



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

FACTSHEET

March 2021

INDONESIA'S PANCASILA

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Indonesia's Pancasila

By Patrick Greenwalt, Policy Analyst

Background

Since its independence in 1945, Indonesia has promoted the state ideology of Pancasila (literally, “five principles”), which comprises: monotheism, civilized humanity, national unity, deliberative democracy, and social justice. Despite the general requirement of a monotheistic faith to fulfill the first principle, the government recognizes six religions as part of the Indonesian nation: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Crucially, the state recognizes Sunnism as the only legitimate interpretation and expression of Islam.

The concept of Pancasila was enshrined in the preamble to the 1945 constitution. During the long, authoritarian period of President Suharto, (1967 until 1998), Pancasila became the focus of an effort to unite the country around broad principles instead of a single religious identity. However, since the transition to full democracy following the resignation of Suharto in 1998, the prominence of state-sponsorship for the concept appeared to decline. During the same period, however, Indonesia has witnessed a continued the growth of hardline Islamist attitudes.

In 1952, the Ministry of Religious Affairs limited the definition of monotheism but did not limit it to the Abrahamic traditions. That loose interpretation has allowed the Indonesian state to consider Confucian, Buddhist, and Hindu communities as in-line with this principle of Pancasila. It leaves no room, however, for other groups such as atheists and other nontheist communities.

Among President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) priorities in his second term has been to combat this rising tide of Islamism while bolstering state support and sponsorship of a moderate brand of Islam. He has done this, in part, by strengthening the government's engagement with the National Ulema Council (MUI), pushing out more hardline voices in MUI's leadership board to bring in more moderate ones. Another initiative, led by former president Megawati Sukarnoputri, is to strengthen the regulation of the ideology of Pancasila as well as promote it both within the government and throughout the country. The concept has found new primacy in President Jokowi's administration; he has *incorporated* it into the government's attempt to address the

COVID-19 pandemic, but this ideology is also *used* as a pretext to purge the civil service of those suspected of supporting or maintaining links to Islamist groups.

This factsheet explores the ongoing religious freedom implications of the first principle of Pancasila in particular, along with current efforts to reform this state ideology. This factsheet then outlines how the state's interpretation of Pancasila allows the Sunni Muslim majority to infringe on the religious freedom of religious minorities, despite implicitly promising equality for all monotheistic faiths. The final section discusses religious freedom issues affecting minority Muslim groups whose beliefs the government does not officially recognize as legitimate forms of Islam. The efforts to bolster Pancasila demonstrate the Indonesian government's commitment to tolerance and religious moderation. However, some efforts *pursued* by President Jokowi appear to be in line with a growing trend of regressive policies pursued by the Indonesian government in general. Additionally, the focus on expanding Pancasila emphasizes tolerance among the officially recognized religions, not on embracing genuine pluralism, and does little to reform areas within the legal system that impinge on religious freedom.

Pancasila's Role in Contemporary Indonesia

Pancasila remains a widely popular ideology; in a November 2019 *survey*, 86.5 percent of Indonesia's Muslim majority viewed it favorably. However, the same survey suggested that a noteworthy minority of Muslims view it negatively, and there is indication that support might be waning among the younger generations. A poll in 2017 from the Ministry of Defense *reported* that 23.3 percent of high school and university students do not ascribe to the principles of Pancasila, while approximately 23.4 percent supported the invocation of a violent interpretation of jihad to establish an Islamic state.

There has been growing concern that the number of individuals sympathetic to radical Islamist ideologies and hostile to Pancasila has been increasing among government bureaucracy personnel. Shortly after beginning his second term in October 2019, President Jokowi's administration *launched* an online portal called *Aduan ASN* (ASN)—ostensibly to *ensure* that the governing bureaucracy maintains the ideology of Pancasila—where people could submit complaints of civil servants engaging in “negative radicalism” and violating Pancasila.

Pancasila has also become a tool of the government to ban organizations that go against the government narrative, as in the case of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). In 2016, blasphemy charges were brought against then governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok), for allegedly insulting Islam and the Qur'an. The case originated in a September 2016 speech in which Ahok encouraged voters not to be dissuaded from voting for him in the February 2017 gubernatorial election because the Qur'an tells Muslims not to align with Christians or Jews. The FPI, as well as some members affiliated with the MUI, called for mass demonstrations, and hundreds of thousands responded by marching in the streets to call for Ahok's arrest (see USCIRF's 2017 Annual Report chapter on *Indonesia*). In May of that year, Ahok was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for blasphemy but was released in January 2019. Following that mass demonstration and Ahok's blasphemy conviction, President Jokowi *enacted* a regulation granting the government the power to ban any organization that contradicts Pancasila. Indonesian authorities acted on that regulation when they *banned* FPI in December 2020 in part for contradicting the ideology of Pancasila, shortly after arresting the group's leader, Rizieq Shihab, for violating COVID-19 regulations.

