

KEY FINDINGS

In 2019, religious freedom conditions in Indonesia generally trended negatively compared to the previous year. Reports from local nongovernmental organizations indicated that the provinces of West Java, Jakarta, and East Java had the [highest number of incidents](#) of religious intolerance—including discrimination, hate speech, acts of violence, and rejections of permits to build houses of worship for minority religious communities. The government continued to prosecute blasphemy allegations and to impose disproportionate prison sentences. Three women were put on trial for blasphemy, [two](#) with diagnosed mental health challenges and one for comments posted on social media. Suzethe Margaret, a Roman Catholic who has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, was detained on June 30, 2019, for entering a mosque with her dog. In September, after months of pressure from Muslim hardliners, authorities announced that she would face trial for blasphemy. On February 5, 2020, after the reporting period, the Cibinong District Court in West Java acquitted Suzethe of blasphemy charges due to her mental incapacity. In April, the Supreme Court [rejected the appeal](#) of Meliana, a Buddhist woman who had been convicted of blasphemy in 2018 for asking a local mosque to lower the volume of the call to prayer. However, in May, Meliana was [released on parole](#). Islamic preacher Abdul Somad was also [investigated for blasphemy](#) after giving a speech in which he insulted the Christian cross, although he was not officially charged.

Hardliners and other intolerant groups continued to threaten houses of worship associated with minority faiths, including by exploiting the 2006 Joint Regulation on Houses of Worship, which requires religious communities to obtain signatures from 90 congregation members and from at least 60 local households of a different faith, as well as receive approval from the local government before building a house of worship. In May 2019, hardliner groups [protested](#)—and reportedly threatened jihad—against proposed plans

to build a Hindu temple in Bekasi. In July, after hardliner groups demonstrated and issued threats of violence, authorities in Bantul district, Yogyakarta, [cited](#) the 2006 decree in rescinding the permit of a Pentecostal church. In an ongoing dispute that started in 2008, the GKI Yasmin church still had not received permits for its house of worship in Bogor, despite [promises](#) by local officials and a ruling from the Supreme Court in its favor.

There were reports that political opportunists attempted to exploit religious tensions for electoral gain ahead of the general elections on April 17, 2019. Prabowo Subianto, the primary challenger to incumbent President Joko Widodo, attempted to [mobilize supporters](#) of the 212 movement, which played a key role in pressuring the government to charge then Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama—a Chinese Christian—with blasphemy in early 2017. Following President Widodo’s reelection, there were reports that the government [planned to introduce](#) stricter background checks to identify religious extremists in the bureaucracy and remove them. In November, the government [launched](#) a website that allowed members of the public to report on alleged “radical content” shared by public servants online. The Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform [banned employees](#) from wearing the niqab headdress. In October, Indonesia’s chief security minister was [stabbed](#) by a man suspected to be an Islamist influenced by the Islamic State.

In September 2019, the Indonesian legislature considered a bill to replace the existing Criminal Code, which dates back to the Dutch colonial era. This new code would have [expanded](#) the criminalization of blasphemy to include insulting a religious leader during a religious service, persuading someone to become an atheist, and defiling or unlawfully destroying houses of worship or religious artifacts. Civil society groups led massive protests in response to these and other proposed restrictions, leading the government to delay the bill indefinitely.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Include Indonesia on the U.S. Department of State’s Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
 - Urge the Indonesian government to revise the draft Criminal Code bill to remove criminal sanctions for blasphemy, as well as to repeal or amend the existing blasphemy laws and release any individuals currently held on blasphemy charges;
 - Incorporate training on international human rights standards related to freedom of religion or belief—including concerns related to enforcement of blasphemy laws—into U.S.-funded programs, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Harmoni and MAJu projects; and
 - Urge the Indonesian government to take the lead on human rights and religious freedom regionally in its capacity as party to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, including by publicly advocating on behalf of Uighurs and other persecuted Muslims in China.
- The U.S. Congress should:
- Support measures such as [H.Res.512](#) and [S.Res.458](#), which urge the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws.

Background

Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. Muslims [comprise](#) 87.2 percent of Indonesia's 267 million citizens, while Protestant Christians comprise 7 percent, Roman Catholics 2.9 percent, and Hindus 1.7 percent; 0.9 percent identify as another minority faith, such as Buddhism and Confucianism. Indonesia has a long tradition of religious pluralism. Article 29 of its constitution "guarantees the independence of each resident to embrace religion and worship according to their respective religions and beliefs." The Indonesian government has promoted an ideology known as Pancasila, which comprises five principles: monotheism, civilized humanity, national unity, deliberative democracy, and social justice ("monotheism" is broadly defined as any religion with a supreme deity, a holy figure, a scripture, and established rituals). However, the government officially recognizes only six religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Violations of religious freedom tend to have the greatest impact on Ahmadiyya and Shi'a Muslims, Christians, believers outside the six officially recognized faiths, and nonbelievers.

