be leaders from outside the community. One example here is the FPI, which is gaining in strength and organizational power with the return of their self-exiled leader (see above).
- **(Extended) family (Strong):** In many cases, converts are challenged by their own families to return to their original faith. Sometimes the family simply cuts all ties. Generally, social ostracism and verbal abuse is an every-day experience for converts. Although physical violence is rare, many converts prefer, if possible, to relocate to bigger cities, a move which is sometimes facilitated by the strong work migration.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Some political parties have a political Islamic agenda. Several conservative Muslim political parties, e.g. the PKS, are known for pushing their goal of setting up a purely Islamic nation. Their representatives in the local legislations are often behind the drafting and passing of Sharia-inspired policies (including in the field of education), despite having relatively few voters supporting them at national level. They are

suspected of having ties with some of the violent vigilante groups, but carefully avoid any visible connections. On the national level, PKS is the only opposition party at the moment, which may make it easier to stand up for their positions. It remains to be seen whether the newly founded Islamic parties (Ummah Party, New Masyumi, etc.) gain political traction.

Drivers of Religious nationalism - Hindu:

- **(Extended) family (Medium):** The strongest pressure on converts to Christianity comes from their own family. They will constantly try to convince the convert to return to his or her original faith. The level of pressure varies from family to family.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Hindu converts are under pressure from their religious leaders, who see leaving Hinduism as seriously weakening their community which is already in a minority position. They will use their influence in the community to oppose conversions and, if possible, to bring converts back to Hindu faith.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** Adding to the pressure already mentioned above, friends, neighbors and community members often show converts that they have placed themselves outside the whole of society. This is especially true in rural areas.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The primary hotbed of persecution in Indonesia is the Province of Aceh at the north-western tip of Sumatra, the only province which is governed by Sharia law. Churches were closed there on a large scale in October 2015 and the building of new churches is much more difficult there than in other provinces - indeed it is virtually impossible. Converts from Islam run the risk of facing severe opposition in many parts of Indonesia, but converts in Aceh probably face the strongest pressure.

Other hotspots are regions within the provinces of West Sumatra (Sumatera Barat), Banten, West Java (Jawa Barat), but also East and Central Java (Jawa Timur and Jawa Tengah). The anti-terror police unit, Densus 88, is effective against potentially violent Islamic militant activity in the whole country.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not scored separately in WWL analysis.

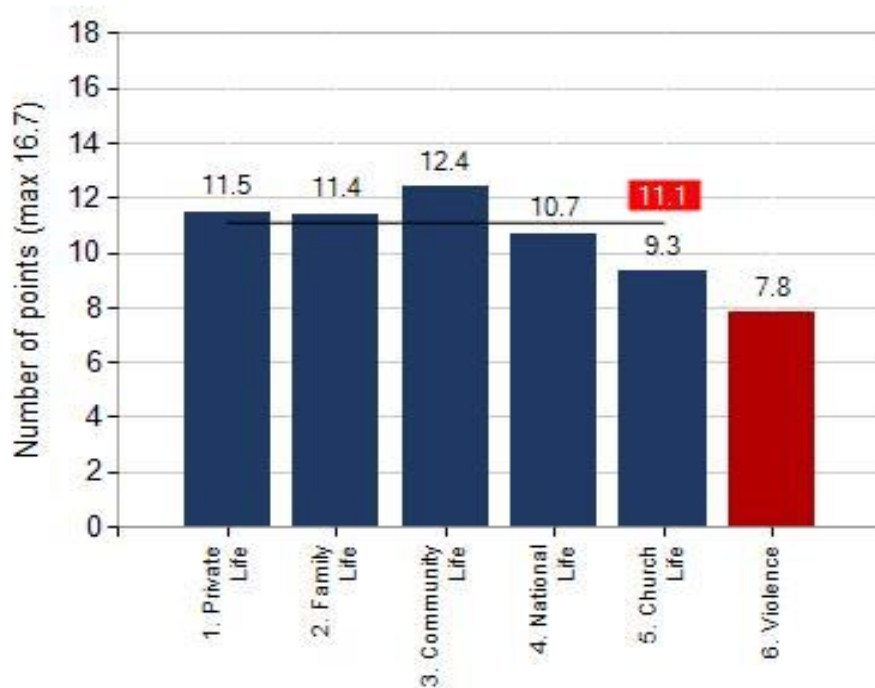
Historical Christian communities: These are groups such as the Roman Catholic Church, but also churches related to various ethnicities (such as the Batak Christian Protestant Church). They are monitored and experience opposition once it is noted that they are growing. The historical churches in poorer regions like Papua, East Nusa Tenggara and Mentawai are subject to aggressive [Islamization attempts](#), especially among children (La Croix International, 14 August 2018).