Ongoing Legislative Debate

The Agency for Pancasila Ideology Education (BPIP) regulates and monitors Pancasila under the authority of the President of Indonesia. In June 2020, lawmakers *proposed* a bill in Indonesia's legislature, the House of Representatives, to outline and provide guidelines on Pancasila for regulation under BPIP and strengthen the government's responsibility to promote the ideology in education. This bill was eventually withdrawn after it received criticism on multiple fronts, including for incorporating state security into the regulation of Pancasila. The MUI also expressed concern that the legislation would make Pancasila “secular and atheistic.” Lawmakers proposed a new bill just one month later that laid out the Pancasila ideology guidelines (HIP) in an attempt to address security concerns as well as the objections of conservative Islamic groups, but these changes ultimately failed to garner sufficient support for the bill to pass. However, HIP *remains* on a list of over 30 bills approved in July for eventual discussion in the House of Representatives.

Challenges for Non-Muslim Minorities

Although about 87 percent of Indonesia *identifies* as Muslim, there are regions around the country in which other religious communities form majorities. Religions minorities throughout these regions share common religious freedom challenges, such as attacks on houses of worship, regardless of their status elsewhere in the country. Between January 2007 and November 2019, for example, the non-government organization (NGO) the Setara Institute recorded 199 cases of attacks against churches, 133 against mosques, 15 against Buddhist monasteries, 10 against Confucian temples, eight against Hindu temples, and one against a Jewish synagogue. In November 2020, an Islamist terrorist group attacked Christians in Sulawesi, *reportedly* burning six houses, including one that was used as a house of worship, and killing at least four individuals.

The regulation of building new houses of worship also represents an ongoing challenge for religious minorities throughout Indonesia. In March 2006, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs *issued* the Joint Regulation on Houses of Worship, which outlines the process of obtaining a permit for a house of worship. Included in the mandate is the requirement of a list of 90 members of the proto-congregation and signatures from 60 local households of a different religion. While this regulation appears to provide an equal bureaucratic step for any religious community seeking to build a new house of worship, *reports* charge that both mainstream and non-mainstream branches of Islam and Christianity struggle in regions in which they represent a relatively small number.

Tensions have also emerged among some parts of Indonesian society against efforts to proselytize Muslims. For example, in May 2020, West Sumatra governor Irwan Prayitno *requested* that the Ministry of Communication and Information ban from the Google Play Store a mobile application that contained a Minang-language version

of the Bible, potentially appealing to a primarily Muslim community that speaks this language—despite the fact that the Bible has been available in Minang translation since the 19th century.

The Limits of Tolerance for Muslim Minorities

The vast majority of Muslims in Indonesia, as many as 99 percent, are *estimated* to identify as Sunni Muslim. However, the country is also home to some smaller Muslim groups such as Shi'a Muslims, Ahmadiyya Muslims, and the Milah Abraham (Gafatar) community. These communities are excluded from Pancasila, which presumes Sunni Islam as the only acceptable interpretation of that religion.

The Ahmadiyya community consistently faces persecution and state-sponsored discrimination in Indonesia. In 2008, the government banned it from proselytizing, and in April 2020, authorities in Tasikmalaya, West Java, *banned* the renovation of an Ahmadiyya Mosque in a decree that also prohibited them from performing religious practices in public. This ban was reportedly based on Law No. 28/2002 as well as joint decrees from the Religious Affairs Ministry and the Home Ministry.

Shi'a Muslims also face official and social pressure to convert to Sunni Islam. Following violence against the community in 2012, then religious affairs minister Suryadharma Ali *argued* that the best way for Shi'a Muslims to avoid violence was to convert to Sunni Islam. Reports from as recently as November 2020 *indicated* that many Shi'a Muslims have indeed converted after facing internal displacement for nearly a decade. However, on December 22, 2020, President Jokowi *reshuffled* his cabinet, replacing six ministers including the Minister of Religious Affairs. In an impromptu speech on December 24, the new Minister, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, *spoke* about the need to uphold the rights of Shi'a and Ahmadiyya Muslims.



Conclusion

As a founding ideology for pluralist Indonesia, Pancasila represented an attempt to craft a national identity for a nation that had been initially brought together only by external, colonial forces. Although the transition from dictatorship to democracy witnessed a decline in state-sponsored emphasis on Pancasila, President Jokowi has more recently engaged in an ongoing effort to revive it even as the country and region *experience* an increased turn toward more conservative interpretations of Islam. The tools President Jokowi has used to reinvigorate and reinforce Pancasila have given his government the ability to both police its bureaucracy and to shut down organizations often perceived as “threats” to the ideology. At the same time, attempts in mid-2020 to broaden the scope of Pancasila were met with harsh reactions from

conservative Islamic organizations whose members fret over what they call “creeping secularization.” As it exists, this state ideology does not have room for minority sects of Islam, such as Ahmadiyya and Shi’a Islam, and no room for atheist or other nontheist communities.

The administration of President Jokowi has made efforts to fulfill the promise of promoting harmony and interreligious tolerance. At the same time, however, his administration has been pursuing increasingly regressive policies in respect to human rights. As such, these efforts to strengthen, reform, and implement Pancasila represent the dual nature of Indonesia’s attempt to bolster tolerance without taking concrete legal steps toward advancing fundamental human rights, including the freedom of religion and belief.

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