The government also requires all citizens to list their religious affiliation on their ID cards, which has historically forced members of unrecognized minority faith communities, and those belonging to no faith community, to misrepresent their faith or leave the field blank. This can impact their access to licenses and permits, education, and government jobs. In February 2019, Bandung in West Java became the [first area](#) in Indonesia to grant a designation "Faith in One God" for members of indigenous faith communities.

Shari'a Law in Aceh

Aceh is the only province in Indonesia with the legal authority to enact Shari'a law. Religious police [enforce](#) a strict form of Shari'a that includes corporal punishment. In January 2019, two 18-year-olds were [flogged](#) 17 times for hugging each other in public and a second man was flogged for being intimate with a woman in a grocery store. In December, in two separate cases, a man and a woman convicted of committing adultery were [beaten unconscious](#) while being publicly caned. The provincial government prohibits women from straddling motorbikes and forces them to wear hijabs. Muslims living in Aceh do not have the option of opting out of the Shari'a legal system.

Extremism in Education Institutions

Some local human rights groups [claim](#) that Indonesian university students are becoming more radicalized. A Ministry of Defense study released in 2017 [reported](#) that 23.3 percent of high school and university students do not believe in Pancasila, while approximately 23.4 percent supported jihad to establish an Islamic state. Some Muslim schools forbid their students from interacting with non-Muslims. In recent years, anti-pluralist Salafist religious groups have [grown](#) in universities across Indonesia.

The government has [pledged to revise](#) the religious studies curriculum and to ban textbooks that propagate intolerance. Some universities have restricted the type of religious clothing female students can wear by banning the niqab; although the universities claim these measures are necessary to combat extremism, they potentially violate the right of individuals to choose how they express their faith.

"Deviant" Groups

Minority Muslim sects—such as the Milah Abraham faith community (also known as Gafatar), Shi'a Muslims, and Ahmadiyya Muslims—continued to face social hostility and state harassment throughout 2019. The quasi-governmental Indonesian Council of Ulema (MUI) has issued *fatwas* (religious edicts) declaring these groups "deviant" and heretical to Islam. In 2005, MUI issued a fatwa declaring Ahmadiyya Muslims as apostates. In 2008, the Indonesian government banned the Ahmadiyya community from proselytizing, a step that former Indonesia President Abdurrahman Wahid [publicly condemned](#). In January 2019, hardliners in Bandung [protested](#) a discussion of Ahmadiyya teachings at a mosque. Although the event was allowed to occur, the pressure did lead organizers to shorten it. In addition, in certain parts of the country, such as East Lombok, local authorities [could not guarantee](#) the safety of members of the Ahmadiyya community.

Key U.S. Policy

The U.S. and Indonesian governments have worked closely on counterterrorism and maritime security issues, including with regard to the Chinese government's territorial claims in the South China Sea. The United States was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Indonesia in 1949, following its independence from the Netherlands, and November 2019 [marked](#) the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations. In August, a congressional delegation [visited](#) Jakarta to discuss trade and investment opportunities. In June, U.S. Ambassador Joseph E. Donovan and Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan [welcomed the return](#) of 88 Indonesian students who participated in the State Department's Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program to study in the United States, where they learned about tolerance and diversity. Throughout 2019, the USAID-funded Harmoni program continued to support Indonesian institutions and communities working to resist the rise of violent extremism and religious intolerance and to promote tolerant democratic values. USAID's MAJu program continued to work with the Indonesian government as well as local civil society actors to widen access to justice and human rights for religious and ethnic minorities. USAID [increased](#) its overall budget for development projects in Indonesia by \$3 million, for a total of \$93 million. In addition, U.S. diplomats [met with](#) Indonesian government officials and key civil society stakeholders to urge them to publicly condemn the Chinese government's detention of more than one million Uighur and other Muslims.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Policy Update:** [Blasphemy Allegations in a Polarized Indonesia](#)
- **Op-Ed:** [Indonesia Should Prevent Religious Conflict, but its Blasphemy Law Does More Harm than Good](#) (in *The Globe Post*)
- **Press Statement:** [USCIRF Welcomes Release of Jailed Jakarta Governor; Denounces Indonesia's Blasphemy Law](#)