Converts to Christianity: Converts are mainly from a Muslim background and face the most severe persecution, especially in the hot-spot areas. There, they are closely monitored and try to blend in with the surrounding society. If their conversion is discovered, they are put under pressure to give up their new faith. Similarly, on the predominantly Hindu island of Bali, if a Hindu becomes a Christian, he/she experiences strong pressure. Pressure on converts comes mainly from family, friends, community and the local authorities. In general, the pressure on converts in cities is less than in rural areas.

Non-traditional Christian communities: The main congregations in this category are Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal. They tend to make themselves conspicuous by their often fervent propagation of the Christian message, which leads them to be targeted by communities and radical Islamic groups alike. Building or renovating a church can be fraught with difficulties – the authorities must issue a permit and Islamic groups and neighbors will often attempt to hinder the actual building process. This can affect all denominations, as was shown in Jambi, where in 2019 a Methodist, a Pentecostal and a Huria Kristen church were closed. It should be noted that Catholic churches can also face the very same problems when it comes to building and renovating.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Indonesia



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Indonesia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Indonesia is at a high level, rising from 10.7 points in WWL 2020 to 11.1 in WWL 2021.

- Pressure is strongest in the *Community* and *Private spheres* closely followed by the *Family sphere*. This pattern is typical in situations where Christian converts from a Muslim background draw the most persecution.
- In WWL 2021, the score for violence against Christians increased by 1.3 points. The score had been 12.0 points in WWL 2019 due to the triple suicide attack against churches in Surabaya in May 2018. For two years, there had been no major attacks against churches, but in September 2020, a pastor in Papua was tortured and killed.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2021 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)

While it is legal to convert from one religion to another, at least as far as the six officially recognized religions are concerned, conversion is despised and even strictly opposed by many families. There are cases where converts were thrown out of their families or children were taken away. Converts can expect to face further problems, e.g. when trying to change religion on their ID cards. Knowing this, most converts prefer to keep a low-profile and hide their new-won faith.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)

As conversion is not seen as a private matter, family and society will not normally stay quiet and listen when converts share their faith. But even other Christians need to be wise in what to say and to whom, as speaking about one's faith can quickly be perceived as being an attempt at proselytism. This is especially true in hotspot areas like Aceh, East Java, Banten, West Java and West Sumatra, but also increasingly in other places as well.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.00 points)

While many Christians in Indonesia are very active in social media and also share about their faith openly, for Christians coming from a Muslim or Hindu background it is dangerous to reveal their identity in such a way and they therefore seldomly express their faith in written form. Especially since the case of ex-Governor Ahok, Christians are being increasingly careful not to provoke the public's anger and weigh their words so as not to be perceived as slandering another faith or as proselytizing.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.00 points)

While it is normally no problem to wear or show Christian symbols at home, this is often different for converts as it points to their new faith and therefore draws unwanted attention. In regions where Islam is getting stricter, even Christians from both historical and non-traditional Protestant churches often prefer not to wear a visible Christian symbol, in order not to provoke any trouble or harassment in communities.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.75 points)

