

World  
Watch  
Research

# Indonesia: Full Country Dossier

January 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Contents

**Introduction .....3**

World Watch List 2024..... 3

Copyright note..... 4

Sources and definitions ..... 4

External Links - Introduction ..... 5

**WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Indonesia .....5**

Brief country details ..... 5

Map of country..... 5

Dominant persecution engines and drivers ..... 6

Brief description of the persecution situation ..... 6

Summary of international obligations and rights violations..... 6

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period ..... 7

Specific examples of positive developments ..... 7

External Links - Situation in brief ..... 8

**WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Indonesia.....8**

Links for general background information..... 8

Recent history ..... 9

Political and legal landscape ..... 10

Religious landscape ..... 12

Economic landscape..... 14

Social and cultural landscape..... 17

Technological landscape ..... 20

Security situation .....	22
Trends analysis .....	24
External Links - Keys to understanding .....	27
<b>WWL 2024: Church information / Indonesia .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Christian origins.....	32
Church spectrum today .....	33
Areas where Christians face most difficulties .....	34
Christian communities and how they are affected .....	34
External Links - Church information.....	35
<b>WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Indonesia .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Reporting period .....	35
Position on the World Watch List .....	35
Persecution engines .....	36
Drivers of persecution .....	38
The Persecution pattern.....	40
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life .....	41
Violence.....	49
5 Year trends .....	51
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female .....	52
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male .....	53
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	54
Future outlook.....	55
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	55
<b>Further useful reports.....</b>	<b>57</b>

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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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).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- 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).

External Links - Introduction

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

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Indonesia

Brief country details

Indonesia: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
281,844,000	34,562,000	12.3

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. , World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Indonesia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	66	42
WWL 2023	68	33
WWL 2022	68	28
WWL 2021	63	47
WWL 2020	60	49

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

*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 comes 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. If possible, they consider relocating within the vast archipelago. 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 exert a heavy influence on society and politics.

Once a church is seen to be proselytizing (as carried out mainly by 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. The situation for Christians has been deteriorating in the course of recent years, with Indonesian society taking on an ever more conservative Islamic character.

While the overall trends described in the paragraphs above have continued in the WWL 2024 reporting period, for the second consecutive year, no Christians have been killed for their faith by Islamic extremists (unlike in former reporting periods). Nevertheless, violence remained at an extremely high level.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Indonesia has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Indonesia is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christian converts experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face employment discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Churches face obstacles to obtain permits for the construction of new buildings (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

**17 September 2023:** Authorities brokered a compromise and [prevented worship taking place](#) for at least two weeks at a GBI church in Depok, Province West Java, after a mob had protested the existence of the church (Morning Star News, 20 September 2023).

**15 September 2023:** Papuan youths were found dead at the mouth of the Brasa River in Dekai, the capital of Yahukimo Regency, Highland Papua Province. The youths – boys aged between 15 and 18 years old – were all members of the Protestant Tabernacle (Kingmi) Church of Papua. According to the church, the five youths regularly delivered food to the village after buying it in a nearby place. (Source: Open Doors research)

**18 June 2023:** Authorities [stopped worship](#) at a house church in Bekasi, Province West Java and Banyuanyar village, Solo, Province Central Java (Morning Star News, 23 June 2023).

**1 April 2023:** Authorities [closed](#) the Simalungun Christian Protestant Church (Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun, or GKPS) in Cigelam, Babakancikao, Purwakerta, Province West Java (Morning Star News, 6 April 2023).

**17 March 2023:** A Christian businessman in Padang, [Elianu Hia](#), complained against the mandatory rules which required his 17-year-old daughter to wear a hijab at school. His plea was eventually heard in the highest government circles in Jakarta and after much pressure, the local authorities adapted the rules and made exceptions for Christian students. However, Jia received hundreds of threatening messages, lost his customers, had to dismiss his five employees and close down his business. Finally, he has had to sell his house (HRW, 17 March 2023).

**6 December 2022:** Gratia Pello, a Christian apologist, was [arrested](#) after his videos of comparing Islam with Christianity went viral and an episode caused a stir in the Muslim community (Morning Star News, 8 February 2023).

## Specific examples of positive developments

**8 June 2023:** Indonesia [announced](#) a degree of relaxation in its building rules for worship places (UCA News, 8 June 2023).

**9 April 2023:** After a 15 year struggle, the GKI Yasmin church in Bogor, Province West Java, [opened](#) its new church building (UCA News, 10 April 2023). Although this is not an entirely positive report (see below: *Political and legal landscape* and *Pressure in Block 5: 5.3*), it was con-



sidered worth mentioning here.

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: prevented worship taking place - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/muslim-mob-forces-christians-out-of-worship-building>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: stopped worship - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/muslims-block-worship-at-two-churches-in-indonesia>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: closed - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/local-officials-seal-church-building-shut-in-indonesia>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Elianu Hia - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/17/forced-home-protesting-indonesias-mandatory-hijab-rules>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: arrested - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/police-arrest-christian-apologist-in-indonesia>
- Specific examples of positive developments: announced - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesia-to-relax-building-rules-for-worship-places/101590>
- Specific examples of positive developments: opened - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesian-protestant-church-opened-after-15-year-row/100935>

## WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Indonesia

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Indonesia report	AI Indonesia 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-east-asia-and-the-pacific/indonesia/report-indonesia/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-east-asia-and-the-pacific/indonesia/report-indonesia/</a>	3 July 2023
BBC News Indonesia profile - updated 24 February 2023	BBC Indonesia profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14921238">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14921238</a>	3 July 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index Indonesia 2022	BTI Indonesia Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/IDN">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/IDN</a>	3 July 2023
CIA World Factbook Indonesia - updated 15 June 2023	World Factbook Indonesia	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/indonesia/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/indonesia/</a>	3 July 2023
Crisis24 Indonesia report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Indonesia report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/indonesia">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/indonesia</a>	3 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Indonesia profile 2023	EIU Indonesia profile 2023	<a href="https://country.eiu.com/indonesia">https://country.eiu.com/indonesia</a>	3 July 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Indonesia	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	3 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Indonesia not included	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Indonesia	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-world/2023</a>	3 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Indonesia	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-net/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-net/2023</a>	5 December 2023
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Indonesia profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/indonesia/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/indonesia/</a>	3 July 2023
Girls Not Brides Indonesia report	Girls Not Brides Indonesia	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/indonesia/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/indonesia/</a>	3 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Indonesia country chapter	HRW 2023 Indonesia country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/indonesia">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/indonesia</a>	3 July 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Indonesia	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#id">https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#id</a>	3 July 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Indonesia	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/indonesia">https://rsf.org/en/indonesia</a>	3 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Indonesia	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/idn">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/idn</a>	3 July 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Indonesia	UNDP HDR Indonesia	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/IDN">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/IDN</a>	3 July 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Indonesia	IRFR 2022 Indonesia	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/indonesia/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/indonesia/</a>	3 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 Indonesia report – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL	USCIRF 2023 Indonesia SWL	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Indonesia.pdf">https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Indonesia.pdf</a>	3 July 2023

World Bank Indonesia data - 2021	World Bank Indonesia data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=yld=yinf=nzm=ncountry=IDN">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=yld=yinf=nzm=ncountry=IDN</a>	3 July 2023
World Bank Indonesia overview - updated 5 April 2022	World Bank Indonesia overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/indonesia/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/indonesia/overview</a>	3 July 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Indonesia	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Indonesia	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/c6aceb75bed03729ef4ff9404dd7f125-0500012021/related/mpo-idn.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/c6aceb75bed03729ef4ff9404dd7f125-0500012021/related/mpo-idn.pdf</a>	3 July 2023

## Recent history

Indonesia, which is spread across more than seventeen thousand islands and more than 5000 kilometers east-west and 1700 km north-south, declared independence on 17 August 1945. It then fought for its independence from the Netherlands in a four year war ending in 1949, having been occupied by Japan in World War 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. He has been released and is now the president commissioner of state-owned oil and gas firm Pertamina.

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). Domestic politics has been almost exclusively focused on the upcoming elections scheduled for 14 February 2024, especially since President Jokowi is constitutionally barred from running again.

In 2021 and 2022, politics in Indonesia was largely - and unusually - focused on foreign policy as the country held the G20 presidency in 2022. The ripple effects of the Russia/Ukraine war have been felt clearly in Indonesia as well, especially in the balancing act concerning invitations to the Bali Summit held in November 2022. President Joko Widodo even made the effort of travelling to Kiev and Moscow in June/July 2022. Indonesia continued to be in the international spotlight through holding the ASEAN chairmanship in 2023. One of its main [regional challenges](#) has been the situation in war-torn Myanmar (HRW, 31 March 2023). Domestically, politics have been concerned with the shortages of cooking oil and the significant price rises generally.

## Political and legal landscape

Democracy only became established in the country 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.

While Islamic political parties never gained many votes in 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 obliged 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). Prabowo Subianto, an eligible candidate for presidency, broke with Islamist groups (or rather the other way around), when he accepted to become [Minister of Defence](#), in the Jokowi government (Benar News, 23 October 2019). The elections in 2024 will tell if the polarization of the Indonesian electorate has continued.

However, no matter who holds power in the end, he will have to grapple with the fact that local authorities enjoy a considerable autonomy, stretching to following their own self-given rules. One example in the WWL 2024 reporting period were regions and even whole provinces like [West Sumatra](#), which have been signing off laws basing their culture and tradition on Sharia law and the Quran (Indonesia at Melbourne, 24 January 2023).” Growing support among high-school students for the introduction of Sharia law is another trend politicians and others need to watch carefully. A recent study published by the Setara Institute and INFID was based on a [survey](#) of more than 900 students from five cities across the archipelago (UCA News, 18 May 2023). It found that more than 83% of the respondents did not think that the nation's founding ideology, Pancasila, can be regarded as permanent and 56% supported the implementation of Sharia law. While 61% said they felt more comfortable if all female students were wearing headscarves, another response was even more worrying: 20% of all respondents said they would be willing to commit violent acts in defending their religion, and a third even said they would be ready to give their lives for it. This adds to a growing number of polls in recent years, illustrating the increasingly conservative and less tolerant development of society.

