

### KEY FINDINGS

In 2024, Indonesia’s religious freedom conditions remained concerning. Although the constitution guarantees religious freedom, the government continued to employ several legal frameworks—including a presidential decree, the Criminal Code, and the Information and Electronic Transactions (ITE) Law—to regulate religion, criminalize blasphemy, and broadly infringe on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). In some instances, Indonesia also tolerated FoRB violations by nonstate actors. A new Criminal Code, signed into law in January 2023 and scheduled for implementation in 2026, will set in place additional restrictions on blasphemy, among other issues, deepening the country’s systematic repression of religious freedom.

Both the government and intolerant elements of Indonesian society exploited the *Izin Mendirikan Bangunan* (IMB)—the permit required to build religious buildings—and the 2006 Joint Decree on Houses of Worship to target minority religious communities. Several Protestant Christian churches faced significant challenges in obtaining the IMB, leading to instances of harassment. In March, a mob in Banten Province disrupted a Christian worship service in a predominantly Muslim area, citing the church’s expired permit. In August, authorities from Jombang Regency joined 50 residents in dragging a pastor from his worship site and sealing the shop where his church gathered. In September, a civil servant in Bekasi disrupted and stopped worship at a Christian house church, resulting in the congregation’s relocation. Residents in Pegambiran village, West Java, rejected a proposal for the legal establishment of a church in a local warehouse.

Indonesian Catholics continued to face serious challenges, despite the government’s welcoming of Pope Francis for a visit in September to promote interreligious harmony and tolerance. St. John the Baptist Parish in Parung has been unable to establish a church building for over two decades, as local Muslims exploited the Interfaith Harmony Forum—the country’s main arbiter on matters concerning interfaith relations—to object to the parish’s IMB. In May, Muslim residents in Banten Province attacked 12 Catholic students at Pamulang University in South Tangerang city, where the students were holding a neighborhood rosary service. In

November, Parahyangan Catholic University in Bandung, West Java Province, reportedly received a bomb threat from Jamaah Ansharut Daulah, a banned militant group connected to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Ahmadiyya Muslims also continued to face significant hurdles in conducting religious activities. In July, authorities in West Java’s Garut Regency forcibly shut down an Ahmadiyya mosque, citing public threats and local Muslims’ claims that the group’s teachings deviated from Islam. In December, under pressure from hardline Islamist groups, including the banned Islamic Defenders Front, authorities in West Java banned Ahmadiyya Muslims’ annual gathering in Kuningan Regency, leaving over 6,000 adherents stranded at Cirebon railway station.

Other religious minorities such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Baha’is, Buddhists, Hindus, and Shi’a Muslims faced similar discrimination and harsh [treatment](#), including government efforts to shut down or outright ban their religious meetings and other activities.

Indonesia continued to experience concerning levels of antisemitism, which have risen since the October 2023 Hamas terror attack in Israel. Consequently, the small number of practicing Jews concealed their religion out of fear for their safety. For example, a rabbi in North Sulawesi reported that both he and his synagogue have received repeated death threats from hardline Indonesian Muslims. The lead rabbi from the United Indonesian Jewish Community took down their website and asked community members not to post about Jewish activities as precautions, given isolated attacks against Jews and some antisemitic messaging amid pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Jakarta.

Among notable positive developments in 2024, the government [added](#) a seventh category—*kepercayaan* (belief)—as a recognized religion on national identification cards, benefiting smaller religious groups that are not part of the six recognized religions and often suffered discrimination. Additionally, the government no longer [required](#) Christians to use the Arabic term *Isa al-Masih* to refer to Jesus Christ—which it regarded as more palatable for the Muslim majority—and formally allowed them to use an indigenous Indonesian term, *Yesus Kristus*, during major Christian holidays.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Include Indonesia on the Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Work with the Indonesian government to repeal or amend existing laws—including Chapter VII of the Criminal Code, blasphemy laws, and the ITE law—to comply with international human rights standards specific to freedom of religion or belief, such as eliminating the 2006 Joint Decree on Houses of Worship requirement that religious groups obtain approval from other religious communities to construct worship facilities; and
- Include FoRB-related issues in the Papua region as a part of U.S.-Indonesia bilateral discussions, including by pressing the Indonesian government to grant access to independent international observers to monitor and investigate FoRB conditions in that area.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Hold hearings to amplify congressional concerns over FoRB violations, including to advocate for the release of FoRB prisoners in Indonesia.

### KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Country Update:** [Legal Impediments to Religious Freedom in Indonesia](#)
- **Hearing:** [Religious Freedom in Southeast Asia: Techno-Authoritarianism and Transnational Influences](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and Appendix 2**

## Background

Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim-majority [country](#). Of its 267 million citizens, approximately 87 percent are registered as Muslims, around 99 percent of whom are Sunni, less than one percent are Shi'a, and 0.2 percent are Ahmadiyya. Protestant Christians comprise seven percent of the population, Roman Catholics 2.9 percent, and Hindus 1.7 percent; 0.9 percent follow Buddhism, Confucianism, and other traditions.

Through its ostensible commitment to *Pancasila*, Indonesia's formal ideology promoting religious pluralism, the government strives to present the country as tolerant and respectful of all religious traditions and practices—provided they adhere to monotheism. However, the implementation of *Pancasila* often faces myriad challenges, as evident in persistent interreligious tensions, religious extremist violence, and systematic restrictions that often marginalize religious minorities and enforce specific interpretations of religion in public life. For example, many local municipalities maintain mandatory hijab regulations for women and girls, leading to bullying and withdrawal from school for those who do not wear the hijab. These regulations violate provisions in several human rights treaties to which Indonesia is party, including those guaranteeing FoRB.

Indonesians elected Prabowo Subianto—a retired army general who backed a 2017 rally in support of the blasphemy law—as president in February 2024, raising concerns about the security of democracy and human rights in the country. In particular, many in West Papua fear the prospect of more violence and repression under Subianto's presidency, given his past human rights record implicating him in atrocities committed in East Timor and Papua.

## Ongoing Human Rights Abuses in the Papua Region

Given its unique composition of ethnic and religious minorities and longstanding aspirations for independence, the Papua region's estimated population of two million—the majority of whom identify as Christians—have long faced discrimination from government agencies, institutions, and laws. Authorities have subjected Papuans to arbitrary arrests, torture, forced displacement, and extrajudicial killings. As of September, increasing armed conflict had led to the internal displacement of nearly 80,000 people who were left with no access to basic necessities such as food, healthcare services, and education, and limited access to employment. Although United Nations (UN) experts have [reported](#) serious abuses against Papuans in the past, such international attention has notably waned in recent years, leading to even less transparency and accountability for government violence and abuses in the area. This lack of attention is particularly troubling in light of Indonesia's present role as a sitting member of the UN Human Rights Council (2024–2026) and its failure to [conduct](#) full, impartial investigations into abuses such as extrajudicial killings against indigenous Papuans.

## Blasphemy Allegations and Convictions

Indonesia's retention and enforcement of blasphemy laws represent some of its most persistent and systematic FoRB violations. In June, a court in Lampung sentenced comedian Aulia Rakhman to seven months in prison for blasphemy for joking about the name "Muhammad." In September, police in North Sumatra Province arrested a former councilor of Sibolga for allegedly blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad and Islam in a Facebook post. In October, police in Sunggal, North Sumatra Province, arrested florist Rudi Simamora for allegedly insulting Islam online; authorities had previously sentenced Simamora to one year in prison for a similar offense, releasing him in early 2024. Police in Medan arrested a social media influencer that same month after local Christians filed a complaint that accused her of making derogatory comments about Jesus's appearance.

## Key U.S. Policy

The United States and Indonesia maintained close bilateral ties, which they had elevated to a [Comprehensive Strategic Partnership](#) in 2023—followed by a Plan of Action for implementation from 2024 to 2028—in which the two countries agreed to further expand cooperation on myriad issues including governance, pluralism, human rights, and the rule of law. The two countries [celebrated](#) 75 years of mutual diplomatic relations in 2024. In July, then Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Jose Fernandez [traveled](#) to Jakarta to highlight U.S. efforts to promote economic growth across Southeast Asia and to further grow the U.S.-Indonesia bilateral economic partnership. That same month, Peter Mandaville, then senior advisor for faith engagement at the U.S. Agency for International Development, visited Indonesia to speak at the International Conference on Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy.

In October, then President Joseph R. Biden designated a presidential [delegation](#) to attend the inauguration of President Prabowo Subianto in Jakarta. In November, the two presidents met in Washington, DC, and jointly announced new programs to further strengthen bilateral ties, including support for interfaith dialogue, promoting democratic governance and human rights, and preserving cultural heritage. In December, the U.S. Department of State [designated](#) Alpius Hasim Madi, deputy Koramil commander, for his involvement in a gross violation of human rights, namely the extrajudicial killing of Pastor Yeremia Zambani in Papua in 2020, pursuant to Section 7031(c).

In September, then co-chairs of the House Abraham Accords Caucus Representatives Brad Schneider (D-IL), Ann Wagner (R-MO), David Trone (D-MD), and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) introduced a [resolution](#) urging the State Department and civil society organizations to promote peace and tolerance through education and expressing support for the expansion of the Abraham Accords to Indonesia and Saudi Arabia.