Based on Republic of Indonesia Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection and supported by Government Regulation Number 54 of 2007, spouses who adopt a child must be of the same faith or religion as the child's biological parents. If the religion of the child's biological parents is not known, the religion of the majority of the population in the region is used as basis.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)

The government has issued a regulation according to which schools have to provide Christian teachers for religious studies. However, many schools at the regency/provincial levels such as in Aceh, Madura, Nusa Tenggara Barat and West Sumatra find it hard to provide Christian teachers. This means that many Christian children have to attend Islamic classes without being able to opt out, or they are sent to a church outside school in order to get Christian teaching. Although the Christians who take Islamic classes generally pass the exams, it is very hard for them to get high marks. To avoid such pressure, Christian parents who can afford to, send their children to a private school.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points)

Many Christian children face being bullied in school because of their faith; they are sometimes called "kafir" (unbeliever), told that God only recognizes Islam and that Christians will go to hell. Sometimes, teachers add to this by telling the class, for instance, that Christians have three gods. There are reports that bullying for faith reasons can also happen at higher education levels, such as at university, where even some lecturers may openly mock students who are Christians. In some regions, the bullying can develop into intimidation or pressure to deny their Christian faith. Many Muslim families forbid their children to play with Christian children.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.00 points)

Baptism has always been a problem for converts and they often need to be baptized far away from the places they are living. If a baptism service is possible, it will be low-key and not many people will be able to attend. Hindrances have been reported in Aceh, West Java, East Java, South Kalimantan and North Kalimantan where Christians have had to go out of their neighborhood in order to be baptized and still faced pressure when their baptism was discovered. Some

converts become afraid when their mentors or leaders encourage them to be baptized.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.50 points)

Education is the primary area where discrimination of Christians take places in Indonesia. There are reports from many provinces such as Aceh, West Sumatra, West Java, East Java, Nusa Tenggara Barat and Gorontalo indicating that discrimination is frequent and the number of Christians who are accepted to study at prestigious public universities is very limited. Many Christian students who are promising intellectuals choose to study abroad, if their parents are wealthy enough, or study in Christian universities, which are also expensive and whose quality is often poorer compared to public universities. There are some scholarships provided by the government for Indonesian students to study in prestigious universities home and abroad, but they are granted mostly to Muslim students. At school, it has happened that Christians are not ranked first in their class, despite having earned top marks. There has been a case reported where a child did not receive a school uniform whereas his Muslim peers got it for free.

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)

One visible example for this are the dress codes enforced in Aceh, but even in other parts of Indonesia, it is more and more common to see Islamic veils and even complete coverings for women. Another example is that Christians in some areas are harassed and ostracized because they are considered unclean, as they are eating pork. In November 2019, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) even warned Muslims to avoid using [greetings](#) from other religions as this may amount to heresy (Jakarta Post, 13 November 2019). There is a growing trend of Muslim-only neighborhoods ("Sharia housing complexes") throughout Indonesia, where some developers build housing complexes for Muslim residents only and non-Muslim are forbidden to rent/buy a house there. [Muslim-only residential areas](#) in and around Jakarta are mushrooming, 81 such areas have opened in recent years and more are planned to satisfy the increasing demand (Jakarta Post, 20 June 2019). This trend will make it more difficult for government politicians seeking to keep Indonesia a multi-cultural, multi-language and multi-religious society, which also upholds the rights of minorities.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 points)

This pressure is strongly exerted on new Christians from a Muslim background and can even lead to situations where converts cannot stand the pressure any longer and return to Islam. However, this pressure can also be put on non-convert Christians, particularly in places such as: Aceh, West Sumatra, Bima (NTB), Madura (East Java) Padang, Banten and West Jawa. This pressure is usually non-violent and comes in subtle forms such as 'jokes' or helpful advice for making progress in the professional or academic world, for example. In other places such as Mentawai