In terms of infrastructure, two significant developments should be reported. One is that the plans for relocating Indonesia's capital to the island of Borneo at last took off in 2022 with building-work commencing. This has often been called President Jokowi's legacy and is part of his strong drive for developing infrastructure. The relocation of the capital - which has been given the (Javanese) name "[Nusantara](#)" - comes with an initial price tag of 32.5 billion USD (Al-Jazeera, 18 January 2022). At the same time, investors seem [reluctant](#) and experts are doubting if a city built from scratch in a jungle area really will take off (ABC News, 5 July 2023). The second is that the long-awaited and Chinese-built [high-speed rail](#) between Jakarta and Bandung opened commercially in August 2023 (Straits Times, 31 May 2023).

Changes in the government's human rights policy could not be observed. 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 Supreme Court ruling in December 2010 confirming that the church authorities had passed all requirements set up by law to obtain a building permit, the town's mayor refused to abide by this ruling and the government did not take 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 December 2021, the Bogor City authorities, still not abiding by the Supreme Court ruling, held a '[groundbreaking ceremony](#)' for constructing the church at another location, an option part of the church declined (UCA News, 7 December 2021), effectively causing a church-split. On 9 April 2023, the new church building was inaugurated (see above: Positive developments). The fact that Mahfud MD, coordinating minister for politics and security, Muhammad Tito Karnavian, minister for home affairs, and Atnike Nova, chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission attended the ceremony illustrates how high-profile and politically sensitive the situation had become.

[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). However, President Joko Widodo [signed it](#) into effect on 2 November 2020 (PwC, November 2020) and the government hopes it will reduce red tape and encourage economic growth. On 25 November 2021, the law was declared "[conditionally unconstitutional](#)" (Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 25 November 2021). The process of revising the law started in June 2022. It certainly acted as a catalyst for the formation of new political and civil society groups, such as the one using the acronym 'KAMI' (Indonesian for 'us' - a short form of "Save Indonesia Action Coalition". However, this group did not play a role in the 2024 elections. Parliament [replaced](#) one of the judges of the Constitutional Court because he deemed a law unconstitutional to the disliking of the parliamentarians, what can be seen as a direct attack on the independence of justice (Jakarta Post, 2 December 2022).

Hardline leader of what was previously called the Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI - see below: *Religious landscape*), Muhammad Rizieq Shihab, decided to [return to Indonesia](#) after three years of self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia. He was greeted by thousands of supporters at the airport (Benar News, 11 November 2020). He and his supporters had been instrumental in campaigning against the Christian governor of Jakarta, who was then sentenced for blasphemy. The FPI was soon after [banned](#) by the government (Jakarta Post, 30 December 2020). A court in Jakarta [sentenced](#) Rizieq Shihab to an additional four years imprisonment for concealing evidence about his health status (Associated Press, 24 June 2021). The sentence was [reduced](#) after an appeal to the Supreme Court to two years (UCA News, 16 November 2021). Even though the FPI seems to have currently lost influence, there is [no lack](#) of other radical Islamic groups in Indonesia (IPAC, "Extremist charities and terrorist fund-raising in Indonesia", Report 76, 31 March 2022). After having spent less than half of his sentence in prison, Shihab was released on parole on 20 July 2022 and declared in a live-streamed statement that he will continue his fight to "[forbid evil](#)" (Benar News, 20 July 2022). However, he has been comparably silent in the WWL 2024 reporting period.

## Gender perspective

From a gender perspective, women remained disadvantaged within Indonesia's political and legal context. There is a lack of legal protection for women having undertaken an interreligious marriage and Muslim women cannot marry or divorce under civil law, as these are governed only by Sharia law. Aceh operates under special autonomy granted by the state and thus is the only province enforcing provisions of the Islamic Criminal law, consequently, women are most subject to discriminatory family laws in this province (US State Department IRFR 2022 Indonesia). Although child marriage is prohibited (Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage, Articles 16, 20 and 22) and the practice is on the decline, it remains a live issue, especially in rural areas; 16% of girls marry before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides Vietnam).

Women's rights groups have highlighted the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women's rights, noting that several long-awaited pieces of legislation were put on the backburner ([The Jakarta Post, 3 August 2020](#)). The [Sexual Violence Prevention bill](#) first proposed in 2016 was finally passed into law in 2022 and was heavily criticized for its watered-down language and provisions; articles relating to forced marriage, forced prostitution, forced abortion, sexual torture and sexual slavery were all initially removed, along with provisions protecting the rights of those with disabilities (Al-Jazeera, 14 April 2022). The Domestic Worker Protection Bill, under deliberation for 16 years, also remains stuck in parliament ([Japan Times, 8 May 2023](#)).

## Religious landscape

Indonesia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	34,562,000	12.3
Muslim	224,059,000	79.5
Hindu	4,476,000	1.6
Buddhist	2,196,000	0.8
Ethno-religionist	5,957,000	2.1
Jewish	200	0.0
Bahai	28,300	0.0
Atheist	331,000	0.1
Agnostic	3,735,000	1.3
Other	6,499,200	2.3
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

According to WCD 2023 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 organization, *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, could well prove a game-changer for Christians in the country. Another shock were the bomb attacks against three churches in Surabaya in May 2018 and - in the WWL 2022 reporting period - another suicide attack against the cathedral in Makassar and two mass killings by radical Islamic group MIT. 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 national nor local governments dare to ignore their demands, fearing public unrest. One of the most radical and vocal of such organizations had been “Front Pembela Islam” (FPI - which translates as “Islamic Defenders’ Front”) which played a prominent role in the presidential elections and supported Jokowi’s rival, Prabowo Subianto, a former army general. It was banned by the government and reacted by simply copying what other radical groups have done elsewhere; it heeded Rizieq’s advice to ‘Relax and just create a new vehicle’ by now calling into life the Islamic Unity Front, which bears the same acronym in Indonesian as the original organization, FPI (Jakarta Post, 4 January 2021). The Indonesian government had 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 Indonesian society as a whole holds increasingly conservative religious 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. According to Indonesia’s State Intelligence Agency, [85% of all millennials](#) in the country have been exposed to radicalism - mainly via social media (SCMP, 23 June 2021).

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 wing 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). After a recent cabinet reshuffle, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, who also chairs the NU youth wing, was made the new minister of religion. This was the continuation of a long tradition (although his direct predecessor had been a former general not related with NU). The new minister announced in one of his first statements that he would work to uphold the [rights of religious minorities](#), naming Shia and Ahmadiyyah (Jakarta Post, 26 December 2020), but also meaning Christians and others. One first step may be the announcement of facilitating the process of obtaining building regulations (see also below: *Trends analysis 1a* and *Pressure in Block 5: 5.3*).

Religious minorities such as 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.

## Economic landscape

According to UNDP's Human Development Report Indonesia:

- **Gross National Income per capita (2017 USD PPP):** 11.459
- **Rate of multidimensional poverty:** 3.6% of the population are living in multidimensional poverty, a further 4.7% are vulnerable to it. 9.8% of the population are living below the national poverty line.
- **Remittances:** 1.04% of the national GDP

According to World Bank Indonesia data:

- Indonesia remained in the lower middle income status, according to the World Bank's most recent classification.
- **GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2017 international USD):** 12.410
- **GDP per capita growth rate:** 4.6%
- **Poverty gap at 6.85 USD a day (2017 PPP):** 22% (2022)

The World Bank aptly summarizes in its Indonesia overview:

- "The largest economy in Southeast Asia, Indonesia – a diverse archipelago nation of more than 300 ethnic groups – has charted impressive economic growth since overcoming the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. Today, Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous nation and 10th largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity. Furthermore, Indonesia has made enormous gains in poverty reduction, cutting the poverty rate by more than half since 1999, to under 10 percent in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Indonesia assumed the G20 Presidency this year, encouraging all countries to work together to achieve a stronger and more sustainable recovery from the pandemic's impacts. Indonesia's economic planning follows a 20-year development plan, spanning from 2005 to 2025. It is segmented into 5-year medium-term development plans called the RPJMN (Ren-

cana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional), each with different development priorities. The current medium-term development plan is the last phase of the 20-year plan. It aims to further strengthen Indonesia's economy by improving the country's human capital and competitiveness in the global market. With its economy impacted by the pandemic, Indonesia went from upper-middle income to lower-middle income status as of [July 2021](#). The pandemic also partially reversed recent progress in poverty reduction, from the record-low of 9.2 percent in September 2019 to 9.7 percent as of September 2021."

The economic downturn coming with the COVID-19 crisis wiped out the success of qualifying for the middle income level, bringing it [back to the lower middle income level](#) (Bloomberg, 8 July 2021). Still, Indonesia remains 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 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 for infrastructure.

The growth of the middle class, predominantly in urban areas, has led to increasing prosperity and consumption which has strengthened society as a whole. However, at the same time, Indonesia is one of the most unequal societies in SEA, the GINI ratio (measuring inequality in a society by income) [hovering around 0.4](#), this growing wealth has been distributed unequally and in clusters (University of Melbourne, 27 November 2018). But numbers can be misleading: While the unemployment rate remains 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). While the GDP continued to grow 5.3% in 2022 and is expected to slow down to 4.9% in 2023, both the rise in commodity prices and [inflation](#) also slowed down (World Bank, Indonesia Economics Prospects Report, June 2023). In terms of poverty, this report concludes on page 26:

- "While millions have moved out of poverty, not all are economically secure. The concept of economic insecurity measures vulnerability of households to shocks that can affect their consumption level and bring them down into poverty. In 2019, 40 percent of Indonesians were economically insecure. Most of these households are non-poor but can fall into poverty when exposed to a shock. The share of economically insecure households has hardly changed since 2011, reflecting that while a significant share of households managed to reach economic security, a similar share escaped poverty but are still insecure."

Indonesia is the 16th largest economy worldwide in absolute terms and is projected to grow annually at a rate of more than 5%, although it shares the fate of all other countries, namely the [growing risk](#) of food insecurity and price hikes from a protracted Ukraine war (World Bank, Indonesia Economic Prospects Press Release, 22 June 2022). Indonesia may become one of the countries 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; The Independent, 2 September 2017). Indonesia depends heavily on its export of com-



modities, including oil and gas, so in the short term it will benefit from higher commodity prices. For 2023, it aims at receiving investment of [95 billion USD](#) into its nickel industry alone, winning high quality investment beyond mere extraction, but also onshore battery production (Invest Indonesia, 4 May 2023). 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.

In 2023, Indonesia decided to apply for [membership](#) in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which is often perceived as a "rich countries' club" (Lowy Institute, 17 October 2023), indicating an increasing confidence in its economic development.

Depending on the region, due to discrimination, Christians may face more problems in finding jobs in a still recovering economy. Apart from that, they are facing the same difficulties as everyone else.

### **Islamic economy**

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.). The [Islamic Banking sector](#) already had a head start and Sharia bank branches are sprouting across the country (Reuters, 21 June 2021). But for now, all effort is focused on getting the economy back on track in the aftermath of the pandemic.

### **Corruption**

One of the challenges haunting Indonesian development is the deeply-rooted corruption. The country sits at rank 110 in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI 2022) 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 Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), has been limited in its impact by parliament. In May 2023, authorities [arrested](#) Minister of Telecommunications, Johnny G. Plate, a Catholic Christian, because of corruption (The Diplomat, 18 May 2023). He became the fifth minister in the Joko Widodo administration to be arrested on such accusations.

### **Gender perspective**

Despite having achieved higher levels of educational attainment than men, women in Indonesia struggle to capitalize on this advantage economically, due to restrictive cultural practices, and the significant reduction in jobs and working hours in the health and welfare sectors as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic ([World Bank Blogs, 8 March 2021](#)). While the pandemic-induced economic shock contributed to increased employment rates among first-time female workers – reducing the gender gap by 14% – women with college degrees were [4.2%](#) less likely to be employed, compared to women with less than a high school education (World Bank blogs, 19 April 2023).

In addition, there are still more than 60 local [dress codes](#) enforced nationwide and reports suggest non-Muslim women, including Christians, face severe consequences at work and in schools for non-compliance (HRW, 21 July 2022).

## Social and cultural landscape

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.

According to the UNDP's Human Development Report Indonesia and the World Factbook:

- **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), more than 700 languages are used in Indonesia
- **Urbanization rate:** 58.6%
- **Literacy rate:** 96%
- **Mean years of schooling:** 8.2 years
- **Health and education indicators:** Per 10,000 people, Indonesia has 6.2 physicians and 10 hospital beds, the pupil teacher ratio in primary school is 17:1.

According to World Bank Vietnam data:

- **Population/Age:** 25.2% of the population is below the age of 14, 6.8% is above the age of 65
- **Education:** The primary school enrollment is 90%, the completion rate is 102.3% (2018)
- **Unemployment:** 3.6%, 49% are in vulnerable employment (modeled ILO estimate) and the rate of people in the non-agricultural sector in informal employment is 72.5% (2016, [ILO](#)).
- **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. The World Bank estimated in a report published in 2017 that almost [4.8 million Indonesian](#) citizens were working legally abroad, but there are estimates almost doubling this number (before COVID-19 struck).
- **Malnourishment:** 30.8% of children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition or stunting

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Indonesia:

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.718, Indonesia ranks 107th out of 189 countries. Its development has been slow and steady
- **Life expectancy:** 71.7 years
- **Median age:** 29.7 years
- **GINI coefficient:** 39.0
- **Gender inequality:** With a score of 0.48, Indonesia ranks 121st of 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index
- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 4.7% and 47.9% are in vulnerable employment. The rate of unemployed youth is 17%, the rate of youth neither in school nor employment

is 22% (between 15 and 24 years of age).

Indonesia is the fourth most populated country in the world, with more than 40% of the population under the age of 25. It has therefore a surplus in workforce and an estimated 4.8 million people legally 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 is striving to increase the production and service sector and education is widely seen as a key to progress. (The World Bank Economics Prospect Report June 2023 mentioned above in *Economic landscape* deals with the topic of educational challenges and the losses the COVID pandemic brought to Indonesia in this respect).

Apart from fighting poverty in general, the government (supported by the World Bank under the heading "promoting human capital") is making better education and training a priority in order to improve the livelihood of young people in particular. Indonesia opened the tertiary education sector for international partners; Australian [Monash University](#) was the first foreign university to open a physical campus just outside Jakarta in April 2022 (Monash University, 14 April 2022). 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 (Asia Pacific Observatory, Vol. 7, No.1, 2017).

According to World Bank's [Indonesia Economic Prospects](#) report published in July 2020, between 2001 and 2018 expenditure for public health increased by 22% annually and the health insurance covers 83% of the population now (p.48). Compared to similar countries, however, Indonesia is still lagging behind. The government prioritized healthcare spending by increasing the level of funding from 0.4% of the GDP in 2020 to 1.2% in 2021, at the same time, it reduced social assistance spending from 1.3% of the GDP to 1.0% (ibid, p.10). The introduction of an [Omnibus health law](#) led to criticism from opposition parties, civil society stakeholders, health professional groups, which even threatened to strike (Jakarta Post, 10 July 2023). This may prove a challenge for an already stretched health system.

Indonesia has remained a democracy, despite challenges and strong independent media. Debates in parliament are lively and open, with room for discussion and the questioning of government action. However, the most recent government has co-opted almost all parties into the government, so there is no strong opposition, although parties are striving to make themselves more visible again the closer the elections in 2024 get. 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 details. A growing number of non-governmental organizations complete this picture. However, in reality such reporting does not change much. The numbers radical Islamic groups are able to mobilize are far more effective at influencing both society's point of view and government action. Another factor is the strong influence that social media has, especially among young people (see below: *Technological landscape*).

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. While work on this major project has started (see above: *Political and legal landscape*), it is far from certain that the relocation of the capital and thus, government functions, will help in solving or even easing the problems in Metro Jakarta. In any case, this is a generational project. Almost 60% 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. A shocking reminder of what local strongmen are capable of was the uncovering of a [human cage](#) within a regent's compound in Langkat/North Sumatra, with the provincial police estimating at least 600 victims of slavery over a span of 10 years (Tempo, 10 March 2022).

One consequence of COVID-19 was that reported cases of child abuse increased by 49% in 2020 according to the Indonesian Child Protection Commission and [tripled](#) in 2021, according to the Witness and Victims Protection Agency (UCA News, 17 January 2022). At the same time, the number of [child marriages](#) tripled in 2020, according to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA) (Antara News, 9 July 2021). The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection [reported](#) that in 2022, more than 16,100 child abuse cases took place, mostly sexual crimes, that victimized over 17,640 children (UCA News, 22 February 2023).

Christians participate in social and cultural life like everyone else, but while in urban areas they tend to belong to the middle class, in rural areas they are often facing poverty and related challenges. It is noteworthy that, according to official [government statistics](#) (Badan Pusat Statistik, accessed 10 July 2023), 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.

### Gender perspective

With the exception of some matrilineal communities, Indonesia operates according to traditional norms. Indonesia's Marriage Law (Article 31) explicitly states that men are the head of the household and that women should manage the household. As highlighted by Human Rights Watch, reports of domestic violence cases associated with COVID-19 lockdown measures were twice the 2019 number ([HRW 2021 country chapter](#)). Although recognized as a serious issue, domestic violence is considered a private matter and incidents are rarely reported; victims reportedly face significant social pressure not to speak out. Advocates have also warned that the pandemic could be linked to a spike in child marriages ([Asia News Network, 8 May 2023](#)). A [2021 UN study](#) revealed that the number of child marriages granted by the Religious Courts increased from 23,126 in 2019 to 64,211 cases in 2020 (UN, 10 June 2021, p.135).

According to a [2019 Study by Value Champion](#), Indonesia is the second most dangerous country to be a woman in the Asia Pacific region. Sexual harassment is reportedly rampant, and access to justice for victims is so poor that some have been jailed for reporting crimes against them ([CNN, 17 July 2019](#)). The practice of kidnapping a woman for the purpose of marriage (Yappa Maradda) also remains an issue of concern, particularly in Sumba ([UCA News, 9 July 2020](#); [BBC News, 21 July 2020](#)).

Furthermore, about 75% of Indonesia's female population – about 80 million women and girls – wear the hijab ([HRW, 18 March 2021](#)). In some regions, non-Muslims face immense social pressure to abide by the established Islamic dress codes, especially young Christian schoolgirls and children under 18 who under a recent [ruling](#) (HRW, 1 July 2021) have "no right to choose their clothes." Surveys also suggest that women experience high levels of sexual harassment while on public transportation and are 13 times more likely to be sexually harassed than men ([The Asean Post, 3 December 2019](#)). In addition to the [women-only train service](#) launched in 2010 (BBC News, 19 August 2010), new women-only bus lines have also been introduced in Jakarta in an attempt to protect female commuters from sexual violence ([Now This News, 28 July 2022](#); [Ankara News, 25 July 2022](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Indonesia):

- **Internet usage:** 76.3% penetration - survey date: July 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 72.7% penetration – survey date: July 2022

According to World Bank Indonesia data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 134 per 100 people (2021)

The gender gap in mobile phone ownership and internet use reduced slightly from 10% to 8% between 2020 and 2022, but is now up to 10% and 15% respectively, according to the Global System for Mobile Communications ([GSMA, 2023, p. 17](#)).