(West Sumatra), Papua, Nusa Tenggara Timur or Jambi (among the Anak Dalam tribe) the pressure to convert to Islam comes with an obligation to learn about Islam, if they want to receive financial and educational support and health care.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Discrimination against Christians at work is normal, especially in public offices at the local and regional level. (It is less strong at the national level.) Of course, it is hard to prove that discrimination has religious motives, but there have been many reports. For instance: In Central and East Java, NTB and Aceh, many Christians find it hard (or even impossible) to get promoted. Converts also face discriminative behavior from their employers and colleagues, if these find out about their Christian faith. Giving students poorer grades in religious education (see 2.8), is done in order to keep them from meeting the minimum requirements to become civil servants. Consequently, few Christians make it into the civil service. In June 2019, Indonesia's minister of defense publicly referred to an unpublished study which showed that 3% of the defense forces – around 12,000 members of the armed forces – were [sympathetic](#) towards hardline Islamic views (UCA News, 21 June 2019). Also in June 2019, a report showed that radical Islamic ideology is [spreading](#) within the civil service and various ministerial departments (Reuters, 21 June 2019). For this reason, high level public servants are to be vetted in the future.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)

In the last three years, one trigger being the Ahok case, Christians have become very cautious about sharing their views in public, especially when it comes to religion. Even many moderate Muslims are becoming more and more cautious. Statements perceived as opposing Islam quickly end with a charge of blasphemy, the most recent prominent one being the incident regarding the politician Grace Natalie in 2018.

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.50 points)

The Constitution does not directly limit the freedom of Christians, but it does only recognize six 'faiths': Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The Constitutional Court stated clearly in a verdict on 7 November 2017 that all religions have to be [treated equally](#), including indigenous religions (World Watch Monitor, 9 November 2017). The implementation, however, is still patchy and only a few communities actually apply it. Given the opposition it faces, it is unlikely that this decision will be implemented country-wide within the near future. Legislation on a local level often restricts religious freedom further. Also, the freedom for Christians to manifest their religion is hindered by a 2006 "presidential decree on Religious Harmony, Empowering Religious Harmony Forums, and Constructing Houses of Worship", making it challenging to obtain building permits for church buildings (see under 5.2 and "Persecution of other religious minorities"). Several provinces have implemented Sharia by-laws, which affect Christians as well.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.50 points)

Hate speech against Christians and Christian leaders can be found almost everywhere in Indonesia, even in the Christian pockets in North Sumatra. In many sermons and talks in mosques and other places, Christians are often the object of slander and made out to be scapegoats. But smear campaigns also happen in written form, for instance as posters and banners making accusations against Christians or rejecting the presence of churches. One example from the previous reporting period (WWL 2020) was a claim made by prominent preacher Abdul Somad in a video-sermon widely shared in social media: He claimed that an "infidel genie" lives in the [Christian cross](#) (UCA News, 23 August 2019).

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points)

One incident illustrating this was the disruption of worship at the home of a Christian during the the COVID-19 crisis by a mob led by a Muslim cleric. The police did not take steps against the [perpetrators](#) (Jakarta Post, 21 April 2020). See "Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period" above for more details.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 points)

Churches face considerable problems in the registration of congregations and in the construction of church-buildings. Based on the revised Joint Ministerial Decree of 2006, a church can only operate if: i) its congregation has at least 90 members, ii) it has the consent of 60 neighbors from another faith, and iii) it has the approval of both the regency chief (administrative subdivision of a province) and the inter-faith harmony forum. Many churches find the permit extremely hard to obtain, even if they have met all the necessary requirements. And if they do manage to receive the permit, there is no guarantee of protection from the government and local police.

In one case, a congregation filed its application five years ago and has never received any response from the authorities since. In other cases, radical groups simply block the entrance of church buildings and hinder access: The authorities then fail to enforce the law, even though courts have decided in favor of the churches. Because of all the difficulties that have to be expected, many churches decide not to try obtaining a permit in the first place. Based on a survey by the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), 85% of worship buildings in Indonesia have no proper permit, especially in rural areas. This includes mosques, churches and buildings used by other religions. Prior to building a church, the government of Aceh requires the congregation to collect 150 signatures from neighbors of a different religious background. In the Province of Banten, there has been a provincial regulation issued by the governor to limit the presence of churches to certain cities.