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 Indonesia:

- "The state of internet freedom in Indonesia declined during the coverage period, primarily due to the enforcement of Ministerial Regulation No. 5 of 2020 (MR 5/2020), which introduced a content moderation regime that threatens freedom of expression and user privacy. After setting a new deadline for compliance with the law's registration rules in June 2022, the government temporarily blocked several platforms and websites that had failed to register. Meanwhile, government critics, journalists, and internet users continued to face criminal prosecution, violent attacks, and harassment in retaliation for their online activities. Internet access in the Papua region continues to be routinely disrupted."
- "Increased online harassment, prosecutions, and technical attacks against journalists, activists, and news outlets also deter free expression and information sharing. Civil society organizations have raised concerns that the Virtual Police program will drive more users to practice self-censorship." "Journalists and activists were violently attacked for their online activities; in one case, a bomb exploded in the vicinity of a journalist's home."

Due to Indonesia censoring the Internet and social media, it was only labelled "partly free", noting a decrease by two points 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 explains:

- "Geographic disparities in internet access persist in Indonesia, with rural residents typically at a disadvantage, and the cost of service, particularly for fixed-line broadband, remains relatively high. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), in 2022, a 5 gigabyte (GB) fixed-line broadband plan cost 6.13 percent of gross national income (GNI) per capita, and a 2 GB mobile broadband plan cost 1.1 percent of GNI per capita. Despite rising penetration rates and improved infrastructure, connectivity remains highly concentrated in the western part of the archipelago, particularly on the more urbanized island of Java. The disparity is evident in the information and communication technology (ICT) development statistics issued by BPS, according to which the country's five eastern provinces received the lowest rankings in 2021. As of February 2023, 26.3 percent of the population lacked internet access, and 2,881 villages were not connected to the internet."

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 for everyone. 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). Quoting government sources, Freedom House noted that around 21,000 villages had limited access to internet and electricity: "People in Indonesia were more severely impacted by low internet penetration rates and poor infrastructure during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The limited availability of electricity and connectivity in more than 21,000 villages has hindered online home learning activities for students in rural areas." According to Freedom House, Indonesians hold 370.2 million mobile phone subscriptions.

The restriction in Internet access imposed by the state referred to in Freedom House's report is not the only way the state can interfere with media communication. Indonesia's Electronic Information and Transaction Law (ITE Law in its 2016 revision) can already be used to [curb and restrict](#) free online speech (East Asia Forum, 2 April 2021). International companies like Google and TikTok abided by a [registration](#) demand imposed by Indonesian law (Benar News, 18 July 2022). This law also requires that content causing "unrest in society or disturbs public order" be taken offline within 24 hours after the authorities' notification or within four hours in urgent cases. Observers are speaking of a "[tide of online defamation cases](#)", since a proposed revision of the law failed (Indonesia at Melbourne, 10 May 2022).



## Security situation

Christians remain vulnerable to violent attack and radical Islamic thinking is widespread. The suicide attack against the cathedral in Makassar in March 2021 (see below) opened fresh wounds and memories of the attacks against [three Christian churches in 2018](#) (CNN, 13 May 2018). The killing and beheading of Christians in Sulawesi in May 2021 added to a feeling of insecurity, although the authorities did investigate the matter and take action.

The security forces in Indonesia confirmed the [killing of Ali Kalora](#) (AP News, 19 September 2021). He was the leader of the East Indonesia Mujahideen group (MIT), which had been responsible for the aforementioned 2021 attacks. Another leader of the group was [killed](#) in January 2022, weakening it further (Jamestown Foundation, 4 January 2022).

Indonesia decided to [ban the return](#) of battle-hardened Islamic State group (IS) 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). It is still hotly debated if and how [Indonesian children](#) of IS radicals should be extricated from camps mainly located in Syria (IPAC, 30 June 2021). How dangerous such an unmonitored return can be, was clearly illustrated in the capture of the town of Marawi in neighboring Mindanao/Philippines in 2017, which was supported by Indonesian Islamic fighters.

In the WWL 2023 and WWL 2024 reporting periods there were no lethal attacks reported. However, in the WWL 2022 reporting period there was a vivid example of an IS-inspired attack: On Palm Sunday, 28 March 2021, a newly-wed couple detonated [two bombs](#) at a church service in the cathedral of Makassar, wounding twenty and killing themselves (ASEAN Today, 7 April 2021). Just three days later, a young woman walked into the [national police headquarters](#) in Jakarta and detonated her suicide belt (Jamestown Foundation, 9 April 2021). Such attacks add to a general climate of insecurity, which is more pronounced among religious minorities, although the authorities do carry out investigations and in general try their best to foil such attacks.

While IS would seem to be on the decline in the country, the [danger](#) of splinter groups, 'lone wolves' and new cells is still very present (IPAC, 21 January 2021). The release of convicted Islamic militants also poses a challenge for communities and security authorities alike (concerning [Poso](#) see IPAC report No 86, 27 June 2023; concerning the [Bali bombers](#) see IPAC report No 85, 29 May 2023). The police also warned that the [Jemaah Islamiyah](#) movement is regrouping and according to observers, they are still posing a threat (Jamestown Foundation, 21 February 2023). Its founder, Abubakar Baasyir, has been quietly [released from prison](#) and while he may not personally pose a fighting threat anymore (he is in his 80s and in poor health), his ideological influence should not be underestimated (Jamestown Foundation, 12 February 2021). The swift victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan in August 2021 has increased the likelihood of attacks by splinter groups, but has so far done little more than strengthen the [ideological resolve](#) of Jemaah Islamiyah, which does not make it necessarily less dangerous (IPAC, 7 September 2021). With the continued actions by the authorities against them, it may however become more difficult for them to run [military training](#) programs and to replenish their ranks (IPAC, 2 November 2022).

The *Mujahideen Indonesia Timur* (MIT) was thought to be on the decline with possibly less than 10 active fighters. It nevertheless managed to carry out two attacks against villages in Central Sulawesi in November 2020 and May 2021, killing eight Christians. The killing of its leader, Ali Kalora, in September 2021 by security forces (see above: Recent history) dealt MIT a serious blow and the group may have been eradicated as such. However, it remains to be seen if this is the end of MIT or if it will mutate into various radical Islamic splinter groups. It should be noted that security forces [arrested](#) 22 suspected Islamic militants in Central Sulawesi, connected with the MIT and who had pledged allegiance to IS (Reuters, 17 May 2022). The leader of Islamist movement *Jamaah Khilafatul Muslimin* (JKM) has been arrested and faces charges of treason for staging 'subversive' motorcycle rallies on 29 May calling for an Islamic caliphate (UCA News, 7 June 2022). The JKM is said to be an offshoot of *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI), an Islamist group banned in 2017 also for rejecting the national ideology Pancasila and calling for a caliphate to be set up. According to observers, the [HTI](#) continues to be a challenge for the authorities despite being banned (RSIS, 6 March 2023). 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. At the same time, a growing Islamic conservatism in society makes it easier for radical groups to demand accommodation, thus, according to one commentator, the real danger lies in the '[democratic backsliding](#)' of Indonesia (The Interpreter, 14 September 2022).

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 very well how to use for their purposes. 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).

Apart from religiously motivated radical groups, a 2021 database compiled by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta records all reported [incidents involving violence](#) in Indonesia "including group-on-group violence, such as village conflicts; group-on-individual violence, such as mob attacks; and state-on-group violence, such as violence by law enforcement" (Benar News, 21 June 2022). A report on incidents occurring in 2021 shows that while large-scale attacks may be a thing of the past, so-called "collective violence" is trending upwards. As the [research](#) shows (CVEW, accessed 1 July 2022), in 2021 there were more than 1,200 incidents of collective violence, claiming at least 294 lives, including group-on-group violence. It is also showing that a disproportionate number of incidents occur in the Papua provinces, amounting to four times the national average. The Papua provinces also have the highest number of casualties, with the much more populous provinces of West and East Java registering the next highest.

This is a reminder of another challenge which concerns the Christian minority (and Indonesia as a whole): The situation in Papua. There is a violent insurgency seeking independence (or full au-



tonomy) and the conflict escalated when the head of intelligence for the Papua region was killed on 25 April 2021. The National Liberation Army of West Papua (TPNPB), the armed wing of the separatist Free Papua Movement (OPM) claimed responsibility. A few days later, the government classified these Papuan separatist groups as terrorists (Benar News, 29 April 2021). While observers doubt this will do anything to solve the conflict, it has allowed the government to bring special forces into the region and it also allows for the anti-terrorist force Densus 88 to become active, a move which has not been taken yet as far as is known. The authorities announced in May 2021 that they had foiled bomb attacks by Islamic radicals against 10 Papuan churches as well as assassination plots against the Archbishop of Papua (UCA News, 31 May 2021). This illustrates the highly inflammable situation in Papua which may have broader consequences for the whole country. It is highly doubtful whether the creation of [three new provinces](#) in Papua, the plans for which were drawn up in Jakarta without Papuan consultation, will help ease tensions and reduce violence. On the contrary, observers fear an increased militarization following this decision (Benar News, 30 June 2022).

### Gender perspective

The threat from violent Islamic militancy remains extremely high in Indonesia. Christian men, especially church leaders and Christian converts from Islam, remain vulnerable to attacks from both Islamic militants and the Indonesian government ([HRW, 17 March 2023](#); [UCA News, 7 April 2022](#)).

## Trends analysis

### 1) Conservatism and radicalization are on the rise

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, the authorities and civil society actors 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) In 2021, Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), elected Yahya Cholil Staquf as its new [leader](#) (UCA News, 24 December 2021), who is a distinguished Sunni scholar known for being the co-founder of "[Humanitarian Islam](#)", a movement seeking to reform on a global basis "obsolete tenets of Islamic orthodoxy that enjoin religious hatred, supremacy and violence" (Bayt Ar-Rahmah, 7 February 2022). One highly visible change in the ranks of NU is that, for the first time since the organization's inauguration in 1926, [several women have](#) been [appointed](#) to its leadership board (Benar News, 14 January (Jakarta Post, 11 February 2022). Thus, they risk being disconnected from an increasingly urbanized audience – typified, for instance, by ever expanding Metro Jakarta with its more than 30 million inhabitants – which has very different interests and needs. An area where this divergence is particularly evident is the vast number of followers enjoyed by online preachers. These preachers are not connected to either the NU or Muhammadiyah and often propagate radical Islamic opinions. Apart from the difficulties this causes NU, it also poses potential danger for religious minorities in Indonesia.

While the new Minister of Religion, Yaquut Cholil Quoemas from NU, [confirmed](#) that freedom of religion includes the freedom for minorities not to be forced to wear religious clothing in a hotly debated case in West Sumatra and even issued a ministerial decree together with his colleague for education in February 2021, this was [struck down](#) by the Supreme Court in May 2021 (HRW, 1 July 2021), which may also indicate that the Court is becoming more conservative. The problems surrounding mandatory religious clothing in Indonesia are discussed in detail in a HRW report entitled "[I wanted to run away](#)" (HRW, 19 March 2021). This is affecting Muslim and non-Muslim students alike and easily leads to bullying (UCA News, 5 August 2022). The fact that Indonesia's Minister of Religion has been [accused](#) of blasphemy after making a statement in which he allegedly compared the muezzin's summons to prayer over loudspeakers to dogs barking (Benar News, 18 March 2022) ("If our neighbors have dogs and they all bark at the same time, don't we think it's a disturbance? Therefore, we have to regulate all noises so they don't become a nuisance.") shows the growing conservative mindset. Election results in 2024 will give an indication if this growing mindset translates into more religiously motivated national politics as well.

**b)** Although the proportion of religious minorities among civil servants is [higher](#) than in society in general, this is not true for leadership positions - the so-called Tier 1 positions (ADB, January 2021). According to Indonesia's State Intelligence Agency, [85% of all millennials](#) in the country have been exposed to radicalism - mainly via social media (SCMP, 23 June 2021), these findings are comparable to the 85% of millennials saying that Pancasila is not a permanent ideology found by the Setara/INFID survey (see above: *Political and legal landscape*). Meanwhile, the government is trying to reduce Islamist sentiment among civil servants. According to official estimates, of the 4.3 million civil servants in Indonesia, at least 800,000 have been influenced by radical Islam. To combat this, the government has now introduced an [anti-extremism test](#) as part of the selection procedure (UCA News, 17 June 2021). While there is always the risk that such a measure could be misused for political reasons (e.g. to target political rivals), the numbers show that something needs to be done about the growing radicalism, and not just for protecting Indonesia's religious minorities.

**c)** Given the increasing threat from radical and violent Islamic group resurgence, it remains to be seen whether the authorities will continue to be successful in curbing this threat and whether attacks will be limited to the security organs or will target religious minorities again. The fact that more and more radicalization happens online does not make this task easier. A growing number of Indonesian supporters of IS ideology are resorting to home-schooling to raise a generation of IS [militant "cubs"](#) (RSIS, 28 August 2020). The government's counter-terrorism agency identified 68 Islamic boarding schools which have close ties with the radical group, Islamic Jemaah Islamiyah. However, it is not enough for the government agency simply to check whether an Islamic school follows the national curriculum, since many 'operate ambiguously', so the [radicalization](#) of pupils at Muslim schools may be a much broader challenge (RSIS, 20 April 2022).

The problem may also be bigger than that: According to Indonesia's National Counterterrorism Agency, at least [198 boarding schools](#) have ties to terrorist networks (UCA News, 26 January 2022). On the other hand, a poll showed that the government's December 2020 policy of banning the Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI) is enjoying surprisingly broad support: While 63% of

survey respondents who were aware of the ban supported it (and only 29% were opposed), social media showed a [different story](#) with 50% of postings opposing the ban and only 34% being in favor. This may point to a growing urban and generational division in Indonesia, since a greater number of urban and young people have access to the Internet (New Mandala, 1 July 2022). A research on Muslim consumers in Indonesia and Malaysia has found that one third of young people consider themselves [more religious than their parents](#), while 45% call themselves simply 'devout' (Al-Jazeera, 21 September 2022). The research also revealed that 91% of respondents said that a strong relationship with Allah was the most important thing in life, on par with family and health.

**d)** A worrying development is that a [pro-IS cell](#) has emerged and been able to operate in Papua (IPAC, 3 February 2022). Reportedly, it recruited migrants from Java and Sulawesi and planned to attack churches and church representatives in Papua. This indicates a growing danger. If such attacks succeed, they have the potential to polarize the population along ethnic and religious lines, deepen existing rifts and widen the conflict to other parts of the country. The ongoing migration makes such developments much easier.

## **2) Growing authoritarianism and polarization**

**a)** Indonesia is in danger of losing its reputation for following a tolerant brand of Islam, which means that the government feels obliged to more overtly defend the country's motto "Unity in Diversity" (and remain loyal to the nation's foundational ideology, Pancasila). However, it will be an enormous challenge to take all citizens into consideration, including 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). It may also be an uphill task, given that the younger generation seems to have looser ties with Pancasila, according to the aforementioned Setara/INFID study.

**b)** 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). The fact that one of the frontrunners in the scheduled 2024 elections not only serves as incumbent Minister of Defense, but also has a checkered military career, illustrates that neither authoritarianism nor polarization is likely to cease in Indonesian politics anytime soon. The armed forces may even gain [more independence and influence](#) on politics after the elections (IPAC, 17 August 2023). Presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto made outgoing president Jokowi's oldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, his running mate, fanning worries that another political dynasty is in the making. The fact that he runs on a different party ticket than his father did as well as the fact that the Constitutional Court had to interpret the law in such a way as to [circumvent the age limit](#) raised more than just a few eyebrows (Benar News, 23 October 2023).

c) Finally, the polarization between Islamists and so-called pluralists will continue to define Indonesian politics, as this is often seen as a method for winning over voters. The unanimous agreement by almost all parties in parliament on a [new criminal code](#) made headlines around the world for criminalizing sex outside marriage (although these would only be complaint offences), but the chilling effect on freedom of religion and religious minorities was less in focus (The Conversation, 8 December 2022). Additionally, in the WWL 2024 reporting period, parties supporting the incumbent government switched to campaign-mode; jockeying for political positions always includes brushing up religious credentials. The government has tried to hold firmly to its banner of tolerance, but this came only after a spate of cases in which permits for church construction or renovation had been denied, although it finally announced a certain relaxation in the application process for religious buildings (see below: *Persecution dynamics/Church sphere*).

### 3) China and other challenges

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, including 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 (RFA, 28 May 2020). China seems intent on seeing how far it can go; it sent a large [survey vessel](#) to the Natuna Sea on 31 August 2021, a move Indonesia responded to with caution, but which may strain an otherwise improving relationship (Benar News, 19 October 2021).

The continued [funding](#) by Saudi Arabia has transformed Indonesia over the last three decades (The Guardian, 16 April 2020). As a result, 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.

The consequences of the Russian/Ukraine war are vividly felt in Indonesia as well. While the country balanced the challenges of chairing and hosting the G20 [presidency and summit](#) very well (El País, 19 November 2022), it has been noted that many Indonesians stay neutral or even [back Russia's invasion](#) of Ukraine (University of Melbourne, 9 March 2022). As the war continues into its third year, the pressure on the Indonesian government to take sides may grow. The same is true for its relationship with China. It will be interesting to see how these challenges will be navigated.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: relocation of the capital - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/26/indonesia-new-capital-city-borneo-forests-jakarta>
- Recent history: regional challenges - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/31/indonesias-asean-leadership-tested-myanmar>

- 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>
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- Political and legal landscape: West Sumatra - <https://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/is-west-sumatra-on-the-verge-of-an-intolerance-and-violent-extremism-crisis/>
- Political and legal landscape: survey - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesian-students-sharia-support-worries-church/101355>
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- Economic landscape: back to the lower middle income level - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-07-08/indonesia-loses-prized-upper-middle-income-status-amid-pandemic>
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## WWL 2024: 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	3,300	0.0
Catholic	8,347,000	24.2
Protestant	20,703,000	59.9
Independent	6,977,000	20.2
Unaffiliated	400,000	1.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-1,868,000	-5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,562,300</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	9,770,000	28.3
Renewalist movement	11,590,000	33.5

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

**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 Roman 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 Komodo islands (well-known for its large lizards). 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 Tapanuli 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.

## 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 (for the latest developments, see below: *Church sphere*). 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). Central Sulawesi has become another hotspot: although the immediate threat of the MIT seems to have passed, communal and religious tensions continue. 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) or the Protestant GPIB church. They are monitored and experience opposition once it is noted that they are growing. The congregations of 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 come 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. Some groups 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. It should be noted that Catholic churches can also face the very same problems when it comes to building and renovating. A country expert points to another difference: "Interestingly, while non-traditional Christian churches do face some threats, they're often better resourced than the traditional churches and have stronger political connections, at least in the major cities, and so sometimes have some element of protection."

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Indonesia – A Country Study - <http://countrystudies.us/indonesia/>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: Islamization attempts - <https://international.la-croix.com/news/christians-in-papua-fear-growing-islamization/7429>

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Indonesia

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Indonesia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	66	42
WWL 2023	68	33
WWL 2022	68	28
WWL 2021	63	47
WWL 2020	60	49

*Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods*

Although the WWL 2024 score decreased by 2 points, the general situation for Christians in Indonesia has not changed greatly. The violence score fell from 12.8 points in WWL 2023 to 11.5 points in WWL 2024, since less killings were reported. Indeed, the threat of attack by Islamic

militants may have died down at the moment after dozens of radical Muslims were arrested by the authorities and planned attacks were foiled. However, the level of pressure across the different spheres of life has been largely unchanged, indicating that not much has changed on the ground for Indonesian Christians.