The rules of the Decree from 2006 have now been [brought before the Supreme Court](#) and it remains to be seen if they will remain unchanged (Jakarta Post, 25 March 2020). For the first time since taking office in 2014, President Jokowi has cautiously [spoken out against](#) the difficulties believers of minority religions are facing when they want to set up a place of worship (Jakarta Post, 14 February 2020).

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.50 points)

In many places, churches are monitored, especially when they are active in evangelistic outreach or suspected of including converts. This is true for rural areas, but also in urban areas radical groups watch and if necessary, intimidate Christian worship services. They are known to instigate protest rallies against churches, stirring up locals. In other cases, banners are erected warning against churches and making false and offensive claims. Sometimes, church buildings are simply blocked or closed by radical Islamic groups, which do not shy away from using violence as well. Even at a time when COVID-19 restrictions were imposed, there were reports from several places like Piau, West Java and Aceh that church meetings had been disrupted by mobs.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, outdoor meetings were not possible. But at other times, outdoor meetings were often not permitted due to the fear that the meeting might evoke the suspicion of attempted proselytism. In 2017, a scheduled event in Yogyakarta stadium celebrating 500 years of Protestant Reformation had to be cancelled due to protests from the local Muslim population and the radical MUI.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.50 points)

As already stated above, the Constitution does not prohibit changes in religious affiliation, provided that they take place within the six recognized religions. Consequently, there is no written regulation in Indonesia to prohibit churches from welcoming converts. Therefore many churches in the largest cities are confident enough to welcome new Christians from a Muslim or other background. Sometimes, these are even (social media) celebrities and their conversion causes a lot of attention. This, however, blurs the fact that is completely different in villages and rural areas, as churches can be quickly accused of proselytism and 'Christianization'. Therefore many churches are cautious and will refrain from welcoming and integrating converts.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (A symbolic number of 10 could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100 could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an

absolutely minimum figure. The symbol “x” denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.

Indonesia: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	1	0
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	16	10
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	2	4
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	2	2
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1	0
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	38	1
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	56	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

For the WWL 2021 reporting period:

- **Christians killed/attacked:** On 19 September 2020, Pastor [Yeremia Zanambani](#) was killed near Bomba, in the district on Intan Jaya, in the restive province of Papua. Independent probes, one supported by the government, found that Indonesian soldiers may have been

responsible for the killing (Benar News, 4 November 2020).

- **Christians arrested:** At least two Christians were arrested for faith-related reasons. For security reasons, no details can be provided
- **Churches attacked/Christian-owned houses/shops attacked:** Several churches in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, West Java, Aceh and Sumatra had to be closed due to protests by radical groups stirring up neighborhoods.
- **Christians forced to leave their homes:** In August 2020, at least 50 Catholic Christians have been [evicted](#) from a plot of land in East Nusa Tenggara (UCA News, 20 August 2020).