## 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	Not at all
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	Not at all

*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. A more recent example is the province of West Sumatra which passed a new law, recognizing that the customs of the province are based on [Islamic law](#) (South China Morning Post, 21 July 2022) as well as rules on churches in the city of Cilegon, Banten province (see below: *Church sphere*) and the mayor of the city signing a petition against churches in his city. This illustrates that locally, *Islamic oppression* and majoritarianism is strong. Indonesia is in the process of revising important criminal codes that could seriously damage the rights of minorities in Indonesia. The current draft in the parliament is focused on the recognition of "any living law" in Indonesia. These "living laws" can be interpreted locally, meaning that local governing bodies can choose to follow Sharia regulations. Since there are no

uniform "living laws" in Indonesia this might open the door to widespread (localized) rights abuses, including the all-powerful blasphemy law that strikes fear in minority groups. This is all a part of the more conservative drive in Indonesian politics and society.

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 so far did not change a lot in terms of encouraging radical Islamic groups or making them more outspoken.

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.

More recent [survey results](#) published by the Lembaga Survei Institute provide a somewhat more mixed picture. Using a 'feeling thermometer' method for measuring polarization, Christians recorded the highest 'temperature' of all religious minorities with 49.8 degrees. Only 18% of respondents objected to having Christians as neighbors, but 75% objected to their child marrying a Christian and 44% objected to a Christian being a local leader (New Mandala, 1 July 2022).

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 few years. The presidential elections in 2024 may give a hint about the direction, in which the country is heading.

#### 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 significant pressure from family, friends and neighbors to return to the belief of the fathers.

### Drivers of persecution

Indonesia: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	WEAK							
Government officials	Strong	Weak							
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	Medium							
Violent religious groups	Strong	-							
Ideological pressure groups	Medium								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very strong	Medium							
One's own (extended) family	Medium	Medium							
Political parties	Medium								

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 (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 (HTI)* in May 2017 and *Jemaah Anshorut Daulah (JAD)* 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. While JAD organized the Makassar bombing, *Mujahideen Indonesia Timur (MIT)* was responsible for the killings in Sulawesi, but seems to be practically defunct since 2023. Ideological pressure groups 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 mobi-



lize 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 distinction between these and ideological pressure groups is not great, but it is important to be aware that 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 simply by declaring that they do not want any Christian church in their community. 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. At the same time, it can intimidate local officials, e.g. neighborhood leaders, in giving in to this pressure.
- **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. While it is true that there is no nation-wide coordinated policy against Christians, the silence of superiors at the national level about the actions of local officials is often deafening. Harmony is generally sought at the expense of the weakest and the local level is most prone to it. This varies from region to region, but in general, the list of provinces named in the Persecution engines section above applies here as well. The ignorance of government officials regarding minorities was highlighted in the case of religious textbooks which the ministry of religion had to withdraw; no Christian experts had been consulted on the content (see below: *Family sphere*).
- **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. The government struggles to act against such popular preachers.
- **(Extended) family (Medium):** 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 on the one side, on the other side by a risk of being kicked out of the house.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Some political parties have an Islamic agenda. Several conservative Muslim political parties, e.g. the PKS, PPP and PBB 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

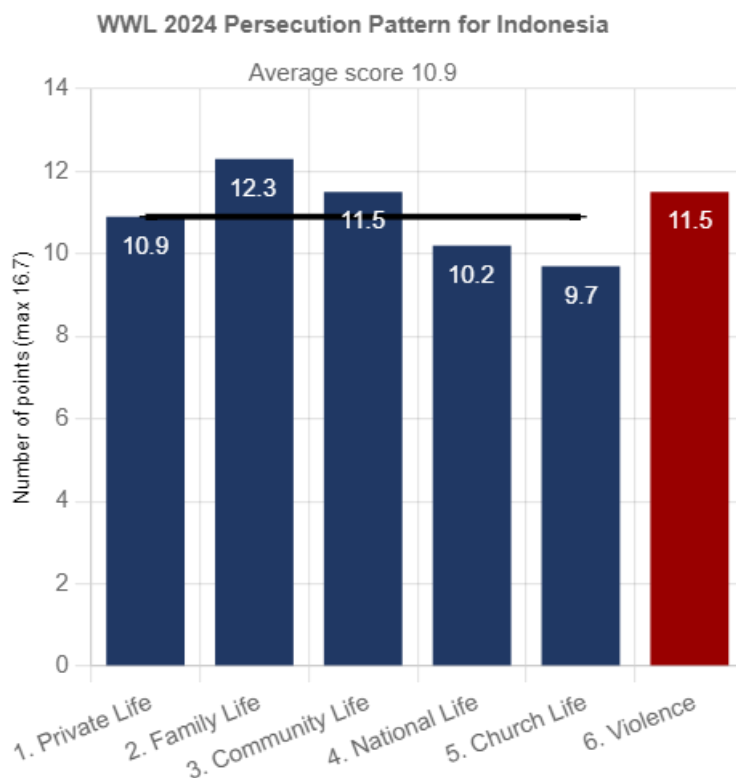


visible connections. At the national level, PKS is the only opposition party at the moment, which may make it easier to stand up for their views. On the other hand, there is a nationalist Islamic party, the PKB, which strongly counters such efforts. All of these parties are comparatively small. It remains 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.

### The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Indonesia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Indonesia remained almost unchanged from last year (11.0 points in WWL 2023 and 10.9 points in WWL 2024).

- Pressure is strongest in the *Family* and *Community spheres* closely followed by the *Private* and *National spheres of life*. This pattern is typical in situations where Christian converts from a Muslim background draw the most persecution.
- In WWL 2024, the score for violence against Christians decreased by 1.3 points but remained at an extremely high level (11.5 points). The killing of five Christian youths in Papua in September 2023 is particularly to be noted (see above: *Specific examples of violent incidents*).

## 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 2024 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: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

**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 speak about their faith, so converts face a comparably higher risk. 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, so many Christians limit themselves to showing their faith through their behavior. This is especially true in hotspot areas like Aceh, East Java, Banten, West Java and West Sumatra, but also in places like South Sumatra, Lampung, South Kalimantan and East Kalimantan.

**Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 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 and larger parts of society, even more so in rural areas. There are cases where converts were thrown out of their family home or children were taken away. Additional pressure comes frequently from friends and neighborhood. Converts can expect to face further problems, e.g. when trying to change the religion recorded on their ID cards. Knowing this, most converts prefer to keep a low-profile and hide their new-won faith or take the opportunity of the country's strong work migration trend into the cities.

**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 rarely express their faith in written form, most definitely not under their real name. Especially since the case of ex-Governor Ahok, Christians

are increasingly limiting themselves not to say or post anything to provoke the public's anger and weigh their words so as not to be perceived as slandering another faith or as proselytizing. As one country expert put it: "Words can often times be taken out of context and, unfortunately, in Indonesia, if words are misconstrued as divisive those words can be held against that person. Those who choose to write on social media must also be careful not to say anything against Islam as that can be taken as blasphemy and could result in government intervention and possibly jail time." "Consequently", he concludes, "many Christians are hesitant to post things about their faith for this reason."

**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 different for converts as it points to their new faith and therefore draws unwanted attention, no matter where they are living. 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. This applies for the provinces Aceh and Banten. There are even places where Christians - even if they are not converts - are advised not to carry their Bible openly when they come to worship at church, in order to avoid provoking any bullying or acts of violence from the local Muslim community,

**Block 1: Additional information**

Converts are not just limited in the ways described above. They always need to be careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only Christians in their family. Bibles and other Christian literature have to be hidden carefully, and can only be read secretly to avoid provoking conflict. Fellowship with other Christians can become challenging in these circumstances, since it can bring themselves and others into danger. All this is less difficult in urban areas. There is also a growing interest generally to monitor people's religious habits.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.75 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 the children of Christians. Christian children have also been bullied into wearing Muslim clothing and received warnings from the teacher for failing to do so.

**Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.50 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 an external church 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. In some cases, Christian children have been forced into reciting and praying, even in a school in Jakarta (VOI, 10 August 2022). Highlighting the general mindset towards Christians (and other minorities), in the previous reporting period (WWL 2023), the ministry of education had to withdraw a new religious curriculum because it taught [incorrect doctrines](#) about Christianity. This is what happens when materials that teach about Christianity are published without first having them reviewed by Christians (whether Catholic or Protestant). Meanwhile, the errors seems to have been amended without any serious problem, but the fact that Christians had not even been consulted is in itself striking (Fides, 29 July 2022).

**Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.25 points)**

Baptism has always been what one country expert called "a very sensitive subject". It is particularly difficult 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, kept as a secret and not many people will be able to attend. Although this is a challenge throughout Indonesia, Aceh, West Java, East Java, South Kalimantan and North Kalimantan are especially prone to this. Christians 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.

**Block 2: Additional information**

In the Family sphere, converts face a broader variety of problems than other Christians. When converts are discovered, they do not just lose their inheritance rights, but are often divorced as well and lose custody of their children. Inter-religious marriage is difficult in Indonesia, as it is the norm that both spouses have the same faith before they marry, so usually, one spouse converts. The Supreme Court [confirmed the ban](#) on registering inter-religious marriages, although some lower courts were open to it (Benar News, 25 July 2023). Organizing a wedding or funeral can become difficult or even impossible in the hotspot areas, especially for converts.

According to traditional Islamic law, a convert to Christianity loses all inheritance rights. Often, this does not happen through a formal decision, but occurs simply because all ties with the family are cut. Hindu converts will also frequently lose their inheritance rights, as families do not want to have anything to do with them. Because of the social stigma on conversions, it is also very difficult to get a new ID card with the religion changed on it or a family card which is needed for a plethora of reasons when dealing with authorities.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

### **Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)**

Pressure to renounce their faith 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, e.g. when they are threatened with being divorced. However, this pressure can also affect non-convert Christians, particularly in places such as: Aceh, West Sumatra, Bima (NTB), Madura (East Java) Padang, Banten and West Java. 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 (which the majority does indeed want).

### **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 been known to happen that Christians have not been ranked first in their class, despite having earned top marks.

### **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 the pressure to dress according to what is perceived as Islamic standards has been rising across the islands of Indonesia. It is more and more common to see Islamic veils and even complete coverings for women. Where this pressure is exerted by the authorities, it easily forces Christian women and girls to comply as well (Human Rights Watch Report, ["I wanted to run away!"](#), 18 March 2021, and an [update](#), 21 July 2022). The issue is ongoing, with a [public hearing](#) of the Commission on

Women's Rights taking place in August 2023 (Human Rights Watch, 17 August 2023). As already stated above in *Trends Analysis*, an effort to de-regulate these rules per ministerial decree was struck down by the Constitutional Court. There is a growing trend of setting up 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. 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 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)**

Discrimination against Christians at work is frequent, 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 about this. For instance, employees in village or sub-district offices, but also those employed in state-owned enterprises face discrimination and will be overlooked for promotion. 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 above: 2.8), is also done in order to keep them from meeting the minimum requirements for becoming civil servants. Consequently, relatively few Christians make it into the civil service.

**Block 3: Additional information**

Several cases have been reported of Christians wanting to get access to public services (such as health and education) but only receiving an inferior standard of service, i.e., no service at all or they are made to wait for hours.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**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)**

Freedom of religion is guaranteed in Article 29 (paragraph 2) of the 1945 Constitution: "The State guarantees the independence of every citizen to embrace their own religion and to worship according to their religion and beliefs". However, the Constitution only recognizes six 'faiths': Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The Constitutional Court stated clearly in 2017 that all religions have to be treated equally, including indigenous religions. 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 countrywide in the short-term. Legislation at the 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 below: 5.2 and *Persecution of other religious minorities*). Several provinces have implemented Sharia by-laws, which affect Christians as well.

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)**

Over the last few years, one trigger being the Ahok case, Christians have become much more cautious about sharing their views in public, especially when it comes to religion. Even many moderate Muslims are becoming more cautious, as conservative Islam is increasingly dominating society. Statements perceived as opposing Islam quickly end with a charge of blasphemy. In more conservative Muslim regions, this self-censorship is even stronger.

**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, including in universities. In many talks in mosques and other places, Christians are often the object of slander and used as scapegoats. This often happens in social media, as in a much-debated YouTube sermon, uploaded in June 2022, where the preacher said that Christians are "statue-worshippers". But smear campaigns also happen in written form, for instance as posters and banners making accusations against Christians or rejecting the presence of churches. Another example is where a politician referred to Kalimantan - a place where many Christians live - as "a [place of evil spirits](#)" (UCA News, 1 February 2022). Even though civil society does provide a backlash against this manner of speaking, it does not seem to have been very effective at preventing further cases.

**Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.25 points)**

Blasphemy cases are brought against members from all religions and even against the Minister for Religious Affairs (see above: *Political and Legal landscape*), but they have a particularly strong and chilling effect on minorities, especially Christians. With the planned expansion of the blasphemy laws within the remodeled Criminal Code, this chilling effect may broaden and there are also fears that these laws could be used for political purposes, [restricting](#) freedom of expression as well (Asia Sentinel, 8 January 2023). Likewise, blasphemy committed by Muslims seems to get a comparably lighter punishment than blasphemy committed by individuals belonging to other religions (UCA News, 13 January 2022). One observer summed up the fear surrounding blasphemy accusations like this: "There is a number one reason why many Christians don't share their faith in the first place. They are willing to and want to, but society tells them it comes with too much risk. It is better to protect the "rukun" (Arabic for "pillar") of the people rather than to have to worry about what could happen to them if they speak up."

**Block 4: Additional information**

Christians face a high, often impenetrable, threshold for being promoted in public service - much higher than for Muslim officials. One particular campaign is an example of the growing mindset: Surah 51 of the Quran ("al Maidah") is highlighted to encourage Muslims to only select and vote for Muslim candidates. This thinking is found for political leadership, but also in administrative positions. The attitude towards Christians is often negative and, even in more tolerant cities like Jakarta, non-Muslim public servants find themselves being regularly discriminated against because of their faith. There are also reports of Christian organizations which struggle to obtain



or maintain visa for their co-workers.

## 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 on "Religious Harmony, Empowering Religious Harmony Forums, and Constructing Houses of Worship", 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.

Church congregations often have their applications pending for many years. In some cases where registration has been approved, radical groups simply block the entrance of the 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. For example: Prior to building a church, the government of Aceh requires the congregation to collect 150 signatures from neighbors of a different religious background stating their acceptance. 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. It remains to be seen if the amendment of the procedure (see above: *Specific examples of positive developments*) will see any tangible improvements in the local contexts.

### **Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.75 points)**

A good example of the challenges involved in building or renovating church buildings has been the current situation in Aceh. Since 2015, thousands of Christians in Aceh's Singkil district have been forced to worship under makeshift shelters. The local authority demolished the eight Protestant churches and one Catholic church and has since refused to allow them to build replacements, claiming Sharia law cannot allow that. The Christians have now moved the dispute to the national level, pointing out that their rights guaranteed by the Indonesian Constitution are being infringed.

In the previous reporting period (WWL 2023), the city of Cilegon, Banten, officially [opposed](#) the building of a church (Benar News, 9 September 2022). The pledge never to allow a church in the city came from a [deal made in 1975](#), when the Soviet Union helped in building the Krakatau Steel Mills in Cilegon, Indonesia's largest steel works (Asia News, 8 September 2022). One of the clauses in the agreement had been to make sure there was no visible church presence in the

city. Whatever the origin, the result is the same: Christians cannot meet for worship in Cilegon and have to commute to the provincial capital, Serang, to attend church services.

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

Outdoor meetings are often not permitted due to the fear that the meeting might provoke suspicions of attempted proselytism. For churches located in strictly Muslim areas, such as Aceh, Padang, Banten and NTB, outside activities come at a high risk. Gathering outside is not such a problem in the majority Christian regions.

**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 it is completely different in villages and rural areas, which make up the majority of Indonesia, as churches can be quickly accused of proselytism and 'Christianization'. Therefore many churches are cautious and will refrain from welcoming and integrating converts.

**Block 5: Additional information**

What has been stated above about the integration of converts is true for many other questions in this sphere of life as well. According to the laws, producing or distributing religious materials and Bibles is no problem, but distribution in the hot-spot areas is nonetheless risky as it will be seen as proselytism. Similarly, Christians have the same right of access to media and the right to form charities by law, but due to the growing influence of conservative Islam, in strongly Islamic areas such ministries face strong opposition where openly motivated by the Christian faith.

The Indonesian government has enacted (and in recent years strengthened) legislation and regulations that have subjected minority religions to discrimination and made them extremely vulnerable to the members of the majority community who take the law into their own hands. Indonesian government institutions have also played a role in the violation of the rights and freedoms of the country's religious minorities. Those institutions, which include the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Coordinating Board for Monitoring Mystical Beliefs in Society (Badan Koordinasi Pengawas Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat, Bakor Pakem) under the Attorney General's Office, and the semi-official Indonesian Ulama Council, have eroded religious freedom by issuing decrees and fatwas (religious rulings) against members of religious minorities and using their position of authority to press for the prosecution of 'blasphemers'.

## 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, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

**1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.** Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

**2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:**

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

**3. The use of symbolic numbers:** In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. 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 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Indonesia: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	7	10
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	12	8
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	12	1
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?	1	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)?	100 *	1000 *
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?	0	211
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?	1	10 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	600 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Christians killed / attacked:** In September 2023, five Christian youths were killed in Papua (see above: *Specific examples of violent incidents*).
- **Christians arrested:** Christians have been detained or arrested for faith-related reasons. For security reasons, no details can be provided.
- **Churches attacked:** Church buildings in West Java, Lampung and Jakarta suffered attacks or had to be closed.

### 5 Year trends

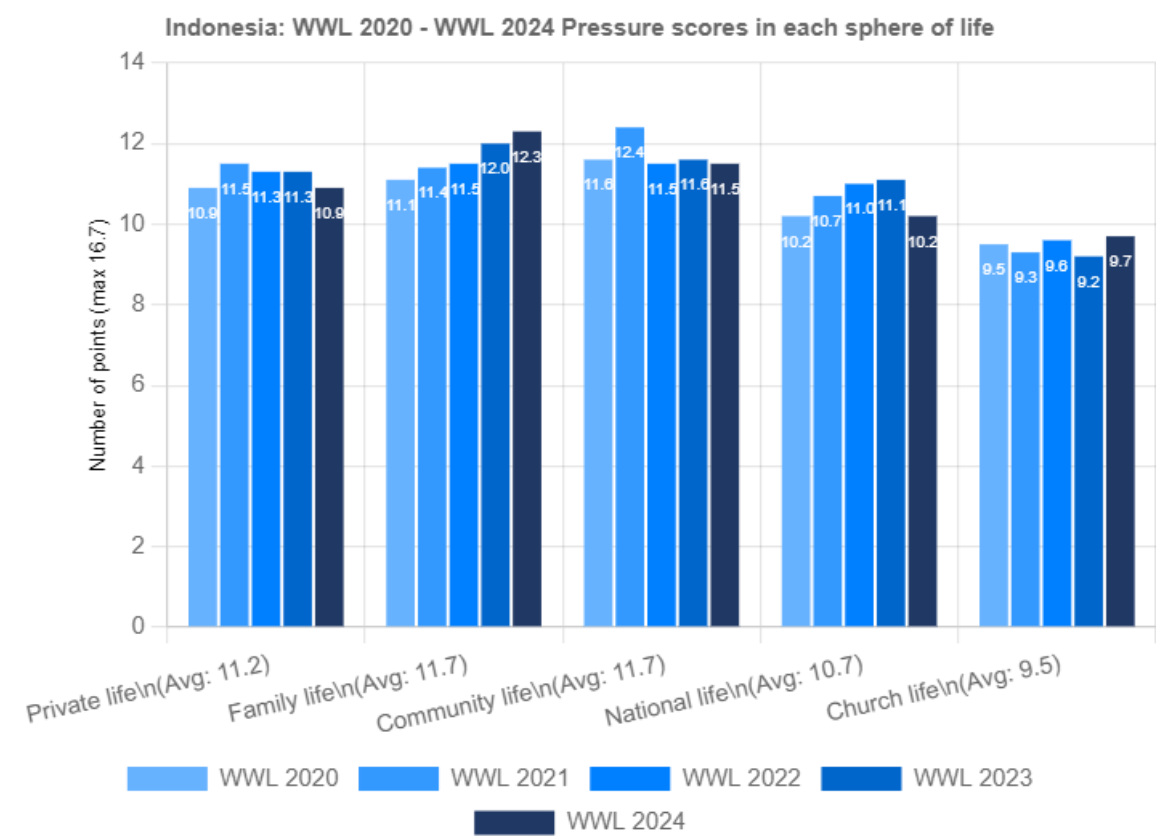
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Indonesia: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	10.9
2023	11.0
2022	11.0
2021	11.1
2020	10.7