5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

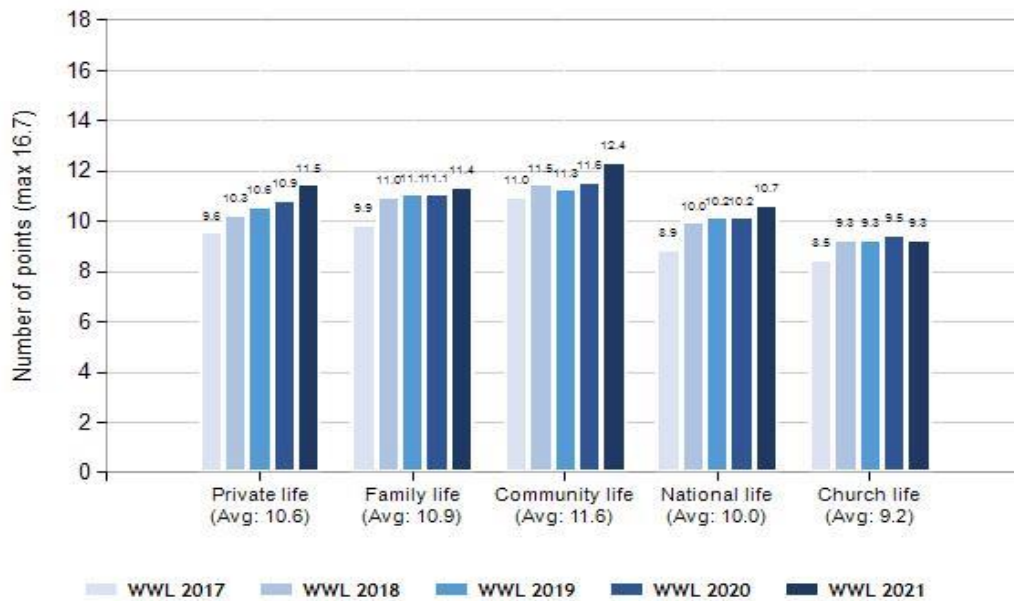
Indonesia: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	11.1
2020	10.7
2019	10.5
2018	10.4
2017	9.6

The average pressure on Christians has crept up constantly each WWL reporting period and is at a high level.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

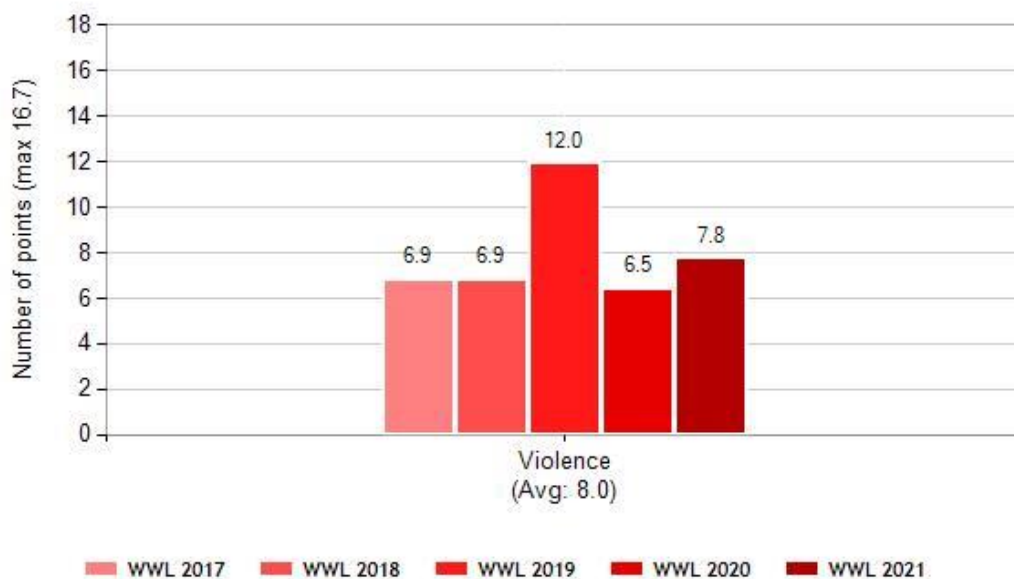
The chart below shows that, over the last five WWL reporting periods, pressure on Christians in Indonesia has increased over all *spheres of life*, (except in Church life), most notably in *Private*, *Family* and *National life*, but also in *Community life* in the WWL 2021 reporting period. The increase in points in the *National sphere* over the years reflects how radical Islamic groups are growing in influence and how blasphemy laws are being strictly implemented against, among others, the Christian minority.

WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Indonesia (Spheres of life)



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Indonesia (Violence)



The chart above shows a peak of violence in WWL 2019, where the score almost doubled reaching an extreme level. In the reporting periods immediately before and after this peak, the score has been more or less stable at the still very high level of just under 7 points. WWL 2021 is an outlier in that respect as it saw one faith-related killing.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points

Enforced religious dress code

Forced divorce

Forced marriage

Violence – physical

Violence – sexual

Gender inequality in Indonesia is an ongoing issue acknowledged by the government; however, patriarchal gender norms, child marriage and high maternal mortality rates remain [largely unaddressed](#) (The Globe Post, 22 June 2018), and it is estimated that [one-third](#) of Indonesian women have suffered physical or sexual abuse (Reuters, 12 April 2017). Recent media reports have highlighted a lack of effective implementation of legislation, noting that it is often challenging for victims to report incidents and [access](#) justice, particularly in the context of COVID-19 which has caused a rise in gender-based violence (Jakarta Post, 8 October 2020).

In this context, most reports of rights violations facing Christian women and girls have to do with the threat of divorce, which means losing their physical and economic security, more so in the rural areas. Christian women who are the first in their household to convert to Christianity are most vulnerable to forced divorce. In a patriarchal system, it is harder for the wife to influence the husband than it is for the husband to influence the wife. Many women choose to keep their new faith a secret, which can lead to beatings and violence if discovered.

On rare occasions, single Christian converts may be pressured into marriage. In one instance, a Christian woman was romantically pursued by a Muslim man; once she fell pregnant, however, he stated that she would have to convert to Islam to marry him. To avoid the stigma and embarrassment of being a single mother, she agreed to his request. Islamization campaigns by pressure groups using such tactics have ceased, although this remains an area of concern.

In addition, Christian women are marginalized through enforced religious dress codes. In provinces like Aceh, women are required to wear a hijab, especially within the government office. Women who are caught not wearing the hijab may face interrogation and be labelled as immoral women.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points

Imprisonment by government

In Indonesia, both female and male Christians face violations of their rights. However, for men this occurs less in private areas of life. Instead, reports indicate that prominent male figures like Christian pastors and activists are the primary targets for public religious discrimination. They can face accusations and have to stand trials for charges such as “inciting religious hatred”. In one such incident, activist [Sudarto](#) was charged under the controversial ‘hate speech’ law for reporting on the banning of Christian celebrations in West Sumatra (International Christian Concern, 1 October 2020).

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department's IRF 2019](#) report:

- "Religious groups outside the six government-recognized religions (Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam, the latter widely interpreted by the government and society to mean Sunni Islam), again reported problems with identifying their religion on their national identification cards (KTPs), although a 2017 Constitutional Court ruling allows for such a listing. Adherents of indigenous faiths cannot enter their specific names, however, because there are too many. Various jurisdictions agreed to use a common term, i.e., 'Faith in One God'. Three jurisdictions began issuing KTPs that could list 'Faith in One God' as the faith category, but the practice was not widely implemented." (Page 1)
- "The government continued to support a smartphone app called Smart Pakem allowing citizens to file heresy or blasphemy reports against individuals and groups with what the government considers unofficial or unorthodox religious practices. The Jakarta Prosecutor's Office launched the app in December 2018 with the expressed goal of streamlining the heresy and blasphemy reporting system. Various human rights organizations continued to criticize the app, saying it could undermine religious tolerance and freedom. According to Human Rights Watch, the app identifies several religious groups and their leaders (including Ahmadi, Shia, and Gafatar), describes their 'deviant teachings', and provides their local office addresses." (Page 10)

Other religious groups suffering persecution are Muslim minority groups such as the Ahmadi and Shia. They have come under scrutiny by both the authorities and radical Sunni groups. Adherents to traditional indigenous religions used not to be recognized by the authorities; the ruling of the Constitutional Court from November 2017 has still not been [implemented](#), as groups like the Indonesian Ulama Council do not want to see traditional religions being placed on a par with Islam, e.g. when it comes to being registered on the ID card (New York Times, 14 April 2018). The city of Bandung was the sixth community nationwide which decided to issue [new ID and family cards](#) for followers of native religions (Jakarta Post, 22 February 2019).

Although there are certain difficulties still to overcome (and adherents of native religions – just like those of other minority religions - still face considerable discrimination) – this is a significant step forward, following up on a decision made by the Constitutional Court in November 2017.

According to a study by the Setara Institute, published on 11 November 2019, in the last 12 years, there were 554 incidents counted against the Ahmadiyya and 324 against the "Aliran Keagamaan" (local traditional religions). Christians were affected in 379 incidents (Protestants in 328 and Catholics in 51). However, from all religious buildings affected in this time period, half of them (199) were Christian churches.

The Hindu minority has also been marginalized. Dozens of Muslims protested the planned construction of what would be the [first Hindu temple in Bekasi](#), West Java (Jakarta Post, 9 May 2019). Without a temple in the regency, at least 6,000 Hindus must go to the Pura Agung Tirta Buana temple in Bekasi municipality for major religious holidays. In similar incidents, protesters have also come from the “outside”; which suggests that even if everything is peaceful among residents, troublemakers intentionally seek to bully minorities. Such incidents have led West Java and Jakarta to lead independent indexes on intolerance.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

Deeper analysis of the April 2019 election results has found that they reflect [longstanding rifts within Muslim society](#) (RSIS, 28 May 2019), between [more radical Muslims and minorities](#), and also between Javanese and non-Javanese citizens (New Mandala, 28 May 2019). The new government's challenge will be to bridge these gaps and do justice to all groups in society. How far these divisions translate into everyday life is the big question. Social media probably paints a too extreme picture of these rifts between different factions.

As one country observer remarked, having President Widodo re-elected is [no guarantee](#) that conservative Islam will not gain more influence, especially in more urbanized areas (New Mandala, 22 April 2019). In any case, all citizens including Christians should be thankful for the peaceful elections, but there are certainly more challenges lying ahead. President Widodo had picked a surprise vice-presidential candidate as running mate: 76 year old [Ma'ruf Amin](#), an Islamic cleric and head of both the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and of the board of advisers of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) (RSIS, 1 November 2018). This very conservative, but renowned cleric, may have been a clever choice politically, but it may bring more difficulties for religious minorities like Christians, given his track record. Amin has not only backed actions in the past against Muslim minorities like Ahmadis and Shia, but also issued a report claiming that the Christian ex-governor of Jakarta, 'Ahok', had indeed committed blasphemy. Additionally, he has backed all efforts to limit the construction of non-Muslim houses of worship anywhere in Indonesia.

This seems to fit the growing conservative stance in society. It remains to be seen if the government in President Widodo's second term will remain loyal to the country's foundational motto "Unity in Diversity" and its related ideology Pancasila for all citizens, thus countering the

exclusivist and radical Islamic tendencies referred to above. The knife-attack against a government minister in October 2019 serves as a reminder that radical Muslim groups are active and especially lone wolf attacks against minorities (such as Christians) and symbols of the government (such as police and politicians) are always possible and the return of firebrand Islamic preacher Rizieq from self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia will turn up the heat in society. How the government and security apparatus deal with him and his supporters (FPI), may well be a litmus test for what religious minorities can expect in the years to come.

Religious nationalism - Hindu

Concerning the situation for Hindu converts to Christianity, nothing substantial is likely to change. They will continue to face pressure from their family, peers and local community to return to Hinduism.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: Islamist views - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/radicalism-survey-05032018162921.html>
- Persecution engines description: at times totally anti-Christian attitudes - <http://www.newmandala.org/measuring-religious-intolerance-across-indonesian-provinces/>
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Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Indonesia>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Indonesia>
- [INDONESIA – Understanding terrorist activity – May 2018](#)