The average pressure on Christians has crept up from 10.7 points in WWL 2020 and now appears to have plateaued at around the 11.0 point mark.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that, over the last five WWL reporting periods, pressure on Christians in *Family* and *National life* (except in WWL 2024) in particular has shown regular increases each year. This trend in the *National sphere* (despite the fall in pressure in WWL 2024) reflects how radical Islamic groups are growing in influence and how blasphemy laws are being strictly implemented against, among others, the Christian minority.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above shows a peak of violence in WWL 2022, when the score reached an extreme level of 13.5 points. Although the violence score has decreased each reporting period since then, the level of violence has remained in the 'extreme' category and has included the killing of several Christians.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

Gender inequality in Indonesia is an ongoing issue acknowledged by the government. Despite the attention, male-biased gender norms, child marriage and educational disparities [remain](#) (World Bank Blogs, 14 December 2020), and sexual harassment is considered an “epidemic” on university campuses ([HRW](#), 12 April 2022). 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 caused a rise in gender-based and domestic violence (Jakarta Post, 10 March 2021).

Women who convert to Christianity can face violence, psychological abuse, and death threats if their faith is discovered by their families. Many women within marriages may choose to keep it a secret for this reason, also risking separation from their children if their husbands find out about their faith.

Christian women and girls can face 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 this threat, although it is rarely implemented. In a patriarchal system, it is harder for the wife to influence the husband than it is for the husband to influence the wife. Christian women also risk being forced to marry, or deliberately groomed into marrying for the purposes of conversion.

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 bullying, interrogation and may be labelled as immoral women. A father who protested a mandatory school hijab ruling for his 17-year old Christian daughter encouraged the school to create an exception for Christian students, but has faced wide community backlash to the point of the family being forced out of their home ([HRW](#), 17 March 2023).

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Violence – death
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

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 pastors and Christian activists are the primary targets for public religious discrimination. They can face accusations, interrogations and may have to stand trial for charges such as “inciting religious hatred.” Blasphemy laws in the country are reportedly [misused](#) to incite religious intolerance and silence critics, although pastors rarely stand trial (CSW, 8 April 2021).



Christian men and boys can be bullied for not being circumcised, particularly in schools. They can face economic harassment; a country expert comments, “generally men who work earn money for their family's living needs. If Christians are in prison, kidnapped, it will have a significant impact on the family's economy. Their children will find it difficult to go to school because there is no money.”

The presence of radical Islamic groups in the region, who have links with the Islamic State group, has also been a threat to their physical safety.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Indonesia, pp.18-19):

- "Although the government generally allowed citizens to leave the religion column blank on their identity card (KTP) applications and a 2017 Constitutional Court ruling allowed citizens to select Indigenous faiths on their KTP applications, individuals continued to report difficulties accessing government services if they chose either option. Faced with this problem, many religious minority members, including those following Indigenous beliefs, reportedly chose to identify as a member of an officially recognized religion close to their beliefs or of the locally dominant religion. According to researchers, this practice obscured the real numbers of adherents to religious groups in government statistics. NGOs and religious advocacy groups continued to urge the government to remove the religion field from KTPs."
- "Members of religious minorities reported they sometimes faced discrimination after others saw their religious affiliation on their KTPs, even if it was one of the six officially recognized faiths. Members of the Jewish community said they felt uncomfortable stating their religion in public and often chose to state they were Christians or Muslims, depending on the dominant religion where they lived, due to concern that local communities did not understand or accept their religion. Although interfaith marriages are legal provided the ceremony is conducted under the tradition of one of the faiths of the couple, couples of differing religions who sought to marry reportedly often had difficulty finding a religious official willing to perform an interfaith wedding ceremony. Some couples of differing religions selected the same religion on their KTPs in order to marry legally. Strict enforcement of this policy and implementation rules reportedly varied by region. Minority Muslim groups, including Ahmadis, Shia, and Gafatar, continued to report resistance when their members applied for KTPs as Muslims, effectively denying them access to public services if they could not secure KTPs."

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, the latter often resorting to [violent means](#) (Berkley Center, 19 April 2021). For example, on 3 September 2021, a mob of 200 people attacked an [Ahmadi mosque](#) in West Kalimantan, which had to be protected by police (UCA News, 7 September 2021). 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. The blasphemy laws are also used to actively prosecute and limit Islamic groups and sects considered as [heretic](#) by the majority (The Jakarta Post, 29 June 2023).

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).

## 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](#) a) within Muslim society (RSIS, 28 May 2019), b) between [more radical Muslims and minorities](#), and c) between Javanese and non-Javanese citizens (New Mandala, 28 May 2019). Bridging these gaps and doing justice to all groups in society is challenging and, even though social media probably paints a too extreme picture of these rifts between different factions, the rifts torn by COVID-19 may prove to be fertile for continuing to emphasize ethnic and religious differences.

Choosing a new minister of religion, who is apparently mindful of the situation of religious minorities can be seen as an encouraging sign, but as the parties are already preparing for the next presidential and parliamentary elections in 2024, with contenders jockeying for the prime positions, it is very possible that some of them will play the religious card. If first polls can be trusted, Prabowo Subianto, who had partnered with radical Islamic groups in the past, stands a good chance of becoming the next president, even though many radical groups currently seem to prefer another candidate, Anies Baswedan. (Please note: This dossier was published before the elections in February 2024 took place).

In any case, society in general is becoming more conservative and therefore, *Islamic oppression* is bound to stay and most likely, even to increase, especially if the younger generation continues to follow firebrand preachers in social media and if traditional Islam does not find an answer to this challenge.

### 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 make them return to Hinduism.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: Islamic law - <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3185970/will-west-sumatras-new-law-lead-more-islamic-conservatism>
- 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/>
- Persecution engines description: survey results - <https://www.newmandala.org/counter-polarisation-and-political-expediency/>
- Persecution engines description: intolerant of other religions - <https://coconuts.co/jakarta/news/57-indonesian-teachers-intolerant-religions-islamic-research-center/>
- Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points): incorrect doctrines - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/72600-ASIA\\_INDONESIA\\_Wrong\\_teaching\\_on\\_the\\_Christian\\_faith\\_after\\_the\\_intervention\\_of\\_the\\_Bishops\\_the\\_government\\_announces\\_the\\_correction](http://www.fides.org/en/news/72600-ASIA_INDONESIA_Wrong_teaching_on_the_Christian_faith_after_the_intervention_of_the_Bishops_the_government_announces_the_correction)
- Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere: confirmed the ban - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/interfaith-marriage-registration-prohibited-07252023114913.html>
- 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): "I wanted to run away!" - <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/03/18/i-wanted-run-away/abusive-dress-codes-women-and-girls-indonesia>
- 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): update - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/21/indonesian-women-speak-out-dress-codes>
- 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): public hearing - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/17/indonesian-schoolgirls-testify-mandatory-hijab-and-bullying>
- Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.50 points): place of evil spirits - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/another-indonesian-politician-hit-with-hate-speech-rap/95944>
- Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.25 points): restricting - <https://www.asiasentinel.com/p/fear-blasphemy-law-indonesia>
- Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.75 points): opposed - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/indonesian-city-officials-allegedly-oppose-church-construction-in-banten-09092022141755.html>
- Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.75 points): deal made in 1975 - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Banten%3A-Local-authorities-continue-to-ban-churches-based-on-a-1975-deal-56613.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: remain - <https://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/gender-and-education-indonesia-progress-more-work-be-done>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/12/epidemic-sexual-harassment-indonesian-campuses-continues-due-culture-impunity>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: access justice - <https://www.thejakartapost.com/paper/2021/03/09/pandemic-shrouds-domestic-violence.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW, 17 March 2023 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/17/forced-home-protesting-indonesias-mandatory-hijab-rules>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: misused - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2021/04/08/report/5219/article.htm>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: violent means - <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/violence-and-micro-sized-religious-minorities-a-conversation-with-jessica-soedirgo>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Ahmadi mosque - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesian-police-arrest-10-over-ahmadi-mosque-attack/94031>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: implemented - <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/14/world/asia/indonesia-religious-freedom-.html>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: new ID and family cards - <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/02/21/keep-the-faith-bandung-issues-first-id-cards-with-native-religion-column.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: heretic - <https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2023/06/29/blasphemy-or-religious-persecution.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: study - <https://setara-institute.org/merawat-kemajemukan-dan-memperkuat-negara-pancasila/>
- Future outlook: longstanding rifts - <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/indonesias-presidential-election-2019-sarungan-vs-cingkrangan-elections-and-contestations-within-indonesian-islam/#.XPj4HEI7nIU>
- Future outlook: more radical Muslims and minorities - <https://www.newmandala.org/religion-ethnicity-and-indonesias-2019-presidential-election/>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Indonesia>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.